

# Does the Message Really Matter? Economy and Poll Rates in the 2010 Brazilian Presidential Election

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## Abstract

In this paper we investigate the reasons why the economically advantaged candidate for the 2010 Brazilian Presidential Election failed to win in the first round of the election. Building on Vavreck's (2009) argument, we print evidence for the claim that the message matters even during one electoral campaign cycle. Initially, Dilma Rousseff had the support of the electorate majority, who was satisfied with the country's economic performance. As soon as her main opponents adopted a successful insurgent message in their campaign, she was urged to modify her own campaign emphasis. As a consequence, there was a slight, decisive support swing among conservative voters that lead to the need of the second round. To show that the message change produced a switch in voters support, we followed two strategies. First, we analyzed Dilma Rousseff's campaign messages content on the 'Horário Gratuito de Propaganda Eleitoral' (HGPE) and mapped her discourse changes through the campaign weeks. We find a strong and positive correlation between Dilma vote support and the amount of time she spent talking about economy. Secondly, we used individual vote data, a tracking poll conducted by Vox Populi. Combining aggregate and individual level data, we were able to present strong empirical evidence for our argument. The government candidate failed to win in the first round as a consequence of the influence the campaign message had on conservative voters.

# 1 Introduction

Do campaigns matter? Earlier scholarly consensus on campaign effects on electoral outcomes was that they are minimal (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1986; Converse, 1964; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948; Salmore and Salmore, 1989), but as Campbell (2000) among others has argued ‘sometimes they are large enough to be politically important’ (Brady and Johnston, 2006; Finkel, 1993; Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Iyengar and Simon, 2000). There are many empirical researches that have sought to explain such important effect on electoral attitude in the U.S. Jacobson and Kernell (1983) work on congressional elections demonstrates the powerful effects of candidate spending on outcomes. Bartels (1987, 1992) documents that, in an arena where predispositions such as party ID are useless, campaigns have substantial effects on how voters evaluate candidates. Holbrook (1996) shows that events, like debates and party conventions during presidential campaigns do shift opinion during an election. Gerber and Green (2000) document that campaigns help to mobilize voters. And Vavreck (2009) argues that even in the face of strong structural conditions, what candidates say and do in their campaigns can affect outcomes.

As many authors have shown, electoral campaigns in Latin America, and especially in Brazil, are becoming more and more ‘Americanized’ (Espíndola, 2006; Smith, 2005)<sup>1</sup>. TV ads, claims, and candidate image building, are all based on North American styles, resembling the strategies and dynamics produced in the U.S. Such similarity raises the question if the same systematic campaign effects observed in North-america could be extrapolated

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<sup>1</sup>Besides their geographic similarities, Brazilian society has become much more related to the American in the last 10 years. In this period, the population formally protected by civil and political rights increased, its levels of inequality and political polarization became considerable, the percentage of protestants in the society grew, the media ensured freedom and independency, greater amount of people became middle class, the average years of schooling of adults raised, the political system showed stability, and the economy proved to be strong. Besides that, and more importantly, both countries have a majoritarian presidential system.

to Latin American countries. In fact, researchers in comparative politics have shown that these models are applicable to other places (Barnes, 1997). In this paper, we use electoral behavior theory of U.S. campaigns to explain the reasons why the results of the first round of the 2010 Brazilian presidential election were observed. Our main contribution is to show that 'the message matters' even within a presidential election campaign.

This exercise will help us to understand how Brazilian candidates' performance in polls varies during campaigns (Figueiredo, 1991; Singer, 1999; de Souza Carreirão, 2002; de Souza Carreirao, 2007). Our aim is to assess why voters, besides becoming more interested in elections as they approach, change candidates overall evaluations between the beginning and the end of presidential races. To do that, we pursue two sets of analysis concerning the 2010 Brazilian presidential election first round outcome. First, we assess the message effects on voter attitudes toward Dilma Rousseff (PT), the government presidential candidate. Here, we focus on a unique aspect of Brazilian campaigns, the 'Horário Gratuito de Propaganda Eleitoral' (HGPE). The HGPE is a free TV and radio advertising time that is rewarded to political parties to promote their candidacies. It is funded through tax exemptions and is the main communicational piece of the campaigns. Secondly, we analyze a tracking poll conducted by Vox Populi during the last 40 days of the presidential election to observe how voters changed their behavior during this crucial time of the contest, and to identify the main determinants of it.

In this paper we explain why the incumbent's candidate, despite starting very well in opinion polls, ended up going to the second round of an election that was considered by many an easy challenge. Based on Vavreck's (2009) theory of insurgent candidates, we argue that the emergence of an agenda that could not be properly addressed by the clarifying competitor produced an unexpected result within the time range of the campaign. To support this idea, we demonstrate that Dilma Rousseff changed her campaign discourse

when the main competitors aired a polemic opinion she had defended previously. In order to respond to the insurgent candidates, Dilma stopped broadcasting economic messages on the HGPE. As we show, Dilma went to the second round of such election for having lost support among the message's most affected voters: the conservatives, the women, and the religious.

