FROM VISIBILITY TO PRESUMED COMPETENCE: DIGITAL PERFORMANCE AND ATTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL APTITUDE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the conditions under which success on social media ceases to function merely as a promotional tool and begins to be perceived as evidence of an individual's aptitude for representation and governance. It distinguishes between the capacity to capture attention, the ability to secure votes, and the competence to perform the duties of an elected office. The study introduces the term "presumed competence" to describe the attribution of aptitude inferred from indicators that do not, in fact, demonstrate performance in those official duties. It posits that signs of communicative success may be treated as sufficient, thereby reducing the demand for—or the weight given to—evidence directly relevant to the office. This substitution is categorized into three modes (absent, superficial, or superseded examination) and five transitions (four involving conversion and one involving maintenance). This is a theoretical inquiry, drawing upon the works of Manin, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Postman, as well as literature on informational shortcuts, digital platforms, and the Brazilian discourse on media visibility and political capital. It is supported by Brazilian case studies spanning from 1994 to 2026, which illustrate various forms of credentialing without explicitly detailing the underlying mechanism. The argument extends to the period of the mandate itself, during which the way an official's performance is presented may hinder the electorate from correcting its initial choice. The occurrence and frequency of this mechanism among the electorate are proposed as subjects for further research, with specific predictions and methodological procedures outlined to make them empirically examinable.

Keywords: presumed competence; political representation; social media; political identification; critical examination.

1. PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS

Election selects representatives without ensuring, of itself, their aptitude for the duties of office, and the statement seems paradoxical only as long as choice is confused with proof. Voters, parties, and the press may assess candidates; what the elective method does not do is require that assessment: it sets no prior standards of aptitude, does not oblige voters to be fair to the candidates, and does not prevent them from preferring someone out of simple liking. That is why

Manin could say that election selects “perceived superiorities”; and nothing guarantees, as Manin himself acknowledges in connection with oratory, that the perceived superiority is the one the office requires.[1] This absence of mandatory examination is structural, and it is not treated here as a defect to be corrected. What is at issue is something that can occupy the place of the examination election does not require and pass itself off as it: the presumption that whoever has captured attention is capable of governing.

The initial unease can be translated into terms that do not take it as a criterion. People with a great ability to go viral, to provoke, and to produce clips (brief excerpts edited for circulation) achieve electoral success in documented cases; what is not documented is whether, and how, their capacity to deliberate, negotiate, oversee, and answer for decisions was assessed by those who chose them. To ask this is not to say that they are incapable, nor that the voter was mistaken, nor that communication is a vice; it is to ask whether an assessment was made, with what indicators, and when, by what means, and for whom it may cease to be made. The indignation that motivates the inquiry is not a measure of anything, and an argument that took a degree, erudition, or sobriety as requirements of office would replace the voter’s preference with the researcher’s.

The thesis has a condition, and that condition is part of the thesis. Competence in capturing attention can be converted into a presumption of aptitude for public functions when the signs of communicative success are treated as sufficient indicators of that aptitude, reducing the search for, or the weight of, evidence pertinent to the office. The capacities can coexist, and knowing how to communicate is a political quality, a legitimate part of the mandate; the problem arises when performance in one of them dispenses with the assessment of the others, and it is this sufficiency, not communication, that is called into question. The thesis is formulated as a hypothesis: it states what would occur under certain conditions and what would need to be observed to know whether it occurs, and nothing in what follows asserts its frequency in the electorate.

The hypothesis has two sides, and the second is the less evident. Social media can transform the way a candidate demonstrates competence, presenting audience as a credential and confrontation as proof; and they can transform the way voters believe they possess the competence to judge the candidate, when the speed of the response produces the feeling of having understood a question before having examined it. The two presumptions, the aptitude attributed to the candidate and the voter’s confidence in their own judgement, can feed each other without either being put to the test; the second has indirect empirical support in studies of how people estimate their own knowledge, and it is developed here with a criterion, drawn in dialogue with hermeneutics, for distinguishing understanding from recognition.[2]

The question, then, is this: under what conditions does success on social media cease to be a promotional tool and come to be treated as evidence of aptitude? What would support and what would weaken the proposed answer can be stated at the outset. The signs that would favour it are of different kinds, and none suffices on its own: a clip that presents confrontation as a

demonstration of capacity documents a communicative offer; criticism of a representative received as an attack on the group may indicate identity protection; the passage the hypothesis asserts, the substitution of communicative success for examination, can be sustained only with evidence of reception, that is, of observable manifestations of what publics do with what they receive (interpretations, justifications of trust and of vote, the value given to each indicator), and not of how much they receive, which circulation records. Such evidence would consist of voters or parties who treat metrics and performances as sufficient reason for trust, and the record of the weight they give to information pertinent to the office. What would weaken it must also be stated. Audiences that recognize a candidate's communicative competence and nevertheless demand evidence pertinent to the office, voters who maintain identification while criticizing decisions, and receptions that distinguish a rhetorical victory from aptitude for the mandate delimit the application of the mechanism, and they constitute a test that is all the stronger the more they are found under the conditions in which the substitution of examination is expected; finding presumed competence in representatives without a digital presence would limit a claim of platform exclusivity, which is not made here, without refuting the mechanism proposed for platforms. None of these results is measured here; they are formulated so that they can be.

The inquiry is theoretical, supported by documented illustrative cases, and it proposes an investigation; it does not demonstrate causality. It defines a form of substitution of examination, organizes the conditions under which it may occur, and confronts it with cases and with objections. Section 2 fixes the vocabulary: the three capacities, presumed competence, the three situations that delimit the central case, and the three modes by which examination gives way. Section 3 situates the argument in relation to its antecedents, and section 4 examines forms of political credential through Brazilian examples between 1994 and 2026. Section 5, the core of the argument, goes through five passages, four of conversion and one of its maintenance: attention as credential, speed as a feeling of understanding, proximity as trust, confrontation as proof, and the circuit that can keep all of this in operation. Section 6 confronts the hypothesis with cases, including negative cases for the conversion of notoriety into votes and cases from distinct fields, and with four families of objections; section 7 carries it into the mandate, where the presentation of performance in office may hinder correction, and states where examination remains possible.

2. THREE CAPACITIES AND PRESUMED COMPETENCE

Capturing the attention of a public, obtaining votes in a contest, and performing the duties of an office are three capacities, and performance in none of them guarantees performance in the others. The first, communicative, consists in making oneself seen, adapting the message to the medium, mobilizing identification, and maintaining an audience; its indicator is reach. The second, electoral, consists in converting recognition, organization, and support into votes; its indicator is the vote count. The third, the capacity for exercise, consists in understanding problems, formulating and evaluating proposals, deliberating, negotiating, overseeing or administering as the office requires, and answering for decisions; its indicators are legislative and

oversight output, rapporteurships, coalitions, management, accountability, and also communication with those represented, which is a legitimate part of the office. Communicative success is therefore an indicator of that part of the exercise, not of the others, and it is the passage from the part to the whole that the thesis examines. In this text, capacity designates each of the three; aptitude, the capacity for exercise referred to a specific office; competence, a term of ordinary usage, is kept in the expressions presumed competence and communicative competence and, outside them, is used as equivalent to capacity qualified by context. Reach does not prove votes, much less aptitude; metrics, moreover, can be bought.[3] The vote count documents the votes obtained and possible election under the conditions of that contest; it does not make it possible to isolate how much of the result stemmed from individual skill, from the party, from resources, or from circumstances, and, in proportional elections, it records neither a complete comparison among candidates nor a majority preference. The three capacities can coexist and share skills: a well-grounded public explanation reveals knowledge pertinent to the mandate, and a negotiation conducted in public can provide indicators of both. What is called into question is the sufficiency of one of them to demonstrate the others.

The third capacity varies with the office. A city councillor legislates on local matters, oversees the municipal executive, and represents local interests; a federal deputy legislates, acts as rapporteur, and builds majorities; a president administers and coordinates coalitions. The analysis therefore compares the candidate with the duties of the office being contested, not with an abstract standard of “preparedness”. Representing interests, responding to the electorate, and mobilizing it are legitimate parts of this capacity; politics is also performance before a public.[4] A degree, erudition, and sobriety, by contrast, are requirements of no elective office, as section 1 suggested. What is examined here is not the lack of these qualities in those who are elected, but the dispensing with a question: whether the candidate is capable of what the office requires.

An election proves that the candidate obtained votes under the conditions of that contest; it does not prove aptitude. The proposition is descriptive, and Manin sustained it by comparing the elective method with the competitive examination: in the examination, standards are defined in advance; in an election, nothing obliges voters to use impersonal criteria or to be fair to the candidates, and nothing prevents them from choosing someone “just because they like this individual better than another”.[5] Hence the consequence Manin draws: election selects “perceived superiorities and actual differences”.[6] The difference between candidates must be objective (one speaks better, appears more), and the perception of it may or may not be accurate; what is inevitably subjective is the political value attributed to it, and therefore “there is no guarantee that a gift for public speaking is a good proxy for capability to govern”.[7] What the thesis isolates is not an error of perception but a passage from one domain to another: from observed skill to unobserved aptitude.

Presumed competence is the name given here to the attribution of aptitude for office inferred from indicators that do not demonstrate performance in the duties of that office. The term “presumption” is taken in a sense close to the legal one: a conclusion drawn from indicators,

which dispenses with direct proof until something rebuts it; it is not an error but a procedure, and what makes it problematic is the quality of the indicators and its resistance to rebuttal. The definition does not, of itself, say what the presumption does to examination: a favourable impression may be an initial attribution still open to verification. What is examined here is one modality of presumed competence, that in which communicative signs are treated as sufficient, dispensing with or overriding other evidence pertinent to the office; that this modality exists, how often, and under what conditions does not follow from the definition, and explaining it is the task of the following sections. That the inference occurs is a documented phenomenon: judgements of competence formed from candidates' faces anticipated the outcome of nearly seven in ten races for the US Senate in 2004 and, with one second of exposure, of slightly fewer; the authors themselves observe that voters may use other information to correct the initial impression, and the experiment shows that the inference exists, not whether it dispenses with examination.[8]

Presumed competence should be distinguished from terms with which it is confused in ordinary usage, because each of them can serve as an indicator of it and none of them is it. Visibility is being seen. Notoriety is visibility accumulated to the point that the name is recognized, in any domain and for any reason. Popularity is measured approval; reach and interaction do not demonstrate it, because they may include hostile attention. Celebrity is, in Boorstin's formula, being known for being known, in any domain; Truman, Postman recalls, was known without being a celebrity.[9] Familiarity is the feeling of knowing someone through repeated exposure. Trust is the expectation that they will act well in unforeseen situations. Credibility has two senses that Postman separated: the record of statements that have withstood the test of facts, and "the impression of sincerity, authenticity, vulnerability or attractiveness" conveyed by the speaker.[10] Demonstrated aptitude is verifiable performance in tasks of the office or analogous ones. Ordinary usage suggests why the distinction matters: "he is very well known", "he has a lot of followers", "he is very sincere", and "he is very well prepared" are said in the same tone, as degrees of a single quality. They are not.

Not every vote for someone the observer considers unprepared is a case of presumed competence, and the thesis would lose its object if it were. Three situations must be distinguished. In the first, the voter chooses out of identity, interest, or rejection of the opponent, without attributing any aptitude to the candidate: this is an alternative explanation of the vote, and it is not treated as a defect. In the second, which is the central case, the voter takes familiarity, popularity, or communicative performance as sufficient indicators of aptitude: "he is prepared because he answers well". In the third, the voter knows of the candidate's limitations, but other motives prevail: "I know he has limitations, but I prefer his positions"; this belongs to the mechanism when communication itself leads to the attribution of aptitude despite the known limitations, reducing their weight, and outside that condition it is informed preference. The distinction is less clear-cut in practice than on paper, because the image the voter forms is rarely devoid of political content, as Manin showed;[11] it may contain relevant information without offering sufficient

elements to assess aptitude, and the three situations are distinguished by what the voter does with what the image does not offer.

When aptitude is attributed, the examination that ought to sustain it may be lacking in three ways, analytical instruments proposed here and subject to refinement. In absent examination, aptitude is attributed without consideration of other pertinent evidence, including evidence that arrives through intermediaries: lack of personal inquiry is not enough, because someone who receives a well-grounded assessment from a reliable source has considered it. In superficial examination, there is consideration, but it is limited, and it does not reach the elements needed to sustain the conclusion attributed: the voter decides by “overall perception”, as Manin describes, and attention goes to whoever stands out, not to what standing out means.[12] In overridden examination, pertinent evidence is known, and not merely available, but it receives less weight by reason of the aptitude attributed on the basis of communicative signs; this is the most instructive mode, because in it examination takes place and loses, and Postman and Han formulated it, without measuring it, for television and for social media.[13] The third mode calls for a delimitation, because it is the one that would most readily absorb what does not belong to it: recognizing a candidate’s limitations and choosing him for values or interests is conscious preference, not overridden examination; the mode is constituted only when the attribution of aptitude associated with communicative performance reduces the search for, or the weight of, evidence pertinent to the office. The three modes are not stages of a degradation, and a single voter may pass through all of them. What distinguishes them, then, is the relation of judgement to the pertinent evidence: not considered, considered short of what the conclusion requires, or considered and passed over.

