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MEMORY AND TRUTH EFFECTS: BRAZIL'S CORRUPTION IN NUMBERS IN THE BRAZILIAN PARLIAMENT

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we present results of the research study that aims at analyzing the truth effects produced by the numbers of parliamentarians of each political party who are accused of having committed unlawful and fraudulent practices or violation of the legal norms during the period of redemocratization of Brazilian society. The analytical archive comprised copies of texts from databases available on the worldwide web, which present information from courts available on the Internet. The first database is part of the Ranking of Politicians project. The second database is the *VigieAqui* (meaning Monitor Here in Portuguese), a tool launched by the *Instituto Reclame Aqui* (meaning Complain Here Institute in Portuguese), which spotlights the names of politicians with pending judicial inquiries of proceedings, and lists exactly what these inquiries or proceeding relate to. In the analysis of the discursive corpus we draw upon concepts from Discourse Analysis, from writings by Michel Foucault and from the field of Memory Studies. The results indicated that, within the memory domain of political corruption in Brazil, there is a regularity of corruption practices in 92% of political parties acting at the level of the Federal Chamber of Deputies and in 79% of political parties acting at the level of the Federal Senate.

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INTRODUCTION

If, during the dictatorship period (1964-1985) in Brazil the cases of corruption were effectively silenced, successive corruption cases were and continue to be spectacularized by the media, as notes Fonseca-Silva (2009). After the corruption scandal of the so-called Collor Case, which involved Fernando Collor de Mello, the first president elected by direct vote after the military regime, the corruption scandals that were most spectacularized by the Brazilian media were the Mensalão scandal, and the cases that were exposed during the different phases of the Operação Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash), initiated in 2014 by the Brazilian Federal Police (Polícia Federal - PF) and by the Federal Prosecution Office (Ministério Público Federal - MPF) and the biggest operation

against corruption ever undertaken in Brazil. As a result of the Operação Lava Jato, top executives of the country's major building contractors were denounced for adopting unlawful practices alongside political agents from various sectors and spheres of power. The investigations reached the top-level leadership of Brazilian political parties in power and sent a number of political agents to prison, such as former President Luís Inácio "Lula" da Silva, elected by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT), and former federal deputy and also former President of the Chamber of Deputies Eduardo Cunha, from the old Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro - PMDB), nowcalled Brazilian Democratic Movement (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro - MDB). Even though schemes involving members of various political parties have also been revealed by investigations of the Federal Police and the Federal Prosecution Office, denunciations of unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms committed by politicians of the Workers' Party attained greater visibility on different media outlets. Considering the analysis of Fonseca-Silva (2009), who remarked that "in a democracy, political

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scandals are thrown into the spotlight in view of the fact that it is a political regime in which political conflicts and frictions [...] become more visible” (p. 2002), but that “not all scandals are [...] discursivized and spectacularized *in* and *by* the media (p. 2002), seeing that the main means of mass communication “have ‘a place for speaking’, ‘power to speak’ and ‘power to suggest *where* and *what* to look at, *what* to read and *how* to interpret” (p. 2003), we investigated, within the ambit of the Discourse Analysis Research Laboratory (Laboratório de Pesquisa em Análise do Discurso - LAPADis), that truth effects are produced by the numbers of parliamentarians of each political party accused of having committed unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms during the period of redemocratization in Brazil, more specifically at the moment the research that resulted in this work was carried out.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the approach of this research, we operated a gesture of quantitative interpretation, both in the construction of the analytical archive and in the construction of the discursive corpus (Pêcheux, [1969] 1990), which contains the discursive sequences selected for analysis. With regard to the objectives, the research was descriptive/interpretative, and as regards the procedures, the discursive analysis is based on the number of politicians accused of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms. The analytical archive was constituted by two databases available on the worldwide web, which present information from courts. The first database is part of the *Ranking dos Políticos* project. The second database was made up of texts accessed through the online tool *VigieAqui*. All of the information contained in both databases are public and can be verified/ confronted based on the sources presented and on the number of lawsuits listed. The discursive corpus comprised discursive sequences, here understood as tables and figures elaborated from data extracted from the analytical archive, and from linguistic formulations selected from the same archive. We borrowed the concepts of analytical archive and of discursive corpus from Discourse Analysis so as to make them operational in this work. Once again, we turn back to the research conducted by Fonseca-Silva (2007a; 2007b) into memory networks to point out in the present work truth effects and memory effects in the discursive sequences of the analytical corpus. Starting from the understanding that the subject position is an effect and that meaning is also an effect of articulations between two subject positions in a certain social structure, ultimately we speak of truth effects within the perspective of discourse analysis, albeit understanding truth based on a Foucauldian perspective. With regard to the concept of memory domain, we turn to the description provided by Foucault ([1969] 2012) in *The Archeology of Knowledge* about his working method. In synthesis, it involves a group of formulations that are diffused and foreign to each other, but which form a memory domain because they are linked by rules of existence common to all of them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As regards the Federal Chamber of Deputies, 513 (five hundred and thirteen) federal deputies represented 25 (twenty-five) political parties, during the period of data collection held in the second half of 2017: Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro - PMDB), Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores -PT),

