



THE BELIEVER VOTES FOR THE BELIEVER

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES ON THE
ELECTION OF JAIR BOLSONARO IN BRAZIL

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Introduction

Historically, in Latin America the political pendulum has always swung from the political left to the political right and back, in a seemingly never-ending dance to find the right balance. After a period of military dictatorships, at the beginning of the 21st century, Latin America embarked on the so-called pink tide¹. In many Latin American countries, left-leaning governments came to power. Between 1998 and 2014, in 11 different Latin American countries, leftist candidates won more than 30 presidential elections (Anria & Roberts, 2019). Therefore, Latin American populism has been mostly associated with the political left. However, in recent years it is becoming evident that the region is drastically shifting away from these leftist politicians. During the mid-2010's a new political wave emerged, the conservative wave (or blue wave). This conservative right-wing to far-right political wave was a direct reaction to the previous 'pink wave' in Latin America. According to Kurlantzick (2013) the decline of these left-wing government might have taken place due to corruption scandals² and a rupture in the economic, social and cultural status quo through diversity and inclusivity policies, as these policies generally tend to empower the poorest, generating pressure and revolts from the middle classes (Kurlantzick, 2013).

As nationalistic populism (and neo-nationalism) knew a resurgence in many parts of the world like in North America and Europe, Latin America soon followed after in the mid 2010's. Conservative leaders have been elected in several South American countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay and Peru since the 2010's (Darlington & Londoño, 2018). However, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil is generally seen as one of the most drastic

¹ Peronists in Argentina (2001-2015), Hugo Chavez (United Socialist Party) in Venezuela (1999-2007), Lula da Silva (Workers' Party) in Brazil, Evo Morales (Movement for Socialism) in Bolivia (2006-?), Rafael Correa (PAIS alliance) in Ecuador (2007- 2017).

² The Lava Jato (Car Wash) scandal in Brazil involving the Workers Party (PT)

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right-wing turns of any country in the region. Moreover, it can be considered the most drastic conservative turn in Brazil since the "re-democratization" after the military dictatorship of the 1980's. A combination of fundamental conditions – the economic recession, rising crime and corruption, along with a backlash campaign that ingeniously made strategic use of mainstream social media to put forth their political agenda and the weakness of their rival political candidates – made the remarkable rise of the right-wing populism in Brazil possible. However, this thesis aims to focus on a specific factor that played a major role in the election of the so-called "Brazilian Trump"³, namely the increasing political aspirations of the Evangelical churches in Brazil. In the latest election, large networks of Pentecostal churches helped spread the political campaign of Bolsonaro – who got re-baptized in the Jordan river in 2016 – in an unprecedented way. This will be analysed as a case study as, Bolsonaro owes a great part of his electoral success to the support of the Evangelical churches and electorate. No president in the history of Brazil has enjoyed such a huge approval and support from the Evangelicals as Bolsonaro.

Given the democratic-pluralist scenario of the political sphere in Brazil, three contemporary developments were being highlighted during the 2018 elections and can be noted as problematic. First of all, the leaders (and/or founders) of the three most important evangelical mega-churches in Brazil have become major economic players with direct and indirect political ambitions, therefore concentrating both religious, political and economic power. Secondly, Bolsonaro and the ideological wing of his cabinet are driven by the idea that they are in a cultural and moral fight with forces that are threatening Christianity.

³ The nickname Bolsonaro quickly gained internationally for his similar rhetoric. However, they are two very different men from two very different countries.

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Lastly, social and legal recognition of non-traditional ways of life are increasing getting opposed by the dominant Evangelical churches (Zilla, 2020).

Given these problematic developments, this thesis aims to analyse the increasing influence of the Evangelical churches on the political sphere in Brazil in relation to the 2018 election of Bolsonaro. And as a sub question to this, it aims to answer how this interaction between politics and the Evangelical churches is structured.

The rise of evangelical churches in Brazil and in the region has been extensively studied in recent years. Consequently, this thesis will build upon this literature while at the same time extending the research to the contemporary Brazilian case, since the influence of the evangelical church on the 2018 election of Bolsonaro specifically has yet to gain traction in academia. Nevertheless, the interest is gaining momentum as it becomes apparent that the ability of Evangelical churches to get their candidates elected is expanding and the support Bolsonaro received from the Evangelicals is unprecedented. Until recently the evangelical endorsement for presidential candidates was not very successful due to their heterogeneous nature, religious leaders did not agree upon a single candidate to support. During the 2018 elections this changed notably with many prominent evangelical leaders openly endorsing Bolsonaro.

This paper will make use of the available peer reviewed journals, articles and academic books, including the most contemporary academic works (like those published just a couple of months ago⁴). Furthermore, the relevant quantitative data and statistics from national and international research institutes such as Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE),

⁴ Like for example, the work of Paula Montero published in April this year ("Religious Pluralism and Its Impacts on the Configuration of Secularism in Brazil")

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Datafolha and Pew Research Centre will be used and analysed to contribute to the qualitative ethnography.

In order to adequately answer the posed research question, this thesis will start with a general theory section about secularism dealing with the contemporary debate of the presence of religion in the political and public sphere, followed by a background study on the history of the emergence and growth of evangelical churches in Brazil (and in the Latin American region), including the relevant terminology and characteristics of the evangelical faith. Then there will be a section on religion and politics and, more specifically, the influence of Evangelical churches on Brazilian politics, focusing on the representatives of the three biggest evangelical churches in Brazil: the Assemblies of God, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and The Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Ultimately, there will be an empirical case study on the evangelical influence on the election of Bolsonaro, showing the impact evangelical adherents had on the last election round⁵ in absolute numbers. Furthermore, a couple of key events will be analysed, such as Bolsonaro being re-baptized in the Jordan River, him getting stabbed during his campaign rally, the march for Jesus and finally, his campaign rhetoric and at the composition of the ideological wing of his cabinet.

O estado é laico ('the state is secular')

In Brazil, the contemporary debate of the presence of religion in the political and public sphere revolves around two axes: the premise that religion and morality have been privatized and the legal separation between church and state (Machado M. D., 2012).

⁵ As a poll conducted by Datafolha right before the election almost exactly predicted the election outcome it is possible to apply the percentages from the poll to the number of valid votes to estimate the number of votes per religious denomination

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Principally, these axes demonstrate the importance of Max Weber's thesis⁶ of secularization and modernity. However, contrary to what is laid out in the secularization theory by scholars such as Mirjam Künkler and Julia Leininger, which assumes that religion will gradually disappear in modern society, the contemporary Brazilian case has shown a different dynamic. Consequently, the limits and relevance of these Weberian modernity theses have since been widely discussed and debated⁷. The religious shift from Catholicism to various forms of Evangelicalism that has taken place over the last couple of decades has not only led to a greater religious heterogeneity but also a more intense overall religiosity in the country. The main premise of the secularization theory - that with the modernization of society, the level of religiosity would decline - has already been contested since the 1980s as it considered Europe to be the norm and the US as the exception without discrediting the rule. In recent decades, the theory of secularization has been largely abandoned by most scholars as Brazilian, among other cases that seems to defy these and largely replaced by the so-called "multiple modernities" concept as proposed by Eisenstadt. By analysing the secularization processes of contemporary western societies, Eisenstadt argued that there are "multiple modernities". According to him the best way to understand the modern world is by considering modernity as *"a continuous history of constituting and reconstituting a multiplicity of cultural programs. These incessant reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns are brought to a head by specific actors in close relation with social, political and intellectual activists as well as social movements that pursue different programs of modernities and defend very different visions about what makes a society modern. Through*

