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Excerpt
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PART I

INTRODUCTION

I

Introduction

On November 7, 2017, conservative opponents of “gender ideology” burned the American feminist theorist Judith Butler in effigy on the street in front of the art institute Sesc Pompeia in the city of São Paulo, while Butler herself was inside giving a lecture. As protesters hoisted a life-sized doll in a pink brassiere and witch’s hat over their heads and set it on fire, they chanted, “Burn the witch!” The protest apparently included both conservative Catholics and evangelicals. Though Catholic crucifixes were on prominent display during the demonstration, evangelical groups built much of the momentum behind the protests. In the days leading up to the talk, a Facebook group and website led by Assembly of God clergy from the city of Ilha Solteira (São Paulo state) drove traffic to an online petition that gathered 366,000 signatures, opposing Butler’s visit (J. Gonçalves 2017). While the protest was cast in the media as an attempt to shut down the conference, a survey conducted with protesters at the event itself found that most did not aim to stop Butler’s talk (Calegari 2017). Rather, they hoped to stimulate a debate over gender, sexuality, and the role of public schools in sexual education.

Gender and sexuality have become perhaps the most important issues driving a recent period of religiously motivated democratic conflict in Brazil – what I term Brazil’s “culture wars.” Protestant clergy, congregants, and representatives are far to the right of Catholics and the nonreligious on matters such as transgender rights or public-school sex education. Meanwhile, religious conservatives and secular voters battle over whether to entirely outlaw or fully legalize abortion, which is presently legal only under conditions of rape or danger to the mother’s life. On this issue, Catholics are sometimes to the right of evangelicals. And Catholics, evangelicals, and the nonreligious each take opposing stances on a third issue: the rights of religious communities in the context of a formally secular state. Conflicts spill into elections, as a growing evangelical voting bloc favors religious conservatives, and especially coreligionist candidates.

However, one typical source of religious and political division is conspicuously absent: partisanship. In Brazil's famously weak and fragmented party system – with twenty-eight parties elected to the lower house of Congress, the Chamber of Deputies, in 2014 – neither Catholics nor evangelicals have much of a partisan home. The correlation between religion and partisanship is near zero. This contrasts markedly with the United States. Though Hunter (1992) first popularized the term “culture wars” to describe conflict between religious and secular citizens in the United States, later scholarship demonstrates that cultural polarization there is tightly bound to parties.

This book is about the causes and consequences of Brazil's culture wars. How has conflict developed, absent partisan leadership? And how have the culture wars affected Brazil's post-1985 democracy? Most urgently, does religious politics either threaten or help to shore up a democracy now facing grave challenges to its legitimacy? I will argue that the answers lie not in parties, but in clergy, interacting with and sometimes leading congregants and politicians. Religious leaders have a complex mix of motivations for getting involved in politics, including religious and political ideals, but also anxiety over religious competition. Ultimately, religious politics polarizes Brazilian politics and pushes it to the right, while contributing to partisan fragmentation; yet it also enhances democratic representation and stabilizes democracy by giving religious leaders a stake in the system.

Before we proceed, some definitions are in order. What is a “culture war”? How do we know whether Brazil (or any other country) is in the midst of one? I define “culture wars” as pervasive and prolonged democratic conflicts within polities, between social groups who perceive their worldviews as fundamentally mutually incompatible.¹ By “democratic” conflict, I mean that culture warriors primarily use democratic arenas and weapons – elections, policy debates, and persuasion – to influence public opinion. This does not preclude physical violence, but outbreaks of violence are usually peripheral and nonstrategic. By “pervasive and prolonged,” I mean that an isolated skirmish does not constitute a culture war. Rather, many groups in society choose sides, levels of hostility are elevated, and the conflict extends across various battles. Some groups may aim for ultimate social or political dominance; others may want discrete policy changes.

Who are culture warriors? The competing worldviews driving culture wars are typically delineated by religions – meaning sets of ideas and practices that communities develop to describe transcendent forces, and to derive prescriptions for human behavior. Culture wars often involve conflict

¹ The second half of this definition is similar to that of Hunter (1992), emphasizing competing groups defined by fundamental worldviews. However, thinking about the culture wars in a comparative context reveals assumptions that are likely implicit in Hunter's definition. To wit, I differ from Hunter in emphasizing the methods – democratic politics – and the extension of the conflict.

