News frames and their influence on political participation and media engagement: A study of the Brazilian Car Wash Operation

Encuadres noticiosos y su influencia en la participación política y el compromiso de los medios: Un estudio de la operación de Lavado de Autos en Brasil

***Frames* de notícias e sua influência na participação política e no engajamento da mídia: Um estudo da Operação Lava Jato Brasileira**

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Abstract: This article discusses the extent the issue frame (Shehata, 2013; Dekavalla, 2016) and the conflict frame (de Vreese, 2004; Kepplinger et al., 2012; Mancini, Mazzoni, Cornia & Marchetti, 2017) affect people's intention of political action. Specifically, it studies the conflict, and the issue news frames affect people's willingness to participate in demonstrations, and in posting online comments in Brazil's Car Wash Operation. The analysis shows that the premises of previous research that the conflict frame would reduce political participation (Schuck et al., 2014) could not be confirmed in this case, and the activation predicted for the issue frame only happened when analysing the variable "going to demonstrations".

Keywords:

Brazil, car wash operation, news frames, Brazil politics, journalism

Resumen: Este artículo analiza en que medida el encuadre temático (Shehata, 2013; Dekavalla, 2016) y encuadre de conflicto (de Vreese, 2004; Kepplinger et al., 2012; Mancini, Mazzoni, Cornia & Marchetti, 2017) afectan la intención de una acción política de las personas. Específicamente, estudia el conflicto y los encuadres temáticos de las noticias y cómo afectan la disposición de las personas a participar en manifestaciones y a publicar comentarios en línea en torno a la Operación de Lavado de Autos de Brasil. El análisis muestra que las premisas de investigaciones previas de que el encuadre de conflicto reduciría la participación política (Schuck et al., 2014) no pudieron ser confirmadas en este caso, y la activación prevista para el

marco temático solo ocurrió al analizar la variable "yendo a demostraciones".

Resumo: Este artigo discute até que ponto o *frame* de temas (Shehata, 2013; Dekavalla, 2016) e o frame de conflito (de Vreese, 2004; Kepplinger et al., 2012; Mancini, Mazzoni, Cornia & Marchetti, 2017) afetam a intenção de ação política das pessoas. Especificamente, estuda o conflito, e os *frames* de notícias da questão afetam a disposição das pessoas em participar de manifestações e na postagem de comentários online na Operação Lava Jato do Brasil. A análise mostra que as premissas de pesquisas anteriores de que o *frame* de conflito reduziria a participação política (Schuck et al., 2014) não puderam ser confirmadas neste caso, e a ativação prevista para o *frame* de questão só aconteceu ao se analisar a variável "indo para demonstrações".

1. Introduction

Studies have shown the potential of media to push individuals to participate in politics, from voting in elections to posting political comments on social media. Previous research points out that the news has effects on audiences in terms of participation, civic, and political engagement (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Schuck et al., 2014). Notwithstanding, it remains unclear if more media exposure would necessarily imply more participation (de Vreese, 2005; Liu et al., 2013).

Apparently, mobilizing effects are different depending on the news frames people are exposed to (Shehata, 2013) and the circumstances in which they receive the message (Strömbäck, 2017; Schuck & de Vreese, 2012). In Brazil, the media coverage of the Car Wash operation (Operação Lava-Jato, in Portuguese) has been a daily topic for, at least, the past 5 years. Over that period, several demonstrations have been organized to support or criticize the probe. Nevertheless, it is hard to figure out how much of the popular engagement with the Car

Wash operation is due to media coverage or not.