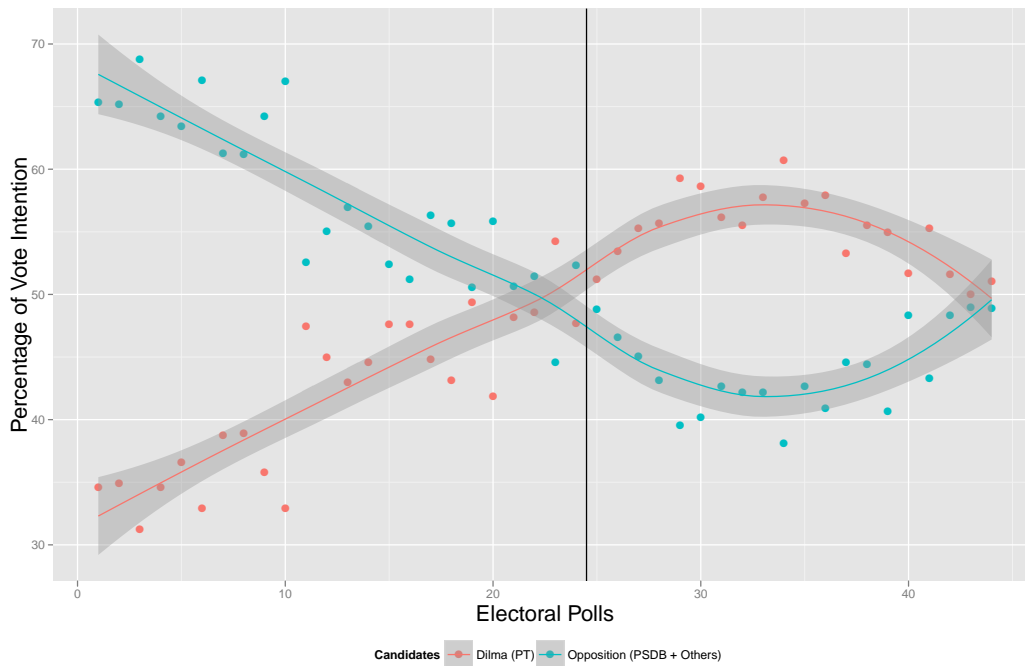
The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section we document the evolution of Dilma's poll rates since the beginning of the official campaign. As such, we explain the striking situation in which she was embedded in the end of the first term. Next, we present our argument for why Dilma's campaign was not successful to win the contest in the first round. Then, we assess our hypothesis using two different strategies: first, we analyze a data set of Dilma's HGPE during the campaign of 2010. Doing so, we show a positive correlation between her poll rates and the amount of time her TV campaign approached economic topics. Second, we use individual-level data to investigate how such correlation was produced at the micro level. We finish our analysis identifying the mechanisms that explain why Dilma went to the second round of the 2010 presidential race.

## 2 Puzzle

On October 1, 2010 Dilma Rousseff was considered 'virtually elected': All available poll data suggested it, since the government candidate maintained more than 50% of voting intention until the week prior to the election's first round. This condition was the result of a campaign which, besides the construction of a new political figure on the national scene - the former minister and chief of staff -, focused primarily on her predecessor and main guarantor: president Lula's government good retrospective. From 2008 to 2010, Lula maintained an approval rate above 50%, peaking at 75% in March 2010 (CNI-IBOPE, 2010). In addition, international media had already anticipated the

virtually certain scenario: in that week's issue, The Economist magazine ran a cover story announcing the expected result and discussing President Dilma's future government priorities.

Figure 1: Percentage of Vote Intention in 2010 Brazilian Presidential Election



\*\*Vertical line indicates the day in which TV ads started.

On October 2, 2010, only 24 hours before the election, there was what appeared to be a sudden change in voting intentions. At first glance, nothing was identified by tracking polls, or surveys conducted through elections evening. At the voting stations, Dilma's vote rate was 46.91%, a large but not sufficient sum to win in the first round. Thus, she went to a runoff with her main challenger, José Serra (PSDB). Exit polls only suggested such possibility, still not fully capturing the opposition candidates' performance.<sup>2</sup> Why did the

<sup>2</sup>IBOPE exit polls projected Dilma with 51%; José Serra, 30%; Marina Silva, 18% and 1% for Plinio Sampaio.

second round happen, while polls, media and most politicians believed this would not occur? What had changed in the campaign final moments? Why did voters switch preferences (if they did), and what factors led to that?

These seem to be particularly interesting questions, especially if we realize that there are many elections decided on the margins (Abramowitz, Alexander and Gunning, 2006*b,a*; Rhode and Strumpf, 2004; Campbell, 2001; Di Franco et al., 2004; Mulligan and Hunter, 2003). Contrary to conventional wisdom, we want to highlight that the way marginal voters decide to cast their ballots is what matters. It is hard to investigate such a small trend in Brazil, especially because it involves a large number of people spread in a wide country, who are not interacting, and are not being exposed to the same motivations. Such approach shifts the focus to pivotal actors collective behavior, and requires caution, as Olson (1965) prescribes.

In figure 1, we illustrate the puzzle addressed here. It is clear that Lula's path to elect his successor in 2010 was not as simple as the electoral behavior theories would expect. Enjoying many of the positive conditions required to obtain the majority of electors preferences<sup>3</sup>, Dilma's voting intentions raised slowly during the first semester of the election year. It was only in HGPE's first week that she overcame all her competitors in the polls. After this, she seemed to be en route to win straight in the first round, when she achieved 50% of preferences by the second HGPE week. But, unexpectedly, between the 4th and 5th campaign weeks, her performance in the polls decreased.

What happened through the campaign that made possible this variation in Dilma's poll rates? How did a safe victory turn into an unexpected run-off in just one week?<sup>4</sup> Why

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<sup>3</sup>Dilma was the candidate of the most popular President in the world (80% popularity ratings in 2010); she was running for office when the economy showed positive results - which includes, for instance, low unemployment rates; and she had the support of the biggest electoral coalition that has ever been formed for a presidential election in Brazil.

<sup>4</sup>Newspapers and Magazines published articles and comments in the last week before the election, October 3rd, already analyzing Dilma's victory. The Economist, for example, had in his cover from October

did Lula's candidate have her worst moments in the polls at the end of the first round of the election (last week of September)? Was this simply a random variation in poll rates, or a systematic effect that we should describe?

### 3 Theory

In order to assess this puzzle we will support our argument with two theoretical axioms. The first, introduced by Downs (1957), is that candidates adapt policy positions or priorities to suit the voting public, not the opposite; and that voters search for cues and signals during elections to reduce the costs of gathering information. The second, proposed by Vavreck (2009) in *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*, is that campaigns and candidates can pursue agenda setting and persuasion strategies in order to prime voters to think retrospectively about objective conditions, such as the economy, and make decisions about their future.

These two foundations lead us to expect that a rational candidate will exploit during the campaign the electoral context to his or her advantage. In other words, 'candidates who are helped by the state of the nation's economy should run campaigns in which they simply explicit their positions or their role in fostering the good economic times'. Vavreck (2009) labels these as *clarifying candidates*. On the other hand, 'candidates who will not be helped by the state of the nation's economy have to find something else to talk about in their campaigns. Quite naturally, these candidates ought to try to refocus the election [] on an issue from which they can benefit', and which their opponents are constrained on. This defines the *insurgent strategy* from which the opponents may try to defeat the incumbent. Therefore, if a clarifying candidate does a good job providing the 'appropriate' message, we would expect that she would get positive electoral feedback. However, if the insurgent

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2nd the following headline: 'The Handover: Lula gave Brazil continuity and stability. Now he needs to give his successor independence'. The article talks about the 'Dilma government', and how she would have to deal with her social agenda.



strategy was persuasive in refocusing the agenda, we would expect an incumbent loss.

