

Following the Leader Against Democracy? Evidence From the 2022 Brazilian Presidential Election

Fernando Mello ¹  and Ignacio Jurado ² 

¹ Department of Social Sciences, University Carlos III of Madrid, Spain

² Institute of Public Goods and Policies, Spanish National Research Council, Spain

Correspondence: Fernando Mello(fernando.barros@uc3m.es)

Submitted: 16 October 2025 **Accepted:** 4 February 2026 **Published:** 22 April 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Causes and Consequences of Confidence in Democratic Elections” edited by Shaun Bowler (University of California – Riverside) and Todd Donovan (Western Washington University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i478>

Abstract

This article examines the 2022 Brazilian presidential campaign to explore the dynamic relationship between political alignment and electoral trust. We argue that trust in elections is not solely a function of partisanship but is also influenced by exposure to elite narratives and citizens’ expectations about who will win. Using a five-wave panel survey conducted during the 2022 election in Brazil, we analyze both between-individual differences and within-individual changes in vote intention and trust in Brazil’s electronic voting system. Employing within-between models, we separate stable partisan differences from changes associated with individual-level shifts in political alignment. We show that then-President Jair Bolsonaro’s voters consistently expressed lower trust in the electronic voting system compared to other voters. Yet, among Bolsonaro voters, trust in the electronic voting system was significantly higher for those who expected him to win and lower for those who expected him to lose. Critically, exploiting within-person variation, we show that switching vote preference toward Bolsonaro is associated with declines in trust. These findings suggest that elite cues and outcome expectations interact to shape electoral trust.

Keywords

backsliding; Brazil; election; electoral trust; electronic ballot; elite cues; Jair Bolsonaro; Lula da Silva

1. Introduction

Free and fair elections are a defining feature of democracy. Yet public trust in electoral processes has declined over the past decade (Kerr et al., 2024). Political trust is central for societal cooperation (Devine, 2024), but growing skepticism about the integrity of elections raises concerns about democratic legitimacy,

political stability, and public compliance with electoral outcomes (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Norris, 2014). While some degree of dissatisfaction with elections is common, persistent and politically asymmetric distrust—especially when concentrated among supporters of losing candidates—can undermine the acceptance of democratic procedures (Anderson et al., 2005; Przeworski, 1991). When individuals lose trust in elections, they are more likely to believe that the outcome was manipulated or stolen, which can severely erode faith in democratic institutions (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). This perception undermines the legitimacy of elected officials and the broader democratic system, regardless of whether there is any evidence of fraud or irregularities. In short, when democracy is disputed, it may be perceived as not the “only game in town” and this will threaten its consolidation (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Understanding how electoral distrust emerges or can be shaped is therefore central to diagnosing democratic resilience.

In this article, we argue that trust in elections is deeply embedded in the environments shaped by political elites and information flows. While much of the literature emphasizes long-standing factors, such as partisan identity, we argue that short-term dynamics are equally consequential. In particular, voters’ trust in elections is not merely a reflection of stable partisan attachments but is also shaped by the elite narratives that they are exposed to and expectations about political outcomes. Specifically, when populist leaders cast doubt on the integrity of elections, their supporters’ confidence in the electoral process may erode. In short, voters may follow their leaders (Lenz, 2013), but against democracy. Consistent with Zaller’s (1992) receive–accept–sample (RAS) model, repeated elite cues questioning electoral integrity are more likely to be received and accepted by predisposed supporters, thereby shaping their attitudes. In this sense, elite cues provide a powerful heuristic through which voters update their beliefs about democratic institutions.

In addition, this erosion may be contingent on their belief in the leader’s electoral prospects. Citizens who expect their preferred candidate to win are more likely to dismiss fraud allegations as irrelevant, whereas those who anticipate defeat may internalize elite claims of electoral manipulation.

To test this argument, we analyze survey data from the 2022 presidential election in Brazil. We draw on a five-wave panel survey in the months leading up to the election. The longitudinal design allows us to trace the evolution of electoral trust over time, measure individual expectations about electoral outcomes and their change, and assess the conditional association of these expectations on trust in the voting system. The analysis leverages vote intention and (positive and negative) partisan identification to disentangle the associations of elite cues from broader partisan orientations.

Brazil has a longstanding tradition of electronic voting and high institutional capacity for election administration (Kapiszewski et al., 2019), yet recent years have witnessed a sustained campaign by political elites to delegitimize these institutions (Rennó, 2020). Former President Jair Bolsonaro emerged as a key figure in this dynamic, repeatedly questioning the integrity of Brazil’s electronic voting system and claiming, without evidence, that it was vulnerable to fraud. Bolsonaro continuously used populist rhetoric against the “system” (Hunter & Power, 2019; Samuels & Belarmino, 2024; Samuels et al., 2023). These developments provide an ideal setting for assessing how elite rhetoric and electoral expectations jointly shape public trust in elections.

In 2022, Bolsonaro ran his reelection campaign against another former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the main figure of the leftist Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). Our findings reveal a pattern of asymmetric and

conditional electoral distrust. While trust in the electronic voting system was high among supporters of Lula during the whole electoral period, fewer than 20% of Bolsonaro supporters expressed complete trust at any point in the panel. Critically, among Bolsonaro supporters, those who believed he would not be re-elected exhibited 23 percentage points lower trust in the electoral system than those who expected him to win or held no clear expectation. This relationship persists after adjusting for demographics such as religion, age, region, gender, education, and income, besides individual perceptions of the economy.

This article contributes to three central debates in political science. First, it advances research on electoral legitimacy by emphasizing the dynamic ways in which trust in elections is shaped by the interplay between elite cues and citizens' expectations about electoral outcomes. This helps explain why trust in elections can fluctuate within partisan groups in different contexts.

Second, the study contributes to the growing body of research on populism and democratic backsliding by documenting how populist leaders strategically deploy fraud narratives to undermine electoral legitimacy. By situating this dynamic within the case of Brazil, we show how accusations of fraud can be instrumentalized to mobilize supporters, delegitimize opponents, and create conditions conducive to democratic erosion.

Third, this article expands the empirical scope of research on electoral trust, which has been concentrated in advanced democracies. Less attention has been given to how these dynamics unfold in the Global South. By examining Brazil's recent democratic experience, this study helps bridge this gap and demonstrates the importance of studying electoral trust in diverse political settings.

This article proceeds as follows: In the next section, we introduce and motivate the research question against the existing literature. Section 3 presents the 2022 Brazilian election as our case study. Section 4 presents the hypotheses, while Section 5 presents the data and methods used. We introduce supporting results for our hypotheses in Section 6 and discuss them and their implications in Section 7.

2. Follow the Leader Against Democracy?

The study of trust in elections has a long tradition, reflecting the central role that electoral legitimacy plays in sustaining democratic systems. Early research highlighted the importance of citizen confidence in elections as a foundation for regime stability (Easton, 1965; Lipset, 1960). Over subsequent decades, scholars have examined the determinants of electoral trust, ranging from institutional performance and electoral administration (Birch, 2011; Norris, 2014) to broader patterns of democratic satisfaction and legitimacy (Dalton, 2004).

