

TARTU UNIVERSITY  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Kristiina Vain

**THE USE OF RELIGIOUS POPULISM IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: THE CASES OF GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS**

MA thesis

Supervisor: Alar Kilp, PhD.

Co-supervisor: Louis John Wierenga, MA.

Tartu 2022

## **Authorship Declaration**

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Word count of the thesis: 23,110 words; the word count of the main body of the text is 20,022 words

*Name, date:* Kristiina Vain, 16.05.2022

## **Abstract**

Religious populism signifies the relationship between religion and populism in otherwise secular states. It includes both the emergence of religious political actors in non-religious states as well as the populist use of religious symbols, traditions, and values by secular politicians. While populism itself is a political phenomenon that has been extensively researched in the last decades, religious populism has not received that much scholarly attention.

The aim of this research is to study the presence of religious populism on social media during presidential elections in Guatemala and Honduras. A multimodal discourse analysis is carried out with the purpose to analyse Facebook posts made by the two most popular presidential candidates in the 2021 Honduran presidential elections, Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura, and by the two most popular presidential candidates in the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections, Alejandro Giammattei and Sandra Torres. Data used in this research consists of posts made on verified public Facebook pages by these four candidates.

Religious populism is assessed through five indicators in this thesis: 1) God's sovereignty – focusing on God's sovereignty instead of popular sovereignty 2) invoking a heartland – emphasising the connection between God and a specific territory 3) charismatic leadership – a leader presenting themselves as a martyr or as a saviour-like figure 4) a mission of salvation – framing one's political mission as a religious one, promising salvation to people 5) a moral community – equating religious communities to the most moral ones. The strongest indicators of religious populism in the analysed Facebook posts proved to be the concepts of invoking a heartland, a moral community, and charismatic leadership, while two aspects of religious populism – a mission of salvation and God's sovereignty – were missing in the posts.

The research confirms that all analysed presidential candidates in Guatemala and Honduras have used some aspects of religious populism in their political campaigns on Facebook. While this thesis offers a comparative analysis of two Latin American countries, future research could focus on conducting a region-wide study regarding the use of religious populism in political campaigning.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction .....	7
1. Populism and religion.....	10
1.1. Populism.....	10
1.1.1. Defining populism.....	10
1.1.2. Populism in Latin America .....	13
1.2. Religion .....	14
1.2.1. Catholicism.....	14
1.2.2. Evangelicalism .....	16
1.3. The relationship between populism and religion .....	19
1.3.1. Existing research on religious populism .....	21
1.4. Research framework.....	22
2. Data and methodology .....	25
2.1. Research design.....	25
2.2. Cases.....	27
2.2.1. Guatemala.....	27
2.2.2. Honduras .....	28
2.3. Method .....	30
2.4. Data collection.....	31
2.5. Data analysis .....	33
2.6. Limitations .....	34
3. Analysis.....	36
3.1. Results .....	36
3.1.1. Guatemala.....	36
3.1.2. Honduras .....	45
3.2. Discussion .....	53
3.2.1. Populism.....	56
3.2.2. Religion .....	58
3.2.3. Religious populism.....	59
3.2.4. Generalisation of findings .....	60
Conclusion.....	62
References .....	64
Appendices .....	72

Appendix 1. A multimodal analysis toolkit. ....	72
Resümee .....	73

**Tables**

Table 1. Description of Evangelicalism and its most important subsets..... 16  
Table 2. Comparison of the four analysed presidential candidates..... 53

**Figures**

Figure 1. The connections between populism, religion, and religious populism..... 23  
Figure 2. Alejandro Giammattei receiving rosary beads from a Guatemalan woman on July 20, 2019..... 40  
Figure 3. The cover photo of Sandra Torres, used during the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections..... 42  
Figure 4. Xiomara Castro with pastors on November 11, 2021..... 48  
Figure 5. Nasry Asfura's post against abortion, made on November 3, 2021..... 52

## Introduction

The political theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been dominated by the idea of secular states where religion does not interfere with political decisions (Barbato & Kratochwil 2009, 320; Philpott 2009, 184). However, in the last decades, the relationship between religion and other political phenomena, such as populism, has attracted the attention of political theorists. While populism itself has been extensively researched in different contexts, its relationship with religion in non-European countries has not received much scholarly attention. Religious populism has been defined on the continuum of two phenomena: sacralisation of politics and politicisation of religion (Siles *et al.* 2021, 3). Sacralisation of politics signifies the use of religious symbols and myths by secular political actors, while politicisation of religion can be characterised by the emergence of religious political actors in an otherwise secular state (*Ibid.*).

The relationship between religion and populism is quite distinct in Latin America. The region has been predominantly Catholic, however, due to the increase of the Evangelical population, its religious composition has changed in the last 50 years. Latin America also has a distinctive relationship with populism, having experienced both right- and left-wing populism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Therefore, the region offers a fruitful ground for researching religious populism. Religious populism in Latin America has been usually analysed through individual cases, for example, many political theorists turned their attention towards the strong Evangelical support of the current president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro. Only a few authors have carried out a comparative analysis of different countries regarding the relationship between religion and populism in the region.

The objective of this research is to analyse the presence of religious populism in two Latin American countries with large Evangelical populations, Guatemala and Honduras. The researcher has decided to carry out a qualitative study of Facebook posts made by the two most popular presidential candidates in each country. The author of this thesis has focused on presidential, not parliamentary elections, since both countries are presidential republics where the president is both the head of state as well as the head of government. The decision to analyse the political campaigns of presidential candidates also arose from the people-centric nature of the Latin American populism where the leader is often considered to be a charismatic strongman who is not afraid of making hard decisions (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 63).

Facebook is chosen as an analysed medium in this thesis, since social media platforms often play an important role in political campaigning, trying to create an emotional reaction in the

platform users. Facebook is also the second most often used social media platform in Guatemala and Honduras, being surpassed only by WhatsApp in these countries. WhatsApp, however, is used mainly for personal communication, while Facebook can also be used for public campaigning. To guide their research process, the author has posed the following research question: how is religious populism used in presidential campaigns on Facebook in Guatemala and Honduras?

The research process has been guided by the author's own triangular framework connecting the concepts of populism, religion, and religious populism. The indicators of populism are defined as follows:

- 1) use of anti-elitist language
- 2) focusing on the will of the people while people are defined as a homogeneous group
- 3) concentrating on a crisis or a potential threat
- 4) creating an "us" vs "them" rhetoric
- 5) emphasising a connection between the people and a territory.

Religious populism is also characterised by five components:

- 1) God's sovereignty
- 2) emphasising the connection between God and a specific territory
- 3) charismatic leadership
- 4) a mission of salvation
- 5) a moral community.

The study utilises the small-N approach and looks at two cases: the 2021 presidential elections in Honduras and 2019 presidential elections in Guatemala. These two countries are chosen based on purposive sampling: due to their common historical, cultural, and political backgrounds as well as their similar religious composition, they offer a fruitful ground for carrying out a comparative analysis of religious populism in Latin America. Both countries have also the highest percentages of Evangelicals in the region, allowing the author to assess the Evangelical influence in the political arena of these countries as well. At the beginning of the research, Nicaragua as the country with the third highest percentage of Evangelicals in Latin America was also considered as a potential case, however, the presidential candidates of 2021 Nicaraguan elections do not have verified Facebook pages. Therefore, due to lack of accessible data, the country was excluded from this thesis.



The analysed data consists of Facebook posts made by presidential candidates Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura in the 2021 Honduran presidential elections and by Sandra Torres and Alejandro Giammattei in the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections. The timeframe for analysed posts is up to two months before the election day, therefore, September 28 – November 29, 2021 for the Honduran presidential elections and April 16 – August 12, 2019 for the Guatemalan presidential elections. Since presidential elections in Guatemala have two rounds and the first round took place on June 16, 2019, the period for analysed posts in the Guatemalan elections is longer. The gross sample of posts analysed in this thesis consisted of 1,638 posts.

A multimodal discourse analysis has been carried out for analysing social media posts made by presidential candidates. Applying the principles of critical discourse analysis in this study allows the researcher to better understand the social and political context of the chosen cases and find hidden context behind the dominant social positions. For analysing Facebook posts, a multimodal framing analysis toolkit developed by Renée Moernaut *et al.* (2020) is used as a supporting instrument.

The thesis is structured as follows. In the first chapter, the definitions of populism, Catholicism, and Evangelicalism as well as their historical and current context in the Latin American region are offered. The chapter also introduces existing studies in the field of religious populism and establishes the study's theoretical expectations. The second chapter gives an overview of the research design, chosen cases, used method, principles of data collection and analysis, and limitations of this research. The third chapter focuses on results and their analysis.

The author of this thesis wishes to thank their supervisors, Alar Kilp and Louis John Wierenga, for their guidance and helpful comments during the writing process.

# 1. Populism and religion

## 1.1. Populism

Populism is a term that is widely used by modern political theorists. Populism does not have a clear definition; it rather has many alternative explanations. Some scholars see it as an ideology or as a set of ideas, while others describe this phenomenon as a political strategy. In the last decades, theories of populism as a rhetoric or as a political style have also emerged. While there are several definitions of populism, it is usually characterised by its anti-pluralist and anti-elitist nature, creating a dichotomous and antagonistic relationship between the “true” people and the “evil” elite (Müller 2016). Populists claim that they are the only ones who can represent the “true” people by excluding other groups based on identity politics (*Ibid.*).

### 1.1.1. Defining populism

While populism has been a widely discussed phenomenon, there is no clear definition of the term. In the Latin American context, populism has been defined as an ideology / a set of ideas or as a political strategy. The idea of populism as a thin ideology has been proposed by Ben Stanley (2008) and later developed by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017). Populism as a thin ideology has some core concepts, however, it does not have a coherent program and, therefore, it can be adapted in different contexts (Stanley 2008, 102; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 6). As an example of populism’s adaptive nature, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, 8) have described the case of Latin American populism where in the 1990s, populist politics were mainly associated with neoliberal ideology, while in the 2000s the local populism shifted towards radicalism.

Sven Engesser *et al.* (2017, 1111) argue that populism as an ideology has five key elements: 1) emphasising popular sovereignty 2) advocating for people as a homogeneous group 3) anti-elitism – criticising the current political elite 4) excluding and attacking others 5) invoking the “heartland”. Regarding the last characteristic, the authors claim that populism relies on deep emotional connections between people and a community or a territory (*Ibid.*, 1112). According to Engesser *et al.* (*Ibid.*), “populists invoke the image of a virtual location which is occupied by the people, represents the ‘core of the community’, and excludes the ‘marginal or the extreme’.”

Some authors, such as Kurt Weyland, do not see populism neither as an ideology nor as a set of ideas but rather as a political strategy. Weyland (2001, 14) has defined populism as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power

based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers”. This theory, therefore, emphasises the direct relationship between the wider audience and a leader using a populist strategy. Some limitations of this idea include the fact that populism as a strategy is seen only as a “movement versus someone” (Yilmaz & Morieson 2021, 4). The definition of populism as a strategy is mainly analysed in the context of Latin American cases but is not supported by wider empirical data (*Ibid.*).

Since this study focuses on analysing social media, populism in the context of this thesis is defined as a rhetoric / political style. Populism is interpreted as a rhetoric by several authors, such as Pippa Norris (2020). With her research team at the Harvard University, she has carried out the Global Party Survey where populism has been defined as the use of language that “typically challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail” (*Ibid.*, 702). She has contrasted populism and pluralism arguing that the latter “rejects these ideas [*of populism*], believing that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, bargaining and compromise, as well as checks and balances on executive power” (*Ibid.*). However, in the survey, other indicators have been used to identify party populism, such as the perceived trustworthiness of politicians, the party’s position towards liberal democratic values, and the role of politicians (whether they should follow the popular opinion or take the lead themselves) (*Ibid.*).

Populism has also been conceptualised as a political style. One of the idea’s main proponents is Benjamin Moffitt who has argued that populism as a political style incorporates three main aspects: 1) the contrast between “the people” and “the elite” 2) the use of a politically “incorrect” communication style, using slang and swear words 3) inclusion of a crisis or a threat that is stated to threaten a specific, homogeneous group of people (Moffitt 2016, 43). Defining populism as a political style also signifies the shift from a binary conceptualisation of populism to a more gradual one, meaning that political actors can be “more or less populist at certain times” (*Ibid.*, 46). As a contrasting term to populism, Moffitt has described the technocratic political style which is characterised by expert opinions, societal stability, and use of “proper” and “politically correct” language (*Ibid.*). However, one of the possible limitations for this theory is that it excludes the possibility for parties and movements having populist ideologies (Yilmaz & Morieson 2021, 4).

### *People-centrism*

One of the most common features of populism is its people-centrism. Populists argue that they are the only ones who are trying to directly communicate with the people and create a specific connection with them. The will of the people gives populists their authority, therefore, populists emphasise the importance of popular sovereignty. To some extent, populism can be seen as a form of “redemptive politics based on the democratic promise of a better world through the actions of the sovereign people” (Spruyt *et al.* 2016, 336; the idea of redemptive politics and the connection between this concept and populism was firstly discussed by Margaret Canovan in 1999).

However, while populists seemingly defend the idea of popular sovereignty and claim that they are the leaders of the “true” people, the notion of “people” might differ. The “true” people seen by populists are a homogeneous group, often excluding others based on a specific characteristic (such as ethnicity, religion, or race) (Müller 2016; Engesser *et al.* 2017, 1111). Populists often use another, external group of people to show them as a potential threat against the “true” people (Engesser *et al.* 2017, 1112).

### *Populist leadership*

Since populism is a people-centric phenomenon, leadership can be considered an important characteristic of populism. While there is no prototype for populist leaders, there are some clear leadership types. A populist leader can be a charismatic strongman: a powerful and masculine actor who is not afraid of making hard decisions (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 63). The character of the charismatic strongman has been especially common in Latin American countries (*Ibid.*). While the charismatic strongman is the most common type of a populist leader, populist leaders can also be entrepreneurs or former businessmen entering politics, and ethnic leaders who focus on a specific ethnicity or a community (*Ibid.*, 70).

Populist leaders are often considered charismatic. In this context, charisma can be defined as a “set of extraordinary personal qualities of the leader, which are considered universal” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 66). However, the universality of these qualities can be questioned, since definitions of extraordinary characteristics vary based on regional and cultural differences (*Ibid.*). The charisma of the populist leader can also be understood as a bond between the leader and the followers, influenced by the leader’s own behaviour as well as by the expectations of the people (*Ibid.*). The importance of this specific bond between the leader and their followers has also been emphasised by other authors, such as N. W. Barber (2019, 130) who argues that

the populist leader tries to directly communicate with the people, without using any constitutional middle structures.

### **1.1.2. Populism in Latin America**

Latin American countries have had a distinctive relationship with populism. Populism has had such a strong historical influence in the region that Latin America has even been called “the land of populism” (Torre 2017, 195). The populist experience of the region has varied: some populist politicians and parties have been more inclined towards right-wing policies while others have identified themselves as left-wing political actors and supported the mobilisation of the working class. However, while there have been different historical and political types of populism, the phenomenon in Latin America is usually characterised by its people-centrism, focus on marginalised groups and socioeconomic issues (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 167).

Historically, Latin American populism can be divided into three distinct phases: classical, neoliberal, and radical populism (Torre 2017, 195). Classical populism became prevalent in the region in the 1930s (*Ibid.*, 196). Classical populists believed in the antagonising nature of populism, the never-ending conflict between the elite and the people (*Ibid.*). They tried to mobilise marginalised groups and increase the political participation of poorer social classes (*Ibid.*, 198). Classical populism was followed by the rise of neoliberal populism in the 1990s (*Ibid.*). The populists of this period were characterised by their support for neoliberal economic policies (*Ibid.*). Finally, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the emergence of radical populists who advocated for greater financial equality, participatory democracy, and socialist values (*Ibid.*, 200).

