

# The Brazilian Evangelical Church and Right-Wing Support by Low-Income Voters

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**Abstract:** The Brazilian presidential election of 2022 surfaced several controversies, namely the role of Evangelical voters supporting Bolsonaro. This project seeks to better understand Evangelical support for right-wing candidates like Bolsonaro by answering the following question: how does the Pentecostal Evangelical Church in Brazil play a role in the choice of low-income voters to support right-wing candidates? Scholars have found that Evangelical Churches exert political influence on the Brazilian government and that they and their members tend to support right-wing candidates. However, existing literature neglects a discussion of the potentially active role the church plays in forming the political preferences of its members. My research uses a qualitative approach through ethnographic fieldwork methods and interviews in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It also introduces the theoretical frameworks of a fear of social death and conjuring necessity. Ethnographic and interview data suggest that the fear of social death may be at play in the decision of low-income Pentecostals to support right-wing candidates but does not discount the possibility that the beliefs of this group naturally align with the Right. Further research is required to ascertain a causal mechanism between a fear of social death and support for the Right.

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## **I. Statement of the Problem and Research Question:**

In 2022, the fate of democracy in Brazil was put to a vote. The presidential election would decide whether then-President Bolsonaro, a man who had consistently made clear his support for dictatorship, would be granted four more years as president (McCoy and Pessoa 2021). The presidential election of 2022 surfaced several controversies, namely the role of Evangelical voters, a group that has become an increasingly important voting bloc. In Brazil, the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Evangelical population rose by 17% from 1980 to 2010, while the Catholic majority fell by 22.9% during these 30 years (Coutinho and Golgher 2014, 79). Currently, Evangelical voters generally tend towards the Right. In the case of the election of 2022, a study by Datafolha projected that 62% of Evangelicals would support Bolsonaro, while only 32% would support Lula in the second round of voting (“Intenção de Voto” 2022, 4). Why did a majority of Evangelical voters support the right-wing candidate? More specifically, what role does the Evangelical Church play in this right-wing support? An article in BBC Brasil sheds light on this phenomenon, suggesting a social pressure within certain Evangelical communities, including the Pentecostal denomination, to support right-wing politics. The article includes the story of Gabriel, who was part of a Pentecostal Evangelical Church in the city of São Paulo for several years. However, he was forced to distance himself from his religious community when he could no longer stand the overwhelming support for Bolsonaro that he witnessed in day-to-day interactions. He described the experience of leaving as “um luto” or mourning such as after a death (Mori 2022).

My research seeks to better understand Evangelical support for right-wing candidates like Bolsonaro by answering the following question: How does the Pentecostal Evangelical Church in Brazil play a role in the choice of low-income voters to support right-wing candidates? This

question seeks to explain the mechanism behind the increasingly important Evangelical vote in a historic election for Brazil. In this prospectus I will describe the context and existing scholarship that drive the relevance of my research. Furthermore, I will outline how the existing scholarship has led me to the hypothesis that right-wing support within Evangelical communities is in part motivated by a fear of social death, a result of the Evangelical Church's omnipresence in the daily lives of its members and perceived neglect by other institutions. I plan to test this hypothesis through qualitative interview data conducted in the western part of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

## **II. Context: Intersections of Blackness, Poverty, and Pentecostalism**

The focus of this research is on low-income Pentecostal Evangelical voters that support right-wing candidates. This focus is compelling because Evangelism, namely Pentecostalism, has been socially and historically intertwined with poverty and right-wing politics. However, the factor of race cannot be ignored in a discussion of low-income Evangelicals because of Brazil's unique history of slavery and abolition. In 2021, 74.1% of Afro-Brazilians were among the 10% of Brazilians with the lowest income (*Desigualdades Sociais* 2022, Table 2.9). This significant amount of poverty among Afro-Brazilians is in part the result of strategic legislation pre- and post-abolition meant to harm the ability of this group to acquire land and employment. The 1850 Land Bill, which created a shortage of land and increased poverty, was passed by the government as a reaction to the imminence of abolition (Veltmeyer and Bras 2003, 302). Additionally, a few years prior to the abolition of slavery in 1888 (Santos Oliveira 1996, 85), the Brazilian government began to stimulate European immigration by guaranteeing newcomers employment and land (74). The result was a shortage of land and increased competition for jobs. This was the environment the Brazilian government created for newly freed enslaved peoples.

The timing of the 1850 Land Bill and the stimulation of European immigration suggest that these policies were a response to abolition, an attempt to maintain the subordination of Black Brazilians. Those in power likely felt threatened by the possibility that abolition would empower newly freed enslaved peoples to challenge the racial hierarchy in the country. The response was an attempt to “whiten” the country through European immigration. The legacy of these policies and the late abolition of slavery are reflected in today’s high poverty rate among Afro-Brazilians.

Low-income, Black Brazilians make up the majority of the Pentecostal Evangelical Community. There is a negative correlation between monthly salary and being a Pentecostal Evangelical: 70.3% of members earn a maximum of twice the minimum wage (Bohn 2004, 299). It is important to note that while this correlation also exists among non-Pentecostal Evangelicals, it is weaker: 58.3% of non-Pentecostal Evangelicals earn a maximum of twice the minimum wage (Bohn 2004, 299). This suggests that Pentecostalism in particular is a denomination within Evangelism that attracts low-income Brazilians. Someone who earns a salary equivalent to the minimum wage is more likely to choose Pentecostalism over other denominations when deciding to become Evangelical.

The prevalence of low-income members within the Pentecostal Evangelical community is a reflection of its structure and beliefs. Firstly, Pentecostalism has attracted low-income members because of the social network its communities offer (Mariz 1994). The Evangelical church fills common needs amongst the low-income population by providing jobs, resources, and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the social network offered by the Evangelical Church is one characterized by accessibility to people from all backgrounds. There have been instances of Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal pastors who are children and even former drug dealers (Antonopoulos et al. 2020, 255; Arsenault 2014). It has also been theorized that Pentecostalism,

specifically, is attractive to low-income Brazilians because of the religion's emphasis on individualism. Sociologist Cecília Loreto Mariz argues (1994) that low-income Brazilians are attracted to Pentecostalism, specifically, because of its rationalization of society. This rationalization encourages members to take control over bettering their lives (8). Furthermore, this Evangelical gospel of self-help is further empowered by prosperity theology, which "promises the believer that by giving money to their church, praying and adhering to strict social rules... a structured life is created and material rewards will result" (Antonopoulos et al. 2020, 253). Pentecostalism encourages its followers to improve their own living conditions and promises that they will achieve prosperity within their lifetime, making the religion attractive for low-income Brazilians.

### **III. Literature Review:**

#### **Right-wing Populism**

The impetus of this research, Evangelical support for Bolsonaro, reflects a larger global trend of right-wing populism (Grzymala-Busse et al. 2020). Scholars have also identified this trend in Brazil (Borges 2021). There is considerable debate surrounding what constitutes populism. One popular definition is the ideational approach. This approach defines populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, 543). Populist parties have also been categorized as inclusionary and exclusionary (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013), which generally correspond respectively to the Left and Right of the political spectrum. Right-wing, or exclusionary, populist parties tend to advocate for greater visibility for the opinions of the "people", while advocating for the disenfranchisement of certain groups.

They also practice welfare chauvinism and portray a conception of “the people” that is inherently exclusionary (Filc 2010: 128-138). Several contradictions within right-wing populism have been identified. Namely, a failure to reduce inequality and improve the lives of those “left behind”, despite promising to do so. Additionally, right-wing populists tend to emphasize anti-elite rhetoric, while cultivating relationships with those same elites (Öniş and Kutlay 2020). Right-wing populism has also been identified as focusing on identity cleavages—such as race, ethnicity, religion—rather than economic ones. Subsequently, they identify a unifying identity to define “the people”, simultaneously identifying outgroups as threats to the “general will” (Rodrik 2018, 24). Thus, the support of Evangelicals for the right-wing populist Bolsonaro is a compelling point of study. As previously discussed, this group is largely represented by low-income Afro-Brazilians, and yet they demonstrated overwhelming support for a form of populism that centers racial and welfare exclusion. On the other hand, populist appeals to “the people” may have attracted support from this group.

#### Political Influence of the Evangelical Church

Evangelical Churches have been cited as politically influential actors in contexts outside of Brazil. In the case of South Africa, Pentecostal Evangelical Churches were found to rely on social media and rhetoric in sermons to encourage political participation among their members during the 2014 presidential election (Frahm-Arp 2015). Scholars have also identified the role of the Evangelical Church in encouraging democratization in Asia. In the case of China, Evangelical Churches in small communities were found to encourage civic engagement among members and, consequently, greater state responsiveness (Chan 2009). Other scholars have also identified the role of the Evangelical Church in democratization in both South Korea and the Philippines (Hong 2009; Lim 2009). Similarly, in the case of Mexico, Evangelical Churches

were found to have positive influences on democratizing attitudes, despite this effect being relatively minimal (Palacios 2008). On the other hand, the case of Nicaragua has revealed that Evangelical political participation can also have the goal of achieving a close relationship with the state and similar privileges to the Catholic Church (Zub 2008). Thus, the political influence of the Evangelical Church is a global phenomenon. However, how this influence materializes and with which goals in mind varies by country.

Right-wing political influence by the Evangelical Church is also not unique to Brazil. Since the mid-20th century, US Evangelicals have attempted to exert influence over right-wing administrations through informal relationships and social mobilization. Around the 1980s these informal relationships shifted as the GOP began to adopt the policy preferences of this group, primarily those of anti-abortion and pro-family (Williams 2010). While Evangelicals around this time were not uniformly Republican, the political influence of Evangelism in the US government was uniformly right-wing, particularly in its advancement of anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ+ rights policies (Steenland and Wright 2014). More recently, Evangelical voters have been found to prioritize social issues within conservative politics (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Smidt 2013). Furthermore, the presidency of the Evangelical Jimmy Morales has been used to identify how Evangelical beliefs are compatible with right-wing discourses in the context of Guatemala, namely opposition to LGBTQ+ rights and abortion (Althoff 2019). As will later be discussed, this centrality of social issues, primarily abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, in Evangelical political participation is also present in the context of Brazil.

#### Political Influence of Brazilian Evangelical Church

Brazilian Evangelical churches have been found to be important sites of civic education for its members (Smith 2017). Earlier scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century found Evangelical political

influence to be heterogeneous in terms of political backing (Oro 2003; Borges 2005). This influence has also been used in existing scholarship to question the health of Brazilian secularism in practice. Some have claimed that it has failed in practice because of its continued relationship with the state through office-holding and coercion amongst Evangelicals in office (Campos Machado 2012; Duarte de Souza 2014; Oro 2005; Oro 2003). The Evangelical Church began this relationship with the state in 1934, but more powerfully in 1984 with the democratization of Brazil, creating a mimetic effect in other religious groups (Duarte de Souza 2014). Political influence by the church has been measured by its provision of civic education to members. Furthermore, existing literature has focused on Brazil's failure to uphold secularism in practice as a result of the Evangelical Churches presence and actions in government positions.

