Veracity pledge or discreditation strategy? Accusations of legacy disinformation in presidential campaigns

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This study constitutes an original contribution to the understanding of how disinformation gains traction in election campaigning by dwelling on yet to be studied case of the 2016 presidential elections in Cabo Verde. Based upon the results of a qualitative analysis focused on the dynamics of legacy disinformation - that is, false or misleading information diffused by the candidates themselves - across platforms, it concludes that besides not being channel-specific, the incumbency and frontrunner status of one of the candidates can be seen as a specific driver of disinformation used to facilitate the election success.

Keywords: legacy disinformation; presidential elections; Cabo Verde; political campaigning; spin and lies.

Although disinformation has been present throughout human history, it has recently surged back into the public consciousness as an increasingly salient phenomenon worldwide and a matter of particular public concern in the wake of the alarming events of the 2016 U.S. election and Brexit (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Freelon & Wells, 2020; HLEG, 2018; Lazer et al., 2017). Coordinated manipulation campaigns by political actors became a rather widespread phenomenon in recent elections across various political regimes. Indeed, while examining cyber troop activity, Bradshaw and Howard (2018) found evidence that political actors had used computational propaganda during elections or referenda in 30 of the 48 analyzed countries, including some African countries.

This use of propaganda can nevertheless be examined in a recent but less studied and less discussed campaigning example in an African democracy. Indeed, the latest presidential elections in Cabo Verde were marked by an unprecedented level of *legacy* or prototypical disinformation, that is, false or misleading information diffused by the candidates during the routine speeches that the incumbent and challenger gave during their campaigns.

This study aims to contribute to the emerging research subfield of disinformation studies within political communication from an international perspective by focusing on the particular case of election campaigning as a key event for consolidation in democratic countries. It concludes that, against all odds, it was the incumbent and front-runner who shared the most disinformation during his campaign. Despite not facing a strong opponent and regardless of the considerable advantage an incumbent had in running for re-election, the incumbent was repeatedly accused of spinning and several selfish lies to bolster his reputation and enhance his chances of staying in the presidential post. The findings corroborate the argument that candidates should be blamed for purposefully producing and/or disseminating disinformation in the context of pre-data-driven campaigns.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the theoretical background of disinformation and formulates the research questions concerning the specifics of legacy disinformation in election campaigning. Then, the contextualization of the study case and the rationale behind the methodological choices set the stage for the empirical analysis. Following a systematic examination of the 2016 presidential election, a discussion of the findings and their implications is provided, together with suggested avenues for future research.

Disinformation in election campaigning

While not new, concerns about disinformation have recently become more widespread both within and outside academia. To a great extent, this resurge is the result of the unanticipated scale of the spread of disinformation. Indeed, there is no shortage of contemporary examples of insidious attempts to politically influence election contexts using disinformation strategies (Ong & Cabañes, 2019; Roemmele

& Gibson, 2020; see also the recent special issue of Political Communication Beyond Fake News: The Politics of Disinformation, 2020).

These examples may involve foreign-sourced disinformation. The US (2016), French (2017), and Czech presidential elections (2018) alongside the German federal elections (2016-2017) are illustrative examples of the disinformation campaigns allegedly produced or supported by Russia. A similar argument has been posited regarding key democratic referenda ranging from the high-profile Brexit vote (2016) to the vote on Catalonian secession from Spain (2017) and the repeal of Ireland's abortion ban (2018). In addition, domestically sourced disinformation has been identified in elections in Kenya (2017), the Philippines (2018), and Brazil (2018).

In short, the spread of disinformation has expanded in recent times from sporadic events in rather competitive elections to concerted campaigns employing a variety of forms and diverse communication channels simultaneously (Bayer et al., 2019; Jackson, 2018). Such a wide-ranging phenomenon occurring in both established Western democracies and some emerging global South democracies reveals the combined effect of the increasing professionalization or scientification (Harsin, 2015; Norris, 2001; Plasser & Plasser, 2002) and digitalization of election campaigning (Bayer et al., 2019).

Such disinformation disorder – to use Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) terminology – is characterized by the exploitation of the political advantages of digital campaigning within a fast-paced information ecosystem; however, the fundamentals at the heart of the disinformation enterprise in election campaigning have not changed. In essence, as stated in the above definition, the defining feature of the political use of disinformation is the purposeful use of false, incorrect, or misleading information for political gain.

It is true that communication on the Internet has added new dimensions and affordances, as well as alternative tactics, in manipulative political communication. However, disinformation practices did not originate online, nor are they limited to digital platforms (Fallis, 2015). Therefore, disinformation is expected to take various forms and be used by a range of different actors employing diverse technologies in distinct settings.

