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Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America

 Instituto de
Estudios
Sociales
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Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America

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FOREWORD

The political transition of the Evangelical churches in Latin America over time has been drastic. While the first Protestant missionaries that arrived from Europe wanted to improve society through the Gospel, without really playing a fundamental political role, today's Evangelicals no longer talk of the "if" but only the "how" of their political actions. They have amassed a sizeable voting power, to the extent that they can tip the electoral balance, as the recent past demonstrates. In this new political and religious environment, governments and political parties in various Latin American countries are considering the pros and cons of an informal or formal rapprochement with Evangelical churches, be it through incorporating Evangelical leaders on their electoral slates or through concessions in their programmatic platforms, for instance concerning issues of the so-called "moral agenda".

Given the importance of this phenomenon for understanding Latin America's current political panorama, it is rather surprising how little thorough and comparative academic research on the issue is available so far. As Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), we aim to help bridge that gap. In our Peru office, we have therefore started the ambitious project of analyzing the political influence of Evangelicals with a regional perspective. We found a highly knowledgeable ally for this undertaking in the former Peruvian Interior Minister and scholar José Luis Perez Guadalupe, who in 2017 published the groundbreaking study: *"Entre Dios y el César – El impacto político de los evangélicos en el Perú y América Latina."* We were able to build a regional network of scholars and experts based on this first joint experience and the very positive reception

of the study. The first result of this cooperation was the book *“Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina”*, published in October 2018 in Lima. It includes an in-depth comparative synthesis by José Luis Pérez Guadalupe and articles by different authors on the political influence of Evangelicals in ten Latin American countries. The book has so far been presented with great success in different countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Germany and Peru.

As a next step, we are now very pleased to present the main results of this work for the first time in English. *“Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America”* contains an enriched version of the introductory chapter of *“Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina”* featuring contributions by the group’s different authors and some new concepts based on intense group discussions during conferences in Lima, Peru, and Berlin, Germany, in October and November 2018, respectively. In that way, the present publication, albeit having one lead author, is a team effort. I would thus like to thank especially the following members of this team for their contributions on the respective countries: Oscar Amat y León (Peru), Álvaro Bermúdez (El Salvador), Claudia Dary (Guatemala), Carlos Garma (Mexico), Fabio Lacerda and José Mario Brasiliense (Brazil), Claire Nevache (Panama), Guillermo Sandoval (Chile), Juan David Velasco (Colombia), Hilario Wyncarczyk (Argentina) and César Zuñiga (Costa Rica). A special thanks also goes to Judy Butler in Nicaragua for her translation and to Andrés Hildebrandt in the KAS Peru for coordinating this project.

Special credit also goes to the *Instituto de Estudios Social Cristianos (IESC)* in Lima, which is co-publishing this publication and co-owns the project. As KAS and IESC we share the aspiration of societies based on the values of freedom, democracy, justice and solidarity. It is our conviction that persons of faith can play an important role in constructing them. In this sense, we hope that *“Evangelicals and political power in Latin America”* will contribute to the international debate not only on the relations between Evangelicals and politics in Latin America but also between faith and politics in general.

Lima, May 2019

Sebastian Grundberger

Resident Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Peru

Introduction

The accelerated growth of Evangelical churches starting in the 1970s has been one of the clearest aspects confirmed by the study of social phenomena in Latin America in recent decades. It has come at the cost of a decline in Catholicism on the continent, where the Catholic faith is the strongest in the world. Moreover, the past few years have revealed equally clear evidence of a related new phenomenon starting in the 1980s: a massive entry of Evangelical leaders into the political party arena, making the Evangelical movement one of the region's new political actors, although with diverse manifestations and unequal impact in each country.

Is this new political-religious—or religious-political—reality in Latin America only a new chapter in a well-known history of the instrumental utilization of religious sentiments for political ends? Or is it rather a novel political instrumentalization for religious ends? Are the Latin American Evangelicals who are currently participating in politics essentially 'political leaders' or do they continue to be and feel like 'religious leaders'? Put another way: is their bedrock motivation political or religious? Are they "political Evangelicals" or "Evangelical politicians"?

Some years ago, Edir Macedo, leader and founder of the largest and most widespread Pentecostal church on the continent, published a suggestive book titled *Plan for Power—God, Christians and Politics*, in which he shows the religious backdrop to this new political wave of Evangelicals ("political Evangelicals"). It isn't a government plan or anything like it, but rather a biblical reinterpretation of a supposed "political nation-building project" that God has designed for "his people" (previously Israel and now Christians). It is

supposed to culminate with the taking of power by “Evangelical Christians.” But what does “power” mean to these Evangelicals and for what purpose do they want it? Is it a search for religious power or political power...or both?

As recently as a few years ago, nobody would have imagined that those marginal and marginalized groups, frequently called “religious sects,” that emerged timidly on the peripheries of our cities and in forgotten rural zones would form an army of loyal parishioners and backers whose pastors now want to see them also converted into political brethren and voters. This has transpired because certain Evangelical leaders are intent on extending their religious militancy into the public sphere and convert that well-earned “religious capital” into profitable “political capital.”

Those most surprised by the appearance of this phenomenon have been the Catholic leaders, who refused to accept that they were no longer the only Christians on the subcontinent or necessarily even the most successful in satisfying people’s needs and gaining followers. Nor have they wanted to accept that the problem of the Latin American Catholic Church wasn’t “religious” but “denominational”; it wasn’t about “religious demand” but about “ecclesial supply.” Even less did they believe that these dynamic modern Christian groups, more prepared for the new times, were going to win over that lost flock, wandering like sheep with no shepherd.

As has been said many times, while the Catholic Church professed its preferential option for the poor, Latin America’s poor made a preferential option for the Evangelicals. Above all, while the former was an option for the poor, the latter was an option of the poor. This was verifiable in the social strata in which Pentecostalism flourished, among other things through the empowerment of a lay leadership that enabled the rapid growth of what was called “*criollo* [native or home-grown] Pentecostalism.” While Catholic clericalism (today very criticized by Pope Francis himself) did not permit the emergence of a mature grassroots laity, small Pentecostal “garage churches” began to inundate the marginal barrios of large Latin American cities. In addition, it has been proven that the lower the social class, the fuller those churches and the emptier the Catholic ones.

Another social sector surprised by this religious and electoral intrusion has been that of the political parties themselves. It never occurred to them to put their money on the Evangelicals, neither considering their numerical importance nor respecting their religious (moral) approaches. Today, however, all parties want to win over the Evangelical vote, or at least have a pastor in their ranks, with the ingenuous idea that it is a way to gain the sympathy

of an assumed “confessional vote.” In addition, political candidates as well as rulers in office are increasingly measuring their words to avoid wounding anybody’s religious susceptibilities, not to mention awakening the wrath of the Christian faithful with a “gender focus,” egalitarian marriage or any other issue that could generate controversy. In fact, religious discourses are now influencing the public policies of the region’s countries, starting with Brazil. The marches and other pressures against education ministers who dare to challenge their religious vision in the school curriculum are well known in Latin America. It would appear that the current motto of the well-organized “political Evangelicals” is no longer just “Don’t mess with my children” but “Don’t mess with us.” Logically, this varies among the region’s different countries, as we will see over the course of this book.

This “silent revolution” has not been limited to the numerical growth that interred five centuries of Catholic religious monopoly in Latin America; it has escalated into a well-planned public and political penetration with supposed Old Testament theological underpinnings and is often complemented by its leaders’ personalist political ambitions. But beyond its doctrinaire sources (both religious and political) and its leaders’ true intentions, a clear Evangelical political potential has unarguably been consolidated that can tip the electoral scales of any country if it achieves unity in its political preferences. Additionally, the Evangelical “moral agenda” (pro-life and pro-family) has succeeded in transcending denominational barriers, and is now attracting both Evangelicals and Catholics to its ranks.

In this regard, we can affirm that 2018 saw the consolidation of Evangelical churches as new actors in Latin America. It is worth recalling that in February of that year Fabricio Alvarado, an Evangelical legislator, surprisingly won the first electoral round against four other major presidential candidates in Costa Rica with an un-nuanced religious and moral discourse; he pulled a quarter of the country’s congressional seats while he was at it. Then in July, leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) won Mexico’s presidential elections with the express support of the Social Encounter Party (PES), an Evangelical party, and pledged to create a “moral Constitution” and submit the issues of the so-called “moral agenda” to a national referendum. And in October, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a rightwing legislator, won Brazil’s presidential elections with not only homophobic, xenophobic and machista attitudes, but also a pro-life and pro-family discourse (anti-abortion and anti-egalitarian marriage) that helped him garner official support from the large Evangelical churches, above all Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal ones. These cases in just one year,

in addition to already having an Evangelical President in Guatemala (Jimmy Morales), demonstrate the impact Evangelicals have achieved on the continent. Moreover, the great diversity of their political support from different parties and tendencies distances them from their classic leanings in the 1960s and 70s, which was only toward military dictatorships and rightwing parties.

We can see, then, that Latin America's Evangelicals have varied rapidly relative to the rest of the world regarding their vision of politics. In the past two decades the Evangelicals virtually went from being socially marginalized to being political protagonists, from "fleeing the world" to "conquering the world," from wondering if they should participate in politics to wondering how they should participate; from being guided by the slogan "brothers do not contaminate themselves with politics" to "brothers vote for brothers," from celestial pre-millenarianism to placating worldly post-millenarianism, from the 'foreign-Protestant-missionary' model to the 'national-Evangelical-pastor' model. This major change of social and theological paradigms has led them in a very short time to monetizing on their numerical potential into electoral capital and converting them into new Latin American political actors.

Nonetheless, we must not restrict our analysis to the basic confessional categories (Catholic or Evangelical). It is also necessary to perceive within each one of them a series of internal segmentations that sustain the possibility of crosscutting units. For example, this has enabled those who were historically Catholic Charismatics to feel themselves very close to the Evangelical Pentecostals, or for the Pentecostals to join easily with conservative Catholic sectors to support certain rightwing political and party proposals. This can even be seen in the national parliaments, where "inter-confessional benches" find common utilitarian ground on specific issues, although always headed up by Evangelicals,

With that in mind, the Evangelicals' current political offering (which at bottom is religious) is more attractive than that of Latin America's Christian Democratic or Social Christian parties. And everything suggests that the process those parties of a Catholic stripe went through in their time, which pulled the vote of many citizens who wanted to defend their religious principles, are being reedited, but this time with the Evangelicals' political proposals. The big difference is that *Pensamiento Social Cristiano* (Social Christian Thought), based above all on the Catholic Church's social doctrine, expressed that values-based baggage in a doctrinal corpus and government plans for the majority of countries in the region with marked success during its history. The Evangelicals have not yet formed this doctrinal framework nor, beyond a few attempts, have

they created the much-longed-for *Pensamiento Social Evangélico*, much less a genuine 'government plan.' This apart, it must be asked whether the current religious-political proposals are filling the bill as a functional equivalent for the Christians of different faiths (Catholics and Evangelicals): i.e. if we are in fact seeing the emergence of new political actors who are raising the banner of Christian values more effectively and successfully than their Catholic predecessors.

Finally, in analyzing this brief history of Evangelical political participation in Latin America that appeared starting in the 1980s, we must not lose sight of the great variety and diversity of said participation, consistent with the Evangelical and national phenomenological heterogeneity of our continent. For this reason, although in this book we analyze the historical standards of this novel political participation, we will also be respectful of the multi-form casuistry that has shown up in different countries and regions during this century and a half of Evangelical presence. To this end we are presenting the cases of 10 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Peru. And beyond the historical political manifestation of the Evangelicals in its tripartite form (Evangelical party, Evangelical front and Evangelical faction), we also present a new regional division by way of 'ideal types': the 'Central American,' 'South American' and 'Brazilian' models. We will end with a prospective vision of the new incursion strategies by 'political Evangelicals' (as 'crosscutting agendas' and 'pressure groups') and a synthesis of this Latin American political-religious phenomenon through 25 conclusive theses.

Chapter 1.

How many evangelicals are there in Latin America and who are they?

In this book we use “Evangelicals” as the term is typically used in Latin America: to refer generally to all Christian groups of a Protestant tradition in Latin America that to a greater or lesser degree center their religious activity on evangelizing and converting. Beyond the doctrinal or denominational differences they may have with their Protestant forebears, Evangelicals are fundamentally mission churches with voluntary Christ- and Bible-centered parishioners. Among them we can historically find everything from the most traditional main-line denominations such as Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists to conservative Evangelicals, Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals and free churches. Even the late Argentine Methodist theologian José Míguez Bonino, who did advanced studies at New York’s Union theological Seminary, speaks of “three faces of Latin American Protestantism—Liberal, Evangelical and Pentecostal” (Míguez Bonino, 1995, p. 7). In the end, however, Bonino concluded that he would also have to include what he called “immigration Protestantism” (transplanted or ethnic churches) as the fourth face of Latin American Protestantism. But with the beginning of the 21st century, we would also have to include a fifth manifestation, the neo-Pentecostal, which we will look at in greater detail later. As can be seen, it is not easy to define, group or differentiate the entirety of this complex Evangelical phenomenon. We can, however, conclude, together with the Swiss Calvinist theologian and sociologist Christian Lalive d’Epinay, author of a study of Chilean Protestantism, that “following the Latin American custom, we understand by Evangelicals all members of the religious movement of the ‘grand Protestant family,’ be they Pentecostals, Methodists, Baptists, etcetera” (Lalive d’Epinay, 1968, p. 29).

What needs to be clear is that we can’t speak of *the* Evangelical Church (as a simile with the Catholic Church), but of Evangelical churches, always in the

plural. We must also specify that the word “Evangelical” doesn’t have the same religious significance in Latin America that it has in the United States (when speaking of conservative Evangelicals¹) or in Europe (as when one refers, for example, to the Lutheran Evangelical Church). It also needs to be specified that the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses or Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) aren’t part of the great and diverse Latin American Evangelical community, as they don’t feel part of it nor does it feel them to be part of it.²

1.1. Religious characteristics of Evangelicals in Latin America

Being an Evangelical in Latin America implies differentiating oneself clearly not only from the Catholics but also from one’s own European ancestors: the Protestants. As is known, what has historically been termed Protestantism is the religious movement that emerged in the 16th Century as a result of what was called the Western Schism, product of the development of the religious experience of Augustine monk Martin Luther in Germany starting in 1517.

The term “*Protestant*” thus generically includes the movements, churches and communities that identify with the basic postulates of the Lutheran reform and its respective theological variants growing out of the social and religious context in which they were emerging in various countries of Europe. The churches commonly identified as Protestant in Latin America are the oldest and most traditional ones, which came to these lands starting in the early 19th Century. They have been called “historical churches,” “transplanted churches,” “liberal Protestantism” (Míguez Bonino, 1995) and the like. Initially, their religious service was directed to foreign personnel, and only gradually did it begin incorporating nationals of the countries where they established themselves. For that reason, these churches are not numerical majorities. The level of historical Protestantism’s presence and influence in the public arena rested instead on the contribution

1 In this book we use the term ‘conservative Evangelicals’ to refer to the most conservative line—in both the religious and political sense—of US Protestantism, which while having arrived in Latin America in the early part of the last century with important evangelizing missions, had reached their apogee by mid-century. This distinction is necessary to clearly differentiate this term from other lines or branches of the complex world of the Latin American Evangelical movement.

2 To delve deeper into these differences, see Pérez Guadalupe (2002), above all pp. 188-282. It is worth noting that the Seventh Day Adventists are very close to the Evangelical movement and in some countries have certain organizational relations, but due to very specific doctrinal issue, they can’t be placed within the great Evangelical family.

of its leaders in different spheres of civil society and in the debate about the period's public agenda issues. As part of their spiritual proposal, the Protestants developed community service activities and understood evangelization beyond the proselytizing emphasis, while at the same time maintaining a high degree of ecumenical dialogue with the Catholic Church.

The term "*Evangelical*" is what members of the non-Catholic Christian churches (heirs of Protestantism) and their descendants in Latin America generally call themselves. Unlike "Protestant," which was initially a term imposed by the adversaries of Lutheranism, "Evangelical" is a self-definition of the heirs of the Reform since the late 19th and early 20th Century, especially under the influence of US expansionism.

As is known, after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910) discarded Latin America as being a "mission land" (due to the presence of the Catholic Church), the Congress on Christian Work held in Panama (1916) in opposition to the conclusions of Edinburgh, consolidated the foreign missions in our continent. Later, according to what is agreed to at the First Latin American Evangelical Conference (CELA I), organized in Buenos Aires (1949), the representatives of the churches on the continent established that:

As the Gospel [*Evangelio*] is what unites us and distinguishes us in the Latin American environment, and as the term "Evangelical" is consecrated by long and honorable employment, we recommend its use; and that our work in Latin America be designated as "Evangelical Christianity" when making reference to it in general. When referring to the churches in particular, we recommend that in each case the word "Evangelical" precede the respective denominational name (CELA I, 1949, p. 30).

This same affirmative perspective about the Evangelical phenomenon was ratified in 1961 in the second Latin American Evangelical Conference (CELA II) by suggesting "to the national Evangelical Councils and Confederations the promotion among the religious organizations... that when using the denominational title it be preceded by the terms EVANGELICAL CHURCH so that said terms are common to all denominations" (compare CELA II, 1962).

But while the term "Evangelical" took hold all over Latin America, it did little to establish a solid unity and homogeneity among the Latin American Evangelicals. The sense of "Evangelism" progressively developed differentiated contents over its history. Thus we can speak of diverse forms of being Evangelical on the continent, which have coexisted with others, and have entered into ongoing conflict to achieve certain hegemony in the Evangelical religious

camp itself. Despite these internal differences, however, we could include in a definition of the Evangelical movement in Latin America the following common characteristics, in addition to those indicated above:

- a) Evangelicals understand themselves as a movement of revival and renewal with respect to a previous tradition from which they distanced themselves and began to break away. After a period of institutionalization, a new rupture begins to take shape, a process we have called its “fissiparous vocation and atomizing DNA” (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017).
- b) Their missionary dimension has gone through different stages of the Evangelical missionology: i) Evangelization with a sense of human promotion, the search for personal and social development and the dignifying of the most excluded sectors of the population; ii) Evangelization with a specifically religious content, and iii) a more proselytizing sense of Evangelization with religious marketing techniques and an ecclesiastical business management logic.
- c) The Evangelical conception of church combines the senses of efficacy and flexibility in differentiating the universal church from the local one. This makes it possible for Evangelicals to feel part of a single and indivisible Universal Church and at the same time compete with and confront Evangelical churches and denominations as local churches.
- d) Eschatology has historically been of great interest to Evangelicals. Pre-millenarianism (as the dominant eschatology of the early 20th Century) denied any value to temporal realities with discourses that interpreted the “coming of the Lord” as a “carrying away” of the just from this world and a posterior “grand tribulation.” This is the context in which the conservative Evangelical missionaries arrived in Latin America, with a pessimistic apocalyptic view of the historic realities and a strong emphasis on the imminence of the “second coming of Christ.”
- e) One of the elements that best distinguishes Evangelicals is their way of approximating and interpreting the Bible, often with a clear biblical literalism. This has led to the affirmation of an ‘Evangelical Biblicism’ through which the doctrines or teachings of a particular Evangelical group are magnified and idealized by identifying them as the church’s “correct doctrine” that must be defended and preserved against any effort of revision or modification.

And, finally, we could suggest a practical or sociological characteristic of Evangelicals to differentiate them from Protestants in Latin America: “A

Protestant church that evangelizes is Evangelical; an Evangelical church that no longer evangelizes has become Protestant.” This functional distinction is underpinned by the main characteristic of Evangelical churches in our continent: evangelization. If these churches institutionalize themselves and are dedicated only to a pastoral of “maintenance” of their faithful (as has happened to many denominations that are the children of classic Protestantism), it means they are losing the essence of being Evangelical: evangelization. Paraphrasing the Latin slogan *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda est*, we could say that the “Evangelical church is always evangelizing.”

1.2. Unusual numerical growth

According to Latinobarómetro (2014), Evangelicals have won over a very large space in the region as a whole and there are countries in which they are very close to catching up numerically with the Catholics, among them Honduras with 41% Evangelicals and 47% Catholics, Guatemala with 40% Evangelicals and 47% Catholics, and Nicaragua with 37% Evangelicals and 47% Catholics. We also have Brazil, with the most Catholics in the world, which in 18 years (1995-2013) lost 15 percentage points of Catholicism to the Evangelicals. Paraguay and Ecuador are the only countries on the continent in which Catholicism still exceeds 80%, while in other countries non-religious affiliation is growing more, for example Uruguay, where 38% of the population claims no religious affiliation, 13% are Evangelicals and 41% are Catholics. But beyond these specific and ever-changing figures, all data show a sustained decline of Catholicism in Latin America over the past five decades, with Evangelical growth in almost the same proportion, followed in second place by the growth of Latin Americans with no religious affiliation. At the present time, then, only approximately one in two Uruguayans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Puerto Ricans is Catholic. Nonetheless, we are also seeing that Catholicism, while no longer hegemonic or dominant, is still the majority religion in the continental sphere with 67% of the total population, albeit very far below the 92% it had in 1970 (a 25-point drop in less than 50 years).

We can see below some tables from the Pew Research Center (with figures similar to those of Latinobarómetro from 2014) regarding the religious evolution of the past decades in Latin America’s changing panorama:

Religious Affiliation in Latin America

	Catholic	Protestant	No affiliation	Other
Predominantly Catholic				
Paraguay	89	7	1	2
Mexico	81	9	7	4
Colombia	79	13	6	2
Ecuador	79	13	5	3
Bolivia	77	16	4	3
Peru	76	17	4	3
Venezuela	73	17	7	4
Argentina	71	15	11	3
Panama	70	19	7	4
Catholic Majority				
Chile	64	17	16	3
Costa Rica	62	25	9	4
Brazil	61	26	8	5
Dominican Rep.	57	23	18	2
Puerto Rico	56	33	8	2
Hispanics in US	55	22	18	5
Half Catholic				
El Salvador	50	36	12	3
Guatemala	50	41	6	3
Nicaragua	50	40	7	4
Less than Half Catholic				
Honduras	46	41	10	2
Uruguay	42	15	37	6
Regional Total*				
(adjusted according to size of population in each country)	69	19	8	4

QCURREL

*The regional total does not include US Hispanic population.
Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The above table summarizes the religious situation in the entire continent, showing us precise figures of Latin American religiosity: Catholics, Evangelicals, those with other beliefs and non-affiliated. As can be seen, the average number of Catholics has dropped to 69% in Latin America as a whole, while the number of Evangelicals has risen to 19%, of those with no religious affiliation has climbed to 8% and of those affiliated with other beliefs holding steady at 4%. In general terms, we can see that Catholicism still maintains two-thirds of

religious membership on the continent. While it has lost its monopoly, it still maintains its majority (so far). For their part, the Evangelicals have a fifth of the Latin American population, but with huge pockets of faithful, such as in the Central American countries.

It is important to take note of the commitment believers have to their church, be it Catholic or Evangelical. It varies considerably, indicating that militancy in each church is not the same as mere membership. In this regard, it is necessary to differentiate religious preferences from religious militancy, as the Evangelicals are usually much more militant and committed to their churches than those who declare themselves Catholics. In other words, the Evangelical percentage can't be compared only in quantitative terms (membership) with the Catholic percentage, as those who declare themselves Evangelicals are regularly much more involved with their churches than are those who define themselves as Catholics.

Catholic Affiliation in Latin America Percentage of Catholic Population

	1910	1950	1970	2014	Diff. 1910-1970	Diff. 1970-2014
Argentina	97	95	91	71	-6	-20
Brazil	95	93	92	61	-3	-31
Bolivia	94	94	89	77	-5	-12
Chile	96	89	76	64	-20	-12
Colombia	80	91	95	79	+15	-16
Costa Rica	99	98	93	62	-6	-31
Dominican Republic	98	96	94	57	-4	-37
Ecuador	88	98	95	79	+7	-16
El Salvador	98	99	93	50	-5	-43
Guatemala	99	99	91	50	-8	-41
Honduras	97	96	94	46	-3	-47
Mexico	99	96	96	81	-3	-15
Nicaragua	96	96	93	50	-4	-43
Panama	84	87	87	70	+3	-17
Paraguay	97	96	95	90	-2	-5
Peru	95	95	95	76	0	-19
Puerto Rico	100	94	87	56	-13	-31
Uruguay	61	62	63	42	+2	-21
Venezuela	93	91	93	73	0	-20

Figures for 1910, 1950 and 1970 are from the World Religion Database and Brazilian and Mexican censuses. 2014 figures are based on a survey by Pew Research Center. For more information on how population was calculated, see report methodology.

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Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador are the countries with the greatest Evangelical growth. The only countries with a single-digit Evangelical following are Paraguay with 7% and Mexico with 9%. Even though Catholicism has lost 19 points in Mexico, the country's low Evangelical growth is interesting, as there is often an attempt to explain the numerical growth of Evangelicals in Central America as proximity to the United States. This doesn't seem to have happened in Mexico, even though it is closer than the Central American countries that are the cradle of Evangelism and of the original Pentecostalism. The countries with a higher percentage of population with no religious affiliation are basically in what is called the Southern Cone, such as Uruguay (37%), Chile (16%) and Argentina (11%).

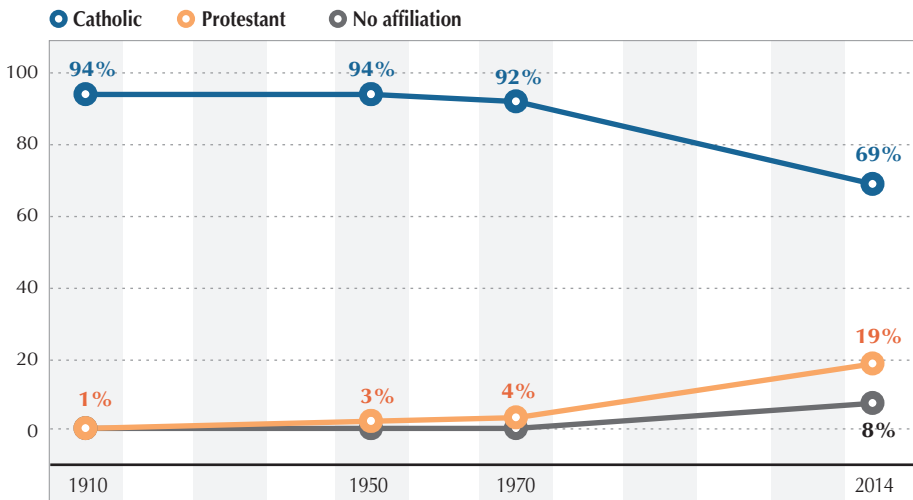
This excellent diachronic table is fundamental to understanding the religious development in all Latin American countries in the past century, above all the abrupt change starting in 1979. In doing a comparative analysis of the figures, the first thing we observe is that from 1910 to 1950, no country with the exception of Chile and Puerto Rico lost more than two percentage points of its Catholicism. Said another way, after four and a half centuries of Catholicism, no major change had occurred in the continent's religiosity. Colombia and Ecuador even gained 11 and 10 points, respectively, perhaps due to the advance of Catholic missions among the indigenous populations that had not been evangelized previously. Prior to 1970 the only relevant case of a Catholic decline was Chile, with -20%, probably due to the early formation and consolidation of the Pentecostal Church, and Puerto Rico, with -13%. But in none of the countries that now have an important Evangelical population, such as those in Central America, had Catholicism lost more than 8% (Guatemala) as of that year, followed by Costa Rica (6%), El Salvador (5%) and Nicaragua (4%). For its part, Brazil only lost 3% of its Catholicism in 70 years, despite having also had an early Pentecostal implantation. Even Uruguay, which had dropped considerably in the late 19th Century, and was already only 61% Catholic in 1910, reached 1970 without a further percentage loss for Catholicism. But contrary to what had been happening in this relatively stable part of the continent, the period from 1970 to 2014 has been characterized by an evident drop of Catholicism in all countries of the continent, in a broad range that goes from 47 points of loss in Honduras to 5 points of loss in Paraguay.

Apart from the Central American counties, those most populated also had important drops in Catholicism in these last 50 years: Brazil (31% fewer) and Mexico (15% fewer). And countries on the continent with a medium

population also suffered an important drop in the percentage of Catholics: Argentina (20%), Venezuela (20%), Peru (19%) and Colombia (16%). This not only confirms the widespread trend of Evangelic growth in recent decades at the cost of a drop in Catholicism, but also defines 1970 as the breaking point of religious stability on the continent. Moreover, while the relevant numerical growth of Evangelicals occurred in the 1970s, their political participation began in the following decade. In other words, they moved into party politics in all countries immediately after they began to they grow significantly. It only took a decade of seminal numerical growth for them to make the leap into the world of politics. They no more than settled in as social actors before debuting as new political actors.

Religious change in Latin America in the past century

Number of Catholics in Latin America has dropped; number of Protestants and people with no religious affiliation has increased
 Percentage of total population belonging to each religious group



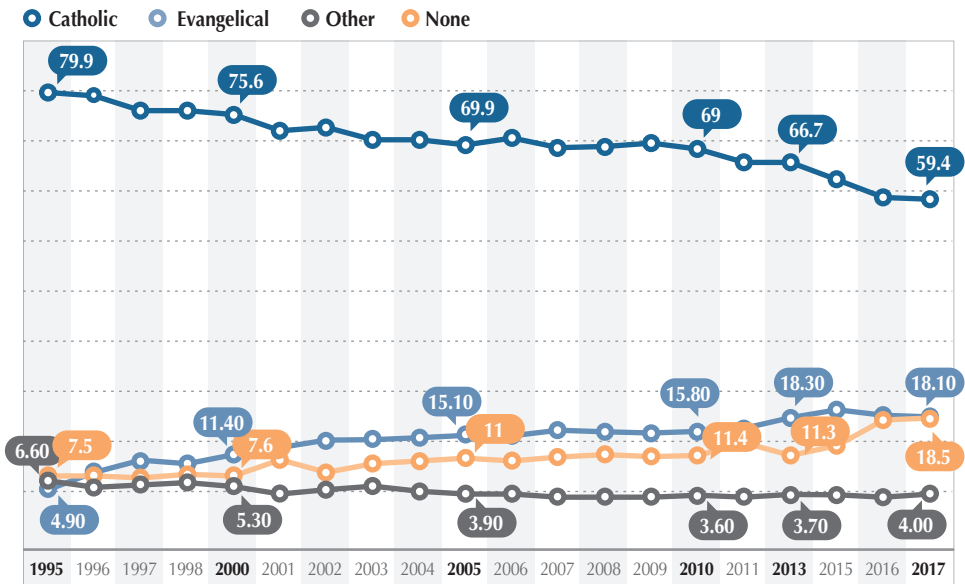
Historical figures are from the World Religion Database and Brazilian and Mexican censuses. 2014 figures are based on a survey by Pew Research Center. For more information on how population was calculated, see report methodology.

Percentages for each group may not total 100 due to rounding and the small percentage of other religious groups not shown in this chart. Figures include 18 countries and the United States territory of Puerto Rico.

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This last graph shows the data seen in the previous table and the trends that marked the religious changes on a regional scale. In 1910, as can be seen, 94% of Latin Americans were Catholics with barely 1% Protestants, and there was no religious migration between the different denominations. We can also observe that between that year and 1950, i.e. the entire first half of the century, Catholicism remained at 94%, Evangelicals increased 2 points and those with no religious affiliation didn't even appear in the statistics. In the next 20 years, from 1950 to 1970, Catholicism lost 2 points but Evangelism gained only 1 point, still not a major variation. The huge changes occurred between 1970 and 2014, with Catholicism falling 23%, the Evangelical movement growing 15% and those with no religion rising to 8%. In sum, the past 50 years have produced more religious changes than virtually all the previous five centuries. This is the genuine transformation of the Latin American religious panorama.

Religious Evolution in Latin America
Percentages 1995 – 2017



Prepared in-house with 2019 Latinobarómetro data

This panorama, however, may be even worse if the recent information from Latinobarómetro's updated on-line database (2019) is verified, as we find more radical figures with respect to Catholic disaffiliation in recent years. According to this source, Latin American Catholics have fallen from 66.7% to 59.4% between 2013 and 2017, those with no affiliation have increased from 11.3% to 18.5%,

and Evangelicals have held steady at 18%, as have those who profess another religion, at 4% on average.³ The most important information demonstrated by these figures (if conformed) is the unlikely stagnation of the Evangelicals' growth. It is more probable that there is a deceleration of their growth than an actual stagnation. Equally important is the strong increase of those with no religion at the cost of the Catholic decline. In other words, according to these data, the new religious migration is no longer only from Catholicism to Evangelism (as was the case in the past century), but from Catholicism directly to religious disaffiliation. The figures show that the 7 percentage points presumably lost by Catholicism in only four years have gone to the category of those who profess no religion. This new trend can be proven in Chile, for example, but confirmation will have to wait in the other countries of the region before stating it as a continental phenomenon.

When discussing the growth of the Evangelical groups, however, we are not referring only to the number or percentage of its members, but also to the social relevance they have acquired in these years; their abandonment of public anonymity, of the "minorities complex" that characterized them and their "garage" churches; their importance in opinion polls and social studies; and their entry into the middle and upper social classes. They are now dedicating themselves to building mega-churches in residential zones, winning over opinion leaders and advocacy groups, invading the social media and entering unexpectedly into the world of party politics. It is evident, then, that the Evangelicals are now no longer looking to do away just with the Catholic religious *monopoly* on the continent (which they have already done), but also with its *hegemony*, both religious and political. We can also see that the huge leap in the Evangelicals' numerical growth on the continent beginning in the 1970s has not stopped. If we consider that the entry into party politics throughout the region began in the 1980s, we can conclude that a determinant factor was its numerical growth the previous decade.

3 Under the category 'Evangelicals' are Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals without further specification, and Protestants. Under the category 'None' are agnostics, atheists, none, no answer and doesn't know. Under 'Other' are Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Jews, believers without a church, Afro-American cults and others. Cfr. Latinobarómetro database, 2019.

Chapter 2.

The political characteristics of the Latin American Evangelicals

We have already mentioned that we cannot speak of *the* Evangelical Church, as if it were a single Church, but rather in plural since there are innumerable churches, denominations, missions and others that belong to the great Christian-Evangelical family within Latin America. This is why it is preferable, sociologically speaking, to speak of “Evangelical churches,” “Evangelical movement,” “Evangelical community” and the like. They in turn have had different tendencies, accents, faces, etc. over their almost two centuries of history. Following the same Evangelical writers, we can distinguish three marked stages of their ecclesial history on the continent, each one with a different way of relating to society:

- a) The first Protestant missionaries who came to these lands in the mid-19th Century were from traditional and historical denominations within Protestantism and sought to insert themselves into evangelizing tasks alongside educational and social ones. These liberal Protestants joined with national political movements in the majority of the region’s countries and participated actively in movements on behalf of religious freedom, separation of Church and State, civil matrimony, lay education and the like. Their major limitation was always their scant public relevance, as their presence was almost exclusively testimonial. In the majority of Latin American countries after a century of mission and implantation, they didn’t amount to even 1% of the population in the 1950s. For that reason, whatever political impact Protestantism was able to have in that decade was due not

to the number of their members (converts) but to their missionaries' ability to establish alliances with Liberal and anti-clerical political movements.

