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




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## The evangelical foreign policy model: Jair Bolsonaro and evangelicals in Brazil

Feliciano de Sá Guimarães<sup>a</sup> , André Felipe Miquelasi<sup>b</sup> , Gustavo Jordan Ferreira Alves<sup>a</sup> , Irma Dutra Gomes de Oliveira e Silva<sup>a</sup>  and Karina Stange Calandrin<sup>a</sup> 

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### ABSTRACT

The article proposes an *evangelical foreign policy model* to analyse the relationship between evangelical groups and conservative governments in foreign policymaking. Using Brazil as a case study, we argue that the model is defined by the convergence of views and interests between conservative cabinet members and domestic evangelical groups on four foreign policy issues that are critical to evangelicals worldwide – the relationship with Israel, persecution of Christian minorities, abortion rights, and evangelical missions in Africa. To analyse the convergence, we use an original database of 207 speeches from Brazilian evangelical parliamentarians (Evangelical Parliamentary Front) and 1992 discourses from Jair Bolsonaro's cabinet members from January 2019 to July 2022, as well as multiple documents from the main evangelical groups in Brazil. In the case of Brazil, this is the first time that typical religious considerations have been officially adopted by the country's foreign policy, indicating the growing importance of evangelical thinking in Brazilian politics. This is also one of the first analyses, not centred in the United States, that shows how views and interests of evangelical groups and conservative governments converge in international affairs, broadening perspectives on the political participation of the ever-growing evangelical movement in the Global South.

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## Introduction

Can religious groups affect a country's foreign policy? More specifically, can evangelical groups use religious narratives in foreign affairs to influence a country's foreign policy? And if they do, what are the effects of these narratives in foreign policymaking if the government is conservative?

There are many open questions as to whether religion has a noticeable effect on foreign policy, and if so, how that effect is generated, and the possible mechanisms of religion's influence. In this paper, we analyse a narrower part of this debate by examining whether evangelical groups can use theological views<sup>1</sup> about a country's role in international affairs

to influence decision-making in foreign policy and whether a concomitant conservative administration produces similar narratives. Using Brazil as a case study, we look at four issues in which evangelical groups have shown greater interest and consistent narratives since the inception of Jair Bolsonaro's government: (1) the relationship with Israel; (2) the formation of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) against Christian persecution; (3) the formation of the anti-abortion Geneva Consensus in 2020; and (4) the defence of Brazilian evangelical missions in Africa. We argue that the combination of a similar evangelical political agenda for international relations and conservative worldviews produces the basis for a 'evangelical foreign policy model' that guided Brazil's foreign policy during Bolsonaro's tenure. The convergence influences foreign policy decision-making and implementation in the four key areas.

To show empirically how this evangelical model operates, we built an original database using speeches from both the executive and legislative branches in Brazil. First, we gathered 34,250 speeches made by all National Congress members from January 2019 to July 2022. After sorting them by subjects related to religion and theological discussions, we identified 207 speeches from Senators and federal deputies who are members of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (*Frente Parlamentar Evangélica*, henceforth EPF) that mention Israel, Christians, evangelicals, abortion, Christian persecution, and missions in Africa. Second, we gathered 1,992 speeches from Jair Bolsonaro and Ernesto Araújo/Carlos França (Brazil's Ministers of Foreign Affairs) on foreign affairs for the same period. We found 206 speeches that mention these same issues. Finally, we analyse multiple official documents from foreign and domestic evangelical associations, as well as documentation from churches that openly demanded a 'Christian foreign policy' for Brazil.

The paper is divided into three parts. First, we discuss the literature on evangelicals and international relations. Second, we discuss the theological views of Brazilian evangelicals on foreign policy and the rise of Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's first openly pro-Christian president. Third, we analyse the four issues using content analysis and anecdotal evidence. Finally, we conclude with remarks about an 'evangelical foreign policy model'.

## Evangelicals and foreign policy

Religion has always been an overlooked dimension of world politics. Religion is rarely included in international relations studies, and when it is addressed, it is usually as a subcategory of some topic that is considered more important (Sandal and Fox 2013, 2–5; Kubalkova 2000, 682–683). The same indifference could be seen in the subfield of foreign policy analysis until recently. Scholars could admit only rational explanations as truly academic knowledge. Religion was only one of the items, alongside culture or identity, that could render knowledgeable arguments but rarely took centrality in explanations (Warner and Walker 2011).

In the last 20 years, the scenario has changed. International relations scholars have begun to devote greater attention to the role of religion in international affairs, acknowledging the growing importance of religious actors in international politics (Toft et al. 2011), debating the implicit secularism within the discipline (Hurd 2008) and reflecting on the adequacy of traditional theoretical and analytical frameworks (Snyder 2011). Also, in the last few decades, studies on the role of religion in foreign policymaking started involving more cases of specific countries such as Turkey (Jung 2012; Bilgin 2008) and, more profusely, the United States (Amstutz 2013; Berggren and Rae 2006; Johnston 2011; Durham 2004).

In this context, the role played by evangelicals in world politics has become an interesting subject. Evangelicalism is a global religious movement (Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012) with roots in British and American eighteenth-century Protestantism (Bebbington 2005; Noll et al. 1994). But while in the beginning of the twentieth century a person identified with the evangelical faith would most probably reside in the United States, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the estimates are that the majority of those professing the evangelical faith are located in the Global South (Hutchinson and Wolffe 2012, chap. 8). Furthermore, evangelicals in developing countries are becoming more socially engaged and politically relevant, extending their influence beyond the national sphere (Offutt 2015).

The evangelical influence on day-to-day politics, in the Global South, has been widely discussed in the literature (Freston 2008; Ranger 2008). However, less attention has been devoted to analysing their influence in foreign policymaking. Even in the US, the emergence of evangelicals as a key factor in foreign policy was not, until recently, on the political and academic radar because its activities were conducted behind closed doors (Amstutz 2013; Berggren and era 2006; Marsden 2008). In this sense, the role played by evangelicals' complex worldviews and their concrete interests in foreign policy need to be understood more holistically. Moreover, the evangelical belief in global affairs is multi-themed and not restricted to single issues (Amstutz 2013, 15).

