Who Distrusts Elections? Evidence from Brazil

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Introduction

Free and fair elections are at the core of the main definitions of democracy in political science (Dahl, 1971; Przeworski, 2019; Schumpeter, 2003). The lack of confidence in electoral integrity might affect support for democracy (Karp et al., 2018), the likelihood of voting, impacting turnout (Birch, 2010; Carreras and İrepoğlu, 2013), and lead voters to choose ideologically extreme candidates (Dyck et al., 2018). It can lead citizens to engage in peaceful and violent protest (Beaulieu, 2014), opt for a blank vote in compulsory voting systems, or prefer extreme right and populist parties (Hooghe et al., 2011). In contrast, where citizens trust the electoral process, turnout (Birch, 2010) and satisfaction with democratic performance (Norris, 2004) increase. At the constituency level, the maintenance of democracy depends on the losers' consent (Anderson et al., 2005; Nadeau and Blais, 1993). In the long term, defeat after defeat might lead both elites and voters to abstain from the electoral process, seek other means rather than democratic ones to achieve power or lead individuals to engage in non-conventional forms of political participation (Anderson et al., 2005).

After losing four consecutive elections, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) asked for a recount in 2014 when Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party) beat Aécio Neves. The 2014 Brazilian elections had close results. Rousseff got reelected with 51.6% of the votes against Neves's 48.4%. The PSDB, which governed the country between 1995 and 2002, immediately asked for a recount. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro ran for the Social Liberal Party (PSL) and broke the long-standing pattern, contesting the runoff with the Workers' Party's (PT) nominee, Fernando Haddad. Even though victorious, Bolsoaro claimed to have evidence that he would have won the elections in the first round. Finally, on January 8, 2023, Brazil witnessed the American January 6th emulation. Jair Bolsonaro's supporters stormed government buildings after losing the 2022 elections, claiming fraud. Although Bolsonaro did not explicitly reject the election results, the then-president refrained from embracing the opposite stance by not calling the winner to concede defeat over the phone—a common practice in the Brazilian context. All these episodes occurred in an electoral system whose

electronic machine votes are consistent and reliable (Figueiredo Filho et al., 2022).

Figure 1: Brazilians' Perception of Electoral Integrity
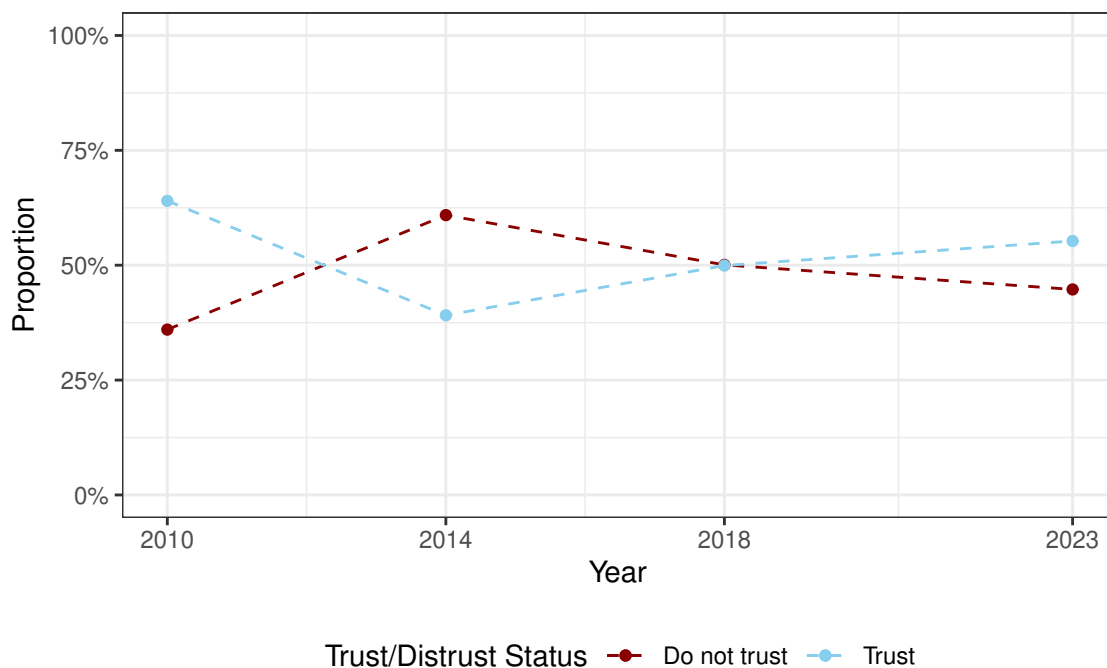
These episodes coincide with the increasing level of distrust in elections in Brazil, as shown in Figure 1. The proportion of the electorate distrusting the electoral process increased by 25 percentual points from 2010 to 2014. In 2018, 50% of Brazilians had no confidence in the electoral process. Finally, 45% of voters believe elections were not reliable in 2022. Yet, little research has focused on the Brazilian case regarding electoral integrity. Given the scarcity of studies and the potentially harmful consequences of lack of confidence in the electoral process, we ask, who distrusts elections in Brazil? To address this question, we use data from the 2018 and 2022 waves of the Brazilian Electoral Study (BES) to address the determinants of electoral distrust. Drawing on the literature, we hypothesize that losers, individuals on the right side of the ideological spectrum, voters who inform themselves through the internet, and those with lower political sophistication are more likely to distrust the electoral process. Probit maximum likelihood estimators confirm that losers, right-wingers, and those with low

2

interest in politics are more likely to distrust elections. Although less significant than the previous predictors, online-informed individuals also tend to doubt the process.

We structure the paper as follows: First, we review the theory and present our hypotheses. The following section discusses data and methods. A third section presents results and robustness checks. Finally, the conclusion revisits the findings considering the specialized literature and contextual facts.

