

Brazil's Digital Resistance Against Corruption

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Abstract

From 2008 to 2010, 3.6 million Brazilians took part in the “Ficha Limpa” movement to impact political corruption by ensuring that anyone who runs for office has a “clean record.” This case study on the combination of a grassroots social movement paired with the Avaaz global web movement’s use of social media holds important lessons for civil society. Nonviolent “digital resistance” in Brazil shifted power relations and translated into real-world actions and outcomes.²

1. Background

Brazil’s once booming economy fell into a deep recession in 2014, and the country has been plagued by inequality and corruption. Political malfeasance has been endemic, and cynicism abounds—so much so that there is a common expression in the country, “Rouba, mas faz” (He steals, but he gets things done).³ Poverty and graft long interacted in the political process, as politicians convicted of crimes used vote buying to get elected.⁴ Yet in 2010, the Ficha Limpa movement wielded people power to root out graft, abuse, and lack of accountability in the electoral system, and to restore legitimacy to Brazil’s hard-won democracy.

¹ The views expressed in this policy brief are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of any entity to which the author has been or is currently affiliated.

² This policy brief is adapted from a chapter in *Curtailling Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice*, by Shaazka Beyerle. Copyright © 2014 by Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. Used with permission of the publisher. It was qualitative research supported by the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) and the United States Institute of Peace. This entailed extensive interviews with civic leaders, including Graziela Tanaka, then a Brazil-based Avaaz campaigner.

³ Franco, Luiza Mello. (2010). “Brazil’s Ficha Limpa (Clean Record) Legislation: Will It Run Over Corruption or Will It Run Out of Steam?” Council on Hemispheric Affairs, July 19. P. 1.

⁴ Gunther, Janet. (2010) “Brazil: A Clean Slate?” Catholic Aid for Overseas Development (CAFOD) blog. March 24. <http://blog.cafod.org.uk>.

2. The Beginning of the Ficha Limpa Movement

Previous attempts to pass political reform bills failed in the Brazilian Congress. But in April 2008, forty-four civil society organizations (CSOs) joined together in a nonpartisan coalition called the Movement to Combat Against Electoral Corruption (MCCE). It included the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB); grassroots organizations linked to the Catholic Church; unions; the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB); other professional groups—for example, nursing, accounting, and biology organizations; and the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission (CBJP). Their objective was simple yet sweeping: to prevent individuals with criminal backgrounds from running for elected office at all levels of government.⁵

Marcus Faver, a judge who in the past had tried to hinder candidates with criminal records from seeking public office, proposed using a legal instrument in the 1988 Constitution—the Popular Initiative (Article 61, Paragraph 2), which allows citizens to submit bills to Congress.⁶ Strict conditions for eligibility apply: the collection of handwritten, documented signatures from a minimum of one percent of the electorate from no fewer than five different states, in which the number of signatures from each state totals at least 0.3 percent of the constituents.⁷ Only then can the legislation be submitted to the Congress, where it is reviewed by relevant committees and must pass in both the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

Finally, should these hurdles be cleared, the law is presented to the president, who can either accept it or veto it. The MCCE's vision was twofold: to clean up Brazilian politics and to change cultural attitudes about corruption and vote buying, by directly involving the population in the solution.⁸ The movement was launched with the slogan, "A vote has no price, it has consequences" (*Voto nao tem preco, tem consequencias*).⁹ Candidates would be rendered ineligible to take office if they had been convicted of the following crimes by more than one judge: misuse of public funds, drug trafficking, rape, murder, or racism. Furthermore, the penalty for politicians accused of such wrongdoing was toughened; they would be barred from public office for eight years. Finally, the legislation was designed to prevent politicians from using constitutional loopholes such as preemptive resignation to avoid prosecution and run again.¹⁰

The movement's name, Ficha Limpa, means "clean slate or clean record." Through the MCCE's vast networks of CSO members and the Catholic Church, including legions of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ (2010). CNBB felicita Marcus Faver por idealizar a Lei Ficha Limpa," *Colegia Permanente de Presidentes de Tribunais de Justica*, August 10. <http://www.colegiopresidentes.jus.br>.

⁷ (2010). "Brazil's Elections: One Messy Clean Slate," *The Economist*, October 3.

⁸ Mello Franco, (2010).