The emergence of radical populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Latin America can be explained by several factors. The region has seen several successful left-wing presidents and, therefore, Latin Americans have started to support the redistributive policies of radical populists (Remmer 2012, 947). In some countries, populist actors have tried to establish minimum wages that has increased their support among the poorer classes (Edwards 2019, 83). Contemporary Latin American radical populism can also be characterised by its support of protective national policies and its strong opposition to globalisation theories (*Ibid.*, 78). Since anti-Americanism and anti-globalisation theories have been gaining popularity in the region, this might be one of the reasons behind the growing success of radical populists.

## 1.2. Religion

Latin America is a predominantly Christian region where Catholicism has the most followers. According to a survey carried out by Latinobarómetro in 2020, 57.1% of the Latin American population is Catholic, while the percentage of Evangelical Latin Americans is 20.7% (Latinobarómetro 2020). 16.6% of the population do not affiliate themselves with any religion, while 1.1% are atheists (*Ibid.*). Since Catholicism and Evangelicalism are the most popular religious movements with the strongest historical influence in Latin America, the two following subchapters give an overview of the history and the current situation of these religious denominations in Latin America.

### 1.2.1. Catholicism

Catholicism signifies the tradition and practices of a Catholic Church. When talking about the Catholic Church, it usually stands for the Roman Catholic Church (hereafter, in this thesis, the term “Catholic Church” stands for the Roman Catholic Church). As of 2019, the number of Catholics in the world is 1.34 billion, therefore, the Catholic Church is the largest Christian church in the world (McGarry 2021). The Catholic Church is hierarchical and centralised: it is headed by the Pope from the Vatican. Catholics base their beliefs not only on the Bible but also on several Catholic traditions (Krämer 2019).

#### *History of Catholicism in Latin America*

Historically, for five centuries, Latin America has been predominantly Catholic (Cuadros 2018, 119). Catholicism reached Latin America with the arrival of the first Christian missionaries at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1493, a year after Christopher Columbus had landed in Latin America for the first time, the Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull that divided the Latin American territories between Portugal and Spain (Schwaller 2011, 40). The wide spread of Catholicism in the region benefitted the local Spanish and Portuguese rulers since it solidified their support from the Vatican and allowed them to control the continent with a small military (Palmer 2013).

The position of the Catholic Church was further solidified in the region in the next centuries. The situation changed with the emergence of secular states claiming their independence from the Spanish Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the Catholic Church as an institution, the wave of independence in Latin America was troubling since their power was closely connected to the Spanish and Portuguese Empires (Lynch 2012, 114). However, on an individual level, the issue

was quite divisive among the Church's members: many bishops supported the independence claims of the new states (*Ibid.*). While this period was challenging and weakened the Church, close relations between the Church and the new independent states emerged: in all first constitutions of these nation-states, Catholicism was declared to be an official state religion (*Ibid.*, 126).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the first arrival of Evangelicalism in Latin America – a set of Protestant movements that became the main rival of the Catholic Church in the region's religious arena. The competition from new religious movements forced the Church to undergo reforms. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church had mainly been conservative and elitist due to its colonial roots, however, this changed in the 1950s when the Church started to support social changes and stronger civic engagement (Hale 2019). During this time, the Church became a little more decentralised and some of its branches became more progressive (*Ibid.*).

#### *Catholicism in modern Latin America*

Nowadays, the number of Catholics in Latin America has been decreasing over the last decades. Former Catholics have either turned to Evangelicalism or become religiously unaffiliated. Despite the Church's increased support regarding social issues, some former Catholics have criticised the institution and its distance from people's everyday problems (Cuadros 2018, 127). According to a survey carried out by the Pew Research Center in 2014, the former Catholics who had turned to Evangelicalism, justified their decision because they wanted to find a “more personal connection to God”, they searched for another style of worship and a congregation that “helped its members more” (Pew Research Center 2014).

Due to the decrease of its followers in Latin America, the Catholic Church has tried to reform its image to prevent its loss of popularity. One of the strongest factors influencing the Church's rebranding is the current Pope Francis, who was born in Argentina. The Pope has tried to encourage the Church to connect with the most vulnerable classes in society (Cuadros 2018, 127). Regarding the rapid rise of Evangelicalism in the region, the Pope has also been more understanding towards the changing religious arena in Latin America. In contrast, the Church's former position towards Evangelical churches used to be competitive and hostile (*Ibid.*, 128).

### 1.2.2. Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism (also known as Evangelical Christianity or Evangelical Protestantism) is an umbrella term that incorporates several different religious denominations. The following sub-chapter gives an overview of the most important Evangelical movements, such as Classical Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, and Neo-Pentecostalism, and outlines their main similarities as well as differences. The definitions are followed by a short description of how Evangelicalism has historically evolved in Latin America and how it has influenced the continent’s socio-political situation.

Evangelicalism is a subset of Protestantism. Contrary to Catholicism, it does not have a centralised authority (Shoemaker 2021). The exact number of Evangelicals in the world is unknown, however, it has been estimated to be 660 million people as of 2020 (Evangelical Focus 2020). Since Evangelicalism includes different churches and religious beliefs, it is also more difficult to offer an unambiguous definition of this term. It is often defined through four features that were first characterised by the British historian David Bebbington (1989, 2), also known as the “Bebbington quadrilateral”: activism – the need to actively spread the gospel, conversionism – the belief in rebirth through baptism, biblicism – the belief in the absolute truth of the Bible, and crucicentrism – emphasising the importance of the Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Table 1 presents a comparison of the most important Evangelical subsets.

**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>Other Evangelical denominations</b>
Focusing on the gifts of the Holy Spirit (extraordinary abilities believed to be given by the Holy Spirit)  Very expressive and spiritual church services  Establishing new congregations	Have Pentecostal practices but do not belong under them  Can be Evangelicals but also Orthodox Christians and Catholics	Pentecostal beliefs in traditional churches	A heterogeneous group of different denominations with diverse practices

Source: Vain 2019, 12.



### *Classical Pentecostalism*

Classical Pentecostalism is an Evangelical movement that is centred around the idea of the “gifts from the Holy Spirit”, for example, speaking in tongues<sup>1</sup>, healing, making prophecies (Masci 2014). The followers of the movement believe in having direct access to God, since Pentecostalism emphasises the importance of one’s personal experiences (Smith 2010, 11). The beginning of Classical Pentecostalism has been associated with the year 1901 when students at the Bethel Bible School in Kansas started to speak in tongues (Smith 2009, 223). This event was closely followed by the Azusa Street Revival, taking place between 1906 and 1915 in California (*Ibid.*). The Azusa Street Revival was a series of religious services characterised by spiritual occurrences (*Ibid.*). Several international megachurches, such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Church of God have historically been classical Pentecostal churches (Robbins 2004, 121).

### *Charismatic Christianity*

Charismatic Christianity can be defined as a Protestant religious movement whose followers have adopted several Pentecostal practices, such as prophesying, speaking in tongues and healing, but who do not consider themselves to be Pentecostals (Pew Research Center 2011). Charismatic Christians usually belong to other non-Pentecostal denominations, like the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, or other Protestant denominations (*Ibid.*). Charismatic Christians have moderated the asceticism that is common to classical Pentecostalism, allowing its followers to drink wine, for example (Robbins 2004, 121). The wider spread of Charismatic Christianity can be traced back to the 1960s when mainline Protestants adopted the idea of the gifts from the Holy Spirit (*Ibid.*).

### *Neo-Pentecostalism*

Neo-Pentecostalism is usually known in Latin America as the explosive spread of Pentecostal practices in mainstream churches, beginning in the 1980s. Alberto da Silva Moreira (2014, 382) has described the main differences between classical Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism, pointing out that Neo-Pentecostalism can be characterised by “the theology of holy war against the devil, the theology of prosperity or wealth-gospel, the abandonment of rigid Calvinist ethics and doctrines, the adoption of rationalised administration techniques and the theology of taking

---

<sup>1</sup> Speaking in tongues, also known as glossolalia – when a person starts to utter speech-like sounds, usually while being in a religious trance (Koić *et al.* 2005, 373). The person is often seen as medium through whom a higher power is speaking (*Ibid.*).

possession of goods”. One of the central ideas of Neo-Pentecostalism is also the “prosperity gospel” – belief that devoutness to God can increase one’s material wealth (*Ibid.*, 383). The movement became popular in both English-speaking countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom, as well as in Africa and Latin America (Anderson 2007, 449).

### *Historical Evangelicalism in Latin America*

Evangelicalism first arrived in Latin America in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Guadalupe 2019, 29). While the missionaries who first came to the continent, joined forces with national political movements, the number of Evangelicals remained small for a hundred years, amounting less than 1% of the continent’s population in the 1950s (*Ibid.*). This period is called the first wave of Evangelicalism in Latin America. During the first wave, Evangelicalism was mainly spread in Latin America by North American missionaries who were members of larger congregations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Churches of God (Bastian 2019).

The second wave of Evangelicalism in Latin America began in the 1950s. While the first wave was characterised by large, foreign churches emigrating to the continent, the second wave saw the appearance of new, local Evangelical churches (Bastian 2019). These new churches first emerged in countries such as Chile, Brazil, and Mexico (*Ibid.*). This new wave of Evangelicalism could also be described by its “politically more conservative, anti-Communist and anti-ecumenical (e.g. anti-Catholic)” nature (Guadalupe 2019, 30).

The third wave of Evangelicalism in Latin America was characterised by an exponential growth of Evangelical denominations and their members (Guadalupe 2019, 30). The 1980s were characterised by the increasing popularity of Neo-Pentecostalism in the region (Bastian 2019). Neo-Pentecostal pastors started to use TV and radio channels to spread their gospel, attracting a wider audience (*Ibid.*).

### *Evangelicalism in modern Latin America*

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Catholicism had been the most dominant religion in Latin America (Cuadros 2018, 119). However, in the 1970s, there was a shift in the continent’s religious composition: the popularity of Catholicism started to decrease and, vice versa, the popularity of Evangelicalism steadily increased (*Ibid.*). Nowadays, Evangelicalism still enjoys a rapid growth of followers among Latin Americans (Cairn International 2021). For decades, Evangelicalism was mainly supported by indigenous people and poorer classes; nowadays, Evangelical denominations are starting to gain popularity among middle classes as well (*Ibid.*).

Andrew Chesnut, a professor of religious studies at the Virginia Commonwealth University, has argued that the popularity of Latin American Evangelicalism has several distinct reasons (Masci 2014). While Catholic priests have usually been part of the social / political elite in Latin American countries, Evangelical pastors present themselves as one of the “common people”, sounding and looking like their congregants (*Ibid.*). Since Evangelicals and especially Pentecostals emphasise the healing power of faith, many Latin Americans have turned towards Evangelicalism due to their health problems, hoping to find a solution from religion (*Ibid.*). Evangelical songs also have similar rhythm compared to the secular music listened by many Latin Americans (*Ibid.*).

Evangelicalism, but especially Pentecostalism emphasises the “prosperity gospel”, meaning that being faithful and fulfilling one’s religious obligations can also increase one’s material wealth (Pew Research Center 2014; Zilla 2020, 10). This aspect has been attractive among the lower classes, giving them hope to improve their life (Masci 2014). Evangelical churches also help their congregants to get rid of unhealthy habits, for example, gambling, smoking, alcoholism (*Ibid.*). Therefore, many people join Evangelical churches to improve their lives both physically and spiritually.

### **1.3. The relationship between populism and religion**

While populists can use religious ideas to promote their political agenda and religious leaders can use populist instruments to appeal to a wider audience, there is a deeper parallel between these two. One could argue that populism resembles the fundamentalist aspects of religion, since populists “sacralise the people and their will” and promise “salvation” to their followers (Yilmaz & Morieson 2021, 7). According to a populist viewpoint, the people form the “good” who are against the “evil” elite, mirroring the dual conflict between the “good” and “evil” presented in Christianity and in other religions as well (*Ibid.*, 8).

José Pedro Zúquete (2017, 455) has described several characteristics of religious populism:

- Charismatic leadership – Zúquete argues that while this aspect is not a part of the definition of populism, it is still seen as a close aspect to populism. The author points out six images related to the charismatic leader:
  - The leader as the Prophet – the leader is a person who is committed to their people and ready to tell them the “hard truths”, he or she is seen as someone looking to the future.

- The leader as the Moral Archetype – the leader is a moral example to their people.
  - The leader as the Martyr – the leader is ready to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause, usually through great pain and suffering.
  - The leader as the People – the leader is seen as the “common man”.
  - The leader as the Party – the leader is seen as the true representative of the party.
  - The leader as the Missionary – Zúquete describes the missionary leader as a “savior-like figure driven by a sense of mission to save the community” (*Ibid.*, 456).
- A moral community – the “true” people who support the populist leader and, therefore, “fight” against the elite and external threats, are elevated into the status of a moral community. To strengthen this idea, populist rhetoric often includes the use of rituals and symbols, for example, drawing a parallel between the leader and a historic national hero.
  - A mission of salvation – the leader has framed their political mission as a salvation to the people, promising redemption and success as their final goal.

Ignacio Siles *et al.* (2021, 3) have argued that the relationship between religion and politics is “a continuum of positions between the politicisation of religion and the sacralisation of politics”. Sacralisation of politics takes place when political power is exercised through (religious) myths, rituals, and symbols (Gentile & Mallett 2000, 21). At the same time, political power is separate from religious institutions (*Ibid.*). It signifies the strategic use of religion and religious ideas / symbols by political leaders (Siles *et al.* 2021, 3). Sacralisation of politics can happen in societies where the state and church are officially separated, but the holders of political power still achieve a religious level among their electorate (Gentile & Mallett 2000, 21).

On the other side of the continuum, there is the politicisation of religion. It can be defined as the emergence of religious parties or politicians in an otherwise secular state (Altnordu 2010, 518). In the Latin American context, politicisation of religion can be seen in the growing success of Evangelical parties and politicians in the last decades (Siles *et al.* 2021, 3). There are several reasons for this kind of shift in Latin America: 1) the percentage of Evangelicals has considerably increased in the region 2) Evangelicals have started to politicise their religious identity because of potential threats to their religion, including the historically elitist position of the Catholic Church in the region, and because of the appearance of value-related issues on

the political agenda, such as the questions regarding same-sex marriage or abortion (Boas 2020).

It can be argued that religious populism usually follows two main characteristics of populism, based on the definition of populism offered by Engesser *et al.* (2017, 1111): 1) popular sovereignty, however, instead of people, religious populists believe in the sovereignty of God 2) invoking a heartland – emphasising a religious connection between the people and a community or a territory (Postill 2018, 760).

### **1.3.1. Existing research on religious populism**

The research regarding the relationship between populism and religion is relatively new. However, in recent years, the connection between these two phenomena has been studied more extensively. Daniel Nilsson DeHanas & Marat Shterin (2018, 182) point out how populists can use religious symbols and ideas as cultural resources to connect with a wider, religious audience. As mentioned before, populists usually have two main purposes: emphasising the difference between “us” and “them”, and presenting themselves as the real, anti-elitist representatives of the “true people”. With this goal in mind, populists can adopt religious values in order to relate to religious communities and create a sense of homogeneous society, usually depicting other religious denominations as antagonistic “them”. In the European context, several populist radical right parties have, for example, created the narrative of the predominantly Christian Europe (“us”) who have to resist the Muslim immigration (“them”) (*Ibid.*).

The use of religion by populist parties in Europe has been analysed by other authors as well. For example, Manuela Caiani & Tiago Carvalho (2021) have researched this phenomenon in the case of Italy. Having compared two political parties – Lega and the Five Star Movement – the authors have concluded that the two parties, especially Lega, use religion as an “identity marker”, creating a Christian European identity against a foreign (mainly Muslim) immigration (*Ibid.*, 212).

As for the relationship between populism and religion in Latin America, Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson (2021, 11) have argued that while the relationship exists in Latin American countries, it has not received much scholarly attention in the last decades. However, there have been both right- and left-wing populists who have benefitted from religious populism. The authors consider Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, as one of the few examples of left-wing religious populism in Latin America (*Ibid.*, 17). During his presidency, Chávez

often used religious rhetoric, and for several times, he was publicly compared to Jesus Christ (*Ibid.*).

