

Election apps bring smartphone democracy to Brazil

September 25 2014, by Javier Tovar

Have you ever wanted to pelt a politician with a tomato? Or wished for that perfect candidate to come along and sweep you off your feet?

In Brazil, where the explosion of smartphones is putting a new twist on next month's elections, there's an app for that.

Mass Internet access is reshaping the campaign for the presidential, congressional and state polls in Brazil, where more than 100 million people—half the population—are now online.

Smartphone sales rose 47 percent in the first half of the year, according to a market survey by research firm Nielsen-Ibope, and 30 percent of Brazilians now own the devices.

And while good old-fashioned rallies and posters are still the main campaign tools, a host of new mobile applications is changing the way voters get news, pick [candidates](#) and talk politics.

One popular election app is "Voto vs Veto," a program inspired by popular dating app Tinder that aims to help users find the right [presidential candidate](#).

The program presents users with candidates' campaign pledges—with no name attached—and asks them to "vote for" or "veto" them.

After the user clicks on one of the two buttons, the candidate's name

appears. With enough clicks, users are supposed to find their political soulmates.

The app is programmed with the official platforms of all 11 presidential candidates and provides statistics on how many times each statement has been voted for or against.

It has been downloaded by 100,000 people.

It was developed by computer science student Walter Nogueira, who said he expects more apps like it in future.

"Mobile apps related to politics are still in their infancy in Brazil," he told AFP. "But they're growing."

Getting the dirt

Another popular application called "Dirty Slate" tells users which candidates have criminal records—helpful information for voters in this country weary of corruption scandals.

Its name is a play on the so-called "Clean Slate" law passed in the run-up to the October 5 polls, which has blocked 250 would-be candidates from running because of past corruption cases.

Another app lets users check candidates' official asset declarations. Yet another lets them throw virtual tomatoes at their faces.

Even the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal has launched an app, giving users easy access to data on all 26,156 candidates.

With so many choices, voters may need help keeping everything straight. So news portal UOL developed an app to store the ballot numbers of

users' preferred candidates, as well as delivering election news, poll numbers and politician profiles.

For voters who dream of taking a selfie with presidential contender Marina Silva, the popular environmentalist whose late entry into the race has rattled incumbent Dilma Rousseff's re-election campaign, her coalition has launched an app to Photoshop yourself into a picture alongside her.

Third-place presidential candidate Aécio Neves's Social Democratic party has also launched an [app](#) delivering campaign news and videos.

Key demographics

The mobile revolution is giving a new political voice to young voters in Brazil, where the minimum voting age is 16.

Nearly 40 percent of voters—56.3 million people—are between 16 and 34 years old.

That demographic also owns 55 percent of the country's smartphones, according to a Nielsen study sent to AFP.

But smartphone use is still mainly limited to educated and middle- or upper-class social groups—part, but not all, of the demographic that took to the streets in mass protests last year calling for better education, health and transport.

To cast a wider online net, the top candidates all have social media teams to reach the tens of millions of Brazilians who use social networks.

The sprawling South American country ranks third in the world in Facebook users (76 million) and second in the world in Twitter users (41

million).

Rousseff reactivated her abandoned Twitter account a year before the elections.

And key backer Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, her predecessor and mentor, opened his own Twitter account several days ago to lobby for Rousseff.

On Facebook, meanwhile, the three top candidates each have more than a million followers.

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