⁶ Secularization paradigm; Berger 1967, and Dobbelaere 1985, 1999, and Martin 1978

⁷ Eisenstadt (2001, 2007); Casanova (1994,2003) : Schluchter (1989): Gauchet (2002): Habermas (2007): Habermas and Ratzinger (2007): Schluchter (1989)

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the connection of these sectors to others that extend further from their respective societies, unique expressions of modernity are realized” (Eisenstadt, 2001, p. 140)

This notion of modernity allows for the consideration of cultural and historical specificities of diverse social formations and for contextualizing the perceived threat the participation of religious denominations in the public and political sphere poses to liberal democracies (Machado M. D., 2012). Paul Freston agrees that the presence of evangelical groupings in the political sphere in Brazil fits well within this “plural” notion of secularity as well as the “multiple modernities” thesis, as there are many ways of being modern, including but not limited to religious ways. Europe is no longer considered the norm but rather seen as the exception globally in the secularization of the public life and its population. In various world regions religion remains to play an important role in the political and social sphere⁸. (Miller & Morgan, 2019) The relationship between public life and religion varies a lot depending on the region as well as the relationship between the state and religion. Therefore, José Casanova argues that both secularization and modernity have their own distinct lineages, which reflect the historical courses of states. Every reflection on the secularization requires *“a critical examination of the different structures of differentiation and fusion of the religious and secular, as well as their mutual formation”* (Casanova, 2008, p. 4). This perspective is arguably very useful in the analysis of the Latin American and Brazilian case.

On the other hand, Ahmet Kuru, a Turkish political scientist suggests a typology that differentiates between five diverse relationships between the state and religion. The first one includes religious states such as Iran. The second includes states with an official and established religion such as England or various religions, such as in Indonesia. The third

⁸ As evident for example during the Arab Spring, the Trump administration (“Muslim ban”) and in India’s ruling Hindu party BJP

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includes states with neutrality, which allow the public visibility of religion. Kuru calls this “passive or plural secularism”, the USA being a good example of this. Fourth are those that exclude religion from the public domain. Kuru calls this “aggressive or combative secularism” good examples of these could be Turkey (previously) or France. Last, there are so-called anti-religious states, such as North Korea (Kuru, 2009). From this typology, one can conclude that the often-used phrase in Brazil “o estado é laico” (or the state is secular) is a hollow phrase as it effectively means very little, for the reason that there are at least three very diverse options within the typology of Kuru that could suit that phrase. The use of this phrase is thus more ideological or used to delegitimize unfavourable proposals. Another conclusion can be made, that there is in fact no ideal or desirable model for the relationship between religion and state. It is always an evolution from the regional realities. Therefore, mere legal changes are not going to make local traditions disappear (Miller & Morgan, 2019).

The background and characteristics of Protestantism in Brazil and Latin America

In the Latin American region, one of the most significant demographic changes of last decades was the shift of large parts of the population from Catholicism to Evangelicalism⁹. In Latin America, protestants were shunned and persecuted for centuries¹⁰ in order to consolidate Catholicism. Only recently in the 20th century were certain restrictions abolished, allowing Protestant denominations to grow. Consequently, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism spread out rapidly and successfully. During the first half of the 20th century, Protestantism established a substantial presence in Brazil, mainly due to American

⁹ in its different forms, mainly Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal

¹⁰ Much like all other non-Catholic religious movements during the colonial era

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missionaries. Their influence grew even more during the second half of the 20th century with liberal leaders who were looking for American and English teachers and businessmen in the hope of promoting the economic growth of their individual nation-states (Clawson, 2012)¹¹.

The most popular and successful denomination seems to be that of the Pentecostal churches. By the 1960s, protestants only accounted for less than 5% of the Brazilian population. However, by the 2000s over 15% affiliated themselves to a protestant church. By now, the percentages are estimated to be between 22% (IBGE, 2012)¹² and 27% (Datafolha) of the population and is consequently the fastest-growing religious denomination in the country. Mainly, Pentecostal and charismatic evangelical churches are responsible for appealing to the masses and enabling the expansion of Protestantism in Brazil.

IBGE	Census 1980	Census 1991	Census 2000	Census 2010
Catholics	89.2%	83.3%	73.7%	64.6%
Evangelicals	6.6%	9%	15.4%	22.2%

Source: Oro and Tadvald 2019, P.59.

Every decade a national census is held, by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The next one will be due this year (2020) and the results will be known one or two years from now. However, estimates from surveys conducted by Datafolha¹³ and Pew Research Centre¹⁴ currently show that around 27% of the population identify as evangelical. Even though these surveys lack the empirical range and depth of a national census conducted by the IBGE, they are a good indicator of the continuation of the trend of the decline of Catholicism and rise of evangelism. Between 1990 and 2010, the Catholic faith declined by

¹¹ Like Benito Juarez in Mexico and Juan Bautista Alberdi

¹² According to the 2010 Census (around 44million people)

¹³ A private national institute

¹⁴ Foreign research institute

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1% a year while the evangelical faith grew by 0.7%; since 2010 the decline of the Catholicism accelerated to 1.2% per year, while the growth of the evangelical faith increased to 0.8%. If we project this trend to the future, by the year 2022, less than half of the Brazilian population will be Catholic, according to Diniz Alves and by 2030, the evangelic church is projected to surpass Catholicism as the biggest religion in Brazil according to Clemir Fernandes¹⁵ (Osborn, 2019).

The Brazilian case is not isolated in this matter, as in the entire Latin American region, Roman Catholicism is in decline and making space for Protestant denominations to flourish. According to the Pew Research Centre survey conducted in 18 Latin American countries one in five consider themselves Protestant (Masci, 2014) and the majority self-identified themselves as Pentecostal (or a Pentecostal denomination).

Terminology

The term evangelic is contested and ambiguous since there are many discrepancies in names between adherents, religious authorities, languages, and researchers. However, the word evangelical or *evangélico* in Brazil has come to be understood as synonymous with charismatic Pentecostal faiths that comprise roughly three-fourths of the protestant population of the region. In this paper, the term evangelical will thus be used as an umbrella term to refer to a heterogeneous group of mostly independent churches belonging to the protestant tradition, mainly Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal¹⁶. Accordingly, focusing on a wide range of contemporary Churches who adhere to four permanent evangelical characteristics, as identified by Paul Freston as “conversionism (emphasis on the need for

¹⁵ A sociologist at the Institute of Religious Studies

¹⁶ As the term *Evangélico* in Brazil is used as such by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and by the majority of Brazilian protestants (members of the so-called historical protestant tradition such as Calvinists, Lutherans, etc.)

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change of life), activism (emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts), biblicism (a special importance attributed to the Bible, though not necessarily the fundamentalist shibboleth of ‘inerrancy’), and crucicentrism (emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross)” (Freston, 2001) Therefore, excluding groups like Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Latter-Day Saints from the classification of *evangélico*.

Popularity and appeal

According to Andrew Chesnut¹⁷ the success of Pentecostalism can be found in the fact that it has in a short time absorbed much of the Latin American culture, something which took the Roman Catholic church more than four centuries to do. Furthermore, Pentecostalism seems to be more appealing than their catholic counterpart as most preachers speak and look like their congregants. Catholic priests, on the other hand, are more elitist as most of them are either mestizo or white and many came from Europe. There is a strong emphasis on nationalization in Brazil; for example, by 1930, the largest Pentecostal denomination “the Assemblies of God” was fully under Brazilian authority, just 20 years after the first American evangelists had arrived. Now the Assemblies of God church in Brazil has far more members than their American counterpart¹⁸. Leadership in Pentecostal churches is often delegated to the local community, making the churches more accessible (Potter, Amaral, & Woodberry, 2014). Furthermore, their masses or services are much more personal and focus on spiritual gifts, making the services more participatory and easily accessible as they focus on the daily needs felt by ordinary people. The most valued so-called spiritual gift seems to be that of healing.

¹⁷ Professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University

¹⁸ 10 to 12 million members in Brazil and 2 to 3 million in the United States

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Characteristics

A literal interpretation of the Bible is being followed by these evangelic churches, accrediting in *sana doctrina* (healthy doctrine) that according to them, heals sin and glorifies Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is a great emphasize on bible studies in these churches. According to the evangelical belief, one can establish a direct personal relationship with God, who will reward those of good faith with health and material wealth (prosperity theology). Neo-Pentecostal churches especially emphasize this material blessing by God to those who serve him well and are of good faith. God will see those who give money to their local church (seed money) and bless the givers with a much larger “financial harvest” (Potter, Amaral, & Woodberry, 2014).

Latin American Protestantism can be characterized by a couple of attributes. First of all, its initial appeal has been the greatest among the rural and urban lower classes. Secondly, the faster growing denominations have been dominated by fundamentalist, charismatic believes and practices. In Latin America adherents of these charismatic protestant denominations like the Assembly of God, and the Universal church of the Kingdom of God are commonly referred to as *Evangélicos*. Thirdly, Evangelical churches place a great emphasize on voluntary and unpaid church services, highlighting the movements communal and egalitarian nature. By sharing the church positions on a rotary basis by the church’s adherents, evangelical church leaders portray strong management skills in the areas of organizational administration, budgeting, public speaking and planning.

Another quality is that most of the Latin American evangelical churches are under independent indigenous control, rather than foreign authority. This is not only the case for local, small churches but also for mega-churches like the Assemblies of God and other denominations originally introduced by Europeans or Americans. These faiths are now almost

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entirely represented by local missionaries and ministers (Clawson, 2012). Already in 1997, Moreno (1997) already reported that 99% of the Pentecostal congregations in Latin America are led by native pastors. Martin (1990) further notes that even though North American personnel and missionaries might be still present in some churches, in the majority of cases they are no longer in control. Ironically, this is in stark contrast to the Catholic church, who is being accused by Latin American protestants of being dominated by foreign control and ideologies. The fifth characteristic of these Protestant Churches is their rapid growth. In Rio de Janeiro city, for example, in two years, from 1990 to 1992, 673 new evangelic churches were established in contrast to one new Catholic Parish (Clawson, 2012). According to some scholars, Latin America is experiencing a belated Protestant Reformation and much like the European reformation in the 16th century, the Latin American 'reformation' came in a time of great economic and social change.

Brazil is after the USA, the country with the largest Christian population in absolute numbers. Furthermore, it is the largest Catholic country that is also home to some of the world's largest Evangelical contingent with millions of followers within the country. As the Evangelical landscape in Brazil is diverse there is a great social inequality within the different churches and denominations. There are for example Evangelical churches for the poor, churches for the rich and larger to mega churches that are all-inclusive. Depending on the number of active practitioners and their social backgrounds, each church has different material and financial resources. According to a survey conducted by Datafolha in 2017, Evangelicals in Brazil tend to financially support their congregations more than their catholic counterparts do¹⁹. Evangelical church leaders rely for a great part on these tithes, which has

¹⁹ 52% of the Evangelicals regularly support their own church financially vs 34% of Catholics

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become a significantly internalized norm within the community. Catholic churches on the other hand, still receive subsidies or financial benefits from the state and are thus less reliant on the financial contributions of their adherents. Many followers of the evangelical denomination regard the payment of tithes to their church as form of social insurance. In case of an emergency, sickness, or unemployment, evangelicals hope to count on the support of the other members of the religious community. In correspondence with the doctrine of prosperity theology, the tithe is considered a worthwhile investment, especially for neo-Pentecostals. Prosperity theology is the believe that God will reward faithful adherents who donate to religious causes with security, good health, and material and financial prosperity (Zilla, 2020).

In 2010, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God²⁰ had more than 3,500,000 adherents and more than 5,875 congregations in Brazil. Considering the low attendance rate of Catholic masses, it is not unlikely that Brazil will have more practicing Protestants than practicing Catholics in some years (Clawson, 2012).

²⁰ Founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1977

Religion and politics

The interaction between Evangelicals and politics in Brazil is one of an unparalleled dynamism in the region. Since the late 1980s when Brazil became a democracy again²¹, evangelical leaders have become increasingly involved in the political sphere as the Catholic church lost its privileged position in politics and society. However, at the time, most of them did not achieve real political relevance as their main goal was to achieve an equal treatment to that of the Catholic church, focusing mainly on the secularization of the state and the expansion of religious freedom (Zilla, 2020).

By now, large numbers of heterogenous evangelical churches have taken over the place of the Catholic church and its privileged access to politics, as the clergy of the Catholic church is strictly forbidden from explicitly supporting political candidates or running for office. Therefore, the Catholic Church mainly focusses on promoting voter turnout and civic norms (Polimédio, 2019). Evangelical leaders on the other hand are not only allowed to openly support political candidates, they even run for office themselves. Some even make use of their titles such as 'bishop' and 'pastor' to gain votes and popularity. Based on the data of the Superior Court, Paula Montero concludes that in 2016 the number of political candidates using the title of 'pastor' reached 3,316²² compared to 150 who used the title 'priest', this was a 25% increase since 2012 (Montero, 2020). As evangelical candidates are above all loyal to their church, they tend to deftly switch political parties based on the changing political landscape. As such, Catholic representation in Congress has declined over the last years and made room for evangetic representation to rise. Since Catholics never held parliamentary

²¹ After two decades of military rule

²² A 25% increase in 4 years' time (2012-2016)

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mandates as representatives of their church. Only few Catholic priests used to be politicians as well. In 2019, 60% of the Congress members identified as Catholic, while in 2010 only 53% identified as such. The evangelical representation on the other hand gained 7% between 2019 and 2020 (Montero, 2016).

Unlike in other Latin American countries the political system in Brazil allows for the evangelical churches to elect their own adherents into congress in relatively large numbers. Nowadays, there are around 70 to 80 evangelical adherents mainly in the Lower house of congress. This is reflecting the ability of these mega-churches to successfully mobilize their members to vote for a political candidate, rather than saying something about the political opinion of said candidate. They have to be part of a political party; however, their main loyalty remains with the church they adhere to. Evangelical candidates can be found at the federal, municipal and federal elections, as the parties want to maximize their voter base, there are usually happy to include some evangelical candidates (Zilla, 2020).

Overall, the evangelical politicians hold a more conservative position. In the Congress a powerful evangelical bloc has emerged uniting members from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal churches in the National Constituent Assembly (Zilla, 2020). The evangelical caucus is a term used for the parliamentary front of the National Congress of Brazil, existing out of evangelical politicians from several distinct political parties. The political relevance of this religious grouping goes well beyond its demographic weight as it is based on a social significance. If the evangelical caucus would be a political party it would be the third biggest, after the Brazilian Democratic Movement and the Workers' Party. Since 2016 the growing influence of this *Bancada Evangélica* (in English: the evangelical caucus) has drawn plenty of international media

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attention, as some politicians clearly benefited greatly from the support of some of the biggest evangelical churches²³. Prof. Túlio Vianna points out the danger of such a parliamentary bloc as their main objectives have shown to be in representing their voter base instead of the Brazilian people as a whole. By blurring the lines between the private and public sphere, the evangelical bloc has mostly been concerned with limiting the rights of other groups who do not adhere to the same faith, instead of representing the public interest as a deputies ought do. The evangelical bloc is mostly known for its opposition to minorities right such as same-sex marriage, adoption, abortion, etc. Therefore, the growing influence of the evangelical caucus is, especially problematic in a state that claims to be secular (Vianna, 2017).

Churches

Even though the Evangelical community in Brazil is very differentiated and multi-layered, there are three Evangelical churches and two aligned political parties that seem to dominate the political landscape. The three most important evangelical churches that are seeking access to the political sphere are The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, The Assemblies of God, and the International Church of the Four-Square Gospel who are already dominating the evangelical landscape in Brazil. Their main concern is to represent their own religious values and protect their institutional interests.

Although these three churches have adherents in several different political parties, they often reside together on the centre-right and right political spectrum. Some of the political parties that were influenced and founded by evangelical church leaders are the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB) and the Social Christian Party (PSC)²⁴ The political relevance

²³ <https://www.camara.leg.br/internet/deputado/frenteDetalhe.asp?id=53658>

²⁴ The party Bolsonaro belonged to when he entered the 2018 election as presidential candidate

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of Evangelicals in Brazil is unparalleled in the region as these three churches and two political parties seem to dominate the political landscape.

The Assembly of God (AG)²⁵ was founded in 1911 and is the largest and the second oldest Pentecostal denomination²⁶ and church with around 22,5 million adherents. Originally the AD was formed in the USA; however, the Brazilian counterpart was founded in the city of Belém (Para state) by two Swedish missionaries Gunnar Vingren and Daniel Berg. Since the 1980s, the church has splintered in countless individual churches (secessions) that have become independent even though they have maintained the original name (Zilla, 2020).

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God²⁷ (UCKG) was founded in 1977 by the former Catholic priest and self-proclaimed bishop Edir Macedo. Contrary to the AG churches, the UCKG has a more hierarchical structure. This church is much smaller in members than the AG with around 8 million followers globally. However, UCKG has managed to infiltrate quite well in the political and public sphere. Accordingly, the UCKG is very visible in the political and in the public sphere. On the 31st of July 2014, the Temple of Salomon was inaugurated in Sao Paulo. The UCKG claims that the Temple is an exact replica of the original one in Jerusalem, with increased dimensions. The mega-church has space for 10.000 worshippers, a radio and television studio, rooms for children's Bible studies, 84 apartments for the pastors and leaders of the church and a museum about the ancient temple. The total cost of the construction is estimated to be around 300 million US dollars. It is thus not surprising that its inauguration attracted some prominent figures²⁸ from both politics and society and drew a lot of media attention (Zilla, 2020).

²⁵ Assembleia de Deus in Portuguese

²⁶ After the Christian Congregation in Brazil

²⁷ Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus in Portuguese

²⁸ Including Dilma Rousseff who served as the Brazilian President at the time (2011-2016)

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The Church of the Foursquare Gospel²⁹ is the third largest Evangelical denomination that exists in Brazil. It is the smallest of the three without around 2 million followers and 11,000 churches in Brazil. Its roots lay in Los Angeles, however, now the Brazilian faction is being led by Mario de Oliveira.

The Evangelical vote

Religion and politics always have had a reciprocal and complex relationship even in the most secular countries. Religion helps shape the worldview and lifestyle of their practitioners. Since the re-democratization of Brazil in the 1980s Evangelical have gotten increasingly involved into Brazilian politics. Therefore, the slogan of “crente vota em crente” or “the believer votes for the believer” in English gained more importance³⁰. Datafolho published a survey in 2017 revealing that 19 percent of the electorate in Brazil strongly consider voting for the candidate proposed by their church. While this might seem little, the survey also revealed that among protestants this percentage is 26 and among neo-Pentecostal evangelicals, it is 31 percent. Therefore, the potential votes from the evangelical side have not gone unnoticed and have even attracted the interest non-evangelical political candidates in recent years. This was especially evident during the 2018 presidential election. Subsequently, the loyalty of these evangelical adherents to their church offers their church leaders some bargaining power to go negotiate with presidential candidates to try and achieve a political deal. This is especially true for the mega-churches mentioned before, as they become increasingly involved with politics during the presidential elections and pursue a corporate model (Zilla, 2020). In exchange for their and their followers’ support, they would negotiate favourable legislation and concession. A good example of this is the 2014

²⁹ or in Portuguese the Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular

³⁰ Hence the title of this thesis

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presidential election campaign of the candidate Marina da Silva, who expressed herself quite liberally on some moral issues and got ‘threatened’ by a renowned leader of the Assembly of God (VC), Pastor Silas Malafaia. He posted a tweet online saying that in Marina would not withdraw from her party’s promise to support same-sex marriage he would call her out and make a disparaging speech about her. This resulted in her returning to a more conservative orthodox agenda in line with the Assembly of God’s moral values (Oualalou, 2019).

There are no strictly Evangelical parties as the evangelical political landscape is as diverse and fragmented, unlike their Christian counterparts. Therefore, saying that Jair Bolsonaro approached evangelical leaders, who urged their faithful to vote for him might be an oversimplification, only highlighting the tip of a complex process according to Magali Cunha.³¹ According to Claudio Couto³², the transfer of votes from the believers to the political candidate proposed by their religious leaders is not automatic. Amy Erica Smith³³ adds to this that evangelicals are critical of leaders who dare to publicly state their political opinion. However, in Brazil, this changes a bit in some specific cases; the more conservative the church, the more cohesive the voting profile of the people who attend it tends to be (Smith, 2019).

During the 2018 elections there was a greater chance that churchgoers would vote for Jair Bolsonaro rather than for Fernando Haddad³⁴ as there was a strong correlation between concerns for gender and sexual issues and the support for Bolsonaro (over Haddad). According to Smith, this is not necessarily due to the political stance of their church leader, but rather due to the values of the community and way of thinking shared among the faithful.

³¹ Who holds an PHD in Communication Sciences

³² Political scientist at Fundação Getúlio Vargas

³³ A professor at the political science department at the University of Iowa

³⁴ Fernando Haddad was Bolsonaro’s main political opponent, replacing the former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from the Workers Party (PT) who was barred from participating in the 2018 Election

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Religion influences and shapes the lifestyle and faith of their followers, who are also state citizens, which creates this reciprocal and complex relationship that exists between politics and religion. All religions contain a certain world view, which regulates the dialectical relationship between involvement in the world (the faithful's daily life and work) and retreating from the world (the relationship with the supernatural, to God and the hereafter). Therefore, in the public sphere as much as in the private sphere, religions shape the secular in a normative way (Zilla, 2020).

In 2018 Erica Smith conducted an online survey among churchgoers in Brazil, revealing that 46% of the Pentecostals indicated that their leader openly supported some candidate of the presidential elections, compared to 38% of the non-Pentecostal evangelicals and 29% of Catholics (Smith, 2019). Almost all those who noted a political statement from their church leaders indicated that the candidate that was being pushed forward was Jair Bolsonaro. This reiterates a strong activism within the churches of those who support Bolsonaro (Machado & Franco, 2018). This sentiment is shared by Ronaldo de Almeida³⁵ who states that the evangelical vote is not automatic but points out that surveys (such as the above mentioned) have shown that evangelicals, more than in other religions, tend to trust and follow their pastors when it comes to politics. It is thus, exactly this relationship of trust that translates into votes. In particular in the highly hierarchical, Universal Church, fidelity to the church has turned out to be even greater (Oualalou, 2019).

