

**Expanding the Public Square: Evangelicals and Electoral Politics in Latin America**

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September 28, 2018

Prepared for inclusion in Diana Kapiszewski, Steve Levitsky, & Deborah J. Yashar, eds., *The Inclusionary Turn in Contemporary Latin America*.

## Introduction

In 1956, Manoel de Mello founded the Brazil for Christ Church, the first native-born Brazilian denomination associated with Pentecostalism, a charismatic branch of evangelical Christianity. The practice non-Catholic religion had been formally legal since 1890, yet Mello's efforts to expand his new church faced opposition at every turn. Politicians and state agencies blocked his attempts to purchase radio stations to reach out to the faithful. Permits to hold outdoor tent revivals or construct new church buildings were routinely denied. Mello's practice of faith healing, an integral component of Pentecostalism, prompted legal charges of medical malpractice. In 1958, Mello struck a deal with São Paulo mayor Adhemar de Barros, promising votes for Barros's gubernatorial candidacy in exchange for a piece of land for a new church building. Yet after the land was delivered and the sanctuary was built, pressure from the Catholic Church convinced Barros to tear down the building and reallocate the property for a different use (Freston 1993; Gaskill 2002; Read 1965).

A half-century later, the political position of another prominent Pentecostal leader in Brazil, Edir Macedo of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), could not have been more different. In the early 1990s, Macedo acquired a national television network, Rede Record, which has since grown into one of the country's largest broadcasters. The IURD's massive headquarters in São Paulo was granted a legally questionable permit by the municipal government that exempted it from paying taxes on new construction (UOL Notícias 2014). Brazil's most prominent politicians attended its inauguration in 2014, including the president, vice president, and the governor and mayor of São Paulo. Present as well were many of the 83 members of the "evangelical caucus" in Brazil's Congress, including those from the Brazilian

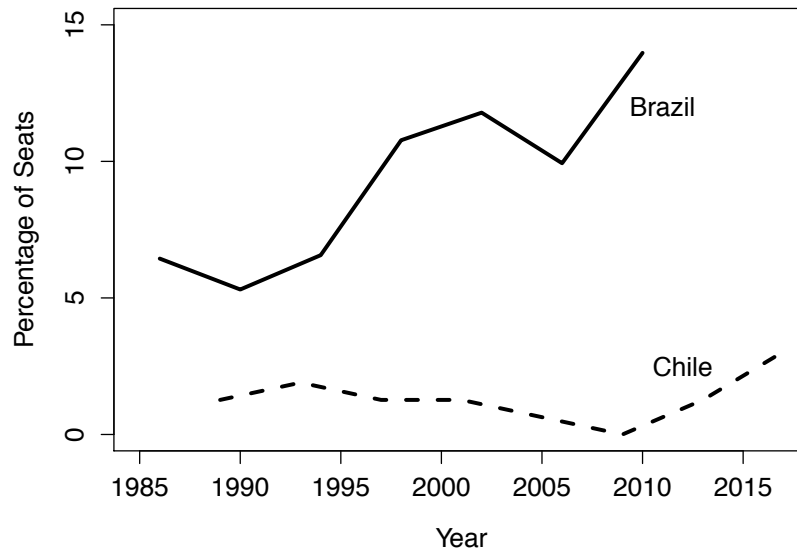
Republican Party, the political wing of the IURD. Once political and social outcasts, Brazil's evangelicals had effectively become power brokers, eagerly pursued as allies by elected officials across the political spectrum.

The political transformation of Latin America's evangelicals—from a small minority routinely suffering *de jure* and *de facto* harassment and discrimination, to full citizens whose rights are protected and whose support is sought by politicians—constitutes one of the most significant components of the “new inclusion” in Latin America. Indeed, this process meets the definition of “incorporation” (Collier and Collier 1991), especially if one takes a long-term view. The practice of non-Catholic religion was specifically prohibited in most of nineteenth-century Latin America. After the separation of church and state in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, Latin America's non-Catholic Christians enjoyed a constitutional right to worship as they chose. Yet as highlighted by the example of Manoel de Mello, evangelicals were often treated as second-class citizens, suffering political and legal discrimination at the hands of local, state, and national officials. Only in recent decades has this religious minority become a constituency whose support politicians seek by offering material and policy benefits. In this sense, the political inclusion of evangelicals is directly parallel to labor incorporation, in which worker activism was transformed from an illegal activity repressed by force into the bedrock of political support for populist politicians.

Just as labor incorporation responded to the swelling ranks of industrial workers in twentieth century Latin America, the political inclusion of evangelicals has been driven by their growing weight in the electorate. In the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer surveys, 21% of all Latin Americans identified as evangelical. A sheer growth in numbers could partially explain the different political fortunes of Manoel de Mello and Edir Macedo. In Brazil's 2010 census, there

were more members of Macedo’s church—itsself only the fourth largest evangelical denomination in Brazil—than there were non-Catholic Christians of any sort back in 1950.

**Figure 1: Legislative Seat Shares for Evangelicals in Brazil and Chile**



Yet parallel to the situation with labor incorporation, the growing numerical strength of evangelicals has had very different political implications across countries. Chile presents a stark contrast with Brazil in this respect. While Brazilian evangelicals have maintained a steady and growing legislative presence since the transition to democracy, Chile has had, on average, only two evangelical representatives in Congress (Figure 1). Few evangelicals run for elected office, and those that do meet with limited success. Like their Brazilian counterparts, Chile’s evangelicals have gained inclusion—they enjoy legal equality with Catholics in nearly every respect, they do not suffer from arbitrary discrimination or harassment by authorities, and they are treated as an important interest group by mainstream politicians. Yet inclusion has taken very different forms in the two countries. In Brazil, evangelicals have sought and achieved influence within the halls of power, whereas in Chile, they have remained primarily on the sidelines.

Brazil and Chile stand out as a natural paired comparison for examining cross-national differences in evangelicals' engagement and success with electoral politics. First, in percentage terms, they have sizeable evangelical populations. In the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer surveys, 31 percent of Brazilians identified as evangelical, the largest share in South America; Chile and Bolivia were tied for second, at 21%. While not ensuring electoral ambitions or success, numbers certainly generate the possibility. Second, evangelicalism was largely a homegrown phenomenon in both countries, and it has deep historical roots (Freston 2001). While missionaries and immigrants established the first Protestant churches, Brazilian and Chilean pastors who founded their own churches or broke away from foreign ones have had the most success with evangelization. The question of electoral ambitions is thus more likely to depend on domestic political variables in these countries than in Central America, where evangelicals are a larger share of the population—as high as 41% in Guatemala—but have been more greatly influenced by missionaries from the United States (Freston 2001).

The present chapter addresses the question of why the inclusion of evangelicals has taken such different forms in Brazil, where evangelicals are engaged and successful with electoral politics, versus Chile, where they have been substantially less motivated and successful. Existing explanations, which I argue have limited purchase, have focused on barriers posed by the social or political system, such as social class or party and electoral systems that are inhospitable to new entrants. The explanation I develop in this chapter focuses instead on the motivations that might lead evangelicals to enter the electoral sphere in the first place. Echoing work on other underrepresented minorities in Latin American politics, such as indigenous groups (Madrid 2012; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005), I argue that the politicization of a social identity is a necessary first step for it to translate into concerted action.

Given a theological focus on the afterlife, Latin America's evangelicals, and especially Pentecostals, have traditionally kept their distance from the worldly pursuit of politics. Where they have overcome this reluctance and thrust themselves into the electoral sphere, it has been to fight legislative battles in two areas at the core of evangelical interests and identities: legal equality with the Catholic Church, and "values issues" such as abortion and same-sex marriage. In Brazil, where the Catholic Church recouped legal privileges during the twentieth century, evangelicals were motivated to elect representatives to defend their citizenship rights. In Chile, where Catholic legal privileges have been more significantly curtailed, there were fewer incentives of this sort. In exploring the implications of the Catholic threat for evangelicals' electoral ambitions, this chapter contributes to a growing literature on the political consequences of interdenominational religious competition in Latin America (Gill 1994; Hagopian 2008; Smith Forthcoming; Trejo 2012).