It remains to fix what counts as sufficient, because without this any assessment different from the researcher’s could be called superficial. Sufficiency requires neither exhaustive knowledge nor a fixed quantity of information; it is examined in relation to the conclusion attributed to the indicator: what capacity is meant to be demonstrated, what reasons sustain that passage, and what information could contradict it. A narrow conclusion, that the candidate communicates well, may be sufficiently sustained by communicative performance itself; a broad conclusion, that he is capable of legislating or administering, requires reasons that communicative performance, on its own, does not secure. Substitution is not identified by the brevity of the message or by the absence of personal inquiry, since voters may legitimately rely on intermediaries; it requires evidence that the communicative sign was received as enough to attribute aptitude and reduced the consideration of information pertinent to that attribution. The criterion does not create a mandatory examination for voting: it states what the researcher needs to find in order to assert that examination has been substituted.

To recapitulate: there are three capacities, and election documents votes, not aptitude; there is a presumption that passes from the first to the third; there are three situations, of which the second is the central case; and there are three modes by which examination gives way to presumption, identified by the relation between judgement and the evidence pertinent to the

conclusion attributed. Examination, here, is the search for and consideration of evidence pertinent to the duties of the office, and critical examination is examination that also weighs that evidence against the impression the candidate produces; mechanism is the conversion by which signs of communicative success come to count as sufficient indicators of aptitude, and sections 5.1 to 5.4 describe passages, that is, routes of this conversion, and section 5.5 the passage that can keep them in operation. Three planes are thus kept apart: the definition, which states what counts as substitution (this section); the explanatory hypotheses, which state what conditions favour it (section 5); and the predictions, which state what one would expect to observe under those conditions (section 6). With these terms, the initial question acquires an operational form: the point is not to know whether success on social media "weighs" on the vote, which no one denies, but to know under what conditions, by what means, and for whom, voter, party, or press, the signs of communicative success come to count as sufficient indicators of aptitude. Part of this answer was given before the platforms.

3. THEORETICAL ANTECEDENTS

The idea that a communicative skill can be converted into a presumption of capacity to govern was not born with the platforms; it was formulated more than once in the twentieth century, and to these formulations the argument owes its premise and the obligation to state what it adds. This section does not repeat what section 5 takes from each author to explain particular passages; it situates the argument in relation to what they have already explained and marks the point at which it parts from them.

Manin is the decisive antecedent, and also the one that most reduces the novelty that might be claimed. Election, for him, selects salience, that is, the trait that distinguishes one candidate from the others in the eyes of the electorate: to be elected, the candidate "needs to attract the attention of the electorate", and the voter decides by "overall perception"; in audience democracy, "a new elite of experts in communication has replaced the political activist and the party bureaucrat", and "audience democracy is the rule of the media expert".[14] Manin further observes that the party selecting a candidate has an incentive to assess what trait, valued by the electorate and rare among competitors, the candidate offers, which makes recruitment by audience a predictable consequence, not an anomaly.[15] Manin distinguishes visible skill from the capacity to govern, as the passage on oratory cited in section 2 shows; what he does not do, because his object is another, is organize this distinction into a scheme of capacities and ask under what conditions salience ceases to be an instrument of selection and comes to be taken as evidence of aptitude. His work provides, at the same time, the most serious objections to the thesis: personal trust may be an adequate basis for choice, the image has political content, the voter reacts to the terms on offer and is not a consumer with prior preferences, and the repetition of elections is "a learning process".[16] Sections 2, 5.3, 5.5, 6, and 7 take them up, each in its place; here it is enough to say that they are not contested, and that the thesis is formulated within the limits they impose.

Bourdieu described, for television, the substitution that is here transposed to the platforms. Consecration "by number and by 'media visibility'" confers "on certain products (cultural or even political) or on certain 'producers' the apparently democratic substitute for the specific sanctions imposed by the specialized fields".[17] The sentence anticipates the thesis on one point, that of visibility as a substitute for a specific recognition. The specific sanctions, in Bourdieu, are the criteria and forms of recognition proper to each field, and the rapprochement between them and the examination of aptitude for office is a proposal of the present argument, not of the author. What Bourdieu did not have before him was the metric displayed to the public itself and renewed daily: politicians already took part in producing their own image on television, and what changes on the platforms is the combination of direct participation, intermediaries, interaction, and publicly available metrics. Bourdieu also provides the method that section 4 adopts: to avoid "the illusion of the 'never seen before'" and that of "'it has always been so'", and to compare "structure to structure"; and he provides a warning against the argument itself, in recognizing that the point of view of those who have time to criticize urgency is "frankly aristocratic".[18]

Habermas, in 1962, formulated the displacement from criticism to identification. "Competent criticism of publicly discussed issues gives way to a mute conformity with publicly presented persons or personifications"; the voter's tie to programmatic goals is "much weaker than the one established between voters and the image […] of the leading candidates"; experts are "hired to sell politics apolitically"; and the expectations that define the voter's role are "liberal fictions of the bourgeois public sphere", belied by the empirical research already accumulating in the 1950s.[19] These formulations are used as antecedents, not as a diagnosis still endorsed by their author: in the 1990 preface, Habermas revises his pessimism about the capacity of the mass public to resist, and the thesis is formulated in accordance with that revision, as an investigation of conditions that weaken examination, not as a finding of an incapable public.[20]

Postman and Debord gave the same phenomenon formulations that matter for what they delimit, and section 5 draws on Postman's. Postman observes that television "makes impossible the determination of who is better than whom", if "better" means "more capable in negotiation, more imaginative in executive skill, more knowledgeable about international affairs"; Postman's list is a list of the duties of office, and his observation is that the medium does not show them.[21] Debord describes a "media status" whose importance exceeds the value of what one has actually been capable of doing and which, for that reason, transfers easily from one activity to another, conferring anywhere the same right to shine.[22] Barthes, in the 1950s, already described identification through the candidate's image, as section 5.3 shows. The antecedents converge on one point: the conversion of communicative skill into political credential is old and was clearly seen.

The literature on informational shortcuts provides the objection that section 6 answers and, at the same time, the delimitation the argument needs. Lupia reports that poorly informed voters with access to a widely available shortcut, knowing which group sponsored each proposition, voted as if they were well informed; Lau and Redlawsk, observing the use of

heuristics in simulated campaigns, found that nearly all participants resort to them when faced with complex choices and that their use increases, among the politically sophisticated, the probability of a “correct” vote (the vote that coincides with what the voter would choose with full information) and reduces it among novices.[23] The use of shortcuts, which may be necessary and appropriate, as section 5.2 says with Hayek, is not contested; what is described is a particular shortcut, the sign of communicative success, and the condition under which it ceases to abbreviate examination and comes to substitute for it. Lau and Redlawsk’s result adds an expectation that the proposed investigation must incorporate: the same heuristic may abbreviate examination for some and substitute for it for others, so that the frequency of substitution is not a property of the sign, but of the relation between the sign and the one who reads it.

In Brazil, the conversion of visibility into a political resource was described before the centrality of the platforms, and the description fixes what the argument inherits. Miguel defines political capital as a kind of symbolic capital, “the recognition of that individual’s legitimacy to act in politics”, distinguishes among its sources “converted capital, that is, popularity achieved in other fields and shifted into politics”, describes the media as a “shortcut” in the political career, and warns that “it is not just any media exposure that leverages electoral ambitions, but rather that which contributes to building an appropriate public persona”; Miguel and Biroli maintain that “media visibility is an important component in the production of political capital”, that the media are perceived “at once as a source and an index of political capital”, and that journalism “gives visibility precisely to the actors who already have the resources to make themselves seen”.[24] From this line the argument inherits visibility as a convertible resource, co-produced and unequally distributed, and the third and fourth forms of credential in section 4 correspond, in part, to converted capital and to the media shortcut, which in Miguel is a career route, not the voter’s heuristic dealt with in the previous paragraph; the popularity he speaks of is the notoriety of section 2, not measured approval. What the argument adds is the distinction between political capital, which is recognized legitimacy to act in politics, and aptitude, which is the capacity to exercise a specific office, and the question of the moment at which the resource ceases to be read as an index of the former and comes to be read as proof of the latter.

The recent literature on platforms provides the bridge, and the argument’s closest neighbours are found in it. Chadwick describes a hybrid media system, in which television and platforms combine rather than replace one another, and it is in this system that the credential under discussion is formed.[25] Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal describe the replacement of selection by experts with selection by users and algorithms, here called selection by metric, and the commensuration that reconstructs relations of authority, for content and services, not for representatives; the transposition is the present author’s.[26] Ceccobelli and Colombo propose that the politician-influencer is recognized at three vertices, trust, similarity, and superiority, and treat competence as an attribution by the public; Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley distinguish audience metrics from effects on opinions and incorporate moral opposition into the concept of political influencer; Schmuck, Hirsch, Stevic, and Matthes link exposure to influencers to the perception

that politics is simple, and the latter to cynicism and to interest (section 5.2).[27] The scope of the present argument is different, and it is this that it claims: the question of when the attribution of competence dispenses with the examination of aptitude for office, approached through the articulation of three capacities, three modes of substitution, and five passages, a finer analysis of what is converted, into what, and under what conditions; the idea of conversion belongs to the antecedents.

4. CREDENTIALS IN BRAZIL, 1994–2026

What changed between 1994 and 2026 was not the existence of unexamined credentials, which is nothing new, but the form of the credential: who grants visibility, how it is displayed, and how often it is renewed, differences listed at the end of this section. A credential, in this text, is a socially recognized indicator of electoral viability or of aptitude for office, whose origin and use may involve different degrees of examination: an electoral credential, when what is recognized is vote potential; a credential of exercise, when it is aptitude for office. An institutional track record or a previous achievement may result from actual assessments. A credential of exercise may sustain an initial attribution of aptitude open to verification; it belongs to the problematic modality examined here when it is received as sufficient and reduces the consideration of other pertinent evidence. Four forms of credential coexist in the period and may combine in the same candidacy; they are types, not stages: Manin warns that his ideal types are “deliberately schematic” and serve comparison, and the four forms are used here as types, without the historical sequence that Manin’s types describe.[28] This section describes the first form without a case of its own, because it runs through the others, and goes through the other three with documented Brazilian cases, saying of each what it shows and what it does not show, and without assuming that the voter of 1994 examined better than the voter of 2026; the historical question is not one of decline, but of reorganization.

The first form is the institutional track record. The credential is the record of office-holding, activism, and organization, granted by the party, by previous offices, and by territorial bases, and selection is partly delegated to the party machine, which chooses before the voter does.[29] This form is present throughout the period and should not be idealized: the mass party, in Habermas’s description, also incited acclamation “without touching the political immaturity” of its members, and the party filter selected organizational capacity, not necessarily aptitude for government.[30] All forms may involve an examinable past; what distinguishes this one is that the examinable past is previous political activity, in the party or in office, whose pertinence to the duties of the office being contested varies from case to case, and it is past behaviour that Manin considers a reasonable criterion for decisions about the future.

The second form is a previous achievement associated with the candidacy and communicated by the mass media, and the case is Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994, who combines it with an institutional track record and media exposure. The real entered circulation on 1 July 1994; the candidate who, as Minister of Finance, had led the initial stages of the plan won

in the first round, on 3 October, with 34,364,961 votes, 54.28% of valid votes; the Plan was the axis of conflict in the free electoral broadcasts, the print press built the image of competence on the basis of the previous office, and a reference study of voting decisions in the presidential elections of the period records, among its determinants, the assessment of performance and personal attributes such as administrative capacity, which indicates that the criterion was available, not that the voter of 1994 examined better.[31] What the case shows is a credential of a particular type: a verifiable deed, presented as proof of capacity, which opponents and press could contest, and which bore a recognizable relation to the duties of the office being contested. What it does not show is that the deed was the sole cause of victory, nor that the presumption of aptitude drawn from it was better founded than others; it shows only that the indicator had to do with the office.

The third form is notoriety transferred from another activity, and the cases are Tiririca and Romário in 2010. The comedian was the most voted federal deputy in the country, with 1,353,820 votes in São Paulo; the former footballer obtained 146,859 in Rio de Janeiro.[32] The credential is prior fame, built in entertainment media and in sport with the participation of the famous themselves; it is what Miguel calls “converted capital”: notoriety achieved in another field and shifted into politics (section 3). The results do not say whether voters examined proposals, values, track record, or capacity for representation; notoriety may coexist with such examination, and experience outside politics may offer relevant indicators without demonstrating sufficient aptitude. What the cases allow one to say is that the indicator that most distinguished these candidates from their competitors bore little relation to the duties of the office. Tiririca’s candidacy, moreover, went through the verification of an eligibility condition: literacy, required by the Constitution, was verified by the Electoral Court, after being challenged, in a test administered in November 2010, and the judge considered “rudimentary notions of reading and writing” to be enough; institutional verification exists for the minimum, not for aptitude.[33] Two limits accompany the cases. Conversion is not automatic: only five famous candidates were elected to the Chamber that year, according to the survey by Congresso em Foco, and the notoriety that elects one may not elect another. And the cases say nothing about the quality of the mandates that followed; the presumption, it should be recalled, may be rebutted or confirmed later, and this section does not judge it. What the third form adds to the second is the distance between the distinctive indicator and the duties of the office; the candidate’s participation in producing their own visibility already exists in it, and what is not yet a credential is the public metric that displays and renews it.

The fourth form is audience built on the platforms, and the cases are Nikolas Ferreira and Lucas Pavanato. The first obtained 1,492,047 votes for federal deputy in Minas Gerais in 2022 and 3,119,318 in 2026; the second, 161,386 votes for city councillor of São Paulo in 2024 and 3,038,438 for federal deputy in 2026.[34] The credential is audience, presented in followers, reach, and continuous presence, and granted by the candidate himself together with teams, funding, party, press, and platforms; examination, according to the hypothesis advanced here, may be

absent, superficial, or overridden. The 2026 cases complicate the picture in a useful way: both combine audience with an institutional track record, because they held a previous mandate and therefore a record of office that could be examined; what they allow one to ask is whether that record entered public judgement or whether the communicative credential dominated it. Recruitment by audience, which the press recorded in 2026 in at least nine parties, indicates that the fourth form came to be treated by party organizations as an electoral credential; section 5 deals with the next passage. What the cases do not show is that the votes stem only from social media, nor that communicative success indicates incapacity.

The electoral rule is a variable, not a backdrop. In Brazil, open-list proportional representation favours the nominal vote, and the votes of a highly voted candidate count towards the party quotient of the ticket, which gives parties an incentive of their own to recruit candidates with high expected vote counts; the performance threshold, which conditions access to the party fund and to free broadcast time on a minimum of votes or of elected members, adds another.[35] These incentives offer institutional reasons for recruitment by audience, which the 2026 reports record as the declared reason; they do not demonstrate that the conversion of audience into a presumption of aptitude is greater in legislative contests than in majoritarian ones, which remains open. Money does not disappear in this form: spending on platform ads, recorded in section 5.1, shows that presence on the platforms has a cost, and the fact that the two most voted deputies of 2026 do not appear on the list, incomplete, of the biggest spenders raises a question about the origin of the advantage, which section 5.1 formulates without answering.

What changes in degree and in form can be stated in five differences, with Bourdieu's method as a safeguard against the "never seen before" and the "it has always been so". Access to visibility depends less on selecting intermediaries, but remains co-produced. The permanent campaign, a privilege that Manin attributes to the notable, the individual salient by name or social position, may become accessible to whoever maintains a continuous audience. Visibility comes to be displayed in a public and commensurable metric, which does not measure approval. Common information, the condition that sustained Manin's optimism regarding non-partisan media, in which "individuals receive the same information on a given subject as everyone else", is altered by personalized curation, although the degree of fragmentation is contested.[36] And proximity, which television already produced, is reorganized by the combination of frequent following, personal narrative, the possibility of response, and continuous circulation. The current formula according to which social media is the new television is therefore a correct and insufficient starting point: correct because the conversion of visibility into credential was already there; insufficient because the form of the credential has changed, and it is the form that the following section examines passage by passage.

5. CONVERSION ON THE PLATFORMS

Between visibility and the presumption of aptitude there is no leap; there are passages, and each of them can be described. This section goes through five: on the candidate's side, how

measured attention comes to count as a credential (5.1); on the voter's side, how the speed of the response produces a feeling of understanding (5.2) and how proximity produces trust and identification (5.3); between the two, the confrontation that unites them around a threat and a protection (5.4); and, finally, the circuit that can keep the previous passages in operation and hinder their correction (5.5). In the first four, the question is the same: at what point, and under what conditions, does a sign of communicative success come to be treated as a sufficient indicator of aptitude, and what happens to the search for other evidence when this occurs; in the fifth, the question is what can keep the previous ones in operation.

5.1. Attention as Credential

The platforms partly replace selection by specialized intermediaries with selection by metric. The formulation draws on van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, who did not write it for politics or in these terms: journalists decided what was news, specialized reviewers what was a good hotel; "online platforms replace expert-based selection with user-driven and algorithm-driven selection", and, where there is no institutional guarantee, they resort to "reputation ratings" to supply it; calling the first selection by specialized intermediaries and the second selection by metric is a terminological choice made here.[37] The transposition to political representation is ours and retains a single point, with two caveats: a candidate is not a rated service, and election has no requirement of aptitude in the sense of the competitive examination, although it has eligibility conditions; the point is that, before the platforms, political visibility passed through intermediaries who, for better or worse, selected, and on the platforms selection is made partly by public metrics that do not measure aptitude and that nonetheless come to function as a credential for those who recruit, and may function thus for those who report and for those who vote. The question of this subsection is why a number that measures attention can count as a credential for a function that attention does not measure.

The answer begins with a property of the metric: it commensurates. Likes, followers, and views reduce distinct qualities to a single scale, and commensuration, as the same authors recall with Espeland and Stevens, "is political: it reconstructs relations of authority".[38] Van Dijck had already observed that "there is no quality assessment built into these buttons", that the like button "favors instant, gut-fired, emotional, positive evaluations", and that, although popularity, in the sense of the metric of likes and followers, "has no relation to values such as truth, trust, objectivity, or quality, it is often equated with these values"; "difficult but important" is not a judgement that social media solicit.[39] Barthes had named the figure more than half a century earlier: "the quantification of quality", by which myth "understands the real at a reduced price".[40] The metric makes it possible to compare reach; it does not compare aptitude, and it is not the metric that puts communicating and governing on a single scale: that equation is a social interpretation of the number, made by those who read it, and it is this that needs to be explained. Superficial examination finds here an available means, not a cause: a number that says how much someone is seen and that can be read as if it said how much he is worth.

The credential of visibility is not self-produced; it is co-produced. The candidate participates directly and continuously in building the audience, a participation that notoriety transferred from sport or television already knew and that here becomes more direct and comes to be displayed in a metric; but the audience depends on teams, on money, on parties, on the press that echoes it, and on the platforms that decide what circulates, and old media combine with the new rather than disappearing.[41] The displayed metric mixes paid and organic reach: in the first round of 2026, electoral advertisements on Meta totalled at least R$ 236 million, according to still incomplete campaign finance reports, and Nikolas Ferreira, through a course company, invested about R$ 745 thousand in commercial advertisements outside the electoral period; the two most voted federal deputies in the country, however, do not appear among the biggest spenders, which raises a question about the origin of the advantage without answering it, because the accounts are incomplete.[42] Co-production matters for the thesis for a precise reason: the display of reach may push into the background the resources and intermediaries that took part in its production, and, when this occurs, the metric appears as personal merit. It is a route of conversion, not a condition of it; someone who knows about the teams and the funding may continue to attribute aptitude to the candidate.

A comparison with the Marxian analysis of fetishism makes it possible to state more precisely the problem of how these results are presented. In *Capital*, the social relations of production appear as properties of the products themselves: “it is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which here assumes, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things”; and this appearance, Marx observes, is not an individual error that more information would dissolve, but something the very organization of relations favours.[43] It is not asserted here that digital audience has the same determination as the value of commodities; the comparison concerns only the way in which a result can be presented without the relations that contributed to producing it.

The application to the number of followers is the present author’s proposal. The number accompanies the candidate’s name; the work of the teams, the funding, the selection by the platforms, and the different forms of circulation may remain outside the frame. Under these conditions, a socially produced result may be received as the direct manifestation of a personal quality. Even so, recognizing a communicative skill does not constitute the substitution examined here. That occurs when the attributed quality also comes to answer for aptitude to exercise the office, reducing the search for, or the weight of, other pertinent demonstrations.

The permanent campaign, which Manin described as the privilege of the notable, may extend to whoever maintains a continuous audience on the platforms, and the cases in section 4 illustrate candidacies built on prior audience, without it being possible to say how often this occurs. Individuals who are salient in the course of their everyday relations “are engaged in a kind of permanent electoral campaign, whereas the spotlight does not fall on the distinctive traits of the other candidates until the campaign proper opens”.[44] The platforms open trajectories of visibility that do not depend exclusively on prior notoriety, although they remain conditioned by resources

and intermediaries; this visibility calls for frequent renewal, because an audience that is not fed may disperse, and it is measured, because each renewal returns a number. Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley call influence measured in this way "platformed".[45] Daily salience may be converted into a credential of exercise by more than one route: it may be read as substantive political activity, when "he is always appearing" comes to mean "he is always working"; but it may also be recognized as entertainment and, even so, provide signs that the public interprets as capacity, ease, promptness of response, the metric itself. None of these readings is necessary.

It remains to say when the communicative advantage comes to serve as evidence of aptitude, and for this two credentials that ordinary usage joins must be separated. Audience is, first of all, an electoral credential: it can be used by parties as an indicator of electoral potential, and recruitment by audience, which the press recorded in 2026 in at least nine Brazilian parties, with access to funds and broadcast time conditioned on the size of the parliamentary group as the declared reason, documents this expectation without guaranteeing its fulfilment.[46] A party may hold this expectation without attributing any aptitude for exercise to the recruit. The conversion examined here occurs when the electoral advantage also comes to justify confidence in aptitude for the mandate or to dispense with its assessment, for the party that asks nothing further, for the press that presents the vote count as proof of preparedness, for the voter who reads reach as capacity. Imagine a strategist who wanted to carry audience all the way to the credential of exercise. One configuration would make the task easier: a measurable audience, recruitment interested in votes, and a candidate with little verifiable experience, because, as Manin observes, "it may be reasonable for voters to use the past behavior of candidates as criteria", and where there is no past, communication more easily occupies the place the past would occupy.[47] The configuration is illustrative, not necessary: a candidate with a track record may have his performance overridden by his image. The missing step, in any configuration, is a single one: treating the communicative advantage as sufficient demonstration of capacity to exercise the office. The metric says that someone is seen; what remains to be shown is why being seen comes to look like knowing, and that requires moving from the candidate to the voter.

5.2. Speed and the Feeling of Understanding

Social media can also transform the way voters believe they possess the competence to judge, and the problem may begin before the wrong opinion, in the formation of an insufficient criterion for considering a question understood. The question here is not whether voters get it right or wrong, but what experience they take for assessment: at what moment they feel they have understood a question and can therefore judge whoever presents it. If that moment arrives before examination, the presumption on the voter's side, that they are capable of judging, feeds the one that falls on the candidate, that he is capable of governing, and the two may reinforce each other without either being put to the test.

There is indirect empirical support for the first half of this thesis, that the feeling of understanding may precede examination. Fisher, Goddu, and Keil report that searching for

information on the internet inflates a person's estimate of their own knowledge; Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu report, in a panel, that the perception that "news finds me", that there is no need to look for news because it arrives through social media, is associated with lower political knowledge over time. The phenomenon the first study explores has a name in cognitive psychology, the illusion of explanatory depth: people believe they understand complex mechanisms better than they do, and the illusion diminishes when they are asked to explain them; Fernbach and colleagues report that asking for an explanation of how public policies work reduces the understanding people report having and moderates extreme positions, whereas asking for reasons for their preference does not produce the same effect.[48] These are distinct phenomena, and these studies do not examine the conversion of visibility into aptitude for public functions. Closer to the object, Schmuck, Hirsch, Stevic, and Matthes report, in three studies with young people in Germany, that the frequency of exposure to influencer content is associated, in all three studies, with a greater perception that politics is simple, a perception associated with greater cynicism in two of the studies and, under the condition of parasocial interaction and depending on the topic, with greater political interest.[49] This antecedent brings speed, simplification, and bond together, and prevents treating perceived simplification merely as withdrawal from politics; what it does not measure is the step the hypothesis asserts, because perceiving politics as simple is different from attributing aptitude to the candidate and reducing the examination of his capacities. What the first studies offer is indirect support for the possibility of a dissociation between access to information, knowledge, and the assessment of one's own knowledge, and an indication that explanation, not adherence, is what puts that assessment to the test; the last, the link between exposure to influencers and perceived simplification; the relation of all of them to the judgement of candidates remains a hypothesis.

The relation between speed and the feeling of understanding has antecedents, and they show that it is not peculiar to the platforms. Bourdieu asked, with regard to television, whether it is possible to think at speed, and answered that "fast-thinkers" manage it because they think in "received ideas", already accepted by everyone and therefore received before they are spoken; thought, on the contrary, "must begin by dismantling 'received ideas' and must then demonstrate", and demonstrating means "long chains of reasons", which "takes time".[50] Han says of the information regime what Bourdieu said of television: "it is not possible to linger on information".[51] If Bourdieu is right, when the answer has to be quick, what presents itself as clarification tends to be what was already accepted, because only the already accepted dispenses with the time of demonstration. A limit comes from Derrida: "a just decision is always required immediately, right away, as quickly as possible. It cannot allow itself infinite information".[52] Every political decision is taken without full command of the reasons, and the criticism in this subsection does not bear on the lack of such command, but on insufficient examination of the available reasons when it is taken as sufficient.

There is a second relation, distinct from the first: the disqualification of complex explanation. It is one thing for the quick answer to be preferred because it costs less; it is another

for the slow answer to be read as a defect of the one who gives it. Barthes, describing Poujadism in 1956, gave this second relation its political form: the “suspicion of language, the reduction of all adverse discourse to noise”; science in which, “beyond a certain dose”, “one reaches the qualitative world of poisons”; intelligence replaced by “cunning”, and the physical fullness that “grounds moral limpidity”, so that “only the strong can be frank”.[53] Barthes analyses a particular movement, but he observes that the anti-intellectualism it expresses “goes far beyond Poujade”, and it is in this sense that the description serves. The relation between the two things must be constructed: the economy of speed makes the long explanation more costly, disqualification makes it suspect, and it is when the two come together that complexity comes to be read as evasion, and whoever offers it, as someone hiding something.

