

# The Impact of Campaign Messages in New Democracies: Results From An Experiment in Brazil

Scott Desposato  
University of California, San Diego\*  
swd@ucsd.edu

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## **Abstract**

Is negative campaigning detrimental for new democracies? Politicians and citizens appear to think so, as increasingly aggressive attack advertising in countries as diverse as Mexico, Brazil, Taiwan, and India have prompted calls for regulation or even bans of attack ads. Scholarship is divided as to the impact of campaign tone, but previous research is mostly limited to the developed world. In this paper, I test the impact of campaign tone on turnout, cynicism, vote choice, and learning, using an experiment conducted in Brazil. I find significant effects on voter persuasion, participation, and cynicism. The magnitude of these treatment effects varies from as much as 60% for less sophisticated voters to 10% for more sophisticated participants.

## Introduction

Are attack advertisements bad for democracy? Voters, pundits, and candidates almost universally express disgust with aggressive campaign tactics, including negative campaigning, but political scientists are less unified in condemnation. One body of research has found that negative advertising can significantly increase cynicism and reduce voter participation, especially among independents. Other scholars have reached opposite conclusions, finding that negative advertising mobilizes and informs voters - increasing participation and improving vote choice and accountability. The two literatures do not always speak directly to each other, using different methods and data, and their empirical analysis is limited to the United States. The overall magnitude of the effects are usually relatively small - a few percentage points in either direction - which is attributed to the stable and enduring party system, as well as other institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Attack advertising is not unique to the United States, and is apparently increasing in the developing world. Observers report rising rates of negativity - often called “Americanization” - in places as diverse as Mexico, Taiwan, India, Ukraine, and Brazil. (Butler and Ranney, 1992) There has been some popular reaction against these trends, with calls for increasing regulation of campaign messages and even for bans on attack advertising. However, there is very little scholarship on the substantive impact of campaign tone in these contexts, and most of it is limited to questions of vote choice.

Understanding the impact of these messages on voting behavior is especially important in these contexts for several reasons. First, whatever the impact of campaign tone, it should be much larger in new democracies, where voters don’t have the same institutions to help them interpret political messages: consolidated parties, issue ownership, and well-defined issue spaces. If campaign tone has mobilization and trust-creating effects, they should be larger in new democracies, and encouraged. If campaign tone stirs cynicism and discourages democratic participation, the effects should be larger and this “Americanization of campaigns” a cause for concern. Second, voters in many developing democracies lack the same levels of information and education as those in the developed world. With less political knowledge and weaker institutions to compensate, these voters may be especially inclined to interpret attack advertising as more evidence that “democracy doesn’t matter”, leading to lower participation rates and less regime support. Finally, given the institutional and societal diversity of democratic regimes, scholarship should seek to generalize theories of campaigns and voting behavior beyond the constraints of the United States and Western Europe. Most democracies are relatively young, poor, and with weakly or partly consolidated party systems, and provide a very different context for political behavior than scholars encounter in older, consolidated democracies.

In this article, I examine the impact of campaign tone using the results of an experiment conducted in Brazil. Subjects were randomly assigned to watch videos that included a positive, negative, or no political advertisement, but which were identical in every other way. Subjects’ post-treatment attitudes were measured in terms of persuasion, participation, and evaluations of democracy. The experiment reveals powerful voter responses to campaign messages, which vary with political sophistication. Positive advertisements increase support

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<sup>1</sup>By negative advertisement, I adopt the standard definition as presented by Geer (2006, p 23): “Negativity is any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign”.

for the targeted candidate and slightly increase turnout intentions. Negative advertisements decrease support for the targeted candidate and significantly decrease turnout intentions. The magnitude of the impact on participation and vote choice varies from 10% for college students to as much as 60% for the lowest education cohort.

In the next section, I review the literature on the impact of negative campaigning's impact on voters and consider how to extend it to the developing world. I then present hypotheses and research design. Finally, I present results and discuss shortcomings, implications, and suggest future directions.

