

DELIBERATIVE FRAMINGS AND THE CONSTITUTION OF “GERINGONÇA”: FROM MEDIA FRAMES TO READERS’ COMMENTS. THE CASE OF “OBSERVADOR”¹

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Abstract: This article analyses how the formation of the XXIst Portuguese Constitutional Government, supported by the Parliamentary Left (Socialist Party, Communist Party and the far-left organization Left Block that holds together fringes from ecologists movements, Trotskyists groups, and ex-Maoists organizations) was framed by “Observador”, a right-wing online newspaper, ideologically opposed, from the editorial point of view, to the new Government. Simultaneously, we aim to understand if this framing process was followed by the audience. The comments posted by the newsreaders on the website but also on Facebook were analyzed during the formation of the new political solution. The goal was to determine whether there was a relationship between the frames used by the medium, and the opinion expressed by its readers. The results show a higher presence of the game-strategy frame in the media coverage of XXIst Constitutional Government formation process, but a closer look reveals that the most common employed narrative

1. This research results from the Ph.D. thesis titled “Participação e deliberação online: o enquadramento mediático e os comentários dos leitores no debate sobre a formação do XXI Governo Constitucional” (Online participation and deliberation: media framing and readers’ comments about the debate on the XXIst Constitutional), by Ricardo Morais, with the supervision of his tutor, João Carlos Correia.

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frames were on political impacts and conflict stories, resulting from an accentuated political turn to the left. Our analysis shows that the “Observador”’s audience triggered different interpretative frameworks always sharing an opposition to the formation of the left Government.

Keywords: Framing; online deliberation; readers’ comments; XXIst Constitutional Government

1. Introduction

The context that led to the XXIst Constitutional Government is one of the most striking moments of the recent Portuguese political history. The circumstances leading to the successive formation of two Governments during the short period of one month, following the electoral event on October 4th, 2015, cannot be ignored. Therefore, this work analyzes how the formation process of the XXIst Government (also known as “Geringonça”) was framed by a particular medium of communication, the only national digital native, that seemed to position itself in an adversarial position to the establishment of the new Government solution. Bearing in mind to the characteristics of the newspaper, and in particular of its public, positioned on the right side of the political spectrum (according to Digital News Report 2017 from Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism) we wanted to understand if this positioning could represent an increase of deliberative quality in the dialogue boxes and contribute to the formation of a counter-agenda against the new political solution.

Following the studies on framing, and the distinction between media and audience frames (Entman, 1993), we tried to understand how the news frames affect the discussions that may happen in the reader’s comments spaces and what if media frames influence online deliberation. The analysis of the comments comes in the line of studies on online deliberation, considering the set of potential deliberative arenas that emerged within the Internet (Mendonça, Sampaio & Barros, 2016, p. 17). Configuring itself as a case study, this work points to the need to deepen the cross research between media and audience frames, in a line of research that considers

deliberative framing as a determinant in the construction of public opinion on different subjects

2. Literature review

2.1. The framing theory

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of studies on framing (Gradim, 2016, p. 17). Even though this is still a concept to be explored (Correia, 2016; Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016), its use has become heavily widespread, particularly in the Communication Sciences domain.

In this field of research, framing started to be used alongside other theories, such as agenda-setting or priming (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1999), making their comprehension difficult (Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002, Correia, 2016). One of the main problems related to framing was and still is, the definition of the frames themselves. The oscillation between different “conceptualizations” is precisely emphasized by Correia (2016), since frames are understood either as “principles of organization” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10), either as “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6) and, in the specific context of journalism, as models to the news writing production” (Capella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 39).

This semantic ambiguity is linked to the interdisciplinary roots of the concept (it is not by chance that Entman calls it a “fractured paradigm”), and its progressive development, but in fact, it is one of the aspects that has preoccupied theorists of the field. In this context, one of the answers found by the researchers is the creation of a typology of frames that helps to the affirmation of the framework analysis in the scope of communication studies (Correia, 2016, p. 10).

Robert Entman’s worked on the clarification of this paradigm, being particularly relevant in suggesting a division between media frames and audience frames (1993, p. 74). Many of the following studies started to adopt this influent division in their analysis. It appears, therefore, a research line

that identifies the “frames” in the journalistic content, i.e., that’s to say the way how media made the coverage of certain problems (Patterson, 1994; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). At the same time, there is another line of studies concerned with the way individuals perceive, organize and interpret the information transmitted in journalistic pieces (Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999).

