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**THE POLITICAL ROLE OF EVANGELICALISM IN LATIN AMERICAN  
COUNTRIES: CASE STUDIES OF GUATEMALA, HONDURAS AND  
NICARAGUA**

Bachelor's thesis

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## **Abstract**

Evangelicalism is one of the fastest growing religious movements in the world. It has enjoyed massive success in non-Western countries, especially in Latin America where it has had an immense cultural and social impact. Several scholars have argued that in addition to changing the societal landscape in American countries, Evangelicalism has quite powerfully entered the political arena as well. However, the role of religion in Latin American politics is often overlooked, while it actually plays an important part in shaping the country's policies.

The aim of this research is to analyse the political activity of Evangelicals in Latin America between 1980 and 2018. A qualitative study of three countries (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), where the percentage of Evangelicals in Latin America is the highest, is carried out. To best assess the scope of religious politics in these countries, a comparative method is used. The author has based the analysis on both qualitative sources, such as official documents, and quantitative data from the Latinobarómetro Corporation and the Pew Research Center.

The results do not confirm the main hypotheses, as the levels of political activity of Evangelicals are not high in Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua where the percentage of Evangelicals is the largest. There are no existing successful Evangelical parties in these countries. As of religious state leaders, Guatemala is the only case that has had Evangelical presidents (and has one now) but their influence on Evangelical political participation has been disputed. The role of Evangelical umbrella organizations in the country's legislative process is quite influential in Guatemala and Honduras but not in Nicaragua.

Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Evangelicalism does not have a strong presence in electoral politics. However, in future research, their indirect political influence and noninstitutional political participation could be studied more thoroughly.

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## **Introduction**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political science was mostly dominated by the secularization theory, setting religion as a political factor aside (Barbato & Kratochwil 2009, 320; Philpott 2009, 184). Many scholars believed that religion's significance was diminishing and overlooked its influence in political systems (Gill 2001, 117; Klausen 2009, 289). Fortunately, political scientists are starting to turn their attention to the religion's role in politics. However, relevant scholarly works mainly focus on the politicization of religion regarding Islam in Asia and Africa and Catholicism and traditional Protestant denominations in Europe and the United States. Evangelicalism as a political driving force in non-Western countries has not drawn that much attention from academics.

Historically a Catholic continent, Latin America has seen a boom of Evangelicalism during the last few decades (Gooren 2007, 162). As of 2017, Evangelicals are believed to make up 19% of the Latin American population (Latinobarómetro 2018a, 15). Being a religious group with a huge social and cultural impact, they bring together people from all kinds of backgrounds. In addition to their social importance, they have also entered the political arena in the last years. While officially most of the countries in Latin America are secular, with religion and politics separated from one another, many authors have argued that the political influence of Evangelicalism is only growing and should not be underestimated (Patterson & Stephens 2018, 6).

The aim of this research is to analyse the roles of Evangelicalism in Latin American politics between 1980 and 2018. While there have been some scholarly works that study this subject (e.g Freston 2008), many of them have been conducted over ten years ago. During that time the religious and political composition of Latin American countries has undergone several changes. To contribute to the existing literature on the phenomenon of religious politics in Latin America, this study uses the latest data to analyse the political activity of Evangelicals in selected cases.

To better assess the role of religion in Latin American politics, three hypotheses are presented. The first hypothesis is that the electoral system and the fragmentation of the party

system affect the emergence of Evangelical parties and the latter's success. The second hypothesis claims that if a country has had an Evangelical leader, there has been a positive impact on the political activity of Evangelicals. The last hypothesis assumes that the umbrella organizations of Evangelicals are included in the state's legislature in countries with larger Evangelical percentages. To compare the political roles of Evangelicalism to the political roles of the Catholic Church in the state's electoral and legislative processes, the number of Catholic parties, the influence of Catholic state leaders on the political participation of Catholics and the political roles of the Catholic Church are given. Public views about the political participation of religious organizations and their leaders are considered.

A qualitative study of three cases – Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – is carried out. The cases are solely chosen by their religious composition since these three states are countries with the largest percentages of Evangelicals in Latin America. At first, every country's religious market structure is introduced. A short overview of history of Protestantism, the current situation of Evangelicalism and the relationship between Evangelicals and politics in these countries are given. The cases are compared to one another by using different variables, such as the number of Evangelical parties, the existence of Evangelical state leaders and the role of Evangelical organizations in the country's legislative processes.

The study is divided into two chapters: theoretical and empirical. The theoretical chapter introduces the main affiliations discussed in this study (Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, the Third Wave, Fundamentalism), describes the current situation of Evangelicalism in Latin America and gives a short overview of the possible frameworks that have been used for researching the religion's role in Latin American politics. The empirical part of the research analyses the cases of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua from a politico-religious perspective.

Since the research is solely focused on three distinctive cases in Latin America, a more comprehensive picture could be achieved by studying more countries in the region. In the future the analysis could also focus more on the capacity of Evangelical churches to shape people's political values. However, the aim of this study is not to make universal conclusions

about the role of Evangelicalism in Latin American politics but rather give an overview of specific cases.



# 1. Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework on which the research is based on. The first subchapter gives the definitions of the main religious affiliations (Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, the Third Wave and Fundamentalism) that are analysed in this study. The second part of the theoretical foundation offers a general overview of Evangelicalism and its success in Latin America. The last subchapter introduces some existing studies on the relationship between Evangelicalism and politics in Latin American countries.

## 1.1. Protestantism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism

Before analysing the relationship between religion and politics in Latin America, it is important to distinguish between different, although often overlapping concepts: Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, the Third Wave and Fundamentalism. The broadest of these terms is Protestantism being the largest denomination within Christianity. The exact figure of Protestants in the world is contested but falls usually between 500 million and 800 million people (Johnson *et al.* 2017, 42).

*Evangelicalism*<sup>1</sup> (also known as Evangelical Protestantism or Evangelical Christianity) is a subset within Protestantism that has distinct doctrines and practices (Freston 2008, 5). Evangelicalism is not a separate denomination but rather a joint definition for many different religious groups. Several researchers of Evangelical Protestantism ground their work on the “Bebbington quadrilateral”: four qualities characteristic to Evangelicalism formulated by the British historian David W. Bebbington. These features are activism (gospel needs to be globally spread), conversionism (people who are going to be baptized will spiritually be born again from the Holy Spirit), biblicism (believing that the Bible is the source of essential truth), and crucicentrism (special emphasis on the Christ’s sacrifice on the cross) (Bebbington 1989, 2).

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<sup>1</sup> The word “evangelical” comes from Greek (originating from the term “euangelion”) and means “good news” or “gospel” (the latter being used in the translation of the New Testament) (Noll 2014, 19).

The formation of Evangelicalism can be traced back to the 1730s England where it was influenced by different religious movements, such as English Puritanism, Scottish Presbyterianism, and High Church Anglicanism (Hutchinson & Wolffe 2012, 27). While many contributed to the development of Evangelicalism, there are three men whose works shaped the new religious movement the most: preacher George Whitefield, evangelist John Wesley and theologian Jonathan Edwards (Noll 2014, 27). Thanks to their efforts, Evangelical ideas began to spread in both Europe and North America. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 90% of Evangelicals lived in North America and Europe (*Ibid.*, 17). The situation, however, changed rapidly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Evangelicalism spread quickly through missionary work to Asia, Africa and Latin America (*Ibid.*).

*Classical Pentecostalism*<sup>2</sup> is a religious approach often associated with Evangelicalism that emphasizes the “gifts from the Holy Spirit”<sup>3</sup> (Pew Research Center 2006). Similar to Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism also represents many different denominations and cannot be analysed as a homogeneous movement (Anderson 2010, 10). The beginning of modern Pentecostalism can be traced back to the year 1901 when students of Bethel Bible School in Kansas started to speak in tongues (speaking in a language unknown to the speaker, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit) (Miller & Yamamori 2007, 18). Thanks to their tutor, Charles F. Parham, their beliefs spread to Houston, Texas, where a preacher named William J. Seymour started to share the Pentecostal ideas. The event became known as the Azusa Street revival (*Ibid.*). In a few years, the Pentecostal missionaries travelled all around the world and preached their gospel (*Ibid.*). Although the movement has not really spread in the West, it has enjoyed a rapid growth in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Freston 2008, 12).

