

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

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**ABSTRACT:** If the inclusionary turn in Latin America involves the mobilization of previously excluded popular sector constituencies, one of the principal forms it has taken is the entrée of evangelical Christians into electoral politics. Yet this process has been uneven across the region, even among the countries where evangelicals are most numerous. This chapter focuses on the cases of Brazil and Chile, arguing that evangelicals' motivations to enter the electoral sphere explain cross-national variation in their involvement and success with electoral politics. Where the separation of church and state is seen as under threat, evangelicals—a religious minority in Latin America—seek to elect representatives to defend it. In addition, where conservative Catholics have a strong electoral presence, evangelicals' preferences on values issues are already well represented, so they have fewer incentives to mobilize electorally. In closing, the chapter discusses how evangelical politicians, despite their socially conservative stances on values issues, often favor economic redistribution and have sometimes served as key allies of traditional leftist movements seeking to broaden their appeal. In this sense, evangelicals' electoral ambitions are intimately interrelated with other aspects of the new inclusion in Latin America, such as anti-poverty spending targeted toward the urban informal sector.

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## Introduction

In 1956, Manoel de Mello founded the Brazil to Christ Church, the first native-born Brazilian denomination associated with Pentecostalism, a charismatic branch of evangelical Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The practice of religious faiths other than Roman Catholicism 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).

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 largest broadcasters in Brazil. The IURD's massive headquarters in São Paulo, a replica of Solomon's Temple that seats 10,000, was granted a legally questionable permit by the municipal government that exempted it from paying

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<sup>1</sup> 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 practice, the majority of Protestants in Latin America, especially those who are politically active, fit comfortably within the English-language definition of "evangelical."

taxes on new construction.<sup>2</sup> Brazil's most prominent politicians attended the Temple's inauguration in 2014, including President Dilma Rousseff, Vice President Michel Temer, and the governor and mayor of São Paulo. Present as well were many of the 84 members of the "evangelical caucus" in Brazil's Congress, including 11 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," in the sense of Collier and Collier (1991), especially if one takes a long-term view. The practice of religions other than Roman Catholicism 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 practice their faith. Yet as highlighted by the example of Manoel de Mello, evangelical clergy and congregations 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

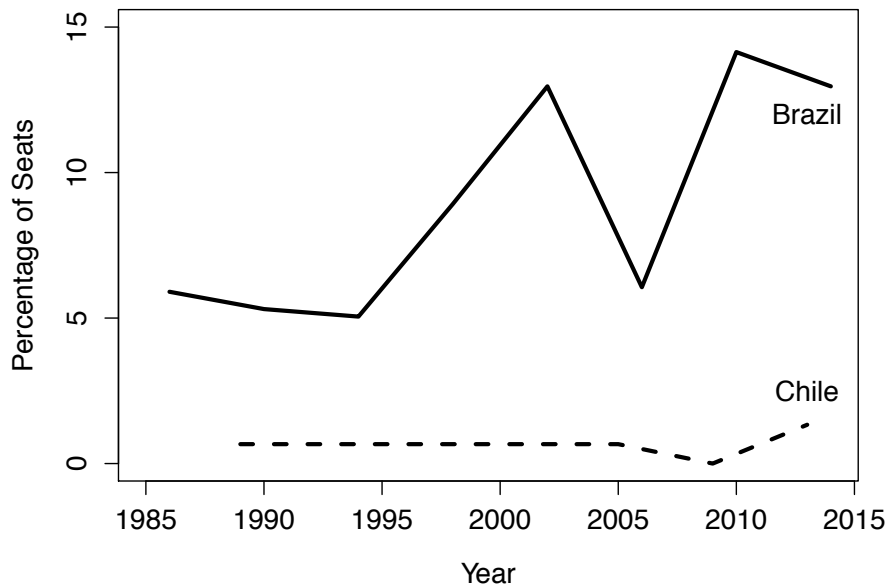
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<sup>2</sup> <http://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-estado/2014/07/29/obra-de-templo-da-universal-tem-alvara-de-reforma.htm>.

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 2014 AmericasBarometer surveys, around a fifth of all Latin Americans identified with non-Catholic Christian denominations. In South America, Brazil topped the list at 32%; in Central America, figures were as high as 43%, in Guatemala. A sheer growth in numbers explains, at least in part, 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 Peru**



Yet parallel to the situation with labor incorporation, the growing numerical strength of evangelicals has had very different political implications across countries. Chile, which has

South America's second-largest evangelical population in percentage terms, presents a stark contrast with Brazil in this respect. While Brazilian evangelicals have maintained a steady and growing presence in Congress since the transition to democracy, Chile has had, on average, only one evangelical representative in the 158-seat legislature (Figure 1). Few evangelicals in Chile run for elected office, and those that do meet with limited success. Mainstream Chilean politicians still treat evangelicals as an important interest group, offering policy commitments during campaigns and making a show of attending an annual inter-denominational service of thanksgiving organized by evangelical churches. Yet Brazilian evangelicals have sought and achieved influence within the halls of power in a way that Chile's evangelicals have not.

The present chapter examines the contrasting cases of Chile and Brazil, addressing the question of what accounts for the stark differences in terms of evangelicals' engagement and success with electoral politics. 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 factors internal to the evangelical community: the motivations that might lead this religious minority to enter the electoral sphere in the first place. Echoing work on other underrepresented minorities in Latin American politics, such as indigenous groups, I argue that the politicization of a social identity is a necessary first step for it to translate into concerted action (Madrid 2012; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005).

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 gained legal privileges vis-à-vis Protestants 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 have been fewer incentives of this sort.

