How Meta Interfered in Brazil's Elections

A practical guide to help you defend your country from Big Tech risks to electoral integrity

Brazil's 2026 elections showed how platform decisions can shape political competition through advertising, artificial intelligence, recommendations and restrictions. This guide summarizes those findings, adds subsequent disclosures and explains how others can investigate and expose similar problems around the world. [1]

1. Four ways Meta can shape an election

Accepting illegal and improper political advertising – Controlled tests found that Meta approved ads containing electoral disinformation and misinformation, calls for military intervention and gender based political violence in Brazil. Ekō and Amnesty International documented foreign operated accounts, unlabelled deepfakes and unauthorized advertising. These investigations reveal failures in the systems through which Meta sells political visibility while also demonstrating how Meta profit from it, even after removing unlawful advertising. Separately, NetLab identified 1,613 election-related ads promoted from abroad by unauthorized actors between July and September. [1, 2, 11]

The later NetLab/IPIE study "Ads Without Accountability" adds a transparency finding: spending bands, incomplete targeting information and other limitations prevent a reliable determination of whether competing campaigns paid discriminatory prices. The study supports demands for auditable advertising data, rather than a claim that unequal pricing has been established. [3]

Allowing illegal use of A.I. and offering A.I. tools with biased algorithms – Generative AI can supply electoral information, rank candidates or produce campaign imagery. Different studies compiled in the dossier found inaccurate information, indirect candidate rankings and unequal responses to comparable image requests involving candidates, offering evidence from multiple AI systems. Data Privacy Brasil and Aláfia Lab used identical questions across five chatbots; InternetLab and partners combined citizen participation with structured testing. Results varied by tool and research round, so findings must remain tied to their original dates and methods. In one case, Meta's AI generated content featuring Flávio Bolsonaro but refused comparable requests involving Lula. [1, 4]

Favoring content related to specific candidates for reach amplification – Recommendations and organic reach determine whose messages become visible. Sleeping Giants Brasil compared the ten most recent Reels from 30 prominent accounts and identified unusually high viewing figures for federal deputy Nikolas Ferreira. Other investigations documented coordinated networks and asymmetric search results of Instagram accounts, GIFs and Whatsapp channels. Such observations identify persistent anomalies requiring explanation; unusually high engagement alone cannot establish how an algorithm worked or prove deliberate favoritism. [1, 10]

Restricting content related to different candidates in different ways – Moderation can remove posts, disable accounts, block advertising or limit sharing and reach. A CTRL+Z collection reported by Agência Pública documented more than a thousand restriction and banning cases; among politically classifiable restricted posts, nine in ten were pro Lula or progressive. This was a collection of submitted reports, not a representative sample of all users. Its value lies in documenting incidents and patterns for verification and further investigation. Meta itself later told Brazil's Federal Prosecutor's Office (MPF) that it automatically blocked 206,910 pieces of content between October 1 and 5, a period that included the first round. The figure shows the scale of automated enforcement during the vote, but not who was affected most, so it supports demands for a breakdown of these removals by account, political alignment and appeal outcome. [1, 5, 12]

2. How to identify an issue and build verifiable evidence

Start with a specific, testable question: does the same search find both candidates, does the same image request receive equivalent treatment, or does a political ad identify its payer? Repeat equivalent tests across accounts, devices and dates, changing one variable at a time. Record the exact prompt or search, language, login status, time, output and relevant settings. For reach comparisons, define the sampling window and comparison group in advance. Collect user reports through a common form, then separate documented restrictions from unexplained impressions of reduced visibility. Acknowledge limitations of the findings: all evidence is subject to the system opacity and limitation and that may also be a finding in itself.

Audit the advertising record – Follow the approaches and methodologies used by NetLab, Ekō, Amnesty International and investigative journalists: preserve ad identifiers, creatives, advertiser and payer information, currencies, delivery dates, political labels and available spending or audience ranges. Document every single data. Compare repeated extractions to detect changes. Cross check apparent irregularities against the applicable rule and its effective date. Deduplicate by ad identifier before combining studies, and distinguish impressions from unique people reached. Notice and register if the tests reveal irregularities in the application of Meta's own standards and policies. [1–3]

Make experiments reproducible – Publish the questions, selection criteria, samples, dates and coding rules, alongside the outputs needed to check the findings. InternetLab's mixed methodology combines user-informed scenarios with structured automated tests; Data Privacy Brasil and Aláfia Lab compared responses to identical questions. Distinguish a single reproducible failure from a measured pattern, and a pattern from a causal explanation. For controlled tests, document the approval outcome without distributing harmful test content. [1, 4]

Preserve the incident and its history – Keep original screenshots, recordings, URLs, notices and appeal responses. Maintain a dated log of collection and any subsequent correction or restoration. When possible, corroborate a report with account status records, an independent retest and/or another source. Protect complainants' identities and publish only the personal information needed to substantiate the case. A platform's later fix does not erase an earlier documented restriction, and the efficiency of its fixing needs to be thoroughly tested.

Evidence from insiders – Internal messages between Meta employees obtained by Folha acknowledged restrictions affecting Lula's accounts alongside prohibited recommendations of Flávio Bolsonaro. Further records published by CTRL+Z documented problems with search visibility, stories and comments, some recurring after reported fixes. Meta employees represented by the UK's Communication Workers Union publicly denounced alleged favoritism toward the Bolsonaro family. Separately, the Oversight Board criticized recurring enforcement failures, including restrictions on Lula's advertising accounts, and demanded transparency. UN Special Rapporteurs also weighed in on October 21, expressing concern over Meta's role in the Brazilian election, citing possible unequal treatment of the Lula and Flávio Bolsonaro campaigns. They called on the company to review its AI and moderation systems and to comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Special Rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council and do not speak on behalf of the UN, but their intervention shows that the concerns have reached the international human rights system.These are distinct forms of corroboration, rather than separate leaks. Meta attributes the problems to technical incidents and denies political favoritism. [6–9; 13]

State what the evidence establishes and what remains unknown. Approval logs can establish an approval failure; archived ads can establish circulation; internal records can establish company awareness. None alone necessarily proves intent or an effect on the election result. Request preservation of internal logs, independent audits and access to the data needed to resolve those questions.

3. How to share the findings and demand answers

Turn the evidence into a public issue: share key findings, dated examples, original sources and a clear request for action. Brief journalists with verifiable records and researchers available to explain the methods. Equip influencers and communicators with accurate scripts, accessible graphics and links to the full evidence. Use public discussions, peaceful demonstrations and coordinated civil society statements to connect allegedly technical failures with their consequences for political participation. Transform the studies, tests and evidence into communication that highlight how interference in elections is a material risk to everyone.

Pair public visibility with formal accountability. Brazil's records referrals to electoral authorities and prosecutors, court proceedings and international mobilization. Make everyone know what's at stake. It was never only about Brazil. Ask for concrete remedies: restoration and effective appeals, equal treatment, transparent advertising records, preservation of evidence and independent scrutiny. Publish Meta's response alongside the findings and track whether announced fixes resolve the documented problems. [1]

Sources and further reading

1 Sleeping Giants Brasil dossier • 2 NetLab on foreign promoted ads • 3 NetLab and IPIE advertising audit • 4 InternetLab methods • 5 Pública on CTRL+Z reports • 6 Folha internal messages • 7 CTRL+Z internal records • 8 ICL on employee statement • 9 Oversight Board statement • 10 Sleeping Giants Brasil report • 11 Amnesty International • 12 Public Prosecutor's Office • 13 OHCHR