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EVANGELICALS AND POWER IN BRAZIL: FROM JOSÉ SARNEY TO JAIR BOLSONARO (1985- 2022)

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Abstract: This research intends to trace the path taken by Brazilian evangelicals in the construction of their power projects, from the election of representatives to the National Constituent Assembly, in 1986, to the choice of pastor André Mendonça for the Federal Supreme Court, in 2021, seeking to understand the sociopolitical context, the methods, stages and motivations of their advance in power structures during the New Republic.

Keywords: Evangelical bench; Brazil; Evangelicals; New Republic; Power.

INTRODUCTION

According to a preliminary survey by the Inter-Union Parliamentary Advisory Department (DIAP), the evangelical group had won, in the 2018 elections, its highest historical representation in the National Congress: 84 federal deputies and 7 senators¹ – in 1982 only 17 federal deputies were elected, with only one representative in the Federal Senate elected in 1978.

In 2016, evangelicals won the mayoralty of Rio de Janeiro, the second most important city in the country and one of the main tourist and cultural routes in the world: Marcelo Crivella (PRB), licensed bishop of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD) [Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG)] and nephew of its founder Edir Macedo, was elected to command the city.

Before that, still in 2005, the then vice-president of the Republic José Alencar – generically Christian – was affiliated with the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), by whose acronym he was re-elected to the position on the ticket of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), the following year, also expanding parliamentary representation and presence in ministries.

After great advances in the Legislative and Executive powers, it was only with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018, that evangelicals

1 DIAP. *Elections 2018: Evangelical caucus grows in the House and Senate*. Available in <<https://www.diap.org.br/index.php/noticias/noticias/88900-eleicoes-2018-bancada-evangelica-cresce-na-camara-e-no-senado>>. Accessed on: June 28, 2022.

finally reached the Supreme Court: in 2021, the president nominated the Presbyterian pastor André Mendonça for a vacancy on the Federal Supreme Court.

The path taken by evangelicals within power structures, in an articulated way, is a recent political phenomenon, occurring only from the mid-1980s, despite their presence in Congress since the 1930s. This phenomenon, conceptualized by Paul Freston as a “Pentecostal irruption in politics”, coincides with the consolidation of redemocratization, the fragmentation of Protestantism and its population growth, which began with the redemocratization of the 1980s.

THE SARNEY GOVERNMENT, THE COALITION PRESIDENTIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL BENCH

The end of the 1970s represented for Brazil the outcome of the dictatorship started by the military in 1964: facing a serious economic crisis, enormous popular dissatisfaction and strong pressure from governments and international organizations in relation to censorship and human rights violations, the government of General João Figueiredo advanced in the process of political openness (FAUSTO: 2012, 426-435).

In 1979, the amnesty forgave politically persecuted people, but included agents of state repression. The following year, new political parties emerged, and in 1982, Brazil had direct elections for state governors again, with the opposition winning in the largest states of the country.

With the defeat of the proposal that would restore direct elections in 1984, the opposition’s strategy was to launch a consensual candidacy: Tancredo Neves, who had been prime minister in the 1960s, had as

his deputy the dissident senator José Sarney, from Maranhão, former president of the National Renewal Alliance (ARENA) and the Social Democratic Party (PDS), parties supporting the military dictatorship.

In the Electoral College, in January 1985, the candidacy of Paulo Maluf (PDS) was defeated by 480 to 180 votes. The dictatorship ended there, but the commemoration was shortened: due to the critical health situation presented by Tancredo, Sarney assumed the interim presidency of the Republic on March 15, 1985. On April 21, under strong popular commotion for the death of Tancredo Neves, Sarney was effectuated in office.

His government had two major responsibilities: the first was the “repeal of the laws that came from the military regime that still established limits to democratic freedoms – the so-called ‘authoritarian rubble’”, and the second “the election of a Constituent Assembly, in charge of elaborate a new Constitution” (FAUSTO: 2012, 441).

Scheduled for November 1986, the elections that chose the constituent deputies were marked by the emergence and rise of new political actors, previously excluded by the military dictatorship: the communists and socialists; the black movement, with a prominent representation on the left; feminist movements; human rights defenders; trade unionists; and evangelicals.

