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Evangelicals and politics in Brazil: The relevance of religious change in Latin America

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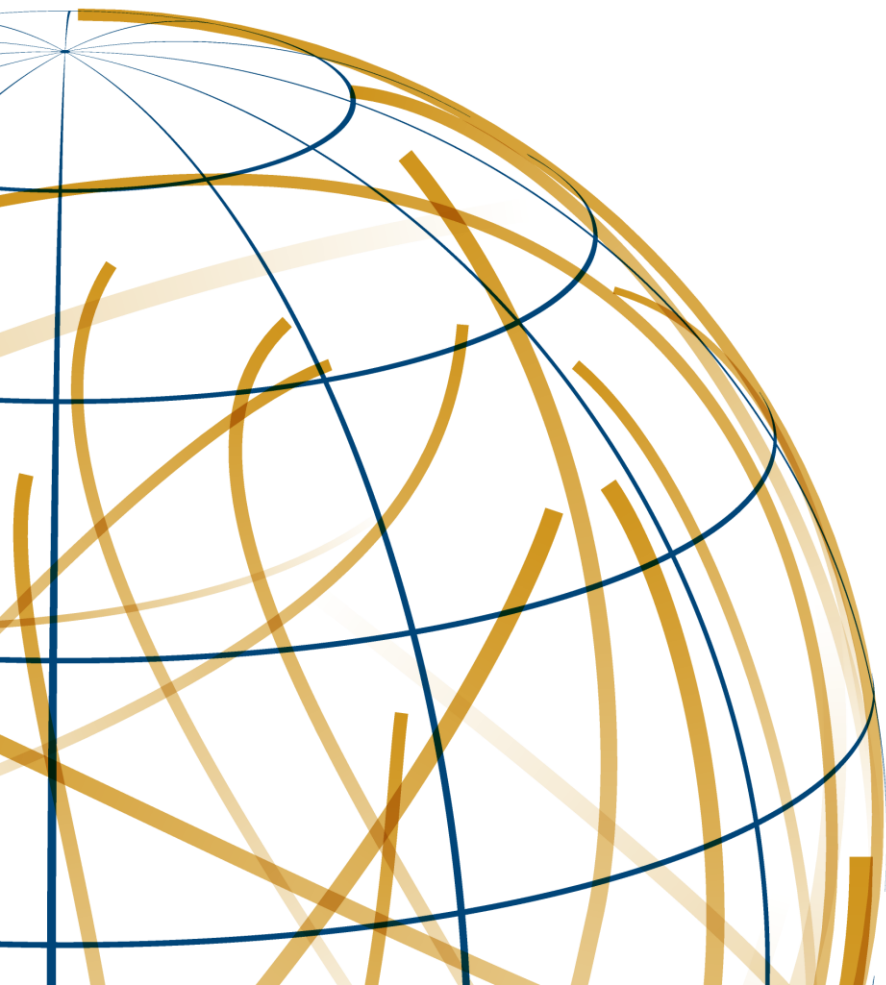
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SWP Research Paper

Claudia Zilla

Evangelicals and Politics in Brazil

The Relevance of Religious Change in Latin America



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
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- Since the 1970s a religious change has occurred in Latin America. As a proportion of the population, Catholics have greatly diminished, and Evangelicals rapidly increased. These developments are causally linked.
- In the course of this demographic transformation, the Catholic Church has lost its special position in society and its privileged access to politics. It has been replaced by a large number of diverse and autonomous Evangelical churches, above all the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal.
- The substantial social weight of the Evangelical churches is connected, inter alia, to their importance as “problem solvers” in precarious sections of society. Faith communities are increasingly extending this commitment into the political sphere.
- The increasing social relevance and political power of the Evangelical churches has come to prominence in a particularly striking way in Brazil. Since 1 January 2019, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a former soldier who was baptised in the Jordan by an Evangelical pastor, has been heading its government.

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Table of Contents

5	Issues and Recommendations
7	The Relationship between Religion and Politics
9	Religious Change in Latin America
9	Evangelicalism
10	The Decreasing Dominance of the Catholic Church
12	Evangelical Diversity
15	The Evangelicals' Growing Political Engagement
17	The Role of Evangelicals in Brazil
17	Social Relevance
20	Political Relevance
29	Conclusion
31	Abbreviations

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Evangelicals and Politics in Brazil. The Relevance of Religious Change in Latin America

One of the most significant demographic transformations of the last decades in Latin America is the conversion of large parts of the population from Catholicism to different forms of Evangelicalism, in particular Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal (which represent the majority within this broad Protestant spectrum). Whereas in the 1970s, 92 per cent of Latin America's population were Catholic and only 4 per cent Protestant, by 2014 19 per cent of believers stated that they belonged to a Protestant church, while the proportion of Catholics had fallen to 69 per cent. In the Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, Protestants, most of them Evangelicals, now make up around 40 percent of the population.

What implications does this development have at the social and political-institutional levels? Is the increasing demographic weight of Evangelicals in Latin America accompanied by a rise in social relevance and political power? And if so, how is the interaction between Evangelical churches and politics structured? What role do Evangelical leaders and believers play in politics? How do they articulate religious and political interests? These questions are addressed by this research paper.

While the analysis of the demographic and social rise of Evangelicals refers to the whole of Latin America, the specific political implications of the development are examined in more detail in a national case study: Brazil. Although Brazil is still the country with the most Catholics in the world, it has also become the largest Pentecostal country. Whilst Evangelicals are still underrepresented in Brazilian politics compared to Catholics, their popularity has been growing – not least because of the inauguration on 1 January 2019 of the new President, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a military officer who was Evangelically baptised in the Jordan River.

This research paper comes to the following conclusions: the enormous expansion of Evangelicalism initially had an impact on the subjective individual attitudes of citizens. These included not only religious beliefs and values, but also their worldview. Within Evangelicalism, one's unique religious identity gen-

erally plays a much more central role than in Catholicism. Personal experiences of God and conscious decisions lead the followers of these churches to convert or profess their faith. Their Evangelical identity therefore shapes their way of life to a greater extent than Catholicism would.

The demographic rise of Evangelical churches is accompanied by an increasing loss of importance of the once-dominant Catholic Church. This changes the balance of power between the most important religious actors in civil society. However, this is a shift of power not only from one denomination to the other, but also from a strongly centralised church to an atomised landscape of myriad, extremely autonomous Evangelical faith communities, which cannot be addressed as a homogeneous whole. A further consequence of this development is that religious and actor pluralism are increasing in society. Evangelical churches dominate in urban centres as much as in slums and remote villages. They are present where the state is absent and the Catholic Church has left room. Large Evangelical churches operate like commercial enterprises. They have significant shares of the so-called gospel market and have extensive media networks.

In Brazil, the political arena is dominated by three Evangelical mega-churches: the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), the Assembleia de Deus (Assembly of God) and the Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular (Church of the Foursquare Gospel). While their members are involved in several parties, the Partido Republicano Brasileiro (Republican Party) and the Partido Social Cristão (Social Christian Party) are particularly influenced by these churches. Evangelicals are more strongly represented on the right and centre-right of the ideological spectrum, though not exclusively. The primary political strategy of major Evangelical churches is to assert their institutional interests, such as religious equality and equal treatment or access to media licenses, and to enforce a conservative moral agenda. Evangelical churches support candidates informally or officially, striving to have their interests represented in parliament by the cross-party Evangelical Parliamentary Front, and by their candidates appointed to the relevant committees in the National Congress.

Generally in Brazil, under the presidency of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, the demarcation between politics and religion has become more porous. Even as a presidential candidate, Bolsonaro benefited like no

other from the support of a large section of the Evangelical electorate; he continues to enjoy disproportionately high levels of approval in this social group. From a democratic-pluralist perspective, three developments in Brazil can be seen as problematic: first, the dominant Evangelical churches are committed to opposing the social and legal recognition of non-traditional ways of life. Second, the leading figures of the most influential mega-churches are becoming major economic players, who are also directly or indirectly politically active — a concentration of power across three social subsystems. Third, the ideological wing of Bolsonaro's cabinet is driven by the belief that it is engaged in a cultural struggle with forces that threaten Christianity.

A context-sensitive (development) policy focusing on Brazil and Latin America should take greater account of the relevance of Evangelicals in society and politics and include selected Evangelical actors as interlocutors, especially at the local level. The fact that societies in Germany and the European Union are strongly influenced by Christianity puts Europeans in a strong position to counteract in bilateral and bi-regional relations ideologies claiming that religions are competing and that Christianity is losing. Such ideas jeopardise social peace in Latin America.

The Relationship between Religion and Politics

Politics and religion have a complex and reciprocal relationship, even in secular states. By shaping the faith and lifestyle of their parishioners, who are also citizens of a state, religions influence society and politics. Every religion contains not only references to the supernatural or transcendental,¹ but also a certain world view. Religious faith offers world orientation and regulates the dialectical relationship between retreating from the world and involvement in the world. Such retreating from the world results from an occupation with transcendental questions (one's relation to God and the hereafter); an involvement in the world is already inherent in the fact that religions and their believers are present, and work, in the world.² Moreover, religions claim to help shape the secular in a normative way, be it in the private individual sphere or in the public collective sphere.

In this tense relationship between retreat from and involvement in the world, religions demand different degrees of world renunciation or engagement from their adherents,³ which in turn can evolve over time, as will be demonstrated here for Evangelicals. This requirement (world renunciation vs. world engage-

ment) is based on a certain ideal conception of society or the social system, and a specific attitude towards politics, at least implicitly. Furthermore, religions continually react to political events and developments, for example via theological divisions, doctrinal renewals and institutional adjustments.

Like politics, religion must be examined at the empirical level of practice to identify patterns of interaction.

Politics does not take place in a vacuum of values, but in a normative environment that is, inter alia, subject to the influence of religious convictions. Political decisions can be inspired more or less covertly by beliefs, or visibly collide with them. Furthermore, it is up to politics to regulate the status and scope of action of religious organisations via legislation. Of course, faith communities are not indifferent to this political task. In secular states with pluralistic societies, churches are recognised actors not only in the “market of spiritual goods” but also in the “market of values, ideas and interests”. A strict institutional separation between state and (dominant) religion exists virtually nowhere.⁴ The balance of power among the different faith communities in a country can differ in terms of material or immaterial resources (status, members, finances, and assertiveness). Each religion also defines its relationship to other faiths. Their relationship pattern can be, structurally as well as situationally, competitive or cooperative (e.g. ecumenism in Christianity). Moreover, religious communities and their organisations often take on social tasks. These have a political effect where church institutions are more noticeably present for citizens than state insti-

1 While Max Weber places the “relationship of men to supernatural forces” at the centre of his definition of religion, Peter Berger emphasises the transcendental dimension, Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University California Press, 1978), 424; Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

2 Max Weber believed that “[t]he most elementary forms of behaviour motivated by religious or magical factors are oriented to *this world*”, Weber, *Economy and Society* (see note 1), 399.

3 Bernd Oberdorfer, “Religiöser Einfluss in Staat und Gesellschaft. Eine Problemskizze”, in *Machtfaktor Religion. Formen religiöser Einflussnahme auf Politik und Gesellschaft*, ed. Bernd Oberdorfer and Peter Waldmann (Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 2012), 1 – 13 (7f.).

4 On this point, see Jonathan Fox, “Do Democracies Have Separation of Religion and State?” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 1 (March 2007), 1 – 25.

tutions, for instance in remote places — which is a very widespread situation in Latin America.

