Local governance, economic interests, and media discourse: insights from legislative projects in a small brazilian town

Governança local, interesses econômicos e discurso midiático: percepções de projetos legislativos em uma pequena cidade brasileira

DOI: 10.55905/rcssv12n6-029

Received on: October 06th, 2023
Accepted on: November 01st, 2023

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ABSTRACT
This article seeks to analyze the bill 006/2018 which prohibited the construction of markets, supermarkets and hypermarkets within a 2km radius of another in the city of Matinhos, in the state of Paraná, Brazil. This fact generated a controversy that caught the attention of the media and created a popular mobilization because it instituted in practice the sector monopoly in the city where the former mayor would be the biggest beneficiary because he owns a supermarket chain, exposing a form of clientelism that occurs in the municipality. The other bill 1960/2018 is identical to that of supermarkets even in the newsroom, but involves gas stations and was voted the week before this bill, being approved and sanctioned by the chief executive and the law in full force, which called attention for not having received the same treatment from the media and the population in it will be analyzed the media micropower and its selectivity in relation to events.

Keywords: legislative controversies, political influence, media agenda-setting, clientelism, economic impact.

RESUMO
Este artigo busca analisar o projeto de lei 006/2018 que proibia a construção de mercados, supermercados e hipermercados no raio de 2km de outro na cidade de Matinhos, no estado do Paraná, Brasil. Esse fato gerou uma polêmica que chamou a atenção da mídia e criou uma mobilização popular porque instituiu na prática o monopólio do setor na cidade onde o ex-prefeito seria o maior beneficiado por ser dono de uma rede de supermercados, expondo uma forma de clientelismo que ocorre no município. O outro projeto de lei 1960/2018 é idêntico ao dos supermercados até na redação, mas envolve postos de gasolina e foi votado na semana anterior a esse projeto, sendo aprovado e sancionado pelo chefe do Executivo e a lei em pleno vigor, que chamou atenção para não tendo recebido o mesmo tratamento da mídia e da população nela contida será analisado o micropoder midiático e sua seletividade em relação aos acontecimentos.

Palavras-chave: controvérsias legislativas, influência política, definição de agenda midiática, clientelismo, impacto econômico.
1 INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the word "coronelism," it evokes various sensations within a framework that creates temporal and geographical contrasts. Common perception often leads us to a historically distant past in a specific region of the country, where the state was represented by the figure of the "coronel" who centralized power autonomously and sometimes tyrannically.

Contrary to popular belief, the concept of coronelism encompasses a broader and more complex form of relationships within a structural system, as stated by Leal (1978) in the classic work "Coronelismo, Enxada e Voto."

Resulting from the superimposition of developed forms of the representative system onto an inadequate economic and social structure, it is not merely the survival of private power, whose hypertrophy constitutes a typical phenomenon of our colonial history. It is, instead, a peculiar manifestation of private power, an adaptation through which the remnants of our ancient and excessive private power have managed to coexist with a political regime of extensive representative foundations.

The phenomenon of "coronelism" emerged during the Old Republic in Brazil as a strategy employed by local leaders, especially landowners, who no longer wielded the same influence as during the imperial era. They sought advantages from the gradually consolidating public power in the national scenario through the federalist system.

It becomes necessary, within the context of "coronelism," to conceptualize terms that, despite their proximity, possess distinct meanings, such as "mandonismo" and "clientelism." In some aspects, these terms can be confusing or even complementary within a patrimonialistic system.

According to Queiroz (1976), "mandonismo" manifested itself in different periods of Brazilian history. During the colonial era, it was central but fragile, evolving through the Empire where it intertwined with local mandonismo through legal professionals, eventually becoming autonomous and independent of coronelism during the Old Republic. In this period, local power-brokers exercised fragmented authority in relation to the state. Queiroz attributes this phenomenon to the "persistence of the country's social structure based on large landholdings and what could be termed as the extended family."

Clientelism, in turn, is a way for political actors to offer public benefits such as jobs, including the distribution of appointed positions in public administration, tax exemptions, and more. Bezerra (1999) defines it as "exchanges of services, favors,
support, votes, and loyalties among parliamentarians, local political leaders, and government authorities."

