

# None of the Above

**PROTEST VOTING IN  
LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACIES**



**MOLLIE J. COHEN**

None of the Above

EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

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*Protest Voting  
in Latin American Democracies*

Mollie J. Cohen

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*For Kenyi, Maya, and Alex  
Quienes me hacen reír cuando lloro, y llorar de risa.*



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## Introduction

### *None of the Above*

The first round of the 2021 Ecuadorian presidential election was decided by an extremely narrow margin. Yaku Pérez of the indigenous Pachakutik Movement was nudged out of contention in the April runoff, winning only 32,115 fewer votes (0.35% of all votes cast) than eventual winner Guillermo Lasso.

After this close loss, Pérez demanded a recount of the votes from three provinces, claiming that fraud had altered the final outcome. Following several false starts and a cross-country protest march by Pérez's supporters, Ecuador's Supreme Electoral Tribunal declared that Lasso, not Pérez, would advance to the runoff.<sup>1</sup> After this determination, Pérez announced that he would not vote for either second-round candidate. Instead, he told his voters that he would spoil his runoff ballot, choosing "the third way" over the available options. Pérez was not alone. The Pachakutik Movement, as well as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, the country's largest pan-indigenous organization, called on their supporters to spoil their ballots to express disappointment that the runoff candidates did not represent their preferences (La República 2021).

On the day of the runoff, images of spoiled ballots circulated on social media. "[The candidates] aren't worth shit" (*valen verga*) read one such ballot (Belchi 2021). "They won't be able to rob this vote," read another, referencing Pérez's claims of election fraud (Pérez 2021). Pérez himself was photographed on Election Day casting a ballot with the words, "Yaku

president, resistance” (EuropaPress 2021). Nearly two million Ecuadorians cast spoiled ballots like these. Invalid votes accounted for 17.9% of all ballots cast in the runoff, a more than 5 percentage-point increase from the first round (12.7%) and nearly three times higher than the rate in the presidential runoff in 2017 (7.0%).

Political scientists tend to think that voters participate in elections to support their preferred party or to punish poorly performing incumbents. Yet, each year, millions of voters turn out and then choose not to select a candidate in executive elections around the world. Existing theories of voter behavior fail to explain why voters would go to the effort to turn out but then opt not to select a candidate, like so many did in Ecuador’s 2021 presidential runoff. This book addresses this gap by answering two central questions. First, why do voters bear the costs of voting and then decide not to choose a candidate, but to cast “invalid” (blank or spoiled) votes? And, second, how do campaigns promoting the blank and spoiled vote influence this decision?

To explain the emergence and success of invalid vote campaigns, I first present a framework for understanding spoiled ballots in presidential elections as a tool that disgruntled, habitual voters use to express their discontent with the candidates on offer. Following from this understanding of invalid vote behavior when it is *not* mobilized, I derive expectations about voter behavior when it *is* mobilized. I argue that invalid vote campaigns should respond to the quality of democracy, emerging more often and garnering more electoral success when democratic backsliding has occurred and where none of the options have strong democratic credentials. Participation in campaigns promoting the invalid vote, then, is a tool of last resort for committed democrats who want to voice their concerns about weakness in *elections* while also expressing a preference for high-quality *democracy*.

I assess these arguments using data from executive elections in Latin America. Because rates of invalid voting in Latin America are the highest in the world (IDEA 2022), and campaigns promoting the spoiled vote have emerged across the region since initial democratic transitions in the twentieth century, this is the ideal region to develop and test general arguments about the nature of invalid vote campaigns.

In the twenty-first century, democratically elected illiberal political leaders from the left and right have used ostensibly legal means to undermine democracy, weakening checks from other branches of government, proscribing opposition parties, and silencing dissent (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Schedler 2002). Given this global democratic reces-

sion (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019), understanding how and under what circumstances citizens use different tools to respond to declining democratic quality is a pressing question. Recent scholarship shows that Latin Americans, increasingly disaffected by the disconnect between politicians' promises and policy outcomes, engage in a range of behaviors to voice their discontent and improve governance. Citizens have taken to the streets to voice their discontent with politics (Boulding 2014; Moseley 2018), elected populists and antiestablishment candidates (Carreras 2012; Weyland 2020), supported impeachments to remove low-quality incumbents (Pérez Liñán 2007), and advocated for constitutional reform (Corrales 2018) in attempting to improve their democracies. Yet, democratic quality often *declines* in the aftermath of such society-wide protests. I show that invalid voting follows a distinct dynamic. As with other forms of protest, invalid voting is more common when democracy is in decline. Strategic political elites and civil society actors are more likely to attempt to mobilize the invalid vote during such moments, seeking either personal political gain or to effect political change. However, the aftermath of invalid vote campaigns is rarely one of democratic decline. If anything, invalid vote campaigns may *improve* the quality of democracy in the short term.

### Outlining the Phenomenon: What Are Invalid Votes?

What is an invalid vote, and why do citizens cast them? Invalid ballots are those that have been destroyed or marked in such a way that election officials are unable to identify the voter's candidate preference. There are two types of invalid votes: ballots that are left unmarked (called "blank" or "empty" ballots), and those that are mismarked (called "null" or "spoiled" votes).

In fair democratic elections, voters receive unmarked ballots from election officials when they enter the voting booth. If a voter decides not to mark that ballot for a given contest, then her ballot is counted as blank for that race. Most countries report the portion of blank ballots separately from null or spoiled votes.<sup>2</sup>

Null or spoiled ballots vary much more widely, as do the laws identifying them. In some countries, like Australia, ballots are marked as spoiled only if markings on the ballot prevent election officials from identifying the voter's intent or identify the voter (Australian Electoral Commission 2019). In other countries, like Peru, any unsanctioned mark on a ballot paper is grounds to invalidate that vote, regardless of the clarity of a voter's

intent (RPP Noticias 2021).<sup>3</sup> There are thus many ways to spoil a ballot, ranging from the relatively straightforward (e.g., an affirmative selection of all options) to the creative (e.g., peppering the ballot with commentary, as above). Most electoral commissions report a single “null vote” total that includes all mismarked ballots.

Voters can leave their ballots empty or mark them incorrectly by accident. Especially in contexts where citizens have relatively low levels of education, correctly casting a ballot may represent a cognitive or mechanical challenge for many voters (McAllister and Makkai 1993; Power and Garand 2007). Complex electoral rules and an overabundance of candidates are also associated with higher rates of invalid votes, which scholars attribute to confusion or error (Cunow et al. 2021; Lysek et al. 2020; Mott 1926).<sup>4</sup> And while colorful ballots that include party symbols and candidate images have been introduced to facilitate voting for illiterate or innumerate populations, these complex ballots may cause higher rates of unintentional vote spoiling than simpler technologies (Reynolds and Streenbergen 2006; Pachón et al. 2017; Pierzgalski et al. 2019).<sup>5</sup>

Executive elections, and presidential elections in particular, should be the least prone to such voter error. Structurally, presidential elections are simple: voters do not have to consider party lists or district magnitude, nor are they required to rank their options. A voter casts a single preference vote for an individual candidate. Depending on local rules, if a candidate wins a plurality or an absolute or qualified majority, she wins the election.<sup>6</sup> In many Latin American democracies, if a candidate fails to meet a minimum vote threshold (often an absolute majority of valid votes), the top-two vote getters advance to a runoff. Again, voters cast a preference vote for a single option, and the candidate with the most votes wins the election.

At the same time, information about presidential candidates is widely available. Unlike lower-level contests that may include dozens of candidates with relatively obscure profiles, presidential elections are discussed regularly in national media. Even voters who are uninterested in politics are likely to be incidentally exposed to information about the candidates through soft news or social media (e.g., Baum and Jamison 2006; Feezell 2018). And, as partisan contests, presidential elections provide voters with readily accessible heuristics that can further simplify voters’ decisions (e.g., Mondak 1993; Sniderman et al. 1993). In other words, not only is the mechanical task of selecting a candidate at its simplest in presidential races, so too is the cognitive task. As a result, intentional ballot invalidation should be at its highest in presidential elections.

### What Invalid Votes Are Not

In this book, I treat invalid voting in presidential elections as an intentional, politically motivated behavior. Doing so runs counter to several common scholarly perceptions of invalid voting, in particular that spoiled ballots are primarily driven by voter error, that blank votes are the equivalent of abstention under mandatory voting, and that invalidating the ballot is interchangeable with other protest tools used by disgruntled citizens, such as street demonstration and voting for antiestablishment candidates. In what follows, I present evidence in support of this understanding of the invalid vote.

A first common conception of invalid ballots is that they are predominantly cast by accident. If invalid voting in presidential elections were driven primarily by error, invalid vote rates should decline as Latin American democracies age. This is because, as citizens gain experience with voting, they should be less likely to commit errors. However, official electoral data, presented in figure 1.1, show remarkable *stability* in invalid vote rates since the democratic transitions of the 1970s and 1980s. Hollow circles denote invalid vote rates in first-round presidential elections, and closed gray circles indicate invalid vote rates in runoff elections. The black line represents the estimated year-over-year trend in first-round invalid voting, and the gray line is the equivalent trend, calculated for runoff elections.

While invalid vote rates vary widely in presidential elections, the figure reveals little in the way of cross-time trends. Average invalid vote rates in first-round presidential elections remained effectively flat over this period, accounting for 5.9% of the total vote, on average. In runoff elections, blank and spoiled votes represent 6.6% of the total vote on average during this period.<sup>7</sup>

A close reading of news sources from the region provides additional evidence that most invalid votes in presidential elections are cast in protest, rather than by accident. To make this assessment, I analyzed the content of 1,995 news stories collected from national and international news sources covering 18 Latin American democracies and including the terms “blank” or “spoiled” vote in reference to a presidential election.<sup>8</sup> I read each story and used an inductive coding scheme to describe the coverage.

A plurality (about 49%) of news stories provide exclusively factual information about invalid votes, for example by reporting official election returns. About 19% of news stories describe the invalid vote in terms of parties’ or voters’ strategic considerations. For example, one story from Chile in January 2000 describes those who cast invalid ballots as an impor-

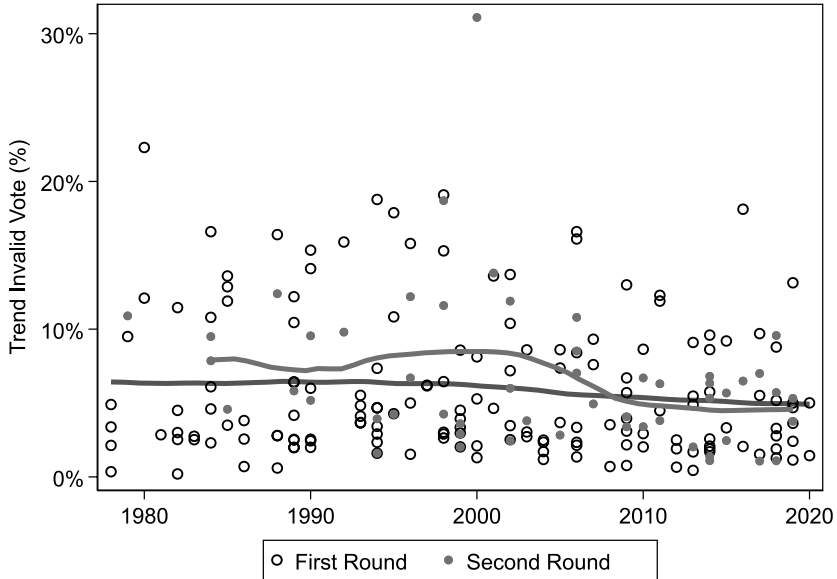


Figure 1.1. Invalid Voting over Time, across Election Rounds, Latin America (1978–2020)

Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies.

tant electoral bloc: “The campaign teams for both candidates began [the day after the first-round election] to make organizational and communications adjustments to break the ‘virtual tie’ that swept the polls, but above all to design a strategy that enables them to capture those sneaky [*esquivos*] voters who preferred to vote blank, null, or simply abstained from voting” (Pérez 2000). This kind of coverage implies that individuals who invalidate their votes are members of a “swing” constituency that is both *able* to cast valid ballots and can be won over with the right messaging.<sup>9</sup>

The next most common category of news coverage describes invalid vote campaigns. About 15% of news stories mention efforts to mobilize voters to leave their ballots blank or spoil them—an intentional, protest-motivated form of invalid voting. A smaller portion of news stories ascribes specific protest intentions to invalid votes. Most notably, about 12% of stories attribute invalid voting to anticandidate sentiment, while 9% of stories attribute blank and spoiled voting to the unrepresentative nature of the candidates or parties competing in the election. More infrequently, those who invalidate their votes are called irresponsible (4% of stories), urged not to cast blank or spoiled votes (4%), or exhorted that this behavior ben-

efits the leading candidate (3%). Of all news coverage, only a small fraction (3%) attributes invalid votes to voter error.

Finally, survey data also affirms that many voters invalidate their presidential ballots intentionally. Many international survey projects exclude the invalid vote as a response option to vote questions, reflecting the belief that this behavior is primarily accidental and making it impossible to conduct cross-regional analysis of survey data. However, the AmericasBarometer project includes this response option in its retrospective vote choice question across countries. For 21 country-years between 2008 and 2019 where an election occurred during the 12 months prior to an AmericasBarometer survey data collection, I compared reported rates of invalid voting in the survey data to official electoral returns from national electoral management bodies.<sup>10</sup> In most countries, rates of invalid voting reported using the retrospective measure are quite close to official results. In 33% of cases, the survey estimate is not statistically distinguishable from reported vote totals using a standard 95% confidence interval. But even where the survey estimate differs significantly from official reports, these differences are relatively small: the median value is an underestimate of 1.7 percentage points.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that a substantial portion of individuals who invalidate their ballots are aware of having done so. In short, electoral data, news reports, and survey data show that invalid voting in presidential elections is *not* primarily driven by voter error.

A second common view of the invalid vote is that it serves as a functional equivalent of abstention, especially in countries where voting is mandatory. Because abstention is costly where mandatory vote laws are enforced, apathetic or disengaged citizens who would prefer to abstain are obliged to turn out. One notion that follows is that such individuals will not care to gather information about the candidates, and they may cast invalid votes as a way to abstain from decision-making while fulfilling the legal obligation to participate (Gray and Caul 2000; Hirczy 1994; Hooghe et al. 2011; Singh 2019; Zulfikarpasic 2001). The implication is that, in mandatory vote countries, rates of invalid voting will be higher and individuals who spoil their votes will be disengaged, expressing low knowledge of and interest in politics (Hill and Rutledge-Prior 2016). In voluntary vote countries, according to this view, intentional invalid voting should occur less often, and these votes should not be attributable to low political engagement (because less engaged individuals are free to abstain).

Certainly, rates of invalid voting are higher in countries where turnout is mandated and that mandate is enforced: in the elections examined here, average first-round invalid vote rates in mandatory vote countries were



twice as high as where voting is voluntary (8.2% versus 4.1%). However, as chapter 2 details, analysis of focus group and survey data provides little evidence that invalidating the vote in mandatory vote countries disproportionately reflects voter apathy, compared to voluntary vote countries. In other words, while *some* invalid voting in presidential elections is a replacement behavior for abstention, *much* invalid voting in these elections is not.

A third common perception is that invalidating the ballot is simply one more tool in protestors' toolkits in a region that is highly engaged in contentious politics. However, data from the cross-national AmericasBarometer survey project shows that citizens who invalidate their ballots differ in key ways from those who participate in street protest or vote for antiestablishment candidates. To examine similarities and differences across these groups, I analyzed data from 23 nationally representative surveys that were conducted within a year of a presidential election. Only 2% of respondents who reported either casting an invalid vote or participating in a street protest in the past year had engaged in both behaviors. This is suggestive evidence that those who intentionally spoil their votes are different people from those who take to the streets in Latin American democracies. Alternatively, invalidating the ballot could serve as a *replacement* for other protest behaviors (Desai and Lee 2021). If this were the case, then individuals who intentionally invalidate their ballots should have similar demographic and attitudinal profiles to those who vote for antiestablishment candidates or participate in street protests. I do not find support for this expectation. Results presented in the appendix (table A1.2) show that, compared to both outsider voters and street protestors, those who cast invalid ballots express lower presidential approval, less interest in politics, and are substantially less likely to belong to a political party. In short, although invalid vote rates are higher where other forms of protest occur (e.g., Power and Garand 2007), those who spoil their ballots in presidential elections represent a distinct group of citizens from those who vote for protest candidates, or those who participate in street protests. Indeed, chapter 2 shows that those who cast invalid votes closely resemble other habitual voters, but that they are particularly disgruntled with respect to low-quality candidates and persistent, poor performance.

### Theoretical and Empirical Questions about Invalid Vote Campaigns

This discussion defining invalid votes and delineating patterns in who casts blank and spoiled ballots in executive elections raises theoretical and

empirical questions. Below, I detail these questions and outline this book's answers to them.

### *Theoretical Questions*

Canonical understandings of turnout treat voting as a costly action: it implies nontrivial time, information, and travel costs while providing voters with few benefits (e.g., Downs 1957). From this perspective, it is puzzling that an individual would bear the costs of voting and then opt not to select a candidate. A first theoretical puzzle, then, is why voters bear the costs of turning out and then choose not to vote for any of the available candidates.

I answer this question by examining the psychology of individuals who spoil their ballots. I build on scholarship that argues that voting can be very *low cost* for habitual voters (Aldrich 1993), that turning out carries important psychological benefits for habitual voters (Blais 2000), and that abstention implies psychological and social costs for such individuals (Aytaç and Stokes 2019; Blais and Achen 2019). For those who habitually participate in politics but are unhappy with the specific candidates and policies on offer, invalidating the ballot can serve as a means to express distaste for the options while demonstrating buy-in to democracy and avoiding costly abstention by participating in elections.

A second theoretical puzzle relates to the emergence of campaigns promoting the blank and spoiled vote. To annul an election result, invalid ballots must commonly constitute an absolute majority or supermajority of the total vote—a threshold higher than that reached by the vast majority of successful political candidates. Chapter 4 shows that invalid vote campaigns are unpopular with the public, making the task of mobilizing voters to engage in this costly political action even more difficult. Further, organizing a political campaign promoting the spoiled vote is costly. Campaigners must not only mobilize voters, which implies both time costs (e.g., time spent on organization and outreach) and financial costs (e.g., for campaign advertising), but must also convince those voters to bear the costs of participating *without reaping the rewards of potentially voting for a winning candidate*. Given these costs, and the very low likelihood of achieving their ultimate goals, we might expect campaigns promoting the invalid vote to emerge very rarely. Yet chapter 3 shows that invalid vote campaigns have occurred in more than one-quarter of post-transition presidential elections in Latin America, and are in fact increasing over time. What accounts for the frequent emergence of invalid vote campaigns?

To answer this question, I turn to features of the political context that are likely to affect voters' decisions. The global context of democratic recession should affect committed democrats' calculations over invalidating the ballot. Democracy has been "the only game in town" (Schmitter and Karl 1991) in most Latin American countries since regime transitions in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, in recent years, incumbent leaders across Latin America have taken steps to undermine democratic quality, eliminating presidential term limits (e.g., in Bolivia), weakening checks from other branches of government (e.g., in Guatemala, El Salvador), undermining press freedom (e.g., in Mexico), and proscribing legitimate opposition party candidates (e.g., in Nicaragua). As politicians degrade the quality of democracy, voters who are strongly committed to the political system should respond. If a single undemocratic candidate is on the ballot and elections are likely to be conducted fairly, committed democrats may choose to vote for a candidate whose policies they otherwise would not support rather than invalidate their vote in protest. This is because spoiling the ballot when an illiberal candidate is viable increases the likelihood that this unacceptable candidate will win. In these circumstances, campaigns promoting the invalid vote should also be uncommon, as it will be harder to mobilize voters who view invalidating the ballot as irresponsible given the political alternatives.

However, some forms of democratic backsliding diminish the quality of elections themselves. If an incumbent's actions undermine elections to the extent that voters no longer believe they will be conducted fairly, democracy's supporters should be increasingly willing to rally against the available options.<sup>12</sup> This is because backsliding affects the likelihood that an invalid vote will alter the final election outcome. When elections are relatively fair, there is a chance—even if it is minimal—that an illiberal candidate will lose. However, when backsliding undermines electoral fairness, voters may come to believe that the probability of casting a decisive vote is, in fact, zero. In these circumstances, voting for an opposition candidate can serve to legitimate unfair elections. Invalidating the ballot, in contrast, carries the benefit of explicitly signaling protest. Campaigns promoting the invalid vote should thus be more appealing to committed democrats when incumbents undermine the quality of elections. In short, if backsliding has undermined the fairness of elections, pro-democracy voters should be more amenable to appeals promoting the invalid vote, making these campaigns more likely both to emerge and to succeed.

This theoretical perspective suggests that invalid voting behavior, mobilized and not, responds to democratic quality. Abrupt changes in

invalid voting behavior—both sudden increases and declines—can thus be interpreted as a leading indicator of declining democratic health from a citizen perspective. And declining democratic quality in Latin America in recent years is, in turn, a likely contributor to the increasing emergence of invalid vote campaigns over time.

### *Empirical Questions*

This book also provides substantial evidence addressing—and often contradicting—common empirical claims about invalid votes. Scholars have focused relatively little attention on blank and spoiled ballots and the individuals who cast them, frequently viewing these votes as electorally unimportant. Campaigns mobilizing invalid ballots have received even less attention, likely due to perceptions that they occur infrequently and have little effect on election outcomes (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2018; Kouba and Lysek 2016). I show that this scholarly consensus is incorrect. Invalid ballots are regularly electorally important in Latin American presidential elections. In fact, campaigns promoting the invalid vote occurred in 26% of post-transition presidential elections (chapter 3), and half of these campaigns were followed by an increase in the invalid vote (chapter 5).

Invalid ballots are usually tallied and then removed from final vote calculations; they therefore have no direct, observable effect on electoral outcomes.<sup>13</sup> However, invalid ballots do *indirectly* affect election results. For example, because they are removed from the electoral tally, high rates of invalid voting shrink the universe of votes from which outcomes are decided, effectively decreasing the number of votes a candidate must earn in order to win office (the “threshold for inclusion”). At the same time, the invalid vote often represents an important proportion of the total vote. In 27% of first- or single-round Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020, the invalid vote rate was larger than the vote margin separating the top two vote-getters. And the invalid vote surpassed the margin of victory in 37% of runoff elections during this period. All told, in more than three of every 10 presidential elections in the post-transition period, altering the behavior of those who cast invalid ballots could have changed the final election result. Individuals who cast blank and spoiled votes can thus represent an important swing constituency for strategic politicians. While capturing the votes of those who are inclined to invalidate their ballots may not guarantee victory, it can, and some politicians are aware of this possibility.

Further, invalid votes *can* have a direct effect on election outcomes. In

several Latin American countries, elections are automatically nullified if a certain proportion (usually a majority or supermajority) of ballots are invalidated. While no national election has been cancelled through this mechanism as of this writing, subnational and supranational contests have been (e.g., Palacio Vélez 2018)—and, as chapter 3 details, campaigns that mobilize voters to spoil their ballots are increasingly common. In short, not only do invalid votes indirectly shape election outcomes, they increasingly have the potential to have a large, direct effect on election outcomes.

Invalid vote campaigns can also shape other features of elections. First, and most obviously, these campaigns may affect blank and spoiled vote rates when they occur, altering election results as outlined above. Additionally, invalid vote campaigns may shape the *electorate*. Invalid vote campaigns have the potential to mobilize formerly disenfranchised citizens to engage unconventionally in electoral politics. Once citizens turn out to vote, scholars find that they are significantly more likely to continue to do so in future elections (e.g., Coppock and Green 2015). A voter who turns out to spoil her ballot as part of an invalid vote campaign may thus become newly motivated to engage in politics in the future. Invalid vote campaigns could therefore have the downstream effect of increasing turnout among formerly demobilized groups. At the same time, invalid vote campaigns can make blank and spoiled ballots a salient tool of protest for disgruntled voters in *future* elections. By linking the invalid vote to protest, invalid vote campaigns can lead to the diffusion of this tactic and increase its use in future elections (Superti 2020). Invalid vote campaigns thus have the potential to shape the ways that voters interact with politics and understand their options when entering the voting booth.

Finally, invalid vote campaigns may have downstream consequences for *democracy*. If elites interpret invalid vote campaigns as a signal of dissatisfaction with declining democratic performance, then the quality of democracy should improve following invalid vote campaigns. This is because election-oriented politicians should seek to win back the support of invalid voters, and pro-democracy politicians should gain an electoral advantage. However, if elites interpret invalid voting as a signal of low public buy-in to democracy, then incumbents should increasingly engage in democratic backsliding in the wake of invalid vote campaigns. Elites' perceptions of voters' beliefs should also affect their future campaign strategies. For example, if elites believe that a preponderance of spoiled votes signals lagging faith in democracy, antiestablishment candidates should be more likely to compete, and should have greater electoral success, in the wake of invalid vote campaigns.

## Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 details the book's central argument. Using data from original focus groups and cross-national surveys, and drawing on theories of voter behavior from American and comparative politics, I argue that, when unmobilized, invalid voting should be a tool used most often by habitual voters who are unhappy with the candidate options. For these individuals, turning out to vote is a very low-cost activity they engage in regularly; invalidating the ballot therefore implies no additional time or information costs but provides a modest expressive benefit compared to voting for a "least-bad" candidate option. I then build on this argument to derive expectations over public responses to invalid vote campaigns. I argue that invalid vote campaigns serve as a heuristic that can increase the potential benefit of a blank or spoiled vote by assigning it a specific protest meaning while also decreasing information costs for unengaged citizens. In the wake of democratic backsliding, committed democrats may become less likely to cast invalid ballots, as doing so under such circumstances may enable a voter's least-preferred, illiberal candidate to enter office. However, when backsliding undermines electoral integrity, committed democrats should become more persuadable, as spoiling the ballot becomes a tool of last resort to signal concerns about the quality of democracy.

Having detailed theoretical expectations over how citizens will engage with invalid vote campaigns, chapter 3 presents descriptive information about these campaigns. I analyze a novel dataset of invalid vote campaigns, which I created using local news sources, to show that these campaigns have emerged more frequently over time, and that they regularly cite a range of grievances including corruption among the candidates, unrepresentative candidate options, low candidate quality, and flawed elections. I then use data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project to assess whether these contextual factors are associated with invalid vote campaign emergence. I find that campaigns are more likely to occur when incumbents intimidate opposition parties.

How do voters view invalid vote campaigns, and does their support for these efforts shift based on features of the campaign? Chapter 4 answers these questions drawing primarily on survey experimental data from Peru, a country with a long history of invalid vote campaigns that often experiences high rates of blank and spoiled voting. A substantial plurality of Peruvians expresses strong disapproval of invalid vote campaigns in general. However, when campaigns protest an egregious grievance (e.g., political corruption or likely electoral fraud), approval increases significantly. Con-

sistent with expectations that invalid vote campaigns will attract committed democrats in the wake of backsliding, these gains in approval are most marked among respondents who express higher support for democracy. I then turn to campaign leadership. I find that Peruvians express lower approval of invalid vote campaigns that are led by politicians versus citizen groups; however, a campaign's stated preference for democracy has no effect on campaign approval. These results are conditioned by citizens' prior feelings toward political parties and democracy. In particular, respondents who distrust political parties express significantly lower approval of campaigns led by parties compared to campaigns led by citizen groups. And respondents who express low support for democracy express significantly higher approval of antidemocracy invalid vote campaigns compared to pro-democracy efforts.

Having shown that citizen approval of invalid vote campaigns shifts based on campaign leadership and grievances, chapters 5 and 6 ask whether these individual-level findings predict aggregate election outcomes. Chapter 5 examines the extent to which campaign leadership and grievances, as well as other features of the political environment, explain the success or failure of invalid vote campaigns in a broader set of subnational and national invalid vote campaigns. I examine subnational data from null vote campaigns in Peruvian gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2018 and in Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020. Consistent with experimental results presented in chapter 4, I find that invalid vote campaigns organized around egregious grievances succeed more often. In particular, campaigns citing corruption and credible claims of election fraud succeed at higher-than-average rates. The chapter closes by turning to questions of causality. Does the emergence of invalid vote campaigns affect voters' willingness to spoil their ballots, or do these campaigns instead emerge where the public is already poised to nullify their votes? The evidence points to the latter scenario. Invalid vote campaigns do not appear to create interest in casting blank and spoiled votes; rather, campaigns are more likely to emerge and gain strength where the public has demonstrated that it is already inclined to cast protest votes.

Chapter 6 examines the mechanisms through which invalid vote campaigns succeed or fail by presenting four comparative case studies of invalid vote campaigns in gubernatorial elections in the Peruvian departments of Áncash and Arequipa. Both departments experienced invalid vote campaigns in 2014 and 2018; only the 2014 campaign in Áncash failed to increase the prevalence of spoiled ballots. By comparing departments to one another at two points in time, and to themselves across time, I am

able to control for specific departmental features to examine the ways that campaigns succeed or fail. I draw on news reports, public opinion data, and personal interviews with campaigners, journalists, and political informants in both regions to trace the paths these campaigns followed to success or failure. The case studies reveal three likely mechanisms for campaign failure. First, citizens may view elites promoting the invalid vote as self-serving, or as sore losers, and politicians' actions can exacerbate this perception. Second, citizens may not receive information about invalid vote campaigns when campaigns exclusively use traditional media outlets to publicize their message. Third, when a null vote campaign's grievances apply asymmetrically to the candidates, voters may overlook these grievances and choose to vote for the "least-bad" option.

Are null vote campaigns bad for democracy, on average? More broadly, what are the downstream effects of invalid vote campaigns on democratic politics and political engagement in the societies where they occur? Chapter 7 answers these questions with V-Dem data, official candidate biographies, and electoral data. I find that across a range of measures, democratic quality is stable or *improves* after invalid vote campaigns occur. That is, invalid vote campaigns not only do not precipitate short-term declines in democratic quality, but may buoy democracies at risk of backsliding. In the aftermath of invalid vote campaigns, antiestablishment candidates win a larger share of the vote, although this tendency appears to result from underlying protest tendencies in the population rather than from invalid vote campaigns. Finally, turning to patterns of participation, the results are clear: turnout does not change following invalid vote campaigns, but voters cast blank and spoiled ballots at substantially higher rates in presidential and gubernatorial elections. Invalid vote campaigns thus appear to shape public understanding of invalid ballots as a salient and viable option through which to express discontent.

The book concludes by considering remaining questions about the downstream consequences of invalid vote campaigns for the individuals who participate in them and the societies where they occur.



## Invalid Ballots as a Protest Signal

On a rainy Sunday in the capital city of an unnamed country, nobody turns out to vote until 4 p.m.; late at night, when the ballots are finally counted, 70% of the votes have been left blank, rather than cast for a party. Threatened by this result, the government holds a second election eight days later. On this temperate day, no one abstains—but 83% of voters leave their ballots blank. While politicians view these events as an unmitigated, antidemocratic crisis, city residents continue to go peacefully about their lives.

This tale from José Saramago's 2004 novel, *Seeing*, highlights some of the diverse understandings of the meaning of blank and spoiled ballots among academics, politicians, and the public. In the real world, some argue that invalid votes are overwhelmingly the result of voter error, while others insist that these are intentional protest votes. This disagreement stems from a sticky fact: votes can be spoiled by accident or intentionally, and it is impossible to distinguish how many ballots were cast for which purpose using official electoral data.<sup>1</sup> Complicating the issue even further, some blank and spoiled ballots may not be cast by voters at all, but instead are attributable to errors (or, more insidiously, election-day fraud) by poll workers or election observers.

Even among those who agree that a meaningful portion of invalid ballots are cast on purpose by voters, there is debate over the factors that drive individuals to spoil their votes. Protest votes could reflect voters' discontent with democracy itself, citizen apathy, or distaste for the candidate options on offer. A preponderance of spoiled ballots might thus reflect a variety of public attitudes, ranging from rampant antisystem sentiment (as

hypothesized by the politicians in *Seeing*) to citizen indifference toward politics, generally. Clarifying which of these scenarios is most reflective of reality is fundamental to advance our understanding of the causes and downstream effects of invalid voting behavior.

This chapter builds a theory of intentional invalid voting. I first review the evidence for two potential explanations of intentional invalid voting in presidential elections: an antiregime protest, and a replacement for abstention under mandatory voting. While each of these explanations accounts for *some* of the variation in invalid voting, I argue that neither explains *most* of the invalid voting behavior that we observe in presidential elections. Instead, I argue that most intentional invalid votes in executive elections are cast by habitual voters who are displeased with the candidates. For these individuals, the costs of turning out to vote are known and quite small. However, these voters gain expressive benefit from invalidating their ballots in protest of specific features of the political contest, e.g., the candidates on offer.

I then turn to a discussion of how the presence of campaigns mobilizing null votes shapes invalid voting behavior. I argue that invalid vote campaigns can serve as heuristics for voters who are unmoored from political parties and searching for an alternative way to select a candidate. Invalid vote campaigns decrease the informational costs of voting for these disgruntled citizens. At the same time, by ascribing a society-wide meaning to blank or spoiled ballots, invalid vote campaigns can increase the benefits of casting a protest vote (e.g., knowing with certainty that this vote will be attributed to protest rather than voter error).

Finally, I examine how the effectiveness of invalid vote campaigns may change when democracy itself is on the ballot. I argue that the stakes of elections are higher in contexts of pervasive democratic backsliding, which should make citizens more cautious about invalidating their ballots. However, this depends on the opposition's ability to challenge the incumbent within existing political structures. The combination of these factors has implications for both the frequency with which invalid vote campaigns emerge and the content of their grievances.

### Explanations of Intentional Invalid Voting

Even among scholars who agree that a significant portion of invalid ballots are cast intentionally in presidential elections, there is disagreement about citizens' motivations for invalidating their votes. Below, I review the

evidence supporting two arguments explaining invalid voting as an anti-democracy protest and as a replacement for abstention under mandatory vote laws. Having eliminated these as likely explanations for most invalid voting behavior, I offer a third explanation: invalid voting as a rejection of the available candidates.

### *Ballot Spoiling as an Antidemocratic Protest*

A first common perspective views intentional invalid voting as reflective of antidemocracy sentiment. Intentionally spoiling the ballot in this view reflects “discontent and disrespect . . . for political institutions and democracy” (Cisneros 2013, 1). If this perspective were true, then high rates of blank and spoiled votes would serve as a warning sign of low public support for democracy. The view that intentionally invalidating the ballot is an “antisystem” behavior is widespread in Latin America. Yet, while the term “antisystem” can suggest opposition to democracy itself, it may also imply opposition to specific features of national politics, including the nature of the party system or electoral rules. Some more explicitly link the invalid vote to antidemocracy sentiment. For example, one Peruvian newspaper argued in 2006 that “the goal [of the blank and spoiled vote] is . . . [for campaigners] to stay in power indefinitely. Their political project is to create a perfect dictatorship dressed in a supposedly democratic costume” (Terán 2006). In Ecuador in 2006, Wilfrido Lucero, president of the National Congress, argued that a campaign favoring the invalid vote that year was “antidemocratic and destabilizing” (Redacción Política 2006). And in Mexico’s 2009 legislative elections, major political parties claimed that the invalid vote “was damaging to democracy,” while some advisors from the Federal Electoral Institute called invalid voting “antidemocratic, as it was contrary to the consolidation of a democratic system” (Alonso 2010, 18).

In their foundational paper, Power and Garand (2007, 434) argue that antiregime sentiment is one potential cause of protest-motivated invalid ballots. If invalid voting reflects antiregime sentiment, they expect it to appear “alongside other manifestations of anti-system sentiment, e.g., revolutionary activity or political violence” (434; see also Power and Roberts 1995). They operationalize the protest motivation using a measure of revolutionary violence; in democratic systems like those under study, this measure implies antidemocratic behavior. Because they find more invalid voting, on average, where revolutionary violence is more prevalent, Power and Garand conclude that antidemocracy attitudes can fuel invalid voting. Some individual-level analyses from single country cases have also shown

that voters who perceive that political institutions are inefficient and corrupt or the process is rigged are more likely than others to cast invalid votes (e.g., Carlin 2006, 644). And Singh (2019, 115) shows that individuals who are negatively oriented toward democracy are more likely to report intent to invalidate the ballot under compulsory vote laws.<sup>2</sup> In short, according to this perspective, individuals who spoil their votes should be indifferent or actively opposed to the democratic political regime.

Focus group data that I collected in Peru and Mexico yield only limited support for this explanation.<sup>3</sup> When asked why individuals invalidate their vote, no respondent in any of 19 groups associated the behavior with rejection of democracy itself. And when asked whether invalidating the ballot is a democratic or antidemocratic behavior, respondents overwhelmingly responded that invalidating the ballot is a democratic right. A few respondents indicated that, although the action of invalidating the ballot may itself be democratic, invalid ballots have potentially harmful implications for democracy. As one respondent in Arequipa, Peru explained:

Democracy doesn't end with the vote. It doesn't simply end when I cast my vote, there's a process of following up, you know, that people have to do of candidates until the next elections. I mean, to verify that they are fulfilling their promises. You know? So, the majority of people who vote blank or spoil their votes don't have this perspective. They don't have this intention to follow up, to conduct citizen oversight. That's why I feel it's antidemocratic. (Arequipa 2)

Analysis of AmericasBarometer data shows a slight negative association between a Churchillian measure<sup>4</sup> of support for democracy and reporting invalidating a ballot (versus casting a valid vote) in 23 countries where a presidential election occurred in the 12 months prior to fieldwork. A logistic regression model including only demographic controls shows that moving from the lowest to the highest levels of support for democracy decreases the likelihood of invalidating a ballot significantly, from 4.7% to 2.8%—about two-thirds of the baseline distribution of the variable (3.1% of AmericasBarometer respondents reported invalidating a ballot during this period). However, this finding is tenuous at best: when even limited attitudinal controls are included in the model, support for democracy no longer significantly predicts invalid voting behavior.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to suggest that individuals who invalidate their ballots intentionally *never* do so to protest democracy as a regime. Indeed, in response to an open-ended question asking respondents who reported invalidating

their ballots in the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey why they had done so, 8.7% of respondents reported that they “did not believe in democracy, or wanted to protest against the political system” (see appendix, fig. A2.1 for more detail). Rather, these individuals do not represent the *average* invalid voter in Latin American presidential elections.

### *Ballot Spoiling as Functional Abstention under Mandatory Vote Laws*

A second perspective links invalid voting to mandatory vote laws. Because abstention is costly where mandatory vote laws are enforced, apathetic or disengaged citizens who would prefer to abstain are obliged to turn out. One notion that follows is that such individuals will not care to gather information about the candidates, and may use the invalid vote as a means to abstain from decision making while fulfilling the legal obligation to participate (Gray and Caul 2000; Hirczy 1994; Hooghe et al. 2011; Singh 2019; Zulfikarpasic 2001). Others may view invalidating the ballot as a way to register their discontent with compulsory vote rules. The implication is that, in mandatory vote countries, individuals who spoil their votes will be disengaged, expressing low knowledge of and interest in politics (Hill and Rutledge-Prior 2016). In voluntary vote countries, according to this view, intentional invalid voting should occur less often, and these votes should not be attributable to low political engagement (because less engaged individuals are free to abstain). Consistent with this expectation, studies of the individual correlates of invalid voting consistently show that individuals who express less interest in politics report invalidating the ballot at higher rates, and that the effect of low interest is stronger in countries with mandatory voting (Cohen 2018a; Katz and Levin 2018; Singh 2019).

I explored this perspective on the causes of intentional invalid voting in focus groups in Peru, a country where voting is mandated and that mandate is strictly enforced. Several participants linked invalid voting to abstention, as described by the theoretical perspective here. For example, one respondent said, “Of course, there are people who only [turn out] because they’re obliged. To avoid paying the fine, and they go and they do whatever. And they spoil the vote because it really doesn’t matter to them” (Lima 3). Others noted that invalid voting in reaction to mandatory vote laws may not signal apathy or indifference, but anger: “I think there are people who don’t think that voting should be mandatory, and as a signal of protest—legitimate, too!—they go and say, I voted blank, why? Because I didn’t want to vote, because I think that it’s not an obligation” (Lima 3).<sup>6</sup>

Analyzing AmericasBarometer data through the 2018/19 round, I find a

strong association between political interest and invalid voting. The likelihood of casting an invalid vote is only 0.9% for the most interested voters, compared to 5.7% for the least interested voters in a simple model with demographic controls, and this finding is robust to including additional attitudinal controls. This effect is large compared to the baseline distribution of the dependent variable—only about 3.1% of AmericasBarometer respondents reported invalidating the vote during a recent election in this time period. Political interest is negatively associated with invalid voting in countries with both mandatory and voluntary vote laws; however, consistent with the theoretical perspective outlined above, the effect of political interest is stronger where voting is mandatory and enforced compared to countries with voluntary voting.<sup>7</sup> Yet another way to examine this question is to look at descriptive results from the motivations question asked in the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey. A meaningful portion of respondents—13.8%—said that they invalidated their ballot because they were not interested in politics.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to these expectations, however, voters who intentionally invalidate their ballots are also significantly *more* educated than those who vote for candidates (see also Cisneros 2013; Cohen 2018a; Moral 2016). And this relationship does not differ significantly across countries with mandatory versus voluntary vote laws. In short, political engagement does drive a significant portion of invalid voting—but the relationship is more nuanced than this theoretical perspective suggests. Certainly, some disengaged voters invalidate their ballots in reaction to mandatory vote laws. But disengaged voters also invalidate their votes where voting is voluntary. And, using education as a proxy measure of cognitive resources, the average invalid voter actually has *more* resources than other voters. What explains this tendency?

### *Ballot Spoiling as an Expression of Discontent with the Candidate Options*

I advance a third explanation of intentional invalid voting, which views most blank and spoiled ballots cast in Latin American presidential elections as a rejection of the specific candidates and policies on offer. I argue that these protest votes are cast predominantly by disgruntled habitual voters for whom invalidating a ballot is a very low-cost behavior that yields a small expressive benefit. I walk through these costs and benefits below.

To unpack the decision to spoil the ballot, it is important to first consider the costs of doing so. Like turning out to vote, spoiling the ballot

implies a series of secondary costs: citizens must register to vote, identify and travel to their polling place, and wait in line.<sup>9</sup> Some citizens may consider these costs to be unbearable when compared to the likelihood of casting a decisive vote (e.g., Downs 1957). However, for others, the costs of voting are minimal. For these citizens, the costs of spoiling a ballot will be especially low when compared to the psychological benefits they gain from casting an expressive protest vote.<sup>10</sup>

Certain types of citizens are particularly likely to bear the costs of turning out. For example, those whose family and friends vote as a matter of habit tend to turn out at higher rates than others (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). Citizens who actively participate in civil society organizations are more likely to vote (Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014). Much of this increase in participation seems to occur through incidental, interpersonal mobilization—individuals are convinced to turn out through conversation with (or social pressure from) their friends, family, and colleagues (Blais et al. 2019; Gerber et al. 2008, 2010). And voting quickly becomes a habit for many; those who vote once are significantly more likely to vote again, while those who do not participate in elections when they are young are less likely to turn out later in life (Coppock and Green 2015; Gerber et al. 2003).

For those who habitually vote, then, the costs of turning out and spoiling a ballot are known and irrelevant. Because these individuals pay the costs of turning out regularly, spoiling the ballot implies no additional time or travel cost. In fact, for individuals who are embedded in participatory social networks, choosing *not* to turn out on Election Day may impose social or psychological costs (e.g., Aytac and Stokes 2019). In short, for habitual voters, turning out and casting an invalid vote is a behavior that incurs no additional cost.

Habitual voters are, on average, engaged democrats who buy in to the political system. Why would such individuals choose to invalidate their votes? I argue that the specific candidates on offer, in combination with the national political climate, fuels the decision to invalidate the ballot for such individuals. The logic of this argument is simple. For an individual who has made a standing decision to turn out, the only remaining decision is which candidate to select on Election Day. During most elections, researching the options should lead this voter to identify a best (or “least-bad”) option, who she will ultimately select. However, if none of the available candidate options is acceptable to that voter, she is faced with a set of imperfect options. She can choose to abstain—but she has already made a standing decision to participate in the election, and being a voter is part of

her personal and social identity. Given this standing decision, the voter has two remaining options. She can choose a candidate she dislikes, resigning herself to feel disappointed with her choice. Or, she can express her frustration with the options by turning out to vote but refusing to select any of the candidates.

Choosing to invalidate the vote to protest the options carries small but nontrivial benefits. As with casting a positive vote for a political candidate, the instrumental value of an invalid vote is effectively zero; any individual vote is very unlikely to be decisive in the final election outcome. Psychologically, however, the benefits of casting a blank or spoiled ballot to protest the options may be more substantial. Studies show that participating in political activity makes people feel good. Irrespective of candidate choice, turning out to vote builds voters' self-confidence as active democratic citizens (their "internal political efficacy," see Valentino et al. 2009) and increases their satisfaction with democracy (Kostelka and Blais 2018).<sup>11</sup> Like voting, participating in street protest improves citizens' feelings of efficacy and promotes individual satisfaction and happiness (Thomas and Louis 2013). Spoiling a vote should similarly yield a psychological benefit to protesting voters, because they are participating actively in politics *and* because they are expressing their frustrations at the ballot box.

This understanding of invalid voting as a means to protest the candidate options was the most commonly expressed view in focus groups in both Mexico and Peru. Protest of the options was the first-mentioned motivation for invalidating the ballot in 16 of 19 focus groups. Participants linked the invalid vote to low-quality candidates (e.g., those with limited experience in elected office), and to the specific policies proposed by the candidates on offer. For example, respondents noted:

I think that people who [cast invalid votes] think, in essence, that they want to show that none of the [candidates] that is on the ballot represents them. (MX Online 2)

People [think] that the most viable thing is to nullify [the ballot] if you don't feel any of the candidates is going to represent you, or [none of them] convinced you. (Mexico Online 1).

When there is no candidate that makes you feel well-represented . . . it's almost like you don't have a choice, so you choose to vote blank or null. (Arequipa 2)



It's because the population sees in the candidate a person that isn't going to represent them fully, but is going to look after their own interests. (Arequipa 1)

[In Peru, political parties] just appear at the time of an electoral campaign, and then they shut down the political party until the next election. So, since there is no presence, or representation, by the political parties, people opt to say they are disappointed, that maybe it's better to either spoil my vote or leave it blank because the authorities aren't representative, you know? (Cajamarca 2)

The open-ended motivations question asked on the 2014 AmericasBarometer further confirms this perspective. One-third (33%) of respondents—a plurality—responded that they had invalidated their vote because they “wanted to express their discontent with all of the candidates; did not like any of the candidates.” Providing this response in the 2014 AmericasBarometer was strongly, negatively associated with presidential approval and trust in political parties. In turn, statistical analyses using the AmericasBarometer data through the 2018–19 wave show a strong negative association between trust in parties, presidential approval, and intentional invalid voting. In models including only demographic controls, the lowest level of presidential approval was associated with a 7.5% likelihood of invalidating the ballot, compared to a 1.7% likelihood among those reporting the highest levels of presidential approval. Those who distrust parties are about 4.8% likely to report spoiling their ballots, compared to 1.4% likelihood among those who trust parties. These effects are quite large compared to the 3.1% baseline likelihood of reporting casting an invalid vote. While these effects attenuate slightly when attitudinal controls are included in the model, they are still large and statistically significant.

Additional evidence suggests that individuals who cast invalid votes resemble other voters on features that tend to predict participatory behavior. For example, analyses show no significant difference in levels of participation in community groups, age, gender, or wealth between those who invalidate their votes and those who select candidates (appendix table A1.2). These are factors that regularly predict participatory behavior, which underscores the notion that intentional null voting is an expressive participatory act, and not a substitute for abstention.

To sum up, for habitual voters who dislike all of the available candidates, casting a blank or spoiled ballot to protest the options is an effectively cost-

less alternative to voting for a candidate they view as unacceptable. This understanding of the costs and benefits associated with intentionally invalidating the ballot is consistent with a growing body of scholarly literature that links much intentional invalid voting behavior to dissatisfaction with incumbent performance or the specific candidates on offer (Cisneros 2013; Cohen 2018a; Driscoll and Nelson 2014; Herron and Sekhon 2003; Kouba and Lysek 2016; Moral 2016; Rosenthal and Sen 1973; Solvak and Vassil 2015; Ugglá 2008).

### Invalid Vote Campaigns as Heuristics

To this point, I have considered the factors that lead individuals to choose to cast blank or spoiled votes in Latin American presidential elections in the absence of efforts to mobilize them to action. How do campaigns promoting the invalid vote alter voters' decisions to spoil the ballot? I argue that invalid vote campaigns affect voters' cost-benefit calculus by increasing the potential benefits of invalidating the ballot, while also lowering information costs for nonhabitual voters. The cost-lowering effect of invalid vote campaigns should be strongest where partisanship is low or in decline and voters are searching for alternative heuristics to make political decisions.

#### *Null Vote Campaigns Increase the Potential Benefits of an Invalid Vote*

The benefits of casting an invalid ballot are small and mostly psychological. When the satisfaction from voicing dissent outweighs the relatively low cost of voting among habitual voters, and when a voter anticipates no regret for not choosing the "least bad" option, she will be more likely to invalidate her ballot. Invalid vote campaigns can shift this calculus by clarifying the meaning of an invalid ballot and by increasing the likelihood that invalid votes will have a tangible effect on election results and policy outcomes.

Campaigns promoting the invalid vote can shape societal understanding of the protest signal underlying blank and spoiled ballots. In the absence of an invalid vote campaign, intentionally spoiled ballots might be misinterpreted by election officials and politicians as unintentional, resulting from voter error. When a null vote campaign is present, however, blank and spoiled ballots "are readily associated with protest behavior" and as a result, a voter who wants to cast a protest vote "can be confident that their [invalid] ballots will be perceived as protest votes" (Alvarez et al. 2018,

151). The knowledge that politicians and the broader public will understand a voter's invalid ballot as a signal of discontent rather than an error may thus increase the expressive benefits of spoiling the vote.

Invalid vote campaigns can also galvanize those who would prefer to cast a protest vote, but who are indifferent to participating in the first place. By presenting the invalid vote as a protest option that carries a specific message, campaigns can mobilize alienated citizens to participate in conventional politics through the use of an unconventional behavior (invalid voting).<sup>12</sup> However, unifying invalid ballots behind a single message can also backfire. If a campaign's message differs from the preferences of erstwhile ballot spoilers, those individuals might choose to cast a valid ballot for a candidate they dislike rather than implicitly support the campaign's message through a blank or null vote.

Beyond shaping public interpretation of invalid ballots, invalid vote campaigns can yield additional concrete benefits by affecting policy debates and election results. High rates of invalid voting following an organized campaign promoting the blank or spoiled vote can show the campaign's strength and bring protesting voters' grievances into the public debate. For example, in Guatemala's 2015 presidential election, citizen groups took to the streets calling on the government to implement anticorruption reforms and to give legal status to invalid votes; these protestors also called on voters to spoil their ballots in protest (Guatemala—Noticias On Line, 2015). The government later passed these reforms; that is, the campaign achieved its major policy objectives.

Invalid vote campaigns can also shape final election outcomes. In the extreme, if an absolute majority or supermajority of ballots are left blank or spoiled through coordinated activity, elections can be canceled and new elections, with new candidates, called. While such results are extremely rare in national elections, some voters are likely motivated to reach this goal—and approaching or achieving this goal could dramatically affect an election's outcomes and the public's view of its legitimacy.

### *Null Vote Campaigns Decrease the Informational Costs of Voting*

Invalid vote campaigns also decrease the informational costs of voting. Campaigns promoting the blank or spoiled vote brand all available options as unacceptable. For voters who are alienated from politics or dissatisfied with their options, this decreases the burden of additional research into the alternatives. Instead, the campaign presents voters with a simple decision rule: if all positive options are bad, then choosing none of them is an obvi-

ous alternative. By refusing to compromise, those who cast blank or spoiled ballots can eliminate a costly information search while washing their hands of a distasteful political decision. Of course, citizens' willingness to receive and accept this heuristic likely depends on the credibility of the campaign's message and its messengers. Indeed, this book clearly shows that individuals who spoil their votes in response to an invalid vote campaign are not fools who are blindly led by self-interested campaign leaders. Rather, they view these campaigns and their leaders with justifiable suspicion. Chapters 3–6 take up these issues in more depth.

Because of this heuristic role, invalid vote campaigns should be better able to mobilize votes where citizen attachments to political parties are weak. Latin America thus presents a region ripe for the emergence of invalid vote campaigns. Partisanship is at a nadir across the region: only 25% of Latin Americans reported identifying with a political party from 2016 to 2019, compared to 36% in 2014 (AmericasBarometer 2019). At the same time, partisan organizations across the region are not typically strong or deeply rooted in society. Party brands have been weakened in recent decades, resulting in high electoral volatility (e.g., Cohen et al. 2018; Roberts 2014) and, in extreme cases, party system collapse (e.g., Lupu 2016; Morgan 2011).

Declining partisanship increases the pool of “swing” voters who can be convinced to change their vote across elections (see Mayer 2007; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013). As the number of voters without a party affiliation increases, more voters will seek out alternative heuristics to determine their vote. In these circumstances, invalid vote campaigns can serve as a substitute for parties, ordering the political space and providing a simple heuristic through which citizens can understand the choice set.

However, it should be rare for a permanent coalition to emerge from invalid vote campaigns. Null vote campaigns rarely put forward a positive political agenda; rather, they promote the blanket rejection of all options as “unacceptable.” Building a political coalition based on positive policy concerns involves nuance and compromise, and risks losing the attention of voters who were brought in by a simpler appeal. At the same time, if the leaders of null vote campaigns forge alliances with partisan organizations they maligned in the past, this can appear hypocritical. This hypocrisy can lead voters to perceive campaigners as self-interested or sore losers (see chapters 4 and 6), leading them to punish those leaders at the ballot box.

This is not to say that positive campaigns never emerge from invalid vote campaign efforts. One recent high-salience example of this phenomenon comes from El Salvador's 2018 legislative elections. On January 14,

2018, Nayib Bukele, then the incumbent mayor of the nation's capital city of San Salvador, asked his voters for a "favor . . . the next election is in March and [Bukele's party] Nuevas Ideas won't be on the ballot. Vote null and if you are feeling lazy, stay home and watch television" (El Salvador Times 2018). Following widespread media coverage of his statements, which arguably increased his name recognition and popularity, and the doubling of the invalid vote,<sup>13</sup> Bukele launched a successful bid for the presidency later that year. However, Bukele's eventual success is an exception, not the rule (see also chapter 7).

### Spoiling the Ballot When Democracy Is on the Ropes

The argument above implicitly treats the political environment as "normal": citizens' motivations for protest are largely related to personal preferences over the candidates or policy programs on offer, and campaigns mobilize citizens along these lines. But how do the costs and benefits of protest voting change in the context of democratic crisis?

Since third-wave transitions to democracy in the 1970s and 1980s, electoral democracy has been "the only game in town" (Schmitter and Karl 1991) in most of Latin America. Yet, in recent years, Latin America, like other world regions, has experienced the erosion of democracy, with countries "backsliding" away from liberal democracy and embracing increasingly authoritarian policies and candidates. Presidents on the left and the right have turned against core democratic principles, seeking to eliminate term limits (e.g., in Bolivia, Venezuela), weaken checks from other branches of government (e.g., in Guatemala) proscribe legitimate opposition parties (e.g., in Nicaragua), undermine press freedom (e.g., in Mexico), and deny accused criminals' human rights (e.g., in El Salvador). Indeed, citizens of some countries have elected candidates promoting overtly authoritarian political agendas (e.g., Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil). Corresponding with this democratic retrenchment, the Latin American commodity boom ended abruptly in the early 2010s, resulting in economic stagnation in many countries. And since 2014, corruption scandals have erupted across the region, linking incumbent politicians to illegal kickback schemes and, in some cases, resulting in their criminal prosecution, imprisonment (e.g., Ollanta Humala in Peru), or removal from office (e.g., Dilma Rousseff in Brazil).

The democratic environment can shape would-be protest voters' behavior. When democracy is on the ballot, the stakes of casting a protest

vote against imperfect candidates change. When a competitive candidate opposes core regime principles, this increases the costs of spoiling the ballot for individuals who prefer democracy, as a single protest vote might enable the unacceptable candidate to enter office. In such a circumstance, voters who are otherwise indifferent to the two candidates will likely act in a way that will “minimize their maximum regret” (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974), and select the pro-democracy candidate. That is, invalid voting among committed democrats should decrease when a popular authoritarian option is on the ballot and ideological differentiation across the candidates is low.

This dynamic played out in Peru’s 2016 presidential election. Sixteen candidates competed in the first-round contest. The ideological left split its votes across several candidates, none of whom advanced to the second round. Instead, the runoff election pitted Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, a right-wing technocrat with a record of commitment to democratic principles, against Keiko Fujimori, a far-right congresswoman and the daughter of ousted dictator Alberto Fujimori. Centrist and leftist voters faced a hard decision: both second-round options failed to represent such voters’ policy preferences. Had both candidates convincingly demonstrated commitment to the rules of the democratic game, rates of invalid voting might have been unusually high in the second round. However, the link between Keiko Fujimori and her father was strong enough that many on the left turned out to cast a vote for Kuczynski, who won the runoff by a mere 41,057 votes (0.02% of valid votes cast). The invalid vote rate in the 2016 runoff (6.5%) was similar to rates in other presidential runoff elections following Peru’s 2001 democratic transition.

This argument is also consistent with past scholarly work linking invalid voting to the quality of democracy. For example, Power and Garand (2007) show that rates of invalid voting in legislative elections are lower in countries where the quality of democracy (as measured by Freedom House) is higher, and that invalid voting increases as the quality of democracy declines. Lysek et al. (2020) similarly link invalid voting in parliamentary elections to protest where the quality of democracy is lower (see also Kouba and Lysek 2016; but see Cohen 2018b). Indeed, in nondemocracies including Cuba (Domínguez et al. 2017), Iran (Samii 2004), and the former Soviet Union (Gilison 1968; Swearer 1961) scholars have identified invalid voting as an expressive “safety valve” that discontented citizens use to express frustration with regime performance. In short, there is good reason to expect that the quality of democracy will affect citizens’ willingness to invalidate their ballots.

*Invalid Vote Campaigns When Democracy Is in Decline*

Campaigns promoting the invalid vote can expand the base of voters who spoil their ballots, shape the meaning of an invalid vote, or make salient new grievances among the public. In the absence of campaigns promoting the invalid vote, declines in democratic quality should shape voters' political concerns. How might declining democratic quality also shape the prevalence and tactics of campaigns promoting the invalid vote?

The prevalence of invalid vote campaigns should be related to declining democratic quality, although this relationship is somewhat complex. When democracy is on the ballot, there is a pro-democracy option, and competition is reasonably fair, the stakes of elections will increase. Specifically, in such instances, the expressive psychological benefits of casting an invalid vote will likely be outweighed by the possibility—however small—that an individual's spoiled vote could allow an antidemocratic candidate to enter office. In these circumstances, all but the most disgruntled voters should become less likely to cast invalid votes in protest. Invalid vote campaigns should also be less likely to emerge, as they will struggle to mobilize public support.

If all viable candidates express antidemocracy predispositions, then ideological polarization will likely shape voter behavior. Recent research shows that, when an authoritarian candidate represents a voter's ideological or policy preferences, voters will tend to disregard the candidate's authoritarianism (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020) or rationalize authoritarian behaviors as protective of democracy (Krishnarajan 2022) and vote for the member of their ideological team. These findings suggest that, even if both candidates have authoritarian predispositions, if the choice set is polarized, many voters will cast an affirmative vote for the more ideologically proximate option rather than invalidate their vote in protest. Because the disposition to cast blank and spoiled votes should be lower in the population, invalid vote campaigns should be unlikely to emerge in such circumstances.

However, some forms of democratic backsliding can shift the playing field in a way that limits political opponents' access to competition and effectively guarantees that incumbents will remain in power. Where opposition parties have been barred from competing or elections are marred by credible claims of fraud, promoting the invalid vote may be the only way for opposition parties to undermine the incumbent's grip on power. For pro-democracy voters in such contexts, the expressive benefit of invalidating the ballot will outweigh the costs of doing so. This is because, if an authoritarian candidate is effectively guaranteed victory, an individual's invalid vote will not contribute to this candidate's win. One such invalid vote campaign occurred in Nicaragua in 2016, when President Daniel Ortega

proscribed major opposition candidates to ensure his reelection. This provided a strong and relevant grievance for pro-democracy voters, who were left with no un-coopted candidate options. An invalid vote campaign emerged that year.

To summarize, then, if democratic backsliding does not occur at the expense of free and fair elections, null vote campaigns should be infrequent during democratic decline. However, if backsliding limits competition in such a way that the political opposition cannot access power, invalid vote campaigns should become more likely to occur (and voters should be more likely to respond to their calls).

## Conclusion

This chapter builds on understandings of electoral and protest participation to derive expectations over who intentionally invalidates the ballot. In light of the costs and benefits associated with spoiling the ballot versus other forms of participation, I build a profile of the average citizen who intentionally invalidates their ballot. Because the costs of invalidating a ballot are effectively nonexistent for individuals who are embedded in participatory networks, or who habitually turn out, engaged but disgruntled citizens should be the most likely to invalidate their votes in protest of features of a specific political contest. Data from focus groups conducted in Mexico and Peru, as well as response patterns to cross-national survey data, affirm these expectations. The evidence is clear: most invalid voting in Latin American presidential elections reflects disapproval of the candidates and policy complaints.

Finally, I built on this understanding of who invalidates the ballot to build expectations over how invalid vote campaigns and the context of democratic decline shape invalid voting behavior. I argue that invalid vote campaigns can serve as heuristics for voters who are disappointed with the available options and are searching for an alternative; they can increase the benefits of casting a protest vote while simultaneously decreasing voters' information costs. However, the stakes of elections are higher when democracy is on the ballot, which should make citizens more cautious about invalidating their ballots when democracy is in decline. The combination of these factors has implications for the frequency with which invalid vote campaigns emerge, the content of their grievances, and whether they are successful in their mobilization efforts. The following chapters assess these propositions.



## THREE

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# Campaigning for No One

## *Invalid Vote Campaigns in Latin America*

Following the resignation of disgraced President Alberto Fujimori,<sup>1</sup> elections for a new president of Peru were held in 2001. Because no candidate obtained a majority in the first round, a runoff election was held between two centrist candidates: Alan García, a former president with a substantial record of political mismanagement to overcome,<sup>2</sup> and Alejandro Toledo, who faced important criminal allegations during the campaign.<sup>3</sup> These candidates were hard to distinguish on policy lines, and prominent journalists Jaime Bayly and Álvaro Vargas Llosa insisted that “neither of the candidates [had] the minimal moral credentials to be President.” Instead, they proposed that voters opt for a third option, arguing that “the only clean candidate, the only transparent candidate . . . [was] a blank or null vote” (*El Mundo* 2001). These two men became the face of an organized invalid vote campaign, which provided a credible exit option to voters faced with a difficult choice. The invalid vote rate increased from 11.6% in the first round to 13.8% in the runoff. This second-round invalid vote rate was more than double the usual rate of blank and spoiled votes (6%) in presidential runoff elections in post-transition Peru.

Although many voters spoil their ballots without external encouragement, efforts to mobilize voters to leave their ballots blank or to spoil them occur regularly in Latin America, and have increased in recent decades. To understand the scope and nature of invalid vote campaigns, this chapter presents a new database covering presidential elections in 18 Latin American democracies from 1980 to 2020.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to perceptions among scholars that such campaigns occur rarely (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2018; Kouba

and Lysek 2016), individuals, citizen groups, or political organizations promoted the invalid vote in 26% of Latin American presidential elections during this period.

Campaigns promoting the invalid vote can shape the meaning of blank and spoiled ballots, which in turn could affect both the prevalence of the behavior and the motivations of individuals who spoil their ballots. Given how often such protest vote campaigns occur, it is important to first understand, descriptively, what these campaigns are—how they are organized, when they emerge, and what grievances they claim to address. By first understanding the nature of these campaigns, we can then begin to consider how and under what circumstances they shape voters' opinions and behavior.

Who leads invalid vote campaigns? What grievances do campaigners emphasize to rally public support? I find that, during the 40-year period from 1980 to 2020, invalid vote campaigns were led by citizen groups and political elites with similar frequency. Common campaign grievances include high or increasing corruption, unrepresentative candidate options, poor candidate quality, and flawed or fraudulent elections.

I also assess whether campaigns are in fact more likely to occur where these grievances are prevalent. The evidence is mixed. Invalid vote campaigns are more likely to emerge where opposition parties face harassment, but not where corruption is high or where ideological polarization is low. Additional analysis suggests that affective polarization shifts the relationship between electoral grievances and campaign emergence. Where affective polarization is low, invalid vote campaigns are significantly more likely to emerge to protest opposition intimidation compared to where polarization is high. That is, evidence in this chapter is consistent with expectations that citizens will downweigh the importance of democratic backsliding where partisan divides spill over into society.

Given that organizing a campaign promoting blank or spoiled voting is less costly than running a positive campaign for a political candidate, some might wonder why invalid vote campaigns do not occur more frequently. I therefore conclude this chapter by walking through campaigners' strategic decisions. I show that, especially for politicians, there can be important reputational costs associated with leading an against-all campaign.

### Conceptualizing and Identifying Invalid Vote Campaigns

What are invalid vote campaigns, and how should they be identified and differentiated from spontaneously high levels of invalid voting? Existing

scholarly work has largely identified invalid vote campaigns in an ad hoc fashion, connecting spikes in invalid voting to campaign efforts. Scholars tend to link invalid vote campaigns to political elites. For example, Alvarez et al. (2018, 147) argue that “major [blank, null, and spoiled vote] episodes usually occur in response to directives from political leaders and elites to their followers,” and Superti (2020, 1) describes invalid vote campaigns as “a top-down and elite-mobilized practice.” Yet, many efforts that local media refer to as “campaigns” to “mobilize” or “promote” the invalid vote do not involve elites or political parties at all. For example, in describing the campaign promoting spoiled votes in Mexico’s 2009 legislative election, Cisneros (2013, 41) notes its diverse leadership and organization: “There is evidence that in at least 20 states across the country, 49 [citizen] groups were present that exhorted electors . . . to nullify their votes.”

What these efforts and those described below have in common is the involvement of various actors—ranging from high-profile politicians and partisan organizations to unions and nascent citizen groups—mobilizing voters in pursuit of a common electoral result: increased rates of blank or spoiled voting. I therefore define invalid vote campaigns as *coordinated activity promoting blank or spoiled voting with the intent to persuade individuals to cast invalid votes in a given constituency*.<sup>5</sup>

By this definition, public statements or solitary op-eds by citizens detailing their intent to invalidate their ballots do not constitute evidence of an invalid vote campaign. The element of *persuasion* must accompany these messages for a campaign to be present. Further, multiple statements must occur in tandem. One individual exhorting others to spoil their ballots from the town square does not constitute a campaign; the same individual working in coordination with others to spread this message does.

I make an exception to this rule for public statements made by political elites, like party leaders and former political candidates. It is possible that politicians make public statements indicating their intent to spoil the ballot without the goal of mobilizing others to follow their lead. However, statements by political elites should influence their followers, and elites likely consider these repercussions prior to making public statements declaring their intent to spoil their votes. News stories affirm this intuition: as one politician from the Partido Independiente de Uruguay noted in 2014, when asked if he planned to announce his runoff vote publicly, “if any of us were to express a preference [over voting for a candidate or leaving the ballot blank], it would be a way to condition our membership” (Redacción El País 2014). While single elite statements are a weak form of mobilization, they represent attempts to influence the final election outcome, so I include them here.

### Measurement

I measure the presence of invalid vote campaigns using news stories published in daily periodicals. To create this measure, I collected news stories from online archives that mentioned “blank,” “null,” or “spoiled” votes in nationally circulated newspapers in 18 Latin American democracies.<sup>6</sup> These searches yielded thousands of individual news stories, which I read to identify articles describing efforts to persuade citizens to spoil their ballots or leave them blank. A single mention of a null vote campaign in a nationally or internationally circulated newspaper was sufficient to identify a campaign as being present.<sup>7</sup> This is a low bar for identifying campaigns; however, the resulting measure probably *underestimates* the frequency of efforts to mobilize the invalid vote, as not all campaigns are covered by national media outlets.<sup>8</sup> After identifying campaigns, I conducted further web searches using additional terms (for example, the name of a mobilizing individual or group) to create as detailed an account as possible of each campaign. I also searched for mentions of “blank,” “null,” and “spoiled” votes on Facebook (post-2004) and Twitter (post-2006) to gather additional detail about the organization, mobilizational strategies, and grievances of campaigns in the 2000s and 2010s.<sup>9</sup>

Campaigns promoting invalid voting occurred across the region over the entire 40-year period, in countries in the midst of political transition and in those with established democratic traditions. Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of presidential election-rounds with an invalid vote campaign by decade from democratic transitions in the 1980s through 2020. In the figure, I treat each election-round as a separate election during which an invalid vote campaign might occur. Invalid vote campaigns took place in three of 40 presidential election-rounds held in the 1980s (7.5%), and in five of the 54 presidential election-rounds in the 1990s (9.3%). Of these eight invalid vote campaigns, four took place in transitional elections (Ecuador 1984, El Salvador 1982, Guatemala 1990, and Paraguay 1988).<sup>10</sup>

In the 2000s and 2010s, the prevalence of invalid vote campaigns increased dramatically. Individuals or politicians promoted the blank or spoiled vote in 12 of 54 presidential election-rounds (22.2%) from 2000 through 2009, and in 20 of 64 (31.2%) election-rounds held between 2010 and 2020. The increased prevalence of invalid vote campaigns post-2000 coincides with the rapid expansion of internet access and social media use across the region. Mobilizers’ ability to use the internet as a campaign tool, and citizens’ ability to gather more information at lower effort through social media, likely decreased the costs of campaigning for the invalid vote in the twenty-first century. In all, invalid vote campaigns were present in

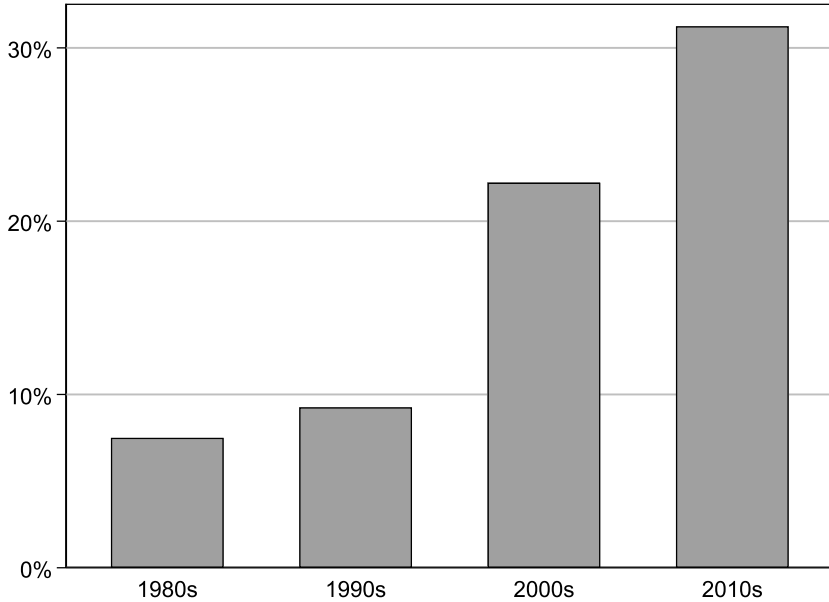


Figure 3.1. Presence of Presidential Invalid Vote Campaigns in Latin America by Decade

Source: Original data collection.

Note: The figure shows the percentage of all executive contests in which an invalid vote campaign took place. First-round and runoff elections are counted as separate observations.

more than 26% of presidential elections, and 19% of presidential election-rounds, across the region during this 40-year period.<sup>11</sup>

Because compulsory voting requires even the most disgruntled voters to either turn out on Election Day or pay a fine, the pool of discontented voters should be larger in these contexts (e.g., Singh 2019). Some might therefore expect invalid vote campaigns to occur more frequently in countries where voting is mandated. The data do not bear this expectation out; 18 (45%) of the 40 invalid vote campaigns identified here occurred in elections in which voting was mandatory, while 22 (55%) took place in country-years where voting was either not mandated or where existing mandates were not enforced. It is also worth noting that, although countries like Colombia, Guatemala, and Peru are especially prone to repeated campaigns over time, invalid vote campaigns occurred across the region. In fact, only the Dominican Republic and Honduras did *not* experience an invalid vote campaign in a presidential election between 1980 and 2020 (see table 3.1).<sup>12</sup>

## The Anatomy of a Null Vote Campaign: Leadership and Grievances

Who leads campaigns promoting the invalid vote? What are the core grievances of these campaigns—do they mobilize voters in opposition to democratic rules of the game, or do they represent pro-democracy complaints? This section describes invalid vote campaigns in Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020. Table 3.1 summarizes this information, categorizing campaigns by the nature of their leadership and stated grievances. Appendix table A3.1 provides additional detail about each campaign.

### *Leadership*

Campaign leadership varied widely during this period. Figure 3.2 shows the prevalence of different types of leadership by decade. Elites led more than half of invalid vote campaigns from 1980 to 2000. In the 2000s and 2010s, popular mobilization, either alone or in combination with elite efforts, became more common. Indeed, in the 2010s, more than 60% of all invalid vote campaigns included mobilization by citizen groups.

Across the time series, 18 of 40 campaigns were organized exclusively by political elites who promoted invalid voting through speeches, statements to the media, and other public appearances.<sup>13</sup> The 2005 campaign in Chile is one such case. Following its exclusion from the runoff election, the Humanist Party refused to throw its support to either runoff candidate. Party leaders “called on their militants to vote blank or null, or to abstain, assuring that [the party did] not believe in the political project put forth by the Concertación coalition, headed by Michelle Bachelet” (El Mercurio en Internet 2005). Campaigns with “elite only” leadership appear to have been organized predominantly in a top-down fashion, with leaders calling on the public to act without support from civil society groups.

In addition to these elite-led efforts, 13 of 40 invalid vote campaigns were organized and led exclusively by civil society actors (such as unions or indigenous associations) or informal citizen groups formed to protest corruption or other issues. For example, in Panama in 2009, the Frente Nacional por los Derechos Económicos y Sociales, a coalition of labor unions including university students and construction workers, among others, called for blank voting in that year’s presidential elections because “neither [candidate] represents the interests of workers” (Redacción Digital La Estrella 2009). Several of these campaigns had disparate or even unidentifiable citizen leadership. For example, although the 2015 null vote campaign in Guatemala was clearly coordinated, local news outlets reflect

TABLE 3.1. Invalid Vote Mobilization in Latin American Presidential Elections (1980–2020)

Country, year	Election round	Political elites or parties	Popular mobilization	Stated grievances
Argentina, 2003*	Single		X	General “anticandidate” sentiment
Argentina, 2015*	Second	X		Unrepresentative options
Bolivia, 2014*	Single	X		Unrepresentative options
Bolivia, 2019*	Single		X	Illegitimate candidacy
Brazil, 2006*	Both	X	X	Corruption, unrepresentative options
Brazil, 2010*	Second	X		Corruption, unrepresentative options
Chile, 1999*	Second	X		Unrepresentative options
Chile, 2005*	Second	X		Candidate quality
Chile, 2013	Second	X		Candidate quality, new constitution
Colombia, 1994	Second	X		Unrepresentative options
Colombia, 2002	First	X		Opposition to armed violence
Colombia, 2010	Second	X	X	Unrepresentative options
Colombia, 2014	Both	X	X	Corruption, unrepresentative options
Colombia, 2018	Second	X	X	Corruption, unrepresentative options
Costa Rica, 1998	Single		X	Candidate quality
Costa Rica, 2018	Second	X		Candidate similarity
Ecuador, 1984*	Second	X		Unrepresentative options
Ecuador, 2002*	Second	X		Candidate quality, unrepresentative options
El Salvador, 1982	Single		X	Limited competition (leftist parties not represented)
Guatemala, 1990	First	X		Limited competition (Ríos Montt candidacy proscribed)
Guatemala, 2011	First	X		Unrepresentative options
Guatemala, 2015	First		X	Corruption
Guatemala, 2019	First		X	Corruption
Mexico, 2012	Single		X	Corruption
Nicaragua, 2011	Single		X	Fraudulent contest
Nicaragua, 2016	Single	X	X	Fraudulent contest, limited competition
Panama, 2004	Single		X	Unrepresentative options
Panama, 2009	Single		X	Corruption, unrepresentative options
Paraguay, 1988*	Single	X		Limited competition, election fraud
Paraguay, 2018*	Single	X	X	Candidate quality, corruption, unrepresentative options
Peru, 2000*	Second	X		Corruption, fraudulent contest
Peru, 2001*	Second	X		Candidate quality
Peru, 2006*	Second	X		Candidate quality
Peru, 2011*	Second		X	Candidate quality
Uruguay, 2014*	Second	X		Unrepresentative options
Venezuela, 1998	Single		X	Candidate quality
Venezuela, 2006	Single		X	Unrepresentative options
Venezuela, 2018	Single	X	X	Fraudulent contest

\*Denotes country–years in which voting was mandatory and enforced.

Note: Grievances are listed in alphabetical order, not in order of relevance

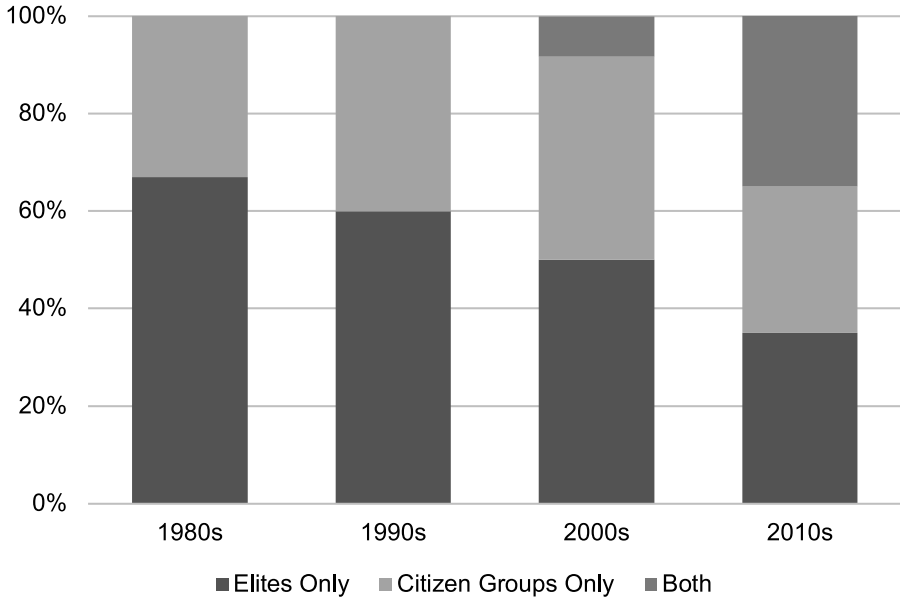


Figure 3.2. Invalid Vote Campaign Leadership by Decade

Source: Original data collection.

considerable uncertainty over the campaign's leadership. Most contemporaneous news articles do not identify any organization or individual as a campaign leader. Those that do attribute leadership to two very different organizations: an apparently ad hoc group (the *Movimiento de la Dignidad Nacional*), and an established coalition of civil society organizations (the *Asamblea Social y Popular*). In short, while coordinated null vote campaign activity clearly occurred in the 2015 Guatemalan election, its leadership was diffuse and composed of ordinary citizens and civil society groups. Several campaigns with citizen leadership were organized in such a fashion.

The advent of social media has decreased the costs associated with mobilizing the invalid vote for citizen groups in the twenty-first century. Through dedicated accounts on Facebook and Twitter (e.g., the “VotoEnBlanco” Twitter handle in Colombia) or the viral spread of cartoons and other information (e.g., in Mexico's 2012 election), citizen activists can campaign for the invalid vote without relying on in-person social networks. These accounts emerge with the explicit, and usually exclusive, purpose of mobilizing the invalid vote. Individual leaders of these accounts are rarely identifiable. Rather than rally behind a leader, these campaigns mobilize voters around a message, which is disseminated by account followers to others in their social networks on- and offline.



Eight of 40 invalid vote campaigns featured calls to invalidate the vote by both elites and citizen groups; such campaigns occurred only in the 2000s and 2010s. Although the grievances of citizen and elite actors often overlap, parties and civil society groups appear not to have coordinated in these cases. For example, in Paraguay's 2018 presidential election, organized peasant groups promoted the null vote, claiming that the options were not representative of their preferences. Simultaneously, the leadership of the minor political party Partido Paraguay Pyahura called for invalid voting, claiming that elected officials "present themselves as worthy [*dignos*] representatives, but they never did anything to benefit the country" (ABC Color 2018). While these groups protested similar grievances—the underrepresentation of indigenous, poor, and working-class Paraguayans—they neither held shared events nor appear to have pooled financial resources. In sum, even when both citizen and elite groups call on their followers to cast invalid ballots, these campaigns are often carried out independently from other groups or individuals that make similar calls.

### *Grievances*

Campaigns' stated grievances also varied widely across countries and over time. Generally, these grievances fell into four broad categories: corruption in politics (usually by the candidates), unrepresentative candidate options, very low-quality candidates, and credible claims of election fraud. Figure 3.3 shows the prevalence of these four grievances by decade: in the 1980s and 1990s, campaigns denounced unrepresentative options, flawed elections, and concerns about candidate quality with roughly similar frequency. In the 2000s and 2010s, corruption emerged as an important complaint of invalid vote campaigns, constituting a central grievance of 25% of campaigns in the 2000s and increasing to 35% in the 2010s. Concerns about unrepresentative candidates were a core grievance of half (50%) of the campaigns in the 2000s and 2010s. While complaints about electoral fraud fueled no invalid vote campaigns in the 1990s, and only one campaign in the 2000s, this grievance became increasingly relevant in the 2010s, when 20% of invalid vote campaigns decried flawed elections. Because there is substantial variation within each of these categories, I describe each grievance in greater detail below.

### *Corruption*

One complaint commonly raised by promoters of the invalid vote was corruption, or the use of public goods for personal gain. Corruption is a pow-

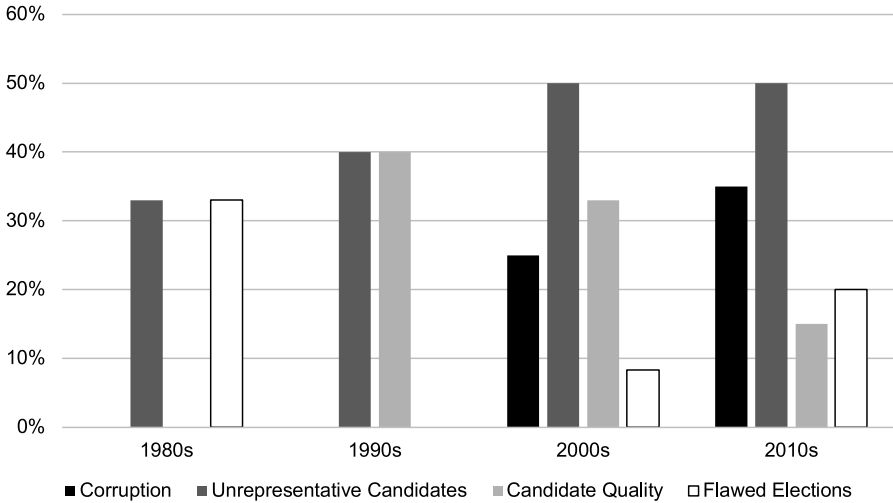


Figure 3.3. Prevalence of Common Invalid Vote Campaign Grievances by Decade

Source: Original data collection.

Note: The figure presents the prevalence of the four most common grievances. Campaigns protesting more than one common grievance are included multiple times in the figure; the denominator is the number of campaigns per decade. As a result, bars may not sum to 100 for each decade.

erful valence issue, especially for ordinary citizens who feel shut out from the mechanisms that allow the powerful to obtain special favors. Over the four decades examined here, 10 of 40 campaigns mentioned corruption as a central issue driving their calls for invalid voting.

For example, in Colombia in 2018, citizen groups online, as well as eliminated first-round candidate Sergio Fajardo, called on voters to cast blank ballots in protest of runoff candidates Gustavo Petro and Iván Duque, the eventual winner. One of their main grievances was corruption by the candidates and among the political class more generally. For example, CNN en Español quoted Fajardo’s Green Alliance Party as stating that second-round candidate Iván Duque was “undesirable for the present and future of Colombia. His candidacy represents all of the traditional corrupt and clientelist machines” (Redacción CNN En Español 2018). Similarly, an op-ed in the daily paper *El Espectador* noted that

the blank vote is useful within democracy. It serves to grab attention, to put salt in the wound [*un dedo en la llaga*]. In Colombia today, there exists a strong repudiation of the political class. The popula-

tion is tired of so much corruption, with so much impunity. (Páez Escobar 2018)

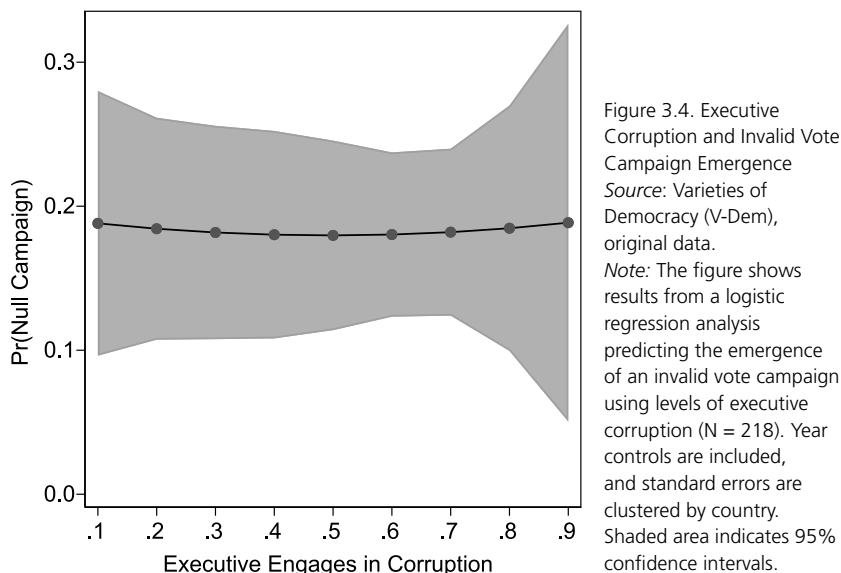
This view—that the political class was corrupt and that voters deserved better—was echoed by online groups. One organizer of the Facebook group *VotoEnBlancoColombia2018* noted in an interview, “We’re not looking for a Messiah, we want someone who knows how to govern and has an unimpeachable record. Our country is rich in everything, that is why we deserve a good president” (Saavedra Álvarez 2018).

Do invalid vote campaigns emerge more frequently when the political environment is more corrupt? Initial evidence suggests no relationship between high-level political corruption and the emergence of null vote campaigns. Figure 3.4 estimates the likelihood that an invalid vote campaign will emerge (y-axis) as a function of corruption in the executive branch (x-axis), measured using data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project.<sup>14</sup> The independent variable, and all independent variables used in this chapter, has been rescaled to range from 0 (which signifies the lowest value observed in Latin American democracies between 1980 and 2020) and 1 (the highest value during this period).<sup>15</sup> The dark gray line represents the likelihood that a campaign will emerge at different levels of executive corruption; higher values indicate more corruption in the executive branch. The line is flat, signifying that executive corruption does not predict the emergence of invalid vote campaigns.

This descriptive exercise certainly does not constitute “smoking gun” evidence that levels or public perceptions of corruption never affect the emergence of invalid vote campaigns. On the contrary, it may be that extremely high-salience corruption scandals lead null vote campaigns to emerge, or that the emergence of a null vote campaign in response to corruption will only occur if no anticorruption candidate is on the ballot. At the same time, corruption is a pervasive issue in Latin America; several major corruption scandals have occurred across the region in the years since democratic transitions. In other words, this measure of executive corruption may simply lack the nuance to capture the complex dynamics linking corruption to the emergence of invalid vote campaigns. Even so, from a purely descriptive perspective, I find no evidence of a direct link between executive corruption during an election year and invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections.<sup>16</sup>

### Unrepresentative Candidates

A second common grievance among those promoting the invalid vote is that competition had been stifled, leading to a menu of candidates that



did not represent the true preferences of the public. All told, 17 of 40 invalid vote campaigns included complaints of an unrepresentative choice set. This grievance was especially common during runoff contests, and was most frequently made by ideologically extreme parties eliminated from competition in the first round. Such campaigns called for blank or spoiled voting in protest of the condensed portion of the political space that was represented in the runoff.

For example, in the 1999/2000 Chilean election, six candidates competed in the first round. In Chile, if no candidate wins an absolute majority of the vote, a runoff is held. In 1999, as in all prior elections since the 1989 transition to democracy, the two candidates to advance to the second round represented Chile’s large coalitions. Ricardo Lagos (of the center-left Partido por la Democracia, and the center-left Concertación coalition) and Joaquín Lavín (of the right-wing Unión Demócrata Independiente, and the center-right Alianza coalition) were backed by two large coalitions that had held the reins of power since the democratic transition.<sup>17</sup> The eliminated leftist Humanist Party responded by calling for invalid voting among its supporters. The party made a statement insisting that

[the remaining candidates] want to distinguish themselves [from each other], but the truth is that Lagos and Lavín are the same. That is why we are calling on voters to opt for this third alternative, which is much more consequential. (Redacción El Mercurio 2000)

Similarly, during the first round of Paraguay's 2018 presidential election, small political parties and peasant groups called on their followers to spoil their votes because, they argued, the candidates on offer did not represent members of the poor and working classes. As one news source details, "Paraguayan *campesinos* announced that they would vote null in the upcoming general elections on April 22nd because of a lack of representativeness among the candidates" (TelesurTV.net 2018).

Not all complaints of similarity among competing candidates came from the political left. In Venezuela in 1998, for example, leaders of two center-right groups, Civil Resistance and the Liberal Network of Venezuela, called on their followers to cast invalid votes:

Both groups decided to promote the "conscious null vote" as a mechanism of protest, in blogs and statements online. "We want to vote for nobody because the two main candidates present the same thing: a socialist offering to govern the country. The only thing that changes is the color of their shirts, but the populist model is the same one that has failed in Venezuela for decades." (Pereira 2006)

Although these groups represent relatively extreme segments of the political spectrum, their calls for spoiled voting reflect a grievance commonly referenced by citizens who independently choose to invalidate their ballots: the perception that none of the available options represents their preferences. When this sentiment is widely shared in society, this may present an opportunity for a campaign promoting the blank or spoiled vote to emerge.

To assess whether invalid vote campaigns occur more frequently where the political offering is limited, figure 3.5 presents the association between V-Dem's measure of partisan differentiation (on the x-axis) and the emergence of an invalid vote campaign (on the y-axis). Higher values of "differentiation" indicate that parties have well-published and distinct platforms, while low values indicate that platforms are poorly publicized and indistinct.<sup>18</sup> I use the distinctive platforms measure rather than a measure of affective polarization because this better approximates campaigners' complaints that candidates either do not offer meaningfully different policies or are unrepresentative of the full ideological spectrum. The gray shaded area around the line denotes the 95% confidence interval around the point estimates.

If invalid vote campaigns are driven by a limited political offering, then campaigns should occur less frequently as partisan differentiation

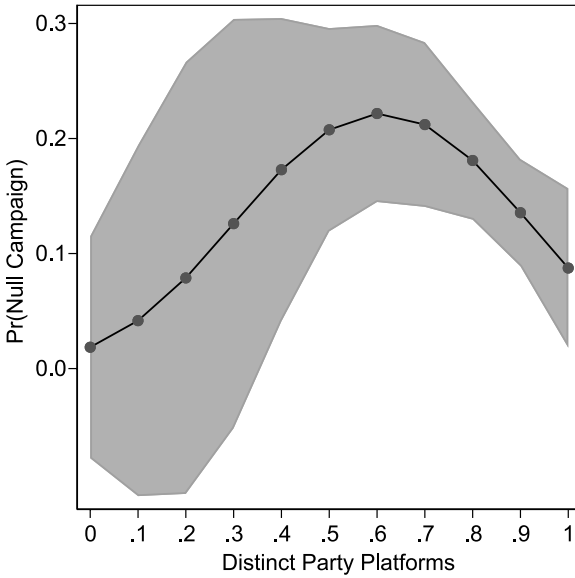


Figure 3.5. Distinct Party Platforms and Invalid Vote Campaign Emergence  
 Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), original data collection.  
 Note: The figure shows results from a logistic regression analysis predicting the emergence of an invalid vote campaign using levels of the distinctiveness of party platforms (N = 218). Year controls are included, and standard errors are clustered by country. Shaded area indicates 95% confidence intervals.

increases. This is not what figure 3.5 shows. Rather, there is no relationship between polarization and the emergence of an invalid vote campaign. The gray shaded confidence intervals overlap over the range of the “polarization” variable, signifying that the likelihood of observing an invalid vote campaign is no different where polarization is very high or very low.

This insignificant finding does not mean that polarization *never* fuels invalid vote campaign emergence. Indeed, the measure may be insufficiently nuanced to uncover those effects. For example, polarization varies within countries across election-rounds: extreme candidates are often eliminated in first-round elections, and many candidates moderate their positions in runoff elections in a bid to capture the median voter, thereby decreasing polarization across election rounds. This measure does not capture such cross-round changes in ideological polarization that could account for some of the variation in campaign emergence, particularly in runoff contests.

At the same time, it is possible that *affective* polarization shapes the emergence of invalid vote campaigns. Specifically, affective polarization could condition the association between high-salience grievances and against-all campaigns.<sup>19</sup> Where citizens hold substantial animosity toward members of opposing political “teams,” their perception of the stakes of losing an election increase. As a result, voters may downweigh antidem-

ocratic grievances where affective polarization is high, relative to where polarization is low. I turn to the potential indirect effects of affective polarization on campaign emergence later in the chapter.

### Low Candidate Quality

The third group of common grievances, complaints of low candidate quality, identifies candidates as “unfit” or “unqualified” for the presidency, usually because of moral failings or a lack of relevant political experience. This was a primary grievance referenced in nine of 40 invalid vote campaigns. These complaints often overlap with claims of political corruption. In Brazil’s second round election in 2006, for example, leaders from the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade and other political organizations called for null voting among their followers, citing the questionable ethical bona fides of both Geraldo Alckmin and the incumbent president, Luiz Inácio (“Lula”) da Silva. As one news article detailed:

For the office of the president, Brazilian voters will have eight names to choose from next month. The variety, however, is not necessarily good. At least, that is what some voters engaged in the null vote campaign have said—there are no good choices. . . .

Shame is a good word to describe the current political scene. Scandals involving public money and contracts have soiled the reputation of many candidates to the parliament and the ethical image of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva’s ruling party. (Lopes Neves 2006)

A similar complaint about the quality of the available options fueled the null vote campaign in Costa Rica in 1998. Presidential candidates José Miguel Corrales (the eventual winner) and Miguel Ángel Rodríguez were ideologically similar. Both promised to maintain Costa Rica’s robust welfare state, which had been sustained by foreign aid to one of Latin America’s few democracies during the Cold War. As one prominent academic explained:

“The system worked for a while, but the parties mimicked each other and the state’s interventionist model in public services won’t work anymore. Now, the public feels distanced from the process, and this election has become a crisis.” (Nuñez 1998)

Because of this convergence over policy, both candidates focused on personal attacks: “Corrales accused Rodríguez of corruption and ties to

international narco-traffickers. Rodriguez countered that Corrales was too inexperienced to be president and won his party's nomination in an [*sic*] primary election marred by widespread fraud" (Garvin 1998). Many Costa Ricans told pollsters that they intended to abstain rather than choose one of these imperfect options, and news outlets noted that "the rejection of both national political forces, the governing Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) and Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (USC), is unprecedented and has reached new extremes" (Nuñez 1998). It was in this context that campaigners called on voters to spoil their ballots: "The self-named Sovereignty Group has openly promoted abstentionism, distributing pamphlets that carry a brief message: 'Vote null, a vote of affirmation as citizens'" (Nuñez 1998).

Saying that a candidate is "low quality" is not a specific accusation. There are many features of candidates that could lead voters to view them as unqualified to serve as president, and the specific traits that lead voters and campaigns to make this complaint are election and context dependent. There are thus many ways to measure low candidate quality. I focus here on candidates without relevant political experience, or "antiestablishment" candidates.<sup>20</sup> This measure reflects complaints lodged by many invalid vote campaigns, that candidates lack political experience.<sup>21</sup> Figure 3.6 presents the association between the presence of antiestablishment candidates and the emergence of an invalid vote campaign.

As with corruption and polarization, I find no strong evidence linking the presence of antiestablishment candidates to the emergence of invalid vote campaigns. In elections with an electorally relevant antiestablishment candidate, null vote campaigns are slightly, but not significantly, more common (controlling for year, invalid vote campaigns are 15.9% likely to occur when no antiestablishment candidate competes, and 19.0% likely when an antiestablishment candidate is on the ballot). As above, it is important to caution that these results do not constitute smoking gun evidence that low candidate quality does not lead campaigners to call for invalid voting. Indeed, it is possible that some other measure of candidate quality has a large effect on campaign emergence, or that there is important heterogeneity across countries or election-rounds. However, the presence of inexperienced candidates specifically—a common complaint among invalid vote campaigners—does not directly fuel the emergence of invalid vote campaigns.

### Flawed Elections

Especially in transitional elections, null vote campaigns often rallied behind claims of flawed elections. In five cases, campaigners complained of election fraud. For example, leaders running pro-democracy campaigns under



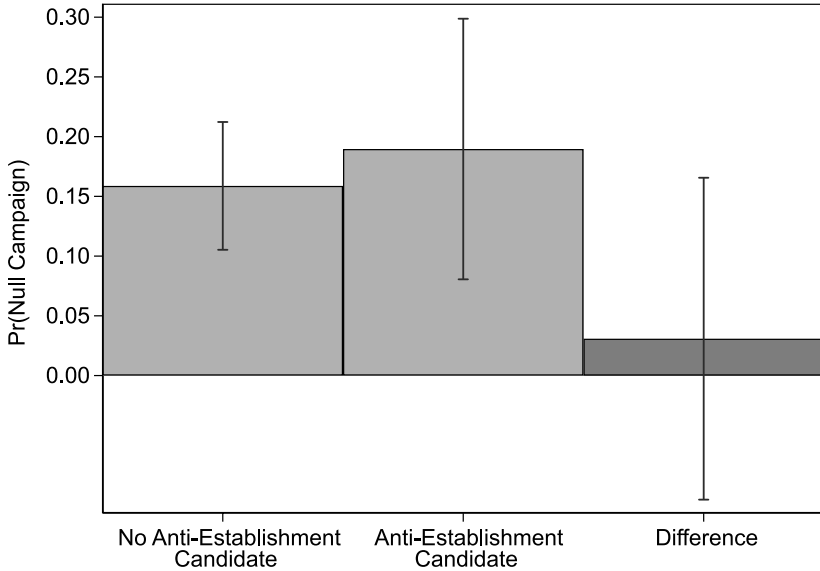


Figure 3.6. Antiestablishment Candidates and Invalid Vote Campaign Emergence  
 Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies, Carreras (2012).

Note: The figure shows the predicted probability that an invalid vote campaign will emerge when an antiestablishment candidate is (not) present, using the results from a logistic regression analysis (N = 217). Year controls are included, and standard errors are clustered by country. Whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

authoritarian leadership in Paraguay and Peru called on their supporters to cast invalid ballots to protest contests they claimed had been rigged by incumbents. Additionally, in three elections, campaigners complained that elections had been seriously marred by the illegitimate proscription of opposition candidates or the recognition of illegitimate candidacies. These calls for invalid voting delegitimized elections by undermining incumbents' mandates and, as well, drew the attention of the international press to the movement's grievances.

In Paraguay in 1988, General Alfredo Stroessner won his eighth presidential term in an election widely denounced by the foreign press as fraudulent. Leading into the election, disaffection among the citizenry appears to have increased in response to economic decline and continued human rights abuses by the Stroessner government. Citizens took to the streets in protest marches, and political repression spiked following years of relative peace. In the wake of these events, opposition parties called for their followers to boycott the election, by either abstaining or casting blank ballots (Graham 1988, A29). Amid rampant election violence, Stroessner won

reelection, but both the fraudulent nature of the vote and the widespread invalidation of ballots were reported on by international media, presented as evidence of a troubled and increasingly illegitimate regime.

Not all invalid vote campaigns protesting imperfect elections came from pro-democracy forces. For example, in El Salvador in 1982, leftist parties did not field candidates because they feared violent retribution from both the government and guerrilla fighters. At the same time, leftist *guerrilleros* directed voters to invalidate their ballots in an effort to delegitimize the result:

The elections have taken on a significance beyond their outcome because leftist guerrillas mounted a campaign to disrupt them and discourage voters from going to the polls. . . . [A] woman . . . said this evening that people had voted out of fear that officials would threaten those whose names did not appear on voting lists. She said she had deliberately cast a null ballot, one with a large X across it, as guerrillas had counseled. (Hoge 1982, A1)

While several invalid vote campaigns occurred during imperfect but ultimately democratizing elections like these, null vote campaigns protesting flawed elections have also occurred in countries experiencing sharp declines in democratic quality. In the lead up to the 2019 Bolivian election, for example, there was public outcry over incumbent Evo Morales's candidacy. Morales had served three terms as president and, in 2016, sought public approval through a referendum to remove the term limits that prohibited him from contesting a fourth term. When Bolivians narrowly rejected the proposal, Morales went to the constitutional court, which reversed the decision and declared that Morales could run for a fourth term. Massive street protests occurred in the lead up to the election, fueled by Morales's candidacy and poor management of environmental crises in the Amazon (Ramos 2019). Amid this broader social mobilization, some called for invalid voting to protest an election that they viewed as taking place on fraudulent premises. As one opinion leader wrote:

With [candidates] that divide the opposition, that enable, legitimate, and guarantee Morales' criminal [reelection], Bolivia can say NO again, with civil resistance through the null vote. . . . It is urgent that Bolivians and international defenders of liberty, democracy, and human rights make the world recognize this usurpation and act with consequence. (Sánchez Berzain 2019)

Unlike prior efforts to mobilize the invalid vote during Bolivian judicial elections (see Driscoll and Nelson 2014), invalid vote rates did not increase in 2019. Morales led in a first-round election that was decried as deeply flawed by the Organization of American States; he resigned and fled to Mexico just days later.<sup>22</sup>

Electoral unfairness can also manifest when incumbents work to undercut the opposition, stacking the deck in favor of preferred candidates and undermining the core democratic principle of contestation (Dahl 1971). Nicaragua in 2016 exemplifies this scenario. Daniel Ortega, the incumbent presidential candidate in 2016, had been an important figure in Nicaraguan politics since his involvement in the military junta from 1979 to 1984 and then as the elected president from 1985 to 1990.<sup>23</sup> After his return to the presidency in 2007, Ortega removed term limits and began repressing opposition groups' political and civil rights. In the years leading up to the 2016 general election, opposition media outlets reported, and Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders confirmed, preferential treatment for government-owned outlets and harassment of opposition reporters (Freedom House 2017; Reporters Without Borders 2017).

In 2016, Nicaragua's Supreme Court disqualified the presidential candidate representing a coalition of opposition parties, effectively limiting the opposition to the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), which many Nicaraguans believed to be co-opted by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN).<sup>24</sup> The united opposition argued that this removal was an attempt to manipulate the election outcome (La Nación 2016) and called on their supporters to abstain from voting or to cast invalid ballots in protest (Chamorro 2016).<sup>25</sup>

Are campaigns promoting blank and spoiled voting more likely to emerge when elections are flawed? Analysis of V-Dem data suggests that, indeed, they are. Figure 3.7 shows the relationship between the presence of election intimidation (on the x-axis) and the emergence of an invalid vote campaign (on the y-axis). Higher values of the "intimidation" measure signify that the opposition is more subject to intimidation by the incumbent.

Figure 3.7 shows that, where intimidation by the incumbent is at its highest, invalid vote campaigns are more likely to emerge. Invalid vote campaigns occur about 15% of the time where intimidation is rare. As intimidation becomes more frequent, however, the likelihood that an invalid vote campaign will emerge increases dramatically. The figure shows that invalid vote campaigns have an 86% chance of occurring where the intimidation of opposition parties is common. In short, invalid vote campaigns are substantially more common where incumbents work to undermine the quality of democratic elections.

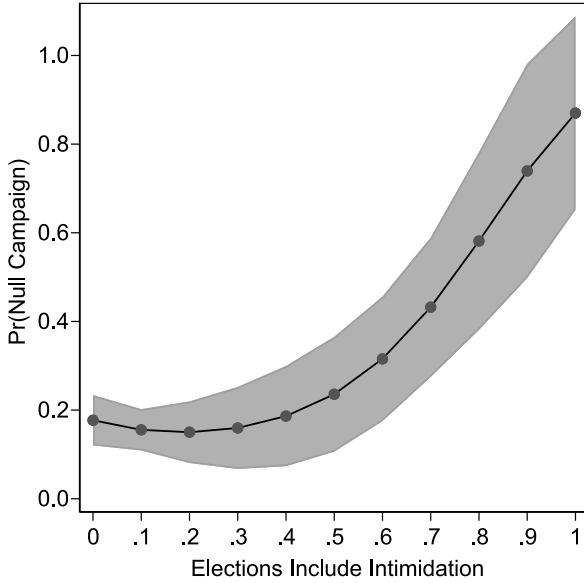


Figure 3.7. Election Intimidation and Invalid Vote Campaign Emergence  
 Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), original data.  
 Note: The figure shows results from a logistic regression analysis predicting the emergence of an invalid vote campaign using levels of election intimidation by the incumbent (N = 218). Year controls are included, and standard errors are clustered by country. Shaded area indicates 95% confidence intervals.

### Affective Polarization Conditions the Emergence of Null Vote Campaigns

The results presented above show that invalid vote campaigns occur most frequently where incumbents intimidate the political opposition. Other high-salience grievances, like corruption in the executive branch, do not predict the emergence of campaigns promoting the blank or spoiled vote. Yet there is reason to expect that the effects of high-stakes, antidemocracy grievances will differ depending on voters’ animosity toward other citizens in society (that is, levels of “affective polarization”). Specifically, high levels of affective polarization may decrease the relative importance of antidemocracy grievances for partisans. This, in turn, could weaken or change the relationships between grievances and the emergence of an invalid vote campaign. Because polarized voters are more willing to minimize antidemocratic behavior by members of their ideological team (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020; Singer 2018), the average voter should be less receptive to invalid vote campaigns that protest these egregious grievances where affective polarization is high. This lack of public receptiveness should, in turn, make campaigns less likely to emerge where affective polarization is high, even when an egregious grievance is present.

Figure 3.8 shows how affective polarization conditions the effect of two

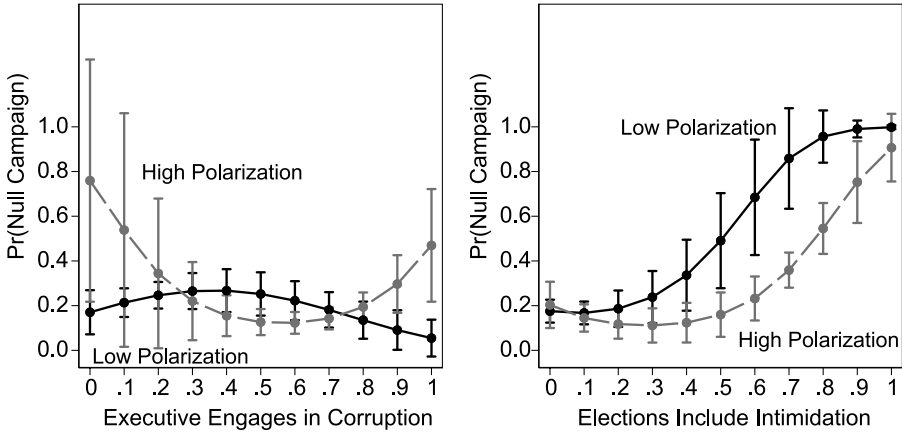


Figure 3.8. Invalid Vote Campaign Emergence Conditional on Grievances, Affective Polarization.

Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), original data collection.

Note: The figure shows results from logistic regression analyses predicting the emergence of an invalid vote campaign using an interaction between each measure of democratic quality and affective polarization ( $N = 218$ ). Year controls are included, and standard errors are clustered by country. The figure presents 84% confidence intervals around point estimates, which is equivalent to a 95% confidence interval around the difference across lines.

egregious grievances. I estimated models interacting V-Dem's measures of corruption and election intimidation with a measure of affective polarization assessing whether society is polarized into antagonistic political camps. The figure shows the effect of each independent variable (corruption and election intimidation) when polarization is low (0.2 on the 0–1 scale, in black) and when polarization is high (0.8 on the 0–1 scale, in gray).