## What We Know About Campaign Tone

Scholars studying campaign tone have focused primarily on persuasion, and especially during the last 15 years, turnout. Research on persuasion, or vote choice, has come to a largely consistent conclusion: campaign messages reinforce partisanship, and have limited persuasion effects. Most campaign messages - positive or negative - reinforce or activate recipients' pre-existing beliefs and partisanship, and facilitate "correct" voting decisions.<sup>2</sup>

More controversial is research on campaign tone's impact on political participation and voter cynicism. One set of findings suggests that negative advertising depresses turnout, reduces trust, and generally increases cynicism among voters. Most prominent in this literature is the work of Ansolabehere et al. (1994); Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995); Ansolabehere et al. (1999). In a series of experiments and analysis of electoral returns, they find that turnout drops on average 5% in response to attack messages, which they attribute to an increase in general cynicism of message recipients. Their work is corroborated by experimental research conducted by Houston et al. (1999); Budesheim et al. (1996), who find willingness to vote falling in response to negative campaign advertisements.

Other scholars have challenged the demobilization hypothesis. Using survey data, electoral returns, and field experiments, a number of scholars have found insignificant relationships between campaign tone and participation, suggesting that tone has no impact on participation. (Wattenberg and Briens, 1999; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002; Finkle and Geer, 1998; Geer and Lau, 2005; Lau et al., 1999; Lemert et al., 1999; Niven, 2006; Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2005) Others have actually found a negative relationship - suggesting that attack advertising increases turnout. Wattenberg and Briens (1999) point out that negative advertisements may be deliberately mobilizing, clarifying the issue positions of the candidates and raising the stakes of the electoral outcome.

A third line of research has found differential effects of campaign tone, depending on the type of message and the voter's characteristics. For example, Kahn and Kenney (1999) find that the impact of negativity on participation varies with content: exposure to "legitimate criticisms" increases participation, while unsubstantiated attacks discourage turnout. Further, the effects are larger for independents and political insophisticates. Lau and Pomper (2001) find a curvilinear relationship between campaign tone and participation. Initially, adding negativity to a campaign increases participation. But at the extremes with very high

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<sup>2</sup>See for example Lazarsfeld et al. (1948); Berelson et al. (1954); Kelley (1983); Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995); Finkel (1993); there are many other examples. Others do argue that the activation/reinforcement models have oversimplified campaigns, showing how campaign events do affect electoral outcomes (Shaw, 1999), but still find that partisanship is an overwhelming predictor of voting decisions.

frequencies of attacks and virtually no positive political messages, participation declines. As with Kahn and Kenney (1999), they find the impact of tone to be especially large among independents. Regardless, this debate appears unlikely to be resolved any time soon given the different methodologies employed on each side of the debate. The strongest findings in support of a demobilization effect come from experiments, while the evidence for null or mobilization effects comes from surveys or electoral returns.

However, in all cases, the impacts on voter persuasion and participation are of relatively limited magnitude, usually less than 5%. The small effects in this literature, and in campaigns in general, may be partly attributed to context. The United States has an institutionalized two-party system, stable issue ownership, and widespread mass partisan preferences. These institutions reduce the potential impact of campaign messages on both persuasion and participation. Campaign messages are received and interpreted through partisan and ideological frameworks. The net result is that campaign messages primarily activate existing beliefs and help voters categorize candidates according to the issues, rather than persuading voters to change their preferences.

Many new democracies lack these vote-stabilizing features, leading to much larger campaign effects. These countries, on average, lack institutionalized party systems. Without consolidated party institutions, voters rely on other sources of information for making choices, including personal traits of candidates, social networks and discourse, and of course campaign messages. The net result is that campaign effects and electoral volatility are much higher in new than in consolidated democracies. (Lawson and McCann, 2005; Baker et al., 2006)

For persuasion, this implies that attack advertising - indeed, any political message - will have a greater impact on a voter in a new democracy than one in a consolidated democracy, *ceteris paribus*. In these political systems, voters cannot fall back on latent partisanship, issue ownership, and party cues to interpret and react to campaign messages. In these systems, party labels have little meaning, issue-ownership is non-existent, and even politicians' party membership may not be stable - party switching is common in many weak party systems. Any political message provides substantial information. Further, unlike in a consolidated party system, voters are less likely to dismiss some messages based on their source. The net result is that any political information has much more impact on opinion and vote choice.

