Representations of Youth Activism in Electoral Campaigns on Television: Brazil and Argentina through time

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Representações da militância juvenil em campanhas eleitorais na televisão: Brasil e Argentina através do tempo

Resumo (PT): Este artigo procura analisar como a propaganda eleitoral na televisão retrata visualmente o ativismo juvenil. Centra-se nas campanhas presidenciais dos dois candidatos mais votados em dois países da América Latina, Argentina e Brasil, e compara dois períodos diferentes: o final da década de 1980 e a década de 2010. O objetivo é compreender estas representações audiovisuais do ativismo político juvenil no contexto de processos mais amplos e interligados, tais como as transformações do laço político - isto é, da formação de identidades políticas e compromisso político - desde a democratização em ambos os países; e também a reconfiguração e profissionalização da campanha eleitoral ao longo dos anos (e, portanto, uma mutação no vínculo entre candidatos, activistas de base e eleitores). Com uma amostra de 12 campanhas, realizamos uma análise de conteúdo da publicidade política (spots de TV na Argentina e programas do Horário Gratuito de Propaganda Eleitoral ou HGPE no Brasil) a partir de uma perspetiva metodológica qualitativa, rastreando e interpretando mensagens e o uso de imagens para entender como o ativismo juvenil é retratado nas campanhas políticas.

Palavras-chave: Militância política, Campanha eleitoral, Argentina, Brasil, Juventude

Representations of Youth Activism in Electoral Campaigns on Television: Brazil and Argentina through time

Abstract (EN): This paper seeks to analyse how electoral campaign ads on TV visually portray youth activism. It focuses on the presidential campaigns of the two most voted candidates in two Latin American countries, Argentina and Brazil, and it compares two different periods: the late 1980s and the 2010s. The aim is to understand these audiovisual representations of political youth activism within the background of wider and intertwined processes, such as the transformations of the political linkage -that is, the shaping of political identities and political commitment- since the return to democracy in both countries; and also the reconfiguration and professionalization of electoral campaigning through the years (and, thus, a mutation in the linkage between candidates, grassroots activists and voters). With a sample of 12 candidates' campaigns, we carry out content analysis of political advertising (TV spots in Argentina and electoral TV programs or HGPE in Brazil) from a qualitative methodological perspective, tracking and interpreting messages and the use of images in order to understand how youth activism is portrayed in political campaigns.

Keywords: Political activism, Electoral Campaign, Argentina, Brazil, Youth

1. Introduction

The question of how political campaigns represent youth activism is meaningful for different reasons. The portrayal of youth activism -or, on the contrary, its omission- by a party or a candidate in a TV electoral campaign can be a reflection of a particular political context, of an ongoing public debate and even of a current social imaginary on activism, mobilization and youth. It also may convey a form of public self-definition of a leader or a political organization, and, thereby, a specific notion of political linkage.

In academic literature, young people have often been approached as voters and as consumers to study the impact of different types of television campaigns (advertising products or communicating state policies).[1] But the representations of youth activism in electoral TV campaigns have not received so far significant attention. This paper seeks to study them diachronically.

Three processes are worth mentioning as a contextual background.

Firstly, some of the literature has shown, since the 1990s, lower levels of partisan identification, significant electoral volatility and intense fluctuation in political identities (Manin, 1992; Gunther & Diamond, 2003). On this matter, the cases of Argentina and Brazil show certain nuances since the return to democracy (Kinzo, 2005; Pousadela, 2007)[2]. Transformations in the activists' own political commitments and practices have also been explored.[3] In other words, political linkage between candidates, grassroots

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[1] A revision of such studies is, for example, the revision by Cheung et al. (2008) on consumers' attitudes towards advertising from the perspective of different generations.

[2] Pousadela (2007) understands the transformations described by Manin (1992) as a process, in Argentina, of metamorphosis inaugurated by the return to democracy in 1983, when, paradoxically, the democratic party competition was reinitiated and, at the same time, the traditional model of strong party identification began to fade. And later, in 2001, that metamorphosis was combined with a situation of party crisis (Pousadela, 2007, p. 129). For Brazil, Kinzo (2005) argues the return to democracy in 1985 was not followed by a stabilization of party identification. She seesfor example, electoral campaigns focused on individual candidates and not on political parties, high levels of electoral volatility, and a lack of knowledge about which party the main political leaders belong to. Before that, Mainwaring (1999) described the Brazilian case as a system in which party labels changed frequently, politicians changed party affiliation without significant repercussions and party discipline was limited. Considering both interpretations of the Brazilian context, Pousadela's (2007) comparative argument seems relevant: what Manin described as "party democracy" never actually materialized in Brazil the way it had in Argentina.

[3] In previous papers I argued a growing contingency, flexibility and informality vis-à-vis activists' political linkage, which has become more partial, multiple and overlapped with other memberships and identities (Rocca Rivarola, 2021).

activists and voters, that is, the shaping of political identities and political commitment, has undergone different mutations over time.

Secondly, and as part of those processes, as well as other global and technological changes, electoral campaigning has also experienced reconfiguration over the years, especially through professionalization. Norris (2002) outlined a periodization of occidental electoral campaigns, in which, from 1990s, professionalization reached every campaign activity, with hired personnel replacing activists, segmented messages, information and communications technology (ICT), a substantial increase in campaign expenses, and the emphasis on candidates' personal attributes over their parties. Since the return to democracy, professionalization of electoral campaigns has followed specific paths and paces in Argentina (D'Alessandro, 2017; García Beaudoux & D'Adamo, 2006) and Brazil (Albuquerque, 2005; Ribeiro, 2004).

Thirdly, in the 21st century youth seem to have emerged as critical political actors in both countries. Young people were key protagonists of many mobilization processes that took place in the 2010s in Latin America (P. Vommaro, 2015). These included, for example, in Brazil, the *Passe Livre* movement, against the rise of public transportation fares. In Argentina, during Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administrations (2007-2015), youth became an activism cause and a principle in the construction of public commitments and political affiliations (Vázquez, 2013).