Between 1985 and 1986, the Brazilian Congress began to live with political diversity and party fragmentation – in 1985 alone, 25 political parties were formed. By political scientist Sérgio Abranches:

[...] (a) high degree of structural heterogeneity, both in the economy and in society, in addition to strong regional disparities; (b) high propensity for conflict of interests, cutting the class structure, horizontally and vertically, associated with different manifestations of inter- and intra-regional cleavages; (c) party-parliamentary

split, between medium and median, and high propensity to form governments based on large coalitions, most likely with relatively high levels of government fragmentation; (d) strong presidentialist and proportional tradition (ABRANCHES, 1988: 31-2).

Based on the difficulties faced by the President of the Republic in building a parliamentary base that would enable governability and stability, denoting a high degree of dependence on Congress, Abranches conceptualized the so-called “Coalition Presidentialism”: presented as a “Brazilian institutional dilemma”, the model highlighted the fragility of the role of the president, whose viability came from the formation of his ministerial cabinet based on the co-option of party leaders in the Legislative, in exchange for majority support for the Executive’s agenda (ABRANCHES: 1988, 5-34).

In this same political context, more specifically in the 1986 elections, what the social scientist Paul Freston identified as a “Pentecostal irruption in politics” took place: “the fundamental characteristic is the entry in weight of Pentecostal deputies, especially from the Assembly of God”, implying “a new geographic and party dispersion, a new social profile and new political trajectories” (FRESTON: 1993, 180).

Freston found, however, that the phenomenon was not part of uncoordinated initiatives, with institutional support and by the Pentecostal churches: denominations such as the Church of the Foursquare Gospel and the Assembly of God, especially this one, carried out internal processes and conventions in the sense of to select candidacy in a given region or state.

As a mobilizing discourse, evangelicals used, *lato sensu*, competition with Catholicism as a civil religion, the strengthening and legitimation of internal church leaders and behavioral and moral guidelines, “threats to the family” (FRESTON: 1993, 180-1). The

immediate consequence was the hegemony, since then, of parliamentarians linked to this evangelical segment.

There were 32 elected evangelicals, and another five alternates held office throughout the 48th legislature (1987-1991), making up the highest representation that the group had achieved historically. In this context, the term “evangelical bench” emerged, which Lopes defined as follows:

The concept of evangelical bench is used to designate, in a generic way, the set of evangelical representatives in the National Congress, especially in the Chamber of Deputies. However, caution is needed in the use of the term. The fact that a deputy is a police officer, for example, does not make him a member of the so-called “bullet bench” which, in general terms, defends conservative proposals in relation to public safety and the arms industry lobby.

This way, an evangelical deputy may not necessarily be part of the articulation of the evangelical bench, as occurred during the Constituent Assembly (LOPES: 2021, 82).

The articulation of the evangelical bench occurred from the Confederação Evangélica do Brasil [Evangelical Confederation of Brazil] (CEB), a former interdenominational institution of a philanthropic and ecumenical character that emerged in 1934, dismantled during the dictatorship. Through CEB, the majority evangelical group, aligned with “Centrão”², negotiated support for government proposals in exchange for public resources

² Centrão(*) was the main parliamentary support group for the presidency of José Sarney, bringing together mainly deputies and senators linked to the PMDB and PFL, in addition to certain members of the PDS, PTB, PL and PDC.

(*) In Brazilian politics, centrão [big center] refers to a group of political parties that do not have a specific ideological orientation and that aim at ensuring proximity to the executive branch in order to guarantee advantages and to distribute privileges through clientelistic networks. Despite its name, the ‘big center’ is not necessarily a strictly centrist political-ideological spectrum group, but a group of conservative-oriented politicians, generally composed of “low clergy” parliamentarians [low clergy is an expression used to designate parliamentarians with little expression in the Chamber of Deputies, moved mainly by provincial or personal interests]. These deputies do not have much influence or participation in the important political processes of the Parliament, being more concerned with issues related to their electoral base, and have little appearance in the media] and catch-all parties [political parties that seek to attract people with diverse points of view and various ideological currents, as opposed to parties that follow a concrete ideological line and seek to attract voters who sympathize with these ideals] that act according to their own interests, linked to physiological practices.

and radio and television concessions (LOPES: 2021, 83-89).

In the year following the promulgation of the new Constitution, elections were held direct appointments to the President of the Republic. In December 1989, former governor of Alagoas Fernando Collor de Mello (PRN) won the second round against federal deputy Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT/SP).