These contextual differences should also affect any relationship between campaign tone and democratic values, including participation and cynicism - but the direction of campaign tone could be positive or negative. On the one hand, in weak party systems, most voters are "at risk" of being demobilized by negative advertising, as partisanship and voter information levels are on average very low. Without other information about candidates, issues, and parties, widespread negativity will simply reinforce general pessimism about the ability of democracy to address the challenges of development. Further, negative campaigns may simply be more evidence that politicians and parties are corrupt, and that elections is a waste of time.

On the other hand, negative campaigning might be especially mobilizing in countries with a recent experience with authoritarianism. A recent transition to democracy might mean that negative campaigning is a major legitimizing signal that validates the electoral process and encourages participation. The open tolerance of criticism and debate could reinforce the completeness of democratic transition, making participation more meaningful for

voters, and thus increasing rates of participation. For example, the Brazilian military regime (1964-1985) continued to hold legislative elections. In 1974, confident in their popularity, the military regime relaxed controls on the press and campaigning. The opposition party campaigned aggressively against the military regime. In response, participation rose from about 16 million to almost 23 million valid votes cast.(Cardoso, 1975) The very existence of negative attack advertising and messages may validate the legitimacy of the electoral process, and dramatically increased participation. Such “democratizing” effects, however, might not persist past the first or second democratic election - scholarship on Latin America and Eastern Europe found that after an initial post-democratization surge, turnout has fallen in subsequent elections.(Kostadinova and Power, 2007)

Finally, these effects should vary with social class. Previous work has not tested for this interaction, but it reflects an important feature of politics in the developing world: there is a much greater range of political knowledge and sophistication than in developed democracies. Many voters have only a rudimentary or even no formal education, many have little or no access to media and other forms of political information, and many usually make voting decisions as part of clientelistic exchanges, not policy debates. For vote choice, less sophisticated voters have less knowledge and much more uncertainty about candidates and policies, and should naturally rely more on new information than high-knowledge voters. Voters with strong “priors” about particular candidates or parties should adjust their beliefs only slightly - if at all - in response to campaign messages. For participation and civic attitudes, less sophisticated voters will process negative advertisements as more evidence that “voting doesn’t matter for people like me”, discouraging participation and support for democracy.

The discussion implies several hypotheses about campaign tone and campaign effects in new democracies:

1. Vote Choice: Campaign tone should be positively correlated with vote choice.
2. Participation and Regime Support
  - (a) Demobilization: Campaign Tone should be positive correlated with participation and regime support.
  - (b) Mobilization: Campaign tone should be negative correlated with participation and regime support.
3. Sophistication: campaign tone effects should be largest for low education voters and largest for high education voters.
4. Context: Campaign effects of all types should be larger in new democracies than previously demonstrated in consolidated democracies.

## **Research Design**

I test these hypotheses using the results of a media experiment in Brazil immediately before the 2006 elections. I measured the impact of campaign tone on vote choice, participation,

cynicism and learning, and how that impact varies with social class. This section introduces the case and context of the election, then describes the methodology used in the experiment.