Ultimately, disinformation should be analyzed within the context of the historical development of campaigning. Whereas in some countries, political campaigning is still in one of (or a blend of) the initial three phases (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Farrell, 1996; Farrell & Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Norris, 2000), other countries have already entered a new "data-driven" era (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020). In lieu of the sophisticated armies of bots, trolls and other forms of digital operation or technological amplification (Tucker et al., 2018) in data-driven campaigns, other forms of legacy disinformation shared by candidates in their political campaigning still play a major part in some countries.

However, there is another relevant distinction to be made here. In contrast to the vast network of actors and anonymous or masked stakeholders involved in the more sophisticated campaigns of the new era (Bechmann & O'Loughlin, 2020), only a handful of easily identifiable candidates are responsible for framing legacy disinformation narratives.

While several academic works have recently been conducted on the former group of actors, little attention has been given to the examination of disinformation from the latter perspective. Thus, given this gap in the extant literature, this study has a dual purpose. It focuses on an assessment of the role and motivation of the candidates involved in the process of creating and/or disseminating legacy

disinformation and contrasts the actual content conveyed in the election campaign in the yet-to-be-studied case of the presidential elections in third-wave democratic African countries.

Based upon the assumption that politicians are among the actors who can be blamed for purposefully producing and disseminating disinformation (Mele et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2018), the goal of the study is to elucidate the specific legacy disinformation strategies and tactics adopted by presidential candidates in Cabo Verde. In so doing, we can bring to light the ways that different technologies and platforms are involved in spreading disinformation (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017), which, in turn, should also reveal the relationship between traditional and social media (Born & Edgington, 2017).

More concretely, the study deals with some of the traditional forms of disinformation associated with the dirty, rudimentary pre-data-driven tricks used in political campaigning. Although veracity is considered an important attribute in presidential candidates, they often make incorrect or misleading statements (Birch & Allen, 2010) by spinning the truth or even outright lying. A workable notion of these two types of legacy disinformation in line with the above proposed definition of disinformation is needed at this point.

In this context, spin consists of emphasizing and linking certain facts while downplaying or ignoring inconvenient facts (Gaber, 2000; Mearsheimer, 2011). Within the context of political disinformation, spinning can be considered a form of indirect lying (Vincent & Castelfranchi, 1979) or a way of lying while disclosing half-truths (Turner et al., 1975). Indeed, spinning in intended to deceive or mislead by divulging information that is only part of the information necessary for complete disclosure. It is usually used as a preventive strategy to avoid a full lie, given that lies

may damage the person's ability to evoke plausible deniability, a vital asset in political contexts (Heffer, 2020, p. 164). As for lying, a traditional account is adopted in this study that matches the above definition of disinformation. It consists of information believed to be false, incorrect, or misleading and is shared with the intent to deceive or to be assumed as the truth (Mahon, 2008; Wright, 2018).

In either case, sharing disinformation may occasionally involve damaging or reducing support for one's opponent with false claims or, in contrast, portraying one's own position in a positive light to attract attention and gain voters. Indeed, self-interested lies and spinning are usually aimed at distracting audiences from and obscuring an inconvenient fact. Furthermore, such lies can also be used to escape culpability and responsibility for previous actions such as wrongdoing or malefaction.

Such a purposeful usage of legacy disinformation—false or misleading information diffused by the candidates themselves—belongs to the darker side of political communication (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018) and assumes the existence of some sort of calculated decision. Indeed, a candidate who resorts to spinning and lying in an election campaign must take into consideration the uncertain benefits and potential costs associated with disinformation (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996). Additionally, while spin is generally considered legitimate in election campaigning, the equally pervasive occurrence of lying is, however, less acceptable behavior and may cause significantly more political harm (Mearsheimer, 2011). If detected at any point in the future, lies can result in costly blows to one's reputation (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996).

Given the risks involved in being exposed, one would expect, all other things being equal, that such campaign behavior would occur in two possible scenarios: either from contenders in very competitive elections or from candidates lagging

behind in the polls. Moreover, lying, in particular, would only be considered a last resort from someone who has little to lose and is therefore willing to bear the risk of a backlash effect. Potential winners, on the other hand, avoid taking such considerable risks and are less likely to resort to sharing disinformation.

Correspondingly, the theoretical discussion outlined above raises specific questions that will be addressed in this empirical research conducted within the specific context of the rather uncompetitive 2016 presidential election in Cabo Verde:

(RQ1)- How do the incumbent and the insurgent employ legacy disinformation?

