



EBC
Citizenship
Ombudsman

A rescue of society's participation in brazilian public communication

An independent review of contents released by Empresa Brasil de Comunicação

- EBC's Citizens' Ombudsman

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2020 Report

In order to ensure society's participation and control as laid out in Law No. 11,652/2008 on the creation of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC, or Brazil Communication Company), we have launched EBC's Citizens' Ombudsman (*Ouvidoria Cidadã da EBC*), confident of the role that must be played by public broadcasting.

The measure proved necessary after the dissolution of the Curator Council in 2016 and the 2018 transformation of EBC's Ombudsman into an apparatus for institutional communications, neither tasked with the critical analysis of contents nor striving to preserve law enforcement.

Our goal is to publish reports, articles, and reviews on contents, naming broadcasts and publications not in compliance with the principles set forth by the law. We will also mention examples of good contents which abide by said principles in order to promote the public debate of ideas and the circulation of information founded on good international practices in public broadcasting.

In this first report, we approach excerpts from contents published and syndicated in 2020 on Agência Brasil, Radioagência Nacional, TV Brasil, and radio stations, as well as posts on EBC's social media pages.

As members of society, we do not carry the same status as EBC's Ombudsman as an institute to demand measures from the company regarding the issues mentioned. We have launched the Citizens' Ombudsman as a tool to document the illegal deviations observed in the project EBC stands for, as we believe in the importance of public broadcasting in a democratic environment.

You can contribute to the initiative by sending criticism, praise, screenshots, links, and reviews about EBC contents to ouvidoriacidadaebc@gmail.com. The material will be published over the course of the year on the social media pages of Front for the Defense of EBC and Public Broadcasting (*Frente em Defesa da EBC e da Comunicação Pública* - <https://pt-br.facebook.com/emdefesadaEBC/>), on the website of the former Curator Council (<https://conselhocurador.ciranda.net/>), and that of EBC's Citizens' Ombudsman (<http://ouvidoriacidadaebc.org/>).

We work in defense of EBC and independent public broadcasting committed to society!

▪ Front in Defense of EBC and Public Broadcasting



Social entities and academic groups:

- ABCPública - Associação Brasileira de Comunicação Pública
- Abraço - Associação Brasileira de Rádios Comunitárias
- AJOSUL - Associação dos Jornalistas do Sul Fluminense
- ARCO-RJ
- AMARC Brasil - Associação Mundial de Rádios Comunitárias
- Artigo 19
- Blog Deixa Falar
- Brasil de Fato
- Centro de Estudos da Mídia Alternativa Barão de Itararé
- Ciranda Internacional da Comunicação Compartilhada
- Coletivo A Esquerda da Praça
- Comissão de Empregados da EBC
- Comitê Lula Livre Zona Norte Rio
- Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (Conaq)
- CNTE - Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação
- Contee - Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores/as em Estabelecimentos de Ensino
- CONTAG - Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores Rurais Agricultores e Agricultoras Familiares
- Condsef - Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores no Serviço Público Federal
- Conselho Comunitário de Maricá
- Conselho Curador Cassado
- CFESS - Conselho Federal de Serviço Social
- ConJor - Grupo de Pesquisa Convergência e Jornalismo (UFOP)
- CTB-RJ
- CUT-RJ
- DHnet - Rede de Direitos Humanos e Cultura
- ECO - Escola de Comunicação da UFRJ
- EMERGE - Centro de Pesquisas e Produção em Comunicação e Emergência (UFF)
- EPCC - Grupo de pesquisa Economia Política da Comunicação e da Cultura (Fundação Casa de Ruy Barbosa)