A recent strand of research concerns the polarization of political trust itself. Trust is increasingly less a general orientation rooted in long-term socialization or broad assessments of government performance. Instead, it is strongly conditioned by partisanship (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2017). Partisans place greater weight on the evaluative criteria that favor their preferred political party. This is a dynamic process through which elites and voters mutually reinforce distrust when political power is perceived to be in the "wrong" hands. Zaller (1992) conceptualizes this elite-driven process as a RAS sequence, in which citizens' political attitudes are shaped by the cues they receive from elites and the considerations made salient in their informational environment. Building on this logic, Lenz (2013) argues that citizens frequently "follow" political leaders by updating their

beliefs in line with elite positions, suggesting that elite cues can reshape not only policy preferences but also evaluations of democratic institutions.

Our argument extends these insights to the electoral arena. When leaders condition the legitimacy of elections on partisan or personal victory, trust in electoral institutions becomes polarized in advance of the vote and responsive to expectations about winning or losing. In this sense, declining trust in elections reflects not only partisan conflict but also a broader pattern of polarized political trust in which democratic institutions are evaluated through the lens of elite cues.

As controversies surrounding electoral integrity have become more visible across both established and emerging democracies, understanding how and why citizens distrust elections continues to be a core concern for the study of democratic resilience. When individuals lose trust in elections and governing institutions, the consequences may extend far beyond electoral behavior. Research shows that political distrust undermines economic performance, weakens government accountability, reduces the likelihood of successful collective action, and can fuel extra-legal forms of justice, such as vigilantism or mob rule (Keefer & Scartascini, 2022). Crucially, such environments of mistrust tend to benefit populist and outsider candidates who position themselves as the only authentic representatives of the people against a corrupt system (Masala, 2020).

In studying trust, existing research identifies multiple structural factors that influence it in elections, particularly those tied to economic performance and partisan alignments. Perceptions of worsening economic conditions or rising inequality are closely linked to declining democratic satisfaction, as individuals in such contexts are more likely to lose confidence in governance and become susceptible to anti-system appeals (Brownlee & Miao, 2022; Lee, 2024). Long-term structural factors shape how citizens evaluate the integrity and legitimacy of electoral processes. Sustained economic growth tends to bolster support for institutions, while persistent inequality or regional disparities can undermine perceptions of fairness and fuel distrust in representative processes.

Partisan alignments represent another key dimension. Stable party systems with clear programmatic competition often reinforce trust by providing voters with predictable choices and facilitating accountability. By contrast, contexts marked by party system instability, weak institutionalization, or frequent partisan realignments are more likely to erode trust, as voters perceive elections as less effective channels for representation (Dalton, 2004; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995).

Taken together, these structural and long-term factors set the context within which citizens interpret electoral processes and evaluate whether elections provide a meaningful and legitimate mechanism of democratic governance. Yet, trust in elections is not shaped solely by these structural conditions. It is also contingent on more short-term factors, such as the interaction between political leaders and mass publics, particularly through the transmission of cues and narratives. When elites consistently question the legitimacy of electoral outcomes or undermine confidence in institutions, citizens' long-term trust in elections may be weakened (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Norris, 2014). This may be especially relevant in Latin America, where partisanship may operate in distinctive ways. Party systems in the region are often more fluid, less institutionalized, and marked by higher levels of electoral volatility (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Roberts & Wibbels, 1999). As a result, citizens may rely less on long-standing partisan attachments to guide

their interpretations of electoral integrity and more on short-term elite signals or charismatic leadership. In such contexts, narratives questioning electoral legitimacy can resonate more strongly and spread more rapidly, amplifying citizens' doubts about the fairness and effectiveness of democratic institutions.

However, the elite–citizen nexus has traditionally been overlooked in the literature on democratic attitudes (Clayton et al., 2021). A growing body of research underscores how populist leaders strategically challenge democracies (Galston, 2018), undermining confidence in democratic elections to consolidate political power and shield themselves from unfavorable outcomes. While allegations of fraud or manipulation have long been present in competitive politics, their deployment by incumbents, particularly those with authoritarian or populist leanings, poses unique risks to democratic stability. As Norris and Grömping (2017) emphasize, populism heightens the risk of electoral malpractice through different channels, such as eroding public trust in democracy or weakening international standards of electoral integrity.

Empirical studies provide evidence that such dynamics are not merely theoretical. In the US, for instance, studies document how exposure to unsubstantiated fraud claims significantly reduces public confidence in elections, particularly when these claims originate from political elites aligned with the individual's partisan identity. Experimental evidence shows that false claims of voter fraud, especially when politically congenial, can delegitimize election results and undermine democratic norms (Berlinski et al., 2023). Similarly, survey work shows how Donald Trump's persistent, baseless allegations of electoral fraud during and after the 2020 US presidential election led to a measurable decline in trust in voting by mail and the electoral process among his supporters (Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

These processes are not confined to advanced democracies alone. Populist rhetoric, often amplified through social media, exacerbates risks to electoral integrity worldwide (Tucker et al., 2018). Populist incumbents frequently frame elections as existential battles between the “virtuous people” and a “corrupt elite,” delegitimizing any outcome that does not favor their political project (Mudde, 2017). Through this strategy, elections become not mechanisms for resolving political competition but tools for reinforcing partisan divisions and sowing doubt about the democratic process itself (Bermeo, 2016).

We argue that this elite effect may be *independent of* partisanship. The literature on democratic backsliding highlights the mechanisms through which political leaders undermine trust in elections. Increasingly, the tools of democratic erosion operate through more subtle channels: targeted attacks on electoral management bodies, disinformation campaigns, and sustained efforts to discredit electoral officials and institutions (Bicu, 2024). Importantly, these elite cues do not always operate by appealing to partisan predispositions. Rather, they function by activating more general heuristics about institutional reliability, integrity, and fairness. Citizens often lack direct information about how elections are administered and thus rely heavily on informational shortcuts provided by elites they are close to, regardless of whether those elites are copartisans or not (Graham & Svobik, 2020). Moreover, research on elite–mass linkages shows that repeated negative elite framing of electoral procedures can erode diffuse support for electoral institutions even among individuals who are not strongly attached to parties (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). This suggests that the persuasive effect of elite rhetoric about electoral integrity travels through institutional trust channels rather than being reducible to partisan identity alone. In other words, elite-driven narratives of fraud or mismanagement can diminish confidence in elections more broadly, shaping attitudes toward the democratic process itself. Also, research shows that citizens' evaluations of an electoral process can be

biased by the election outcome itself, depending on whether the result aligns with their own preferences (Anderson et al., 2005). In this regard, losers are more likely to perceive that the election was not completely clean (Cantú & García-Ponce, 2015), and elites may amplify or shape this by questioning the fairness of the process. (Hernández-Huerta & Cantú, 2022). Another factor we explore is the role of expectations. Disinformation campaigns often thrive in polarized informational environments, where citizens' pre-existing political beliefs strongly condition how they interpret new information.

If effects might occur *after* elections, we situate the following argument *in the lead-up to* elections. Some individuals exhibit a strong preference for information that confirms their prior beliefs, even when such information is false (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). This motivated reasoning, coupled with elite-driven fraud narratives, creates a potent mechanism through which trust in elections can be systematically eroded. Once aligned with leaders, voters increasingly rely on their cues to interpret political information, deepening polarization and weakening the informational foundations of democratic accountability. In polarized contexts, corrections and fact-checks often fail to mitigate the effects of disinformation, as individuals simply discount contradictory information or attribute it to partisan manipulation (Batista Pereira et al., 2022).

