

Discussion of
When Democracies Refuse to Die
Evaluating a Training Program for New Politicians

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Very interesting project at the core of democratic backsliding

Study the role of screening, and training on electoral outcomes in a critical juncture

Questions

- ▶ What are the electoral effects of a *screening* and *training* program for new politicians?
- ▶ Does it affect competence and representation?

This paper

- ▶ Focus on: **RenovaBR** version for local elections in 2019
- ▶ Context: *Brazil* council elections of 2020

Punchline

⇒ *Screening + Training*

1. ↑ the likelihood of candidacy
2. Conditional on being able to run → trained politicians receive ↑ votes
3. Conditional on being able to run → *no effects* on winning
4. Differences in competence and representation only through *screening*
5. Variance decomposition: Screening >> Training

Many things to like about this paper

Assessment and Contributions

▶ Novel data

- Individual-level data on performance and ideology during screening by judges

▶ Theory

- Modeling of **observed** and potentially **unobserved** drivers of program selection

▶ Contribution

- ▶ Expands recent work on politician selection & incentives in other countries
 - Pro-social motives or “the call-to-serve” in Pakistan (Gulzar & Khan, 2024)
 - Role of party leaders in the selection in Sierra Leone (Casey, Kamara, & Meriggi, 2021)
- ▶ Importance of **screening** and **training** in candidate selection by “civil society”

▶ Key differences in contrast to RCT studies

1. No pure control group → **within analysis** of self-selected citizens who wanted the training
2. Yet, propose a new **model of selection** and a **variance decomposition analysis**
3. A well-intended and top-notch training program (in principle, a bottom-up approach)

A well-intended and top-notch training program



Claudio Ferraz
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Gravei hoje uma aula para candidatas e candidatos do [@RenovaBR](#) a cargos de vereador e prefeito em 2020 sobre a importância de políticas públicas baseadas em evidência. Por um Brasil onde a discussão de políticas públicas tenha mais conteúdo e menos achismos e ideologia [@JPAL_LAC](#)

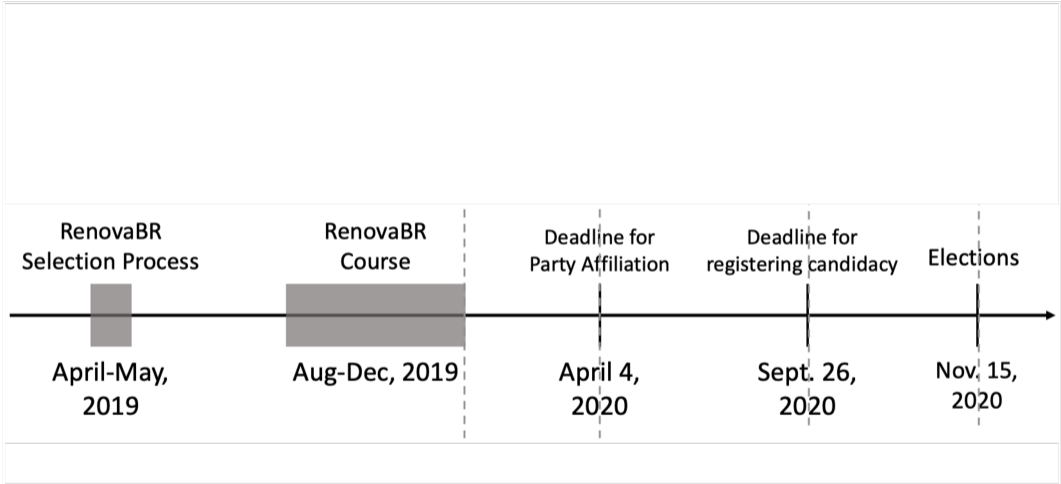
Translated from Portuguese by [Google](#)