The specialised literature indicates several international topics are under evangelicals' political scrutiny. The most common ones are (1) the relationship with Israel (Marsden 2008, chap. 6, Rubin 2012; Amstutz 2013, chap. 6; Spector 2009); (2) global economic and social inequities (Croft 2009; Amstutz 2013, chap. 5; Rowe 2019); (3) the need to reform international institutions according to Christian values (Croft 2009; Buss and Herman 2003); (4) the evangelical missions in southern countries, especially in Latin America and Africa (Amstutz 2013, chap. 3); (5) the persecution of Christian minorities (McAlister 2019); (6) immigration (Rowe 2019); (7) the war on terror (Marsden 2008, chap. 7; Durham 2004); and (8) the broad theme of sexuality, which includes abortion, contraceptive methods, marriage, and LGBT+ rights (Buss and Herman 2003, chap. 6). Thus, any analysis on how evangelicals influence foreign policy should include many subjects and different theological beliefs to capture a more nuanced picture of their actions and intentions.

However, what does the concept 'evangelical' mean for a political analysis? Several terms refer to it, and they are not always interchangeable. Expressions such as 'Christian right', 'religious right', 'conservative evangelicals', or 'evangelicals' often appear when the topic is discussed. In fact, scholars often mention the complexity of defining the term evangelical, alluding to its diversity of theological, ecclesiastical, denominational, social and political views (Joustra 2019). Larson and Wilcox (2006) point out that the movement consists of many overlapping agendas, and it does not have a centralised organisation or spokesperson to represent them. In Latin America, it is common to conflate its meaning with that of Protestantism or even the Christian Right. There is a consensus that Protestantism and evangelicalism are synonymous in the region (Guadalupe and Carranza 2020; Cavalcanti 2002).

In this paper, we use the term 'evangelicals' in a broad sense to analyse Brazil's evangelical groups' narratives and actions in international affairs. Although there is an evident diversity among evangelicals, including multiple progressive groups, we use the term to capture different Christian groups in the Brazilian contemporary political context that share particular conservative worldviews in international politics. In addition, while evangelical support for conservative issues is widely considered a given in the United States, it is unclear whether

the same is true in other countries. As we argue, much of the evidence on how evangelical groups influence international affairs is predominantly based on the American experience, and this may not be generalisable to other countries and contexts, especially in the Global South.

## Evangelicals in Brazil

In the last 30–40 years, the emergence of the ‘next Christendom’ became clear among evangelicals in the Global South (Jenkins 2011). The numerical growth of churches in Brazil or South Korea is closely related to the US global evangelism that has promoted evangelisation missions to expand its influence worldwide (McAlister 2019). For Boas (2021), evangelicals in Brazil have grown from a small minority to become one of the most important constituencies, contributing significantly to the ‘inclusionary turn’. In addition, many new political actors that the political arena has incorporated in the last 30 years are evangelicals.

Brazilian evangelicalism shares many characteristics of American Protestantism, but it has evolved in a reasonably independent manner. Pentecostal missionaries from the United States and Europe arrived in Brazil at the beginning of the 1900s, but Pentecostalism was only consolidated through two recent waves: first, in the 1950s and 1960s, with the establishment of the Church of the Four-Square Gospel, Brazil for Christ and God is Love; and, second, in the 1970s, with the formation of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) and the International Church of the Grace of God (Freston 1995). This last wave has notably been characterised by an emphasis on the so-called ‘Prosperity Gospel’, which preaches that God will make believers prosper as a sign of divine favour and approval (McFarland 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Since the return to democracy in the mid-1980s, evangelicals have elected candidates across the country. Some specific churches, particularly Pentecostal ones, such as the Assemblies of God and the UCKG, successfully devised methods of promoting and centralising votes through a ‘corporative representation’ model that enabled the appointment of ‘official church candidates’ (Guadalupe and Carranza 2020, 63).

Brazil is a federal system composed by a multitude of political parties represented in two legislative bodies – the House and the Senate. As a result of a strong multiparty politics tradition, Brazil has more than 30 active political parties. Many of these parties, however, express their interests through political caucuses or fronts (for example, the EPF, the Agriculture Parliamentary Front, etc.). These fronts meet regularly to vote and act according to their interests. Various civil society groups and business associations with similar interests reach out to these politicians and their respective political fronts. As part of their lobbying efforts, they help to create and reinforce such issue-based agendas. The Brazilian lobby, however, is poorly regulated, and there are no laws controlling lobbyist activities in Congress, turning their relationship with the fronts into a shady area of Brazilian politics.

In this context, one of Brazil’s key evangelical political actors is the EPF. Created in 2003 with a handful of evangelical federal deputies to represent ‘family values’ in Brasília, the EPF has grown to 204 members in 2021 (196 federal deputies and eight senators). However, despite its supra-party character, bringing together parliamentarians from different evangelical denominations and political parties, the EPF has never been a cohesive body. Noting its high heterogeneity, Quadros and Madeira (2018) question whether there is any political cohesion among EPF members and whether they act as a group. Cassotta (2016, 97) argues

that although Congress internal rules 'compel EPF members to act as a team in defense of common issues, it does not facilitate law-making in favor of their views that need supermajorities to pass'. Nevertheless, no study as of yet has analysed EPF views in international affairs and a possible a cohesive position in foreign policy issues.

### **Brazil's first pan-Christian president**

Evidence showing that most evangelicals in Brazil lean towards political conservatism has been demonstrated by the massive support given by evangelical voters, leaders, and politicians to the far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The so-called evangelical vote was one of the key reasons behind his victory (Almeida 2019).

