

# **E-participation in electoral campaign: the Brazilian experience**

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on voters' participation in 2006 Brazilian election campaign, when the Internet played an important role in the result. The research observes who participated and why, in an analysis of e-mails sent to presidential candidates and debates between militants and supporters in virtual communities. The analysis focuses not only the supply of political information, but also the users' demands, in a profile about which variables lead to politicians and voters access to Internet – gender, age, partisanship, education degree, profession. The motivations for participation are described by political and social factors, and also by mediatic events.

**Keywords:** e-democracy; e-participation; elections; Internet; campaign strategy

## **1 Introduction**

As the use of Internet in electoral campaigns has been increasing in the last years, a transformation is expected to happen in the relations between candidates and voters. Some scholars expect that the Internet may enhance voter information about candidates and elections, and in turn stimulate increased participation (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). Others see political life on the Net as an extension of political life off the Net, so the new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) reinforces political forces already dominant in society, appearing to exacerbate the socioeconomic bias already exhibited by civic and political participation prior to the rise of the Internet (Weber, Loumakis and Bergman, 2003).

In another perspective, technological change should contribute toward information abundance, which in turn contributes toward a postbureaucratic political organization. In this organizational type, collective action does not require substantial resources on the part of organizers and is often narrowly focused on subsets of members or affiliates; organizational boundaries are frequently permeable and not sharply defined; and informal association are

important. But group-based politics remain vitally important and in tension with the majoritarian politics of mass media (Bimber, 2003).

Elections represent an important field to measure the ICT political use because of voting position as main participation channel (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). On-line structures may facilitate engagement in the election process through provision of election-related information, opportunity for discussion and debate and opportunity for undertaking election-related political action (Jankowski, Kluver, Foot and Schneider, 2007).

This paper is based on a research about Brazilian presidential campaign in 2006. In that year, the use of Internet had risen following three factors: the expansion of Web access; a new electoral legislation that had forbidden expenses like rallies with musical shows and encouraged candidates to search for alternatives to reach voters; and the strong opposition of mainstream media against president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who run for re-election.

The hostility of traditional media – noted in two independent studies, organized by Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute (Iuperj) and Brazilian Media Watch, associated to Media Watch Global – affected the credibility of television, newspapers and magazines and stimulated the exploration of new sources of information. Both studies indicate that, during the campaign, Lula was much more exposed to media coverage, with more negative news. According to the researches, this negative exposure rose 10% during the last two weeks before the first round (Lima, 2007). By detailing history of politics and the Net, Graeme Browning also points media coverage of the 2000 United States presidential election as an element to stimulate new media campaign, especially on the period of vote re-counting following the unclear results in Florida (Browning, 2002).

Despite the fact it is still lower than in European countries and in the United States, the Internet access has rapidly increased in Brazil. The number of users has jumped from 5 million, in year 2000, to 42.6 million, in 2006, passing from 3.7% to 27.3% of the population. Based on data from the Electoral Justice and the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee, we estimate that 25.2% of the voters had Internet access in 2006 – almost 32 million people.

The conjunction of these factors makes the 2006 Brazilian elections emblematic to analyze the use of Internet in campaigns.

## **2 Methods**

The purpose of this paper is to delineate the profile of voters that participated in the on-line political debate, and also to observe what were their intentions and motivations and

how they acted in the virtual sphere. Participation is understood as action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). The Internet is defined as a network of networks of one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many, and many-to-one local, national and global information and communication technologies with relatively open standards and protocols and comparatively low barriers to entry (Chadwick, 2006).