Like politics, religion must also be examined at the empirical level of practice, i.e. at the level of institutional functioning and the actions of specific actors to identify patterns of interaction. For example, even in the case of the distinctly hierarchical Catholic Church in two similarly developed South American countries such as Argentina and Chile, there are clear differences in the way the respective clergy dealt with the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s: supportively and cooperatively east of the Andes (Argentina), critically and in a spirit of some resistance west of the Andes (Chile).⁵ Such divergences show that “religion” is too broad, too heterogeneous a category to serve as a heuristic diagnostic instrument and lead to meaningful insights. The Catholic Church, for example, is home to such divergent currents as *Opus Dei* and liberation theology.⁶

One should be cautious about generalising the relationship between Evangelicals and politics in Latin America, since the national context is of great significance. Factors such as a specific sacred tradition, political culture or historical imprint influence the actors and institutions in the religious and public spheres of a country in different ways. Moreover, in each state, the two social subsystems of religion and politics are differently structured in legal, institutional and social terms. The Evangelical world consists of a diverse, highly fragmented landscape of churches that stand in stark contrast to the centralism of the Catholic Church, with its pontificate at the head and the Vatican as its headquarters. In order to examine the political activity of the Evangelicals, we must

therefore focus on a specific setting: in this paper, it will be Brazil. An analysis of the development of Evangelical churches in Latin America precedes and contextualises the case study.

5 Peter Waldmann, “Verbündeter oder Gegner der Herrschenden: Die Rolle der lateinamerikanischen Kirche unter der Militärdiktatur”, in *Machtfaktor Religion*, ed. Oberdorfer and Waldmann (see note 3), 233 – 52. The author identifies two main factors that explain the different patterns of action. In contrast to Argentina, the existence in Chile of a significant Protestant, especially Pentecostal, community (i.e. a pronounced religious pluralism) and a more deeply rooted democratic tradition (i.e. a political culture) would have prepared the ground for the Catholic Church to adopt a more critical and distanced attitude towards the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet — although the military dictatorship in Argentina was also much more repressive.

6 Nikolaus Werz, “Theologie der Befreiung in Lateinamerika”, in *Die Ambivalenz des Religiösen. Religionen als Friedensstifter und Gewalterzeuger*, ed. Bernd Oberdorfer and Peter Waldmann (Freiburg et al.: Rombach, 2008), 107 – 31.

Religious Change in Latin America

Evangelicalism is spreading rapidly in Latin America. Two additional developments accompany it. On the individual, subjective level, religiosity intensifies since, compared to Catholics, faith plays a much more significant role in the life of Evangelicals. On the level of society, the dominance of the Catholic Church decreases for two reasons: it loses members in favour of the Evangelical Churches; and the latter challenge its social and political influence. It is a relationship that can be starkly observed in Brazil, yet it also tends to apply to the entire region, with a few exceptions.

Evangelicalism

The term “Evangelical” (Spanish: *evangélica(o)*)⁷ is ambiguous and controversial. It refers to a heterogeneous group of largely independent Christian churches from the Protestant tradition attached to various national and regional associations. Nomenclatures and classifications within this religious universe are not strictly consistent. There are discrepancies in names between languages, adherents, religious

authorities and researchers.⁸ “Evangelical” is used here as an umbrella concept, which primarily includes Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches.⁹ Members of the historically Protestant churches such as Lutherans and Calvinists, i.e. the so-called immigration churches or transplant churches in Latin America, do not fall under this category. Rather “Evangelical” refers to a wide range of more recent and now Latin American churches, which exhibit many of the characteristics below.¹⁰

Evangelical churches assume a literal interpretation of the Bible. It contains, they believe, the healthy doctrine (*sana doctrina*) that glorifies Christ and heals sin. Huge importance is therefore attached to intensive study of the Bible. Evangelicals believe that God intervenes in daily life, for example by giving good health and material wealth to Christians with strong faith (Prosperity Gospel). The work of the Holy Spirit has a central importance in the teaching and faith practice of Evangelicals. Worship services often in-

⁷ In Spanish-speaking Latin America the term *evangélica(o)* has come to mean the religious communities discussed here. *Evangelicas*, however, not only includes the Pentecostal (*pentecostales*) and neo-Pentecostal (*neopentecostales*) communities, but also a number of other non-Catholic Christian denominations (on this term, see Fn. 25). It does not include the historically Protestant congregations of the Lutheran or Calvinist traditions, for these are usually referred to as *Protestant congregations*. *Evangelical*, on the other hand, is used more frequently to refer to the first missionaries who came from the USA. The term *Evangelista*, sometimes erroneously used in Latin America for members of Evangelical churches, should be reserved for Jesus’ four disciples, after whom the four gospels are named.

⁸ Heinrich Schäfer, “The Pentecostal Movement: Social Transformation and Religious Habitus”, in *What the World Believes: Analysis and Commentary on the Religion Monitor 2008*, ed. Bertelsmann Stiftung (Gütersloh, 2009), 533 – 85 (536f.).

⁹ The word *Pentecost* comes from the ancient Greek (Πεντηκοστή, *Pentēkostē*, in English: fiftieth day). In the New Testament it refers to a Jewish holiday on the 50th day after Easter Sunday. This became relevant for Christianity since on this day the Holy Spirit is said to have descended on the disciples of Jesus.

¹⁰ Paul Freston identifies four constant characteristics of Evangelical faith: “conversionism (emphasis on the need for change of life), activism (emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts), biblicism (a special importance attributed to the Bible, though not necessarily the fundamentalist shibboleth of ‘inerrancy’), and crucicentrism (emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross)”, Paul Freston, “Introduction”, in: idem, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1 – 7 (2).

clude manifestations that are considered “gifts from the Holy Spirit,” such as healing by laying on hands, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), exorcism, and receiving direct revelations from God. With regard to eschatology, i.e. the doctrine of the ultimate destiny of the individual human being and the world, Evangelicals are followers of millenarianism. They believe that the return of Jesus Christ (parousia) is imminent, and that he will establish a kingdom for a thousand years (a millennium) with Israel as the politically and religiously dominating world power, followed by the Last Judgment. While Pentecostal churches more strongly profess pre-millennialism (the belief that the present is pre-millennial), the neo-Pentecostal churches adhere to a post-Millennialism (the belief that the millennium has already begun).

Evangelicals usually oppose non-traditional lifestyles even more rigorously than Catholics.

While the Catholic Church in Latin America (with the Vatican’s support) takes a similarly conservative attitude to moral and social issues, most Evangelicals are even more rigorously opposed to abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, artificial means of birth control, sex outside marriage, and alcohol consumption. This difference remains even between Catholics and Evangelicals of similar piety levels.

In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2014, former Catholics most frequently gave the following reasons for their conversion to Evangelicalism:¹¹ the search for a personal connection to God (81%); the joy of worship in a new church (69%); the need to attach more importance to morality (60%); the desire to belong to a church that helps its members more (59%); and the personal approach of the new church (58%). Immaterial concerns thus clearly prevail over material interests. Qualitative studies show that Evangelical churches convey a sense of belonging and foster an emotional bond that neither the Catholic Church nor the state can offer today. People from precarious and vulnerable social conditions marked by alcoholism and domestic violence seem to succeed better in escaping the misery and

reintegrating the world of work after having joined an Evangelical church.¹² Faith communities thus lead them back to an orderly life. The view held by Pentecostal churches that material well-being is proof of God’s favour (Prosperity Gospel) here works as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It also refers to the community as a whole. In Evangelical circles, the principle that believers cede a tenth (tithe) or other portion of their personal income to the church plays a central role. This pecuniary charge is levied by church authorities based on the Old Testament, and paid with great discipline by the majority of the faithful, providing Evangelical churches and elites with significant resources.

Another characteristic of Evangelicals, especially the Neo-Pentecostals, is a strong sense of mission. Missionary work has gone through three different phases in the history of the (wider) Protestant movement in the region:¹³ (1) Evangelisation in the service of human development, aiming to individually and socially promote and recognise the most marginalised groups in society; (2) Evangelisation in the exclusively religious sense; (3) Evangelisation with the predominant intention of proselytising and promoting oneself, based on an understanding of the church that resembles corporate management. One speaks of the “second Evangelisation of Latin America” considering the numerical expansion of Evangelical congregations in the region and the centrality they attach to mission.

The Decreasing Dominance of the Catholic Church

Latin America is regarded as *the* Catholic region of the world. Its two most important colonial powers, Spain and Portugal, left the subcontinent with a socially,

11 Pew Research Center, *Religion in Latin America. Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region* (Washington, D.C., 13 November 2014), <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/11/Religion-in-Latin-America-11-12-PM-full-PDF.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2018).

12 See Schäfer, “The Pentecostal Movement” (see note 8), 546.

13 This division into three phases, in which missionary work or evangelisation has variously played a role, draws on José Luis Pérez Guadalupe, “¿Políticos Evangélicos o Evangélicos Políticos? Los Nuevos Modelos de Conquista Política de los Evangélicos en América Latina” [Evangelical politicians or political Evangelicals? The new models of political conquest of the Evangelicals in Latin America], in *Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina* [Evangelicals and power in Latin America], ed. José Luis Pérez Guadalupe and Sebastian Grundberger (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Sociales Cristianos [IESC] and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung [KAS], 2018), 11 – 106 (17).

economically and politically dominant religion. The variety of religious beliefs that shaped Latin America by its numerous indigenous peoples and the influence of African slaves has always been reflected in religious syncretism (e.g. Macumba in Brazil); immigrants of other denominations also contributed to a certain religious diversity. For a long time, however, this remained limited to migrant settlements and was relatively “invisible”, especially in wider society.

In the vast majority of Latin American countries, the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church still has a special status with a number of legal and financial advantages, such as a special mention in the Constitution, recognition as a public corporation (and not merely a civil corporation), tax benefits or financial contributions from the state. Among the prerogatives of the Catholic Church is a privileged access to politics, whether through formalised or tolerated influence on legislation, the official participation of the Church in political processes; or close links between the spiritual and political elite. The Catholic Church also has great mobilisation capital: it can host mega-events and bring people out onto the streets. Extensive intellectual resources and a pronounced attitude of involvement in the world allow it to articulate doctrinal positions — that is, teachings of the Church — in secular terms and in the form of ostensible sociological arguments, so that they can be presented as universalist and accessible. Finally, the Catholic Church has schools, universities, hospitals, social organisations, and political parties (such as Christian Democratic parties) that are more or less close to it, and members in all organs of state.¹⁴

The Catholic Church in Latin America has already experienced two caesuras, which were accompanied by a marked loss of power.

Such connections between church, state and society can seem natural and be taken for granted as long as the dominant religion is not challenged by secular social or political forces and/or other, worse-off or oppressed religious communities. In the long

epoch of its supremacy in the region, the Catholic Church has experienced at least two caesuras, accompanied by a marked loss of power.

The first upheaval was driven by secular forces. In the second half of the 19th century, the Catholic Church in Latin America had to accept a significant curtailment of its prerogatives. With the emergence of the bourgeoisie and associated liberal political forces, demands were voiced in the subcontinent’s states for a sharper separation of church and state and for a secularisation of the state, which resulted in a series of laicist reforms. For example, religious education was banned from state schools, civil marriage and birth registration were introduced, and much of the land and real estate of the Catholic Church was transferred to state ownership. By these measures the Church lost not only material resources, but significant political influence; nevertheless it maintained its supremacy over other faith communities.¹⁵

The second challenge to the Catholic Church’s dominance in Latin America is more social than political in nature, and manifests itself as “religious competitive pressure”.¹⁶ Since the 1950s, and even more so since the 1970s, it has been steadily losing members — though not due to an expansion of secularism.¹⁷ Rather, religious pluralism is growing, no longer because immigrants contribute to it, but undoubtedly from within Latin American societies. Evangelical churches in particular have gained followers over the years (and are subsumed hereinafter under the broader category “Protestant” due to the terminology used in the main data source). Only four countries in the region show deviating trends,¹⁸ on

¹⁵ Peter Waldmann, “Verbündeter oder Gegner der Herrschenden: Die Rolle der lateinamerikanischen Kirche unter der Militärdiktatur”, in *Machtfaktor Religion*, ed. Oberdorfer and Waldmann (see note 3), 233–52 (233).

¹⁶ The following paragraphs are based on an earlier publication by the author: Claudia Zilla, *Evangelicals and Politics in Latin America. Religious Switching and Its Growing Political Relevance*, SWP Comment 46/2018 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2018), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/evangelicals-and-politics-in-latin-america-1/> (accessed 20 December 2018).

¹⁷ Secularism comprises three categories of religious self-description: atheistic, agnostic and non-religious.