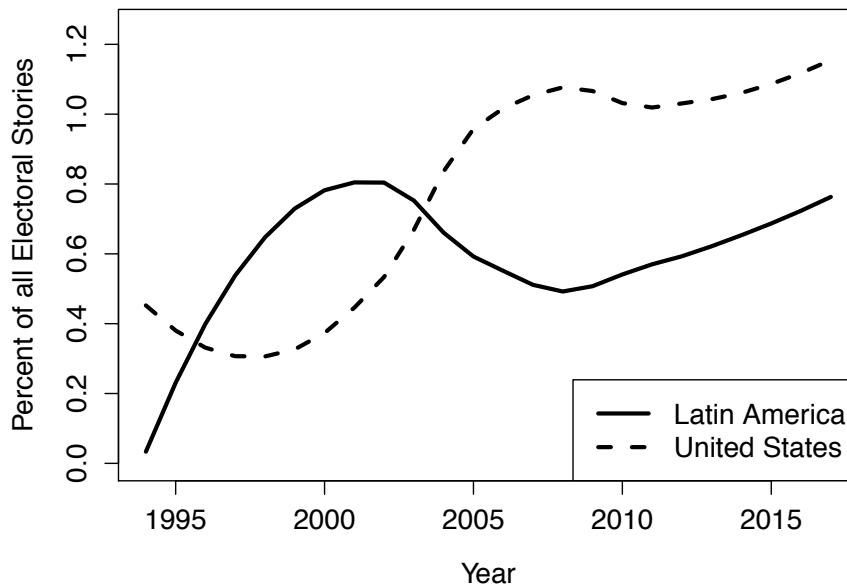
Legal equality with the Catholic Church dominated the evangelical political agenda for most of Latin American history, but over the past decade, values issues have become a more significant concern. In this most recent battle, Catholic and evangelical positions are aligned, and the potential for cooperation, rather than competition, is key. Where conservative Catholics do not already have a strong organized presence in electoral politics, as in Brazil, the struggle over values issues can help draw evangelicals into the electoral arena. Where Catholics do have a strong electoral presence, as in Chile, evangelical leaders are more likely to seek out allies among existing socially conservative politicians than to organize their own entrée into electoral politics.

### **Prior Research on Evangelicals and Electoral Politics in Latin America**

Evangelicals’ entrée into Latin American electoral politics has garnered significant media attention in recent years. Figure 2 plots a smoothed trend line showing the percentage of all stories about “elections” in the Factiva database that also include the term “evangelical.” The level and trend in coverage of this phenomenon in Latin America has been similar to that of the United States, where the “evangelical vote” is a common topic of discussion during election season. In some Latin American countries, the perceived strength or decisiveness of evangelical

voters has prompted similar coverage. The cover of Brazilian newsweekly *Época* highlighted “The Power of the Evangelical Vote” during the 2014 presidential campaign, while Colombia’s *Semana* ran numerous stories about the role of evangelicals in the defeat of the 2016 plebiscite on a proposed peace treaty with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

**Figure 2: Newspaper Coverage of Evangelicals and Elections**



While the news media have devoted significant coverage to the electoral ambitions of Latin America’s evangelicals, systematic attention to the phenomenon within political science has been rare. There is a substantial literature on Protestantism in Latin America, but most contributions have come from other disciplines. Single case studies predominate; comparative work has mostly taken the form of edited volumes. To my knowledge, only an unpublished doctoral dissertation has used systematic, cross-national comparisons to explain variation in the electoral ambitions of this faith community (Mora Torres 2010). The opinions and voting behavior of Latin American evangelicals have attracted somewhat greater attention from political scientists (Aguilar et al. 2003; Boas 2014, 2016; Boas and Smith 2015; Bohn 2004, 2007; Camp

2008; Patterson 2004a, 2005a, 2005b; Smilde 2004; Steigenga 2003; Valenzuela, Scully, and Somma 2007; Zub 2002), though cross-national comparative work is still limited.

The paucity of political science research on evangelicals in Latin America stands in contrast to the much more extensive literature on related topics. The political strategy of the Christian Right in the United States has been the subject of extensive research over several decades (Conger 2009; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2000, 2003, 2006; Lienesch 1993; Rozell and Wilcox 1995; Wilcox and Robinson 2010; Wilcox 1992). Within Latin America, the political role of the Roman Catholic Church has received substantial attention (Bruneau 1982; Camp 1997; Fleet and Smith 1997; Gill 1998; Hagopian 2008, 2009; Klaiber 1998; Mainwaring 1986; Mainwaring and Scully 2003; Smith 1982). Likewise, the limited political science research on Latin American evangelicals contrasts with the burgeoning scholarship on other historically excluded groups, such as the indigenous, that have recently sought to enter electoral and party politics (Madrid 2012; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005).

Among Latin American countries, Brazil and Chile stand out as a natural paired comparison for studying the determinants of cross-national variation in evangelicals' involvement and success with electoral politics. First, in percentage terms, they have the largest evangelical populations in South America. In the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey, 20% of Brazilians and 14% of Chileans identified as evangelical, while another 11% and 3%, respectively, identified with some other form of Protestantism. 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 non-Catholic Christian churches in each country, 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 but have been greatly influenced by missionaries from the United States.

Third, while existing social science research on evangelicals in Latin America has been sparse, there is much more covering Brazil and Chile than most other countries, especially those from Central America. Brazil and Chile have also been singled out for paired comparisons in the past (Patterson 2005b; Willems 1967). Combined with the extensive secondary literature on politics in these countries more generally, prior work on evangelicals and electoral politics in Chile and Brazil forms a stronger footing on which to build.

