

# **EDGS WORKING PAPER**

Number 21

“Religious Competition and the Rise of the Workers’ Party in Brazil”

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May 27, 2014

Presented as part of the “Comparative Politics Workshop” speaker series at the Equality Development and Globalization Studies (EDGS) program at Northwestern University, with generous support from the Rajawali Foundation.

**Religious Competition and the Rise of the Workers' Party in Brazil**  
*Why the Catholic Church Provided the Mass Base  
for the Democratic World's  
Largest Leftist Party*

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Comparative Politics Workshop, Northwestern University, May 27, 2014. Preliminary versions of this paper were presented at the "Religion and Politics" Colloquium, Macmillan Center for International Studies, Yale University. We are grateful to workshop participants and to Oswaldo Amaral, Germán Feierherd, Matthew Kocher, Rachel Meneguello and Joao Paulo Viana for insightful suggestions and to the Center for Metropolitan Studies at the University of São Paulo and the Center of Studies in Public Opinion at the State University of Campinas for sharing data. We acknowledge the financial support of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies. We are accountable for errors and omissions.

One of the most influential accounts of political party development in Western Europe suggests that workers' unions created Social Democratic parties<sup>1</sup> and Catholic lay organizations gave rise to Christian Democratic parties.<sup>2</sup> This parsimonious narrative, in which mass organizations of low-income workers led the development of national leftist political forces and religious networks led the rise of national conservative parties, has traveled beyond Western Europe and has crucially influenced how scholars view the development of leftist parties in the developing world. It has led scholars to mechanically accept that the working class is the only class actor capable of developing mass-based national leftist parties and that religious actors only play an important role in the development of confessional conservative parties but play no role in the creation of leftist political forces.

Because industrialization processes in developing countries have been truncated or have been only partially successful, any argument that seeks to portray the working class as the social base for the creation of mass-based national leftist parties in the less industrialized world faces a *demographic* challenge.<sup>3</sup> The simple fact that the size of the working class and the territorial presence of workers' unions may not be large enough for workers to serve as the mass base for national leftist parties should lead us to observe perennially weak leftist parties in the developing world or to explore alternative paths and underexplored political actors and social groups to explain the existence of strong leftist parties in the absence of class cleavages.<sup>4</sup>

Because levels of religiosity are particularly high in developing countries<sup>5</sup> and religious institutions and lay organizations often play an important role in the development of social movements for economic redistribution,<sup>6</sup> any account that underestimates the role of religion in the development of leftist parties in the less industrialized world faces a *sociological* challenge. Contrary to the post-Enlightenment view that conceived of religion as the "opium of the masses,"<sup>7</sup> research over the past three decades has persistently shown that every religious tradition is Janus-faced – it can serve to justify the status quo but it can also become the basis for progressive mobilization for economic and political change. This important observation has come from research on the developing world.<sup>8</sup>

If workers are demographically constrained to provide the mass base for the development of national leftist parties in the less industrialized world and if churches and lay parishioners can lead the formation of influential grassroots movements for economic redistribution, we need to move beyond a purely secularist story of leftist-party development and ask about the conditions under which religious actors may have

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<sup>1</sup> Durverger 1951; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Bartolini, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Kalyvas, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Recognizing the demographic limitation of organized labor, scholars of leftist parties in Latin America have suggested that workers will only be able to create small leftist parties with limited electoral bases or that states will use corporatist organizations to develop a powerful labor base for the rise of populist, rather than leftist, parties. We address this issue below. See Collier and Collier, 1996; Roberts, 2002; Levitsky, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Norris and Inglehart, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Smith 1996; Rosefsky-Wickham, 2000; Wood, 2005; Trejo, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, 1844/1978.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 1996; Gill, 1998; Philpott, 2007; Bellin, 2008; Trejo, 2009; Grzymala-Busse, 2012.

incentives to become major advocates of progressive social movements and when these social networks may become important players in the development of leftist political forces.

In this paper we explore the crucial role the Catholic Church and Catholic lay organizations played in the development of the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil – a party that emerged under military rule in the 1970s, became the main opposition force in the 1990s, and has been in power since 2002. The PT is the only mass-based party to have ever emerged in Brazil's history<sup>9</sup> and it is the single leftist party with the largest membership and electoral base in the democratic world today.<sup>10</sup>

While the scholarly consensus on Brazil is that metal workers led a coalition of workers' unions, student movements, middle-class professionals and Catholic lay organizations that spearheaded the initial development of the PT,<sup>11</sup> in this paper we show that the demographic size and geographic spread of the Brazilian independent labor movement was not extensive enough to enable the transformation of the PT from a regional force with a strong social base in São Paulo (1980s) into a national mass-based organization (1990s). Brazilian workers could not have created a national workers' party on their own.

We suggest, instead, that the expansion of the PT into a mass-based national organization depended mainly on an extensive network of Catholic communities and grassroots organizations that Catholic bishops and priests developed from the 1960s into the 1980s in response to the rapid expansion of U.S. Protestant, Pentecostal and other Christian churches in the country's most impoverished urban and rural regions. Lay Catholic leaders from thousands of Christian Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiais de Base or CEBs) became the local party leaders and activists and CEBs the social networks for the expansion of PT membership and the effective mobilization of voters in national, state and local elections.

Although a shared ideological affinity in favor of a pro-democracy and pro-poor agenda facilitated the partnership between progressive Catholic bishops and priests and leaders of Brazilian dissident workers' unions, we suggest that their respective needs for membership retention (Catholics) and electoral expansion (workers) is what brought clerics and workers together into developing a powerful socio-electoral coalition.<sup>12</sup>

To deter a mass defection from Catholicism and to confront the successful initial Protestant proselytizing strategy by which U.S. missionaries provided welfare and social services to thousands of Brazilians in impoverished areas and trained them to become pastors of local churches, Catholic bishops and priests in competitive areas engaged with the poor for the first time in centuries and became major promoters of community networks, grass roots organizations and social movements for democratization, economic development and land redistribution. To dispel any doubt about the extent of their true commitment in favor of the poor, Catholic authorities engaged in activities that

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<sup>9</sup> The PT is the party with the most extensive organizational apparatus (Guarnieri, 2010; Mainwaring, Power and Bizzarro Neto, 2014) and the highest levels of partisan identification (Braga and Pimentel Jr., 2011) in Brazil.

<sup>10</sup> PT membership is larger than that of any Western European party – e.g. it is twice the membership of the German CDP and SPD. For data on Western European party membership, see Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012, and for data on Brazil see Mainwaring, Power and Bizzarro Neto, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> For the seminal work on the origins of the PT, see Meneguello, 1989 and Keck, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> On the concept of "socio-electoral coalitions," see Trejo, 2014.

undermined the Church's historical alliance with the rich and powerful – they opposed military rule, became champions of human rights and democratization, and developed a strong partnership with the political force that had become the most vocal pro-poor political organization in the country: the Workers' Party.

To enlarge their constituency beyond Brazil's main metropolitan centers and to become a viable national political party, union leaders and the founders of the PT pursued a long-term strategic alliance with Brazil's progressive Catholic movement. An alliance with the progressive wing of the Church would give them access not only to a new generation of catechists and lay leaders who would become party activists and candidates for local office but also to dense social networks to mobilize the poor during election campaigns. Whereas embracing the PT's pro-poor agenda was instrumental for Catholic authorities' membership-retention strategy, access to Catholic social networks was instrumental for the PT's goal of becoming a mass-based national party.

