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# ***Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Elections***

*David Smilde*

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## ABSTRACT

Venezuelan Evangelicals' responses to candidates in that country's 1998 presidential election seem to confirm the view that their political culture is inconsistent, contradictory, and paradoxical. Not only were they just as likely to support nationalist ex-coup leader Hugo Chávez as was the larger population, they also rejected Venezuela's one Evangelical party when it made a clientelist pact with the infamous candidate of Venezuela's discredited Social Democratic party. This article uses concepts from recent cultural theory to analyze qualitative data from these two cases and make sense of the contradictory nature of Evangelical politics.

Venezuelan Evangelicals' behavior in that country's 1998 presidential election clearly challenges traditional views of their politics. Neo-Weberian views generally see Latin American Evangelicals as favoring self-government, personal initiative, and cautious, peaceable change (Martin 1990; Sherman 1997; Willems 1967; Smith 1994). In this election, however, they were just as likely as non-Evangelicals to support Hugo Chávez, a nationalist candidate whose revolutionary and totalitarian rhetoric sparked acrimonious polemics nationally as well as friction with the world's one superpower. Critical views, on the other hand, doubt Evangelicals' importance for democratization, arguing that they are easily swept into patron-client political logic (Lalive d'Épinay 1969; Bastian 1994, 1997; Chesnut 1997; Corten 1999). In this election, nevertheless, a pact between Venezuela's most important Evangelical politician and an infamous Social Democratic candidate caused outrage, leading Evangelical leaders to mobilize publicly against it.

Evidence from the 1998 election, then, supports a strand of recent scholarship on Latin American Evangelicalism that rejects the search for monolithic political tendencies and focuses instead on the simultaneous coexistence of tendencies toward autonomy, individualism, and democracy, on the one hand; and patriarchy, corporatism, and authoritarianism, on the other. These authors have conceptualized Evangelical political tendencies as inherently inconsistent (Levine and Stoll 1997), as the result of a "tense syncretism" (Ireland 1991), or as irreducibly "paradoxical" (Williams 1997; Droogers 1991; Cox 1995). Their findings have

driven home the absolute necessity of studying Evangelical politics empirically in context rather than through deductions from theology (Smith 1998; Steigenga 2001; Freston 2001; Peterson et al. 2001). Paul Freston, for example, argues, “Evangelical *organization, religious location* and *sociopolitical location* are often more important for understanding its politics than is evangelical *theology*. Theology is important, but as one factor amongst many which may affect evangelical politics in any given context” (Freston 2001, 282, emphasis in original).

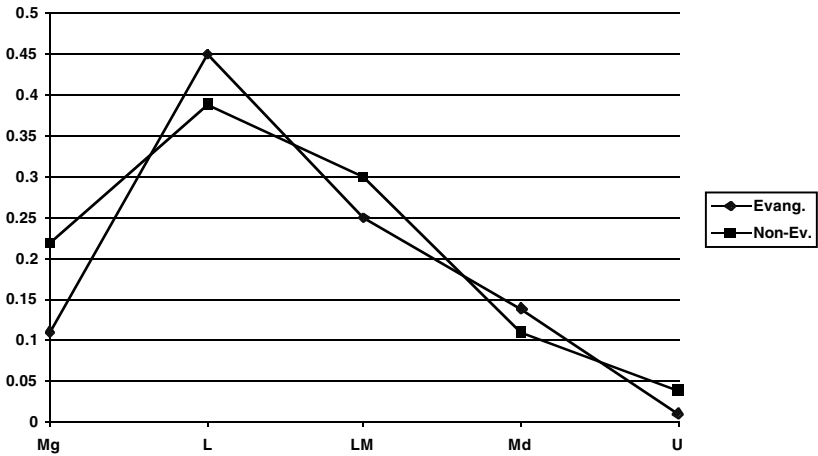
While this scholarship pushes researchers past globalizing monolithic portraits, future progress depends on moving beyond the notion that Evangelical theology is irreducibly paradoxical or a “factor” that competes with other independent causal factors (see Smilde 2003). This study will suggest that contemporary understandings of how culture engages social context can help make sense of the contradictory nature of Evangelical politics. After reviewing the diversification of the political field in Venezuela, this article will present a conceptual framework for understanding Evangelical political culture. It will then use that framework to make sense not only of the pluralism evident in the reception of Chávez but also of the focused opposition mobilized against the Evangelical political pact.

## **THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE VENEZUELAN POLITICAL FIELD**

The rise of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement-200 (MBR-200) from an obscure movement within the armed forces to one of the leading political forces in Venezuela, and the growth of Evangelical Protestantism from a new religious movement to one of the most important networks of civil associations in the country, are two faces of the same process of diversification in Venezuelan politics over the past 20 years. Since the early 1980s, perpetual fiscal crisis and the accompanying decline in living standards for the majority of Venezuelans, combined with high-profile corruption cases at all levels of politics, have steadily undermined the legitimacy of the state-parties hegemony that once ensured stability (Salamanca 1997). By the 1990s, the formerly comprehensive Social Democratic and Social Christian parties could no longer contain the demands of an increasingly diverse, highly urban population fully connected into the mass media (Lander 1995; Crisp et al. 1995).

At the same time that the parties' financial resources for cooptation and clientelism were dwindling, an array of new social movements and civil associations began to emerge (Karl 1995; Navarro 1995). Uribe and Lander write that throughout this period, the two dominant parties were actually quite successful at preserving themselves; but in the process, they discarded any aspiration to ideological leadership. Increasingly,

Figure 1. Social Class of Evangelicals and Non-Evangelicals, 1998



Mg Marginal, L Lower, LM Lower Middle, Md Middle, U Upper

Notes: Poll based on a stratified national sample of 1,500 cases in urban centers greater than 20,000. Maximum sampling error 2.58 percent. Social class index used by Consultores 21 constructed on the basis of five variables: average monthly household income, type of housing, educational level, social class self-identification, and social class identification made by interviewer.

Source: Consultores 21 1998.

new social movements—be they environmental action groups, neighborhood associations, women’s groups, new labor unions, or religious associations—formed new spaces for political life that did not pass through the mediation of the party-state complex and did not justify themselves in terms of “the programmatic political rationality that was traditionally offered to the country as the path to the construction of a modern society” (Uribe and Lander 1995, 23).

While they have never been significant in terms of numbers, these new social movements rely on “symbolic effectiveness,” reaching the public through the mass media or through public demonstrations (Uribe and Lander 1995, 26). Of course, these civil associations and new social movements formed largely among the middle and upper-middle classes rather than those sectors most acutely affected by restructuring (Lander 1995, 88).