Thus, expectations about electoral outcomes play a crucial role in shaping citizens' trust in voting mechanisms. Trust is often depicted as an ex-post rationalization of whether the outcome has been favorable to a voter or not. We argue that this rationalization also happens *before* the election. Individuals who anticipate that their preferred candidate or party will win are more likely to express confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, while those who expect to lose are predisposed to question the fairness of elections (Anderson et al., 2007). This asymmetry reflects the psychological dynamics of motivated reasoning, whereby electoral losers become more susceptible to fraud narratives and less willing to accept unfavorable results as legitimate (Norris, 2014; Svobik, 2020). Conversely, electoral winners often interpret the same procedures as fair and reliable, reinforcing trust in voting institutions. Thus, expectations do not simply reflect partisan preferences but also interact with elite cues and political rhetoric, shaping whether citizens evaluate elections as trustworthy (Clayton et al., 2021). In this sense, trust in voting mechanisms is not fixed but contingent upon both anticipated outcomes and the broader informational environment in which elections take place.

In this context, fraud allegations serve both as a political weapon and a mechanism for shaping public perceptions of electoral legitimacy. Leaders who suggest that only their victory is legitimate effectively condition trust in elections on partisan expectations about the outcome. When supporters believe their candidate will win, they are more likely to view the electoral process as legitimate; conversely, when they anticipate defeat, trust collapses. This dynamic is particularly pronounced when populist leaders prime their supporters to believe that any unfavorable result is the product of manipulation.

This dynamic suggests that elite rhetoric operates not only as a direct cue but as a conditional mechanism that interacts with voters' expectations, amplifying distrust among pessimistic supporters. This conditionality of trust has important implications for democratic resilience. If public confidence in elections depends not on institutional performance or independent assessments of integrity, but rather on partisan cues and perceived outcomes, democratic legitimacy becomes increasingly fragile. In sum, existing research demonstrates that populist leaders strategically deploy fraud allegations to undermine trust in elections, that these narratives interact with partisan identities and cognitive biases to shape public perceptions of electoral integrity, and that the resulting decline in trust carries profound consequences for democratic stability.

3. The Brazilian Case: Bolsonaro and Electoral Trust

Brazil's *urna eletrônica* (electronic ballot) system combines a controlled “chain of custody” with layered technical safeguards that make large-scale manipulation difficult and detectable (Agência Brasil, 2022). The voting machines are prepared through a formal sealing process, and they run only election software that is cryptographically authenticated. The election authority (the Superior Electoral Court; TSE) runs public security challenges and allows extensive inspection procedures. Importantly, independent forensic analyses of electoral results’ data find no statistical evidence consistent with vote-count manipulation. Figueiredo Filho et al. (2022) apply five widely used fraud-detection diagnostics and conclude that the joint evidence “rules out” fraud with high confidence.

Still, Jair Bolsonaro, who served as president from 2019 to 2022, persistently attacked the legitimacy of Brazil’s electronic voting system (Bastos & Recuero, 2023), before and after the election. Researchers argue that Bolsonaro and his allies were among the most prolific disseminators of electoral falsehoods (Alves et al., 2023). Table 1 lists a selection of Bolsonaro’s public statements casting doubt on Brazil’s electronic voting system and the integrity of its elections.

Table 1. Bolsonaro’s statements questioning Brazil’s ballots and elections.

Statements	Outlets
Here in Brazil, if we have electronic voting in 2022, it will be the same thing. Fraud exists.	Jornal Nacional, G1, 01/07/2021
If we don’t have printed voting in 2022, a way to audit the vote, we’re going to have a problem worse than the United States.	Jornal Nacional, G1, 01/07/2021
It’s impossible to audit elections here in Brazil.	Gazeta do Povo, 07/18/2022
I’ll hand over the presidential sash to anyone who beats me cleanly at the ballot box. Not by fraud. Let’s go for an auditable vote. Not this ‘fake’ vote. It won’t work. We’re going to have an upheaval in Brazil.	Veja, 07/01/2021
If we don’t have a printed ballot, we won’t have an election.	CNN Brasil, 05/06/2021
I also recall that in 2014, when Aécio Neves lost to Mrs. Dilma Rousseff, the PSDB hired an external audit, and the conclusion of that external audit was that the electronic voting machines are unauditabile.	UOL, 10/06/2025
A hacker said that there had been fraud during the elections, that he had hacked into the TSE. It is the TSE itself that is undermining the elections and democracy by trying to hide the investigation.	Poder 360, 07/18/2022
My election was rigged, I have evidence of fraud in my election. I should have won in the first round.	Poder 360, 01/06/2021
We’re going to invite the press, we’re still going to decide on the time, to demonstrate what happened in the second round of 2014, and also part of what happened in 2018. That gives you more than the feeling, the conviction that there was, yes, interference in 2014, and there was, yes, interference in 2018.	Congresso em Foco, 07/29/2021
With the printed ballot, there will be no doubt in the minds of any Brazilian citizen whether the process was conducted fairly or not.	Poder 360, 05/12/2021

Judicial investigations point to strategic objectives behind the narrative. According to testimonies, the former president hoped to use alleged fraud to persuade the Armed Forces' top commanders to back an attempt to reverse the election outcome (Maia, 2025; Richter, 2025). Additional evidence cited by the Prosecutor General's Office highlights the coordinated nature of the effort. The prosecutor referenced multiple times a ministerial meeting held at the Presidential Palace less than three months before the election, where ministers allegedly sought to mobilize other cabinet members in support of the false narratives of electoral fraud. The prosecutor argued that Bolsonaro "systematically mobilized state agents, resources and competencies to propagate false narratives" (Prosecutor General of the Republic, 2025, p. 66) and that "incisive attacks on the electronic voting system and democratic institutions...have intensified with the approach of the electoral period" (Prosecutor General of the Republic, 2025, p. 88).

While establishing a direct causal chain is difficult, it has been suggested that narratives about fraud helped incite the January 8, 2023, attacks on Brazil's democratic institutions, when thousands of Bolsonaro supporters stormed the headquarters of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidential Palace (Fuks & Casalecchi, 2025). The extent to which Brazilian democracy was at risk remains debated. Some argue that, despite the severity of his rhetoric, Bolsonaro was "ultimately unable to mount an antisystem challenge," even if he "tested the fabric of Brazilian democracy" (Hunter & Power, 2023), while others see the answer to his actions as evidence of the institutional strain of the country (Melo & Pereira, 2024). Brazilian authorities have investigated and prosecuted Bolsonaro and allies for alleged coup-plotting. Regardless of whether democracy itself was fully imperiled, the question of how Bolsonaro's narrative influenced a share of the electorate is empirical.

In contrast to Bolsonaro, Lula's 2022 campaign explicitly positioned itself as a defense of Brazilian democracy and adherence to democratic principles became, for the first time, a significant predictor of voting behavior (Fuks & Casalecchi, 2025). Throughout the campaign, Lula expressed confidence in the electoral system and praised the role of the TSE in ensuring clean elections. His decision to form a unity ticket with former rival Geraldo Alckmin underscored this message. As Alckmin put it: "Today, we find ourselves in the exceptional position of fighting for democracy" (Porcella & Rosa, 2022).