Brazilian Social Democracy Party (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira - PSDB), Progressive Party (Partido Progressista - PP), Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrático - PSD), Party of the Republic (Partido da República- PR), Brazilian Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Brasileiro- PSB), Democrats (Democratas-DEM), Brazilian Republican Party (Partido Republicano Brasileiro -PRB), Democratic Labor Party (Partido Democrático Trabalhista-PDT), Podemos (meaning “We Can” in Portuguese -PODE), Brazilian Labor Party (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro-PTB), Solidarity (Solidariedade, or SD), Communist Party of Brazil (Partido Comunista do Brasil -PCdoB), Christian Social Party (Partido Social Cristão - PSC), Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista - PPS), AVANTE, Republican Party of the Social Order (Partido Republicano da Ordem Social - PROS), Socialism and Freedom Party (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade - PSOL), Green Party (Partido Verde - PV), Sustainability Network (Rede Sustentabilidade - REDE), Social Liberal Party (Partido Social Liberal - PSL), National Ecological Party (Partido Ecológico Nacional -PEN), Progressive Republican Party (Partido Republicano Progressista - PRP). Figure 1 (below) presents the number of federal deputies elected per party (in blue), and the number of federal deputies of the respective parties who were investigated are currently under investigation (in orange) for unlawful and fraudulent practices or of violation of the legal norms.

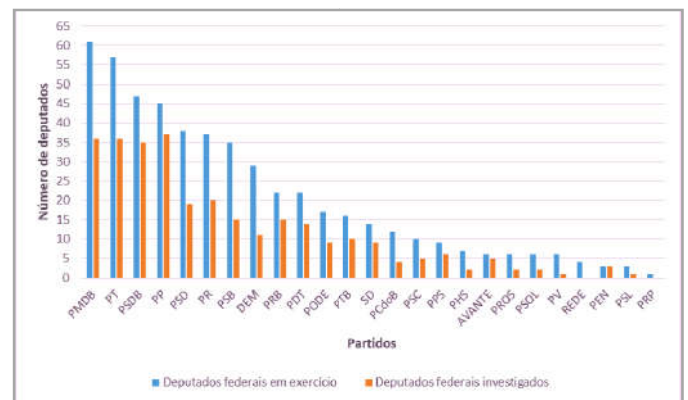


Figure 1. Number of federal deputies investigated by political party

From the group of 513 (five hundred and thirteen) federal deputies, 296 (two hundred and ninety-six) were targets of investigation for unlawful practices or violation of the legal norms, through which the individuals subjectivated themselves in and through the corrupt subject-position. This figure represents approximately 58% of the total number of federal deputies. Figure 1 shows that only two parties, namely the Sustainability Network (Rede Sustentabilidade – REDE), and the Progressive Republican Party (Partido Republicano Progressista - PRP) did not have representatives that were targets of investigation or of corruption charges. The graph also indicates that federal deputies accused of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms are representatives of 92% of political parties. The quantitative analysis indicates that the Workers' Party (PT) appears next to the other parties, presenting numbers and percentages that accommodate themselves in the interior of a curve wherein we have, on one end, the Sustainability Network (REDE), and on the other end, the Progressive Party (PP). The numbers revealed produce