Freston found that the evangelical denominational leaders were mostly supporting Collor’s candidacy against those of the left: “if Lula wins, the Catholic Church will rule the country” and another statement, that Lula and Brizola would close the UCKG, for example, it was attributed to Bishop Edir Macedo (FRESTON: 1993, 255).

In the Executive, the evangelical presence was in charge of Íris Rezende, Minister of Agriculture during much of José Sarney’s government (1986-1990). Rezende was a member of the Evangelical Christian Church and is often appointed as the country’s first evangelical governor (LOPES: 2015, 2), also appearing as one of the articulators of the evangelical bench.

CONSOLIDATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE, FROM COLLOR TO FERNANDO HENRIQUE CARDOSO

In 1990, Evangelical representation in the National Congress suffered a major setback: only 22 were elected for the legislature that began in 1991, whose decline can be

attributed to its alignment with the Sarney government, marked by failed economic plans, and accusations of corruption involving parliamentarians linked to the CEB (LOPES: 2021, 87-9).

In Collor's short term, the supporters of the evangelical group gradually lost strength, either because of his disastrous economic policy – which included the confiscation of savings accounts – or the corruption scandals that directly involved his campaign treasurer, Paulo Cesar Farias (FAUSTO: 2012, 474-6).

President Collor faced a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) and then, the great mobilization of public opinion and the lack of parliamentary support in the face of an impeachment process forced his resignation, in December 1992. In his place, vice-president Itamar Franco was sworn in.

That year, evangelical deputy Eraldo Tinoco (PFL/BA) was chosen for the Ministry of Education, in an attempt to garner support from his political group and evangelicals. Among them, however, the impeachment obtained the support of 91% of the parliamentarians (FREESTON: 1993, 270-1).

The government of Itamar Franco (1992-1995) was marked by the creation of the Real Plan, instituted in 1994, which put an end to the inflationary spiral and contributed to the stabilization of the Brazilian economy. Although his government had a character of conciliation between different political forces, including historic left-wing politicians, the participation of evangelicals was nil.

Evangelical parliamentarians were once again involved in corruption scandals, such as that of the Dwarfs of the Budget³: Manoel Moreira (PMDB/SP), for example, resigned from his mandate, and João de Deus Antunes

(PDS/RS) escaped impeachment for a small margin of votes (LOPES: 2016, 905).

In 1994, the evangelicals Íris Rezende and Benedita da Silva (PT/RJ) were elected to the Senate (LOPES: 2015, 3). In the Chamber of Deputies, Evangelical representation returned to the level of 1986, with 33 elected parliamentarians, in the same election in which Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB/SP) won the presidency of the Republic.

Throughout the 1990s, the dynamics of the evangelical bench changed considerably, with the disappearance of the CEB and the emergence of the conservative Conselho Nacional de Pastores do Brasil [National Council of Pastors of Brazil] (CNPB) and the progressive Associação Evangélica Brasileira [Brazilian Evangelical Association] (AEVB).

This period coincided with the increase in UCKG representation, the parliamentary consolidation of the Assemblies of God and the affiliation of a considerable part of evangelicals to the parties of the President Cardoso's coalition, such as the PFL. Again, the most prominent evangelical figure was Iris Rezende, Minister of Justice between 1997 and 1998.

With the controversial approval of the constitutional amendment that made it possible to be re-elected to Executive positions in 1997, Fernando Henrique Cardoso ran again in 1998, being re-elected in the first round. In the National Congress, 51 federal deputies were elected, in addition to seven alternates who held office.

Although there is no representation in President Cardoso's ministerial cabinet, evangelicals have deepened their relations with the central power, a fact that is demonstrated, for example, by the radio and television

3 The "Dwarfs of the Budget" was a group of Brazilian congressmen who, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, were involved in fraud with the Federal Budget until they were discovered and investigated, in 1993, before a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) of great repercussions. The name "dwarfs" was due to the fact that the main people involved in the case were congressmen without great national repercussions, that is, "dwarfs of power" in the Brazilian Congress. The final report called for the expulsion of 18 of them, but only six lost their mandates:

concessions granted to churches and leaders of the segment, appearing as the fourth stage of the evangelical strategy of occupation and control of the media:

The fourth stage is the evangelical assault on television, with the parallel articulation of radio networks, enabling the construction of large evangelical media conglomerates. This stage began in the 1980s, with TV Rio de Nilson by Amaral Fanini, in 1983. But it is from the 1988 Constitution that the process advances and consolidates, gaining strength in the 1990s, merging, in the field of television, new concessions, leasing and purchase of stations.