In view of this background, how was youth activism portrayed in campaigns? How did those visual representations change over time?

1. 1. Purpose and concepts

This paper examines visual representations of youth activism in electoral TV ads of the two most-voted presidential candidates in Argentina and Brazil in two different periods: the late 1980s and the 2010s. It is based on content analysis, from a qualitative perspective, of political advertising -TV spots in Argentina and electoral TV programs of the HGPE (*Horário Gratuito de Propaganda Eleitoral*) in Brazil.Two terms should thus be defined: political activism and youth.

In Duverger's (2012 [1957]) definition of the political party concentric circles showed different levels of involvement. First, an outer circle of "sympathizers" with an inclination

towards the party, which they defended and sometimes supported financially. A second, more internal circle of "affiliates" or formal members of the party. And, finally, the nuclear and more limited circle of "militants" or activists, active affiliates involved in party activities. The aforementioned mutations in the political linkage call for a wider image to understand current political activism. Following Quirós (2014, p. 251) we can identify activists as those who "are part of and participate in an organic and active way, in a political organization, party or otherwise". In other words, their political activism is an organic behavior, whether they are formally affiliated to a party or not.

This paper, on the other hand, understands youth from a generational perspective. Not as a mere socio-demographic group, determined only by age or conceived as a stage of life, but as a socio-historical category defined in situated terms. And linked to the notion of generation: the configuration of a generational consciousness in a process of subjectivation associated with a shared social or historical experience (Mannheim, 1993 [1928]; P. Vommaro, 2015).

1.2. Methodological decisions

As shown in Table 1, the corpus consists of a selection of TV spots, for Argentina, and the longer electoral programs of the HGPE, in Brazil.[4]

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[4] Legislation that regulated TV air time during political campaigns was substantially different in Argentina and Brazil in 1989. For example, parties could buy time for their TV ads in Argentina, whereas in Brazil air time was regulated and assigned by the State. In 2009, a new law in Argentina determined that electoral advertising on TV and radio would be distributed entirely by the State, forbidding paid advertising. In Brazil, on the other hand, different laws and judicial decisions have changed the electoral advertising rules time and again.

Table 1

	ARGENTINA	BRAZIL
LATE 1980s	1989: Carlos MENEM: Sample of 33 spots. Eduardo ANGELOZ: sample of 40 spots.	1989: Luiz Inácio LULA Da Silva Fernando COLLOR de Mello In both cases, all of the HGPE programs for the second round and a sample of programs for the first round[5].
2010s	2011: Cristina FERNÁNDEZ DE KIRCHNER (CFK): sample of 23 spots. Hermes BINNER: sample of 11 spots.	2014 Dilma ROUSSEFF: all of the programs (71)[6]. Aécio NEVES: all of the programs (71)[7].
	2015:[8] Daniel SCIOLI: sample of 67 spots. Mauricio MACRI: sample of 59 spots.	2018 Fernando HADDAD: all of the programs (24)[9]. Jair BOLSONARO: all of the programs (24)[10].

Source: Prepared by the author

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[5] Some clarifications on this particular sample: For both 1989 campaigns in Brazil, the corpus can be best detailed in terms of the length of the videos instead of the total number of programs. This is because several programs were grouped in single longer files, and the beginning and ending of each HGPE piece is not always absolutely clear (in some cases, for example, there was a single 2-hour file only with Collor programs). Although I could access all of the programs for Lula and Collor's campaigns, out of a total corpus of 891 minutes of HGPE for both candidates, I analyzed 781 minutes (88% of the material), which is over 13 hours of HGPE programs.

For the second electoral round, with equal air time for both campaigns, all the files were analyzed . That is, a total of 411 minutes.

For the first round, some files only included Collor's HGPE programs (around 250 minutes in total). I analyzed all of them. Other files consisted of programs of all the 1989 running candidates, including Collor and Lula (who had around five minutes each), amounting to 230 minutes for both of them. Out of those files, I analyzed a sample of 12 (120 minutes). There, as a criterion, one file was selected, the next one was omitted in chronological order, and the one following it was analyzed, and so on.

[6] For the first round, 40 programs of 11 minutes 24 seconds each. For the second round, 31 programs of 10 minutes each.

[7] For the first round, 40 programs of 4 minutes 35 seconds each. For the second round, 31 programs of 10 minutes each.

[8] The wider sample gathered for 2015 in Argentina can be explained by the increasing proliferation of spots on YouTube and social media.

[9] For the first round, 11 programs of 2 minutes 30 seconds each. For the second round, 13 programs of 5 minutes each.

[10] For the first round, 11 programs of only 7 seconds each. For the second round, 13 programs of 5 minutes each.

Access to empirical material was different in each country. In Argentina, the TV spots were found on *YouTube* and on the *Observatorio de Campañas Electorales*, a website organized by the Political Science Department of the UBA that functioned intermittently.[11] In Brazil, the *Laboratório de Estudos Eleitorais, de Comunicação Política e Opinião Pública* (DOXA) from the *Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos (IESP) – Universidade do Rio de Janeiro* (UERJ) provided me with access to their digital collection of HGPE programs.[12]

While I could access all the electoral programs of the Brazilian HGPE, in Argentina, the samples of TV ads were composed of all the material found online.[13]

The duration of the campaigns varies depending on the election year and the country. For example, in 1989, in Argentina, the formal campaign lasted less than a month (from April to May), while it had two different stages in 2011 (August to October) and three in 2015 (August to November).[14] In Brazil, the 1989 campaign lasted around three months, whereas the 2014 HGPE programs lasted two months (August 19-October 24). By 2018, there had been a reduction not only in HGPE air time but also in the duration of the campaign (September 4 to October 26).[15]

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[11] http://xn--campaaselectorales-r0b.com.ar/. (Last access was possible on November 16, 2022).