Theoretical Framework

Many factors shape the perception of electoral integrity. At the structural level, institutional arrangements play an essential role (V. Hernández-Huerta and Cantú, 2022; Karp et al., 2018). These include the autonomy and capacity of Electoral Management Bodies (Birch, 2008, 2010; Garnett, 2019), public funding of campaigns (Birch, 2008), the age of democracy (V. A. Hernández-Huerta, 2020), and the quality of information delivered to voters and media freedom (Kerr and Lührmann, 2017), among others. At the individual level, the determinants of election distrust do not necessarily associate with the integrity of the process (Daxecker et al., 2019; V. Hernández-Huerta and Cantú, 2022). The literature shows that partisanship (Beaulieu, 2014; Kernell and Mullinix, 2019), individuals' personal experiences (Atkeson et al., 2015; Kerr and Lührmann, 2017), political sophistication (Luskin, 1987), media exposure and ideology (Karp et al., 2018), conspirational beliefs and populist attitudes (Norris et al., 2020), the presence of electoral observers (Bush and Prather, 2017; Chernykh, 2014), populist, Euroskeptical and anti-media attitudes (Goldberg and Plescia, 2024), and sociodemographic attitudinal variables such as age, gender, and race, correlate with individuals' perception of electoral integrity.

One of the main variables used to assess the level of electoral trust is the winner-loser gap. In minimal terms, democracy is a system in which incumbents leave office when they lose elections (Przeworski, 2019). The losers' consent also matters at the individual level.

3

Scholars show that voters of losing candidates are more prone to distrust the process (Alvarez et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2005; Cantú and García-Ponce, 2015; Daniller and Mutz, 2019; Maldonado et al., 2014). Such dissatisfaction with the system is more pronounced among those who keep losing than voters with a recent history of winning (Anderson et al., 2005), when defeated candidates refuse to accept the outcome (V. Hernández-Huerta and Cantú, 2022), and when the perception of electoral fairness is low (Mauk, 2022). Drawing on the losers' consent theory, the first hypothesis follows:

> *H1: Individuals who voted for the loser candidate are more likely to distrust the electoral process.*

The literature on electoral integrity often uses ideology as a determinant of distrust in elections, even though the findings are inconsistent (Freeder and Shino, 2024). Following Al Gore's defeat in 2000, scholars show that Democrats were more likely to distrust the electoral process, as was also the case in 2004 and 2016 when the party left the process as the loser (Alvarez et al., 2008; Bullock et al., 2005; Levy, 2021; Llewellyn et al., 2009). In 2008, 2012, and 2020, when Republicans lost the elections, they, instead of Democrats, were more prone to distrust elections (Atkeson et al., 2015; Berlinski et al., 2023; Llewellyn et al., 2009). Although ideology plays an important role in shaping individuals' perception of electoral integrity, the loser-winner status interacts with it, leading scholars to use it mainly as a control. Yet, research on the 2012 Korean presidential elections shows that conservatives are more likely to distrust elections (Cho and Kim, 2016). The same pattern exists in the 2016 Australian elections (Karp et al., 2018). Considering that Bolsonaro supporters are more likely to dislike progressive stances such as same-sex marriage, adoption by gay couples, and decriminalization of drugs, among others (Rennó, 2020), his defeat in 2022 and his unfounded claims that he would have won the 2018 elections in the first round, the fourth hypothesis suggests:

> *H2: Conservative voters are more likely to distrust elections than liberal ones.*

There is a common belief that increased access to the internet would have led to political distrust. Yet scholars show counterintuitive findings when examining such a relationship: the new informational context strengthened political trust (Lu et al., 2019). Higher internet penetration is linked to fairer elections in countries with and without a free press, suggesting improved access to political information and more transparent electoral processes (Stockemer, 2018). Studies also show that the more individuals inform themselves online, the greater their probability of distrusting political institutions (Memoli, 2020). The lack of confidence in political institutions in a highly interconnected world stems from digital misinformation campaigns that not only manipulate electoral outcomes but also affect individuals' trust in democracy (Lukito, 2023).

Research on the 2020 American elections shows that individuals whose primary way to get political information is through social media are more likely to fear voter fraud than others (Jarvis and Park-Ozee, 20244). Studies on Brazilian elections show the spreading of misinformation related to the electoral process on Twitter in 2018 (Ruediger et al., 2020) and a similar pattern in 2022, with fraud allegations and actors advocating for printed ballots (Ruediger et al., 2022). Given the contradictory findings in the literature and strong evidence of online misinformation taking place during the Brazilian electoral process, especially in 2018, we suggest our third hypothesis:

> *H3: Individuals informed about politics online are more likely not to trust elections.*

Another essential element that explains different political outcomes is political sophistication. It appears as a critical factor in determining not only trust in elections but also partisanship (Borba et al., 2015) and a shift in the average voter profile (Dalton, 2013). The theory suggests that individuals with more formal education tend to be more engaged, critical, and better informed about politics, thereby fostering the development of democratic values (Dalton, 2013; Luskin, 1987). Recent literature operationalized this idea, bringing together individuals' knowledge about electoral rules, reception, and treatment of media

exposure given their previous beliefs, interest in politics, and high educational levels (Bush and Prather, 2017; Karp et al., 2018; Kerr and Lührmann, 2017). This set of hypotheses is built on cognitive theories and measures whether individuals understand how votes translate into seats, but also consider a university degree as a proxy for political sophistication once it theoretically enables individuals to absorb, interpret, and make sense of information (Karp et al., 2018; Norris et al., 2020). Instead of building a political sophistication index, we look at two independent variables: university degree and interest in politics. Therefore, our fourth hypothesis splits into two:

> *H4.1.: Voters with a university degree are less likely to distrust the electoral process.*

> *H4.2.: Individuals with a higher interest in politics tend to trust elections more than those with low interest.*

Methods and Data

This study relies on data from the 2018 and 2022 waves of the Brazilian Electoral Study (BES). The BES survey is applied sixty days after the runoff of presidential elections. Considering our research design, we merged these two datasets into a single database, which we used to address our research question and examine the hypotheses raised in the theoretical section.