⁹ MCCE website, <http://www.mcce.org.br/> (Accessed on 15 November 2018)

¹⁰ Mello Franco. (2010).

volunteers, it systematically built mobilizing capacity and engaged citizens through training, grassroots meetings, dissemination of information about Ficha Limpa, debates, public lectures in churches, schools and at NGOs, and street actions.¹¹ The support of the Catholic Church proved to be vital. Its social authority was a counterweight to the institutional authority of the Congress, and its reach extended throughout the country, particularly in rural and more remote areas. Online technologies were also used extensively to communicate, debate, and exchange information.¹² As importantly, the MCCE cultivated allies within the Congress—politicians supportive of Ficha Limpa who would later prove to be instrumental eyes and ears for a digital resistance campaign.¹³ In less than one and a half years, the MCCE surpassed the required 1.3 million signatures. On September 29, 2009, the Ficha Limpa bill, together with 1,604,794 handwritten signatures, was submitted to the Congress. The movement made history, and the first victory was won.

3. Avaaz, Digital Resistance, and a Flying Cow

The MCCE's leaders understood that without massive civic mobilization, it was unlikely that Ficha Limpa would ever be passed. Opposition to it was fierce; once enacted, the bill would disqualify close to one-third of the entire Congress from serving. Legislators could also try to weaken it and use a myriad of stalling techniques to indirectly quash it, such as keeping the bill under review in committees for years. One politician commented, "It is easier for a cow to fly than this initiative to get approved in Brazil" (*É mais fácil uma vaca voar do que esse projeto ser aprovado no Brasil*).¹⁴

The MCCE had already been in contact with Avaaz, a worldwide digital movement with the goal of bringing "people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere."¹⁵ Now, at this critical juncture, the groups decided to join forces. According to Graziela Tanaka—at the time an Avaaz campaigner based in Brazil—Ficha Limpa was an ideal anticorruption initiative. "It had a clear goal, clear input, it was easy to cut to the issue, and was something bold that people would want to join."

4. Three Avaaz Strategies

Facing an uphill battle with the Congress, Avaaz identified three strategies for its overall campaign. In order to create political will for the legislation to be passed, it had to turn Ficha Limpa into an issue that no one could dare oppose. Their approach was to use sustained, overwhelming public pressure on the one hand and positive media attention on the other, which in turn would also generate pressure. Second, building support—genuine or pragmatic—from within the Congress during the legislative process was also essential, in order to overcome efforts to thwart and delay the bill's passage. "When

¹¹ "The Ficha Limpa in Brazil." Active Citizens, Accountable Governments: Civil Society Experiences from the Latin America Partnerships Programme Arrangement, UKAid, p. 9.

¹² Rosa, Jovita Jose. (2010) "Interview: Popular Participation in Brazilian Politics," Poder Legislar, October.

¹³ Bressan Muhlbeier, Debora. (2010). Ficha Limpa: Politicians in Brazil Must Have Clean Criminal Records," Infosurhoy, June 22.

¹⁴ "Ficha Limpa," (2010). Poder Legislar.

¹⁵ See Avaaz website "About Us" at <http://www.avaaz.org>.

thinking of campaign strategy, you need to think of how there's a two-way benefit for people in power," said Tanaka.

The upcoming October 2010 general elections became the vehicle for this interchange. Once the campaign began to reach a critical mass and go viral, backing for the bill grew as politicians grasped the political advantages of coming out in favour of it even before a vote.

Finally, Avaaz sought to reinforce the movement's discourse and legitimacy that the MCCE had cultivated: the struggle was led and owned by regular citizens, who—initially through the documented, handwritten signatures, and now through mass digital and nondigital actions—were demanding that their elected representatives uphold Brazilian democracy by carrying out the people's will.

5. Recruitment

Avaaz campaigner Tanaka credits the MCCE with having done the hard part—building a national civic alliance, activating people on the ground, developing relationships with honest politicians and other powerholders, and cultivating the media. When Avaaz joined the struggle, citizens had already reached the point of wanting to participate. Avaaz's strategy was to tap and multiply this people power by adapting to the Brazilian context its online model of recruitment and mobilization. This consisted of sending out regular alerts with specific calls for action and asking recipients to spread the alerts throughout their social networks—via Twitter, Facebook, Orkut (another social networking site), and “old-fashioned email”—to the extent that sharing becomes exponential and seemingly takes on a life of its own. That is, it goes viral. “It's the power of people spreading and owning the campaign,” Tanaka explained.

