DECODING POLITICIANS' SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS IN RIO DE JANEIRO AND RECIFE
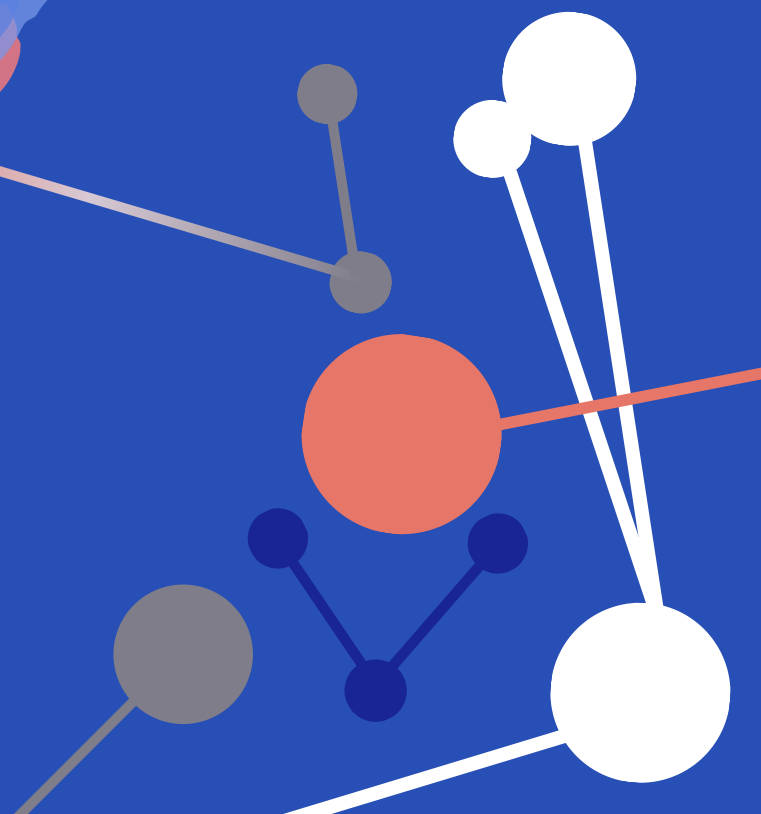
THE RE-ELECTED MAYOR'S SOCIAL MEDIA DOMINANCE

2024

FGV COMUNICAÇÃO RIO

Decoding Politicians' Social Media Campaigns in Rio de Janeiro and Recife:

The Re-Elected Mayors' Social Media Dominance

November, 2024

Analysis by

DEMOCRACY REPORTING INTERNATIONAL

This analysis was performed by **Democracy Reporting International,** in collaboration with **Agencia Lupa**.

In **Brazil's 2024 municipal elections**, centre and right-wing parties secured victories in most cities. A noticeable trend was that of incumbents winning re-election. Among the notable examples were **Eduardo Paes** (Social Democratic Party), in Rio de Janeiro, and **João Campos** (Brazilian Socialist Party), in Recife, both of whom were re-elected in the first round by significant margins. This study focuses on these two mayors, selected for their high digital popularity, as noted by BBC Brazil a year before the elections. It examines their digital strategies and audience responses on Instagram and TikTok in comparison to their challengers in both cities.

Key Findings

- The data revealed distinct digital communication strategies among the candidates in both cities. Although **Instagram** was the primary platform for all, conservative candidates in Rio de Janeiro demonstrated greater attention to **TikTok,** and in Recife, João Campos's active TikTok presence resulted in notably high engagement levels.

- **Engagement metrics** demonstrate the substantial lead in public reactions for the two incumbent mayors over their opponents.

- **In the two cities, conservatives and progressives promoted contrasting agendas** throughout the campaign. Conservatives focused on themes of "freedom, patriotism, religion, and family," often accompanied by criticism directed at opponents, institutions, and the media. In contrast, progressives demonstrated a wider ideological range, discussing topics like "anti-capitalism" and "anti-fascism," as well as "representation of gender, class, and race."

- Both candidates faced targeted disinformation campaigns. **Paes** was subjected to more personal attacks, often focusing on his political alliances and behaviour. **Campos**, on the other hand, faced indirect attacks aimed primarily at his partner, Tabata Amaral, who was running for mayor in São Paulo.

Methodology

This report analyses posts published throughout the entire political campaign (from 16 August to 6 October) by the major candidates in two cities: eight candidates in **Rio de Janeiro**, the capital of the state by the same name, and six in **Recife**, the state capital of Pernambuco.

We gathered posts from **Instagram** and **TikTok**, totalling:

- 1,783 posts in Rio de Janeiro (1,201 from Instagram and 582 from TikTok);
- 1,125 posts in Recife (932 from Instagram and 187 from TikTok).

With this data, we conducted analyses to investigate the difference in strategies compared to the conservatives candidates. First, we examined the volume of posting on both platforms, and then dived into the political narratives used by candidates, using BERT **topic modelling**. This latter process required additional qualitative reviews to gain a better understanding of the automatically identified topics. Next, we assessed audience responses to candidates' messages, both overall and by topic, by analysing **engagement** metrics (likes, comments, and shares).

In the final part of the analysis, we examined **disinformation narratives** surrounding the two winning candidates: Paes in Rio de Janeiro and Campos in Recife. Agência Lupa supported the mapping of key narratives about these candidates. Using this list, we were able to collect data from sources such as websites and social media (especially X) via BrandWatch, a consumer intelligence platform that enables data gathering through targeted queries. In this way, we were able to gain significant insights into the disinformation trends targeting the two candidates during the campaign.