Legal equality with the Catholic Church dominated the evangelical political agenda for most of Latin American history, but over the past decade, values issues have become a more significant concern. Here, the key factors are the timing of progressive legislative initiatives and the potential for evangelical leadership in the struggle against it. In Brazil, values issues landed on the political agenda at an early stage, and evangelicals have been better positioned than Catholics to defend the socially conservative position from within Congress. Hence, values issues have served as a continued motivator for evangelical political involvement after religious liberty largely subsided. In Chile, serious debate on values issues came to the fore much later, and a strong conservative Catholic contingent in Congress has been better positioned to lead the charge against progressive legislation in this area; both factors have limited evangelicals' electoral ambitions.

Electoral ambitions are necessary but not sufficient for electoral success; politicians and parties must also win votes. Given space constraints and data limitations, this chapter focuses on evangelicals' decisions to run for office rather than voters' decisions to support them. The politicization of evangelical identity is likely relevant to voting behavior as well as the strategies of churches and politicians, but I leave this demand-side analysis as a task for future research.

### **A Contradictory or Complementary Form of Inclusion?**

Evangelicals' presence in Latin America has grown from a handful of foreign missionaries in the 1800s to around a fifth of the population today. Over time, the composition and meaning of the "evangelical" category have shifted as well. Following Latin American usage, I apply the term "evangelical" to all Protestants, in contrast to its English-language meaning as a form of Protestantism that stresses personal salvation and a literal interpretation of the Bible. In the nineteenth century, nearly all of Latin America's evangelicals were members of mainline denominations, such as the Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian churches. Many early communities were founded by European immigrants; others grew up around isolated missionary settlements. While European origins gave early evangelicals a relatively privileged social status, the category soon came to overlap much more with the popular sectors, due to both the successful evangelization of lower-class communities (often in indigenous areas) and the arrival of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century.

Pentecostalism, a branch of evangelicalism that emphasizes mystical gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and faith healing, spread rapidly to Latin America following its founding in the United States in the early 1900s. It has been particularly attractive to lower-

class communities because of its emphasis on oral tradition, which makes it more accessible to illiterates, and its informal route to becoming a pastor, which relies on street preaching rather than seminary training (Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997). Today, the majority of Latin American Protestants are Pentecostal—an average of 80% across 18 countries in the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer. In terms of theology and practice, Pentecostals fit comfortably within the standard English-language definition of evangelical.

While evangelicals have had a presence in Latin American countries since independence, they clearly meet the definition of an “excluded” social group for most of this period. Latin America’s first post-independence constitutions generally established Roman Catholicism as the official state-sanctioned religion and forbade the public practice of any other (Mecham 1966). Prior to the establishment of civil registries and state-run cemeteries, the Catholic Church held a monopoly over the recording of births, the celebration of marriages, and the burial of the dead. In Chile, evangelicals had no access to Catholic cemeteries and were forced to bury their dead at sea or in the Santiago garbage dump alongside criminals and those who committed suicide (Canales Guevara 2000: 30). At best, non-Catholic Christians were treated as second-class citizens in early Latin America; at worst, they were closer to outlaws, subject to arrest for the practice of their faith.

The de jure situation for Latin American evangelicals improved around the turn of the century, with constitutional guarantees of the freedom to worship and the formal separation of church and state in many countries. Yet as highlighted by the example of Manoel de Mello in Brazil, de facto discrimination and harassment by authorities often continued. Moreover, in some countries, evangelicals’ legal rights actually deteriorated as the Catholic Church succeeded in recouping lost privileges. In Peru, three decades after the constitutional reform that established



freedom of worship, a 1945 decree prohibited public proselytizing (i.e., outside of church buildings) by non-Catholics in an effort to limit competition with the dominant religion (Armas Asín 2008). Less egregious forms of inequality, such as preferential access for Catholic clergy in prisons and hospitals and as military chaplains, continue to this day in many countries.

Given their historical treatment as second-class citizens, evangelicals' transformation into a politically influential constituency meets this volume's definition of inclusion—"a multi-dimensional process through which previously marginalized actors gain more meaningful and effective citizenship" (Introduction, p. 4). Yet when one thinks about the concept of "inclusion" in Latin America, evangelical Christians are probably not the first group that comes to mind. For many scholars, the present-day political agenda of evangelicals is explicitly *exclusionary* in terms of policies toward women and sexual minorities—a reactionary response to the progressive social and political trends that are more readily associated with inclusion. Evangelicals may constitute a new pressure group that has gained influence and, in some countries, achieved electoral success. But does their entrée into electoral politics really deserve to be grouped with other developments that fit under the inclusion label, including the rise of indigenous parties, the expansion of redistributive social policies, and an electoral shift to the left?

I argue that the electoral success of evangelicals in Latin America has more synergies with progressive forms of inclusion than might be obvious at first glance. For evangelicals, "meaningful and effective citizenship" has come first and foremost through the defense of religious freedom, a quest in which they historically enjoyed substantial support from the Left. During early battles over the separation of church and state, evangelicals formed political alliances with the most progressive forces in society—anticlerical Liberals and Radicals—against the conservatism of the Catholic Church. Only in recent decades, as values issues have

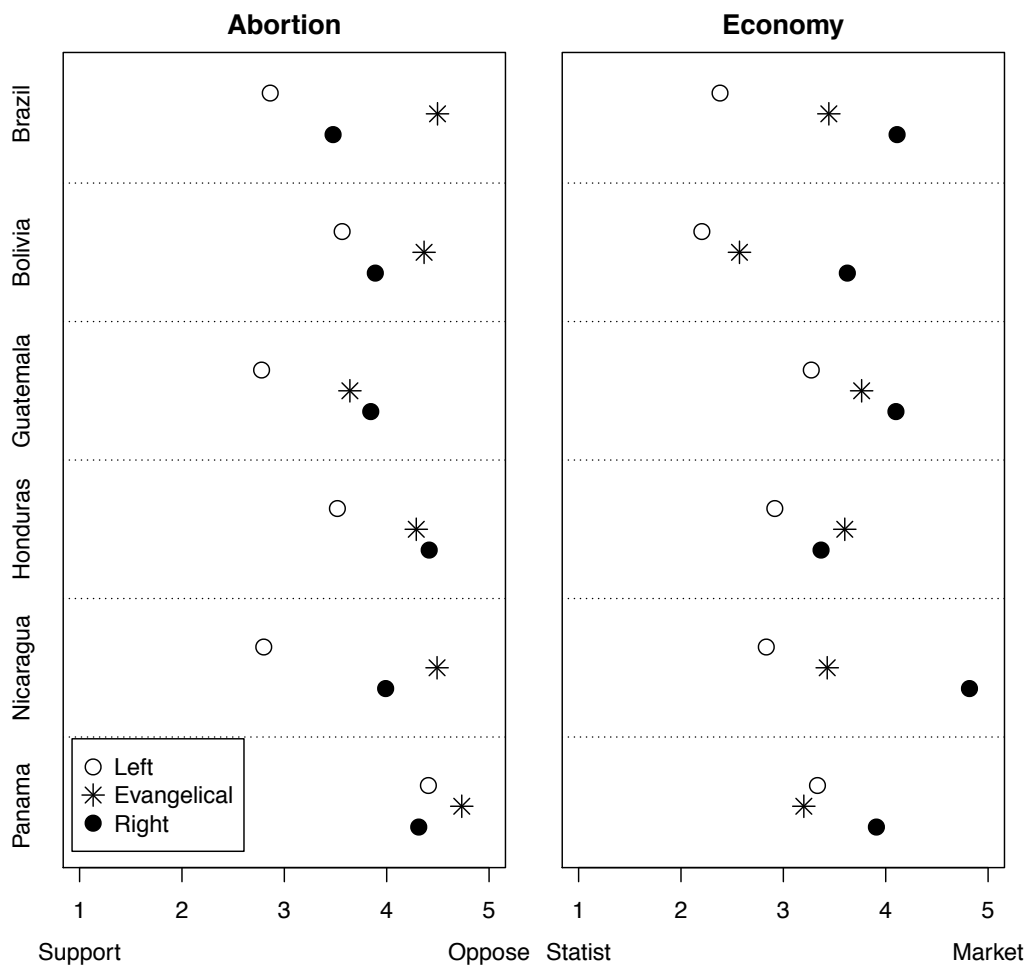
become a priority, have evangelicals' shifted more definitively toward the conservative camp, pushing causes that are exclusionary toward sexual minorities. Yet inclusive attitudes toward all marginalized actors is hardly a requirement that we impose when applying the inclusion label to other groups—such as organized labor, whose historical gains often served to reinforce traditional social roles for women.