At the outset of the campaign Avaaz had 130,000 members in Brazil. By April 2010 this number had grown to 650,000 and then climbed to 700,000, most of whom were multipliers, circulating Avaaz alerts to their social networks. While not all were equally active, Avaaz has found that the longer a person stays on the alert list, the more active that person becomes. Tanaka reports that they had no challenges maintaining member interest in Ficha Limpa and, more generally, in corruption. “People were disillusioned with the political system and because the same politicians always had power.” It was seen as another form of *coronelismo*, a term referring to big land owners associated with rural elite dominance and vote buying. “People wanted to see corrupt politicians out of elections,” she added.

6. “Sign to End Corruption”

Avaaz sought to build people power momentum to push the Ficha Limpa bill through the entire legislative process, all the way to a final vote in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, ratification by the president, and a Supreme Court vote over the constitutionality and validity of the law.

The pace of the online campaign picked up in February 2010, when the bill began winding its way through congressional committees. Building upon the MCCE's signature drive to submit the bill, Avaaz launched an online petition with the goal of obtaining two million signers, although Tanaka acknowledged that the total seemed "far off" at the outset.

The petition went viral, which Avaaz used to garner media coverage. Media interest was so great that Ficha Limpa was landing on the front pages of the biggest newspapers on a weekly basis, reported Tanaka. This, in turn, piqued public interest in the movement, the bill itself, and the legislative process—driving more and more citizens to Avaaz, which then reaped further media attention. The interplay between the online social media campaign and the news media resulted in an ever-increasing, mutually reinforcing cycle of attention and pressure. By May 3, 2010, the petition reached the 2-million mark.¹⁶

7. Mini-campaigns

From approximately February through April 2010, Tanaka coordinated one to two such rapid-response campaigns almost every week. The MCCE tracked the movement of Ficha Limpa through committees in real time, thanks to congressional allies it had cultivated over the previous two years. These legislators would inform the MCCE—day by day, sometimes even hour by hour—about what was going on, what was being said, who was opposed, who was undecided, who was supportive, and so on. In turn, the MCCE conveyed this information immediately to Avaaz, which was able to send out action alerts quickly with status updates to hundreds of thousands of members to take action, including these tactics,

- Emailing messages to specific legislators straight from the Avaaz website.
- Directly phoning the offices of targeted politicians involved in the Ficha Limpa committee, which broke new people power ground in Brazil, as literally thousands of citizens flooded offices with calls. People were asked to register their call through a live chat tool, which Avaaz used to tally numbers.
- Signing the e-petition, and tweeting and posting the alerts to Facebook and Orkut.

Through the emails and phone calls, citizens conveyed collective demands to individual lawmakers at critical junctures in the legislative process. Avaaz's time-sensitive asks were directed at committee members who did not publicly disclose their opposition but behind the scenes were using watering-down and delaying tactics. "We showed them that we had a presence online and a real presence," said Tanaka.

¹⁶ This section is based on the Avaaz alert to sign the e-petition: "Assine Para Acabar com a Corrupção/Sign to End Corruption. (2010) May 12. (Accessed on 15 November 2018 at https://secure.avaaz.org/po/brasil_ficha_limpa/)

8. Additional Tactics

In conjunction with Avaaz's campaign, the MCCE created a video on increasing social action that was used to create political awareness in civil society.¹⁷ Another tactic was the prominent use of online information feeds to generate excitement among citizens as well as media interest and coverage. This included tweets and e-petition names appearing on the Avaaz website in real time. Finally, on May 4, 2010—the day the Chamber of Deputies was scheduled to vote on Ficha Limpa—Avaaz organised a rally at the National Congress. Rich with symbolism and visuals that garnered extensive national media coverage, Avaaz submitted a complete list of the names of the two million citizens who signed the e-petition in favour of the bill. Supporters, including some politicians, engaged in street theatre, humorously cleaning the site by washing the steps with pails of water and brooms.