We test our basic propositions using data on local party organization in Brazilian municipalities from 1982 to 2000. Based on the number of municipalities in which the PT was able to field candidates for city councilors in 1982 – when the party had a narrow base concentrated in the state of São Paulo – we show that the proportion of the municipal population engaged in industrial labor and urbanization were the strongest predictors of PT presence in local politics. A decade later, however, using data on city council elections in 1996 and 2000 – when the PT had become a mass-based national organization – our results show that religious competition was the most powerful predictor of the party's presence while labor was no longer significant. Through the analysis of presidential, gubernatorial, state-legislative, and municipal elections in the 1990s, we show that religious competition was a strong predictor of PT vote share. These results provide compelling indication that cities experiencing the most intense levels of religious competition led the development of the Workers' Party into a national organization.

Based on a comparative study of two contiguous Catholic dioceses from the northern Amazon state of Rondônia, which are nearly identical on a number of socio-economic and demographic factors except for their levels of religious competition, we show that Protestant competition drove Catholic clergy from the Diocese of Ji-Paraná to become major promoters of CEBs and of a wide variety of social cooperatives for the provision of public goods and major sponsors of rural movements for land redistribution. We show that these networks became the social base for the development of the PT into a major political force in Ji-Paraná. Under monopolistic conditions, however, Catholic clergy from the neighboring Diocese of Porto Velho did not promote CEBs or any significant grassroots movement and the PT did not emerge as a major political force.

The paper is divided into four sections. We first discuss how dominant "secularist" models of leftist-party development based on the Western European experience fail to explain the development of the PT into a mass-based national party. Bringing religion into the discussion of leftist-party development, in the second part we explain why religious competition and the successful proselytizing strategy of U.S. Protestant, Pentecostal and other Christian churches in Brazil's most impoverished regions led Catholic clergy to become major promoters of grassroots leftist movements and to develop a strategic alliance with the Workers' Party. In the third part we present our statistical tests of the impact of religious competition on the development of the PT

and in the fourth section we discuss qualitative evidence that links religious competition with the creation of CEBs and CEB membership to PT development. In the final section we discuss the need to rethink the likely influence of religion on leftist party development beyond the canonical Western European experience.

## **THEORIES OF LEFTIST-PARTY DEVELOPMENT AND THE ANOMALOUS RISE OF THE LEFT IN BRAZIL**

The dominant story of leftist party development in Western Europe is a story of workers creating mass-based political parties from below.<sup>13</sup> Following the Industrial Revolution and the universal enfranchisement of male adults, national labor unions became the prime mobilizing vehicle for recruiting, educating and organizing millions of workers into powerful electoral forces and transforming the demographic force of workers into political power. In this process, it was not economic or political elites who integrated workers into the political system from above but union-led leftist political parties that facilitated the aggregation of millions of workers into strong and centralized mass political organizations. Leftist parties relied on mass working-class membership, extensive network organizations and widespread territorial penetration to mobilize voters and win power.<sup>14</sup> As Przeworski and Sprague acknowledge, the dual goal of mass-based leftist parties was to prevent intra-class warfare and competition while empowering workers to confront economically powerful elites and conservative parties in national elections.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing the demographic limitation of the working class in the developing world, students of leftist parties in less-industrialized countries have recognized the difficulties of extrapolating the Western European experience outside the developed world.<sup>16</sup> Working under the assumption that the working class is the only social class capable of creating mass-based leftist parties, a group of scholars has argued that small independent worker's unions together with middle-class urban intellectuals have developed relatively small socialist parties.<sup>17</sup> In this story, truncated or unsuccessful experiences of industrialization will yield perennially weak regional leftist parties. An alternative account, in which authors recognize the prominent role played by the state in less- and late-industrializing countries, scholars have recognized that through the incorporation of labor into state-controlled corporatist structures, charismatic leaders have developed mass-based populist – rather than leftist – political parties.<sup>18</sup>

Viewed against dominant explanations of leftist party development in Western Europe and in the developing world, the development of the Workers' Party in Brazil as a powerful mass-based organization represents a theoretical anomaly.

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<sup>13</sup> Duverger, 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Duverger, 1962; Panebianco, 1982; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Kitschelt, 1993; Bartolini, 2007; Archer, 2007; Di Mascio, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Przeworski and Sprague, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Van Biezen, 1998, Mainwaring, 1999, Levitsky, 2003; Roberts, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Van Bizen, 1998, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See Collier and Collier (1994) for the classic statement on how state incorporation of the working class in authoritarian regimes enabled the development of labor-based populist parties. Although these parties advocated for a strong state presence in the economy via import substitution industrialization, they were anti-socialist and anti-communist political forces.

Unlike most leftist (populist) parties in the less industrialized world, the PT was not built from above but from below. The party had no links to the Brazilian authoritarian/populist experience under President Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) or to the state corporatist workers' organizations developed during these years.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the independent unions that spearheaded the creation of the PT were part of a movement – the so-called “new unionism” – that defied authoritarian state corporatist controls.<sup>20</sup> These were independent unions leading major labor strikes and the opposition against military rule.

Unlike leftist parties built from below in other parts of the developing world, the PT was not a marginal political force with a limited electoral presence. The PT made poor electoral showing in the 1982 subnational electoral cycle organized under military rule, but a decade later it had become a vertically-integrated national political organization with a clear programmatic platform and an extensive membership<sup>21</sup> – like the Western European mass-based political parties of the nineteenth-century – and then reached presidential power in 2002.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike Western European leftist parties, however, the PT emerged in a context in which industrialization had been truncated or had only partially succeeded and the working class had a geographically limited presence in southeastern Brazil. Data from the Brazilian Industrial Census shows that between 1950 and 1980, the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo accounted for 42% of the country's population but were home to 67.8% of the Brazilian industrial workforce.<sup>23</sup> Although the PT emerged in this region, with the electoral support from the southeast the party was able to become only a regional political force, not a national mass-based organization. Contrary the dominant Duvergerian theories of leftist party development, however, the PT also emerged as a powerful political force in regions where industrial labor was absent, including such unlikely places as the northern and predominantly rural Amazon states of Rondônia and Acre.

The seminal works on the origins of the PT – both in the Portuguese<sup>24</sup> and English-language versions<sup>25</sup> – clearly recognized that the party was a pluralistic coalition of workers' unions, student movements, urban popular movements and Catholic grassroots communities. Yet, under the influence of the canonical Duvergerian model of leftist party development and building primarily on evidence from the industrial state of São Paulo, the scholarly literature on the PT came to identify workers as the leading force in the transformation of the PT from a regional party into a national political force assigned a secondary role to religious actors. While the Catholic Church and Catholic lay organizations were recognized as important members of the PT coalition, the exact role they played remained underspecified and their true role in the expansion of the PT into a mass-based organization underplayed. While the more recent scholarship on the PT

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<sup>19</sup> Weffort, 1978; Souza, 1985; Diniz, 1992; Stepan, 1980; Rodrigues, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Keck, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Meneguello, 1989; Keck, 1992; Rodrigues, 1997; Samuels, 2004; Ribeiro, 2009; Hunter, 2010; Amaral, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> On its way to power in the 2000s, the PT experienced yet another transformation from a programmatic leftist party into a catch-all party. See Hunter, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Silveira, 2005; Cano, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Meneguello, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Keck, 1992.

empirically shows that a multiplicity of territorial networks provide the social base of the party,<sup>26</sup> these studies continue to see the creation of the PT as a predominantly secular process of mass-based organization, more akin to the Western European experience of leftist party development in which religion plays no role.

