

## **Social Networks in the Brazilian Electorate**

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### **Abstract**

Research on social networks and voting behavior has been largely limited to long-established democracies. In young democracies with unstable party systems and low levels of mass partisan identification, such networks should be even important. This chapter examines egocentric political discussion networks in Brazil. In this country, political discussion is plentiful and exposure to disagreement somewhat more frequent than in the United States. Over the course of campaigns, such conversation affects vote choices and helps citizens learn about candidates and their issue positions; networks are especially important for learning among low-status individuals. The chapter highlights the availability of two important panel data sets incorporating design elements that can improve inference regarding network effects: the 2002-2006 Two-City Brazilian Panel Study and the 2014 Brazilian Electoral Panel Survey.

Keywords: political discussion; networks; Brazil; voting behavior; campaigns

Beginning with the Columbia school's classic studies of electorates in two U.S. cities (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944), a rich line of scholarship has directly measured voters' social networks and assessed the impact of these networks on voting behavior in US elections (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Sokhey & McClurg 2012). Although this body of work has contributed countless valuable insights, one cannot help but wonder if its findings, constrained as they are to the US context, are generalizable and universal. While a number of important studies have looked at networks and voting behavior outside the US, these too, drawing on samples from places like France, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the UK, have focused on long-established democracies (Fitzgerald 2011; Wolf, Morales, and Ikeda 2010; Zuckerman, Dasović, and Fitzgerald 2007).<sup>1</sup> Only a minority of the world's population lives in affluent, stable democracies like these, so current knowledge about political discussion and voting behavior speaks to a small slice of humanity's political experience.

In less developed countries, the primary political trend of the past 30 years has been the "Third Wave" of democratization (Huntington 1991). Dozens of countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America have moved from autocratic to democratic rule. While most political scientists view this trend favorably, a cottage industry now documents the shortcomings of these young democracies. These critical observations point, for example, to their excessive clientelism and to a lack of programmatic political competition (Ames 2001; Keefer 2007; Kitschelt et al. 2010; Stokes et al. 2013). They also point to poorly sedimented mass partisan identification and to the resulting instability of party systems (Mainwaring 1999; Roberts 2014). In other words, two features of mass politics that scholars of older democracies tend to take for granted—programmatic policy-based competition and a large pool of stable party identifiers—

are alleged to be less common in younger democracies.<sup>2</sup> Voters in third-wave democracies are thus less likely to call on long-standing decisions or to rely on heuristics such as party affiliation that enable voters in advanced democracies to make reasonable decisions with minimal information (Lau & Redlawsk 2001, 2006). Instead, many voters may base their decisions on short-term influences disseminated through the media and social networks. Thus, if scholars have found social networks to be important for voting behavior in older democracies, they are potentially of even greater importance in newer ones.

In this chapter, we look at the third-wave democracy of Brazil, which transitioned in 1985 from military dictatorship to democracy, a democracy that today seems consolidated. We review the small but burgeoning literature that finds political discussion in Brazilian social networks to be highly relevant to mass political behavior (Ames, García-Sánchez, and Smith 2012; Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006). Our focus is necessarily on studies of egocentric networks—that is, studies based on sample survey respondents and the list of immediate political discussants they give in response to a name generator query. Whole-network studies or experiments gauging the political relevance of social interaction have not been conducted in Brazil. We rely on the two datasets that are the primary workhorses for studies of social networks in Brazilian mass politics: the 2002-2006 Two-City Brazilian Panel Study (2-city)<sup>3</sup> and the 2014 Brazilian Electoral Panel Survey (BEPS 2014).<sup>4</sup> We also draw briefly on other studies that examine citizens' "vertical" interpersonal connections to clergy, clientelistic brokers, and politicians.<sup>5</sup>

Political discussion is an important aspect of Brazilian political behavior. Most Brazilians say they discuss politics at least sometimes; the frequency of political discussion and number of discussants named in surveys are similar in magnitude to reports from the long-

established US democracy. Brazilians construct political discussion networks with a balance between relatives and non-relatives, though there is evidence of a gender skew. Outside of the family environment, men are more likely to talk politics, and citizens are more likely to report male than female discussants.

People everywhere prefer to talk politics with agreeing discussants, that is, fellow citizens with whom they share preferences on candidates and issues. Overall, however, Brazilians are slightly more likely than US citizens to have disagreeing discussants. Few Brazilians have party preferences, but partisans talk politics with other partisans. Strikingly, though, there is little evidence of party-based homophily. Among party identifiers, levels of disagreement with discussants are *even higher* than in the general population. Partisanship, in sum, neither motivates nor hinders most political discussions.