Even accounting for affective polarization, executive corruption has little effect on the emergence of invalid vote campaigns for most of the independent variable's range. Where executive corruption is very low, out-party animosity does not influence the emergence of invalid vote campaigns: the differences between high and low polarization contexts are not statistically significant. Where executive corruption is at its highest, however, polarization predicts the emergence of invalid vote campaigns against expectations: invalid vote campaigns are 47% likely to emerge when society is polarized, but only 5.5% likely where polarization is low.

Turning to election intimidation, the results are strong and consistent with expectations. As in figure 3.7 above, in low-polarization contexts, the likelihood that an invalid vote campaign will occur increases sharply as parties' ability to participate freely declines. Where election intima-

tion is infrequent and polarization is low, the predicted likelihood that an invalid vote campaign will emerge is less than 20%. However, as opposition harassment becomes more widespread, invalid vote campaigns are virtually guaranteed to emerge in low polarization contexts (the predicted likelihood is over 95% for high values of intimidation). This overall pattern persists in high-polarization contexts: where elections are free, the predicted likelihood that an invalid vote campaign will occur is below 20%, and this likelihood increases sharply as opposition harassment increases. As opposition intimidation increases, however, a sizeable gap emerges. The figure shows that invalid vote campaigns are 24–50 percentage points less likely to occur where intimidation is above the midpoint (0.5) and affective polarization is high, compared to where affective polarization is low. The polarization gap does not close until harassment reaches its highest value. These results are consistent with the expectation that voters will overlook antidemocratic behavior when the public is divided into political teams, countenancing opposition intimidation as long as their political team is likely to win elections.

### *Anti-Null-Vote Campaigns*

During many of the campaigns documented here, public opinion leaders, clergy, and politicians made public statements urging citizens *not* to spoil their votes. These countermobilization efforts occurred simultaneously with and in elections following well-publicized null vote campaigns. Leaders of these “anti-null-vote campaigns” argued that spoiling the vote was at best frivolous or irresponsible and, at worst, antidemocratic.

For example, the 2012 Mexican presidential election pitted eventual winner Enrique Peña Nieto, of the formerly hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), against Mexico City’s former mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who ran under the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) banner. The center-right, incumbent Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) ran Josefina Vázquez Mota, former secretary of education, and Mexico’s first female presidential candidate. Following a highly visible null vote campaign in the 2009 legislative election, some campaigners promoted spoiled voting in 2012, naming candidate corruption and stagnation in the party system as grievances.

In response to these calls, opinion leaders published op-eds denouncing invalid voting as irresponsible, arguing that voters who refused to choose among the candidates would “foment the possibility that the party of the old authoritarian regime [the PRI] would return to power” (Bartra 2012).

Political cartoons circulated online arguing that the invalid vote was a “null protest” that would not result in political change. Several such cartoons featured variations of a stick figure throwing its spoiled ballot into a garbage can, suggesting that invalidating the ballot was, in fact, akin to throwing one’s vote away.

I do not examine anti-null-vote campaigns in depth here because of a fundamental difference in the logic of anti- versus pro-null-vote efforts. Those who oppose invalid voting promote status quo political behavior, and often support a particular candidate. Further, efforts to minimize invalid voting are a normal part of political campaigns: candidates and nonpartisan electoral management bodies regularly conduct citizen outreach encouraging voters to mark their ballots correctly. In short, while anti-null-vote campaigns are interesting in their own right, their effectiveness is a question that I leave for future research.

### Why Invalid Vote Campaigns Do Not Always Emerge

By organizing to protest a specific set of grievances, campaigns promoting the invalid vote can lend a particular meaning to that behavior, mobilizing a new coalition of citizens to spoil their votes. The 2010s saw a wave of high-level corruption scandals, and the expansion of internet use across Latin America. Given this backdrop, finding disgruntled citizens and galvanizing them to political action online should have been less costly than ever before. Why, then, do invalid vote campaigns not *always* emerge?

One likely answer to this question is the potential reputational cost to campaigners. Invalid vote campaigns can backfire when voters view their motivations as insincere. This hurts the credibility of the campaign and can also affect the reputation of campaign leaders in the future. Politicians and voters alike view campaigns led by political elites as especially prone to this risk.

Political elites, especially former candidates, are actors in the political game that invalid vote campaigns accuse of being unrepresentative, undemocratic, or corrupt. Some citizens may therefore view former candidates who make these accusations as sore losers whose personal political considerations, rather than deeply held convictions, lead them to call for spoiled voting. One local politician from Áncash, Peru, explained her decision not to call for invalid voting in a gubernatorial runoff in these terms, saying that “people could say, ‘you’re calling for null votes because you’ve lost, so you’re a bad loser!’” (Áncash, Interview 5).

Focus group participants also affirmed this perspective. For example, while discussing first-round candidate Elmer Cáceres Llica's decision to support invalid voting in the gubernatorial runoff in 2014, one participant in Arequipa, Peru noted,

I think it's mostly an issue of interests. Because [if] the elections are cancelled [*frustradas*], [because] 65 percent of the vote is blank and null, because that was the goal, you know? 65 percent. So that there could be a new election [and Cáceres Llica could compete again]. (Arequipa 3)

In brief, when elites call for invalid voting, voters may distrust and discount their rhetoric and search for ulterior motives.

In addition, voters sometimes view invalid vote campaigns led by elites as running contrary to politicians' interests and therefore lacking credibility. As one focus group participant in Cajamarca, Peru noted, "It doesn't make sense [for parties to mobilize invalid votes] . . . each candidate, on the contrary, has to go to the population to win their votes for themselves. They can't tell people to vote null" (Cajamarca 2). A focus group participant in Lima made a similar point:

The primary function [of parties] is to take an idea, or some complaint, and try to change it, right? So, I think that if [parties or politicians] promoted this kind of vote, they would be contradicting themselves . . . they would basically be signing their death warrant to society . . . Because it would cause indignation. (Lima 2)

Others noted that parties and candidates promoting invalid voting are "losing money" that they spent in the campaign, and "losing votes" that otherwise could support their organization (Lima 3). In short, partisan elites who promote invalid voting may struggle to gain credibility with voters, who have reason to view their campaign activities as insincere.

Following from this discussion, if a politician plans to seek elected office again in the future, she might prefer to accept her loss in the present with the goal of protecting her political reputation, rather than seek to attract future supporters through an invalid vote campaign. Are these reputational costs real, or do politicians merely believe that they exist? Former leaders of invalid vote campaigns have been able to leverage their campaigns to grow a larger political following, enabling their future election. Nayib Bukele in El Salvador in 2018 and 2019 is a clear example of such a trajec-



tory. On January 14, 2018, Bukele, then the mayor of El Salvador's capital city of San Salvador, called on his supporters to spoil their votes, since his party *Nuevas Ideas* would not appear on the ballot (El Salvador Times 2018). Following a substantial increase in the invalid vote, Bukele began to campaign for the presidency; he was elected president in 2019. However, outcomes like this are very uncommon. In addition to Bukele, Rafael Correa (in Ecuador, 2006)<sup>26</sup> and Alejandro Toledo (in Peru, 2000–2001)<sup>27</sup> are the only politicians who promoted the invalid vote in a legislative or presidential election to have later won a presidential election during this 40-year period.<sup>28</sup> Chapters 4 and 6 of this book present survey experimental and case study evidence from Peru demonstrating that elite leaders of invalid vote campaigns do pay a reputational cost for their actions: voters view these actions as self-serving, and perceive that elite mobilizers are sore losers.

### Discussion

In his classic framework, Hirschman (1978) identifies two ways in which discontented individuals can channel their dissatisfaction: by exiting politics or voicing their discontent. Null vote campaigns organize discontented citizens into a voting bloc, providing a participatory outlet—an opportunity for “voice”—for individuals with disparate preferences who otherwise might exit politics by assigning a specific protest motivation to invalid votes.

While invalid vote campaigns are not present in all Latin American presidential elections, they are far more common than previous scholarly work suggests: more than one-quarter of presidential elections since democratic transitions in the 1980s have included organized efforts to promote invalid voting, and these campaigns have become more prevalent over time. This chapter shows significant variation in the leadership and grievances of these mobilization efforts: while many invalid vote campaigns are led by elites, others are spearheaded by citizen groups. The most common grievances cited by invalid vote campaigns are pervasive corruption, limited competition, low-quality candidates, and election fraud. Questions remain about how campaigns are organized: How disparate or concentrated is campaign leadership, how are campaigns funded, and how do they identify and target potential supporters?<sup>29</sup>

Statistical analyses in this chapter show that invalid vote campaigns are more likely to emerge when incumbents undermine the quality of elections, and that affective polarization depresses the emergence of campaigns

where opposition harassment is widespread. These results underscore the pro-democratic content of invalid vote campaigns, which occur most frequently where political challengers cannot access power through elections. However, these results are consistent with other research showing that societal divisions can make voters indifferent to democratic backsliding that advantages their political team.

The descriptive information presented in this chapter raises several questions. A first set of questions asks whether and under what circumstances null vote campaigns successfully convince voters to invalidate their ballots. How often does the invalid vote increase when a campaign is present? Do invalid vote campaigns cause increased ballot invalidation, or do they merely emerge in contexts where ballot invalidation is already likely to increase? Chapter 5 addresses these issues in depth.

The results presented here also raise questions about the health of democracy over time. Do campaigns promoting invalid voting depress democratic public opinion by uncovering abuses of power, or do they mobilize committed democrats by focusing on especially egregious behavior by political incumbents? What are the long-term consequences of organized protest vote campaigns on citizens' perceptions of system responsiveness and other democratic attitudes? Do invalid vote campaigns hasten or slow democratic backsliding? Chapters 4 and 7 turn to these questions.

## Public Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns

Chapter 3 shows that invalid vote campaigns in Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020 varied widely in their leadership and grievances. How do citizens react to invalid vote campaigns? Do features of campaigns, like their leadership or grievances, change the public's perceptions? Answering these questions is a first step to understanding whether and under what circumstances invalid vote campaigns can shape voter behavior.

This chapter answers these questions using data from a nationally representative survey and a series of survey experiments conducted in Peru. Data from survey experiments is especially useful in the study of invalid vote campaigns. Very few public opinion surveys conducted during elections when a null vote campaign occurred include questions directly referencing the campaign.<sup>1</sup> But even if there were a plethora of such public opinion data available, it would be impossible to attribute public preferences to aspects of campaigns themselves, as opposed to other, unrelated cross-time or cross-national shifts in political circumstances. By asking citizens their opinions about a hypothetical invalid vote campaign in the context of a survey experiment, I am able to vary campaign characteristics, while holding all other factors constant. I can thus attribute changes in voters' opinions to features of the campaign itself, independent of the political environment.

I show that public approval of invalid vote campaigns is very low, on average. However, approval increases when campaigns are explicitly linked to egregious grievances, like corruption or election fraud. This increase in campaign approval is concentrated among those who express high support

for democracy. Put differently, those who are more likely to participate regularly in democratic politics respond more positively to invalid vote campaigns that emphasize egregious grievances, on average.

Public disapproval of invalid vote campaigns is higher when campaigns are led by politicians, affirming elites' intuitions that campaigning for the invalid vote can be reputationally costly (see chapter 3). Indeed, shifts in campaign approval are mediated by perceptions that elite leaders of null vote campaigns are sore losers, and that campaigns are undemocratic or irresponsible. In other words, citizens view the promoters of invalid vote campaigns with suspicion, and this suspicion drives their disapproval of campaign efforts.

The survey experiments presented here provide hints about the answers to questions about whether and when invalid vote campaigns will affect voter behavior. Observing increased invalid vote rates during an election that features an invalid vote campaign *suggests* that the campaign caused a change in voters' behavior. However, it is entirely possible that calls for invalid voting occur only when the public is already predisposed to spoil ballots en masse, and that campaigns themselves actually have a very small effect on public behavior. If public receptiveness to invalid vote campaigns changes substantially in response to campaign attributes, this implies that campaigns have the potential to substantially alter voter behavior. However, if public opinion does not change, or changes only at the margins, as campaign attributes shift, this suggests that, on their own, campaigns may have relatively little impact on behavior.

The evidence presented in this chapter is consistent with the latter perspective. While a hypothetical invalid vote campaign's attributes do shape public opinion, substantively these effects are small or moderate. At the same time, political deficits are more motivating to the public than are campaign attributes. That is, campaign grievances have the largest substantive effect on public approval of invalid vote campaigns, while the effects of a campaign's leadership and democratic orientations are quite small.

### Peruvians Express Low Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns in the Abstract

What does approval of invalid vote campaigns look like in a country where these campaigns are common? To answer this question, I analyze survey data gathered in Peru in 2017. Rates of invalid voting in Peru are among the highest in the world, due in part to the country's well-enforced manda-

tory vote laws. In the first-round presidential election in 2016, for example, 18% of all ballots cast were left blank or spoiled. Further, Peruvians have substantial experience with mobilization of the invalid vote: from anti-democracy campaigns spearheaded by the Sendero Luminoso in the 1990s to a series of pro-democracy campaigns throughout the early 2000s opposing second-round presidential candidates—and many recent examples from gubernatorial elections (see chapters 5 and 6)—campaigns promoting invalid voting take place regularly in Peru. There is therefore good reason to expect Peruvians to have well-informed opinions in responding to questions about these campaign efforts.

To assess citizen approval of invalid vote campaigns, I examine responses to a question from the 2017 AmericasBarometer survey in Peru:

**IVV3.** And how firmly do you approve or disapprove of individuals or groups trying to convince others to leave their ballot papers blank, or to nullify them?

Responses ranged from 1–10, with 1 indicating “strong disapproval” and 10 indicating “strong approval.” Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of responses to this question. On average, approval is quite low: 39.3% of respondents strongly disapprove of campaigns mobilizing voters to cast invalid votes, that is, they give the lowest possible response value. In stark contrast, only 11.7% of respondents approved of invalid vote campaigns, that is, they responded with values of 7 or higher.

*Who* approves of campaigns mobilizing the invalid vote? Do similar attitudes predict both campaign approval and ballot spoiling behavior? Appendix table A4.2 shows the results of an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model that predicts approval of invalid vote campaigns using the attitudinal and demographic variables identified in chapter 2 as likely predictors of invalid voting behavior (support for democracy, partisanship, trust in political parties, interest in politics, and education). I also control for respondents’ gender, wealth, age, and place of residence in the model, as these demographic factors covary with both the attitudinal factors and invalid voting.

Neither support for democracy nor political interest predicts approval of invalid vote campaigns. Trust in political parties and partisanship do predict campaign approval, although their effects run in opposing directions. Those who most strongly trust political parties report about 1.5 units more approval of invalid vote campaigns than those who trust parties the least—about half of a standard deviation increase. In contrast, those

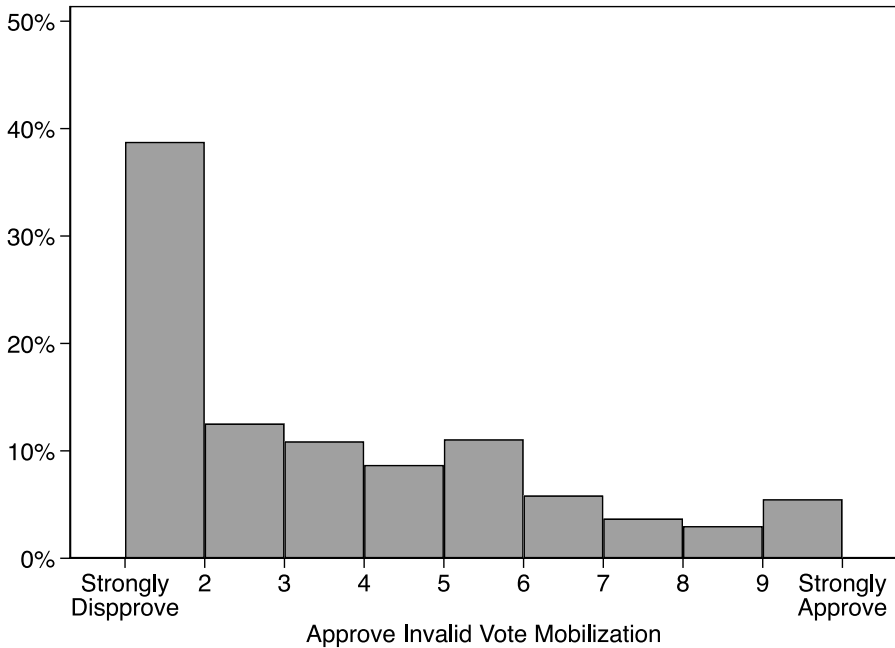


Figure 4.1. Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns in Peru, 2017

Source: AmericasBarometer, Peru (2017).

who identify with a political party express significantly lower approval of invalid vote campaigns, although this effect is more modest (0.5 units less, or 0.2 standard deviations).<sup>2</sup> Those with higher education express significantly lower approval of invalid vote campaigns compared to those with incomplete primary schooling, by about 0.7 units on the 10-point scale. In short, attitudes about political parties predict approval of invalid vote campaigns in the abstract, while attitudes about democracy and political engagement are at best weakly linked to campaign approval.

### Creating Conditions That Shift Public Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns

The survey question analyzed above is intentionally devoid of political context; it measures baseline approval of invalid vote campaigns independent of the political environment and campaign features. But elections do not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, campaigners try to shape the political environment, emphasizing specific grievances to drum up public support for

the invalid vote. Is it possible to create conditions that increase public support for invalid vote campaigns? To answer this question, I conducted two survey experiments that aimed to change public approval of invalid vote campaigns by manipulating (1) the grievances cited by the campaign, (2) the leadership of the campaign, and (3) the pro- or antidemocratic nature of the campaign. Below, I detail the motivation for these manipulations before presenting the results.

### *Grievances*

Campaigns that emphasize egregious grievances may find that citizens are more receptive to their appeals to cast blank or spoiled votes. Chapter 3 details the most common grievances raised by invalid vote campaigns. These include unrepresentative options, low candidate quality, corruption, and election fraud. Some of these grievances represent limitations to core democratic principles.<sup>3</sup> For example, ballot box stuffing by a powerful incumbent violates the mandate for “free and fair” elections. Similarly, when selective enforcement of electoral law results in the removal of a popular opposition candidate from competition, this limits the foundational pillar of open contestation. However, other grievances have a more tenuous relationship to democratic principles. For example, “low-quality” candidates may have limited political experience, while being substantively or descriptively representative of groups that have been marginalized historically in a nation’s politics. Such candidates might represent a threat to quality governance to some voters, while representing the increased accessibility of democracy to others.

This discussion points to important variation in the egregiousness of complaints that invalid vote campaigns cite.<sup>4</sup> A campaign protesting the proscription of a popular candidate is lodging a far more serious complaint than is a campaign protesting the elimination of an extreme candidate option in a runoff election. The former scenario undermines a foundational democratic principle, while the latter reflects a mechanical outcome of multi-round contests. To summarize, some common grievances, like corruption and election fraud, clearly represent egregious complaints, while others, like unrepresentative candidates, may not.<sup>5</sup>

Comparative scholarship also confirms that individuals who perceive egregious wrongs are more likely to boycott the perpetrators of these wrongs. For example, Beaulieu (2014) shows that election boycotts are more likely to occur where elites are relatively unconstrained and therefore more likely to engage in election fraud. At the individual level, survey

respondents and lab study participants are more likely to boycott firms whose actions they view as more egregious (Klein et al. 2002; see also Ettenson and Klein 2005). In short, there is reason to expect that support for invalid vote campaigns will be higher when these campaigns explicitly protest egregious grievances.

### *Leadership*

The leadership of an invalid vote campaign can also affect public perceptions and approval. Existing scholarship argues that, due to their existing relationships with voters, popular elites should be particularly well equipped to mobilize the null vote (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2018; Driscoll and Nelson 2014; Superti 2020). Political candidates forge ideological, demographic, or clientelistic bonds with citizens, which enable them to win votes on Election Day (Kitschelt 2000). Politicians who have cultivated such linkages with voters should be able to reactivate those bonds to mobilize voters in future contests. In theory, this ability should extend to campaigns promoting the invalid vote (Cisneros 2013; Superti 2020).

However, focus groups and personal interviews with citizens and elites in Latin America suggest that politicians may be particularly *poorly* equipped to mobilize invalid votes, because they are prone to be viewed as insincere or self-interested. Former political candidates and other elites are active participants in the political processes that invalid vote campaigns accuse of being unrepresentative, undemocratic, or corrupt. Voters may therefore view these elites as hypocrites who treat the process as legitimate when it serves their purposes and seek to undermine it after a loss. As one former gubernatorial candidate from Áncash, Peru noted in explaining her decision not to call for invalid voting in a gubernatorial runoff, “people could say, ‘you’re calling for null votes because you’ve lost, so you’re a bad loser!’” (Áncash, Interview 5). In short, some voters may view elites promoting the invalid vote as sore losers who are driven by personal political considerations rather than by principle.

Voters might also believe that campaigners who promote the invalid vote stand to benefit personally or financially from doing so. One focus group participant in Mexico, speaking about a journalist who promoted the null vote in 2009, typified this perspective: “I absolutely do not approve of [null vote campaigns] because [the campaigner] is taking advantage of the spotlight they have. . . . [This journalist] just wanted people to buy her book, to read it, to invite her on shows. . . . I think it’s an abuse that she invited people [to nullify their votes]” (ITAM 1). Political or social elites



may be especially prone to this criticism, as they are more likely to have products (e.g., books, news columns, radio shows) they can advertise to the public through their campaign efforts. In sum, while there is some reason to expect that voters will respond positively to invalid vote campaigns led by political elites, there is also reason to expect voters might instead reject elite-led efforts to mobilize the null vote.

### *Democratic Orientations*

A campaign's democratic orientations—that is, the values it espouses in its messaging—could also affect public perceptions of the campaign. Democracy is popular in Latin America, even though its popularity is in decline: more than half of citizens across the region agreed that democracy is the best form of government in the 2019 AmericasBarometer survey (AmericasBarometer 2019). There is thus reason to expect that explicitly pro-democracy campaigns will be more popular than campaigns that either explicitly oppose democracy or are silent about the political regime. This is reflected in campaign strategy: from 2000 to 2020, no invalid vote campaign during a presidential election made explicit antidemocracy appeals, although efforts during transitional elections in the 1980s and 1990s had more varied democratic orientations.

Voters might view even explicitly pro-democracy invalid vote campaigns as irresponsible. Because casting a spoiled ballot functionally disenfranchises disgruntled voters, some citizens likely view efforts to mobilize the null vote as misguided. Even in a country where an absolute majority or supermajority of invalid votes will nullify an election, this outcome is very unlikely to occur. As a result, invalid vote campaigns effectively encourage citizens to cast ballots that will not count toward deciding the election. Citizens, elites, and news sources regularly use this logic to frame invalid vote campaigns as irresponsible. For example, an Ecuadorian opinion column in 2006 argued that “it is wrong [*no está bien*] to promote the null vote, that is an error. A responsible party should promote voting for the person they believe is most capable to exercise citizen representation” (El Comercio, 2006). In this view, all invalid vote campaigns undermine democracy by disenfranchising their adherents.

At the same time, some likely view invalid vote campaigns as inherently antidemocratic. Null vote campaigns gain support by undermining public trust in political candidates. In doing so, campaigners run the risk of undermining trust in the political system that produces those candidates and, as an extension, of democracy itself. Indeed, columnists in the

region have argued that a preponderance of invalid votes is “damaging for democracy” (Agence France-Presse 2006). Alternatively, some may view the *consequences* of an invalid vote campaign as undemocratic. Because these campaigns fuel citizens’ frustrations with politicians, promoting the invalid vote could undermine “the democratic legitimacy of an [elected] government” (Brenes Villalobos 2006), the stability of the party system, and, as a result, democracy. Campaigns that explicitly denigrate the political system should be especially vulnerable to this critique, while campaigns that are framed as pro-democracy efforts should be less prone to this criticism.

### *Features of Citizens*

Individuals’ preexisting political attitudes should also shape their responses to invalid vote campaigns. In particular, citizens who are committed to democracy and those who trust political parties should respond differently to invalid vote campaigns compared to those who are indifferent about the political system or who distrust parties.

Scholars have long argued that citizens provide a “reservoir of support” (Easton 1975) that bolsters the political system when a country faces challenges (see also Booth and Seligson 2009; Claassen 2020; Lipset 1959). When a preponderance of citizens is not committed to democracy, this can lead to democratic decline, either through the election of authoritarian candidates (Canache 2002; Cohen and Smith 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019), or as the public signals its willingness for elites to take antidemocratic actions to further their agendas (Casper and Tyson 2014; Cohen et al. 2022; Graham and Svulik 2020; Singer 2018). In light of recent backsliding episodes across Latin America, voters who are committed to electoral democracy should be especially receptive to campaign appeals responding to violations of foundational democratic principles, such as the integrity of elections. At the same time, individuals who are committed to democracy should be more supportive of campaigns that are framed as explicitly pro-democracy efforts, compared to antidemocracy campaigns.

A second factor that likely conditions support for invalid vote campaigns, particularly those led by partisan elites, is trust in political parties. The discussion above lays out a series of reasons that voters might minimize or ignore concerns raised by politicians who campaign for the invalid vote, instead viewing campaigners as self-interested sore losers. However, certain individuals should be more likely to adhere to standard political science perspectives of citizen-elite linkage, responding positively to calls for invalid voting made by elites. Specifically, citizens who trust or identify

with political parties should be more likely to respond positively to their campaign efforts. Individuals who trust parties should view them as relatively credible sources of information, and therefore be more likely to take cues from partisan elites (e.g., Botero et al. 2015). Individuals who identify with a political party may engage in partisan motivated reasoning, justifying messages they would otherwise find unappealing when those messages come from their preferred party (Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Taber and Lodge 2006). Indeed, individuals who trust political parties may view partisan elites who promote the null vote as *more* credible than citizen groups that do the same.

In brief, I expect that individuals' preference for democracy, as well as their trust in political parties, will moderate the effect of campaigns' democratic orientations and leadership on public approval of null vote campaigns. Those who are more supportive of democracy should respond more strongly to calls for ballot spoiling that affirm basic democratic principles, while those who are the least supportive of democracy should respond positively to antidemocratic messaging. And individuals who trust parties should be more likely to respond positively to null vote campaigns led by political candidates, while those who distrust parties should react negatively to calls from such leaders.

### Experiment I: Manipulating Campaign Grievances

To test my expectations about the effect of grievances on campaign approval, I turn to the results of an online survey experiment conducted on a diverse national sample of 825 Peruvian citizens in 2020.<sup>6</sup> Although the sample was drawn using quotas for gender, income, age, and location of residence, it is not representative of the population with respect to educational attainment, income, or age. Because the sample is not representative, these results should not be used to make inferences about average public opinion in Peru (Castorena et al. 2023). However, differences across treatment groups, the main quantities of interest in what follows, are less prone to this concern, and can be used to make reliable causal inferences (e.g., Mullinix et al. 2015).

Survey participants were randomly assigned to either a control group or one of three treatment conditions.<sup>7</sup> Participants in the control condition received the abstract campaign approval question analyzed above: "And how firmly do you approve or disapprove of individuals or groups trying to convince others to leave their ballot papers blank, or to nullify

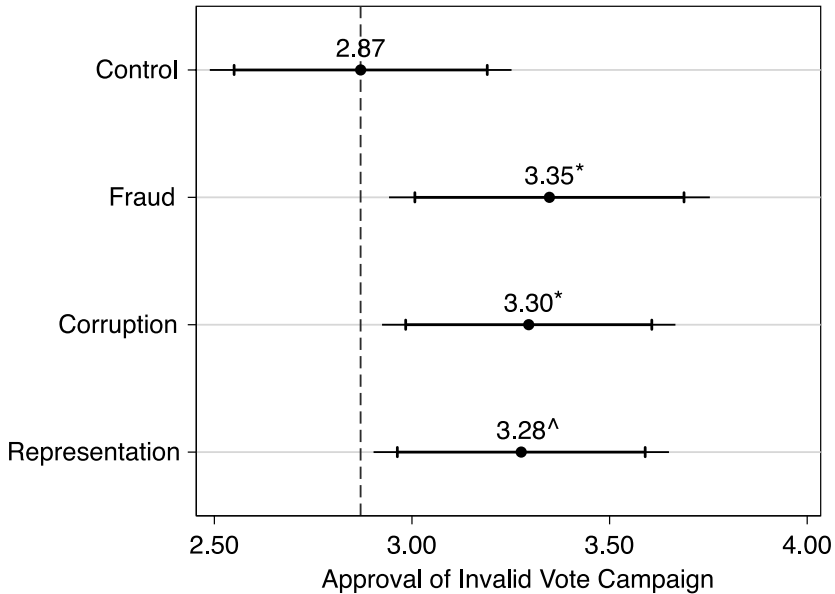


Figure 4.2. Average Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns by Condition

Source: Peru Study II.

Note: The figure presents results from an OLS regression model, estimated without controls.

Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals (two-tailed) around point estimates, with 90% confidence intervals at the vertical hash marks. Results are significantly different from the control with  $\wedge p \leq 0.1$ ,  $*p \leq 0.05$ , one-tailed. For complete results, see appendix table A4.4.

them?” Each treatment condition included additional language linking the campaign to one of three common grievances: fraud (“when there is strong evidence that the election will likely be fraudulent?”), corruption (“when there is a lot of corruption?”), and representation (“when the candidates do not represent the public’s preferences?”).<sup>8</sup> Fraud and corruption represent egregious grievances that are directly related to the quality of democracy. However, the representativeness of the candidates is somewhat less egregious: while low-quality representation can breed discontent with democracy in the long term, it is not an immediate threat to the political system itself.

The results, summarized in figure 4.2, show that Peruvians approve significantly more of invalid vote campaigns that protest specific grievances. As in the nationally representative survey data, approval of invalid vote campaigns is very low. Most respondents (between 43.3% and 51.4%) express the lowest possible approval in all four conditions, and average approval in the control group is 2.9 units on the 10-point scale. Introduc-

ing specific grievances increases average campaign approval significantly, to 3.4 units in the fraud condition, and 3.3 units in the corruption and representation conditions. These approval rates are significantly different from the control group at  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.1$ , and  $p < 0.1$  (one-tailed), respectively.<sup>9</sup> In addition to being statistically significant, these differences are substantively meaningful: each grievance increases campaign approval by about 0.4 standard deviations. Still, it is important to note that Peruvians strongly disapprove of invalid vote campaigns, irrespective of their stated grievances.

A second way to analyze these data is to consider how much *approval* of campaigns—rather than average values—changes across conditions. In the control condition, 51.4% of respondents give the lowest value of approval, and only 10.8% approve (values of 7 or higher on the 10-point scale) of the campaign. Disapproval remains high across conditions. However, when a hypothetical null vote campaign protests the egregious grievances of fraud and corruption, campaign approval increases to 14.8% ( $p = 0.1$ , one-tailed) and 14.7% ( $p = 0.09$ , one-tailed) of respondents, respectively. In the representation treatment, campaign approval does not change: 10.5% of respondents in this condition approve of the invalid vote campaign. That is, in the representation condition, respondents' attitudes shift from the strongest level of disapproval to lesser disapproval, which results in a significant treatment effect. However, campaign *approval* only increases when a campaign protests an egregious grievance.

Do democratic attitudes shape the effect of campaign grievances on citizen approval of invalid vote campaigns? Figure 4.3 shows that committed democrats are significantly more supportive of invalid vote campaigns that name a grievance. The figure plots average campaign approval (Panel 1) and average change in campaign approval (Panel 2) across levels of support for democracy, by condition. Dots represent point estimates, and the vertical whiskers in Panel 2 represent 95 percent confidence intervals around point estimates. Unlike the nationally representative sample from 2017, committed democrats in the online sample report significantly lower approval of null vote campaigns than those who express low support for democracy in the control condition.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, the figure shows a significant increase (of over 1 unit, between 0.4 and 0.5 standard deviations) in campaign approval among committed democrats for all three grievance conditions. That is, when a hypothetical invalid vote campaign names any of these three grievances, committed democrats express significantly higher approval of the campaign than when no grievance is mentioned.

As before, these findings change slightly when examining only those

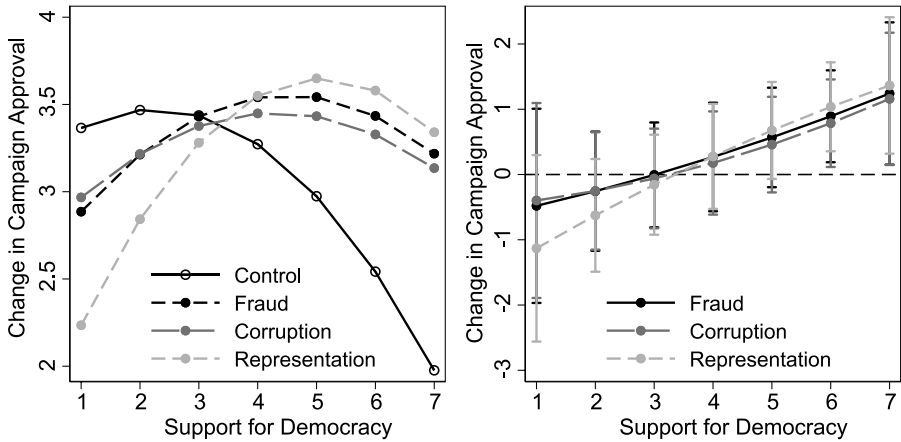


Figure 4.3. Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns by Democratic Orientations

Source: Peru Study II.

Notes: The figure presents the results of an OLS regression model interacting treatment condition and support for democracy, estimated without additional controls. The left panel presents average campaign approval by condition, and the right panel presents change in average approval, relative to control. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. For complete results, see appendix table A4.5.

who “approve” of an invalid vote campaign (values of 7–10 on the 10-point scale). Respondents who express the highest support for democracy are significantly more likely to approve of invalid vote campaigns that protest fraud and corruption, compared to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed). However, those who are least supportive of democracy are significantly *less* likely to approve of a null vote campaign that protests poor representation, compared to the control condition.

In sum, invalid vote campaigns are unpopular irrespective of campaign grievances. However, approval increases significantly when campaigns protest specific grievances, and especially egregious antidemocracy grievances. This shift in average opinion is due in large part to substantial attitudinal shifts among those who express strong support for democracy.

### Experiment II: Leadership and Democratic Commitment

Abstract approval for invalid vote campaigns in Peru is low, but increases significantly when campaigns reference specific grievances, especially the egregious grievances of electoral fraud and corruption. Do other features

of campaigns, specifically their leadership or democratic orientations, affect public attitudes? To answer this question, I analyze the results of a second online survey experiment conducted on a diverse national survey of 1,531 Peruvian citizens.<sup>11</sup>

This experiment presented readers with a short vignette about a hypothetical invalid vote campaign in a gubernatorial election protesting corruption and unrepresentative candidates. These grievances mirror the most common complaints lodged by invalid vote campaigns in Peruvian gubernatorial elections (see chapter 5). The vignette varies both the leadership (conditions 1 and 2) and democratic orientations (conditions a, b, and c) of the campaign. It reads:

[1. Citizen groups] [2. *Politicians and political parties*] have called on voters to spoil their ballots in an upcoming gubernatorial runoff election. [1. The newly formed Movement Against Corruption (MAC) says] [2. *Several local political figures, including the regional movement, “Movement Against Corruption” (MAC), say*] that both candidates have a record of corrupt behavior and do not represent the public’s preferences. Yesterday, Pablo Muñoz, spokesman for the MAC, said in a public statement that, “[a. democracy is a broken political system that cannot resolve these persistent problems and that] [b. democracy is the best system to resolve these persistent problems and that] [c.] the best way to send a message to the candidates is by casting an invalid ballot in protest on Election Day.”

Following the vignette, respondents were asked to rate their approval of the campaign on a 5-point scale; higher values signify stronger approval. Figure 4.4 presents the average treatment effect of the campaign’s leadership and democratic orientations on approval. Reflecting common wisdom among political elites, Peruvians express significantly lower approval of campaigns led by politicians versus citizen groups. The effect is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed), but it is substantively small: 0.12 units on the 5-point scale, just 12% of a standard deviation.

Turning to a campaign’s democratic orientation, the results are somewhat surprising. Approval of explicitly antidemocratic campaigns is *higher* than approval of pro-democracy campaigns. This difference is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) but again is substantively small: 0.13 units on the 5-point scale, or 13% of a standard deviation. Unlike the effect of campaign leadership, which becomes stronger when I control for imbalanced covariates, the effect of democratic orientations is not robust to demographic controls.

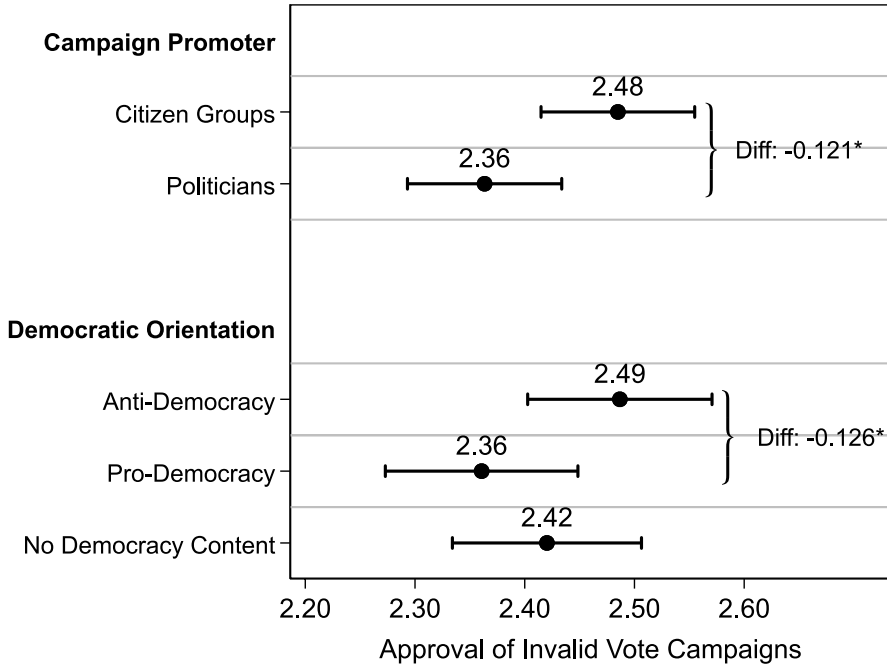


Figure 4.4. Average Effect of Campaign Attributes on Approval

Source: Peru Study I.

Note: The figure presents results from an OLS regression model including treatment dummies, estimated without controls. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. Differences between coefficients are significant with \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. For complete results, see table A4.7.

Do the mechanisms outlined above explain approval for campaigns with different characteristics? There are four reasons that an invalid vote campaign's leadership or democratic orientations should shape citizen approval. First, the public might believe that politicians promoting invalid voting are sore losers. Second, citizens could believe that those who promote invalid voting stand to benefit from the campaign, usually materially. Third, voters might view invalid vote campaigns as irresponsible or, fourth, as undemocratic.

These mechanisms likely move together. If a voter views a campaign as antidemocratic, for example, she will likely also view that campaign as irresponsible, particularly if she supports democracy. Similarly, a citizen who believes that an invalid vote campaign's leadership is self-interested might reasonably believe those leaders are irresponsible. My goal here is not to assess the relative importance of specific mechanisms. Rather, I aim to determine whether features of campaigns shape citizen attitudes, and



TABLE 4.1. Mechanisms and Survey Items

Mechanism	Question
Sore loser	To what extent do you think that the null vote campaign's leaders are sore losers? (1-4)
Benefit	To what extent do you believe that the null vote campaign's leaders stand to benefit from the campaign? (1-4)
Responsible	To what extent do you believe that the null vote campaign is irresponsible? (1-5)
Democratic	To what extent do you believe that the null vote campaign is democratic? (1-5)

whether these attitudes, in turn, shape campaign approval. To measure each mechanism, I asked respondents four questions immediately following the vignette, and immediately prior to the approval question. Table 4.1 presents the question wording; in all analyses, I have coded variables so that higher values indicate “more of” each factor.

Overall, and unsurprising given the low levels of approval described above, perceptions of invalid vote campaigns are negative. Pooling across treatment conditions, 75.6% of respondents said that campaigners are sore losers, and 77.9% of respondents thought campaigners stood to benefit from the campaign. More than half (57.8%) of respondents believed that the campaign was irresponsible, while 35.6% of respondents reported that the campaign was undemocratic. These distributions, while not representative of average public opinion in Peru, provide important context for the treatment effects below.

Figure 4.5 shows how campaign leadership shapes these perceptions. Once again reflecting common wisdom among political elites, respondents more strongly believe that elite campaigners are sore losers and stand to benefit from the campaign, compared to citizen groups campaigning for the invalid vote. On the other hand, Peruvians view campaigns led by citizen groups as both more responsible and more democratic than campaigns led by politicians, on average. These differences are statistically significant with  $p \leq 0.05$ . However, the size of effects is small, ranging from 10% to 11% of a standard deviation for each dependent variable.

Figure 4.6 shows results from the same analysis, but presents the effect of a campaign's pro- or antidemocracy orientations. Contrary to expectations, a campaign's democratic messaging does not affect citizens' perceptions of the campaign. The difference in perceptions that the campaign is responsible is negligible (about 2% of a standard deviation). Surprisingly, a campaign's pro- or antidemocracy stance does not shape public percep-

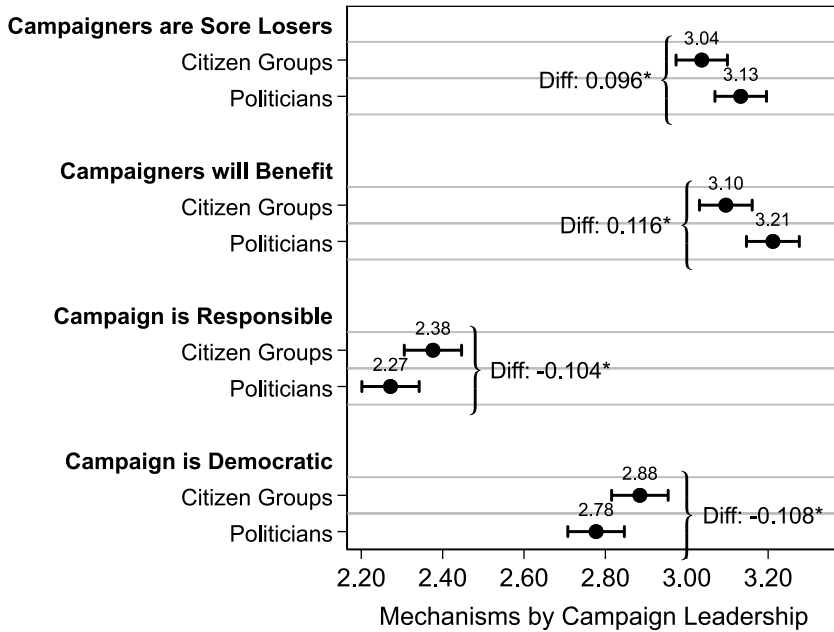


Figure 4.5. Mechanisms by Campaign Promoter

Source: Peru Study I.

Note: The figure presents results from an OLS regression model estimated without demographic controls but controlling for a respondent's assigned democracy condition. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. Differences between coefficients are significant with  $* p \leq 0.05$ . For complete results, see table A4.7.

tions that it is democratic. In fact, respondents indicated that the antidemocracy campaign was *more* democratic than the pro-democracy campaign; however, this 0.1-unit difference is not statistically significant. Nor does information about a campaign's democratic orientation significantly shape beliefs that campaigners are sore losers, or that they stand to benefit from the campaign. In sum, the hypothetical invalid vote campaign's democratic orientation has no significant impact on voters' perceptions of the campaign or its leaders.

The evidence presented above shows that campaign leadership has a small but significant effect on citizens' beliefs about invalid vote campaigns. Do these perceptions affect campaign approval? Additional analyses show that three mechanisms predict approval of invalid vote campaigns: perceptions that campaign leaders are sore losers, belief that the campaign is responsible, and belief that the campaign is democratic. Those who strongly believe that campaigners are sore losers express 0.5 units

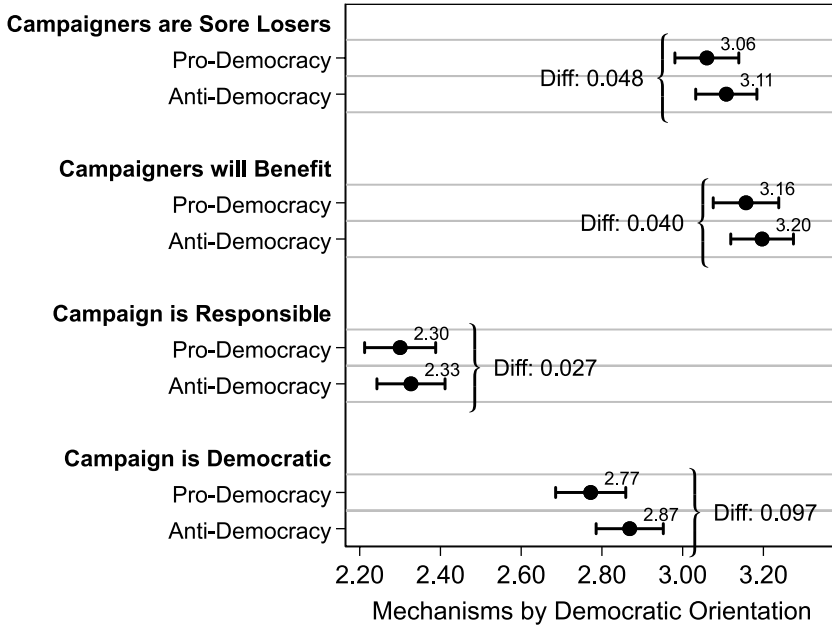


Figure 4.6. Mechanisms by Democratic Orientation

Source: Peru Study I.

Note: The figure presents results from an OLS regression model estimated without demographic controls but controlling for a respondent's assigned leadership condition. Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. Differences between coefficients do not reach standard thresholds of statistical significance. For complete results, see table A4.7.

lower campaign approval (about half of a standard deviation) than those who think campaigners are not sore losers at all. Peruvians who think an invalid vote campaign is very responsible report 1.1 units more approval (1.1 standard deviations) than those who think the campaign is very irresponsible. And respondents who believe the campaign is very democratic express 1.2 units (1.2 standard deviations) higher campaign approval than those who think that the campaign is not democratic at all. These results are all significant with  $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed, and the effects are quite large.

Individuals' perceptions of campaigns mediate some of the effect of the treatments on campaign approval. In models predicting campaign approval that control for treatment condition and for these mechanisms, the effects of campaign leadership and democratic orientations attenuate and are no longer statistically significant. That is, features of invalid vote campaigns can shape campaign approval indirectly, by shaping beliefs about campaign leaders and the nature of the campaign.

*Heterogeneous Effects: Support for Democracy and Trust in Parties*

The above analyses focus on the average effect of campaign leadership and democratic orientations on citizens' perceptions of invalid vote campaigns. However, individuals' preexisting attitudes, especially their democratic orientations and trust in political parties, likely shape the way they respond to campaigns with different features. This section examines these factors in turn.

A first expectation is that citizens' support for democracy will shape their beliefs that invalid vote campaigns are responsible. The first column of figure 4.7 presents the results of analyses interacting individual support for democracy, measured prior to treatment, with a campaign's democratic orientation. The top panel plots the resulting point estimates, and the bottom panel plots the treatment effect for each level of support for democracy, with 95% confidence intervals. The figure shows that committed democrats do not view pro-democracy campaigns as more responsible, compared to campaigns that explicitly oppose the political system. For individuals who support democracy (values of 5–7 on the 7-point scale), the treatment is positive but has no significant effect: the confidence intervals in the bottom panel cross the horizontal zero line. However, those who do not support democracy (values of 1–3) view antidemocracy campaigns as significantly more responsible than pro-democracy campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

A second set of expectations is that individuals who are relatively less trusting of politicians should hold more negative views of elite campaigners. Trust in political parties only modestly affects respondents' perceptions of elite-led campaigns. Columns 2 and 3 in figure 4.7 show the effect of campaign leadership on perceptions that campaign leaders are sore losers and that they will benefit from the campaign, respectively, conditional on the type of leader and respondents' trust in political parties. Those who express lower trust in parties are slightly more likely to report that elite campaigners are sore losers and that they will benefit from the campaign, compared to citizen campaigners. For those who trust political parties (values of 5–7 on the 7-point scale—only 9.4% of the sample), estimates are imprecise, and treatment effects are not statistically significant.

Substantively, the results for these models are quite modest. The largest effect is for perceptions that a campaign is responsible. Among Peruvians who are the least supportive of democracy, antidemocracy campaigns moderately increase beliefs that the campaign is responsible (0.4 standard deviations). However, as support for democracy increases, the effect of a campaign's democratic orientations on citizens' perceptions of responsibility

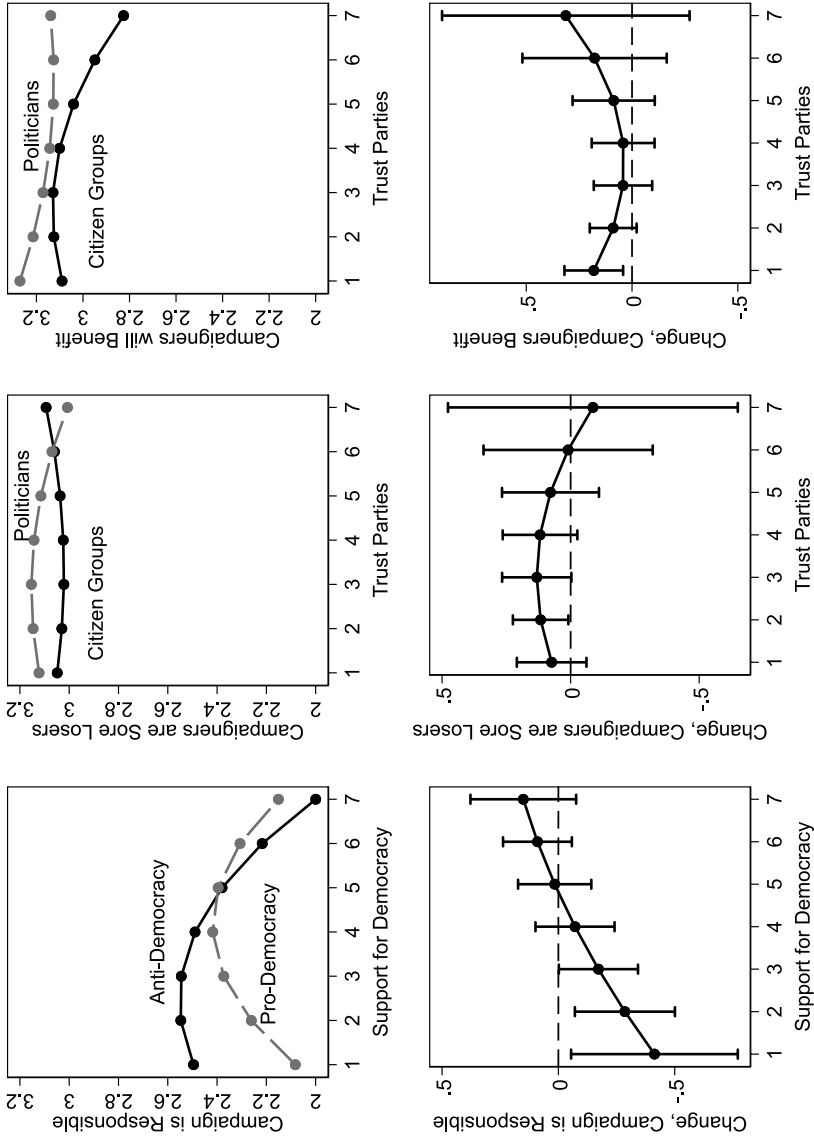


Figure 4.7. Campaign Perceptions Conditional on Treatment, Support for Democracy, and Trust in Parties

Source: Peru Study I.

Note: The figure presents results from OLS regression models estimated without demographic controls but controlling for assigned leadership and democracy conditions. The top panel plots point estimates, and the bottom panel reports cross-group differences, with 95% confidence intervals. For complete results, see tables A4.8 and A4.9.

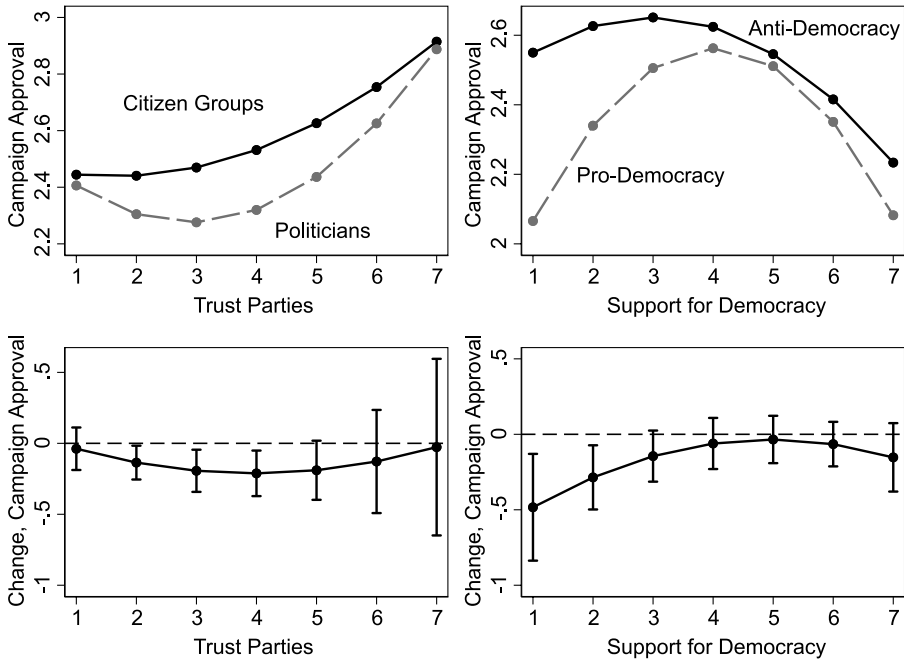


Figure 4.8. Campaign Approval Conditional on Trust in Parties, Democratic Orientation

Source: Peru Study I.

Note: The figure presents results from OLS regression models estimated without demographic controls but controlling for assigned leadership and democracy conditions. The top panel plots point estimates, and the bottom panel reports cross-group differences, with a 95% confidence interval. For complete results, see tables A4.8 and A4.9.

declines. For perceptions that campaigners are sore losers or stand to benefit, effects are smaller, ranging from 8% to 12% of a standard deviation.

Figure 4.7 shows that the effects of invalid vote campaigns' characteristics depend on citizens' prior attitudes. Peruvians who disagree that democracy is the best form of government react more positively to campaigns that explicitly oppose democracy, while individuals who distrust political parties react more negatively to campaigns led by politicians. Do prior attitudes also predict citizens' overall approval of invalid vote campaigns?

Figure 4.8 shows that individuals' prior attitudes do indeed shape the effect of the leadership and democratic orientations treatments on campaign approval. The figure predicts approval of the invalid vote campaign described in the vignette. The first column examines the effect of campaign leadership, conditional on trust in parties. The second column shows the

effect of a campaign's democratic orientations, conditional on support for democracy. The top panel presents point estimates, while the bottom panel presents the estimated treatment effect, with 95% confidence intervals, across levels of each independent variable. As expected, individuals who distrust political parties (values of 1–3 on the 7-point scale) express higher approval of invalid vote campaigns led by citizen groups, versus political elites. However, as trust in parties increases, this gap disappears: leadership does not predict campaign approval for those who trust parties the most. The size of these significant effects is modest, ranging from -0.14 units (14% of a standard deviation) to -0.21 units (21% of a standard deviation). With respect to a campaign's democratic orientations, column 2 shows that support for democracy affects individuals' receptiveness to invalid vote campaigns. These effects are concentrated among those least supportive of democracy: Peruvians who express low support for democracy report significantly higher approval of antidemocracy campaigns, compared to pro-democracy campaigns. The size of these significant effects is small to moderate, ranging from -0.14 units (14% of a standard deviation) to -0.41 units (41% of a standard deviation). Among committed democrats, approval is not conditioned by a campaign's democratic orientation.

To sum up, individuals' preexisting political attitudes change their receptiveness to invalid vote campaigns with particular attributes. Antidemocracy orientations shape beliefs about campaigns that are framed as a reaction to democracy, while distrust of political parties affects assessments of campaigns led by politicians versus citizen groups. These prior attitudes affect citizens' perceptions of invalid vote campaigns as responsible, democratic, or self-interested; they also shape campaign approval.

These results suggest that campaign success could depend on underlying political attitudes where they occur. In societies where trust in political parties is low, for example, invalid vote campaigns led by political elites may be less likely to gain traction. Where support for democracy is low, on the other hand, invalid vote campaigns opposing the existing political order may find a more amenable audience. However, the small size of these effects further suggests that these features may only affect a campaign's likelihood of success at the margins.

### Robustness and Extensions

This chapter draws heavily on survey data collected in Peru, where invalid vote rates are high and campaigns promoting the blank and spoiled vote

occur regularly. Do these results travel to other national contexts? A series of robustness checks suggests that they do, on average. Below, I outline results from a series of additional studies testing these questions. First, I describe the effects of grievances on campaign approval in surveys and survey experiments conducted in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Next, I address concerns that weak effects for the democracy treatment might result from the wording of the vignette. Finally, I examine the extent to which the vignette experiment travels to another national context, Mexico.

### *Does the Effect of Grievance Travel?*

Analysis of data gathered from nationally representative surveys in Chile (2017) and Nicaragua (2017) confirms that, across the region, invalid vote campaigns are unpopular.<sup>13</sup> A large plurality of citizens in both countries express strong disapproval of invalid vote campaigns in the abstract. In Chile and Nicaragua, 47.6% and 41.2% of respondents gave the lowest level of approval to the abstract campaign approval question, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Only 11.8% of respondents approved of invalid vote campaigns in Chile, compared to 20.7% of Nicaraguans.

In addition to these descriptive data, online surveys in Brazil (2018) and Mexico (2020), as well as the 2017 survey in Nicaragua, experimentally varied the invalid vote campaign's grievances. In Nicaragua, half of respondents were asked how much they approved of invalid vote campaigns protesting election fraud, while in Brazil, one-third of respondents were asked their approval of campaigns protesting either corruption or fraud. The Mexico study exactly replicates the Peruvian survey question examined in Experiment I, asking about corruption, fraud, and unrepresentative options. In all three countries, respondents in the control condition received an identical question asking their approval of invalid vote campaigns, without any information about campaign grievances.

As in Peru, campaign approval is significantly higher in the egregious grievance conditions in Brazil and Nicaragua ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed). Also consistent with results from Peru, effects are substantively moderate: about 0.3 and 0.4 standard deviations for the fraud and corruption conditions, respectively, in Brazil, and about 0.2 standard deviations for the fraud condition in Nicaragua. In both cases, campaign approval also varies according to respondents' prior support for democracy, consistent with results shown in figure 4.2. Specifically, campaign approval is significantly higher among respondents who support democracy when the campaign protests an egregious grievance (corruption or fraud) compared to the control condition.



In Mexico, however, results are mixed. Average levels of campaign approval are only significantly different from the control group ( $p < 0.1$ , one-tailed) in the representation condition. Comparing the proportion of respondents who approve of the invalid vote campaign yields significantly higher values in the fraud and representation conditions; the corruption condition is not statistically distinguishable from the control group. Substantively, even this significant effect is very small (0.1 standard deviations). Nor does the effect of specific grievances vary by respondents' support for democracy in Mexico.

Taken together, these results suggest that patterns in Peru resemble those in other countries. Specifically, in a high-quality, nationally representative sample in Nicaragua and a nationally diverse sample of citizens in Brazil, all of the chapter's central grievance findings replicate. However, partial replication in the Mexico study raises questions about scope conditions, which I address below.

### *Is the Antidemocracy Vignette Too Weak?*

A second potential concern relates to the democratic orientations treatment used in Experiment II. The effect of campaigns' democratic orientations on citizen approval of invalid vote campaigns runs against expectations and is not robust to controlling for demographic imbalances. However, the antidemocracy treatment is also relatively weak; respondents may have interpreted the vignette as an expression of frustration with the state of national politics, rather than an explicit rejection of the political system. To address this concern, I replicated the vignette experiment in a smaller ( $N = 825$ ) sample, using a stronger antidemocracy treatment.<sup>15</sup> The new vignette read as follows:

[1. Citizen groups] [2. *Politicians and political parties*] have called on voters to spoil their ballots in an upcoming gubernatorial runoff election. [1. The newly formed Movement Against Corruption (MAC) says] [2. *Several local political figures, including the regional movement, "Movement Against Corruption" (MAC), say*] that both of the candidates have a record of corrupt behavior and do not represent the public's preferences. Yesterday, Pablo Muñoz, spokesman for the MAC, said in a public statement that, "[a. democracy is a broken political system that cannot resolve these persistent problems, the best way to make change is to take up arms against the state] [b. *democracy is the best system to resolve these persistent problems, to make*

*real change, citizens have to participate actively in their communities*]. He added that, “the best way to send a message to the candidates is by casting an invalid ballot in protest on Election Day.”

In contrast to the findings presented above, but consistent with expectations, average approval of the elite-led antidemocracy campaign was significantly lower than approval in all other conditions ( $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed, with a modest effect size of 0.3 standard deviations; see table A4.10). Respondents also affirmed that pro-democracy campaigns were more democratic ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed). However, even the strong treatment did not shape average beliefs that the campaign was responsible. As above, prior attitudes conditioned the effect of treatment on beliefs about campaign responsibility: respondents who are unsupportive of democracy view the antidemocracy campaign as more responsible, while committed democrats view the pro-democracy campaign as more responsible ( $p < 0.1$ , two-tailed).

In short, the weak democracy treatment likely affects the average effect of campaign attributes on approval. However, the null effect of the democracy treatment on perceptions of the campaign (e.g., whether the campaign is responsible) does not appear to be attributable to question wording. Rather, this relationship is conditioned by prior attitudes in Peru, resulting in an average null effect.

### *Does the Effect of Campaign Leadership Travel?*

Finally, I assess the extent to which findings about campaign leadership and democratic orientations travel to a second national context, Mexico. I replicated the strong vignette experiment described in the paragraphs above on a diverse online sample of 1,628 Mexican respondents; see appendix table A4.1 for sample details. I made slight changes to the language to fit the Mexican context, referring to a local party rather than a regional movement. I also included a “control” democratic orientation condition, as in the original experiment. Otherwise, the treatment is identical.

The replication produced mixed results (see table A4.11). Consistent with findings from Peru, estimated campaign approval was highest in the citizen group condition with no democratic content.<sup>16</sup> However, average campaign approval is effectively static across the remaining conditions. Nor do the treatments affect mechanisms as expected: campaigns’ leadership and democratic orientations have no significant effect on any of the four mechanisms.

As in Peru, perceptions of campaigns have a strong effect on campaign approval. Beliefs that a campaign is democratic and responsible are positively associated with campaign approval ( $p \leq 0.01$ ), while perceptions that leaders are likely to benefit from the campaign or are sore losers negatively predict campaign approval ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). These effects are modest in size, ranging from 5% of a standard deviation (benefit) to one-third of a standard deviation (responsible). However, these perceptions do not mediate the effect of the treatment. Rather, the results suggest that beliefs about invalid vote campaigns in Mexico shape campaign approval, that respondents likely held these attitudes prior to taking the survey, and that exposure to the vignette did not alter perceptions of invalid vote campaigns.

Why did the grievance experiment only partially replicate in Mexico? And why did the vignette experiment fail to change respondents' perceptions of the invalid vote campaign there? There are at least two possible reasons. A first explanation for the difference in results is Mexico's recent history with coordinated, high-salience *anti*-invalid vote campaign efforts by the media, religious groups, and the electoral commission, especially during the 2018 presidential election. Widespread media discussion of invalid vote campaigns as irresponsible may have "pretreated" citizens, making their views very difficult to change through a single experiment. A second alternative explanation is that respondents in Mexico simply paid less attention to the vignette. Unfortunately, with the available data, it is not possible to adjudicate between these explanations.

## Discussion

This chapter set out to describe patterns of support for invalid vote campaigns in Peru, where rates of invalid voting are high and campaigns promoting the invalid vote occur regularly, and to assess whether it is possible to create conditions that shift public approval for these campaigns. The results are clear: a plurality of Peruvians (and, indeed, a plurality of respondents in five Latin American democracies) express strong disapproval of campaigns promoting the blank or spoiled vote. While interest in politics and support for democracy do not predict approval of invalid vote campaigns in the abstract, trust in political parties, partisan identification, and educational attainment do.

I find that public support for invalid vote campaigns changes significantly depending on the campaign's stated grievances and leadership. Peruvians approve more of invalid vote campaigns that cite egregious

grievances, like corruption or likely electoral fraud, compared to a campaign citing no specific grievances. Campaign leadership also significantly affects public approval of invalid vote campaigns: Peruvians express significantly lower approval of campaigns led by political elites compared to citizen groups. However, the effect of campaign leadership is much more modest than the effect of grievances.

In Peru, campaign approval is mediated by three mechanisms—beliefs that campaigners are sore losers, that the campaign is irresponsible, or that the campaign is antidemocratic—and moderated by citizens' preexisting support for democracy and trust in political parties. Citizens who do not support democracy express higher approval of antidemocracy invalid vote campaigns, while those who distrust political parties express more negative assessments of campaigns led by politicians versus citizen groups.

The survey experiments presented in this chapter are somewhat unique in the study of invalid voting. Scholars have used lab experiments (Cunow et al. 2021; Pachón et al. 2017) and quasi experiments (Cunha and Crisp 2022; Desai and Lee 2021) to examine how the number of candidate options or the structure of the ballot shapes invalid voting. However, the vast majority of studies about blank and spoiled voting to date rely on the correlational analysis of electoral or survey data. Prior work examines whether and how individuals' attitudes and experiences, political institutions, and societal factors affect ballot invalidation. This chapter advances our understanding of how invalid vote campaigns affect the public by randomly varying features of hypothetical campaigns. Doing so allows me to conduct internally valid tests of individual-level theories that cannot be tested with high levels of confidence using observational data. It is my hope that scholars will continue to use this tool in examining invalid voting in the future.

Several questions remain about how the public interacts with invalid vote campaigns. For example, how does campaign leadership interact with campaign grievances in shaping public approval of invalid vote campaigns? The experimental analyses presented here do not vary campaign grievances and leadership simultaneously. The grievance experiments provide no information about campaign leadership, and the leadership experiments present a unified, egregious grievance (corruption and unrepresentative candidates). It is possible that campaign leadership matters more when grievances are less egregious, or that grievances matter less when campaign leaders are more credible. At the same time, additional factors may drive citizens' approval of invalid vote campaigns. For example, more credible campaigners and grievances should be better positioned to shape public

opinion than less credible ones. Future work should further examine these, and other, questions.

Lingering questions aside, this chapter has implications for our understanding of the circumstances under which invalid vote campaigns are likely to affect election outcomes. The results suggest that campaigns will be differentially successful based on their grievances, their leadership, and the underlying distribution of political attitudes where they emerge. Campaigns protesting egregious political grievances should always be more likely to succeed, especially if a large portion of the population supports democracy in the abstract. With respect to campaign leadership and democratic orientations, these expectations are somewhat more nuanced. In societies where trust in political parties is low, for example, invalid vote campaigns led by political elites may be less likely to gain traction. Where support for democracy is low, on the other hand, invalid vote campaigns opposing the existing political order may find an eager audience.

In considering how these results aggregate to predict campaign success, it is worth remembering the relative size of the effects described here. While egregious grievances have a moderate effect on public opinion, the effects of campaign leadership and democratic orientations are modest at best. If these individual-level findings aggregate up and predict electoral outcomes, it is likely that grievance will be a strong predictor, while campaign leadership will only affect campaign success at the margins. It is to questions about campaign success that the next chapters turn.

## Predicting the Electoral Success of Invalid Vote Campaigns

Because no candidate won a majority of the valid ballots in the first round of Uruguay's 2014 presidential elections, a runoff election was held a month later. The incumbent Frente Amplio won 47.8% of the first-round vote, while its next closest rival, the Partido Nacional, won 30.9% of the vote. To win, Frente Amplio would have to pick off support from smaller opposition parties. In the days following the election, however, leaders from several of these eliminated first-round parties called on their followers to invalidate their ballots. Leaders from the Partido Independiente (3% of the first-round vote), Unidad Popular (1% of the first-round vote), and the Partido Ecologista Radical Intransigente (0.8% of the first-round vote) announced that they would cast blank ballots in the November runoff and encouraged their followers to do the same. Within the larger Partido Colorado, which won 12.9% of the first-round vote, several self-styled "dissident" leaders published an open letter noting their intentions to "vote blank as a form of protest of an election that has already been decided" (Redacción la República [UY] 2014). Frente Amplio won easily in the runoff, but the invalid vote increased to 5.3%, compared to 3.3% of all ballots in the first round and 4.1% in the 2009 presidential runoff. Calls for invalid voting were clearly associated with an uptick in the behavior.

Some view invalid vote campaigns as "successful" only when they achieve their leaders' stated objectives, usually the nullification of an election's result (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2018). Using this criterion, invalid vote campaigns succeed extremely rarely—and almost never at the national

level.<sup>1</sup> But, to date, there has been no systematic examination of how often and under what circumstances invalid vote campaigns are associated with *change* in invalid vote rates. As a result, scholars simply do not know whether and under what circumstances campaigns promoting the invalid vote are associated with meaningful shifts in blank and spoiled vote rates, as in the case of Uruguay in 2014. This chapter identifies as “successful” those campaigns that are associated with an increase in the invalid vote rate compared to prior, similar elections in that locale, and turns to these questions.

Previous chapters of this book demonstrate that voters are more supportive, on average, of hypothetical invalid vote campaigns that protest egregious grievances, and express somewhat lower support for campaigns led by political elites. But the effects on individuals’ attitudes are small, and attitudes do not always translate to behavior (e.g., Ajzen and Cote 2008; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). This chapter therefore examines whether these findings aggregate up—that is, the extent to which campaign leadership and grievances, as well as other features of the political environment, explain the success or failure of invalid vote campaigns in a broad set of subnational and national elections.

First, I examine an original dataset identifying invalid vote campaigns in all Peruvian gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2018. Using subnational data allows me to control for features of the national electoral context that might, in theory, affect campaign success. Within a single country, these institutions do not vary; I can therefore answer questions about the factors that are associated with change in invalid voting, holding national-level factors constant. I then examine cross-national data identifying invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections across Latin America. Doing so allows me to maximize variation in campaigns’ stated grievances and leadership, as well as variation in national political contexts, although I cannot disentangle all likely correlates of campaign success with certainty.

Both sets of results show a strong effect of a campaign’s grievances on its success. Invalid vote campaigns citing corruption or credible claims of election fraud are associated with significant increases in the invalid vote compared to prior contests, while campaigns protesting less egregious concerns have little effect on blank and spoiled voting. The effects of leadership are small and mixed across datasets. Characteristics of the choice set also have mixed effects on the success of invalid vote campaigns: the presidential analysis shows that the presence of one or more candidates with openly authoritarian tendencies is not associated with campaign success. I further find that the presence of an antiestablishment candidate is

*positively* associated with campaign success in gubernatorial elections (there is no association in the presidential analyses).

I end by considering the question of causality: Does campaign activity result in increased invalid vote rates, or do invalid vote campaigns rather emerge where the population is already more likely to invalidate their ballots at higher-than-average rates? Using data from Google Trends, news sources, and public opinion polls, I construct timelines tracking public intent to spoil the vote and the emergence and activity of apparently successful invalid vote campaigns. In 17 of 18 national and subnational campaigns examined, public interest in casting a blank or spoiled vote preceded the invalid vote campaign's emergence. In other words, while campaigns promoting the invalid vote may bolster public intentions to cast protest votes, they appear unlikely to instigate this behavior in an otherwise uninterested public.

### Understanding "Success" as Mobilizing Votes

Political campaigns, including those promoting the blank or spoiled vote, often have multiple goals. For example, although political candidates contesting elections primarily seek to win office, they may also have secondary goals, like pushing policy debates toward their preferred position or introducing new issues to the public debate. Similarly, campaigns promoting the invalid vote can have varied goals. Many invalid vote campaigns have the primary stated goal of invalidating an election result, which usually requires that an absolute majority or supermajority of all votes cast be left blank or spoiled.<sup>2</sup> Surpassing this threshold is a very high bar for defining success; indeed, only a handful of subnational invalid vote campaigns—and one national campaign, in Colombia's Andean Parliament elections in 2014—have been successful by this metric.<sup>3</sup>

However, those who campaign for the invalid vote often have secondary goals. Sometimes, campaigns seek to draw attention to internal election dynamics that campaigners view as unfair or undemocratic, as in Nicaragua in 2016. After the electoral court removed opposition candidates from contention and limited antigovernment speech, united opposition parties claimed this constituted electoral manipulation and called on their supporters to spoil their votes (La Nación 2016; Chamorro 2016). Authoritarian incumbent Daniel Ortega won reelection in a landslide. Because the electoral commission does not publish official invalid vote tallies, it is impossible to know with certainty whether the campaign succeeded in



increasing the protest vote. However, survey data collected soon after the election suggests that spoiled votes accounted for 12% to 14% of all ballots in that election, compared to 1.6% of votes in 2011 (Cohen and Cassell 2023, appendix G). Irrespective of the election results, foreign news outlets repeated the opposition's framing, calling the contest "blatantly rigged" (Chamorro 2016) and "flawed" (Wroughton and Pretel 2016).

In other cases, leaders of invalid vote campaigns may seek policy concessions from incumbent governments. For example, in Guatemala's 2015 presidential election, citizen groups took to the streets calling on the government to implement anticorruption reforms and to give legal status to invalid votes; these protestors also called on voters to spoil their ballots in protest (Guatemala—Noticias On Line, 2015). The government later passed these reforms. Although levels of spoiled voting were not high enough to invalidate the election, campaigners achieved their major policy objectives.

Finally, in rare instances, the leader of an invalid vote campaign can leverage their increased popularity to seek election to national office. For example, in El Salvador's 2018 legislative elections, Nayib Bukele, then mayor of San Salvador, called on his followers to cast invalid ballots during a speech marking the twenty-sixth anniversary of the nation's peace accords (El Salvador Times 2018). While turnout in 2018 was similar to levels in the 2015 legislative elections, the invalid vote more than doubled, to 8% (compared to 3.9% in 2015). Following widespread media coverage of this campaign, which arguably increased his name recognition and popularity, Bukele launched a successful bid for the presidency later that year.

Achieving these secondary objectives generally requires an increase in invalid vote rates so that a campaign's leaders can credibly claim public support. In this chapter, I therefore define invalid vote campaign "success" as *those instances in which invalid vote rates increase compared to ex-ante expectations in a particular locale and election type when a campaign is present*. This definition allows for a campaign to succeed even if it fails to invalidate an election result. Further, by linking campaign success to similar contests in the past, this definition accounts for known variation in invalid vote rates by election type.

### Under What Conditions Should Invalid Vote Campaigns Succeed?

There are four likely factors that explain the success of invalid vote campaigns: campaign grievances, leadership, the presence of an alternative

protest option on the ballot, and the presence of authoritarian candidate on the ballot. Below, I summarize expectations for each of these factors.

The grievances that invalid vote campaigns cite should affect campaign success. Most null vote campaigns are organized in reaction to perceived flaws in democratic politics (see chapter 3), and campaigns that focus directly on democratic quality should be more convincing to citizens, particularly to regular voters. Consistent with this expectation, chapter 3 of this book shows that invalid vote campaigns are more likely to *emerge* when incumbents work to undermine the quality of elections by intimidating the opposition—an egregious violation of the core democratic principle mandating free and fair elections. Moreover, chapter 4 shows that citizens express higher *approval* of invalid vote campaigns that are organized around egregious grievances, specifically corruption and the likely commission of election fraud. If these findings aggregate up, then invalid vote campaigns should be more likely to succeed when they address egregious grievances.

A second likely explanation of campaign success is campaign leadership, which may affect success in one of two ways. Past studies of invalid vote campaigns have argued that popular elites will be better able to mobilize the invalid vote (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2018; Driscoll and Nelson 2014; Superti 2020), although evidence for this claim is limited. Political elites, particularly political candidates, forge ideological, demographic, or clientelistic linkages with voters (Kitschelt 2000) and should be able to reactivate those bonds to mobilize voters in future contests. In turn, invalid vote campaigns led by politicians should be more successful where those elites are most popular (Cisneros 2013; Superti 2020).

However, voters may have good reason to discount messages from campaigns led by political elites. Chapter 4 confirms that, on average, Peruvians view hypothetical invalid vote campaigns led by political elites as less democratic and less responsible than those led by citizen groups. Citizens are also more likely to perceive the leaders of these campaigns as “sore losers” who stand to benefit from their involvement in the campaign, and express significantly lower average approval of elite-led campaigns. If these individual relationships predict aggregate behavior, then campaigns led by political elites should be *less* likely to succeed, on average.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to features of null vote campaigns themselves, features of the broader electoral context, like the presence of a protest candidate on the ballot, could decrease a campaign’s likelihood of success. Invalid vote campaigns call on voters to “waste” their ballots by not selecting a candidate. When a candidate presents himself as an antiestablishment option, disillusioned voters must decide whether it is preferable to invalidate their

ballot or to cast an affirmative vote for the protest candidate instead. Some may prefer the latter option, although individuals who vote for populist candidates tend to hold different political attitudes from those who spoil their ballots, which hints that replacing one behavior with the other will occur only rarely (see appendix table A1.2 and discussion in chapter 1, but see Aron and Superti 2021; Desai and Lee 2021).

The presence of a single competitive candidate with authoritarian tendencies could similarly decrease a campaign's likelihood of success. In the twenty-first century, authoritarian politicians around the world have worked to undermine democracy once in office. These candidates signal their authoritarianism on the campaign trail by expressing weak commitment to democratic rules of the game, denying their opponents' legitimacy, tolerating violence, and showing willingness to violate opponents' civil liberties (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 23–24). When a competitive candidate shows herself to be authoritarian, this increases the costs of spoiling the ballot for voters who are committed to democracy, as a single protest vote could enable that unacceptable candidate to enter office.<sup>5</sup> When an authoritarian candidate is on the ballot, voters who would otherwise consider spoiling their ballot to protest the candidates should become more likely to vote for an option they dislike, to keep the antidemocrat from gaining power. In the aggregate, then, invalid vote campaigns should be less likely to succeed when a popular authoritarian option is on the ballot.

### *Subnational Analysis in Peru*

To better understand the circumstances in which invalid vote campaigns successfully mobilize blank and spoiled votes, I first analyze data from Peru's 2010, 2014, and 2018 gubernatorial elections. Peru is a unitary country that in 2002 began to devolve power subnationally. Departments, also called "regions," are the largest subnational political unit. "Regional presidents," or governors, have broad power to propose, plan, and execute departmental projects and budgets, and to administer public property. Runoff elections for gubernatorial races in which the first-place candidate wins less than 30% of the vote were implemented in 2010; I focus on the years following the implementation of this law.<sup>6</sup>

To identify invalid vote campaigns in subnational gubernatorial elections in Peru, I first gathered news stories from regional, national, and international sources using online news archives and social media outlets. I searched for the terms "spoiled vote," "null vote," and "blank vote," and included each region's name with each search term separately (for example,

“blank vote Loreto”).<sup>7</sup> I code an invalid vote campaign as being present if there is at least one mention of an effort to promote invalid voting in print or social media.<sup>8</sup> I identified 20 campaigns in this eight-year period, in 15 of Peru’s 25 departments. Of these, 16 invalid vote campaigns were held in runoff elections. After closely reading all available news stories and social media posts about the invalid vote campaigns, I identified and coded key details about each campaign, for example, campaign leadership and principal grievances. Details about the resulting dataset are available in appendix table A5.1.

This data collection effort has two potential sources of bias. First, it only captures efforts to promote invalid voting that were reported on in print media or mentioned on social media. If a campaign was deemed insufficiently newsworthy to merit coverage, or if local activists or journalists did not post about the campaign on Facebook or Twitter, then it is not included here.<sup>9</sup> Second, the limited number of local news outlets hinders my ability to identify news stories about elections in more remote departments that also receive little national coverage, potentially biasing the data against identifying campaigns in these regions when they exist. These limitations make the measure of campaign presence more conservative: I am more likely to miss campaigns that exist than to incorrectly identify campaigns where they did not occur.

As figure 5.1 shows, invalid vote campaigns have become more common over time: while a single invalid vote campaign took place in 2010, similar efforts emerged in six departments in 2014 (13% of regional election-rounds), and in 13 departments (27% of regional election-rounds) in 2018.

Most of these campaigns (15 in total) cited corruption as a core motivating grievance, while seven campaigns named candidate quality as their primary grievance. In addition to these main complaints, some campaigns identified additional grievances. For example, the 2018 campaign in Tacna named suspect first-round election results as its main complaint, while campaigns in Cajamarca (2018), Cusco (2018), and Madre de Dios (2018) pointed to unrepresentative candidates as their core grievance.

That corruption represents the overwhelming majority of grievances is unsurprising, as dozens of candidates had been found guilty of governance-related crimes (e.g., abuse of authority, embezzlement of public funds) or were under investigation at the time of the 2014 and 2018 elections.<sup>10</sup> Reports by government agencies demonstrate how widespread corruption was in regional governments: in May 2018, the office of the Public Prosecutor Specializing in Corruption reported that more than 2,000 subnational political officials—including 57 former governors—had been sen-

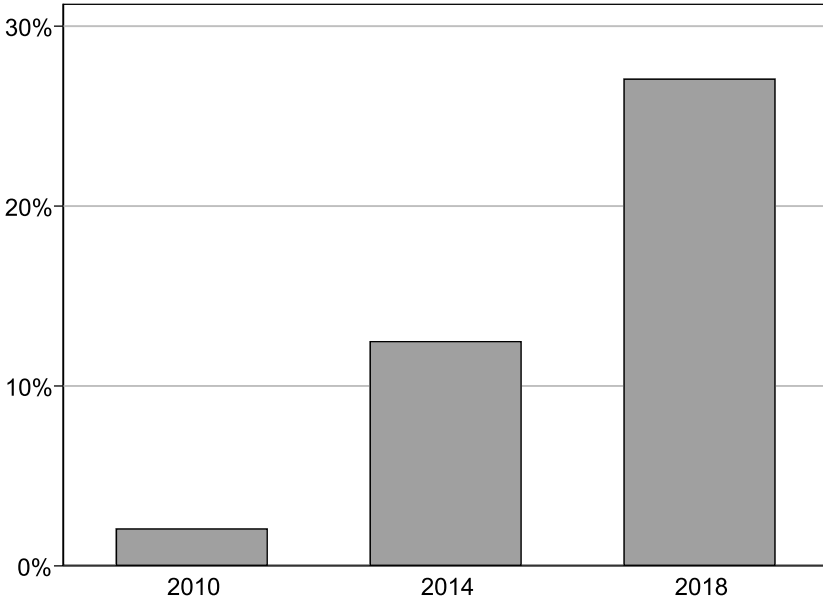


Figure 5.1. Gubernatorial Invalid Vote Campaigns over Time in Peru

Source: Original data collection.

Note: The figure shows the percentage of first-round and runoff gubernatorial elections that included an invalid vote campaign in 2010, 2014, and 2018. Because the number of runoff contests varies over time, the denominator varies across the time series.

tenced for corruption-related crimes.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, former governors had been criminally sentenced in all but one (San Martín) of Peru's 25 departments (Vélez Fernández et al. 2018).

Campaign leadership varied widely across departments and time. Of the 16 second-round invalid vote campaigns observed, 12 included leadership by former candidates or parties, while 10 included nonelite leadership. Elite mobilizers of the invalid vote mostly consisted of first-round gubernatorial candidates (11 campaigns), although a political organization that competed exclusively in local mayoral contests led campaign efforts in Ica in 2014. In Cajamarca in 2018, former governor and 2016 presidential candidate Gregorio Santos emerged as the primary promoter of the invalid vote in the gubernatorial runoff. Nonelite leadership included citizen collectives led by lawyers (Junín 2014) and ordinary citizens (Arequipa 2014), as well as online groups organized by laypeople (Tacna 2018).

The strength of calls for invalid voting also varied widely. In Ayacucho in 2018, for example, first-round gubernatorial candidate Germán Mar-

tinelli made a public pronouncement stating his support for spoiling the vote in the runoff:

Martinelli signaled that his sympathizers are free to vote [how they want] in the second round, but that they should evaluate the best proposals and sufficient morality and ability to work for the good of the region and if they believe that neither of the candidates are convincing, he signaled they could cast blank or spoiled votes to make [the candidates] feel this rejection of both options. (Escalante 2018)

Public statements like these are a weak form of mobilization. While Martinelli encouraged his followers to consider invalidating their ballots as an option, he did not exhort them to do so. Nor did he later proceed to actively campaign for invalid voting in the department. However, it is difficult to imagine that a former gubernatorial candidate would make such a public statement without considering the political ramifications—specifically, that some of his followers might be convinced to invalidate their ballots.

In other departments, such as Áncash in 2018, invalid vote campaigns were much larger and included sustained mobilization online and in-person. Campaigners in Áncash placed billboards, hung street signs, and engaged in public demonstrations to promote the spoiled vote. The campaign even paid for radio spots to promote invalid voting in that year's runoff election (Áncash, Interview 7). Unlike Martinelli's modest call for his followers to consider invalidating the ballot as an option, the effort in Áncash in 2018 was a full-blown campaign that ordinary citizens in the region would have been hard pressed to ignore.<sup>12</sup>

In short, invalid vote campaigns in Peruvian gubernatorial elections varied widely in terms of their central grievances, their leadership, and even the tactics they used to encourage voters to cast blank or spoiled ballots.

### *Measuring Successful Electoral Mobilization*

Measuring the electoral success of invalid vote campaigns is difficult because it is impossible to know how many blank or spoiled ballots would have been cast in the absence of the campaign. Ultimately, there is no way to observe this counterfactual scenario. I address this issue by using past election results from each department to create “benchmark” invalid vote values. I then compare election results to those historical results. If blank and spoiled vote rates are higher than the benchmark value when a campaign is present, that campaign is deemed an electoral “success.”

Ideally, I would compare election results from contests with an invalid vote campaign to the most recent election of the same type in which no invalid vote campaign occurred. That is, I would compare invalid vote rates in a gubernatorial runoff election with a campaign to invalid vote rates in a prior runoff with no campaign. This strategy controls for known differences in patterns of invalid voting across election types and rounds. Gubernatorial elections are highly disproportional, which tends to increase invalid vote rates (e.g., Power and Garand 2007; Ugglá 2008). Invalid vote rates also tend to decline in runoff elections. Although some spoil their ballots to express dissatisfaction with the remaining candidates, runoff contests are necessarily decisive, which increases their relative stakes and drives average invalid voting down (Kouba and Lysek 2016). The benchmark comparison is only possible for 10 of the gubernatorial elections analyzed here (four first-round elections and six runoffs). Gubernatorial runoffs were implemented in 2010, and as a result 12 departments where second-round invalid vote campaigns occurred in 2014 or 2018 had held no prior gubernatorial runoff elections to use as a benchmark. I therefore employ a second measure of success in runoff elections, comparing invalid vote rates in the runoff to rates in the first round.

For both measures, positive values indicate higher invalid vote rates when a campaign occurred, compared to the benchmark election. Campaigns with positive values—that is, campaigns that are associated with an increase in invalid voting compared to past contests—are deemed “successful,” while campaigns with negative or zero values—where the invalid vote remained static or decreased compared to a prior election—are not.<sup>13</sup> Larger values indicate greater success.

### Invalid Vote Campaigns Succeed Where Grievances Are Egregious, Outsiders Run

Figure 5.2 shows the average change in the percentage of invalid votes cast when a campaign is and is not present compared to a recent benchmark election of the same type (top panel) and, for runoff elections, compared to the first-round contest two months prior (bottom panel). In all, 13 of 20 invalid vote campaigns (65%) “succeeded” using one of these metrics.

The top panel shows that invalid vote rates are significantly higher when an invalid vote campaign takes place. Compared to benchmark elections of the same type (previous first-round or runoff gubernatorial contests in the same department), the invalid vote is 4.4 percentage points

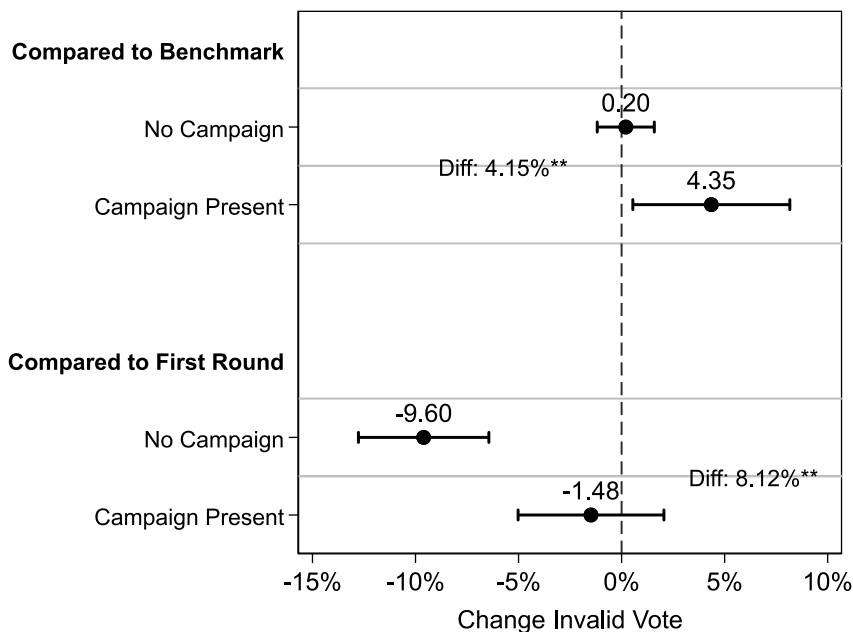


Figure 5.2. Change in Invalid Vote Compared to Benchmarks by Campaign Presence  
 Source: Jurado Nacional de Elecciones, original data collection.

Note: The figure compares change in the percentage of invalid votes cast between elections of the same type (upper panel) and across election rounds (lower panel) in Peruvian gubernatorial elections in 2010, 2014, and 2018, where invalid vote campaigns were and were not present. Differences in estimates are significant with \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed.

higher, on average where a campaign occurred, pooling across years. The lower panel compares cross-round change in invalid vote rates in runoff elections with and without an invalid vote campaign. Compared to first-round elections and as expected, the invalid vote rate declines in runoff elections. However, this decrease is much smaller in elections including an invalid vote campaign. Pooling across election years, the cross-round decrease in the invalid vote rate is 8.1 percentage points larger in departments where no campaign occurred (-9.6%), compared to those where a campaign took place (-1.5%).<sup>14</sup> In short, figure 5.2 shows that invalid vote campaigns are associated with higher average invalid vote rates and smaller cross-round declines in invalid voting in Peruvian gubernatorial elections.

What features of campaigns explain their success or failure? Table 5.1 below describes how often campaigns with specific features succeed. This analysis includes 18 campaigns for which there is sufficient evidence to confidently assess both campaign leadership and grievances.<sup>15</sup> There is



insufficient information to assess candidate authoritarianism in the gubernatorial elections. The invalid vote increased in 12 (67%) of these elections. Column 2 of table 5.1 shows the percentage of the six unsuccessful campaigns that had a particular trait, and column 3 presents the percentage of the 12 successful campaigns with each trait. Column 4 calculates the success rate among all campaigns with each trait. It is important to recall that these results do not control for any other features of the electoral context; the table merely describes trends in campaigns' success according to their characteristics.<sup>16</sup>

Do campaigns that name egregious grievances, like corruption, succeed more frequently than campaigns that reference less egregious grievances? The gubernatorial results broadly confirm this expectation. Campaigns that cite corruption or candidate quality as central grievances succeeded 73% and 71% of the time, respectively. These rates are not especially high compared to baseline expectations (67% success), especially given the small number of cases. However, campaigns citing a less egregious grievance, unrepresentative options, succeeded far less frequently—only 33% of the time. Finally, claims of electoral fraud are the most egregious examined here. In Tacna in 2018, invalid vote campaigners alleged fraud in the first round in calling for spoiling the ballot in the runoff. Ultimately, this campaign was successful—the invalid vote rate increased by more than 18 percentage points across election rounds—resulting in a 100% success rate for this egregious grievance in this set of cases.

A second likely set of explanations relates to campaign leadership. Experimental evidence presented in chapter 4 suggests that Peruvians approve more of invalid vote campaigns that are led by citizen groups rather than by political elites. While statistically significant, these results are substantively quite small. Table 5.1 shows that, on average, this result does not aggregate up. Campaigns are similarly likely to succeed when they are led by citizen groups or by political elites: 71% of campaigns led by former candidates or political parties succeeded, compared to 60% of campaigns whose leadership was comprised entirely of popular groups. Success rates are similar (67%) when campaigns are led by both citizen groups and partisan actors.

A third expectation is that antiestablishment candidates provide an alternative protest option, making invalid vote campaigns less likely to succeed.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to this expectation, the presence of an antiestablishment candidate is *positively* associated with campaign success in Peruvian gubernatorial elections. Indeed, in all three elections in which an invalid vote campaign occurred and an antiestablishment candidate competed, the

TABLE 5.1. Correlates of Campaign Success, Peruvian Gubernatorial Elections

Explanation	Unsuccessful (6)	Successful (12)	% Success among campaigns with trait
Grievance: Corruption	67% (4)	92% (11)	73%
Grievance: Candidate quality	33% (2)	42% (5)	71%
Grievance: Unrepresentative options	33% (2)	8% (1)	33%
Grievance: Fraud	0% (0)	10% (1)	100%
Partisan mobilization only	33% (2)	42% (5)	71%
Popular mobilization only	33% (2)	25% (3)	60%
Partisan <i>and</i> popular mobilization	33% (2)	33% (4)	67%
Antiestablishment option	0% (0)	30% (3)	100%

*Note:* Columns 2 and 3 show the percentage (number) of gubernatorial invalid vote campaigns that were ultimately (un)successful with a particular trait. Column 4 calculates the overall success rate of campaigns with each trait. “Success” is determined using (1) an available benchmark election as a comparison or, if no benchmark is available, (2) the difference in invalid votes across election rounds. If the invalid vote is higher compared to the benchmark election, a campaign is considered “successful.” Results are for 18 departments where there is sufficient evidence to make a confident assessment about campaign traits.

invalid vote campaign was successful. There are two likely explanations of this result. First, antiestablishment candidates may be particularly low-quality options, which increases the salience of one common campaign grievance where antiestablishment candidates compete. Second, both invalid vote campaigns and strong antiestablishment candidacies could result from underlying societal tendencies toward protest. This research design cannot distinguish between these potential explanations. However, consistent with the latter perspective, all three antiestablishment candidates won election when an invalid vote campaign occurred concurrently to their candidacy.

### *District-Level Results*

Most of the factors in table 5.1 vary across departments within Peru. For example, the presence of an antiestablishment candidate is constant within departments, as are campaigns’ grievances. However, the popularity of mobilizing candidates can vary widely within departments. Former candidates who promote the invalid vote should have greater influence where they were popular in prior contests, even if the campaign fails to affect the overall election result. Focusing on department-wide results may thus obscure a campaign’s subregional success, failing to reveal aggregate rela-

TABLE 5.2. Correlation between Candidate Popularity and Cross-Round Vote Change

	Difference invalid	Difference blank	Difference null
Promoter's vote share	0.083 (0.059)	-0.036 (0.036)	0.118* (0.052)
Promoter's vote share <sup>2</sup>	-0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Wealth (quintile)	0.413 (0.259)	0.135 (0.151)	0.279 (0.215)
Illiteracy	-18.824* (8.327)	0.174 (4.328)	-18.998* (7.717)
Year	1.129* (0.190)	0.200 (0.103)	0.929* (0.177)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.43	0.46	0.32
N	1,074	1,074	1,074

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Información, Jurado Nacional de Elecciones, original data collection.

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Table presents jackknifed OLS regression estimates. Province-level fixed effects are included but not shown to preserve space.

tionships between campaign leadership and change in invalid votes when they exist subregionally (i.e., committing the “ecological fallacy”; King et al. 1994; Przeworski and Teune 1970). This section assesses this possibility by presenting district-level correlations between elite campaigners’ prior vote shares and cross-round change in the invalid vote.

Twelve invalid vote campaigns in gubernatorial elections between 2010 and 2018 were led by elites who had competed in a recent local election; all occurred during runoff campaigns. Nine of these campaigns were led by first-round gubernatorial candidates.<sup>18</sup> In these cases, I examine the relationship between public support for campaign leaders, measured using their first-round vote share, and cross-round change in the invalid vote rate in each electoral district (the smallest political unit in Peru). In three campaigns, former local candidates promoted invalid voting in the runoff election; I use their prior vote shares to measure their district-level popularity.<sup>19</sup> Table 5.2 shows the relationship between the combined prior vote share of all parties or candidates promoting invalid voting in each district<sup>20</sup> and the cross-round change in blank and spoiled votes, controlling for district-level demographic factors.<sup>21</sup>

In theory, change in the invalid vote could range from -100 (a decline from 100% invalid votes in the first round to none in the runoff) to 100 (an increase from no invalid votes in the first round to 100% invalid ballots in the runoff).<sup>22</sup> Observed values range from -86 to 34; on average the invalid

vote declined by 6.7 percentage points across rounds in these districts and years. Promoters' vote share is also a percentage and ranges from 0 to 79, with a mean of 16 and a median of 10.

A maximal increase in a promoter's vote share (from 0 to 79) is associated with an 8 percentage point increase in the estimated invalid vote rate. In districts where an invalid vote promoter won no votes in a recent election, the invalid vote decreased by 8 percentage points across election rounds, on average, compared to cross-round *stability* (a change of 0.0 percentage points) where a campaigner won 79% of the first-round vote—a substantial change in the invalid vote rate. However, a more typical shift in candidates' vote shares, from minimum to median support for an invalid vote promoter, is associated with a much smaller 0.8 percentage point increase in cross-round change in invalid voting (0.07 standard deviations). In other words, the average effect of a popular elite leader on invalid voting is quite modest.

Because some campaigners specify that voters should cast spoiled ballots rather than blank ballots, I disaggregate the results by the type of invalid ballot. The association between electoral support for campaign leaders and invalid voting is driven by cross-round change in spoiled votes. Figure 5.3 shows the association between campaigners' prior vote share in a district on the x-axis, and cross-round change in blank (Panel 1) and null (Panel 2) votes on the y-axis. Gray shaded areas denote 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

The first panel shows no significant effect of support for a campaign promoter on the blank vote. Irrespective of a campaigner's electoral support, the blank vote rate declines by about 10 percentage points on average across election rounds. The second panel, in contrast, shows a small but statistically significant effect of electoral support on null and spoiled votes. As a campaigner's past vote share increases from 0 to 40% (the 90th percentile of candidate support), cross-round null vote rates increase from 2 to 5.6 percent. However, for districts where campaigners had very high first-round support—precisely where we should observe the largest cross-round increases in invalid voting—the association is neither statistically significant nor significantly different from districts where the promoter won no votes.

These results link electoral support for invalid vote campaigners to a modest cross-round increase in invalid voting, consistent with political science theories emphasizing elites' ability to reactivate existing political linkages. However, these results come with two important caveats. First, models estimated for each department independently do not confirm the

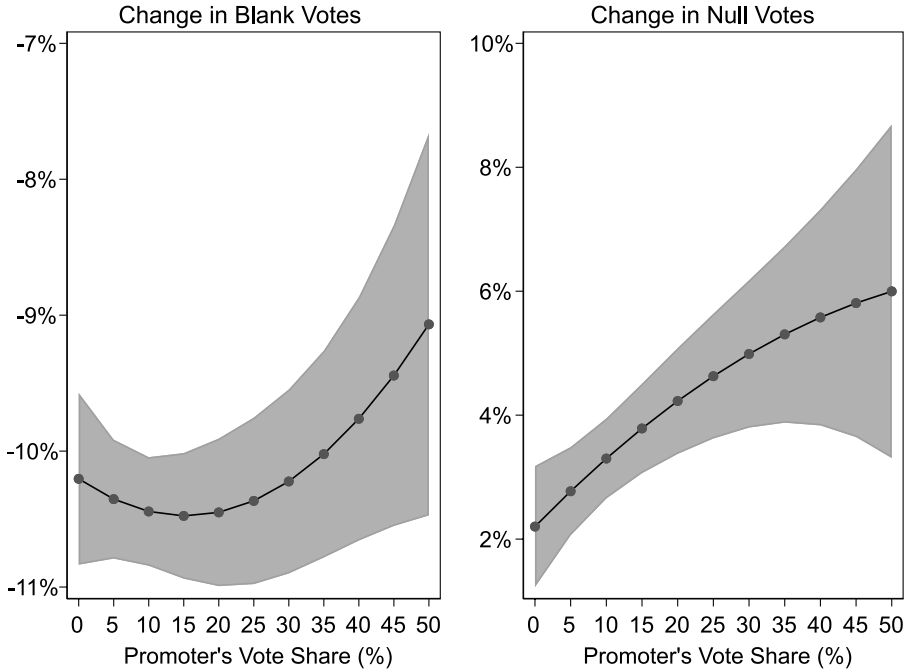


Figure 5.3. Cross-Round Change in Blank and Null Votes by Promoter's Vote Share  
 Source: Jurado Nacional de Elecciones, original data collection.

Notes: The figure presents marginal effects estimated following the jackknifed OLS regression models predicting change in blank (Panel 1) and null (Panel 2) vote rates presented in table 5.2 (N = 1,074). The shaded gray area represents 95% confidence intervals around point estimates.

aggregate trend. Results are significant in only two departments (Arequipa and Cusco, both in 2014), and these results run in opposing directions—results are positive in Arequipa, while in Cusco the null vote *declines* in districts where first-round candidates who campaigned for the null vote were more popular. Indeed, the positive result above is driven by Arequipa in 2014: when this department is removed from analysis, the effect no longer reaches standard thresholds of statistical significance. Second, this analysis is likely prone to omitted variable bias. Specifically, I cannot account for the local strength of popular mobilization efforts. It is therefore possible that the apparent effect of candidate popularity is attributable instead to the presence of local citizen-led efforts, or the interaction of these factors.<sup>23</sup> Bearing in mind these caveats, the results presented above suggest that mobilization by elites *can* affect the invalid vote, but that these effects are modest and inconsistent across locales.

### Egregious Grievances Predict Campaign Success in Presidential Elections

The subnational Peruvian analysis has the advantage of controlling for national-level features like mandatory voting that might affect the success of invalid vote campaigns. But do the trends presented above reflect patterns across the region? To address this question, I analyze data from Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020.

As with the gubernatorial data, I measure campaign success by comparing election results when a campaign is present to results from a benchmark election. This strategy accounts for known variation in invalid vote rates across countries and election rounds. I compare invalid vote rates when a null vote campaign occurred to invalid vote rates during the most recent election of the same type without a null vote campaign. Positive values indicate higher invalid vote rates when a campaign occurred, relative to the benchmark election. Campaigns with positive values are deemed successful, while those with negative or zero values are not.

Not all elections where an invalid vote campaign took place during this period occurred after a benchmark election of the same type. I employ two strategies to determine success in these cases. For invalid vote campaigns that occurred during runoff elections that were the first of their kind (as in Argentina in 2015), I follow the same strategy as above and subtract second-round invalid vote rates from first-round rates. Where invalid vote rates increased across election rounds, a campaign is deemed “successful”; where invalid vote rates declined or stayed the same, the campaign “failed.” I employ this strategy in three elections: Argentina 2015, and Peru 2001 and 2006.<sup>24</sup> In two additional cases (Chile 2005 and Panama 2009), there is no baseline election without an invalid vote campaign, but there *is* a relevant benchmark election during which an invalid vote campaign failed. For Chile’s 2005 presidential runoff, for example, the proximate benchmark election is the 1999 runoff, when an unsuccessful invalid vote campaign occurred. In these cases, I compare invalid vote rates in the current campaign (e.g., the 2005 Chilean runoff) to the recent election when the invalid vote campaign failed (e.g., the 1999 Chilean runoff).

In four cases, determining campaign success is ultimately not possible. In two elections (El Salvador 1982 and Paraguay 1988), invalid vote campaigns occurred during single-round, democratizing elections. Because there was no recent election with which to compare results in those cases, it is not possible to create an informed baseline expectation. In two additional cases (Nicaragua in 2011 and 2016), the government did not publish invalid vote rates, making it impossible to determine campaign success.

### *Mobilizing the Invalid Vote in Presidential Elections*

How do blank and spoiled vote rates change in the presence of invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections? The top panel of figure 5.4 shows average rates of invalid voting in presidential elections when an invalid vote campaign is and is not present. Average invalid vote rates are 1.2 percentage points higher in elections when an invalid vote campaign occurs, compared to elections with no invalid vote campaign. While this significant difference could reflect a positive effect of invalid vote campaigns on invalid vote rates, it could also reflect underlying differences in the distribution of invalid vote rates across countries and years where campaigns occur. The bottom panel of figure 5.4 therefore shows the *difference* in invalid vote rates when an invalid vote campaign is or is not present, compared to a benchmark election. The average change in invalid vote rates is an increase of 0.2 percentage points when an invalid vote campaign is present, and a decline of 0.2 percentage points when no campaign occurs; this 0.4 percentage-point difference is not significant. On average, then, invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections are associated with higher levels of invalid voting, and with a very slight, but statistically insignificant, increase in invalid voting compared to benchmark elections.

About half of all presidential invalid vote campaigns (54%) from 1980 to 2020 were associated with an increase in the invalid vote, compared to benchmark elections. Table 5.3 shows the prevalence of likely explanatory factors of campaign success in presidential elections. As in table 5.1, column 2 shows the percentage (number) of unsuccessful campaigns with a given trait, column 3 presents these values for successful campaigns, and column 4 calculates the success rate among all campaigns with each trait. It is important to emphasize that this descriptive exercise does not control for any potential confounding factors.

Which factors are associated with campaign success? Starting with grievances, campaigns that protest candidate quality, unrepresentative options, and fraud are slightly more successful. The invalid vote rate increased in 64% of elections in which a campaign complained of corruption, in 61% of campaigns complaining of unrepresentative options, and in 67% of campaigns mobilized against fraud. Considering the small number of cases, these changes are quite modest. Complaints of candidate quality did not change campaign success rates: 56% of campaigns making this complaint succeeded, which is effectively equivalent to the cross-national average.

Turning to campaign leadership, campaigns led exclusively by former political candidates and political parties were successful 62% of the time,

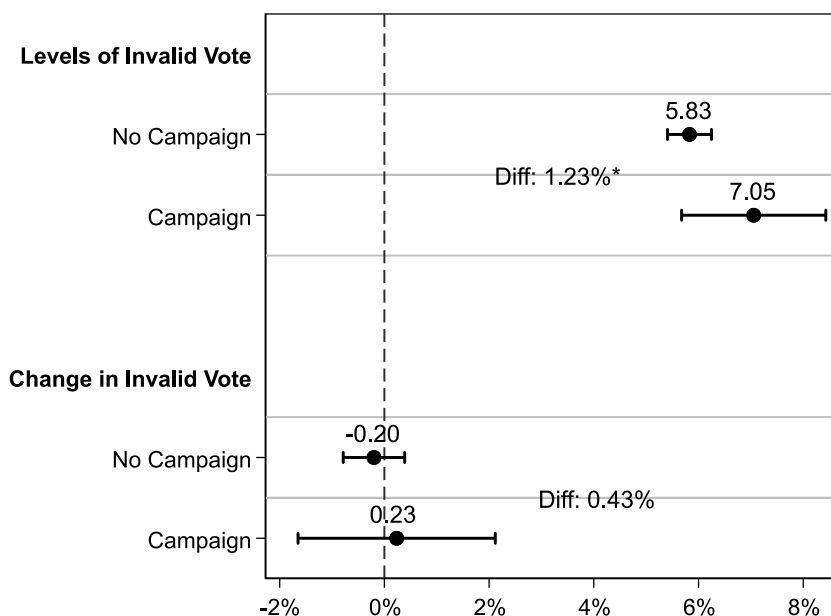


Figure 5.4. Invalid Voting in Presidential Elections with and without Null Vote Campaigns

Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies.

Notes: The figure presents results from jackknifed OLS regression models including country fixed effects and controlling for year. Horizontal whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. \*  $p < 0.1$ , two-tailed.

TABLE 5.3. Correlates of Invalid Vote Campaign Success, Presidential Elections

Explanation	Unsuccessful (16)	Successful (19)	% Success among campaigns with trait
Grievance: Corruption	25% (4)	37% (7)	64%
Grievance: Candidate quality	25% (4)	26% (5)	56%
Grievance: Unrepresentative options	44% (7)	58% (11)	61%
Grievance: Fraud*	6% (1)	11% (2)	67%
Partisan mobilization only	31% (5)	42% (8)	62%
Popular mobilization only	50% (8)	26% (5)	39%
Partisan <i>and</i> popular mobilization	13% (2)	16% (3)	60%
Antiestablishment option	25% (4)	21% (4)	50%
Authoritarian candidate	50% (8)	42% (8)	50%

Notes: The table shows the percentage (number) of presidential invalid vote campaigns that were ultimately (un)successful that had a particular trait.

\* Two campaigns citing election fraud occurred in Nicaragua, which has not published invalid vote rates since 2001, and two more invalid vote campaign (El Salvador 1982, Paraguay 1988) occurred in single-round transitional elections. Success for these campaigns cannot be determined.



a rate not much higher than average. However, and unexpectedly, success rates were much lower (39%) for campaigns led exclusively by civil society groups. Campaigns with mixed leadership succeeded 60% of the time.

Finally, there is no clear association between antiestablishment options and campaign success. Invalid vote campaigns were successful in 50% of cases where an antiestablishment option competed. This null result runs contrary to the expectation that an explicit protest option will depress invalid vote campaigns' success by attracting disgruntled voters. Nor does the presence of an authoritarian candidate decrease campaigns' likelihood of success: in elections featuring at least one viable authoritarian candidate, campaigns were successful 50% of the time.

In brief, theoretically relevant features of campaigns appear not to be associated with successful mobilization of the invalid vote, measured using a binary indicator. Differences in the success rate of campaigns with different attributes are small and clustered around the average success rate (54%). However, invalid vote rates vary widely when an invalid vote campaign is present, compared to relevant baseline elections. Do certain features of invalid vote campaigns make them relatively more or less successful?

To answer this question, figure 5.5 presents the results of an OLS regression model predicting change in invalid vote rates relative to a baseline election using invalid vote campaign characteristics. The dependent variable in this analysis ranges from -22.6 to 21.6. These values indicate that the invalid vote was 22.6 percentage points lower (or 21.6 percentage points higher) than rates in a recent benchmark election of the same type.<sup>25</sup> Dots represent point estimates for each independent variable. Horizontal whiskers represent the 90% confidence interval (two-tailed) around each point estimate, while vertical hash marks indicate an 80% confidence interval (two-tailed; the equivalent of 90% confidence using a one-tailed test). I use these generous thresholds for statistical significance because of the small number of country-year observations (N=36). All independent variables take the value of "1" if a campaign has a given attribute, and "0" if it does not. In addition to these theoretically relevant variables, I control for year; standard errors are clustered at the country level.

As in the individual-level analyses presented in chapter 4—and as in the gubernatorial results presented above—political deficits rather than campaign leadership are the strongest predictors of campaign success. The only independent variable in the model that reaches standard thresholds of statistical significance is corruption: invalid vote rates increase by 6 percentage points more, on average, where null vote campaigners raise the grievance of corruption. The only other factor that approaches statistical

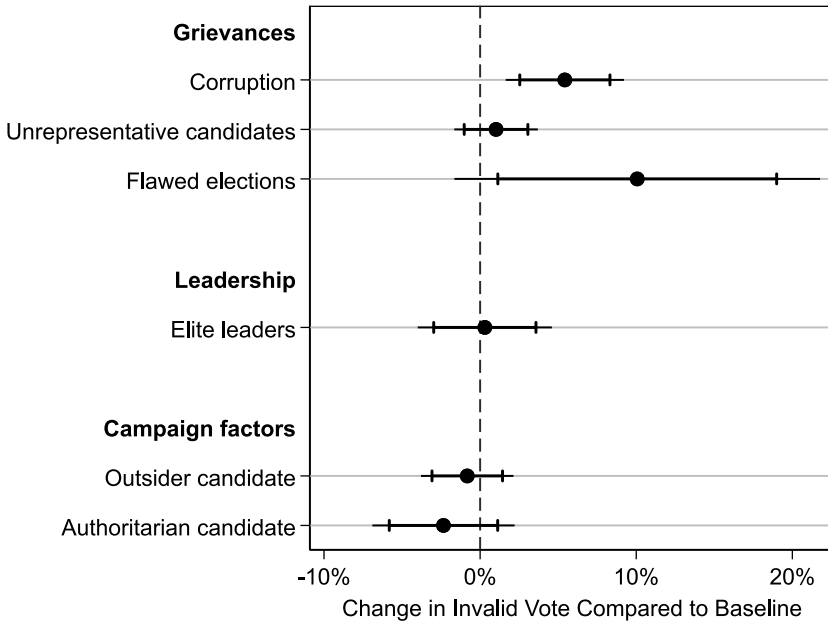


Figure 5.5. Predicting Change in the Invalid Vote Using Features of Null Vote Campaigns

Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies.

Note: The figure shows coefficient estimates from an OLS regression model regressing change in the invalid vote compared to a recent baseline election on indicator variables for each campaign attribute (N = 36). The figure shows 90% confidence intervals, with 80% confidence intervals (two-tailed) at the vertical hash marks. I control for year, and standard errors are clustered at the country level.

significance in the model is credible claims of election fraud. The effect of fraud claims is large—it is associated with a 10-percentage point increase in the invalid vote—but this coefficient is imprecisely estimated ( $p = 0.07$ , one-tailed). The remaining variables in the model, including features of campaign leadership and the nature of the choice set, have substantively small and statistically insignificant effects.

These results are striking in their consistency with past chapters in this volume. On average, campaigns that protest egregious political grievances—corruption, and to a less reliable extent election fraud—are better able to mobilize the invalid vote. However, other features of campaigns, including their leadership, have no consistent effect on invalid vote campaigns’ success.

### *Addressing the Issue of Causality*

Referring to campaigns as “successful” implies that they causally influence voters’ decisions to spoil their ballots. While the associations presented here are consistent with such a causal relationship, they are not “smoking gun” evidence of causality. Indeed, a second likely scenario is that invalid vote campaigns are more likely to emerge where a significant portion of the public already plans to spoil their ballots in protest. If this is the case, then the emergence of a campaign promoting invalid voting could be a *consequence* of voter discontent, which might have led to increased invalid voting even in the absence of the campaign.

If the causal arrow is reversed and invalid vote campaigns emerge where a large portion of the public intends to cast blank or spoiled ballots, then campaigns should emerge only once this public preference becomes clear. To assess this possibility, I analyze the timelines of eight apparently successful invalid vote campaigns in Peruvian gubernatorial elections. I combine available polling data, internet search data collected from Google Trends, and news coverage of invalid voting (e.g., opinion editorials, political cartoons) and compare the timing of public interest in invalid voting to the timing of reported campaign activity.<sup>26</sup> If evidence of a campaign emerges only *after* large portions of the public report intentions to spoil their ballots in public opinion polls, for example, this suggests that a campaign is mobilizing existing support for the behavior, rather than causally inducing invalid voting. If, on the other hand, public interest in invalid voting (evidenced, for example, by internet searches for “spoiled vote”) spikes only after the emergence of campaign activity, this suggests that the campaign affects protest voting. Table 5.4 summarizes the results.

Tracing the trajectory of null vote intentions and campaign activity in gubernatorial campaigns in 2014 and 2018 suggests that successful campaigns tended to emerge where public interest in invalid voting was already high. In seven of eight elections examined here, public interest in invalid voting appears to have preceded campaign activity. The following section briefly summarizes the timeline in each of these contests.

In Arequipa in 2014, large spikes in Google searches for the terms “null” and “spoiled” vote began on Election Day (October 5), prior to all reported calls to action by elites or civil society groups. Unfortunately, no polling data is available immediately following the first round, and first-round polls did not collect second-round vote intentions. However, the earliest report of an elite promoting the invalid vote took place a week after this initial spike in public interest, on October 13, 2014, when Elmer Cáce-

TABLE 5.4. Public Interest in and Campaign Activity Promoting the Invalid Vote in Peru

Department, year (round)	Campaign precedes increased interest	Increased interest precedes campaign
Áncash, 2018 (2)		X
Arequipa, 2014 (2)		X
Arequipa, 2018 (2)		X
Callao, 2018 (1)		X*
Cusco, 2014 (2)	X	
Piura, 2018 (1)		X*
Tacna, 2014 (2)		X
Tacna, 2018 (2)		X

*Note:* Insufficient search and polling data are available to create timelines in Huánuco (2018), Ica (2014), Lambayeque (2018), Loreto (2018), and Madre de Dios (2018).

\* Denotes a low confidence assessment given limited information about the campaign, search activity, and vote intentions.

res Llica encouraged his followers to cast blank and spoiled votes. Following these events, organized protest groups published materials online and participated in protest marches in the central plaza in Arequipa. These events were often followed by spikes in searches for invalid voting, and by mid-November, invalid vote intention had surpassed 30% in Arequipa. On Election Day, the invalid vote accounted for nearly 28.7% of all ballots cast. While campaign efforts may have helped increase the visibility and viability of the invalid vote as an option, it appears that citizen interest in invalid voting began before elites and organized groups started calling for that option in 2014.

In 2018, the evidence is even clearer that Arequipeños' plans to invalidate the second-round vote preceded any attempted mobilization effort. As early as April (six months before the first-round contest), and again in June, July, and September 2018, Google Trends identifies surges in searches for null and spoiled votes. On Election Day (October 7), another large spike in searches for null and spoiled ballots occurred in Arequipa. The first news report of online efforts to mobilize the invalid vote was printed 10 days after the election, on October 17. In mid-November, news stories about elites opposing organized spoiled voting started to appear in local newspapers; however, by that point, it may have been too late to stop widespread ballot invalidation. In the runoff, 31% of Arequipeños invalidated their ballots. As in 2014, there is insufficient polling data to track voters' intentions through the preelection period; however, using internet searches as a proxy, voter interest appears to have preceded mobilization.

In Áncash in 2018, citizen voices promoting invalid voting emerged on Election Day. Six days after the first-round contest, on October 13, the first spike in web searches for the term “spoiled vote” occurred. Two days later (October 15), Koki Noriega, the gubernatorial candidate for the Movimiento Acción Nacional Peruano, made public statements indicating his intention to cast an invalid ballot in the runoff. On October 22, only two weeks after the first-round election and a week after Noriega’s public statements, the *Prensa Ancashina Regional* published poll results showing invalid vote intention in the second round had reached 35%. News sources continued to report on efforts to mobilize the invalid vote spearheaded by civil society leaders throughout November, and a December 2 poll showed that invalid vote intention had stayed relatively stable since late October, at 33.2%. On December 9, 29.2% of Ancashinos spoiled their runoff ballots, and another 5% cast blank votes. This record suggests that the public was already considering casting spoiled ballots in protest before citizen groups and elites began to call for invalid voting.

In Tacna, in both 2014 and 2018, public interest in invalid voting also preceded news reports of campaigns promoting the behavior. In 2014, initial spikes in web searches for the null vote occurred before the first-round contest, in September. It was not until November 27 that news sources identified a civil society group promoting the invalid vote; on November 28 reports emerged that a first-round candidate was calling for the invalid vote. Searches for the term “null vote” spiked shortly after these reports were published, on November 30; however, the search data clearly indicate that interest preceded mobilization in this case. Similarly, in 2018, spikes in Google searches for the terms “null” and “spoiled” vote occurred in September and again on October 7, the day of the first-round election. The first report of a named candidate promoting invalid voting occurred on October 23, and reports of citizen groups promoting the invalid vote did not emerge until mid-November. In short, as in other departments, citizen interest appears to have emerged prior to elite or citizen calls for mass ballot invalidation in Tacna.

Although there is substantially less evidence for the cases of Callao and Piura in 2018, the limited information available suggests that citizen intentions to cast invalid ballot preceded campaign activity in both departments. Two polls published in September showed that voters in Callao intended to invalidate the ballot at high rates in the first-round election—15% according to an IPSOS poll published on September 26, and 25.3% according to a CPI poll published on September 30. Calls for invalid voting were not made publicly until October 2 by the Frente de Unidad de Defensa del

Pueblo Peruano. Search activity spiked on Election Day (October 7), when the invalid vote accounted for 23.6% of ballots cast in Callao. In short, vote intention appears to have preceded calls for invalid voting in Callao. In Piura in 2018, the first spike in online search activity for “null votes” occurred long before the election, on July 8. On July 22, CPI reported that 31% of Piuranos intended to cast an invalid vote in the election. It was not until September 8 that Perú Libertario Piura, a political party that was not permitted to stand in the 2018 elections, called on supporters to invalidate their ballots in the first-round contest. Invalid ballots accounted for 22.8% of the first-round vote in that case.

Cusco in 2014 is the lone exception to the general trend. Calls for invalid voting by former first-round candidates began on October 15, a mere 10 days after the first-round contest. However, Google searches for “spoiled,” “null,” and “blank” vote did not show any movement until December 4. Polling data published on November 24 showed that 11% of Cusqueños intended to cast a blank or spoiled vote in the runoff, half of the 22% of invalid votes cast two weeks later. It is unlikely that this high rate of spoiled voting in the runoff is due to accidental roll-off in Cusco, as in the first-round election, where the task of correctly marking the ballot was far more complex, spoiled votes accounted for 8.3% of ballots. At the same time, I found no reports of election misconduct that would cast doubt on the validity of official results. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the campaign likely increased interest in invalid voting in Cusco in 2014.<sup>27</sup>

In Peruvian gubernatorial elections, invalid vote campaigns probably do not cause protest vote intentions. But does this trend extend beyond Peru? In brief, it appears to. To answer this question, I created similar timelines for the 10 successful post-2010 presidential invalid vote campaigns. Table 5.5 summarizes the cross-national results. The evidence is consistent with the results from Peru: in none of the 10 presidential elections with an apparently successful invalid vote campaign did campaign activity precede public interest in the invalid vote.

This is not to say that invalid campaigns have no effect on voters. It is possible—and even likely—that sustained calls for invalid voting during a campaign remind voters that spoiling their ballots is an option. Campaign efforts across contexts may thus buoy invalid vote intentions, sustaining higher levels of protest voting than would otherwise occur.<sup>28</sup> However, these results strongly suggest that invalid vote campaigns do not *create* a constituency for the protest vote. Rather, campaigns are apparently born of public interest in casting blank or spoiled votes.

TABLE 5.5. Public Interest in and Campaign Activity Promoting the Invalid Vote in Presidential Elections

Country (year)	Campaign precedes increased interest?	Increased interest precedes campaign?
Bolivia (2014)		X
Brazil (2010)		X
Colombia (2010)		X
Colombia (2014, first round)		X
Colombia (2014, second round)		X
Colombia (2018)		X
Guatemala (2011)		X
Mexico (2012)		X
Uruguay (2014)		X
Venezuela (2018)		X*

*Note:* Table summarizes timelines for ten successful, post-2010 invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections.

\* Denotes a low confidence assessment given limited preelection estimates of invalid voting in Venezuela.

## Discussion

This chapter describes the factors that contribute to the success of invalid vote campaigns in subnational elections in Peru and in presidential elections across Latin America. I find that campaigns promoting the invalid vote were associated with an increase in blank and spoiled ballots compared to a benchmark election in 54% of Latin American presidential elections from 1980 to 2020, and in 67% of Peruvian gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2018. These success rates are far higher than conventional wisdom would suggest.

Consistent with experimental results presented in chapter 4, I find that invalid vote campaigns organized around egregious grievances are more successful. Campaigns that cite corruption or make credible claims of election fraud have higher-than-average success, while campaigns protesting limited competition (e.g., in a second round) have no effect on invalid vote rates. Campaign leadership has slight and inconsistent effects on campaign success, again consistent with experimental results from chapter 4. Analysis of results from Peruvian gubernatorial elections suggests that elite leaders *can* affect the invalid vote, but these effects are inconsistent and quite modest, on average.

The choice set also shapes the success of invalid voting campaigns. Invalid vote campaigns are no less likely to succeed where antiestablishment candidates compete, and, in the Peruvian gubernatorial analysis, are

*more* successful in such cases. While inconsistent with some past scholarship, this finding is consonant with individual-level findings showing that invalid vote campaigns and antiestablishment candidates attract different types of voters (see chapter 2). I find no direct effect of authoritarian candidates on invalid vote campaigns' success, although supplemental analyses are consistent with conditional expectations.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, this chapter shows that successful invalid vote campaigns emerge where the public is already poised to protest via the invalid ballot. In 17 of 18 gubernatorial and presidential campaigns examined here, invalid vote campaigns emerged *after* public opinion polls and online search activity show public interest in using this protest tool. This suggests that invalid vote campaigns do not create interest in blank and spoiled voting. Rather, these campaigns are more likely to succeed where the public has expressed interest in using the invalid vote to protest the options.

This chapter identifies factors that are associated with campaign success, on average. But, *how* do these factors interact with one another to affect campaign success or failure? The next chapter turns to this question, by tracing the paths invalid vote campaigns in gubernatorial elections in two Peruvian departments took to success or failure.



## A Tale of Two Departments

### *Tracing the Success of Invalid Vote Campaigns in Peru*

In May 2014, a series of scandals broke across Peru's subnational departments.<sup>1</sup> On May 15, César Álvarez, the seated governor of the department of Áncash, was placed in pretrial detention while the state built a case against him for allegedly engaging in corruption and ordering the assassination of a political opponent (Redacción RPP 2014). Soon thereafter, governors from the departments of Pasco and Tumbes were imprisoned on corruption charges (Redacción El Comercio 2014b). By the end of June 2014, 19 of 25 governors and key members of their staff were under investigation or in prison for mismanaging public funds and other abuses of power (Tapia 2014; Redacción El Comercio 2014b). Across Peru, citizens had reason to distrust and protest local politicians.

And protest they did. Gubernatorial elections were held shortly after this wave of investigations began, on October 7, 2014. Runoff elections were held on December 7 in 13 departments where the leading candidate did not meet the 30% vote threshold to win outright. In six of those second-round contests, campaigns emerged promoting the invalid vote. Leaders across these departments decried runoff candidate options as corrupt or of low quality. In four of these departments (Arequipa, Cusco, Ica, and Tacna), the invalid vote rate increased. Only in Áncash—the first department to see an incumbent governor fall to corruption accusations—and Junín did invalid vote campaign efforts fail.

In 2018, corruption was once again a focus of Peruvian politics. Latin America was rocked by the Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato)<sup>2</sup> corruption

scandal in 2014, and Peru faced a national reckoning in the following years. On March 21, 2018, facing the threat of a second impeachment trial for alleged corruption, President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski stepped down from office.<sup>3</sup> He was replaced by Vice President Martín Vizcarra, who made anticorruption measures a focus of his tenure; his early initiatives included a nationwide anticorruption referendum, held concurrent to the 2018 gubernatorial runoff, in December 2018.<sup>4</sup> In this context of high-salience scandals and low information about local races (Redacción La República 2018d), four departments, including Áncash, experienced renewed calls for invalid voting in the gubernatorial runoff. As in 2014, campaigners in all four departments protested candidates they viewed as corrupt and unqualified. However, unlike the 2014 effort, the 2018 campaign in Áncash was successful: blank and spoiled votes increased from 26% to 34% of the total vote across election rounds.

Previous chapters have shown that invalid vote campaigns are more successful when they protest egregious antidemocracy grievances, like corruption. Both campaigns in Áncash responded to egregious and highly salient grievances; they should have been poised for electoral success. Why, then, did the 2018 campaign in Áncash succeed, while the 2014 campaign—which protested similar grievances—failed?

This chapter answers this question by tracing the trajectories of successful and failed invalid vote campaigns in Áncash and Arequipa, Peru, in 2014 and 2018. Doing so illuminates three ways that campaign strategy can bolster or undermine the credibility of campaign leaders and their grievances. First, when campaigners act in a way that appears hypocritical (for example, seeking to compete in a runoff election while simultaneously calling for ballot spoiling in that runoff), they undermine their credibility. Particularly when campaign leadership is limited to a small number of political elites, this can feed perceptions that campaigners are self-interested, weakening the campaign. Second, when campaigners rely on traditional media outlets to spread their pro- or anti-null-vote message, fewer citizens are incidentally exposed to information about the campaign. As a result, such campaigns struggle to attract voters. Finally, asymmetries in perceptions of candidate quality can influence campaign success or failure. Where one candidate represents the “least bad” option on a dimension relevant to null vote campaigners’ grievances (e.g., corruption), voters may overlook that candidate’s weaknesses and reluctantly vote for him, rather than casting a protest vote. In sum, this chapter shows how campaigners’ strategic decisions can shape the strength of grievances and, ultimately, affect the success of invalid vote campaigns.

### Case Selection and Empirical Strategy

Several features of national politics in Peru contribute to the regular emergence of organized invalid vote campaigns there. The grievances these campaigns often protest—pervasive corruption and low candidate quality—exist at high levels in Peru’s national and subnational governments. A string of high-profile corruption scandals in recent years has made this grievance more salient. At the same time, Peru’s volatile party system and permissive rules for candidate entry enable inexperienced or otherwise low-quality candidates to compete with ease at all levels of government. This confluence of factors has created a political environment rich with low-quality candidates and high-stakes grievances. Arguably, it has also contributed to the increasing emergence of invalid vote campaigns in subnational elections since 2010. The high incidence of invalid vote campaigns in turn makes Peru a particularly informative case for examining the ways that invalid vote campaigns succeed and fail.

Corruption is a high-salience concern in Peru. Since 2014, the country has been embroiled in a series of corruption scandals involving political candidates and established leaders at both the national and subnational levels. At the time of the 2018 election, dozens of local and national politicians, including four former presidents, had been charged with bribery and corruption related to the Brazilian conglomerate Odebrecht.<sup>5</sup> Trials related to the scandal are ongoing; in addition to former presidents, three former governors and many influential legislators, high-level ministers, journalists, and business leaders have been implicated in related crimes.<sup>6</sup> High-level corruption scandals have been widely covered by the news media, and the public has taken note: data from the AmericasBarometer surveys show that, in 2019, 36% of Peruvians thought that corruption was the most important problem facing the country, a significant increase from 2017 (26%) and 2014 (10%). Further, candidates for regional office are regularly implicated in egregious, electorally relevant crimes like abuse of authority or the embezzlement of public funds (Hidalgo Bustamante 2018). In short, elite corruption—a central grievance around which invalid vote campaigns mobilize voters—is common in Peru’s governorships, and is of growing concern to Peruvian citizens.

At the same time, a protracted crisis in the Peruvian party system has resulted in high turnover across levels of government, limiting candidate quality and accountability. Reelection is rare (Aragón and Incio 2014), and parties are ephemeral, often emerging to compete in an election and disappearing days after the contest (Levitsky and Cameron 2003; Mainwar-

ing 2006; McNulty 2011). The frequent entry and exit of political options increases the costs of candidate selection for voters, who often cannot rely on heuristics like partisanship to identify the candidate who best represents their preferences. Beyond complicating decision-making for voters, high electoral volatility can affect governance. Parties that enter and exit competition across election cycles are unable to accrue institutional knowledge over time, which limits their ability to effectively represent their constituents. Finally, high turnover can harm political accountability: high-quality candidates are not rewarded with reelection for good performance, and low-quality representatives who do not compete for reelection are not punished for poor performance. This combination of factors—a confusing and unstable partisan landscape, limited expertise among elected officials, and poor accountability—can decrease the quality of political representation over time, fueling citizen discontent and creating a natural constituency for protest vote efforts mobilized around complaints of low candidate quality.

To examine the ways that campaigns succeed and fail, it is necessary to observe failed cases, ideally while controlling for observed and unobservable features of departments that could affect outcomes. Organized invalid vote campaigns took place in four departments in both 2014 and 2018: *Áncash*, *Arequipa*, *Cusco*, and *Tacna*. Of these eight campaigns, two failed: *Áncash* in 2014, and *Cusco* in 2018. News coverage of the 2018 invalid vote campaign in *Cusco* was limited, and, indeed, campaign efforts appear to have been quite modest. I therefore selected *Áncash* for in-depth study. I chose *Arequipa* as a comparison case because doing so allows me to control for geographic and demographic factors (both regions are close to Lima, the national capital, and have territory in the coastal and Andean regions;<sup>7</sup> both departments also have large indigenous populations), while observing substantial variation in education and wealth across regions (both are higher in *Arequipa*).

Both *Áncash* and *Arequipa* are home to large indigenous populations,<sup>8</sup> although illiteracy is significantly higher in *Áncash*.<sup>9</sup> While both departments have large cities (the port city of *Chimbote* and the mountain city of *Huaraz* in *Áncash*, and *Arequipa*, the mountain capital of *Arequipa*), *Arequipa*'s population is substantially more urban than that of *Áncash*, and education and literacy, as well as development as measured by internet connectivity, cellular phone access, and access to indoor plumbing, are significantly higher there (INEI 2017). The proportion of invalid voting fueled by voters' inability to correctly mark the ballot due to illiteracy or innumeracy (e.g., McAllister and Makkai 1993; Power and Roberts 1995) should therefore be higher on average in *Áncash*.<sup>10</sup> This might make it

more difficult to observe increased invalid voting across election rounds in Áncash: if high initial invalid vote rates are driven by voter error, even a very influential invalid vote campaign in the runoff might not lead to an overall increase in the invalid vote if most citizens find the task of voting correctly easier in the runoff.

While *accidental* ballot invalidation might be higher in Áncash in the absence of campaigns, *intentional* invalid voting may be more common in Arequipa. At the same time, it may be easier to mobilize voters to spoil their votes in Arequipa due to higher levels of education and access to information there. Resource mobilization theories of protest suggest that educated individuals have greater cognitive and social resources through which they learn of and are convinced to participate in protest (e.g., Boulding 2014; Moseley 2018). Applied to invalid voting, this argument suggests that null vote campaigns should be better able to mobilize support where the population is relatively educated and has greater access to information, as in Arequipa (Cisneros 2013; Driscoll and Nelson 2014; see also Cohen 2018a; Moral 2016).

Because invalid vote campaigns were present in both 2014 and 2018 in both regions, I am able to make cross-time comparisons *within* each region, as well as across regions.<sup>11</sup> By examining campaign trajectories within departments over time, I can control for observed and unobservable features of each department that might be associated with campaign success or failure, and approximate a most similar systems design (Przeworski and Teune 1970). Doing so allows me to identify the factors that contributed to the differential success of campaigns promoting invalid voting in Áncash in 2014 and 2018 while holding population factors constant. By replicating this strategy in Arequipa and observing variation in campaign strategies and the choice set in 2014 and 2018 that did *not* alter the outcome, I am able to clarify the pathways that campaigns followed to success or failure.

### *Data Sources*

To develop these case studies, I draw on data from three main sources. First, I gathered contemporaneous news stories from online archives, as follows. I used the search terms “voto viciado,” “voto nulo,” “voto [en] blanco,” as well as each region name and election year (2014 and 2018) in a series of news outlets. For each region, I first gathered news stories from four nationally circulated outlets (*El Comercio*, *Diario Correo*, *Expreso*, and *La Tercera*), using their online archives. These daily newspapers

were selected to represent a range of political viewpoints, and for their broad readership in Peru.<sup>12</sup> I then replicated this initial search using local news sources (among others, *El Bubo* in Arequipa and *Huaraz Noticias* in Áncash),<sup>13</sup> Google, and LexisNexis Academic, to ensure coverage of blogs, relevant newspapers, and other popular media. Second, I searched Twitter and Facebook using the same terms, to identify information about calls for ballot invalidation that may have occurred exclusively or predominantly via social media.<sup>14</sup> Third, I incorporate information collected through focus groups in Arequipa in 2014, and semistructured interviews conducted in June 2019 with 21 local experts on invalid voting in Áncash and 16 experts in Arequipa.<sup>15</sup>

I operationalize campaign success, the dependent variable, using official election returns published online by the electoral commission (Jurado Nacional de Elecciones) as detailed in chapter 5. Using either of two alternative measures of success (cross-round change in invalid vote rates, or change relative to a benchmark election) shows that the 2014 effort in Áncash failed to increase the invalid vote, whereas the 2018 effort in Áncash, as well as both the 2014 and 2018 campaigns in Arequipa, were successful.

With respect to campaign leadership and grievances, I use information gathered from news accounts and local expert reports. After closely reading news and social media sources, I coded each article as mentioning or not mentioning elite and popular mobilization of the invalid vote, as well as each of four campaign grievances: candidate quality, corruption, unrepresentative options, and fraud. I then made a coding decision based on the sum of the evidence. If, for example, only one citizen group was mentioned as supporting an invalid vote campaign among 40 news articles that all named elite mobilizers, I coded popular mobilization as “not present.” I then confirmed these coding decisions through expert interviews.

I identify outsider candidates using biographical information gathered from candidates’ official CVs (made available by the Jurado Nacional de Elecciones). I identify “antiestablishment” candidates as those with no previous elected experience, who run under a new party label (Carreras 2012). To identify the presence of protest candidates, I searched the same news sources for information about protest candidates (“candidato[s] de protesta”). I also rely on the assessments of local experts, coding candidates they spontaneously referred to as “protest,” “populist,” or “outsider” options as protest candidates.

In what follows, I present the case study evidence for Áncash and Arequipa in 2014, and then for each region in 2018. In doing so, I pay particular

attention to the presence or absence of theoretically relevant explanatory factors detailed in chapter 5, and the likely mechanisms through which these factors worked. I then summarize the cross-time and cross-regional results before concluding.

### Áncash 2014—Campaign Failure

As early as October 15, eight days after the first-round gubernatorial election, candidates and political parties in Áncash started promoting spoiled voting in the runoff. In the wake of César Álvarez's high-profile arrest on corruption and assassination charges, the stakes of the regional election were high. While early exit polls predicted that the popular regional movement<sup>16</sup> Río Santa Caudaloso (RSC) would compete against regional movement ANDE-MAR in the runoff, in the final tally RSC was supplanted by the candidate for the regional movement Puro Áncash, Waldo Ríos Salcedo, the eventual winner. Ríos became infamous during the campaign for promising to pay Ancashinos 500 *nuevos soles* per household per month (more than half of the national monthly minimum wage of 930 *nuevos soles*) if he were victorious. This promise was widely covered by news media in the lead up to the runoff election. Indeed, when asked to discuss the 2014 election five years later, every expert interviewed in Áncash mentioned the 500 *nuevo sol* promise as dominating the second-round campaign.

Three regional political movements—RSC, the Movimiento Acción Nacional Peruano (MANPE), and the smaller Humanist Party—called publicly for their supporters to spoil their ballots in the runoff. These calls focused on alleged corruption among the candidates. For example, in its public statement calling for spoiled voting, RSC said that the organization “[did] not share the distracting, nontransparent positions . . . of both [second-round] candidates” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2014b). The party further elaborated that the “spoiled vote is a warning to both candidates and to any candidate who manages to win the governorship . . . [that] we will not allow the corrupt past from the previous government to return to power, we will take to the streets to stop that” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2014b).

MANPE, the fourth-place finisher in the first round, also promoted spoiled voting in the runoff; like RSC, MANPE explicitly linked this effort to corruption. Mautino Ángeles, a party leader, explained at the time that “both candidates . . . [are] housing many corrupt actors within their regional movements” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2014a). MANPE argued that

“neither Waldo Ríos nor Ricardo Narváez energetically condemned the nefarious acts that occurred in the region” under César Álvarez, and that MANPE’s decision to mobilize the spoiled vote aimed to send a signal to the incoming regional government that MANPE would hold them to account (Aeronoticias 2014). Similarly, the smaller Humanist Party called for spoiled voting among its followers, arguing that Ricardo Narváez and Waldo Ríos were both “corrupt” and “owned by the Álvarez family mafia” (RSD Noticias 2014). In short, null vote campaigners focused on an egregious grievance—corruption—that was also highly salient in local politics at the time of the election.

Complaints of low candidate quality during the runoff were focused on the candidates’ past performance in office and their willingness to engage openly in vote buying, rather than a lack of political experience. Indeed, both candidates had substantial political experience and ran with existing political organizations. Narváez had served as governor of Áncash from 2003 to 2006, and Ríos had previously served both as a congressman for Áncash and as mayor of its second-largest city, Huaraz. Thus, neither candidate was an antiestablishment option, and neither positioned himself as a protest candidate. If anything, complaints of corruption linked the candidates to illegal behavior on the basis of their experience.

In theory, the campaign in Áncash had all the necessary pieces in place to succeed. Campaigners protested an egregious and highly salient grievance, and there was clear evidence that the runoff candidates were willing to engage in corrupt practices such as vote buying. But the campaign did not successfully increase the invalid vote across election rounds. Instead, invalid vote rates declined, from 21.4% in the first round to 16.4% in the runoff. Why did the campaign fail? Campaign leadership, the mobilizational and legal strategies campaigners pursued, and the asymmetric relevance of campaign grievances for the candidates are key to understanding this outcome.

The 2014 invalid vote campaign in Áncash was led by popular political elites who promoted the spoiled ballot through traditional media outlets (i.e., print media). Together, the three parties that campaigned on behalf of the invalid vote won 19.4% of first-round ballots. This represents a substantial share of the vote in a crowded field of candidates, in which the top-two candidates won 14.1% and 13.7% of the vote, each. In fact, organizations campaigning for the invalid vote were among the most popular in the region. They should have been able to reactivate existing linkages to mobilize invalid votes (e.g., Superti 2020).

These politicians did not work in concert with civil society or other



nonelite organizations to promote invalid voting. As one journalist noted in 2019, “In 2014, I don’t recall any . . . social group that promoted [null voting] with much [effort]. So it mostly [existed] in commentary by opinion-makers, but it’s not something that . . . [sparked public interest]” (Áncash, Interview 1). A former gubernatorial candidate similarly noted that the 2014 null vote campaign was spearheaded by “political actors, especially those who came in third or fifth place in the election. . . . chiefs of staff for political campaigns or the candidates themselves,” not by citizen groups (Áncash, Interview 3). A journalist of 20 years indicated that in 2014, “there was no campaign, per se . . . with signs, and an identifiable group, and institutions from civil society” promoting the spoiled vote (Áncash, Interview 6). Print media sources do not mention civil society groups engaged in mobilizing invalid votes; rather, news stories explicitly link efforts to mobilize the invalid vote to political organizations eliminated from the runoff. Reviewing social media underscores how constrained these efforts were to elite circles: the few mentions of invalid voting on Facebook and Twitter from Áncash in 2014 are from news outlets mentioning elite campaigners, or politicians calling on their followers to spoil their ballots. These mentions did not receive substantial citizen interaction, nor were they widely shared. In sum, efforts to promote spoiled voting in Áncash in 2014 were mostly top-down, mobilized by eliminated political candidates, and took place almost exclusively through traditional media. This likely limited voters’ exposure to the campaign and contributed to its failure. To learn about the invalid vote campaign, voters would have had to seek out information about the election directly from eliminated parties or from print news sources, rather than being incidentally exposed to this information in the course of their regular activities.

A second likely reason that the campaign did not succeed is that campaigners’ actions led voters to view them as self-interested rather than sincere. For example, at the same time that third-place party RSC campaigned for the invalid vote, it took legal action attempting to remove Waldo Ríos from the ballot.<sup>17</sup> Had this effort succeeded, RSC would have competed in the runoff. That the organization sought to undermine the incoming government by calling for spoiled voting while simultaneously working to remove the second-place competitor to enable itself to compete likely contributed to public perceptions that the political organizations mobilizing the spoiled vote were sore losers. As one local politician in Chimbote noted, “There are sectors of political movements and parties that lose and . . . don’t want the opposition candidate to win” (Áncash, Interview 4). A professor at the Universidad Nacional Santiago Antúnez

de Mayolo agreed: “[The 2014 null vote campaign] was self-interested . . . It wasn’t a representative group of citizens, what always happens is, [a candidate] doesn’t advance to the second round and says, ‘[the candidate] who came in second shouldn’t have! I invite the people to vote blank’” (Áncash, Interview 17). In the words of one former gubernatorial candidate, “When you are a candidate or participate as part of a [regional movement] you are accepting the rules of the game. . . . So there is a conflict of interest when you don’t enter the second round and you call for null voting. . . . To what point do you accept the rules of the game [if you] also question those rules of the game?” (Áncash, Interview 5).

Finally, asymmetries in voters’ perceptions of candidate quality might also have worked against invalid vote campaigners. The 2014 campaign pitted two imperfect candidates against one another. However, in discussing the 2014 runoff election, several local politicians, journalists, and activists noted a stark difference in the quality of the two candidates competing. Complaints about Narváez focused on a lack of action, specifically an insufficient response to allegations of corruption within his party. In contrast, Ríos had been convicted of corruption in Congress and in 2014 was recorded stating his plans to engage in future corruption. For many, then, Narváez was the obvious, higher-quality option. As one journalist noted in 2019: “[People] like me practically viewed it as a done deal that Narváez would win [the runoff] because of Waldo Ríos’ priors” (Áncash, Interview 6). A local politician confirmed, “Waldo Ríos didn’t inspire confidence [*prestar garantías*]. But the other candidate, from ANDE-MAR, did” (Áncash, Interview 4). To the extent that the public perceived one of the candidates to be *more* corrupt than the other, some voters may have preferred not to spoil their ballots, casting halfhearted votes for Narváez rather than invalidating the ballot, and making it easier for Ríos to win.

This discussion thus points to three likely mechanisms through which the 2014 invalid vote campaign in Áncash failed. The specific combination of campaign tactics (disseminating campaign information through traditional media; campaigning simultaneously for the invalid vote *and* for the removal of a competing candidate) likely undermined the campaign in two ways. First, many voters may simply not have been exposed to information about the invalid vote campaign. Second, ordinary citizens who *were* exposed to campaign messaging likely downweighed that information as a self-interested attempt by sore losers to undermine the runoff result.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, chapter 4 shows that citizens view elite-led invalid vote campaigns as more self-interested and irresponsible than campaigns led by citizens, on average. Evidence consistent with that preexisting belief could make

citizens even more likely to dismiss null vote campaign efforts. A third likely reason for the campaign's failure is that one candidate was arguably a "least-bad" option with respect to the null vote campaign's grievances. While Narváez was not the candidate many preferred, evidence supporting allegations that he was corrupt was significantly less concrete than the evidence of Ríos's corruption, which was caught on video and widely reported on during the campaign.

### Arequipa 2014—Campaign Success

The 2014 campaign in Arequipa was in some ways similar to the campaign in Áncash. Mere days after the first-round election, popular political candidates called for invalid voting in the runoff. Corruption was an important issue in the campaign in Arequipa, as well; not only was incumbent governor Juan Manuel Guillén under investigation for alleged self-dealing while in office, accusations of corruption were levied against both second-round candidates.<sup>19</sup>

Two main grievances fueled calls for invalid voting in Arequipa in 2014: concerns about the second-round candidates' qualifications, and concerns about corruption. With respect to the former, neither candidate had a long record of elected service. Yamila Osorio, the eventual winner, was 28 years old and had been elected to a single four-year term in Arequipa's Regional Council, while Javier Ísmodes had been appointed to a single term in the regional government's Office of Private Investment. As one political expert said at the time, "[Both candidates] are unknown. Neither has any successful experience in public office. They weren't in charge of public works that they could show the population, independent of their professional accomplishments" (Huanca Urrutia 2014).

In addition to their limited experience, voters and first-round candidates linked both Yamila Osorio and Javier Ísmodes to corruption during Guillén's government. In September 2014, seven first-round candidates held a press conference arguing that both candidates were "moles" for incumbent Guillén and proposing to "fight against 'continuism' [of Guillén's rule] and corruption" (Redacción El Buho 2014a). Ísmodes was accused of selling government-owned lands to an investment company for a fraction of their value, effectively losing hundreds of thousands of *nuevos soles* in taxpayer money (Redacción El Buho 2014b). Osorio was accused of self-dealing, specifically of using government funds to purchase fuel from her family members' business at above-market prices (Redacción El Buho

2014d). Neither candidate was found guilty of corruption or self-dealing by Arequipa's comptroller, but the accusations persisted as a central issue during the campaign.

Although neither candidate had a long record of public service, neither Osorio nor Ísmodes campaigned as an "outsider." Nor did the candidates present themselves as antiestablishment or protest candidates. Osorio ran on the incumbent regional movement's ticket, although Guillén (who was under investigation at the time) did not make public appearances with her. Ísmodes also ran on an existing platform, emphasizing his experience with the business community and presenting himself as a centrist technocrat (Zegarra 2014). In short, the 2014 gubernatorial runoff in Arequipa did not feature a protest candidate who could have captured the votes of disgruntled Arequipeños.

As in Áncash, popular politicians promoted invalid voting in the 2014 runoff election in Arequipa. On October 13, 2014, a story in *El Bubo*, a prominent regional newspaper, noted that Elmer Cáceres Llica, the third-place candidate, had called for invalid voting, saying that "voting for either of the options is a vote in favor of corruption and . . . the mafias that have governed in Arequipa will continue in power" (Redacción El Bubo 2014c). Other eliminated first-round candidates also made public statements promoting blank or spoiled voting in the runoff (Palomino 2014). In 2019, one of these former candidates explained: "Many candidates, and I was one of them . . . oriented [voters] to vote null or spoil their ballots. I remember that in 2014, after seeing a lot of manipulation [of information] in the political scene, I got together with other candidates and we even held a press conference, saying that neither of the candidates filled expectations. But it was really a matter of conviction" (Arequipa, Interview 4).

However, despite their involvement and in contrast to Áncash, eliminated candidates were not the face of the invalid vote campaign in Arequipa's 2014 gubernatorial runoff. There is substantial evidence of public demonstrations and online mobilization efforts in support of invalid voting.<sup>20</sup> For example, on November 19, 2014, *El Bubo* published an article describing "a group of citizens washing the flag of Arequipa [a symbolic, anti-corruption protest] . . . with the objective of promoting the blank or spoiled vote in the runoff election." According to the article, the protestors argued that neither candidate "represented an electable option" due to allegations of corruption and their inexperience (Redacción El Bubo 2014e). Some members of this protest likely belonged to the Frente Anticorrupción, a citizen group formed to promote invalid voting that, in addition to protesting in the town square, "formed district and province-level

committees” and planned a “close of campaign meeting” where members “present[ed] arguments” against both of the candidate options (Redacción Diario Correo 2014b).<sup>21</sup> News reports indicate multiple demonstrations promoting invalid voting at the Plaza de Armas in the lead up to the election, including two days prior to the election (Redacción La República 2014c). In addition to these demonstrations, news stories detail campaign activity including the distribution of flyers and small businesses “transformed into new campaign offices for . . . the null vote” (Mamani 2014).

Campaign efforts were even more pervasive online. For example, during this period, the Colectivo Dignidad Arequipa promoted invalid voting via Facebook and Twitter. As of November 24, 2014 (13 days before the runoff), the Colectivo had more than 120,000 online followers (Mamani 2014). Newspapers noted that, on social media, “amusing images abound, and on Facebook [protestors] have even created accounts dedicated to not voting for Osorio and Ísmodes, while collectives in favor of null or blank voting call on the public not to support either of the gubernatorial candidates. The images critique their campaign and, in other cases, portray them as characters from the *Neighborhood of the Chavo del Ocho*<sup>22</sup> or reggaetón singers” (Redacción La República 2014b). Interviews affirm that the bulk of campaign activity took place online. A professor at the Universidad Nacional de San Agustín de Arequipa, for example, noted that the 2014 campaign was organized “principally on social media” (Arequipa, Interview 7).<sup>23</sup>

As in Áncash, it is possible that some viewed elites mobilizing the invalid vote as sore losers. Indeed, in Arequipa, some high-profile individuals came out in opposition to null voting using exactly this language. Both Osorio and Ísmodes opposed the null vote efforts, impugning the spoiled vote as “not democratic” and arguing that the campaign was “orchestrated by some ex-candidates who [were] sore losers” (Redacción Diario Correo 2014c). Similarly, one local political expert argued at the time (contradicting the weight of evidence about the campaign’s origins) that “the idea [for the campaign] came from the first-round losers, but that looked bad” (Palomino 2014). In addition to narratives about elite promoters of the invalid vote, some media circulated unflattering narratives about citizens who planned to invalidate their ballots. For example, one opinion piece published six days before the runoff in *La Mula*, an independent blog known for its biting commentary, argued, “Personally, I think that those citizens who support null voting don’t have sufficient political inclination to listen to these candidates or (even worse) don’t have the capacity for critical thought” (Perea 2014).

Yet, despite these widely publicized arguments suggesting that elite promoters of invalid voting were self-serving and that spoiling the ballot was irresponsible, the 2014 invalid vote campaign in Arequipa succeeded. Blank and null votes increased significantly in the second round, from 17.2% to 28.7% of all ballots cast.<sup>24</sup> The likely reasons for campaign success mirror the reasons for campaign failure in Áncash. First, information about the campaign was disseminated widely, via traditional media and also through street protests, campaign propaganda, and on social media. Voters in Arequipa were therefore more likely to receive messages promoting the invalid vote incidentally (e.g., by passing protestors on the street, or encountering flyers and signs in the town square) than in Áncash, where campaign messages were communicated almost exclusively through traditional media. As a result, awareness of the invalid vote as a protest option, and of the existence of a group of citizens supporting this option, should have been higher in Arequipa, likely increasing voters' willingness to consider spoiling their votes in protest, and potentially even increasing social pressure to participate in the protest campaign (e.g., Aytaç and Stokes 2019).

Second, the diversity of campaigners in Arequipa likely increased the campaign's credibility. In contrast to elite campaigners in Áncash, former candidates who called for invalid voting in Arequipa did not seek to undermine the first-round election's results through the courts. That is, elite campaigners' actions did not directly undermine their credibility. Even so, voters may have discounted messages from former candidates as self-interested—certainly, the media encouraged them to do so. However, messages promoting the invalid vote were repeated by a wide range of citizen groups and social organizations. The size of the coalition supporting the invalid vote, and its inclusion of ordinary citizens, likely counteracted any negative effects of elite campaigners, bolstering the campaign's credibility.

Finally, null voters' complaints about the candidates were symmetrical. Campaigners' grievances against Ísmodes were very similar to those against Osorio in scope and in kind. Both candidates had little relevant experience, and both candidates were accused of self-dealing on the same scale. As a result, neither candidate was the "least bad" on either of the dimensions around which the null vote campaign mobilized voters. This probably decreased the chance that likely protest voters would begrudgingly identify one candidate as the least objectionable choice, clearing the way for the invalid vote campaign to succeed.

### Áncash 2018—Campaign Success

As in 2014, those who promoted the invalid vote in the gubernatorial runoff in Áncash in 2018 argued that both second-round candidates were “corrupt” or “of low quality.” One local politician linked this tendency to broader regional trends in a personal interview: “[In 2014,] the region was completely undone, filled with corruption, and then Waldo [Ríos took office] and he was also involved in corruption . . . and the [popular] discontent that was already present in 2014 increased progressively to 2018” (Áncash, Interview 4).

Many invalid vote campaigners argued that the candidates were corrupt, or that their campaigns had been financed illegally. For example, one association that promoted invalid voting argued that “both candidates have spent millions on their campaigns, which reflects links to different businesses that are trying to govern the region” (Fernandez 2018e). Others insisted that the campaigns had spent “millions, financed by businesses and corruption” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2018). After the first round, several losing candidates called both runoff options “dangerous” because of their alleged links to illicit funding sources. One first-round candidate, Luis Luna Villarreal, “believed that both candidates [had] mortgaged the regional government to finance millionaire campaigns. ‘We have to be very careful because those who have financed the campaign are going to be in charge during the next government,’ he said. . . . ‘I consider them dangerous . . . because they will not have complete freedom’” (Fernandez 2018b). Juan Carlos Morillo, a candidate from the minor party Juntos por el Perú, voiced his support for spoiled voting in the second round because “both candidates have problems . . . just look at how they have invested in the campaign, their campaigns have been like galas [*han hecho gala en sus campañas*], and where did they get the money? We don’t know” (Diario de Chimbote 2018a).

With respect to the quality of the candidates competing in the runoff, many doubted their understanding of the problems facing ordinary Ancashinos (Diario de Chimbote 2018b). Unidos por el Perú, a citizen collective formed to promote invalid voting in the second round, voiced concern that “the candidates didn’t visit rural areas and therefore don’t understand the reality of the region” and, further, that they “hadn’t put forth clear and coherent proposals to combat [Áncash’s] main problems” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2018). One former politician was quoted in a local newspaper saying that the candidates “seem more like shamans who think they’re going to resolve all of the . . . region’s problems overnight,

with witchcraft and lies” (Redacción Huaraz Noticias 2018). The provincial mayor of Santa, Áncash’s most populous province, suggested publicly that he might spoil his vote because of the lack of policy proposals put forth by both campaigns: “There is a huge negative campaign, I don’t see a single [policy] proposal, and what there is, isn’t serious” (Fernandez 2018d). In short, those promoting the invalid vote in Áncash’s 2018 gubernatorial runoff linked their efforts to allegations of candidates’ corrupt ties to criminal organizations and to their unserious policy positions.

In contrast to 2014, when both second-round candidates were experienced politicians, neither candidate in Áncash’s 2018 gubernatorial runoff had previously held elected office. Although both candidates were novices, neither ran as an “outsider”; Juan Rebaza ran on the ticket of the established regional movement El Maicito, and Juan Carlos Morillo represented a national party, Somos Perú. Thus, while both novice candidates offered *change* to the political status quo, neither represented an antiestablishment option.

The invalid vote campaign in Áncash resembled the 2014 effort in several important ways. In both contests, compelling claims of political corruption and candidate quality drove calls for the invalid vote. And, in both cases, former candidates called on voters to invalidate their ballots. However, key differences in the 2018 campaign likely made its message more accessible, and more credible, to voters.

As in 2014, local politicians campaigned for the invalid vote in the 2018 runoff. However, while the 2014 campaign was limited to three political parties and their leaders, a much broader range of former candidates and local political actors publicly rejected the runoff candidates in 2018. The list of elites who made anticandidate statements was long, and included district and provincial mayors, as well as former gubernatorial candidates (Fernandez 2018b). In contrast to 2014, these were statements of individual preferences, not official party platforms.<sup>25</sup> Nor did partisan organizations undermine the credibility of their former candidates’ calls for invalid voting by working to change first-round election results. Together, these factors—the broad range of elites campaigning for the null vote, and a lack of apparently self-interested behavior—likely bolstered elite campaigners’ credibility.

Perhaps more importantly, the leadership of the 2018 campaign included a diversity of citizen groups, which employed a range of mobilizational strategies. For example, one news story described that “on social media and diverse personalities from the local political scene have insisted that Ancashinos should spoil their votes or simply leave the ballot blank . . .



as a signal of protest of the [second-round] candidates” (Fernandez 2018c). Citizen collectives also formed to promote invalid voting. For example, the newspaper *Diario Correo* reported that “on the basis of [extreme discontent], a group of citizens has formed an association [Unidos por el Perú] that seeks to promote that the majority of Ancashinos nullify their votes” (Fernandez 2018e). In personal interviews, journalists also identified citizen collectives as the birthplace of the 2018 campaign: “There were citizen collectives, like the Colectividad Dignidad Ciudadana . . . or the Frente de Defensa . . . [that promoted spoiled voting] to nullify the elections” (Áncash, Interview 16).

Contemporaneous reports and interviews with local experts confirm that much of the campaign activity undertaken by these groups occurred over social media. However, there is also broad agreement that the campaign evolved over time and used other tools of social mobilization. One journalist described this evolution: “[The campaign] started on social media, from person to person. Then it moved to interpersonal networks, WhatsApp and direct messages, and then there was a third phase of paid publicity on the radio, and television and billboards” (Áncash, Interview 1). Promoters of invalid voting in Áncash told members of their social networks to spoil their votes; they also placed billboards, hung street signs, and engaged in demonstrations to promote the spoiled vote. “It started in social collectives. . . . One or two weeks before the [runoff], the rumors turned into a full-blown campaign, with graphics on social media and paintings on the streets and radio spots” (Áncash, Interview 7).

This high level of citizen engagement in the null vote campaign was all but unprecedented in Áncash. One expert commented, “I have been a journalist for more than 20 years and I have never seen a null vote campaign, not a real campaign with banderoles and posters and people standing in front of stoplights with huge black banners saying ‘Vote Null! Spoil Your Vote!’” (Áncash, Interview 6). A political analyst who works with a local nongovernmental organization in Chimbote similarly noted, “This is the first time I’ve seen [such a strong] null vote campaign since Sendero Luminoso<sup>26</sup>. . . . Sendero used to mobilize the null vote, but using other tactics and not in democratic spaces. Since the days of the Sendero, I haven’t seen a campaign that laid out so clearly, you know, ‘vote null or spoil your vote,’ and with no response to that . . . like, ‘spoiling your vote is antidemocratic’ as a response, or, ‘people who talk about null voting are terrorists.’ There wasn’t this kind of response. The response was more like, ‘voting null is interesting’” (Áncash, Interview 7).

At the same time, and in contrast to 2014, complaints against the can-

didates were symmetrical. Neither candidate had relevant political experience, so this complaint applied equally to both options. The potential criminality of the campaigns was described in nonspecific terms, but similar language was used to describe both candidates' purported links to illicit actors. Indeed, experts from the region agreed that a second major difference between the 2014 and 2018 campaigns was that neither of the 2018 candidates represented a "least bad" option (e.g., Áncash, Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 15).

In short, the 2018 invalid vote campaign in Áncash differed from the 2014 effort with respect to leadership and mobilizational tactics. Both campaigns focused on the presence of low-quality candidates and elite corruption as core grievances. As in 2014, neither of the runoff candidates presented himself as a protest candidate, although both 2018 candidates were political novices. However, while the 2014 campaign was led exclusively by political organizations, the 2018 campaign included a wider range of political candidates and, perhaps more importantly, was strongly associated with civil society organizations and citizen collectives. This likely led voters to view campaigners as relatively less self-interested in 2018 versus 2014—or to overlook the presence of potentially self-interested actors given the presence of other, noncandidate leaders. At the same time, campaign activity occurred in diverse spaces and using varied modes, including street protest and online activity. This increased the likelihood that citizens would be incidentally exposed to information about the invalid vote campaign. Finally, complaints of candidate quality in 2018 were symmetrical. Similarities in the strength of complaints about the candidates likely decreased voters' ability to identify a "least bad" option, making them more likely to pay attention to anticandidate messages that they were, in 2018, more likely to receive.