Although not declaring himself an evangelical, Bolsonaro began to approach religious and evangelical agendas in mid-2010, particularly during the Dilma Rousseff government where opposition to her government grew especially among evangelical groups. In 2016, Bolsonaro was baptised in the Jordan River by a Pentecostal pastor. The baptism helped him cultivate an image as the anti-establishment messiah, capable of saving Brazil from its endemic corruption. Considered an outsider of the political establishment, despite being a congressman for 27 years, Bolsonaro built a close relationship with the evangelical right in the preceding decades, forming a robust alliance against LGBT+, sexual and reproductive rights, and sexual education. For this movement, waging 'cultural wars' has become a dominant political platform (Almeida 2019).

In this context, Bolsonaro forged a coalition of conservatives, agribusiness, neoliberals, military and evangelical groups that dramatically changed Brazil's foreign policy. It was the first time that such conservative ideology had found explicit political expression in its foreign policy. However, following in the footsteps of his partner Donald Trump, Bolsonaro adopted typical far-right traits in Brazil's foreign policy (Guimarães and Silva 2021). In addition, his administration opted for a religious nationalism that elevated a pseudo-Christian ethnic-nationalist community over any other minorities in the country's foreign policy (Casarões and Farias 2021).

For instance, in front of an audience composed of evangelical leaders in 2019, Bolsonaro argued that Brazil's votes in the United Nations (UN) should follow the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Former foreign minister Ernesto Araújo (2019–2021) was an adamant defender of Christian values.<sup>4</sup> In deference to the evangelical caucus, Bolsonaro and Ernesto Araújo invited several EPF members on international trips. On one of these trips, Pastor and Federal Deputy Marco Feliciano, a strong supporter of Bolsonaro, emphasised that 'the evangelical church is missionary' and that 'internationalism is in its DNA'.<sup>5</sup> Bolsonaro's close relationship with evangelical leaders would become an essential aspect of Brazil's foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

### **The evangelical foreign policy model**

This section develops the argument of an 'evangelical foreign policy model'. We argue that such a model is built around four issues in which the narratives of cabinet members and evangelicals' groups converge: (1) the relationship with Israel, (2) persecution of Christian minorities, (3) the liberalisation of abortion at the UN, and (4) evangelical missions in Africa. We will show that the convergence influences foreign policy decision-making and implementation in the four key areas.

With Brazil as a case study, we first analyse each issue, looking at speeches made by four actors: the EPF, the National Congress (excluding EPF members), Jair Bolsonaro, and Foreign Affairs ministers Ernesto Araújo and Carlos França. Second, we look at anecdotal evidence – documents, news coverage, interviews and tweets – from multiple churches and religious leaders defending their theological views in foreign affairs.

Figure 1 shows 35,435 speeches gathered from January 2019 to July 2021, 9058 from the EPF, 2001 from the Executive, and the remainder from the National Congress (24,376). The data is also divided into four subjects.

This dataset was created using two methods. In the first, we extracted speeches from congressmen directly from the open data initiatives available on the websites of both the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and the Senate using web-scraping techniques, along with the usage of the Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) available in these referred websites.<sup>7</sup> The database available through these APIs offers a plethora of information about the federal legislative – speeches, meetings, budgets of federal projects – we selected all the speeches made by congressmen in the previously mentioned time frame. Once we created this subset of speeches, we filtered only the discourses related to our four subjects, dividing them by the actors of our interest. We used the APIs and filtered and treated texts with the support of the R programming language.

In the second methodology, we extracted content using mainly web-scraping techniques to gather discourses from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, news websites, and governmental websites other than the legislative site, creating a database of speeches made by Brazilian politicians. To compare speeches by different actors, we used an algorithm called Wordscores (Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003; Grimmer and Stewart 2013).<sup>8</sup> Wordscores treats speeches as a collection of data that have their political positions measured using as reference proper dictionaries linking words and phrases to specific ideological perspectives. When classifying such quantitative content methodologies, Grimmer and Stewart (2013), along with Izumi and Moreira (2018), identify Wordscores as a supervised ideological scaling method, considering the training set documents are guiding the analysis based on their ideological content. For example, we selected the most prominent pro- and anti-Israel discourses to create a training set necessary for the proximity analysis and compared it to each actor's speech set per subject. The above authors warn that when using reference documents to

<i>Themes</i>	Evangelical Parliamentary Front (EPF)	National Congress (excluding EPF members)	Executive
1. Israel	89	95	84
2. Religious persecution	41	218	78
3. Abortion	77	54	15
4. Missions in Africa	17	11	9
Total items mentioning subjects	207	367	215
<b>Total original database</b>	<b>9,058</b>	<b>24,376</b>	<b>2,001</b>

Figure 1. Speeches data.

define liberal and conservative discourses, the remaining documents that are analysed (test set) will be strongly attached to the dictionary created from the training set. With this caveat in mind, we present the samples that constitute the training set for each topic analysed in this article (Figures 2–5).

Actors	sample number	ideological position
Filipe Martins (Bolsonaro's IR special adviser)	2	pro-government
Evangelical Parliamentary Front	10	pro-government
Members of the National Congress (excluding EPF)	10	opposition

**Figure 2.** Training set - Israel.

Actors	sample number	ideological position
Filipe Martins (Bolsonaro's IR special adviser)	3	pro-government
Damaraes Alves (Minister of Human Rights and Family)	6	pro-government
Evangelical Parliamentary Front	8	pro-government
Members of the National Congress (excluding EPF)	14	opposition

**Figure 3.** Training set - religious persecution.

Actors	sample number	ideological position
Chris Tonietto (Federal Deputy pro-choice)	1	pro-government
Damaraes Alves (Minister of Human Rights and Family)	2	pro-government
Feminist parliamentary group	1	opposition