#### Right-Wing Politics and the Brazilian Evangelical Church

While previous literature claimed the Evangelical Church's political influence did not align with a single political party, more recently scholarship has focused on how the institution has exercised its influence to support right-wing politics. This shift towards a more united voting bloc appears to have occurred around 2010. The Pentecostal Evangelical Church mobilized in order to prevent the election of Dilma Rousseff of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT hereafter) in the election of 2010 (Duarte de Souza 2014). The recession of 2014 has also been emphasized as an important year for right-wing mobilization among low-income voters (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2020), a majority among Evangelicals. Others have cited that the shift towards right-wing support among Pentecostal religious leaders also reflects a shift away from playing an assisting role in a larger PT-led governing coalition. Thus, this shift is in part a decision by Pentecostal leaders to take on a more powerful and important role by aligning with right-wing administrations (Pagliarini 2023). While the exact year and why this occurred has not been

studied specifically, different scholars have identified different key years of right-wing support. This is an interesting phenomenon for study, but it is beyond the scope of my research.

Nevertheless, some scholars have attempted to explain this shift toward right-wing politics, locating alienation from the Left as the main factor that has led to right-wing support by Evangelical voters. Some have pointed to right-wing support from low-income voters as being a product of feeling neglected or alienated by the Left, especially due to its perceived shift in focus towards agendas that go against "family values" (Antonopoulos et al. 2020; Campos Machado 2012; Duarte de Souza 2014; Araujo 2022). Others have described the historical and ideological factors that naturally align Evangelical beliefs with those of the Right (Davis and Straubhaar 2020; Almeida 2020; Antonopoulos et al. 2020). The former identifies the role of outside factors, while the latter discusses how Evangelism and the Right are correlated.

Scholars have also found that Evangelicals have supported those candidates that the church has backed or who their church leader prefers (Bohn 2004; Duarte de Souza 2014; Smiderle and Mesquita 2016). This is further supported by the fact that candidates that have the support of a Pentecostal church with strong leadership are more likely to receive votes (Lacerda 2018). The power of reactionary religious leaders, such as Silas Malafaia of the Pentecostal Assembly of God Church, in connecting Bolsonaro to Christian values and even giving the Bolsonaro government God's blessing (Pagliarini 2023; Leitão 2023). This approximation of Bolsonaro to the holy sphere by religious leaders portrays the way in which religious leaders politically influence Evangelical voters to support right-wing candidates such as Bolsonaro. The power of this strategy is further emphasized by Pentecostal beliefs that portray the earthly world as a battle between God and the Devil (Smiderle and Mesquita 2016). Thus, the blessing of Bolsonaro's candidacy and administration locates him as the choice that best aligns with

Christian values and beliefs. Furthermore, Tommaselli (2020) identified the influence of the neo-Pentecostal Evangelical Church as an important point of study for why Black Brazilians voted for Bolsonaro, despite his overtly racist rhetoric (192). Generally, scholarship has focused on alienation by left-wing agendas as the cause of Evangelical support for the right-wing.

Existing scholarship on the political influence of the Evangelical Church neglects a discussion of the potentially active role the church plays in forming the political preferences of its members. This study fills a gap in the existing literature. While Bohn (2004) and Duarte de Souza (2014) have studied the individual behavior of Evangelical voters, their research fails to explain why they align with the voting choices of their church's leaders. My research begins to fill this gap by focusing on the influence of the Evangelical Church at the individual level, studying the experiences of low-income voters within their religious communities. It builds upon existing research at the individual level on the power of the Evangelical Church as an institution that contributes to the political socialization of low-income voters (Smith 2017). My research, however, goes further by looking at political attitudes rather than the Evangelical Church's effect on civic education. It fills a gap in existing literature by focusing on the role of the Evangelical Church on the individual choice of low-income voters to support right-wing candidates.

#### **IV. Object of Explanation: Support for the Right Among Low-income Pentecostals**

The main outcome my research seeks to explain is low-income Pentecostal Evangelical support for the Right. This outcome is temporally and rationally compelling. It is temporally compelling because right-wing support in Brazil reflects a global wave of right-wing candidates winning elections. The global rise of populism has even driven Stanford University to create The Global Populisms Project. In terms of right-wing populism, the project's most recent report cites

cases of its rise in England, the US, Poland, Hungary, and Italy (Grzymala-Busse et al. 2020). My research differs in that it seeks to understand right-wing support specifically in Brazil.

This outcome is further puzzling because many low-income Brazilians benefited from left-wing government programs. Many were able to achieve inclusion and visibility through financial means thanks to these programs (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2020, 23). It is further puzzling because Afro-Brazilians, who make up a majority among low-income Brazilians (*Desigualdes Sociais* 2022), supported the right-wing Bolsonaro despite his overtly racist rhetoric, which includes comparing Black people to animals (Tommaselli 2020, 194). While Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco (2020) have analyzed this outcome, their focus was recession led low-income voters to support the conservative Bolsonaro. Furthermore, while Tommaselli (2020) asserted Evangelical influence as an important point of study for why Black Brazilians voted for the right-wing Bolsonaro, he does not attempt to understand the extent to which Evangelical influence plays a role. My research, instead, emphasizes the role of the Evangelical Church in the rise of conservatism in Brazil. This focus is justified based on the projections of the second round of voting in the presidential election of 2022, which reflected 62% support for Bolsonaro among Evangelical voters (Barbon 2022). Right-wing support through voting by low-income Evangelicals is thus compelling because it is part of a global trend towards the Right, seemingly contradictory to the interests of Black, low-income voters, and substantial among the Evangelical population.

The Bolsonaro government promised and proved to be anti-welfare and anti-Black. During his administration, Bolsonaro redirected nearly R\$90 million in welfare funds for the purposes of clientelism. The funds were intended to be used to remedy conditions in low-income communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Saldaña and Machado 2022). Bolsonaro, thus,

prioritized his political influence and ambitions for reelection over the needs of low-income communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, his administration oversaw a cap on the number of families eligible for Bolsa Familia, which resulted in the waiting list of more than 1.5 million families (Salomão 2022).<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note that Bolsa Familia was a key program for Lula in gaining support among Pentecostals (Pagliarini 2023). The right-wing former president proved to be a political leader intent on restricting social services to low-income Brazilians.

The impact of his policies on Black Brazilians make it seem even more contradictory that a Black, low-income individual would support him. The Bolsonaro government invested in a marketing campaign to promote an anti-crime bill that would, among other changes, increase mandatory minimum sentences for several crimes and make it more difficult to be granted parole (“O que sobrou” 2019). These policies directly targeted poor Black youth, who are disproportionately affected by mass incarceration in Brazil (Rios 2022). In essence, the provisions in this bill would serve to reinforce systemic racism by contributing to the issue of mass incarceration, making it harder for the predominantly Black and poor incarcerated to reenter society. Despite Bolsonaro’s anti-Black and anti-welfare policies that doubly harm the predominant demographic among Evangelicals, these voters chose to support this right-wing politician. This seeming dissonance drives my research question: How does the Pentecostal Evangelical Church in Brazil play a role in the choice of low-income voters to support right-wing candidates?

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<sup>1</sup> Bolsa Familia is a welfare program established during President Lula’s administration in 2004. The program provides conditional cash transfers to families experiencing extreme poverty. In return parents promise to keep their children in school and make sure they go to health checkups (Lei N° 10.836 2004).

## **V. Theory**

### Pentecostalism and Right-wing Politics

While it is possible that the Pentecostal Church could be exerting influence to encourage political support for the Left, several factors limit the likelihood of this occurring. Primarily, the socially conservative nature of Pentecostal beliefs has been proven by existing scholarship to be incompatible with the agenda of the Left in Brazil. Opposition to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights are the two most salient examples of this social conservatism. Furthermore, the characteristics that make the Pentecostal Church attractive to low-income communities are also incompatible with left-wing politics. The Pentecostal gospel of self-help and Prosperity Theology encourage members to seek financial ascendance through hard work and dedication to one's faith (Mariz 1994; Antonopoulos et al. 2020). In doing so, Pentecostalism prioritizes individualism. On the other hand, the Brazilian Left advocates for a strong state presence in the economy, namely through wealth redistribution programs ("Direita e Esquerda" 2019). Thus, in terms of economic policy, Pentecostalism is also unlikely to influence political support for the Left. This is further reinforced by the use of conjuring necessity. As the church positions itself as the main resource for its members to fulfill their financial and medical needs, the role of the government as a service-provider is lessened within Pentecostal communities.

Finally, historical factors play an important role in the likelihood of left-wing political influence by the Pentecostal Church. The increasing emphasis of the Brazilian Left on socially progressive policies in recent years is one example of this (Duarte de Souza 2014). Furthermore, the Right has presented itself as an opportunity for Pentecostal leaders to gain a more central role in governance. While the PT was in power, Pentecostal leaders were forced to take a secondary role as part of a larger governing coalition. Bolsonaro specifically has presented himself as an

opportunity for these same leaders to gain more power in terms of having influence over the ruling administration (Pagliarini 2023). If Pentecostal leaders only care about obtaining political power, it is possible that in the future they could shift to encouraging support for the Left among their members. However, the previously mentioned incompatibility between the Left's agenda and Pentecostal social conservatism makes this possibility unlikely to happen, unless Brazil's Left decided to make drastic changes to its social and economic policies.

### Fear of Social Death

Based on existing scholarship I describe the phenomenon of right-wing support among low-income Pentecostals in Brazil through the theory of social death.

This theory was first introduced by sociologist Orlando Patterson in his 1978 book *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study, With a New Preface*. Patterson used social death to describe the way in which enslaved peoples were "social nonpersons". In his words, an enslaved person "had no socially recognized existence outside of his master" (Patterson 1982, 5). Thus, the theory was originally used to describe the way in which a person can be deemed not fully human by society. Since then, the theory of social death has been applied in existing scholarship in studies of illness, teen pregnancy, racialization, genocide, and religion (Sweeting and Gilhooly 1997; Whitehead 2002; Cacho 2012; Card 2003; Ransom et al. 2022). In its application to religion, social death has been used to describe the way in which former Jehovah's Witnesses experienced feelings of loneliness. Because their religious community was their only community, after leaving many described feeling as though everyone except them had died (Ransom et al. 2022, 2471). However, it has never been applied to the context of low-income Pentecostal Evangelicals in Brazil. In this case, the fear of social death is constructed by two interwoven facets: the social omnipresence of the church and the perceived neglect of other

institutions. These facets serve to characterize the process of leaving the church as one of social death. Losing one's church community is equivalent to losing one's social identity. It is a process of mourning the death of one's life, both lived and planned, prior to leaving the church.

