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Touched by the Holy Spirit: The
Pentecostalization of Venezuela and the
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Jensen Michael Grant

TOUCHED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE PENTECOSTALIZATION OF
VENEZUELA AND THE 1998 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Timothy J. Steigenga, and has been approved by the members of her/his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the fact that when surveyed 92.4% of the Venezuelan population self identified as Catholic, a large swath of Venezuelans stand Pentecostalized. Pentecostalization in Venezuela seems to take the form of growth in the Catholic Charismatic Movement. The study shows Chávez gained a majority of those whose self identified affiliation is evangelical as well as a majority of those who hold Pentecostal beliefs. The relationship between religion and voting patterns in the 1998 Venezuelan Presidential case has not been explored. The study does this, concluding that although Venezuela is by and large Pentecostalized, a desire in political and governmental change was the most salient reasons for Venezuelans when they voted for President in 1998.

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As the millennium draws to a close, scholars of religion are no longer asking if Latin America is turning Protestant, or even why. Instead, the current debate swirls around the long-term implications that religious change holds for the region.¹

-Virginia Garrard-Burnett, 1998

Part I: Venezuela & the 1998 Election

Introduction

On December 6, 1998, Hugo Chávez became the man who would lead Venezuela into the 21st century with the vote of 56.2% of the Venezuelan electorate.² Significantly for scholars of religion and politics in Latin America, the country's evangelical minority voted overwhelmingly - to the tune of 63.0% - for Hugo Chávez, according to the Consultores 21 survey.³ This figure, and others distilled from the survey, raise several questions worthy of scholarly attention. Why did evangelicals, a group "casual observer[s] might reasonably expect . . . [to be] conservative," vote so convincingly for a populist, former-coup leader?⁴ What does this mean for the ongoing debate about the political impact of evangelical growth in Latin America? Will evangelicals in Latin America act as catalysts for

¹ Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Transnational Protestantism," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 3., Autumn (1998): 117.

² Harold Trinkunas and Jennifer McCoy, "Observation of the 1998 Venezuelan Elections: A Report of the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government [on-line]," *Special Report Series: The Carter Center*, available from <http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1151.pdf>: 49.

³ The survey used throughout this study is the January 1999 Consultores 21 Poll. The statistic of Evangelical voters is taken from this survey.

⁴ David Smilde, "Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Elections," p. 82.

“democratic and capitalist values” or will they simply reinforce “existing corporatist or authoritarian political structures?”⁵

This paper will follow the advice of scholar David Smilde, who points out the “the absolute necessity of studying evangelical politics empirically, *in context*.”⁶ Using survey data collected after the election of Chávez in December 1998, this study will explore the relationship between religious variables and voting patterns. In particular, this paper explores the specific relationship between religious affiliation and votes for Chávez. At least in the Venezuelan case, religious affiliation is found to have little effect on political feeling and voting patterns. Moving beyond religious affiliation, the study also examines the relationship between religious beliefs, specifically Pentecostal ones, and votes for Chávez. In the end, neither religious affiliation nor religious belief is found to be significant in explaining votes for Chávez in the 1998 Presidential election. Though there is a clear correlation between Pentecostal beliefs and votes for Chávez, what truly caused Venezuelans to vote for Chávez in 1998 were political desires.

The gradual spread of Protestantism and its subgenre of Pentecostalization is well documented in the literature on religion and politics in Latin America. Pentecostalism is seen as a more charismatic and puritanical form of Christianity, and its political impacts have long been

⁵ Timothy Steigenga, *The Politics of the Spirit: The Political Implications of Pentecostalized Religion in Costa Rica and Guatemala* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 1-2.

⁶ David Smilde, “Popular Publics: Street Protest and Plaza Preachers in Caracas,” *IRSH* 49, Supplement (2004): 76.

suspected to be conservative in nature, a reflection of its seemingly conservative religiosity. Venezuela will be situated as a case where Pentecostalism is making a quiet coup d'état. The exploration of religious beliefs in Venezuelan society leads to one of this study's most important conclusions: despite being almost exclusively Catholic by affiliation, Venezuelans are largely Pentecostalized. This includes the substantial percentage of the population which can be categorized as Charismatic Catholics, as their beliefs and practices are substantially similar to Pentecostals.⁷ Thus, describing Venezuela as a Catholic country is only true insofar as religious affiliation is concerned.

Towards the end, the study analyzes the ramifications of the above relationships for the study of religion and politics in Venezuela, and for elsewhere in Latin America. What the numbers of the January Consultores 21 poll illustrate is a Venezuelan religious population that overwhelmingly voted for a leader who has shown himself a populist.⁸ That Chávez was involved with, and actually led, a coup attempt in 1992 did not seem to matter to the majority of the Christians of Venezuela, who elected him.

Today, as Latin America is experiencing what might be called a

⁷ Kenneth R. Samples, "What Think Ye of Rome?: An Evangelical Appraisal of Contemporary Catholicism" *The Christian Research Institute* [on-line]; available from <http://www.equip.org/free/DC170-1.htm>; Internet; accesses 27 April 2006: 5. In the article Samples called Charismatic Catholics "evangelical Catholics," and notes them for having a "Pentecostal piety."

⁸ See Richard Gott, *In the Shadow of the Liberator: Hugo Chávez and the Transformation of Venezuela* (London: Verso, 2000), Alma Guillermoprieto, "Venezuela According to Chávez," *National Geographic* (April 2006). The article in the latter details Chávez's attempts to appeal to the popular masses through land distribution and his own weekly television show when he fields calls, sometimes for hours, from Venezuelan citizens.

populist revival, with leftist or anti-neoliberal candidates winning elections in Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, and elsewhere, what are the implications of the evangelical vote for Chávez? Are the “Pentecostalized” in Latin America a potential pool of supporters for a new wave of populist leaders? If so, the conventional wisdom linking the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America to political conservatism will be fundamentally discredited, paving the way for further empirical research into the specific connections between religious variables and political attitudes in the region.

Why Latin America and Why Venezuela?

Venezuela is commonly thought of as a stronghold of Latin American Catholicism. Colonized exclusively by the Spaniards since the late 16th century, the Catholic tradition in Venezuela runs nearly half a millennium. And the strength of the tradition shows: fully 92.4% of Venezuelans self-identify as Catholic, according to the January 1999 Consultores 21 poll. But as Brian H. Smith points out in his study *Religious Politics in Latin America: Pentecostal vs. Catholic*, times may be changing. By the early 1990s fully 11% of Latin Americans identified themselves as Protestants.⁹ And as David Stoll points out, even of those who identify as Catholic few are active in the Catholic Church.¹⁰ Venezuela is coming to mirror this trend. Per the Consultores 21 Survey in January 1999, as of the late 1990s,

⁹ The term “Protestant” is more of a Euro-American term. In Latin America, Protestants are often labeled “Evangelicos” or Evangelicals. The terms will be used interchangeably throughout the study, both meaning the same: a Non-Catholic Christian.

