

# Qaddafi

Guilherme Oliveira and Mehmet Kutluay

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## Introduction

Hello, listeners. Welcome to the first episode of “Rise and Fall”, the podcast that retrieves and analyzes press coverage of the rise and fall of power of political leaders that have marked the recent history of humanity. My name is Mehmet Kutluay and I am doing this podcast with my good friend Guilherme Oliveira, who will be hosting the Portuguese version called “Ascensao e Queda”.

To start, we begin with coverage from the New York Times on the day of the rise and the day of the fall of Muammar Qaddafi, Libya’s leader for more than four decades. Muammar Qaddafi was a controversial figure who shook the Arab, Western and African worlds at different stages of his life. This flexibility manifested itself throughout his life: he came to power in a bloodless coup; conducted a war with Chad that introduced Toyota jeeps onto battlefields; provided financial and logistical support for terrorist organizations to trigger attacks against Israel as well as the Lockerbee attack; cooperated with the US on the war on terror after 9/11; transformed Libya from a medieval theocratic monarchy to a dictatorship with significant pockets of development; the crushing of any internal dissent, including the massacre of prisoners in a revolt in the 1990s; alleged funding to European universities and politicians; the violent and bloody reaction to the arrival of the Arab Spring in your country. For many, Qaddafi was a vain leader who did everything he could to attract attention and put Libya at the media level of the world superpowers. For others, he was a brave fighter against Western rule and against the creation of the State of Israel. That is, it is difficult to find a more passionate character to start this podcast.

The New York Times was chosen for technical reasons. First, I don’t speak Portuguese but the other podcast host does. Second, the analysis of the articles is partly done with software that is optimized for English texts. Third, the New York Times has all of its articles available on its website in PDF format. Finally, the New York Times is a leading publication in a country that, during Qaddafi’s lifetime, was always a democracy without any state censorship. Their coverage may not always have been favorable, given the animosity between the US and Qaddafi during most of Qaddafi’s time in office. However, this podcast is interested in just that - the nature and evolution of news coverage. We are not attempting to objectively evaluate Qaddafi. Rather, we look at the difference between coverage from when he came to power on September 1, 1969, to when he fell from power, and died, in October 20, 2011.

Guilherme and I have decided to divide the show into three sections. The first section is about analyzing and comparing the articles in their technical aspects - such as number of words, overall tone and the use of direct and indirect speech. The second section looks at the articles within their political and social milieu. The final section goes through things we find interesting, but that do not fit perfectly into the first two sections. One important thing to note: we are not going to offer a verdict on the quality of the articles or comment on possible improvements or degradation found in the news coverages. This is too subjective for the scope of this podcast. Therefore, we discourage discussions about this in the comments section. Lastly, always feel free to contact us via email. We will be constantly trying to improve forthcoming episodes and are open to suggestions - especially on any political leaders you’d like us to cover.

## Part 1: Technical Analysis

So let's begin with part 1 - the technical aspect of the articles. The first New York Times article was published on September 2nd, 1969 - even though Qaddafi's coup occurred on September 1st, 1969. This gap is probably explained by the lag in delivering information in the world before the internet. In contrast, the second article was published on the same day that Qaddafi died at the hands of a mob, on October 20th, 2011.

There are also differences in declaring authors - the 1969 article is written anonymously, whereas the 2011 article has the name of three authors on it. This could be another consequence of the internet - there is more space to include information. This is probably why the 2011 article is much longer than the 1969 article.

The 2011 article is 1474 words and the 1969 article is 881 words. Note that these numbers do not include titles and subtitles.

There are variances in tone as well. Some passages from the 1969 news are slightly condescending. For example, this passage in the article: "Observers believe that the new leaders may have difficulty finding grounds on which to accuse the monarchy. King Idris and other members of the royal family have been living relatively modestly and are known to have avoided corruption." A moral judgement is being made, but based on generic comments from anonymous sources. The 2011 article, by contrast gives, mostly verifiable, details for its sources.

Both articles are structured around repeating information, each time giving more details or presenting a slightly different perspective. This most likely reflects how journalists are trained to write articles. The difference, funny enough, is the content that is repeated. The 1969 article repeats the geopolitical environment Libya is in, and the potential break in ideology between the old and new regime. In the 2011 article, the repetition is on the event of Qaddafi dying. More specifically:

1. Qaddafi's last words are discussed at least twice.
2. Two references without additional information about Assad's future in Syria;
3. Repeated references to testimonies and opinions about the possible cause of death, including the opinion based on videos and photographs of a doctor based in New York;
4. Constant allusions to Qaddafi's attire at the time of death;
5. Constant allusions to the bullet holes in the former leader's body. We also use statistics to analyze the tone of the news in as quantitative a way as possible.

This difference in focus is augmented by the overall sentiment that can be found in both articles. The 1969 article may at times be condescending, but its tone is largely clinical. After all, one can only put so much colorful language when describing geopolitics. The 2011 article, by contrast, contains much more emotive and graphic language. A lot of emphasis is put, for example, on the clothes that Qaddafi wore when he died, or the number and location of the gunshot wounds he was found with.

Our statistical analysis begins with a test of the impression that the 1969 article seems to discuss the geopolitics of the Arab world more than the 2011 article. In fact, about 49% of the words in 1969 went to a description of basic facts of regional geopolitics, while only 20% of the words in the 2011 article are dedicated to this topic.

Also at first glance, the 2011 article seems to use much more direct and indirect speech than the 1969 article. This is probably a result of journalists in 2011 being more time-pressed to write and publish than their peers in 1969.

