Do Anti-Communist Fear-Mongering campaigns shape elections in Latin America? Evidence from Brazil and Colombia using Google Trends Data [*]

Juan Gelvez-Ferreira[†]   Flavia Batista da Silva[‡]

November 17, 2022

Abstract

How do fear-mongering campaigns affect election outcomes? Does targeting candidates as "socialists" or "communists" affect their vote share? Our research explores these questions and offers a new proxy for measuring the effect of fear-mongering campaign strategies on electoral outcomes: we match the percentages of searches on google that include anti-communist and anti-socialist language with vote share data from the 2022 elections in Brazil and Colombia to measure the effects of fear-mongering campaigns on candidates' vote share. More specifically, we analyze the election of the left-wing candidates Gustavo Petro and Lula da Silva. Both candidates won the elections amid an intense fear-mongering campaign around the "communism" threat perpetrated by their opponents. They were both conceived as communist leaders that would make their countries like Venezuela if elected. We hypothesize that both candidates have lower vote share in places where socialism and communism-related words were searched the most on google on Election Day.

Keywords:

JEL Classification Codes: