

Social Media Disruption

MESSAGING MISTRUST IN LATIN AMERICA

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Politics is playing out on social media as never before. Governments rely on these platforms to put out their messages and energize supporters. Their political opponents rally their ranks with a technology that levels the playing field in a way traditional media failed to do. Movements catch fire, organize, and outwit with posts that go viral. In turn, growing numbers of citizens turn to social media as a bridge to, and a source of, political news, sharing it within their networks and fueling the political engine further.¹

The implications for democracy are a growing concern for observers, scholars, and ordinary citizens alike. According to one 2019 study, 85 percent of Brazilians worried about distinguishing real news from fake on the internet. Similar concerns were voiced by 70 percent of survey respondents in the United Kingdom and 67 percent in the United States, while sizeable majorities in the latter saw social media as dividing the nation and spreading falsehoods. A Pew study of eleven developing countries found that large majorities believed social media and related technologies made people more informed, yet similar majorities also felt that these same tools left people more susceptible to manipulation.²

While most studies have focused on social media's effects in the advanced democracies of North America and Western Europe, social-media usage is skyrocketing in the developing world, where democracy may be more fragile. The notion that social media are a largely democratizing force that would help citizens around the world hold their political leaders to account now seems quaint, as it is clear that these technologies also

offer a platform for viral misinformation, hate speech, and the stoking of violent emotions and divisive politics. In the developing world, there is an added wrinkle: In these countries, larger shares of the population have limited access to political information, and political competition is often less structured and institutionalized. As social media become a key source of political information in developing countries, are they fulfilling their democratizing promise or instead hastening democracy's undoing?

To assess how social media—especially Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp—are shaping democratic attitudes and electoral politics in Latin America, we examine recent national campaigns in Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Mexico. We also analyze new regionwide survey data from the AmericasBarometer for insights into the attitudes of those Latin Americans who make the most frequent use of social media. Across the region, as Latin Americans increasingly campaign—and spread misinformation—on social media, it appears greater exposure to these platforms is simultaneously fostering prodemocratic attitudes *and* heightening mistrust in democratic institutions. If politicians and officials fail to address the underlying political conditions that are the fodder for social media's ill effects, this failure could lead to mounting cynicism from Latin American citizens toward their governments.

The Rise of Social Media in Latin America

Social media are now one of the primary channels for political engagement in Latin America. This reflects in part the rapid spread of internet access, which AmericasBarometer data show nearly doubled in the region between 2008 and 2017. Today, many Latin American politicians use social media both as an integral part of their campaigns and as a tool for communicating with constituents once elected.

To see this rapid growth, consider Argentina and Brazil. In Argentina, social media took on a major role in the electoral campaigns of 2011 and 2015, with these platforms used with particular intensity by right-leaning politicians such as former president Mauricio Macri (2015–19) and former Buenos Aires governor María Eugenia Vidal.³ From 2011 to 2015, the share of Argentine national politicians with a Twitter account rose sharply from slightly above 60 percent to 95 percent. During the 2019 general election, nearly every congressperson and presidential candidate used Twitter.

The rise of Facebook in Brazilian politics tells a similar story. During the 2010 elections, when Google's social-networking site Orkut was still popular in Brazil, only a small proportion of the country's politicians used Facebook. But by the 2018 election, Facebook had become part of the political toolkit for nearly all presidential candidates and congressional incumbents. These figures are easier to measure for Twitter and Facebook, where posts are publicly accessible. Evidence from

recent election cycles, however, also suggests that WhatsApp (which is encrypted and therefore more difficult to study) has become an even more prominent platform for politics in Latin America.

Although WhatsApp is primarily a messaging service, usable since 2016 on both smartphones and desktops, in Latin America and other developing contexts it commonly serves as a social-media platform. People join WhatsApp groups to share news and information, coordinate activities, and discuss issues. These groups are often quite large, comprising extended families, neighborhoods, schools or clubs; moreover, individuals are regularly added to groups without their knowledge and interact through group messages with individuals whom they do not personally know. Political candidates regularly push campaign messages via these WhatsApp groups.