¹⁸ Data from Corporación Latinobarómetro, *El Papa Francisco y la religión en Chile y América Latina. Latinobarómetro 1995–2017* [Pope Francis and religion in Chile and Latin America] (Santiago de Chile, January 2018), <http://bit.ly/2NvpPYt> (accessed 20 December 2018).

¹⁴ On this point I follow the arguments concerning Argentina proposed by Hilario Wynarczyk, “Argentina: ¿Vino Nuevo en Odres Viejos? Evangélicos y Política” [Argentina: new wine in old hoses? Evangelicals and politics], in *Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina*, ed. Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger (see note 13), 107–40 (134ff.).

the one hand because Catholicism has been stable there, on the other due to growing secularism. In contrast with the rest of Latin America, the Catholic Church has not suffered (considerable) losses in Mexico and Paraguay. Respectively 80 and 89 percent of their population today describe themselves as Catholic, and only 5 percent as Protestant. Yet in Chile (38%) and Uruguay (41%), the number of atheists and agnostics has increased significantly.

Most Latin American countries, however, are experiencing religious transformation. The data point to a strong correlation between the declining number of those who describe themselves as Catholic and the increase in non-Catholic Christians, mainly Evangelicals. According to *Latinobarómetro 2018*, less than half the population of Honduras (37%), El Salvador (38%), Nicaragua (40%), Guatemala (43%) and the Dominican Republic (48%) consider themselves Catholic. These countries have the highest proportions of Protestant believers in Latin America, most of whom are Evangelicals: Honduras (39%), El Salvador (28%), Nicaragua (32 percent), Guatemala (41%), and the Dominican Republic (21%). In Brazil (54%), Panama (55%) and Costa Rica (57%) a majority of the population still sees itself as Catholic, but even there more than a quarter of the population self-describes as Protestant. Between 1995 and 2017, the proportion of Catholics in ten countries in the region fell by between 22 and 39 percentage points. The decline is particularly pronounced in Central America.

In the last 50 years, religious adherence has shifted towards Evangelical churches in most Latin American countries.

Thus in the last fifty years in the great majority of Latin American states, the numerical weight has shifted from the Catholic Church towards Evangelical churches.¹⁹ These developments are causally linked: surveys confirm that most Evangelicals formerly belonged to the historically dominant religion. They have changed from “passive Catholics” or “nominal believers”, who felt culturally connected with the

¹⁹ A further development in Latin America consists of the so-called “Evangelicalization of the Catholic Church”. This refers to the influence of the charismatic renewal movement within the Catholic Church, which has much in common with Pentecostalism. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal was officially recognised by the Vatican in 1973.

denomination but did not regularly participate in religious activities,²⁰ to “active Evangelicals”. This is partly because Evangelicalism is not a matter of birth, but a conscious decision by adults. The turn towards an Evangelical faith community goes hand in hand with a stronger commitment to religion and one’s own congregation.

In parallel with the expansion of religious pluralism in Latin America, religious acceptance also increased. Two factors have contributed to this. The Second Vatican Council (October 1962 – December 1965) under Pope John XXIII, which was intended to bring about a pastoral and ecumenical renewal of the Church, also moved the Catholic Church toward recognising religious freedom. Moreover, with the expansion of (collective) rights and the strengthening of political and social movements of indigenous communities in Latin America, tolerance for diverse worldviews increased.²¹ There is a certain “cultural continuity” between Latin American popular religiosity and Evangelicalism.²² Elements of popular religiosity are adopted and legitimised by the Evangelical churches.²³

Evangelical Diversity

The development of Latin America’s Protestant (in the broadest sense) churches can historically be divided into three phases, each of which is characterised by a different degree of retreating from the world or becoming involved in it, and thus also by a specific relationship to society and politics.²⁴

²⁰ R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits. Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

²¹ Juan G. Navarro Flórida, “Introducción” [Introduction], in *Estado, Derecho y Religión en América Latina* [State, law and religion in Latin America], coord. Juan G. Navarro Flórida (Buenos Aires et al.: Marcial Pons, 2008), 11 – 16.

²² Alejandro Frigerio, “La experiencia religiosa pentecostal”, *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 280 (March – April 2019): 47 – 54 (50).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ There are numerous models for systematising the history of Protestant and Evangelical churches in Latin America. While there is broad consensus on the major lines of development, the models differ in terms of phase classification, grouping and differentiation. The present study is based most closely on the systematisations of José Luis Pérez Guadalupe and Hilario Wynarczyk in *Evangelicos y Poder en*

The first missionaries of the traditional Protestant denominations²⁵ reached Latin America in the mid-19th century. They saw mission and educational opportunities as ways of influencing society. The ideological foundation for their social commitment was social ethics directed towards the common good. Church members were involved in evangelisation, education and social work. Numerous pastors and parishioners within these churches sympathised with liberation theology, the ecumenical movement and a contextualised interpretation of biblical statements that distances itself from a purely literal reception of Scripture. Politically mostly liberal, the early Protestants together with anti-clerical forces stood up for religious freedom, the separation of state and church, secular education and civil marriage. Even though this kind of alliance was successful, the political role of these first Protestants remained limited, as did their social role, since their evangelisation efforts hardly bore any fruit. Their impact remained limited to European immigration communities. Today the churches of this phase are a minority within the Protestant universe in Latin America. However, they have considerable intellectual capital and good connections to the middle and upper social strata.

In the early 20th century a new Protestant movement mainly consisting of missionaries from the USA reached the region. Comparative analyses describe it as conservative-biblical, anti-communist and anti-ecumenical.²⁶ The main focus of the mission work of this “Evangelical Protestantism” or “Evangelicalism” (Spanish: *Evangelicales*) was conversion, so as to help bring Jesus Christ into people’s lives and steadily grow the faith community. This Evangelicalism was based on a literal understanding of the Bible, which in the opinion of its representatives contained a plan of salvation, and called for a retreat from the corrupt world and thus also from politics; at most, individual participation was tolerated. Accordingly, social ethics here were less focused on society as a whole than on a believer’s immediate religious community. Evangelical Protestantism spread with great success among the

middle, and especially the lower social strata of Latin America. Supporters of this religious movement²⁷ tend to adopt conservative values and to be apologists for the prevailing social and political conditions.²⁸ It was this Protestant movement that finally helped the denomination *evangélica/o* (instead of *protestante*) to prevail in Latin America. In the context of this growing Evangelical presence, the role type of the national Evangelical pastor replaced the one of the foreign Protestant missionary.

Today’s Evangelicals, whose denominations form the largest group within Latin American Protestantism, can trace back to a movement which originated in the early 20th century in the USA and was brought into the region by charismatic leaders. Yet these churches are now clearly rooted in Latin American culture, and the denomination — though conservatively biblically oriented — can today no longer be called Evangelical (*evangelical*), but *evangélica*. The Evangelicals now predominant in Latin America have abandoned many previous stances (anti-communism, anti-ecumenism etc.). First and foremost they want to convert and bring about a renewal of Latin American religiosity. They have gained new supporters especially among the urban and rural lower social strata.

There may be several thousand different Evangelical churches in the same country.

Pentecostal social ethics were originally individualistic and focused on mission work. Their pre-Millennialism encouraged the acceptance of worldly injustice and personal suffering, since the imminent return of Christ would put an end to it. This resulted in a retreat from the world, a rejection of social and political commitment. However, this attitude changed from the 1980s onwards and gave way to an increasing involvement in the world, which is more typical for the post-Millennialism of the neo-Pentecostal church movement. The latter likewise assigns the highest prestige to mission for the purpose of conversion. The social ethics of the neo-Pentecostals, however, present themselves as political ethics, while

América Latina, ed. Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger (see note 13), 11–106 and 107–41.

25 “Denomination” denotes a separate religious community within a religion. For the faith community, its shared name (denomination) stands for its collective identity.

26 “Anti-ecumenical” describes an attitude that opposes the dialogue between different Christian faith orientations. In the Latin American context, it generally means anti-Catholic.

27 The term “movement” here generally refers to a cross-denominational type of religious community that has a number of relevant common characteristics and shapes a particular historical phase.

28 Later tendencies of Evangelical Protestantism have attached more importance to the “social question”.

charity work is considered of marginal importance. Believers are invited to get involved in society and politics. The neo-Pentecostal church movement finds special resonance in the middle and higher social strata of Latin America. Due to the success of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, these third-phase Evangelicals have become important minorities in many of the region's countries. In Central America, they have already exceeded the 40 percent mark.

From a perspective of the sociology of religion the Pentecostal movement has been described as a heterogeneous, fluid and highly dynamic social movement.²⁹ Several thousand different and independent Evangelical churches may exist within the same country, and may join together to form a variety of umbrella organisations — if at all. Even religious communities in remote places belonging to a particular Evangelical church (usually located in a big city) normally retain a high degree of autonomy. The relationship between the central and peripheral congregations is often based on a sort of franchising, whereby the rural branches are given the right to use the denomination.

Numerous Evangelical churches have emerged as a consequence of secessions that regroup around charismatic leaders. There is a general tendency to favour pastoral charisma over theological competence (there is hardly any formal training).³⁰ Occasionally churches have developed a few selection criteria and preparatory stages for qualification as pastors, but these are not systematically applied. Overall it is relatively easy for believers with leadership skills to legitimise themselves as pastors after a short “socialisation period” and subsequently establish their own congregation or even a new church. Progressing to such a position is also experienced and understood as a form of social advancement. Most pastors come from humble backgrounds. The pronounced tendency towards secession is also connected with the self-image of Evangelicals. They see themselves as a movement of revival and renewal of traditions. Therefore, after a certain period of institutionalisation, they often dare to break with existing churches, which further advances the process of fragmentation.³¹ This is why Evangelical churches with presences in many Latin American states tend to be the exception. However, even where Evangelical faith communities

count themselves as part of a larger international movement of foreign origin, the Latin American profile (and even more so the national profile) predominates in terms of personnel, structure and operation.

The work of the Evangelical churches is now shaping the lives of many people, be it in the city or in the countryside.

This Latin American or national profile manifests itself in many different ways. Public attention has been particularly drawn to Evangelical churches that, like corporations, offer services to various social milieus. More numerous, however, are the Evangelical churches whose activities focus on marginalised and disadvantaged social groups in poorer congregations. The work of Evangelical churches is now shaping the lives of many people, be it in the city or in the countryside. In urban centres, many mostly neo-Pentecostal Evangelical communities under the leadership of charismatic preachers have changed from “garage temples” to “mega-churches”, and settled in former theatres and new monumental buildings. In Santiago de Chile the first Evangelical University of the country is to be built opposite the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.³² In smaller towns and villages, simple shops (for example) are transformed into Evangelical temples in the evening or on weekends. Evangelical churches also have a strong presence in the slums (*villas*, *favelas*), where criminal gangs often hold sway. They tend to be the only providers of pastoral care and social and health assistance in the “underworlds” of Latin America, the prisons. Wherever human rights are massively violated and the state is either absent or only repressive, Evangelical pastors support the affected persons immaterially and materially.

29 Schäfer, “The Pentecostal Movement” (see note 8), 534.

30 Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits* (see note 20), 157.

31 Pérez Guadalupe, “¿Políticos Evangélicos o Evangélicos Políticos?” (see note 13).

32 This is an initiative of the Municipality of *Bendecidos para Bendecir*, Nicolás Massai and Francisco Velásquez, “Frente a frente: primera universidad evangélica se levanta mirando a la PUC” [Face to face: the first Evangelical University is built in front of the PUC], *diarioUchile*, 1 January 2018, <https://radio.uchile.cl/2018/01/01/frente-a-frente-primera-universidad-evangelica-se-levanta-mirando-a-la-puc/> (accessed 20 December 2018).