Regarding our dependent variable, trust in elections, due to differences in the scale, we opted to recode the 2022 question as a dummy in order to test our hypotheses. In the 2018 wave, the variable is a dummy, where 1 indicates "elections are reliable," and 0 means "elections are rigged." We inverted these values for hypothesis testing. In the 2022 wave, the dependent variable is a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "elections happened reliably" and 5 "elections did not happen reliably." Responses equal 4 and 5 were recoded to 1, and from 1 to 3, coded as 0.

The first hypothesis states that losers are more likely to distrust elections. We build the loser variable on the question, "For whom did you vote for president in the first round?" All respondents who did not vote for Bolsonaro in 2018 were coded as 1, while Bolsonaro voters received a score equal to 0. For 2022, Lula da Silva's voters were coded as 0, while the rest of the respondents' scores were equal to 1.

The second hypothesis tests the relationship between ideology and lack of confidence in the electoral process. The survey measures ideology through a self-placement question: "Considering left and right in politics, how do you classify yourself?" The ideology variable is a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represents the extreme left and 10 the extreme right.

The third hypothesis assesses the association between getting political information online and distrust of elections. Here, surveys have different questions. Whereas the 2018 wave has a categorical variable, the 2022 questionnaire measures how often respondents access political news online. In order to make them comparable, we created a variable called "Online Informed," coded as 1 for individuals in the 2018 survey whose main ways to get political information are "online blogs," "social media," or "Google research." We coded other individuals as 0. For 2022, the variable is based on two questions. The first asks respondents how often they accessed websites to get political information during the electoral campaign. The second asks the same thing related to social media instead of websites. We consider that the sum of both variables should be greater than seven, indicating that, on average, the respondent looked for political information at least four days a week in each means - internet, broadly, and social media. Although arbitrary, the variable is somehow conservative once we coded as 1 only individuals who spend more than half the week consuming political information online. At the same time, the remaining received a score equal to 0.

The fourth hypothesis relies on political sophistication theories. Instead of building an index, we follow the specialized literature and access it through two predictors. First, studies list a university degree as an indicator of higher political sophistication, considering that individuals with higher education are more qualified to process information and are

more critical of politics. We created a variable based on the education variable, coding as 1 for those with a university degree and 0 otherwise. Second, how interested individuals are in politics indicates political sophistication. Therefore, we use the same question for both waves: "How interested are you in politics?" Individuals can answer "very interested, interested, slightly interested, or not interested at all." We inverted the scale to check our hypothesis.

As controls, we use sociodemographics present in the literature, adding race to the Brazilian case. These are age, gender, race, and education. Age is a continuous scale from 16 to 92. We recoded it based on the life cycle criteria of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Gender is a dummy variable in which 1 means male and 0 means female. Race relies on a self-identification question following the options given by IBGE in the Brazilian Census: black (*preto*), brown (*pardo*), white (*branco*), yellow (*amarelo*), and indigenous (*indígena*). Considering that most Brazilians identify as white in the 2010 Census, we created a variable "white" coded as 1 for those whose answer to the race question is "white," otherwise 0. Finally, education is on a scale from 1, indicating the respondent has never attended school, to 10, when they have a graduate studies degree. We kept it as it is.

Due to the binary nature of our dependent variable, we use probit maximum likelihood estimators and predictive margins to assess the effect of our hypotheses on electoral distrust.

Results

We explore the results in two sections. First, we present and discuss the results for the entire dataset. Second, we check the models' robustness by analyzing each wave separately. Through these two steps, we can analyze electoral integrity perception in the last two cycles of Brazilian general elections and also unveil whether the predictors of distrust in elections changed after the Bolsonaro administration.

Tabel 1 displays all models we ran for the entire dataset. We test each hypothesis isolated

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)	(Model 6)	(Model 7)	(Model 8)	(Model 9)	(Model 10)	(Model 11)
H1: Loser	0.559***	0.607***									0.567***
	(0.046)	(0.047)									(0.058)
Age		0.008		−0.019		−0.010		−0.013		−0.006	0.032
		(0.019)		(0.017)		(0.016)		(0.016)		(0.016)	(0.022)
Male		−0.189***		−0.117***		−0.124***		−0.121***		−0.096**	−0.146***
		(0.047)		(0.043)		(0.039)		(0.039)		(0.039)	(0.052)
White		−0.037		0.009		−0.016		−0.012		−0.007	−0.006
		(0.051)		(0.047)		(0.042)		(0.042)		(0.042)	(0.057)
Education		−0.039***		−0.028***		−0.035***		−0.024**		−0.021**	−0.026
		(0.011)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.011)		(0.010)	(0.016)
H2: Ideology			0.074***	0.074***							0.058***
			(0.006)	(0.006)							(0.008)
H3: Online Informed					0.043	0.085**					0.130**
					(0.040)	(0.043)					(0.059)
H4.1: University Degree							−0.134***	−0.062			−0.023
							(0.047)	(0.058)			(0.078)
H4.2: Interest in Politics									−0.105***	−0.089***	−0.128***
									(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.028)
Constant	−0.281***	0.007	−0.492***	−0.204*	−0.029	0.267***	0.020	0.256***	0.227***	0.383***	−0.283**
	(0.033)	(0.108)	(0.044)	(0.108)	(0.024)	(0.090)	(0.022)	(0.095)	(0.048)	(0.092)	(0.139)
Observations	3,052	3,031	3,521	3,506	4,234	4,210	4,275	4,252	4,245	4,223	2,527
Log Likelihood	−2,040.892	−2,011.714	−2,360.376	−2,341.741	−2,933.971	−2,905.965	−2,959.017	−2,935.894	−2,927.627	−2,907.108	−1,611.864
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,085.784	4,035.428	4,724.753	4,695.482	5,871.942	5,823.930	5,922.033	5,883.789	5,859.255	5,826.216	3,243.729