Historically, the term "coronelism" was intimately linked to rural areas, often associated with backwardness, particularly during the emergence of the Republic when the role of the "coronel" became secondary. This marked a period of decline for large landowners and their influence within the federalist system.

However, today, due to the phenomenon of population inversion where urban areas prevail over rural ones (Velho, 2007), a fresh approach to this subject is necessary. Urbanization, besides progress, should usher in new practices, leaving behind the clientelistic and outdated past of rural regions. The expectation is a modernization of relationships. Contrary to this anticipation, observed realities defy this assumption as past practices endure.

In his research conducted in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Reis (1971) noted that migrants in favorable social and economic conditions managed to maintain their status in urban areas by exerting influence over the less privileged. This gave rise to a local political elite that sustained its power through descendants, a phenomenon labeled as "Neo-Coronelism."

Coronelism was not a phenomenon exclusive to a particular region of Brazil, just as Neo-Coronelism, with industrialization and urban modernization, initiated the formation of new local elites. An illustrative example is Belo Horizonte in Minas Gerais, Southeastern Brazil. Another significant instance is the Contestado region in Santa Catarina. These examples highlight Neo-Coronelism as a broad and diverse phenomenon, as stated by Thomé (2001). According to him, local oligarchies had their own 'electoral strongholds' and rotated in power. However, with the decline of the coronelistic system, particularly post-World War II (1946-1967), the rise of the state toward industrialization and urbanization proved pivotal for the emergence of Neo-Coronelism. This phenomenon was now represented not by the figure of the 'coronel' but by their descendants, close relatives, or trusted individuals.

According to Foucault (2005), micro-powers have diverse representations within contemporary society, which 'can be a small chief, a guard in an H.L.M., a prison director, a judge, a union leader, or an editor-in-chief of a newspaper.' It is through this lens that this article seeks to analyze the role of the media in the shelving of one legislative project and its limited influence on another nearly identical project that was approved.
In the contemporary world, the media holds a special prominence as a significant influencer, particularly in the political arena, as stated by Castells:

(...) Electronic media (not just radio and television, but all forms of communication such as newspapers and the internet) has become the privileged space of politics. Not that all politics can be reduced to images, sounds, or symbolic manipulations. However, without the media, there is no means of acquiring or exercising power. Therefore, all political parties, regardless of their distinct ideologies, end up entering the same game, albeit not in the same manner or with the same purpose. (CASTELLS, 2000).

Matinhos, a coastal city located in the state of Paraná, reflects the political dynamics found in many municipalities across the country. With an estimated population of 34,207 inhabitants and a GDP of over 133 million Brazilian reais (IBGE, 2018), this small city exemplifies broader political patterns. For more than a decade, the same political group has held power in Matinhos, first under the leadership of former Mayor Eduardo Antônio Dalmora during the terms of (2009-2012) and (2013-2016), followed by his successor Ruy Hauer Reichert (2017-2020) (TSE, 2019).

In the legislative arena, a similar trend is observed. Out of the 11 current city council members (MATINHOS, 2019), six were re-elected from the previous election. Of these, eight council members support the current mayor, while three are part of the opposition in the municipality. Despite the legislative body's role in overseeing the executive power (JURISWAY, 2016), ethical and democratic principles are at risk when members of the legislature are part of a large "coalition" government, as noted by Bittencourt (2012). This situation can lead to the overlooking of programmatic incompatibilities in exchange for clientelism, exemplified by the distribution of appointed positions and other benefits granted by the executive branch.

In May 2018, the Matinhos City Council became embroiled in a national controversy surrounding a proposed bill. The legislation aimed to prohibit the establishment of new "markets, supermarkets, and hypermarkets" within a 2km radius, effectively preventing the creation of new businesses in this sector. This move ensured a monopoly, with former Mayor Eduardo Antônio Dalmora being a major stakeholder due to his ownership of several businesses of this nature within the municipality, as reported by RPC, a local news outlet (RPC, 2018). The bill was withdrawn from the agenda after public pressure and media coverage.