Despite the secondary role that dominant theories of leftist party development in Brazil have assigned to religious actors and institutions, numerous scholars of religion have persistently recognized the crucial role that Catholic clergy and lay Catholic organizations played in the expansion of the PT beyond the core industrial sector of São Paulo and into the less industrial, rural and indigenous areas of the country. For example, the important ethnographic work by Petit (1996) and Chiovetti (1997) shows the crucial role of Catholic clergy and Catholic lay communities in the development of the PT in the northern Amazon states of Pará and Rondônia. Petit famously reported that in Rondônia, the PT was known as “the party of the priests.” The life histories of two bishops in the northeastern state of Sergipe reported by French (2007) show that Catholic clergy and lay communities were instrumental in the formation of the PT in this predominantly poor and rural region.<sup>27</sup> And the influential work by Pierucci (1982) and Machado (2010) show the crucial Catholic role in the development of the PT in the periphery of São Paulo – Brazil’s largest metropolitan area.

If the Catholic Church and lay communities played a prominent role on the rise and development of the PT – as anthropologists, sociologists and historians have suggested – then we are faced with two major theoretical puzzles.

The first puzzle is that Western European history does not present a single case in which the Catholic authorities and parishioners were involved in the development of a major leftist party. In the secular story of Western European leftist-party development, lay Catholic religious organizations created confessional and conservative parties and workers’ created leftist political forces. Viewed against this narrative, Brazil followed an “anomalous” path in which a strategic coalition of workers and Catholic clergy and lay organizations gave rise to a mass-based national leftist party.

The second puzzle is that Brazil presents an unusual case in which prominent members of the Catholic Church became major promoters of the Workers’ Party. In his influential model of the rise of Christian Democracy in Western Europe, Kalyvas (1996) persuasively argues that religious institutions with universalizing goals, like the Catholic Church, would have no incentives to endorse political parties. Because parties only represent a “part” of society, churches that seek to represent society as a whole would refrain from creating religious parties. And because these churches speak the language of universal truth, they would have no incentives to see their more cherished moral values being subject to the ballot box. And yet Brazil followed an “anomalous” path in which members of the influential National Bishops’ Conference (CNBB) were vocal partisan supporters of the PT for a number of years.

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<sup>26</sup> On the relevance of social networks, see Samuels and Zuco, 2014. The most influential analysis of the PT in government since 2002 shows how the massive conditional-cash transfer programs – the favorite social policy program of the Left in power – has contributed to redefining the party’s electoral base in recent years. See the influential analysis by Hunter, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Other scholars have recognized the impact of progressive Catholic clergy and communities on PT development in Acre (Keck, 1990); Espírito Santo (Pinto, 2003); Goiás (Tavares, 2011).

Understanding why the Catholic Church became so involved in the development of progressive mobilization and the formation of the partisan Left in Brazil requires that we move directly into exploring the conditions under which religious actors seek to influence the secular political world.

## **RELIGION AND THE RISE OF THE LEFT IN BRAZIL**

One of the most significant developments in the historical development of the Catholic Church in Brazil is the radical transformation of a large number of bishops and priests and religious orders from being strong allies of state power and focusing their pastoral activities on serving the middle and upper classes to becoming a major force for the poor and the underprivileged.<sup>28</sup> From the 1960s to the 1980s, a significant number of Brazilian clergy became major promoters of thousands of Christian Base Communities (CEBs),<sup>29</sup> literacy groups, economic and social cooperatives, and active sponsors of a wide variety of social movements for economic redistribution and democratization in the country's most impoverished areas.<sup>30</sup> Under the influence of progressive bishops, the Catholic Church developed pastoral teams dedicated to labor, land, education, and human rights, and specialized teams to address specific problems affecting black and indigenous populations. After the military opened the country's political system to multiparty competition in 1978, a significant number of bishops and priests openly endorsed the Workers' Party and saw the PT as the political instrument of the poor – the single political force that would help the country establish “God's Kingdom on Earth” – socialism.<sup>31</sup>

While dominant accounts of this transformation have centered on the role of religious ideas and on state-church conflict, here we develop a series of testable propositions based on the likely impact of religious competition.

### *Religious Ideas*

The dominant explanation of the epic transformation of a large number of Brazilian Catholic clergy from servants of the rich and powerful to advocates of the poor points to the Second Vatican Council – the historic meeting of all of the world's Catholic bishops to reform the Church under the leadership of Pope John XXIII between 1962 and 1965 – as the main causal factor. This is an explanation about theological changes and the power of religious ideas. While we concur with Mainwaring (1986) and others who suggest that Vatican II opened a period of revolutionary change in the Catholic Church in Latin America, encouraging Catholic clergy to pay greater attention to social injustice and proselytize recognizing their countries' social and cultural realities, an account based simply on ideas would fail to explain subnational variation. Although all Brazilian

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<sup>28</sup> For important discussions of this epic transformation, see Bruneau, 1974 and 1982; Pierucci, 1982; Mainwaring, 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Different sources estimated the existence of 40,000 CEBs as early as 1974 and a striking 100,000 by 1986. See Dawson, 1999. General Jarbas Passarinho, one of leaders of Brazil's military regime, once even suggested – with anxiety – the possible existence of up to 200,000 CEBs. See Pierucci, 1982.

<sup>30</sup> Mainwaring, 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Pierucci, 1982.

bishops were exposed to the ideas emanating from Vatican II, only a few of them adopted progressive theological and pastoral practices while many others did not.

### *State–Church Conflict*

An alternative explanation of the epic transformation of a significant number of Brazilian Catholic authorities points to state–church conflict. Many of the privileges in social and education policies that the Brazilian Church had received under the populist authoritarian regime of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) and that had been extended under democracy (1945–1963), were gradually taken away by successive military governments following the 1964 right-wing military coup. The social activism that bishops and priests had adopted to help underprivileged populations in rural, indigenous and urban areas came under attack during the most repressive years of the military dictatorship in the early 1970s and some members of the clergy became targets of intimidation, arrest and even murder. Despite growing state–church tensions, not all Catholic bishops embraced a progressive theological and pastoral approach; in fact, a significant number of clerics remained deeply conservative and critical of their peers’ embrace of Liberation Theology and of the dialogue between Christians and Marxists. As Bruneau (1982) explains, however, when the military government repealed restrictions on divorce laws in 1975, state–church tensions in Brazil became severely polarized and even conservative bishops joined progressive clergy from the National Bishops’ Conference in opposing the military regime. And yet, despite the general clerical opposition to the military regime, not all bishops became progressive promoters of grassroots mobilization or supported the PT. More crucially, after the bitter state–church conflict came to an end under democracy, Catholic clergy who had engaged in pro-poor and pro-democracy activism continued with their progressive pastoral work in favor of the underprivileged.