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between the two poles on a continuum of religious devotion: “seculars” vs. “religious conservatives.” However, culture wars can also occur between members of different religious communities – for instance, evangelicals and Catholics, or Muslims and Christians. In Brazil, the culture wars take place on two fronts simultaneously: between religious and secular citizens, and between evangelicals and Catholics. Sometimes evangelicals and Catholics are allies, and at other times they are in conflict.

In Brazil, culture-war opponents *agree* about many issues beyond sexuality, the family, and church–state relations. Yet though disagreement may be fairly narrow in scope, it is deep. Views on contested issues are deeply held and expressed in sacred, stark, black-and-white terms. Culture warriors perceive issues such as gay rights or sex education as existential threats to their own group, perhaps involving a struggle against supernatural evil forces. Disagreement intensifies into conflict as it is reinforced by the fault lines of religious identity.

To return to our first puzzle: what drives Brazil’s culture wars, if not parties? This book takes a clergy-centered approach. Two shocks have triggered clergy activism. First was a leftward shift in Brazilian society and public policy on issues related to sexuality, gender, and family roles. Conservative religious leaders perceive policies such as the high court’s legalization of same-sex marriage, in a pair of decisions in 2011 and 2013, as deeply threatening to social order. The second shock entails an increasing fragmentation of the religious landscape – a shift away from monolithic Catholicism, toward both religious nonadherence and evangelicalism – that has intensified interreligious competition for what I will term “souls and money.”

Both ideas and group interests motivate Catholic and evangelical clergy. On the one hand, the experimental evidence presented in Part II shows that Catholics and evangelicals both hold inflexible stances on one all-important issue, homosexuality, anchoring Catholics to the center and evangelicals to the right on this issue. Abstract support for the democratic regime is also high and unbudging. On the other hand, competition to attract and keep souls also affects clergy behavior and attitudes. In the two-front culture wars, Catholic clergy contend with both secularism and evangelicalism; strategic calculations in response to the threat of membership loss sometimes push Catholics to de-emphasize certain “culture-war” issues. At other times, membership pressures draw both evangelicals and Catholics into activism, or repress both evangelical and Catholic speech when clergy fear controversy. Meanwhile, clergy who perceive their group to be unfairly treated lose faith in the legitimacy of the political system.

Do clergy influence congregants’ behaviors and attitudes? If so, how? Part III of this book shows that clergy can shape citizens’ issue attitudes, turnout, voting behavior, and democratic dispositions. Nonetheless, influence is *partial* – affecting some attitudes and behaviors more than others – and *asymmetric* – affecting some citizens more than others. The great majority of citizens hold

secular democratic norms that lead them to resist some types of clergy influence. Clergy are more influential on issues seen as core religious concerns, such as those related to sexuality and the family, and less effective in guiding other attitudes as well as vote choice. Doctrinally conservative citizens and congregations are more readily influenced than others, yet even in the most politically effective Pentecostal denomination, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), influence is far from automatic. In the early 2000s, UCKG leaders projected that just 20 percent of “their” voters supported in-group candidates (Conrado 2001). The partial and asymmetric influence of clergy pushes Brazilian politics to the right, as religious conservatives are most likely to be influenced.

Clergy also affect citizens’ democratic attitudes. On the one hand, clergy convey their own robust support for democracy to citizens. On the other, clergy who perceive the political system as biased against their religious in-group undermine congregants’ confidence in that system. In addition, clergy who promote dualistic, good-versus-evil visions of social conflict can contribute to intolerance of out-groups such as atheists and gays.

Part IV argues that religious leaders also have substantial leverage over politicians whom they choose to support. In Brazil’s highly permissive party and electoral systems, hundreds of candidates run in most legislative districts, and religious leaders have great latitude to get their chosen candidates onto ballots. Furthermore, religious candidates attribute their electoral support more to their grassroots religious base than to mass partisanship, elite party organization, or ties to wealthy social groups. Thus, when religious candidates get elected, they are strongly tied to religious patrons. Religious institutions’ influence is intensified when “their” elected representatives are themselves religious professionals.

This discussion provides many of the tools needed to address our second puzzle: how are the culture wars shaping Brazilian democracy? Clergy-driven politics both enhances and dulls representation, I argue. In classic theories in political science, party leaders are supposed to help citizens understand how issues fit together: “what goes with what” (Converse 1964). Parties may be largely incapable of this kind of opinion leadership in Brazil, outside narrow wedges of strong party identifiers (but see Samuels and Zucco 2014, 2018). By acting as opinion leaders, however, clergy can help to align the views of religious conservatives – both voters and legislators (Boas and Smith in press). At the same time, they strengthen Brazil’s right more generally (Power and Rodrigues-Silveira 2018). And in the context of the massive “Operation Car Wash” corruption scandals (named after one money-laundering site) that have unfolded across Brazil since 2014, religious middlemen have another positive externality. Reliance on clergy as electoral intermediaries reduces candidates’ need for large campaign donations from wealthy individuals – the kinds of transfers that feature prominently in corruption scandals, and that lead to overrepresentation of business interests.

