Democracy at Work: Pressure and Propaganda in Portugal and Brazil addresses democracy both as an institutional value system and as a practice. How are the media exerting their mediation role? How are the media re-(a)representing the political world to society? Are different media voices offering diversified and complementary perspectives on politics? How is propaganda perceived within different democratic and economic contexts? Is political trust and mistrust shaping the strategy of propaganda? These questions are addressed in theoretical and empirical chapters in a book that addresses problems which are in need of urgent discussion, as their impact and consequences are deeply transforming politics and the way politics is communicated, lived and understood by its main actors.

Within this framework, Political Communication Studies has a major role in identifying and urging new diagnosis of, and insights into, the political and the media systems, and, above all, how both the people and political institutions can both survive crisis and improve democracy in the Lusophone world. This book aims at making a contribution to that acknowledgment.

Rita Figueiras
Paula Espírito Santo
Isabel Ferin Cunha

Rita Figueiras is a professor at the Human Sciences Faculty at the Catholic University of Portugal, coordinator of the PhD program in Communication Studies at the UCP and member of the board of the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC). Her work focuses on political communication, political economy of the media and journalism, particularly in the areas of public opinion, pundits, electoral campaigns, and, more broadly, the relationship between the media and democracy. Along with journal articles and book chapters, she has published several books.

Paula Espírito Santo is a professor at the School of Social and Political Sciences (ISCSP) - University of Lisbon (UL), Portugal, and is Visiting Professor at several Universities abroad. She is a Researcher at the CAPP (Public Administration and Public Policies Centre), in the areas of political communication, social sciences methodology and political sociology, including the study of political culture and party members. She conducted several national and international projects (such as about party supporters). Among her contributions there are several chapters and articles, in national and international journals, and several books, namely, Introduction to Methodology of the Social Sciences, Lisbon, Sílabo, 2010.

Isabel Ferin Cunha is associated professor at the University of Coimbra (UC), Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FLUC), Portugal, and is Visiting Professor at several Universities abroad. She was Vice Chairman of the Research Centre Media and Journalism (2004-2006; 2011-13) and has coordinated several projects approved by the Foundation for Science and Technology in Portugal, including the Project “Acts of Journalism and Democracy”, “TV and Images of Difference” and “Journalistic Coverage of Political Communication”. Among her contributions there are several chapters and articles, in national and international journals, and several books, namely, Coverage of Political Communication: political systems; media systems and legal framework, Lisbon, Altheia, 2014.
CHAPTER 3

DEMOCRATIC CULTURE, PUBLIC OPINION
AND PUNDITRY IN PORTUGAL

Rita Figueiras

Introduction

The integration of Portugal in the European Union in 1986 prompted a vast transformation to the country, namely modernization, and political stability (Braga da Cruz 1995). These changes had a huge impact on Portuguese economic structures (higher income rates and a progressive internationalization of the Portuguese economy), employment (socio-professional change, feminization and progressive growth in the tertiary sector), education and qualification of the Portuguese population (particularly amongst young generations and women), democratization of political structures, and liberalization of the media sector (Freire 2003, Cardoso and Costa 2005). Hence, in the aftermanth of both the institutionalization of Portuguese democracy and the development of the media sector in the 1990s, an increased relevance given to public debate started to be noticed, and, with that, the value and visibility given to punditry increased considerably (Figueiras 2005, 2008, 2011).

The valorization of public debate culture can be framed in western societies’ cultural matrix, which perceives democracy as a social organization model structured itself around communication and public opinion as the prime mover of democratic politics (Habermas 1984, Fraser 1991,
2007, Luhmann 1992, Schudson 1995). In several instances within the public sphere, where the media and op-ed pages represent the ‘public voice’ of the press (Nimmo and Combs 1993, McNair 2003), society debates public issues and public opinion is built.

Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann are leading scholars whose theories embody opposite archetypes regarding public opinion function in democratic politics. For Habermas (1984), it is through communication that debate takes place in society, and where citizens embody a powerful political role in reinforcing civic culture. Diversity and pluralism of voices, themes and perspectives are considered to be elements that shape the democratic cultural identity model, and that structure the interaction among its main features: political system, media and public opinion. In turn, according to Luhmann, public opinion is a structure formed by institutionalized issues conveyed by the media, but defined according to the political system’s needs, that he calls thematization. This concept can be understood as a process of definition, establishment and recognition of major public themes throughout media action (Luhmann 2005: 30-32). Therefore, the author understands public opinion as a consequence of a selective activity by the media that gives relevance to a set of public issues. These themes don’t intend to determine either opinion contents or decision or action; they serve, exclusively, to capture attention and to reduce uncertainty according to the political system’s strategic decisions.

In Western cultural tradition of the public sphere, diversity and pluralism of voices, themes and perspectives are considered to be structuring democratic cultural values that society esteems. Furthermore, in spite of how differently it may be shaped in democratic politics, epitomized in Habermas and Luhmann’s opposite archetypes, public opinion is considered to be the prime mover of democratic politics (Habermas 1984, Fraser 1991, 2007, Luhmann 1992, Schudson 1995), which, in turn, is framed by historical, political, cultural, and media development, as configuring elements of political communication culture (Hallin and Mancini 1996). The chapter departs from this acknowledgement to discuss the ‘democraticity’ of the Portuguese democratic culture. For that purpose mechanisms that lead to public opinion building will be analyzed, by studying one of its components, published opinion.