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Religion and Political Parties in Brazil

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Abstract:

While formally a secular democracy, Brazil, the largest Catholic nation in the world with a growing Evangelical population is an excellent case in which to study the interaction of religion and party politics in the Americas. This chapter considers how culture and institutions have uniquely shaped the ways in which religion interacts with political parties historically and contemporarily. To investigate this relationship, this chapter first provides a brief description of the religious landscape in Brazil, outlining the rise of Evangelical Christianity in the country. Second, the chapter analyzes the relationship between the two main religious movements in the country, Catholicism and Evangelicalism, in the evolution of politics and party dynamics. Third, it provides the current institutional context that influenced the limited connection between political parties and specific religious groups, paying special attention to the role of electoral rules and the multi-party system in undermining the connection between religious groups and political parties. Finally, this chapter elaborates on the rise of the Evangelical Caucus and its importance in the political process, discussing the ways in which the caucus weakens and strengthens the connection between religious groups and political parties.

Introduction

The polarization and fragmentation of the Brazilian political environment reached an all-time high following the 2018 general elections. An unprecedented thirty political parties won at least one seat in the Chamber of Deputies, the country's lower house. Amid corruption scandals, many of the historic center-right parties lost a significant number of seats both in the Chamber and the Senate to a surging nationalist party. Led by the presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro, the *Partido Social Liberal* (Liberal Social Party or PSL) went from a minuscule party (one Federal Deputy) to the second largest party in the Chamber of Deputies with 52 Deputies (10.1 percent of seats) and the fourth largest party in the Senate with four Senators (five percent of seats) (Caesar, 2018; Venaglia, 2018). Emblematic of the party system in Brazil, the PSL traditionally

had a somewhat ambiguous political ideology of social progressivism. However, when Bolsonaro switched from the Social Christian Party to the PSL in March of 2018 (his eighth political party), the party ideology changed to one of fiscal conservatism, nationalism, and conservative family values (Federowski & Marcello, 2018). The rise of Bolsonaro propelled what has been called an *onda conservadora* (conservative wave), and the incoming Congress is considered by some the most socially conservative since the return to democracy in the early 1980s (Dip, 2018; Venaglia, 2018). This conservative wave includes causes connected to the rising Evangelical movement and traditional Catholic values in the country.

Given the current political landscape, this is an opportune moment to re-analyze the relationship between religion and politics. Situating current developments within Brazil's past helps contextualize the future impact religion may play in politics. Previous research suggests that Brazil's electoral system created conditions that tend to limit religious groups' ability to influence politics and policymaking. This chapter argues that the rise of the Evangelical Caucus in Brazil demonstrates an alternative way religious groups have attempted to influence the political system, one that transcends party relations and provides for a new way to coalesce in the pursuit of common political interests congruent with religious beliefs.

The Brazilian Religious Landscape

Historically a Catholic nation, twenty-first century Brazil is more religiously diverse than ever. While the constitution declared Brazil a secular state over a century ago, religion, specifically Catholicism, intertwined with the state during the colonial period and remains a significant influence and participant in Brazilian democracy (Azevedo, 2004; A. E. Smith, 2018; L. A. G. de Souza, 2004). Theoretically, Brazilians have enjoyed religious freedom for over a hundred years; however, for much of its history the Catholic Church worked to inhibit the spread of other faiths (Montero 2016). Since the end of the dictatorship in the 1980s religious freedom has blossomed, allowing for greater inclusion and tolerance of Protestants, Spiritualists, and practitioners of African-derived religions.

According to the 2010 census more than 85 percent of the population identify with a Christian religion, although Catholicism continued to be the principal faith at 65 percent. In addition to

Christianity, there is a small but present minority of practitioners of *Espiritismo* (a Brazilian adaptation of Spiritism and Spiritualism), *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* (religions with strong influence of Afro-descendent traditions and beliefs) that make these religious groups a part of the country’s socio-cultural space (Aureliano & Cardoso, 2015; Hess, 2010; Selka, 2007). Brazil’s history of religious syncretism means that the practice of these African-derived faiths does not necessarily exclude one from the simultaneous identity and practice of other faiths, especially Catholicism (Schmidt & Engler, 2016; Selka, 2012). A little over two percent of the population practices Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other indigenous and world religions.