¹⁰ Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 2.

5.2% of the Venezuelan population self identified as Protestant. The population is clearly small as of the turn of the 21st century, but the history of the rest of Latin America's experience with Protestantism illustrates why Protestantism and its Pentecostal subtype are worth studying in Venezuela. The number of Protestants in Latin America has been changing for decades now, and the assumption that Latin America always has been and always will be Catholic is in jeopardy. By 1993, Chile, Guatemala, Brazil, and El Salvador already had populations which were more than 20% Protestant.¹¹ By 1990, the effects of this growth were evident in the ascension of two Protestant heads of state in Guatemala: Efraín Ríos Montt in 1982 and Jorge Serrano Elías in 1990.¹²

Protestantism has thus made huge strides throughout Latin America as well as Venezuela. But as pointed out above, Venezuela still remains a Catholic stronghold. It has resisted the overt large scale Protestant incursions which made inroads in other Latin American countries. A study by Anne Motley Hallum in 1993 ranked Venezuela 13th out of 17 as to its percentage of Protestants, fourth from last.¹³ Another scholar, Phillip Berryman, in his book *Religion in the Megacity: Catholic and Protestant Portraits from Latin America* points out that Protestant churches are

¹¹ Anne Motley Hallum, "Looking for Hope in Central America," in *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, The Few, and The Many*, eds. Ted Gerard Jelen and Clyde Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 226.

¹² Steigenga, *The Politics of the Spirit: The Political Implications of Pentecostalized Religion in Costa Rica and Guatemala*, 1.

¹³ Hallum, "Looking for Hope in Central America," 225. It is interesting to note the percentage of Protestants in Venezuela at this time is the same as the percentage found in the January 1999 *Consultores* poll: 5.3%.

relatively new in Venezuela, going back only twenty years or so, and that the history of the Protestant movement in the country goes back only some fifty years.¹⁴

Yet, it is precisely because Venezuela stands as one of the most Catholic countries in Latin America that it warrants study. If Pentecostalism is found to have made inroads there, the importance of evangelical and Pentecostal religions can logically be posited as quite large throughout Latin America. Year 2003 statistics and estimates for the number of Protestants place it 4th to last in Latin America; Colombia, Paraguay, and Uruguay are the only countries with fewer.¹⁵ Though the Catholic Church lost some power to the state after the rise of the Punto Fijo democracy in 1958, it continued to grow “substantially during [the 20th] century.”¹⁶ In Daniel Levine’s early 90s study of Catholicism in Venezuela and Colombia, as early as 1980 Venezuela had more Catholic parishes per persons despite the latter being nearly 25% larger in land mass.¹⁷

This study also examines Venezuela because the Protestant influence goes beyond pure numbers and religious identification, and beyond the strength of the institutional church. Affiliations can only capture so much of the story. The same is true for statistical indicators of the strength of the

¹⁴ Phillip Berryman, *Religion in the Megacity: Catholic and Protestant Portraits from Latin America* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 107-8.

¹⁵ Providence College, *Catholic Church in Latin America* [on-line]; available from <http://www.providence.edu/las/Statistics.htm>; Internet; accessed 27 April 2006.

¹⁶ Daniel Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 66.

¹⁷ Levine, 67.

church. Despite the fact the country almost exclusively identifies as Catholic according to the January Consultores 21 survey, Pentecostal beliefs and practices have made huge inroads. Several measures point out the average Venezuelan today, even if he or she self-identifies as Catholic, is what Liliana Goldin and Brent Metz call a “hidden convert” to Protestantism. In their study on *Invisible Converts to Protestantism in Highland Guatemala*, the authors point out a “significant proportion of self-identified Catholics have essentially converted to Protestantism, if not formally, then ideologically.”¹⁸ What this study exposes in Venezuela may well be what Goldin and Metz found in the Guatemalan highlands. To that end, this paper aims to contribute to the evolving study of Protestant and Pentecostal beliefs and their influence on politics by studying the relationship between Pentecostalized beliefs and the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998.

A Pentecostalized Catholicism

It is important to keep in mind Pentecostal beliefs may not always manifest themselves under a Protestant banner. The Catholic Charismatic Movement within the Catholic Church is regarded, as Michael I. Harrison points out, a “Catholic Pentecostalism” which receives its support from “college students, middle class adults, and clergy.”¹⁹ In his article for the Christian Research Institute, Kenneth R. Samples discusses Charismatic

¹⁸ Liliana R. Goldin and Brent Metz, “Invisible Converts to Protestantism in Highland Guatemala” *Ethnology* 30 (1991): 74.

¹⁹ Michael I. Harrison, “Sources of Recruitment to Catholic Pentecostalism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March (1974): 49.

Catholics as a part of the Catholic Church, yet calls them “evangelical Catholics.”²⁰ Samples speaks to the growth of the Catholic Charismatic Movement worldwide, which began some twenty-five years ago in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Today, Samples notes Charismatic Catholicism “remains one of the most energetic forces in the Catholic church” with members worldwide numbering as many as sixty-five million.²¹ Speaking to the close ecumenical link between Charismatic Catholics and Pentecostals, Samples points out “Catholics now make up more than one-fifth of the worldwide Pentecostal-Charismatic constituency.”²² Charismatic Catholics “tend to be more evangelical in belief” than their average Catholic brethren.²³ Further speaking to the similarity of the two, scholar R. Andrew Chesnut of the University of Houston has even written to the competitive nature of Charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostalism, seeing the former as a response to the latter.²⁴ Thus, with Venezuela being largely Catholic by affiliation, yet Pentecostalized by other measures (as this study will bear out) we should expect to find a significant degree of Pentecostalized behavior and beliefs among the Catholic population of Venezuela in the form of Charismatic Catholicism.

²⁰ Samples, 4.

²¹ Samples, 5.

²² Samples, 5.

²³ Samples, 5.

²⁴ R. Andrew Chesnut, “Opting for the Spirit in Latin America: The Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a Response to Pentecostal Competition,” *The University of Notre Dame* [online]; available from <http://www.nd.edu/~kellogg/pdfs/chesnut.pdf>; Internet; accessed 22 April 2006.

The 1998 Presidential Election²⁵

There is little doubt Chávez brought something new to the table in his campaign for President. This study bears out his disdain for the “traditional political parties and the old corrupt political regime” clearly resonated with voters; his promise of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution was simply an outgrowth of this general feeling.²⁶ There was equally little doubt Venezuela’s population desired political change: as McCoy points out “the standard bearers of the country’s two powerful and deeply rooted political parties . . . won only 3 percent of the total presidential vote.”²⁷ And indeed, if we discount the two traditionally powerful parties’ last minute switch to the second place finisher Salas Romer, their percentage is even less.

