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1

Social Communication and Voting Behavior

The gift of speech . . . proves that man is a more social animal
than the bees.

—Aristotle¹

THE PUZZLE OF VOTE CHOICE IN BRAZIL

Even by Brazil's lofty standards, the October 2014 presidential campaign was exciting. Though surges by outsider candidates and other kinds of momentum swings have been frequent in the country's recent presidential contests, the 2014 contest contained all the drama of a *telenovela* and a closely fought soccer match. Early in the year, President Dilma Rousseff of the left-of-center Workers' Party (PT) held a commanding lead in the polls, a lead so safe that she was seemingly on course to win in the first round of Brazil's majority runoff system (see figure 1.1). In a distant second place was Aécio Neves of the center-right Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB). As in Brazil's previous five elections, it thus seemed that the top two finishers would come, despite the country's 30-plus political parties, from these two parties.

Once campaigning had officially begun in July, however, Eduardo Campos of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) began to surge in the polls. After nearly a month of steady gains, Campos was nipping at Aécio's heels for second place, contending for a spot in the now increasingly likely second round. Tragically, Campos died in a plane crash on August 13, but his running mate, Marina Silva, immediately grabbed the party's baton and continued its ascent. Marina was the ideal replacement.* She was a known quantity who four years earlier had earned 19 percent of the first-round vote atop her own presidential ticket (for a different party). Capitalizing on a surge of sympathy for the deceased Campos, she zoomed past Aécio in the polls. By early September, with just a

*Throughout this book, we refer to politicians, after the first mention, with Brazilian shorthand conventions; these sometimes eschew the formality of English by using first names or nicknames.

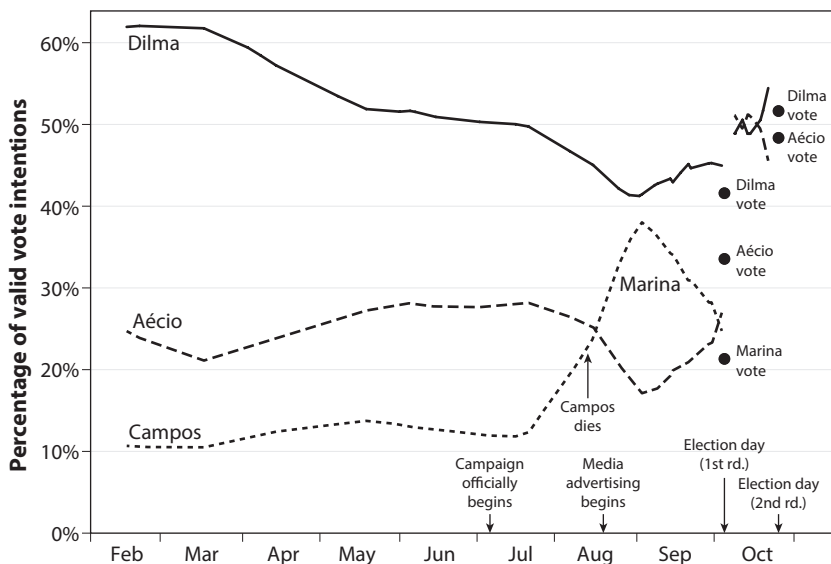


FIGURE 1.1 The Evolution of Vote Intentions for Major Presidential Candidates in Brazil 2014

Notes: Each line (LOWESS-smoothed with a bandwidth of .25) summarizes results from nationally representative polls and represents a candidate’s estimated percentage of valid vote intentions (dropping undecided respondents). Actual election-day results are indicated with circle markers. Only the top three finishers are depicted.
Sources: Datafolha, IBOPE, Vox Populi.

month remaining, Marina had a 20-point lead on Aécio, even reaching a statistical tie with the front-runner Dilma in a few polls.

Then Marina’s fortunes began to unravel. No single gaffe or mistake triggered her slide. In fact, Marina ran a disciplined campaign. Over the final 30 days, however, her support cratered almost as quickly as it had risen. By the eve of election day, she had fallen into a tie with Aécio in the contest for a second-round spot, and voters went to the polls on October 5 genuinely uncertain which of the two would earn the right to face the incumbent Dilma in the second-round election (also “runoff”). Was Brazil on the verge of producing the world’s first female-only presidential runoff? Or would the country see its fourth consecutive PT-PSDB runoff?

In the end, the result was another PT-PSDB runoff, and it was not even close. Aécio defied the final polls by a wide margin, beating Marina by 12 points and finishing closer to Dilma than to Marina. After peaking near 40 percent of vote intentions in early September, Marina fell to just 21 percent on election day, only a minor improvement over her performance four years earlier. The second round began in a tie, but Dilma opened a small lead toward the end of the

three-week campaign period and, in Brazil's closest-ever presidential contest, squeaked out a three-point victory.

This horse-race intrigue poses a major puzzle about the nature of Brazilian voting behavior and election outcomes. On the one hand, the election featured a huge and fascinating amount of change in voter preferences. It is clear from figure 1.1 that many voters were changing their minds as the contest unfolded. By our own panel-data estimates, at least 40 percent of the electorate shifted their vote intentions across party lines at some point during the campaign. This represents a high degree of volatility by international standards. On the other hand, this volatility ended in a predictable outcome. Aggregate vote intentions before the campaign's start were similar to the eventual first-round vote totals. Moreover, because pre-campaign vote intentions favored the two traditional parties, the campaign restored *os mesmos de sempre*, the same ones as always, to their usual places in the second round. What explains this aggregate predictability despite the high rates of individual-level voter volatility?

Some Incorrect Answers

To scholars of US campaigns and voting behavior, this puzzle of short-term change amidst medium-term stability has a familiar ring to it: enlightened preferences.² During political campaigns, many US voters vacillate between indecision and a particular candidate, thus making aggregate vote intentions somewhat volatile. Election outcomes, however, are highly predictable based on the political and economic fundamentals (e.g., macroeconomic health and the distribution of partisanship) in place before a campaign's start. Moreover, virtually all US voters end up choosing the candidate in line with the partisan predispositions and group affiliations they held before the campaign began.³ Thus in the US a campaign serves to bring voters home to the partisan choice that has lurked beneath the surface all along—the one based on their most informed, and thus enlightened, preferences.

Although a powerful predictor in the US context, this explanation does not fit the Brazilian case. Because Brazil is a new democracy with an extremely high number of parties, Brazilians' partisan predispositions are weak.⁴ In any given cross-sectional survey in 2014, just 15 to 20 percent of the electorate identified with the PT, less than half of Dilma's first-round total.⁵ Panel data show that only half of Dilma voters declared themselves to be PT sympathizers at some point during the campaign, and the PT is the party that had Brazil's *largest* base of citizens. Aécio's PSDB and Marina's PSB had virtually no mass bases. Just 13 percent of his voters and 7 percent of hers declared themselves to be PSDB or PSB sympathizers, respectively, at least once during the campaign. Clearly, most voters were not returning to an underlying partisan leaning over the course of the campaign. Moreover, the sorting of voters into pro- and anti-incumbent camps based on stable economic perceptions cannot explain

the volatility: most of the switching occurred between the nonincumbent candidates, Aécio and Marina. Finally, unlike US voters, Brazilian voters do mull different party choices, as evidenced by the 40 percent who crossed party lines. They do not simply end up where they began. The group of individuals lined up to vote for Aécio at the campaign's start was very different from the group that ultimately voted for Aécio on election day. In summary, the enlightened preferences argument does not export well to Brazil.

Strategic voting poses another possible answer to the puzzle. Perhaps the high degree of volatility arose as voters, and particularly strongly anti-Dilma voters, sought to coordinate around the most viable opponent to her candidacy, an instinct that would maintain Brazil's stubborn two-party duopoly in presidential elections.⁶ Yet this hypothesis contains a logical failure: Brazil's president is chosen by majority, not plurality, rule. Two-round systems with strategic voting should reduce to three-party, not two-party, competition. In other words, there was no strategic reason for sincere Marina supporters to abandon her for Aécio, especially when she had a 20-point lead on him. At that point, the contest had reduced to a battle between the two for a second-round slot. Moreover, polling results for simulated second-round scenarios showed Marina to be the better competitor against Dilma. Strategically minded Dilma-haters should have voted for Marina.