The facet of social omnipresence is expressed through the church's advertising tactics and its community-based structure. The church has begun to use social media and music to access younger audiences. In doing so, it has asserted its presence in these new spaces (Antonopoulos et al. 2020, 247). Furthermore, this omnipresence is exacerbated by the community-based nature of Evangelical churches, which results in the church's presence in one's job, access to resources, planned future, etc. (Mori 2022; Arsenault 2014; Mariz 1994) The community encompassed by the church creates a bubble for members contributing to the omnipresence of the church. This omnipresence drives a fear of social death: that one's whole life, both lived and planned could be destroyed. Because of this, assimilation, in the form of supporting right-wing candidates appears to be the only option. A vote in exchange for the preservation of one's social life.

The second facet of a fear of social death, which supports the findings of existing scholarship, is the perceived neglect of other institutions, which furthers a sense of isolation and reliance. The Catholic Church has had difficulty asserting its presence in *periferias*, low-income communities in the outskirts of cities, whereas Evangelical Churches, especially the Pentecostal denomination, have not (Vital da Cunha 2018). Due to its centralized and hierarchical structure, the Catholic Church has been slow to incorporate its churches into these communities (Colares 2021). Thus, for the residents of *periferias*, the Catholic Church has been largely absent as a social and religious institution. Furthermore, left-wing parties, specifically the PT, have alienated many by diverting its focus toward supporting causes that, in the eyes of many Evangelical

groups, are seen as “sexually deviant”, such as LGBTQ+ rights (Duarte de Souza, 2014). This alienation was exacerbated by the economic recession, which began in 2014 and served to diminish the social welfare achievements of PT programs (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2020, 22). Thus, both the Catholic Church and the PT party have been portrayed/perceived as having given up on low-income communities.

### Conjuring Necessity

Through my field work I developed a theory that has not yet been discussed in existing scholarship. I refer to it as conjuring necessity. Conjuring necessity will be defined as a strategy by which pastors either create or heighten one’s awareness of a financial, medical, or psychological need. Pastors conjure necessity as a way to position themselves as the only actors able to fulfill those needs. Conjuring necessity is a strategy which Evangelical pastors employ to maintain church membership and encourage conversion. This strategy involves portraying the church as the only place able to provide for one’s needs, thus encouraging dependency on the church. Pastors participate in the process of conjuring need through several ways. The first is the promise of miracles. The promise of miracles is a pathway through which the pastor is able to foreground need, whether financial or medical, in the minds of members. Needs that members may have not even found important or cared enough to seek out help with are foregrounded and an accessible solution is offered. Through the promise of miracles, pastors establish themselves as a resource that supersedes other institutions. While members could choose to go to the doctor for a checkup, the church promises an instant cure with a simple raise of a hand.

The position of the church as the ultimate resource for all of one’s needs is solidified through the use of testimony. Those who have received miracles vouch for the credibility of the pastor’s promise. In terms of encouraging conversion, conjuring necessity also occurs through

the foregrounding and even fabrication of one's needs. Pastors claim that there is something missing in one's life or that they suffer from some kind of struggle. Simultaneously, they position the church as the one resource that can fill that gap or alleviate that struggle. Conjuring necessity is a strategy that is characterized by foregrounding need and positioning the church as the only site where those needs can be fulfilled.

## **VI. Methodology**

Due to the specific scope and exploratory nature of this novel study, its aim is not to make universalizable claims or identify causal mechanisms. Instead, the goal of my research is twofold. First, to shed light on a perspective not often discussed in political science in the context of contemporary Brazilian politics. Second, to serve as a catalyst for further research on the potentially active role that the Evangelical Church plays in the choice of its low-income members to support right-wing candidates. With this in mind, my research design is structured to explore and observe possible phenomena and mechanisms, not to make universalizable causal claims about the dependent variables.

### **A. Hypotheses:**

I posit that the Evangelical Church exerts political influence over its low-income members through political discourse within the church, leading members to vote in line with their church's beliefs. By employing social death and conjuring need as a mechanism, the church then determines political behavior in support for right-wing candidates.

Below are the hypotheses that motivate this research.

#### **H0: Null Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that the Evangelical Church does not play an active role in the choice of low-income Evangelicals supporting right-wing candidates.

In other words, existing scholarship misattributes the political influence of the Evangelical Church. It would mean that the political preferences of this group of study involves a rational and unbiased choice. The Left's agenda is contradictory to the beliefs of the Evangelical voter: family values and individualism (Davis and Straubhaar 2020; Almeida 2020; Antonopoulos et al. 2020; Machado 2012; Duarte de Souza 2014; Araujo 2022). Therefore, the beliefs of low-income Evangelicals naturally align with the Right. While this hypothesis has been posited by other scholars, there is evidence that it does not capture the full picture. This seems especially true considering the lack of scholarship that attempts to understand the potentially active role of the Evangelical Church.

**H1: By utilizing the fear of social death, the Pentecostal Evangelical church in Brazil has encouraged its members to support Bolsonaro**

H1a: Follow the Shepherd Mentality

Members of Pentecostal Churches decide what candidates they support based on the views of religious leadership. This hypothesis is supported by existing scholarship that has found that Evangelical voters, in general, tend to support candidates their church leaders support (Bohn 2004). This Shepherd Mentality is driven by a fear of social death, wherein political dissidence poses the risk of losing one's community. This hypothesis is more likely to be the case considering the anecdotal evidence that exists from former Pentecostals who felt forced to find another church because they did not support Bolsonaro. For example, the previously discussed story of Gabriel suggests that there is a feeling of pressure to conform to the right-wing political beliefs of one's church (Mori 2022). This anecdotal evidence, and stories like it, also demonstrate that the beliefs of the church do not necessarily align with right-wing politics. If this was the case, there would

not be those who felt the need to leave their religious community because of the strong right-wing support within them.

## **B. Research Design:**

### Case Selection:

For this thesis I performed field research of Pentecostal Evangelical Churches in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro was a compelling location choice for my research question because it is the state with the fourth-largest Evangelical population and a substantial Evangelical presence in legislative positions, 26% of representatives in 2010 (Campos Machado 2012, 74). Moreover, my status as a Brazilian dual-citizen and my connections in the region made this study site accessible. This was primarily helpful in terms of navigating the social divisions and culture of the study site. Furthermore, my personal connection to Brazilian Evangelicals allowed me to blend in better in the environment of the church and religious communities. I am also fluent in Portuguese, which allowed me to communicate easily with community members.

### Ethnographic Observation:

I engaged in ethnographic observation of three church proceedings, from which I fielded possible interview subjects. I then performed 4 open-ended interviews. I chose to supplement my interview data with ethnographic observations in order to gain an unbiased understanding of the dynamics within the church. Interview data can be affected by social desirability bias, especially considering the rise in media claiming that religious leadership is forcing Evangelicals to vote for Bolsonaro (Castro 2022; Dorea 2022; Marques and Varella 2022). Ethnographic observation allowed me to personally experience how it feels to be within the church, interact with the pastor and attendees, and to witness firsthand what is said during church services. My initial goal was to see how often implicit or explicit references to politics are made during services. However, in

practice, this possibility was limited by the fact that in order to conduct recruitment, I had to announce my presence as a researcher. Nevertheless, my ethnographic observations provided important insight into the dynamic between church members and the pastor, and even God. It also provided insight into the ways in which space and the format of the services create and uphold these dynamics.

Identifying churches for ethnographic research was quite challenging. Many churches appeared on google maps but had no pictures of the church to ascertain if they were still open. Yet another challenge was the lack of information online about when services were held. The three churches where I conducted ethnographic observations were selected based on the accessibility of information about them found online. Additionally, they were selected because they were Pentecostal churches located in a low-income community. Furthermore, they were selected based on accessibility. Certain neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro that fit the criteria were inaccessible because of limited public transportation routes and/or because of heightened tensions between paramilitary groups. Santa Cruz, for example, was a neighborhood I had initially selected for my research. However, throughout 2022, the neighborhood had been involved in militia wars over control of territory and informal service provision, such as alternative transportation, internet, and cable (Nunes 2022). As a result of the prevalence of militia wars, certain locations were deemed inaccessible for the purposes of my research.

The first church I conducted ethnographic observations in was located in the neighborhood of Campo Grande in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The 2010 census found that Campo Grande had a per capita monthly wage of R\$737. This reflects the lower end of the spectrum of a map of per capita monthly wages in different Rio de Janeiro neighborhoods (“Mapas” 2018). While R\$737 is R\$227 higher than the minimum wage in Brazil in 2010 (Lei

Nº 12.255 2010), it can still be classified as low-income. The “cesta básica”, which is a calculation of basic monthly food costs for Brazilians based on region, in Rio de Janeiro in December of 2010 was R\$242.67 (“Pesquisa Nacional” 2010, Table 2). Thus, around one third of the per capita monthly wage in Campo Grande would have to be dedicated to basic food necessities, leaving the rest to cover living expenses, transportation expenses, emergencies, etc. Because of the proximity of its per capita monthly wage into the minimum wage and to the “cesta básica” index, I identified Campo Grande as a low-income neighborhood where I could conduct ethnographic observations

The second and third sites of ethnographic observation were Church 2 and Church 3 in Seropédica. Seropédica is a small town bordering the city of Rio de Janeiro. It is an intensely Christian municipality. In 2005, Lei Nº 282 was passed by the local government which served to grant Jesus Christ the title of Spiritual Guardian of Seropédica. Seropédica is also a predominantly low-income population. As of 2022, only 18.7% of the population were formally employed (“Seropédica” 2021). This suggests that a majority of residents are either unemployed or work in the informal labor market. Furthermore, in 2010, 37.4% of the population earned only half the minimum wage (“Seropédica” 2021).

For these ethnographic observations, I arrived slightly early to ask the pastor if I could distribute flyers with my contact information to attendees. I explained that I was a student at Northwestern University and that I was looking for Pentecostals to interview about their faith and opinions. While announcing my presence as an observer may have affected the way in which services were led, this was necessary in order to conduct an ethical recruitment process. Following this initial introduction, I would find a seat in a pew towards the back of the church to be able to observe most of the attendees during the service. My main priority was to be respectful

and to make sure my presence was comfortable for those around me. Because of this, I did not take notes during the church service. Instead, I took down my observations as soon as I arrived home from the service to make sure the experience was still fresh in my mind. Furthermore, I did my best to blend in physically with other churchgoers. I removed all of my facial piercings and covered my tattoos. I wore ballet flats, nice pants, and a blouse. I also made sure to communicate with everyone in Portuguese in order to blend in and make research subjects more comfortable with my presence. Once I made my initial introduction, it was my goal to be an invisible observer, to blend in with other churchgoers without actively participating in the service. As I will discuss in my results, it was impossible to truly blend in and I was consistently made an active participant in the church services I attended.