The Evangelicals' Growing Political Engagement

Religious pluralism now forms part of the social reality of Latin America; the Evangelical churches have an important role to play. Yet measured by their demographic weight, Evangelicals are (still) politically underrepresented in all Latin American countries. The beginnings of political participation by Evangelicals in Latin America go back to the 1980s, when many countries transitioned from a military dictatorship to a democratic regime. The Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Evangelicals only began to influence politics later, in the 1990s. The change in the Latin American Evangelicals' perspective on the world — from an initial retreat to a subsequent involvement that was once characteristic of traditional Protestantism — was due to several factors.³³

Evangelicals in Latin America now have their own specific history spanning several generations, and great demographic weight. This has boosted their self-confidence and strengthened their claim to shape politics. The established parties, on the other hand, have been highly discredited over poor governance and corruption scandals. This so-called crisis of representation has prepared the way for new actors, who draw their social cachet from professions outside politics, such as acting, sport, and journalism. In this context, some Evangelical pastors have also sought to make their way into politics, presenting themselves as successful religious leaders with a discourse of ethical renewal and moralising politics. In Latin America “the church” (of any denomination) is rather highly trusted by the population (63%), while the political parties (of any colour) are the least trusted (13%).³⁴

The turn towards politics, which more and more Evangelicals have pursued, also has a theological dimension, namely the turning away from pre-Millennialism and the shift to post-Millennialism, a process which many faith communities went through in the late 1980s. The post-Millennial doctrine goes hand in hand with a more optimistic view of the world, and a stronger reference to the present. Its followers believe

that they can actively participate in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth, including through political engagement.

The civic engagement of Evangelicals in Latin America has strongly increased.

Evangelical parties have been founded in many Latin American countries since the third wave of democratisation in the 1980s. However, most of them could not achieve political relevance. In that phase Evangelical churches also tried to achieve equal treatment with the Catholic Church in the sense of an expansion of religious freedom, the secularisation of the state, and the realisation of the democratic principle of equality. In many of the region's countries, Evangelicals have relied on public engagement and lobbying to advance relevant legislation and constitutional reforms.

Yet in the same epoch the first Evangelicals did take the levers of power. In the 1980s and 1990s, Guatemala had the first two Evangelical heads of state in Latin America: the dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt and the democratically elected Jorge Serrano Elías. Decades later, in January 2016, the Evangelical comedian Jimmy Morales took office as President of Guatemala. In Costa Rica, the Evangelical Fabricio Alvarado, a singer of Christian music and a member of the Protestant National Restoration Party (Restauración Nacional, RN), made it to the runoff for the presidency in 2018, which he lost to Carlos Alvarado. More successful were Jair Messias Bolsonaro in Brazil (of whom more below) and the Catholic and left-wing candidate of the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, MORENA), Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who received Evangelical support in the 2018 Mexican presidential elections: the Evangelical-Conservative Party of Social Encounter (Partido Encuentro Social, PES) supported his successful presidential candidacy.³⁵

The civic engagement of Evangelicals in Latin America has also increased considerably. Many of them regularly take part in protest rallies and go on the offensive against diversity politics, positive discrimination for minorities, and the extension of equal rights for women and for groups who follow non-

³³ For a detailed analysis of these facilitating factors, see Pérez Guadalupe, “¿Políticos Evangélicos o Evangélicos Políticos?” (see note 13), 34ff.

³⁴ Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Informe 2018* [Report 2018] (Santiago de Chile, November 2018), <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latNewsShowMore.jsp?evYEAR=2018vMONTH=-1> (accessed 20 December 2018).

³⁵ Cecilia A. Delgado-Molina, “La ‘irrupción evangélica’ en México” [The ‘Evangelical irruption’ in Mexico], *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 280 (March – April 2019): 91 – 100.

traditional lifestyles. In Colombia, for example, Evangelicals mobilised against the peace agreement in the 2016 referendum because it was allegedly supported by a “gender ideology”; the same year in Mexico, they agitated against same-sex marriage;³⁶ in Argentina in 2018 against the decriminalisation of abortion; and similarly in Uruguay against the so-called integral law for the legal recognition of transsexuals —just to name a few current examples. In their struggle “for life and family”, the Evangelicals strongly concur with some Catholic groups and right-wing political forces, an ideological convergence that has been called “conservative new ecumenism”.³⁷

36 Alberto Nájjar, “La marcha ‘sin precedentes’ en México contra la legalización del matrimonio gay” [The ‘unprecedented’ march in Mexico against the legalisation of gay marriage], *BBC Mundo* (Mexico City), 11 September 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37331685> (accessed 20 December 2018).

37 Wynarczyk, “¿Vino Nuevo en Odres Viejos?” (see note 14), 135.

The Role of Evangelicals in Brazil

In Brazil, the interplay between Evangelicals and politics has a dynamism that is unparalleled in the region.³⁸ The political relevance of the Evangelicals in this South American country is based on a social significance that goes beyond the demographic weight of the faith community. Brazil's "Evangelical world" is highly differentiated and now comprises various social strata. However, it is primarily three Evangelical churches and two parties associated with them that dominate the political stage. They played a major role in Jair Messias Bolsonaro being elected president in October 2018.

Social Relevance

In absolute numbers, Brazil is the country with the second largest Christian population in the world (after the USA). It is also the largest Catholic country and is now – according to several estimates – home to the Evangelical congregations with the most members in the world. The 2010 Brazilian census identified over 42 million people of Evangelical faith, representing 22.2 percent of the total population.³⁹ Of these, 13.3 percent are members of Pentecostal churches, 4 percent of historical Protestant churches, and 4.8 percent Protestants without church affiliation. According to a representative national survey conducted in October 2017, seven years after the census, as many as 32 percent of Brazilians now describe

themselves as Evangelical.⁴⁰ Women and younger people, i.e. the group with the greatest demographic growth, are disproportionately represented among Evangelicals.⁴¹

The Evangelical universe is as diverse as Brazilian society, and there is great social inequality in this religious subsystem as well. There are Evangelical churches for the rich and Evangelical churches for the poor, but there are also large churches that are more socially inclusive. According to the number and social background of their members, the Evangelical churches and their leaders have different material resources. In general, however, Brazilian Evangelicals are more likely to support their congregations financially than Catholics do.⁴² The tithe is a deeply internalised norm on which church leaders rely. Unlike the Catholic Church, which receives financial benefits or subsidies from the state, the Evangelical churches are also much more dependent on these revenues.⁴³ Many believers regard paying the tithe as the functional equivalent of contributing to social insurance (which does not exist for them in this form in Brazil): in an emergency or in the event of unemployment,

38 R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil. The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

39 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), *Censo Demográfico 2010. Características da população e dos domicílios* [Demographic census 2010. Characteristics of the population and households] (Rio de Janeiro, 2011), https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/93/cd_2010_caracteristicas_populacao_domicilios.pdf (accessed 20 December 2018).

40 "Na hora do voto, 19% do brasileiros com religião seguem líder da igreja" [When it comes to voting, 19% of Brazilians who profess a religion follow their church leaders], *Instituto Datafolha*, 26 October 2017, <http://bit.ly/33VNpn6> (accessed 20 December 2018).

41 José Eustáquio Diniz Alves, IBGE, cited in: Paula Corrêa, "Honrar a Dios... con tarjeta de crédito o efectivo. El auge evangélico en Brasil" [Honouring God... by credit card or cash. The Evangelical boom in Brazil], *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 248 (November–December 2013): 134–43 (139), http://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/3997_1.pdf (accessed 20 December 2018).

42 In a 2013 Datafolha survey, 34 percent of Catholics and 52 percent of Evangelicals stated that they regularly support their own church financially, Corrêa, "Honrar a Dios ...". (see note 41), 139.

43 Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits* (see note 20), 11.

believers can hope to be supported by other members of the community.⁴⁴ In accordance with the theology of prosperity to which the Neo-Pentecostals in particular adhere — i.e. the belief in a right to spiritual as well as material blessing — the tithe is seen as an investment that pays off.

Some Evangelical churches have developed into spiritual niche products that appeal to specific social groups.

Although Evangelical morality is more in line with traditional understanding of roles and conservative values, more liberal community concepts have also emerged in Brazil. City of refuge (Cidade de Refúgio), for example, is the name of the Evangelical congregation founded by a lesbian pastor couple in São Paulo in 2011.⁴⁵ A homosexual couple of (male) Evangelical pastors established the Contemporary Christian Church (Igreja Cristã Contemporânea, ICC) in 2013, “so that homosexual believers can find their place too”.⁴⁶ Such Evangelical churches dedicating themselves to an inclusive theology and serving the LGBTQ community are also increasing and growing, most notably in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Other churches have developed into niche products that appeal to a specific spiritual market segment. In 1999, for example, Rinaldo Luis de Seixas Pereira, called Apostle Rina, founded the Bola de Neve Church (Snowball Church). With his informal and strongly sports-focused church concept, the passionate surfer and pastor with a degree in marketing addresses a young audience that wants to follow Jesus beyond dogmas. At the services of this neo-Pentecostal church, which is now represented in all regions of Brazil and

in many countries on all continents, a surfboard serves as an altar.⁴⁷

Evangelical congregations active in Brazilian *favelas* (slums) and prisons reach a completely different target group.⁴⁸ Both are places where human rights are massively violated — even by the state apparatus itself — and where marginalised, severely disadvantaged population groups are exposed to the control of criminal gangs and the arbitrariness of the (barely present) state. In terms of milieu, prisons are an extension of the isolated neighbourhoods where the prisoners used to live. Besides drug gangs, Evangelical churches are usually the only actors who have (permitted) access to *favelas* and prisons. They offer people an alternative to criminal activity. Where there are no cultural or sports facilities, they provide experience-oriented services of worship with much music and appealing entertainment; they also promote a sense of personal recognition and peaceful belonging.

Dozens of Evangelical churches register weekly in the country’s various prisons to hold church services, and offer pastoral care and social work to the detainees in prison yards. Evangelical volunteers provide inmates with sanitary products and medical treatment. Pastors also communicate between the prisoners and their relatives, who often simply considered them missing. Sometimes they provide financial support to families when the imprisonment of a relative has cut off the household’s (illegal) source of money. Evangelical pastors are held in high esteem in prisons. From time to time they are asked by the prison management to mediate in internal conflicts, and they are respected by gang leaders. However, this personal proximity is not without pitfalls. Sometimes pastors cannot resist a lucrative deal, and make their personal or church bank accounts available for money laundering. They take the liberty of retaining a portion of the contributions that are regularly made.

The pastoral care and social work provided by the Evangelical churches in the *favelas* and prisons follows an individualistic-pragmatic approach. Church representatives help people spiritually and materially to survive the day-to-day. However, community work by

44 Lamia Oualalou, “El poder evangélico en Brasil” [Evangelical power in Brazil], *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 260 (November–December 2015): 122–33 (126), http://nuso.org/media/articles/downloads/7.TC_Oualalou_260.pdf (accessed 20 December 2018).

45 *Cidade de Refúgio*, <http://cidadederefugio.com.br> (accessed 20 December 2018).

46 “Pastores homosexuales crean la ‘Iglesia Cristiana Contemporánea’” [Homosexual pastors establish the ‘Contemporary Christian Church’], *Valores Religiosos* (online), 2014, <https://www.valoresreligiosos.com.ar/Noticias/pastores-homosexuales-crean-la-iglesia-cristiana-contemporanea-6989> (accessed 20 December 2018).

47 *Bola de Neve Church*, <http://boladeneve.com> (accessed 20 December 2018).

48 The following is based on Andrew Johnson’s anthropological study, “The Politics of Presence. Evangelical Ministry in Brazilian Prisons”, in *Religious Responses to Violence. Human Rights in Latin America Past and Present*, ed. Alexander Wilde (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 395–415.

Evangelical pastors at the local level rarely results in a socio-political commitment at the higher institutional level, or in a demand for national structural reforms.

Three mega-churches dominate the Evangelical landscape of Brazil. They are all characterised by a pronounced will to shape policy.