**Figure 4.** Training set - abortion.

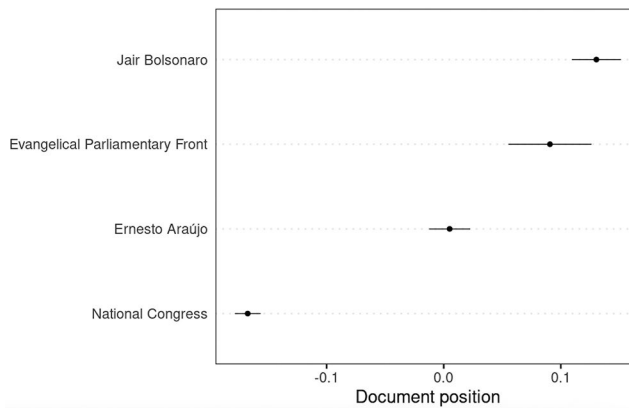
Actors	sample number	ideological position
Evangelical Parliamentary Front	3	pro-government
Members of the National Congress (excluding EPF)	3	opposition

**Figure 5.** Training set – missions in Africa.

## The relationship with Israel

In Figure 6, we applied the Israel training set to the Wordscore to analyse how close the EPF and executive's positions are in relation to the National Congress concerning the issue. For example, Jair Bolsonaro and the EPF have a reasonably similar pro-Israel position, while Ernesto Araújo is almost neutral. More importantly, the National Congress (excluding EPF members) tends to be more critical of Israel and position themselves on the opposite side.

The similarity between Jair Bolsonaro and EPF members is also supported by anecdotal evidence. In March of 2019, Bolsonaro changed Brazil's historical stance at the UNHRC, voting



**Figure 6.** Wordscores about Israel.

against Palestine and in favour of Israel.<sup>9</sup> The vote occurred a week before Bolsonaro's first visit to Israel. Then, the president announced that Brazil would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in clear deference to EPF members who had openly demanded the embassy move.<sup>10</sup>

However, Bolsonaro did not keep his promise in the light of Arab countries' opposition and, mainly, the domestic opposition brought by Brazilian rural producers, who exported large volumes of grain to the Arab countries, frustrating evangelical voters.<sup>11</sup> Brazil opted to inaugurate a business office in Jerusalem instead. Immediately afterwards, evangelical leaders such as Silas Malafaia argued that the business office was the first step towards the definitive embassy change, which would be gradually accomplished.<sup>12</sup> The religious leader kept pressuring Bolsonaro about the issue throughout the mandate. Finally, in December 2020, Bolsonaro gave an interview to Malafaia, establishing the year 2021 as the deadline to accomplish his electoral promise.<sup>13</sup>

In turn, EPF members would back Bolsonaro's decision in religious terms. Sóstenes Cavalcante, an EPF member, maintained that the motivation in changing the embassy 'is more based on faith principles, than political matters. Those who truly believe in the Bible, who blesses Israel, would receive the same blessings.'<sup>14</sup>

Despite the failed plan to move the embassy to Jerusalem, the country would keep a close relationship with Israel. In 2020, Donald Trump proposed the Peace to Prosperity plan, intended to be a realistic two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Brazilian diplomatic corps did not hesitate in showing support for the initiative. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs published official notes that the plan was considered a positive proposal for 'both Palestinian and Israeli aspirations.'<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, Brazil expressed support for Israel when the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation for war crimes allegedly perpetrated by the Israeli army in Palestinian territories. The ICC investigation was considered by Brazil 'a disservice to the cause of justice, which will undermine the prospect of a negotiated settlement to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.'<sup>16</sup> Gabi Ashkenazi, then Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, personally thanked Ernesto Araújo for the support.<sup>17</sup>

The similarity between evangelicals and Jair Bolsonaro's cabinet on the issue of Israel is not coincidental. Although there are various theologies influencing evangelical views on Israel, the three most widely accepted ones are replacement theology, covenantal theology

and premillennial dispensationalism. Despite having different approaches and emphases, they all agree that it is the duty of any true Christian to defend the right of Israel to exist so it can prepare for the return of Jesus Christ (Amstutz 2013, chap. 6).

In addition to theological orientations, some conservative evangelicals and many far-right politicians tend to have a stereotyped view of Jews called Philo-Semitism. Wieviorka (2018, 43) defines Philo-Semitism as ‘a love of non-Jews for a Judaism that is somewhat imaginary’. In the case of the far right, the imaginary Jew tends to be part of a stereotyped Judeo-Christian civilisation in which the White man is still dominant (Jews are perceived as White), erasing a millenary tradition of non-European Jews. Moreover, the far right sees Jews defending the Judeo-Christian civilisation against the ‘Muslim menace’ (Rose 2020). Although Bolsonaro has established a very close relationship with many Muslim-majority countries, his immigration policy towards Afghani people in 2021 was very clear: ‘The future of Afghanistan is of deep concern to us. We will grant humanitarian visas to Afghan Christians, women, children and judges’. Islamic Afghans males were deliberately excluded.<sup>18</sup>

### Religious persecution of Christian minorities

In a study of the Christian Right involvement in US Foreign Policy during George W. Bush’s government, Marsden mentions that ‘[g]iven that [Christianity] began with the torture and death of its founder it is perhaps unsurprising that persecution has continued to play a prominent role in the Christian psyche over the past two millennia’ (2008, 115). Religious freedom in Brazil was only guaranteed after the country became a republic in 1889, when separation of church and state was made official. For most of the twentieth century, evangelicals were just a tiny minority in Brazil’s religious landscape. Empathy with Christian minorities elsewhere and a concern for their religious freedom should come naturally for Brazilian evangelicals.

In Figure 7, we applied Wordscores to the religious persecution training set to analyse how close the EPF’s and executive’s positions are to that of the National Congress concerning

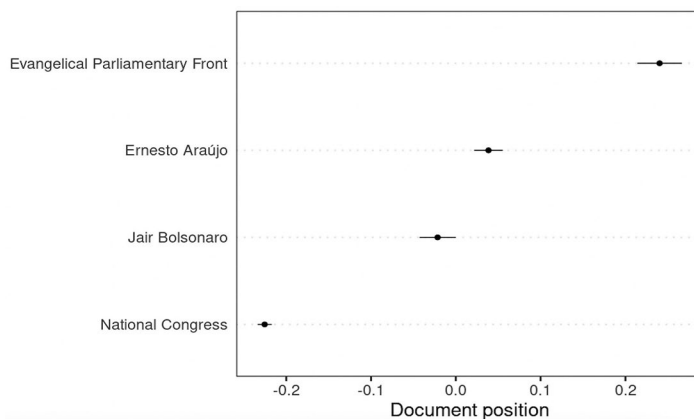


Figure 7. Wordscores about religious persecution.

the issue. We can see that EPF and Bolsonaro have different positions, although they seem to be very different from the rest of Congress.