Most importantly, discussion affects electoral outcomes. The 2002 and 2006 Two-City Study demonstrated that political conversation, over the course of the campaigns, contributed substantially to voters' knowledge of the candidates and their issue positions. These effects were strongest among those lowest in education and living in low-education neighborhoods. Moreover, respondents with discussants whose preferences diverged from their own (in the early waves of the 2014 survey) were much more likely to change their vote intentions by the time of the election.

We begin by describing various aspects of political discussion and egocentric networks in Brazil, drawing contrasts with information from a variety of datasets on equivalent features in the United States. We then discuss some of the literature's findings on the consequences of social networks for mass political behavior. A subsequent section discusses the two main data sources.

## 1. The Nature and Structure of Egocentric Networks

Many of the weaknesses identified in new democracies are found in Brazil. Mass partisan identifiers do exist, but they are less stable and fewer in number than those in the United States and other developed-world democracies (Baker, Ames, Sokhey, and Renno 2016; Carreirão & Kinzo 2004; Kinzo 2003, 2005; Samuels 2006). Brazil has more parties than virtually any country in the world—28 hold seats in the Congress in 2015. As a result, the electoral environment can be complex and confusing for voters (Ames, Baker, and Renno 2008).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, although party competition and electoral behavior are oriented to some degree around a statist-liberal dimension (Baker & Greene 2015), politics is generally characterized by contestation over clientelistic and pork-barrel resources rather than programmatic concerns (Ames 2001). Partly for this reason, political cleavages only weakly reflect Brazil's deep and myriad socioeconomic cleavages, such as those around class, gender, race, region, religion, and rurality (Boas and Smith 2014).

Given this political environment, should social networks and political discussion matter more or less for voting behavior in Brazil than in older democracies? Theoretical expectations are mixed. On the one hand, the party and electoral environment might lead voters to tune out politics. With so many parties oriented around seemingly distant concerns, politics may seem irrelevant or overly complex and confusing. On the other hand, the absence of long-standing decisions for many citizens potentially leaves an important role for political learning and frequent preference change through social networks. Voters may actually rely on family and friends to help them make sense of politics precisely because it is so messy (Huckfeldt 2001). Moreover, while Brazil's politics and party system are complex, they are also highly competitive, something that breeds political conversation (Nir 2012).

In this section, we look at some basic descriptive statistics to see if the raw materials for network influence exist in Brazil. Our descriptives answer the following two questions: Do Brazilians discuss politics with a non-negligible frequency? And if so, do they discuss politics across lines of social and political difference, so that political persuasion can spread via informal networks? To provide some point of comparison, we also report statistics on political discussion from the United States, which has a much older, simpler, and programmatic party system, one rooted in meaningful social cleavages.

### **1.1 *The Prevalence of Political Discussion: Frequency and Network Size***

How frequent is political discussion in Brazil, and with how many different people do citizens discuss politics? If interpersonal influence over mass political behaviors exists, then a society must have at least some politically relevant discussion among peers. Using data from a 2014 nationally representative survey (BEPS), Table 1 shows the marginal distributions of self-reported political discussion frequency with family, with friends, and in social media. It also shows the distribution of discussion with family and friends from a 2012 sample of US respondents. Only a minority of Brazilian respondents say they never discuss politics, and the modal response is “rarely.” Levels of reported political discussion with family and friends are fairly similar to each other and are correlated at .68. Levels of discussion in social media, however, are much lower, with 76.1% reporting never discussing politics in such a setting.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, a question in the US with a similarly worded stem (from the American National Election Study, ANES) does not offer the same response set, but it does allow us to distinguish those who never discuss politics from those who do. Table 1 shows that the percentage reporting “never” discussing politics in this US sample is virtually the same as in

Brazil. This parity may be new: looking back to World Values Survey data from the 1990s, we find somewhat greater frequency of political discussion in the US than in Brazil.<sup>8</sup> Still, given the dramatic changes over the last two decades in Brazil’s level of social development and in the overall political landscape, we speculate that the rising frequency of political discussion in Brazil may represent real change rather than an idiosyncrasy of measurement. All told, it would surely be a stretch to say that there is “a lot” of political discussion in Brazil, but there does seem to be a moderate amount, similar in magnitude to that which occurs in the long-established democracy of the US.

