

Pentecostal Evangelical Churches in Brazil: a technology for the social

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ARTICLEINFO ABSTRACT

— The article aims to analyze public actions by religious actors with regard to civil participation. To delimit the theme, it was decided to analyze the entry of evangelical leaders into the positions of Guardianship Councils in Brazil - a position designed to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents -, seeking to understand whether there is any type of stimulus and training on the part of the churches evangelical Pentecostals in order to encourage interest in public action and political participation in Brazil. The research proposes to understand how this connection between religion and politics is made, how this relationship affects the democratic process and the secularism of the State, what are the means mobilized, actors involved and the narratives activated.

Keywords: Guardianship Councils; politicalsubjects; Evangelical Church. the key of citizenship and the “social responsibility of

INTRODUCTION

In the last Guardian Councilor elections in the city of São Paulo-Brazil, 53% of the councilors who took office in 2020 were people linked to evangelical churches of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal [1] traditions, and many of them linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD). The work of the Universal Church (IURD) stands out in this universe, and is undoubtedly an important articulator and encourager of candidacies from its members and leaders to Guardianship Councils. From this, the present research seeks to reflect on how some evangelical churches start to function as a space for the construction of political and social subjects, as well as a tool for the insertion of evangelical actors in the public space, seeking to think about the production of these political subjects based on of the dispute for the State.

Part of the interest of this work focuses on mapping the relationship between the federal government and the Guardianship Councils in Brazil, focusing on the strategies and ways in which evangelical actors are inserted into Guardianship Councils through evangelical churches, and later begin to work in institutional politics. In this sense, the research's central focus is to think about this process of construction of these evangelical political subjects based on a given religious connection, but also to understand how these new patterns of social, political and civil participation occur.

The research is part of a broader context of the emergence of evangelicals in the political scene. Could the growing search for evangelical people for Guardianship Counselor positions be related to the consolidation of a Parliamentary Front in Congress? Would being evangelical make any difference in terms of civic participation? Does religious practice have noticeable consequences for citizenship? Is there interference from Christian values in the actions taken? These are some of the questions we seek to understand throughout this research, which is still in its initial phase.

One of the focuses of the research is to observe how these evangelical groups began to value engagement in public space following the logic of civic movements, in the church”, in order to claim a specific notion of family and rights. humans. Another issue that is being analyzed is the fact that Guardianship Councils may be functioning as an instrument that allows religious actors to have initial contact with politics, so that they can later introduce themselves into institutional politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND JUSTIFICATION

Several authors [2] highlighted the formation of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), in 1986, as the trigger for the entry of evangelicals into Brazilian institutional politics. Although this cohesive bloc within Parliament that was formed over the decades was only made official in 2016.

However, long before the creation of the Statute of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE) and its institutionalization, a dizzying growth of the evangelical bloc in Parliament was already observed. Several churches, notably the Assembly of God, Universal of the Kingdom of God and the Foursquare Gospel Church, have had, over the last few decades, significant success in electing the candidacies of their leaders through varied strategies, a topic much covered in the literature in the area [3].

In 1998, 49 federal deputies were elected, and this number was not greater, as some parliamentarians were not re-elected. However, it was after the 2002 legislature that this bloc expanded significantly, strengthening the evangelical presence also within the federal legislature. In this legislature, an increase in the number of candidates launched, and the number of those elected as well, can be noted.

According to studies, the curve for the number of evangelical parliamentarians grows exponentially over the years, with the exception of 2006, which was a year in which there was a significant drop in the number of seats occupied by evangelical candidates due to the political scandal of the monthly allowance scheme, which occurred the previous year, in 2005. This scandal deeply shook the bloc's structures, since many names of evangelical deputies were involved in the scheme, some of them such as Bispo Carlos Rodrigues (PLRJ) and Wanderval Santos (PL-SP), both from the Universal Church. In addition, there was also Operation Leech, an operation that aimed to put an end to the fraud scheme in public tenders in the health sector, and exposed 72 federal deputies, of which 28 were evangelicals. Thus, the year 2006 can be considered as marked by an evangelical electoral crisis. Only 30 federal deputies were evangelicals.