To observe all these different patterns of communication, interaction and social organization, the paper uses three databases, collected daily from August to October 2006, during the first and second rounds of the election:

- the electoral websites homepages of the two main candidates to Brazilian Presidency – Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the Worker’s Party (PT), and the oppositionist Geraldo Alckmin, from Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), a former governor of São Paulo, the richest and most populous Brazilian state. With a multipartidary system, other six candidates run for president in 2006 Brazilian election. Together, these six candidates had less than 10% of the votes and, hence, will not be analyzed in this paper. The homepages were collected daily from August to October. Each hyperlink in the homepages, excluding the ones with interactive resources, was counted as one “information”. The result was an array of 5,617 information – 3,104 from Lula's website and 2,513 from Alckmin's website.
- the e-mails sent by voters to the websites of the former governor of São Paulo Alckmin and president Lula. The PT campaign committee provided 2,090 messages. Other 1,141 e-mails to Alckmin were analyzed in PSDB headquarters, in Brasília, in five e-mail boxes, including the candidate's own personal messages. These numbers represent all messages available, due to problems in the committee’s backup, causing so many e-mails to be lost after replied. In total, Lula campaign committee received approximately 500 e-mails every day, during the first round, and 1,300, in the second round; while Alckmin obtained a daily average of 5,000 in all the electoral period. Despite the backup flaws, we can assume that these samples are partially representative of the whole amount of e-mails – at least, the messages that mattered to the campaign's staff. E-mails are the most popular communication tool in the Internet, used by almost 65% of Brazilians who are on-line.
- the debates between voters and grassroots supporters in virtual communities of social network, such as Facebook, Myspace and others – used by almost 36% of Brazilian internauts. The paper focuses the most popular social network in Brazil, Orkut, considering only the biggest community of each candidate. Lula and Alckmin even released videos addressed to the voters who joined the candidates' communities. The main pro-Alckmin

virtual community registered from 74,000 members, during the first round of elections, to 222,000 members, in the second round, while the main pro-Lula community joined from 47,000 to 103,000 members. To verify the campaign organization, the paper analyzes the topics inserted in the communities' forums, with the respective number of posts (comments). Thus, 78,886 topics in the Alckmin's community and 43,373 in the Lula's one were collected.

To identify the voter that sent e-mails or joined virtual communities, we verify gender, age, career, years of education, religion and partisanship. These variables were collected from the messages themselves or from the personal pages (profiles) in social networks.

The coding of websites information is adapted from a classification proposed by Joslyn (1990), in a set of seven “appeals”: future politics (political program, proposals and government plan); past politics (political career and accomplishments); conjuncture analysis (comments on national events or circumstances); negative campaign (attacks against other candidates); partisanship (declaration of endorsement from politicians, parties, interest groups and celebrities); personal features (candidates biography and qualities) and metacampaign (segments aimed at promoting the candidate’s campaign, including poll results, rallies and TV debates). The first three measurements of public policy (future politics, past politics and conjuncture analysis) were also coded in 14 issues: agriculture, economy, education, employment, energy, environment, ethics, health care, human rights, international politics, security, social care, taxes and urban development.

The coding of e-mails and topics on social networks consider interactivity, according to voter engagement, on a set of measures: criticisms directed at candidate; support to other candidate; questions about program; declaration of support or vote; request for campaign material or other ways to participate on-line; offer to off-line participation; questions about the campaign; critics against the campaign; suggestions for the campaign; critics against the program; and suggestions for the program. The e-mails and topics were also coded in the same 14 issues listed above.

### **3 Electoral websites supply**

Before starting to analyze the participants and the forms of on-line participation, it is necessary to observe the supply of electoral websites in Brazil, which grew from 542 websites, during the 2002 campaign, to 2,640, in the one of 2006. These numbers take in account candidates to president, governor, senator and representatives (both federal and state). In relation to the total number of candidates there has been a growth from 3.2% to 14.5%.

For the proportional representation candidates (only federal and state representatives), the percentage of those connected continues below the on-line electorate, but nevertheless the general interest of the candidates for the Internet grows in a faster rhythm. From the candidates to president, 62.5% had electoral websites, what justifies the research focus on the presidential campaign. After that came the candidates to governor (43%), senator (29.8%), federal representative (18.6%) and state representative (12.1%).