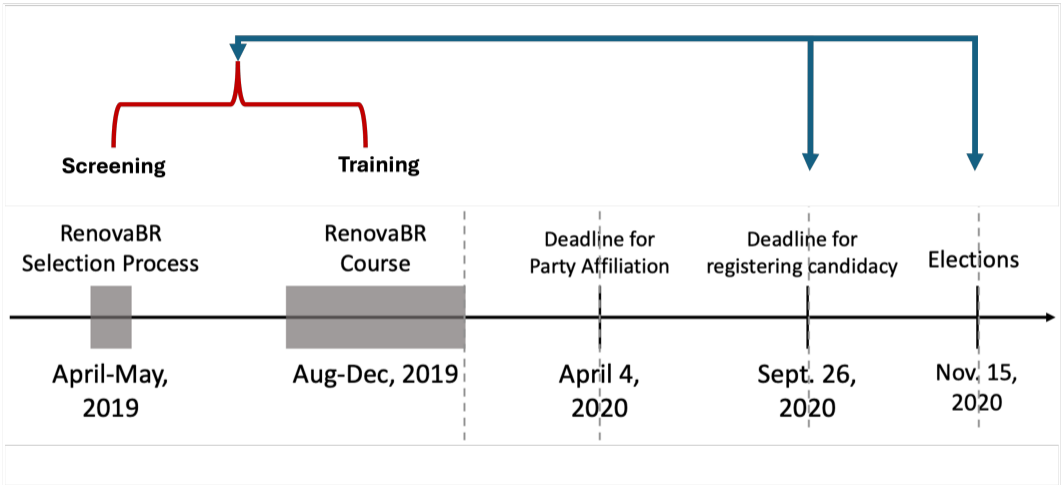
Today I recorded a class for [@RenovaBR](#) candidates running for city council and mayor in 2020 about the importance of evidence-based public policies. For a Brazil where the discussion of public policies has more content and less guesswork and ideology [@JPAL_LAC](#)

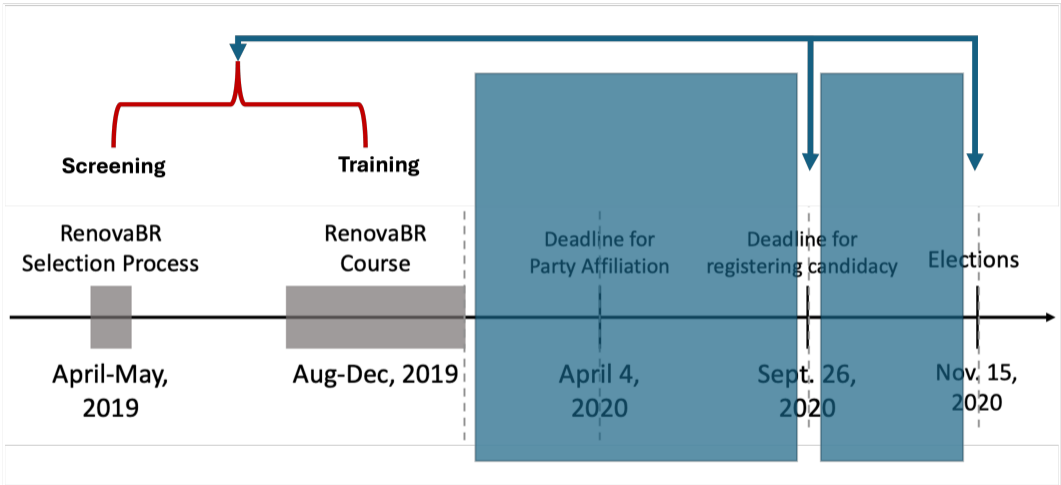


It made me reflect on three sets of questions and potential extensions

1. Role of political parties
2. RenovaBR as a bundled treatment and the importance of networks
3. Capture: Broader implications of this type of program and scale-up