*Charismatic Christianity* signifies Christians who do not label themselves Pentecostals but who have adopted some Pentecostal beliefs (such as divine healing and prophecies) (Noll 2007, 423). They usually belong to traditional Protestant denominations, to the Catholic

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<sup>2</sup> In some cases Pentecostalism is not considered to be a subset within Evangelicalism but rather an independent movement. To simplify, this study does not separate the Pentecostal affiliation from Evangelicalism.

<sup>3</sup> Gifts from the Holy Spirit include spiritual acumen, speaking in tongues, prophecies and performing miracles (Pew Research Center 2006). Since these customs are widely practiced in Pentecostal churches, their worship services are known for their expressiveness.

Church or to Evangelical denominations (*Ibid.*). In some cases, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity are researched together due to their similar practices, but there are some differences between the Charismatic movement and the classical Pentecostalism. For some Charismatics, speaking in tongues is not the only way to connect with the Spirit, as the classical Pentecostals have believed (Robbins 2004, 121). Some Charismatic churches have also abandoned the original abstinence of Pentecostalism, allowing their members to consume wine (*Ibid.*). While Pentecostals are mainly members of Protestant denominations, Charismatics can be found from Catholic and Orthodox churches as well (Pew Research Center 2011).

*The Third Wave* (sometimes also known as Neo-Pentecostalism) is a term used to describe a religious affiliation that dates back to the 1980s. The movement represents a change in traditional Protestant denominations: respecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit became popular in mainstream churches and its followers did not have to found new congregations, as did Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians (Barrett 1988, 128). The movement spread especially in English-speaking countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom where the traditional Anglican church was “revived” (Anderson 2007, 449).

*Fundamentalism* is a religious approach that has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Evangelicalism (Trollinger Jr. 2007, 344). They are usually associated with believing in biblical inerrancy and can be distinguished from Pentecostals by their hostility to gifts of the Holy Spirit (Pew Research Center 2006). They have historically had more conservative, anti-modernist views and have emphasized the “fundamental truths” of early Christianity (Noll 2014, 21). Fundamentalists are not considered Pentecostals due to their opposition to gifts of the Holy Spirit but many of them fall under the category of Evangelicals (*Ibid.*).

Aforementioned definitions are quite flexible and often overlap in academic works. To simplify, this study focuses on Evangelicalism (including Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity) and its role in politics. Other Protestant denominations are excluded because Evangelicalism is the most influential Protestant movement in Latin America. The characteristics of Evangelicalism and its subsets are given in table 1.

**Table 1. Description of Evangelicalism and its most important subsets.**

<b>Evangelicalism</b>				
<b>The Bebbington quadrilateral: activism, conversionism, biblicism and crucicentrism.</b>				
<b>Classical Pentecostalism</b>	<b>Charismatic Christianity</b>	<b>The Third Wave (Neo-Pentecostalism)</b>	<b>Fundamentalism</b>	<b>Other Evangelical denominations</b>
<p>Focusing on the gifts of the Holy Spirit</p> <p>Very expressive and spiritual church services</p> <p>Establishing new congregations</p>	<p>Have Pentecostal practices but do not belong under them</p> <p>Can be Evangelicals but also Orthodox Christians and Catholics</p>	<p>Pentecostal beliefs spread in traditional churches</p>	<p>Do not believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit</p> <p>Believe in biblical inerrancy</p> <p>Mainly conservative and traditionalist views</p>	<p>A heterogenous group of different denominations with diverse practices</p>

## **1.2. Evangelicalism in Latin America**

Latin America has mostly been Roman Catholic over the last five centuries (Patterson & Stephens 2018, 3). The boom of Evangelicalism did not start before the 1970s (Gooren 2007, 162). Since then, the religious movement has seen a massive growth in most Latin American countries while the number of Roman Catholics has diminished (Zilla 2018, 2). Only four countries have not experienced the increase in Evangelicalism: Mexico and Paraguay where the Catholic Church has a strong presence, and Chile and Uruguay where people have rather become agnostic/atheist (*Ibid.*).

The expansion of Pentecostalism in Latin America can be divided into three waves. The first phase lasted until the 1950s when Pentecostalism was mainly spread by larger denominations who originated from North America, such as the Assemblies of God and the Churches of God (Bastian 2018, 3). The second stage was characterized by the emergence of indigenous

churches in several Latin American countries (Chile, Brazil and Mexico) (*Ibid.*). The third wave is the popularization of Neo-Pentecostalism in the 1980s (*Ibid.*). The success of Neo-Pentecostalism in Latin America was determined by their skilful use of modern technology: they started to spread their gospel on mass media to mobilize as many people as possible (*Ibid.*).

Andrew Chesnut (2014) argues that there are several reasons why Evangelicalism (more specifically Pentecostalism) has become so popular in Latin America during the last few decades. The expressiveness of Pentecostal practices is more plausible for Latin American people than the rigidity of the Catholic church (Masci 2014). Some Pentecostal customs resemble Latin American folk traditions, for example, their music is similar to Latin rhythms (*Ibid.*). Pentecostal preachers are usually native Latin Americans, while several Catholic priests are members of the elite or have come from Europe, remaining distant for common citizens (*Ibid.*). Many converts have argued that Pentecostal churches have given them a sense of belonging and emotional security (Moreno 2009, 64).

Evangelicals are politically associated with more right-wing parties (Corrales 2018). Their partnership is quite a recent phenomenon: right-wing parties tended to cooperate more with the Catholic Church (*Ibid.*). Since Evangelicals are popular among the poorer classes of society and the conservative parties need the non-elite votes, they are ready to compromise with the Evangelicals (*Ibid.*). Evangelicals have also found a common ground with the Catholic Church, the latter being an important societal and political player in the region. Both movements have taken an opposing stance against the “gender ideology”, being against promoting LGBTQ-rights and gender diversity (*Ibid.*). Economically, Evangelicals support the neoliberal theorists and the idea of meritocracy (Girard 2018, 166).

### **1.3. Analysing the relationship between religion and politics in the Latin American context**

Since Latin America has been predominantly Catholic for over 500 years, several researchers have focused on the political role of the Catholic Church, using different theoretical approaches. Anthony Gill (1998) compares the actions of the Catholic Church to a market strategy, arguing that the Church's stance towards the state depends on its dominant position. If the Catholic Church has no competition, they can peacefully continue their cooperation with the political elite; however, if the Church is threatened or challenged by other religious groups, they might need to oppose the state to get the public approval (Gill 1998, 48).

The Catholic Church as an important player in the Latin American political field is also discussed by Jean Daudelin and W. E. Hewitt (1996). They compare two, sometimes opposing theoretical frameworks developed to analyse the relationship between politics and religion in Latin America. The institutional approach treats the church as an influential societal institution and focuses on its leaders and organizational structure (Daudelin & Hewitt 1996, 316). The people-ascendant approach, grounded in Marx's class theory, argues that the church acts as a cultural and political arena for poorer members of society (*Ibid.*, 320).

While the political influence of the Catholic Church is a thoroughly researched area in Latin American politics, fewer studies exist for analysing the role of Evangelicalism in the continent's politics. Many academic works that focus on Evangelical politics are over ten years old (e.g. Freston 2008). Since Evangelical groups cannot be considered a homogenous institution, such as the Catholic Church, assessing the former's impact in the country's political arena is complicated. The main variable that is usually studied is the emergence of Evangelical political parties.

One of the main contributors to assessing the religious politics in Latin America has been the British sociologist Paul Freston. His scholarly works analyse several examples of Evangelical politics in the continent (see Freston 2008). He has mainly used a comparative approach and focused on specific cases, such as Guatemala and Brazil (Freston 1998, 37).