### Arequipa 2018—Campaign Success

The 2018 election in Arequipa, like the election in Áncash, was colored by high-level corruption scandals. As one political analyst noted in a contemporaneous news article, "The corruption scandals of the last few months have unchained popular discontent. [High levels of null votes in the first round] show us that the electorate does not want to be held responsible for designating new public authorities" (Redacción Web—Diario Sin Fronteras 2018). Following historically high levels of invalid voting in the first-round election—22.2% of all votes cast—a polarizing and conflictive run-

off contest began. News sources described the campaign as a “battle” and a “fight” (Perú 24 2018). Several local experts noted that the 2018 runoff election was “much more intense than previous [campaigns]” (Arequipa, Interview 3). It pitted the eventual winner, Elmer Cáceres Llica, a former provincial mayor who took “a principled, demagogic, populist position” (Arequipa, Interview 4), against Javier Ísmodes, a “technocrat” (Arequipa, Interview 10) with limited political experience.

Protestors’ grievances once again focused largely on candidate quality and concerns about corruption. As one newspaper succinctly notes, “Moral questions about and judicial proceedings against both candidates have generated distrust among the population, which wants new candidates” (Condori 2018). Echoing the 2014 campaign, Ísmodes was linked to unproved allegations of self-dealing; he was also smeared online as a “traitor” [*traidor*; *vendepatria*] to the region (Quispe 2018), and even falsely accused of being a Chilean, rather than Peruvian, citizen (e.g., Redacción Peru21 2018a). Cáceres Llica, in contrast, faced criticism based on his history of criminal charges, including multiple accusations of rape and bribing the press (Redacción Perú 21 2018b; Redacción RPP 2018). In short, campaigners’ grievances were based on the candidates’ alleged corruption and their qualifications to serve as the region’s executive.

As in 2014, neither 2018 candidate represented an “antiestablishment” option with respect to their political experience. Cáceres Llica had extensive experience in political office, and neither candidate ran on a new party platform. Indeed, both candidates had been strong contenders in the 2014 gubernatorial race, finishing in second (Ísmodes) and third (Cáceres Llica) place. However, Cáceres Llica positioned himself as a protest candidate, promoting populist and xenophobic policies (for example, he proposed limiting Venezuelan migration to Arequipa; Redacción El Comercio 2018). In addition to these differences in political style, in 2018 the candidates represented distinct policy alternatives: Ísmodes represented the urban center-right while Cáceres Llica represented the rural, populist, “antisystem” left (e.g., Vargass Gutierrez 2018).

At the same time, in stark contrast to 2014, politicians and former candidates did not promote the blank or spoiled vote in Arequipa in 2018. Instead, they overwhelmingly campaigned *against* the invalid vote. For example, seated congressman and former gubernatorial candidate Marco Falconí opposed invalid voting in the second round (Choque 2018). Antonio Gamero, an unsuccessful first-round candidate, argued that it “would be very difficult to reach the number of votes needed to hold new elections (66%)” (Velasquez 2018). Regional Councilor Fernando Bossio Rotondo “opined

that one shouldn't support the blank and spoiled voting that is brewing [*fomentando*] for the second round . . . because someone has to govern the region" (Prensa Regional 2018). Victor Hugo Rivera, a former mayoral candidate, similarly said that "it is a duty to decide between the two candidates who aspire to govern Arequipa" and Ysrael ("Cachete") Zúñiga, a former soccer player and seated regional councilor from Arequipa, published a video online on November 27, 2018, urging voters to select one of the candidates. "In my best goals, I took a second to decide. This December 9th, vote your conscience. Arequipa can't go backwards! Don't spoil your vote!" (Cuentas 2018) These anti-null-vote efforts in theory could have undermined the 2018 campaign's ability to mobilize spoiled ballots.<sup>27</sup>

While most elites decried invalid voting as "irresponsible" or "antidemocratic," scattered opinion leaders disagreed. For example, one professor at the Universidad Nacional de San Agustín de Arequipa "affirmed that when a citizen opts for a spoiled or blank vote, that is not an irresponsible decision, but rather a symptom of the partisan crisis in the country. '[Political organizations in Arequipa are] without ideology, without a political project. They are formed before elections, nobody knows who the candidates are, they just appear every four years'" (Redacción La República 2018c). Some protesting voters viewed their null votes as explicitly pro-democratic. As one local expert noted: "One discourse . . . was that the null vote was the only [principled] political vote, because the candidates weren't politicians and the defense of [democratic] politics implied a null vote because we didn't have competition over political ideas, we just had political marketing. So, the null vote was like a defense of democracy" (Arequipa, Interview 3).

News reports are mostly silent about the specifics of the 2018 invalid vote campaign. Rather, reports focused their attention on the above-mentioned efforts to *dissuade* the public from spoiling their votes.<sup>28</sup> What information is reported suggests that mobilization took place online, in particular on social media, especially Facebook (RPP Noticias 2018). Interviews overwhelmingly affirm that much of the mobilization in 2018, as in 2014, occurred by citizen groups online: "[The campaign] was [organized] by citizens via social media" (Arequipa, Interview 1). A former gubernatorial candidate agreed that most mobilization took place "on Facebook" and on "local radio," although he also mentioned having seen leaflets and flyers (*volantes, pasquines*) in the streets (Arequipa, Interview 2). Others agreed that the campaign started online, but that it later migrated to television, with "two debates [over the pros and cons of spoiling the vote], and later also newspapers, and radio stations, too" (Arequipa, Interview 12).

Together, the runoff candidates won only 24.5% of the total first-round vote; most Arequipeños thus went into the runoff disappointed with their options. This large pool of discontented voters was faced with a choice between two imperfect options who campaigned on personal attacks rather than policy programs, likely inflaming feelings of grievance during the runoff. Although this high-salience grievance likely increased the 2018 invalid vote campaign's likelihood of success, additional factors should have made the campaign *less* likely to succeed than the 2014 effort. By positioning himself as a protest option, Cáceres Llica likely attracted some aggrieved voters who otherwise might have spoiled their ballots. At the same time, high perceived polarization (both ideological and across the urban-rural divide) between the runoff candidates likely led some voters to ignore their concerns about the candidates to vote for their own political team (see chapter 3). In combination with multiple, highly publicized anti-null-vote messages from popular political figures, it is perhaps surprising that the campaign succeeded. Ultimately, though, it did: the invalid vote increased dramatically across election rounds, accounting for more than 31% of all ballots cast in the runoff. Why?

As in the three campaigns described above, the nature of the campaigners, combined with their mobilizational and communication strategies, likely resulted in the campaign's success. Regarding the former, the invalid vote campaign appears to have started as a grassroots political movement. Unlike the 2014 campaign, virtually no elite voices promoted the blank or spoiled vote in the 2018 runoff. Rather, elites focused on *demobilizing* the invalid vote, mostly through appeals made by traditional media sources. While a small number of voices argued that the 2018 invalid vote campaign was fueled by online "astroturfing" efforts by Cáceres Llica's supporters, this perception was not widely expressed in news articles, social media posts, or expert interviews.<sup>29</sup> In short, the campaign addressed a compelling, credible grievance, and its leadership did not take contradictory actions that undermined its credibility.

The 2018 campaign also mobilized voters using a range of communication strategies including social media, street protests, and, to a much lesser extent, traditional media. As in 2014, then, disaffected voters were likely incidentally exposed to information about the invalid vote campaign through their interpersonal networks and while going about their lives. This incidental exposure may have been enough to lead voters to consider invalidating the vote as a viable protest option.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the two successful campaigns detailed above, there were important asymmetries in voters' complaints about the

runoff candidates in Arequipa in 2018. Although both candidates faced accusations of criminal behavior, the accusations levied against Cáceres Llica, the eventual winner, were both more credible and severe on their face. As in 2014, Ísmodes was accused of self-dealing; however, Arequipa's comptroller found no evidence of wrongdoing and he was cleared of all charges. In contrast, Cáceres Llica faced multiple accusations of rape, domestic abuse, and press bribery. Although he had not been tried for these crimes, candidate Cáceres Llica had been convicted of making false statements to the state by falsifying documents.<sup>30</sup> The credibility and stakes of these accusations are clearly different; it is somewhat surprising, then, that so many Arequipeños would choose to spoil their ballots rather than vote for the "less-bad" option in this case. It is possible that the asymmetry in grievances did not impede the invalid vote campaign's success in Arequipa in 2018 due to the overall tenor of the campaign. The extremely contentious runoff may have turned potential swing voters off, leading undecided voters who considered casting a protest vote and supporting Ísmodes to view the candidate not as "less-bad" but as "differently bad" instead.

### Summary of 2014 and 2018 Results

Taken as a whole, these case studies offer three likely reasons that campaigns promoting the invalid vote fail, even when the political circumstances are amenable to their success:

1. Campaign leaders' actions undermine the campaign's credibility.
2. Campaign information is diffused exclusively through traditional outlets, limiting public exposure.
3. One candidate represents a "least-bad" option with respect to campaign grievances.

Table 6.1 summarizes the evidence presented in the four case studies in this chapter. The first column lists each potential explanation. In the remaining columns, "plus" signs indicate that a given factor was present in a particular department in a given year, while "minus" signs indicate that factor's absence. Cells in bold type and marked with asterisks represent those factors that changed across elections within each department. For example, while no protest candidate competed in Arequipa in 2014, Cáceres Llica ran as a protest candidate during the 2018 runoff; these cells are therefore in bold, and the 2018 cell is marked with an asterisk.

TABLE 6.1. Explanations of Campaign Success over Time in Áncash and Arequipa

Explanation	Áncash		Arequipa	
	2014 (failure)	2018 (success)	2014 (success)	2018 (success)
Central grievance: Corruption	+	+	+	+
Central grievance: Candidate quality	+	+	+	+
Anti-establishment option (2nd round)	-	-	-	-
Protest candidate	-	-	-	+*
Popular mobilizing elite	+	+	+	-*
Popular mobilization	-	+*	+	+
High polarization	-	-	-	+*
Anti-null-vote campaign	-	-	-	+*
<i>Mechanisms</i>				
Elite leaders undermine credibility	+	-*	-	-
Varied diffusion strategy	-	+*	+	+
Asymmetric grievances	+	-*	-	+*

Note: + indicates the presence of a factor in a given election year, and— the absence of a factor. Bold type and asterisks (\*) represent factors that changed across elections within each department.

Within departments, there is variation in several potential explanatory factors over time: the presence of a protest candidate, popular elites mobilizing the invalid vote, and mobilization by civil society organizations vary both across and within departments over time, as does polarization and the presence of an anti-null-vote campaign. However, except for popular mobilization, cross-time change in these factors is not associated with invalid vote campaign success. In Arequipa, change in the presence of a protest candidate, pro-invalid-vote mobilization by popular elites, candidate polarization, and even a coordinated anti-null-vote campaign did not stop invalid vote campaigns from succeeding. In Áncash, in contrast, only one factor changes across time, the presence of mobilization by citizen groups. This change *is* associated with campaign success: all three successful campaigns included substantial popular mobilization efforts, while the only unsuccessful campaign did not. However, evidence presented in chapter 5 shows that, on average, this factor does not predict campaign success.

Rather, a closer examination of the mechanisms for campaign success suggests that there are at least three pathways through which campaigns may fail, even if they have characteristics that in theory should lead to their success. First, campaigns can undermine their own credibility when leaders behave in ways that appear self-serving. This can involve, for

example, seeking to overturn a first-round election result in a way that benefits a candidate who is simultaneously campaigning for the protest vote.<sup>31</sup> Second, by distributing information about an invalid vote campaign exclusively through traditional media outlets or partisan sources instead of using a broader range of technologies to spread the campaign message (e.g., social media, street signage, rallies), campaigners limit their audience and, as a result, the potential influence of their campaign message. Finally, if somewhat less consistently, when a null vote campaign's grievances more accurately describe one of the candidate options, voters may instead select the "least-bad" candidate option.<sup>32</sup>

### Discussion

The case studies presented in this chapter take advantage of spatial and temporal variation in the presence and success of invalid vote campaigns in Peruvian gubernatorial elections to better understand how these campaigns succeed or fail. By comparing campaigns across geography and over time, I am able to control for explanatory factors that do not change across or within locales, while gaining variation in the dependent variable (campaign success).

The case studies analyzed here suggest three likely mechanisms for campaign failure. First, citizens may view elites who promote invalid voting as self-serving, or as sore losers. Elite behavior can exacerbate (or, potentially, minimize) this perception. Second, citizens may simply not receive information about invalid vote campaigns. This should be more likely to happen where campaigns rely on traditional media outlets to publicize their message, rather than also using social media and the tools of popular mobilization. Third, where a null vote campaign's grievances apply more clearly to one candidate, voters may be less likely to spoil their votes, and more likely to select the "less-bad" candidate option.

In Ancash's failed 2014 campaign, all of these mechanisms occurred simultaneously: elite campaigners undermined their credibility, the diffusion of information about the campaign was limited to traditional media sources, and grievances applied asymmetrically to the runoff candidates. The question thus remains whether these mechanisms must coexist to undermine an invalid vote campaign, or whether the presence of only some of these factors is sufficient.<sup>33</sup> Evidence from Arequipa in 2018, where the campaign succeeded in spite of the asymmetrical relevance of its grievances, suggests that this mechanism is not sufficient for campaign failure.



While these mechanisms appear to explain the success and failure of invalid vote campaigns in Áncash and Arequipa, they are not the only possible routes through which campaigns could succeed or fail. Questions remain about whether these mechanisms apply in other cases and under what circumstances. It is my hope that future work will identify these scope conditions, as well as additional mechanisms that may lead campaigns to succeed or fail in other circumstances.

## The Downstream Consequences of Invalid Vote Campaigns

On January 14, 2018, Nayib Bukele, then the mayor of El Salvador's capital city of San Salvador, took to Twitter to ask his supporters for a "favor." Because his party, *Nuevas Ideas*, would not be appearing on the ballot during the March 2018 legislative elections, Bukele asked that his supporters, "Vote null and if you are feeling lazy, stay home and watch television" (El Salvador Times 2018). Bukele's statements were widely covered in the national press, arguably raising his popularity; the invalid vote more than doubled in the March election. Bukele later launched a bid for the presidency, and was elected in 2019.

Following his election, Bukele engaged in a series of illiberal maneuvers that hastened democratic backsliding in El Salvador. For example, in 2019, Bukele ordered the Supreme Court of Justice to open a trial against a prominent political rival, although a prior investigation by the same court showed no evidence of wrongdoing (García-Sayan 2020). In February 2020, he sent armed soldiers to the National Assembly to pressure legislators to approve his anticrime bill (Guzmán et al. 2020). And in April 2020, Bukele authorized the use of lethal force by security officers against suspected gang members, undermining their fundamental human rights (Renteria 2020).

Bukele represents an evocative example of an invalid vote campaign fueling the rise of a political candidate whose later actions undermined democracy. But how common is this trajectory? Are null vote campaigns bad for democracy, on average? More broadly, what are the downstream

consequences of invalid vote campaigns on democratic politics and political engagement in the societies where they occur?

This chapter reviews the evidence of null vote campaigns' potential downstream effects. First, I analyze data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project to assess whether democratic quality declines in the aftermath of campaigns promoting the invalid vote. I find that, contrary to the Bukele example, invalid vote campaigns precede stability or slight *improvements* to democratic quality in the short term, on average.

I next examine whether the kinds of candidates that emerge and are elected to office change in the wake of invalid vote campaigns. Official candidate biographies and electoral returns show that antiestablishment candidates are no more likely to compete in the years following an invalid vote campaign. When these candidates do compete, though, they win a larger share of the vote. Finally, I examine whether patterns of political participation change after invalid vote campaigns occur, using data from presidential elections across Latin America and gubernatorial elections in Peru. Rates of blank and spoiled voting increase substantially in elections following a campaign, suggesting that the invalid vote becomes normalized as a tool of protest in these contexts. However, invalid vote campaigns do not precede changes in turnout. This suggests that campaigns promoting the blank and spoiled vote do not mobilize new voters, but rather help shape decisions made by habitual voters, who cast invalid ballots to express their discontent with the available options.

Invalid vote campaigns emerge in response to local political circumstances. By their nature, then, these campaigns are endogenous, making it effectively impossible to determine whether these cross-time shifts are the result of null vote campaigns or artifacts of regional or global trends in democracy.<sup>1</sup> Still, these results are an important first step in understanding how invalid vote campaigns affect voters and the democracies in which they live. This chapter suggests that invalid vote campaigns are not innately harmful to democracy. Indeed, null vote campaigns can actually precede *improvements* in democratic quality in the short term in the societies where they occur.

### Invalid Vote Campaigns and Democracy

Beyond the example of Nayib Bukele's 2018 campaign for the invalid vote and his later efforts to undermine Salvadoran democracy, there is a theoretical reason to expect that invalid vote campaigns might precipitate

democratic decline. Past scholarship has shown that citizens can communicate their preference for antidemocratic policies to elites who, in turn, engage in democratic backsliding (Casper and Tyson 2014). Voters who disapprove of democracy's core institutions elected some of Latin America's most clearly authoritarian leaders, including Venezuela's Hugo Chávez (Canache 2002; Kutiyski and Krouwel 2014) and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro (Cohen et al. 2022). If—correctly or not—political elites interpret invalid vote campaigns as a signal of low public support for democracy, then in the years following these campaigns, illiberal politicians should be emboldened to engage in behaviors that undermine democracy bit by bit.

Invalid vote campaigns emerge more often where democratic quality is lower (see chapter 3), which might lead elites to interpret a preponderance of blank or spoiled ballots as an expression of citizens' discontent with democracy itself, rather than with the specific candidates on offer. News sources affirm that many Latin American opinion leaders view invalidating the vote as “irresponsible” precisely because of such potential downstream effects. For example, members of El Salvador's electoral commission argued in 2018 that calling for the invalid vote is “absolutely irresponsible . . . because [that call] becomes influential [for the final results]” and electorally benefits “the same [parties] as always”—an outcome that runs contrary to protesting voters' intentions (Castro 2018). When establishment parties and candidates win election despite high rates of protest votes, the argument goes, this can erode voters' faith in the political system's ability to represent them, emboldening antidemocratic candidates in the future.

Others view the act of casting a blank or spoiled vote as inherently undemocratic. One Colombian intellectual typified this view in a 2014 opinion editorial, arguing that casting a blank vote was emblematic of voters' “authoritarianism, disrespect for the constitution and the law, strongman rule (*caudillismo*), the culture of fear, and proved corruption” (Rueda 2014). In this view, the very existence of campaigns promoting the blank or spoiled vote is evidence of the public's disdain for democracy. That such views appear in the media—even if they are not the dominant view (see chapter 1)—might lead elites to interpret invalid vote campaigns as an indication of low public buy-in to democracy, irrespective of the public's actual preferences.

If elites interpret invalid vote campaigns as a signal of low public support for democracy, there are several outcomes we might expect to observe. First, if elites believe that citizens want them to engage in antidemocratic activities, then incumbent politicians should increasingly engage in demo-

cratic backsliding—by expanding their own power through court packing, limiting press freedoms, or cracking down on political opposition, for example—following invalid vote campaigns (Bermeo 2016). Second, candidates that explicitly challenge the political status quo, including anti-establishment candidates, should be more likely to compete (and should win more votes) in elections that follow invalid vote campaigns. This is because protest voters who oppose democracy should be more likely to support candidates who express an intent to undermine democracy in later elections (e.g., Azpuru and Malone 2019; Cohen et al. 2022). Such individuals may also be more amenable to populist messages in future elections (Aron and Superti 2021).

If, on the other hand, elites interpret invalid vote campaigns as an expression of public disapproval of low or declining democratic quality, winning candidates should work to *improve* the quality of democracy. Strategic, election-oriented politicians should seek to win the support of those who cast blank or spoiled ballots during an invalid vote campaign, especially where this group represents a large constituency. The relatively moderate nature of ballot invalidation as a protest may also convince elites to respond to invalid vote campaigns by strengthening democracy. The evidence presented in previous chapters suggests that, in casting blank or spoiled ballots, protestors use their votes—a standard tool of democracy—to make anticandidate demands, not antisystem ones. This tactic thus leverages existing political structures against democratic backsliding, which past studies have shown can be an effective strategy (Cleary and Öztürk 2020; Gamboa 2017, 2022). Mainstream politicians should be receptive to pro-democracy demands, which shore up the political system that allowed them to gain power. This should be especially true if elected officials believe that protest voters are likely to turn out again to reward responsive incumbents in future elections. In short, there is reason to expect that invalid vote campaigns could lead to *improvements* in the quality of democracy if elites view those who cast invalid votes as habitual voters responding to deficiencies in democracy.

Hypothesizing about the downstream effects of invalid vote campaigns on democratic quality implies that invalid vote campaigns can have lasting effects on political participation, more broadly. These campaigns have the potential to mobilize formerly disenfranchised citizens to engage in conventional politics, by turning out and using the vote in an unconventional way. An important body of scholarly work on voter participation suggests that once citizens turn out to vote, they are significantly more likely to turn out again (e.g., Coppock and Green 2015). The act of participating improves

citizens' feelings of efficacy and their satisfaction with democracy, leading them to participate again in later elections (Kostelka and Blais 2018; Valentino et al. 2009). A citizen who turns out for the first time to spoil her ballot as part of an invalid vote campaign may thus become newly motivated to engage in politics in the future. However, if they mostly alter the behavior of habitual voters rather than mobilizing new ones, campaigns promoting the invalid vote should not affect turnout in future contests.

More directly, invalid vote campaigns should increase the use of blank and spoiled votes to signal discontent in later elections. Citizens have a range of tools that they can use to express their dissatisfaction with politics at any given time. Invalid vote campaigns highlight one of these tools both by making the option salient and by assigning it a specific meaning (Alvarez et al. 2018). By defining the invalid vote as a protest tool, campaigns that promote blank and spoiled voting can make the behavior salient for disgruntled citizens. Following an invalid vote campaign, casting blank or spoiled ballots may thus become an increasingly normalized means of expressing political frustration (e.g., Superti 2020). If this is the case, then invalid vote rates should increase significantly in the years following an invalid vote campaign.

The following sections examine the extent to which invalid vote campaigns affect each of these outcomes. First, I examine the effect of invalid vote campaigns on common measures of democratic backsliding. Next, I turn to the types of candidates that compete in presidential elections—are antiestablishment candidates more likely to compete, and do they win more votes following invalid vote campaigns? Finally, I assess whether invalid vote campaigns affect turnout and the use of blank and spoiled voting in later presidential and gubernatorial contests.

### **Invalid Vote Campaigns Do Not Precipitate Democratic Backsliding**

If invalid vote campaigns precipitate democratic backsliding, then measures of democratic quality should decline abruptly following elections featuring these campaigns, as newly elected politicians move to expand their power. Figure 7.1 assesses this possibility by examining trends in four measures of democratic quality collected by the V-Dem project for the years immediately before and after invalid vote campaigns in presidential elections. The first two dependent variables (the absence of court packing and executive respect for the constitution) capture the independence of branches of government that serve as checks on executive power. The

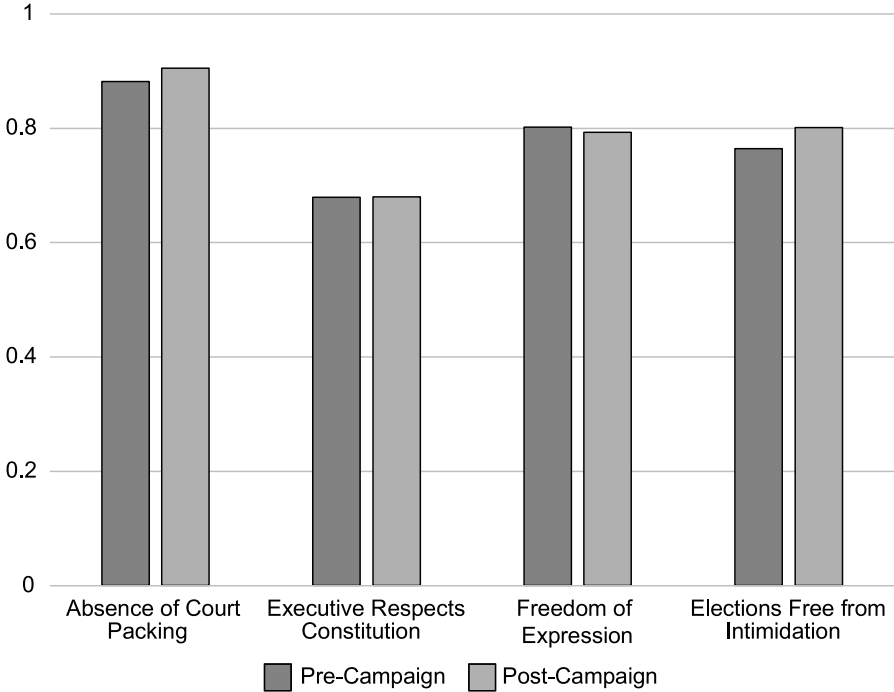


Figure 7.1. Measures of Democratic Quality Pre- and Postinvalid Vote Campaigns

Source: Original data collection, Varieties of Democracy.

Note: The figure presents average values of four measures of democratic quality for years immediately prior to and following an invalid vote campaign (N = 68 for *Court Packing*, *Respect Constitution*, *Respect Media Freedom*, N = 73 for *Free from Intimidation*).

third measure, respect for press and media freedom, captures whether the government stifles dissenting voices, while the fourth dependent variable, election intimidation, captures the extent to which opposition parties can compete without being harassed. For this analysis, I rescaled all dependent variables to range from 0 to 1, with 1 signifying “more of” each variable. Higher values also represent “pro-democracy” outcomes, such as the *absence* of court packing and election intimidation. I compare values of each dependent variable for the year immediately prior to, and immediately following, an invalid vote campaign.<sup>2</sup> I use this brief window to ensure that the invalid vote campaign, rather than some other intervening political factor, is the likely cause of a particular outcome.

Figure 7.1 presents average values of each dependent variable for the pre- and postinvalid vote campaign period. The figure shows small pro-democracy changes or stability for all four variables, although the magni-

tude and significance of these effects varies. To start, there is a 0.04 unit decrease in court packing immediately following an invalid vote campaign, compared to years immediately preceding the campaign. This change is modest compared to observed variation in the court packing measure (0.25 standard deviations), and does not reach standard thresholds of statistical significance ( $p < 0.15$ , one-tailed). Respect for the constitution and freedom of expression see much smaller, statistically insignificant postcampaign shifts (0.07 and 0.04 standard deviations, respectively), indicating that neither executive respect for the constitution nor respect for press and media freedom changes in the wake of invalid vote campaigns, on average. Invalid vote campaigns do precede improvements to election quality: elections immediately following an invalid vote campaign are 0.08 units freer from intimidation (0.35 standard deviations) compared to elections immediately preceding an invalid vote campaign, and this difference is marginally significant ( $p < 0.1$ , one-tailed).

It is possible that these improvements to democratic quality co-occur with invalid vote campaigns. Incumbent politicians may see the writing on the proverbial wall and work to improve the quality of democracy in an attempt to maintain power at the same time that a distinct or overlapping set of factors leads invalid vote campaigns to emerge. Additional analysis suggests that this is not the case for election intimidation. Intimidation of opposition candidates declines only in elections that *follow* invalid vote campaigns, not during the election in which the campaign occurs. Results for the measure of court packing are inconclusive.

Chapter 3 of this book presents evidence that invalid vote campaigns are more likely to emerge where incumbents intimidate the political opposition, that is, where the quality of elections is low. The evidence presented in figure 7.1 suggests that invalid vote campaigns can also be associated with improvements to democracy in the short term. That is, rather than precipitating further declines in democratic quality, invalid vote campaigns appear to be a neutral or even *pro*-democracy force on average.

### Antiestablishment Candidates Win More Votes Following Invalid Vote Campaigns

Beyond the quality of democracy, invalid vote campaigns could have implications for a nation's democratic politics. For example, invalid vote campaigns may shape the kinds of candidates that choose to compete, as well as those who win elections. If politicians interpret invalid vote campaigns



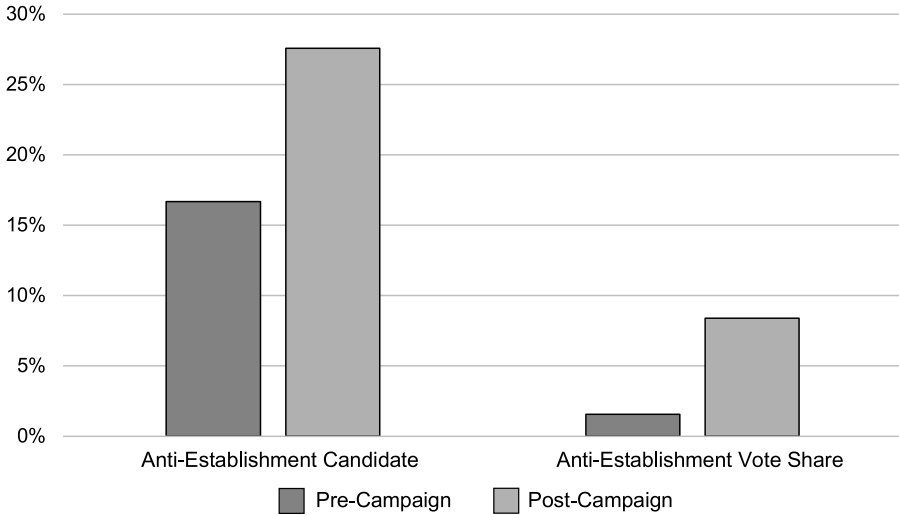


Figure 7.2. Antiestablishment Candidates Pre- and Postinvalid Vote Campaigns

Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies.

Note: The figure shows the frequency of antiestablishment candidacies, and their average vote share, in elections that immediately precede or follow an invalid vote campaign (N = 53 for candidacies, N = 34 for vote shares).

as a signal of public discontent with the political system, then antiestablishment candidates should become more likely to compete—and should win more votes—following an invalid vote campaign.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 7.2 shows that, while antiestablishment candidates are not significantly more likely to emerge, they do garner greater electoral support in the wake of invalid vote campaigns. The first set of bars represents the frequency with which antiestablishment candidates compete in elections immediately preceding or following an invalid vote campaign, while the second set of bars shows the average vote share of antiestablishment candidates before and after invalid vote campaigns.

Figure 7.2 shows that antiestablishment candidates competed in 27.6% of postinvalid vote campaign elections, compared to 16.7% of precampaign elections. This large increase in the presence of antiestablishment candidates is suggestive, but does not reach standard thresholds for statistical significance, due to the small number of elections that include antiestablishment candidates. Still, it is possible that antiestablishment candidates will be emboldened to compete after invalid vote campaigns. However, even if they are emboldened, antiestablishment candidates may not enjoy electoral support when they compete. The second set of bars in the figure

therefore compares the vote shares of antiestablishment candidates who compete in elections immediately preceding and following an invalid vote campaign. On average, antiestablishment candidates' vote shares increase significantly in elections immediately following an invalid vote campaign, by 6.8 percentage points. Indeed, antiestablishment candidates won 8.4% of the vote following an invalid vote campaign, on average, compared to 1.6% in elections immediately prior.

As with the measures of democracy, it is possible that increased support for antiestablishment candidates co-occurs with, rather than follows from, invalid vote campaigns. Additional analyses show that this is likely the case. Compared to elections that immediately precede an invalid vote campaign, antiestablishment candidates win a significantly higher share of votes during elections in which an invalid vote campaign occurs. However, antiestablishment candidates' vote shares do not change significantly when comparing elections with an invalid vote campaign to the postcampaign election. This suggests that invalid vote campaigns probably do not cause the increase in antiestablishment candidate performance. Rather, underlying political factors (e.g., public disenchantment with low-quality candidates, high-salience corruption scandals, or democratic backsliding) appear to *simultaneously* increase invalid voting and support for antiestablishment candidates, and this improved antiestablishment performance persists in future contests.

### Invalid Vote Campaigns Precede Changing Patterns of Political Participation

Perhaps most intuitively, invalid vote campaigns should alter the ways that citizens participate in electoral politics. Campaigns promoting the blank and spoiled vote have the potential to mobilize alienated citizens to turn out to the polls to cast invalid ballots. If these campaigns newly mobilize apathetic citizens, then turnout should increase in the future, as turning out begets future electoral participation. On the other hand, invalid vote campaigns may work by changing the use of the invalid vote among those who already vote. Campaigns make the invalid vote a salient protest option, linking it explicitly to voter discontent. As a result, leaving the ballot blank or spoiling it may become a more normalized means for disgruntled habitual voters to express frustration following an invalid vote campaign.

Figure 7.3 shows that invalid vote campaigns do not lead to increased voter turnout, although they do precede increases in invalid vote rates in

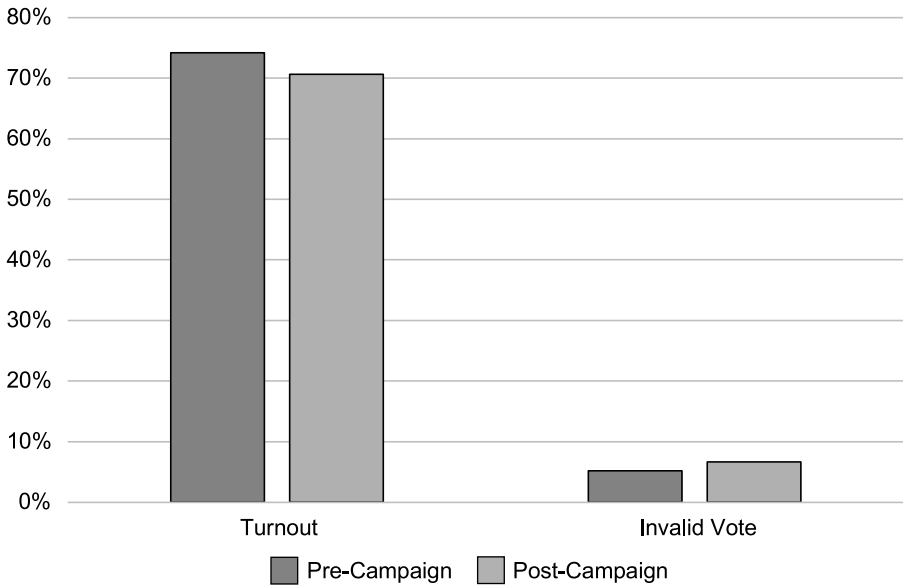


Figure 7.3. Turnout, Invalid Voting in Presidential Elections Pre- and Postinvalid Vote Campaigns

Source: Original data collection, electoral management bodies.

Note: The figure shows average voter turnout and the average invalid vote rate in elections that immediately precede or follow an invalid vote campaign (N = 52).

presidential elections. The figure presents average turnout and invalid vote rates in elections that immediately precede and follow an invalid vote campaign.

Figure 7.3 shows that turnout does not increase in the years following an invalid vote campaign. Indeed, turnout *declines* slightly, on average, although this difference is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.2$ , one-tailed). Invalid vote rates, in contrast, increase slightly in elections following an invalid vote campaign.<sup>4</sup> In elections immediately preceding an invalid vote campaign, the average invalid vote rate is about 5.2%; in the election that follows the invalid vote campaign, the average invalid vote rate increases to 6.7% of all votes cast (this difference is marginally significant,  $p < 0.1$ , one-tailed). In short, invalid voting as a protest behavior increases following invalid vote campaigns.

Do subnational invalid vote campaigns in Peru follow a similar trend to that shown in the presidential analyses? I analyze official electoral data from each Peruvian department for gubernatorial (fig. 7.4) and presidential (fig. 7.5) elections immediately prior to and following the 2014 invalid

vote campaigns described in chapter 5. Analyzing data from gubernatorial elections has the advantage of linking invalid vote behavior to campaigns that occurred in the same type of contest. The presidential results speak to whether any downstream effects spill over to different types of elections.

I model these outcomes using a difference-in-differences strategy: I use OLS regression to estimate the effect of the year on turnout and invalid vote rates in “treated” departments (where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014) and “control” departments (where no invalid vote campaign occurred).<sup>5</sup> If the slopes for these groups of departments differ, this suggests changes in voter behavior in departments where invalid vote campaigns occurred.

Difference-in-differences is a tool usually used to conduct causal inference; however, the results presented here are descriptive. Invalid vote campaigns are a potential cause of differences in trends in voting behavior across departments. However, gubernatorial and presidential elections only occur every four to five years in Peru. This means that each dependent variable is measured several years prior to and following the “treatment.” Any number of political shocks can occur in the intervening period, making it impossible to attribute differences across groups of departments to null vote campaigns. Certainly, many political shocks that affect voting patterns are unrelated to the occurrence of invalid vote campaigns. However, departments that experienced an invalid vote campaign in 2014 could also have experienced systematically different local shocks than other departments that might be responsible for observed cross-time differences. Issues of causality aside, these analyses are informative: they compare trends in turnout and invalid voting to a precampaign baseline where campaigns did and did not occur, while controlling for a host of potentially confounding national factors.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 7.4 shows results for the difference-in-differences analyses for turnout (Panel 1) and invalid voting (Panel 2) in gubernatorial elections. Between 2010 and 2018, there is a significant decline in gubernatorial turnout, of about 7 percentage points. Results for departments where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014 are represented in gray, and results for departments with no campaign are represented in black. *Levels* of turnout are significantly higher in both 2010 and 2018 in departments where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014 than where no campaign took place. However, the downward *slopes* of the lines are not distinguishable from one another. That is, the cross-time decline in turnout in Peruvian gubernatorial elections is no different in departments where an invalid vote campaign did or did not occur.

Panel 2 of figure 7.4 shows the results of a model estimating the dif-

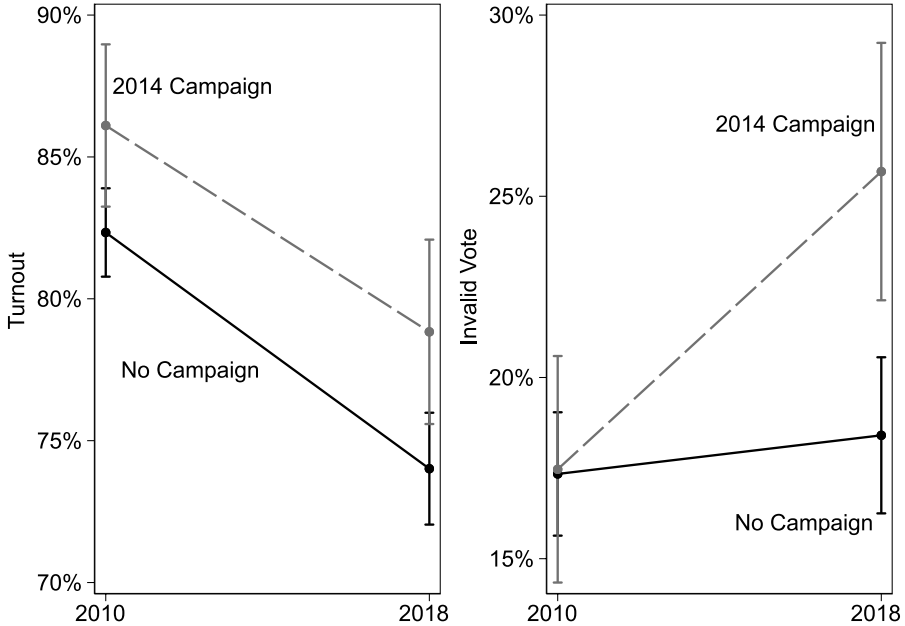


Figure 7.4. Turnout and Invalid Voting Pre- and Postinvalid Vote Campaign in Peru's Gubernatorial Elections

Source: Original data collection, Jurado Nacional de Elecciones.

Note: The figure plots difference-in-differences estimates for turnout and invalid vote rates in departmental elections where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014 ( $N = 95$ ). Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. Models control for whether an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2018. For complete results, see table A7.2.

ference in trends in invalid voting in gubernatorial elections from 2010 to 2018 in departments where an invalid vote campaign did or did not occur in 2014. The results show a substantial difference in blank and spoiled vote rates across departments. In 2010, rates of invalid voting are indistinguishable from one another in departments that did and did not experience an invalid vote campaign in 2014. Where an invalid vote campaign took place in 2014, the estimated slope for “time” is positive: the invalid vote rate increased from about 17% in 2010 to over 25% in 2018.<sup>7</sup> Where no campaign occurred in 2014, however, there is a substantially smaller, statistically insignificant increase in invalid voting over time, of about 1 percentage point.

Thus far, the results presented in this section suggest that invalid vote campaigns are associated with shifting patterns of political participation, specifically the increased use of blank and spoiled voting, in later elections

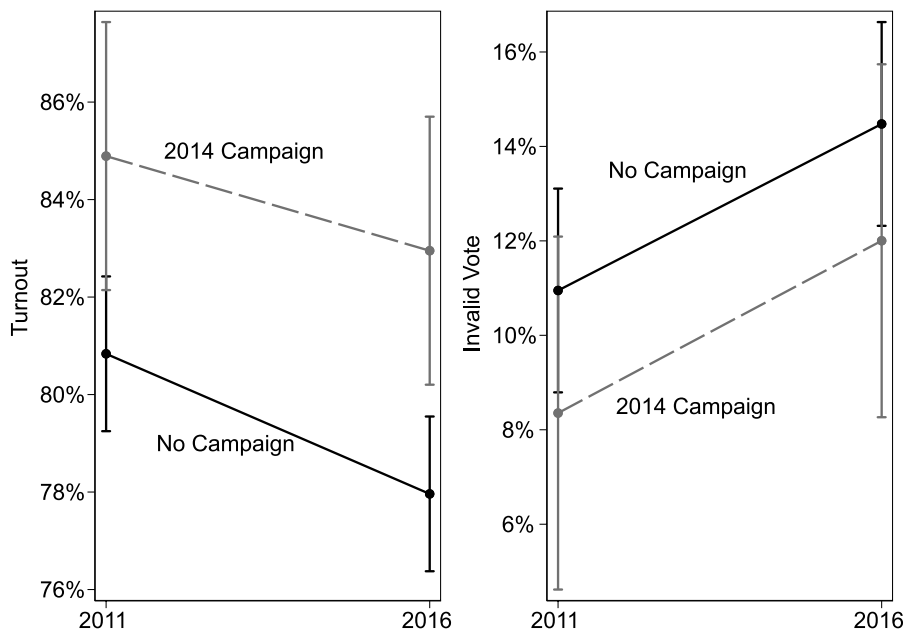


Figure 7.5. Turnout and Invalid Voting, Pre- and Postinvalid Vote Campaign in Peru's Presidential Elections

Source: Original data collection, Jurado Nacional de Elecciones.

Note: The figure plots difference-in-differences estimates for turnout and invalid vote rates in departmental elections where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014 ( $N = 96$ ). Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals around point estimates. Models control for whether an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2018. For complete results, see table A7.2.

of the same type. Do these patterns “spill over” to affect voters’ behavior in other types of elections? Figure 7.5 examines this question by estimating the difference-in-differences for turnout (Panel 1) and invalid voting (Panel 2) in presidential elections prior to and following 2014 gubernatorial invalid vote campaigns. The figure shows null results for both dependent variables. Although levels of turnout are higher where invalid vote campaigns occurred in 2014, the estimated slopes for turnout are not significantly different across departments where null vote campaigns occurred. And trends in invalid voting in presidential elections are effectively parallel in departments where an invalid vote campaign occurred in 2014 and where no campaign took place.<sup>8</sup>

Presidential elections are a hard test of the argument that invalid vote campaigns will shift voters’ patterns of behavior in different types of elections. While the mechanical task of selecting a candidate is similar in

gubernatorial and presidential elections (winner take all, with the potential for multiple rounds), the stakes are higher and the electorate larger in presidential contests, which likely alters voters' strategic calculi compared to gubernatorial campaigns. Still, these null results suggest that changes in patterns of blank and spoiled voting that result from invalid vote campaigns likely do not spill over to elections at higher levels of government.

### Discussion

The case of Nayib Bukele serves as a warning to observers of invalid vote campaigns that savvy political operators who mobilize voters to spoil their ballots could later leverage that electoral strength in support of antidemocratic goals. However, this chapter shows that El Salvador's trajectory is unrepresentative of average tendencies following invalid vote campaigns. Invalid vote campaigns do not, on average, precipitate democratic decline. Rather, the quality of democracy, especially electoral fairness, can actually *improve* slightly after these campaigns occur. That is, invalid vote campaigns not only do not precipitate short-term declines in democratic quality, but may *buoy* democracies at risk of backsliding.

Antiestablishment candidates win significantly more votes during and following elections that feature an invalid vote campaign. Put differently, the circumstances that lead invalid vote campaigns to emerge also appear to fuel electoral support for antiestablishment options. However, invalid vote campaigns, themselves, do not appear to mobilize a new base of support for these candidates. Across presidential and gubernatorial elections, I find no evidence that patterns in turnout shift significantly due to invalid vote campaigns. However, I do find significant changes in the use of blank and spoiled ballots in the years following a successful invalid vote campaign. It is unclear whether and under what circumstances this behavior persists across levels of elections. However, in elections of the same type, voters cast blank and spoiled ballots at a significantly higher rate in the years following an invalid vote campaign. This suggests that invalid vote campaigns teach the public to view spoiling the ballot or leaving it blank as a viable protest option.

Importantly, these results are descriptive rather than causal. Because invalid vote campaigns result from local political circumstances, they are not assigned at random. In light of this fact in combination with a limited number of cases and a dearth of information about invalid vote campaigns around the world, I cannot account for a host of potential confounding

variables that might shape the relationship between invalid vote campaigns and democratic outcomes or voter behavior. Still, the results suggest that invalid vote campaigns can play an important role in normalizing the behavior. I hope that future scholarship continues to develop and carefully test expectations about the downstream effects of invalid vote campaigns.

In addition to lingering questions about causality, this chapter does not address questions about the *long-term* effects of invalid vote campaigns on political participation and democratic quality. I focus on short periods immediately preceding and following invalid vote campaigns, in an effort to link outcomes directly to campaigns. However, it is possible that repeated efforts to mobilize the blank or spoiled vote within a country undermine the quality of democracy, or have adverse effects on voters' buy-in to the political system. It is my hope that future research will turn to these lingering questions.



## Conclusion

This book offers a framework through which to understand the emergence and success of invalid vote campaigns in executive elections in democracies. On average, invalid votes are cast by habitual but aggrieved voters who prefer to live under a democratic system. When candidates do not play by the rules of the democratic game, elite- or citizen-led campaigns calling on citizens to cast blank or spoiled ballots are more likely to emerge, and to garner electoral success.

To better understand the factors that cause invalid vote campaigns to emerge and succeed, I present original data identifying these campaigns in presidential elections across Latin America. These analyses show that efforts to mobilize the blank and spoiled vote are far more common than scholarly consensus suggests. More than one-quarter of Latin American presidential contests since the 1980s featured an invalid vote campaign, and the frequency of these campaigns is increasing steadily over time. From 2010 to 2020, for example, citizens or candidates worked to mobilize the invalid vote in more than 30% of presidential election-rounds across the region.

Even though they are common, invalid vote campaigns are very unpopular with the public. Nationally representative surveys from Chile, Peru, and Nicaragua show that a plurality of citizens in each country expresses very strong disapproval of invalid vote campaigns in the abstract. It is thus perhaps puzzling that these campaigns emerge at all, and even more surprising that they garner electoral support. Viewed through the lens of global democratic recession, this trend becomes clearer. Public approval

of hypothetical invalid vote campaigns increases substantially when campaigns protest specific political grievances, and especially egregious ones, like corruption or electoral fraud. This result aggregates up across presidential and gubernatorial elections: invalid vote campaigns have greater electoral success when they address egregious antidemocracy grievances. That is, while voters do not view invalid vote campaigns as desirable, political circumstances can change in ways that lead citizens to view these campaigns as useful or even necessary. And in the twenty-first century, there is no shortage of antidemocracy grievances for campaigners to protest.

The evidence in this book suggests that invalid vote campaigns (and indeed, blank and spoiled votes in general) can serve as a leading indicator of democratic backsliding. Where election integrity is compromised and citizens feel they have no other recourse, campaigns promoting the invalid vote are more likely to emerge and to win electoral support. Sharp increases in blank and spoiled votes across elections should thus raise flags for observers interested in strengthening democracies around the world, as these sudden shifts suggest backsliding. Sudden declines in the invalid vote compared to historical trends absent changing voting technology, like a shift from paper to electronic ballots, should also raise flags. A sudden drop in invalid voting suggests the absence of invalid vote campaigns. However, such a drop may reflect citizens' concerns about the democratic credentials of popular candidates, with many erstwhile protest voters choosing instead to vote for a less-bad option to protect democracy. Sudden drops in the invalid vote rate should thus serve as a likely sign of low-quality or anti-democratic candidates on the ballot.

Around the world, democracy is in retrenchment in the twenty-first century, as popularly elected presidents have weakened checks from other branches of government and stifled opposition voices. Concurrent with these declines in democratic quality, Latin Americans have increasingly engaged in nonconventional action to voice their political concerns. Where democratic quality is low or in decline, scholars have shown an increase in street protest, votes for populist or antiestablishment candidates, presidential impeachments, and even wholesale constitutional reform. Yet these pro-democracy protests often fail to improve democratic performance, and can even precipitate democratic backsliding (e.g., Corrales 2018; Huber and Schimpf 2016; Kaufman and Haggard 2019; Pérez Liñan 2007).

Campaigns promoting the invalid vote are another downstream outcome of democratic decline. However, I find no evidence that these campaigns cause future backsliding, on average. If anything, invalid vote campaigns precede small *improvements* in measures of the quality of democracy

in the short term. Both the nature of the protestors and the nature of the protest behavior help explain this result. Those who invalidate their ballots are regular participants in democratic politics, who use a standard tool of democracy—the vote—to express anticandidate rather than antidemocracy attitudes. It may thus be inaccurate for incumbents to paint those who spoil their votes as anti-democratic; they use common, legally recognized tools of contention to protest. Indeed, a similar strategy—using accepted parliamentary procedures to hinder anti-democracy actions by incumbents—has worked to shore up support for *elites* resisting democratic backsliding (e.g., Cleary and Öztürk 2020; Gamboa 2017, 2022). Successful invalid vote campaigns could thus serve as a model for slowing democratic backsliding through citizen action, rather than elite bargaining.

Lingering questions about the causes and consequences of invalid vote campaigns remain. Many of the results presented here are descriptive. This is a necessary first step to understanding the causes and consequences of these campaigns. It is not possible to make sound causal claims about the emergence and success of invalid vote campaigns without first understanding where these campaigns have occurred, who has led them, and how they have mobilized voters. An important next step is for scholars to carefully theorize over, and find ways to test, the downstream effects of invalid vote campaigns on citizens and the societies where they emerge.

One set of lingering questions links invalid vote campaigns, and invalid voting behavior more generally, to the long-term health of democracy and democratic citizenship. Although I find no short-term negative effect of invalid vote campaigns on democratic quality, invalid vote campaigns could affect these outcomes in the medium or long term. Where invalid vote campaigns occur regularly in presidential elections, for example, these campaigns may lose their pro-democracy influence on political elites. The repeated occurrence of invalid vote campaigns could also undermine citizen faith in the political class in the longer term. Repeated exposure to anticandidate messages could lead citizens to distrust the system that produces these candidates year after year. In turn, these aggrieved citizens could use the invalid vote—mobilized or not—to protest less egregious grievances over time, enabling low-quality officials to stay in power and, perversely, inhibiting gradual improvements to the quality of democracy.

At the same time, the fact that invalid vote campaigns emerge repeatedly suggests that public grievances persist, perhaps because elites' responses to these campaigns are insufficient. The repeated emergence of invalid vote campaigns could foretell antidemocracy ruptures. Consider the case of Peru in 2022, when incumbent president Pedro Castillo staged

an unsuccessful self-coup in response to repeated impeachment attempts by Congress. Invalid vote campaigns did not cause this government crisis; it was the result of a series of high-stakes, bad-faith interactions between government branches over many years. However, the repeated occurrence of invalid vote campaigns for years prior to the self-coup was an important signal from citizens that Peruvian democracy was in peril.

Questions also remain about how the act of invalidating the ballot affects individuals in the short, medium, and long term. Spoiling one's ballot could affect individual conceptions of democratic participation and citizenship over the course of a voter's life. How does the decision to cast an invalid vote affect democratic attitudes and citizenship in the medium and long term? Do the potential downstream effects of invalidating the ballot vary depending on whether a voter casts an invalid ballot early versus later in life, or as part of an organized campaign effort versus independent of organized external encouragement? Long-term panel data including individuals who cast blank or spoiled ballots could provide considerable insight into these questions.

Finally, this book treats invalid vote campaigns as strategically motivated but sincerely interested in increasing the invalid vote to nullify an election outcome or achieve other goals. However, the costs of mobilizing voters to cast blank and spoiled ballots have declined rapidly in the internet age. It thus seems likely that actors with malicious intentions will seek to use this tool to achieve a range of outcomes including undermining public faith in democracy or promoting the election of antidemocratic candidates. Future scholarship should consider the potential for astroturfing, and its effects on campaign grievances and election outcomes.

Irrespective of these lingering questions, there is no doubt that invalid vote campaigns will continue to emerge and to be electorally relevant around the world. As the current wave of democratic erosion continues, understanding the ways citizens respond to incumbents' antidemocracy impulses will likely continue to be a pressing concern.



# Appendixes



## Chapter 1 Appendix

Table A1.1 compares official invalid vote rates collected from electoral management bodies to retrospective and hypothetical invalid vote estimates from AmericasBarometer surveys conducted within 12 months of a presidential election. Survey estimates that are statistically different ( $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed) from official results are in bold. All tests are calculated using survey weights.

The retrospective measure is not perfect; in two-thirds of cases, the AmericasBarometer surveys underestimate invalid voting. However, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Guatemala in 2007, Peru in 2011 and 2016), these differences are small. The median difference between survey estimates and official reports is an underestimate of 1.67 percentage points. This is to be expected, as some portion of invalid voting behavior will result from error by voters (when casting votes) or poll workers (while counting votes).

A second possible measure of invalid voting behavior is a “hypothetical” vote question, which asks how respondents would vote “if the election were held next Sunday.” This measure has the benefit of being asked in every AmericasBarometer country-year. However, this measure is less accurate than the retrospective measure. The final column in the table presents differences between official invalid vote rates and the hypothetical measure. Differences that are statistically different ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) are denoted in bold. All 21 estimates are statistically different from official invalid vote rates. Further, these variations are quite large; the median difference is an *overestimate* of 8.32 percentage points.