Like the United States, Brazil has a federal structure and presidential form of government, but in terms of the key variables discussed above, that country provides a dramatically different context for campaign effects. First, Brazil is a young democracy, having transitioned to civilian rule in 1985 after 21 years of military rule. Second, Brazil does not have a well-developed mass party system. The party system is highly fragmented due to the rules used for local council, state assembly, and national chamber elections: open-list proportional representation with high district magnitude. Although there are five main parties, more than twenty have won seats in most recent Congressional elections. Besides being highly fragmented, the parties lack well-developed and stable policy positions, although there is a rough left-right continuum. Party membership is not stable even for politicians - many elected officials switch party while in office - about one-third of legislators during each term. Third, mass partisanship is low; less than 2% of Brazilians are party members, and less than half express any party membership. The net result is that the party system is not sufficiently structured at the mass or elite level to control the impact of campaign messages. Campaign messages cannot activate latent partisanship that does not exist. Finally, Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world in many measures of well-being: income, wealth, education, and even life expectancy. The net result is that the Brazilian electorate provides wide variance on social class and political knowledge that can be used to test the interaction of campaign tone and social class.

I conducted the experiment in the city-state of Brasília during September of 2006. The experiment used random assignment of subjects to watch videos that included a positive, negative, or neutral political message. All subjects watched an approximately 12-minute long video on efforts to preserve ecological links between Brazil's Pantanal and Cerrado ecosystems. Into this video were inserted a juice commercial, a telecommunications commercial, and an automotive commercial. There were three versions of the video: a positive, a negative, and a neutral. The positive video also included a 55-second positive political advertisement. The negative video included a 55-second negative political advertisement. The neutral video did not include any political advertising and was thus 55 seconds shorter than the other videos.

The political messages either supported or opposed the Senate candidacy of Joaquim Roriz. Joaquim Roriz is the most important and popular politician in Brasília today. Roriz was the appointed governor of Brasília in 1988, won the first election for governor in 1990, won a second term in 1998, and a third term in 2002.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, having served the maximum two consecutive terms, he ran for senate and was an early favorite. In the October 1 elections, he easily won against a field of 8 other candidates, with 52% of the vote, in a plurality SMD election (the closest competitor had 43%). As governor for twelve of the last sixteen years, he has very high name recognition and support as a "go-getter" that has made substantial investments in Brasilia's infrastructure.

The positive and negative advertisements used identical images, music, and voice (native

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<sup>3</sup>Immediate reelection of governors was not allowed in 1994, so Roriz was required to step down. In 1996, a constitutional amendment was passed allowing one immediate reelection for presidents, governors, and mayors.

female Brazilian), with minor changes in tone. The ads evaluated the achievements of Joaquim Roriz' three terms as governor and endorsed or opposed his candidacy for Senate. The content of the ad provides actual government data on Roriz' accomplishments, but varies the tone of the information. The source of the ad was a non-existent "Worker's Alliance".

And now, a message from the Worker's Alliance.

What's at stake in the Senate Elections? Our future. Who can you trust? Joaquim Roriz. Let's look at some numbers:

Education: More than 60% of students finish high school, and more than 90% of Brasilienses are literate.

Development: More than half the roads in the Federal District already have now been paved. And 14 Metro stations are operational.

Economy: Unemployment is just 15%. And 75% of families have incomes above two minimum salaries

The numbers don't lie! Joaquim Roriz, the right choice for Brasília.

The negative advertisement read:

And now, a message from the Worker's Alliance.

What's at stake in the Senate Elections? Our future. Who can you trust? *Not* Joaquim Roriz. Let's look at some numbers:

Education: 40% of students don't finish high school, and 10% of Brasilienses still aren't literate.

Development: Half the roads in the Federal District still haven't been paved. And just 14 Metro stations are operational.

Economy: Unemployment is above 15%. And 25% of families have incomes below two minimum salaries.

The numbers don't lie! Joaquim Roriz, the wrong choice for Brasília.

Several features of the spot deserve some attention. First, the information in both advertisements is essentially identical, varying only the frame of the message as good or bad news. For example, in the positive ad the script on income is "75% of families have incomes above two minimum salaries" and in the negative advertisement the script is "25% of families have incomes below two minimum salaries". There is a minor difference in the delivery, with some figures being reported as point estimates, and others as inequalities: "more than 60%" versus "40%". This variance in framing and inequality was introduced for realism - actual candidates will vary framing and will round data and report inequalities when doing so maximizes the delivery of their message. Second, note that there is no other candidate or party identified as the source of the message - instead, the ad references a "Workers' Coalition", which did not exist in the 2002 Senate race. The ad also relies on common knowledge of Roriz' terms in office, blaming or crediting him for the situation in Brasilia after twelve



years under his direction. Finally, the content of the message is substantive, not based on personal traits.