truth effects of which: i) the Workers' Party is not the most corrupt party in the Chamber of Deputies; ii) federal deputies subjectivate themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms both in the Workers' Party and in 92% of the parties; iii) federal deputies subjectivate themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms in all administrations, seeing that there are federal deputies implicated in unlawful practices who are in their sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth mandates; iv) federal deputies elected for the first time in 2014 have also previously subjectivated themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms, seeing that, of the 209 newly elected deputies, 124 are shown as being implicated in the databases of the *Ranking dos Políticos* and of the *Vigie Aqui*, that is, approximately 59%. As regards the Senate, in turn, 80 (eighty) senators represented 18 (eighteen) political parties in 2017: PMDB, PSDB, PT, PP, PSB, PSD, PR, DEM, PODE, PDT, PTB, PRB, PCdoB, PSC, PPS, PROS, REDE and PTC. Figure 2 indicates the number of senators elected per political party (in blue), and the number of senators from the respective parties who are accused (in orange) of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms.



Figure 2. Number of senators investigated by political party

The Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) was the party with the greatest number of senators elected in the Senate in November 2017 at the time. 17 (seventeen) senators out of a total of 22 (twenty-two) were accused of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position. This number represents 77% of the PMDB's bench in the Senate house. With the second greatest number of elected senators, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) had 11 (eleven) parliamentarians in the Senate. From this group, 9 (nine) or 82% were on the list of senators charged with corruption. The PT was the third party with the greatest number of representatives in the Senate and had 9 (nine) senators, among which 5 (five) or 56% were included in the list. Adding up the number of parliamentarians in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, the PMDB was the greatest number of congress members investigated or charged, totaling 52 members; the PSDB appears in the second place, with a total of 44 congress members. And the PT comes in third, with 41 congress members implicated in unlawful practices. From a total of 80 (eighty) senators who represented political parties in the Senate, 76 (seventy-six) were accused of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms, which represents 95% of the total. If we take into account the political parties of the Chamber of Deputies whose parliamentarians were accused of committing such practices, this number reaches almost 99%. Only the parliamentarians of the REDE party,

created after the 2014 elections and represented by 2 federal deputies and 1 senator, were not accused or charged. These numbers produce a truth effect where incorruption is not only tolerated, but finds acceptance within the political parties. Deputies and senators against whom there was no charges for unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms work alongside cohorts against whom there was an enormity of investigations or accusations related to corruption, such as bribery, administrative corruption, fraud in bidding or acquisition processes, embezzlement, etc. In analyzing the amount of political parties involved in corruption in the Chamber of Deputies, we concluded that in 92% of them there was deputies accused of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms. In the Senate, the percentage of parties with senators implicated in unlawful and fraudulent practices were 78%. The numbers presented create a truth effect that senators subjectivate themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms both in the Workers' Party and in 78% of the parties; that senators subjectivate themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices or of violation of the legal norms in all governments and administrations, seeing that there are senators who have been investigated or are currently under investigation who are in their fourth 8-year term in office. These numbers produce a truth effect that indicates that the practices through which parliamentarians subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position are legitimated within the political parties. Deputies and senators against whom there was no charges of unlawful practices work alongside cohorts against whom there are accusations of subjectivating themselves in the corrupt subject-position through unlawful practices, including bribery, administrative corruption, fraud in bidding or acquisition processes, embezzlement, criminal association, etc.

Conclusion

The results lead us to affirm that, in the memory domain of corruption in Brazil, the number of parliamentarians accused of or charged with unlawful or fraudulent practices or with violation of the legal norms produce truth effects wherein the Workers' Party is not the most corrupt political party in Brazil, since there is a substantial degree of regularity of practices linked to corruption in 92% of political parties active in the Senate.

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