Table 1—Religious Affiliation by Major Groups: 1940-2010¹

Religion	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1991	2000	2010
Catholic	95.2%	93.7%	93.1%	91.1%	89.2%	83.3%	73.7%	65%
Evangelical	2.6%	3.4%	4 %	5.8%	6.6%	9 %	15.5%	22.4%
<i>Espiritismo</i>	1.1%	1.6%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.6%	1.3%	2%
<i>Umbanda/Candomblé</i>	-	-	-	-	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Other	0.9%	0.8%	1.4%	1%	0.4%	0.5%	1.8 %	2.3 %
No Religion	0.2%	0.5%	0.8%	0.8%	1.9%	5.2%	7.4%	8%

Source: Pierucci (2004), Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2018).

The most important demographic shift in the past decades has been the rise of Evangelical Christianity. We define Evangelicals in the Brazilian context, a highly diverse set of religious groups encompassing historical Protestants, evangelical, and Pentecostal groups (dos Santos & Moddelmog, Forthcoming; A. E. Smith, 2018, 2019). Evangelical churches tend to promote traditional family values and a general rejection of secularism (Bohn, 2004). Believers are also encouraged to attend church frequently, tithe, and spread the message of God through missionary work in their communities (Bebbington, 1989; Freston, 2008). Evangelicals in Brazil must be analyzed as a heterogeneous group that share certain ideological stances and political objectives but that also differ in important ways. Nevertheless, in the context of party politics since the return to democracy in the country, scholars, journalists and the public in general use

¹ Data aggregation based on a simplification of the possible options for religious affiliation provided for respondents. For discussion of the issues regarding religious affiliation and the Brazilian Census, please see Santos (2014).

the term Evangelical to describe this heterogeneous group as one group with important common ideological and policy objectives (A. E. Smith, 2018).

This demographic change has direct implications for the study of party politics in the country. As seen in Table 1, there are fewer Catholics in the country than ever before while the number of Evangelicals has risen at a fast pace since the end of the twentieth century. For most of Brazilian political history, being a Catholic was a given among political leaders, where differences were delineated across material interests or ideological leanings and Catholics participated in politics across the political spectrum. There were little to no religious cleavages that translated into political issues (Mainwaring, 1999). The demographic shift that started in the 1980s coincided with the return to multiparty democratic politics in the country and created an environment that allowed for Evangelical politicians to increase their political influence and consequently change the Brazilian political landscape.

Political Parties and Religious Participation

The relationship between religion and parties has evolved since the establishment of republicanism in Brazil, changing at a fast pace since the return to democracy in the early 1980s. The presence of a strong Catholic Church throughout the Portuguese period in Brazil allowed for the religion and its leaders to maintain public and private influence in the country even after the separation between Church and state established in the Republican era in 1889. Therefore, while Catholicism lost the privilege of being the official state religion, it still had influence in maintaining a strong Christian tradition in politics and society (Azevedo, 2004; Mariano, 2011; L. A. G. de Souza, 2004). This power, wielded by public figures and religious leaders, curbed the expansion of *espírito* and afro-descendant religions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and included concerted efforts to undermine the growth of Protestantism in the country during the *Estado-Novo* period (1937-1946) and throughout the mid-twentieth century (Mainwaring, 1989; Mariano, 2011).

The military dictatorship (1964-1985) changed the dynamic between the Catholic Church and the state. The initial role of the Catholic Church in the military regime is still debated. Historical records indicate some support from members of the high clergy, possibly out of fear of atheistic communism, but there was no official support or rejection coming from the Catholic Church at

that time (Arruda, 2014; Cleary, 1997; Mainwaring, 1989). Of important note is a large protest that preceded the military coup. On March 19, 1964 a protest called the “Family March with God for Liberty,” organized by various religious groups (mostly Catholic and Protestant), but with no official support from the Catholic Church as an institution (Arruda, 2014; Melito, 2014).

Angered by President Goulart’s policy proposals, a perceived move towards socialism, protestors called for his impeachment. Taking the cue, two weeks later a group of military officials successfully staged a coup and replaced civilian leadership with military. Nevertheless, as the authoritarian regime maintained its grip for over two decades, specific groups within the Catholic Church became important forces in the redemocratization of the country, the fight for human rights, the development of future political leaders, and in the establishment of political parties. The most influential political party to be shaped by the Catholic Church was the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker’s Party, or PT). Given the demographic dominance of Catholicism as a religious identity, the influence of the Catholic Church in the creation of the PT comes from specific social movements inside the Church structure. Influenced by Liberation Theology (Boff, 1987; C. Smith & Smith, 1991; Tombs, 2003) and through the support of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), various important groups shaped the ideology behind the PT (connecting it to other leftist causes such as those of labor unions and poverty alleviation). Groups such as the *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (Ecclesiastic Base Communities, or ECBs), the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (Pastoral Land Commission), and the *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (Missionary Indigenous Council) provided a “voice for the voiceless” and a breeding ground for future political leaders inside the PT and other political parties (Keck, 2010; Mariano, 2011; L. A. G. de Souza, 2004).

The role of the Catholic Church has changed throughout Brazilian political history. The legacy of being the official Imperial religion contributed to the demographic dominance of Catholicism as “the only game in town” for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, it is impossible to talk about the Catholic Church and Catholicism as monoliths, especially in a large and diverse country like Brazil (Boas & Smith, 2015). Catholics in the country support ideologies across the political spectrum, as evidence by support of some Catholics for the dictatorship, followed by opposition from many other Catholics to that same regime. As we enter

the modern era of party politics in Brazil, Catholics are present in all political parties, and at the national level they are represented in every party that has a member in Congress.

The leftist movements inside the Catholic Church and among the Catholic population helped in the creation and strengthening of the PT, the country’s second largest party today and one of the most influential parties of the late 1990s and 2000s. Today, certain institutions within the Catholic Church structure still support leftist ideals, candidates, and parties. This sentiment, however, is not felt uniformly throughout the Church hierarchy and across the country’s Catholic population. In the 2018 presidential elections, Catholic priests became vocal supporters (sometimes in the pulpit) of both presidential candidates: Fernando Haddad of the PT and Jair Bolsonaro of PSL (Balloussier, 2018). The election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, a Catholic himself whose campaign slogan was “Brazil above everything, God above all” (Seto, 2018), showed once again the ideological, political, and party divisions among those of the Catholic faith.

Table 2: Last Presidential Poll Before 2018 Presidential Elections by Religious Affiliation²

Religion (Percentage of Population)	Jair Bolsonaro (PSL)	Fernando Haddad (PT)
Catholic (65%)	44%	43%
Evangelical (22.4%)	59%	26%
<i>Espírita</i> (1.3%)	48%	39%
<i>Umbanda, Candomblé</i> and other Afro-Descendant Religions (0.3%)	27%	62%
No religion/Agnostic (8%)	46%	38%

Source: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2013), G1 (“Datafolha de 25 de outubro para presidente por sexo, idade, escolaridade, renda, região, religião e orientação sexual,” 2018).

While efforts to establish a religious oriented party have been present in Brazilian political history, their success has been limited (A. E. Smith, 2019). Brazil did not experience the establishment of a strong Christian Democratic Party as is seen in other countries in Europe and in the region (L. A. G. de Souza, 2004, p. 86). The stunting of a strong Christian Democratic Party may have been a consequence of the 1964 military coup. The Christian Democratic Party (PDC) was officially created in Brazil in 1945, obtained important political victories in the 1954 election, but was extinguished, along with all other political parties in 1965 (Coelho, 2003). In

² As for the writing of this chapter there were no analyses or studies relying on post-election polls and surveys that distinguished voters by religion. We rely on the last poll prior to the election (10/25) in this table.