Thus, this article discusses to what extent two types of frames affect people's intention of political action. More specifically, it studies to what extent the conflict and the issue news frames affect people's willingness to participate in demonstrations, and in posting online comments about the Car Wash operation. The two frames we study are the most dominant frames when it comes to covering politics: the issue frame (Shehata, 2013; Dekavalla, 2016) and the conflict frame (de Vreese, 2004; Kepplinger et al., 2012; Mancini et al., 2017). Whereas the first one is focused on explaining the case rather than emphasizing divergences between two or more sides (Shehata, 2013), the second is more concerned about showing the conflict between individuals, groups or institutions, in order to capture the attention of the audience (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). These frames are expected to activate mental categories, affecting the interpretation and personal evaluation of the events (de Vreese, 2004; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

There is broad literature about how the news exposure activates people towards political participation or media engagement (Falaska, 2014; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Schuck & de Vreese, 2012). However, the majority of it is focused on politics stricto sensu (e.g., elections, new legislation) and not specifically about corruption (Masters & Graycar, 2015). The goal of this research is to help to fill this gap, bringing forward a better understanding of the effects of the news framing over audiences on corruption scandals. To do so, an experiment was conducted using both media frames. In the first part of this article, the case is described in great detail and the research question is presented. Secondly, an explanation of what "media engagement" and "political participation" mean for the purpose of this paper is presented, and how media frames could activate (or not) individuals to act. It is supported by a literature review about conflict and issue frames, indicating their main features, the effects expected by the exposure of people to them, and the hypotheses. In the next part, the experiment and the methods used on it are explained, followed by the findings and the discussion about them. This paper closes with the conclusions, limitations of the research, and possible approaches for further investigation.

1.1. After all, what is the Car Wash Operation?

The Car Wash operation is one of the largest investigations on corruption in Brazilian history. It began in 2014 and has this name because its first goal was to track illegal activities by money dealers at a petrol station in Brasília, the capital of Brazil. The probe advanced and found

shreds of evidence of bribery and overpriced contracts involving the country's biggest oil company (the state-owned Petrobrás), several civil construction companies, and politicians. As a result of it, public figures from incumbent and opposition parties were accused (and convicted) of corruption-linked crimes. The most notorious one is former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was in office from 2003-2011, elected by the left-wing Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, in Portuguese). He was convicted and arrested in 2018 but released by a Supreme Court decision in November 2019, as he still has the right to appeal from the sentence.

Nevertheless, the modus operandi of the authorities divides citizens' opinions. There are several points of view and different perspectives about the operation that it is difficult to summarise all, but two of them are broadly diffused through social media and the press, being frequently used to cluster all opinions under only two trends. The first one is a perspective where people believe that the justice authorities ride roughshod over the law, abusing of preventive detentions and plea bargaining. The main criticism has to do with Sérgio Moro, a former first instance judge who sentenced Lula to prison. He was always accused of being biased in his decisions against politicians with links with the former left-wing government. This suspicion raised after he was appointed by right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro as Minister of Justice in 2019. The second string of claims that preventive detentions are necessary to avoid pressures over the investigation by the indicted politicians and that the alleged bias of the operation is just a conspiracy theory. These positions often are expressed through traditional political participation (e.g., demonstrations, signing a petition) or media engagement (e.g., posting on social media, writing comments).

2. Political participation and media engagement

The exposure to different media frames is expected to produce distinct effects on attitudes regarding political participation and social media engagement (Strömbäck, 2017; Hwang & Kim, 2015; Schuck et al., 2014). In this section, I define the central dependent variables of this study: political participation and media engagement.

Political participation is defined as actions aiming to influence the government and the decision-making process (Norris, 2001). At its core lies the role of citizens: actions by politicians, professionals, and lobbyists cannot be considered as political participation (van Deth,

2014). It can be exerted at any time and be targeted to reach any public institution at any phase of the policy-making process (Hooghe, 2014; van Deth, 2014). The Car Wash operation, although it is a judicial investigation, has a clear political dimension as it defies politicians and partially sets their agendas.

Political participation requires the externalization of an idea through an action (van Deth, 2014). For instance, just watching the television or reading the news does not fulfill the requirements of a political participation act as it is strict to the private sphere. Public participation is a dynamic process of information and motivation publicly constructed (McLeod et al., 1999). Traditional acts of political participation involve voting or contacting officials, but it can also be represented by protests on the streets or by attending public discussion forums (McLeod et al., 1999; van Deth, 2014). In the Car Wash case, demonstrations are often used as a way of influencing the decision-making process and supporting or questioning a public figure.