I then analyzed my observations from attending services at the three different churches through qualitative coding. I analyzed a narrativized version of the observations line by line, from which I was able to categorize recurring themes. The categories I produced were a sense of comfortability, use of speakers and sound, promises of cures and prosperity, power dynamics and intimidation, conversion attempts, perceptions of status. The latter two categories refer to instances when I was forced to become an active participant in my ethnography. The first centers on recurring instances in which pastors attempted to convince me to accept Jesus into my life, while the second refers to instances in which churchgoers exalted me for being a university student in the US.

#### In-depth Interviews:

I conducted 4 in-depth interviews with different members of the same Assembly of God Church in Seropédica. Interviewees were those who felt compelled to reach out to me after receiving my flier. While all 4 of them were Black or mixed-race adults, they varied in age and

gender. Interviewee 1 was a middle-aged woman, who serves as a deaconess in the church. Interviewees 2 and 4 were young men, who play in the church's orchestra. Interviewee 3 was a woman probably in her 30s who was raised in a Baptist church. Below are a sample of the questions that I used to organize the interviews:

1. What led you to your faith? How long have you been a part of this community?
2. How would you describe your most important values and beliefs? How did you come to have these beliefs?
3. What are the main qualities you look for in a presidential candidate? Why?
4. How often do you witness or participate in conversations about politics with your community? How would you describe these conversations?
5. Have you ever heard political messages during services? How are these messages political?
6. What role does the church play in your daily life?
7. Have you ever encountered anyone in your community with different beliefs than your own? How did you react?
8. If a close friend/family member told you that they were going to vote for a candidate that you did not like, how would you react?

All 4 interviewees consented to have their interviews recorded. The interviews were then transcribed from Portuguese into English by me. Interviews were qualitatively coded for patterns: their political views, their political interactions within their religious community, their level and form of interaction with the church, and the reasons for which they chose to live as Evangelicals.

## VII. Results and Analysis

### Political Ideology

Unlike in the US, where elections are generally dominated by two parties, Brazil has numerous parties. Currently, seven different parties have more than 40 members in the House of Representatives (“Confira os partidos” 2022). The table below covers the political ideology of many, but not all, of the political parties in Brazil. It is important to note that like in other countries, there is some variance in political ideology within parties. The Democratic Labor Party (PDT), for example, is generally associated with the Left in Brazil, as shown in its positioning in the table below. However, in 2022 it became apparent that several PDT candidates were actually part of a radical Rightist movement called the Nova Resistência (Declercq and Oliveira 2022). Thus, party allegiance does not always reflect political ideology.

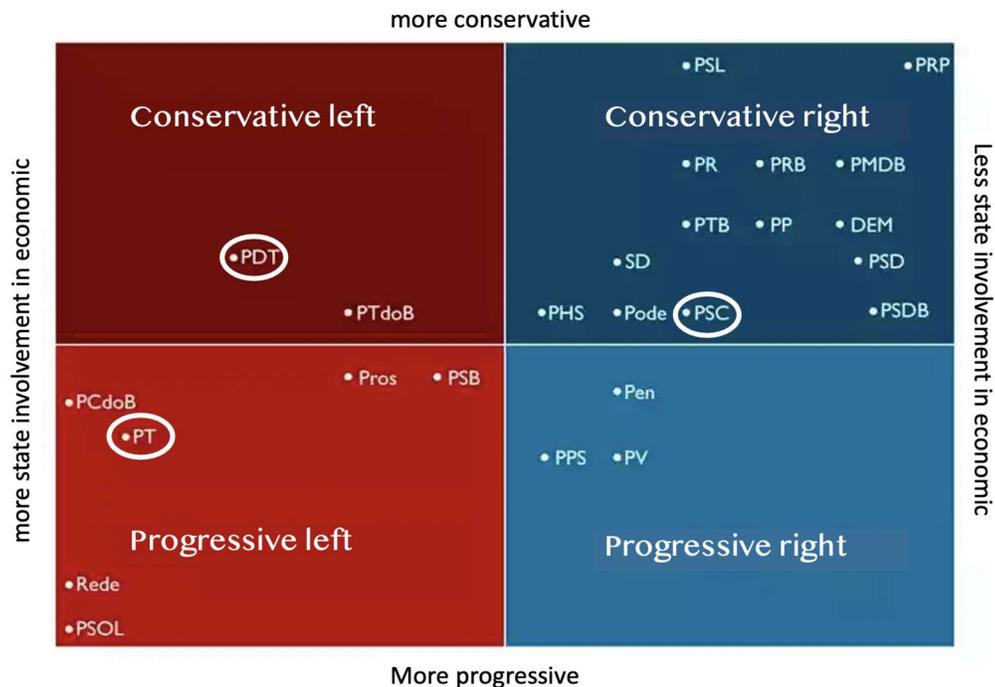


Figure 1: This figure plots the political ideology of several parties in Brazil  
Source: Estado de Minas News 2019

When analyzing the political ideology of respondents there were several “smoking guns” I looked for. These involved the position of respondents on key issues that divide the Left and Right in the context of Brazil. The first is that of LGBTQ+ rights and the legalization of abortion, which have become important staples of left-wing agendas (Antonopoulos et al. 2020; Campos Machado 2012; Duarte de Souza 2014; Araujo 2022). Another is government intervention in the economy. The Left in Brazil is known for supporting policies that attempt to achieve a more equitable income distribution, while the Right is known for encouraging the lowering of taxes on businesses and promoting economic liberalism (“Direita e Esquerda” 2019). Mentions of security or police were also noted. The Left in Brazil has focused less on investing in police forces and more on targeting the root of crime: poverty and inequality. The Right on the other hand has been known for using rhetoric involving increased security and support for police officers (Mori 2022; Filho 2022). One final “smoking gun” I looked for in interviewee responses was declared support for parties that are known to be right-wing or left-wing.

<b>Left-Wing</b>	<b>Right-Wing</b>
Legalize abortion	Anti-abortion rights
LGTQ+ rights	Anti-LGBTQ+ rights
Wealth redistribution	Economic liberalism
Invest in diminishing roots of crime	Invest in police and security
Declared support for left-wing party	Declared support for right-wing party

Table 1: “Smoking guns” for political ideology during interviews

In terms of political ideology, all four interviewees tended to the Right. While they were not asked about their political leaning specifically, in order to avoid discomfort and encourage responses, throughout the interviews respondents either explicitly or implicitly communicated their political beliefs.

#### *Interviewee 2*

Interviewee 2 was the only respondent who communicated this explicitly. When asked “How do you perceive political leaders today?”, interviewee 2 quickly made his political leaning clear: “My perception of leaders today in Brazil is that a thief was elected president. Unfortunately, he was convicted as a thief, but people still voted for him.” This comment was in reference to the imprisonment of current President Lula prior to the election (Pombo 2022). Interviewee 2 then clarified, “I didn’t like either one of them. But I preferred Bolsonaro because he would maintain the patriarchy, which is one of the Christian values.” Interviewee 2 clarified that by maintaining the patriarchy, he meant “maintaining the man being a man and the woman being a woman. A mom and a dad.” Much like the existing scholarship argues, interviewee 2’s support of right-wing politics was a result of the cultural cleavage of LGBTQ+ rights. Interviewee 2 strongly believed that even though he did not like Bolsonaro, voting for him would be necessary to prevent heteronormative systems, which he saw as central to the Christian belief, from being dismantled.

#### *Interviewee 1*

While Interviewee 1 did not explicitly express her support for left-wing or right-wing politics, I deduced that she was right-leaning from her use of references and characteristics she looked for in a political leader. In terms of her use of references, Interviewee 1 made two

references to existing political leaders, one a left-wing mayor and the other a right-wing mayor. The former reference involved a news story she had seen about a nearby town where the mayor had spent R\$4 million on Christmas decorations while neglecting to pay his employees on time. This was a true story about the town of Belford Roxo (Rianelli and Soares 2022), whose mayor had declared his support for Lula in the election prior to when this interview was conducted (“Waguinho” 2022). The reference about a right-wing mayor involved a more positive review. Interviewee 1 mentioned that the church was divided in the previous municipal election, but that the candidate elected mayor, “Professor Lucas”, had since made improvements in education and the lives of teachers. The Lucas mentioned is Lucas Dutra dos Santos, who is a member of the Social Christian Party (PSC). The PSC is a conservative party.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Interviewee 1 made a negative reference about a mayor who openly supported a left-wing candidate for president and a positive reference about a conservative mayor. What makes her choice of references even more interesting is that while she chose to focus on a scandal involving a left-wing mayor, she failed to discuss the fact that the “Professor Lucas” she praised had been investigated for buying votes earlier that year. This was after he was found with R\$15,000 in cash in his car and caught meeting with armed militia members (Lucchese et al. 2022). Interviewee 1 referenced two mayors that had been or were currently being involved in some kind of scandal but chose only to discuss the scandal associated with the left-wing mayor.

Despite this observation, however, it would be inappropriate to categorize Interviewee 1 as right-wing. This is especially true considering the fact that Interviewee 1 explicitly stated that the wedge issue of LGBTQ+ and abortion rights was not important enough to sway her vote, “Because Lula supports homosexuality and abortion. But Bolsonaro is for the family. So many

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<sup>2</sup> See Figure 1 above.

Evangelicals feel strongly about this. Me, for example, I observe but I don't just feel strongly about these issues. I also care about other things like security and education." In saying this, it seemed Interviewee 1 was attempting to separate herself from other Bolsonaro supporters who vote solely on the basis of these two wedge issues. This statement limits my ability to categorize her as right-wing.

Nevertheless, she does state that she greatly considers the issue of security in her voting choice. Security is an example of a "smoking gun" in terms of political ideology. What points to a more right-wing outlook on this issue is the following statement: "You see all the time police being killed...When they kill a criminal. Everyone makes a huge deal, no they couldn't have killed a criminal. Yes, they are human beings, but he was doing bad things. But when the police are the victim, no one does anything, no one says anything." Interviewee 1 expresses frustration at the fact that too much attention is placed on "criminals" who are killed by police. As previously mentioned, the Left has been known to focus more on targeting what they believe to be the root of criminality. Interviewee 1 demonstrates a lack of this kind of empathy towards criminals and centers the importance of police and their safety in society, similarly to the way in which the Right applauds the work of police. Despite the fact that Interviewee 1 separates herself from Evangelical Bolsonaro supporters, she still prioritizes security in a way similar to that of the Right in Brazil. Therefore, I categorize her as Right-leaning in consideration of the limitations of calling her political ideology fully right-wing.

### *Interviewee 3*

Interviewee 3 also seemed neutral in political ideology at first. However, in two separate instances her rhetoric mirrored that of Bolsonaro. The most compelling of these instances was when she said the following: "Because I am of the political party: don't give them a fish, give

them a fishing rod to fish. Because if you give a fish, the person gets comfortable. But if you give a fishing rod, the person will work to achieve dignity.” In a campaign ad in 2022, Bolsonaro claimed that left-wing governments “gave them fish” and that his government “taught them how to fish”. This campaign ad aired, prior to when this interview was conducted, on the Brazilian “free electoral hour”, a time slot reserved on all broadband channels for campaign ads (“Bolsonaro no horário” 2022). Thus, anyone watching TV would have to watch this ad unless they switched to a cable channel.