The hypothesis about habits of judgement can now be stated with its conditions. Recurrent exposure to brief, conclusive, and shareable content may favour habits in which familiarity with a statement and the availability of an answer are taken as sufficient signs of understanding. No generalized cognitive transformation is asserted: the hypothesis concerns habits of judgement about public questions, not the capacity to think of those who use social media. And a summary is not superficiality: brief content may favour understanding; superficiality appears when the synthesis erases what would be needed to evaluate the conclusion and still presents itself as sufficient. The hypothesis is investigable, but not by observing the content alone, since a post may present a conclusion as definitive without its public accepting it as such; what it calls for are manifestations of reception that indicate which reasons the public considers sufficient to attribute knowledge and aptitude to the candidate.

The criticism of superficial examination does not require voters to command personally all the knowledge relevant to their choice. Hayek points out that social life depends on dispersed knowledge and that the individual “benefits from a much greater volume of knowledge than he can consciously perceive”, being able to “transcend the limits of his ignorance by drawing on knowledge he does not possess”; and he recalls that part of useful knowledge is not substantive, but “knowledge of where and how to find the desired information”.[54] This consideration delimits the argument: relying on condensed signs, intermediaries, and the knowledge of others may be necessary and appropriate, and insufficiency arises when the sign is used beyond what it allows one to know and closes questions to which it offers no answer. For the same reason, aptitude for office should not be confused with a demonstration of omniscience. Depending on the duties of the office, the capacity to seek knowledge, to listen to affected people, to recognize constraints, and to revise decisions may be pertinent. These are criteria proposed here, not requirements whose satisfaction can be inferred merely from the confidence with which someone presents a conclusion.

To distinguish understanding from mere recognition, a criterion is proposed in dialogue with hermeneutics. To understand is not to recognize a message that confirms what one anticipated; it is to let one’s own anticipations be put to the test by what one reads or hears, so that they can be corrected by it. The formulation is in dialogue with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, for

which understanding starts from prior opinions that one is not required to forget, but which require openness to the opinion of the other or of the text. Ricoeur makes it possible to state the difference precisely: an initial interpretation may be a plausible conjecture, but its validation requires reasons that sustain it against competing interpretations; the plurality of readings does not make all of them equally justified, and an interpretation is not strengthened merely by finding confirmation of itself.[55] The application to political reception is the present author's proposal: recognizing in a post what one already thinks may produce an experience of understanding without the context, objections, and alternatives needed to sustain the conclusion having been examined; the problem is not starting from a situated understanding, but dispensing with the mediations that could confirm, qualify, or contradict it. A confirmation may result from good examination, and the criterion is not disagreement with the researcher. What is proposed is an investigable criterion: openness can be investigated through the willingness to consider relevant objections, recognize limits, and revise conclusions in the face of contrary reasons; making explicit what could modify one's own judgement is a possible sign of this willingness, not a proof of understanding. Three things are thus distinguished: the feeling of understanding, openness to revision, and understanding sustained by reasons.

The passage of this subsection unites the two presumptions and can be described as a mirror. The hypothesis is that voters tend to recognize as competent whoever presents the world in the categories the voter already commands, because it is in those categories that the answer seems clear, and that the candidate captures attention by confirming them, if confirmation favours circulation, as section 5.5 proposes. The voter's feeling of mastery, "I understand what he says", becomes a sign of the candidate's competence, "he explains well", and the competence attributed to the candidate returns to the voter confidence in their own judgement. The formulation that sums up the subsection is this: communicative competence may be taken as aptitude for office when the public recognizes as clarification a message that confirms its anticipations, offers an immediately reproducible answer, and produces a feeling of mastery, even without subjecting the candidate's statements and his capacity to sufficient examination. What the mirror does not explain is why the voter trusts this candidate and not another who also confirms their anticipations, and that requires proximity.

5.3. Proximity and Identification

Personal trust may constitute a legitimate reason for choice in the face of the unpredictability of government. The observation is Manin's: since it is increasingly difficult to foresee the events to which a government will have to respond, "the personal trust that the candidate inspires is a more adequate basis of selection than the evaluation of plans for future actions".[56] Its pertinence, however, depends on the elements that sustain it, and it is with these elements that the subsection deals; the affects that sustain political participation, for the same reason, are not a defect to be corrected. The question is not whether the voter trusts, but what experiences produce that trust on social media and at what moment it ceases to concern the person and comes to answer, without examination, for capacities the person has not yet shown.

Three experiences can be distinguished in the voter's relation to the candidate they follow on social media, and the passage between them is the route of the mechanism in this subsection. The first is access: "I can follow him", every day, without depending exclusively on traditional intermediaries. The second is the bond: "he listens to me", he answers, reacts, seems to speak to me. The third is the expectation of fulfilment: "he will manage it". The following may be real; the feeling of being heard may exist without actual listening or response, and the two experiences are not to be confused. What the hypothesis asserts is that communicative distance, which diminishes in them, may seem also to diminish the distance between promise and result, which is a different one: the reduction of communicative distance does not demonstrate, of itself, greater viability of the promise, even though in some cases interaction improves information, responsiveness, or mobilization. There is indirect support for the strength of the bond: Tsfati and colleagues found, in a seven-wave Israeli panel, that the parasocial relationship with the party leader was among the strongest predictors of political support and of the vote; Ceccobelli and Colombo propose that the politician-influencer is recognized as "someone I can trust", "someone like me", and "someone better than me".[57] What these studies do not show, and the hypothesis adds, is the transfer from "I can follow him" and "he listens to me" to "he will manage it"; and the transfer is a route, not a necessity.

The expectation of fulfilment deserves to be broken down, because it is there that proximity does its quietest work. Three things are distinguished: the desired result, the expectation that the candidate will produce it, and the possibility of its being produced; the problematic passage goes from the first to the second without examination of the third. "Against taxes" may be heard as a promise before anyone asks which taxes, and with what revenue they would be replaced; denouncing corruption may be received as preventing it, when denouncing does not demonstrate, of itself, capacity to prevent it, although a well-made denunciation may reveal knowledge and oversight. What forms when the passage occurs may be called a shared representation of the political future: invested with hope or fear, its persuasive force exceeds the examination of means and conditions of fulfilment. The representation is not therefore false; it may start from real proposals and add to them certainties they do not sustain. It should not be assumed that the examination of viability was the rule before the platforms: Habermas records that the research of his time showed the mass of voters far from the standard democratic theory assumes, "liberal fictions of the bourgeois public sphere".[58] What the proximity of social media adds is an experience that may make examination seem less necessary: the promises of someone who is close may seem closer to coming true, without the conditions of execution receiving equivalent examination.

Financial reactions offer an example of this passage. A favourable financial reaction, a rise in asset prices or a change in traded rates, may record the expectations of agents at that moment; it does not demonstrate, of itself, the candidate's aptitude for office, the future execution of his programme, or the improvement of the population's economic conditions. Between the movement and confidence in the exercise of office there are four operations, and each requires its own

support: observing the movement; attributing a cause to it, when other factors may have contributed; forming an expectation about future policies, which belongs to particular agents, assets, and horizons; and converting that expectation into presumed competence. A post may compress the four into an immediately comprehensible sequence: the market reacted favourably; the reaction stems from the candidate; therefore, his economic competence has been recognized. Identifying the compression in the post does not demonstrate that the public accepted it; it makes it possible to formulate what to look for in reception, and any post used as a documented event must have authenticated authorship and date. When the sequence dispenses with other assessments, an expectation comes to function as a credential of exercise. The mechanism does not presuppose that market participants are wrong, nor that the reaction is irrelevant; it presupposes investigating whether a sign pertinent to particular agents was received as sufficient evidence of broader political results, whose fulfilment depends on decisions and conditions not yet examined. Similar reactions to different candidates, in different contexts, do not establish equivalence between them; they show the insufficiency of the indicator for the broad conclusion the post offers. The example makes it possible to bring to bear separately the two comparisons of the previous subsections: reconstructing the relations involved in producing the sign, as the Marxian comparison in 5.1 suggests, and delimiting the conclusions it can sustain, as Hayek's does in 5.2.

Identification may operate as protection against criticism, and it is here that proximity ceases to be merely a source of trust and becomes an obstacle to its revision. The sequence is short: "he says what I think" is recognition; "therefore his decisions deserve trust" is the inference; "to criticize him is to attack what I am" is the protection. The first situation of section 2, the identity vote without attribution of aptitude, lies outside this sequence, which begins only with the inference. When the third step sets in, criticism of the representative is received as criticism of the group, and the defence of the choice occupies the place its revision would occupy. The criterion is investigable: can the voter still say "he represents me, but here he is wrong"? Two signs can be sought in reception: the reaction to evidence unfavourable to one's own leader, whether it is examination or defence, and the symmetry of the criteria applied to one's own camp and to the opposing one. Protection is not defined by a political orientation, and it is not presumed to have the same intensity in both camps; the subsection relies on the criterion it proposes; the literature on identity-protective cognition provides the framework, not the demonstration.[59]

Identification through the image has precise antecedents. Barthes, in the 1950s, described the portrait on the election leaflet, an "anti-intellectual weapon" that spirits politics away "in favour of a 'way of being'": "the photograph is a mirror; it offers the familiar, the known, it proposes to the voter his own likeness", and the voter "is invited to elect himself".[60] Postman observed, with regard to television, that the politician offers "himself as an image of the audience", and Habermas, that arguments were "perverted into symbols, to which one cannot […] respond with arguments, but only with identifications".[61] Manin saw, as he wrote, no sign of identification with the media elites, which records an epoch, not an impossibility.[62] What the

platforms change, therefore, is not the existence of identification through the image, but its organization. Television already allowed everyday exposure and personal narrative; what is specific to the platforms is the combination of frequent following, personal narrative, the possibility of response, and continuous circulation, and van Dijck observes that politicians use Twitter "to wrap their political messages in personal narratives in order to exploit the intimate connotation" of the medium, without being "dependent on journalists' framing".[63] A response may be real; but following without response can also produce a feeling of bond, and it is this experience that the parasocial relationship describes. None of the four elements produces, of itself, the transfer of trust to viability; combined, they reorganize proximity, and it is on this reorganization that the hypothesis bears.

The passage of this subsection can now be stated in full. Everyday presence and interaction on social media may produce a perceived proximity that sustains trust in the candidate. When that trust is transferred to the viability of his promises, the communicative bond comes to fill the space in which the conditions of fulfilment and the capacities required by the office ought to be examined; and when identification comes to protect the choice against criticism, reopening that space may become more difficult. None of this makes proximity a defect; the problem appears in the transfers, and each of them leaves traces in manifestations of reception that can be sought. The bond so formed is what confrontation, next, puts to work: it is the bond that is asked for protection, and it is in its name that the fight is fought.

5.4. Threat, Protection, and Confrontation

The candidate needs to define the opponent, and confrontation predates the platforms. Manin formulates it as a structural condition of election: individuals "mobilize and unite more effectively when they have adversaries and perceive differences between themselves and others", and therefore "a candidate must not only define himself, but also his opponents. He does not present only himself; he presents a difference".[64] Television already rewarded combat between persons: Bourdieu describes journalists who, afraid of boring, give "priority to combat over debate, to polemic over dialectic", and Habermas records that, in discussion turned into a commodity, conflicts "are diverted to the level of personal frictions".[65] What the platforms add can be stated in two points: "entertaining and emotionally charged content tends to travel much faster and further than hard news", and deliberate provocation is a strategy identified in a Brazilian campaign, the "flamebait" that Melo and Pozobon describe in Nikolas Ferreira's 2022 campaign.[66] None of this is, of itself, the mechanism described here, which lies in the passage in which the difference presented, a legitimate part of politics, comes to count as a demonstration of aptitude, and the disposition to fight, as proof of capacity to exercise the office.

The difference may be presented through pairs, and the pairs may express real differences. Good and evil, traditional and new, corrupt politics and moral politics, Christian politics and demonized politics: no pair is false for being a pair, and there are disputes in which moral opposition correctly describes what is at stake. The last pair deserves its own mention, as a

framing to be investigated: in it, a political camp may appropriate religious legitimacy and attribute evil to the opponent, so that political disagreement may be received as opposition to the faith. The pair comes to belong to the mechanism when it functions as an anticipated answer, that is, when it dispenses with the examination of facts, proposals, and performance because it already says, before examination, on which side reason lies. Two inferences can then be attributed to the public, and it is their occurrence that the hypothesis investigates: fighting the opponent may be received as a sufficient demonstration of integrity, and winning an exchange of phrases as a sufficient demonstration of knowledge. These inferences produce a moral or intellectual reputation, and the conversion is completed only when that reputation also comes to answer for the capacity to exercise the duties of the office, which integrity and knowledge, though pertinent, do not demonstrate of themselves. The instrument for analysing these passages comes from Barthes: myth does not deny things, “it simply purifies them, makes them innocent, grounds them in nature and eternity, gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact”.[67] It makes it possible to separate, in each post, what it shows, the quality it attributes to what it shows, and the conclusion about aptitude that this quality authorizes; the event need not be false for the interpretation to exceed what it demonstrates, and it is in this excess that the conversion is located.[68]

The difference may also be drawn on the map and on society, and then a category that indicated a region, an occupation, or a condition may come to indicate a side. South and Northeast, “communists” and “entrepreneurs”, “criminals” and “good citizens”: the categories are of different kinds, and not all were neutral before political use; what they have in common is the use, by which they condense persons, positions, and reasons into an identity that anticipates judgement, so that the argument comes to be judged by the identity attributed to whoever presents it. The documented case comes from the first round of 2022: after Lula led in all nine states of the Northeast, attacks circulated calling Northeasterners “manipulable” and the region “Cuba of the South”, converting a regional electoral result into an explanatory identity.[69] The mechanism is not defined by an ideological orientation, and its occurrence in distinct camps must be investigated by the same criteria. “The Northeast voted mostly for X” is description; “Northeasterners are X”, with derogatory attributes that allow someone to be disqualified before what they said is examined, is a trench. Generalization and depreciation are the criteria of this example, not universal requirements of prejudice, which may also appear in exclusions and in apparently complimentary stereotypes.