With the online era, the ways of political participation have been changing, as the public has the power to perform communicative acts anytime and anywhere (Norris, 2001). Those citizens' actions are embedded with the same purpose of challenging and influencing politics present in classic political participation (Zukin et al., 2006; Norris, 2001). Thus, the concept of political participation was expanded to be as open as possible to embrace the potentialities of the digital era (Hooghe, 2014). For instance, when users can create content, express themselves and publicly share their thoughts and feelings about a political issue, this can be considered as a way of political participation (Hwang & Kim, 2015; Norris, 2001).

Media engagement, in turn, is defined as a communicative act performed through media (social media, online forums, commenting the news) with the purpose of debating a political issue (van Deth, 2014). It differs from political participation as it is not focused, in the beginning, on influencing politicians or public institutions directly. Occasionally, it has the potential of bringing to the political arena a communicative act that was first restricted to a semi-private (or semi-public) online sphere. Several researchers argue that, recently, people are appealing to social media to express their political opinions and to engage politically (Lee, 2015; Hyesun & Kee-Oh, 2015). Twitter, for instance, has been extensively used to express changes in political expression, to coordinate protests, and to spread information and political discussion (Theocharis et al., 2014). Occasionally, political participation and media engagement by citizens are so entangled that the theoretical distinction between them disappears in practical situations (van

Deth, 2014; Jackson & Valentine, 2014).

The literature shows uncertainty about how much personal commitment and effort (defined here as "activation") are needed to perform actions of political participation and media engagement. Mostly, online media engagement is more likely to attract people with low levels of previous political participation, as it requires lower levels of activation (Norris, 2001; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). People usually begin to engage with a cause via media (including social media), which requires a low degree of activation, to afterward participate in political actions that require higher levels of effort (Shirky, 2011). Social movements tend to instigate people online to also act in the "real" world. Otherwise, if the level of activation is not high enough through media, the organizers will not be able to call the mass of "keyboard activists" to take part in "real" actions (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

In general, the premise that online engagement leads to traditional political participation, in a causal chain relation, has been based on the perception that there is a "hierarchy of political participation" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). For instance, a traditional act of political participation with a low threshold (or level of activation) is going to a pre-scheduled demonstration, while one with a higher threshold is the illegal occupation of a public facility. The hierarchy of traditional political participation could be applied to online tactics as well (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). For instance, signing an online petition has marginal thresholds in comparison with hacking a political party website.

Nevertheless, in some cases, the dynamic between online engagement and traditional political participation is more complex than the flow from social media activation to political participation (Katz, 2014, Jackson & Valentine, 2014). In the Car Wash operation case both media engagement and political participation coexist in such a dynamic that makes impossible see it as a chain relationship, where one causes the other. Sometimes, online media engagement is enough to fulfill people's will of engaging with a cause (Boulianne, 2015; Strömback & Shehata, 2010), whereas for others it is impossible to take a stand without a political participation act (e.g., voting on a referendum), which points out that the level of activation is completely personal and very hard to standardize.

3. Conflict and issue frames

The frames are broadly defined as rhetorical lenses that affect, to some extent, how the individual processes information and gives it to its social and cultural meanings (de Vreese, 2004; McEntire et al., 2015; Norris, 2001). Thus, media framing is the selection of information to promote a particular angle of a problem, directing towards audiences through a mediatized public sphere, enabling the receivers to give meaning to that information and to choose political alternatives (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Norris, 2001). For Strömbäck (2017) media frames trigger changes in attitudes, intentions, or behaviours towards political actors, organizations, or institutions.

