

My conversation with Ismar after the municipal elections in Brazil, October 6, 2024. I spoke with Ismar on October 14, 2024

Ismar

I told you that I was sure of two votes, the one from myself and the other from my mom, and I had 53. It was very, very little. It was a small number. Yeah, it was a small number, but I had two visions of the election.

Of course, I'd like to be elected, for example, to have 3,000 or more votes. I suppose that the last one to be elected was something around 3,100, almost 3,200 votes. And the first place was the ex-mayor. He resigned two years ago to be a candidate for our state governor, but he was defeated. And it was a surprise for me because it was some news about his second schedule.

I'm not a known person in the city. Even though I wanted to be elected, I knew that it was very hard to get it. I'm not sad about that. I'm not frustrated. And even some colleagues from my party that considered themselves sometime before the election, they considered themselves as already elected, and none of them was elected. It was a surprise for me because the party, people from the party wanted to have at least one serial councillor elected, and they didn't. The number of votes of a candidate for mayor was very small. He got only a little above 10,000 votes, and the percentage was 2.5%.

But we have good results when we speak in terms of national results, because we have now only two mayors, and in the next year we have 19. Okay. And we elected more than 200 city councillors around the country.

Frank

Okay, so when did the party actually get founded? When did the party, novo party, start becoming a political party?

The first was years ago, 2016.

Frank

2016. So in the space of eight years, you have started from zero to, what, one or two members in the Senate, now 19 mayors and 200 city councillors dotted around the country.

There are two things that we heard here in Europe about the elections was there was a significant drift away from the socialists, from Lula to the conservatives, and apparently the result in São Paulo, not surprising because it is the largest city in Brazil, the result in São Paulo is or was very tight. So those were the two things that came through in the big picture in the media. So I think if you look at eight years of development to get 200 city councillors, okay, that's what it is. Where is the biggest concentration? Where are you the most successful at the moment as a party?

Ismar

As in my state, the governor is from our party. I don't know the number, but we have many mayors

elected there in my state. It's beside São Paulo and it's near São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. It's the second biggest number of voters in Brazil.

Frank

Okay, so now I want to bring it down to a personal level. I want to bring it down to the level of Ismar. It's the morning of October 6th, 2024. At some point you get up in the morning, have breakfast, etc, etc. How did you actually spend the day? What time did the polls open? I think they closed at four o'clock or five o'clock in the evening. How did you spend that Sunday? What did you do?

Ismar

In that day, I was with my mom. I had to stay with her because it was my day with her. I told her to not prepare lunch. We had lunch out. After that, we went to vote, something around 1 pm. After 17 years old in Brazil, you weren't obliged to vote. My mom is 86, but I convinced her to vote for me. After my vote, we went to my aunt's house, my mother's sister's. She's 88 years old. We stayed some hours there with her and we would have a snack together and we came back home. I would say that here in my state, the election finished at 4 pm. Around 7 pm, we had the result.

Frank

So you spent, for all intents and purposes, you spent a normal Sunday with your family. You did your civic duty and voted, but the only difference on that day is that you didn't vote for a candidate, you voted for yourself.

Ismar

Yeah, I voted for myself and for our candidate for mayor to vote.

Frank

I mean, we listening to you will never be in this situation. Can you describe the feeling, what it's like to go into the electoral cabin? You have these electronic voting machines, you tap in the number 30111, which is your electoral number, and then you tap in the number for the candidate for the mayor, and then you go. And you know that this day is special because you voted for yourself.

Ismar

Yeah, it's something unusual. The first time in my life I voted for myself and I don't know if I voted once more. It's something very interesting. It was a special day, my story.

Frank

Yet for all intents and purposes, it was a normal family Sunday with you and your mother and your aunt and whoever else joined you. So you're having this normal day, and in the background you know that this important event is happening. Yeah. Did you feel excited? Did you feel, I mean, you have always been very realistic about your result. From the beginning you said that you are an unknown quantity of people. So the result was as expected, but there is this sense of anticipation. And how do you deal with that?