This separation, however, also opened a space “for new works on the intersection between audience and media frames”, analyzing the frames in the news and the effects of these frames on the public (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991). Our work is precisely interested in this intersection. Additionally, to the analysis of the news frames, one intends to watch if they influence the formation of public opinions, here represented by the reader’s comments.

In journalistic studies, a frame is characterized by the selection, organization and emphasis of certain aspects of reality and exclusion of others (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). According to the authors, we can also distinguish specific and generic frames. Specific frameworks handle subjects, while generic ones apply to a wide range of public issues. A more specific analysis allows collecting data on the selection, organization, and elaboration of a well-defined question, presenting advantages in detail, but, simultaneously, raising problems of generalization and comparison. That is why more generic frames are used more frequently, in order to allow comparative studies, for instance, the coverage of the same event in different countries.

The work of Iyengar (1991) on generic news frames is one of the best where we can find a distinction between episodic and thematic frames with its own terminology. The episodic pictures would address the specific cases and situations, while the thematic ones tried to identify more generic frames, that transcend the questions confined to a specific time and space. Among the more generic frameworks, the “strategy” or the “conflict” (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997) stand out as some of the most used frames, for example,

in the analysis of electoral campaign coverage. Thus, generic frames are addressed to broader issues and not an episodic event.

The frameworks used to cover elections are particularly relevant. Over the years, several authors have focused their analysis on electoral campaigns (Patterson, 1994, Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, Wilke & Reinemann, 2001, Lakoff, 2004, among others). Cappella & Jamieson analyzed three categories of frames: those “issue-oriented”, those related to “leadership/personality qualities” and those that focus on “horse race”, a metaphor of the competitive fight among leaders.

In the first category, are considered the “frames” that address issues related to the type of policies to be implemented, such as the policies and measures included in the electoral program, but also opinions on issues such as economics, education, and health. In “leadership/personality qualities”, the authors focused their analysis on the aspects related to the qualities of the candidate and the personal and professional characteristics that can make a good or bad leader. Finally, in the category “game/strategy”, the strategic and tactical aspects of the campaign are considered, in a real logic of electoral race (hence the designation “horse race”), that is, in which one only one can come out as the winner. The language used, namely the metaphors that refer to expressions of competition or war are particularly important for the identification of the framework.

We also consider how the study of the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2009) identified thirteen possible frames for news stories as the ones journalists use mostly. The frames were: “a) straight news account: no dominant narrative frame other than outlining the basic who, what, when, where, why and how; b) conflict story: focus on conflict inherent to the situation; c) consensus story: an emphasis on the points of agreement around an issue or event; d) conjecture story: a focus around conjecture or speculation of what is to come; e) story: an explanation how something works; f) outlook: how the current news fits into history; g) horse race: who is winning and who is losing; h) trend story: the news as an ongoing trend; i) policy explored:

a focus on exploring policy and its impact; j) reaction story: a response or reaction from one of the major players; k) reality check: a close look into the veracity of a statement made or information given; l) wrongdoing exposed: the uncovering of wrongdoing or injustice; m) personality profile: a profile of the newsmaker” (p. 4).

It is, therefore, from these categories that we proceeded to the analysis of the content of the journalistic texts, trying to identify the dominant frames and to evaluate how they are present in the comments of the readers.

2.2. Deliberative Frames in election times

Frames are constructed in an active context of processed information in which they are mobilized to an ideological struggle. Frameworks are cognitive occurrences that appear at various levels: in culture, in the elites’ minds and professional political communicators, in the texts and the minds of citizens, in social movements, public spheres, etc. (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009, p. 176).

At the beginning of the present decade, when the Governments were more aligned with the globalization policies, they emphasized as a structuring element of the key political framework “fiscal responsibility and the deficit control of public accounts”, while left and alternative critical movements classified those policies as “austerity policies” and alerted to a defense of social achievements.

