

# Explaining Evangelical Representation

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In May 2011, the government of newly inaugurated Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff was planning to roll out an antihomophobia educational campaign in public schools. Then the evangelicals in Brazil's Congress, who held 14 percent of seats, sprang into action, threatening to block all future legislation and support a corruption investigation against the president's chief of staff if the plan was not withdrawn. Rousseff backed down, and the educational campaign was canceled.

In Chile, evangelical leaders similarly mobilized against a civil unions bill that was being debated in Congress in 2014–2015. Pastors led protests in front of the Congress building; one even got into a shoving match with a legislator while attending a committee hearing on the bill. Yet Chile's evangelicals, with only one representative in the 158-seat legislature, lacked influence within the halls of power. The bill passed and became law in April 2015.

In Peru's 2011 election, five out of nine evangelical representatives entered Congress as candidates of *fujimorismo*, a right-wing populist movement. Led by Congressman Julio Rosas, conservative evangelicals and Catholics united to block several civil unions bills. Yet factionalism and corruption scandals decimated *fujimorismo* in the latter half of the decade, and evangelicals' political representation suffered as a result. In 2020, only a single evangelical was elected to Congress, on a different party's list.

The culture wars are coming to Latin America, as issues of LGBTQ and reproductive rights rise to the forefront of the political agenda and prompt a socially conservative backlash. In many countries, the rapidly

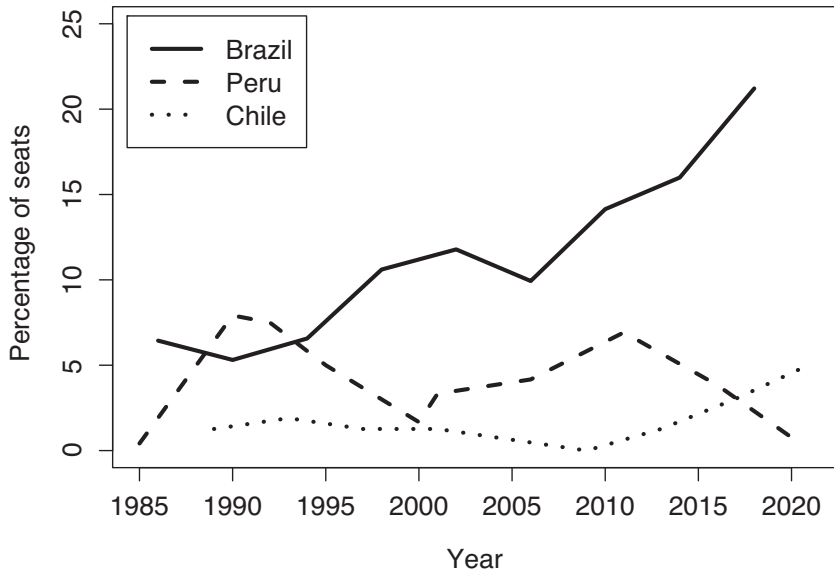


FIGURE 1.1 Legislative seat shares for evangelicals  
See Appendix for a description of data sources.

expanding ranks of evangelical Christians are leading the political charge against this liberalizing trend. Costa Rica made headlines in 2018, when a decision in favor of same-sex marriage by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights immediately transformed the presidential race, boosting the fortunes of the previously minor candidate Fabricio Alvarado, an evangelical pastor. Alvarado lost in the runoff, but his National Restoration Party gained 25 percent of seats in the Legislative Assembly, giving Costa Rica one of the region's largest evangelical caucuses in percentage terms (Zúñiga Ramírez, 2018).

Yet evangelicals' engagement and success with electoral politics in Latin America also vary significantly across countries and over time. Figure 1.1 plots evangelicals' legislative seat shares over several decades in Brazil, Chile, and Peru, the three countries examined in detail in this study. In Brazil, evangelicals enjoy a decades-long influential presence in Congress, dating back at least to the 1986 Constituent Assembly election, and their numbers have continued to grow steadily. In Chile, the electoral representation of evangelicals has been much more modest, despite their mobilization for the 2017 and 2021 elections after a series of defeats on abortion, civil unions, and same-sex marriage. And in Peru, evangelicals'

electoral representation has come and gone in waves, following the fluctuating electoral fortunes of *fujimorismo*, their most reliable route to office since 1990.

What explains why Latin America's evangelicals have become political power brokers in some countries and are largely relegated to the sidelines in others? Existing research on this question has focused primarily on formal political institutions. Following the broader literature on the descriptive representation of minority groups, permissive party and electoral systems that are open to new entrants are seen as favorable to evangelicals' electoral prospects. Hence, the traditional argument goes, they have faced fewer barriers to representation in Brazil than in Chile, with Peru falling somewhere in between. Another set of arguments focuses on voting behavior, claiming that evangelicals are simply more willing to vote for coreligionists in Brazil than they are in other parts of Latin America.

In contrast to the formal institutionalist bent of the existing literature, I argue that the most important factor in explaining evangelicals' political representation is the degree to which their religious identity has been politicized by threats to their interests and worldview. Historically, most evangelicals in Latin America preferred to live their lives apart from mainstream society, practicing their religion and focusing on the afterlife without engaging in "worldly" pursuits such as politics. Where they have overcome this reluctance and thrust themselves into the electoral sphere, it has been to fight legislative battles in two areas at the core of evangelical interests and identities: legal equality with the Catholic Church and sexuality politics issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. My comparative historical explanation thus focuses on a factor, the politicization of a group identity and consequent motivations to seek representation, that is logically prior to any barriers imposed by political institutions or voting behavior.

I argue that cross-national differences in the politicization of evangelical identity emerged as a result of two critical junctures: disestablishment of the Catholic Church or major episodes of secular reform in the early twentieth century and the arrival of sexuality politics on the political agenda at the turn of the twenty-first century. Where an aggrieved Catholic Church mobilized politically to recoup privileges that had been lost via disestablishment, as in Brazil, evangelicals perceived material threats and mobilized politically in response. Where the Catholic Church was more accepting of disestablishment, as in Chile, the lack of a major threat to evangelical interests meant little political mobilization. Once

sexuality politics arrived on the political agenda, coalitional possibilities shifted, and historical adversaries became potential allies in a shared effort to oppose progressive policy initiatives. Where evangelicals were already better positioned to lead this battle than conservative Catholics – as in Brazil, thanks to their prior mobilization on behalf of religious equality – they sought to further expand their electoral representation to defend against a new set of threats. Where conservative Catholics had a stronger position, as in Chile, evangelical electoral mobilization lagged.

Threats to material interests or a conservative worldview help explain the politicization of evangelical identity, but cleavages potentially serve as a brake upon this process. Where salient divides within the evangelical community have coincided with broader political cleavages – as in Peru, with the split over *fujimorismo* – conflict along other dimensions may displace the collective struggle to defend against material or worldview threats. Thus, in Peru, evangelicals have been less mobilized, and less successful in obtaining electoral representation, than one would expect based on threats alone.

## 1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION

If politics is about who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1936), there are many different ways for groups to pursue their interests, including behind-the-scenes political pressure, formal lobbying, and promises of support in exchange for policy concessions. Descriptive representation – putting group members in public office to advocate for concerns directly – is but one option among many. So why should evangelicals in Latin America seek to elect fellow believers as a means of pursuing their interests? And why should scholars care about this outcome?

Historically, most religious organizations that exerted political influence did so via their close ties to the state. Weberian traditional authority (Weber, 1978) is the oldest justification for a ruler's monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force, underlying the divine right monarchies of early modern Europe. Secularism subsequently challenged this fusion of religion and politics, with the emergence of republics such as France, Turkey, and the United States that sought to separate church and state (Kuru, 2009). Yet dominant religious institutions often retained considerable political influence behind the scenes. In cases where churches were closely associated with the national identity – such as Ireland and Poland, where they defended against foreign-imposed regimes – they were able

to cultivate a suprapartisan form of “institutional access” to formally secular states (Grzymała-Busse, 2015).

Dominant religious institutions may often enjoy behind-the-scenes political influence, but most organized interests are forced to more openly pursue their objectives. Some groups may engage in lobbying, especially those whose causes cut across partisan divides, as with the American Association of Retired Persons in the United States. Others may cultivate an alliance with an ideologically sympathetic political party, a tack that dominant churches have often taken when they do not have a plausible basis for claiming to represent the national interest (Grzymała-Busse, 2015). Lobbying and partisan alliances are most effective for groups that have numbers on their side, but some well-resourced minority groups may succeed with these strategies as well, as with the pro-Israel lobby in the United States (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007). Neither of these forms of influence requires placing group members in office; rather, they seek to persuade those who already hold power.

Historically excluded and socioeconomically marginalized actors, including evangelicals in Latin America, have fewer options for direct political influence. In such circumstances, descriptive representation – placing group members in office – can be particularly valuable for achieving their aims. Legislators from politically underrepresented gender, racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic categories are likely to adopt similar positions as their descriptive constituents on core issues of concern for the community (Boas and Smith, 2019). By contrast, traditional partisan forms of interest representation have not served marginalized communities particularly well, at least in Latin America (Htun, 2016). For this reason, subaltern communities have not historically been content with mere alliances and word-of-mouth guarantees from out-group politicians seeking their support. For example, successful Latin American populist parties such as Argentina’s Justicialist Party and Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party not only made commitments to pro-labor policies but gave allied unions the right to name candidates for public office, including many from their own ranks (Collier and Collier, 1991; Levitsky, 2003).

Latin American evangelicals have often sought electoral representation after concluding that mere alliances were not good enough. In 1958, Brazilian Pentecostal pastor Manoel de Mello promised to deliver votes for São Paulo mayor Adhemar de Barros in exchange for a piece of land for a new church building, but pressure from the Catholic Church eventually convinced Barros to renege on the deal and tear down the newly

constructed building (Freston, 1993*b*; Gaskill, 2002; Read, 1965). In the next election, Mello shifted to a different approach – sponsoring the candidacy of one of his own assistant pastors. In a 2017 speech, making a pitch for evangelicals to elect their own representatives, Chilean congressional candidate Eduardo Durán Salinas opined: “Enough of those politicians that visit our temples and claim to defend our values and principles and then ... promote laws that go against everything we believe as Christians!”<sup>1</sup> Electoral representation is not a foolproof guarantee of interest representation; in Peru, in the early 1990s, Alberto Fujimori’s authoritarian turn effectively hobbled the country’s largest-ever evangelical caucus. But under conditions of democracy, descriptive representation provides the best prospects for the substantive representation of most minority group concerns.

My focus in this book is on descriptive representation in national legislatures, the most promising option for members of minority groups, especially under proportional representation (PR).<sup>2</sup> Latin American countries have presidential systems of government with some of the most powerful executives in the world, and legislatures play a subordinate political role compared to the United States, which has a stronger separation of powers. But while the legislative branch generally does not set the political agenda, well-organized congressional caucuses often have effective reactive power to block bills that they oppose (Cox and Morgenstern, 2001; Saiegh, 2010; Shugart and Carey, 1992). Presence in Congress also positions minority group representatives to line up broader support for their goals by engaging in practices such as logrolling, or reciprocal trading of votes. Descriptive representation has thus allowed Latin American evangelicals to defend against perceived threats to their interests and way of life by blocking legislation they oppose, as with the example of Brazil’s evangelical caucus and the 2011 antihomophobia campaign in public schools.

While this book focuses on evangelicals in Latin America, the descriptive representation of minorities is a broader theme with relevance for democracies around the world. From European Muslims to American

<sup>1</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK\\_6qQGjPYc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK_6qQGjPYc), at 7:10 (accessed February 11, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> District magnitude, which varies across the cases I examine and also at the subnational level, conditions the viability of minority groups obtaining seats through PR, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet I argue that variation in evangelicals’ motivation to enter the electoral sphere, which depends upon threats that politicize evangelical identity and cleavages that divide the community, better explains cross-national variation in their descriptive representation.

Jews, religious minorities have often sought descriptive representation to advance their interests and defend against threats. The same is true of racial and ethnic minorities, including Afro-descendants and Indigenous communities in the Americas. Yet the descriptive representation of a particular minority group can differ dramatically across countries, as with the cases of Black representation in Brazil versus the United States (Telles, 1999) or Indigenous representation in Bolivia versus Peru (Madrid, 2012; Van Cott, 2005). And these differences in descriptive representation have policy consequences, such as the advances in Indigenous rights legislation in Bolivia under the government of Evo Morales. Hence, my argument about how politicized group identities facilitate minority descriptive representation has relevance beyond the specific case of evangelicals seeking elected office in Latin America.

