

Indigenous Brazil Violated

Challenges and risks faced by indigenous peoples in today's Brazil



Media Analysis Report

A report on seven Brazilian national and regional newspapers, from 01/01/2016 to 30/04/2020.

By Tom Gatehouse, for Latin America Bureau in partnership with Cardiff University.

<https://lab.org.uk/indigbrazil/>

Indigenous Brazil Violated: Media Analysis Report

I: Introduction

There has been a major intensification of violence towards indigenous people in Brazil in recent years, coinciding with the aggressive advance of conservative social policies and further entrenchment of an economic model based upon massive extraction of raw materials for export. This violence can be seen in increasing rates of both homicide and suicide amongst indigenous populations; ever more frequent invasions of indigenous lands by a range of actors, including loggers, wildcat miners (*garimpeiros*), poachers, evangelical missionaries, land grabbers (*grileiros*) and drug traffickers; refusal by the Brazilian state to demarcate indigenous lands, or obstruction of existing processes of demarcation; cuts to and disruption of institutions charged with protecting indigenous people and their lands, particularly the National Indian Foundation (Funai), but also Brazil's federal environmental agency (Ibama) and indigenous health services; and finally, employment of a divide-and-rule rhetoric which aims to weaken indigenous resistance to the advance of extractive industries, particularly agribusiness.

This media analysis aims to determine the role of a selection of the Brazilian print media in these trends, providing some answers to the following questions:

- What have the selected newspapers had to say on these issues, and how have they said it?
- Who are the main spokespeople quoted in reports? To what extent do indigenous people have a voice?
- Are there any significant common narratives or frames which come up across the selected publications?
- How have the different publications analysed reported on common stories and trends?
- How is the coverage different across the three study areas and across the designated timeframe?
- To what extent can the print media studied be said to have been complicit in the recent intensification of violence towards indigenous people in Brazil?

II: Methodology

The main body of the analysis looked at content from Brazil's three leading daily national newspapers: *O Globo* (shortened hereafter to *Globo*), *O Estado de S.Paulo* (*Estadão*) and *Folha de S.Paulo* (*Folha*), from 01/01/2016 to 30/04/2020, relating to three separate study areas corresponding to the states of Amazonas, Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul.

The search terms were the same for all three newspapers, though varied according to the study area, as follows:

- **Amazonas:** "Indígenas Amazonas"; "Índios Amazonas"; "Tabatinga"; "Vale do Javari"; "Marubo"; "Matis"; "Ticuna"; "Tikuna"; "Kambeba"; "Omágua"; "Kaixana"; "Cawishana".
- **Mato Grosso:** "Indígenas Mato Grosso"; "Índios Mato Grosso"; "Parecis"; "Paresis"; "Teles Pires"; "Juruena"; "Kayabi"; "Kaiabi"; "Munduruku"; "Mundurucu"; "Rikbatsa"; "Rikbatsá"; "Apiaká"; "Apiacá".
- **Mato Grosso do Sul:** "Indígenas Mato Grosso do Sul"; "Índios Mato Grosso do Sul"; "Guarani"; "Kaiowá"; "Caiová"; "Terena"; "Kadiwéu".

A supplementary analysis was also carried out for four regional papers from the three study areas: *A Crítica* and *Em Tempo* (Amazonas), *A Gazeta de Cuiabá* (Mato Grosso) and *Correio do Estado* (Mato Grosso do Sul). The timeframe remained the same as for the national newspapers, though the analysis looked only at content relating to the home state of a given newspaper (i.e. it did not take into account content published in Amazonas-based newspapers covering events in Mato Grosso or

Mato Grosso do Sul, unless it also contained specific reference to events in Amazonas). Due to difficulties accessing online content, it was not possible to include further newspapers (particularly for Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul) which had been identified as potential candidates for analysis. To make results from these regional newspapers more manageable, the search terms were refined as follows:

- **Amazonas:** “Vale do Javari”; “Marubo”; “Matis”; “Ticuna”; “Tikuna”; “Kambeba”; “Omágua”; “Kaixana”; “Cawishana”.
- **Mato Grosso:** “Paresis”; Parecis”; “Teles Pires”; “Juruena”; “Kayabi”; “Kaiabi”; “Mundurucu”; “Mundurucu”; “Rikbatsa”; Rikbatsá”; “Apiaká”; “Apiacá”.
- **Mato Grosso do Sul:** “Guarani”; “Kaiowá”; “Caiová”; “Terena”; “Kadiwéu”.

There are around 305 indigenous tribes in Brazil today (Survival International, 2020) and for obvious reasons, it was not possible to use all the many groups living in the three study areas as search terms. Nonetheless, the search terms used were sufficient to identify most relevant articles across all publications analysed, generating a sample which is comprehensive, if not exhaustive.

Once identified, articles were read to determine whether they were to be included in the sample. The main criteria for inclusion was reports of violence, either towards indigenous people themselves or those responsible for their protection and wellbeing. The understanding of violence as a concept was broad, taking in not only acts of physical violence towards indigenous people, their land and their property, but also the following:

- Government or court decisions regarding demarcation of indigenous lands that have resulted or could result in harm towards indigenous people;
- Budget cuts, or disruptive changes in personnel in agencies responsible for protecting indigenous people;
- Cuts to, or inadequate provision of, health services for indigenous people;
- Actions or processes likely to result in drastic modification or erasure of traditional indigenous culture, e.g. evangelical missionary work in indigenous villages;
- Construction of major works of infrastructure (e.g. hydroelectric dams), where these pose a clear danger to the ability of indigenous people to continue with their traditional way of life;
- Collaboration between indigenous groups and non-indigenous actors engaged in activities harmful or potentially harmful to indigenous people and their lands, e.g. *garimpeiros* and large-scale soy farmers.

These cases are intended only to be illustrative and the sample includes many other examples of the various forms of violence, discrimination and neglect suffered by Brazil’s indigenous people over recent years.

Articles that did not correspond to any reasonable understanding of violence were excluded, e.g. content covering indigenous culture or food, or articles promoting tourism in indigenous areas. Coverage of cultural production with indigenous themes (e.g. film reviews) was also excluded.

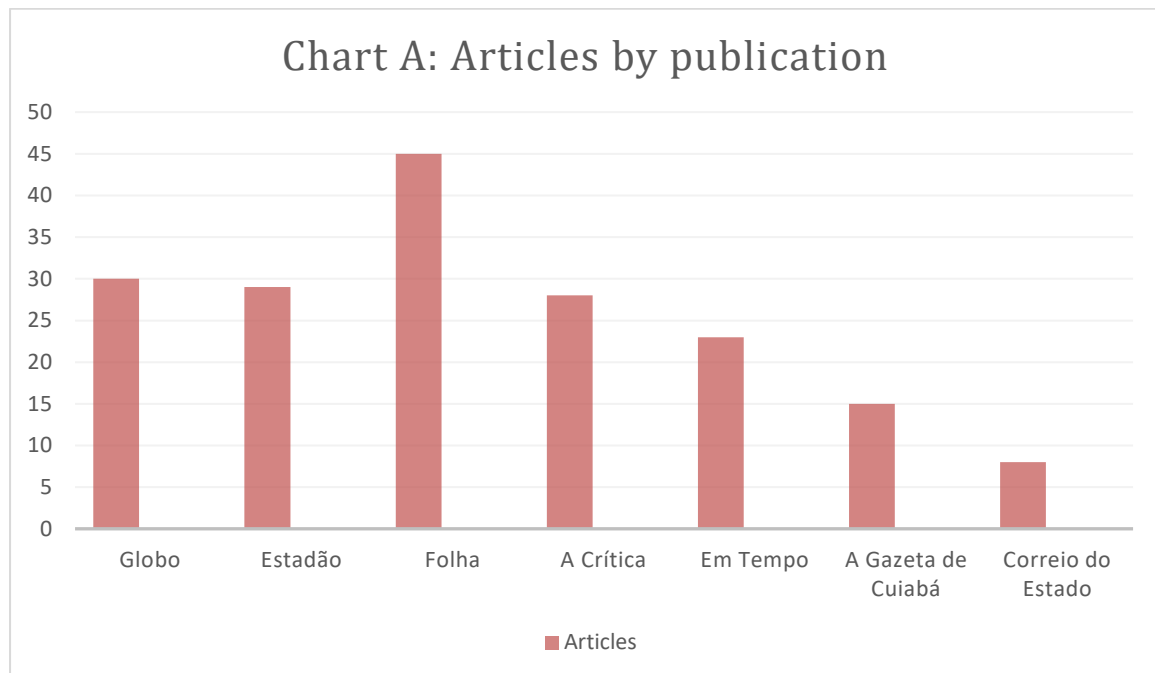
For indigenous groups such as the Yanomami, who inhabit lands in one of the study areas (Amazonas) and another state which does not correspond to one of the study areas (Roraima), content has been included where a) it is obviously concerned with the relevant study area; b) where it is concerned with the borderlands between the two states; or c) or where it is unclear. Where content clearly relates to the state outside the relevant study areas, it has been excluded.