Another example of the relationship between religion and populism, this time right-wing populism, is Jair Bolsonaro, the current president of Brazil. During his presidential campaign, Bolsonaro, being a Catholic himself, successfully attracted the Brazilian Evangelical population by using religious symbols and acts, such as being baptised in the River Jordan in Israel (Boadle 2018). A lot of support for him during the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil came from powerful Neo-Pentecostal churches. In his research, Oswaldo E. do Amaral (2020, 10) concluded that identifying as a Pentecostal Christian increased the possibility of voting for Bolsonaro in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections. Evangelicals supported Bolsonaro because of his anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ stances (Boadle 2018). They also believed that compared to other presidential candidates, Bolsonaro would be an anti-corrupt ruler with a steady hand (*Ibid.*).

One of the most thorough studies regarding the relationship between populism, religion, and social media has been carried out by Ignacio Siles *et al.* (2021). The authors analysed Facebook posts made by two presidential candidates, Fabrico Alvarado, a presidential candidate in the 2018 Costa Rican elections, and Nayib Bukele, the current president of El Salvador and one of the presidential candidates in the 2019 Salvadoran elections. Siles *et al.* (*Ibid.*, 5) conducted a content analysis as well as a multimodal discourse analysis of Facebook posts in the period of up to six months before the elections, analysing altogether 838 posts.

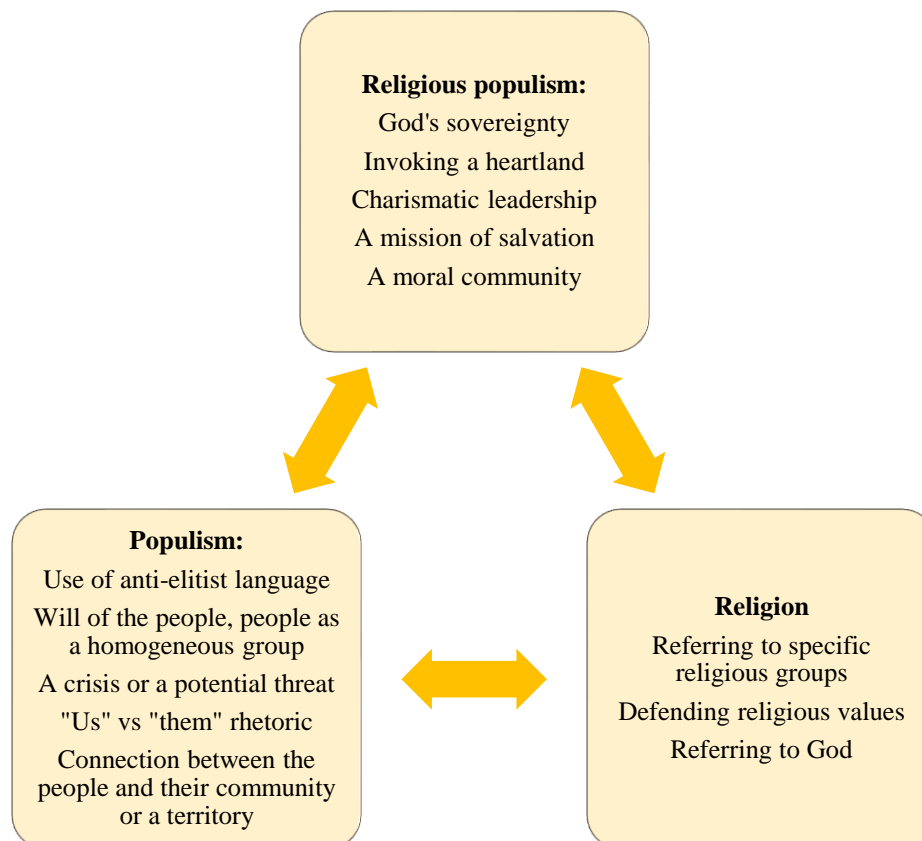
Based on their research, the authors concluded that both candidates had used religious populism in their Facebook posts (Siles *et al.* 2021, 14). The candidates had also met with the representatives of both the Catholic Church and different Evangelical groups (*Ibid.*). Religious symbols, both visual and verbal, were used as an attraction for religious voters (*Ibid.*, 16). The authors found that “populism gave political validity to religious discourse, while a religious imaginary provided populism with charismatic and messianic authority” (*Ibid.*). Both candidates also depicted themselves as messiahs who had come to “save their people” from corruption and “dirty” politics (*Ibid.*, 17).

#### **1.4. Research framework**

Based on the described theoretical expectations, the author of this thesis has posed the following research question to analyse the relationship between religion, populism, and social media in Guatemala and Honduras:

*How is religious populism used in presidential campaigns on Facebook in Guatemala and Honduras?*

Figure 1 shows the author's own framework for analysing religious populism in social media posts, based on Postill (2018, 760) and Zúquete (2017, 455):



**Figure 1. The connections between populism, religion, and religious populism.**

**Author's own theoretical framework, based on Postill (2018, 760) and Zúquete (2017, 455).**

*Populism*

In the context of this thesis, the author conceptualises populism mainly through the definitions of populism as a rhetoric, offered by Pippa Norris, and populism as a political style, offered by Benjamin Moffitt. Regarding the research design and purpose of this thesis which is to study social media posts to analyse the use of religious-populist rhetoric by presidential candidates in Latin America, defining populism as a rhetoric / political style is the most accurate

characterisation of the phenomenon in the context of this thesis. However, the definition of populism also includes the anti-elitist and anti-pluralist nature of populism, based on Müller (2016), Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), and Engesser *et al.* (2017). Therefore, in the context of this study, populism is defined as a rhetoric that:

- uses anti-elitist and anti-establishment language; anti-elitist language used by populists is directed against the ruling political elite
- focuses on the will of the people while people are defined as a homogeneous group
- concentrates on a crisis or a potential threat that endangers the same homogeneous group of people
- creates an artificial gap between the “true” people (“us”) and another external group (“them”), excluding the other group based on their identity
- emphasises a deep emotional connection between the homogeneous people and a community or a territory.

### *Religion*

In the context of the use of religious populism in social media posts, three main factors are taken into account. Firstly, the author analyses if the candidates have addressed or mentioned specific religious groups in their posts. Secondly, the presence of religious values in social media posts is studied while religious values are defined here as a general concept. Thirdly, the author observes if and how the candidates have referred to God in their posts.

### *Religious populism*

In this thesis, religious populism is defined through five main characteristics. While populists support the idea of popular sovereignty, religious populists often replace popular sovereignty with God’s sovereignty. They also emphasise the connection between God and a specific territory – the notion of invoking a heartland. A religious populist is a charismatic leader: they often present themselves as a prophet or as a martyr who is on a “mission of salvation”, offering redemption and success through their political mission. Religious populists also refer to religious values or symbols to create the idea of a moral community: a homogeneous group of “true” people who are just and ethical.



## **2. Data and methodology**

The study analyses Facebook posts made by the two most popular presidential candidates in the 2021 Honduran elections, Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura, and by the two presidential candidates in the second round of the 2019 Guatemalan elections, Alejandro Giammattei and Sandra Torres. The gross sample consisted of 1,638 Facebook posts made on the verified public pages of these candidates. The period for the analysed social media posts was September 28, 2021 – November 29, 2021 for the Honduran elections and April 16, 2019 – August 12, 2019 for the Guatemalan elections. The Guatemalan presidential elections have two rounds and, therefore, the analysed period was longer for the Guatemalan elections. All the posts were in Spanish, several translating programs, such as Google Translate, the direct translation program offered by Facebook itself, and WordReference were used.

Firstly, the chapter describes the study's research design. The author has conducted a small-N comparative study of two countries that allows the researcher to account for the historical and socio-political context of these cases. The cases of Guatemala and Honduras are then introduced to the reader; a short overview of the political situation, religious composition, and religion's role in politics in both countries is given. The next subchapter explains the study's method – a multimodal discourse analysis – and approaches to data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter describes the study's limitations and the author's solutions to these limitations.

### **2.1. Research design**

In this thesis, a multiple case study is carried out by the author, comparing the cases of Guatemala and Honduras. The cases were chosen based on their common historical and political backgrounds as well as their similar religious composition: both countries have a considerably sized Catholic and Evangelical populations. Case study as a research method can be used in situations where three following conditions are fulfilled: 1) the research puzzle focuses on questions “how” and/or “why” 2) there is no required control over behavioural events 3) it deals with contemporary, not historical events (Yin 2018, 9).

The research design is built upon the principles of social constructivism. Social constructivism is a theory that sees reality and knowledge as something that are jointly created by individuals in a society (Creswell 2002, 10). Therefore, the researcher should understand the historical, cultural, and social context behind the phenomenon that they are researching (*Ibid.*). The research process is mainly inductive and theories are generated during the process itself (*Ibid.*).

The researcher is not an objective bystander but creates their own meaning while conducting the research (Wahyuni 2012, 70). From a social constructivist viewpoint, the research questions should be open-ended and descriptive (*Ibid.*). Following the theory of social constructivism, the process of writing this thesis has been cyclical: during the data collection and analysis processes, the author has returned to the theoretical framework, revised the research question, and then gone back to conducting the empirical analysis.

The small-N research design is used in this thesis by comparing the use of religious populism in two cases: Guatemala and Honduras. Since the main case unit in the analysis is an independent nation state, it can be considered as a macro-social unit that is a product of various historical and political processes (Ebbinghaus 2006, 4020). A small-N research design allows the researcher to better understand and take these kinds of processes into account, especially for macro-social units (*Ibid.*). Small-N (comparative) analysis has been supported by several political theorists, such as Arend Lijphart (1971, 685), who has argued that “the intensive analysis of a few cases might be more promising than the superficial statistical analysis of many cases.”

The cases of Guatemala and Honduras are chosen based on the principles of purposive sampling: they offer good representation of the Central American region, especially based on their high percentages of Evangelicals. The countries have many common characteristics, such as their Catholic and Evangelical populations, and similar historical and political backgrounds that are described more thoroughly in the following sub-chapter. Both countries are also presidential republics. However, their presidential election systems are different: the Honduran presidential elections only have one round, while the Guatemalan presidential elections have two rounds. The presidential candidates in these countries also differ based on their views and political experience.

Since Latin American populism is a people-centric phenomenon, often characterised by charismatic leaders, both cases are also chosen based on their political system: both Honduras and Guatemala are presidential republics. In both countries, the president holds the role of the head of state as well as the head of government, wielding a considerable amount of executive power. In both countries, the president can introduce new bills to the legislative power as well as veto laws that are already approved by this legislative power. All presidential candidates analysed in this thesis ran for their first term; none of them had been in office before.

## 2.2. Cases

### 2.2.1. Guatemala

Guatemala is a Central American country, sharing a border with Honduras, with the population of 16.9 million people as of 2020 (World Bank 2020a). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Guatemala was governed by the Spanish Empire. Like Honduras, Guatemala claimed its independence in 1821. American influence over the country quickly increased at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the United Fruit Company achieved economic control over Guatemala which is why Guatemala is also known as a “banana republic<sup>2</sup>”.

Guatemala is a presidential republic and has a multi-party system. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was politically unstable for Guatemala and the country had several authoritarian rulers. Between 1960 and 1996, there was a civil war between the government of Guatemala and leftist rebel groups, the latter being supported by the country’s indigenous population (BBC News 2018a). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the country has had democratically elected leaders, however, several of them, such as Alfonso Portillo and Otto Pérez Molina have been accused of corruption during their presidential terms. In 2019 presidential elections, Alejandro Giammattei became the president of Guatemala.

#### *Religious composition of the country*

According to the most recent Latinobarómetro survey, carried out in 2020, the percentage of Evangelicals<sup>3</sup> in Guatemala is 41.7% (Latinobarómetro 2020). In comparison, the percentage of Catholics as of 2020 in Guatemala is 41.4% (*Ibid.*). According to the state’s constitution, religious freedom is guaranteed to everyone since the official separation of the church and the state in 1832 (Lamport 2018, 323). However, religion is still an important part of everyday life. 89% of Guatemalans say that religion is important to them (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 40). 74% of respondents say that they attend religious services at least once a week (*Ibid.*, 43). As of 2020, the church is the most trusted institution in the country: 71% of the survey respondents trust the church (Latinobarómetro 2021, 72).

---

<sup>2</sup> A banana republic – a country ruled by a dictatorship or by a private company, whose export is dependent on one specific trade article, such as bananas (Wright 2020).

<sup>3</sup> In the Latinobarómetro (2020) survey, Evangelicals include Evangelicals who have not specified their denomination, Evangelical baptists, Evangelical methodists, and Evangelical Pentecostals.

### *Religion in politics*

While the church as an institution is the most trusted in the country and people find religion to be important in their everyday lives, only 51% of Guatemalans believe that the government should promote religious values (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96). 44% of Guatemalans think that religious leaders should have a say in political matters (*Ibid.*, 97). Historically, Guatemala has had several Catholic presidents, for example, Álvaro Colom, Óscar Humberto Mejía Victores, the current president Alejandro Giammattei, and three Evangelical presidents: Ríos Montt, a military officer who seized power in 1982 during the Guatemalan Civil War and served as the country's president between 1982 and 1983, Jorge Serrano Elías, and Jimmy Morales. There have been religious parties in the country, such as the Guatemalan Christian Democracy (*Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca*, a Catholic party, dissolved in 2008) and The Party of Democratic Renewal Action or ARDE (*The Acción Reconciliadora Democrática*, an Evangelical party that lost its registration in 1999), but currently, there are no clear religious parties in the country's political arena (Bjune 2016, 158).

While there are officially no religious parties in Guatemala, both Catholics and Evangelicals have successfully entered many mainstream parties. Besides religious politicians, both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical umbrella organisations play an important role in the country's political arena. The Catholic Church has had an advisory position to the government in social and educational questions (United States Department of State 2017a, 2). The largest Evangelical umbrella organisation in Guatemala, the AEG (the Evangelical Alliance of Guatemala or *La Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala*), has advised the Guatemalan government on topics such as health, security, and crime (Bjune 2012, 119). It has also organised presidential debates during the 2011 presidential elections (*Ibid.*).

#### **2.2.2. Honduras**

Honduras is a Central American country with the population of 9.9 million people as of 2020 (World Bank 2020b). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the country was ruled by the Spanish Empire. Honduras became independent in 1821. The Spanish rule that lasted for over three centuries, solidified the position of the Catholic Church in the country which is why Catholicism is one of the most followed religions in Honduras nowadays. The US influence in Honduras increased at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when several American fruit and infrastructure companies entered the country (BBC News 2018b). One of them, the United Fruit Company, started to control most of the country's banana export and, therefore, established an

economic and political monopoly over Honduras, making it a “banana republic”, similar to Guatemala.

Honduras is a presidential republic. The country has mainly had a two-party system, the two parties being the National Party of Honduras (*Partido Nacional de Honduras*) and the Liberal Party of Honduras (*Partido Liberal de Honduras*). Nowadays, however, Honduras is a multi-party system, the most popular party being the Liberty and Refoundation party (*Partido Libertad y Refundación*), the party of the current president, Xiomara Castro. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Honduras had several authoritarian periods, ending in the 1980s. In 2009, President Manuel Zelaya was ousted by a military coup and replaced by Porfirio Lobo Sosa in 2009 presidential elections. In the 2010s, presidential elections were carried out as usual. The current president, Xiomara Castro, the wife of the previously ousted president, Manuel Zelaya, became the leader of country in 2021.

#### *Religious composition of the country*

As of 2020, the percentage of Evangelicals in Honduras is 42.6% (Latinobarómetro 2020). In comparison, the percentage of Catholics as of 2020 in Honduras is 38.3% (*Ibid.*). While the constitution ensures religious freedom for all, the government has been historically accused of being too strongly influenced by the Catholic Church and Evangelical churches (United States Department of State 2017b, 1). 90% of the Honduran people deem religion to be important in their lives, while 64% of the population visit religious services at least once a week (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 40, 43). As of 2020, the church is the most trusted institution in the country: 74% of the survey respondents trust the church (Latinobarómetro 2021, 72).