Presenting the Candidates in Rio de Janeiro and Recife

Rio de Janeiro

- Re-elected with a strong majority in Rio de Janeiro (60.4 per cent), **Eduardo Paes** (PSD) enters his fourth term as mayor, having previously won in 2008, 2012, and 2020. This fourth term places Paes in an unprecedented position in Rio de Janeiro since the country's re-democratisation in 1985. His current administration has high approval ratings and, given that Rio de Janeiro is traditionally a stronghold for former President Jair Bolsonaro (PL), it is noteworthy that Paes's progressive stance and alliances with left-leaning parties, and particularly his association with President Lula during the campaign, did not adversely affect his electoral performance.
- Eduardo Paes received twice as many votes as the runner-up, Alexandre Ramagem (PL), the candidate from Bolsonaro's party (PL). For many analysts, this election signalled a decrease in the polarised dynamics that have characterised recent elections in Brazil. For instance, Paes's campaign focused on achievements by his administration, carefully avoiding a positioning that would align him with a specific side of the political spectrum. His political trajectory in Rio de Janeiro is particularly recognized in areas such as health, sports, culture and leisure, and infrastructure.

Table 1: Profiles of Mayoral Candidates Monitored in Rio de Janeiro

Mayoral candidate	Political party	Political affiliation	Political orientation
Eduardo Paes	Partido Social Democrático	Centre	Progressive
Alexandre Ramagem	Partido Livre	Far right	Conservative
Carol Sponza	Partido Novo	Right	Conservative
Cyro Garcia	Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificados	Far left	Progressive
Juliete Pantoja	Unidade Popular	Far left	Progressive
Marcelo Queiroz	Progressistas	Right	Conservative
Rodrigo Amorim	União Brasil	Right	Conservative
Tarcísio Motta	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade	Left	Progressive

Recife

- The mayor of Recife (PE), João Campos (PSB), was re-elected in the first round with 78.12 per cent of the vote. Achieving one of the highest vote counts among Brazilian capitals, he received the highest share of votes for any candidate in Recife since Brazil's re-democratisation.
- Although positioned in the centre-left of the political spectrum, Campos's overwhelming electoral success was one of the few exceptions amid the general trend in capital cities, where centrist and centre-right politicians gained ground. During his term, Campos made significant investments in health, infrastructure, and education. Throughout his campaign, his presence and active engagement on social media were focal points of criticism by opponents, who considered his performance superficial, "typical of social media filters". On Instagram alone, Campos has 2.7 million followers, surpassing the entire population of Recife, which is approximately 1.5 million.
- Campos belongs to one of Pernambuco's most prominent political families; he is the son of former state governor Eduardo Campos, a 2014 presidential candidate, who died in a plane crash during that election, and is the great-grandson of Miguel Arraes, another former governor and a lasting figure in local political history.

Table 2: Profiles of Monitored Mayoral Candidates' in Recife

Mayoral candidate	Political party	Political affiliation	Political orientation
João Campos	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade	Centre-left	Progressive
Dani Portela	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade	Left	Progressive
Daniel Coelho	Partido Social Democrático	Centre	Progressive
Gilson Machado	Partido Livre	Far right	Conservative
Tecio Teles	Partido Novo	Right	Conservative
Ludmila	Unidade Popular	Far left	Progressive

● The classification of the candidates' political affiliations was based on their political party affiliations (from far left to far right), as well as their positions on public policies and political issues (distinguishing "progressive" and "conservative"), as will be demonstrated in subsequent sections.
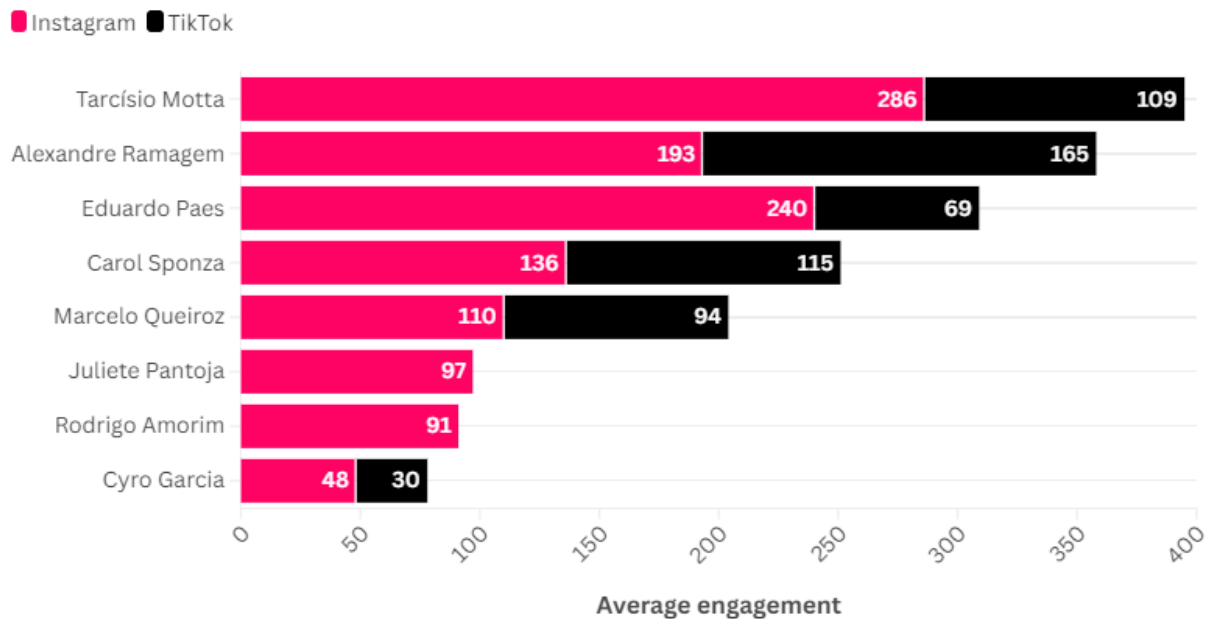
Unpacking the Political Strategies on Social Media

● According to Quaest research published in October 2023 on CNN Brazil, Paes (80.4/100) and Campos (63.7/100) were the two mayors with the **highest popularity ratings** on digital platforms in Brazil. These scores took into account 27 variables from different platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X, Google, Wikipedia, YouTube, and TikTok.