Articles were included where concrete reference to violence in one or more of the three study areas is made, even if the focus of the article is on events elsewhere. For example, several articles were published in 2019 reporting on killings of Guajajara Indians in Maranhão, but which also carry references to acts of violence towards indigenous people in the relevant study areas.

To qualify for inclusion in the spokesperson analysis (Charts H and I below), relevant individuals and organisations had to refer specifically to issues of violence towards indigenous people in one or more of the three study areas. Spokespeople had to be quoted directly; paraphrasing was not considered. Neither were general comments about the indigenous in Brazil. Statements made in previous speeches or posted on social media were also excluded (e.g. Bolsonaro’s oft-quoted declaration during the election campaign in 2018 that he would not demarcate another centimetre of indigenous land if elected president). Finally, due to time constraints the spokesperson analysis included just two of the years analysed – the first and last full years (2016 and 2019).

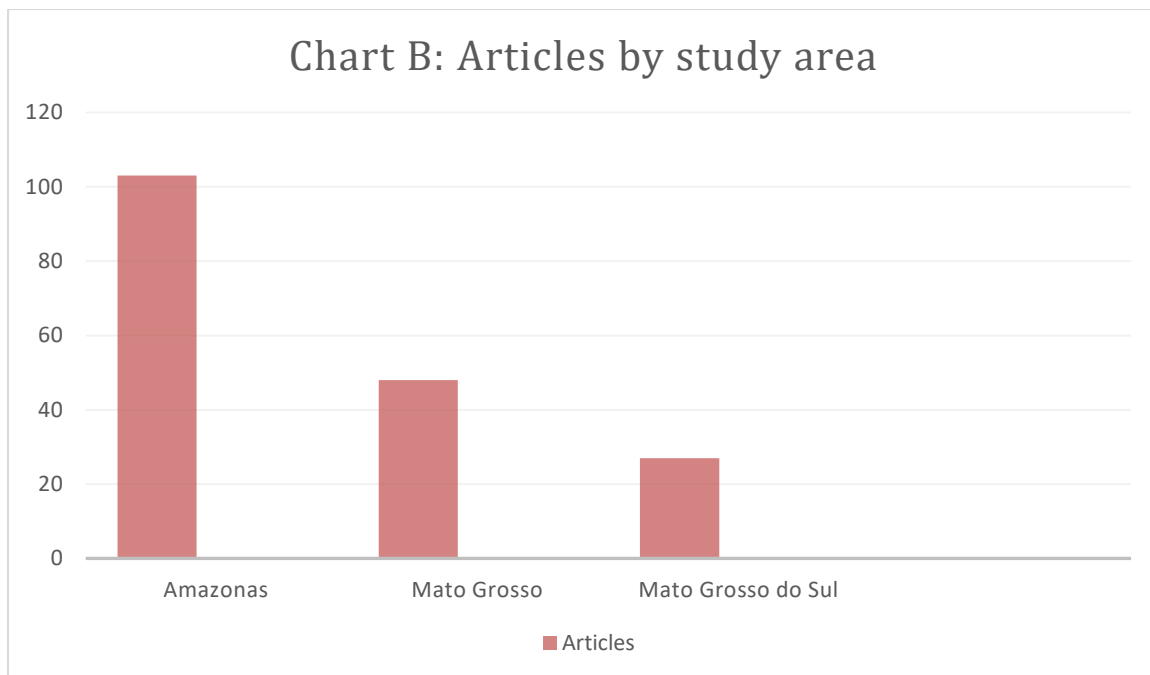
III: Statistical analysis

The methodology described above generated **a total of 178 articles across all publications**. The division of the content by publication is illustrated in Chart A:



As is clear, the three national papers generated more relevant content than the regional papers. This is not surprising, not only given their greater resources and capacity, but the fact that the methodology limited the regional papers to articles concerned with their home state. With a total of 45 articles, *Folha de S. Paulo* produced by far the greatest amount of relevant content across the timeframe. Even allowing for the ten articles which were taken from *Folha*’s recurring “Sebastião Salgado na Amazônia” series, in which the journalist Leão Serva accompanies the photographer Sebastião Salgado on his expeditions to indigenous communities in the Amazon region, *Folha* remains comfortably in the lead.

The division of content by study area is illustrated in Chart B:



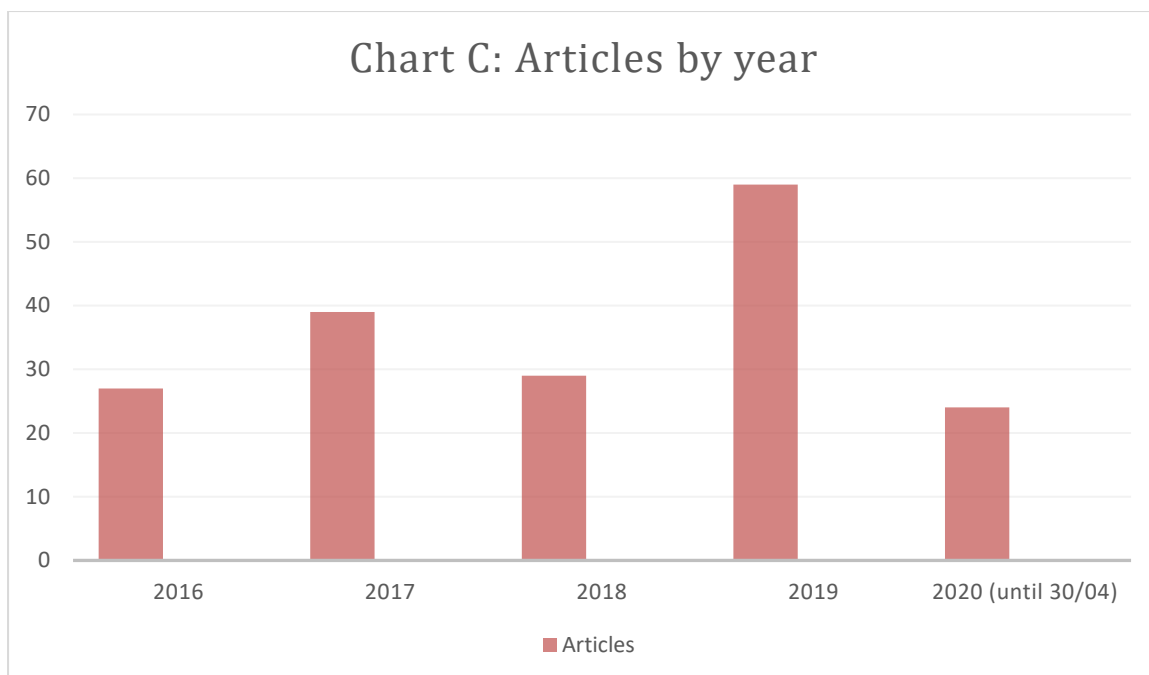
By far the greatest volume of content was published on Amazonas, with more than double the number of articles published on Mato Grosso and nearly four times that for Mato Grosso do Sul. Even allowing for the fact that two regional papers from Amazonas were included in the sample, compared to one each for Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul, it is possible to subtract the figure for either of the two Amazonas regional papers analysed (*A Crítica* or *Em Tempo*) and the figure for Amazonas is still significantly higher than that for either of the other two study areas.