Threat and protection may articulate, in a single narrative, the opponent, the danger, and the candidate. Three operations are distinguished by their degree of relation to reality: inventing a danger that does not exist; exaggerating a problem that exists; and attributing to the opponent, exclusively, a complex problem with many causes. Only the first requires the danger to be fictitious; recognizing the second and third may require examining the size of the problem and its causes. In any of the three, the narrative structure is the same, a simplified threat, a recognizable enemy, and a promise of protection, and none of them automatically dispenses with the

examination of the candidate: they may produce fear, rejection, or mobilization without any attribution of competence. Moffitt helps analyse the presentation of threat: a failure may be presented as a crisis, linked to a broader framework and associated with the need for a certain leadership, and this presentation does not require the problem to be entirely invented.[70] The hypothesis examined here adds another passage, which depends on evidence of reception: conversion occurs when the promise to confront the threat is received as sufficient demonstration of aptitude to exercise the office, and then whoever presents himself as the antidote is relieved of showing that he knows how to treat the disease. The candidate may thus become the answer to the danger his own communication helps to define; what is sought, in reception, is whether the naming of the threat is received as a diagnosis, which still calls for treatment, or as a credential, which already dispenses with it.

Confrontation may come accompanied by an appearance of rigour, and, without a criterion for recognizing when appearance exceeds foundation, analysis turns into antipathy. Quotations, numbers, and documents confer an appearance of foundation, and often confer foundation itself; the problem is identified by signs that do not depend on who is speaking: the omission of a datum relevant to that conclusion, the comparison between situations that differ in the pertinent respects, the source removed from its context, the unequal treatment of similar situations, the weakened version of the opposing position, and the conclusion that exceeds the evidence. True information taken out of context belongs here: each piece withstands isolated verification, and the isolated truthfulness of the elements does not secure the truthfulness of the message or of the conclusion they compose. Barthes identified, in literature, the reason why detail produces this effect, and it carries over to numbers, screenshots, and details: the detail that merely attests “what took place” becomes “the sufficient justification for saying”, and what it signifies is not its content, but the very category of the real, so that “a reality effect is produced”.[71] Documentary details may confer an appearance of reality on the whole without demonstrating the political conclusion, and appearance is not authentication: a screenshot may be fabricated, edited, or displaced from context, and the reality effect is produced in every case. When the exchange of reasons comes to an end, the maxim that closes it has the form Barthes called “counter-explanation”, the imperative “because that’s how it is”.[72] These are instruments for analysing content; what the public does with them is a question of reception.

Presentation may suggest not only a quality, but a performance it does not show. The operation does not depend on confrontation, and it is recorded here because it is examined with the same instruments. A person photographed with her hands on the keys of a piano may be received as a pianist, although the image does not make it possible to distinguish mastery, initial learning, and pose; the problem lies not in appearing before the instrument, but in presence being offered, or received, as a sufficient indicator of a skill that has not been demonstrated. Staging of capacity is the name given here to the presentation of the outward signs of a skill in place of its demonstration. The term imputes no intention: staging may deliberately seek to induce an attribution known to be false or exaggerated, and in that modality it constitutes deception, which

is asserted only when that intention is documented; intention is not inferred from the insufficiency of the image, and the photograph of someone learning the piano is not deception. The operation has three moments: presentation, in which the person appears in a situation associated with a skill; attribution, in which the public reads the association as evidence of mastery; and authority, in which the attributed capacity comes to justify trust, recognition, or deference; and it adds a step prior to what the previous subsections described, because there an actual communicative skill came to answer for aptitude for office, and here the skill itself is presumed from its signs, so that the presumption of aptitude may rest on a capacity that was never actually shown.

In political communication the operation is the same when proximity to documents suggests study, presence at a public works site suggests responsibility for its execution, and a clip from a debate suggests mastery of the subject. The instrument for examining the first moment remains Barthes's: the electoral photograph, he wrote, proposes "a physical climate, a set of everyday choices expressed in a morphology, a way of dressing, a pose", and spirits politics away in favour of a "way of being"; composition and caption offer the visible support, the attributed skill adds to it a meaning the image does not demonstrate, and the result has the clarity of a statement of fact, not of explanation, with which myth presents what it naturalizes. The application proposed here distinguishes the suggested capacity, its demonstration, and the political use of the authority attributed to it; the piano example and the passage from pose to mastery are the present author's analysis, not Barthes's.[73]

It is not presumed that these images are false: they may accompany actual capacities and responsibilities, and presenting oneself is what all communication does. Staging belongs to the mechanism when the outward signs of an action are received as proof of its mastery and reduce the search for other evidence. The platform adds an inequality: the presentation is immediately accessible, and verifying the performance requires information, context, and time that the presentation does not provide; this inequality may favour the acceptance of the image as sufficient evidence, without making every digital presentation false; it constitutes a condition potentially favourable to the substitution of examination, not a demonstration of its occurrence.

In polarized environments, the performance of confrontation may function as proof of moral, intellectual, and political superiority; when the impression so produced is transferred to aptitude for office, success in mobilizing the audience reduces the search for evidence pertinent to the mandate. Voting for the fight against the opponent without considering the candidate competent is an alternative explanation of the vote, and not the mechanism; and presenting a difference, naming a problem, and promising to confront it are legitimate acts, on whose sufficiency, not existence, the criticism bears. Confrontation produces, in addition to the credential, the material that circulates: the scene of combat is what is shared, commented on, repudiated, and repeated, and that circulation is the next step.

5.5. Reproduction of the Circuit and Difficulty of Correction

The substitution of examination may be reproduced by the very conditions of success of political communication, without anyone having planned it; the four previous passages describe conversions, and this one describes what can keep them in operation. The circuit proposed here has six steps: a complex event is converted into a provocation or into a simple moral opposition; the post mobilizes indignation, identification, and responses; circulation gives visibility to the participants, including those who try to refute the post; these results may encourage new posts of the same kind; explanations that require context may have difficulty competing for attention; and success in these clashes may confer an appearance of competence, because whoever dominates the superficial discussion may be perceived as dominating the complex problem it represents. The antecedents support parts of the circuit, not its complete concatenation. Manin maintains that "in politics, demand is not exogenous; in general, preferences do not exist before the action of politicians"; the argument develops this thesis in a direction it does not take, namely that confrontation may form the public that rewards it.[74] Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal impose a limit: "the existence of filter bubbles is, however, still contested", so that the circuit is not a closure of each public upon itself, but a set of incentives that operates also among publics that see one another.[75] In Brazil, Cesarino described, for the 2018 presidential campaign, a circulation close to the one the circuit supposes: a candidate who appeared on social media as a "kaleidoscopic" figure, whose "pieces" were replicated by supporters in chains that segmented "spontaneously", and a bond grounded in the "alleged spontaneity and courage to speak the truth"; the description is anthropological and does not measure reception in the sense of section 1; the segmentation it describes is of distribution chains, not a closure of publics upon themselves, and it is taken here as a record that replication by supporters is part of what circulates.[76] Self-reinforcing does not mean inevitable: the circuit may be interrupted by accessible explanations, effective contestation, the experience of the mandate, or other sources of information, as section 7 shows; and the name is circuit, not "autopoietic system", because feedback, of itself, is not enough for autopoiesis.[77]

Repudiation can also make things circulate, and a recent case makes it possible to see what a capture documents and what it does not. On the night of 4 October 2026, after the first-round result, federal deputy Júlia Zanatta, re-elected for Santa Catarina, posted a video in which she gives thanks on her knees, in the street, holding a whip, and later explained that in Santa Catarina "foi de relho" ("it was by the whip") means a sweeping victory. An Instagram entertainment profile reposted the scene the same night, under the word "ABSURDO!" ("OUTRAGEOUS!"), and a screenshot taken while the repost was circulating recorded 4,119 shares, 455 reposts, and 811 comments.[78] The capture records a critical repost and interaction indicators, that is, circulation, not reception in the sense of section 1; and circulation is not approval, is not a vote, and is not protection against accountability. What the case suggests, as a possibility of reception to be investigated, is more: that the critical repost carried the scene to publics the deputy would not reach; that supporters received it as courage, and opponents as a sufficient explanation of a career; and that, in these readings, the reaction to the scene took the place of the examination of her performance. If this substitution occurs, the two readings, though

not equivalent, reduce the object examined in the same way. The gesture came after the election and says nothing about the votes.

The circuit may have an effect on what receives attention, in two versions that are not to be confused. Strategic diversion, in which someone produces a scene to draw attention away from something else, requires evidence of intention, and it is attributed to no one without it. Collective displacement occurs without coordination: attention may concentrate on what the circuit rewards, characters, phrases, and alignments, and move away from what it does not reward, the object in dispute, the evidence, the grounds, and the effects of a decision. In public discussions of decisions of the Federal Supreme Court, for example, comparing what circulates about a decision with what it contains may identify what was highlighted and what was omitted, without demonstrating, on its own, that the public ceased to examine the grounds. That is why the argument speaks of the production and maintenance of conditions that hinder critical examination, and not of an agent who keeps the public in ignorance: the first expression describes the effect proposed for investigation; the second would impute what has not been demonstrated.

An analogy helps to see the displacement, with a limit stated before it: political representation and criminal trial have different purposes and criteria, and election should not function as a judicial assessment. Faced with an oral argument before a jury, the pertinent question is whether the presentation makes the evidence more comprehensible to those who decide or whether the impression it produces may override the assessment of the evidence; an oral argument may do both. The same question applies to political communication: does the presentation of performance clarify what the candidate has done and knows, or does the impression it produces occupy the place of that assessment? The analogy serves to formulate the question, not to answer it.

The mandate may be exercised as a continuation of the campaign, and to make this possibility examinable an ideal type is constructed here, an analytical figure that brings together traits of the mechanism, without portraying all parliamentarians who use social media or any person at all. Consider a fictitious parliamentarian who gained notoriety through the recurrent posting of quick replies to opponents; his audience recognizes in him someone who “says what needs to be said”, and his candidacy presents this recognition as a credential. Once elected, he continues to organize part of his activity according to the conditions that sustained his visibility: he selects topics of high emotional yield, identifies recognizable opponents, and prepares interventions that can circulate as demonstrations of courage, knowledge, or loyalty, and he makes himself seen before documents, public works, and experts, so that presence may count for performance, in the staging of capacity that section 5.4 described. During a session, he answers a complex question with an accusation that shifts the discussion to the identity of whoever raised it; the excerpt posted afterwards ends with the accusation, omitting the rejoinder of whoever raised the question, and, for the audience that receives only the clip, the absence of contestation in the edit may look like the absence of an answer in the debate. The type does not presuppose incompetence; its defining trait is the priority given to repercussion when it conflicts with the

requirements of examination: the relevant objection treated as an occasion for confrontation, the difficulty of execution replaced by a declaration of firmness, presence in place of results, criticism of performance presented as an attack on the group. A viral speech may be a good parliamentary contribution; the criterion is not repercussion, nor simplification, which all public communication requires, but the suppression of elements needed to evaluate the conclusion, above all when the result so presented comes to count as sufficient demonstration of capacity. Barthes offers a form for the difference between the debate and this kind of clip: in boxing there is “a story that is built up before the spectator’s eyes”; in wrestling, “each moment is intelligible, dispensing with development”, and “the function of a wrestler is not to win, but to perform exactly the gestures expected of him”.[79] The analogy holds for the clip constructed to offer an immediately recognizable victory, and the caution comes from Barthes himself: the wrestling public knows it is watching a spectacle and “does not care in the least” whether the fight is a sham or not; it is not supposed that the audience of the clip is unaware of its performative character, but rather, as a hypothesis, that this knowledge does not prevent the performance from being received as a sign of capacity.

The type illustrates; what can be investigated is narrower: comparing the full parliamentary intervention, in the stenographic records and in the Chamber’s video, with the clip posted by the parliamentarian himself, recording what was preserved, what was omitted, and what was presented as the outcome of the debate. The protocol must be fixed before data collection: an inclusion rule for parliamentarians, period, and videos, so that only the episodes that confirm the hypothesis are not chosen; explicit criteria for what counts as alteration, the edit that changes the conclusion, omits a relevant answer, or presents a contested statement as uncontested, with a record of why the omitted element changes the interpretation; and the counter-test of clips that preserve meaning, because reducing duration is not, of itself, making superficial. The procedure identifies how an intervention was selected and framed; it does not demonstrate that the audience receives the clip as proof of aptitude, which remains a hypothesis until reception is investigated. To recapitulate section 5: measured attention may count as an electoral credential and, by one further step, as a credential of exercise; speed may produce a feeling of understanding that is taken for understanding; proximity, trust that is transferred to viability; confrontation, a reputation that is taken for aptitude, and staging, outward signs that are taken for performance; and the circuit that rewards these passages may keep them going without anyone coordinating it. The skill that favoured election may thus become the criterion by which the mandate is conducted and defended, and it is this consequence that section 7 takes up.