### 1.3 EXPLAINING EVANGELICAL REPRESENTATION

Evangelicals' entrée into Latin American electoral politics has garnered significant media attention in recent years. Figure 1.2 plots a smoothed trend line showing the percentage of all stories about "elections" in the Factiva database that also include the term "evangelical." The level and trend in coverage of this phenomenon in Latin America outpaced that of

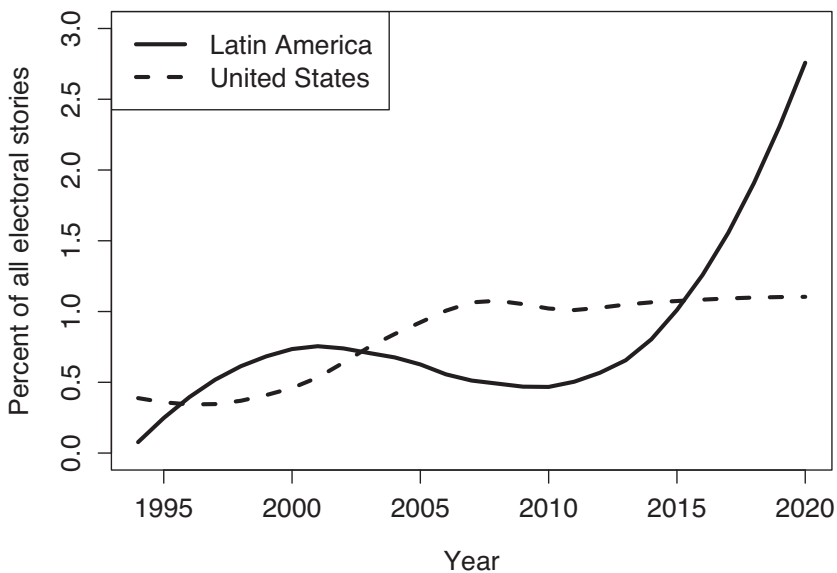


FIGURE 1.2 Newspaper coverage of evangelicals and elections

the United States in the latter half of the decade, despite significant media attention to the role of evangelicals in the election of Donald Trump. Evangelical voters have been highlighted as a key factor in the outcome of the 2018 presidential elections in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Brazil as well as the 2016 plebiscite on a peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Bedinelli, Marcos and LaFuente, 2018; Cosoy, 2016; Reyes, 2018).

Despite substantial news coverage of Latin American evangelicals' electoral ambitions, there has been little attention to this phenomenon from within political science or the subfield of comparative politics. The substantial and long-standing literature on Protestantism in Latin America often touches upon religious groups' political ambitions, but most contributions have come from other disciplines, such as history, sociology, and religious studies (Algranti, 2010, 2012; Bastian, 1999; Cleary and Stewart-Gambino, 1997; Freston, 2001, 2004, 2008; Garrard-Burnett and Stoll, 1993; Goldstein, 2020; Hartch, 2014; Ireland, 1992; Lalive d'Épinay, 1969; Lehmann, 1996; Martin, 1990; O'Neill, 2009; Pérez Guadalupe, 2017; Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger, 2018; Smith, 1998; Steigenga and Cleary, 2007; Stoll, 1990; Willems, 1967). Comparative work has mostly taken the form of edited volumes, which typically lack a single, unifying theoretical framework. To my knowledge, only an unpublished doctoral dissertation in political science has used systematic, cross-national comparisons to explain variation in the electoral ambitions of this faith community (Mora Torres, 2010). The opinions and voting behavior of Latin American evangelicals have attracted somewhat greater attention from political scientists, though cross-national comparative work is still limited (Aguilar et al., 1993; Boas, 2014, 2016a; Boas and Smith, 2015, 2019; Bohn, 2004, 2007; Camp, 2008; Patterson, 2004, 2005a,b; Rink, 2018; Smith, 2019b; Smith and Boas, 2020; Steigenga, 2001; Valenzuela, Scully and Somma, 2007).

In recent years, a new generation of political scientists (and some economists) has turned its attention to evangelicals in Latin America, with many focusing explicitly on the question of their political ambitions and electoral representation (Cerqueira do Nascimento, 2017; Costa, Marcantonio and Rocha, 2019; Lacerda, 2017a, 2018; Reich and dos Santos, 2013; Rink, 2018; Rodrigues-Silveira and Cervi, 2019; Smith, 2019b). They are joined by a new wave of scholars looking at the Catholic Church in the region (Hale, 2018; Mantilla, 2021; Smith, 2019b; Trejo, 2012; Tuñón, 2019; Ziegler, 2020), often examining the political implications of Catholic–Protestant competition for the faithful. In keeping



with methodological trends in the discipline, much of this newer work is particularly attentive to questions of causal inference, and some studies have found creative sources of exogenous variation in aspects of religion or factors that influence it (Costa, Marcantonio and Rocha, 2019; Rink, 2018; Tuñón, 2019; Ziegler, 2020). Yet recent studies are almost exclusively focused on single-country cases, primarily Brazil. As such, while they may yield important insights or suggest hypotheses that could explain cross-national variation in evangelicals' political representation, none seeks explicitly to account for this outcome.

The paucity of cross-national comparative research on evangelicals and politics in Latin America stands in contrast to the much more extensive literature on related topics. The Roman Catholic Church has been a perennial topic of research in Latin American politics, with many studies focused on its varying political roles across countries and over time (Cleary, 2011; Fleet and Smith, 1997; Gill, 1998; Hagopian, 2008, 2009; Levine, 1992; Mainwaring, 1986, 2003*b*; Mainwaring and Wilde, 1989; Trejo, 2012). There is also a burgeoning comparative literature on the political representation of other historically excluded groups in the region, including women, Afro-descendants, and the Indigenous (Barnes, 2016; Bueno and Dunning, 2017; Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008; Htun, 2016; Madrid, 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010, 2018; Van Cott, 2005; Yashar, 2005). Likewise, a growing research agenda seeks to explain cross-national variation in the electoral representation of European and North American Muslims (Aktürk and Katliarou, 2021; Dancygier, 2013, 2014, 2017; Hughes, 2016; Sinno, 2009), whose rise – both demographically and politically – is a more recent phenomenon than that of evangelicals in Latin America.

In advancing an explanation for cross-national variation in the political representation of evangelicals in Latin America, I seek to contribute to these diverse bodies of literature. As a political scientist, I bring to the table different approaches than those that have been prominent in other disciplines, including survey experiments to examine voting behavior and the analysis of electoral results to study the influence of party and electoral systems. As a multimethod comparativist, I situate these more microlevel analyses of particular elections and institutions within a broad comparative historical analysis that seeks to account for varying outcomes across countries and over time. As a Latin Americanist, I seek to draw connections between the political incorporation of evangelicals and other new forms of inclusion that are not often thought of as being similar phenomena (Boas, 2021; Boas and Smith, 2019). Finally, as a scholar

of religion and politics, I aim to contribute to the broader understanding of how religious identities and interests translate into concerted political action in some contexts but not in others.

### 1.3.1 Defining “Evangelical” and Disaggregating Religion

In this book, I use the term “evangelical” in the same way that *evangélico* is used in Spanish and Portuguese: to refer to all Protestants, regardless of denomination.<sup>3</sup> This usage differs from the more common English-language meaning of “evangelical,” denoting a form of Protestantism that stresses personal salvation (being “born again”), missionary or conversion efforts, and a literal (albeit typically selective) interpretation of the Bible (Balmer, 2006, xviii–xix). My usage thus includes members of historical or “mainline” denominations, such as Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, alongside many other groups, including Pentecostals, who would more readily be classified as evangelical by the North American definition. Some scholars writing for an English-language audience translate *evangélico* as “Protestant,” but the literal equivalent in Spanish and Portuguese, *protestante*, is much less commonly used. While “evangelical” means slightly different things depending on which language one is speaking, the majority of *evangélicos* in today’s Latin American would qualify as evangelical in the English-language sense based on their beliefs and practices.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the composition of the “evangelical” category has changed significantly over two centuries of Latin American independence. The first Latin American evangelicals were mainline Protestant immigrants from northern Europe who established expatriate communities, often worshiping in their native languages. Missionaries arrived in the latter half of the century, initiating efforts to convert local residents, especially the Indigenous. Pentecostalism, a form of Christianity that emphasizes mystical gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and faith healing, reached Latin America in the early 1900s and spread rapidly throughout the continent; today, a majority of Latin

<sup>3</sup> Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses merit special mention. While these groups are descended from the Protestant Reformation, they grant authority to scriptures other than the Bible, and their theology deviates from that of other Protestant denominations in significant ways. They are thus excluded from the “evangelical” label in this study, unless otherwise noted (e.g., in a survey question where they are lumped together with other non-Catholic Christians and cannot be separated out).

American Protestants identify with Pentecostalism and related traditions. Throughout all of these changes, *evangélico* has consistently been the most common term used to refer to this community, both by its own members and society at large. Examples range from the names of nineteenth-century publications, such as the Chilean newspaper *Alianza Evanjélica*, to interest groups founded in the 1990s and 2000s, including the Brazilian Evangelical Association, the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru, and Chile's National Council of Evangelical Churches.

In speaking of evangelicalism as a religious tradition, one potentially bundles together a vast array of denominations with distinct histories, traditions, and beliefs. Moreover, a given Christian denomination consists of diverse individuals whose identities, religious practice, and interpretation of scripture may differ significantly from one another, due to intra-denominational factionalism, the influence of particular pastors over their flock, or simply unique personal experiences. And even speaking of "religion" as a concept aggregates distinct components of a complex human institution, including beliefs, practices, scripture, sermons, community, social identity, and interests (McClendon and Riedl, 2019, 27; Menchik, 2018, 712). Different components of religion, such as individual prayer, collective worship, group identity, and religious teachings, may have diverse and even contradictory effects on nonreligious attitudes and behavior (Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche, 2015; Hoffman, 2020). For theoretical and conceptual clarity, therefore, it is important both to specify which components of religion play a key role in my analysis and to address the inevitable reification that results from using terms such as "evangelical" and "Pentecostal" to refer to diverse communities of individuals.

In this book, I focus on three specific aspects of the broader bundle of things that constitute religion. First, religion consists of theological doctrine, or a set of core beliefs about the relationship between people and the divine, which is often based on the interpretation of written scriptures (Philpott, 2007; Toft, Philpott and Shah, 2011). While these scriptures themselves are generally fixed, doctrine itself is not; rather, it can change over time and also vary across different sects or denominations that give credence to the same set of holy books. As such, religious doctrine is "multivocal" (Stepan, 2000) and "ambivalent" (Appleby, 1987), lending itself to multiple interpretations. Despite this flexibility, the theological doctrine of a particular church, denomination, or broad religious tradition provides a common point of reference for believers and religious leaders alike. Individual Methodists may believe a variety of things, and

Methodist clergy may preach different messages from one another, but Methodism is still distinguishable from a Pentecostal denomination like the Assemblies of God, in part due to differences in theology.

A second core dimension of religion examined in this book is that of a social identity (Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche, 2015; Grzymala-Busse, 2012; McCauley and Posner, 2019; Menchik, 2016). Organized religions create social identities by binding people together in a shared community of believers. Religions define in-groups and out-groups by specifying the criteria for belonging: the rituals and practices one should participate in, the theology one should subscribe to, and, in the case of ethno-religions such as traditional Judaism, the line of descent that determines membership. Collective worship, coming of age ceremonies, religious marriages, and the celebration of holidays all serve to reinforce group membership on a regular basis. Religion as a group identity can persist long after religious practice or belief has declined. In Wave 6 of the World Values Survey, 51 percent of those who never attend services, 47 percent of those who never pray, and 30 percent of those who do not believe in God nonetheless listed a religious affiliation.

While religion is inherently a social identity, it is not automatically a politically salient one (McCauley and Posner, 2019). Communities of believers who are free to practice their faith without impediment or any sense of threat to their way of life may have little motivation to mix religion and politics. Yet others may find themselves entering into conflict with rival religious groups, persecuted by the state, subject to discrimination in broader society, or unable to live according to the tenets of their faith. Shared grievances, especially those that derive from minority status, tend to make religious identity more politically salient. Theology can also militate for or against the political salience of religious identity.

The question of political salience gives rise to a third dimension of the concept of religion: that of an interest group (Gill, 1998; Kalyvas, 1996; Warner, 2000). All religious organizations have a core interest in survival; those that seek conversions have an additional interest in expanding their ranks. In multifaith societies, these core interests of different religious groups potentially come into conflict as they compete with one another for believers. In addition to a basic interest in survival and expansion, faith communities whose theology tasks them with righting the perceived wrongs of the world have preferences for particular policies – those that contribute to fighting poverty, ending war, preventing abortion, or whatever their causes may be. When religious communities

act as interest groups, they seek to pursue their preferred policies through lobbying, public demonstrations, placing their own members in office, or any number of other tactics.