One point of interest is the clear underreporting of violence in Mato Grosso do Sul, where indigenous people suffer from some of the highest rates of both homicide and suicide, not just amongst these three states but in Brazil as a whole (“Com a Funai, problemas; mas como será sem ela?”, *Estadão*, 2019; “Morte de índios aumenta cobrança por proteção”, *Globo*, 2019). In comparison, violence towards indigenous people in the Amazon tends to receive far greater coverage, though the numbers are much lower.

One explanation may lie in the fact that the Guarani-Kaiowá (the most numerous indigenous group in Mato Grosso do Sul) are more Westernised than most of the more isolated groups in the Amazon: they wear Western clothes and many of them speak Portuguese. As such, from a journalistic perspective, they may be of less interest than, for example, the groups covered by *Folha* in the “Sebastião Salgado na Amazônia” series (the Korubo, the Marubo and the Yanomami, as well as indigenous groups living in the Parque Indígena do Xingu in Mato Grosso).

Another reason is that much of the violence faced by indigenous groups in Mato Grosso do Sul stems from agribusiness interests, an economic sector which accounts for around a third of Brazilian GDP and holds considerable political power, meaning journalists may be unwilling or unable to run stories portraying landowners in a negative light. In contrast, the threats faced by indigenous people in the Amazon – such as wildcat mining, logging and drug trafficking – tend to be less legitimate and are therefore harder to defend.

The number of articles generated by year is illustrated in Chart C:



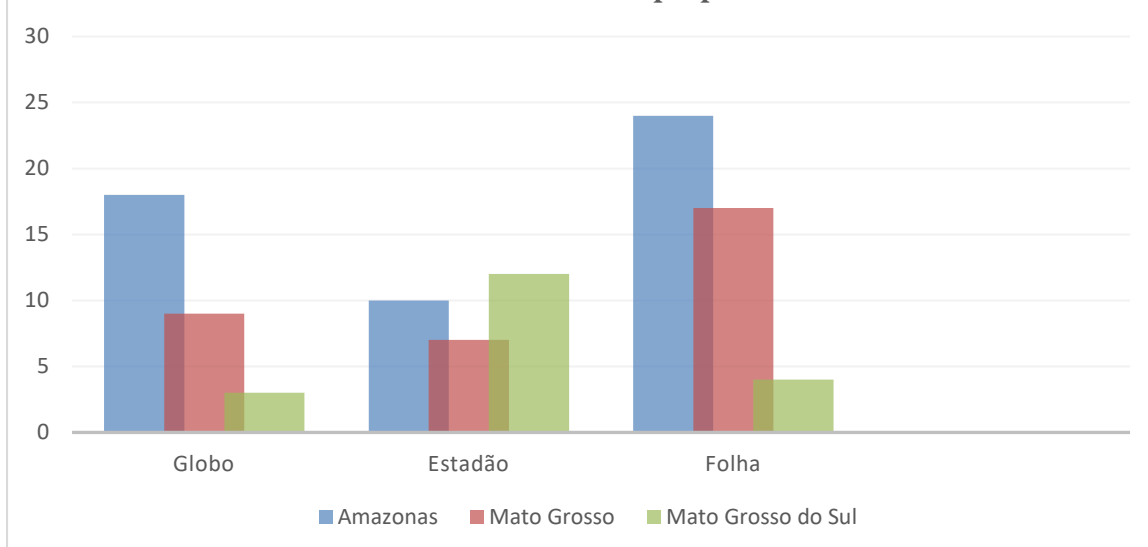
The amount of content fluctuated between 2016 and 2018, before undergoing a big spike in 2019. This trend looks set to continue for 2020, with 24 relevant articles being generated by the methodology for the first four months of the year alone. Assuming the remainder of the year produces similar results, 2020 will comfortably surpass 2019 for relevant content. There are three obvious and interrelated explanations for this: Jair Bolsonaro, the forest fires in the Amazon in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Bolsonaro’s long and well-documented hostility towards indigenous territorial rights ensured that even before he assumed the presidency, much of the Brazilian print media were already looking at the implications of his election victory for indigenous people. Of the eight articles included from the three national papers between Bolsonaro’s election victory in late October 2018 and the end of the year, five refer to him by name. This “Bolsonaro effect” is clearly responsible for the spike in 2019 to a large extent.

The forest fires in the Amazon also helped boost the coverage in 2019. Across all publications analysed, five articles were published dealing with the impact of the fires on indigenous people. Finally, the threat posed to Brazil’s indigenous peoples by the COVID-19 pandemic is a major factor behind the ongoing increase in coverage of violence towards the indigenous in 2020, being the subject of nine out of the 24 articles in the sample for the year up to the 30th of April.

The breakdown of articles by state for the three national papers is illustrated in Chart D:

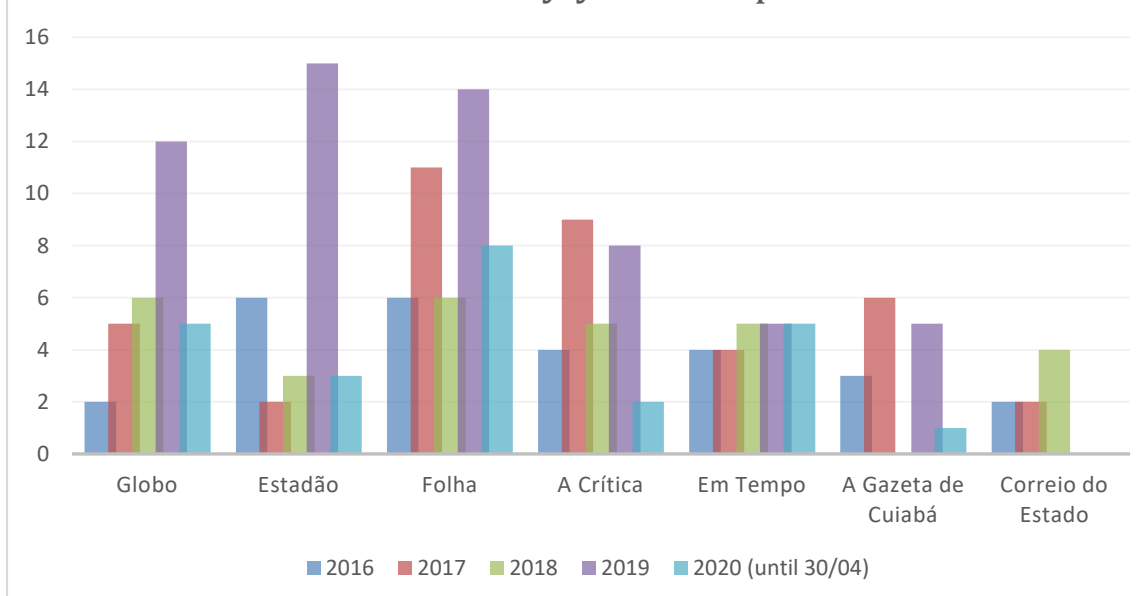
Chart D: Articles by state, for the three national newspapers



Globo and *Folha* both conform to the overall trend shown in Chart B. *Estadão* is exceptional here: not only did it give a roughly equal amount of coverage to the three study areas, it was the only paper to give Mato Grosso do Sul the most coverage. Given both the quantity and quality of its coverage of Amazonas and Mato Grosso, *Folha* is particularly guilty of underreporting in Mato Grosso do Sul.