**Table 1. Frequency of Political Discussion in Brazil and the United States by Interlocutor**

	Brazil (May 2014)		United States (November 2012)	
	With Family	With Friends		With Friends and Family
Never	27.9%	33.3%	Never discusses	28.4%
Rarely	33.4%	29.4%		
Sometimes	25.7%	23.4%	Does discuss	71.6%
Often	13.0%	13.9%		

Source: BEPS 2014; ANES 2012

Another way of thinking about the prevalence of political discussion is to consider the size of networks. With how many different people, on average, do Brazilians discuss politics, or, in the language of network theory, what is the average “degree” of Brazilian citizens? Higher degree generally implies a propensity to seek out more information sources; it raises the probability of exposure to disagreement and thus may lead to tolerance of political difference (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Mutz 2006). The Two-City Study twice administered a name generator allowing respondents to list up to three political discussants, similar to the name

generator employed in the nationally representative 1996 Spencer Foundation survey of U.S. citizens (Mutz 1996).<sup>9</sup> Table 2 shows the relative degree distribution, using data from the August 2002 wave of the Two-City Study.

**Table 2. Degree Distribution in Brazil and the United States: Number of Named Discussants**

	Brazil	United States
	August 2002	October 1996
Zero	33.0%	17.2%
One	9.7%	18.7%
Two	10.6%	30.4%
Three	46.6%	33.7%
<i>N</i>	4,507	715

Source: Two City Panel Study, Wave 2. Spencer Foundation data, University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 1996 (Mutz 2006).

The degree distribution of Brazilian citizens is more bimodal than that of their U.S. counterparts. A larger minority of Brazilian respondents listed zero discussants, but a near-majority list three. On average, Brazilian respondents listed 1.71 discussants, virtually equivalent to the number mentioned in the US sample (1.81). We cannot, of course, conclude that this is an extremely large number of discussants, but it is moderate in size and surely enough to provide the basis for interpersonal influence.

### **1.2 Types of Relationships within Networks**

A number of research traditions show that discussion and contacts outside the family provide a public good. They create social capital, sustain a vibrant civil society, ease the flow of information and innovation, and increase the likelihood that individuals will deliberate across lines of political disagreement. The results presented in Table 1 suggest that Brazilians report



discussion frequency to be virtually equivalent, on average, between family and friends. Do the network name generators back this finding? Are non-family members just as prevalent in political discussion networks as family members?

Table 3 shows these results from the two Brazil surveys and the Spencer Foundation survey. The nationwide BEPS 2014 sample had a two-name generator that asked respondents to name a relative and then a non-relative. Given the focused nature of each question, we assess whether responses of “none” were more frequent to the relative query than to the non-relative query. These questions were administered repeatedly in multiple waves of the panel study, starting in July, 2014 (just after the start of the 2014 presidential election campaign), and ending in early October, 2014 (just prior to the October 5th first-round presidential election). Respondents were in fact equally likely to mention a relative as they were a non-relative, confirming the findings in Table 1. The results from the 2-city panel are similar despite differences in geographic scope and question wording. While this survey allowed respondents to mention whomever they wanted, regardless of the relationship, we still find that Brazilians construct their political discussion networks with a balance between relatives and non-relatives. Nearly half (46.1%) of named discussants were non-relatives, and 43% of respondents named at least one non-relative as a discussant. The distributions in Brazil bear an overall resemblance to that in the United States.

**Table 3. Percent Reporting Family or Non-Family Political Discussants in Each Wave**

	Brazil		United States
	August 2002	July and August 2014	October 1996
No discussant	33.0%	36.4%	17.2%
Only named family members	21.9%	16.3%	21.1%
Only named non-family members	16.3%	16.4%	23.2%
Named both family and non-family members	26.6%	31.0%	36.2%
Total	97.8%	100.0%	97.7%

Source: BEPS 2014, Waves 2 and 3. Two-City Panel, Wave 2. Percentages for the Two-City Study do not sum to 100% because not all respondents provided relationship information for their named discussants. Spencer Foundation data, University of Wisconsin Survey Center, 1996 (Mutz 1996).

Whereas many Brazilians clearly go outside familial bonds to discuss politics, how many cross the gender divide? Research in the US finds that the gender divide, save for discussions between spouses, often constitutes a hidden border around an individual's pool of potential discussants (Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995, chapter 10). In the 2014 BEPS, respondents were more likely to report male than female discussants, with men outnumbering women by roughly a 3:2 ratio. This gender skew is more pronounced among non-relative discussants (37% female) than among relatives (42% female), largely because so many men named their spouses. Outside the family, men and women each prefer same-gender discussants, but the preference is much

stronger among men: 20% of women report an opposite-gender non-family discussant, while only 2% of men do so.