Chávez’s campaign began predictably: he expanded his network and connections in political circles once he was released from Yare prison. He was in touch with *La Causa R* as well as the *Movimiento al Socialismo*, and was laying the groundwork for his own *Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement*, which was to blossom into his *Movimiento Quinta Republica*, or the *Fifth Republic Movement*.²⁸ Chávez’s support began to snowball with the dawn of 1998; the other parties meanwhile, experienced varying degrees of implosion. COPEI, one of the two original founders of the Punto Fijo democracy which ruled Venezuela semi-democratically for forty years,

²⁵ See Gott, 143-49, for a succinct treatment of Chávez’s road to political power after his release from prison for the attempted coup in 1992.

²⁶ Jennifer L. McCoy, “Demystifying Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez,” *Current History* February (2000): 66.

²⁷ McCoy, 67.

²⁸ Gott, 143-44.

found itself backing a former beauty queen whose support in the polls dropped to near zero in the few months before the election.²⁹ COPEI then transferred its support to the second place candidate at the time, Henrique Salas Romer. Acción Democrática, or AD, found itself in a similar position. After dropping its support for the unpopular Luís Alfaro Ucero, the party jumped on with COPEI and Salas Romer at the last minute yet still failed to capture the Presidency. Venezuela's pacted Punto Fijo democracy lay in shambles.³⁰

David Smilde's data on evangelicals and the Venezuelan Presidential election of 1998 indicates evangelicals preferred Chávez more than twice as much as the candidate they preferred after him.³¹ Though evangelicals based their distaste for Chávez for the same reasons as non-evangelicals – “his totalitarian tendencies and his violent past” – they supported him by and large for his religious rhetoric.³² Smilde points out that a Bible verse, Jeremiah 5:21, became Chávez's most popular campaign slogan: “El que tenga ojos, que vea. El que tenga oídos, que oiga (Let he who has eyes see.

²⁹ COPEI is commonly known as Venezuela's Christian Democratic party. Literally its name is Comité de Organización Electoral Independiente, or the Independent Electoral Organization Committee.

³⁰ See Appendix 1 for a table of vote totals by percentage

³¹ David Smilde, “Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Election,” *Latin American Politics & Society*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring (1999): 83. Note evangelicals supported Chávez in Smilde's qualitative interview based study 41.4% of the time. The next favorite on Evangelicals' list was Salas Romer, and he garnered only 16.1%.

³² Smilde, “Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Election,” 83.

Let he who has ears hear).”³³ The usage of Bible verses resonated with the country’s evangelicals, who saw in Chávez’s usage of holy scripture evidence God himself “was working on Chávez or planned to work through him.”³⁴ If Chávez’s usage of Christianity during the campaign resonated with the majority of evangelicals, as the Consultores 21 poll numbers bear out, it is likely it also resonated with the large numbers of Venezuelan Catholics who practice some form of Pentecostalized religion.

Part II: Religion & Religious Change in Latin America & Venezuela

The Change to Protestantism: Latin America & Venezuela

At first glance, it appears as though religion played a significant role in the election of Chávez in 1998. But the question still remains as to why Latin America, and by extension Venezuela, has seemingly changed sides in the centuries old Christian schism between Protestantism and Catholicism. Why is, as David Stoll asks, *Latin America Turning Protestant?*

As Brian H. Smith points out, there are many reasons Latin America is turning Protestant: external forces, such as missionary activity, shifts and changes in Latin America itself, the “failure of Catholicism,” and the vitality of Pentecostalism.³⁵ These have all undoubtedly contributed to the shift away from Catholicism. One could also hypothesize the Catholic Church was able to harness many of these soon to be Protestants in the

³³ Smilde, “Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Election,” 84.

³⁴ Smilde, “Contradiction Without Paradox: Evangelical Political Culture in the 1998 Venezuelan Election,” 84.

³⁵ Brian H. Smith, *Religious Politics in Latin America: Pentecostal vs. Catholic* (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 3.

1960s and 1970s, when the church was swept up in the socially and politically active Liberation Theology, possibly delaying the shifts for a couple of decades.³⁶ The papacy of John Paul II however, marked a conservative turn away from Liberation Theology. As Smith points out Pope John Paul II shifted the church's emphasis from social and political matters and activism to more spiritual concerns.³⁷

In Latin America, there is also something to be said for the difficulty of maintaining a faith as institutionalized as the Catholic Church. What may be occurring is what Carol Ann Drogus points out is the “increasingly problematic [struggle] to control [the] faith” in institutional churches.³⁸ Drogus points out the literature in this area singles out the Catholic Church, as an institutional church, “will find it increasingly problematic to control [the] faith and thus to promote or act upon any unified vision of . . . change.”³⁹ While speaking to the difficulty of maintaining homogeneity amongst members of a particular affiliation, Drogus also points out “personal religious faith remains vibrant and politically salient for Latin Americans” and thus for Venezuelans as well.⁴⁰ The findings of the January

³⁶ See Steigenga, 31 for a counterpoint. Catholicism is often said to be overextended in Latin America, where it isn't uncommon for Catholics to not receive communion from a Priest for long lengths of time. As noted one can conjecture Liberation theology largely prevented massive flight from Catholicism. In his book however, Steigenga notes the very essence of Liberation Theology “also opened opportunities for religious competition from evangelical Protestant groups.”

³⁷ Smith, 12.

³⁸ Carol Ann Drogus, “The Rise and Decline of Liberation Theology: Churches, Faith, and Political Changes in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 27, No. 4, July (1995): 466.

³⁹ Drogus, 466.

⁴⁰ Drogus, 466.

1999 Consultores 21 survey bear out religious belief was correlated with voting outcomes for the 1998 Venezuelan Presidential election.

Meanwhile, specifically in Venezuela, Protestantism has its own unique manner of propagation. In his study of social networks in Caracas, David Smilde points out the success of evangelicalism in Venezuela spreading not just as a tool for resolving life problems but through social networks. Smilde argues the spread of evangelicalism can occur “simply [when one] lived with an evangelical.” Hence, evangelicalism is adapting itself and spreading through what Smilde terms “meaning networks.”⁴¹

Defining Protestantism & Pentecostalism

For the purpose of this paper, evangelical is any non-Catholic Christian; the category is thus a broad one. Pentecostals meanwhile are a specific subgenre of evangelicals. Several factors distinguish Pentecostals from their Protestant brethren: “a dramatic personal conversion experience . . . entire sanctification (a kind of freedom from sin . . .) and, empowerment through the Holy Spirit” through speaking in tongues or similar Charismatic actions.⁴² More importantly for this study, as Steigenga points out, their most defining characteristic is “their concern with the second coming of Christ” seeing the current state of the world being the one the Bible describes as the time of tribulation with “war, poverty, corruption [and]

⁴¹ David Smilde, “Meaning Networks in Conversion to Venezuelan Evangelicalism: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis,” *University of Michigan* [on-line]; 2-3; available from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mmarteen/svs/lasa03/smilde.pdf>; Internet; accessed 27 April 2006: 2-3.