[12] For citations of campaign materials from that collection, I will indicate the file code provided by DOXA. Future requests of a particular file can be directed to my email address. I also consulted the videos posted on the youtube channel "Canal Panke", organized by the Grupo de Pesquisa Comunicação Eleitoral - CEL (UFPR). https://www.youtube.com/@CanalPanke (Last accessed, May 6 2025).

[13] The online search of the Argentine spots was carried out since 2016 by me and members of the [research group]: [Names of colleagues]. The group is based at the [Research Institute], of the [University]. Partial advances of this analysis have been published in individual papers (Rocca Rivarola, 2023) and also in co-authored ones (Rocca Rivarola & Moscovich, 2018; Rocca Rivarola et al., 2022). Unlike the Brazilian corpus, I could not reconstruct the exact size of the universe for Argentina, that is, the total number of spots each political alliance produced and aired for the campaigns.

[14] In 1989 the TV campaign was briefer, because in a critical economic context, president Alfonsín decided, on April 21, to set the election date earlier, for May 14, instead of October. For 2011 and 2015, and following the 26.517 Law, there were two different election moments: the PASO, sort of Open Primaries, in August, and the general election or first round, in October. The TV campaign started, by law, 20 days before the PASO election and, then again, 25 days before the first round. In 2015 there was a second round on November 22, so the campaign continued until then.

[15] The first round was held on November 15 and the run-off, on December 17. The HGPE programs (two a day) started airing on September 15. Source: https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2022/08/27/horario-eleitoral-gratuito-para-presidente-teve-auge-em-1989-relembre/. Last accessed May 6, 2025.

To approach the TV campaigns, I reviewed studies focused on content analysis of audiovisual campaigns in Argentina and Brazil: among others, Albuquerque (1999); Panke (2011); Gouvêa (2014); García Beaudoux and D'Adamo (2006).

Just as an example, the thematological analysis by Gouvêa (2014) on the journalistic narratives on Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in 2010 was useful to organize the methodological approach. The author looks for issues that gained relevance in the journalistic discourse about the president-elect at that time, and seeks regularities, symbolic perceptions, sensitivities and elements that permeate those verbal and visual narratives. In this paper, I analyze the audiovisual relevance given to youth activism, the ways of representing and valuing it, or, on the contrary, of omitting it.

Another example is García Beaudoux and D'Adamo's (2006) analysis of television spots as a communicational tool. Their work provides guidelines on the purposes of spots, their distinctive elements, precepts and persuasive effectiveness, as well as keys to analyze their verbal and non-verbal contents.

Some reflections on visual qualitative research methodologies from Mikos (2014) and Knoblauch et al. (2014) were also enriching for the analysis. Mikos (2014) argues that the first step in the qualitative analysis of film material is to establish meaning. And that,

> what is interesting in the analysis of film is how content is presented and, by that, how it contributes to the production of meaning and the social construction of societal reality. The content to be expressed is united with the format for representing it. [...] Here, we basically have to assume that everything the camera shows is important and significant (Mikos, 2014, pp. 413–414).

Following the author, this relates, in turn, to how these contents constitute subjects and form identity in viewers. This question of identity building is especially important, we should add, in TV campaigns, which seek support for a particular candidate or political alliance.

In the stage of analysis, I sought to trace and interpret the messages, images and meanings constructed in the surveyed materials. At first, for several months, I registered the contents of each piece (spots in Argentina and HGPE programs in Brazil)[16] in sequential

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[16] Spots and HGPE programs are quite different pieces. HGPE can be much longer, although this depends on the candidate's assigned air time (Bolsonaro, for example, only had seven seconds for the first round in 2018). And, thus, the content conceived for HGPE programs can have a different logic than short TV spots. Having said this, both kinds of campaign audiovisual material are what voters actually consume in each

notebooks -similar to what Knoblauch et al. (2014, p. 445) call "a content logbook". From a methodological approach of "interpretive video analysis", the authors recommend that data is recorded in a content logbook, which "contains the temporal sequence of events, a rough transcription of activities, gestures and talk, reflections" (Knoblauch et al., 2014, p. 445). This first register sought to be a thick description or even what Guber (2004) has called "rough notes".[17] My notebooks included a precise, detailed description of the campaign pieces' script, images, aesthetics, music. And I registered on the side of the page (distinguished from that description), notes with personal impressions, questions, or "interpretative babbling" (Guber, 2004). From time to time, I wrote analytical memos (Meo & Navarro, 2009). Then, I revisited these notes and elaborated manual systematization files according to the dimensions I wanted to explore (in this paper and others), completing each dimension, as the analysis notes were reread, with direct references to the sources and to the notebooks, examples, reflections and comparisons.

1.3. Propositions

I will present here three propositions or arguments.

First, the audiovisual representation of youth activism on TV campaigns during the selected presidential elections shows oscillations (and not a linear evolution), both among the different political alliances and over time.

Second, underneath the decision to show (or omit) the candidate's own activist bases in their TV campaigns, there are specific ways of conceiving the political linkage between those candidates or leaders, and citizenship. In other words, flaunting the candidate's grassroots activism, with its passionate and organic adhesion, involves a conception of

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country, and they use similar marketing resources, such as storytelling, or emotional appeals through music. Regarding the purposes of this paper and its methodological perspective, comparability between spots and HGPE programs was possible and fruitful.