● As demonstrated by DRI in a previous report, politicians in Brazil often rely on social media and digital channels to consolidate support, promote consensus, and mobilise voters, especially during election campaigns.

● A study by FGV Comunicação Rio showed that **Instagram and TikTok** dominated the electoral interactions in the capitals during these elections.

● In the following sections, we will analyse the main candidates' communication strategies on Instagram and TikTok, highlighting the difference in approaches in both cities.

I. Volume Analysis

● In the first part, we examine the **overall volume of posting** on both of the platforms. Post *quantity* and *frequency* are strategic elements to consider during the planning and implementation of an effective social media strategy, especially in political contexts.

● In Rio de Janeiro and Recife, publication levels were comparable across the candidates and consistent over time, allowing us to delve into candidates' strategic choices when communicating online.

● Graph 1 shows that, in **Rio de Janeiro**, Tarcisio Motta (PSOL) – totalling 395 posts – and Alexandre Ramagem (PL) – with 358 posts – who finished third and second in the race, respectively, were the most active in terms of overall number of posts.

● While all candidates favoured Instagram, conservative candidates were noticeably more active on TikTok, making up 64 per cent of the total posts on that platform (Graph 2).

Graph 1: Total Volume of Posts on Instagram and TikTok in Rio de Janeiro by Candidate

● Instagram ● TikTok

Tarcísio Motta	286 / 109
Alexandre Ramagem	193 / 165
Eduardo Paes	240 / 69
Carol Sponza	136 / 115
Marcelo Queiroz	110 / 94
Juliete Pantoja	97
Rodrigo Amorim	91
Cyro Garcia	48 / 30

Average engagement

Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

Graph 2: Percentage of Posts on Instagram and TikTok by Progressives and Conservatives

● Progressive ● Conservative

Instagram	55.87 / 44.13
TikTok	35.74 / 64.26
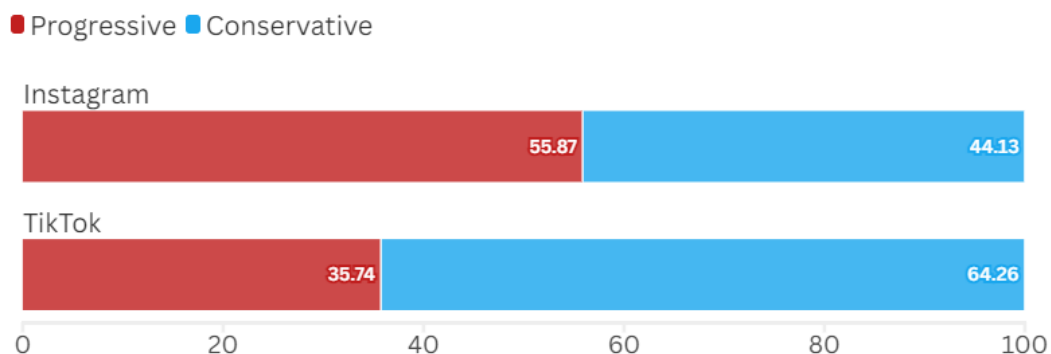
Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

● In **Recife**, re-elected mayor João Campos ranked highest in the number of posts overall, and stood out as the most active candidate on TikTok, being among the few who truly adopted the platform and used it actively (Graph 3).

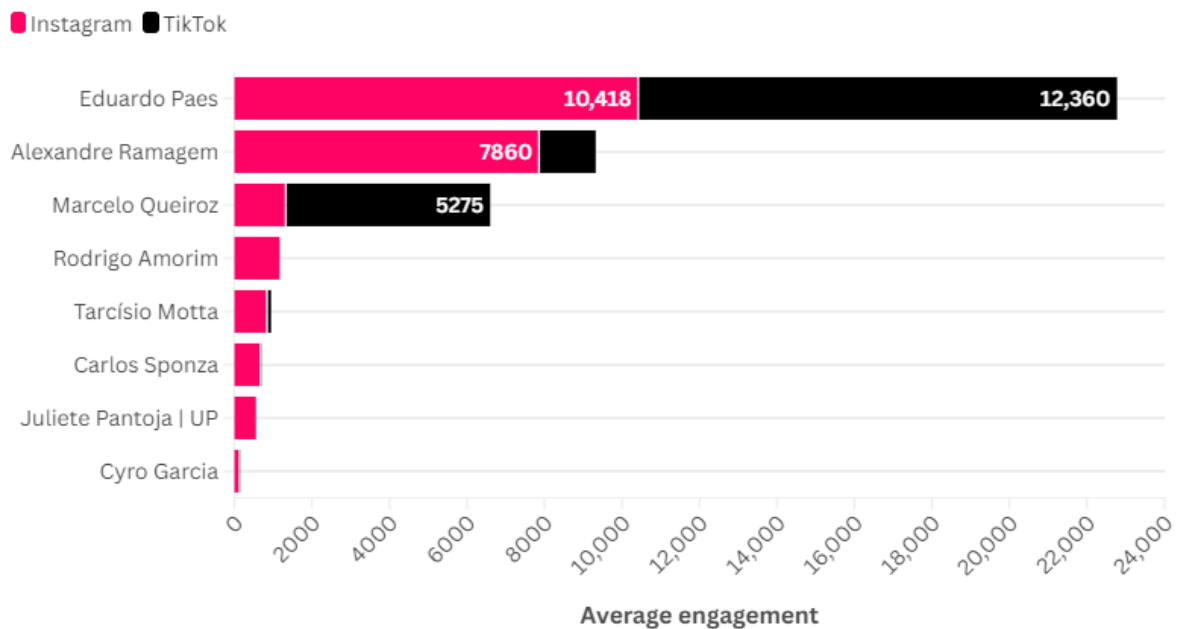**Graph 3: Total Volume of Posts on Instagram and TikTok in Recife**