Theology, social identity, and interests capture important facets of the concept of religion, but they are not comprehensive. My analysis does not directly consider a number of other components, including ritual practice, spirituality, social networks, social welfare, or even sermons, the messages that individual religious leaders convey to the faithful as they interpret religious doctrine during worship services. Each of these unexamined components of religion has its own potential implications for political attitudes and behavior. For example, the content of sermons, even if not explicitly political, can influence decisions about political participation (McClendon and Riedl, 2019), and informal socialization within religious communities may contribute to attitude formation apart from messages conveyed by clergy (Smith, 2019b).

My approach to disaggregating the concept of religion is largely a practical decision driven by this study's comparative historical scope. Many components of religion that I do not examine are best observed at close range, through participant observation, focus groups, ethnography, or original surveys of congregants. Such methods work well for in-depth studies of contemporaneous phenomena, typically in single countries and often in a small number of communities or cities (McClendon and Riedl, 2019; Smith, 2019b). They are less well suited to studying broad historical transformations across multiple countries, as I seek to do in this book. All choices about conceptualization, measurement, methodology, and research design entail trade-offs, and the study of religion and politics is no exception. My focus on theology, social identity, and interests is a partial view of evangelicalism and politics in Latin America, but I believe it is sufficiently comprehensive to account for cross-national differences in evangelicals' descriptive representation, the outcome I seek to explain.

Disaggregating the concept of religion is separate from whether one uses aggregate categories, such as "evangelical" and "Pentecostal," to refer to diverse communities of individuals. The "lived religion" approach – most prominent in history, sociology, and anthropology but also with its proponents in political science – is skeptical of the analytical value of aggregate categories based on denomination, theological distinctions, or other macro-level differences between groups. Orsi (2005, 167) argues that "there is no such thing as a 'Methodist' or a 'Southern Baptist' who can be neatly summarized by an account of the denomination's

history or theology.” Lived religion shifts the emphasis to individuals, focusing on how religious identities, experiences, and discourses are constructed in their day-to-day lives in both nominally religious spaces and nominally secular ones (Ammerman, 2016; Hall, 1997; Hurd, 2017, 2019; McGuire, 2008; Orsi, 1997, 2005; Rabbia et al., 2019; Roldán and Pérez, 2020; Rubin, Smilde and Junge, 2014).

I acknowledge the lived religion critique of aggregate categories, and this book makes no assumption that all evangelicals, Assemblies of God members, or any other religious group consists of individuals who all think and act alike. Yet diverse groups of individuals also voluntarily choose to associate with aggregate categories. A social identity implies a sense of belonging to a community that, despite its diversity, shares something fundamental in common. Identifying as evangelical, Pentecostal, or Methodist – or, for that matter, as Black, queer, feminist, or any other social category – does not imply that there is perfect homogeneity within the group or that this social identity will determine the entirety of one’s attitudes and behaviors. Aggregate categories are also inherent in the notion of an interest group, which performs the function of interest aggregation – translating diverse individual preferences into a set of collective positions that allows group members to speak with a more powerful voice. When a church or evangelical interest association takes a political position on behalf of its members, no one should assume that every member fully endorses that stance – nor would one make that same assumption about a labor union, environmental organization, or any other interest group.

Categorical disaggregation also ignores the political process whereby individuals themselves lay claim to these labels and contest each other’s efforts to define them. There may be no such thing as a Methodist who can be summarized by the doctrine of the United Methodist Church, but individual Methodists have not been content to remain “immersed in their worlds, struggling with local realities of work, life, gender, politics, illness, sexuality,” and so on (Hurd, 2019, 19). On the contrary, factions with very different beliefs have clashed over the meaning and official positions of Methodism, especially with respect to gender and sexuality (Zauzmer, 2020). To take an even more highly aggregated category, conservative evangelicals in Chile have long sought to speak hegemonically on behalf of “the evangelical Church,” from expressing support for the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1970s (Puentes Oliva, 1975) to promoting a slate of socially conservative candidates for Congress in 2017. By seeking to define and redefine aggregate categories such as “Methodist”

and “evangelical,” religious actors imbue them with meaning, quite apart from whatever reification scholars are willing to do on their own.

More broadly, my epistemological approach to the study of religion and politics is to assume that objective realities and causal processes exist in the world and that the scientific method is capable of uncovering them. At the same time, I acknowledge that social scientists’ efforts to measure this objective reality and make inferences about real-world causal processes are often ridden with error. A Latin American evangelical politician speaking to me in the context of an interview might convey her religious identity and political objectives in quite different terms than if she were talking with her pastor.<sup>4</sup> Other, more seemingly objective data sources can conceal biases of their own – as is well known in the case of survey enumerator effects, for example (Lupu and Michelitch, 2018). As a social scientist, I aim to be honest and forthcoming about possible measurement errors or threats to causal inference, while striving for an approach that minimizes both.

### 1.3.2 Existing Explanations

As with the broader literature on comparative and Latin American politics, scholars focused on religion and politics or the descriptive representation of minority groups have had relatively little to say about why evangelicals are a more potent electoral force in some Latin American countries than in others. Comparative research on the political strategies of religious organizations has generally focused on dominant religions – primarily the Catholic Church – and how they respond to declining influence over time. A separate strain in the religion and politics literature has looked at the resurgence of fundamentalism, but it generally paints this phenomenon with a broad brush rather than seeking to explain cross-national variation in the political influence of insurgent religious groups. And research on minority group representation has looked extensively at European Muslims, but it has had little to say about evangelicals, whether in Latin America or elsewhere.

Despite these empirical omissions, the existing literature on religion and politics and minority group representation offers useful insights that can serve as the building blocks of a theory of religious minority

<sup>4</sup> See the Preface for reflections on how my own religious background may have colored the analysis.

representation. This section examines these research traditions and what they might imply about evangelical descriptive representation in Latin America.

### *Religion and Politics*

How might the subfield of religion and politics explain the boom in evangelicals' descriptive representation in a country such as Brazil, versus very different patterns of representation in other parts of Latin America? The subfield's oldest paradigm is of little help, as it would predict declining relevance of religion across a developing region such as Latin America.<sup>5</sup> Secularization theory – the argument that religion would disappear as societies became more modern – has deep roots in the social sciences, dating back to the work of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social theorists such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim. In mid-twentieth century sociology and political science, it became a cornerstone of modernization theory (Berger, 1967; Lerner, 1958; Martin, 1969). Secularization theory predicted that a variety of processes associated with modernization would undermine religion, including urbanization, increased mass literacy and education, the growth of science and technology, the spread of rationalism, mass participation in politics, greater wealth and prosperity, and geographical mobility (Fox, 2015). As noted in the Preface, this perspective would suggest that evangelical clergy running for public office in Latin America are an anomaly destined to die out over time.

Beginning in the 1980s, the religious economy perspective emerged to challenge secularization theory on both empirical and theoretical grounds. Drawing on rational choice theory, religious economy conceives of churches as firms seeking to maximize their market share, offering religious goods to consumers who may have a choice among many different providers (Finke and Stark, 1992; Stark and Bainbridge, 1987; Stark and Finke, 2000; Warner, 1993). In the discipline of sociology where it originated, this perspective is principally concerned with explaining religion and religiosity rather than religious influence in politics, but it does argue that dominant religious organizations will collude with the state in order to enforce monopolies, such as that of the Catholic Church in early Latin America (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994). In political science, research in

<sup>5</sup> As discussed below, more modern revisions of secularization theory seek to account for persistent religiosity in much of the world; these are more relevant for the outcomes I examine.



the religious economy tradition has focused on the political strategies of churches, especially those facing threats of regulation from the state or competition from upstart religions (Gill, 1998, 2008; Kalyvas, 1996; Koesel, 2014; Trejo, 2012; Warner, 2000). Related work also focuses on religious interests and threats without invoking the core assumption of religious organizations as firms (Gould, 1999; Grzymała-Busse, 2015; Hagopian, 2008; Hale, 2018; Wald, 2019), or by embracing this notion but allowing for ideas to matter as well (Smith, 2019b).

I draw inspiration from the religious economy perspective and other interest-based work in my analysis of how evangelicals respond politically to material threats, but existing studies in this tradition cannot explain evangelicals' increasing political representation in some parts of Latin America. Stark and Iannaccone (1994, 234) argue that increasing religious pluralism *decreases* overall religious involvement in politics because in a competitive religious marketplace, no single group is strong enough to impose itself in the political sphere. In political science, most of the interest-based work in religion and politics has focused on declining religious hegemons – the Catholic Church, as well as established Protestant churches in Northern Europe – examining their political responses to diminished influence (Gill, 1998; Gould, 1999; Grzymała-Busse, 2015; Hagopian, 2008; Hale, 2018; Kalyvas, 1996; Trejo, 2012; Warner, 2000). Some studies do examine the rise of Protestant challengers, but they treat it as an independent variable – a source of competitive pressure on the dominant Catholic Church – rather than an outcome to be explained in its own right (Gill, 1998; Hagopian, 2008; Hale, 2018; Trejo, 2012).<sup>6</sup> Political scientists' use of this framework thus contrasts with sociology, where work in the religious economy perspective has primarily sought to explain the vibrancy and pluralism of the religious marketplace in the United States (Finke and Stark, 1992, 2005; Warner, 1993).

Several of the theoretical claims of the religious economy perspective are also less applicable to religious newcomers like evangelicals in Latin America. The core religious economy assumption of churches as firms that are sensitive to competitive threats and membership loss and will collude with the state to maintain market position works much better for dominant religions – especially the Catholic Church – than it does for upstarts (Bellin, 2008; Grzymała-Busse, 2012). As highlighted in Chapter 3, Latin American evangelicals have rarely had to worry about membership loss, and they have been able to expand their ranks

<sup>6</sup> Smith (2019b) is an exception.

quite effectively without state support. The religious economy perspective also de-emphasizes ideas as a factor in religious actors' political decisions (Bellin, 2008) – a theoretical simplification for any religious organization, but one that is less defensible for newcomers. While the Catholic Church is certainly constrained by its doctrinal commitments, and it has increasingly taken non-self-interested positions in defense of human rights, Indigenous rights, democracy, and the environment, it also has two millennia of experience as a strategic actor, so treating it as a believer-maximizing firm may be an acceptable application of Occam's razor. By contrast, most Protestant denominations are defined by theological differences with either the Catholic Church or another Protestant denomination from which they split. Theology thus looms larger in their decisions about involvement in secular politics, at least initially.

While interest-based work on religion and politics has primarily examined declining religious hegemony, other studies more focused on ideas have sought to explain the resurgence of religious fundamentalism from the 1970s to the present. One strain of this broad literature is revised secularization theory (Norris and Inglehart, 2004, 2011) and its cousin, post-modernization theory (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Revised secularization theory claims that traditional secularization arguments are valid in advanced economies where people no longer face existential threats, but that the world as a whole is becoming more religious because birthrates in poorer, more devout countries are much higher. While the primary dependent variable is religiosity (Bellin, 2008), a subsidiary argument holds that secularizing societies will see increased political involvement by isolated pockets of fundamentalists reacting against value change, challenging trends such as the legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, 45; Norris and Inglehart, 2011, 24, 241). The wide-ranging Fundamentalisms Project of the early 1990s similarly conceived of this phenomenon, including its political manifestations, as the reaction of traditionalists to the identity crisis caused by modernization (Gill, 2001; Marty and Appleby, 1991, 822–823; Marty and Appleby, 1993, 620). For Toft, Philpott and Shah (2011), the resurgence of religion in different parts of the globe, fundamentalist and nonfundamentalist alike, also depends on ideas – namely, different groups' political theology, or religious doctrine about politics and authority.

I draw from the literature on fundamentalism and revised secularization theory the notion that ideas matter and that liberalization can prompt political mobilization to defend traditional values, which often cannot be explained through a pure interest perspective. However,

existing work in this tradition is also limited in its ability to explain cross-national variation in evangelicals' descriptive representation in Latin America. Revised secularization theory would imply that religious-driven political conflict over value change should be most prevalent in the wealthiest societies, where those with traditional values feel most threatened. Yet evangelicals have been less successful at mobilizing politically around these issues in Chile, one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America, than in Brazil and Peru, which lie in the middle of the pack. Moreover, within a given country, values-driven conflict over particular issues such as abortion or same-sex partnerships tends to ebb and flow in a fashion that does not correlate with increasing prosperity or growth in the number of nonbelievers (Smith and Boas, 2020). And much of the research in this vein focuses on explaining variation in the *form* of newly mobilized religious actors' political involvement – peaceful and democratic versus violent and authoritarian (Huntington, 1996; Toft, Philpott and Shah, 2011) – rather than why some religious groups are more motivated to participate than others. While one can extract predictions from the work of Norris and Inglehart (2011) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005) about where the anti-modern political backlash should be most intense, it is not a hypothesis they advance on their own.