Following Snow and Atheide, one may identify three kinds of frames, in what concerns with political mobilization: a) diagnostic frame, which implies the identification of the problem and an attribution of public responsibility; b) the prognostic frame, that implies an identification of the solution, the identification of the problem, for example, “reordering the forest to fight the fires” vs “contract spending to reduce the deficit”; c) the motivational frame implies a call to action and an identification of claims that justify a participation in an action to change a state of affairs; the motivational dimension of the framework includes building a vocabulary appropriately, for exam-

ple: “ask the population for sacrifices or call for a demonstration against austerity”.

At the time of the elections, there was a frame that can be identified: the horse racing frame. It corresponds to a situation that results from bipartisanship itself and contaminates, with efficacy, the western television language. The dominant framework in the electoral choices made so far in Portugal has insisted on the issue “Election of the Prime Minister”. For the dominant culture, there is a traditional constitutional interpretation of the elections that identify the Prime Minister as the leader of the winning party. This traditional understanding and this dominant framework have historical reasons. In the first place, we can verify the existence of a scarce policy difference between parties at the center of the political spectrum. Portugal lived what Gomes Canotilho called an “imperfect bipartisanship” with a rotation between PS (Socialist Party) and PSD/CDS (Social Democratic Party/ People’s Party), remaining the left-wing political forces confined to the local power (CDU [Unitary Democratic Coalition] and, more marginally, BE [Left Bloc]).

The 2008 crisis reflected the collapse of this ideological framework. Among the profound causes is the erosion of the welfare state, the sudden impoverishment of the middle class, the flexibilization of labor relations and the breakdown of the aspiration to social mobility.

Facing the imminent bankruptcies of social democracy, the current leader of the PS considered the possibility to explore constitutional routes, admitting a paradigm shift in the Government formation, with a Government based on the parliamentary majority. This shift of political habitus nevertheless implied a change of frame. Diagnostic frame questioned the dilemma: “economic growth and debt contention” versus “the reposition of labor incomes”, severely cut during Troika’s intervention. In the framing of prognosis came a new question: “what to do?”. According to the framework of the Socialist Party, it was possible to reconcile domestic consumption with economic growth. The prognosis frame supported by its opponents

was to reduce debt, increase growth through fiscal responsibility income and contain social spending. The motivational frame suggests the greatest difficulties: “How to mobilize the PS, one of the protagonists of one of the last episodes of the Cold War in the direct confrontation against the PCP and the extreme left as opponents?; How to mobilize a social base of support from CDU and BE that saw in the PS a traditional adversary?”

In turn, the conservative block had another dilemma, to mobilize legitimacy based on the victory of the elections against the legitimacy resulting from the formation of a majority in Parliament, to accentuate the differences between the supporters of the left Government. It has mobilized one of the oldest rhetoric commonplaces: “we got here; we cannot go back. If something started, it’s natural to end”.

2.3. Internet, readers’ comments spaces and deliberative framing

After reviewing the main aspects of framing theory, we highlighted how the Internet has changed many aspects of current societies, but especially how participation and deliberation can take advantage of the potential of this technology.

Without the euphoria of the 90s studies that searched inside the Internet for a new public sphere, one must admit that the digital networks have changed older communication models and provided new channels for the exchange of opinions and ideas (Mendonça & Amaral, 2016, p. 51). “The internet represents an extremely diverse environment for social interaction, whose characteristics transform and reorganize social practices. Communication between individuals and groups, as well as the organization of communities of interest and environments for discussion, are inherent characteristics of the evolution of the Internet” (Maia, Rossini, Oliveira & Oliveira, 2016, p. 236 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]).

Today there are unlimited spaces, like forums, blogs, sections for comments in news web pages, social network sites, where one can participate in discussions about different issues. In this particular study, we focused

on comments sections in digital newspapers, because this was for a long time one of the most used spaces by readers to post comments and debate about public matters, regarding their accessibility, absence of costs, possibility of anonymity and the immediacy in exchanging messages (cf. Silva, 2013). However, in the last years, the number of users commenting on digital newspapers comment spaces decreased, mainly because the debates made on those spaces, began to be seen as unproductive, with no presence of real discussion or rational dialogue, and full of “flaming”, “trolls” and insults (cf. Ruiz et al., 2011; Silva, 2013). Some sites even decided to end with these spaces to control what was becoming an image problem. In spite of that, no one can deny, the potential of these spaces to public deliberation. Today, “understanding the dynamics of online discussions is therefore to understand a fundamental dimension of today’s experience, in general, and of political practice in a more specific way” (Mendonça, Sampaio & Barros, 2016, p. 12 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]).