Although such argument looks correct, it has not been part of the mainstream in American Politics. The first set of scholars analyzing electoral results suggested that economy was very important, although some scholars challenged such interpretation (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1986; Campbell et al., 1980; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948). There are many arguments stating that there are fundamental factors - things like party identification, ideology, religion, gender, race, and even long-standing attitudes stemming from views about morality and values - that robustly drive vote choice and that can be activated during presidential campaigns (Gelman and King, 1993; Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Jackman and Vavreck, 2010).

But, as Vavreck (2011) points out 'these mainly immutable characteristics (the economy and the fundamentals above) are not everything. And what is left unexplained is routinely enough of the vote margin to swing an average U.S. presidential election. The campaign effects and candidate messaging might be 'minimal' as early researchers labeled them, but that does not mean these effects are unimportant. By definition, it is the effects at the margin that are of consequence. Minimal effects can matter - and that means candidates' messages matter'. We do believe this to be true outside the U.S. too, particularly for Brazil.

Looking specifically at the case investigated here, we will demonstrate that it is possible to answer our puzzle taking into account the message that each candidate is delivering during the six weeks of the Brazilian campaign. Candidates set agendas, and prime voters based on what benefit them, but not their competitors. Based on Vavrecks' (2009) argument, we claim that the government candidate had her worst poll rates when she stopped talking about Brazil's positive economic outcomes, and started making defensive statements about issues raised by her adversaries; specifically on abortion favorability and

corruption scandals. In sum, when Dilma played the 'clarifying' card, she had positive feedback in the opinion polls. Inversely, when José Serra and Marina Silva, the other competitors, realized that an 'insurgent strategy' was available, and used it, her vote intention rates decreased.

Marina Silva, member of the Green Party (PV), and ex-member of the Worker's Party (PT), was particularly important for the occurrence of the runoff. As environment ex-minister in Lula's government, she had important disagreements with Dilma about the trade-offs between economic growth and ambient preservation. When she raised these issues, she forced Dilma to reshape her agenda. Serra, in turn, also weakened Dilma's arguments by making corruption and abortion salient campaign issues. Abortion was strategically used because Brazil is mostly a Christian country that in its majority rejects abortion legalization. Moreover, Dilma had defended the abortion legalization in an interview one month before the campaign started. Together, those elements seemed to be sufficient to damage her credibility in front of voters. The scandals were also useful because the opposition found 'potential' irregularities associated with Dilma's most important aide when she was Lula's chief of staff.

If in fact 'the message matters', and might be extended to the Brazilian case, we should observe that the campaign agenda content is strictly associated with the candidates' performance in the polls. Our aim here is thus to pursue a critical test of this argument. If the message really matters, it should matter a lot when a candidate changes her message content during the same campaign. Although data to test message effects are very difficult to get (Brady, Johnston and Sides, 2006), we identified a longitudinal research design that will allow us to assess the argument proposed here properly. As we discuss below, we processed data to observe the campaign message effects over time on voting attitude in Brazil.

## 4 Research Design

The research design we use, overcomes many of the limitations of prior evidence. Although it is hard to control who was watching TV when the HGPEs were broadcast, available data shows that an average above 55.9% of voters watched the HGPE daily (Dias, 2011), and that the same message set was presented at the same time everywhere in the country. To investigate the role that the campaign messages had on voters' behavior in the Brazilian presidential election of 2010, we use two different sources. First, we analyze Dilma Rousseff's campaign messages content. As the main independent variable in this paper, her message is measured using 22 propaganda programs broadcast nationally (HGPE) every other day during the last 45 days of campaign. Following Vavreck (2009), we will be able to describe the amount of time that each important clarifying issue, such as job creation, investment in schools, and urban violence control, were presented in the candidate's campaign <sup>5</sup>.

Second, we use the most desegregated vote data produced at that time. It is a tracking poll conducted by Vox Populi for an important TV channel in Brazil, TV Bandeirantes. In such tracking, they interviewed around 20,000 voters in a representative sample of Brazilian voters everyday between August 26th and October 2nd. The survey contains questions about vote intention, party affiliation, and candidate charisma, besides socio-demographic features of respondents. The performance of each candidate during the campaign is operationalized by their voting intention published by Vox Populi during the campaign.<sup>6</sup> As the dependent variable in our analysis, voting intention rates are calculated

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<sup>5</sup>As required by the electoral legislation, the HGPE content was provided on the website of each candidate, and remained easily accessible. More than classifying the content and time of each ad, we also produced robustness checks of the measurement validity. To test the internal validity of this measure, we asked five students to code the same HGPE content and compared their classification with ours. We coded the campaign ads concerning the appeals presented in the advertisements, but excluding repetitive ones. Doing so, we expect to highlight the content of the message over the form of it. Moreover, only spoken words were coded, not visualization or musical features of it.

<sup>6</sup>Vox Populi is one of the most traditional and trustful poll houses in Brazil. In its profile there are

as the percentage of vote intention for the government candidate (Dilma), and the main opposition candidates (Serra and Marina). Such procedure is necessary, as the multi-party system associated with the run-off rules tend to produce incentives for more than two parties to run for the presidency in order to negotiate portfolio and pork in exchange to support for presidential agenda in the legislature.<sup>7</sup>

With the dataset in hands, our analysis will be divided in two different tasks. First, we analyze the seven weeks before the first round of the election. Along this period, we compare the HGPE content and vote intention rates for each 3 days. Therefore, the message would be expected to cause some effect, at least, 2 days after it has been presented. This seems to be reasonable, as a first exploration of the HGPE programs showed that all candidates repeated their videos twice, one day after the other. As we will describe in detail in the next section, in this first analysis we find a clear positive correlation between HGPE's time spent on economy and Dilma's vote support.

Next, we use the tracking poll data conducted during the campaign to spell out the effectiveness of the mechanism that produced such a trend, namely, vote conservatism expressed by religion. Our aim is to explore how vote intention changed especially among the most conservative voters when the insurgent candidates brought to the campaign agenda the issue of abortion. If our argument is plausible, then we should observe conservative voters switching attitudes much more intensively than liberal ones. The way to assess such a mechanism will be to evaluate survey responses and show that even when conservative

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research produced for different parties and politicians across the country, what makes it a great source of information.