6. CASES, OBJECTIONS, AND LIMITS

The cases discussed here illustrate conditions of the mechanism; they do not demonstrate its occurrence, they are not a list of disapproved politicians, and they say nothing about the competence of those who feature in them. The selection followed six criteria, stated here so that the reader can hold the argument to them: variation in the origin of visibility, between platform

natives and transferred celebrities, with the institutional track record of strong media exposure documented in section 4; variation in track record, between newcomers and candidates with a previous mandate, because the mandate offers a potentially assessable record, although separating absent from overridden examination requires knowing whether the voter sought it, knew it, and considered it; variation in office; the presence of negative cases for the conversion of notoriety into votes, without which the selection would suggest that audience elects by itself, and an indication of the results that would be negative for the thesis of presumption, results the documented cases do not reach; variation between political camps, examined by the same criteria; and verifiable documentation, with vote counts documented by a press or institutional source indicated in a note, and public sources on the trajectory.[80] What each case allows one to observe is stated alongside it, and nothing more. The selection has an asymmetry that must be stated: the central cases, those of the fourth form of credential, belong to the same camp, and those of the opposing camp enter through a declared strategy and a proposed case; the asymmetry reflects the documentation available, not a property of the mechanism, and the proposed investigation must correct it.

The central cases are Nikolas Ferreira and Lucas Pavanato, both of the PL, whose vote counts are in section 4; here they matter for what they limit. Pavanato's trajectory contains its own contrast, because in 2022, for the Novo party, he obtained about 36 thousand votes and became an alternate for state deputy; between that contest and the following ones, office, electorate, context, and party changed, and the difference cannot simply be attributed to audience.[81] Deliberate provocation was identified as a strategy in Nikolas's 2022 campaign, by a content analysis that says nothing about reception.[82] And the question of section 5.1 about the origin of the advantage, given the absence of both from the incomplete list of the biggest spenders, admits as a possible, undemonstrated answer the audience accumulated before the campaign.

The two cases from another camp do not demonstrate, of themselves, that the central mechanism has no side; they show only that it must be sought in all camps by the same criteria. André Janones, federal deputy for Minas Gerais like Nikolas, obtained 238,967 votes in 2022, for Avante, and, while coordinating the digital communication of the presidential campaign in the second round of that year, already elected, publicly declared that he was providing "techniques of digital guerrilla warfare"; in 2026, for Rede, he obtained 78,780 and was re-elected.[83] The declaration documents a strategy acknowledged by the parliamentarian himself, not that of his own candidacy, and the drop between the two elections, with a change of party and context, is not explained by a single variable. Erika Hilton, federal deputy for São Paulo for the PSOL, went from 256,903 votes in 2022 to 1,596,472 in 2026; a high vote count does not demonstrate, of itself, substantive performance, and the case will serve as a test of coexistence only when her performance is documented, with bills, rapporteurships, and attendance compared with those of her peers in the legislature and read for their pertinence to the duties of the office. Until then, it is a proposed case, and it is not presumed, in any case, that visibility indicates lack of content.[84] Júlia Zanatta, of Santa Catarina, re-elected in 2026 with the vote count the press recorded as the

largest in the state's history for the Chamber, enters only through what section 5.5 has already said: the circulation of a scene through repudiation, and through adherence as a hypothesis, after the election.[85]

The negative cases are negative for the conversion of notoriety into votes, not for the thesis of presumption. Adrilles Jorge, with notoriety built on television and social media, obtained 91,485 votes for federal deputy in São Paulo in 2022 and was not elected; Pavanato became an alternate that same year; in 2010, Netinho de Paula obtained 7,773,327 votes for the Senate in São Paulo and was not elected, in a majoritarian contest for two seats, which makes him a reminder, not a control; and, according to the survey by Congresso em Foco, only five famous candidates reached the Chamber in 2010.[86] Proportional defeat also depends on party, on quotient, and, until 2018, on coalition, and for that reason these cases do not measure the strength of audience; what they show is that the conversion of notoriety into votes is not automatic. The thesis bears on the attribution of aptitude, not on victory, and therefore the results that would weaken it are different: voters who recognize a candidate's communicative competence and nevertheless demand evidence pertinent to the office; intense identification accompanied by revision of judgement; reception that clearly distinguishes a rhetorical victory from aptitude to exercise the mandate. If the investigation of reception finds these results regularly, the mechanism described will have narrower conditions of application than those proposed, and it is this that the cases ought to be able to show.

The first family of objections says that none of this is new, and it is right in what it asserts. Fame, spectacle, and simplification predate the internet: Manin shows that, in party democracy, what voters retained from programmes were "vague and catchy slogans" and that social belonging weighed more than adherence to platforms, Postman and Bourdieu described television, and van Dijck observes that the difference between YouTube content and that of television was contested from the site's launch.[87] The standard of the voter who examines aptitude, Habermas recalls, did not adequately describe the electorate as a whole already in the research of the 1950s, and personalization is structural, not accidental.[88] The answer is that of section 4: what is offered is not a narrative of decline nor of the loss of an examination that supposedly existed; it describes a displacement of criteria and intermediaries, a difference of degree and form in the credential, and the novelty it claims is that of the analysis, not of the phenomenon.

The second family says that the thesis is elitist, and it is the one that most compels precision. Communicating and mobilizing are a legitimate part of politics, and performance is integral to representation; personal trust may be a legitimate reason for choice; voters choose by identity, interest, and values without claiming to examine aptitude, like Postman's father, who voted for the party and thought it naive to look for "the best man"; and representation should not depend on elitist credentials, because, as Manin concludes, "Election inevitably selects elites, but it is for ordinary citizens to define what constitutes an elite and who belongs to it".[89] Each of these propositions is accepted. The thesis bears not on the existence of trust, but on its source, nor on entry into politics, but on the examination appropriate to the office; the identity vote without

attribution of aptitude is an alternative explanation, not a case of the mechanism, as section 2 established; and the normative criterion the argument needs comes from within Manin, for whom "freedom of choice is not secured if the specific content of the superiority is determined solely by external factors and circumstances", the traits of those elected having to result, as far as possible, "from a conscious and deliberate choice of the electorate".[90] Voters may consciously choose to value audience; the condition fails when reach is given the value of a sufficient demonstration of aptitude without consideration of other pertinent evidence. The requirement is one of examination, not of a degree, and it does not exclude informational shortcuts, which the literature in section 3 describes as capable of replacing the encyclopaedia to the benefit of some voters; what is examined here is the shortcut that is taken for proof.

The third family says that the argument confuses correlation with cause and forgets correction. Followers do not demonstrate the cause of votes: in Ribeiro and Oliveira's survey of the hundred most voted city council candidates in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte, the number of Instagram followers captures a larger share of the variation in vote counts than campaign spending, but a small one, with coefficients of determination between 0.14 and 0.18 against 0.04 to 0.12, in a sample limited to the most voted and without causal value; metrics can be bought; parties, money, religion, territory, and rules weigh, the very diffusion of information "favors those able to mobilize greater resources", and, in the contest for votes on the internet, Brazilian campaigns from 1998 to 2016 gave a decisive advantage to those with more resources, according to Braga and Carlomagno.[91] None of this is contested: a mechanism among others is described, rules are treated as a variable, and cases are used as illustration, not as causal proof. As to correction, Manin is right that the repetition of elections is "a learning process" in which voters may discover the value of their criteria; the question added here, and developed in section 7, is when this learning is hindered, and the 2026 cases with a previous mandate are the ground on which it can be investigated.[92]

The fourth family says that the platforms give voice and allow reply, and that the image of a passive public is false. This is true: the constraint of "don't talk back" that Habermas attributed to the new media no longer describes them, Han observes that in the information regime people "are no longer passive television viewers" but "active senders", and van Dijck shows users who appropriate the platforms and contest them.[93] The answer is that the possibility of reply does not, of itself, restore examination: interaction may produce familiarity and a feeling of being listened to without criticism occupying the space the bond occupies, as section 5.3 proposed; and the reciprocal adaptation between candidates and publics described here is not a portrait of all the users of a platform.

The definition in section 2 states what counts as substitution, and the passages of section 5 propose conditions that favour it; from them follow predictions that make it possible to compare situations instead of recognizing the mechanism after the fact. First: holding constant the track record and proposals presented, signs of communicative success, such as followers, a viral clip, or a rhetorical victory, increase the aptitude attributed and reduce the search for additional

information. Second: it is proposed to investigate whether the association varies with prior identification with the candidate, perceived bond, and familiarity with the subject in dispute; Lau and Redlawsk's result suggests attention to differences between publics, but does not demonstrate these specific moderations. Third: faced with unfavourable evidence pertinent to the office, those who attributed aptitude on the basis of communicative signs revise their judgement less than those who attributed it on the basis of track record, and the difference grows when criticism is presented as an attack on the group. These are proposed predictions, not results; if the differences do not appear under the conditions indicated, their absence may weaken the corresponding explanatory hypothesis or require its reformulation, and not merely reduce the scope of the mechanism.

It remains to say what has not been done here. The central link of the thesis, the reduction of examination through familiarity and presumption, would require its own design: a vignette experiment on Todorov's model, varying followers, a viral clip, and a record of achievements, that measures not only the competence attributed but also the search for additional information and the weight given to track record and to contrary evidence, because it is the substitution of examination, and not the attribution, that the thesis asserts; a scale of political parasocial relationship in a Brazilian survey, on Tsfati's model, accompanied by items on the viability of promises, because the scale measures the bond and does not demonstrate, of itself, the transfer of trust; and a reception analysis with a corpus and criteria fixed before data collection, separating content, circulation, interpretations, justifications of vote, and demonstrations of capacity.[94] The readings that support the argument are declared in the notes, and their extent is stated where it matters. To recapitulate the section: the cases illustrate conditions and include negative ones and opposing camps; three predictions make the hypothesis comparable across situations; the four families of objections have been answered within the stated limits, and the answer to the second of them fixes the two limits of the thesis: the restriction to the case in which communicative signs are taken as sufficient indicators of aptitude, set out from section 1, and the normative criterion taken from Manin in this section. It is this delimited version that the following section carries into the mandate.

7. SELECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The possibility of retrospective assessment does not guarantee the correction of presumed competence, because correction depends on the availability and consideration of evidence capable of contradicting the presumption, wherever it comes from. When the presentation of the mandate continues to obey the criterion that favoured election, that is, when the parliamentarian communicates his performance in the forms that sustained the candidacy, later experience may reach the voter already framed by the same signs of competence: the quick reply, proximity, confrontation, and the clip the circuit rewards. Continued exposure may then renew the impression of aptitude without new evidence about performance. This does not require the evidence to come from outside: a post by the parliamentarian himself may reveal an error, preserve an objection, or offer elements for revising judgement, and the electoral learning Manin

speaks of depends on such elements being available and considered.[95] Framing may hinder correction; it does not prevent it, and stating where correction remains possible is the task of this section.

Accountability may be blocked by loyalty, and here the argument merely brings together the routes that sections 5.3 and 5.4 proposed, without having demonstrated their occurrence. When identification protects the choice, criticism of performance is received as an attack on the group; when the candidate has presented himself as protection against a threat, criticizing the protector is perceived as favouring the threat; and, in both cases, the defence of the choice occupies the place its revision would occupy. The investigable sign is the same as before, the voter who can or cannot say “he represents me, but here he is wrong”, and the mandate is the ground on which this sign can be sought most profitably, because it is there that there is performance to compare with presentation.

Examination can take place without an elitist barrier, and there are four places in which it takes place or can take place. Parties that make their recruitment criteria explicit and publish them render examinable the credential they grant; the performance threshold they cite as a reason for recruiting by audience does not prevent them from saying what else they require. Hearings and debates that ask about the duties of the office, and not only about positions on the topic of the day, produce the indicator the metric does not produce. The press that compares the clip with the full intervention and the mandate with peers of the same legislature carries out, in public, the procedure section 5.5 proposed. And voters themselves, when they have access to other information, can use it: what Manin requires, the deliberate choice of the kind of superiority that is valued, does not require a degree; it asks that the credential not be defined by the medium alone.[96] The contest between critical publicity and publicity organized for manipulative ends remains open, as Habermas concluded in 1962, and the 1990 revision, in recognizing a greater capacity of the public to resist, reinforces this conclusion rather than undoing it; the scale on which the former prevails is the measure of democratization; the selection mechanisms of the platforms, as van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal recall, are a matter of governance, not of fate.[97]

To recapitulate the argument. The three capacities are distinct, and election documents votes, not aptitude. Presumed competence was examined in the modality in which communicative signs are treated as sufficient; three modes described how examination gives way, and five passages, four of conversion and one of maintenance, stated where conversion may occur and be maintained, feeding two presumptions, the voter’s about their own judgement and the public’s about the candidate’s aptitude. It is firm that the capacities are distinct, that election does not prove aptitude, and that the inference of competence from signs unrelated to the office, such as the face, exists; it is a hypothesis, with conditions stated in each case, that the passages occur and that the circuit maintains them, and the predictions of section 6 state what would make them examinable; the cases showed vote counts, declared strategies, and circulation, never reception, which remains to be investigated.