One group that has had success in mobilizing outside the upper and middle classes is the Evangelical Protestants.<sup>1</sup> As figure 1 shows, the class distribution of those who identify themselves as Evangelical Protestant is remarkable for its similarity to the overall class structure of Venezuelan society. It is, indeed, primarily a religion of the lower and marginal classes; but that is because Venezuelan society consists primarily of the

lower and marginal classes. Evangelicalism is unique among social movements in its ability to attend to these hard-to-mobilize sectors.

Until the mid-1980s, Venezuela experienced little Evangelical growth. But with the progressive breakdown of Venezuela's development model, Evangelicalism, as well as other manifestations of civil society, have increased the social space they occupy (see Smilde 1999a). From 1986 to 1993, by Johnstone's figures, the Evangelical population more than doubled, from 2.6 percent to 5.34 percent (Johnstone 1986, 1993). According to Johnstone (1993), two-thirds of the Evangelicals in Venezuela are Pentecostal, meaning they believe in spirit possession, faith healing, perfectionism, and premillennialism. They do not dislike the term *Pentecostal*, and frequently use it in the names of their churches, but they identify themselves as *Evangélicos*, denoting their professed prioritization of the *Evangelio* (gospel, referring to the first four books of the New Testament telling the story of Jesus, or more broadly to the Bible as a whole), or *Cristianos*, denoting their "Christocentrism" (and implicitly delegitimizing the identification of Catholics as Christians).<sup>2</sup>

Their focus is not primarily political. Evangelical meanings and practices provide a means for individuals to gain a cognitive fix on the processes that are affecting their lives in such a way that they can reformulate their personal lives and reestablish or strengthen primary social ties. These same meanings and practices will be used nevertheless to engage political options that impinge on Evangelicals' lives either because of individual interest or because of the actions of Evangelical leaders (see Smilde 1999a).

The two most important Evangelical organizations in Venezuela are the Evangelical Council of Venezuela (CEV) and the Pentecostal Evangelical Council of Venezuela (CEPV). They are not mutually exclusive, and many Pentecostal churches belong to both. They have traditionally shied away from politics beyond issues related to religious freedom. One of the best-known experiments with an Evangelical party in Latin America, however, occurred in Venezuela with the Authentic Renewal Organization (ORA), headed by Baptist chemistry professor Godofredo Marín. ORA participated in Venezuela's last three electoral cycles, each time gaining one or two seats in the national congress. Such was ORA's success in the 1988 elections that French historian Jean Pierre Bastian wrote that the "mechanisms of electoral manipulation" ORA used provided a model for the new "confessional politics" of Latin American Evangelicals (Bastian 1994, 273).

That year, ORA garnered almost one percent of the popular vote for Marín as presidential candidate and gained two seats in the congress. Pastors generally saw Marín as an important ally in the congress and permitted him to campaign in their churches.<sup>3</sup> They rallied around him in 1988 with strong support from the pulpit and gave the party official,

if somewhat less enthusiastic, support again in 1993. ORA was always a somewhat more difficult project at the grassroots level with Evangelicals of the lower and lower-middle classes, who tend toward Pentecostalism. These Evangelicals are generally more antiestablishment and less conservative than Marín and ORA.<sup>4</sup> The party's strength came from the minority of Evangelicals among the middle and upper-middle classes who tend toward Baptist and Neo-Pentecostal churches, among whom Marín's conservative politics resonated and his willingness to collaborate with traditional parties seemed reasonable.<sup>5</sup> These differences played out in the 1998 elections.

The MBR-200 represents a different trajectory within the same diversification. While Evangelicals are among the new social movements that eschew the programmatic political rationality of nationbuilding, the MBR-200 is one of those that aspire to revive the project. Indeed, its mobilization throughout the 1980s was largely motivated by the perception that the traditional parties had betrayed the nation through corruption and antidemocratic elite pacts. As this history is readily available elsewhere (Zago 1998; Gott 2000; López-Maya 1997; López-Maya and Lander 1999; Vivas 1999), this article will simply focus on aspects of this party's mobilization strategy as they relate to Evangelicals.

During the two years they served in jail as a result of the failed 1992 coup attempt, the leaders of the MBR-200 worked on plans to become a civilian political movement. Key to their strategy was the idea of gaining a base among independent civil associations. In documents from this period, the leaders of the movement called for a national dialogue between the MBR-200 and what they called "new social and political forces" that exhibited the desire, capacity, and "recognized honesty and public morality" to promote changes in Venezuela. The first two mentioned were the Catholic Church and "the Evangelical Community" (MBR-200 n.d.).

After being pardoned by President Rafael Caldera in March 1994, the MBR-200 leaders began working to develop a "civic-military movement" and focused on collaboration with other organized elements of civil society. "The Movement must have a policy of alliances with the most advanced and revolutionary forces of our society, a policy of allies is vital for the achievement of historical objectives and strategies of the movement"; among the seven potential allies listed were "Christian and Evangelical churches with a progressive orientation" (MBR-200 1994). These alliances never really developed until Chávez's presidential campaign began to pick up steam in 1998, and even then, most remained symbolic gestures rather than articulated social networks.

MBR-200's alliance with Evangelicals never took the form of official contact between leaders but instead consisted of frequent mentions of Evangelicals along with other members of civil society in the speeches of Chávez and others. Remaining at this symbolic level, this outreach

was intangible enough to be embraced by Chávez supporters yet discounted by opponents.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING EVANGELICAL POLITICAL CULTURE**

Presentations of Latin American Evangelicalism as a uniquely contradictory and inconsistent guide for behavior result from the expectation that culture will function as a set of rules and values enacted by members of that culture (Ortner 1984). Contemporary theorizations of culture, however, look not for coherent sets of deeply held values and beliefs that determine behavior, but rather for repertoires of discourses and symbols that can be used by individuals and groups to define the terms of interaction, debate, and conflict (Obeyeskere 1981; Swidler 2001; Steinberg 1999).

This study conceptualizes Evangelical political culture as a repertoire of schemas relating to the relationship between the observable universe and a supernatural order, which are available to Evangelicals for organizing experience, orienting problem solving, and inspiring and legitimating action (Smilde 1998, 1999a). Schemas are abstractions from the detail of experience that highlight recurring features. Like road maps that are helpful precisely because of their poverty of detail, schemas enable action by reducing complexity and thereby constraining alternatives. Nevertheless, any repertoire of schemas can have contradictory or inconsistent implications for action for two basic reasons: what William Sewell (1992) calls multiplicity and transposability.

Multiplicity posits that any repertoire contains overlapping and often contradictory schemas. Two that seem to have been important for Evangelicals in the 1998 elections are what can be called the schemas of spiritual communion and supernatural autonomy. First and foremost in the Evangelical repertoire is the idea of human behavior facilitating the action of supernatural agents. In the Evangelical frame, when humans sin or otherwise break communion with God, they facilitate Satan's agency and may even become Satan's agents themselves. When, on the other hand, they establish communion with God through prayer, reading the Bible, and righteous behavior, they facilitate God's agency and may even become God's agents. This schema of spiritual communion is the primary one Venezuelan Evangelicals use. Those individuals, groups, structures, or acts that appear to facilitate human communion with God are supported; those that seem to prevent it are rejected. Because it involves human facilitation of supernatural agency, this schema permits Evangelicals to think about themselves and the surrounding world as malleable to their effective action. They use it primarily to conceptualize situations in which there are clear signs of obedience or sin, or understandings of what these might mean in a potential course of action.

