

Historical Events as Bridges Between Social Domains Taking Bolsonaro's Victory Personal in the 2018 Brazilian Elections

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[Draft]

Abstract

How do historical events—emergent, intense, and collectively experienced instances of political contingency—generate sweeping bursts of politicization immediately after they occur? Rationalist outlooks see this capacity as stemming from how events perform as purveyors of information to citizens with exogenous and inflexible political identities. Politico-cultural approaches, on the other hand, contend that events politicize by changing the meanings with which people navigate politics. These outlooks assume that events' politicizing impact develops strictly within the domain of political experience. But, given that politics is scantily instantiated in everyday life, they have a limited ability to explain how events generate sweeping political activation. I offer an alternative "connective" approach to understand events' immediate politicizing capacity. I anchor this influence in events' ability to generate semantic disturbances that allow the infiltration of political narratives into stories and identities driving action from social spheres of more frequent instantiation than politics. I find support for this outlook by conducting qualitative fieldwork in São Paulo in the wake of the unexpectedly strong victory of right-wing extremist Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. My observations in public spaces and moments of sociability between left-leaning citizens portray this time as one of "politicization without politics". Bolsonaro's surprising popular support expanded feelings of vulnerability, leading to political perceptual and behavioral reaccommodations that emerged from changes in personal, rather than properly, political domains of social experience. These connective reaccommodations produced an environment of political "engagement without action" where visible political behavior drastically decreased while political conversations skyrocketed.

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INTRODUCTION

Some minutes after 10 PM on October 7, 2018, conversations in a gathering of left-wing sympathizers following with beers and peanuts the Brazilian presidential election results in a downtown São Paulo apartment suddenly came to an end. At that moment, the screen of a small TV began showing the press conference by which the Brazilian Electoral Court (TSE) announced that a run-off election would take place on October 27 to decide the election's final winner. The run-off candidates were Fernando Haddad and Jair Bolsonaro — the most contrasting, polarizing, and popular candidates of a convulsed electoral process that reflected as much as it had kept adding to the political convulsions that had reshaped Brazilian politics since 2013 (Singer 2018; Patto Sá da Motta 2018; Pinheiro-Machado and Freixo 2019).

Runner-up Fernando Haddad was the last-minute candidate of the left-wing and technically incumbent Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT). He was a former São Paulo mayor and a federal Education minister during the presidency of Inácio “Lula” da Silva, who was the PT's original presidential nominee. Lula was also the architect of the left's preponderance in Brazilian politics from the beginning of the century up until 2014. That year, the popularity of PT (or “petista”) president Dilma Rouseff started to crumble due to a steep economic crisis and a vast judicial inquiry into systemic corruption in the Brazilian public sector. In 2015, this highly mediatized investigation triggered a massive wave of right-wing protests demanding Rouseff's removal, which occurred one year later after a

controversial impeachment process. In the midst of this downfall, the PT nominated Lula as its 2018 presidential candidate in an attempt to remain electorally competitive. When the campaign started, he combined being both the most popular and the most divisive figure of Brazilian politics. Lula led the polls throughout the campaign even after being controversially imprisoned in April in connection with a corruption scandal. However, his candidacy came to an end after the Supreme Court invalidated it on August 3. On September 11—less than one month before the election—Haddad substituted Lula as the PT's presidential candidate.

Jair Bolsonaro, the plurality winner, was on the other hand a retired military official and a lackluster seven-term congressman known for his vocal and crude right-wing extremism. Once considered an inconsequential aberration of Brazilian politics, his political star began to grow hand in hand with the PT's fall to the abyss. After Lula's bid came to an end, Bolsonaro became the election's frontrunner—a position that was cemented after suffering a stabbing murder attempt on September 6. In the last week before the election, his political ascendance took over six-hundred thousand people to Brazil's streets in either opposition or support for his presidential bid.

That Bolsonaro and Haddad would face-off in a run-off election was long and resignedly expected by many Brazilian left-wingers, including those with whom I was watching the Electoral Court's press conference. Less anticipated, however, was the relief that the run-off election confirmation produced after the first election results that were made public had given Bolsonaro a shocking 48% of the votes cast—a figure between 6 and 15 points higher than forecasts from polls conducted two days before the election, and 2 points shy of an absolute majority that would have made a run-off election unnecessary.

Having been spared seeing Bolsonaro become president-elect that evening, my party companions almost instantly reacted to the Court's announcement with sighs of relief. But this joyful instant did not last long. A new silence descended into the living room moments afterward. More than suspenseful, it felt mournful. This was an understandable sentiment, as the election results unavoidably marked a moment of reckoning for the Brazilian left. Haddad had received only slightly more than half of Bolsonaro's votes and had no credible path to victory in the run-off election.¹ With the PT's vote share slashed by a third relative to the preceding election, the left saw itself relegated to the minority for the first time in the twenty-first century. On the night of October 7, the fourteen-year long period of leftist dominance in Brazil was receiving its coup de grace by the victory of a crude and unabashedly open homophobe, gun-supporter, climate-change denier, gender equality attacker, and apologist of torture and dictatorship (Dieguez 2016). By midnight, Brazil seemed to embark on the risky political adventure, unexplored in any liberal democracy since the 1930s, of electing a man with overtly fascist tendencies to the highest office in the land.

Whatever my party companions were thinking of in the muteness that came shortly after the Court's message, it didn't take long for a minimal sense of normalcy to return to the apartment. Some people resumed checking their cell phones, trying to get the most recently updated numbers of the vote count. Others occasionally threw isolated comments about the election with no apparent addressee. For a little longer, the most hopeful among them maintained, each time less enthusiastically, that once votes from the PT bastions of the Northeast began to be counted, the election results would get easier to digest.

¹ The election's final results gave Bolsonaro 46.6% and Haddad 28.5% of the votes cast. In the city of São Paulo, both figures were smaller, but the relative distance between them similar: 44.6% and 19.1%, respectively.

This performance of serenity, however, was interrupted when Ifigênia, the party's host, walked in direction to the living room balcony and began roaring onto the street the signature cry of the anti-Bolsonaro protests that had flooded Avenida Paulista, the city's flagship thoroughfare, merely a week before:

“ELE NÃOOOOO!” [NOT HIIIIIM!]

“ELE NUUUNCA!” [NEVER HIIIIIM!]

I joined Ifigênia in the balcony to see what these cries were about. When I got there, I realized her words, rather than being lonely shouts, were one among many others being poured onto the city from other balconies across São Paulo's undulating fields of apartment towers.