The most researched case of the role of Evangelicalism in Latin American politics is Brazil, especially after the country's last presidential elections in 2018. 27% of the population of Brazil consider themselves Evangelicals as of 2017 (Latinobarómetro 2018a, 15). In the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the National Congress of Brazil, 15% of members are Evangelicals (Polimédio 2019). Many Evangelical and non-Evangelical politicians are also united under the Evangelical Parliamentary Front in the Congress (Câmara dos Deputados). Brazilian Evangelicals (especially Neo-Pentecostals) are believed to be behind the huge success of the newly elected president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro (Polimédio 2019).

## 2. Empirical analysis

This chapter applies the former hypotheses on three countries with the largest percentages of Evangelicals in Latin America (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). A qualitative study is carried out. The chapter is divided into five subchapters. The first chapter introduces the study's data and methodology. The following three chapters give a general overview of Evangelicalism in these countries and describe the Evangelical role in each country's politics over the last decades. The final part of this segment outlines the differences and similarities between the three cases and analyses how Evangelicalism has entered politics in these Central American countries, using the comparative method.

### 2.1. Data and methodology

To better evaluate the relationship between Evangelicalism and politics in Latin America, the author has posed three hypotheses about the political activity of Evangelicals in the legislative and electoral processes. The hypotheses consider three variables: the existence of Evangelical parties, the role of Evangelical state leaders in shaping the country's political culture, and the inclusion of religious umbrella organizations in the state's legislature (cf. table 2, page 19). To better assess the political role of Evangelicalism, the variables are compared to their Catholic counterparts: the existence of Catholic parties, the influence of Catholic state leaders on the political activity of Catholics and the role of the Catholic Church in the legislature. The public views about the political participation of Christian movements are also considered. The studied time period is from 1980 to 2018.

**Hypothesis 1: If a country has an electoral system based on proportional representation and if the party system is fragmented, the number of Evangelical parties is higher.**

The existence of Evangelical parties is largely based on how a country's electoral system is regulated. Taylor C. Boas has argued that it is easier to form an Evangelical party if the country has an electoral system based on proportional representation (Boas 2018, 15). Since Evangelicals do not usually live in a specific part of a region but are distributed through the country, Evangelical candidates or parties do not benefit from a majoritarian voting system



(*Ibid.*). Boas claims that the most beneficial system for new Evangelical parties is an open-list proportional representation with a high district magnitude (*Ibid.*). Party fragmentation is another factor that helps Evangelical parties to survive: it is easier to enter the political arena when there are no dominating parties who have achieved absolute majority in the parliament (*Ibid.*, 16). In addition to Evangelical parties, the number of Catholic political parties over the studied time period is also briefly analysed.

**Hypothesis 2: If a country has had Evangelical state leaders, their influence on the political activity of Evangelicals has been positive.**

A religious president as a state leader could have a strong influence on shaping the population's political values. Such president could also appoint members of different churches to be the state officials. The effect would probably be stronger in presidential countries but could also be noticed in parliamentary republics. The existence and impact of Catholic state leaders are also considered.

**Hypothesis 3. In countries with large Evangelical populations, Evangelical umbrella organizations are more included in the legislative process.**

While several authors (see Nieuwenhuis 2012) have argued that in an ideal pluralistic society, religious leaders should not have decision-making power in politics, there are many cases where religious institutions still play a large role in the country's legislative process. One choice for religious groups is to engage in active lobbying work in governmental organizations and indirectly influence the state's policies. In some cases, religious umbrella organizations are officially consulted by the government throughout the legislative process. The role of the Catholic Church in the country's legislature for a fixed time period is also analysed.

To test the hypotheses, a qualitative study of three countries (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) is carried out. The cases are chosen according to their large Protestant proportions. Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have the largest percentages of Evangelicals in Latin America. Evangelicalism has been present in Central America for over a century and its history in these three countries is quite homogeneous.

To study the possible emergence of Evangelical politics in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua most effectively, a comparative method is used. While the comparative analysis might have reduced capacity to eliminate rival theories, it enables to study few cases with limited resources (Lijphart 1971, 685). Several authors have argued in favour of using the comparative method while studying religion and politics because it gives a deeper understanding of their relationship from institutional and interest-based viewpoints (Gill 2001; Grzymala-Busse 2012).

**Table 2. Theoretical framework used to assess the role of Evangelicalism in the political activity of Evangelicals in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.**

<b>Percentage of Catholics (% , as of 2017)</b>	
<b>Percentage of Evangelicals (% , as of 2017)</b>	
<b>General views about the relationship between religion and the state (as of 2014)</b>	Percentage of people who believe that the government should promote religious values
	Percentage of people who believe that religious leaders should influence the state's politics
<b>Hypothesis 1: Features of party system, existence of Evangelical parties</b>	Proportional vs majoritarian system
	Party fragmentation
	Existence of Evangelical parties
<b>Hypothesis 2: Evangelical state leaders and their influence on the political activity of Evangelicals</b>	Have there been any Evangelical state leaders in the country's history?
	In case there have been Evangelical state leaders, what kind of influence have they had on the political activity of Evangelicals?
<b>Hypothesis 3: Role of Evangelical umbrella organizations in the country's legislative process</b>	Are religious umbrella organizations officially consulted by the government in the legislative process?
<b>The role of Catholicism in the country's politics</b>	Existence of Catholic parties
	Have there been any Catholic state leaders in the country's history and if yes, have they had any influence on the political role of Catholicism?
	Is the Catholic Church officially consulted by the government in the legislative process?

The study uses both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are governmental documents, such as the international religious freedom reports for every country published by the United States Department of State, public polls and religious data. The main quantitative data comes from two studies: a study about the changes in the religious landscape of Latin America conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 and a research carried out

by Latinobarómetro Corporation<sup>4</sup> in 2017. The secondary sources used in this thesis are newspaper articles, articles from scientific journals and books about the history and political situations in Latin America. Some sources are in English, some in Spanish.

## **2.2. Guatemala**

Guatemala is a unitary presidential republic in Central America that became independent from Spain in 1821 (Holland 2002). Religious freedom has been guaranteed in the constitution since 1832 when the church was officially separated from the state (Lamport 2018, 323). Religion plays a major role in people's everyday lives: according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, 89% of people who were questioned responded that religion is an important factor for them (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 40). As of 2018, 71% of Guatemalans trust the church, making it the most trusted institution in the country (Latinobarómetro 2018b, 49). 51% of people believe that governmental policies should be based on religious values and 44% of people think that religious leaders should influence the country's politics (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96–97). While the first number is quite high compared to other Latin American countries, the belief that religious leaders should have a say in politics is quite low in contrast to other countries in the region (see appendix 1) (*Ibid.*).

### **2.2.1. Evangelicalism in society: Guatemala**

The first Protestants started to arrive in Guatemala in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see appendix 2 for full chronology of Protestantism in Guatemala) (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs 2017, 30). In 1882 the Reverend John Clark Hill, the first Protestant missionary in Guatemala, arrived in the country after being formally invited by the president Rufino Barrios (Zapata 2009, 1). Hill started a Presbyterian church in Guatemala but Evangelical missions followed soon after. In 1899 the Central American Mission started their missionary work in Guatemala (Lamport 2018, 323). The Protestant missionary work intensified at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when Presbyterians, Friends, Nazarens, and Methodists divided the region between themselves, creating specific religious zones in the country (Berkley Center for

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<sup>4</sup> A non-profit organization that publishes the annual Latinobarómetro survey in 18 Latin American countries (Latinobarómetro).

Religion, Peace & World Affairs 2017, 30). Although the Catholic church had established itself as the leader of the local religious monopoly, the Protestant churches grew rapidly thanks to the latter's adaptability: while the Catholic priests did not often speak the local language, the Protestant missionaries learned the regional dialects and translated the Bible into the local languages (O'Kane 1999, 62).

Pentecostalism arrived in Guatemala at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it started to become popular only in the 1930s (Dary 2015, 15). The Assemblies of God (*Las Asambleas de Dios*), the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, started their work in Guatemala in 1937 (Holland 2002). The period between 1940 and 1982 can be considered a rapid explosion of Evangelicalism in the country (Zapata 2009, 3). Many new missions and churches were established and the number of Evangelicals (especially Pentecostals) rose fast (*Ibid.*). In the 1970s several Neo-Pentecostal movements started their missionary work in Guatemala. One of the first was the Church of the Word (*El Verbo*) that was founded in Guatemala in 1978 and had risen to 15,000 members by 1994 (Dary 2015, 17).

