

THE POLITICAL EXPANSION OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN LATIN AMERICA



Religion and Power in IIRR

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1. THE PENTECOSTALIZATION OF LATIN AMERICAN AND U.S. LATINO CHRISTIANITY

Evangelical Mass in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 18, 2018. GETTY



A service in an evangelical church in Llamahuasi, Ecuador, in June 2015. GETTY

a.
Prosperity Theology:
the Latin Triumph of
Luther

- Roman Catholicism & "liberation theory" in retreat.
- Their churches preach a "gospel of prosperity" that ensures, as did Calvin in Geneva, that material wealth is a manifest sign of divine favor.
- Fight against corruption

Religious Affiliations of Latin Americans

	Catholic	Protestant	Unaffiliated	Other
Predominantly Catholic				
Paraguay	89%	7%	1%	2%
Mexico	81	9	7	4
Colombia	79	13	6	2
Ecuador	79	13	5	3
Bolivia	77	16	4	3
Peru	76	17	4	3
Venezuela	73	17	7	4
Argentina	71	15	11	3
Panama	70	19	7	4
Majority Catholic				
Chile	64	17	16	3
Costa Rica	62	25	9	4
Brazil	61	26	8	5
Dominican Rep.	57	23	18	2
Puerto Rico	56	33	8	2
U.S. Hispanics	55	22	18	5
Half Catholic				
El Salvador	50	36	12	3
Guatemala	50	41	6	3
Nicaragua	50	40	7	4
Less than half Catholic				
Honduras	46	41	10	2
Uruguay	42	15	37	6
Regional total*	69	19	8	4
<small>(adjusting for each country's population size)</small>				

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*Regional total does not include U.S. Hispanics.

b. The protestant tide

Until the 1980s, Catholicism had almost a religious monopoly in the region. Their only rivals were anticlericalism and atheism, minority in most countries.

Thirty years ago, Protestants represented only 3% of the Lat. American population. Evangelicals today account for almost 20% of the population in Lat. America.

The origins of this expansion: mid-20th century.
Central America + Brazil

Today: Guatemala (Jimmy Morales), Costa Rica (Fabricio Alvarado), Chile (Sebastián Piñera). Venezuela (Javier Bertucci) and Colombia (Jorge Antonio Trujillo), Brazil (Jair Bolsonaro).

c. The mediatic pen & a hand-to-hand combat



An extensive network of places of worship widely distributed.

A powerful system of media outlets, comprising hundreds and indeed thousands of radio and TV stations, many focusing on the local communities.

A strong presence on social media.

All manner of services, especially to the least advantaged

A more than notable degree of popular support, something that no party –certainly no left-wing party– no NGO and no other political or social movement is capable of matching.

A strong logic of solidarity and social mobility and ascent. A parallel social welfare network with great cultural and political impact.



2. Case study: Brazil

Followers of Bolsonaro, at a rally in São Paulo, October 21, 2018. GETTY



Evangelism in Brazil

- Recent years – notable shift in political, social and religious attitudes.
- Evangelical Protestants – fastest-growing religious demographic group in Brazil.
 - 6.6% Evangelicals (1980)
 - 22.2% Evangelicals (2010)
- Massive growth in the country's Evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal churches.
 - UNQUESTIONABLE POLITICAL ACTOR
 - Evangelist movement – prominent presence at a local level but recently expanded its representation in the National Congress.



Precedents

- Marcelo Crivella – mayor of Rio de Janeiro since 2016
 - Bishop (Unviersal Church of the Kingdom of God)
 - Supported by the Pentecostal Church
- Edir Macedo – founder of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God
 - Crivella's uncle
 - Owner of TV channel Rede Record
- Evangelical candidates – have been winning voters from the new lower middle class, especially during the LP government (2003-2016).
- Labor Party's lost of popularity.
 - Evangelical collective had supported former president Lula da Silva (LP)
 - 2016 – Evangelical representatives in Congress supported the impeachment againts Lula's heiress in the presidency (Dilma Russef)
- Main consequence? Support for Bolsonaro.



Jair Bolsonaro

- Newly elected Brazilian President (2018)
- Far-right-wing politician
- Former army captain
- Evangelists – find him close to their political (in favor of order and security and against corruption) and religious thesis.
- Bolsonaro's boom – explained by the increase of powerful evangelistic leaders supporting him.
 - José Wellington Bezerra (Assambleia de Deus)
 - Silas Mafaia (Assembly of Deus Vitória em Cristo)
 - Edir Macedo (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) - Rede Record TV



Catholic Church vs. Evangelical Church

- **CATHOLIC CHURCH:**

- Prohibits clergy from running for office.
- Prohibits clergy from explicitly supporting a candidate.
- It focuses on promoting civic norms and voter turnout.

- **EVANGELICAL CHURCH:**

- Evangelical leaders can openly support candidates.
- They can run for offices themselves.

- ❖ **Consequences:**

- Decline in Catholic and a rise in Evangelical representation in the Congress
- Catholics from 60% in 2010 to a 53% of the Congress in 2019.
- Evangelical from 8% in 2010 to a 15% of the Congress in 2019.