Evangelicalism in Latin American also overlaps demographically with a number of marginalized groups, and it may serve to further their social and political inclusion in specific ways. In the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer surveys, evangelicals were significantly less white than non-evangelicals in 3 out of 18 countries, significantly less male in another 3 out of 18, and significantly less wealthy in 7 out of 18. Nowhere were they significantly more white or more male, and in only one, Honduras, were they significantly more wealthy. Pentecostalism, in particular, has been disproportionately attractive to women in Latin America because it helps them confront domestic violence, alcoholism and other forms of machismo (Chesnut 1997; Hallum 2003). Women often convert first, in the hopes that their male partners will follow them and be influenced by norms of good behavior. Women are also often attracted to evangelical churches because there are fewer barriers to becoming clergy, in terms of either doctrine or required seminary training (Silva 2010). Empowerment in the home and leadership positions in the church both facilitate other forms of political activity and help to engender meaningful and effective citizenship (Hallum 2003).

Furthermore, while few observers would place Latin American evangelicals on the political left, it would be a mistake to characterize them as an exclusively right-wing movement. On values issues, evangelical politicians tend to hold reliably conservative positions. However, reflecting the lower-class demographics of their membership, they are not particularly pro-

market on economic issues. Figure 2, based on data from the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA) surveys from the University of Salamanca, plots the mean issue positions of evangelical legislators in several countries, compared to those legislators who place themselves on the left (ideological self-identification of 1–3 on a 10-point scale) or the right (8–10). Evangelical politicians are staunchly opposed to abortion, typically holding even more conservative opinions than those who self-identify as right-wing. Yet on the economy, they hold attitudes that, on average, fall in between those of the Left and the Right.

**Figure 2: Attitudes of Evangelical Legislators in Latin America**



Note: Data are from the fourth wave, except for Panama (third wave), and include all countries where five or more evangelical legislators responded.

In some countries, evangelicals' openness to economic redistribution and state-led development has allowed them to form important alliances with the partisan Left. In Brazil, the IURD supported Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for president in 2002, beginning a long partnership with the Workers' Party (PT) government that lasted until 2016, when Edir Macedo finally broke with Dilma Rousseff amidst the effort to impeach her. The PT's partnership with evangelicals was an important element of Lula's shift to the center in 2002; his running mate, businessman José Alencar, came from the Liberal Party, which at the time was closely tied to the IURD and other evangelical churches.

Finally, evangelicals have played an important role in the provision of state-funded social services for the informal sector and other marginalized groups, an important component of the new inclusion. In Rio de Janeiro, the *Cheque Cidadão* program, which provides food vouchers for the poor, was introduced under the governorship of Anthony Garotinho, an evangelical, and coordinated by Everaldo Dias, an evangelical pastor (Machado 2006, 2012). In Chile, interdenominational evangelical groups known as *Unidades Pastorales* have formed partnerships with local governments to provide state-funded services such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation and low-income schools and orphanages (Fediakova 2004). Certainly, evangelicals stand to benefit politically from these partnerships, and patterns of benefit distribution may suggest clientelism or other *quid pro quos*. In Rio's *Cheque Cidadão* program, the distribution of benefits was outsourced to churches—82% of them evangelical, and only 11% Catholic (Machado 2006). Yet evangelicals are hardly unique in this respect; clientelism and political benefits from the distribution of social services are arguably the bread and butter of Latin American politics.

One major difference between the inclusion of evangelicals and that of other groups such as the indigenous or the informal sector is that citizens can choose their religion much more readily than their ethnicity or employment status. If one can freely convert into or out of an historically excluded category, does inclusion “count” in the same way as it does for groups whose membership is heavily influenced by genetics or the economy? I argue that “meaningful and effective citizenship” implies that citizens do not suffer a loss of recognition, access, or resources merely on the basis of legitimate choices about their lifestyle, including their religious affiliation. Certainly we apply the same standard in other realms. While indigenous ancestry is determined by birth, inclusionary policies toward the indigenous are often about supporting a lifestyle—including education in indigenous languages and traditional forms of self-government—that members of this group might otherwise opt out of via assimilation into mainstream society. An inclusive society implies that one should not be forced to abandon one’s beliefs, customs, or practices in order to gain rights, political representation, or material benefits.

### **Explaining Evangelicals’ Electoral Success**

While evangelicals have benefited from an inclusive turn in both Chile and Brazil—in the sense of legal equality, a decline in arbitrary harassment, and being taken seriously as an interest group—inclusion has taken substantially different forms in each country. As religious minorities, Latin America’s evangelicals have had no basis for claiming to represent the national interest in their countries, so the behind-the-scenes, supra-partisan influence sometimes enjoyed by the Catholic Church is off-limits to them (Grzymała-Busse 2015). Their best bet for political influence is putting themselves in positions of power where they can shape policy outcomes

directly. In Brazil, evangelicals have established a strong presence in the national legislature since the 1980s, forming a bloc in Congress that holds around 14% of seats and has been influential in policies related to religious freedom and values issues. In Chile, evangelicals have had minimal representation in Congress over the same period—even counting the 2017 election, which saw an increase in evangelical candidacies—and their much less successful efforts to influence legislation have mostly taken place outside the halls of power. What explains these differences in engagement and success with electoral politics in two of South America’s most heavily evangelical countries?

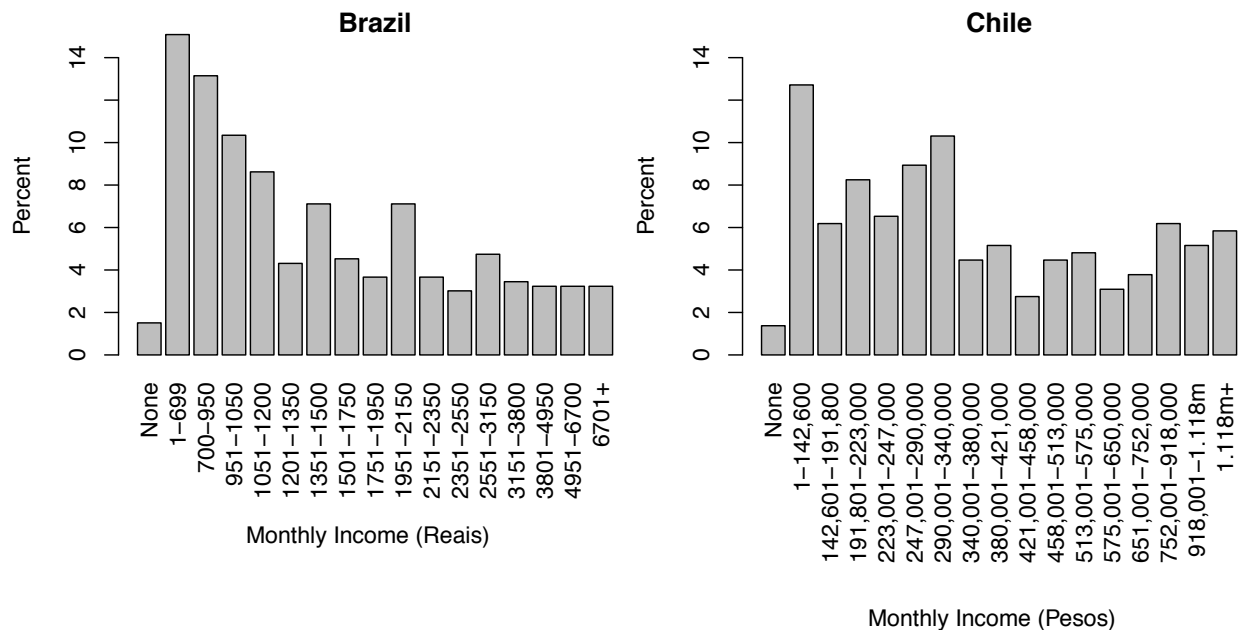
Existing explanations for evangelicals’ electoral accomplishments in Chile and Brazil have focused on the presence or absence of barriers posed by the social or political system. A first factor is social class. Throughout Latin America, evangelicalism has been particularly attractive among lower-class communities; on average, evangelicals are less wealthy than Catholics. However, the class structure of this religious minority differs cross-nationally; evangelicals are overwhelmingly lower-class in some countries and more on par with Catholics in others. Social class matters in numerous ways for success with electoral politics (Carnes 2018). A better educated community is more likely to produce leaders who have the volition to enter electoral politics and who stand a chance of succeeding. Higher average incomes mean more lucrative sources of campaign donations and other financial resources for incipient political movements. Discrimination may also hinder the political ambitions of communities that are perceived as lower-class, even when individual leaders are wealthier or better educated.