While it is possible that Interviewee 3 did not see the ad or hear about it on social media afterwards, the use of this rhetoric by Bolsonaro to separate the Right from the Left supports the possibility that Interviewee 3 supports the Right to some extent. This possibility is reinforced by the fact that during her interview, she claimed that the January 8 invasion of government buildings in Brazil’s capital was perpetuated by MST, a left-wing agrarian movement. This is fake news that was disseminated by Bolsonaro supporters on social media who claimed that damage inflicted on the government buildings was not done by radical right-wing extremists, but actually left-wing infiltrators, more specifically a member of MST (Domingos 2023). It is, thus, very likely that Interviewee 3 learned of this fake news through social media and believed it, despite the complete lack of proof that this was truly the case. Furthermore, she placed full blame on MST for the invasion, absolving right-wing extremists of any culpability. This, combined with her mirroring of Bolsonaro’s rhetoric, leads me to conclude that her political ideology can be categorized as at least Right-leaning. To categorize her as right-wing would be inappropriate considering she never explicitly claimed this identity.

*Interviewee 4*

While Interviewee 4 asserted that he did not vote, I would still classify him as leaning slightly to the Right. Interviewee 4 contradicted himself several times during his interview. He equated homosexuality to being murder, but then said that it was wrong to criticize people for being part of the LGBTQ+ community. He also compared supporting abortion rights to supporting genocide, but then said that it was a woman's choice whether to abort or not. These contradictions made it difficult to ascertain his political ideology. Nevertheless, when sharing his position on abortion he stated, "...if I was in a position to interfere, I would interfere, reasonably." I believe this comment supersedes his assertion that women should have the right to choose. If given the opportunity to, he would not allow a woman to get an abortion, but instead "interfere". Thus, his political ideology seems to lean slightly to the Right. While he does not believe that the LGBTQ+ should be judged and that women should have a choice, he does not believe that society should simply be allowed to harm "a soul that isn't even born yet". It may be argued that Interviewee 4's political ideology cannot be categorized as such because he claims he supports no political leader: "Since always, no one does anything right. No matter who goes in or out, no one will ever be able to do everything 100% right. So, I don't support anyone." However, the fact that he does not vote or support any political leader, does not diminish his ability to have a political ideology. His views on abortion, while contradictory, signal that he is slightly Right-leaning.

Data Source	Observations and Quotes	Analyses	Political Ideology Conclusion
Interview 1	<p>"I was watching a news story about a municipality around here in Rio de Janeiro. The mayor spent R\$4 million on decorating the city for Christmas, while there were civil employees with late paychecks."</p> <p>"In the last municipal election, the candidates that came were Anahel and Lucas. Many were divided on this. Lucas ended up winning. He focused heavily on education because he is a teacher. So many voted for him because of this. Also, once he won many things have improved for teachers and he is investing in this."</p> <p>"Because Lula supports homosexuality and abortion. But Bolsonaro is for the family. So many Evangelicals feel strongly about this. Me, for example, I observe but I don't just feel strongly about these issues. I also care about other things like security and education."</p> <p>"You see all the time police being killed... When they kill a criminal. Everyone makes a huge deal. No, they couldn't have killed a criminal. Yes, they are a human beings, but he was doing bad things. But when the police is the victim, no one does anything, no one says anything."</p>	<p>-news story is in reference to city of Belford Roxo (Rianelli and Soares 2022), whose mayor declared his support for Lula ("Waguinho" 2022)</p> <p>-Lucas Dutra dos Santos is part of the Social Christian Party (PSC), a conservative party (Cassotta 2019). The president of the PSC is Pastor Everaldo Pereira, who is a member of the Assembly of God Church (Nascimento 2020).</p> <p>-In early 2022, Mayor Lucas Dutra dos Santos was investigated for buying votes after being caught meeting with armed militia members and with R\$15,000 in cash in his car (Lucchese 2022).</p> <p>-negative commentary on Leftist mayor vs. positive commentary on Rightist mayor despite the latter being involved in this scandal</p> <p>-hard to definitively say Right because claims important cleavage issues not as important to her (security and education can be described as both Left and Right)</p> <p>-emphasis on public safety and investing in police suggests more of a Right-wing ideology</p>	<p>Right-Learning: seemed neutral. Yet when describing political leaders, they viewed positively or negatively, they demonstrated beliefs that align more with the political Right. This conclusion is limited by the fact that she separates herself from those who voted for Bolsonaro saying she cares more about other issues than just LGBTQ+ rights and abortion.</p>
Interview 2	<p>"My perception of leaders today in Brazil is that a thief was elected president. Unfortunately, he was convicted as a thief, but people still voted for him"</p> <p>"I didn't like either one of them. But I preferred Bolsonaro because he would maintain the patriarchy, which is one of the Christian values."</p> <p>"-maintaining the man being a man and the woman being a woman. A mom and a dad."</p>	<p>-"thief" is Lula</p> <p>-explicitly stated he voted for Bolsonaro</p> <p>-LGBTQ+ rights as an important reason for his political choice</p>	<p>Right</p>
Interview 3	<p>"If you govern well, you wouldn't need to seek help in a private hospital. Stay in a public hospital. Most of Brazil's prior presidents would stay in public hospitals. Because today hospitals aren't as well funded."</p> <p>"The speech of the current president when he was a candidate. He said that we have to see improvements for homeless people, those things. In the speech he talked about MST. He said those things to tend to the people of MST. With this command from the president, these people felt they had the right to invade, make it happen. How it also happened with Bolsonaro."</p> <p>"And that my country isn't sold in parts to other countries/foreigners like what happened in previous administrations. The Amazon was overtaken by foreigners. And what happened. The people who were from Brazil were left out. Biologists, researchers weren't having access to their own country. Which I think is ridiculous."</p> <p>"Because I am of the political party: don't give them a fish, give them a fishing rod to fish. Because if you give a fish, the person gets comfortable. But if you give a fishing rod, the person will work to achieve dignity."</p>	<p>-critique of Lula</p> <p>-conflicting statement. On the one hand it argues the false narrative that it was MST, a left-wing agrarian movement, that invaded the capital on January 8, 2023. She relieves blame from the Right-wing extremists actually responsible (Domingos 2023). On the other hand, she mentions that Bolsonaro may have also been at fault for other kinds of violence.</p> <p>-mirrors rhetoric of Bolsonaro and right-wing fake news that the Amazon is being sold to foreign NGOs (Aguar 2020). Bolsonaro claimed that forest fires in the Amazon in 2019 were caused by foreign NGOs (Mazui 2019)</p> <p>-Idea of a party that gives the fishing rod not the fish mirrors the exact words of Bolsonaro in a campaign video on September 1, 2022. The ad aired during the "free electoral hour" a time slot reserved on all non-cable TV channels for campaign ads ("Bolsonaro no horário" 2022). Anyone watching TV would have to watch this ad unless they switched to a cable channel.</p>	<p>Right-Learning: I determined that this interviewee is Right-leaning due to the mirroring of Bolsonaro rhetoric from campaign ads and fake news about NGOs in the Amazon. She also absolves Right-wing extremists of blame for the January 8th attack, placing blame instead on Lula and a left-wing agrarian movement.</p>
Interview 4	<p>"So, if the people want to preach genocide, want to depend on that. For me that's fine, me I'm not."</p> <p>"-Fine, the woman has to have a choice. That is super correct. But the moment our choices stop following the ethical value. A society that harms a soul that isn't even born yet. I find this totally incorrect, and if I was in a position to interfere, I would interfere, reasonably."</p> <p>"So, I never stopped to think what would be specific in a political leader. The same way I never liked any of them. Never thought of any of them. I didn't even vote last year."</p> <p>"In the times of Jesus Christ, there were gays there were assassins there was everything."</p> <p>"In terms of LGBT people, people say oh that's wrong to support that. If that person is happy with that path, I'm not going to criticize her because she is different from me."</p> <p>"Something that I think that people care a lot about saying isn't true is about the theft that occurred. I never stopped to research this. But what I know is that a person wouldn't suffer punishment for no reason. So, if something happened, it is because that person really did that. But for me, they are all wrong."</p> <p>"What I understand about the previous four years. It may not have been, you know everything right. Did he do everything right, no. The opposite. Since always, no one does anything right. No matter who goes in or out, no one will ever be able to do everything 100% right. So, I don't support anyone."</p>	<p>-refers to abortion as genocide, but simultaneously says he doesn't criticize abortion</p> <p>-says women should have a choice but also says would interfere to stop abortion</p> <p>-apathetic of the political system as a whole, doesn't vote in municipal or presidential elections</p> <p>-discusses homosexuality alongside murder</p> <p>-separates himself from people who say homosexuality is wrong</p> <p>-critiques Lula supporters that say that his imprisonment was unjust, but also says all politicians are bad</p> <p>-explicitly states he does not support anyone</p>	<p>Slightly Right-Learning: Asserted he did not support any politician and did not vote. However, his view on abortion in particular seemed to be one similar to that of the Right.</p>

Table 2: This table outlines interview data and how it corresponded to a specific political ideology

## Political Rhetoric from the Pastor

While interviewees mentioned that politicians did come to visit the church to talk about their campaigns, all asserted that their pastor never encouraged a specific political ideology. When asked if there were any political messages during church, Interviewee 2 stated, “Our pastor prefers not to talk about this. He just talks about Christian values to help in the vote. But in terms of politics, honestly no.” Thus, while some Christian values preached could be perceived as political by some members, such as discussions of homosexuality and the importance of life, Interviewee 2 was adamant that his pastor never explicitly preached a particular political ideology.

Even though interviewees consistently stated that *their* pastor did not preach politics, two of them communicated this in contrast to other pastors or religious leaders. Interviewee 1 stated, “This church is part of a very large ministry. So, this ministry is very connected to politicians. So, it is common for them to provide guidance on who church members should vote for. But my pastor says that everyone has the freedom of expression” Here she contrasts her own pastor's refusal to encourage a single political ideology from the political influence of religious leaders of the Assembly of God, which her church is a part of. Similarly, Interviewee 4 had very positive things to say about his pastor: “What I understand about the Assembly, is that the leader of the Assembly, for me, is an efficient leader. He is a leader that makes the youth understand that that is the correct path.” In contrast, he emphasized the political rhetoric of other pastors, “Always the Assembly has supported one party, the previous party. It was always like this.... It was different than in a church where everyone thinks the same as one person. Some don't, right. But the pastors only think about one person.” It is important to note that Interviewee 4 identified the right-wing political party of Bolsonaro as the one that religious leaders in the Assembly of God

support. Furthermore, his language suggests that in his perspective other churches engage in a kind of groupthink, which is led by the pastor. The contrasting between the “apolitical” pastor of that specific Assembly of God church and the pastors of other Assembly of God religious leaders suggests two things. The first is that the pastor is a central figure in terms of enacting political influence. Interviewee 1 emphasized that the pastor wanted everyone to feel comfortable having their own political opinion. Potentially as a result, she, along with Interviewees 2 and 4, said that the church community was heterogeneous in terms of political support. The second thing that the contrasts made during these interviews suggests is that pastors in other churches may be directly influencing their members to vote for right-wing candidates.