WhatsApp appeals to Latin America's politicians because public usage in the region has soared. The platform, which first appeared in 2009, took off after it was acquired by Facebook in 2014. In the 2018–19 AmericasBarometer survey,⁴ nearly two in three Latin American adults reported using WhatsApp, making it the most popular social-media platform. Facebook, used by 56 percent of adults, comes in a close second. Twitter is far less popular in the region, with only one in ten adults reporting using it.⁵ The platforms overlap considerably in their user base: 51 percent of Latin American adults use both Facebook and WhatsApp. Meanwhile only 30 percent of Latin American adults report either not having or never using social-media accounts.

Within Latin America, the share of citizens who use social media varies considerably across countries. For instance, 80 percent of Uruguayans use WhatsApp compared to only 47 percent of Hondurans. In general, social-media usage is substantially above the regional average in the wealthier Southern Cone countries and significantly below average in less affluent Central America, a difference that reflects higher rates of cellphone ownership and, particularly, home-internet access in the former group (as measured by AmericasBarometer data).⁶

Of course, not everyone with a social-media account logs into their network of choice with the same frequency. In Latin America, 82 percent of those who use WhatsApp do so daily, while another 15 percent report accessing the app a few times a week. Facebook users visit the social network somewhat less frequently, with 57 percent saying they see content daily and another 33 percent a few times a week. In contrast, a mere 37 percent of Twitter's users view content on the social network daily, and another 34 percent do so a few times a week.

By itself, all this social-media usage does not necessarily mean that people are seeking or engaging with *political* information. Indeed, social media are considered by communications scholars to be “soft news” sources, where political content is an ancillary interest for users.⁷ Still, in Latin America, majorities of social-media users report seeing political content

very often. The share of AmericasBarometer respondents who report seeing political information a few times a week or more is 61 percent among Facebook users, 57 percent among Twitter users, and 32 percent among users of WhatsApp. All this represents dramatic growth in social media's political relevance since 2012, when only 11 percent of Latin Americans reported receiving or sharing political information on social networks.⁸

Who uses social media in Latin America? Perhaps unsurprisingly, AmericasBarometer data show that the average social-media user is younger, urban, more affluent, and more educated than the average citizen in the region. These same traits distinguish the most frequent general users and those who most frequently view political content. There does not seem to be a substantial gender divide in WhatsApp and Facebook usage, although Twitter users are more likely to be men. Women and rural users are marginally less likely to report frequently seeing political information on social media. While social-media usage predictably varies across and within countries, the upward trend is abundantly clear: Social media are here to stay.

Lessons from Recent Elections

What does this mean for Latin American politics? On the one hand, by making it easy for people to create their own content and to share their views, social media change the dynamics of information exchange: Rather than just passively absorbing information from authorities, citizens are more able to engage in discussion among their peers.⁹ This is the democratizing promise of social media. On the other hand, in the absence of content control, the rapid pace of information-sharing on social media can facilitate the spread of misleading stories, fake news, and disinformation.¹⁰ These dynamics were evident in four recent presidential elections in Latin America: Mexico (2018), Brazil (2018), El Salvador (2019), and Argentina (2019).

Mexico's 1 July 2018 general election centered around the presidential race, in which leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the consistent frontrunner and eventual winner. The election cycle witnessed extensive efforts to disseminate misinformation and disinformation on social media using a combination of contracted human accounts, automated accounts (or "bots"), and "cyborg" accounts (which are partly automated and partly managed by a person).¹¹ Specious claims were constant and plentiful, including that López Obrador's campaign was being financed by Venezuela's authoritarian president Nicolás Maduro or supported by Russia's Vladimir Putin, that Pope Francis had spoken out against López Obrador, and that Ricardo Anaya, one of López Obrador's challengers, backed Donald Trump's border wall. Bots saturating social media with messages supporting particular candidates had appeared in prior Mexican elections,¹² but the misinformation campaigns—which now unfolded not only on Twitter, but also on Facebook

and WhatsApp—reached further and took on a new intensity in 2018. Commercial groups also sold their services coordinating large-scale and often misleading responses to Facebook posts about candidates.