The second schema points to supernatural agents who act autonomously. Since God is omnipotent, he is not confined to act within the space humans provide him; he can act by his own volition through whomever or whatever means he chooses. Likewise, Satan can take the initiative in trying to discourage Christians, lead them away from God, or keep non-Christians from finding God. The schema of supernatural autonomy deemphasizes the importance of human agency and is used primarily in those situations that definitely seem to further or hinder God's will, yet in which there are no clear signs of human obedience or sin. It functions as a sort of backup schema that makes sense of important situations that otherwise would not fit into the Evangelical repertoire.

The schemas of spiritual communion and supernatural autonomy point in contradictory directions; one emphasizes human behavior, the other disregards it. If prodded, some Evangelicals will reconcile them by arguing that God is omnipotent but gives humans free will to choose to help God in his project or not. Without such prodding, however, they rarely seem bothered by the contradiction.

Sewell's concept of transposability refers to the way schemas are applied over a variety of situations and their applications are always underdetermined. No situation is exactly like any other, and the application of a given schema usually involves ingenuity, improvisation, and negotiation. Thus, even actors who apply the same schema to the same situation may apply it differently depending on what aspects of the situation they choose to key into.

These two sources of contradiction—multiplicity and transposability—do not mean that the engagement of cultural repertoires in action is irreducibly paradoxical or inevitably subject to individual whim. To the contrary, strong tendencies and even consensus can develop in two ways. First, situations with clear and distinct features relevant to the repertoire engender relatively more consensus regarding which schemas are relevant to the situation and how. Second, strong tendencies or consensus in interpretation can result from social processes—through the mobilization of certain definitions of the situation rather than others by individuals with relevant power.

Hugo Chávez's political history and campaign were diverse enough that individual Evangelicals were able not only to apply both the schemas of supernatural autonomy and spiritual communion, but also to use the latter en route to contrary conclusions. Because there was no mobilization of opinion either for or against Chávez by Evangelical leaders, moreover, individual variety was the norm. The characteristics of the AD-ORA pact, on the other hand, were much clearer. This clarity, combined with mobilization by evangelical leaders, resulted in a considerable amount of consensus in opposing the pact.



## EVANGELICALS IN THE 1998 ELECTIONS

The data used in this article reflect the empirical characteristics of the two cases. One of the central features of the Evangelical reception of the Chávez candidacy was precisely the lack of public mobilization in support or opposition, as individual believers were left to their own devices. The surprising fact that many Evangelicals were supporting Hugo Chávez did not begin to appear in my participant-observation ethnographic research on conversion until well into 1998, casting new light on data I had previously collected.

To establish the empirical trend, a colleague and I were able to attach questions regarding religious affiliation to a poll carried out a little less than four months before the election.<sup>6</sup> The trend confirmed, questions were added to the life history interviews already ongoing with Evangelical men. In all, interviews regarding the election were taped with 30 men, and informal conversations were conducted with dozens of men and women. The analysis uses quotations that represent the most typical responses. These qualitative data can provide a portrait of how Evangelicals in this historical context related religious ideas to political options. Given the nature of the sample, however, they cannot tell the relative distribution of these different ways of making meaning in the population, or whether there were other ways of making meaning that eluded the data collection altogether.<sup>7</sup> Since Chávez assumed power, potential data sources have changed as his relationship with Evangelicals has been frequently covered in the media.

One of the central features of the mobilization against the AD-ORA pact, in contrast, was the public way it was accomplished. Indeed, I learned of the controversy in the mass media before it appeared in my participant observation. During the electoral process I collected articles on the controversy, and after the election a couple of Evangelical informants lent me their own collections of clippings. I supplemented this by reviewing a wider selection of papers from this period in Venezuela's national library. These print materials not only serve as a guide through the objective course of events; their content allows the researcher to construct an interpretive account of the meanings put into play in this conflict.

## EVANGELICALS AND CHAVEZ

A casual observer might reasonably expect a religious movement normally thought of as conservative, or at least politically cautious, to oppose a polemical candidate such as Hugo Chávez. At minimum, a movement that strongly and aggressively seeks unity in religious ideology might be expected to unify either for or against such a political option. Nevertheless, in the 1998 elections, neither expectation was cor-

Table 1. Evangelicals' Comparative Voting Preferences, 1998  
(percent of respondents)

	Non-Evangelical	Evangelical
Sáez	13.3	11.4
Chávez	40.6	41.4
Salas Römer	19.3	16.1
Fermín	3.5	5.7
Alfaro	4.2	3.4
Undecided	10.3	12.6
Not voting	7.0	5.7

N = 1,500

Source: Consultores 21 1998

rect. Evangelicals did not unify either for or against Chávez's candidacy and simply mirrored the tendencies of the larger population. A poll that included religious identification several months before the elections reflected this trend (see table 1).<sup>8</sup>

### Negative Opinions

Respondents who opposed Chávez's candidacy based their negative opinions on the same two aspects of his political profile as most non-Evangelicals—his totalitarian tendencies and his violent past—but with their own Evangelical slant. Respondents frequently expressed fear that a Chávez presidency would impede the work of Evangelicals; they also admitted discomfort with his role in the bloody February 1992 coup attempt. Fredy, a high school electronics teacher, said he did not want to vote for Chávez.<sup>9</sup> He explained,

Well, because Chávez has a project for the country just like how he attempted that coup, no? I'm not going to say that for sure it would be bad, but it seems like he wants to install something like what is in Cuba. So I can imagine, if Chávez wins, we *bermanos* would be preaching in the Metro [Caracas's subway train system] with the police behind us threatening us: "You can't preach here!" They might impose certain things that would block the path of the Gospel.

The opinion of David, an accountant and a member of a large, middle-class Pentecostal church in Caracas, was typical among those Evangelicals who saw Chávez's past as anathema to Christian morality. He said he was planning to vote for the candidate opposing Chávez.

I prefer Salas Römer a thousand times more. Why? Because the other candidate is this Chávez. And with what he did years ago,

with that coup attempt, you know, all the violence, so many dead. That's not godly. I don't approve of that. I don't agree with that—so that's why—we can't vote for a candidate who transmits violence.

Such negative opinions should not surprise, given the worldwide involvement of Evangelical groups in conservative politics. Understanding, on the other hand, how so many Evangelicals were able to support Chávez presents a greater challenge.