### Racial Identity

While all of the respondents were Black. None identified themselves with Blackness. Instead, they foregrounded their identity as Evangelicals when discussing their values and sense of self. Interviewee 1 stated, “Today I seek to be, of course we are not perfect in everything, but who I am today is thanks to God, my parents, and the church.” Interviewee 4 had something similar to say about the importance of religion in his sense of self, “Because I know that without Him, I wouldn’t be able to be here.” In both examples, religion was foregrounded as an identity central to the sense of self of interviewees.

Furthermore, the identity of Evangelical was foregrounded in terms of their political choices. The importance of a candidate’s racial, gender, religious, etc. identities on voting choice has long been researched. A study published by Cambridge University Press found that when faced with a long ballot, Brazilians tended to prefer same-race candidates. This even included Brazilians who did not self-identity as Black (Aguilar et al. 2022). Thus, race does play an important role in the voting choice of Black Brazilians. Despite the race of all four respondents,

none mentioned their race in terms of their political choices. Instead, they foregrounded their identity as Evangelicals. When asked what characteristics he looked for in a political leader, Interviewee 2 stated the following: “Because of course it is better if they’re Christian, but they do not have to be.” While being a Christian was not necessary for Interviewee 2 to support a candidate, in his opinion it was a kind of bonus point. In the case of Interviewee 4, religious identity was even more important in his voting choice. This is because Interviewee 4 did not vote in municipal or presidential elections. However, further into the interview he admitted that there was one event that would push him to vote: “In the moment that they respect one religion and disrespect another...this for me is wrong. Then I will start to care more.” The persecution of his religion was the one reason he named that was important enough to him that he would begin to care about politics. In both examples, respondents cited religion as a significant reason for either voting for a certain candidate or voting at all.

There was also one instance where an interviewee actively sacrificed their Black identity in contrast to the foregrounding of their Evangelical identity. The first thing Interviewee 1 said when asked what she looked for in a political leader was, “First, a characteristic independent of religion: having faith in God.” She named faith in God as the first, signaling the importance of her religious identity when it came to her voting choice. In contrast to this, she emphasized the importance of security when deciding who to vote for. She then said, “When they kill a criminal. Everyone makes a huge deal, no they couldn’t have killed a criminal. Yes, they are a human being, but he was doing bad things. But when the police are the victim, no one does anything, no one says anything.” The way in which Interviewee 1 foregrounds the importance of police lives directly diminishes the importance of the lives of Afro-Brazilians. The annual report by the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety stated that in 2021 84.1% of those killed by police in Brazil

were Black (“Letalidade policial cai” 2022). In other words, the vast majority of the “criminals” Interviewee 1 refers to are Black. Her critique of public outcry for the death of Brazilians at the hands of the police is a critique on public outcry for the death of predominantly Black people. While her religious identity is foregrounded in her voting choice, her Black identity is simultaneously sacrificed as she diminishes the importance of Black lives.

### Conjuring Necessity

A trend I identified in my ethnographic observations was the act of conjuring necessity. For the purposes of my research. Conjuring necessity amongst members generally came in the form of offering miracles.

At one point during the service at Church 1, all attendees stood as the pastor began to offer God’s blessing to those with various illnesses or pains. He would shout: “who here has a pain in their knee”. In a church filled with Brazilians middle-aged and older. Several would raise their hands. The pastor would then point at a select two or three that would receive God’s blessing in easing their pain. This went on for several blessings. The pastor would list off common illnesses that were sure to exist in the predominant age group present, and then auction off God’s blessing that a select few would be healed. What was most interesting about this was that several attendees raised their hands in response to multiple illnesses, one man even did so every single time. It is very possible that this man was being completely honest and suffered from various ailments. Nevertheless, what I witnessed at Church 1 was the pastor actively creating a need among attendees that only he as a messenger of God could fulfill. Pains or illnesses, that were minute or non-existent to the point that attendees would likely not visit a doctor, became powerful enough that they would seek God’s blessing to achieve healing.

The position of the pastor and the church as the only resource able to provide for the needs of members was solidified through the use of testimony at Church 1. During the service, a woman was allowed to speak into the microphone to tell attendees that after donating money to the church in exchange for a blessing, her son was finally given a stable position at his job. The pastor strategically invited this woman to speak during one of the instances in which donations were being collected. If the promise of a miracle was not enough, the testimony of a woman who had received a blessing would help to prove that the church was a resource that could provide for any need.

Similarly, at Church 2 the pastor opened the service by claiming that if you were looking for a miracle, you had come to the right place. Again, the promise of miracles was used to conjure or foreground need amongst members, simultaneously positioning Church 2 as the only site able to provide for those needs. The pastor then went on to explain that if you were willing to let God into your home, He would fix it His way not yours. I perceived this comment as verbal insurance for Church 2. By including this caveat—God would fix your life, but it might not be the way you intended—the pastor would be able to shield himself from possible complaints or attempts to undermine Church 2's position as the only site where attendees could have their needs truly fulfilled. At the end of the day, it would all be part of God's plan.

The pastors I encountered also tried to conjure need in me as a strategy to convince me to convert. At both Church 1 and Church 2 the pastor actively sought me out to urge me to accept Jesus/God into my life. At both, the pastor used the same strategy: convince me that there was something wrong with the way I currently led my life and that I needed to join their faith. At Church 1, the pastor sought me out shortly after agreeing to let me pass out fliers amongst attendees. He proceeded to lecture me for a long while, referencing the bible throughout, but his

main point was that if I didn't accept Jesus into my life, my soul would die. In essence, he conjured a dire need in me. That my soul was in danger of death, but that the church could save me. A similar strategy was used on me by the pastor at Church 2. I was identified early into the service as a target for conjuring necessity. I watched as the pastor urged a woman in the row in front of me to do something she clearly was not interested in doing, but she soon gave in. She walked up to me and asked if she could hold my hand and before I knew it she had pulled me into a tight hug chanting blessings in my ear for several minutes. I later learned that the woman was the pastor's partner and that this hug was essential to the pastor's attempt at positioning himself as the only one who could fulfill a need I was not yet aware I had. Following the service he approached me to inform me that he had recognized a deep depression within me from afar. That he had had a vision of a little girl sitting at the bottom of a well, suggesting I was that girl. He said that he did not know me, but that Jesus did. He informed me that all I needed to do was accept Jesus. With his speech, he did three things. First, he conjured need, suggesting that I was deeply depressed. Second, he established himself as God's messenger by telling me he had had a vision and that Jesus knew me. In doing so, he attempted to make me, and my newly conjured need, feel seen, not only by him but by God Himself. Thirdly, as God's messenger he qualified himself in making it clear to me that my best course of action to rid myself of my depression was to accept Jesus. At both Church 1 and Church 2, the pastor actively sought me out in a strategy of conjuring necessity and positioning the church as the only site which would be able to fulfill that need.

Data Source	Target of strategy	Conjured necessity	Solution presented	Analyses
Interview 1	interviewee	1. To be a good person (honest and loving)	"They said you need to be in the presence of God. Today I seek to be, of course we are not perfect in everything, but who I am today is thanks to God, my parents, and the church."	In this case, conjuring necessity was enacted by the interviewee's family. She was taught that on her journey to trying to be as perfect as she can, God and the church were necessary. She attributes religion to constructing her identity. The perceived identity-forming power of the church also poses the implication of a possible social death. Having to leave the church would mean detaching oneself from an identity-forming institution.
Interview 2	interviewee	1. Community and a support system	"For me, the church is a place of community for us. So, when I need to, I don't necessarily go to church, but my friends talk to me, and my parents also talk to me. So, the church is all of us. The church itself is just a place of gathering. When I need to, I go over there and talk to someone. Whenever I have a problem, I go there and talk to someone who can help."	The church is the main source of community for the interviewee. It is the most important resource for him when dealing with any problem. This quote suggests that the church is an amorphous concept: it exists within his family and friends. Even if he is not seeking to fulfill his needs at the physical church, he reaches out to those with a connection to the church. This supports the social omnipresence facet of the fear of social death theory. Even when one is not at the church, the church is present because it encompasses one's entire community and social network.
Interview 3	interviewee	1. escape/solace from grieving or loss	"When I got baptized my grandfather had died. Then I was baptized, years later my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She also died. I believe that around that time, I was very effected by the death of my grandmother who had been like a mother to me. So, I went to the Assembly [of God]."	It is interesting to note that this interviewee chose to join the Pentecostal Church around the time where she suffered great loss. It is impossible to ascertain who conjured necessity in this case, but it is clear that the Pentecostal Church portrayed itself as the only place that could truly bring her comfort.
Interview 4	interviewee	1. Sense of community 2. Proximity to God	"...my life with the youth group, who are basically a second family to me. The leaders who are basically second parents to me. I think it is something amazing. It feels so good to be welcomed even if people think differently from you... They are brothers to you. The church for me is like a second home." -"Since I felt the presence of God there, it is there that I will feel whole." "Other churches, I feel fine. But it's not like that one where I was always raised."	This interviewee identified the church as a second family to him. He also identified the importance of his church being the site in which he felt God's presence. It is important to note that Interviewee 4 has visited other churches but does not experience the same level of community and proximity to God as the one he frequents. The church has thus established itself as the only church that can provide for his needs.
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 1	1. Attendees 2. Me	1. Medical and financial needs: myriad pains and chronic injuries, employment stability 2. Spiritual need: my soul was in need of saving	1. Receiving blessings and giving money: Giving blessings to those who suffered from several kinds of pain, the pastor claimed that after giving money his son achieved a stable position at his job. 2. My soul would be saved if I accepted Jesus into my life	In the first case, the promise of blessings that would cure medical and financial troubles foregrounded necessity amongst attendees. In the second case the pastor used conjuring necessity, fabricating that my soul was in need of saving, as a strategy for convincing me to convert. In both cases, the pastor used conjuring necessity as a strategy for positioning the church as the only place where our needs could be fulfilled.
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 2	1. Attendees 2. Me	1. One's life was in need of fixing: any dissatisfaction 2. Depression	1. Church would provide miracles and if you were willing to let God into your home, He would fix it His way not yours. 2. Accept Jesus	In the first case, the pastor situated the church as a site where miracles could be granted, foregrounding any necessity attendees might have. Furthermore, stating that attendees might not love the way that God fixes their home seemed as a kind of insurance on the promise of fulfilling the attendees needs: whatever happened would be part of God's larger plan. The second case again involved the pastor attempting to fabricate a necessity in me for the purposes of conversion.
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 3	Not applicable			Important to note that this was the only church where I showed my Wildcard as proof of my credentials as a researcher. It was also a special service where children were performing a Nativity play. This may have affected attempts to conjure necessity.