The colourful spectrum of Evangelical faith communities in Brazil includes three mega-churches with a dense presence in the country and other Latin American countries, and with a pronounced will to shape policy. The Assembly of God (Assembleia de Deus, AD) celebrated its centenary in 2011 and is thus — after the Christian Congregation in Brazil (Congregação Cristã no Brasil, CCB) — Brazil's second oldest, and at the same time the largest Pentecostal Church with, according to its own figures, around 22.5 million members. The origins of the AD movement lie in the USA; the Brazilian branch was founded by Swedish missionaries Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren in Belém, in Pará State. Since the 1980s, the AD movement has experienced several secessions. Many individual churches and church groups have also become independent without giving up their names. The General Convention of Assemblies of God in Brazil (Convenção General das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil, CGADB) is part of the historical umbrella organisation headquartered in Rio de Janeiro, but its integrative and leadership functions are weak. CGADB owns a publishing house (Casa Publicadora das Assembleias de Deus, CPAD), a radio station⁴⁹ and universities.⁵⁰ Within the spectrum of Evangelical major churches, the AD churches are comparatively decentralised. In this respect, they follow the Presbyterian model of representative assemblies, in which lay people participate and are under the charismatic leadership of pastor-presidents.⁵¹ The AD is divided into numerous Ministérios, each of which consists of several parishes and is headed by a mother church with a pastor-president (also called bishop or apostle). The National Convention of the Assemblies of God in Brazil (Convenção Nacional das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil, CONAMAD), also known as Ministério de

Madureira, was created in 1989 by splitting off from the General Convention. Another important branch of the AD is the Assembly of God — Victory in Christ (Assembleia de Deus Vitória em Cristo, AD-VC) under the charismatic leadership of Pastor Silas Malafaia. The boards of all these AD mother churches are exclusively male.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, IURD), founded in 1977 by the former Catholic and self-proclaimed bishop Edir Macedo, is smaller (with 8 million members, according to its own figures), but is particularly visible in Brazil's public sphere and politics. In contrast to the AD churches, the IURD is organised hierarchically.⁵² The IURD now resembles a group of companies run according to modern management and marketing criteria. It includes a media empire with numerous medium wave and VHF radio stations, which cover most of the national territory. Furthermore, it owns over 20 TV stations, stakes in 100 further stations, and the media network Rede Record, as well as a publishing house and three daily newspapers. The inauguration of the IURD's Salomon Temple in São Paulo on 31 July 2014 attracted great public attention: a monumental building with room for 10,000 believers, it is supposed to be a replica of the Temple in Jerusalem. The opening was attended by prominent figures from society and politics, including representatives of the PT government. The majority of the IURD's assets are said to come from donations.

Even Brazil's Evangelical elite is not resistant to the endemic problem of corruption in the country.

The Church of the Foursquare Gospel (Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular, IEQ) is the third major Evangelical denomination in Brazil, and the smallest of the three, with less than 8 million members. It was originally founded in 1923 by Aimée Semple McPherson ("Sister Aimee") in Los Angeles, California, and introduced to Brazil by the couple Harold and Mary Williams. Today the church is led by Reverend Mario de Oliveira and has more than 11,000 churches and congregations throughout Brazil, according to its

⁴⁹ *Radio Senami*, <http://www.radiosenami.com> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁵⁰ *Faculdade Evangelica de Tecnologia, Ciências e Biotecnologia da CGADB*, <http://faecad.com.br> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁵¹ Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits* (see note 20), 157.

⁵² *Ibid.*

own figures. It is particularly strongly represented in the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Paraná.⁵³

Even Brazil's Evangelical elite is not resistant to the endemic problem of corruption in the country. For example: Pastor Silas Malafaia, leader of the AD-VC, has been linked to a case of money laundering.⁵⁴ As part of Operação Timóteo,⁵⁵ the federal police took action against a network of corruption concerning mining licensing in which Malafaia was allegedly involved. The Brazilian public prosecutor's office also investigated Bishop Macedo and other IURD leaders for embezzlement. According to the prosecution, two letter-box companies were used to transfer funds from tax-exempt donations to tax havens and then back to Brazil. Over a period of two years, 38 million US dollars are said to have been shifted back and forth through these channels.⁵⁶ The accusations made by the Federal Police in 2007 against Mario de Oliveira, pastor-president of the IEQ and national deputy of the Partido Social Cristão (PSC), are even more serious. De Oliveira was suspected of having ordered the murder of Carlos Willian de Souza, IEQ lawyer and national deputy of the Partido Trabalhista Cristão (PTC), in the early 2000s. De Oliveira is said to have put pressure on Willian, an elected parliamentarian, to give up his mandate in the House of Representatives in favour of the first candidate on the substitute list, IEQ pastor Antonio Costa. Willian refused, however, insisting on his mandate as a deputy, which cost him his IEQ membership; he was excluded from his

Evangelical congregation.⁵⁷ The Federal Supreme Court discontinued criminal proceedings for lack of evidence.

Political Relevance

The Catholic Church in Brazil can still rely on privileged relations with the state. This is the context in which Evangelical actors advocate for the defence of individual and institutional religious rights. They are also politically committed to securing the position of their own denomination within the framework of growing Evangelical competition. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) is particularly active in this regard. It thus represents a model to which other Evangelical churches increasingly orient themselves. Although most denominations tend towards an emphatically conservative and traditional moral agenda, it is almost impossible to position the diverse Evangelical church landscape ideologically. It is noticeable, however, that the spiritual authorities of the Evangelical denominations increasingly often and explicitly take political stances in the run-up to elections. The pastors' public commitment ranges from informal support for certain candidates (at times from outside their own denomination) to standing for election themselves. Evangelical members of parliament also participate in cross-party cooperations that represent their interests. And finally, some Evangelicals try to shape government policy at federal, state and city levels by holding executive offices, including ministerial posts.

(In)Equality in Religious Pluralism

Like other countries in the region, the transition to democracy in Brazil in 1985–86 paved the way for growing political participation by Evangelical actors. The National Constituent Assembly (1987–88) provided the framework for an initial, still modest political commitment. It consisted of both chambers of the directly elected national legislature. Of the 559 members of the assembly, 32 were Protestants, of whom 18 were Evangelical (13 AD, 2 IEQ and 1 IURD).⁵⁸ The

53 Portal of the Foursquare Gospel Church, <http://www.portalbr4.com.br/materias/5> (accessed 20 December 2018).

54 Estadão Conteúdo, "Silas Malafaia é indiciado pela PF na Operação Timóteo" [Federal police suspects Silas Malafaia in Operação Timóteo], *Exame* (online), 30 December 2018, <https://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/silas-malafaia-e-indiciado-pela-pf-na-operacao-timoteo/> (accessed 27 August 2019).

55 The operation's name refers to a section from 1 Timothy 6: 9-10: "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

56 Gary Duffy, "Pastor brasileiro acusado de fraude milionário" [Brazilian pastor accused of multi-million dollar fraud], *BBC Mundo* (Sao Paulo), 11 August 2009, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/cultura_sociedade/2009/08/090811_2300_brasil_macedo_gm (accessed 20 December 2018).

57 Alan Rodrigues, "Marcado para morrer" [Marked to die], *Istoé*, 4 July 2007, https://istoe.com.br/195_MARCADO+PARA+MORRER/ (accessed 27 August 2019).

58 Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (see note 10), 24.

Evangelical members of the Constituent Assembly were committed to achieving equality with the Catholic Church for their denominations. Ideologically, they were right-of-centre. But apart from an emphatically conservative moral agenda (for example, against the right to abortion and against homosexuality), they lacked a clear position on many other issues.

Despite the principle of equality laid down in the Brazilian Constitution, the Catholic Church has always enjoyed a privileged status.

Although the preamble of Brazil's constitution,⁵⁹ which was passed in 1988 and revised in 1998, contains a reference to God, it does not confer any special status on Catholicism or the Catholic Church. In the dogmatic part, the Constitution guarantees the freedom of conscience, religion and practice of religion, the protection of places of worship and religion as well as associated writings and liturgies. Its organic section prohibits the state from establishing religious cults or churches or subsidising them or entering into a relationship of dependence with them. According to the Civil Code (2002), religious organisations of any denomination are legal entities under private law.⁶⁰

Despite this principle of equality before the law (isonomy), the Catholic Church in Brazil has always enjoyed a privileged status — both *de jure* and *de facto*. The bilateral agreement between the Brazilian state and the Holy See, which was ratified by the National Congress in 2009, has established and even extended the privileges (for example by permitting public grants). This decision met with strong criticism in non-Catholic circles. George Hilton, a national deputy of the Progressive Party (Partido Progresista, PP) and IURD pastor, submitted a draft General Law on Religion (Lei Geral das Religiões 5598/2009), which extended the provisions of the Agreement with the Vatican to churches of all denominations.⁶¹ Following the large-scale mobilisation of Evangelical deputies, the legislative initiative was adopted in the lower

chamber and passed on to the Senate. There the bill was last amended in March 2016 and shelved at the end of the 2018 legislative period due to lack of activity.⁶² The election of Jair Bolsonaro and the start of the new legislative period in January 2019 should have been a favourable juncture for re-debating the law. However, this has not yet come to pass more than a year later.

Even though this “major equality project” has failed for the time being, Evangelicals have notched up smaller political achievements. Following an initiative by Cleber Verde, a member of the Republican Party of Brazil (Partido Republicano Brasileiro, PRB), and also of the AD, the Brazilian National Congress passed Law No. 12,328 in 2010, which declares 30 November to be the Dia Nacional do Evangélico.⁶³ In addition to the many Catholic feast days, Protestant citizens now have their own officially recognised day. Federal states and cities can decide for themselves whether they celebrate the day on the specified date, and how (whether it is also a holiday, for example). Furthermore, in May 2016, José Serra, foreign minister in the government of Michel Temer (2016–18), issued a three-year diplomatic passport to AD pastor Samuel Cassio Ferreira and his wife. Certainly, the decree regulating the issue of diplomatic passports does not list religious leaders among those to be favoured. However, it has been customary to issue such passports to Catholic cardinals. The Brazilian Foreign Ministry referred to the “national interest” and the principle of isonomy (equality before the law), which had been enshrined under the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, as justification for the practice now being extended to other denominations. In 2011 it was decided to grant each denomination the right to two diplomatic passports.⁶⁴

⁶² Câmara dos Deputados, *Projeto de Lei 5598/2009*, <http://www.camara.gov.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=441559> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁶³ Câmara dos Deputados, “Câmara aprova criação do Dia Nacional do Evangélico [House approves creation of National Protestant Day]”, 26 August 2009, <http://bit.ly/3744vRK> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁶⁴ The issuing of diplomatic passports is regulated by Decree 5.978/06 of 4 December 2006, Article 6, paragraph 3; Marina Correa, *Os donos do poder – a construção da nomenclatura de pastor-presidente nas Assembleias de Deus (ADs)* [Powerholders — the construction of the nomenclature Pastor-President in the Assemblies of God (ADs)]. (2017, unpublished manuscript).

⁵⁹ *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988*, http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁶⁰ *Código Civil Brasileiro*, http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/LEIS/2002/L10406.htm (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁶¹ Maria das Dores Campos Machado, “Religião, cultura e política” [Religion, culture and politics], *Religião e Sociedade* (Rio de Janeiro) 32, no. 2 (2012): 29–56 (32), <http://bit.ly/2R2OLso> (accessed 17 September 2019).

Informal and Official Candidates

Until the 1980s, Evangelical circles in Brazil followed the imperative that “believers do not get involved in politics”. But with the social and political upheaval that accompanied democratisation, Evangelicals increasingly adopted the motto “the believer votes for the believer”. Since this change of attitude, the three mega-churches AD, IURD and IEQ in particular have pursued a corporate model of representation, within which they make use of a wide range of options for action in elections. They provide “external candidates” with informal support, or promote their own candidates for parliamentary mandates and executive offices at all levels of state organisation.⁶⁵ This occurs in the context of a highly fragmented party system and electoral provisions (such as proportional representation in large constituencies with a de facto low threshold) that allow a large number of parties to be represented in parliament. In the current legislative period (2019–23), 30 parties are represented in the Chamber of Deputies, with the strongest political force, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), having just under 11 percent of the seats.

The Evangelical electorate votes according to the proposals of its church leaders more than other groups do.

