



FLOORS LIVE: A BROADCASTING/WEBCASTING MAPPING OF AMERICAN CONTINENT PARLIAMENTS

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Abstract: This paper presents an unprecedented investigation of the extent to which national parliaments in the countries of the American continent use live video broadcasts and webcasts of plenary sessions as a means for transparency, publicity and encouraging accountability. Data collected through direct systematic observation of plenary sessions shows that 51 among 55 legislative houses offer at least one means for the public to watch real-time discussions and decisions from the most important arena of the Legislative Branch. Considering the multiple formats offered, we have classified broadcasts in four informative categories, which imply different levels of transparency and publicity. To conclude, for most parliaments there is the challenge of qualifying the information from the live broadcasts of the plenary sessions to broaden understanding, promote greater interactivity and increase the degree of public engagement.

Keywords: Broadcasting; Webcasting; Legislative television; Plenary session; Legislative Power.

1 Introduction

Live video broadcasts/webcasts are showcases of the political action that takes place in the legislative plenary sessions. Full and real-time exhibition of discussions and decisions is among the main forms of openness and transparency of Parliament, and it is also considered fundamental to democratic strengthening (BEETHAM, 2006; NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, 2007; DECLARATION FOR PARLIAMENTARY OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY, 2012; INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2018; NOW, 2019).

This paper presents part of the results of an unprecedented survey of broadcasts/webcasts in the Americas. We obtained the data through direct and systematic observation of plenary sessions, a qualitative research technique that comprises the direct observation of the phenomena investigated by the researchers, based on previously defined criteria (YIN, 2016; PÁDUA, 2019).

We considered technical variables for the broadcast/webcast analysis and created qualitative categories to classify the information (Appendix A). The study corpus comprises all 55 legislative houses of the 35 autonomous and independent countries in the region. We analyzed 172 sessions, totaling over 670 hours, between October 2019 and April 2020. We recorded the

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observation according to a question systematization, in the form of a digital field diary, which gathered written notes and photographs of specific moments of the plenary sessions' broadcasts/webcasts.

We systematized the records in electronic spreadsheets and later related them to political, social, economic, and geographical variables. We conducted the data manipulation between June and July 2000. This process results in the data as follows.

2 The plenary session that is exhibited to the citizen

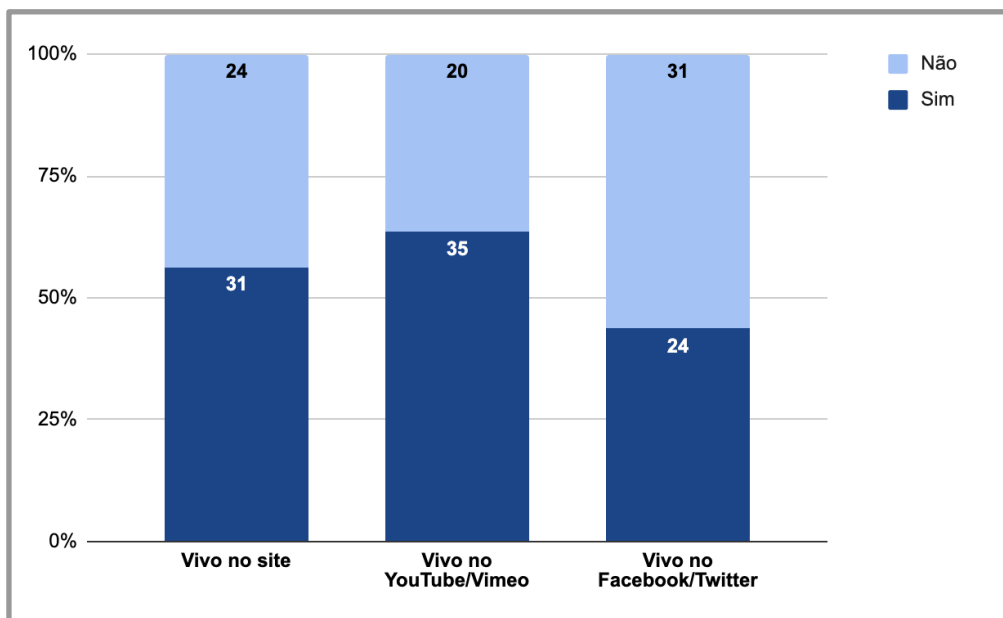
Live video broadcasts/webcasts of plenary sessions is widely adopted on the American continent. The survey revealed that 92.7% of legislative houses make available at least one of the considered formats - television *broadcast* or *webcast* on *websites*, *online* video platforms (*YouTube* or *Vimeo*), and social media (*Facebook* or *Twitter*). It is worth mentioning those that offer all of these modalities: unicameral parliaments in El Salvador, Peru, and Guatemala, and the chambers of deputies and the senates in Brazil and Mexico. However, there are legislative branches that are at the other extreme: in four (7.3%) legislative houses - the two in Belize and the two in Haiti - we found no alternative for the population to watch the plenary sessions in real time.

The most widely used mean for live broadcast of plenary proceedings on the continent is the internet, which has been considered crucial in expanding the service to citizens, as technology has reduced costs and made the operation technically easier (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2018). *Webcasting/streaming* is made available by 87.3% of American legislative houses. The survey shows that parliaments in the region have decided to adapt to changes in audience consumption, since in places where Internet access is more widespread, people are no longer watching *broadcast* television (CANNITO, 2010).

A detailed analysis of the live streaming of plenary sessions on the Internet (Graph 1) shows that 31 legislative houses (56.4% of the total) use their own *website* for such. Thirteen of them use mechanisms integrated into the *webpage* itself, and 18 insert in the page the *link* or the video which is actually being streamed by *YouTube* and/or *Vimeo*.

Almost a third (63.6%) of the parliaments studied make their live streamings on private *online* video platforms, notably *YouTube*, which is used by 34 of the 35 legislative houses that webcast in this mode. This is the most common option for real-time video broadcasting of plenary sessions.

Graph 1 – Live streaming modalities on the internet



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

No. Yes. Live on the website. Live on YouTube/Vimeo. Live on Facebook/Twitter.

Among the legislative houses that stream the session live on *YouTube* (61.8% of the total of 55), not all use the parliament's official channel on the platform. In Dominica and St. Lucia, live *streaming* is done through the Government's account. On the other hand, the Jamaican parliament has its sessions broadcast on the state-owned *Public Broadcasting Corporation of Jamaica* (PBJC) television account.

Another strategy, used by 43.6% (24) of the surveyed legislative houses, is live streaming on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. On the American continent, 69.1% of legislative houses have a *Twitter* account and the same percentage on *Facebook* (data compiled by the survey), a percentage close to that of parliaments that globally claim to use social media: 70% (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2018). It shows that American legislative branches, while following the global trend of social media use, have not adopted such media majorly as *streaming* media.

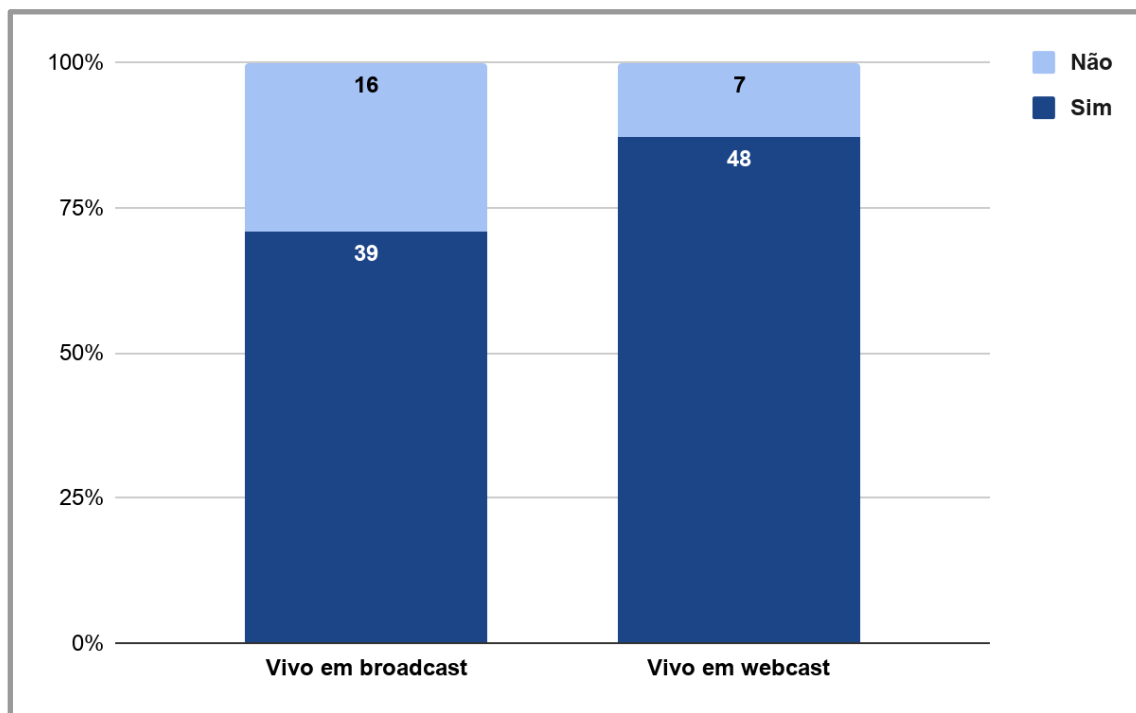
It is relevant to point out that, globally, social media is the main way for legislative branches to communicate with citizens since 2016, if we consider the number of parliaments adopting it. They are in use as tools to inform about parliamentary actions, explain the political and legislative process, and engage society with the institution (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2018). Such presence in the social media seeks to reach an audience that is there for the most varied reasons and that tends more and more to consume information directly in these environments. The expectation is that this audience may eventually become interested in the political information that is offered (SURYADJAJA, 2016). While television is part of a massive communication model, social media integrates a collaborative model, as it involves greater engagement (D'ANDRÉA, 2015), although this ideal does not always materialize due to a lack of

interaction between parliaments and Internet users. Furthermore, the streaming cost on the Internet and social media is much lower than on TV.

The direct observation of the sessions revealed that, in some legislative houses, live streaming on social media is the main form of dissemination of the plenary sessions, as in the *National Assembly* of the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis, where live *streaming* on *Facebook* is the only option for those who want to watch such events remotely in real time. In other legislative houses, live streaming on social media is an additional way to get closer to the public, complementary to broadcasting on television, *website*, and *YouTube*. These parliaments meet the vision that it is necessary to multiply the media presence, because it is through the media that people have access to information that allows them to act politically (MAIA, 2006).