### **1.3 Agreement and Disagreement within Networks**

Decades of research in a variety of disciplines, including evolutionary biology, have shown a human propensity toward “homophily”--meaning that individuals prefer to associate with others who are similar to them. Still, if social networks influence political attitudes, disagreement between discussion partners must exist, at least some of the time (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). If Brazilians only forge echo-chamber networks with like-minded discussants, then social influence via ongoing discussion cannot persuade participants, aside from reinforcing their prior views (Bishop 2008). More seriously, scant rates of disagreement within networks can create a “homogeneity problem” (Mutz 2006, 43), whereby very little deliberation occurs across lines of political difference, potentially signifying or leading to a polarized and intolerant society.

Table 4 shows rates of respondent-discussant agreement (in column 1) on vote intention in presidential elections in Brazil and the U.S. To provide an anchor for these results, the table (in column 2) also shows the probability of agreement in dyads between any two randomly chosen voters. There are more opportunities for disagreement in multi-party systems like Brazil’s than in the U.S., but Brazil’s most recent presidential elections have boiled down to three- or four-candidate contests. In fact, the probability of finding an agreeable discussant if choosing one randomly (based strictly on aggregate election results) was virtually the same in the two Brazilian cities surveyed in 2002 and nationwide in the U.S. in 1996, so these two datasets provide a nice point of comparison. The results show that a majority of dyads (.69) were

agreeing ones in the two cities. This figure is lower than that observed in the U.S (.80). In the nationwide data for Brazil, the share of agreeing dyads was closer to that in the U.S. in 1996. Overall, Brazilians seem slightly more likely than U.S. citizens to have disagreeing discussants, but there are apples and oranges issues (such as the sizes of the name generators) that make this comparison imperfect.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 4. The Prevalence of Political Agreement in Discussion Dyads in Brazil and the United States**

	Brazil		United States
	2002	2014	October 1996
Share of dyads with agreeing partners	.69	.76	.80
Probability two randomly chosen people agreed (based on election results)	.41	.33	.42

Source: Baker 2009 (Brazil 2002 and US 1996 results); authors' own calculations for BEPS 2014. Results for Brazil are from first-round elections.

Note: Calculations of agreement within dyads are based only on dyads in which both the ego and the alter have known candidate preferences.

Discussants can agree or disagree not only on vote choice but also on party preferences. As we pointed out in the introduction, levels of partisanship are quite low in the Brazilian electorate. In BEPS 2014, partisanship hovers around 30% in each campaign wave (and around 35% among those who name at least one discussant). Given the low importance of party affiliation for most citizens, do respondents know the party preferences of their discussants? In fact, as Table 5 shows, the percentage of respondents able to identify the party preferences of family and non-family discussants is nearly as high as the percentage able to identify their own party preferences.

**Table 5. Party Preferences of Discussants and Agreement/Disagreement with Main Respondent, July/August 2014**

	Family Discussants	Non-Family Discussants
Total respondents naming discussant	602	537
% of total reporting discussant's party preference	31.7%	30.4%
% of total reporting discussant supports same party as respondent	16.9%	11.4%

Source: BEPS 2014

A little over half of those who know family members' party preferences share those preferences. The rates of partisan agreement between respondents and non-family discussants are somewhat lower. Only 9.1% of respondents with two discussants reports that both support the same party as the main respondent. In analyses not shown, we found that the extent to which partisans are surrounded by agreeing discussants is related to the party's support in the electorate. For supporters of the Workers Party (PT), Brazil's most popular party in terms of mass affiliation, nearly two-thirds of family discussants and nearly half of non-family discussants share the respondent's party identification. Among supporters of other parties, the rates are much lower.

Partisanship, in sum, is neither salient nor consistent within most political discussions. Comparatively few people have party preferences. Even among those who do, relatively high levels of disagreement persist. Levels of *partisan* disagreement are higher than levels of *candidate* disagreement, even though few people have party preferences.

#### **1.4 Vertical Network Ties**

Citizens can talk about politics in many different places and with many different types of contacts: spouses, close family members and friends, bosses, soccer buddies, local grocers,

pastors, neighborhood leaders, and local politicians. These different types and contexts of conversation may well have different effects on voter behavior. In research following in the line of Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), social networks have been conceived as small, close-knit and intimate groups. Studies in the American context show that networks measured with the name generator tend to be comprised of people known well, such as family and close friends (Bailey & Marsden 1999; Bearman & Parigi 2004; Klofstad et al. 2009). Even batteries requesting the names of *political* discussants largely elicit networks of “core” discussants (Klofstad et al. 2009). The data reviewed above indicate that the same is true in Brazil.

This approach, however, ignores the broader social and political structure in which networks are embedded. While some network members hold little social or political capital, others contribute important political resources. Though voters may not typically mention their connections to pastors or vote brokers in response to network-generator batteries, such vertical connections could be as important or even more important for electoral behavior than horizontal ties to people of similar social status and political resources. This may particularly be the case in a society such as Brazil, which is characterized by high levels of inequality and stratification.

