

# **The Ebb of the Pink Tide and a Turn to the Right in Latin America**

A comparative case study into why the left has lost power in the Southern Cone



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# Abstract

The left-wing governments that possessed the power of the executive in Latin America for almost two decades are now under duress. The event that has posed the initial threat to the “reign” of the Pink Tide is believed to be the 2015 election of Mauricio Macri in Argentina. This event triggered a chain reaction of conservative changes in government and a backlash against left-leaning dominance. Having this phenomenon in mind, this study attempts to explain why the left has lost power in Latin America, by employing a comparative case study approach. The selected cases, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, are regarded as representative for the issue under scrutiny. Few accounts, if any, have attempted to explain the leftist retreat using a two-folded framework encompassing competing explanations. As a result, the relationship between an economic and religious variable is explored, by disentangling the two and testing whether they are mutually exclusive or convergent. The findings suggest a certain degree of variation between the three cases, but prove that economic and religious voting coexist in each and every case. The end of the commodity boom generated severe economic crisis that triggered discontent amongst the masses, who cast their vote using an economic, forward-looking rationale. What other studies neglected is that economic voting did not necessarily exist independently, but was coupled with the significant voting capacity of conservative Evangelicals, a denomination with a relevant increase in adherents recently. This expanding trend is not yet a massive phenomenon all over Latin America. But despite impacting countries disproportionately, this study demonstrates it has a tangible impact on the region’s politics.

*Key words:* turn to the right, economic voting, religious voting, Latin America, retreat of the pink tide

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# Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Specific aims .....	1
1.2	Background and significance .....	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Preliminary studies .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1	The interaction between politics and the economy .....	6
3.2	The interaction between politics and religion .....	7
<b>4</b>	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1	Research design.....	10
4.2	Case selection .....	11
4.3	Data collection and analysis .....	12
<b>5</b>	<b>Analysis.....</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1	Argentina.....	13
5.2	Brazil .....	16
5.3	Chile .....	22
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Concluding remarks .....</b>	<b>28</b>
7.1	Avenues for future research .....	28
<b>8</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>30</b>

# 1 Introduction

With the electoral victory of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, the year of 2015 marked the rolling back of the pink tide after a decade and a half of dominance. Closely following, Brazil and Chile joined the “team” of the new right-leaning governments that took the power of the executive and made history by breaking the leftist cycle. This paper attempts to explain right’s return to power by using a comparative case studies approach and employing a framework that translates into the symbiosis between an economic and a religious competing explanation.

One primary force that conspired against the left turn was the end of the commodity boom, that brought about economic crisis around the region and markedly changed the economic and political environment. This event triggered a decisive change in voters’ behaviour in search of a forward-looking presidential candidate that signified change and a possible resolution of the economic mishaps.

The economic explanation of the phenomenon is more pervasive in the literature, but scant attention has been given to the religious variable. In a time when the Catholic Church has lost ground to Evangelicalism, which considerably increased its representatives among Latin American citizens, it is timely to explore its growing influence in the region and its effects on the electoral politics of the new right-wing governments.

Unlike other studies that broadly and disparately analyze the experience of multiple cases, this study seeks to explore more in-depth three leading economies of the Southern cone: Argentina, Brazil and Chile. They are illustrative for the backlash of this incipient right turn and could offer illuminating positions in the study of the leftist retreat.

## 1.1 Specific aims

The purpose of this research is to offer a critical exploration into the gradual retreat of left-leaning governments in Latin America and the right-wing electoral success that followed. Building on recent theorizations, this research paper aims to explain, at least partially, the causality of this drift to the right and identify how two of the explanatory factors of the gradual retreat of leftist governments manifest both separately and together. This will be conducted as a comparative study of an emerging pattern of rightist governance, through the lens of economic and religious voting.

To achieve this, the thesis entails a double-edged theoretical framework, thoroughly explained in the next section and which enables the comparative analyses and discussion of cases. This thesis represents an attempt to frame the

increasing restoration of conservative governments, which begs the question if the pink tide's sustainability is slowly fading. It is also an attempt to open up avenues for future debate and underlying rationales of the matter under scrutiny. It is a relatively new phenomenon that did not receive enough attention yet, especially in comparison with the heavily researched pink tide. Hopefully, this research will pave the way towards potential future studies and add congruence to the existing body of research.

In order to adhere to the purpose of the paper, achieve its aims and establish delimitations, a research question was drawn up. The question guiding this research, that will help maintain focus and allow to reach a conclusion, is:

- Why has the left lost power in Latin America?

Moreover, this study hopes to answer the following underlying sub-question:

- What explains the rise of right-wing governments in Latin America in the past few years?

## 1.2 Background and significance

The end of the 20th century marked an important turning point for Latin American democracies. The region went through a revolutionary leftward shift in governance characterized by an urge to stray away from the neoliberal economic model. The turn to the left is thought to be pioneered by the electoral success of Hugo Chavez's left-wing party in Venezuela in 1998 (Levitsky and Roberts 2011). This event triggered a domino effect or regional diffusion for most of the countries in the region, giving rise to a wave of successive left-wing victories, a phenomenon that goes under the name of the pink tide (Marea Rosada in Spanish) in public discourse. At the peak of the pink tide, in the mid-2000s, the breadth of "the left" turn was unparalleled: two-thirds of Latin America, roughly 350 million people, experienced at least some form of left-leaning government. The decade of 2003-2013 was deemed in various ways the best in Latin America's history.

The new "cohort of leaders" that rose to power in the past few decades occupied a vast range of positions along the ideological spectrum of the left, advocating policies that varied slightly: from social expansion programmes with inclusionary and redistributive effects for unprivileged classes to nationalization programmes (Stephens 2018). Generally, these left-leaning parties were mostly associated with programmatic commitments that advocated for public investment and social-policy innovation that have resulted in the improvement of education, health and social security coverage (North and Clark 2018, p.205). A unified regional goal of social expansion and a detachment or moderation from the tenets of the Washington Consensus's neoliberalism have managed to decrease the rates of extreme poverty

and the notorious high Gini index of inequality. As such, the rise of the pink tide can be regarded as “the political logic” of poverty alleviation (Blofield 2019).

This seemingly perpetual trend is now challenged by a right-leaning force, whose presence is increasingly visible in Latin America. After almost two decades of mostly left dominance is the pink tide on the verge of receding? In the past years, Latin America’s left has suffered many setbacks and reactionary impediments, leading many to wonder whether the “Pink Tide” is now on the wane. The resurrection of the Latin American left in the post–Cold War era has been under duress since the 2015 presidential election of Mauricio Macri in Argentina, followed by the 2016 ascension to power of Vice President Michel Temer in Brazil due to Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. With the 2017 victory of Sebastián Piñera in Chile and that of the far-right congressman Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 in Brazil, for the first time since the 1980s, the three leading economies of the region were in the hands of conservative right-wing parties (Encarnación 2018). This right-wing political phenomenon that has emerged in mid-2010 in South America as a direct reaction to the pink tide is regarded as the conservative wave or blue tide, a term used mostly in the contemporary political analysis of the media.

The region may be witnessing a gradual comeback of the historically stigmatized right, which, in all likelihood, is not groundless. Two factors conspired against the governing parties: public dissatisfaction with the performance of consecutive terms in office and the end of the commodity boom which generated slow economic growth (Murillo and Levitsky 2019). Religious influences on conservative electoral victories across Latin America, especially Evangelical advocacy, have received attention recently (Hale 2019; Boas 2020).

## 2 Preliminary studies

After a decade of the left's nearly complete hegemony in Latin America, previously defamed conservative politicians in favor of capitalist neoliberal policies, privatization and austerity are gaining momentum again. This irrefutable reality constitutes a reminiscence of the time before Hugo Chavez, when conservative governments held power in all Latin America, apart from Cuba (Becker 2017). These ruling governments became infamous for implementing neoliberal economic policies that privatized public resources mostly favouring the elites, with the consequence of increasing inequality and poverty among the working class and the unprivileged. The same perspective is shared by Vargas (2020), who acknowledges that the progressive wave may be coming to an end and that conservative forces are advancing. Since the crisis of 2008, neoliberal forces, the equivalent of ruling classes, have sought to strengthen their political clout in order to recapture control of the state apparatus. The agendas of right-wing parties now coming to power reflect this. The parliamentary 'coups d'état' that used democratic mechanisms for deeply antidemocratic actions, as in the case of Brazil 2016, also reflects this (Taddei 2016).