Perhaps Aécio rode a wave of vote buying into the second round. After all, he had the backing of most of Brazil's conservative, and largely clientelistic, establishment parties, while Marina had virtually no machine infrastructure supporting her. Yet no empirical evidence or even speculation exists that a vote-buying operation of this scope occurred on Aécio's behalf. It would be a hard operation to keep secret, as Marina lost an estimated 20 million votes, nearly one-fifth of the electorate, in five weeks. In fact, research on Brazil shows that targeted vote-buying attempts have limited relevance for presidential politics because of the country's federalized and fragmented party system. Almost all vote-buying and party-contacting efforts are made on behalf of municipal and legislative candidates,⁷ and these lower-level candidates avoid making upward endorsements of presidential contenders who are lagging in the polls.⁸ Evidence from the broader literature on Latin American clientelism shows that vote-buying attempts are ineffective at producing this amount of preference change because parties do not even target swing voters.⁹

Perhaps the solution to the puzzle lies in the mass media and the relative balance of partisan information broadcast during the campaign. On this front, Marina's campaign did face a major disadvantage. In Brazil campaign commercials in the traditional electronic media (television and radio) are strictly regulated. The Federal Electoral Tribunal prohibits commercials before the final seven weeks of the campaign (figure 1.1), and airtime is allocated to candidates in proportion to the size of the legislative coalitions backing them. Hailing from a smaller party, Marina received half the airtime that Aécio did, and just one-sixth that of Dilma. Media consumption thus exposed citizens to rel-

atively little pro-Marina content, potentially spelling her eventual demise. Two facts, however, undermine this hypothesis. First, figure 1.1 shows that Marina's surge continued several weeks after electronic media campaigning began, a fact leading some observers to conclude at the time that the amount of media exposure was unrelated to success.¹⁰ Second, among voters who had expressed a mid-campaign intention to vote for Marina, those *least* exposed to campaign commercials were *more* likely to abandon her, according to our panel survey data. In other words, attention to electronic media correlated negatively, not positively, with changing one's mind. Direct exposure to the partisan balance in campaign commercials does not explain vote switching.

Socially Informed Preferences

Our solution to the puzzle lies in an arena of political life that scholars of Latin American politics have largely ignored: the arena of horizontal social ties and informal political discussion. During election campaigns, nearly every Brazilian voter converses about the candidates and parties. Some do it just once, some do it many times every day, and most do it at a frequency falling between these two extremes. Nearly all these conversations occur between peers—between spouses, siblings, work colleagues, neighbors, soccer teammates, lifelong friends, and so on. Such conversations thus occur between individuals with *horizontal* social ties, meaning no political elite is involved. Occasionally they occur between individuals connected by vertical ties—between a common voter and a politician or a party broker—but these instances are relatively rare. The vast majority of voters' political conversations occur not with a politician or a party worker. Instead, they occur spontaneously among otherwise socially connected individuals.

In Brazil's roller-coaster campaign of 2014, the voters most likely to change preferences across party lines were not those returning to an under-the-surface partisan leaning, nor those bought off by a party, nor those settling for second best to defeat their least-liked candidate, nor those who watched the most campaign commercials. According to our survey data, the voters most likely to switch preferences across party lines were those who had discussed politics with peers who disagreed with their mid-campaign vote intentions. These peers often persuaded them to change. Just as important, the voters least likely to switch were those who discussed politics only with peers who agreed with them—peers who reinforced their mid-campaign vote intentions. Between these two types of voters, the difference in the probability of switching preferences across party lines was more than 35 percentage points. Conversations with social ties produced both preference change and preference stability.

A model of horizontal social influence addresses the puzzle of short-term volatility amidst medium-term aggregate stability. We show that in Brazil the most important means of social influence during campaigns is deference to role-model peers. Many voters who are relatively uninformed and overwhelmed

by politics seek advice on how to vote from discussion partners who have more political expertise than themselves. Thus the vote choices of the less informed are influenced by political experts in their social milieu. Over the course of the campaign, voters eventually settle on what we call their socially informed preferences, meaning the candidate preferences they acquire upon being influenced by their social ties. This process of social influence creates the high rates of vote switching in Brazil, as many voters update their preferences based on cues they receive from the political opinion leaders in their everyday lives.

Paradoxically, social influence also produces medium-term aggregate stability, meaning the main candidate contenders at the campaign's onset are the top finishers on election day, even if candidates who were initially also-rans experience compelling mid-campaign momentum surges. The deference to more knowledgeable peers produces this result because political experts tend to have more stable preferences. Acquiring socially informed preferences from opinion leaders brings less informed voters in line with more stable and predictable voting patterns. To be clear, the campaign exerts major influence in this formulation and determines the winner. In 2014 at least 40 percent of voters switched preferences across party lines, and relatively few of these simply circled back to pre-campaign predispositions. But polling surges by initially weak candidates are hard to sustain, as most voters end up choosing a candidate who was running well at the campaign's onset. Social influence induces a modicum of aggregate preference stability in Brazil's otherwise weak and volatile party system.

Brazil is not alone in these campaign patterns and voting behaviors. Latin American presidential campaigns often feature bandwagon effects and momentum swings that are large by international standards (e.g., Argentina 2015, Chile 2005, Ecuador 2006, Guatemala 2015, Mexico 2006, Peru 1990 and 2006).¹¹ Sometimes these are momentous enough to eradicate the traditional parties and players, but more typically they maintain the candidates who were strong at the campaign's start.¹² The process of horizontal political communication and voter gravitation toward socially informed preferences explains, we suspect, these aggregate campaign patterns in Latin America's other new democracies as well.

SCHOLARLY CONCEPTIONS OF THE LATIN AMERICAN VOTER

This book illuminates the influence of horizontal social networks and political discussion on a central political act, voting behavior, in Latin America. It is thus a study of political communication and political intermediation. Political communication is the process whereby political information flows to and

through a mass public. In modern societies, citizens learn and form opinions about politicians, policies, and politics through different information intermediaries, such as newspapers, Facebook, or party brokers.

The systematic study of political communication and political intermediaries in Latin America emerged rather recently, and it has focused almost exclusively on intermediaries of a top-down, vertical nature—namely, local elites and mass media. The largest body of research focuses on one of the *least* common forms of intermediation: direct vertical ties to politicians, parties, and politicized organizations, and especially the clientelistic form of these ties.¹³ For example, research on clientelism, which predates the region's present democratic era, is now a booming area whose volume heavily outweighs research on all other intermediary types.¹⁴ The focus on these top-down sources of persuasive political information reveals an assumption among scholars that formal organizational structures (parties, labor unions, social movements, churches, participatory budgeting forums) are the primary source of political information for voters.

Direct vertical ties to elites, however, are relatively rare and unrepresentative sources of political information. Vote-buying payoffs are delivered, by the most generous election-year estimates, to just a quarter of the citizenry, and large majorities of citizens expect to receive no private handouts during campaigns.¹⁵ Steeped in hierarchy and transactional norms, clientelistic ties also lack the sincerity and intimacy of horizontal social ties with family and friends. As this research area has grown, moreover, its cumulative findings question the ability of clientelism to explain the changes in campaign preferences and momentum swings that are so common in Latin America.¹⁶ Evidence that party machines prefer to pay off swing and potentially volatile voters is surprisingly thin. If anything, machines seem more likely to target individuals who are already their loyalists—to reinforce, reward, and mobilize.¹⁷ In other words, changing the recipient's vote preference is often not the goal of the party machine or broker.

Latin American parties also engage in non-clientelistic forms of citizen contact. During campaigns, parties canvass, distribute leaflets, and hold rallies. These activities occur so infrequently, however, that they are but a minor source of political information for voters. For that reason, they are rarely objects of research.¹⁸ Similarly, the vast majority of Latin American citizens are not party members and belong to no politicized organizations. In fact, most belong to no secondary association at all.¹⁹ In sum, the top-down flows of persuasive political information that occur through direct vertical ties to politicized structures represent just a small share of political communications in Latin American societies.