Social class is often mentioned as an explanation for evangelicals’ limited electoral success in Chile. Chilean evangelicalism was traditionally seen as providing an apolitical haven or refuge from the difficulties of everyday life, with ties between pastors and the faithful

reproducing the relationship between peasants and landlord on a rural estate (Lalive D’Epinay 1969). Both census and survey data have shown the movement to be of humble origins; in a 2007–2008 survey of evangelicals, 97% were from the middle or lower income categories (Fediakova and Parker 2009). In particular, scholars have pointed to Chile’s rigid social structure as a barrier to the electoral success of this primarily lower-class movement (Freston 2001).

Yet as underscored by survey data from both countries, evangelicals are as much if not more of a lower-class movement in Brazil as they are in Chile. Figure 3 plots the income distribution of evangelicals in each country from the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer. In both cases, the mode of the distribution is the lowest nonzero income category. In Brazil, evangelicals’ median monthly income falls into the sixth out of seventeen categories; in Chile, the median category is the seventh out of seventeen. While comparisons should be made with caution since we cannot be sure of the equivalency of income brackets across countries, these data suggest that Brazilian evangelicals are slightly poorer, relatively speaking, than their Chilean counterparts.

**Figure 3: Evangelical Income Distribution**



Moreover, in comparative perspective, social class seems an unconvincing explanation for evangelicals' limited electoral success in any country. Lower levels of income or education may pose challenges to electoral success, but they can also convey advantages—for example, producing candidates whose more humble demographic background gives them a common touch. Given the general correlation between measures of class and of partisanship or political participation in Latin America (Carlin and Love 2015; Lupu 2015), a lower-class evangelical community might be less likely to have firm pre-existing political loyalties, leaving it more available for mobilization by politically ambitious evangelical leaders. If social class were such an impediment to electoral victory, it would be difficult to explain the historical success of labor-based parties in any country or of indigenous movements in the Andes in recent years.

A second common explanation for the contrasting political achievements of evangelicals in Chile and Brazil focuses on political institutions and their implications for evangelicals' entry into electoral politics. Electoral systems matter for minorities' chances of winning office, as the literature on indigenous political parties in Latin America has made clear (Van Cott 2005). In contrast to indigenous groups, which are often concentrated geographically and may benefit from single member district systems, evangelical Christians tend to be distributed throughout the country, not (yet) constituting a plurality in any one region. Proportional representation (PR) is thus more likely to help them win office.

In particular, open list PR with high district magnitude has been identified as an electoral system that is particularly favorable to evangelicals' electoral prospects (Freston 2008). This electoral system facilitates evangelicals' access to the ballot by giving party leaders incentives to diversify their lists and generating numerous slots to offer candidates from different social groups. If identity voting outweighs party voting for evangelicals (Boas and Smith 2015), party



or coalition leaders can bring in additional votes for the party list by featuring an evangelical candidate.

The different forms of PR used in Chile versus Brazil are often mentioned as an explanation for differences in evangelicals' electoral success. Both countries use open-list PR for their lower electoral chambers, but Brazil's districts are much larger, with a magnitude ranging from 8 to 70—an arrangement that is thought to be particularly favorable for evangelicals' ballot access (Freston 2001). In Chile, from 1989 to 2013, district magnitude was fixed at 2 (the binomial system); since 2017, it ranges from 3 to 8. In particular, the binomial system's low district magnitude has been considered a barrier to evangelicals getting on the ballot (Freston 2001; Fediakova and Parker 2006).

Apart from the influence of electoral systems, party systems also matter for evangelicals' electoral prospects (Freston 2001). Fragmented party systems imply numerous legislative lists in each election and more opportunities to get on the ballot with established parties. Fragmentation may also make it easier for evangelicals to form new, viable parties themselves, either because of permissive registration requirements (strictly speaking, a cause rather than an effect of fragmentation) or because the effective threshold for winning office is lower.

Given this logic, Brazil's fragmented party system would seem highly favorable to evangelical candidates. Brazilian evangelicals have diversified their bets over time, electing representatives from an increasing number of parties. In the 1986 election, they gained office with 6 different parties; by 2010, the number had nearly tripled, to 17. Evangelicals have also founded their own successful parties. In 2003, the IURD organized the new Municipal Renewalist Party (PMR), later renamed the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB); in 2010, all of the IURD-affiliated elected deputies came from this party. Finally, party switching, though restricted

by recent legislation, has traditionally been rampant among evangelical legislators, who generally have institutional loyalty to their churches and treat party affiliation in a purely instrumental fashion (Freston 2001).

In contrast, Chile's more institutionalized party system has been considered much less hospitable to evangelical candidates (Freston 2001). There are many fewer parties in Chile than in Brazil, and major parties have traditionally been grouped into two blocs, the center-left New Majority (formerly known as the Concertación) and the center-right Chile Vamos (formerly known as the Alianza). Non-bloc parties and independents form their own lists to run for Congress, though they tend to fare poorly. Electoral system reform and the splintering of the center-left coalition helped open up this party system in 2017, with a new bloc, Broad Front, winning 13% of lower-house seats. Three new evangelical parties attempted to register in 2017 but did not complete the process prior to the election; their ultimate success remains to be seen.

Electoral and party system openness certainly correlates with evangelicals' electoral success in Brazil and Chile. Moreover, ballot access—the hypothesized mechanism linking institutional variables to electoral success—covaries in the expected direction as well. Drawing on secondary, news, and interview sources, I compiled a list of 26 evangelical politicians in Chile who ran for Congress 38 times across 7 elections from 1989 to 2013. A comparable list does not exist for Brazil and would be nearly impossible to construct given the large number of candidates. However, the number of Brazilian evangelicals who have been elected to Congress dwarfs the number that have even attempted to run in Chile. From a variety of secondary and news sources, I identified 212 Brazilian evangelical politicians who were elected to office 374 times in 7 elections from 1986 to 2010. Even accounting for differences in the size of each

country's legislature, it is clear that evangelicals have been much more successful in getting on candidate lists in Brazil than in Chile.

Yet it is difficult to attribute causality to the relationship between institutional openness and ballot access in Chile and Brazil. Many other factors differ between the two countries as well, so this correlation could easily be spurious. For a better controlled comparison, we can exploit subnational variation in Brazil, holding constant all national-level variables. Brazil's 27 states vary widely in terms of district magnitude for lower chamber elections. They also have distinct political party configurations—some operate essentially as two-party or even dominant-party systems, whereas others are highly fragmented, mirroring the national political scene. If permissive electoral and party systems matter for evangelical ballot access in the ways that have been hypothesized, we would expect evangelicals to constitute a greater share of candidates in states with higher district magnitude or more legislative lists.

To identify evangelical candidates in Brazil, I use a combination of candidates' self-declared occupations and official electoral names, which are available for the 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014 elections. Candidates are required to state their occupation when registering to run for office, and one of the options is "priest or member of a religious order or sect." Few Catholic clergy run for office, due to Vatican prohibitions, so this category is composed almost entirely of evangelicals. Brazilian candidates also have broad leeway to choose how their names will appear on the electronic ballot, and many evangelicals include church-related titles or qualifiers, such as "Pastor," "Brother," or "of Jesus" (Boas 2014). This measurement strategy certainly undercounts evangelical candidates, and it is more likely to identify clergy than laypersons. However, I cannot think of any reason why this form of measurement error would covary with district magnitude or party system fragmentation.



3% of all candidates in 2017, versus 1.3% in 2013. In the lead-up to the election, evangelical political organizers saw the new electoral system as presenting an opportunity (Emol 2016; author's interviews, Larrondo, Soto, H. Muñoz, F. Muñoz). The numbers suggest that it may have been realized, at least to a small degree.