In sum, major research traditions in the religion and politics subfield of political science offer useful insights for explaining why evangelicals are better represented in some Latin American countries than in others. But existing research from these schools of thought has not addressed this particular question. Rather, interest-based accounts, including the religious economy perspective, have focused on the political reactions of religious hegemons like the Catholic Church when they are threatened by secularism and competition for believers. Many of these studies' core assumptions are less applicable to upstart religious actors such as evangelicals. For their part, arguments about the rise of global fundamentalism, which focus more on ideas, paint with an excessively broad brush; they are less useful for understanding where in the developing world we should see values-driven political activism and where we should not.

Apart from these major research traditions, a somewhat separate literature focuses specifically on the political implications of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in the Global South. Since 1990, various projects have sought to map out the political involvement of evangelicals or Pentecostals across Latin America as well as the developing world more broadly (Cleary and Stewart-Gambino, 1997; Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001; Freston, 2001, 2004, 2008; Garrard-Burnett and Stoll,

1993; Hefner, 2013; Martin, 1990; Miller, Sargeant and Flory, 2013; Pérez Guadalupe, 2017; Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger, 2018; Stoll, 1990). These efforts are primarily descriptive, seeking to gather evidence and take stock of a new phenomenon, dispel myths and stereotypes, and characterize the diversity of evangelical experiences while also advancing a few broad generalizations. Some of these studies address the question of whether evangelicals are a force for democracy (Freston, 2001, 2008), but in general, this literature does not systematically characterize or seek to account for country-level variation in evangelicals' participation in democratic politics. Pérez Guadalupe (2018) comes closest, outlining three models of evangelical political participation – Central American, South American, and Brazilian – and distinguishing different routes to office, including the confessional party, evangelical front, and evangelical party faction. Yet this work does not explain why a country might end up with one or another form of evangelical politics – beyond, perhaps, geography and colonial heritage – and it offers little leverage for understanding variation within these categories, such as between Chile and Peru.

### *Minority Descriptive Representation*

Separate from the religion and politics subfield, another body of literature has examined why members of historically excluded and marginalized groups, including religious minorities such as European Muslims, are better represented in some democracies than in others. Research on this question looks primarily at formal democratic institutions, especially electoral and party systems.<sup>7</sup>

Which electoral system is most favorable for a minority group depends upon how many members it has and where they are located. Groups that are geographically concentrated and numerically dominant in one or more regions, such as Sikhs in India (Wallace, 1986), are likely to profit from single-member district electoral systems that allow them to win national office with a plurality of votes in their stronghold. In Bolivia, Indigenous communities benefited from an electoral system reform in the 1990s that made it easier for regionally concentrated political groups to win seats (Van Cott, 2005). At the local level, the same dynamic applies to Muslims in the United Kingdom and African Americans in the United States, as patterns of urban residential segregation in many cities mean

<sup>7</sup> A few works in the religion and politics subfield do pay close attention to formal political institutions (Mantilla, 2021; Smith, 2019b).

that these groups can dominate elections in particular districts (Dancygier, 2014, 2017; Marschall, Ruhil and Shah, 2010; Trounstine and Valdini, 2008).

In contrast, minority groups that are more geographically dispersed, including Muslims at the national level in most Western democracies, tend to obtain better descriptive representation under PR systems (Aktürk and Katliarou, 2021; Bloemraad and Schönwälder, 2013; Hughes, 2016). Latin America's evangelical Christians clearly fall into the dispersed category, not (yet) constituting a plurality in any one region of most countries. Patterns of immigration and missionary activity have meant more concentrated evangelical populations in some states or subnational regions of Brazil, Chile, and Peru than others. But while foreign influences may jump-start Protestant growth in particular locations, domestic proselytizing and internal migration tend to even out these patterns of geographical concentration over time.

Among PR systems, those with high district magnitude and open-list rules are often seen as being particularly favorable to the representation of minority groups, including Latin American evangelicals (Bird, 2005; Dancygier, 2017; Freston, 2008; Mantilla, 2021; Schönwälder, 2013). Under open-list proportional representation (OLPR), voters have the option of choosing one (or sometimes more than one) candidate of preference from the list. These personal votes determine which candidates win seats, but they also contribute to the party or coalition's total, helping it win more seats overall. Party leaders thus have an incentive to diversify their lists, offering slots to candidates who represent different constituencies and can bring in new votes. The same "balance the slate" tendency has been identified in PR systems more generally, including those that use closed-list rules (e.g., Norris, 2004, 188–189), but OLPR strengthens the dynamic. When OLPR is combined with low district magnitude – that is, few seats per district – the diversifying incentive is countered by a scarcity of list positions. However, when district magnitude is high, party leaders can freely hand out candidacies.

High district magnitude not only helps members of minority groups gain access to the ballot, but it can also help them win seats (Schönwälder, 2013). By increasing the number of candidates running in a given district, high district magnitude lowers the effective threshold for winning office. In single-member district systems, victory may require close to an absolute majority of votes – a formidable bar for any newcomer to electoral politics, especially one that hails from a minority group. By contrast, where district magnitude is high, candidates may be able to win

office with only a few percentage points of the vote, much of which could be drawn from fellow group members.

If high district magnitude lowers the effective threshold for candidates to win office, open-list rules give them a way to win the necessary voters (Bloemraad and Schönwälder, 2013; Dancygier, 2017). OLPR pits candidates against their listmates as well as those from opposing coalitions, so successful campaigning requires cultivating an independent appeal, apart from the party label (Carey and Shugart, 1995). Membership in a religious minority group – and for pastors, religious leadership – potentially offers just such an appeal. Politically ambitious evangelicals tend to be quite cognizant of the advantages of an electoral system that allows them to win votes independent of their party's efforts. In the 2010s, as Brazilian politicians were debating a potential switch to closed-list PR, the magazine of the Assemblies of God clearly expressed its opposition to the proposed reform, arguing that the loss of OLPR would harm evangelicals and other candidates with an independent following (Fonseca, 2011; *Mensagem da Paz*, 2013b).

Party systems also matter for whether previously excluded identity groups can gain electoral representation. In highly institutionalized party systems, especially those with few major parties, the most relevant question is the openness of the existing political establishment to representatives of new groups (Dancygier, 2017). Where parties are programmatically well-defined, newcomers' options may lie primarily on one side of the ideological spectrum, such as Indigenous communities and Muslim immigrants on the left (Aktürk and Katliarou, 2021; Dancygier, 2017; Van Cott, 2005), or evangelicals on the right, at least during a period when sexuality politics has been their major political cause. Established parties that reach out and form programmatic bonds with new constituencies, such as the alliance between US evangelicals and the Republican Party starting in the late 1970s, may offer extensive and long-lasting opportunities for political representation (Layman, 2001). Yet in other cases, the political establishment may be more wary of newcomers – even those who are ideologically akin – because of discrimination or a reluctance to take up their causes.

Fragmented and less programmatic party systems, like those found in most Latin American countries, offer opportunities and potential pitfalls of a different sort. Multiparty systems, especially those with high levels of fragmentation, imply numerous legislative lists in each election and more opportunities to get on the ballot (Bloemraad and Schönwälder, 2013). Where party switching is permitted, fragmentation provides ample

opportunities to change affiliations once in office and run for reelection on a new ticket, a potentially useful option provided that the politician has sufficient personal appeal. Fragmentation may also make it easier for politically ambitious outsiders to form new, viable parties themselves, either because of permissive registration requirements (strictly speaking, a cause rather than an effect of fragmentation) or because the effective threshold for winning office is lower. In less programmatic party systems, a larger share of established parties may welcome any and all candidates who can bring in votes and material resources, regardless of their ideological leanings or policy preferences. And where the partisan Left or Right is not already dominated by a well-organized political establishment, new parties on that side of the ideological spectrum are more likely to gain traction. In Bolivia, Indigenous parties experienced little success until established Left parties collapsed in the 1990s, paving the way for mobilizing voters along ethnic rather than class lines (Van Cott, 2005).

Yet weakly institutionalized, fragmented, and less programmatic party systems offer more fleeting options for the political representation of minority groups. Weak institutionalization makes it easier for minority groups to form new parties but also for those parties to collapse in the future. And without strong programmatic commitments between established parties and minority constituencies, ballot access and voter support may not last more than a single electoral cycle.

Party and electoral systems have featured prominently in existing explanations for differences in evangelical political representation across Brazil, Chile, and Peru. OLPR with high district magnitude is a common explanation for why evangelicals are so well represented in Brazil (Freston, 1993*b*, 2001, 2008; Gaskill, 2002), and it has also been seen as facilitating their political ambitions in Peru (Lecaros, 2016, 109). Meanwhile, Chile's much lower district magnitude is thought to have stymied evangelicals' electoral prospects (Fediakova and Parker, 2006). Likewise, Brazil and Peru's fragmented, weakly institutionalized, and largely nonprogrammatic party systems have been considered favorable to evangelicals getting on established party lists as well as forming their own parties (Freston, 1993*b*; López Rodríguez, 2004; Pérez Guadalupe, 2017; Willems, 1967). By contrast, Chile's institutionalized and ideologically structured party system is often seen as an impediment to evangelicals' electoral prospects, making it difficult to break into the political establishment (Fediakova, 2002; Fediakova and Parker, 2006; Freston, 2001; Willems, 1967).

In this book, I argue that variation in political institutions offers a partial but incomplete explanation for differences in evangelicals' descriptive representation across Latin America. Most institutional explanations for the representation of minority groups – whether Latin American evangelicals, European Muslims, or others – rely on the implicit assumption that groups differ only in terms of the barriers to representation, not whether they seek it in the first place. Yet the motivation to participate in electoral politics is logically prior to the question of whether party and electoral systems facilitate or restrain these ambitions. The comparative historical analysis that I present in this book – outlined theoretically in the next section and developed empirically in Chapters 3–6 – focuses centrally on this question of how evangelicals' motivations to enter the electoral sphere vary across countries and over time in response to perceived threats to their interests and identities.

#### 1.4 A THEORY OF RELIGIOUS MINORITY REPRESENTATION

The theory I develop in this book seeks to marry the comparative historical approach of many political science studies of the Catholic Church or other hegemonic religious organizations (Gill, 1998; Gould, 1999; Grzymała-Busse, 2015; Kalyvas, 1996; Hagopian, 2008; Hale, 2018; Mantilla, 2021; Trejo, 2012; Warner, 2000) with the emphasis on marginalized populations that is inherent in the literature on minority group representation. In contrast to the Catholic Church, whose involvement in politics historically sought to preserve its privileged position in society, most religious minorities initially contemplate the political world as outsiders, excluded from both electoral and nonelectoral channels of influence. Assumptions about what motivates a dominant religious organization to flex its political muscles in order to retain influence do not necessarily apply to newcomers who, if they choose to enter the political sphere, would be seeking a seat at the table for the first time.

By the same token, one also cannot assume that religious minorities are equally motivated to seek political representation in the first place. History is full of persecuted religious groups that primarily chose “exit” over “voice” (Hirschman, 1970) within their country of origin, including European Jews, English Puritans, and Indian Sikhs. Often, the strongest desire of religious minorities is simply to be left alone. And socioeconomic marginalization – a characteristic of many religious minorities – can compound these incentives. In Lalive d'Épinay's (1969) classic argument



about Pentecostalism in Chile, religion served as a refuge from worldly concerns, leading congregants to withdraw from society rather than engage with it. Pentecostal churches, with their vertical structure of authority centered on the all-powerful pastor, were seen as reproducing the social relations of rural clientelism, in which a subservient population was politically quiescent and dependent on the local landlord.

My analysis thus looks centrally at the historical process by which religious group identity is or is not translated into a political identity that can motivate involvement in electoral politics. Ideas and interests both play a key role in this process. While theology is hardly determinative of a religious group's political goals, it provides an important initial predisposition. Politically ambitious pastors may be able to lead their flock into the voting booth, and they may cite or reinterpret scripture to justify their moves, but this task is easier if their denomination's traditional theology endorses political participation than if it condemns the political world as a place of sin. Against this backdrop, perceived threats to both interests and identities can motivate a minority group's involvement in electoral politics, potentially overcoming an initial theological disinclination to participate. Yet cleavages within the religious minority community, which are typically interest- as well as idea-based, can also serve as a brake on this process of political mobilization.