- b)** In the middle of the last century a new type of Protestantism burst onto the stage, politically more conservative, anti-Communist and anti-ecumenical (e.g. anti-Catholic). Contrary to its predecessors, it achieved notable numerical growth through evangelizing and massive outreach strategies. The missionaries in this second wave, more dynamic and with evident US conservative influence, were the ones who succeeded in positioning "Evangelicals" socially (it was here that they gradually began to stop using the term "Protestants"), encouraging the emergence of the modern "Latin American Evangelical corpus." In some places, they also slowly began to change the Sunday Mass for the Sunday church service and the crucifix (of the priest) for the Bible (of the pastor) as a new image of Latin American renovated Christianity. The Pentecostal denominations acquired special importance as in this stage. Even though they had implanted themselves decades earlier in the majority of the region's counties (above all Brazil and Chile), they had remained in anonymity just like the other Evangelical denominations. The move from the 'foreign Protestant missionary' ecclesiastical model to the 'national Evangelical pastor' model was also consolidated in this stage. This new ecclesial protagonism of the nationals, together with their numerical growth, is what later made possible the entry of Evangelical leaders into the political arena in all countries of the region.
- c)** The fall of the Berlin Wall brought conservative anti-Communism to an end, and a renewed religious vision put an end to anti-ecumenism. Armed with this vision, these same Evangelicals who had appeared between the 1950s and 1970s together with their by-then fully Latin-Americanized descendants, now had a significant number of members (i.e. possible voters) who made up the new Evangelical social and political asset throughout the continent. Evangelicals were by then more than 15% of the faithful in Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Colombia; more than 20% in Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico; and more than 40% in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In short, the Evangelicals achieved an extraordinary numerical growth in the majority of countries that they now want to capitalize on in the political sphere.

2.1. The different waves of the Evangelical movement and their political priorities

In line with the historical defeat we have just seen, we can say that Protestantism-Evangelism in Latin America has been very diverse with respect to its political options. But it is important to indicate that the different responses the Evangelical churches have given regarding their participation in public life relate back to a prior question about their “relationship with the world.”

Classic authors such as Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Richard Niebuhr or Bryan Wilson, have already dealt extensively with the relationship the “sects,” “established sects,” denominations, churches, etc. have historically taken up with the “world.” They have shed light on the different behaviors and changes the groups of Christian origin have had over the years. For that reason, we would like to focus on analyzing how that response to the world has also been shaped into a political response by Latin America’s Evangelicals. But given that the relevant political-party participation of Evangelicals on the continent has only occurred in recent decades, we turn to more recent analyses of this phenomenon.

One of the pioneer analytical works on Evangelicals and their relationship to politics in Latin America was *El refugio de las masas*⁴ (The refuge of the Masses) by Christian Lalive d’Epinay (1968), about Chilean Pentecostalism in the mid-1960s. He later expanded his investigations into Argentina and tried to offer an explicative model for the whole of the Latin American Evangelical movement. These studies, together with those of the German sociologist/anthropologist Emilio Willems (1967), who applied Weberian theses to Pentecostalism in Brazil and Chile, are the first works that open up a different perspective into the accustomed missionary or apologetic ethnographies (in favor of or against the Evangelical phenomenon) circulating at the time.

The objective of Lalive d’Epinay’s research is to “grasp the Protestant religious systems in the dialectic that, at various levels, unites them to Chilean society,” focusing his attention especially on the Chilean Pentecostal movement. In addition, he poses as a working hypothesis that “Pentecostalism presents itself as a community religious response to the abandonment of large segments of the population; abandonment provoked by the state of mind of a society in

4 Although this book was published in Spanish in 1968, a French edition came out first, as the research was based on field work done between 1965 and 1966 in Chile, sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Other more recent editions exist, but we have preferred to use this first Spanish edition from 1968.

transition" (Lalive d'Épinay, 1968, p. 47). Feeling themselves "citizens of another kingdom" led Chilean Pentecostals to cut ties to the world, marginalize that world that had previously marginalized them, and finally remain in their communities as a "refuge of the masses," which implied separating the spiritual from the material and the church from the world in pure dichotomous fashion. Moreover, the set of religious values and ideas that made up the social ethic of their creed would determine their sociopolitical (non)commitment, indicating that the Gospel has nothing to do with politics and the only way to participate in the country's problems is through preaching and praying for the "saving of souls." This attitude, based on their social and religious experience, led them into the public sphere, into what was called the "social strike" and the "political strike." This was nothing other than increased withdrawal and rejection of the extra-religious spheres, prohibiting the faithful from committing themselves to the country's cultural and political life. For that reason, Lalive d'Épinay quickly came to define these attitudes as "sectarian" in the sociological sense. This "political force" definitely made Evangelicals appear as defenders of the *status quo* and not promoters of social change.

After Lalive d'Épinay came a series of Protestant or Evangelical authors who also reflected on Evangelicals' political commitment in our continent starting in the 1970s. These included Pablo Deiros (1986), René Padilla (1991), José Míguez Bonino (1995) Jean-Pierre Bastian (1994 and 1997), Paul Freston (2006 and 2008) and Darío López (2008), among others. Apart from them, it is worth mentioning two important consultations on this issue, both pulled together by the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL). The first was called the Jarabacoa (Dominican Republic) Consultation in 1983, and the second the Buenos Aires Consultation, in 1987. Finally, we have a work compiled by René Padilla, titled *De la marginación al compromiso. Los evangélicos y la política en América Latina* (From Marginalization to commitment. Evangelicals and politics in Latin America) (1991), also initiated by the FTL.

The most pertinent text for our analysis, however, is by the German theologian and Lutheran pastor Heinrich Schäfer, who is doing an excellent and curious study of the different currents of Protestantism and their political repercussion in Latin America. In our opinion this is one of the best and most complete studies on the topic, as he integrates into his analysis theological, historical, sociological and political aspects. Although Schäfer focuses on Central America, his scheme and projection can easily be applied to the entire continent. We are particularly interested in the distinct responses given to the social and political issue by the four main ecclesial tendencies of Protestantism

in Latin America (historical Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism). What stands out most in this approach is that it starts from a strictly theological criterion to determine a social conduct (in the same line as Bryan Wilson and Lalive d'Épinay). In other words, the social and political response the churches give the world is determined by their theological criteria. We are going to focus not only on the ecclesial repercussion these four forms of Protestantism had, but also on the social repercussion their theological doctrines have had on the political conduct of each of them on our continent:⁵

- a) **In historical Protestantism**, the concept of mediating grace is strongly objective and takes mission and education as forms of exercising influence in society. Its social and political ethic is generally geared to the “common good” and differentiates its Christian ethic from the secular ethic, which makes way for Christian participation in social asks. In Latin America, historical Protestantism had little numerical influence theologically or politically. It had some relevance, above all in Latin America’s early Evangelical movement and in the “transplant churches” or “migration churches.” These churches correspond to the major migratory waves that occurred in past centuries of European settlers who maintained their customs, language and religion, but never tried to extend their religious conceptions to the natives and still less dedicated themselves to evangelizing work. They were, then, churches of “maintenance” more than of “proselytism.” As a result they had no major impact on the religious life of our countries (save in some areas of the Southern Cone). Nor did they have much political influence, not only because it wasn’t their intent, but also given their few numbers.
- b) **In “Evangelical” Protestantism**, its strongly conversionist concept of mission has a distinguished place in its doctrine and is geared toward quantitative growth of the church. Its social ethic, meanwhile, is subordinated to that

5 It should be mentioned that the author proposes a “bi-dimensional model” of interpretation, following two coordinates: one is *theological*, understood as a “continuum” between an objectivist conception and a subjectivist one of the mediation of divine grace. The other coordinate is *sociological*, formed by the church’s institutional organizational forms, understood as a “continuum” of the different degrees of tension between church and society. The result is a chart in which the *ordinates* (sociological) are: denomination, established religious grouping and religious grouping (sect); and the *abscissas* (theological) are: historical Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism. For our Latin American political analysis we will center only on the abscissas and basically in accord with two criteria: their concept of mission and their social and political ethic. See Schäfer (1991, pp. 91 and ss.).

mission. In this regard, its concept of social ethic is charitable works as a means of evangelizing, leaving side the “common good” of historical Protestantism as a main objective. In any event, common good is understood as the result of converting the majorities. Its political ethic rejects institutional activity in favor of individual activity. In Latin America, conservative Evangelicals dedicated themselves to the middle and lower middle strata of society and their fundamentalist biblical conception (or biblical literalism) led them to a conservative vision of history. As a consequence, social and political practice manifested itself as strictly conservative, with respect to both traditional values such as social structures, and to a clear sympathy for the reigning capitalism and an evident antipathy toward any reform. Later some more renovative lines appeared, which understand that what is called the “social question” cannot be excluded from their Evangelical vision.

- c) **In the Pentecostal movement**, the conversionist mission is just as important as in Evangelical Protestantism, but the subjects of conversion are both historical Protestants and conservative Evangelicals, whom the Pentecostals believe lack the complete experience of the Christian faith reached only through “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” As part of its social ethic, strongly pre-millenarian and subordinated to the missionary work, it only admits individual charity, thus rejecting social commitment and, above all, politics. Its individualist morality acts more as a criterion of differentiation between the church and the world than as a motivation for action. In Latin America Pentecostalism set itself up mainly in the lower classes, both rural and urban, and based itself on a millenarian doctrine that preached that with the prompt coming of Christ, this impious world was going to disappear together with all its personal suffering. In this sense, a social ethic centered on transforming and improving the world not only was condemned to failure but was seen as a perspective that would delay the second coming of the Savior. So with respect to the world, hope consisted of ceasing to act. For this reason, the traditional Pentecostal believer cut all relations with the world, wo participated in no grassroots organizations, cooperatives or unions, or in community activities, much less in political ones (as we saw in the text of Lalive d’Epinay). This radical vision of the initial Pentecostalism began changing toward the 1980s for diverse reasons we will see further on, but mainly due to the influence of the neo-Pentecostal perspective we will address next.
- d) **In the neo-Pentecostal movement**, the concept of mission and conversion of the greatest number of people has a primordial place, also including conversion and influence within the previous groups: historical Protestants,

conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Its social ethic presents itself as a political ethic, while the charitable ethic (of Evangelical Protestantism) is marginal. Its members are exhorted to participate in social and political processes and their political posture is in agreement with their particular interests, which in turn are linked to the dominant interests of a neoliberal political system. As with Evangelicalism, they understand the common good as a consequence of mass individual conversion and as a useful effect of particular interests for the collectivity. In this way, the divine grace is transmitted to the world via the particular interests of neo-Pentecostal individuals. In Latin America, neo-Pentecostalism works above all in the medium and upper classes and is the only one that has succeeded in making Protestantism (accustomed to focusing on the lower and lower-middle classes) a functional alternative for the well-off and influential sectors of society in general. Its huge churches, located particularly in residential areas, welcome a greater number of people than the classic stereotyped “garage churches” of traditional Pentecostalism, as they have known how to adjust “Pentecostal spirituality” to the dominant classes. That is why they have radically changed the traditional discourse of Latin American Evangelical conservatism with respect to the world and politics, and become great promoters of participation in both as a functional strategy for their evangelizing mission. In that regard, they are playing a weighty political role as they have set themselves up in medium and upper classes and have direct political influence and major economic power. Moreover, while neo-Pentecostalism is still not the ecclesial tendency that numerically dominates the Evangelical community, it is definitely enjoying a major growth spurt. This combination of “movement” and “denomination” has also allowed it to penetrate into the Pentecostal and conservative Evangelical groups, as in its moment Pentecostalism did with the latter and with the historical Protestants.

The interesting aspect of this taxonomy is that it shows us that each type of Protestantism that has installed itself in Latin America throughout history has developed differently and has also manifested its political options differently, from the historical Protestants’ search for the common good to the neo-Pentecostals’ promotion of political participation passing through the Evangelicals’ charitable deduction and the Pentecostals’ exclusively individual charity. These discrepancies are due to the fact that their fundamental criterion of differentiation, the “mediation of grace to believers” referred not only to

their Church's relationship to God but also to its relationship to the world. This unflinching plays itself out in a given political behavior. One of the practical consequences of this spiritual differentiation can be seen in the distinct social classes where these four groups differentially establish themselves and flourish: the classic Protestants among the European settlers in what are called "immigration churches," conservative Evangelicals in the middle and lower middle classes of the Latin American societies, Pentecostals in the lower classes, and neo-Pentecostals in the middle and upper classes. We are speaking of preferences and not of exclusivities because, as was logical, each of these churches began consolidating themselves in those social sectors in which their theological vision of society and of the world best adjusted to their reality and for that reason was more welcomed.⁶

2.2. The two classic lines of Evangelical political thinking in Latin America

As we have mentioned above, the Evangelicals' political-party participation started becoming publicly visible in Latin America in the 1980s, after a prior rethinking process that took several years. Even before that decade, however, the Evangelicals has already participated in public and political life, such that in 1983 the FTL consultation mentioned above was conducted on "The theology and practice of power" in Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic. Then in 1987 came the other consultation, again sponsored by the FTL, titled "Toward a comprehensive transformation." It should be noted that this social and theological reflection process was engaged in above all by Latin American theologians of the more traditional churches and denominations during those years, not by the Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals that appeared on the scene some time later. We must thus clearly differentiate the initial period of political participation by the Evangelicals of traditional denominations (after many years of social analysis and theological reflection) and the later avalanche of new

6 In this analysis of the theological thought and practice of the four versions of Latin American Protestantism-Evangelicalism, put forward as "ideal types," we have favored the multiple differences among them, although there are surely innumerable practical similarities in their ecclesial development, such as theological fundamentalism, anti-Communism and the undeniable work to maintain the *status quo* of our societies. In other words, we have to see this typology as an interpretative methodological tool and not a descriptive straightjacket. Even more so if we are speaking of a reality as complex and diverse as that of the Evangelical Churches in a social and historical context that is even more intricate and diverse, such as that of our Latin American countries.

Evangelical political actors (whom we have called “political Evangelicals”). These latter are particularly those of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal line, who had always appeared opposed to participate in politics, yet when they did, the force of their faithful, which was both greater and more active than their forebears, inundated the Evangelical participation.

The immediate antecedent to this outcome in the 1990s is that a major split in Latin American Evangelical thinking had been incubating from mid-century. On one side was the movement called “ecumenical,” with a clear left-leaning social focus and a more Latin American contextualized accent. On the other was the socially and theologically “conservative” movement, particularly focused on verbal evangelizing. The former was represented by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and the latter by the Latin American Evangelical Consultation (CONELA).

The sectors interested in maintaining an active social testimony group together (often with international “ecumenism”) and create their organizations (MEC, ISAL, MISUR, CELADEC, etc.) [...] But they do not achieve the participation of certain churches or the support of a good part of the membership (and sometimes not even of the leaders) of the churches of which they form a part. Around 1960 there was a very clear warning about this crisis in the discussions of CELA II (1961) and even more so in those of CELA III (1969). The fracture later became more evident: ecumenical or Evangelical, CLAI or CONELA, ‘left’ or ‘right,’ ‘liberationists’ or ‘Evangelicals;’ no “third ways” accepted (Míguez Bonino, 1995, p. 50).

The Baptist pastor Samuel Escobar finds the origins of this division in the mid-20th Century: “In the 1950s Latin American Protestantism began to bifurcate into an ecumenical sector and another that is conservative, which adopted the adjective ‘Evangelical’ for itself” (Escobar, 2012, p. 144). Escobar’s allusion to the conservatism of the 1950s largely refers to the wave of missionaries that spilled into our continent after the triumph of Mao Tse Tung’s revolution in China, which expelled all the missionary organizations found in its territory. This provoked not only a redistribution of missionaries in the world (at least a quarter of the total of 12,000 Evangelical missionaries were in Latin America) but also a strong reaction against everything that might sound like Communism. In addition, the “closing of China to US influence that provoked the return of hundreds of missionaries (1950) made Latin America North America’s privileged continent, and the space reserved for the confrontation between ideological blocs” (Bastian, 1990, p. 99). This context framed the US missions

to Latin America of those years and explains their strong rejection of any reference to Social Christian responsibility, particularly if it included mention of socialism or liberation theology.

Alongside the consolidation of these two blocs, another important group of Evangelicals and their leaders reflected theologically about the coming of the Evangelical communities to Latin America. They saw these disputes as extreme positions they were not prepared to sign on to: "Neither CLAI nor CONELA" was the phrase heard more and more by these authorities. As Baptist Pastor Escobar pointed out so well in trying to sum up these two positions:

Nowadays we have two extremes: on the one hand the "liberationists" who take Marxism as if it were the revealed truth, allowing themselves to be instrumentalized by the extreme Left. On the other, those who, by passively accepting the *status quo*, deliver themselves into the hands of conservative political forces [...]. It would be tragic to abandon this doctrinal treasure to go ask the truth of Marxism, as certain liberation theologians are doing. It would also be tragic to abandon this doctrinal treasure, exchanging it for the superficial and cheap Christianity the US television preachers are spreading among us (Escobar, 1982, p. 9-10).

But this ideological dispute among the Evangelical churches had no major repercussions in our country as the Evangelicals were then statistically irrelevant. It was only starting in the 1970s, when they began to grow numerically, that this ideological fight began to be important on our continent, and in the next decade, when movements and parties of an Evangelical stripe emerged in all countries of the region.

The conservative position finally won this ideological dispute. It was an arid period with respect to social commitment, one of escaping the world (with a very few exceptions), in which Evangelical leaders had no particular participation in Latin America's political life. At that time, fruit of the US conservative Evangelical influences and those of homegrown Pentecostalism, an unbreakably Manichean doctrinal position was established in the Church-World relationship: the heavenly in contradiction with the earthly, the spiritual with the material, believers against gentiles, Christians (Evangelicals) against pagans (Catholics). The God-Devil dichotomy even extended to ideological categories between US capitalism (God) and atheist Communism (Devil); and ultimately to the absolute rejection of the political, above all politics.

Faced with the radicalization of Latin American Evangelicals on the socialist side, the United States preferred to decidedly support the more conservative

tendencies in the hope that they could counteract this 'dangerous' religious and political deviation. As we have noted, the theological division already existed, but at that timer there was militant support for this conservative sector of Evangelicalism in geopolitical terms to counter the leftist sector. We need to remember that the Evangelical faithful in the United States are conservative and Republican for the most part and that Evangelical Democrats are an exception. For that reason, the option selected at that moment by the US ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical institutions and churches was no surprise. In fact, the change in the Latin American Evangelicals' political vision in the 1980s (such as the current moral agenda) has had a direct correlation with the US Evangelical agenda, above all what is referred to as the "new religious Right." But that conservative trend has gone further, to the point of forming an entire "reconstructionist" theological body of thought (legitimized by a "theology of prosperity") that holds that Christians are called upon to govern their countries and construct them based on "biblical principles for the governing of nations."

2.3. The great change: from "fleeing the world" to "religious conquest"

Based on this historical background regarding the two ecclesial trends within the Latin American Evangelical movement in the mid-20th Century, we might wonder why this surprising change in the traditional Evangelical vision about society and the world came about, evolving into a change of position with respect to politics and its participation in it. Or, as Paul Freston, a celebrated scholar on Latin American religions and global Evangelicalism, phrased the question for the Brazilian case: What were the external factors that facilitated and the internal factors that provoked that peculiar form of 'politicization,' the change from the phrase 'believers don't get into politics' to 'brothers vote for brothers'? (Freston, 1991, p. 31).

We will try here to explain briefly the reasons for that huge political change, putting the emphasis on three factors: the sociological, the political and the theological. To contextualize these three interpretive keys, it is necessary to keep two things in mind. First, this change was developing around the 1980s, when the region was leaving dictatorships or civil wars behind and entering the democratic system, which opened a wide array of possibilities for political participation by new social actors. And second, the Evangelical churches were growing in the middle and professional classes in urban areas, which also permitted them not only religious leadership but also certain social leadership within their communities. In addition we need to recognize as a backdrop the

major changes produced within the US denominations, which had an evident influence on the political decisions of their Latin American peers.

a) *The sociological factor: the maturing of the Latin American Evangelical churches.* As we pointed out in the first part of this book, statistics show a clear growth trend of the Evangelicals in Latin America. But this growth, accentuated starting in the 1970s, has its roots in more than a century of history and experience. The members of the Evangelical churches are now not only Catholic converts but also, second-, third- and even fourth-generation Evangelicals, jealous guardians of an Evangelical tradition they won and have known how to manage both within the church and in the “world.” All this allows us to state that, despite the changes and different accents, the Evangelical movement in Latin America has reached adulthood and it is therefore natural that it would try to have greater participation in the social life of its countries. This participation is not only for the purpose of claiming a legitimate place in society (in line with the numerical representation it was acquiring), but also to enlighten the development of society itself with its Christian message. In other words, they wanted to participate as both believers and citizens.

This “adulthood” in Latin American consciousness is expressed, for example, in the Evangelical theology produced on the continent in that period (“Comprehensive Mission”), the emergence of a set of civil society organizations of Evangelical inspiration committed to a path of social transformation, and the development of a vocation of service to a generation of Evangelical professionals and university students willing to convey the reality of the theoretical and theological assumptions promoted by the Latin American Theological Fraternity. They were precisely the representatives of this trend within the Evangelical movement who initiated a social and political reflection on the continent, as their Pentecostal and conservative Evangelical peers were still denying any public participation in the “world” in those years. But this new consciousness of their religious (Evangelical) and citizen (Latin American) identity wasn’t enough for this sector of Evangelicalism, nor was their desire to move into the political sphere. Other global factors also had to come about to make possible an effective political party incursion.

b) *The political factor: the collapse of Communism and fall of the Berlin wall.* The peak came in 1989 of a long and complex process that had as one of its most powerful symbolical expressions in the fall of the Berlin Wall. The events leading up to that moment, taking place in the heart of Europe, had a

direct repercussion on the world as a whole. In Latin America, for example, it profoundly affected the Communist and Socialist parties. This crisis of the traditional ideologies and political parties began generating vacuums and pockets of power that were left without viable political representation in the region.

In this context, the continent soon overflowed with new actors who began to participate in electoral races, many of them claiming as their only virtue the fact that they had no political trajectory. At the same time new sources of social prestige were being generated that “legitimated” some incursions into the public arena: artists, sports figures, communicators, etc. Into this mix also came some religious leaders with an Evangelical background, who presented themselves with an image of ministerial success (coming from the numerical growth of their congregations) and with a capacity to influence other local religious leaders, developing a discourse of moral renovation of politics as one of their electoral banners.

The collapse of Communism, with the iconic fall of the Berlin wall, also resulted in the collapse of the Manichean vision centered on anti-Communism and on the demonization of atheist Marxism by Evangelical conservatism. That in turn meant the end of the ideological enemies that had underpinned the theory of leftist conspiracy within the church and the disappearance of the rejection of the world and of politics as a dangerous path. No longer having ideological enemies or reasons to cut oneself off from the world, the Evangelical conservatives saw a magnificent occasion to cozy up to politics, not out of an interest in participating in this sphere, but “only” as an evangelizing medium.

The Christianity of Evangelical believers (particularly Pentecostals) longer impedes them from working in and for the world; the pastors no longer demand that they stay away from whatever is not ecclesial. This opened the doors of both heaven and earth, both celestial and terrestrial to them, supposedly for the purpose of evangelizing a greater number of people through the wide portal of electoral participation. At the same time, their evangelizing objectives were changing: they no longer sought only a greater number of members in their churches, but also more influential ones. To that end, they no longer mounted massive campaigns with programs such as ‘In-depth Evangelicalism’ or ‘Church growth,’ as in the 1960s and 70s. Now they were looking for what they call “advocacy groups” and began to prioritize politicians, businesspeople, communicators, actors and the like. In other words, the focus was now on people with public repercussion and

influence on society. This is also why they began to set themselves up comfortably in the middle and upper classes.

In conclusion, the left-leaning ecumenical vision had prepared the social and political environment for a well-sustained public participation, but the conservative Evangelicals, on seeing that their anti-Communist message no longer had theological viability with the fall of socialism, made use of the occasion to change the sign of that political participation. They converted it into liberal, rightwing and conservative (sustained by the so-called 'theology of prosperity'). That is where many Pentecostal and above all neo-Pentecostal groups moved into the spheres of party politics and now aim to convert their religious base into a political trampoline.

- c) *The theological factor: the step from a pre-millenarianist eschatology to a post-millenarianist one.* A third factor that helps explain the reasons for the Evangelicals' political participation in Latin America has to do with their new theological vision of the Church-world relation and its ethical consequences in social attitudes and conduct. In our opinion, the most notable aspect of this point is that it is based on a theological element (specifically eschatological) to explain a political behavior along the same lines as Bryan Wilson, Lalive d'Épinay and Heinrich Schäfer. In other words, the changes in attitudes and behaviors the Evangelical churches have assumed with respect to the world are in accord with their theological changes.

There was definitely an important change within Evangelical eschatology in the 1980s. For decades it had been taught and emphasized that the second coming of Christ (or Parousia) was imminent, which generated a mentality of living in this world as in a "waiting room." If the Evangelicals were waiting to be whisked away from this world in the unpostponable second coming of Christ, why worry about improving the world or making it a fairer and more habitable place? That was the reason Evangelicals didn't participate in 'mundane' things in general (and even less in politics). It wasn't only that they had been anathematized by their pastors but also that it made no sense to do so if Christ was coming any minute now. What's more, the worse things were in the world, the more reason God would hurry the coming and restore his Kingdom, as had been promised.

That was the way Latin American Evangelicals were taught to deal with the perspective of the future: pay little attention to what is occurring in history, since the truly significant realities are beyond this world. This theological system came to be known as *pre-millenarianism*, a widespread Evangelical theological current in Latin America that formed an almost innate part

of the hegemonic Evangelical corpus of the period. But what was most emphasized in that doctrine was its imminence. A tremendous pressure was exerted on the Evangelical communities to leave mundane things aside and dedicate themselves entirely to evangelization, given the imminence of the second coming of the Savior.

Theological proposals were erected against this general way of thinking that questioned it as an indolent attitude. The contextual Evangelical theology of the 1960s and 70s, for example, managed to recover the Evangelical inheritance of social sensitivity and the important work developed by the first liberal missionaries. As a fruit of that confrontation with this undervaluing of temporal realities, some Evangelical believers succeeded in opening up spaces in the local or national government of their respective countries starting in the 1980s. But in the next decade, the Pentecostal sector of the Latin American Evangelical churches produced a new way of dealing with the theological issue of the future and the mental attitude toward the world: *post-millenarianism*.

For post-millenarianism, the millennium represents a golden age, a time of spiritual prosperity that will be verified in the present-day of the Church, in a kind of grand good will that will involve the massive conversion of gentiles and Jews, a fulfillment of the Pauline vision we find in Romans 11:25-27. Always within Church time, the man of illegality (2Ts 2:11ss.) will be manifested in the world and in the end the second coming of Christ will occur. Satan will be defeated, the dead will resurrect and there will be new heaven and new earth. (Fernández Roldán, 2002, p. 106).

Said another way, it was a move from pre-millenarianism to post-millenarianism—not only as a change of prefix—that converted the pessimistic pre-millennial view into a post-millennial optimism regarding the future of humanity. It unexpectedly changed believers' attitude toward the world, moving from the pre-millenarianist horror to a stage of greater opening up to and temporizing with secular culture from a post-millennial scatological background. This theological change definitively modified the rules of Evangelicals' political participation in and attitude toward the world, which was fundamental to formulating a new way of engaging in politics by the Evangelicals who burst onto the public stage in the 1990s in a neo-Pentecostal context.

As Joaquín Algranti states, with reference to the Argentine case, this redrafting of the millenarist eschatology linked to the second coming of Christ was what

pushed some Christians to work actively for the restoration of the Kingdom of God on earth and constituted an essential characteristic of the neo-Pentecostal groups that moved aggressively into the world of politics. “The ‘Theology of the present Kingdom’ is one of the distinctive features of neo-Pentecostalism that differentiates it from Pentecostal groups. It is an eschatology of victory that makes its believers authentic heirs of the power, authority and divine right to conquer nations in God’s name. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ no longer has to do with the promise of future blessings, but with the *real time* of the believers and their church” (Algranti, 2010, p. 21).

For the Colombian case, William Beltrán indicates to us that until the early 1990s, the dynamic dominated by the imminence of the “end of time” prevented Pentecostalism from becoming a political movement, just it did in the great majority of other Latin American countries. “To the contrary, it led it to assume an ethic of quietism and resignation, accompanied by apathy regarding the mechanisms of political participation. As a consequence, Pentecostals excluded themselves from the field of ‘electoral politics.’ While they trusted in God, they distrusted politics” (Beltrán, 2013, p. 304).⁷ It wasn’t until the end of the 1980s that Pentecostalism emerged as a new political force, largely due to its growth in the urban areas, particularly among the middle and professional sectors. “This new attitude of the Pentecostals can be expressed as the move from the ‘social strike’ to the ‘theology of prosperity’” (Beltrán, 2013, p. 306). It coincided, according to the author, with the consolidation of the mega-churches, which can act as disciplined electoral forces under the direction of a charismatic leader.⁸

As can be seen, the prohibition of political participation (championed by the conservative Evangelicals) was a thing of the past, and a new stage of massive entry of ‘political Evangelicals’ (above all neo-Pentecostals) was inaugurated. In other words, a stage of religious leaders who use their ecclesial legitimacy to move into public arenas of power and government.

7 According to the author, the disinterest in participating in politics shown historically by the Pentecostal groups was due to three factors: 1) the dominant nature of the social strike at the core of Pentecostalism; 2) the anti-Communism shown by Colombian Pentecostalism; and, 3) the scant formal education of the majority of its members.

8 The first experience of this type that occurred in Colombia was the International Charismatic Mission (MCI), the country’s largest Pentecostal congregation, founded by the spouses César and Claudia Castellanos in 1983, who were the first to become aware of the political capital represented by the multitudinous organization they headed. That is why, in 1989, they founded the Christian National Party (PNC) which put up Claudia Castellanos as its presidential candidate in 1990. She only pulled 0.6% of the vote.

In summary, if we look in perspective at these three factors, we can infer that there was no single causal reason that determined the sudden and radical change of political perspective by Latin America's Evangelical churches. We could give more or less weight to each factor, but in the end it was a gradual and multi-causal process that occurred almost simultaneously and similarly in the majority of countries in the region.

It needs to be insisted that the changes produced in the US churches had similar repercussions in all our countries; i.e., it wasn't necessarily the contagion of one country by another, but that it could have been the simultaneous contagion of the South by the North of the American continent, and that historically the unequal Latin American evangelical models have been influenced by the missionaries and denominations of the North. Today, although a clear link still exists between the Latin American and North American Evangelical churches, there is less dependence. Moreover, the most booming Latin American Evangelical churches are of homegrown creation, called "independent churches" because they do not belong to any traditional denomination of a foreign matrix.

2.4. The new "political Evangelicals": the neo-Pentecostals

Never before had Evangelicals had the relevant role they now have in the politics of our countries. It is due above all to the new face of Latin American Evangelism: the neo-Pentecostals. Because they are the main protagonists of the entry of Evangelicals into party politics, we will focus on them in this section. They have pulled behind them, at least ideologically, a large part of the other Evangelical factions and a good number of Catholics.

As is known, the new Evangelical scene in Latin America is mainly Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal. At the same time, however, it grows out of two distinct stages in the development of Evangelical church history. Latin American Pentecostalism⁹ goes back to the early 20th Century, when it came to our shores as a movement of spiritual renewal more than of a specific denomination or missionary organization. Its intent to serve and renew all the Evangelical churches on the continent, spreading the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctifying the believer, concretely translated into the emphasis on the experience of the baptism

9 An infinity of works in different languages and with different approaches exists on Pentecostalism as organization, history and thought. We recommend two classics that have not lost relevance: Dayton (1991) and Hollenweger (1976).

of the Holy Spirit, followed by evidence of speaking in tongues (glossolalia). All of this unquestionably put the Evangelical believer on the path to a life full of “sanctity and power” not only with respect to religious life, but also life in society. In this regard, Pentecostalism found an enormous echo in the Latin American population—both Catholic and Evangelical—and evolved into the creation of new churches or denominations that couldn’t be contained within the previously existing Evangelical structures. In conclusion, the Pentecostal movement in Latin America began as a renovation project of the existing denominations, but ended up turning into one denomination more on the Evangelical spectrum.¹⁰

Based on this century of Latin American Pentecostal experience and practice, a new religious factor emerged on the continent starting in the 1980s that became known as *the neo-Pentecostal movement*. In those years a rethinking of certain postulates took place in some classic Pentecostal churches, first in the United States and then in Latin America. This rethinking meant a renovation and, in some cases, the founding of new “churches” of a neo-Pentecostal stripe (a category that represents a broad umbrella of diverse neo-Pentecostal forms).

We can find many differences between classic Pentecostalism and the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement. Below we present a summary of some of them:

a) *The theological difference: baptism of the Holy Spirit.* Traditional Pentecostalism emphasizes that at the start of the life of sanctification, the Evangelical believer fundamentally has a concrete experience, with date, day and hour: the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of which is speaking in tongues, God’s gift to the believer who has reached this level of relationship with him. According to Pentecostal theology, this would not be an experience of salvation, but rather of consecration (sanctity and power), which each believer who wants to live a life of greater profundity with God experiences, according to this theology’s interpretation of Chapter 2 of The Acts of the Apostles. Neo-Pentecostalism, or the Charismatic Movement, in contrast, does not make the baptism of the Holy Spirit its founding

10 The Pentecostal movement emerged in the United States in the early 20th Century. Two complementary versions exist about its founding: the first, about the history of the African-American preacher William Seymour with his Apostolic Faith Mission church, organized in a stable on Azusa Street, Los Angeles, between 1906 and 1909; the second, about the Anglo preacher Charles F. Parham, a Methodist Church minister who in the Bethel Institute of Topeka, Kansas began to spread the teaching about the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and “speaking in tongues” to his students around 1901.

experience. They are rather the spiritual gifts of charismatas emphasized as part of the blessings God provides to believers in the framework of a process they call “filling of the Holy Spirit,” which need not be an event at a given moment in time, but can be a process that develops progressively. With respect to evidence that one is living this process, we have the various spiritual gifts as manifestations that the individuals receive in a differentiated manner, of which glossolalia is only one possibility.

- b) *The sociological difference: the winning over of middle and upper sectors.* Pentecostalism centered its Latin American religious service in rural sectors and among the urban poor, both at the outset and during a good part of its consolidation as an Evangelical denomination. In contrast, the ecclesial infrastructure, education level of its leaders and economic capacity of its members make clear that the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement puts its emphasis on the middle and upper sectors of society. In current times we can thus find evidence of expectations of social climbing (materially or symbolically) offered by the charismatic mega-churches to those who join their ranks. This is due to their new theological (or ideological) focus on prosperity, as we will see further on.
- c) *The missionological difference: from the theology of the cross to the theology of resurrection.* Probably due to the public the movement aims to reach (the middle and upper sectors), the religious discourse of the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement transcends the traditional Christian message of guilt, cross and sin—typical of the Evangelical and classic Pentecostal discourse—to delve more deeply into the dimensions of pact, resurrection and blessings with which it seeks to make its religious message more palatable and more in line with the sensibility of these middle sectors, who are more resistant to direct or invasive messages. In the words of the sociologist Óscar Amat y León: “We can state that if for the Evangelical generation of the 1960s and 70s, the dominant perspective of the Protestant ascetics was the theology of the cross and suffering, the Evangelical generation of the 1990s grew up with the affirmation of enjoyment, elimination of pain and theology of resurrection” (Amat y León, 2004, p. 121).
- d) *The scatological difference: from negation and rejection of the world to its redemption.* Classic Pentecostalism and a good part of the Latin American Evangelical Movement in general reject various practices of mundane society’s functioning. The Pentecostals, historically, have criticized materialism, hedonism and the lax behavior of non-Evangelicals. The consequence of this is a vision of the future that emphasizes the conflict in the world and proposes

“not to become contaminated” by it. The neo-Pentecostal Movement, in contrast, is much more conciliatory with these mundane realities and procures not to scandalize the sectors it is trying to reach with an excess of norms or visions of the world that go against their social expectations. This way neo-Pentecostalism neither denies the world nor insists on criticizing the consumer system’s ways. On the contrary, it seeks to redeem, i.e. liberate, all those arenas traditionally vetoed by the old Pentecostals. It also tries to be less onerous with regard to norms of conduct within and outside of the church. In this new vision, the world is no longer something from which one must flee, but is rather the place one needs to conquer and enjoy without feelings of guilt. In this regard, the ‘theology of prosperity’ and the reconstructionist vision of the world, which are also characteristic of the majority of neo-Pentecostal sectors, are in contradiction with classic Pentecostal thought.