### **Existing Explanations: External Barriers to Evangelical Electoral Success**

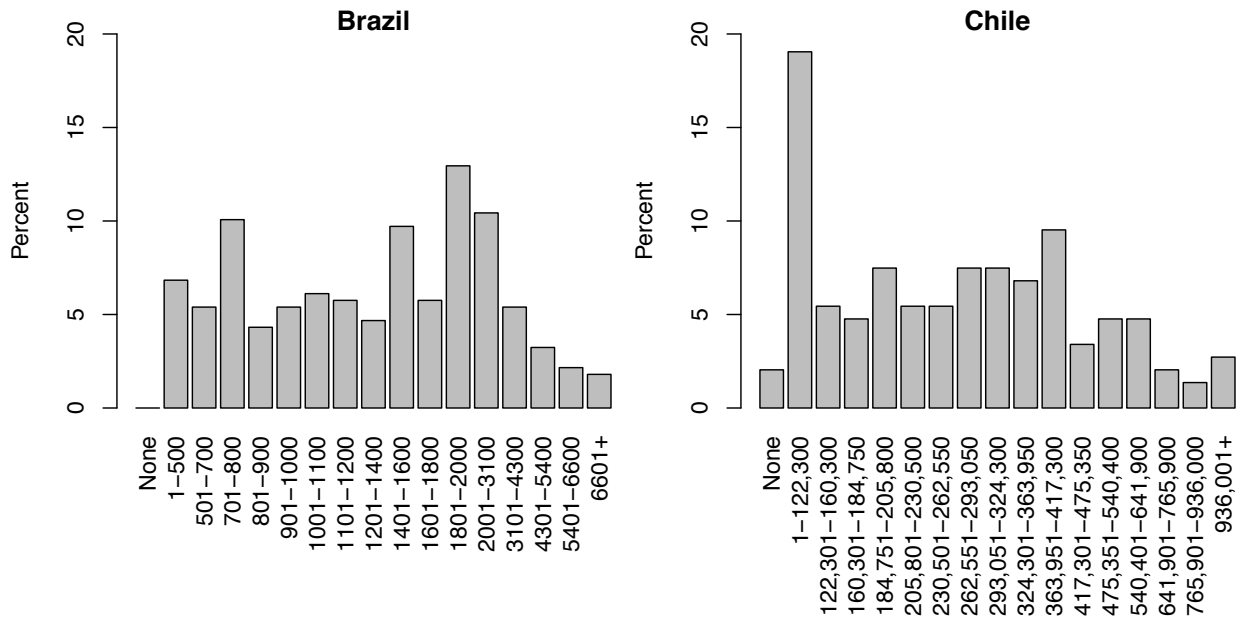
Existing explanations for evangelicals' electoral accomplishments in Chile and Brazil have focused on the presence or absence of barriers posed by the social or political system. A first factor is social class. Throughout Latin America, evangelicalism has been particularly attractive among lower-class communities; on average, evangelicals are typically 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. A better educated religious 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 of 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'Epina 1969). Pentecostalism, the dominant form of evangelicalism in Chile, is 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). 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).

Survey data from the 2014 AmericasBarometer reveals a contrast between Chile and Brazil with respect to evangelicals' class background. In Brazil, the median income of both Catholics and evangelicals falls into the same bracket, whereas in Chile, evangelicals' median income is 19% lower than that of Catholics. Figure 3, which plots the income distribution of evangelicals in each country, underscores these differences. In Brazil, the evangelical income distribution is essentially bimodal and symmetric, with a large share earning nearly three times the monthly minimum wage (R\$ 724 in 2014). In Chile, the evangelical income distribution is heavily skewed toward the low end, with 19% of the sample in the lowest nonzero income category.

**Figure 3: Evangelical Income Distribution**



Yet in comparative perspective, social class seems an unconvincing explanation for evangelicals’ limited electoral success in Chile versus Brazil. 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. 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. For example, in Peru's 1978 constituent assembly election, diversifying the list—for an election with a single national district of 100 seats—was APRA's explicit motivation for inviting evangelical pastor Pedro Arana to run for office (Arana 1987).

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); starting with the 2017 election, it will range 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).

Though a handful of evangelicals have found their way onto congressional lists in recent elections in Chile, list diversification does not seem to be a major factor in their selection. In

interviews with four evangelical candidates who ran with established right-wing parties in 2005 or 2013, none claimed that they were recruited because of their religion or parties' efforts to attract evangelical votes. Rather, other factors, such as prior success in conservative youth activism and student politics, encouraged party leaders to offer them a slot (author's interviews, Barrientos, Contesse, F. Muñoz, and Sepúlveda).

Apart from the influence of electoral systems, party systems also matter for evangelicals' electoral prospects. Fragmented party systems imply numerous legislative lists in each election and more opportunities to get on the ballot with established parties. Candidates who develop an independent appeal and electoral support base may be able to change parties with the political winds and still win reelection, but only if there are viable alternatives in the party system and few barriers to party switching. Party system 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. Aside from the goal of winning office, electing candidates in multiple parties may help evangelicals, or particular churches, spread their bets around and retain legislative influence regardless of who is in power.

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 7 different parties; by 2010, the number had doubled to 14. Evangelicals have also founded their own successful parties. In 2003, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (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 are grouped into two blocs, the center-left New Majority (traditionally known as the Concertación) and the center-right Chile Vamos (traditionally known as the Alianza). Non-bloc parties and independents form their own lists to run for Congress, though they tend to fare poorly. As discussed below, the major effort to register an evangelical party in Chile—the National Christian Alliance (ANC), founded in 1995—was ultimately unsuccessful, as was the ANC's efforts to negotiate slots on the lists of established right-wing parties.