It took around fifteen minutes for this spectacle of vertical protest to fade into the night. By then, the void it had left had been filled by the feeling that a historical breaking was fast developing before my eyes, by questions on how exactly the election results would politically impregnate the days ahead, and by the more general interrogation of how historical events—major emergent moments of political contingency—produce politicization bursts in the societies where they emerge.

In light of the multiple political contingencies that have recently emerged across the world—of which Bolsonaro's victory is a significant instance—understanding how events generate spikes in political activation has acquired a renewed importance. However, this capability is not well understood yet. The literature currently assumes that events increase political engagement either as neutral purveyors of political information or by modifying the meanings that orient people's actions when they use politics as an explicit lens of social experience. But, since politics is rarely activated as an explicit frame of experience in

everyday life, these positions cannot fully explain how events produce the fast and widespread changes in political engagement they are credited with. Against this backdrop, in this paper, I ask the following question: how do historical events *instant politicization bursts*—spikes of politicization in everyday life right after they happen?

In my answer to this question, I offer an alternative outlook to understand the origins of historical events' politicizing influence. My approach, which I call “connective,” recognizes that in their daily life, people toggle between different domains of social experience and that these domains are linked through intersectional elements of meaning that orient actions and interpretation in more than one of them. In this environment, I see an event's capacity to shift connective meanings relating politics with more frequently applied—or “instantiated”—domains of social experience as the locus of their disruptive power. By doing so, events perform as semantic bridges through which political stories infiltrate more experientially active social domains, leading to the production of political action outside politics.

I develop this argument by drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted in São Paulo in the first four days after Bolsonaro's victory. My observations in socialization moments of upper-middle class, left-leaning subjects, and in broader interactions in public spaces in downtown São Paulo suggest that October 7 generated a political environment of “engagement without action.” Politics increasingly started to occupy people's thoughts, generated sentiments of personal vulnerability, and became a focal topic of private conversations all while behaviorally disappearing from public spaces.² These political modifications were executed not by political but by personal self-understandings. As such,

² I understand “political action” as a minimally purposeful behavior motivated or justified by accounts related to the field of politics, and “interaction” as conduct primarily aimed at the act of communication and not directly related to the attainment of a specific goal.

the political changes I observed after Election Day were connective. They did not come from attempts to make political sense of Bolsonaro's victory; they proceeded, quite literally, from “taking it personal.”

My investigation is divided into five parts. The first discusses current outlooks to event-based—or “evenemential”—politicization bursts and introduces the connective outlook I develop to understand them. I then discuss how I explored how Bolsonaro's victory altered how politics manifested in everyday life in São Paulo. In the third section, I describe the political shifts I observed in the aftermath of October 7, and the fourth provides an analytical account of these changes. The fifth section concludes by recapping the investigation's main findings and implications.

EVENTS' INSTANTANEOUS INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: RATIONAL, POLITICO-CULTURAL AND CONNECTIVE APPROACHES

We count with two theoretical frameworks available to understand how Bolsonaro's victory in particular and historical events, in general, can politically charge everyday life.

A rationalist approach to evenemential politicization considers historical events as large-scale political billboards acting as neutral purveyors of information to people with fixed political attributes (Francisco 2004; Hess and Martin 2006; Beissinger 2013; Shultziner 2018). One example of how a historical event would increase political engagement along this line would be when someone discontent with economic austerity policies decides to join a demonstration after knowing of massive protests against them. Based on a model of political action premised on seeing individuals as agents that monitor their social context continuously and exclusively from a political standpoint (Downs 1957; Olson 1965), this

outlook assumes that people are effortlessly capable of attending events and identifying them as political discontinuities.

William Sewell offers an alternative theory of evenemential politicization in *Historical Events as Transformations of Structures* (Sewell 1996). In this seminal essay, he argues that events produce shifts in the meanings through which people understand politics that lead to higher political engagement. Sewell famously exemplifies this process by examining how the Storming of the Bastille modified the meaning of the terms “people” and “revolution” in ways that legitimized massive political participation from July 12 to July 23, 1789, in the wake of what we know now as the French Revolution.³ His discussion suggests that events politicize by increasing the frequency and time span with which politics is “instantiated” as an active domain of social experience. Within the context of revolutionary France, a case in point would be one when someone had decided to take arms against the Bourbons after reimagining her political identity from “regal subject” to “member of a sovereign people.”

Different as they are, both the rationalist and Sewell’s politico-cultural approach to evenemential politicization assume a strict correspondence in social domains between motivation and action. Both views understand political behavior as developing only from properly political chunks of social experience. By doing so, in both of these views, events’ capacity to generate widespread politicization changes assumes that politics is a commonly activated domain of concrete social experience. This view, however, is at odds with empirical studies that have consistently found that politics receives very little attention in everyday life (Bennet, Fischer and Resnick 1995; Wyatt, Katz, and Kim 2000; Bearman and Parigi 2004).⁴

³ This period began when the Storming of the Bastille became a feasible quest and ended the day when it ended up being legitimized by the French National Assembly.

⁴ Results from studies on conversation topics show, for example, that only 11% of survey respondents mentioned having talked about politics in their important conversations (Bearman and Parigi 2004); that out of nine different topics of conversation, politics was the third least frequent in

Against this backdrop, the problem remains, in the words of Robin Wagner Pacifici (2017: 1358), of how events might “force their way into subjects field of attention” to produce political modifications.

Informed by this issue, I identify an alternative path to evenemential influence. In this alternative, which I call “connective,” events’ political ruptures politicize social perceptions and actions by modifying domains of social experience that *are not* properly political. Harrison White’s discussion of the interrelationship between social domains, identities, contingency, and action provides a useful framework to gain analytical insight into this process.

White describes individuals socially as collections of identities. Each of these identities constitutes specific and differentiated platforms of social perception and action (White and Mische 1998; White 2008, 1-10) related to particular social “domains”—realms of social experience constituted by two elements: social networks and the stories that embed meaning to them.⁵ Each of these identities drives social action when their respective domains instantiate into people’s experiences. Seeking to control social uncertainty—and in a way that can be thought of as similar to that of a shock absorber—they constantly shift in reaction to changes in the social networks or stories of its underlying domain to generate regular behavioral and interpretive regularities. These changes might be fully circumscribed to the domain where an identity operates. But when stories or networks connected to multiple social domains shift—think, for example, of a person who is both a close friend and a work colleague—identities and behaviors from one domain might be able to change in response to modifications occurring in another. This possibility opens up a “connective” path for

people’s discussions (Wyatt, Katz, and Kim 2000); and that more than half of Americans talked about politics less than twice a week in every electoral year between 1982 and 1994 (Bennet, Fischer and Resnick 1995).