³⁵ Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the State University of Campinas and researcher at the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning. Specialized in the Anthropology of Religion and Urban Anthropology.

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Bolsonaro

The 65-years old president of Italian descent was born the city of Glicério (Sao Paulo state). When he was 19 years old (in 1974 during the military dictatorship) he joined the Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras for more than 17 years, eventually reaching the rank of Captain (Polimédio, 2018). After getting into trouble³⁶ with his superiors, Bolsonaro left the military and entered public sphere when he got elected councillor of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1988, running for the Christian Democratic Party. According to a biography made by his son Flávio, Bolsonaro became a candidate for councillor, because it turned out to be his best option at the time to prevent him from being persecuted by some of his military superiors. Therefore, his entry into politics happened by chance rather than by choice, as his desire was to continue his military career (Bolsonaro, 2017, p. 79). Since then he has remained a politician, serving as the federal deputy³⁷ for seven continues terms from 1991 until in 2018 when he decided to run for presidency.

During his presidential campaign Bolsonaro effectively sought to appeal to Brazil's evangelicals aided by the vital support from several evangelical pastors and leaders. Even though he served as a congressman for over 20 years, before the 2018 elections Bolsonaro was relatively unknown. In May 2016³⁸ as he was planning to run for presidency Bolsonaro was publicly re-baptized³⁹ in the Jordan River by the celebrity Pastor Everaldo Pereira, president of the Christian Social Party and distinguished leader of the Assembly of God. According to Figueredo, the moment that Bolsonaro was re- baptized and filmed doing so,

³⁶ He was involved in a plan to drop stun grenades inside the Army barracks to pressure the government into raising the salaries of military officers.

³⁷ Being elected through different political parties

³⁸ The same month former president Dilma was impeached

³⁹ Bolsonaro was raised a Roman Catholic

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was actually his first campaign act; out of which he emerged as the Messiah⁴⁰ (Oualalou, 2019) Bolsonaro was raised as a Roman Catholic and has always declared to remain Catholic even though he has attended the Baptist church for more than 10 years and his wife⁴¹ and son are evangelical. His last marriage⁴² was performed by the evangelical pastor and leader of the Assembly of God Victory in Christ church pastor Silas Malafaia. Which earned Bolsonaro just enough credibility to gain the support of significant evangelical leaders like Malafaia himself who openly supported and endorsed him.

During his election campaign Bolsonaro on several occasions declared that God⁴³ should receive more space in Brazilian politics and that the Christian majority will no longer be ignored by politics. Uttering that the Brazilian state might be secular, but Brazil is a Christian country and reasserting his commitment to the catholic faith by using the slogan of “Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos” or in English “Brazil above everything, God above everyone” during his election campaign. According to a survey conducted by Datafolha shortly before the runoff campaign versus Bolsonaro’s rival Haddad (PT), Bolsonaro enjoyed a 40% approval rate from the Evangelical electorate in contrast to 15% for Haddad. Among the Catholic electorate on the other hand both candidates enjoyed similar support rates 29% and 25% respectively. Furthermore, Bolsonaro could count on the explicit support of the two largest Evangelical churches UCKG and AG.

The 2018 elections

Every four years presidential elections take place in Brazil, whereby everyone between 16 and 70 years of age is obliged to vote. The election system consists out of two rounds. The first round of general elections take place on the first Sunday of October, so in 2018 this was

⁴⁰ which is ironically also his middle name.

⁴¹ Who serves as a sign language interpreter in Pentecostal services

⁴² He got married three times

⁴³ The Christian God

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the 7th of October. If one candidate gathers more than 50% of the votes (which is highly unlikely) he or she will become the elected president. However, in case this 50% threshold is not met, a second round of votes will be held. The second round will then take place on the last Sunday of October (in 2018 this was the 28th of October) and will only include the candidates with the most votes⁴⁴. The winner of this final voting round will be elected as the president of the nation (Studart, 2013).

In general, the assessment during latest electoral campaign was that, despite the winner, Jair Bolsonaro, or Fernando Haddad, the country would remain politically fractured and the election would not lead to any form of overcoming or normalizing the political system (Almeida, 2019). Therefore, the 2018 elections were anticipated with many uncertainties and speculation. Among the various projections regarding the presidential elections, perhaps the most widespread was that it would be an election similar to that of 1989, due to the lack of viable candidates, from either the left or the right (or the centre)⁴⁵. For a few weeks before the first round, the electoral race was open to at least five candidates; then they became four; and, two weeks before the final vote, the election was practically defined between the two who passed to the second round, Haddad and Bolsonaro.

Of the previous presidential candidates, three were directly related to and backed by the evangelical church: Cabo Daciolo, Marina Silva and Jair Bolsonaro. Cabo Daciolo spoke openly in favour of Pentecostal growth in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro: mimicking the behaviour and speeches of those being used by both the pastors of the Assembly of God and the Universal Church. He demonized the secular state and preached in a fundamentalist way, by referencing and using the bible excessively, that politics should be subordinate to the

⁴⁴ In 2018, those two candidates were Fernando Haddad and Jair Bolsonaro

⁴⁵ In addition to the five main candidates (Bolsonaro; Haddad; Alckmin; Ciro and Marina), at least five more candidates (Álvaro Dias; Cabo Daciolo; Henrique Meirelles; João Amoêdo and Guilherme Boulos) achieved some visibility with their participation

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command of the true God of the Bible. Furthermore, he was the first presidential candidate to use the Bible to speak in front of the National Congress and the first to show the bible in a political debate that was broadcasted on television (Aragao, 2018). To summarize Daciolo's speeches had more in common with fundamentalist religious preaching's than with an electoral speech given at a legislative platform (Almeida, 2019).

Marina Silva was a former minister of the workers party and it was her third attempt to run for presidency. topics as she suggested to organize a national referendum to decide about some Silva used to be a missionary for the Assemblies of God nonetheless, she kept a strict division between her personal believes and politics. When asked about her faith she said that does not want to (ab)use her faith for political leverage. Furthermore, she appeared to be quite liberal on some moral issues such as the legalization of marijuana, abortion, moreover her electoral campaign included LGBT guidance. This has resulted in a great rejection from the conservative electorate and criticism from major evangelical leaders (Aragao, 2018).

Alternatively stated, Cabo Daciolo seemed to be too radical to be accepted by the majority of Brazilians, while Marina Silva appeared to be too liberal for the evangelical vote, leaving only Bolsonaro as the desired political candidate in the interest of the evangelical churches.

Fake news

After the first round of voting, on Sunday October 7, the influence of social media networks became increasingly evident for the spread and production of news and the creation of narratives. There were several reasons for Bolsonaro's excellent performance and popularity such as the strong discontent of the PT and the desire for fresh, new names and

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so-called anti-systemic candidates, among others. However, what seemed surprising to all competitors, was the intensive and strategic use of social networks, especially the WhatsApp platform, for the creation and distribution of fake news. The use of social media and fake news was not exactly new to election campaigns and it would be wrong and naive to say that only Bolsonaro took advantage of this method during the presidential election campaign as fake news was being produced on all sides of the political spectrum (Almeida, 2019).

However, indisputably, the use of social networks by Bolsonaro's campaign was different from the others due to its intensity and the dissemination of fake news. When the Workers Party (PT) announced in September 2018 that Fernando Haddad would replace Lula da Silva since Lula would not be able to run for presidency⁴⁶ a unique opportunity seemed emerged to trash-talk the new PT candidate. When served as the minister of education under the Dilma administration, the rather progressive Haddad tried to introduce a guide against homophobia in school something for which he at the time received a lot of criticism on mainly from the evangelical churches (Oualalou, 2019). Already in 2011, pastor Silas Malafaia condemned the distribution of (according to him) "gay kits" and preached that it was the objective of Haddad to turn children into homosexuals. The term 'gay kits' had since been circulating for a while and turned out to be a perfect opportunity for Bolsonaro to pick into. Bolsonaro used the educational measure as a way to showcase the immorality of the previous PT government. The term 'gay kit' has consequently been used repeatedly and gave rise to a multitude of fake news , such as images distributed on social networks in which babies are seen fed in public nurseries with penis-shaped bottles⁴⁷ (Oualalou, 2019). So much so that

⁴⁶ Since he was imprisoned since April already, and was barred from running for presidency

⁴⁷ In a few weeks time the video was viewed more than 4 million times until it got removed from Facebook (<https://www.e-farsas.com/e-verdade-que-o-pt-de-haddad-distribui-mamadeira-erotica-nas-escolas.html>)

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during the first electoral round, Bolsonaro's campaign even got criticized and condemned by the Superior Electoral Court⁴⁸.

Except for Bolsonaro, all the other candidates used traditional political marketing strategies. Bolsonaro's propaganda, on the contrary, was more spontaneous through live transmissions via the Internet made by advisers and participants in the events. Functioning as a repeater station, voters felt empowered because they were not just receivers of news, but propagators of campaign movements (Almeida, 2019). Additionally, Edir Macedo offered Bolsonaro his established WhatsApp social networks, in favour of Bolsonaro's campaign (Oualalou, 2019). The result was an explosion of information, some of it out of context or even false. The effectiveness of the social media campaign was not necessarily found in the gravity of the news, but in its plausibility, on one hand, and on the degree of confidence in the people who circulated it, on the other. What became visible during the campaign was that the flood of information, spread in closed networks, between people with close ties or kinship, created an environment of trust that competed with the mainstream media, which were partially placed under suspicion (Almeida, 2019).

The exact impact remains difficult to measure, however it is undeniable that the contribution of large social media networks and fake news for the political campaign of Bolsonaro has been invaluable. Therefore, further research is still needed to study the role of social networks in the 2018 election in order to comprehend the effects of the overwhelming flood of information received by the electorate.

⁴⁸ The highest body of the Brazilian Electoral Justice

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The Second election round

During the second electoral round there were 104,8 million valid votes of which Bolsonaro received 57,8 million (equivalent of 55,1%) and Haddad 47,0 million (or 44,8%). The difference being 10,76 million votes. A poll conducted by Datafolha on the 25th of October, already revealed that 56% had the intention of voting for Bolsonaro and 44% for Haddad. Percentages which indeed turned out to be very close to the actual result of the election round. This survey thus allows, us to take a deeper look at the electoral preferences of various religious groups within the electorate. When we apply the percentages from the poll to the number of valid votes⁴⁹ we can estimate the number of votes per religious denomination, like demonstrated in the table below (Alves, Cavenaghi, Barros, & Carvalho, 2017).

The first column of the table shows the weight of each religious group estimated in the sample profile of the Datafolha survey: 56% for Catholics, 30% for Evangelicals, 7% for those without religion, 1% for atheists and agnostics, etc. In the second column, the number of voters for each religious (or non-religious) denomination is found based on the information in the previous column applied to the number of valid votes. Columns 3 and 4 show the percentage of intention to vote, considering the religion variable, for both candidates. Columns 5 and 6 show the number of votes for each candidate, considering the voting intentions of the Datafolha survey applied to the set of valid votes (Alves, 2018).

⁴⁹ 104,8 million in total

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Distribution of the electorate per religion and the percentage of the intention to vote in accordance with the data from the Datafolha poll (25/10/2018), applied to the total valid votes during the second round of the presidential elections in Brazil.

Religion	Sample size per religion	Number of valid votes per religion	Intention to vote for Bolsonaro in percentage	Intention to vote for Haddad in percentage	Estimate of the valid votes for Bolsonaro	Estimate of the valid votes for Haddad
Total	100,00	104.838.753	56	44	58.709.702	46.129.051
Catholic	56	58.709.702	51	49	29.941.948	28.767.754
Evangelical	30	31.451.626	69	31	21.701.622	9.750.004
Afro-Brazilian	1	1.048.388	3	7	314.516	733.871
Spiritism	3	3.145.163	55	45	1.729.839	1.415.323
Other religions	0,1	1.048.388	68	32	712.904	335.484
Without religion	7	7.338.713	45	55	3.302.421	4.036.292
Atheistic or Agnostic	1	1.048.388	36	64	377.420	670.968

Source: DataFolha survey released on October 25, 2018. Retrieved from:

<http://media.folha.uol.com.br/datafolha/2018/10/26/3416374d208f7def05d1476d05ede73e.pdf>

Thus, there is no doubt that the evangelical vote was essential to the electoral victory of Jair Bolsonaro. Even though the evangelical adherents represent less than a third of the electorate, evangelical leaders are very active in politics and are reaping the result of years of religious activism in society.

Although in recent years its importance is declining, Catholicism remains the most important religion in Brazil and a great cultural mediator. In absolute numbers however, the Catholic votes are evenly spread between both presidential candidates, though there appears to be a small preference for Bolsonaro. The real difference, when we look at religion in particular, comes from the evangelical side. In absolute numbers the evangelical support has

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made a difference in the outcome of the elections in favour of Bolsonaro. Some of the most important reasons for this evangelic support were the fear of a “communist” threat, the appeal for good and honest people (to combat corruption), and Bolsonaro’s moral and conservative agenda. Furthermore, there were a couple of other more general reasons that mobilized a broader faction of the population like the effects of the economic crisis, the discontent of the previous government associated with its corruption allegations (Anti-PTism) and the perceived increase in insecurity and violence in the country (Almeida, 2019).

It should be noted though that one third of the evangelical vote went to Haddad, revealing an internal inconsistency and diversity in the evangelical landscape. The main reasons for voting for Haddad turned out to be the fear of a military government, the desire for more equality, the defence of minorities and human rights, and a protective state (welfare state) providing social protection, among other things. Nonetheless, the distrust in the workers party (considering its leaders recent convictions for corruption) turned out to be more decisive than all the positive sentiments for Haddad and PT. Bolsonaro would be an example of a "clean slate" politician, with no involvement in corruption cases, as opposed to Lula's party (Machado & Franco, 2018). Carlos Henrique Bernardes⁵⁰ even went as far as saying that Brazilians “don’t have options for ‘clean’ candidates, and Bolsonaro seems to be the only one who’s not corrupt, and that’s what makes him so appealing.” (Polimédio, 2018).

Something that seems to be a continuum in Brazilian politics are the moments of ethical atonement emphasized during the election periods. In the latest election the topic of corruption was conceivably considered as the greatest evil of politics or even constitutive of politics. Consequently, for the public opinion corruption had to be combatted by more good

⁵⁰ a member of the Baptist church

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people rather than through institutional mechanisms. Playing into this sentiment, “Pessoas de bem” or “good people” became one of Bolsonaro’s popular mottos which he used to identify honest, hardworking Brazilians who were the victim of violent crimes and state corruption. This way Bolsonaro presented himself as a good person while at the same time using this performance to justify his reactionary rhetoric (Almeida, 2019).

A Facada (‘the stabbing’)

Almost all candidates expressed that in the second electoral round they would prefer to face Bolsonaro, especially the workers party (PT) who needed an opponent with an equally high rejection rate. As analyses were already pointing out that Bolsonaro had already reached his electoral ceiling. However, one incident seemed to have had a great impact on his popularity, one month before the first voting round, on the 6th of September, Bolsonaro was stabbed during his campaign rally. At the time the motive of the stabber, Adélio Bispo de Oliveira, was questioned. The speculations were that he acted on behalf of PSOL (the (far-left) Socialism and Liberty Party) to whom he was affiliated some years before, other speculations were that the attack was a setup by Bolsonaro himself. However, none of these speculations have been confirmed by the police investigation and ultimately, he was deemed mentally unstable (Almeida, 2019). The initial expectation, from both sides of the political spectrum, was that the stabbing incident would victimize Bolsonaro enough to take him through to the second round. The stabbing did indeed allow Bolsonaro to emerge with the image of a survivor, with a religious discourse that he managed brilliantly. In fact, the attack stirred many people and several videos of him were produced showing his determination to overcome his injuries and continue to run for presidency, all with a sharp political-religious inclination. When Jair was in his hospital bed, his son Flavio tweeted a photo of his father giving a thumbs up: “Jair Bolsonaro is stronger than ever and ready to be elected President of Brazil in the 1st

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ROUND! God has just given us another sign that good will overcome evil! Thanks to everyone who gave us strength in this very difficult time! Brazil above everything, God above everyone!" (my translation)⁵¹.

The most evident outcome of the attack was Bolsonaro's increased visibility in the media and his absence the debates on the Globo channel⁵² (Almeida, 2019). The evangelical billionaire bishop and founder of the UCKG, Edir Macedo invited Bolsonaro to give an exclusive and accommodating interview on his television channel TV Record⁵³ while the other presidency candidates were debating each other on another channel⁵⁴. Bolsonaro stated that the reason for doing the interview in the comfort of his own home was because he was recovering from his injuries. However, the fact that TV Record (the rival channel of Globo) was broadcasting his first interview for many already signalled the growing political aspirations of the conservative evangelical churches. Among others, the undisputed media presence that Bolsonaro could enjoy, was one he was not legally entitled to as his party only had a weak parliamentary representation. Eventually Bolsonaro won the second round of elections with 57.8 million valid votes (55.13%), compared to 47 million for Fernando Haddad (44.87%), a difference of 10.76 million of votes. Although evangelicals make up less than a third of the electorate with more than 11 million votes in favour of Bolsonaro they made up for more than difference in votes between both candidates (Oualalou, 2019).

⁵¹ Original in portuguese: "Jair Bolsonaro está mais forte do que nunca e pronto para ser eleito Presidente do Brasil no 1º TURNO! Deus acaba de nos dar mais um sinal de que o bem vencerá o mal! Obrigado a todos que nos deram força nesse momento muito difícil! Brasil acima de tudo, Deus acima de todos!" Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/FlavioBolsonaro/status/1037915560863051776>

⁵² The largest commercial television station in Brazil (and Latin America).

⁵³ The third largest commercial TV network in Brazil

⁵⁴ Globo TV channel

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After the elections

As the leaders of the AG and the UCKG openly supported and backed Bolsonaro there was some implicit expectation that as the new president, he would protect and pursue the interests and values of their churches. The Evangelical Parliamentary Front for example has implored to make the fiscal burden on the churches lighter which was successfully. Furthermore, under the pressure of the new president the Internal revenue centre of the Minister of Economy has lifted the obligation for small churches to be included in the National Register of Legal entities. Additionally, Bolsonaro raised the minimum amount of daily transactions that churches must make public from 1,2 to 4,9 million reals.

The Cabinet of Bolsonaro

Bolsonaro opposed what he calls 'coalitional presidentialism', a system of promising cabinet positions to party leaders in exchange for their endorsement, something which used to be commonplace practice for the previous presidents. Instead Bolsonaro chose to rely on his ability to appease the politicians of the evangelical caucus, of which he used to be a member. Therefore, Bolsonaro did seem to have given in to some of the wishes of the evangelical caucus by appointing the conservative Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez as minister of education and culture, after evangelical politicians denounced his first choice as too progressive. Furthermore, Bolsonaro chose Damares Alves, an evangelical pastor, to be the minister of women, family, and human rights. These two ministries, place evangelical front in such position that they can shape the policies of some of their core areas, such as sexual education in public schools (Oualalou, 2019).

The cabinet of Bolsonaro consists out of 16 ministers, 4 secretaries (directly linked to his presidency) and 2 cabinet-level personnel. Seven of them are career politicians, eight are technocrats and seven are former military men. The Hindustan Times noted that only two out

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of the 22 are women and none of them is black in a country where at least half of the population has some African descent (France-Presse, 2018). There is also a clear religious ideological wing of Bolsonaro's cabinet that consists out of three evangelical ministers. Two of which are religious leaders like the Presbyterian Pastor André Luis de Almeida Mendonça, former head of the Federal Attorney General's Office.⁵⁵ Then there is the Foreign affairs minister Ernesto Aruajo a diplomat and Catholic, and perhaps one of the most influential minister. Furthermore, there is the Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights, Damara Alves a pastor at the International Church of the Four-Square Gospel and lawyer. She already provoked a range of mockery and outrage with her rather bold statements. Including "A new time has come for Brazil: Boys will wear blue and Girls will wear pink again" as girls as she is a strong advocate for traditional gender roles, according to her should be treated as princesses and boys as princess (Madov, 2019). During her swearing-in she stated that: "The State is secular, but this minister is extremely Christian, and because of that, she believes in God's design," (Madov, 2019). Furthermore, Paulo Pimenta (PT) posted a video, of her saying that Elsa from the movie Frozen has to be a Lesbian as she ended up alone in a frozen castle, that turned viral on the internet⁵⁶ resulting in even more mockery.

The March for Jesus

On the 20th of June 2019 an estimate of three million evangelicals marched through the streets of Sao Paulo, during the March for Jesus. The march for Jesus is an annual (international) Christian interdenominational event, bringing together believers of diverse evangelical denominations, organized by the 'Renascer em Cristo Church'⁵⁷. It represents the

⁵⁵ Advocacia-Geral da uniao

⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkcq2n8KkEk>

⁵⁷ With the help of other evangelical churches

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largest evangelical march in Latin America and has been taking place in Sao Paulo for more than 27 years, with its the largest turnout in 2019.

Jair Bolsonaro is the first Brazilian president ever to participate in the March for Jesus⁵⁸. The year before in 2018, he attended as presidential candidate and promised to return as president. During his speech he thanked the evangelical electorate for their support; that helped him win the presidential elections last year. Speaking to the crowd of believers that “you were decisive in changing the destiny of our homeland called Brazil”⁵⁹ (Marchao & Ramaloso, 2019). Bolsonaro said “Last year I said: ‘if god is willing, next year I will participate in the march for Jesus as the President of the Brazilian republic’”. Now “we have a government that for the first time in history is complying with its campaign promises.”⁶⁰ The mayor of São Paulo, Bruno Covas (PSDB, Congressman Marco Feliciano (PSC-SP) and Senator Major Olímpio (PSL-SP) all accompanied the president on stage. A president that says that the Brazilian “state is secular, but he, its current leader is a Christian.”⁶¹ For Bolsonaro, his participation in the event could be seen as an opportunity to reinforce his campaign commitment to defend Christian values and to connect with his evangelical supporters (Marchao & Ramaloso, 2019).