[17] Following Guber (2004, pp. 170–171), "In fieldwork, the researcher usually appeals to two uses of the register that are not mutually exclusive. One is to record only that which is linked to what the researcher expected to find, to their questions and to their study object. This register [...] can circumscribe the material to its presuppositions, confirming hypotheses, but without leading to other veins and without contributing significant knowledge. Another use is to record everything they see fit [...] and then establish relationships and non-relationships (i.e., what they recognize as significant and what they do not yet see as relevant) with their object of research. [...] Even if it is never achieved, perhaps it would be convenient to continue cultivating that old and productive utopia of recording everything [...] we propose to record everything (what is possible)".

the political linkage that is quite different from the one presented by leaderships who leave out a representation of their militant bases or make them less visible. In the latter case, the aim would be to present a supposedly direct link between the leaders and their voters, without organic mediation or party apparatuses behind, thus trying to blur any frontier between professional politics and common (and not politically affiliated) people. This is the case in Collor de Mello's campaign in 1989, Macri's in 2015 and Bolsonaro's in 2018. Exactly the opposite happens on other occasions, when activism receives special attention in images and messages conveyed by TV ads: Lula's campaign in 1989, Fernández de Kirchner's in 2011 and Rousseff's in 2014.[18]

A third argument is that the specific political climate or setting should be considered to understand these oscillations. For example, in Argentina in 2011 and in Brazil in 2014, youth mobilization had gained momentum and legitimacy.

2. Representations of Youth Political Activism in Presidential TV Campaigns: the Late 1980s and the 2010s

2.1. 1989: Democracy at Stake and Dissimilar Representations of Youth Activism

In both Argentina and Brazil, the 1989 elections can be considered a turning point. In Brazil, it was the first direct presidential election after two decades of dictatorship (1964-1985) and four years of a government (José Sarney) that had not been elected by popular vote (but by the Congress) and that experienced serious macroeconomic problems and enormous social inequality. 1989 also showed a spike in social support for democracy in Brazil, the so-called Honeymoon effect (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

The Argentine context was somewhat different. After almost eight years of authoritarian regime (1976-1983), a new president had been elected by popular vote in 1983. By 1989, however, the economic crisis was at its peak, and the "democratic spring" was over, against a backdrop of disenchantment with partisan politics that was even more noticeable among young people (P. Vommaro, 2015).

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[18] Even considering other PT presidential campaigns not included in this study, such as 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, the 1989 and 2014 campaigns showed a more significant emphasis.

These national contexts intertwined with the aforementioned global trends of disaffection between voters and political parties, personalization and professionalization of electoral campaigns, which were to deepen in the 1990s.

The construction of the candidates' image displayed different, and even opposite, notions of political linkage. Menem's campaign, under the *Frente Justicialista Popular* (FREJUPO) in Argentina, tried to present him as a leader in a close link with voters, even if, in fact, the Peronist Party (PJ) was a particularly significant party mediation. Collor's HGPE, in Brazil, also sought to portray this image of closeness, and postulated him as a morally superior authority in terms of competence, experience and his stance against corruption (Albuquerque, 1999). At times, he was even depicted as a hero (Albuquerque, 1999), albeit, I should add, a solitary one, without party apparatuses conditioning him. I will return to that feature later.

Lacking Menem's personal charisma, Angeloz, was portrayed as a skilled administrator, having been the governor of Córdoba, the country's second most populous province. His proposals were depicted as feasible and realistic, as opposed to the empty promises and the threat of chaos and misrule that a Menem administration would entail. This description of the adversary as a threat was also noticeable in Collor's campaign for the second round. An eventual Lula government was associated with words reiterated all the time: chaos, disturbance [*baderna*], disorder [*bagunça*] and disorganization.[19]

Presenting himself as a worker, Lula spoke as someone who personally understood the hardships suffered by most Brazilians, because, as he said, "I lived 20 years of my life as most of the people live".[20] Albuquerque (1999) calls this the construction of an image of identity with the electorate. He was also presented as the builder of an alliance of progressive parties, stressing their grassroots activism.

Considering these different ways of presenting political linkage, what were visual representations of youth activism like in these four 1989 campaigns?

Angeloz's party, the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR), had a robust youth branch, the *Juventud Radical* (JR), with great capillarity, for example, in public universities. Although his ads portrayed that activist youth mobilized in his rallies, this was not an

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[19] File "017_89C" of the DOXA Collection.

[20] File "1-2-89 dvdiv" of the DOXA Collection.

outstanding feature in the spots, and was limited to a few brief images. Moreover, in one of those spots, rallies were portrayed in an almost negative way, as an off-screen narrator associated activist cheering [*agite militante*] in rallies to a "noise" that would hinder the rational and calm reflection necessary for voters to opt for stability and viable change.[21]

Menem's TV campaign put emphasis on his personal leadership, and activists were not explicitly represented. There was, however, an indirect and noteworthy kind of representation: in a series of several animated spots (cartoons),[22] a street band composed of youth and children sang provocative and catchy songs, generally mocking the rival candidate.[23] It might be an exaggeration to identify these young characters as activists, but they were certainly not the sort of innocent children represented in Angeloz's ads, swinging in the park[24] or drawing little houses on paper. These were children and young people somewhat involved in politics, walking next to street walls with political graffiti, taking a political stance, criticizing the government and its incumbent candidate.

The HGPE programs of Lula's *Frente Brasil Popular* highlighted activist intermediation, exhibited as predominantly composed of youth. This intermediation was valued as a distinctive feature. Recurring images showed rallies with activists cheering, raising a fist (a historical left-wing gesture), and waving their party flags. In the campaign towards the second round, long segments included an off-screen narrator describing a political rally, identifying the presence of young political activists, and listing, one by one, their respective parties. Additionally, youth activism was called upon to form pro-Lula campaign committees (with images of young people sewing a flag or assembling campaign materials); to carry out fundraising activities; or "door-to-door activities in your neighborhood"[25]. In the final stretch towards the second round, Lula himself summoned

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[21] With Angeloz working at his desk, an off-screen male narrator said, "when the rallies are over [photo of a campaign event with a frozen crowd of activists with flags], and the noises are silenced, when all the electoral promises are over, a man will have to do the hard work of governing". (Spot N°80 of the Electoral Campaigns Observatory, saved in the collection gathered by the Group of Studies on Politics and Youth (GEPOJU). From now on, where a link is not provided for an Argentine spot, the source is always this collection.

