

PROTESTANT GROWTH AND CHANGE IN EL SALVADOR

Two Decades of Survey Evidence

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Abstract: Using data from three surveys of religion in El Salvador from 1988 to 2009, this research looks at changes in the demographic characteristics, religious orientations and practices, and political attitudes of Salvadorans as they transition from civil war to democracy and participation in global capitalism, and from mostly Catholic affiliation to increasing affiliation with Pentecostal Protestant churches. Over the two decades encompassed by the study, the Protestant population has become less clearly differentiated from the Catholic majority in terms of education, income, occupation, and even political beliefs, while remaining distinct in terms of religious beliefs and practices. Unlike much previous research, this study allows for comparisons among practicing and nonpracticing Catholics as well as Protestants and those identifying themselves as unaffiliated.

Our primary goal in this article is to document changes in religious affiliation and practice in El Salvador between 1988 and 2009 and to explore demographic and political shifts occurring among the various religious subgroups, using data from three nationwide surveys on religion conducted by the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (IUDOP) at the Jesuit Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) in San Salvador. In doing so we will be replicating the work of Edwin E. Aguilar and Kenneth M. Coleman and their associates (see Aguilar et al. 1993; Coleman et al. 1993). In addition we will use this rich longitudinal data to test several hypotheses regarding the nature of religious change in El Salvador.

Over the two decades covered by this study, El Salvador has witnessed the remarkable spread of Evangelical religiosity, especially its Pentecostal elements such as speaking in tongues and faith healing. From 1988 until 2009, the percentage of the population identifying itself as Protestant grew from 17 percent to over 35 percent, and four out of five in this group are Evangelical and/or Pentecostal.¹ This growth is in line with the experience of other countries in Latin America and the global South (Acosta 2009; Bergunder 2002; Freston 2008; Garrard-Burnett

1. Since most Protestants in El Salvador adopt the strictly religious doctrinal ideas of conservative Evangelicals in North America and Europe and share Pentecostal features to one degree or another, it is very difficult to distinguish between Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Charismatic labels. Almost all Protestants, apart from historic Anglican and Lutheran congregations, are firmly Evangelical. They believe the Bible is inspired and that Christ atoned for sin through his death on the cross; that one must be born again through conversion; and that Christ will return again to rescue the saints and take them to heaven. While a few Evangelical Protestant churches are firmly set against Pentecostal or Charismatic-like activities (speaking in tongues, prophecy, physical worship such as the raising of the hands), most congregations are more or less receptive to such manifestations in their corporate worship.

2009; Ireland 1998; Pew Forum 2006a; Smith 2009). Typical of what is primarily an urban phenomenon, in the capital city of San Salvador alone there are now over a dozen Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, each having attendance figures of more than two thousand. One of the largest is the Tabernáculo Bíblico Bautista "Amigos de Israel Central." The Tabernáculo boasts a membership of over eighty thousand and has spawned over four hundred smaller, loosely affiliated churches throughout the world. It is one of the few major Evangelical churches in El Salvador that is not overtly Pentecostal. Even larger is the thoroughly Pentecostal Misión Cristiana Elim, located in the poor city of Ilopango just outside metro San Salvador. Unlike the more middle-class and theologically relaxed Tabernáculo, Elim is a church of the poor. Elim has eighty full-time pastors, two radio stations, one television station, and over ten thousand cell groups that meet weekly. Its eight weekly church-wide celebrations in an eight-thousand-seat sanctuary are serious events animated by fiery preaching, open weeping, speaking in tongues, and prophetic messages. Impressive as these huge churches are, even greater numbers of Salvadoran Evangelicals and Pentecostals belong to one of the thousands of very small congregations of less than one hundred members with names like Amigos de Jesús, Tabernáculo de Gloria Monte Sión, or Iglesia de Restauración el Shaddai (Wadkins 2012).

Our focus in this article is to document trends within this movement in El Salvador as manifested in results of the national surveys on religion conducted in 1988, 1998, and 2009. Using these data, we will test several hypotheses regarding growth patterns, socioeconomic trends, alterations of religious expression, and changes in political attitudes of the mainly Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants in relation to practicing and nonpracticing Catholics.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

Teams of IUDOP researchers conducted the three surveys with samples of adults over the age of seventeen in June 1988, May 1998, and June 2009. Tables 1 and 2 give sample size and the breakdown by age, sex, and religious affiliation for the three surveys. Based on contemporary census data from El Salvador's Ministry of Economics, IUDOP determined, for each survey, the number of questionnaires to be administered proportionate to the population of the country's departments (major geographic units); and within departments, to municipalities and rural administrative districts (cantons). The actual sites (urban neighborhoods or rural cantons) were selected using a complex mapping system (see especially IUDOP 2009 for details). At each site a predetermined number of dwellings were chosen using a stratified sampling approach (within age and sex quotas). Only one individual was surveyed per dwelling.² For the 1988 survey, the margin of error was estimated to be plus or minus 3 percent, for the 1998 survey, plus or minus 4 percent, and for the 2009 survey, plus or minus 2.8 percent. The 2009 survey contained 103 items, the 1998 survey 74 items, and the 1988 survey 33 items. All of

2. In 2009, the survey team used handheld PDAs to prompt questionnaire items and to record responses. The data were automatically downloaded to a computer for processing.

Table 1 Age and sex of survey respondents

	1988	1998	2009
N	1,010	1,210	1,260
Average age (standard deviation)	36.5 (15.0)	37.5 (15.31)	39.48 (16.07)
Percent male	45.7	48.6	45
Percent female	54.3	51.4	55

Table 2 Percentage of population by affiliation and year

	1988	1998	2009	Change 1988–2009
N	1,010	1,210	1,260	
Practicing Catholic	35	29	30	–5
Nonpracticing Catholic	32	26	21	–11
Protestant	17	21	38	+22
Unaffiliated	15	22	9	–6

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 due to a small group of respondents who indicated “other” when asked about religious affiliation.

the 1988 items were replicated in the 2009 survey, and all but three were included in the 1998 survey (IUDOP 1988, 1998, 2009).