### **Mentions of the Bible**

As in most modern elections, the bulk of Chávez's support was gained not through grassroots networks but rather through a skillful use of the mass media. Chávez's campaign speeches and interviews frequently mixed elements from the writings of Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, Venezuelan literature, and, most important for the purposes of this article, the Bible. Indeed, his adaptation of a Bible verse (Jeremiah 5:21, Ezekiel 12:2, Mark 8:18, Acts 28:27. *NIV Study Bible* 1995) became his most popular campaign slogan: *El que tenga ojos, que vea. El que tenga oídos, que oiga* (Let him who has eyes see. Let him who has ears hear).

Chávez's use of the Bible received a lot of attention and frequently met with tongue-in-cheek derision from leading opinionmakers. The day after Chávez officially opened his campaign at the end of July 1998, all the major newspapers made reference to it. *Ultimas Noticias* said, "Chávez gave his usual message in which he appealed to the Bible, to Bolivarian thought, to Christianity, to Catholicism, to humanism, social justice, state reform, the fight against corruption, the perfection of democracy and several authors . . ." (*Ultimas Noticias* 1998). Three of *El Universal's* four headlines were "Hugo Chávez Frías: I ask God to raise me up to the Task"; "Waiting for the Messiah"; and "Demon or Savior?" (*El Universal* 1998a).

Chávez's religious rhetoric was nonetheless popular among average voters (Gott 2000 46). For average Evangelicals, the rhetoric and frequent mentions of the Bible could easily be portrayed, through the schema of spiritual communion, as evidence that God was working on Chávez or planned to work through him. Keison, a computer systems auditor for a Caracas bank, used the following terms to explain his support to another Evangelical.

Chávez is citing the Bible. That's what is getting our attention. That's what we're interested in. The Bible says that God honors him who honors Him . . . . When has [then-president] Caldera cited the Bible? Never. He mentions idols [Catholic saints] but he doesn't cite the Bible. He cites the Pope but hasn't cited the Bible.

In interviews during an outdoor religious service in a plaza two days before the elections, Francisco and Andrés revealed why Chávez's men-

tions of the Bible were so important to them. Francisco had expressed his support for Chávez, and I asked him whether he thought that God could use a person like Chávez even though he was not an Evangelical.

*And do you think that Chávez, not being converted and not being a member of an Evangelical church, can be used by God?*

Of course . . . because Chávez has read the Bible, and the Bible says that faith comes from hearing the word of God. So a man that reads the Bible acquires knowledge of God. God can touch that person. So I believe that God can use this man. Because if in 40 years of democracy we have failed [it is because] God has not been able to penetrate the hearts of these politicians. He hasn't been able to because none of these men who have governed Venezuela have been Christians.

Andrés is a barrel-chested Afro-Venezuelan from the region of Barlovento, two hours east of Caracas, and was a key informant throughout my work with his church. He is an extrovert and perpetual optimist who is joking and facetious more often than he is serious. In the same plaza two days before the election, he came up to me and interrupted a conversation I was taping between two other Evangelicals. Knowing he is rarely shy, I asked him in front of the other two whom he was planning to vote for.

"For Chá-vez, Chá-vez, Chá-vez. Nu-e-vo Pres-i-den-te," he chanted. Then, with a look of false seriousness on his face, he turned toward the plaza on the step where he was standing and, acting as if he were speaking to the multitudes, said: "Chá-vez! We're going to enter the new millennium with a broad vision, a cutting-edge vision, a *cuuuuuutting*-edge vision (*una visión de puuuuuunta*) with our new President Chávez!" (dramatically pumping his fist in the air). I followed up by asking, "And do you think it is legitimate for a Christian to vote for Chávez?" The unstated premise was that Chávez was not an Evangelical. He answered in a more serious tone, "I really think that this man can do something for Venezuela. And people think that this man doesn't know the Bible. But he is getting to know the Bible, and that's why you hear him citing Biblical texts! I think that God himself is permitting this man to rise up."

In sum, for Keison, Francisco, and Andrés, Chávez's knowledge and use of the Bible meant that despite his not being an Evangelical, God might be working on him or through him.

## Looking Past Violence

Chávez's history of violence, as well as his repeated mention early in the campaign of the possibility of taking up arms again, was a stumbling block for many Evangelicals, just as it was for the general public. Even among early Evangelical supporters, there was concern. After a 1997 rally, I asked

Ramiro and Keison for their general impressions. Ramiro described how he admired Chávez for his stance against corruption and desire for a more just society, but added, “Putting aside the violent part, I think his ideas are right on track.” After Keison gave me his positive assessment, I asked him if he saw parallels to the Christian vision of the world.

The parallel I see is that he is willing to take up arms, and with arms, blood is going to flow, and that is where we—since the Bible says “thou shalt not kill,” we are not willing—we want this to happen peacefully, and if God wants to place him there, let it be by a legal election, just as God requires . . . . The only thing we do not agree with is the use of arms for people to kill each other.

Keison was apparently so concerned about this aspect of Chávez’s discourse that he mentally replaced the word *parallels* with the word *contrasts*.

Canache (2002) argues that those who voted for Chávez in 1998 were able look beyond his coup involvement either because they were ambivalent about democracy in the first place or came to see him as a “converted militant”—a revolutionary who had undergone a political conversion to democracy. In the following responses we can see Evangelical variants of these reasons. In my interview with Andrés, I asked whether a Christian could vote for a coup leader. In his response, he uses the schema of supernatural autonomy to underline his ambivalence toward democracy. He argues that God puts worldly leaders in their position, and if a strongman emerges to fight oppression and corruption, it must be God’s work.

*And do you think it’s okay for a Christian to vote for a coup leader, I mean, someone who attempted a coup?*

Look, you know that I always try to go to the Bible. I follow the Bible. The Bible says that God is the one who places and gets rid of kings (*pone y quita reyes*). And if God permits this man to rise up, and he puts a caudillo there so that oppression and corruption finally are defeated? Then I think that God must be at work in all of this.

The responses of Ignacio and Alberto, by contrast, show how the schemas of supernatural autonomy and spiritual communion can be combined to support the idea of Chávez as a “converted militant.” Ignacio, an elderly Evangelical I interviewed during a plaza service, used a Biblical example to portray Chávez’s violent past in a way that might reveal God’s agency. He suggested that perhaps God might be “processing” Chávez as he did Moses. Among Venezuelan Evangelicals, “processing” refers to the idea that God builds character among his followers by putting them through trials of fire, in the same way that “fine gold” is smelted. Ignacio said,

Maybe it was God who put this man [Chávez] through all of this . . . and God has put a sensitivity in this man like he did with Moses? . . . Moses didn't like [the abuse of the Egyptians], and God processed him through that to the point that he killed an Egyptian and had to flee. And God processed him so that he would have a personal encounter with God. Now, you don't know if this guy is—[shrugs his shoulders]

He ended his sentence by leaving open the possibility that God is processing Chávez as he did Moses and will likewise bring him to a personal encounter with God.