Therefore, we analyzed the comment spaces as an environment with distinct opportunities and constraints for deliberation, considering “there is no discussion of the socially relevant issue that does not pass significantly through them (online arenas), crossing platforms as distinct as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs. The discussions between individuals, permeated by the content produced by newspapers or by bloggers, in texts, photos and videos, form a complex environment in which the main issues of public interest are approached by a multiplicity of actors” (Mendonça, Sampaio & Barros, 2016, p. 11 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]).

It is in this sense, that we analyze the reader’s comments since we wanted to see how the news frames can affect the discussions that may take place in these deliberative arenas, following the idea of a deliberative framing (Barisione, 2012, pp. 4-5). We understand that this concept is what best represents the objectives of this work, considering on the one hand news frames and, on the other hand, deliberative comments. When the framing processes are applied in the context of deliberative practices it is of a deliberative framing that we speak of, as what is at issue is precisely the

interpretative “framework” in which deliberation can be made. Thus, meaning that the media, when selecting certain points of view, emphasize certain elements to the detriment of others, suggest certain interpretive frames that, possibly, will influence the process of opinion formation and, therefore, the outcome of a deliberation (Barisione, 2012, p. 4-5). In this sense we must think, when we analyze the opinion resulting from a journalistic text, on a set of elements that help us to understand the interpretative “framework” within which a deliberation is constructed. In addition to the initial diagnosis related to identifying what the problem is, the framework will also indicate a possible causal interpretation of the problem, i.e. where it comes from, as well as an assignment of responsibility and prognosis or solution to the problem. In the background, the entire context of interpretation can be defined by the primary frame or, in turn, be deconstructed by the participants, giving rise to a new interpretive framework.

3. Research strategy and methodological design

In methodological terms, this paper aligns with the case studies, since this is “the most appropriate research strategy when we want to know the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of current events about which the researcher has little or no control” (Yin, 1994, p. 9). It is precisely in this situation that we find ourselves in this study, since we aim to understand how the process of formation of the XXIst Constitutional Government was framed by the news and its readers. At the same time, we also seek to understand if there is an influence of the news frames on the formation of public opinion, measured here by the readers’ comments.

The case study is also an approach “(...) that deals deliberately with a specific situation that is supposed to be unique or special, at least in certain aspects, trying to discover what is in it of most essential and characteristic and, thus, to contribute to the comprehension of a certain phenomenon of interest” (Ponte, 2006, p. 29 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]). As the goal of a case study is always “holistic”, once it seeks to promote “understanding as a whole” and an “intensive and detailed”

study (Coutinho, 2015, p. 335 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]), it seemed to us that this methodological strategy was that which best suited our work. Case studies may be: intrinsic, if the investigator seeks to understand a case because it provokes specific attention; instrumental, when the case study functions as a tool to understand another phenomenon (Coutinho, 2015, p. 338). In our work the case study it is simultaneously both intrinsic and instrumental.

In terms of data collection, in a case study “multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). In our particular case, we used the analysis of content and news, intending to identify news frames (in a frame analysis logic), but also the analysis of comments, identifying “frames” and assessing the quality of online deliberation.

3.1. Brief contextualization of the case under study: formation process of the XXIst Constitutional Government

The “case” under analysis here, is the debate surrounding the formation of the XXIst Portuguese Constitutional Government. To better understand this case, it is important to return to the day of October 4th, 2015, the date on which the Portuguese were, for the fourteenth time since April 25, called to choose the representatives for the parliament. The results of the electoral process gave victory to the coalition “Portugal à Frente” (PaF) (the result of the pre-electoral agreement between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Popular Party (CDS/PP), although with a relative majority (38.5% of votes, corresponding to 107 members). The absence of an absolute majority and the percentage of votes of the remaining parties (PS - 32.3%, BE - 10.2%, CDU - 8.3%, PAN - 1.4%) let immediately forecast a difficult scenario for the winners. But the process around the establishment of the next Government was just beginning.