However, although Bolsonaro and Araújo show a divergent position from that of the EPF members, the Brazilian diplomacy joined an international coalition to protect Christians against 'religious persecution', with the support of the Trump administration. In 2019, the Brazilian government officially participated in an event held in Budapest to discuss Christian persecution. The conference included, among others, official representatives from conservative governments such as Poland and the US. The Brazilian ambassador defended not only a policy against Christian persecution but also absolute freedom for conversion missions to those without religion.<sup>19</sup>

In 2020, Brazil, the US and more than 24 other countries founded the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA).<sup>20</sup> At the first IRFBA ministerial forum, Araújo was proud to have Brazil as a founding member. Furthermore, Araújo argued that 'Bolsonaro called upon the international community to protect the religious freedom and to combat Christophobia' and stated 'we will not turn our backs to the plight of Christians, by many accounts one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world'.<sup>21</sup> The minister also promised that Brazil would create a refugee centre specialising in assisting people persecuted for religious purposes and committed to hosting international religious meetings, including the IRF ministerial forum.<sup>22</sup>

During the opening speech at the UN General Assembly in 2020, Bolsonaro made direct references to an alleged wave of Christophobia. The speech received strong support from the National Association of Evangelical Jurists (ANAJURE), an association closely related to EPF members. For the association, more proactive measures were necessary on the issue, including creating a Brazilian 'Ambassador for International Religious Freedom'.<sup>23</sup>

In 2019, the Federal Deputy Elis Borges, then EPF president, gave a harsh speech criticising a series of attacks against Christians in Sri Lanka. He claimed 'It is not the first time that Christians are persecuted and attacked in that country, which already has a history of persecution of those who follow the Christian faith, and it is necessary to adopt measures to curb this repetition'.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to remember that 'Christophobia' is a traditional subject among far-right politicians and some evangelical denominations that goes back to a conspirational medievalism. It refers to a medieval past that portrays the 'threat' of Islam as a transhistorical condition of Christian civilisation (Millar and Lopez 2021, 5). In this sense, since the Geneva Declaration in the World Congress of Families in 1999, evangelicals (and the Christian right in general) are increasingly concerned with the persecution of Christians in non-Christian states. Multiple evangelical denominations produce volumes of self-selected evidence and advocacy materials of Christian oppression in Muslim states, much of it proving quite anti-Islamic in tone (Buss and Herman 2003, 90). Bolsonaro's administration and some EPF members have become fervent defenders of such conspirational views.

## Abortion

Evangelicals do not have a single position on abortion. In Brazil, some important religious leaders, for example bishop Edir Macedo, head of the UCKG, have shown liberal stances towards this topic (Machado 2014). A Pew Research survey (Pew Forum on Religious Public

Life 2006) in 2006 showed that 91% of Brazilian Pentecostals were morally against abortion, saying that it was never justified. However, 48% agreed that the government should not interfere with a woman's ability to have an abortion. Nonetheless, evangelicals in Congress have displayed a more clearly conservative attitude against abortion since the constituent assembly of 1988 (Melo 2022).

On this issue, we included domestic debates in the database due to the sheer magnitude of the discussion in Brazil. However, the Wordscores training set contains only speeches associating the discussion with the Brazilian foreign policy. When empirically analysing the speeches, it became virtually impossible to disentangle the domestic debates from the international implications of the conservative agenda on the issue.

In this context, Figure 8 reflect the divisions among those actors when approaching the matter. The National Congress (excluding EPF) had a slightly different perspective from the evangelical group and executive members. However, the differences were not that significant, because congresswomen from the EPF were coordinating with left-wing or centre-wing parliamentarians to approve bills related to women's rights. Naturally, such behaviour from EPF congresswomen should not be generalised.

On the other hand, executive members tended to apply a more symbolic anti-abortion perspective in their speeches. For example, Jair Bolsonaro in social media lamented when in December 2020, Argentina's senate approved a bill legalising abortion procedures in the country. At the same time, Ernesto Araújo was promoting speeches and lectures connecting the Brazilian diplomatic corps with the defence of 'family values' and a 'pro-life' stance, thus defending an anti-abortion agenda.

The Brazilian candidacy for a UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council) seat in 2019 was deeply related to the abortion issue. In the official document promoting its candidacy, Brasília affirmed that it was determined to 'defend the right to life and security of persons'.<sup>25</sup> Brazil was eventually elected to the 2020–2022 mandate, continuing its stand against the right to abortion.

In 2020, in a series of lectures at the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation, a research institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, key leaders of Brazil's conservatism promoted pro-life policies. Chris ToniETTO, a federal deputy linked to Minister Damares Alves and an EPF

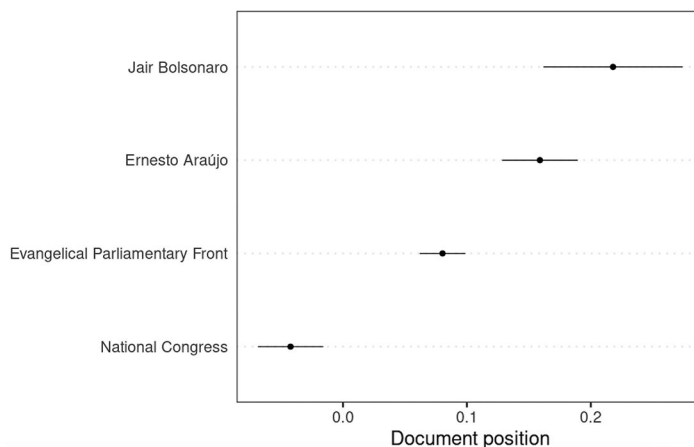


Figure 8. Wordscores about abortion.