Outside the Internet, we verified that 70.9% of the 55 legislative houses surveyed broadcast the plenary sessions live on *television* (Graph 2), through their own or third-party broadcasters, in free or paid open signal. A little more than half (50.9%) have a television channel specially dedicated to broadcasting parliamentary activities (*broadcast* on an open signal or by subscription). The so-called legislative televisions can be run by the parliament itself, as in Brazil and Argentina, or managed by third parties, cable TV companies (United States and Canada) or the state-owned media corporation (Bahamas). They are media created so citizens can consume information regarding the Legislative Branch directly from its source (RENAULT, 2004; SANT'ANNA, 2006). However, they also aim to influence the private media's news coverage, which usually refers to the Parliament in a superficial and negative way (SANT'ANNA, 2006). Televisions dedicated to covering events in the Legislative Branch add to the informative scenario in favor of Citizenship by clarifying political decisions (SANT'ANNA, 2009). They also contribute to the effectiveness of the transparency and publicity principles, fundamental in representative systems (BARROS; BERNARDES; RODRIGUES, 2014). Even though they are the stage for constant conflicts between political and journalistic logics (BERNARDES, 2013b).

Graph 2 – Comparison between the plenary session's live broadcast/webcast



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).
 No. Yes. Broadcast Live. Webcast Live.

The survey showed a somewhat different reality than that stated by the legislative branches themselves to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 2019, the entity's database pointed out that 61.8% (34) of legislative houses on the American continent had a television channel dedicated to broadcasting plenary sessions, 23.6% (13) did not, and 14.5% (8) had not made the information available. We believe the difference between the situation found by the study (50.9% of legislative houses with dedicated TV channels) and that registered in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (61.8%) can be explained by the fact that some parliaments only stream specific events live on the Internet, such as the plenary sessions themselves, without providing additional programming, and yet they have considered this as a TV channel when declaring information to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The divergence can also be justified by this research's limitation in registering the reality, since it is a survey on television channels in countries not visited in person by the researchers, i. e., analyzed only with information available at a distance.

2.1 When to watch live

To enable the population to watch the representatives' discussions and decisions in real time, citizens need to be aware of the day and time when the plenary session will take place. Therefore, the survey verified whether the parliaments of the American continent are making such agendas available in advance on their official *websites*. Most offer such a service, but what stands out is that 41.8% still do not offer this transparency tool.

Once again, the result obtained by direct observation does not confirm the information

given by the American parliaments to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In the international entity's database, in March 2020, only 10.7% of the legislative houses did not offer the plenary session agenda on the Internet. The justification for the divergence may lie in the number of legislative houses that did not provide such data to the Inter-Parliamentary Union or that claimed to disclose only "some previous agendas", which can be done through news or communiqués, which do not have the periodicity and place defined, the criterion established for direct observation. We also need to consider that the data was collected at different times and the *websites* are constantly being modified.

It is worth noting that some parliaments post the plenary session agenda on social media. However, we did not consider this modality in this survey due to the irregularity of the information, with no defined periodicity or location. On *Facebook* and *Twitter*, there is no search engine on the posts within each account. Thus, you have to scroll through all the posts on the *timeline* until you find the information on the agenda. On the official *website*, there is a fixed and predetermined path where the agenda is available, usually along with the voting agenda. Often, it is already available, on the homepage of the parliament's official *website*, or just a click away, with a *link* easily located by the public, as in a calendar, or the word "agenda", which moves towards clear transparency (FOX, 2008). However, the language is not always simple enough for the public to understand.

In other cases, finding the plenary sessions' prior agenda is not intuitive and requires knowledge on the *website's* structure, as it happens in the Bolivian *Cámara de Diputados* and in the Guyanese *Parliament*, where the information is in a PDF within a specific section with legislative process documents. This situation fits Fox's (2008) definition of opaque transparency, in which data are disclosed, but are not intelligible and accessible. And this is in fact what has happened: the agenda's language is usually far-fetched and technical, which limits immediate comprehension to those who are not familiar with the terms and the legislative process.

2.2 What can be seen and heard in the live broadcast/webcast from the plenary session

Since this is a live video broadcast/webcast, the main informational components are images and sounds. Therefore, capture imposes itself as relevant because it has the potential to interfere with what people will see and hear from the plenary session, to limit transparency by establishing what can be seen, when, and how (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018). In live broadcasts/webcasts in the legislative branches, the image and audio technical procedures are carefully predetermined and often go through the scrutiny of political actors, corroborating the "disciplined image" concept highlighted by Renault (2004) and reinforced by Barreto (2018).

The direct observation employed in this research considered the control of images and sounds conveyed in the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts. Given that not all of the parliaments that are part of the scope were visited in person, we analyzed them based on the

product that is delivered to the public in these broadcasts/webcasts.

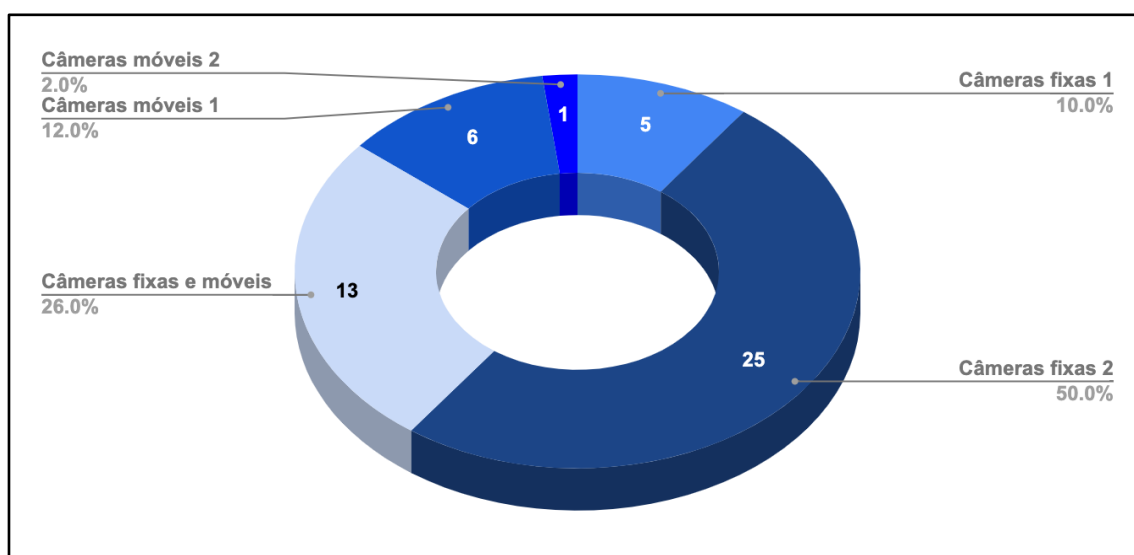
As of this point, to profile the live broadcasts/webcasts of the American parliaments' plenary sessions, we will only consider those legislative houses where we have been successful in analyzing such sessions. Thus, the universe comprises 50 legislative houses (thus removing the Bahamas Senate, which only *broadcasts* live, and the upper and lower houses of Belize and Haiti, which do not broadcast live).

We found five patterns regarding the positioning, type, and operation of cameras during plenary sessions broadcasts/webcasts. We categorized such realities as follows:

- **Fixed Cameras 1:** Fixed cameras, automated or not, with predefined framing;
- **Fixed cameras 2:** Fixed cameras operated by professionals;
- **Fixed and mobile cameras:** Fixed and mobile cameras operated by professionals;
- **Mobile Cameras 1:** Mobile cameras operated by professionals;
- **Mobile Cameras 2:** Mobile cameras operated by professionals, but with framing limitation due to restricted location.

In 60% of the analyzed legislative houses (30) there is exclusive use of fixed cameras to capture live images from the sessions (Graph 3). In almost all cases, such devices are installed on the plenary session hall walls and, because they are small pieces of equipment, they are virtually unnoticed in the images that are aired. However, there are differences in these cameras' operation. The most common way, observed in 50% of legislative houses, is when there is a professional to operate the fixed cameras in real time, providing focus and framing adjustments. In 10% of the cases, they are fixed cameras with rigid predetermined framing, most likely automated devices, as no adjustments are made to the images in real time.

Graph 3 – Cameras used to capture the plenary session video



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).
 Mobile cameras. Fixed cameras. Fixed and mobile cameras.

We have also seen the use of mobile cameras to capture the images being aired from the plenary session. In some cases, this equipment works alongside fixed cameras (26%), enabling a better view of representatives who choose to speak from their seats in the plenary session (and not from the rostrums).

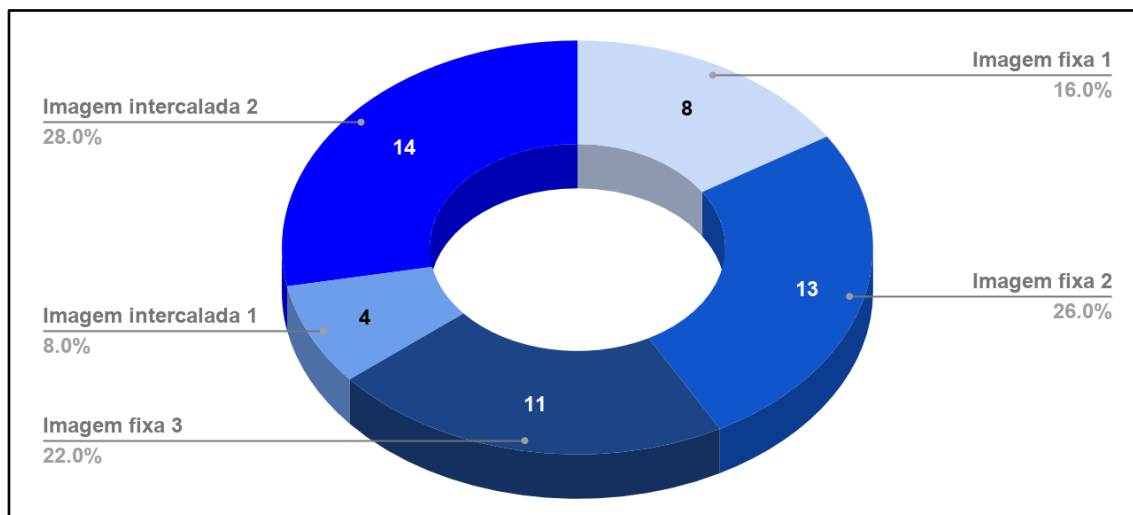
Moreover, we recorded the exclusive use of mobile cameras during the live broadcast/webcast of plenary sessions in seven legislative houses (14%). In only one, in the *Asamblea Nacional* of Venezuela, the camera was in a restricted part of the gallery, which restricted the framing and sometimes blocked the face of those speaking outside the rostrum. The precariousness in capturing images with only one mobile camera required adjustments, such as movement and *zoom* to locate and frame the speaker, which were conducted live, before the viewer's eyes - a situation we have also observed in the Surinamese Parliament, although, unlike in Venezuela, the cameraman was in the same room as the representatives in the plenary session (*floor*).

The research also analyzed the image framing patterns regarding the plenary session dynamics: what is shown to the audience while a speaker is at the microphone, at which moments the plenary session as a whole appears, whether there is camera movement and the use of features such as *zoom in* and *zoom out*. Similarly to the criterion that mapped how camera capture is done, this parameter aims to verify the extent of the "disciplined image" (RENAULT 2004; BARRETO, 2018) of these parliamentary broadcasts and how they can limit parliamentary transparency depending on how they define what can be seen, when, and how (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018). To what extent does the broadcast/webcast show the context in which the speeches and events in the plenary session take place?