In all of them, candidates with electoral websites had a superior average of votes, in comparison to those without Internet access. Candidates in the web had between 15.9% and 23.2% more chances of victory. However, this difference is not only explained by the electoral websites, but also by other favorable conditions that connected politicians had over others. The average expenditure of the on-line candidates was between 2 and 3.7 times superior to the disconnected ones. These numbers show that the most influential actors have been more committed to on-line propaganda.

The main factor that influenced candidates to connect to web was partisanship. Large parties' politicians presented higher probabilities of using on-line campaign than the others. After that factor came education degree (complete graduate course) and professional career (especially in the public administration and liberal professions). The candidates to re-election were also proportionally more connected to the Web. In contrast with the young profile of internauts, who were in their majority are less than 35 years old, between 61% and 86% of the connected candidates are 45 years old or more. The gender did not have significant influence on the politician access.

Between the two main candidates to president, Geraldo Alckmin's website presented more interactivity resources to voters. Both candidates offered in their websites four types of services: sending of e-mails to candidate, supplying of campaign material, signing up to receive campaign news and getting information about donations.

The on-line fund-raising, which has grown substantially in recent United States campaigns (Panagopoulos and Bergan, 2007), did not play a significant role in the 2006 Brazilian elections, as it may be ascertained by the low number of small donations declared in Electoral Justice. This can be ascribed in part to the own deficiencies of the electoral legislation. As an example, none of the websites allowed donations with credit card, one of the most popular ways of transaction in the electronic commerce and totally admitted by the North American electoral regulation. Neither Lula nor Alckmin had used its websites to give to accounts on donations and expenses of campaign.

Lula's website provided more options of interactivity specific to militants and supporters. As an example, the PT campaign used the Internet to address and inspire allied mayors. In general, both candidates used the new technology to boost and deepen traditional ways of campaign. The homepage of Lula was more informative (see table 3.1). In the first round, it had 1,984 information, against 1,593 in Alckmin website. Lula also made a much more programmatic campaign, with 410 information about future policies, while Alckmin had 205, also comparing the first round. Thus, the two candidates had presented a significant percentage of information on government proposals. As president, Lula also had consequently much more information about past politics, with the accomplishments of the first mandate – 345 in his homepage, against 106 in Alckmin website.

Table 3.1 Number of information in Brazilian presidential candidates' homepages – 2006

	Lula (1 <sup>st</sup> round)	Alckmin (1 <sup>st</sup> round)	Lula (2 <sup>nd</sup> round)	Alckmin (2 <sup>nd</sup> round)	Total
Future politics	410	205	87	96	798
Past politics	345	106	142	93	686
Conjuncture analysis	155	353	110	196	814
Negative campaign	64	402	129	261	856
Partisanship	263	57	194	39	553
Personal features	74	124	56	59	313
Metacampaign	673	346	402	176	1,597
Total	1,984	1,593	1,120	920	5,617

The former governor of São Paulo Geraldo Alckmin presented more information with conjuncture analysis, and concentrated attacks against the PT government. In the first round, in August and September, the PSDB candidate had 402 information against Lula, while the PT candidate had a much inferior number, with 64 attacks. The negative propaganda against Alckmin increased in the second round, in October, passing to 129 attacks. Comparatively, the information about Lula's future policies had fallen from 410, in the first round, to 87, in the second – almost the same number as Alckmin (96).

Without obtaining the victory in the first round and feeling the attacks of the adversary, Lula lowered the informative level of the campaign, and increased the propaganda against Alckmin. Meanwhile, the former governor of São Paulo did not significantly change his campaign strategy, concentrating it more on the attacks against the PT candidate than on the discussion of public policies.

The virtual campaign also gave a bigger dimension to the discussion of public policies than to the personal qualities of each candidate. Lula directed his attention to the economy and Alckmin, to the ethics and proposals to combat corruption. The PSDB candidate had a

more balanced treatment of issues on public policies. But more important, Lula's news about future or past policies were tied with campaign calendar, like rallies and debates. Thus, the PT candidate offered local news, with specific initiatives for each region, which would not earn as much attention in traditional media, nor would so easily be found.

