

When the Church Votes Left:

How Progressive Bishops Supported the Workers' Party in Brazil

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Abstract

Social scientists routinely characterize religious influence in electoral politics as conservative and left-wing parties as fundamentally secular. Against these claims, I argue that the relationship between religion and electoral politics is shaped by the redistributive beliefs and preferences of religious leaders, who can become valuable allies of left-wing parties. I evaluate this argument in Brazil following the appointment of Pope John Paul II, leveraging as-if random variation in municipalities' exposure to progressive Catholic bishops. I show that bishops who actively supported state-led redistribution were essential to the electoral success of the left-wing Workers' Party (PT). Voters in municipalities with longer exposure to these bishops supported the PT at higher rates. The findings highlight the under-examined role of religious leaders in shaping the electoral influence of religion and provide evidence that these leaders can, in fact, be key for the development of left-wing parties, especially in the developing world.

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Scholars of political economy conventionally characterize religion's electoral influence as conservative, arguing that religiosity decreases electoral support for left-wing parties and undercuts redistribution. Some have argued that religion can substitute for the welfare state by providing a source of spiritual and material insurance or by serving as an alternative channel for redistribution through religious charities.¹ Others have emphasized the conservative orientation of religious economic and social moral teachings, which is thought to reduce demand for redistribution among religious voters and potentially lead them to support parties on the right.²

Yet, leaders of religious organizations at times have actively supported progressive economic positions that both seek to mitigate inequality and advocate state-led redistribution. Often, this progressivism stems from religious doctrines that profess strong concern for the poor and a critical view of inequality.³ Protestant leaders within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in the United States, formed the Poor People's Campaign in the 1960s to demand economic reforms to address inequality throughout the country (see e.g. [Laurent 2019](#)). In the mid-20th century, Catholic priests around the world promoted the causes of the poor from their pulpits and, at times, in the electoral arena.⁴ This movement was particularly strong in Latin America, where progressive clergy often led opposition to military rule ([Mainwaring, 1986](#); [Mainwaring and Wilde, 1989](#); [Hagopian, 1996](#); [Gill, 1998](#); [Philpott, 2007](#)) and grassroots movements for economic redistribution, human rights, and ethnic rights for rural and indigenous populations ([Scully, 1992](#); [Yashar, 1997](#); [Wood, 2003](#); [Yashar, 2005](#); [Trejo, 2012](#)). More recently, Pope Francis has repeatedly called on global leaders to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.⁵

Despite their central role in shaping the religious experience of parishioners in most denominations, religious leaders are absent from political economy theories of the electoral influence of religion. In this paper, I argue that the ideological leanings of religious leaders shape religion's electoral impact. The presence of progressive religious leaders can improve the electoral fortunes of left-wing parties, allowing them to expand their base of electoral support and win national polit-

¹On religion as a source of spiritual insurance, see [Scheve and Stasavage \(2006b,a\)](#). On material insurance, see [Dehejia, DeLeire and Luttmer \(2007\)](#) and [Chen \(2010\)](#). On the role of religious charities as an alternative source of redistribution, see [Huber and Stanig \(2011\)](#). On how right wing parties can use this technology to attract poor voters, see [Thachil \(2014a\)](#).

²On the role of economic moral teachings, see [Benabou and Tirole \(2006\)](#). On teachings on social issues, see [Roemer \(1998\)](#); [De la O and Rodden \(2008\)](#).

³For example, Islamic scripture underscores the importance of economic protections for the poor, promotes economic equity, and mandates that society provide for the less fortunate ([Davis and Robinson, 2006](#); [Pepinsky and Welborne, 2011](#)). Similar directives exist in Christian doctrine, which affirms the importance of compassion for the poor and the need to alleviate suffering ([Kahl, 2005](#)).

⁴On progressive Catholicism in western Europe, see, e.g., [Horn \(2015\)](#).