TABLE A1.1. Comparing Survey Measures to Observed Invalid Voting, 2008–2019

Country	Invalid (official)	Invalid (AB)	Difference (official-AB)	Invalid (AB, hypothetical)	Difference (official-AB, hypothetical)
Argentina (2007)	7.60%	4.61%	<b>3.01%</b>	11.26%	<b>-3.65%</b>
Bolivia (2009)	5.70%	5.65%	-0.05%	15.87%	<b>-10.17%</b>
Chile (2009)	3.95%	3.13%	0.82%	20.17%	<b>-16.22%</b>
Chile (2013)	1.69%	1.22%	0.47%	6.66%	<b>-5.11%</b>
Colombia (2018)	3.28%	3.31%	-0.03%	39.07%	<b>-35.79%</b>
Costa Rica (2014)	2.08%	2.15%	-0.07%	2.89%	<b>-0.81%</b>
Dominican Republic (2016)	2.06%	0.24%	<b>1.82%</b>	13.10%	<b>-11.04%</b>
Ecuador (2009)	13.0%	11.22%	<b>1.78%</b>	25.18%	<b>-12.19%</b>
El Salvador (2009)	0.77%	1.46%	<b>-0.69%</b>	12.02%	<b>-11.25%</b>
El Salvador (2014)	1.88%	1.68%	0.20%	5.17%	<b>-3.91%</b>
Guatemala (2007)	9.32%	1.77%	<b>7.55%</b>	5.75%	<b>3.57%</b>
Honduras (2009)	6.70%	3.90%	<b>2.80%</b>	8.65%	<b>-1.96%</b>
Honduras (2013)	4.88%	2.75%	<b>2.13%</b>	7.38%	<b>-2.50%</b>
Mexico (2018)	2.78%	1.11%	<b>1.67%</b>	18.11%	<b>-15.33%</b>
Nicaragua (2011)	.	1.30%	.	3.64%	.
Panama (2009)	3.10%	2.54%	0.56%	7.07%	<b>-3.97%</b>
Panama (2014)	1.70%	4.62%	<b>-2.92%</b>	4.48%	<b>-2.78%</b>
Paraguay (2013)	5.47%	1.43%	<b>4.04%</b>	22.21%	<b>-16.91%</b>
Paraguay (2018)	5.18%	3.25%	<b>1.93%</b>	43.54%	<b>-38.36%</b>
Peru (2011)	12.29%	4.64%	<b>7.65%</b>	22.61%	<b>-10.32%</b>
Peru (2016)	18.12%	4.77%	<b>13.35%</b>	26.44%	<b>-8.32%</b>
Uruguay (2009)	2.17%	3.71%	<b>-1.54%</b>	7.09%	<b>-4.92%</b>

TABLE A1.2. Odds of Invalidating the Ballot vs. Other Behaviors

	Invalid vs. valid vote	Invalid vs. antiestablishment vote	Invalid vs. street protest
System support	0.51* (0.11)	1.01 (0.01)	1.00 (0.00)
Presidential approval	0.29* (0.05)	0.44 <sup>^</sup> (0.22)	0.62 <sup>^</sup> (0.16)
Trust parties	0.71* (0.12)	0.69 (0.32)	0.65 <sup>^</sup> (0.15)
Partisan	0.19* (0.03)	0.32* (0.12)	0.15* (0.03)
Political interest	0.34* (0.05)	0.35* (0.15)	0.12* (0.02)
Education	1.64* (0.33)	0.79 (0.32)	0.73 (0.21)
Participation: Comm. improvement	1.20 (0.19)	1.09 (0.41)	0.38* (0.09)
Participation: Partisan orgs	0.67 (0.18)	0.12* (0.1-)	0.09* (0.04)
Female	0.99 (0.08)	1.39 <sup>^</sup> (0.28)	1.32* (0.15)
Age	0.64 <sup>^</sup> (0.17)	1.01 (0.55)	3.75* (1.39)
Rural residence	0.72* (0.07)	0.83 (0.25)	0.85 (0.13)
Wealth (quintiles)	0.88 (0.10)	0.66 (0.23)	0.96 (0.17)
Constant	0.10* (0.04)	0.40 (0.27)	1.01 (0.50)
Observations	27,074	1,255	3,377

<sup>^</sup>  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Standard errors in parentheses. Table shows the odds ratio of intentionally invalidating the vote associated with a maximal change in each independent variable. Models estimated using survey weights.

TABLE A1.3. Public Opinion Variable Descriptions

Variable	Coding details
Invalid vote	VB3N. "Who did you vote for in the most recent presidential election of [year]?" <i>Response categories vary by country. Respondents who cast blank or spoiled ballots are coded as 1, and those who voted for a candidate are coded as 0. Abstainers are dropped.</i>
Presidential approval	M1. "Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the performance of President [Name]?" (1) Very Good (2) Good (3) Neither Good nor Bad (4) Bad (5) Very Bad <i>Responses are recoded so that higher values indicate better performance.</i>
Trust parties	B21. "To what extent do you trust the political parties?" <i>Coded 1–7, low to high trust. Rescaled to range from 0–1.</i>
Partisan	VB10. "Do you currently identify with a political party?" <i>Recoded so 1 indicates identification, and 0 is no identification.</i>
Political interest	POL1. "How much interest do you have in politics?" (1) A lot (2) Some (3) A little (4) None <i>Recoded to range from 0 (no interest) to 1 (high interest)</i>
Education	ED. "What is the highest level of education you completed?" <i>Responses are recoded as a categorical variable for No Education; Primary Education; Secondary Education; Secondary Education; and Higher Education.</i>
Participation: Comm. involvement	"Please tell me if you attend meetings of these organizations at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, or never. Meetings of a community improvement committee or association?" <i>Responses are recoded so that higher values indicate more frequent participation and are rescaled to range from 0–1.</i>
Participation: Partisan organizations	"Please tell me if you attend meetings of these organizations at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, or never. Meetings of a political party or political organization?" <i>Responses are recoded so that higher values indicate more frequent participation and are rescaled to range from 0–1.</i>
Support for democracy	ING4. "Changing the subject again, 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?" <i>Coded 1–7, low to high support</i>

System support	<p><i>Mean of responses to five items:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B1: “To what extent do you think the courts in [Country] guarantee a fair trial?”</li> <li>• B2: “To what extent do you respect the political institutions of [Country]?”</li> <li>• B3: “To what extent do you think that citizens’ basic rights are well protected by the political system of [Country]?”</li> <li>• B4: “To what extent do you feel proud of living under the political system of [Country]?”</li> <li>• B6: “To what extent do you think that one should support the political system of [Country]?”</li> </ul> <p><i>Items are coded 1–7, low to high support</i></p>
Gender	Coded by interviewer; takes the value of 1 for women and 0 otherwise.
Wealth	<i>An index based on a principal components analysis of a series of household possessions: R1, R3 R4, R4A, R5, R6, R7, R12, R14, R15. Rescaled to run from 0 to 1.</i>
Age	<p>Q2. “How old are you?”</p> <p><i>Responses were reported in years and recoded into age brackets [18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, 65+]</i></p>

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## Chapter 2 Appendix

### Focus Groups

The chapter discusses results from 19 focus groups conducted from 2013 to 2018, in two countries. All focus groups used the same script, which I have reproduced in English below. Focus groups ranged from three to 15 participants. In Mexico, half the participants were randomly assigned to participate in online focus groups.

I conducted a first set of six focus groups in Lima, Peru in June 2013. Students from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú (four groups) and maintenance staff at the university (two groups) were recruited using signs and flyers. The convenience sample aimed to recruit respondents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, while focusing on the student population, which prior scholarship suggested would be more likely to have cast invalid votes. I recruited and trained an undergraduate political science student to moderate groups. I was present for all focus groups, which were audio recorded. The focus groups followed a contentious mayoral recall election in Lima. Because voting is mandatory in Peru, and the legal voting age is 18, all university students should have voted in the recall. The project aimed to better understand the role of the invalid vote in Peruvian elections, to assess the face validity of existing theories of invalid voting behavior, to uncover additional potential explanations of invalid voting behavior, and to collect information and impressions about prior invalid vote campaigns.

I conducted a second set of six focus groups in 2014, in Arequipa (three

groups) and Cajamarca (three groups), Peru. Recruiting participants outside of Lima was important, as experts suggested that protest motivations for invalid voting were less likely to operate there (focus group and other evidence suggest this expert view was incorrect). I selected these departments based on prior invalid vote rates. In each department, I worked with local nongovernmental organizations to recruit a diverse sample of Peruvian adults. All groups in Cajamarca were conducted with nonstudent samples. In Arequipa, one group was exclusively comprised of students from the Universidad Nacional de San Agustín. I trained a moderator in Arequipa and was present for all focus groups. Due to time constraints, I moderated all focus group interviews in Cajamarca. Again, all focus groups were audio recorded. These focus groups were conducted during the 2014 gubernatorial elections, prior to the first round (in Cajamarca) and at the beginning of the runoff period (in Arequipa). The goal was to replicate the Lima study from a year prior.

The third set of seven focus groups took place in June 2018, in Mexico City. Students from the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica (CIDE) and the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), a public and private university, respectively, were recruited to participate in focus groups. Two in-person focus groups took place at CIDE and ITAM on the same day, and three mixed focus groups were conducted the following day via Zoom. Participants were recruited through flyers and email announcements, and were randomized into the Zoom focus groups. Unlike focus groups in Peru, the invalid vote script followed questions about another topic (support for populist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador.) An undergraduate student was recruited and trained as moderator, and I was present for all focus groups, which were audio recorded. The main goal was to replicate the Peru studies.

### Focus Group Script

1. “Sometimes during elections, people choose to turn out to vote, but leave their ballots blank, or mark them incorrectly. Why do you think people sometimes choose to cast blank or null ballots in [country]?”
  - a. Do you think that most of these votes are cast intentionally?
  - b. Do you think invalid ballots are ever cast as a means to punish certain political actors?
  - c. [alternative]: Describe the kind of person that invalidates their

- vote. [probes] What are their political beliefs? How educated are they? Where do they live?
2. “Does a null vote mean the same thing as a blank vote in [country]?”
    - a. [if “no”]: “What is the difference between the meaning of a null vote and a blank vote?”
    - b. [alternative]: Describe the kind of person who casts a blank vote. What are their political beliefs? What about the kind of person who spoils their vote?
  3. “Do you think that people are usually open about casting a blank or null vote, or is it something they prefer not to talk about? Why?”
  4. “Have you seen a journalist, politician, or an individual who is not associated with a political group try to convince someone to vote blank or null in an election?” [note: make sure to identify what type of actor they have seen try to convince someone to spoil their votes]
    - a. “How did they try to convince that person to cast a blank or null vote?” [clarifying] “What tactics did they use?”
    - b. “Do you approve of people trying to convince others to invalidate their ballots? Why or why not?”
  5. “Some people believe that voting blank or null is a citizen’s right that should be protected. Other people believe that blank or null voting is anti-democratic. What do you think?”
  6. “We’re just about out of time. Does anyone have any final thoughts they would like to share about the topics we’ve discussed today?”

TABLE A2.1. Logistic Regression, Invalid Vote (vs. Vote for a Candidate)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Support democracy</b>	-0.56* (0.14)			
<b>Interest</b>		-1.86* (0.15)		
<b>Presidential approval</b>			-1.60* (0.14)	
<b>Trust parties</b>				-1.31* (0.14)
<b>Woman</b>	0.15* (0.07)	-0.00 (0.07)	0.14* (0.07)	0.18* (0.07)
<b>Education</b>	0.42 (0.18)	0.68* (0.19)	0.28 (0.18)	0.32 (0.18)
<b>Rural residence</b>	-0.38* (0.10)	-0.42* (0.10)	-0.40* (0.10)	-0.37* (0.09)
<b>Age</b>	-0.85* (0.24)	-0.73* (0.23)	-0.85* (0.23)	-0.81* (0.23)
<b>Quintiles of wealth</b>	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.11)	-0.18 (0.10)
<b>Observations</b>	29,325	29,776	29,356	30,009

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Standard errors in parentheses. Table shows the results from a logistic regression model predicting intentionally invalidating the vote versus voting for a candidate associated with a maximal change in each independent variable. Models are estimated using survey weights.

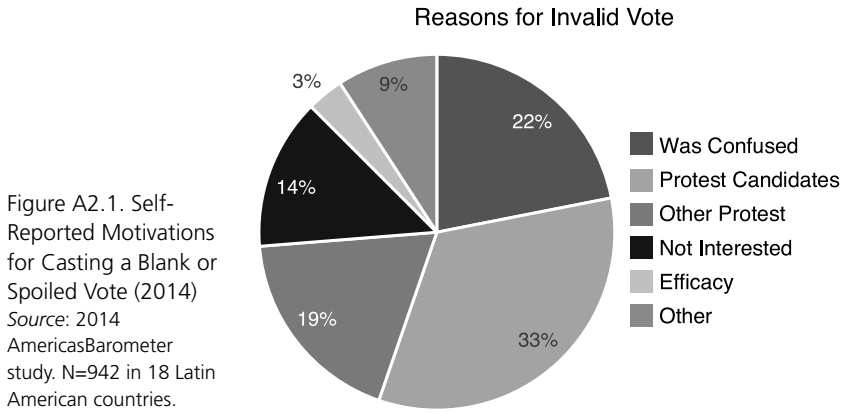
Figure A2.1 displays responses to item VB101, from the 2014 AmericasBarometer:

**VB101:** “Why did you cast a null or blank ballot in the last presidential election?” [response alternatives not read aloud]:

- (1) Was confused
- (2) Wanted to express their discontent with all of the candidates; didn't like any of the candidates
- (3) Do not believe in democracy, wanted to protest against the political system
- (4) Do not believe in elections/electoral authorities
- (5) Not interested in politics
- (6) My vote does not make any difference
- (7) Another reason

Interviewers coded respondents' spontaneous answers into the appropriate category. Response categories correspond to the theorized motivations





for invalid voting (antidemocratic protest, performance, and voter apathy), and to motivations mentioned in focus groups (low political efficacy).

## Chapter 3 Appendix

### *Null Vote Campaigns: Web Search and Coding Strategy*

#### Search Terms

Spanish- and Portuguese-language searches were conducted in online news archives using the terms:

1. “voto nulo,”
2. “voto [en] blanco,”
3. “voto [de] protesta.”

In Peru, I included “voto viciado,” and in Argentina, “voto bronca”; these terms denote protest votes in each country.

I searched Google News, NewsBank, and ProQuest’s Global News Stream using these terms and their English equivalents (null/spoiled vote, blank vote, protest vote, respectively), to identify additional national and international coverage.

#### Rules for Identifying Campaigns

A campaign was coded as present if a news story included at least one reference to any of the following:

1. The “mobilization,” “promotion,” “exhortation,” “calling for,” or “convocation” of blank or spoiled ballots<sup>1</sup>
2. A mention of a “blank/null vote campaign”<sup>2</sup>
3. A protest or rally in which individuals carried signs promoting the invalid vote
4. Campaign materials promoting the invalid vote (e.g., signs, paintings, pamphlets)
5. Politicians (esp. former candidates and party leaders) declaring their personal decision to invalidate the ballot in a public forum.<sup>3</sup>

Opinion editorials promoting the invalid vote were also considered evidence of an invalid vote campaign. A single editorial on its own was not considered sufficient unless it mentioned a campaign that adhered to the above rules. Multiple opinion editorials in conjunction would have been sufficient to code a null vote campaign as present. In practice, a single op-ed was never the sole piece of evidence used to make a determination.

### Rules for Identifying Campaign Leadership

A single mention of a campaigner in a news story or op-ed was sufficient to identify that individual or organization as a mobilizer of the invalid vote. This is a very permissive coding strategy; however, given limited coverage of invalid vote campaigns in print media, this was the only way to identify leadership in many cases.

1. Campaigns whose leadership was described as including “civil society” or “citizen” groups, as well as mentions of “associations” (e.g., of teachers) or “unions” are coded as “popular mobilization.”
2. Campaigns whose leadership is indeterminate, but whose strategies include mass mobilizations are coded as “popular mobilization.”
3. Campaigns whose leadership consists of current or former political candidates or party organizations are coded as “elite mobilization.”
4. Campaigns whose leadership consists of other elite political actors, such as former political advisors, are coded as “elite mobilization.”

5. Any campaign with at least one leader of both types is coded as having “both” types of leader, even if one leader appears to have predominated.

### **Rules for Identifying Campaign Grievances**

Grievances were identified inductively, after reading all available coverage of a given invalid vote campaign and seeking out additional source material. I took campaigners at their word: if they said that the campaign opposed corruption, then I code the campaign as opposing corruption.

TABLE A3.1. Details about Invalid Vote Campaigns in Latin American Presidential Elections, 1980–2020

Country, year	Leadership	Details
Argentina, 2003	Multiple popular organizations. Among others, the <i>Corriente Clasista Combativa</i> (CCC); <i>Movimiento Independiente de Jubilados y Desocupados</i> (MIJD); la <i>Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón</i> . Writer Mempo Giardinelli.	In 2001, Argentina experienced an anti-corruption, “vote for nobody” legislative campaign in response to a political and economic crisis. During the 2003 presidential election, news sources reference a similar invalid vote campaign. Campaigners made general anticandidate statements (for example “we do not want to be complicit in another deception of the population”; <i>Redacción El Universo</i> 2003). I found no evidence of leaders making more specific accusations.
Argentina, 2015	Nicolás del Caño (eliminated first-round candidate for the <i>Frente de Izquierda y los Trabajadores</i> , FIT)	After the first round election, the FIT (fourth most voted party, accounting for 3.08% of the total vote) called on its supporters to cast blank votes during ballotage because neither of the second-round candidate represented their interests. “For the FIT, both Scioli and Macri represent the political right in Argentina” (Massa 2015).
Bolivia, 2014	The <i>Partido Obrero Revolucionario</i> (POR)	The POR argued that Evo Morales and the MAS did not adequately represent laborers’ interests. Instead, they argued that the MAS and Morales had, in recent years, shown their “bourgeois” roots and that this conflict between the upper- and lower-class bases of Morales’s support would erupt in “a period of ‘a lot of conflict; he will have to harden his repressive politics judicially or by brute force.’” As a response, the POR is organizing a null vote campaign” (La Razón 2014).
Bolivia, 2019	<i>Comité Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia</i> ; columnists	Evo Morales ran in 2019 after he lost a 2016 referendum seeking to change term limits and appealed to a favorable Supreme Court. Some opposition forces argued that his candidacy was illegal and illegitimate, and that the playing field had been rigged. Some of these opponents, including the <i>Comité Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia</i> , called for opposition parties to remove their candidates from contention, and on voters to cast null votes (e.g., Sánchez Berzain 2019).

Brazil, 2006	Undefined citizen groups (first-round); Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU, during the runoff)	During the first-round election, citizen groups, particularly online, encouraged voters to vote for “Mr. Nobody,” saying “Vote for Nobody because: Nobody cares about you; Nobody cares about your family; Nobody will govern for you and your interests; Nobody will do something for the poor people” (Lopes Neves 2006). The group argued that all of the candidates were corrupt. In the runoff, the PSTU, whose candidate Heloisa Helena was eliminated in the first round, called on their supporters to spoil their votes. The PSTU argued that Geraldo Alckmin was a corrupt candidate, and that Lula did not represent the needs of working-class Brazilians (Cruz 2006).
Brazil, 2010	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL)	In the second round, the PSOL made an official statement that neither candidate represented their preferences. The national leadership called on supporters not to vote for Jose Serra, to cast a blank or spoiled vote, or to cast a “critical” vote for Dilma Rousseff (the eventual winner; Pasini 2010).
Chile, 1999	Partido Humanista, Partido Comunista	The Humanist and Communist Parties called for null voting, in protest of the exclusionary economic model proposed by the Alianza and Concertación (Maldonado 2000; see also Partido Humanista 2005).
Chile, 2005	Partido Humanista; Tomás Hirsch; Cultura Mirista	The Humanist Party claimed that the Concertación and the Alianza electoral alliances “are the same face of an economic model that benefits a minority and excludes” (Partido Humanista 2005). Eliminated first round candidate Tomás Hirsch noted the unrepresentativeness of the options in an interview explaining his decision: “Now [the Concertación] is in a situation to lose power, they come and say, ‘please, give us just a few votes.’ They govern for the right and every four years they say, give us just a few votes to keep governing” (Pardo 2005).

- Chile, 2013 Marcel Claude; Partido Humanista; Partido Comunista; Movimiento Izquierda Recolocatoria (MIR) Called on voters to write “AC” (for Asamblea Constituyente, constituent assembly) on their second-round ballots, thus both nullifying their ballots in protest of the second-round candidates (who the party argued did not represent their preferences) and expressing support for a new constitution (Diario UChile 2013). The MIR and Communist Parties made a similar statement, arguing that the parties of the center-left “say that they are from the left, but they only look for new institutional positions in exchange for maintaining the disunity of the power of the people” (Yáñez 2013).
- Colombia, 1994\* Enrique Parejo Gonzalez (ex-candidate) Parejo, who won only 29,246 votes in the first round in 1994, called on his supporters to cast a blank vote in the runoff because it was the “best option” compared to the candidates (El Nuevo Herald 1994).
- Colombia, 2002 Augusto Lora Ramírez (presidential candidate) Lora Ramírez was on the ballot but campaigned explicitly for the blank vote, saying that “by promoting the blank vote, we propose that the country declares its discontent and rejection of politicking, of armed and violent groups, and that [the people] vote for democracy” (EFE 2002).
- Colombia, 2010 Piedad Córdoba (senator); Gustavo Petro (mayor); Polo Democrático Alternativo (political party); undefined “social groups” In the 2010 runoff, parties and political candidates from the political left called on voters to cast blank ballots. The specific reason for this decision is unclear based on contemporaneous news accounts, although articles from later years allude to a lack of substantive policy differences between the candidates. For example, Piedad Córdoba referred to the blank vote as an option for voters who were “dissatisfied” with the second-round candidates, without specifying a specific source of dissatisfaction (e.g., EFE 2010).

- Colombia, 2014 Fernando Vallejo (author); citizen groups (e.g., Sin Odio Social; S.O.S); widespread citizen mobilization; several politicians (e.g., Mauricio Vargas, Senator Jorge Robledo, Iván Cepeda); Jaime Araújo (ex-magistrate of the Constitutional Court); Jorge Enrique Robledo and Aurelio Suárez from the Polo Democrático Alternativo (in the second round); “Timochenko” (the former head of FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in the second round)
- Prior to the first round, Vallejo accused the candidates of organizing “mafias with others of their ilk, and if they win the elections, they split the spoils among themselves. . . . They call themselves public servants, but they take advantage of the public” (Quoted in Hernández Mora 2014). Images of protestors and vehicles bearing pro-blank-vote slogans appeared online (see e.g., photos at <https://twitter.com/GustavoBolivar/status/436605008898174976>). These slogans suggest anticorruption motivations. For example: “I am fed up with so much fucking [*bijuepuerca*, literally ‘son of a pig’] corruption. I’m voting blank, bro”; “I won’t give my vote to those who sack and destroy my country. Vote blank.” In addition to continued, similar anticorruption calls, in the runoff, parties and political leaders called on voters to cast blank ballots because the second-round candidates were not representative of public preferences or they were not distinguishable on important policy issues (for example, Timochenko, former head of the FARC, said both candidates “symbolize war”; quoted in *El Espectador* 2014).
- Colombia, 2018 Online citizen groups (e.g., VotoEnBlancoColombia2018); Sergio Fajardo (first-round candidate)
- Fajardo’s Green Alliance Party argued that second-round candidate Iván Duque was “undesirable for the present and future of Colombia. His candidacy represents all the traditional corrupt and clientelist machines.” Similarly, an op-ed in the daily paper *El Espectador* (2014) noted that “in Colombia today, there exists a strong repudiation of the political class. The population is tired of so much corruption, with so much impunity.” Citizen groups online made similar complaints, for example an organizer from VotoEnBlancoColombia2018 said in an interview, “We’re not looking for a Messiah, we want someone who knows how to govern and has an unimpeachable record. Our country is rich in everything, that is why we deserve a good president.”



- Costa Rica, 1998      Citizen groups (e.g., Grupo Soberanía)      Both candidates proposed very similar policies and as a result, the campaign focused on personal attacks. Many Costa Ricans told pollsters that they intended to abstain rather than choose one of these imperfect options. In this context, campaigners called on voters to spoil their ballots: “The self-named Sovereignty Group has openly promoted abstentionism, distributing pamphlets that carry a brief message: ‘Vote null, a vote of affirmation as citizens’” (Nuñez 1998). While the specific complaints called one of the candidates corrupt and linked another to primary election fraud, calls for invalid voting did not center on these issues, but instead on the particular qualities of the competing candidates.
- Costa Rica, 2018      Abel Pacheco (former president)      Abel Pacheco, who was president from 2002 to 2006, stated publicly that he would vote blank in the 2018 election. “Because I do not belong to either of these parties, and since I see a lot of hostility between both teams, I am going to vote blank to act as a bridge between them both” (as quoted in Grupo La Nación 2018). In another interview, Pacheco said that both candidates were “so good” that he “did not dare” to choose between them, so by voting blank, he would “vote for both of them” (Cruz Brenes 2018). Arguably, this statement was a way to stay in the good graces of whichever candidate eventually won. Another interpretation is that, for Pacheco, the candidates were similar on relevant policy dimensions, and so not worth choosing between; this is the interpretation I use. Although this statement was not apparently intended to mobilize the blank vote, I code this as a campaign, as a former president making this kind of public statement is likely to influence his former supporters.

Ecuador, 1984*	Leftist leaders (unclear who)	The <i>Washington Post</i> notes that “more than 9 percent of the 2.8 million total votes were reported blank or invalid in what analysts here said reflected response to a call by leftist leaders for a rejection of both candidates” (Diehl 1984).
Ecuador, 2002	Rodrigo Borja (former president); León Febres Cordero (former president); Jaime Nebot	Borja said that he would cast a null vote because “neither of the two candidates inspires confidence and because they ran a dirty [ <i>maloliente</i> ] and unedifying campaign, without platforms, just with complaints between the two of them” (as quoted in <i>El Universo</i> 2002). Jaime Nebot, mayor of Guayaquil, said that he would leave the ballot blank to express disagreement with the policy positions of both candidates.
El Salvador, 1982	Leftist guerrillas	Parties from the political left did not field candidates during the 1982 transitional election out of fear of retribution. <i>Guerrilleros</i> directed voters to invalidate their ballots in an effort to delegitimize the result: “The elections have taken on a significance beyond their outcome because leftist guerrillas mounted a campaign to disrupt them and discourage voters from going to the polls. . . . [A] woman . . . said this evening that people had voted out of fear that officials would threaten those whose names did not appear on voting lists. She said she had deliberately cast a null ballot, one with a large X across it, as guerrillas had counseled” (Hoge 1982, A1).
Guatemala, 1990	Efraín Ríos Montt (former dictator)	Having been barred from competing in presidential elections by the new Constitution, Ríos Montt called on his supporters to write in his name or spoil the ballot in a sign of support, to influence the incoming government. “The more null votes, Ríos Montt says, the more power he will be able to exert on the next government. He says that since the ‘system’ has barred him from running, he must exercise power through congressional seats, if his supporters win, and null votes” (Benesch 1990).

Guatemala, 2011	Sandra Torres (first lady)	Torres “asked her followers to vote null in protest of her prohibition from participation [as a political candidate]” (Llorca 2011). As a result of this call, she was later investigated for improperly influencing the vote (EFE 2011).
Guatemala, 2015	Citizen groups, among many others, Movimiento de la Dignidad Nacional (MDN); Asamblea Social y Popular (ASP); Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC). One news source notes but does not name leadership from 72 distinct civil society organizations calling for invalid votes (EFE 2015).	In 2015, Guatemala was embroiled in a series of high-level corruption scandals that resulted in mass anticorruption street protests and eventually the removal of the president and vice president. Promotion of the spoiled vote was explicitly linked to these corruption scandals by citizen groups and street protestors. For example, the Asamblea Social y Popular, a civil society organization whose members include indigenous, peasant, academic, religious, and union groups, made a public statement following a meeting with leaders from over 70 other civil society groups calling on its supporters to cast invalid ballots: “In these conditions . . . we do not want elections; that is why, our call is to not vote, or to vote null. . . . Voting null or blank will not change who is elected, but our votes must not serve to legitimate corruption and impunity” (EFE 2015). In addition to the pro-null-vote campaign, there were also efforts to minimize invalid voting. For example, the Organization of American States, along with important political figures in the country, called on voters <i>not</i> to spoil their votes (Soy502 2015).
Guatemala, 2019	Citizens, especially online. No evidence of credit claiming by named civil society groups.	News stories report an important online presence supporting the null vote, as well as individuals handing out flyers and at least one vinyl banner supporting the null vote prior to the first-round presidential election. These materials read “No more wolves dressed like sheep. Let’s clean the system! #VoteNull” (Lopez 2019).

- Mexico, 2012      Citizen groups (“apartidistas”; #VeVotaAnula); Javier Sicilia      Coverage of the 2012 null vote campaign in Mexico is oblique. There was a clear *antinull* campaign that was well publicized in the news; however, references to affirmative calls to spoil the vote tend to be made in passing. This might have represented a corrective to “irresponsible” coverage of the 2009 legislative election, when a high-profile null vote campaign received substantial coverage and the null vote increased substantially. There is some evidence of small in-person protests organized by online groups; these groups referenced generalized anticandidate and anticorruption sentiment, and complained of stagnation in the party system (e.g., Montalvo 2012). Journalist, poet, and activist Javier Sicilia called for null votes in protest of pervasive violence in Mexico; he later said that this was not meant to “condition” others to follow his example (Sánchez and Rea 2012).
- Nicaragua, 2011      Mónica Baltodano (*ex-guerrillera*)      Following his return to the presidency in 2006, Daniel Ortega removed term limits and started cracking down on independent media and the political opposition. Mónica Baltodano, an *ex-guerrillera* and former leader of the FSLN, argued that the 2011 election was effectively rigged. She promoted the null vote, saying that “everything was a farce, the results were fraudulently handled to permit Ortega to control Parliament and ensconce himself in power forever” (as quoted in Deutsche Presse-Agentur 2011).

Nicaragua, 2016	United opposition parties; civil society organizations (e.g., Frente Amplio por la Democracia [FAD]); Zoilamerica Narváez (Ortega's stepdaughter)	Following years of efforts to undermine the political opposition, in 2016, the Nicaraguan Supreme Court disqualified the presidential candidate representing a coalition of opposition parties, effectively limiting the opposition to the PLC, which many Nicaraguans believed to be co-opted by the FSLN. This coincided with increased harassment of opposition parties and journalists (e.g., Freedom House 2017; Reporters Without Borders 2017). The united opposition argued that this removal was an attempt to manipulate the election outcome (La Nación 2016) and called on their supporters to abstain from voting or to cast invalid ballots in protest (Chamorro 2016).
Panama, 2004	The Movimiento Popular Unificado (MPU), comprised of leftist political unions (SUNTRACS, CONUSI), student groups, and farmworkers	Citizen groups from the political left called on voters to leave their ballots blank as “a way to reject the four presidential candidacies” (Marcel 2004), which all represented “the same economic interests” (EFE 2004b). Groups argued that there was no “real alternative” option and that casting a blank vote as a “punishment” was the best choice (EFE 2004a).
Panama, 2009	Civil society organizations, including Frente Nacional por los Derechos Económicos y Sociales (a coalition of labor unions including student groups and construction workers); Movimiento de Acción Reformista; Alternativa Popular	The Frente Nacional por los Derechos Económicos y Sociales called on their supporters to cast blank votes, saying that “neither [of the candidates] represents the interests of the workers” (Redacción Digital La Estrella 2009). The newly formed Movimiento de Acción Reformista also called on voters to cast blank votes, null votes, or to abstain in response to corruption among the candidates, arguing that “the different presidential candidates ‘want to gain political power to give favor to their own businesses. . . . We are tired of the political corruption and continuism’” (EFE 2009).

Paraguay, 1988	Opposition parties under the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner	Extraparliamentary parties in 1988 “decided not to run and to promote the blank vote or abstention” (Servicios cablegraficos combinados 1988). Sources confirm that opposition parties “urged voters wither to abstain or to cast blank ballots” (Graham 1988). The election was “marred by widespread claims of vote fraud” (The <i>Washington Post</i> 1988). There are no direct quotes from campaigners in available sources identifying specific motivations for the invalid vote. However, news articles link the campaign implicitly to parties’ perceptions that the election was rigged, and to the lack of a real opposition party on the ballot. I therefore code this campaign as a reaction to election fraud.
Paraguay, 2018	Several <i>campesino</i> groups, the Partido Paraguay Pyahura	Organized peasant groups promoted the null vote, claiming that the options were not representative of their preferences. The group mentioned specific grievances, such as agrarian reform, that would benefit its members, but which the candidates had not debated. The leadership of the Partido Paraguay Pyahura also called for invalid voting, because “of a lack of representivity among the candidates.”
Peru, 2000	Alejandro Toledo (presidential candidate)	Alejandro Toledo, who came in second place during the first-round contest, called for invalid voting to protest credible allegations of electoral fraud in the 2000 runoff election. He removed himself from consideration in the runoff and publicly “invited the population to abstain, or vote blank or spoil the vote by writing the phrase ‘no to fraud’ on the ballot” (La Voz de Houston, 2000).
Peru, 2001	Jaime Bayly, Álvaro Vargas Llosa	Jaime Bayly and Álvaro Vargas Llosa, prominent journalists and former advisors to runoff candidate Toledo’s campaign, argued during the runoff that neither candidate had “the minimal moral credentials to be president.” They proposed that voters cast a blank or null vote to protest the quality of the candidates (El Mundo 2001). While there were insinuations of corruption, the specific calls made by Bayly and Vargas Llosa focused on the candidates’ “moral credentials,” so I code this as a case focused on candidate quality.

Peru, 2006	Factions within the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC)	The 2006 runoff was between center-left Alán García, who had been president during one of the worst economic crises in Peruvian history, and Ollanta Humala, who represented a far-left platform. Some supporters of the conservative PPC, whose candidate was eliminated in the first round, called for spoiled voting in the runoff (El Comercio 2006a). These calls were not well publicized.
Peru, 2011	TV personalities (unnamed in print news), online groups (e.g., Voto VICIADO. Ni keiko ni Ollanta en Segunda Vuelta 2011 on Facebook).	The 2011 runoff was between Keiko Fujimori (of the far right, daughter of Alberto Fujimori, the former dictator) and Ollanta Humala (of the far left, a candidate in 2006 who opponents likened to Hugo Chávez). Some framed the choice in the runoff as the equivalent of choosing between “AIDS and Cancer.” News sources do not provide detail about invalid vote promoters, focusing instead on calls from prominent personalities (e.g., Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian Nobel Prize winner in literature) to vote for one candidate or another (Notimex 2011).
Uruguay, 2014	Partido Independiente; Unidad Popular; Partido Ecologista Radical Intransigente; “dissident” members of the Partido Colorado	Leadership from three eliminated first-round parties called on supporters to cast blank votes, as a reflection that the remaining candidates did not represent their policy preferences. “Dissident” leaders from the Partido Colorado published an open letter noting their intentions to “vote blank as a form of protest of an election that has already been decided” (Redacción La República 2014). This complaint reflects the insurmountable popularity of the Frente Amplio, and is not an accusation of election fraud.
Venezuela, 1998*	Venezuelan intellectuals (e.g., Armando Rojas Guardia, Moisés Moleiro, Héctor Silva Michelena, and Antonio Pasquali)	An article from 2006 describes calls for invalid voting in 1998 by a group of intellectuals. They “signed a proclamation that called for the null vote in the presidential elections that year, disappointed with the polarization between Hugo Chávez and Henrique Salas Römer” (Pereira 2006). Because the author mentions high polarization, I code this as an issue of candidate quality, rather than a perceived lack of political diversity in the candidate offering.

Venezuela, 2006*	Citizen groups (Resistencia Civil, la Red Liberal de Venezuela)	Civil Resistance and the Liberal Network of Venezuela, called for invalid votes to protest the lack of ideological variety in the candidate offering. “We want to vote for nobody because the two principal candidates present the same thing: a socialist offering to govern the country. The only thing that changes is the color of their shirts, but the populist model is the same one that has failed in Venezuela for decades” (as quoted in Pereira 2006).
Venezuela, 2018	Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD); la Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo	News sources describe tension among anti-Maduro groups, with some calling for an election boycott and others calling on voters to turn out to cast spoiled votes, because abstaining “would mean losing the opportunity to express their discontent” (Bigio 2018) with the incumbent.

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\* weak evidence (single news story)



TABLE A3.2. Variable Descriptions

Data Source	Variable name	Description
See table 3.1 above	Invalid Vote Campaign	The presence of an invalid vote campaign in a given election-round. Takes the value of "1" if a campaign is present and "0" if no campaign is identified.
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project	Executive Corruption (v2x_execorr)	Expert responses to the following question: "How routinely do members of the executive, or their agents grant favors in exchange for bribes, kickbacks, or other material inducements, and how often do they steal, embezzle, or misappropriate public funds or other state resources for personal or family use?" Runs from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating less corruption and 1 indicating more corruption.
	Distinct Party Platforms (v2psplats_mean)	Average expert responses to the following question: "How many political parties with representation in the national legislature or presidency have publicly available party platforms (manifestos) that are publicized and relatively distinct from one another?" V-Dem clarifies that parties "must have platforms that are both distinct (either in terms of content or generalized ideology) and publicly disseminated. This question is not intended to measure how much the public actually knows about these platforms or whether they are important in structuring policymaking." Measure was rescaled to run from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating that very few parties have publicly disseminated and distinct platforms, and 1 indicating that all or nearly all parties do.
	Elections Free from Intimidation (v2elintim_mean)	Average expert responses to the following question: "In this national election, were opposition candidates/ parties/ campaign workers subjected to repression, intimidation, violence, or harassment by the government, the ruling party, or their agents?" Rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the most intimidation, and 0 the least.

	Affective Polarization (v2cacamps_mean)	Average expert responses to the following question: "Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps?" The question refers to "the extent to which political differences affect social relationships beyond political discussions. Societies are highly polarized if supporters of opposing political camps are reluctant to engage in friendly interactions, for example, in family functions, civic associations, their free time activities and work-places." Rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating less polarization and 1 indicating the highest polarization.
Candidate biographies	Antiestablishment candidate	Adapted from Carreras (2012). Takes the value of "1" if a presidential candidate wins more than 5% of the vote <i>and</i> has no experience in elected office <i>and</i> runs for the presidency under a new party name, and "0" otherwise.

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TABLE A3.3. Campaign Emergence and Campaign Grievances (corresponds to Figures 3.3–3.7)

Variable name	Figure 3.3	Figure 3.4	Figure 3.5	Figure 3.6	Figure 3.7— Panel 1	Figure 3.7— Panel 2
Executive corruption	-0.37 (2.12)				8.62 (5.13)	
Executive corruption <sup>2</sup>	0.38 (2.42)				-9.90 (5.47)	
Distinct platforms		9.17 (8.17)				
Distinct platforms <sup>2</sup>		-7.52 (5.84)				
Antiestablishment candidate			0.21 (0.46)			
Intimidation				-2.31* (2.49)		-0.35 (5.00)
Intimidation <sup>2</sup>				6.20* (3.19)		10.37 (8.70)
Affective polarization					5.01 (3.76)	0.34 (1.11)
Executive corruption X Polarization					-25.88* (13.12)	
Executive corruption <sup>2</sup> X Polarization					25.72* (11.14)	
Intimidation X Polarization						-6.38 (9.10)
Intimidation <sup>2</sup> X Polarization						-0.94 (12.88)
Year	0.06* (0.01)	0.06* (0.01)	0.06* (0.01)	0.07* (0.02)	0.06* (0.01)	0.08* (0.02)
Constant	-115.36* (26.27)	-120.00* (30.32)	-117.24* (26.24)	-143.26* (30.28)	-121.96* (27.13)	-152.00* (30.92)
Observations	218	218	218	218	218	218

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Country-clustered standard errors shown in parentheses.

## Chapter 4 Appendix

TABLE A4.1. Demographics of Survey Samples

	Peru I—June 2020	Peru II—December 2020	Mexico—2020
<b>Number of observations</b>	1,525	825	1,628
<b>% Female</b>	50.1	50.4	50.8
<b>Race</b>			
% White	13.3	11.2	18.0
% Mixed	75.6	80.0	70.6
% Indigenous	3.1	3.0	7.2
% Other	7.9	5.8	4.2
<b>Education</b>			
% No/primary education	1.0	1.2	3.0
% Secondary education	20.9	16.7	24.6
% Higher education	78.2	82.1	72.4
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>			
A	3.6	4.8	NA
B	13.7	16.9	NA
C	29.9	30.4	NA
D	20.9	31.9	NA
E	31.9	16.0	NA
<b>Age</b>			
% 18–24	24.2	22.0	30.5
% 25–34	24.4	23.3	23.2
% 35–44	19.2	21.7	19.6
% 45–54	11.2	14.9	12.7
% 55–65	13.3	13.0	8.8
% 66+	7.6	5.1	5.2

*Note:* Survey characteristics for surveys conducted by LAPOP in Chile (2017), Peru (2017), and Nicaragua (2017) are available at [www.LapopSurveys.com](http://www.LapopSurveys.com). Survey characteristics for the Brazil (2018) study are available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/4IZ11I>.

TABLE A4.2. Predicting Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns (OLS, Peru 2017)

Variable	Approve invalid vote campaign
Support for democracy	0.09 (0.23)
Partisanship	-0.53* (0.17)
Trust political parties	1.45* (0.30)
Political interest	-0.12 (0.21)
Education	-0.72* (0.30)
Quintiles of wealth	-0.06 (0.19)
Age	-0.22 (0.25)
Urban	0.08 (0.12)
Female	0.15 (0.13)
Constant	3.47* (0.32)
Observations	2,452

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Standard errors in parentheses. Model estimated using survey weights and Stata's "svy" prefix to account for complex sample design.

Source: AmericasBarometer Peru, 2017.

TABLE A4.3. Balance Checks, Grievance Experiment, Peru II (2020)

	Control	Fraud	Representation
<b>Sex</b>	-0.12 (0.21)	0.01 (0.22)	0.14 (0.21)
<b>Socioeconomic level</b>	-0.04 (0.06)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.06)
<b>Age (years)</b>	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
<b>Secondary education</b>	1.51 (1.20)	-0.17 (0.89)	0.26 (0.88)
<b>Postsecondary education</b>	1.46 (1.19)	0.10 (0.86)	0.13 (0.86)
<b>Mixed</b>	-0.88* (0.33)	-0.55 (0.36)	-0.57^ (0.34)
<b>Indigenous</b>	-0.16 (0.71)	0.26 (0.72)	0.05 (0.72)
<b>Black/Afro-Peruvian</b>	-0.64 (0.88)	0.24 (0.81)	-0.39 (0.88)
<b>Mulatto</b>	-1.09 (0.97)	-0.28 (0.89)	-0.89 (0.98)
<b>Other</b>	-0.09 (0.66)	-0.51 (0.75)	-0.07 (0.67)
<b>Negative PID</b>	-0.04 (0.31)	0.25 (0.31)	0.58* (0.28)
<b>Constant</b>	-0.13 (1.43)	-0.41 (1.20)	0.29 (1.17)
<b>Observations</b>	823	823	823

^  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.4. T-Tests, Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns in Four Countries

	Mean	Observations	Standard deviation	Difference (t-statistic)
<i>Peru 2020</i>				
Control	0.11	232	0.31	
<i>Fraud</i>	0.15	209	0.36	-0.04 <sup>^</sup> (-1.28)
<i>Corruption</i>	0.15	251	0.36	-0.04 <sup>^</sup> (-1.30)
<i>Representation</i>	0.11	238	0.31	0.00 (0.10)
<i>Mexico 2020</i>				
Control	0.11	425	0.31	
<i>Fraud</i>	0.14	404	0.35	-0.03 <sup>^</sup> (-1.33)
<i>Corruption</i>	0.12	434	0.33	-0.01 (0.64)
<i>Representation</i>	0.11	446	0.31	0.00 (0.10)
<i>Brazil 2018</i>				
Control	0.32	522	9.47	
<i>Fraud</i>	0.32	265	0.47	-0.01 (-0.13)
<i>Corruption</i>	0.41	254	0.49	-0.12* (-3.51)
<i>Nicaragua 2017</i>				
Control	0.21	786	0.41	
<i>Fraud</i>	0.28	753	0.45	-0.07* (-3.16)

<sup>^</sup>  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , one-tailed. Values of 7–10 on the 10-point scale are coded as “approval.” In Brazil, values of 5–7 on the seven-point scale are coded as “approval.”

TABLE A4.5. Approval of Invalid Vote Campaigns by Democratic Orientations (corresponds to Figure 4.3)

	Responsible (figure 4.7)
<b>Fraud</b>	-0.68 (1.28)
<b>Corruption</b>	-0.50 (1.28)
<b>Representation</b>	-1.67 (1.24)
<b>Support democracy</b>	0.30 (0.47)
<b>Fraud* support democracy</b>	0.19 (0.67)
<b>Corruption* support democracy</b>	0.08 (0.66)
<b>Representation* support democracy</b>	0.56 (0.66)
<b>Support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	-0.07 (0.05)
<b>Fraud *support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	0.01 (0.08)
<b>Corruption *support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	0.02 (0.08)
<b>Representation *support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	-0.02 (0.08)
<b>Constant</b>	2.13* (0.90)
<b>Observations</b>	828

<sup>^</sup>  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.



TABLE A4.6. Balance Checks, Vignette Experiment, Peru I (2020)

	Leadership	Democratic content	
	Politicians	Pro-Democracy Campaign	No Democratic Content
<b>Female</b>	-0.05 (0.10)	0.13 (0.13)	0.18 (0.13)
<b>Partisan</b>	0.07 (0.15)	0.42* (0.18)	0.19 (0.18)
<b>Education</b>	0.01 (0.05)	0.06 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.07)
<b>Age</b>	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
<b>Mixed</b>	-0.00 (0.16)	-0.01 (0.19)	0.06 (0.19)
<b>Indigenous</b>	0.05 (0.34)	-0.10 (0.44)	0.48 (0.39)
<b>Black/Afro-Peruvian</b>	-0.01 (0.38)	0.34 (0.43)	-0.76 (0.56)
<b>Mulatto</b>	-2.16* (0.76)	0.95 (0.62)	0.27 (0.70)
<b>Other</b>	-0.06 (0.29)	-0.05 (0.38)	0.47 (0.34)
<b>Income</b>	0.00 (0.01)	0.03^ (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
<b>Constant</b>	-0.10 (0.37)	-0.91* (0.46)	-0.27 (0.44)
<b>Observations</b>	1,443	1,443	1,443

^  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.7. Mechanisms by Treatment Condition (corresponds to Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6)

	Campaign approval	Sore loser	Benefit	Responsible	Democratic
<i>Leadership—citizen groups excluded</i>					
Politicians	-0.12* (0.05)	0.10* (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.11* (0.05)
<i>Democratic orientation—antidemocracy excluded</i>					
Pro-democracy	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)
No democracy content	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)
Constant	2.55* (2.55)	3.06* (0.05)	3.14* (0.05)	2.38* (0.05)	2.92* (0.05)
Observations	1,508	1,514	1,515	1,509	1,509

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.8. Models with Support for Democracy as a Moderator

	Responsible (figure 4.7)	Democratic (figure 4.7)	Campaign approval (figure 4.8)
<b>Pro-democracy</b>	-0.55 <sup>^</sup> (0.31)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.74* (0.30)
<b>No dem. content</b>	0.15 (0.29)	-0.14 (0.29)	0.04 (0.29)
<b>Support democracy</b>	0.13 (0.11)	0.16 (0.11)	0.15 (0.10)
<b>Pro-dem* support democracy</b>	0.15 (0.15)	-0.12 (0.15)	0.28 <sup>^</sup> (0.15)
<b>No dem. content* support democracy</b>	-0.12 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)	-0.02 (0.15)
<b>Support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)
<b>Pro-dem*support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 <sup>^</sup> (0.02)
<b>No dem. content * support democracy<sup>2</sup></b>	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
<b>Politicians</b>	0.11* (0.05)	-0.12* (0.05)	-0.13* (0.05)
<b>Constant</b>	2.45* (0.21)	2.86* (0.21)	2.48* (0.21)
<b>Observations</b>	1,509	1,509	1,508

<sup>^</sup>  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.9. Models with Trust in Parties as a Moderator

	Sore losers (figure 4.7)	Benefit (figure 4.7)	Campaign approval (figure 4.8)
<b>Politicians</b>	0.00 (0.15)	0.32* (0.15)	0.10 (0.17)
<b>Trust parties</b>	-0.03 (0.08)	0.08 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.09)
<b>Politicians * trust parties</b>	0.08 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.13)
<b>Trust parties<sup>2</sup></b>	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
<b>Politicians * trust parties<sup>2</sup></b>	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
<b>pro-democracy</b>	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.13* (0.06)
<b>No dem. content</b>	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.09 <sup>^</sup> (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)
<b>Constant</b>	3.10* (0.11)	3.07* (0.11)	2.55* (0.12)
<b>Observations</b>	1,514	1,515	1,508

<sup>^</sup>  $p \leq 0.1$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.10. Approval and Mechanisms by Treatment Condition (Robustness, Peru)

	Sore loser	Benefit	Responsible	Democratic	Approval
<i>Leadership—citizen groups excluded</i>					
Politicians	0.18* (0.06)	0.07 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.13^ (0.07)
<i>Democratic orientation—antidemocracy excluded</i>					
Pro-democracy	-0.12^ (0.06)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.10 (0.08)	0.15* (0.08)	0.19* (0.07)
Constant	3.27* (0.06)	3.34* (0.06)	2.15* (0.07)	2.59* (0.07)	2.09* (0.06)
Observations	717	718	718	716	718

^  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

TABLE A4.11. Approval and Mechanisms by Treatment Condition (Robustness, Mexico)

	Sore loser	Benefit	Responsible	Democratic	Approval
<i>Leadership—citizen groups excluded</i>					
Politicians	-0.92 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.05)
<i>Democratic Orientation—antidemocracy excluded</i>					
Pro-democracy	-0.06 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.07)	0.00 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)
No democratic content	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)
Constant	3.12* (0.05)	3.09* (0.05)	3.55* (0.05)	2.58* (0.05)	2.17* (0.05)
Observations	1,618	1,618	1,608	1,608	1,601

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , two-tailed. Standard errors in parentheses.

## Chapter 5 Appendix

TABLE A5.1. Details about Invalid Vote Campaigns in Peruvian Gubernatorial Elections, 2010–2018

Department, year	Leadership	Details
Amazonas, 2018*	Unnamed, popular mobilization	Multiple op-eds written in local news sources called on voters to spoil their ballots. In one, a professor at the National University of Trujillo in Amazonas called on voters to spoil their votes “for the dignity of Amazonas” (Ruiz Tejedo 2018). TVO in Amazonas noted in a Facebook video that “there has even been a campaign started on social media, so that in the second round of the regional elections, people vote blank, null, or spoiled” (TVO Amazonas 2018). Articles make oblique reference to candidate corruption. However, there is very little specific detail available about the campaigners or their grievances, and the number of available sources is limited, so I code this as weak evidence.
Áncash, 2014	Political parties (MANPE; Juntos por el Cambio; Río Santa Caudaloso; Partido Humanista)	Three regional parties called on their supporters to cast invalid votes in the runoff election, citing low candidate quality and alleged corruption. See chapter 6 for a detailed description.
Áncash, 2018	Popular mobilization (Unidos por el Perú; leader of the Chamber of Commerce in the Province of Santa; Conrede; Frente de Defensa y Desarrollo de la Provincia del Santa); political candidates and parties (David Aguilar; Rubén Almendra-dez; Koki Noriega; Áncash a la Obra; Helvezia Balta Salazar; Roberto Briceño Franco)	Many former political candidates and elected leaders, as well as citizen groups and civil society organizations, called on voters to cast spoiled votes in the runoff. Campaign activity included street protest and paid advertising (e.g., billboards). Campaigners’ principal grievances included corruption (in particular, allegedly illegal campaign financing) and low-quality candidates (neither candidate had experience in elected office, and their policy positions were generally viewed as unserious). See chapter 6 for a detailed description.
Arequipa, 2014	Political candidates (Elmer Cáceres Llica); Popular mobilization (Frente Anticorrupción; Hector Herrera)	Popular mobilizers (especially the Frente Anticorrupción) and former political candidates (in particular, Elmer Cáceres Llica) called on voters to invalidate their ballots in the runoff to protest the candidates’ limited political experience and alleged corruption. See chapter 6 for a detailed description.
Arequipa, 2018	Popular mobilization	Unnamed citizen groups engaged in organized street and online mobilization of the invalid vote. Principal grievances included corruption (both candidates had faced judicial proceedings for corruption) and candidate quality (especially their moral credentials). See chapter 6 for a detailed description.

- Ayacucho, 2010\* Popular mobilization (Comité Cívico por la Dignidad de Ayacucho) While it is clear that a null vote campaign occurred, details of the campaign are thin. The Association of Rural Services (SER) in its 2010–11 issue published top news items from Ayacucho from November to December. “November 23—Members of the Comité Cívico por la Dignidad de Ayacucho, presided over by Mariano Mendoza Fernández, promoted the spoiled vote in rejection of the candidates Rofilio Neyra and Wilfredo Ocorima, who they said would not ensure governability in the region.” Aside from this reference and scattered social media posts linking to this news article, contemporaneous sources were limited. A M.A. thesis from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú published in 2017 notes that campaigners argued that “neither candidate represented a guarantee of a transparent government, since they had mortgaged their future government to obscure interests given the ostentatious economic capacity that these two candidates showed over the campaign. This, in addition to the ‘camouflaged Fujimorismo’ of candidate Neyra, plus the ‘obscure’ and ‘undignified’ businesses of candidate Ocorima, as well as the supposed inability of both candidates to run the regional government because they ‘lack knowledge’ and academic training justified the null or blank vote” (Aronés Palomino 2017, 18). The thesis provides no sources for these claims. I code the central grievance as corruption, although this constitutes weak evidence.
- Ayacucho, 2018\* Political candidate (Germán Martinelli); popular mobilization (unidentified leadership) Martinelli, an eliminated first-round candidate, publicly stated his plans to spoil his ballot and named that option open as a valid one for his supporters: “Martinelli signaled that his sympathizers are free to vote [how they want] in the second round, but that they should evaluate the best proposals and sufficient morality and ability to work for the good of the region and if they believe that neither of the candidates are convincing, he signaled they could cast blank or spoiled votes to make [the candidates] feel this rejection of both options” (Escalante 2018). In addition to this elite call, local media discussed “rumors of a ‘movement’ for the spoiled vote, it’s just lacking a face. So, it will be a runoff among three proposals. In that scenario, whoever wins legally will have weak popular support and low levels of legitimacy” (Onofre 2018). Because Martinelli specifically linked the invalid vote to candidate morality and capacity, and because news stories suggest that doubts about candidate quality and corruption fueled the campaign, I code these two grievances although specific evidence is weak.