4. Hypotheses

4.1. General Effects

We derive a set of hypotheses that specify how trust in elections varies within the Brazilian electorate. Our main expectation is that trust in elections is not simply a reflection of broader political orientations but is actively shaped by elite rhetoric and, crucially, by supporters' expectations about the electoral result. Classic theories of public opinion formation emphasize that citizens' attitudes toward political institutions depend heavily on the signals they receive from political elites, particularly when those elites are perceived as credible partisan leaders (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2017; Lenz, 2013; Zaller, 1992).

In the Brazilian case, Bolsonaro's sustained attacks on the electronic voting system provide an ideal setting to evaluate this argument. Bolsonaro has been labeled the "primary purveyor of electoral disinformation" in the country (Rossini et al., 2023). If elite cues shape institutional trust, and given the campaign characteristics described in Section 3, we should observe systematic differences in trust across political camps, which raises the first hypothesis:

H1: Bolsonaro voters are less trusting of the electronic voting system compared to supporters of all other candidates.

4.2. Temporal Effects

Understanding temporal dynamics is critical for assessing whether changes in political alignment are associated with changes in trust in elections. The panel structure of the data allows us to observe respondents' vote intentions and trust repeatedly over the campaign period, making it possible to examine within-individual change rather than relying solely on cross-sectional comparisons. If elite cues actively shape trust, changes in vote intention should be accompanied by corresponding changes in trust within individuals. Specifically, adopting support for Bolsonaro should be associated with declining trust, hence:

H2: Individuals who switch their support to Bolsonaro between survey waves exhibit a decrease in trust in the electronic voting system.

4.3. Conditional Effects of Expectations

We also expect that the relationship between elite rhetoric and trust in elections is not static. Supporters' beliefs about the outcome of an election condition how strongly they internalize elite narratives of fraud. When individuals believe their preferred candidate will win, the perceived threat to democracy diminishes. By contrast, when defeat seems imminent, elite claims about electoral manipulation become more psychologically appealing, helping supporters reconcile unfavorable expectations with partisan loyalty. We therefore expect heterogeneity within Bolsonaro's electorate:

H3: Bolsonaro voters who believe he will win the election exhibit higher trust in the electronic voting system than Bolsonaro voters who believe he will lose.

To isolate the influence of Bolsonaro's elite cues from more stable partisan predispositions, we leverage measures of partisan identity that distinguish between positive and negative identification with the PT. The divide between *petistas* and *antipetistas* (supporters and opponents of the PT) is the single most important cleavage structuring political attitudes and behavior in Brazil (Samuels et al., 2023; Samuels & Zucco, 2018). Most Brazilian voters do not simply respond to short-term performance evaluations by rewarding incumbents or punishing challengers (cf. Amaral, 2020; Peixoto & Rennó, 2011; Rennó, 2020). Instead, perceptions of performance, public policy, and candidate favorability are deeply shaped by pro- and anti-PT partisan identities.

The negative PT identity is stronger than any other positive attachment to a right-wing party. Our survey data echoes this broader literature and recent national surveys. Approximately 20% of respondents are classified as *petistas*, 32% as *antipetistas*, and the remaining 48% as non-partisans. Importantly, only a small number of voters identify positively with Bolsonaro's own party (less than 5%), the vast majority of them being also *antipetistas*. This distinction allows us to test whether conditional declines in trust reflect Bolsonaro's candidate-specific rhetoric or a more generalized anti-PT orientation.

If trust in elections were driven purely by partisan hostility toward the PT, we would expect similar expectation-based patterns among *antipetistas* and Bolsonaro voters. If, instead, Bolsonaro's elite cues play a distinct role, the association should be weaker among *antipetistas* who do not support him. Therefore:

H4: Expectation associations are weaker among *antipetistas* than among Bolsonaro voters.

5. Data and Methods

We use data from a five-wave panel survey conducted by the Instituto Brasileiro de Pesquisa e Análise de Dados (IBPAD) between May and September 2022, covering the months leading up to Brazil's presidential election. The survey is designed to be representative of the Brazilian electorate. In addition, the attrition rate is not correlated with the key explanatory variables. The panel retention declined from 3,383 respondents in Round 1 to 2,426 in Round 5. To assess whether attrition is systematically related to key political variables, we estimate a linear probability model predicting whether a respondent dropped out before the final wave as a function of baseline trust in electronic voting, vote intention, partisan identity (PT and anti-PT), and demographics measured in Round 1. Attrition is not significantly associated with baseline trust, vote choice, or partisan identification. While older and more educated respondents are modestly more likely to remain in the panel—a common pattern in longitudinal surveys—these characteristics are time-invariant and are controlled for in all analyses (see the Supplementary File for complete information).

The panel structure enables us to track whether distrust in elections reflects selection into political camps or changes associated with elite discourse during the campaign. Our main outcome is a binary indicator of high trust in Brazil's electronic voting system. This measure captures confidence in the institution at the center of Bolsonaro's public attacks on electoral integrity and is therefore a substantively relevant indicator of democratic trust during the campaign.

Our key independent variable is the declared intention to vote for Bolsonaro, Lula da Silva, or another candidate in each survey wave. Outcome expectations are measured by respondents' beliefs about which candidate will win the presidential election. To capture partisan identities, we also classify respondents using positive and negative partisan identification items following Samuels and Zucco (2018). Respondents who name the PT as their preferred party are coded as *petistas*, those who name PT as the party they most reject are coded as *antipetistas*, and the remaining respondents are coded as non-partisans.

Our primary empirical strategy is a random effect within-between model, as outlined by Bell et al. (2019). The motivation for this approach is that our hypotheses involve both between-person differences (e.g., whether Bolsonaro supporters exhibit lower trust in elections than other voters) and within-person change over time (e.g., whether trust changes as individuals' vote intentions shift during the campaign). Estimating these dimensions separately risks conflating selection effects (where individuals with systematically lower trust sort into particular political camps) with within-person change consistent with persuasion or alignment with elite cues. The hybrid model allows both processes to be estimated and compared within a single specification.

The dependent variable, Trust_{it} , is a binary indicator equal to one if respondent i reports high trust in Brazil's electronic voting system in wave t , and zero otherwise. The model is estimated using a logistic link function

with survey weights. For each time-varying political alignment variable X_{it} (e.g., vote intention), we decompose it as:

$$X_{it} = \bar{X}_i + (X_{it} - \bar{X}_i),$$

\bar{X}_i is the individual-specific mean across waves (the *between-person component*) and $X_{it} - \bar{X}_i$ is the deviation from that mean (the *within-person component*). The between-person component captures stable differences across individuals, while the within-person component isolates changes over time within the same individual.

Combining this decomposition with a random-effects logistic framework, the estimating equation is:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Pr}(\text{Trust}_{it}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_B^W \text{VoteBolsonaro}_{it}^W + \beta_L^W \text{VoteLula}_{it}^W \\ & + \beta_B^B \text{VoteBolsonaro}_i^B + \beta_L^B \text{VoteLula}_i^B \\ & + \boldsymbol{\gamma}^T \mathbf{C}_{it} + \beta_t \text{Time}_t + u_{0i} + u_{1i} \text{Time}_t, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Where $\text{VoteBolsonaro}_{it}^W$ and VoteLula_{it}^W denote the within-person components of vote intention, and VoteBolsonaro_i^B and VoteLula_i^B denote the corresponding between-person components. The vector \mathbf{C}_{it} includes indicators for partisan identity (anti-PT and PT identification), a standard set of demographic controls (sex, age group, social class, religion, and education), and time-varying perceptions of household economic conditions. We model time using a linear trend common to all respondents, while allowing individual-level random intercepts (u_{0i}) and random slopes for time (u_{1i}). The individual-level random effects are assumed to follow a joint normal distribution (Bell et al., 2019).