1985 the party was re-established, but saw limited success given the multiplicity of parties and the differing strategies to attract religious voters. Today, *Democracia Cristã* (Christian Democracy), the party that carries the legacy of PDC, is a small party with only one Federal Deputy in Congress and a relatively small number of party members.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the majority of the Evangelical population remained apolitical (Chesnut, 1999; Fonseca, 2008; A. E. Smith, 2018). It was not until the late 1970s and the early 1980s that evangelical churches became more directly involved in the political process. According to Campos Machado and Burity (2014), the political incentives to enter the political landscape were three-fold: 1) to become less invisible and claim access to public resources newly available in a democratic regime; 2) the opportunity to become a more influential, less cultural subaltern, group; and 3) confrontation with the progressive social movements (such as feminist groups and LGBT rights groups) that were also gaining ground in the new political landscape (see also Borges, 2010; dos Santos & Moddelmog forthcoming; Freston, 2001; Ogland & Verona, 2014; Pierucci & Prandi, 1986; Reich & dos Santos, 2013; Siepierski, 1997; Silva, 2016; Trevisan, 2013).

In the three decades since the re-establishment of multiparty democracy, parties started to open spaces for previously under-represented sectors of society, including religious leaders from Evangelical churches (Campos Machado & Burity, 2014). This led to a marked increase in the number of Evangelicals politicians elected to the Chamber of Deputies (see Tables 3 & 4). Additionally, scholars have increasingly found that Evangelicals make political decisions (including voting choices) based on their religious beliefs, while Evangelical churches have developed specific plans to promote their candidates (Boas, 2014; Boas & Smith, 2019; Lacerda, 2017; Mariano, 2011; Reich & dos Santos, 2013; Smiderle & Mesquita, 2016).

As congregations started to develop corporatist models to promote their own candidates and interests, these new strategies did not bring about the creation of one umbrella Evangelical party. The clearest example of a congregation's attempt to create a party is the *Partido Republicano Brasileiro* (Brazilian Republican Party, or PRB). Established in 2005, one of its most prominent members is Bishop Marcelo Crivella, a former National Senator (2003-2017) and mayor of Rio

de Janeiro (2017). Crivella is the nephew of Edir Macedo, the founder of *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom God), which is one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Brazil today. Crivella was once an ally of President Lula and his efforts to reduce poverty, however, he opposed abortion and voiced support for traditional family values, and in 2016 the PRB voted unanimously for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff of PT. The PRB is able to utilize the resources of the church, including one of the largest television and radio networks in the country, to support their candidates. While Evangelicalism is not a requirement for the party, 14 of their 21 elected Deputies in the 2014 Congress identified as Evangelicals. In 2018, the party won 31 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 19 of them (62 percent) identified as Evangelicals (17 are members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom God) (Marini & de Carvalho, 2018).

Evangelicals, like Catholics, differ on economic and some social policies. In 2016 Evangelical members of Congress hailed from 22 different political parties (Dip, 2018, p. 44) and preliminary accounts for the 2018 elections show at least 23 parties (Marini & de Carvalho, 2018). With the growing population of Evangelical voters, it is possible that there may be more concerted attempts to create Evangelical minded political parties in the future. While not yet in existence, the *Assembléia de Deus* (Assembly of God) Church has announced plans to create the *Partido Republicano Cristão* (Republican Christian Party), demonstrating that these are not the only parties seeking Evangelical political leaders or voters (A. R. de Souza, 2009; Favretto, 2017, 2018).

Culture and Institutions: Impact of Religion in Politics

The political landscape in Brazil is characterized by a curious paradox when thinking about religion: culturally, there appears to be a close association between religion and politics.

However, Brazilian political institutions and electoral rules have limited the influence religious groups exert over political parties.