What is called *theology of prosperity* is one of the main characteristics of the neo-Pentecostal agenda, which started to head up the Evangelical movement in the region in the 1990s. Its boom coincides with the hegemonic expansion of globalized neoconservative political thinking. As heir to the postulates of the Charismatic movement and Pentecostal theology, the “theology of prosperity” doesn’t propose a plan for transforming the existing social order, but a usufruct of the resources present in the world, in the belief that Christians are the “sons of the King,” with the right to enjoy the goods of creation. As Jesús García-Ruiz and Patrick Michel point out:

Within the perspective of US conservative Protestantism, the theology of prosperity refers to the individual—not the community—as a register of privileged action, establishing poverty in an index of non-submission to God, and hence into the impossibility of Salvation. In effect, if the goods of this world belong to the Father, it follows that they revert as a priority to his sons. According to this logic, divine elevation opens for the faithful access to his goods. (García-Ruiz and Michel, 2014, p. 4)

For many authors, the theological formulation of this current is directly aligned with US political Evangelical sectors linked to the most rightwing factions of the Republican Party, known in the 1980s as the “moral majority.” At the turn of this century, they were directly linked with groups related to the Tea Party Movement and the Alternative Right, which were supporters of Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy and have continued to support him as President, even though there is little Evangelical about many of his

attitudes and behaviors.¹¹ An undeniable linkage point between the theology of prosperity and political project is reflected in the way various sectors of the Pentecostal movement in the continental sphere have imported the political-religious discourse of US radical movements into the Latin American reality.

But under no point of view can we say that the theology of prosperity is the new “Protestant ethic,” as they start from opposed biblical interpretations. While one sees the beginnings of economic growth in work, austere life and savings, fruit of giving oneself to God, the other sees the sign of divine blessing in economic success, enjoyment and social ascent, without effort or austerity, but rather as fulfillment of an alleged ‘pact with God.’ A sober, virtuous and ascetic Protestant life is now opposed by an intemperate life of sumptuousness and Pentecostal ostentation (starting with its ‘pastors’) without the least Christian modesty or social commitment to the needy.

On the other hand, *reconstructionism* is a tendency within the Latin American Evangelical movement—coming above all from “US Evangelicalism” of the 1970s—aimed at moving into the political sphere to incorporate citizens’ demands into its religious agenda but from the logic of winning power. It is an assumed political theology with Pentecostalism that seeks a reconstruction of theocracy in current society. Some authors see this as the political face of the theology of prosperity and predict that Christians are predestined to occupy the world’s command posts: the presidency, ministerial posts, mayoral offices, parliaments, etc. They also have a very particular biblical understanding that assumes the construction of political power from the logic of religious dominion in the diverse public spheres of society. In addition, they assume that Christians have the mandate to conquer these public posts and arenas to affect society’s political life (Pérez Vela, 2016).

In reality, ‘reconstructionism’ isn’t a totally new proposal. Its theological underpinnings were formulated originally in ultraconservative Calvinist circles and later recovered by Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal political activists in search of a theological legitimacy for going after power under a supposed

11 As Óscar Amat y León explains in analyzing the beginnings of these linkages: “... in 1979, the Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell founded the group known as the Moral Majority [...]. A series of groups sponsored by well-known preachers and tele-Evangelists aligned with this Evangelical presence in US politics and made alliances with the closest sectors of a new Right that was pushing for the expansion of the market system as the economic key to modernization and prosperity. At the same time, they directly set themselves up as the bulwarks and defenders of the political and economic system the United States promotes” (Amat y León, 2004, p. 123).

Evangelical moral superiority and a subordination of the State's legal system to biblical laws.¹² These currents not only validate US neoliberalism as an economic and political system, but also offer a supposed religious foundation and a Christian cosmivision that serves to support this conquest of power by Evangelical religious leaders.

For practical purposes, we can say that the vast majority of Evangelicals who espouse the theology of prosperity (or ideology of prosperity) and Christian reconstructionism come from recently founded neo-Pentecostal churches that do not belong to any Evangelical denomination or Protestant tradition. In other words, they are independent churches that are outside of any Christian institutional heritage. Their founders are in truth the owners of these religious undertakings, some of them now converted into religious-political undertakings. No one other than them directs all the religious, economic and political activities of these successful family enterprises. These "pastors" control absolutely everything in these "churches". Even when they participate in electoral contests, the first in line are their direct relatives, which shows signs of an intention to form a sort of "spiritual dynasty." They and their families are the center and the end of these "business providers of magic-religious services," as William Beltrán calls them.¹³ As a pastor of the Central American Mission in El Salvador put it: "These churches don't put emphasis on the word, but on who offers it; they don't put emphasis on the miracle, but on who creates it; these churches don't have benches, but easy chairs; they don't have altars, but stages" (Bermúdez, 2018, p. 289).

These church owners, proclaimed pastors and even "apostles," have commonly come out of other Evangelical denominations (almost always of a neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic tradition) to found their own "ecclesial" projects of a strong conservative influence, allegedly under divine inspiration. And precisely because they know that they don't belong to any tradition that will back them, they now seek refuge under a pretended "spiritual cover" of some "apostle" who is doing them the favor: obviously for prior monthly payment for their "spiritual services."

12 On this issue one can consult Maldonado Gago (2013) as well as the interesting and very sensitive article by Spadaro and Figueroa (2017).

13 In this regard, Beltrán defines the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), for example, as a "multinational company that provides magic services collectively to huge multitudes and does not seek to generate dynamics of solidarity of a community nature. The faithful who seek these services [...] are treated as a mass of clients who converge for the urgency of a miracle" (Beltrán, 2013, p. 266).

In summary, with all respect to the exceptions, these neo-Pentecostal pastors do not belong to some church; the “church” belongs to them; they don’t have believers in their temples, but clients; and now they not only seek the tithing of their flock but also its votes. Furthermore, although there are honest and sincere people within their mega-churches, many of them go in search of a miracle more than of God; they want cleansing more than conversion and prosperity more than spirituality.

On the other hand, their excessive eagerness to show off their material goods responds to a logic of supposed divine blessing of their faith. The more faith their believers have, the more material goods they will obtain from God (so says the ‘theology of prosperity’). According to that logic, people who are poor are so because they lack faith. For that reason, while Pentecostal pastors (and Evangelicals in general) were somber and austere, neo-Pentecostal pastors and apostles are pretentious and vain. They believe that their example of prosperity will educate the devout who are seeking a better life. It is also why they go to the middle and upper sectors in search of parishioners who will plug into their mercantile vision of Christianity, albeit aspiringly. These same neo-Pentecostal pastors are the ones who, when expanding their monetary vision—with the tithing of their congregation—move into new business spheres via the purchase of radio stations, TV channels, huge buildings and the like, just as in recent years via the formation of political parties. From there, they engage in unequal competition, as the financing of their political adventures is assured with the “religious finances” that only they know about and no one controls. Moreover, all the goods of their ‘church’ are in the name of shell corporations where the pastors and their relatives are the only shareholders. They are the best examples of what we have called “political Evangelicals” in contrast to “Evangelical politicians” (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017, p. 221 and ss).

In this regard, there is a major difference between Evangelicals active in already existing political parties (‘Evangelical politicians’) and these upstart religious leaders who move into politics (‘political Evangelicals’). In truth, many Evangelicals currently participating in politics belong to this second group, as they not only see their flock as believers and contributors, but also as possible voters (not, however, as citizens). It is there that these religious leaders make the leap to attempt to become political leaders, but without passing through an experience of citizenship. That is why the success of these ‘Evangelical politicians’ will depend on their professional performance as politicians, independent of their Evangelical confessionality. They will always constitute an important value added, while ‘political Evangelicals’ depend exclusively on their faithful. That is

always why the former have more political projection than the latter and could pull in more followers beyond the Evangelical voters, while the latter, as we will see below, often even fail to attract the vote of their brothers in faith.

2.5. The supposed “confessional vote”

In response to the recurring question of whether there exists a ‘confessional vote’ among Latin American Evangelicals, we could divide the response into two parts, according to the market theories approach: one from the side of the religious supply and the other from the side of its demand. The first alludes to the existence and viability of Evangelical confessional parties and the second to the existence of an ‘Evangelical confessional vote.’ Many Evangelical parties (supply) could be created, but the central question is: does a believing public exist that is disposed to vote for Evangelical parties or candidates merely because they are Evangelical (demand)? In other words, can it be said that Evangelical confessional parties or candidates have a ‘captive public’ that votes for them unconditionally for religious reasons? Or, along the same lines, do Evangelical candidates have the assured vote of their “brothers in faith” merely because they belong to the same religious confession? Our initial answer is that there is no Evangelical ‘confessional vote’ in Latin America today, even in Brazil, where we do find a ‘denominational vote.’ Not even in Brazil do ‘brothers vote for brothers’ (the ‘confessional vote’), although more Pentecostals generically do vote for a Pentecostal candidate, Universals for a Universal candidate, Assembly of God members for an Assembly candidate, and Baptists for a Baptist candidate (i.e. the ‘denominational vote’).

In our opinion it is clear that two requisites are needed if one is to speak of a ‘confessional vote’: a) that the decisive factor for determining the Evangelicals’ vote is religious; i.e. that it is a ‘captive vote’ for confessional reasons; and b) that Evangelicals vote for an Evangelical candidate only for being Evangelical, even if they don’t know him/her and don’t even belong to the same congregation or denomination.

Moreover, we would have to be even more specific regarding the supposed ‘confessional vote’: one thing is the vote for President of the Republic, and another is the vote for legislative representatives. In fact, for the election of Presidents (and of local authorities such as mayors) we find infinite examples showing that no matter how many Evangelical candidates there may be, Evangelical voters don’t necessarily chose them. A series of criteria and factors that are not necessarily confessional are taken into account by Evangelicals in casting their vote for President. In this regard, the Evangelicals’ vote

generally hasn't differed from the rest of the electorate. We can, however, find certain local differences with respect to some known Evangelical candidate for legislative representative, or some Evangelical community that dares to extra-officially support a candidate without that vote getting to the point of being fully 'confessional,' but rather a 'denominational vote.' Many times support from the candidate's communities of faith isn't enough to win, as we will see further on. Under the model of 'Evangelical faction' we can find Evangelicals on the slates of all parties, and generally they win because they are on the winning parties' slates, or because given few electoral obstacles (as in Colombia, Panama or Brazil), the support of their churches (basically neo-Pentecostal ones) is enough to win a seat.

Brazil is a particular case, in which we find official support from Pentecostal churches for certain candidates who belong to their communities. Unlike the rest of Latin America, the big Brazilian Evangelical churches have been formally intervening in party politics since 1986, with 'official candidates,' confessional political parties (PRB, PSC, etc.) and even parliamentary benches, forming an important electoral backing (more than 30% of Brazilians are Evangelicals). In addition, we can see that on special occasions certain consensus can be achieved among the Evangelicals to vote for a presidential candidate, as happened in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, in which he got the Evangelical vote to separate out from the ordinary vote of the remaining Brazilians. The interesting thing to show in that electoral process is that there was also a very well-known Pentecostal candidate, Marina Silva, who only pulled 1% of the votes, while Bolsonaro (a Catholic baptized by Pastor Everaldo in the River Jordan) pulled the Evangelical vote. Bolsonaro did what no Evangelical in Brazil had ever achieved (uniting the vote of Evangelicals for President). He did it with an authoritarian conservative discourse that met the religious expectations of the great majority of Evangelicals and many Catholics. It also must be said, however, that a series of complementary factors came together in this electoral process suggesting it could be wrong to infer that being baptized in the River Jordan and invoking the 'moral agenda' is enough to win presidential elections in Brazil.¹⁴

14 In some countries of the region, like Colombia, we can also find 'denominational' political parties (above all founded by mega-church owners). But they pass totally unnoticed on the political stage and are really unimportant. In reality, they don't even think about winning a presidential election (even though they run candidates), but only about getting a legislator or two elected, which they ultimately manage to do given the low electoral hurdle, creating atomized parliaments.

Another interesting case to analyze is Guatemala's, as it is not just the only Latin American country in which an Evangelical has democratically been elected President but has had three Evangelical Presidents: the dictator Ríos Montt in 1982, Serrano Elías in 1991 and Jimmy Morales in 2016—all with serious accusations of corruption or human rights violations and a rupture of the constitutional order. But even in Guatemala, which would be cited as a 'textbook example' to affirm that a confessional vote exists on our continent, there is some doubt if they were really elected because they were Evangelicals or the population's tendency was simply followed without any special preference between Evangelical and non-Evangelical voters.

Claudia Dary states that "[Guatemalan] Evangelicals follow the national political trends: they don't bank on specific candidates or vote differently from the rest of the Catholic population or those of different religions" (Dary, 2018, p. 317). One proof of that is that in 2011, Harold Caballeros, a lawyer and Evangelical pastor well known all over the country, founder of the 'El Shaddai' neo-Pentecostal church, formed a coalition of political groupings and parties we could call "confessional" and ran for President of the Republic. Despite his electoral campaign, Caballeros only pulled 6.24% of the votes, when Evangelicals in Guatemala were already close to 40% of the population. In other words, not even a sixth of Guatemala's Evangelicals voted for him. Moreover, following Israel Ortiz (2004), we can say that there has never been an explicit plan on the part of the Evangelical churches to win top executive posts in the government or the Congress. Rather the Evangelicals who end up in these posts generally did it as individuals. For that reason, we could conclude with Dary that:

No confessional vote exists in Guatemala. Even though the censuses do not record the citizenry's religious affiliation, the polls our representatives have taken in which this variable has been asked don't get results that would enable the affirmation that Evangelicals, Catholics and citizens with other religious affiliations vote in a clearly differentiated way. In other words, the tendency of Evangelical voters follows the national tendencies. Moreover, it could so far be stated that the so-called 'Evangelical vote' in Guatemala is a myth. (Dary, 2018, p. 344).

We can find that same reality in Panama, which in contrast to Guatemala is the least Evangelical country in Central America. Claire Nevache has shown that the nonexistence of an Evangelical vote was confirmed in Panama's 2014 elections, in which Evangelicals voted very similarly to the rest of the population (Nevache, 2018, p. 389).

Another example commonly cited to demonstrate the existence of a confessional vote is Peru, with the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990. But in a previous publication (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017, pp. 29 y ss.) we demonstrated that the 'Cambio [Change] 90' political party that carried Fujimori to the presidency did not even win the general elections *with* the Evangelical vote, much less *due to* it. It is true that the beginnings of Fujimori's campaign were forged in the Evangelical churches, above all the Baptist denominations, as Alberto Fujimori was socially and politically an illustrious unknown and Evangelical support was fundamental to be able to tour the country and found his party base under the protection of this "sleeping lion"—as Fujimori liked to call the Evangelicals. But from there to inferring that Fujimori won the 1990 elections thanks to the Evangelical vote is quite a stretch.¹⁵

In this regard, Pastor Darío López, in an interesting article that dissects the Evangelical voting of 1990, shows that those who voted for Fujimori weren't even a fifth of the potential Peruvian Evangelical vote. It also shows that of the preferential votes obtained by Cambio 90, only 8.3% went to Evangelical senators and 2.2% to Evangelical representatives (López Rodríguez, 2008, pp. 131-161). In conclusion, although it is true that the participation of Evangelical leaders at the outset of Fujimori's electoral campaign was fundamental, we cannot state that he won the elections thanks to that support, or to the Evangelical vote, as the Evangelical sociologist Gerson Julcarima states:

The Evangelical networks were not the only ones that wove together the Change 90 movement and made possible Fujimori's links to the masses [...] Change 90 instead represented a quite heterogeneous conglomerate of social forces, in which Evangelicals were only a minority (Julcarima, 2008, p. 398).

In fact, if it were true that Evangelicals had the strength to win presidential elections in the 1990s, it would be even more likely that they could do it today, when they have triple the population they had in those years. But the Evangelicals' real political trajectory in Peru puts the lie to any such myth. Another fact that confirms that there is no such thing as a confessional vote in Peru was the 2006 elections, which were a genuine milestone in the history of political, or at least electoral, participation in Peru. It was the first time ever

15 For more details on this issue see also: Pérez Guadalupe, José Luis and Oscar Amat y León: *"Perú: los 'evangélicos políticos' y la conquista del poder"* in: Pérez Guadalupe, José Luis and Sebastian Grunderberger (Eds.). *Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina*. Lima: KAS-IESC 2018, pp. 405-430.

that 20 Evangelical candidates ran in 13 different political groupings. But, even more tellingly, it was the first time that a movement appeared that could accurately be described as a “confessional Evangelical party” (or of Evangelical inspiration) with its own presidential candidate: Pastor Humberto Lay. He took sixth place, obtaining only 4% of the votes, while the Evangelical population represented at least 12%. That, together with the case of Pastor Caballeros in Guatemala, confirmed that not even Evangelicals voted for him (Pérez Guadalupe, 2006).

But this failure of the Evangelical confessional party and the verification that not all Evangelicals are necessarily in favor of Evangelical parties is not a particularity of the Peruvian or Guatemalan case. We can also see it in other countries of the region; in Colombia, for example, William Beltrán states very clearly that:

There is no simple correspondence between the loyalty of Pentecostals for a charismatic religious leader and support for him at the polls [...] Evangelicals can thus not be seen as “useful fools” who passively receive political guidance from their leaders (Beltrán, 2013, p. 367).

Argentina presented a similar scenario in the 1990s. The Evangelicals had a project to found a confessional party headed up by (neo)Pentecostalism, which produced the Independent Christian Movement (MCI) in 1991. As is known, this project was such a colossal failure that they abandoned this messianic idea of a confessional party. Instead they opted for another, strategically more viable and more realistic one: individual candidacies sprinkled out among the different existing political parties under an “Evangelical faction” model, which we will look at further on. The reason for the MCI’s failure was summarized very well by Joaquín Algranti, who wrote that: “At voting time, the Peronist identity weighed more than the Evangelical one, and the grassroots sectors, even though recognizing themselves as Christians, choose the candidates of *justicialismo*. [...] Unquestionably the formula of a Christian party fails” (Algranti, 2010, p. 244). For his part, Hilario Wynarczyk tried to explain the failure of all political projects of Argentine Evangelicals as follows: “By believing that the Evangelicals’ votes were epiphenomena of the religion, they dabbled in a sort of sociological naiveté” (Wynarczyk, 2009, p. 199). The Argentine pastor Míguez Bonino expressed a similar idea when he said that “the options of the leaders, which are followed on the religious plane, are not always also followed on the political one” (Míguez Bonino 1995, p. 68).

Evangelicals similarly tried to form confessional parties in the 2017 elections in Chile: the Christian Citizen's Party, the United in Faith Party and the New Time Party, all of which ran aground in the attempt. As a result, the creation of a Chilean confessional party is not glimpsed in the near future, as so far all have failed. Moreover, as Guillermo Sandoval writes, "The Chilean Evangelicals mainly vote for non-Evangelicals. [...] In that setting, it's not possible, or at least not relevant, to speak of an Evangelical confessional vote" (Sandoval, 2018, p. 218).

On the other hand, we can verify that the so-called 'Evangelical vote' (which in reality is the 'vote of Evangelicals') doesn't exist as a consensus and even less as a political unity, as is commonly believed. On the contrary, following its own ecclesial performance, it is totally dispersed and divided. In Brazil, for example, the religious-political vote is absolutely atomized. In other words, there is no single Evangelical party, but diverse 'confessional'—or perhaps better said, 'denominational'—parties that are the extension of some (neo) Pentecostal churches that have achieved an important numerical growth, such as for example the Assemblies of God or the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. In fact the Evangelicals who won a seat in the House of Representatives in the 2014 elections belonged to 23 political parties and there are currently 23 Evangelical representatives from 26 denominations in 22 different political groupings.

But this political atomization within the 'Evangelical faction' model is not exclusive to Brazil. In Chile, for example, in the 2017 elections, Evangelicals participated in 16 different political parties; in Colombia in recent years, they have run in 15 different political movements or parties; and in the 2006 elections in Peru, despite an Evangelical candidate running for the presidency (Pastor Lay), the Evangelicals participated in 13 different political groupings.

So, if not even in the interpretation of the Bible can Evangelicals come to agreement, a better panorama cannot be expected in interpreting the signs of the times or determining issues of public life, in which they have less experience. As Beltrán states: "the Pentecostal movement reproduces its chronic fragmentation in the political field, which impedes it from becoming a unified political front" (Beltrán, 2013, p. 26).

In summary, if, as we have seen, there is no Evangelical 'confessional vote,' the formation of an Evangelical confessional party makes no sense. That has been precisely the great error of both the social-climbing Evangelicals in politics and the hyped-up politicians who tried to coopt the Evangelical vote.

But an exception must be made: there is an issue right now, just one, that has the potential to reunite the value judgments of the majority of Evangelicals in favor of an electoral option: the so-called 'moral agenda' (pro-life and pro-family, and against abortion and egalitarian marriage), as we saw in 2018 in Costa Rica and Brazil. But as we will see further on, not even this factor has been enough to shift the Evangelical electoral balance, which is always complex, dispersed and unexpected.

Chapter 3.

Toward the political conquest of Latin America

The Evangelicals' political changes in Latin America have been radical throughout their history: the first Protestant missionaries wanted to light society's way with the Gospel, but they saw converting this continent into a space inhabited by evangelized citizens as an impossible task. Today's Evangelical communities went from wondering whether or not to participate in politics to questioning how to participate. Between 1960 and 1980, those who first opened the political party door were leaders of the most traditional denominations, which believed in social change, the defense of human rights and the construction of the Kingdom. But given the scant backing by their communities and the unviability of their political projects, they found themselves numerically and ideologically outdone by the Pentecostals and, above all, neo-Pentecostals. Both of the latter saw in this attempt a magnificent opportunity to convert their religious capital into profitable political capital, without going through any theological reflection process and even less any awareness-building about the social reality (as their predecessors did). In other words, the old Evangelicals heated the water for the new ones to drink the coffee.

For the most part, this change originated in the new theological perspective that emerged in the 1980s and 90s, above all with the rise of the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal movement within the historical US conservative Evangelical churches and the new religious Right. Their vision with respect to the world and their relationship with it thus changed from a clear position of fleeing from it (the classic *fuga mundi*) to an unprecedented conquest of it. This brought an immediate rethinking of the Evangelicals' political position throughout the

continent: from the total rejection of politics to its utilization for their evangelizing purposes. But, with time, these heavenly theological motives were also muddied by the earthly profit interests of some leaders; some even went so far as to endorse dictatorships and unconstitutional regimes in Latin America.

The most curious aspect of this change of theological thought and attitude regarding the world, however, was that it didn't actually seek to secularize Church-State relations or separate the political and religious powers. Their goal was rather to open the doors of political power to the Evangelical communities so they could situate themselves at the same level as the Catholic Church, or simply replace it. In other words, they sought the sanctifying of the world, but this time with the Evangelicals as protagonists.

3.1. The three historical models of political participation by Evangelicals

From the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries to our continent, an Evangelical incursion took place in the public spaces through the search for freedom of religion, the separation of Church and State, secular education, etc., within a civilizing and evangelizing plan. But the entry into party politics did not take place fully until the 1980s in all the Latin American countries. Doing an overall analysis of this phenomenon, we can conclude that up to three ideal models or types –in the Weberian sense– of participation have occurred within the recent history of the Evangelical incursion into the Latin American political sphere:

1. **The Evangelical party:** This is the confessional political party or movement, made up of and led exclusively by “Evangelical brothers”, who under a “religious mandate” want to reach the government of their counties and, from there, be able to evangelize better.

Their political objectives are merely instrumental and strategic, as their real intention is to take power to be able to govern religiously –some would say “theocratically”– and evangelize. The aim of forming confessional movements or parties has occurred in virtually all of the region's countries starting in the 1980s, and all have failed, as they have not even garnered the support of their own brothers in faith, much less of non-Evangelical voters. As we have already indicated, one thing is that there be confessional parties (supply) and another is that there be a ‘confessional vote’ (demand). And that is precisely the reason for the failures of the confessional parties: the inexistence of a “confessional vote” in Latin America.

The historical facts show us that it is difficult, for the moment, for this model of Evangelical confessional party to have statistical and political viability, save perhaps in some Central American countries where Evangelicals are close to being the majority.

Projection: At this time the Evangelical party is an option virtually negated in the majority of Latin American countries, both by the old leaders who already tried to pull off this enterprise and failed, and by the new Evangelical political actors who see too much risk in investing all their religious capital in an uncertain electoral incursion. Those who would be willing to risk themselves for this option are the leaders of independent churches with messianic airs who have little or nothing to lose by moving into the political sphere—above all those of the self-styled “neo-Apostolic” line—and seek to create a theocracy in Latin America (reconstructionism). We doubt that the most settled leaders of the instituted churches really intend to put their religious capital at risk for such a political adventure. Meanwhile, the most inflated and “illuminated” ones with “charismatic personalities” will allude to some “prophecy of the Lord” that has chosen them to be President of their country. As such, some Joseph or Moses will lead his peoples to “be the head and not the tail,” as the promise of Deuteronomy (28:12-13) prays. But as we have indicated, even though Evangelicals may have a numerical majority, their faithful do not necessarily vote for them. Nor would they make up a single religious unity (much less a political one). And even if they do achieve that unity, we believe it would be very difficult to maintain it in a hypothetical Evangelical confessional government.

2. **The Evangelical front:** This is a political front led by Evangelical brothers of different denominations, but is open to other actors who share their political ideals (although not fully their religious ones). In this case, in a certain sense they renounce their religious principles to give pragmatic privilege to their political possibilities.

As can be seen, the Evangelical front has certain nuances of the failed—although not discarded—confessional party. Given the real impossibility of reaching power through the Evangelical confessional party, in which only brothers are accepted as members, they opt for an intermediate alternative by appealing to non-Evangelical political actors, as long as the brothers are the ones who head up the movement—although they can run a non-Evangelical candidate. In addition, the Evangelical leaders are aware that they are not professional politicians or public personalities and often are not known

beyond their congregation. They then turn to known personalities who can carry the banner of their Christian principles, even without fully sharing their evangelizing spirit.

The facts indicate to us that this model enjoys sympathy and certain viability in the Evangelical community that wants greater political voice, but has not yet been sufficiently convincing for either the Evangelicals or the non-Evangelicals.

Projection: Evangelical fronts now prefer to win over known politicians and media personalities (not necessarily themselves political), such as artists, journalists or sports figures with certain charisma, to represent them in electoral races. Furthermore, while the Evangelical front may have some viability and even success, it could be very ephemeral for two reasons: a) Evangelicals are novices in the political sphere, and b) the success of a possible Evangelical front will also depend on how quickly divisions emerge within the political party or the churches. If the Evangelicals now have decades of splits and disputes within their churches, what would make anyone think they are now going to maintain exemplary institutional behavior within a political party or a hypothetical government?

3. **The Evangelical faction:** This consists of the participation of Evangelical leaders in electoral processes within already created political parties or movements, based on electoral alliances (without having the capacity to head up the given movement or party).

Given the failure of the Evangelical party and the impossibility in the immediate future of an Evangelical front, they have opted to participate in this model of mutual gratification. Evangelicals are content to participate in an important political party that will presumably give them greater visibility and expectations of victory, and the parties appear happy to have some representatives of the Evangelical movement in their ranks.

The facts tell us that while it is the model most turned to on the continent and the one that has given the best electoral results to the Evangelical leaders so far, it is also the case that very few Evangelicals elected have remained successfully in the political sphere and made a career with projects of heading up an independent Evangelical movement. Among other reasons, they seem to move from one party to another without any ideological fidelity. Moreover, the majority of Evangelical candidates who succeed in being elected have done so because they participated on the slates of winning parties. Said differently, they don't win due to their own votes—which aren't enough—but because they are pulled by the parties on whose tickets they run. It even seems that this model is

running out of steam and has so far failed to empower an Evangelical candidate to capture national preferences (although the case of Fabricio Alvarado in the 2018 presidential race in Costa Rica came somewhat close).

Projection: At this time the Evangelical faction is the most viable option. It will probably remain so for a long time, as even though Evangelicals continue increasing in Latin America they will not do so indefinitely in all countries. Nor does their statistical growth necessarily translate into electoral growth. It is evident that this model fits best for minorities with a certain electoral relevance, as is the case of Evangelicals who, while unable to create a strong political group, do make up a politically relevant electoral sector. That is why, in the majority of countries, this model rules strategically but, at bottom, doesn't satisfy the aspirations of those who want their own Evangelical confessional party.

As can be seen, this historical development of the Evangelicals' political participation passed through the unprecedented enthusiasm of the 1980s, which led them to form confessional, *Evangelical parties*, believing ingenuously that through them they would easily win the presidency of their countries. After that early eye-opener they opted to generate strategic alliances with other movements or parties to achieve an *Evangelical front* that could get them to power, although alongside a non-Evangelical candidate. Finally, they complemented these two options with a new strategy: they are no longer centering their immediate interest on making it to the presidency of their countries (having discovered it wasn't as easy as they thought, no matter how many prophecies and prayers they did), but on getting the greatest number of seats in their country's parliament in order to exercise political influence from there. They have had relative success in that endeavor, although still not achieving political representation equivalent to their national percentage (as we will verify further on). Nor have they succeeded in having major influence on the promulgation of laws, but they have had success in vetoing some laws that went against their values-based vision of life and family with what they call 'gender ideology.'

On the other hand, we can find some variants or approximation in different countries based on these three categories worked as ideal models of political behavior by Evangelicals through their historical development. Brazil, as always, is a very special case given its huge size and diversity, in which we can find, for example, the simultaneous presence of all three models.

- a) Brazil has *Evangelical parties*, such as the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB) which belongs to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) and

whose candidates are all from that neo-Pentecostal church. There is also the Christian Social Party (PSC), which represents a sector of the Assemblies of God (AD), but not all Assembly candidates run on that party's ticket. It is worth mentioning that AD is the most numerous denominational confederation in Brazil and has the most legislators. But these Evangelical or 'denominational' parties no longer have the immediate objective of winning Brazil's presidency. They now want to place the greatest number of legislators possible, and from there achieve more influence in government. After the stinging defeat of Pastor Everaldo Dias Pereira (who ran for President for the PSC in 2014 and only got 0.75% of the vote), Evangelicals are more aware of their possibilities, so in 2018 they concentrated on the vote for the legislative seats.

- b) A variant of the *Evangelical front* model occurred in Brazil in 2018 with Jair Messias Bolsonaro's presidential victory. Although the vote for legislative representatives is still 'denominational' and atomized into different political parties, an 'Evangelical front' was formed in practice with the support of Bolsonaro who, while not identifying as Evangelical (his wife does), he ended up representing the conservative thinking of the majority of Evangelicals (and Catholics as well) on values-based issues. As a result, he received the explicit support of the leaders of the largest Evangelical denominations in the second voting round. As compensation, Bolsonaro put a Pentecostal pastor as the head of the new Ministry of the Woman, Family and Human Rights in his first Cabinet of Ministers. He also took a clear conservative line on values-based issues in his government from the outset.
- c) *Evangelical factions* are the most common way for Evangelicals in Brazil to run for office, winning innumerable seats as candidates for different political parties (including 'Evangelical' ones), then joining together in what they called an 'Evangelical bench.' Moreover, the 'corporative model of political participation practiced in Brazil is strategically the most successful as it has placed a major number of legislators by targeting only some 'official candidates' and thus avoiding the dispersal of the vote of its faithful.

Finally, as we said at the beginning, these three models are one way or other those that have appeared most in the Evangelicals' recent political history in Latin America. In the next chapter we will see how these models are concretized in Latin America's different regions as well as the Evangelicals' new strategies for winning power: pressure groups.

3.2. The new Evangelical political ideology

In the book by Brazilian “bishop” Edir Macedo (2008) we can find a basic but symptomatic biblical interpretation of the political role Christians (Evangelicals) should play in today’s world. Emulating Machiavelli in his work *The Prince*, Macedo tries to lay the groundwork for a possible Christian government of nations, with recommendations for both taking power and exercising and keeping it. But, while the author is the founder and leader of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), his discourse is not restricted only to it, but also to what the latest national census (2010) says is more than 40 million Evangelicals who make up Brazil’s Evangelical Christian community;¹⁶ (other sources indicate that they are now closer to 50 million). Macedo indicates that “the objective of this book is to reveal, conscientize and wake up Christians to a biblically announced cause” (Macedo, 2008, p. 47), which is nothing other than a “nation-building project” designed by God and concretized by a “project of political power.”

Although the author clearly indicates that he does not want to see the churches become political parties, he states that believers should not remain on the sidelines of the issue. Moreover, he both gives some practical advice for implementing this political project and exhorts all Evangelicals to join together, forgetting their internal doctrinal differences. In this regard, Macedo lays out what he believes it Christians need to establish themselves politically:

Well-coordinated actions that start from a strategic political conscientization, and unity around that noble cause, which depends in part on the religious leaders who are at the head of God’s flock. In this cause, denominational, ideological and doctrinaire issues must remain separate. Otherwise, we will fail to fulfill something that is common to all of us Christians: to execute the great nation-building Project conceived and sought by God (Macedo, 2008, p. 52).

16 “Never, in any moment of the history of the Gospel in Brazil, was it as opportune as now to massively call them to participate in national politics: moreover, to consolidate the grand nation-building project intended by God. Imagine if all those who say they profess that Faith hook into that divine idea.” (Macedo, 2008, p. 104). Further on he notes: “As has been proven through the biblical texts, the promise exists and the divine desire that this be fulfilled is constant, such that we can observe his persistence in this goal, first with Adam and Eve, later with Noah, with Joseph, with Moses, Daniel and so many others, and now with 40 million Evangelicals” (Macedo, 2008, p. 112).

It is clear that this book isn't an academic interpretation of the plan for salvation consecrated in the Old Testament, but an effort to convince believers, in a not very subtle way, to get involved in a "nation-building political Project promoted by God" (but of course guided by pastors). The book contains no major exegetical depth and even less hermeneutic profundity, nor are there great sociological or political analyses. It is simply a text that is as accessible as it is tendentious regarding God's supposed plans for his people. In this regard, as we believe the most valuable aspect of this work is not its theological profundity, but that it allows the new (theological?) thinking of the neo-Pentecostal groups about the participation of "Christians" in politics to shine through.

Another example of this new Evangelical political ideology is the 2018 book by Alberto Santana: *Nacidos para gobernar* (Born to govern), in which he makes a closed defense of Evangelicals' political participation as obligatory. This neo-Pentecostal pastor made himself known in Peru when he supported a presidential candidate with machista and homophobic arguments (supposedly based on the Old Testament) and tried to buy the stadium of Lima's Alliance Club. His book wastes no words, showing us from the introduction where his gratuitous "argumentation" is headed: "It is necessary for the church to know what the Holy Scriptures say about politics and government, so that the veil is removed and they realize that God has formed all believers as King and Priest to be able to govern the world "he made" (Santana, 2018, p. 11).

Making an erratic tour through different biblical texts, the author says that if God is the great ruler of the world, then "God is a great politician," and God's children, made priests and kings, must also be politicians and govern the earth, as God governs it. Ergo, it is not an option for Christians to be politicians, but an obligation. What's more, to say that "politics is the devil" or that the "Church is apolitical" is to commit a sin of blasphemy against God, as "God's children have been born to govern and the godless and corrupt to be governed."

An additional idea we cannot let slide is that Santana presents Evangelical pastors as the best politicians, as they could govern their countries just as they govern "their churches." They would be the natural candidates of a religious political project, as they have been prepared by God to govern nations: "Never forget that governing a church is similar to governing a nation, in that the functions of a minister of Jesus Christ is the same function the President of the Republic fulfills. So, it isn't much different for a Minister of the Lord to be President; the only difference is the number of people" (Santana, 2018, p. 55).

We can see, then, that the new Evangelical leaders, after more than a century of explicit rejection of the world and of politics, suddenly totally changed their

biblical interpretations: now they (particularly those of the neo-Pentecostal line) are haranguing their faithful to participate in it.¹⁷ But Edir Macedo and Alberto Santana are not the only ones who seek to justify their “political projects” biblically. There is also a series of parvenu pastors in politics who want to invent some “theological reflection” as they go that can underpin their change of political vision and their debuting participation in it.