The 2009 survey provided a more detailed breakdown of religious affiliation than the previous two surveys, which contained only the categories of practicing Catholic, nonpracticing Catholic, Protestant, and unaffiliated. Among those identifying themselves as Protestants, 59.9 percent were Pentecostal, 18.5 percent Evangelical Baptist, 12 percent not classified (includes those indicating no particular church along with those belonging to historical Protestant churches such as Lutheran and Anglican), and the remaining 12 percent belonged to other groups usually considered on the margins of Protestantism, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists, and members of the Mexico-based La Luz del Mundo church. Among Catholics, 59 percent claimed to be “practicing,” and within this group, 15 percent identified themselves as members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Only 9 percent of the population indicated no religious affiliation. These results are similar to those of other countries in Latin America, particularly Central America (Espinoza 2003; Pew Forum 2006a).

It should be noted that IUDOP asks about the religious affiliation of respondents in almost all of its surveys. In the ten national surveys (mostly dealing with political attitudes) it conducted between 2008 and 2010, an average of 32.3 percent of respondents identified themselves as Protestants (range = 29–35.5 percent, with a modal value of 33 percent). For the unaffiliated, the average was 14.5 percent (range = 13–16.5 percent, with a mode of 14.5 percent). As previously noted, in the 2009 survey on religion, 38 percent identified as Protestant. Although outside the range of what other contemporary IUDOP surveys found, this value is identical to the findings of the Gallup World Poll (Stark and Smith 2012). Because of this, and because the 2009 survey was more sensitive to religious variables, we feel confident that Protestants make up at least 35 percent of the Salvadoran population.

PATTERNS OF GROWTH

From where did the burgeoning Protestant churches draw their members during the 1988–2009 era? While the ranks of practicing Catholics and those unaffiliated with any religion declined 6 and 5 percentage points respectively, the group that saw the largest decline by far was that of nonpracticing Catholics, which shrank from 32 percent, or nearly a third of the country's population in 1988, to 21 percent, or just over one in five Salvadorans in 2009.

Looking a little more closely at each decade of change, it appears that the years 1988 to 1998, years that bracketed the end of the civil war, saw large declines among all Catholics, a substantial increase among the unaffiliated, and only a small increase in Protestants. The following decade, however, saw smaller declines among Catholics, a large falloff among the unaffiliated, and a significant increase among Protestants. We infer from these findings that most converts to Evangelical and Pentecostal churches likely have been drawn from the ranks of nonpracticing Catholics and, to lesser extent, the unaffiliated.

Socioeconomic trends

To capture changes in the Salvadoran religious landscape we also look at changes over the past twenty years in terms of the relationship between religion and the socioeconomic characteristics of the population. The 2009 survey provides a detailed portrait of El Salvador's current religious landscape and at the same time allows for comparisons to the 1998 and 1988 data to see what has changed and what has stayed the same.

Aguilar et al. (1993, 125) stated that in 1988 "the sociological outline is clear. Salvadoran Protestants . . . have lower education levels, occupy lower-status occupations, and earn less than Catholics, whether the latter are practicing or nonpracticing." Since then, evidence from Latin America has been accumulating that, in conjunction with Protestant growth, exposure to Evangelical Protestantism tends to lead to economic and occupational advancement (Berger 2004; Martin 2002; Soltero and Saravia 2003). We expect El Salvador to reflect these trends. We form the following hypothesis for the two-decade period covered by this study:

Hypothesis 1: Income, educational, and occupational levels of Protestants will increase in absolute terms and relative to those of Catholics.

Income / It has been a common finding that Pentecostal religion in Latin America is typically associated with lower socioeconomic status and more marginalized people (Freston, 2008; Martin, 2002). In 1988, income in El Salvador was very low across the board, with about half of the population reporting no income at all. Even so, at that time Catholics reported significantly higher incomes than Protestants. While there were many very poor Catholics, almost a quarter of practicing Catholics were in the highest income category. Protestants in 1988 were the poorest religious group with an average income a little over half that of practicing Catholics. Since 1988, however, income for all groups has increased significantly.

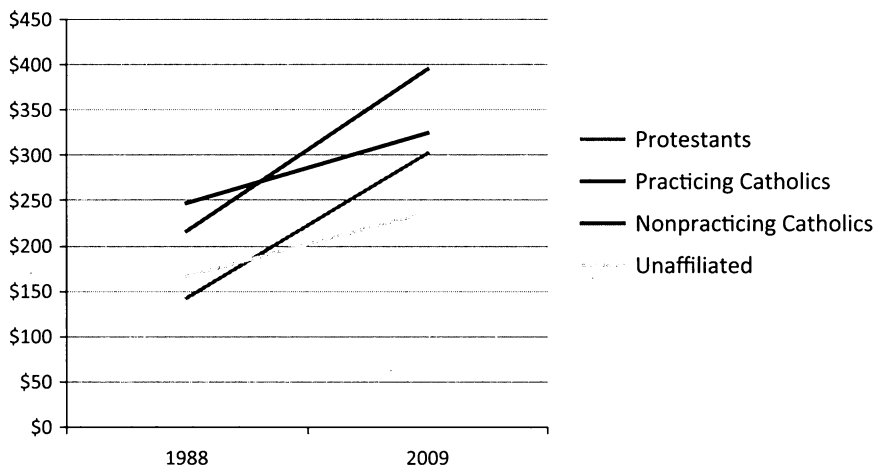


Figure 1 Mean monthly income in 2009 dollars

In terms of constant 2009 dollars, Protestant average monthly income more than doubled, from \$142 in 1988 to \$303 in 2009.³ This marks the highest rate of growth among the four groups. As can be seen in figure 1, Protestant average income has practically caught up with that of practicing Catholics. The percentage of Protestants in the top two categories of income (more than \$307 per month) increased from 21 percent in 1988 to almost 30 percent in 2009—overtaking practicing Catholics, whose percentage declined from 33 percent to 27 percent in those categories.⁴ Meanwhile, nonpracticing Catholics' average monthly income rose to \$395, nearly one-third more than Protestants'.