The lack of an absolute majority forced the coalition voted to establish agreements to ensure the largest number of seats in parliament and thus stable governance. The real debate about the formation of the Government begins then, with the coalition seeking to negotiate with the Socialist

Party, the only one available for this negotiation. Thus, it began a period of meetings between the two political forces, accompanied in detail by the media and leaving public opinion suspended to the formation of the XXIst Constitutional Government.

However, while meeting with the PaF coalition, the Socialist Party has initiated contacts with the Left Bloc (BE) and the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU), given the negotiations for the formation of a Government of the left, with a parliamentary majority, which could make it impossible to form a new Government on the part of the coalition that had won the elections.

The electoral act, more than deciding the political situation of the country for the next four years, ended up throwing the country into a real debate between parties but also forced the public opinion to argue on which was the best Government solution. The hypotheses of a central bloc Government (PaF [PSD + CSD/PP] + PS) were put on the table; a management or interim Government (the winning coalition would govern until it was possible to call new elections, never in less than six months); a presidential initiative Government (elements of Government would be indicated by the President of the Republic); but also, the possibility that gradually gained strength: a leftist Government with parliamentary majority. Tight deadlines, presidential elections were at the door, forcing daily meetings, multiple political-party discussions and raised great uncertainty in the public opinion, with voices against and in favor of each of the options previously described

António Costa, Socialist Party's secretary-general did not agree to form a bloc with the winning coalition nor to support it in the assembly, rejections that gradually began to help define the future. Especially because on October 20th, Costa assured the President of the Republic of having the conditions to form a Government-supported in the parliament by the Left Bloc and by the Portuguese Communist Party. The facts exposed so far would be more than enough to make this case a study, but the chronology of events makes it even more interesting, since, after an electoral act, the Portuguese would get to know two Constitutional Governments.

The first, which was the XXth Constitutional Government, would end to being formed with the winners of the elections. Not having reached an agreement with any party with a parliamentary seat, the PaF coalition met with the President of the Republic, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, who after listening to all parties with representation in parliament, choose to nominate Pedro Passos Coelho (22 October 2015) as Prime Minister and lead him to form a Government. Five days later, on October 27th, 2015, the Prime Minister-nominee presented to the President of the Republic his proposal for the constitution of the XX Constitutional Government, which took office on October 30th, 2015. The leftist parties already had asserted that they will reject a new right-wing Government and even with the Government formed, guaranteed that it would not pass in parliament.

The XXth Constitutional Government would thus, be remembered historically as the shortest executive administration of the Portuguese democracy, as it would take only 27 days for the country to be introduced to a new political configuration. The meetings on the left pointed increasingly to an understanding no one believed to be possible. The news headlines expressed the doubts that many had (national digital native “Observador” questioned on October 7th: “What if Costa is not bluffing when he speaks of Government on the left?”), about the real possibility for the first time since the Constitution of 1976, Portugal had a coalition of left-wing parties, although post-electoral.

The month of November proved to be decisive. On the day that the new Government led by Pedro Passos Coelho had scheduled the debate on the Government program, the left parties signed the agreements that would later support the first left Government in history (PS minority Government supported in the assembly by BE, PCP, PEV and PAN). The XX Government would end on the same day, on November 10, after the rejection from the Socialist Party of the Government program.

Resulting from that, began the process of nomination of António Costa, on November 24th, 2015, and the inauguration of the XXIst Constitutional

Government on November 26th, the second Government based on the results of the legislative elections of October 4th, 2015.

Briefly summarizing the chronology of the facts, this situation provided a unique opportunity to investigate a public discussion process carried out around an unprecedented political solution in the country. After all the meetings and decisions taken, what is not known is the opinion of the citizens who, after the elections, did not have an opportunity to express themselves again. Far from imagining that it is possible to know how the public opinion has positioned itself concerning the development of the two Governments, we believe that the analysis of spaces where citizens' opinions are represented deserves at least to be considered.