However, in 2010, the bloc grew again, increasing the number of elected deputies by around 50% compared to 2007. According to Mariano and Geraldi (2019), the 2010 elections were strongly influenced by proposals full of debates and moral themes, such as abortion and homophobia, and which had, as a backdrop, the "defense of the family". In this way, a political-ideological movement of a moral nature was reactivated and strengthened even further after the launch of programs to combat homophobia and PLC 122/2006, which aimed to criminalize it, and mainly PNDH-3, which proposed the decriminalization of abortion. In this last document, some issues considered controversial and that had not been discussed in previous documents were addressed, among them: stable unions between people of the same sex, the decriminalization of abortion, and the right of adoption for same-sex couples. In the conception of this evangelical bloc, all these agendas represented a "threat to the Christian family", and therefore organized a powerful reaction against these agendas.

In this scenario, the main victory of the evangelical bloc was the reformulation of the wording of the PNDH-3 [4], in which some topics were removed, such as the one that showed agreement with the decriminalization of abortion. This fact was marked as the beginning of the "anti-gender" position in the country and the central role of these sectors in the maintenance of a "traditional" family configuration by the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies.

Since then, religious actors have begun to act publicly to prevent or hinder any action by the Federal Executive that seeks to reformulate the various configurations of family and sexual and reproductive rights. Themes relating to abortion, new family models and homosexuality gained great centrality in the 2010 and 2014 elections for the Presidency of the Republic this was evident mainly from the clearly combative reaction of evangelical leaders who began to demand that any and all proposals aimed at decriminalizing abortion and expanding reproductive rights be removed from the government plans of all candidates.

Many studies in the area demonstrate that such behavior on the part of evangelical parliamentarians has been reactive, however, at a certain point these actors move from reaction to action, seeking not only to block the expansion of rights presented by progressive groups, but to put their conception of the world, their values and its morality to the entirety of Brazilian society.

An emblematic example of this was the proposal, in 2013, by the evangelical deputy Anderson Ferreira of bill 6583/13 which refers to the creation of the Family Statute, a document in which he proposes to limit the definition of family only to the union between a man and a woman, clearly proposing the exclusion of family arrangements based on affection and the promotion and appreciation of the "traditional family". Another striking example was the proposition of the Unborn Child Statute, which would reverse all possibilities of abortion in the country by placing the fetus, or even the fertilized cell, as a subject of rights.

METHODOLOGY

According to anthropologist Maria das Dores de Campos Machado [4], when Deputy Eduardo Cunha (PMDB-RJ), member of the Assembly of God and affiliated with the Evangelical Parliamentary Front was elected to the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies, many Project files of Laws on the prohibition of abortion and the valorization of heterosexuality were unarchived.

In the midst of this dispute "in defense of the family" and "Christian values" in the Brazilian political sphere, in 2018, Jair Messias Bolsonaro was elected, who aligns himself with the values and agendas of the FPE

[3] From the beginning of his mandate, Bolsonaro made it clear that he would carry out, in the Federal Executive field, all the demands and actions articulated until then in the Legislative field by the FPE. President Jair Bolsonaro, even before launching himself as a candidate for president, already demonstrated his strong position in agreement with the so-called "new Christian right", which resulted in a strong and resistant alliance, in which he received enormous support from the population.

With the support of central public figures in the evangelical universe, Bolsonaro came to be considered a bearer of "Christian values" and became a "salvation" against the left that supposedly intended to "destroy the traditional family". He synthesized and adequately represented the values of this group, expressed by its leaders in the pre-election period: Bolsonaro "is in favor of family values, he is against this banditry of eroticizing children at school, which the entire left wants". of evangelical public figures contributed to Bolsonaro's leverage in the elections.

One of the achievements that is very important to us in Jair Bolsonaro's government in terms of morality, was the creation of the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH). With a clear intention of mobilizing both an evangelical parliamentary base and evangelical voters who are sensitive to the moral perspective regarding the family and the regularization of this unit, the current government added the term "family" to the name of the ministry [3], Bolsonaro implemented this ministry as the one responsible for managing human rights and the centrality of the family. The evangelical and former guardianship counselor, Damares Alves was chosen to head this ministry. Damares became well known for her religious preachings concerned especially with the eroticization of children, the threat to the traditional family, abortion, homosexuality, LGBTI and Feminist movements. The MMFDH, since its creation, has been working actively in conjunction with the Federal Executive, in order to re-establish a supposed moral order and the appreciation of moral, Christian and traditional precepts.