Ismar

I was very aware of my chance to be elected, but many times I thought, oh, how my life will change if I am elected. Many times I thought about it, but in that day I wasn't anxious, but I fought many, many times. Imagine, even I will be the last one, the 29th elected city councillor. Oh, it's mayor, it is elected. It would be something very interesting. I suppose it was something indescribable. Yeah, sometimes I thought about this, but I wasn't nervous or anxious. I was very tranquil.

Frank

So did you at any point decide to go to the party headquarters or wherever the central offices of your party to await the election results or spend the afternoon there or how did this continue?

Ismar

The party direction, the party board rented a house and invite people to go there in a space of some hours. And as I told you, there were some quarrels between the candidate for mayor and some candidate for city councillor and the party board. And we were divided. And the candidate for mayor invited people to go to his kind of office. And I saw some that followed, but there weren't many people in any of them, but I would have been to one of them. I don't know exactly which one, but as I was with my mom, I didn't. And they were there in two small groups in two different places expecting for the results. And after that, people continue fighting on the WhatsApp group. And we have some colleagues that support our candidate for mayor and some other support the party boards. But I tried to not support any of them because I don't know where exactly the truth is. Because the reason of this problem, in my opinion, is a childish behaviour. It was a kind of misunderstandings from, I would say, most from the the candidate for mayor.

And now, after that, two days after the election, they scheduled a meeting with me, with the municipal leader and state leader. And they asked me many questions. And they asked me if I would like to be a candidate again in two years time. I answered that. I didn't know in that moment because it's very difficult to be a candidate. And mainly, as I told you, when other party, they receive money from government and you don't have them. Exactly. And exactly my part received a small amount of money, but they decided yet to use. Because we have two names, two financial reserves, but all of them are from government. One is something it's called like a party aid or party funds that we receive every year. And another is from just in the year of election is called something like election fund, election aid. And my party didn't decide yet to use the money that they receive every year. And my party has no update, something nearly a hundred million of reals. And if they decide to use this money in 2026, probably novel that we receive more financial aid.

Frank

Well, it makes sense that if this money is legally allocated to all the political parties and that you are not in any situation connected to corruption and you can use this money, then I think it would be logical for the party to use it in order to be more successful in becoming or be more successful in getting elected representatives on a local to a state or federal level. I think that's from my perspective, looking outside, it's okay.

Ismar

Socially, I think it's not fair to receive money to make politics, to be politicians, while our people have many other necessities. I think that is not fair. But if everyone else is using public money, why don't you use? I think it's unjust because it's something like if someone wants to kill me and I have no gun and I want to convince them, him just with talking. I think it's not fair. It's a very difficult situation.

Frank

Okay, so we're sort of projecting a little bit too far into the future. I want to go back to the Sunday. So you did not go to the house that your party had rented to be with your party colleagues, etc. So the elections closed at four, the polling closed at four, and at seven o'clock in the evening, you had the results. So first of all, where were you when you were given the result? Were you at home in your own apartment or were you with your family?

Ismar

I was at my mom's house.

Frank

Okay. And how did you find out? How did you find out? What did you do to how many people voted for you? Is there an internal system that you can use that is not publicly available or how does it work?

Ismar

The biggest TV channel in Brazil is called the TV Globo. And it was giving us the numbers for mayors all around Brazil, mainly for capitals, only for capitals and some other big cities. But for my case, I have to search on a specific site from, I would say, electoral departments, something like this. And it was possible, for example, which kind of vote would you like to know for our city councilor or mayor?

No, of course, we choose the region after the state and the city. And then the last, I had to choose mayor or city councilor, then I had the number.

Frank

Okay. All right. So and then on your screen pops up, Ismar 53 votes. Describe to us that precise moment when you saw the result of all of the hard work. And I mean, you and I, we have been discussing this topic for at least six months, if not longer. Yeah. And what is what happened when you saw the result of your hard work?

Ismar

It's something very praise, many a sensation because they don't match to one to another. I'm not a non-person, then I have 53 votes, then it's all right. And I would like to be elected. And for that, I would have to have at least 3,200 votes. Okay. I see where this is going. And there is another feeling. I worked a lot to get only 53 votes. I think it's something that it's the reason a proportion between how much I worked and the number of votes that I got. It's like an account that it's not fair.