3.1.1. Data collection and sample definition

Among the various spaces of participation placed today at the disposal of the citizens, we have opted to analyze those dedicated to the comments of the readers, as they correspond to private arenas of participation, where different opinions may occur. Considering the spaces made available to citizens by the media, we understand that more participation is generated on newspapers' websites. We then began to consider these spaces, however restricting the analysis to a particular medium, the only national digital native of Portugal and also the one more ideologically tuned with the right-wing block. What drove us to choose this particular news organization resides in the fact that according to the Digital News Report of 2017 from Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, this medium is the one which possesses a more right-wing audience, but also has an ideological alignment and editorial positioning very divergent of the new Government. In this context, we also remember the work of Hallin and Mancini (2004), which emphasizes that the Portuguese media system is part of the "Polarized Pluralist Model" which is characterized by "an elite-oriented press with relatively small circulation" and an "instrumentalization of the media by the government, by political parties, and by industrialists with political ties is common" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 73). It is by considering these two aspects, the type of audience and the characteristics of the media system,

that we justify our choice since one of the hypotheses that we put in this research has to do with the possibility of the media news to influence potential debates generated in the spaces for readers' comments. As we have needed to explain in a brief contextualization, the process of creation of the XXIst Constitutional Government had many particularities, and above all, developments occurring almost daily.

For the collection of data, we considered the period that began on October 4th, the date of the electoral process, and lasted until the end of November, four days after the inauguration of the Government. From the definition of the period, we advanced to the research of the news and its comments. In the search system of the online newspaper "Observador" the search was made from two key terms: "legislative 2015" and "Government". The result was composed of 281 journalistic items. From this selection, opinion pieces were left out, since these are the result of opinion makers, who are mostly linked to political parties and therefore defend their positions. As Márcia Galvão and Rita Tavares remember, these texts intend above all to "make 'noise' in the public opinion, or more importantly, in published opinion" (Galvão & Tavares, 2016, p. 52 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]).

The 281 pieces are distributed from a heterogeneous outside for the period under analysis, which reveals well the need to look at each day, as it is important to remember that it was through the media that the country itself was "almost watching the construction of a new political landscape" (ibid., 21).

Considering the 281 journalistic texts, we then looked at the number of comments for each piece, and to operationalize the analysis we chose the most commented news on each of the days of the referred period, which resulted in a total of 58 pieces and 2944 comments. Because one of the purposes of the work was also to confront the differences of opinions between the comments made on the website of the newspaper and the Facebook page, to this

number, we added 5885 comments that this same news generated in the profile of the newspaper on Facebook, reaching a total of 8829 comments.

3.1.2. News and readers' comments content analysis

As we have previously mentioned, we have opted to study news and comments through content analysis, since it “encompasses a set of communication analysis techniques that aim to obtain, by systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of the messages (quantitative indicators or not) that allow the inference of knowledge regarding the conditions of production/reception of these messages” (Bardin, 1979, p. 42).

The option for content analysis also appears in the line of Tankard (2009) that suggests the adoption of a model that allows the quantification of the frames. “The reason is that individual frame identification runs the risk of being accused of being arbitrary, so it advocates an ‘empirical’ and ‘systematic’ approach that calls ‘the list of frames’”(cit. in Gradim, 2016 pp. 74-75).

Within the variants of this technique we choose a direct quantitative analysis, that is, the count of the answers as they appear according to the previously established categories. It is therefore important to explain how the analysis was operationalized, specifying, in particular, the categories of analysis and the indicators used.

3.1.3. Data and coding procedure for news frames and readers' comments

Taking into account that “the very techniques of the news building – title, lead, inverted pyramid –, all presupposing opinion and selection, constitute framing devices designed to cut the ‘news’ of the amalgam informing elements that make up the event” (Gradim, 2016, p. 25 [translated to English from the original in Portuguese]), we began by considering these elements for the generic identification of the news theme.

Then, following the works of Iyengar (1991) and Cappela and Jamieson (1997), we considered, respectively, two types of framing (thematic or episodic) and three categories of frames: those concerning “substance”, those relating to “qualities of leadership/personality” and those that focus on

“game/strategy (horse race)”. By “substance” we mean matters relating to the electoral program and measures that the candidates intend to implement; by “qualities of leadership/personality” the particular characteristics of the candidates, in a logic of creating a profile; and in the category “game/strategy” we considered candidates’ positions and actions aimed at the conquest of power, in a competitive logic. Then, following the Study of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, we tried to capture other elements related to the presentation of news, namely: the trigger, considering what triggered the news organization to cover the story; and a more profound analysis of frames, considering narrative devices and approaches used by journalists in composing the story.