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What is important here is to understand how much the growth and vigor with which the FPE has been operating in the political sphere is directly linked to the advancement of progressive agendas related to sexual and reproductive rights and gender issues, generally perceived by evangelical sectors as a "threatens the traditional family". Various research in the area of social sciences has already demonstrated that this scenario was constituted precisely as a reaction and resistance to sociocultural, legal and political changes that converge towards recognition of the rights of women and LGBTI people in Brazil, especially since the 1990s, when the country went through a scenario of creating public policies aimed at prioritizing diversity and the inclusion of historically marginalized minorities. In this context, the national scenario becomes conducive to the expansion of rights and the institution of an increasingly diffuse pluralism in accordance with the new internationally established guidelines focused on human rights.

On the other hand, there is also great support from the population for these conservative agendas, represented and defended by religious leaders in Parliament. This phenomenon became very significant in the last election, in which Bolsonaro was elected in front of a large portion of the population that identified with such moral-Christian discourse.

According to researches [4], these demands come from part of the population that confuses the political sphere with private morality, and therefore, attributes to political authorities the power and even the duty to establish the Christian moral order in society as a whole [5]. This debate brings to light the issue of secularity. Anthropologist Paula Monteiro contributes with the important methodological perspective that highlights the role of religion in the formation of public space, assumed as a space that is discursively constituted in opposition to other spheres [3]. It is important to highlight, therefore, that there is no space in society in which religion is not present, considering that the Catholic church is a constituent part of the construction of the Brazilian State and public space. According to Paula Montero [3] the Church benefited from this relationship to develop, in civil society, a specific proximity between Catholicism and patriotism, thus building a certain national identity.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the presence of religion in the public space is not unprecedented, however, the phenomenon of the insertion of evangelical leaders in institutional policy. It's still relatively recent. Researcher Ronaldo Almeida [1] states that evangelical leaders and parliamentarians have an active and purposeful conservatism, this means that they seek more than containing the advances of progressive agendas, but dispute to implement evangelical morality as universal and public, claiming that their moral

values are registered in the country's legal order. We highlight that many of these values are related to morality and the defense of a specific family configuration, classified by them generically as "family" or even "Christian family".

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According to sociologist Juan Marco Vagionne [6], the defense of the family would be the basis of the political organization of religious actors, including evangelicals. The expansion of the rights of sexual minorities and rights related to reproduction are perceived as a threat to the traditional family structure today. The movements of religious agents, in their mobilization in the political sphere, seek to influence electoral processes and also judicial processes in opposition to the agendas defended by the LGBT and feminist movements.

In this sense, the election of President Bolsonaro is not an isolated fact, it is directly related to this entire process described here. The reactive movement to advances in agendas linked to sexual and reproductive rights has been ongoing since the beginning of evangelicals' entry into the public arena, however, the complexity of its articulation and the vigor with which this reaction occurs has been reformulated over time. , also following the advancement of demands raised by minority groups and social movements linked to feminist and LGBTQI groups.

The transformations in Brazilian political dynamics described above are the backdrop against which religious actors linked to evangelical strands seek to redefine their place in Brazilian society in order to influence the country's "civil religion", reconfiguring and managing new forms of action. civic, as is the case with the entry of evangelical leaders into Guardianship Councils.

The Guardianship Council becomes a new field of dispute under construction, which is no longer restricted to the field of institutional politics, and the dispute for elective positions in the legislative and executive branches. This change from institutional policy to action in grassroots policy, one that directly interferes with families, may represent a "family defense" strategy, of a specific family configuration, shaped by values on the part of evangelicals, just as it may come to assume the function of a kind of "school" for evangelicals who are interested in political action, as it provides a first experience with political activity and

public debate.

GUARDIANSHIP COUNCIL AND THE PERFORMANCE OF EVANGELICAL ACTORS AND CHURCHES

The creation of Guardianship Councils in Brazil is linked to art. 227 of the 1988 Constitution, which guarantees the State's responsibility towards the rights of children and adolescents, but it was mainly in 1990 with the writing and promulgation of the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) that the Rights Guarantee System was fact effected. Among the bodies of this system was the Guardianship Council, a body responsible for providing development circumstances compatible with childhood [[7]. This period consists of a new moment in the modes of civil participation with the State, in which it becomes responsible for creating and implementing public policies regarding childhood (BULHÕES, 2010).

Since its creation, the Guardianship Councils have been defined as a permanent body, that is, the Guardianship Councils represent something that exists and is organized independently of the political scenario, this guarantees that this device is autonomous and free to fulfill its duties and the way it is carried out. , ensuring the strengthening of a rights-protecting body within the State and civil society. Guardianship councils do not belong to the Judiciary Branch, but are considered an administrative body, linked to the Executive Branch [7].