There is a standard image to all the broadcasts/webcasts of the 50 legislative houses analyzed: the one that keeps fixed on the screen the figure of the representative who is speaking in the middle foreground (from the waist up) or in the foreground (from the chest up). From then on, there is the emergence of variations that make it possible, to a greater or lesser degree, to observe the pairs and get a sense of the event as a whole (Graph 4). We found five patterns regarding this observation criterion, which we categorized as follows:

- **Still image 1:** Still image on the speaker, without showing the whole plenary session;
- **Still image 2:** Still image on the speaker, with the plenary session between speeches and at votings;
- **Still image 3:** Still image on the speaker, with the plenary session between speeches and at votings, using features such as *zoom* and camera movement;
- **Interlaced Image 1:** Image intersperses speaker, peers, and the plenary session during the speech, with fixed shots;
- **Interlaced image 2:** Image intersperses speaker, peers, and the plenary session during the speech, using features such as *zoom* and camera movement.

Graph 4 – Image framing patterns verified in live broadcasts/webcasts



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).
Interlaced image. Still image.

Only eight (16%) legislative houses do not show the entire plenary session at any time during the live broadcast/webcast, keeping the camera framing focused on a part of the plenary session (usually the Directing Board) and/or the speaker at the time. Still with fixed framing on the representative throughout the speech, the next pattern advances by using the plenary session's open plan in the exchanging of speakers. The plenary session's full view is also inserted at voting times. This pattern is the one adopted by almost half (48%) of the American legislative houses analyzed, which demonstrates the predominance of procedures that forbid the variation of images and dictate that only the speaker should be on the screen. We can divide this group into two: broadcasts/webcasts that take advantage of features such as camera movements and *zoom* when capturing the speakers and the plenary session (22%) and those that only use tight framing (26%).

We also found that 36% of the legislative houses intersperse, during a speech, the speaker's image with that of other representatives or with the whole plenary session. Most of them (28%) go beyond the fixed and still frames, using resources such as camera movement and *zoom*. This variation in images and framing, besides making the broadcast/webcast more dynamic, is an addition of visual information and allows the public to observe the reactions of other representatives to what is being said at the moment. At more tense times, it is possible to watch protests promoted in the venue during the session.

The lack of variation in images prevented, for example, the public from understanding the reason for the plenary session suspension at Chile's *Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados* on December 18, 2019, while rules for drafting a new constitution were being discussed. The cameras were restricted to the speaker while shouts of protest were heard and demonstrators stormed the plenum. On the other hand, it was the cameras' wider framing that enabled the audience to witness the shock and outrage of the Government Caucus towards the betrayal of one of its members,

Charandass Persaud, by voting in favor of the Guyanese *Parliament's* Motion of No Confidence in the Government on December 21, 2018 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Differential framing at plenary session reactions in Chile's *Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados* (above) and the Guyanese *Parliament* (below)



Source: Montage made from *frames* captured by the authors (2020). Above, on 02/25/20 from https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2496567217291691&ref=watch_permalink. Below, on 02/29/20 from <http://parliament.gov.gy/chamber-business/sittings/111th-sitting-eleventh-parliament/>

Regarding audio, the plenary sessions observation showed that whoever leads the session has the power to give voice (or not) to the other representatives. And it depends on this political actor's discretion, usually the legislative house president, whether the reactions and manifestations can be heard and recorded by the audio and video equipment recording and broadcasting/webcasting the event. In only one legislative house, the *Asamblea Nacional* of Venezuela, we detected audio recording regardless of the decision made by the Directing Board.

And this was only possible because the capture system was precarious. It seems the speakers in the venue allowed for a high ambient noise level. All the other 49 legislative houses analyzed had the live broadcast/webcast supplied with audio captured directly from the institutional microphone system, in which there is control over the microphone of the representative who is authorized to speak.

The analysis of the broadcasts indicates that almost all legislative houses have their audio categorized into two groups: parliaments where it is possible to hear only the voice of the speaker authorized to speak at the moment (32%) and parliaments where it is possible to hear primarily the representative who is speaking but it is also possible to hear the ambient sound, which allows the perception of reactions, even those that are not shown on video (a situation verified in 66% of the legislative houses). Even where the latter pattern of audio capture is present, there have been episodes where even the ambient sounds have been cut, completely muting the broadcast/webcast for a while. These occurrences were verified at various times during the session, such as votings, discussions, and disrespect for the authorized speaker's speech, without the possibility of identifying a specific cause.

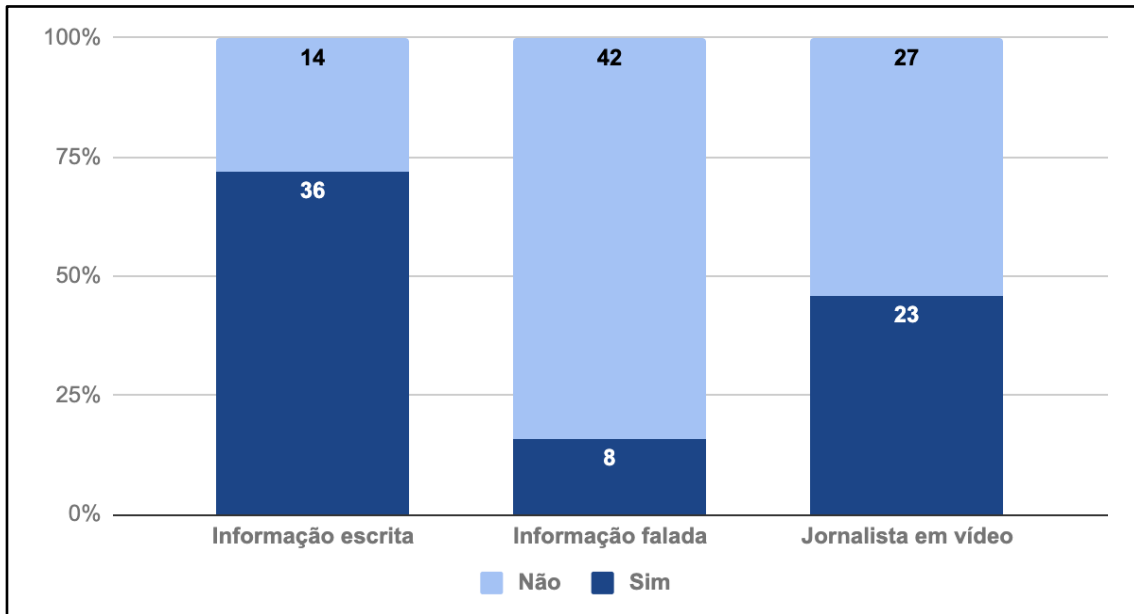
The survey also found that two out of three (66%) of the analyzed legislative houses do not make use of sign language interpreters to offer the sessions' content to hearing-impaired people.

2.3 What content the plenary session broadcast/webcast offers

This study also aimed at analyzing what information is available in the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast, beyond the event's raw image and sound. We consider it a crucial point, given society's ignorance and lack of information regarding the functioning of state institutions and politics (MAIA, 2002; MIXON; UPADHYAYA, 2003; COSSON, 2011). The legislative sessions have their own complex rites, which make them difficult to understand for those who are not used to them. Moreover, such events often involve dozens and even hundreds of representatives, quantities that alone prevent individual recognition of all speakers unless there is a written identification on screen.

We found that 80% of the 50 legislative houses analyzed make available some type of complementary information, even if minimal, during the plenary sessions' live video broadcast/webcast. We considered information written on the screen, information spoken by journalists or announcers but not appearing on the screen (narration or *voiceover*), and information provided by journalists that appears on the screen during the live broadcast/webcast. Graph 5 shows each category's incidence below.

Graph 5 – Type of information provided in the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

Written information. Spoken information. On-screen journalist. No. Yes.

The written content on the screen is the most frequent, and it is used by 72% of the analyzed legislative houses. The information provided in the video is fundamental to identify the speaking representative, such as his or her name, position, state, and political party. In addition, there is data indicating what phase the session is in, the number of the bill that is being debated or voted on, and additional explanations regarding the topic in question.

Almost half (46%) of the legislative houses insert journalists or communicators on screen throughout the live broadcast/webcast. These professionals explain and summarize the proposals that are on the agenda or have been deliberated, and interview representatives in some cases. They act according to the premises of the subcategory of political journalism, the "legislative journalist" (FREITAS, 2020). Among these premises, journalists must have specialized knowledge in the area, but, when making interventions, they should limit themselves to transmitting reports and processing the information as quickly as possible, without giving an opinion, keeping in mind the public interest (MALAVAZI, 2004; SANT'ANNA, 2009; FREITAS, 2020). On the other hand, the only spoken information, which offers a narration on the plenary session's image, also bringing explanations regarding the proposals and the legislative process, is the least used by the parliaments. We verified it in only 16% of the legislative houses.

The written information inserted into the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast is the least potentially invasive regarding the progress of the legislative process, as it does not impose interference on the representatives' vision or listening. Noise can occur when the explanation is given by journalists (appearing or not on the screen). The written information is also relatively simple to use. It can be inserted remotely (outside the parliament's headquarters) and it uses the

same formats, patterns, and *software* already commonly used by the generalist channels' television broadcasts, especially the journalistic ones.

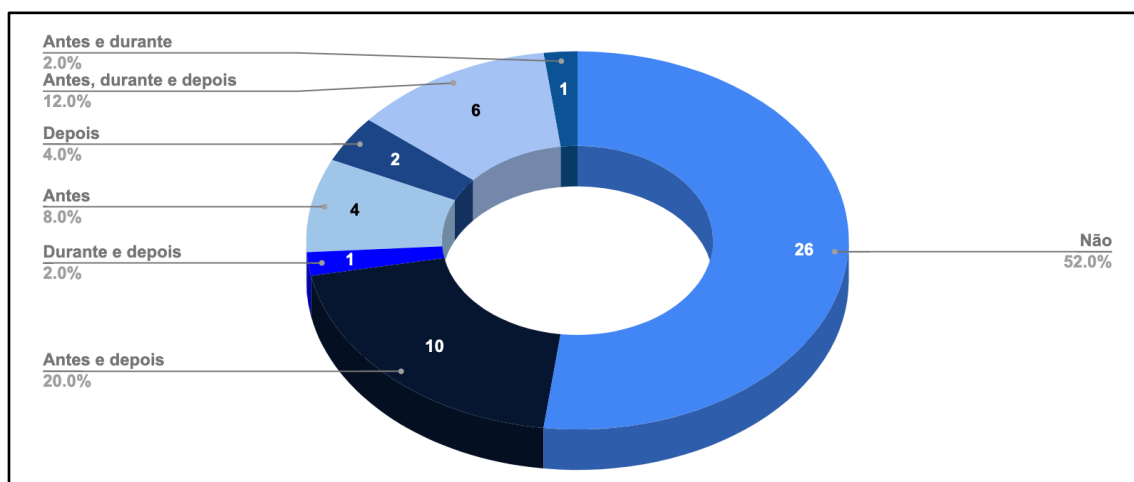
As for the insertion moment, generally the written information is verified throughout the live broadcast/webcast, unlike the other information categories this research analyzed ("spoken explanations" and "journalists on video") which, when incident, are usually restricted to the before and after the sessions' official period.