As it has been the trend in Latin America, the number of Evangelicals has rapidly grown in Guatemala during the last decades. The information about the exact percentage of Evangelicals in Guatemala varies. According to a study conducted by the Latinobarómetro in 2017, 41% of Guatemalans consider themselves to be Evangelicals (the same number for Catholics is 43%) (Latinobarómetro 2018a, 15). The country is regarded to have the highest Evangelical proportion of the population among Latin American countries (*Ibid.*). The last years have especially seen the growth of Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism (Althoff 2017, 339). Several Guatemalan Pentecostal churches are among the largest Evangelical congregations in Central America, being labelled the "megachurches"<sup>5</sup> (see appendix 3).

### **2.2.2. Evangelicalism in politics: Guatemala**

The transformation of the Evangelical movement from an apolitical actor into a political one took place at the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Maren Christensen Bjune associates this

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<sup>5</sup> The term „megachurch“ is often used for describing large Protestant congregations that have more than 2,000 attendants on their Sunday mass (Hartford Institute for Religion Research).

change with four crucial events in Guatemalan history: 1) the 1976 earthquake and its impact 2) the governing period of an Evangelical General Ríos Montt 3) the emergence of a multi-party system and the period of democratization 4) the peace negotiations succeeding the civil war (Bjune 2016, 110). These four cases mark the rapid growth of popularity of Evangelicalism in Guatemala and the start of its political identity.

In 1976 the country was shaken by an earthquake with a moment magnitude of 7.5 (Melton & Baumann 2010, 1275). After the catastrophe, the immediate response and community aid offered by the Evangelical churches increased their importance in the country (*Ibid.*). Several Protestant missions arrived from the United States with the aim to assist in the “physical but also the spiritual rebuilding of Guatemala” (Bjune 2016, 115). Evangelical churches gained more popularity and became more visible in the political arena while the Catholic Church grew unpopular because of its inability to effectively aid the country after the earthquake (*Ibid.*, 120).

Evangelicalism also influenced the events during and after the country’s civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996 and claimed the lives of 200,000 people (*BBC News* 2018). During the war, in 1982, an army general and an Evangelical Protestant Ríos Montt took power. Although his time in the office (from 1982 to 1983) was characterized by bloodshed and violations of human rights in the country, he also helped Evangelicalism to strengthen its political power in Guatemala (Bjune 2016, 123). Thanks to the religious affiliation of the new president, the Evangelical churches gained much more power at the national level and Evangelicalism began to be associated with the Guatemalan politics (*Ibid.*, 125). After ousting Ríos Montt in 1983, the first general elections were held in 1985 (*Ibid.*, 134). The presidential elections in 1990 were won by Jorge Serrano Elías, another Evangelical from the Church of the Word (*Ibid.*). In the 1990s, several Evangelical organizations (AEG<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> AEG or the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala (*La Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala*) – an umbrella organization that represents many Evangelical churches in Guatemala.

CIEDEG<sup>7</sup>, the Episcopal Church of Guatemala) played an important role in the civil war peace negotiations, consolidating their political positions (*Ibid.*, 146).

The country has a mixed electoral system<sup>8</sup> with closed party lists (CIA World Factbook 2019). The party system has become quite fragmented and more parties have successfully entered the run for the seats of the Congress (Jones 2011, 15). Although the country has a mixed electoral system with closed party lists, all the other factors should favour the emergence of Evangelical parties. However, the current situation is quite the opposite: there are no clear Evangelical parties in Guatemala. Historically, there has been only one Evangelical party in the state's political arena: The Party of Democratic Renewal Action or ARDE (*The Acción Reconciliadora Democrática*) which was founded in 1999 by Francisco Bianchi (Bjune 2016, 158)<sup>9</sup>. Although the party and its chairman were broadly covered by media during the elections in 1999, ARDE received only 2.1% of the total vote and lost their party registration<sup>10</sup> (*Ibid.*, 159). Prior to the 2003 presidential elections, Bianchi created another party, the Movement for Principles and Values (*Movimiento de Principales y Valores*) but it was unsuccessful as well (*Ibid.*).

The absence of Evangelical political parties in the Guatemalan politics can be explained by the fact that the political elite has already accepted Evangelicalism and many Evangelical candidates belong to mainstream parties (Freston 2004, 132). In 2016, Guatemalans elected the country's third Evangelical president, Jimmy Morales (the previous two being Ríos Montt and Jorge Serrano Elías). During Montt's leadership, Evangelical movements gained serious

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<sup>7</sup> CIEDEG or the Conference of Evangelical Churches in Guatemala (*La Conferencia de Iglesias Evangélicas de Guatemala*) – an organization uniting several Evangelical congregations, in some aspects similar to the AEG. However, while the AEG is opposed to ecumenism (collaborating with other religions), the CIEDEG supports it (Bjune 2016, 172).

<sup>8</sup> 127 members of the Congress of the Republic (*Congreso de la República*) are elected by simple majority vote, remaining 31 representatives are elected by proportional representation vote (CIA World Factbook 2019).

<sup>9</sup> In some sources, the Institutional Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Institucional* or PRI, until 2013 known as the Guatemalan Republican Front or *El Frente Republicano Guatemalteco*), founded by General Ríos Montt, is also considered an Evangelical party because of Montt's Evangelical affiliation. The author has decided to exclude this party from the current study because the PRI did not define itself as a clear Evangelical party.

<sup>10</sup> In Guatemala, parties who receive less than 4% of the votes in presidential elections, lose their registration (Bjune 2016, 159).

political power for the first time in the country's history. This power was consolidated during the Serrano's presidency in 1991–1993. Nowadays, Jimmy Morales is also supported by many Guatemalan Evangelicals despite his corruption scandals (Hofkamp 2017). However, for many Evangelical churches, these Evangelical state leaders are associated with the impurity of politics due to Montt's human rights violations, Serrano's self-coup and Morales's scandals, being one of the reasons for them to avoid going into politics.

In addition to Evangelical politicians in Guatemala, several umbrella organizations representing the Evangelical movements in Guatemala have also entered the country's political arena. The largest of them is the AEG with approximately 18,000 Evangelical congregations as of 2012 (Bjune 2012, 117). The organization has formed groups of advisors for the Guatemalan presidents on subjects like health, security and crime (*Ibid.*, 119). During the 2011 elections, the AEG also hosted presidential debates between the candidates (*Ibid.*).

### **2.2.3. Catholicism in politics: Guatemala**

Although historically the Catholic Church has been a major political force in Guatemala, their party presence has not been that strong. While there are two active parties in Guatemala (Vision with Values (VIVA) and TODOS) whose programs are based on Christian values, they cannot be considered clear examples of Catholic political movements. Between 1980 and 2018, only the Guatemalan Christian Democracy (*Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca*, DCG) described itself as a Catholic party but they were dissolved in 2008 (Mantilla 2018, 373). The state has had several Catholic presidents (Álvaro Colom, Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores) but their influence on the political role of Catholicism has been insignificant (Meislin 1983).

The Catholic Church is recognized to have a distinct legal standing while other religious groups usually register themselves as non-governmental organizations (United States Department of State 2017a, 2). Historically, they have had an inclusive role in the state's politics (Bjune 2016, 19). The Church was an important actor being a wall of resistance against the General Ríos Montt and it was also one of the leading figures of peace negotiations after the Civil War (*Ibid.*, 145). Nowadays, the Church is still consulted by the



government in social and educational questions (United States Department of State 2017a, 2).

### **2.3. Honduras**

Honduras is a presidential republic in Central America that borders with Guatemala. Although religious freedom is ensured by the constitution, the state has been accused by religious minorities of maintaining too close relationships with the Catholic Church and several Protestant movements (United States Department of State 2017b, 1). Religion still plays a major role in people's everyday lives: 90% of Hondurans say that religion is an important factor in their daily activities (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 40). As of 2018, the church is the most trusted institution in the country: 75% of the population have confidence in the church (Latinobarómetro 2018b, 49). 46% of the population believes that the government should uphold religious values and 42% of Honduran people think that religious leaders should be allowed to influence the country's politics (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96–97). Although Honduras is considered to be a strongly religious country, these numbers are not very high compared to other Latin American states (see appendix 1) (*Ibid.*).