⁵See, e.g., [Time \(2014\)](#); [The Washington Post \(2022\)](#).

ical office.⁶ Progressive religious leaders can leverage their moral authority to shape parishioners' beliefs and preferences about economic inequality and advocate state-led redistribution as a fair solution to this issue. These leaders can also promote local organizations that advocate redistribution, such as labor unions. Left-wing parties can directly benefit from these activities, especially in contexts where the otherwise limited reach of traditional labor unions prevents them from connecting with and mobilizing poor voters.

I evaluate my argument in Brazil after the democratic transition in 1985. To provide evidence of religious leaders' effect on the electoral success of left-wing parties, I study the role of Catholic bishops in shaping the development and electoral success of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT). The limited scale of Brazil's labor movement made the country a very unlikely setting for the emergence of a left-wing party. Yet the left-wing PT, which rose to prominence in the 1980s, built an electoral coalition with country-wide support.

To examine the impact of progressive religious leaders on the PT's surprising electoral success, I analyze a novel natural experiment in which the length of exposure to economically progressive bishops varies as-if randomly. After two decades of progressive Catholic leadership, the death of Pope Paul VI in 1978 brought about a conservative shift in the Vatican's outlook due to the appointment of John Paul II (JPII) as Pope. To curb progressives' influence in Brazil, JPII sought to replace incumbent bishops with his preferred conservative candidates. However, institutional rules within the Church prevented him from doing so before these bishops reached the retirement age of seventy-five. Since the timing of bishops' seventy-fifth birthday—and thus their replacement—varied across dioceses, this generated exogenous variation in the length of time that progressive bishops remained in office.

I show that exposure to progressive bishops had important and lasting effects on the electoral success of the left-wing PT. I find that the party's vote share increased significantly in localities that spent more years under a progressive bishop. In 1989, during Brazil's first direct presidential elections after its democratic transition, the party increased its vote share by 3 percentage points in districts that retained their progressive bishop until after 1985 as compared to those in which bishops were replaced during the initial years after the 1978 papal transition—roughly a 20% increase over the PT's average vote share in that election. The positive effects of progressive-bishop tenure are present throughout the period I study (1989-2002), indicating that the presence of a progressive bishop had a long-term impact on the PT's electoral fortunes.

I draw on an array of novel empirical evidence to demonstrate how progressive Catholic clergy

⁶I define left-wing parties as those that appeal to lower-class constituencies—often with roots in organized labor—and seek the support of these constituencies by offering some level of wealth redistribution.

benefited the PT. Leveraging archival data, I first show that progressive bishops underscored the importance of economic inequality as a political issue and advocated redistributive economic policies to reduce disparities between the rich and poor. I then demonstrate, using an original panel dataset of municipal-level PT affiliation from 1980 to 2002, that progressive bishops increased the PT's territorial reach across Brazil. Exploring heterogeneity in treatment effects, I show that the effects of longer progressive-bishop leadership are most pronounced in areas where the PT had access to fewer labor unions to mobilize the poor without external help. In these municipalities, they were instead able to expand their electoral base by relying on the support of a dense network of religious and lay organizations built by progressive Catholic bishops. In a final empirical section, I explore the ways in which the replacement of progressive bishops reshaped church dynamics at the local level. Evidence from an original, parish-level dataset of local priests between 1965 and 1997 suggests that the replacement of progressive bishops significantly increased priest turnover, preventing progressive priests from fostering ties to local networks in their communities and limiting their political influence.

This paper sheds light on the role of religious leaders in shaping religion's electoral influence. At least since Durkheim and Weber, modern social science has focused on the social and political impacts of denominational differences, such as between Catholics and Protestants. This paper demonstrates that religious leaders' beliefs about economic redistribution can shape a given religious denomination's political influence.⁷ The focus on religious leaders speaks to the literature that seeks to "unbundle" the different components of religion.⁸ It highlights how leaders link religious ideas to political issues and shape the preferences and behaviors of their parishioners.

These findings also contribute to scholarship about the rise of left-wing parties. Scholars have argued that left-wing parties can build winning coalitions by expanding their support through non-class based policy appeals—e.g. based on ethnicity, kinship, and social policies—and through the provision of patronage.⁹ While perhaps effective, these efforts often undermine the party's preferred focus on class-based politics. In this paper, I show that the presence of progressive religious leaders provides an alternative path to electoral victory, one that allows the left to incorporate poor religious voters through redistributive programmatic appeals consistent with the left's economic policy agenda.

Finally, I contribute to the understanding of the political influence of the Roman Catholic

⁷In doing so, I build on a body of scholarship that emphasizes that religious denominations are often multivocal, with different interpretations of a shared religious doctrine co-existing in a single denomination (Stepan, 2000; Philpott, 2007; Grzymala-Busse, 2012; Hagopian, 2009).

⁸See McClendon and Riedl (2015, 2019); Masoud, Jamal and Nugent (2016).

⁹See e.g. Przeworski and Sprague (1986); Levitsky (2003); Dancygier (2017).

Church specifically by identifying the effects of bishop appointments—one of the key channels through which popes can influence domestic politics. While I focus on the effects of religious leadership on the electoral success of the political left in post-democratization Brazil, the research design I introduce can be used to study the effects of papal appointments across countries and pontificates. This article therefore makes a methodological as well as a substantive contribution to the study of the Church’s political influence.

1 Religious Leaders in Electoral Politics

In most religious traditions, religious leaders are responsible for interpreting sacred texts and for conveying these interpretations to their followers (Grzymala-Busse, 2012). Their position atop religious organizations also grants them extensive influence in the mobilization of their parishioners as well as the production and distribution of religious resources (Wickham, 2002; Cammett and Luong, 2014).

Though few scholars have studied religious leaders’ influence on electoral politics directly, there is good reason to expect them to hold conservative economic preferences that undercut support for left-wing parties.¹⁰ Scholars have documented, for example, that religious teachings often underscore the merit of hard work and personal responsibility for one’s economic situation (Weber, 1905). These ideas may promote a view of inequality as a fair outcome that does not require state intervention to address (see e.g. Benabou and Tirole 2006; McClendon and Riedl 2019).¹¹ We might thus expect religious leaders to not only hold these views themselves, but also to promote them among their followers, thereby reducing support for left-wing parties.

Yet, religious leaders may in fact support economic redistribution. While perhaps less studied, religious teachings often define poverty as a moral concern that society has a collective responsibility to address. In Judaism, for example, inequality is generally described as a social concern that merits engagement in political action (Cox and Jones, 2012). This is reflected in the economic progressivism of most Jewish leaders in the United States (Djupe and Sokhey, 2003). Within Protestantism, leaders of the Social Gospel movement in the early twentieth century called for a reconstruction of the social order and advocated wide-ranging labor reforms, including the abolition of child labour, a shorter workweek, and higher wages (Evans, 2017).

Notably, religious leaders who support, and take actions to promote, economic redistribution co-

¹⁰For an exception focusing on Catholic bishops in Latin America, see Hagopian (2009).

¹¹In contexts where religious institutions play a large role in the provision of welfare, that may also lead religious leaders to redistribution through state channels. See e.g. Kalyvas (1996) and Warner (2000).

exist alongside those leaders who oppose redistribution, even within a single denomination. While this paper focuses on differences within Catholicism, there also exists variation within a wide array of religious traditions.¹² A recent study on the politics of religious leaders in the United States, for example, documents wide variation in their views across, and also within, denominations ([Malina and Hersh, 2021](#)).

To characterize this variation among religious leaders, I distinguish between whether or not leaders support economic redistribution.¹³ I refer to religious leaders who oppose state-led redistribution as “conservatives.” These leaders do not consider there to be a religious imperative to address poverty through state channels.¹⁴ In contrast, I label religious leaders who promote redistribution as “progressives.” Unlike their conservative counterparts, these leaders emphasize the unjust roots of poverty and inequality and perceive a moral responsibility to mitigate these ills through state-led economic redistribution.

I argue that the presence of either progressive or conservative religious leaders shapes the electoral prospects of left-wing parties. In contrast to conservatives, progressive religious leaders often harness their broad societal legitimacy and authority in support of state-led economic redistribution. They can also leverage their organizational resources to facilitate the territorial growth of left-wing parties. This section develops the logic behind these predictions.

1.1 Religious Leaders and the Poor’s Support for Left-wing Parties

Poor voters are a natural constituency of the left-wing parties, however their support cannot be assumed. These voters may be particularly susceptible to clientelistic and other non-programmatic appeals, which reduce the attractiveness of left-wing parties’ programmatic platforms.¹⁵ They may also prioritize other policy dimensions—such as crime or social issues—that make it easier for other parties to compete for their support.¹⁶ While left-wing parties may be able to recruit the sup-

¹²On Judaism, see [Sharkansky \(1996\)](#); on Islam, see [Davis and Robinson \(2006\)](#); [Pepinsky and Welborne \(2011\)](#).

¹³For an alternative characterization that focuses on Catholic bishops and considers multiple policy dimensions, see [Hagopian \(2009\)](#).

¹⁴Conservatives may oppose state-led redistribution because they perceive it as an individual responsibility or view religious welfare provision as the only appropriate channel through which to carry out redistribution.

¹⁵Indeed, right-wing parties—who support little to no economic redistribution—have often captured the support of poor voters through non-programmatic appeals. See e.g., [Stokes et al. \(2013\)](#); [Chandra \(2007\)](#); [Thachil \(2014b\)](#); [Dancygier \(2017\)](#). Left-wing parties have also, in some cases, pursued clientelistic strategies to recruit voters. See e.g. [Levitsky \(2003\)](#).

¹⁶For example, socially conservative parties who favor less redistribution or do not take strong positions on the economic policy dimension, have often relied heavily on the electoral support of poor voters. See e.g., [Frank \(2007\)](#); [Romer \(1975\)](#); [De la O and Rodden \(2008\)](#).

port of these poor voters through socially embedded organizations, such as labor unions, in many cases—and increasingly since the 1980s—union membership rates have decreased.¹⁷ This creates a central challenge for left-wing parties in many countries: how can enduring ties be established with poor voters?

I argue that the presence of either progressive or conservative religious leaders critically shapes left-wing parties' ability to recruit the electoral support of the poor. Due to their high levels of religiosity and religious participation (Norris and Inglehart, 2011), poor voters are likely to assign a high value to the actions and statements of religious leaders. As a result, these leaders can shape the nature of religion's electoral influence. When religious leaders are conservative, their redistributive preferences do not align with those of left-wing parties and they are thus unlikely to further the left's ability to mobilize the poor. When religious leaders are progressive, however, their influence over religious voters can facilitate left-wing parties' ability to establish ties with poor voters.

One channel through which progressive religious leaders can aid left-wing parties is by shaping parishioners' preferences over redistribution. Religious leaders have widespread moral authority in the eyes of their followers. From their pulpits, progressive leaders can portray poverty and inequality as morally unjust and can frame the resolution of this problem around state policies to redistribute wealth in society, increasing parishioners' demand for redistribution.¹⁸ Furthermore, progressives can use their sermons and other forms of religious communication to emphasize economic inequality as a pressing social and political problem. In this way, progressive leaders can shape the electoral salience of redistribution, elevating it above other programmatic and non-programmatic appeals. They thus shift the policy preferences and priorities of poor voters to be more in-line with those of left-wing parties, ultimately increasing these parties' electoral support.

Progressive religious leaders can also aid in the formation and development of socially embedded organizations, such as labor unions and other class-based associations, that increase the mobilizational capacity of left-wing parties. Progressive religious leaders can provide a wide variety of resources to secular organizations, including meeting space and access to their network of parishioners.¹⁹ These resources, along with the explicit or implicit endorsement of progressive leaders, can contribute to the territorial expansion and membership growth of the class-based

¹⁷This is especially true in the developing world, where levels of industrialization are low and geographically concentrated and the informal economy predominates (see e.g. Handlin and Collier 2011; Auerbach et al. 2018; Feierherd 2020).

¹⁸On the relationship between beliefs about fairness and demand for redistribution, see Benabou and Tirole (2006) and Cavaille (2023).

¹⁹On the organizational resources available to religious leaders, see Cammett and Luong (2014).

organizations upon which left-wing parties often rely to mobilize voters.²⁰ Progressive religious leaders can thus aid left-wing parties in mobilizing poor voters, particularly where these secular organizations were previously weaker.

The argument developed here highlights the role of progressive religious leaders in improving the electoral fortunes of left-wing political parties. Progressive religious leaders can shape the redistributive preferences of their parishioners, increasing demand for state policies to reduce inequality and raising the electoral salience of this issue. They can also aid the development of secular organizations upon which left-wing parties can rely to mobilize poor voters, a resource that is likely to be particularly beneficial to parties with a history of building a base of electoral support through linkages with nonpartisan local organizations. Through these channels, progressive leaders can help left-wing parties to expand their base of electoral support to include previously untapped poor voters and increase their prospects of winning national political office.

2 Background

Progressive Catholicism in Brazil The traditional Catholic response to inequality was focused on the virtues of poverty, which it conceptualized as a state of grace—the poor are blessed in the eyes of the Church and it is their acceptance of material destitution that will ultimately lead to their salvation (Kahl, 2005). Growing labor conflict and rising economic inequality following European industrialization saw the emergence of an alternative strain of Catholicism, which I refer to in this paper as “progressive.”²¹ While this strain of Catholicism embraced capitalism, it acknowledged the role of the state in reducing economic equality and argued that the free operation of market forces should be tempered by moral considerations. One of the first documents to advocate for these ideas was *Rerum Novarum*, a 1891 encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII which condemned unfettered capitalism and advocated for the organization of labor unions and the right to collective bargaining. In the 1960s, Pope John XXIII further expanded official Church doctrine on social issues with the publication of two encyclicals that supported strengthening workers’ rights and increasing the power of labor unions and called on the Catholic Church to address the suffering and injustice of contemporary society.²²

The opening of the Second Vatican Council—a series of meetings of bishops and other Catholic

²⁰While religious leaders may occasionally choose to aid parties by lending their organizational resources directly, this overtly partisan involvement can undercut their moral authority and is thus quite costly. See e.g., Warner (2000); Gill (2007); Grzymała-Busse (2015).

²¹For an account of the emergence of this strain of Catholicism, see Horn (2015).

²²For a timeline of Catholic Popes since 1939, see Appendix Figure B1.

clergy from across the world between 1962 and 1965—was a watershed moment in the development of progressivism within the Church. The documents that emerged from Vatican II emphasized issues of social injustice and economic inequality, yet went significantly further than before in outlining the causes of these problems and identifying prescriptions to alleviate them. For example, the pastoral constitutions produced during Vatican II advocated expanding the role of unions and other worker organizations to level the playing field between capital and labor (Horn, 2015). In discussing rural land inequality, they went so far as to promote agrarian reform, arguing that “insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful” (Paul, 1965).

While not all of the Catholic clergy championed this progressive strain of Catholicism, these ideas were embraced by a large share of priests and bishops in Brazil. Many Brazilian priests shared a longstanding concern with promoting the economic development of the poor and Vatican II further strengthened their commitment to this theme (Lowy, 2000; Mainwaring, 1986). Brazilian bishops played a key role in the 1968 Conference of Latin American Bishops, which further cultivated this strain of progressive Catholicism under labels such as “liberation theology” and the “preferential option for the poor” (Adriance, 1985; Bruneau, 1974; Mainwaring and Wilde, 1989).