⁵White calls these spaces “netdoms.” I will refer to them as domains for ease of exposition.

evenemential influence. Unlike rationalist and politico-cultural approaches, in this alternative an event generates politicization bursts by generating abrupt discontinuities in meanings shared between politics and more commonly active social experience domains. Here, the cultural work needed to address these turbulences creates an opening for political stories to infiltrate other domains' interpretive apparatus and generate politically informed action out of them.

METHODS

Event effects have been mainly investigated using retrospective accounts, written elite testimonies (Sewell 1996), or surveys coincidentally conducted during or close to the emergence of a major political disruption (Beissinger 2013).⁶ While these sources have generated seminal knowledge of how events modify political traits, they provides few clues into the analytical objective of my investigation: how it is that events *immediately* politicize daily life, and whether this influence is connectively organized.

Exploring this connective path empirically calls for an observational assessment of how events shift people's engagement with politics in their everyday life⁷. Doing this, of course, is easier said than done. Like tornadoes, events are short-lasting and impossible to predict. These qualities pose substantial barriers to research event effects observationally. In 2018, I was able to do so. Focusing on Jair Bolsonaro's shockingly commanding victory of

⁶ Sewell's recount of the Storming of the Bastille, for example, is based on speeches of National Assembly deputies and articles from *Les révolutions de Paris*, a newspaper catering to the scant 37% of the literate French population during 1789 (Markoff 1986; Gough 1988).

⁷ I understand "everyday life" as the thread of concrete social experience that enters and gets out from specific social domains as people wake up, leave their house, work, eat, get out from work, relax, sleep and wake up again.

October 7 as an instance of a major political contingency, I conducted observational fieldwork in São Paulo during the last month of the Brazilian presidential election. In concordance with my focus in this paper, which centers around the instant effects that this occurrence had on political engagement, my investigation is based primarily in data qualitative observations taken in São Paulo—which I complemented with social media, news consumption, and official reports on politically-induced violent incidents—between October 3 and October 11, the days immediately neighboring Bolsonaro’s victory in the first round of the election.

I conducted daily day-long qualitative observations oriented at exploring the following questions: what were the narratives and the social domains through which people made sense of Bolsonaro’s triumph? How did people understand this victory as a tangibly consequential outcome? When and how did the electoral results serve as motivations or justifications to generate or modify politically oriented behavior?

My observations explored these questions in two types of social settings. One were social interactions in public spaces in what is now known as downtown São Paulo. This area is a mash-up of public squares, boulevards, occasional historic buildings, modernist masterpieces, and non-descript high-rises lumped together in the undulating area occupied by the entire city at the turn of the nineteenth century, when São Paulo remained a provincial capital yet to become Brazil’s economic powerhouse and the center of a 24-million people metropolis. In recent times, this area has undergone repeated cycles of abandonment and reoccupation that have made it a multilayered patchwork of white-collar workers, buyers and sellers of low-cost commodities, middle-class residents, a small but visible population of creative workers, and a large community of homeless citizens.

The second settings I observed were moments of socialization between my personal left-leaning upper middle class people, their friends, and friends of their friends in coffee shops, restaurants, bars, parties, living rooms, kitchens, and workspaces. The people whose sociability interactions I traced were mostly creative professionals in their thirties, “white” in the meaning this term often carries in Brazil (Farah Schwartzman 2007), and resided in São Paulo’s central area.

My fieldwork came with the challenge of identifying and observing an adequate number of analytically relevant situations in a very short period of time. My ability to do so was, of course, constrained by the irrepeatability of time, my inability to be at two places at once, and the fluidity of social situations characteristic of a major metropolis. I addressed these limitations by making my fieldwork as flexible as possible. I readjusted it throughout the day (and the days) in response to the shifting political conditions of my fieldwork period, the changing schedules of my contacts, and the analytic interest of the situations I ran into. The relevant situations I observe did not come at a steady, regular pace. In some periods, these moments were sparse; in others, they passed before my eyes at a vertiginous pace. These fluctuations made the rhythm of observations of my fieldwork so diverse that at moments days appeared as if they were not comparatively but constitutively different from one another. Thus, rather than analyzing each of these daily observations as temporal stages of a clear, linear, and additive process of evenemential influence, I examined them as an aggregate compilation of everyday situations.

As my fieldwork was primarily focused in observationally identifying and tracing processes of change in political engagement in a set of *concrete* individuals as they traversed time and space, it privileged “internal validity” —the ability to observe longitudinal changes

and attribute particular meanings to *concrete* individuals in the first four days—over “external validity” —that is, the ability to produce directly generalizable knowledge on how Bolsonaro’s victory impacted São Paulo city dwellers. Nevertheless, for the theoretical purposes of my research, I believe that its observational strategy exhibits important strengths relative to the evidence that has been traditionally used to research evenemential influence.

ENGAGEMENT WITHOUT ACTION: POLITICS AND THE EVERYDAY IN THE AFTERMATH OF JAIR BOLSONARO’S VICTORY

The political environment I observed in the wake of Bolsonaro’s victory can be characterized as one of “engagement without action.” I begin discussing this environment by describing my observations of a single day—October 10. I then discuss the political features that characterized the everyday situations I observed throughout my fieldwork period.

Inaction, Self-Censorship, and Exaltation: Wednesday, October 10.

On October 10, my fieldwork began in downtown São Paulo in the point where São João Avenue morphs into a pedestrian walkway descending into the riverbed that is now the Anhangabaú Park. With the memory of Ifigênia’s chants still fresh and knowing of the intense polarization prevailing in Brazil, my fieldwork had begun at 9 AM in the preceding days in an attempt to observe politicized behavior in the streets in the crowded moment when people are reaching their workplaces. My expectations, however, were incorrect. I was not able to witness any. As time went by and left Election Day behind, my fieldwork started that Wednesday at 10 AM.