member, presented a lecture entitled 'The Importance of Promoting International Pro-Life Policies'. Tonietto argued that pro-life policies were among the new directives for Brazil's foreign policy and according to Congress's dominant pro-life position.<sup>26</sup>

Damares Alves is a key leader in Brazil's anti-abortion international policy. In 2020, the minister was sent to Poland to participate in the Women's Rights Conference. The official press release stated that the Brazilian representative travelled to Poland after an invitation from the Ordo Iuris Institute, a private organisation recognised for promoting ultra-conservative projects worldwide.<sup>27</sup> It also states that the visit was an opportunity to discuss matters regarding family and women's values. Among other things, it emphasised that Brazil, Poland, Hungary and the United States were founding members of the Partnership for Families, a forum created by those countries to promote conservative principles, including anti-abortion perspectives. Finally, during Damares Alves's participation at a UNHRC virtual meeting in February 2021, Brazil 'remained firm in defense of democracy, freedom, family, and life from conception'.<sup>28</sup>

Brazil was also a key country for establishing the Geneva Consensus, an anti-abortion initiative similar to the Partnership for Families. In the official press release, Brazil stated that the Geneva Consensus was important to 'strengthen the role of the family to a prosperous and successful society and to emphasize the need to protect the right to life'.<sup>29</sup> During the virtual ceremony to sign the declaration, Ernesto Araújo argued that Brazil 'categorically rejects abortion as a family planning method, along with any initiative favoring or covertly insinuating an international law for abortion'.<sup>30</sup> Brazil became the initiative leader. After Biden's electoral victory, Valerie Huber, former secretary for the Trump administration and one of the Geneva Consensus creators, stated that those countries willing to become members should contact the Brazilian embassy in Washington for further instructions.<sup>31</sup>

ANAJURE would also show a similar position to the Brazilian government. The association maintained that the Brazilian Supreme Court took a biased stance, favouring an allegedly pro-abortion side. ANAJURE collected evidence from a Supreme Court publication called 'International Jurisprudence'. In their view, the Brazilian Supreme Court carefully selected international cases that reinforced a pro-abortion position to show a false narrative that such a perspective prevailed outside Brazil.<sup>32</sup>

Pro-life leaders in Congress would receive praise from Bolsonaro ministers. For example, Congressman Roberto de Lucena, an evangelical bishop, an EPF member, and president of the recently created Front for the Defense of Human Rights and Social Justice, repeatedly received support from Damares Alves. The bishop was very clear on his pro-life position, stating that 'this is our agenda. The life agenda. Life does not belong to the right or left-wing; it belongs to those who own it'.<sup>33</sup>

It is important to remember that US conservatives have since the early 1980s openly enacted policies against women's reproductive rights, with global implications. The Reagan administration approved the Mexico City Policy, also known by its opponents as the Global Gag Rule, which restricts Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in developing countries that receive United States Agency for International Development (USAID) family planning funding from engaging in most abortion-related activities. President George W. Bush provided reinforcement to another long-standing US policy, the Helms Amendment, that had already banned the use of US foreign aid funds for most abortion-related activities. President Trump not only reinstated the policy but significantly expanded it to encompass the vast majority of US bilateral global health assistance (McGovern et al. 2020). Evangelical groups

widely supported such initiatives.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, American evangelical pastors who repeatedly visited Brazil to advocate against women's reproductive rights were openly received and praised by local public officials.<sup>35</sup>

## Evangelical missions in Africa

In Christianity, the instruction given by Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations, as described in the gospel of Matthew, is known as the 'Great Commission'. It is at the core of the globalist characteristic of evangelicals, which 'remains a strong chord that resonates in every continent, including both the global north and among the growing population of Christians in the global south' (Rowe 2019, 36). The idea of international evangelism in Africa runs deep among evangelicals, especially in the United States. Imbued with a missionary sentiment and aware that the growth of evangelism depends on its expansion in the Global South, American missions in Africa number in the thousands (Amstutz 2013, chap. 3). Huliaras (2008) argues that the US foreign policy to Africa is greatly influenced by evangelical groups in their interest in expanding missions throughout the continent.

In Brazil, the growing interest among local evangelicals in the African continent, especially among UCKG leaders, is not different. Evangelical missions in Africa are probably the most critical issue for EPF members. One of the most prominent evangelical institutions in Brazil – UCKG – has been expanding its evangelical missions in African countries such as Angola and Mozambique since the 1980s, creating what some call a 'Brazilian Evangelical Empire' in Africa.<sup>36</sup> Freston (2005) argues that the evangelisation of Africa by UCKG is impressive because UCKG is from a developing country and not from the traditional West.<sup>37</sup>

In this sense, we analysed speeches mainly associated with the missionary work made by UCKG. The Wordscores reflect this difference in the speeches from both sides of our ideological scale. Figure 9 demonstrates that the EPF and National Congress are on different ideological sides, with one side (EPF) defending the UCKG (pro-missions). In contrast, the National Congress did not discuss the issue with the same level of concern. Nevertheless, the executive branch is on the same side as the National Congress. We speculate that since Bolsonaro and Araújo did not discuss the issue with the same level of intensity, they became closer to the position of the National Congress (excluding EPF).

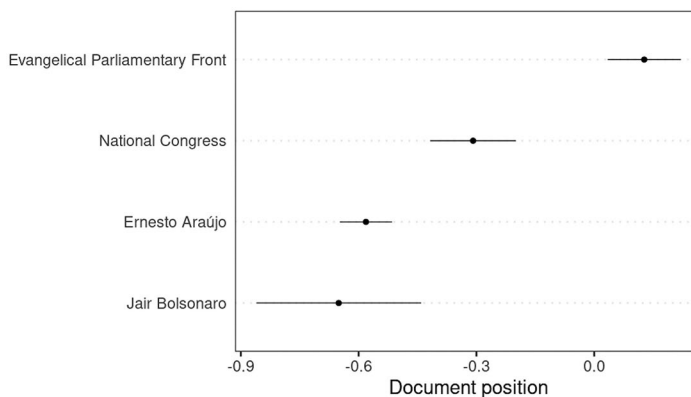


Figure 9. Wordscores about evangelical missions in Africa.