Evangelical leaders have often been seen who railed for many years against their colleagues who wanted to participate in politics and now are launching their own candidacies saying that “God has revealed” this participation to them. They even rented supposed ‘ideologues’ and got their own fundamentalist biblical interpretations to underpin that great change. One of the most “original” is that of Ana Roncal in her book *Fundamentos de Gobierno. Dios para Presidente* (Fundamentals of Government: God for President) with its prologue by Pastor Humberto Lay, who then ran for President of Peru. Roncal defended political participation as a right of the Evangelicals to govern the world, virtually as a commandment of God. What she proposed at bottom was a ‘biblical theocracy’ with a ‘reconstructionist’ vision: “It is my prayer and desire that, reading these pages, each reader will be convinced and motivated, starting now, to take God’s candidacy for President to the nations of the world.” Further on she adds: “Man united with God in a linkage of love does not need to be governed by other human beings; only by God” (Roncal, 2001, pp.18 and 21).

This same type of varnished religious argumentation about politics can be found espoused by the majority of Evangelical leaders who run for President of their respective countries. At bottom, they are religious speeches, not political ones. For that reason, when these candidates enter into the technical debate regarding issues of government, their doctrinaire bareness is discovered and they are revealed for what they are: Evangelical leaders who are trying to turn

17 In this regard, it is not gratuitous that the latest book by Macedo is called *La nación de nuestros sueños* (The nation of our dreams) or that the author states that “The nation-building project intended by God depends on what we are emphasizing in our argumentation; that Christians need to wake up to the reality of the project, involve themselves, hook into it, and mobilize for the realization of that divine dream” (p. 116). And at the end of his book he concludes: “The objectives of this book were, in first place, to contribute to the conclusion of a biblical cause that expresses a divine desire, which is the nation-building project. In second place, to elaborate for the political and democratic maturation through the involvement of all Christian people, which is the decisive element of this entire process. [...] With respect to the votes of Evangelicals, we are facing two interests: his interest of Christians themselves to have genuine representatives, and the interest of God that his nation-building project be concluded” (Macedo, 2008, 123).

a profit on their religious capital by turning it into appealing political capital under an alleged divine promise or mandate.

3.3. The political conquest of 10 Latin American countries

As we mentioned at the beginning of this book, the religious and political manifestations of Evangelicals in Latin America through their history has been a very diverse phenomenology. For that reason, we will make a brief synopsis of what happened in 10 countries of the region:

Argentina¹⁸

Argentina is a country of 44 million inhabitants, 70% of whom define themselves as Catholic and between 12% and 15% as Evangelical. The majority of the latter are of the Pentecostal line, with 60% of them attending their churches.

The socioeconomic distribution of the Evangelicals varies significantly. Evangelicals do not make up even 4% of the upper-middle and upper class urban strata of the city of Buenos Aires (Wynarczyk and Jhons, 1996), while in the municipalities of the Buenos Aires province (approximately 9.000.000 inhabitants around the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires), a study centered on the municipality of Quilmes shows that Evangelicals range between 5% in upper-middle sectors, 10% in general and 22% in lower-income sectors (Esquivel, García, Hadida and Hondin, 2002).

Looking at the political participation of Evangelicals, Hilario Wynarczyk (2018) differentiates between the different denominations and classifies them in two major poles: 1) the historical liberationist pole, and 2) the biblical conservative pole. The latter, in turn, are divided into two sectors: a) Evangelical sector and b) Pentecostal sector. The biblical conservative pole, made up of conservative Evangelical groups such as the Baptists and Free Brothers, and a great variety of Pentecostal churches, are the vast majority of Evangelicals in Argentina (approximately 90%). They are also the ones who have led the protagonism of political participation in recent years.

The Argentine case has aspects very similar to other countries of the region (like Peru and Colombia) with respect to its historical development. With some

18 The Argentine case has been co-authored with Hilario Wynarczyk based on his article "Argentina: ¿Vino nuevo en Odres viejos? Evangélicos y Política." In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 107 – 140.

years and topics apart, they coincide in the struggle for vindication on legal issues (religious equality beyond mere religious freedom); among others the failure of the confessional party and the current diversification of Evangelical candidates within existing parties; the centering now on a 'moral agenda' (pro-life and pro-family and against the so-called 'gender ideology'); the absence of a proposal for government due to the real inexistence of "Evangelical social thought" and the atomization of Evangelical churches and leaders; the presence of an Evangelical population under 20% but very active and militant, in which the great majority are of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal line; and the polarization of two opposed factions of political participation (leftist ecumenicals vs. rightwing conservatives). What makes this a singular case is that the majority of Argentine Evangelicals are not linked in their electoral preferences to rightwing parties, but rather to center-left ones. "The inclusion of people in grassroots sectors can induce them to be, simultaneously, Pentecostals and voters for Peronism" (Wynarczyk, 2018, 133).

The liberationist historical pole is called 'historical' because it is made up of original Protestant and 'liberationist' Churches that in the mid-1900s, through the numerous pastors, congregations and entities of these churches moved close to the underpinnings of liberation theology, the ecumenical movement and contextual theological reflection. Today, the churches of this pole are markedly smaller than the other Evangelical churches, but they have intellectual capital, prestige and contacts with the middle and upper-middle classes. In addition, the churches of this pole adhere to the values of modernity, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 'Social Gospel,' and have maintained ecumenical links with the Catholic Church starting with the Vatican II Council.¹⁹ The churches of this pole are represented in the Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches (FAIE), the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and the World Council of Churches (WCC, Geneva, Switzerland). These churches have maintained links with sister churches of the United States and Europe and have obtained financing sources for social action projects. Furthermore, they created various quality schools and gave testimony of an active commitment to the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH) and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH).

The biblical conservative pole is called like that for its adhesion to biblical literalism (biblical inerrancy, etc.), its distancing from politics (without going

19 Methodist pastor and theologian José Míguez Bonino is a distinguished intellectual in the ranks of liberation theology in Argentina.

as far as radical *fuga mundi*), rejection of Communism in certain historical moments, conservative morality on issues of sexuality and bioethics that permit their leaders to empathize with the 'moral agenda' of the Catholic Church. As we mentioned above, this pole can be subdivided into two sectors:

- What is called the 'Evangelical sector' in Argentina arrived through the missionary churches starting in the second half of the 19th Century. They are descendants of the radical Reform, which tried to deepen the proposals of the Lutheran Reform, with the subsequent accentuated distancing from the beliefs and rituals of Catholicism. Their most important churches in Argentina are the Baptists, Free Brothers and Mennonites. The conservative Evangelicals put their emphasis on the internal conversion of individuals through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, which (rather than the sacraments administered by clerics) is the only means of grace and sanctification. Conservative Evangelicals hold that the Bible is a book inspired totally by God and that a Plan of Salvation is found expressed within it that gives them a model of what the future will be, and also a method and a personal discipline. Due to their rejection of the "world" as a corrupt plane of existence, they have tended to distance themselves from politics and have no interest in achieving structural changes in society. The churches of this pole are represented in the Christian Alliance Federation of Evangelical Churches of the Argentine Republic (ACIERA) and the Federation of Argentine Evangelical Christian Churches and Institutions (FICEA).
- The second sector of the biblical conservative pole is the Pentecostals. They descend from the original movement that appeared in the United States at the beginning of the last century, and spread through Mexico and the rest of Latin America. These churches appeared in Argentina brought by individuals who had had a charismatic experience. The main churches of that cycle of the outreach of Pentecostalism are the Union of the Assemblies of God, the Assemblies of God and the Church of God. The Pentecostals also emphasize conversion through personal encounter with Jesus Christ, but are distinguished by the belief that God continues acting in people's lives and in the true Christian churches. They also believe emphatically that miracles of sanctity and liberation of spirits (which produce disturbances in the life of individuals and families), emerge from the power of the Holy Spirit, and believe in prophecies and in glossolalia (or the "gift of tongues"), through which people receive messages from the Spirit and transmit them in "angelic tongues."

We can distinguish up to three segments within the Pentecostals: **1)** the classic Pentecostals, such as the Assemblies of God; **2)** the neoclassical Pentecostals, according to the nomenclature of Brazilian sociologist Ricardo Mariano (2001); i.e. churches similar to the classic but created locally, such as the Association of the Church of God (ALID), founded in Buenos Aires; the Future Vision Church, founded in Santa Fe and spread from there; and the Emblematic Church of the Good Tidings of Pastor Juan José Churrarín, founded in Goya, province of Corrientes; **3)** the neo-Pentecostals, who exacerbate Pentecostal features with their emphasis on curing miracles and on the 'theology of prosperity,' among others (Mariano, 1999). One very particular characteristic of the neo-Pentecostals is that they tend to surmount denominational borders (post-denominationalism) in spreading their beliefs and praxis, rather like a cultural colonization within the Evangelical camp, which makes itself felt mainly among the Pentecostals and conservative Evangelicals, both at the doctrinal level and in ecclesial and social practices.

From these forms of Pentecostalism emerge 'spiritually empowered' leaders: master preachers, prophets who understand messages from God, and especially apostles within what came to be known as the New Apostolic Reform (NRA). These Pentecostal churches are represented in the Pentecostal Evangelical Brotherhood Federation (FECEP), although some are also associated with ACIERA. Other churches, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), are considered in Argentina as new religious movements outside of both Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism.

As in many countries of the region, the Evangelicals' entry into political party life was inaugurated by a faction of the liberationist historical pole while in the end, those that took advantage of and consecrated it came from the other faction of the biblical conservative pole, specifically the Baptist Churches and Free Brothers. Starting in the 1990s, they were joined by Pentecostal sectors. This new entry meant that once the conservative Evangelical sectors withdrew from that political effort, the Pentecostals took over the task, with the idea of reconstructing society under the mandates of the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

But the Pentecostals' scant theological formation and serious political naiveté led to the failure of the original experience of the confessional party in several electoral campaigns (1993, 1994 and 1995), as they could never grasp that the decisions of Evangelical voters were politically independent, like those of other citizens. With that, the Evangelicals abandoned the idea of an electoral participation with their own 'confessional' party; instead their possible candidates joined existing political parties, ranging from Christian

Democracy to the Social Pole, within which they were called the 'Evangelical fraction.' In this way the idea was confirmed that the Evangelical party based on a supposed 'confessional vote' wasn't the option of Argentine Evangelicals, who knew how to differentiate between their religious militancy and their political options: "The empirical data show that the mechanistic conception of the Evangelicals' vote as a dependent variable of religious belonging is a kind of 'ingenuousness'" (Wynarczyk, 2018, 133).

Although Argentina is not a strictly two-party country, the system's great actors (Peronists) function like a class party that appeals to the population from which the Pentecostals emerged, despite their notable internal contrasts. In Evangelical circles, membership in a church and the orientation of one's vote function in a differentiated way.

Today the Evangelical churches have defined their new path as the pro-life and pro-family 'moral agenda,' which is giving them new visibility and new relevance with respect to their relations with certain sectors of the Catholic Church, which share their struggle around the same agenda. The Evangelical churches leading this ideological-value laden shift are largely from the biblical conservative pole, representing more than 90% of Argentina's Evangelical or Protestant population. The operative axis of the phenomenon is found in ACIERA, the main federation of the Evangelical camp's biblical conservative pole, while the FAIE is that of the liberationist historical pole.

The interesting aspect of these events is that this new moral agenda has served to unite different Argentine Evangelical federations and also many sizable Catholic associations. Together with ACIERA, the largest federation of Pentecostal churches, FECEP, stood out in the crusade against the legalization of abortion. The central point of its vision is the struggle against what it calls the "gender ideology," which, in its opinion, is functioning as an artefact of the world financial power to dominate humanity through international entities such as the United Nations, various nongovernmental organizations, etc.

Nowadays, the biblical conservatives appear in civil society aligned with the Catholic Church leadership around the pro-life and pro-family moral agenda and in opposition to 'gender ideology.' The Evangelicals are thus helping "confront the secularization tendency" and becoming a moral issue in politics (Corrales 2018). With regard to this, it is worth wondering to what degree Evangelicals are acquiring their own differentiated weight, as opposed to only acting as lesser partners of the Catholic Church leadership, even allowing journalism to describe the Evangelicals as "also mobilizing on behalf of the moral agenda" (Rubín, 2018).

In contrast to what is happening in the other Latin American countries, where the Evangelicals are heading up this kind of mobilization, in Argentina the Catholic Church is playing the outstanding protagonist role, putting itself in the vanguard of the pro-life initiatives. It is the Catholic Church that (a) is promoting and leading impactful collective demonstrations in many cities of the country; (b) enjoying notable intellectual capital embodied by bishops and laypeople who are enunciating a discourse in sociologically contextualized secular and for that reason universally accessible terms;²⁰ (c) has several universities, numerous elementary and high schools, and links to people who occupy positions in the legislative and judicial branches and in labor unions; (d) has a pastoral line in the “grassroots field” whose dynamo is a group of young priests that is small but with great biblical and media presence, who work in the “*villas*” (extremely poor urban populations, mainly within the city of Buenos Aires and provincial Buenos Aires). These “*villero*” priests, together with some secular and political leaders, defend the cause of the poor who are excluded from the formal labor system and also support the ‘pro-life.’ Within this context, the Evangelical churches of the biblical conservative pole have mobilization potential in the city of Buenos Aires and can also put out the call in the interior of the country, but because they participate in marches promoted by the Catholics, they appear only as accompaniments in a sort of “community of interests” in which they are neither protagonists or vanguard leaders.

Brazil²¹

Brazil, with approximately 210 million inhabitants, is the country with the most Catholics in the world, but the national censuses show that its religious scenario has been rapidly changing in recent decades. In 1960, Catholics made up 93% of the population, while Evangelicals were only 4%. In 1980, Catholics were still 89% and Evangelicals 6.6%. Moreover, despite their percentage drop, Catholics continued increasing in absolute terms. Between 2000 and 2010, however, Brazil’s Catholic population dropped significantly in both percentage terms (from 73,9% to 64.5 %) and in absolute numbers

20 This can be perceived when they comment on social, political, economic and ethical questions and are quoted in the pages of newspapers, without necessarily constructing arguments around biblical texts or theological arguments

21 The Brazilian case was co-authored with Fabio Lacerda based on his article (with Jose Mario Brasiliense) “*Brasil: la incursión de los pentecostales en el poder legislativo*”. In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 141-180.

(from 125.5 million to 123.9 million). During the same period the Evangelical population grew from 15.4% to 22.2% and numerically from 26.2 million to 42.3 million. It is important to note that like the Catholic Church, the historical Protestant churches, such as Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and others, suffered a drop in the absolute number of faithful. It even occurred in some Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, such as the Christian Congregation of Brazil and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD).²² Those “promoting” Christian growth in Brazil were some Pentecostal churches – Assemblies of God, the Four Square Gospel Church and lesser Pentecostal churches, as well as Evangelicals with no institutional link, i.e. those who identified as Evangelicals but did not belong to any specific church (Almeida and Barbosa, 2015).

Investigative samples taken after the 2010 Brazilian census showed that the Catholic population continued shrinking and the Evangelical one continued growing. According to the 2017 data of *AmericasBarometer* (LAPOP), Catholics were 51.5% of the population and Evangelicals 32.3%. These percentages are similar to those found in the research of the Datafolha Institute of October 2017, according to which 52% of Brazilian adults identified themselves as Catholics and 32% as Evangelicals.²³ Although both investigations are samples, it seems reasonable to assume that in 2019 around half of Brazil’s population is Catholic and a third is Evangelical.

Following Lacerda and Brasiliense (2018), we can state that during the better part of the 20th Century Evangelicals had a discreet presence in Brazil’s party politics. Until the 1986 elections, the majority of Protestant candidates elected to the House of Representatives came from historical churches. There were virtually no representatives of Pentecostal churches. In 1982 only 12 Evangelicals were elected to the House, of whom 7 were linked to the Baptist Church and 1 to the Assembly of God. This panorama changed radically in the elections for the Constituent Congress of 1986, when 32 Evangelical representatives were elected. This time, despite the presence of 10 Baptist legislators as well as representatives of other historical churches, 13 were elected from the Assemblies of God, 2 from the Four Square Gospel Church and 1 from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. It is only after

22 The IURD case should be viewed with caution. Despite the loss of Brazilian faithful between 2000 and 2010, this community states that it grew around the world. They want it to be believed that their supposed global growth has compensated for the loss in Brazil.

23 “At voting time, 19% of Brazilians with religion follow the leader of their church” (Instituto Datafolha, 26/10/2017).

those 1986 elections that the growth of the Evangelical population began to be reflected in political representation.

The basic explanation for this great leap—apart from the theological changes of some churches—was the adoption by Pentecostal churches of a “corporative model of political representation.” In this model churches adopt “official candidacies” and promote them to their faithful. At first the adoption of this model was limited to three churches: Assemblies of God, the Four Square Gospel Church and the Universal Church.²⁴ Gradually, however, other churches also adopted corporative representation. It should be noted that in the majority of cases, the support the Pentecostal churches provided to their candidates only occurred within the church itself and was not publicized outside, probably because political propaganda by churches is prohibited (Law 9.504/97, art. 37). For that reason, the identification of the link between Evangelical candidates and their churches is sometimes difficult to prove.

This adoption of “official candidacies” by certain Pentecostal churches meant that the number of Evangelical legislators elected grew considerably in Brazil. Table 1 diachronically represents the result of elections for House of Representatives, the estimated growth of the Brazilian population, the percentage of the Evangelical population and the number of Evangelical federal legislators in percentage and absolute terms. If, in 1945, shortly after the end of the *Estado Novo*, only one Evangelical federal legislator was elected in Brazil; in 2018 the number reached 82.²⁵ As was said above, the 1986 elections were marked by a large growth of Evangelical representation in the federal legislative branch. It should be indicated that in 2006 the number of Evangelical legislators elected fell due to the corruption scandals that affected representatives of the Assemblies of God and the IURD. In 2010, however, Evangelical representation grew again and has been maintained since then. Despite this growth, however, Evangelicals are underrepresented in the House of Representatives.

24 If at times we refer to the Assemblies of God as “a” Pentecostal church, we maintain the plural “Assemblies” to stress that, in reality, they are a set of churches fragmented into different ministries (cf. Alencar, 2012).

25 Brazil went through a democratic period between 1945 and 1964. After 1964 the country was governed by an authoritarian regime until 1985. Unlike other experiences in the continent, Brazil’s military regime was marked by elections and the existence of political parties.

Evolution of Evangelical Political Representation versus Numerical Growth

Year	Total Estimated National Population	% Evangelical Population (approx.)	Evangelical Representatives	Total Representatives	% Evangelical Representatives
1945	46.600.000	3.1	1	304	0.3
1950	51.944.397	3.6	5	304	1.6
1954	60.000.000	3.8	6	326	1.8
1958	70.000.000	3.9	7	326	2.1
1962	77.800.000	4.2	10	404	2.5
1966	85.600.000	4.7	12	409	2.9
1970	94.508.583	5.2	9	409	2.2
1974	107.830.000	5.9	13	409	3.2
1978	118.000.000	6.6	12	420	2.9
1982	126.304.000	7.2	12	479	2.5
1986	136.603.950	8.1	32	487	6.6
1990	145.000.000	9	23	503	4.6
1994	155.000.000	12.2	?	513	?
1998	163.140.000	15.4	29	513	5.7
2002	174.000.000	15.4	42	513	8.2
2006	182.300.000	18.8	35	513	6.8
2010	190.755.799	22.2	65	513	12.7
2014	200.000.000	27.1	67	513	13.1
2018	209.000.000	32	82	513	16.0

Source: Brazilian censuses (1940 to 2010); Lacerda and Brasiliense (2018); Nicolau (1997); Brazilian House of Representatives website

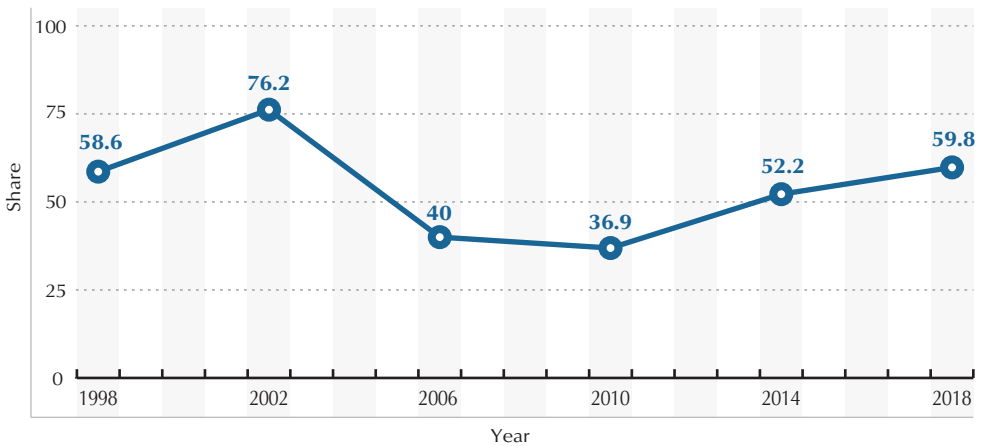
While it is true that the growth of the Evangelical population in Brazil explains to some extent the growth of its political representation, other countries of Latin America also had an Evangelical growth without it translating into a larger number of elected Evangelical parliamentarians (see the cases of Chile, Peru, Colombia and El Salvador). What, then, would explain the Evangelical electoral success in Brazil?

In addition to the growth of the Evangelical population and the democratic constituent process of 1986, it is possible that other variables partially explain the electoral successes of Pentecostal churches in Brazil. In the first place, it should be underscored that Brazil has a large number of Evangelical churches, but relatively few run candidates in elections. Among those that do, even fewer are successful in electing a representative. The growth of the number of Evangelical parliamentarians in Brazil is thus due to the success of a small

number of large Pentecostal churches with a centralized structure. Among the most successful are the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) and the Assemblies of God (ADs). In fact, these two churches are responsible for a good part of the Evangelical federal legislators elected in recent decades. Below, Figure 2 presents the proportion of legislators elected by ADs and IURD relative to the total of Evangelical legislators. Although there is a significant variation in the period analyzed, it is observed that in several years, more than 50% of the Evangelical parliamentarians elected came from some of these churches. In the 2018 elections, approximately 60% of them came from the IURD or the ADs.

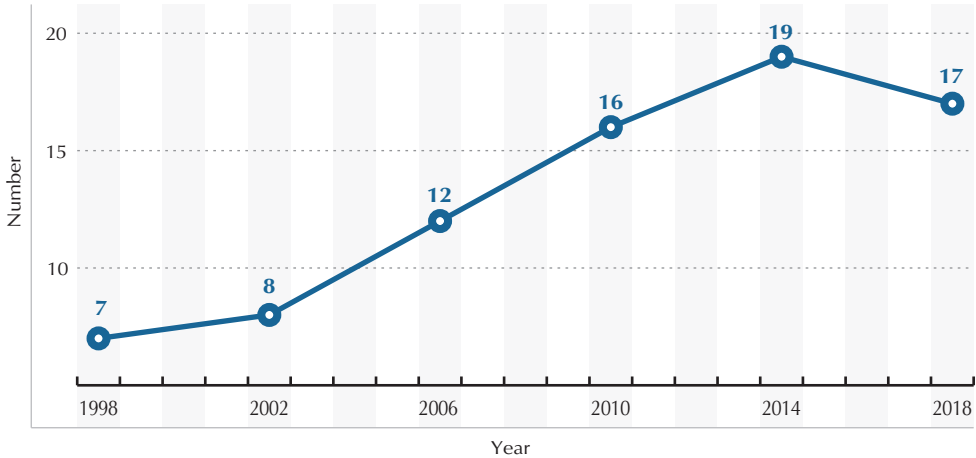
This does not mean that the number of Evangelical churches represented in the House of Representatives is shrinking. In reality, as Figure 3 shows, the number of churches represented is growing, having passed from 7 in 1998 to 17 in 2018. This data alone would indicate a growing Evangelical fragmentation in Brazil’s federal legislative branch, but when we analyze the data of Figures 2 and 3 together, we see that the Evangelical fragmentation is growing at the same time that the ADs and the IURD maintain their hegemony. In an extremely competitive “religious market,” more churches get their representatives elected in the House, but the fragmentation means that the other churches remain weak compared to the ADs and the IURD.

**ADs + IURD Representatives versus
Total Evangelical Representatives (%)**



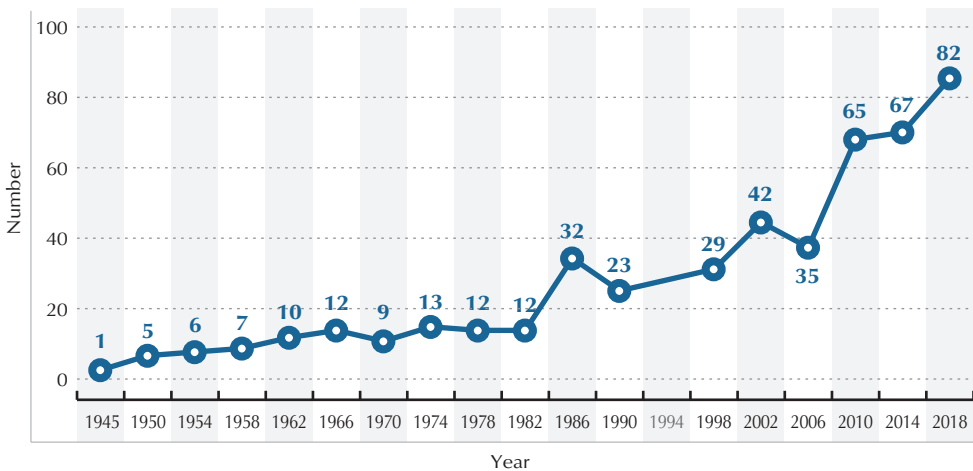
Source: Lacerda (2017); for 2018, Marini and Carvalho (2018)

Number of Evangelical Churches Represented in House of Representatives



Source: Lacerda (2017); for 2018, Marini and Carvalho (2018)

Number of Evangelical Representatives Elected to House of Representatives



Source: Lacerda (2017); for 2018, Marini and Carvalho (2018)

The IURD can be considered the prototypical case of Evangelical electoral success in Brazil. In 2018 it ran 35 ‘official’ candidates, 21 of whom (60%) were elected. No political party enjoys such a success rate. The IURD has a centralized structure, which allows it to coordinate its candidates to avoid

intra-ecclesial competition. It also controls the Brazilian Republican Party whose decision-making entities are dominated by IURD members although it is formally a secular party (Cerqueira, 2017). As a result, the great majority of its candidates are concentrated in that party. Other churches, in contrast, disperse their candidates among various parties. Brazil is the only country on the continent where the big Pentecostal churches have managed to promote political loyalty in their congregation through the ‘denominational vote.’ In other words, Brazil has Evangelical candidates within ‘denominational parties’ (Evangelical party) and within other secular parties (Evangelical faction). There is enough ‘religious market’ for all tastes and publics.

On the other hand, the good behavior of “official” Evangelical candidates supported by their churches—compared to other candidates—can be explained in different ways. The first basic explanation is supported in Evangelical identity. Social identities such as race, gender and religion can generate political cohesion and become relevant in electoral disputes. In the case of the churches, candidates’ Evangelical identity could pull the Evangelical electorate’s vote, but particularly within their own denomination (the ‘denominational vote’). A second explanation is based on the support the church offers its own candidate; church leaders promote their candidates within their communities, thus assuring them a contingent of votes.

In addition to the existence of large Pentecostal churches with a centralized structure, some political-institutional variables can also explain the Evangelical electoral success. Two important variables would be the size of the electoral districts and the fragmentation of the party system. Brazil’s electoral districts are quite large. The State of Sao Paulo, for example, elects 70 members to the federal House of Representatives, which has 513 seats in total. That large number means that candidates can be elected with a very small fraction of the valid votes. In the 2014 elections, for example, the candidate in Sao Paulo who won with the smallest number of valid votes got 0.1% (the average number of winning valid votes there was 0.8 %). Another important point is the high fragmentation of parties. Brazil has one of the highest party fragmentations in the world. In the 2014 elections, 28 parties won seats in the House of Representatives, and four years later the number rose to 30. In principle, this large number of parties would make it easy for Evangelical candidates to get into a party. The literature characterizes Brazil’s political parties as weak and with diluted “brands” (Mainwaring, 1992; Samuels & Zucco Jr., 2014). Pentecostal candidates are usually disseminated in small, poorly structured parties with a diffuse ideology (normally of the right or center-right). As a result,

all these variables—Evangelical population growth, the 1986 Constituent, large and centralized Pentecostal churches, large electoral districts and high party fragmentation—help explain why Evangelical political representation is greater in Brazil than in other Latin American countries.

But it also needs to be said that the political rise of Brazil's Evangelical churches cannot be generalized. It corresponds mainly to the Pentecostal churches that decided to participate politically with 'official candidates,' which enabled the concentration of their congregations' votes on them. This detail is very important, as hundreds of candidates of the Evangelical confession might participate in a given electoral race but the 'official candidates' who have the corporative support of their (Pentecostal) churches are the only ones likely to win. This is one reason the winning candidates do not represent the total of Evangelical candidates, nor do they reach the representativity that all Evangelicals should theoretically have based on the percentage of the current Evangelical population. This latter phenomenon will be repeated in all countries of the region, since there is no proportional correlation between the percentage of the Evangelical population and the number of Evangelical candidates elected, precisely because there is no 'confessional vote,' even in Brazil. In the best of cases, there is perhaps a 'denominational vote.' Proof of this is that despite all the political development achieved in Brazil, and having 32% Evangelical population, Evangelicals only obtained 82 out of 513 seats (16%) in the federal house of Representatives and 9 of 81 senators (11%) in 2018.

So far, then, we have discussed the statistical data of political representation of Evangelicals in Brazil, but what is the behavior of those Evangelical representatives in the House of Representatives? Are they a cohesive bench? Do they act in a clientelist and corporative manner? According to the literature, it is not possible to state that Evangelical representatives act as a bloc. In the legislative arena, their unity is restricted to a few questions (position on abortion and on homosexual matrimony, for example) and even in these cases it is not a unity that results from any kind of concerted action, but rather from the moral convictions of the individual representatives (Fonseca, 2008).

With specific regard to the behavior of Evangelical legislators, the few studies on the issue do not corroborate the assumption that it is more clientelist than that of other legislators. In comparative politics, political clientelism is usually defined as the provision of benefits or material goods in exchange for electoral support, generally in the form of votes. So far, the majority of the literature on Pentecostal growth and its incursion into politics has assumed that those who

elect representatives of the churches impose their clientelist politics. For that reason, it seems hardly refutable to argue that Pentecostals, like any other social group, might struggle for political participation and representation. Similarly, it seems relatively unquestionable that Pentecostal voters would choose candidates who share their identity and values to represent them. The point that should be investigated, then, is if anything is different in Pentecostal political actions than in the actions of other groups. The few studies done on this issue, however, do not corroborate such a hypothesis. In general, there is no significant difference between the production of laws by Evangelical parliamentarians and those of non-Evangelicals (cf. Lacerda, 2016; Cassotta, 2016).

Furthermore, Evangelical political representation in Brazil has been less evident in the presidential elections than in the legislative ones. In 2002, the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) presidential candidate Anthony Garotinho, a member of the Presbyterian Church, ended up in third place with 17.9% of the valid votes. In 2006 no Evangelical candidate even ran for the presidency, and in 2010 Marina Silva, a member of the Assemblies of God, ran on the Green Party ticket and also came in third, with 19.3% of the valid votes. In the following elections in 2014, Marina Silva ran again, that time on the PSB ticket, and again came in third, although with 21.3% of the valid votes. The other Evangelical candidate, Pastor Everaldo, who ran on the Social Christian ticket, pulled 0.75% for fifth place. Marina Silva ran for the presidency a third time in 2018, but only got 1.0% of the valid votes, ending up in eighth place. Although she and Garotinho both did well in the race for the federal executive in 2002, 2010 and 2014, both are candidates of the Evangelical faith but not corporative representatives of a church. The only case of notable success of a corporative candidate linked to a Pentecostal church in the election of an executive post was IURD bishop Marcelo Crivella, who ran on the Brazilian Republican Party ticket for mayor of *Río de Janeiro* in 2016. He got 59% of the valid votes in the second round against 40.6% for Socialist Marcelo Freixo, who ran on the Socialism and Liberty Party.

Nonetheless, although they have only won a single mayor's post in pertinent executive elections, the support of Pentecostal churches has been very important in the race for the presidency for some time.²⁶ Since 2000, the presidential candidates have been courting the leaders of the ADs, IURD and

26 Historically, Brazil had two Protestant Presidents; the first was Café Filhoa Presbyterian who took office for a little over a year (August 1954-November 1955) after the suicide of Getúlio Vargas. The second was Ernesto Geisel, a Lutheran, who became President in 1974, during the military regime. Neither was elected by direct vote.

other large Pentecostal churches, making the Evangelical vote important in the Brazilian executive elections. This importance seems to have been even greater in the 2018 presidential elections, even though the elected President, Jair Bolsonaro, is Catholic, not Evangelical, because there is evidence that he got major support from the Evangelical segment. According to a poll by the Datafolha Institute, 6 of every 10 Evangelicals voted for him.²⁷

Alves (2018), using sample data of Datafolha as a base, believes Bolsonaro could have obtained nearly 21.7 million Evangelical votes in the second round, while Haddad only got 9.7 million, a difference of over 11 million. Such support was not obtained by luck; on the contrary, it was the fruit of the candidate's deliberate campaign strategy. It should be highlighted that in May 2016, Bolsonaro was re-baptized in the waters of the River Jordan by Pastor Everaldo, a member of the Assembly of God (Madureira ministry). Bolsonaro's campaign used slogans loaded with religious references such as "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make thee free" (Juan 8, 32), and "Brazil above all and God above everyone." In addition, some of the most important supporters of his campaign were Evangelicals, among them Senator Magno Malta of the Party of the Republic and parliamentarian Onyx Lorenzoni of the Democrats who with Bolsonaro's victory became minister of the Casa Civil (the presidency's executive offices). In addition, Bolsonaro received the backing of the main Brazilian Pentecostal leaders: Edir Macedo (founder and leader of the IURD), Romildo Ribeiro Soares (leader of the International Church of the Grace of God),²⁸ Valdemiro Santiago (leader of the World Church of God's Power),²⁹ Estevam and Sônia Hernandes (leaders of the Rebirth in in Christ Church),³⁰ Robson Rodovalho (leader of the Sara Nossa Terra Church)³¹, Silas Malafaia (leader of the Victory in Christ -AD ministry), Manoel Ferreira (leader of the Madureira-AD ministry), José Wellington Bezerra da Costa (leader of the Bethlehem-AD

27 "Con 60%, Bolsonaro ha más que duplicado la ventaja sobre Haddad entre evangélicos, afirma Datafolha" (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 10/10/18).

28 "Líder de la Iglesia Internacional de la Gracia de Dios declara apoyo a Bolsonaro" (*UOL*, 06/10/18).

29 "Valdemiro Santiago pide a los nordestinos que apoyen a Bolsonaro" (*JM Notícia*, 10/10/18).

30 "Grabación de CD de Renascer Praise comienza con un acto de apoyo a Jair Bolsonaro" (*JM Notícia*, 02/10/18).

31 "Bolsonaro recibe apoyo de Robson Rodovalho, creador de Sara Nossa Terra" (*Correio Braziliense*, 24/09/18).

ministry) and Mário de Oliveira (president of the Church of the Four Square Gospel of Brazil).³² Bolsonaro's victory, without him being Evangelical, may even be a milestone in the Evangelicals' political influence in Brazil's executive elections.