Frank

Yeah. The relation is an interesting observation because it happens the same in social media. Yeah. Everybody focuses on the person with the biggest number of followers with the highest visibility. And that is an attraction. And if you are outside of this sphere, then you have to work even harder to become visible, to become successful. So, you know, we talk about success. If you were successful, it is easier to be even more successful. But if you are unsuccessful, but you may have the right ideas, it is very difficult to become successful. And that and I think the question there is, corruption aside, is this actually fair that if you are successful, life is easy? Is this really fair? Yeah. I don't think we can change that. But yes, for you to be successful, you have to not only maintain the 53 votes that you got, yeah, you have to get 3,247, no 3,147 extra votes to get through to become a city councillor. Yeah. You've got two years to do that.

Ismar

And there's something interesting. For example, I have a colleague from my party. She worked much more than me. Maybe one at least as far I know. If he wasn't the one who wanted more, but he was the one that has wanted more, a group that has worked more. And on Instagram, her post had many more comments and likes, something like 300, 400, like 50, 100. And the most of them were below 20. And she had only 142 votes. And it's something that show us, as you said, there is no relation between the number of followers like and the number of votes. And some other item, we have 29 city councilors, 15 were re-elected, only 15. And some other people who are famous, for example, a judge or some people from media, and they didn't get a good good result or many votes. Some people who are famous and have worked for our city, I think it's something that I can't understand exactly how it happened. And another point that I told you, there are some politicians that buy votes from people. They would pay, I would say maybe 20 euros or 40 euros, something between 20 and 40 euros. It's illegal, but people do that. Some politicians do that.

Frank

Okay, so you processed the results. What did your mother say?

Ismar

My mom said, oh, you had only 53 votes. I think it's not a good idea to be a candidate again. Why don't you try to do something different that you like? I think it's better you give up.

Frank

Okay, I suppose at the age of 86 or so, horizons are a little different or timelines are a little different. Of course, the period leading to the election was very intense for you, and the closer you got to election day, the more intense this whole scenario was. The day of the election is almost like you are in this bubble with no air. You are floating around. You have the unusual situation that you vote for yourself. You spend the day with your family. In the evening, you hear or you see your result, and it's like a pin going into the balloon. You go pop, and the balloon explodes, and you come back to reality. So how was the week between last Monday and today? How was your week? How did you process this without all this intense or medium intense pressure of campaigning, looking for people to vote for you, the whole politics? How was it the morning after?

Ismar

I told you that two weeks ago I had a problem on my knee. I suppose that it was because I walked a lot. I don't know if I mentioned it. Yes, and the week after the election, until now, I have been thinking, isn't it something like a vanity to be a City Councillor? Why do I want to be a City Councillor? Because there are many people to work for, or see things. You are only an ordinary person. You aren't a special person. Why do you want to do that? Sometimes I ask myself about that, and of course, the majority of candidates are younger than me. Probably there are a few that are older, and I thought, isn't it better to do something calmer, easier? But I don't have the answer to now, and of course, there are some other activities that I like, for example, English. You mentioned my mum that told me to not contact me again, because my mum is very practical. For example, my mum will never study English if she didn't have an objective with that, because I study English, because I like it, but I don't have an objective to reach with English, and my mom wouldn't do that. Fair enough. I suppose politics is the same. I know that many people want to be a City Councillor because of the salary, because according to Brazilian standards, it's a very good salary. Probably maybe something around 10 or less percent that receives what City Councillor receives here, but it's not my objective. The salary, I suppose, that their salary should be much more, much smaller than... I think it's like an offence to people, how many politicians gain. But I don't have answers for them, for these questions I had this week. And in two years I will be 65 to be a candidate for a state... I don't know how to say the state... A state representative to be in the state parliament, Because, I mean, the barrier is even higher, because being a city councilor you have to get 3,200 votes. You just worked in Campo Grande. If you want to become a member of the state parliament, then of course the... At least 25,000, at least. How many votes? To be sure to be elected, I suppose 30,000.