#### **2.3.1. Evangelicalism in society: Honduras**

The first Protestant mission to Honduras took place between 1768 and 1785 (see appendix 4 for full chronology of Protestantism in Honduras) (Holland 2009, 10). The Protestant mission work increased in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British Wesleyan<sup>11</sup> missionaries arrived in the Bay Islands (Melton & Baumann 2010, 1351). In 1846 they were joined by the Baptist congregations from the British Honduras (the current region of Belize) (*Ibid.*). The Central American Mission started their work in Honduras in 1896 (*Ibid.*). The number of Protestant missionaries and missions grew exponentially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Ibid.*).

Pentecostalism came to Honduras at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but grew slowly, until the year 1931 when Frederick Mebius, a missionary from El Salvador, founded the first

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<sup>11</sup> A Protestant denomination that is based on the teachings of John Wesley (1703–1791) and emphasizes holiness and the importance of loving God and one's neighbour (Indiana Wesleyan University).

Pentecostal churches in Honduras (Melton & Baumann 2010, 1352). The Assemblies of God and the Church of God, two of the largest Evangelical denominations in the country, started their work in Honduras in the 1940s (*Ibid.*, 1353). As in Guatemala, Evangelicals played a large role in assisting in the country's rebuilding after a natural catastrophe (Honduras was hit by a hurricane in 1974) which increased their popularity (*Ibid.*, 1354). Several authors have also argued that the Evangelical church influenced the outcome of the state's 2009 *coup d'état* (Legler 2010, 607).

According to the Latinobarómetro study conducted in 2017, there are 39% of Evangelicals in Honduras (Latinobarómetro 2018a, 15). In comparison, the number of Catholics in the country is only 37%, making Honduras the only Latin American country where there are less Catholics than Evangelicals (*Ibid.*). Honduras also hosts the second largest Evangelical megachurch in Central America, the International Harvest Ministry of Honduras (*Ministerio Internacional La Cosecha Honduras*) which has an auditorium with 30,000 seats; the exact attendance at their Sunday's mass is unknown (Prolades 2015).

### **2.3.2. Evangelicalism in politics: Honduras**

The state has been criticized for having too close relations with the Catholic Church and several Protestant movements (United States Department of State 2017b, 6). Similar to the AEG in Guatemala, the CEH (Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras or *Confraternidad Evangélica de Honduras*, an umbrella organization representing Evangelical congregations in Honduras) often advises the government on various issues (*Ibid.*). Another important non-governmental Evangelical organization, the ASJ (Association for a More Just Society or *La Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa*) deals with human rights violations and governmental transparency in Honduras but is often accused of being controlled by the Protestant movements in Honduras (Frank 2018). It has also been criticized for having a close relationship with the CEH.

While the country has a proportional electoral system with open party lists, the party system is not very fragmented (European Union Election Observation Mission 2017, 9). For a long time, Honduras was a two-party system and changed into a multi-party system only in 2013

(Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018). This might be one of the reasons why there have been no Evangelical parties in Honduras: the politico-religious movements have just been too weak to compete with two dominating parties. Evangelical state leaders have also been absent in the political history of Honduras.

Many authors have argued about the role of the Catholic and Evangelical churches in the 2009 *coup d'état* when the president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, was overthrown. Thomas Legler claims that during this event the political role of the Evangelical congregations in the Honduran society could be clearly seen and that one of the reasons the coup was successful was because of the support of the country's Christian religious institutions (Legler 2010, 607). Since Pentecostalism is often associated with neoliberalism, one of the reasons the Evangelical movements could have opposed president Zelaya were his more leftist politics (Girard 2018, 166).

While the current president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, is himself a Roman Catholic, he has shown strong support for the Evangelical congregations in the country. In 2017 when Hernández won the presidential elections in Honduras, the Protestant denominations in the country were quite sceptical of him because he was believed to have won thanks to a voting fraud (Bolaños 2017). However, Hernández has attempted to improve his relations with the largest religious groups in Honduras by attending Evangelical celebrations and emphasizing Christian values in his speeches.

In 2018, several Evangelical leaders presented a legal draft to the National Congress with the intention to change the electoral law (Aguilera 2018). Currently it is impossible for pastors to enter political positions without renouncing their religious posts. If the law were to be accepted by the Congress, this requirement would disappear (*Ibid.*). Due to the growing number of Protestants in Honduras, Evangelical leaders are more interested in having political power as well.

### **2.3.3. Catholicism in politics: Honduras**

As in other Latin American states, Catholicism in Honduran politics has been represented by the Christian Democrats, specifically by the Christian Democratic Party of Honduras

(*Partido Demócrata Cristiano de Honduras*) (Mantilla 2018, 383). However, as of 2019, they hold only one seat in the National Congress of Honduras (Tribunal Supremo Electoral 2017). There have been several Catholic presidents between 1980 and 2018 (e.g. Carlos Roberto Flores, the country's current president Juan Orlando Hernández) but they have focused more on cooperation with both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical groups.

As in Guatemala, the Catholic Church enjoys a distinct recognition by the government, being the only religious organization to do so (United States Department of State 2017b, 1). The Catholic Church with some Evangelical umbrella organizations is officially consulted by the government in several matters and is also invited to hold prayers in formal governmental events (*Ibid.*, 7).

## **2.4. Nicaragua**

Similar to Guatemala and Honduras, Nicaragua is a presidential republic in Central America, bordering with Honduras and Costa Rica. The church and the state are formally separated but the country still promotes religious values in the society (United States Department of State 2017c, 2). The Catholic Church and several Protestant groups have accused the government of favouritism arguing that the government has repressed religious groups who have been critical of the state's policies (*Ibid.*, 3). 88% of the population feel that religion is an important part of their lives (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 40). As in Guatemala and Honduras, the church is the most trusted institution in the country, being trusted by 69% of Nicaraguans (Latinobarómetro 2018b, 49). 46% of people believe that the government's policies should be based on religious values but only 33% of the population would support the participation of religious leaders in state affairs (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96–97). The last number is only lower in Uruguay, showing that the citizens of Nicaragua believe in the important role of religion in the social, but not in the political sphere (see appendix 1) (*Ibid.*).

### **2.4.1. Evangelicalism in society: Nicaragua**

Although there were already several Anglican movements in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the region, the more serious Evangelization missions started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see appendix 5 for full chronology of Protestantism in Nicaragua) (Melton & Baumann 2010, 2091). The Miskito

Coast (a historical region on the coast of Nicaragua and Honduras) was one of the first areas to become Protestant, thanks to the activities of the Moravian Church in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Ibid.*). The Central American Mission came to Nicaragua in 1900 and the Assemblies of God in 1919 (Holland 2001a). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the missionaries usually communicated with the Creoles and Indians; the Spanish-speaking population was not converted before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Ibid.*).

Until the 1960s, the growth of Protestantism was quite slow in Nicaragua (Holland 2001a). Their number started to grow with the arrival of Evangelical fundamentalists after the World War II (Lubensky 1999). Pentecostalism came to Nicaragua in the 1960s and became one of the most popular denominations by the end of 1980s (*Ibid.*). As in Guatemala and Honduras, the growth of Evangelicalism was accelerated due to a natural disaster: in Nicaragua it was the earthquake of 1972 where the Protestant response to the catastrophe was quick and helpful. In order to deal with the consequences of the earthquake, the CEPAD (The Nicaraguan Council of Evangelical Churches or *Consejo Evangélico Pro Ayuda a los Damnificados*) was created (Robinson 2006, 409).