A much smaller body of literature looks at what is nonetheless a far more frequent form of vertical political intermediation, mass media. Parties proselytize through print, broadcasting technologies, and the internet in the form of campaign advertisements, televised speech making, party websites, and

other messaging techniques. Media professionals—newspaper journalists, TV news anchors, and leaders of media conglomerates—also contribute original content to the arena of political communication, with many injecting their own partisan biases.²⁰ Latin Americans are far more likely to get political information from mass media than from direct contact with parties and politicians, as a large majority consume some political news content at least once per week.²¹ Because of the near ubiquity of mass media in Latin American societies and the fact that citizens have, at most, only occasional direct contact with politicians and parties, the vast majority of information about politics that circulates through a mass public originates from a media source. As a result, the relative distribution of scholarly attention to direct party contacts and mass media is inversely related to each one's actual importance for the acquisition of political information.

Still, the literature on mass media and citizen political behavior in Latin America has its own flaws. Although this literature focuses more on the heart of the matter, it is grounded in an incomplete model of influence. Models of media effects presume that attitudinal change is correlated positively with the degree of a citizen's exposure to specific media content. In other words, media influence occurs only among those directly exposed to it.²² The problem with this assumption is that citizens talk about media content. Media stories and campaign commercials quickly become fodder for horizontal, peer-to-peer communications about politics and politicians. Consider these remarks from some of our Brazilian interviewees:

At work, we read the newspaper and then comment on one thing or the other.
[TA1.1]*

[In my family] we didn't watch political news together. We left the TV on, and when someone saw something of interest, they commented on it.^[TA1.2]

[My friends and I] talk about the [political] videos that we see . . . Sometimes, one of us shares a video with our WhatsApp group. Then we always talk about it . . . We talk a lot about the videos that we share.^[TA1.3]

The truism that people talk about the news means that “*empirical studies of media impact that fail to consider media's interaction with social networks risk bias.*”²³ For instance, the diffusion of a persuasive media message through social networks weakens the estimated relationship between media exposure and the probability of opinion change, even though social networks are actually disseminating that mediated information to those who were not directly exposed to it.²⁴ In fact, studies of campaign effects in Latin America often find that those

*The superscripted letters and numbers behind each quotation give the location of the original Portuguese in the Translation Appendix, which can be found online at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/andybaker>.

who are the least exposed to political news are *more* likely than the highly exposed to change vote intentions.²⁵

Furthermore, the literature's overall emphasis on vertical intermediaries—both direct and mediated information from politicians—assumes a level of trust toward elites that is often lacking in Latin America. Many Latin American voters confront self-serving information from elites with a deep skepticism, as politicians are typically not a credible breed.²⁶ For this reason, an exclusive focus on vertical intermediaries struggles to understand the following Brazilian voters interviewed by our research team:

INTERVIEWER: How do you decide how to vote?

VOTER 1: I speak with people. . . . I don't believe what [politicians] say . . . If one comes to talk to me, I don't listen.

INTERVIEWER: What about the free electoral hour [i.e., the televised bloc of campaign commercials]?

VOTER 2: Nobody watches that! People only watch it when there's a clown show, when Tiririca [a famous clown elected as federal deputy] or someone like him is on. . . . It's a waste of time, just lies. We see who gets things done by talking with one another . . . Aside from that, it's all lies.^[TA1.4]

Clearly, both voters distrust vertical intermediaries but trust their family and friends.

Armed only with vertical understandings of political intermediation, research on Latin American voters “conceives the citizen as an independently self-contained decision-maker,” ignoring voters’ embeddedness in peer networks.²⁷ For this reason, even when referring to groups and so-called social factors, research on Latin American voting behavior is dominated by economic and psychological approaches that see voters as social isolates. The economic perspective envisions the causes of vote choice as some combination of policy interests, clientelistic payoffs, and incumbent performance evaluations.²⁸ A social-structuralist approach to voting coalitions and behavior resides within this economic camp, treating groups with shared demographic traits as collections of people with similar economic and policy interests.²⁹ The more psychological view of Latin American voters stresses their affinity for a party, their tendency to succumb to persuasive appeals by candidates, and their emotional orientations toward politics and political events.³⁰ This tradition depicts the important group identity of partisanship as a product of vertical intermediation—that is, of party activism, elite cues, and evaluations of politicians.³¹

In neither case are the so-called group or social factors actually about interpersonal communication. But what is a group if not a “collection of individuals who are interacting with one another”?³² Viewing group affiliations and demographic traits strictly as indicators of policy interests or psychological identities is reductionist, since such affiliations and traits are also measures of

social context and thus the kinds of people by whom one is likely to be influenced.³³ The phenomenon of shared political attitudes among members of a group is a product of more than just common interests and identities.³⁴ In other words, a group is more than the sum of its individual parts: “the group formed by associated individuals has a reality of a different sort from each individual considered singly.”³⁵

Economistic and psychological conceptions of groups do have high explanatory value, but we wish to explore the *truly social* side of the Latin American voter. To gain a more complete understanding of political intermediation, voting behavior, and elections, scholars of the region must come to grips with the horizontal social ties and informal political discussion reported by voters in the quotes above. Beneath all the elite-level strategizing, messaging, and maneuvering that plays out through vertical intermediaries lies a world of social communication and peer effects that scholars of Latin American politics have roundly ignored.³⁶

HORIZONTAL SOCIAL TIES, POLITICAL DISCUSSION, AND THE VOTE

Around 90 percent of Latin Americans report engaging in some form of politically relevant conversation. Nearly all these conversations emerge organically and spontaneously; humans are social animals. (Recall this chapter’s epigraph.) Some conversations take place over social media, but even today most are face-to-face.³⁷ They require no motivation from office-minded elites, and they exist largely outside the realm of organized civil society. The vast majority of political conversations are thus informal, occurring within horizontal social networks of friends, family, and acquaintances. Social communication carries a uniqueness that distinguishes it in both character and consequence from other forms of political communication. In this section, we define this uniqueness, and then we describe the precise mechanism by which social influence shapes vote choices in Latin American electorates.

The Uniqueness of Political Talk

Social communication is an important and unique form of political intermediation in several ways.* In contrast to vertical forms of intermediation, discussion among peers is active and can even be authoritative for the common citizen. Political discussion is a two-way street, so it is often considered

*Throughout the book, we use the following important terms synonymously: “social communication,” “discussion,” “conversation,” “horizontal intermediation,” and “peer-to-peer intermediation.”

a form of political participation that cultivates “leader-like” qualities.³⁸ Studies of citizens in established democracies show that a minute of political discussion has greater impact—on knowledge acquisition, on community standing, on civic skills, on tolerance for opposing views—than a minute of media consumption.³⁹

Political discussion is also biased. Political information is usually communicated with partisan bias, but some sources are more biased than others. Even when media sources have a political leaning (a common state of affairs in Latin America), some journalistic norms and regulations around fact-finding and reporting do exist.⁴⁰ Adherence to these norms lends an air of impartiality to most major media outlets. Common citizens, in comparison, are not subject to these norms and regulations, and discussion partners inherently carry political biases. Moreover, social ties with politically disagreeing individuals tend to be harder to sever than attention to a media source: contrast the ease of navigating to a different newspaper website with the difficulty and even emotional pain of avoiding family conflict over politics at a holiday table. Overall, political discussion exposes individuals to more imbalance and bias than media consumption.⁴¹

Further, political discussion is intimate. Consumption of political news via print or a screen is an impersonal process, but social communication occurs with other thinking and emoting individuals who are part of one’s life routines. Political discussion across disagreeing lines carries a gravity—a potential for social discomfort and interpersonal sanctioning—that media consumption lacks.⁴² Even clientelistic relationships in which party brokers apply social pressure to induce voting-booth compliance carry lower stakes, as brokers are typically connected only to voters’ extended, less intimate social contacts.⁴³ Moreover, the intimacy of political discussion means that it conveys information to voters in colloquial terms and in their own parlance. Consider the following remark from yet another Brazilian voter who does not consume mass media in isolation:

I read *Valor Econômico* [a financial newspaper] every day on the web. I also read *Folha de São Paulo* and *Estadão* [two major newspapers]. But I don’t understand everything. I ask my friends at work what they think. There are people there who understand a lot. I ask them to explain things to me when I don’t understand something.^[TA1.5]

Friends and family package political information in more comprehensible terms than the mass media.⁴⁴

Finally, political discussion belongs to the masses. It exists largely beyond the purview, manipulation, and monitoring of politicians, party brokers, and civil society. Democratization in Latin America has opened new public spaces, such as participatory budgeting and neighborhood associations, for mass deliberation and debate, but even these are formal and organized

in comparison to the “messy and radically decentralized” realm of informal conversation.⁴⁵ Elites in Latin America do have a vague awareness of this conversational domain, but they have limited abilities to manipulate it. Consider the following campaign statements by candidates in Brazil’s 2002 presidential election:

José Serra, in a final campaign commercial: “Until Sunday [election day], I want you to have one goal: Get one more vote. With your vote, plus one more, victory!” [This was accompanied by images of a child trying to convince his grandparents to vote for Serra.]^[TA1.6]

Anthony Garotinho, at a rally: “Multiply your vote! Spread the number 40 among your undecided friends and relatives!” [“40” was the number voters needed to enter in electronic vote machines to vote for Garotinho.]^{[TA1.7]46}

Serra and Garotinho were clearly aware of social communication’s power, but they were unable to harness it. Both lost.

Importantly, horizontal intermediation is not a theoretical competitor to, nor is it mutually exclusive from, vertical intermediation. Much to the contrary, different intermediary types *interact*. In modern societies, the raw material—the content—of political discussion usually originates in the mass media, and in contexts where clientelism is commonplace, individuals talk about the favors they received from a party. In both cases, far from muting or competing with alternative intermediaries, social communication can *magnify* the effects of the information conveyed through them, creating a ripple or cascade effect.⁴⁷ Our approach thus firmly eschews social determinism.

Overall, its unique combination of traits makes political discussion a particularly effective intermediary in shaping vote choice. Our primary purpose is to demonstrate how horizontal social influences work during election campaigns in Latin America.

Mechanisms of Social Influence

The most common form of peer influence on vote choice in Latin America combines two mechanisms: role modeling and the deliberative exchange of information.* Voters engage in deliberation, meaning the exchange of information and opinions among discussion partners, but they do so with carefully chosen partners, particularly partners they consider to be trustworthy and knowledgeable role models on political topics.⁴⁸ To illustrate, consider the following comment from a Brazilian interviewee, to whom we give the pseudonym Eva:

*We use “peer influence” and “social influence” as synonyms.

EVA: I have an uncle. He is PT because he is a factory worker. He knows more. I ask him whom I should vote for. My uncle is more involved in that stuff. He's really linked to the PT.^[TA1.8]

Eva's remarks illustrate in several ways how social influence took place in this scenario and, we find, in many others in Latin America. It shows clear evidence of the role-modeling mechanism—that is, one individual imitates the attitude or behavior of a trusted peer.⁴⁹ What has occurred, however, is not role modeling in its purest form, since Eva has done more than just passively observe and model the behavior of her uncle. Instead, she seeks out her uncle to converse with him. The discussion that took place in this appeal to the uncle's perceived expertise alludes to the other mechanism of social influence: the exchange of persuasive information through conversation. The content of the message mattered, not just the messenger.⁵⁰

The model of social influence that we posit is a hybrid of these two mechanisms. Voters discuss *and* defer. They seek to gather information through discussion, but they prefer to do so from role models: "some people have far more influence than others, simply because the decisions of those people convey more information. [People] are especially likely to follow those who are confident, who have special expertise."⁵¹ Learning about politics is an overwhelming informational chore for voters in any country. This is especially so in our primary case of Brazil, where the proliferation of parties and the weakness of party cues make information shortcuts scarce. Faced with this situation, many voters, and particularly less politically knowledgeable ones, take cues from more knowledgeable peers.⁵² Because knowledgeable peers carry a credibility and confidence that reassure uncertain voters, they serve as opinion leaders in informal social networks; they are persuasive peers. By appealing and listening to their best-informed social contacts, many Latin American voters acquire socially informed preferences over the course of a campaign.

Another aspect of Eva's comment merits our attention. The role-modeling uncle is a partisan and thus likely to be a stable voter, maintaining his candidate preference over the course of the campaign. In seeking and imitating his opinion, Eva ends up with a preference on election day that is in line with that of a more partisan and stable voter. She gravitates toward a dominant preference in her social environment, creating aggregate stability even as she herself vacillates during the campaign. The following observation about persuasive peers from the literature on US politics, worth quoting at length, describes what has taken place:

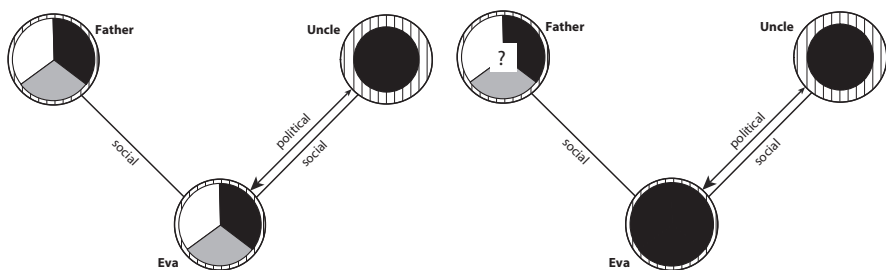
Opinion leaders are much less likely to dramatically modify their own opinions due to changing opinion distributions in the aggregate. Their staying power, in turn, serves as an anchor on changes in public opinion. Rather than moving toward new opinions, they tend to pull the movement of public opinion back

toward their own beliefs. . . . The influence of opinion leaders lies in their own unwillingness to change their beliefs.⁵³

Two simple sociograms (i.e., network diagrams) depict the scenario implied in Eva's remarks and visually summarize these main points. Frame A of figure 1.2 includes three actors, each depicted as a circle (also "node"): Eva, her uncle, and (for the sake of illustration) her father.* Eva does not mention her father in the quotation, but that is exactly the point: she mentions her uncle, not her father, as a primary source of mid-campaign political information and advice because her uncle is the more knowledgeable one. Eva has a relationship (or "tie") with both, as indicated by the diagonal "social" lines, but she chooses to have a "political" tie—meaning informal political discussions—only with her uncle. Her only tie to her father is social, so he is an apolitical contact. (A political tie can exist only when a social tie is present.) Eva's only political conversation partner, or "political discussant," is her uncle. Her uncle's greater political knowledge is captured by the thick ring (with vertically hatched lines) around his node; it is thicker than the rings of Eva and her father. The political tie is directional, with the arrowheads indicating the direction of flow of political information. Eva's incoming arrowhead is larger than her outgoing one, meaning she receives more political information and advice from her uncle than she gives to him. In sum, these graphical elements convey Eva's selection decision—that is, her choice to discuss politics with her knowledgeable uncle rather than her poorly informed father.

The figure also conveys our argument about partisan politics and vote choice. Both frames A and B of figure 1.2 color each node according to the actor's candidate preference. Frame A depicts a mid-campaign scenario, and frame B depicts the votes cast on election day. Eva's uncle is an unwavering *petista* (PT partisan), so his node is black at both times, meaning his preference is Dilma. (For the sake of illustration, we continue with the 2014 election example.) In contrast, Eva's node in frame A is tricolored, indicating that she is still undecided among Dilma, Aécio (white), and Marina (gray). We will assume her father is also undecided because, empirically, politically unknowledgeable individuals are less likely to be committed partisans with stable preferences. Across all three actors, as in the real world, political knowledge and stability of candidate preference are positively correlated. On election day (frame B), Eva casts a vote for Dilma, turning her node black, because of her uncle's influence. (Absent any assumed channel of social influence, we cannot be certain how her father votes.) Eva's tendency to deliberate and defer to a trusted role model pulls her toward the preference held by a strong partisan in her social milieu.