Bowen (2011) writes about the evolution and role of right-wing politics in Latin America, addressing four variables. To compensate for the leftward shift, he deems high the likelihood of a rightist resurgence. Under the umbrella of historical institutionalism, the global and economic zeitgeist has been usually more conducive to the right than to the left. This latter theorization has been heavily used by scholars as a token for the decline of leftist governments in Latin America. Svampa (2016) attributes this change to the end of a cycle of economic bonanza, with high prices of exported raw materials. Its end called for corrective measures, entrusting more the progressive management of capitalism, rather than its mobilization. By contrast, for Gudynas (2016 in Vargas 2020) it is not the end of a cycle, but its exhaustion, expressed in the pink tide's loss of innovative capabilities, difficulty in coping with new circumstances and weakening of the theoretical reflection that once supported them. The conservative twist is deepened by corruption at alarming levels, the neoliberal paradigm and its extractivist logic, weakening secular culture and strengthening religious fundamentalisms.

In a similar spirit, Murillo and Levitsky (2019) identify two forces conspiring against the left turn. The first is the end of the commodity boom: economic and political conditions have changed drastically since 2013 when commodity prices started to fall, followed by slowed GDP growth and recessions in multiple countries. Left-leaning governments were especially vulnerable because their redistributive programmes were funded by the revenue generated by the commodities boom. The second factor is prolonged incumbency alongside corruption scandals which tend to erode public support. The combination of economic downturn and long-term

incumbency unsurprisingly triggered public discontent. A good parallel can be made to the study by Dabene et al. (2015 in Murillo and Levitsky 2019) who argues that when fiscal deficits reemerged, popular support for incumbents plummeted across much of the region.

Veltmeyer and Petras (2019, p. 143-144) seek to explore a perceived swing in the pendulum of electoral politics towards the far right and the return to neoliberal orthodoxy. Coinciding with the theoretical underpinnings above-mentioned, this transition from a progressive cycle of centre-left regimes coincides with the end of the primary commodities boom. Once the collapse of the commodity boom hardened the realization of redistributive politics and created massive fiscal deficits, the left became vulnerable and opened up more room for the right parties on the political spectrum. This change incentivized the right to abandon the coalition with the left, retake power and go back to “the golden age of the 1990s”. Pervasive corruption, right-left alliances and an elite that wields extraordinary economic and political power have been extensively approached in the literature (ibid; North and Clark 2018; Gonzalez 2019). The Left catastrophe (2015-2018) meant simply that the klepto-left has been replaced by a more efficient klepto-right. The end of the commodity super-cycle and public exposure of corruption inflamed the conservative opposition and enabled centre-right governments to use anti-corruption campaigns as vehicles for embracing neoliberal economic policies and gaining power.

While some scholarly works are more reticent in labelling this phenomenon a right turn, there are some that classify it as an undeniable and tangible reality, which was looming on the horizon since the 2008 economic crisis (Balán and Montambeault 2020). Plunging commodity prices and economic mismanagement brought about recessions in countries with leftist governments by 2015: Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela. Momentum in social programmes began harder to sustain. All these factors heightened the risk of political polarization associated with redistributive agendas. There are works that analyzed the legacies of the left through an institutionalization approach, concluding that while the pink tide is in retreat, it continues to possess a diverse range of party systems with highly uneven pattern of institutionalization and to structure partisan competition along programmatic lines. Such alternation in office is the generator of electoral democracy and could advance the institutionalization the left started (Roberts 2020).

There are some additional contemporary scholarly works that identify the international crisis of 2008-2009 and the subsequent decline in commodity prices in 2014-2015 as the roots of destabilization for neodevelopmentalist administrations (Sankey & Munck 2016; Webber 2017; Grigera 2017; Loureiro 2018).

Alternative narratives for the “ebb of the pink tide” and the rise of a so-called brown wave of peripheral-fascism surface in the literature. The concept of uneven and combined development engaged with dependency theory, proving that the Latin American crisis was not the result of the shortcomings of neodevelopmentalism, but that of the dominated-dominant classes that reacted to falling commodity prices, pushing for a cyclical intensification of the super-exploitation of labour (Antunes de Oliveira 2019).

## 3 Theoretical Framework

In search of long-range, comprehensive explanations, this paper revolves around a core question posed by competing parties in a democracy: what determines a constituency to vote for a specific party in favour of the others? An attempt to contribute to understanding this process could not be timelier, given the circumstances. Although most of the literature identifies this conjunctural phenomenon catching momentum in Latin America, there is need for a study that places it in relation to a two-folded framework: the intertwining of the economy and religion with a high potential of influencing voter's decisions at the polls, with a direct effect for the retreat of the pink tide. The severity of the economic decline following the end of the commodity boom has led to the inquiry of whether partisan stripes are sensitive to economic changes. Religion's impact on politics has been underestimated by modernization theorists, as religion, religion institutions and leaders can play a critical role and act as interlocutors in the citizens-state relationship (Steigenga 2004).

This study contributes to the existing body of literature because it modestly attempts to understand the interplay between religion, economy and politics at the executive level and find out if there is the case of either economic or religious voting or both in each of the three cases. It further seeks to disentangle the two variables mentioned above, test which one is more likely to express the turn, find out how they are affecting each other and to what extent they are mutually exclusive or complementary. While the commodity boom and subsequently the economy have captured the interest of many scholars in search of an explanation, the other explanation was heavily neglected. Therefore, this study assumes the retreat of the left is also about religion and its power on changing voter behaviour.

The theory section below more thoroughly presents the two-folded framework employed, made up of two competing explanations: economic and religious. This theoretical blending is believed to coincide with the circumstances surrounding Latin America recently.

### 3.1 The interaction between politics and the economy

The first part of the framework is an economic one. Murillo and Visconti (2017) argue that negative economic conditions have deleterious effects on the ability of incumbents to sustain their constituency support. The propensity of a government to collapse and undergo a change in the executive power is heavily influenced by people's perception and experience of the economy.

This interdependence can trigger a vicious circle: assume that for some exogenous reason, like the end of the commodity boom in Latin America, the probability of an incumbent government to collapse is higher. As a result of the shock, investment and growth fall, leading to political uncertainty and increasing the likelihood of a change in the executive. In the aftermath of the shock, citizens hold the government responsible for the poor economic conditions they experience. There is one objection worth mentioning. It is assumed that there is a high probability of government change if the current government is already perceived as corrupt and unable to deal with the present situation (Alesina et al. 1996).

Bowen (2011) contends that historical institutionalism shows us that sudden shocks, such as an economic crisis, can have disruptive effects on the stability of formal and informal institutions. Economic perceptions affect incumbent support, as established above.

The populace is not hermetically sealed from the economic, political and institutional background. On the contrary, their actions are shaped by them. As such, the concept of economic voting comes into play. In short, economic voting refers to how the economy affects incumbent support (Singer and Carlin 2013). The concept is usually observed among people who are impacted by an adverse economic situation (Fossati 2014). Latin Americans, like other post-transition constituencies, have come to learn democratic accountability, despite weaker parties and institutions. The general consensus in the economic voting literature is: voters who perceive the economy as strong are more inclined to support the incumbent than those who think the economy is weak. The famous campaign slogan depicts this: “it’s the economy, stupid!”(ibid). How electoral politics performs under periods of economic expansion and economic contraction has come to be known as fat politics and lean politics respectively (Hellwig and Calvo 2017).

The temporal dynamics of prospective versus retrospective economic orientations are also considered. Voters vote retrospectively in order to hold incumbents accountable for past outcomes, or prospectively, taking into account the outcomes candidates are likely to produce or promise to produce in the future (Singer and Carlin 2013). Prospective voting means a forward-looking strategy by which voters predict the future performance of presidential candidates and choose the candidate that could yield the most favourable outcomes. Retrospective, incumbent-centered voting implies a backward-looking strategy by which voters reelect an incumbent if their current performance in office exceeds performance standards (Reed and Cho 1998).

