



Pérez Guadalupe, José Luis and Carranza, Brenda (eds): *Novo ativismo político no Brasil: Os evangélicos do século XXI*

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The 2018 Brazilian General Election has captured the attention of a number of international analysts and scholars from different areas of study, both in Brazil and worldwide. Whereas the large number of researches on it in Brazil could be regarded as obvious, the interest (which) this event has awakened worldwide may be construed as an indication of its topicality within the current global political scene (e.g., Añez and Costa 2019; Falomir et al. 2019; Kourliandsky 2019; Manow 2020; Nöthen 2020, among others). On a macro level, a correlation between the victory of Donald Trump, in the USA (2016), and Jair M. Bolsonaro, in Brazil (2018), can be indeed contended, as it has been. Accordingly, there would be a close connection between the emerging, well-mobilized conservative forces in Brazil with those in the USA and across the world so as to reshape the global political scene (e.g., Souza 2020).

It is precisely against this backdrop of theoretical challenges and conceptual gaps in political as well as social sciences in the face of these new phenomena and a significantly changed public sphere and discourse that the collective volume *Novo ativismo político no Brasil: os evangélicos do século XXI* is to be located. It should be noted, though, that, rather than setting out to account for this phenomenon in its full complexity, the organizers of this project made the epistemological and methodological choice of restricting themselves to a very specific question, viz., which actors or protagonists have stood out throughout such rearrangement of the public sphere in Brazil, with particular emphasis being placed on religious players. This choice is warranted by the fact that there has been a widely held perception that Evangelicals and Pentecostals emerged just as victorious from the 2018 General Election as Bolsonaro and conservatism (e.g., Almeida 2019; Vital da Cunha and Evangelista 2019).

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Although most contributions therein examine, in particular, the Brazilian scenario, the work does not lose sight of the broader Latin American landscape. In effect, the introduction consists of a 92-page, fairly comprehensive text in which Pérez Guadalupe, one of the editors, provides a general overview of the key issues relative to this topic, as they have been discussed in Latin America. First, he gives an account of the demographic increase of Evangelicals and Pentecostals across the continent. Next, he elaborates at length on three questions of great import, *inter alia*: the (theological) reasons for these religiously motivated actors to actively engage in (partisan) politics, the strategies Evangelicals have been employing in their political engagement across Latin America, and whether or not there is such a thing as an “Evangelical vote” or a “confessional voting behavior”.

The volume is divided into three parts: (1) political processes and Evangelicals in Latin America, (2) Evangelicals in times of crisis, and (3) the Evangelical agenda and the Bolsonaro administration. The first part essentially inquires into the strategies adopted by Evangelicals to climb the political ladder. Accordingly, the first chapter by Taylor C. Boas mainly shows how Evangelicals have been ingenious enough to make use of the “windows of opportunities” offered by the party system in Brazil and to establish, or at least do the groundwork for, what could be called Evangelical voting behavior. An effective strategy to exercise such influence is by means of “political pressure groups”. This tactic is spelled out by Oscar Amat y León and Pérez Guadalupe in Chapter 3 in which they show how this “pressure” may be exerted both *ad intra*, *i.e.*, among their church cohorts, and *ad extra*, *i.e.*, in the public sphere so as to shape public opinion, notably through the strategic weapon of the so-called moral agenda. Remarkably enough, the success of this tactic is owed to a battle that is mainly fought by an army of “non-professional actors of social mobilization” (158) through the channels of social media. Finally, Guillermo Flores Borda lays bare the underpinnings of the idea of a “Christian Nation”, very widespread in the USA, which is winning acceptance in Brazil and across the continent and has fueled a number of “cultural wars” (151).

The contribution by Brenda Carranza, the second editor, functions as a hinge between the first and the second part of the volume. In her quest for a conceptual framework that could shed light on Evangelical/Pentecostal political engagement, she proposes—partly drawing on Burity—the heuristic category of “public religion” as key to understanding such engagement in terms of a fundamental “shift of religion” from the private to the public domain. In addition—she identifies, and so does Joanildo Burity in the following chapter— (a portion of) Evangelicals as arguably being the chief protagonists of the change in public discourse. In effect, the argument underlying the volume’s second part is that Evangelical and Pentecostal “elites”, *i.e.*, eminent figures, took advantage, as it were, of the severe crisis that Brazil has gone through in the last decade in order to amplify their influence, both political and public. These pastors, bishops, apostles, and prophets are referred to by Burity as a “parliamentary and pastoral elite” (see also Burity 2020) whose narrative does not necessarily resonate across the entire Evangelical spectrum and, nonetheless, overshadows public discourse.