#### *Religion in politics*

While 90% of the Hondurans say that religion plays an important part in their life, only 46% of people believe that the government should uphold religious values and 42% of Hondurans say that religious leaders should play a part in the country’s politics (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96-97). As for party politics, there have not been any Evangelical parties and Evangelical state leaders in the history of Honduras. However, there have been several Catholic presidents, such as Carlos Roberto Flores and Juan Orlando Hernández, as well as Catholic parties, like the Christian Democratic Party of Honduras (*Partido Demócrata Cristiano de Honduras*) (Mantilla 2018, 373).

As for the political role of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical umbrella organisations, for example, the CEH (Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras or *Confraternidad Evangélica de Honduras*), they are often asked to offer governmental advice regarding various issues. The Catholic Church has also been asked to carry out prayers in formal governmental events (United States Department of State 2017b, 1). It has been argued that both the Catholic Church and several Evangelical groups openly supported the 2009 coup d'état (Legler 2010, 607).

### **2.3. Method**

The study relies on multimodal discourse analysis as its research method. Compared to content analysis, a discourse analysis does not include strict coding processes. The emphasis in a discourse analysis is not on statistical occurrence but rather how language and context shape our understanding of the situation (Kalmus 2015). More specifically, critical discourse analysis is used in this research. According to Gwen Bouvier and David Machin (2018, 178), critical discourse analysis “is a particular strand of discourse analysis that focuses on the role of language in society and political processes” and often concentrates on the language used by the political elite.

(Critical) discourse analysis has been often used in analysing social media posts and their role in shaping political and societal processes. Bouvier and Machin (2018, 188) have pointed out that while the growing popularity of social media generates new possibilities for researchers, it also creates some obstacles that need to be considered when analysing social media through discourse analysis. Some of these obstacles include the multimodal nature of the researched data, the nonlinear type of posts, and the condition where most social media platforms are owned by huge corporations. However, at the same time, critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to better understand the political and social shifts that are happening through social media.

Critical discourse analysis has several advantages (Morgan 2010, 4):

- It allows the researcher to understand the historical, political, and social context of their research and find hidden meanings.
- It can create positive change by questioning dominant societal positions.
- It is applicable to different situations and contexts: it can be used “at any given time, in any given place, and for any given people”.

One of the potential disadvantages of critical discourse analysis might be the method's subjectivity. However, as Senem Aydin-Düzgüt and Bahar Rumelili (2018, 17) have argued, the use of critical discourse analysis expects the researcher to be subjective to some extent since the researcher's main goal is to understand and explain the linguistic context and reveal distinct social mechanisms. In order to ensure the validity of a discourse analysis and limit its disadvantages, Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips (2002, 173) recommend that a thorough discourse analysis should fulfil three following conditions: 1) the analysis must be solid, it should be based on several textual features 2) the analysis must be comprehensive, it must answer all the posed research questions 3) the analysis must be transparent, meaning that sufficient empirical evidence should be presented to the reader.

Multimodal discourse analysis allows the researcher to better understand the audio-visual content of Facebook posts. Since social media posts are often accompanied by other forms of media besides textual content, such as photos, videos, memes, reels, analysing them will give a more comprehensive overview of the topic. Some authors, such as Renée Moernaut *et al.* (2020, 485) have argued that “most contemporary communication cannot be adequately understood unless both the verbal and the visual are taken into account.”

## **2.4. Data collection**

The empirical data of this thesis consists of social media posts made by presidential candidates in Guatemala and Honduras. All analysed posts were obtained from the verified public pages of the presidential candidates. To access older posts of the presidential candidates, Facebook Lite app was used. The app lets the user to filter posts by their author and the exact posting date. The gross sample consisted of 1,638 Facebook posts made on the verified public pages of these candidates.

The social media channel analysed in this thesis is Facebook since Facebook is the second most often used social media platform<sup>4</sup> in Guatemala (51.8%) and Honduras (56.5%), being surpassed in these two countries only by WhatsApp (Latinobarómetro 2020). However, WhatsApp allows its users to send text and voice messages but does not offer a public, digital platform for institutions, as it is the case for Facebook. That is why Facebook is the only social media platform included as a data source. Twitter as a social media platform is also excluded

---

<sup>4</sup> The respondents were asked if they use any of the following network services and were given different options (Facebook, Snapchat, Youtube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, other, or do not use).

in terms of this thesis, since firstly, Twitter is less used in these cases (7.0% in Guatemala, 6.8% in Honduras) and secondly, Facebook has been used more for personal campaigning and mobilisation, while Twitter is mainly used for political commentary (Stier *et al.* 2018, 63).

The following presidential elections are included in the empirical data:

- Guatemalan presidential elections in June – August 2019: the candidates in the second round were Alejandro Giammattei and Sandra Torres.
- Honduran presidential elections in November 2021; the two most popular candidates were Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura.

The thesis focuses on the last presidential elections in each country since it will give the most accurate overview of the relationship between the political elite, religion, and populism in these countries. Multimodal analysis includes the analysis of both verbal and nonverbal data and there is a large amount of empirical data that could be used in this study. Therefore, the number of cases should not be too high. That is why the author has decided to limit empirical data by looking only at the last presidential elections in these countries and not to introduce time as one of the possible variables.

For the 2021 Honduran presidential elections, the period of analysed posts is September 28 – November 29. The Honduran presidential elections have one round, and the election day was on November 28, 2021. A day after the elections is also included in the gross sample to better understand the post-election emotions of both winners and losers. The author has chosen two months up to the election day as the period for analysed posts, since it is a sufficient time to get a thorough overview of the rhetoric used by presidential candidates. At the same time, the number of posts should not be too high, and, therefore, the analysed period should not be too long due to timely limitations of the thesis writing process.

For the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections, the period of the analysed posts is April 16 – August 12. The Guatemalan presidential elections have two rounds, the first round took place on June 16, the second round took place on August 11. Therefore, due to the different nature of elections in Guatemala, the period of analysed posts of Guatemalan presidential elections is also longer compared to the period used in case of the Honduran presidential elections. A day after the elections is also included in the gross sample.



## 2.5. Data analysis

For analysing the social media posts made by presidential candidates, a multimodal analysis will be carried out. In this thesis, the author has applied the multimodal framing analysis toolkit developed by Renée Moernaut *et al.* (2020, 489; the toolkit is given in the Appendix 1). The instrument incorporates eight levels of framing devices – (in)animate participants and attributes, interactions, positionality, context, modality, rhetorical figures, narration, and intertextuality – that are constructed to look at both verbal and visual information. The instrument has a supportive function in the thesis and is used for helping to categorise the topics found from the Facebook posts.

1. (In)animate participants and attributes – who is depicted in the media and how they are depicted: how they are named, is the focus on them, how human emotions are shown.
2. Interactions – how the participants interact with one another. In the verbal context, whether active or passive voice is used, what kind of verbs have been used. In the visual context, gaze, composition of the picture, in what order images are given.
3. Positionality – how the participants are positioned. One of the verbal cues of this aspect is the use of (im)personal pronouns, while visual cues incorporate the point of view, distance, depth of field, focus, lighting.
4. Context – includes the aspects of time, space, and causality. Verbal hints for this device are, for example, the use of recognisable people in known contexts and whether the analysed media is more event-centred or subject-centred. Visually, one could understand context through visual clues that give an overview of the context, such as the visual use of known people.
5. Modality – Moernaut *et al.* (2020, 489) describe it as “degrees of necessity, possibility, certainty, likelihood”. Verbally it signifies the use of grammatical mood, modal auxiliaries, adjectives, and adverbs. Visually, one could focus on such characteristics as texture, colour, tone, focus, depth of field, illumination, brightness.
6. Rhetorical figures – using both visual and verbal metaphoric devices to convey a (hidden) idea and add a deeper meaning. These devices can be, for example, repetition, metaphors, metonyms, ellipses.
7. Narration – how and by whom the story is narrated. Verbally it signifies the depiction of the narrator, like how the narrator is depicted by the media, use of specific quotes and / or verbs, while visual cues can indicate what the dominating narrative is, how the

narrator is visually depicted. As Moernaut *et al.* (2020, 489) have argued, people tend to give more attention to either narrators who are like them or to experts.

8. Intertextuality – referring to other key events, symbols or stories that may create connections in the reader’s head. These symbols can be verbal, such as known sayings or mythological motifs, and visual, for example, visual references, symbols, icons.

## **2.6. Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations of this thesis might arise from a language barrier. All analysed Facebook posts are originally in Spanish and, therefore, some linguistic nuances might become lost in translation. To ensure the reliability of the used data, different translating programs, such as Google Translate, the direct translation into English offered by Facebook itself, and WordReference have been used in the thesis. The author also has a sufficient knowledge of Spanish to understand the fundamental meaning of the posts. Some limitations might also arise regarding the data collection methods. Ideally, the discourse analysis of online posts should be accompanied by other qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews (for example, used by Siles *et al.* 2021). Unfortunately, considering the epidemiological situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, carrying out fieldwork in Honduras and Guatemala might have been difficult and ineffective. Therefore, the author has decided to limit the research to analysing social media posts in these countries.

At the beginning of the writing process, the author planned to include Nicaragua as one of the cases besides Guatemala and Honduras, since the percentage of Evangelicals in Nicaragua is 38.2%, making it a country with the third highest Evangelical population in Latin America by percentage. The two main candidates of the elections were Daniel Ortega and Walter Espinoza, however, there are no verified Facebook pages / accounts linked to these people. There are also no verified pages of their parties, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, Ortega’s party) and the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal Constitucionalista*, Espinoza’s party). The 2021 Nicaraguan elections were widely perceived by the international arena as fraudulent since several opposition members and critics of the current president, Daniel Ortega, were jailed (BBC News 2021). In November 2021, Facebook took down from their platform a government-controlled, pro-Ortega network that had posted anti-opposition and pro-government posts (Al Jazeera 2021).

As mentioned before, one of the strengths of small-N studies is its better understanding of the socio-political and historical context of a selected number of cases. However, to better analyse

the relationship between religion and populism in Latin America, a region-wide study incorporating other countries would be beneficial. In addition, other social media channels besides Facebook, such as Twitter, could be analysed in the future (the same proposition was also made by Siles *et al.* 2021). Future research could also focus on traditional media outlets besides social media channels, such as local newspapers.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1. Results**

##### **3.1.1. Guatemala**

The last general elections in Guatemala took place in 2019. During the general elections, both the presidential and parliamentary elections were held. The Guatemalan presidential elections have two rounds: the first round took place on June 16, 2019, and the second round took place on August 11, 2019. In the first round, there were 19 candidates participating in the presidential race, the two most popular being Sandra Torres, a representative of the party called the National Unity of Hope (received 25.42% of the votes), and Alejandro Giammattei, a representative of the Vamos party (received 13.89% of the votes), who both advanced to the second round of elections (Tribunal Supremo Electoral Guatemala, C.A. 2020, 373). The second round was won by Alejandro Giammattei with 57.95% of the votes, while Sandra Torres received 42.05% of the votes (*Ibid.*, 374). The voter turnout in the first round was 61.84%, and in the second round 42.66% (*Ibid.*).

The Facebook pages of the two candidates who managed to proceed to the second round of the elections, Alejandro Giammattei (Facebook a) and Sandra Torres (Facebook b), were analysed. The period for the analysed social media posts was April 16, 2019 – August 12, 2019, including a day after the elections. In this timeframe, Alejandro Giammattei made 730 posts, while at the same time Sandra Torres made 524 posts.

##### **Alejandro Giammattei**

In his posts, Giammattei has emphasised the unity of Guatemalans as well as his closeness to the Guatemalan people. He has described how Guatemalan people are coming together to build a new, transparent, and reliable country, arguing that “together, rulers and governed, we will achieve building the Guatemala that we have dreamed of [...]” (original text in Spanish: *juntos, gobernantes y gobernados, lograremos construir la Guatemala que hemos soñado [...]*, the post was made on April 18, 2019). In one of his posts, made on July 2, 2019, Giammattei has stated that this campaign is “meant for the people and belongs to them” (original text in Spanish: *esta campaña es de ustedes y para ustedes*). Giammattei has also pointed out how his party, Vamos, has toured the country for three years now and listened to the problems of ordinary Guatemalans:

*“As a new party, we have been touring our country for three years and we have realised that Guatemala needs a new direction [...].” April 27, 2019*

*“Como partido nuevo llevamos tres años recorriendo nuestro país y nos hemos dado cuenta que Guatemala necesita un nuevo rumbo [...].”*

In one of the posts made on May 8, 2019, he argues that he “knows his country, that's why he can talk about the problems by municipalities and by departments” (original text in Spanish: *conozco mi país, por eso es que puedo hablar de los problemas municipio por municipio y departamento por departamento*).

In several of his Facebook posts, Giammattei has called for a change in the country, striving for “a different Guatemala”. He has argued that his party and his future government are the first ones who are going to improve Guatemala:

*“We will go down in history as the first new party that will change the course of this country [...].” June 29, 2019*

*“Pasaremos a la historia como el primer partido nuevo que va a cambiar el rumbo de este país [...].”*

Giammattei has also described his fight against corruption, describing the situation as “damned and disgusting” (original text in Spanish: *la maldita y asquerosa corrupción*, the post was made on July 29, 2019). He has also called out the Guatemala’s former president, Jimmy Morales, for corruptive practices and his non-transparent handling of international relations, especially with the United States.

Two addressed groups that arose from Giammattei’s posts were women, especially mothers, and the Guatemalan youth. Giammattei described mothers as “the pillar of development” (original text in Spanish: *la mujer es el pilar del Desarrollo*, the post was made on May 20, 2019) and used a similar sentence structure in a post made on April 17, 2019:

*“I believe in a Guatemala where young people and women are the protagonists of change and development. With VAMOS they will have the opportunities to grow professionally.” April 17, 2019*

*“Yo creo en una Guatemala donde los jóvenes y las mujeres son los protagonistas del cambio y el desarrollo, con VAMOS tendrán las oportunidades para crecer profesionalmente.”*

## Religion in Alejandro Giammattei's posts

During the Holy Week in Guatemala, Giammattei had made a post on April 18 (Thursday), notifying his followers that due to the Holy Week celebrations, “we respectfully interrupt our activities” (original text in Spanish: *interrumpimos nuestras actividades respetuosamente*). Giammattei did not post anything on the following weekend (April 19 – April 21), including the Holy Friday, the Holy Saturday, and the Easter Sunday. In comparison, his rival candidate Sandra Torres, did not suspend her posting activities for the Holy Week celebrations, nor did she address the event in any way in her Facebook posts.

Giammattei has also declared himself to be a protector of traditional family values. In one of his Facebook posts, posted on May 21, 2019, he is depicted signing a document called “the Life and Family Declaration” (original text in Spanish: *la Declaración Vida y Familia*), accompanied by a non-profit organization called AFI Guatemala. The latter has characterised themselves as the protectors of the Guatemalan society, life, values, and freedom. In one of the photos in the post, Giammattei and his vice president candidate Guillermo Castillo Reyes are depicted holding their right hand on their chest, creating a holy-like atmosphere in the picture. In the post, Giammattei also calls the family “the foundation of our society” (original text in Spanish: *la familia como base de nuestra Sociedad*).

The protection of family values is also described in a post made on June 6, 2019. Giammattei posted a “message to the nation” (original text in Spanish: *comunicado a la nación*), where he confirmed his party's position towards protecting family values and being against abortion. In the same post, he declared his party, Vamos, as the defender of the human rights of all the people of Guatemala:

*“[...] however, we reiterate our calling in defence of the Human Rights of Guatemalans.”* June 6, 2019

*“[...] no obstante reiteramos nuestra vocación en defensa de los Derechos Humanos de los guatemaltecos.”*

Giammattei's position towards family values and abortion are also given in one of his official campaign commitments. During his campaign, he made 40 official promises and introduced them on his Facebook page, including a post where he argued that life starts from the conception:

*“Commitment 33: In our government, the integration of the family as well as life from conception will be respected.” August 3, 2019*

*“Compromiso 33: En nuestro gobierno la integración de la familia será respetada y también la vida desde su concepción.”*

In several of his posts, Giammattei has emphasised the importance of God’s support for his campaign. For example, in a post from August 6, 2019, he thanked “God for allowing us to get here” (original text in Spanish: *agradezco a Dios por permitirnos llegar hasta aquí*). After the successful results in the first round of elections, he also thanked God for his success: “Despite my mistakes, with God's help I have gotten ahead” (original text in Spanish: *a pesar de mis errores, con la ayuda de Dios he salido Adelante*).