If politicians and officials fail to address the underlying political conditions that are the fodder for social media's ill effects, this failure could lead to mounting cynicism from Latin American citizens toward their governments.

Brazil's October 2018 general election cemented WhatsApp as the dominant platform for misinformation campaigns.¹³ Some observers believe that as many as a million WhatsApp groups aimed at boosting various candidates emerged during the contest.¹⁴ Other social-media platforms played a reinforcing role, with some misinformation disseminated further after being shared by influencers on Twitter and Facebook.

Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right, largely unknown congressional deputy who came from behind to win the presidency, regularly used social media to

issue provocative statements that would then draw attention from traditional media outlets—the same strategy used by Trump in the 2016 Republican primaries. But reports also surfaced that outfits contracted by Bolsonaro's financial backers may have used illegal lists of phone numbers to create WhatsApp groups and distribute inflammatory disinformation about his chief rival, Fernando Haddad of the Workers' Party (PT). These messages included outrageous claims that Brazil's electronic voting system had been hacked by Venezuela and rigged to favor Haddad, and that the PT candidate had given out baby bottles with penis-shaped tops in an effort to fight homophobia.¹⁵ Another item displayed the name of the highly popular former PT president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was closely associated with Haddad, next to the number 17. Brazilians vote by selecting the number of their preferred party or candidate, but 17 was the number of Bolsonaro's party, not the PT.¹⁶

Social media also upended El Salvador's February 2019 general election, but in a different way. For three decades, two parties had alternated control of the presidency. In 2019, however, Nayib Bukele, the independent right-wing mayor of San Salvador, became the instant frontrunner. The 37-year-old Bukele railed against the corruption of the traditional parties and was known for communicating directly with constituents through social media.¹⁷ As mayor, he used Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to announce policies and inform citizens about events in the capital. As a presidential candidate, he used social media to hammer home his provocative campaign messages to his 1.3 million followers (in a country of 6.4 million). Lacking a party or campaign organization, Bukele made social media his path to a landslide victory.

In the final months of the election cycle, misinformation spread widely on the social platforms: doctored images of Bukele's competitors on the campaign trail, unsubstantiated claims that German airline Lufthansa would build a new state-of-the-art international airport if Bukele won, and a photo collage that misleadingly suggested there were large crowds at a speech Bukele gave by incorporating images from a different rally.¹⁸ The El Salvadoran election demonstrated that even in a country where social-media usage is comparatively low, these networks can have an enormous impact in the hands of an adept political personality.

In Argentina, WhatsApp had become a major campaign platform and a major source of misinformation by the time citizens went to the polls in October 2019. Already in 2015, social media were an important resource for presidential contenders. But by 2019, the campaigns were utilizing these platforms on a massive scale. Incumbent Mauricio Macri's team reportedly managed a network of 300,000 activists via WhatsApp groups, with parents' groups being a particular object of attention since users were less likely to personally know everyone else in the group.¹⁹ Supporters developed and spread texts, memes, and audio and video clips. More so than in 2015, activists used microtargeting to direct these messages to the particular types of users they were most likely to persuade.

Along with these campaign initiatives came a flood of misinformation directed against both sides of the political spectrum. This misleading content ranged from false claims about huge numbers of immigrants receiving social-welfare benefits to doctored videos of candidates making embarrassing statements or appearing drunk.²⁰ The Argentine fact-checking website Chequeado lists hundreds of false claims that spread across social networks and sometimes made their way into traditional media outlets during the campaign.

As these four elections illustrate, social media have both become integral to campaigning and emerged as useful platforms for those seeking to undermine the legitimacy of elections. Misinformation campaigns are growing more sophisticated, and their center of gravity is shifting away from the more public platforms to WhatsApp, where encryption makes them harder to detect and obstruct.