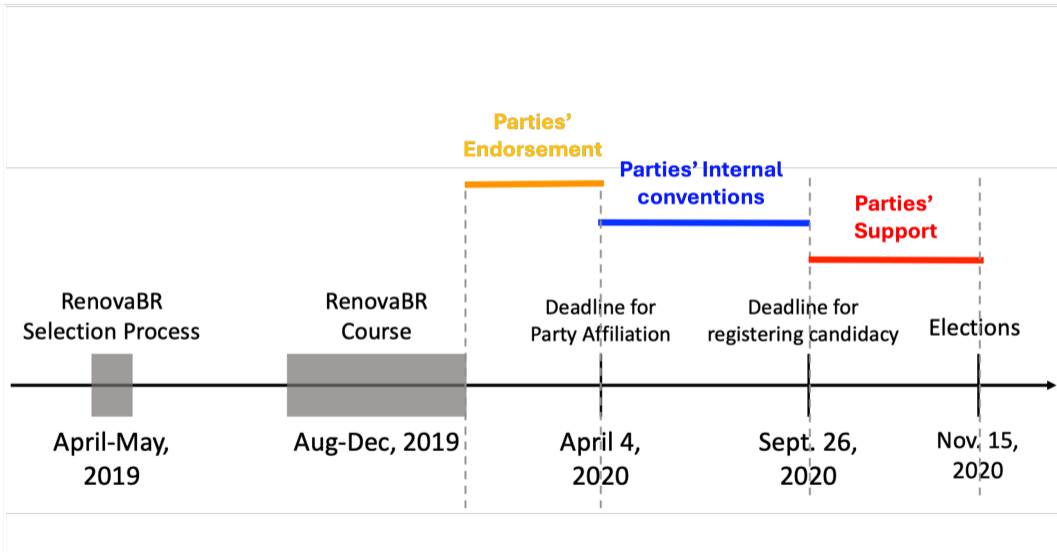






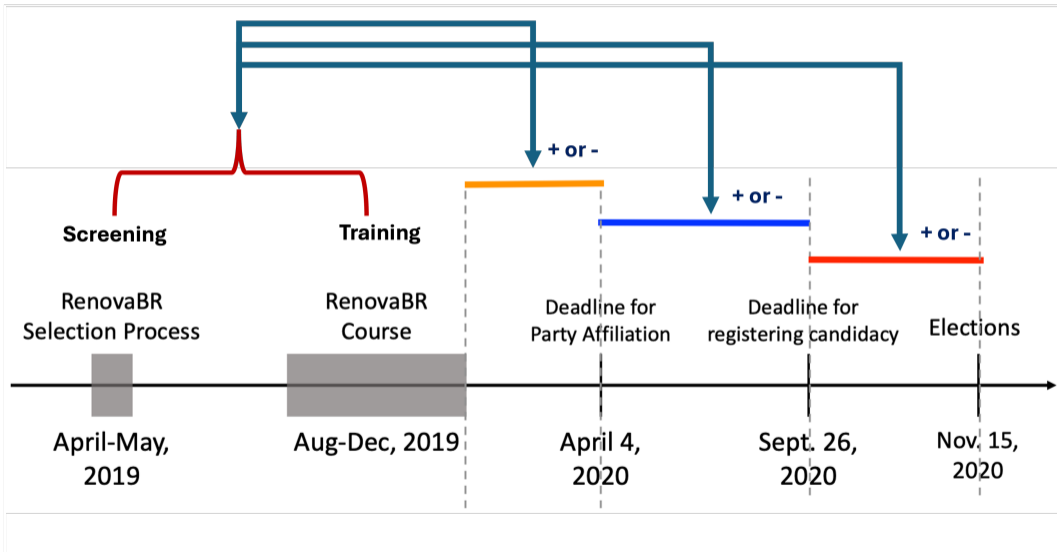
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Model & empirics implicitly assume participants can decide on candidacy unilaterally, but

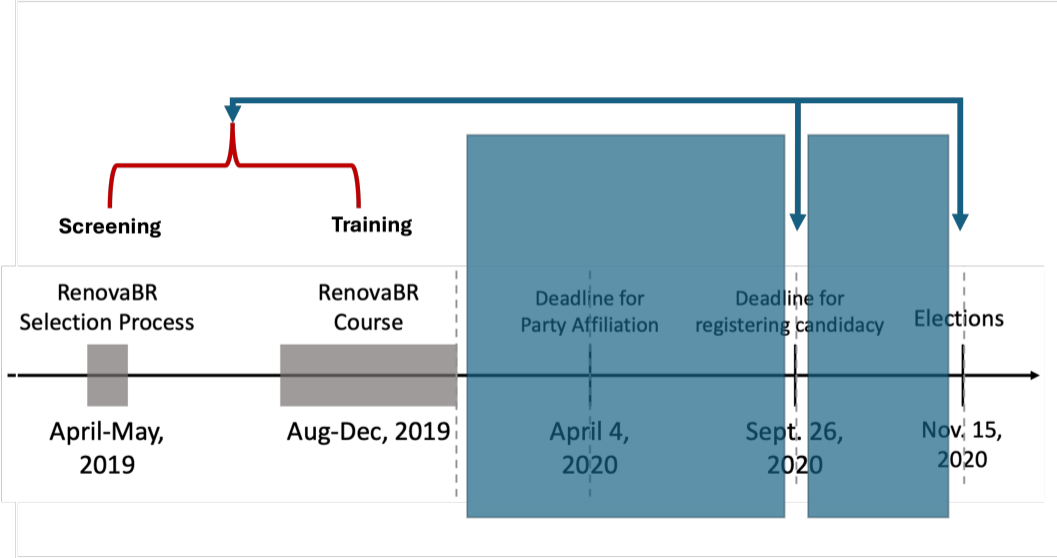
1. All candidates have first to be endorsed by an established party (no independents)
 - ▶ This has to happen at least 6 months before the election
2. Conditional on being party affiliated, parties chose from their rank-and-file
 - ▶ , e.g., party conventions + each party can only nominate up to 1.5 times the available seats
3. Conditional on being able to run, decide who to support more during the campaigns
 - ▶ Even within the party, the allocation of resources depends on perceived prospects