Nonetheless, despite the electoral support from Evangelical leaders, it is not clear if that support as such will transfer to the legislative sphere. As was said above, 30 parties obtained representation in the House of Representatives in the 2018 elections. The Social Liberal Party and the Workers' Party won the largest benches, with 54 representatives each. But despite being the largest benches, each one represents only 10.5% of the House. Precisely because of this parliamentary atomization, the head of the executive branch needs to find strategies to obtain majorities in the parliamentary voting. Thus in post-1988 Brazilian democracy, the majority of Presidents have opted to form government coalitions, offering posts to political parties in exchange for their legislative support. Bolsonaro was elected with a discourse contrary to the negotiation of party posts; his proposal was to negotiate legislative support directly with the benches themselves, sub-party parliamentarians organized around specific issues. Two of the best known are the 'Evangelical bench' and the 'ruralist bench' (i.e. of agro-business). This type of negotiation isn't easy, however; while parties enjoy resources and prerogatives to force their members to vote according to their orientation, the same cannot be said of these ersatz 'benches.'

Finally, in many regards Brazil is a particular case in the region, together with Mexico and Uruguay. For that reason, we cannot generalize that concrete experience to other countries on the continent. Even less can we generalize the phenomenology of Brazil's largest neo-Pentecostal church; the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) and its Brazilian Republican Party (PRB). Although the IURD has spread to many countries of the region, its presence in Brazil is very special and not generalizable.³³ Thus "IURDian neo-Pentecostalism," as Leonildo Silveira Campos (2000) calls it, has impressed

32 The reverend declared his support in Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsw4YAn-gA4>).

33 The IURD has achieved a major media impact in a majority of the Latin American countries where it has set itself up (at times with the commercial name 'Pare de Sufrir'/ Cease Suffering) but not a numerical one and even less one of influence. In Basil, the IURD reaches more than 2 million (equal to the Four Square Gospel Church, while the Assemblies of God reach more than 12 million. For a more detailed and critical analysis of the IURD, consult Silveira Campos (2000) and Oro, Corten and Dozon (2003).

many “scholars” who (wrongly) believe they are seeing in this specific type of religious manifestation the most representative example of Brazilian and Latin American Protestantism (Pérez Guadalupe, 2018). Lastly, the apparent role played by the Evangelical vote in Bolsonaro’s election may represent the breakup of the Evangelical political actions in elections for executive posts in Brazil. More research is still needed to understand the real dimension of the Evangelical support for Bolsonaro and whether it will benefit the Evangelicals in their numerical growth and in their attempts to take power.

Chile³⁴

With a population of more than 17 million inhabitants, Chile, according to the last national census in 2012, has 67.37% Catholics, 16.62% Evangelicals and 11.58% who profess no religion. But these figures have seen an important variation in recent years, according to the latest ‘Bicentenary Survey’ of the Catholic University of Chile (2018). In any event, it needs to be considered that the same survey for the same years as the 2012 census turned in the following figures: 59% Catholics, 18% Evangelicals and 19% atheists, agnostics and no religion.

	2012 Census	2017 Latinobarómetro	2018 Bicentennial Survey
Catholic	67.37%	45%	58%
Evangelical/Protestant	16.62%	11%	16%
Agnostic, Atheist and No religion	11.58%	38%	21%

Author’s Note: Concerns were raised regarding the application of the 2012 census (coverage). A complementary census was conducted in 2017, but it was oriented solely to urgent aspects for public policy design. It did not include religious identity. On the other hand, note that the two referenced surveys included only face-to-face interviews in their methodology. Latinobarómetro data: https://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/site/artic/20180112/asocfile/20180112124342/f00006494_religion_chile_america_latina_2017.pdf

These figures place Chile as the country with the second greatest percentage of no religious affiliation, after Uruguay, even above the percentage of Evangelicals. It should be noted that while Chile has not had a 19th-Century

34 The Chilean case was co-authored with Guillermo Sandoval based on his article “Chile: Avance Evangélico desde la Marginalidad al Protagonismo.” In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 181 - 220.

Liberal tradition like Uruguay, it did experience an accented secularization as a relatively recent phenomenon. It is also relevant to point out that it is not substantially lowering the belief in God; the secularization process is manifested as a deinstitutionalization of faith and religion; increasingly fewer Chileans seem to need a church in order to relate to God. The Bicentenary survey puts the number of people who do not believe in God at 5-6% and the same tendency is observed by Latinobarómetro. In the opinion of Eduardo Valenzuela, dean of social sciences of the Pontificate Catholic University of Chile, “we find a lot of religiosity, but outside of the churches.”³⁵

The Bicentenary Survey has revealed another important aspect: the population’s confidence in the Catholic Church, presumably the hierarchy, decreased from 20% in 2011 to 9% in 2018. If only those who define themselves as Catholics are counted, confidence dropped from 44% to 15%. It is noteworthy that 59% of Chileans say they are Catholics yet only 15% of them trust their Church. The sexual abuses and abuses of power and conscience that have hugely affected the Church in Chile are the reasons given for two thirds of the changes of religious preference or identity, according to the same survey.

The approximately 40 accusations of sexual abuses of minors committed by Evangelical pastors have not had equal media weight, and in fact have gone virtually unperceived. In recent times, however, “communication noise” is beginning to be generated by the investigation of accusations of corruption against the leader and Santiago minister of the Pentecostal Methodist Church, its bishop Eduardo Durán, father of one of the three Evangelical parliamentarians.

Protestantism arrived in Chile in the early 19th Century, above all as religious assistance to the European migrants. By 1827, it already had its first Anglican religious service, and in 1835 the first Anglican congregation was formed in the city of Valparaíso. In 1856 the first Protestant church building was constructed in the Pacific Coast; in 1862 the first Evangelical newspaper was published in Valparaíso; and in 1862 a Lutheran community was founded in Osorno. After what was called the “interpretive law” of the 1865 Constitution, which permitted private services and the creation of schools for non-Catholics, a series of Protestant missions of different denominations and nationalities began to arrive. At the same time, church services began to be developed in Spanish and the first Presbyterian community for nationals was created in 1868. By

35 Valenzuela, Eduardo. Paper for the seminar “El Chile de hoy: desafíos para el nuevo gobierno,” January 9, 2018, Casa Central de la Pontificia Universidad católica de Chile (presentation of the Bicentenary Survey 2017).

1871 the country had its first Chilean Presbyterian pastor, José Manuel Ibáñez, who is believed to have been poisoned to death by opponents of Protestant preaching (Sepúlveda, 1999). The growth of traditional Protestantism in the 19th Century was slow, such that by 1895 it only amounted to 0.54% of the Chilean population.

Like Brazil, however, Chile has a long history of rooted Evangelical churches, above all of the Pentecostal line, but they are much more institutionalized than in Brazil, with the changes that occurred in the Pentecostal Methodist Church after the so-called “revival” at the beginning of the 20th Century. Unlike in the majority of Latin American countries, Pentecostalism did not begin in Chile with a sudden wave in the middle of that century and reach its boiling point in the 1970s. Rather it went through a slow, more institutional and consolidated growth with a seminal “home-grown Pentecostalism.” To that was added the constitutional separation of Church and State in 1925. From the middle of the previous century, there were alliances between Protestants, Liberals and Masons to open spaces for the Evangelical churches.

That particular history of early nationalization and institutionalization of the Chilean Evangelical movement—not without huge mishaps and divisions—has enabled them to have an Evangelical Cathedral (which, in reality, is Pentecostal) inaugurated by the dictator Augusto Pinochet on September 11, 1974. The following year he began the tradition of calling it the “Te Deum Evangélico.” They also have Evangelical chaplains in the majority of state institutions—from penitentiaries to La Moneda Palace—and an agreement with the Chilean State, signed in 2000, that legally places them on the same level as the Catholic Church. There is also a National Day of the Evangelical and Protestant Churches, formalized by ex-President Michelle Bachelet on October 31, 2008. There are now 3,500 Evangelical churches created as corporations of public law and 700 that are corporations of private law, and some 23,000 pastors, according to estimates by Pentecostal bishop Emiliano Soto, president of the expanded table of Evangelical churches.

The growth of the Evangelical population in the 20th Century enabled the Pentecostals to have important political participation, for example when some pastors endorsed the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. That support was sealed on December 13, 1974 when the self-styled ‘Council of Pastors’ issued a declaration titled “The Evangelical position,” which pointed out that the intervention of the Armed Forces in Chile’s historical process “was God’s response to the prayer of those believers who see in Marxism the maximum expression of the satanic forces of darkness.” This position was seconded only

by one small group of pastors, counterpoised to what had been the tradition of alliances with Catholic sectors, but they had a lot of public visibility.

With the return to democracy in 1990 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ideological polarizations diminished and institutional forms of agreement were sought between the consolidated Evangelical community and the Chilean State. It should be pointed out that parallel to this, there were Protestants who, together with the Catholic Church and Chile's Grand Rabbi, Ángel Kreiman, ecumenically and inter-religiously, but less publicly, defended the violated human rights. The Lutheran pastor Helmut Frenz, who headed that Protestant action and was prohibited from returning to Chile after a trip abroad, symbolizes this struggle. Frenz and Catholics headed by Cardinal Silva Henríquez enabled the creation of the Pro-Paz Committee (which was soon closed at the dictatorship's 'suggestion') and later of the 'Vicariate of Solidarity' in which Catholics, Protestants and people not linked to any church collaborated.

Evangelicals have had no notable political participation in Chile's recent history and even less any successful attempt at a confessional party. The Evangelical candidates have mainly run as individuals within the diverse existing parties under the 'Evangelical faction' modality. Although they won some posts in the 2016 municipal elections, their results have been more than modest. A greater number of Evangelical candidates ran in the 2017 legislative and presidential elections, than in previous races, but they only placed 3 of their own in the House of Representatives out of a total of 155. All three are Pentecostals—Eduardo Durán, Leonidas Romero and Francesca Muñoz, and the last two are from the same district in which the mayor of the most important city is also Evangelical.

The three were very clear about being Evangelical during the electoral campaign and afterward formed a small 'Evangelical bench' in the Congress that occasionally 'makes noise' about some issues, including in opposition to the governing coalition to which they belong. Moreover, for the 2014-2022 period, they have two Senators (out of 43): Ena Von Baer (Lutheran) and Iván Moreira (Pentecostal). During the electoral period, neither senator has alluded to their respective religious identity.

It merits mention that it is the first time Pentecostals won Evangelical political representation. There have been non-Catholic parliamentarians since the end of the 19th Century, but mainly Protestants (Lutherans, Presbyterians and Anglicans), and they functioned more in accord with the 'Evangelical politician' model. Meanwhile, the current legislators in the House could move closer to that 'Evangelical politician' model, although much more measured

and institutional, but without belonging to any neo-Pentecostal church. The table below shows the evolution of the Evangelical population through the years and the percentage of its political representation.

Election of Representatives

Year	National Population	Evangelical Population	Elected Evangelists/ Total Elected	Evangelical Representatives in House of Representatives
1949	5.023.539	2,50%	2/143	1,39%
1953	5.932.995	4,06%	1/147	0,68%
1957	5.932.995	4,06%	1/147	0,68%
1961	7.374.115	5,58%	1/147	0,68%
1965	7.374.115	5,58%	1/147	0,68%
1969	7.374.115	5,58%	0/147	0,00%
1973	8.884.768	6,22%	0/147	0,00%

National Congress closed by military dictatorship in 1973

1989	11.232.160	N/A	2/120	1,67%
1993	13.265.563	12,23%	2/120	1,67%
1997	13.265.563	12,23%	3/120	2,46%
2001	13.265.563	12,23%	1/120	0,83%
2005	15.051.136	15,14%	1/120	0,83%
2009	15.051.136	15,14%	0/120	0,00%
2013	16.634.603	16,62%	0/120	0,00%
2017	17.574.003	N/A	3/155	1,94%

Election of Senators

Year	National Population	Evangelical Population	Elected Evangelists/ Total Elected	Evangelical Senators in House of Representatives
1989	11.232.160	N/A	1/47	2,12%
1997	13.265.563	12,23%	1/48	2,01%
2013	16.634.603	16,62%	2/45	4,44%

Note: The last official census data was used to indicate population and percentage of evangelicals in the country. Therefore, numbers repeat in two or more elections, though population obviously increased in reality. N/A in the % of Evangelicals column indicates that the last census did not consult religious identity.

The detailed results of the 2017 elections show that the Evangelical candidates only obtained 1.94% of the parliamentary representation and 2.5% of the votes, while Evangelicals make up 16.62% of the population according

to the last census that asked about religious identity (2012). As in almost all the other countries of the region, it is thus possible to state that there is no confessional vote in Chile. In other words, Evangelicals do not necessarily vote for Evangelical candidates and there is no major difference in political preferences with the rest of the Chilean population at voting time. If the Evangelical parliamentary representation were equivalent to its population percentage, they would have elected between 24 and 28 representatives, rather than only 3, as happened in 2017.

In the 2017 elections, there were only Evangelical candidates in half of the districts. Moreover, those candidates only pulled 171,000 of the more than 1.2 million Evangelical voters. And of those, approximately 15,000 were for the rightwing alliance candidates. Two parties especially benefited: National Renovation, to which 10% gave their votes, helping them become Chile's main political party, and Amplitude, which did not receive enough votes to get any parliamentary seats and was thus dissolved as a party, but its Evangelical candidates contributed 14.39% of the votes for it. The parties that constitute the current opposition made no political effort to include well-known Evangelicals on their slates even though 84% of the Evangelicals defined their identity as centrist, 7% as rightwing and 8% as leftwing, according to a 2010 study (Fediakova, 2013).

Another aspect often mentioned about Evangelical voters is that they are part of the "value vote." This observation could currently be controversial in Chile in two senses. First, because it assumes that the value vote refers to issues such as egalitarian marriage, abortion, adoption by homosexual couples, etc. But in Chile, social issues such as social justice, participation, inclusion, income distribution and others are also value issues. That makes it more appropriate to state what kinds of values Chilean Evangelical voters are opting for, since, in light of the results, it would seem they are not so different from those embraced by the majority of the population. Second, it needs to be considered that three decades ago only 4% of the children of Chilean Evangelicals attended university, whereas today the number exceeds 50%. In addition, data of recent years shows changes in the youths' value approach with respect to the pastors' credibility, and in the level of their willingness to follow their religious leaders.

Chilean society as a whole has changed a lot in the past ten years, as a product of the technological advances and integration into a global society which has a strong impact on lifestyles. It is thus risky to hypothesize about a greater modification in the view of Evangelical youths regarding the so-called value issues being made currently by the religious population, Evangelicals in

particular, as it is a moderated sector. A 2008 work already showed significant changes in acceptance of therapeutic abortion, sexual freedom and equal rights for sexual minorities (Fediakova, 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that the great sex scandals disclosed within the Catholic Church have so far not generated an abrupt drop in their religious identity (beyond the ordinary descent it was already experiencing), and even less has it swollen the ranks of the Evangelicals. Nonetheless, trust by the faithful in the ecclesial hierarchy has fallen notably. Among youths, with a presumably more critical view about the institutions and an even more severe one about ethical questions and consistency, it is obvious that they are producing some changes. What seems clear is that there is no notable 'abandonment of God' by Chileans; instead there is a 'de-institutionalization of faith.' This would make it increasingly difficult to think that the different churches could have greater impact or participation in Chilean politics in the near future.

Colombia³⁶

Colombia has nearly 50 million inhabitants, of whom 75% declare themselves Catholic and 16% Evangelical, according to Latinobarómetro (2014). Of the latter, three quarters have been Catholics (Pew Research Center, 2014). This means that the large Colombian Catholic emigration has been determinant in the recent growth of the Evangelicals. For their part, the population censuses confirm progressive growth of the different variants of 'Evangelical Christianity.'³⁷ According to the Evangelical Council of Colombia (Cedecol, 2018) some 10 million belong to these churches, which corresponds to approximately 20% of the total number of inhabitants. Ratifying these higher figures, the latest survey of Barómetro de las Américas (2018) indicates that Catholics total 60.4% and Evangelicals 20.6% (including Protestants and Pentecostals).

The first Evangelical missions began to arrive in the late 19th Century, and increased significantly at the start of the next century: the Evangelical Missionary (1908), the American Biblical Society in Cartagena (1912), the Scandinavian

36 The Colombian case was co-authored with Juan David Velasco based on his article "Colombia: de Minorías Dispersas a Aliados Estratégicos." In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 221 - 246.

37 In Colombia people who attend non-Catholic church services are all generically called "Christians." For that reason it is preferable to speak of "Evangelical Christianity" to refer to the theological varieties derived from Protestantism, Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism in Colombia.

Evangelical Mission (1918), the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1923), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1927), the World Evangelization Alliance (1930), the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia (CEDEC, in 1939), and the Eastern Missionary Society (1940). But it was not until the end of the 20th Century that a significant growth of Evangelicals was noted in Colombia. This was partly due to the introduction of Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal elements, such as the defense of the ‘theology of prosperity,’ the reaffirmation of enjoyment, the questioning of the classical doctrine of guilt, the conception of a “Christian I” as God’s administrator on Earth, and the exaltation of the individual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit. This numerical increase meant the gradual abandonment of the “complex of minorities” that characterized them (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017).³⁸

Following David Velasco (2018), we can state that in the 1980s and 1990s Evangelical political participation began through the formation of confessional parties, which tried to break the accustomed two-party system and reach the presidency, but its results were insignificant. In this regard, the Evangelical movement’s participation in Colombian electoral politics has had boom and bust moments.

1. A first moment, which could be called the “abandonment of public anonymity,” occurred at the end of the 1980s, when the pastor of the International Charismatic Mission, Claudia Rodríguez de Castellanos, headed the creation of the Christian National Party (PNC), ran for President in the 1990 elections,³⁹ then created a great “front” as the product of an alliance of several pastors of Pentecostal churches that had penetrated well

38 This “minority complex” in Colombia is actually the result of objective factors that impeded the advance of the US Evangelical missions since the first movements situated themselves between 1908 and 1930, when a political regime existed in Colombia known as the ‘Conservative Hegemony,’ characterized by a series of Conservative presidential governments that enabled the Catholic Church to administer the public and private life of Colombians by defining educational programs, land concessions and even ‘police’ actions to punish vice and vagrancy. This led to a persecution of dissident tendencies of Catholicism and the political self-censorship of US missionary campaigns in the middle of the 20th Century. In fact, not until 1991 did Colombia’s Political Constitution recognize the existence of a “secular State.” In this regard see Beltrán & Bastián (2013) and López (2014, pp. 65-103).

39 Rodríguez de Castellanos became the first Evangelical pastor to run in presidential elections. In that event, she only obtained 33.000 votes, equivalent to 0.35% of the total vote. The winner in that race was the Liberal César Gaviria Trujillo, who got 2.891,808 votes, equivalent to 47.82%. In other words, de Castellanos’ candidacy was absolutely inconsequential.

into the urban middle classes; they baptized it the Christian Unity Movement (MUC). The purpose of this union was to have direct representation in the Constituent National Assembly, as several religious leaders saw in it the opportunity to promote the end of the Concordat with the Catholic Church, which dated back to the 1886 Political Constitution.

With the promulgation of a new Political Constitution in 1991, democratic participation channels in the Congress opened for the Evangelical movement. Nonetheless, the different Evangelical tendencies did not join together around a single party or political movement. Instead, they intermittently set themselves up in diverse political groupings, which led to a dispersed and volatile vote. What enabled the entry of these confessional parties into the political arena was the lowering of the electoral bar, which encourages all manner of social actors to form their own party. The consequence was not only the normal Evangelical ecclesial atomization but also a political one. “The discrediting of the traditional political class, the social setback of Catholicism and the favorable rule of the electoral game combined to lead Evangelicals to abandon their public anonymity and shake off that ‘minority complex’ that had characterized them from the start of the 20th Century” (Velasco, 2018).

2. A second moment, which could be called “eclipsing and renovation,” occurred between 2002 and 2015. In that lapse, several parties of Evangelical-Pentecostal origin lost their legal status as a consequence of not getting the electoral vote threshold increased with the electoral reforms of 2003 and 2009.⁴⁰ The Christian movements, given their minority nature, suffered strong setbacks in the political sphere; the first Evangelical parties or movements founded—Christian Civic Commitment for the Community (C4), Hope Front, Christian Unity Movement, etc.—were dissolved and others, such as MIRA, not only faced institutional obstacles to survival but were also victims of a major electoral fraud that snatched away from them

40 To strengthen the political parties and discourage excessive personalism in electoral politics, the Congress approved Legislative Act 01 of 2003, which raised the threshold to 2%, instituted the Law of Benches (to foster voting by party blocs) and created the single slate by party. With this new design, the effects of dispersion generated by multiple slates was counteracted and the number of candidates controlled, as each party could only present one slate with the number of candidates equivalent to that of the seats open (Cfr. Losada, 2007). Later, in 2009, the Congress approved a new electoral system reform, which consisted of increasing the threshold to 3%, which obliged the regional political parties or movements to confederate, making way for the creation of new parties or strengthening or the existing ones that were connected to the government coalition (Ávila and Velasco, 2012).

the possibility of parliamentary representation in the 2014-2018 period. In that same period the neo-Pentecostal movement and the most visible pastors of the Charismatic churches launched their protagonism.

3. A third moment, which could be called “apogee and subsequent fractioning,” started in 2016, in the middle of the plebiscite that sought to validate the Peace Agreement. With the country as a whole politically polarized between followers of former President Uribe and a fleeting coalition of then-President Santos’ followers and the Left, the Evangelical movement again unified around a massive vote for the NO option, which was promoted by religious interests more than by a specific political force. In the end, the NO option won with 6,431,376 votes, equivalent to 50.21%.

The reasons for rejecting the signed Peace Accord presumably consisted of the fact that several statements about the text alluded to “gender ideology,” which was understood as a desire to stimulate diverse sexual orientations in order to implant a family model different than the traditional one of father, mother and children. This unified opposition in the polling stations gave the appearance of the emergence of a ‘confessional’ Evangelical vote that wanted to test its strength in the 2018 elections for Congress, presenting 266 candidates for the 280 seats—the highest figure in history. It only won 11 seats (not even 4%).

The Christian candidates who obtained those seats were endorsed by 15 different political parties and movements, of which (according to Pérez Guadalupe, 2017) only 2 were properly “Evangelical parties,”⁴¹ 3 were “Evangelical fronts,”⁴² and 8 were “Evangelical factions,” distributed into party organizations of diverse ideological inspiration.⁴³

41 The Christian National Party and the Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation (MIRA).

42 The Christiana Civic Commitment for the Community, the Front of Hope and Free Fair Colombia.

43 The Liberal Party, Social Party of National Unity (the U Party), National Integration Party, Colombia Lives, Democratic Colombia, Alternative Democratic Pole, Radical Change and Democratic Center.

Political Underrepresentation of Evangelicals

Year	Total Population	% Evangelical Population	Total Number of Congress Members	% of Evangelical Congress Members
2002	42.629.884	10%	5/268	1.87%
2006	43.667.806	11%	2/268	0.74%
2010	45.778.509	8%	6/268	2.24%
2014	47.392.886	18%	7/268	2.61%
2018	48.476.279	20%	11/280	3.93%

The greatest Evangelical presence in Colombian politics so far has been through small confessional political parties or fronts, satellites of some neo-Pentecostal mega-churches (religious and political corporations), but they have barely succeeded in winning some congressional seats without seriously trying for the Colombian presidency, however much that might have been their intent. This type of participation in politics seems a lot like the Brazilian model of corporative representation of particular churches and ‘official candidates’ who do not represent the entire Evangelical congregation. In fact, from 1991 to 2018, only 36 Evangelicals (73% of them neo-Pentecostals) won congressional seats over the course of eight electoral processes in corporative representation of their denominations as part of 15 different movements or parties of both the right and the left. This demonstrates the great atomization of the Colombian Evangelicals’ political incursion.

Finally, following Vasco (2018), we can indicate up to eight characteristics of the Evangelicals’ political impact in Colombia, all similar to those occurring in other countries of the region:

1. When choosing the political grouping within which Evangelicals are going to participate electorally, they show strong pragmatism and accommodation, as the Congress members belonging to Evangelical churches have been enrolled in heterogeneous political parties and movements, some of a rightwing ideology and others of a leftwing one; some of a “cartel type”⁴⁴ (Katz & Mair, 1995) and others of a “catch-all type.”⁴⁵

44 “Cartel parties” are those that are mainly oriented to accessing the state bureaucracy (public posts). So by their nature they revolve around forming government coalitions (Wolinetz, 2002). In the Colombian case, examples of cartel parties that have endorsed Evangelical leaders are the Party of the U and the Citizen Option Party.

45 “Catch-all” parties are those that seek to attract different types of voters, which means their

2. The instability other Evangelical parties and fronts have had (with the exception of the MRA party) in the political system can largely be explained by the change in the electoral game rules, especially with the introduction of the political reforms of 2003 and 2009, which changed the electoral threshold number to 2% and then later to 3%. In fact, leaders of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have ultimately opted to adhere as factions of national parties with a vocation for presidential power ('Evangelical faction'), since that way they assure their survival as the votes of their faithful alone are insufficient to exceed the threshold.
3. The representative leaders of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have changed the party endorsement several times. This phenomenon, known as "electoral turn-coating" or "changing shirts" (Pizarro, 2002), has allowed various congressional representatives to strategically accommodate themselves to different political moments: for example, former Senator Viviane Morales has moved through four different party organizations, Edgar Espíndola through the same number and Claudia Rodríguez de Castellanos through three (so far).
4. Neo-Pentecostals are the main protagonists in Evangelical party politics. Between 1991 and 2018, 73% of the Christians elected to Congress belonged to congregations that incorporate Charismatic elements in their doctrine and publicly defend the 'theology of prosperity.' The Christian political leaders who have greater national projection are precisely the ones who belong to neo-Pentecostal churches, among which are the Rivers of Life Christian Church, House on the Rock, International Jesus Christ Ministerial God Church, World Revival Center, International Charismatic Mission and the Place of His Presence.
5. One characteristic of the political behavior of Evangelical Christianity is that they favor "moral agenda" issues over those related to public policies of security, job generation, labor formalization, public transport, etc. In other words, to underpin their political speeches, Evangelical leaders who take part in Congress focus their attention on assuming public postures that reject adoption by same-sex couples, egalitarian marriage, the 'gender ideology' in general, euthanasia and abortion. In synthesis, they have a shared slogan in defense of the family as the center axis of society and a conservative vision of curricular teaching.

leaders make their ideological postures flexible to be able to recruit candidates of different origins and tendencies. In Colombia, the Liberal Party is of this type and has endorsed congressional candidates belonging to Evangelical churches.

6. The pastors of the neo-Pentecostal churches are strategically allying with rightwing Catholic leaders with increasing frequency. These unions occur especially in the middle of electoral campaigns or critical moments such as the plebiscite on the Peace Accord (October 2, 2016), in which the Evangelical movement linked together around the “No.”
7. The publicizing of the ‘theology of prosperity’ is one of the strong attractions making thousands of lower-middle class urban residents and peasants affected by the domestic armed conflict and now living in recently settled regions join neo-Pentecostal mega-churches. Moreover the aid work provided by some mega-churches—such as childcare centers, delivery from markets, marriage counseling and the like—has generated solidarity and fraternity links among the community of believers, reinforcing the idea of Jesus Christ’s compassion regarding poverty and disability.
8. Although it cannot be generalized, some pastors have imitated the clientelist practices of traditional parties by negotiating votes in exchange for the issuing of high-ticket contracts that economically benefit their faithful. With this new modality, the neo-Pentecostal churches are fusing to perfection their ‘theology of prosperity’ discourse with clientelist dynamics by satisfying social climbing expectations, since the forming of winning coalitions in power allows the pastors to be intermediaries of the State when it comes to divvying up public posts and budgets. With well-remunerated jobs or huge sums of money as the product of giving out contracts, many of the faithful are seeing the “promised dream” of economic growth professed by the pastors in their preaching become reality.

Costa Rica⁴⁶

Costa Rica is a country of 5 million inhabitants, of which 10% are immigrants. Although it is the only officially confessional State (Catholic) in the entire continent, Catholicism has dropped in recent decades just as it has done in all its neighbors. According to *Latinobarómetro*, Catholics in 2013 were 65% of the population, Evangelicals 21%; and those who professed no religion 11%. The latest study by the University of Costa Rica, however, attributed 25.5% of confessionism to the Evangelicals (CIEP, 2018).

46 The Costa Rican case was co-authored with César Zúñiga based on his article “Costa Rica: el Poder Evangélico en una Democracia Estable.” In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 247 - 282.

From the economic point of view, Costa Rican society presents a very diversified and open productive apparatus connected to the rest of the world, as well as the adoption of an economic strategy geared to agro-exports of nontraditional products to third markets starting in the 1980s. The socioeconomic tendencies of Costa Rica's social structure show a poverty rate of approximately 20% that has remained stable within the range reached by the end of the 1970s. By 2017, it was in 66th place in the world in the human development index and 7th in Latin America, while its inequality level puts it in a hardly flattering 10th place in the region, given that its Gini coefficient is 48.53 (Boeglin, 2017).⁴⁷

Following Zúñiga (2018), we can state that Costa Rica is historically the most stable democracy in the region, largely due to the abolition of the army in the middle of the last century, which freed it from the military dictatorships or internal wars suffered by almost all Latin American countries. With regard to the political party system, it has evolved since the founding of the Second Republic in the 1948 Civil War from a system with one dominant party, the National Liberation Party (PLN), to a two-party system with the founding of the Christian Social Unity Party (PUSC) in 1984. Starting in 2002 it moved to a model of limited pluralism with the entering into the political arena of the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) and the Libertarian Movement Party (PML). It is also necessary to mention parties with what is called an "evangelical vocation": the Christian National Alliance Party (PANC), National Restoration Party (PRN), Costa Rican Renovation (PRC) and Christian Democratic Alliance (PADC). Although they have had a modest performance, they served as a base for the unexpected leap of Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz in February 2018.

Between 2006 and 2008, with this new pluralism, no party achieved an absolute majority in the Congress, and the PLN even barely managed to exceed the threshold of 20 seats on one occasion (winning 29 of the 57 that make up the Legislative Assembly (Congress)). It also won the presidential elections twice (2006-2010), while the PAC won the other two (2014-2018). The Legislative Assembly is now structured with a pluralist logic, as in 2006 three parties got more than 10% of the seats each, while in the other periods four groupings got more than that percentage.

47 Compare it with Barquero (2017).

Historically, the first Protestant missionaries came to Costa Rica at the end of the 19th Century, just as they did in the rest of the region. The first Protestant church for the attendance of foreigners was founded in 1865 and later affiliated to the Anglican Church. The Central American Mission, of US origin, was the first to arrive in 1891 to preach to nationals, but it met major opposition from the Catholic bishops, making its progress slow. Then, in the early 20th Century, diverse Evangelical and Pentecostal churches and missions began arriving, founding churches, schools, hospitals, Bible institutes and pastoral centers, among others.

By 1950 around 15 missions were working in Costa Rica. Among those that stood out were the Episcopal Methodist Church (1917); independent Pentecostal missions (1918), which would later become the International Pentecostal Holiness Church; the Latin American Evangelizing Campaign (1921); the Church of God (1939); the Southern Baptist Convention (1943); Assemblies of God (1944); the Pentecostal Church of God (1945) and the American Baptist Association (1945). In 1929, the Biblical Temple was created, a congregation located in the center of San José, out of which an important Evangelical movement developed that gave origin to the Association of Costa Rican Biblical Churches in 1940. Five years later it already had 14 congregations and 406 baptized faithful, which multiplied to 1,055 by 1959.

Costa Rica hasn't had an Evangelical growth as significant as the rest of its neighbors. It is the second least Evangelical country in Central America after Panama, although the incursion into the educational sphere has been important with the founding of various educational institutions and five universities. It was since the 1980s that the Evangelical Christian sector of the country began gaining numerical importance and qualitative weight in Costa Rican society. A study by Prolades, done at the request of the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance Federation (FAEC), determined that the faithful of these confessions virtually doubled between 2000 and 2013, the year of the last investigation conducted. It was determined that of the approximately 1,042,795 Evangelicals living in the country, 488 Evangelical associations existed that had accepted around half a million baptized faithful older than 15 in more than 752 churches distributed all over the country. Today the majority of Costa Rica's non-Catholic Christians, around 62%, profess a faith of a Pentecostal stripe, 16% are Adventists, 12% are separatists, 1% are liturgicals and the remaining 8% is made up of other groups (Avendaño, 2018).

The link between religion and politics in Costa has shown a very clear manifestation in recent years in terms of the participation of so-called "Evangelical" parties. But that relationship has always represented a sort of

latent “crypto-power” of Costa Rican society (Zúñiga, 2018). This crypto-power, however, has been more evident relative to the Catholic Church, which has openly acted politically when the political circumstances have merited it: be it about a civil war (when the Church became a key political actor for the country’s political development in the 1940s), or during the Cold War (when the Church took the side of democracy in the 1980s in the middle of a domestic economic restructuring to confront the crisis).

The history of Costa Rican Evangelical political parties began in 1981, when a group of Evangelical leaders founded the first confessional party, calling it the Christian National Alliance (PANC) (Avendaño, 2018). We can divide the development of the parties of an Evangelical vocation into four well-delimited stages starting with that act:

- a) Foundational period (1981-1998): this was a long lapse in which a group of Evangelicals entered full bore into the country’s politics via the PANC, with a perspective that was not very programmatic, was laden with mysticism and had very little practical result. Its first electoral incursion was in 1986 and its vocation was that of an ‘Evangelical party’ in a very strict sense, as we have defined.
- b) Programmatic period (1998-2006): in this stage, the Evangelical option appeared with a new political grouping, the Costa Rican Renovation Party (PRC), which won a congressional seat for the first time thanks to its founder, Mr. Justo Orozco, in 1998.
- c) Splintering period (2006-2018): during this phase the Evangelical political movement became more diverse and the splits more common, as also occurred on the religious plane. Additional parties were founded: the National Restoration Party (PRN) and the Christian Democratic Alliance (PADC) and all of them, including the PRC, managed to hold onto congressional seats during the period. All these parties come close to the ‘Evangelical front’ model to differing degrees.
- d) Condensation period (2018): Last year the PRN, one of those three Evangelical parties, succeeded in condensing the support of the country’s conservative population and with its seal won 14 of the 57 seats open and seriously contested the presidency of the Republic itself. For their part, the other parties lost the parliamentary representation they had.

The electoral results and political praxis of these parties, very “parochial” and personalist, meant that their historical support was predominately marginal

for each group, enough to win only one parliamentary seat in the majority of the elections held (Zúñiga, 2018). While the internal splits seem to have invigorated these parties, the low relative support they obtained, save in the 2018 process, clearly indicates equally low practical support for the Evangelical churches themselves with regard to their champions (Gómez, 2013: 24). If we consider that, on average, the Evangelical population was around 20% from its first participation in the 1986 election until its latest in 2018, it is clear that the thesis we have posited about the inexistence of a confessional vote (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017 and 2018) is confirmed in Costa Rica.

Costa Rica: Evangelical Vote and Congressional Election Results (1986-2018)

Elections	Valid Votes	National Population	Evangelicals in Costa Rica ⁽¹⁾	Evangelical Vote ⁽²⁾	% Evangelical Vote / Register	Evangelical Representatives / Total	% of Evangelical Representatives
1986	1172199	2751059	8.6%	19972	2%	0/57	0%
1990	1336172	3057164	9%	22154	2%	0/57	0%
1994	1475593	3389481	10%	21064	1%	0/57	0%
1998	1383527	3757082	16%	37068	3%	1/57	2%
2002	1521854	4071879	17%	61524	4%	1/57	2%
2006	1613961	4326071	16%	88707	5%	1/57	2%
2010	1899825	4563539	20%	103480	5%	2/57	4%
2014	2048301	4667096	23%	191234	9%	4/57	7%
2018	2137556	4978459	25.5%	482217	23%	14/57	25%

⁽¹⁾ We were not able to obtain this information for each of the years in which elections were held, and chose to use the closest figure to each year, almost all one year before or after elections. Thus, the figure for 1983 was used for the 1986 elections; from 1989 for 1990; from 2000 for 1998; from 2001 for 2002; from 2007 for 2006; and from 2009 for 2010.

⁽²⁾ The “Evangelical Vote” is the total combined votes obtained by “Evangelical” parties (PRC, PRN and PADC) in each election for appointment of representatives.