Electoral and party system openness certainly correlate with evangelicals' electoral success in Brazil and Chile. As shown in Figure 1, evangelicals have met with much more electoral success under Brazil's permissive institutional environment. 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 20 evangelical politicians in Chile who ran for Congress 29 times across 7 elections from 1989 to 2013; 7 of these candidacies resulted in electoral victory.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> This list should be reasonably complete; I showed the list-in-progress to approximately 20 interviewees in January 2015, including a number of evangelical politicians and academics who specialize in the topic. I asked them if they were aware of any omissions, and I researched and, if appropriate, incorporated any new names that arose.

news sources, I identified 211 Brazilian evangelical politicians who were elected to office 344 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.

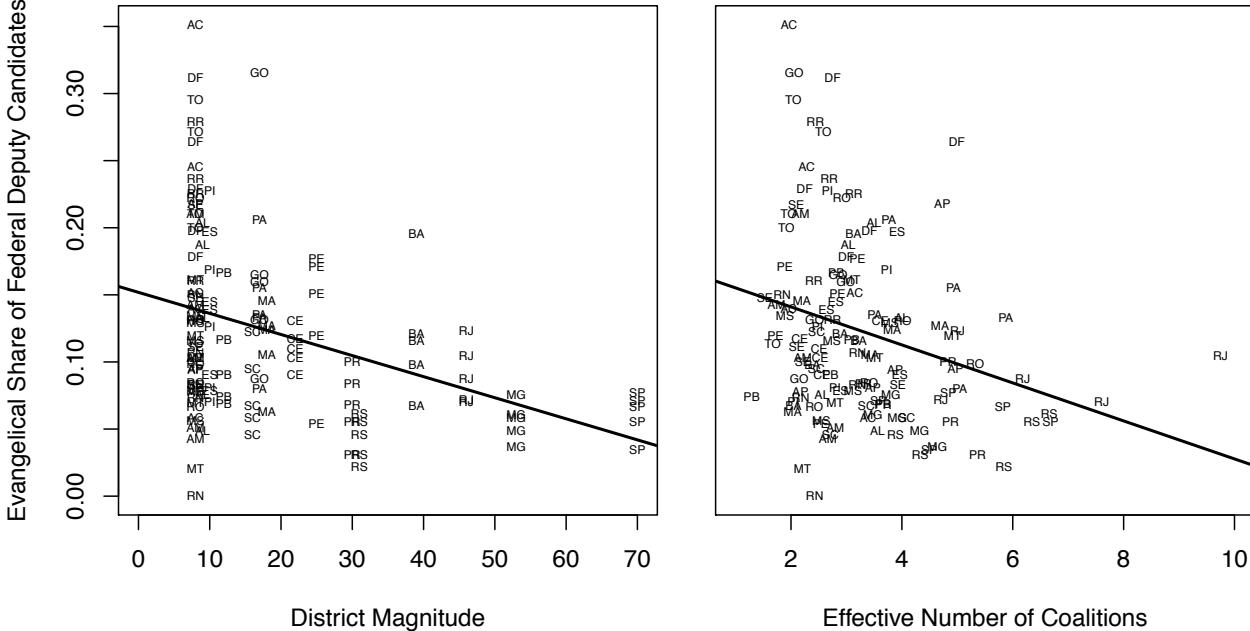
Yet it is difficult to attribute causality to the relationship between institutional openness and ballot access in Chile and Brazil. Many other factors differ between the two countries as well, so this correlation could easily be spurious. For a better controlled comparison, we can exploit subnational variation in Brazil, holding constant all national-level variables. As noted above, 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 occupation and official electoral name, 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.

The results of this subnational analysis clearly argue against the notion that permissive electoral and party systems explain evangelical electoral success through the mechanism of ballot access. As shown in Figure 4, greater district magnitude and more candidate lists (operationalized as the effective number of coalitions, calculated from electoral results) are negatively rather than positively related to evangelicals' share of legislative candidacies. The negative slope is highly statistically significant and remains so when controlling for a time trend. Certainly, there are still uncontrolled differences across states and elections that differ in terms of district magnitude and party system fragmentation, but fewer than we would expect when comparing Chile and Brazil as a whole.

**Figure 4: Institutional Predictors of Legislative Ballot Access in Brazil**





In Chile, it is impossible to conduct a similar analysis based on historical data because of limited variation in these subnational variables. The magnitude of electoral districts has been fixed at 2 since the return to democracy, and two-bloc competition in nearly every district means that there is also little variation in the effective number of coalitions. However, Chile's 2017 legislative election will present something of a natural experiment that facilitates testing the effects of district magnitude on evangelical electoral prospects. The 2015 electoral system reform was almost certainly not endogenous to evangelicals' political influence or their expected prospects under the new system. In interviews conducted in January 2015, just after the reform had been approved by Congress, several evangelical politicians expressed optimism that their prospects would improve under the new system (author's interviews, Larrondo, Soto, H. Muñoz, F. Muñoz). Whether it ultimately does so remains to be seen.

Evidence from interviews with evangelical leaders and evangelical politicians in Chile 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% 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). Selection bias may be affecting these responses; candidates who have made it onto the lists of mainstream parties may be less likely to identify barriers. However, they are also likely to be knowledgeable of any barriers that do exist.

In sum, existing explanations for evangelicals' success with electoral politics in Brazil versus Chile focus on the presence of absence of barriers posed by the social or political system. While these factors correlate with electoral outcomes in the expected direction, closer scrutiny casts doubt upon their explanatory value. The claim that low social class holds back an incipient political movement is incongruous with the electoral success that lower-class movements have had in many other countries. As for the permissiveness of electoral and party systems, subnational analysis of Brazil shows the opposite relationship from what we would expect; evangelicals get less ballot access in states with high district magnitude or fragmented party systems. Finally, evangelical politicians in Chile routinely blame their own movement, rather than mainstream party leaders, for their paltry representation among the ranks of candidates.