Frank

Okay, 53 to 30,000 in two years. Okay, I suppose the fundamental question there isn't how realistic you are, but I think the more important question is how idealistic, not realistic, but idealistic are you, because the picture that you have always painted is that the system in Brazil is corrupt to the bone, and that it will take The Novo party a very long time to achieve electoral success. And I suppose you will know that you know that you can never really be a candidate, or you can be a candidate, but you will never be an elected representative, but you will help contribute to the future, so that your idealism is more important than the realistic chances of is more important than the realistic chances of success. Is that a fair argument?

Ismar

But I think my idealism is only theoretical, because I have done, and I haven't been doing something real till now, and sometimes I think, how can I have my city or community without being a politician with some power? My decision is, but it's not completely decided yet, it's something I have been thinking, is to take part in the regional council in my city, we have seven, I still take part of one, and I have to know more about what's its importance, how they can interfere or to suggest some good things for municipal administration. I think the first step till now, I suppose that is to take part of these regional councils.

Frank

I suppose what you are actually doing, Ismar, and it doesn't really matter where people live and what political party they wish to follow, that's democracy, we have the right to choose any political party we

believe in, but I think what you are doing is challenging the ordinary citizen to think about how they can improve the environment in which they live. So, for instance, I live in this small village of 700 people, and you can challenge me and say, Frank, what are you doing for your local community? Are you talking with the mayor? Are you talking with the people who hold office in our small community? Are you involved in people who are in the local community? Are you talking with the people who hold office in our small community? Are you involved in the community projects? Are you helping somebody do this or do that? Are you actually an active member of the community, or are you a passive member of the community who always complains, or even worse, are you a passive member of the community who simply does not care? And that's, I think, the worst that you can do. So maybe, Ismar, just being active and speaking and doing something, it will not revolutionize Brazil, but it will somehow improve something somewhere in the community. And if you can motivate other people to do this, is that not success enough? In the big scheme of things, it's tiny, but it affects your immediate environment.

Ismar

Yeah, but I think if you compare your case of not acting to be an active member of your community with my case, I think it's not fair because you are still working to have some income. You work a lot, and in my case, I don't have to work to have an income because I have my pension. I think it's not fair to compare. Okay, thank you for that. But I don't need to do it. It's something that my inner tells me I have to do something more. It's correct to say my inner? You have this inner desire to do something more, yeah. But let me tell you something that I considered to know, but I didn't close my reflection. How many people welcomed me? Welcome. And how they discussed with me in a positive way, how people smiled and gave me a patient. I suppose that the number of them is much superior than 53 votes. And I have a question. Are people, some part of this, some part of people very polite, because I said that there is a part that is very impolite, or they are hypocrites, to show me some emotion, some agreement with my point of views in our discussion, and they voted in a different way. I have no answer for them.

Frank

There is, and I can send you the links to these, there is a discussion that I have been following called The Dilemma, and it addresses this problem. And we are led to believe that those who shout the loudest are the best. And, but privately, and I have experienced this myself, privately, people will say, I believe that Mr. X, Y, Z is correct, because everybody else says the same. But off the record and privately, they will say, actually, this is not true. I am saying this because I am afraid, or I don't want to stand out, or some other reason. And there is something in the human nature where it goes click, and everybody says, yes, that's correct, but personally, they do not believe this. And so to translate this to two situations, years ago, when I was still talking to senior management in big companies, they would publicly say, we have to do this, the system demands it from me, but privately, they said, we don't like it, we're not happy, but we are powerless to change this. And in your case, I think the answer is that even if the vote is anonymous, and somebody taps in the number of the electoral candidates, yeah, they may be very, very honest to you and say, yes, Ismar, I fully agree with you, I believe what you say, and I will vote for you. And then they go to the election booth, they tap a number on the machine, and something will change, because either they were hypocritical, you have to allow for that, or maybe they couldn't go and vote, they were sick, or didn't want to vote, or did a zero, you know, a 0000 vote or something,