Progressive leaders in Brazil’s Catholic Church viewed reducing economic inequality—often through political channels—as a central concern of the Church. They issued several documents and official statements that called for major socioeconomic reforms and criticized the “social imbalances produced by... economic liberalism” (Mainwaring, 1986, 123-124).²³ At the local level, these progressive clergy members educated parishioners about their economic and political realities and served as a nexus between religious and secular organizations (Keck, 1995). They supported, and at times spearheaded, the formation of labor unions to improve workers’ living and working conditions, particularly in rural communities. Their role in framing social injustice and economic unfairness in terms of religious ideas resonated with the prevailing belief systems in local communities and promoted the poor’s social and economic engagement (Houtzager, 2001). Though generally hesitant to formally endorse specific political parties and/or candidates, progressive clergy members could shape the policy priorities of parishioners and the organizational resources available to left-wing parties through these indirect channels.²⁴

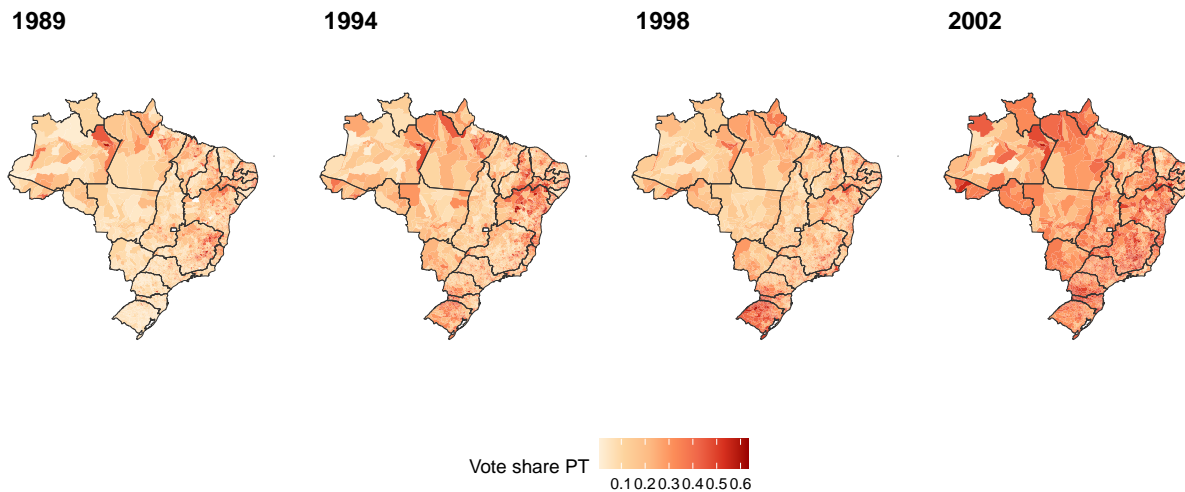
²³See also Cleary (1997); Mackin (2010).

²⁴Legal norms regulated some forms of religious engagement in politics in Brazil. For example, it was illegal for religious leaders to campaign for politicians or parties during religious services. While explicit endorsements were permitted outside of religious services, Brazilian priests and bishops generally abstained from these more direct forms of engagement in politics (Cleary, 1997, 265).

The Rise of the Workers' Party (PT) Amidst Brazil's gradual transition to democracy in the 1980s, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) emerged out of the country's labor movement as a left-wing political party. Drawing on its roots in labor, the party espoused a redistributive economic platform that prioritized the concerns of organized workers (Keck, 1995, 2010; Samuels, 2004; Hunter, 2010).²⁵

In the years following its formation, the PT sought to expand its party base and grow its electoral support. In 1982, it obtained only 8 of 479 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and no seats in the Senate. In a context in which organized workers comprised only a small share of the Brazilian electorate, the PT struggled to expand its presence beyond urban centers (as the map of the party's vote share in the 1989 Presidential election illustrates in Figure 1). To overcome this challenge, the party sought to leverage civil society organizations to build mass partisanship (Samuels and Zucco, 2015). In exploring the PT's rise, numerous scholars have noted how the support of progressive Catholic organizations—with their presence throughout Brazil and their deep roots in Brazilian society—played a critical role in facilitating the party's electoral expansion (Mainwaring, 1986; Mainwaring and Wilde, 1989; Meneguello, 1989; Keck, 1995).

Figure 1: Territorial Expansion of the PT, 1989-2002



The figure shows the growth in the vote share for the PT in Brazil's first four direct presidential elections after the democratic transition, 1989-2002. Darker shades indicate higher vote shares. The black lines marks state borders.

