

# Winning over voters with the right words

An Ipsos House Research Study



## Who shall I vote for?

If presidential candidates were more aware of the power of their words and the effects they have upon the electorate, the course of history in many countries might have been very different.

During a presidential campaign, the candidates present their manifestos which win the favor of their party's loyal voters and may in some cases help to gain the vote of those who are still undecided.

The days running up to the elections are critical. Voter preferences can change very quickly as they hear

reports and opinions on recent developments which are transmitted through social networks or the traditional media channels of radio, television and newspapers.

At play in the process of choosing a favored candidate there is a rational component based on the content of their policies. But there is also another emotional aspect which is critical in making the final decision of who to vote for.

It is natural, then, that we asked the following questions ourselves: Which candidate generates more empathy or most aversion amongst voters? What could a candidate say to gain new voters, or what would lose them existing

voters? Which issues are most important to people? Up to what point does a voter remain loyal to their chosen political party? And, in the case of Mexico, are debates an effective way for candidates to capture votes?

## Finding answers at Ipsos House

Ipsos designed an experiment at Ipsos House to understand the kinds of emotional responses a political candidate should aim to prompt if they are to gain new votes and retain existing voters. The final debates for 2018 Mexican presidential elections provided the ideal timing for us to study how voters would respond to political discussions on important topics including security, corruption, poverty, education, climate change and health.

At Ipsos House everything revolves around experience. Participants are brought in to experience situations in the most believable context possible so that we can observe genuine behavior and obtain realistic responses. So, the participants were invited to witness two live presidential debates, where they could show their true unbiased responses to the political discourse and candidate speeches.

To record the most emotionally charged moments in the debate, and determine whether they were positive or negative, we used two tools: the GSR (Galvanic Skin Response), which records perspiration of the skin at times of high emotional intensity, and Facial Coding, which notes movement in facial muscles and deciphers the corresponding emotion. For the duration of the debate, the participants' behavior, verbal and non-verbal language and reactions were observed with cameras.

In this way, we could closely monitor the participants and understand not only which parts of the discourse

stirred emotion in the audience, but the nature of these emotional responses. The results, when analysed against the participant responses on which candidate they intended to vote for both before and after viewing the debates, could demonstrate the part that emotion plays in voting outcomes.



### About Ipsos House

Ipsos House is a modular research facility with installations of different environments that reproduce common spaces in which people interact daily. This allows for contexts and scenarios to be recreated in the most realistic way possible. Ipsos House contains a bar, a doctor's office, a bank branch, a supermarket, a neighbourhood shop, and even a confessionary, where, without the need for a priest, participants can reveal their most secret thoughts. All these spaces are adaptable to the needs of research, considering the necessary psychographic characteristics.

The House is equipped with the latest technology in verbal and non-verbal techniques to bring the real context into a controlled environment. It has audio and video equipment in all areas, and neuroscience tools to record behaviour such as GSR (Galvanic Skin Response), Eye tracking, Facial Coding, EEG, and VR.

All these design features make the research space of Ipsos House an optimal arena for exploring - and ultimately better understanding - human behaviour.

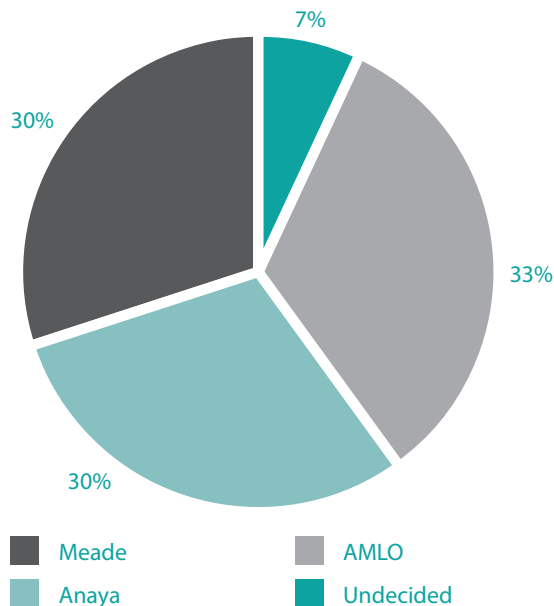
## I don't care what they promise – only how they make me feel.

What we observed with the debate viewings at Ipsos House serves as evidence that, in the Mexican presidential elections, emotion came above rationality. The ranking of the final election results corresponds to the levels of emotion that were detected during the experiment, at 7 key 'moments of impact'.

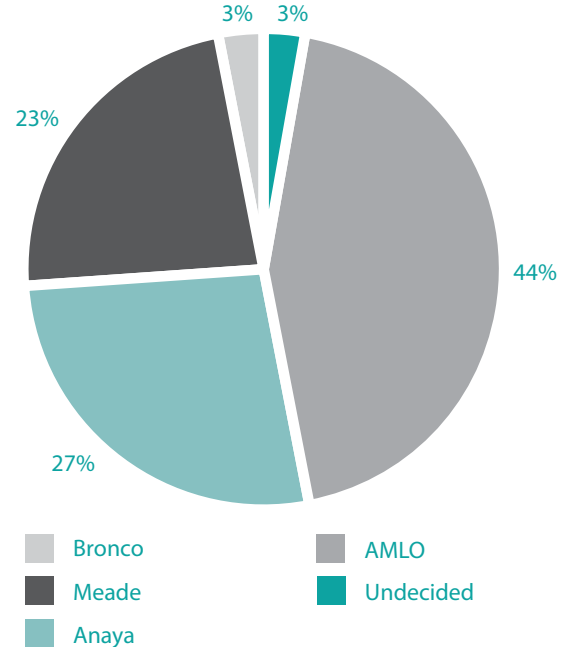
The candidates who provoked less emotional responses obtained fewer votes, and the winner of the presidential content was the individual who was able to elicit more positive emotional responses. Furthermore, this pattern was true regardless of whether or not the discussion related to a critical public issue.

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**Total voters per candidate (before debate)**



**Total voters per candidate (after debate)**



**Unchanged voters: 83%**  
**Voter conversion: 17%**

Although strong voter preferences may pre-exist and outlast election debates, they do provide pivotal moments in which voter intentions can change. This is shown by the 17% conversion rate in our study. The winning candidate increased his vote share by 10 percentage points after the debate, taken directly from his competitors.

It is significant we can attribute shifts in opinion and voter intention to the workings of moments of emotional intensity experienced by the individuals.

By designing a study with research facilities of Ipsos House, it is possible to understand the drivers of human thought and behavior in close relation to complex emotional responses. Knowledge gained on how and why voter preferences change have many practical applications, including helping to develop successful campaign strategies for future candidates.

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Ipsos House is a research facility which uses the latest technologies in verbal and non-verbal techniques to answer business questions in a unique way. This first of its kind has been built in Mexico City.



## Contact the Ipsos House team

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