Table 1. Operationalization of variables and categories in news analysis

Variable	Category	
Trigger	Statement by government news maker	
	News organization enterprise	
	Analysis or interpretation	
	Preview of event	
	Release of report or poll	
	Press release	
Frames	Issue	
	Qualities of leadership/personality	
	Game/Strategy (horse race)	
Types of frames	Straight news account	<i>No dominant narrative frame</i>
	Conflict Story	<i>Focus on conflict inherent to the situation or between players</i>
	Consensus Story	<i>Emphasis on the points of agreement around an issue or event</i>
	Conjecture Story	<i>Focus around conjecture or speculation of what is to come</i>
	Story	<i>Historical explanation of the process or something</i>
	Outlook	<i>How the current news fits into history</i>
	Horse Race	<i>Who is winning and who is losing</i>
	Trend Story	<i>The news as an ongoing trend</i>
	Policy Explored	<i>A focus on exploring policy and its impact</i>
	Reaction Story	<i>A response or reaction from one of the major players</i>
	Reality Check	<i>A close look into the veracity of a statement or information</i>
	Wrongdoing Exposed	<i>The uncovering of wrongdoing or injustice</i>
	Personality Profile	<i>A profile of the newsmaker</i>

Table made by the authors from the referred theoretical references.

In addition to the framing of news, the presence of frames in comments was also measured with the same variables for each type of frame. On the other hand, we consider that “the definition and construction of the deliberation context (i.e., the deliberative frame)” (Barisione, 2012, p. 6), generates some categories we need to consider on the analysis of reader’s comments, because “the deliberative frame is a construct existing at a more implicit level, and for this reason, it may govern the procedure and even determine the outcome of a deliberation” (p. 7).

Table 2. Operationalization of deliberative frame analysis on readers’ comments

Variable	Category	Explanation
Deliberative frame analysis	Diagnosis	<i>This is the problem</i>
	Causal interpretation	<i>Where the problem comes from</i>
	Responsibility	<i>Collective or individual actor responsible for the problem</i>
	Moral evaluation	<i>Such an actor is blameworthy</i>
	Prognosis	<i>How to resolve the problem</i>

Table made by the authors from the referred theoretical references.

To analyze the frames, present in both the news and comments together, all comments derived from the 58 news stories selected and were included in a database along with these news stories. The database with the information derived from the comments was merged with the news stories database to examine the relationship between the types of frames in news and the reader’s comments.

4. Results

Looking first at the news, we noticed that the most common trigger, what motivated the news organization to cover the story in the first place, was the news organization itself. This particular trigger, with journalists actively going out and getting the story, represents almost half (48%) of all triggers. It is interesting to note that the trigger was in most cases the news organization although the statements by the Government were the second motive that justifies the news organization to cover the story (31%).

Considering the general framing of the text we realize that the most commonly employed narrative frame was game-strategy (60%), which highlights the modern tendency to explore disputes between candidates in a political game approach, as a kind of chess game. According to Capella & Jamieson (1997), this focus on political competition turns out to be normal, in that it represents the opportunity for a new story with winners and losers.

Table 3. Most common frames in news

Types of frames	%
Conflict Story	21%
Consensus Story	11%
Conjecture Story	15%
Story	2%
Outlook	1%
Horse Race	11%
Trend Story	2%
Policy Explored	23%
Reaction Story	12%
Personality/profile	2%

However, in a more detailed analysis of the frames, we observed that in fact, the most commonly used frame was related to policies and their impact on society. The focus on exploring the political dimension and its impact was the narrative frame employed in 23% of news stories. We also realized that the focus on conflict inherent to the situation or among players, known as the conflict story frame, appears in 21% of the news. Similarly, the conjecture story, the focus around speculation of what is to come, was a frame used in 15% of stories. Therefore, we perceived that, despite the game-strategy being the dominant framework, in a more detailed analysis, we identified as main frames the political measures and their impacts, in a logic of who wins and who loses with the presentation of a proposal, but also the conflicts between individuals and speculation about what will happen as the most used frames.

Considering both the triggers and the frames of the news, it is interesting to note a considerable difference in the frames used to compose the story taking into account what was the trigger. When the stories were initiated by the news organization, the most common frame was reaction story (32%), what means a response or reaction from one of the major players, closely followed by a focus on conflict inherent to the situation or brewing among the players (28%). On the other hand, when it was a news organization that triggered the story to become news, the predominant frame focused on policy and its impacts (42%) or in consensus stories, an emphasis was made on the points of agreement around certain issues (15%).