At the same time, these elections also saw increasing efforts by governments and civil society to combat misinformation. In Mexico, a group of more than eighty media outlets set up a joint initiative called Verificado 2018 with financial support from civil society, foundations, universities, and the social-media platforms themselves. Over the course of that year's election campaign, Verificado debunked hundreds of false stories and memes that were spreading on social and traditional media. This initiative is to date the most extensive effort to counter misinformation that Latin America has seen, although similar efforts emerged in Brazil (Projeto Comprova) and Argentina (Chequeado and Reverso). In 2019, the Argentine government went a step further and set up a fact-checking body within the agency that

manages elections. Government and civil society actors are innovating and learning from experience how best to combat misinformation.

In poorer parts of the region, such as El Salvador, civil society and election agencies are weaker and so poorly funded that they have not tried to launch similar initiatives. In these countries, governments are relying much more heavily on self-regulation by the social-media companies, which have made mostly limited efforts to contract out fact-checking and to inform users if content they encounter is deemed to be false.²¹

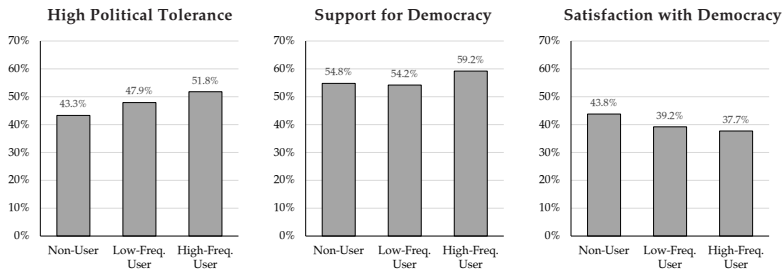
Social-Media Use and Political Attitudes

Yet even if the veracity of every claim spread on social media could be communicated quickly and convincingly, being barraged with false information, incivility, and provocative messages would still affect people's political attitudes, "reinforcing and radicalizing . . . partisan beliefs and values."²² Social-media messages, whether true or false, are often designed to evoke negative emotions such as anger and fear, breeding doubt and distrust even when users know that certain claims they encounter are false. As a result, even a careful social-media user may become more cynical or apathetic.²³

To assess how much of this dynamic has taken root in Latin America, we again turn to data from the 2018–19 AmericasBarometer. We classify the survey respondents into three different groups according to the frequency with which they view content on social media: those who do not use social media, those who use them relatively infrequently (either a few times a month or a few times a year), and those who use them frequently (either a few times a week or daily).

Figure 1 compares these groups along three dimensions: level of political tolerance, support for democracy in the abstract, and satisfaction with democracy in their country.²⁴ Across the region, people who use social media more frequently appear on average to be more politically tolerant and more supportive of democracy in the abstract. But they also tend to be less satisfied with the workings of their own country's democracy. These results hold even when we account for the fact that people who use social media frequently tend to be younger, more urban, more affluent, and more educated than the average citizen in their country.²⁵

The evidence is even starker in suggesting that social-media use breeds distrust. For each of our three groups, Figure 2 shows the proportion of survey respondents who reported high levels of trust in democratic institutions: the president, congress, the supreme court, local governments, elections, and the media. Overall, trust in democratic institutions is quite low in the region, a situation that reflects years of poor governance and high-profile corruption scandals. But people who use social media more frequently are more distrustful of each institution (even when we account for demographic characteristics). The groups differ most starkly in their

**FIGURE 1—POLITICAL ATTITUDES,
BY FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL-MEDIA USAGE**

Source: AmericasBarometer 2018-19.