Culturally, voters and politicians are supportive of their religious traditions and the influence of religious beliefs on societal dynamics. An overwhelming majority of elected officials in Brazil are religious (see Table 3). Politics become intertwined with religion as priests and pastors use

their pulpit to show support to specific politicians, parties, and policies. In fact, many pastors and priests run for office themselves, and frequently candidates have taken to signaling to voters their religious affiliation by using the moniker of Pastor or Brother (Boas, 2014). Additionally, while the constitution mandates secularism, there are plenty of uncontested examples of religious and governmental entanglements, funding of programs, and policies reflecting religious interests (Montero, 2016).

Table 3- Survey of Federal Deputies: Religious Identification

Religion	1991 1994	1995 1998	1999 2002	2003 2006	2007 2010	2011 2014	2015 2018
Protestant/Evangelical	6.1%	6.3%	6.9%	11.8%	13.6%	13.6%	16.7%
Others	1.7%	1.8%	2.1%	2.8%	2.7%	3.7%	3.9%
Catholic	57.5%	71.1%	73.6%	73.6%	73.5%	72.4%	68.9%
No Response	34.6%	20.8%	17.3%	11.8%	10.1%	10.3%	10.5%

Source: Centro de Documentação e Informação (2018).

Institutionally, the connection between religion and political parties is limited due to the pressures the electoral system places on parties. Brazil uses an open-list proportional electoral system for their Chamber of Deputies. In an open-list system, parties do not pre-rank candidates on party lists prior to the election. Rather the votes a candidate receives translates to the position they hold on the party list. Additionally, because district magnitude varies, in accordance to the state's population between eight and 70 seats, numerous parties participate in the electoral process. For example, in the 2018 Congressional elections, the state of *Paraíba* elected 12 deputies, but over 138 candidates won significant votes, amongst a field of hundreds of candidates (Carr, 2018). This has several consequences for the party system. First, parties in Brazil are weak, and many of them lack in ideological consistency and resources. Elections tend to be candidate centered, in that candidates raise their own money, craft their own messages, and easily move from one party another when their current party no longer serves their interest (Ames, 2002). Therefore, it is difficult to identify party ideology or treat parties and their connection to religion or congregations as fixed or entirely consistent. To win a larger share of the votes parties strategically attempt to 'diversify their social base...as such, all the major parties are quite happy to have Protestant candidates on their list' (Freston, 2001, p. 145).

Adding a layer of complexity to the party system is the low level of partisan identification among the electorate. Survey results show that partisanship in the electorate remains low since 1988, with only two brief periods in which party identification was around 50 percent of the electorate (Samuels & Zucco, 2018). Mainwaring argues that partisanship has little impact on voter behavior. Instead, agreeing with Ames, what matters most in elections is “pork, pageantry, and performance,” the candidates personal qualities and their ability to deliver constituent services (Mainwaring, 1992). In the case of Evangelical candidates, Freston (2001, p. 20) states, “Pentecostal official candidates are typically the following: men prominent in the church as itinerant evangelists, singers or media presenters, sons and sons-in-law of *pastores presidentes*; and Pentecostal businessmen who make agreements with their ecclesiastical leaders,” fitting well into the “pork, pageantry, and performance” needed by successful candidates.

Brazilian society tends to be religious, and because of the numerous and weak parties, one can find religious candidates and religiously informed political positions in numerous parties. However, with few exceptions, parties in Brazil are not currently serving to coalesce or group religious influence in a coordinated way. Rather they are happy to work with whatever individuals or groups that can get elected. Which means the coordination of religious interests comes mostly from religious caucuses in the Congress. Additionally, because no party has successfully been able to stake a claim on the religious vote, Evangelical and conservative Catholic voters operate like swing voters, particularly in presidential elections (Mariano & Oro, 2011; Mariano & Pierucci, 1992; A. F. Pierucci & Prandi, 2015). In presidential elections, the pressure of gathering a winning coalition is different than in the proportional elections used in the Chamber of Deputies. Presidential candidates court conservative Evangelical and Catholic voters by visiting places of worship and reading from the Bible during the service; producing pamphlets for distribution to churches; seeking endorsements from religious leaders; and, in the case of Dilma Rouseff’s elections, shifting support from policies in areas of abortion or LGBT issues in order to attract voters (Mariano & Oro, 2016).