The decomposition between within-person and between-person coefficients is theoretically informative. A substantially larger between-person effect is consistent with selection, whereby individuals with lower trust disproportionately support Bolsonaro (even though the change could have happened before the survey started, because of the years of messaging). In contrast, a sizable within-person effect indicates that trust changes meaningfully as individuals' political alignment shifts during the campaign, consistent with dynamic elite cueing effects.

The between-person difference in trust across vote-intention groups functions as the covariate-adjusted regression test of whether typical Bolsonaro supporters exhibit lower trust than other voters, net of demographics, economic perceptions, and waves (H1). For the within-person change (H2), the coefficients on deviations from individual means, $(X_{it} - \bar{X}_i)$ and $(Z_{it} - \bar{Z}_i)$, capture whether trust changes as the same individual's alignment and expectations change across waves.

To assess whether expectations and information environments condition how political alignment relates to trust in the electoral system, we estimate interaction models that combine within-person and between-person effects. We interact the within-person component with both vote choice and reliance on social and message apps. The same controls are used for consistency. Substantively, the interaction term captures whether the same individual becomes more or less trusting of the electronic voting system as their expectations about the election outcome change.

Extending this logic, we use questions about media consumption and interest in politics to create variables about people who consume political information, legacy media, and use social media. Both variables were measured only in the first round of the panel. The interaction between within-person vote switching and

social media exposure tests whether changes in trust associated with political realignment are amplified in information environments where elite claims are more likely to circulate unchecked. The same is true for interest in politics.

6. Results

We begin by examining baseline differences in trust by vote intention (H1; Figure 1). We then test within-individual “switching” effects using the hybrid model (H2; Figures 1 and 2). Next, we document the overlap between vote choice and PT-based identities (Figure 3) and assess whether electoral expectations moderate the relationship between political alignment and trust in elections (H3; Figure 4). We further examine whether these expectation-based effects extend beyond Bolsonaro voters to the broader antipetista category (H4; Figure 4). Finally, we evaluate whether these within-person effects are amplified among individuals who consume political information on social media (H5; Figure 5). Throughout the presentation of the results, we report point estimates with 95% confidence intervals and clustered standard errors at the individual level.

Figure 1 shows the estimates from a mixed model that decomposes the relationship between vote intention and trust into (a) between-person differences (baseline differences across individuals) and (b) within-person changes (how the same individual’s trust changes when their vote intention changes). Consistent with H1, the between-person component of the hybrid model reveals significant differences in trust in electronic voting across vote groups. Respondents who are Bolsonaro voters, consistently across waves, exhibit substantially lower baseline trust in the electronic voting system (point estimate = -0.22 , $p < 0.01$), whereas respondents who are, on average, Lula voters display markedly higher trust ($+0.46$, $p < 0.01$). These differences indicate strong sorting in attitudes toward electoral institutions. Individuals who support Lula tend to trust the voting

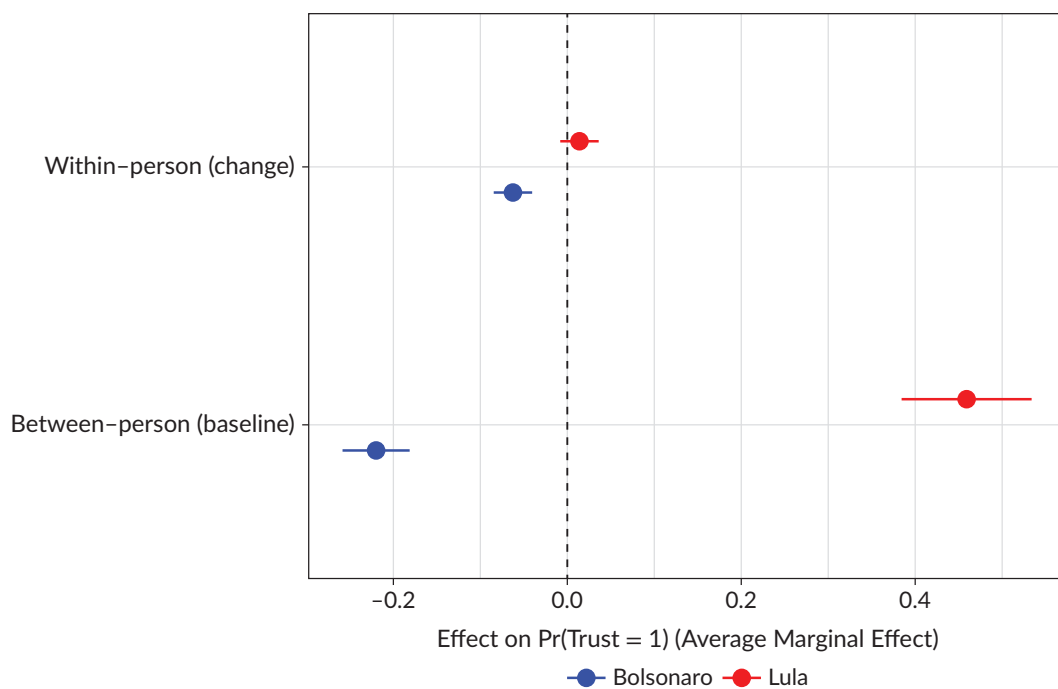


Figure 1. Within-between estimates of trust in electronic voting.

system even prior to any changes in vote choice, while Bolsonaro supporters are disproportionately drawn from a pool of citizens who are already skeptical of the system.

However, the results are not driven only by between-group differences, indicating that there is more than an effect based only on selection. We also see that there is an effect of persuasion by elite cues. In the case of Bolsonaro, the within-person change offers evidence for the follow-the-leader hypothesis. Figure 1 also plots the within-person coefficients from the hybrid model, which provide the main evidence for H2. Switching into Bolsonaro support is associated with a sizable and statistically significant decline in trust in electronic voting (within-person effect = -0.07 , $p < 0.01$). In contrast, switching into Lula support is not associated with a change in trust (within-person effect = $+0.01$, $p = 0.21$). The evidence is consistent with the idea that, among Lula’s supporters, trust in the electoral system is already high, leaving little room for further updating. By contrast, the negative within-person shift among Bolsonaro voters provides clear evidence of a “following the leader” dynamic: as individuals move into Bolsonaro’s camp, their confidence in the electoral system declines in tandem with the candidate’s rhetoric.

Next, we examine whether electoral expectations condition trust among Bolsonaro switchers. Figure 2 presents within-person interaction estimates from the hybrid model, focusing on how expectations are associated with changes in trust. Consistent with H3, when Bolsonaro voters expect a Bolsonaro victory, their trust in the electronic voting system increases (within-person estimate = $+0.15$, $p = 0.044$). In contrast, when Bolsonaro voters expect a Lula victory, their trust declines sharply (within-person estimate = -0.26 , $p = 0.002$). Anticipated defeat is associated with a reduction in confidence in the voting system, consistent with the argument that elite cues can shape institutional trust.