<sup>7</sup>Different from other strategies, this study does not consider newspaper reports. Besides not being associated with candidates' messages (Vavreck, 2009), it is expected that newspapers and magazines are ideologically slanted (Groeling, 2010; Groseclose and Milyo, 2005). In Brazil, the media is biased because the newspapers and TV channels tend to support different parties, although they don't assume that. The 540 short TV ads are also not analyzed here. Although the content of their messages is relevant, we assume they are repetitions of what is showed in the HGPE, therefore, any result found here should be understood as an underestimation of the true effect added by the small TV ads.

voters were satisfied with the state of the economy, they tended to switch vote intention from Dilma to other candidates.

## 4.1 Hypothesis

Generally speaking, we will investigate the relationship of the centrality and salience of economy in Dilma's campaign, and her performance in poll rates in the 2010 presidential election. We test, therefore, the following hypothesis:

- H1: If voters vote retrospectively based on economic standards, then the greater amount of time dedicated to economic issues in Dilma's campaign, the higher should be her vote support in polls, given the good standing of Brazilian government.
- H2: If the competitors find an efficient and effective insurgent strategy against Dilma, then the voters who are most affected by the insurgent message should change more intensively the vote support from Dilma to other candidates.

## 5 Dilma's Campaign and the Clarifying Message

The HGPE is a legal dispositive<sup>8</sup> that provides candidates and parties free time on radio and television to broadcast their main campaign messages ('Programs') for 45 days before the date of the election. Parties with presidential candidates dispose of 50 minutes time daily, in two emissions on open and cable networks: in the afternoon and prime time evening, 25 minutes time each. One issue is aired from 1:00 to 1:25pm, the other from 8:30 to 8:55pm. Broadcast time for each competitor is proportional to the number of seats that each party or electoral coalition in parliament (see Table 1 for time distribution in 2010). Moreover, Brazilian legislation provides an additional 30-minute time slot, to be distributed

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<sup>8</sup>Law 9.504/1997

among the candidates, according to the same proportional criterion, to broadcast a number of short TV ads lasting up to 1 minute each, transmitted over the normal programming of all the stations, from 8:00am to midnight. Campaigns are not allowed to buy additional time, or give any other message out of HGPE.

Because it constitutes the main candidate's propaganda instrument, HGPE receives great attention from campaign heads. For example, most of the electoral coalitions formed take into account the mounting of time the addition of each partner (political party) would bring to the total time available for the candidate. A big deal of human and material resources is mobilized, so that the emissions have the highest possible efficiency. The amount of money invested in hiring political marketing professionals, research houses, audience monitoring services, TV production crews, among others, is probably the main item of expenditure in election campaigns in Brazil.<sup>9</sup> As Jardim (2004) and Campos (2009) show, in fact, commercial airtime and expenditures related to the HGPE correspond roughly to 70% of the total election expenditures estimates.

Table 1: HGPE Time Distribution by Candidate in 2010

Candidate	Time	Coalition
Dilma Rousseff	10'38"54'''	PT/ PRB/ PDT/ PMDB/ PTN/ PSC/ PTC/ PSB/ PR/ PC do B
José Serra	7'18"54'''	PSDB/ PTB/ DEM/ PMN/ PTdoB
Marina Silva	1'23"22''	PV

Source: Superior Electoral Court (TSE) Resolution 23.320, Brasília, August, 10, 2010

Political identity elements which, in other countries like the U.S., contribute to forge a link between voters and candidates, such as party identification, conventions, and rallies, are less relevant in the Brazilian case. Thus, HGPE is the main space responsible for presenting candidates and their proposals to the public. Moreover, the large country's

<sup>9</sup>See PT financial committee report for 2010 elections at <http://spce2010.tse.jus.br>.

territorial dimensions as well as the resulting displacement difficulties for candidates, lead campaigns to occur practically in the virtual world of television. Campaign activities receive mainstream media coverage, but the events are handled by each candidate's HGPE in much more detail, and of course, with the persuasive bias of each campaign. HGPE time available for each candidate becomes a crucial variable, especially when competitors with very different levels of familiarity to the voter are participating in the contest, as was the case in 2010. In the beginning of the election year, Serra was known to more than 60% of voters, while those who had information about Dilma and Marina were less than 30% (CNI-IBOPE, 2010).

Given its importance, we coded the entire set of HGPE programs for the leading candidate in 2010 elections classifying its content by issue. We took into account the temporal sequence content of 22 advertising programs broadcast by Dilma's campaign between August 17 and September 29, 2010. The contents were timed and classified into 8 different categories as follows:

1. **Diagnostics:** refer to content mentioning Brazil's social and demographic situation. It is fundamentally the HGPE section in which the candidate explored the positive national statistics comparative to previous governments;
2. **Economy:** content on the country's current economic situation, its achievements and prospects. This is the section in which the candidate shows and reinforces the country's good outcomes under the current government. The main topic presented in this section was the investment amount done by the government, the number of jobs created in the last eight years, and the drastic inequality reduction in the same time frame;
3. **Emotions:** focuses campaign events, favorable testimonies, music, pictures, and

stimulant images. This section can be considered the HGPE part in which voters received positive signals to make the program less boring and more appealing to the people;

4. **Biography:** information about the candidate, her political career, professional and administrative achievements, personal relationships, family and friends;
5. **Lula:** laudatory content on the incumbent, his career and accomplishments, his leadership and contribution to the progress of the country;
6. **Negative:** attacks on her competitors or proposals;
7. **Polls:** news about Dilma's leading position in the opinion polls; and
8. **Proposals:** discussion of conjuncture topics, and proposals for future achievements. This is the moment of the election in which the candidate defines her position on police issues raised during the campaign.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of available time each program devoted to each issue and its evolution over time.<sup>10</sup> The variation is visible, especially concerning the amount of time dedicated to economic issues. We see that at Dilma's HGPE onset, its content strongly focused on issues like biography and economy, seeking to present a relatively unknown candidate to the voter, and at the same time, referring to the growth achieved during the second term of Lula da Silva. 'Proposals', at first, received relatively little space, and President Lula, as the candidate's main guarantor, anchored the programs claiming credit for his government achievements. The next campaign phase, corresponding to the second and third broadcast weeks, was characterized by an

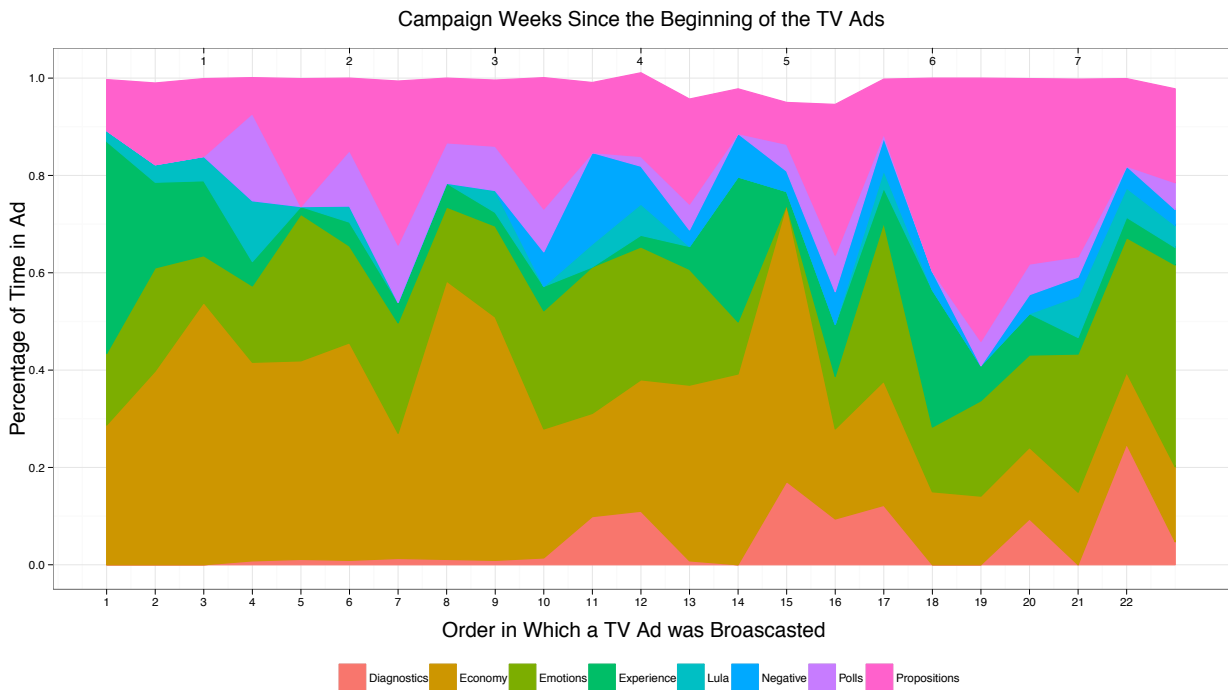
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<sup>10</sup>In coding the HGPE we did not include part of the program not classified in any of the categories defined before. Such time period contains transitions, openings and endings to make the program look like a real TV piece.



emphasis on emotional content and proposals, but strongly combined with references to economic issues. It is easy to see that emotional and economic content dominated the HGPE at the expense of biographical information and citations about Lula at that time.

Figure 2: Percentage of Time Dilma’s Ads Spent by Subject in the First Round, 2010

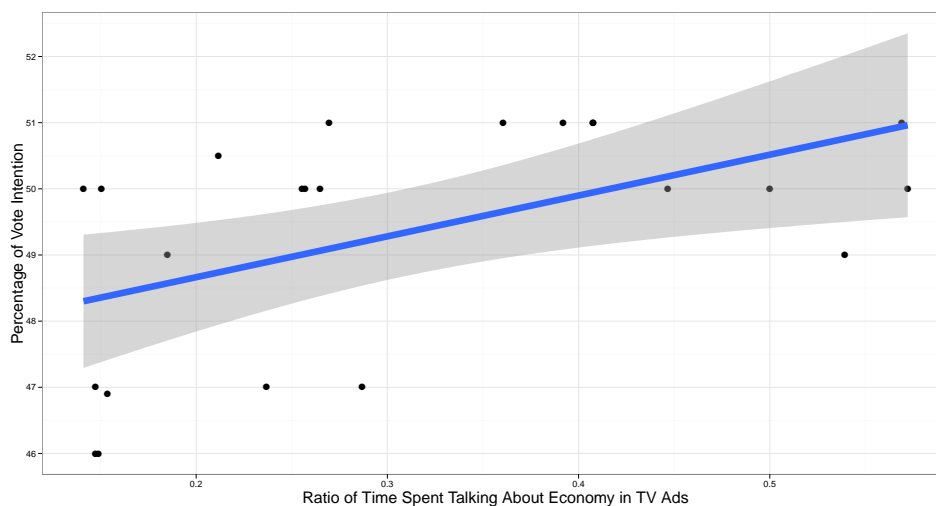


Between the third and fifth weeks, the campaign shows a first important emphasis change, with a strong decrease in economy, a significant increase in emotional content and early negative messages against competitors. After almost disappearing at the beginning of this phase, by the end of the fourth week, candidate’s biographical information strongly returned. Proposals also occupied more space in this period, combined with information about changes in the country during Lula’s mandates (diagnosis). The seven programs broadcast in the final two weeks, however, clearly mark the sudden emphasis change in speech and content that, we claim, ultimately altered the election first round outcome.

This change is even more surprising because it occurs at a time when Dilma reached the highest voting support levels.