*Note that the spatial placement of the nodes is arbitrary and irrelevant. Because no elites are present, ties depicted in sociograms throughout this book are horizontal. The only exception to this statement is in chapter 7 (figure 7.1).



Frame A: Middle of Campaign

Frame B: Election Day

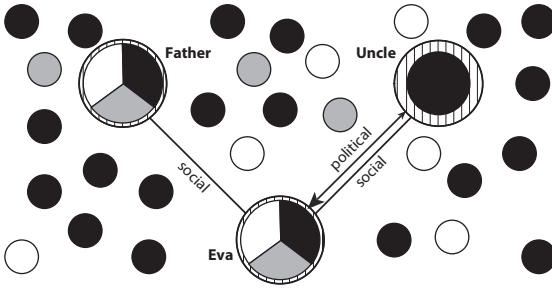
FIGURE 1.2 Eva's Network through Time

Notes: Node color indicates vote choice for Dilma (black), Aécio (white), or Marina (gray). A tricolored node means the actor is undecided. The thickness of the rings with vertically hatched lines indicates the amount of the actor's political knowledge. Arrowheads indicate amount (with arrowhead size) and direction of political information being exchanged.

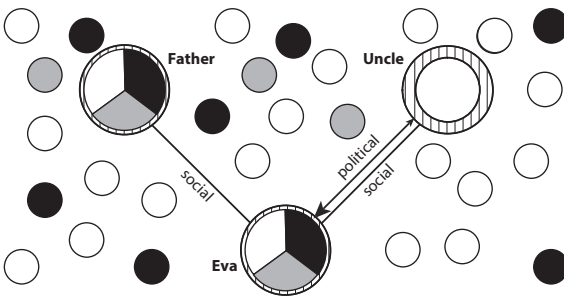
Implications for Political Geography, Clientelism, and Democratic Citizenship

With a creative look at figure 1.2, one can imagine further theoretical implications of Eva's scenario. We derive three such implications and explore them in this book. First, persuasive peers can induce citizens to cast a vote that differs from the one they would have cast if they lived in a different social and political context. If some exogenous factor dictated that Eva's trusted political discussant were a stable Aécio voter rather than a stable Dilma voter, then the persuasive information emanating from this discussant would influence her toward an Aécio vote rather than a Dilma vote. This exogenous factor would thus be of utmost importance, and political geography is one such factor.

Frame A of figure 1.3 illustrates the role of geography, redrawing Eva's mid-campaign network while adding a simplified representation of the (hypothetical) political geography in which she and her two contacts are embedded. Imagine that Eva, her uncle, and her father live in a social environment—a neighborhood, a city, or even a state—in which stable Dilma voters are plentiful while stable Aécio voters are rare. These *potential* face-to-face discussants are portrayed by the smaller nodes now peppering Eva's sociogram in frame A. She talks to an infinitesimally small fraction of them, but they still matter because they constitute the pool from which she probabilistically chooses her knowledgeable contact. The pool leans pro-Dilma, making it likely that she ends up with a pro-Dilma tie who, as illustrated in figure 1.2, later leads her toward a Dilma vote by election day. In contrast, frame B shows a counterfactual scenario where Eva is embedded in a heavily pro-Aécio geographical environment. With



Scenario A: Eva in a Dilma-Leaning Context



Scenario B: Eva in an Aécio-Leaning Context

FIGURE 1.3 The Effect of Political Geography on Eva's Mid-campaign Network
Notes: See figure 1.2 for meaning of colors and symbols.

this different partisan mix in her pool of potential political discussants, she ends up with an Aécio-voting discussant who (again by assumption derived from figure 1.2) later convinces her to vote for Aécio. The externally imposed factor of political geography shapes the distribution of partisan leanings among Eva's potential and actual social contacts and, because one of the contacts is a persuasive peer, influences her voting decision.

Second, clientelistic party machines should try to pay off voters who have large political discussion networks. Reconsider Eva's original (figure 1.2, frame A) mid-campaign network from the perspective of a strategically minded politician or broker armed with clientelistic payoffs. Traditional formal models of clientelistic targeting treat voters as horizontally isolated. These models would conclude that brokers should target Eva and her father because these two are more persuadable than Eva's uncle.⁵⁴ But the recognition of voters' horizontal social ties changes the calculus and better fits the balance of empirical evidence, which shows that clientelistic parties in Latin America tend to reward their loyalists.⁵⁵

We illustrate by expanding Eva's original mid-campaign network using the following simple and realistic assumption: there are other voters like Eva. In

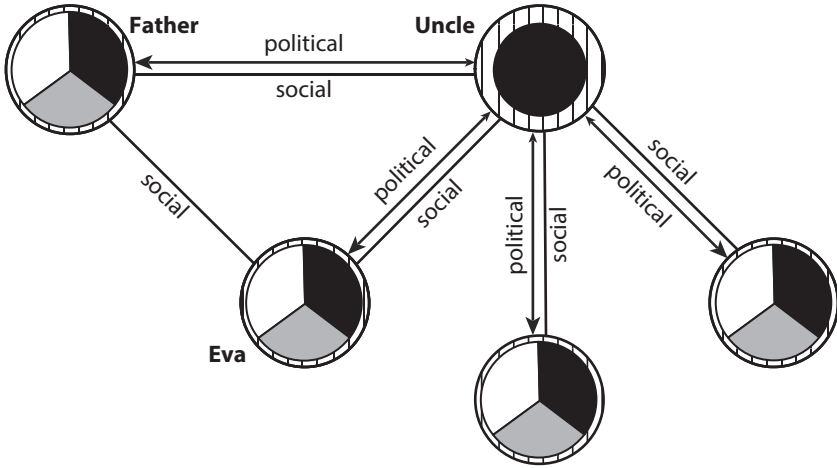


FIGURE 1.4 Eva's Mid-campaign Network Expanded

Notes: See figure 1.2 for meaning of colors and symbols.

other words, many other voters seek informed political advice from a knowledgeable peer. Figure 1.4 represents this expanded network. Because of his expertise, Eva's uncle attracts political ties and functions as an epicenter of political discussion and social influence. He is, in other words, a "hub" within these informal social networks. (In this scenario, even Eva's father gets in on the act by discussing politics with Eva's uncle.) From this perspective, a clientelistic party with limited resources should pay off the uncle, since the favor could further energize him to proselytize the party's message to his many contacts. In other words, when the uncle is paid off, his impressive network magnifies the payoff's partisan message. If the party paid off Eva, its possible return from the favor would end with her.

Third, peer influence raises important normative questions about the quality and equity of political voice and democratic citizenship—questions that require empirical answers. Does social influence lead voters toward the candidate most aligned with their political values and issue positions? In figure 1.2 Eva's uncle led her to a particular candidate choice, but it is not clear whether this is the *best* candidate for Eva's interests. Because of his own partisan desires, Eva's uncle is surely not motivated to nudge Eva toward the candidate maximizing *her* utility. This utility maximization could occur incidentally if Eva's values and interests are similar to those of her uncle, perhaps because the two have a shared city of residence or religious affiliation. But this is a big if, one that can only be answered empirically. This scenario also points to a second important question. Does informal political talk weaken or deepen status-related differences in political knowledge and in the quality of citizens'

political voices? The uncle's greater degree of political knowledge and larger number of political discussants might be indicative of and even partly caused by his masculine identity, or by a higher social and economic status. After all, the acquisition of political knowledge requires resources, such as time, cognitive skills, and finances. Although radically decentralized and largely uncontrolled by elites, the informal airwaves of political discussion and social influence might still carry a "strong upper-class accent."⁵⁶ We address these questions and implications with our empirical analyses of network data in Latin America.