Education / The picture of education among Pentecostal Protestants in Latin America has historically been “skewed towards the less educated” (Freston 2008, 135). However, in El Salvador over the last two decades, Protestants have caught up with Catholics, especially in primary and secondary education.⁵ Catholics still have the edge in postsecondary education, but here, too, Protestants are increasing their representation while Catholic numbers appear to be decreasing, especially since 1998.

3. Income data were available only in the 1988 and 2009 surveys. In the 1988 survey, income was measured in El Salvador's local currency, *colones*. We converted colones to US dollars using the 1988 fixed exchange rate of 5 colones to one US dollar. In 2009 income was measured in dollars (El Salvador adopted the US dollar as its currency in January 2001). To report 1988 values in terms of constant 2009 dollars, we applied a scale value obtained using the Bureau of Labor Statistics calculator for changes in the consumer price index over the twenty-one-year period equal to 1.81×1988 values.

4. Detailed statistics are available in an online appendix to be found at <http://www.canisius.edu/person/timothy-h-wadkins-phd>. See table A1 in appendix.

5. See table A2 in online appendix.

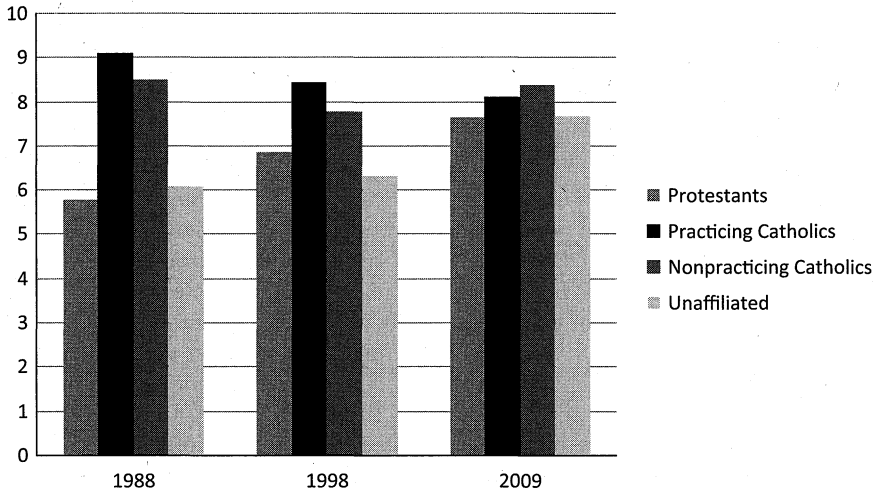


Figure 2 Average years of schooling

Of particular importance for a developing country like El Salvador is the percentage of the population completing at least the tenth grade. According to the United Nation’s Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), a minimum of ten years of schooling is necessary to pull a person out of poverty (see Gindling 2005, 222). In 1988 fewer than one in four Protestants had completed tenth grade, compared to 48 percent of nonpracticing Catholics and 52 percent of practicing Catholics. By 2009, 38 percent of Protestants were educated at this level, only four percentage points behind practicing Catholics, among whom the percentage completing tenth grade declined to 42 percent.

Occupation. / Occupation was included only in the 1988 and 2009 surveys. The occupational categories used in the two studies overlapped but not enough to allow us to present the data in a common table. We are, however, able to make comparisons regarding the results. In 1988, Protestants were predominantly in lower-status occupations (e.g., agricultural worker, day laborer, domestic worker). Over 50 percent of what Coleman and colleagues (1993) called “economically active” Protestants were in working-class occupations, compared to 40 percent of nonpracticing Catholics and 24 percent of practicing Catholics. At the other end of the status scale, 53 percent of practicing Catholics were in service occupations and 23 percent in professional jobs, whereas only 35 percent and 8 percent of Protestants were in those categories.

By 2009 the picture had changed dramatically. Whereas 36 percent of Protestants held jobs as “laborers”—including agricultural and domestic workers—47 percent of nonpracticing Catholics and 50 percent of practicing Catholics were found in these occupations. Thirty-two percent of Protestants listed their occupa-

tion as “skilled trades” and 22 percent as “small retailer.” The comparable figures for nonpracticing Catholics were 23 percent and 17 percent, respectively, and for practicing Catholics only 14 percent and 16 percent. Only in the top two occupational categories did Catholics still have an edge. “Teacher/technician” occupations were claimed by 10.5 percent of practicing and 10.8 percent of nonpracticing Catholics; and 8.9 percent of practicing Catholics were in “professional” jobs. For Protestants the percentage in teacher/technician was 5.4 percent and in professional 3 percent (similar to nonpracticing Catholics). These results echo the finding of Soltero and Saravia (2008) that, if anything, individuals from middle-status occupations are as likely as poorer Salvadorans to embrace Protestantism.