⁴² Steigenga, 8.

natural disasters.”⁴³ Furthermore, Pentecostalism is often fundamentalist, as is the bulk of Latin American Protestantism. Fundamentalism can take the simple form of “attention to the religious fundamentals” but may also include “legalistic morality and an exclusionary emotionalism.”⁴⁴ Thus Pentecostals can be identified through their ascription to variables such as biblical literalism. Neopentecostalism, a subgroup of Pentecostalism, ascribes to a prosperity theology, believing “health and wealth come only to those who obey God.”⁴⁵ And finally, Protestants in Latin America, as well as Pentecostals to a larger extent, are religiously charismatic. Steigenga found in his study of Guatemala and Costa Rica the majority of the measures testing for Charismaticism had been experienced by over 85% of the Pentecostal population, and over 75% of Protestants, including religious experiences of miracle cures, being tempted by the devil, and personal conversions.⁴⁶ Hence the close ecumenical relationship between Pentecostalism and Catholic Charismaticism; in this study the two are treated as but two manifestations of the same religious ideology: Pentecostalism.

Four variables, measured in the Consultores 21 January 1999 survey, will be used to test the level of Pentecostalizacion of the Venezuelan

⁴³ Steigenga, 8.

⁴⁴ Steigenga, 9.

⁴⁵ Steigenga, 9.

⁴⁶ Steigenga, 45. It is interesting to note, in light of the findings of this study, measures of Charismaticism were also held by the majority of Catholics in Steigenga’s study, except for speaking in tongues, which never topped 57.8% for any of the religious affiliations including Pentecostals.

citizenry. They include: millennialism, biblical literalism, prosperity theology, and Charismaticism (as measured by a personal experience with God). All four found support amongst large percentages of the Venezuelan population. Before proceeding with analysis of religious belief, however, the role of religious affiliation in the Chávez election will be explored.⁴⁷

Part III: Religious Affiliations in Venezuelan Society

Religious Affiliation in Venezuelan Society

According to the Consultores 21 survey, religious affiliation in Venezuela today breaks down as follows: practicing Catholics, non-practicing Catholics, and evangelicals, make up 33.6%, 58.8%, and 5.2% of the population, respectively (See Table 1.1). Christians thus make up a total of 97.6% of the Venezuelan population.

Table 1.1 Venezuela: Religious Affiliation⁴⁸

	Frequency	Percent
Practicing Catholic	486	33.6
Non-Practicing Catholic	851	58.8
Evangelical	75	5.2
None	35	2.4
Total	1447	100.0

N=1447, System Missing=53

An examination of these religious affiliations should be seen in light of Daniel Levine’s argument that religious forces in Latin America are not

⁴⁷ For the language of the questions pertaining to religion which were utilized from the Consultores 21 survey in January 1999, see Appendix II.

⁴⁸ Data taken from the January 1999 Consultores 21 Survey, the same used throughout this study. “Other” and “No Answer” were marked System Missing for purposes of this data.

ossified and archaic but dynamic and pertinent to contemporary studies of the region.⁴⁹ Thus affiliation does not tell the whole picture. The picture of religion in Latin America and Venezuela in particular is necessarily complex. Steigenga, in his study on Costa Rica and Guatemala, found religious beliefs to be much more significant than religious affiliations with respect to political implications.⁵⁰ And indeed, as will be illustrated in the next section, religious affiliation in Venezuela does not necessarily correlate with true religious belief. Its power as an explanatory variable is thereby reduced.

Religious Affiliation & Voting

Clearly, Chávez was able to garner a significant amount of the “religious” vote in the 1998 Venezuelan presidential elections, though in a country that is over 97% Christian by self-identification, this fact is not particularly illuminating. What is surprising is that as a populist, Chávez was able to garner votes from those whose votes would be presumed as conservative. The common assumption would go roughly like this: it is common sense that religious people, as social conservatives (i.e. self identified Catholics and other Christians) *vote* conservative. The same line of logic would surmise for Pentecostals, whose religious views are more fundamentalist and conservative, and would thus be more politically conservative than their Catholic and other Protestant brethren. Following

⁴⁹ Levine, 22

⁵⁰ Steigenga, 92.

this logic would mean the vast majority of Venezuelan citizenry would have voted for one of the other Presidential candidates, such as Henrique Salas Romer, whose party had represented the Venezuelan status quo for decades. Recall that Salas Romer received last minute support from the two traditionally powerful political parties of Venezuela, AD and COPEI, the founders of the Punto Fijo democracy which ruled over Venezuela for forty years until Chávez was elected. However, what appears to have happened, according to the Consultores 21 survey from January 1999, are high levels of support for Chávez across all the religious affiliations. Though evangelicals supported him the least, their level of support - to the tune of 63.0% - indicates the common assumption of pairing religious conservatism with political conservatism is far from an “iron rule.”

The Consultores 21 survey for January 1999 shows fully 65.9% of practicing Catholics, 74.5% of non-practicing Catholics and 63.0% of evangelicals voted for Chávez (see Table 1.2). Less surprisingly, the January 99 poll shows Chávez gained 68% of the “none,” category, the no religion category. Most importantly, what seems to have occurred during the election is exactly what we would *not* expect to happen: Chávez garnered a significant majority of those who were most likely to be socially and politically conservative, the practicing Catholics and evangelicals.

Table 1.2 Religious Affiliation & Voting: Percentage of Each Religious Affiliation Voting For Candidates⁵¹

	Hugo Chávez	Henrique Salas Romer	Other ⁵²
Practicing Catholic	65.9%	22.0%	12.1%
Non-Practicing Catholic	74.5%	16.9%	8.6%
Evangelical	63.0%	17.4%	19.6%
None	68.0%	24.0%	8%

N=1074, P>.05

Obviously, the survey figures do not match perfectly with the election results; we know Chávez gained only 56.2% of the vote in reality, yet the data analysis for the January 1999 survey shows over 70% of Venezuelans saying they voted for him.⁵³ Issues of bandwagoning aside, the statistics indicate there is a statistically significant relationship between religious affiliation and voting. That is not to say there is necessarily a directional causation, one way or the other, between religious affiliation and voting patterns. At least in the Venezuelan context, the evidence for the related nature of religious affiliation and voting patterns is strong.

⁵¹ Interestingly, 4.3% of evangelicals noted they had a “null vote,” meaning in some way they nullified their ballot, perhaps in protest. This is the highest of any religious affiliation: practicing Catholics had 1.6%, non-practicing Catholics had .3%, and no affiliation had 0%. The 4.3% percentage is included in the 19.6% who votes were counted in this study as “other.” The 19.6% also included 2.2% of those who voted for Luis Alfaro Ucero, and 4.3% for Irene Saez, the former Miss Universe.

⁵² Includes both those logged “no answer” and “don’t know.”

⁵³ See Richard F. Carter, “Bandwagon and Sandbagging Effects: Some Measures of Dissonance Reduction,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer (1959). Carter argues persons may find advantages or incentives in saying they voted a way differently than they actually did.