#### 1.4.1 Theology

Theology is perhaps the classic explanation for religious groups' motivations to enter the political sphere. Weber (1993, 166) drew a distinction between world-rejecting asceticism, which encourages believers to distance themselves from a world of sin, and inner-worldly asceticism, in which they are called upon to transform the world through political and social action. Some religions incorporate a rejection of politics (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses) or secular society more generally (e.g., the Amish) into their theology (Knox, 2018; Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner and Nolt, 2013). Others, such as Quakers, have beliefs that encourage social and political activism (Hamm, 2003). Political theology can also vary within broader faith communities, both geographically and over time. For example, traditional Buddhism encourages quiescence, but the newer Engaged Buddhism movement promotes political and social activism to transform the world (King, 2009; Philpott, 2007; Queen, 2012; Queen and King, 1996).

I argue that theology provides an important starting point for the question of Latin American evangelicals' participation in electoral politics. As explained in Chapter 3, the mainline Protestant view of the nineteenth century saw public engagement and political activity as a social expression of the Gospel, but the emergence of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century challenged this position. In the premillennial theology that prevailed among Pentecostals, the second coming of Christ was imminent, and Christ's return would destroy all forces of evil in the world, initiating a 1,000-year reign of peace and prosperity. The world was thus conceptualized as a mere "waiting room" for the afterlife (Pérez Guadalupe, 2018, 37), and engagement with politics was seen as a pointless distraction from the principal task of evangelization (Campos, 2010; Carvalho, 2015; Ortiz, 2012; Pérez Guadalupe, 2018).

Some scholars have attributed evangelicals' political ambitions to neo-Pentecostalism, whose very different view of the end of the world is more favorable to participation in public life. Neo-Pentecostal denominations like Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God revived an older view, postmillennialism, which held that Christ would return after the 1,000-year period of peace and prosperity, not before. Christians were thus tasked with building the "Kingdom of God on earth," including preparing the political terrain for the Second Coming (Campos, 2010; Pérez Guadalupe, 2018). Contemporary Pentecostal churches, including those without the "neo" qualifier, may also encourage political participation by emphasizing individuals' self-efficacy and capacity to bring about positive change in the world, even if not in an explicitly political sense (McClendon and Riedl, 2019).

Theology certainly carries great import for the worldview of religious groups, but it is hardly determinative of political ambitions. On the contrary, a religious community's political theology is potentially endogenous to the preferences of members or leaders, and religious actors often interpret scripture to comport with their political goals, rather than the other way around (Grzymala-Busse, 2012; Margolis, 2018; Menchik, 2018; Philpott, 2007). As with many topics, the Bible hardly conveys a single, unambiguous message about engagement with secular politics. Traditional Pentecostal theology may discourage political participation, but it also grants substantial authority to divine revelation and individual pastors, potentially giving clergy leeway to redefine and reinterpret biblical texts (Gaskill, 2002).

There are numerous examples of Christian denominations whose political theology shifted over time, or of different religious leaders using the

Bible to argue both for and against engagement. Romans 13, Paul's call for Christians to submit to governing authorities, is commonly cited by Pentecostal leaders who oppose political participation or advocate allegiance to authoritarian regimes (Mancilla, 1975; Pérez González, 2015; Pizarro Rojas, 2015). Yet others have argued – sometimes citing this same passage – that Christians are obligated to participate in politics to shape the laws that they will be bound by (Bertho, 2002; Chile Pentecostal, 1961*a*; Sylvestre, 1986), or that they owe no obedience to governments that go against the will of God (Albano, 2013). Romans 13 was even cited by organizers of National Restoration, an evangelical political party in Peru, in a letter to clergy seeking their support for the incipient movement (Rosas et al., 2000). For every argument that the political world is a place of sin and that evangelicals should stay away from it, there are others citing the mandate from the Gospel of Matthew to be “salt of the earth” (that is, preserve what is in danger of rotting) and “light of the world” and not hide one's light “under a bushel” (Cooper, 2011; Couto, 1985). Jewish and Christian history also provide examples to support arguments on both sides: those who favor mixing religion and politics cite Daniel, David, and Esther as examples of divinely inspired political leaders (Mensajeiro da Paz, 2001*a*; Renacimiento, 1945*b*), while those who are opposed mention the decline of the early Christian Church after the fusion of church and state under Roman Emperor Constantine (Abner de Jesus, 1982; Couto, 1994*a*).

Theology thus provides a useful starting point for thinking about the politicization of religious minorities. However, influences from outside of their immediate communities of faith can potentially shift attitudes toward political participation, prompting a reinterpretation of theological dictums about politics.

#### 1.4.2 Threats

Shared grievances are a factor that routinely transforms group identities into political identities that can prompt members to participate in politics to achieve common aims. If group members are satisfied with the status quo and no issues of concern are at stake in domestic political battles, they are unlikely to be drawn into electoral politics, especially if theology and socioeconomic factors make them initially disinclined to participate. Among once-isolated religious minorities, those that have largely been left alone by mainstream society, such as the Amish, have retained an apolitical stance, whereas those that have historically suffered persecution, such

as Mormons, have been much more inclined to participate (Perry and Cronin, 2012; Campbell, Green and Monson, 2014).

Threats have a particularly powerful ability to mobilize political participation among initially reluctant communities. Prospect theory argues that people react differently to the threat of losses than the prospect of gains and that they are more likely to take risks to recoup or avoid losses (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Threats have been shown to motivate individual-level political participation (Campbell, 2003; Miller and Krosnick, 2004), and the prospect of losses can also mobilize interest groups to organize politically to defend the status quo (Pierson, 1996). Perceived threats – both symbolic and material – contribute to the formation of in-group solidarity (Huddy, 2013), and they can politicize previously apolitical groups, seen most tragically in instances of ethnic conflict and genocide such as Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Gagnon, 2013; McDoom, 2012).

As discussed above, threats to material interests feature prominently in existing explanations for the political mobilization of religious groups. In many European countries, the Catholic Church's political reaction to liberal, anticlerical reform efforts led eventually (albeit unintentionally) to the creation of Christian Democratic parties (Kalyvas, 1996). In Turkey, regulation of Islamic organizations by an assertively secular state has prompted backlash and political mobilization in recent decades, facilitating the rise of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (Mantilla, 2021). When confronted with Protestant competition for believers in Latin America, the Catholic Church supported grassroots-level progressive activism both within and outside of its institutional structure (Gill, 1998; Hale, 2018; Trejo, 2012). In the United States, the rise of the Christian Right in the late 1970s was a direct response to the threat of religious educational institutions losing their tax-exempt status if they continued to discriminate on the basis of race (Balmer, 2006). And as evangelicals shifted en masse to the Republican Party under the Reagan Administration, Jewish Americans perceived a threat to the country's historical commitment to secularism, triggering "almost immediate resistance and countermobilization" (Wald, 2019, 161).

Threats to the material interests of religious minorities have a particularly strong capacity to mobilize political reactions because they often imperil a group's ability to practice its faith and compete for believers in the religious marketplace. Material threats include, first and foremost, laws that challenge or restrict the freedom to worship or proselytize. Legal privileges granted to powerful religious competitors, such as mandatory

Catholic education in public schools in Latin America, can effectively pose material threats as well if they limit the ability of religious minorities to compete for believers. Nonenforcement of religious freedom legislation can also pose a material threat if it allows authorities to discriminate against religious minorities without sanction. Finally, extralegal threats can fall into the material category, such as mob violence against religious minorities in which law enforcement does little to intervene. If the threat of regulation by a secular or liberalizing state can pull even dominant religious organizations into partisan politics, material threats definitely have the potential to do the same for religious minorities, since such threats are typically posed by the state acting in alliance with the dominant religious actor.

The mobilization of religious minorities in response to material threats bears much in common with interest-based arguments in the religion and politics literature, including the religious economy approach. Yet Latin American evangelicals are often not as strategic as the Catholic Church in such cases, and a firm seeking to defend or expand its market share is not the best metaphor. Rather, we see instances of evangelicals mobilizing electorally to defend against material threats even when doing so is essentially hopeless, as with Brazilian evangelicals' efforts in the 1933 Constituent Assembly election, where they confronted a powerful Catholic Church that was aligned with the government. Cold calculation is hardly foreign to Latin American evangelicals; Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which switched from enemy to ally of the leftist Workers' Party once it seemed destined to win power in the 2000s, is one prominent example. Yet material threats serve more to politicize a group identity – which may then lead religious actors into electoral politics – than to prompt firm-like thinking about the costs and benefits of entering the political sphere.

My argument also moves beyond existing threat-based analyses of religio-political mobilization by focusing on a second, ideational category: worldview threats. In contrast to material threats, worldview threats involve changes in the degree to which the core values of a religious group are shared more broadly in society, beyond their immediate community. Religious people of all sorts tend to hold more conservative positions with respect to gender, sexuality, and the family (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). The conservative worldview of religious minorities is challenged not by the strength of more powerful religious competitors, who often adopt similar positions on these issues, but rather by the growth of the religiously unaffiliated and of secular attitudes in broader society, which

has prompted a shift in recent decades toward more liberal policies on abortion, same-sex marriage, and related issues.

Worldview threats to religious minorities are primarily idea-based; as such, they fall outside of the scope of political science studies in the religious economy tradition that are focused on the calculation of material interests. Same-sex marriage and legal abortion do not imperil a religious organization's right to worship as it chooses and to characterize these practices as sinful to its members. For strategic reasons, conservative religious actors often portray progressive legislation, such as laws that prohibit businesses from discriminating against LGBTQ people, as an assault on religious freedom. Some also charge that anti-discrimination provisions could force them to celebrate same-sex marriages in their sanctuaries, though such concerns are generally unfounded. Yet policies with no bearing on the right to discriminate, such as abortion legislation or the treatment of gender and sexuality in public school curricula, have prompted similar levels of electoral mobilization. If progressive social trends challenge religious minorities' ability to retain members or recruit new ones, they might be seen as indirectly bearing upon material interests (Smith, 2019*b*). Yet social and theological conservatism in the face of advancing liberalism has generally been a boon for Protestant church membership; such denominations have been growing rapidly, while more liberal, mainline Protestant churches have seen stagnation or decline (Finke and Stark, 2005; Haskell, Flatt and Burgoyne, 2016; Iannaccone, 1994).

Political mobilization in response to worldview threats parallels arguments about the growth of fundamentalism, including revised secularization theory. Yet these arguments generally identify secularism or modernity themselves as a sufficient threat to prompt a political backlash by conservative religious actors. By contrast, I argue that evangelicals respond politically to specific policy initiatives, such as bills to legalize same-sex partnerships or expand access to abortion, and not to a more general sense of growing secularism or progressive social change. This theoretical approach helps explain evangelicals' limited and late-stage electoral mobilization in Chile, where the ranks of the irreligious have grown steadily for decades (Bargsted and De la Cerda, 2019; Valenzuela, Bargsted and Somma, 2013), but major sexuality politics legislation did not hit the political agenda until the 2010s.

In terms of specific policies, my analysis focuses on the areas of religious equality and sexuality politics. Under religious equality, I consider laws that govern the right to believe, worship, and proselytize the faith of

one's choosing; issues of church–state separation with respect to major life events and processes, such as civil marriage and secular public education; and equality across faiths in the laws that confer privileges or obligations upon religious organizations, including taxation, subsidies, regulatory oversight, and church–state partnerships in the delivery of social services. Sexuality politics bundles together issues related to gender, sexuality, and the family, including abortion, same-sex marriage or civil unions, transgender rights, nondiscrimination on the basis of LGBTQ status, and the treatment of gender and sexuality in public school curricula.