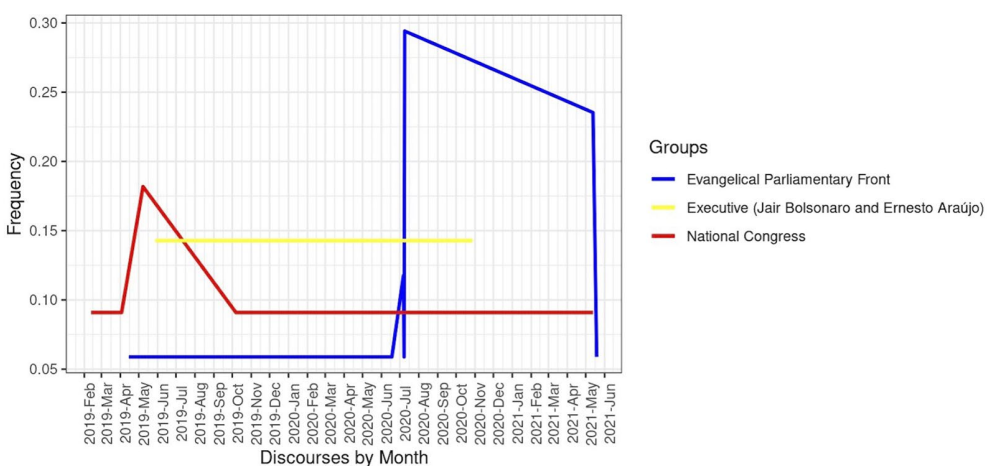
However, since the beginning of his administration, Bolsonaro has been under intense pressure from evangelical leaders to protect and expand Brazilian missions in Africa. As a result, Marcos Feliciano, a former missionary bishop in Angola during the 1990s, travelled with Ernesto Araújo and other politicians from Bolsonaro's political coalition to six African countries in 2019. Feliciano not only participated in the diplomatic discussions but also emphasised the importance of religious issues on the continent. The congressman stated that 'Africa is currently the place facing the biggest expansion of Christianity globally, which deserves my special attention'.<sup>38</sup>

As a demonstration of how critical the issue of missions in Africa is to EPF members, **Figure 10** shows a spike of speeches on the issue after evidence of UCKG corruption in Angola surfaced in early 2019. Local investigations accused UCKG of practising money laundering.<sup>39</sup> In May 2021, the UCKG situation in Angola became unsustainable. UCKG members were required to leave Angola after the local government denounced their involvement in corruption schemes. Carlos França immediately recalled the ambassador in Angola, demonstrating Brazil's disapproval.<sup>40</sup> The Committee on International Affairs of the Brazilian Senate, controlled by EPF members, called for the Angolan ambassador to explain the 'illegal deportation of Brazilian nationals'.<sup>41</sup>

Edir Macedo, leader of the UCKG, pressured Bolsonaro and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to officially interfere, threatening to break his alliance with the government in case nothing was done.<sup>42</sup> In May 2021, members of the EPF organised a meeting with Carlos França to make the same demands. As a result, it was established that França would set up a meeting between the Angolan government and EPF members.<sup>43</sup>

However, the Angolan government refused to receive EPF members. As an alternative, Bolsonaro sent the vice-president, Hamilton Mourão, in July, to an official meeting with João Lourenço, Angola's president. However, the visit was interpreted as interference in domestic politics.<sup>44</sup> Although unsuccessful in changing Angola's decision to expel UCKG, the pressure withstood by Bolsonaro demonstrated how influential the EPF lobby was on the issue.

Bolsonaro, amid this tense situation with the evangelical leaders, would try to ameliorate his relationship with the UCKG by nominating Marcelo Crivella, former mayor of Rio de



July-2020: Celebrations to 'Universal Church' foundation anniversary, Attacks against missionaries in Angola  
May-2021: Missionaries from the 'Universal Church' deported from Angola

**Figure 10.** Relative Frequency of Speeches - Evangelical Missions

Janeiro and a UCKG pastor, as the Brazilian ambassador to South Africa. Pretoria, however, never answered the Brazilian request, implying its refusal, which forced Bolsonaro to withdraw the name of his ally for the position.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusions

This paper proposed an evangelical foreign policy model to analyse the relationship between evangelical groups and conservative governments in foreign affairs. To illustrate this connection, we analysed thousands of speeches from evangelical parliamentarians and a conservative government in Brazil. By focusing on four issues critical to evangelicals, we found that conservative administrations and evangelicals converge in foreign affairs in terms of both narratives and material decisions. Although it is challenging to disentangle the line of causality—do evangelicals influence conservative governments or do conservative governments handpick evangelical issues for political and electoral support?—it is fair to argue that the level of convergence on issues like Israel or abortion indicates that evangelical politics is a core element of conservative international politics in Brazil.

We make three qualifications on the empirical findings. First, on the issues of Israel and religious persecution, there is a clear convergence between Bolsonaro's administration and the EPF. The anecdotal evidence also backs up the convergence. Second, on the issue of abortion, the picture is not so clear. Although Araújo and EPF seem to converge, Bolsonaro's positions are unclear or ambiguous. On the other hand, the anecdotal evidence seems to support the idea that the administration and evangelicals converge on the issue.