*Note: Controls in italics*   *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

and with controls before running the whole model. Results[1] regarding the first hypothesis confirm the theory and previous findings. Individuals who voted for losers are more likely to distrust elections. The loser status indicates that the correlation with electoral distrust is positive and statistically significant at $p-value < 0.01$. For the second hypothesis, we also find a positive correlation between ideology and lack of confidence in the electoral process, meaning that the more right-leaning respondents identify, the more likely they are to distrust elections. This finding is also significant at $p-value < 0.01$, suggesting a strong correlation. Our third hypothesis states that individuals who mainly get politically informed online are more inclined to distrust elections. Although we find a positive correlation, we see moderate evidence that it is significant at a $p-value < 0.05$. The fourth hypothesis is tested through two variables and is confirmed partially. Even though a university degree is associated negatively with the probability of mistrusting the electoral process, it is not statistically

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[1]Figure 5 shows our findings in a plot of the estimated coefficients in a graphic for better visualization.

significant. Interest in politics, in turn, associates negatively at a $p-value < 0.01$, indicating a strong correlation, as expected.

Figure 2: Predictive Margins
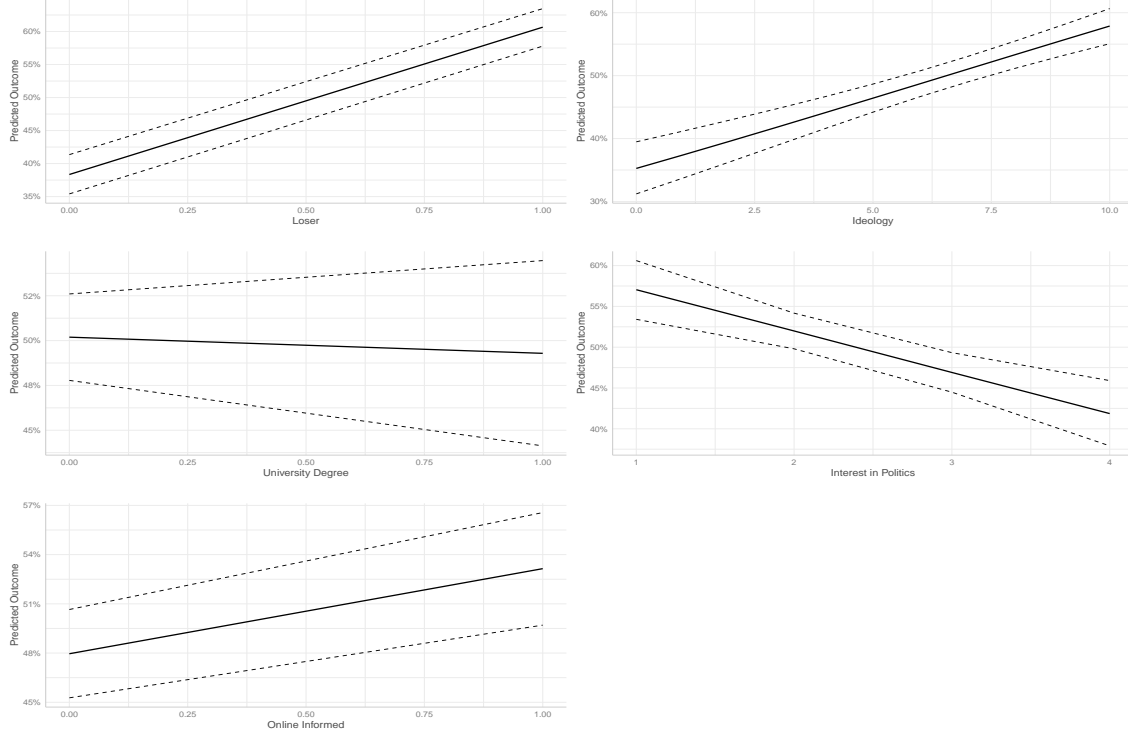
Figure 2 plots the findings using predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals. The top-left graphic compares the predicted probabilities for losers and winners. The difference between them is statistically significant, showing that losers are 57% more likely to distrust elections. The top-right graphic shows electoral distrust by ideology. The more inclined to the right, the more likely to distrust elections individuals are. The plots in the middle show the predicted probabilities for hypothesis four. While the left one shows that individuals with and without a university degree have very similar probabilities of distrusting elections, the one on the right shows that the more interested in politics respondents are, the more likely they are to trust the electoral process. Finally, the left-bottom plot shows that individuals who inform themselves online are more likely to distrust elections than those who do not.

The difference between these groups is statistically significant, although less significant than the loser status, ideology, and interest in politics.

Overall, these models provide evidence supporting a few of our hypotheses. For the loser status, ideology, and interest in politics, we have strong evidence that the correlation confirms theoretical expectations. Regarding online informed individuals, although the relationship is also positive at significant levels, there is only moderate evidence that this correlation is significant. Evidence suggests that a university degree, as part of the political sophistication hypothesis, does not matter in determining whether respondents trust elections or not.

Robustness Checks

As a robustness check, we split the dataset into two, considering the two waves of our first models. This process allows us to check if there are any changes from one electoral cycle to another. Tables 2 and 3 display models for the 2018 and 2022 elections, following the same logic as the first models.

In 2018, Table 2 shows that the hypothesis on interest in politics retained statistically significant levels ($p-value < 0.01$). However, other previously confirmed hypotheses do not. The loser status loses complete significance, inverting the correlation. The evidence for the hypotheses on online informed individuals and right-wingers is weaker, with $p-values < 0.1$. Figure 3 brings the predicted probabilities for these hypotheses. All slopes are less inclined. The most interesting one is the loser status, which indicates that losers are less likely to distrust elections, although the difference between losers and winners is not statistically significant. The difference in the predicted probability of distrusting the electoral process is also not statistically significant between left and right-wingers, individuals who do not or do inform themselves online, and respondents with or without a university degree.