As of 2017, the number of Evangelicals in Nicaragua is 32% (Latinobarómetro 2018a, 15). This figure has remarkably grown throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number of Catholics is 40%, having decreased over the last decades (*Ibid.*). Several megachurches of Central America are situated in Nicaragua (see appendix 6). Evangelicalism does not only influence politics and the civil society but also education: there are four private Protestant universities in the country: the Nicaraguan Polytechnic University, Martin Luther King Evangelical University, the Adventist University, and Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (Melton & Baumann 2010, 2095).

#### **2.4.2. Evangelicalism in politics: Nicaragua**

Until the 1970s, the political presence of Evangelicals in Nicaragua was limited. Many Evangelicals decided to distance themselves from politics believing in the latter's "dirty" nature. The situation changed in 1972 when Nicaragua was hit by a 6.3-magnitude earthquake and the Evangelical congregations assisted in rebuilding the country (Zub 2008, 101). Thanks

to this event, Evangelical movements became socially and politically more active and increased their political participation (*Ibid.*, 102). In the 1980s, during the rise of the Sandinista National Liberal Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN), Evangelical groups took political sides in the country's turbulent situation. Several Evangelical denominations (including the Assemblies of God) opposed the Sandinista party and were repressed because of this opposition (Gooren 2010, 53). At the same time, the CEPAD that was the representative organization of many Evangelical churches in Nicaragua, decided to support the Sandinista government (Robinson 2006, 409).

The country has a proportional electoral system with closed lists (Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean). Fragmentation of the party system is quite moderate: in 2016, the FSLN and the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal Constitucionalista*, PLC) dominated the general elections (Ramírez 2016). However, there have historically been several successful Evangelical parties. The first of them was the National Justice Party (*Partido de Justicia Nacional*, PJN) that was created in 1992 by members of the Assemblies of God (Zub 2008, 110). The PJN declared themselves to be ideologically neutral and tried to oppose the left-wing evangelicals (*Ibid.*). Contrary to the PJN, a left-wing party called the Popular Evangelical Movement (*Movimiento Evangélico Popular*, MEP) was founded (*Ibid.*). A third alliance, the Nicaraguan Christian Way (*Camino Cristiano Nicaragüense*, CCN) was formed in 1996 by Evangelicals and Charismatic Christians (*Ibid.*). Although in the 1990s, these parties seemed to change the Nicaraguan political arena, they have disappeared over the years.

While in Guatemala the president of the country, Jimmy Morales, is a practicing Evangelical, and the president of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, is looking for support from the country's Christian movements, the situation is quite different in Nicaragua. Although the current president Daniel Ortega was supported by the country's Evangelicals in the 2006 presidential elections, their position has now changed (Gooren 2010, 55). Ortega has been accused of persecuting religious groups who are critical of his policies (Córdoba 2018). He has also challenged the distinct status of the Catholic Church in the country (*Ibid.*). The

Apostolic Network of Nicaragua that represents about 1,500 Evangelical churches in Nicaragua has demanded the resignation of Ortega (Torres 2018).

Contrary to Guatemala and Honduras, Evangelical umbrella organizations do not play a large role in Nicaragua's legislative process. While in other countries with religious majorities, the leaders of these organizations are usually involved in the policy-making processes, the main religious associations are left aside in Nicaragua. The CEPAD as a representative organization was an important political actor in the 1980s, connecting the Sandinista government and the country's Evangelicals, but nowadays their political influence has diminished (Robinson 2006, 409).

### **2.4.3. Catholicism in politics: Nicaragua**

Only one Catholic party, the Nicaraguan Christian Democratic Union (*Unión Demócrata Cristiana*, UDC) is currently active. However, it did not secure any seats in the last general elections in 2016 (Mantilla 2018, 373). Other Catholic parties, such as the Social Christian Party (*Partido Social Cristiano*, PSC) have been dissolved or have joined the FSLN (*Ibid.*). The country has had several Catholic presidents (even the current president Daniel Ortega has declared himself a "devout Catholic") but it does not mean that they have supported the Catholic Church: Ortega, for example, has criticized the church for opposing the Nicaraguan government (Córdoba 2018).

Until Ortega's assumption of power in 2007, the political position of the Catholic Church was quite similar to the one in Guatemala and in Honduras. The institution was often consulted by the government in various issues and had a distinct legal personality. However, during Ortega's presidency, the Church has become a symbol of resistance against the current leader and his government which is why its close relationship with the state of Nicaragua has deteriorated (Córdoba 2018).

## **2.5. Discussion and case comparisons**

The comparative analysis did not provide sufficient evidence to confirm the first hypothesis (the number of Evangelical parties depends on the country's electoral system and party system fragmentation) (cf. table 3, page 34). None of the selected states is a clear case of an

ideal environment for the emergence of Evangelical parties (the ideal situation being the proportional representation system with open party lists and fragmented party system). All of these countries have a proportional electoral system (although, the electoral system in Guatemala is mixed) but only Guatemala has a high party system fragmentation. The latter is moderate, even low in Honduras and Nicaragua. Open party lists are used in Honduras but not in Guatemala or Nicaragua.

However, there have historically been more or less successful political Evangelical movements in the past, such as the ARDE in Guatemala and the PJN, the MEP and the CCN in Nicaragua. Still, these parties have disappeared over the years and nowadays there are no clear examples of Evangelical parties in these countries' political arenas. This might be due to several reasons. Several Evangelical politicians have already found a successful running platform in mainstream political parties (Freston 2004, 132). Some religious leaders defend the separation of the church and the state and condemn the situations where religion has entered politics. In some cases, for example in Honduras, the political participation of religious leaders without them denouncing their position in the congregation is also prohibited by law.

One of the possible explanations for the absence of Evangelical parties in these countries might also be the existence of dominating Catholic parties who have prevented the entrance of new rival Evangelical parties. However, as it can be seen from table 3, the success of different Catholic parties has been quite moderate in these countries, meaning that no religious political movements have been successful in the political arenas of these states. The Catholic Church and the Evangelical denominations have been more active in social and cultural spheres, not in the political field. Their political activities could also be influenced by the public opinion: the percentage of people who believe that religious leaders should have a say in politics is quite low in all three cases.

Of these three cases, only Guatemala has had Evangelical state leaders. Their political legacy in Guatemala has been controversial. The first Evangelical president Ríos Montt took Evangelical movements closer to politics. However, he is also associated with bloodshed that took place during the Guatemalan Civil War. The next Evangelical president, Jorge Serrano



Elías, was forced to resign after he attempted an unsuccessful self-coup. The current president, Jimmy Morales, also an Evangelical, has been linked with several financial scandals. Therefore, Evangelical state leaders (such as Montt) have helped Evangelicalism to get access to wider politics but these leaders have also been associated with corruption, violations of human rights and limiting individual freedoms. All three states have had Catholic presidents but their influence on Catholicism in politics has been insignificant.

Umbrella organizations that represent Evangelical congregations, such as the AEG and the CIEDEG in Guatemala and the CEH in Honduras, are often consulted by the government in the legislative process. Historically, a similar organization in Nicaragua, the CEPAD, was an important actor in the country's political arena. Nowadays, the situation has changed due to president Daniel Ortega's policies. In Guatemala and Honduras, the Catholic Church is consulted in governmental issues besides the Evangelical institutions but not in Nicaragua where all the religious organizations have been alienated from the legislative process.