And thus, the 1969 article does not even contain direct speech, and indirect speech consumes about 20% of the words in the article; in 2011, direct and indirect speeches claimed more than 50% of words.

Finally, we used the Python software NLTK package to classify the tone of the sentences in each story.

In the 1969 article, 88.3% of the sentences are considered neutral, 8% positive and the remaining sentences negative.

In comparison, in the 2011 article, 80% of phrases are considered neutral, with the drop of 8 percentage points favoring almost only negative phrases. In other words, overall, the two texts are neutral, with a slight

increase in the negative charge from 1969 to 2011.

This change can possibly be explained by the fame and magnetism of Qaddafi, who placed Libya on the world geopolitical map and which generated so much hatred in the USA.

Whereas in 1969, Libya was yet another state at the crossroads of the Middle East and Africa, in 2011 it was the country of Qaddafi, an opponent to the West and a supporter of terrorist actions.

The fact that the 1969 coup was absolutely peaceful at the same time that Qaddafi's fall degenerated into civil war is another potential cause for explaining the differences in tone.

Also, as previously mentioned, the internet lowered the cost of speaking and accelerated the world:

1. A journalist in 1969 had at least a day or two to write a compact article, at a time when checking many facts required a visit to the library;
2. In 2011, the journalist has to compete to be the first to cover all events, with a lot of content available online and with a lot of content produced by a myriad of actors.

Finally, the differences may be a reflection of deeper changes in society, such as attitudes towards authoritarian regimes and the use of violence.

Once again, this podcast wants to put the cards on the table rather than reach a verdict: that's why we renewed the invitation to a debate in the comment box.

## Part 2: Political and Social Analysis

- 1969 article, fun fact, does not mention Qaddafi at all. Another commander is mentioned, but he is mentioned in his role in the broader events within and outside of Libya. The 2011 article, on the other hand, is almost entirely about Qaddafi. This is evidence of how the attention surrounding Libya has changed, from the US perspective.
- 1969 article talks about oil and what happens in other Arab countries. 2011 article, when not talking about Qaddafi dying, does not mention oil at all but does mention the Arab spring.

Now we move on to the second part of the episode: the approach to political and economic issues.

The 1969 news article explicitly mentions Western interests in Libya at the time of the revolution.

For example, the news points out that the military junta's first radio statement did not refer to the American base in Libya. The news also ends with a reference to the importance of Libyan oil in Europe's supply.

When we go to the news of 2011, Western interests are barely mentioned:

1. There is a quick reference and quote to President Obama's intervention on the death of Qaddafi;
2. The role of NATO's military forces in the fall of the Qaddafi regime is briefly mentioned.

Another difference between the two articles: the 1969 article speaks of oil several times; the 2011 article only mentions the word when referring to the visit of the Libyan minister of oil and finance to see Qaddafi's corpse.

Guilherme and I speculate that this reduction in the role of oil from one episode to the next may have been caused by very different factors, from the shale gas revolution in the USA - which reduced the importance of external supply - to the decline of the sector's reputation oil as a source of wealth in the context of the rise of environmentalism and American geopolitical disasters in the past 20 years. The 2011 article is littered with vocabulary from the internet age as "viral" or "twittersphere".

In contrast, Cold War terminology is prevalent in the 1969 article: Baathism; Arab nationalism; leftist regimes in opposition to conservative monarchies; among others.

In other words, the 1969 article seems very concerned with defining the ideological position of the actors: some are left-wing nationalists anti-Israel; others are conservative or monarchical.

The 2011 article seems to be limited to dividing the world between the dictators and the pro-democratic masses of the Arab Spring.

Both articles share a strong antagonism to the Qaddafi regime.

The 1969 article openly defends the deposed monarchy and inserts the coup d'état as yet another in the series of coups of left-wing Arab nationalism against the conservative regimes of the time, such as Saudi Arabia or Tunisia.

The 2011 article shares interventions and messages of relief and rejoicing about the fall of Qaddafi.

Another similarity between the two news is related to the fact that Libya never appeared as a protagonist in the events: in 1969, it ended up being carried out in a wave of coups d'état originating in Egypt from Nasser; in 2011, it was another piece in the Arab Spring dominoes of neighboring Tunisia.

To end this part, it should be noted that the 2011 article also mentions, through two testimonies, the disappointment of some actors about the absence of a trial for Qaddafi.

## Part 3: Interesting Nuggets

Finally, we move on to the last section: curiosities.

While the 1969 article covers a coup d'état without bloodshed, the 2011 article describes yet another episode of civil war.

It is still curious that Qaddafi started in such a peaceful way and ended in so much chaos. Some will speak of an attempt to erase their legacy; others will dazzle the harvest of hatred with which it crushed any internal opposition.

Guilherme and I were cruel and left the most interesting observation about the 1969 article to the end: never mention the name of Qaddafi.

Despite historical sources claiming that Qaddafi was the leader of the coup, the article only mentions an unknown Colonel Saaduddin Abu Shwirrib.

Incidentally, the first New York Times article that mentions Qaddafi as the leader of Libya only appears on November 10, 1969, a story that briefly describes a rally where Qaddafi threatens to expel the American Armed Forces from the area's base. Wheelus before the concession treaty expires.

In other words, it is ironic that journalists in 1969 did not identify the real leader of the coup.

## Conclusion

We have reached the end of this episode.

Thank you very much for following him.

Please share your views, suggestions for future episodes and everything else that comes to mind.

We only ask you to do so with politeness and decorum.

Until the next episode!