Third, the issue of missions in Africa shows a more complex and interesting scenario. The Wordscores analysis showed the executive on the opposite side of EPF. Only the anecdotal evidence seems to corroborate the idea that Bolsonaro's administration has similar views on the importance of evangelical missions in Africa. However, it might be that either Bolsonaro's government has not fully developed a cohesive narrative on the issue or pure political pressure from UCKG leaders forced the administration to take a proactive stance. Only further studies can pinpoint the line of causality more accurately. Nevertheless, the findings seem to point out that there is no total convergence between conservatives and evangelicals, but reasonably similar positions and worldviews.

Our contribution to the literature is fourfold. First, we contribute to the literature on how religion can affect international relations. We add evidence to the ongoing trend of showing how religious beliefs and narratives can affect or even structure foreign policies. In our case, we showed that a conservative government can turn official narratives into religious litanies by adopting evangelicals' discourses. Second, we show a fair amount of evidence about the influence of evangelicals in foreign policy, using an example from the Global South. Most studies on evangelism and foreign policy are centred in the North, particularly in the United States. Third, combining several evangelical issues into a single model produced a holistic view of how evangelical groups and conservative governments cooperate in foreign policymaking. The literature tends to analyse these issues separately, disregarding that evangelical groups might act on multiple issues simultaneously.

Finally, the fourth contribution is related to Brazilian politics *per se*. Our study indicates that evangelical groups represent a loose coalition of representatives and churches that actively work

to move Brazilian foreign policy in a pro-theological direction. We also show that evangelism in Brazil is not a single unified movement with a centralised leadership pushing its agenda in international affairs, but a massive and dispersive grassroots movement with tremendous electoral power that bends foreign policy in their favour. The literature on political evangelism in Brazil has yet to analyse these groups' initiatives in foreign affairs more thoroughly.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Notes

1. Toft et al. (2011, 9) define 'political theology' as 'the set of ideas that a religious community holds about political authority and justice'. In this paper, the term 'theological' is used in the same sense, to denote a series of beliefs that shape religious actors' political stances.
2. According to data from the Brazilian Census conducted in 2010, Pentecostals make up 60% of total evangelicals. Traditional protestant sects, established in the 1800s – also called Historic Protestant churches or Mission Churches (*Igrejas de Missão*) – account for 18.5%, and others (non-determined) 21.8%. Source: IBGE Population Census (2010).
3. Juliana Castro, "Bolsonaro diz que Brasil passou a votar na ONU seguindo a Bíblia," *O Globo*, April 11, 2019.
4. See the following articles by Ernesto Araújo: "Now We Do," *The New Criterion* (2019), 37 (5); and "Trump e o Ocidente," *Cadernos do IPRI* (2018), Issue 06, pp. 323–358.
5. Eliane Oliveira, "Governo deixa religião guiar política externa sob argumento de que Brasil é 'país cristão,'" *O Globo*, February 16, 2020.
6. The Bolsonaro administration was composed of various groups with different ideological strands. In terms of those closer to the evangelical groups, there was an important political faction that followed the teachings of the ultra-conservative thinker Olavo de Carvalho – including Filipe Martins, Ernesto Araujo and Eduardo Bolsonaro. Many of them were evangelicals, such as the minister Damara Alves who had close contact with Ernesto Araújo, a Christian conservative. There were also those who supported the return to monarchy, such as Luiz Philippe de Orleans e Bragança and Carla Zambeli. However, it is interesting to note that such groups, despite having ideological differences, tended to have a fruitful political relationship amongst themselves. Eduardo Bolsonaro, for example, belonged to multiple groups. In other words, although we

- observed clear political differences among them, there were significant similarities in their foreign policy narratives, especially when it comes to defending Christian values.
7. The APIs containing the speeches from Brazilian congressmen and other information about the federal legislative can be found at <https://dadosabertos.camara.leg.br/swagger/api.html> and <https://legis.senado.leg.br/dadosabertos/docs/ui/index.html>
  8. Wordscores is a technique created by Laver, Benoit, and Garry (2003) as a computational alternative to traditional text analysis using hand-coding.
  9. Thaís Chaves, “Bolsonaro vota contra palestinos na onu e fere tradição diplomática,” *Carta Capital*, March 22, 2019.
  10. Jeffrey Heller, “Bolsonaro inicia visita a Israel com decisão pendente sobre embaixada,” *Reuters*, March 31, 2019.
  11. To mitigate this clash between Bolsonaro’s ideologically pro-Israel position and rural producers who wanted to preserve favourable relations with Arab countries, in April 2019, Minister of Agriculture Tereza Cristina held a dinner with 55 members from different Arab states in Brasília. Tereza Cristina thus signaled to Muslim states and producers that Bolsonaro’s ideological stance was less extreme than his visit to Israel appeared to be. However, she also indicated to the Brazilian government the need for a more careful stance in relation to Jerusalem and the Arab countries.
  12. Julia Carneiro, “Malafaia garante que Bolsonaro mudará embaixada em Israel: ‘Vai ter que ser macho, e acho que ele é,’” *BBC Brasil*, April 1, 2019.
  13. Talita Fernandes, “Bolsonaro afirma que transferirá embaixada para Jerusalém até 2021,” *Folha de São Paulo*, February 3, 2020.
  14. Mariana Schreiber, “Como o apoio evangélico ajudou a aproximar Israel e governo Bolsonaro,” *BBC Brasil*, January 9, 2019.
  15. Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Trump’s Peace to Prosperity Plan to solve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict,” January 31, 2020, <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/president-trump-s-peace-to-prosperity-plan-to-solve-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>
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  18. Guga Chacra, “Bolsonaro não quer dar visto a muçulmanos perseguidos pelo Talibã,” *O Globo*, September 9, 2021.
  19. Jamil Chade, “Itamaraty contraria Constituição e prega religião como política de Estado,” *UOL*, November 28, 2019.
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  22. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Address by Minister Ernesto Araújo at the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministers’ Forum,” November 17, 2020, <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/content-centers/speeches-articles-and-interviews/minister-of-foreign-affairs/speeches/intervention-by-minister-ernesto-araujo-at-the-international-religious-freedom-or-belief-alliance-ministers2019-forum-2013-17-11-2020>
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