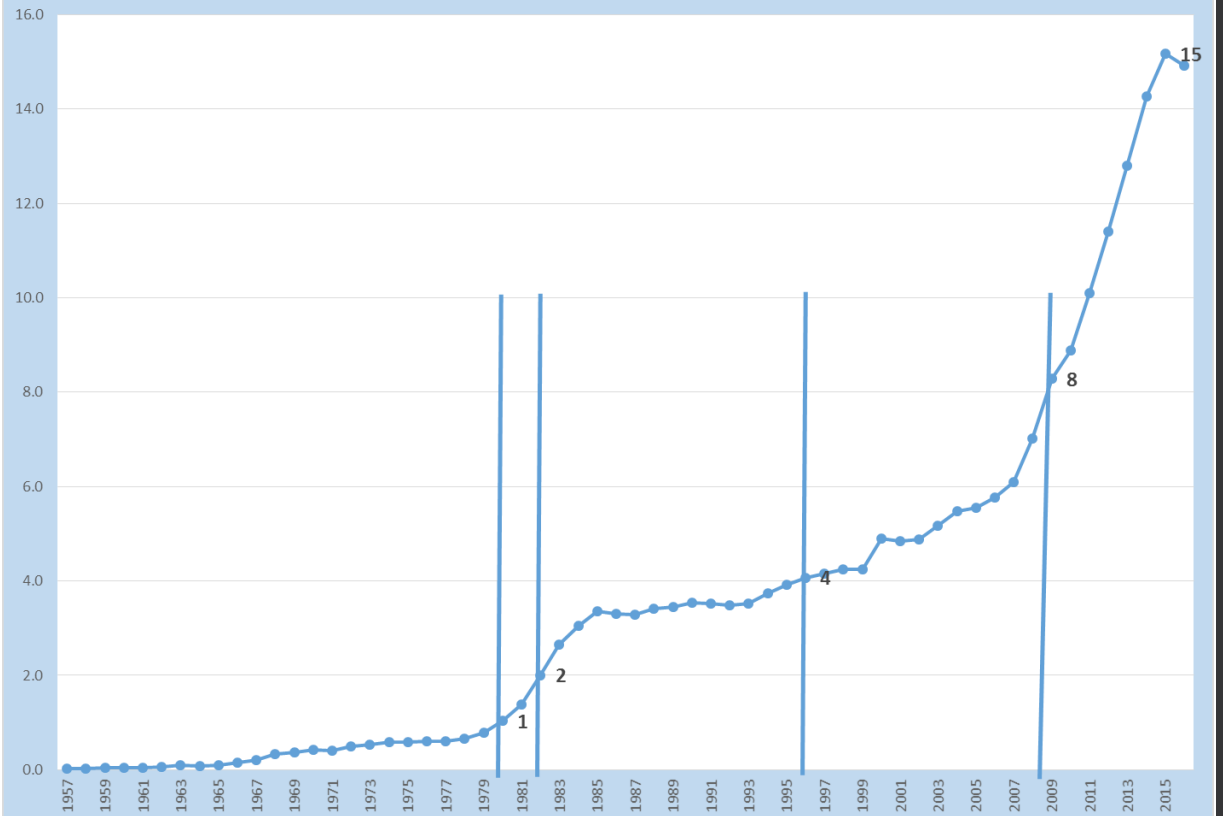
- **A powerful evangelical bloc has emerged in Congress.**
- Through this legislative juggernaut, Brazil's conservatives have greatly amplified their political power.

A large audience is seated in a hall, facing a stage with a screen and speakers. The text "3. Case study: Guatemala" is overlaid on the image.

3. Case study: Guatemala



Guatemala: Iglesias Evangélicas por cada 100 mil habitantes, 1957-2016



- Natural disasters and political instability
- Theology of liberation
- Neopentecostalism



Efraín Ríos Montt

- Military coup
- President of Guatemala 1982-1983
- Family union
- Kingdom of God in Guatemala
- Political discourse: sermons

"Every good Christian should carry both a Bible and a gun."



Harold Caballeros

- Evangelical pastor
- El Shaddai church
- Prophecy: God wanted him to be President of Guatemala
- Founded his own party
- Foreign Minister 2012-2013



Jimmy Morales

- Current President of Guatemala since 2016
- Endorsed by evangelical leaders
- Focus on family and evangelical values
- Corruption
- Undermining judicial system
- Attempting to jail his opponents



4. The Catholic reaction

The Catholic reaction

How Catholicism is
losing power

Unfulfilling Spirituality

Child sexual abuse allegations

Strict practices

Church location

Reaction

- Charismatic services
- Cooperation
- Fighting secularization leaves the Pope unable to do anything.



How have Evangelicals become so politically powerful?

- Growing dissatisfaction with democracy and the marked deterioration of traditional political parties and democratic institutions.
- The strong presence of pentecostalist and neopentecostalist denominations among the masses, helped by the withdrawal of left-wing parties and the Roman Catholic church.
- The inclusion in their rhetoric of a unwavering defence of the so-called values-based agenda. Conservative parties + Roman Catholic clergymen against "ideology of gender"
- External ties: US
- Worshippers take a lead from the opinions of their preachers, even in terms of voting.



5. In a nutshell:



Questions for Debate:

- Can the growing influence of the evangelical churches in regional and national politics bring the possibility of serious reversal as far as the separation between church and state is concerned?
- Is the Pentecostalization of Latin American and U.S. Latino Christianity a counter-reaction against Feminism and LGTB's Rights movements in the region?