Attitudes were measured using pre and post test questionnaires. Respondents first completed a pre-questionnaire that included basic demographics and opinions about the environment, development, and juice purchase decisions. A random subset of respondents received a slightly longer prequestionnaire that also asked about their interest in politics, their preferred party, and their vote intention for president.

After watching the video, subjects were given a post-test questionnaire that included 23 questions. Among the questions about saving the Pantanal wetlands, trying new juice products, choosing a telecommunications provider, and buying an automobile, were three questions of relevance for the study, as listed below:

- Persuasion: “If the senate elections were held today, who would you vote for?” (List of all actual candidates followed)
- Regime Support: “How do you evaluate the way Brazil’s democracy is working? (Possible responses: Good, Ok, Bad, Don’t Know)”
- Participation: “If voting were not mandatory, would you vote? (Possible responses: Yes, No, or Don’t Know)”

Note that in Brazil, voting is currently mandatory for all literate citizens between the ages of 18 and 70, although the fines for not voting are small and not difficult to avoid. There is ongoing controversy over whether or not to remove this requirement, and more than twenty proposed constitutional amendments to eliminate mandatory voting have been introduced since the return to democracy.

Participants were recruited from employees and adult students of two universities: the University of Brasília (UnB) and the University of the Federal District (UniDF). Research assistants posted advertisements and distributed pamphlets campus-wide. A total of 403 subjects participated in the study.

This population is not a representative sample of all Brazilians. In much of the experimental literature, scholars claim that college students are fairly representative of the population at large. I can make no such claim here, and my hypotheses regarding social class/political sophistication require using a broader sample. In Brazil, there is a very strong correlation between educational achievement and social class, and college is beyond the reach of most citizens. The college students at UnB are a particularly exclusive group, representing the best and the brightest of Brazilian youth. In contrast, sixty percent of Brazilians have a junior high or lower education; fewer than 15% can aspire to any college degree, let alone admission to a top university like UnB. Ideally I would have recruited participants from low income neighborhoods, but the logistical requirements of relocating made this not possible. Including university staff provided reasonable variance on demographics; most staff members were well above-average in education, but some occupational categories (servant, gardener, security guard, cleaning staff) included education and income cohorts more typical of the Brazilian voter. The sample and national demographics are presented in Table 1.

I use education as a proxy for political sophistication. Survey data reveals a strong correlation between standard measures of sophistication and education. Several examples

Table 1: Representativeness of Sample

Ed. Level	Education <sup>A</sup>		Monthly Salaries	Income <sup>B</sup>	
	Brazil	Sample		Brazil	Sample
Up to Four Years	29%	4%	Less Than 1	34%	1%
5-8 Years	36%	8%		1-2	19%
Some High School	4%	10%	2-5	25%	23%
High School	19%	17%	5-10	13%	21%
Some College	4%	57%	10+	4%	33%
College +	8%	4%			

Brazil data from IBGE (2000a) and IBGE (2000b)

Table 2: Education and Other Measures of Political Sophistication

Source: ESEB nationwide survey of Brazil, 2002.

	Places PT		
	Ideological	on Left	Knowledge
No formal Education	0.48	0.24	1.25
≤ 4 years	0.68	0.38	2.55
5 to 8 years	0.75	0.41	3.30
9 to 11 years	0.84	0.57	4.14
College plus	0.95	0.68	5.43

*Ideological* reports the proportion able to self place on a left-right scale.

*Places PT* reports the proportion correctly identifying the PT as a leftist party.