I began walking through a grid of streets that were undergoing their daily transformation into bustling shopping walkways. Like the days before, the only political elements I observed were newspaper headlines hanging in magazine stalls. The cover pages of Brazil's reference newspapers addressed stories related to October 7. Center-right *Folha de São Paulo* (or "Folha"), making reference to the feuds that had sprouted in Brazil's once-dominant right-wing party after its electoral implosion a few days before, informed that "tension at the PSDB [*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*] increase[d] after Alckmin sugges[ted] Doria betrayed his candidacy." *O Globo*, a right of center newspaper, published that "Jacques Wagner negotiate[d] with FH, Ciro and Marina," alluding to negotiations between a major PT figure and first-rank politicians across the spectrum to build a united anti-Bolsonaro front for the run-off election. The headline story of right-wing *Estado de São Paulo* (or "Estadão"), on the other hand, skipped the second electoral round altogether and jumped to report news related to the impending Bolsonaro administration: "Four generals coordinate Bolsonaro's government program."⁸

I kept walking in the direction of the São Bento convent and sat in a bench of the rest area overlooking its severe, Gotham-city-like façade. My sitting neighbors were taking sunbaths, playing chess, having a break from shopping, or taking a break from shoppers. None were engaging in any form of political behavior. After twenty minutes of waiting, I began to walk again and entered the Antonio Prado square, a small and leafy bourgeois enclave home to the São Paulo stock exchange and the historic headquarters of many of

⁸ All translations are my own. Geraldo Alckmin was the PSDB's presidential nominee, and João Doria, then mayor of São Paulo, its candidate for the São Paulo governorship. FH refers to Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a former Brazilian president, and the PSDB's most important historical figure. Ciro Gomes, Haddad's main left-wing competitor, was the presidential candidate of the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT), a center-left party. Marina Silva, the presidential candidate of the centrist REDE party, was an environmentalist and a former Environment Minister in Lula's second administration.

Brazil's flagship banking institutions. I entered a bakery meticulously decorated in the bland style of smart design and spent a good half hour there taking a look at the crowd surrounding me. The word "Bolsonaro" frequently crossed the air, but I could not identify any sustained conversation about him or the election results. This buzz was the strongest kind of political act I observed that morning.

Around 11:30, I started walking westwards to have lunch with Paulo, a graphic designer in his mid-thirties. On my way, I ran into the first purposive political behavior of the day. In front of the Municipal Theater, an overcharged Belle Époque construction, a middle-aged PT activist shouted rallying cries against Bolsonaro under the utmost indifference of the passersby. A man and a woman, both younger, barricaded with him behind a plastic table full of Haddad campaign materials, waiting in vain for people to approach. No soul did before I decided to do so a few minutes after. I asked the younger man how many people had engaged with them that day. I received a mechanical reply: "Not many."

Rather indifferently, he then let me take a sheet of Haddad stickers from a pile lying on the table. A few minutes later, I joined Paulo on a restaurant's terrace at the edge of the park surrounding the Mário de Andrade Library. Knowing that Paulo was an active Haddad sympathizer, I took the stickers I had picked a few moments ago out and put one without much thinking on my t-shirt and another on his. We ordered food and started catching up.

Our conversation centered mainly on the results of the election. We talked about their shocking nature, how hard it was not to be thinking about who among São Paulo denizens had voted for Bolsonaro, the surprising absence of strong political reactions in the streets, and the fear that Bolsonaro's victory would bring back a conservative atmosphere into the city. Our conversation was agile, but it eventually became obstructed by a string of

monosyllables that began to pop from Paulo's mouth as he began throwing increasingly frequent gazes at other restaurant-goers.

"Is there something going on?" I asked.

"Do you see how they're looking at us?"

I took a look around. As far as I could see, nobody was watching us. "It all looks normal to me," I replied. We kept talking normally but in a lower voice. The rest of the meal went by undisturbed, although Paulo kept manifesting a certain discomfort. Every once in a while, he turned his head back one more time to check the demeanor of the restaurant's clients.

After lunch, we took a walk around the streets I had traversed in the morning. They were boiling with people, like in all other weekdays at that time. As we walked, Paulo suddenly uttered the same interrogation he had made in the restaurant:

"Do you see how they're looking at us?"

I still could not see what he was seeing. In the middle of the crowd, it was hard for me to even figure out to what exactly his question referred to. His interrogation remained opaque until he suddenly ripped the Haddad sticker I had given him off his t-shirt and put it in a trash bin. It then became crystal clear that the sticker had made him feel politically exposed.

We then entered a small bodega and bought a bottle of cachaça from a woman sandwiched between an old office desk and beer boxes. "I also like what that guy's saying," she said with a complicit smile as she pointed towards the Haddad sticker that remained in my t-shirt. "That's great to hear," I replied. "It's nice to see not everyone around voted for Bolsonaro." Paulo and I said good-bye once we went back to the street.

I spent the rest of the afternoon walking around a downtown that kept being empty of overt political interactions. Around six pm I walked into a pharmacy to buy a bottle of water. The place was packed with what appeared to be white-collar workers who had just finished their workdays. When I finally made it to the cash register, a pharmacy employee—a young black woman—began talking to me as she scanned my purchases. “So you’re not being fooled either, huh?” she said while looking at my sticker. “That Bolsonaro guy is just cheap spectacle. I think people will regret choosing him very soon.” I told her I just wished that regret would come before the run-off election. I wished her luck and went back to the street.

On the way back to my apartment, I received a text message from Paulo. Attached to it was a cellphone screenshot of Grindr, a popular application for gay encounters. The image had been taken a few minutes before and showed the grid of users’ pictures that commonly pops out once the app opens being obstructed by a text box. The box had a succinct title: “Warning.” A brief but telling message followed suit: “After the recent election, members of the Grindr community expressed concerns [about the] increase in violence. Take the necessary steps to remain safe this week.”

In the evening, I took a car ride service to Paulo’s, close to Avenida Paulista. My driver was a full-frontal Bolsonaro supporter—a “bolsonarista.” He proudly began explaining my travel companion, a Peruvian tourist, how “the myth,” as Bolsonaro was sometimes called by his supporters, would get rid of “thieves” in the Brazilian government and kill those in the streets. I tried to counter his fervor by pointing to the perils of violent law and order policies and the notable social achievements that Brazil had attained during the PT administrations. But at some point, I was interrupted by a litany of Bolsonarista talking points emanating from the driver’s mouth. He boastfully declared that the only thing

he cared about was seeing streets “clean of thugs” and that he was happily certain that after Bolsonaro’s inauguration, “rapists would be castrated and thieves resisting police shot.”

The rest of the ride went by silently.

It took me about forty minutes to get to Paulo’s. He was cooking dinner with Rafael, a visual artist, and João, a fashion designer. They both were gay and in their thirties. I met them at a house party on October 6, hours before polling booths started to open. In that get-together, electoral stories gained only intermittent traction. Every once in a while, someone referred to the topic speculating about the political positions of acquaintances or throwing lackadaisical comments about how rapidly Brazil had become seduced by the extreme right.

Five days later, at Paulo’s, Rafael, João, and Paulo were dealing with the election in an entirely different manner. They literally could not stop talking about it. Through a heated and overexcited collection of screams, interruptions, and overlapped talk, they were particularly fixated in discussing, again and again, stories of violence and harassment. Rafael described how an acquaintance had been subjected to homophobic slurs downtown in plain daylight. João let us know of a tense argument the day before at the Copãozinho, a popular lunch spot, between a leftist client and a bolsonarista server. And all three meticulously dissected the story, which they had all come to know via social media, of the news of a swastika carved out in the belly of a leftist woman by bolsonaristas in the southern city of Porto Alegre.