### *Religious Competition*

Building on the economics of religion,<sup>32</sup> analytic sociology,<sup>33</sup> or simply based on ethnographic observations,<sup>34</sup> a number of scholars have suggested that the spread of U.S. Protestant and Evangelical churches and their success in proselytizing in Latin America’s most impoverished regions motivated Catholic clergy to become major detractors of military rule and of repressive policies against the underprivileged (Gill, 1995 and 1998) and active sponsors of grassroots movements for economic redistribution, human rights, and ethnic rights for rural and indigenous populations (Trejo, 2009 and 2012). Beyond Latin America, Woodberry (2012) has suggested that Protestant missionaries were directly involved in promoting civil society organizations and pro-democracy movements or that their actions indirectly motivated clerics from majoritarian religions to adopt pro-democracy practices in order to avoid membership losses.

Following Bruneau (1982) we suggest that the spread of U.S. Protestant missionary activity and the internal migration of Protestant populations of European descent had a major long-lasting impact on Brazilian subnational religious markets and

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<sup>32</sup> Iannaccone, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Stark and Finke, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Santana, 1992; Le Bot 1994.

on Catholic pastoral action. While most studies on religion in Brazil focus on the major growth of neo-charismatic Pentecostal and other independent Christian churches in the last quarter of the twentieth century,<sup>35</sup> there is extensive evidence that the proselytizing success of U.S. mainline Protestant churches and the missionary activity of linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) first alerted Catholic clergy in the 1950s and 1960s to the institutional weakness of the Church in low-income regions and shaped the initial clerical reaction to competition.<sup>36</sup> As in Ecuador and Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, Catholic clergy in Brazil initially reacted to three “threats”: Communism, Protestantism, and the persistence of folk religious traditions – stemming from Afro-religious influences in the case of Brazil.<sup>37</sup>

Three elements of the quintessential Protestant proselytizing strategy conditioned Catholic parishioners’ demands and the Catholic clerical reaction: (1) the translation of Bibles to local languages and the promotion of an unmediated relation of parishioners with God and the scriptures; (2) the provision of material rewards and social services such as literacy groups and health clinics; and (3) the creation of local churches led by native pastors. The unprecedented initial success of Protestant missionaries in impoverished urban, rural and indigenous regions and an initial wave of defection to Protestantism motivated Brazilian Catholic bishops and priests as long ago as the 1950s to develop Christian Base Communities (CEBs) led by local catechists who would lead Biblical reinterpretations based on their everyday realities.<sup>38</sup> Building on CEBs, Catholic clergy would support the rise of literacy groups and a wide range of economic and social cooperatives.<sup>39</sup> Hoping that a greater institutional presence would deter defections and turn nominal Catholic parishioners into active members of the Church, Catholic clergy adopted key elements from Vatican II and rapidly shifted from serving the rich and the middle class to becoming staunch supporters of the poor and underprivileged.

Two structural limitations hindered the initial Catholic reaction to Protestant competition: the inability of the Catholic Church to decentralize ecclesiastic hierarchies to the extent that Protestant missionaries could, and a reputation deficit for having historically served the interests of the rich and powerful. First, as Trejo (2009) suggests more generally for Latin America, Catholic catechists resented that they remained subordinate to priests while their Protestant neighbors were being trained as pastors and heads of their local churches. And, second, as Gill (1998) persuasively claims, a reputation deficit for having sided with authoritarian rulers in the past and favored the middle and upper classes raised many questions among impoverished parishioners across Latin America about the Church’s true commitment to the poor.

To overcome the limited ecclesiastic decentralization and to credibly show their long-term commitment toward the poor, Catholic clergy in Brazil moved from simply advocating for grassroots organizations and cooperatives to becoming major sponsors of independent workers’ unions,<sup>40</sup> movements for landless peasants,<sup>41</sup> indigenous

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<sup>35</sup> See the important work by Freston, 2001; Chesnut, 2007; and Sofiati, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> See Bruneau (1982) and Dawson (1999) for influential general accounts. For an influential personal account of the impact of Protestantism on the rise of grassroots church communities, see Rossi, 1957.

<sup>37</sup> See Santana (1992) for Ecuador and Trejo (2012) for Mexico. For Brazil, see Bruneau, 1982; Dawson, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Rossi, 1957.

<sup>39</sup> Dawson, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Betto, 2002.

movements for ethnic rights<sup>42</sup> and urban popular movements.<sup>43</sup> To dispel any doubt about their long-term commitment, Catholic bishops and priests from competitive ecclesiastic jurisdictions increasingly became vocal defenders of human rights and civil liberties and major advocates for the end of military rule and democratization.<sup>44</sup>

While dynamics of religious competition may contribute to explaining why a number of Brazilian Catholic clerics became major promoters of grassroots movements, this does not explain why some of them publicly endorsed the Workers' Party. Vatican II and the Latin American Bishops' Conferences of Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979) had encouraged a Catholic commitment toward the poor and the underprivileged but never advocated for allegiances with leftist parties. And yet, after the military consented to multiparty elections and legalized all political parties in 1978, some of the country's most progressive bishops openly endorsed the PT.

We suggest that Catholic clergy living among the most intense levels of religious competition – including threats of mass defections and lay demands for ecclesiastic decentralization and a long-term commitment toward the poor – were more likely to develop a strategic alliance with the Workers' Party. A crucial element that allowed clergy from a church with universalizing goals to side with a party that only sought to represent the Brazilian poor was the controversial theological interpretation made by some of the most influential Brazilian theologians and clergy that “the poor” represented the only relevant universe for proselytizing and liberation.<sup>45</sup> By conceptualizing the poor as “God's people,” progressive Catholic clergy saw an alliance with a party that claimed to represent the poor as a powerful signal of the Church's *true commitment* toward the underprivileged. The fact that the leaders of the workers' unions who had spearheaded the creation of the PT were faithful Catholics provided important assurance that the party would respect religious liberties if they ever reached power and that they would continue to share the cultural, moral and family values that were so precious to the Catholic Church, including its progressive members.

In summary, we would expect that:

**H.1.** Catholic clergy in competitive subnational regions were more likely to become major promoters of grassroots lay organizations and social movements for economic redistribution and human rights and powerful advocates of the Workers' Party.

While an alliance with labor unions and the PT presumably would help Catholic clergy deter mass defections to Protestantism, for the PT leadership the access to Catholic associational networks and movements would provide them with a social base for the expansion of the party in regions where workers simply had no presence and where communities would have not opened the door to union leaders. The membership-retention needs of Catholic clergy in competitive districts and the worker union's desire

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<sup>41</sup> Wright and Wolford, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Boyer-Araújo, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Keck, 1992; Mainwaring 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Bruneau, 1982.

<sup>45</sup> This is a conclusion reached by some of the most influential representatives of the Liberation Theology movement in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, including Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, Pedro Casaldáliga and Frei Betto. See Dawson, 1999.

to expand beyond their core industrial regions and build a mass-based national party led to the creation of a powerful socio-electoral coalition between Catholic communities and workers' unions.

Consistent with the recent theoretical formulation of political parties as networks of interest groups developed by Bawn et al. (2012), the PT was a constellation of interest groups in which workers led the process of party formation and Catholic communities provided the social base for the expansion of the party into a national mass-based organization. Catholic lay communities did not play a secondary role; they provided the local leadership and the social networks for the expansion of the PT into a mass-based national force. Even after the Vatican punished the Brazilian bishops who most vocally advocated for socialism and for the PT, the strong initial clerical support for the PT motivated lay leaders and members of CEBs to feed the long-term relationship with the party. Beyond clerical goals, lay leaders developed their own interests and seized the opportunity to gain local power by becoming the party activists and the social base of the PT. We would expect that:

**H.2.** The Workers' Party was more likely to field candidates for local office in cities and municipalities experiencing higher levels of religious competition.