LATIN AMERICA AS A CASE

With these theoretical arguments and our empirical examinations, we seek to introduce scholars of Latin American politics to a world of social communication that has thus far evaded their view. There is some scholarship on peer influence in mass politics outside the US, but the vast majority of research on this subject is conducted on US citizens.⁵⁷ To those who misinterpret as bald imperialism our effort to export ideas from scholarship on the US to a Latin American context, we hasten to point out that this book also stresses the reverse flow of findings and ideas. Latin America offers a venue that is distinct in important ways from that of the US, and for multiple reasons scholars of mass political psychology in any country have much to learn about peer effects by paying attention to their workings in Latin America.

Most important, the laboratory of Latin American politics proffers many more instances of short-term changes in voter preferences, our primary dependent variable, than the US laboratory. The minimal effects paradigm of campaign influence is a stubborn one in the US, where citizens switch their vote intentions across party lines during presidential election campaigns far less frequently than Latin Americans. Panel surveys show that only about 5 to 8 percent, in sharp contrast to the aforementioned 40 percent in Brazil, switch during a US campaign.⁵⁸ Larry Bartels finds the average net impact of campaign persuasion over six elections to be just 1.8 percent in the US, and Robert Erikson and Christopher Wlezien claim that "only a small percentage of the vote is at play during the autumn in a typical election year."⁵⁹

To get around this lack of variance, empirical work on peer-to-peer intermediation and candidate choice in the US uses dependent variables that are related to but distinct from changes in candidate preference—variables such as ambivalence about candidates or lateness in deciding.⁶⁰ Even in these studies, however, the appearance of indecisiveness and uncertainty is somewhat illusory. Recall the enlightened preferences tendency: virtually all US voters have partisan instincts to which, even if they have dabbled with indecision dur-

ing the campaign, they return by its end. Similarly, the first modern studies of campaign effects, carried out by the Columbia school scholars, concluded that social influences activate and reinforce voters' preferences but rarely change them across party lines. In other words, if social influence exists at all during US campaigns, it produces preference stability and thus invariance.⁶¹

In Latin America, by contrast, the raw materials for social persuasion during campaigns are in place. Because most parties and party systems in the region are young, mass attachments to parties are poorly sedimented.⁶² Many citizens possess relatively weak affinities for a candidate or a party at a campaign's onset, so they are open to social persuasion during the campaign. Unlike the US electoral system, moreover, those in Latin America feature proportional representation with, in most presidential elections, majority runoffs. Multiparty competition, therefore, is the norm, and more choices mean more opportunities for disagreement with, and then persuasion by, peers.⁶³ (Chapter 2 presents this evidence.) For these reasons, between one-third and one-half of all Latin American voters change their vote intentions *across party lines* (as in Brazil 2014) in the months before a presidential election. (Chapter 3 presents this evidence, showing high rates of change in Argentina and Mexico as well.) To summarize, Latin American campaigns and elections provide a rich arena for studying peer effects on changes in voter preferences because the region's elections feature substantial and important variation in this dependent variable.

Latin America is also distinct because neighborhoods are arenas of social influence. Scholars of the US generally agree that its neighborhoods are no longer forums for rich social interaction.⁶⁴ This does not accurately describe Latin America, where urban neighborhoods tend to have greater cohesion and organization, more residential stability, and better-defined borders.⁶⁵ Latin Americans discuss politics with their neighbors more than is typical in the US and in Europe (chapter 2). As a result, the region provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate when and how political discussion is a channel of neighborhood influence during campaigns.

The Latin American context can also inform theories of peer influence because clientelistic party machines are a thing of the past in the US, whereas the distribution by parties of jobs, gifts, and services in exchange for votes remains common in the region.⁶⁶ The contemporaneity of vote-buying efforts allows us to answer questions no longer relevant in the US. These questions incorporate the idea that clientelistic parties recognize the horizontal embeddedness of potential payoff recipients.

Finally, Latin America's fragile new democracies raise a unique set of normative questions about democratic citizenship in a horizontally networked world—questions that are unanswerable in the US context. Pundits and scholars of the US have made much of how social homogeneity and small-group echo chambers reinforce values and partisan polarization, with some groups allegedly drawn by these influences toward vote choices that are counter to their

material interests.⁶⁷ The average social network in Latin America, by contrast, is more politically diverse and more likely to induce short-term preference change during a campaign. As a result, Latin American cases allow one to observe whether these factors produce some of the benefits, such as moving voters toward choices that align better with their interests, that advocates of deliberative democracy claim can arise from discussion and disagreement.⁶⁸

METHODS OF ANALYSIS AND DATA

Horizontal social networks and the political discussions that take place within them can be difficult to measure and observe, a major reason why scholars of Latin America tend to ignore both. Measuring networks of social ties is time-consuming and expensive, and the direct observation of political conversations requires an ethnographic approach that can limit generalizability. It is easier to treat survey respondents as atomized social isolates and thus to reduce their attitudes, preferences, and information to individually held traits.

This book moves beyond this methodological individualism by measuring and analyzing voters' social contexts in several ways. Our primary method of inquiry is analysis of network (also "relational") data collected as part of nationally or municipally representative panel surveys. Some of these surveys also contain rarely measured neighborhood traits, enabling us to situate voters in a social environment that is broader in geographic scope than their immediate horizontal networks. In a few cases, we incorporate information from state-level social environments. Finally, we supplement these findings with data from open-ended, in-depth interviews about respondents' political ties and conversations as well as more traditional survey questions about the frequency of political discussion.

Egocentric Network Analysis

Our primary method of inquiry is longitudinal egocentric network analysis, conducted in the context of sample and panel surveys. Egocentric networks (also "egonets") center on a focal individual, as we did with Eva, who is called the "ego" or (in surveys) "main respondent." Egonets describe the number and nature of ties, if any, that this focal individual has with "alters" or (for conversational ties) "discussants." (We will use "ego" and "main respondent" synonymously and "alter" and "discussant" synonymously.) To provide an example, figure 1.5 shows the sociogram of two simple egocentric networks for egos E1 and E2. The lines indicate the presence of a tie between ego and alter (labeled as "A#"), and each ego ↔ alter pair is called a "dyad." In the figure, each of the two egos has three alters.⁶⁹

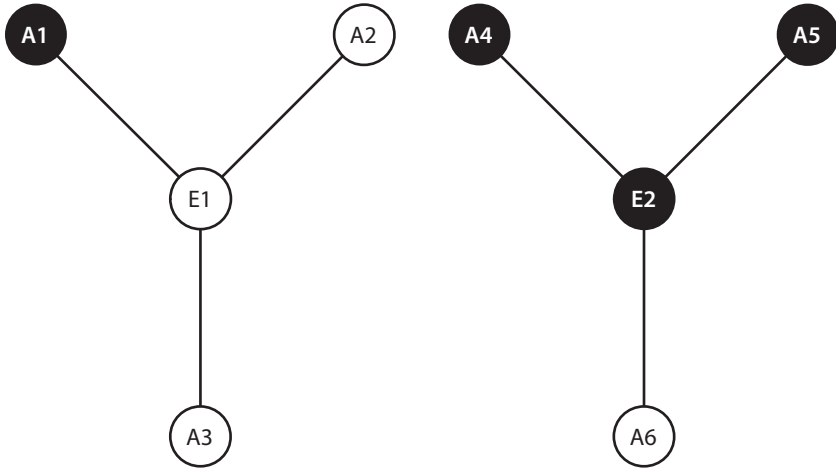


FIGURE 1.5 Sociograms of Two Egocentric Networks

Notes: Node color indicates vote choice for a hypothetical White or Black Party. Lines indicate political ties.