We must consider that, besides the written content being restricted to the screen's limited space, oral information (with or without the journalist's image on the screen) has the potential to be more didactic to the public, considering the possibility of contextualizing complex legislative issues that need to be assimilated simultaneously to the event.

The diffuse audience of live broadcasts/webcasts also increases the need to explain facts (MAIA, 2002). It is especially important in the Latin American context, which comprises most of the countries in this research scope. This is a territory where, according to Martín-Barbero (1997), orality is predominant in popular culture and communication.

Nevertheless, just over half (52%) of the legislative houses offer no spoken information or information provided by a journalist appearing on video during the entire live broadcast/webcast (Graph 6). Among those that offer it (48%), most do so before the plenary session opening and/or after the official closing, which shows the availability of technical and human resources to add oral explanations throughout the event. However, there is a strong respect for the liturgy and parliamentary speeches, which limits such insertions so as not to interfere with the representatives' speech. Such a finding fits into what Barreto (2018) called "media parliamentarization", which is a resistance of political procedures towards aesthetic standards and media narratives.

Graph 6 – Insertion of spoken information or journalist on video



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

Before, and during the session. Before, during, and after the session. After the session. Before the session. During and after the session. Before and after the session. No.

We verified the occurrence of oral explanations in only eight (16%) legislative houses, with or without a journalist on video, during the plenary session. In all of these, the interventions occurred only in the pauses between parliamentary speeches (between speeches, in silences for votes and in the suspension of sessions), that is, with minimal interference in parliamentary liturgy. Overall, we observed that the purpose was to clarify technical terms and procedural rites, as well as to contextualize issues that were being debated or voted on at that particular moment. Once again, what we found is that professionals (journalists and announcers) act to gather data, process it, and report it without giving an opinion (SANT'ANNA, 2009).

2.3.1 Information written on the screen

Just over a quarter of the legislative houses (28%) do not provide any written information throughout the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast, not even the names of those who are speaking at the microphone, as is the case of the Bolivian Senate. It leaves the public without elementary information regarding parliamentary politics, which is the identity of the actors and the electoral base they represent.

There are 36 legislative houses that include written information throughout the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts (72% of the universe of parliaments in which we were able to analyze the broadcasts/webcasts). To qualitatively distinguish the data displayed on the screen, we created a scale according to the type of information made available and the offered language. The established gradations were:

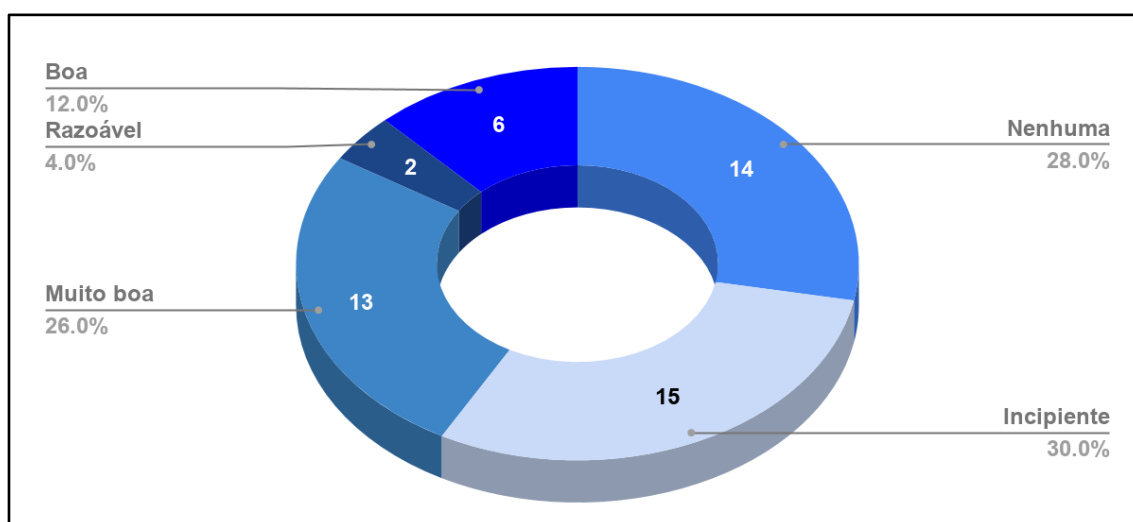
- **None:** No information is inserted into the screen;
- **Incipient:** there is only the speaker's identification (name, political party, electoral base, etc.);
- **Reasonable:** there is the speaker's identification and the topic/bill being discussed or voted on, in technical language (with letters, numbers, and amendment);
- **Good:** There is the speaker's identification and the subject/bill being discussed or voted on, in *plain language*³;
- **Very good:** there is the speaker's identification, the name/number of the bill being discussed or voted on, and additional explanations (quorum, current session stage, etc), with elements in *plain language*.

In 30% of the analyzed legislative houses, we found that only basic information was offered to enable the recognition of the representatives who are speaking, usually their names, political parties, and electoral base (Graph 7). Two (4%) add to this the technical name of the bill

³ *Plain language* is an international movement that advocates communicating with simple, clear language that allows the public to "understand the first time they read or listen", as defined by the *Plain Language Action and Information Network*, a body officially linked to the United States Government (2019).

at the time of voting, data often intelligible for being formed by letters and numbers, which limits the understanding to promote publicity (FILGUEIRAS, 2011). It becomes an example of opaque transparency, in which there is information but it does not reveal the actual meaning of the political act (FOX, 2008). In 12% of the legislative houses there is an advance towards making what is being voted on more understandable, with the insertion of written information in simple language regarding the proposition. It is worth noting that in some legislative branches the speakers' names and data on their proposals are only displayed on the screen for a few seconds, even in long speeches.

Graph 7 – Incidence of written information during live broadcast/webcast



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).
Good. Reasonable. Very good. None. Incipient.

We verified the availability of different information to identify the representative and to understand the session and the proposal being debated or voted on (category "very good") in 26% of the analyzed legislative houses. Although we have classified these legislative branches into the same group, the informative formats are so different that we cannot say there is a pattern to the frequency and permanence of the data on the screen, nor to the variety of explanations provided, or to the language (we sought the simplicity and clarity required by *plain language*⁴, but we did not verify it in all of the group's cases, nor even in all of the occasions of the same plenary session). The fact is that, throughout the broadcast/webcast, information beyond that considered in the previous categories (name, political party, district, and proposition) is provided, which offers better contextualization and may enable a broader understanding of the parliamentary event.

In some parliaments in the "very good" category, the written information is on the screen

⁴ *Plain language* is an international movement that advocates communicating with simple, clear language that allows the public to "understand the first time they read or listen," according to the *Plain Language Action and Information Network*, which is linked to the United States government.

throughout the broadcast/webcast, with the information banner constantly changing, making it possible to include more data. We have verified it, for example, in Ecuador's *Asamblea Nacional* and in Brazil's *Câmara dos Deputados*.

2.3.2 Journalistic mediation on the screen

We found that 46% (23) of the legislative houses had an on-screen journalist on at least one occasion during the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast. The communicator usually appears in the video to provide explanations of the issues involved in the parliamentary event and/or to interview representatives. The journalist acts as a kind of translator of the liturgy and of the specific language, an understanding facilitator (MAIA, 2002) between the Legislative Branch and the citizens, an agent that selects content and builds nexus (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1997).

In this regard, we can divide this research's direct systematic observation result into two analysis points. The first is regarding the moment of the live journalistic intervention (Table 1). This aspect is relevant because it reveals the type of content being brought to the audience. Before the session begins, the journalist can talk about the day's agenda, contextualizing the political debate and explaining the proposals that may be deliberated on by the representatives. It is an expectation, which, in the course of events, may not be fulfilled. During the plenary session, the explanations given by journalists allow for a simultaneous understanding of the event. We understand it is a relevant insertion due to the specificity of the procedures, norms, and language inherent to the legislative process, which are usually reminiscent of already existing legislation, preventing instant comprehension even by those who work in the area. In addition, plenary sessions often do not have a linear discussion, with topics "going back and forth" between speakers, interspersed with other subjects, which may not make much sense to those who are not used to such dynamics. Therefore, we argue that the presence of a journalist making the connections and explaining the rules of procedure can contribute to the clarification of technical issues to the lay public and to the practical understanding of the legislative actions and the debates as they take place. After the session is over, the journalist summarizes the event, talks about a fait accompli: what the representatives did or did not debate/decide. The journalist may even echo this outcome in interviews with representatives and address possible developments, but that will no longer take place in that time and place.

We found that 36% of the legislative houses have journalists appearing on video, but only before and/or after the official opening and closing of plenary sessions. In only 10% of the legislative houses the professional also appears on the screen during the plenary session.

The moment when journalistic mediation is done in the plenary session's live broadcast/webcast is relevant from the perspective of transparency, publicity, and *accountability*. In other words, considering what the citizen has the potential to do with such information at the time he or she becomes aware of it. There is the possibility of empowering the people and specific

interest groups, which, in an increasingly virtually connected social-political context, can pressure representatives over the Internet and alter the course planned for a given plenary session. The information provided by journalists before and during the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts reinforces the possibility of immediate reactions from society, such as "protest tweets", voting in *online* polls, massive sending of messages directed to a certain representative, and even face-to-face actions (demonstrations, gatherings of people in a certain place, etc.). These mobilizations fall within the context of increased social demands that came with the advances in information technology (FILGUEIRAS, 2011). They can resonate in the political arena and postpone a voting, for example, which fits the concept of transparency *in fieri*, where a public policy is made available for deliberation before it is implemented (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018). Journalistic summaries made after the session has ended have the potential to drive the same popular reactions, but the effects may not be the same, especially in cases where a voting is already completed.

As much as journalistic mediation points to an aggregation of information and understanding, we must emphasize that the initiatives are quite diverse in terms of duration and content offered. Thus, we cannot say that the communication professionals' performance always makes the broadcast/webcast more intelligible to the citizen. Among the cases studied, there are cases in which the journalist brings explanations only before or after the plenary session and while the legislative rite is going on no additional information is inserted, not even the written indication of the name of the speaking representative. We verified it in the legislative houses of Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Venezuela.