The Evangelical Caucus

At the 1988 Constituent Assembly, Evangelicals established the only religious “front” to influence the creation of the new Constitution (Freston 2001). Prior to the Constituent Assembly,

the Assembly of God Church pursued a strategy to elect one Evangelical (preferably an Assembly of God member) per state to represent the interests of Evangelicals in the drafting of the new constitution (Freston, 1993). Other large congregations joined national parties in a more strategic fashion, with Evangelical candidates receiving direct support from their congregations (Fonseca, 2008; Mariano & Oro, 2011). A marked shift from the “believer does not mess with politics” approach, Evangelical leaders pursued an aggressive strategy prior to the 1987-1988 Constituent Assembly for two main reasons: a marked interest in influencing social policy and an attempt to keep the power of the Catholic Church in check during the drafting of the new constitution. The strategy proved successful, as an estimated thirty-two Federal Deputies elected declared to be Evangelical (Trevisan, 2013), working at times as a cohesive group to protect their aligned religious interests.

Since 1988 the party system has evolved to include numerous parties and attempts to formalize discussions across party lines inside the Federal Chamber of Deputies. *Frentes Parlamentares* (Parliamentary Fronts) are an attempt to organize in an official manner congressmembers interested in promoting a specific topic of interest to society. Once established, Parliamentary Fronts can request access to offices to organize meetings related to their interest. There are over 300 Parliamentary Fronts in Congress (“Frentes Parlamentares,” 2017). Because these fronts require signatures from at least one third of the Chamber to become official, not all signatories are active participants of debates on said issues. Therefore, these Parliamentary Fronts are not the same as a caucus or lobby, but the official nature of the fronts allow caucuses to use the benefits provided to a Parliamentary Front to organize inside the Chamber of Deputies to discuss political objectives (Coradini, 2010; de Araújo, 2016). Currently, three Parliamentary Fronts have a religious focus: The Religious Freedom Front, the Catholic Front, and the Evangelical Front. The Afro-Brazilian Front also discusses issues of religious freedom, focusing on the protection of Afro-descendent religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

The words “front” and “caucus” are used interchangeably in the media. Of specific interest to the discussion of religion and political parties is the *Frente Parlamentar Evangélica* (Evangelical Parliamentary Front), also known as the *Bancada Evangélica* (Evangelical Caucus). The Evangelical Parliamentary Front has 199 signatories. While the front is the formalization of the

Evangelical Caucus, allowing the group to meet regularly, the Evangelical Caucus has an estimated 84 active members in 2019. The Evangelical Caucus has become an influential political group, one of the Parliamentary Fronts that meets regularly to discuss policies and political issues that Evangelical Deputies see as connected to their religious beliefs and those of his constituents and congregants.

Table 4- The Evangelical Caucus:1986-2018

Year	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Evangelical Deputies	33 (5.7%)	22 (4.4%)	21 (4.1%)	53 (10.3%)	69 (13.5%)	42 (8.2%)	63 (12.3%)	80 (15.6%)	84 (16.4%)

Sources: 1986 to 2010, Oro (2011). 2014, Bacelar and Carvalho (2014). 2018, Departamento Intersindical de Assessoria Parlamentar (2018)

The current political landscape, especially regarding the recent election of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency, shows the importance of family values and religious identity in the current political marketplace. Evangelical groups and Evangelical politicians have been vocal opponents to key policy proposals during the fourteen years the presidency was held by the Worker’s Party, most notably a fierce opposition to abortion (Mariano & Oro, 2011; Ogland & Verona, 2011) and rejection of key legislations seeking to promote LGBTQ rights (dos Santos & Modelmog, Forthcoming; Lopes & Vital, 2013; Ogland & Verona, 2014). In both of these issues, religious views become an important policy signal, and some of these policy stances are in line with the views of a large portion of Evangelical voters and politicians as well as with Catholics who hold more socially conservative beliefs (Bohn, 2004; Nishimura, 2004; Ogland & Verona, 2011, 2014).