*Knowledge* is the mean number of office holders respondents can name.

are displayed in Table 2. For example, survey respondents from the college educated group have political information scores that more than double those of the least educated group. Ninety-five percent of college-educated respondents can self-place on an ideological scale, while over thirty percent of low education respondents choose “I don’t know what left and right mean”.(CESOP-Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2002)

## Results

Table 3 shows simple cross-tabs of results by ad tone, with mixed results. For vote choice, the initial results are quite powerful. 36% of subjects viewing the positive ad preferred Roriz, to just 13% of subjects viewing the negative advertisement, with the difference significant at the .0001 level. This 20% swing is also significantly larger than findings from similar experiments conducted in the United States. The results for participation intentions are *not significant*. The figures are consistent with the demobilization hypothesis: the percentage of subjects reporting they would vote slips from 82% for the positive ad to 77% for the negative ad, but the p-value is .14. Further, the control group actually reports slightly *lower*

Table 3: Impact of Campaign Message Tone

Tone	Vote Choice			Turnout Would Vote?	Eval. Democracy			
	Roriz	Other	DK/Null		Bad	Ok	Good	Mean
Positive	36	37	27	82	27	55	18	0.91
Neutral	31	44	25	76	36	51	13	0.77
Negative	13	54	33	77	36	54	10	0.74
Test $p_- = p_+$	$p = .000$			$p = .14$				$p = .016$
$n =$	378			297	336			

participation than the poorest cohort (75.8% versus 76.6%), though this difference is not significant. For regime support, the results are again fully consistent with the hypotheses. Positive evaluations of Brazilian democracy increase after exposure to a positive message, and decrease after exposure to a negative message, when compared to a control group. The difference between positive and negative groups is significant ( $p = .016$ ), as is the the positive-control difference. The negative versus control differences are not significant ( $p = .379$ ).<sup>4</sup>

Do campaign tone effects interact with education levels? The results vary across dependent variables. Table 4 shows the relationship between tone and vote choice by education level. Message impact varies dramatically with education level. All cohorts show significant tone effects, but the magnitude varies enormously, from 11% for high education subjects to 47% for low education subjects. One obvious problem, however, is the obvious class-based support patterns: low-income Brasilienses show very high support for Roriz (90% of control group respondents prefer him), which decreases with education to just 13% for college students.

Table 7 shows results from logistic regressions on support for Roriz, and finds no evidence of an interaction between tone and sophistication. Tone (coded -1, 0, and +1) remains significant and positive, implying that the campaign messages had roughly equal effects across all cohorts, with no class differentiation. I tried controlling for obvious confounders, especially age (not shown), with no effect on the core results - there is no interactive effect on vote choice. However, this null result is somewhat inconclusive. The logistic transformation implies a different slope for different levels of education, and with only six categories for education, can “soak up” any interaction effects.

For participation, there is evidence of a strong interaction between class and campaign tone. There are still no significant differences in turnout intentions for higher education groups, but there are very large effects for the low education cohorts, in spite of the small

<sup>4</sup>The significance tests for the Vote Choice and Turnout questions are standard difference of proportions tests; the significance test for the Democracy Works question is a standard two-sample t-test.

Table 4: Vote Choice, Tone, and Education Level

	Education Level		
	$X <$ High School	High School	College +
Positive	70	52	19
Neutral	90	41	13
Negative	23	24	8
Test $p_- = p_+$	$p = .008$	$p = .01$	$p = .03$
	$n = 43$	$n = 95$	$n = 232$

sample size. In the estimated models of Table 7, the interaction is significant even after controlling for education. Further, the impact is driven primarily by negative messages (Model 4). Finally, participation may fall for low income subjects, but this is apparently not a function of cynicism: there are only weak changes in regime support in response to ad tone, and they disappear when controlling for education levels.

## Discussion

Most of the world’s voters are poor, have limited access to education, and live in relatively new democracies. Most of the world’s research on democracies is based on a handful of consolidated, wealthy countries with free public education, widespread media penetration, and few children in the workforce. An important challenge for the current generation of scholars is building general theories that apply to all democracies, in which institutions and contextual factors are variables, not just generally accepted features of the political landscape.