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Yet clergy-driven politics also has troublesome implications for representation. Recall that clergy have partial influence, shaping some attitudes but not others. By contrast, clergy are more closely aligned with the range of views of religious politicians, as we will see in Part IV. Thus, on many issues, religious politicians are arguably better representatives of the clergy who constitute middlemen than of the religious citizens who voted for them.

The clergy-driven nature of Brazil's culture wars also likely exacerbates partisan fragmentation. When each religious leader has his (or occasionally her) own built-in base of support, there are few incentives for coordination. Commentators often note that evangelical elites' alliances are "pulverized" across a very large number of candidates and parties – ones chosen based more on personalistic ties, than on clear ideological criteria (Dantas 2011; Freston 1993; Lisboa 2010). As Power and Rodrigues-Silveira put it, "in partisan terms, Pentecostals are highly diasporic" (2018). Evangelical organizers recognize the benefits they could achieve through collective action, especially the ability to win elections to executive office, where one needs to assemble majority coalitions of voters. Every election cycle features many calls for evangelical unity, and even for the creation of unified evangelical parties. However, the "pulverization" of evangelical candidate support reflects the "pulverization" of evangelical religious institutions. The problem is not just that there are no incentives for resolving the evangelical collective action problem. Rather, the nature of evangelical institutions actually creates disincentives for coordination, since religious groups that subordinate their own identity or "brand" to a broader evangelical collective may hurt their long-term prospects for competitive church growth.

The clergy-driven culture wars have yet broader democratic implications. When clergy feel that their religious group is unfairly treated, their congregants come to perceive the political system as less legitimate. Church politics can also erode tolerance of the political rights of atheists and gays. Yet clergy-driven politics also helps steady Brazil's stressed and fractured democratic regime. Democratic competition provides religious leaders a stake in the system, and clergy convey their high levels of support for democracy to their congregants. They also encourage many forms of electoral, non-electoral, and civil-society participation. As citizen confidence in democracy, the political system, and elections has plummeted in recent years, trust in religious authorities who are invested in the rules of the democratic game is helping to maintain the stability of the democratic system. Over time, the declining credibility of politicians could lead citizens to give greater credence to the political views of clergy.

This book contributes to scholarship on representation, partisanship, and religion and politics. First, it elucidates the causes and consequences of the culture wars by examining how such conflicts developed in an institutional and religious context that has not been explored before, and which is very different from those examined in previous studies. The great majority of academic work on the culture wars has focused on the United States. Some

scholars have also examined the international activism of US-based religious conservatives, particularly in Africa (e.g., Bob 2012; Kaoma 2014). More germane to the present study, a rich but relatively small literature traces how parties, religious activists, and political elites shape policy debates on issues such as abortion and homosexuality in a wide range of wealthy, highly institutionalized democracies (Ang and Petrocik 2012; Bean 2014b; Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen 2013; Grzymala-Busse 2015; T. A. Smith and Tatalovich 2003; Studlar and Burns 2015). A key conclusion emerges from this latter body of work: party institutions and political elites strongly affect the outcomes of potential religious and cultural conflicts. When political parties, elected officials, or high-level bureaucrats largely ignore orthodox-progressive cleavages in the electorate, those cleavages are less likely to shape policy. By contrast, when one or more groups of elites ally themselves with orthodox or progressive forces, latent issue cleavages are more likely to manifest in electoral divides or policy changes.

However, this insight provides a poor explanation of the Brazilian case, in which political parties have largely failed to build strong linkages to religious groups, with the important exception of the linkages between the leftist Workers' Party (PT, or Partido dos Trabalhadores) and the Catholic Church in the 1980s. Furthermore, in Brazil's secular, pluralistic policymaking context, no faction of bureaucrats has captured the policy process to benefit a single religious group. The clergy-driven approach I develop in this book better explains Brazil's recent period of political and social conflict. At the same time, it suggests broader lessons about the mutual influence of religious and electoral conflict. Just as parties can capture and exacerbate latent social cleavages for electoral gain, in countries with permissive party systems such as that of Brazil, religious groups use the tools of democratic politics to aid in interreligious competition.

The book also has implications for the long-running debate among scholars of comparative politics over the causes of multipartisanship. In broad strokes, the debate has revolved around two potential explanations: one focused on the nature and number of fundamental social cleavages (e.g., Sartori 1976), and the other on the mechanical functioning of electoral institutions, as well as the incentives they create for strategic behavior (e.g., Duverger 1972). I do not assume that social cleavages automatically create parties. Nonetheless, I suggest that when competing civil-society organizations are not simply allies to preexisting parties, but actually coordinate candidacies, the organizations' incentives for disunity at the level of civil society can undermine incentives to electoral collective action. This argument thus brings together elements of both cleavage-based and competitive-incentive-based approaches to understanding party systems.

Finally, the book contributes to scholarship on comparative religion and politics, synthesizing approaches in several domains. First, prior scholarship distinguishes between "demand-side" and "supply-side" explanations of clergy

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behavior – that is, between explanations focusing on the social and political circumstances stimulating doctrinal changes, and those focusing on the strategic calculations of clergy. By contrast, I argue that explaining clergy political activity requires us to consider the interaction between the religious supply and demand sides; the strategic calculations of clergy respond to changes in social and political conditions. Second, previous scholars have debated the relative explanatory power of theologically based policy ideas and institutional interests as incentives for clergy behavior. I argue, however, that both ideas and institutional interests matter to clergy. Moreover, ideas shape calculations of group interests by constraining the range of alternatives that can be considered. Third, the richest studies of religion and politics in Latin America have generally developed micro-level explanations of the political behavior *either* of Catholic or of Protestant clergy; rarely have scholars incorporated these two groups' motivations and behaviors within a single study. Fully understanding the ideological and institutional incentives clergy face, however, requires incorporating the two groups within a single theoretical framework.

But before we go further, let us introduce the actors who are the protagonists of this story. What are Brazil's major religious groups? Which citizens join which groups? How have they taken part in Brazilian politics? Most of the remainder of this chapter takes up these questions.

THE PROTAGONISTS: EVANGELICAL AND CATHOLIC INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

Winds of change. At the large, middle-class Vila Bela Methodist Church, a visiting African preacher was giving a sermon on a Wednesday night. The sanctuary was full. Doors were open to the street. Electric fans located high along the walls near the ceiling kept a cool breeze circulating through the room, and breathed some life into the colorful pendants decorating the walls of the sanctuary in honor of the guest. At the end of the preacher's hour-long sermon on fighting the devil, he called all the congregants up to the front of the room for individual blessings. Long, single-file lines snaked through the sanctuary as ecstatic music played, pendants waved, and the visiting preacher blessed each person. About ten people fell to the floor in shaking trances when they were blessed. Attendants, obviously at the alert, jumped up each time a person fell to make sure he or she was arranged comfortably and was securely out of the way of foot traffic [CO2].²

A few weeks earlier, about thirty people had met for a prayer group in the sanctuary of the São Ignácio Catholic Parish in a working-class neighborhood in Juiz de Fora for two-plus hours on a Thursday night. There was no formal

² Throughout the text, the numbered codes beginning "CO" and "FG" denote specific visits to congregations and other field sites, as listed in Appendix A.

service or preacher, though one of the participants stood up to give a long reflection on how the Holy Spirit had changed his life. Mostly, though, the group just sang and prayed, hands stretched upward. About an hour in, a breeze picked up through the open doors and windows, a relief on a hot night in the middle of a drought. And then there was a crack of thunder, and the sudden onslaught of rain drumming on the roof, and the dusty smell of ozone refreshed the air. As the prayer group ended, the rain let up a bit, but by the time I climbed down the hill to my bus stop, I was thoroughly wet.

This is not your grandmother's Methodism, and it is not your grandfather's Catholicism. Methodism is typically classified as a "mainline Protestant" denomination in the United States, and the common image of both Catholic and Methodist worship services is fairly staid. A month before the visiting preacher's sermon at the Vila Bela Methodist Church, though, I had asked an affiliated Methodist pastor how he classified the congregation, whether as "traditional Protestant" or "evangelical" or "Pentecostal." He responded, "most people see our church as a traditional Protestant church, but today it's very Pentecostal." The pastor had come to believe that Pentecostalism was more "biblically justified." He pointed out that Pentecostalism had changed even Catholicism [CO23].