The question thus ceases to be only how attention is converted into votes, and comes to include when the maintenance of the audience interferes with deliberation and accountability. The hypothesis has been subjected to the openness it asks of the voter: it has stated where it explains, where objections delimit it, and where it does not apply. Being seen is not knowing, and the difficulty of distinguishing visibility from aptitude may compromise the assessment of the mandate and the revision of the choice.

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NOTES

1 Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 136–138 and 149; the passage on oratory, p. 146, is cited in section 2. Unless a Brazilian or Portuguese translation is indicated in the References, quotations from foreign-language works (Manin, Postman, Boorstin, van Dijck, Espeland and Stevens, Todorov and colleagues, Fisher and colleagues, Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues, Tsfati and colleagues, Ceccobelli and Colombo, Riedl and colleagues, Kahan and colleagues, Mason, Moffitt, Ricoeur, Schmuck and colleagues, Lupia, Lau and Redlawsk, Rozenblit and Keil, Fernbach and colleagues, Horton and Wohl, and Habermas's 1990 preface, read in Spanish) were translated by the author in the Portuguese text; the original is transcribed in a note when the wording matters, and in this translation such transcribed wording is used in the body; where it is not transcribed, quotations from English-language works are rendered from the author's Portuguese version. Quotations from works consulted in Portuguese or Spanish translation, and from the author's own works, are rendered into English by the author.

2 Fisher, Goddu, and Keil (2015); Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu (2017); the studies are presented and delimited in section 5.2.

3 Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 44: fake followers "can be bought for a small fee". The observation concerns Twitter; the extension to the other metrics is ours.

4 Cf. Street, "Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2004), for whom performance and popular culture are integral to representation. The premise is accepted here, without concluding from it that every performance is a demonstration of aptitude; section 6 takes up the objection.

5 Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 136 and 138: "they may also decide to elect someone just because they like this individual better than another"; "Nothing in the elective method requires that voters be fair to candidates". The contrast with the competitive examination, whose standards are "formulated in an abstract and general manner" and "publicly announced in advance" (author's rendering), is Manin's, p. 137.

6 Manin, p. 149: "election selects perceived superiorities and actual differences".

7 Manin, p. 146: "there is no guarantee that a gift for public speaking is a good proxy for capability to govern". In the same place, Manin adds that the repetition of elections makes them "a learning process" (author's rendering); section 7 asks when this learning is hindered.

8 Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall, "Inferences of Competence from Faces Predict Election Outcomes", *Science*, 308 (5728), 2005, pp. 1623–1626: inferences of competence from faces anticipated "68.8% of the Senate races in 2004" (p. 1623; 71.6% of the Senate races from 2000 to 2004 and 66.8% of the House races), and, with one second of

exposure per pair of faces, 67.6% of the Senate races (p. 1624); “actual voting decisions are certainly based on multiple sources of information other than inferences from facial appearance. Voters can use this additional information to modify initial impressions of political candidates” (p. 1625). The study shows that the inference exists; it says nothing about social media or about Brazil.

9 Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (Atheneum, 1962), ch. 2 (“From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-Event”), pp. 57–58: “The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness”; the passage and its location were checked in a transcription from a secondary source, not in the volume itself. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Penguin, 1986), ch. 9: “Being a celebrity is quite different from being well known. Harry Truman was well known but he was not a celebrity”.

10 Postman, ch. 7: “‘Credibility’ here does not refer to the past record of the teller for making statements that have survived the rigors of reality-testing. It refers only to the impression of sincerity, authenticity, vulnerability or attractiveness”.

11 Manin, p. 227: “the images formed by voters are not free of political content”.

12 Manin, p. 143: voters “operate on the basis of an overall perception, and their attention is drawn to those individuals whose image stands out from the rest”.

13 Postman, ch. 7, on the reporters who expose the president’s lies: “But apparently the public declines to take an interest”. Han, *Infocracia*, trans. Gabriel S. Philipson (Vozes, 2022), chapter “O fim da ação comunicativa” (“The end of communicative action”), on digital collectives confronted “with facts and data that contradict their conviction”, which “are simply ignored, because they do not fit the narrative that generates identity”. In both passages the contrary evidence is available, exposed by the reporters or presented to the collectives, and is set aside, which defines the overridden mode. Han says that the tribalization of the web is propagated “above all on the right”; the argument does not inherit this restriction (section 5.4). Both passages are essayistic and count as formulation, not as measurement.

14 Manin, pp. 142–143 and 220: “To be elected, a candidate needs to attract the attention of the electorate”; “a new elite of experts in communication has replaced the political activist and the party bureaucrat. Audience democracy is the rule of the media expert”. The first part of ch. 4 is presented by the author as “a pure theory” of the aristocratic character of election (p. 134; author’s rendering), and ch. 6 relies on electoral studies from the 1970s to the 1990s.

15 Manin, p. 139.

16 Manin, pp. 221, 227, 222–226, and 146, respectively.

17 Bourdieu, *Sobre a televisão*, “A influência do jornalismo” (“The influence of journalism”), the text the Brazilian edition numbers as the third, after the two lectures.

18 Bourdieu, ch. 2 (“A estrutura invisível e seus efeitos”, “The invisible structure and its effects”), on the two illusions and the comparison “structure to structure”; ch. 1 (“O estúdio e seus bastidores”, “The studio and its backstage”), on the “frankly aristocratic” character of the Platonic opposition between the philosopher who has time and the urgency of the agora.

19 Habermas, *Mudança estrutural da esfera pública*, §20, p. 229; §22, pp. 251, 252, and 247, in that order.

20 Habermas, preface to the 1990 edition of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, consulted in the Spanish translation (*Historia y crítica de la opinión pública*, Gustavo Gili, 1994, preface trans. Francisco Javier Gil Martín, p. 19). §§18–22 are not used as a diagnosis endorsed by the author in its 1962 form.

21 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, ch. 9: “television makes impossible the determination of who is better than whom, if we mean by ‘better’ such things as more capable in negotiation, more imaginative in executive skill, more knowledgeable about international affairs”.

22 Debord, *Comentários sobre a sociedade do espetáculo* (1988), section IV, paraphrased; the expression “media status” is the author’s. The passage is identified by section because it was read in a digital reproduction of the text, without the pagination of the edition listed.

23 Lupia, “Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections”, *American Political Science Review*, 88 (1), 1994, pp. 63–76, consulted through the abstract: “access to a particular class of widely available information shortcuts allowed badly informed voters to emulate the behavior of relatively well informed voters”. Lau and Redlawsk, “Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making”, *American Journal of Political Science*, 45 (4), 2001, pp. 951–971: “heuristic use generally increases the probability of a correct vote by political experts but decreases the probability of a correct vote by novices” (p. 951); the five shortcuts studied are party, ideology, endorsement, viability, and the candidate’s appearance, and the gain of about 20 points among the sophisticated is almost cancelled by the loss of about 21 among the unsophisticated. The application to the sign of communicative success is ours.

24 Miguel, “Capital político e carreira eleitoral: algumas variáveis na eleição para o Congresso brasileiro”, *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, 20 (2003), pp. 115–134, at pp. 121, 122, 130, and 131; Miguel and Biroli, “Visibilidade na mídia e campo político no Brasil”, *Dados*, 53 (3), 2010, pp. 695–735, at pp. 695 (abstract), 697, and 729. Both works deal with the mass media and the political field; the extension to the platforms is ours.

25 Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System* (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2017), introduction.

26 Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, ch. 2, pp. 40–47.

27 Ceccobelli and Colombo (2025) and Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley (2023), consulted in the passages cited in sections 5.1, 5.3, and 5.4; Schmuck, Hirsch, Stevic, and Matthes (2022), consulted through the abstract (section 5.2, note 49).

28 Manin, p. 202: the three ideal types “are deliberately schematic”.

29 Manin, p. 208.

30 Habermas, §21, p. 238. Manin’s observation on past behaviour as a reasonable criterion is on p. 180, cited in section 5.1.

31 National base of 34,350,217 votes according to Brumes, Silva, and Pinto, “Eleições presidenciais de 1994 no estado do Paraná”, *Paraná Eleitoral*, 11 (4), 2022, table 1, sourced from the TSE; plus the 14,744 votes from abroad recorded on the TSE’s 1994 results page for voters abroad (consulted on 7 Oct. 2026). The figure of 55.22% that circulates is Fernando Henrique’s share of the vote abroad, not of the total; 54.28% is his share of valid votes in the national total, according to Rolling Stone Brasil, 2 Oct. 2022. On the Real Plan as the axis of conflict in the free electoral broadcasts, Freitas, “O primeiro grande antagonismo entre PSDB e PT”, *Opinião Pública*, 24 (3), 2018; on the construction of the image of competence in the press on the basis of the Ministry of Finance, Renault, “A construção da imagem de FHC na mídia impressa (1993–1994)”, *Comunicação e Espaço Público*, XI (1–2), 2008; on the assessment of performance and personal attributes in voting decisions from 1989 to 1998, Carreirão, *A decisão do voto nas eleições presidenciais no Brasil (1989 a 1998)* (thesis, USP, 2000), consulted through the abstract. The inauguration took place on 1 January 1995.

32 Tiririca: 1,353,820 votes, according to the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo, news item of 17 Dec. 2010; Romário: 146,859 votes, according to Agência Senado, 5 Oct. 2014. On the five famous people elected that year, Congresso em Foco, 4 Oct. 2010 (section 6, note 86).

33 Congresso em Foco, “Justiça Eleitoral de São Paulo libera Tiririca”, 1 Dec. 2010, on the test administered on 11 November 2010 and the decision of the 1st Electoral Zone of São Paulo; the ineligibility of the illiterate is laid down in the Constitution, art. 14, §4.

34 Nikolas Ferreira in 2022: Jovem Pan, 3 Oct. 2022, and Agência Brasil, 5 Oct. 2026; Pavanato in 2024: Congresso em Foco, 7 Oct. 2024; both in 2026: Agência Brasil, 5 Oct. 2026, based on the TSE’s official tally. A tally is not

immutable: the numbers should be cited with the date of the source.

35 Electoral quotient and party quotient: Electoral Code (Law 4,737/1965), arts. 106 to 109. Performance threshold: Constitution, art. 17, §3, as worded by Constitutional Amendment 97/2017; the distribution of the Special Campaign Financing Fund also follows the size of the parliamentary groups (Law 9,504/1997, art. 16-D). On recruitment by audience with these incentives as the declared reason, Revista Oeste, 10 Apr. 2026, and A Tarde, 7 Apr. 2026.

36 Manin, p. 228: “individuals receive the same information on a given subject as everyone else”; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, p. 65, on filter bubbles being “still contested”.

37 Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, pp. 40–41 and 43: “Online platforms replace expert-based selection with user-driven and algorithm-driven selection”; platforms “employ reputation ratings to make up for the lack of institutional guarantees”. The context is the selection of content and services, not of representatives.

38 Idem, pp. 46–47, citing Espeland and Stevens (1998, p. 323): “commensuration is political: it reconstructs relations of authority”.

39 Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 13, 62, and 65–66: “there is no quality assessment built into these buttons”; “it favors instant, gut-fired, emotional, positive evaluations”; “although popularity has no relation to values such as truth, trust, objectivity, or quality, it is often equated with these values”; “‘difficult but important’ is not a judgment prompted by social media sites”.

40 Barthes, *Mitologias*, trans. Rita Buongermino, Pedro de Souza, and Rejane Janowitzer (DIFEL, 4th ed., 2009), p. 245. Barthes describes a figure of the bourgeois rhetoric of the 1950s; its use as an instrument for analysing the metric is ours.

41 Cf. Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System* (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2017), introduction.

42 Poder360, 2 Oct. 2026 (ads on Meta in the first round of 2026; incomplete accounts and a list restricted to the biggest investors); The Intercept Brasil, 3 Jul. 2025 (Destra Cursos, R$ 745.3 thousand in ads outside the electoral period). The data show spending, not the cause of votes.

43 Marx, *O capital*, book I, ch. 1, §4 (“The fetishism of the commodity and its secret”), trans. Rubens Enderle (Boitempo, 2013), in the electronic edition consulted. Marx does not deal with audiences or elections; the application to the number of followers is ours, and it does not suppose an equivalence between audience and value.

44 Manin, p. 143. Manin speaks of the notable, salient by name or social position; the extension to those salient by technique is the addition.

45 Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley (2023): “their influence is platformed”, that is, captured by the platforms’ proprietary metrics and on the terms the platforms set; the authors distinguish audience metrics from effects on opinions, which rules out using followers as proof of persuasion.

46 Revista Oeste, “A caça de influenciadores”, 10 Apr. 2026; A Tarde, 7 Apr. 2026. What the press documents is the use of audience as an electoral credential; knowing whether recruitment also dispenses with the examination of aptitude for the mandate would require interviews or party documents.

47 Manin, p. 180: “it may be reasonable for voters to use the past behavior of candidates as criteria in decisions bearing on the future”. The inference about the absence of a past is ours.