#### 4 Who participates in on-line campaign

Even though the users should identify themselves when they sent a message to a candidate's website, up to 10% of the e-mails to Lula did not present the sender's name. Most e-mails without identification were sent by the opponent's voters, with direct attacks to president Lula. These voters did not expect a reply, but simply wanted to express a specific option against the candidate. When the user expected to receive an answer, the message contained more information, even some that were not requested in websites.

The virtual communities had also a considerable percentage of anonymous users: 13.6%, in that of Lula and 14.8% in that of Alckmin. The reason of the anonymity can be varied: since preserving themselves from possible attacks of adversaries' voters to using this resource to attack other communities. In both cases, the anonymity made possible by the web served as an incentive to participation, which would otherwise not happen.

Table 4.1 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by gender – 2006

Gender	Lula	Alckmin
Male	67.2%	66.2%
Female	19.2%	19.1%
No answer	13.6%	14.8%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

Among the information declared, gender was the most easily perceived, with only 14.2% of the manifestations without reference. After that came electoral district (24.6%), religion (52.2%), partisanship (55.5%), profession or career (58.1%) and education degree (60.9%). The age was the variable with the highest lack of information (69.6%).

Either in the e-mails sent to candidates or in the debates of the virtual communities, male users prevailed. This shows that, in 2006 Brazilian elections, the Internet could not surpass the inequalities in participation based on gender. From the e-mails sent to Alckmin, 80% of the users were men and 20% women; to Lula, 62.5% were men and 27.3% women. The percentages are similar in the virtual communities, where the number of women's manifestations gets close to 19.1% in Alckmin forum; and 19.2% in that of Lula. As other

studies point out few gender differences in on-line participation (Fuller, 2004), these numbers can reveal only a specific case of Brazilian political culture.

Table 4.2 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by region- 2006

Region	Lula	Alckmin
North	2.8%	1.6%
Northeast	23.6%	11.2%
West	7.7%	7.6%
Southeast	41.7%	41.7%
South	8.6%	12.7%
No answer	24.3%	24.8%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

In the regional comparison between the on-line participants and the total number of Internet users, we notice a strong influence by the percentages of access in each state, more than by support bases. We should notice, however, that on-line campaign activists worked to overcome the access limitations. It is common to find messages indications not only to forward e-mails, but also print the messages for off-line distribution. Likewise, some users had sent to candidates messages from individuals who were not connected to the web.

Table 4.3 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by age – 2006

Age	Lula	Alckmin
16 to 20 years old	6.7%	7.7%
21 to 24	9.5%	4.7%
25 to 34	10.9%	9.4%
35 to 44	4.8%	3.5%
45 or more	1.7%	1.8%
No answer	66.4%	72.8%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

As regards the education degree, most users had completed higher level or were attending a college: 27.8%, in the community of Alckmin and 32.9% in that of Lula. Four percent of the PT candidate's community users were graduated, against 2% of PSDB. The participants with average education also occupy a significant band in the manifestations of the candidates: 8.8% in Alckmin's and Lula's forums.

Table 4.4 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of candidates, by instruction degree - 2006

Instruction degree	Lula	Alckmin
Post Graduate	4.0%	2.0%
Graduate or undergraduate	28.9%	25.8%
High school or under	8.8%	8.8%
No answer	58.4%	63.5%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.



The Internet reached the youngest voters, whose participation in the elections had been falling in recent years. The range of 25 to 34 years old concentrates a great number of Lula's voters (10.9%) and Alckmin's (9.4%). Thus, an average of 11.2% of the participants were students. The percentage of liberal professionals was also distinguished: 8.2% for Alckmin and 7.2% for Lula. The PT's community had more education and health professionals (8.6%). Professions or careers related to ICTs had significant manifestations: 5.2% in that of Lula and 4.4% in that of Alckmin. This might indicate that Internet skills could somehow determine on-line mobilization – a possibility already pointed out in another research (Krueger, 2006).