■ Instagram ■ TikTok

Candidate	Instagram	TikTok

João Campos — 210 | 145
Daniel Coelho — 220 | 30
Dani Portela — 204
Gilson Machado — 142
Ludmila — 84
Tecio Teles — 72 | 12

Average engagement
(x-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400)
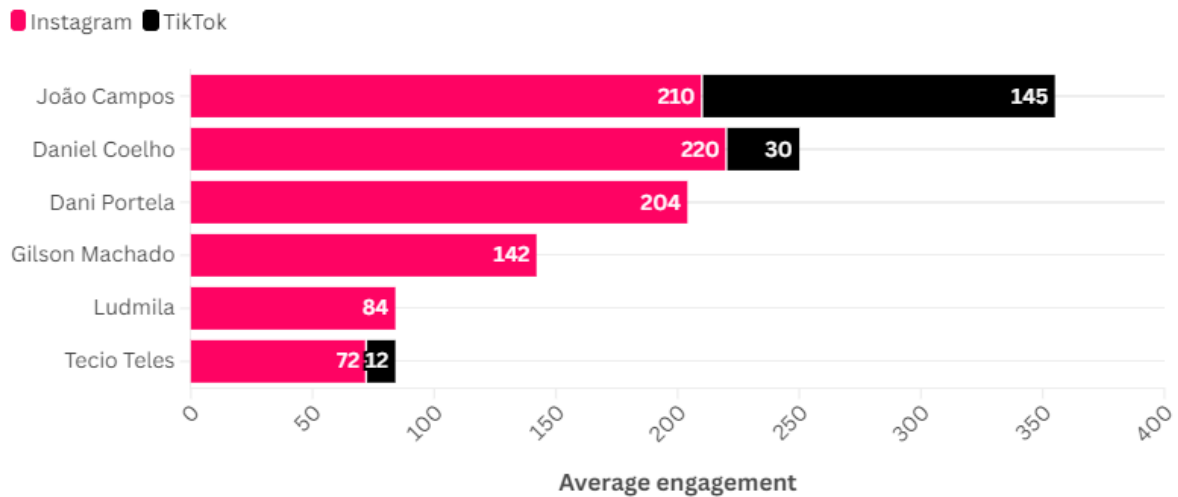
Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

II.   Engagement Analysis

- In this research, we considered the *average engagement*, which is the sum of total interactions (likes, comments, and shares) by users, divided by the total number of posts by candidate.
- The real contest between the candidates played out in terms of **engagement**, highlighting the clear difference in public reaction to the incumbents and their opponents.

- In **Rio de Janeiro**, Paes not only stood out as the candidate with the highest average engagement, but he also lead in engagement on TikTok, despite having been less active on the platform as compared to Instagram (Graph 4).
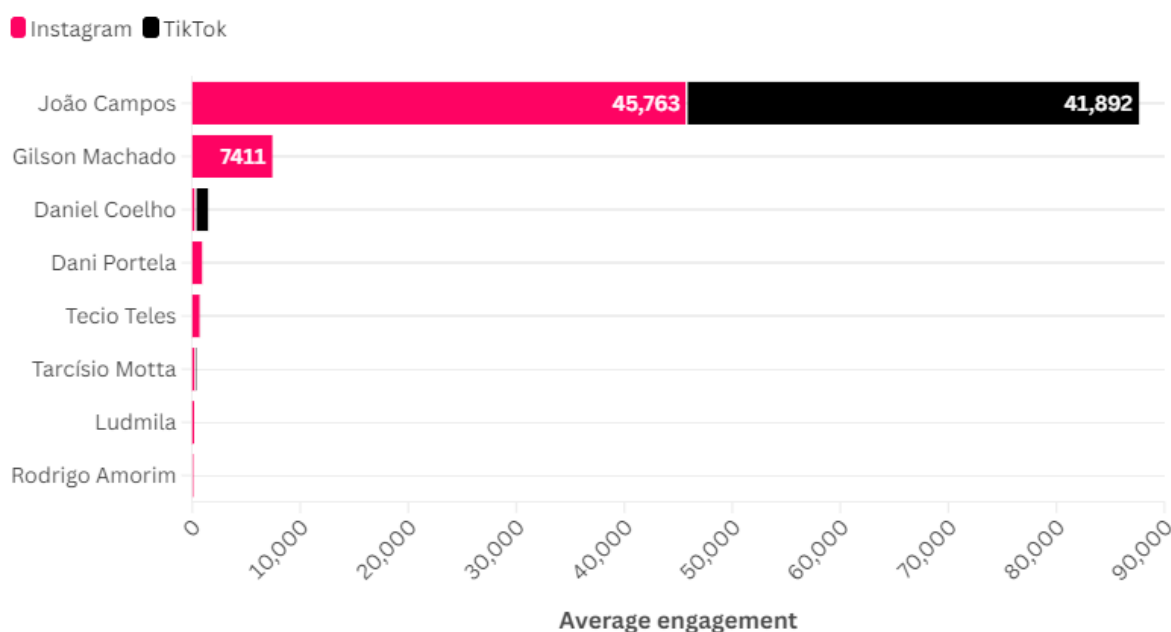
Graph 4: Average Engagement per Candidate in Rio de Janeiro

Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

● **In Recife**, although the main candidates displayed a balanced volume of posts on Instagram, there was a clear disparity in average engagement, with candidate Campos dominating the platform almost entirely. Campos was the only candidate that used TikTok, as is also seen in his significantly higher engagement levels on the platform (Graph 5).