For the 2022 wave, no evidence exists that interest in politics predicts trust in elections, as displayed in Table 3. The loser status and ideology are significant at $p-values < 0.01$ levels. Evidence supporting a significant propensity of online informed people to distrust elections

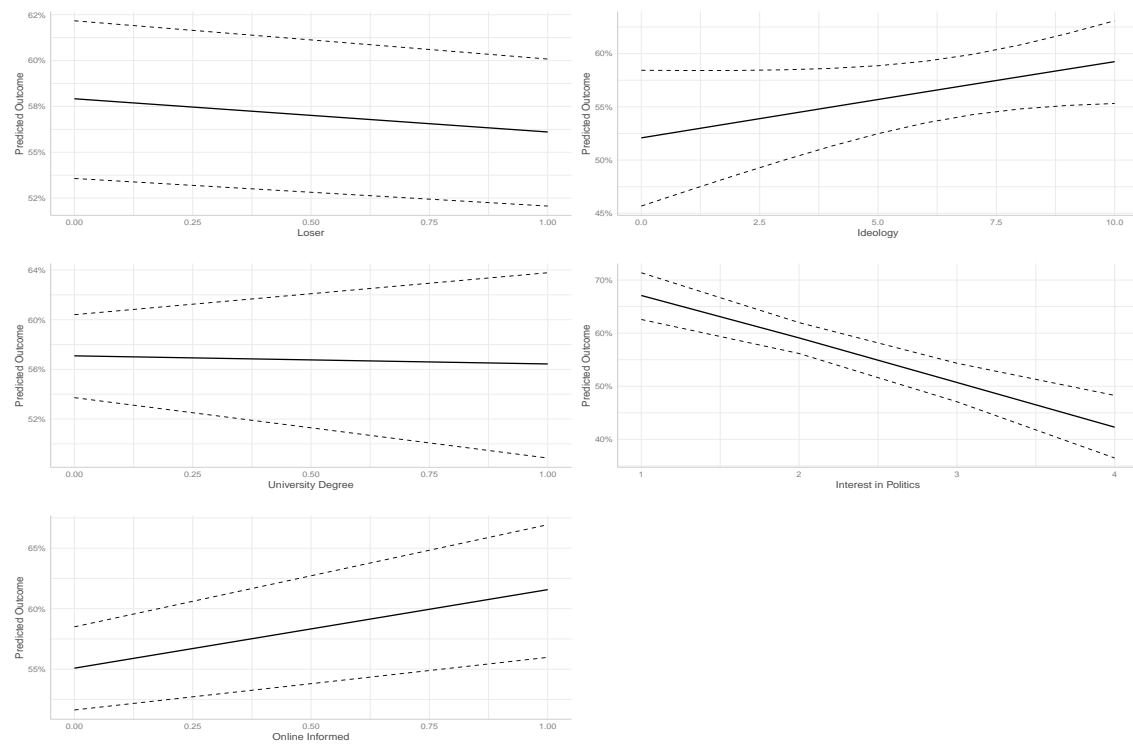Table 2: Robustness Checks: Distrust in the 2018 Elections

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)	(Model 6)	(Model 7)	(Model 8)	(Model 9)	(Model 10)	(Model 11)
H1: Loser	-0.149^{**}	-0.082									-0.046
	(0.065)	(0.067)									(0.079)
Age		-0.062^{**}		-0.079^{***}		-0.078^{***}		-0.081^{***}		-0.066^{***}	-0.022
		(0.027)		(0.024)		(0.022)		(0.022)		(0.022)	(0.032)
Male		-0.269^{***}		-0.277^{***}		-0.286^{***}		-0.280^{***}		-0.223^{***}	-0.213^{***}
		(0.067)		(0.059)		(0.053)		(0.053)		(0.054)	(0.075)
White		-0.039		-0.096		-0.076		-0.074		-0.072	-0.052
		(0.073)		(0.065)		(0.058)		(0.058)		(0.058)	(0.082)
Education		-0.056^{***}		-0.073^{***}		-0.066^{***}		-0.056^{***}		-0.043^{***}	-0.046^{**}
		(0.016)		(0.014)		(0.013)		(0.016)		(0.013)	(0.022)
H2: Ideology			0.012	0.012							0.018^{*}
			(0.008)	(0.009)							(0.011)
H3: Online Informed					0.029	0.070					0.167^{*}
					(0.059)	(0.064)					(0.089)
H4.1: University Degree							-0.225^{***}	-0.073			-0.017
							(0.063)	(0.080)			(0.113)
H4.2: Interest in Politics									-0.244^{***}	-0.209^{***}	-0.212^{***}
									(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.039)
Constant	0.276^{***}	0.896^{***}	0.060	0.905^{***}	0.163^{***}	0.941^{***}	0.225^{***}	0.923^{***}	0.707^{***}	1.212^{***}	0.972^{***}
	(0.047)	(0.154)	(0.062)	(0.147)	(0.031)	(0.124)	(0.030)	(0.131)	(0.065)	(0.128)	(0.196)
Observations	1,499	1,499	1,846	1,846	2,280	2,280	2,303	2,303	2,280	2,280	1,215
Log Likelihood	$-1,017.918$	$-1,003.184$	$-1,266.961$	$-1,239.736$	$-1,559.115$	$-1,528.982$	$-1,567.590$	$-1,543.449$	$-1,516.618$	$-1,500.542$	-800.697
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,039.836	2,018.367	2,537.921	2,491.473	3,122.231	3,069.964	3,139.180	3,098.898	3,037.236	3,013.084	1,621.395

Note: Controls in italics *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

is moderate, at $p-value < 0.05$. University degrees remain insignificant in determining a lack of confidence in elections. Figure 4 shows predictive margins for each hypothesis in 2022. Plots on the top show that losers and right-wing individuals are more likely to distrust elections, with statistically significant differences compared to winners and left-wingers, respectively. The difference between individuals with or without a university degree is not statistically significant, as is the case for those interested or not in politics. In other words, the probability of these individuals to distrust elections is very similar. Finally, individuals whose primary way of obtaining political information is the internet are more likely to distrust elections than those who inform themselves through other means. Yet, the statistical significance of the difference between them is weaker than other predictors.