[22] Two examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ-HfGYfwm8 ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MspAlzl7uk8 . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[23] For example, one of those songs' lyrics were: "In this election there are many candidates. You have to look closely, not to vote for short-sighted ones [*chicatos*]" (Spot "17-Menem-chicatos", from the GEPOJU Collection). This, in reference to Angeloz's thick glasses.

[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fbei3rf-apA. Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[25] File 1-2-89dvdiii of the DOXA Collection, from minute 57.

activists, thanking them for their involvement thus far and calling for a last effort, to go out to the streets with "our" flags.

The opposite was true in Collor's campaign. Permanently pondering a supposedly direct link with the people, the candidate of the *Movimento Novo* alliance omitted any mention to his own party, the PRN (to which he had affiliated shortly before), or to allied parties. Instead, he emphasized that his candidacy was born "pure" and "crystalline,"[26] without the tutelage of any group or party. And he insisted that his candidacy "does not belong to any party, but only to you".[27] Moreover, Collor sought to establish an informal and affectionate dialogue with the audience, constantly calling them *minha gente* [my people], forging an "us" (*eu e você*, or *eu e vocês*, in plural) that excluded the rest of the political class. Attendees to his campaign events were presented as "electors" or as "the people of [name of the town]", and never as organized activists, something similar to what Bolsonaro would do regarding his "followers" in the 2018 campaign. In fact, almost no party flags were seen in the images, but only banners with Collor's name and face.

As an extreme corollary of this strategy of glorifying the supposed absence of mediations between the candidate and his electorate, Collor's campaign for the second round displayed a vicious stigmatization of the Workers' Party's (PT) young activists. After the incidents prior to a rally in Caxias do Sul (in the state of Rio Grande do Sul), Collor's programs started associating PT youth activism with violence, intolerance, fanaticism, and even drew a visual parallel to the Nazi youth in Germany in the 1930s. In a HGPE segment, a journalist hired by Collor's campaign, Belisa Ribeiro, highlighted the juvenile character of those accused of political violence: "young people, who never voted for president, breaking everything, hitting."[28] This attempt to draw a parallel between left-wing youth activism and authoritarianism and disorder was invigorated as Collor's campaign assumed an increasingly anti-communist narrative.[29]

Thus, the representation of youth activism in Collor's campaign was non-existent in terms of his own supporting grassroots activism, and categorically negative in references to the

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[26] File "001_89A", from minute 33. Doxa Collection.

[27] Ibid.

[28] File "1-1-89dvdiii" of the DOXA Collection. From minute 32.

[29] The Berlin Wall fell shortly before the first round and Collor's HGPE fed on these events, trying to link the PT to the "backwardness" of the socialist Eastern Europe, and declaring that PT activists sang *The Internationale* instead of Brazil's national anthem.

opposing political youth. In Argentina, one of Angeloz's ads, also tried to associate the other candidate, Menem, with a violent and authoritarian youth, showing a succession of historic images that included the Peronist Youth's armed organizations in the 1970s (such as *Montoneros*). However, that same spot then depicted the *Juventud Radical* (JR), Angeloz's supporting grassroots youth, as peacefully mobilized in political rallies already in a democratic context[30]. In contrast, in Collor's recurring stigmatization of PT young activists, there was no vindication of other politically organized youth activisms, but rather a contrast with "the people".

2.2. Visual Emphasis on Youth Activism: The Reelections of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina (2011) and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2014)

Different electoral campaigns during the 1990s and 2000s sought to highlight a direct political linkage between the candidate and voters, visually omitting partisan or activist mediations. In Argentina, this was the case with Menem's campaign in 1994, and Néstor Kirchner's in 2003. In Brazil, studies have shown that even some PT campaigns during those years seemed to dissociate the image of the presidential candidate from the party logo, its iconography and colors (Panke, 2011; Dias, 2013).

However, the situation changed in Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's (from now on, CFK) campaign in 2011, in Argentina, and in Dilma Rousseff's campaign in 2014, in Brazil. Both showed an especially prominent audiovisual representation of political youth.[31]

Their opponents' campaigns in those elections –Hermes Binner (*Frente Amplio Progresista*) in Argentina, and Aécio Neves (*Coligação Muda Brasil*) in Brazil– did not

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[30] That narrative is in line with the JR's self-presentation slogan in the early 1980s, "we are life, we are peace" (an indirect self-differentiation from armed organizations). A video of their activists, decades later, singing the same slogan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDlpoSlMmLM . Last accessed 29 January 2025.

[31] CFK ran for her reelection with the *Frente para la Victoria* and Dilma with the coalition *Com a Força do Povo.*

show a similar feature, even though in both cases their respective parties had some grassroots bases.[32]

In Argentina, youth activism was pictured in CFK's TV campaign through shots of massive rallies, young people waving flags and chanting, ovations to the leader and even through images of activist T-shirts (with the names of kirchnerist organizations). But also exploiting a narrative resource: "Argentines," "young people," "housewives," and other social categories mentioned by CFK's off-screen voice were personified or illustrated in the form of *kirchnerista* activists, who were shown heading to a political rally, wrapped in a flag, greeting the candidate or crying, emotionally moved by her speech (Rocca Rivarola & Moscovich, 2018). A spot called "*La fuerza de los jóvenes*" (the strength of young people), for instance, did not portray young people as potential voters, but rather as politically committed youth. In the final seconds of several spots, the slogan "the strength of a country" was accompanied by a very symbolic image: CFK's back and, facing her, a crowd in a political rally. Here, the "country" was embodied by a mobilized crowd, and what stood out was the organic and emotional bond with the candidate. [33]

As argued in the introduction, the political context is key. Ever since the agrarian conflict in 2008, the CFK administrations assigned a core visibility to its grassroots youth activism, boasting of having garnered a political base of youth active commitments (in different akin organizations, such as *La Cámpora*, which experienced a vertiginous growth, especially after Néstor Kirchner's sudden death in 2010). Some studies have addressed this public and discursive exaltation of its own militant bases, as well as its derivations in the composition of state bureaucracies (Vázquez, 2013; Vázquez & Rocca, 2022).