Graph 5: Average Engagement per Candidate in Recife

Instagram ■ TikTok

João Campos	45,763 (Instagram) 41,892 (TikTok)
Gilson Machado	7411
Daniel Coelho	
Dani Portela	
Tecio Teles	
Tarcísio Motta	
Ludmila	
Rodrigo Amorim	

Average engagement

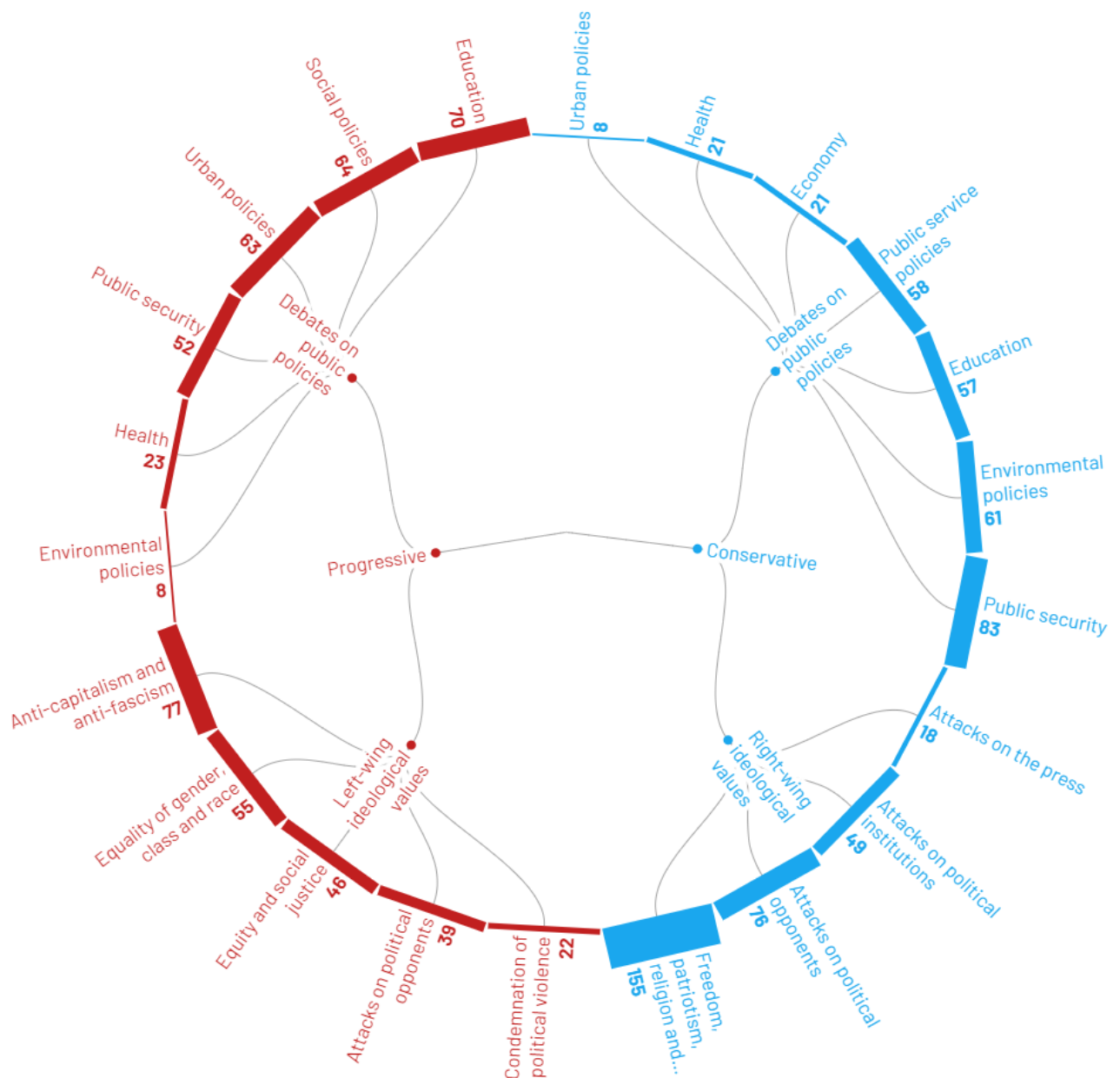Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

III.   Topic modelling – Progressives vs Conservatives

- To explore the main discussion around content and agendas, we performed a **BERT topic modelling** analysis, considering data from both platforms.
- For this specific analysis, we aggregated with regard to ideologies, instead of comparing topics across individual candidates. For this reason, topic comparisons are available across "progressive" and "conservative" candidate groupings. Within each of the groups, candidates developed their discussions around two main topics:
  - **Ideological values** (either "right-wing" or "left-wing"), or
  - **Debates on public policies,** which is a common category, including agendas and proposals on several different topics (health, education, urban policies, etc).

- In **Rio de Janeiro** (Graph 6), conservative debates on public policies showed more diversity, ranging from "public security" and "environmental policies" to "the economy" and "urban policies". Progressive candidates focused more on "education", "social policies", and "urban policies".
- Regarding "**ideological values**", conservative candidates distinguished themselves by talking mainly about "freedom, patriotism, religion, and family",

followed by attacks on "political opponents", "political institutions", and the "traditional media".

Progressive candidates mainly discussed "anti-capitalism and anti-fascism", "representation and equality" (especially regarding gender, class, and race), and "equity and social justice".

Graph 6: Topics Discussed by Conservatives and Progressive Candidates in Rio de Janeiro

Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

- In **Recife,** progressive candidates discussed "urban policies", "social policies", "education", and "health", while conservatives discussed "the economy", "urban policies", and "public security" (Graph 7).
- When it comes to ideological values, conservatives emphasised "freedom, patriotism, religion, and family," while progressives focused on "equality and representation."