Beyond these general elements of terminology and diagramming, our specific application of egocentric network analysis has several important features. In our public opinion surveys, the egos are the standard interviewees chosen by probabilistic sampling procedures. Each ego's unique set of alters is derived via a question battery known as a network name generator: respondents are asked to list the two or three people with whom they most discuss political matters.⁷⁰ In other words, the ties we identify are *political*, meaning the ego and alter discuss politics with one another. Eva's egocentric network in figure 1.2 shows two kinds of ties: social ties and their political subset. We occasionally refer to apolitical social ties (like Eva's father) or to potential ties in the social environment (like the small nodes in figure 1.3) for conceptual reasons, but we do not directly observe apolitical ties, save one exception that we exploit in chapter 2.⁷¹ Stated differently, in our data the selection of *political* discussants that is partly modeled and described in figures 1.2 and 1.3 *has already taken place*. Despite this, we can learn a great deal about the motivations and processes underlying citizens' selection of political discussants by comparing the observed traits of alters to those of their egos and to the entire sample.

The name generators are accompanied by name-interpreter questions that ask egos to describe different traits of each alter, including a "proxy report" of alters' intended or already-cast votes in the presidential election. With the name interpreters (along with direct questions about ego's vote preferences), we can identify the candidate preference of every node in each respondent's egonet.

This information allows us to, in essence, color-code each node in figure 1.5 for that actor's current political preference.

We have datasets with repeated measures of egocentric networks for four different presidential election campaigns in recent Latin American history. This book represents, in fact, the culmination of nearly two decades of collecting such data. The four elections are Brazil 2002, Brazil 2006, Brazil 2014, and Mexico 2006. The data on the first two were collected as part of the Brazil 2002–2006 Two-City Panel Study,⁷² data for Brazil 2014 were collected as part of the Brazil 2014 Elections Panel Study (BEPS 2014),⁷³ and data for Mexico were collected as part of the Mexico 2006 Panel Study.⁷⁴ The Two-City Panel polled representative samples of respondents in the midsized Brazilian cities of Caxias do Sul and Juiz de Fora, and the other two panels are based on nationally representative samples. The Two-City Panel project conducted six waves of interviews: three in 2002, one in 2004, and two more in 2006. The Mexico 2006 Panel contains three waves, and BEPS 2014 contains seven. All four elections featured major momentum swings and high rates of individual-level preference change that we measure with these wave timings.

The precise protocols used to measure egocentric network traits vary somewhat across the different surveys, and we highlight these when relevant. Two merit brief mention here. First, the Two-City Panel includes interviews with many of the named discussants, itself a rarity in egocentric network measures in any country context.⁷⁵ These discussant interviews allow us to directly validate alters' preferences and to assess the accuracy of egos' reports of these preferences. Second, in BEPS 2014 main respondents were asked to list up to two discussants, whereas for the other three election studies they could list up to three.

The longitudinal nature of the egocentric network measures is crucial to our analyses and arguments about peer influences. For a study based on observational data that nonetheless wishes to estimate causal effects, longitudinal (panel) data are essential. Scholars of social influence consider longitudinal data to be “ideal” and a “Holy Grail,” because “it is perilous to infer influence from relationships in cross-sectional surveys.”⁷⁶ Figure 1.5 illustrates this. It might be tempting to conclude from a cross-sectional comparison of E1 and E2 that E1 is a White Party voter and E2 is a Black Party voter because both were influenced by the balance of opinion among their alters. After all, the majority opinion in the two networks correlates perfectly with the two egos' vote choices. But it is equally plausible that the majority of E1's network are White Party voters because, far from being influenced by them, White-partisan E1 *prefers* conversation partners with that stable trait. Black-partisan E2 also prefers to fraternize with fellow Black partisans and chose political ties with this in mind. This is the familiar, and seemingly universal, effect of homophily: humans prefer to have relationships with others who are like them and who share their views.⁷⁷ In politics, homophily is the tendency of citizens to avoid politically discordant relationships because disagreement can be uncomfortable.⁷⁸

Panel data can address this selection effect. Our panel studies allow us to hold egos' and alters' constant across two observed time periods, and this enables us to assess whether changes in alters' preferences during the campaign are correlated with changes in egos' preferences. In this setup the choice of discussion partners is not a methodological confound because the alter or set of alters is constant through time. For instance, the Two-City Panel achieves this by holding the alters constant in two panel waves during the 2002 election campaign. Respondents listed their alters and their alters' vote intentions in an early panel wave conducted during the campaign, and respondents then reported the actual vote choices of these same alters in a panel wave conducted just after election day. In other words, if a main respondent listed João, Maria, and José as discussants in the earlier wave, that respondent was asked about the vote preferences of João, Maria, and José in that wave and then again in the post-election wave. Holding discussant identities constant in this way is preferred—yet rarely executed in political science studies—because it allows us to control for lagged alter preferences and thus the confound of alter selection.⁷⁹ In essence, our methodology adheres to the following prescription: “a proper study of social influence requires a dynamic, interactive framework that simultaneously focuses both on the source and the target of influence.”⁸⁰

Confounding from homophily is the greatest, but not the only, threat to achieving unbiased causal estimates of social influence. Latent homophily, environmental confounding, reverse causation, and measurement error also pose challenges, but we define these technicalities and our solutions to them as they arise in the chapters below. Experiments could address some of these shortcomings, and their recent proliferation in studies of horizontal intermediation and politics is welcome.⁸¹ But experimental treatments that manipulate social communication are, by definition, artificial and lack the depth, intimacy, and realism of the social ties of everyday life.⁸² Our primary research goal is to maximize external validity. Our measures of egocentric networks in panel surveys enable conclusions about social influences on actual voting behavior across electorates in Latin American elections.⁸³

Other Methods of Analysis

Our longitudinal analyses of egonets with surveys generate conclusions about social influence that are generalizable to the real world and across a wide geographic scope while at the same time addressing, to the best extent possible with observational data, threats to making unbiased causal inferences. Still, this approach reveals rather little about the nature of the political conversations that took place between our egos and alters, save whether they were largely agreeing or disagreeing in nature. Participant observation and online text analyses have enabled scholars to observe discussion and interpersonal influence in action, but these methods require a deep commitment of time to a small number of physical or virtual sites.⁸⁴

We balance these challenges by reporting quotations, as we did in a few instances above, gleaned from open-ended interviews that we and our research assistants conducted with individuals (many of them our survey main respondents) in Brazil and Mexico. In 2002, 2004, and 2018, our team conducted a total of about 80 such interviews with common citizens and another 60 with neighborhood leaders. The interviews probed the reasons respondents voted the way they did and the nature of the conversations they held in their horizontal social networks. These qualitative data offer clear examples of peer influences and elucidate the mechanisms through which those influences occurred. They also provide crucial information about voters' motivations for discussing or, as is sometimes the case, *not* discussing politics. When it is necessary to use a name in these quotations, we always use pseudonyms (like Eva) that nonetheless convey the gender of the referent. For each quotation, the original Portuguese or Spanish appears in an online Translation Appendix (TA). The quotation's precise location in the appendix is indicated by a superscripted identification number (e.g., TA3.1) that appears at the end of each quotation.

Despite our heavy reliance on the egocentric network data from the four Brazilian and Mexican elections, we also make use of many traditional, non-relational measures available in these and other surveys. Most innovative, the Two-City Panel sampled a critical mass of respondents (100 or more) in 22 different neighborhoods in each city. These data allow us to analyze rarely measured political aspects of respondents' neighborhood-level environments and to assess the degree to which neighborhood influences on vote choice are truly social in nature. The surveys for these four elections also include standard indicators of concepts such as the frequency of political talk and exposure to other political intermediaries (e.g., media, party contacting, and clientelism).

Finally, to present findings on a broader set of countries and elections, we report analyses of three cross-national survey datasets. The Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) and the World Values Survey (WVS) convey important descriptive information about political intermediation in Latin America and provide points of comparison to countries in other world regions. In particular, the CNEP contains rich cross-sectional measures of exposure to all political intermediary types, including measures of egonets. The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) includes cross-national information on the relationship between political talk and clientelism.