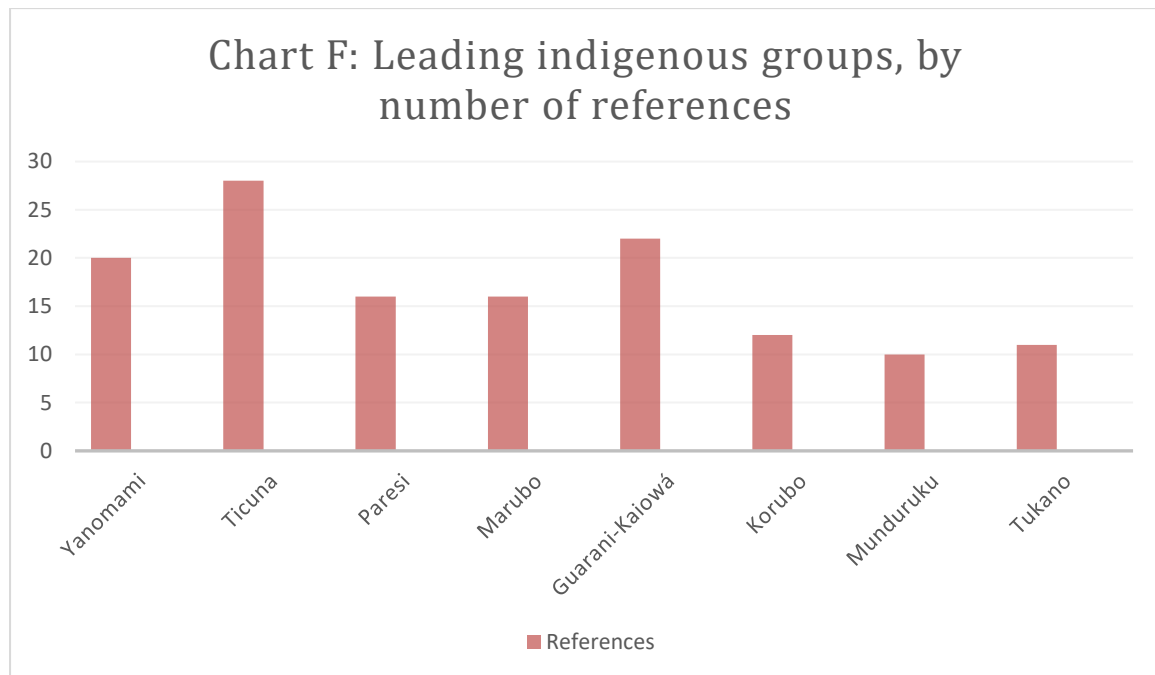
Chart E shows the breakdown of articles per year over all publications analysed:

Chart E: Articles by year and publication



What stands out here is that the spike in 2019 is restricted to the three national papers. In fact, 2019 is not the single most prolific year for any of the regional papers at all. While it is the joint most prolific for *Em Tempo* along with 2018 and 2020, given that 2020 only covers four months it is likely that the total figure for the year will comfortably surpass that for 2019. However, given the disparities in resources and capacity between national and regional papers we should avoid making too many close comparisons between them.

Chart F illustrates the eight indigenous groups which received most references in the sample:

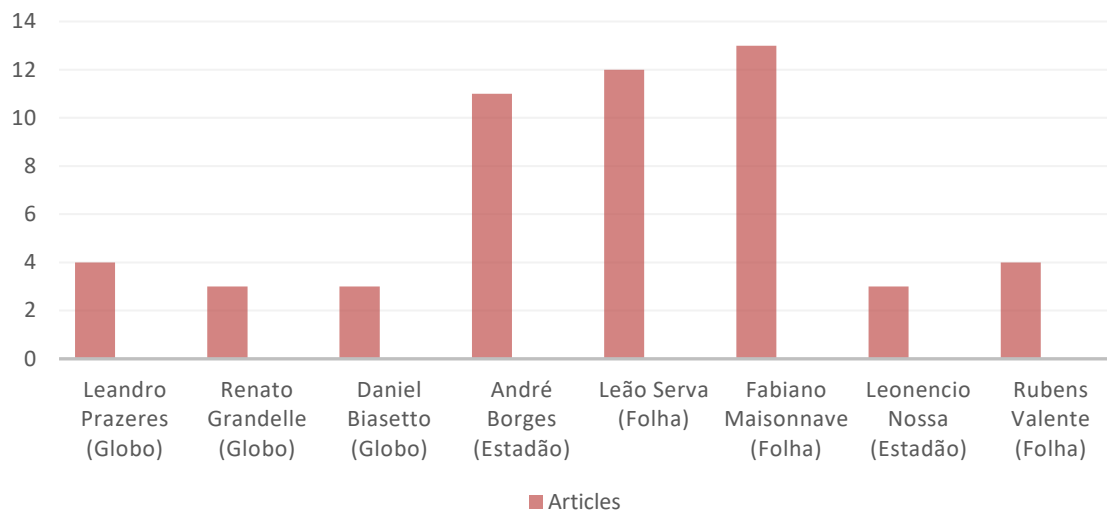


As three of Brazil's most populous indigenous groups, it is no surprise to see the Yanomami, Ticuna and Guarani-Kaiowá receive most references in the sample. Moreover, the situations of hardship and violence affecting the Yanomami and the Guarani-Kaiowá are some of the most extreme currently faced by indigenous people in Brazil. The Yanomami are suffering from a whole host of problems, including alcoholism, pneumonia and malnutrition, not to mention a new wave of *garimpeiro* invasions which has resulted in violent confrontations and is polluting their water sources with mercury. Meanwhile, the Guarani-Kaiowá continue to suffer the consequences of historic land disputes in Mato Grosso do Sul, living in extreme poverty and facing frequent attacks from local landowners.

The real outlier amongst these groups are the Korubo, a tiny group (of probably less than 100 individuals) of recent contact, who inhabit lands in the Vale do Javari in Amazonas. Explanations for this disproportionate amount of coverage include interethnic conflict between the Korubo and the Matis, which resulted in a Funai expedition in 2019 to resolve the disputes peacefully, as well as the extensive coverage they received in the "Sebastião Salgado na Amazônia" series in *Folha de S. Paulo* in 2017. Finally, as one of the last groups on Earth to live in near-total isolation from society – they do not wear clothes or speak Portuguese, continuing to practice a highly traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle – they exercise an obvious interest from a journalistic perspective.