Reviewing the Evidence: Religious Affiliation

The conventional wisdom would assume both Catholics and Protestants would not be voting for Chávez in high numbers. Pentecostals would be considered the least likely to vote for Chávez because they stand as the most religiously conservative. But the cursory examination has revealed robust religious support for Hugo Chávez. What is important to keep in mind, even in light of the inflated vote totals for Chávez, to be able to say one voted for him indicates one well *could* have voted for him. What we may be seeing in these results is what Timothy Steigenga posited: the link between Protestants and political conservatism “must certainly be revised.”⁵⁴ The results thus far point to another testable idea: that all of these citizens in Venezuela, of whatever religious or non-religious stripe, have something in common. Something besides religious affiliation is uniting Venezuelans of whatever religious and non-religious stripe to support Hugo Chávez. This study will now explore the variable of religious belief, hypothesizing it is the variable behind the widespread support for Chávez in the 1998 Presidential elections, and keeping in mind what Steigenga noted as the widespread acceptance of “charismatic and religiously conservative [read: Pentecostal] characteristics” across religious affiliations.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Steigenga, 142.

⁵⁵ Steigenga, 44. Recall Steigenga’s study took place in Guatemala and Costa Rica.

Part IV: Religious Beliefs in Venezuelan Society

Pentecostal Beliefs in Venezuelan Society

The overwhelming support for Chávez across religious affiliation indicates the population shares more common ground than their disparate affiliations let on. How else to explain support for a populist across Christian groups, from Catholics to Pentecostals? The study will next investigate the relationship between religious belief and the election of Hugo Chávez.

Questions asked in the Consultores 21 Survey of January 1999, the month after the 1998 Presidential election, indicate widespread acceptance of Pentecostal beliefs despite only five percent of the population self-identifying as members of evangelical churches (to say nothing of the amount that are Pentecostal, which would be even less). There were four questions about Pentecostal beliefs, with three out of four being ordinal variables coded from one to four. Table 1.3 below shows the frequency of those in the population who agreed with the belief or had experienced what the belief measure asked. As the table shows, in sequential order starting from number one, 71.8%, 89.9%, 88.8% and 28.3% ascribed to each indicator of Pentecostal belief, respectively. Taking the frequencies of the first three, and dividing the number of respondents who agreed with *all* three indicators of Pentecostal belief, more than 32% of the population agreed either “very much” or “somewhat” with three out of the four indicators of Pentecostal belief, more than six times the amount of

evangelicals in the population.⁵⁶ Individually, these percentages run from roughly six to almost nine times the percentage of the population which identifies itself as evangelical. Recall each of these first three indicators ran on an ordinal scale from one to four, where one was “very much agree” and four was “very much disagree”, while the last indicator, number 4, was either yes or no and coded one or two, respectively.⁵⁷

Table 1.3 Frequency of Pentecostal Beliefs in Venezuelan Survey Population

	Percentage of Population Agreeing/Having Experienced
#1: There are Many Signs of the End Times	71.8%
#2: The Bible is the Literal Word of God	89.9%
#3: God Gives Health and Well-Being to Those that Do His Will	88.8%
#4: Have you Experienced the Sensation of the Holy Spirit	28.3%

#1N=1327, #2N=1387, #3N=1407, #4N=1418

Clearly, there seem to be many “closet” Pentecostals and evangelicals. Note that question four was scored only “yes” or “no.” A data point of “one” meant the respondent had experienced the sensation of being touched by the Holy Spirit (yes), while “two” meant the respondent had not (no). Over 28% of respondents indicated they had experienced the sensation of being

⁵⁶ The respondents, or N value, to each of these three indicators varied, as shown under the table. To be safe I used the measure out of the three, indicator three, which had the highest N. This gives me the lowest possible percentage but is also subject to the least amount of manipulation. Recall the fourth measure cannot be included because it only has two options, yes or no, and would skew the percentage heavily.

⁵⁷ The variable was recoded for purposes of the regression to 0 for “no” and 1 for “yes” to prevent any statistical problems. For purposes of percentage however, it does not matter.

touched by the Holy Spirit. Though the indicator has the lowest level of support amongst the surveyed population, the number still indicates the pervasiveness of Pentecostalized beliefs. As a Pentecostal belief, the idea should occupy the same percentage of the population that identifies as Pentecostal, which is even less than 5% (as not all evangelicals identify as Pentecostals). Thus, even by the weakest measure, at least five times more of the population than one would think are Pentecostalized.

What the percentage in support of having experienced the sensation of the Holy Spirit shows is the development of a Catholic Charismatic Movement in Venezuela. The Pentecostalization of Venezuela, shown by the high percentages of support for Pentecostal beliefs, can take the form of growth in Catholic Charismatic beliefs. Believing one has been touched by the Holy Spirit is one such belief.

Believers in Hiding

It appears as though key “Pentecostalized” beliefs run deep in Venezuelan society. With the statistics on this idea so strong, it is only logical to then posit a significant portion of Venezuelan Catholics, whom make up 92.4% of the population, stand Pentecostalized. The question then becomes: to what extent are Venezuela’s *Catholics* Pentecostalized? Before going through each of the four measures of Pentecostal beliefs by religious affiliation, a brief visit of the mean score data for three out of the four measures of Pentecostalism will be discussed. The numbers hint that as we delve deeper into the data, we are likely to see significant Pentecostalization

of Venezuelan Catholics. It seems probable the data will bear out more Pentecostalization amongst non-practicing Catholics, as logic dictates they would be more susceptible to conversion due to their lesser religious intensity and their weaker attachment to the institutional church.

A one-way ANOVA test was run on the mean scores for each of the first three measures of Pentecostalism.⁵⁸ Within the test, the three measures were made the dependant variables, while the independent variable remained religious affiliation.

Table 1.4 Mean Score of Four Measures of Pentecostal Belief

	Catholic	Non-Practicing Catholic	Evangelical	Non-Affiliated
There are many signs of the end times	1.96* (2.01)**	2.08* (2.01)**	1.36* (2.01)**	2.62* (2.01)**
The Bible is Inspired by God	1.5* (1.60)**	1.66* (1.60)**	1.23* (1.60)**	2.29* (1.60)**
God Gives Health and Well-Being to Those that Do His Will	1.43* (1.59)**	1.68* (1.59)**	1.23* (1.59)**	2.07* (1.59)**

*: p=.000

** : The *mean* mean score for all those who answered the question, regardless of religious affiliation

As table 1.3 shows, the null hypothesis can safely be rejected; the differences between the mean scores are statistically significant. Note the means for all Catholic, non-practicing Catholic, and Evangelical lie

⁵⁸ Because the fourth measure, the one for Charismaticism, is either “yes” or “no,” an ANOVA test cannot be run on it.

decidedly on the agree side of the scale. The sole exception is non-practicing Catholics' belief in millennialism, which still lies far closer to "somewhat agree" than "somewhat disagree." What is interesting in Table 1.4 is the Pentecostalization of practicing Catholics, which according to these three measures surpasses that of non-practicing Catholics. Now the study will turn to a look at each measure of Pentecostalization as it relates to religious affiliation.