Cajamarca, 2018	Former governor (Gregorio Santos)	Gregorio Santos, a former governor of Cajamarca, made public calls for the invalid vote online. “[Acción Para el Progreso, APP] and [Acción Popular, AP] are going to the second round in Cajamarca, with evasion around the irrational sacking of natural resources. . . . Quieroz, Pereyra of AP and the Acuña [APP] always go along with the mines. Vote rebellion, spoil your vote” ( <a href="https://twitter.com/Gregorio_Goyo/status/1052739110345957376">https://twitter.com/Gregorio_Goyo/status/1052739110345957376</a> ). This apparently weak mobilizational effort was not widely publicized; however, the evidence that Santos made this call is clear. Because this call is linked directly to specific mining policies that are framed as unrepresentative, I code the central grievance in Cajamarca as “unrepresentative candidates.”
Callao, 2018*	Popular mobilization (Frente de Unidad de Defensa del Pueblo Peruano, FUDEPP)	FUDEPP called on voters in Callao to write “¡Por una Nueva Constitución con el pueblo y para el pueblo!” (“For a new constitution with the people and for the people!”) on their ballots as a protest of corrupt incumbent politicians and of the neoliberal capitalist system. It is unclear whether this call on social media led to sustained action—the post only received a single “like” on Facebook, and while there are isolated Twitter posts indicating individuals’ intent to invalidate their ballots, I found no evidence of an additional, organized campaign. This therefore constitutes weak evidence.
Cusco, 2014	Political candidates (Jaime Facundo Aragón; Dora Monzón; Héctor Acurio; Carlos Cuaresma; Armando Villanueva)	Several eliminated first-round candidates called for the invalid vote as a protest of the remaining candidates. While some former candidates did not give clear reasons for this decision, others linked the decision to “a rejection of political mediocrity” and a response to supposed corruption among the second-round candidates (Redacción La República 2014).
Cusco, 2018	Political candidates (Werner Salcedo; Jejosnovara Cervantes); popular mobilization (Teachers’ Union, Sindicato de Trabajadores en la Educación Región [Suter], Ernesto Meza Tica)	Two first-round candidates made public statements that they would cast invalid votes because the runoff candidates “don’t represent us” (La República 2018a). However, both candidates said they would leave their voters free to decide their own votes rather than actively campaign for the null vote. The head of the Cusco Teachers’ Union left the second-round debate and asked voters to spoil their ballots, arguing that “neither of the two [candidates] has sufficient morals to represent us, that already happened with Edwin Licona (the current governor) who never stood up for Cusqueños, just for his province of Calca” (La República 2018b). I code core grievances for this case as corruption and unrepresentative options.

Huánuco, 2018	Political candidates (Rodolfo Espinoza Zevallos; others, unnamed)	Espinoza called on voters to spoil their ballots because “both [candidates] have a lot to explain about their financing and campaign management” (Ahora 2018). He specifically called for spoiled voting, because blank votes “could be manipulated at the ballot box in favor of one candidate or another” (Ahora 2018). Other sources mention that first-round candidates promoted the invalid vote, but do not name these candidates (Prensa Regional 2018). There is some limited evidence of popular mobilization efforts in support of the invalid vote; however, these appear to be disparate, individual efforts rather than a coordinated campaign. I therefore code this case as elite mobilization, and the central grievance as corruption.
Ica, 2014	Political organization (Partido Humanista)	The Humanist Party called on its followers in Ica to spoil their votes in the runoff election, as a “vote of protest against both options . . . which represent options linked to the violation of human rights, tax violations, money laundering and acts of corruption” (Humanist Party on Facebook, November 21, 2014). Scattered op-eds promoted invalid voting; it is unclear whether the authors of these op-eds were working in coordination with each other, or with other organizations. I therefore code this campaign as having “elite” mobilizers. There is very limited evidence of the dissemination of these calls for spoiled voting. However, because the call itself came directly from the party organization, I do not code this as weak evidence. I code the central grievance as corruption.
Junín, 2014	Popular mobilization; political organization (Movimiento Regional Independiente con el Perú)	Ángel Berrocal, the former candidate of regional movement “con el Perú,” supported the party’s calls for invalid voting. The argument was that neither runoff candidate had “shown interest in initiating a direct fight against corruption and poverty . . . that is why it was decided that we would not vote for corruption and opt for the real change the public demands” (Diario Primicia 2014).
Lambayeque, 2018*	Political organization (Movimiento Verde Unido, led by Manuel Arellano Ruiz)	The Unified Green Movement, led by Manuel Arellano Ruiz, called for invalid voting in the first-round election in Lambayeque in 2018, in opposition to corruption. “We see candidates with large billboards, buying survey firms and the Pharisee press, as well as the purchase of votes in exchange for necessities and artifacts with money that nobody knows the origin of or how they will get it back. That is corruption” (Fernández 2018a).



Loreto, 2018*	Popular mobilization (no leadership identified)	Online, images of multiple vehicles driving through Loreto with signs promoting the invalid vote. These included signs reading “Don’t choose your thief. Vote blank” and “Spoil your vote against corrupt politicians.”
Madre de Dios, 2018*	Political candidates (Freddy Vracko, unnamed others)	A contemporaneous news story published in <i>El Comercio</i> noted that “for now, a campaign for the null vote has begun . . . Candidates who were left out of the running are pushing this option with the goal of surpassing the two-thirds of invalid votes that convokes new elections. The candidate who was left in third place, Freddy Vracko, is one of the promoters of this proposal on social media . . . ‘None of the options for the second round make us confident. If one of them comes into power, the illegality of the [gold] mines in La Pampa will get stronger’” (Latam 2018). I only identified a single news story for this case, so code it as weak evidence. Because the call is linked to a specific mining policy, I code the chief grievance as “unrepresentative options.”
Piura, 2018*	Political party (Perú Libertario/Perú Libre)	On September 8, 2018, Perú Libertario’s Piura branch made a post promoting the invalid vote on its Facebook page. “Perú Libertario Piura ratifies its position of promoting the SPOILED VOTE for these 2018 regional elections here in our city” ( <a href="https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=316236382288266&amp;id=184214655490440">https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=316236382288266&amp;id=184214655490440</a> ). The party claims no grievances in its post, so I do not code grievances in this case. I also identified isolated posts on Twitter expressing voters’ intent to invalidate their vote; however, these posts do not link their invalid vote to an organized campaign effort. Because the information identifying campaign details is so sparse, I code this as weak evidence.
Tacna, 2014	Political candidates (Fernando Martorell Sobero); political parties (unnamed); popular mobilization (Comité Impulsor del Voto Viciado; unnamed others)	Multiple news sources identify political parties (which are generally unnamed, although former candidate Fernando Martorell Sobero is identified in Surco Huayna 2014) and popular mobilization groups (especially the Comité Impulsor del Voto Viciado, with unnamed others) in opposition to low-quality and corrupt candidates.
Tacna, 2018	Political candidates (Abel Bolaños; Marco Limache; Fernando Martorell); popular mobilization (Colectivo “No al Fraude”)	News sources link the invalid vote campaign due to “serious doubts about the transparency of the electoral process during the first round in Tacna” (La República 2018b). During organized street protests in favor of the invalid vote, protestors carried signs reading e.g., “Down with corruption” and “The mafia is looking for impunity!” (La República 2018a).

\* Weak evidence

TABLE A5.2. Variable Descriptions

Variable name	Variable description
<i>Peru: Gubernatorial Analysis</i>	
Difference invalid/ blank/null	Cross-round change in the invalid vote rate (invalid vote <sub>second round</sub> - invalid vote <sub>first round</sub> ) in each district in all departments where an elite-led invalid vote campaign occurred during the second-round of the 2014 or 2018 gubernatorial elections. Ranges from -86 (a decline of 86 percentage points) to 34 (an increase of 34 percentage points).
Promoter's vote share	<p>The summed first-round vote share of all political elites that were named in news stories as having promoted the invalid vote during the runoff, measured in each district in all departments where an elite-led invalid vote campaign occurred during the second-round of the 2014 or 2018 gubernatorial elections. Ranges from 0 (no votes) to 79 (79% of the first-round vote), with a mean of 16 and a median of 10.</p> <p>There are two exceptions to the first-round candidate rule. Ica's 2014 invalid vote campaign was led by the Humanist Party, which competed in mayoral elections in all but one of that department's provinces. In that case, I use mayoral results, which yields a small number of missing cases in Ica. Additionally, two campaigns were led by political elites who had competed in previous subnational elections. In Cajamarca in 2018, Gregorio Santos (a two-term governor and 2016 presidential candidate) promoted spoiled voting in the runoff. In Lambayeque, the 2018 campaign was led by an unsuccessful 2014 gubernatorial candidate. In the cases of Cajamarca and Lambayeque, I use each politician's vote share in their most recent (2014) department-wide contest.</p> <p>In five of 12 departments, more than one former candidate is identified as promoting invalid voting in the runoff. Results are generally consistent for models estimated using only one promoting candidate at a time.</p>
Wealth (quintile)	I conducted a principal component analysis of household ownership of common items (e.g., televisions, washing machines, cell phones, cable TV) to create five categories of wealth in each department. In the resulting measure, each department has five equally sized groups of citizens, grouped from least wealthy to wealthiest.
Illiteracy	The illiteracy rate in each district is as measured in the 2017 census.
Province	A series of indicator variables denoting the province in which each district is located.

## Chapter 6 Appendix

### Identifying Respondents for Interviews

Respondents in Arequipa and Áncash were selected for their expertise on invalid vote campaigns. I developed an initial list of potential participants that included (1) the authors of and (2) the experts or campaigners named in news stories from each region. These individuals were contacted via email, telephone, or social media as available. At the end of each interview, respondents were asked to identify others with relevant expertise; multiple attempts were made to contact each of these individuals for interviews, as well.

### Interview Script, Informants in Arequipa and Áncash

Note: interviews included additional questions about citizen security at the end of the script. I do not reproduce those items here.

1. In general, how would you describe the 2018 gubernatorial campaign?
  1. [PROBE] Do you think that the candidates were of high quality?
    1. Why? Why not?
    2. Did any of these candidates campaign as an “outsider”?
  2. [PROBE] What were the three most important issues during the campaign?
  3. [PROBE] According to what you remember hearing or seeing during the 2018 campaign, was there an effort to manipulate the results by any of the candidates or political parties?

Now I would like to speak with you a little more about campaigns in favor of null or spoiled votes in the second round 2018 election in [REGION]/Do you remember any campaign in favor of the null or spoiled vote?

2. Thinking about what you saw or heard during the 2018 gubernatorial campaign, who were the most influential leaders in the campaign promoting the blank, null, or spoiled vote in 2018?
  1. Names/contact information
    1. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018, **political elites** were the main promoters of blank, null, or spoiled voting?
    2. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018, **groups of citizens** were the main promoters of blank, null, or spoiled voting?
    3. [PROBE] Would you say that there were other actors involved in promoting the blank, null, or spoiled vote in the 2018 elections? Who?
    4. [PROBE] Based on your observations, would you say that this type of campaign was organized **principally** through social media, informal interpersonal networks, formal communication networks, or some other way? What other way?

In 2014, there was also a campaign in favor of the invalid vote in the second round gubernatorial elections in [REGION]. Do you remember this campaign? [If no, skip questions 3, 4]

3. Thinking about what you saw or heard during the 2014 gubernatorial campaign, who were the most influential leaders in the campaign promoting the blank, null, or spoiled vote in 2014?
  1. Names/ contact information
    1. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2014, **political elites** were the main promoters of blank, null, or spoiled voting?
    2. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2014, **groups of citizens** were the main promoters of blank, null, or spoiled voting?
    3. [PROBE] Would you say that there were other actors involved in promoting the blank, null, or spoiled vote in the 2014 elections? Who?
    4. [PROBE] Based on your observations, would you say that this type of campaign was organized **principally** through social media, informal interpersonal networks, formal communication networks, or some other way? What other way?

4. According to what you remember, how were the 2014 and 2018 campaigns similar?
  1. And what differences did you observe between these campaigns?
    1. [PROBE]: Were the main promoters different? The strategies used to mobilize the public to cast blank or spoiled votes? [for example: did the campaign employ street protest as a strategy in one election but not the other? In the media used to communicate their message? The content of the messages they promoted?]
    2. Do you think the campaign promoting null or spoiled votes in 2014 was more or less successful than the 2018 campaign? Why?
      1. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018 there was more, less, or similar participation by **political elites promoting** the blank, null, or spoiled vote compared to 2014?
      2. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018 there was more, less, or similar participation by **citizen groups promoting** the blank, null, or spoiled vote compared to 2014?
      3. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018 there was more, less, or similar participation by **political elites opposing** the blank, null, or spoiled vote compared to 2014?
      4. [PROBE] Would you say that in 2018 there was more, less, or similar participation by **citizen groups opposing** the blank, null, or spoiled vote compared to 2014?
  5. Do you have any suggestions about individuals who I should contact to collect more information about these campaigns?

## Chapter 7 Appendix

TABLE A7.1. Difference in Means Tests, Backsliding, and Participation

	Mean	Observations	Standard deviation	Difference (t-statistic)
<i>Corresponds to Figure 7.1</i>				
<b>Absence of court packing (pre-)</b>	0.88	34	0.16	-0.02 (-0.71)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	0.91	34	0.11	
<b>Executive respects constitution (pre-)</b>	0.68	34	0.17	-0.00 (0.02)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	0.68	34	0.18	
<b>Respect for media freedom (pre-)</b>	0.80	34	0.16	0.01 (0.23)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	0.79	34	0.18	
<b>Elections free from intimidation (pre-)</b>	0.76	32	0.24	-0.05 (-1.07)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	0.82	41	0.20	
<i>Corresponds to Figure 7.2</i>				
<b>Antiestablishment candidate (pre-)</b>	0.17	24	0.38	-0.11 (-0.94)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	0.28	29	0.45	
<b>Antiestablishment Vote (pre-)</b>	1.57	18	5.30	-6.81 (-1.80)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	8.38	16	15.05	
<i>Corresponds to Figure 7.3</i>				
<b>Turnout (pre-)</b>	75.19	23	15.53	3.56 (0.85)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	70.63	29	14.60	
<b>Invalid vote (pre-)</b>	5.17	23	3.49	-1.49 (-1.35)
<i>Postcampaign</i>	6.66	29	3.97	

TABLE A7.2. Difference-in-Differences Results, Peru (Corresponds to Figures 7.4 and 7.5)

	Gubernatorial (2010–2018)		Presidential (2011–2016)		Congressional (2016–2020)	
	Invalid	Turnout	Invalid	Turnout	Invalid	Turnout
<b>Campaign</b>	0.12 (0.18)	3.77* (1.63)	-2.60 (2.17)	4.06* (1.60)	-1.24 (2.52)	4.48 (2.56)
<b>Time</b>	1.07 (1.40)	-8.32* (1.28)	3.53* (1.54)	-2.87* (1.13)	-13.85* (1.72)	-7.48* (1.76)
<b>Campaign X time</b>	7.15* (2.74)	1.05 (2.51)	0.12 (3.07)	0.93 (2.26)	-1.21 (3.57)	1.36 (3.60)
<b>2018 campaign dummy</b>	7.15 (2.74)	-2.04* (1.09)				
<b>Constant</b>	17.08* (1.19)	83.81* (1.00)	10.95* (1.09)	80.84* (0.80)	36.26* (1.21)	79.14* (1.28)
<b>Observations</b>	95	95	96	96	52	50
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.132	0.385	0.067	0.177	0.628	0.361

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . Standard errors in parentheses. Presidential and gubernatorial analyses include first-round and runoff results, which is why there are more observations in those models.

# Notes

## CHAPTER 1

1. Lasso initially agreed to the recount, but later retracted his support on procedural grounds (Télam 2021). Indeed, Ecuador's electoral court, the National Electoral Council, began a recount, only to halt it midway (Romero 2021).

2. Mexico groups blank and spoiled ballots into a single "null vote" category. Some countries (among others, India, Indonesia, Greece, and Ukraine) and one U.S. state (Nevada) include an explicit "None of the Above" option on the ballot. In Colombia, this against-all option is named the "blank" vote. In these contexts, the "None of the Above" option is considered a valid protest vote.

3. Additionally, poll workers likely adhere more or less strictly to the rules as written based on their personality, their level of training, the presence of partisan poll watchers during counting, or the competitiveness of an election (Aldashev and Mastrobuoni 2019).

4. On the other hand, where candidate options are limited compared to prior elections, invalid voting tends to increase, with voters protesting a perceived lack of options (Cohen 2018b; Cunha and Crisp 2022).

5. Complex ballots have also been linked to increased invalid voting in wealthy democracies. For example, complicated technologies (e.g., the butterfly ballot during the 2000 presidential election in Palm Beach County, Florida) result in higher blank and null vote rates in the United States (Herron and Sekhon 2003; Mebane 2004), while the use of paper ballots and optical scan technology is linked to lower invalid vote rates in the U.S. (e.g., Darcy and Schneider 1989; Stewart III 2011).

6. Although the specifics of qualified majorities vary by country, most Latin American democracies require candidates to win at least 40% of the vote (McClintock 2018).

7. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models separately estimating the effect of year and country on the invalid vote rates support these observations. An



otherwise empty model estimating the effect of year explains 5% of the variation in invalid voting (adjusted  $R^2$  value of .05), compared to 59% for a similar model including country fixed effects, suggesting that political factors within and across countries explain a much greater portion of the variation in invalid vote rates than time.

8. I searched ProQuest's Global Newsstream and the Access World News News Bank for the terms "voto [en] blanco," "voto nulo," "voto viciado" (in Peru), and "voto bronca" (in Argentina), as well as each country's name; in Brazil, I used "voto [em] branco" and "voto nulo." I then reviewed thousands of resulting stories and identified any news article or opinion piece that was related to invalid voting in a Latin American presidential election. Finally, I read the resulting articles and coded their content. I identified whether the coverage was factual (e.g., presenting official vote tallies or polling results), described voters' or parties' strategies around invalid votes, described invalid votes as the result of voter error, or linked blank and spoiled votes to any of several protest motivations. These categories were not mutually exclusive; for example, an article that reported the invalid vote rate before detailing voters' motivations for spoiling their votes would be coded as both factual *and* as describing a given motivation.

9. News stories discussing the strategic considerations of voters and elites are more common in countries with multiround elections.

10. Nicaragua is excluded from this analysis, as official invalid vote rates are not longer reported there. For details, see appendix table A1.1.

11. Survey estimates of invalid vote behavior should be lower than official estimates if respondents are answering questions truthfully. Some portion of invalid voting behavior will always be unintentional, caused by error by voters when casting votes or by poll workers while tallying them. The survey estimate is significantly higher than invalid vote rates reported by the electoral management body in only one election studied here (Panama 2014). This suggests that survey respondents are not merely posturing when they report having invalidated their ballots, but are likely reporting their true behavior.

12. Not all committed democrats will support efforts to promote the invalid vote. Indeed, many overlook democratic backsliding when it favors their preferred party (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020; Singer 2018). Polarization may thus limit citizens' willingness to punish politicians who engage in backsliding.

13. Recent bills in Guatemala and Argentina have "validated" invalid ballots by including them in the denominator for final vote tallies, thereby increasing the number of votes candidates must win to earn a seat (Álvarez and Hernández 2015; Blando 2015).

## CHAPTER 2

1. With few exceptions (e.g., the U.S. state of North Carolina), governments do not report the content of invalid ballots, making it impossible to determine whether voters spoiled their ballots by accidentally mismarking the paper or by writing an explicit protest message.

2. Singh operationalizes antidemocracy orientations by combining three survey measures: the belief that democracy does not matter, external political efficacy, and dissatisfaction with democracy as it works in the country.

3. Each group was asked: “Sometimes during elections, people choose to leave their ballots blank or to mark them incorrectly. Why do you think that some people invalidate their votes in [country]?” In Peru, this was the opening question to the focus groups. In Mexico, this item came toward the end of the instrument, following discussion about then-presidential-candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and independent voters. See the chapter 2 appendix for further detail about the focus groups.

4. The “Churchillian” support for democracy question asks respondents the extent to which they agree with the statement, “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.” This question is adapted from a speech by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, in which he noted that, “democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

5. There is also a significant association between the belief that living in a democracy “does not matter” and reported invalid voting behavior. This variable was not included in the AmericasBarometer survey instrument after 2014.

6. Apathy was frequently discussed as a reason for invalidating the vote during focus groups, while not being linked directly to the electoral rules. In many cases, participants described voters choosing to disengage from politics because of overwhelming evidence of candidate corruption. For example, one participant noted that “there are people who are tired of politics, they think that politics is just corruption, you know? This is because in Peru . . . the regional presidents are corrupt. It’s been proven, they’re even in jail, you know? Or, still being searched for, they’re being pursued by the state, by justice, you know? So, seeing those situations, people don’t believe in politics. So, because of that, people spoil their vote or leave it blank.” (Arequipa 1). Others linked apathy to voter confusion about the options as the result of the information environment, for example: “On the one hand, [people] don’t feel like the information they receive is true [*sea cierta y sea verdadera*]. All of the information that the candidates or political groups themselves offer, all of the information online [at the electoral commission], . . . the candidates, the political parties have to post that information. People distrust all of that. And that’s why . . . I have seen that people opt to . . . to vote blank or spoil the vote, because of that generalized distrust [*duda*] that exists” (Arequipa 2).

7. In some countries, voting is legally compulsory, but the government has no mechanisms in place to guarantee compliance. Because past scholarship suggests that weak mandates do not condition turnout behavior (e.g., Fornos et al. 2004), I treat countries where turnout is mandated but that mandate is not enforced (e.g., Mexico) as having voluntary voting.

8. In voluntary vote countries 12.5% gave this answer, compared to 14.7% in mandatory vote countries. A two-samples t-test shows that this difference in means is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.17$ ). Of the respondents, 22.3% said they invalidated their ballot because they were “confused”—a potential indicator of low political information although not necessarily of disengagement. Contrary to the expectations detailed here, confusion as a motivation was significantly more common in countries where voting is voluntary (31.7%) compared to where voting is mandated (15.6%). A two-samples t-test shows that this difference is significant with  $p < 0.0001$ .

9. Downs (1957) also emphasizes the informational costs of voting. However,

most citizens are incidentally exposed to information about candidates in the lead up to high-salience elections without exerting any specific effort (Aldrich 1993; Baum and Jamison 2006; Niemi 1976).

10. These “expressive” benefits include staving off guilt associated with an individual’s sense of duty, or “the belief that not voting in a democracy is wrong” (Blais 2000, 93; see also Blais and Achen 2019; Bowler and Donovan 2013; Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968).

11. On average, Latin American voters express greater satisfaction with their lives than nonvoters (although voting may not increase happiness; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2011).

12. The cost of participating in an invalid vote campaign for non-habitual voters is significantly higher than boycotting the election (i.e., abstaining as an expression of protest, see Beaulieu 2014). In voluntary vote countries, especially, invalid vote campaigns send a clearer protest signal.

13. Turnout was similar in 2015 and 2018, but the invalid vote doubled, from 3.9% in 2015 to 8% in 2018.

### CHAPTER 3

1. Fujimori fled to his parents’ native Japan following the 2001 release of videocassettes revealing that his administration had bribed members of Congress. Amid this scandal, Fujimori scheduled new elections and announced he would not compete.

2. During García’s tenure as president, the Peruvian economy plummeted, poverty skyrocketed, inflation rose by more than 1,000 percent, and the Maoist Sendero Luminoso guerrillas began to commit increasingly frequent acts of violence within the country.

3. Toledo was accused of corruption, of recent cocaine abuse, of bribing the press not to publish unflattering news stories, and of having fathered an illegitimate daughter.

4. Limiting the universe of cases studied to executive elections in the current democratic period excludes some of the most dramatic invalid vote campaigns in Latin American history, including the 1957 Argentine campaign spearheaded by then-exiled former president Juan Perón; the 1982 primary election in Uruguay, when leftist parties were proscribed and called for their supporters to cast blank ballots as a pro-democracy protest; and the blank vote campaign in Bolivia’s 2011 judicial elections, in protest of perceived court packing by incumbent Evo Morales.

5. Campaigns promoting protest voting have a variety of goals. Sometimes (e.g., El Salvador 2018–19), the leader of an against-all campaign later seeks election to national office. Other campaigns aim to invalidate an election’s result (e.g., Peru 2001) or seek to draw international attention to internal election dynamics (e.g., Nicaragua 2016). Attaining these objectives requires an increase in the invalid vote, although how large of an increase is “big enough” will vary. It is also important to note that the logic of invalid vote campaigns is distinct from that of election boycotts. To boycott an election, party organizations remove their candidates from contention, and their supporters from polling places, to protest incumbent malfeasance (e.g., Beaulieu 2014). Boycotts’ structure is thus inherently top-down,

while there is far more diversity in the organization and strategies of invalid vote campaigns.

6. I searched for the terms “voto [en] blanco” and “voto nulo” in all Spanish-speaking countries (“voto [em] branco” and “voto nulo” in Brazil). In Peru, I included the term “voto viciado” and, in Argentina, “voto bronca.” These terms denote spoiled ballots in these countries. For additional details about the search, as well as the coding strategy used to define invalid vote campaigns and their grievances, see the appendix.

7. In four campaigns (Colombia 1994, Ecuador 1984, Venezuela 1998, 2006), I found only a single mention of efforts to mobilize the invalid vote in nationally circulated sources.

8. News organizations may consider null vote campaigns to be unimportant or inconsequential, and therefore might choose not to cover them. Alternatively, media outlets may view these campaigns as undemocratic or irresponsible and opt not to publish stories about them to avoid perceptions that they are promoting the behavior. By necessity, I exclude radio broadcasts, which are an important means for information dissemination and mobilization in many Latin American countries, which could further contribute to an undercount.

9. While I used social media to gather additional information about the invalid vote campaigns detailed here, for the sake of comparability across the time series, I did not use social media sources to identify campaigns.

10. Nearly all null vote campaigns included in this dataset made explicitly pro-democracy appeals; El Salvador in 1982 is an exception. In that case, guerrilla fighters engaged in voter intimidation, threatening citizens with physical mutilation if they voted for a candidate rather than spoiling their ballots. Null vote campaigns protesting democratization also occurred in Sendero Luminoso strongholds in Peru in the 1990s; these campaigns are not included here because they preceded the democratic transition.

11. The increased prevalence of invalid vote campaigns during this period might appear to be in tension with figure 1.1, which shows that average invalid vote *rates* are quite stable over time. However, there is substantial variation around the average values presented in figure 1.1: over the 40-year period, some elections have very high and very low invalid vote rates even in the absence of campaigns. Further, about half of invalid vote campaigns were not associated with an increase in the invalid vote (see chapter 5). This apparent tension, then, reflects the combination of high variation in invalid vote rates and frequent campaign failure.

12. The Dominican Republic experienced a citizen-led invalid vote campaign during its 2010 legislative elections. And Honduras experienced an election boycott in 2009 following President Manuel Zelaya’s ouster, organized by Zelaya and the Frente Nacional de Resistencia al Golpe (FNRG; the National Front against the Coup). There is evidence that the FNRG *considered* calling for null voting (Jardim 2009). However, I found no direct evidence of the FNRG calling on voters to cast invalid votes.

13. Sixteen campaigns were led exclusively by former candidates, former elected leaders (e.g., ex-presidents), or party organizations.

14. For details about independent variables and complete models, see appendix tables A3.2 and A3.3.

15. The figure thus shows the entire range of the variable observed within this set of countries and years, but does not necessarily reflect the entire theoretical range of the measure.

16. Additional analyses show that invalid vote campaigns are slightly *less* likely to occur where executive corruption was very high in the year prior to the election year ( $p < 0.1$ ).

17. Not only had all presidents in the intervening period represented one of these coalitions, more than 85% of seats in the lower house of Congress were allocated to coalition member parties between 1989 and 1999.

18. This variable does not measure the ideological distance between candidates, although it should be correlated with polarization. I use the V-Dem measure rather than other measures of ideological polarization (e.g., the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America data, or differences in self-reported ideology among partisans) because neither of those measures is available over the whole time series. At the same time, measuring ideological polarization among presidential candidates using legislators' preferences, as with the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America data, underestimates polarization where presidential candidates have no legislative presence, as in many cases examined here.

19. Additional analyses show no direct relationship between affective polarization and the emergence of invalid vote campaigns.

20. I operationalize “antiestablishment” candidates using Carreras’s (2012) definition of “full outsider” candidates: those without prior experience in elected office, who also run under a new party label. I follow Carreras and include only “relevant” antiestablishment candidates, or those who won at least 5% of the vote. The nonresult persists if I treat “amateurs” (those with no experience who run on established party platforms) as antiestablishment candidates.

21. A second common complaint links candidates to criminal activity. However, because formal charges are rarely brought against candidates, it is difficult to distinguish credible accusations of a candidate’s involvement in crime from unsubstantiated rumor.

22. Debate about whether election fraud occurred is ongoing.

23. Ortega left the presidency after his defeat in an open election in 1990, but remained a key player in Nicaraguan politics in the years preceding his return to the presidency in 2007.

24. Following Ortega’s 2006 election, the FSLN forged a pact with the main opposition party (the PLC) that concentrated power in these organizations, facilitating the FSLN’s return to power (Close 2016). In 2016, the united opposition claimed to be “*la única verdadera oposición*”—the only true opposition, in contrast to the co-opted PLC (Sáenz 2017).

25. Because Nicaragua no longer reports invalid vote tallies, it is impossible to know what effect the campaign had on voter behavior. However, survey and experimental evidence from Nicaragua in 2016 and 2017 suggests that as much as 20% of the public may have spoiled their ballots (see appendix G in Cohen and Cassell [2023] for more detail).

26. In 2006, Correa ran on an anticorruption platform, representing a new political party. His party presented no candidates for Congress; instead, he supported invalid voting in the legislative elections held simultaneously with the first-round

presidential race. His call for invalid voting in congressional elections, then as now a very unpopular institution, likely solidified his reputation as an anticorruption outsider, rather than undermining his democratic bona fides in that case.

27. This transitional election was exceptional for several reasons. Toledo called for invalid voting to protest credible allegations of electoral fraud in 2000. After Fujimori was removed from office in 2001, Toledo ran for election against Alan García, a known candidate whose previous time as president had resulted in severe economic and security crises in the 1980s and 1990s. Toledo's position as a recent presidential candidate and his deeply flawed opponent likely contributed more to his victory than his history of mobilizing blank votes.

28. Gustavo Petro of Colombia called for the blank vote in 2010 and was a presidential runoff candidate in 2018; he did not ultimately win that election, although he did win his 2022 presidential bid.

29. An invalid vote campaign's stated aims likely affect mobilizational strategies. For example, campaigns in Áncash and Arequipa, Peru detailed in chapter 6, sought to invalidate those elections, which required two-thirds of all ballots be invalidated. Those campaigns appear to have taken a "whole of public" approach. However, in Uruguay's 2014 presidential runoff, self-identified "dissidents" within the Colorado Party published an open letter stating their intent to "vote blank as a form of protest of an election that has already been decided" (Redacción la República [UY] 2014). This was a call to their membership, not to the public, to use blank votes symbolically, to send a specific message to the winning party.

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Peru in 2000 is an exception: the Instituto de Opinión Pública conducted multiple polls that year asking citizens about their intentions to invalidate their votes, their beliefs about the election's fairness, and their attribution of their null vote decision to the campaign or some other factor. These data show that many voters who intended to invalidate their votes believed the election would be rigged. However, very few Peruvians attributed their vote decision to the campaign.

2. Trust in parties and partisanship are weakly correlated in this sample ( $p = 0.12$ ). Results are robust to dropping each variable sequentially, and to ordered logit, ordered probit, and logistic regression models predicting high (values of 7–10) and low (values of 1) campaign approval.

3. I use a procedural minimal definition of democracy: "fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association" (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 434).

4. In this chapter, I assume that campaigns' grievances are equally credible. However, in the real world, invalid vote campaigns present evidence of varied quality, and credibility likely conditions the effect of egregiousness on campaign support (see chapter 6).

5. The presence of a single egregious grievance may make campaigns more credible, as they are viewed as "unified" and "worthy" in the eyes of the public (Tilly 1994). For the sake of simplicity, treatments in this chapter provide unified, credible campaign grievances, which may increase average campaign approval.

6. The survey was conducted from November 16 to December 2, 2020. Participants were recruited by Netquest, an international survey provider, and the survey was conducted using the Qualtrics platform. Information about sample characteristics is available in appendix table A4.1. All expectations were preregistered at the Open Science Foundation; the preanalysis plan is available at <https://osf.io/9esfp>.

7. Balance checks for treatment assignment are presented in appendix table A4.3.

8. The question wording mirrors language used by campaigners, described in chapter 3. The claim that candidates “do not represent the people” is frequently employed during invalid vote campaigns in runoff elections, when politicians representing relatively small or extreme portions of the electorate are eliminated from competition. However, this complaint can also reflect real distance between the policies promoted by politicians and the electorate’s preferences (e.g., Siavelis 2009).

9. Controlling for demographic imbalances makes the fraud and corruption results stronger ( $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed).

10. This discrepancy across studies could reflect changing attitudes toward invalid vote campaigns over time. Alternatively, the 2020 results could reflect differences in the surveyed and national populations.

11. The study was conducted from May 12 to June 20, 2020. Participants were recruited by Netquest, and the survey was conducted using the Qualtrics platform. The sample meets gender and income quotas, but is not nationally representative. The complete sample includes 2,303 respondents; 772 are excluded because they were exposed to an additional set of treatments describing anti-null-vote campaigns. Additional sample information is available in appendix table A4.1. Preregistered expectations are available at <https://osf.io/exqfg>.

12. Including demographic controls strengthens these results: the pro-democracy treatment becomes marginally significant ( $p = 0.07$ ) among committed democrats. Alternative measures of democratic support (Eastonian “system support”) and opposition to democracy (support for limiting opposition parties, and support for rule by “iron fist”) yield similar results.

13. These countries constitute a convenience sample: in each case, I was able to include a survey item on a preexisting survey. Still, these countries provide broad representation of the region with respect to institutional features (e.g., party system stability, mandatory vote laws), democratic quality, and geography. For results for the grievance experiments, see appendix table A4.4.

14. Nationally diverse samples of respondents to online studies in Brazil (2018) and Mexico (2020) similarly expressed strong disapproval (49.7% in Brazil and 56.9% in Mexico). Like the online studies in Peru, the results from these studies are not representative of the population due to differential internet access. As a result, sample means likely differ from population averages.

15. The replication was included in the December 2020 survey in Peru.

16. Approval for a citizen-led campaign without democratic content is marginally higher ( $p < 0.1$ , one-tailed) than approval in the politician-led control, citizen-led antidemocracy, and politician-led pro-democracy conditions.

## CHAPTER 5

1. The 2014 Andean Parliament election in Colombia is one exception. In that contest, a majority of voters selected the “blank vote” option. After considerable public debate over whether new elections should be called, as stipulated in Colombian electoral law, representatives to the Andean Parliament were selected by Congress, rather than the voting public (Quintero 2014).

2. It is perhaps worth noting that the vast majority of candidates who win elections around the world—even those who are required to win an absolute majority of the valid vote—fail to clear this threshold.

3. In Bolivia’s 2011 judicial elections, a majority of ballots cast were left blank or spoiled; however, this was insufficient to cancel the election result (Driscoll and Nelson 2014).

4. The *combination* of elite and citizen leadership could also result in campaign success, as a broader range of campaigners with diverse networks increases information dissemination about an invalid vote campaign. I find limited support for this argument in the presidential data.

5. Substantial nuance underlies this argument. For example, choosing to vote for the more democratic option should be more common when polarization is low and there is only one authoritarian on the ballot. In decisive elections featuring two authoritarian candidates and low polarization, invalid vote campaigns should be more likely to succeed, as committed democrats are left without an option that fills this basic criterion. When an authoritarian candidate represents a voter’s preferences, she may overlook their authoritarianism, instead casting a vote for her ideological team (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020). Especially if polarization is high, candidates’ authoritarianism should become less relevant, and voters more likely to decide their vote on partisan or ideological lines, resulting in campaign failure. There are too few cases here to test these expectations.

6. Multi-round elections encourage more and more ideologically diverse candidates in the first round. However, because all but two candidates are eliminated from the runoff, this proliferation of candidates can lead to a larger pool of disgruntled voters whose preferred option is eliminated in the first round. Null vote campaigns may therefore be more successful in runoff elections.

7. In Spanish, these terms were “voto viciado,” “voto nulo,” and “voto en blanco.” I read all resulting news stories and analyze only those referencing an invalid vote campaign here.

8. This coding strategy is more permissive than in the national dataset. Using social media helps mitigate the limited coverage of subnational invalid vote campaigns in print media.

9. Unfortunately, archives of local radio transmissions do not exist for these years, so it is not possible to conduct a similar audit of radio news. If a campaign was only mentioned on the radio, it is therefore not included.

10. In 2018, the most common offense was failure to pay child support; however, candidates had also been sentenced for domestic abuse (e.g., Juan Murillo Ulloa of Áncash), lying under oath (e.g., Elmer Cáceres Llica of Arequipa), abuse of authority (e.g., Marcelino Martínez Gonzales of Apurímac), conspiracy (e.g., Luis Guevara Schultz of Huancavelica), embezzlement of public funds (e.g., Absalón



Vásquez Villanueva of Cajamarca), and defamation (e.g., Gastón Medina Sotomayor of Ica), among other crimes (Hidalgo Bustamante 2018).

11. The relative egregiousness of an invalid vote campaign's complaint should be associated with its success. In the campaigns examined here, candidates were accused of corruption beyond existing criminal charges, and these accusations varied in their credibility. I therefore do not consider the egregiousness of pending charges or convictions at the time of the election.

12. In six regions that experienced invalid vote campaigns, journalists, academics, politicians, and members of the electoral commission called on voters not to spoil their votes, but to make a more "responsible" choice and select one of the available candidate options. In five of the six campaigns where a sustained anti-null-vote effort occurred, the simultaneous effort to mobilize the blank or spoiled vote was successful. The only exception is Cajamarca in 2018. It is unclear the extent to which anti-null-vote efforts affected invalid vote rates.

13. Many campaigns call on voters to cast a specific *type* of invalid vote. For example, in Huánuco in 2018, campaigners promoted casting a "null or spoiled vote and not blank votes because this vote can be manipulated [during the count] in favor of some other candidate" (Ahora 2018). In this and other cases, it is therefore possible that observing no change in the total invalid vote across election rounds will mask drastic shifts in the *type* of invalid ballots cast. Using change in null votes to determine campaign success does not substantially alter the results reported here.

14. In 2010, invalid vote rates declined by 12.2 percentage points across rounds where there was no campaign, compared to 11.4 percentage points where a campaign occurred. In 2014, invalid vote rates declined by 8.8 percentage points across rounds where there was no campaign, and increased by 0.9 percentage points where campaigns took place. In 2018, invalid votes declined by 6.5 percentage points across election rounds where no campaign occurred, and by 2.0 percentage points where an invalid vote campaign took place.

15. I exclude Amazonas (2018) and Piura (2018) due to insufficient information.

16. Logistic regression analysis predicting campaign success using all these factors simultaneously shows that campaigns protesting corruption are more likely to succeed. In some specifications, fraud and candidate quality, as well as mixed leadership, are associated with larger increases in invalid vote rates. Due to the small number of cases, results are highly sensitive to model specification, so I do not present them here.

17. I code candidates with no previous experience in elected office who represent a new party as antiestablishment candidates (Carreras 2012). Three of 20 gubernatorial races with an invalid vote campaign include an antiestablishment candidate, and 15 include political "novices," who had no experience in elected office but represented an existing party.

18. A single mention of an elite leader in local news stories about invalid vote campaigns was sufficient to code that elite as campaigning to mobilize invalid votes.

19. Ica's 2014 invalid vote campaign was led by the Humanist Party, which ran mayoral candidates in all but one of that department's provinces. In Ica, I use mayoral results, which yields a small number of missing cases. Two more campaigns were led by candidates from previous subnational elections. In Cajamarca in 2018,

Gregorio Santos, a two-term governor and 2016 presidential candidate, promoted spoiled voting in the runoff. In Lambayeque, the 2018 campaign was led by an unsuccessful 2014 gubernatorial candidate. In Cajamarca and Lambayeque, I use each politician's vote share in their most recent (2014) department-wide contest.

20. In five cases, more than one former candidate promoted invalid voting in the runoff. Results are consistent for models estimated including only one candidate at a time.

21. I use cross-round change because I can only create the more ideal benchmark measure for two departments. I use a square term to allow for a nonlinear association between candidate support and invalid voting, and control for district-level measures of wealth (measured in quintiles using household belongings) and illiteracy reported in the 2017 census (INEI 2017).

22. Results are robust to using a normalized dependent variable, calculating change relative to the prior election.

23. I do not estimate separate models for departments that had elite and popular promoters, because in all cases where the elite analysis is possible and popular mobilization also occurred, campaigns succeeded. That is, this analysis amounts to selecting on the dependent variable. However, in departments where popular mobilization did *not* occur but elite mobilization did, I find no significant effect of leadership on the cross-round invalid vote.

24. Peru's 1990 runoff election is the closest proximate benchmark runoff election for 2001, as the 2000 elections were marred by widespread, credible claims of election fraud. Because the baseline for Peru's 2006 runoff is the 2001 election, which included a successful invalid vote campaign, I compare the runoff to the first round in that case.

25. The grievance results are robust to using a normalized dependent variable, calculating change relative to the prior election.

26. There was insufficient search and polling data available to create detailed timelines for unsuccessful cases.

27. Interestingly, increases in invalid voting in Cusco in 2014 occurred in districts where null vote promoters performed *poorly* in the first round, suggesting that elite campaigners did not motivate the invalid vote in this case.

28. Some early spikes in public interest in invalid voting could also be driven by localized campaign activity, with campaigners quietly "seeding" interest outside of the view of news outlets.

29. In additional analyses, I find that invalid vote campaigns are significantly less successful in runoff campaigns featuring a single authoritarian candidate, as expected. Campaigns are also less successful where at least one authoritarian candidate competes *and* polarization is high, consistent with voters downweighing authoritarianism in these contexts. The number of observations is very small, and results are sensitive to model specification, so I do not present them here.

## CHAPTER 6

1. While Peru is a unitary country, it began to devolve power to subnational political units in the 2000s. Departments, also called "regions," are the largest subnational political unit in Peru.

2. Operation Car Wash, named after the case's first identified money-laundering site, linked illegal payments from the Brazilian corporation Odebrecht to individuals and governments around the world.

3. In December of 2017, Kuczynski ("PPK") faced impeachment for allegedly covering up hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of payments to his company, Westfield Group Capital, by the Odebrecht corporation. Keiko Fujimori, PPK's 2016 presidential opponent and daughter of imprisoned former dictator Alberto Fujimori, led the charge. The impeachment proceedings took place December 15–21, 2017 and came to an abrupt halt after PPK freed Alberto Fujimori on December 24 in an apparent *quid pro quo*. Following street protests, Fujimori was returned to prison.

4. The referendum of four ballot measures proposed congressional term limits, introducing new regulations for political organizations, creating a new anticorruption court, and reopening the Peruvian Senate, which was shuttered after Alberto Fujimori's 1992 self-coup. All but the fourth proposition passed.

5. At the time of the 2018 gubernatorial elections, former president Alejandro Toledo (2001–6) had fled the country and was wanted on charges of bribery and money laundering. Alan García (2006–11) had been forbidden from leaving the country as the government built a case against him for alleged money laundering and bribery; in November 2018, he sought political asylum in the Uruguayan embassy. Ollanta Humala (2011–16) had been placed in pretrial detention for alleged money laundering and illegal receipt of campaign funds in 2006 and 2011. Finally, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016–18) had been forced to step down from office for his alleged involvement in corrupt dealings with Odebrecht as a private businessman, and as interior minister under President Toledo. Each of these cases was directly tied to the Odebrecht scandal.

6. Google Trends data shows that the prevalence of the search terms "Odebrecht" and "lava jato" in Peru has increased steadily since 2014, with significant spikes in 2017 and 2019, suggesting continued public interest in the investigations.

7. Peru is often divided into three topographical regions that span North to South: *costa* (the coast), *sierra* (the Andes mountain range), and *selva* (the Amazon rain forest), which is furthest inland.

8. In the 2017 census, 34% of Ancashinos identified as Quechua, as did 31.3% of Arequipeños. These rates are substantially higher than the national average (22.3%).

9. In the 2017 census, 10.4% of the population was recorded as illiterate, a value that is significantly higher than both the national average (5.8%) and illiteracy in Arequipa (3.4%).

10. This should largely affect first-round election outcomes, which included more than 15 candidates in both regions in 2018. However, runoff elections present a substantially simplified choice set, as only two options compete. This could result in larger declines in invalid vote rates across election rounds in Áncash, as fewer individuals should commit errors in marking their ballots in a runoff.

11. Comparing census data gathered in 2007 and 2017 suggests that demographic factors within Áncash and Arequipa potentially associated with campaigns' ability to mobilize invalid votes (e.g., education, literacy, wealth) did not change meaningfully over this 10-year period. Internet access expanded significantly across

Peru during this period; however, Áncash and Arequipa maintained their national rankings with respect to relative access to the internet.

12. Newspapers with particular ideological leanings might be more or less likely to publish stories about invalid vote campaigns depending on campaigners' real or perceived goals. To minimize potential bias in the type of campaigns covered by national outlets, I include left- and right-leaning newspapers, as well as centrist sources.

13. I used the same search terms, excluding department name, in available online archives for all available regionally circulated daily newspapers. Many local news outlets do not maintain online archives, which presents a challenge for analyzing local sources.

14. In interviews conducted in 2019, politicians and journalists in both regions indicated that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used social media platforms in these regions.

15. Experts in each region were selected for their knowledge about invalid vote campaigns. I developed an initial list of potential participants that included (1) the authors of and (2) experts or campaigners named in news stories from each region. These individuals were contacted via email, telephone, or social media as available. At the end of each interview, respondents were asked to identify others with relevant expertise; multiple attempts were made to contact those individuals for interviews, as well. All interviews were anonymized, to ensure forthright responses. The elite interview script is provided in the appendix.

16. Political organizations have different designations in Peru. Whereas political parties compete nationally, "regional movements" compete exclusively within a given department.

17. A 2008 court decision barred Ríos from holding elected office as part of his sentence for receiving a S/ 10,000 bribe to caucus with the Fujimoristas in Congress in 2000 (Redacción El Comercio 2014a). After the court ruled that Ríos's candidacy could proceed, RSC appealed the decision, arguing that his candidacy was "illegal" (Redacción El Comercio 2014c).

18. Consistent with the argument that exposure to campaigners' message was limited (or that likely supporters downweighed elite cues), first-round electoral performance is not associated with invalid voting in the runoff. Even where candidates who later promoted blank and spoiled voting performed well in the first round, there is no significant increase in invalid vote rates in the runoff. Nor did the invalid vote campaign in Áncash affect turnout. Turnout decreased by 9.6 percentage points in the 2014 runoff, from 83% of all registered voters to 73.4%. This decline is consistent with cross-round trends in turnout across the country and over time: on average, turnout decreased by 8.3 percentage points in runoff gubernatorial elections in 2014.

19. Very low ideological polarization in the runoff may have increased the attention on these grievances. News coverage did not focus on substantive policy positions and many perceived that "the [policy] difference was *very* minimal" (Arequipa, Interview 8; also Arequipa, Interview 1).

20. This record includes my contemporaneous notes, as I was conducting fieldwork in Arequipa at the time.

21. The Comité Ciudadano por el Voto Nulo, Voto Digno (Citizen Committee

for the Null Vote, Dignified Vote) also staged protests in the Plaza de Armas; see El Buho 2014e.

22. The *Chavo del Ocho* is a Mexican comedy sitcom that is popular across Latin America.

23. The campaign appears to have been led primarily by independent citizen groups with little in the way of financial resources. For example, one news story describes the campaign by the Frente Anticorrupción as “austere” (Radio Bulevar 2014).

24. As in Áncash, this difference in the invalid vote rate does not appear to be the result of changes in turnout across election rounds: turnout decreased by 4.7 percentage points in the second round, a value that is lower than the national average (an 8 percentage point decrease) but is consistent with changes in turnout across presidential election rounds in Arequipa. In contrast to Áncash, district-level data show a strong link between elite mobilizers’ first-round performance and invalid voting in the runoff. Where candidates who later promoted blank and spoiled voting performed well, there is a substantial, statistically significant increase in invalid votes in the runoff.

25. There is no association between a candidate’s first-round popularity and change in the invalid vote in Áncash in 2018, suggesting that elite influence was not the primary driver of invalid voting in the runoff.

26. Sendero Luminoso, the Shining Path, was a Maoist revolutionary group that committed acts of terrorism across Peru during the 1980s and 1990s.

27. If elite campaigners reactivate linkages with their first-round supporters, then efforts to mobilize the invalid vote should be less successful where anti-null-vote campaigners performed well in the first round. Analysis of electoral returns shows no statistical difference in cross-round change in invalid vote rates in districts where Gamero (the only first-round candidate to publicly denounce invalid voting) performed very well compared to where he performed very poorly. Gamero was one of many opponents of the invalid vote, and as the sixth-place finisher, was likely not the most popular anti-null-vote campaigner.

28. There are many potential reasons for this shift in coverage from 2014 to 2018. The successful 2014 campaign (and the emergence of a second such effort) may have led news outlets to view reporting on invalid vote campaigns as irresponsible, shaping coverage. Alternatively, the widespread nature of the anti-null-vote effort may simply have seemed more novel and therefore newsworthy in 2018 than a second pro-null vote effort. Finally, the types of mobilizers involved in the pro- versus anti-null-vote efforts (citizen groups versus well-known politicians and celebrities) may have led the media to view the negative campaign as more newsworthy.

29. Some experts believed that the null vote campaign was backed by “unscrupulous businesses” (Arequipa, Interview 4) who thought they would benefit financially from Cáceres Llica’s win. Another expert agreed, but argued that the initial impulse for the mobilization had come from the citizenry: “The campaign for null or blank voting eventually wasn’t just promoted by [a university student collective]. . . . That campaign moved to the background and Cáceres’s people started thinking about promoting the [null] vote to reach a conclusion [Cáceres Llica’s win]” (Arequipa, Interview 15). It is certainly worth considering who stood to ben-

efit from efforts promoting the invalid vote; however, it is unclear that this was Cáceres Llica. He started the runoff at an advantage, having beaten Ísmodes by more than 4 percentage points in the first round. Certainly, promoting the invalid vote could have dissuaded orphaned voters from choosing Ísmodes. However, this would have been a risky strategy: null vote campaigners regularly maligned Cáceres Llica, and complaints against the former mayor were more egregious and better founded in fact. It is thus unclear that the invalid vote campaign benefitted Cáceres Llica.

30. In 2021, Cáceres Llica was removed from office and placed in pretrial detention for leading a corruption ring, Los Hijos del Cóndor, as governor of Arequipa.

31. Politicians could also take actions, or political events can occur, that *increase* campaigners' credibility, enabling campaigns to succeed where they otherwise should not. The limited information available from Cusco's 2014 invalid vote campaign is consistent with this expectation. The successful 2014 invalid vote campaign in Cusco included public statements by politicians and citizen groups, although there is not strong evidence of protracted popular mobilization or significant campaign publicity in nontraditional outlets. Political events in 2014 (one candidate's close ties to an incumbent governor facing 19 corruption-related charges, and the other's conviction on corruption charges during the campaign) arguably made clear that campaigners' main grievances of low candidate quality and corruption were well founded and urgent.

32. Political events can also make grievances appear more or less asymmetrical. The failed invalid vote campaign in Cusco in 2018, for example, appears to have lost traction after Alan García, former president of Peru and leader of the Partido Aprista Peruana (APRA), sought political asylum to avoid prosecution on corruption charges. Because one of the runoff candidates had been a high-ranking APRA official for many years, these events likely heightened concerns about that candidate's links to the party, creating asymmetry in the relevance of campaigners' main grievances (low candidate quality and corruption).

33. While there is limited evidence with which to examine the successful (2014) and failed (2018) campaigns in Cusco, these campaigns were not apparently widely publicized beyond traditional media. This suggests that actions and events can undermine or bolster campaign credibility irrespective of the campaign's communication strategy.

## CHAPTER 7

1. To estimate such a causal effect would require confidently estimating trends in democratic quality and participation for a counterfactual scenario without an invalid vote campaign. Because all but two Latin American democracies experienced invalid vote campaigns during presidential elections during this period, these countries do not represent reliable counterfactual examples. Nor does a global database of invalid vote campaigns exist with which to estimate a reliable counterfactual (e.g., by using synthetic control).

2. Because the measure of election intimidation is only collected during election years and Latin American presidential terms range from 4–6 years in length, I expanded the pre- and postelection periods for this variable to compare measures

of intimidation for the five years preceding the election with an invalid vote campaign to the five years following. Using this wider time band for other dependent variables does not alter the substantive results.

3. Another implication of this argument is that elected leaders should use more populist rhetoric in elections following invalid vote campaigns. Analysis of data from the Global Populism Database shows no such association: presidents' rhetoric does not become significantly more populist after an election that features an invalid vote campaign.

4. The significant invalid vote differences are driven by changes in first-round voter behavior. There are no differences by election round for turnout.

5. I control for the presence of an invalid vote campaign in 2018, as campaigns reoccur in several departments. Excluding this variable does not affect the substantive results. Results are stronger when I include additional controls (e.g., election round).

6. The difference-in-differences approach relies on the “parallel trends” assumption that, in the absence of the treatment, slopes across treated and untreated units would have been the same. Historical election data is consistent with this assumption. While there are substantial cross-time fluctuations in turnout and invalid vote rates in 2002–10 gubernatorial elections, these trends are very similar in departments where campaigns did and did not occur in 2014.

7. The increase in invalid voting is driven by changes in runoff elections. This is perhaps not surprising, as all 2014 campaigns occurred during runoff contests.

8. The null finding persists across election rounds. A similar analysis predicting congressional election results from 2016 and 2020, using the presence of an invalid vote campaign in 2018 as the treatment, also yields no significant campaign effect.

### CHAPTER 3 APPENDIX

1. *Movilización, promoción, exhortación, convocación*, and their other grammatical forms.

2. *Campaña de voto nulo/en blanco*.

3. Even if politicians do not explicitly call on their followers to emulate their behavior, these statements are coded as campaigns.

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