How the informal support for candidates from outside a church operates can be observed particularly well amidst presidential elections. During the election campaign, Evangelical church leaders, above all those of the three mega-churches, seek dialogue with the presidential candidates and enter into concrete negotiations with some of them — on the left as well as on the right of the ideological spectrum. In the most successful scenario, they achieve a political deal: the prospect of specific legislation and concessions in exchange for their church members’ political support. Even in Brazil one cannot speak of denominational voting in the narrower sense of captive voting; nevertheless, the electioneering that charismatic pastors carry out through the liturgy, Evangelical mass and social media is not ineffective. A survey conducted by the Datafolha opinion research institute in 2017⁶⁶

revealed that only 19 percent of the Brazilian electorate strongly consider the candidates proposed by their own church. However, that proportion rises to 26 percent among Protestants and even 31 percent among neo-Pentecostal Evangelicals. This religious-political allegiance is also attractive to non-Evangelical candidates for the potential votes it represents. Simultaneously, it is the basis of Evangelical church leaders’ bargaining power, as the following example illustrates.

In the 2014 presidential election campaign, won by Dilma Rousseff (PT), Pastor Silas Malafaia, a prominent leader of the AD-VC, posted a tweet in which he called on the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB) candidate, Marina da Silva, to withdraw her promise to defend “marriage for all” in the event of electoral success. If she did not, Malafaia threatened to make a defamatory speech about her. AD member Marina da Silva had been Minister of the Environment under the Lula government (2003–08) and expressed herself liberally on certain moral issues in the run-up to the election campaign. She changed tack immediately after the pastor’s intervention, returning to the orthodox AD moral agenda.⁶⁷

Brazil certainly has parties with a Christian orientation, but no Evangelical parties in the narrower sense.

In contrast to the informal backing of outside candidates, the church’s support for official candidates is an act of institutional representation, even though it takes place in line with electoral law, i.e. via a party list. The general public does not necessarily know that a candidate has this additional tie, beyond membership to a church. Rather, such candidacies — mostly for legislative bodies — are launched and promoted within religious communities. The candidate’s religious affiliation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. Religious leaders must also be united behind the candidate and promote him or her among church members. In some cases, primary elections even take place within the faith community. Church electioneering can take different forms; the IRUD, for instance, pursues it with particular, even aggressive, emphasis.

⁶⁵ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (see note 10).

⁶⁶ “Na hora do voto” (see note 40).

⁶⁷ Oualalou, “El poder evangélico en Brasil” (see note 44), 122f.

Brazil certainly has parties with a Christian orientation, but no Evangelical parties in the narrower sense. The Evangelical political landscape is as fragmented as the party system. Nevertheless, Evangelical candidates predominate in the right and centre-right. Two political parties have a disproportionately high number of Evangelicals: the Republican Party of Brazil (Partido Republicano Brasileiro, PRB), which renamed itself Republicans (Republicanos) in May 2019, and the Social-Christian Party (Partido Social Cristão, PSC). Both parties distinguished themselves in the 2018 parliamentary elections by their large number of successful official candidates. The PRB was founded in 2003 and received its registration at the Supreme Electoral Court two years later. The request was made by IURD pastor Vitor Paulo Araújo dos Santos. While the IURD and PRB are linked neither legally nor statutorily, the party is in fact under the political control of the church. This control is largely based on personal relationships. About two-thirds of the members of the National Executive Commission and the National Management Board of the PRB have close ties to the IURD.⁶⁸

The PSC was founded in 1985 and officially registered in 1990. It bases its ideological orientation on Christian social doctrine and respect for the traditional moral order. It maintains particularly close political ties with the AD. The prominent AD pastor Everaldo Pereira was the official PSC candidate in the 2014 presidential elections, but without success. With 0.75 percent of the votes, he came fifth. The two (non-Evangelical) traditional parties that have provided the country's recent presidents, the PT and the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, PSDB), have experienced very different levels of Evangelical impact. In the period 1998–2014, the PSDB put forward more than four times as many Evangelical candidates as the PT. It has also been more successful (by the same ratio) in getting them elected.⁶⁹

68 Fábio Lacerda and José Mario Brasiliense, "Brasil: la incursión de los Pentecostales en el Poder Legislativo Brasileño" [Brazil: Neo-Pentecostals enter the Brazilian legislative branch], in *Evangelicos y Poder en América Latina*, ed. Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger (see note 13), 141–79 (167).

69 Ibid.

Corporate Parliamentary Work

In terms of denominational distribution, Evangelicals are underrepresented in the National Congress. One consequence of the informal and official support for mandate candidates, however, is that Evangelical interests are articulated more strongly in parliament than would be expected. They are represented, for instance, by the cross-party Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, FPE), also known as the Evangelical Group (bancada evangélica). According to parliamentary rules of procedure, this cross-party parliamentary group or caucus is a statutory association of deputies from various parties with the aim of pushing through common agenda items. To be officially recognised, such a group must bring together at least one-third of the members of the legislature.⁷⁰ In the last legislative period, 199 deputies and four senators belonged to the FPE. Most of them were members of the IURD and the AD.⁷¹ Its coordinator was PSC deputy Hidekazu Takayama, a well-known AD pastor.⁷² The current number of Evangelical congressional members (deputies and senators) varies according to the source. Generally, however, it is apparent that more than 20 parties – the PRB (21), PSL (7), PSD (7), PR (6), PP (6), DEM (6), PSDB (5), and PSC (5) – have Evangelicals in their ranks and that at least three Evangelical churches – the AD (33), IUDR (17) and Igreja Batista (12) – are represented in the National Congress. Among the

70 Câmara dos Deputados, *Frentes e grupos parlamentares*, <http://www2.camara.leg.br/deputados/liderancas-partidarias/frentes-e-grupos-parlamentares> (accessed 20 December 2018).

71 Luisa Marini and Ana Luiza De Carvalho, "Renovada, bancada evangélica chega com mais força no próximo Congresso" [With new members, Evangelical group gains more weight for coming legislative period], *Congresso Em Foco*, 17 October 2018, <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/legislativo/renovada-bancada-evangelica-chega-com-mais-forca-no-proximo-congresso/> (accessed 17 September 2019).

72 Ibid.; Lúcio Big, "Lista completa dos senadores e deputados federais eleitos em 2018" [Full list of senators and deputies elected in 2018], *Congresso Em Foco*, 8 October 2018, <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/eleicoes/lista-completa-dos-senadores-e-deputados-federais-eleitos-em-2018/#1539186570511-64ddeb73-47e6>; Departamento Inter-sindical de Assessoria Parlamentar, *Eleições 2018: bancada evangélica cresce na Câmara e no Senado* [Elections 2018: Evangelical Group gains in Chamber and Senate], 17 October 2018, <http://www.diap.org.br/index.php/noticias/noticias/28532-eleicoes-2018-bancada-evangelica-cresce-na-camara-e-no-senado> (both accessed 20 December 2018).

Evangelical deputies of the FPE, there are many who, as candidates, were able to win the most votes in their constituencies.

In the last legislative period, the FPE explicitly supported Bolsonaro for president. Moreover, on 24 October 2018, four days before the run-off, it presented its manifesto “Brazil for Brazilians”. The 60-page document contains an analysis of the country’s political and economic situation and a series of market-oriented proposals for modernising the state, strengthening legal security, and completely restructuring the education system.⁷³ Its authors argue for education without ideology (*Escola sem Ideologia*) or education without a party (*Escola sem Partido*), catchphrases that have since gained great popularity. They therefore oppose the policies of previous PT governments, which had advocated gender equality, the criminalisation of homophobia, and the legalisation of abortion.⁷⁴ In line with this conservative moral agenda, the FPE launched two legislative initiatives in 2013 and 2014. The first aims to limit the interpretation of the concept of family to the “union between a man and a woman” (*Estatuto da Família*, Projeto de Lei 6583/2013). The second aims to end the alleged “cultural Marxist” indoctrination of pupils (*Escola sem Partido*, Projeto de Lei 7180/2014).

Conservative values can be asserted particularly effectively from key positions in parliamentary committees that deal with social issues. In the last legislative period, 14 of the 36 members of the Human Rights Committee were Evangelicals. Their equally strong presence in the Committee on Technology and Communication (14 out of 42) is because Evangelical churches are keen to have unrestricted access to radio and television licenses.⁷⁵ In 2014, only a narrow majority prevented then-Congressman Jair Bolsonaro — known for his homophobic and misogynistic statements, and statements glorifying the former military dictatorship — from chairing the

Commission on Human Rights and Minorities in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.

An Evangelical President

In October 2018, the Partido Social Liberal (PSL) candidate, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, won the run-off election for the office of President of Brazil with the motto “Brazil above everything; God above everyone”. During the election campaign, Bolsonaro received the open support of the cross-party Evangelical Parliamentary Front in the National Congress and of most leaders of the major Evangelical churches. Eventually a large part of the Evangelical electorate voted for him. This support also had an effect on how Bolsonaro’s cabinet was formed and on his government’s actions. In contrast to re-democratised Brazil’s previous governments, religion — especially Evangelicalism — plays an important role in Bolsonaro’s presidency.

Whether or not Bolsonaro himself can be regarded as a “true Evangelical” is the subject of much public debate in Brazil.

Whether or not Bolsonaro himself can be regarded as a “true Evangelical” is the subject of much public debate in Brazil. In May 2016 he was baptised in the Jordan River by Pastor Everaldo Pereira, a prominent AD leader and president of the Partido Social Cristão (PSC); pictures and videos of the ceremony were disseminated on the Internet. His current wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, is Evangelical. The wedding was performed by the prominent AD-VC Pastor Silas Malafaia. On the evening that the result of the second round became known, Bolsonaro stepped outside his front door: before the president-elect gave a short speech to the cameras, the Baptist preacher and politician Magno Malta took his hand and said a prayer. Yet some see in Bolsonaro’s behaviour the expression of a “Christian ambiguity” and claim that he never ceased to feel Catholic.⁷⁶ What is noteworthy for this analysis, however, is less Bolsonaro’s subjective religious beliefs but

⁷³ Câmara dos Deputados, *Frente Evangélica lança manifesto com propostas para gestão do Brasil* [Evangelical Front presents manifesto with proposals for governance], 24 October 2018, <http://bit.ly/2rDVfDL> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁷⁴ Talita Bedinelli, “Bancada evangélica converte proposta pró-mulher em projeto antiaborto” [Evangelical group turns pro-woman proposal into an anti-abortion project], *El País Brasil*, 10 November 2017, https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/11/09/politica/1510258493_477218.html (accessed 17 September 2019).

⁷⁵ Oualalou, “El poder evangélico en Brasil” (see note 44).

⁷⁶ Lamia Oualalou, “Los evangélicos y el hermano Bolsonaro” [The Evangelicals and Brother Bolsonaro], *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 280 (March–April 2019): 68–77, <https://nuso.org/articulo/los-evangelicos-y-el-hermano-bolsonaro/> (accessed 23 August 2019).

rather the increased significance that Evangelicals can achieve through his election victory and leadership.

Bolsonaro's Evangelical Support

Bolsonaro had already declared in his election campaign that (the Christian) God should be given more space in politics. He now asserts that the Brazilian state is secular, but that Brazil is Christian, and that the faith of the great majority of the population should not be ignored. During his campaign, Bolsonaro relied heavily on the Evangelical electorate and its religious leaders. This phenomenon is hardly new: since re-democratisation, many politicians with presidential ambitions have actively sought the support of spiritual authorities and their communities. Some have even founded "Evangelical committees" within their campaign machinery to gain the favour of Evangelical voters. But Bolsonaro relied on this strategy in a particularly visible and successful way. Shortly before the runoff election between Bolsonaro and his PT rival Fernando Haddad, a Datafolha survey revealed that among Evangelical citizens, who make up 31 percent of the electorate, Bolsonaro led with 40 percent approval (compared to 15 percent for Haddad). Among Catholics, who represent 55 percent of the electorate, the two candidates could count on almost the same amount of support (29 percent vs. 25 percent).⁷⁷ Six months after the start of his presidency, Bolsonaro received higher approval rates among Evangelicals (41 percent) than among Catholics (30 percent) and the non-religious (25 percent).⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Bolsonaro cresce e atinge 32%" [Bolsonaro increases and reaches 32%], *Instituto Datafolha*, 3 October 2018, <http://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2018/10/1982865-bolsonaro-cresce-e-atinge-32.shtml> (accessed 20 December 2018).