Table 1 – Moment of the journalistic intervention

Moment of the journalistic intervention	Legislative House
Only before the session	Colombia - <i>Cámara de Representantes</i>
	Ecuador - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>
	Jamaica - <i>House of Representatives</i>
	Jamaica - <i>Senate</i>
	Nicaragua - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>
Before and after the session	Argentina - <i>Senate</i>
	Bahamas - <i>House of Assembly</i>
	Chile - <i>Senate</i>
	Cuba - <i>Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular</i>

	El Salvador - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	Honduras - <i>Congreso Nacional</i>
	St. Lucia - <i>House of Assembly</i>
	St. Lucia - <i>Senate</i>
	Venezuela - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>
Before, during, and after the session	Mexico - <i>Cámara de Diputados</i>
	Mexico - <i>Senate</i>
	Panama - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	Peru - <i>Congreso de la República</i>
During and after the session	Brazil - <i>Câmara dos Deputados</i>
Only after the session	Chile - <i>Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados</i>
	Costa Rica - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	United States - <i>Senate</i>
	Guatemala - <i>Congreso</i>

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

The second analysis point to which the survey on journalistic mediation in plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts must be submitted refers to the professional's physical location when he or she appears in the video, because it directly influences the information that the communicator has access to at the moment and, consequently, influences the explanations that he or she will provide to the audience. Journalists who are outside the plenary session or in the studio usually follow the session through the images captured by the cameras. In other words, without a view of the plenary session as a whole, they cannot perceive and have access to events that take place outside the lens, such as conversations between party leaders, protests by representatives who are not at the microphone, provocations coming from the galleries, representatives entering and leaving the room, etc.

On the other hand, the reporter who is inside the plenary session, even with restricted mobility and restricted to the galleries or press area, is an eyewitness to the plenary session as a whole. And the freer the journalists circulation is, the more access they will have to information, because they will be able to talk to advisors and representatives, even interview them live. The physical presence in the same environment as the legislative action is certainly a relevant

differential in journalistic mediation.

Figure 2 shows examples of the main locations of live journalist inputs during plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts. Above, on the left, there is the record of the moment when the professional, because she was inside the plenary and close to the Directing Board, manages to approach the president of the *Asamblea Nacional* of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, for an interview at the end of the ordinary session on October 29, 2019. Above, on the right, there is the image of the reporter summarizing the votings on September 17, 2019 straight from the plenary session gallery of the St. Lucia *House of Assembly*. Below, on the left, the professional explains, from outside the plenary, what is on the agenda for the January 6, 2020 session of the Chilean Senate, which is about to begin. And below, on the right, the journalist explains from the studio what has been decided up to the suspension moment of the Cuban parliament's session on December 21, 2019.

Figure 2 – Records of journalists' insertions in the video during live broadcasts/webcasts



Source: Montage made from *frames* captured by the authors (2020). Above, on the left (Venezuela), on 10/30/20 from <https://youtu.be/SouVgAcKmpE>. Above, on the right (St. Lucia), on 11/03/19 from <https://youtu.be/39yE4Nw6SZ4>. Below, on the left (Chile), on 02/25/20 from <https://youtu.be/fOjKt04iEJo>. And below, on the right (Guatemala), on 02/29/20 from <https://youtu.be/URygOxOhEb0>.

From the perspective of the mediator's location, we found that of the 23 legislative houses that use video journalists to make explanations, 16 allow the live entries to come from inside the plenary session, either in the middle of the representatives (*floor*), in the galleries, or in spaces reserved for the press. In the others, the journalist either goes live outside the plenary session or in the studio. Table 2 below details the patterns we found.

Table 2 – Location of the journalist/communicator at the moment of the live entry

Mediator's location	Legislative house
In the studio	Bahamas - <i>House of Assembly</i>
	Cuba - <i>Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular</i>
	United States - <i>Senate (C-SPAN2 signal)</i>
	Jamaica - <i>House of Representatives</i>
	Jamaica - <i>Senate</i>
Outside the plenary session and in the studio	Chile - <i>Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados</i>
Outside the plenary session	Chile - <i>Senate</i>
Inside and outside the plenary session	Ecuador - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>
Inside the plenary session and in the studio	Peru - <i>Congreso</i>
Inside the plenary session	Argentina - <i>Senate</i>
	Brazil - <i>Câmara dos Deputados</i>
	Colombia - <i>Cámara de Representantes</i>
	Costa Rica - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	El Salvador - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	Guatemala - <i>Congreso</i>
	Honduras - <i>Congreso Nacional</i>
	Mexico - <i>Cámara de Diputados (Canal del Congreso signal)</i>
	Mexico - <i>Senate (Canal del Congreso signal)</i>
	Nicaragua - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>
	Panama - <i>Asamblea Legislativa</i>
	St. Lucia - <i>House of Assembly</i>
	St. Lucia - <i>Senate</i>
Venezuela - <i>Asamblea Nacional</i>	

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

What we have observed is that there are more interviews with representatives in broadcasts/webcasts where the journalists' live entries originate inside the plenary session and where the professionals are free to circulate among the representatives and approach them. However, it is not the case in Guatemala or St. Lucia, for example, where the communicator speaks live directly from the galleries.

2.3.3 Oral explanations

Only eight (16%) legislative houses insert spoken explanations over the plenary session's image, in narration or *voiceover*, without the journalist/communicator appearing on the video. These explanations are important for the same reasons as the journalistic interventions on screen, described above: they are contextual information, which translate the legislative language, narrating the fact in a way that establishes a relationship between the technical text and its impact on social reality.

The occurrences of spoken information vary depending on the moment of the live broadcast/webcast at which such audio information is made available. Records can be classified as follows:

- **Before the session:** *Chile's Cámara de Diputadas y Diputados*;
- **Before and during the session:** *US House of Representatives* and *US Senate* (C-SPAN signal broadcast);
- **After the session:** *Costa Rica's Asamblea Legislativa*;
- **Only during the session:** *Brazil's Câmara dos Deputados* and *Peru's Congreso*;
- **During and after the session:** Unicameral parliaments in Ecuador and Panama.

The use of narration is limited to times when representatives are not speaking. We found a single exception in Brazil's Câmara dos Deputados (Chamber of Deputies), where there is *voiceover* at specific moments of the session, notably in legislative technique, such as when the minutes are read (at the opening of some sessions), when the session is renewed (according to the rules, a session can last up to five hours, after which it has to be closed and a new one started, even if it has the same agenda), and when the report on the proposition's progress is read at the beginning of the voting process, which is mandatory. The journalists who participate in the live broadcast make use of these periods to offer more explanations about the content of the proposals under deliberation, about parliamentary agreements, and even about situations that are external to the plenary, but that directly interfere in the work developed there, such as facts that are generating repercussions in parliamentary speeches or propositions considered to be a priority, but that are still under analysis by specific committees.

2.3.4 More than one broadcast/webcast available to the citizen

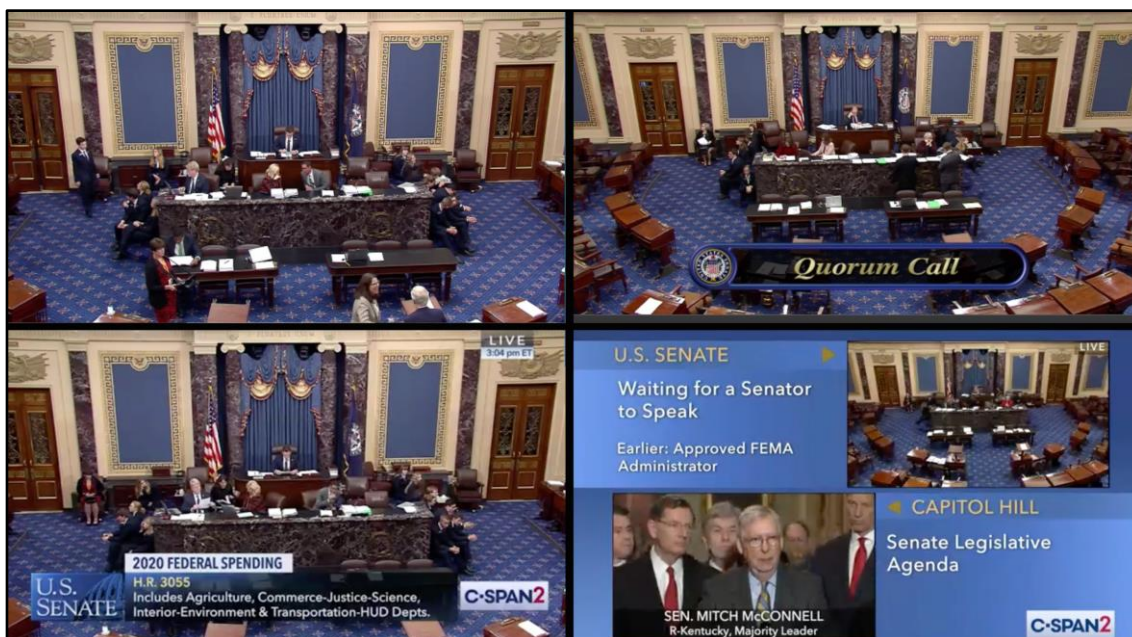
In most of the analyzed countries, the plenary session live broadcast offered by the television signal is replicated on the Internet, enabling the *online* audience to also follow the legislative event. However, we found an atypical situation in two countries, where the *broadcast* and *webcast* managers are separate and independent, and make differentiated coverage available to the public. In the United States and Mexico, the population has two options to watch the plenary sessions live: on the legislative house's own *website*, managed by the institution itself, or on the television channel dedicated to Parliament, which is owned by a third party⁵. In the United States, C-SPAN is completely independent from the Legislative Branch, and can set rules and priorities regarding what is aired. As for Mexico, the Parliament has control because the *Canal del Congreso* needs to follow guidelines dictated by a bicameral committee, comprised of deputies and senators, without society's participation.

What is noteworthy in these two countries is that the differentiated responsibility of broadcast/webcast also implies diversified content delivered to the citizen. Overall, the plenary session's image and sound are the same, with capture controlled by the Legislative Branch, but there is a difference in the information made available: the live coverage from the TV stations adds more content.

In the US case, the webcast made by the official *webpage* of each legislative house includes only written information, while the one broadcast by C-SPAN inserts more data on screen and also other types of information in the moments of silence in the plenary session, such as during voting and in the pauses between speeches (in the US Senate, periods without speakers are frequent and can reach tens of minutes). On these occasions, C-SPAN divides the screen, includes edited excerpts from previous moments of the session, interviews, explanations in narration format or with the appearance of a journalist in the studio, and even live insertions from other spaces in the Congress. In other words, in the United States, the public can choose a more informative and contextualized coverage (C-SPAN) or simply watch the plenary session without any intervention, only with written data on screen indicating the bill being voted on, the speaker's name and political party, the verification of quorum, and the voting result (the *webcastings* of the *House of Representatives* and *Senate* are embedded in websites that provide technical data on the legislative process in formal language). Figure 3 exemplifies how evident the informational difference is between the live webcasts carried out by the official *website* (above) and the C-SPAN live broadcasts (below).

⁵ In Canada, there are also differentiated sources of live broadcasting/webcasting of plenary sessions - a private television channel (CPAC) and the *webcast* of the *House of Commons* and *Senate website*, but the content that reaches the public through both sources is the same, so it does not fit into this analysis point.

Figure 3 – Comparison between the live webcast of the United States *Senate* plenary session on the official *website* and the C-SPAN2 live broadcast.



Source: *Frames* captured by the authors (2020). On the right, from 02/28/20, above from https://floor.senate.gov/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3606, and below from <https://www.c-span.org/video/?465752-1/senate-session>. On the left, from 01/14/20, above from https://floor.senate.gov/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=3544, and below from <https://www.c-span.org/video/?468109-2/senate-session-part-2>.