It should be noted that in 1988, 38 percent of nonpracticing Catholics, 47 percent of practicing Catholics, and 52 percent of Protestants reported being “economically inactive.” In 2009, respondents were asked whether or not they were “currently working.” Only those who answered in the affirmative were questioned about their occupation. The others were treated as equivalent to 1988’s “economically inactive.” The percentages in this category in 2009 were alarmingly high. But in contrast to 1988, Protestants now reported the lowest rate of economic inactivity: 61 percent of nonpracticing Catholics, 67 percent of practicing Catholics, and only 58 percent of Protestants said they were not “currently working.” We interpret this response to include those working in the informal economy as well as those who are truly economically inactive, since almost all of these respondents reported some family income.

The above results allow us to confirm hypothesis 1. It is no longer accurate to say that Protestants are drawn from the lower strata of Salvadoran society. During the period of the study, Protestant income, education, and occupational levels increased in absolute terms as well as relative to those of Catholics. This finding is significant, but it does not account for Protestant advances in these areas. Max Weber (1958) argued that there was a direct connection between what he termed Protestant worldly asceticism and the accumulation of wealth. Some Latin American scholars have also shown that as part of what is called the “redemption and lift” phenomenon, some converts to Evangelical Protestantism, as part of their church’s ascetic ethic, exercise greater degrees of economic self-discipline and thus have improved their family’s social standing. Annis (1987) has uncovered this kind of discipline and economic advance among poor Guatemalan Evangelicals, and Brusco (2010) has shown that as women converts in Colombia have converted their husbands to the faith, traditional machismo pastimes of gambling, womanizing, and drinking have declined and families have risen in their economic status. However, aside from some anecdotal evidence in our own research, such “redemption and lift” explanations are mostly speculative awaiting further research.⁶

6. There are other possible explanations for Protestant social advancement. It may be that more members of the middle and upper classes are converting to Protestantism, thus increasing its economic and educational profile. We also do not know what impact remittances from Salvadoran immigrants in the United States may be having on the Protestant community in El Salvador. Given the fact that there are now nearly two million Salvadorans living in the United States and that a number of Salvadoran churches have developed satellite churches among immigrant communities, it is reasonable to assume

Routinization

Coleman and colleagues (1993) reported that in 1988, Salvadoran Protestants had much closer relationships with their religious leaders, prayed more, and attended worship more than did Catholics. This is in line with the individualized, unmediated, do-it-yourself theological orientation of Protestants, especially Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Our study investigates how these characteristics and practices might change over time.

Weber (1958), for example, articulated the notion of “routinization of charisma”—that over time religious movements inevitably change as charismatic authority evolves into either traditional or legal forms of authority. Similarly they move from spontaneous to more ritualized forms of practice, resulting in a decline in overall religious fervor (O’Dea 1966; Poloma 1997; Weber 1968). Several authors have observed evidence of such routinization occurring among Protestants in Latin America (Berger 2012; Freston 2008; Ireland 1998; Martin 1990; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Stark and Smith 2012).

Along the same lines, as religious movements transition from being made up predominantly of recent converts to having more believers who have been members for a long time or who were born into the faith, it might be expected that religious intensity would wane (see Pew Forum 2009; Christian, Gent, and Wadkins 2013). Therefore, entrance into the ranks of Protestantism is increasingly based on intergenerational transmission, not just conversion.

Hypothesis 2: Among younger Protestants a significantly higher percentage will have been born into their religion than among older Protestants in 2009 than in the previous time periods. Similarly, in 2009 more Protestants will have been born into their religion or will have been members for a relatively long period of time.

Hypothesis 3: Overall religious involvement among Protestants will trend down but will continue to be significantly higher than among Catholics.

Intergenerational transmission / Results from items included only in the 2009 survey signal a nascent routinization among Protestant churches in El Salvador (Miller and Yamamori 2007). One finding is that the proportion of respondents claiming church membership from birth is greater among younger congregants. Of those aged eighteen to twenty-five (the youngest group included in the survey) 38 percent were born into their religion, compared with only 15 percent of those over forty years old. Among all Protestants, 55 percent claim to have been members of their denomination for over ten years. These figures suggest that conversions, while still an important source for harvesting souls, account for fewer members of Protestant churches. If these trends do presage a budding routinization, then as Freston (2008, 142) proposes, “Pentecostalism will therefore, in the not too distant future, become much more numerically stabilized. . . . With a far higher proportion of birth members, the demands for teaching will change, new types of leaders will be required, there will be greater social expectations and less

that economic assistance has brought greater wealth to Salvadoran Protestants (Annis 1987; Berger 2004; Brusco 2010; Martin 2002; Soltero and Saravia 2003; Weber 1958).

triumphalism, and the interaction with other religious currents will take place on an entirely different basis." As previously suggested this intergenerational trend correlates with an overall decrease in religious involvement.

Religious involvement / Protestants in El Salvador, like their coreligionists elsewhere, have traditionally practiced a highly participatory faith characterized by frequent church attendance, a close relationship with clergy, and strict adherence to doctrinal tenets (Barna Group 2001; Pew Forum 2006b; Stark and Smith 2012). The 1988 survey showed that, compared to Catholics, Protestants pray more, attend services more, and have a closer relationship with their clergy. The two subsequent surveys have enabled us to track trends in religious practices and beliefs over the next two decades.⁷

There was little change in closeness to clergy during the period 1988–2009. Almost all Protestants continue to report knowing their church leaders (95 percent). Catholics, even nonpracticing, report slightly more intimacy with pastors but still trail Protestants (87 percent of practicing Catholics, 67 percent of nonpracticing Catholics).