For Alberto, Chávez's violent past is clearly unacceptable. But because God can work in mysterious ways, Alberto suspects that God worked on Chávez during his time in jail after the 1992 coup attempt.

*Can a Christian vote for a coup leader?*

Christianly we can't. But you don't always know what God's will is. If God has brought this man to this position [imminent winner of the elections], it must be for some reason. This man was in jail, which is where they preach the word a lot. And he has cited the Bible. The Bible says in Isaiah 55, verse 11, that the word of God doesn't come up empty-handed. So if this man can cite the Bible, then there is something in his heart . . . I think God is working on him slowly.

Thus, while Chávez's history of violence was indeed one of the principal stumbling blocks for Evangelicals—just as it was for non-Evangelicals—the idea that God can work in mysterious ways, as well as the presence of other signs that God might be working through this candidate, could be marshaled to move past this obstacle.

## **MBR-200 Support For Evangelicals**

From the time he began public appearances after being released from jail in 1994, as well as throughout the 1998 campaign, Chávez mentioned Evangelicals whenever he mentioned emergent actors in civil society working for change. Alongside unions, peasant organizations, student groups, and others, Chávez would call for Evangelicals to support his movement's attempt to revolutionize Venezuela. This captured the attention of Evangelicals already sympathetic to the MBR-200.

Keison, a member of the downtown church where I was doing fieldwork, grew up in the 23 de Enero, a massive housing project at the western end of Caracas. In the years before becoming an Evangelical he participated in underground urban guerrilla groups and even provided logistical support with his car in both 1992 coup attempts. A year-and-a-half after the second coup attempt failed he became an Evangelical, leaving behind his political participation but maintaining his interest.

In the days before the fifth anniversary of the February 4 coup attempt, newspaper advertisements announced an MBR-200 rally in the Plaza Caracas. Keison invited me to accompany him and a couple of other sympathetic Evangelicals. Interested in what at that time was a subaltern event, I brought my tape recorder and interviewed people attending. Keison knew many of the MBR-200 leaders and pushed me to interview them. Usually, after a couple of questions, Keison interrupted and took the role of interviewer while I recorded.

Behind the stage where Chávez would speak several hours later, Keison spotted one of the MBR-200 leaders, ex-lieutenant colonel Luis Reyes Reyes.<sup>10</sup> I asked him a general question, which he was not quite finished answering when Keison blurted out, “And your opinion of Evangelicals in Venezuela?” At first he was at a loss for words, but quickly regained his stride.

*Luis Reyes Reyes:* Well, [pause] look, [pause] we respect [pause]. I am an Apostolic, Catholic, Christian. Ummm, ah, look, we look at Evangelicals with a lot of interest. We are friends of the Christian movement here in Venezuela. We admire them. We think that everything that is done to strengthen faith, to help foment the ethical principles that all Christian movements have here in this country is positive. We view them with a lot of respect, we have good relations with them in conversation and, to say it in one word, we admire them and respect them profoundly.

*Keison:* So in the case that the Movimiento Bolivariano 200 should attain power, would there be a guarantee of respect for Christian groups?

*Luis Reyes Reyes:* Absolutely. We would respect them. Not only would we respect them, we would even promote them [*promoverlas*]. They would help or contribute to the regeneration of the country.

Keison was enamored of this response and repeatedly mentioned it throughout the afternoon. Reyes Reyes had touched on a key concept in Venezuelan political discourse: *promover*. Most Venezuelans of all classes see the state not as a group of bureaucracies that regulate activity and maintain order, but as the entity that controls and distributes the country's oil wealth and has the responsibility to be the primary mover in the development of a modern society (Coronil 1997). At the same time, despite Venezuela's continuing fiscal crisis, most social sectors continue to believe that the state is wealthy and to critique its inability to carry out that development.<sup>11</sup> Any negative societal tendency, from the lack of a manufacturing sector to the absence of civil society, may be portrayed as the result of the state not “promoting” it as it should. The prospect that Evangelicalism would not only be freed from bureaucratic regulation of its activities but promoted by the state represents the sort of official appreciation and state support that Keison and other Venezuelan Evangelicals feel they are due.

After the interview, as we waited and talked, I asked Keison and Ramiro, another key informant from the same church, their opinions of the MBR-200.

*Ramiro:* Personally, I think—Jesus Christ said these divine words: “Lucky are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will be satiated.” . . . God said that if we [Evangelicals] don’t speak, the rocks would speak instead. And these men are making a call for justice . . . . God is there because if they don’t stand up, who’s going to? God has to use someone to stand up . . . . If he has to use these men and place someone up there [in power] who is really of the people and for the people, then God knows what he is doing.

*Keison:* One thing that Ramiro said with which I agree a lot is that the Bible says that blessed is he who thirsts and hungers for justice. Even he who is not a follower of the Gospel—if they hunger and thirst for justice, they will be satiated. So I believe that God, like Ramiro says, is seeing that those who are in power are not the ones, and that there are some people that might hunger and thirst for justice. So God, in his wisdom, could move one of these men. And I think it’s interesting what the Lt. Colonel said a minute ago, that they not only would respect the Christian movement in Venezuela, but that they also would use it to regenerate the morality of the society.

In their answers, both Keison and Ramiro use the schema of supernatural autonomy. They find in their perception of the MBR-200 as working for justice—including just treatment for Evangelicals—a means to argue that God might be using its leaders even though they are not Evangelical.

After about three hours of nationalist folk music and several other speakers from the MBR-200, Chávez took the stage. The crowd was not large, probably two thousand people. Chávez gave a fiery speech attacking President Caldera’s administration, Venezuela’s traditional parties, and abstractions like neoliberalism and imperialism. Several times he quoted Bible verses. Each time he did, Keison yelled “Amen!” or “¡Gloria a Dios!” Toward the end of the speech Chávez called on the different elements of civil society to support the movement, as was his custom, mentioning Evangelicals along with unions, peasant organizations, student groups, and others. Keison was waiting anxiously for this, and as soon as Chávez uttered the word, Keison exploded with a scream: “¡Evangélicos!” jumping up and down and laughing with joy. Then he turned to Ramiro and me, and said excitedly, “That guy is converted to Christ! Let’s go up and shake his hand!”