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

I argue that existing explanations for evangelical inclusion in Latin America err in assuming a politicized movement that wants electoral representation but is blocked by external barriers. Research on the political representation of indigenous groups—another new entrant to the electoral scene in some countries, but not all—has paid closer attention to this question of politicization. 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 the same is true of evangelicals in Latin 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 involvement in electoral politics in Latin America, it is necessary to first gain an appreciation for Pentecostalism, the dominant form of Protestantism among Latin American evangelicals (Stoll 1993), and its views of the political world. Pentecostalism is a branch of evangelicalism that emphasizes mystical gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and faith healing. Following its founding in Los Angeles, California in the early 1900s, Pentecostalism spread rapidly to much of Latin America, including Brazil and Chile. 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, Pentecostalism accounted for an estimated 74% of all Protestants (Read 1967), numbers that would remain steady for the next 50 years.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the question of evangelical involvement in Latin American 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

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<sup>4</sup> Among evangelicals whose denomination could be classified, Pentecostals accounted for 72% in the 2000 census and 77% in the 2010 census.

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 toward public life, becoming politicized and seeking to elect their own representatives. In Brazil, they successful did so. In 1986, the Assemblies of God published a tract, "Brother Votes for Brother" (Sylvestre 1986) which symbolically abandoned the "believers don't mess with politics" stance and called for active participation in that year's Constituent Assembly elections. The church, which was the only one to endorse specific candidates in this election, ended up with 14 of its members in the Constituent Assembly, nearly double the size of the next largest church contingent (Burity 2005; Freston 1993; Pierucci 1996).

In recent decades, there can be no doubt about Brazilian evangelicals' willingness to elect representatives to defend common interests. The IURD has set the standard in terms of a strategic approach to politics. It takes a census of church members prior to each election and transmits these data to the national leadership, which 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). The IURD even planned church locations in Rio de Janeiro in an effort to maximize its chances of electing federal deputies (Freston 1993). Competition with the

IURD has also helped other churches' electoral performance by encouraging them to adopt some of its successful tactics, instructing church members on how to vote or systematically assessing their electoral prospects in each district before deciding whether to run candidates (Campos 2005, 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 for Congress in 2013, used campaign funds to purchase 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>5</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."

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 politics still persists in Chile? In the sections that follow, I argue that the paths taken at two

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9Xh17AySeM&t=3s>.

critical junctures account for the differential politicization of evangelical identity in Brazil and Chile. The first critical juncture concerns opportunities and incentives to defend legal equality with the Catholic Church through electoral means, principally elections to constituent assemblies. The second critical juncture 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.

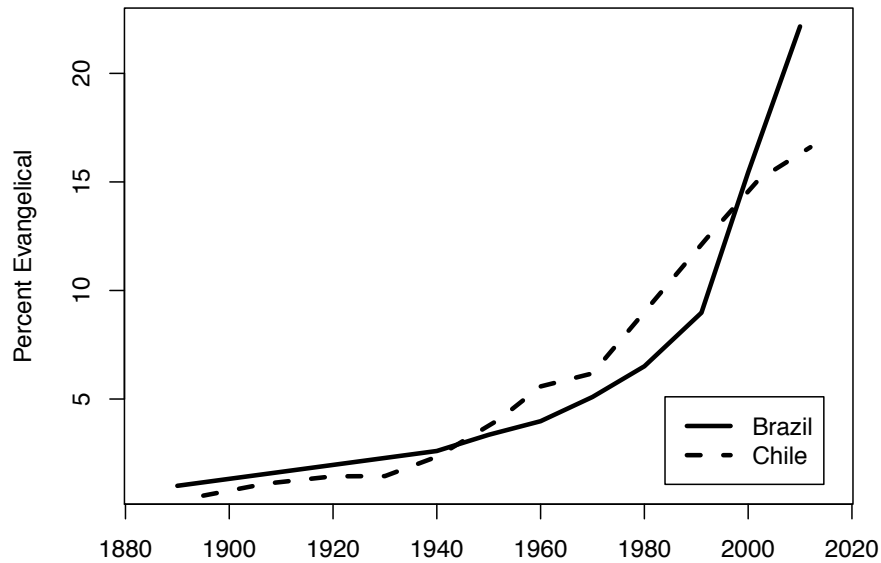
### **Struggles for Religious Liberty**

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 those who belong to the Catholic Church. Latin America’s first post-independence constitutions generally established Roman Catholicism as the official religion sanctioned by the state and forbade the public practice of any other. 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. 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 struggle for religious liberty motivated evangelical participation in politics and public life during this early period. Evangelicals found strong allies in the anticlerical segments of the non-evangelical political elite who, inspired by European Enlightenment ideas of secularism, founded Liberal and Radical parties to oppose the pro-Church Conservatives (Coppedge 1998). In Chile, for example, David Trumbull, and 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).

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



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. In Brazil, evangelicals were only 1% of the population in the 1890 census; in Chile, they were 0.55% in 1895. Moreover, Pentecostalism, the now-dominant strain of evangelicalism, did not arrive until 1909–1910. Nineteenth-century Protestants who were active in public life and electoral politics were from mainline denominations, including Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Congregationalist. In contrast to the otherworldly Pentecostalism, the theology of mainline Protestantism was much more conducive to political participation. Many of these early evangelical politicians were also immigrants (or children of immigrants) from Europe and the

United States, giving them a privileged social position and educational background that facilitated participation in politics, especially under the restricted franchise of the day.

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. Informal harassment and discriminatory enforcement of the law by state authorities have also served as a stimulus for political organizing over the years.

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 significant 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 (Mora 2010).

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 who 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 leader 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*), which sponsored a pastor running

for deputy. Churches organized voter registration drives, and pastors urged the faithful to vote.