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[32] Binner's campaign in 2011 pictured some young people in their everyday life and as citizens. Youth active political commitment was almost never represented. Even though the candidate's Socialist Party had a considerable tradition of youth activism, no campaigns rallies and no activist iconography were shown, in a campaign that highlighted, instead, Binner's experience as governor of the province of Santa Fe. In Aécio Neves' case, the campaign referred to the 2013 and 2014 street protests and included some images of mobilized protesters there, but otherwise, it was the candidate who was pictured, for example, greeting common people. Historically, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) TV campaigns had not shown political activism as an asset (the way the Workers' Party had), and 2014 was no exception. Furthermore, Borba and Medeiros (2019) argue that Neves, grandson of Tancredo Neves (a key politician in the democratic transition), presented himself in his HGPE programs through personal attributes such as efficiency and courage. And as just another Brazilian outraged by government corruption scandals.

[33] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDlpoSlMmLM . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

In Brazil, the use of images of political activism (scenes of street rallies, mobilized crowds, banners and ovations) was a historical feature in the PT's HGPE (Albuquerque, 1999). As discussed before, the 1989 campaign represented a climax in this respect, and visual emphasis on militant intermediation seemed to diminish in the following years. In 2014, however, the representations of grassroots activism regained an outstanding strength and also a new kind of reference to youth activism was introduced.

In 2014, Dilma's HGPE segments dedicated to supporting activists were longer than in her campaign programs in 2010. In addition, there was, especially in the programs towards the run-off, a recurring announcement of the new collective adhesions that the candidate was garnering (youth organizations, trade unions and social organizations). Images of rallies were described by an off-screen narrator as "the Brazil that mobilizes" or "that fights for more jobs, more salaries, for political reform."[34] And there were also two other ways in which Dilma's HGPE in 2014 portrayed youth political commitment.

The first one was the reference to the protests in June 2013. These initially consisted of demonstrations, composed mainly of youth, against the increase in public transport fares, and led by the *Passe Livre* movement. A year later, Dilma's campaign mentioned those events. The HGPE included scenes of a meeting held by Dilma Rousseff with some akin youth organizations' leaders, presented as protagonists of those demonstrations. The HGPE segments covering the meeting seemed to appeal directly to young voters who had demonstrated in June 2013, acknowledging the legacy of those protests. But they also seemed to want to rewrite their meaning: an off-screen voice presented the organizations at the meeting, all with some degree of affinity with the government, as "movements of young people who took to the streets in the June demonstrations, to defend more progress." Thus, Dilma's HGPE tried to redefine the protests, which, by the end, were taking a clearer anti-government turn, as an impulse for her administration to "continue" advancing. .

A second way of visual representation of youth activism in Dilma's 2014 campaign is the pondering of her own experience as a young armed militant against the dictatorship.

In the 2010 election, although Dilma's past membership in armed organizations was the subject of extensive media coverage, in the form of criticism and denunciation (Gouvêa,

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[34] File "038_14" of the DOXA Collection.

2014), her own HGPE avoided references to her youth militant trajectory (Jucá & Chaves, 2015; Rocca Rivarola & Moscovich, 2018). In 2014, on the contrary, Dilma's HGPE took that period of armed struggle (and even her detention by the regime) and stripped it of the negativity that the press had assigned to it in 2010. In 2014, it was invested with an epic character, depicting Dilma as a heroine of the resistance against the military dictatorship, with a slogan that synthesized that symbolic operation: "Dilma, a brave heart".[35] Different resources were used for that purpose. First, two pictures that became part of the core aesthetics of the campaign for the run-off showed her as a political prisoner: one, where she was about to give her statement to a military court, and the other one, a sort of mug shot turned into a drawing, where her hair and clothes were digitally edited with a filling of images allusive to the dictatorship. Dilma's youth activism during the dictatorship was also acknowledged through explicit references to her detention and torture (in Lula's and her own speeches in rallies shown in the HGPE). Also, in the aforementioned meeting with young activists, Dilma made explicit the socialist and revolutionary character of her own political background during the dictatorship[36]:

> There is a belief that we have in youth, which is something that justifies one's being in the world [...] I thought that the socialist revolution depended on my being a militant 24 hours a day. And if I stopped fighting 24 hours a day, the socialist revolution would not happen. You would arrive, get up in the morning and say "I am a revolutionary. Tomorrow everything will be solved" [laughter]. I think the June demonstrations [2013] have a little bit of that. That's why I found them so interesting (Dilma's HGPE, Program No. 24, 13 September 2014)[37].

In that statement included in the HGPE, Dilma seemed to bind together two important ways in which her campaign represented youth activism: on one hand, the vindication of her own past as a young militant against the dictatorship; on the other, the attempt to re-signify the legacy of the 2013 protests as a critical input for her administration.

In sum, both CFK's 2011 and Dilma's 2014 campaigns exhibited a distinct emphasis on audiovisual representations of youth activism. This feature entails a specific conception

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[35] An example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k8YQCSs8es . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[36] Due to extension limits and the dimensions of the corpus, I have not included many long textual quotes of the campaign messages. But this one is particularly significant as it illustrates by itself different observations of this subsection.

[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OEeIOaW7Ms&list=PLTFICznn6CeEQ1v3BRCi7OHFwBQW5SVh0&index=47. Last accessed January 28, 2025.

of the political linkage between leaders and voters, but it is also better understood by taking into consideration the political context at the time.