Table 6 reports the percentages of respondents to the Brazilian Electoral Panel Study of 2010 who reported such vertical political connections. At both the beginning and the end of the campaign, over half of the respondents reported that they “know personally a politician or someone who is campaigning for a politician,” while only one in ten said that they had heard a clergy member in their church discuss the election. Awareness of clergy members’ preferences is much higher, however, in certain groups. Among evangelicals, 27.6% had heard their church pastor discuss the election. In the 2014 presidential election, half of evangelicals responding in the post-election wave of BEPS 2014 had heard their pastor do so.

**Table 6. Vertical Political Connections in Brazil, 2010**

	August 2010	October 2010
Percentage knowing a politician or campaigner	57.2%	54.5%
Percentage hearing their own clergy member discuss the election	7.7%	11.7%

Source: BEPS 2010

## 2. The Political Consequences of Discussion Networks

Do these network configurations exert a causal impact on political behavior? Assessing causality using observational data is always difficult, particularly when the independent variables are self-selected, reciprocal behaviors such as political discussion. To date, there have been no experimental studies related to the influence of mass-level political discussion networks in Brazil. However, the two survey projects on which most studies have been based are both rich panel studies incorporating many innovations that can improve causal inference. For example, assessing the impact of change in discussant preferences on change in main respondent preferences is superior to a strictly cross-sectional approach, since the former zeroes out homophily (i.e., selection) effects. These innovations will be discussed in detail in the next section. Based on these rich data, scholars have found that Brazilian networks at the mass level produce a number of politically relevant consequences.

Perhaps most importantly, political discussion seems to play a major role in shaping voter choice. In one set of self-reports from Brazilian survey respondents, discussion with friends and family was the most-used source of political information during campaign season (Straubhaar, Olsen, and Nunes 1993). Studies based on network name generators also find that political discussion matters (Ames, Garcia, and Smith 2012; Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006). Brazilian

voters as a collective seem prone to dramatic momentum swings during campaigns; that is, the share of likely voters reporting a preference for a particular candidate changes rapidly in a short span of time. Some of these shifts are ephemeral “fads.” In the 2002 campaign, for example, presidential candidate Ciro Gomes shot from 9% of vote intentions (fourth place) to 30% (second place) over the course of eight weeks, only to fall again, to 12% of the vote (fourth place) on election day.<sup>11</sup> Other momentum swings have more staying power. Consider the wave that brought Fernando Henrique Cardoso to victory in 1994. He began the year 20 points behind the front-runner only to win by 20 points. Whether these shifts are ephemeral or durable, research suggests that preference-changing swings can be triggered by media reports (Gomes’ repeated gaffes in 2002) or economic change (Cardoso’s role in 1994 in ending hyperinflation). Using the 2-City data from the 2002 election, Baker, Ames, and Renno show that these swings occur when new information diffuses through the population via discussion networks (Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006).

Table 7 provides preliminary evidence from the BEPS 2014 nationwide sample that discussion mattered in the same way in 2014. We compare the vote intentions of respondents and discussants from the second and third waves, assessing whether their preferences (for the top three candidates) matched or did not match. We then link those matches and non-matches to respondents’ reported votes as measured in wave 6. The results suggest that respondents with discussants whose preferences diverged from their own in wave 2 or 3 were much more likely to change their vote intentions by the time of the election.



**Table 7: Do Discussants Help Change Vote Intention?**

	Discussant's Vote Intention Compared to Respondent's Vote Intention, Wave 2/3 (July/August 2014)	
	<i>Do Not Match</i>	<i>Match</i>
<i>Respondent's Wave 6 Preference</i>		
Changes from Wave 2-3 to Wave 6	335 (60.9%)	54 (36.0%)
Stable from Wave 2-3 to Wave 6	215 (39.1%)	96 (64.0%)
<i>Number of Observations</i>	550	150

Note: This table includes only respondents declaring an intention to vote for Dilma, Aécio, or Marina in wave 2 or 3. Respondents' vote intentions are measured in wave 2 or wave 3 (mutually exclusive waves), except for respondents preferring Marina Silva. The latter were selected only in wave 3 due to the death of the initial presidential candidate on her ticket, Eduardo Campos. Respondents' actual votes were measured in wave 6.