Figure 3: Predictive Margins for 2018

Source: Made by the authors with data from the Brazilian Electoral Study.

Figure 4: Predictive Margins for 2022
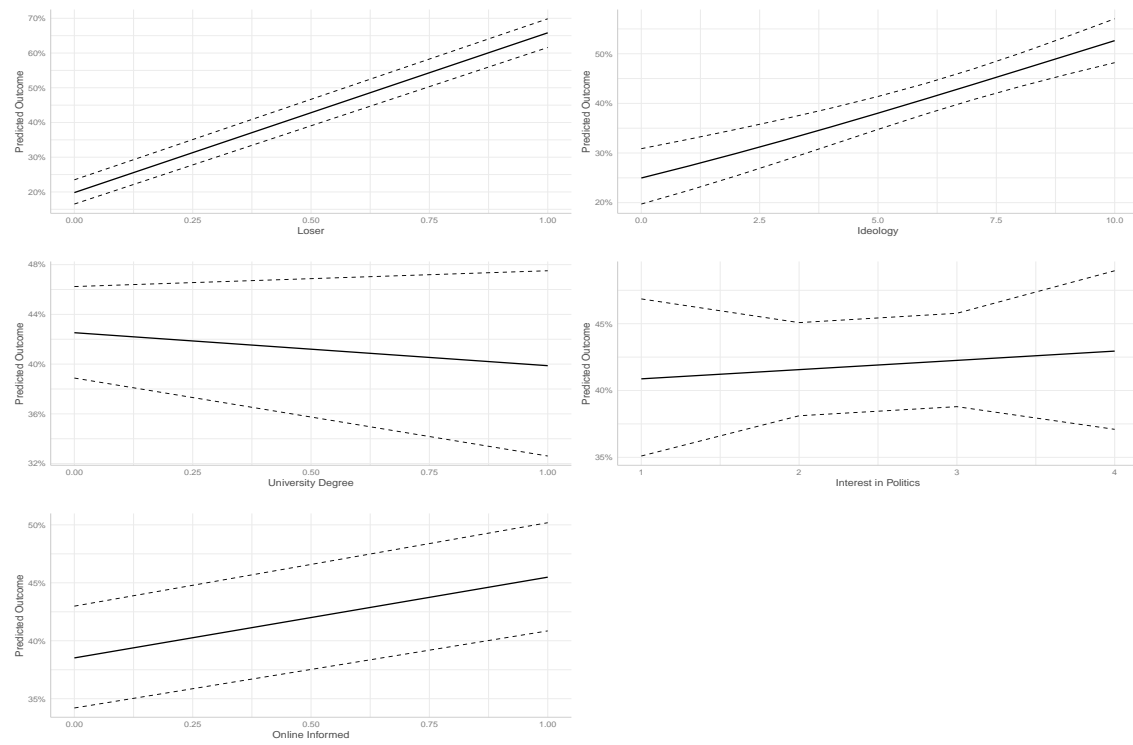
Table 3: Robustness Checks: Distrust in the 2022 Elections

	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)	(Model 4)	(Model 5)	(Model 6)	(Model 7)	(Model 8)	(Model 9)	(Model 10)	(Model 11)
H1: Loser	1.346*** (0.070)	1.384*** (0.073)									1.256*** (0.092)
Age		0.102*** (0.029)		0.076*** (0.027)		0.083*** (0.023)		0.078*** (0.023)		0.072*** (0.023)	0.117*** (0.033)
Male		−0.092 (0.071)		0.063 (0.066)		0.055 (0.058)		0.053 (0.057)		0.032 (0.058)	−0.053 (0.080)
White		−0.025 (0.075)		0.149** (0.069)		0.067 (0.061)		0.077 (0.061)		0.062 (0.061)	0.006 (0.085)
Education		−0.002 (0.018)		0.046*** (0.017)		0.010 (0.015)		0.039** (0.017)		0.015 (0.015)	0.007 (0.025)
H2: Ideology			0.012 (0.008)	0.146*** (0.009)							0.074*** (0.012)
H3: Online Informed					0.208*** (0.058)	0.214*** (0.062)					0.178** (0.088)
H4.1: University Degree							−0.034 (0.070)	−0.125 (0.086)			−0.068 (0.117)
H4.2: Interest in Politics									0.097*** (0.029)	0.083*** (0.030)	0.018 (0.044)
Constant	−0.913*** (0.053)	−1.189*** (0.171)	0.060 (0.062)	−1.748*** (0.179)	−0.323*** (0.039)	−0.694*** (0.137)	−0.217*** (0.032)	−0.727*** (0.145)	−0.456*** (0.074)	−0.773*** (0.142)	−1.817*** (0.228)
Observations	1,553	1,532	1,846	1,660	1,954	1,930	1,972	1,949	1,965	1,943	1,312
Log Likelihood	−863.292	−841.730	−1,266.961	−987.086	−1,315.661	−1,293.063	−1,335.544	−1,312.211	−1,324.810	−1,304.458	−662.375
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,730.584	1,695.460	2,537.921	1,986.173	2,635.322	2,598.126	2,675.089	2,636.423	2,653.620	2,620.916	1,344.749

Note:Controls in italics $^{*}p<0.1;\ ^{**}p<0.05;\ ^{***}p<0.01$

Discussion

Considering our case, there are a few words regarding ideology and the loser's status. Brazilians increasingly identify as right-wingers (Amaral, 2020; Rennó, 2020). Voting for Bolsonaro is more likely when individuals self-place themselves on the right side of the ideological spectrum. Not by chance, the congress after 2018 was the most right-leaning since redemocratization (Nicolau, 2020), and the 2022 elections made it even more conservative. It is worth noticing that Brazil has only one party classified as radical right (Bolognesi et al., 2023). Presumably, one can assume that Bolsonaro's attacks on the TSE incentivize his supporters or those dissatisfied with the Brazilian situation to distrust the electoral process or adopt even more violent strategies, such as storming the congress in January 2023. The 2022 wave survey dates on December 30, 2022, sixty days after the runoff. After breaking the tradition by not calling Lula da Silva over the phone to concede defeat, Bolsonaro gave a press conference in which he did not recognize the outcome straightforwardly on Novem-

ber 1 and flew to Miami on December 30, 2022, his second to last day in office. However, Bolsonaro's tendency to discredit the electoral process does not stem from his defeat.