My dinner companions were completely taken by these stories, avidly perusing them a first, second, and third time in a seemingly endless loop they eventually came to recognize as exhausting. “That’s enough, guys,” Rafael said at one moment, as if he had been brought

back to reality by an exorcism. “Can we just try to stay sane for a while and stop talking about the elections for at least 5 minutes?” Everyone nodded in agreement. For a moment, screams and hasty talk gave way to silence. A few seconds later, however, this truce was broken by an interrogation thrown by João as we were finishing eating: “How much time do you think will pass before they start shouting at you for being gay on the street?”

Political Evacuation: Public Evaporation and Intimate Condensation

The way politics manifested in the situations I observed on October 10 point to broader characteristics of how politics impacted everyday life in the wake of Bolsonaro’s election.

The most straightforwardly visible was, ironically, the absence of public political action. This was a stark change relative to what I had observed in the last four weekdays previous to the election. At that time, I observed three unprompted political acts performed by non-activists in downtown streets. By contrast, the dreary stall of PT militants where I picked up Haddad stickers was the only open political act I saw during my fieldwork. Public life in São Paulo appeared strikingly numb to the watershed quality of Bolsonaro’s victory. Brazilian reference journals—*Folha*, *Globo*, and *Estadão*—exhibited similarly indifferent reactions. During my fieldwork, less than half of their headlines cast the election results as out of the ordinary. This trend was even stronger for tabloids, where electoral stories were a cover topic only twice.⁹

⁹ Examples of headlines emphasizing the election’s extra-ordinary quality include “The stock exchange soars after the conservative wave in the new legislature” (*Estadão*, October 9); and “Bolsonaro and Haddad commit to respect the Constitution of 1988” (*O Globo*, October 9). Headlines that presented October 7 as a regular election focused on issues like government formation or run-off election polls—for example, “Bolsonaro and Guedes recruit executives for their administration” (*Folha*, October 9); or “Datafolha: Bolsonaro has 58% and Haddad 42%” (*Globo*,

Against this backdrop, one could have thought of São Paulo's political atmosphere after October 7 as yet another instance of politics simply not being "close to home" as a result of the process of political evaporation that Nina Eliasoph (1998) describes to understand how political apathy descends into middle-class Americans' everyday life. There was, however, a major difference. In São Paulo, the disappearance of political action did not go hand in hand with avoidance of politics. On the contrary, Election Day intensely politicized social interactions.

Compared to the times before the election, this spike was particularly acute in arm's length transactional interactions. In the first four weekdays before the election, I engaged in 17 such interactions, and none of them addressed politics. One week after, as my interactions with the women in the pharmacy and the bodega attest, political talk began to leak into these instrumental exchanges. From the 26 transactional interactions I counted having then, 5 carried political content. In one instance—my car ride to Paulo's—politics became the dominant topic of conversation.¹⁰ The presence of politics in these interactions marked a substantial departure from their complete absence in the week before the election.

The electoral results were also frequently addressed in other forms of public talk. I overheard references to Bolsonaro's victory in coffee shops, restaurants, and bars. However, this topic appeared in fickle and short-lasting word exchanges rather than in long deliberative conversations. Early on October 8, for example, I heard a magazine vendor caustically saying to an acquaintance how "fun" it would be to see Bolsonaro "kill the fags" ("*matar viado*"). He

October 11). In tabloids, most headlines covered crimes, soccer matches, or practical advice—for instance, "The falsifier of cheap clothing strikes again" (*Súper Notícia*, October 11).

¹⁰ There were interesting interactive differences between bolsonaristas and leftists in these types of interactions. The interventions of bolsonaristas tended to be longer. They were also more prone to lead to substantive deliberations and were less likely to demand certainty of political homophily to develop. Leftists' interventions were shorter. They were exclusively catered to express solidarity and seemed to appear only after people were certain of having a minimal ideological affinity with another person.

was clearly alluding to Bolsonaro's well-known homophobia, which had become a central issue in the way the electoral campaign reflected the "culture wars" currently ongoing in Brazilian society (Maracci 2019). A few moments after, however, he effortlessly switched to talk about soccer matches with his friend.

Perhaps more importantly, politics also circulated much more strongly in personal interactions. While conversations about the election were already frequent in gatherings between friends before October 7, what was new was how dominant it became in people's interactions. The week before the election, I witnessed only one conversation where the election became a focal talking point. The week after, it was the protagonist in all but one conversation.

On October 9, in a conversation at a museum coffee shop with two friends, Clarice toggled back and forth between maternity issues, moving out from São Paulo, the future of public funding for the arts under Bolsonaro, and estranged relationships due to political disagreements over Bolsonaro.¹¹

The next day, as I described at the beginning of this section, I observed how both little and big stories and gossip about post-electoral violence and harassment guided Paulo, Rafael, and João's conversations at a dinner party.

On October 11, at a get-together in the apartment of Francisco and his partner with Paulo, Ana, and Julia,¹² conversations meandered around inside jokes, stories of sexual conquests, and wholly unexpected conversational switches towards the election. One began when Francisco stormed from the kitchen into the living room and interrupted a juicy love

¹¹ Clarice was an architect and a recent mother in her thirties. Her friends were a heterosexual couple working in the film and advertising industry.

¹² Francisco was a makeup artist of around forty years. His partner was a similarly aged artist. Ana was a retiree and a neighbor of Francisco. Julia was a white-collar black woman in her late thirties.

story being told by Julia. Nervously describing his unrest after the election, he described how in June a friend had suffered a homophobic assault in Higienópolis, an affluent neighborhood not far from downtown. His intervention immediately led to a political conversation that lasted for more than an hour. Behind the political disinterest they attempted to perform, this shift was a testimony of the level of interest and concern that the people present in that living room had about the state of Brazilian politics.

The next morning I had breakfast with Emilia, an expatriate architect, and her partner Franco, an engineer. In the three hours of our get together, the election was pretty much the only theme we talked about in the two hours of our meeting.

In light of these situations, what I observed during my fieldwork is that the evaporation of public political behavior that occurred after October 7 was accompanied by an equally strong process of political condensation in personal conversations. Politics appeared to have been “evacuated” from public action to intimate interaction.

This evacuation did not only changed the frequency with which my contacts talked about the elections. It also changed how they talked about them. Politics stopped being “far from home.” Overnight, it began to be perceived very close—sometimes too much so—from their physical, concrete daily experiences.