9. Communications and Media

The MCCE's core message, reinforced by Avaaz, was that Ficha Limpa was a Popular Initiative bill—demanded, initiated, and driven forward by the Brazilian people. What claimed media attention during the online campaign was the movement's legitimacy and numbers, and the novelty of digital resistance. After the legislation was successfully submitted to Congress, Tanaka reported that they did not receive much attention from journalists at first. "It was only when we got close to a million e-signatures and the mass calls to congressmen started that we became interesting to them." Positive media coverage surged as Ficha Limpa became one of the top-trending Twitter topics. According to Tanaka, journalists and congressional representatives later voted Ficha Limpa the most important political issue of 2010.

10. Backfire

By March, Congress started to block messages that citizens were sending from the Avaaz website tool. Avaaz shifted gears straightaway. It used alternative email addresses, switched servers, and rallied people to send messages from their own accounts. In any case, the blocks went into effect after the first thousands of emails reached the designated inbox, so many emails still made it through. The congressional move backfired; it was perceived as an affront to citizens. Rather than stymieing them, it spurred higher levels of commitment and action. Moreover, the MCCE publicised the developments to the media, gaining valuable coverage.

Campaign Attributes

11. Organization and Coordination

Avaaz defies definitions. It pioneers a new form of citizen engagement, civil resistance, and people power that transcends national borders and the virtual-physical divide. Although Avaaz is not a conventional international nongovernmental organization (INGO)

¹⁷ "The Ficha Limpa in Brazil"

or civil society organization (CSO) with fixed headquarters, it has a structure for decision making. Nor is it a regular social movement where the leadership and strategists operate out of a physical space and interactions both among core activists and with citizens occur largely in the real world. Its stated mission is to “organise citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want.” Avaaz’s overriding objective is to empower “millions of people from all walks of life to take action on pressing global, regional and national issues, from corruption and poverty to conflict and climate change.”¹⁸

Consisting of a small core team working virtually from points around the world, meeting occasionally in person at strategy and planning sessions, Avaaz is completely member-funded. Tanaka, the digital group’s only campaigner in Brazil, interacted remotely with the core leadership. For Ficha Limpa, she regularly coordinated with one of the leaders of the movement, the aforementioned Judge Reis. At the time, it was a unique partnership for Avaaz, and Tanaka believes it was effective, due in part to the good collaborative process established with the MCCE.

12. Tactical Planning and Sequencing

Digital resistance lets a movement see in real time how people react to online calls for action by their “click rate,” and how they in turn spread appeals to others. Such monitoring allows the campaign to measure public interest; quickly assess and hone strategies, tactics, and messaging; and create new actions and media outreach efforts, for example, Avaaz created an online Twitter button and focused strongly on Twitter after noticing that the petition started to go viral through it.

13. Breaking Down Barriers

The Avaaz action alerts empowered citizens to become engaged in the legislative process, all the way down to the committee level, and communicate with lawmakers by providing contact information as well as tips about what to say and how to interact with congressional staff. These exchanges started to break down the entrenched boundaries between the ruling elites and regular people. “In a way,” reflected Tanaka, “the campaign was strengthening the democratic process because Members of Congress weren’t used to getting calls from voters, and voters were not used to following the legislative process and calling and making demands of Members.”

14. Unity

The MCCE and Avaaz both strategically cultivated unity of goals and people—in their messaging and tactics. The Popular Initiative bill was, by nature, grassroots and dependent on citizens sharing Ficha Limpa’s objectives and translating support into tangible actions, first and foremost, through handwritten signatures with voter identification. Tanaka recounted that Avaaz’s action alerts always contained a movement-building message that “reinforced that people were a part of something bigger, that the campaign’s

¹⁸ See Avaaz.org.

strength depended on how far people spread the messages, and that it depended on us to keep the pressure and show Congressmen we were watching them,” she added. The live chat tool also built unity; Tanaka explained that people could share messages of encouragement as well as excitement for the campaign.

Outcomes

15. Ficha Limpa Passage

The law was ratified by a majority in the Chamber of Deputies on May 4 and unanimously in the Senate on May 19. It was subsequently approved by then-President Luis Ignacio da Silva on June 4, 2010. Soon after this people power triumph, corrupt interests launched efforts to undermine the new law, resulting in a confusing application of it for the 2010 elections and ongoing legal battles all the way to the Supreme Court by candidates who won their seats but were ruled ineligible to take office by lower electoral courts. Avaaz launched a subsequent wave of digital resistance, powered by citizens, during the Ficha Limpa vote in the Supreme Court.