Source: Zúñiga (2019).: Zúñiga, C. (2019). “National Restoration in 2018 Elections: Religious War in a Post-Material Democracy?” In: Continuities and Ruptures: The 2017-2018 Election Situation. San Jose: FLACSO Costa Rica 2019 (being printed).

As is observed in the table, between the 1986 elections and those of 2010, the percentage of the Evangelical vote relative to the effective vote, according to the Costa Rican electoral polls, ranged between 2% and 5%, while the Costa Rican Evangelical population was between 8.6% and 20%. This implies that in the seven first elections, the majority of Costa Rican Evangelicals probably did not vote for their party candidates, which also translates into a low number of legislative wins, no more than 2 out of 57 in the best of cases. For the 2014

and 2018 elections, however, things seem to have taken a different course, since there was clearly a relatively increased weight of the Evangelical vote for the parties labeled as such. For the first of those two years they got 9% of the votes while they were 23% of the population, for 4 of the 57 seats. Four years later, for the first time in their history, they pulled 23% of the votes, with an Evangelical population representing 25.5% of the total, and with that they won 14 seats, making them the second largest political force in the parliament.

The Costa Rican case is especially relevant because in February 2018, the Evangelicals acquired an unanticipated leadership role with the Evangelical legislator Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz—a known journalist and singer—unexpectedly coming in first in the first round of voting in the presidential elections. The Consultative Opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which had recommended acceptance of egalitarian matrimony only a few weeks before the elections, is what catapulted him to first place in electoral preferences. That totally changed the electoral game board, since Alvarado Muñoz was the candidate who made the best use of the moment by radically opposing the Court’s opinion and asking Costa Rica to renounce it. Religion, always a latent “crypto-power” in Costa Rican national politics, thus came out of the traditional subsoil and ended up marking the rest of the race (Zúñiga, 2018: p. 275).

Alvarado Muñoz won that first round with 25% of the votes, fruit of what has been called a “religious shock” (Alfaro et.al., 2018b: 14-15), although in reality it was more an “axiological shock.” In the second round, however, other elements, this time clearly religious ones, came to the fore—Alvarado Muñoz also opposed popular Catholic devotions such as the Virgin of the Angels—that halted his supposedly imminent victory. Carlos Alvarado Quesada, of the Citizens’ Action Party, won the race in the final days with 60% of the votes, leaving Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz with the other 40%.

Nobody had expected that a religious-moral issue would elevate the candidacy of an Evangelical with an evident religious discourse in the way it did, and even less that the same religious factor would dash it only weeks later by opposing the devotion of the Virgin of the Angels (la “Negrita”), symbol of Costa Rican national identity.

Be that as it may, Fabricio Alvarado generated an electoral shake-up never before seen in the political life of Latin America’s most stable democracy, and it has aftershocks both outside and within the Evangelical world. For example, during the second round, Alvarado’s distance from the people who had official control of his party began to be abundantly clear, showing evident power cracks

that after the elections created a second political earthquake, now of domestic connotations. In effect, given the accusations by the party's president and legal representative, who had also been elected to the parliament, about the handing of funds during the campaign, Fabricio Alvarado decided to leave the party he represented to found a new political grouping, the New Republic Party, which took with it 8 of the 14 legislators elected on the National Restoration ticket.

In conclusion, Costa Rica's Evangelical parties have been raised and grew up in the solid subsoil of the construction of religious and axiological identities that assist them. In effect, the attention to a common political ethic, inspired by Christian postulates, and the struggle to defend traditional moral values are fertile ground for these parties to develop in, even if they do so with the vices of their own religious sphere, such as extrapolated personalisms, visions of being owners of the organizations, organizational fragmentation and atomization that hurt their capacity to bring together different social groups and actors around a shared vision of the country, etc. Even with all that, one of their representatives was at the point of taking the presidency in the 2018 elections, which fully demonstrated their mobilizing capacity. It remains to be seen in the coming years whether history will repeat this unprecedented fact, but for now, it is clear that Evangelical power has come to stay in Costa Rica and that the construction of 'Evangelical front' projects could mark a trend for the country's political future.

El Salvador⁴⁸

El Salvador has an approximate population of 7.5 million, of whom 45% define themselves as Catholic and 40.7% as Evangelical (LAPOP, 2014). Religion is still a fundamental aspect of this country's culture, although its forms have changed.

Following Álvaro Bermúdez (2018), we can state that the Protestant missions began to come to El Salvador in the second half of the 19th Century, but not until 1896 did the first missionaries of the Central American Mission establish themselves. According to Holland's scheme (2011), we can recognize up to four significant moments of the Evangelical presence in the 20th Century.

48 The Salvadoran case was co-authored with Alvaro Bermúdez based on his article "El Salvador: Religión e Identidad Política." In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 283 - 316.

1. The first Evangelical missions settled all around the country in the first decades, producing a serious confrontation with the Catholic Church.
2. The first Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church of God, arrived in the 1930s and were fundamental in El Salvador's religious transformation.
3. The exponential growth of the Evangelicals, above all the Pentecostals, began in the 1960s, fed by the lack of clergy and the perceived distance of the Catholic Church, aggravated by the domestic armed conflict.
4. New "independent" churches began to emerge in the 1970s and 80s that had little relation to the large missionary denominations or "mother churches." They were influenced by the attractive campaigns of the US tele-Evangelists who later promoted the Salvadoran Pentecostal movement. That is when the Evangelicals began to reach the middle and upper classes, through the formation of communities without much of a biblical tradition, raising the banner of what they called the 'theology of prosperity.'

The role of both Catholic and Evangelical churches in El Salvador is very relevant. They are the institutions that generate the most confidence in Salvadorans, and the political parties often knock on their doors in search of voters. Institutionally the churches tend to assume a cautious and distant position with respect to electoral processes, maintaining a dual vision of the public space, making the mutually exclusive distinction between the sacred (religion) and the profane (politics), and making very clear what side they are on.

The above, however, does not mean that the rejection of party politics and the exercise of power translate into renouncing the recognition of the public arena; it would be erroneous to assume that Evangelicals do not participate electorally. In fact, respect for authority, paying taxes and participating at the polls are obligations for members of the Evangelical churches that are "doctrinally" required by their Christian commitment. They simply do not consider that the church's role is to involve itself institutionally in processes that they fatalistically consider corrupt and dirty a priori. It is this that often impedes a discussion of the Evangelical churches' *political impact*.

Furthermore, the importance of religion in Salvadoran politics must be analyzed in the political context of a strong bipartitism between the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) on the right and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) on the left that made it impossible for new political party actors to enter. But the presidential election of February 2019 transformed

that system, putting an end to the bipartite reality, at the same time showing that the 'confessional vote' is not determinate for Salvadorans.

The winning candidate of that election, Nayib Bukele, filled the profile of the new popular politicians: a charismatic person with a short political career as mayor, perceived as an *outsider*, well able to use the social networks effectively and to channel the discontent of the masses. For that reason, he swept the first electoral round with 53% of the votes. But he did so with a particular difference from his peers throughout the continent: he was raised in a family with a Salvadoran mother and a father of Palestinian descent and of the Muslim religion, in an eminently Christian country.

While he never publicly professed any given faith during the campaign, the new President and his family have always been perceived as promoters of Islam in El Salvador. Even so, neither that nor the dirty campaign aimed at attacking the then-candidate for his faith had any effect at the polls. The Salvadorans made him their new President.

This demonstrated that the 'confessional vote' doesn't exist in the country and can't be the main parameter for measuring the impact of religion on Salvadoran politics. But that does not mean that religion is unimportant in citizens' identity or that it does not affect political processes. In fact, the now-President Bukele made a public effort to get Evangelical church pastors to pray for him, describing himself to them as *a faithful person who has given fruits*, differentiating himself from his opponents who usually give *false testimony*. What Bukele wanted to appeal to was the social capital the churches have in El Salvador, not only because 72% of Salvadorans participate in some religious organization (well over any other type of civil participation), but also because both the Catholic and Evangelical churches are institutions that inspire major confidence in the country.

In this regard, the end of the two-party system is a call for new actors to decide to participate as aspirants for directly elected posts in this new ideologically diffuse scenario. In an attempt to identify with their electors, these candidates must show that they share values and principles that are important to voters, not only in the civic sphere but in the religious and moral one as well. And it is here that the recent Evangelical population can play an important role. Insofar as the churches can get their beliefs assimilated in the public arena and appear as legitimate and necessary to the social order, they will also be able to get the aspirants to institutional politics to respond to their interests. That is why religion continues to have an important political impact: "even though [Evangelicals] are not organized in political parties, do not use their faith as

a political platform and to date no political party is declaring an Evangelical cause” (Bermúdez, 2018, p. 293). Moreover, while politicians make clear nods to Evangelicals to win their vote, like the approval in the Legislative of the National Day of the Evangelical Church, for example, the impact of religion on politics is not confessional.

It is not ‘religious affiliation’ that impacts political sense to a greater or lesser degree, but ‘religious identities.’ Thus, Bermúdez (2018) proposes an interesting model to analyze the political impact of religion, based on a differentiation of four different ‘religious identities’: a) religiously committed non-fundamentalists, b) religiously committed fundamentalists, c) progressive/liberal believers and d) non-institutionalized individuals of lesser commitment.

The central hypothesis of this classification assumes that the way individuals assume their religion, understand as the set of practices, beliefs, values and world view, molds these citizens’ behaviors and political options in a differentiated way. Thus, for example, the data suggest that the support or not for abortion and egalitarian matrimony, as well as respect for and trust in the public institutions, party politics and the State itself are also related to the person’s identity type and religious commitment. In other words, what is being proposed is that the public impact of religion must be sought in the degree that the different forms of Christianity construct different religious identities. And although the constructed identities are not alien to the community of faith to which they belong, that identity does not have an exclusive association with either Catholic or Evangelical confessionalism.

In other words, not all members of a given religious community (in the broad sense of the term) support the same civil claims equally or have the same demands of or trust in the system and its officials in the same way or to the same degree. The level of civic commitment and political participation depends on the way each person (Catholic or Evangelical) assumes his/her religious commitment and a given religious identity. It is precisely the individuals of greater religious commitment who, due to the requirements of their faith, are more willing and interested in participating politically, although they may be those who trust least in the electoral system. Evangelicals, for example, are usually among the most committed believers, which means also that they would potentially have a greater capacity for influencing the Salvadoran political system (through their vote) than other social segments. Nonetheless, as we will see below, the Evangelicals remain politically under-represented in the legislative body.

Evangelical Representatives in El Salvador 2012-2018

Elections	Evangelical Population*	Total Representatives in Assembly	Total Evangelical Representatives***	Percentage of Evangelical Representatives
2012	37%	84	3	3.57%
2015	40%	84	4	4.76%
2018	42%**	84	5	5.96%

Source:

*Lapop 2012, 2014.

**Estimated population

***This table was prepared by Alvaro Bermúdez through consultation with Congressional advisors, academics and religious leaders from El Salvador, because there is no official or public information regarding representatives' religious identity.

The Salvadoran experience, like other regional experiences, confirms that support from the churches still has a modest impact on the electoral results and the majority of the churches (for now) understand that their role is not to govern but to intercede for those to whom God has given authority. Nonetheless, as a growing social group and an actor that has shown an interest in political recognition and in decisions about the public sphere, it is also to be expected that the Evangelical churches will propose officials that respond to their interests.

Finally, with the opening up of the electoral system, it is possible that religiously committed but politically unsatisfied groups will oppose or promote candidates and/or movements as they feel themselves politically underrepresented given that the increase in the Evangelical population is not reflected yet in the increase of its political representation (Perez Guadalupe 2017 and 2018). In addition, given the major ascendance both the Catholic and Evangelical churches are having in the population, added to the erosion of the traditional political parties, it should not be discarded that the churches, or religious mediation, will play a more protagonist role in Salvadoran politics in the coming years.

Guatemala⁴⁹

Guatemala has more than 17 million inhabitants and, together with Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, is a country in which the Evangelical movements have grown most. Regrettably, the national censuses do not record religious affiliation, so we have to turn to other databases. According

49 The Guatemalan case was co-authored with Claudia Dary based on her article "Guatemala: Entre la Biblia y la Constitución." In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 317 - 354.

to the Pew Research Center (2014), Catholics are 50% of the population, Evangelicals 41% non-affiliated 6% and other religions 3%. It is affirmed that in Guatemala's Metropolitan Region, Evangelicals now outnumber Catholics. Despite having had two Evangelical Presidents, however, there is still a debate about whether one can speak of a 'confessional vote.'

Following Claudia Dary (2018), we can indicate that, like the majority of Latin American countries, Guatemala was not only monopolistically Catholic until the end of the 19th Century, but the Catholic Church was also the lead authority in education, morality and good customs, was a major economic power (the owner of immense amounts of land) and was very influential in the country's governing classes. In 1873 freedom of religion was permitted and nine years later the first Protestant missions linked to social projects began to arrive. The Pentecostals first came to the country in 1916 and began to open small congregations in different parts of the territory (Garrard-Burnett, 2009).

The work of Canadian Pastor Norman Parish, who initiated his ministry in Guatemala around 1954, was important for the development of Guatemalan Pentecostalism. Parish modernized the Pentecostal services and attracted a large number of followers. Some see in him the immediate antecedents of Guatemalan neo-Pentecostalism and the beginning of what would later become the self-named 'Apostolic movement.' Among his apprentices must be mentioned the pastors who today direct mega-church successes: Jorge H. López, Luis Fernando Solares, Harold Caballeros, Carlos "Cash" Luna and Sergio Enríquez, among others (Canahuí, 2012).

But beyond the Pentecostal explosion in Guatemala, it must be asked what political protagonism the Evangelicals have had. If we review the history of the second half of the past century, we can see that after more than three decades of armed conflict (1960-1996), Guatemala retook the democratic path with new sociopolitical actors, among them the Evangelicals, who began to participate, although without express planning by the Evangelical churches (Ortiz, 2004). During the military dictatorships, we have the first case of an Evangelical President: José Efraín Ríos Montt, a member of the 'Verbo' Church, after having previously been a candidate for Christian Democracy. On this occasion, thanks to the coup d'état, Ríos Montt took over the presidency de facto between March 1982 and August 1983 (Smith y Grenfell, 1999). It has been said of this historical period that it was characterized by the Pentecostal growth in Guatemala and that many people sought refuge in a Pentecostal identity to avoid repression. Nonetheless, as Garrard-Burnett (2013, p. 173) assures: "attributing the growth of the conversion that began in the mid-1970s

and started to regularize in the early 1990s to simple convenience is to seriously undervalue the impact that the Protestant conversion had on the life of society and of individuals.”

In November 1990, Jorge Serrano Elías, a member of the ‘El Shaddai’ Church and former collaborator of Ríos Montt, won Guatemala’s presidential elections and became the first democratically elected Evangelical President in Latin America. His administration was very short (from January 1991 to June 1993), due to a self-coup d’état popularly dubbed the “serranazo.” Both Ríos Montt and Serrano Elías left the presidency enveloped in scandals involving human rights violations and rupture of the constitutional order, a hardly favorable antecedent for the Evangelicals who wanted to get openly involved in politics.

According to Ortiz (2004), the Evangelicals were shifting their attitude toward politics at the beginning of this century. If in the past they considered it dirty and sinful, they were now starting to see it as a mechanism for reforming the country, by which they meant a moral reform, not an economic or social one. Nonetheless, though relatively few Evangelicals participated in politics up to the election of Óscar Berger (2004-2008), they had a significant impact.

Furthermore, while several Evangelicals in this century have held government posts and been elected mayors and legislators, it can generally be said that they have gone unnoticed. This even happened even with the candidacy of lawyer, businessman and Evangelical pastor Harold Caballeros of ‘El Shaddai’ Church. He was the general secretary of the Vision with Values (VIVA) party, founded in 2007, which formed a political coalition four years later with the Encounter for Guatemala (EG) party. Despite the support of several neo-Pentecostal leaders, Caballeros only won 6.2% of the votes. In the second round that year, he gave his support to Otto Pérez (2012-2015) of the Patriot Party (PP), who was elected. During the first year of the PP government, Caballeros was the minister of foreign relations, a post he left in 2013.

The latest electoral episode of this relationship between religion and politics in Guatemala has been headed up by Jimmy Morales, Evangelical by birth and a well-known comedian, who won the 2015 general elections in the midst of huge corruption scandals involving the established political class; he took office in January 2016. During his campaign he proclaimed defense of some Christian principles (love of God, family and honor). Several analysts agree that he won the elections through a ‘punishment vote’ against the other candidates (Sandra Torres and Manuel Baldizón), and because he offered an image of a clean and upright person with no corruption baggage. At the end of the day, Morales did not win because he was an Evangelical, but because he was someone who

presented himself as “outside” the contaminated political spheres (Colussi, 2015). In other words, what got Morales elected with a sweeping 67.44% of the votes (against 32.56% for Sandra Torres) was the citizenry’s desire to punish his opponents. In no time at all, however, some of his own relatives (brother and son) were revealed to be involved in corruption scandals as well. It was only the first setback for this Christian President, who later undertook an absurd struggle against the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which had been at the forefront of uncovering the Pérez administration corruption scandals. He got CICIG’s commissioner and a good part of his staff expelled, after intimidating them with a military presence, including tanks, in front of their offices, but this move earned Morales the antipathy and strong criticisms from the citizenry and the international community. His decision to follow Trump in moving the Guatemalan Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem didn’t help.

Finally, the question remains whether the three Evangelical Presidents—Ríos Montt, Serrano Elías and Jimmy Morales—won the elections because they were Evangelical or because they were successful politicians, independent of their religion. On this issue, Claudia Dary (2018) concludes that “there is no confessional vote in Guatemala; the Evangelical vote follows the national tendencies.”

On the other hand, between the election of Presidents Berger (2004) and Morales (2016), it has become customary for Presidents to participate in the ‘Christian *Te Deum*’ organized by the Christian Brotherhood Church. In their speeches they have sought to ingratiate themselves with the Evangelical faithful, including phrases of a religious tint and moral mumbo jumbo. This need by politicians for religious blessings, or more to the point the backing of Evangelicals, results from their recognition that a sizable number of Evangelicals is found among voters, particularly an undeniable growth of Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals that no politician wants to slight.

It is worth underscoring that the first Evangelical woman (from the Verbo Church) to have figured publicly in party politics has been Zury Mayte Ríos Sosa (1968-), daughter of General Ríos Montt. After serving four terms in Congress, she ran for the presidency three times, but each time her candidacy became embroiled in controversy due to article 186 of the Constitution which forbids relatives of coup-monger generals to the fourth degree of blood relations to be candidates. In 2011, she ran on the ticket of the now defunct Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), founded by her father but withdrew in May of that year. In 2015 she tried again on the Vision with Values (VIVA)

party ticket, after, the Supreme Court found in her favor; he placed fifth, with 5.97% of the vote. She tried yet again in February of 2019, this time as a presidential candidate for the VALOR party, but the Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench upheld the prohibition of her candidacy filed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

How have Evangelicals been participating in the political party system? There are no statistical data to confirm that Evangelicals are entering as either affiliates or candidates more than before. Perhaps they are becoming more wary given the bad experiences some had in the political arena. Normally it is thought that a Christian who goes with the Bible under his/her arm, does not drink alcohol, smoke or spend money on games of chance or on women is an example of good living and therefore should do well in politics. But the role played by figures such as Ríos Montt, Serrano Elías and Jimmy Morales shoot holes in that idealized image.

It also needs to be analyzed whether Evangelicals are changing the way they think about their role as voters and how they react to problems concerning civil society, such as corruption and the execution of public spending. Evangelicals are known to show enthusiasm for voting in electoral races because it is an action seen as part of the obligations of a Christian citizen. But when it comes to running as candidates for a popularly elected post, there is a lot of reservation (Dary, 2018, p. 342). The main hesitation is based on fear of the loss of prestige this could bring with it to their churches and pastors.

Given the experience of the figures mentioned above, Guatemalan Evangelicals generally still think of politics as "dirty." That is why those who live in the capital reiterate that the main role of the Evangelical church is to pray for the rules and for all those situations that could affect the people of Guatemala. As a result, they avoid any situation that could call into question the good image of their church. Their leaders prefer to keep their sheep close at hand rather than risk them in the quicksand of politics. The tendency in recent years has thus been for Evangelicals to get involved in politics empirically and as individuals without having a defined political project. Nor has Guatemala had a political party with an "Evangelical" line of thought, much less one whose rank and file has been Evangelical. Evangelicals are generally much more worried about issues related to the traditional values of family, marriage, children, youth, divorce, sex and reproductive education and homosexuality than to political incursion in a "confessional party."

But it is clear that they have not been indifferent to violence and corruption. They protest against it but in their own terms (praying, singing and presenting

placards about it in the public plaza, peacefully marching without interrupting the public order). The sectors represented by the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala (AEG) generated the initiative *United to Pray*. They also came out publicly against corruption making *Prayer Chains*, since May 2015. In addition, the “I am Samuel” civic campaign launched in 2019 was organized by a group of Evangelical leaders called “Pastors of the Next Generation.” This initiative, thought up by pastors’ children, talks about the responsibilities governors should have. The campaign, inspired by the Book of Samuel 16:6 is about praying and fasting so God will provide the citizenry with the wisdom to know for whom to vote.

The current tendency of some Evangelical pastors is to impact public policy through civil organizations and movements promoting conservative agendas regarding rights to sex and reproductive education under the idea of protecting family values and life itself. An example of that was the “Grand national march for life and family” held on September 2, 2018, organized by the “Let’s Transform Guate” movement, in which the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala, the Association of Pastors the Bishops’ Conference, the Archbishopric of Guatemala and the Guatemalan Judaic Community all had representation.⁵⁰ The initiative was presented as “ecumenical” and included a walk along the public way, carrying placards and balloons, sounding the Shofar and pushing baby carriages. Through videos and texts in the social media and the written press their leaders expressed their open rejection of two bills; 5395 (Law of Gender identity) and 5376 (Law for the comprehensive protection, access to justice, dignified and transforming reparation for girls and adolescents victims of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons).⁵¹ Each bill contains several issues, but the main slogan of the demonstration was an unequivocal “no to abortion.” It is around these issues that the Evangelicals and conservative Catholics go shoulder to shoulder. It is interesting that even though the movement halted approval of those two bills of social impact, those who called for the march requested that “it not be politicized.”

There is a definite lack of rigorous follow-up to the role of the Evangelicals within Guatemala’s Congress, but we can mention some bills presented by specific legislators:

50 López, Alex (September 2, 2018). Manifiesto Gran Marcha Nacional Por La Vida en Guatemala. Recovered from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X75Dsem7w4>.

51 Congreso de la República de Guatemala. Iniciativa 5376 presented by Representatives Sandra Nineth Morán Reyes and Erwin Enrique Álvarez Domínguez. Guatemala, February 15, 2018.

- No. 5384, presented by Representative Edwin Lux in November 2017, proposed to declare August 1 each year a national day of the Evangelical Church. This initiative was rejected by Congress's culture commission, which argued that one religious group cannot be favored over others and recalled that the State is secular.
- In July 2015 Representative Marvin Osorio of the Renewed Democratic Liberty Party (Líder) proposed obligatory reading of the bible in public, private and cooperative schools. The majority of the congressional representatives, including those of the same Líder bench to which Osorio belonged, made it clear that he had presented it individually, thus demonstrating that even within the legislative body Evangelical politicians must follow the thematic lines of their party's bench and not those of their church. In other words, the party's political agenda is imposed over the religious one.
- In September 2018 the second vice president of the Congress, Javier Hernández Ovalle (of the FCN-Nation party), proposed that the first Saturday of November every year be declared the "National day of prayer."⁵² Curiously, this law was approved with modifications. Its passage came with the clarification that it not be supported specifically by some religion, but be an act of prayer in general.

By way of synthesis, it can be stated that the incursion of Evangelicals into politics in Guatemala began in the early 1980s. Since that time, its path through some public posts has not been free of criticisms due to errors, inexperience and specific actions contrary to respect for human rights and the rule of law. In the grassroots sphere, the idea prevails that political participation by Christian citizens must be limited to voting, paying taxes, respecting and obeying the authority and praying for the governors. Nonetheless, it is in the local Evangelical churches, mainly those of the rural area, where an important difference is usually made between political participation and civic participation. Citizenship is understood as accepted, biblically underpinned and required participation, while political participation is associated with party politics, which is generally viewed with a great deal of caution. When the issue is active participation, it triggers reserve and an incompatibility between a life of faith and public life. This obeys not only theological explanations,

52 Congreso de la República, Dirección Legislativa. No. 5499. A bill presented by Representative Javier Alfonso Hernández Valle who was also willing to approve that the national day of prayer be decreed.

but also practical concerns having to do with fear of the disparagement that questionable performance by some of its members could extend to the congregation or the church itself (Dary and Bermúdez, 2013).

Mexico⁵³

The United States of Mexico is a country of approximately 125 million inhabitants. According to the 2010 census, Catholics represented 83%, Evangelicals 7.6%, and those who do not profess any religion 4.5%. Some recent soundings calculate that the Evangelical population is now at between 10% and 12%, but there are no certain data or a more recent census. Other sources show a reduction in the total number of Catholics, putting them at between 70% and 75% of the Mexican population, with Evangelicals representing between 15% and 20%, and nonbelievers 10%.⁵⁴

Despite these last figures and the fact of being the first secular State on the continent (according to the 1857 Constitution), Mexico enjoys a deeply rooted grassroots religiosity. In addition it has a particular religious and ecclesial history that traces a different path from the other countries of the region. The special and also conflictive relation the Mexican State has had with the Roman Catholic Church over more than a century has also marked the development of the Evangelical churches. In addition, the participation of the first Protestants, allied with the Liberals of that period, in Mexico's political and revolutionary struggle from the second half of the 19th Century also left his mark on the country's history. Mexico is definitively one of the countries with the greatest Catholic religiosity—or better said “Guadalupan” for the major symbol of national identity—and where the Evangelical movement has developed the least in the region (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017).

53 The Mexican case was based on Carlos Garma's article “México: los Nuevos Caminos de los Creyentes. Transformaciones en las Posiciones Políticas de las Iglesias Evangélicas, Protestantes y Pentecostales”. In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 355 - 376. It includes additional contributions by Andrés Hildebrandt.

54 *Lo religioso dentro de lo religioso: las elecciones de México 2018* (Masferrer, 2018), pp 47-48.

Following Carlos Garma (2018), we can state that it was Benito Juárez who established the separation between the Catholic Church and the State, making him still a referential figure for Mexican Evangelicals. Later, the 1917 Constitution established an excessively restricted set of norms on religious issues, which denied the churches legal status, and did not permit them to have properties. It also impeded public services outside of the churches and limited the rights of religious leaders, which resulted in an evident anti-clericalism. These conflicts made way for what was called the “Cristero War” (1926-1929), an armed conflict between the government and militias of lay people and Catholic presbyters that caused the death of more than 250,000 people.

Although many years have passed since that conflict, and diplomatic relations with the Holy See have been reestablished, religious ministers since the 1990s may not be appointed or popularly elected to political posts. Nor may churches own media outlets.

Historically, just as in the rest of the Latin American countries, the first Protestants who arrived in Mexico in the mid-19th Century were members of the more traditional Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and other mainline churches. They were followed by Evangelical missions, above all North American ones. There is currently a melting pot of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal denominations and churches (Assemblies of God, Interdenominational Christian Church, Independent Pentecostal Churches and others).

Although the Evangelicals had maintained a low numerical, social and political profile, they began in recent years to participate more actively in public life, but without reaching the protagonism of their Central American neighbors. In the July 2018 presidential elections, the winning candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)—with the leftwing Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA)—surprisingly joined with an “Evangelical party,” the Social Encounter Party (PES) of Hugo Erick Flores, closer to conservative positions, especially on moral aspects. The PES was founded in 2006 and in 2014 obtained its official status as a national political party. During his short history, it has been very active, opportunist and dilettante, and has known how to situate itself in strategic places of public visibility, which may be how it succeeded in establishing its alliance with MORENA.

The final results of the expectant 2018 election shows a meager result for the PES, which lost its official status as a party and its state financing for failing to exceed the minimum bar required (3% of the votes for either of the two legislative houses). In that sense, it was not benefited by allying with the winning party, as the Evangelical voters knew to differentiate their

political opinions from their religious beliefs. Nonetheless, due to the system of alliances between political parties, the PES has obtained important political yields, considering its low electoral results. Thanks to the alliance with MORENA and the Workers' Party (PT), the PES reached the notable figure of 30 representatives and 5 senators.⁵⁵ Although the loss of its party status obliges those legislators to join new benches or be legislators without a party, it cannot be denied that this result represents important political capital.⁵⁶ At the same time, the fact that many Evangelicals voted for MORENA and AMLO while sidelining the PES reveals with full clarity that it would not be legitimate to speak of a "confessional vote" in the framework of this presidential election.⁵⁷ "The Mexican Christian Evangelicals maintained their diversity of positions and many did not recognize the PES or its omnipresent leaders as legitimate representatives of the community of believers. [...] What seems evident is that Mexico is not in conditions to maintain a strong Evangelical party" (Garma, 2018, p. 369).

According to the analysis of Elio Masferrer (2018), the only way to adequately understand the support of many Evangelicals for AMLO and MORENA is to review the complex historical process starting in the mid-1970s. Before then the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had been the guarantor of the secular regime in Mexico—an especially rigid one in the Latin American context because of the above-mentioned Cristero War⁵⁸—but it had also guaranteed the legal framework that permitted the peaceful life of the Evangelical minority in Mexico. The PRI and the Catholic Church, however, began a new phase of their relations starting with the "informal" visit of PRI politician Luis Echevarría Álvarez to the Vatican and his interview with Pope John Paul II in 1979. In this first phase, the controversial founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, Marcial Maciel, played a crucial role, as he accompanied the pope in his trip to Mexico that same year. This visit, during which a Mass was held in the then-official presidential residence of Los Pinos, implied a symbolic rupture with the strict forms of state laicism and reinforced Mexico's identification as a Catholic

55 Delgado Molina (2019) p.97.

56 <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20180709/45803203147/los-evangelicos-que-apoyaron-a-lopez-obrador-perderan-su-registro-de-partido.html>.

57 "Los evangélicos votaron en tanto ciudadanos y no cómo feligreses. Lo mismo sucedió con el voto de los católicos" (Masferrer, 2018, p.111).

58 Masferrer highlights that this conflict must be understood as between ultraconservatives and lay-liberals of Mexican Catholicism. For the author, Mexico's primarily Catholic identity was never put into question or confronted (Masferrer, 2018) p.11.

country. This new 'relationship' between the Holy See and Mexico, made possible to a large degree by conservative sectors, was accompanied by adjustments within the Catholic Church in Mexico.

The bishops and other Catholic authorities close to liberation theology, the indigenous movements and the more disfavored sectors allied with diverse leftist groups. More conservative sectors equally critical of the PRI moved closer to the center-right National Action Party (PAN). Beyond their differences, however, these divergent groups were equally relegated, while the new conservative cadres who were seeking to rise in the Catholic hierarchy sought to get close to Maciel to take advantage of his ties with the Vatican. This configuration of the Church and State relations generated a climate of hostility toward the Evangelical groups. The Mexican State, longstanding guarantor of laicity, began to use these groups of "foreignizers" and to ally with the United States. It also financed diverse studies on the 'sects' in the southeast part of the country. This institutional confrontation was accompanied by outbreaks of violence, especially in indigenous and rural zones. This reaffirms the thesis according to which the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church, the definition of laicity and the role of non-Catholic groups is a process that still occupies Mexican society—perhaps with greater intensity than in any other country of the region—until our days and is not exempt from episodes of violence.⁵⁹

All this apparently led many Evangelicals to break with the PRI, resulting in an important diversifying of the Evangelical vote, with the most conservative groups moving toward the PAN and the more progressive ones to diverse leftist sectors. This factor in Mexico's recent history seems to have played a central role in AMLO's victory in 2018.

Following this interpretative line (Masferrer 2018), attention must also be paid to a series of tactical errors committed by the PRI in its handling of the 2018 presidential campaign. The first was to assume that the great majority of Catholics would be reticent to recognize the right to freely elect one's religion and would therefore not vote for López Obrador, supposedly an Evangelical.⁶⁰ The second error, also committed by the PAN, was apparently the commitment with the National Front for the Family (FNF), an organization that claimed to represent more than a thousand civil organizations in favor of the exclusive definition of marriage as a union between man and woman, among other

59 Masferrer (2018) p.27.

60 Masferrer (2018) p.57.

conservative positions regarding what is called ‘gender ideology.’ This political gamble made two apparently incorrect assumptions: that the issues of the ‘moral agenda’ were priorities of the electorate in general and that this agenda would appeal equally to the entire Evangelical spectrum. This strategy, according to Masferrer, not only generated no returns for the PRI, but actually resulted in an important loss of votes from non-believers.⁶¹ In contrast, López Obrador focused his proposals on issues that would prove to be of greater relevance for the electorate, such as the economy and the fight against corruption. At the same time he handled his identification as a Christian with tactical ambiguity and knew how to maintain the support of the most progressive Evangelicals without putting at risk his alliance with the much more conservative PES.⁶²

It thus seems that the “balancing act” between the conservative and progressive sectors of Mexican Evangelicalism was an imperative for López Obrador’s administration. This equilibrium could be seen from the first days of his government in two concrete acts. First was the direct arrival of the National Confederation of Evangelical Christian Churches (CONFRATERNICE) to the presidency. This organization supported the designation of Yasmín Esquivel, criticized for her rejection of homoparental adoptions, as minister of the Supreme Court of Justice.⁶³ AMLO apparently also facilitated meetings between CONFRATERNICE and the secretaries of state, government, health and welfare, and with the national coordinator of social programs. CONFRATERNICE was also reportedly pressuring to modify the 1992 Law of Religious Associations, the norm that prohibits religious ministers from accessing concessions or permits for television and radio. In the second place, the expulsion of legislator Carlos Leal Segovia of MORENA for having made offensive comments against the LGBT community merits mention.⁶⁴ Everything thus seems to indicate that the tension between conservative and progressive sectors is also having an effect on the López Obrador administration’s human rights and inclusion policy.

61 Masferrer (2018) p.85.

62 Masferrer (2018) p.85.

63 https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/03/23/mexico/1553301643_388311.html?id_externo_promo=enviar_email.

64 <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/republica/politica/por-comentarios-homofobicos-lgbt-Comunidad-gay-carlos-leal-morena-expulsa-a-diputado-en-nuevo-leon-3206353.html>.

Panama⁶⁵

Panama is a country with four million inhabitants. Although it eliminated the confessional question from the national census in 1940, soundings indicate that 70% of Panamanians are Catholic, 20% are Evangelical, 8% have no religious affiliation and 2% belong to another religion. This means a drop of 20% of the Catholic population and an increase of 15% of the Evangelical population since the 1970s. Although Panama is Central America's least Evangelical country, it has not been removed from the Catholic religious emigration process on the continent.

Following Claire Nevache (2018), we can state that the arrival of Protestantism to Panama occurred at the end of the 19th Century, when it still belonged to the Republic of Colombia. The construction of the railroad and the Panama Canal brought a large number of Protestant churches and missions, above all from the United States, for the religious attendance of the foreign communities, both US and Afro-Caribbean. An ethnic and linguistic leap to the Hispanic population was taken with the creation of the first Evangelical community in the Spanish language in 1928 (the International Four Square Gospel Church, of the Pentecostal line). This church was the most numerous until the arrival of the Assemblies of God at the end of the 1960s. Although it is difficult to get access to updated data about the number of the churches' members, different sources allow us to prove the important fragmentation of the Panamanian Evangelical gamut: approximately a quarter of the faithful belong to the Assemblies of God, which claim more than 1,000 churches and a membership of 80,000 people. Among the most important congregations of the Assemblies of God is the mega-church of the Hossana Apostolic Community, which has a television channel, three radio stations, a complete school center and a university.