Giammattei’s several posts end with the sentence “God bless Guatemala!” (originally in Spanish: *¡Que Dios bendiga a Guatemala!*). In one of his posts, posted on August 9, 2019, two days before the second round of elections, he ended the post by saying: “May God bless you but above all may God bless Guatemala” (original text in Spanish: *que Dios los bendiga pero sobre todo que Dios bendiga Guatemala*). These posts are visually often accompanied by photos where Giammattei is in the foreground, touching or hugging people. In a post made on July 20, 2019, he is shown to receive and wear rosary beads that he got from local Guatemalans as a gift (shown on figure 2, p. 40):

*“What a great surprise I received today in Chiquimulilla, my heart is filled with all the love they gave me. I will treasure this rosary and it will be a reminder of the commitment I have made to this beautiful town.” July 20, 2019*

*“Qué gran sorpresa recibí hoy en Chiquimulilla, me llena el corazón todo el cariño que me han dado. Este rosario lo voy a atesorar y será un recuerdo del compromiso que tengo con este hermoso municipio.”*



**Figure 2. Alejandro Giammattei receiving rosary beads from a Guatemalan woman on July 20, 2019.**

Source: Facebook 2019.

As seen from figure 2, Alejandro Giammattei is depicted in the foreground of the photo with an older Guatemalan woman. The woman is smiling and talking while gifting the rosary beads to Giammattei. The photo is taken in a campaign event in the town of Chiquimulilla where Giammattei is shown to be surrounded by ordinary Guatemalans. This creates a feeling of a people-centric leader who is close to his electorate. The post is accompanied by three photos: the photo in figure 2 is the first one showed in the post, while in the second and third photos Giammattei is shown wearing the rosary beads. The three photos create a narrative of Giammattei as a leader who is thankful for his voters and appreciates small gestures and gifts.

As for mentioning specific religious groups, Giammattei has addressed Evangelical groups two times in his posts. On July 10, he met with several Evangelical pastors:

*“I want to thank the group of evangelical pastors for meeting with us today. The path to development requires listening to everyone’s opinions to bring about real change. With the VAMOS Party we will have a different government.” July 10, 2019*



*“Quiero agradecer al grupo de pastores evangélicos por reunirse hoy con nosotros, el camino del desarrollo requiere escuchar las opiniones de todos para lograr un cambio real. Con el Partido VAMOS tendremos un gobierno diferente.”*

The second time, on July 30, 2019, Giammattei expressed his support for MENAP (*Movimiento Evangélico Nacional de Acción Pastoral* or the National Evangelical Movement for Pastoral Action) regarding the protection of family values and life from conception. MENAP publicly asked from two presidential candidates, Alejandro Giammattei and Sandra Torres, to express their support for the initiative 5272: a bill called “Law for the Protection of Life and Family” (in Spanish: *Ley de Protección a la Vida y la Familia*) that calls for prohibiting same-sex marriages and sexual education at schools, as well as higher penalties for women who have abortions. The bill was also publicly supported on Facebook by the other presidential candidate, Sandra Torres.

After winning the elections, Giammattei referred to God in his first post after the election day:

*“I made a pact with God, if he allowed me to live<sup>5</sup>, I would do it to serve my country. After 12 years of struggle, work, and sacrifice, we achieved the goal [...].”* August 12, 2019

*“Hice un pacto con Dios, si él me permitía vivir lo iba hacer para servir a mi país. Luego de 12 de años de lucha, trabajo y sacrificio, logramos la meta [...].”*

### **Sandra Torres**

Most of the posts made by Sandra Torres in the analysed period depicted her touring the country and addressing different Guatemalan departments with region-specific proposals. One of the hashtags that she used in all her posts was #ForYouAndYourFamily” (originally in Spanish: #PorTiyTuFamilia). During her family-centric campaign, Torres emphasised in her posts the importance of well-being of both young people and women. In several posts, she also referred to herself as a mother and used the expression “a woman of my word” (original text in Spanish: *soy mujer de palabra*). In her cover photo that she used during the presidential campaign, she is depicted in the centre of the photo with Guatemalan children who are smiling (shown on figure 3, p. 42).

---

<sup>5</sup> In the post, Giammattei is probably referring to his multiple sclerosis diagnosis that he had received several years ago.



**Figure 3. The cover photo of Sandra Torres, used during the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections.**

Source: Facebook 2017.

As seen in figure 3, in the cover photo used during the Guatemalan presidential elections by Sandra Torres, the candidate is in the middle of the photo, depicted with children who are smiling. Torres is crouching down with the purpose to be on the same height level as children surrounding her. Torres is also shown hugging the two girls who are besides her. This photo solidifies her family-centric campaign, depicting the candidate as a person who is happy and comfortable around children.

In several of her posts, Torres promised to deliver her proposals and work for the country and all its people. In one of her posts, made on May 6, 2019, Torres stated that she wanted to become the president since she had the experience and the commitment to make Guatemala better, but “above all the passion to work for its people” (original text in Spanish: *pero sobre todo pasión para trabajar por su gente*). The post is accompanied by a photo where Torres is smiling and standing next to a Guatemalan farmer.

Like Alejandro Giammattei, Torres also emphasised in her posts the readiness to work together and her closeness to ordinary Guatemalans:

*“[...] because that's how my government will be: close and attentive to what the people need.”* May 17, 2019

*“[...] porque así será mi gobierno: cercano y atento a lo que necesita la gente.”*

The same sentiment is expressed by Torres in a post made on May 2, 2019, claiming that “together we will create a country we deserve and want for our children” (original text in Spanish: *juntos crearemos el país que merecemos y queremos para nuestros niños*). The

presidential candidate, who is wearing jeans and a denim shirt, is depicted in these photos in the middle of the crowd, communicating with local Guatemalans.

One of the key points of Torres was also the fight against corruption. In one of her posts, made on July 23, 2019, she stated that “fighting corruption is one of our main objectives” (original text in Spanish: *combatir la corrupción es uno de nuestros principales objetivos*). She has also criticised the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, in her posts, accusing him of unnecessarily spending public funds and creating a political crisis in the country. In a post made on July 31, 2019, Torres has blamed the former government of low salaries, increased corruption, and high unemployment rates, promising to change Guatemala for the better (“Let's make the real change that brings well-being and progress to all”, original text in Spanish: *hagamos el cambio verdadero que traiga bienestar y progreso a todos*). The post is accompanied by a video where Guatemalans themselves are talking about their bad experiences, such as work loss and low salaries.

### **Religion in Sandra Torres's posts**

Compared to Alejandro Giammattei, Sandra Torres has fewer posts where she has either mentioned specific religious actors or written about religious values. One of the most prevalent topics regarding religion in her posts has been her anti-abortion stance, similar to Alejandro Giammattei. Like her rival candidate, Torres has expressed her beliefs on Facebook that life starts from conception and that her goal is to protect and strengthen family values. In one of the posts made on May 21, 2019, she is depicted signing a document regarding this position. Like Giammattei, this signing was done in cooperation with AFI Guatemala, a local non-profit organization. In the photo, the flag of Guatemala is behind Torres, giving her legitimacy in the eyes of Guatemalans. The post is accompanied by two tags, #ForYouAndYourFamily, the usual hashtag used by Torres in her posts (originally in Spanish: *#PorTiyTuFamilia*), and #NoToAbortion (originally in Spanish: *#NoAlAborto*). The post includes the following statement:

*“Let us pray for the souls of all those who defend abortion because they have legalised murder.”* May 21, 2019

*“Recemos por las almas de todos aquellos que defienden el aborto porque han legalizado el asesinato.”*

As seen from the quote above, Torres is drawing a parallel between abortion and murder. A similar notion is mentioned in a post made on July 30, 2019, where Torres is addressing the MENAP and confirming her support for the aforementioned legal initiative 5272 (“Law for the Protection of Life and Family”, originally in Spanish: *Ley de Protección a la Vida y la Familia*). Like Alejandro Giammattei, Torres was asked by MENAP to show her support for the initiative. In her official statement, Torres emphasised her belief that life starts from conception. The statement has two quotes from the Bible and starts with the following words:

*“I greet you cordially, in the love of Jesus, believing that God has a good, pleasant, and perfect plan for our country and that each of us has a responsibility towards him and our nation.”* July 30, 2019

*“Les saludo cordiamente, en el amor de Jesús, creyendo que dios tiene un plan bueno, agradable y perfecto para nuestro país y que cada uno de nosotros tiene una responsabilidad para con Él y nuestra nación.”*

In the Facebook post accompanying the statement, Torres confirms that as a “mother and Guatemalan, she reaffirms her commitment to life from conception and believes in marriage between a man and a woman. Defence of moral, ethical, and spiritual values strengthens national unity” (original text in Spanish: *como madre y guatemalteca, reafirmo mi compromiso con la vida desde su concepción y creo en el matrimonio entre hombre y mujer. La defensa de los valores morales, éticos y espirituales fortalece la unidad nacional*). In this post, she argues for a correlation between supporting traditional, Christian values, and the unity of the Guatemalan society.

In addition to answering to MENAP, Torres mentioned religious actors in another post as well, made on July 9, 2019, where she met with the pastors and chaplains of the Escuintla Department. The photos depicted Torres and her guests in a more informal setting, sitting behind tables and coffee cups. The presidential candidate thanked all those in attendance and stated that “their ideas enrich our project” (original text in Spanish: *sus ideas que enriquecen nuestro proyecto*).

In addition to aforementioned posts, Torres mentioned God only in two additional posts. In the first post, made on July 3, 2019, she mentioned that if she was going to get elected as president, it would be by God’s will. In the second post, made on July 9, 2019, she shared a post made by her party, the National Unity of Hope, where they offered condolences to one of the party members because of his mother’s death. The post ended with the words: “May God grant him

and his family peace, strength and resignation at this time” (original text in Spanish: *que Dios le conceda a él y a su familia la paz, fortaleza y resignación en estos momentos*).

### **3.1.2. Honduras**

The last general elections in Honduras took place on 28 November 2021. During the general elections, both the presidential and parliamentary elections were held. There were 15 candidates participating in the presidential race, the two most popular being Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura, receiving 51.12% and 36.93% of the votes respectively (Consejo Nacional Electoral 2021). Castro, a representative of the left-wing party called Liberty and Refoundation, won against her main political opponent, Nasry Asfura, who represented the National Party that had been in power in Honduras since the coup in 2009. The voter turnout was 69.09% (*Ibid.*).

The Facebook pages of two most popular candidates, Xiomara Castro (Facebook c) and Nasry Asfura (Facebook d), were analysed. The period for the analysed social media posts was September 28, 2021 – November 29, 2021, including one day after the elections. In this timeframe, Xiomara Castro made 185 posts, while at the same time Nasry Asfura made 199 posts.

#### **Xiomara Castro**

In many posts, Castro referred to the “unity of the people of Honduras” and their unified fight against the former party in power, the National Party. In several posts, the National Party was accused of corruption and in some cases, it was referred to as a dictatorship:

*“The people are wise and united with one purpose: to end this despicable dictatorship and start a new era of prosperity and dignity.”* November 17, 2021

*“El pueblo es sabio y está unido con un propósito: terminar con esta dictadura oprobiosa e iniciar una nueva era de prosperidad y dignidad.”*

Torres also accused the former government of Honduras of corruption, as well as their elitism:

*“They get away with their arbitrary laws, they get away with their corruption, and they get away with their lack of attention to the people.”* November 7, 2021

*“Se van con sus leyes arbitrarias, se van con su corrupción y se van con su falta de atención al pueblo.”*

Regarding the former party in power, the National Party, Castro’s slogan was “Today they leave” (originally in Spanish: “*Hoy si se van*”) and for many posts, the tags #SeVan and

#HoySiSeVan” were used. Castro often mentioned freedom and democracy that Honduras would achieve together with its people in case she would win the elections:

*“I realise that Honduras is ready for its freedom, one that we will achieve together [...].”* September 28, 2021

*“Honduras está listo para su libertad, una que lograremos juntos [...].”*

The people were often described as the highest authority in the country:

*“The upcoming triumph is not mine but belongs to the people to whom I am committed to returning their rights and freedom.”* November 23, 2021

*“El triunfo que se avecina no es mío sino del pueblo con el que tengo el compromiso de devolverles sus derechos y libertad.”*

The unity of the Honduran people was mentioned in several posts. In a post made on November 14, 2021, the presidential candidate said how “political colours were left behind, here what we have is the result of the unity of the people deciding to move forward towards the recovery and rebuilding of their country” (original text in Spanish: *los colores políticos se quedaron atrás, aquí lo que tenemos es el resultado de la unidad del pueblo que decidido avanzar rumbo a la recuperación y refundación de su país*). In a post made on November 11, 2021, Castro also emphasised her closeness to ordinary Honduran people, describing her meeting with a 97-year-old Honduran man and his granddaughter. The post was accompanied by a video where Castro was seen meeting the man and hugging other people. She stated that “politics is the relationship that one builds with people. [...] It is that direct relationship with all people, it is the affection of my People. This is the only privilege I want to enjoy!” (original text in Spanish: *la política es la relación que uno construye con la gente. [...] Es esa relación directa con todas las personas, es el cariño de mi Pueblo. ¡Este es el único privilegio del que quiero disfrutar!*).

### **Religion in Xiomara Castro’s posts**

In the analysed period, concepts such as “God”, “faith”, “Christian values” were mentioned in five posts. In several posts, God was described as the supporter of the Honduran people and the people of Honduras were depicted as people of faith:

*“Honduras will advance in unity towards the victory of the people with the help of God and solidarity [...].”* November 21, 2021

*“Honduras avanzará en unidad hacia la victoria del pueblo con la ayuda de Dios y la solidaridad [...]”*

Like Castro’s other posts, these five posts also described the people of Honduras as one entity, however, in these posts there were no anti-elite sentiments:

*“I have the conviction that here lies the blessing of God. I felt it in Puringla because God is with the People, and I felt it in every corner of the country.”* November 20, 2021

*“Tengo la convicción de que aquí está la bendición de Dios. Lo sentí en Puringla porque Dios está con el Pueblo y lo he sentido en cada rincón del país.”*

During the analysed period, Castro has not specifically addressed neither the Catholic Church, the Evangelical groups, or other religious denominations. However, in one post, Castro has described how some pastors stopped her and offered to say a prayer for her; in this post, pastors as well as religious values in general are shown in a positive light:

*“Yesterday some pastors stopped me and offered to say a prayer for me. All of us who live in communion, with Christian values and principles, want the best for Honduras. The future of his people is in God's hands, and we know he wants the best for us. In Him We Trust.”* November 11, 2021

*“Ayer unos pastores me detuvieron y se ofrecieron a hacer una oración por mi. Todos los que vivimos en comunión, con valores y principios cristianos queremos lo mejor para Honduras. En manos de Dios está el futuro de su pueblo y sabemos que él quiere lo mejor para nosotros. En él confiamos.”*

Visually, four out of these five posts are also accompanied by photos or videos. In the photos, there are many people, often smiling and joyful, holding supportive banners. In some photos, smiling children are depicted; in one of the pictures, Castro is hugging one of the children. In two photos, Castro is shown praying with pastors, and in one of these pictures, the sun is shining directly behind Castro, creating a halo-like depiction around her head, similar to how Virgin Mary has been depicted in the Catholic art (see figure 4, p. 48). In the photo, all people have lowered their heads and closed their eyes, creating a sacred atmosphere in the picture.



**Figure 4. Xiomara Castro with pastors on November 11, 2021.**

Source: Facebook 2021a.