As Protestant congregations have become more established, fewer members report receiving home visits by their pastor (down from 77 percent in 1988 to 68 percent in 2009). This finding could be due to increased "managerialism" among pastors—that is, media work, meetings, or conducting church business reduces their time available for hands-on ministry (Gudorf 2008). There also has been a slight decline in home visits for Catholics after a spike in 1998. The difference between Protestants (68 percent) and practicing Catholics (23 percent) reporting home visits in 2009 remains dramatic. This is in part due to Catholics having a much higher member-to-clergy ratio (Gill 1998). The results, however, do not account for visits from Catholic religious sisters or lay leaders, who may fill this pastoral role in place of priests (Cleary 2010).

For Protestants as well as Catholics, attendance at church services is a reflection of religious fervor. During the period of this study Protestant attendance decreased from 9.27 occasions on average per month in 1988 to 7.16 times per month in 2009. Even so, in 2009 almost half the Protestants reported attending more than eight religious services per month. Attendance among practicing Catholics during the period also trended down slightly, from 4.66 times per month on average in 1988 to 3.59 in 2009. This finding indicates fairly regular Sunday mass attendance, but it remains at roughly one-half the level of Protestant church attendance.

As we hypothesized, Protestants continue to demonstrate a more constant and personal style of worship. After a puzzling drop-off in 1998, by 2009 the percentage of both faiths who prayed more than three times daily returned to near-1988 levels, with over one-third of Protestants reporting praying on their own more than three times a day compared to fewer than one-fifth of Catholics reporting personal prayer at that frequency. Since 1988, however, there appears to have been a general drop-off in the frequency of prayer among all respondents. In 1988 only 1 percent of Protestants and 3 percent of Catholics prayed less than daily. By 2009

7. See tables A3–A7 in online appendix.

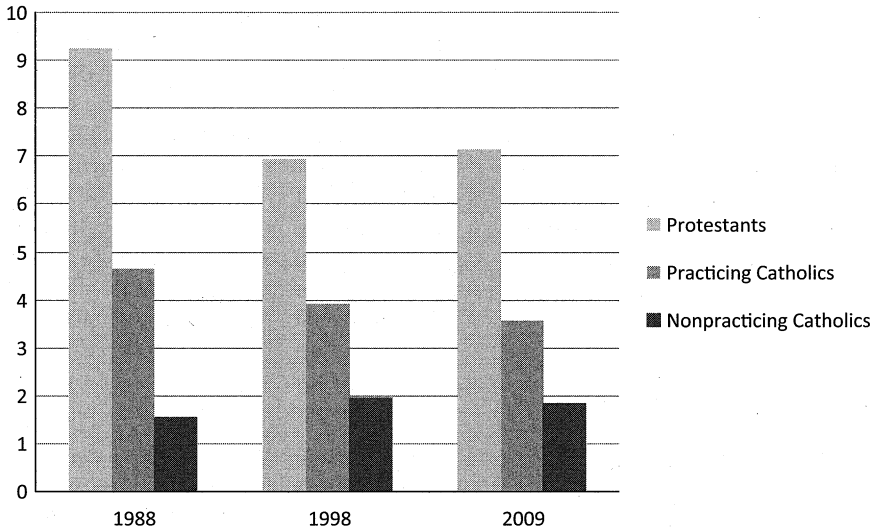


Figure 3 Average monthly church attendance

the percentages had jumped to 14 percent and 19 percent, respectively. The above findings support both hypotheses 2 and 3. Consistent with the notion of routinization, we find evidence that entry into the faith is becoming more intergenerational and that religious involvement has declined somewhat, especially in the area of daily prayer and attendance at services.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In the past it was commonly thought that Latin American Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants were either not interested in politics or were steadfastly conservative in their orientation. The reality is much more complex and varied (Freston 2008).

As Evangelical and Pentecostal churches gain legitimacy in Latin American society, their pastors and congregants have begun to show more willingness to become involved in the political life of their communities and countries. At the turn of the twenty-first century, evidence was mounting that not only did Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants share the same social justice concerns as others, especially those from the same socioeconomic status groups, but their churches were also beginning to take direct action to protest and bring about change (Kamsteeg 1999; Martin 2002; Cleary 2004). Where poverty was seen as a consequence of unjust social conditions, these same Protestants expressed a growing concern for the plight of the poor, similar to traditional Catholic social teachings on the preferential option for the poor (Martin 2002).

In the 1970s and 1980s the religious right in the United States was an acknowledged force in Latin American politics, and Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders in several Latin American countries supported conservative politicians and

even oppressive dictators (Garrard Burnett 2009; Klaiber 1998). Many members of their churches, however, supported socialist candidates and positions (Anderson 2004). More recently, progressive leaders such as Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva courted Pentecostals before elections, as have other leftist leaders in the region (Pew Forum 2006a). There are clear signs that Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants tend to manifest the justice perceptions and political positions of their Catholic and nonreligious socioeconomic peer groups and are becoming more publicly involved in political action.⁸ These phenomena, however, are constrained somewhat by Protestant congregants who continue to be suspicious of a corrupt political system they see as part of the recalcitrant world that rejects the values of God's kingdom (Ireland 1992; Smilde 1998). At the same time many remain sensitive to the biblical injunction to respect the "powers that be" (Romans 13:1–2). During the period of this study, we expect to see similar trends in El Salvador. Thus we propose the following hypotheses for the period from 1988 on:

Hypothesis 4: Protestant attitudes toward the option for the poor will, along with Catholics' attitudes, become more positive. Protestant and Catholic perceptions of justice in society will become less negative, with Protestants maintaining a more optimistic view than Catholics.

Hypothesis 5: Protestants, while continuing to lag behind Catholics, will move closer to them in their endorsement of the church's role as mediator of conflict in society.

Hypothesis 6: Protestant voting preferences will continue to be no more conservative than those of Catholics.

Justice

The authors who analyzed the 1988 survey results argued that perceptions about how just a society is form the basis for what citizens expect from institutions of society, and their desire for societal reform (Coleman et al. 1993; Aguilar et al. 1993).