Graph 7: Topics Discussed by Conservatives and Progressive Candidates in Recife
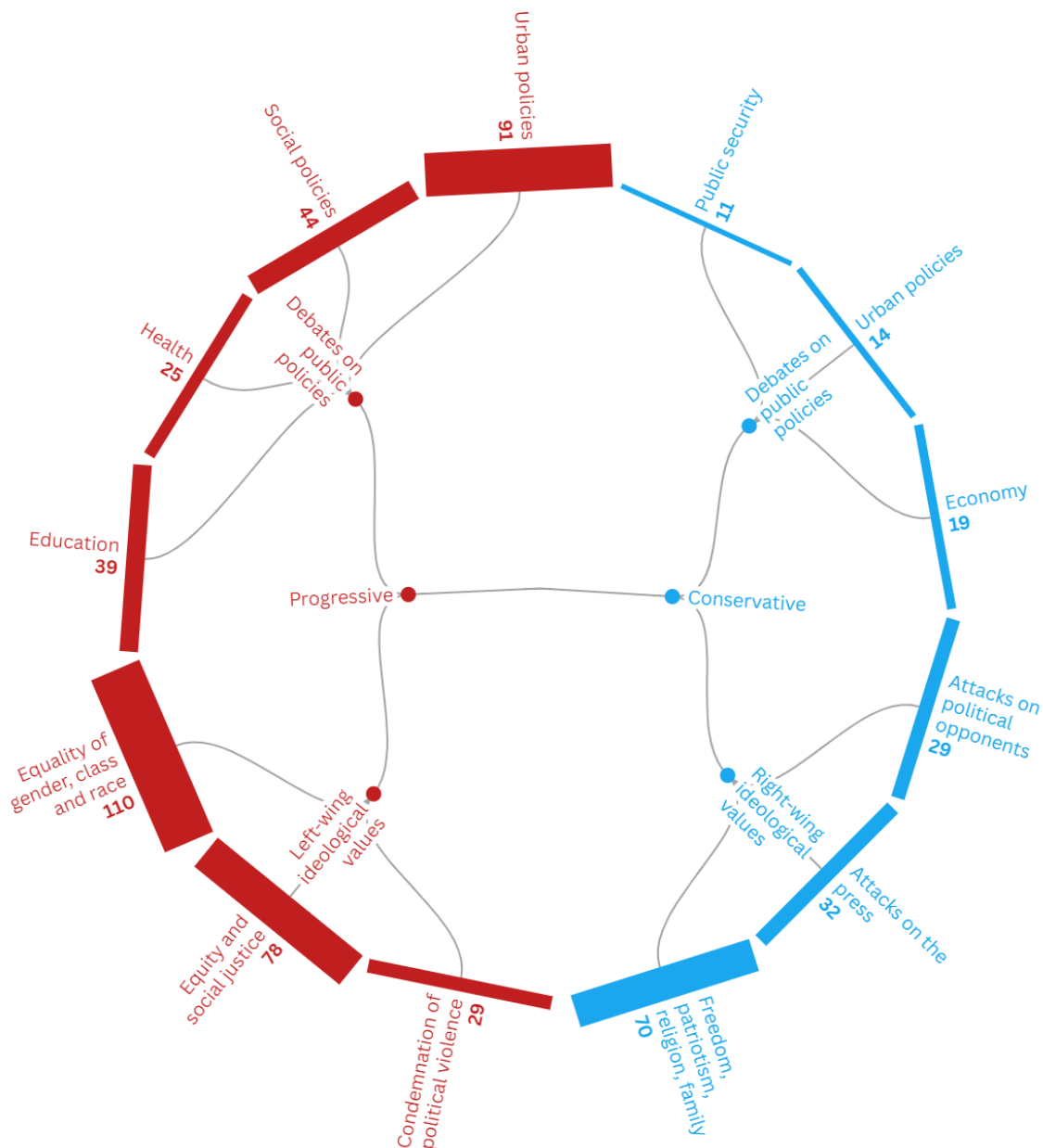
Source: Instagram and TikTok Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

Assessing the Impact of Disinformation Narratives against the Candidates

- Although the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) worked to address disinformation during the municipal elections, the problem remained prevalent, with a noticeable peak on X, particularly after the platform was reinstated following an initial ban.
- The fact-checking and media literacy, **Agencia Lupa**, closely followed the campaign to debunk disinformation narratives and set up processes to facilitate the flagging by users of false news.
- With support from Lupa, we were able to monitor **disinformation narratives around the two winning candidates** in Rio de Janeiro and Recife, starting by pre-debunked discussions circulated online since August 2024.

- In **Rio de Janeiro**, narratives surrounding Paes primarily targeted his political image, by scrutinising his behaviour (e.g., claims of him being drunk in public), fabricating accusations (e.g., labelling him as a "mafioso"), and questioning his alliances (e.g., suggesting support from the criminal organisation Comando Vermelho).

Table 3: Disinformation Narratives around Eduardo Paes

City	Target	Disinfo narrative	Debunked narrative	Link
Rio de Janeiro	Eduardo Paes	**1.** A video showing Paes (PSD), dancing next to other people at a street party. The publication does not mention the date the video was taken, suggesting that the content is current. The caption accompanying the video states that the mayor was drunk, without the protection of security guards, in Complexo da Maré, in the city's North Zone.	The video is old and has been circulating on social media since at least November 2020. The location is also not the one indicated in the video's caption. The recording was actually made in Magalhães Bastos, a neighbourhood in the West Zone – which is more than 22 kilometres from Maré, which is in the North Zone.	https://lupa.uol.com.br/jornalismo/2024/10/05/video-de-eduardo-paes-em-festa-na-rua-e-antigo-e-nao-foi-gravado-na-mare

Rio de Janeiro	Eduardo Paes	**2.** A text circulated on social media calling the mayor, Paes, "the biggest mafioso in the history of Rio de Janeiro", was attributed to journalist Ancelmo Gois, and published by the newspaper O Globo.	The text "Máfia Carioca" was neither authored by Ancelmo Gois nor published in *O Globo*. A search of the blog the journalist maintains at the newspaper yields no results linked to this text.	https://lupa.uol.com.br/jornalismo/2024/08/22/ancelmo-gois-nao-e-autor-de-texto-que-liga-mafia-carioca-a-eduardo-paes
Rio de Janeiro	Eduardo Paes	**3.** Content circulating on social media asserted that the criminal organisation Comando Vermelho and the PT (Workers Party) were "openly supporting" the re-election of Paes. The information was shared along with a video showing people marching in support of the PT and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT).	The video showing a march of people wearing red T-shirts, the colours of the PT, is old, and has nothing to do with recent party conventions or support for Paes' re-election. There is no public record to indicate that the Comando Vermelho supports Lula or Paes' re-election.	https://lupa.uol.com.br/jornalismo/2024/08/07/video-nao-mostra-apoio-do-comando-vermelho-a-eduardo-paes

- Analysing the trends of these narratives over time shows that **narrative 3** was most prevalent in the first two weeks of the campaign. In contrast, **narrative 1**, despite being debunked earlier, peaked in shares on X (Table 2) on 6 October, the day of the election. This suggests a possible coordinated effort to undermine him (Graph 8).