The way the election results got closer to people’s embodied experiences took a variety of forms. Sometimes they brought the election to their direct daily experiences by engaging in speculations about the political leanings of the people they saw or interacted with. For instance, Pedro, an architect in his mid-thirties, told me that the day after the election, he could not stop thinking about who among the passersby he saw in the streets had decided to support Bolsonaro. He became so flustered by these speculations that he chose to spend the rest of the afternoon alone. Similarly, Jorge, a film student in his early

twenties, mentioned that after the election, he decided to stop small talking to a bus driver he had befriended for fear of hearing he had voted for Bolsonaro.¹³

The proximity with which politics began to be felt after October 7 also became manifest in how frequently people associated the election results with mental physical discomforts. Pedro described how time slowed the Monday after the election as he failed to shut down thoughts about it. Lina, a middle-aged public official, told me she woke up that day with intense back pains, which she attributed to stress from the election results. She also mentioned having had trouble sleeping, which most of my contacts also reported having experienced. Bernarda, an artist in her early thirties, told me during a telephone conversation in mid-October that she had been unable to sleep more than three hours since Election Day due to nightmares related to Bolsonaro's triumph. (In fact, electoral nightmares appeared to be widespread enough to have merited op-eds on the matter; see Zuker and Zeytounian 2018).

The type of post-electoral news, stories, and conversations most frequently attended to was another evidence of the personal proximity with which Bolsonaro's triumph was often experienced. Information on policy proposals or campaign trails received very little attention. Most of my contacts' attention went to concrete stories of political harassment and violence in Brazilian streets.

Some of these stories came by word of mouth. I came to know of an altercation between a bolsonarista and a left-wing sympathizer in a downtown restaurant through Rafael, who learned of it in turn by a text message from a friend. I heard from another instance in late October as I was descending an elevator. There, a young black woman told

¹³ Jorge shared this information after I asked him on the matter in the last week of October 2018.

me that a few days after October 11, a friend was jeered with racist slurs in the square in front of her building by young men in a car with Bolsonaro stickers.

My contacts also became familiar with harassment episodes via social media. A particularly powerful dissemination outlet was an Instagram account titled *elenãovainosmatar*—literally, “he [Bolsonaro, it goes without saying] will not kill us”—.¹⁴ It had 66,000 followers twenty-four hours after its creation on Tuesday, October 9. By Thursday, it had 88,000 (Mena 2018).

Online news pages were another important source of information on physical and symbolic political violence. During the first post-election week, they regularly published extreme stories of violence and harassment. One such news was the swastika-in-the-belly incident that Paulo, Rafael, and João told me about. During my fieldwork, this startling incident became a topic of conversation in all but one personal interactive situation. In the incident, which occurred a few hours before I joined Paulo and his friends for dinner, a young woman was attacked in a bus by bolsonaristas who confronted her over the presence of anti-Bolsonaro stickers in her purse. Together with an uncanny image showing a close-up of the woman’s carved belly, the news was first published on the Facebook page of a local journalist and was recirculated by major online media outlets almost immediately after (El Pais 2018). Another news that received wide attention was an op-ed published on October 11 in El Pais, a major online journal. The text argued that verbal abuse exerted against leftists, women, and LGBTQ people had mushroomed in the vicinity of the election and included several first-hand accounts of these aggressions:

¹⁴ Other examples of these repositories were vitimasdaintolerancia.org, an open Google maps project titled *Violência Política no Brasil*, and mapadaviolencia.org. Until May 2019, the first two were still active as webpages.

A friend was breastfeeding her child, who was less than a year old, in a bread store near her house, when one of two men walking through began staring at her and screamed: “When he [Bolsonaro] wins, these sluts [vagabundas] won’t be able to this anymore (Brum 2018).

In this news and many other post-electoral political stories I heard, the protagonists were not soldiers, party bosses, or militants. They were not politicians, activists, or legislators either. Bolsonaro himself was only a contextual character. The main figures were systematically ordinary citizens that appeared to be, borrowing from von Clausewitz’s aphorism, “doing politics by other means.” They appeared to do so not through bellicose but through politically motivated behavior conducted in their spare time and in the sidewalks and parks my contacts and many other people regularly traversed. These made them ambivalent subjects regarding the social domains they pertained to. They had a foot in the domain of politics and another in everyday life. They signed their actions as Bolsonaro supporters, but they performed them in their experiences as laypersons.

Last but not least, another evidence of how much the election results were perceived as personally close was the widespread development of sentiments of fear and worry in the people I observed, and the concomitant readjustment of social behavior that emerged out of these feelings. A telling instance in this regard is how Paulo’s fear of retaliation by passersby made him toss, in an act of political self-censorship, his Haddad sticker. Another startling example was the unprompted description of how the black woman I encountered in an elevator later in the month described how she felt Bolsonaro’s victory: “like a gun pointed at your head.”

My observations, in sum portray the wake of October 7 as a moment of political evacuation where public political performances evaporated, political talk condensed in private interactions, and sentiments of malaise, exposure, and vulnerability significantly

expanded. While how general these trends were awaits further research, they seem to be supported by available archival and news content data.

I found no news evidence, for example, of major demonstrations having taken place in the week after October 7. In stark contrast to the what happened right before the election, neither traditional nor online news outlets reported demonstrations against (or for) the election results in the week after. But on the other hand, news connecting the election with mental health erosion was abundant and widely read. Such stories—a genre rarely seen until 2018—were published eight times in *Folha* and *El País* the first week after the election. On average, each of these news was directly retweeted 64 times in the first three days after their release. This number was more than four times larger than the equivalent figure before October 7. The most frequently circulated news on mental health was the *El País* op-ed I described earlier. Three days after being published, it was directly retweeted 331 times. This number is similar to that from news on run-off election poll results published by *Folha* and *O Globo* in an analog period.

Finally, there is also evidence of a generalized spike of consumption of news on political violence. Analyses of the political dynamics of social media conducted by the Getúlio Vargas Foundations' Sala de Democracia Digital (SDD-FGV) show supporting trends in this regard. The election night saw 3,200 tweets on political violence published *per minute*. Four days later, by October 11, 2.7 million tweets on violence had been poured into this platform—a volume 300% larger than in the thirty days prior to the election (SDD-FGV 2018a). On October 11, tweets on violence amounted to the combined number of messages in this platform published on campaign issues related to law and order, corruption, economy, health, and education (SDD-FGV 2018b). It is also estimated that the swastika

incident in Porto Alegre was tweeted about more than 329,000 times the day when it occurred (SDD-FGV 2018a).

TAKING IT PERSONAL: POLITICIZATION OUTSIDE POLITICS

In this investigation, I presented three different theoretical approaches to understand how historical events reshape the relationship between politics and everyday life when they occur. How well does each adjust to the shifts I observed in the wake of Bolsonaro's victory?.