Table 4.5 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by career- 2006

Career	Lula	Alckmin
Students	12.3%	10.2%
Education and health professionals	8.6%	5.4%
Self-employed (liberal) professionals	7.2%	8.2%
Services workers	6.0%	5.5%
ICTs professionals	5.2%	4.4%
Public administration	4.2%	1.9%
Farmers	0.1%	0.5%
Industrial workers	0.1%	0.4%
Others	1.6%	2.1%
No answer	54.7%	61.4%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

Concerning partisanship, it is interesting to observe that part of the manifestations came from users who declare themselves non-partisans. The percentages of these manifestations vary from 1.4%, in Lula community to 3.9% in that of Alckmin. There were also manifestations of independent voters: 4.9% for Lula and 7.4% for Alckmin. Added, these two categories almost represent 20% of manifestations with declared partisanship. The declaration as non-partisan or independent can indicate people with low insertion in electoral debate, and demonstrates the relevance of informal association, as suggested by Bimber.

Table 4.6 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by partisanship - 2006

Partisanship	Lula	Alckmin
Left	33.9%	6.1%
Center	1.8%	8.2%
Right	0.8%	13.2%
Others	4.6%	3.1%
Independent	4.9%	7.4%
Non-partisan	1.4%	3.9%
No answer	52.7%	58.3%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

Lula's voters were more defined in the political alignment. As expected, most of the participants (33.9%) declared to be leftist and only 1.8% centrists. Yet Alckmin's voters locate in the opposite field, with more balanced distribution: 13.2% of the manifestations are of “rightwing conservatives”, 8.2% of centrists and 6.1% of leftists.

The distribution of the participants according to religion is similar between the two communities. A great part is Catholic: 22.5% for Alckmin and 21.8% for Lula.

Table 4.7 Distribution of participants in virtual communities of Brazilian candidates, by religion - 2006

Religion	Lula	Alckmin
Agnostic	2.5%	1.3%
Atheist	2.9%	1.5%
Catholic	21.8%	22.5%
Christian	4.3%	4.8%
Protestant	4.9%	6.0%
No religion	10.1%	10.2%
Others	1.4%	1.6%
No answer	52.2%	52.1%

Notes: For Lula, N=1,087; for Alckmin, N=1,102.

## 5 Interactivity motivations and results

In the answers to voters' e-mails, Alckmin and Lula campaign committees used standard texts as base, which was adapted depending on the issue and the commitment of the user. Both standard answers invited the voter to engage in the campaign and indicated forms of participation and propaganda material. When the demand for a specific issue was greater, Alckmin's and Lula's teams produced another specific reply.

It is interesting to register the small number of e-mails containing requests for personal favors to the candidates, as help to find a job, get financial assistance or access government benefits. The biggest difference between Alckmin and Lula is the percentage of critical messages to each candidate: 55.9% of e-mails directed to the PT candidate, but only 0.9% of the sample to the PSDB candidate. This difference might indicate that governor Alckmin's staff didn't pay much attention to negative messages, so they were not archived properly.

In some cases, the voter received earlier a message criticizing the candidate, and then decided to forward it to the committee, just to check if the message was true. Depending on the reply, it could change the vote. But in most messages, the voter just looked for arguments to strike the criticisms against the candidate.

The PT committee stimulated this kind of e-mails, with the purpose of monitoring the attacks against the candidate and prepare the answers, transmitted later to all the network of supporters. It was a gigantic task of counterpropaganda, which could only be successful with the contribution from the militants and supporters' networks – which actually happened, as we could see from the amount of messages. Thus, the committee accomplished to change negative propaganda from adversaries into participation of its voters, who strengthened the intentions of vote on the candidate while had the chance to contribute to the campaign. In the answers, Lula's team presented numbers on the government activities and made comparisons with the previous administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB), from 1995 to 2002.

Another significant amount of messages dealt with doubts on the program of government or the candidate: 37.9% for Alckmin against 3% for Lula. This was the variable that could most influence the voter and, in most cases, the user declared the intention to decide his-her vote based on the reply. The small number of these messages to president Lula is explained by the fact that he was already in the government. Therefore, the voter had a clearer notion of how his program would be in a possible second mandate.