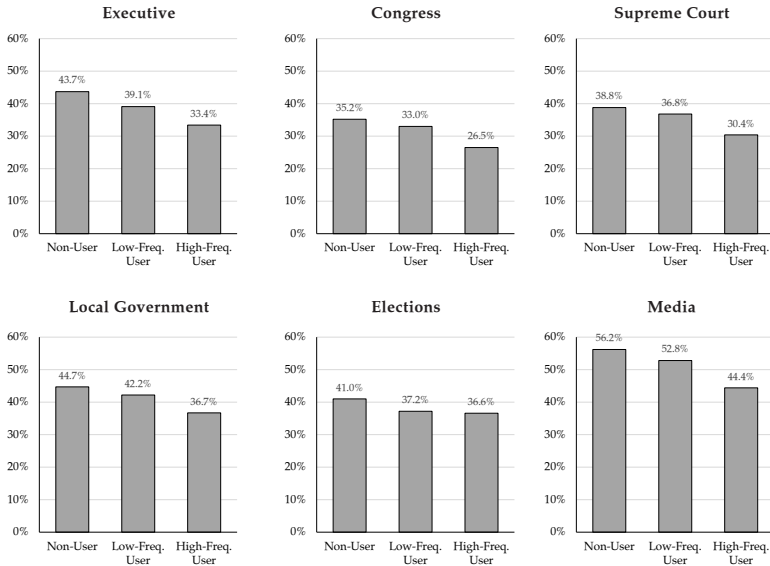
levels of trust in the executive and in traditional media.²⁶

These findings illustrate that there are two sides to the social-media coin. On the one hand, frequent social-media users are more committed to political diversity and democratic politics, at least as abstract principles. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that frequent exposure to the false claims and emotive, often hateful, messages spread on social media can indeed breed dissatisfaction with political systems and distrust of democratic institutions. These effects might well persist to some degree even if fact-checkers could effectively inform and persuade each citizen about whether the content they see on social media is true or false. And cynicism and distrust are detrimental to well-functioning democracies, which rely on citizens being invested in the political process and confident in the legitimacy of their institutions, regardless of political outcomes.

Social media offer a mixed fortune for Latin American democracies, but the bad seems to be outweighing the good. As more people join the ranks of social-media users—and especially as citizens who are less digitally savvy come online—the pernicious effects of social media may intensify more quickly than the beneficial ones. Already, each new election in the region seems to bring more sophisticated, more sustained, and less detectable campaigns aimed at misinforming and manipulating the public.

Fact-checking is an important tool in the fight against misinformation, especially during election campaigns. Efforts in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico demonstrate one way forward: building robust consortia of news outlets with the capacity to review and, where necessary, debunk stories, images, and videos that circulate on social media. But to effectively check the large volumes of misinformation that circulate, these initiatives need to be well staffed and amply funded, and they need the support of government election agencies. When resources are more limited, there will inevitably be gaps: For instance, although fact-checking initiatives may review many false claims made at the national level, stories about local candidates and politics receive almost no attention.

**FIGURE 2—TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS,
BY FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL-MEDIA USAGE**



Source: AmericasBarometer 2018–19.

At the same time, such efforts work only if the public trusts these assessments of what is fact and what is fiction. Skepticism is likely to rise if citizens have reason to doubt fact-checkers’ objectivity—as, for instance, with Argentina’s Chequeado, which was headed by the spouse of a mayor with political ties to the incumbent president.

Even under better conditions, fact-checking cannot be the last word in fighting misinformation. There is mixed evidence regarding its effectiveness, and repeating false claims in order to debunk them can also help to spread them.²⁷ In the best circumstances, fact-checkers are contracted by social-media companies themselves, and their assessments not only accompany a post but also affect how likely people are to see it: Platforms can “demote” false items, reducing their prominence in users’ feeds. More often, fact-checking organizations simply post their assessment online or disseminate it via traditional media outlets. In either case, it takes time to assess a post, and by the time the evaluation is completed, tens of thousands of users might have viewed the false information. And even a well-resourced fact-checking operation cannot review every story and claim shared on social media.

Finally, this approach to fact-checking only works for social-media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, where posts are either public or at least available to the company itself. Developments in Argentina and Brazil suggest that efforts to check misinformation on these networks have pushed purveyors of falsehoods to turn instead to WhatsApp. Since

WhatsApp messages are visible only to the users, there is no way for the platform itself to incorporate a fact-checking assessment. In order to find out whether a WhatsApp post is false, users need to look outside the app itself—but this too may be difficult since more and more WhatsApp users, particularly poorer ones, rely on cellphone plans that provide WhatsApp for free but charge for other internet data.

Social-media companies are not helpless in this fight. They could invest more in reliable fact-checking initiatives in every country, especially those, such as El Salvador, that have little local infrastructure. Since fact-checkers have a hard time keeping up with misinformation, social-media companies could also take steps to limit the speed with which it spreads. WhatsApp has already done this in some countries through measures that make it harder to rapidly disseminate messages *en masse*: allowing users to restrict who can add them to groups, reducing the maximum number of users in a group, and limiting the number of times a post can be forwarded. More of these kinds of limits could be implemented, especially during election periods. In addition, the platforms themselves might regularly remind users to report content they believe to be false.

It is also well past time for government agencies to enter the fray. Although many governments enforce rules about campaign advertising and regulate traditional media, they have been slow and under-resourced in regulating and investigating campaign messaging on social-media platforms. Rather than relying on self-regulation by social-media companies themselves, political leaders must act to protect the public interest. They should work more closely with social-media companies to identify misinformation campaigns and the people behind them. They should also invest in inoculating the public against misinformation, through widely distributed warnings and campaigns to teach digital literacy.

Perhaps most important, though, is that the spread of misinformation and the ill effects of social media on political attitudes do not exist in a vacuum. Research shows that people are more likely to believe misinformation when they already have less trust in their political system and when political polarization is high.²⁸ This may be one reason we saw so much more misinformation in the more polarized contexts of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico than in El Salvador.

These are underlying conditions that policy makers must address. The task is not easy, but also not impossible. Political leaders need to emphasize building coalitions, and governments ought to encourage and spotlight examples of compromise rather than confrontation. Government agencies, with the help of international actors, should put resources into winning back trust by rooting out corruption and more efficiently providing services to the public. And then they should publicize these successes as widely as possible—perhaps via social media.

NOTES

1. See for instance Pablo Barberá and Thomas Zeitzoff, “The New Public Address System: Why Do World Leaders Adopt Social Media?” *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (March 2018): 121–30; Nic Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019), https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf; Joshua A. Tucker et al., “From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media And Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 28 (October 2017): 46–59.

2. Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*; Mark Murray, “Poll: Americans Give Social Media a Clear Thumbs-Down,” NBC News, 5 April 2019; Pew Research Center, “Publics in Emerging Economies Worry Social Media Sow Division, Even as They Offer New Chances for Political Engagement,” 13 May 2019, www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/05/13/publics-in-emerging-economies-worry-social-media-sow-division-even-as-they-offer-new-chances-for-political-engagement.

3. Rocío Annunziata, Andrea Fernanda Ariza, and Valeria Romina March, “‘Gobernar es estar cerca’: Las estrategias de proximidad en el uso de las redes sociales de Mauricio Macri y María Eugenia Vidal,” *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública* 24 (January-June 2018): 71–93.

4. Our regional analyses weight each country equally, regardless of sample size. For more analysis of the AmericasBarometer data, see Noam Lupu, Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, and Mariana V. Ramírez Bustamante, “Social Media and Political Attitudes,” in Noam Lupu and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, eds., *Pulse of Democracy* (Nashville: LAPOP, 2019), 52–65.

5. For each platform, we identify users based on a combination of two survey questions. The survey first asked, “Do you have a Facebook/Twitter/WhatsApp account?” Those who answered yes were then asked, “How often do you see content on Facebook/Twitter/WhatsApp?” We identify users as those who both said that they have an account and reported seeing content more frequently than “never” (one of the response options for the follow-up question).

6. For instance, there are strong correlations between WhatsApp usage in a country and home internet access (0.93), cellphones in the home (0.86), and smartphone ownership (0.83). These data are drawn from AmericasBarometer 2018/19 and Pew Research Center. See Jacob Poushter, Caldwell Bishop, and Hanyu Chwe, “Social Media Use Continues to Rise in Developing Countries but Plateaus Across Developed Ones,” Pew Research Center, 19 June 2018.