Table 3: This table outlines instances of conjuring necessity in both interview and ethnographic data

### Level of Interaction with the Church

All four interviewees cited having high levels of interaction with their church outside of attending services. Both interviewees 2 and 4 learned to play music at the church and perform in the church's orchestra. They also emphasized their interaction with the church through their social circles, primarily the youth group of the church. These interactions ranged from friendships with other youths in the church to attending events, such as retreats that are hosted by the church. When asked if the youths from the church were Interviewee 2's most important community outside of his family, he answered yes. Interviewee 4 also emphasized the importance of the church in terms of community in his life, "...my life with the youth group, who are basically a second family to me. The leaders who are basically second parents to me." Interviewee 4 thus described church members as a pseudo-family in his life. Similarly to Interviewee 2, the youth of the church were a very important community in Interviewee 4's life.

Interviewees 1 and 3 described their interaction with the church in terms of labor rather than community. This is likely because they were older. Interviewee 1 works as a deaconess at the church, which means that she must attend all services in order to welcome attendees at the door. Her position also requires her to perform work outside of the church including but not limited to visiting sick people and spreading the word of God. While her position is unpaid, she still reported having a very high level of interaction with the church and its members through her diligent work as a deaconess. Similarly, Interviewee 3 also described her interaction with the church in terms of labor. She is the secretary of the missionary group at the church. Her work involves collecting and sorting donations for those in need in Seropédica. Her work was also unpaid, but frequent. When asked how often she interacted with the church, Interviewee 3 said

every day. Thus, all four interviewees cited high levels of interaction with the church through several different means.

### “The Pastor Speaks”

Another common trend I identified through my ethnographic observations and my interview data was the centrality of the pastor. This was demonstrated through the use of sound, positionality, and discourse.

In terms of sound, all three churches I visited were equipped with large speaker systems. The pastors communicated through a microphone and their voices boomed inside the church regardless of size. Church 1, especially, appeared to have been structured primarily with the importance of sound in mind. It consisted of a large white hall with bare walls which echoed the sounds from the large speakers that hung above the stage like the ones one would see at a concert hall. Having the sound of the pastor’s voice reverberate throughout the church was so important for the Pentecostal Churches I visited that even the small Church 2 had speakers. Church 2 was large enough only to fit 4 or 5 rows of seats. Despite this, the pastors still spoke into microphones that connected to booming speakers. The use of sound was so important that neighbors were very aware of the fact that they lived next to a Pentecostal Church. On my walk through Seropédica looking for church service times, which was necessary because the information was not available online, I asked a man in the neighborhood if he knew when church services were held. He laughed and said that it felt like it was every day. Speakers in Pentecostal Churches are thus an essential part of services. They carry the voice of the pastor throughout the church, no matter how big or small it may be. The sound of Pentecostal Church services is so strong that they even invade spaces outside of the church, specifically the homes of neighbors.

The centrality of the pastor was also signaled by positionality, or how the pastor was positioned in comparison to the church attendees. Visually speaking, this was clear in all three churches. In all three, the pastors spoke while standing on stage. Furthermore, in all three churches there was special reserved seating for pastors either on the stage or in the front of the church. The seating for pastors starkly contrasted with the seating for attendees. The former were individual chairs with tall backs and cushioning. The latter were plastic or wooden chairs. Visually, the use of a stage and contrast in the quality and location of seating communicated the centrality of the pastor.

Furthermore, positionality was also signaled verbally. At Church 1, I approached a woman who worked at the church during the service to ask if I could hand out fliers for participant recruitment. She was visibly uncomfortable with the idea of being the one to give me permission. She then told me to talk to someone more important than her and pointed me in the direction of the pastor. Despite the fact that this woman wasn't just a regular church attendee, she worked at the church and moved freely in that space during the service, her discomfort at being the one that I sought permission from reflected a stark power dynamic between her and the pastor. Church 1 was not a place where all were equal, some were, in her words, more important than others. She refused to overstep her place in allowing me to pass fliers with my contact information and instead sent me to ask the pastor.

At Church 2, the centrality of the pastor was communicated to me even more explicitly. While I was passing out my fliers before the service, I approached an older woman and asked if she would be interested in being interviewed. She refused and told me that she had nothing to say "the pastor speaks". The pastor spoke, and thus she would not. I will not suggest that this woman was silenced, but there is something to be said about how her statement reflects her positionality

in relation to the pastor. Through her statement she signaled to me that the pastor is so central in Church 2 that he speaks for her.

Data Source	Form of signaling	Observations	Analyses
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 1	1. Sound 2. Spatial construction 3. Verbal	-large boom boxes like concert, plain walls and tile to echo -pastor seating on stage -worker uncomfortable when asked if I could recruit, told me to talk to someone more “important”	-emphasizes importance of the pastor through sound -situates centrality of pastor -signals power dynamic, pastor as more important than followers
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 2	1. Sound 2. Spatial construction 3. Verbal	-small church but speakers and microphone -pastor seating on stage -“the pastor speaks”	-pastor accesses spaces not only in the church but spaces around it -situates centrality of pastor -pastor’s words supersede those of followers
Ethnographic Fieldwork: Church 3	1. Sound 2. Spatial construction 3. Implicit	-speakers and microphone, tall ceilings -pastor seating in front of stage but separated by short wall, facing away -asked if I could speak to pastor, several people said they didn’t know where he was/looked at me strangely, deaconess went to talk to him before he came to talk to me	-emphasizes importance of the pastor through sound -establishes power dynamic -pastor as inaccessible to the average person, importance

Table 4: This table outlines ethnographic observations that signaled the centrality and power of the pastor

Neglect from other institutions

Interview data revealed distrust or disappointment in political leaders and government in general. Interviewee 1 expressed the importance of having political leaders that are sincere in their campaign promises, “There are a lot of political leaders who say they’re going to do this or that, but we know they are not giving their word. So then they have, in my eyes, already sinned. I now don’t believe that they’ll do it because, some of them, don’t do it.” Sincerity was the first characteristic Interviewee 1 named when asked what she looked for in a political leader. She made sure to note that in her perception “a lot” of politicians do not fulfill the promises they

make. This distrust in the word of politicians was mirrored by Interviewee 2, who also named sincerity as the most important characteristic of a political leader.

While Interviewee 1 thought that many politicians were not sincere, Interviewee 2 stated “...there is no one who could be president who would be good for Brazil. No one no one. To me, no one is sincere enough for this.” He was adamant. His distrust of politicians was so strong that it extended to any candidate for president, despite having voted in the election. Interviewee 3 also mentioned distrust in the sincerity of political leaders, “The person can say they are Evangelical, that they are Christian, but are they really? I don’t know. I’m not saying they’re not. But there is a gap between saying and being. I listen. I listen to everything. But to be sure that that person is telling the truth is another story.” Finally, Interviewee 4 was also adamant about not trusting the words of politicians, “What I understand about when a person says something opposite from the other, in that moment they only want to be different. It could be that they are only saying this to gain votes. What I understand about what comes out of the mouth of a politician is that nothing nothing nothing is true.” He expressed that in his opinion campaign promises were simply a way to gain votes and that everything politicians say is a lie.

Interviewees also mentioned specific qualms they had with political leaders that led to the distrust and disappointment previously mentioned. Interviewee 1 mentioned a news story she had seen about a nearby municipality where the mayor had spent R\$4 million on Christmas decorations for the city (Rianelli and Soares 2022), meanwhile government employees were reporting waiting for months to receive their paychecks. “This is very disrespectful. It’s outrageous. To me it’s outrageous. It is disrespectful to citizens,” she said. Interviewee 1 used this specific news story to reflect her overall dissatisfaction with how government funds are spent. Interviewee 2 also issued a scathing review. When asked about his perception of political

leaders today he said, “My perception of leaders today in Brazil is that a thief was elected president. Unfortunately, he was convicted as a thief, but people still voted for him,” referencing the fact that President Lula was imprisoned prior to being elected (Pombo 2022). Interviewee 3 cited several instances that built distrust in government for her. The first was that previous administrations had sold the Amazon in parts to foreigners, preventing Brazilian biologists and researchers from having access to the Amazon. The second was the fact that Lula had stayed in a private hospital because public hospitals aren’t funded well enough, “If he can, why can’t the rest of the population also stay in a good quality hospital, instead of dying in the lines of SUS. Basically, that is what I think. He says that public hospitals are good quality. Then presidents should be the first to use them.” SUS refers to the Sistema Único de Saúde, Brazil's public health care system. Three out of the four interviewees described specific instances that created a strong distrust in existing political leaders and governments.

The interview data reflects that candidates themselves aren’t doing enough to combat this perceived neglect. The level of interaction between respondents and local political leaders was lacking, and respondents were clearly aware that interaction that did occur was part of a strategy for gaining votes. When asked if there were political discussions during church services interviewees 1 and 3 brought up the fact that candidates are invited to speak at the church during election season. Interviewee 1 repeated variations of the same comment 3 times, “politicians here only come when it’s election season.” The repetition of this comment and the use of the word “only” reflects a dissatisfaction with the level of interaction between church members and political leaders. Furthermore, Interviewee 1 portrayed an awareness for the intention behind the limited interactions she had with political leaders, “The last time that the mayor of this municipality came to the church was when he ran for reelection. He never came again. He’ll

come back when it's time for reelection.” To interviewee 1 it was clear that political leaders were only coming to speak at the church in order to gain support during the election. Once elected, candidates would neglect to interact with church members until voters were needed in the next election.