A fifth of the faithful still belong to the first Pentecostal denomination present in Panama, the International Four Square Gospel Church. Currently 80% of Panama's Evangelicals are of the Pentecostal line, although many of them are moving toward neo-Pentecostalism, with the typical characteristics of a "spiritual war," "theology of prosperity," implantation of mega-churches, incursion into middle and upper sectors, etc. Effectively, a quick comparison of the incomes of Evangelicals shows that although they continue showing

65 The Panamanian case has been co-authored with Claire Nevache based on her article "Panamá: Evangélicos ¿Del Grupo de Presión al Actor Electoral?" In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 377 - 404.

lower income levels than the general population, there is a notable Evangelical middle class⁶⁶ of more than a third of the Evangelicals.

Contrary to other countries of the region, there is little religious migration at this time. Effectively, 70% of the adults declare themselves Catholic while 74% say they were raised Catholic, which is the smallest difference in Latin America. Furthermore, only 15% of the Protestants were raised as Catholics, which, again, is the smallest proportion in the region (Religion in Latin America, January 13, 2014, pp. 32-34). Only 12% of Panamanians do not belong to any religion since childhood, the second lowest figure after Paraguay. The religious changes benefit non-affiliated individuals more than Protestants (Religion in Latin America, January 13, 2014, pp. 31-33).

These figures indicate that there is no massive desertion from the Catholic Church, contrary to what is happening in other countries of the region. Both figures show some “stagnation” of the conversions between Catholics and Evangelicals. The expansion of the Evangelical population is thus not sustained by a spiritual migration, although that is useful to explain the first population moves from Catholic to Protestant (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017, p. 65). Thanks to the data of Barómetro de las Américas, we can observe that the mean rate of children of Catholics in Panama is 1.4, while it is 1.9 for Evangelicals (www.LapopSurveys.org). This could indicate that a higher demographic dynamism of Evangelicals who converted in the 1970s and 80s is the main reason for the Evangelical growth in Panama today rather than new conversions (Nevache, 2018).

As in other countries of the region, the transformation of the religious landscape in Panama, as well as its increasingly middle-class and neo-Pentecostal profile, motivated Evangelicals to get into politics for the purpose of affirming and protecting their interests as a religious minority, but also to compete with the Catholic Church, which held the monopoly of political influence in the country.

Starting with the democratic transition (1989/1990), Evangelicals got politically involved through four forms: **a)** the creation of an ‘Evangelical party’ (the National Unity Mission-MUN in 1993), **b)** the formation of alliances with existing parties (such as the PRD, Solidarity, MOLIRENA and most recently the Panamanianist Party), **c)** the attempt to create an ‘Evangelical front’ called PAIS

66 According to the definition of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) the middle class in Latin America has incomes of between US\$12.40 and US\$62 a day.

in 2018⁶⁷ and **d**) the establishment of pressure groups (Nevache, 2018). The second option, which we have called ‘Evangelical faction’ (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017), is the one that has been most successful and has permitted the Evangelical leaders to occupy popularly elected posts both in the legislative branch and in municipal government.

The Evangelicals’ electoral success in Panama has been very fluctuating, as they obtained eight legislators in 2004; only three in 2009; and increased it to nine in 2014 (out of 71).⁶⁸ Depending on the periods, a preponderance of ‘political Evangelicals’ could be verified (especially in 2004) or of ‘Evangelical politicians’ (in 2009 and 2014). The presence of Evangelicals in the national Congress is summarized in Table 8.

Evolution of Evangelical Political Representation versus Numerical Growth

Year	Total Estimated National Population ¹	% Evangelical Population	Evangelical Representatives in National Assembly ²	% Evangelical Representatives in National Assembly ³
1994	2.684.183	5% ⁴	Data not available	Data not available
1999	2.971.197	10.3% ⁵	2/71	3.1%
2004	3.269.541	18,02% ⁶	8/71	12.3%
2009	3.579.385	18% ⁷	3/71	4.8%
2014	3.903.986	19% ⁸	9/71	19.1%

Source: Table prepared by Claire Nevache based on data from INEC (National Institute of Statistics and Census), Barómetro de las Américas, Pew Center, and Universidad de Salamanca’s Observatorio de Élités Parlamentarias en América Latina (Latin American Congressional Elite Observatory).

(1) Banco Mundial.

(2) The data from surveys conducted by the Observatorio de Élités Parlamentarias en América Latina, of the University of Salamanca.

(3) The percentage does not correspond to the fourth column, as it was calculated based on the number of legislators that answered the survey, not the total number of legislators.

(4) Latinobarómetro (1996). The figure is the sum of Evangelical responses without specifying Baptist, Methodist or Pentecostal Evangelicals.

(5) INEC (1998).

(6) Barómetro de las Américas (2004).

(7) INEC (2009).

(8) Pew Center (2014).

We can see that although Evangelicals are usually very underrepresented in the legislative body, the 2011 election seems to have been determinant in giving them greater representation, possibly because of the support the Evangelical churches received during the administration of President Ricardo

67 In the end, the PAIS party could not enroll in the Electoral Tribunal after a challenge by the Electoral Monitoring Office for irregularities in the collection of signatures.

68 Sources close to the National Assembly say that the number of Evangelicals was greater among alternates, probably perceived as electorally attractive although there was no intention of granting them any kind of power.

Martinelli. Effectively, the former President did not belong to the political class or the traditional oligarchy and had few relations with the Catholic Church, so his spiritual and religious legitimacy was largely found in the relations with the Evangelical churches, which were very closely attended. In addition, diverse Evangelical authorities were named to administrative and political posts during his administration (Nevache, 2018).

In Panama, as in the other countries of the region, it has not been possible to prove the existence of a confessional vote. Evangelical voters do not all choose a given candidate; the Evangelical vote is instead quite similar to the rest of the population. The only tendency we have been able to verify in the past two elections is a slight preference for the Democratic Change party of former President Ricardo Martinelli, but it is not enough to speak of an “Evangelical vote” as such. The only confessional party, the MUN, which they created in 1994, has been an electoral failure.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the large majority of Evangelicals who have gone into politics belong to a single denomination, the Assemblies of God, and in particular the Hossana Apostolic Community.

But beyond failed Evangelical candidates and parties, the Evangelicals got into politics strongly as a ‘pressure group’ in 2016. That year, proposed legislation (Bill 61) on sex education in schools turned the evangelicals into genuine political actors through huge protests and marches that forced the withdrawal of the bill from parliamentary debate. This successful grassroots mobilization has convinced the population, and the Evangelicals themselves, that Evangelical participation in national politics was an indisputable fact. Effectively after the sex education bill failed, conservative religious groups racked up other victories: the cancellation of a pilot plan on education in October 2016, the abrogation within four days of a governmental decree for the creation of a Gender Equality Department within the Ministry of Education in December 2016, an eight-month extension of the President’s sanction of a law that sought to prevent, prohibit and sanction discriminatory acts and sexual harassment in February 2018, the prohibition of the commercialization and use of certain textbooks by the Ministry of Education, especially due to their content on sex education and on discrimination against LGBTI individuals (in March 2018 and the blockage of a bill creating a system of guarantees and protection of rights of children and adolescents in October 2018 (Nevache, 2018). Parallel to the 2016 conflict over Bill 61, a writ of unconstitutionality (File 1042-16 followed by another similar one in 2017), was filed with the Supreme Court rejecting article 26 of the Family Code, which defines matrimony as the union of a man and a woman. The

debate about egalitarian marriage aggravated the cultural conflict that had begun with the Sex Education Law (Núñez, July 26, 2017).

Because of all this, politicians are now taking more conservative positions regarding the 'gender agenda' and sex education to avoid going against this large pressure group Christians have become, headed up by the 'Panamanian Alliance for Life and Family' with its motto "Don't mess with my children."⁶⁹ This Alliance is the convergence point of conservative Catholic and Evangelical Christian groups that, according to its president, Juan Francisco de la Guardia Brin, began as a group of "pro-life" Catholics and gradually began bringing Evangelicals on board. This set of organizations is not publicly identified, according to them, to avoid "reprisals," which leads one to think that it is not only about churches and religious organizations, but probably also about politically and economically risky individuals and even businesses. This organization likely constituted the most important platform for the rejection of the Sex Education Law, without this inter-religious alliance really being public until a joint communique released on January 30, 2018, by the Panamanian Bishops' Conference, the Ecumenical Committee of Panama and the Evangelical Alliance of Panama in reaction to the OS-24/17 Consultative Opinion issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Nevache, 2018).

The Evangelicals' successful activism as a pressure group, added to the lowering of requirements for creating new parties or running for office without a party has permitted a reactivation of Evangelical enthusiasm in Panama for getting into politics. New movements are being created with clear intentions to participate in electoral contests. An example of this electoral desire is the attempt to create the National Democratic Action Party (ADN) as a confessional party, the Independent National Union (UNI) and the Social Independent Alternative Party (PAIS), of an Evangelical front type, all of which emerged after the 2016 marches.

The first two attempts mentioned failed to get the number of signatures needed to create a political party. And when PAIS' effort to create an Evangelical front didn't work, it opted for the strategy that has been most efficient in Latin

69 It is important to mention that the Panamanian Alliance for Life and Family maintains militant and personal ties with other similar movements in Latin America. In a personal interview, its president said he was a personal friend of Fabricio Alvarado, winner of the first electoral around in Costa Rica in 2018. Moreover, according to the same source, the Panamanian Alliance was the inventor of the motto "Don't mess with my children," during the conflict of 2016, which later achieved a continent-wide success and resonance in conservative pro-life movements.

America: alliance with an existing party, in this case MOLIRENA, which in turned allied with the PRD.

Another example is the attempt, headed up by a Catholic member of the Panamanian Alliance for Life and Family, to launch an “independent bloc” of a religious and conservative nature made up of candidates of legislative and municipal posts, including a pastor for the Panama mayoral race. These candidacies were moved particularly by a pro-life and anti-immigrant agenda. The majority of candidates of this “independent bloc,” however, also failed to get the number of signatures required to run.

The most attention probably came from the candidacy of the governing Panamanianist Party (Partido Panameñista). José Isabel Blandón, the winning candidate of the primaries in 2018, is known for his progressive positions, particularly on the issue of egalitarian marriage. He participated in the gay pride march as a legislator, and supported the march the first year he was in office as mayor of Panama City, the capital. During his administration, the mayor’s office supported all the events of gay pride month. One of the most symbolic gestures was the hoisting of the rainbow flag in Independence Plaza⁷⁰ in June 2018. While his position became more moderated as the elections neared, the designation of his running mate, Nilda Quijano, surprised everyone. She has an enviable profile for this post: an Afro-descendent woman from one of the country’s most marginalized zones,⁷¹ of grassroots origins and with a history of unstained personal achievement (starting as secretary, she became the general manager of the Colón Free Trade Zone, the second largest of its kind in the world). Her constant reference to her faith, however was a surprise, particularly her public comments that she considered this role a “mission” mandated by God and that she had given her life in service to God. But what caught even more attention was her comment that she had “consulted her leader” about her candidacy. In an audio attributed to Pastor Edwin Álvarez of the Panamanian mega-church the Hossana Apostolic Community (Assemblies of God), he tells about a meeting between several pastors and candidate José Blandón, in which the religious elders proposed two figures for Vice President (it is not known if the current candidate was one of them) and Blandón asked for the ‘Evangelical vote’ in exchange for some high-level posts, particularly those related to family issues (very similar to what happened with Bolsonaro and the support of the Brazilian Evangelicals, and the later naming of a Pentecostal pastor as minister of women, family and human rights).

70 Best known in the country as “Catedral Plaza”.

71 Colón is in the Caribbean Coast.

The Evangelical Alliance of Panama immediately announced that it had no knowledge of said pact and rejected such an agreement given Blandón's political positions as mayor of the capital, thus giving a new example of the "atomizing DNA" of the Evangelical churches (Pérez Guadalupe, 2017). This would mean that this supposed electoral pact is not with the Evangelical churches in general, but with one denomination in particular, gambling on a 'denominational vote' as is becoming customary in Brazil. Nonetheless, the existence of that 'denominational vote' has yet to be demonstrated in Panama and furthermore, the support of a single denomination would have a hard time being determinant to winning a presidential election. Finally, in March 2019, José Blandón, reversing his entire political past, signed a pact with the Panamanian Alliance for Life and Family, and against the so-called 'gender ideology.'

All this only confirms that the 'moral agenda' has now entered fully into Panama's presidential campaigns. Despite the fact that its introduction into party politics is still incipient, its impact on public health and education policies has been an undeniable for some years now. In this context, it is probable that the Evangelicals, as Panama's new 'political actors,' will have greater protagonism in politics in the coming years.

Peru⁷²

Peru has a population of over 31 million inhabitants, of which 74.3% are assumed to be Catholic and 15.6% Evangelical Christian, according to the latest National Census, of 2017.⁷³ In this country, religion continues to be relevant, both in the private sphere and in the public one, as it is linked to morality and public opinion.

Following Amat y León and Pérez Guadalupe (2018), we can state that this quantitative growth process has had a direct correlation with the involvement of Evangelicals in politics. But while that Evangelical growth has been a necessary condition to explain the phenomenon of political participation by Evangelicals in Peru starting in the 1980s, it is not sufficient.

Qualitative factors would have to be added to numerical growth, such as the maturation of the practice of social service and action by the Evangelical

72 The Peruvian case has been co-authored with Oscar Amat y León based on the article "Perú: los 'Evangélicos Políticos' y la Conquista del Poder." In: PEREZ GUADALUPE, Jose Luis and Sebastian GRUNDBERGER (Eds.). O. c. pp. 405 - 430.

73 INEI (2018) Perú: Perfil Sociodemográfico. Informe Nacional. Censo Nacional 2017: XII de Población, VII de Vivienda y III de Comunidades Indígenas. Lima, INEI.

communities, which has apparently given them an image of social credibility due to their involvement in the pacification process, as is recognized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) report. In addition, since the end of the past century, the Evangelical sector of US Protestantism, characterized by its theological conservatism and its links with the Republican Party, discovered that political action could be a good strategy for protecting its religious convictions and expanding its influence in government at a world level. That led this sector to seek strategic allies among its peers in Latin America. Another important factor for the initiation of the Latin American Evangelicals' political participation was the change in Evangelical ecclesial leadership from a progressive Evangelical sector to a conservative neo-Pentecostal one.

Historically, we can indicate that the ecclesial and social development of Evangelicals in Peru began when the first Protestant missionaries arrived in the country at the end of the 19th Century, bringing a progressive image of the development model from European culture, with a tendency toward what was called the "Social Gospel." In general, the public actions advocated their own identity, secular education and, above all, the separation between Church and State, in alliance with other organizations such as the Masons, the indigenist movement and the Liberal parties. Then at the beginning of the last century, they moved into public affairs, above all those related to the legalization of Protestantism in republican life and to the processes of constructing the identity of this religious minority.

At the end of the Second World War, and especially with the arrival of US missionaries who brought a mentality impregnated with the Cold War, the Evangelicals' social work diminished to give way to an emphasis on the numerical growth of the churches and the verbal announcement of the Gospel as the essence of the Christian mission. Until the mid-20th Century, the conservative Evangelical churches were the ones that grew most, and starting in the 1960s the Pentecostalization of the Evangelical churches began with the explosive growth of the Pentecostal movement, of both a foreign origin and a national one ('*criollo*' or homegrown Pentecostalism).

Later, at the end of the last century, the neo-Pentecostal churches emerged with force. They are relatively new independent churches (without major links to foreign "mother churches" or with any historical denomination). They came on the scene in the post-conflict context and that of the crisis of ideologies in the postmodern world. These churches only have a few congregations, although with a high average attendance in their religious services, the majority of which are located in the city of Lima. This means that the neo-Pentecostals are not

the most numerous movement within the Peruvian Evangelical community, nor the one with the greatest trajectory, but they have known how to capitalize best on their participation in the public and political sphere.

With respect to the Evangelicals' direct link with party politics, we can identify at least three stages:

- a) The first moment of the Evangelicals' political participation took place in the framework of the presence of 'Evangelical politicians' without a conventional political party, in which they promoted their Christian principles together with their aspiration for social recognition. Two emblematic cases of Evangelical politicians who had successful electoral results occurred in the second half of the 20th Century. Both of them were associated with the Peruvian American Revolutionary Popular Alliance (APRA or Aprista) party. The first was José Ferreira, as a repeat parliamentary representative for the department of Cerro de Pasco and the other was Pastor Pedro Arana, as a member of the 1979 Constituent Assembly.

The tradition that links the Peruvian Aprista Party with the Evangelicals' political participation dates back to the beginning of the public life of APRA's founder, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, and to his relationship with the Scottish Presbyterian missionary John A. Mackay. Beyond the time-bound dimension of this foundational relationship between the Evangelicals and the Apristas, it is important to highlight that the Peruvian Aprista Party, in its origins, is seen as a political party that rebelled against the oligarchic order. For that reason, it suffered persecution by several governments, which nourished that link between Christianity and APRA's followers, by sharing a similar mystique of political suffering (Amat y León y Pérez Guadalupe, 2018, 411).

The bond between the Aprista Party and the Evangelicals was such that although it was known that not all APRA members were Evangelical, it was believed that all Evangelicals were Apristas. This phrase was even coined: 'Only God will save my soul, and only APRA will save Peru.'

- b) The second moment of political participation by Evangelicals was linked to the work done by a sector identified with a Latin American theologically contextual proposal known as the "integral church mission." By way of a moderate alternative vision of Latin American liberation theology this mission toured theological formation centers for pastors, national and international Evangelical NGOs, university centers, etc. to try to construct an Evangelical social thought via the Evangelical National Council of Peru (CONEP). This

moment of political participation was expressed through the Evangelical professional sector formed in the Association of University Evangelical Groups of Peru (AGEUP), which shared a social and political practice around university life and provided its professional contribution to CONEP.

With this accumulated social capital for the purpose of calling the general elections of 1980, Evangelical leaders belonging to this sector of people who had come out of AGEUP and were linked to CONEP organized what was called the “Evangelical Front,” the first attempt at organized participation by Evangelicals in Peru.⁷⁴ This attempt to get into public life, however, did not have its first successful expression until the 1990 elections, when a large group of Evangelicals ran on the slate of Alberto Fujimori and managed to win 18 congressional seats (7.5% of the House of Representatives and Senators). That was the first and last time the Evangelicals got an important number of congressional members, which confirms the hypothesis that it was a fortuitous and isolated moment that responds to other very particular and time-bound factors that were not confessional.

But the history of the relationship between the Evangelicals and Alberto Fujimori throws interesting light on the changes that were being experienced in Peru in the 1990s. On the one hand, Fujimori’s victory made it possible to see the Evangelical movement as a collective actor in an electoral race, as up to that point its own members had not even distinguished themselves to any great degree for social action in defense of human rights. On the other hand, it gave Fujimori’s political adventure that first push to organize his political infrastructure. That initial Evangelical support was fundamental to touring the interior of the country and founding party bases under the cover of various Evangelical communities. It cannot be stated, however, that Fujimori won the 1990 elections thanks to the Evangelicals. Moreover, we cannot even assert that Fujimori won with the Evangelical vote (as not all Evangelicals voted for him). Less yet did he win due to the Evangelical vote, as at that moment the Evangelicals did not make up even 5% of the voting population and Fujimori got 29.1% of the votes in the first round and 56% in the second.

Be that as it may, the self-coup of 1992 and the later development of the pro-Fujimori regime determined the withdrawal of the progressive Evangelical

74 ARROYO, Víctor y Tito PAREDES (1991). Perú: los evangélicos y el “fenómeno Fujimori”. En PADILLA, René (comp.). *De la marginación al compromiso. Los evangélicos y la política en América Latina* (pp.89-101). Quito: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana.

sector ('Evangelical politicians'), making way for a new sector with more conservative ideas, which began to exercise greater ecclesial leadership and assume the protagonist roles of political participation in the following elections ('political Evangelicals').

- c) The third moment of political participation by the Evangelicals began at the end of the last century, with the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic movement that appeared in the Evangelical world to dispute the religious leadership and political protagonism. Although the movement is a minority in quantitative terms, it has succeeded in promoting a religious cosmivision within the Evangelical world characterized by the so-called 'theology of prosperity' and reconstructionism, the re-sacralizing or re-enchantment of the world, the public presence of the church in the media, the expectation of social ascent, missionary incursion into the middle and upper sectors of the population, and greater participation in the country's political life.

The most emblematic and representative case of this sector has unquestionably been that of Pastor Humberto Lay, who succeeded in creating, after many attempts, a party that we could call 'confessional': the National Restoration Party. He ran for President of the Republic on that ticket in 2006, attracting the national evangelical movement to his campaign. In the end, he only got 4% of the votes, when the Evangelical population was approximately 12%. In other words, not even that many Evangelicals voted for him, which would confirm yet again the non-existence of a confessional vote. For that reason we can state that despite the attempts to form an Evangelical confessional party, reality has shown that the Evangelical vote in Peru is blurred into different political sectors. Nor is there a slogan in the Evangelical vote, and the public figures of an Evangelical background have had better electoral results participating as individual candidates in different political parties than when they have done so in confessional parties.

There is no doubt, however, that something changed in the way of seeing and understanding the political participation of Evangelicals in Peru with the entry into politics of Pastor Humberto Lay. We mention some points below that corroborate it:

1. Since Lay, the political participation of Evangelicals stopped being linked to a formal political party, to be centered on "the religious personality" who moves in the political arena.

2. At the same time, the existing distance expanded between the development of social and political consciousness of the faithful who supported Lay and the political aspirations of their leaders. It is worth saying that with this new way of doing politics, the idea is accentuated that those called to get involved and participate in politics are the pastors or individuals especially “designated by God” to assume a public function: other Christians only have the responsibility to pray, support and back their political-religious leaders.
3. The new ‘political Evangelicals’ now have a set of professional cadres, mid-leadership level technical personal and operational workers willing to work around the structures that are generated as a consequence of occupying a position of political power in Peru, but some cases of ‘religious clientelism’ were also revealed.
4. There was a definite shift of the ideologies that previously promoted the Evangelical political candidacies; these occurred within parties or movements with “progressive” thinking. Starting with Pastor Lay, Evangelical candidates began reflecting a “rightward” vision with respect to the previous progressivism, prioritizing the ‘moral agenda’ against the ‘gender ideology.’

Finally, in the latest electoral processes, the Evangelicals—inserted in different political parties (‘Evangelical faction’)—got only 4 of the 130 seats that make up the Peruvian Congress in 2006, 6 in 2011 and 4 in 2016. This represents less than 5% of the seats, when the Evangelical population in Peru exceeds 15%, which confirms the regional tendency of a political underrepresentation of the Evangelicals.

Below we present a table that summarizes the percentage of Evangelical participation in each congressional election, together with the national population and the percentage of Evangelical population. With it we want to demonstrate that there is no direct correlation between the increase of the Evangelical population and its political representation in the legislative branch and even less in the executive branch. The same phenomenon of underrepresentation of Evangelicals in Latin American politics is thus maintained, although it must be said that the percentage of representation in the legislative chambers is not the only factor for measuring their political arrival.

Evolution of Evangelical Political Representation versus Numerical Growth

Year	Total Estimated National Population	% Evangelical Population	Total Number of Representatives	% Evangelical Congress Members
1956	8 904 891	-	1/182	0,54
1963	10 825 811	0,63 ⁽²⁾	1/,45	2,22
1978	16 447 370	-	1/,100	1,0
1985	19 518 555	4,7 ⁽³⁾	1/,60	1,66
1990	21 764 515		18/,240	7,5
1992	22 640 305	7,2 ⁽⁴⁾	5/80	6,25
1995	23 926 300	-	5/120	4,16
2000	25 983 588	-	1/120	0,83
2001	26 366 533		1/120	0,83
2006	28 151 443	12,5 ⁽⁵⁾	4/120	3,33
2011	29 797 694	13,4 ⁽⁶⁾	6/130	4,61
2016	31 488 625	15,6 ⁽⁷⁾	4/130	3,07

⁽¹⁾ Data obtained from INEI (National Institute of Statistics and IT).

⁽²⁾ According to data recorded for 1960 in Stoll (1990).

⁽³⁾ INEI (1981).

⁽⁴⁾ INEI (1993).

⁽⁵⁾ INEI (2007).

⁽⁶⁾ Webb and Baca (2011, pg. 1064).

⁽⁷⁾ INEI (2017).

Today the most relevant Evangelical (neo-Pentecostal) discourse on public issues is related to the defense of the pro-life and pro-family ‘moral agenda.’ It is not known for sure if Evangelicals will be able to attract the vote not only of Evangelical and Catholics but also of other citizens. It also remains to be seen whether the Evangelical ‘pressure groups’ in defense of the moral agenda will be able to articulate themselves into a civic movement in the coming years. But if it is kept in mind that less than 30 years ago the Evangelicals’ political participation was stigmatized, it is a matter of record that they are now able to get mayors, governors, legislators and the like elected in the various electoral processes. Nonetheless, many of them maintain the illusion that the day will come when an Evangelical leader will meet the profile necessary to elect “God as President.”

Chapter 4.

Vision of the future

More than 500 years after the birth of Protestantism (1517), and more than 100 years after the Panama Congress (1916), which would mark the “formal” beginning of the Latin American Evangelical movement, we are seeing a new generation of Evangelicals come up in our continent today, with their own Latin American identity and an autonomous agenda in the social and political scenarios. But this political participation has for the moment been centered more on the electoral sphere than the broader political one, in that structured and permanent political parties have not been formed, nor is there an Evangelical Social Thinking. Historically, the only issue the Evangelicals have raised as an electoral banner has been the promise of “ethical behavior” in public administration and a frontal struggle against corruption. Although this is a fundamental and necessary perspective, it is not an option or proposal for government that includes economic, social, security and other policies with ideological underpinnings that inspire such proposals. Nor are they presenting great technical visions, but rather religious ones. Said another way, they propose being “moralizers” not “managers” and launching “pastors,” not “politicians,” as candidates. For that reason, the supposed ‘political participation’ of Evangelicals, in the majority of cases, is limited to a mere ‘electoral participation.’ Moreover, there is no official political participation by the Evangelical churches, just by their leaders (pastors or laypeople), which does not formally commit their religious communities.

The exception is Brazil, whose Pentecostal churches have participated formally in electoral campaigns since 1986 and have ‘official candidates’ and

even political parties. As a result, these churches and their parties are considered part of the traditional political system. In addition, government 'proposals' are beginning to be tested, beyond the typical offers of the 'moralizing of politics' and of their publicized 'moral agenda.' Comprehensive government plans are being prepared, and schools of political formation and public administration are being created with an eye to forming their faithful for the exercise of power.

In addition, it is necessary to underscore that while Evangelicals are still a minority in all countries of the continent, they are a significant and militant presence that, given the weight of their votes, could tip any electoral alliance according to their beliefs and issues of interest. Moreover, they could decide voting that is not necessarily electoral, as happened in the Peace Agreement Referendum in Colombia in 2016. It also needs to be stressed, however, that we are talking about a strongly atomized religious movement, both in its organizational forms and pastoral strategies, and in its political options and behaviors. Certainly, the atomizing mindset has not changed in this century and a half of Latin American history; quite to the contrary, the 'religious' segmentation of Evangelicals only gets stronger and accentuates when it moves into the political sphere. In other words, although Evangelicals constitute a major religious, social and political potential, they do not make up a unitary movement, or even a manageable one, as would be the case of a religious or political entity.

In the current panorama, as we have indicated above, the only issue that could pull the great majority of Latin America's Evangelicals together around it is the moral proposal: pro-life and pro-family, and anti-abortion, anti-homosexual marriage and anti-'gender ideology' in general. In the 1960s and 70s, the Evangelicals' 'ideological agenda' was anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism, and that was what achieved that time-bound union of the great majority of Evangelical churches. Now that the Berlin Wall has fallen, there is not much sense in alluding to an anti-Communism as an agglutinating nucleus, and anti-Catholicism has been put on the back burner as long as they continue marching together against the 'gender ideology.' We see, then, that the unifying agendas have changed but they continue to exist as a necessary amalgam to achieve a certain unity, which shatters immediately once they turn their attention to within the Evangelical movement. The atomizing DNA of the Evangelicals is not disappearing, it just hunkers down on certain occasions.

We are also seeing that these agendas are not for something, but rather against something (before it was against Communism and Catholicism, and now it is against the 'gender ideology'). The campaign of Jair Bolsonaro, for

example, explicitly revived this anti-Communist agenda but referred to the Workers' Party (PT) of Ignacio Lula da Silva and Venezuela's Chavism as the great ideological enemies that must be combated. He also related every kind of social evil, from corruption to hyperinflation to the 'gender ideology,' with Communism, giving him a well-prepared cocktail for the supposed values-based, conservative ideological and political battle that was very effective during the 2018 electoral campaign. Obviously this type of argument doesn't hold up against the most minimum analysis, but it was disseminated through the 'anonymous' social networks, causing an ideological and moral panic that fueled a conservative vote.

In our opinion, however, a fundamental element prevents electoral agendas from filling with religious content (independent of its sign). We are referring to the existence of a functional two-party system. In other words, insofar as there is a major political volatility in our countries—which is always converted into electoral volatility—the probabilities increase that the ideological absence will be filled with religious morality, or a 'religious ideology,' which is what has happened in the countries in which the Evangelicals' 'moral agenda' has inundated the political agenda, even if only in passing. In this regard, we can verify that in the electoral surprises of 2018—Costa Rica and Brazil—both had a traditional bipartite functioning until a few years ago, whose disappearance has allowed the entry of other elements (religious or values-based) that have filled this ideological vacuum.

This lack of political institutionality has also meant that the parties easily let 'political Evangelicals' into their ranks (above all in electoral periods)—even though they do not share their religious thinking—for the sole purpose of getting more votes. It is on this point that a perverse and mutual utilization is produced, with absolute awareness on both sides. It is also the reason why Evangelical candidates have been skipping from one party to another in each election, as if they were wombs for rent.

All that suggests that party institutionality would be the main antidote to the entry of religious agendas into the political sphere, as the ideological vacuum is the best breeding ground for the appearance of religious (or other) contents in electoral campaigns. This has not happened before simply because it was not the intention of the Evangelicals to get into politics nor did they have a sufficient number of faithful to attempt it.

In addition, this has been unleashed in the context of the so-called "crisis of ideologies," the exhausting of the political party system and of a greater distrust of the institutions. We must also take into account what are called the

“outsiders,” in Brazil (Bolsonaro), Costa Rica (Fabricio Alvarado), Guatemala (Jimmy Morales) or El Salvador (Nayib Bukele), who have won elections through a ‘punishment vote’ against the other candidates. It could even be said that what prevailed was a ‘negative’ vote: not that they won, but that the others lost, because people voted for the ‘lesser evil’ rather than the ‘greater good,’ and because they best represented the fight against corruption (at least in their speeches) and the disaffection with the traditional political class. But, *stricto sensu*, they weren’t even outsiders, because they had all participated one way or another in politics.

On the other hand, it also needs to be taken into account that there is a political underrepresentation of the Evangelicals. This means that in the region’s electoral process no direct correlation has appeared between the percentage of the Evangelical population and the percentage of votes for Evangelical candidates, nor is it easy to prove their political endorsement. The political inclinations of Evangelicals are not necessarily a correlate of their religious adhesions, so we can state that the Evangelical community is still politically ‘underrepresented.’ Perhaps it is because Evangelical voters so far give their particular political options, or their apoliticalness, more weight than their religiosity, although in general a rather more conservative political tendency has prevailed in the region.

If we analyze the number of Evangelical parliamentarians in the different countries of the region, we can see that historically it has always been far below the percentage of that person’s religion. Said another way, a high percentage of Evangelical population does not guarantee high political representation in the legislative bodies, and even less in the executive branch. As we have been able to prove in some countries of the region (which we presented graphically in synthetic tables in the previous chapter) Peru currently has a 15.6% Evangelical population, but only 3% of those in Congress are Evangelicals; Colombia has a 20% Evangelical population and only 4% Evangelical parliamentary representation; Chile has a 17% Evangelical population and only 2% Evangelical representation in Parliament; El Salvador has a 40.7% Evangelical population and only 6% of its legislators are Evangelical; Brazil has a 32% Evangelical population and only 6% representation in the House of Representatives, etc.

Costa Rica, as we have seen, is an exception to the rule, due to the particularly of the 2018 electoral process, which did not continue the historical line of ordinary representation. While that year’s elections were able to equal the percentage of the Evangelical population (25%) in the percentage of legislators,

they only obtained 7% in 2014, 4% in 2010, 2% in 2006 and also 2% in 2002, very far from the Evangelical percentage of the population. In Panama something similar to Costa Rica happened in the 2014 elections, when for the first time the percentage of Evangelical representation in the House of Representatives reached the same percentage as the Evangelical population, apparently due to the major support Evangelicals received during the government of Ricardo Martinelli (2009-2014) in which their representation in the National Assembly went from 4.8% in 2009 to 19.1% in 2014. Curiously, these two countries are the least Evangelical in Central America. But we will have to wait for the next elections to confirm whether Evangelicals in those countries succeeded in matching their confessional percentage with their legislative representation or it only had to do with passing peaks, as happened in Peru in 1990 then never happened again.

As is obvious, we do not think the percentage of representation in the legislative branch is the only criterion for measuring Evangelicals' political impact in the region. Others are political alliances in the parliaments (even when their representation is not very numerous), 'pressure groups' and crosscutting agendas as new political strategies, which we will see in this chapter. Brazil is a clear example of this, as Brazilian Evangelicals (politically more experienced) have not limited themselves to getting representatives into the houses of Congress. They have also known how to take advantage of other methods of political incursion: the so-called 'church of the street,' lobbies, an 'Evangelical bench,' and Evangelical media, creating a 'political synergy' and greater social impact. In addition, in a political context without an official or functional bipartisan system, and with an absolutely atomized legislative body, the Brazilian 'Evangelical bench' is negotiating its own group interests politically with other minority benches (BBB: Biblia/Buey/Bala), and obtaining good results without the need to achieve a parliamentary majority.

On the other hand, we can indicate that there is an underrepresentation within the Latin American Evangelicals themselves. Within the large and diverse Latin American Evangelical movement not all Evangelical denominations are equally represented. There is no proportionality with respect to the number of faithful. The neo-Pentecostals, who are more organized, more media-oriented and political, and best present the discourse of the 'moral agenda,' are over-represented, to the detriment of other Evangelical denominations that may have a larger population percentage but do not participate as militantly in electoral processes.

Finally, the Evangelicals who have captured the vote of the devout in the legislative bodies have so far been more efficient in negotiating some vote than in getting more votes. In other words, they have generally not accomplished great legislative changes in their favor in the parliaments, but they have been able to paralyze laws that go against their proposals.

4.1. Three “regional models” of Evangelical political participation: Central American, South American and Brazilian.

In the previous chapter, we have shown that while there are differences among the 10 countries described in them, there are also regional similarities that we can geographically group into three ideal models—in the Weberian sense—of political participation in Latin America: ‘Central American,’ ‘South American’ and ‘Brazilian.’ These three regional types, combined with the three historical political types laid out above (Evangelical party, Evangelical front and Evangelical faction) allow us to move beyond the easy and uninformed generalization that some authors make about these continental phenomena, and do a differentiated and more full-blown analysis of the sizable and diverse political expressions of Evangelicals in the region.

As we have seen above, argued in general and in the 10 countries analyzed, it is not possible to speak of a ‘confessional’ Evangelical vote or demonstrate decisive success with respect to the objectives proposed (winning political power in the entire continent). Nor is it possible to prove automatic endorsement at the polls by the percentage of Evangelicals in a given country, as other criteria determine how many Evangelicals or Catholics elect their political representatives beyond their mere religion. On the other hand, we are seeing in the majority of countries a strong tendency to accentuate the Evangelical ‘moral agenda’ as a political agenda, and to participate electorally through the ‘Evangelical faction’ model, as we have defined it.

In any event, what is certain is that Evangelicals are now present in party politics and are political actors in all countries of the continent, although with differing impact and influence. That is why we propose these three ‘ideal types’ of regional political participation. We say ideal because they are theoretical constructs that try to group the main characteristics of each region. Not all countries necessarily fit all characteristics of its model, which is why Brazil is apart and not within the ‘South American model.’ Mexico, given its particularities, is closer to the South American model than the Central American one, while El Salvador, despite having a nearly 40% Evangelical

population, has always had its own profile, a little removed from the Central American model, which is why it chose a Muslim President in the first round in February 2019.