Pentecostal Measure #1 by Religious Affiliation:

Table 1.5 Religious Affiliation & Pentecostal Measure #1: There Are Signs of the End Times

	Very Much Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Very Much Disagree
Practicing Catholic	45.6%	27.1%	13.6%	13.8%
Non-Practicing Catholic	34.6%	35.3%	17.6%	12.5%
Evangelical	76.7%	15.1%	4.1%	4.1%
None	12.2%	41.4%	3.4%	37.9%

N=1297, P>.001, Chi-Square=81.322, df=9

The numbers in table 1.5 further support the Pentecostal incognito hypothesis: both practicing and non-practicing Catholics largely agree with the Pentecostal assertion that Jesus is returning soon. Fully 72.7% of practicing Catholics, and 69.9% of non-practicing Catholics believe that there are signs of the end times and that Jesus Christ will return soon. Quite expectedly, over 90% of evangelicals feel this way. The hypothesis that non-practicing Catholics will be more Pentecostalized is thus far incorrect;

at least for this first measure of Pentecostalism. What the larger support amongst practicing Catholics could show is the inroads of Charismatic Catholicism. As discussed above, the movement would tend to manifest as Pentecostal beliefs within Catholic affiliated circles. What truly points to the Pentecostalization of Venezuelan society however, is the fact that fully 58.6% of respondents who claim to have *no* religious affiliation agree with this measure. If the majority of those who do not have a religious affiliation agree with this Pentecostal-Christian assertion, the reach of Pentecostalism in Venezuela has grown long indeed.

Pentecostal Measure #2 by Religious Affiliation:

Table 1.6 Religious Affiliation & Pentecostal Measure #2: The Bible as the Literal Word of God

	Very Much Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Very Much Disagree
Practicing Catholic	61.1%	30.4%	5.9%	2.6%
Non-Practicing Catholic	48.1%	41.1%	6.9%	3.8%
Evangelical	82.2%	13.7%	2.7%	1.4%
None	35.5%	29.0%	6.5%	29.0%

N=1347, P>.001, Chi-Square=98.174, df=9

The second measure of Pentecostal feeling, shown above in table 1.6, confirms what the first measure first exemplified: Pentecostal beliefs run deep in Venezuela, even amongst Catholics and those who claim no religious affiliation. The trend of practicing Catholics surpassing non-practicing Catholics continues, though here not by much: fully 91.5% of

practicing Catholics and 89.2% of non-practicing Catholics either “very much agree” or “somewhat agree” with the Pentecostal belief that the Bible is the literal word of God and should be taken word for word. The statistics for this measure of Pentecostalism are nothing short of astounding; nearly all Catholics agree with this assertion. As with the first measure however, again the respondents who claim to have no religious affiliation are the most surprising: 64.5% of them agree that the Bible is the literal word of God, a percentage which is extremely high seeing as they should *in theory* put no stock in the book. Nearly 96% of evangelicals, meanwhile, agree with this assertion, much in line with what one would expect to find.

Pentecostal Measure #3 by Religious Affiliation:

Measure number three, shown below in table 1.7, continues to confirm the Pentecostalization of Venezuelan society. The numbers bear out the predominantly Neopentecostal character of Venezuelan Pentecostalization. Insofar as practicing Catholics, 92.8% of them at least “somewhat agree” with the Neopentecostal belief that God gives health and well-being to those that do his will. For non-practicing Catholics, the number stands at 87.1%, keeping the current trend: non-practicing Catholics seem just slightly less Pentecostalized than practicing Catholics. As surmised in the first indicator of Pentecostal belief, this is likely because of the inroads Charismatic Catholicism is making in the Venezuelan Catholic Church. Evangelicals again show numbers one would expect; these are after all measures of their very own beliefs. Fully 93.2% of them agree with the

assertion God gives good health and well-being to those that do his will.

Table 1.7 Religious Affiliation & Pentecostal Measure #3: God Giving Health & Well-Being

	Very Much Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Very Much Disagree
Practicing Catholic	67.4%	25.4%	3.8%	3.4%
Non-Practicing Catholic	50.4%	36.7%	7.0%	5.8%
Evangelical	87.7%	5.5%	2.7%	4.1%
None	41.4%	31.0%	6.9%	20.7%

N=1366, P>.001, Chi-Square=79.410. df=9

As with the previous three questions, what is the most surprising is the extent of Pentecostalization of those without a religious affiliation: 72.4% of those without a religious affiliation believe the fourth measure of Pentecostal feeling. This measure, together with the previous two, indicates those without religious affiliation may be lapsed Pentecostals; that is, people who have belonged to a Pentecostal church but are now between churches. The data is saying something important about the seemingly non-religious in Venezuela: while they may declare no religious affiliation they are certainly not non-religious. Hence the percentage of the population which is Christian may be even higher than the survey numbers indicated.

Pentecostal Measure #4 by Religious Affiliation:

Table 1.8 Religious Affiliation & Pentecostal Measure #4: Sensation of the Holy Spirit

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Answer
Practicing Catholic	34.6%	59.5%	4.7%	1.2%
Non-Practicing Catholic	19.0%	76.9%	4.0%	.1%
Evangelical	68.0%	29.3%	1.3%	1.3%
None	20.0%	71.4%	8.6%	0.0%

N=1447, P>.001, Chi-Square=120.960, df=9

The fourth and final measure of Pentecostalism, shown above in table 1.8, brings home the extent of Pentecostalization of Venezuelan society. The other three measures are indeed measures of Pentecostal sentiment; but the fourth and final measure is most identified with Charismaticism. And with the vast majority of Venezuelans self identifying as Catholic, this is where we would expect to see the most Pentecostalization. Practicing Catholics said they had been touched by the Holy Spirit to the tune of 34.6%; 19% of non-practicing Catholics felt they had. Expectedly, 68% of evangelicals answered in the affirmative. Again, most surprisingly, fully 20% of those without a religious affiliation, of any stripe Christian or otherwise, felt they had been touched by the Holy Spirit. What is happening with respect to the “non-religious” is what occurred with the first three; it now stands very likely these persons are simply Pentecostals or Protestants in transition. Once more the Pentecostalization of Venezuelan society becomes readily apparent.

Pentecostalization of Venezuelan Society

A few notable findings can now be summarized from the data on religious affiliation and Pentecostal beliefs. First off, practicing Catholics in Venezuela are the most Pentecostalized. Though they do not surpass by much their non-practicing Catholic brethren, they still do so each time. This is likely due to the inroads the Catholic Charismatic Movement is making in the Venezuelan Catholic Church. Secondly, the extent persons in the no religion category held Pentecostal beliefs was surprising. Though the situation with the no religious affiliation category seems to defy basic logic, it also seems to confirm the extent of Pentecostalization in Venezuelan society. The no religious affiliation category in Venezuela seems to be composed by and large with persons in transition from one form of Christianity to another. To that end, the data on Pentecostal beliefs confirms Venezuelan society is by and large Pentecostalized.