Simultaneously, a nearly identical bill, this time targeting gas stations, was approved by the council. Strikingly, this project, which prohibited the installation of new
fuel stations within a 2km radius from existing ones, did not receive the same level of attention from both the media and the public. Consequently, the law 1960/2018 was passed and sanctioned (LEIS MUNICIPAIS, 2018).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In understanding neocoronelism and its local context, three key authors are central to this study. Fábio Wanderley Reis (REIS, 1971) conducted a significant study on political leadership in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. His work sheds light on the enduring influence of political figures, particularly in urban settings. Rejane Vasconcelos Accioly Carvalho’s article, "Coronelismo e Neocoronelismo: Eternização do quadro de análise política do Nordeste" (CARVALHO, 1987), discusses the transition from agrarian to industrial societies, highlighting the persistence of the "coronel" figure in urban contexts.

In the southern region of Brazil, Nilson Thomé's article, "Oligarquias, Coronelismo e Neocoronelismo na região do Contestado em Santa Catarina" (THOMÉ, 2001), demonstrates how the process of urbanization led to the adaptation of "coronéis" to new systems while retaining their power and influence through politics.

When discussing micro-powers, Michel Foucault's work, particularly his book "Microphysics of power" comes into focus, emphasizing the diverse locations where power can reside, from family and schools to the media. This notion is further explored by José de Assunção Barros (BARROS, 2009), who links micropower intimately with everyday life, translating into the political use of representational systems, familial and intergroup relations, and discourse.

Suzana Varjão's book, "Micropoderes, Macroviolências" (VARJÃO, 2008), delves into micropower within the realm of media. The book exposes the journalistic habitus of the media and the unequal treatment of violent events, especially when involving impoverished individuals marginalized by society. Varjão's work highlights the stark contrast in media representation between incidents involving a person from a low socio-economic background and those involving an individual with economic and social power, shedding light on this grave social issue.

3 METHODS

Through a qualitative bibliographic analysis, this study will contrast the roles of the executive and legislative powers, as well as hidden influences, in the formulation of
legislative projects. Additionally, it will explore the media's significance in framing issues and mobilizing the masses. As noted by Marconi and Lakatos:

Bibliographical research, or secondary sources, encompasses all publicly available literature related to the study topic. This includes standalone publications, bulletins, newspapers, magazines, books, research papers, theses, cartographic material, etc., as well as oral communication mediums: radio, magnetic tape recordings, and audiovisual materials such as films and television. Its purpose is to directly connect the researcher with everything written, spoken, or filmed on a particular subject, including conferences followed by debates that have been transcribed in any form, whether published or recorded. (MARCONI e LAKATOS, 1992)

4 RESULTS

Eduardo Antônio Dalmora stands as a stark example of neocoronelism and urban clientelism. As the owner of a supermarket chain, he served as the mayor of Matinhos for two consecutive terms from (2009-2016), holding executive power for eight years. He then elected his relatively unknown tourism secretary, Ruy Hauer Reichert, as his successor, who served from (2017-2020). Dalmora's tenure was marred by controversies, including a legal battle initiated by the Paraná Public Prosecutor's Office in 2013. The case involved Dalmora's purchase of land, leveraging his public position to convert an environmental preservation area into a zone of social interest. He then sold the land to a construction company for the government's "Minha Casa, Minha Vida" housing program, resulting in a legal process for administrative misconduct (PARANÁ, 2017).

In 2015, Dalmora's administration gained national attention when the program CQC (Custe o Que Custar) on Rede Bandeirantes reported on an unfinished daycare center, originally slated for completion in 2013 (TRIBUNA DO PARANÁ, 2015). During the coverage, reporter Juliano Dip was pursued by individuals claiming to be municipal employees, allegedly acting under Mayor Dalmora's orders. Inside the town hall, Dip and his team were physically assaulted. It is noteworthy that this article is not the first to label Mayor Dalmora as a "coronel," with Dip referring to the incident as taking place at the "ranch of a colonel," highlighting the persecution and aggression faced by the reporter and his team.

The bill 006/2018 (CORREIO DO LITORAL, 2018) in its summary states the following text: 'Establishes regulations for the installation of markets and/or hypermarkets and other provisions.
The body of the bill, comprising only 2 articles and lacking any justification, states in its first article the prohibition of construction and installation of establishments such as markets, supermarkets, and/or hypermarkets within a distance less than 2 KM from another similar one already installed. The bill is signed by three members of the mayor's political base and met with abstention from one council member.
After leaving the mayor's office, Dalmora left his successor, Ruy Hauer Reichert, who was elected with the political support of the former mayor. Even outside the political scene, Dalmora continued to operate behind the scenes. The executive-initiated bill aims to create a cartel, monopolizing this sector and inhibiting competition, leading to effects such as abusive prices above market value and reduced investments in entrepreneurial activities (MAGGI, 2010). In this maneuver, Dalmora and his supermarket chain would be the biggest beneficiaries. It is noteworthy that there is no justification provided for the bill, a common absence of explanations regarding the benefits for society.