After winning the 2018 elections, Jair Bolsonaro, unusually - since he was the winner - attacked the electoral system by saying he would have won the presidential elections in the first round. Not by chance, robustness checks show that the loser status correlates negatively with distrust in elections, even though not significantly, showing that winners were more likely to distrust the electoral process that year. Scholars stress his authoritarian populism (Hunter and Power, 2019; Ricci and Venturelli, 2023), arguing that authoritarian traits matter more than populist features in determining votes for him (Castanho Silva et al., 2022). Furthermore, Bolsonaro is well-known for his radical, racist, and homophobic declarations beyond having openly defended a military regime when serving as a congressman. Between 2021 and 2022, Bolosonaro consistently attacked the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) in his weekly livestreams on YouTube (Revista Piauí, 2022). The combination of right-wing ideology and authoritarianism is a strong predictor of the vote for Bolsonaro. Considering that Lula da Silva and Bolsonaro summed more than 90% of the votes in the first round of the 2022 elections, the majority of losers were Bolsonaro supporters. Therefore, we can speculate that *Bolsonarism* is behind both the positive correlation between ideology and electoral distrust and loser status negative and positive correlation for 2018 and 2022, respectively. That said, the findings mirror other cases (Karp et al., 2018), showing that losers and right-wing individuals are more likely to distrust elections than their counterparts.

The internet certainly changed politics. The end of the monopoly of big media groups over information is over, particularly with the advent of social media. There are several consequences of this, and misinformation is one of the main topics when it comes to studying social media. Spreading misinformation through social media correlates with distrust in political institutions (Lukito, 2023). Our evidence is moderate in suggesting a correlation between consuming political information online and distrusting the electoral process. These nuanced effects are also valid for Europe, where internet use affects political trust, while

social media notably does not affect it (Memoli, 2020). Although our findings indicate a moderate relationship between this predictor and our dependent variable, we lack evidence to reject the hypothesis, as is the case elsewhere (Lu et al., 2019).

Regarding political sophistication, results do not support the association between higher levels of formal education and increased trust in the electoral process. Several factors may explain this finding: highly educated individuals belong to groups that have been politically polarized since the 2014 presidential elections, making their adherence to democratic values susceptible to contextual factors such as the outcome of elections, economic conditions, and other short-term effects (Layton et al., 2021). Therefore, higher levels of formal education do not necessarily translate into greater political knowledge.

The other predictor to assess the correlation between political sophistication and electoral distrust is interest in politics. The literature suggests that interest in politics, demonstrated through participation in non-conventional political activities, compensates for the lack of formal education, leading individuals to develop democratic values (Gimenes, 2017). Results testing this hypothesis confirm the negative association between interest in politics and distrust of the electoral process, implying that individuals with a keen interest in politics comprehend how the electoral process occurs, fostering trust in the electoral process (Dalton, 2013; Norris et al., 2020).

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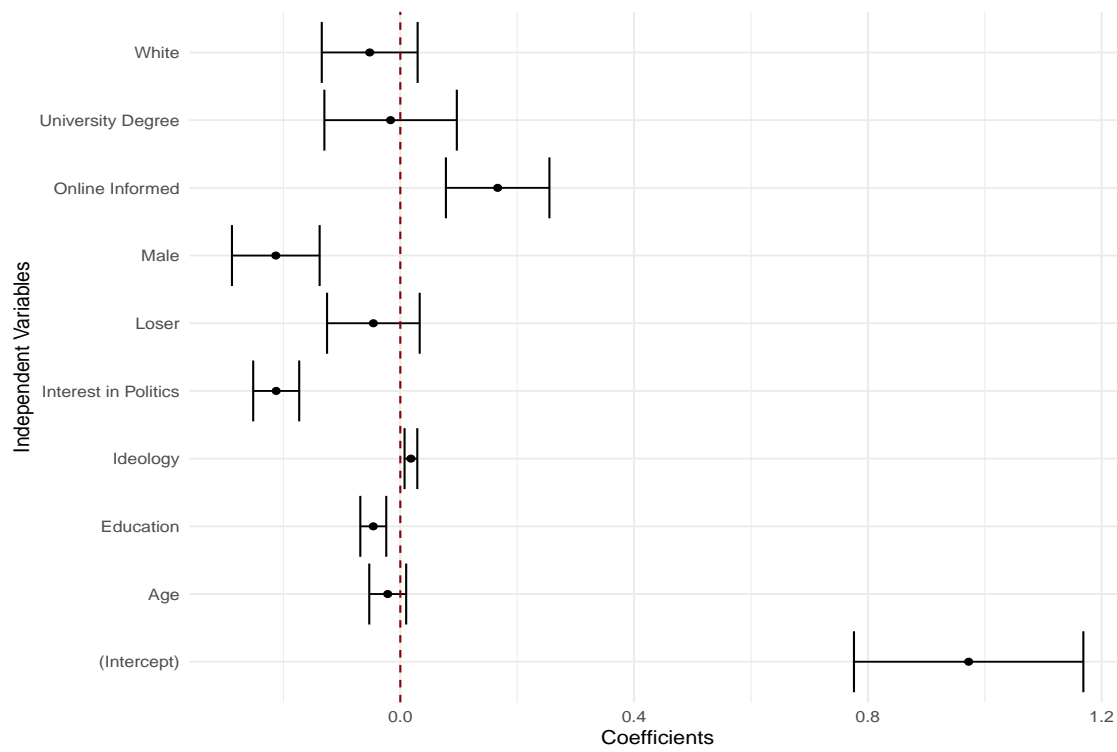Stockemer, D. (2018). The internet: An important tool to strengthening electoral integrity. *Government Information Quarterly, 35*(1), 43–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq. 2017.11.009

Appendix A.