Data Source	Neglectful Institution	Quotes	Analyses
Interview 1	-political leaders -candidates	<p>-“There are a lot of political leaders who say they’re going to do this or that, but we know they are not giving their word. So, then they have, in my eyes, already sinned. I now don’t believe that they’ll do it because, some of them, don’t do it.”</p> <p>-“I was watching a news story about a municipality around here in Rio de Janeiro. The mayor spent R\$4 million on decorating the city for Christmas, while there were civil employees with late paychecks.”</p> <p>-“politicians here only come when it’s election season.”</p> <p>-“The last time that the mayor of this municipality came to the church was when he ran for reelection. He never came again. He’ll come back when it’s time for reelection.”</p>	<p>-general distrust/caution believing the promises of political leaders</p> <p>-example of political decisions that fuel distrust</p> <p>-repeated variations of this twice, candidates neglect to connect with the people once in office</p> <p>-awareness of intent to only gain votes by reaching out to the people</p>
Interview 2	-political leaders	<p>-“Sincerity is of the utmost importance. If he is a politician, of course”</p> <p>-“...there is no one who could be president who would be good for Brazil. No one no one. To me, no one is sincere enough for this.”</p> <p>“My perception of leaders today in Brazil is that a thief was elected president. Unfortunately, he was convicted as a thief, but people still voted for him.”</p>	<p>-sincerity as the main quality he looks for in a political leader</p> <p>-the current president having previously been imprisoned fuels his distrust, sees political leaders as thieves</p>
Interview 3	-political leaders -government	<p>-“The person can say they are Evangelical, that they are Christian, but are they really? I don’t know. I’m not saying they’re not. But there is a gap between saying and being. I listen. I listen to everything. But to be sure that that person is telling the truth is another story.”</p> <p>-“If he can, why can’t the rest of the population also stay in a good quality hospital, instead of dying in the lines of SUS. Basically, that is what I think. He says that public hospitals are good quality. Then presidents should be the first to use them.”</p> <p>-“And that my country isn’t sold in parts to other countries/foreigners like what happened in previous administrations. The Amazon was overtaken by foreigners. And what happened. The people who were from Brazil were left out. Biologists, researchers weren’t having access to their own country. Which I think is ridiculous.”</p>	<p>-general distrust/caution believing the promises of political leaders</p> <p>-lack of funding in public hospitals and privilege of accessing private medical care as form of neglect</p> <p>-example of what creates distrust toward government</p>
Interview 4	-political leaders -candidates	<p>-“What I understand about when a person says something opposite from the other, in that moment they only want to be different. It could be that they are only saying this to gain votes. What I understand about what comes out of the mouth of a politician is that nothing nothing nothing is true.”</p> <p>-“Man, for me that is kind of complicated because in politics, for me, they are all corrupt. There is no one that is not corrupt. They’ve always done something.”</p> <p>-“The same way I never liked any of them. Never thought of any of them. I didn’t even vote last year.”</p>	<p>-believes all politicians are liars that only say things to gain votes</p> <p>-believes all politicians are corrupt/have done something wrong while in power</p> <p>-chose not to vote in the election because doesn’t like/trust any politician</p>

Table 5: This table outlines instances of neglect from other institutions in interview data

## VII. Limitations

It is important to note that the time of year that my fieldwork was conducted likely had an effect on the data I collected. Firstly, my fieldwork was conducted almost two months after the results of the presidential election were announced. It is likely that I would have identified more political rhetoric in my observational data had my fieldwork been conducted during or slightly before the election. Secondly, my fieldwork was conducted less than two weeks before Christmas, which may have also had an effect on the level of political rhetoric used during services. This seems to be the case considering the service I attended at Church 3 was almost entirely dedicated to presenting a Nativity play.

My results are also limited in terms of sample size. While a smaller sample size allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis of the data collected, the generalizability of my findings is an appropriate point of critique. The limited sample size was likely due to a lack of encouragement from the pastors I encountered. The only respondents that reached out to me to participate in this study were from Church 3, which coincidentally was the only church where the pastor announced my research during the service and encouraged attendees to participate. On the other hand, the pastors simply gave me permission to hand out flyers but were more interested in convincing me to convert than in supporting my research. Immediately, I noticed a difference in my interactions with the churchgoers. While I had to seek out churchgoers who might be interested in participating at Church 1 and 2, several individuals sought me out to participate at Church 3. Despite this having limited the sample size of my interview data, it also reinforces the results I did gather, namely the influence of the pastor. This contrasting experience between the first two churches and Church 3 suggests that the pastor has the ability to influence the decision making of church members, in this case encouraging them to participate in my research.

## VIII. Discussion

In terms of identity, interview data supports the argument that Black and low-income Evangelicals foreground their religious identity over other identities (Walsh 2003). In doing so, my results also question the validity of Anthropology Professor John Burdick's conclusions on the intersections of race and Pentecostalism. Based on his fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, Burdick claimed that Pentecostal Churches in Brazil uphold practices that encourage a strong Black identity (1999). Using the same study site as Burdick, my results suggest a debasement of Black identity in political engagement. While all of the interviewees were Black and lived in low-income communities, none mentioned racial/economic issues or claimed their Black identity as central to them. Instead, they spoke on the importance of the Evangelical Church in developing them into the people they became. This suggests that while it may seem that low-income Evangelicals are voting against their interests by supporting right-wing candidates, their main concern may instead be supporting those that uphold their religious interests. If this is the case, supporting right-wing candidates seems like a rational choice, considering the importance of individual work ethic and a traditional family structure within the Evangelical faith (Antonopoulos et al. 2020). However, race and class are still identities that affect one's access to mobility. Thus, the church's ability to make members sacrifice these identities in favor of foregrounding their religious identity limits their ability to seek out material interests through their elected representatives.

In terms of the theoretical framework of the fear of social death, the two identified facets are supported both by ethnographic observational data and interview data. The facet of social omnipresence appeared in various ways in my results. One of these was through the use of sound. Every church I visited, regardless of its size, blasted its services over loudspeakers. This

meant that the sounds of these services were not secluded to the space of the church. They, instead, infiltrated private and public spaces around the church. When asked if he knew what time services were held at the church across the street from his home, a man from Seropédica joked that it felt like services happened every day. I had heard similar complaints about the noise of Evangelical Church services in my personal life. My late great-uncle often ranted about how loud the Evangelical Church next door to him was. Through the use of sound, the Evangelical Church is thus able to assert its presence not only within the church but on the street outside and even in the homes of unassociated neighbors. This use of sound to assert presence in unlikely spaces is also seen in the rise of Evangelical funk music (Antonopoulos et al. 2020, 247), a Brazilian genre generally characterized by heavy bass and raunchy lyrics. While funk developed as a protest genre meant to invade white affluent spaces with its loud beats and cause discomfort by forcing the realities of poverty to the forefront (Trotta 2022), Evangelicals have repurposed the genre to spread their gospel. The use of sound is thus an important way in which the Evangelical Church asserts its presence in public and private spaces outside of the church building.

Social omnipresence also appeared in the level of interaction with the church cited by interviewees. All interviewees reported high levels of interaction with the church, whether that be attending service, interacting with family and friends that are also from the church, or doing work for the church. This high-level of interaction supports what I expected from the church's social omnipresence. The church encompassed a large part of the respondents' social network, so that even outside of the church, the church as an institution was still present. This high level of interaction also asserted the church's presence as a service provider. Two of the interviewees learned to play a musical instrument for free at church and now play in the church's orchestra.

Any opportunities or benefits that are achieved through their musical skills will in large part be thanks to the church. Thus, the Evangelical Church asserts its presence not only in the social lives of members, but also in their potential futures.

The role of the Evangelical Church as a service provider and its presence in the potential futures of members was also reflected in the act of conjuring necessity. Whether through the promise of miracles or salvation, the pastor positioned the church as the only resource that could fulfill one's every need. Conjuring necessity was a strategy consistently used to maintain membership and encourage conversion. Moreover, the promise of miracles and salvation asserted the church's presence in the daily lives of attendees and in their potential futures. In terms of the former, the promise of miracles ranged from fulfilling financial needs to curing medical issues. This large range of needs reflects the range of aspects of one's life the church consequently asserted its presence. The church exists in the workdays and doctor's appointments of members. It exists in the physical pain and financial struggles of its members. But it also exists in the healing and success of its members. Furthermore, salvation and miracles help to assert the church's presence in the potential futures of its members. Future success is indebted to the church and if success is not achieved the church remains absolved of blame because it is part of God's greater plan.

Social omnipresence is also reflected in the power of the pastor over the speech of members. While the Evangelical Church has a pseudo-familial structure, members consistently referred to themselves as brothers and sisters, ethnographic observations demonstrated the limitations of what appeared to be a comfortable and equal space. Verbally and spatially, a skewed power dynamic was communicated between the members and the pastor. There were two instances in which members deferred their own speech in favor of elevating the voice of the

pastor. In one of these cases, a member at Church 2 chose to silence her speech and deferred to the pastor. In the other, a woman at Church 1, who seemed to move through the space of the church with comfort and ease, felt uncomfortable granting me permission to recruit respondents and referred to the pastor as “someone more important”. In terms of space, the set-up of all churches visited reflected a difference in power and importance: the pastor sat separately, spoke on a stage, and in one case a mediator was required to be able to gain access to the pastor. The power dynamic between the pastor and church members reflects an omnipresence over the speech of members. The power dynamic signaled through spatial construction also reinforces the power of this presence.

Finally, the fear of social death facet of perceived neglect from other institutions was also supported through interview data. Interviewees consistently prioritized sincerity in political leaders and felt that current politicians did not always stick to their promises. Their responses reflected a distrust of politicians. Many also cited specific examples of politicians’ decisions or actions that led to this distrust. One interviewee demonstrated an awareness that politicians only came to speak to church members in order to gain support from voters during election time. Interviewees did not mention distrust of institutions outside of the government. However, their responses reflected a caution in terms of believing the promises of political candidates.

While research data supported the two facets of my fear of social death theory, there was no evidence that a fear of social death was driving right-wing support amongst interviewees. Instead, as previously discussed, interviewees generally cited cleavage issues as their reasoning behind their political ideology. Furthermore, interviewees, who were all from the same church, claimed that their pastor did not share his political beliefs or personally discuss politics. Nevertheless, because the data collected supports the presence of the two facets of the fear of

social death, postulate that the pastor is the central figure that has the power to activate the fear of social death mechanism to politically influence members. While not all pastors politically influence their congregations, the structure and practices of the church—such as spatial construction, high interaction levels, power dynamics, conjuring necessity—can potentially make it traumatic for members to leave the church. This trauma can be described as a social death due to the level of presence of the church in the everyday lives and social circles of members. Subsequently, if a pastor were to use political rhetoric and encourage a certain political ideology within the church, it is possible that the fear of social death could be powerful enough to influence the political ideology of low-income Evangelicals in Brazil.

Purely looking at the interview data, I found support for the null hypothesis. All four interviewees were deemed to hold a right-wing/right-leaning political ideology. Furthermore, all four interviewees cited important cleavage issues that led them to have those beliefs. The cleavage issues named were LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, security, and individualism. Respondents named these cleavage issues as central to what they look for in a political leader. Thus, interview data supports the claim that Evangelical voters choose to support right-wing candidates over important cleavage issues. However, as Interviewee 1 stated, not all Evangelical voters feel alienated by the Left because of agendas that go against a traditional family structure.

Nevertheless, further research is required to establish the fear of social death as a causal mechanism. This would require a larger sample size of interview respondents from several different churches. It would also require the employment of ethnographic field studies for a longer period of time and during important political periods, such as prior to a municipal or national election. The lack of political rhetoric I witnessed during my fieldwork may have been a result of the fact that the election happened a month prior. Additionally, a larger sample size

from various churches could lead to more generalizable conclusions of the role of the fear of social death. I believe it would also be compelling to research the low-income communities I was unable to access due to safety reasons. The facet of perceived neglect from other institutions will likely be further heightened in those areas. Despite the need for further research to make a universal causal claim, the theoretical frameworks of conjuring need and the fear of social death are both unique in this context of study. My research presents a new and compelling way of analyzing the political influence of the Evangelical church by focusing on the potentially active role religious leaders within the Evangelical Church play in the decision of low-income members to support right-wing candidates.

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