I reluctantly followed Keison over to the gate in the fence surrounding the stage. We were admitted, and we made our way through the crowd (Keison barging through with me in tow) over to Chávez, where a television crew was interviewing him. When they finished, Keison pushed his way toward the candidate, saying “*Comandante*,



*Comandante.*” When he got close, he said, “The Evangelical people love you a lot, but we need to hear something: a greeting for the Evangelical public.” I gave Chávez the already rolling tape recorder, into which he said,

Today, the 4th of February 1997, five years since the people’s resurrection, from the Plaza Caracas, packed with people, I send a warm, very Christian greeting, committed to all Evangelicals, those people who walk with the cross of Christ through the streets carrying a hopeful message to the people. The voice of the people is the voice of God. With Christ, with Bolívar, with Zamora we will again have a fatherland [*patria*]. Accept my warm greeting and may God bless you all. (Chávez 1997)

As Bastian (1994) has pointed out, such courting of Evangelical groups has become a common strategy in Latin America among new political actors who do not have a readymade political base. These ethnographic scenes demonstrate how sympathetic Evangelicals can interpret such courting. Consistent shows of respect toward Evangelicals, promises of future support, or simple recognition can combine with the Evangelical desire to see God working for better in the world. Within this view, a politician or political movement can easily fit into the schema of spiritual communion or at least the schema of supernatural autonomy, as an instrument that God will use to bring justice to a fallen world.

### **After the Election**

Chávez, of course, won a landslide victory and took office in February 1999. While Bastian (1994) argues that outreach to Evangelicals is usually abandoned once political actors obtain power, the course of events in this case suggests that his view needs modification. Chávez’s outreach to Evangelicals continued long after assuming power, through unilateral actions that were designed largely to weaken the Catholic Church in comparison to new religious movements. To run the Directorate of Religion, an office of the Ministry of Justice that oversees religious practice and with which Evangelicals have traditionally had conflict (see Smilde 1999b), Chávez placed Roman Delgado, a lawyer who is not Evangelical but was a strong sympathizer and had previously represented the group before the Directorate (*El Nacional Online* 1999b). The administration also put into effect existing legislation that permitted Evangelicals to teach religion in public schools (*El Nacional Online* 1999a). Catholic Church officials openly criticized these measures but were sent reeling when Chávez decided to cut by half the part of the subsidy given to the Catholic Church that is controlled directly by the executive (*El Nacional Online* 1999e).

In his inaugural speech, Chávez encouraged Evangelicals to participate in the impending constitutional revision process. They did run several candidates for the Constitutional Assembly, but they lost—along with most other politically unaligned candidates—to those officially supported by Chávez. Despite the lack of Evangelical representation, the National Constitutional Assembly expanded religious freedom to include religious practice as well as religious expression (*El Nacional Online* 1999d). This constitutional change, in the context of the other pro-Evangelical measures, led individual members of the Catholic hierarchy to call for a “no” vote in the December 1999 constitutional referendum (*El Universal Digital* 1999b). Several Evangelical associations, on the other hand, joined the “Yes Commandos,” which worked to mobilize an affirmative vote (*El Universal Digital* 1999c). For a more detailed review of 1999, see Smilde 2000).

Chávez’s unilateral measures favoring Evangelical groups compared to the Catholic Church have continued, but have never taken the form of explicit contact with Evangelical leaders. Samuel Olson, president of the CEV, explained that although under the Chávez administration the Directorate of Religion has been consistently supportive of Evangelicals, Evangelical lawyers have been consulted regarding a new law on the freedom of religion, and other Evangelicals have been given positions in the government, he and other Evangelical leaders find out about these initiatives after the fact.

The openness of this government has been helpful in certain ways . . . but we have never been brought into any type of conversation with the executive [branch of the government]. We have never met with the president of the nation. So we have no way of knowing his reason for being open—or apparently being open—to the Evangelical Church. (Olson 2001)

Olson and other Evangelical leaders have maintained a supportive but independent position regarding government initiatives. Members of the CEV participated in the independent commission that selected new members of the National Electoral Council in June 2000 (*El Nacional Online* 2000). In the months following the April 11, 2002, coup, in which Chávez was briefly deposed and then reinstated, Evangelical leaders participated along with other sectors of civil society in the “national dialogue and reconciliation roundtables” organized by the Chávez administration. These meetings were boycotted by the leading components of the opposition: the Federation of Chambers of Commerce (*Fedecámaras*), the Venezuelan Workers’ Confederation (CTV), and the mass media (*El Nacional Online* 2002). Evangelicals also publicly called for the government to disarm its supporters and for the opposition to participate in the negotiations sponsored by the Carter Center in July 2002 (*El Universal Digital* 2002).

They shunned, however, a government attempt to incorporate religious bodies into the government. From November 2000 to May 2001, the Office of Human Rights of the Chávez administration attempted to organize a Bolivarian Interreligious Parliament, which would bring together representatives of all the different religions in Venezuela with the goal of devolving governmental social projects and funds to them. Along with the Catholic Church and other established religions, the CEV and CEPV rejected the initiative, largely because they distrusted the low-level administration officials, who misquoted several religious leaders in their glossy promotional brochures and were evasive about their own origins and purpose (Olson 2001). The CEV and CEPV were wary of having the officials organize the project, and they bristled at being lumped together with Afro-Venezuelan and New Age groups and followers of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (*El Nacional Online* 2001). The initiative survived, but it has accomplished little without the participation of Venezuela's main religious associations (PIV 2002).

Chávez's postelectoral courting of Evangelicals suggests that, given their status as one of the most important forms of civil society currently functioning in Latin American societies, Evangelicals may become a target constituency for those in power, not just those seeking it. Nevertheless, the extent of cooptation may have its limits, a point that will be further explored in the next section.

### **The AD-ORA Pact**

In April 1998, ORA leader Godofredo Marín visited one of the churches where the research for this study was being conducted. The pastor introduced him, endorsed him, and permitted him to announce his candidacy from the pulpit. Interviews done in the following weeks show the built-in support an Evangelical candidate can receive through the schema of spiritual communion. Vincenzo, a member of the church, was enthusiastic after he heard the news.

Here in the church they are telling us that there is an *hermano* who is going to declare his candidacy for president. Wow! What a blessing that would be if an *hermano* should win. I think everything would change. He would need support but, I don't know, I think the support of God would be enough. God would touch people's hearts and all this would change.

Pedro, on the other hand, saw voting for a Christian candidate as a way not to be at fault if he did poorly in office.

If I vote for a person who does not have Christ in his heart and he starts doing things that are not pleasing to God, [I] would be to

blame because] I voted for him, knowing the truth. But if I vote for someone who knows the truth and he does things that are not pleasing before God, the blame is placed on him because he knows the truth.

In the last week of July, presidential candidates had to register their candidacy officially with the National Electoral Council. For each candidate, the registration was followed by a rally in the Plaza Caracas, in front of the council's headquarters. On July 22, Luis Alfaro Ucero registered as the AD's candidate. For years, Alfaro had had de facto control of AD and, for most Venezuelans, epitomized the corrupt party caudillo. Indeed, from the time of his nomination as candidate by AD up until the elections, he consistently edged out Chávez for the lead in negative perceptions (*El Universal Digital* 1998b).