Chart G illustrates the eight leading journalists from the three national papers, by articles published:

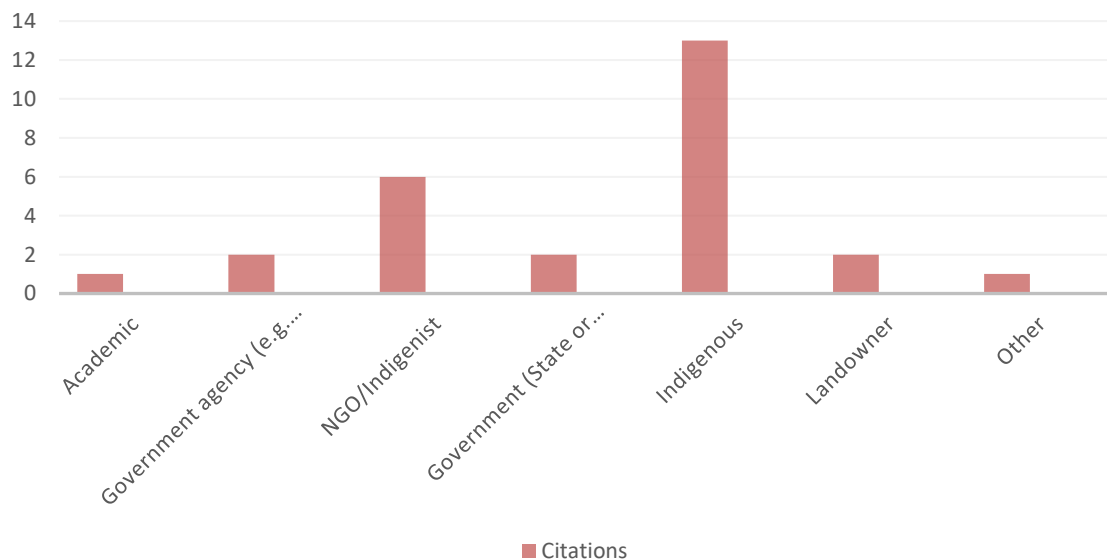
Chart G: Leading journalists from national newspapers, by articles published



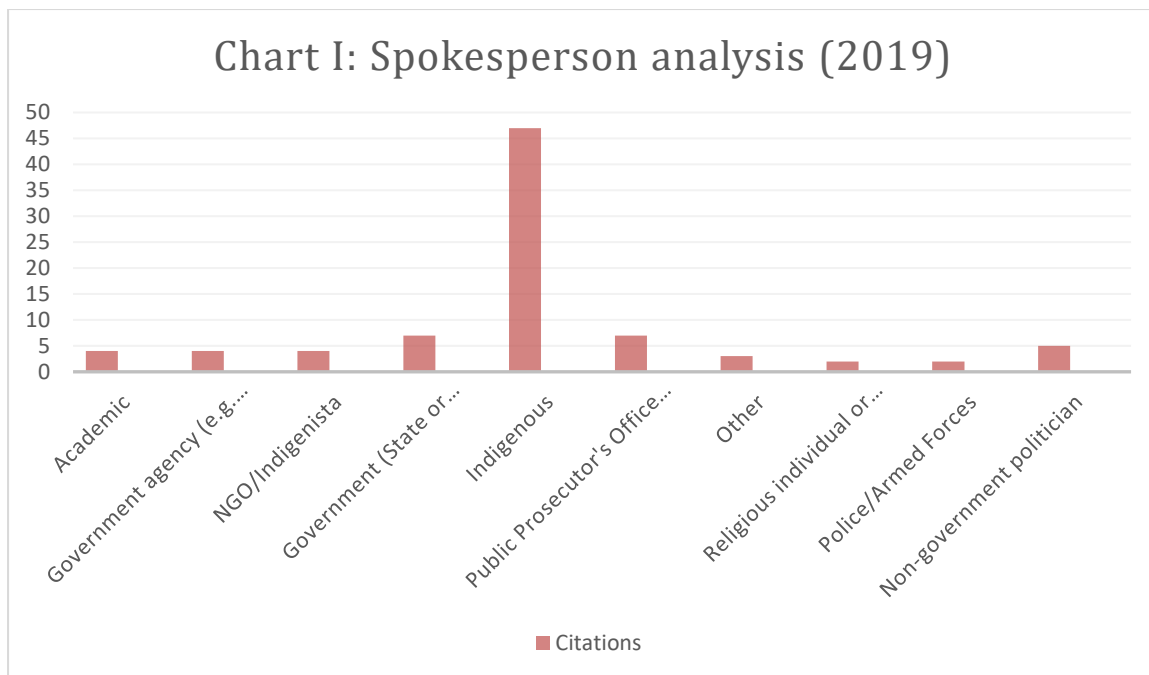
Together, these eight journalists are responsible for 53 articles, around 51% of the total coverage for *Globo*, *Estadão* and *Folha*. André Borges, Leão Serva and Fabiano Maisonnave alone account for 36 of these articles, over a third of the total. This suggests that much of the coverage of indigenous issues in the Brazilian press is written by a small number of journalists who are specialists in the field. I have omitted the regional papers from this analysis as these publications tend to rely more on news agencies and because sometimes the journalist is not credited.

The results of the spokesperson analysis are illustrated in Charts H and I:

Chart H: Spokesperson analysis (2016)



The relatively low numbers of citations here reflect the sparse coverage of indigenous issues in 2016. Indigenous people themselves are well represented, as are NGOs and indigenist or environmental groups sympathetic to indigenous causes.



In 2019, there were a far higher number of citations, and from a wider range of actors. This indicates not only greater coverage of indigenous issues, but also more nuanced content which attempted to engage with a wider range of opinions. Indigenous people themselves received by far the greatest representation, with numbers for all other actors being broadly similar. One point of interest is that the number of citations of people from NGOs or indigenist organisations is lower than 2016, despite the far greater amount of content analysed. This indicates a growing tendency to seek opinions from the indigenous themselves rather than those purporting to speak on their behalf.

IV: Qualitative analysis

The sample generated 33 rough topic areas; for reasons of concision I have chosen to focus on just four here. These are demarcation, given the vital importance of land for indigenous people; Funai, Brazil's National Indian Foundation, because of the demolition it has undergone over the last decade; health, due to the dismantling of already-precarious health infrastructure for indigenous people, alongside their vulnerability to the COVID-19 pandemic; and a comparative analysis looking at coverage of the Paresis in Mato Grosso, an emblematic case of an indigenous group collaborating with external interests traditionally opposed to their territorial rights, in this instance agribusiness.

Demarcation

*The land issue is always the main concern for any indigenous community. It's impossible for indigenous people to lead their lives without peace and tranquillity in these areas, and that's something we only get via demarcation. – Marcos Terena ("Não há proposta de política indigenista forte no Brasil, diz Marcos Terena", *Correio do Estado*, 2016)¹*

Demarcation aims to guarantee the right of indigenous people to land and prevent the occupation of these lands by third parties. This is based on the recognition that the Indians are first and natural owners of land in Brazil, a principle enshrined in the Constitution of 1988 (Instituto Socioambiental, 2018). However, this principle has been increasingly under attack in recent years.

¹ All translations of media content in this analysis are my own.

The publications analysed highlighted the steep decline in demarcation since the Workers' Party (PT) administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and particularly Dilma Rousseff ("Governo paralisa homologação de terras indígenas", *Globo*, 2016). The regional papers in Amazonas also covered attempts to modify the process of demarcation to the detriment of indigenous people in detail ("Processo de demarcação de terras indígenas pode ser modificado", *A Crítica*, 2017; "Áreas indígenas do AM podem ser reavaliadas com PEC", *Em Tempo*, 2016), with the article from *A Crítica* quoting the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (Coiab), which calls the proposal to allow third parties to contest processes of demarcation "a full-frontal attack on indigenous rights."