Yet evidence from interviews with evangelical leaders and politicians in Chile in 2015 and 2017 also argues against the notion that class or institutional barriers explain their limited electoral success. In every interview, I asked subjects why evangelicals were 16% of the population but only about 1–2% of the candidates for Congress. None spontaneously mentioned discrimination by party leaders. When I asked specifically about discrimination in a follow-up question, most subjects denied that it was a factor; more commonly, they blamed the evangelical community itself for a reluctance to engage with politics. In the words of one evangelical staff member to a (non-evangelical) senator: “there is no discrimination toward evangelicals, but rather the reverse: the evangelical world discriminates against politicians” (author's interview, Valenzuela). Moreover, when those running in 2017 were asked why there had been a boost in candidacies, none spontaneously mentioned the new electoral system. Rather, they argued that evangelicals were spurred to action to oppose new, progressive legislation on values issues introduced or passed under the Bachelet government.

### **The Politicization of Evangelical Identity**

While prior research has focused on external barriers that might limit evangelicals' electoral success in Latin America, I argue that these explanations err in assuming a politicized movement that wants electoral representation in the first place. Studies of religion and party

politics in other parts of the world have focused centrally on this question of politicization. In Europe, threats posed to the Catholic Church by anticlerical Liberal reformers helped create a politicized Catholic identity and, eventually, Christian Democratic parties (Kalyvas 1996). Research on the political representation of indigenous groups in Latin America has also paid closer attention to the politicization of a social identity. In Van Cott's (2005) analysis, organizational resources and favorable party and electoral systems all play an important role in the success of indigenous parties in Latin America, but the politicization of ethnic cleavages is a necessary first step to transform a standoffish or disinterested stance toward electoral politics into active engagement.

I argue that what is true of Catholics in Europe and indigenous groups in the Andes is also true of evangelicals in South America. Whether the evangelical community overcame an initial reluctance to engage with the worldly pursuit of politics is the most important factor explaining variation in evangelical electoral success between Chile and Brazil.

To understand evangelical attitudes toward electoral politics, it is necessary to first gain an appreciation for Pentecostalism, the dominant form of Protestantism among Latin American evangelicals. In Chile, the first Pentecostal denomination, the Methodist Pentecostal Church, was founded in 1909; by 1920, it was Chile's largest non-Catholic denomination (Lalive d'Épinay 1969: 22, 35). By the end of the century, 75–90% of Chilean evangelicals belonged to Pentecostal churches (Freston 2001; Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997). In Brazil, Pentecostalism arrived in 1910–1911; by 1964, it accounted for an estimated 65% of all Protestants (Read 1965), increasing to 77% in the 2010 census. Thus, the question of evangelical involvement in Brazilian and Chilean electoral politics is largely a question of Pentecostal involvement.

As a religious tradition with a theological focus on the afterlife, Pentecostalism has traditionally been skeptical of political activity. Max Weber (1993) drew a distinction between other-worldly religions, which serve to discourage active engagement in public life, and worldly religions, which promote it. Pentecostalism, with its mysticism-filled worship practices and emphasis on heavenly rewards for earthly suffering, falls squarely into the other-worldly camp, at least in its original formulations (Gaskill 2002). Given this orientation, the initial inclination of most evangelicals in Brazil and Chile was to maintain their distance from the political world. Brazil's largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God, long promoted a stance of "believers don't mess with politics" (Freston 1993). Likewise, in the first decades of their presence in Chile, Pentecostals accepted "participation in political battles only when it was necessary to defend the interests of evangelical churches" (Ortiz R. 2012: 8).

A crucial first question for explaining evangelical involvement in electoral politics—logically prior to the question of social or political barriers that might hold them back—is whether the evangelical community overcomes this initial standoffish attitude. In Brazil, they successfully did so. In 1986, an Assemblies of God leader published a book, "Brother Votes for Brother" (Sylvestre 1986), which symbolically abandoned the "believers don't mess with politics" stance. The church promoted a slate of candidates in the 1986 Constituent Assembly election and successfully elected 14 of them, nearly double the size of the next largest church contingent. It has continued this practice more recently, publishing an official list of church-sponsored candidates in its magazine in 2010, for example (Mensajeio da Paz 2010). The IURD has been even more electorally ambitious. It takes a census of church members prior to each election and identifies specific church-affiliated candidates to run in each district. It provides

institutional support for their campaigns, via sermons and church-owned media, and it carefully instructs church members on how to vote (Machado 2005; Oro 2005).

In contrast, evangelical politicians in Chile have struggled to convince their broader faith community that running for office is an appropriate endeavor. Jaime Barrientos (author's interview), an evangelical candidate for Valparaíso city council in 2008 and Congress in 2013, purchased a series of five-minute advertisements on a local evangelical television station for both elections, largely to make the case to other evangelicals that participating in elections was legitimate. Topics included "What is a Christian doing in politics?"—a question that would be unnecessary to ask in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> When Salvador Pino Bustos, a radio evangelist and Pentecostal bishop, launched an independent bid for the presidency in 1999, he failed to attract the support of most evangelical leaders (Fediakova 2004; Fonseca 1999).

Evangelical politicians and leaders often attribute their community's limited politicization to the continued influence of the notion that politics is not appropriate for believers. In the words of Anglican priest Alfred Cooper (author's interview), former evangelical chaplain of the presidential palace La Moneda, evangelicals have had little interest in running for office because of "the pietistic idea that was part of our revival here: you do not get involved in worldly affairs, and politics is a worldly affair." As discussed below, some church leaders abandoned this traditional standoffish attitude in the 2017 election, endorsing a slate of evangelical candidates, though the results of the election suggest that voters may still be reluctant to support them.

What explains why Brazilian evangelicals have set aside the "believers don't mess with politics" attitude in favor of active engagement, while a suspicious attitude toward electoral

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9Xhl7AySeM>.

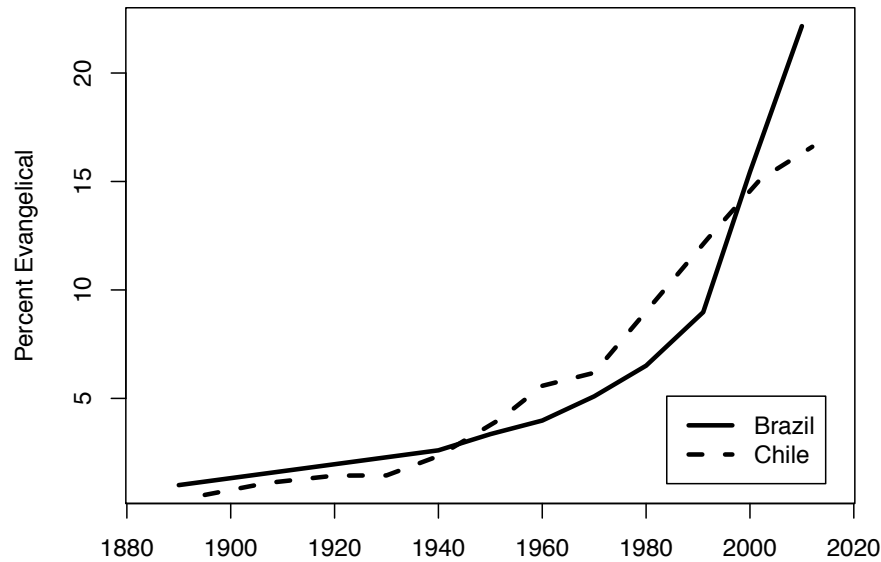


politics persists in Chile? In the sections that follow, I argue that two sets of legislative battles account for the differential politicization of evangelical identity in Brazil and Chile. The first concerns opportunities and incentives to defend legal equality with the Catholic Church through electoral means, principally elections to constituent assemblies. The second battle concerns the newly relevant “values issues”—primarily abortion and same-sex marriage—that have largely replaced religious liberty as the dominant political concerns for evangelicals in the 2000s.

### **Struggles for Religious Liberty**

Throughout Latin American history, the primary issue that has motivated evangelical participation in electoral politics has been the right to practice their religion as freely as Roman Catholics. In the nineteenth century, prior to the formal separation of church and state, the struggle for religious liberty drove evangelical participation in politics and public life. In Chile, David Trumbull, an American Congregationalist minister and nationalized Chilean citizen, campaigned actively in the 1860s–1880s for the passage of religious freedom legislation via sermons, church-affiliated newspapers, and the organs of the Radical and Liberal Parties (Ortiz Retamal 2009). Yet nineteenth-century struggles for religious freedom happened too early in the growth of the evangelical population to serve as a major stimulus for sustained political participation. As shown in Figure 5, evangelicals were only 1% of the population in Brazil’s 1890 census; in Chile, they were 0.55% in 1895. Moreover, Pentecostalism, the now-dominant strain of evangelicalism, did not arrive until 1909–1910.