As shown in Figure 4, in 1988 the degree to which all Salvadorans saw their socioeconomic system as just was abysmal, regardless of religious affiliation. In 2009, almost two decades after the peace accords, perceptions had improved; but still two-thirds of its citizens saw El Salvador's society as unjust.⁹ This finding corresponds to the IUDOP's documenting, in survey after survey, that the population is frustrated by the failure of government to lower the rate of violent crime, provide employment, and reduce income inequality and corruption (see, e.g., IUDOP 2008; Macías, Cruz, and Seligson 2010). Protestants, however, perceived the social system as being just at significantly higher rates than Catholics did in 1988, and they continued to do so in 2009.

Throughout El Salvador's recent history essentially the same percentage of Protestants as Catholics believed the church should show a preference for the

8. Other sources of increased social activism among Protestants include the writings of René Padilla, Ruth Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and other members of the Argentina-based Latin American Theological Fraternity. These materials have been very influential in promoting a socially conscious, liberationist theology among Latin American Evangelicals. Many Salvadoran Protestant church leaders have received training from Semillas, an affiliate of the Fraternity (see Wadkins 2013b).

9. See table A8 in online appendix.

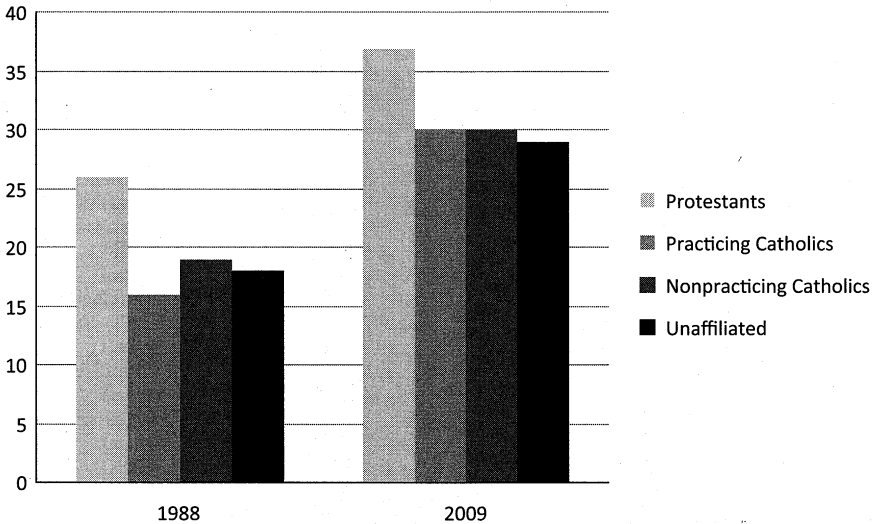


Figure 4 Percentage viewing social system as somewhat or very just

poor.¹⁰ And, across the board, percentages endorsing this preferential option have skyrocketed from less than 45 percent to more than 74 percent. These findings call into question the belief that Protestants are less likely than Catholics to see their religious role as engaged in solving social problems. Regarding this issue, however, nontrivial differences between the two groups remain. For example, results from the 2009 survey show that, in contrast to only 16 percent of Catholics, over one-third of Protestants still see the role of the church more as one of prayer than of political action (Carranza 2009; IUDOP 2009). Even so, hypothesis 4—that Protestant attitudes toward societal justice and concern for the poor would become increasingly more positive and converge with Catholic views—is supported.

Church as mediator / During the period of this study, the mediational role of the church was predominantly a Catholic phenomenon. Through the agency of high-ranking clergy, the Catholic Church has been active in the social sphere by acting as mediator in social conflicts, as it has done historically in El Salvador. Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant churches, however, have espoused the belief that through evangelism and conversion God will change society. Therefore, rather than direct institutional involvement in social issues, these churches have concentrated on changing society one person at a time through changing individuals' beliefs and way of life (Orózco 2004). As a result Protestants are less likely than Catholics to endorse a public mediational role for the church.¹¹ Nevertheless, in 1998, among all religious groups, there was a significant increase in approval for the church taking on this activity. This finding could be attributed to the major

10. See table A9 in online appendix.
 11. See table A10 in online appendix.

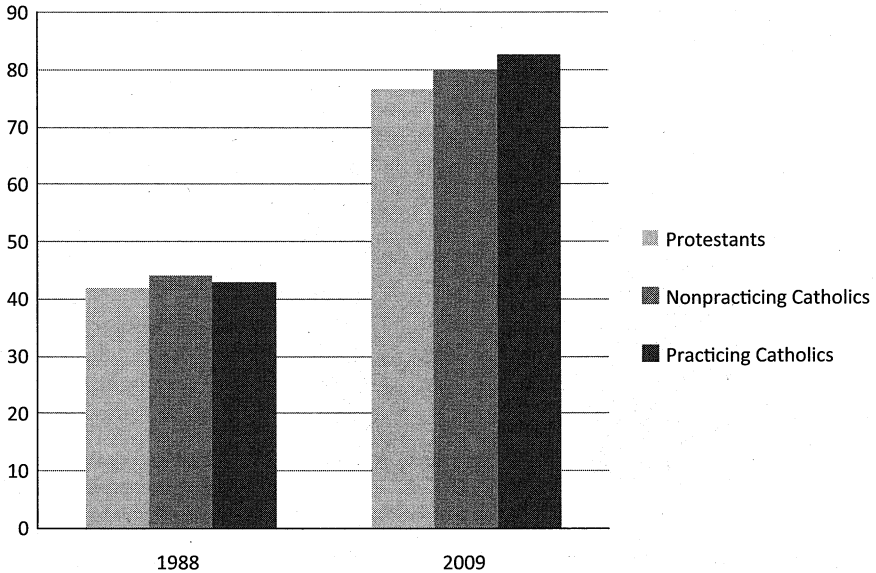


Figure 5 Percentage agreeing churches should prefer the poor

and public role the Catholic Church under Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas and his auxiliary bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez played in the run-up to the peace accords in the early 1990s (Klaiber 1998).