The conflict frame is frequently studied as a strategy from the press to catch the attention of the audience (Falaska, 2014; Schuck et al., 2014). It focuses on disagreements and divergences between individuals, groups, institutions, or other conflicting parties in the news narrative (Falaska, 2014). The conflict is something inherent to politics and when correctly balanced it can be considered as beneficial for a well-functioning democracy (Schuck & de Vreese, 2012; Aalberg et al., 2011). Framing news as conflict is often expected in systems with a sharp political polarisation (like the Brazilian one, especially after the 2014 and 2018 elections), but less polarised societies can also have similar frequencies of the news focused on political conflict in specific contexts, such as elections (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012). The conflict frame is more present when the news is about specific issues that often raise some level of controversies within the society. One example is the higher frequency of conflict news during election campaigns (Falaska, 2014; Schuck et al., 2013; Shehata, 2013). The coverage of political scandals is often fragmented and framed in terms of accusations and conflict, creating a see-saw game between politicians and reporters about what will be on the agenda (Kepplinger et al., 2012; Molotoch & Lester, 1974).

The issue framing, on the other hand, focuses not on portraying disagreement between actors but in showing points of view on issues, problems, proposals for solving them, and the implication of policies for the society (Dekavalla, 2016; Shehata, 2013). It is dominant if the news stories are focused on an informational perspective rather than focusing on individuals (Valentino et al., 2001; Guggenheim et al., 2015). In other words, the issue frame is less concerned about personal points of view, having a more analytical approach to subjects. Likewise, it is directed to information and to increase the knowledge about a topic using an

analytical narrative (McEntire et al., 2015). The issue frame is often used when the story requires a deeper level of analysis, information gathering, and data display (McEntire et al., 2015). It is also predominant in the news when the focused policy is at its early stages of discussion rather than when it has already matured (Dekavalla, 2016). Likewise, the issue frame is more often used during the early stages of political campaigns, when the level of polarisation is usually lower (Dekavalla, 2016).

The effects' magnitude of news consumption over political action is unclear. Part of the literature indicates that there is a strong correlation between media consumption and voting but a limited effect on protesting (Corrigal-Brown & Wilkes 2014). Other studies show that it is impossible to attribute to news consumption, isolated from other actions, the capacity of activating people to act (Liu et al., 2013; Boulianne, 2015). The literature shows that different media frames do not usually trigger the same effects (de Vreese, 2004; McEntire et al, 2015). On the one hand, the issue frame is normally expected to have a positive effect on activating people to act (Shehata, 2013), on the other hand, the conflict frame is likely to reduce the levels of activation (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Based on that, the first hypothesis of this study is: H1a: The issue frame has a positive correlation between political participation and media engagement regarding the Car Wash operation; H1b: The conflict frame has a negative correlation between political participation and media engagement regarding the Car Wash operation.

Why does this happen? The literature often relates the media frames with political cynicism. It is defined as the absence of trust in politicians and politics in general (de Vreese, 2005). On the issue frame side, the literature remains divided in evaluating the effects that frame has over political cynicism. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) found that the issue frame during political campaigns, in general, does not increase cynicism, but they did not find any evidence that it reduces cynicism either. However, Shehata (2013) found that it is possible for the issue frame to be positively related to the reduction of political cynicism. The conflict frame, on its side, is positively associated with political cynicism and distrust in politics, especially during election campaigns (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2005; Shehata, 2013).

Looking at the Car Wash operation, it is expected that some politicians will be seen as undermining the investigation, as they can exert pressure over it or change legislation. Thus, it is expected that the news frames about the Car Wash will have effects on political cynicism and those will follow a similar logic from previous research (the conflict frame increases cynicism

whereas the issue frame reduces it). Based on that, the second hypothesis is: H2a: The issue frame reduces political cynicism and, consequently, people will have a better perception of politics, which will make them feel more willing to participate/engage with the Car Wash operation; H2b: The conflict frame rises political cynicism and, consequently, people will have a worse perception of politicians, which will make them feel less willing to participate/engage with the Car Wash operation.