On March 23, 2011, the Supreme Court issued a decision that Ficha Limpa could not be applied to the 2010 elections. Consequently, those candidates who won but were barred from taking office would now be eligible to claim their seats.¹⁹ On February 16, 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that Ficha Limpa was constitutional and would be enforced in the October municipal elections that year.²⁰

16. Cleaning Up the Corrupt

In September 2012, regional election courts banned 317 mayoral candidates from running in the municipal elections.²¹ Some politicians are reported to have stepped down due to public pressure, even before the bill was ratified. In the ensuing years it launched an electoral reform campaign and coordinated a civic initiative on “Electoral Corruption and Health” with the slogan, “Voting is Priceless. Health is your Right.”²²

17. Bottom-Up Democracy and a Civic Awakening

The Ficha Limpa movement transcended political ideologies and party politics. It united citizens from different walks of life and civic organizations, and identified linkages between graft, poverty, violence, and democracy. It also changed the way Brazilians viewed themselves, their democracy, and their capacity to make their collective voice heard. “What’s happening now is part of this new democratic process,” reflected Tanaka at that time. “People are excited that they can exercise their civic duty, that they can be

¹⁹ Mazenotti, Priscilla. (2011). “Supreme Decision Means Losers Are Now Winners in Brazilian Congress,” *Brazzil.com*. March 27.

²⁰ De Sainte Croix, Sarah. (2012) “Brazil Anti-Corruption Act Upheld,” *Rio Times*. February 17.

²¹ Jordan, Lucy. (2012), “Ficha Limpa Bans 317 Candidates in 2012,” *Rio Times*. September 11.

²² “Movement Against Electoral Corruption: Meet the Movement that Fights Corruption in Brazil.” MCCE website. (Accessed on March 21, 2019 at <http://www.mcce.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/08-Folder-MCCE-Institucional-Ingles.pdf>)

engaged with their democracy.” This shift in public consciousness—from cynicism and apathy to outrage and empowerment—is manifested in a variety of ways:

Since the 2010 Ficha Limpa movement, digital activism has been expanding to remote areas, allowing people to become part of political and social activism even when they cannot physically connect to groups. The Ficha Limpa movement changed Brazil's culture of *citizen advocacy* from a traditional reliance on civil society specialists to mass popular pressure. Just one day after the law went into effect, protests were organised in 13 cities in the southern state of Parana.²³ In addition to organised civic action to fight corruption, regular people began taking their own initiative. “People now want things to do,” observed Tanaka. They use Facebook and Twitter for political purposes—to post their reactions to political events and developments, to find out about campaigns and actions, and to link up over shared concerns. For instance, Mapa Colaborativo da Corrupcao do Brasil, an online, interactive, open-access corruption map, was created after the legislation's passage by Rachel Diniz, a journalist and filmmaker.

Rather than peter out, people power pressure continued over massive corruption involving politicians and political parties across the political spectrum in the transnational “Lava Jato” (Car Wash) scandal that began in 2015 and is still unfolding as this brief goes to print.²⁴ Meanwhile, for over a year, Avaaz combined digital resistance and on-the-ground nonviolent action to campaign for electoral reform. In September 2015, the Brazilian Supreme Court banned corporate donations to political parties and candidates in future elections.²⁵ In 2016 Avaaz set its sights on Eduardo Cunha, the Lower House speaker of the Brazilian Congress implicated in the Lava Jato scandal.²⁶ Through social media, over 1.3 million citizens wielded digital pressure on the national Ethics Committee to remove him, and inundated wavering members with mass calls and messages.²⁷ He was expelled, barred from running for office for eight years, and shortly thereafter, arrested.²⁸

By 2015, however, this cohesion began to erode. The Lava Jato investigations initially uncovered colossal corruption involving Petrobras, the state-owned oil company, and the ruling Workers Party. While public distrust of the overall political system was widespread, wrath was initially directed towards then-President Dilma Rousseff and former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in a wave of demonstrations. On March 3, 2016, an estimated 3.5

²³ Panth, Sabina. (2011) “The Ficha Limpa (Clean Record) Campaign.” People, Spaces, Deliberation, World Bank, May 9. (Accessed on March 22, 2019 at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/ficha-limpa-clean-record-campaign>)