Graph 8: The Trend in Disinfo Narratives around Eduardo Paes During the Campaign
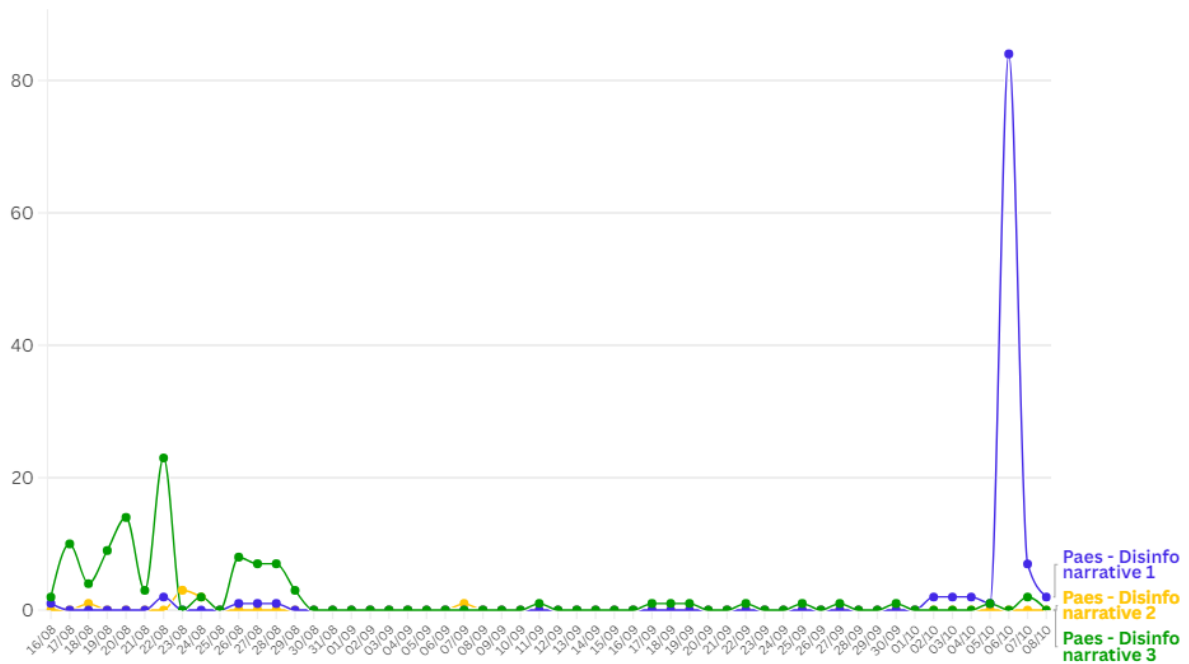
Source: BrandWatch Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

Table 4: Close-Up on the Disinfo Narrative 1 Posts Being Shared on X on 6 October

Eduardo Paes no Complexo da maré cheio de pinga livre e solto ... pois tem o tráfego que faz segurança : tá garantido 👇 5:48 AM · 6 de out de 2024	Original posts shared on X on 5 October 2024: "Eduardo Paes in Complexo da Maré, full of booze, free and easy... since he has the traffickers providing security: he's all set"

- In **Recife,** disinformation narratives around Campos mostly targeted his partner, Tabata Amaral, a politician also running for mayor in São Paulo. DRI already reported the extent and variety of attacks against her in a previous report.
- The disinformation narratives, debunked by Agencia Lupa, include the circulation of digitally altered images or photomontages that falsely depict Amaral in the nude.
- The false narratives surrounding Campos appear to leverage disinformation campaigns that initially targeted Amaral with misogynistic and defamatory intent. It seems that these narratives not only fail to inflict direct damage on Campos' reputation and image, but they also indicate a lack of substantial evidence to undermine his standing.

**Table 5: Disinformation Narratives around João Campos**

City	Target	Disinfo narrative	Debunked narrative	Link
Recife	João Campos and Tabata Amaral	**1.** An image is circulating in WhatsApp groups in which federal deputy and candidate for mayor of São Paulo, Tabata Amaral (PSB), João's partner, poses with her breasts exposed.	It is a montage. In the original image, posted by Tabata Amaral (PSD) on Facebook on February 25, 2021, she is wearing a Flamengo t-shirt.	https://lupa.uol.com.br/jornalismo/2024/09/24/e-falsa-imagem-de-tabata-amaral-com-seios-a-mostra
Recife	João Campos and Tabata Amaral	**2.** Once again, the target was Amaral, of whom fake nude photos were posted on a pornography website. Via WhatsApp, Lupa received photos of Amaral half-naked, accompanied by messages such as "Is this a candidate's posture?" or "You know this princess: she's Tábata Amaral, candidate for mayor of São Paulo. In the debates she thinks	A real photo of Amaral wearing a 2021 Flamengo shirt was used as a model to create fake nudes. In the fake versions, it is possible to identify the same background and the same expression on her face. Another version uses images of Amaral during a recent appearance on Roda Viva, an interview programme on TV Cultura. The fake versions use the same background and face as the politician, and create a montage with the body of a	https://lupa.uol.com.br/jornalismo/2024/09/24/site-porno-whatsapp-e-telegram-expoem-fotos-falsas-de-tabata-amaral-e-marina-

		she's a saint to fool the mediocre and idiotic voters!"	naked woman in the chair of the television programme.	helena-nuas

- Beyond Lupa's debunked narratives, we also decided to include personal attacks regarding Amaral's alleged use of private jets and public funds to visit Campos in Recife. These accusations were brought up by her opponent, Marina Helena, during a televised debate on September 17, which explains the spike in mentions shown in Graph 9. It is important to note that Helena raised these accusations without providing any supporting evidence, seemingly aiming to damage Amaral and Campos's reputation at a critical stage in the election.