Shehata's (2013) research also supports that the issue frame increases institutional trust in political institutions whereas the conflict frame would trigger the opposite effect. Thus, the level of trust might have a positive correlation regarding media engagement and political participation (Shehata, 2013). Despite Shehata's analysis is focused on political institutions and not on the judicial system, we assume, by analogy, that his findings could be replicated to analyze the trust in the institutions involved on the Car Wash operation (Federal Police, courts, etc.). So, the third hypothesis is: H3a: The issue frame rises trust in institutions and, consequently, it enhances political participation and media engagement with the Car Wash operation; H3b: The conflict frame reduces trust in institutions and, consequently, it trims political participation and media engagement with the Car Wash operation.

Although most of the research indicates that the conflict frame leads to deactivation, if people perceive that something they agree upon is under threat, or if there is a turning point to come, they could feel motivated to act (Schuck et al., 2014; de Vreese & Tobiansen, 2007; de Vreese & Semetko, 2002). Very often is on the news that the Car Wash operation is under threat. That can be exemplified by the death of Teori Zavascki in a plane crash in January 2017. He was the Justice responsible for the investigation in the Supreme Court and his death raised suspicions of sabotage. To cover that possibility, we elaborated the fourth hypothesis H4: Through the conflict frame, people perceive a threat to the continuity of the Car wash operation more intensively than those exposed to the issue frame. Thus, the conflict frame enhances political participation and media engagement at a higher level than the issue frame if mediated by the perception of a threat.

Also, the role of the three moderators is analysed. These moderators may intervene in how the media frames activate political participation and media engagement. The first moderator is political leaning. As the Car Wash operation is sometimes accused of being partisan, levels of activation could be affected by political preferences. The second one is how supportive of the

operation one is. And thirdly, interest in politics as a factor that can affect the levels of political participation and media engagement (Boulianne, 2011).

4. Data and Methodology

To test the moderators and the hypothesis, we ran an experiment, between April 3 and 10, 2017. The experimentation enables one to perform an action (stimulus) and to look at how the subjects respond to that, assessing the respondent's behavior, intentions, and emotions (Babbie, 2005; David & Sutton, 2011). Controlled manipulations in the media content have been proving to be an efficient way of establishing a relationship between framing and its effects, guaranteeing a high level of internal validity (de Vreese, 2004; Valentino et al., 2001). One of the following three conditions were randomly assigned to a participant. The first one was a news piece showing a conflict between two politicians from different parties in the Parliament. In that context, they were discussing a new bill that could change the way the Car Wash operation has been conducted (conflict frame - CF). The second one was a news piece based on the same issue but rather than focusing on conflict, the framing was discussing the issue and, instead of politicians arguing, it shows two political scientists explaining what the new legislation was and what it could cause (issue frame - IF). And the third condition was assigned to a group (control group - CG) which received the same questions of the other two groups but without being exposed to any news material.

Firstly, the participants had to complete a questionnaire about their political preferences to test the moderators (how interested in politics, how supportive of the operation and where would you place yourself in the political spectrum), with values ranging from one to five. Afterward, the issue and conflict frame groups were exposed to their respective stimulus and had to answer their reaction to the content of the news. Finally, the respondents were asked to report their level of agreement with some statements (e.g.: I feel I want to go a demonstration; I feel that I want to post something online, etc) and to fill up demographic data. The sample consisted in a total of 372 people (CF N=119; IF N=121; CG N=132), 59,79% were females and 40,21% males. 27,25% were between 18-22 years old, 41,80% between 23-30, 14,81% from 31-45, 14,55% from 46-60, and 1,59% with 61 years old or more, the experiment was conducted online with Brazilians which were recruited via social media using a snowball sampling technique.

Often, the experimental method comes with the price of an unnatural exposure that maybe would not happen in the real world, reducing the external validity of the study (de Vreese, 2005; Babbie, 2005; McDermott, 2002). Nonetheless, the creation of stimulus closer to real-life experiences could reduce those limitations (McDermott, 2002), that is why the stimuli were written to be as closer to a real situation as possible. The conflict frame stimulus was operationalized as having: (1) a conflict or disagreement between political actors; (2) personal attack between two or more politicians; and (3) an actor's reproaching or blaming another (Aalberg et al., 2011; Schuck et al., 2014; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Falaska, 2014). The issue frame, on its side, was produced focusing on three elements: (1) explaining the issue; (2) having the voice of specialists rather than politicians' ones; (3) showing data and interviewing scientific sources (Valentino et al., 2001; Shehata, 2013; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012). Both stimuli were based on real situations and elaborated from news extracts of Brazilian broadsheets (notably Folha de São Paulo, O Estado de São Paulo, and O Globo). Both pieces were written with an equal number of paragraphs and lines, similar word count (CF: 396; IF: 377), and related content and quotes.