A rationalist approach to evenemential influence would have expected decreases in leftist collective action and political engagement after October 7 since a steep electoral defeat and an impending extreme-right government diminishes the expected benefits of dedicating time and attention to politics. Since this view assumes that changes in political meanings are not at play when an event occurs, it would also have expected Bolsonaro's victory not to have provoked major shifts in the meanings people use to relate to politics. Neither of these expectations adjust well to my observations. In them, I saw a decrease in political action accompanied by substantial increases in political engagement, and broad cognitive and perceptual changes in how people made sense of politics.

On the other hand, the politico-cultural approach to evenemential influence espoused by Sewell fitted my observations only partially well. October 7 generated cultural changes indeed, and some of them were self-contained within the domain of politics. But these strictly political changes received the least attention and provoked the fewest reactions. Very few words were given to discuss how a figure like Bolsonaro had won a presidential election in the world's fourth-largest democracy, or to talk about future courses of resistance

and political action in the context of an impending run-off election. Instead of talking about rally speeches or hemicycle discourses, most of the conversations I witnessed directed their attention to the election's effects in streets, parks, and squares. These consequences might have been of lesser political importance than the policy and governance changes that the election results heralded, but they were nonetheless the most talked-about. The conversations they sparked did not occur in political activism sites either, but during leisure times when friends met with the nominal objective of just having a good time. Formally speaking, in these interactions, the domain of politics continued being weakly instantiated.

But the dormancy of politics as a direct lens of social experience did not hinder my contacts from undergoing profound behavioral and perceptual political modifications. Rather than being related to changes of meaning fully contained within the domain of politics, the locus of these shifts lied in how Bolsonaro's victory managed to infiltrate political stories into my contacts' "personal domain"—that is, the sphere of social experience related to individuals' self-understandings as distinctive, temporally continuous, physically concrete, and biographically consistent social agents.

By doing so, October 7 appeared to generate a wave of politicization connectively, starting in the way Bolsonaro's commanding lead crushed long and widely held assumptions about the relative forces of the left and the right in Brazil. In a matter of hours, the left was violently evicted from its long-held majoritarian condition by a right-wing block dominated by its most virulently and reactionary strand.¹⁵ And since in liberal democracies electors are also restaurant-goers, joggers, coworkers, and rideshare drivers, the sudden change in the content of what the "political majority" meant in Brazil after October 7 created an

¹⁵ I do not mean that this specific breaking point was enough to generate the post-electoral reactions I observed. Had the PT lost the election against the moderate PSDB, its historic rival, reactions to the election probably would not have been as strong and abrupt.

opportunity for Bolsonaro's victory to impact identities and network perceptions related to non-political domains. The election results became primarily embodied not in the figure of Bolsonaro or any other professional politician but in the flesh and bones of people individuals ran into in their everyday life. They came to be perceived as potential authors or tacit supporters of the aggressions that my contacts vertiginously talked about in the wake of the election.

These resignifications appear to be connected more to perceptual rather than to factual changes in Brazilian political reality. While all of my contacts knew of politically induced acts of aggression, none witnessed any directly. Some of the key stories of violence they shared had actually occurred long before the election, like the assault that Francisco's friend suffered in June. Others were later found to be false. João, for example, found out that the restaurant altercation he had talked about at Paulo's had not actually happened. And tellingly, the widely covered swastika incident in Porto Alegre also turned out to be manufactured (Gazeta do Povo 2018).

To see if spikes in attention to violence existed at a larger level, and if they were related to factual increases in aggression, I collected data on tweets on violence, hate crime reports in São Paulo, and newspaper news on violence in the days immediately before and after October. Table 1 reports these figures, which suggest that indeed there was a spike in attention to violence and factual aggression trends. The number of tweets on violence in the first four days after the election skyrocketed to 2.68 million—a nine-fold increase relative to the four days before it. But they do not produce evidence that this spike was related to either an increase of media news on violence or by factual hate crimes. Absolute numbers in these cases remained relatively low and underwent, comparatively, much lower increases before and after the election.

TABLE 1
 VOLUME OF POLICE REPORTS, NEWS AND TWEETS OF VIOLENCE
 BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION^{1,2}

	Volume		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Oct. 4-7	Oct. 8-11	Δ
1.—Tweets on Violence ¹	284,036	2,686,894	+ 945.96%
2.—Hate Crime Reports ²	64	95	+ 048.43%
3.—News on Violence ³	04	11	+ 275.00%

¹ Source: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Sala de Democracia Digital (FGV-SDD)

² Police Reports on Hate Crimes in the city of São Paulo.

³ News on violence published in printed versions of *Folha de São Paulo*, *Estado de São Paulo*, and *O Globo*, and the online edition of *El País*.

These patterns suggest that the attention that political aggressions received during my fieldwork were associated with perceptual shifts attempting at making sense—or “control,” using White’s terminology—the abrupt and unavoidable realization that it was more probable than not for a Brazilian citizen to have preferred a raw, right-wing extremist for the presidency than any other available alternative. As a result, the people subjects sighted in their everyday lives were resignified from being anonymous and generic entities to becoming politically loaded characters: political opponents, bolsonarista supporters, and likely executors of his intolerant agenda.¹⁶ This transformation generated a space through which political narratives began to connect with and reshape personal domains of experience

¹⁶ A startling media example of this resignification process was an op-ed in the Brazilian edition of *The Intercept* on October 16. It was titled “Bolsonaristas are wanting a Crystal Night,” making a not so subtle association between the election results and the political environment that prevailed in Germany in November 1938, when the Nazi government prompted a wave of lynching instances against the Jewish community (Magalhães 2018).

by grafting political components into its constitutive stories. More concretely, this occurred through three processes I call attributional politicization, classificatory politicization, and motivational attribution.

Attributional politicization occurred when political stories began to be used to account for social situations that were previously legible as non-political. One such instance was Francisco's talk of the homophobic aggression a friend of his suffered in June. Instead of tying this aggression to deep-entrenched "structural" processes of heteronormative violence—an argument commonly used in Brazil and elsewhere to account for these inexcusable acts—he saw it as an act directly triggered by Bolsonaro's political rise even if this act occurred four months before the election, at a moment when Lula was comfortably leading the polls.

In some other instances, situations that were previously not tied to the realm of politics began not only to be explained through political narratives but be classified as properly political moments. I call this process classificatory politicization. One example was how the way the woman in the elevator narrated the racial slurs her friend suffered shortly after October 7. In her account, her friend's aggressors had not acted as young, male, probably white, or probably wealthy people (or any combination thereof). Their behavior was fundamentally political as they had executed their aggression as Bolsonaro supporters.

