

Codebook for Apprehending Political Discussion Online

General Instructions

- Coders must read the news stories that were selected in the sample to be able to understand the broader context and topic before coding the comments. This step is mandatory, as it enables coders to identify reasoned opinions and disagreements in the comments.
- Coders should read **each** story **before** coding the comments from that story. For Facebook comments, must also consider the content of the post from the source (that is, the caption that accompanies the link).
- Coders should only move to another story once all comments from the previous story are coded.
- This codebook operates with two units of analysis: **News Stories, and Comments.**

1 News Stories

At the story level, the goal of the analysis is to identify the main topic in the story, considering the types of actors that it refers to. The **unit of analysis** is the story. Coders should read the story in the source to identify the **topic**.

1.1 Topic

1. *Formal Politics*: Stories about, featuring, or making reference to, political leaders or elected representatives in all three branches of power (executive, legislative, judiciary), in any level (federal, state, city).
2. *Organized Civil Society*: Stories about, featuring, or making reference to, NGOs, social movements, unions and other types of formal citizen organizations.
3. *Celebrities*: Stories about, featuring, or making reference to, celebrities that are affected by, or advocates for, political and social issues.
4. *Minorities*: Stories about, featuring, or making reference to protected categories (e.g. gender, sexuality, race) or socially and economically disenfranchised groups (e.g. poor, uneducated).
5. *Public Policies*: Stories about, featuring, or making reference to issues that relate to public policies or fall under the scope of government's responsibilities, such as education, public security or violence, crime.
6. *International*: Stories about political issues in other countries (e.g. political conflict, major political developments) etc.
7. *Others*: Stories about other political or social issues that did not fit in any of the main categories.

2. Comments

¹ Note: the codebook used in this research project has a set of other variables that were not analyzed in this paper and are not included in this appendix.

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The unit of analysis is the "comment", meaning that each category in the codebook should be applied considering the entirety of the comment.

2.1 Relevance

By relevant, we will consider the comments in which there is a meaningful attempt to express an opinion. This code is used to exclude from the sample comments that cannot be meaningfully interpreted by coders for being too short or by lacking substance. A comment is coded as **not relevant** when it is reduced to the following: tagging someone else's name, one-worded reactions (yes, no, sad, great, etc.), laughing (e.g. lol, kkk, rs, hahaha etc) and emoticons/emojis. The purpose of this category is to exclude from the analysis posts that cannot be further classified in the categories of this codebook and that do not represent

0. Not relevant
1. Relevant

If a comment is classified as not relevant, there is no need to apply any of the following categories to it.

2.2. Target of Interaction²

This category aims at identifying dialogical discussions (e.g. replies), distinguishing those from comments that are reactions to the original content or express personal opinions. Subcategories:

0. **Reply:** User responds to previous speaker. Use this code when you can identify explicit responses to a previous speaker (addressing their name/pseudonym, using mentions, or referring to someone else's argument or position). On Facebook, the use of replies (nested comments) should be also considered a reply.
1. **Reaction to the content of the story:** use this code when the comment is a clear reaction to the story, its actors, its topic, the news organization, the journalist/columnist.
2. **Generic opinion expression:** this code is used to classify comments in which participants are expressing their opinion without addressing other participants and/or the forum topic, by making generic claims regarding the political sphere, such as "politicians are bad", "parties are corrupt", etc. In other words, these comments present generic claims that are not clearly connected to the story. This code is also used when it is not possible to identify if the comment replies to someone else or to the story.

2.3. Disagreement

The presence of heterogeneous perspectives is held at high esteem by scholars aligned to deliberative theory. In this sense, disagreement may contribute to a better understanding of others' positions and foster respect toward challenging views. It can also produce bad epistemic outcomes - such as increase intolerance and trigger the use of disrespect and incivility. This category aims at identifying the presence of heterogeneous opinions in political discussion online and is based on prior scholarship³. Code for disagreement when users explicitly disagree

² Note: for the analyses, this variable was transformed in a binary for 'replies'.

³ Stromer-Galley, J. (2007). Measuring deliberation's content: A coding scheme. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 3(1), 12.

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with arguments or perspectives that have been previously made by other participants in the comment thread. To code for disagreement, take into account the other comments in a thread – that is, comments that come before the one you are coding under a particular news story.

0. Absence of disagreement

1. **Disagreement:** Assign this category when a comment clearly expresses disagreement towards a message, an argument, or a person in the thread. Note that disagreement can also be expressed respectfully, when a participant acknowledges others before offering a counter perspective. Comments that express an opinion that is clearly different than others in a thread should be coded as disagreement, as they signal heterogeneity of perspectives.

2.4. Arguments & Opinions

This variable aims at identifying if and how people express their views when discussing politics online. Contrary to studies on online deliberation, our aim is not to evaluate the quality of arguments and justifications. Rather, we are interested in observing whether people attempt to articulate or explain their opinions when expressing political views online. We follow Stromer-Galley (2007) in distinguishing opinion expression as a "expressed judgement the speaker has made on a person, an event, a social problem, a state of affairs, a crisis, values and the like" from reasoned opinion expression, which conveys the articulation of an opinion with arguments and reasons to substantiate it.

0. No opinion expression: when the comment is a neutral statement that does not indicate the commenters' opinion about the story, the discussion, or the topic
1. "Simple" opinion expression: comments that present personal judgments or reactions that express an opinion about the story, the discussion, or the topic, without offering any reasons or explanations to back up their claims.
 - a. E.g.: "This is so wrong"/ "They are all corrupt"
2. Reasoned opinion expression: comments that include opinions grounded on simple or complex justifications, which includes motivations, examples, stories, analogies etc. Comments that present an attempt of justifying or backing up a claim should be included in this category.