Importantly, these patterns indicate that expectations moderate the effect of Bolsonaro’s cue. While the cue questioning the integrity of the electoral system is constant, its impact on individual trust varies depending on whether voters foresee electoral victory or defeat. When victory is expected, voters appear more willing to discount or reinterpret the elite’s negative rhetoric. By contrast, when defeat is anticipated, the same elite

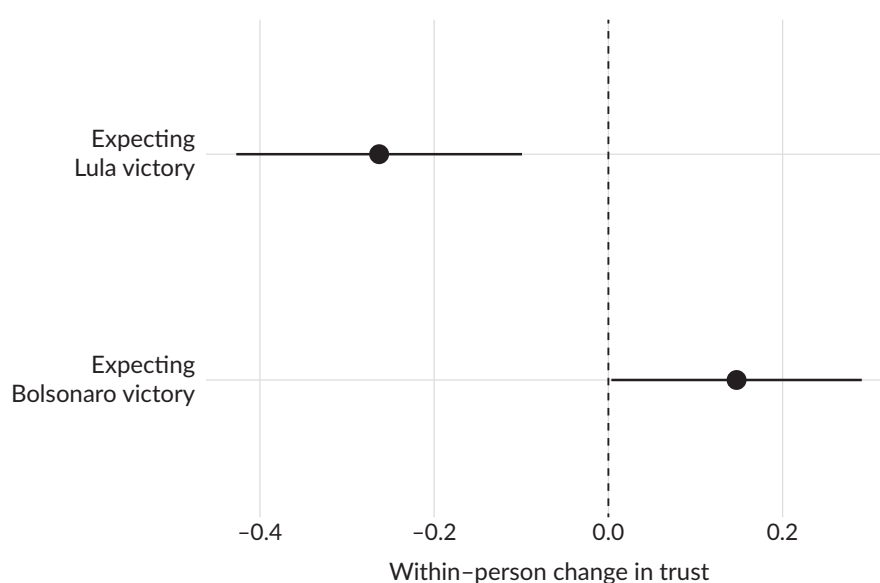


Figure 2. Within estimates of trust in electronic voting, moderated by expectations.

cue becomes more persuasive, amplifying distrust and leading to sharper declines in institutional confidence. This suggests that expectations function as a psychological filter through which elite messages are processed, intensifying their effects under conditions of anticipated loss. These results show that electoral expectations condition the extent to which elite cues undermine confidence in democratic institutions.

Once we have shown the importance of elite cues and expectations, we move on to the test of H4. As this requires distinguishing between *anti-petism* and voting for Bolsonaro, we first examine descriptively how vote intention maps onto PT-based partisan identities. Figure 3 presents cross-tabulations of vote choice by mutually exclusive identity categories (*petistas*, *antipetistas*, and neither). The results show substantial but incomplete alignment. Bolsonaro voters are predominantly *antipetistas*, but roughly one-fifth lack an explicit partisan identity, while virtually none identify as *petistas*. Lula voters, by contrast, are far less tightly anchored in positive partisanship: fewer than half identify as *petistas*, with a majority falling into the nonpartisan category. This distinction is central for interpretation. If distrust in elections were driven primarily by negative partisanship toward the PT, expectation effects should appear broadly among *antipetistas* regardless of vote choice. If, instead, distrust reflects elite cueing by Bolsonaro, expectation-based responses should be concentrated among those who not only oppose the PT but also align electorally with Bolsonaro.

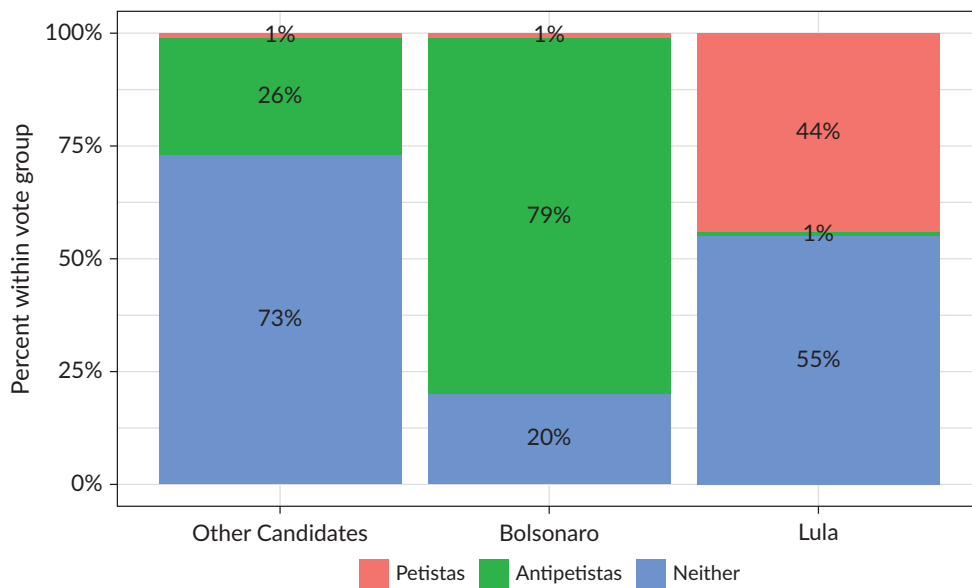


Figure 3. Composition of vote groups by PT-based identity (*petistas*, *antipetistas*, neither).

This incomplete alignment between vote choice and partisanship motivates the key comparison in the next step of the analysis. Figure 4 estimates models interacting antipetista identity with expectations about the winner. In line with H4, expectation interactions among antipetistas are small and statistically indistinguishable from zero. This stands in sharp contrast to the large expectation effects among Bolsonaro voters in Figure 2. Substantively, these results indicate that expectation-driven distrust is not simply a feature of anti-PT sentiment; rather, it is concentrated among voters who align electorally with Bolsonaro and who are responsive to his cues, consistently with the RAS model. All in all, *antipetismo* may predispose citizens toward political opposition, but the switching results provide evidence that trust tracks Bolsonaro’s alignment within individuals, consistent with the central “following the leader” mechanism.