In 1989, negotiations began for the acquisition of TV Record in São Paulo by the UCKG, which took place the following year. [...] From then on, the emergence of evangelical channels follows: in 1993, TV Boas Novas appears, in Manaus, linked to the CADB and transformed into a network two years later. Other important broadcasters would emerge throughout the 1990s, such as Rede Gospel [Gospel Network] (1996), linked to the Igreja Apostólica Renascer em Cristo [Reborn-in-Christ Apostolic Church], and Rede Internacional de Televisão [International Television Network] – RIT (1999), of the Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus [Grace of God International Church] (LOPES, 2021, p. 186).

This movement occurred at the same time as the evangelicals, in full population growth – in 2000 they were already 15.6% of the population –, demonstrated their strength in the organization of mega-events such as the March for Jesus and the great cults in the Maracanã stadium and on the beaches of Copacabana and Botafogo.

THE PT ERA: LULA (2003-2011) AND DILMA ROUSSEFF (2011-2016)

The year 2002 put an end to the PSDB government, which at that time was facing unpopularity due to the ineffectiveness of its economic policy, which included privatizations, reforms and a wage squeeze, insufficient measures to contain unemployment and inflation. The PSDB nominated former minister José Serra as a candidate for the presidency.

Serra would face Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a candidate for the fourth consecutive time. In the evangelical milieu, the highlight was the candidacy of Anthony Garotinho (PSB) to the Planalto, supported by important leaders and denominations of the segment, such as the president of the Convenção Geral da Assembleia de Deus no Brasil [General Convention of the Assemblies of God in Brazil] (CGADB), José Wellington Bezerra⁴.

Despite the support from evangelical leaders, Anthony Garotinho's candidacy received 15 million votes (17.86%), and candidates Serra (23.19%) and Lula (46.44%) competed in the second round. From then on, the evangelical leaders split: the CGADB supported the PSDB, the UCKG supported the PT in exchange for "discourse moderation"⁵.

That year, 62 evangelical federal deputies and four senators were elected. Of these, 14 were affiliated with the PL, the party of vice-president José Alencar and most of the eight parliamentarians linked to the Universal Church [UCKG], including Marcelo Crivella. During the 52nd Legislature (2003-2007), a considerable number of evangelicals joined President Lula's governing parties, such as the PL and the PTB.

According to Lopes (2016), the Workers'

4 DIARY OF THE GREAT ABC. *Garotinho receives support from the Assembly of God*. Available in <<https://www.dgabc.com.br/Noticia/194264/garotinho-recebe-apoio-da-assembleia-de-deus>>. Accessed on: 29 Jun. 2022.

5 FOLHA DE S. PAULO. *To support PT, Universal asks for moderation of the speech*. Available in <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil/fc1902200216.htm>>. Accessed on: June 29, 2022.

Party governments provided a favorable political environment for the consolidation of the evangelical bench at the center of power: “in 2003, the first year of the Lula government, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front was officially created, coordinating the group’s activities in the Chamber of Deputies”. (LOPES, 2016, p. 906).

However, again, evangelical parliamentarians had their names involved in accusations of corruption scandals, such as what happened with CEB resources and involvement in the CPI of the “Dwarfs of the Budget”:

Despite the enormous growth, it was precisely in the 2003-2007 legislature that the evangelical bench faced its greatest crisis. After the disclosure of the Mensalão scandals, which involved buying votes in Congress in order to approve projects of interest to the government, and the Sanguessugas (or Ambulance Mafia), involving fraud in the allocation of SUS resources, several evangelical parliamentarians were investigated or accused of corruption (LOPES, 2016, p. 906).

In 2005, when the denunciations peaked, the Universal Church created the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB). The new acronym exploited the crisis that befell the PL in its favor, transferring not only the political group linked to the UCKG, but also attracting important national political leaders: the greatest of them, the Vice President of the Republic, José de Alencar.

In the dispute for reelection, in 2006, President Lula had as his main competitor Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB), former governor of São Paulo. Despite the poor performance in the parliamentary elections – 45 evangelicals

6 In Brazil, it is common to use the term ‘believer’ to designate a person of evangelical belief. Possibly, the president made a play on words between ‘being a believer’ and ‘being evangelical’ (= ‘being a believer’ in the popular sense, we can say).