The other messages analyzed did not present a so significant potential on the decision of the voter. Even though, the several forms of interactivity strengthened the bonds with the candidate, helped to confirm the voter's choice and stimulated the search for more votes among his-her personal contacts. Is worth mentioning that Lula committee received a greater percentage of requests to participation in the campaign – both on-line and off-line.

The criticisms and suggestions about campaign were more common to Alckmin: 29.8%, against 10,8% for Lula. This is explained because, in the first place, PSDB campaign showed more interactivity and was more open to voters' suggestions, as mentioned previously. Another explanation was that the greatest incidence of suggestions to Alckmin indicated problems in the campaign, mainly between the alliances.

Critical messages and suggestions about plans of government were also significant to both candidates: 9.6% for Alckmin and 4.4% for Lula. This is a demonstration of the Internet potential to reestablish the programmatic dialogue between candidates and voters. However, none of the two candidates followed those suggestions.

Although they did not influence the program, e-mails had affected Lula's campaign in the second round, when the PT candidate started to accuse the opponent of planning the privatization of public companies, as banks and postal services. This information originated from messages that circulated in the Internet in the first round, from e-mails of the employees

of these companies. The PSDB candidate denied the accusation, but he did not have a structure of counterpropaganda as PT had.

Comparing the issues of voters' e-mails and candidates' websites, we can notice differences between the demand and supply of Lula's and Alckmin's campaign information. The main subject of the messages for the former governor of São Paulo was the public security, which received 45.5% from the manifestations. However, this percentage was influenced by a campaign of advocate groups against a law, approved in Government Lula, which restricted the use of weapons. Yet the messages to Lula had as their main subject the fight against corruption (28.7% of the manifestations), especially because of the adversary attacks. The economy was the great subject with nearest percentages between the two candidates: 8.2% for Alckmin and 6.9% for Lula. As well as the websites, e-mails also presented small diversity of issues.

Table 5.1 Comparison between issues on candidates e-mails and websites

	Alckmin website	Alckmin e-mails	Lula website	Lula e-mails
Agriculture	2.1%	1.7%	6.4%	5.2%
Economics	7.4%	8.2%	22.7%	6.9%
Education	4.1%	2.1%	14.7%	3.9%
Employment	3.7%	2.0%	9.8%	2.5%
Energy	0.3%	0.3%	4.6%	0.3%
Environment	0.2%	0.0%	3.5%	0.4%
Ethics	40.3%	17.1%	5.9%	28.7%
Health care	5.7%	1.3%	4.7%	2.9%
Human rights	0.3%	0.4%	2.5%	0.7%
International politics	0.8%	2.1%	1.5%	5.3%
Security	3.2%	45.4%	3.8%	4.9%
Social care	5.5%	4.6%	12.4%	9.1%
Taxes	7.1%	2.3%	7.3%	10.8%
Urban development	11.5%	1.2%	9.0%	4.4%

The volume and the intensity of information against Lula were much superior than those against Alckmin. Another difference already cited is that only the PT's team presented a strategy of counterpropaganda. Most part of the messages containing criticisms directed at Lula (38.9%) consisted of jokes, especially about rumors of corruption in the government.

## 6 Organization and participation patterns in forums

The virtual Orkut communities follow very similar patterns of participation, regardless the number of enrolled users. The main factor is exactly the proximity of the elections, reached on October 1 and 29. Beside this factor, the communities had been influenced by

mainstream media events, as interviews and debates with the candidates and the release of polls results. This influence of traditional media on Net mobilization and participation was also noted by Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign manager, especially about on-line fund-raising (Trippi, 2008). In the week before the voting in the first round abrupt falls or stabilization in the number of topics and commentaries were registered. This was caused by hackers attacks against the communities, which even interrupted its functioning and caused the lost of users. The participation has also been influenced by the own dynamics of on-line campaign, as the mobilization of users to spread e-mails and get more members.