After a single program (15th) when her HGPE briefly resumes the most profitable line of emphasis, showing a strong content about economy and biography, Dilma's campaign enters a content sequence whose standard totally differs from all that had been aired before. Economy issues loses ground dramatically, as well as Lula and biographical references. In exchange, there is a large increase in emotional content and proposals, here understood as a side discussion on topics such as abortion and religion. This pattern will not suffer significant changes until the end of the campaign in the first round. This development corresponds, in the polls, to the cessation of growth of Dilma and a corresponding increase in the percentage of voters willing to support Serra or Marina, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 3: Poll Results for Presidential Election by Time Spent on Economy, 2010



Although the variation in the time spent by Dilma talking about economy does exist, it does not necessarily implies variations in how likely are voters to change their attitudes in regard to the government candidate. But to assess the plausibility of this idea we plot

Dilma's campaign time proportion spent on economy in the HGPE with the percentage of Dilma's vote support in the polls two days after the broadcast. As can be seen in Figure 3, there is a strong correlation between both variables. Comparing the two sets of data expressed in Figure 1 and Figure 2 we observe that when the proportion of economic time in the HGPE was small (around 20% of the time), Dilma's vote intention dropped to levels like 45% and 47%; while that at times the proportion of economy in the TV ads reached 50% of the time, the voting intentions significantly rose to over 51% level, exceeding the threshold required for a first round victory. Although very suggestive, this correlation is not a sufficient evidence for a causal relationship between Dilma's HGPE content change and her drop in opinion polls. In the next section we address this problem more carefully trying to identify changes in voter preference using individual data on Brazilian voters during the last 40 days of the first round of the campaign.

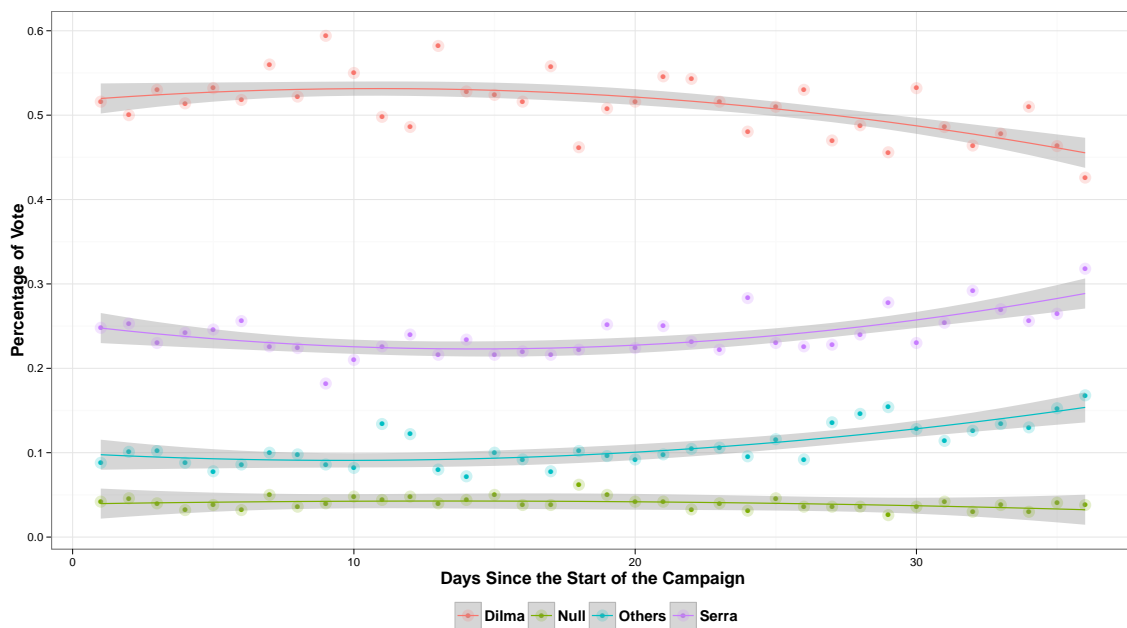
## 6 How Conservative Voters Changed Their Minds

Although the correlation between HGPE time on economy and Dilma's poll rates shows a clear positive trend, it is insufficient evidence for the argument we claim here. In order to demonstrate that the insurgent strategy played by Dilma's opponents was the main reason for Dilma's failure in the first round, we need to investigate voters' attitudes when her campaign discourse changed. We have already shown that the government candidate switched her message after 35 days of the campaign on TV. Now, we need to assess whether or not such change affected the public's vote intentions as we claim. Figure 4 shows the predicted voting trend for all three relevant Presidential candidates in 2010. Results indicate that while Dilma loses strength in the end of the first round, her competitors, especially Marina Silva, observe a huge increase in public support.

Pooling all the data from different poll houses, as we did in Figure 1, or plotting the tracking data from Vox Populi, we find the same results. In the last section we

suggested there is a strong correlation between the amount of time Dilma talked about economy and her poll rates. Given this scenario, a question remains: Why did Dilma's campaign message change, if the data shows the strategy was working very well? As we claimed before, Dilma had to change her message in order to face insurgent attacks from her opponents. Serra and Marina started airing information on TV and newspapers about Dilma's stance on abortion. Such position emerged in a TV debate prior to the beginning of the electoral year. Dilma was asked about her opinion regarding abortion, for which she replied: 'I think abortion should be decriminalized in Brazil. It is an absurd that we still don't have that here.'<sup>11</sup>

Figure 4: Tracking Poll Results for Brazilian Presidential Election, 2010



When Serra's campaign managers found out about such position, they started priming the other debates and his HGPE content with the idea that Dilma had a pro-choice bias. Such strategy worked quite well because Dilma kept denying her stand, whereas the

<sup>11</sup>Watch video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdjN9Lk67Io>

video from the beginning of the election started gaining popularity on the internet and other media sources. After that, not being able to state her 'true' position, nor to avoid it, Dilma's campaign decided to respond to it. Her point of view on abortion was 'constrained': First, she made public speeches in which she refused the label of an anti-life candidate. Secondly, she put together a set of catholic and protestant congressmen and made them sign with her a letter addressed to Brazilian Christians, in which she committed herself not to change any law related to abortion. Finally, she started talking about abortion on every TV debate she participated. In many of them, she was not very successful in denying the position, which further complicated her situation.<sup>12</sup>