The ramifications for Venezuelan society are great indeed. With the extent to which Pentecostal beliefs are held even by Catholics, the political impact of Pentecostalism needs to be addressed with empirical data. How did this play into the election of Chávez in 1998? The study will now turn to the correlation between Pentecostal beliefs and voting for Chávez. We now know asking whether or not religious affiliation affects voting is simply not the right question. With the pervasiveness of Pentecostal beliefs in Venezuela now established, this study will test the hypothesis that there is a link between these beliefs and Chávez's election in 1998.

Part V: Regression Analysis of the 1998 Presidential Election

Pentecostalism in Venezuelan society is pervasive. Self-identified religious affiliation is shown to be an inadequate measure of religious feeling; practicing Catholics, as well as non-practicing Catholics, hold Pentecostal beliefs. Now the study will move forward and analyze the relationship between Pentecostal beliefs, amongst other variables, and voting patterns. To test the impact of key variables on support for Chávez, the model only accounts for votes for Hugo Chávez and “other,” a category which includes any candidate one could have voted for besides Chávez. A series of variables were put into the regression model to attempt to explain the voting patterns for the 1998 Presidential election in Venezuela per the Consultores 21 survey of January 1999. The first variable inserted measured Charismaticism: whether or not a surveyed participant had experienced the sensation of being touched by the Holy Spirit. This measure is included to measure Pentecostal feeling in the Venezuelan population. In Venezuela this is probably the most potent indicator of Pentecostalized Christianity, considering the vast majority of the population identifies as Catholic, and in light of the high support Pentecostal beliefs received amongst the practicing Catholic population there. Next, religious affiliation was inserted. The regression was only concerned with the small percentage of the population whom identified as evangelical. With large swaths of Venezuela now shown as Pentecostalized with the earlier data, the

study will try to ascertain the political bends of those who should be most affiliated with these Pentecostal beliefs.

The affiliation measure together with the measure for Charismatic belief constitutes the attempt to explain the relationship between evangelical religion and voting patterns in Venezuelan society. Including any more measures of religious belief could have created a case of statistical overlap, wherein multiple variables are explaining much the same thing and consequently *hindering* the efficacy of the model. After all, each of Pentecostal beliefs were held by large swaths of the population. The next three variables are three indicators of political feeling: the appointment of a constituent assembly, punishing corrupt politicians, and the hope of bettering one's personal and familial economic position.

Table 1.9 Regression Model for Venezuelan Presidential Election

	Unstandardized B	Unstandardized Std. Error	T	Significance (p)
Touched by the Holy Spirit	-.041	.119	-.348	.729
Evangelical Religious Affiliation	-.013	.115	-.114	.910
To Appoint a Constituent Assembly	.254	.044	5.751	.000
To Punish Corrupt Politicians	.091	.065	1.389	.172
To see If My Personal and Familial Economic Condition Improves	-.094	.071	-1.318	.194
Monthly Familial Income	.005	.025	.196	.846
Social Class	.084	.053	1.566	.124

$r^2 = .504$

These variables are testing a widespread belief in the academic literature on Chávez's ascension to power as a rebuff of traditional Venezuelan politics. The last two, monthly income and social class, are standard variables one would assume would have some impact on votes in any given election.

Several notable points arise out of the table. First, as suspected evangelical religious affiliation has little to no efficacy as a predictor of voting patterns. The measure for evangelical religious affiliation is

negatively correlated with votes for Chávez. The measure for religious belief, in the form of one's answer to a Charismatic belief question, turns out a little stronger, but still far from what could be seen as statistically significant. The B value indicates the negative relationship between votes for Chávez and one claiming they have been touched by the Holy Spirit. Thus, although evangelicalism is negatively associated with votes for Chávez, it explains very little of voting patterns. Pentecostalized religious belief is also negatively related, but neither it nor religious affiliation contribute to a usable predictive model.

The three indicators of political feeling illustrate the centrality of political dispositions in determining voting patterns for the Presidential election in 1998. One of the three indicators was significant at higher than the $p = .001$ level, while the other two were still strong predictors of votes but not enough to be considered significant. These three variables are thus better indicators of voting patterns in the 1998 Presidential election than the religious indicators. The positive B measures for the appointment of a constituent assembly and punishing corrupt politicians indicate the positive relationship between increasing importance of this measure and votes for Chávez. That is to say, the more one feels a constituent assembly should be appointed and/or corrupt politicians should be punished, the more likely one is to vote for Chávez. The variable for economic improvement presents as somewhat of an anomaly. The negative B value indicates as the importance of improving one's economic situation rises, votes for Chávez fall. Official

election results in Appendix I bear out of course that Chávez gained a majority of the votes. What this measure would seem to indicate then is support for Chávez across economic strata. This lines up with the significance of the constituent assembly measure. Above all it would seem Venezuelans desired a political change, even to the point that the some of the upper class voted against its interests. As it turns out then, desire for political change is the strongest and most salient reason for explaining Chávez's rise in the 1998 Presidential election. As Patricia Márquez, an anthropologist who works in Caracas *barrios* and shanty towns, said, "most [of the popular class's] reasons for supporting Hugo Chávez revolved around the idea of change."⁵⁹ The middle class and some of the upper class, it would seem, also followed suit.

The final two variables are familial income and social class. As with the variable for desire of economic betterment, these two measures seem to present as anomalies. The positive B values for both indicate as social class and familial income rose, so do votes for Chávez. Though the correlation is there, neither measure turns out to be significant. Thus they are not significant predictors of votes in the 1998 Presidential election. Again here, as with the variable on economic betterment, there is an odd correlation, but almost no explanatory power.

⁵⁹ Patricia Márquez, "The Hugo Chávez Phenomenon: What Do "the People" Think?" in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 197.

Thus, political change was the most important explanatory variable by far of votes for Chávez. The three measures of political feeling were first, third and fourth in order of significance. The first and most powerful of the model (the desire for a constituent assembly) is the ultimate measure of a desire for political change. Appointing a constituent assembly would involve a complete reworking and restructuring of the government. Evangelical religion turned out to be negatively correlated with votes for Chávez, but neither affiliation nor belief holds anything close to significant power as explanatory/predictive variables for votes in the 1998 election. And indeed across all the variables except for the appointment of a constituent assembly this is the case. Though the regression model did reveal some seemingly odd correlations, including the positive correlations between votes for Chávez and increases in social class and familial income, as well as the negative correlation between votes for Chávez and an increasing desire for economic betterment, all this does is illustrate the saliency of the desire for political change. And indeed, though these three variables may have had counterintuitive correlations, none are significant as predictive/explanatory variables on the surveyed population for the 1998 Presidential election. Thus we can still be confident in the model, even if Chávez seems to have received less support amongst the poor than one would at first posit. There may indeed be a relatively simple explanation for the lowered support amongst the country's poor. Recall from the regression model the negative correlation between evangelical religious

affiliation and belief and votes for Chávez. With evangelical Protestantism in Latin American being what Steigenga called “a movement primarily of the poor in a region plagued by poverty,” we can then deduce the poor voted less for Chávez than we would at first think precisely because they account for the vast majority of those who are Pentecostalized.⁶⁰