Scholars have also discovered that social networks play a role in voting behavior via clientelism, an electoral strategy in which elites attempt to garner voter support by handing out private goods. In a 2010 survey, 16% of Brazilian respondents said that in the recent past a vote-seeking politician or broker had offered them a good or favor in exchange for support.<sup>12</sup> Horizontal and vertical political ties are differentially associated with being targeted for clientelistic offers. Research on Brazil and other Latin American countries shows that politicians target citizens who are high out-degree nodes--that is, citizens who have the habit of trying to persuade their peers to vote a certain way (Schaffer & Baker 2015). With this "social multiplier" strategy, politicians pay off influential people in the hopes that, via persuasive discussion, the effect of a single payoff will be magnified, transmitting their political message to non-recipients. Likewise, vertical ties to politicians and organizers are also, not surprisingly, associated with clientelism. However, recent research indicates that personal ties to politicians and organizers are most strongly associated with clientelistic offers precisely among those with fewer horizontal

ties; high out-degree nodes are targeted for clientelistic offers even in the absence of personal connections to politicians and organizers (Smith 2015a).

Political discussion also has consequences for other aspects of mass political behavior in Brazil, namely political knowledge and turnout. Political conversations convey general knowledge about candidates and campaigns. An analysis of the 2-City Study shows that over the course of both the 2002 and 2006 campaigns, political conversation contributed substantially to voters' knowledge of the candidates and their issue positions (McCann & Lawson 2006; Smith Forthcoming). For most types of knowledge, effects were strongest among those lowest in education and living in low-education neighborhoods, thus contributing to declining knowledge gaps over the course of campaigns. Similarly, political conversation furthers citizens' ability to use ideological labels (Ames & Smith 2010).

Political conversations also affect turnout and other forms of campaign participation. Though voting is compulsory (and moderately well-enforced) for Brazilians aged 18-69, turnout is never universal. The same individual characteristics, moreover, predict turnout under either compulsory or voluntary voting (Maldonado 2011; Power 2009; Singh 2011). Research in the United States and other democracies has shown that social networks strongly shape participation. While political conversation generally boosts turnout and engagement, exposure to disagreement as well as strong ties to non-voters can be demobilizing (McClurg 2003, 2006; Mutz 2002; Partheymüller & Schmitt-Beck 2012). Evidence from Brazil indicates that, as in the US, large political discussion networks generally boost citizen engagement with electoral campaigns, while disagreement within networks demobilizes individuals (Smith 2011).

### 3. Data Sources

This section briefly describes two Brazilian datasets featuring political discussant name generators.<sup>13</sup> Both are panel studies, providing added value for understanding network dynamics during and even across campaigns.

#### *3.1 The 2-City Brazilian Panel Study*

The 2-city study is a six-wave panel carried out from 2002 to 2006 in two mid-sized municipalities, Caxias do Sul (state of Rio Grande do Sul) and Juiz de Fora (state of Minas Gerais). While the two cities have similarities—populations of roughly half a million each, and manufacturing-based economies—they are politically quite distinct. Juiz de Fora, like many Brazilian cities, has weakly organized parties and voted strongly for Lula, the eventual winner of both elections. Caxias do Sul features greater party organization, with the Workers' Party (PT) representing the left and the PMDB organizing a right-of-center bloc. Voters in Caxias do Sul defied national trends, largely voting against Lula in both 2002 and 2006.

Waves 1 through 3 occurred in conjunction with the state and federal elections of October of 2002 (March and August waves before and an October wave after the first round). Waves 5 and 6 occurred in conjunction with the state and federal elections of October of 2006 (a July wave before and an October wave after the first round). Wave 4 occurred in 2004, a municipal election year. A city-representative sample of about 2,500 interviews was collected in the first wave in each municipality, and a total of 21,267 main respondent interviews and re-interviews occurred across all six waves. There are limits to a study of two cities; urban networks may function differently from ones in rural areas, particularly in the less developed North and

Northeast, and these two cities are relatively well governed. Still, 81% of Brazilians lived in urban areas in 2000, and the percent urban continued to increase in the ensuing decade.

While the study was not nationally representative, the research design was exceptionally sensitive to micro- and meso-context. Representative samples were collected in fifty neighborhoods across the two cities, facilitating the disentanglement of the relative impacts of local social context and personal characteristics on political behavior (e.g., Smith Forthcoming). Across the six waves, moreover, respondents were asked about their contacts with a wide variety of intermediaries, from neighborhood associations to informal networks to local politicians.

Discussant name generators were included on the wave 2 and wave 5 questionnaires. Main respondents were invited to list up to three people with whom they discussed politics. Respondents were then asked to provide their relationship with each named discussant, each discussant's presidential vote choice, and each discussant's gubernatorial vote choice. The batteries in waves 2 and 5 were independent of one another, meaning respondents could name an entirely different list of discussants in each. This affords the rare opportunity to analyze network stability through time (Sokhey, Baker and Djupe 2015).