To the surprise of most of the Evangelical community, Godofredo Marín was at Alfaro's side during the registration ceremony and in the rally that followed, as a representative of the independent parties supporting the candidate. Marín announced that he was withdrawing his own candidacy in favor of Alfaro and then introduced him by saying it was "a great honor" and asking God to bless the candidate (*El Nacional Online* 1998a).

This alliance caused an immediate uproar in the Evangelical community, disarming Marín's supporters and mobilizing his opponents. On August 1, an article in *El Nacional*, a major daily newspaper, titled "Alzados in ORA" (Rebellion in ORA), reported that a number of party coordinators in Caracas had resigned their membership in protest over the pact (*El Nacional Online* 1998b). A couple of days after the announcement, Keison gave me a copy of a letter from an Evangelical pastor and ORA member, Euclides González, in the interior state of Guarico, that had been faxed to various Evangelical associations the day before Marín's announcement. The title read, "ORA-Guarico Rejects the National AD-ORA Pact." In the text González declares,

I want to warn the Evangelical people and *guariqueños* that the AD-ORA pact is a vulgar deal in which morality has been exchanged for economic privileges, with a complete lack of dignity and credibility, surrendering our ideals to immoral, unethical actions that lack any respect for the people and above all for God. (González 1998)<sup>12</sup>

An editorial in *El Mundo* at the end of August by another Evangelical pastor was titled *Ora . . . por Marín* (Pray for Marín), using the name of the party for a play on words.

Today, Godofredo, with evident desire to guarantee himself a seat in Congress, has surrendered himself to the Alfarist party—AD—

promising them his Evangelical followers, as if they were sheep or dopes without free will. The position assumed by our old-fashioned evangelist speaks badly of his spiritual condition. His disguise as a spiritual Christian and follower of the inalterable divine Word has been unmasked (Ayala 1998).

Pastor Vinicio, the leader of a small congregation in a *barrio* of Petare at the eastern end of Caracas, mentioned the situation from the pulpit during the announcements at the end of a Sunday service in August. He held up and read to his congregation two paid advertisements in two leading newspapers with national circulation, from Christians with ORA Always, a supposed group of Evangelicals supporting Marín. The first ad thanked Marín for sacrificing his candidacy in favor of Alfaro's for the good of the country and ended with: "Brother Marín, you can count on the support of Christians." The second ad said, "We Christians want . . ." and asked Evangelicals to vote for Alfaro. Pastor Vinicio put down the publication and said, "These advertisements intend to speak on behalf of the Evangelical people. Well, I'm an Evangelical, and I'm not going to vote for Democratic Action." He followed this by enjoining the members of his congregation to vote for "whomever God touches you to vote for."

Encouraged by other Evangelical leaders, Keison sent a 1,500-word, highly emotional letter regarding the situation of Venezuela, AD, and ORA to several newspapers. Although no local newspaper picked it up, two months later it appeared in *Victoria Patriótica*, a magazine published by the Fifth Republic Movement (the electoral face of the MBR-200) as part of the electoral campaign. The magazine printed Keison's letter verbatim with the title "Why I Do Not Support ORA." Most the letter describes Keison's perception of the Venezuelan crisis; then it states his motivation for writing.

Reflecting on this situation and asking why things are the way they are, it is my duty as a citizen and a Christian to ask myself: what responsibility does Democratic Action have in this tragedy? And the overwhelming answer has to be that it has a large part of the responsibility. . . . What left me flat was when I read that in the nomination ceremony of Alfaro Uceró there were only two spokesmen; one was from AD, and the other was Godofredo Marín from ORA. . . . Of course I am not against a Christian having a position in the highest structures of political power, but I thought that when this happened he would be an example of morality and rectitude for the professionally corrupt who use politics not in order to serve, but as a means to enrich themselves. . . . With this I don't want to discourage *hermanos* who in the future might know how to do right what others betrayed. But I do not want to be seen as linked to ORA for being an Evangelical Christian committed to the work of God. I do not and will not support ORA. (Carrillo 1998)

Marín and his advisers had clearly underestimated how Evangelicals would react to a pact with AD. In mid-October, ORA published advertisements titled “Why do we support Alfaro?” which gave two reasons: “Because Alfaro is the only Presidential Candidate who invited us to participate actively in his next government” and “Because with Alfaro we have more similarities than differences” (ORA 1998). These *realpolitik* explanations, however, provoked laughter and derision among the Evangelicals I knew. ORA nonetheless supported Alfaro’s candidacy right up to the end—even after several regional chapters defected to support Chávez (*El Nacional Online* 1998c) and AD itself abandoned Alfaro in favor of Salas Römer. Marín indeed regained a seat in Congress through the deal, as a *diputado por lista* for “AD-ORA” from the state of Monagas.<sup>13</sup> But in the process he undermined the party’s already weakened base among Evangelicals, receiving less than 5 percent of the Evangelical vote compared to one-third in the 1988 elections (Consejo Nacional Electoral 2000).

Godofredo Marín maintained his congressional seat until the newly formed National Constitutional Assembly dissolved the legislature in August 1999. He achieved perhaps the greatest notoriety of his career in that period, when he and several other deputies scaled the fence that had locked them out of the congressional building (*El Nacional Online* 1999c). The event received international coverage and sparked a day of protests and riots around the congress building. Marín has not run for public office since. ORA, however, still exists as a party, participating in regional elections in Venezuela’s interior.

## CONCLUSIONS

The traditional search for a monolithic political tendency among Latin American Evangelicals is clearly inadequate. The data presented here support other recent research indicating that Evangelical politics can be quietist or mobilized, diverse or unified, leftist or right-wing. This does not, however, require us to regard Latin American Evangelicalism as somehow more contradictory, syncretic, or paradoxical than other religions. If we conceive of Evangelical political culture as a repertoire of multiple, often countervailing schemas that are transposed by actors, schemas that can lend themselves to both individual variety and collective unity depending on the context and social processes, we can capture both the diversity and the consistency in Evangelical politics.

The Chávez candidacy presented contrasting features that opposing and supporting Evangelicals alike could key into. The conspicuous lack of public mobilization by Evangelical leaders facilitated this diversity. The contrasting features of Chávez’s candidacy partially explain this lack of mobilization, but the explanation should not be reduced to that factor.

We might easily imagine that if Chávez had not only publicly recognized Evangelicals but also sought a high-level meeting with Evangelical leaders and made concrete promises of, say, increased religious freedom, they would have mobilized on his behalf and presented favorable applications of Evangelical schemas as the “correct” applications, as happened with the 1990 Fujimori candidacy in Peru (Freston 2001). Alternatively, we can easily imagine that if Chávez had coddled the Catholic hierarchy or perhaps linked Evangelicalism with cultural imperialism, as did elements in Caldera’s administration (Smilde 1999b), Evangelical leaders would have mobilized against him and presented negative applications of Evangelical schemas as the “correct” applications.