In the analysis of the comments, a set of topics were identified that constitute what we can call the frames of the readers, as they represent how they think, interpret, and assess the issue in their terms.

Table 4. Most common readers’ frames and interpretation of the issue under deliberation

Readers’ frames	%
PS did not win elections therefore cannot govern	4%
Left must govern since it was majority	2%
There must be anticipated elections	2%
PS/António Costa just want to lead	6%
Right-wing parties destroyed the country	2%
The people will pay	2%
Trick from left parties	3%
Troika is coming back	2%
António Costa (PS) breaks the principles of the party	1%
Management or interim government	1%

Note: n = 2248. Considering that 75% of the comments don’t have a dominant frame.

If we cross these frames from readers with news frames that we saw earlier, we realized how we can establish a relationship between those who are the most common news frames and the way readers reinterpret the issues. Considering policy and its impacts, the most common frame used on news, we realize that the audience interprets it saying “Troika is coming back” (53% of comments). Conflict story was the second most employed frame

on the news what in the comments appears in the sense that “PS/António Costa just want to be in power” (20%). The third most used frame on the news was a conjecture story, that readers express in comments through “PS/António Costa just wants to lead” (35%). This is, in fact, the frame that stands out most in the readers’ comments. Horse race frames on news were also commonly used, and in comments, it appears in the form of “PS did not win elections, therefore, cannot govern” (25%).

We perceive therefore that in the comments of the readers there is effective, although not in a direct way, a connection with the dominant frames in the news. On the other hand, considering that “deliberative frames suggest how an issue should be understood, read, and judged in some terms rather than in others, according to a given perspective, in a determinate light” (Barisione, 2012, p. 7), we realized that the identified reader’s frames represented a form of organization of the deliberation, that may suggest categories such as the attribution of responsibility, but also a prognosis for the problem.

Table 5. Relation between readers’ frames and deliberative frames

Readers’ frames	Deliberative frames
PS did not win elections therefore cannot govern	Causal interpretation
Left must govern since it was majority	Causal interpretation
There must be anticipated elections	Prognosis
PS/António Costa just want to lead	A moral evaluation
Right-wing parties destroyed the country	Attribution of responsibility
The people will pay	Prognosis
Trick from left parties	Attribution of responsibility
Troika is coming back	Attribution of responsibility
António Costa (PS) breaks the principles of the party	Attribution of responsibility
Management or interim government	Prognosis
Centre-party government	Prognosis
PSD/CDS must fall	Prognosis
PaF must govern	Prognosis

In this way, we realize that in fact, deliberative frames were constructed by the readers at an implicit level, ultimately determining the course of the discussion, even if any participant in the deliberation was aware of it. We

consider that in some ways the news frames were deconstructed by the readers, giving rise to a new interpretive framework.

5. Conclusions

The main purpose of this work was to analyze the news coverage of the formation process of the XXIst Constitutional Government by an ideologically oriented medium, as well as to understand how the frames that gain visibility in the news, can affect the discussions that may take place in the reader's comments space.

The results obtained from the analysis show no direct relationships between the media frames and the audience interpretative frames. We noticed the presence of deliberative frames related to the attribution of responsibility for the situation and the presentation of a resolution of the problem. These deliberative frames show that the "Observador" audience created new interpretive frameworks but always in opposition to the formation of the left Government. Therefore, even if the general coverage of "Observador" seemingly did not produce the effect of setting the media frames in the opinions of the readers, the analysis of deliberative frames shows some reframing, with the participants critically reflecting on the media frames in their own terms.

An interesting finding was the significant relationship observed between the media frame related to policies and their impact, and the readers' idea of "Troika coming back to the country" for one more rescue. Hence, if we can say that news stories have no power to set the ways for a public debate, they contribute at least with information for a deliberative reframing.

The debate that emerged about the influence of the media's coverage on the public needs further studies to understand how this reinterpretation works, but above all, in understanding the relationship between framing and deliberation, analyzing how deliberative frames, resulting from the interaction between actors in comment spaces, could dominate the group discussion.

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