1. Central American model: This is closest to the ‘confessional party’ and ‘Evangelical front’ we have discussed. Compared to the other countries of the continent, although not in all aspects or in all cases, the Central Americans are closest to creating an electoral unity (purely time-bond) around a proposal, candidacy or party. In fact, it is the only region that has succeeded in having clearly Evangelical Presidents (like Guatemala on three occasions: 1982, 1991 and 2016) and a candidate who won on the first round and came close to winning the second round with a preponderantly religious discourse (Costa Rica in 2018).⁷⁵

Although not the only reason, a large part of this Central American phenomenological differentiation is due to the high percentage of Evangelicals in the region: it already exceeds 40% in four countries (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala), which is the highest anywhere on the continent, and it is over 20% in two of the remaining countries. For this reason, it would not be surprising if Evangelicals consolidate themselves as the new religious majority in this region in the coming years. In other words, Catholicism could cease to hold the historical monopoly of faith it has enjoyed for centuries, becoming instead a religious minority.

It is interesting to see that not only these countries’ Evangelicals have a strong religious commitment; so do the Catholics, with a large number of the faithful committed to a Charismatic line very similar to the Pentecostal one. This has meant that in these countries more than in others, Catholics and Evangelicals join together more easily around a political agenda centered on pro-life and pro-family morals, guided by Evangelical leaders in media terms, since ‘political Evangelicals’ have so far been better than Catholics at channeling these preferences electorally.⁷⁶

75 This does not mean we are necessarily accepting the existence of a “confessional vote.” In Guatemala, for example, despite the three Evangelical Presidents it has had in recent decades, there is no consensus to confirm that they won the elections with a confessional vote by the Evangelicals (Dary, 2018).

76 In the Catholic case, loyal to its “ecclesial structure,” they have been manifested mainly through the discourse of the bishops, while for the Evangelicals, faithful to their “ecclesial strategy,” it has been focused above all on grassroots demonstrations of their faithful in the streets, and with much more media repercussions.

This does not mean that the emergence of Evangelical candidates who could take power is clearly glimpsed in all these Central American countries. It just suggests that it is more likely that this leap could be taken here than in other regions of the continent, among other reasons due to the high number of their faithful. In El Salvador, for example, while there is a very high index of Evangelical population (about to overtake the Catholics), there has not been any evidence so far of this possible Evangelical electoral force, perhaps due to the historical existence of a functional two-party system. But now that it has been shattered by Bukele's victory, there is no way around the fact that the Christian churches (both Catholic and Evangelical) are the institutions that enjoy the greatest credibility in that country. After what happened in Costa Rica in February 2018, no analyst is willing to discard any possibility since no one would have predicted that an Evangelical candidate with a strictly religious-judgment laden agenda could have won a first-round vote in that country—the only confessional State on the continent, historically the most stable democracy in the region, with a political system until recently bipartisan and with a low level of Evangelism. For its part, Panama is Central America's least Evangelical country (with only 20%) and has remained predominantly Catholic. Despite that, however, the Evangelicals, with a very low social and political profile, came into the limelight in 2016, around the Sex Education in Schools bill, which resulted in them consolidating as a new political actor.

Said another way, it can be shown that in the Central American countries, more than in other regions of the continent, a single detonator is enough to shake up the judgment-laden Christian substrata (both Evangelical and Catholic) and transfer it to the political sphere, whether in the form of an Evangelical party front, faction or pressure group. This was even true in Central America's least Evangelical countries (in Costa Rica the detonator was the Consultative Opinion OC-24/17 issued by the Human Rights Court in 2017; and in Panama it was the sex education law in 2016).

Moreover, while the 'Central American model' has not manifested itself in all countries equally, it remains highly probable that it could also appear in its variant of a confessional vote or of a political pressure group around a specific issue, particularly the 'moral agenda' ones that they define as pro-life and pro-family. Whichever form it takes, there are more probabilities that we will have a new Evangelical President in Central America in the coming years, particularly given the rejection of the 'gender ideology,' which brings together Evangelicals from the majority of denominations and Catholics from the most traditional line.

2. South American model: It is closest to the 'Evangelical faction' and to a lesser degree the 'Evangelical front.' Evangelical parties have not yet been able to consolidate themselves successfully in this region; all have failed to take power and most were stillborn. No Evangelical presidential candidate has run so far that even came close to winning. For that reason, seeing that they didn't have the numbers of voters that Central America has, and confirming in practice that there is no such thing as a confessional vote, the South American 'political Evangelicals' opted to participate in different strong political parties to at least achieve some representation in their country's parliament, although they always longed to have their own 'confessional party.'

In fact, the Evangelicals who made it into the legislative branch did not always do so through their own votes, but rather by hitching themselves to the bandwagon of winning parties. Let's not forget that under the modality of an 'Evangelical faction' there are Evangelical candidates in virtually all of the parties that run in the electoral race. The winning parties are thus the ones that place Evangelicals among their candidates, which gives them value added for doing so but isn't enough by itself to get them elected. A particular case is Colombia's, for example, which once the electoral law was changed in 1991 reducing the minimum number of votes required to form a political party, some candidates from mega-churches made it into the parliament. While this was more like the Brazilian model of the 'denominational vote' for official candidates, they were never close to winning a presidential election. The same thing has happened in other countries of the continent when the electoral barriers were lowered.

In the majority of South American countries, Evangelical movements (often together with Catholics) have formed and consolidated a political 'pressure group' in defense of Christian values and against what they call the gender ideology. That, however, has not managed to empower them enough to become a central issue in the electoral campaigns. The reason, as we have noted, is the presence of ideologically more consolidated parties or the existence of functional two-party systems. In other words, unlike the Central American model, it is less probable in the South American countries that a religious value issue such as the moral agenda, for example, will take propriety among the electoral preferences and become the determining factor in a presidential election. For their part, countries such as Argentina and Chile, where an abortion law was passed for certain cases, shows us that moral agenda issues have a different impact than in the Central American countries. But in the

social sciences we speak more about probabilities than about possibilities, which will always be infinite.

The case of México is special, in that, while it borders geographically with Central America, it appears closer to the South American model—above all after the support that part of the Evangelical sector, specifically the Social Encounter Party (PES) gave López Obrador. Among other motives, this is due to the country's particular religious history of early secularism and to the low percentage of Evangelical population compared to its Central American neighbors. The development of these relatively new formal religious alliances, above all since the Mexican State decided to establish diplomatic relation with the Vatican State (1991) and now with these Evangelical party associations affiliated with the governing party (2018) allows us to glimpse that in the Mexican case, and not only in it, political-religious relations are now imposing themselves more pragmatically, beyond Church-State relations.

3. Brazilian model: This is a mixed model, between the 'confessional party' and 'Evangelical faction' types. As is known, Evangelical churches participate actively in Brazilian politics. They have 'official candidates' and political groups in the 'confessional party' style, like the Brazilian Republican Party to which the IURD belongs, and the slogan "brothers vote for brothers" has been popularized. Nonetheless, we do not believe these will end up being genuine 'confessional parties,' but rather 'denominational parties,' as the vote is more the latter than the former. Said another way, they do not represent all Evangelicals nor do they attempt to do so. They only represent the members of their concrete denomination or mega-church, as they have enough votes that way to place their 'official candidates' in the parliament.⁷⁷

We can thus verify in Brazil—as in all countries of the region—a fractioning of the Evangelical denominations and 'denominational parties,' which permits us to continue affirming that there is no 'confessional vote.' Even in the best of cases there is a 'denominational vote,' restricted to a given church or denomination due to the inveterate atomizing DNA.

As we have seen, the breaking point of the electoral success of Brazilian Evangelicals—specifically the Pentecostals (as affirmed by Lacerda and Brasiliense, 2018)—occurred just when these Pentecostal denominations

⁷⁷ This particular figure is possible in a country like Brazil, where the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), for example has more than 2 million faithful and the Assemblies of God (AD) has more than 12 million.

decided to opt for the corporative representation model and support ‘official candidates’ to avoid the electoral dispersion of their aligned flock. This strategic measure has permitted them to place a significant number of congressional representatives since 1986, the year Brazil’s Pentecostal churches decided to start formally participating in party politics. Nonetheless, due to their ecclesial fractioning and to the personalism of their religious leaders, they have yet to achieve the unification of all Brazilian Evangelicals in a single political party, much less their support for a single Evangelical candidate.⁷⁸ In this regard, the election of Bolsonaro in 2018 was a parenthesis in this tradition, as a *de facto* informal Evangelical front was formed to support Bolsonaro in the second electoral round, even though he was not an official candidate nor did he even belong to any Evangelical church.

In fact, if all Evangelicals were to unite religiously and politically they would be a major Brazilian political party, and if all Evangelical parliamentarians united they would be a third political force in Brazil’s Congress. But beyond thinking of these futurables, there does exist what is called the ‘Evangelical bench,’ made up of Evangelical representatives of different parties and it is, finally, the circumstantial union of Evangelical congresspeople that succeeds in grouping together around specific issues of a religious, moral, legal or public policy stripe. This Evangelical bench comes together artificially on behalf of its particular interests, but outside of that its members continue to maintain their denominational and party identity as a priority. In this regard, there is no way one could speak of a unitary vote or strategic plan that would unify Brazil’s Evangelical congressional representatives permanently. This means the ‘Evangelical bench’ is above all a pragmatic way to get immediate results and achieve political agreements on behalf of their interests, often not very saintly ones, as several of the Evangelical legislators have been accused of acts of corruption. They have even succeeded in uniting with other Catholic parliamentarians at times to expand their radius of action within the parliament.

An important issue to stress is the ‘moral agenda,’ which in the Brazilian Evangelical movement in general is a very strong point of religious and social thought, militancy and cohesion. Nonetheless, it does not reach the same weight of ‘political pressure’ it has in Central America, although it does have

78 This is why the self-styled “bishop” Edir Macedo constantly alludes within his “Plan of Power,” to the unity of all the people chosen by God, which could be more than 40 million Evangelicals in Brazil, according to the 2010 census. With this he seeks, illusorily, to transcend his 2 million affiliates (voters of the “church” he founded) and get the vote of all Brazilian Evangelicals beyond their denominations; which of course he has not managed to do.

greater preponderance than in the average of South American countries. Even in this aspect Brazil continues to be a hybrid between the Central and South American models. For that reason it is a model of its own. In the case of Bolsonaro's election, for example, it is unquestionable that this 'moral agenda' played an important role in the Evangelicals' decision. Although the three main topics the candidates debated during the campaign were the economic crisis, citizen security and the struggle against corruption, there is no doubt that there were two other topics in the background: opposition to the Workers' Party and the 'moral agenda', which played a more decisive role than the rational and public issues of the political debate.

On the other hand, although Brazil takes second place to the Central American countries with respect to 'religious success,' it is the Latin American country with the greatest political success. But we have to be very objective in delimiting the genuine scope of that 'success.' As we have already indicated, there is a political under-representation of Evangelicals in the region, although if they were to unite, they would make up an undeniable force in any electoral process. If we analyze Brazil's electoral process in 2014, we see that the Evangelicals obtained the best results up to that moment: they won 67 of 415 seats in the federal House of Representatives (only 13%) and 75 out of 1,059 seats in the state Legislative Assemblies (only 7%). In addition, they won 3 senators out of 81 (only 4%) and no governor in any of the 27 states of the country. In other words, even though by that year they were already approximately 25% of the population, they were only able to get 13% in the federal elections, 7% in the state ones and 4% in the Senate. In the 2018 elections, things improved a little for the Evangelicals, above all given the sweep by Bolsonaro, but they still did not get great percentages, taking into account that they by now make up nearly a third of the Brazilian population. By that year, being approximately 32% of the population, they got 82 out of 513 seats in the House of Representatives (only 16% of its members) and increased to 9 members in the Senate. But as we have already indicated, the percentage of representatives in the legislative chambers is not the only criterion for measuring the Evangelicals' impact in a country.

In fact, these figures reflect a good performance compared to the previous campaigns, but not necessarily a stunning success in accord with their expectations. In addition, the confirmed organizational fractioning of the Evangelicals in that country becomes even stronger when they get into the political arena. For that reason we have parliamentarians within the so-called 'Evangelical bench' from 26 different Evangelical denominations belonging

to 22 distinct political parties, which denotes an immense denominational and political atomization. It should be added that the denominations with the greatest number of representatives are the Assemblies of God, the Baptist Church, the IURD and the Presbyterian Church.

In conclusion, in the country with the most Catholics in the world and the most Evangelicals in all of Latin America, the slogan “brothers vote for brothers” is widely disseminated, ‘confessional parties’ or at least ‘denominational parties’ exist, there is supposedly a ‘confessional vote’ and Evangelicals have obtained the greatest ‘political success’ on the continent, we can prove that the concrete results do not yet reflect the great social and political potential Evangelicals have. Even less do they have a religious or electoral unity. But we could say the same of the 60% Catholics in Brazil, a great ‘sleeping lion’ that has yet to awaken. In this context, it seems that the ‘crosscutting agendas’—such as the ‘moral’ one—continue to be the only alternative that could move the Catholic and Evangelical institutional machinery into action—above parties or candidates—and mobilize that Christian substrata that still underlies the Latin American culture.

In summary, if we analyze these three models, we can see that while they correspond to a single Latin American political religious phenomenon, we find some particular sub-regional features. In fact, we could find some peculiarities of each country within the different sub-regions. The ‘*Central American model*’ is characterized by its high Evangelical percentage that will exceed the Catholics in the coming years. It is also where we find a greater religious commitment by both Evangelicals and Catholics; for that reason we believe the ‘moral agenda’ could be the detonator of a ‘values-based vote’ that tips the electoral scale, as happened in the first round in Costa Rica in 2018. The ‘*Central American model*’ describes some plural countries, with half of the Evangelical community there is in Central America, where the religious discourse, although relevant in legislative races, does not become the decisive element in a presidential election. The ‘*Brazilian model*’ is the one that presents the greatest complexity, with a percentage of Evangelical population halfway between the Central American one and the South American one, but with an unusual political confluence on the continent. The breaking point is the open participation of Evangelical churches in politics, with parties and official or unofficial candidates that represent them in the electoral races. It is definitively the country with the greatest religious impact on politics, whether through votes, the number of representatives or the effectiveness of its ‘Evangelical bench,’ or its capacity to veto laws or determine biblical policies on education

issues. In fact, it is in Brazil that the Evangelicals have greater participation and political experience, with more sustained results than in the rest of the region. That is why we believe that the new 'Brazilian model,' which is reaching a first stage of consolidation with Bolsonaro, could politically influence the other countries of Latin America. In this regard, it is necessary to visualize to what point and what degree this repercussion could be reproduced. Certainly the Evangelicals' political influence in Brazil did not begin with Bolsonaro and will certainly not end with him, but it does represent an important and significant stage in this planned advance, which is being observed very closely by the region's other countries.

4.2. The new political strategy: from "confessional parties" to "crosscutting agendas"

An in-depth analysis of the region, from the most ethnographic to the most comprehensive, allows us to point out the great novelty of these last years regarding Evangelicals' political participation in Latin America: the classic tripartite phenomenology (Evangelical party, front and faction) centered on electoral processes, formal parties and official candidates. It is now sharing spaces with new forms of organization of a 'pressure group' nature, focused on crosscutting thematic proposals converted into "political agendas," although there is not always much that is political about them. In fact, what is predominating on the continent today is the pro-life and pro-family 'moral agenda.' It appears to be the only Evangelical political agenda capable of temporally and electorally pulling together the majority of Latin American Evangelicals... and also Catholics.

We can affirm that the neo-Pentecostal proposals have now become, in practice, transdenominational and even transconfessional. In other words, their religious political proposals are very attractive and are electorally winning over many Evangelicals beyond the denomination to which they belong. This is why, although the neo-Pentecostal communities are a numerical minority in the majority of the continent's countries, they have been able to ideologically and electorally reach a far greater number than their own congregation. Even transcending their own confessions, they have been able to attract many Catholics who would have no interest in participating in Evangelical religious services, but would vote for candidates that fight for their own moral convictions in the political spheres beyond their denomination or church, as has happened in some countries.

It is thus worth asking if instead of speaking of a “confessional” or “denominational” vote, we should be referring to a “values-based vote” that goes beyond denominations, confessions or churches, and also beyond political parties. In other words, the “religious fluidity” we have been observing for more than two decades appears to be migrating from the strictly political sphere into a sort of “religious-electoral fluidity.” This involves traditional Evangelicals and Pentecostals who vote for neo-Pentecostal leaders, Catholics committed to their own church who end up voting for the most radical wing of the Evangelical movement, and believers without religious affiliation who elect more religious candidates because they disagree with the gender equality focus. This novelty, in both the religious and political spheres, although contradictory in the realm of religious ideas, is less so when it has to do with personal values-based options or political interests. In sum, there are unexpected things that only politics and religion can achieve.

Another practical consequence of the empowering of the crosscutting agendas on the formal Evangelical confessional political organizations is that the “pressure groups” have been taking the lead over parties and candidates, without getting to the point of displacing or disconnecting from them. It is rather a anew strategy of empowerment. In other words, the para-ecclesiastic or meta-party organizations—like some Evangelical pressure groups—now neither need nor want institutional structures, among other things to avoid having to be accountable for their actions or be supervised by some electoral authority. Only when they feel strong and with a certain media impact, which could be very transitory and relative, do they get enthusiastic about forming their own political movement or accepting the call from strong parties to participate in their ranks. This does not, however, mean leaving their own pressure platforms. Finally, these pressure groups, free of party structures and of submission to political leaders, can move from one party to another without much problem in each election (as usually happens in fact) and in the end stay in the arena with their own ‘crosscutting agendas.’

4.3. The new religious look of the political parties

We are currently seeing that the different political forces in the region’s countries are getting more and more interested in the so-called “Evangelical vote.” Many political parties, including some of a Catholic or Social Christian inspiration, want to take advantage of that electoral grab bag with the ingenious idea that Evangelical churches are a hierarchized bloc like the Catholic Church and that the vote within this opposed bloc is confessional and easily manipulable.

The political parties and presidential candidates, for example, no longer allude directly to Catholics or Evangelicals, but to all “Christians.” By so doing, they are trying to avoid nomenclatures to keep from discriminating against anybody, and at the same time include all citizens who have some Christian substratum—be it cultural, confessional, practicing or militant. With that catchall effort, they include the vast majority of our continent. Along this same line, candidates seek to use a language that is closer to the religious sensibilities of their possible voters: speeches, gestures, gatherings, visits, messages, words, approaches, photos, etc., that make the candidate appear one of them. Of course, in the end, it isn’t hard to recognize a mere veneer of religiosity and even of morality. Said another way, while all politicians formally accept the separation of Church and State, it doesn’t mean they won’t make use of the relationship between religion and politics in their electoral intention. A very particular case was that of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (whose wife is Pentecostal, and who was himself re-baptized in the Río Jordan in May 2016 by Pastor Everaldo). The fact is, however, that Bolsonaro never presented himself as Evangelical, however much many of them saw him as “God’s chosen one.” Rather, he presented himself with a conservative pro-life and pro-family Christian discourse. The second part of his electoral slogan even alluded to a strong religious conviction: “Brazil above all and God above everyone,” which left each person to see him as part of his/her own religious community; the Catholics thought he was Catholic and the Evangelicals thought he was Evangelical.

From a political perspective, the Catholic Church has the great advantage of a longer and more illustrious history, tradition and stability, a hierarchy and an indisputable institutional unity, not to mention a Vatican State with an experienced diplomatic apparatus and a long tradition of international negotiations. For their part, the Evangelical churches have a growing number of faithful, are more conservative and even “officialist” and have a more religiously committed congregation. But at the end of the day, what weighs more for pragmatic politicians is the possibility of endorsing religious militancy in the ballot boxes. In this regard, politicians, independent of their own confessionality, value the Catholic Church more for its institutionality and experience than for its parish (possible voters), as it is not perceived that the Catholic hierarchy can electorally influence its faithful. Meanwhile, they value Evangelicals not for their institutionality and unity (neither of which they have), but for the possibility of converting their symbolic capital into electoral capital, as they perceive that their leaders are closer to and have more influence (not

only religious) on their flock. Moreover, seeing the continental statistics of Evangelical growth, it is not a percentage of the population that politicians of any stripe would sneer at.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that in recent decades, the Evangelicals have already won a space in the political sphere, not just the religious or social one. No one can deny that in all countries of the continent, the Church-State relationship⁷⁹ no longer involves just the Roman Catholic Church, but the Evangelicals as well. The extinction of the religious monopoly also put an end to the monopoly of relations with the State, in which the Catholic Church was the only “legitimate and strategic partner.” But beyond the formal link that could exist in some of our countries with Evangelical churches, these close relations show up in a factual way in the entire region, through more or less informal linkages with the growing Evangelical community, their religious leaders and their political leaders.

The current political panorama certainly marks a bolder and more protagonist path on which Evangelicals throughout the region could embark. Facts such as the majority support of conservative Evangelicals for Donald Trump in the United States, the Referendum for the Peace Accord in Colombia (which the pro-government side lost because it did not know how to communicate its message well to the Evangelical community), the election as mayor of Río de Janeiro of a bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) with more than 60% of the votes, the election of Bolsonaro himself, and the victory of an Evangelical legislator in the first presidential voting round in Costa Rica, are all manifestations of a new scenario in the evident and now relevant electoral participation of Evangelicals all over the continent. But it must also be taken into account, as we have mentioned previously, that the relationship between the percentage of the Evangelical population and the percentage of

79 Paul Freston makes an interesting distinction between the religion-political relationship (as something natural and positive) and the Church-State relationship: “The State must be non-confessional. It was precisely that perception by some of the first Protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries that initiated the separation between the Church and the State. With theological underpinnings, they perceived that a *Christian vision of the State is that the State must not be ‘Christian,’* in the sense of defending and promoting a given church or religion. It is not the role of any State to dispense grace. Religion and politics, meanwhile, can be mixed. A person can be inspired by his/her religious faith and go into politics to defend certain proposals. Confessional politics yes; confessional State no” (Freston, 2006, p. 10). We agree with the non-confessionality of the State, but the ‘confessionality of politics’ seems risky to us, which is why we have differentiated ‘Evangelical politicians’ from ‘political Evangelicals.’

Evangelical votes does not necessarily follow a direct or linear correlation. In other words, it is not so certain that if a country has a given Evangelical population it will get that same percentage of votes for President, congressional representatives or local governments. Neither the logic of electoral norms nor the political reality of our countries sustains the incorrect idea that political inclinations follow religious adhesions to the letter.

In summary, independent of the fact that Evangelicals have not been able to achieve an ecclesial and political unity, it is the case that all political parties now want to take advantage of that atomization to take some significant representatives of the Evangelical communities into their ranks, believing that by so doing they will win the electoral sympathies of all Evangelicals. The paradox is that many politicians are trying to take advantage of the 'captive vote' of Evangelicals without realizing that there is no institutional, much less ideological unity within the Evangelical movement, nor is there an unconditional unitary vote. In sum, there is no 'captive Evangelical vote' in the sense in which it is commonly believed.

Conclusions

At the turn of the 21st Century, the renovated Evangelicals—now with an evident neo-Pentecostal spirit, airs of the ‘theology of prosperity’ (or ‘ideology of prosperity’), reconstructionist pretensions and a recent entry into the middle and upper classes—seem to be the new Latin American face and new social and political actors of the continental Evangelical movement. They have thrown off the initial 19th-Century political liberalism and the rooted apoliticism, anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism of the mid-20th Century. They have also tossed aside the stereotyped “garage churches” and “refuges of the masses” to acquire more power each day in huge churches of prosperous congregations, but without losing their seminal bastions in the grassroots sectors. As can be seen, the Evangelicals have come to stay, stayed to grow, and grew to conquer. But that conquest has not been restricted just to the religious sphere, but has extended also to the social and political spheres.

This leads us to reflect on the current role of Catholics and Social Christian (or Christian Democratic) parties of a Catholic origin in our continent. Do they perhaps not perceive in themselves the “Christian” stamp in their proposals? Or was the name “Christian” was too big for them so the “new Christians” (Evangelicals) had to come to fill the vacuum? Let’s remember that the major Latin American religious transformation in recent decades has not been the growth of non-believers or of secularism, as in Europe, but the switch from a traditional Catholic Christianity to a militant Evangelical Christianity. This confirms that our continent remains mainly Christian, since almost 90% of Latin Americans still call themselves Christian (although with some pockets of

religious disaffiliation). Furthermore, although the ecclesial commitment of the Evangelicals is much greater than that of the average Catholic, this factor does not necessarily imply that the latter do not still hold to the fundamental Christian values in favor of life and family, and as such support the Evangelical “political agenda.”

In this line, we must recall that while we currently have Evangelicals of second, third and fourth generations, the majority of those in Latin America are neo-converts; i.e. they were once Catholics. They decided to switch to Evangelicalism and thus have a greater commitment to their church. The majority of Catholics, in contrast, were born Catholics and belong to their church because they were baptized, formed and educated in it. They often even follow Catholicism by custom, as is the case of nominal, traditional, cultural, devotional, sociological Catholics and the like. But despite a lesser commitment of the majority of Catholics to their church, we must recognize the existence of a Catholic (at least Christian) substratum in the great majority of our societies (to a lesser degree in the Southern Cone). This religious sentiment comes to flower on special occasions, such as the visit of Pope Francis to Peru, for example, which brought millions of Peruvians into the streets, vastly exceeding their attendance at Sunday Mass. Another manifestation of the Christian substratum occurred in Costa Rica when the IACHR Consultative Opinion on egalitarian marriage was issued, taking Evangelical candidate Fabricio Alvarado from being favored by only 2% of voters to 25% voter intention in only two weeks. That was surely also the reason why sociologists cannot explain the dimensions achieved by the Catholic Church’s “March for life” or the Evangelical churches’ collective “Don’t mess with our children,” which finally succeeded in uniting in one mammoth grassroots demonstration of religious groups that never before had come even close to such a practical ecumenism. This must also be why “political Evangelicals” have virtually displaced “Evangelical politicians” in the electoral sphere and are the ones heading up the political protagonism of the growing Evangelical movement in Latin America.

Perhaps we are witnessing the religious crystallization of a continent that refuses to forget the most rooted Christian values that, while they do not show up in all spheres of daily life—it is enough to check out the levels of violence and corruption in our countries—they do flourish in special circumstances, such as those we have mentioned. And in the political sphere it is undebatable that religion is taking an unusual political leadership role and that religious discourses are beginning to determine public policies. We are thus verifying that the siren songs of some Latin American scholars, who dislocatedly always

look to Europe as their referent, were not heard by the Latin American majorities who are continuing their own development, just like all complex societies.

In this regard, we believe that the new (and renewed) phenomenon of religion and politics in Latin America—more than that of Church-State— is not going to incline only between confessional categories such as “Catholic or Evangelical,” but among different segmentations within each church. For example we have already seen that there are at least four features and stages within the Evangelical movement as well as diverse options also within the faithful of Latin American Catholicism. The non-existence of a “confessional vote” in Latin America, be it Evangelical or Catholic, and the political underrepresentation of Evangelicals confirms that there is no direct relation between religious confessionality and political (or electoral) option. In addition, we are seeing that issues such as the ‘moral agenda’ unite and congregate both Catholics and Evangelicals into single public proposals, although not attracting either all Catholics or all Evangelicals. We believe this will be the path the new political trends of the religious groups in the continent will take, segmented into a continuous process of fusion and fission, led “anonymously” by crosscutting agendas and pressure groups more than by formal political parties or religious leaders, although the way of making these proposals politically visible will be through them.

Finally, after analyzing what has happened in Latin America in recent decades, we would like to sum up the main theses of this book, which seek to outline the common elements of the majority of countries, without sidestepping the exceptions, particularly the Brazilian case:

1. Rather than speaking of a single “Evangelical Church” in Latin America, it is better to speak of “Evangelical churches” (in plural) which have historically passed through different moments, waves, accents or features: Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, etc.
2. Evangelicals share the same doctrinal base with Protestants. They are centered on Christ and the Bible, but their main characteristic is that they are “conversionists.” Evangelization is the essence of their Church and is not limited to a pastoral of maintenance; rather they are ‘mission churches’ (*ad intra* and *ad extra*).
3. While the first Protestant missionaries came to Latin America in the middle of the 19th Century, the great numerical Evangelical growth started in 1970, above all due to the Pentecostalization of their churches, fruit

of the expansion of *criollo* or national Pentecostalism (not of mission Pentecostalism).

4. In the second half of the 20th Century, a “Pentecostalization” was also produced in the Catholic Church. In fact, the most numerous apostolic movement is the “Catholic Charismatic Renovation”, which has opened the way for a “charismatization” of the Catholic liturgies and pastoral models. For this reason we can confirm that the spirituality most embraced in Latin America among both Catholics and Evangelicals is Charismatic or Pentecostal.
5. The “religious migration” phenomenon on the continent is reduced to a ‘Catholic migration’ to the Evangelical churches, which confirms that Latin America continues to be eminently Christian (approximately 90%). Nonetheless, the second fastest growing group is made up of those who say they have no religious affiliation.
6. Since the middle of the last century, the move from the ‘foreign-Protestant-missionary’ model of Evangelical leader to the ‘national-Evangelical-pastor’ model has consolidated, permitting greater participation by Evangelicals in local politics.
7. Evangelical confessional parties were formed in all countries of the continent in the 1980s, but all failed in their attempt to take power.
8. In the next decade, the majority of Evangelical churches began to shift from their historical *fuga mundi* to the conquest of the world; they no longer wondered whether to participate in politics, but how.
9. It has not been possible to empirically prove the existence of a “confessional vote” as a “captive vote,” that would lead Evangelicals to vote for Evangelical candidates only because they belong to the same religious confession. Nor has it been demonstrated that the religious factor is determinant in electoral races or that a significant difference exists between the vote of Evangelicals and that of the rest of the population, even in Guatemala, which has had three Evangelical Presidents. But there are indications to affirm that Brazil’s 2018 presidential elections marked an exception, or perhaps an inflection point, although Bolsonaro was not Evangelical.
10. There is a political underrepresentation of Evangelicals, meaning that the percentage of Evangelical confessionality of a country is not necessarily reflected in the voting urns or in the number of their representatives in

the legislative branch, much less in the executive branch. But this is not the only factor for measuring Evangelicals' political impact in each country.

11. The Evangelicals' ecclesial fragmentation is buttressed and accentuated when they get into the political sphere, among other reasons because of the Evangelical movement's institutional fissiparous vocation and endemic atomizing DNA, which make it possible for them to multiply and grow, but then impedes them from unifying. What works as a blessing for their numerical growth ends up a curse for their ecclesial (or political) unity: they grow and divide, divide and grow.
12. The only issue that can fleetingly bring together the great majority of Evangelicals (and also many Catholics) is the pro-life and pro-family 'moral agenda,' although not with the same force in all countries. For many decades, anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism constituted the unifying ideological agendas of Latin American Evangelicals; today they have been replaced by the moral agenda, which has also become their political agenda.
13. For now, Evangelicals have more electoral impact than political, as they have not been able to forge an Evangelical social thinking or a viable government plan for any country of the region. Nor do they present major technical cadres –only religious ones. In other words, they have "moralizers" but not "managers," and they run "pastors," not "politicians" as candidates. But in Brazil they have recently begun to test government proposals (beyond the typical offers of 'moralizing politics' and their diffuse 'moral agenda') and they are preparing comprehensive government plans and political formation schools.
14. For the most part, Evangelicals have supported maintaining the *status quo* and rightwing parties, but not in all places or at all times (let's remember the Peronist Pentecostals in Argentina). Although Evangelicals are still following their conservative moral and political tendency, the case of Mexico and the alliance of López Obrador (AMLO) with the Social Encounter party (PES), and that of Brazil, with the support for the Brazilian Left's Workers' Party (PT) some years ago, indicate to us that Evangelicals are very pragmatic (not to say opportunist) in politics.
15. Those currently taking the ideological and operational lead in the Evangelical political incursion are the neo-Pentecostals, with their 'theology

of prosperity' and 'reconstructionism.' Their new political strategies right now are 'crosscutting agendas' and 'pressure groups.'

16. In practice, 'political Evangelicals' have displaced 'Evangelical politicians' and are seeking to expand the religious militancy of their faithful into the political sphere and convert their religious capital into profitable political capital.
17. Historically, Evangelicals have had three forms of political participation: 'Evangelical parties,' 'Evangelical fronts' and 'Evangelical factions.' In fact, the Evangelical faction (running Evangelical candidates in different political parties) is the option that has given the best results without them having major qualms about moving from one party to the next in each election.
18. The majority of political parties in Latin America, including those of a Catholic inspiration, are currying the favor of the supposed 'Evangelical vote,' even going so far as to have some pastors on their parliamentary slates.
19. The incursions of the 'moral agenda' as a political agenda does better in countries in which there are no organizationally and ideologically solid parties and no functional two-party system.
20. Within Latin America's heterogeneous phenomenology, we can find up to three ideal regional types: the 'Central American model' (the majority of countries with more than 40% Evangelical population and a strong influx of the 'moral agenda'), the 'South American' model (15-20% Evangelical population but without the 'moral agenda' hogging the political agenda), and the 'Brazilian model' (30% Evangelicals, but with 'denominational parties' and 'official candidacies').
21. 'Church-State relations'—in which the only church was the Catholic one—are currently coexisting with the new relations between 'Religion and Politics,' a sphere in which the Evangelicals are gaining protagonism.
22. The incursion of 'political Evangelicals' responds more to a new logic of instrumental utilization of politics for religious ends than to the historical utilization of religion for political ends.
23. The Evangelical political movements or 'pressure groups' (centered on the 'moral agenda') are to a certain extent replacing the Social Christian parties of a Catholic origin in the capturing of Latin American votes with Christian principles.

24. In some countries where indications of an Evangelical party can be found, what exists in reality is a 'denominational party' more than a 'confessional party.' It doesn't seek to represent all Evangelicals, but only those of a particular mega-church or denomination, and its strategic goal (for now) is to get congressional representatives elected more than to win the presidency, as they verified that the latter was not as viable.
25. When the 'moral agenda' is accentuated in political proposals, one could speak more of a 'values-based vote' than a 'confessional vote,' which attracts a more conservative sector of Evangelicals and Catholics.

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Starting from the back left: Andrés Hildebrandt (KAS Peru), Oscar Amat y León, Jose Mario Brasiliense, Guillermo Sandoval, Hilario Wynarczyk, Álvaro Bermúdez, Fabio Lacerda, María Esperanza Adrianzén (Peruvian Ministry for Justice and Human Rights), César Zuñiga, Jose Luis Pérez Guadalupe, Sebastian Grundberger (Resident Representative of KAS Peru), Claire Nevache, Vicente Zeballos (Minister for Justice and Human Rights), Fernando Castañeda (Viceminister for Justice), Juan David Velasco Montoya and Claudia Dary. October 2018, Lima, Peru.

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LIMA - PERÚ

One of the most noticeable changes in Latin America during recent decades has been the rise of the Evangelical churches from a minority to a powerful factor. This applies not only to their cultural and social role but increasingly also to their involvement in politics. While this development has been evident to observers for quite a while, it especially caught the world's attention in 2018 when an Evangelical pastor, Fabricio Alvarado, won the first round of the presidential elections in Costa Rica and — even more so — when Jair Bolsonaro became President of Brazil relying heavily on his close ties to the country's main Evangelical leaders.

Touching on ten country cases, José Luis Pérez Guadalupe analyzes the impact of Evangelical churches and their leaders in the political sphere across the region. In particular, he examines their political strategies, evaluates the ambiguous success of Evangelical political parties and draws conclusions about patterns of Evangelical voting behavior. Distinguishing between three models of Evangelical political participation, the Central American, South American and Brazilian, the author counters simplifications and generalizations about monolithic patterns of political action by Evangelicals. The book also seeks to contribute to the debate about the Catholic Church's loss of hegemony, Latin America's alleged secularization, a re-sacralization of the political sphere and the emergence of more diverse societies on a religious, social and political level.