RenovaBR may have affected these steps (+/-)

- ▶ **Concern:** Treatment relates to obs and unobservables also considered by parties
- ▶ May be responsible for the muted effects on winning, competence, and representation?
- ▶ **Suggestion:** Retrospective data on how they were further screened + model parties

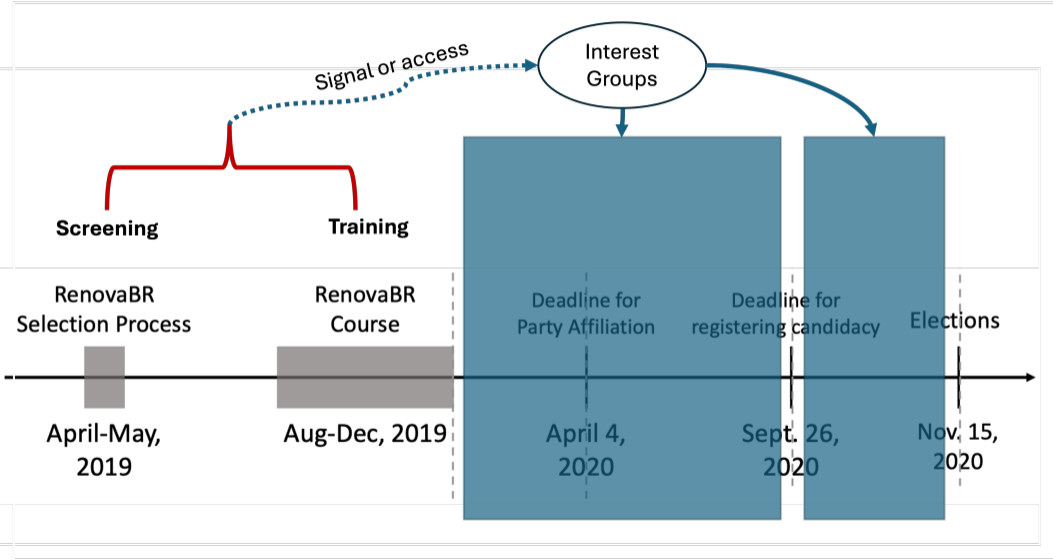
2. Is it only screening and training?

RenovaBR is a mixture of screening, training, access to influence networks, and spillover effects



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To interpret the results and their implications, it is important to realize that beyond training:

1. RenovaBR provided access to influence networks (specific donors who backed RenovaBR, contacts, media influence, etc.)
 - ▶ Influence networks also have a margin of screening and support
 - ▶ Even if positively selected, a concern if parties reversed the positive selection precisely because of that
 - ▶ A problem, too, if such influence implies backing up specific ideologies
2. Furthermore, it might have had spillover effects
 - ▶ So it is hard to assume (as in the model and the empirical strategy) that they didn't affect the never-trained (e.g., efforts of the not-chosen)
 - ▶ Positive too: Networks of alumni (if running for the same election, effects might have to be canceled out?)

3. What about capture? Scale-up and broader implications

Who funds RenovaBR? Who funds candidates? What about the expected influence of money in politics?

1. Can we extend the insights and lessons beyond councils? Brazil?
2. Challenge anywhere: Scaling while ensuring diverse representation and independence
 - ▶ Risk of RenovaBR influencing political agendas as it scales
 - ▶ Potential vulnerability to interests of private funders
 - ▶ Raises questions on maintaining democratic integrity as it scales

RenovaBR: The Privatisation of Brazilian Politics

By Rejane Carolina Hoeveler August 31, 2020



*Launched in October 2017, “**leadership training and civic engagement initiative**” RenovaBR claims to be a response to endemic corruption in politics. Through the “selection and preparation of future leaders”, the neoliberal organisation, backed by a familiar alliance of Wall Street lobbies and Brazilian business elites, seeks to dominate Brazilian political decision making using candidates spread across many different parties.*

It is in effect a bid for control of a post-Bolsonaro scenario by the same economic interests which helped bring him to power...

RenovaBR's legality questioned in Parliament

As RenovaBR captured business donations and passed them on to potential candidates, it violated electoral legislation.

When this was [exposed in the media](#), RenovaBR was questioned in Parliament. Congressman Jorge Solla (PT-BA) tried to suspend the so-called “Civic Fund for the Renewal of Politics”, asking the then Attorney General of the Republic, Raquel Dodge, for an investigation into RenovaBR. The PT deputy’s argument was that there was “strong evidence that the business group led by large entrepreneurs intends to organize, via a legal entity – a ‘Civic Fund’, to circumvent the Law”.