**Table 3. Different variables characterizing the role of Evangelicalism in politics and their comparisons in cases of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.**

		<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>
<b>Percentage of Catholics (% , as of 2017)</b>		43	37	40
<b>Percentage of Evangelicals (% , as of 2017)</b>		41	39	32
<b>General views about the relationship between religion and the state (as of 2014)</b>	<b>Percentage of people who believe that the government should promote religious values</b>	51	46	46
	<b>Percentage of people who believe that religious leaders should influence the state's politics</b>	44	42	33
<b>Hypothesis 1: Features of party system, existence of Evangelical parties</b>	<b>Proportional vs majoritarian system</b>	Mixed system with closed party lists	Proportional representation with open party lists	Proportional system with closed party lists
	<b>Party fragmentation</b>	High	Moderate	Moderate
	<b>Existence of Evangelical parties</b>	Absent (formerly the ARDE and the Movement for Principles and Values)	Absent	Absent (formerly the PJN, the MEP and the CCN)
<b>Hypothesis 2: Evangelical state leaders and their influence on the political activity of Evangelicals</b>	<b>Have there been any Evangelical state leaders in the country's history?</b>	Ríos Montt, Jorge Serrano Elías, current President Jimmy Morales	Absent	Absent
	<b>In case there have been Evangelical</b>	They have brought Evangelicalism closer to politics	There have not been any	There have not been any

	<b>state leaders, what kind of influence have they had on the political activity of Evangelicals?</b>	but due to their controversial natures, many Evangelicals began to believe in the “dirty” nature of politics	Evangelical state leaders	Evangelical state leaders
<b>Hypothesis 3: Role of Evangelical umbrella organizations in the country’s legislative process</b>	<b>Are religious umbrella organizations officially consulted by the government in the legislative process?</b>	Yes (the AEG and the CIEDEG)	Yes (the ASJ and the CEH)	No (the CEPAD was formerly consulted but not anymore)
<b>The role of Catholicism in the country’s politics</b>	<b>Existence of Catholic parties</b>	No active Catholic parties (the DCG was dissolved in 2008)	The Christian Democratic Party (they hold one seat at the Congress)	The UDC is politically active but has not seats at the Congress, other Christian parties are dissolved or have joined the FSLN
	<b>Have there been any Catholic state leaders in the country’s history and if yes, have they had any influence on the political role of Catholicism?</b>	There have been Catholic state leaders but their influence has been insignificant	There have been Catholic state leaders but they have focused more on having a good relationship with both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical groups	There have been Catholic state leaders but their influence has been limited
	<b>Is the Catholic Church officially consulted by the government in the legislative process?</b>	Yes, especially in educational issues	Yes, to some extent	Not anymore (it was consulted until Ortega’s presidency)

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to analyse the role of Evangelicalism in Latin American politics and to establish whether religion can be a major influential element in the legislative process of a secular state. While religion and politics are often intertwined, religion as a political factor is sometimes overlooked when analysing different political systems. This has also been the case in Latin America where Evangelicalism has started to play a much bigger political role than before.

In order to assess the relationship between Evangelicalism and politics, three hypotheses about the political activity of Evangelicals were proposed. The first hypothesis claimed that the emergence of Evangelical parties would be more plausible in countries that had proportional representation system and highly fragmented party system. The second assumption presented was that if a country had had Evangelical leaders in its history or had one right now, they would have influenced positively the role of Evangelicalism in politics. The third hypothesis argued that the Evangelical umbrella organizations had a say in political decision-making in countries with larger Evangelical percentages.

To test the proposed hypotheses, a qualitative study of three countries – Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – was carried out. The cases were chosen because they have the highest percentages of Evangelicals in Latin America. Both qualitative and quantitative data were assessed. Qualitative data included official documents about the international religious freedom issued by the United States Department of State and several press releases about the political and religious situations in these countries. Quantitative data was based on surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation and the Pew Research Center.

The case studies did not confirm the hypotheses. None of these cases had a clear proportional system with open party lists and highly fragmented party systems. There are currently no clear Evangelical parties in these countries (although there were some examples in the past). There have never been any Evangelical state leaders in Honduras and Nicaragua. Guatemala has seen three Evangelical presidents (including the country's current president Jimmy Morales) but their impact on Evangelical politics is disputed. The first Evangelical president

Ríos Montt named several members of Evangelical churches to be the state officials and therefore increased the Evangelical political power. However, he was also responsible for violations of human rights during the Guatemalan Civil War. The other two presidents, Serrano and Morales, were associated with corruption and limiting citizens' freedoms. The role of Evangelical umbrella organizations in the legislative process is significant in Guatemala and Honduras but not in Nicaragua where the Catholic Church and the Evangelical groups are being oppressed by Daniel Ortega's government.

The absence of clear Evangelical parties might be due to several factors. Many religious politicians have already found their success in mainstream parties and do not feel the necessity to create another political movement. Some Evangelical churches have chosen to stay apolitical because of the "dirty nature" of politics. Evangelical denominations have also found their calling in reforming the society and helping those in need which is why they are not interested in entering the political arena.

This study has sought to give insight into the relationship between politics and religion in Latin America. Although the hypotheses about religion and the political activity of Evangelicals did not find a causal linkage between the two, it does not mean that Evangelicalism has not had any impact on Latin American politics. The paper contributes to the existing literature by analysing specific cases (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua) where the Evangelical percentages are the highest.

While the comparative method enables researchers to analyse few cases thoroughly, it is more difficult to be operationalized with a larger number of cases. However, if one wishes to find a clear causal relationship between the percentage of Evangelicals in the society and their role in politics, more cases could be considered. Also, the indirect political activity (for example, shaping people's political values) of Evangelical churches could be researched more thoroughly.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Public views on the political role of religion.

	Governmental policies should be based on religious values (% , as of 2014)	Religious leaders should have a say in country's politics (% , as of 2014)
Dominican Republic	57	50
El Salvador	55	42
<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>44</b>
Costa Rica	50	49
Paraguay	49	61
<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Honduras</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42</b>
Colombia	45	50
Venezuela	45	58
Panama	44	73
Bolivia	43	42
Peru	43	50
Argentina	39	53
Puerto Rico	39	42
Brazil	33	55
Ecuador	27	34
Chile	25	44
Mexico	21	39
Uruguay	21	24

Source: Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96–97.

**Appendix 2. Presence and arrival dates of Protestant Churches:  
Guatemala.**

<b>Churches/denominations</b>	<b>Examples and their arrival/founding date</b>
Immigration Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglican (arrived in the 1830s)</li> <li>• Lutheran (arrived in 1873)</li> </ul>
Mission Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presbyterian Church (arrived in 1882)</li> <li>• Friends Church (arrived in 1902)</li> <li>• Nazarene Church (arrived in 1904)</li> <li>• Primitive Methodist Church (arrived in 1921)</li> </ul>
Faith Mission Evangelical Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central American Mission (arrived in 1899)</li> <li>• Missionary Christian Alliance (arrived in 1969)</li> </ul>
Mission Pentecostal Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of God of Full Evangelism (arrived in 1934)</li> <li>• Assemblies of God (arrived in 1936)</li> </ul>
Autochthonous Pentecostal Churches (founded in Guatemala)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of God of the Prophecy (1941)</li> <li>• Church of the Prince of the Peace (1955)</li> <li>• Calvary Church (1962)</li> <li>• Church of the Gate of Heaven (1963)</li> <li>• Mt. Basam Church (1973)</li> <li>• Elim Church (1976)</li> </ul>
Neo-Pentecostal churches (founded in Guatemala)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of the Word (1978)</li> <li>• Christian Fraternity Church (1978)</li> <li>• El Shaddai Church (1983)</li> <li>• Family of God Church (1990)</li> <li>• House of God Church (1994)</li> </ul>

Source: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs 2017, 31.

**Appendix 3. Megachurches, ranked by their Sunday mass attendance:  
Guatemala.**

<b>Church</b>	<b>Presumable number of Sunday's mass attendance</b>
Christian Fraternity Church	10,500
Ebenezer Ministries of Guatemala	10,500
Family of God Church	9,000
Elim Church	6,000
Showers of Blessing Church	4,700
El Shaddai Church	4,700
Palabra Mi-El Central	3,400
Royal Life Christian Church	3,000

Source: Prolades 2015.



**Appendix 4. Presence and arrival dates of Protestant Churches:  
Honduras.**

Churches/denominations	Examples and their arrival/founding date
Immigration Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglican (the first missionary arrived in 1768)</li> </ul>
Mission Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Wesleyan Methodist Church (arrived in the 1840s)</li> <li>• The United Brethren in Christ Mission (arrived in 1849)</li> <li>• Baptists (arrived in 1846)</li> <li>• The Seventh-Day Adventists (arrived in 1887)</li> <li>• The Plymouth Brethren (arrived in 1898)</li> </ul>
Faith Mission Evangelical Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central American Mission (arrived in 1896)</li> </ul>
Mission Pentecostal Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assemblies of God (arrived in 1940)</li> <li>• The Church of God (arrived in 1944)</li> <li>• The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (arrived in 1952)</li> <li>• The Prince of Peace Pentecostal Church (arrived in the 1960s)</li> </ul>

Source: Holland 2001b.