Recent work has found that electoral volatility is higher, and campaign effects larger, in young democracies. This volatility increases the importance of campaigns for informing citizens, enabling representation, and helping systems evolve toward a stable issue space with party issue ownership. In particular, given the controversy surrounding the impact of negative campaigns on participation, regime support, and other democratic values, clarifying how campaign tone affects voters in new democracies is an important task for political scientists.

My results suggest that negative campaigns are cause for concern in new democracies. Experimental analysis confirmed that negative advertising reduces participation, regime support, and candidate support, and that these effects, on average, are larger than in the United States. The effect for participation showed a strong interaction with social class: while attack advertising did not affect participation rates for higher education groups, subjects with little

Table 5: Turnout, Tone, and Education Level

	Education Level		
	$X < \text{High School}$	High School	College +
Positive	80	74	90
Neutral	78	59	85
Negative	23	78	86
Test $p_- = p_+$	$p = .001$	$p = .711$	$p = .529$
	$n = 42$	$n = 88$	$n = 160$

Table 6: Regime Support, Tone, and Education Level

	Education Level		
	$X < \text{High School}$	High School	College +
Positive	106	85	89
Neutral	110	73	71
Negative	92	75	71
Test $\mu_- = \mu_+$	$p = .488$	$p = .506$	$p = .100$
	$n = 40$	$n = 86$	$n = 202$

Table 7: Voting Behavior and Campaign Tone

	Vote Choice		Turnout		Regime Support	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Education	-.621 (.099)***	-.602 (.102)***	.394 (.110)***	.250 (.210)		-.047 (.028)*
Tone	.630 (.147)***	1.092 (.494)**	1.578 (.522)***		.064 (.039)*	.053 (.039)
Tone*Ed		-.116 (.117)	-.353 (.127)***			
Pos Ad				1.048 (1.131)		
Pos Ad*Ed				-.163 (.269)		
Neg Ad				-2.161 (1.195)*		
Neg Ad*Ed				.559 (.287)*		
Obs.	397	397	313	313	357	354

political knowledge were vulnerable to being pushed out of politics. I also found substantial tone effects on vote choice, and smaller, but still significant effects on regime support. These results were robust to alternative specifications and controls for age, gender, regional origin, and partisanship.

These results are particularly disturbing given recent trends in Latin American politics. Twenty years after transitions from authoritarian rule, citizens do not appear convinced of democracy's efficacy. One recent survey asked whether "Democracy is always best" or "In some cases, authoritarianism is preferable to democracy". Only thirty-seven percent of Brazilians still feel that democracy is always the best form of government. (The Economist, 2002) Equally disturbing is the popular support for leaders that are attempting to dismantle core democratic institutions, including separation of powers, judicial independence, and even freedom of speech. If negative campaigning is part of the problem, then reforms are in order, especially in the poorest countries where voters are particularly vulnerable to demobilization effects and skeptical of democracy's utility.

In spite of these troubling results, it may be too soon to call for electoral reform or restrictions on campaign messages. Like all experiments, this one suffers the inevitable tradeoff between external and internal validity. Subjects watched the videos in a very artificial environment, and paid close attention to the messages. Actual viewing would likely take place at home, with many interruptions, or even turning to other tasks during political advertisements. This also means that while the magnitude of some effects were large, they cannot be directly generalized to the population at large. In addition, as with survey work, the questionnaire only measures self-reported intended vote choice and participation. These are quite different than the act of voting, with resulting measurement problems. In addition, I have no expectations that these effects are permanent or persistent, but rather that they

are short-term psychological responses to political messages. However, during political campaigns voters receive thousands of political messages directly from advertisements as well as from news broadcasts, print media, and even conversations.