or they simply thought, okay, if I vote for Ismar, if I tap in 30111, who's Ismar? He is unknown, so my vote will be wasted, so I will vote for the candidate who has the highest chances of success. And we come back to this, we come back to this scenario that once you are successful, everything is easy. And that's unfair. But if you are honest and down to earth, and I mean, like I said to you, politically, I don't know if I would agree with everything that Novo Party proposes, okay, I do not know the political program. But something tells me that there might be a lot of things that I do not agree with, even if I were living in Brazil and understand the context. But having spent all these hours talking with you, understanding you, getting to know you, then I would have voted for you irrespective of the party, because I see the man. And I would have had this feeling, but come to the booth, I would have said, well, yeah, okay, so Ismar is a nice person, but he has no chances. So I might as well vote for so and so, because I know it will be, it will be a vote, he will succeed, and the system is corrupt, the system is wrong anyway, but I cannot change it. Yeah, so there are two things at play here. Your lack of visibility, and the feeling of, well, I cannot change it anyway. So why try? Yeah, and that's the negative, that's the negative thinking, or the negative connotation here. And which is why my advice to you is, for the next two years, do you want to be re-elected, or do you want to be a candidate for the state senate, for the state parliament? Yes. Will you be elected as a member of parliament? No. Will your input help make the party that you represent better? Yes. And for that reason, it would be a good idea to continue this process, because you will contribute. And it is, if there are many of Isma's all working along the same thing, and not thinking what is the power for me, and what is my advantage, but what is the advantage for my party, for my state, and for the country that I was born in, that's the question we should be looking at.

Ismar

And there is another point that I thought. I have a family problem with my sister that don't help me to look after my mom. And in general, I would say that I am socially more orientated than my sisters. I have studied more than them. I have travelled more than them. They lived here in this city for almost, no, for 50 years. And last week, my youngest sister, for the first time, travelled alone. She's 61. Only now that she's 61 years old, she travelled alone for the first time. And if I'm not skilful enough to convince, to show my sister that they have the duty to share my mom's activities in equal or something like, almost equal in three parts, how much skilful am I to be a city councillor or a state parameter to help people if I'm not good enough to change my whole family?

Frank

Okay. I understand the logic of your arguments. And from your perspective, the logic of this argument makes sense. Yeah. I would argue against that by saying, your sister, your youngest sister, is a very individual person. And there are many, many factors which, you know, there are many factors which have influenced her life and influenced the decisions that she makes or does not make. Yeah. And if you cannot convince your sister to do something, it does not mean that you can convince other people to do something. And that's not the case. And that's not the case with your sister. It's just that your sister has led a life the way she has led. She has made decisions that she's made and something somewhere doesn't work. Yeah. And maybe the question isn't, should I be a candidate for a state parliamentarian? The question is, between now and election day in two years time, what can I do to help the party that I represent be more successful? So look at the bigger picture and less on the role of Ismar.

Ismar

I told you that the number of votes of one candidate conducted to help others to be elected. Yeah.

Okay. Suppose that in a good scenario, I got 2,000 votes for a state parliamentarian.

This number of votes will add to have one state parliamentarian for my party. But if you have only 53 votes in the next election, it won't help much.

Frank

I'm going to challenge this. There is a saying that, behind every successful husband is an ambitious woman.

Ismar

Okay. You are saying that I have to get married.

Frank

What I am saying is, you may not be the successful husband, that will be the party, but you can be the ambitious woman pushing the party forward. I didn't think, because there are less parties. So, if we equate, if we take the sentence, behind every successful husband is an ambitious woman, let us change this role and say that your political party is a successful woman, and you are the ambitious husband. So you are the ambitious husband. And you are the ambitious husband. So you're quite happy to let the woman be successful, but you will push her with your own ambitions. Okay. I have to help my party. Even I won't be elected. Yeah. But somehow you will benefit from this. Yeah. Yeah. It makes sense. Yeah.

Ismar

And something that let me, but I don't know if they were only polite, but the two leaders, municipal and the state leader told me that I have the profile that is what the party looks for. Yeah. And that they would like to have me together with them because they trust me and they invited me, of course, in a question, if I'd like to be a candidate again. And this part specifically got me a little proud of myself because if not, I thought they wouldn't say that I am the kind of person that the party looks for. Yeah. They could only have asked me for the next election, would you like to be a candidate again or not? Okay. But they present some appreciation. They think about me. Of course, they could be only polite or not, but I don't know.

Frank

Yeah. Okay. I'm going to translate this into the husband-wife scenario. So your political party is asking you to marry it. I think you should say yes.