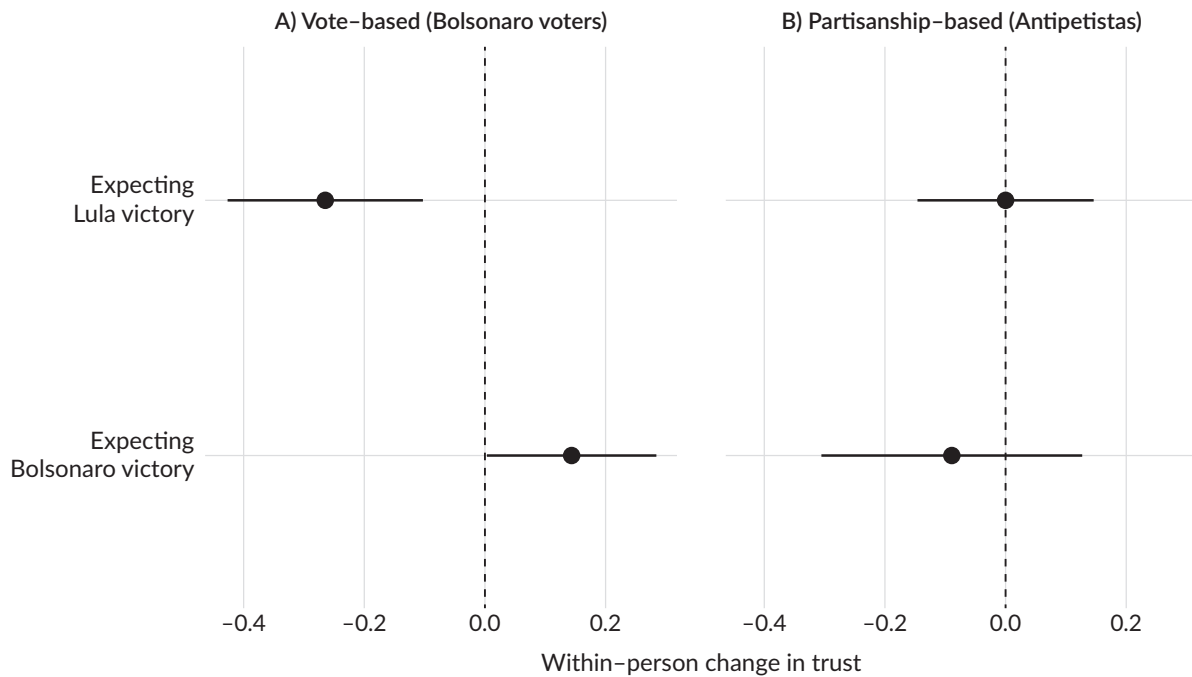


Figure 4. Expectation moderation on trust among *antipetistas* and Bolsonaro voters.

In the Supplementary File, we explore the mechanisms that may explain the results. We find two things. First, political messaging depends critically on individuals’ information environments, particularly the media through which political claims are encountered and reinforced. In Brazil, social media platforms and message apps (e.g., WhatsApp and Telegram) play a central role in disseminating claims about electoral fraud (Fernández-Caba et al., 2025). As a result, the association between switching into Bolsonaro support and declining trust in the electronic voting system is strongly conditioned by information environments. Individuals who rely more heavily on social media and messaging apps experience substantially larger within-person declines in trust when they shift toward Bolsonaro, whereas reliance on legacy media is associated with higher baseline trust and does not amplify the effects of vote switching (see Figure 1 in the Supplementary File). This pattern suggests that social media–centric environments play a key role in translating elite rhetoric into institutional distrust. Second, political interest further moderates this relationship: the negative within-person association between switching into Bolsonaro support and trust is significantly stronger among individuals with higher levels of political interest (see Figure 2 in the Supplementary File). As Bolsonaro supporters tend to be more politically engaged, these politically interested voters account for a disproportionate share of the observed decline in trust, helping to explain the overall results.

7. Discussion

Using panel data from Brazil’s 2022 presidential election, this article demonstrates that distrust in the electronic voting system is not only unevenly distributed across political camps but also changes within individuals as their political alignment shifts. The hybrid within-between models reveal strong baseline differences consistent with partisan sorting. At the same time, the within-person evidence points to a distinct “following the leader” dynamic among Bolsonaro voters. When individuals move into Bolsonaro’s electoral camp, their confidence in the voting system declines, net of controls and time trends.

Crucially, among Bolsonaro supporters, anticipated defeat is associated with sharp within-person declines in trust, while anticipated victory is associated with increased confidence in the system. This pattern does not generalize to *antipetistas*. This contrast allows us to rule out a purely partisan-hostility account and strengthens the interpretation that Bolsonaro's candidate-specific rhetoric is the primary driver of distrust. Our evidence that social media consumption amplifies within-person declines in trust among Bolsonaro switchers highlights how elite rhetoric can be magnified through communication channels.

These findings have important implications for democratic resilience. When trust in elections becomes contingent on whether one's preferred leader is expected to win, democratic legitimacy shifts from being procedural to being conditional. In such contexts, distrust becomes a mobilized political stance tied to leader loyalty and reinforced through permissive information environments. More broadly, the results contribute to scholarship on electoral legitimacy, populism, and democratic backsliding by showing that confidence in democratic procedures can erode endogenously during campaigns, when elites strategically question the rules of the game. In polarized contexts, this dynamic poses a serious challenge to democratic stability.

Acknowledgments

We thank IBPAD and JOTA for providing the anonymized microdata for this project, particularly Max Stabile and Leticia Medeiros. We are also grateful to Wendy Hunter and Lluís Orriols for comments on previous versions of this article.

Funding

This research has received support from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 101170551).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

LLMs were used only to check and proofread specific phrases. No other uses were made.

Data Availability

Replication files and data can be found at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/09BA7A>

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

References

- Agência Brasil. (2022, July 15). *Court of auditors concludes that electronic voting machines are safe and that there are no risks for the October elections*. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/politica/noticia/2022-07/court-auditors-concludes-electronic-voting-machines-are-safe>
- Alves, M., Grohmann, R., Recuero, R., & Tavares, C. (2023). *Disinformation and 2022 elections in Brazil: Lessons learned from a South-to-South context*. INCT em Disputas e Soberanias Informacionais. <https://inctdsi.uff.br/2023/11/15/disinformation-and-2022-elections-in-brazil-lessons-learned-from-a-south-to-south-context>

- Amaral, O. (2020). The victory of Jair Bolsonaro according to the Brazilian Electoral Study of 2018. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 14(1), 1–13.
- Anderson, C. J., Blais, A., Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Listhaug, O. (2005). Political legitimacy and the winner-loser gap. In *Losers' consent. Elections and democracy legitimacy* (pp. 17–32). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199276382.003.0002>
- Bastos, M., & Recuero, R. (2023). The insurrectionist playbook: Jair Bolsonaro and the National Congress of Brazil. *Social Media + Society*, 9(4), 1–12.
- Batista Pereira, F., Bueno, N. S., Nunes, F., & Pavão, N. (2022). Fake news, fact checking, and partisanship: The resilience of rumors in the 2018 Brazilian elections. *The Journal of Politics*, 84(4), 2188–2201.
- Bell, A., Fairbrother, M., & Jones, K. (2019). Fixed and random effects models: Making an informed choice. *Qualitative & Quantitative*, 53(2), 1051–1074.
- Berlinski, N., Doyle, M., Guess, A. M., Levy, G., Lyons, B., Montgomery, J. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2023). The effects of unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud on confidence in elections. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 10(1), 34–49.
- Bermeo, N. (2016). On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.
- Bicu, I. (2024). *Challenges for electoral officials in the information environment around elections*. IDEA. <https://www.idea.int/theme/information-communication-and-technology-electoral-processes/election-officials-challenges-information-environment-around-elections>
- Birch, S. (2011). *Electoral malpractice*. Oxford University Press.
- Brownlee, J., & Miao, K. (2022). Why democracies survive. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), 133–149.
- Cantú, F., & García-Ponce, O. (2015). Partisan losers' effects: Perceptions of electoral integrity in Mexico. *Electoral Studies*, 39, 1–14. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261379415000499>
- Clayton, K., Davis, N. T., Nyhan, B., Porter, E., Ryan, T. J., & Wood, T. J. (2021). Elite rhetoric can undermine democratic norms. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(23), Article e2024125118.
- Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford University Press.
- Devine, D. (2024). Does political trust matter? A meta-analysis on the consequences of trust. *Political Behavior*, 46(4), 2241–2262.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life*. Wiley.
- Fernández-Caba, R., Chauchard, S., & Mello, F. (2025). Does the style of misinformation condition its effects? An experiment in Brazil. *The Journal of Politics*. Advance online publication. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/739778>
- Figueiredo Filho, D., Silva, L., & Carvalho, E. (2022). The forensics of fraud: Evidence from the 2018 Brazilian presidential election. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 5, Article 100286.
- Fuks, M., & Casalecchi, G. A. (2025). When democracy divides the electorate: Voting in the 2022 Brazilian presidential election. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 19, Article e0003.
- Galston, W. A. (2018). The populist challenge to liberal democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2), 5–19.
- Graham, M. H., & Svobik, M. W. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 392–409.
- Hernández-Huerta, V., & Cantú, F. (2022). Public distrust in disputed elections: Evidence from Latin America. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 1923–1930. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-political-science/article/abs/public-distrust-in-disputed-elections-evidence-from-latin-america/D4066C5C2AB200C3214A96537A060BB1>