- FaleRio- Frente Ampla pela Liberdade de Expressão RJ
- FENAJ - Federação Nacional dos Jornalistas
- FNDC - Fórum Nacional pela Democratização da Comunicação
- Fórum Grita Baixada
- GP Rádio e Mídia Sonora da INTERCOM
- Grupo de Pesquisa Comunicação Pública, Políticas de Comunicação e Amazônia da UFPA
- Intervezes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social
- IPROSA
- Jornalistas Livres
- Labjor - Laboratório de Estudos Avançados em Jornalismo (Unicamp)
- LaPCom - Laboratório de Políticas de Comunicação da Universidade de Brasília
- LECOTEC - Laboratório de Estudos em Comunicação, Tecnologia, Educação e Criatividade (Unesp)
- LEMEP - Laboratório de Estudos da Mídia e Esfera Pública, do Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos (IESP/UERJ)
- MNDH - Movimento Nacional de Direitos Humanos
- MNRC - Movimento Nacional das Rádios Comunitárias
- Movimento Revoada
- MST
- Observatório de Comunicação Pública (OBCOMP/UFRGS)
- PEIC - Grupo de pesquisa em Políticas e Economia Política da Informação e Comunicação (ECO/UFRJ)
- Portal Favelas
- Rede Nacional de Observatórios da Imprensa (RENOI)
- RUBRA - Rede de Rádios Universitárias do Brasil
- Sindicato dos Jornalistas Profissionais no Estado de São Paulo
- Sindicato dos Jornalistas Profissionais do Município do Rio de Janeiro
- Sindicato dos Jornalistas Profissionais do Distrito Federal
- Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Radiodifusão e Televisão no Estado de São Paulo
- Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Radiodifusão e Televisão no Distrito Federal
- Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas de Radiodifusão e Televisão no Estado do Rio de Janeiro
- TV Comunitária de Niterói
- UBM - União Brasileira de Mulheres
- UNE - União Nacional dos Estudantes
- Viração Educomunicação

Individuals:

- Debora Cristina Lopez - Docente da Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto
- Laurindo Lalo Leal Filho - Professor da ECA/USP e 1º Ouvidor-geral da EBC
- Pedro Aguiar - Professor de Jornalismo da UFF
- Pedro Barreto Pereira - Jornalista e pesquisador pós-doc PPGMC/UFF
- Regina Lima - Ex-ouvidora da EBC e professora da UFPA
- Tereza Cruvinel - Jornalista, primeira diretora-presidente da EBC (2007-2011)

▪ Background

Empresa Brasil de Comunicação was created in 2007 to materialize the project of a public broadcasting system as defined in Article 223 of Brazil's Federal Constitution. The company incorporated federal news outlets and agencies formerly managed by Empresa Brasileira de Comunicação, also known as Radiobrás, and the educational outlets run by the Roquette Pinto Educational Communication Association (ACERP).

Thus, EBC is a communication conglomerate comprising television channel TV Brasil; radio stations Rádio Nacional (AM/FM) in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Amazônia, and Alto Solimões, and MEC (AM/FM) in Rio de Janeiro; Agência Brasil, and Radioagência Nacional, as well as their social media accounts.

After nearly a decade working to consolidate the principles of public broadcasting in a country accustomed as it was with successful models in private broadcasting, EBC faced an intervention following the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. Michel Temer's administration enacted legal norms that put an end to both EBC's Director-President's tenure and the main mechanism for ensuring society's participation in the company, the Curator Council.

The move led to EBC's losing the little editorial autonomy it had, and society was removed from the company's official instances, as the Curator Council consisted mostly of members selected through public consultation and aimed to guarantee that society's interests were represented in the contents made public by the company.

In 2018, EBC's Ombudsman, which independently and critically reviewed contents from public outlets, changed directions and took on an institutional communication role. Reports started no longer to assess what goes on air. Instead of reviews and opinions from the audience, documents included a large amount of self-praise, complimenting the ombudsman's as well as the company's "new administration."

In a process of bureaucratization of the people's access to the agency, EBC's Ombudsman was moved to the official portal with the ombudsmen of all federal government agencies, Fala.BR, thus assuming the role of a government agency, not committed to the public interest.

▪ Contents Assessment

Below is a rundown of a few contents reviewed in the first EBC's Citizens' Ombudsman report.

Agência Brasil

Agência Brasil has been subjected to the role of a typical governmental agency, virtually a press office for federal bodies, repeatedly publishing merely declaratory stories or acts of government without the proper contextualization or the right to contrary opinions. The role of a public news agency has been led utterly astray.

Efforts to shield President Jair Bolsonaro are conspicuous in transcriptions of his own quoted statements, like the *E daí?* ("So what?") uttered on April 28 while he commented on the surging number of people killed by COVID-19 in Brazil early in the pandemic. Agência Brasil omitted this "detail" from the president's statement¹.

Agência Brasil also silently edited a text reproduced from Reuters while preserving the signature of the international private news agency. In the article entitled *Militares se mobilizam para proteger indígenas de covid-19 na Amazônia*², the word *polêmico* ("controversial"), used in reference to the anti-malaria drug chloroquine as treatment against COVID-19 was removed³. The excerpt was edited with a view to corroborating Bolsonaro's stance on the use of the medication, even without its efficiency against the novel coronavirus having been demonstrated.