(RQ2)- What, if any, are the differences in how they employ such disinformation?

Before explicating the methodological choices and beginning the actual analysis of the disinformation in the election, however, some contextual background on the 2016 presidential election in Cabo Verde and political campaigning in the country is needed.

Presidential elections and hybrid political campaigning in Cabo Verde

The January 1991 parliamentary ballot marked the beginning of free, multiparty elections in Cabo Verde and signaled a peaceful transfer of power from the previous hegemonic African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde (PAICV) to the Movement for Democracy (MPD), as the latter won 68% of the votes. One month later, with the support of MPD, António Mascarenhas Monteiro defeated the incumbent, Aristides Pereira, with 74% of the votes and became the first president elected in a multiparty election in the country.

These landmark "founding" elections that gave birth to democracy were followed by a "second" round of competitive elections (Bratton, 1998). Beyond the minimal function of marking the survival of the new political system, this second round of elections also deepened the democratic routines and attested to the resilience of the new scenario in which both the president and the majority of the members of parliament were from the same political party.

Indeed, not only did the MPD increase its majority in the parliamentary elections in late 1995, but António Monteiro was re-elected as president. After he won an election against an incumbent, Monteiro's re-election meant that he was the only candidate to have ever run alone in an election (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019). Such a unique outcome should be interpreted as a result of him being approved of across the political spectrum and not as a display of any sort of democratic insufficiency.

The PAICV returned to power in the 2001 elections. The candidate it supported also won the second round of the presidential elect by a meager 12 votes. The results were nonetheless accepted, and the new transfer of power once again confirmed the previous pattern of peaceful political transition. This PAICV-dominated scenario prevailed in the next elections, and in the case of the presidency, on this occasion, Pedro Pires did not need a second round to confirm that he would gain a second mandate in office.

It was not until 2011, two decades after the establishment of a semipresidential system comprising a popularly elected president and a prime minister and cabinet accountable to the parliament that the country finally experienced the envisaged situation of having a president (MPD support) and a prime minister (PAICV) from different parties. Although Prime Minister José Maria Neves managed to secure an unprecedented third mandate for the PAICV during the democratic period, the party's

internal struggle (with the result of presenting two candidates in the presidential election) benefitted the MPD's candidate, who achieved victory in the second round.

Thus, it could be said that Jorge Carlos Fonseca was both an unexpected and an improbable president. A combination of unusual circumstances had conspired in his favor to catapult him into the country's presidency in the first place. Five years later, he was running for re-election and would benefited from the exceptional circumstances.

What also became clear from these second elections was that parties played a decisive role in political campaigning in Cabo Verde. The campaigning still displays features of the premodern or party-centered phase of political campaigning (Novais, 2020b; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Norris, 2000; Plasser & Plasser, 2002).

On the one hand, local party organization capacity is critical as a principal machine for mobilizing people for key real-life encounters in a campaign, such as rallies and canvassing (Gibson & Roemmele, 2001). On the other hand, regardless of the difficulties associated with being an archipelago country and of the considerable logistic constraints associated with traveling between islands, face-to-face contact is at the core of election campaigning, and candidates are expected to engage in shoe-leather campaigning on local doorsteps (Norris, 2001).

These enduring premodern facets of campaigning coexist with a gradual shift to mass communication. As both radio and television are highly popular in Cabo Verde, candidates are likely to use and to adapt their narratives to mass media. This is because election campaigns usually attract considerable media attention because of the limited news menu in the country (Novais, 2020b). In addition, candidates are given free broadcasting time on both television and radio, with practically no

restrictions, which allows them to communicate with and reach a large audience. This is something that requires attention and advanced preparation from the candidates.

A similar point could be made regarding television debates in which the moderator(s) steer the discussion. Television debates were introduced in Cabo Verde in 2011, enabling voters to become familiarized with the personalities and issue positions of the different candidates (Carlin et al., 2001). Finally, because elections like those in a semipresidential system are all about individual contenders, another distinctive feature of the modern campaign stage is also at play: they are candidate-centered.

More recently, political parties and candidates have substantially transformed their communicative strategies. Such a move comprises gradually abandoning the largely amateur and locally sourced campaign approach to the detriment of more professional and strategically planned communication (Denver & Hands, 2002; Farrell & Webb, 2002; Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Norris, 2000). Not without resistance, however, have such campaigns adopted postmodern specialized technical services and new communication technologies beyond their institutional capacity. Social networks and other digital tools are nothing more than separate, rudimentary operations with few online interactions and are quickly discontinued once the related rally is over.

Against this backdrop, the 2016 presidential election is an interesting case. It provided an opportunity to continue the desirable situation of cohabitation that had emerged in the previous election. The circumstances of the race, however, pointed to the likely continuation of the persistent pattern of the first 25 years of democratic experience in the country—that is, of a single party holding the most prominent political posts.

In addition, it was the second democratic election in which no candidate was supported by the PAICV, one of the main parties (Angop, 2016). Following two successive defeats that same year in parliamentary and local elections, the party did not nominate a presidential candidate (Sapo, 2016). Amidst the crisis following the resignation of its leader, Janira Hopffer Almada, the PAICV also rejected overtures from independent candidate Albertino Graça.

Hence, the front runner, Jorge Carlos Fonseca, had the considerable advantages of holding incumbency status and having the official support of the new ruling party. Indeed, not only had all previous democratic presidents in Cabo Verde been re-elected, but Fonseca was likely to profit from the contagion effect of the landslide results of the MPD in the latest elections (Voa, 2016). The rare pre-election polls on Fonseca confirmed his considerable lead and anticipated his re-election in the first round, while his closest opponent, Albertino Graça, had only 5% of the predicted vote. Another independent candidate was also running but should not be taken into account in this study because he campaigned very little, produced no broadcasts, and attended no televised debates (Morais, 2016).

Since the 2016 presidential election was not a very competitive election, the only likely way in which disinformation would appear would be in the case of a desperate last resort strategy from the disadvantaged candidate.

Materials and methods

Given the considerations in the theoretical discussion, in order to answer the research questions, an adequate examination of the existence of legacy disinformation in a specific episode of election campaigning requires a case study approach, which is the

strategy most capable of answering questions about the contemporary phenomenon while giving due consideration to its contextual conditions (Yin, 2014). This methodology is suited for this work to the extent that it considers the interrelationship between the behavior of the candidate and the production and dissemination of disinformation in political campaigning.

The decision to adopt the specific case of the 2016 presidential elections in Cabo Verde was based upon the need for a situation that contrasted with previous situations and contradicts some of the assumed conditions underpinning extant theoretical considerations. First, this study examines the case of "third wave" democracy in the Global South that has previously been disregarded in the literature. The few exceptions to the overall scarcity of published research on Cabo Verdean political campaigning comprise a handful of studies devoted to the general elections and either include a diachronic analysis of the media coverage (Novais, 2020b) or an assessment of the free radio broadcasts by the two main contenders in the 2011 parliamentary elections (Reis et al., 2016). However, what makes this study case even more unique and worthy of investigation is that no prior study of disinformation in political campaigning in Cabo Verde has been conducted.

The decision to adopt the candidates' broadcasts as a data source is based upon the strategic importance of such media in countries where television (along with radio) still has an enormous reach. Given that television plays a predominant role in the effective communication of political messages, it remains a critical vehicle for informing the electorate of a candidate's policies and empowering them to make informed choices. That this is the case in Cabo Verde is an educated guess. In addition to the nonexistence of figures on TV broadcast audiences, studies that measure the direct effects of political advertising are also nonexistent.

As elsewhere (Scullion & Dermody, 2005), election broadcasts via TV and radio are one of the few means through which candidates in Cabo Verde can communicate directly with voters. As such, they are of key strategic relevance in election campaigning. The potential of such broadcasts for imparting knowledge about the political process and presidential candidates is even more considerable in countries such as Cabo Verde, where broadcasts are aired at peak viewing hours and across all TV channels.

Accordingly, under the nondiscriminatory principle of equal access, free time slots are allocated to all candidates during the campaign to directly address the general public. Provided that they fit into the 6.67 minutes of television airtime (and 20 minute-long radio spots), there are no legal restrictions on the content of the broadcasts. Indeed, they generally end up being actual political advertisements aired across public and private networks each night for three weeks and comprising the bulk of the postings on the candidates' respective official Facebook pages. Hence, being completely controlled by the candidate's own campaign, the broadcasts reveal the candidates' campaign priorities in the political battle (Hansen et al., 1998; Hodess et al., 2000; Scullion & Dermody, 2005). They also constitute reliable indicators of who is producing and disseminating disinformation, as well as of the traditional or legacy forms of disinformation employed.

Thus, an empirical analysis of the manifestations of disinformation within the candidates' broadcasts, shared on both national television and official Facebook pages, is proposed. Such an analysis fills two gaps in the previous literature: in addition to allowing us to compare the prevalence of disinformation across different platforms, it also reveals the relationship between traditional and social media (Born & Edgington, 2017).

The data sources for the analysis were the transcripts from a personal database of campaign broadcasts from both Jorge Carlos Fonseca and Albertino Graça. Data collection involved watching all 32 broadcasts recorded during the fieldwork conducted in Cabo Verde during the 2016 elections. Given that political campaigning is banned on the day prior to the election, which is devoted to allowing voters to reflect on their decision, all broadcasts from the start of the campaign (on September 15) until the end of that same month were included. All content was transcribed and translated by the researcher (familiar with both Portuguese and Cabo Verdean Creole) in the order in which the material was broadcast and posted on Facebook pages. Then, the full transcription was checked once more against the video recording to enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis (Riffe et al., 1998).

Any manifestations of traditional forms of disinformation found in the collected data were selected for description, categorization, and analysis. Then, a rhetorical approach was taken to exploring the rather particular sociocultural context underlying the specific types and uses of disinformation devices (Finlayson, 2003). The use of qualitative techniques (Ezzy, 2013) is germane to the research questions posed in the study on the traditional forms of disinformation present in election campaigning. Indeed, it makes it possible to determine which candidates resorted to legacy disinformation as well as to make inferences about both the intentionality and the implications of such usage within the respective campaign broadcasts.

Assuming that it may be difficult to detect disinformation in campaign materials, this study adopted an original approach with the aim of being efficient. This was logical, given the impossibility of evaluating the candidates' broadcasted material through the two most common sources for detecting possible disinformation, that is, the media and other fact-checkers. On the one hand, the media in Cape Verde

curiously tends to provide rather superficial and shallow coverage of political campaigns (Novais, 2020b; Reis et al., 2016), as evidenced in the marginalization and depolitization of press reporting (Esser and Strömbäck, 2012, p.318; Farnsworth & Lichter, 2003; Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Patterson, 2000) by recent electoral campaigns in Cabo Verde (Novais, 2020b; Reis et al., 2016). Therefore, media reporting on election campaigns usually consists of merely reproducing the daily activities and declarations of the candidates in lieu of devoting the coverage to more substantial issues determined by the press's own editorial initiative. Nor do Cabo Verdean journalists endeavor to critique or debunk the content of the material produced by the candidates for either the broadcasts or the digital platforms, thereby ignoring an invaluable source of information that could inform their reporting on the campaign.

On the other hand, at the time of the election, there was no tradition of fact-checking political figures or the campaign material, something that seems to have been introduced by the civic watchdog Sokols Movement that emerged in 2017 in the aftermath of the elections (Novais, 2020a).

This being the case, instead of coding all content of the TV broadcasts (Kaid & Holtz-Bocha, 2006, p.450), a more pragmatic and appropriate way to detect the presence of disinformation in the campaign material in an empirical analysis is to consider key episodes involving direct accusations by a candidate's opponent. Thus, the unit of analysis is an explicit mention of any manifestation of legacy disinformation in the opponent's platform, generally conveyed as an exposé in the broadcasts.

Moreover, a preliminary analysis of the broadcasted material revealed that the accusations concerned two particular types of disinformation, which were therefore

adopted in this study: spin and lies. This study does not aim to examine in detail all of the types of lies and spinning acknowledged in the taxonomies of the existing literature. It focuses on the ones emerging from the fine-grained analysis that are at play in election campaigning and develops their theoretical significance. More concretely, the deliberate omission of strategic information, known as "cherry-picking", alongside the "limited hangout" tactic, which consists of attempting to evade an issue by volunteering information while hiding more incriminating or less convenient information, feature among the kinds of spin under examination.

The study also includes only the three different varieties of lies that resulted from the preliminary analysis of the data: false context, fabricated content, and exaggeration. Whereas the first refers to genuine content shared with false contextual data, the second is information manipulated in order to deceive (Wardle, 2017), and exaggeration occurs when extraneous information is given or when information is overstated (Turner et al., 1975).

Results

A straightforward analysis of the aired material of both candidates reveals rather contrasting campaign strategies right from the outset. Whereas the incumbent opted for a positive approach and focused on himself instead of referring to his opponents, the same could not be said about the challenger. Indeed, Graça chose to gain notoriety while making a critical assessment of the previous mandate by the candidate running for re-election as part of an attempt to contrast the logic of the two candidates to reveal what differentiated them. Beyond the contrast offered in relation to the

incumbent's performance during his previous mandate, the final stage of the 2016 presidential campaign in Cabo Verde was nevertheless dominated by numerous attacks on the incumbent from the challenger.

Of particular interest to the present analysis were the unprecedented accusations concerning different kinds of legacy disinformation employed within the incumbent's campaign material. This happened across platforms since both candidates posted the same content being broadcasted on national television on their respective official Facebook pages without any adaptation whatsoever. Indeed, in addition to the posted broadcasts, both official pages featured only a few clips of footage of their candidate's campaign events.

Although the Graça campaign's exposés on the opponent's spin and lies were concentrated in the final days of the campaign, the subject of the first disinformation episode was, nevertheless, one of the focal themes across the whole campaign: the undesirable prospect of returning to the political scenario of having the same party controlling both the national assembly and the presidency.

The disinformation episode involved the incumbent depicting the PAICV's control of parliament as a weakness in the previous presidential elections. Indeed, by questioning the wisdom of having one party leading both the government and the presidency, he was able to garner some support and secure the presidency in 2011. Five years later, however, the same argument would come back to haunt him following the victory in the early March parliamentary elections of the party that was also officially supporting his candidacy. Now, during the September 26 TV debate, Fonseca depicted the likely prospect of having the MPD controlling both the government and the presidency as a blunt manifestation of the "sovereign will of the people".

After his "cherry picking" or refraining from addressing the issue of cohabitation was pointed out by his main opponent, as much as possible throughout the campaign, the incumbent employed the "limited hangout" tactic. As conveyed in Graça's broadcast of September 28**,** "what constituted a threat to democracy back in 2011 – only because it involved the PAICV – was now softened into a healthy democratic contingency since it related to the MPD". While attempting to justify this convenient reversal of his position, Fonseca implicitly conveyed one of two possibilities: "Either the PAICV was an anti-democratic party in the sense of not being worth a similar manifestation of the sovereign will of the people, or that voters sympathizers of PAICV were some sort of second-class citizens".

Thus, the challenger exposed both the "cherry-picking" and "limited hangout" strategies of the incumbent. In addition to denouncing Fonseca's efforts to avoid "fully disclosing his true motives", Graça's broadcast on September 28 directly accused Fonseca of supporting "double standards". Fonseca's flip was also depicted as evidence of his "political shortsightedness for not considering the supporters of the opposing party as true democrats when a candidate to the presidency is supposed to be pledging for the trust and respective vote of all Cabo Verdeans".

Indeed, by spinning away from the previous topic, Fonseca was accused of having "cleverly ignored inconvenient facts" and "fabricated false content" concerning the usage of testimonials on his broadcasts. Indeed, celebrity endorsement and supporting testimonials from well-known local community members are widespread in all political campaigns and are of pivotal importance for conveying vivid messages that resonate with voters.

First, the leader of the third political force in the country, the Cabo-Verdean Independent and Democratic Union (UCID), was featured in Fonseca's broadcast of

September 28 and pledged support for his re-election. However, António Monteiro's presentation with the incumbent was conveyed with "false contextual information". As stated in Graça's broadcast on the following day, it should have been aired "as individual support and not as the UCID support, as explicitly conveyed in the broadcast and referred on other different occasions by Fonseca". Indeed, "by choosing to ignore the critical fact that UCID preferred to give its militants freedom" instead of aligning with any of the presidential candidates, "the frontrunner created an alternate agreed-upon reality about his popular grass-roots support". In practice, he was "shading the truth to make it fit more comfortably into his campaign narrative and intentionally mislead the voters".

This move was by no means accidental. Fonseca's campaign also went to the extreme of "fabricating content to deceive". Indeed, a well-known president of a national NGO was included in the same broadcast from the incumbent without her knowledge and consent. Surprised at being featured in Fonseca's TV broadcast when she actually supported Graça's candidacy, Idalina Freire was not happy. Graça's broadcast pointed the finger at the Fonseca team for using "pre-recorded video material belonging to a specific initiative of the Organization of Cabo Verdean Women (OMCV) named HeForShe, and aired it in its campaign broadcast out of the context and without her endorsement". That same day, Freire featured in Graça's broadcast, acknowledging her support for his the candidacy over that of the incumbent.

The "intentional generalization" of not acknowledging individual testimonials as such, alongside "the usage of unauthorized fabricated statements", was considered "unacceptable behavior" by a presidential candidate. This time, the Graça campaign

described the surprising and objectionable conduct of the incumbent as “intellectual dishonesty” from someone “invested in a dual-role of politician and academic”.

A final episode involving a significant exaggeration erupted on the penultimate day of the campaign, although the issue had been festering throughout the campaign. Indeed, the front runner made repeated attempts to derive political benefits from the sinking of the Vicente ferry in January 2015, which marked the greatest sea tragedy in the country’s history.

Fonseca started by attempting to discredit his main opponent during the September 26 TV debate. When he had the opportunity to directly question Graça on any topic, Fonseca chose to focus on the “lack of a public reaction from him at the time of the sinking”. This was a clear strategy to avoid giving his opponent the opportunity to talk about substantive issues. A few days later, however, Fonseca turned the diversion tactic into a self-interested lie when he claimed on the September 28 TV broadcast that "he had made himself present in critical moments that had moved the country. For instance, at the time of the Vicente shipwreck, which killed several of our brothers, he was there to comfort the families".

A brief investigation by the Graça team revealed this to be “an outright overstatement, at best”. Then, this false narrative was easily debunked. By providing testimonies of relatives of both the deceased victims and survivors of the Vicente sinking in his broadcast of September 30, Graça made it clear that “the incumbent had not contacted them nor made any arrangements to support their losses while in office”. Thus, Fonseca was “fueling a lie by exaggerating his presidential achievements and inflating his abilities”.

As further stated in Graça’s broadcast, “one would expect him at the time of the accident to have displayed genuine interest beyond the mere circumstantial

declarations that the official protocol required from him". The broadcast argued that Fonseca "should have been with all 11 survivors and the families of those deceased and missing afterward" (15 in total). Although unanswered, the implicit question in the broadcast about "how many had he reached out to either via telephone or a written message" served as a springboard to the conclusion that "both fake appearances and populist profits during the campaign was another revealing evidence of intolerable intellectual dishonesty from an unfit candidate to the presidency". In sum, Fonseca's claim was "yet another objectionable act done in an attempt to derive benefits from a tragedy by such an overt exaggeration of his past deeds". Once again, the incumbent was being unmasked and harshly criticized like no other presidential candidate in Cabo Verde had been.

In the end, Fonseca was re-elected in the first round with 74% of the valid votes, while Graça, whether as a result of his campaign or not, greatly surpassed the initial polls and received a relevant 22.5% of the vote.

Discussion of the findings

This study has aimed to improve the understanding of how disinformation gains traction in election campaigning. It has attempted to fill some gaps detected in extant studies. First, it has advanced a definition of disinformation that should help to overcome the frequent overlapping usage of other terms, such as disinformation or fake news, when specifically referring to political campaigning.

Second, it has endeavored to make up for the scarce attention granted to disinformation in the election period across its different dimensions: agents, content and technologies (Wardle & Derakshan, 2017). Indeed, while elucidating the role and

motivations of political candidates in creating and disseminating disinformation throughout the campaign, the study has also addressed other related issues of particular interest to the present work, which constitutes yet another unique contribution. Other forms of legacy disinformation shared by candidates in their political campaigning still play a major part in some countries instead of the more sophisticated data-driven campaigns. But it also includes an analysis of their prevalence across different platforms, which in turn reveals the relationship between traditional and social media. To the author's knowledge, no previous work has endeavored to jointly analyze these three different dimensions in terms of legacy disinformation. Nor has any study examined specific evidence-based episodes of political campaigning in a previously neglected country that is part of the "third wave" of African democracy.

The analysis of the broadcasting material aired by the two main candidates confirmed the contrasting focus in rhetoric between the incumbent and the challenger (Jacobson, 2013). Ultimately, the findings make it possible to answer the research questions by highlighting several aspects of the role and motivation of the candidates involved in the process of creating and/or disseminating legacy disinformation.

Indeed, the analysis of the candidates' broadcasts revealed that it was the frontrunner of the 2016 election in Cabo Verde who purposefully produced and disseminated legacy disinformation throughout his campaign (RQ1). Against the prevailing expectation in the extant literature, despite not facing a strong opponent and regardless of his considerable competitive advantage as a front-runner in re-election, Fonseca was unable to avoid being exposed and accused of employing spin and lies. Surprisingly, instead of the challenger directly targeting the opponent with false claims, he accused the incumbent of using disinformation. As for the incumbent

candidate, the examination of Fonseca's broadcasts did not reveal any accusations of disinformation among his opponents or any reaction to the assertions conveyed against Fonseca himself. Graça's last resort was thus to deconstruct, expose and debunk the disinformation campaign of his opponent.

The unexpected finding that the incumbent was making use of disinformation even though he was not the disadvantaged candidate in the election can be explained in different ways. Perhaps he did not expect his opponent to scrutinize his campaign material, given the lack of historical tradition in the country of doing so. Alternatively, it could be the case that Fonseca expected his supporters to share his epistemological preference for posttruth politics, similarly to the preferences of Donald Trump, according to which, priority is given to candor and sincerity over factual accuracy.