What happens in Mexico is similar. Only *Canal del Congreso's* broadcast (both *broadcast* and *webcast*) includes both spoken and video journalistic mediation, which is done by a reporter inside the plenary session. And there is a pattern difference between the *Cámara de Diputados* and the Senate. The *webcast* of the *Cámara de Diputados* does not use exactly the same video signal as *Canal del Congreso*. At times when no representatives are speaking, a general image of the plenary session and ambient audio are provided, while the equivalent *Canal del Congreso* broadcast inserts the image and audio of a journalist explaining what is happening in the session. The written information on the *webcast* is more bureaucratic and less explanatory than that on *Canal del Congreso*.

In the Mexican Senate, the *webcast* uses exactly the same video signal, but not the audio one, which creates a strange situation for the viewers. When there are no speakers, a journalist appears on the screen to explain, but the professional's audio is only aired on *Canal del Congreso*. In the *webcast*, the journalist's image appears without sound. People watching the session on the Senate *YouTube* channel do not understand why this is happening and complain in the chat about the reporter's lack of audio. The answer is that the signal is not available. Another differential is that the *streaming* from the Senate itself does not add any information, not even written, to identify legislators or the bill being voted on. Unlike what is aired on *Canal del Congreso*, which adds written, spoken, and video journalist explanations, as mentioned above.

What we can infer from the comparison between the broadcasts/webcasts offered in Mexico is that despite the availability of different signals to the population, *Canal del Congreso's* broadcast is the most comprehensive from an informative point of view, since it uses orality and plain language to explain the agendas and the political context in real time.

2.4 Legislative houses profile according to the broadcasts'/webcasts' information level

This research step aims to profile the legislative houses grouped according to the addition (or not) of information compared to the pure audio and video recording of the plenary sessions broadcast/webcast live. We have analyzed these sets of legislative branches according to more than 50 criteria (approximately 20 related to political, social, economic, and geographical aspects). We will only present here those results considered relevant.

Of the 50 legislative houses analyzed, ten (20%) do not provide any additional information to the live broadcast. There is neither written information, nor spoken information, nor explanations given by journalists appearing on the screen. These are parliaments that have taken the transparency initiative by making information available (RIVERA, 2008), in this case by allowing the public eye to see plenary session actions in real time. However, they have not taken the next step, that of implementing actions for public understanding and involvement (CURTIN; MEIJER, 2006). That is, without publicity actions and *accountability* incentives in live broadcasts/webcasts, they maintain, to some extent, the informational asymmetry between the principal (people) and the *agent* (representative) (FILGUEIRAS, 2011).

The US legislative houses that broadcast/webcast only the raw audio and video signal of the plenary session, without adding any data, are:

- *House of Representatives* and *Senate* of Antigua and Barbuda;
- *Cámara de Diputados* and *Cámara de Senadores* of Bolivia;
- *House of Assembly* of Dominica;
- *House of Representatives* and *Senate* of Grenada;
- Dominican Republic Senate;
- *National Assembly* of the Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis;
- *De Nationale Assemblée* of Suriname.

There are 40 legislative houses on the American continent that offer some kind of additional information in the live broadcast of plenary sessions, adding written or spoken information and/or allowing the presence of an on-screen journalist at some point in the video coverage. This is a very heterogeneous group because it ranges from legislative houses that only inform the speaker's name to those that provide real-time explanations on the impacts of the proposals in dispute in the plenary session.

We understand that, in this group, legislative houses have taken a step on the informative scale of plenary sessions broadcasts/webcasts because, at least, they provide the public with

information about who is the representative who is speaking, including name, position, where he or she comes from, and which political party he or she belongs to, for example. These legislative houses add data to the live broadcast/webcast, which increases the transparency level, even if clear transparency is not yet achieved (FOX, 2008). Similarly, they have elements of publicity and incentive to *accountability*, even if incipient and compromised by the use of technical language, which impairs the automatic association between what is being debated in the political arena and the social reality.

Further narrowing the analysis, we arrive at the number of 24 legislative houses that use the presence of journalists to add oral information (on video or not) to the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts. This group goes one step further on the information scale by using professionals who, besides interviewing the actors involved in the political decisions made there, summarize and "translate" the legislative procedures and the proposals that go through the plenary sessions into popular language. These journalists and communicators have specialized knowledge, they select the information and make available "to the population what it NEEDS to know, to have the means (clear, impartial, and plural information) to exercise full citizenship" (FREITAS, 2020, p. 16, emphasis added). As we have seen before, such interventions in favor of public understanding most often occur before and/or after the plenary session's protocol period.

There are only eight legislative houses that broadcast/webcast spoken explanations either with or without the journalist on video during the plenary session:

- Câmara dos Deputados of Brazil;
- *Asamblea Nacional* of Ecuador;
- *US House of Representatives* and *US Senate* (C-SPAN and C-SPAN2 signal broadcast);
- *Cámara de Diputados* and *Senate of Mexico* (*Canal del Congreso* broadcast);
- *Asamblea Nacional* of Panama;
- *Congreso* of Peru.

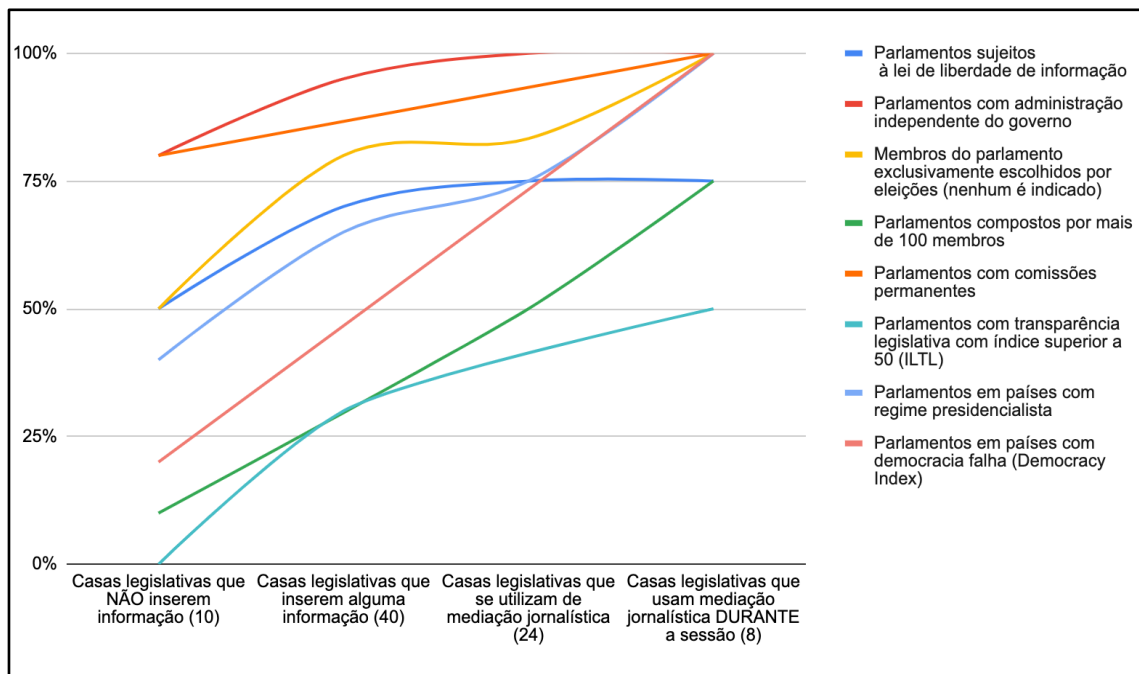
We consider this group of eight legislative houses to be at the highest informative level because it uses journalists to offer explanations throughout the session. It is an intervention that contributes more pronouncedly to the publicity of parliamentary debates and decisions by producing "true information" (FILGUEIRAS, 2011, p. 79), intelligible, with a view to the public interest, in an attempt to provide an immediate adequate understanding of the facts or their outcome (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018) at the moment they occur, and not just before (an expectation of the fact) or after (the realization of the fact).

The analysis of the data collected in the direct systematic observation phase shows that some political, economic, and geographical markers vary progressively according to the degree of information inserted in the plenary sessions' live broadcast. In other words, certain characteristics become more pronounced (or diminished) the greater the degree of information. To this end, we consider, in summary:

- **First informative level group:** comprised of the ten legislative houses that do not add any information to the session's raw audio and video;
- **Second informative level group:** comprised of the 40 legislative houses that offer some kind of information, even if minimal, whether written or oral;
- **Third informative level group:** comprised of the 24 legislative houses that use journalistic mediation to convey spoken explanations at some point during the plenary session. As we have already seen, such intervention is concentrated before and/or after the parliamentary event;
- **Fourth informative level group:** comprised of the eight legislative houses that offer oral explanations (with or without the journalist's on-screen image) not only before or after, but also during the official plenary session period.

Graph 8 shows that as the information degree advances, the greater the proportion of more populous, presidential countries. There is also a higher percentage of parliaments with members elected through a proportional representation election, subject to the freedom of information law, with greater transparency⁶, administratively independent from the government, consisting of more than 100 members, and with more than ten standing committees.

Graph 8 – Percentage variation of political and legislative criteria according to the informative level of plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

⁶ We used the Latin American Index of Legislative Transparency (ILTL) as a transparency parameter. Although limited, it is the only one exclusively focused on such criteria. Developed by the Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency (RLTL), which brings together 24 civil organizations from 13 countries in the region, the index ranges from 0 (worst evaluation) to 100 (best evaluation) and considers four dimensions related to transparency and accountability of parliaments, such as the existence of standards and citizen participation. This research adopted data from the 2018 report.

Horizontal: Legislative houses that DO NOT insert information (10). Legislative houses that insert some information (40). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation (24). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation DURING the session (8). Vertical: Parliaments subject to the freedom of information law. Parliaments with an administration independent from the government. Representatives exclusively chosen by elections (none of them is appointed). Parliaments with more than 100 members. Parliaments with standing committees. Parliaments with a legislative transparency index greater than 50 (ILTL). Parliaments in countries with a presidential regime. Parliaments in countries with a flawed democracy (Democracy index).