City	Target	Narrative	Link
Recife	João Campos and Tabata Amaral	**3.** São Paulo mayoral candidates Marina Helena (Novo) and Tabata Amaral (PSB) got into an argument about Tabata's relationship with the mayor of Recife, João Campos (PSB), during the RedeTV/UOL debate on 17 September. Helena asked how many times Tabata travelled by jet to visit her partner, and who was responsible for paying for the trips. Tabata responded by saying that she had never travelled by jet. In her reply, Helena once again accused the federal deputy. "Tabata did. She flew in a twin-engine King Air, took the plane from Luziânia, and stopped in Feira de Santana to visit her boyfriend in Recife," she said.	"Isso é um delírio", diz Tabata a Marina após acusação sobre jatinho | Metrópoles

Graph 9: The Trend in Disinfo Narratives around João Campos During the Campaign
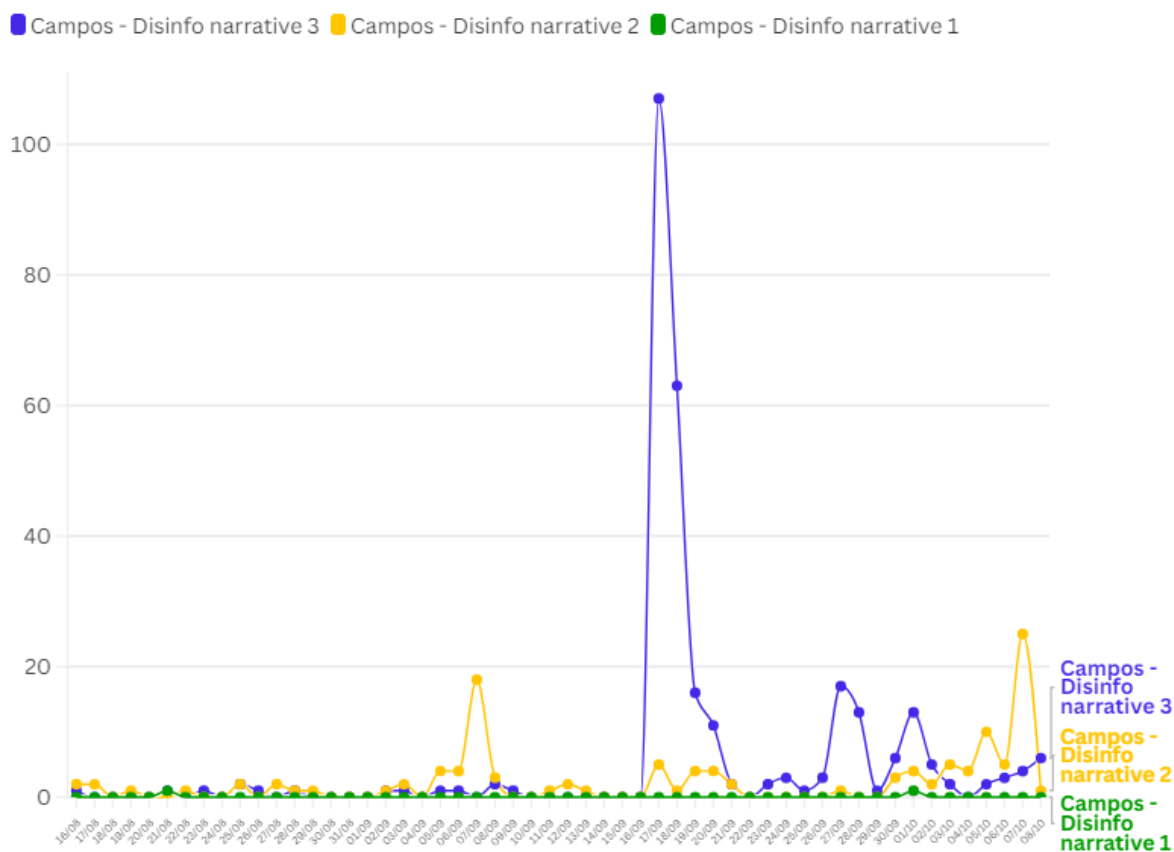
Source: BrandWatch Elaboration: Democracy Reporting International

About the **Media and Democracy Project**

The School of Communication, Media, and Information of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV ECMI) and the European Union (EU) have established a partnership to collaborate on strengthening Brazilian democracy and the integrity of digital spaces.

The initiative, known as the Media and Democracy Project, is being conducted in collaboration with the fact-checking platform Lupa, "Democracy Reporting International" (DRI), the German centre for public debate analysis. The project focuses on debates concerning gender issues, racial inequality, minority rights, hate speech, and other important issues in Brazilian politics. The project encompasses the monitoring and analysis of digital media, fact-checking, and the establishment of a council as a public space for promoting positive dialogue, involving researchers, civil society, governmental representatives, and platform stakeholders.

Authorship:

This report was written and the data analysis conducted by Francesca Giannaccini, Digital Democracy Research Associate, and Sabrina Almeida, Researcher, at DRI, in collaboration with Agencia Lupa.

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Founded in 1944, the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (Fundação Getúlio Vargas, FGV) was established with the goal of promoting Brazil's socioeconomic development through the education of qualified administrators in both the public and private sectors. Over time, FGV expanded its scope to encompass other fields of knowledge such as Social Sciences, Law, Economics, History, Applied Mathematics, International Relations, and Communication, becoming a benchmark for quality and excellence with its ten schools.

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