Furthermore, the fact that Fonseca did not level similar accusations does not automatically imply that Graça refrained from spinning or lying. It could also be that the incumbent did not consider it strategically relevant to expose his opponent's usage of legacy disinformation, instead refraining from making any reference to Graça whatsoever. Alternative, it could be that such instances of disinformation accusations uttered by a candidate are not necessarily proof that disinformation is actually present; rather, such accusations could just be part of a discreditation strategy.

However, to make a strong case about his honesty and pledge to expose and debunk the incumbent's legacy disinformation, Graça resorted to examining past press reports, the testimonies of the people directly involved in previous episodes of interest, and the content of his opponents' broadcasting material to ensure that the statements made were indeed misleading or false. Last, whereas Graça's broadcasts were still available online at the time of the writing (at

https://www.facebook.com/AlbertinoGraca.cv), thus assisting the public scrutiny of all the accusations, the front runner decided to erase any vestige of the aired broadcasts once the election was over.

Whatever the reason or reasons, the fact remains that never before had a Cabo Verdean campaign denounced the disinformation strategy of an opposing campaign's televised broadcasts. Indeed, despite some tenuous accusations in previous campaigns, the Graça broadcasts targeted the incumbent *ad libitum* by exposing his numerous dirty tricks that were aimed at distracting from and obscuring an inconvenient fact and, above all, at portraying Fonseca in a positive light and helping him gain voters. Graça's strategy thus consisted of deconstructing, exposing and debunking the disinformation campaign of his opponent (RQ2).

First, Fonseca used the "cherry-picking" and "limited hangout" spin techniques, aiming to distract attention from and obscure the troublesome issue of his reversal on the issue of the desirability of political cohabitation. Unable to keep a silent on the matter (and lying by omission), Fonseca first reconfirmed his conviction about the wisdom of having different parties leading the government and presidency as the best formula. However, this was just a half-truth. In reality, he was merely pretending to give information while withholding what he actually believed (Castelfranchi & Poggi, 1994) for strategic reasons (Scheppele, 1988). To avoid damaging his reputation and jeopardizing his support from the MPD, he then turned to another form of spin. A politician shifting positions is, to some degree, to be expected in politics. Occasionally, it may even demonstrate the candidate's beneficial ability to compromise or adapt to the will of voters, which would be beyond political criticism. However, this was not the case in this situation since Fonseca was actually avoiding taking ownership of his indefensible reversal on the matter.

For the first time in the campaign, the official narrative of the incumbent was being challenged, and he was caught spinning. However, matters worsened when he switched from spinning to lying, which is usually even less acceptable in political campaigning. In fact, Fonseca's campaign was also accused of having no qualms about lying regardless of the significant political harm it would do to his reputation. The argument put forward in the aired broadcasts was that to fit the pre-established narrative of popular grassroots support for his candidacy, the incumbent intentionally presented a false context and fabricated content in the testimonials his campaign used. Last, he exaggerated his past deeds while in office in an effort to live up to the enhanced self-image he had been projecting as a president "always close to the people". All this occurred across multiple platforms, given that the content on the Facebook official pages was largely "shovelware" originating as TV broadcasts.

In conclusion, based upon the empirical evidence of this study case, the 2016 presidential campaign in Cabo Verde was marked by a pledge of veracity on the part of the challenger in light of the incumbent having made use of disinformation even though the latter was not the disadvantaged candidate in the election; the incumbent simply believed that we would get away with it and further enhance his chances of reelection. Against this backdrop, it is argued that beyond being a strategic decision dependent upon calculated consideration of the structural circumstances of the race, legacy disinformation can be consubstantial with pre-data-driven political campaigns and can appear irrespective of the position the candidate holds in the competition.

As the study aptly shows, considering the agents, content, and technologies within the election campaign dynamics may be critical to understanding the reasons for the strategic usage of disinformation. This particular study case, however, should not be isolated from its local and wider global contexts, nor should it be treated as an

altogether new phenomenon, as in terms of claims and features, it might resemble elections elsewhere. The singularity of the incumbent being the actor who purposefully produced and disseminate legacy disinformation across platforms, however, needs to be studied separately. To date, the significance of incumbents in less competitive elections resorting to disinformation tactics within the framework of campaign dynamics is still underdebated and underexamined among academics. Similarly, more studies are needed to illustrate and clarify the use of legacy disinformation strategies involving spinning and lying across different platforms, especially in non-Western democracies.

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