### **Nasry Asfura**

Asfura's posts have always a hashtag called *#PapiALaOrden* (in English: "father at your service"). The hashtag might signify Asfura's beliefs that he is the father of the Honduran nation, a true leader of the people. Several Asfura's photos and videos include his slogan "Homeland. Life. Progress" (original text in Spanish: *Patria. Vida. Progreso*). In his posts, he has often used an expression "building a greater Honduras" (original text in Spanish: *construir una Honduras más grande*) which resembles the slogan "Make America Great Again" used by Donald Trump in his United States presidential campaign in 2016. Compared to Xiomara Castro, his posts have less references to the people of Honduras as a united, homogeneous group, however, he has referred to himself as a person who governs for all Hondurans:

*"We will govern for all Hondurans, for a bigger and stronger Honduras."* November 26, 2021



*“Vamos a gobernar para todos los hondureños, por una Honduras más grande y más fuerte.”*

The same emotion is depicted in a post made on October 5, 2021, where Asfura confirms that “Honduras is for everyone!” (original text in Spanish: *¡Honduras es de todos!*). During his visit to the department of the Islas de la Bahía (Bay Islands), he referred to the locals as “the greatest wealth of this wonderful island” (original text in Spanish: *la mayor riqueza de esta maravillosa Isla*, the post was made on October 16, 2021). The sentiment of invoking the heartland is also present in Asfura’s posts:

*“I will continue to work every day to defend this beautiful land that gave us life and protect the future of each and every Honduran.”* November 10, 2021

*“Seguiré trabajando todos los días para defender a esta bella tierra que nos dio la vida y proteger el futuro de todas y todos los hondureños.”*

While Castro as the representative of the opposition in Honduras chose to advocate against the nationalist coalition that had governed Honduras since 2009, the same anti-elitist approach does not emerge in Asfura’s posts, since the latter is a member of the National Party, the former party in power. However, in one of his videos, Asfura distances himself from other politicians:

*“[...] I do not speak like other politicians do [...].”* November 13, 2021

*“[...] no hablo como hablan otros politicos [...].”*

In his posts, Asfura has created a profile of himself as a hard-working Honduran who is ready to govern the country. In several posts, he has mentioned his 40-year long career in the public sector. Asfura also confirms in several posts that his main goal is to “serve our beloved Honduras” (original text in Spanish: *vamos sirviendo a nuestra querida Honduras*). He has often emphasised the importance of work in his life and argued that this differentiates him from other politicians:

*“I’m different because my upbringing has always been work, work, work and more work. As they look at me today, they will always see me, firm and ready to serve.”*  
October 23, 2021

*“Soy diferente porque mi formación siempre ha sido la del trabajo, trabajo y más trabajo. Así como me miran hoy, me verán siempre, firme y listo para servir.”*

This sentiment is also depicted in another post made on November 2, 2021, where Asfura also described himself as one of the “co-workers”, creating a connection between him and the Facebook users:

*“Let's dedicate ourselves to work. See me as another co-worker, ready to serve and provide solutions.”* November 2, 2021

*“Dediquémonos a trabajar, mírenme como otro compañero de trabajo, listo para servir y dar soluciones.”*

Two prevalent topics in Asfura’s posts are climate change and creation of new jobs. In a post made on November 2, 2021, the presidential candidate promised to create more jobs for the Honduran people:

*“We are already transforming the capital, generating thousands of jobs, we will do the same nationwide.”* November 2, 2021

*“Ya transformamos la capital generando miles de empleos, lo mismo haremos en todo el país.”*

In his posts, Asfura has often addressed women and teachers as separate, important groups in the Honduran society, calling women “the engine of Honduras” (original text in Spanish: *el motor de Honduras*, the post was made on November 17, 2021) and the position of teacher as “the highest honour in a society” (original text in Spanish: *el máximo honor en una Sociedad*, the post was made on November 23, 2021).

### **Religion in Nasry Asfura’s posts**

Asfura has mentioned concepts such as “God”, “Christian values”, “the protection of life”, “family values” in 18 posts during the analysed period. In several of his posts, Asfura has emphasised how God has been giving him the support and opportunity to become the president of Honduras, often using the expression “if God gives us the opportunity to lead the country” (this specific quote is taken from a post made on October 25, 2021, original text is Spanish: *si Dios nos da la oportunidad de administrar el país*). One of the videos posted on Asfura’s timeline on November 25, 2021, also included a scene where a woman and three children were in a church, looking at the statue of Virgin Mary.

In his posts, Asfura has referred to Honduras as a land “carried in God’s hands” and stated that “with God's help, all things are possible” (original text in Spanish: *con la ayuda de Dios todo*

*es possible*, the post was made on October 24, 2021). He has also emphasised the closeness between God and all the Honduran people:

*“God is with us in every kilometre travelled, with every woman, man and child of this great land that saw us being born.”* October 15, 2021

*“Dios está con nosotros en cada kilómetro recorrido, con cada mujer, hombre y niño de esta gran tierra que nos vio nacer.”*

One of the most prevalent campaign promises made by Asfura is his defence of traditional family values and life from conception. In several of his posts, he refers himself to the defender of these values, making a promise to create programs for promoting and preserving family principles and values. This promise is officially declared in a post made on November 24, 2021. In various posts, Asfura has emphasised the importance of life as “the God’s creation”:

*“Our job is to protect God's creation, ensuring the right to life [...].”* October 18, 2021

*“Nuestro trabajo es proteger la creación de Dios, garantizando el derecho a la vida [...].”*

Asfura has used several visual instruments to create positive emotions in the viewer regarding the topic of protection of family values and life from conception. In several photos he is depicted with pregnant women or infants. In one post, made on October 18, 2021, Asfura is shown to kiss a pregnant woman’s stomach, while other people around them are smiling. In another photo, also posted on October 18, 2021, Asfura is caressing an infant’s head. In a post made on November 3, 2021, the presidential candidate advocates for “protecting God’s creation”. The post is accompanied by a photo where an adult, probably a parent is holding their infant’s hand, creating an intimate and emotional moment (the photo is depicted in figure 5, p. 52). In the same post, Asfura has made the following statement: “God's creation is unquestionable” (original text in Spanish: *La creación de Dios es indiscutible*).



**Figure 5. Nasry Asfura's post against abortion, made on November 3, 2021.**

Source: Facebook 2021b.

Asfura's emphasis on family values is also pointed out in a post made on November 18, 2021, where he has confirmed his future government's dedication to Christian values:

*“Christian principles and values will be at the centre of decision-making in my government and with God's help we will work to strengthen the ethical, moral and family values that define us as Hondurans, in order to build a greater Honduras.”*

November 18, 2021

*“Los principios y valores cristianos estarán al centro de la toma de decisiones en mi gobierno y con la ayuda de Dios trabajaremos para fortalecer los valores éticos,*

*morales y familiares que nos definen como hondureños para construir una Honduras más grande.”*

### 3.2. Discussion

Based on the analysis of Facebook posts of presidential candidates, it can be concluded that all of them have used populist and religious-populist elements in their Facebook channels to some extent. The following discussion of results is presented based on the three components of the author’s own theoretical framework: populism, religion, and religious populism. These aspects are compared by presidential candidates in table 2.

Most of the analysed data proved to be textual. The visual aspect of the posts did not form its own separate dimension but was meant for exemplifying the textual part. The visuals accompanying the text amplified the post’s impact, creating stronger emotions in Facebook users. One of the examples of creating both verbal and visual connections with the users can be found from a post made by Nasry Asfura on November 3, 2021 (the photo is shown on page 52) where the post describes children as “God’s creation” and is accompanied by a photo where a new parent is holding their child’s hand. Other posts made by the analysed candidates include visuals such as the use of actual religious symbols, for example, depicting children visiting a church (a video posted by Nasry Asfura on November 25, 2021) or showing a gifted rosary (a post made by Alejandro Giammattei on July 20, 2019).

**Table 2. Comparison of the four analysed presidential candidates.**

**Based on the author’s own research.**

<b>Alejandro Giammattei (Guatemala)</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Populism</b>	Strong use of anti-elitist language, criticising the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales Corruption is framed as a crisis Emphasising his closeness to the Guatemalan people	“We will go down in history as the first new party that will change the course of this country [...].” – June 29, 2019
<b>Religion</b>	Met with Evangelical pastors Officially addressed one of the Evangelical umbrella	“I want to thank the group of evangelical pastors for meeting with us today. The path to

	<p>organisations in Guatemala (MENAP)</p> <p>Used religious values to defend his anti-abortion position</p> <p>Often used the expression “God bless Guatemala!”</p> <p>Did not post anything during the Holy Week</p>	<p>development requires listening to everyone's opinions to bring about real change. With the VAMOS Party we will have a different government.” – July 10, 2019</p>
<b>Religious populism</b>	<p>Invoking a heartland</p> <p>Using religious values to defend his anti-abortion position</p> <p>Framing himself as a martyr</p>	<p>“I made a pact with God, if he allowed me to live, I would do it to serve my country. After 12 years of struggle, work, and sacrifice, we achieved the goal [...].” – August 12, 2019</p>
<b>Sandra Torres (Guatemala)</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Populism</b>	<p>Criticising the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales</p> <p>Corruption is framed as a crisis</p> <p>Emphasising her closeness to the Guatemalan people</p>	<p>“[...] because that's how my government will be: close and attentive to what the people need.” – May 17, 2019</p>
<b>Religion</b>	<p>Met with pastors</p> <p>Officially addressed one of the Evangelical umbrella organisations in Guatemala (MENAP)</p> <p>Used religious values to defend her anti-abortion position</p>	<p>“Let us pray for the souls of all those who defend abortion because they have legalised murder.” – May 21, 2019</p>
<b>Religious populism</b>	<p>Potential win by God’s will, giving her religious legitimacy</p> <p>A religious community is equated to a moral community</p> <p>Invoking a heartland</p>	<p>“[...] believing that God has a good, pleasant, and perfect plan for our country and that each of us has a responsibility towards him and our nation.” – July 30, 2019</p>

<b>Xiomara Castro (Honduras)</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Populism</b>	Strong use of anti-elitist language Emphasising the unity of Hondurans Describing the ruling political elite as a common enemy	“They get away with their arbitrary laws, they get away with their corruption, and they get away with their lack of attention to the people.” – November 7, 2021
<b>Religion</b>	Did not refer to specific religious groups in her posts Referred to God as the supporter of the Honduran people	“I have the conviction that here lies the blessing of God. I felt it in Puringla because God is with the People, and I felt it in every corner of the country.” – November 20, 2021
<b>Religious populism</b>	A religious community is equated to a moral community Invoking a heartland	“All of us who live in communion, with Christian values and principles, want the best for Honduras.” – November 11, 2021
<b>Nasry Asfura (Honduras)</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Populism</b>	Lack of anti-elitist language, however, Asfura distances himself from other politicians Governing for all Hondurans	“[...] I do not speak like other politicians do [...]” – November 13, 2021
<b>Religion</b>	Did not refer to specific religious groups in his posts Used religious values to defend his anti-abortion position Christian values as a base for his government’s policies	“Christian principles and values will be at the centre of decision-making in my government [...]” – November 18, 2021
<b>Religious populism</b>	Potential win by God’s will, giving him religious legitimacy Invoking a heartland	“God is with us in every kilometre travelled, with every woman, man and child of this great land that saw us being born.” – October 15, 2021

### 3.2.1. Populism

#### *Use of anti-elitist language*

The use of anti-elitist language has been especially prevalent in the Facebook posts made by Alejandro Giammattei and Xiomara Castro. Both candidates were the representatives of relatively new parties in the political arena and, therefore, they often criticised the ruling political elite and promised to do better. In several posts, Alejandro Giammattei called out the former president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, for the latter's non-transparent practices. Giammattei also argued how his new party would be the first one to change Guatemala for the better. While his opposing candidate, Sandra Torres, also promised to improve Guatemala, the anti-elite sentiments were not that strong in her posts. However, like Giammattei, Torres also claimed that Jimmy Morales had taken advantage of the Guatemalan people and the country's finances.

As for Honduras, Castro referred to the former party in power, the National Party, as a dictatorship and used a slogan "Today they leave!" (original text in Spanish: *Hoy si se van!*). Compared to Castro, anti-elitism was not strongly present in the posts made by Nasry Asfura, since he is the member of the former ruling party in Honduras, the National Party. However, in one of his posts, he had distanced himself from other politicians, arguing that "he is not like the others", but otherwise he had not criticised the ruling elite.

#### *People as a homogeneous group and will of the people*

To some extent, all candidates referred to the unity of the electorate and promised to govern for all the people. The idea of the electorate coming and working together to build a new and better country was present in the posts of all candidates. In one of her posts, Torres argued that "together we will create a country we deserve and want for our children". The same sentiment was echoed by Castro who argued that the people of Honduras should be united against the old political elite, while her opponent Nasry Asfura declared in one of his posts that Honduras was for everyone. However, while the unity and closeness of the people has been emphasised by all the candidates, the posts do not have strong anti-pluralist sentiments. While candidates have emphasised the unity of their country, their promises to govern for all the people do not clearly indicate the belief that their electorate is a homogeneous group.

While there are no strong anti-pluralist sentiments present in the analysed posts, the will of the people has often been emphasised by the candidates. In one of her posts, Torres stated that she



has the experience, the commitment, and the passion to work for the Guatemalan people. The same sentiment was repeated in the posts of Giammattei, Castro, and Asfura. For example, in one of her posts, Castro referred to her potential win as the triumph of the people, while Asfura described himself as a “co-worker” who is ready to serve his people and his country. The candidates have also used several textual and visual tools to demonstrate their closeness to the ordinary citizens. One of the most prevalent examples for this is when Castro posted a video of herself, showing the presidential candidate meeting with a 97-year-old Honduran man and his granddaughter.

#### *A crisis or a potential threat*

The use of a crisis or a potential threat as a populist element was not really dominant in the analysed posts. While representatives of new parties, Giammattei and Castro, referred to the poor situation of their country, they did not frame it as a crisis or a threat. Three out of four candidates, Giammattei, Torres, and Castro, had described corruption in their posts as a political element they were going to fight against, however, this topic was not framed as a crisis or as a potential threat but rather as a long-lasting issue.

#### *“Us” vs “them” rhetoric*

While the candidates had not used an external group of people to create an outsider threat, the “us” vs “them” rhetoric was prevalent in their anti-elitist language. For example, Castro argued that the people should be united against their common enemy: the ruling political elite. Candidates also claimed that they are the real leaders who want to represent and work for their people, distancing themselves from other politicians.

#### *Connection between the people and a territory*

Candidates often emphasised the connection between their electorate and their home country. This was especially prevalent in case of religious populism, for example, Asfura called Honduras a land “carried in God’s hands”, indicating that Honduras is chosen by God. In their posts, candidates referred to the connection between the people and a specific territory and promised to defend their country. All candidates claimed that they were committed to changing the country for the better. Castro argued that her potential win would bring Honduras democracy and freedom, while Asfura promised to work every day to “defend this beautiful land”. Similar emotions were presented by Giammattei and Torres in their posts, for example, one of Giammattei’s slogans was “a different Guatemala”.

### **3.2.2. Religion**

#### *Referring to religious groups*

As for referring to specific religious groups, both Giammattei and Torres had made social media posts where they were shown meeting with representatives of religious groups: Giammattei with Evangelical pastors and Torres with the pastors and chaplains from one of the Guatemalan departments. Both candidates also officially addressed the MENAP, one of the Guatemalan Evangelical umbrella organisations, who had asked the candidates to give an official statement on their position regarding abortion and family values. Compared to Giammattei and Torres, both Castro and Asfura had not addressed any specific religious groups in their posts.

#### *Defending religious values*

Religious values were usually mentioned in the context of the questions of abortion and same-sex marriages. Three candidates – Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura – used religious values to defend their anti-abortion and pro-family stance, for example, in one of her posts, Torres drew a parallel between supporting religious and traditional values and the national unity of Guatemala. Religious values as a more general concept were also mentioned in one of the posts made by Asfura who argued that Christian values and principles would guide his government's decision-making processes.