7 Brazil Agency. *Looking at 2010, the “bloc of the left” was born to put pressure on an unopposed government*. Available in <<http://memoria.ebc.com.br/agenciabrasil/noticia/2007-09-04/mirando-2010-%E2%80%9Cbloco-de-esquerda%E2%80%9D-nasce-para-pressor-governo-no-opposition>>. Accessed on: 06 Sep. 2022.

8 FOLHA DE S. PAULO. *A Catholic, Alencar joins the Universal Church party*. Available in <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/brasil/fc3009200502.htm>>. Accessed on: Sept 12, 2022.

were elected – and the distrust on the part of the electorate regarding President Lula’s exemption from the accusations, the evangelical leaders’ support for the PT has stained strong:

Bishop Manoel Ferreira even delivered a letter of support for his re-election, representing 42,000 evangelical ministers linked to the CNPB and 19,000 ministers and 25,000 temples of CONAMAD.

Lula’s phrase, “we are all believers”⁶, said during an event held at the Assembly of God temple in Santa Cruz, in the west zone of Rio de Janeiro, called by Ferreira, became famous. The president claimed that his government benefited churches, especially through the approval of Law 10,825/2005, which established “the right of churches to be recognized as private law entities” (LOPES, 2016, 907).

At the end of the second round, Lula was reelected with 60.83% of the votes. In 2007, political parties supporting the PT government formed the Bloc of the Left, grouping PDT, PC do B, PSB, PHS, PMN and PRB and 73 federal deputies – second only to the PMDB and the PT itself.⁷ Joining the PRB reinforced what had been announced by Senator Crivella: “the alliances that the new party will make will be on the left”⁸.

In Lula’s second term, the evangelical bench remained distant from the Ministries Esplanade. Senator Marina Silva (PT/AC), Minister of the Environment from 2003 to 2008, despite being a Pentecostal evangelical, was not linked to the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE). As for the other powers, there were no significant debates on the nomination of representatives of the group for the highest

levels of the Judiciary.

Despite forming a political coalition supporting the government of a leftist party, evangelical groups began to gradually express their dissatisfaction with behavioral and human rights guidelines conducted by the PT. The most obvious example was the National Plan for Human Rights (PNDH-3), especially on issues related to abortion, homosexuality and civil disarmament (LOPES: 2016, 908-9).

In addition to the growth of conservative mobilization in the evangelical milieu, another important element emerged in 2010, in Lula's succession: the candidacy of Marina Silva, now his former ally, who joined the Green Party (PV), emerging as a potential presidential candidate for the following year, fragmenting the evangelical electoral and social base.

More than in previous elections, behavioral guidelines were at the center of the presidential debate, leaving aside topics such as economic growth. Dilma Rousseff, twice minister and PT candidate, obtained 46.91% of the votes in the 1st round, against 32.61% for José Serra. Marina Silva won just over 19% of the electorate and maintained a neutral position.

Seeking to bring together the evangelical parliamentary base, made up of 68 deputies and four senators elected in 2010, President Rousseff chose Senator Marcelo Crivella as Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, still in 2012. The following year, however, her government faced a series of protests throughout the month of June, starting from dissatisfaction with the high cost of

living and expenses with mega-events – the World Cup and the Olympics. Over the weeks, the demonstrations gained surprising proportions, also including anti-system speeches, against party representation and the Brazilian model of representative democracy.

Since then, a social environment favorable to the expansion of movements has been created ultra-conservative and far-right groups, empowered by Operation “Lava-jato” [Jet Wash Operation or Car Wash Operation]⁹, with direct implications for the following elections:

The weakening of the PT was evident in the results of the 2014 elections, when Dilma defeated Aécio Neves, from the PSDB, by a small margin: 51.64% against 48.36% of the votes in the second round. [...] The presidential debate revolved around the country's economic downturn, rising inflation and the make-up of public accounts, the famous “fiscal pedaling”¹⁰. At the same time, Operation “Car Wash” began, which investigates billionaire corruption schemes involving the largest state-owned company in the country, Petrobras, commanded by federal judge Sérgio Moro, from Curitiba. Prominent PT figures, such as former leader of the party in the Senate Delcídio Amaral, former Minister of the Civil House José Dirceu, convicted in the Mensalão¹¹ process, in addition to former President Lula himself, were investigated by the operation. (LOPES: 2016, 910-1).