Finally, motivational politicization occurred when people re-estimated political considerations upwards as drivers of people's social behavior. For example, by fearing being harassed for carrying a Haddad sticker after lunch, Paulo assumed that it was very likely that somebody would bring forward his bolsonarista condition and confront him downtown in the middle of the day.

These three perceptual shifts made the election results look and feel closer than they objectively were. The election results began to be felt not as a political phenomenon but as something that was ineludibly personal. It was from these feelings of personal vulnerability that both avoidance of political action and hyper-political engagement in personal interaction rose. Rather than running independently from one another, they were two sides of the same attempts at stabilizing behaviorally and cognitively the contingency that the election results had provoked.

CONCLUSION: EVENTS AS BRIDGES BETWEEN SOCIAL DOMAINS

Perhaps at no time since the 1960s has studying the socializing effects of historical events been as relevant as today. Major political ruptures have taken front stage in global political reality at a disciplinary moment that has developed a keen interest in better understanding the relationship between contingency and social change (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Swidler 1983; Padgett and Ansell 1993; Sewell 1996; White 2006; Wagner Pacifici 2000). Against this backdrop, my work seeks to refine our theoretical understanding of events' elusive ability to politically charge everyday life right when they occur. I propose that this ability stems mainly from an event's capacity to generate changes in meanings that lead to the infiltration of political stories into the motivational and interpretive schemas driving action in non-political domains of experience. Leveraging a rare opportunity to observationally explore how an event impinges on people's daily lives, I conducted fieldwork in São Paulo in the wake of Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory on October 7, 2018, to evaluate this proposition vis-a-vis extant approaches to evenemential influence.

In public spaces, I observed a near-complete absence of political action. Had my research been focused only on these sites, I would have probably concluded that Bolsonaro's victory had gone without major consequences. But in moments of intimate socialization between personal contacts, I saw his triumph becoming a dominant and heated conversation topic. If my fieldwork had been solely centered on these situations, I would probably have concluded that October 7 had generated a large and dark wave of political action in São Paulo's streets. But by conducting fieldwork on both types of settings, I was able to see that the almost complete absence of public political manifestations in the wake of Bolsonaro's victory did not go hand in hand with political apathy. The wake of October 7 was characterized as much by evaporation of political action as by increasingly politicized exchanges in people's personal interaction networks.

I saw this combination of engagement without action developing as a consequence of a chain of semantic, perceptual, and identity-related attempts to make sense—or “control” —the results of the election in ways that align well with a connective stance to evenemental influence that relates this ability with the capacity that events have to infiltrate political narratives into constitutive stories of personal domains of social experience.

This infiltration process originated in how the election results snatched the Brazilian left of its long-held majority position and gave it to a right-wing block dominated by its most extreme strand. This sudden change unleashed cognitive readjustments that required making and applying new political stories and frames of reference to make sense of this shift. These cognitive modifications became manifest in the vertiginous consumption and strong personal reactions to news and stories of violence and harassment against leftists and social constituencies associated with the left. These stories provided a novel, compelling, and readily available frame of reference to understand the new political reality emerging in Brazil

after the election. They also changed the meanings the subjects whose daily sociability I observed ascribed to the people they encountered as they traversed the city. Before the election, these persons were barely experienced as tangible presences. Afterward, they were felt as concrete—and dangerous—politicized and politicizing presences.

While the morphing of laymen from everyday extras into avid bolsonaristas did not do much to increase the instantiation of politics as a direct frame of experience, it introduced political narratives into domains of personal experience. Processes of attributional, classificatory, and motivational politicization began to develop out of this infiltration. Politics was more frequently used to account for social situations; a larger array of social moments began to be classified as political; and politics was imagined as a more frequent driver of people's actions. Out of these changes, my contacts began to perceive their everyday environments as unsafe and started to change how they imagined themselves in them. Their personal identities became tainted with a vulnerability hue that transformed Bolsonaro's victory from a political contingency to a personal emergency. This transformation became the locus of the behavioral rearrangements I observed in my fieldwork: on the one hand, acts of self-censorship of political action, and on the other, a steep increase in political talk.

Departing from rationalist theories' expectations, these perceptual and behavioral reconfigurations produced a reduction of political action that was paired with an increase in political engagement and behavioral changes related more to perceptual than factual shifts in São Paulo's political environment. These changes did not fit smoothly with politico-cultural theories of evenemential influence either. The ruptures "for politics" that the election provoked received much less attention and produced fewer reactions than the "bridging" ruptures through which the electoral results started to infiltrate into and inform non-political

domains of social experience. These extra-political changes were the ones that modified political behavior. My contacts *did* politics without experientially *being* in politics. In line with the connective perspective I presented, they reacted to Bolsonaro's victory not by "taking it politically" but by "taking it personally."

In a seminal essay, William Sewell characterized historical events as "dislocations and transformative rearticulations" of social structures (Sewell 1996, 861). Distilling further his powerful assertion, my research suggests that the most impactful of these rearticulations are the ones that confer events with the ability to act as bridges between politics and other social domains. Events' capacity to reconnect domains is likely to play an important role in constructing their intriguing ability to generate widespread political disruptions in "settled times" (Swidler 1983) contexts when politics is infrequently instantiated as a domain of experience. In these situations, a connective path of influence can enable an event to produce large political modifications without necessarily having to build the cognitive scaffolding that people without prior sustained political experiences would need to robustly expand the time they dedicate to socially participate as political subjects (Fiske 1983).¹⁷ In this sense, historical events' everyday political influence might be less related to the properly political dislocations it produces than by how they act as bridges between domains of social experience.

All in all, this investigation sought to make a theoretical contribution to our understanding of how events begin to exert everyday influences on those exposed to them. Previous models of evenemential influence see the locus of their effects in the changes they

¹⁷ At the same time, the fact that events may politicize without necessarily strengthening frames of experience that are properly political might also be a reason why the politicization waves they produce tend to be short lasting.

make in society's political information and meaning environment. But analytically, these explanatory models implicitly but strongly assume a type of social actor that is, to put it in a way, perpetually imprisoned in politics. By doing so, they leave unrecognized a large part of people's everyday experience. In a time when the eruption of multiple political contingencies across the globe has made the study of politicizing role of events increasingly relevant, adopting a connective perspective recognizing and analytically focused on events' capacity to produce shifts in meanings spilling from politics into other non-political social domains can help us move towards an understanding of events as bundles of ruptures in political meanings, and be instrumental in understanding differences in their politicizing capacity across them in terms of variations in the type, number, and destination of the bridging connections they are able to perform.

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