The New Party

In November 2019 the Alliance for Brazil was founded after Jair Bolsonaro stated his departure from the Social Liberal Party. According to Bolsonaro his new party is one that is conservative but with respect to “all religions, backs family values, supports the right to self-

⁵⁸ A Marcha para Jesus (in Portuguese)

⁵⁹ "Vocês foram decisivos para mudar o destino dessa pátria maravilhosa chamada Brasil"

⁶⁰ "Temos um governo que, pela primeira vez na história, está cumprindo o que prometeu durante a campanha"

⁶¹ "No ano passado, eu lhes disse: 'Se Deus quiser, estarei o ano que vem nessa marcha como presidente da República do Brasil'. Um presidente que diz que o estado é laico, mas ele é cristão"

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defence, the right to possess a firearm, free-trade with the whole world, without any ideological agenda" (Da Agência Brasil, 2019)⁶². The media in Brazil, however, has labelled Alliance for Brazil as a far-right populist political party. In order to create this party Bolsonaro relies for a great part on his evangelical support, for the much-needed signatures to get his party ratified by the Superior Electoral Court. As of January, this year, many evangelical temples have already announced their support to help Bolsonaro collect the nearly 500,000 signatures, from at least nine different states, needed to create his new party.

In exchange Bolsonaro has attempted to aid the evangelical churches in many possible ways. For example, at his request a draft decree was prepared by the Ministry of Mines and Energy, to subsidize electricity bills of large religious temples, and sent to the Ministry of Economy. However, Bolsonaro's favouritism towards these evangelical churches is creating friction between the other wings of his cabinet (the military and the economic/neo-liberal wing). Consequently, economic team of the ministry has initially rejected the measure, which goes against the agenda of Minister Paulo Guedes, known for defending quite the opposite, a reduction of benefits of this type. The Ministry of Mines and Energy has confirmed that the matter is still being evaluated (Warth & Fernandes, 2020).

⁶² "Um partido conservador, que respeita todas as religiões, dá crédito aos valores familiares, defende a legítima defesa, defende a posse e o porte de arma com requisitos, o livre comércio com todo mundo, sem o viés ideológico" (original portuguese)

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Conclusion:

This thesis did not intend to argue that the evangelical vote was the only determining factor in the election of Bolsonaro and the subsequent rise of conservatism, however it aimed to demonstrate its contingent decisiveness in the 2018 elections. When looking at religion exclusively, the data from Datafolha has shown that that during the second election round, Bolsonaro won little among the Catholic electorate, as there was practically a tie between him and Haddad. For the categories Spiritism and other religions, he received the majority of the votes, even though, the difference in the number of votes was almost neglectable. Haddad on the other hand, gained the majority of votes from the Afro-Brazilian religions, those who declare themselves without religion, atheists and agnostics but also without a substantial difference in the number of votes. What made the real difference, however, was the weight of the evangelical vote, as the estimated difference in votes from the evangelical electorate turned out to be more than 11,6 million in favour of Bolsonaro. Indisputably, the positive difference that Bolsonaro received from the evangelical electorate was more than sufficient to compensate for the defeats in the other religious areas, as the positive difference in the evangelical vote was greater than the total difference recorded between both candidates (Alves, 2018).

In order to comprehend the concentration of votes, unprecedented in the history of the country, it is important to look at demographic dynamics. Brazil is undergoing an accelerated religious transition, unique in the world for a nation of its size. The increasing denominational shift that has been taking place from the Catholic church to various forms of Evangelicalism over the past 50 years, has not only led to a greater religious diversity but also to greater overall religiosity. This development contradicts the main premise of the secularization theory – which assumes that with the modernization of society, the level of

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religiosity would decline. There is indeed a minor increase in people stating they adhere to no religion in Brazil, however as of now this increase is not significant enough to speak of a decline in religiosity. On the contrary, the shift from nominal Catholicism to practising Evangelicalism has been accompanied by a more intense level of religiosity in Brazil, as faith plays a very important role in the daily life's of evangelicals (Zilla, 2020).

In order to explain the unprecedented evangelical support for a presidential candidate, the case study, has identified a couple of key events that played a significant role in solidifying the evangelical support for Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 election. In 2016, Bolsonaro was publicly⁶³ re-baptised in the Jordan River by a prominent evangelical Pastor⁶⁴ Everaldo Dias. This event officially marked an important step in formalizing Bolsonaro's relationship with the Evangelicals, resulting in his endorsement by one of the most prominent Assemblies of God Pastors, Silas Malafaia who declared his support in March 2018.

Another important event happened on the 6th of September 2018, when Bolsonaro got stabbed during his campaign rally in Juiz de Fora. The stabbing and Bolsonaro's resilience to continue and pursue for presidency, allowed him to emerge with the image of a survivor, brilliantly managed by his religious discourse. After this event on the 30th of September, Bolsonaro received the public backing of the billionaire, founder of the Universal Church for the Kingdom of God and owner of TV Record, Edir Macedo. The support of Macedo resulted in Bolsonaro receiving an 'softball' interview at home, instead of debating the other presidential candidates on the Globo Channel. Furthermore, Macedo provided his established WhatsApp social networks, in favour of presidential campaign of Bolsonaro, allowing for the rapid distribution of his campaign along with fake news. Something that has undoubtedly

⁶³ The event was filmed and shown online

⁶⁴ The leader of the Social Christian party and a prominent pastor of the Assembly of God

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contributed to his popularity, but the exact impact still needs to be studied more. Later on, by the beginning of October, the President of the General Convention of the Assemblies of God of Brazil, José Wellington Bezerra da Costa, and the *Bancada Evangélica* followed the example of Malafaia and Macedo by publicly endorsing Bolsonaro as their presidential candidate.

These events have shown Bolsonaro's evangelical alliances, however, did the political activism of these important evangelical pastors and leaders impact the voter behaviour of their followers and pastors? To answer this question the survey that Amy Erica Smith conducted during the two weeks before the first election round has proven to be very insightful. According to the survey: 46% of the Pentecostal evangelicals who attended church indicated that their church leader was supporting Bolsonaro, in contrast to 29% of the Catholics (Smith, 2019). The political stance of some church leaders, combined with the shared values of the community and way of thinking among evangelicals, eventually resulted in an unparalleled evangelical support for a presidential candidate.

Since Bolsonaro has been in office, his implicit and explicit favouritism for the Evangelical churches has not gone unnoticed. He has been pushing for and supporting legislation that favours the evangelical churches and communities and has publicly shown his support by appearing at the March for Jesus, for example. Furthermore, Bolsonaro has appointed evangelical and religious ministers in the fields that are considered the most important to the evangelicals, such as education and family rights.

In summary, the evangelical vote was undoubtedly been pivotal during the 2018 presidential elections. As Catholic vote resulted in a tie between the two final presidential candidates it was mainly the Evangelical vote that made the difference in the field of religion.

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The demographic shift from large parts of the population to the evangelical faith is nothing new and has been studied extensively in the past years. The increasing interest of the evangelical churches in the political sphere in Brazil has not gone unnoticed as well and is most visible in the Evangelical Parliamentary Front. However, what can be seen considered a total surprise was the anticipation and decisiveness that have led evangelicals to unite behind one presidential candidate, resulting in an unprecedented victory for Bolsonaro and the major evangelical churches that supported him. Without a doubt the evangelicals have become a decisive political force to be reckoned with now and in the future.

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