Evangelicals in Latin America are not uniformly conservative actors – in many respects, their issue attitudes do not differ significantly from those of their fellow citizens – but they do tend to hold more right-wing attitudes on sexuality politics issues. Figure 1.3 uses data from

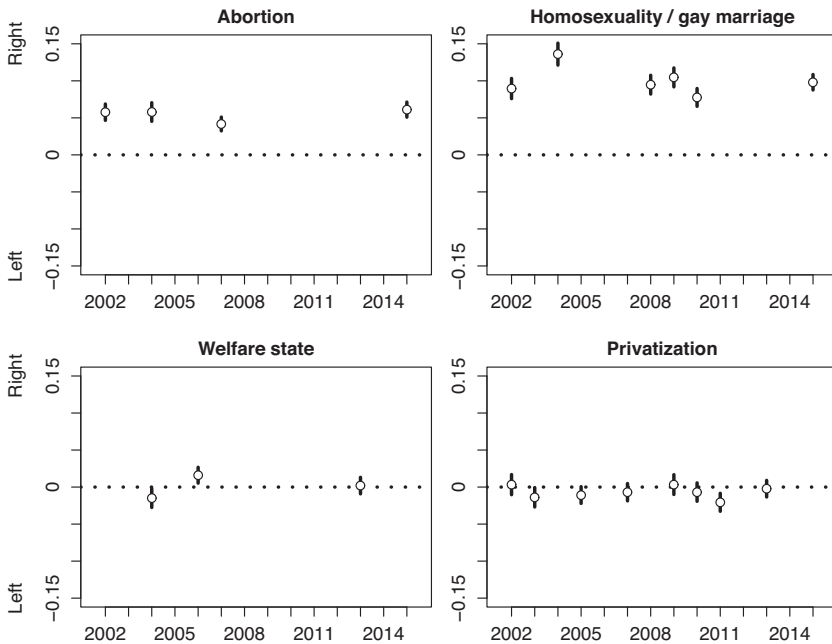


FIGURE 1.3 Evangelical versus nonevangelical issue positions

Note: Dots give mean differences between issue positions of evangelicals and nonevangelicals; lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. Each item is rescaled 0–1, with higher numbers corresponding to the right-wing position. Data are from the Latinobarómetro surveys, pooling all countries. The 2002, 2004, 2008, and 2009 surveys measure approval or disapproval of homosexuality; the 2010 and 2015 surveys ask about same-sex marriage. All other questions remain the same across waves.

Latinobarómetro surveys in the 2000s and 2010s to examine whether evangelicals across the region stand out in terms of their attitudes toward abortion, homosexuality/same-sex marriage, the welfare state, and privatization. On economic issues, evangelicals are almost always indistinguishable from those of other religious beliefs, but on attitudes toward abortion and homosexuality or same-sex marriage, they are always significantly to the right.

Latin American evangelicals care about other issues besides religious equality and sexuality politics, including the environment, crime, and corruption. They take positions on this broader range of issues both as a matter of faith (e.g., Smith and Veldman, 2020) and also as citizens whose opinions and concerns are not uniquely determined by their religion. Evangelical politicians, clergy, and the public may also care about particularistic benefits for themselves and their churches, such as a broadcasting license for a church-owned television station or a building permit for a new mega-temple. Yet religious equality and sexuality politics are the issues that have consistently had the capacity to draw initially reluctant religious actors into the political arena. Once there, they may discover a broader set of reasons to remain.

### 1.4.3 Cleavages

Shared grievances have the potential to politicize group identity, but significant subgroup cleavages can serve as a brake upon this process. If group members are engaged in internecine battles, they are less likely to unite to fight common ones. In Andean countries with large Indigenous populations such as Bolivia and Ecuador, the formation of successful Indigenous political parties required overcoming ethnic, ideological, and regional cleavages in order to forge a common electoral front (Van Cott, 2005). If the cleavages that divide an identity group are also salient for broader national politics, pursuing common interests through the political process should be particularly difficult. Just as cross-cutting cleavages reduce ethnic voting and ethnic conflict (Chandra, 2006; Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Posner, 2005), they are likely to diminish the salience of religious group identity.

Protestantism is internally diverse, and in any given Latin American country, evangelicals will be divided among a number of distinct churches. In the 2014 Pew Survey on Religion in Latin America, the average effective number of Protestant denominations was 6.1 across the



18 countries of Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some large denominations, such as the Assemblies of God in Brazil, are internally divided into several distinct factions. Different Protestant churches have distinct histories, theological orientations, styles of worship, and demographic characteristics of their congregations. They compete with one another for members, and their leaders may have personal rivalries. At times, they may have competing policy interests – for example, state partnerships with one religious organization at the expense of others.

Yet the numerous divides among different evangelical churches are not necessarily a barrier to pursuing those political interests that they do have in common. Evangelicals need not unite in a single political party in order to get elected; indeed, they have been most successful when running on the lists of nonconfessional parties. Once in office, they can easily form a caucus that coordinates votes on issues of common concern, such as religious equality or sexuality politics, while remaining free to vote their party or church's preference on other legislation. In many countries, evangelicals have even cooperated with conservative Catholics, their historical adversaries, in a shared effort to block progressive laws on gender and sexuality.

In contrast to denominational divides, cleavages of relevance for national politics constitute deeper fissures. By cutting across the religious landscape, they have the potential to displace political mobilization around shared interests and identity by sowing distrust and conflict among different factions of the evangelical community.

#### 1.4.4 A Critical Junctures Explanation

In contrast to the formal institutionalist bent of the literature on minority descriptive representation and existing arguments about evangelicals' electoral presence in Latin America, my argument is a historical institutionalist one that examines the process by which a religious group identity is transformed into a political identity over time. In particular,

<sup>8</sup> The effective number of Protestant denominations, an adaptation of the effective number of parties measure in political science (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979), is calculated as  $1/\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2$ , where  $p_i$  represents each denomination's share of a country's Protestant population. It produces a count of denominations weighted by their size. The figure of 6.1 is an underestimate, however, since Pew uses residual categories to group together smaller denominations.

TABLE 1.1 *Summary of the argument*

	Critical juncture 1: liberal reform	Critical juncture 2: sexuality politics	Intra-evangelical divides	Result
Question	Does Catholic reaction pose a threat to evangelicals?	Who is better positioned to defend social conservatism?	Do they coincide with broader political cleavages?	Evangelical political mobilization
Brazil	Yes	Evangelicals	No	High
Chile	No	Catholics	Not after 1990s	Low
Peru	Yes	Catholics (initially)	Yes	Moderate

I adopt a critical junctures framework (Collier and Collier, 1991; Collier and Munck, 2022), focusing on two distinct historical moments in which Brazil, Chile, and Peru moved in different directions in terms of evangelicals' engagement with electoral politics. The overall comparative historical argument is summarized in Table 1.1.

The first critical juncture concerns Catholic reactions to disestablishment or significant liberal reform in the early twentieth century. In most of Latin America, a Catholic Church that was virtually synonymous with the state during the colonial period was increasingly challenged by the rising tide of liberalism in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As they gained power through elections or military force, liberal reformers oversaw constitutional rewrites or revisions that either disestablished the Catholic Church (in Brazil in 1891 and Chile in 1925) or guaranteed freedom of worship to religious minorities (in Peru in 1915). Yet the Catholic Church did not always accept its diminished status without a fight. Where an aggrieved Catholic Church sought to recoup lost privileges in the decades following liberal reform – in Brazil, and to a lesser extent, in Peru – evangelicals perceived significant threats to their basic material interests, and they responded with electoral mobilization. The extent of such mobilization depended both on the size of the evangelical population – smaller in Peru, especially at mid-century – and on opportunities to elect representatives to constituent assemblies, where basic issues of church–state relations are most commonly hashed out. By contrast, the Catholic Church in Chile was much more accepting of disestablishment

and did not make a major push to regain legal privileges at the expense of religious minorities. As a consequence, evangelical churches perceived few material threats, and they mostly retained their traditional distance from electoral politics.

The second critical juncture concerns the political position of evangelicals versus Catholics when sexuality politics arrived on the agenda in a serious fashion, starting in the 1980s in Brazil. In contrast to the question of religious equality, in which the interests of evangelicals and the Catholic Church are almost always in conflict with one another, the two major branches of Christianity are more closely aligned on issues of abortion, same-sex partnerships and other LGBTQ rights, and policies regarding gender and the family. Here, most churches and religiously observant politicians are potential allies in a shared effort to defend a socially conservative worldview. Hence, the degree to which evangelicals perceive major worldview threats and mobilize politically against progressive policy initiatives depends to a significant extent on whether conservative Catholics are already well positioned to lead this battle. In Brazil, sexuality politics arrived on the political agenda early, starting with the 1987–1988 Constituent Assembly, at a time when evangelicals were better represented than conservative Catholics thanks to their prior mobilization to defend religious equality. Hence, evangelicals took the lead in a shared effort to oppose progressive change on abortion, LGBTQ rights, and related issues. In Chile, sexuality politics issues arose in a serious fashion only in the 2010s, and conservative Catholics were much better represented in Congress thanks to their leadership of the right-wing party Independent Democratic Union (Unión Demócrata Independiente, UDI). In Peru, Catholics were initially better positioned to take the lead in sexuality politics battles, but their weak partisan intermediation allowed evangelicals to play an increasingly important role in the 2010s. Hence, evangelical electoral mobilization around these issues has been extensive in Brazil, minimal in Chile, and moderate in Peru.

Data from the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA) surveys from the University of Salamanca underscore differences in the strength of conservative Catholics within each country's legislature. During 2010–2011, 44 percent of Chilean legislators self-identified as Catholic and were strongly opposed to both same-sex marriage and abortion (self-placement of 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale). In Peru, the figure was 23 percent; in Brazil, it was only 12 percent. Given these differences, Chilean evangelicals have most readily been able to oppose progressive sexuality

politics reform by supporting existing conservative Catholic legislators, whereas Brazil's evangelicals have needed to take the lead in these same battles.

While the manifestation of material and worldview threats are the main independent variables in my argument, cleavages also play a significant role as a potential brake on evangelical electoral mobilization. In particular, I focus on a common cleavage that historically divided both evangelicals and the broader public in Brazil, Chile, and Peru: support for or opposition to authoritarian rule. In Chile, the repressive Pinochet regime split the evangelical community, but the salience of these divisions faded after the 1990 transition to democracy, so cleavages have not been an impediment to uniting around shared interests in recent decades. In Brazil, divisions within the evangelical community were more personalistic than ideological or theological, both during and after military rule, so they likewise have not distracted evangelicals from fighting common battles. Nor have Brazilian evangelicals meaningfully split along the Workers' Party (PT) versus Bolsonaro divide in more recent years. But in Peru, a largely unified evangelical community (including during the period of military rule in the 1970s) grew increasingly divided in the 1990s and 2000s over support for or opposition to Alberto Fujimori and his legacy. This highly salient internecine cleavage limited efforts to mobilize in response to perceived threats and led different factions of evangelicals to characterize each other's electoral efforts as an inappropriate mixing of religion and politics.

Threats as a principal cause of evangelical political mobilization should be distinguished from an alternative model in which politically ambitious religious entrepreneurs seek to mobilize followers by whatever means will work – emphasizing religious equality, sexuality politics, or a different set of issues – and other religious actors subsequently respond to these competitive pressures. In this alternative explanation, political ambitions rather than threats are the key causal variable. It is akin to the “garbage can model” of decision-making from organizational sociology (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972), in which actors have solutions – political mobilization, in this case – and are looking for problems to respond to. As I discuss in Chapters 4–6, politically ambitious religious entrepreneurs certainly play a key role in some instances of evangelical mobilization, as do efforts to respond to prior mobilization by other churches. Yet in the absence of salient threats, such efforts have generally fallen flat, as is demonstrated by the case of

Chile. Nor do first movers always maintain prior levels of mobilization after threats subside or cleavages divide, as illustrated by Brazil and Peru.

#### 1.4.5 Voting Behavior: An Alternative Explanation

If members of a religious minority group are motivated to seek representation – the main focus of my argument – and can find positions on the ballot – the main focus of the institutionalist literature – the final necessary ingredient is winning votes. Voting behavior is thus central to the political representation of religious minorities. If candidates from these groups are more or less likely to win support than similar politicians of other faiths, voting behavior matters for their ability to place members in office. And if the effect of candidate religion on voting behavior varies cross-nationally, voting behavior is a potential explanation for why religious minorities are better represented in some countries than in others.

Social identity theory argues that, all else equal, voters are more likely to favor a candidate with whom they share a politically salient group identity such as religion, thanks to the psychic benefit that it provides and the intrinsic sense of attachment to members of one's "team" (McDermott, 2009*b*; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). If the political salience of group identity varies across countries or religious groups within a country, we might expect the strength of in-group voting effects to vary as well. A candidate's group membership can also serve as a heuristic, offering voters who do not know them well some insight into their likely policy positions (Campbell, Green and Layman, 2011; McDermott, 2007, 2009*a*). To the extent that a religious community is organized as an interest group with a clear set of policy preferences, co-religion should signal to in-group members that a candidate is prepared to defend causes that they presumably share.