Re-elected, but weakened, President Dilma Rousseff faced constant protests against her government. Within parliament, the coalition that supported his government eroded: the

9 It was an operation conducted by the Federal Police in Curitiba, named as Jet Wash Operation in March 2014 due to the use of a network of laundromats and gas stations to move sums of money of illicit origin.

10 “Fiscal pedaling” is a type of accounting trickery. It is a nickname given to a type of accounting maneuver made by the Executive Branch to meet fiscal targets, making it seem that there would be balance between spending and expenses in the public accounts. Why ‘fiscal pedaling’? It is a figuration that is taken from a soccer dribble called ‘pedalada (pedaling)’, which consists of a move of the soccer in which the player passes his foot over the ball, as if he were pedaling, one or more times, alternately and quickly, to deceive the opponent. The idea is to - let's say - circumvent strict budget constraints.

11 The neologism “mensalão” (monthly payment), popularized by then federal deputy Roberto Jefferson in an interview that gave the scandal national resonance, is a variant of the word “mensalidade” (monthly fee), used to refer to an allowance paid to congressmen to vote in favor of projects of interest to the Executive Branch.

evangelical deputy Eduardo Cunha (PMDB/RJ), elected president of the Chamber in 2015, led the opening of the impeachment process against Rousseff, directly benefiting the vice-president Michel Temer (MDB).

In addition to the MDB, acronyms such as the Party of the Republic (PR) and the PRB itself had left the allied base. However, the main movement occurred on account of the evangelical bench, which massively voted for the impeachment of the President of the Republic:

On April 15, 2016, the Chamber of Deputies approved the admissibility of the process against Rousseff, by 367 to 137. The following month, it was the turn of the Senate to approve it, by 55 votes to 22. President Michel Temer was temporarily sworn in as President. After months of judgment, directed by the president of the STF, Minister Ricardo Lewandowski, Dilma Rousseff was finally impeached, without loss of political rights, by the score of 61 votes in favor and only 20 against. Michel Temer was definitively sworn in on the same day, August 31, 2016 (LOPES: 2016, 911).

Despite the fundamental role of evangelicals in Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process, opening space for Temer to take office, his presence boiled down to the appointment of Marcos Pereira, bishop of the UCKG and president of the PRB, to the Ministry of Industry. In his ministerial composition, Temer preferred to rely on traditional political leaders such as Henrique Eduardo Alves, Eliseu Padilha, Gilberto Kassab, Roberto Freire, Romero Jucá, José Serra and Henrique Meirelles.

In his short government, Temer managed to pass the Proposed Constitutional Amendment on the Expenditure Ceiling (2016), the High School Reform (2016), the Labor Reform (2017) and the Outsourcing Law (2017). Temer still faced accusations

and impeachment requests in Congress, but in 2017 the admissibility of opening impeachment proceedings was rejected.

BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT: FROM THE ESPLANADA TO THE SUPREME COURT

Held in October, the 2018 presidential elections marked the contemporary history of Brazil due to some significant factors, which we will list below: the first of them was the number of candidates for the Planalto Palace, in a total of thirteen, the largest since the elections from 1989.

Among the motivations, we list party fragmentation – 32 acronyms had registration with the Superior Electoral Court and were able to launch candidacies –, and the dispersion of President Michel Temer's allied base, mainly due to his decision not to run for a new term: since 1998, it was the first time that the incumbent did not seek re-election.

Another circumstance with a strong impact was related to the financing of electoral campaigns, carried out only with donations from individuals and public resources from the Special Campaign Financing Fund (FEFC), which allocated more than R\$ 1 billion and 700 million for this purpose¹².

However, the most relevant fact involving the 2018 elections was the arrest of former President Lula in April, ordered by Judge Sérgio Moro, in the first instance, as part of Operation "Car Wash". The PT even registered Lula's candidacy, with the former mayor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad, as vice-president. The TSE, however, rejected the request, and Haddad inherited the vacancy.

Three former presidential candidates stood out: Ciro Gomes (PDT); Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB) and Marina Silva (Rede Sustentabilidade). Temer's candidate was the former minister Henrique Meirelles (MDB).