²⁴ For additional information, see: Watts, Jonathan. (2017) “Operation Car Wash: Is this the biggest corruption scandal in history?” *The Guardian*. June 1. (Accessed on 22 March 2019 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/01/brazil-operation-car-wash-is-this-the-biggest-corruption-scandal-in-history>)

²⁵ Mercopress. (2015) “Brazil Justices ban corporate contributions to political campaigns and parties.” September 21. (Accessed on March 22, 2019 at <https://en.mercopress.com/2015/09/21/brazil-justices-ban-corporate-contributions-to-political-campaigns-and-parties>)

²⁶ “Our Victories.” Avaaz (Accessed on March 21, 2019 at <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/en/highlights/>)

²⁷ Marcello, Maria Carolina. (2016). “Brazilian House Speaker assets frozen, future in doubt.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 15. (Assessed on 22 March 2019 at <https://www.smh.com.au/world/brazilian-house-speaker-eduardo-cunhas-assets-frozen-future-in-doubt-20160615-gpjhr1.html>)

²⁸ Sandy, Matt. (2016). “Brazilian politician who led Rousseff impeachment arrested on corruption charges.” *The Guardian*, October 19. (Accessed on 22 March 2019 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/19/eduardo-cunha-arrested-corruption-charges-brazil>)

million citizens mobilised around the country.²⁹ In spite of prosecutions of powerholders across the political spectrum, starting with the aforementioned Cunha, the anti-corruption struggle became identified with the political right. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing legislator, was elected president of Brazil. Many analysts implicated social media platforms in his surprising meteoric rise.³⁰ In 2019, Bolsonaro argued that Ficha Limpa laws apply to lower level elections in Brazil, indicating that right wing political leaders view public outrage on corruption and the Ficha Limpa laws as key to public support.³¹

Policy Recommendations

The Ficha Limpa case illuminates four lessons about people power. These translate into policy recommendations for civil society.

Successful digital resistance involves the same people power dynamics as on-the-ground civil resistance. Whether civil resistance takes place in the digital or real-world realms, the elements of success are the same: shared grievances; unity of goals and people; collective ownership of the campaign or movement; skills, strategies, and planning; tactical creativity, diversity, and strategic sequencing; effective communications and messaging; and a strict commitment to nonviolent methods.

Recognise that digital resistance offers economies of scale. While this alone is not a determinant of success, it can provide a strategic advantage under some circumstances and at critical points in a struggle. “Instead of going to meetings and planning rallies, in two hours we can send an email to 200,000 which can spread,” noted Tanaka.

Plan for a diverse set of nonviolent tactics, both online and offline. Digital actions expand the repertoire of nonviolent tactics but are not inherently superior or more effective than on-the-ground actions, and vice versa. What is essential in nonviolent action is strategically choosing and sequencing a range of tactics that can mobilise people and wield power, either online or offline. As social media is not static, nonviolent action organisers need to continuously assess their particular “digital context” and keep abreast of new technologies. This involves adapting to the latest devices and social platforms, as well as creating tactics through them.

Institutionalise accountability to address political corruption. Ficha Limpa brings a new strategy to address political corruption. Rather than pressure political parties to drop corrupt candidates or inform voters about them during elections, both of which require recurrent civic campaigns, a legal mechanism was created to institutionalise exclusion

²⁹ Watts, Jonathan. (2016). “More than a million Brazilians protest against ‘horror government’” *The Guardian*, March 3. (Accessed on 22 March 2019 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/13/brazil-anti-government-protests-dilma-rousseff-rio-de-janeiro>)

³⁰ Nalon, Tai. (2019) “Did WhatsApp help Bolsonaro win the Brazilian presidency?” *Washington Post*. November 1, 2018. Accessed on April 2, 2019 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-worldpost/wp/2018/11/01/whatsapp-2/?utm_term=.79342d1ef3a2