Part VI: Conclusions

Venezuela remains a largely Catholic country at least by affiliation. The vast majority of Venezuelans, some 92.4%, self identify as Catholic according to the January 1999 Consultores 21 survey. Evangelicals still account for only a small percentage comparatively: 5.2%. What is happening in Venezuela is what Timothy Steigenga observed in Costa Rica and Guatemala in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Pentecostal beliefs are held by large swaths of the population. In Venezuela, this seems to take the form of growth in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, as Pentecostal beliefs are held more by practicing Catholics than non-practicing Catholics. To call Venezuela a Catholic country today is only half true. It is true in the sense that its citizens by and large consider themselves Catholic. That is to say, Venezuela is largely Catholic by affiliation. However, when probed about their religious beliefs, they are decidedly Pentecostalized, including the category who would identify as Charismatic Catholics.

Looking to religious beliefs and the election data, there are clear majorities in Venezuela which both ascribed to a given indicator of

⁶⁰ Steigenga, p. 2.

Pentecostal feeling and voted for Hugo Chávez in 1998. Yet as a predictive model, religion, in terms of affiliation and belief, turns out to be an insignificant predictor of voting patterns. A “yes” answer to whether or not one had experienced the touch of the Holy Spirit is indeed negatively associated with voting for Chávez, but not at a level of significance that makes it a useful predictor.

Political indicators turned out to be the most powerful indicators and predictors of voting patterns in the 1998 Venezuelan Presidential election. Specifically, voters clearly factored in their desire for a constituent assembly together with their desire to punish corrupt politicians. These findings support the conventional wisdom on the ascension of Hugo Chávez. The Punto Fijo democracy was increasingly discredited by corruption in its ranks, as well as the onset of neoliberal economic reforms which badly shocked the economy and skyrocketed unemployment.⁶¹ The regression model, with the correlation between higher social and economic class and votes for Chávez, may indicate these economic shocks affected more than just the popular class in Venezuela. These positive correlations, together with the negative correlations for evangelical religious beliefs and votes for Chávez, indicate support for Chávez was more widespread across economic

⁶¹ See Daniel Hellinger, “Political Overview: The Breakdown of Puntofijismo and the Rise of Chavismo,” in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict*, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003): 27-53. The article is a good summary of the breakdown of the Punto Fijo democracy which preceded Chávez.

strata than most assume. Above all, Venezuelans wanted a governmental change.

The inefficacy of religion as a predictive/explanatory variable in voting patterns in the 1998 Presidential election however, does not change the main argument of the study: Venezuela is no longer hallowed ground for Catholicism, or in the very least the traditional Catholicism seen in Latin America. As the quotation which opened this paper noted, the evangelicalization of Latin America is a foregone conclusion. It will certainly have both successes and failures, as well as its own bends politically. In Venezuela, because of the high amount of the population that ascribes to Pentecostal beliefs, it is not clear if this group endorses the politics of populism seen enacted under the Presidency of Hugo Chávez. The clearest finding of this study however, is that in 1998, all Venezuelans, regardless of religious affiliation and religious beliefs, and even often ignoring their own social and/or economic interests, desired a change in their government. This is what drove them more than anything else to elect Hugo Chávez in 1998 by a comfortable majority. Though many individuals with Pentecostal beliefs voted for Chávez, it is clear from the regression model this is not *why* they voted for Chávez in 1998. A large portion of Venezuelan society stands Pentecostalized. But their religious beliefs did not stand in the way of their greater desire for change in the 1998 Presidential election.

For Latin America as a whole the picture is more unclear. At the risk of being curt, religion remains important as a political variable, but it does not seem to be the primary force driving electoral results. What one can take from the Venezuelan case in 1998 is the fluidity of religious belief. Despite the conservative nature of the teachings of Pentecostal churches, Pentecostalized Venezuelans surveyed in the 1999 Consultores survey voted for a populist in Hugo Chávez. Though religion remains salient, the old fashioned desire of political change and economic betterment drove Chávez to victory. As the revolt against neoliberalism spreads across the region, these desires will likely remain far more important to the voting patterns of Latin Americans than religious affiliation or beliefs.

Appendix I: Official Vote Totals for Venezuela's 1998 Election

	Percentage of Vote
Hugo Chávez	56.20
Henrique Salas Romer	39.97
Irene Sáez	2.82
Luis Alfaro Uceró	.42
Miguel Rodríguez	.30

Source: CNE Venezuelan Election Results, found in Trinkunas, Harold and Jennifer McCoy. "Observation of 1998 Venezuelan Elections: A Report of the Freely Elected Heads of Government."

Appendix II: Language of Survey Questions

Following are the questions as they appeared on the original survey from January 1999. They were originally in Spanish, but I have provided English translations for convenience.

Religious affiliation:

Spanish: “Cambiando de tema, de las siguientes afiliaciones religiosas cuál es la que mejor describe su religión?”

English Translation: “Changing the topic, which of the following religious affiliations best describes your religion?”

Measures of Pentecostalism:

The first three measures were all preceded by a brief paragraph explaining the question and providing an example. Respondents were then asked to agree “very much” or “somewhat”, disagree “very much” or “somewhat,” or were given the option to no answer or to say they “didn’t know.” The paragraph preceding the four questions was:

“Ahora le voy a leer una serie de afirmaciones y me gustaría que para cada una de ellas usted me dijera si está muy de acuerdo, algo de acuerdo, algo en desacuerdo, totalmente en desacuerdo o no sabe. Por ejemplo, ¿Está usted muy de acuerdo, algo de acuerdo, algo en desacuerdo o totalmente en desacuerdo con la afirmación “Hay muchas señales de los “últimos tiempos: que nos indican que Jesús viene pronto.”

#1/Millennialism:

Spanish: “Hay muchas señales de los “últimos tiempos” que nos indican que

Jesús viene pronto.”

English Translation: “There are many times of the “end times” and this tells us that Jesus is coming soon.”

#2/Biblical Literalism

Spanish: “La Biblia está inspirada por Dios y debe ser aceptada literalmente, palabra por palabra.”

English Translation: “The Bible is inspired by God and should be accepted literally, word for word.”

#3/Neopentecostalism

Spanish: “Dios de salud y bienestar a quienes hacen su voluntad.”

English Translation: “God gives health and well-being to those who do his will.”

#4/Charismaticism

Spanish: “¿Usted ha experimentado la sensación de haber sido tocado por el Espíritu Santo o, por el contrario, no ha experimentado esta sensación?”

English Translation: “Have you experienced the sensation of being touched by the Holy Spirit, or on the contrary, have you not experienced this sensation?”

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