But CEBs and Catholic-sponsored social movements did not only provide the leadership for the local development of the PT; they also served as a powerful organizational vehicle to mobilize voters during elections. As candidates, catechists and lay leaders mobilized their community networks and their affiliation to local social movements to engage in powerful get-out-the vote campaigns and proselytize in favor of the Left. Hence, we would expect that:

**H.3.** Vote share for the Workers' Party in national and subnational elections was more extensive in cities and municipalities experiencing higher levels of religious competition.

Using quantitative data on religious affiliation and elections, in the next section we put H.2 and H.3 to test. Based on qualitative information from the northern Amazon state of Rondônia, in the following section we use a paired comparison of two dioceses to test for H.1.

## **QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE**

We test our basic propositions using electoral data from two decades of local, state and national elections in Brazil, from 1982 to 2000. Note that the Workers' Party was legalized under authoritarian rule in 1980 and the country did not return to democracy until 1985. We use data on the 1982 subnational elections as a base for comparison. This is the first election in which the PT ever competed for office and the party was a small regional force with a voting core in the state of São Paulo. We compare these data with election outcomes for subnational elections under democracy in the 1990s, when the PT had expanded quite dramatically and become a national party with a solid mass organizational base. We limit our sample temporally to 2000 because the PT's electoral

base changed in significant ways after the party won office in 2002.<sup>46</sup> By design, our analysis reflects the rise of the PT as a mass-based national *opposition* leftist party when it had no presidential incumbency advantage.

### *Dependent Variables*

We test for two different dependent variables. We first assess the impact of religious competition on the PT presence in Brazilian municipalities (H.2.). We use as indicator of party presence whether the PT was able to field candidates for city councils in municipal elections.<sup>47</sup> City councilors are members of municipal legislative bodies who are concurrently elected with mayors in national elections taking place across the country's 3,928 municipalities.<sup>48</sup> We take the party's ability to field candidates for city councils as an indicator of a party's local presence and organizational capacity.<sup>49</sup> Under Brazilian electoral laws, parties are required to register and prove the existence of a local party organization and a membership directorate to field candidates for city councils. In 1982, the PT was able to field candidates for city councils in 20% of the country – mostly in the state of São Paulo and its surroundings – but by 2000 the party had candidates running for office in 61% of the country. For purposes of statistical modeling we assign a 1 for every city in which the PT was able to field candidates and 0 otherwise and use logistic regression models for testing.

We also test for the impact of religious competition on the PT vote share (H.3) in presidential and subnational elections. Our goal is to analyze the likely mobilizing impact of the lay Catholic social networks on leftist votes. We restrict the analysis to elections in the 1990s when the PT had already gained a national presence but had not yet become a catch-all party – as it did in the 2000s.<sup>50</sup> We assess PT vote share for presidential, gubernatorial and state legislative elections in 1994 and for municipal and city councilor elections in 1996. Note that throughout the 1990s the PT was able to win approximately 20% of the national vote. In a highly fragmented party system, as the Brazilian system was in the 1990s, this vote share made the PT a competitive party.<sup>51</sup> For purposes of estimation, we test for the natural log of vote share for PT and use ordinary least squares models.

### *Religious Competition*

*Religious competition* is our key explanatory variable. Drawing on Brazilian census information on religious affiliation,<sup>52</sup> we use the effective number of religions (ENR) as indicator of competition. ENR is defined as  $1/\sum r_i^2$ , where  $r_i$  represents the

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<sup>46</sup> Soares and Terron, 2008; Singer, 2012; Zucco, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Data on electoral results were obtained from the IPEADATA website. <http://www.ipeadata.gov.br/>

<sup>48</sup> For the 1982 elections Brazil had 3,928 municipalities. Although by 2012 the country had 5,570 municipalities we retain the smaller sample because we are interested in comparing the evolution of the PT from the 1980s into the 1990s.

<sup>49</sup> For a similar strategy, see Samuels and Zucco, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Ribeiro, 2009; Hunter, 2010; Amaral, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Mainwaring, Power and Bizzarro Neto, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> We accessed the data from the website of the Center for Metropolitan Studies, University of São Paulo. <http://www.fflch.usp.br/centrodametropole/1147>

proportion of a municipal adult population that adheres to religion *i*. Brazilian census information groups religious affiliation into ten broad categories: Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, Other Christians, Afro-Brazilian religions, Spiritism, Jewish, Other, No Religion, No Answer. The Protestant category identifies historical Protestant churches from Western Europe and the U.S. and other Christians identify Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Afro-Brazilian religions identify religious traditions that African slaves brought to Brazil (e.g. Candombé) and Spiritism is a religious tradition associated with the anti-materialist teachings of nineteenth-century French educator Hippolyte Rivail. Note, however, that the banning of Afro-Brazilian religions in the nineteenth century drove a significant number of practitioners to register themselves as Spiritists while continuing to practice African creeds.<sup>53</sup> Although the ban on Afro-religions was lifted in the twentieth century, this practice prevailed. For this reason, we consider the No Religion and No Answer as potential indicators of syncretic religious practices and therefore keep them as alternative religious affiliations.

The average ENR for the 1980–2000 period is 1.3. This number reflects a monopoly situation. However, there is significant variation over time. Although Brazil has historically been a predominantly Catholic country and in absolute terms remains the single country with the largest Catholic membership in the world, Catholic affiliation has been declining from 94% in 1950 to 73% in 2000 and 65% in 2010. As Catholic bishops recognized as far back as the 1950s, the initial challenges to Catholic hegemony came from historical Protestant churches<sup>54</sup> – Baptists, Presbyterians and Reformed churches, Methodists and Lutherans – and from Seventh-Day Adventists. Although the important neo-Pentecostal wave of conversions in Brazil began in the 1970s, the Pentecostalization of Protestantism took place in the 1990s. The timing of these waves is important because we have claimed that the Catholic Church initially reacted to the competitive pressure from historical Protestant missionaries. This is validated by the data: while in 1980 the correlation coefficient of Protestant affiliation with ENR was 0.7, this association went down to 0.4 in 2000 – when the neo-Pentecostal wave took over. To more strictly assess the competitive pressures triggered by historical Protestant churches on PT development, we only use the ENR of 1980 and 1990.<sup>55</sup>

While the temporal evolution of ENR shows a marked competitive trend, the most important competitive dynamics took place at subnational levels. For example, by 1980 the north-western Amazon state of Rôndônia had 1.6 effective religions – a semi-competitive situation – and within the state the Diocese of Ji-Pará already showed a competitive situation of 1.8 religions.<sup>56</sup> By 1980, the southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo on the Atlantic coast showed 1.45 effective religions. However, within the Diocese of São Mateus in the northern part of Espírito Santo, the cities of Mantenópolis, Baja De São Francisco and Pancas already had more than two effective

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<sup>53</sup> Prandi, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Rossi, 1957.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Chesnut (2004) has suggested that Catholic clergy responded to the Pentecostalization of Brazil by adopting Catholic Charismatic Renewal practices. While we recognize this important observation, we caution that the development of Catholic Charismatic movements emerged in the 1990s, nearly four decades after Catholic clergy became major promoters of CEBs, grassroots organizations and social movements for material improvement in response to the proselytizing of U.S. mainline Protestant churches.