The manipulation of the stimuli was made over: (1) actors, from politicians (CF) to specialists (IF) - whereas the quotes are practically the same -; (2) headlines and pictures (the CF had two pictures showing politicians arguing, whereas the IF had two neutral images of the Brazilian Supreme Court building and a Petrobrás logo); (3) verbs; and (4) the last paragraph (the CF highlights the discussion whereas the IF brings data and explanations about the Car Wash operation). The stimuli were inspired by Valentino et al. (2001) work and submitted to a professional journalist who helped me to check if the stimuli were developed in accordance with their respective operationalizations.

The dependent variables were evaluated through a 5-point scale (ranging from 1=not at all to 5=completely), and they were operationalized in the following way:

- Political participation: to what extent do you feel activated to: (1) participate on demonstrations; (2) sign a petition (physically); (3) sign an online petition, (4) merged variable.

- Media engagement: to what extent do you feel activated to: (1) share news on social media; (2) post something produced by yourself on social media; (3) comment on news portals; (4) merged variable.

The moderators (political leaning, support to the operation, and political interest) and mediators (political cynicism, institutional trust, and perception of a threat) were measured using Likert scales, usually varying from 1 to 5, with a few exceptions. The questionnaire and the stimuli were written and applied in Brazilian Portuguese.

5. Findings

Firstly, the effects of moderators on political participation and media engagement were analysed. The data was run on the SPSS PROCESS software, which allows assessing the different effects of mediators and moderators over the relationship (interaction) between an independent and a dependent variable (Hayes, 2013). It is combined with the Johnson-Newman technique, which gives intel about the direction of the relationship (Hayes, 2013). Through that, it is possible to have in details the effects of a news frame over political participation and media engagement inside "zones of significance", which are regions where we can detect if there are values of the moderator for which the relationship with the variable is significant (Hayes, 2013; Dawson, 2014).

It was analysed if the frames would have any effects on political participation and media engagement while moderating for political leaning (a scale from 1-100) within the two groups - conflict and issue frame. When people were exposed to the issue frame, we found a statistically significant activation for political participation on people that are more on the left side of the political spectrum [b=.3018, t(249)=1,9695; p<.05 for people who scored <39.084 on the political leaning scale (43,08% of the respondents)[1]]. For media engagement, the activation occurs on those who are on the extreme left side of the political scale [b=.2837, t(249)=1.9695; p<.05 for people who scored <28.8977 on the political leaning scale (27,27%)]. The results indicate the interesting effect that people who identify themselves as left-leaning tend to engage more (act politically) when exposed to an analytical frame. At the same time, people who identify as right-wing do not feel motivated to act when exposed to the issue frame.

Running the test to analyse the interaction between media frames and political participation, while moderating for Car Wash operation perception, the interaction is significant when we look at media engagement. The respondents who identified themselves as more

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[1] Statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval (p<.05). A positive "t" (t-statistics) shows activation (willingness to act), whereas a negative "t" indicates the opposite (deactivation).

supportive felt deactivated to perform online actions when exposed to the conflict frame [F(3, 247)=6.2913, p=.0004, R^2=.0742; interaction: b=-.2118, t=-2.2476, p=.0255]. In turn, when exposed to the issue frame, the opposite effect happens: people who are less supportive tend to engage through media [interaction: b=-.2552, t(249)=-2.7835, p=.0058; transition point: b=-.6122, t=1.9695, p=.05; p<.05 for people who scored <2.043 on the supporting the operation scale (42,69%)].