Figure 5: Distrust in Elections (2018 and 2022)
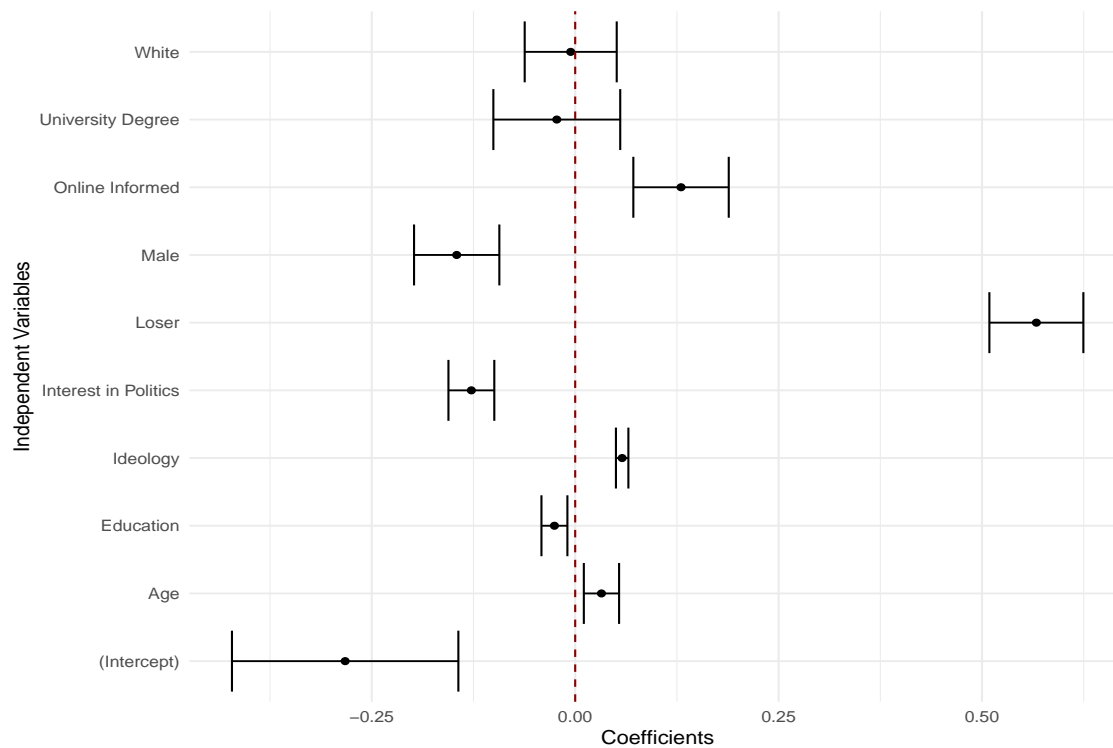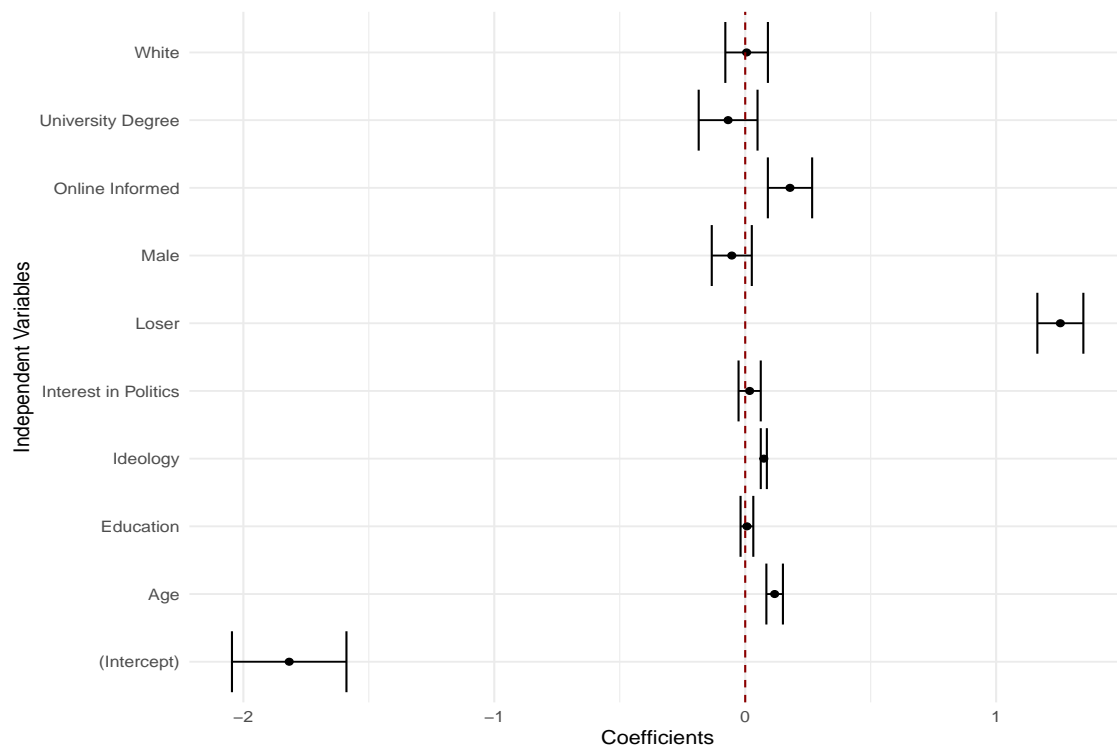
Figure 6: Distrust in the 2018 Elections

Source: Made by the authors with data from the Brazilian Electoral Study.

Figure 7: Distrust in the 2022 Elections

Source: Made by the authors with data from the Brazilian Electoral Study.