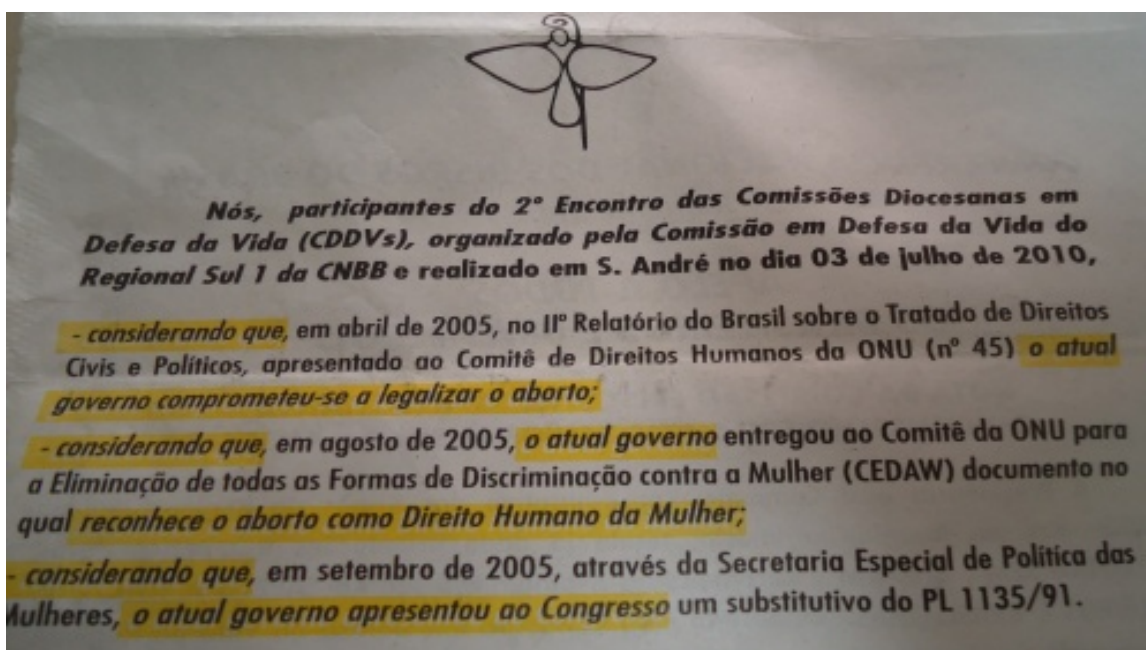
Christian community promptly reacted. Catholic and Protestant church members began not only to preach against Dilma, but also to distribute pamphlets within the cults explaining why not to vote for the woman who advocated abortion in Brazil. The anti-Dilma manifest was signed by bishops Nelson Westrupp, Benedito Beni dos Santos and Ailton José dos Santos, who are from São Paulo, where José Serra had large political influence. Figure 5 shows part of the manifest distributed in many Brazilian cities. The document's main message stated that 'the current government is committed to legalize abortion', therefore, 'they [the Christians of São Paulo State] should not vote for candidates favorable to abortion', in a clear reference to Dilma Rouseff.

Given what we have argued so far, we should expect that Dilma's failure in the first round of the election would be due to a conservative voters attitude swing in her regard. A very large population of Christians, either Catholic or Protestants - roughly 85% - composes Brazil's electorate. The intersection of Christian faith and abortion has a long and complex history. The Catholic Church states that 'human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception' (Vatican, 2012). Protestant views on abortion

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<sup>12</sup>Watch video: <http://noticias.uol.com.br/ultnot/multi/2010/08/18/0402193668E49913C6.jhtm>

Figure 5: Pamphlet Bishops of the Brazilian Catholic Church Used Against Dilma

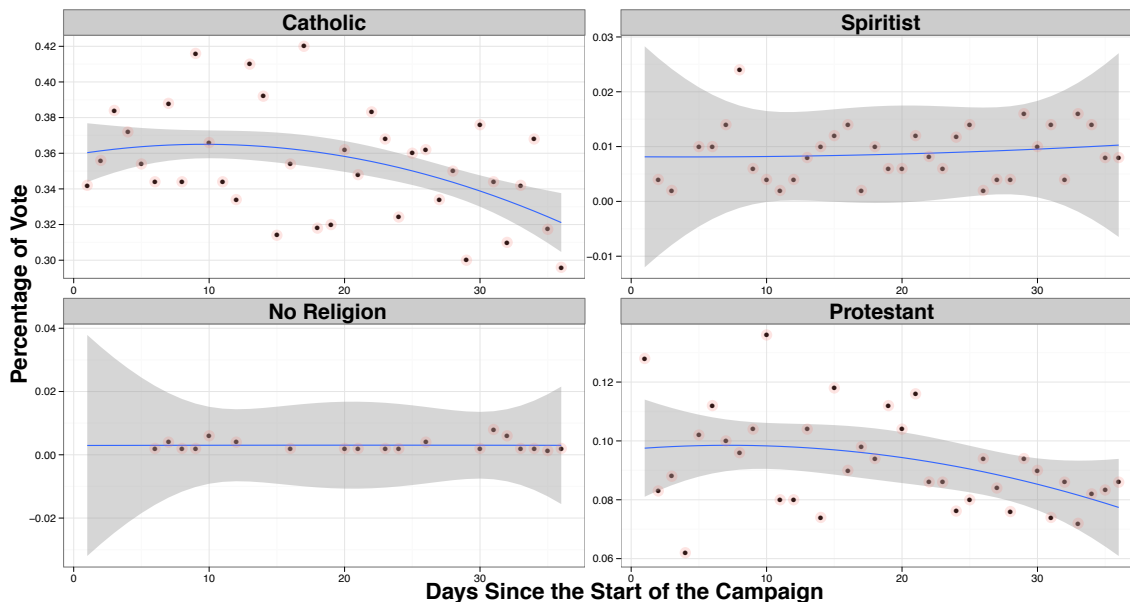


vary considerably, but conservative Protestants, the majority in Brazil, tend to be pro-life. Given their values concerning the importance of life, and the necessity to guarantee that the human beings do not intervene in God's provisions, the opposition attack weakened Dilma in an issue she could not deal with properly. As a former socialist and gorilla activist, she had a hard task to convince people she had changed. Or at least, that she was not looking forward to her term to change the law in Brazil.

If this argument were true, we should expect that among Dilma voters who left her behind in the end of the campaign were the conservatives self-identified as Christians. To assess that, we model the vote intention rate for Dilma in the tracking poll by religion. The results are striking (see Figure 6): first, the Christians support toward Dilma decreased significantly over time (note the drop on the predicted vote rate among Catholics and Protestants); but secondly, they did it in the end of the first round when the insurgent message was presented. Among Catholics, the drop in Dilma's vote intention is predicted

as 6 percentage points, and for the Protestants, the predicted drop is of about 4 percentage points. Observe that there is no change in the predicted vote intention among Spiritists and those without religion.