One open letter to Brazilian evangelicals 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 (Campos 2005: 39).

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 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).

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 (Araújo 1982; Cavalcanti 1988; Chesnut 1997; Dantas 1982). 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.

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” tract mentioned above. In a 1992 interview, the head of the General Convention of the Assemblies of God in Brazil 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 (Mariano and Pierucci 1996: 209).

In addition to formal privileges for the Catholic Church enshrined in constitutions, evangelicals have been motivated to elect representatives to defend against informal discrimination and differential application of the rule of law. As noted in the introduction, Pentecostal pastor Manoel de Mello frequently encountered administrative or legal obstacles in the 1950s in his efforts to purchase radio stations, construct new buildings, hold outdoor meetings, or practice faith healing. Moreover, his effort to strike a deal for political support of a mainstream politician, Adhemar de Barros, ended in betrayal. These experiences prompted Mello to launch a church-sponsored candidate for Congress, Levy Tavares, who was successfully elected in 1962 and 1966. Edir Macedo and the IURD, though close to presidents and power brokers in the 2000s, initially suffered similar forms of legal harassment in the early 1990s (Freston 1993; Gaskill 2002), which may have inspired its aggressive attempts to elect deputies in the years that followed. In a survey of evangelical pastors conducted in several major cities in the late 1990s, Gaskill (2002: 157–168) found that receiving or expecting benefits from politicians in terms of administrative dealings with the state is a strong predictor of endorsing a candidate.

In sum, Brazil during the twentieth century has provided both incentives and opportunities for evangelicals to abandon a tradition of apoliticism in favor of electoral mobilization. Church and state were separated early, without the protagonism of evangelicals, but in the decades that followed, the Church regained substantial privileges. Concerns about Catholic electoral organizing and the potential loss of religious equality in the writing of new constitutions prompted evangelicals to mobilize for the constituent assembly elections of 1932, 1945, and especially 1986. Informal harassment by the state and differential application of the rule of law has also prompted several Pentecostal churches to elect representatives that could defend their interests.

### **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 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. It is also less common for evangelicals to suffer discriminatory application of the rule of law, and political connections seem less useful for resolving those situations that do arise.

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. A constitutional separation of church and state would settle the major “leftover” issue from Chile’s struggles of the nineteenth century, depriving the Conservative Party of the ability to win votes as a defender of Church interests. It would thus weaken a party that also stood opposed to social reform, Alessandri’s major priority (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 juridical personality 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). 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.

Congress proposed an alternative version that was included as one of the plebiscite options, but this task was not a known part of its mandate when it was elected in 1924. 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 Catholic Church has not engaged in any major push for additional rights and privileges at the expense of evangelicals or other religious minorities. As a result, evangelicals have had few major grievances in the area of religious liberty. The only issue that has prompted any significant mobilization concerns the legal status of religious entities. In the Chilean legal tradition, the Catholic Church is considered a legal 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; Lagos Schuffeneger 2005; Orrego, González, and Saldaña 2003; Pimstein Scroggie 2006; Salinas Araneda 1999). While the difference has no implications for day-to-day 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.

Efforts to resolve the question of evangelical churches' legal status ultimately failed to stimulate significant participation in electoral politics. 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 effort 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 efforts to launch a larger political offensive fell flat. The Religious Worship Law effort failed to 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).

The push for approval of the Religious Worship Law ultimately failed to unify evangelicals behind a common electoral project for several reasons. First, it 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. Second, the struggle during the 1990s was largely about shaping the details of proposed legislation rather than lining up "yes" votes. In such a context, lobbying existing members of Congress was more likely to bear fruit than trying to elect new evangelical representatives, who might not have the necessary seniority or the committee assignments to make a difference. Finally, given the technical nature of the question of legal status, demands for action emanated from evangelicals' national leadership, but not from the base level of believers and their pastors around the country, which might be expected to generate a more substantial political response.

Another factor motivating evangelical politicization in Brazil has also been largely absent in Chile—discriminatory enforcement of the law. In interviews with Chilean evangelical politicians and leaders in January 2015, most claimed that they had never experienced any legal harassment or discrimination (author’s interviews, Larrondo, Salas, H. Muñoz, F. Muñoz, Barrientos, Sepúlveda). One multi-term evangelical congressman explained that “all churches are treated the same under the law, and the demands made of them are exactly the same...I don’t think that evangelical churches are discriminated against for being evangelical” (author’s interview, Sepúlveda). Those who acknowledged isolated incidents, such as problems obtaining a permit for church construction, insisted that the problem could be resolved by working through established channels and demanding that their rights be respected, rather than leveraging political connections (author’s interviews, Contesse, Cooper, and Lagos).

In sum, compared to Brazil, Chile presents much weaker incentives and opportunities for evangelicals to get involved in electoral politics to defend religious freedom. The Catholic Church put up little resistance to the constitutional separation of church and state and has never made a major push to recoup lost privileges. Chile’s modern constitutions have been written by appointed committees and approved by referenda, so there have been no chances to elect representatives to a forum where basic questions of religious liberty are in play. Moreover, likely due to Chile’s stronger tradition in terms of the rule of law, evangelicals seem to suffer little legal discrimination by the state and, when they do encounter problems, do not see electoral politics as the solution.



## **Values Issues: Cheering on Catholics or Leading the Charge?**

For most of Latin American history, the major issue inspiring evangelicals' political activism, religious liberty, regularly brought them into conflict and competition with the Catholic Church. In the past several decades, as most questions of religious freedom have been settled and Latin American societies have shifted in the direction of cultural liberalism, legislative battles over values issues—primarily same-sex marriage and abortion—have gained much greater prominence. In this most recent set of struggles, Catholics and evangelicals are largely aligned in terms of their positions; for the first time, they are potential political allies rather than adversaries.

I argue that, in recent decades, legislative battles over values issues can pull evangelicals into electoral politics in a similar fashion as struggles over religious liberty during much of the twentieth century. Given the potential for an alliance with the Catholic Church, whether evangelicals are electorally mobilized around these issues depends on the extent of conservative Catholic presence in Congress when values issues rise to the fore. Where evangelical presence in Congress is stronger than conservative Catholic presence, evangelicals are likely to lead the charge on values issues—an effort that can inspire a new generation of candidates even after battles over religious liberty have subsided. Where the conservative Catholic presence in Congress is strong and well-organized, evangelicals are instead likely to support the efforts of these more experienced legislators who are already in office.

In Chile, a strong, socially conservative Catholic presence in Congress has encouraged evangelicals to align with experienced existing legislators. Chile has one of Latin America's strongest Christian Democratic parties (PDC), which dates back to 1957, has elected several

presidents, and played a lead role in the transition to democracy. While the PDC has been aligned with the Left since the transition, PDC identifiers and right-wing partisans have similar attitudes on values issues, and the PDC's stance is perceived as closer to that of the right-wing parties (Mainwaring and Scully 2003; Raymond and Felch 2014). The Independent Democratic Union (UDI), one of the two major right-wing parties, has strong ties to the conservative Catholic society Opus Dei, and National Renewal, the other major rightist party, has a conservative Catholic contingent as well.

As legislative battles over abortion and LGBTQ rights have heated up in recent years, some conservative Catholic legislators have sought and received enthusiastic backing from evangelicals. The most prominent example is Manuel José Ossandón, an independent senator who belonged to RN until 2016 and ran for nomination as the presidential candidate of the right-wing coalition in 2017. In 2014, Ossandón was featured on the cover of the evangelical publication *Prensa Evangélica* with the quote “saying that Nicolás has two dads is like a pig in mass.” During his 2017 bid for the presidential nomination, Héctor Muñoz, a city council member in Concepción and a leading evangelical political organizer, served as Ossandón's campaign manager in the Biobío region.

Given the option to build alliances with conservative Catholic legislators who have experience and seniority, electing their own representatives has been less of a priority for Chile's evangelicals. According to Alfred Cooper (author's interview), former chaplain of La Moneda, “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.”

Moreover, those evangelicals who do run for office on a values issues platform have difficulty distinguishing themselves from conservative Catholic competitors. In Concepción, Francesca Muñoz, wife of Héctor Muñoz and the RN candidate for deputy in 2013, built her campaign around a conservative stance on values issues. However, during the main candidates' debate, incumbent Enrique Van Rysselberghe of UDI largely stole her thunder, launching an attack against President Michelle Bachelet's stance on abortion and same-sex marriage before Muñoz had a chance to raise the issue.

In Brazil, by contrast, evangelicals have a stronger and better organized presence in Congress than conservative Catholics, and they have led the charge with respect to battles over values issues. The Christian Democratic Party founded in the 1940s still exists but is basically irrelevant, with only two elected deputies in the current (2015–2018) legislature. While many legislators profess an adherence to Catholicism, Catholic organizing in the Brazilian Congress began only in the 1990s, following the electoral success of evangelicals. The Pastoral Parlamentar Católica, the main vehicle for conservative Catholic representation in Congress, was formed only in 1997, ten years after the entrée of evangelicals (Vital and Lopes 2013). In the 2011–2014 legislature, it had only 24 members, versus 70 who belonged to the evangelical equivalent, the Frente Parlamentar Evangélica. Evangelicals also have a stronger presence in the large Frente Parlamentar Mista em Defesa da Vida e Contra o Aborto (Mixed Congressional Front in Defense of Life and Against Abortion)—12 of the Catholic caucus members belong, versus 42 from the evangelical caucus. In 2010, the National Evangelical Forum for Social and Political Action, a values issue pressure group, was expanded into National Christian Forum for Social and Political Action following an alliance between the National Confederation of

Brazilian Bishops, an official body of the Catholic Church, and evangelicals in Congress (Machado 2012).

Values issues did not draw Brazilian evangelicals into electoral politics in the first place, but they have provided continued motivation for sustaining a robust presence, especially as the relevance of religious liberty concerns declines. While defending religious liberty was the primary motivation for the Assemblies of God's "brother votes for brother" stance in the 1986 constituent assembly election, during the actual constitutional deliberations, evangelical deputies spent a substantial amount of time combatting liberalizing proposals in the areas of abortion, divorce, and even same-sex marriage (Sylvestre 1988: 33–34). By the 2000s, values issues had become a 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. In 2009, the government's launch of the National Human Rights Program, which proposed criminalizing homophobia and liberalizing abortion legislation, helped bring these issues to the fore for evangelical politicians (Machado 2012).

In sum, the struggle over values issues has the potential to draw evangelicals into the electoral arena or to motivate their continued involvement, but only where socially conservative Catholic legislators are not already prepared to lead the battle. In Chile, where conservative Catholics have a strong presence in Congress, evangelical leaders are more likely to seek out allies among existing socially conservative politicians than to organize their own entrée into electoral politics. In Brazil, where the conservative Catholic presence is much weaker, evangelical politicians have been leading the charge.

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

In this chapter, I have argued that cross-national differences in evangelicals' ambitions and success with electoral politics in Latin America are best explained in terms of a historical process in which this religious identity is or is not transformed into a political identity. In this sense, the argument has direct parallels to research on indigenous politics in the region, which has also emphasized the importance of politicizing groups that have a certain initial reluctance to engage with mainstream parties and elections. Historically, two critical junctures served to draw Brazilian evangelicals into the electoral arena—the struggle for equal rights and privileges with the Catholic Church, particular in constitutions written by elected constituent assemblies, and the defense of conservative positions on values issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. In Chile, the reduced threat from the Catholic Church, lack of electoral opportunities for influencing constitution-writing, and the protagonism of conservative Catholics on values issues meant that these same critical junctures did not result in the politicization of evangelical identity in a way that could mobilize electoral participation.