Ample coverage was also given to the changes in indigenous policy brought in by the Bolsonaro government, particularly his promise during the 2018 election campaign not to demarcate any further indigenous land ("Exploração irregular de minério", *Globo*, 2018; "Bolsonaro acentua conflito de interesses em terras indígenas", *Folha*, 2018). One *Globo* piece also draws a clear link between Bolsonaro's rhetoric on demarcation on the one hand and invasions of indigenous land and acts of intimidation and violence on the other ("Terras indígenas em questão", *Globo*, 2018). Bolsonaro's attempt to transfer responsibility for demarcation to the Ministry of Agriculture – controlled by some of the fiercest opponents of indigenous territorial rights – is also criticised, with an *Estadão* opinion piece calling the indigenous resistance to the move "more than justified" ("Com a Funai, problemas; mas como será sem ela?", *Estadão*, 2019).

While the coverage is broadly sympathetic to the indigenous demand for demarcation, there are also some critical voices. In an opinion piece in *Estadão*, while conceding that demarcation is essential for the survival of isolated tribes, Denis Lerrer Rosenfield claims the issue has been manipulated by NGOs for political purposes ("A questão indígena", *Estadão*, 2019). "If you want to see the instrumentalization at work, just look at how photos are published by national and foreign NGOs!" he writes. He also argues that demarcation can result in unfair expulsion of rural producers from their land:

Imagine a farmer, who for decades has lived and worked in a given place, who one fine day receives the news that their land doesn't belong to them. Come again? They should be evicted, abandoned to their fate, just because of some anthropologist's report which annuls everything?

There are also articles critical of specific instances of demarcation. In *Em Tempo*, there is a long piece critical of a proposed demarcation in the municipality of Barcelos ("Barcelos entre o potencial turístico e a demarcação de terras indígenas", *Em Tempo*, 2017). It claims demarcation "has become a nightmare for the population", arguing that it will sink the local economy and increase crime. Similarly, in 2017 the lawyer Cícero Alves da Costa published a piece in *Correio do Estado* which is highly critical of the 1984 expansion of the Kadiwéu indigenous territory, which he argues was done "in error, in bad faith, illegally, and constitutes a real attack on public order" ("Cícero Alves da Costa: "O caso real da questão Kadiwéu"", *Correio do Estado*, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, given the longstanding land conflicts in the state, the issue of demarcation features heavily in coverage of events in Mato Grosso do Sul, with several articles emphasizing the human and social costs of the failure to demarcate indigenous lands. As the Guarani-Kaiowá leader Valdelice Veron told *Estadão*, "When the [Supreme Court] judge Carmen Lúcia suspended demarcation, she signed the death sentence of the Guarani-Kaiowá, the death sentence of the Veron family" ("Extermínio Guarani-Caiová", *Estadão*, 2016). In another article in the same edition, *Estadão* also draws a link between the extreme poverty in which the Guarani-Kaiowá live and failure to demarcate: "In sub-human conditions, the Indians are waiting on studies on the demarcation of their ancestral lands, a process which has dragged on amidst a series of legal cases and four eviction orders" ("Índios acusam Bumlai de contaminar rio em Dourados", *Estadão*, 2016). Similarly, an article from *Correio do Estado* reports on a Guarani-Kaiowá community in Passo Piraju who have no

access to healthcare or electricity, the government having invoked the fact that their land was not demarcated as an excuse not to provide these services (“União terá que construir posto de saúde em aldeia indígena de MS”, *Correio do Estado*, 2017).

Globo also puts the decline in demarcation of indigenous lands in the context of the dismantling of Funai, which, due to budgetary constraints, was forced to limit expeditions by staff to areas which had already been demarcated (“Dez povos isolados ficam sem supervisão”, *Globo*, 2019). The piece argues that this will leave at least ten hitherto non-demarcated areas home to isolated Indians “at the mercy of fishermen, poachers, loggers and *garimpeiros*”. However, the decline in demarcation is just one of several consequences of the dismantling of Funai, as we will see ahead.

Funai

*Funai, which is supposed to defend the Indian, is today the executive branch of this rotten politics. It represents the government and its disastrous policy on the indigenous. – Sydney Possuelo, indigenist and former Funai director (“Assédio missionário”, *Globo*, 2020)*

There was extensive coverage of the dismantling of Funai across all papers analysed except for *A Gazeta de Cuiabá*. This dismantling has taken several forms; first and foremost, via drastic cuts to Funai’s funding. Between 2012 and 2019, Funai’s budget was cut by 44% (“Justiça determina reestruturação de bases de proteção a índios isolados da Funai no AM”, *A Crítica*, 2018).

This has had a major impact on Funai’s department for isolated tribes and on its ability to retain a presence in the remote areas which these groups inhabit. The closing down of Funai bases in Amazonas received ample coverage across all three national newspapers and in both the newspapers analysed from Amazonas. These bases were attacked on several occasions and Funai employees forced to evacuate for their own safety, with serious implications for indigenous people living in these areas. “If it’s not safe for them, then it’s not safe for us either,” the indigenous leader Lucas Marubo told *Globo* in 2019. “The invaders are on the lookout, just waiting to enter. Without anyone from Funai there, it’s easier for them. It’s a very dangerous situation” (“Insegurança: Atacados, servidores da Funai deixa base que protegia índios”, *Globo*, 2019).

Political interference in Funai constitutes another major method of dismantling. Funai has seen an extremely high turnover of staff in key positions, not least its presidency, with eight different presidents being appointed over the timeframe analysed. Funai is now headed by a former police inspector who has close ties to agribusiness and a long history of opposition to indigenous territorial rights (“Ouvidor da Funai defende investigar índios”, *Folha*, 2017; “Delegado da PF deve ser novo presidente da Funai”, *Estadão*, 2019).

Again, the department for isolated groups has been especially impacted. In 2019, Bruno Pereira was removed as head of the department, a move criticised by other specialists who argued that he had been removed “without any kind of technical reason being offered” (“Exoneração de agente da Funai é criticada”, *Estadão*, 2019). In 2020 the recruitment criteria were changed (“Entidades criticam Funai por abrir brecha a indicação política na proteção de índios isolados”, *Globo*, 2020), making it possible for non-specialists to be appointed. This is precisely what then happened, with an evangelical missionary, Ricardo Lopes Dias, being appointed to head this department (“Funai quer nomear evangélico para chefia de índios isolados”, *Folha*, 2020; “Pastor deve comandar área de índios isolados da Funai”, *Estadão*, 2020) – a decision criticised by the Vale do Javari Indigenous People’s Union as “another stupid and irresponsible decision of the current president of Funai” (“Povos indígenas do Vale do Javari assinam nota de repúdio contra Funai”, *Em Tempo*, 2020).

Further attacks on Funai came in the decision to move it from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Women, the Family and Human Rights, overseen by Damara Alves, an evangelical pastor and Bolsonaro loyalist (“Damara defende produção em área indígena”, *Globo*, 2018; “Exploração

irregular de minério”, *Globo*, 2018), as well as the removal of the responsibility for demarcation, which was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture (“Com a Funai, problemas; mas como será sem ela?”, *Estadão*, 2019) – though both these changes were later overturned by Congress.

The coverage of the dismantling of Funai was either neutral in tone or broadly sympathetic to Funai employees and the indigenous people they are responsible for protecting. There is no indication that any of these publications have encouraged what is effectively the systematic sabotage and perversion of Funai by the Brazilian state. The tone has become increasingly urgent since Bolsonaro came to power and particularly in 2020 with the appointment of Lopes Dias and the outbreak of COVID-19. Of the nine uses of the term *genocídio* across the three national papers, five occur in just the first four months of 2020, though in all cases the journalists are quoting or paraphrasing.