⁷⁸ Bolsonaro has higher approval among men (38%) than women (29%), among the over-60s (37%) than 16 to 24 year-olds (27%), among higher earners (52%) than lower earners (27%), among entrepreneurs (58%) than workers in the informal sector (25%) and the unemployed (22%), in the south of Brazil (42%) than in the northeast (25%), and among those who call themselves whites (42%) than those who consider themselves brown (31%) or black (25%), *Folha da S. Paulo* and *Instituto Datafolha*, *Avaliação do Presidente Jair Bolsonaro* [Approval rates for President Jair Bolsonaro], 4/5 July 2019, <http://bit.ly/2CHXpEB> (accessed 27 August 2019).

The AD and IURD expect the new president to pursue a policy consistent with their values and interests.

Bolsonaro also counted on the explicit support of the two large Evangelical churches AD and IURD. For example, Bishop Macedo, IURD founder and owner of Brazil's second largest media network, offered Bolsonaro the opportunity to give an exclusive interview (conducted by a sympathetic reporter) on his television channel *TV Record*, while the other aspirants for the presidency debated together on another channel. Inter alia, this gave Bolsonaro a strong undisputed media presence, which as a member of a party with weak parliamentary representation he was not entitled to under election law.

In return for openly backing Bolsonaro, the AD and IURD expect the new president to pursue a policy consistent with their values and interests. For example, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front has urged Bolsonaro to make the churches' fiscal duties more flexible. They have already been successful with two demands: first, the Internal Revenue Service (*Receita Federal*) of the Ministry of Economy, under pressure from President Bolsonaro, lifted the obligation for the smaller churches to be added to in the National Register of Legal Entities (*Cadastro Nacional de Pessoas Jurídicas*, CNPJ); second, the minimum amount of daily financial transactions which the churches must make public was raised from 1.2 to 4.9 million Brazilian real.⁷⁹

The (Religious) Ideological Wing of Bolsonaro's Cabinet

Since he has been in power, Bolsonaro has strongly emphasised his "calling" to the military, not only in his self-representation, but also in terms of governance. On the one hand, the Brazilian president likes to say: "I was not born to become president, I was born to become a member of the armed forces". Although he was a parliamentarian without interruption from 1988 to 2018 — first for one legislative period in

⁷⁹ Bernardo Mello and Thiago Prado, "A pedido de evangélicos, Bolsonaro afrouxará obrigações fiscais de igrejas" [At request of Evangelicals, Bolsonaro will relax church tax obligations], *O Globo*, 11 July 2019, <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/a-pedido-de-evangelicos-bolsonaro-afrouxara-obrigacoes-fiscais-de-igrejas-23793306> (accessed 27 August 2019).

the city council of Rio de Janeiro and then in the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress — he regards his former military career as formative. Bolsonaro enlisted in his last years of school. He attended the Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras (AMAN), the Brazilian military academy, which he left in 1977 as an artillery lieutenant. Bolsonaro was a paratrooper in the Brazilian army and is now a reservist with the rank of captain. On the other hand, Bolsonaro formed a 22-department cabinet at the beginning of his mandate. Only two are run by women. Of the remaining 20 men, eight are members of the armed forces.⁸⁰ Vice President General Hamilton Mourão, who joined Bolsonaro on the double ticket in the presidential election campaign, is also a military man. Subordinate positions in the ministries are occupied by members of the armed forces (active members as well as reservists). A large number of military personnel are at the levers of power, particularly in the Ministry of the Environment.

Bolsonaro's cabinet consists of a military, a technocratic and an ideological wing.

Moreover, Bolsonaro has entrusted four Evangelicals, including two religious leaders, to head ministries. He appointed Presbyterian Pastor André Luiz de Almeida Mendonça, who had had a long career in the hierarchy of the Federal Attorney General's Office (Advocacia-Geral da União, AGU), which has the rank of a ministry in Brazil, as its head. Damares Alves, a lawyer and IEQ Evangelical pastor, he appointed Minister for Women, Family and Human Rights. Since then, Alves has provoked floods of outraged and mocking reactions in the (social) media, with statements such as: "Attention, attention. New era dawns in Brazil: boys dress in blue and girls in pink."⁸¹ "A wife must submit to her husband in marriage. In mar-

riage, the man is the leader."⁸² "Girls in the Amazon region are victims of sexual abuse because they normally do not wear underwear, because they are poor and therefore cannot afford panties."⁸³ The Minister is a well-known opponent of the legalisation of abortion, and secular and gender-pluralist sex education in schools. The daughter of an IEQ pastor, she sees herself as "one of the conservative Christian women who have been oppressed, ignored and forgotten in this nation". Alves has announced that she wants to reinstate conservative-Christian values that have been heavily neglected under the "dictatorship of the left-wing minority in the media, universities and non-governmental organisations".⁸⁴ She has declared war on gender ideology, as it is called in conservative Christian circles.

Alves' views make the minister part of the so-called ideological wing of the Bolsonaro government, which is the third group within the cabinet alongside the military wing (centred on Vice-President Hamilton Mourão), and the technocratic wing (centred on Economics Minister Paulo Guedes). The most important exponent of the ideological wing, however, is Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo, a Catholic and career diplomat. Other representatives of this camp are Bolsonaro's sons Eduardo (national deputy for São Paulo), Flávio (federal state deputy in Rio de Janeiro) and Carlos (city councillor in Rio de Janeiro). Although Bolsonaro's sons are not members of the executive branch, they always comment — mostly through social media — on current political events from a government perspective.⁸⁵ All three belong to an

80 Members of the armed forces chair the following ministries: Government Secretariat (Carlos Alberto Santos Cruz), Institutional Security (Augusto Heleno Riberi Pereira), Infrastructure (Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas), Mining and Energy (Bento Costa Lima Leite), Health (Luiz Henrique Mandetta), Defence (Fernando Azevedo e Silva), Science and Technology (Marcos Pontes), Transparency, Tax Supervision and Control (Wagner Rosário).

81 See e.g. the Youtube video, "Damares Alves: menino veste azul e menina veste Rosa" [Damares Alves: boys wear blue and girls pink], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA8gxoXeBk> (accessed 16 September 2019).

82 André de Souza, "Damares repete que, 'no casamento, mulher é submissa ao homem'" [Damares repeats that in marriage the woman submits to the man], *O Globo*, 16 April 2019, <https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/damares-repete-que-no-casamento-mulher-submissa-ao-homem-23603765> (accessed 16 September 2019).

83 Damares Alves, "Meninas são abusadas por que não usam calcinhas" [Girls are abused because they do not wear panties], contribution to Brazilian TV broadcast, published on Youtube on 24 July 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ttsP9AzF6A (accessed 16 September 2019).

84 Tobias Käufer, "Jair Bolsonaros Chefideologin ist die umstrittenste Politikerin Brasiliens", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 August 2019, <https://www.fr.de/politik/jair-bolsonaro-chefideologin-praesidenten-frauenministerin-12923162.html> (accessed 23 August 2019).

85 Claudia Zilla, "Brasiliens neue Regierung: Ein besorgniserregendes Kabinett", *SWP Kurz gesagt* (online), 21 December 2018, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/kurz-gesagt/2018/>

Evangelical faith community. This does not apply to all forces of the ideological wing, but religion does play an important role within this group. All representatives share the idea that a cultural struggle is currently taking place that threatens Christianity. In his Internet blog “Metapolitica 17 – Against Globalism”, which he is still running after having taken office as foreign minister, Araújo made clear his intention to contribute to the liberation of the world from globalist ideology. In his view, economic globalisation is controlled by followers of a “cultural Marxism” that is an anti-human and anti-Christian system. To believe in God today, he claims, means to fight against globalism, because its goal is to break the connection between God and man, so that man becomes enslaved and God becomes superfluous. According to Araújo, the metapolitical project is primarily a matter of visualising the presence of God in political action and in history.⁸⁶

Araújo’s worldview is strongly influenced by conspiracy theories and anti-Marxist and anti-Communist impulses. In his view, a “left-wing project” is being pursued in Brazil and throughout the world whose aim is to destroy the family, eradicate religion, and control language. In line with this, the foreign minister opposes accepting non-traditional family constellations or gender-pluralistic life styles and secular-liberal values. According to Araújo, a language sensitive to minorities and gender pluralism must also be combated. All these tendencies are ultimately “dehumanising”. Moreover, the Foreign Minister regards relations between religions as competition: “ecumenism à la we are the world”, which many sides aspire to, should be rejected because it puts religions on an equal footing while also reducing them to mere moral systems. The search for the lowest common denominator within the framework of an interreligious dialogue usually ends with discrimination against or the exclusion of Christianity, Araújo wrote. The “political correctness” enforced by atheists, he

further claims, has led to a devaluation of language and religion. Against this background, he welcomes the fact that a debate on religious freedom has begun in the world, but especially in the West, because, he concludes, all religions are tolerated and protected in America and in Europe – except their own, the Christian religion.⁸⁷

President Bolsonaro is cultivating very close ties with the Evangelicals.

The President’s integration performance in the cabinet is weak. He is not able to prevail over the three wings or in pooling them. Even if he emphasises his identity as a soldier above all, his statements and actions suggest that he is more part of the (religious) ideological wing. Bolsonaro was the first President of Brazil to participate in the “March for Jesus” in Brasília and São Paulo in August 2019 together with his Head of Cabinet (Ministro da Casa Civil), Onyx Lorenzoni. This Evangelical mass event, which has been taking place at irregular intervals in various Brazilian cities since 1993, is jointly organised by several Evangelical umbrella organisations, in Brasília primarily by the Council of Evangelical Pastors of the Capital (Conselho de Pastores Evangélicos do Distrito Federal, COPEV/DF). This time, the rally’s motto was “Together we march for the family and for Brazil”. With reference to the Bible, Bolsonaro’s speech defended the ideal of the traditional family consisting of a man and a woman, and declared war on sex education in school and what he called gender ideology. His election success was “practically a miracle”, he said, to which the majority of Evangelical pastors had decisively contributed. Pointing to an Israeli flag waved by the demonstrators, he paid tribute to Judaism as the origin of Christianity, stating that the common Jewish-Christian tradition was important. Israel was a role model he wanted to emulate in Brazil since the Israelis were a godly people.

The Brazilian President sees Israel and its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as his closest allies. Bolsonaro’s sons also have great admiration for the country. A 2018 photo on Twitter shows one son in a Mossad T-shirt, another in a T-shirt with the inscrip-

brasiliens-neue-regierung-ein-besorgniserregendes-kabinett/ (accessed 21 December 2018); Claudia Zilla, “Kein Honey-moon für Bolsonaro. Das Kabinett ist zerstritten, Gesetze kommen nicht durch und die Jugend protestiert – Brasiliens rechte Regierung ist unter Druck”, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* (online), 4 June 2019, <https://www.ipg-journal.de/regionen/lateinamerika/artikel/detail/kein-honeymoon-fuer-bolsonaro-3511/> (accessed 22 August 2019).

⁸⁶ Ernesto Araújo, *Metapolitica 17 – Contra o Globalismo* (Blog), <https://www.metapoliticabrasil.com/about> (accessed 23 August 2019).