## 3.2 The interaction between politics and religion

The second part of the theoretical framework concerns religion. The incursion of Evangelical Christianity, especially Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism, into political and electoral spheres has acquired particular salience in Latin America in the past decade (Hughes and Machado 2016). Conservative political agendas and

Evangelical values and interests converge strongly (Zilla 2018). A charismatic leader or movement can influence Evangelicals to vote in one direction that could cause a significant alteration in the political landscape (Gonzalez 2019).

It should be clarified that the analysis targets the Evangelical-Pentecostal population, both under the realm of Evangelical religions, which is a branch of the Protestant denomination. These two churches will not be separated and the cases will discuss them together and thus use the terms interchangeably, as a new alternative wave of Evangelical religiosity that has swept Latin America, in a constant attempt to adapt to the political climate and support conservative politics that better translate their moral-ethical preaching.

Religious denominations, such as Catholics and Evangelicals, are associated with partisanship and are a predictor of party identification, as religion represents a way to interpret the world (Domínguez 2020). The rising electoral strength of Evangelicalism, a religious minority, is often perceived as a key component of a region-wide shift towards the right and a backlash against the left-leaning dominance (Reyes 2018 in Boas 2020; Smith 2018). Mallimaci and Esquivel (2013) reinforce the idea, stating that the proliferation of different religious groups, with Evangelicals as the most prominent and continually increasing, put an end to the monolithic Catholic monopoly in the region. In 1940 only 1% of Latin America was Protestant, today it is approximately 12%, with 75% of all Protestants being Pentecostals. Consequently, it is not uncommon anymore to see Evangelicals actively promoting a specific candidate (Miller et al. 2013). In the 2016–17 AmericasBarometer surveys, 21% of the population of Latin America identified as Evangelicals.

This transformation of Evangelicals from a discriminated minority, second-class citizens to citizens with full rights and political influence constitutes an important component of electoral politics, with Evangelicals leading a conservative backlash against progressive policy agendas (Boas 2019). Corrales (2018) states that “no tactic has been more transformative than the decision by Evangelicals to forge alliances with political parties on the right”.

Boas 2020, focusing on voting behaviour, shows how a candidate’s religion affects electoral support. Hale (2019) argues for the Catholic Church advocacy for conservatism, claiming the church has sought to establish alliances with conservative right-wing political parties. The activism of the church is present in the political agendas of conservative parties, on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion. Regarding religious dimensions, those who hold the highest levels of religiosity are more likely to identify with political parties (Domínguez 2020). On the same note, Lindhardt (2016) describes a model of Protestant political involvement that aims to mobilize the faithful around pervasive moral-ethical issues, such as abortion, same-sex marriage, divorces, sometimes in partnership with conservative churches. Viable applications of this model have been recorded in Brazil, Chile and other Latin American countries. A relatively new position in the model of Pentecostal involvement is the conviction that Pentecostals should always vote during elections in order to trigger social and political change. Evangelical churches, particularly, have played an increasing role in politicizing debates over

subjects such as gender and sexual orientation, reflecting a degree of public resistance to societal changes (International IDEA 2019).

The rise in Evangelical voters affects power in politics, according to Guadalupe (2019), whose scholarly work shows awareness towards the impact of a growing Evangelical population on the political scene in Latin America. While Evangelicals vote as citizens more than accounting for their identity as Christians, those votes risk getting lost in a sea of Neo-Pentecostalism. The latter is a wide-ranging movement of non-denominational mega churches that endorse candidates and policies and even form political parties centered on an Evangelical political vision. This influx of Neo-Pentecostals is engaged with the politically right movement, which could explain the support for conservative parties and the leftist retreat (ibid).

# 4 Methodology

## 4.1 Research design

In order to trace a pattern based on the cumulative factors above-mentioned, the study will be carried out as a comparative case study. A comparative design is understood here following the definition of Lijphart (1971). According to him, “the comparative method is not complete without a consideration of the case study method” and needs to be applied to at least two cases. For Wallerstein and Hopkins (1967), cross-national research is limited to the comparative study of national societies. This type of study is regarded as a pluri-national study, whose design encompasses observations on two or more national societies. The cases selected (elements) are considered comparable and the same set of properties is employed to describe each element - in this study the set of properties equates to the economic and religious explanations. Each element has a certain value on each property and interrelationships are asserted between these properties (ibid).

According to Bryman (2012, p.72), this design implies studying contrasting cases resorting more or less to identical methods. Cross-national research occurs when the aim is “to examine particular issues or phenomena with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings”. The same research instruments are used to conduct secondary analysis of national data or new empirical work. There is increased awareness that the multiple-case study approach may enhance the understanding of causality.

The comparison will be established between societies that are concerned with a similar issue. The context of this study is rather descriptive and exploratory as denoted by the research questions. As the analysis unfolds, I believe it will reveal some sort of interconnectedness between the selected cases: given the many common features of the region, the level of comparability between the selected cases may be high. Naturally, variation will surface in each individual case, as there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for the ascension of the right.

This approach, among others in social sciences, comes with limitations. The most common one is the inability to generalize (Bryman 2012, p.69). The case studies under scrutiny act as mere glimpses within the limited scope of this thesis. Therefore, the external validity of this desk-based research is restricted, but through its findings it can contribute to theory building. The study does not claim to generate generalizable statements (nomothetic), nor be exhaustive (idiographic).

## 4.2 Case selection

Three instrumental case studies in the Southern Cone were selected for the purpose of this study, more specifically Argentina, Brazil and Chile. During their leftist dominance, these three countries were part of Castaneda’s “good left” category, due to their resemblance with the social-democratic governments of Western Europe (Encarnación 2018). When discussing the paradoxes of the pink tide, James Petras came up with three classifications, Argentina, Brazil and Chile belonging to the second group - eclectic and pro-imperialist (Gonzalez 2019). A decade ago, they were governed by left-leaning governments, but recently these three countries experienced a conservative change in the executive. Some observers pointed to Macri's 2015 election to the Argentinian presidency as the beginning of a rightward shift (Ghitis 2015). He was then followed by Michel Temer in Brazil due to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process - Temer was not elected, but served as an acting president, therefore his presidency is ruled out from the analysis. The win of Sebastian Piñera in 2017 underscores an increasing tilt to the right in South America. Jair Bolsonaro’s 2018 victory in Brazil further consolidates the rightward trend. The table below illustrates the countries and affiliated presidencies subjected to analysis.

<b>Country</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>Election Year</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Party affiliation</b>
Argentina	Mauricio Macri	2015	2015-2019	Republican Proposal (PRO) - Cambiemos Coalition
Brazil	Jair Bolsonaro	2018	2019 - Present	Social Liberal Party (PSL)
Chile	Sebastián Piñera	2017	2018 - Present	Chile Vamos Coalition

*Table 4.1 Description of the cases’ presidential candidacies*

The cases are comparable not only by means of being situated in the same geographical area. But they share common features and the unified regional experience of the pink tide and its retreat. Additionally, their comparability will be realized with the use of the theoretical framework.

In delimiting the scope, a geographical criterion is applied: the three countries above mentioned are situated in the same Latin American region, more precisely the Southern Cone. Timewise, this thesis will analyze the period that is representative for its purpose, that is events depicting the ascension to power of conservative parties. It will not focus on the one decade and a half of left turn, as the paper attempts to highlight key factors denoting the end of an epoch, not its dominance. The thesis will try to identify broad patterns, but also local conditions.

### 4.3 Data collection and analysis

This study integrates a mixed methods approach. The corpus of data consists of secondary qualitative and quantitative data, which should be mutually illuminating and complementary. It is envisaged that combining the two will enhance the internal validity and accuracy of the study. The multifaceted issue under scrutiny cannot simply be reduced to numerical findings if validity is desired. That is why possible gaps are tackled by the corroboration with well-coded qualitative sources. The qualitative sources comprise scholarly work: academic articles and books, as well as non-academic work: media articles. The data is analyzed to extract themes through coding and interpretation, having in mind to link it to the theoretical framework.