“With clear simplicity, Xikxu sums up the message of the Korubos for the Brazilian government: they need state infrastructure for their protection to work”, wrote the *Folha* journalist Leão Serva back in 2017 following his visit to the Korubos with Sebastião Salgado. Sadly, as these publications have reported on in detail, the current tendency is for state infrastructure for the protection of indigenous people *not* to work. The consequences, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to be dire – and not least when indigenous health infrastructure has undergone a similar process of dismantling.

Health

Out of all the sectors for which we have any data on health, the statistics for the indigenous population are the worst. – Luiza Garnelo, researcher at Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz) in Amazonas (“Saúde indígena perderá 301 de 372 médicos com a saída dos cubanos”, *Folha*, 2018)

Even taking into account the severe, longstanding challenges related to indigenous healthcare in Brazil, the content analysed suggests that conditions further deteriorated during the timeframe. In coverage of a meeting of indigenous teachers and health professionals in Manaus in 2017 (“Indígenas denunciam retrocesso e organizam atos de enfrentamento em Manaus”, *A Crítica*, 2017), Ivânia Vieira summarised the situation as follows:

...budget cuts; a lack of multidisciplinary professionals; an absence of technical and administrative autonomy for the Special Indigenous Health Districts (DISEIs); a lack of basic, technical and higher education for indigenous people working in the provision of basic healthcare in the villages, which would help to ensure greater autonomy for indigenous people in the management of healthcare policies directed at them; and political interference in recruitment of managers and healthcare professionals working in indigenous health.

The dismantling of Funai and the consequent weakening of the ability of the Brazilian state to keep invaders out of indigenous lands has direct implications for indigenous health. Invaders bring disease, commit acts of physical violence, facilitate the flow of drugs and alcohol into indigenous communities and pollute water sources that indigenous people depend upon for their survival. But invasions are not the only threat to the health of indigenous communities. In an article from 2016, *Globo* highlights that while social welfare programmes such as the *Bolsa Família* [Family Allowance] have given indigenous people greater spending power, they have also led to the introduction of processed food into these communities, with increased rates of obesity and associated diseases as a result (“Cenário de risco”, *Globo*, 2016). For Artur Nobre Mendes, then head of Sustainable Promotion Development at Funai:

We’re very concerned about the consumption of processed products, which are causing obesity and related illnesses in indigenous lands [...] There are studies which associate this problem with the extension of social welfare programmes, such as the rural pension scheme

and the Bolsa Família. These are positive, but they have collateral effects. The money is changing dietary habits, bringing with it lots of carbohydrates and products high in sugar.

The withdrawal of the Cuban doctors from the *Mais Médicos* ["More Doctors"] programme following Bolsonaro's election victory in 2018 also had a disproportionate impact on the indigenous, with the Special Department for Indigenous Health (Sesai) losing 301 of its 372 doctors, 81% of the total ("Saúde indígena perderá 301 de 372 médicos com a saída dos cubanos", *Folha*, 2018). However, the programme was dysfunctional even before the departure of the Cubans. Ananda Conde, an indigenist and doctor who worked in the Yanomami indigenous reserve, published a piece in *Folha* in 2019 where she recounts how she dropped out of *Mais Médicos* due to precarious working conditions, lack of support from her superiors, cancelled travel arrangements, repetitive training sessions and inadequate remuneration ("Brasileira desiste de Mais Médicos por falta de condições e pagamento", *Folha*, 2019).

This is the context in which the COVID-19 outbreak occurred. As the Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) wrote in a statement to *Folha*, "The neglect was clear even before the pandemic, with the weakening of policy on indigenous health, territory and sustainable development" ("MPF cita risco de genocídio indígena e cobra governo", *Folha*, 2020).

Leão Serva summarises the particular vulnerability of the indigenous to COVID-19 as follows:

*...the fragility of the Indians when faced with new diseases, the lack of sufficient healthcare, and their traditional way of life itself, with constant sharing of houses and meals, as well as the ease with which demarcated territory can be accessed from neighbouring municipalities. ("Xingu fecha fronteiras para evitar chegada do coronavírus", *Folha*, 2020)*

Globo also points out that government provision of welfare payments such as the Bolsa Família, alongside the announcement of an emergency benefit of R\$600 designed to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic, could end up being disastrous for the indigenous ("Auxílio emergencial na crise pode expor indígenas a risco", *Globo*, 2020). As the article explains:

The worry is that Indians come into contact with infected people upon their arrival in the cities, and that when they go back to their villages, they will become vectors for contagion in isolated areas where healthcare infrastructure is precarious.

In *Em Tempo*, the ʘtãpinopona-Tuyuka anthropologist Justino Sarmiento Rezende makes a similar point, warning of the potential for contagion by Indians living in urban centres who go to visit relatives in more remote communities ("Dia do índio: três indígenas já morreram por Covid-19", *Em Tempo*, 2020).

It is no surprise then, to find the press talking of a potential genocide. The first *Folha* article cited above covers the decision by the MPF to warn all three levels of government of this danger, highlighting dozens of historical cases and demanding that appropriate measures are taken. In the second, Leão Serva draws a parallel between the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastation of Brazil's indigenous communities following the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century. Also in *Folha*, Philippe Watanabe also refers to a measles epidemic brought by *garimpeiros* between 1960 and 1980 that killed 15% of the Yanomami population at the time ("Força-tarefa pede ações na Amazônia contra riscos de devastação e de Covid-19", *Folha*, 2020), while *Em Tempo* includes a similar warning from Sofia Mendonça, a doctor and researcher at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp).

Comparative analysis: the "21st century Indian"

Many people want to condemn you to remain isolated within indigenous reserves, like something strange in a zoo. You don't deserve this. You are Brazilians and you have the right

to exploit your land [...] and even sell some of it, if that's what you want. – Jair Bolsonaro, (“Bolsonaro acentua conflito de interesses em terras indígenas”, *Folha*, 2018)

One particularly significant narrative is that of the “21st century Indian”, a concept sometimes employed by opponents of indigenous territorial rights, including indigenous people themselves, such as Ysani Kalapolo, a young indigenous woman who accompanied Bolsonaro to the UN General Assembly in September 2019 (“Entre indígenas, o apoio isolado a bandeiras bolsonaristas”, *Globo*, 2019).

While the same article concedes that indigenous support for Bolsonaro exists only amongst “isolated groups”, pro-Bolsonaro Indians have received extensive coverage in the publications analysed here. There is a total of 15 articles referring to indigenous support for Bolsonaro or his proposals on use of indigenous land, or in which Bolsonaro or an ally invoke the experience of a particular indigenous group to argue for more relaxed regulation on this issue.

The indigenous group most frequently referred to is the Paresis in Mato Grosso, who use lands on their indigenous reserve to farm corn, soy and other crops using modern methods. They have planted genetically modified (GM) crops, though they claim they have phased them out (“Índios pró-Bolsonaro querem ampliar lavoura de soja e desafiam fiscalização”, *Folha*, 2019). This has brought them into conflict with Brazil’s environmental agency (Ibama) and the courts; in 2018 Ibama fined five Paresi and Nambikwara associations in north-eastern Mato Grosso R\$6.3 million for various environmental offences.

But as Fábio Zanini writes in *Folha*, “The tribe has been championed by the federal government as the example of a new model for the indigenous question” (“Índios pró-Bolsonaro querem ampliar lavoura de soja e desafiam fiscalização”, *Folha*, 2019). In February 2019, Bolsonaro sent two of his most loyal ministers, Tereza Cristina (Agriculture) and Ricardo Salles (Environment) to visit Paresi villages, a trip which received extensive press coverage – eight articles across four of the newspapers analysed.