<sup>56</sup> This was the mean level for all municipalities in the diocese.

religions. Our goal is to assess whether this marked regional variation is associated with the development of the PT.

### *Alternative Explanations and Controls*

To test for alternative explanations we control for the proportion of the municipal population employed in *Industrial labor*, the municipal proportion of *Urban population* and the natural log of the municipal population, *ln pop*. The literature on PT has emphasized the working class and urban nature of the party. We use the size of the industrial labor force as proxy of labor union presence<sup>57</sup> and we use direct measures of urbanization and population size. Because the literature has emphasized the role of student movements, we control for the proportion of the municipal population involved in *Higher education*. Since PT leaders in the 1980s and 1990s programmatically claimed to represent the poor, we also control for municipal local development through a *Development index* – a composite measure that pools into a single metric indicators of household income and wealth and access to a wide variety of public goods and services, including health, education and road infrastructure. We use dummy variables to control for unobservable features of Brazil’s main geographic regions: North, Northeast, Center-West, Southeast and South.

### *Results I: PT presence*

Table 1 presents logistic regression models of the presence of the PT in the 1980s and 1990s and Table 2 adds robustness checks. Overall the results show a strong and unambiguous effect of religious competition on the transformation of the PT from a regional party into a mass-based national leftist force.

(Table 1 about here)

The results in Model 1 show that in the 1982 municipal election – the first election in which the PT ever participated and in which PT candidates received 2% of the vote – religious competition did not play any significant role in defining whether the party was able to field candidates for city councilors. Instead, PT presence seems to have been more widespread in more populated and more urban cities with a greater proportion of industrial labor force. However, the results in Model 2, which assess the party’s presence in the state of São Paulo – the state where the party emerged and its historical electoral bastion – show that the PT had a greater presence in cities that had both a large industrial labor force and higher levels of religious competition. Consistent with the observations made by the pioneering scholars on the PT, our results suggest that both labor unions and Christian Base Communities (CEBs) presumably played a key role in the rise of the PT in São Paulo. This means that a socio-electoral coalition between lay Catholic organizations and the PT was first established in São Paulo and then expanded to other parts of the country.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> We retrieved information from the Brazilian censuses of 1980, 1990 and 2000.

<sup>58</sup> In a critical evaluation of the role played by the CEBs in the 1982 election, Frei Betto – a Dominican friar who was a key figure in the Brazilian Liberation Theology movement and a major promoter of labor

The results in Models 3 and 4 provide important evidence that religious competition was a major driver in the expansion of the PT from a small regional party to a mass-based national organization in the 1990s. The results in Model 3 show that in the 1996 municipal election, in which the PT was able to field candidates for local councils in over 50% of the country's municipalities, religious competition was the main organizational factor explaining where the PT was able to run for office. It is important to note that the size of a city's industrial labor force and the population with higher education were no longer significant factors and that the impact of religious competition is robust to the inclusion of the party fielding candidates in 1982. The results in Model 4 show that the impact of religious competition remains strong if we test for changes from 1982 to 1996 – that is, if we assess only variation in the new municipalities where the PT was able to field candidates for local councils.

Results from statistical simulations based on Model 3 and plotted in Figure 1 show that the impact of religious competition on PT local organizational capacity in 1996 was substantively large. Holding all of the model's variables at their mean values, on average the PT was 55% likely to field local candidates where the Catholic Church had monopolistic controls (ENR = 1), but 75% likely when ENR = 2 and 90% likely when ENR = 3. To put this result differently, a shift from a monopolistic situation to a competitive market with two effective religions on average would increase the odds of the PT filing a candidate by 20%.

(Figure 1 about here)

The results in Models 5 and 6 reveal that the impact of religious competition on the PT's local presence diminishes by the turn of the century. This result should not be surprising. As Hunter (2010) and others<sup>59</sup> have persuasively shown, the PT remained a principled leftist programmatic party up to the late 1990s, but had begun a major transformation into a pragmatic, vote-maximizing professional party by the turn of the century. As the PT began to moderate its ideological positions, develop alliances with centrist and moderate forces, and dilute its initial pro-poor leftist message, the electoral base of the party began to expand among more moderate voters until the party won the presidency in 2002. As a result, the impact of religious competition and the presence of CEBs and Catholic lay organizations diminished as the PT became a catch-all party.

Focusing on 1996 – when the PT had already become a national mass-based party but was still a principled leftist political force – the results in Table 2 show that the impact of religious competition on the party's local presence is robust to the inclusion of additional regional controls (the PT core region)<sup>60</sup> and to state-level fixed effects. This means that the impact of religious competition on the PT's organizational presence remains nearly unchanged even after controlling for unobserved state characteristics.

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unionism – argued that the failure of the CEBs to mobilize in favor of the PT outside of São Paulo explained the 1982 election failure. In his view, moreover, CEB members did not uniformly vote for the PT. He concluded his evaluation by making a public plea for Catholic communities to align with PT candidates in the future. See Betto, 1985.

<sup>59</sup> Ribeiro, 2009; Amaral, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> For the importance of the core PT region, see Samuels and Zucco, 2014.

(Table 2 about here)

To address the possibility that an unobserved municipal factor may explain both religious competition and local PT presence, we restricted our initial sample and analyzed only municipalities from (1) the rural Amazon region in northern and central states and (2) the southeastern urban states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo. These are fairly similar municipalities from two distinctive regions. The municipalities from the northern Amazon states represent a least likely case – cities where we would have least expected to observe the rise of a leftist party led by industrial workers. In contrast, the southeastern municipalities represent a most likely case – cities where urban and labor conditions are most amenable to the rise of a leftist party. Despite the differences between these two regions, Models 9 and 10 show surprisingly similar results: in both the Amazon and urban municipalities religious competition was a major driver of the presence of the PT in local elections for city councils.

### *Results II: PT vote share*

Beyond the organizational presence of the PT in local elections, the results summarized in Table 3 show that religious competition was also a significant predictor of vote choice in national and subnational elections.

(Table 3 about here)

Focusing on elections in the mid-1990s, the results in Model 11 show that vote share for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva – one of the PT’s founders and a presidential candidate in 1994 – was larger in cities experiencing the most intense levels of religious competition. The results in Models 12 and 13 also show that PT vote share in the gubernatorial and state legislative elections in 1994 was significantly greater in municipalities experiencing more intense levels of religious competition. Beyond the 1994 election cycle, the results in Models 14 and 15 show that while religious competition was not a statistically significant predictor of PT vote share for mayors, it was a significant determinant of preferences for PT candidates in elections for municipal councilors.

One plausible explanation of these ecological findings is that CEB members and members of Catholic lay organizations that more commonly emerged in areas with higher levels of religious competition did provide important votes to PT candidates. More importantly, these results suggest that Catholic lay leaders and organizations might have played a crucial role in mobilizing voters during national and subnational elections. As Models 12 and 13 show, labor unions and Catholic lay organizations might have played a crucial mobilizing role for PT vote in the 1994 gubernatorial and state legislative elections. As Models 11 and 14 suggest, however, in presidential and city elections Catholic lay organizations were possibly the only mobilizing networks that made a difference in favor of PT candidates.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Based on two national surveys conducted before the 1994 election cycle, Perucci and Prandi (1995) found that CEB members were eight times more likely to vote for PT candidates than Catholics who did not participate in progressive grassroots movements.