The qualitative data is triangulated with secondary quantitative data to enrich the findings. Data is gathered from Latinobarómetro, a comparative public opinion survey tracking political attitudes in Latin America since 1995, and AmericasBarometer, a rigorous survey conducted periodically in 34 nations by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University and a consortium of some twenty partner institutions. The data sets were downloaded for the years of interest and processed in SPSS, mostly conducting frequencies and cross-tabulations. When using data from Latinobarómetro, I identified some shortcomings that prevented me from optimally analyzing the data in SPSS. Therefore, new variables were recorded to ease the statistical process. Additionally, Datafolha electoral polls and TSE (Electoral Justice) database were used in the case of Brazil, which was the most transparent with statistical data.

# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 Argentina

Mauricio Macri won Argentina's second-round election on 22 November 2015, ending 12 years of leftist Peronist and Kirchnerist dominance. This victory made PRO the first conservative party to take the presidency after democratization. The plunging popularity of the left is due to the end of a decade-long economic boom, Macri inheriting a challenging economic scenario. Plagued by the economic crisis, inflation and slow growth, the electorate saw in Macri a candidate of change, who promised to combat poverty (Mander 2015).

The runoff of the presidential race brought Macri, the mayor of Buenos Aires, 51.4% of the votes compared to 48.6% for Daniel Scioli. The difference in votes between the two was approximately 700,000 votes, which represents almost 3%. The triumphs achieved in the centre of the country (Córdoba and Santa Fe) and in the City of Buenos Aires were key to Cambiemos' victory. While in the Province of Buenos Aires Scioli won by 200,000 votes, Macri won in most of the electoral districts (Villar et al. 2015).

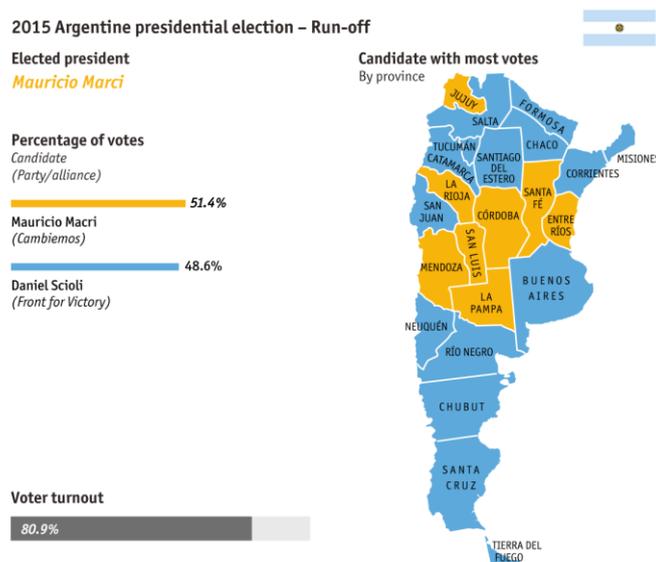
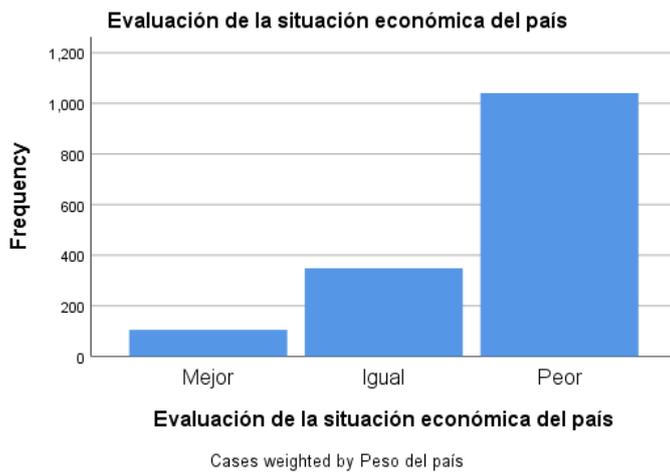


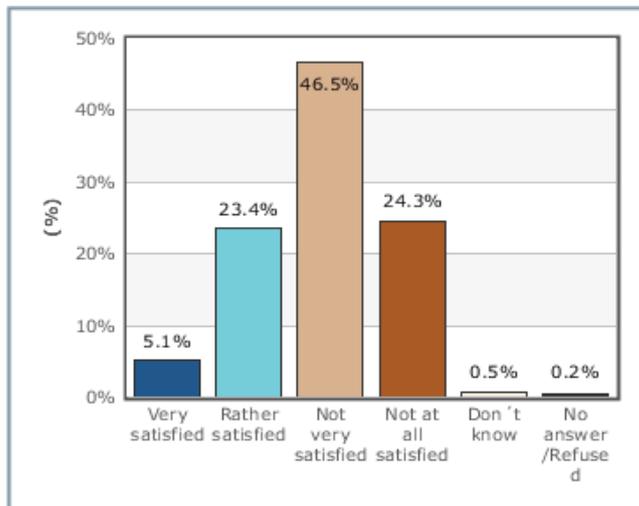
Figure 5.1 Source: Elecciones Argentinas; The Economist

The former leftist incumbent Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has faced electoral fatigue due to the mounting economic challenges. Lack of economic growth and unceasing inflation have spurred an anti-incumbent popular demand for change (Freytes and Niedzwiecki 2016). In the 2014-2015 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked *Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?*, the highest percentage of respondents answered the economic situation is worse, data that complements the qualitative accounts (Figure 5.2).



*Figure 5.2 Evaluation of the economic situation of the country. Source: AmericasBarometer 2014-2015*

The 2015 Latinobarómetro survey is consonant with the responses of the above-mentioned survey.



*Figure 5.3 Satisfaction with the functioning of the economy in general. Source: Latinobarómetro 2015*

When evaluating national voting patterns, Mangonnet et al. (2018) found that the local economic conditions connected to agricultural interests (dissatisfaction with the export restrictions and agricultural taxes of Kirchner administration) were relevant for the prospective voting of Macri. They also strengthen the idea that economic voting in Argentina has been linked with national economic conditions.

Freytes and Niedzwiecki (2016) also attribute the loss of the Peronist majority to contingent agricultural factors, such as bad redistribution of agricultural rents to the center, which is precisely the geographical area that voted for Macri.

Transitioning to the religious explanation, in the 1960s, over 90 % of Argentinians identified themselves as Catholic. At present, only one out of four identifies with that religion (Mallimaci and Esquivel 2013). In the 2014-2015 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked this question: *What is your religion, if any?*, 10.7% of Argentinians identified as Evangelicals, being the second largest religious group after Catholics.

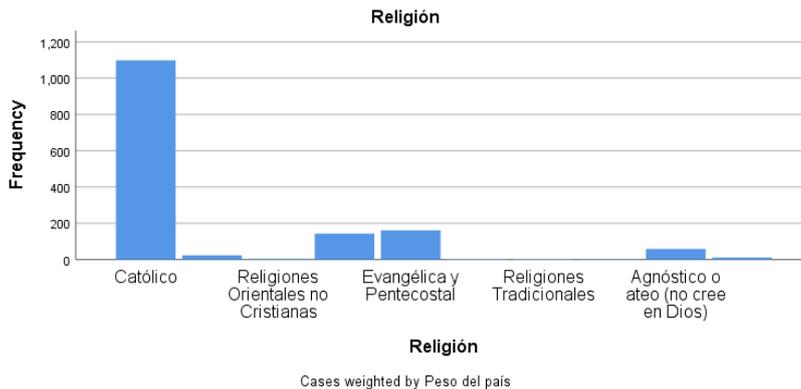


Figure 5.4 Source: AmericasBarometer 2014-2015

According to Guadalupe (2019), between 12% and 15% Argentinians define themselves as Evangelical, the majority of Pentecostal line, with 60% attending church. He also points out to the socioeconomic distribution of Evangelicals: in Buenos Aires city, Evangelicals do not make up even 4% of the upper-middle and upper class urban strata, while a study centered on the municipality of Quilmes in Buenos Aires province shows that Evangelicals range between 5% in upper-middle sectors, 10% in general and 22% in lower-income strata.