Two other novel features of the design are also important. First, main respondents were asked in waves 3 and 6 to name the presidential and gubernatorial vote choices of the discussants they had named in the preceding wave. In analyses of network influence, this enables one to account for the confounding effect of homophily by controlling for network selection in the previous wave. In addition, two waves of data on *both* discussant *and* main respondent preferences can help improve causal inference regarding mutual influences among discussion partners.

Second, a nonrandom sample of named discussants was interviewed just after wave 3 and again after wave 4. Nearly 4,000 such interviews occurred. These interviews provide an opportunity for clearer causal inference regarding network influence, since analysts do not have to rely on main respondent reports of their discussants' preferences. Data from these interviews could be used as instruments for network members' perceived preferences. In addition, rich data on discussant characteristics can help researchers assess *which* types of discussants are most likely to be influential.

### *3.2 The 2014 Brazilian Electoral Panel Survey*

A second valuable dataset for assessing discussion effects is the Brazilian Electoral Panel Study of 2014. BEPS 2014 conducted seven waves of interviews between May and November of 2014. The first wave, involving face-to-face interviews in 22 of Brazil's 26 states, was representative of the Brazilian population. Subsequent waves, conducted through phone interviews, were based on subsamples drawn from the first wave. During the first interview, 79.6% of respondents agreed to be contacted by phone for follow-up interviews; 70.3% of those who agreed to a recontact were actually re-interviewed at least once. Four interim waves were conducted during the campaign prior to the first-round election: July 16-20 (wave 2), August 28-September 1 (wave 3), September 16-21 (wave 4), and September 29-October 4 (wave 5). The sixth wave was implemented in October, immediately following the first round election, and the seventh in late October-early November, immediately following the second round runoff for president. The list of potential interviewees was randomly split in waves 2 and 3 and again in waves 4 and 5. That is, a contact was attempted with each respondent in *either* wave 2 or 3 and

then again in *either* wave 4 or 5. Thus, the maximum number of interviews per respondent is five.

In the first wave, the survey asked three questions on the general frequency of political conversation with family, friends, and in social media. Each intermediate wave included a battery of six items related to political discussion: the identity, perceived vote choice, and perceived party preference of a family member discussant; and the same three questions for a non-family member discussant. Interviewers did not ask for discussants' names but identified them only by relationships, such as spouse, mother/father, male colleague or female colleague. Finally, in waves 6 and 7, the survey asked respondents about the first and second round presidential vote choices of their most recently named discussants, identified by the relationship. Table 8 lists the questions asked in each wave.

**Table 8. Interview Waves and Network/Conversation Questions in BEPS 2014**

Wave	N	Network/Conversation Questions Asked			
		General Conversation	Discussant Generator	Discussant Vote Pref.	Discussant Party
1 (A)	3120	X			
2 (B)	609		X	X	X-
3 (C)	595		X	X	X
4 (D)	606		X	X	X
5 (E)	667		X	X	X
6 (F)	1207			X	
7 (G)	1001			X	

This design again incorporates a number of features that help to improve causal inference and address theoretically interesting questions. The fact that many respondents received the discussant generator twice, in wave 2 or 3 and in wave 4 or 5, provides an unusual opportunity to examine stability in network composition. In analysis of discussant influence, repeated measures of the preferences of the two most recently named discussants can again help to improve causal inference with respect to mutual influence and stability in the main respondent-discussant dyad.

#### 4. Conclusion

Our brief review of the structure and consequences of political discussion in Brazil makes it clear that politics, while it does not dominate the day-to-day conversations of Brazilians, is not an infrequently discussed topic, and a large share of Brazilians does discuss politics at least some of the time. And while we do not mean to establish the United States as a role model of democratic citizenship for developing countries (to say the least!), one cannot help but notice that the frequency of discussion and the structure of political networks in Brazil are similar to those of the US. Moreover, we present arguments and findings indicating that these moderate amounts of political discussion have major political consequences in Brazil, perhaps even more significant consequences than in the US. Political discussion influences a variety of mass-level political behaviors and traits, including vote choice, political knowledge, campaign engagement, and even clientelistic targeting.

Although we are confident in these conclusions, several data and measurement challenges remain. Conceptualizing and measuring the social network as a self-reported, egocentric collection of up to three relatively close family and friends has inherent limitations. These lists are surely truncated for many respondents, and one cannot hope to map out entire networks, even when discussants themselves are interviewed. Furthermore, we still have no nationwide samples with a full (3-or-more discussant) battery.

