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Americas - Brazil

Campaign blighted

Attack on radio station a worrying development in run-up to local elections

17 September 2012

In the early hours of 13 September, two men entered the premises of the radio station *Radio Farol* in União dos Palmares in Alagoas state and set off a bomb which destroyed the studio. The blast caused no casualties but put the station off the air.

Security cameras were reported to have recorded images of the two bombers and police have not ruled out a political motive. The attack is an ominous development in the run-up to the local elections on 7 and 28 October.

"Unfortunately the election campaign has often been marked by online censorship, newspaper seizures and procedural abuses," Reporters Without Borders said. "An attack of this type could lead to self-censorship on the part of many journalists, at the expense of diversity of news, which is particularly essential in such circumstances.

"We hope that the investigation now under way will lead to the punishment of the perpetrators. At the same time, we call on media organizations, most of which are owned by politicians running in the current elections, to observe as scrupulously as possible the rules on equal airtime and balance in the coverage of the campaign. At stake are spirit of democracy and their own safety."

Radio Farol is owned by João Caldas, a member of the federal parliament who represents the National Ecological Party (PEN). It is known for its criticism of the outgoing mayor of d'União dos Palmares, Areski Freitas of the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB). The day before the attack, it broadcast a discussion between the mayor and the former governor, Manoel Gomes de Barros of the Social Democracy Party (PSDB), who is standing as his successor.

The station's co-manager, **Lucas García**, was quoted in the regional press as saying the attackers struck after the last night watchman had left at 4 a.m., an hour before the first journalist was due to arrive to start his shift. The blast caused damage estimated at more than 25,000 reais (approx 10,000 euros).

A political motive cannot be ruled out since there has been a rise in attempts during the campaign to obstruct or censor media organizations and blogs perceived as hostile. A mass buy-up of a newspaper took place in the city of Itaboraí in Rio de Janeiro state, where people close to the Republic Party candidate Altineu Cortes grabbed 400 copies of the 4 and 5 September editions of the daily *O Dia*.

Censorship is more often exercised via court decisions, of which candidates make full use. In one of the most dramatic cases, the federal police halted the distribution of the newspaper *Correio do Estado* in Campo Grande in Mato Grosso do Sul state on 30 August after it published a poll on voting intentions.

However, court decisions can go in opposite directions from one state to another. Thus, in Curitiba in Paraná state, the regional electoral court eventually granted a request, denied by a lower court, by Democratic Labour Party candidate Gustavo Fruet to block publication of an opinion poll by the website *Datafolha*. Conversely, the electoral court in Fortaleza allowed the publication of a poll commissioned by the newspaper *O Povo* and published by *Datafolha*,

overturning an earlier ban obtained by two candidates.

On 3 September, **Fernando Conceição**, a journalist and blogger, criticised an attempt to censor him by a candidate for mayor of Salvador de Bahia, Mário Kertész of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). The candidate had asked the courts to order the removal of any reference to an embezzlement case from the journalist's [blog](#). The court order was suspended.

Such was not the case for the blogger **Tarso Cabral Violin**, who runs the [Blog do Tarso](#). At the instigation of the Curitiba's PSDB mayor Luciano Ducci the electoral court ordered him to pay two fines totalling 106,000 reais (40,000 euros) for publishing two simulated ballots.