Carlin et al. (2015) found that church attendance in the case of Evangelicals is more than triple compared to Catholics and that such practice pushes voters considerably to the right in Argentina.

Evangelicals' entry into political life was inaugurated by the liberationist pole of Evangelicalism, but consecrated by the biblical conservative faction and Pentecostals, possessing conservative morality on issues of bioethics and sexuality. The biblical conservative pole represents more than 90% of Argentina's Evangelicals and Protestants. They are helping combat the "secularization tendency" and having a political stance around the pro-life and pro-family moral agenda. But in contrast to other Latin American countries, the Catholic Church is still the protagonist in this kind of mobilization (ibid).

According to Perfil (2015), about 9% of Argentinians who profess Evangelicalism could turn the percentages of the second presidential round. Campaign advisors tried to capture the religious portion of the electorate, adhering to the belief that Evangelical pastors can suggest and even convince their followers which candidate to vote for. One of Cambiemos coalition's strategies was to add Evangelical references in their list of governors, mayors and councilors.

Macri acknowledged the importance of having a non-Catholic religious vote since 2003. The Evangelical vote is one of the most coveted practices of Cambiemos, it is the way to directly reach neighborhoods, as the association with renowned pastors returns a considerable number of votes. Macri highlighted during campaigning the Evangelical presence in Argentina and his battle for “values we believe in”. He declared he is anti-abortion and opposes the decriminalization of marijuana. It is known that of every 10 registered churches 7 are evangelical, so adding the Evangelical vote to the vote of the elderly, who is the captive voter group of PRO, would be reasonable (Escalada and Ronconi 2017).

Having concluded that Macri won on a background of strong dissatisfaction with the economic situation of the country, it is time to test how the economic variable interacts with the religious one. It can be argued that religious voting did exist in the case of Argentina, it was acknowledged by the candidate, but exact data about its percentual salience in the final election result is missing. Despite this, when testing the perception of the Evangelical denomination about the economy, most people showed discontent, most rating the economy as average, bad or very bad (Figure 5.5). It can be assumed that the voters who voted using a religious logic, also cast an economic vote, in the hope of a general betterment of the economy.

**Current economic situation of the country according to religion**

		Very good	Good	About average	Bad	Very bad	Total
Religion	Catholic	273	2530	6077	2703	1165	12748
	Evangelical	80	622	1982	883	401	3968
	None	57	529	1070	443	175	2274
Total		410	3681	9129	4029	1741	18990

Figure 5.5 Source: *Latinobarómetro 2015*

## 5.2 Brazil

On 28 October 2018, Rio de Janeiro congressman wins Brazil’s presidency, marking a shift to the far right. He is considered the furthest to the right compared to other regional leaders, like that of Argentina and Chile. This was the country’s most strident political change since the restoration of democracy (Londono and Darlington 2018).

When considering the totality of votes in the Brazilian 2018 presidential election, Bolsonaro (PSL) received 57,8 million votes, which represent 55,13% of valid votes (excluding abstentions, null and blank votes), while Fernando Haddad (PT) received 47 million votes, the equivalent of 44,87%. Bolsonaro won in 15

**Brazilian election 2018: Bolsonaro and Haddad into 28 October head-to-head**



states, while Haddad won in 11 states. Considering regional patterns, Bolsonaro took the votes in the South region, with 68 percent of votes, followed by the Midwest (66 percent) and the Southeast (65 percent). Haddad won in all states of the Northeast with 69 percent of votes. Figure 5.6 is illustrative for the facts previously mentioned.

Figure 5.6 Map of results for each state. Source: TSE via Reuters

Citizens have grown tired of the status quo due to a combination of political and economic crises that have afflicted the country in recent years. Michel Temer was deeply unpopular amidst a struggling economy and a massive corruption scandal. Around 2014, unemployment increased and household family income decreased, after a period of growth. People have seen these objective markers stall and decrease during the Workers’ Party, whom they now hold accountable (Kirby 2018). In the 2018-2019 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked *Do you think that the country’s current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?*, the highest percentage of people claimed it is the same, this translating into the bad economic conditions they were already experiencing for years, followed by the second largest percentage of people considering it is worse than before.

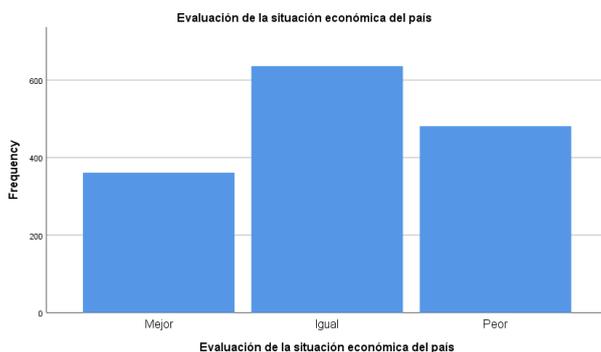


Figure 5.7 Evaluation of the economic situation of the country. Source: AmericasBarometer 2018-2019

Another study that asserts the dissatisfaction with the functioning of the economy is the survey by Latinobarómetro 2018 (Figure 5.8), which clearly shows the negative responses of citizens.

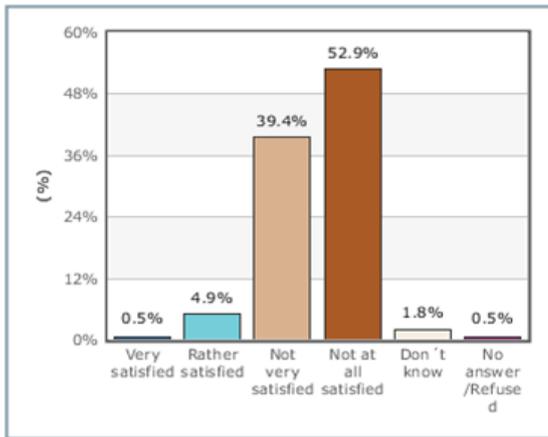


Figure 5.8 Satisfaction with the functioning of the economy in general. Source: Latinobarómetro 2018

Based on an economic pattern, data concerning the election was gathered. According to Estado de São Paulo newspaper, Haddad won in municipalities with lower Human Development Index (HDI), while Bolsonaro won in 98 % of higher HDI cities.

Similarly, Llaneras (2018) reported a sharp divide between candidates based on income. Bolsonaro won in the richest municipalities, while Haddad won in the poorest municipalities (Figure 5.9)



Figure 5.9 The vote according to income (Source: El País, 30 October 2018)

Out of the voters who earn between five and ten minimum wages per month, 66% declared they would vote for Bolsonaro. Families who earn less than two minimum wages voted for the other presidential candidate (Figure 5.10)

Families that earn between 5 and 10 minimum wages per month.



Figure 5.10 Source: Datafolha 2018

But these last results do not change the possibility of an economic voting, since the vast majority of citizens experienced the bad effects of the economy, but with less devastating effects. Bolsonaro’s support mostly came from Brazilian cities, from poor urban outskirts. The recession gripping Brazil also hit these areas, apart from the rural, where disaffected voters believed in the call for a radical change. For instance, in São Paulo’s urban periphery, Bolsonaro won 17 of the 23 electoral zones (Bradlow 2018).

Judging by the answers of the two former surveys, it can be stated that people were well-aware of and affected by the economic malaise. On grounds of prolonged dissatisfaction with the state of the economy, it can be deduced that Brazilians were on the lookout for a change. This can well be the case of prospective voting: people negatively assessed the “performance” of the incumbent and therefore wished for a shift in the executive power, with the hope of their economic situation being improved under the command of another leader.

Shifting towards the religious explanation, Brazil has gone through a Pentecostal boom, being home to the largest Charismatic Protestant population in the world (Chesnut 2003). Protestants, irrespective of their own divisions, have achieved to build a political base that can act as an influential voting bloc if being activated (Sigmund 2009). Once considered political and social outcasts, Evangelicals of Brazil had become power brokers, pursued as allies by elected officials across the political spectrum (Boas 2019). Latin America’s inclusionary turn encompasses one significant component, that is the political transformation of Evangelicals, who transitioned from being a minority, to a constituency whose support is sought by politicians offering benefits in return (ibid).