The Evangelical Caucus, through the formalization of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, has been an important space for Evangelical politicians to meet and promote political strategies that support their congruent religious and ideological objectives. According to various media and scholar accounts, the Evangelical Caucus is one of the most active caucuses in Congress (Dantas, 2011; Dip, 2018; Marini & de Carvalho, 2018; É. Medeiros & Fonseca, 2016; Quadros & Madeira, 2018). Since its official creation (as a Parliamentary Front) in 2003, the Evangelical Caucus has become more vocal about their interests, more disciplined in votes related to their

own religious and political interests, and more ambitious in their political agenda. In the case of the Evangelical Caucus, similar to the Rural Caucus and the Security Caucus, the institutional establishment of a Parliamentary Front facilitated the ability of Federal Deputies to align across ideological and policy interests, bypassing the fragmented and sometimes weak party structures and dynamics (Alessi, 2017; É. Medeiros & Fonseca, 2017).

Bolsonaro's presidential campaign focused on religion and family values to attract moral conservative voters, propelled by a growing "conservative wave" that have gained ground both in the general public and in Congress in response to progressive policies implemented by the Worker's Party during the 14 years (2003-2016) they held the presidency (Almeida, 2017; Quadros & Madeira, 2018). While many voters and politicians pushing for moral conservative values and policies are Catholic, the powerful force propelling Bolsonaro's candidacy and victory were Evangelical voters. This connection to Evangelical voters and the current fragmentation of the party system may strengthen the Evangelical Caucus. One evidence of this newfound influence is the fact that Bolsonaro asked the Evangelical Caucus to indicate names for his cabinet (Lopes Alves, 2018). This is an unprecedented move, as negotiations for cabinet positions have historically been a part of party negotiations among those forming the presidential coalition. As the number of Evangelicals in the population and in politics increase, the role of the Evangelical Caucus in shaping politics and policy may become more influential, which in turn may have a direct impact on party strategy in the country.

Conclusion

"Our time has come! This is the moment for the church to take over the nation. It is time for the church to tell the nation what we came to do. It is time for the church to govern."

Dameres Alves (quoted in Caleiro & Machado, 2018)

The Brazilian demographic and political landscape has changed drastically since the return to democracy. Religion is playing a larger role in party strategy and vote choice. Dameres Alves, a lawyer and Baptist pastor, was named Jair Bolsonaro's Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights in 2019. In one of her first official statements as minister, she stated, "the state is secular, but this Minister is very Christian. (...) I believe in God's intention and in God's purpose" (A. Borges, 2019). Jair Bolsonaro, in his inauguration speech mentioned God twelve times, more

mentions of God than all inauguration speeches of the democratic era (“Análise,” 2019).³ The 2018 presidential campaign, the rise of Evangelical politicians, and the first speeches and political moves of President Bolsonaro and his staff indicate that religion will become an important component of Brazilian politics during his tenure. The 2018 elections also point to a new dynamic in Congress, one where party fragmentation and ideological polarization may lead the president to attempt alliances across caucuses such as the Evangelical Caucus instead of the traditional model of coalition presidential that gives power to parties allied to the president (Cascione & Araújo, 2018; Schreiber & Shalders, 2018).

The relationship between religion and party politics changed considerably since the return to democracy. A crowded party marketplace and a significant demographic shift contributed to a bulk of these changes. The 2018 election arguably shifted once again this relationship. Future research on Brazilian party politics must include a continuous focus on understanding how Evangelical politicians influence their party platforms, the influence of Evangelical voters and politicians (through the growing Evangelical Caucus) on majoritarian elections and coalition formation, and the ways in which the Evangelical Caucus strengthen or undermine party dynamics in the country.

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³ José Sarney (1985) mentioned God once in his speech. Fernando Collor (1990) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995 and 1999) did not mention God in their inauguration speech, Luiz Inácio da Silva mentioned God once in 2003 and five times in 2007. Dilma Rousseff mentioned God once in her 2011 speech and did not mention in 2015 (“Ex-presidentes,” n.d.)

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