Among Protestants, support for the church mediating social conflict grew during the two decades of the study, peaking in 1998 and then falling back somewhat in 2009. Catholic approval, meanwhile, continued to increase. In the first decade of the new century high-level leaders in the Catholic Church continued to take on an occasional mediating role. For example, Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chávez and the rector of the Jesuit University of Central America were active as observers to the negotiations to resolve the crisis caused by the government's attempts to privatize parts of the National Health Service (Dean Brackley SJ, personal communication, August 1, 2010). In addition the Salvadoran Bishops' Conference interjected the church into the movement to prevent foreign firms from mining gold in the country, which they see as environmentally hazardous (CEDES 2007; Morin 2010). It should be noted that some Evangelical pastors also spoke out publicly in opposition to foreign mining endeavors.

There is additional evidence that Salvadoran Protestant leaders are beginning to see a place for the church in resolving social problems that goes beyond evangelism. Recently leaders from the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican churches, the Assembly of God, and other Protestant and Evangelical churches have come together to indicate their collective agreement to use their role as pastors to advocate for a culture of peace in El Salvador. And during the 2008 presidential campaign, the left-leaning FMLN candidate met with six hundred Evangelical pastors to present his party's platform. An official of the Evangeli-

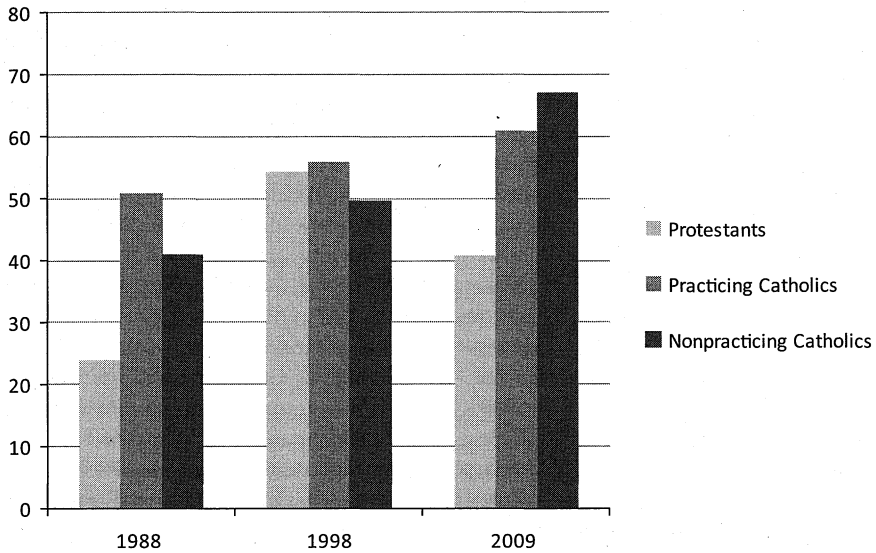


Figure 6 Percentage agreeing the church should mediate conflict

cal Union of Salvadoran Christian Churches stated, “As Evangelical churches we have rejected the passive role in order to play an active role. We are listening to what the candidate . . . has to say; and in this way it will be the church that decides whether or not to accept what is presented.”¹²

The overall increase in Protestant approval of the Catholic Church taking a mediational role in society is supportive of hypothesis 4. The finding appears to be due to an appreciation of the outcomes of the Catholic hierarchy’s mediational efforts, and to Evangelical leaders’ growing acceptance of a more active, institutional role for their churches in addressing social issues.

Voting preferences / Finally, a direct measure of the relationship between religious affiliation and political stance among Salvadorans is their voting patterns. Table A11 in the online appendix¹³ provides three snapshots in time regarding the voting preferences of Protestants and Catholics. The situation at each point in time was different. In 1989 there was no FMLN party. Only ARENA, the new party founded by right-wing demagogue Roberto D’Aubuisson, the anemic Christian Democratic Party of the Duarte, and the military-oriented Partido de Concertación Nacional were on the ballot. Society was reeling from the paroxysm of the rebel force’s last major offensive. Under a state of siege, many citizens avoided the polls, and many who did vote were unwilling to disclose their choice of party.

12. “Iglesias salvadoreñas lanzan iniciativa para respaldar tregua entre pandillas,” Agencia EFE, November 17, 2012.

13. Political party preference by religion was not addressed in the 1988 survey. Data for this analysis were available from a national IUDOP survey conducted in May 1989.

A significantly larger percentage of Protestants than Catholics did not vote, suggesting they were less interested in political involvement than Catholics at that time. Nevertheless, of the survey respondents who did vote and who disclosed their vote, more Catholics than Protestants voted for the conservative ARENA party (43 percent to 34 percent). This result was likely due in part to Protestants believing that ARENA was the party of the more affluent Catholics (Klaiber 1998). In 1998 the percentage of respondents indicating a willingness to vote was similar to the 1989 results. However, large majorities were willing to reveal their party preference, with both Catholics and Protestants supporting ARENA more than the FMLN party. In 2009 the picture was radically different. After two decades of successive ARENA administrations, the population of El Salvador was primed for change. Over 70 percent of Catholics and Protestants went to the polls to elect a president, and majorities of both religious groups voted for the leftist FMLN candidate. Whereas in 1989 and 1998, Catholics were more likely than Protestants to vote ARENA, in 2009 Catholics were somewhat more likely to vote FMLN. Overall, the data confirm what others have found—that Protestants are no more likely than other religious groups to vote for conservative candidates (Bergunder 2002; Patterson 2005; Smith 2009).