### **Figure 5: Evangelical Population Growth in Brazil and Chile**



The question of relevance for evangelical participation in present-day electoral politics is thus a somewhat more contemporary one. During the period of evangelical, and especially Pentecostal, growth—roughly speaking, from the 1920s onward—what struggles related to religious liberty might serve to politicize this faith community, overcoming an initial disinclination to participate in politics and public life?

### **Brazil: Catholic Offensives and Constituent Assemblies**

In Brazil, the formal, constitutional separation of church and state happened early on, when evangelicals were a tiny share of the population. Yet in the decades that followed, the Catholic Church regained significant privileges, leading to a sense that early gains in the area of religious liberty were under assault. Meanwhile, during the twentieth century, Brazil held several elections for constituent assemblies to write new constitutions, providing the opportunity for evangelicals to organize politically to defend the separation of church and state and the rights of religious minorities. The most recent of these constituent assembly elections, in 1986, marked a surge in evangelical electoral success.

Brazil's Republican movement was anti-clerical, and following the successful coup against Emperor Pedro II in 1889, the first act of the provisional government was ending the status of Catholicism as the official, state-sanctioned religion. The Constitution of 1891 formalized this separation of church and state, instituting freedom of religion, civil marriage, and secular education (Oro 2006). Thus, one of the major political objectives of evangelicals in Latin America was achieved early on in Brazil, without their participation as protagonists or even significant allies, and well before it could serve to mobilize a large number of evangelicals.

Yet the Catholic Church put up substantial resistance to its loss of privileges, and for decades after the formal separation of church and state, it organized electorally in an attempt to regain them. While efforts in the early 1900s were of limited success, the political scenario took a positive turn for the Catholic Church, and a negative one for religious minorities, after the 1930 coup that brought Getúlio Vargas to power. Vargas sought closer relations with the Church in order to bolster his nationalist image; one of his first acts as president was a decree reestablishing Catholic education in public schools (Williams 1974).

In the lead-up to the 1933 constituent assembly elections, the supra-partisan Catholic Electoral League (LEC) was established for the purpose of elaborating a Catholic platform for the new constitution, endorsing candidates who pledged to support it, registering Catholics to vote, and offering them advice on whom to support. The LEC succeeded in electing the majority of candidates it endorsed, and it achieved most of its aims for the new constitution: state recognition of Catholic marriages, prohibition of divorce, religious holidays, the possibility of state financial support of Church activities, and a reaffirmation of Catholic education in public schools (Williams 1974; Mainwaring 1986).

Evangelicals perceived a clear threat to secularism in the Catholic Church's political efforts—Protestant leaders protested that “the return of compulsory religion” would bring about a reprise of the Inquisition (Williams 1974: 308)—and the activities of the LEC prompted evangelicals to organize politically for the first time. The lead-up to the 1933 constituent assembly elections saw the formation of a new evangelical political party, the São Paulo Evangelical Civic Union (*União Cívica Evangélica Paulista*), and several evangelical candidates, one of them successful (Campos 2005; Freston 1993). Churches organized voter registration drives, pastors urged the faithful to vote, and denominational publications engaged in “an unprecedented job of raising political awareness” (Freston 1993: 154). One open letter to Brazilian evangelicals in 1932 expresses the motivation quite clearly:

Let's abandon, once and for all, the attitude of mere observers, of hoping, of apparent well-being, of indifference and comfort... We urge that the voice of evangelicals in all Brazil be heard by those who will make up the Constituent Assembly, who will decide on the problems that affect spiritual and social life... Do not by any means vote for candidates or parties who support measures that compromise the secular nature of the State, introduce or permit religious instruction in public schools (Sylvestre 1986: 93, 96).

The end of the Vargas regime and the calling of another constituent assembly election for 1945 prompted another round of electoral mobilization by both Catholics and evangelicals. The LEC, which had disbanded after Vargas suspended elections in 1937, was resurrected in the lead-up to the 1945 elections. The Christian Democratic Party was also founded during that year and ran candidates in the constituent assembly elections, though the project was opposed by the Church hierarchy, which favored the supra-partisan LEC (Coelho 2003). In response, evangelicals tried to unify around a common electoral platform, and there were calls for supporting designated candidates and coordinating the vote (Campos 2005).

The LEC model of Catholic Church-endorsed candidacies was used through the 1950s and 1960s (Bruneau 1974: 101), and evangelicals continued to express support for political

involvement to defend their own interests. In interviews conducted in 1959–1960, Willems (1967: 222) found that 27 out of 36 pastors favored political action to protect freedom of religion.

During the 1964–1985 period of military rule, a rift between the Catholic Church and the government generated opportunities for pro-regime evangelicals. Friendly pastors were invited to take courses at the Superior War College, and authorities offered appointments, jobs, and partnerships for church leaders (Cavalcanti 1988; Chesnut 1997). Yet benefits for evangelicals during this period were individualistic and potentially tenuous, and with redemocratization, there was a sense of unease among many evangelical leaders about what a new situation—one with the potential for rapprochement between the state and Catholic Church—would bring (Cavalcanti 1988: 208).

Given the uncertainty of the transition and a concern about another Catholic offensive during constitutional deliberations, the 1986 constituent assembly election prompted a major surge in evangelical candidacies and the successful election of 33 representatives. Moreover, for the first time, a Pentecostal church, the Assemblies of God, was leading the effort, including publication of the “Brother Votes for Brother” volume mentioned above. In subsequent interviews, Assemblies of God leaders mentioned the Catholic Church’s constitutional agenda—including a supposed effort to have Catholicism declared the official religion for the first time since 1891—as the factor that led the church to abandon its traditionally apolitical stance (Freston 1993: 213; Mariano and Pierucci 1996: 209). Articles in the church’s official magazine sounded a similar line in the lead-up to the election (Freston 1993: 213–214).

### **Chile: Catholic Détente and Authoritarian Constitutions**

Chile differs from Brazil in terms of evangelical incentives to defend religious equality as well as opportunities to do so via electoral politics. The constitutional separation of church and state went largely uncontested by the Catholic Church, which did not seek to recoup lost privileges in the decades that followed, either electorally or through other means. Moreover, Chile's twentieth-century constitutions were written by appointed committees and approved by referenda rather than elected constituent assemblies, limiting evangelicals' opportunities to elect representatives to debate fundamental questions of religious freedom. Smaller-scale efforts to gain legal equality with the Catholic Church have failed to mobilize evangelical electoral participation.

The formal separation of church and state came later in Chile than in Brazil—the 1925 Constitution passed during the presidency of Arturo Alessandri—but it was similarly pushed by Liberal reformers without significant involvement of the evangelical community. Alessandri was strongly committed to separating church and state, a position included in his 1920 campaign platform for pragmatic reasons—to deprive the Conservative Party of the ability to win votes as a defender of Church interests (Smith 1982: 72).

Yet Chile's constitutional separation of church and state differed starkly from Brazil's in terms of the Catholic reaction and the threat that it posed to evangelical interests. Alessandri negotiated the terms of separation directly with the Vatican, which agreed not to oppose the new Constitution—and to communicate this stance to Chilean bishops—in exchange for guaranteed legal status for the Catholic Church, the right to own property and administer its educational system, and the right to manage its internal affairs via Canon Law (Smith 1982: 72, 78; Mecham 1966: 218–219). In contrast to the overt politicization of Brazil's Catholic Electoral League, Santiago Archbishop Crescente Errázuriz issued a pastoral letter in 1922 forbidding priests'

active involvement in party and electoral politics. Evangelicals were thus much less likely to perceive an aggrieved Catholic Church that wanted to regain lost privileges.

Chile's 1925 constitution, as well as its present 1980 constitution, also differ from the majority of Brazil's charters in terms of the opportunities they afforded for evangelical electoral mobilization. In 1925, there was no electoral process to choose representatives specifically charged with writing, and voting to approve or disapprove, the constitutional separation of church and state and the guarantee of religious equality. Rather, the proposed constitutional text was drafted by a committee appointed by the president and approved by popular referendum. Chile's present constitution, which dates from the Pinochet regime, was similarly written by an appointed committee and approved in a (particularly undemocratic) referendum; subsequent changes have come only through amendments.

