

The "Inequality" of News Coverage

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Judiciary, MP and federal careers concentrate super salaries in the public service. On Tuesday (25), a Folha article pointed out that public servants in Brazil concentrate 6 of the countrys ten highest-paid occupations. "We talk about servers, but when we go to the text, we find a small caste from the Judiciary and the Executives pinnacle. Its embarrassing," said a reader. "There is a long discussion on the subject, and I sincerely agree that there are very high salaries in the public service given the countrys average income. But this discussion needs to be better qualified," said another. It is not new for the newspaper to address the extremely high wages of public servants, especially when compared to the private sector. Often, however, the paper chose a simplistic and accusatory approach to the topic. "Servers," the "public sector" or "state officials," would form a group of Maharajas who would ruin the countrys finances. The most curious thing is that the study that serves as the foundation of the article does not make generalizations. Based on data from the Personal Income Tax (IRPF) of 2018, the survey, carried out by FGV Social, accurately points out that the Public Ministry and members of the Judiciary have three of the five highest-paid occupations in the country. Federal civil servants, such as diplomats and Central Bank employees and tax auditors, are among the ten highest-paid. In fact, super salaries do not seem reasonable. And that is why the data could have served for a more lively discussion both about where, within the public service, these super salaries are located (MP, Judiciary, federal service), and about the return they bring to society, to understand if they are justified. Comparing Brazils civil service with that of other countries and trying to find out why it seems to be so challenging to deal with these interests are ways to deepen the analysis. The text, however, exhausts the finding - who makes up, after all, the top of the pyramid in public service - in a single paragraph. For the rest, it seems to defend a single agenda: it returns to treating public servants as a uniform mass, contrasting the state payrolls weight with the need to control public accounts and expand aid to the most vulnerable in the post-pandemic. And it reiterates, without hearing a divergent voice, that advantages such as job stability and higher salaries would justify the application of temporary mechanisms to reduce 25% of remuneration and the corresponding working hours in case of non-compliance with the public spending limit. With an air of revenge, the reasoning seems to be this: if the private sector was sacrificed, why not the public sector? It so happens that, in the private sector, the proposal to reduce wages due to the pandemic was accompanied by compensation for lower wages. Would it make sense to propose a linear cut in public service wages? How would reducing the supply of public safety, education, health, and research on coronavirus serve the public interest? This discussion has not happened. The need to reduce the Unions public service payroll, the states and the municipalities seems to be an end in itself, without this generating other reflections. The study reveals that, within the Federal District, a Federation unit with the highest average monthly income, Lago Sul has an income of at least three times higher than that of entire municipalities with higher income. At the same time, it also says that, proportionally, more people are earning a minimum wage among the countrys municipal servants than among domestic employees in the private sector — professionals whose wages, on average, are low. Hence the imprecision of any phrase that begins with "servers in Brazil." Who would generalizations serve? Not to readers. The public servant is a broad category that includes from judges to cleaning assistants. Having an elite X-ray in hand and missing the opportunity to exploit it in the name of harassing this abstract entity (the "public servant") favors either the thoughtless dismantling or the top of the pyramid. The debate around the challenges of the public sector, the many inefficiencies, and the super salaries and the effects they have on the public budget are very relevant. However, the way the press usually carries out this discussion leaves something to be desired. News coverage has to identify these asymmetries not as a way to reach civil servants without distinction, but with a focus on improving the

quality of services provided to the population. Here, interest cannot only be saving. Otherwise, it seems like a tantrum or disinterest from those who never used the service. Translated by Kiratiana Freelon