In everyday practice, counselors work directly with the community, are contacted by institutions, such as schools, and must "inspect" families in cases of complaints regarding the rights of children and adolescents. Every Brazilian municipality must have at least one Guardianship Council made up of 5 councilors.

Guardianship councilors are elected by the local community through a secret and optional vote. To apply to become a guardianship counselor, according to article 133 of the ECA, proof of moral integrity is necessary, this means that the candidate must not have a police record or criminal record, however, in the absence of these documents, a letter is also accepted recommendation written by local leaders. This question is interesting for us to think about how this can be used by churches, considering that the recommendation by religious leaders to appoint a guardianship counselor can represent a determining factor for trust and recognition for certain communities.

In relation to its duties, the Guardianship Council carries out intervention in situations of risk and social vulnerability suffered by children between zero and twelve years old, and at teenagers between twelve and eighteen years of age. In addition to these cases, the Guardianship Council also has the power to intervene in cases involving threat and violation of rights, among the conditions considered to be at risk are housing vulnerability, abandonment of primary education, family and community maladjustment, prostitution, use and dependence on illicit drugs, the execution of criminal acts, the omission or abandonment of those responsible. (CUNHA, 2013).

It is in this universe of action that evangelical actors have sought to operate, through the launch of candidacies by their members in the elections for Guardianship Councils. Anthropologist Jaqueline Teixeira has been carrying out surveys on this new area of activity for evangelical segments. According to the author:

The elections for guardianship councils in 2019 were the most disputed. In the south of the country, in the city of Porto Alegre, in the 2019 election there was a 175% increase in the number of candidates compared to previous years, there were 385 people competing for 50 vacancies, shortly after the votes were counted it was speculated that only 20 of these vacancies had gone to people whose campaign had not been carried out in religious associations. The so-called "blessed" candidacies were the focus of prayer vigils and leafleting, producing not only record numbers of applications, but queues at voting stations.[7]

A similar fact was observed in the city of São Paulo. Data from the newspaper El País show that 53% of the counselors who took office in 2020 are people linked to evangelical churches of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal traditions, and many of them linked to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD).

The performance of the Universal Church (IURD) stands out in this universe, and is undoubtedly an important articulator and encourager of candidacies from its members and leaders to Guardianship Councils. In 2019, the Folha Universal newspaper, the church's main print media and news portal, dedicated four posts to talking about the importance of candidacies for new guardianship counselors. In addition to the publications in its largest circulation institutional newspaper, there were posts on the blogs of central leaders, such as that of Bishop Edir Macedo and his daughter Cristiane Cardoso.

Thus, preliminary data already points to this interest of evangelical actors, especially those linked to the IURD, in the Guardianship Councils of some Brazilian capitals. Considering that counselors work directly with the community, and, more specifically, with families, it is necessary to understand what guidelines are being given by evangelical religions for "their" candidates for the Councils and also the encouragement of voting by the faithful. Are there specific guidelines regarding these topics in Church guidance material? If so, what would those guidelines be?

Several videos posted on the YouTube channel of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and on other social networks allow us to identify that there is a stimulus and a huge campaign for evangelical leaders to apply for positions as Guardian Councilors, and for believers to participate massively in the vote.

A platform for training courses aimed at evangelicals coordinated by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights was also identified. The platform, which is called the National School for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (ENDICA)⁴, offers several training and extension courses aimed at professionals who work in the Child and Adolescent Rights Guarantee System. In addition to Guardianship Counselors, professionals who work in the Service Network of the Unified Health System (SUS), in the Educational System, in the Social Assistance Network, Rights Councils, Military Police of the School Battalion, Child and Adolescent Protection Police Stations, Institutional Reception, Children and Youth Courts can also enroll in the courses. The ENDICA Platform aims to promote the qualification and training of professionals who work in some way with children and adolescents, establishing a concrete and direct network between the MMFDH and these professionals. Among the main courses offered are: "The role of Rights Counselors and Guardianship Counselors", "Family and Community Coexistence", "Sexual Abuse and Exploitation", in addition to specialization courses and Master's courses with these same themes.

Guardianship Councils would be an arm of the State that can be strategically occupied by religious subjects in order to operationalize agendas linked to moral precepts, since the position of the Counselor makes it possible to bring the State closer to civil society and directly to families. The insertion of evangelical leaders in the Guardianship Councils could function as a means of imputing the conceptions and values belonging to the universe of these religions to the families served by the Councils, or of exercising "inspection" over the violation of the rights of children and adolescents based on religiously oriented precepts.