The silence from most members of the legislative body, specifically the council members, regarding the bill can be explained, as corroborated by (BURGOS, 2005), within the context of neocoronelism or urban clientelism.

Structured within a highly hierarchical framework, centered in the Executive Power, the power circuit involved intermediation by politicians in the Legislature. These politicians relied on community leaders, who, in turn, acted as pathways to the local population. The population, in response, engaged in this circuit through voting, thereby completing the cycle of loyalty-based relationships, grounded in a system of favor exchange.

Despite violating fundamental principles of the constitution, the law was put up for discussion and could have been approved if it had not caught the attention of the media and the public. Residents were mobilized to attend the municipal council meeting on the day of the project's discussion. As a result of public pressure, the bill had to be taken off the agenda and later archived.

The Paraná coast boasts various media outlets, including newspapers, blogs, and a television network, TVCI in Paranaguá. However, the influence of RPC TV (HERZ, 1987), a retransmitter of Globo Network television, combined with its reach, magnifies its impact compared to local media in setting the agenda and defining news coverage.

RPC's involvement occurred in two distinct moments. Firstly, in an edition presented by Alana Gazoli from RPC Maringá the day after the events, featuring a report by Wilson Kirsche (RPC, 2018). The report includes an interview with the president of Matinhos City Council, Councilman Gerson Júnior, who portrayed the project as an initiative by local traders. In an attempt to justify his stance, he mentioned that the economic crisis affecting the country was a concern for the traders, emphasizing that the former mayor had no connection to the project.
In the second instance, during another statewide edition of 'Meio Dia Paraná' hosted by Fernando Parracho (RPC, 2018), the presenter began by questioning, 'How far does free competition among companies go?' He continued by stating that coastal traders were worried about a proposal that aimed to determine where new supermarkets could be established in Matinhos. It's essential to consider (COOK, 2011): 'Journalism should be regarded not only as an institution but also as a political institution; in other words, journalists are political actors.'

The same report from the edition aired by RPC Maringá was presented by the host, who, at the end, added his comments to the story. 'Now, I pose a question to the council members of Matinhos: Will they vote and approve similar projects, such as gas stations, pharmacies, gift shops, and other types of businesses, or will it only concern markets?' He concluded by reading the responses provided by Mayor Ruy Hauer, who declined to comment on the decision, and former Mayor Eduardo Dalmora, who stated that he would support new markets. This statement was met with a skeptical facial expression as he uttered the words.

Law 1960/2018 (MUNICIPAL LAWS, 2018) has almost identical wording to bill 006/2018. The difference is that instead of markets, supermarkets, and hypermarkets, the target is gas stations, which must maintain a distance of 2 km from any existing or licensed gas station.

The law was sanctioned and approved by the Matinhos City Council on May 7, 2018. In contrast, the law related to supermarkets was supposed to follow the same process and be approved the following week, on May 14, as the Matinhos City Council sessions take place every Monday.

There was no discussion or movement calling for the repeal of the law regarding gas stations, despite its unconstitutionality determined by the Supreme Federal Court (STF, 2016). Media outlets did not cover any articles regarding this law, which theoretically has the same detrimental and monopolistic effects as the law concerning supermarkets.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In the 21st century, discussing terms like "Coronelism," "Neo-Coronelism," or "clientelism" underscores that practices that were theoretically supposed to have ceased still persist, especially in Brazil's interior cities. The roots of these practices are deeper
than we might imagine, originating from a patrimonialist society where the public realm became an extension of the private. Urban coronels may no longer own vast estates, but they represent the local elite through economic power, often translating into local political leadership that can directly benefit themselves, essentially legislating in their own favor.

The media, through its micro-powers, can mobilize and focus on specific issues. However, sometimes, this is done in a biased manner, favoring or harming certain economic or social sectors. This partial journalism lacks attention to details or social actors.
REFERENCES