Chávez has maintained his unilateral outreach toward Evangelicals from a distance—continuing his public mention of them and favoring them through policy at several points—and some Evangelical leaders and groups have responded favorably, mobilizing for the government and participating in government initiatives. They resisted a more comprehensive corporatist project by rejecting the Bolivarian Religious Parliament. That initiative, however, might well have had a different result if Chávez or other high-ranking officials had developed it in cooperation with Evangelical leadership and if it had not obliged them to collaborate with groups they consider “satanic.”

In the case of ORA, we can see the automatic application of the schema of spiritual communion that an Evangelical candidate can receive. The same schema that generates such immediate support, however, prevents that support from being the blind clientelism that Bastian and other critics describe. Application of the schema depends on the candidate’s behaving in a way that fits it. Indeed, Marín behaved very much in the way analysts such as Bastian (1994, 1997), Chestnut (1997), and Freston (1993, 2001) have described in other contexts: he attempted to hand over his Evangelical following in exchange for political favors.

Maintaining a congressional seat from which Marín could continue working for improvements in religious freedom, moreover, was in Evangelicals’ best interests. Playing politics in and of itself was not the problem. It is unlikely, for example, that a pact with candidate Henrique Salas Römer would have produced such outrage. But Marín’s support for a candidate widely viewed as a corrupt party caudillo in evident exchange for a congressional seat was viewed as a betrayal of God and Christian principles and an insult to the Evangelical people. Marín’s later *realpolitik* explanations of the pact did not engage schemas in the Evangelical repertoire, and only hurt him. The pact effectively sounded the death knell for Marín as a politician and for ORA as a national political party. This case shows that while cultural logic is flexible, not just any extension or interpretation will do. At a minimum, an interpretation cannot openly contradict the central schemas of the repertoire.

A systematic model of Evangelical political culture and politics is, of course, not possible on the basis of the two cases presented here. What can be said is that if we conceptualize Evangelical political culture as a repertoire of schemas instead of a coherent set of deeply held values and beliefs, future research will allow us to refine our understanding of the way specific aspects of the social context (including denominational organizations and the political and religious fields) affect the paths Evangelical politics take. Doing so will permit us to understand the impact this ever more important form of civil society is having and will have on Latin American politics.

## APPENDIX: WOMEN'S PREFERENCES

Although this article highlights data from a larger study of Evangelical men, gender was a highly salient variable in voting tendency. Evangelical females were similar to non-Evangelical females in their substantially lesser tendency to vote for Chávez. The 20 percent difference between male and female voters here is largely explained by women's much greater inclination toward the one female candidate, Irene Sáez; toward nonparty candidate Claudio Fermín; and a more frequent "undecided" response. These gender differences will be analyzed in future quantitative work.

Table 2. Evangelicals' Voting Tendency by Gender, 1998  
(percent of respondents)

	Female/ Evangelical	Female/ Non-Evangelical	Male/ Evangelical	Male/ Non-Evangelical
Sáez	18.4	19.2	6.1	6.9
Chávez	28.9	31.3	51.0	50.4
Salas Römer	15.8	21.4	16.3	17.0
Fermín	10.5	4.1	2.0	2.8
Alfaro	2.6	3.8	4.0	4.5
Undecided	15.8	11.3	10.2	9.2
Not voting	5.3	7.3	6.1	6.7

N = 1,500

Source: Consultores 21 1998



## NOTES

This article evolved through presentations at the 2000 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, the 2001 meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, the Calvin College History Department, and the graduate seminar on methodology in the Sociology Department, University of Georgia. It benefited from the comments of John Burdick, James Coverdill, Michael Coppedge, Daniel Levine, Margarita López-Maya, Patricia Richards, Martin Riesebrodt, Timothy Steigenga, anonymous reviewers for LAPS, and LAPS editor William C. Smith. A previous version appeared as Kellogg Institute Working Paper no. 300, September 2002. This research was supported by a U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Abroad Fellowship. Addition of questions regarding religious affiliation to the Consultores 21 poll was made possible by a Davidson College faculty research grant to Timothy Steigenga, as well as the active collaboration of Roberto Zapata.

1. While the term *Pentecostal* would be more accurate in Anglophone discourse on religion, the term *Evangelical* is used here, for two reasons. First, using *Pentecostal* to refer to informants who, in the data used here, refer to themselves as Evangelicals would require unwieldy prose. Second, not using the term would obscure important ambiguities it causes in the social context under study. For example, the difficult relationship between Baptist congressman Godofredo Marín and his Pentecostal constituents was framed by their use of the same term—*Evangelical*—to identify themselves.

2. Venezuelan Pentecostals conform to Ernst Troeltsch's observation on modern sects: they tend to concentrate more on the Pauline Epistles than the Gospels of Jesus (Troeltsch 1992, 433, n. 164. On this point see also Smilde 1997).

3. Indeed, while in office, he has been instrumental in several political battles over religious freedom (see Smilde 1999b).

4. Froehle (1997) points out that in 1993 more Evangelicals voted for the Social Christian and Democratic Action parties than for Marín.

5. For a review of the Neo-Pentecostal movement see Cleary 1997.

6. Aruba-based Consultores 21, an independent polling company that works throughout Latin America but primarily in Venezuela, carried out the survey. As the elections neared, such cooperation from polling firms—for whom an election cycle is something like the holiday season for retailers—became impossible.

7. For example, an unfortunate result of collecting these data as part of a project on Evangelical men is that, entirely beyond my intention, I did not conduct a taped interview with even one woman. The survey data suggest another story there; see table 2 in the appendix.

8. It is unlikely that this trend changed in the following months, because Chávez, on his way to building a coalition broad enough for a landslide victory, progressively moderated his violent and divisive rhetoric. In other words, the aspects of Chávez's candidacy that might have posed problems particularly for Evangelicals decreased.

9. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all respondents other than Hugo Chávez and Samuel Olson and are not cited in the reference list. Relevant contextual information regarding respondents and informants is provided

in the text. The rationale is that what ethnographic respondents and informants say should be evaluated not in terms of its truth value but in terms of how ideas are related to each other.

10. Like the other coup leaders, Reyes Reyes was forced to retire from the armed forces as part of the presidential pardon. He would later hold several important positions in the Chávez administration.

11. In a 1999 poll, 82 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that Venezuela is the richest country in the world, and 76 percent with the statement that the government has not been able to distribute this wealth because of corruption (*El Universal Digital* 1999a).

12. Included in the fax was a balance sheet of the congressional stipends received by each party represented in the congress, including ORA. The author is arguing here that Marín's real motivation was to avoid losing this income.

13. Marín won the AD-ORA congressional seat even though he did not follow AD in withdrawing support for Alfaro the week before the presidential election. This was possible because the congressional elections took place a month before the presidential elections.

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