12 SUPERIOR ELECTORAL COURT. *Special Campaign Financing Fund (FEFC)*. Available in <<https://www.tse.jus.br/eleicoes/eleicoes-2018/prestacao-de-contas-1/fundo-especial-de-financiamento-de-campanha-fefc>>. Accessed on: 20 Jun. 2022.

The candidacy of federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro (PSL/RJ), however, won the election, becoming a viable electoral alternative to the PT due to his speech authoritarian; by the ultraliberal economic agenda; by conservative moral guidelines; for its anti-human rights and pro-gun agenda; and by a strong anti-leftism, occupying the anti-PT niche previously represented by the worn-out PSDB.

The evangelical bench immediately supported the candidacy of Jair Bolsonaro, also based on subjective political criteria, such as evangelical messianism and Dominion Theology:

We understand evangelical political messianism as waiting for a political leadership that, under divine inspiration, will solve the nation's problems, fighting crime, chasing corrupt people, imposing order and respect for the hierarchy, ridding the people of their enemies.

Divine inspiration does not necessarily mean that the chosen leadership is Christian or evangelical [...] in the 2018 election [...], after defeating the PT in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the right wing finally defeated the petist project with the legitimacy of the popular vote. And the chosen for such a mission was Jair Bolsonaro, who even "crazy", "weak" and "despicable", in the words of Silas Malafaia, was the divine instrument to put an end to the "communism" of the PT (LOPES: 2019, 7-8).

Specifically, about the Theology of Dominion (or dominionism), it is the idea that "the Christian must have power reestablished over all things, starting from a spiritual assumption, battling and winning spirits and evil forces, and reaching dominion in the earthly plane as its consequence, resuming governments and the State as a consequence" (LOPES: 2019, 10).

Supported by the main evangelical leaders

in the country, including Edir Macedo, RR Soares (Igreja da Graça [Grace Church]), Silas Malafaia (Assembleia de Deus Vitória em Cristo [Assembly of God Victory in Christ]), Roberto Brasileiro (Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil [Presbyterian Church of Brazil]), José Wellington Bezerra (CGADB), Estevam Hernandes (Igreja Renascer em Cristo [Reborn-in-Christ Church]) and Valdemiro Santiago (Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus [Worldwide Power of God Church]), Bolsonaro managed to instrumentalize his moral discourse, fundamental for the segment to become his main electoral base, reaching almost 70% of the votes there (ALMEIDA: 2019, 37).

The strategy was also adopted in the election of Evangelical representatives to the National Congress, proving to be equally successful with the election of more than 100 parliamentarians, concentrated in parties of the political right such as Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party (PSL), PRB, PR, Social Democratic Party (PSD) and Democrats (DEM), parties that are part of Jair Bolsonaro's government coalition form of 2019.

Contrary to what happened in previous presidential terms, the evangelical presence became evident in Jair Bolsonaro's ministerial cabinet: five ministers occupied nine different ministries, with emphasis on Onyx Lorenzoni, the president's trusted man; Damares Alves, Baptist pastor and lecturer; and André Mendonça, Presbyterian pastor.

Minister	Church	Ministry	Period
André Mendonça	Presbyterian Church of Brazil	Ministry of justice and Public Security	04/2020-03/2021
		General Attorney of the Union	01/2019-04/2020 03/2021-08/2021
Dameres Alves	Baptist Church of Lagoinha	Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights	01/2019-03/2022
Marcelo Álvaro Antonio	Christian Church Maranata	Ministry of Tourism	01/2019-12/2020
Milton Ribeiro	Presbyterian Church of Brazil	Ministry of Education	07/2020-03/2022
Onyx Lorenzoni	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil	Civil House of the Presidency of the Republic	01/2019-02/2020
		Ministry of Citizenship	02/2020-02/2021
		General Secretariat of the Presidency	02/2021-07/2021
		Ministry of Labor and Social Security	07/2021-03/2022

Table 1 – Evangelical ministers in the Jair Bolsonaro government (2019-2021)

Despite the relevant presence of the religious group in Bolsonaro’s ministerial cabinet, the most important evangelical figure in the Bolsonaro government did not hold any portfolio, nor did he have a mandate: First Lady Michelle Bolsonaro, a member of the Igreja Batista Atitude [Attitude Baptist Church] was the centerpiece of the engagement of the president in social causes, seeking to relax its public image.