In another example, Agência Brasil showed support for the president anti-vaccine denialism on December 2 by publishing the headline *Ministério vai buscar vacina de excelência, diz Pazuello no Congresso*⁴, with the featured subheading *Ele reafirmou que a população não será obrigada a se imunizar*⁵.

On August 21, two Agência Brasil stories displayed a clear tone of government propaganda already in their title: *Água e auxílio emergencial levam esperança a município do semiárido*⁶ and *Presidente entrega internet gratuita e água potável no sertão potiguar*⁷. The articles also included propaganda for plans by the city government during the restriction period set by electoral law.

On November 19, Agência Brasil published a report in which EBC Director-President Glen Valente makes statements that go against the company's foundation law, arguing that public broadcasting platforms should be maximized *para fazer a comunicação de*

¹ <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2020-04/virus-vaiatingir-70-da-populacao-diz-bolsonaro>

² "Military agents mobilize to protect indigenous from COVID-19 in Amazon" (<https://br.reuters.com/article/idBRKBN2425Q2-OBRTPT>)

³ <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2020-07/militares-semobilizam-para-protoger-indigenas-de-covid-19-na-amazonia>

⁴ "Ministry will seek top-quality vaccine, Pazuello says in Congress" (<https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/saude/noticia/2020-12/ministerio-vaibuscar-vacina-de-excelencia-diz-pazuello-no-congresso>)

⁵ "He restated the population will not be obligated to be immunized"

⁶ "Water and emergency allowance bring hope to municipality in semi-arid region"

⁷ "President delivers free internet and drinking water in the backlands of Rio Grande do Norte state"

*tudo que acontece no governo*⁸. In a tone fit for institucional announcements, the text neither objects the utterance nor mentions EBC's foundation law or mission.

TV Brasil

EBC's Citizens' Ombudsman denounces the reiterated use of TV Brasil for the personal promotion of President Jair Bolsonaro. Such proselytizing, illegal under the law, was seen during the transmission of a supposedly religious ceremony on Easter Sunday⁹, in which guests—among whom politicians and evangelical pastors—took turns praising the president.

Other instances include a salute directed at the president during a sports broadcast and an attempt by the TV host covering municipal elections to lead the guest to comment on the vote count and to downplay the electoral defeat the outcome represented for Bolsonaro.

The (deliberate) misunderstanding of the distinction between public broadcasting and government communications can also be seen on at least ten occasions in which news show *Repórter Brasil* went on air straight from the studios of radio program *A Voz do Brasil*. The broadcast was created in the 1930s to report the acts of government of the Getúlio Vargas administration countrywide and is now produced by EBC as a service provided to the government's Special Communication Secretariat (SECOM).

TV Brasil was also used to corroborate Bolsonaro's view of the pandemic. On July 5, show *Impressões* interviewed Dr. Nise Yamaguchi, who, as the president, is an ardent advocate of the use of hydroxychloroquine early in the treatment against COVID-19. Such use was condemned by the World Health Organization (WHO) and in studies conducted by renowned Brazilian institutions. The TV hostess, however, failed to question its use during the program.

Since April 2019, TV Brasil (EBC's public channel) and TV NBR (an outlet for government communications also controlled by EBC as a service provided to SECOM) have had their schedules merged, eliminating the constitutional divide that should stand between the two broadcasters. This caused TV Brasil to have its timetable repeatedly interrupted by official announcements of acts of government—also during a section of the schedule dedicated to children's shows, the flagship of the public channel.

Since the two schedules were combined, a governmental news program, dubbed *Brasil em Dia*, has been part of the timetable. However, EBC's board of directors prioritizes live transmissions of events that praise the president and his ministers. A case in point is the inauguration of a project duplicating the section of a highway, to which TV Brasil dedicated over ten minutes of broadcasting with footage of President Bolsonaro waving at passing drivers on the scene¹⁰.