³¹ Costa, Fabiano and Marcelo Parreira. (2019) “Bolsonaro decides to apply for Clean Sheet even for commissioners who entered previous governments” *Globo News*. March 21, 2019. Accessed on April 1, 2019 at <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/03/21/bolsonaro-decide-aplicar-ficha-limpa-ate-para-comissionados-que-entraram-em-governos-anteriores.ghtml>

from the political process—hence, to gain accountability for malfeasance. One could argue that Ficha Limpa cannot prevent all corruptors from seeking public office. Some have not been caught and tried by more than one judge, or they can get associates to run in their place. However, it fundamentally disrupts the corrupt status quo, creates incentives for integrity, supports—and, one could argue, even rewards—honest politicians, and tackles impunity without having to directly target each and every corruptor. On the demand side, such legislation can also impact voter behaviour. A survey conducted by *FGV Direito-Rio* a week after the October 2010 presidential elections found that 73 percent of people in the 1300 sample reported taking Ficha Limpa into consideration when selecting a candidate.³²

Strive to reach tipping points. Just as the MCCE gained numbers and strength through the networks of the forty-four civic organisations in the coalition, Avaaz's ever-growing number of online Brazilian members tapped into their own social networks to involve others. The difference was in magnitude. "The effectiveness of online campaigning is that you can reach a scale where you are not interacting with individuals but with hundreds of thousands of people who don't expect personal interaction but are ready to act upon receiving alerts," explained Tanaka. At the moment when enough citizens say "this is enough," digital resistance can provide an alternative recruitment method that quickly channels people's anger toward mitigating the injustice and oppression via tangible objectives and demands, and it can tap into their desire to act through multiple online and real-world nonviolent tactics. Avaaz tries to identify "tipping point moments" in struggles, when powerholders are faced with a monumental choice and "a massive public outcry can suddenly make all the difference." It sees these instances as briefly open windows of both crisis and strategic opportunity, as "crucial decisions go one way or another depending on leaders' perceptions of the political consequences of each option."³³

Identify a "good ask." For Avaaz, tipping points go hand-in-hand with a "good ask," a demand that Tanaka characterised as "ambitious and inspiring enough for people to take action." A good ask has the dual strategic function of encapsulating tangible requests for powerholders while appealing to or resonating with citizens. Online rapid-response alerts issued at key junctures convey a sense of urgency that enhance unity, ownership in the struggle, and excitement to be involved.

Move from Mini Campaigns to Going Viral. The Ficha Limpa movement—on the ground and online—demonstrated how thousands of individual actions, even of a modest nature, can be combined into a powerful collective force. Through digital technology, the process of civil resistance can be broken down into rapid-response mini campaigns,

³² Pereira, Carlos and Matthew Taylor. (2010). "Clean Slate Law: Raising Accountability in Brazil." Brookings. December 22. (Accessed on 22 March 2019 at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/clean-slate-law-raising-accountability-in-brazil/>)

³³ "The Avaaz Way: How we work" (Accessed on 15 November 2018 at <https://secure.avaaz.org/en>)

sometimes on a daily basis. These smaller civic initiatives can quickly create a sense of momentum among citizens, provide positive reinforcement for taking action, and produce modest, incremental victories.

Build Partnerships. Avaaz strategically assessed both its own and the MCCE's strengths and limitations. Each brought what the other generally lacked: Avaaz had a track record of rapid response and scaling-up mobilization, while the MCCE excelled in winning allies from within the corrupt system, intelligence gathering, grassroots organizing and action, and media outreach and communications.

Think Beyond the Online-Offline Dichotomy. Avaaz's Ficha Limpa campaign demonstrates that the debates about digital versus real-world activism tend to be framed through absolute questions; for example, "Do social media make protests possible?" or "Have the new tools of social media reinvented social activism?" or "Do social media lead to democracy?" Such queries are based on a faulty assumption—that there are direct, linear relationships between the realm of struggle (digital) and tools (such as social media) on the one hand, and outcomes (democracy, freedom, accountability, justice) on the other hand. In the field of civil resistance, the overwhelming conclusion among scholars and activists is that there is no formula or consistent matching up of objectives, strategies, tactics, and outcomes. A more fruitful line of inquiry involves the examination of power relations, strategies, tactical choices, and people power dynamics in the digital sphere.

The boundaries between the online and offline worlds are blurring. As the Ficha Limpa movement demonstrated, on-the-ground and online civil resistance share the same grievances, objectives, and demands, while creating synergies. Moreover, tactics can no longer be neatly categorised as digital versus real-world; they can actually combine both realms.

The Author

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