- Hetherington, M. J., & Rudolph, T. J. (2017). Political trust and polarization. In E. M. Uslaner (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust* (pp. 579–597). Oxford University Press.
- Hunter, W., & Power, T. J. (2019). Bolsonaro and Brazil's illiberal backlash. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 68–82.
- Hunter, W., & Power, T. J. (2023). Lula's second act. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(1), 126–140.
- Kapiszewski, D., Alexander, J. S., & Nyenhuis, R. (2019). Judging elections: Electoral courts and democracy in Latin America's federal systems. In D. Kapiszewski & M. C. Ingram (Eds.), *Beyond high courts* (pp. 143–182). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Keefer, P., & Scartascini, C. (2022). *Trust: The key to social cohesion and growth in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Inter-American Development Bank.
- Kerr, N., King, B. A., & Wahman, M. (2024). The global crisis of trust in elections. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 88(SI), 451–471.
- Lee, S. K. (2024). Inequality and the eroding base of liberal democracy. *Social Science Research*, 124, Article 103087.
- Lenz, G. S. (2013). *Follow the leader? How voters respond to politicians' policies and performance*. University of Chicago Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die*. Crown Publishing.
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). Misinformation and its correction: Continued influence and successful debiasing. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13(3), 106–131.
- Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. C. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lipset, S. M. (1960). *Political man: The social bases of politics*. Doubleday.
- Lührmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). A third wave of autocratization is here: What is new about it? *Democratization*, 26(7), 1095–1113.
- Maia, F. (2025, July 15). Valdemar afirma ao STF que foi pressionado a divulgar relatório sobre fraude nas urnas. JOTA. <https://www.jota.info/stf/do-supremo/valdemar-afirma-ao-stf-que-foi-pressionado-a-divulgar-relatorio-sobre-fraude-nas-urnas>
- Mainwaring, S., & Scully, T. R. (Eds.). (1995). *Building democratic institutions: Party systems in Latin America*. Stanford University Press.
- Masala, A. (2020). Populism as the crisis of political trust. In A. Fabris (Ed.), *Trust* (pp. 187–197). Springer.
- Melo, M. A., & Pereira, C. (2024). *Por que a democracia brasileira não morreu?* Companhia das Letras.
- Mudde, C. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. (2014). *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P., & Grömping, M. (2017). *Populist threats to electoral integrity: The year in elections 2016–2017* (Working paper series RWP17-018). Harvard University.
- Peixoto, V., & Rennó, L. (2011). Mobilidade social ascendente e voto: As eleições presidenciais de 2010 no Brasil. *Opinião Pública*, 17(2), 304–332.
- Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2021). Research note: Examining false beliefs about voter fraud in the wake of the 2020 Presidential Election. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-51>
- Porcella, I., & Rosa, I. (2022, March 23). Alckmin usa defesa de democracia para justificar aliança com Lula. *Estadão*. <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/eleicoes/alckmin-assina-filiacao-ao-psb-e-abre-caminho-para-ser-vice-na-chapa-de-lula/?srsltid=AfmBOopbV1ZW7VAp32YqeSbOzk5XknC5pncp7bKBVj0sMU-5qli3EUFg>

- Prosecutor General of the Republic. (2025). *Alegações finais*. [https://static.congressoemfoco.com.br/attachment/2025/07/15/56f380_AP-AF-REVISADO2\(2\)\(1\).pdf?_gl=1*j8trl8*_ga*MTk2ODI4MjQyLjE3NzU2NDQ4NDI.*_ga_V46CYWTD2Z*czE3NzU2NDQ4NDEkbzEkZzAkDE3NzU2NDQ4NDEkajYwJGwwJGgw](https://static.congressoemfoco.com.br/attachment/2025/07/15/56f380_AP-AF-REVISADO2(2)(1).pdf?_gl=1*j8trl8*_ga*MTk2ODI4MjQyLjE3NzU2NDQ4NDI.*_ga_V46CYWTD2Z*czE3NzU2NDQ4NDEkbzEkZzAkDE3NzU2NDQ4NDEkajYwJGwwJGgw)
- Przeworski, A. (1991). *Democracy and the market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rennó, L. R. (2020). The Bolsonaro voter: Issue positions and vote choice in the 2018 Brazilian Presidential Elections. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 62(4), 1–23.
- Richter, A. (2025, June 9). Cid: Bolsonaro buscava fraude nas urnas para justificar intervenção. *Agência Brasil*. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/justica/noticia/2025-06/cid-bolsonaro-buscava-fraude-na-urna-para-justificar-intervencao>
- Roberts, K. M., & Wibbels, E. (1999). Party systems and electoral volatility in Latin America: A test of economic, institutional, and structural explanations. *American Political Science Review*, 93(3), 575–590.
- Rossini, P., Mont’Alverne, C., & Kalogeropoulos, A. (2023). Explaining beliefs in electoral misinformation in the 2022 Brazilian election: The role of ideology, political trust, social media, and messaging apps. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-115>
- Samuels, D., Mello, F., & Zucco, C. (2023). Partisan stereotyping and polarization in Brazil. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 66(2), 47–71.
- Samuels, D., & Zucco, C. (2018). *Partisans, antipartisans, and nonpartisans: Voting behavior in Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.
- Samuels, D. J., & Belarmino, K. (2024). Partisan dehumanization in Brazil’s asymmetrically polarized party system. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 17(1), 53–79.
- Svolik, M. W. (2020). When polarization trumps civic virtue: Partisan conflict and the subversion of democracy by incumbents. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 15(1), 3–31.
- Tucker, J. A., Guess, A., Barbera, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). *Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature*. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3144139>
- Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

About the Authors



Fernando Mello is a post-doctoral research associate in the POLARCHATS project, at the University Carlos III of Madrid and Instituto Juan Linz. His work addresses key challenges of the digital democracy era, focusing on polarization, the spread of misinformation in the Global South, and the influence of social media and messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp) on the behavior of both politicians and citizens.



Ignacio Jurado is a distinguished research fellow at the Institute for Public Goods and Policies of the Spanish National Research Council, where he leads CONSENT, a research project funded by an ERC Consolidator Grant on the breakdown of the losers’ consent. His research focuses on democratic attitudes, democratic backsliding, and the politics of immigration.