FOCUS AND PLAN OF THE BOOK

Our focus in this book is peer influence on *presidential* voting in Latin America. Presidential elections are the headlining contests for each country's most powerful post in a region where presidents are especially strong actors. Still, it is important to bear in mind that presidential races are least likely cases for our

argument. The presidential election is the most visible election in any given country, and mass-mediated information is readily available for the citizen who wishes to decide without consulting social contacts. In contrast, elections to lower offices in our country cases are often low-information affairs. This is especially true of elections to legislative posts in Brazil, where an overwhelming number of candidates (literally hundreds) and parties (several dozen) run in every district. For voters, vertically mediated information about their legislative options is harder to come by, so they are probably *more* likely to ask peers to help them winnow down their choices for legislative elections than they are for presidential elections. In short, evidence of peer influence in presidential campaigns suggests that it is likely to exist during campaigns for other offices.

The plan of the book is as follows. The next chapter (“Latin American Political Discussion in Comparative Perspective”) rounds out the background material of part I (“Introduction and Descriptive Background”). Chapter 2 fills a major gap in the literature on Latin American politics by providing sorely needed descriptive information about the region’s political discussion networks, our principal explanatory variable. Using our panels, the CNEP, and the WVS, we report the absolute and relative prevalence of political discussion—compared to other countries and to other intermediaries—in Brazil, Mexico, and eight other Latin American countries. Latin American citizens discuss politics at a frequency that is typical or even above that prevailing in other countries, and their propensity to speak with residential neighbors is well above the global average. Chapter 2 then portrays the amount of political disagreement and the disparity in political expertise between discussion partners. Rates of disagreement over vote choices in Latin America are high relative to those in the US, and this is largely because the region’s multiparty systems afford more opportunities for disagreement. Moreover, Latin Americans seek out discussion partners with relatively high political expertise, an important part of the socially informed preferences argument.

Chapters 3 through 6 constitute part II: “Social Influence and the Vote.” They carry the core empirical material in support of the argument on social influence. Part II provides crucial descriptive findings about rates of preference change by voters during Brazilian and Mexican presidential campaigns. We then show that the volatility of voters’ preferences is caused by political discussion and persuasive peers. In doing so, we also demonstrate in part II how social influences deepen the geographical clustering of the vote across neighborhoods and even across states.

Chapter 3, “Voter Volatility and Stability in Presidential Campaigns,” reports novel descriptive facts on part II’s primary dependent variable, the dynamics of vote choice during presidential election campaigns. Using all available panel data from Brazil and Mexico (plus one from Argentina), we estimate the amount of preference change that occurred in 10 election campaigns. Between any two panel waves, 17 to 45 percent of voters switched across party

lines. We then depict campaign volatility at the national level, using nationwide poll results to show how the horse race unfolded in our four main election cases (Brazil 2002, Brazil 2006, Brazil 2014, and Mexico 2006). These polling trends provide a brief historical background to our election cases and allow us to refute claims that the observed switching is based strictly on individual (and potentially socially isolated) calculations to avoid a wasted vote.

Chapter 4 (“Discussion Networks, Campaign Effects, and Vote Choice”) is the book’s core empirical chapter. It demonstrates that the dynamics of vote choice described in chapter 3 are caused by the discussion and social ties described in chapter 2. During campaigns, discussion with disagreeing partners tends to induce preference change in voters, while discussion only with agreeing partners reinforces vote intentions, causing preference stability. We demonstrate this relationship at multiple levels of analysis, estimating relationships in the Brazilian and Mexican panel surveys in ways that address threats to causal inference. Quotations from our qualitative data also illustrate social influence in action, showing vividly that many voters defer to their more politically knowledgeable social ties. In short, the votes cast on election day in Brazil and Mexico are socially informed. Chapter 4 also shows that the social influences that occur during campaigns determine who wins elections. Candidates whose mid-campaign supporters encounter high rates of disagreement from social ties struggle to hold on to these voters through election day. These voters’ preferences are less reinforced in conversation, so many switch to different candidates. The candidate they previously supported collapses in the polls.

Chapter 5, “Neighborhoods and Cities as Arenas of Social Influence,” is the first of two chapters linking political discussion to the geography of the vote (as illustrated in figure 1.3). Social influences induce many citizens to cast votes that differ from the ones they would have cast if they lived elsewhere. This chapter considers neighborhood effects on vote choice in two Brazilian cities. Nearly two-thirds of discussion partners in the two cities are residents of the same neighborhood. Neighborhoods with a stable and relatively homogeneous partisan leaning assimilate, over the course of a campaign, initially disagreeing residents toward that leaning. We show that this effect occurs through discussion between neighborhood coresidents in the politically polarized city of Caxias do Sul. In other words, the clustering of political preferences by neighborhood in Caxias is partly due to social influences and not, as in the case of the US, mere self-sorting. By contrast, the same level of political discussion in Juiz de Fora, a less polarized city where the partisan leanings of neighborhoods are amorphous, yields no assimilation effect.

Chapter 6 (“Discussion and the Regionalization of Voter Preferences”) completes part II by scaling up the focus to larger subnational units. It illustrates how political discussion explains the geography of the vote across states and entire subnational regions. Political discussion during the Brazil 2014 and

Mexico 2006 campaigns drew many voters toward the political leanings of their states, deepening North versus South and other regional divides. Scholars tend to see the regional clustering of political preferences in Brazil and Mexico as the sum of individual-level interests, identities, and demographics (e.g., the Mexican North is conservative because its residents are relatively wealthy). We show that social influences make the regionalization of preferences much greater than the sum of these individual parts.

With the empirical evidence of peer influences on vote choice in hand, part III considers the implications of a horizontally networked world for other aspects of political behavior. Chapter 7, entitled “Clientelism as the Purchase of Social Influence,” turns to elite behavior, demonstrating that clientelistic party machines try to pay off hubs—that is, voters with large political discussion networks who frequently engage in persuasion. In seeking to buy votes, the best strategy a party can pursue, as we argued using figure 1.4, is to target citizens who are well-connected opinion leaders in informal networks. These voters represent the machine’s highest potential yield because they can magnify the effect of the payoff by diffusing positive information about the machine through their large social networks. We use LAPOP and the Mexico 2006 Panel Study to show that party machines do target well-connected voters throughout Latin America. We also show that a finding central to previous theories—namely, that loyal partisans are the most likely targets of clientelism—is driven by omitted-variable and endogeneity bias. In other words, scholarly expectations of party activity change when we recognize that parties operate in a world of horizontally networked voters.

Our final set of empirical exercises, chapter 8 (“Discussion, Societal Exclusion, and Political Voice”), explores the implications of horizontal intermediation for the normative issues of the quality and equity of political voice. Because its monetary costs are virtually nil, the realm of horizontal intermediation could be a haven for under-resourced and marginalized groups. Our analyses of data from the panel studies and the CNEP, however, show that political discussion in seven Latin American countries suffers from an exclusion problem. Individuals of high socioeconomic status (SES) are much more likely to discuss politics than individuals of lower status, and men discuss politics more than women. This has concrete consequences, as high-SES individuals and men have more political knowledge than low-SES individuals and women, respectively. Chapter 8 then considers whether these inequalities distort the political voice of marginalized groups. In Brazil and Mexico, the degree of engagement in horizontal intermediation is positively correlated with voters’ abilities to choose the candidates who best represent their issue attitudes (i.e., their “correct” candidates). Because of this correlation, the poor are sometimes less likely than the rich to choose candidates who support their expressed values and beliefs about politics and policies. Moreover, the emergence of socially informed preferences during a campaign does not move voters toward their correct candidates.

Seen collectively, our findings paint a somewhat complicated picture of democratic citizenship in Latin America. Chapter 9 wrestles with these findings and strikes a balanced conclusion. On the one hand, the high rates of vote switching during campaigns, often as a result of informal discussion, reflect an open-mindedness and a responsiveness to counterargumentation that is absent in the more polarized and partisan US. In thinking about their vote decisions, moreover, Latin American voters seek informed advice, identifying knowledgeable peers from whom to learn. On the other hand, this social process during the campaign does not necessarily yield better decisions, at least according to the correct-voting criterion. Furthermore, this process is dominated by the upper class in a region that already suffers deep socioeconomic inequalities.

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