These results indicate that when people are supportive of a cause, they can feel demotivated to engage through media. Maybe this is due to the negativity that usually follows conflict news and the lack of willing to expose themselves on a discussion where they can be at a disadvantage point. On the other hand, those who oppose a cause can feel encouraged to engage with the news when the issue is on neutral ground[2].

Overall, the analysis of mediators showed that the issue frame activated people more on the left and less supportive of the operation to perform political participation and media engagement acts. Whereas the conflict frame demotivated people to act. Thus, the media frames seem to affect differently people from diverse ideological preferences and how much they are supportive of a cause.

Moving to the analysis of the hypothesis, the dependable variables "going to demonstrations", "signing online petition", and "signing petition in person" were merged into one: "political participation" (CF: M=2.41, SD=1.24; IF: M=2.72, SD=1.26; CG: M=2.49, SD=1.24). The same procedure was followed with "posting on social media", "sharing the news on social media", and "commenting on news portals", which were merged into the single "media engagement" variable (CF: M=1.85; SD=.96; IF: M=2.20, SD=1.11; CG: M=2.08, SD=1.03). Those merges were made to give a better comparison of media engagement and political participation. The data was analysed using PROCESS, and add-on by Andrew Hayes (2013) to the SPSS program. It allows us to run several series of models to predict effects, controlling first for the mediators (political cynicism, institutional trust, and perception of a threat), then for the moderators (political leaning, interest in politics, and perception about the car wash operation).

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[2] One possible explanation is linked with Noelle-Neuman's Spiral of Silence theory, where individuals who perceive that their personal opinions become dominant, they tend to voice them more often in public. On the other hand, those who notice that their opinions are losing ground or being attacked tend to remain more reserved (Noelle-Neuman, 1993).

In all tests, variances can be considered as equal (Levene test >.05), and to get the p-values, the post hoc Tukey HSD test was run.

Regarding the H1a and H1b, it was run an ANOVA test to analyse frames and political participation and media engagement, having the control group as a baseline. A negative mean difference shows that the respondents exposed to a particular frame scored less in comparison to the control group, whereas a positive figure shows the opposite: a higher willingness to perform acts than the control group. Those exposed to the conflict frame showed no statistically significant difference in comparison to the control group. The issue frame group, on its side, showed a positive and statistically significant correlation between being exposed to it and going to demonstrations (CF M= 2.29, SD= 1.33; IF M=2.62, SD=1.31; CG:M=2.13, SD=1.34). The only statistically relevant result was that the issue frame raises levels of activation to attend demonstrations. Thus, H1a can be partially confirmed and the H1b must be discarded (see full results in Table I).

Table I – Means and mean differences between the CF/IF groups and the control group.

		Conflict frame				Issue frame			
		Mean	**Mean differences**	**SE**	**Sig.**	**Mean**	**Mean differences**	**SE**	**Sig.**
Political participation	**Protest**	2.286	.157	.168	.619	2.628	.499	.167	.008[3]
	Online Petition	.2.546	-325	.195	.221	2.901	.030	.194	.987
	Petition in person	2.412	-.058	.186	.948	2.628	.158	.184	.668
	Merged variable	2.414	-.075	.157	.880	2.719	.229	.156	.307
Media engagement	**Own post.**	1.689	-.273	.146	.148	2.107	.145	.145	.576
	Share news	2.176	-.339	.173	.125	2.603	.088	.172	.866
	Comment news	1.672	-.092	.141	.787	1.892	.127	.140	.635
	Merged variable	1.846	-.235	.131	.174	2.201	.120	.130	.627

To analyse the H2a and H2b, we ran an ANOVA to test the relationship between the media frames and political cynicism, having the control group as a baseline (M=4.454,

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[3] Statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval (p<.05)

SD=.0883). It used a scale ranging from 1 to 5, and all control groups presented a very high level of political cynicism. Both groups, exposed to the conflict (M=4.454, SE=.124, p=.998) or the issue frame (M=4.469, SE=.123, p=.997), showed no statistically relevant difference of political cynicism levels in comparison to the control group. Thus, from the analysis, it was not possible to prove that the conflict frame creates more political cynicism than the issue frame, that is why H2a and H2b are not confirmed.