After three unsuccessful presidential campaigns in 1988, 1994 and 1998, Lula was elected president of Brazil under a PT ticket in 2002 and reelected in 2006. In the aftermath of his second presidential term, during a long interview with the Spanish international newspaper *El País*, Lula recognized the role CEBs and Catholic lay organizations had played in the PT's rise to power. "The CEBs brought us to power," Lula plainly put it.

While religious competition was not a statistically significant factor in explaining variation in PT vote share in the 2002 presidential election (results not shown), our more general findings do show that religious competition was a major factor in the creation of the PT's core in São Paulo in 1982 and in the development of the party into a national mass-based organization in the 1990s. The hundreds of thousands of CEBs and Catholic grassroots organizations scattered throughout Brazil's vast territory played a key organizational and mobilizing role enabling the nationalization of the PT. Although the CEBs did not strictly bring Lula to power in 2002, their mobilizing role was the crucial factor that enabled the party to become a national organization on which Lula eventually came to power.

## **QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE**

While the statistical analyses show the association between religious competition and PT presence and vote share, the regression coefficients do not provide any meaningful information of how the decline of Catholicism motivated Catholic clergy to create the communities and grassroots organizations on which PT expanded (H.1) and how lay leaders and Catholic communities became a strong electoral base for the PT.

To understand how religious competition motivated Catholic clergy to develop the social bases for progressive social action and for PT development we analyze religious and social dynamics in two dioceses from the northern state of Rondônia. A predominantly rural state in the northern Amazon region, Rondônia is not a place where one would expect to observe the development of a leftist party led by industrial workers.

### *Religious Competition and the PT's Success in Rondônia: A Tale of Two Dioceses*

Located in the northwest portion of Brazil in the Amazon, Rondônia is one of the smallest and least populated states in the country. Rondônia is the byproduct of two waves of internal migration: a labor migration associated with the rubber boom in the nineteenth century and a rural migration that resulted from a major population relocation conducted by the military regime in the 1970s.

Besides being a state of migrants, Rondônia is one of Brazil's most dynamic religious markets. Because the Catholic Church had a very scant presence in the Amazon, most migrants moving into Rondônia found themselves religiously underserved. The absence of the Catholic Church opened a window of opportunity for a wide variety of U.S. Protestant missionary churches to actively proselytize in the region. For example, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a U.S. NGO of missionary linguists who specialized in the translation of Bibles to indigenous languages throughout the twentieth century and who sought to convert impoverished indigenous populations to

Protestantism, developed an important missionary site in R ndonia in the 1950s. By 1980, before the Pentecostal boom that would transform Brazil’s religious landscape, the R ndonia scored the highest levels of religious competition in the country: 1.6.

A state of migrants and religious plurality, R ndonia is also one of the early success stories of PT presence. In 1982 the PT was able to present candidates for city council elections in seven of the thirteen cities in the state. Although the PT vote share was low in plurality elections, the PT had a strong presence in a sizeable part of the state via mechanisms of proportional representation. The party, however, did not evenly develop in R ndonia. For example, the PT had a strong presence in the surrounding areas of the city of Ji-Paran  but only a weak presence in Porto Velho, the state capital.

To understand the local development of the PT we compare six cities from two of R ndonia’s Catholic dioceses – the Diocese of Ji-Paran  and the Diocese of Porto Velho. Table 4 summarizes basic social, economic and religious information about the cities of these two contiguous dioceses.

(Table 4 about here)

As the information shows, all the cities are roughly similar in socio-demographic characteristics, except for Porto Velho. The main difference, however, is the city’s religious structure: while all the cities in the Diocese of Ji-Paran  experienced competitive religious market structures (ranging from 1.5 effective religions in Vilhena to 1.9 in the other three cities), the capital city of Porto Velho was not a dynamic religious marketplace. The other important difference is that while the bishop and clergy of Ji-Paran  adopted progressive pro-poor pastoral practices, the clergy of Porto Velho adopted a more traditionalist approach. The final notable difference is that while the PT became an important political force in the cities of the Diocese of Ji-Paran , the party had a scant presence in Porto Velho.

The important work by Chiovetti and Jacob and his colleagues provides compelling evidence that the early success of U.S. Protestant missionaries and Protestant churches in attracting migrants to R ndonia led Catholic authorities from the Diocese of Ji-Paran  to adopt progressive practices – to launch a major campaign to develop CEBs and grassroots cooperatives and mutual aid networks. Many of these groups soon became politicized and began demanding public goods from local authorities: better road conditions, and health and education services. With the assistance of the diocesan team in charge of rural pastoral activities, CEB members spearheaded the creation of a large number of local rural labor unions. During election cycles, Catholic authorities went as far as to establish a “partisan pastoral program,” by which CEB members received resources and training to actively participate and press their demands during election campaigns.

In his influential work on religion and politics in R ndonia, Chiovetti is clear about the crucial role that CEBs and Catholic lay organizations played in the creation of the PT:

“The sequencing was as follows: Catholic pastoral agents first organized migrants into Christian Base Communities and then CEBs became the bases for the creation of rural labor unions. The most politicized leaders from the CEBs and the unions would subsequently become PT members.”

While the pastoral agents of the Diocese of Ji-Paraná were actively involved in the mobilization and the politicization of the lay, the clerical team of Porto Velho did not adopt any progressive pastoral actions, and did not develop CEBs or endorse the PT. To the extent that the PT built any presence in the city of Porto Velho, it was the result of outside pressure, mainly coming from Ji-Paraná.

## CONCLUSIONS

The canonical account of leftist-party development in political sciences suggests that workers are the only social class capable of creating mass-based national leftist political organizations. In this “secularist” story, religious actors play no role. If religious institutions and actors play any role in party development, their contribution is toward the formation of confessional or conservative parties.

By analyzing the surprising rise and development of the Workers’ Party in Brazil – the only mass-based party to have ever emerged in Brazil and the largest leftist political party in the democratic world today – in this paper we sought to challenge the canonical view of leftist party development as a secular story. We provided extensive evidence showing that workers in Brazil did not have the demographic size and geographic presence to serve as the social base for the rise of the PT as a national party. We showed that the extensive network of Christian Base Communities and lay associational networks that Catholic clergy developed in response to the spread of U.S. Protestant missionary activity in the country’s impoverished regions became, instead, the organizational infrastructure for the transformation of the PT from a regional party into a national mass-based organization. We provided extensive quantitative evidence showing that the PT was more present and had a larger vote share in cities experiencing the most intense levels of religious competition. And based on qualitative evidence we showed that CEB members and lay organizations provided the local leadership and the organizational infrastructure for the transformation of the PT into a mass political organization.

While our discussion centered predominantly on Brazil, there is extensive evidence that similar dynamics of religious competition led Catholic clergy across Latin America to adopt progressive pastoral practices and develop grassroots organizations and social movements that facilitated the rise of different leftist movements. In El Salvador, religious competition played a crucial role in the creation of dense rural associational networks, which first served as the social base for the development of the FMLN and for civil war, but later became the organizational infrastructure for the transformation of the rebel group into a successful mass-based leftist political party. Two decades after the end of El Salvador’s civil war, the FMLN, like the PT, is the country’s incumbent party. In Bolivia, religious competition and Catholic social activism played a crucial role in the rise of indigenous movements which served as the organizational basis for the rise of the MAS to power.