In the nearly 100 years since 1925, Chile's evangelicals rarely experienced any perceived threat to the separation of church and state that might prompt political organizing. In the view of Meham (1966: 222), "the tolerance of Chileans and the constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion have been favorable to the Evangelical movement." The only major attempt during this period to recoup the Catholic Church's legal privileges, a 1944 bill that would have required public servants to take Catholic religion classes, was defeated in the Chamber of Deputies after evangelicals took to the streets in protest; direct representation in Congress was unnecessary (Canales Guevara 2000: 61). Chile is a case of unusually successful Catholic electoral initiatives; the Falange Nacional, established in 1938, had elected one senator and 14 deputies by 1957, and the Christian Democratic Party, founded that year, dominated Chilean politics during the 1960s (Huneus 2003; Smith 1982). Yet both parties emerged out of left-leaning Catholic student movements and emphasized progressive social policy rather than recouping Catholic legal

privileges, so they were unlikely to generate a perception of threat on behalf of evangelicals.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, new conservative Catholic groups, such as Opus Dei and the *gremialismo* movement that emerged in Chile's Catholic University during the 1970s, did not find expression within the party system until the founding of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) in 1983 (Berrier Sharim 1989), so they were also unlikely to generate a perceived electoral threat.

During the Pinochet dictatorship, strained relations between the government and Catholic Church created an opening for a conservative faction of the evangelical movement, which embraced the regime in exchange for public recognition and benefits (Boas 2016; Lagos Schuffeneger 1988). Given these cozy relations, the newspaper of the Methodist Pentecostal Church, Chile's largest Protestant denomination, expressed no anxieties about any loss of privileges in Chile's 1980 Constitution (Vieyra 1980), a stark contrast to the position of the Assemblies of God in Brazil.

Since the formal separation of church and state, the only religious freedom-related issue that prompted notable mobilization by Chile's evangelicals concerns the legal status of religious organizations. The Chilean Catholic Church is considered an entity under public law whose legal status, under most interpretations, can only be dissolved via constitutional amendment. Prior to 1999, nearly all other religious entities were considered non-profit corporations under private law, meaning that their legal status could be canceled by either administrative action of the Ministry of Justice or a court sentence (Cortínez Castro 1998; Orrego, González, and Saldaña 2003; Salinas Araneda 1999). While the difference has no implications for day-to-day

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<sup>2</sup> By the same token, the rise of liberation theology—more extensive in Brazil than in Chile, especially at the local level (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989)—is unlikely to have affected evangelicals' perceptions of threats to core interests, since it sought progressive socioeconomic change rather than legal privileges for the Catholic Church.



operations, evangelical leaders in Chile had long considered their churches more vulnerable to arbitrary government action (author's interview, Salas), even if such action was rarely taken.

With the return to democracy in 1990, a number of evangelical leaders began to advocate for legislation that would give all churches public law juridical personality—a reform that was ultimately implemented via the 1999 Religious Worship Law. The push for its passage did inspire some political activity—for example, pastors told the media that they were instructing their congregations not to vote for candidates who opposed the bill (Cortínez Castro 1998). Yet the effort ultimately generated little opposition from the Catholic Church. The Church's main demand was that it be effectively “grandfathered” in terms of its constitutionally-recognized juridical personality; once this provision was included in the final text, the Church offered its support for the bill, which was approved almost unanimously (Orrego, González, and Saldaña 2003; Salinas Araneda 1999).

Given the limited sense of threat to evangelicals' core interests during the 1990s, the push to resolve their churches' legal status ultimately failed to stimulate significant participation in electoral politics. The Religious Worship Law effort did not significantly boost the number of evangelicals running for Congress, even though those elected in 1993 and 1997 would be in a position to shape and vote on the new legislation. The one political project that sought to elect candidates for this purpose ultimately collapsed. In 1995, a group of young lay evangelicals organized the National Christian Alliance (ANC), which tried unsuccessfully to register as a political party and also failed to negotiate a slate of candidates with established right-wing parties. Many of Chile's senior evangelical leaders opposed the project due to generational, lay-pastoral, and partisan divides (Fediakova 2004; author's interview, Larrondo).

## Values Issues: The Question of Timing and Alliances

In recent years, the quest for religious liberty, the major issue inspiring evangelicals' political activism for most of Latin American history, has taken a backseat to new battles over values issues, including same-sex marriage and abortion (Corrales 2017). Blocking progressive legislation on these issues constitutes a new struggle that can potentially politicize evangelical identity, prompting an initial entrée into the electoral sphere or maintaining evangelicals' involvement once questions of religious liberty have largely been settled. One important feature of the struggle over values issues distinguishes it from these earlier battles. On same-sex marriage, abortion, and related issues, conservative Catholics generally adopt the same positions as evangelicals; for the first time, they are potential allies rather than adversaries.

**Table 1: Liberalization on Values Issues**

	Date of Legalization	
	<u>Brazil</u>	<u>Chile</u>
Limited abortion*	1940	2017
Divorce	1977	2004
Same-sex civil unions	2011	2015
Same-sex marriage	2013	—

\*Abortion in the case of anencephaly was not legal in Brazil until 2012. Therapeutic abortion was legal in Chile from 1931–1989.

I argue that both the timing and the question of alliances on battles over values issues have been much more favorable to evangelical electoral participation in Brazil than in Chile. Brazil was an early adopter of progressive legislation on values issues, while Chile was a comparative laggard, as summarized in Table 1. Abortion and LGBTQ rights were up for debate during Brazil's 1987–88 Constituent Assembly, engaging an evangelical caucus that was initially focused on defending religious liberty. In contrast, similar issues did not mobilize evangelical

candidates in Chile until 2017. Moreover, the socially conservative Catholic presence in Chile's Congress is much stronger than in Brazil's. In the 2010 PELA surveys in each country, 45% of Chilean legislators both identified as Catholic and were strongly opposed to same-sex marriage and abortion (self-placement of 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale); only 13% of Brazilian legislators fell into the same category. As a result, Chilean evangelicals have been able to oppose progressive values legislation by supporting existing conservative Catholic legislators, whereas Brazil's evangelicals have needed to take the lead in these same battles.

### **Brazil: Leading the Charge Against an Early Progressive Turn**

In Brazil, evangelical politicians who initially entered the fray to defend religious liberty in the Constituent Assembly instead found themselves defending conservative positions on values issues, which were very much up for debate during deliberations. Evangelicals dominated the Subcommittee on the Family, Minors, and the Elderly, which was responsible for drafting relevant portions of the constitutional text, and their proposal initially banned abortion, which had been permitted under limited circumstances since 1940. When the abortion ban was stripped from the text that went to a floor vote, evangelical legislators introduced two amendments that sought (unsuccessfully) to reinstate it. Another evangelical representative proposed to broaden the constitutional grounds for state censorship to allow the censoring of pornography. Evangelicals also helped vote down an amendment that would have included sexual orientation in the list of conditions protected from discrimination (Freston 1993; Sylvestre 1988: 33–34).

In the 2000s, as LGBTQ rights become a more central issue in the political debate, evangelical representatives took the lead in opposing liberalizing proposals in this area. One of the major cases involved a school curriculum designed to combat anti-LGBTQ bullying, known

colloquially as the “gay kit.” The newly inaugurated Dilma Rousseff government was planning to roll out this curriculum in early 2011 when the evangelical caucus began to mobilize against it. Though public school curricula were an executive branch responsibility and did not require legislative approval, evangelicals controlled 14% of seats in Congress and were able to exercise pressure in other areas. Evangelical legislators and their conservative Catholic allies threatened to block all future legislation and to support a corruption investigation against the president’s chief of staff unless the curriculum was withdrawn. The government soon backed down, and the educational campaign was canceled (Vital and Lopes 2013).

Defending conservative positions on values issues was not the main reason for evangelicals’ initial entrée into electoral politics in Brazil, but it quickly became the major motivation for their continued presence. While Sylvestre’s (1986) argument for evangelical participation in the Constituent Assembly had focused on religious freedom, in his subsequent review of that experience and call for continued political involvement, values issues were a much more important justification (Sylvestre 1988: 33). By the 2000s, they had become the primary motivation. In interviews conducted in 2011–2012, Machado and Burity (2014) found that, when asked about their attitudes toward electoral politics, evangelical leaders and politicians frequently mentioned the importance of defending traditional religious values against secularizing, liberal political projects.