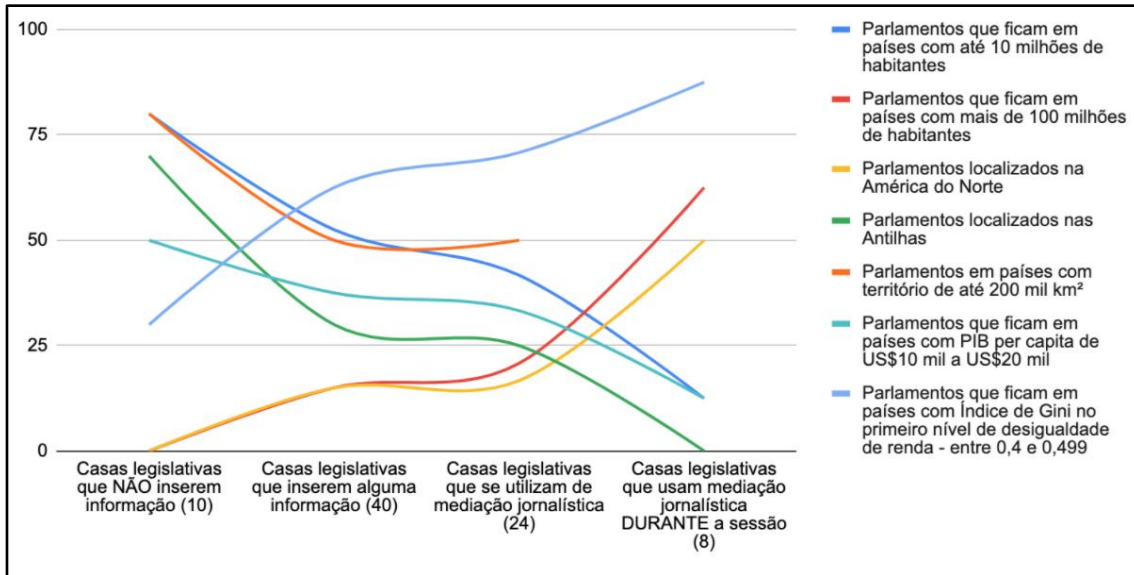
We have also verified that some geographical, economic, and social characteristics are more pronounced as the degree of information increases, as shown in Graph 9 below. In the economic aspect, there is a decrease in the percentage of legislative houses in the group of countries with average per capita GDP (between US\$10,000 and US\$20,000). There is a migration to the groups that register *per capita* GDP above US\$20,000 and below US\$10,000, the latter being the one that concentrates the most parliaments (62.5%) when the maximum level of information insertion during live broadcasts/webcasts is reached.

As for income inequality, the higher the degree of information in the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts, the higher the proportion of legislative houses located in countries whose Gini Index⁷ registers the lowest level of income inequality. The group with the highest informative level comprises legislative houses from countries with some income inequality, either at the first level (87.5%) or above (12.5%).

In the geographical aspect, we can see that the higher the degree of information, the higher the percentage of countries located in North America and the lower those located in the Antilles. We also see a decreasing relationship when it comes to territorial size: the proportion of legislatures from small countries, with an area of up to 200,000 km² (equivalent to the state of Paraná), is lower in the group that offers more legislative information in the broadcasts/webcasts.

⁷ For classification, the Gini Index considers that up to 0.399 the country has equality, and from 0.4 on there is income inequality (the first range, from 0.4 to 0.499, is the mildest level). The closer the number is to 1, the greater the inequality.

Graph 9 – Data on geographical, economic, and social criteria that varied as the informative level of plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts increased



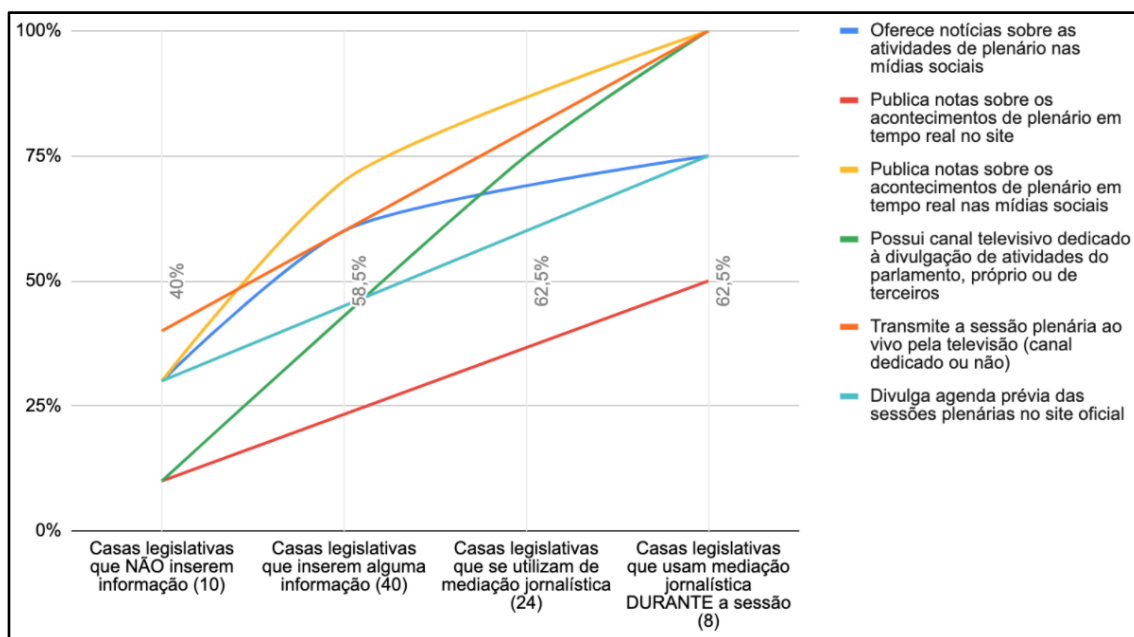
Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

Horizontal: Legislative houses that DO NOT insert information (10). Legislative houses that insert some information (40). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation (24). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation DURING the session (8). Vertical: Parliaments in countries with up to 10 million inhabitants. Parliaments in countries with more than 100 million inhabitants. Parliaments in North America. Parliaments in the Antilles. Parliaments in countries with a territory of up to 200 thousand km². Parliaments in countries with a per capita GDP of US\$ 10,000 to US\$ 20,000. Parliaments in countries with a Gini Index in the first income inequality level – between 0.4 and 0.499.

Other criteria this research analyzed did not present a variation directly related to the informational aspect of the live broadcasts/webcasts, such as who decides when there is a deadlock between the Executive and Legislative branches about legislative proposals, HDI, and the classification of regimes by the *Democracy Index*, except for that of flawed democracy, exposed in Graph 8, which presented an increasing variation according to the higher informative level of the broadcasts/webcasts.

The systematization and analysis of the data also enabled us to verify that the more information provided in the live broadcast/webcast, the greater also the dissemination of plenary session activities as a whole, in other formats. Graph 10 shows that the sessions disclosed in real time with more explanations are part of a deliberate strategy of the institutions to give the public a broad knowledge of the legislative accomplishments, not limited only to live broadcasting/webcasting and recording of the plenary session on video.

Graph 10 – Data on means and actions to disseminate plenary sessions that varied according to the broadening of the informative level of the broadcasts/webcasts

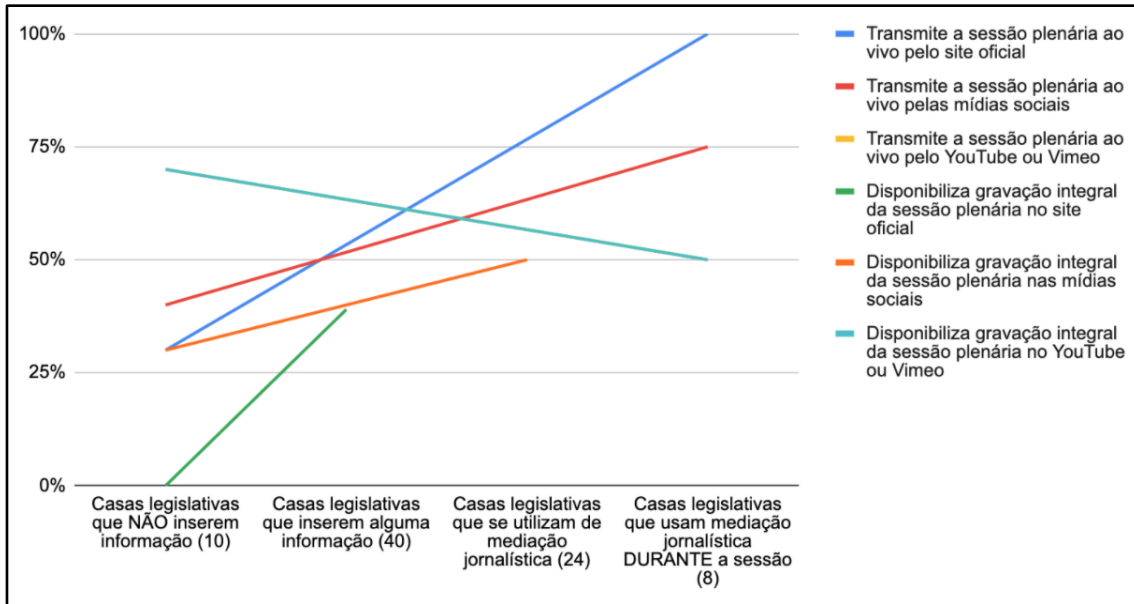


Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

Horizontal: Legislative houses that DO NOT insert information (10). Legislative houses that insert some information (40). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation (24). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation DURING the session (8). Vertical: Provides news reports regarding the plenary session activities on social media. Publishes notes regarding the plenary session activities in real-time on social media. Has a television channel dedicated to disseminating legislative actions (self-owned or third-party owned). Broadcasts the plenary session live on TV (dedicated channel or not). Publishes the prior agenda of plenary sessions on the official website.

Another finding is that the higher the informational degree of the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts, the higher the percentage of legislative houses that value the official *website* as a reference Internet location for such *streaming* and for the storage of the sessions' video recordings, and the lower the percentage of legislative houses that use private video platforms as repositories. Graph 11 shows the variation below:

Graph 11 - Data on *streaming* and storage of plenary sessions on the Internet that varied as the informative level of live broadcasts/webcasts increased



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).

Horizontal: Legislative houses that DO NOT insert information (10). Legislative houses that insert some information (40). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation (24). Legislative houses that use journalistic mediation DURING the session (8). Vertical: Webcasts the plenary session live on the official website. Webcasts the plenary session live on the social media. Webcasts the plenary session live on YouTube or Vimeo. Makes the full plenary session recording available on the official website. Makes the full plenary session recording available on the social media. Makes the full plenary session recording available on YouTube or Vimeo.

It is worth noting that the criteria dealing with making available a prior agenda of the sessions on the *website* and offering live webcasting and full video recording of the plenary session on the *website* do not have a completely increasing variation. Nevertheless, we verify a change in the trend in the midst of the intensification of the webcasts' informative level. However, we understand that such a deviation is not an impediment to state that there is a worsening of the percentages in the variables, mainly because we can verify such a movement by analyzing the general behavior of the informative groups in each question.

3 Conclusion

This mapping shows that, among the legislative houses of the American continent, there are different degrees of transparency, publicity, and encouragement of *accountability* in the live broadcasts/webcasts of plenary sessions, varying according to the content that is made available to the citizen.

Overall, American legislative branches fall in line with the trend of using live video broadcasting/webcasting of plenary sessions as a transparency tool (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2018). By doing so, they aim to achieve visibility (CANADA, 2016), legitimacy (LEÓN, 2012), greater engagement (GRIFFITH; LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2012), and potentially

encourage *accountability*, because by debating in public, they are subject to being held accountable by the public (HAJER, 2009). By enabling live broadcasting/webcasting of plenary sessions, parliaments enable society to experience the authenticity of events as they are happening (CARLÓN, 2012) and to see how representatives are actually acting, even if they are physically far away (MEYROWITZ, 1985; CRAIN; GOFF, 1988; MARRIOTT, 2007).