According to a [report](#) by Istoé, in addition to Mufarej, this group’s coordinators or investors included figures such as publicist Nizan Guanaes, former Central Bank president Arminio Fraga, and businessman Abílio Diniz. [According to the article](#), the group’s intention would be to try to elect 70 to 100 federal deputies at the 2018 elections.

RenovaBR: the 147 young people elected at the service of the elites in 2020

Group defends the "political renewal". In practice, it only ensures that the interests of its financiers are met.

The case in which the pedetista Tabata Amaral, a rare elected Renova student who presents herself as a progressive, opposed the PDT and voted in favor of Bolsonaro's social security reform became known. Tabata disrespected a decision of the party's national convention, in which she was present and did not pronounce. Two deputies formed by Renova affiliated to the Novo party even visited the fascist president to offer full support in the approval of the reform, which was even **celebrated by Mufarej**. The Novo party, Renova's darling, **is one of the most faithful to bolsionarism** in the House votes, having joined the government 93% of the time.

There are other groups in the same molds as Renova such as Agora and Acredito, which are also supported by Huck and Mufarej. They were created in the wake of the wave of denial of politics and the crisis of party representation. **Ciro Gomes calls them** "clandestine parties", created to "circvent the ban on business financing".

█ Movements like this are nothing more than a way to ensure that the interests of their financiers are met'.



In fact, being a Renova student opens doors to electoral collection. Its members now have easier access to this circle of millionaires willing to invest in political campaigns. Tabata Amaral, for example, admits that being from Renova "is a seal of quality". **About 20% of** the total raised by his campaign in 2018 were donated by entrepreneurs at dinners. Most of these dinners were promoted by supporters of the group.

To be approved by Renova, the student must pass the "democracy test", created to identify authoritarian tendencies and bar extremists, whether left or right. In practice, the theory is different. The group approved, in 2018 and 2019, the participation of PSL affiliates - the party that embraced bolsionarism and helped put in power a declared project of degradation of democracy. When Bolsonaro was elected, Mufarej was quoted to be Minister of Education. It was the favorite name of Paulo Guedes, with whom he had already had business.

Conclusion

- ▶ Stimulating and thought-provoking project
- ▶ Great balance between theory and empirics
- ▶ Potential to be THE empirical contribution to our understanding of training programs and selection process for new politicians in LMICs
- ▶ Yet, I believe there is still much to explore in the pipeline up to "election day"
 1. Selection by parties
 2. Selection by other interest groups (lobbyists, media outlets)
- ▶ Implications for repeated versions of programs like this?
 - ▶ How can the system avoid being captured by the same parties and networks of influence?

Thanks!

Miscellaneous

- ▶ The model and the current version of the paper and slides are about reducing entry costs, but nothing in the empirical analysis speaks directly to that.
- ▶ Heterogeneity in individual effort (effect in benefits, not in costs) might be the driver, would be consistent with the documented results
- ▶ It's hard to claim identification of the selection margin without downstream outcomes of the never-elected and never-trained (passed over).

4.3 Treatment

We consider treatment to have two different effects. The first one consists in treatment shifting down the distribution of C , leaving the marginal for \mathbf{X} unaffected. Define $G_{C|\mathbf{X}}^{S,T}(\mathbf{x}|c) \equiv \int_{-\infty}^c g^{S,T}(y|\mathbf{x}) dy$ as the conditional probability of a C realization below c when qualities take the value \mathbf{x} . Since costs are a negative, we take stochastic dominance to mean lower values. Our assumption then is,

Assumption 2. Treatment lowers the cost of running For every possible value of \mathbf{X} , the conditional distribution of C for the treated first-order stochastically dominates the distribution for the controls. More formally, treatment implies $G_{C|\mathbf{X}}^{S,1}(\mathbf{x}|c) > G_{C|\mathbf{X}}^{S,0}(\mathbf{x}|c) \forall (\mathbf{x}|c) \in \chi \times \mathbf{R}$, and $G_{\mathbf{X}}^{S,1}(\mathbf{x}) = G_{\mathbf{X}}^{S,0}(\mathbf{x}) \forall \mathbf{x} \in \chi$.

The second treatment effect we consider is,

Assumption 3. Treatment increases electability Formally, $P(\mathbf{X}, T = 1) > P(\mathbf{X}, T = 0)$.

- ▶ Model assumptions?