Moreover, while evangelicals and conservative Catholics largely coincide in their stance on values issues, Brazil’s evangelicals have a stronger presence in Congress, putting them in a position to lead the charge against progressive legislation. While most legislators are nominally Catholic, the group with strong institutional loyalty to the Catholic Church is much smaller. Serious Catholic organizing within the Brazilian Congress began only in the 1990s, in response

to evangelicals' electoral success. The Pastoral Parlamentar Católica, the main vehicle for conservative Catholic representation, was formed in 1997, ten years after the entrée of evangelicals. In the 2011–2014 legislature, it had only 24 members, versus 70 who belonged to the evangelical equivalent, the Frente Parlamentar Evangélica. Evangelicals also had a stronger presence in the large Frente Parlamentar Mista em Defesa da Vida e Contra o Aborto (Joint Parliamentary Front in Defense of Life and Against Abortion)—12 of the Catholic caucus members belonged, versus 42 from the evangelical caucus (Vital and Lopes 2013).

### **Chile: Delayed Mobilization Amidst Conservative Catholic Leadership**

In Chile, values issues did not present a perceived threat to evangelicals' way of life until much more recently, despite continued center-left government from 1990 to 2009. The return to democracy did not begin with a constitutional convention where every issue was on the table; rather, the governing Concertación had to choose which reforms it would pursue through the normal legislative process. Chile's first two post-Pinochet presidents were from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC)—a centrist party overall, but one that clusters with the right on values issues (Mainwaring and Scully 2003; Raymond and Felch 2014). Right-wing parties also retained a strong presence in Congress. As a result, there were no serious attempts to liberalize values legislation in the 1990s. A 1991 bill to re-legalize therapeutic abortion made little headway; the only abortion bill that went to a floor vote was sponsored by a right-wing senator and sought to increase criminal penalties for offenders (Blofield 2006).

Not until the issue of civil unions—initially proposed by Sebastián Piñera in 2011, and finally approved and signed into law by Michelle Bachelet in 2015—did evangelicals worry about new legislation on values issues posing any major threat to their conservative worldview.

According to Eddy Roldán (author's interview), an evangelical political organizer and candidate for Congress in 2017, "until the year 2010, the church was comfortable. We kept on doing our work as a church, preaching the Gospel, and in politics, it ultimately did not matter that much who governed."

Since Bachelet's second term began in 2014, a series of progressive laws on values issues jolted this comfortable position for evangelicals and prompted a rethinking of their traditional political quiescence. In addition to the civil unions law in 2015, the Bachelet government legalized abortion under limited circumstances in September 2017, two months before the election, and it introduced bills to allow same-sex marriage and adoption and strengthen transgender rights. In interviews with six evangelical candidates during the 2017 campaign, nearly all of them mentioned the Bachelet government's values agenda as the primary impulse for evangelicals' political activity in that election, characterizing it as an "awakening," an "earthquake," or a "bubble bursting" (author's interviews, Roldán, Contreras, Gómez, Pérez, and Durán).

The evangelical political awakening of 2017 took the form of a surge in candidacies and the first organized efforts to promote a slate. As noted above, at least 32 evangelical candidates ran for Congress in 2017, compared to 10 in the previous election. There were also three efforts to found new evangelical parties, though none successfully completed the process before the election. Moreover, a group tied to several prominent pastors, *Por un Chile para Cristo* (For a Chile for Christ), promoted a slate of 14 of the most conservative evangelical candidates, holding press conferences, handing out fliers at Christian events, and circulating their names on social media. Organizers of these efforts cited the Bachelet government's values agenda as the impetus for their electoral offensive (Cosmovisión 2017; Emol 2016).

Yet the fruits of evangelical electoral organizing in 2017 were relatively modest. Only four evangelical candidates were elected, much less than the surge organizers were hoping for. All were on the lists of a major party, National Renewal (RN), and had previously held elected office or gained prior campaign experience running for Congress in 2009 or 2013, so neither the political scenario nor the new electoral system seems to have helped true newcomers or outsiders win office. Combined with two evangelicals already in the Senate, these victories brought the evangelical presence in Congress to 3% of seats, slightly better than the best results from the 1990s (Figure 1).

Beyond the later stage at which values issues have come to the fore, a second reason for evangelicals' limited electoral ambitions in Chile is the strong, socially conservative Catholic presence in Congress, which has encouraged evangelicals to align with existing legislators. In addition to Chile's Christian Democratic Party, the two major right-wing parties have strong conservative Catholic contingents—especially UDI, many of whose leaders belong to conservative Catholic societies such as Opus Dei. Conservative Catholic legislators have long led the battle on values issues; Hernán Larraín of UDI sponsored a bill to increase criminal penalties for illegal abortions that was only narrowly defeated in 1998 (Blofield 2006).

Amidst the struggle over values issues, some conservative Catholic legislators have received enthusiastic backing from evangelicals. Manuel José Ossandón, an RN senator, was featured on the cover of the publication *Prensa Evangélica* in 2014, criticizing same-sex parenting; several evangelical politicians helped organize his 2017 bid for the right-wing coalition's presidential nomination. After Ossandón lost the presidential primary, a number of evangelicals, including the party-in-information Unidos en la Fe, threw their support behind former UDI senator and far-right independent candidate José Antonio Kast.

Given the option to build alliances with conservative Catholic legislators who have experience and seniority, electing their own representatives has historically been less of a priority for Chile's evangelicals. As Alfred Cooper (author's interview), former chaplain of La Moneda, stated in 2015, "evangelicals have a kind of a blockage, that this is the way life is. You find the friendliest senators and deputies ... and you get alongside them. There's very little movement to actually become parliamentarians." This attitude changed in 2017, in part thanks to Cooper's own support for the Por un Chile para Cristo effort; relying on conservative Catholics in Congress was no longer considered sufficient. Yet even if such electoral offensives bear more fruit in the future, evangelical legislators will likely be a long way from leading the charge on values issues as they do in Brazil.

Moreover, those evangelicals who do run for office on a values platform have difficulty distinguishing themselves from conservative Catholic competitors. For example, Francesca Muñoz of RN built her 2013 campaign for deputy from the Concepción region around a conservative stance on values issues. But during the main candidates' debate, incumbent Enrique Van Rysselberghe of UDI stole her thunder, attacking President Bachelet's stance on abortion and same-sex marriage before Muñoz had a chance to raise the issue. While voting behavior is beyond the scope of this chapter, it seems plausible that evangelical voters motivated by values issues, the natural support base for a candidate like Muñoz, might instead opt for someone like Van Rysselberghe, who had more legislative experience and strong ties to the right-wing political establishment and was arguably better positioned to defend their concerns in Congress.

## **Conclusion**



In this chapter, I have argued that increases in “meaningful and effective citizenship” for evangelical Christians constitute an important part of the new inclusion in Latin America. Evangelical Christianity is a core component of the lives of a growing number of Latin American citizens who are disproportionately poor, female, and non-white. The rights that they have gained over the past century—to practice their religion on the same legal footing as Roman Catholics, and to be taken seriously as citizens, voters, and potential political leaders—is itself an important element of inclusion. To the extent that they have gained office or organized as pressure groups in recent years, evangelicals have tended to promote socially conservative policies that are exclusionary toward sexual minorities and, in some ways, women as well. Yet they also often serve to empower women in the home and through leadership opportunities; to support, and even help implement, redistributive social policies; and to form political partnerships with the Left as well as the Right. In all of these ways, their entrée into the political sphere is part and parcel of the new inclusion in Latin America, writ large.

While gains in meaningful and effective citizenship for evangelicals have been a common trend throughout the region, political inclusion has taken different forms cross-nationally, with evangelicals gaining substantial electoral presence in some countries and remaining nearly devoid of descriptive representation in others. I argue that cross-national differences in evangelicals’ ambitions and success with electoral politics depend on whether this religious identity is transformed into a political identity. In Brazil, two sets of legislative battles served to draw evangelicals into the electoral arena—the struggle for equal rights and privileges with the Catholic Church, particularly in constitutions written by elected assemblies, and the defense of conservative positions on values issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, where evangelicals took an early lead. In Chile, the limited threat from the Catholic Church, lack of

electoral opportunities for influencing constitution-writing, later date with which values issues came to the fore, and protagonism of conservative Catholics have all inhibited the politicization of evangelical identity in a way that could mobilize electoral participation. This scenario began to change in 2017 after a flurry of progressive legislation, but it is still too soon to tell whether it will bear fruit.

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