2.5. Incivility

Civility can be broadly conceptualized as a set of social norms and standards of behavior that individuals recognize as appropriate behavior in given situations (Jamieson et al, 2014). Because it is highly contextual, "civility is also very much in the eye of the beholder" (Herbst, 2010: 3) -- e.g., behaviors that might be acceptable among friends can be considered uncivil in the workplace, like swearing. For the purpose of this codebook and based on prior work⁴, uncivil discourse can be understood as expressions that feature a rude, disrespectful or dismissive tone towards other participants in a discussion, the story, or the discussion topic, as well as opinions expressed with antinormative intensity.

Stromer-Galley, J., & Muhlberger, P. (2009). Agreement and Disagreement in Group Deliberation: Effects on Deliberation Satisfaction, Future Engagement, and Decision Legitimacy. *Political Communication*, 26(2), 173–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600902850775>

⁴ Coe, K., Kenski, K., & Rains, S. A. (2014). Online and Uncivil? Patterns and Determinants of Incivility in Newspaper Website Comments. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 658–679. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12104>

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Uncivil discourse includes swearing, using foul or vulgar language, personal (ad-hominem) attacks focusing on demeaning characteristics or personality, attacks towards ideas and arguments etc. Subcategories:

0. **Civil:** operationalized as comments that do not feature any expression of incivility.
1. **Profane or vulgar language:** comments that feature profanities and vulgarities, not necessarily addressed at a particular person or group. These types of expression can signal antinormative intensity or be used to emphasize opinions. Attempts to disguise profane language using graphic signals or numbers instead of letters should also be coded as profane/vulgar language.
 - a. E.g. “What the f* does the president thinks he’s doing?”, “This is a s* situation”
2. **Personal attacks:** comments that feature attacks targeted at specific persons or groups, including pejorative remarks. These can focus on personal characteristics (e.g. appearance) or traits, character, choices, etc. Includes accusations of lying/dishonesty. Personal attacks can be targeted at other people in the thread, the journalist/columnist, actors in a story etc. These also include attacks towards forms of expression (e.g. criticizing grammar)
 - a. E.g. “you’re an idiot/a moron/stupid/ugly.” / “Stop lying about this”
3. **Aspersions:** Use of pejorative language towards policy, institutions, organizations and parties, with the intention of deprecating, attacking and/or questioning credibility/legitimacy.
 - a. E.g. “Congress is a circus”, “PT’s social programs are a scam to give free money to people who don’t want to work”.
4. **Attacks towards arguments or perspectives:** comments that aim at attacking, disqualifying, or dismissing a position or an argument.
 - a. E.g. “This is a stupid argument to make”, “You are clearly lying about this”

2.5.1 Target of Incivility (*Only use this code if any type of incivility is identified.*)

This category aims at identifying how incivility is used by commenters and whether it is targeted at someone else in the discussion, at politicians or other actors featured in news stories, at the news outlet or journalist, or at particular people or groups. Incivility may also be untargeted, e.g. when it is used to emphasize a point of view or as a language marker, which may be seen as uncivil in itself but is not directed at a person or group.

Code as follows:

0. Unfocused
1. Other participants in the thread (mentioning names, tagging, replies)
2. Actors or groups featured in the story: Incivility targeted at particular subjects or groups that are featured in the news stories. This category should only be used if the target is not listed under another subcategory in this variable.
3. Politicians, political institutions or political parties
4. Minorities
5. Journalists, columnists, bloggers, or the news media

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6. Others: use this code for specific actors and groups not identified in this list, as well as for generic offenses towards “Brazilians”, the people, etc.

2.6 Intolerance

Intolerance is operationalized in this study as set of behaviors that are threatening to democracy and pluralism - such as prejudice, segregation, hateful or violent speech, and the use of stereotyping in order to disqualify others and groups. Intolerant expressions deny others or groups of an equal status, rights and freedom of expression, and denote profound moral disrespect towards a person or a group of people. Note that intolerant expressions can be civil. These behaviors are coded as:

0. Absence of expressions of intolerance
1. Threats towards individual rights (the denial of equal rights to individuals and groups)
 - a. E.g. saying that poor people shouldn't be allowed to vote
2. Intolerance towards political positions and personal opinions
 - a. E.g. disqualifying opposing political views as valid
3. Racism: discriminatory/stereotypical/hateful/prejudicial speech towards racial minorities (e.g. black, native, mixed)
4. Social or Economic Intolerance: discriminatory/stereotypical/hateful/prejudicial speech towards others based on education level, social status, income.
5. Gender and Sexual Freedom: discriminatory/stereotypical/hateful/prejudicial speech towards women and/or LGBTQ+ based on gender status or sexual choices
6. Religious Freedom: discriminatory/stereotypical/hateful/prejudicial speech towards people or groups based on religious preferences
7. Offensive stereotyping: speech targeted at people or groups highlighting detrimental/offensive features
 - a. E.g. based on personal characteristics
8. Violent threats: incitation or violent threats
 - a. E.g. saying that people should be beaten up/killed, that congress must explode etc

2.6.1 Target of Intolerance (*Only use this code if any type of intolerance is identified.*)

This category aims at identifying which groups are targeted by intolerant discourse online. The subcategories mirror targets of incivility to enable post-hoc comparison between the two types of expression.

Code as follows:

0. Unfocused
1. Other participants in the thread (mentioning names, tagging, replies)
2. Actors or groups featured in the story
3. Politicians, political institutions or political parties
4. Minorities
5. Journalists, columnists, bloggers, or the news media
6. Others: use this code for specific actors and groups not identified in this list, as well as for generic offenses towards “Brazilians”, the people, etc.