In the subsequent chapter, Ronaldo de Almeida substantiates this argument, insofar as he shows how, at the beginning of the 2013 mass protests across Brazil, prominent Evangelicals and Pentecostals actually were one of the targets of demonstrators. However, thanks to their skillful rhetoric and professional use of communication media, these religious leaders were ingenious enough to join the protests and successfully present themselves as the true “saviors of the fatherland”, thereby turning out to be protagonists of a generalized

indignation movement against “the establishment”. In Chapter 9, Maria das Dores Campos Machado elaborates on the apparent alignment of these actors with the conservative and even ultraconservative side of the political spectrum—which is suggested in most contributions—and demonstrates which consequences this alliance has for gender-related issues as well as for the public debate around sexual and reproductive rights.

A further rhetorical device by means of which Evangelicals could capitalize on in the midst of the crisis is what Christina Vital da Cunha calls, in her recent studies and in Chapter 7, “the rhetoric of loss”. Functioning as a diagnosis, and building on a generalized feeling of fear and threat, this rhetorical device urges “the return of order, predictability, security, and unity” (244) and underpins, in its turn, the abovementioned “moral agenda” defended by these religious actors. Another aspect emphasized by Vital da Cunha concerns the alliances formed by these actors. According to her, in the aftermath of the 2014 General Election, in which Pastor Everaldo Pereira was embarrassingly beaten while running for presidency, these actors might have realized that it would be more effective to rely on alliances with non-Evangelicals, especially for the executive, than to put up their own candidates. In fact, as Fábio Lacerda contends in Chapter 8, with the aid of detailed statistical data, several influential denominations, especially megachurches, opted for supporting “official candidates” of their respective churches for legislative offices and supported non-Evangelicals for the executive. Thus, he attributes the increase of Evangelical congressmen in Brazil “to the success of a small number of large Pentecostal churches organized in a centralized structure” (261), which undergirds the aforementioned argument of the existence of a “parliamentary and pastoral elite”.

The third part sets out to lay bare the “elective affinities” (Weber) between the interests of Evangelical political actors and President Bolsonaro’s. In this respect, Paul Freston’s apparently sober reading of this phenomenon may be helpful. In the book’s last chapter, he argues that the seemingly ideological affinity between both is neither “ontological”, as it were, i.e., pertaining to their very “nature”, nor irreversible. In his view, it is rather about a pragmatic, timely, and perhaps temporary alliance, in the first place (373). This is compatible with Leonildo Silveira Campos’ argument for whom the very strong characterization of Bolsonaro as “political myth” and “charismatic leader” by Evangelicals and (Charismatic) Catholics during the electoral campaign and in the first months of his administration appears to have been consistently waning as time went by.

However, this in no way implies that there are not close affinities between both. From Chapter 10, by Marina Basso Lacerda, and from Chapter 12, by Ricardo Mariano and Dirceu André Gerardi, one may infer that the point of intersection between President Bolsonaro and Evangelicals is an extreme variant of (neo)conservatism, which is used, in tune with the Pentecostal tenet of spiritual warfare, to discredit or to demonize their political opponents, especially left-wing parties. As Alexandre Brasil Fonseca demonstrates in Chapter 11, the most effective instrument to perform this battle taking place in the public arena has been the professional use of social and mass media, and not rarely with recourse to techniques of disinformation, notably in electoral campaigns.

Throughout the volume, the overall depiction of these new actors in the Brazilian political scene is quite sobering, if not gloomy. The primary focus on the “parliamentary and pastoral Evangelical elite” seems to have obscured other shades of Evangelical agency, since no significant efforts are noticed through the pages to portray alternative, even progressive (cf. Miller and Yamamori 2007) manifestations of engaged Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism as political actors as well—few as they may be. This might be due to the fact that initiatives

such as the “Evangelical Front for the State of Law”, in the Brazilian Parliament (e.g., Dip 2018, p. 62), or the few other active, rather progressive pastors whom Magali do Nascimento Cunha spots in one of her works (2019), albeit being equally active, do not enjoy the same popularity and visibility in the public sphere as the actors described in *Novo ativismo político no Brasil*. Finally, although the book definitely fulfills all formal standards expected of a publication of this level, readers could have enjoyed a conclusive chapter in which some of the central ideas put forward by the contributors would have been taken up in the fashion of a systematic reflection, thereby attaching even more analytical value to the standard of this publication.

This volume is highly recommended to all those who may be interested in the topic of Evangelical-Pentecostal political engagement, those who may be grappling with the challenges resulting from the substantial changes taking place in the Brazilian public domain and across the world, and to attentive observers of the shifts of emphasis observed in the field of religion today.

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