7. Jody C. Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris, “MyFaceTube Politics: Social Networking Web Sites and Political Engagement of Young Adults,” *Social Science Computer Review* 28 (February 2010): 28–9.

8. AmericasBarometer 2012.

9. Andrea Ceron, “Internet, News, and Political Trust: The Difference Between Social Media and Online Media Outlets,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 20 (September 2015): 487–503; Tucker et al., “From Liberation to Turmoil.”

10. David M. J. Lazer et al., “The Science of Fake News,” *Science*, 9 March 2018: 1094–96.

11. Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, *Challenging Truth and Trust: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation* (Oxford Internet Institute, 2018); María Fernanda Pérez Argüello and Donara Barojan, “Disinformation in the 2018 Elections. Mexico,” in Luiza Bandeira et al. *Disinformation in Democracies: Strengthening Digital Resilience in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council, 2019), 20–29.

12. Marcos Martínez, “México: los ‘bots’, ‘trolls’ y otros trucos de manipulación en internet que amenazan las próximas elecciones presidenciales,” BBC News, 30 May 2018.

13. See Luiza Bandeira and Roberta Braga, "Disinformation in the 2018 Elections. Brazil," in Bandeira et al. *Disinformation in Democracies*, 8.

14. Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, 121.

15. See Tai Nalon, "Did WhatsApp Help Bolsonaro Win the Brazilian Presidency?" *Washington Post*, 1 November 2018.

16. Mike Isaac and Kevin Roose, "Disinformation Spreads on WhatsApp Ahead of Brazilian Election," *New York Times*, 19 October 2018.

17. Kate Linthicum and Emily Green, "Social Media Star from Far-Right Party Declares Victory in El Salvador's Presidential Election," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 2019.

18. Rodrigo Baires, "Las Noticias Falsas de la Campaña Presidencial," *América Latina en Movimiento*, 13 February 2019.

19. Hugo Alconada Mon, "¿Cómo combatir las noticias falsas durante las elecciones en Argentina?" *New York Times*, 1 April 2019; Federico Mayol, "El macrismo busca llevar la campaña electoral a los grupos de WhatsApp," *Infobae*, 2 May 2019.

20. Lucas Robinson, "Fake News Persists in Argentina as Election Draws Near," *Buenos Aires Times*, 14 September 2019.

21. Daniel Funke, "Facebook Announces Sweeping Changes to Its Anti-Misinformation Policies," *Poynter*, 10 April 2019.

22. Ben Raderstorf and Michael J. Camilleri, *Online Disinformation in the United States: Implications for Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Dialogue, 2019). See also Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (2012): 405–31.

23. Lazer et al., "Science of Fake News;" Kai Shu et al. "Fake News Detection on Social Media: A Data Mining Perspective," www.kdd.org/exploration_files/19-1-Article2.pdf.

24. Political tolerance is an index based on the degree to which respondents approve or disapprove of the right for regime critics to exercise the right to vote, the right to participate in peaceful demonstrations, the right to run for office, and the right to make speeches. Support for democracy is measured by the question, "Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?" Satisfaction with democracy is measured by asking, "In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in (country)?"

25. The differences between non-users and high-frequency users are all statistically significant and robust to regression analysis with demographic controls.

26. Other studies have also found that social media users are less trusting of traditional media. See Ryan Salzman, "Understanding Social Media Use in Latin America," *Palabra Clave* 18, no. 3 (2015): 842–58.

27. Adam J. Berinsky, "Rumors and Health Care Reform: Experiments in Political Misinformation," *British Journal of Political Science* 47 (April 2017): 241–62.

28. See for instance, Stephan Lewandowsky, Ullrich K.H. Ecker, and John Cook, "Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the 'Post-Truth' Era," *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 6 (December 2017): 353–69; Brian E. Weeks and R. Kelly Garrett, "Electoral Consequences of Political Rumors: Motivated Reasoning, Candidate Rumors, and Vote Choice During the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 26 (Winter 2014): 401–22.