In percentage terms, Brazil boasts a sizeable Evangelical population. In the 2016-2017 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked: *What is your religion, if any?*, 21.8% of Brazilians identified as Evangelicals, which makes them the largest share in Latin America, a third of Brazilians and second largest religious group after Catholics, out of all the religions mentioned in the survey. In the survey for 2018-2019, Evangelicals continue to hold the second place after Catholics. Latinobarómetro 2018 survey concludes there are 58.1 Catholics and 24.5 Evangelicals, suggesting once again that their religious stance in society is strengthening.

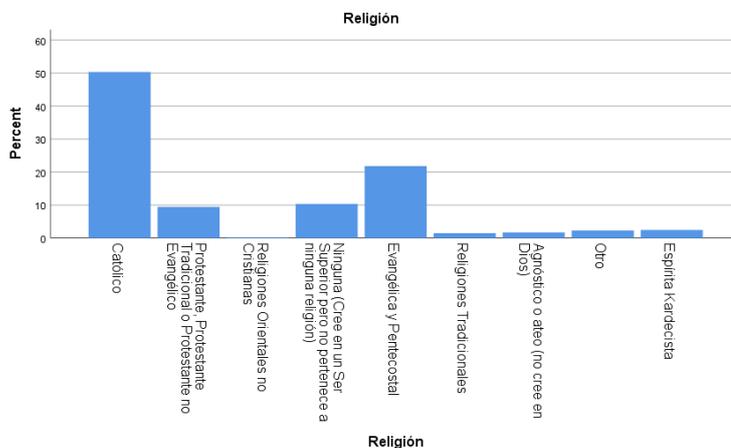


Figure 5.11 Source: AmericasBarometer 2018-2019

Corrales (2018) regards Brazil as the prime example of the soaring Evangelical clout in Latin America, where the Evangelical church exerted rising influence on party politics. There are approximately 90 Evangelical members in Congress who have thwarted LGBT legislative actions and played a role in impeaching the leftist president Dilma Rousseff. Their bloc in Congress accounts for 14% of the seats (Boas 2019). Their “infiltration” is also felt at the mayoral level, due to the election of an Evangelical pastor as the mayor of Rio de Janeiro. The successes of Evangelical pastors in Brazil have grown a reputation, with other pastors saying they want to imitate “the Brazilian model”. The intensity with which Evangelicals participate in politics gives them outsized political leverage, especially in Brazil (Boas and Smith 2015).

Smith (2019) states that religious politicking contributes to a soaring threat to the existence of Brazilian democracy and could be helping to bring to power the elites. Evangelical support for far-rightist, Evangelical presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro, alongside other right-wing candidates, could eventually tip the balance of the vote to the far right in October 2018 or beyond.

According to a poll from Datafolha, nearly 70% of Brazilian Evangelicals voted for Bolsonaro, in contrast with a more divided Catholic electorate, with 51% of Brazilian Catholics opting for Bolsonaro to be their next president. This demographic has captured a considerable amount of influence in society and politics (Machado 2018).

The reason for Evangelicals entrée into electoral politics can be justified by the fact that they were averse to the progressive politics of the Worker’s Party (PT) that had the power for 13 years, between 2003-2016. As their agenda clashed with their conservatism, they felt politically underrepresented. They saw in Bolsonaro and his Social Liberal Party (PSL) during candidacy, a suitable figure capable of representing their traditional family values. Bolsonaro, whose middle name ‘Messiah’, represented the perfect bait for Evangelicals, who frowned upon the PT’s inclusionary approaches towards minorities and social issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage. The rising Evangelical infiltration can be traced back to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 by Eduardo Cunha, an influential Evangelical figure. Bishop Marcello Crivella, elected mayor of Rio de Janeiro in 2016, is the nephew of Edir Macedo, founder of the Evangelical Church called Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and owner of the second largest broadcast network in Brazil, Rede Record. Macedo publicly declared his chosen candidate is Bolsonaro, who, as the Evangelical network’s protégée, gave his first interview as presidential candidate for Rede. This shows the power of constituency mobilization by media outlets affiliated with the Evangelical Church. (ibid).

According to Guadalupe (2019), Jair Messias Bolsonaro won the election with a homophobic, xenophobic and machista discourse and a pro-family attitude (anti same-sex marriage and anti-abortion), exactly what the conservative and Evangelical voters were in search of. This strategy helped him acquire the official support of large Evangelical churches, above all Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal ones.

Data from Datafolha electoral polls (2018) concerns religious voting, more precisely reflecting the Evangelical vote, which is of interest in this thesis. This is

shown in Figure 5.12. Relevant are the numbers denoting voters who identify as Evangelicals. Bolsonaro obtained 21,595,284 among this denomination, while Haddad got 10,042,504 out of this religious group. This meant an advantage of approximately 11,6 million voters for Bolsonaro. There is no significant difference in the number of votes obtained from Catholics by the two candidates.

Correction of voters distribution per religion according to second turn results

Religion	Bolsonaro	Haddad	Difference
Catholic	29,769,232	29,630,786	164,446
Evangelical	21,595,284	10,042,504	11,552,780
Afro-Brazilian	312,975	755,887	-442,912
Spiritism/Kardecism	1,721,363	1,457,783	263,580
Other	709,410	345,549	363,862
No religion	3,286,239	4,157,381	-871,142
Atheist or agnostic	375,570	691,097	-315,527
Total of votes	57,768,074	47,080,987	10,715,087

Figure 5.12 Distribution of the electorate based on religion. Source: Datafolha, 25 October 2018

The demographer Alves (2018) conducted an analysis of religion-based voting patterns based on this data. He concluded, after considering all religions, including the Protestant denomination, that Evangelicals massively voted for Bolsonaro, accounting for an astounding 69%. Triangulated with the finding above-mentioned, it can be concluded that the Evangelical vote has defined the results.

Reflecting on the collected data, it is feasible now to test whether the two variables of interest are mutually exclusive or they coexist. Cross-tabulating the data, as depicted in Figure 5.13, most of Evangelicals assessed the current situation of the economy as about average, bad and very bad. On the other front, Evangelical voting steadily inclined the balance in the winner's favour, helping him to win by more than 11,5 million religious votes. This figure is larger than the aggregated difference among the candidates, which was roughly 10 million. Disentangling these results, it can be assumed that in the case of Bolsonaro's election, economic voting and religious voting do converge. We can therefore determine that two forces worked complementarily: the economic and the religious.

**Current economic situation of the country according to religion**

		Very good	Good	About average	Bad	Very bad	Total
Religion	Catholic	3	37	223	222	204	689
	Evangelical	2	17	99	89	86	293
	None	1	7	30	46	33	117
Total		6	61	352	357	323	1099

Figure 5.13 Source: Latinobarómetro 2018

## 5.3 Chile

On 17 December 2017, Sebastián Piñera won Chile's Presidential election. This marked a turning point for Concertación, Chile's historic coalition of centre-left parties. His victory highlights an increasing tilt towards the right in South America, accompanying the rise of conservative leaders in Argentina and Brazil.



Considering the results of the Chilean 2017 election, Piñera collected a total of 54.5% votes (3,790,397), while Alejandro Guillier obtained 45.4% (3,154,713). The former won with an advantage of 635,000 votes. Regionally, the defeated lost in all regions except Magallanes, where he accumulated 56% of the votes compared to Piñera's 43% and Aysén, where he got 51% versus 48% for the right (El Desconcierto 2017).

Figure 5.14 Source: *Electoral Geography*

In the 2016-2017 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked *Do you think that the country's current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?*, a very small percentage attested it is better, while the other replied it is the same or worse (Figure 5.15).