It is important to highlight that the analysis of the presence and performance of evangelical actors in the Guardianship Councils gains even more centrality following the election of former president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, with the increase in evangelical parliamentarians and with the occupation of the portfolio of the Ministry of Women, the Family and Human Rights by Damares Alves, evangelical pastor strongly linked to Guardianship Councils. In this context, issues regarding childhood began to be heavily debated, mainly between two parliamentary fronts: the Evangelical Parliamentary Front and the Parliamentary Public Security Front, which led to the creation of three more Parliamentary Fronts with this same focus, these being the Front Mixed Parliamentarian Combats Pedophilia; the Mixed Parliamentary Front for Early Childhood and the Parliamentary Front for Encouraging the Adoption of Children, also responsible for changes to ECA's articles. The main change made by the government regarding the ECA was Law 13,824/2019 approved in May 2019, which changed art. 132, which establishes new requirements for the process of choosing members of the Guardianship Councils, facilitating the entry of representatives of evangelical groups into this body. Until then, each guardianship councilor could not be reappointed more than once, this was modified with this law, which facilitated the permanence of religious segments, due to their strength in electing religious leaders to the Guardianship Council. This change tends to make the democratic rotation of the election of guardianship councilors difficult.

Furthermore, Damares Alves changed the way of promoting the direct relationship with the management of Guardianship Councils, which began to be promoted through programs launched by the Children's Secretariat, linked to the Ministry of Family and Human Rights, as well as through the creation of platforms. On various platforms and events, Damares and his advisors enable direct contact with guardianship counselors, providing materials, booklets with guidance, training courses and even a WhatsApp number for direct contact. These booklets and the materials produced by two secretariats linked to the MMFDH, the children's secretariat and the family secretariat, will also be the target of our analysis in this research.

Damares inaugurated a specific relationship of proximity between the State and society, in particular, he brought a new conception about the role and function of Guardianship Councils, making evangelicals aware of the reason why this space should be occupied. In addition to Damares Alves' actions, several rationalization and engagement strategies were also constructed by evangelical churches in order to obtain victory for their peers in counselor positions. Awareness campaigns about the importance of the Councils focused on the development of what can be called a pedagogy of building engagement, that is, the Guardianship Council came to be seen as a space in which the church could act vis-à-vis society, and more than This is a place of formation and learning for religious leaders without political experience to enter the public arena.

Many evangelical actors began their political careers in the Guardianship Council, which shows that this space represents a channel that connects individuals previously marginalized by society with possible decision-making spaces. In an interview, a Guardian Counselor mentioned that "Guardian Counselors have the same responsibility as judges".

The Guardianship Councils, in this sense, start to function as a space for political exercise, where there is training, learning, connections are made, and where evangelical actors act in social functions, in addition to providing the possibility of acting in the future as parliamentary advisors in municipal chambers, state, federal or even on a larger scale, as in the dispute for legislative positions.

CONCLUSION

Considering that the research is still ongoing, the results are still inconclusive, however, it is possible to raise some pertinent questions so far. The first question is to consider that the Guardianship Councils represent, for some sectors of evangelical groups, a pedagogy of building engagement and insertion in the public space, in which the Guardianship Council functions as a space for training, learning and engaging religious leaders in

the political environment. Based on this previous experience in Guardianship Councils, these leaders begin to work in other positions and functions of institutional policy.

A second discussion that can be raised based on what has been collected so far is the content of the Guardian Councilors' campaigns in the last election. Some elements stood out, such as the issue of religious identity: it was observed that religious identity becomes an instrument for verifying trust used to build the idea that the evangelical candidate cares more about his family than others. In this sense, we can also point out the family category as being the most mobilized agenda of these campaigns, and mainly emphasis on the idea that the family is the bearer of rights, in this way "child protection" is used to justify the protection of the family. Therefore, the mobilization of the so-called "gender ideology" is brought into the discussion to elaborate the narrative about the threat to the family.

Given these considerations, it is possible to understand this dynamic as an expansion of the notion of political participation, in which religious subjects who are not restricted to the Catholic Church as before, start to act as political subjects and the State starts to be contested by more parts of the population, framing a new format and pattern of political participation with new actors, mechanisms and devices, in a Pentecostal grammar whose demands and agenda converge in a conflicting way with other social groups

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