#### *Referring to God*

All candidates had referred to God in their Facebook posts. In some cases, God was mentioned in expressions, for example, Giammattei used the expression “God bless Guatemala!”. In other posts, the candidates argued that they would win the elections thanks to God's support. Three out of four candidates, Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura, claimed that their presidential win would be by God's will.

The notion of God's support was also used regarding the anti-abortion stance of Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura. When asked by MENAP, a Guatemalan Evangelical umbrella organisation, Giammattei expressed his support for the initiative 5272, an anti-abortion bill. In one of her posts regarding the question of abortion, Torres stated that people should pray for those who defend abortion. Asfura had also referred to life as “God's creation” in one of his posts while advocating against abortion.

### **3.2.3. Religious populism**

#### *Popular sovereignty*

While in case of religious populism, politicians often emphasise God's sovereignty, the analysed presidential candidates still stated that the power was held by the electorate, not by God. However, three out of four presidential candidates, Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura, had argued that if they were going to win, it would have been because of "God's will". Connecting their win to God's wishes, they effectively legitimise their coming to power, claiming that they are supported not only by the people but by a higher power as well.

#### *A moral community*

The notion of a moral community was present in posts made by Torres and Castro. The candidates associated the following of Christian values with supporting the country's unity. For example, Torres argued in one of her posts that she believes that "God has a good, pleasant, and perfect plan for our country and that each of us has a responsibility towards him and our nation". In one of her posts, Castro mentioned, how all those who follow Christian values and principles, want the best for Honduras. Both candidates have referred to their religious electorate as a moral community.

#### *Invoking a heartland*

The idea of invoking a heartland was strongly emphasised in the posts of Giammattei, Castro, and Asfura. They had highlighted the connection between their country and God, stating how God defended their country and its people. Giammattei often used in his posts the expression "God bless Guatemala!" or "May God bless you but above all may God bless Guatemala!" The same sentiment was expressed by Castro who stated in one of her posts that God is with the Guatemalan people, and Asfura, who claimed that Honduras was a land "carried in God's hands". This kind of rhetoric confirms the idea that their electorate is chosen by God and, therefore, special.

#### *A mission of salvation*

Religious populists often promise salvation through their political mission. While the analysed candidates often claimed that they would build a new and better country when in power, the notion of religion was missing in these posts. While Asfura, for example, promised to follow Christian values when in power, and Torres stated that she believed that God had a plan for every Guatemalan, these statements alone do not represent the concept of a mission of salvation.

The only candidate who has seemingly promised redemption through their political mission, is Castro who has argued for a free and democratic Honduras when in power. However, her political mission is still framed as secular and it does not promise any kind of religious salvation.

#### *A charismatic leader*

Three candidates, Asfura, Giammattei, and Torres, have argued that their political win would be supported by God, indicating that they are the chosen leaders by God. Giammattei has also presented himself as a martyr or as a saviour in his Facebook posts. In one of his posts, Giammattei describes how he made a pact with God: if God let him live, he would dedicate his life to serving his country. This pact might refer to Giammattei's diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. In his post, he portrays himself as a martyr or as a God's servant.

#### **3.2.4. Generalisation of findings**

As for the five characteristics of populism – anti-elitism, people as a homogeneous group and emphasising the will of the people, a crisis or a potential threat, “us” vs “them” rhetoric, and connection between the people and a territory or a community – four of them were strongly present in the analysed posts. The anti-elite sentiments were mostly demonstrated by Giammattei and Castro. Since they are both candidates of newcomer parties in the political arena, this finding was as expected. All the candidates emphasised the will of the people and pointed out a connection between the people and a territory or a community. One of the aspects of populism that was missing in the posts, was the presence of an external crisis or a threat.

All candidates had referred to God in their Facebook posts, either in expressions or in another context. Three candidates, Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura, defended religious values and Asfura even promised that his government would rely on Christian values when making political decisions. The support of religious values is quite surprising since only 46% of Hondurans and 51% of Guatemalans believe that the government should uphold religious values (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96).

As for mentioning specific religious groups, only the Guatemalan candidates, Giammattei and Torres, had met with religious actors and addressed an Evangelical umbrella organisation (MENAP) in their posts. Neither Asfura nor Castro had mentioned any specific religious groups. While in both countries, religious institutions often advise the government regarding various issues, their political role is larger in Guatemala where both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical organisations advise the government on topics such as education, health,

security, and crime. In case of the 2019 presidential elections, the MENAP, an Evangelical umbrella organisation, even asked Giammattei and Torres to give their official position on the question of abortion and same-sex marriages.

As for religious populism, three out of five indicators – a moral community, invoking a heartland, and charismatic leadership – were present in the analysed posts. The presidential candidates had not emphasised God’s sovereignty instead of popular sovereignty and they had not framed their political agenda as a mission of salvation in a religious context. The lack of the first indicator might be explained by the fact that both Guatemala and Honduras are still secular states and many people do not support the promotion of religious values by the government (Bell & Sahgal 2014, 96). Since Latin American populism is people-centric, the notion of popular sovereignty and the authority of the people is prevalent in these countries. This might also be one of the reasons why the candidates did not justify God’s sovereignty but showed their support for popular sovereignty.

Comparing the rhetoric of the Guatemalan and Honduran candidates, the differences between them arise mainly from their individual characteristics, not from cultural and socio-political disparities between the two countries. For example, Castro and Giammattei as representatives of new parties used the anti-elitist political style, while Asfura and Torres as representatives of old parties did not use this kind of rhetoric. There are also no clear differences arising from the different nature of election systems in both countries. While the Honduran presidential elections have one round and Guatemalan presidential elections have two rounds, there is no change of political rhetoric in Guatemala, comparing the first and the second round of elections.

## Conclusion

The objective of this research was to evaluate the use of religious populism in presidential campaigns in Latin America and analyse the adoption of different visual and verbal instruments used in political campaigning on social media.

For achieving the research objective, a multimodal discourse analysis of Facebook posts of four presidential candidates – Xiomara Castro and Nasry Asfura, who participated in the 2021 Honduran presidential elections, and Alejandro Giammattei and Sandra Torres, who participated in the 2019 Guatemalan presidential elections – was carried out. 1,638 Facebook posts made on the verified public pages of these candidates were included in the analysis. For analysing the posts, a multimodal framing analysis toolkit developed by Renée Moernaut *et al.* (2020) was used as a supporting tool for the author.

The posts were analysed based on the author's own theoretical framework, consisting of three main components: populism, religion, and religious populism. The component of populism had five indicators: 1) anti-elitist language 2) emphasising the will of the people while people are seen as a homogeneous group 3) use of a crisis or a potential threat 4) “us” vs “them” rhetoric 5) emphasising the connection between the people and their homeland / community. The use of anti-elitist language was common for two candidates from new parties, Xiomara Castro and Alejandro Giammattei, while the representatives of old parties, Nasry Asfura and Sandra Torres did not really use anti-elitist language in their posts. The candidates often referred to the unity of their people and emphasised the connection between the people and their homeland.

The component of religion included three indicators: 1) referring to specific religious groups 2) defending religious values 3) referring to God. Two candidates, Giammattei and Torres, referred to specific religious groups in their Facebook posts, including Evangelical pastors as well as the MENAP, an Evangelical umbrella organisation in Guatemala. The defence of religious values as a general concept was quite prevalent in cases of Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura who all explained their anti-abortion position through religious values. Asfura also pointed out how the decisions of his future government would be based on Christian values. All candidates had referred to God in their posts, either in expressions or in other contexts, such as explaining the anti-abortion stance of the candidates.

The main concept analysed in this thesis, religious populism, included five elements: 1) the emphasis on God's sovereignty instead of popular sovereignty 2) invoking a heartland –

emphasising the connection between God and a specific territory 3) charismatic leadership – leader is described as a martyr or as a saviour-like figure 4) a mission of salvation – a political agenda is framed as a mission offering redemption 5) a moral community – a community living in accordance with religious values is seen as moral or ethical.

None of the candidates emphasised God’s sovereignty instead of popular sovereignty. While the candidates often referred to “God’s will” and “God’s support”, they still described people as the main powerholders in the country. The strongest indicator of religious populism in the Facebook posts was invoking a heartland. One of the candidates, Nasry Asfura, called Honduras “a land carried in God’s hands”, while Torres stated that she believes that “God has a good, pleasant, and perfect plan for our country.”

The notion of charismatic, religious leadership was mostly showed by three candidates, Giammattei, Torres, and Asfura, declaring that their win would be by God’s will. This kind of declaration gives them religious legitimacy in the eyes of their electorate. Giammattei also presented himself as a martyr who had sacrificed a lot but who was ready to sacrifice even more for serving his country. The indicator of mission of salvation was missing from the analysed posts: the candidates had not framed their political mission as a road to redemption. However, both Castro and Torres referred to religious communities as moral and ethical communities.

The thesis has contributed to the existing research by carrying out a comparative analysis of two countries with large Evangelical populations, Guatemala and Honduras, and showing how religious populism is used in highly religious countries. The thesis also offers an independent theoretical framework, connecting the concepts of populism, religion, and religious populism, that can be used to analyse religious populism in the Latin American context. The study’s main limitation is its limited number of cases. At the beginning of the writing process, Nicaragua was considered to be a third case study besides Guatemala and Honduras but due to the lack of reliable data, Nicaragua was excluded from this research. Future research could focus on cross-regional comparison of countries since it would give a better overview of the development of religious populism as a regional phenomenon. A regional study would allow the researcher to compare the use of religious populism in more religious countries, such as Guatemala and Honduras, and in less religious countries, like Uruguay.

## References

- *Al Jazeera*. 2021. "Facebook says it shut down Nicaraguan government-run troll farm." November 1, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/1/facebook-says-it-shut-down-nicaraguan-government-run-troll-farm> (accessed on April 15, 2022).
- Altınordu, Ateş. 2010. "The Politicization of Religion: Political Catholicism and Political Islam in Comparative Perspective." *Politics and Society* 38 (4): 517–551.
- Amaral, Oswaldo E. do. 2020. "The Victory of Jair Bolsonaro According to the Brazilian Electoral Study of 2018." *Brazilian Political Science Review* 14 (1): 1–13.
- Anderson, Allan. 2007. "The Future of Protestantism: The Rise of Pentecostalism." In *The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*, eds. Alister E. McGrath, & Darren C. Marks. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwood, 439–452.
- Aydin-Düzgüt, Senem, & Bahar Rumelili. 2018. "Discourse Analysis: Strengths and Shortcomings." *All Azimuth*: 1–21.
- Barbato, Mariano, & Friedrich Kratochwil. 2009. "Towards a post-secular political order?" *European Political Science Review* 1 (3): 317–340.
- Barber, N. W. 2019. "Populist leaders and political parties." *German Law Journal* 20: 129–140.
- Bastian, Jean-Pierre. 2019. "Pentecostalization of Protestantism in Latin America." In *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, ed. Henry Gooren. New York: Springer Publishing.
- *BBC News*. 2018a. "Guatemala profile – Timeline," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19636725> (accessed on April 14, 2022).
- *BBC News*. 2018b. "Honduras profile – Timeline," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-18974519> (accessed on April 14, 2022).
- *BBC News*. 2021. "Nicaragua vote: Ortega tightens grip on power in 'pantomime election'." November 9, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59202881> (accessed on April 15, 2022).
- Bebbington, David W. 1989. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge.
- Bell, James, & Neha Sahgal. 2014. "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region." *Pew Research Center*, 13 November,



<https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/> (accessed on March 30, 2022).

- Bjune, Maren Christensen. 2012. “Te Deum Cristiano Evangélico: “The Evangelical” In Guatemalan Politics.” *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 42 (1–2): 109–133.
- Bjune, Maren Christensen. 2016. “Religious change and political continuity: The evangelical church in Guatemalan politics.” Dissertation. University of Bergen, Department of Politology.
- Boadle, Anthony. 2018. “Brazil's evangelicals say far-right presidential candidate is answer to their prayers.” *Reuters*, September 27, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-election-evangelicals-idUSKCN1M70D9> (accessed on April 16, 2022).
- Boas, Taylor C. 2020. “The Electoral Representation of Evangelicals in Latin America,” <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-e-9780190228637-e-1748> (accessed on March 31, 2022).
- Bouvier, Gwen, & David Machin. 2018. “Critical Discourse Analysis and the challenges and opportunities of social media.” *Review of Communication* 18 (3): 178–192.
- Caiani, Manuela, & Tiago Carvalho. 2021. “The use of religion by populist parties: the case of Italy and its broader implications.” *Religion, State & Society* 49 (3): 211–230.
- Cairn International. 2021. “Latin America’s evangelical wave,” <https://www.cairn-int.info/dossiers-2021-1-page-1.htm> (accessed on May 7, 2022).
- Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council of Honduras). 2021. “Elecciones Generales 2021. Resultados,” <https://resultadosgenerales2021.cne.hn:8080/#resultados/PRE/HN> (accessed on April 10, 2022).
- Creswell, John W. 2002. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (2nd Edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cuadros, José Darío Rodríguez. 2018. “The religious shift in Latin America.” *Hérodote* 171 (4): 119–134.
- DeHanas, Daniel Nilsson, & Marat Shterin. 2018. “Religion and the rise of populism.” *Religion, State & Society* 46 (3): 177–185.

- Ebbinghaus, Bernard. 2006. “When less is more: selection problems in large-N and small-N cross-national comparisons.” In *Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München. Teilbd. 1 und 2*, ed. K.-S. Rehberg. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verl, 4013–4021.
- Edwards, Sebastian. 2019. “On Latin American Populism, and Its Echoes around the World.” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 76–99.
- Engesser, Sven, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser, & Florin Büchel. 2017. “Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology.” *Information, Communication & Society* 20 (8): 1109–1126.
- *Evangelical Focus*. 2020. “660 million evangelicals in the world?” February 18, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/print/5119/660-million-evangelicals-in-the-world> (accessed on March 19, 2022).
- Facebook a. “Alejandro Giammattei,” <https://www.facebook.com/AlejandroGiammattei> (accessed on April 19, 2022).
- Facebook b. “Sandra Torres,” <https://www.facebook.com/SandraTorresGua> (accessed on April 19, 2022).
- Facebook c. “Xiomara Castro De Zelaya,” <https://www.facebook.com/XiomaraCastroZ> (accessed on April 10, 2022).
- Facebook d. “Nasry Tito Asfura,” <https://www.facebook.com/papialaorden> (accessed on April 11, 2022).
- Facebook. 2017. “Sandra Torres,” January 1, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1044985775613278&set=a.540463134111098> (accessed on May 15, 2022).
- Facebook. 2019. “Alejandro Giammattei,” July 20, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2663402333691534&id=148947708470355](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2663402333691534&id=148947708470355) (accessed on May 15, 2022).
- Facebook. 2021a. “Xiomara Castro De Zelaya,” November 11, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=5186348111391920&id=299920016701445](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=5186348111391920&id=299920016701445) (accessed on May 8, 2022).
- Facebook. 2021b. “Nasry Tito Asfura,” <https://www.facebook.com/papialaorden/posts/375788957666467> (accessed on May 8, 2022).

- Gentile, Emilio, & Robert Mallett. 2000. "The Sacralisation of politics: Definitions, interpretations and reflections on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1 (1): 18–55.
- Guadalupe, José Luis Pérez. 2019. *Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America*. Lima: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung e.V. (KAS).
- Hale, Christopher W. 2019. "Catholic Church Advocacy in Latin America." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-811> (accessed on May 6, 2022).
- Jorgensen, Marianne, & Louise J. Phillips. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Kalmus, Veronika. 2015. "Diskursusanalüüs," <https://samm.ut.ee/diskursusanalyys> (accessed on April 16, 2022).
- Koić, Elvira, Pavo Filaković, Sanea Nađ, & Ivan Ćelić. 2005. "Glossolalia." *Collegium Antropologicum* 1: 373–379.
- Krämer, Klaus. 2019. "The main differences between Catholics and Protestants." *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-main-differences-between-catholics-and-protestants/a-37888597#:~:text=For%20Protestants%2C%20the%20ritual%20only,commemorate%20Jesus'%20death%20and%20resurrection.&text=In%20the%20Roman%20Catholic%20Church,holy%20orders%20and%20extreme%20unction>. (accessed on May 7, 2022).
- Lamport, Mark A. 2018. *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Latinobarómetro. 2020. "Online Analysis," <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp> (accessed on March 19, 2022).
- Latinobarómetro. 2021. "Informe 2021," <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp> (accessed on March 19, 2022).
- Legler, Thomas. 2010. "Learning the hard way: Defending democracy in Honduras." *International Journal* 65 (3): 601–618.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review* 65: 682–693.