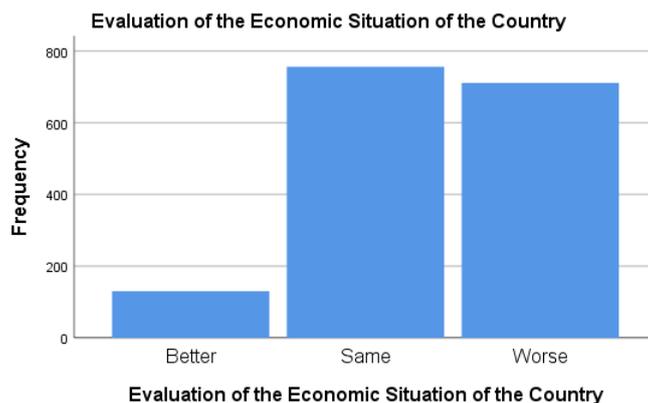


Figure 5.15 Evaluation of the economic situation of the country. Source: *AmericasBarometer 2017*

Corroborating the AmericasBarometer survey with that of the Latinobarómetro, the uneasiness with the economy is once again confirmed, with most respondents not being satisfied.

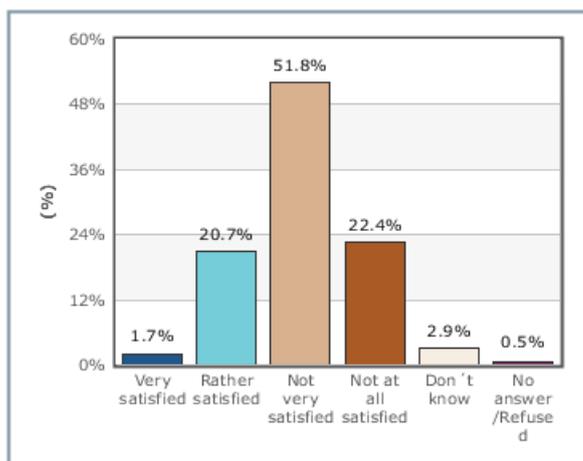


Figure 5.16 Satisfaction with the functioning of the economy in general. Source: Latinobarómetro 2017

Benedikter and Zlosilo (2017) argue that disapproval with Bachelet term ending in 2017 reached highest since 2000, when it hit 56%. According to Adimark and CEP, an astounding 69% of people considered the country is going through a state of stagnation, 14% saw it in economic decline and only 16% thought it was better. Her failed tax reform is believed to be the cause of scarce economic growth and growing inequality, which seems to be one of the most pressing issues.

Qualitative empirics show that voters seemed to have been looking for a potential candidate to put the country back on track, because of a slowing economy, stagnant wages and unemployment (Navia 2017).

Moving on to the religious component, as above-mentioned, Chile's Evangelicals have enjoyed inclusion like the Brazilian counterpart: they enjoy legal equality with Catholics in almost every aspect, they are not the victim of arbitrary discrimination by authorities and are viewed as an interest group by mainstream politicians (Boas 2019). Guadalupe (2019) states that, just like Brazil, Chile has a long history of Evangelical churches, but they are more institutionalized than in the former case. Evangelical chaplains are present in the majority of state institutions and are placed on the same level with the Catholics, according to an official agreement.

In the 2016-2017 AmericasBarometer survey, when asked: *What is your religion, if any?*, 18.7% of Chileans identified as Evangelical, the second largest share in the region after Brazil and second largest religious denomination after Catholics.

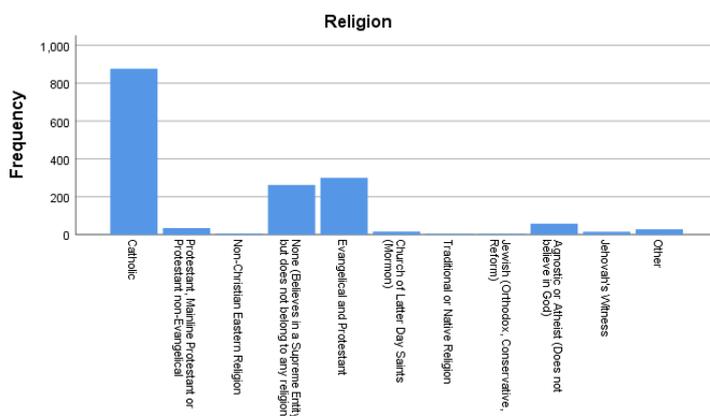


Figure 5.17 Source: AmericasBarometer 2016-2017

Political involvement is theoretically still a taboo for the Evangelical Pentecostal Church as Evangelicalism was traditionally perceived as an apolitical haven, but in practice pastors have tried for long to legitimize conservative political leaders, as was the case for Pinochet. Pastors integrate themselves especially with the municipal and regional governments, establishing a much more fluid relationship and having a so-called corporatist agenda due to involvement in both Chilean society and its politics. Indirect involvement in politics has been perceived in more favourable terms: mobilizing members without necessarily getting involved in politics. Despite the 2017 election seeing an increase in the level of Evangelical candidates, when it comes to the level of political representativeness, Evangelicals have a minimal representation in Congress and their efforts to influence national legislation occurred outside the halls of power (Boas 2019).

Bishop Emiliano Soto affirmed that political parties are interested in having contact with Protestant leaders, as believers constitute more than 3 million prospective voters in Chile, 20% at the time the statement was made in 2011. This makes them an appealing social sector from a political perspective (Lindhardt 2016).

During his 2009-2010 presidential campaign, Sebastian Piñera and his Renovacion Nacional were publicly endorsed by Evangelical conservative pastors, as a retaliation that other pastors endorsed his centre-left Concertación adversary. Before winning the elections, Pinera made a list of thirty promises to those Evangelical leaders, including financial support for Protestant social ministries. In the 2017 elections, when Pinera managed again to recapture the executive role of the state, the Evangelical influence once again played its part.

Value issues did not pose a threat to Evangelicals' life, until recently when during Bachelet's second term (2014-2018) several progressive laws concerning value issues prompted Evangelicals to rethink their traditional political dormancy. Two months before the presidential election in 2017, the Bachelet administration legalized abortion under special circumstances and passed on bills to allow same-sex marriage, adoption and expand transgender rights (Boas 2019).

Conservative parties and Evangelicals are visibly joining forces. Chile's 2017 presidential election provided a perfect example of this union of pastors and parties. Sebastián Piñera and José Antonio Kast, the two center-right electoral candidates, courted Evangelicals. Piñera, the winner of this presidential battle, even had four Evangelical bishops as campaign advisors (Corrales 2018).

During the election, presidential candidate Juan Antonio Kast managed to mobilize Evangelicals (13% up to 14% of the country) through messages similar to those of Bolsonaro. Despite receiving significant support, he did not get past the first round (Moyano 2019). After Kast's defeat, religious figures, the likes of pastors Hormachea and Durán, redirected their support from Kast to Piñera in the second round. Before the final round, Piñera accompanied by Kast, met with some Evangelical leaders, including the two just mentioned, to confirm their continual support. At the meeting, representatives of Evangelical churches, including the National Council of Evangelical Churches and the Coordination of Evangelical Pastoral Units of Chile, were present. In line with the meeting were the 50 measures promised by the candidate in the interest of pastoral churches.

Kast and Ossandón also gave their unrestricted support to the campaign of Piñera, encouraging their adherents to vote for him. It is important to note that at the end of the campaign Kast was endorsed by about 300 pastors, while Piñera by 100.

No pastor came out publicly to condemn them, because in the acceptance of the conservative Evangelical imaginary supporting a center-left candidate is political, while supporting a right-wing candidate is apolitical or politically neutral. The Chilean conservative press also favours rightists, providing more coverage to leaders and pastors who support right-wing candidates (Mansilla 2017).

A universe of 17,000 pastors exist in Chile and in order to appeal to them, Piñera presented himself as messiah and used religious semantics in his discourse: "because fundamental values such as the value of life, respect and family have been weakened". According to the 2012 census there were 2.500.000 people of Evangelical religion with the right to vote and it was predicted that 1.2 million cast their vote (ibid). Pastor Landeros, founder of the National Evangelical Television of Chile, states "it was the Evangelicals who proposed to vote for Piñera, who was in favor of the Christian rights and principles, while the losing candidate was against the Evangelical principles and rights, so that he lost much of the Evangelical vote in this election" (Bolanos 2017).