So what are these groups? Throughout this book, I follow Brazilian usage in applying the term "evangelical" (*evangélico*) to Brazil's largest and most politically important religious minority. This highly diverse set of religious communities includes those termed historical Protestant, evangelical, and Pentecostal. Historical Protestant denominations – often called "mainline Protestant" in the United States – arise from the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent fragmentation of denominations over the course of several centuries. Examples include Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Baptists.³ More recently, some Protestant congregations have chosen to be nondenominational.

Academics also use the term "evangelical" in a narrower sense, to refer to a subset of Protestants identified by their beliefs and behavior, rather than their denomination. Bebbington (1989) influentially defined evangelicalism based on

³ Within historical/mainline Protestantism, large religious traditions such as Presbyterianism or Methodism have tended to be fragmented into many denominations, each with their own organizational identity and hierarchical decision-making structures. For instance, three of the many Presbyterian denominations in North and South America include the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA), the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (which largely operates in the United States, in competition with the PCUSA), and the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. Constituent denominations within one tradition often vary greatly in their theological and political stances. In some traditions, constituent denominations continue largely to maintain a shared identity and to work together within a larger federation. In the Church of England, for example, denominations are for the most part organized territorially (by country or group of countries); national Anglican denominations take part in a global body known as the Anglican Communion that has no legal existence, but maintains a unified identity and shares much of its doctrine.

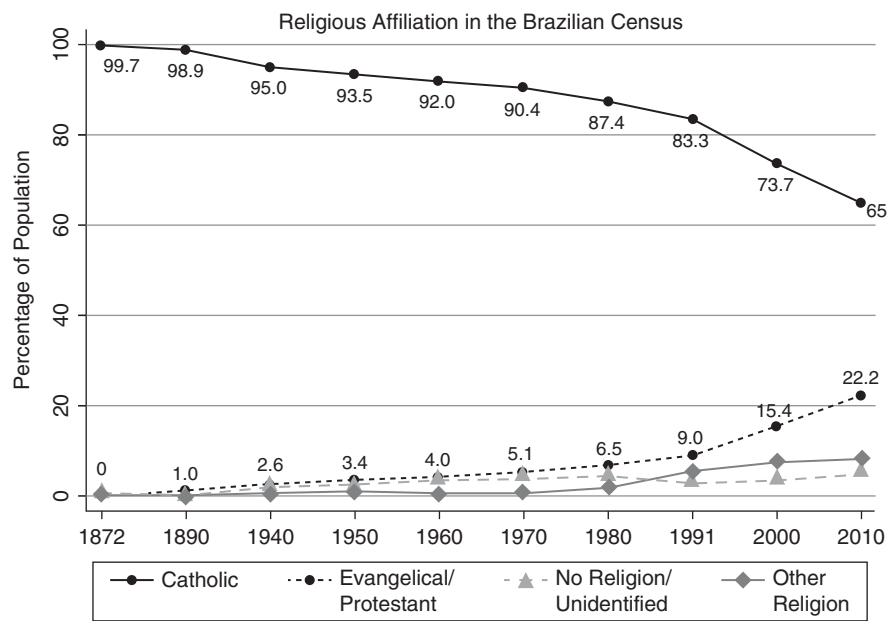


FIGURE 1.1 Religious affiliation in Brazil

four beliefs: “conversionism” (belief in the need to have an adult affirmation of religious commitment); “crucicentrism” (emphasis on Jesus’ death and resurrection to save humanity); “Biblicism” (special regard for the Bible); and “activism” (belief in the need to actively express one’s faith and convert others). Robbins (2004) further discusses two distinctive behavioral commitments: moral asceticism, or emphasis on conservative codes of behavior; and continuous evangelism (“activism” in Bebbington’s scheme).⁴ Protestant individuals, congregations, and denominations may or may not be evangelical. In Brazil, the overwhelming majority of Protestant clergy, both ones in nondenominational congregations and those affiliated with historical Protestant traditions, adhere to these traits. They also emphasize supernaturalist aspects of Christian faith, and envision the divine as an agentic, interventionist presence in society (Bohn 2004; Mariz and Machado 1997; Pew Research Center 2006).

Figure 1.1 shows that the sporadic censuses of the nineteenth century registered extremely few evangelicals. At the time Brazil gained its independence from Portugal, Roman Catholicism was officially a religious monopolist, in that it was the religion of state. This is not to say everyone was

⁴ Robbins (2004) discusses these as defining traits of Pentecostalism and charismatic Protestantism. However, they apply to evangelicalism more broadly.