The Paresis’ experience is often invoked to argue that the country’s indigenous people are being held back by overbearing environmental legislation. According to Tereza Cristina, the Paresis are leading “a revolution in agriculture” (“Estado garante apoio e suporte para ampliação de renda dos indígenas”, *A Gazeta de Cuiabá*, 2019), while for Salles, the Paresis “are persecuted by agents of the state, who, with their watermelon ideology [green on the outside, red on the inside], make the most ridiculous arguments to belittle and undermine the work of this group” (“Ministros de Bolsonaro visitaram plantio ilegal em área embargada”, *Folha*, 2019).

There are clear differences in framing of the Paresis between the different publications – principally between *Estadão* and the others. In the “Coluna do Estadão”, Alberto Bombig writes that “The Paresis plant 10,000 hectares of soy, corn and rice, without GM and with biological pest control. This is the model the government should support for the sector” (“Coluna do Estadão”, *Estadão*, 2019). Likewise, in an opinion piece, Denis Lerrer Rosenfield writes that “[The Paresis] are an exemplary case, having put into practice their freedom of choice. They want to decide for themselves their own future, without depending on the state or appealing to NGOs. And yet, for demanding their rights as citizens, they are being penalized!” (“A questão indígena”, *Estadão*, 2019).

This line is taken less explicitly by the *Gazeta de Cuiabá*. While the opinions of the writers are never explicitly stated, the choice of spokespeople – mostly pro-government politicians – is very one sided. There is also some misrepresentation of the issue. In its coverage of Salles and Tereza Cristina’s visit (“Estado garante apoio e suporte para ampliação de renda dos indígenas”, *A Gazeta de Cuiabá*, 2019), the *Gazeta* claims that “the meeting [...] helped to strengthen the demand of the indigenous people to be able to farm their land”, a statement which falsely implies that indigenous communities are prohibited wholesale from agricultural activity on their lands.

In contrast, the coverage by *Globo* and particularly *Folha* is far more critical. The *Globo* piece (“Enfim, Amazônia”, *Globo*, 2019) includes a quotation from the anthropologist Sonia Troncoso, who points out that the Paresi business model involved “a series of harmful effects and illegalities”, highlighting as problematic “the influence of external agents, principally farmers with their own interests.” The same *Globo* article, along with three separate articles published in *Folha* (“Índios pró-Bolsonaro querem ampliar lavoura de soja e desafiam fiscalização”, *Folha*, 2019; “Ministro visita terra indígena que arrenda área para plantar soja”, *Folha*, 2019; “Ministros de Bolsonaro visitaram plantio ilegal em área embargada”, *Folha*, 2019), call out the false claim, made by Tereza Cristina and the Ministry of Agriculture, that the Paresis had struck a deal with the Public Prosecutor’s Office (MPF) to legitimise their production. The third of the *Folha* pieces also clearly emphasizes the fact that two leading government ministers visited an illegal soy plantation on an area of land which was under an Ibama embargo at the time.

The Paresis are by far from the only indigenous Brazilians involved in this kind of agricultural production. However, they exemplify like few other groups the vision of the current Brazilian government for the country’s indigenous people, having received explicit government support for activities that contravene Brazilian law. Their experience also exposes clear divisions within the Brazilian press on the use of land within indigenous reserves, and beyond that, it points to broader questions about the role of indigenous people within the national economy and society.

V: Conclusions and recommendations

Brazil has experienced particularly vicious political polarisation in recent years. Considering the links between indigenous organisations and left-wing political parties and NGOs on the one hand, and the traditionally conservative editorial position of most major Brazilian media outlets on the other, one might expect the press to ignore, belittle or even attack indigenous people, their demands, and the organisations that represent them. However, the analysis found little evidence of this over the timeframe.

The publications analysed have borne witness to a period in which indigenous people have seen gains made during the 1980s and 1990s aggressively rolled back, endangering them on a scale not seen since the dictatorship period. Indigenous people themselves have been much involved in the reporting of this process, and there are clearly established lines of communication between indigenous people, their organisations and newspaper journalists.

This new attack on indigenous rights tends to be framed in terms of acts of neglect by the Brazilian state. However, looking at the coverage as a whole, what emerges is a portrait of a systematic attack on indigenous people by a range of different actors and economic sectors, some of which have taken control of state apparatus to achieve their aims to a major extent. This has resulted in the weakening of regulations and perversion of institutions designed to protect indigenous people and their lands. This attack was well underway before 2016, though it increased in momentum throughout the timeframe of this research, and particularly since Bolsonaro’s election in 2018.

Arguably the publications analysed have not done enough to frame this attack as a systematic phenomenon; on the other hand, by its very nature, newspaper journalism tends to retain a fairly narrow focus on current events. Undoubtedly, the press did not provide adequate coverage of this process prior to 2019, and for Mato Grosso do Sul throughout the timeframe. There is also a handful of articles, mainly from *Estadão* and the local papers in Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul, which are one-sided in their choice of spokespeople, reflect an uncritical attitude towards agribusiness or question existing legal frameworks on demarcation and/or use of indigenous land.

As expected, both quality and quantity of coverage was lower for the regional papers, being reasonably strong in Amazonas, much weaker in Mato Grosso, and weakest of all in Mato Grosso do

Sul. The comparatively strong coverage for Amazonas is unsurprising, given the state's high indigenous population, strong indigenous cultural influence, and the relative weakness of the agribusiness sector in the state compared to the other two study areas. The paucity of coverage for Mato Grosso do Sul, both for the national papers (*Estadão* excepted) and the local paper analysed (*Correio do Estado*) is of concern, given the extreme poverty and ongoing violence faced by indigenous people in the state.

Further research should investigate other forms of media, particularly television but also social media. Indeed, one may argue that the influence of print media in Brazil is relatively limited. Using the monthly averages for 2019, combined total circulation for *Globo*, *Estadão* and *Folha* – for both printed copies and digital subscriptions – was 1,484,930 (*Folha de S.Paulo*, 2020). This means that only around 0.89% of the Brazilian population aged 15 and above regularly read one of these three papers in 2019 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020).

In conclusion, there is no serious evidence to suggest that these newspapers have been complicit in the intensification of violence towards indigenous people in Brazil. For the most part, coverage is sensitive and well-informed, and has increased both in quality and quantity since Bolsonaro's election, with newspapers becoming more assiduous in their reporting and more strident in their criticism.

All the indications are that the Brazilian press will continue to expand its coverage of violence towards the indigenous throughout 2020 and beyond, especially given the very real threat of genocide carried by the COVID-19 pandemic. But with so many Brazilians – indigenous and non-indigenous alike – suffering from the effects of the pandemic and the government's calamitous response, it remains to be seen how much influence this will have on public opinion.

Bibliography

For the complete list of the articles included in the sample for this analysis, please see <https://lab.org.uk/indigbrazil/ib-media-analysis/>

Central Intelligence Agency (2020) 'The World Factbook – South America: Brazil', 19 August, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/br.html>>

Folha de S.Paulo (2020) 'Folha cresce e lidera circulação entre jornais do país em 2019', 21 January, <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/01/folha-cresce-e-lidera-circulacao-entre-jornais-do-pais-em-2019.shtml>>

Instituto Socioambiental (2018) 'O que são terras indígenas?', 6 November, <https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/O_que_s%C3%A3o_Terras_Ind%C3%ADgenas%3F>

Survival International (2020) 'Brazilian Indians', <<https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/brazilian>>