⁸ "to publicize everything that takes place in the government"
(<https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2020-11/ebc-participa-de-x-encontro-de-gestao-de-custos-do-setor-publico>)

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoULwu1diHw>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXL6e2PnnX8>

Another unusual schedule interruption took place on December 28, 2020, when the president joined the opening ceremony of beneficent football match *Natal Sem Fome* at the Vila Belmiro stadium, in the city of Santos, São Paulo state¹¹. After the 15-minute airing of people taking photos with the president, Bolsonaro kicked off the ball marking the beginning of the match. TV Brasil still aired the game for approximately ten minutes until Bolsonaro scored a goal and fell to the ground. The move was replayed twice before the transmission ended.

Social networking

The social media accounts of EBC's public outlets and agencies started being predominantly used to advertise the federal government in general and President Bolsonaro in particular. The Facebook pages of TV Brasil, Agência Brasil, and TV BrasilGov have aired live broadcasts for the government, tagging the profiles of the president and the vice-president on a nearly daily basis. No other politicians or agencies are tagged on EBC's social media.

This shows an unfair predilection that contravenes the constitutional principles stipulated in EBC's Law for an unbiased and autonomous line of work with no place for proselytizing.

Reports have also circulated according to which editors have received lists with topics allowed on the social media pages of news outlets. The death of Beto Freitas, for instance—a black man beaten to death in a Carrefour store in Porto Alegre city on November 19—was not posted on Agência Brasil's account, despite its being reported on the website.

Also detected was the removal of posts with stories regarded as unsavory to the federal government.

Radio stations, Radioagência

EBC's radio network encompasses seven broadcasters plus *Radioagência*, which provides contents for upwards of 2 thousand broadcasters countrywide. Among the remarks made by the Citizens' Ombudsman is the inappropriate utterance of the opinion of program *Revista Brasil's* host, who labeled a secretary allegedly involved in wrongdoing "a thief."

Amid a pandemic and a severe economic and political crisis, EBC announced that a new news program was to be launched which would focus on "soft and positive journalism." Among the instances where this approach was made visible on radio broadcasting is the use of material from the program *Por dentro da Amazônia*, distributed by *Rede Nacional Rádio*, another service provided by EBC including the syndication of governmental contents. The program belongs to vice-President Hamilton Mourão, and was used a few times in news reporting on EBC's public radio stations, despite the lack of any criteria based on newsworthiness.

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-BedD6zF_8

Conversely, statements made by the vice-president that were worthy of repercussion have been ignored, as was the case on November 20, Black Awareness Day in Brazil, when Mourão said "For me, there's no racism in Brazil. This is something they want to import. There's no such thing here. I'll tell you with all ease of mind, there's no racism." The controversial opinion was given when the vice-president was asked about the murder of Beto Freitas, beaten up by two security agents at a supermarket.

The post made by President Jair Bolsonaro on the same issue also seemed to go unnoticed on EBC's radio waves. On his social media, he wrote, "As a man and as president, I'm color-blind: Everyone's the same color. There's no skin color better than the others. There are good men and bad men."

The coverage of the wildfires in Brazil's Pantanal in 2020 on EBC radio stations was limited to government announcements, like the deployment of military agents and helicopters to help put out the fire. No specialist was heard gauging the impact of the Armed Forces' assistance.

Brazil's municipal elections, which have the highest number of candidates as it selects the representatives within the Legislative and Executive branches nearest to the people, was approached in a rather unusual way in radio reporting: candidates disappeared from the coverage. Not a single story about who was running for mayor across the country's main capitals was heard on EBC's radio stations. The coverage kept the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) as the source for reports on the elections.

Full report (in Portuguese):

<https://emdefesadaebc.wordpress.com/2020/12/17/acesse-aqui-o-primeiro-relatorio-da-ouvidoria-cidada-da-ebc/>

Launch broadcast on December 16, 2020:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qd7vXCvhlj4&feature=youtu.be>

Participants:

Laurindo Leal Filho, ECA/USP professor and EBC's first ombudsman-general;

Rita Freire, journalist, former chair of EBC's Curator Council;

Pedro Aguiar, UFF professor of Journalism, specialist in news agencies;

Juliana César Nunes, from the Journalists' Trade Union of the Federal District and the Commission of Journalists for Racial Equality (Cojira);

Mediated by Akemi Nitahara, EBC Workers' Commission.

Considerations by Fernando Oliveira Paulino, UnB professor and coordinator for Laboratory of Communication Policies (LaPCom), and the National Network of Media Observatories (RENOI), former deputy ombudsman with EBC for radio systems:

<https://www.facebook.com/emdefesadaEBC/videos/395487768202142>

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