Since it gives visibility to the parliamentary event, live video broadcasting/webcasting is an effective transparency tool, albeit limited by parliaments in terms of what can be seen. We can see there are initiatives ranging from opaque transparency (FOX, 2008), in which the citizen cannot even find out the name of the deputy or senator who is at the microphone, to initiatives with a clear degree of transparency (FOX, 2008), in which there is visibility of the information that allows precise conclusions to be drawn from it (MICHENER; BERSCH, 2013).

We also found that the more informative the plenary sessions broadcasts/webcasts are, the greater is the dissemination of plenary session actions through other means and formats, such as dissemination of prior agendas and news on the official *website* or in social media. We understand that such a scenario shows a commitment of these legislative houses with the adequate understanding of the facts, with publicity, which is an indispensable marker of democratic quality (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018).

Considering that transparency and publicity are fundamental to *accountability*, it is possible to affirm that it is enhanced according to the higher informative level of live broadcasts of plenary sessions, as they allow not only access to the content, but intelligibility, which increases the capacity of the represented to demand their representatives (SANTOS, 2003; LEMOS; BARROS; BERNARDES, 2017). In promoting understanding, live broadcasting/webcasting still presents itself as a tool for an ongoing connection between representatives and represented (BARRETO, 2018). Also in this regard, we can conclude that there are different levels in the continent's legislative branches. The more informative the live broadcast/webcast, the greater the incentive for parliamentary *accountability*.

Live video broadcasts/webcasts of plenary sessions also contribute to the right of access to information, they help political literacy when they use plain language to provide understanding to a broad and heterogeneous audience, they provide for a more informed society (LEÓN, 2012), and they assist in the search for greater public engagement (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2014). The more real-time data and explanations are offered to the public, the more favored these aspects are.

Detailed analysis of the oral information offered throughout the plenary sessions' live broadcast/webcast shows patterns that point to minimal interference by communications professionals. There is a concern not to violate the representatives' symbolic space. In the space and time of the plenary session, only elected representatives or persons authorized by them can speak. Even when broadcasting/webcasting the event by media, the liturgy is maintained, preserving the legislative process parameters rather than adopting media techniques,

characterizing what Barreto (2018) called media parliamentarization. This is because the live entries of reporters and announcers are concentrated before and/or after the regular session period. And even when there are explanations in real time during the event's official period, they are conducted only in the pauses between parliamentary speeches, so as not to compromise the speech of those who have been legitimately delegated by the people. There is a paradox: the live broadcast of plenary sessions is made for the citizens, a diffuse public, which is partly uninterested and lacking in political literacy. However, it needs to convey the facts according to the rules of the event itself, which are generally unknown to this same public.

The research delved into the analysis of broadcast/webcast technical aspects, as they can limit transparency by determining what will be seen by the public, how, and when (GOMES; AMORIM; ALMADA, 2018), which can have direct implications for publicity and stimulating *accountability*. We have verified five patterns of plan variation, which to a greater or lesser extent provide insight into the plenary session as a whole. The most commonly found one, used by almost half of the analyzed legislative houses, is the one that inserts the image of the entire plenary session only when voting and changing speakers. Only 34% of the legislative houses enable verification of reactions from peers or the entire plenary session during a parliamentary speech. Sixteen percent do not show the full plenary session at any time during the broadcast/webcast. These findings also confirm that within the American continent there is the use of controlled images, as pointed out by Renault (2004) and Barreto (2018) in studies on Brazil. Legislative houses control audio and video capture and, most of the time, do not allow visual contextualization of a speech.

The Internet is the most widely used means of disseminating live plenary sessions and has been used as a repository of the sessions' recordings, which are available for access whenever the citizen wishes (although they are not always easy to find, due to lack of content organization). Noteworthy is that in a mediatization context, in which there is an intense communicational interaction that articulates several technological devices (VERÓN, 2014), with relations increasingly mediated by communication channels and linked between society and virtual databases (BRAGA, 2015), the presence of live plenary sessions on the Internet expands these events' reach. It provides information to more citizens, so as to expand the political judgment arena beyond elections, creating a circular movement of opinions between state institutions and society (URBINATI, 2013). The greater reach of statements also increases the opportunities for the constitution of representation throughout the term of office (BARRETO, 2018), since communication symbolically personifies the representative's figure (COLEMAN, 2005). It also contributes to *accountability*, as it encourages the monitoring and oversight of legislative actions, responsiveness and accountability, improved quality of debates (SANTOS, 2008), public engagement (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2014), and the generation of a more informed public opinion (LEÓN, 2012).

The diversification of live internet webcasting goes hand in hand with the *web's* popularization. Over the past 15 years, the number of users has been growing by 10% per year - 77.2% of the American continent's population are internet users (ITU, 2019). However, the fact that there is a problem with the penetration of the technology cannot be ignored. Data from the International Telecommunication Union (2019) shows that although 96.6% of the US territory is covered by internet signal, there is a considerable digital exclusion, which varies by country, but in most of them it is between 25% and 50% of the population. It particularly impacts the lower income population, who have limited access to the Internet (when they do) in terms of data speed and volume, which can make it impossible to access live video webcasts. In other words, parliaments' investment in *webcasts* can be considered an advance, but public institutions like parliaments cannot ignore that the virtual environment is still unequal.

If, on the one hand, the legislative branches are taking the opportunity of cheaper and more popular technologies to inform society in real time about the plenary sessions, on the other hand, there is a concern about the autonomy of the institutions over the content. Among the American parliaments, *YouTube* is the main live streaming platform and the most usual repository of full-length recordings of plenary sessions (a resource used by 63.6% of legislative houses). *Facebook* and *Twitter* also play a relevant role in this scenario (43.6% live stream, 40% use them as a storage place for session recordings). These are situations where public data is subject to private, profit-driven business decisions.

Another point worth mentioning is that just giving visibility to the legislative session is not enough, because the lack of understanding of what happens in the legislative event compromises clear transparency (FOX, 2008), publicity, and accountability, especially vertical *accountability*, which occurs in the relationship between society and public institutions (SCHEDLER, 2004). Therefore, the research established four informative levels used in the plenary sessions' live broadcasts/webcasts. First, the group that does not add any data to the raw register of images and sounds, then the group that inserts some information, even if minimal, such as the speaker's identification, followed by the group of legislative houses that make use of journalistic mediation to make explanations, mainly before and after the session's regular period, and finally, the group of parliaments that insert explanations made by journalists throughout the broadcast/webcast, including during the event's official period. We can assess that this is an action aimed at strengthening representation, as it decreases the public's misinformation regarding the actions of the representatives (BARROS; BERNARDES; RODRIGUES, 2014).

One challenge we identified is the need for the American continent's parliaments to qualify the information provided during the live video broadcast/webcast of plenary sessions to offer clear transparency to the public. They also need to expand publicity initiatives to provide greater understanding, with information that allows the connection of legislative actions with the population's everyday life. It is because plain language and real-time explanations of the session

are still restricted to a small group of legislative houses. Understanding is what makes information useful and turns it into a tool for the pursuit of other rights. It is by understanding the impact and importance of parliamentary decisions that the population can better understand the relevance of the Legislative Branch itself to the democratic system and to society. Legislative liturgy is important, but is the live video broadcast/webcast intended to please the citizens or the representatives? It is still necessary for parliaments to appropriate technologies to create effective public engagement actions (LESTON-BANDEIRA, 2014), a greater interactivity on the Internet can be one of them, enabling citizens to get closer to the institution and engage in the construction of public policies focused on the common interest.

4 References

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APPENDIX A - Criteria considered in direct observation

	Criterion	What was observed
TV	Own channel	Whether the Legislative Branch has a dedicated, self-managed television channel.
	Dedicated channel managed by a third party	Whether the Legislative Branch has a television channel dedicated to parliamentary activities, but under third-party management.
	Open TV	Whether the TV channel's signal is open and free.
	Cable TV	Whether the TV channel signal is broadcast on satellite, cable or other forms that require subscription or payment by the public.
	Live TV	Whether the plenary session is broadcast live on video by a television channel.
Website	<i>Official website</i>	Address of the Legislative Branch's official <i>website</i> .
	Prior agenda	Whether there is advance notice of the date and time of the next plenary session on the parliament's official <i>website</i> .
	Live on the <i>website</i>	Whether the plenary session is webcast live, on video, directly from the Legislative Branch's official <i>website</i> or by some link redirected by it, as long as it is visible and clear that when you click on a certain place you will be directed to the session or to the live legislative TV.
	Full session recorded on the <i>website</i>	Whether the video recording, in its entirety, of the plenary session is available on the Legislative Branch's official <i>website</i> .
	News on the <i>website</i>	Whether the <i>website</i> publishes a written report with the plenary session's result.
	Real time of the session	Whether the <i>website</i> publishes, in real time, notes or text reports informing what is happening in the plenary session.
	Web TV	Whether the <i>website</i> has television with 24-hour programming dedicated to the Legislative Branch.
YouTube and Vimeo	Profile	Address of the Legislative Branch's official <i>Youtube</i> and <i>Vimeo</i> accounts.
	Live	Whether the plenary session is webcast live, on video, by an account on <i>YouTube</i> and/or <i>Vimeo</i>

	Full session recorded	Whether the video recording, in its entirety, of the plenary session is available on a channel on <i>YouTube</i> and/or <i>Vimeo</i> .
Social Media	<i>Facebook</i>	Address of the Legislative Branch's official <i>Facebook</i> account.
	<i>Twitter</i>	Address of the Legislative Branch's official <i>Twitter</i> account.
	<i>Instagram</i>	Address of the Legislative Branch's official <i>Instagram</i> account.
	News Reports	Whether there is publication of reports with the outcome of the plenary session in the analyzed social media.
	Video excerpts	Whether there are video extracts of the plenary session published in the analyzed social media.
	Real time of the session	Whether the analyzed social media disseminate, in real time, notes or text reports, informing what is happening in the session.
	Live from the session	Whether the analyzed social media conduct live video webcast of the plenary session directly from such media, using tools such as <i>Periscope</i> , <i>Facebook Live</i> , or <i>IGTV</i> .
	The session in its entirety	Whether the video recording, in its entirety, of the plenary session is available on the analyzed social media.
Video and Audio	Cameras	Whether the live broadcast/webcast is captured by fixed or mobile cameras and their location within the plenary session.
	Framing	Image framing patterns of the live broadcast/webcast.
	Microphones	Whether the audio is captured by their own microphones or ambient sound and whose control is over the word.
	Sign Language	Whether the broadcast/webcast inserts the image of a sign language interpreter.
Additional Information	Written explanations	Information patterns inserted on screen in live video broadcast/webcast.
	Spoken explanations	Spoken information patterns in live video broadcast/webcast.
	Journalist	On-screen journalist insertion patterns in live broadcast/webcast.

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2020).