Voting behavior for evangelical candidates is both a rival and a complementary explanation for my main argument about evangelicals' motivations to participate in electoral politics. If the evangelical public differs cross-nationally in its willingness to vote for *any* coreligionist candidates who might run for office, evangelicals' motivations to contest elections may not matter so much. In Brazil, a variety of studies have shown that evangelicals are more likely than those of other faiths to vote for a coreligionist candidate when one is on the ballot (Bohn, 2004, 2007; Gaskill, 2002; Smith, 2019*b*). Yet there is less evidence of a similar phenomenon in other countries, and some scholars have expressed skepticism

that evangelicals are as willing to vote for coreligionists in the rest of Latin America as they are in Brazil (Barrera Rivera, 2006; Dary, 2018; Delgado-Molina, 2019; Fediakova, 2014; López Rodríguez, 2004, 2008; Nevache, 2018; Pérez Guadalupe, 2017, 2018, 2020; Sandoval, 2018; Smith and Grenfell, 1999). In Chapter 2, I address this question of evangelicals' abstract preference for an evangelical over a Catholic candidate using a candidate choice conjoint experiment administered via online surveys in each country.

Beyond their willingness to vote for coreligionists in principle, evangelical voters might differ cross-nationally in their support for evangelical candidates in practice. Voting behavior in real rather than hypothetical elections is more a complementary than a rival explanation because the specific evangelical candidates who run for office, the political parties they join, and the issues they emphasize during campaigns are all endogenous to how evangelicals have mobilized politically in response to material threats, worldview threats, and internal cleavages. Evangelical voters might want to support a fellow believer but be unenthused about the particular evangelical candidates that end up on the ballot. Alternatively, those who have reservations about supporting coreligionists in the abstract might be persuaded by those who actually get a chance to campaign for their support. In addition to the conjoint experiment, Chapter 2 also examines evidence of in-group voting in real elections via an ecological analysis of evangelical population and support for evangelical candidates in each country.

### 1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

This book is a work of comparative historical analysis in which I use a diverse array of methodological approaches to build the argument within as well as across cases. At a macro-level, the book is a small-N case comparison; I seek to explain differences in evangelicals' descriptive representation across three countries in South America. Chapters 3–6, which develop this historical argument, are primarily qualitative, drawing on sources of evidence such as secondary literature, content analysis of official church publications, and interviews with evangelical politicians. Here, I use process tracing to draw out the implications of specific threats to the evangelical community that influenced their stance vis-à-vis electoral politics in each country. Before delving into the historical argument, Chapter 2 takes on existing explanations, primarily via a large-N, quantitative approach. Here I leverage survey experiments, electoral results,

TABLE 1.2 *Evangelical population in Latin America (percent)*

Country	Average	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
<b>North/Central America</b>								
Guatemala	38.2	34.3	31.3	39.0	37.3	41.1	42.6	41.4
El Salvador	36.0	33.4	31.8	35.9	37.8	40.1	32.5	40.2
Nicaragua	34.4	22.6	28.2	35.9	38.4	38.3	37.7	40.0
Honduras	34.4	30.3	19.5	37.3	37.1	39.3	25.6	51.3
Dominican Republic	23.9	20.1	20.2	23.5	23.1	23.7	27.6	29.1
Panama	22.8	15.7	14.9	23.6	31.1	14.8	26.4	33.3
Costa Rica	22.5	16.4	20.8	26.3	21.8	18.4	25.6	27.9
Mexico	7.7	7.9	5.6	9.1	7.9	5.9	8.7	9.1
<b>South America</b>								
Brazil	25.6	17.0	19.5	26.1	24.7	30.6	31.5	30.1
Bolivia	17.7	20.0	12.1	13.9	16.0	18.7	21.3	22.1
Chile	17.6	18.9	15.8	17.4	14.7	14.8	20.8	20.6
Peru	13.9	14.3	12.5	13.7	14.1	14.6	14.6	13.3
Colombia	12.8	11.1	9.8	13.8	15.1	12.4	9.8	17.5
Ecuador	12.6	10.6	8.7	14.6	10.9	11.6	13.9	18.1
Venezuela	11.7	11.9	5.9	10.1	10.9	15.7	15.5	
Uruguay	11.2	13.6	8.1	10.6	11.5	12.3	10.8	11.3
Argentina	11.0		4.2	8.7	10.6	12.2	14.4	16.1
Paraguay	9.7	9.6	8.3	8.5	10.2	9.5	10.2	11.7

*Source:* AmericasBarometer by LAPOP. Figures use sampling weights and include respondents identifying as traditional Protestant, evangelical, or Pentecostal.

and census data from each country to examine the degree to which voting behavior and political institutions help explain cross-national differences in evangelicals' descriptive representation.

### 1.5.1 Case Selection

The goal of this book is to explain differences in evangelicals' descriptive representation across some of the most heavily evangelical countries in Latin America. Sizable evangelical populations ensure that differences in representation are not merely a function of numbers and electoral potential. In the AmericasBarometer surveys from 2006 to 2018, Brazil has the highest percent evangelical in South America (an average of 25.6 percent across these seven surveys), while Chile is third at 17.6 percent and Peru is fourth at 13.9 percent (Table 1.2). In Chapter 7, I examine how well the argument travels to three additional countries, including Guatemala, the most heavily evangelical in the region.

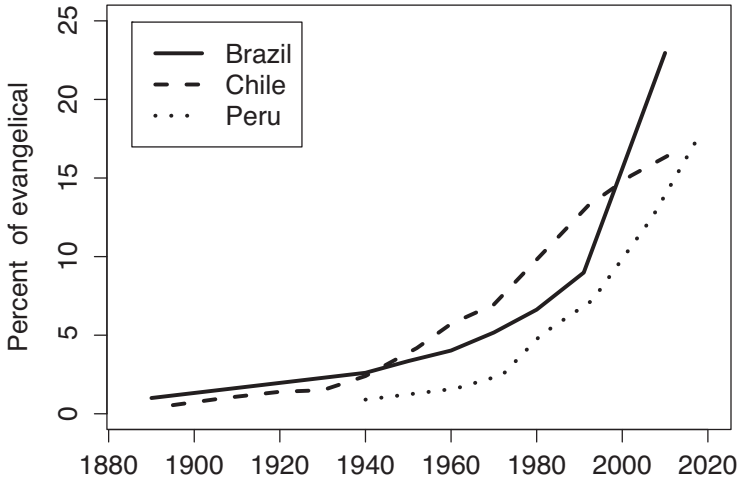


FIGURE 1.4 Evangelical population growth in Brazil, Chile, and Peru  
Source: National census data; see Appendix for details.

Brazil, Chile, and Peru are also comparable in terms of evangelical population growth over time. Figure 1.4 summarizes evangelical growth based on all censuses that have inquired about religion from the late 1800s to the present.<sup>9</sup> The growth curve has been roughly similar in all three countries, though it got a later start in Peru, and Brazil's evangelical population has grown more rapidly in recent decades.

While Brazil, Chile, and Peru are at the high end in terms of evangelicals' share of the population in South America, they span the range of the study's dependent variable, evangelicals' descriptive representation in the national legislature, as summarized in Table 1.3. In Brazil, evangelicals' legislative presence is twice that of the second-place country, Bolivia. Meanwhile, Chile is nearly tied with Paraguay at the low end of evangelical descriptive representation, and Peru is squarely in the middle of the pack. Purposively selecting cases that cover the full range of the dependent variable is an important strategy for small-N comparative research designs, where the error involved in random sampling might leave one with little variation to explain (Collier, Mahoney and Seawright, 2004; Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Religious composition as measured in the census may differ slightly from figures obtained from survey data, as summarized in Table 1.2.



TABLE 1.3 *Legislative seat shares for evangelicals in Latin America*

Central/North	Percent	South	Percent
Guatemala	18.6	Brazil	13.0
Honduras	18.1	Bolivia	6.5
Costa Rica	11.0	Ecuador	4.4
Dom. Rep.	9.1	Colombia	4.0
Panama	8.2	Peru	3.3
Nicaragua	7.9	Uruguay	2.6
El Salvador	6.5	Argentina	1.4
Mexico	2.5	Venezuela	1.2
		Chile	0.6
		Paraguay	0.5

*Source:* Parliamentary Elites in Latin America surveys, 2001–2020. Figures for each country pool all respondents across multiple waves. Those self-identifying as “Christian” are not counted as evangelical given ambiguity about where they fit; see Appendix section on evangelical politicians for further discussion of this issue.

Within each country, I focus primarily on evangelicals’ representation in the lower house of the national legislature. Most issues of special concern to evangelicals, whether related to religious equality or sexuality politics, are legislated at the national level. Given its greater number of seats, larger district magnitude, and lower effective threshold for victory, each country’s Chamber of Deputies (or Peru’s unicameral Congress from 1992 onward) is the most accessible point of entry for evangelicals seeking national-level political representation. Single-member district elections – for executive positions, and for some Senate seats in Brazil – present a much higher bar, especially for a religious minority that is not geographically concentrated in a single region. While Latin American evangelicals often dream of electing a president, and they have occasionally succeeded, conquering the highest office is unnecessary to achieve substantial political influence, as the case of Brazil amply demonstrates.

Patterns of evangelical population growth in these three countries show that evangelicals have had the potential to elect congressional representatives for some time. European Muslims, another diverse and rapidly growing religious minority, began to gain representation in national parliaments under a variety of different electoral systems in the first decade of the 2000s, when they constituted around 3–4 percent of national populations, on average (Aktürk and Katliarou, 2021; Hughes, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2017). In Chile, evangelicals reached 4 percent of the

population by 1952; in Brazil, they did so in 1960, and in Peru, they hit this mark at some point in the 1970s. Hence, by this somewhat arbitrary benchmark, evangelicals have had national electoral potential since the 1980s transitions to democracy in each country, and in Chile and Brazil, also for some years prior to military rule.

Evangelicals have had significant presence in some subnational regions of each country – the level at which representatives are chosen – for an even longer period of time.<sup>10</sup> In Chile's 1952 census, the provinces that constitute the present-day regions of Bío Bío, La Araucanía, and Los Ríos were between 4 and 10 percent evangelical, thanks to German immigration to this area. Brazil also had heavy concentrations of evangelicals in states that received large numbers of European immigrants; in 1940, Protestants accounted for more than 10 percent of the population of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. In Peru, evangelicals were 5 percent of the population of Puno in 1940, thanks largely to Seventh-Day Adventists' early missionary presence, and the central highlands Department of Pasco was 4 percent evangelical in 1961.

These subnational concentrations of evangelicals clearly facilitated early electoral gains. In Chile, the handful of Protestants elected to Congress from the late 1800s through the 1950s were almost entirely Lutherans from the south, with surnames that give evidence of German descent (Vilches, 2017). Likewise, the first evangelical elected to Congress in Peru, José Ferreira in 1956, represented the Department of Pasco.

In sum, Brazil, Chile, and Peru are all cases in which evangelicals have had sufficient numbers to potentially elect representatives for quite some time. Especially from the 1980s to the present, cross-national differences in their descriptive representation can safely be attributed to something other than being too small a religious minority to have realistic electoral ambitions.

### 1.5.2 Data Sources and Indicators

In addition to secondary literature in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, this book draws on a variety of original or primary data sources to measure and account for differences in evangelical descriptive representation across Brazil, Chile, and Peru. In this section, I describe these data sources and how they are used in the analysis.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix for maps of subnational evangelical population growth over time in each country.

### *Evangelical Politicians*

Measurement of this study's dependent variable, evangelical descriptive representation, is based on an original database of evangelical candidates and elected officials in each country. When candidates register to run for office, they do not declare their religious affiliation, so my database relies on lists of evangelical politicians that have been published by scholars and news organizations, as well as information gleaned from interviews and lists circulated on social media, such as the "Christian Politicians for Chile" Facebook group. For Brazil, I also draw on data provided by the Chamber of Deputies' Center for Documentation and Information (Centro de Documentação e Informação, CEDI), which administers surveys to all members of the lower house for each legislative session and records self-declared religion. This latter data source expands the list of Brazilian evangelical elected officials beyond those that other scholars and journalists have published, bringing in legislators who are less public about their religious affiliation. The Appendix offers additional information on the construction of this database.