⁸⁷ Ernesto Araújo, “Liberdade religiosa, religião libertadora” [Religious freedom, liberating religion], *Metapolitica 17 – Contra o Globalismo* (Blog), 20 July 2019, <https://www.metapoliticabrasil.com/blog/liberdade-religiosa-religi%C3%A3o-libertadora> (accessed 25 August 2019).

tion “Israel Defense Forces”. In contrast to the pro-Palestinian policy of the previous PT governments, Bolsonaro had already announced in his election campaign that he wanted to move the Brazilian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, following the example of the USA. This aimed to do justice to the importance of the Holy Land in the Evangelical faith, pay tribute to the political right, and advance the desired rapprochement with the USA. At the end of March 2019, Bolsonaro paid a state visit to Israel shortly before the parliamentary elections there. Together with the Israeli head of government, he visited the Wailing Wall in East Jerusalem. According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, this was a first for an acting head of state with an Israeli prime minister.⁸⁸ But the plan to relocate the Brazilian embassy is only supported by the ideological wing of the Bolsonaro government. The military wing and the technocratic wing are opposed, fearing that the decision could result in economic disadvantages for Brazil. Exports to Arab countries could suffer, especially Brazilian halal meat, which is currently exported to those countries for an estimated five billion US dollars a year. Meanwhile the project of the embassy relocation seems to have been reduced to the establishment of a trade mission in Jerusalem, which Bolsonaro nevertheless presents as “the first step” towards complete relocation.

In the cabinet, then, the President, the Catholic Foreign Minister and the Evangelical pastor and Minister for Women, Family and Human Rights form a kind of “Christian Trinity”. These three members of the government are most clearly engaged in strengthening Christianity in Brazil, also in politics. This religious thrust is reinforced by the interventions of Bolsonaro’s sons and the pressure exerted by the Evangelical Parliamentary Front.

88 US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited the Wailing Wall with Netanyahu in March.

Conclusion

The strong denominational migration from the Catholic Church to diverse forms of Evangelicalism that has taken place in Latin America over the last five decades has not only been accompanied by a shift in religious emphasis; it has also led to greater religious pluralism and more intense religiosity in society. This development is diametrically opposed to the secularisation thesis,⁸⁹ which assumes that religion gradually loses significance in modern societies. The contradiction applies to all three sublevels on which the process, described in teleological terms by the social sciences, should take place.

At the *subjective individual level*, no decline in the significance of religious beliefs and practices can be observed in Latin America. There are very few countries in the region in which the proportion of people without faith or without religion is increasing significantly. Rather, the most striking trend is the demographic growth of Evangelical communities at the expense of the Catholic Church. Usually, however, this is accompanied by an intensification of religious identity and a more religious lifestyle. A nominal Catholicism gives way to a practised and intensively experienced Evangelicalism.

At the *societal level*, there is similarly no evidence that religious belief is retreating into the private sphere. Evangelical churches and their members have become recognised and visible actors in civil society. Due to their demographic weight, their increased self-confidence and their intensified focus on the world, Evangelicals with a visibly lived religious practice, lifestyle and mega-events play a role in the public sphere. The new religious pluralism is reflected in various areas of society, such as the establishment of Evangelical educational institutions, newspapers, radio and TV stations, the emergence of an Evangelical music and clothing industry, and of other lifestyle

products for believers. Beyond this “Evangelical market” the Evangelical churches legitimise themselves primarily in everyday life as problem-solving agencies for disadvantaged population groups;⁹⁰ they thus assume social tasks. The increased “customer orientation” of churches is accompanied by an individualisation and fragmentation of religious offerings. The growing segregation of Latin American societies, i.e. the spatial separation of social (sub)groups or milieus, corresponds to an increasingly segmented spiritual market. The religious monopoly of a world church with a world view that shapes the whole of society is a thing of the past. It has been replaced by a variety of religious offerings that are geared to the special needs and preferences of different social groups.

On the *political institutional level*, where Evangelicals are still strongly underrepresented — especially compared to Catholics — the desire for Evangelical churches to influence political developments in the country and assume responsibility in state institutions is becoming ever clearer. The plea for the separation of state and church, which rallied Protestants in the 19th century with regard to their own protection as a minority against the Catholic Church, has today given way to a sacredly reformed political commitment. However, in the context of growing religious pluralism, demands for legal equality and equal political treatment vis-à-vis the Catholic Church are once again being voiced. Accordingly, more importance is attached to equality than to the separation of church and state. It is solely within the framework of a so-called conservative new ecumenism, which strives for the implementation of a moral agenda “for the family and for life”, that the Catholic Church changes from a rival to Evangelical churches to a cooperative partner.

This study’s findings concerning Latin America particularly apply to Brazil. In the region’s largest country, Evangelical involvement in politics and the concomitant entanglement of religion and politics is

89 Mirjam Künkler and Julia Leininger, “Einleitung: Zur Rolle von Religion in Demokratisierungsprozessen”, in *Religiöse Akteure in Demokratisierungsprozessen: konstruktiv, destruktiv und obstruktiv*, ed. Julia Leininger (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), 13–45 (26).

90 Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits* (see note 20), 7.

well advanced.⁹¹ Within a political system plagued by marked corruption, it seems legitimate for advocates for militant religiosity to proclaim a need to moralise politics. However, there have been no positive effects as yet; instead, there have been corruption scandals involving prominent Evangelical church leaders with close ties to politics.

The “new churches” are seeking access to the political arena to represent their institutional interests and religious values. Three Evangelical mega-churches dominate the religious landscape of Brazil, and especially its politics: the IURD, the AD and the IEQ. Although adherents of these three religious communities belong to different parties, they are more frequently found in political organisations of the right and centre-right. Two parties, the PRB/Republicans and the PSC, are strongly influenced by Evangelical church leaders. They also have great mobilising power. Although Evangelical churches usually lack a developed social doctrine and substantial political programs, they are able to influence and sometimes even shape citizens’ social and political preferences, and bring to bear the conservative values and traditional understandings of the roles they represent. In Brazilian history, only a few Catholic priests used to hold parliamentary mandates, though not as representatives of the Church. Now, the largest and most politically active Evangelical denominations pursue a strategy of informally or officially supporting candidates they like. Although Brazil’s Evangelicals do not vote as a monolithic bloc, their parishioners follow the election recommendations of their charismatic church leaders to an above-average extent.

Once they have won a mandate at the national level, the Evangelical deputies of the most powerful denominations come together under the umbrella of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE). In the highly fragmented Brazilian Congress, where party discipline is very weak, religious identity forms a centre of gravity for intra-parliamentary cooperation. Religious identity therefore sometimes binds members of parliament more than that of party membership; the principle of corporative cross-party cooperation prevails over the principle of pluralist represen-

tation. This cooperation also extends to the relevant parliamentary committees. There Evangelical deputies try, inter alia, to secure or obtain economic privileges for their churches.

No president in the history of Brazil has owed his or her electoral success to the support of the Evangelical electorate and the Evangelical church leaders as much as Jair Messias Bolsonaro. No head of state before him has enjoyed such massive approval from the citizens of Evangelical faith. At the same time, Bolsonaro is distinguishing himself as a head of government who cultivates close relations with Evangelicals and pleads for a stronger role for religion in Brazil in general and in politics in particular. Those members of the cabinet who belong to the (religious) ideological wing around the Catholic Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo follow suit.

From a perspective that assumes democracy and pluralism to be normative, there are three problematic interactions between religion and politics at the empirical level in Brazil (although they are by no means generally necessary). First, the demographic weight of the Evangelicals is the result of a growing (religious) diversity in society; yet the dominant Evangelical churches with their moral agenda oppose any policy that recognises the diversity of life styles or promotes their equal rights. Second, Brazil’s political and economic elites overlap to a large extent. If rich businessmen who go into politics or support candidates are at the same time Evangelical leaders of mega-churches, then a “Trinity of Power” emerges that counteracts the democracy-promoting diffusion of power. Although the religious monopoly of the Catholic Church with its political privileges is in decline, in the longer term it could be replaced by an oligopoly of Evangelical mega-churches with charismatic leadership. Third, the ideological wing of Bolsonaro’s cabinet is dominated by the conviction that a worldwide conspiracy threatens Christianity. Associated with this is the belief that religions are in competition and (more or less explicitly formulated) in the supremacy of Christianity, which, however, is currently being neglected. These three tendencies have a negative impact on peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic, open society and on inter-religious dialogue.

From the point of view of ordinary citizens, the phenomenon is different. The aforementioned secularisation thesis is based on an understanding of modernisation that does not take into account the fact that development can go hand in hand with the

91 Ari Pedro Oro, “A política da igreja universal e seus reflexos nos campos religioso e político brasileiros” [The politics of the Universal Church and its impact on Brazilian religion and politics], *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 18, no. 53 (Oktober 2003): 53–69 (64), <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbcsoc/v18n53/18078.pdf> (accessed 17 September 2019).

persistence of poverty and an increase in social inequality. Factors such as political, social and economic instability promote the experience of existential insecurity, and consequently the need for eternal certainties. The cultivation of conservative values and intense religiosity can compensate for situations of relative deprivation. Regardless of the question of whether or not a sense of the transcendental or religious feelings are inherent in human beings, non-inclusive development models and a state that is absent or criminal for many citizens reinforce the impulse to search for a “practical spirituality” that is also aimed at solving everyday problems and promoting social mobility. Today this need seems to be fulfilled above all by the Evangelical churches. Many see their outreach as the concretisation of God’s work, according to Max Weber’s assertion: “Whether one should at all try to influence a particular god or demon by coercion or by entreaty is the most basic question, and the answer to it depends only upon proven effect.”⁹²

A context-sensitive developmental approach to Brazil and Latin America in general should take account of the fact that Evangelical faith communities in the region are growing on the fertile ground of unequal and unjust development. The Evangelical churches have advanced to become relevant social and political actors. Some of them, especially at the local level, are suitable as interlocutors and partners for German and European (development) cooperation. Identifying them, however, is complicated by the fragmentation and diversity of the Evangelical church world; actor mapping based on profound knowledge of the milieu will be essential.⁹³ Considering the Christian-influenced character of their societies, important tasks await Germany and the European Union in their bilateral and bi-regional relations. They could and should contribute arguments to counteract prevailing ideas in some Latin America milieus that there is a cultural struggle at work which threatens Christianity, and against which it has to assert itself.

⁹² Weber, *Economy and Society* (see note 1), 427.

⁹³ Thus e.g. Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer, *Friedenspotenzial von Freikirchen in den USA und Lateinamerika. Potenziale und Hindernisse für die internationale Zusammenarbeit* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen; ifa-Edition Kultur und Außenpolitik, 2020) https://publikationen.ifa.de/out/wysiwyg/uploads/70%20ifa-edition/friedenspotenzial-freikirchen_schaefer.pdf (accessed 14 January 2020).

Abbreviations

AD	Assembleia de Deus (Assembly of God; Brazil)
AD-VC	Assembleia de Deus Vitória em Cristo (Assembly of God — Victory in Christ; Brazil)
AGU	Advocacia-Geral da União (Attorney General’s Office; Brazil)
AMAN	Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras (Military Academy of Black Needles; Brazil)
CCB	Congregação Cristã no Brasil (Christian Congregation in Brazil)
CGADB	Convenção Geral das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil (General Convention of Assemblies of God in Brazil)
CNPJ	Cadastro Nacional de Pessoas Jurídicas (National Register of Legal Entities)
CONAMAD	Convenção Nacional das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil (National Convention of Assemblies of God in Brazil)
COPEV/DF	Conselho de Pastores Evangélicos do Distrito Federal (Council of Evangelical Pastors of the Capital; Brazil)
CPAD	Casa Publicadora das Assembleias de Deus (Publishing House of the Assemblies of God; Brazil)
FPE	Frente Parlamentar Evangélica (Evangelical Parliamentary Front)
IBGEI	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics)
ICC	Igreja Cristã Contemporânea (Christian Church of the Present; Brazil)
IEQ	Igreja Internacional do Evangelho Quadrangular (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel)
IURD	Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God; Brazil)
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Movement of National Regeneration; Mexico)
PES	Partido Encuentro Social (Social Encounter Party; Mexico)
PP	Partido Progresista (Progressive Party; Brazil)
PRB	Partido Republicano Brasileiro (Brazilian Republican Party)
PSB	Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party)
PSC	Partido Social Cristão (Social Christian Party; Brazil)
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy)
PSL	Partido Social Liberal (Social Liberal Party; Brazil)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Labour Party; Brazil)
PTC	Partido Trabalhista Cristão (Christian Labour Party; Brazil)
RN	Restauración Nacional (National Restoration Party; Costa Rica)