Analysing the relationship between institutional trust and exposure to media frames (H3a and H3b), we ran a bivariate correlation analysis for institutional trust and media engagement and political participation. There, it was found positive and statistically significant figures, which indicates that people with a higher institutional trust are more willing to act (political participation: r=.154, p=.003; media engagement: r=.123, p=.017). When we analyse the effects of media frames over institutional trust, using an ANOVA test, despite both groups expressed higher levels of institutional trust in comparison to the control group (M=2.378, SD=1.351), the result of the post hoc test showed no statistically significant difference between them (CF: M=2.723, SE=.172, p=.114; IF: M=2.529, SE=.171, p=.656). Thus, H3a and H3b should also be discarded.

And, for the last hypothesis (H4), the control group presented a positive and marginally significant correlation between the perception of a threat and political participation (merged variable) [r= .145, p=.096] and media engagement (merged variable) [r=.158, p=.071]. That means that the higher the perception of a threat over the Car Wash operation, the higher the activation to act. Nevertheless, when we ran the ANOVA models to analyse the correlation between the media frames and the perception that the Car Wash operation is under threat, no statistically significant difference was found between the frames (CF: M=3.242, SE=.160, p=.899; IF: M=3.116, SE=.159, p=.909) and the control group (M=3.182, SD=1.312). Thus, H4 must be dismissed.

6. Conclusions and limitations

The analysis of the moderators showed that the conflict frame indeed reduces activation levels, particularly among those who positioned themselves more on the right side of the political spectrum and who are more supportive about the operation. In this case, the conflict frame seems to trigger what Newton (1999) labels as media malaise. It is defined as democratic pathology,

which is caused by modern mass media, creating political apathy, distrust, cynicism, disillusionment, and even fear (Newton, 1999). On the other hand, the issue frame showed to have positive effects in some cases on groups that scored lower on political participation and media engagement, activating people to act.

Looking into the hypothesis, the premises of previous research that the conflict frame would reduce political participation (Schuck et al., 2014) could not be confirmed in this particular case, and the activation predicted for the issue frame only happened when analysing the variable "going to demonstrations". One possible explanation is that the operation began five years ago, thus it is an issue which people had a long time to think about, almost as an institution that is supposed to last forever. Besides, the conflict between political figures and those responsible for the investigation is very redundant in the news, more than the issue frame. That could have created a kind of "conflict frame fatigue", where people no longer identify the disputes as extraordinary events.

Secondly, the issue frame activating people to go to demonstrations indicates that the idea that internet-based acts (media engagement) could be easily activated in comparison to "real" action (political participation) cannot be confirmed in every case. A possible explanation is that media engagement may not be perceived as powerful enough when people want to take a stand. This may be a symptom of the Brazilian media's extensive coverage of protests, which may create the feeling that going to demonstrations is a more effective way of "making a change". Another possible cause is that engaging in the online sphere also has a personal cost that some of the previous research does not consider. Every time someone post or share something at one's page is exposed to aggressions and controversies that probably would not happen in the "real" world, especially within crowds that share similar thoughts - which is coherent with the Spiral of Silence theory (Noelle-Neuman, 1993). However, it requires further investigation to check the feasibility of those ideas.

The study has the following limitations. The first one is that the design (a questionnaire with close-ended responses) did not leave wide margins for people to express more precisely their feelings about the stimulus. A second limitation is that the research measures the levels of activation to perform media engagement and political participation regarding the Car Wash Operation, but it is not fit to assess what are people's goals with those actions. For further and more extensive research, it would be interesting to evaluate why the conflict frame demotivates

and the issue frame motivates people to act and to evaluate if people's attitudes, triggered or not by the frames, tend to be more critical or more supportive of the Car Wash Operation. Besides, a future investigation could look in-depth if the conflict and the issue frame are perceived differently according to political preferences.

7. References

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