In summary, our longitudinal findings support hypotheses 4, 5, and 6. During the twenty-year period all Salvadorans came to see their society overall as somewhat less unjust than in 1988, and they increased their support for the church's role in helping the poor and mediating conflict. Voting preferences among Catholics and Protestants continued to converge.

DISCUSSION

Our primary goal in this article was to document the changes in demographics, religious practice, belief, and political orientation of Protestants relative to Catholics in El Salvador from 1988 to 2009. The time series results of the three IUDOP surveys show that a religious sea change is clearly under way in El Salvador. Catholic Church membership has declined appreciably, and nonpracticing Catholics seem to be heading to the altars of Evangelical conversion. Moreover, the numbers of Evangelicals who enter the movement by birth rather than through conversion has risen dramatically. It is now possible to speculate that on any given Sunday, or for that matter any other day of the week, more Salvadorans are receiving the Gospel in the context of an emotional Pentecostal-style service than are receiving it at the hands of a Catholic cleric. Nevertheless the data do not support some kind of Evangelical or Pentecostal takeover of traditional religion. For one thing, Evangelicalism is a strikingly diverse movement without a common institutional identity. For another, the Catholic Church maintains a long tradition of legal recognition; its churches, schools, and symbols still visibly dominate the cultural landscape, and even most nonpracticing Catholics attend church for baptisms, marriages, and burials. What is new is that religion in El Salvador has become a marketplace of religious pluralism and that the Catholic Church must now compete for souls.

Second, as fissiparous as Salvadoran Protestantism is, it has nevertheless evolved into a socially equivalent alternative to Catholicism and in addition is becoming more and more routinized both institutionally and in terms of religious involvement. Protestants have all but caught up with Catholics in important social indicators such as overall wealth, education, and occupation. As entry into the ranks of Protestantism is increasingly through birth rather than conversion, it has shown evidence of greater formality and less fervor. Based on our own field research, it is worth noting here that over the past decade at least three new Pentecostal churches have emerged in the capital city whose memberships top two thousand and that deliberately pitch their message directly to the socially mobile, educated classes and consciously tone down the emotion in worship (Christian, Gent, and Wadkins 2013; see also Berger 2012). Even long-established Pentecostal churches such as *Misión Cristiana Elim* have eliminated the traditional Pentecostal requirement that women ought to shun makeup, wear veils, and sit separately from their husbands. In a few of the more affluent Assembly of God churches, women wear dangling earrings, high heels, and designer jeans to church (Wadkins 2013a, 2013b).

Third, the current study's results suggest that during the last two decades, Protestants, despite their growth, diversification, and growing economic and social status, have not distinguished themselves politically from Catholics. Their growing beliefs that the poor ought to be the recipients of justice and that the church ought to mediate in conflict, and their voting record—of support for ARENA in 1988 for ARENA and FMLN in 2009—were similar to or converging with Catholic Salvadorans. Overall, the attitude of both Protestants and Catholics is that Salvadoran society continues to be unjust, although most Protestants tend to be more optimistic, believing social change will come through a religious reorientation of each individual rather than through structural alterations.

These findings provide scant evidence that Protestantism is having its own unique impact on civic society or moving it in a more democratic or participatory direction. But just below the surface of these findings, the essentially different orientations of Catholics and Protestants remain, and these differences have social and political import. The shared psychological disposition of Evangelical and Spirit-filled Protestantism is inherently individualistic and participatory. It rests upon the power of God that is immediate and direct to each believer by virtue of the unmediated grace of Christ, the biblical blueprint for living an individual Christian life, and the personal indwelling and enabling power of the Holy Spirit (see Cox 1994; Martin 1990, 2002).

Equipped with new self-understandings as a result of conversion, believers perceive themselves to have new identities as autonomous individuals, to be empowered equally with other believers, and to have unlimited access to God. In such a priesthood of all believers, the church becomes a fellowship of equals where everyone's gifts are shared in social spaces that operate like small democracies. The rapid growth and mutation of Salvadoran Evangelicalism comes from the fact that it is a bottom-up movement in which individuals freely convert and form numerous differentiated and voluntary congregational niches throughout society (see Brackley 2009). These intentional, intimate, and vibrant churches give

congregants a renewed sense of community and solidarity, along with a heightened experience of autonomy and control (Inglehart 2009).

Several of the larger Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in El Salvador are led by well-known autocratic personalities. These leaders are indigenous and have grown up in the movement locally (D'Épinay 1968; but see Wadkins 2013b). Despite some tendency toward authoritarianism, Protestant development is, on the whole, inherently participatory and democratizing, and it seems adaptive to the many forms of modernity now enveloping El Salvador (Martin 2002; Wadkins 2013b).

Moreover, this democratizing element seems to be spilling over into the Catholic Church. Earlier in this article we noted the presence of the Catholic charismatic movement, which in Latin America is called the *Renovación Carismática Católica*. This movement now amounts to some 15 percent of the practicing Catholic population; it is highly organized, rapidly growing, and apart from distinctly Catholic doctrinal proclivities is difficult to differentiate from its Spirit-filled, Protestant counterparts (Gooren 2010). While the charismatics have often clashed with some bishops and members of the Catholic clergy, it is clear not only that they are the fastest-growing sector within the Church but that they are bringing into it new, more individualistic spirituality and democratic principles of organization (Cleary 2010; Wadkins 2013a). Future studies will be required to confirm that the subjective, individualistic, participatory, and egalitarian orientation of the now large and important Evangelical and Pentecostal sector of Salvadoran society has allowed it not only to become ecumenical but also to propagate new patterns of modern social organization.

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