Challenges also remain in terms of theory development and testing. We have indicated a number of ways in which social context may shape the nature and consequences of political discussion networks, both generally and in the specific case on which we focus. Still, the striking similarities between the US and Brazil in levels of discussion and disagreement pose something of a puzzle, and suggest the need for further theoretical and empirical work. What leads to this



congruence, despite the fact that the US party system is more programmatic and less complex than its Brazilian equivalent, and that the democratic regime of the US is much older? Our answers are at this point speculative. In both countries, levels of television viewership are high and media play a major role in campaigns; the saturation of television may contribute to moderate levels of political discussion. In addition, citizens in both countries may respond to the competitiveness of presidential elections by talking politics (Nir 2012). At the same time, certain features of Brazilian campaigns may compensate for any downward effect on political discussion resulting from the complexity of the party and electoral systems. In particular, the famous personalization of Brazilian politics leads elites at all levels, as well as vote brokers (*cabos eleitorais*), to seek to establish personal contact with voters. Personal connections to the political world may lead to high levels of political discussion among citizens.

We also have far to go in understanding how the impacts of social networks vary across contexts. Recent cross-national work has begun to explore these issues; a forthcoming special edition of the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* contains a collection of articles devoted specifically to this question. Two further avenues for research may be fruitful in this regard. First, given the dearth of research on social networks in developing democracies, it may be particularly interesting to compare survey data from Brazil with social network data from other countries included in the Comparative National Elections Project (Chile, Hungary, Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa, Uruguay).<sup>14</sup> Second, experiments hold much promise. Researchers could develop lab-based conversation groups in which the structural parameters of decision tasks vary in ways that mimic institutional variation. Such research should be helpful in understanding more clearly how institutions affect the outcomes of political discussion. We are confident that

these and other explorations of political discussion and its effects on political behavior will add to our understanding of mass political behavior in comparative contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> Several cross-national studies based on the Comparative National Elections Project include developing democracies (Eveland & Song 2015; Gunther, Montero, and Puhle 2007; Gunther et al. 2015; Smith 2015b).

<sup>2</sup> But see Baker and Greene (2011) for evidence of positional issue voting in Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006. Funded by National Science Foundation (SES #0137088). Available at <http://spot.colorado.edu/~bakerab/data.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ames et al. 2015. This research was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Brazilian National Research Council, and the Andrew Mellon Professorship at the University of Pittsburgh. These data will be publicly available from the Inter-American Development Bank by January 2016. **NOTE: IF POSSIBLE PRIOR TO PUBLICATION, WE WILL ADD THE URL.**

<sup>5</sup> For national-level data on citizens' connections to clergy, see BEPS 2010 and BEPS 2014 (Ames et al. 2011, 2015). For national-level data on citizens' connections to vote brokers and politicians, see BEPS 2010 and the 2012 wave of the AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project.

<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, see Samuels and Zucco (2014) for evidence that some Brazilian voters do use party affiliation as a meaningful heuristic.

<sup>7</sup> For respondents in the top half of the wealth distribution, the correlations between social media discussion of politics and the other two forms of political discussion are .40 and .42. For respondent under the age of 30, the respective correlations are .44 and .48.

<sup>8</sup> To the best of our knowledge, the only opportunity to compare an equivalently worded question is the World Values Survey, which asked a discussion question in Brazil in 1991 and in the United States in 1995. This shows a slightly higher self-reported mean of discussion frequency in the US (higher by about 1/5th of a standard deviation), where the share of "never discusses" (26.8%) is lower than in Brazil (44.4%). That said, the share of "frequently discusses" responses is actually lower in the US (16.0%) than in Brazil (19.8%).

<sup>9</sup> These are not the only US-based network name generators available, but to maximize comparability, we use this Spencer Foundation data because, like the Two-City Study, they explicitly requested *political* discussants and capped the list at three.

<sup>10</sup> Not to mention the fact that these were measured after election day, and thus presumably after a great degree of social influence had occurred.

<sup>11</sup> A similar fate befell Marina Silva in 2014. She began the campaign as running mate to the then-third-place candidate Eduardo Campos. Upon his unexpected death in a plane crash, she shot up in the polls to second place (34%), only to fall to third place on election day, finishing more than 10 points behind the runner-up.

<sup>12</sup> This datum is from the 2010 Brazilian Electoral Panel Study.

<sup>13</sup> Yet another data set that included some network and social influence questions is the Brazilian Electoral Panel Study of 2010 (Ames et al. 2011). BEPS 2010 included items asking for the name and contact information of a discussant in both Waves 1 and 2. Phone interviews with those named discussants were attempted, but the study was unable to obtain a reasonable response rate, and so phone interviews were abandoned. BEPS 2010 also contains rich information on other types of networks, including contacts with politicians and political brokers and discussions of politics in church.

<sup>14</sup> The third round of the CNEP also studied Indonesia but, sadly, did not include any network questions.

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