**Appendix 5. Presence and arrival dates of Protestant Churches:  
Nicaragua.**

<b>Churches/denominations in Nicaragua</b>	<b>Examples and their arrival/founding date</b>
Immigration Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglican (arrived in the 1760s)</li> </ul>
Mission Protestant churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Wesleyan Methodist Church (arrived in the 1830s)</li> <li>• The Moravian Church (the German United Brethren, arrived in 1849)</li> <li>• Baptists (arrived in the 1850s)</li> <li>• The Seventh-Day Adventists (arrived in the 1940s)</li> </ul>
Faith Mission Evangelical Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central American Mission (arrived in 1900)</li> </ul>
Mission Pentecostal Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Pentecostals (arrived in 1910)</li> <li>• Assemblies of God (arrived in 1919)</li> </ul>

Source: Holland 2001a.

**Appendix 6. Megachurches, ranked by their Sunday mass attendance:**

**Nicaragua**

<b>Church</b>	<b>Presumable number of Sunday's mass attendance</b>
Christian Centre Apostolic Ministries	9,000
Rivers of Living Water International Ministry	8,500
Hosanna Community of Family Renewal	7,000
Evangelistic Centre of the Assemblies of God	4,500

Source: Prolades 2015.

# EVANGEELSETE LIIKUMISTE ROLL LADINA-AMEERIKA RIIKIDE POLIITIKA KUJUNDAMISEL GUATEMALA, HONDURASE JA NICARAGUA NÄITEL

Kristiina Vain

## Resümee

Töö eesmärk on uurida evangeelsete liikumiste rolli riigi poliitilisel areenil. Evangeelsete ühenduste järgijate arv on hüppeliselt kasvanud eelkõige Ladina-Ameerikas, Aafrikas ning Aasias. Liikumisel on olnud oluline sotsiaalne ja kultuuriline mõju paljudes riikides, ent evangeelsete poliitilisele osalusele riikide seadusandlikus protsessis on pööratud vähem tähelepanu.

Evangeelsete poliitilise rolli uurimiseks Ladina-Ameerikas on autor esitanud kolm hüpoteesi. Esimene hüpotees uurib evangeelsete parteide olemasolu ja nende tekkimise eeltingimusi, väites, et evangeelsete erakondade eksisteerimine on tõenäolisem proportsionaalse, avatud nimekirjadega valimissüsteemis ja fragmenteeritud parteisüsteemis. Teine hüpotees väidab, et evangeelsete riigijuhtide olemasolul on nende mõju evangeelsete liikumiste poliitilise identiteedi kujundamisele olnud positiivne. Kolmas hüpotees analüüsib religioossete organisatsioonide kaasamist riigi seadusandlikku protsessi. Kuna Ladina-Ameerikas on ajalooliselt olulist poliitilist rolli mänginud ka katoliku kirik, on võrdluseks toodud samasugused näitajad katoliku kiriku kui institutsiooni osaluse kohta riigi poliitikas. Samuti on kirjeldatud avalikku arvamust selle kohta, kas valitsus peaks oma tegevuses toetuma usulistele väärtustele ning kas religioossed juhid peaksid osalema poliitikas.

Hüpoteeside testimiseks on läbi viidud kvalitatiivne uuring kolme Ladina-Ameerika riigi, Guatemala, Hondurase ja Nicaragua kohta. Tegu on riikidega, kus evangeelsete protsent kogurahvastikust on kontinendi kõrgeim. Uuritud periood keskendub aastatele 1980–2018. Autor kasutab võrdlevat meetodit, mis võimaldab piiratud aja ja ressurssidega kõige paremini hinnata usu rolli poliitikas. Töös on kasutatud nii kvalitatiivseid (valitsuse dokumente,

varasemaid uurimusi) kui ka kvantitatiivseid allikaid (kvantitatiivne andmestik pärineb uuringutest, mille on läbi viinud Latinobarómetro Corporation ja Pew Research Center).

Juhtumite puhul tutvustatakse kõigepealt evangeelsete liikumiste ajaloolist ja hetkelist olukorda. Seejärel on antud ülevaade evangeelsest poliitikast aastatel 1980–2018, keskendudes evangeelsetele erakondadele, presidentidele ning evangeelsete katuseorganisatsioonide rollile riigi seadusandlikus protsessis. Viimaks võrreldakse omavahel evangeelsete poliitilist rolli Guatemalas, Hondurases ja Nicaraguas, lähtudes eeltoodud näitajatest.

Töö ei kinnita esitatud hüpoteese. Esimese hüpoteesi puhul ei vasta ükski juhtumitest täielikult vajalikele eeltingimustele (proportsionaalset, avatud nimekirjadega ja fragmenteeritud erakondade süsteemi pole ei Guatemalas, Hondurases ega Nicaraguas). Üllatuslikult on nii evangeelseid kui ka katoliiklikke parteisid kõigis kolmes riigis olnud vähe ning nad on olnud küllaltki ebaedukad. Selline leid võib tuleneda mitmest põhjusest: nii evangeelsed kui ka katoliiklikud kandidaadid on leidnud oma kandideerimispinna juba suurtes erakondades, religioossed liikumised ei ole huvitatud poliitilisest sekkumisest ning ka avalik arvamus ei ole eriti selle poolt, et usuliidrid osaleksid poliitikas.

Teise hüpoteesi puhul saab evangeelsetest riigijuhtidest rääkida vaid Guatemalas, kus nende mõju evangeelsete liikumiste poliitilise rollile on olnud vastuoluline. Kindral Ríos Montt, kes oli Guatemala president aastatel 1982–1983, nimetas küll mitmed evangeelsed liidrid riigiametitesse, ent kuna ta rikkus tugevalt inimõigusi, kinnitas ta mitmete usuliidrite arvamust, et poliitika on liiga räpane. Sarnane olukord esines teiste Guatemala evangeelsete presidentide, Jorge Serrano Elíase ja Jimmy Moralese puhul (viimane on Guatemala praegune riigijuht), keda seostatakse pigem negatiivsete tegudega, nagu indiviidi vabaduste vähendamise ja korruptsiooniga. Katoliiklike riigijuhtide olemasolu ei ole avaldanud erilist mõju katoliiklaste sisenemisele poliitikasse.

Religioosseid organisatsioone kaasatakse seadusandlikku protsessi Guatemalas ja Hondurases, ent mitte Nicaraguas. Nicaragua on riik varasemalt konsulteerinud usuliste institutsioonidega, ent see suhe lõppes pärast praeguse presidendi Daniel Ortega

võimuletulekut, kes on pigem vaenulik religioosete organisatsioonide suhtes. Guatemalas ja Hondurases kaasatakse poliitikakujundamise protsessi nii katoliku kirikut kui ka erinevaid evangeelseid liikumisi.

Töö analüüsitulemusi saab kasutada edaspidi religiooni ja poliitika suhte uurimisel nii Ladina-Ameerikas, Aafrikas kui ka Aasias, kus evangeelsete liikumiste arv on tugeval tõusuteel. Akadeemilises kirjanduses puudub selge teoreetiline raamistik, mille järgi saaks uurida kristlikku (eelkõige evangeelset) poliitikat mitte-Lääne riikides ning see uuring aitab kaasa taolise raamistiku kujundamisele. Täielikuma pildi saamiseks tuleks uuringusse kaasata rohkem riike kindlast regioonist (nt kõik Kesk-Ameerika või Ladina-Ameerika riigid) ning võrrelda neid omavahel. Samuti analüüsiti selles töös vaid evangeelsete liikumiste otsest poliitilist rolli, aga mitte seda, kuidas nad kujundavad inimeste poliitilisi väärtusi.

## **Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

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“The Political Role of Evangelicalism in Latin American Countries: Case Studies of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua” (“Evangeelsete liikumiste roll Ladina-Ameerika riikide poliitika kujundamisel Guatemala, Hondurase ja Nicaragua näitel”)

mille juhendaja on Alar Kilp,

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