In both communities, most topics are represented by short dialogues, with up to ten commentaries. This category represents 48.1% of the topics in Alckmin's community and 50.3% in Lula's. The list of the topics in each forum is ordered by the last update, so the most commented topics appear on the top. Another curious data is the small number of deleted topics in the communities (almost 3%). This demonstrates that, in general, communities had kept a democratic organization and had limited the exclusion of few topics and members – supposed voters of opponent candidates.

It is also interesting to note that the increasing number of topics did not negatively affect the competition between the issues discussed in each community. In these cases, the bigger was the participation in the community, the greater was the number of topics created, as also grew the relation of issues with larger amount of commentaries. Meanwhile, the growth in the number of topics did not lead to an increase in percentage of topics without commentaries, nor harmed the size of dialogues.

Clearly, the basic point to community success was the action of mediators, who could not be neither so restrictive nor so permissive in the task of excluding topics, commentaries or members. In case the mediation was not satisfactory, users could leave the community and participate in another one, or then create a new one. However, the analyzed communities adopted a democratic organization, appealing to debates even to discuss the maintenance of topics with criticisms directed at the candidate. The prevalence of rules of mutual respect and tolerance can be, precisely, the main cause of these communities' success.

In the first round, both forums received more manifestations to stimulate the campaign and the vote in the candidate: 23.5% in Alckmin's and 22.3% in Lula's. These topics showed the growth of the support to the candidate, giving as an example the poll results. Another significant amount of manifestations was dedicated to supply campaign material or to mobilize internauts to combine on-line action. The participation was not limited to the virtual environment. Many collaborators searched in the community the support they could not find

in the local partisan structure to organize and participate in campaign activities. Sometimes the users requested campaign material that could not be found in their cities or states.

Another considerable part of the topics was dedicated to organize the community and to form networks by state, region or issues. These topics included complaints to the moderator against the action of adversary voters. In the most serious cases, the aggressor could be excluded of the community and even from the website. We should notice that the criticisms to the candidate by the community represent only a small percentage of the manifestations. When they were inserted by adversary voters, this behavior was classified as an “invasion”.

In almost 10% of the topics, the users expressed doubts, criticisms and suggestions about the campaign. These manifestations were not limited to the forums. The voters mobilized themselves to influence the campaign, sending several e-mails with their opinions to the candidate’s website. The doubts about the candidate or the program, who could guide the vote decision, corresponded to a relatively small number of topics, on average below 1%.

These numbers demonstrate that virtual communities are much more useful to organization of the net of militants and collaborators than for the debate of the candidates’ proposals or to persuade undecided voters. These actions would progress by means of interactivity with e-mails exchange, in a direct contact between collaborators of the campaign and their own network – on-line or off-line. It is very difficult to calculate the real dimension of these informal and spontaneous social networks, and even more to measure its degree of utility. But it presumes that they are one of the main forms of gaining the votes on Internet.

## **7 Conclusions**

In general terms, the 2006 Brazilian on-line campaign was focused more on public policies than on other issues. The voters sent e-mails with a diversified and considerable number of government suggestions. A large number of negative propaganda was also analyzed, especially that against Lula. Despite this, the PT candidate had an efficient system of counterpropaganda, which privileged the voter participation. Alckmin did not make use of a similar structure, and was affected by the wave of attacks in the second round. Candidates adopted several suggestions of campaign presented by e-mail. The social network adopted by itself an open and flexible organization between each candidate supporters.

E-participation in Brazilian election is explained by age, high level of education and, geographically, by Web access. The research is not conclusive about gender differences in on-line participation, which may indicate only a specific case of Brazilian political culture.

Internet skills could also determine on-line mobilization. We notice the participation of people with low insertion in the electoral debate, what evidences the relevance of informal association, as suggested by Bimber. The on-line participation also increased as Election Day got closer and during mediatic events, such as interviews and debates. These findings demonstrate that Internet campaign continues to dialogue with mass media and traditional structures of collective action.

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