2.3. Non-Activist Youth on Display and the Rise of the Right: 2015 in Argentina and 2018 in Brazil.

The elections of 2015 (Argentina) and 2018 (Brazil) marked the rise of right-wing candidates –Mauricio Macri and Jair Bolsonaro, respectively– and the defeat of Kirchnerism and the PT. This general statement needs some clarification. First, the PT had already been ousted from power in 2016, in an impeachment that many read as a political coup, and the 2018 elections took place under an interim conservative administration (Michel Temer) and also with Lula imprisoned for corruption and unable to run for presidency (his conviction would be overturned years later). Second, in Argentina, the incumbent candidate chosen by CFK to succeed her in the 2015 election was Daniel Scioli, whose relationship with Kirchnerist grassroots organizations was much weaker than hers.

The appeal to young voters was key in Haddad's HGPE, for example in the aesthetics and interaction of TV ads with ICT and online social media. In some of Fernando Haddad's HGPE programs (coalition "*O Povo feliz de novo*") there was a youthful graphic style, as well as a fast succession of images and Facebook-like symbols and reactions. Since Haddad was a university professor, and former Minister of Education, his HGPE gave considerable attention to PT's education promises and policies (and their young beneficiaries).

Bolsonaro's HGPE for the first round, with almost no air time (his programs lasted seven seconds), showed him in a political street rally, carried through the crowd on someone's shoulders, as a recurring written message told the viewer to "access now" a link. Moreover, social media was a key platform for his electoral campaign. However, the right-wing candidate's HGPE did not address young people as directly as Haddad did, and the followers his programs showed were from different generations. But what about the representations of youth activism? What were they like in both campaigns?

Especially towards the end, most of Haddad's programs included images of political activism in campaign rallies, with red T-shirts and activist flags (although the

organizations' names were not clearly shown, as they had been in 1989 and 2014). Even some of the supposedly unscripted opinions gathered in the street by the campaign –what Albuquerque (1999) conceptualizes as "the popular" accounts in HGPE programs– were taken at scenes of street protests against Temer's government, or even Bolsonaro's candidacy (the "*Ele não*" ["Not him!"] demonstration led by women). In other words, these were not mere voters giving their opinion, but people mobilized for a cause. When compared with Dilma's campaign in 2014 and Lula's in 1989, however, the weight of youth activism representations in Haddad's HGPE in 2018 seemed much more modest, as was the use of the party logo and identity.[38]

Once Bolsonaro's HGPE equaled Haddad's time, after the first round, his programs acquired a distinctive mark that would share several features with Collor's run-off campaign in 1989 and its image construction. Bolsonaro's campaign also pictured him as a candidate without the support of a large party apparatus: "How to overcome a system, a machine so clung to the ground? […] I knew that I would not have a big or medium-sized party by my side, I would not have TV airtime, I would not have party funds, I would have nothing".[39] Despite having been a congressman for almost three decades, Bolsonaro posed in 2018 as an outsider, seeking to attract the anti-partisan sentiment that boiled up within the anti-PT demonstrations of 2015 and 2016.

Moreover, even though Bolsonaro's HGPE programs repeatedly exhibited scenes of campaign walking tours [*caminhadas*], his followers were not pictured as activists but rather as common people, enthusiastic about his candidacy. This resembled Collor's 1989 strategy of presenting attenders to his campaign rallies as mere "electors." And there lay a conveyance of the political linkage as a direct bond between the leader and citizens, without any organic intermediation. Drawing on the same narrative, the HGPE presenter declared that "Bolsonaro arrived here with the support of his people, with nothing more than his determination, with only seven seconds of TV" and that "it is from social media that the most important support comes, the support of our people."[40] Something similar

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[38] The PT logo, a red star with the number 13 (voting code), mutated along the campaign until it became a circle with the number and in different colors. Comparing Bolsonaro and Haddad's HGPE for the run-off, Menezes and Panke (2020) argue that Haddad mentioned his own party on more occasions than Bolsonaro. But, even so, in 62% of Haddad's programs, the PT did not appear nor was it mentioned.

[39] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOQW6sUu2CI&t=245s&ab_channel=Poder360. Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[40] File 031_18-2018-10-15-HGPE-PRES-GOV, from the DOXA Collection.

was conveyed in homemade videos made by supporters and broadcasted in Bolsonaro's HGPE. A young couple in their car said: "We'll vote for Bolsonaro because for the first time in history, the Brazilian cause is more important than the cause of a political party."[41] Bolsonaro's own slogan, "*Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos*" [Brazil above everything, God above all of us], suggested a similar idea: the "Brazilian People" were more important than any partisan interest. This had lingered from the 2015-2016 anti-PT protests, where the generalized attire was the T-shirt of the Brazilian national football team. One of Bolsonaro's HGPE musical jingles went: "blue, white, yellow and green is our flag. With faith in the people's strength, it will never be red".[42] Red as in the PT, but also, red as in communism. This, as anticommunism coated Bolsonaro's TV campaign for the second round (with references to the São Paulo Forum, Lula and Dilma's foreign relations with Cuba and Venezuela, and even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989)[43]. In sum, the valued portrayal of young people by Bolsonaro's campaign was that of nonpartisan voters, fed up with a corrupted political system.

In Argentina, neither Mauricio Macri (*Cambiemos*) nor Daniel Scioli (*Frente para la Victoria*) showed, in their campaigns, the highlighting of youth political commitment that CFK's campaign had displayed in 2011.