Our findings have two important theoretical implications. First, in the developing world, in which industrialization processes were truncated or partially successful and social cleavages are underdeveloped, religious actors can play a major role in the creation of mass-based leftist parties. In the absence of national workers’ unions, the development of mass-based leftist parties is not necessarily a state-led process leading to populism. As the Brazilian experience showed, in the absence of an extensive working class base,

religious actors played a defining role in the development of a programmatic national leftist party from below. Second, while the Western European experience has led us to axiomatically understand the development of leftist political parties as secular processes and to see experiences in which religious actors play a leading role in the development of leftist forces as “anomalies,” it is plausible that in the grander comparative scheme the Western European experience of secular leftist-party development might actually be the anomalous case.

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Table 1. Logistic Regressions of Workers' Party Presence in Brazilian Municipal Elections, 1982–2000 (Candidates for City Councilor = 1; 0 otherwise)

	Model 1 1982	Model 2 1982 (Sao Paulo)	Model 3 1996	Model 4 2000	Model 5 Δ 82 – 96	Model 6 Δ 82 – 00
Religious competition 80	-0.338 (0.286)	1.502* (0.826)				
Industrial labor 80	4.553*** (1.470)	8.541* (4.420)				
Urban pop. 80	0.027*** (0.003)	0.016 (0.012)				
ln pop. 80	1.085*** (0.058)	1.694*** (0.258)				
Higher education 80	0.820 (1.214)	0.107 (2.683)				
Development index 80	-2.256*** (0.726)	2.985 (4519)				
Religious competition 90			0.872*** (0.180)	0.354* (0.183)	0.365*** (0.141)	0.097 (0.137)
Industrial labor 90			-0.005 (0.011)		-0.007 (0.009)	
Urban pop. 90			0.004* (0.002)		-0.003 (0.002)	
ln pop. 90			1.161*** (0.052)		0.201*** (0.036)	
Higher education 90			0.077 (0.137)		-0.492*** (0.111)	
Development index 90			1.279 (0.931)		0.158 (0.824)	
Industrial labor 00				-0.039*** (0.011)		-0.006 (0.009)
Urban pop. 00				0.006** (0.002)		-0.001 (0.002)
ln pop. 00				1.244*** (0.054)		0.115*** (0.034)
Higher education 00				0.242*** (0.082)		-0.214*** (0.061)
Development index 00				-0.538 (1.101)		-1.406 (0.928)
Regional controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
PT vote 82			0.675*** (0.115)	0.557*** (0.122)		
Constant	-12.24*** (0.681)	-23.43*** (3.304)	-13.17*** (0.667)	-12.14*** (0.799)	-2.750*** (0.495)	-0.440 (0.588)
Observations	3,928	570	4,013	4,084	4,013	4,084
McKelvey & Zavoina's $R^2$	0.402	0.706	0.437	0.459	0.031	0.025

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Standardized coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 2. Robustness Checks – Logistic Regressions of Workers’ Party Presence in Brazilian Municipal Elections, 1996 (Candidates for City Councilor = 1; 0 otherwise)

	<b>Model 7</b>	<b>Model 8</b> (Fixed Effects)	<b>Model 9</b> (Amazon)	<b>Model 10</b> (Southeast)
Religious competition 90	0.935*** (0.180)	0.781*** (0.199)	1.840*** (0.633)	1.843*** (0.387)
Industrial labor 90	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.012)	-0.064 (0.069)	0.022 (0.020)
Urban pop. 90	0.003 (0.002)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.010 (0.008)	0.007 (0.005)
ln pop. 90	1.166*** (0.050)	1.214*** (0.057)	0.916*** (0.171)	1.179*** (0.008)
Higher education 90	0.040 (0.133)	0.091 (0.151)	-0.612 (0.962)	0.451** (0.210)
Development index 90	2.371*** (0.731)	-0.284 (1.044)	2.930 (2.460)	-5.561*** (1.782)
PT core region	0.112 (0.112)			
PT vote 82	0.681*** (0.115)	0.616*** (0.116)	1.114*** (0.354)	0.515** (0.209)
Constant	-13.72*** (0.630)	-12.79*** (0.828)	-12.96*** (2.267)	-10.29*** (1.268)
Observations	4,013	3,999	355	1,413
McKelvey & Zavoina’s $R^2$	0.473	0.437	0.369	0.541

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Standardized coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 3. OLS Models of Vote Share for the Workers' Party in Brazilian Elections, 1990s

	<b>Model 11</b> President 94	<b>Model 12</b> Governor 94	<b>Model 13</b> Legislator 94	<b>Model 14</b> Mayor 96	<b>Model 15</b> City Councilor 96
Religious competition 90	0.056** (0.024)	0.134** (0.047)	0.046** (0.021)	0.029 (0.072)	0.043** (0.063)
Industrial labor 90	-0.024 (0.002)	0.107** (0.003)	0.123** (0.001)	0.026 (0.005)	-0.019 (0.004)
Urban pop. 90	-0.020 (0.000)	-0.295 (0.001)	0.054** (0.000)	0.006 (0.001)	-0.023 (0.001)
ln pop. 90	0.137** (0.007)	0.178** (0.012)	0.183** (0.005)	0.278** (0.018)	0.355** (0.016)
Higher education 90	0.004 (0.017)	0.035* (0.032)	0.004 (0.014)	0.038* (0.049)	0.001 (0.043)
Development index 90	0.362** (0.164)	0.302** (0.281)	0.261** (0.099)	0.045 (0.395)	0.053 (0.383)
Geographic controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
PT vote 82 (governor)	0.223** (0.013)	0.230** (0.024)			0.144** (0.031)
PT vote 82 (legislator)			0.297** (0.013)		
PT vote 82 (mayor)				0.124** (0.048)	
PT vote 82 (city councilor)					0.144** (0.031)
PT runs gov. candidate			0.145** (0.011)		
Observations	4,485	3,277	4,085	4,014	4,013
Adjusted $R^2$	0.236	0.315	0.604	0.178	0.238

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Standardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses

Table 4. Comparing Two Catholic Dioceses in Rondônia

Diocese	Ji-Paraná				Porto Velho		Brazil
City	Cocoa	Pimenta Bueno	Ji-Paraná	Vilhena	Ariquemes	Porto Velho <sup>1</sup>	
Population	67030	29993	121714	50290	53365	133882	
Urban population (%)*	20.3	36.6	32.5	39.4	36.9	76.6	31.0
IDH*	0.488	0.548	0.532	0.540	0.569	0.693	0.370
Illiteracy (%)*	36.4	32.3	35.9	34.2	37.5	23.4	26.4
Poverty (%)*	51.4	43.8	42.0	29.1	43.6	28.3	57.9
Industrial labor (%)*	0.8	1.5	1.2	2.3	0.8	3.0	2.1
<b>Religious Competition</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	1.17
<b>Pastoral Approach</b>		<b>Progressive</b>			<b>Traditionalist</b>		
<b>Vote for PT (1982, City Councilor)</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>2.9</b>		--	<b>0.9</b>	3.3

\* Data for 1980. Municipal mean levels.

<sup>1</sup> State Capital

Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of PT Presenting a Candidate for City Council at Different Levels of Religious Competition, 1996 (Simulations Based on Table 1, Model 3)