48 Fisher, Goddu, and Keil, “Searching for Explanations: How the Internet Inflates Estimates of Internal Knowledge”, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144 (2015); Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu, “Effects of the News-Finds-Me Perception in Communication”, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22 (2017), who examine the perception that news finds the user and its relation to political learning, not the conversion of visibility into aptitude; Rozenblit and Keil, “The Misunderstood Limits of Folk Science: An Illusion of Explanatory Depth”, *Cognitive Science*, 26 (5), 2002, pp. 521–562: “people feel they understand complex phenomena with far greater

precision, coherence, and depth than they really do" (p. 521), and "nearly all participants showed drops in estimates of what they knew when confronted with having to provide a real explanation" (p. 529); Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, and Sloman, "Political Extremism Is Supported by an Illusion of Understanding", *Psychological Science*, 24 (6), 2013, pp. 939–946: "asking people to explain policies in detail both undermined the illusion of explanatory depth and led to attitudes that were more moderate", whereas "enumerating reasons did not lead to any change in position extremity".

49 Schmuck, Hirsch, Stevic, and Matthes, "Politics – Simply Explained?", *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27 (3), 2022, pp. 738–762, consulted through the abstract, which reports design, samples, country, and period: a panel of adolescents (N = 294 in the second wave), a survey of young adults (N = 632), and a panel of young adults (N = 496 in the second wave), Germany, 2019–2020.

50 Bourdieu, *Sobre a televisão*, trans. Maria Lúcia Machado (Jorge Zahar, 1997), pp. 38–41.

51 Han, *Infocracia*, chapter "Infocracia". Han adds that a single tweet with decontextualized information "is possibly more effective than a well-grounded argument".

52 Derrida, *Força de lei*, trans. Leyla Perrone-Moisés (WMF Martins Fontes, 2nd ed., 2010), pp. 51–52. Derrida speaks of judicial decision and of justice; its use as a limit on the criticism of speed is ours.

53 Barthes, *Mitologias*, "Poujade e os intelectuais" ("Poujade and the intellectuals"), pp. 184–191, at pp. 184–188 (the passages cited); the observation that anti-intellectualism "goes far beyond Poujade" and "takes hold of the most varied political milieux" is on p. 191.

54 Hayek, *Os fundamentos da liberdade*, ch. II ("The creative powers of a free civilization"), in the subdivision "Civilization and the growth of knowledge", in the electronic edition consulted. The application to political duties is ours; the argument does not inherit Hayek's programme, only the distinction between using knowledge one does not possess and claiming sufficient knowledge.

55 Gadamer, *Verdade e método*, I (Vozes, 4th ed., 2002), pp. 404–405: "what is required is simply openness to the opinion of the other or to that of the text", and "a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, receptive to the otherness of the text"; passages cited apud Moreira and Cabral (2008), who transcribe them with this location. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* (Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 76–79, on conjecture and validation, the logic of probability that governs the latter, and the confrontation between competing interpretations, paraphrased; the distinction is Ricoeur's, the application is ours. The hermeneutic reading is instrumental: no theory of understanding is proposed, but a criterion of investigation that owes its form to it.

56 Manin, p. 221: "the personal trust that the candidate inspires is a more adequate basis of selection than the evaluation of plans for future actions".

57 Tsfati et al. (2022): a seven-wave panel, from January to October 2019 (N = 1,061), in which the constructs of political parasocial relationship "were among the strongest predictors of political support" in all models, alongside voting history and thermometer ratings; the authors warn that the temporal order of the measures does not demonstrate causality. The concept of parasocial relationship comes from Horton and Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction", *Psychiatry*, 19 (3), 1956, pp. 215–229. Ceccobelli and Colombo (2025), whose three vertices ("someone I can trust", "someone like me", "someone better than me") are the authors' own hypothesis. Both study the bond; the transfer of trust to viability is the passage the argument adds as a hypothesis.

58 Habermas, *Mudança estrutural da esfera pública*, trans. Flávio R. Kothe (Tempo Brasileiro, 1984), §22, p. 247. The research referred to dates from the 1950s.

59 Kahan et al., "Culture and Identity-Protective Cognition" (2007), in the introduction, for whom, "as a means of identity self-defense, individuals conform their appraisals of information in a manner that buttresses beliefs associated with belonging to particular groups", and Mason, *Uncivil Agreement* (2018), ch. 1 ("Identity-Based Democracy"), on

polarization “rooted in social identity”, in which partisan belonging organizes the evaluation of opponents (presentation of the book; author’s rendering).

60 Barthes, *Mitologias*, “Fotogenia eleitoral” (“Electoral photogeny”), pp. 162–163; the spelling “antiintelectual” is that of the edition. Barthes deals with French election leaflets of the 1950s; the extension to social media is ours.

61 Postman, ch. 9: “on television the politician does not so much offer the audience an image of himself, as offer himself as an image of the audience”; Habermas, §21, p. 241.

62 Manin, p. 233: “Nor is there any sign that those elites are in a position to inspire feelings of identification on the part of voters”.

63 Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, pp. 75 and 77: “politicians use tweets to wrap their political messages in personal narratives in order to exploit the intimate connotation of the medium’s communicative mode”; “dependent on journalists’ framing”.

64 Manin, p. 222. Manin adds (pp. 222–223) that candidates do not invent cleavages with complete freedom: the lines of social cleavage pre-exist and, where they are numerous and shifting, it falls to politicians to choose which to activate.

65 Bourdieu, *Sobre a televisão*, afterword; Habermas, §18, p. 194.

66 Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, p. 68: “entertaining and emotionally charged content tends to travel much faster and further than hard news”; Melo and Pozobon (2025), *RAE-IC*, who analyse content, not reception.

67 Barthes, *Mitologias*, “O mito é uma fala despolitizada” (“Myth is depoliticized speech”), p. 235. Barthes writes against bourgeois mythology and admits, further on, a “myth on the left”; the instrument is used here without inheriting the target.

68 Riedl, Lukito, and Woolley (2023) incorporate the moral opposition between right and wrong into the concept of political influencer they propose, with reference to Mouffe, which suggests a recurrent trait of the genre, not a necessary characteristic of every influencer.

69 O Povo, 5 Oct. 2022; the terms come from press coverage.

70 Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism* (Stanford University Press, 2016), ch. 7, pp. 120–121, on the transformation of failures into crises through their political presentation; the list of the three traits of the populist style, “appeal to ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’; ‘bad manners’; and crisis, breakdown or threat”, is on p. 8. The sequence is also in Moffitt, “How to Perform Crisis”, *Government and Opposition*, 50 (2), 2015, pp. 189–217: identifying the failure, elevating it to a crisis by linking it to a broader framework, presenting simple solutions and strong leadership; “crisis marks the spectacularization of failure”. The analysis of presentation is taken from Moffitt; the passage to the presumption of aptitude is the present author’s.

71 Barthes, *O rumor da língua*, trans. Mario Laranjeira (Martins Fontes, 2nd ed., 2004), “O efeito de real” (“The reality effect”), pp. 188 and 190. Barthes speaks of literature and historiography; the transposition to the post is ours.

72 Barthes, *Mitologias*, “O mito, hoje” (“Myth today”), p. 246.

73 Barthes, *Mitologias*, “Fotogenia eleitoral”, pp. 162–163 (section 5.3, note 60), and “O mito, hoje”, p. 235 (note 67) and p. 221 (“transforms history into nature”). Barthes describes the naturalization of meaning by the image; the attribution of skills from outward signs, the piano example, and the three moments of staging are the present author’s.

74 Manin, p. 225, in the context of his rejection of the metaphor of the voter as consumer (pp. 224–226).

75 Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, p. 65: “the existence of filter bubbles is, however, still contested”; the authors attribute the effects to the interaction between platforms, users, and organizations.

76 Cesarino, “Identidade e representação no bolsonarismo: corpo digital do rei, bivalência conservadorismo-neoliberalismo e pessoa fractal”, *Revista de Antropologia*, 62 (3), 2019, pp. 530–557, at pp. 533, 540, and 549.

77 The term autopoiesis refers to Luhmann, *A realidade dos meios de comunicação*, trans. Ciro Marcondes Filho (Paulus, 2005), for whom the media form a system that operates through the code information/non-information; the concept is not used here, because the feedback described does not amount to the operational closure of a system, and the criticism of superficiality cannot be attributed to that author.

78 The deputy’s explanation according to Poder360 and Correio Braziliense, 5 Oct. 2026. Screenshot, kept with the article’s research material, of the post by the profile @ohbafo on Instagram on the night of 4 Oct. 2026, subsequent to the deputy’s own post on her profile; the capture, taken at 9:53 p.m., recorded 5,523 likes, 811 comments, 455 reposts, and 4,119 shares, and the post reproduced a post by the same profile on X: “A bolsonarista Julia Zanatta vai as [sic] ruas com chicote após ser eleita deputada federal por SC” (“Bolsonarist Julia Zanatta takes to the streets with a whip after being elected federal deputy for SC”). The case documents circulation, not reception.

79 Barthes, *Mitologias*, “O mundo do catch” (“The world of wrestling”), pp. 15–16.

80 The choice of cases from distinct camps follows the example of Melo and Pozobon (2025), who analyse André Janones and Nikolas Ferreira side by side; the other criteria are the present author’s.

81 Congresso em Foco, 7 Oct. 2024, and Agência Brasil, 5 Oct. 2026, for 2022 (about 36 thousand votes and alternate status); other vote counts in section 4, note 34.

82 Melo and Pozobon (2025), *RAE-IC*, on fourteen posts from 2022.

83 Jovem Pan, 3 Oct. 2022, for 2022; Metrópoles, 6 Oct. 2026, for 2026; Poder360, 25 Oct. 2022, for the statement about “digital guerrilla warfare”.

84 Jovem Pan, 3 Oct. 2022, for 2022; Agência Brasil, 5 Oct. 2026, for 2026.

85 Poder360, 5 Oct. 2026, for 2022 (111,588 votes), for 2026 (560,223 votes), and for the record of the largest vote for the Chamber in the state’s history; Agência Brasil, 5 Oct. 2026, for the 2026 total.

86 Adrilles Jorge: Band, 3 Oct. 2022 (91,485 votes, 0.39%); Netinho de Paula: Congresso em Foco, 13 Oct. 2010 (7,773,327 votes); Pavanato: section 4, note 34, and Congresso em Foco, 7 Oct. 2024. Ribeiro and Oliveira (2024) comment, with regard to the 2024 municipal election, on Adrilles Jorge’s performance below what his follower base would lead one to expect, in contrast with Pavanato’s. On 2010, Congresso em Foco, “Apenas cinco ‘famosos’ elegem-se na Câmara”, 4 Oct. 2010: Romário, Tiririca, Danrlei, Stepan Nercessian, and Jean Wyllys.

87 Manin, pp. 210–211; van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, p. 130.

88 Habermas, §22, p. 247; Manin, p. 219.

89 Street (2004); Manin, p. 221; Postman, ch. 9 (the author’s father and the anecdote of Big Tim Sullivan, of Tammany Hall); Manin, p. 238: “Election inevitably selects elites, but it is for ordinary citizens to define what constitutes an elite and who belongs to it”. Bauman, *Vida para consumo*, trans. Carlos Alberto Medeiros (Zahar, 2008), ch. 4 (“Collateral casualties of consumerism”), citing Furedi, recalls that the consumerist critique of representative democracy is “fundamentally anti-democratic”; the warning holds against elitist criteria of aptitude.

90 Manin, p. 160: “freedom of choice is not secured if the specific content of the superiority is determined solely by external factors and circumstances. The distinctive traits of those who are elected ought, as far as possible, to result from a conscious and deliberate choice of the electorate”. Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, p. 146, add that “selection mechanisms are [not] intrinsically faulty”, which rules out any inference of incapacity from digital success.

91 Ribeiro and Oliveira, “Popularidade digital e sucesso eleitoral”, *Boletim de Políticas Públicas/OIPP*, n. 43 (Sept.–Oct. 2024): R^2 of 0.15, 0.14, and 0.18 for followers and of 0.05, 0.04, and 0.12 for spending, in São Paulo, Rio de

Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte, among the hundred most voted city council candidates of each city in 2024. The reading is ours, and the sample, restricted to the most voted, does not allow causal inference. Manin, p. 144: the diffusion of information about candidates “favors those able to mobilize greater resources”; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, p. 44, on purchasable metrics; for Brazil, Braga and Carlomagno, “Eleições como de costume?”, *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política*, 26 (2018), pp. 7–62, find, across the campaigns from 1998 to 2016, that “actors with more resources (both individual candidates and political parties) have a decisive competitive advantage in the contest for the vote on the internet” (p. 41).

92 Manin, p. 146.

93 Habermas, §18, p. 202; Han, *Infocracia*, chapter “Infocracia”; van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, p. 63, on users who appropriate and contest Facebook’s protocols.

94 Todorov et al. (2005); Tsfati et al. (2022).

95 Manin, p. 146. The hypothesis of this opening does not assert that voters cease to learn; it asserts that learning depends on evidence capable of contradicting the presumption being available and considered, and that the presentation of the mandate in the forms that sustained the candidacy may reduce the availability or the weight of such evidence.

96 Manin, p. 160.

97 Habermas, §23, p. 270: the contest between critical publicity and “that publicity which is organized solely for manipulative ends”, whose scale “indicates the degree of democratization”; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, ch. 7, on the governance of selection mechanisms. On the 1990 revision, section 3, note 20.