Macri focused on proximity, a direct dialogue with the electorate and on blurring the boundaries between professional politics and "the people" (Annunziata et al., 2018; Rocca Rivarola & Bonazzi, 2017). In 2015, his ads presented a sort of intimate link between *Cambiemos*' candidates and voters, whom they would "visit" in their own homes, have lunch or drink *mate* with. This direct bond was pictured not only as lacking organic political mediations, but also stripped of some typical elements of party politics, as suggested by a spot: "With the heart, not with speeches."[44] This indirect impugnation of party politics went hand in hand with a visual omission of Macri's akin youth activism, as opposed to the hyper-visibilization of young activists portrayed in CFK's 2011 campaign.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Jingle at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOe1YtaoJ08 . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[43] An example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwchEHLhcJw . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[44] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTYQ_H3X7EM . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

Scioli's TV ads, on the other hand, did carry an explicit party identity (Peronism/Kirchnerism). But the contrast with CFK's campaign in 2011 was considerable. In Scioli's official campaign,[45] the representations of activist youth were much scarcer than in 2011. They were limited to, for example, a young girl making a "V" gesture with her fingers (a sign associated, in Argentina, with Peronism)[46]; or to a very brief camera shot towards the end of some ads, showing, in the distance, an activist flag among the audience in a theater rally.

The political context in 2015 is critical to understand the contrast with CFK's campaign. First, Scioli's candidacy did not attract full support from kirchnerist youth organizations that had grown outside the Peronist Party. The slogan seen on banners in different mobilizations in 2015 (not in the TV ads, of course), "the candidate is the [kirchnerist] Project" seemed to point to distrust towards Scioli, who even had been disdained by the president herself in the past (G. Vommaro, 2015). But also, the 2015 campaign took place after years of public discussion regarding La Cámpora. The organization's political and state practices were often criticized and even stigmatized.[47]). It is against that specific background that Scioli subtly delimited himself, in his TV spots, from some of the most stinging features of Kirchnerism during those years, including its aforementioned boasting of its own grassroots activism. Presenting himself as someone open to dialogue and reflective on mistakes, he postulated change but also certain continuity. In that narrative line, Scioli's campaign focused on picturing common people (young workers, students, young mothers and fathers, etc.) and relegated images of politically committed youth that had been so remarkable in 2011.

3. Final Remarks

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[45] By "official" here I am referring to ads conceived by Scioli's coordinated campaign.

[46] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2k7MQMfLhE . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

[47] For example, they were compared with fascism, accusing them of "indoctrinating" young people in schools. An example, in an editorial piece in the journal La Nación: https://www.lanacion.com.ar/editoriales/la-campora-y-su-confusion-entre-adoctrinar-y-capacitar-nid1507917/ . Last accessed 30 January 2025.

The aim of this paper was to examine representations of youth activism in the main audiovisual electoral campaigns in Argentina and Brazil in two different periods: the late 1980s and the 2010s.

If we regard the literature on the process of campaign professionalization together with studies related to mutations on political representation, there seems to be a trend towards campaigns centered on candidates' personal attributes and seeking direct proximity to voters. However, this paper's findings show specific moments when the candidates especially highlighted their supporting political activism in their TV campaigns: Lula's campaign in 1989; CFK's in 2011; and Dilma Rousseff's in 2014. Compared to those cases, the other elections showed different patterns. In other words, between the late 1980s and the 2010s, TV campaigns do not show a linear trend but rather oscillating dynamics in terms of their audiovisual representation of youth activism. As argued here, those fluctuations can be better understood by taking into account two elements.

First, there is the specific conception of the political linkage between candidates and the citizenship involved in each campaign. Underscoring the candidate's supporting grassroots activism goes hand in hand with a notion of the political linkage defined by organic intermediation. The opposite is true for campaigns where candidates present themselves as lacking a party apparatus and as having only spontaneous non-partisan followers. In this case, the aim is to present a supposedly direct dialogue between the leader and voters. Although the latter has been a more common feature on electoral advertising since the return to democracy in Brazil and Argentina, this paper has shown some moments and cases where candidates went the furthest in trying to dilute any kind of collective reference to their own bases of support: Collor de Melo in 1989 and Bolsonaro in 2018, in Brazil; and Mauricio Macri in 2015, in Argentina. All three of them sought to distinguish themselves from candidates whose political parties held a tradition of organic activism and mediation.

A second element that we should bear in mind to understand the fluctuations on the visual representations of youth activism on TV political advertising is the political setting. The Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil was hardly the same in the 2010s as in 1989, given that it had undergone substantial transformations in its organization and platform (Hunter, 2010; Amaral, 2010). Therefore, even though the PT was – of all political forces considered in this study – the one that showed most continuity in its portrayal of grassroots activism in the HGPE, it could also have experienced a decline in that representation over time. Yet,

this paper's findings show intense underlining of activism in Dilma's reelection campaign in 2014, with even some remarkable references to her own political experience as a young armed militant against the dictatorship in the 1960s.

Therefore, the political context –for example, in terms of youth mobilization and its public legitimacy in 2011 in Argentina and in 2014 in Brazil– should not be overlooked when we draw conclusions about representations of youth activism in TV campaigns. The ostentation and legitimization of kirchnerism's militant youth had been built by its leaders as a feature since 2010 (Néstor Kirchner's death) or even 2008 (the agrarian conflict). On the other hand, both 2015 campaigns, Scioli's but more notoriously Macri's, were a manifestation or derivation of an ongoing public debate about the actions, practices and insertion in the State of that kirchnerist activist youth (involved in various organizations but commonly reduced, as the object of criticism, to La Cámpora).

In 2014 the Brazilian HGPE was also mediated by the political context and the events initiated a year earlier: the June Protests in 2013. Both 2014 campaigns (Aécio Neves and Dilma) reflected this process. But Dilma's campaign did so by trying to appeal to the mobilized youth, with an epic narrative about the candidate's earlier trajectory as a young militant against the dictatorship, and at the same time, showing a "listening" tone by her government, which was also depicted as a recipient of mobilized support.

In both countries, thus, the specific portrayal of youth activism reflected both a particular context, and a self-definition of candidates or their parties in terms of the political linkage they intended to forge and bear.

These representations of youth were not only nourished by the context, but, in some way, they might also have contributed to shaping or reinforcing, even if briefly, certain social and institutional views and notions regarding young people and youth activism.

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