It was in the Bolsonaro government that, after more than 30 years of articulation, evangelicals began their journey towards the Judiciary. In July 2019, Bolsonaro stated that he would appoint a “terribly evangelical” minister to the Federal Supreme Court:

Many try to put us aside by saying that the state is secular. The state is secular, but we are Christians. Or to plagiarize my dear

13 G1. *Bolsonaro says he will appoint a ‘terribly evangelical’ minister to the Federal Supreme Court (STF)*. Available in <<https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/07/10/bolsonaro-diz-que-vai-indicar-minister-terribilidade-evangelico-para-o-stf.ghtml>>. Accessed on: 22 Jun. 2022.

Dameres [Alves, minister]: We are terribly Christian. And this spirit must be present in all powers. Therefore, my commitment: I will be able to appoint two justices to the Federal Supreme Court [STF]. One of them will be terribly evangelical,” declared President¹³.

President Bolsonaro repeatedly admitted the nomination, generating expectations regarding the name of André Mendonça – which faced resistance in the Senate, with its hearing postponed for months. In plenary, he received 47 votes in favor and 32 against – the lowest approval among the last nominees to the STF.

On December 16, 2021, Mendonça was sworn in as minister of the Federal Supreme Court, being the second evangelical in the role: the first was the deacon-baptist Antônio Martins Vilas Boas, appointed by President

Juscelino Kubitschek in 1957.

It was during the government of Jair Bolsonaro, therefore, that opportune conditions were presented for the advancement of evangelical groups in power structures, consolidating their presence in the Executive Branch and advancing for the last instance of the Brazilian Judiciary Power – the last word in constitutional matters, whose ministers are appointed by the President of the Republic, with a term of office up to 75 years of age.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The political action of evangelical groups, in different spheres and instances, shows the existence of a power project. However, due to their particularities and the significant heterogeneity of the Brazilian Protestant milieu, it is not enough to state that these groups share the same methods and motivations in advancing the control of power structures, the most appropriate, in this sense, is the statement that there are projects of power and domination.

From our analysis, we identified that, in the context of the New Republic, this process unfolds in three different phases: the first one started in the Sarney government, coinciding with the re-democratization of the country in 1985. The following year, elections are held to choose the members of the National Constituent Assembly, when the pentecostal irruption in politics takes place, led by the Assembly of God.

This is the legislative phase: the evangelical bench consolidates itself in the Chamber of Deputies, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, when its action advances to the Federal Senate. In parallel, its parliamentary representation also expands in the state Legislative Assemblies and in the Municipal Chambers of capitals and large cities – whose analysis becomes fundamental to identify and understand the different projects of power at

the local and regional level.

The second phase began in 2003, when the Evangelical Parliamentary Front was created and, in 2005, with the definitive registration of the Brazilian Republican Party. This is the stage of the Executive: José Alencar, Vice President of the Republic, left PL towards the PRB, leading the UCKG party to the dispute – victorious – in a presidential ticket, which occurred in 2006.

From the government of President Dilma Rousseff (2010-2016), the evangelical presence on the Esplanada dos Ministérios intensified with the choice of parliamentarians like Marcelo Crivella, Eduardo Lopes and George Hilton – all linked to the Universal Church.

In 2016, attention turned to Marcelo Crivella, winner of the Rio de Janeiro mayoral elections. This way, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God conquered command of the second most important city in the country.

Therefore, during the governments of the Workers' Party, the consolidation of the evangelical presence in the Legislative and the advance to the Executive, whose apex was experienced in the government of President Jair Bolsonaro: between 2019 and 2021, five evangelicals had occupied nine different ministries.

It was during Bolsonaro's government that the third phase of the expansion of evangelicals in power structures reached the highest position in the Judiciary, with the choice of Pastor André Mendonça for STF. This period coincided with the highest representativeness in the history of evangelicals in the National Congress: 103 deputies had held terms between 2019 and 2022, along with seven incumbents and one substitute, elected in 2018.

In this sense, we highlight an important aspect: although the starting points of each of the three phases become evident at different times, they unfold concomitantly. In other

words, while evangelicals advance in the Judiciary, they do not fail to show concern with spaces in the Legislative Power. However, these cycles may not be repeated, in the same stages and chronological cuts, in other spheres of power, such as state legislatures.

Our contribution, therefore, occurs in the sense of confirming that evangelical parliamentary activity is not just a representative component of the social segment, it is also related to different power projects that, despite the diversity of discourses and motivations, share similar methods with the aim of gaining power.

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