- Lynch, John. 2012. *New Worlds: A Religious History of Latin America*. London: Yale University Press.
- Mantilla, Luis Felipe. 2018. “Faith and experience: Authoritarian politics and Catholic parties in Latin America.” *Party Politics* 24 (4): 370–381.
- Masci, David. 2014. “Why has Pentecostalism grown so dramatically in Latin America?” *Pew Research Center*, November 14, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/#:~:text=Pentecostalism%20is%20now%20overwhelmingly%20anchored,2%20million%20to%203%20million>. (accessed on March 27, 2022).
- McGarry, Patsy, 2021. “Number of Catholics increasing worldwide, falling in Europe.” *The Irish Times*, October 25, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/number-of-catholics-increasing-worldwide-falling-in-europe-1.4710161#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Catholics%20worldwide,world%20population%20of%207.6%20billion>. (accessed on May 7, 2022).
- Moernaut, Renée, Jelle Mast, & Luc Pauwels. 2020. “Visual and multimodal framing analysis.” In *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, eds. Luc Pauwels & Dawn Mannay. New York: SAGE Publications, 484–499.
- Moffitt, Benjamin. 2016. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Morgan, Angela. 2010. “Discourse analysis: An overview for the Neophyte Researcher.” *Journal of Health and Social Care Improvement* 1: 1–7.
- Mudde, Cas, & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2013. “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.” *Government and Opposition* 48 (2): 147–174.
- Mudde, Cas, & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2017. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. “Kuidas mõelda – ja mitte mõelda – populismist.” *Vikerkaar*, <https://www.vikerkaar.ee/archives/20250> (accessed on March 31, 2022).
- Norris, Pippa. 2020. “Measuring populism worldwide.” *Party Politics* 26 (6): 697–717.

- Palmer, Richard. 2013. "A Brief History of Catholicism in Latin America." *The Trumpet*, <https://www.thetrumpet.com/10541-a-brief-history-of-catholicism-in-latin-america> (accessed on May 6, 2022).
- Pew Research Center. 2011. "Christian Movements and Denominations." December 19, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/> (accessed on March 28, 2022).
- Pew Research Center. 2014. "Religion in Latin America. Chapter 4: Pentecostalism." November 13, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/chapter-4-pentecostalism/> (accessed on March 27, 2022).
- Philpott, Daniel. 2009. "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 183–202.
- Postill, John, 2018. "Populism and social media: a global perspective." *Media, Culture & Society* 40 (5): 754–765.
- Remmer, Karen L. 2012. "The Rise of Leftist– Populist Governance in Latin America: The Roots of Electoral Change." *Comparative Political Studies* 45 (8): 947–972.
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 117–143.
- Schwaller, John Frederick. 2011. *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond*. New York: NYU Press.
- Shoemaker, Terry. 2021. "Understanding evangelicalism in America today." *The Conversation*, August 4, <https://theconversation.com/understanding-evangelicalism-in-america-today-164851> (accessed on March 19, 2022).
- Siles, Ignacio, Erica Guevara, Larissa Tristán-Jiménez, & Carolina Carazo. 2021. "Populism, Religion, and Social Media in Central America." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*: 1–22.
- Silva Moreira, Alberto da. 2014. "Globalization, Cultural Change and Religion: The Case of Pentecostalism." *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 2: 381–387.
- Smith, C. L. 2009. "Pentecostal presence, power and politics in Latin America." *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 30 (3): 219–229.
- Smith, Calvin. 2010. *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism*. Leiden: Brill Publishers.

- Spruyt, Bram, Gil Keppens, & Filip Van Droogenbroeck. 2016. “Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?” *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (2): 335–346.
- Stanley, Ben. 2008. “The thin ideology of populism.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13 (1): 95–110.
- Stier, Sebastian, Arnim Bleier, Haiko Lietz & Markus Strohmaier. 2018. “Election Campaigning on Social Media: Politicians, Audiences, and the Mediation of Political Communication on Facebook and Twitter.” *Political Communication* 35 (1): 50–74.
- Torre, Carlos de la. 2017. “Populism in Latin America.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, & Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 195–214.
- Tribunal Supremo Electoral Guatemala, C.A. 2020. “Memoria de Elecciones Generales 2019,” <https://tse.org.gt/index.php/info/memoria-electoral-2019> (accessed on April 17, 2022).
- United States Department of State. 2017a. “Guatemala 2017 International Religious Freedom Report,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281320.pdf> (accessed on March 30, 2022).
- United States Department of State. 2017b. “Honduras 2017 International Religious Freedom Report,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281326.pdf> (accessed on March 31, 2022).
- Vain, Kristiina. 2019. “The political role of Evangelicalism in Latin American countries: case studies of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.” Bachelor’s thesis, University of Tartu, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies.
- Wahyuni, Dina. 2012. “The Research Design Maze: Understanding Paradigms, Cases, Methods and Methodologies.” *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research* 10 (1): 69–80.
- Weyland, Kurt. 2001. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 34 (1): 1–22.
- World Bank. 2020a. “Population, total – Guatemala,” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=GT> (accessed on April 14, 2022).

- World Bank. 2020b. “Population, total – Honduras,” <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=HN> (accessed on April 14, 2022).
- Wright, Robin. 2020. “Is America Becoming a Banana Republic?” *The New Yorker*, June 4, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/is-america-becoming-a-banana-republic> (accessed on May 15, 2022).
- Yilmaz, Ihsan, & Nicholas Morieson. 2021. “A Systematic Literature Review of Populism, Religion and Emotions.” *Religions* 12 (272): 1–22.
- Yin, Robert K. 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications. Design and Methods: Sixth Edition*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Zilla, Claudia. 2020. “Evangelicals and politics in Brazil: the relevance of religious change in Latin America.” *SWP Research Paper* 1: 1–31.
- Zúquete, José Pedro. 2017. “Populism and Religion.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, & Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 445–466.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1. A multimodal analysis toolkit.

Multimodal framing analysis toolkit		
Verbal		Visual
Naming and predicational strategies Ordering of lexical terms Overlexicalization versus deletion	<b>(In)animate participants and attributes</b> Presence or absence, categorization, connotation Narrative roles (villain, hero, victim ...)	Facial expression, gesture, props, size ... (Dis)connection, symmetry/similarity, repetition Relative size, focus Depictions of human beings, emotions
Choice for particular verbs Active/passive constructions, nominalizations Foregrounding/backgrounding/deleting of agents/patients/other specificities	<b>(Inter)actions</b> Transitivity (property of verbs), active/passive voice, abstraction	Vectors (e.g. gazes, arm lines) (Lack of) gaze Ordering of images (e.g. causality) Composition: centre/margin, foreground/middle ground/background
Personal pronouns Type of address	<b>Positionality</b> (Moral) alignment between participants inside/outside the picture frame	Point of view Distance Depth of field, focus, lighting Point of view, distance, contact, depth of field, focus, lighting First person perspective
Adverbs, prepositional constructions ... Event/context-centred versus subject-centred Recognizable people, in recognizable contexts	<b>Context (time, space, causality ...)</b> Presence or absence, character	Visual cues suggesting particular time-spaces Distance/angle/depth of field Emphasis on context/scene or subject Recognizable people, in recognizable contexts
Grammatical mood, modal auxiliaries, adjectives, adverbs Strong modality: high commitment, confidence	<b>Modality</b> (Degrees of) necessity, possibility, certainty, likelihood	Articulation of detail, background, colour (e.g. saturation), depth, light and shadow, tone ... Focus, depth of field, illumination, brightness, quality, texture, colour, tone
Juxtaposition, contrast, metaphors, metonyms, hyperbole, presupposition, personification, exemplification, ellipsis, inversion, rhetorical question, semantic reversal, stock phrases, one-liners ... Repetition, metaphor, metonym, ellipsis	<b>Rhetorical figures</b> Add deeper layers of meaning Foreground certain elements Make (parts of) the frame more convincing	Juxtaposition, contrast, metaphors, metonyms, hyperbole, presupposition, personification, exemplification, ellipsis, inversion ... Repetition, metaphor, metonym, ellipsis
Depiction of narrator: Naming and predicational strategies Depiction of quotes: modality and hedging, choice for particular quoting verbs Expert/'people like us' (legitimation of source) First person perspective Emotion, drama, the unexpected Placement in the structure of the news story Duration (reduction, expansion)	<b>Narration</b> (De)legitimization of narrators As a rhetorical device the narrative helps to communicate the frame effectively	Depiction of narrator: choice for particular attributes, pose, setting, distance... Narrator as focalizer: global, objective, subjective ... point of view Expert/'people like us' (legitimation of source) First person perspective Aesthetic, affective or graphic quality, the unexpected
Verbal icons, symbols, metonyms, (mythological) motifs, intertextual references Frame lines (structural) similarity Cultural resonance Repetition, placement (e.g. top versus bottom), size, incongruities in lay-out, frame lines, vectors (leading lines) ... on page/outlet/inter-source level	<b>Intertextuality (direct/broader context)</b> Key events, icons and symbols, myths ... Similar (multimodal) texts (e.g. same theme) Interaction on a page (layout), in an outlet, on inter-source level	Visual icons, symbols, metonyms, (mythological) motifs, intertextual references Frame lines, similarity Cultural resonance Repetition, placement (e.g. top versus bottom, centre versus margin), size, number of pictures, incongruities in layout, frame lines, vectors (leading lines) ... on page/outlet/inter-source level

Source: Moernaut *et al.* 2020, 489–490.



# RELIGIOOSSE POPULISMI KASUTAMINE SOTSIAALMEEDIAS PRESIDENDIVALIMISTE AJAL: GUATEMALA JA HONDURASE JUHTUMINÄITED

Kristiina Vain

## Resümee

Töö eesmärgiks on uurida religioosse populismi esinemist Ladina-Ameerika riikides presidendivalimiste kampaaniate ajal sotsiaalmeedias ning analüüsida erinevate visuaalsete ja verbaalsete instrumentide kasutamist poliitilistes kampaaniates.

Töö eesmärgi saavutamiseks viis autor läbi multimodaalse diskursuse analüüsi, kuhu kaasati nelja presidendikandidaadi – Alejandro Giammattei ja Sandra Torrese, kes olid Guatemala 2019. aasta presidendivalimiste teises voorus osalenud kandidaadid, ning Xiomara Castro ja Nasry Asfura, kes olid kaks kõige populaarsemat presidendikandidaati Hondurase 2021. aasta presidendivalimistel – Facebooki postitused. Kokku analüüsis autor 1 638 Facebooki postitust. Guatemala presidendikandidaatide Alejandro Giammattei ja Sandra Torrese puhul analüüsiti postitusi ajavahemikus 16. aprill 2019 – 12. august 2019, Hondurase presidendikandidaatide Xiomara Castro ja Nasry Asfura puhul analüüsiti postitusi ajavahemikus 28. september 2021 – 29. november 2021.

Postitusi analüüsiti lähtuvalt autori enda teoreetilisest raamistikust, mis koosnes kolmest eraldiseisvast, aga omavahel ühendatud komponendist: populism, usk ja religioosne populism. Populismi iseloomustamiseks kasutati töös viit indikaatorit: 1) eliidivastatus 2) rahva tahte rõhutamine, seejuures defineeritakse rahvast kui homogeenset gruppi 3) kriisi või potentsiaalse ohu retooriline kasutamine 4) kahe vastandliku grupi, „meie“ versus „nemad“ rõhutamine 5) rahva ja kodumaa vahelise sideme rõhutamine. Xiomara Castro, üks Hondurase presidendikandidaatidest, ning Alejandro Giammattei, üks Guatemala presidendikandidaatidest, kasutasid mõlemad eliidivastast retoorikat, kuna mõlemad kandidaadid olid vastloodud erakonade liikmed. Eliidivastast keelekasutust oli vähem märgata Nasry Asfura ja Sandra Torrese postitustes, kuna nii Asfura kui ka Torres on vanemate erakondade liikmed. Kõik kandidaadid toonitasid sageli oma rahva ühtsust ning rõhutasid emotsionaalset sidet rahva ning nende kodumaa vahel.

Usu komponendi iseloomustamiseks kasutati töös kolme indikaatorit: 1) kindlate usuliste gruppide mainimine postitustes 2) usuliste väärtuste kaitsmine 3) vihjamine Jumalale. Kaks

kandidaati, Giammattei ja Torres, mainisid oma Facebooki postitustes kindlaid usulisi gruppe, sealhulgas evangeelseid pastoreid ning ühte Guatemala evangeelset katuseorganisatsiooni, MENAP-i. Giammattei, Torres ja Asfura kaitsesid oma postitustes ka usulisi väärtusi üldise terminina, näiteks vihjasid kõik kolm kandidaati usulistele väärtustele seoses nende abordivastatuse kampaaniatega. Lisaks kirjeldas Asfura, kuidas tema tulevase valitsuse töö hakkab põhinema kristlikel väärtustel. Kõik kandidaadid olid oma postitustes maininud Jumalat, kas kõnekujundites või mõnes muus kontekstis.

Selles töös analüüsitud peamine mõiste, religioosne populism, hõlmas endas viit elementi: 1) Jumala suveräänsuse rõhutamine 2) Jumala ja kindla territooriumi vahelise sideme toonitamine 3) karismaatiline juht – poliitilist juhti kirjeldatakse kui märtrit või rahva päästjat 4) lunastus – poliitilist agendat kirjeldatakse kui usulist missiooni 5) moraalne kogukond – usuliste väärtustega kooskõlas elavat kogukonda kirjeldatakse moraalse ning eetiliseksena.

Ükski kandidaatidest ei rõhutanud oma Facebooki postitustes Jumala suveräänsust. Kandidaadid vihjasid küll sellele, et Jumal toetab nende potentsiaalset valimisvõitu, ent samaaegselt tõid nad esile just rahva, mitte Jumala suveräänsuse. Kõige tugevam religioosse populismi indikaator postitustes oli Jumala ja kindla territooriumi vahelise sideme rõhutamine. Näiteks kirjeldas Asfura ühes postituses oma kodumaad Hondurast kui „maad, mida Jumal oma kätel kannab“.

Karismaatilise ja religioosse liidrina kujutasid end Giammattei, Torres ja Asfura, väites, et nende valimisvõit lähtuks „Jumala tahtest“. Taoline avaldus annab neile valijaskonna silmis religioosse legitiimsuse. Giammattei kirjeldas ka end kui märtrit, kes oli oma elus palju ohverdanud, ent kes oleks oma riigi teenimise nimel veelgi valmis ohverdama. Postitustes ei olnud märgata tendentsi, et kandidaadid oleksid pakkunud lunastust oma poliitilise agenda raames. Siiski kujutasid nii Torres kui ka Castro usulist kogukonda kõige moraalsema kogukonnana.

Tänu magistrیتöös tehtud võrdlevale analüüsile on võimalik hinnata, kuidas on religioosset populismi kasutatud usklikes Ladina-Ameerika riikides. Magistrیتöö on välja toodud ka iseseisev teoreetiline raamistik, mis ühendab populismi, usu ning religioosse populismi ning mida on võimalik rakendada ka teiste Ladina-Ameerika riikide uurimisel. Tuleviku-uuringud võiksid analüüsida religioosse populismi kasutamist terves Ladina-Ameerika regioonis.

## **Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public**

I, Kristiina Vain,

herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to the work created by me [“The use of religious populism in social media during presidential elections: The cases of Guatemala and Honduras”], supervisors Alar Kilp, PhD, and Louis John Wierenga, MA,

- 1) reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright;
- 2) to make the work specified in p. 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright;
- 3) I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in p. 1;
- 4) I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons’ intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.