On its own, evangelicals' transformation from second-class citizens 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." Yet when one thinks about the concept of "inclusion" in Latin America, the entrée of evangelical Christians into electoral politics is probably not the first phenomenon that comes to mind. Indeed, for many critics on the left, evangelicals' agenda 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 the concept of 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 have 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 2014 AmericasBarometer surveys, evangelicals were significantly less white than non-evangelicals in five out of 18 countries, significantly less male in 9 out of 18, and significantly less wealthy in 11 out of 18. Nowhere were they significantly more white, more male, or more wealthy. Pentecostalism, in particular, has been disproportionately attractive to

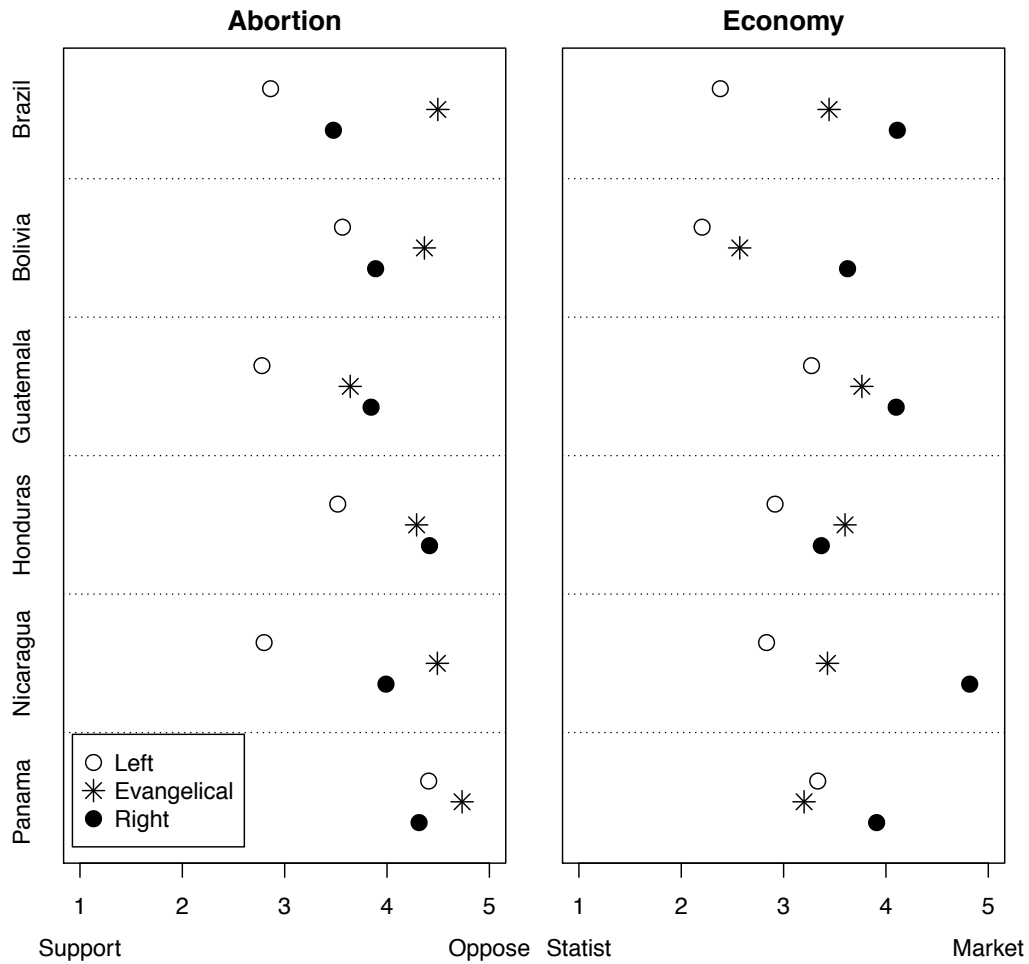
women in Latin America because it helps them confront domestic violence, alcoholism and other forms of machismo (Chesnut 1997; Hallum 2003). Women often convert first, in the hopes that their male partners will follow them and be influenced by norms of good behavior. Women are also often attracted to 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 consistently pro-market on economic issues. To examine the attitudes of evangelical legislators in each area, I analyzed the fourth wave of the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America surveys from the University of Salamanca, focusing on those countries where at least five evangelical legislators responded.<sup>6</sup> I compare evangelicals' attitudes to those of legislators who place themselves on the left (ideological self-identification of 1–3 on a 10-point scale) or the right (8–10). Figure 6 plots mean positions for each group on attitudes toward abortion (left panel) and a statist versus market economy (right panel). Evangelicals 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.

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<sup>6</sup> I substitute the third wave for Panama.

**Figure 6: Attitudes of Evangelical Legislators in Latin America**



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. Beyond the IURD, whose alliances with both Left and Right have



clearly been strategic, there are prominent examples of Brazilian evangelical politicians on the ideological Left, including Benedita da Silva, a longtime *petista* and advocate for women's and Afro-Brazilian rights, and Marina Silva, an environmentalist who has run for president several times as a leftist challenger to the PT.

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, churches 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 churches 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.

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 the Catholic Church, and to be taken seriously as citizens, voters, and potential political leaders—is itself an important element of inclusion in Latin America. To the extent that they gain office or organize as pressure groups, evangelicals tend 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 electoral politics is part and parcel of the new inclusion in Latin America.

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