While scholars and evangelical activists often debate which politicians count as "truly evangelical" – with issue positions, church attendance, date of conversion, or some other criterion used to trim the list – I take an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach based on self-identification wherever possible, and identification by scholars or journalists otherwise. My database thus includes all politicians who are evangelical in the Latin American sense – that is, they belong to any Protestant denomination, from historical/mainline to neo-Pentecostal – while all those who identify as something else are excluded. By this criterion, Brazilian President and former federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro, a social conservative who is close to evangelicals but has always described himself as Catholic, is not included on the list. I also exclude other self-identified Catholic legislators who have joined Brazil's Evangelical Parliamentary Front, presumably out of solidarity, shared issue positions, or political expediency rather than religious identity. Meanwhile, someone like Chile's Harry Jürgensen Rundshagen, a low-profile, multi-term Lutheran deputy, does appear in my database, even though many listings of evangelicals in Chile's 2018–2022 Congress include only the three outspoken, newly elected Pentecostal deputies.

Self-identification as a criterion for counting Latin American evangelicals is consistent with other scholars' approaches (Smith, 2019b), and it has practical advantages. Like Freston (2001), I avoid building institutional or denominational criteria into the definition, thus

casting a broad net. Self- or other-labeling can be problematic when one seeks to compare across regions (Freston, 2001), given that “evangelical” has different meanings in different languages and parts of the world, but the term’s connotations in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese are fairly consistent. Self-identification also ensures that the operationalization of this concept in lists of candidates and politicians is consistent with how it is measured in other data sources such as surveys and censuses, where “evangelical” is often the only Protestant option and members of particular denominations generally cannot be excluded.

Lists of elected evangelical legislators are relatively easy to come by; lists of all candidates, including those who lost, are more complicated. For Chile, where there have been relatively few evangelical candidates, I have assembled what I consider a comprehensive database that draws on interviews, publicly circulated lists, and lists compiled by other scholars. In Peru, scholars have published lists of evangelical candidates for most elections since 1978; my database incorporates all of these. I lack reliable candidate lists for the 2016, 2020, and 2021 Peruvian elections, so I exclude these from any analysis that covers both successful and unsuccessful evangelical politicians. For Brazil, given the massive number of legislative candidates in each election (around 1,000 run for Congress in the state of São Paulo alone) and the large share who are evangelical, no reliable comprehensive list of candidates exists. To identify a subset of the evangelical candidates in Brazil, I focus on those who declare their occupation as clergy (few Catholic priests run for office, given Vatican prohibitions) or use religious titles, such as “Pastor” or “Bishop,” in their official electoral names (Boas, 2014).

While my candidate databases are as comprehensive as possible, they are not complete. I am aware, for instance, of one scholar’s more comprehensive list of Peruvian evangelical candidates, including in the 2016, 2020, and 2021 elections, to which I have not been granted access. Given the differential severity of this issue across countries, I mostly avoid calculating figures with number of evangelical candidates in the denominator, such as electoral success rates, since cross-national and over-time comparisons could be biased by missing data.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The exception is in Chapter 2, where I examine how electoral success rates correlate with party and electoral system characteristics at the district level. Since the X–Y relationship is the quantity of interest, a biased intercept is of minor concern.

### *Church Publications*

The official publications of major evangelical churches in each country serve as a key source of data in Chapters 4–6. In each country, I examine the two largest evangelical denominations for which I could locate publications. In Brazil, these are the Assemblies of God and the Baptist Church, which had the most affiliates in the censuses of 2000 and 2010 as well as the 2014 Religion in Latin America survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. In Peru, I look at the Assemblies of God and Peruvian Evangelical Church (Iglesia Evangélica Peruana, IEP), which are first and third in the 2014 Pew survey and have historically been identified as the largest denominations (Freston, 2001; Gutiérrez Sánchez, 2015; Huamán, 1982; López, 1998). In Chile, I focus on the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Methodist Pentecostal Church, the major historical denominations and the top two in the 2014 Pew survey (the Methodist Pentecostal Church was tied for second with the Assemblies of God). I also examine an independent evangelical publication in Chile, *Prensa Evangélica*. The most common publication format is a monthly magazine or newspaper, though the Brazilian Baptists' *O Jornal Batista* is published weekly, and some Chilean and Peruvian publications have come out irregularly.

I use evangelical church publications both for general background information and as source material for a content analysis that tracks denominations' stances on political participation and coverage of religious equality and sexuality politics issues. The Appendix offers more information regarding the content analysis. In each publication, only a small share of articles has anything to do with politics per se; the majority are devoted to church news and theology. However, those articles that do focus on politics offer revealing patterns across countries and over time. Evangelical church publications are a useful record of the official stance of a denomination, or at least the dominant faction that controls the publishing house. One certainly should not assume that all pastors or congregants agree with the positions they put forward, but these positions are likely to be influential, making their way into the Sunday sermons of pastors who receive the publication on a regular basis.

### *Elite Interviews*

The quantity of secondary literature on evangelicals and politics in Latin America varies significantly by country. While there is a vast literature on Brazil, much less has been written about Chile and Peru. The collection of evangelical church publications available for consultation is also much

more extensive in Brazil than in Chile and Peru. For the latter cases, therefore, I also rely on a series of interviews with evangelical politicians and church leaders conducted during several short periods of fieldwork from 2015 to 2019. In Chile, I sought to interview all evangelical politicians, past or present, that I could locate and meet with in person, regardless of whether they had been elected or not. In Peru, where more evangelicals have run for office, my interviews focused on those politicians who had served in Congress. In each country, one period of interviews took place during an electoral campaign – March 2016 in Peru and October 2017 in Chile – so I was able to interview candidates and ask about dynamics that were unfolding in real time. I introduce interview evidence at various places throughout the analysis where it bears upon the question at hand, such as evangelicals' motivations for running for office, cleavages within the evangelical community, and the degree to which electoral and party systems facilitate or frustrate their efforts.

### *Electoral and Census Data*

Given this study's focus on evangelicals' electoral performance, official electoral results constitute a key source of data. In conjunction with the database of evangelical candidates, I use electoral results to score the main dependent variable, evangelical descriptive representation. I also rely heavily on these data in Chapter 2, which examines how evangelical population, electoral systems, and party systems influence evangelical politicians' prospects. All electoral results were obtained from official government repositories, either by downloading or, when necessary, web scraping.

The ecological analysis of voting for evangelical candidates in Chapter 2 combines electoral results with census data on religious affiliation, and various maps and graphs of evangelical population growth also rely on census data. Brazil, Chile, and Peru all inquire about religious affiliation in their national censuses and have done so regularly since at least the 1940s.<sup>12</sup> For more recent censuses where results are already in digital format, I obtained census figures on religious affiliation from each census agency's official data repository. For historical data, I digitized scans of official census publications obtained from government websites or interlibrary loan. The Appendix lists the sources of census data.

<sup>12</sup> Chile did not measure religion in the censuses of 1982 or 2017.

### *Conjoint Survey Experiments*

Estimating the causal effects of real-world religion using a statistically identified quantitative research design is a notoriously difficult task, notwithstanding some recent creative efforts (Costa, Marcantonio and Rocha, 2019; Rink, 2018; Tuñón, 2019). Yet experiments provide an accessible way to estimate the effect of certain aspects of religion on public opinion and voting behavior (Djupe and Smith, 2019). In Chapter 2, I analyze conjoint experiments in which respondents from each country were asked to indicate a preference between two fictional candidates with a series of randomly varying characteristics, including religion. The surveys were administered in May 2019, and respondents were recruited via Facebook advertisements, a common method for drawing samples of convenience in comparative politics (Boas, Christenson and Glick, 2020). The Appendix offers details on the recruitment of these samples, including data on representativeness.

#### 1.6 PLAN OF THE BOOK

Following upon the present chapter's theoretical introduction, the argument begins by examining existing explanations for evangelical descriptive representation in Brazil, Chile, and Peru that focus on voting behavior and political institutions (Chapter 2). Using a conjoint survey experiment, I show that evangelicals in each country have similarly strong abstract preferences for coreligionists over Catholic candidates. Turning to an ecological analysis of evangelical population share and vote for evangelical candidates, I show that a preference for fellow believers is also evident in data from real elections. I then examine whether political institutions make it easier in some countries to translate these preferences into electoral victories for evangelicals. Cross-nationally, the permissiveness of electoral and party systems covaries with evangelicals' descriptive representation in the expected direction; evangelicals have faced the fewest barriers to election in Brazil and the most in Chile, with Peru falling in between. However, subnational analysis, which controls for a number of potentially confounding national-level variables, tells a different story: party and electoral system permissiveness do not have a consistent relationship with evangelicals' access to the ballot and chances of electoral success. I conclude that, at best, existing explanations centered on voting behavior and political institutions offer a partial and incomplete explanation for cross-national variation in evangelicals' descriptive representation.

The remainder of the book turns to a comparative historical analysis, focusing on a factor that is causally prior to voting behavior and political institutions: the politicization of evangelical identity. Chapter 3 establishes a historical baseline by examining the growth and diversity of evangelical populations in Latin America since independence, focusing on theological and ideological orientations toward politics. International trends within Protestantism have all had major repercussions in the region, including turn-of-the-century Social Gospel thought, the rise of Pentecostalism, and the clash between anticommunist fundamentalism and liberation theology-influenced progressivism. During the period of military rule in Brazil, Chile, and Peru from the 1960s to the 1980s, these existing divides within Latin American Protestantism consolidated into different sorts of cleavages within each country's community of evangelicals, with implications for their willingness to pursue collective political representation after redemocratization.

Chapters 4–6 develop the comparative historical analysis for the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Peru, respectively. In Chapter 4, I argue that both the historical and the contemporary critical junctures have been favorable to the politicization of evangelical identity in Brazil. Following disestablishment, the Catholic Church consistently sought to recoup lost privileges during the twentieth century, leading evangelicals to perceive significant material threats and to mobilize electorally in response. The most dramatic example was the 1986 Constituent Assembly election, where concerns about the Catholic Church's designs during the constitution-writing process led the Assemblies of God to promote an official slate of candidates. Thanks to this mobilization to defend religious equality, evangelicals were better positioned than conservative Catholics to oppose progressive sexuality politics reform during the second critical juncture. From the late 1980s onward, and especially after 2001, issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and the treatment of gender and sexuality in school curricula have prompted a second wave of evangelical electoral mobilization.

Chapter 5 argues that both the historical and the contemporary critical junctures have put Chile on a different path, involving minimal threats and much more limited electoral ambitions. Disestablishment of the Catholic Church in the 1920s was cordial rather than conflictual, and the Church did not mobilize to recoup lost privileges during the ensuing decades, limiting evangelicals' perception of a threat. The few times that evangelicals took a stance on policy initiatives bearing upon religious equality, they were able to achieve their aims through lobbying or



mass mobilization, with no apparent need for congressional representation. Partly as a result of this limited historical mobilization, conservative Catholics have had a much stronger electoral presence than Chile's evangelicals. Hence, when sexuality politics arrived on the political agenda at a relatively late stage in the 2010s, conservative Catholics were already well positioned to lead the battle against progressive reform. World-view threats did prompt evangelicals to mobilize for the 2017 and 2021 legislative elections, 2020 plebiscite on a constitutional rewrite, and 2021 Constitutional Convention elections, but their efforts were comparatively lackluster, and they met with limited success.

In Chapter 6, I argue that Peruvian evangelicals' motivation to enter the electoral sphere has been complicated by their close association with *fujimorismo*, the personalistic movement that has emerged as one of Peru's most salient political cleavages. Evangelicals in Peru faced significant threats during both the historical and the contemporary critical junctures, and one would expect these threats to prompt a political reaction. From the 1940s through the 1980s, we do see evangelicals favoring electoral mobilization to defend the cause of religious equality. But Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian presidency from 1990 to 2000 deepened existing cleavages within the evangelical community, sowing mistrust between moderate and conservative factions of evangelicals. After redemocratization, these factions were unable to forge common ground in the pursuit of religious equality legislation, undercutting evangelicals' commitment to electing representatives. The rise of sexuality politics issues in the 2000s and 2010s did provide new incentives for conservative evangelicals to seek representation, but without the active support of the more stridently anti-Fujimori faction.

Chapter 7 steps back to a broader view of evangelicals and electoral politics in Latin America. The chapter first recaps the argument for the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Peru, focusing on theoretical insights for the study of religion and politics and institutional change. Drawing on secondary literature, I then examine the degree to which my theory explains evangelical representation in three other Latin American countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. The first two cases confirm the argument's broader applicability, while the third underscores that numerically large minority groups may have other routes to office than mobilization in response to threats, especially when group members are well represented among the economic elite. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the future of evangelical political representation in the region. Here, I consider the possibility that evangelicals' preference

for coreligionists may be fading as socially conservative Christians forge a common, interdenominational front in the culture wars. The new conservative ecumenicism also has a decidedly authoritarian bent, epitomized by the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Hence, the future of evangelical political participation in Latin America may be less explicitly evangelical, but also less democratic, than in the past.