The research design also leaves several questions unresolved. One is that the null result for an education\*tone interaction is inconclusive, because of the class division in support for Roriz. Because the logistic function is not linear, the impact of covariates on the probability of voting, or supporting Roriz, is not constant. With just six education levels, it is possible to overfit any interaction effects. In other words, the logistic curve might be accurately capturing the relationship between education and vote preference, or it might be soaking up an interaction effect. Because of the class differences in support, the two possibilities cannot be separated.<sup>5</sup>

Also unresolved are the mechanisms at work in the tone-turnout connection. One possibility is that *any* negative message promotes cynicism and weakens democratic values. I did find a significant link between regime support and campaign tone, though it was small. The other possibility is that the large effects for low-income subjects reflect their support for Roriz. In other words, given additional negative information about their preferred candidate, and without information about the other candidates (most can only name the President and no other politicians), uncertainty about the utility of voting for any particular candidate makes the entire exercise useless. Subjects watching the negative ad were more likely to respond “Don’t Know” or “Null Vote” when asked about their vote intentions.

These issues are a function of the complexity of conducting campaign experiments in multiparty systems. In the United States, an ad targeting the Republican and another targeting the Democrat will resolve most of these issues. But in a multiparty system with high electoral volatility, researchers would need ads attacking as many as ten different targets, and possibly from ten different sources - implying many variants of any particular ad.

I will suggest two essential next steps for scholars interested in campaign effects in new democracies. First, these results need to be generalized to other developing countries. Not all new democracies have party systems as volatile as Brazil’s. While there are many signs of stabilization (Desposato, 2007), the party system still is largely uninstitutionalized. Party switching continues at high rates, mass partisanship is low, and elites seem unconstrained by their campaign platforms. Some new democracies have, or had, much stronger and older parties, with mass membership, widespread recognition, and generally clear policy positions. In these contexts, partisanship might make up for the lower levels of political knowledge common among the electorate. Still other countries have ethnic parties. When partisanship and core identity are highly correlated, it may be that no amount of negative campaigning will affect vote choice or participation rates.

Finally, these results need to be compared with electoral returns and survey data. At this point, there is no comprehensive archive of campaign advertisements that can be used to identify which states or cities within Brazil had negative, or positive campaigns. A number of scholars are working to generate a multi-country archive of campaign messages, but until that point, there is no way to test negativity’s impact on mobilization.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For example, if the constant term in the model is restricted, the interaction becomes significant, and the overall fit of the model is *not* significantly different.

<sup>6</sup>Some authors have tried, like Morena (2004) in Mexico, but have no variance on the electoral race, and have not examined participation intentions.

This leads me to a final lesson to be learned from scholarship on the United States. Current research on the impact of negativity in that country is stalled by methodological divisions. Experimentalists find consistent effects and criticize observational studies' lack of controls. Observationalists find positive or null results and criticize experiments' lack of external validity. But what is needed is a careful effort to unravel the explanation for the difference, not argue about apples and oranges. Comparativists should learn from the methods but avoid the gridlock.



## **More on the Experiment**

Multiple subjects watched the video at the same time, in the same room, but separated by dividers and under instructions not to speak. They could not observe or hear the reactions of any other participants. We had no cases of subjects making comments about the video during the experiment, or standing up and moving about, or otherwise violating the independence of same-session participants.

A number of factors risk some contamination of the experiment, but including control variables did not affect results. For example, although Brasilia has very high literacy rates, many of our less-educated subjects had great difficulty in completing the questionnaires on their own. Because of the group setting, I could not switch to interviews. The compromise was to verbally read the questionnaire and each response, and let each subject mark the appropriate box. To test for any subject impact of being read the questionnaire (though they had a copy in front of them), research assistants read the questionnaire to a random sample of all subjects, as well as in any session where a subject requested such reading or where it was obvious that a subject was having difficulty with the questionnaire. Including a control variable did not affect results. There were a series of other unanticipated events. For example, the university environment was sometimes very noisy - with many students outside the laboratory having discussions, and their voices sometimes being audible inside the laboratory. A control variable for "Noisy" did not affect results.

## **Toward a Model?**

There are several ways to go about constructing a model of the impact of different kinds of messages on behavior. Some preliminary thoughts follow....

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