Reyes and Massai (2018) underscore that Piñera understood the power of the Evangelical electorate and therefore chose to adopt a conservative moral agenda and incorporate four Evangelical bishops into the citizen council, whom he called "Evangelical friends".

In the 2017 legislative election, the contribution of the Evangelical vote has surfaced: 10% of the votes came from this denomination, helping National Renovation (part of the coalition Chile Vamos backing up Piñera) to become Chile's main political party (Guadalupe 2019).

It can be presumed that the game-changing electoral results are explained in part by economic malaise, as well as the influence of Evangelicalism in the political support for Piñera. Additionally, the interaction between the two variables, religion and the economy, was tested. As it can be seen in Figure 5.18, Evangelicals showed dissatisfaction with the economy, as other religious or non-religious groups. These results could claim that the association of economic discontent with a growing Evangelical movement are compatible and religious and economic voting coexist.

**Current economic situation of the country according to religion**

		Very good	Good	About average	Bad	Very bad	Total
Religion	Catholic	106	1419	5789	3092	1509	11915
	Evangelical	58	370	1334	721	413	2896
	None	49	441	1352	915	509	3266
Total		213	2230	8475	4728	2431	18077

*Figure 5.18 Source: Latinobarómetro 2017*

## 6 Discussion

To clarify the results of the analysis, a summary of the findings is presented in this section, taking into account how the two competing explanations interact with each other. Considering that the logic of the theoretical framework is correct, it is important to restate the results are of an exploratory nature, that predict highly likely tendencies, and not an incontestable causality.

The analysis of the three cases suggest that the propensity of a government to suffer a change in the executive is due, in part, to people's perception of the economy. The cases display engrained dissatisfaction with the economic situation on the part of voters. Reed and Cho (1998) argue that prospective voting is of greater significance for voters' behaviour when it comes to economic distress. This assumption proved to be true in all the case studies under scrutiny. This triggered a reactionary effect, a forward-looking mindset for the electorate, in search of a candidate embodying a possible alteration of the status quo. In the aftermath of a persistent economic shock, people hold governments accountable for the way they tackle the situation, therefore turning public vote into a sort of "rational god of vengeance and reward" (Wilkin et al. 1997).

Given the fact that in all three cases the citizens rejected the incumbent at the time of the voting, or any party associated with the incumbent, it can be argued that prospective voting prevailed in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Even though previous incumbents did not run their candidacy in the examined elections, due either to term limits, constitutional laws or simply the decision not to re-run, representatives of the incumbents' party ran the electoral campaign instead, having their constant support and in all the cases reaching the run-off. Due to the ambiguous track record and past considerations of the incumbent, voters were reticent towards candidates associated with and endorsed by the incumbent and cast their vote hoping for a change and based on the outcomes the winning candidate promised to produce. In this study's context, prospective voting is viable (Dalton et al. 2007).

Based on the collected observations, while Evangelicals were initially reluctant to engage in worldly pursuits such as politics, they have overcome this stage and the denomination of an Evangelicalism bent often mobilizes its adherents so that they become influential on electoral politics (Boas and Smith 2015). The trend of a constantly growing Evangelical populations is present in all the three cases. Brazil and Chile are two of South America's most heavily Evangelical countries, closely followed by Argentina.

The gathered evidence clearly points out that religious influence is present, but there is variation in its intensity amongst the three counties. The highest degree of visibility and documented influence is in Brazil, with clear statistical data pointing in that direction. Evangelicals have had the heaviest electoral weight there. This

religious minority with growing clout in the society and politics, has made the final and defining difference between the two electoral candidates in the second round. The 11.6 million Evangelical votes that defined the results of the election indisputably confirm a religious voting explanation. This demographic may not have been as pivotal for Macri and Piñera, as it was for Bolsonaro. It can be established that in the Brazilian case the Evangelical vote has taken a primary role. In the other two cases, Argentina and Chile, Evangelicalism has definitely played a role in the election, but to a lesser extent and with unaccounted statistical evidence, that is why it can be assumed the Evangelical vote had a secondary role, as contrasted with Brazil.

The conservative political agendas of the three elected presidents converge strongly with Evangelical interests. Pro-family and pro-life rhetorics based on traditional values were part of the presidential discourses, strategy that managed to draw the Evangelical community closer and win the required votes. Although the rightist presidents-elect' proposals may have seemed of an aggressively social conservatism, they coincided with the social views of Evangelicals. Macri, Bolsonaro and Piñera alike established partnerships with Evangelical pastors, attended meetings to solidify the collaboration and made a list of promises to be carried out post-election, all the efforts in the hope that these religious figures can influence who the faithful vote for.

Although it differs cross-nationally, usually Evangelicals belong to the marginalized social classes or to the middle-class strata. But as Corrales (2018) underscored, politicians are embracing conservative Evangelicalism because this demographic is solving a right-wing parties handicap: the lack of ties with the nonelites.

When disentangling the interplay between religion and the economy, it can be stated that they are not mutually exclusive in neither of the cases, but their convergence varies. Although they coexist, religious voting was fundamental only in the case of Brazil, while in the other two cases had a complementary stance. Due to the economic malaise of the countries whose population was oversaturated with the state of affairs, economic voting is present in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. The candidacies of the rightist winners revolved around the convincing message of change, just the promise people were eager for in times of crisis. Overall, an intertwinement of economic and religious voting, with degrees of variation, could express the turn to the right in the Southern Cone. The cases are interconnected and share common traits, which strengthen the results and trace a pattern of electoral voting, with the possibly of reiteration in the region.

## 7 Concluding remarks

This comparative case study attempted to explain why the left has lost power in Latin America and what explains the rise of right-leaning governments in the past five years in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. A two-folded framework was employed in answering the research questions, encompassing religion and the economy as the explanatory variables. The frame was applied to three illustrative cases in the Southern Cone, believed to have “set the tone” of the pink tide’s retreat.

The cases hold resemblance, but the degree to which the two variables interact differs. Economic and religious voting alike are believed to have influenced the conservative backlash. Economic voting can be explained due to the economic downturn that resulted in large parts from the ripple effects of the end of the commodity boom. This pervasive discontent with the state of the economy determined voters to reject any association with the incumbent and adopt a forward-looking strategy, in their search of a candidate embodying change. The reward-punishment theory seems to apply to the study at hand.

The politicization of religion during the campaign mattered as well. Evidence shows that although there is an unbalanced level of religious influence depending on the country, the Evangelical community demonstrates a dynamism and relevance that demands attention. The Evangelical boom has spillover effects into the political sphere and can visibly influence electoral movements and the results of electoral campaigns. But one thing has become clear: the Evangelical community has positioned itself strategically and with relevance for domestic politics and elections.

The convergence of these two types of voting represents a key finding. These variables could not be separated in the three cases, but rather coexisted, despite their degree of variation. Brazil is the case that yields the strongest correlation between the two, as religious voting had the heaviest weight there, apart from the asserted economic factor. In Argentina and Chile, religion has a more diffused and modest influence.

### 7.1 Avenues for future research

Previous research papers tend to disparately analyze economic and religious voting, or not approach the topic at all. The findings of this study constitute an initial contribution to the interaction of the two variables and provide an incentive for future research avenues. Religious voting, especially, is an understudied topic in Latin America in a time when the influence of Evangelicalism in the political sphere and on electoral politics cannot be invalidated. To strengthen the findings of this thesis, further research on the complementarity of economic and religious voting

should be carried out, as well as a separate and more in-depth examination of the two explanatory variables. In Latin American countries ravaged by economic crisis and the constant growth of a religious population in search of a better life, it would be reckless to state that religion and the economy are mutually exclusive and isolated and fully dismiss the thought that they can coexist and influence each other. Additionally, although the study finds two competing explanations that could feasibly explain the retreat of the left, this narrative should be expanded to analyze the counterfactual and if these combined factors continued to generate conservative incumbencies, because it could have well been the case of just the timely collision of the two variables, without the case of prolonged sustainability. In other words, the sustainability of right-wing governments should be investigated more thoroughly.

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