Figure 6: Dilma's Voting Intention Over Time by Religion



The evidence we have so far is suggestive of what we were expecting, but the models are still incomplete. To properly assess the second hypothesis presented in this paper we run a generalized linear mixed-model that takes into account the longitudinal trend of vote intention. Although the data does not present time-correlation between individuals that answered the surveys, it does present time-correlation among cluster of individuals who are representative in the samples used by Vox Populi. It means we need to control how similar the pattern of voters by sex, age, region, and education is. Poll results in Brazil also indicate such characteristics to be the most predictive of vote attitude.

The results suggest Dilma's electorate were mainly comprised of three groups: males, poor, and religious. They also indicate her support decreased over time, specifically

Table 2: Generalized Linear Mixed-Model for Voting in Favor of Dilma

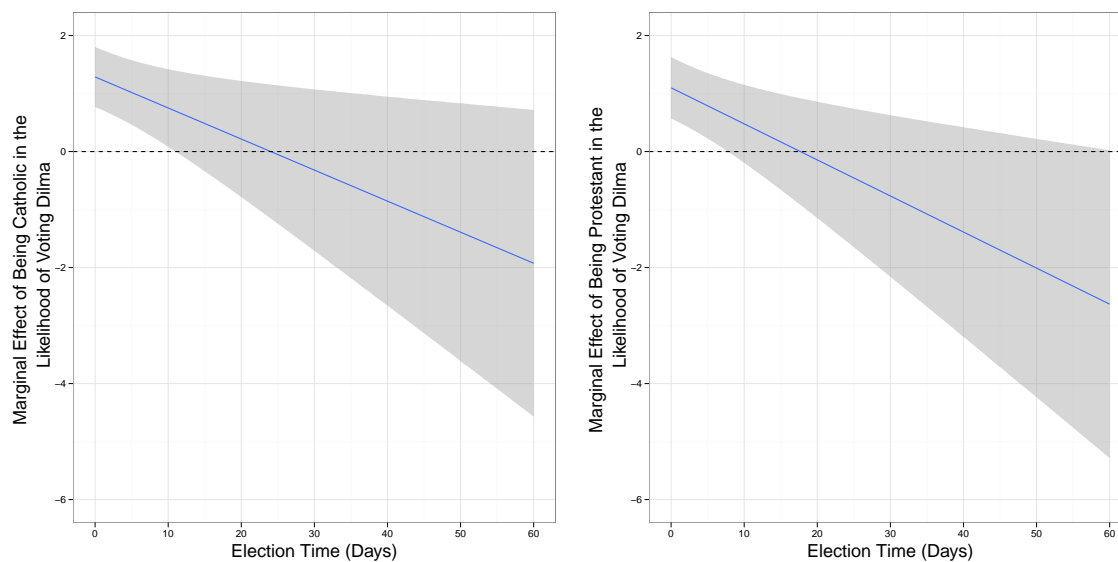
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Time	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.04* (0.00)	0.04* (0.02)
Catholic		0.67*** (0.13)	0.60*** (0.13)	0.59*** (0.13)	1.29*** (0.26)
Protestant		0.34* (0.13)	0.28* (0.13)	0.43** (0.15)	1.10*** (0.27)
Espiritualist		0.18 (0.17)	0.12 (0.17)	0.09 (0.27)	0.88* (0.36)
Other		0.50*** (0.14)	0.42** (0.14)	0.28 (0.16)	0.99*** (0.28)
No religion		0.28 (0.28)	0.20 (0.29)	-0.78. (0.56)	-0.12 (0.57)
Male			0.15*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)
Catholic*Time				-0.05* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)
Protestant*Time				-0.06** (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)
Espiritualist*Time				-0.05* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)
Other*Time				-0.04* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)
Age					Yes
Education					Yes
Income					Yes
Race					Yes
Random Effects - Variance					
Municipality	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.27
State	0.64	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.27
<i>N</i>	19500	19500	17565	17565	17565
BIC	22453	22407	22397	22422	22288
Log Lik	-11212	-11164	-11154	-11147	-11012

\*\*\*  $p < 0.000$  \*\*  $p < 0.001$  \*  $p < 0.01$  ·  $p < 0.05$



amongst religious voters. But more importantly, the regression results point to the direction we speculated before. In fact, Dilma’s failure to win in the first round of the presidential election is due to religious voters migration toward her opponents. To assess that properly, we present in Figure 7 the marginal effect of being either Catholic or Protestant over the likelihood of voting for Dilma in the first round of the election as a function of time. The direction and size of the marginal effects support the argument we propose here. Both Catholics and Protestants are predicted to ‘abandon’ Dilma in the end of the first round of the electoral cycle.

Figure 7: Marginal Effect of Religion on Dilma’s Vote Intention, 2010



As reported before, Dilma failed to win the elections in the first round by a tiny margin of votes - approximately 2%. This is consistent with what our model predicts about the behavior of religious voters. While in the beginning of the election Catholics and Protestants supported her, in the end they were the main responsible group for the second round. They left Dilma, as we argue, because of the campaign messages about abortion. This is not true for all voters, though, the non-religious did not drop their support. The

same happened among Spiritists who do not have any constraint on this issue.

## 7 Final Remarks

The results of this paper show that the message matters even during one electoral campaign cycle. We demonstrate that for the case of Brazil. Initially, Dilma Rousseff had the support of the electorate majority, who was satisfied with the country's economic performance. As soon as her main opponents adopted a successful insurgent message, she was urged to modify her own campaign content emphasis. As a consequence, there was a slight, decisive support swing among conservative voters that led to the need of the second round.

To show that the message change produced a switch in voters support, we followed two strategies. First, we analyzed Dilma Rousseff's campaign messages content on the HGPE and mapped her discourse changes through the campaign weeks. Secondly, we used the most desegregated vote data produced at that time, a tracking poll conducted by Vox Populi. Combining aggregate and individual level data we were able to present strong empirical evidence for our argument. The government candidate failed to win in the first round as a consequence of the influence the campaign message had on conservative voters.

Such finding suggests that campaigns are able to alter electoral results, even if the number of influenced voters is marginal. Although Dilma was still the best-voted candidate in the election, she suffered the risk of defeat in the second round by not guaranteeing the continuation of her initial economic message. The remarkable fact is that Dilma discourse change needed to happen or otherwise the loss could have been even bigger. As we showed, religious voters were indeed affected by the insurgent message switching from Dilma to her main competitors.

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