²⁵While the party moved away from its initial socialist agenda, it remained economically progressive and never abandoned its emphasis on redistribution (Samuels, 2004; Hunter, 2007, 2010).

3 The 1978 Papal Transition as a Natural Experiment

Did progressive Catholic leaders increase electoral support for the left in Brazil? Answering this question presents a key empirical challenge: it is generally difficult to systematically assess the ideological inclinations of individual clergy members. To overcome this difficulty, I focus on bishops within the Catholic hierarchy. While the pope exercises ultimate authority over Catholics throughout the world, he entrusts his leadership to a bishop in each diocese. Bishops exercise ultimate authority within their respective dioceses ([Code of Canon Law, 1983](#), Can. 381-402).²⁶ They control religious policy, shape the content of Catholic teachings, control the placement of priests, and are responsible for governing the faithful in their dioceses.

I assess bishops' ideological inclinations based on the pope who oversaw their appointment to a bishopric within the Catholic hierarchy. Popes enjoy complete discretion over the selection of bishops and often use this authority to appoint individuals who share their ideological sympathies. Previous studies of the Catholic Church in Latin America have leveraged this selection process to measure bishops' preferences. [Gill \(1998\)](#), for example, gauges bishops' receptivity to reforms adopted in Vatican II by arguing that bishops appointed during the tenure of the Church's two most progressive popes—John XXIII and Paul VI—would be more open to implement reforms than bishops appointed under more conservative pontiffs. Closer to the focus of this paper, [Hale \(2015\)](#) measures religious conservatism based on whether a bishop was selected after the appointment of John Paul II (JPII)—a conservative Pope—in 1978, when the Vatican systematically replaced retiring Mexican bishops with individuals who adhered to an orthodox and conservative social stance.

Building on this work, I consider bishops who were in office *prior* to Pope JPII's appointment in 1978 to be progressive and all bishops appointed under JPII to be conservative. While progressive bishops promoted political action to address economic inequality, the bishops that JPII selected as their replacements were less supportive of redistribution through state channels. Indeed, the appointment of conservative bishops represented a key component of JPII's efforts to curb the influence of progressives within the Church, often referred to as the “restoration” ([Ratzinger, Mackenzie and Messori, 2006](#)). The power to select bishops allowed JPII to use his appointments strategically to empower the conservative faction of the Church in Brazil.²⁷ Scholars and journalists studying the Catholic Church in Latin America were quick to take notice of this strategy in Brazil. For example, [Lernoux \(1989\)](#) and [Betances \(2007\)](#) underscore JPII's efforts to reduce the influence of

²⁶See also [Woywod \(1918\)](#). Dioceses are the basic administrative unit of the Church. They are an exhaustive and mutually exclusive geographical area akin to a state or province.

²⁷See e.g., [Alves Barbosa \(2007\)](#); [Lowy \(2000\)](#); [Cleary \(1997\)](#).

progressives through the appointment of conservative bishops. Lowy (2000, 216) argues that these new bishops were appointed “to substitute bishops that used to support pastoral activities committed to social change and who died or retired.” In 1988, the *New York Times* reported that the Pope was “using his authority to name new cardinals and bishops as a way of reasserting Vatican control” through “clergymen who unquestioningly accept Rome’s authority and share the Pope’s interpretation of church doctrine” (*The New York Times*, 1988).

I examine variation in the length of exposure to progressive bishops—the number of years each diocese spent under a pre-JPII bishop prior to that bishops’ replacement by JPII. As I show in Figure 2, pre-JPII bishop turnovers spanned more than three decades, producing significant variation in the amount of time that each diocese was led by a progressive. The longer progressives remained in office, the more time the left had to benefit from their presence. A simple comparison of the observed length of exposure, however, may lead to biased results. This would occur, for example, if JPII was more likely to replace progressive bishops in larger, more urban dioceses, where left-wing parties often enjoy an electoral advantage. In the next section, I describe an empirical strategy to overcome this inferential challenge.

3.1 Empirical Strategy

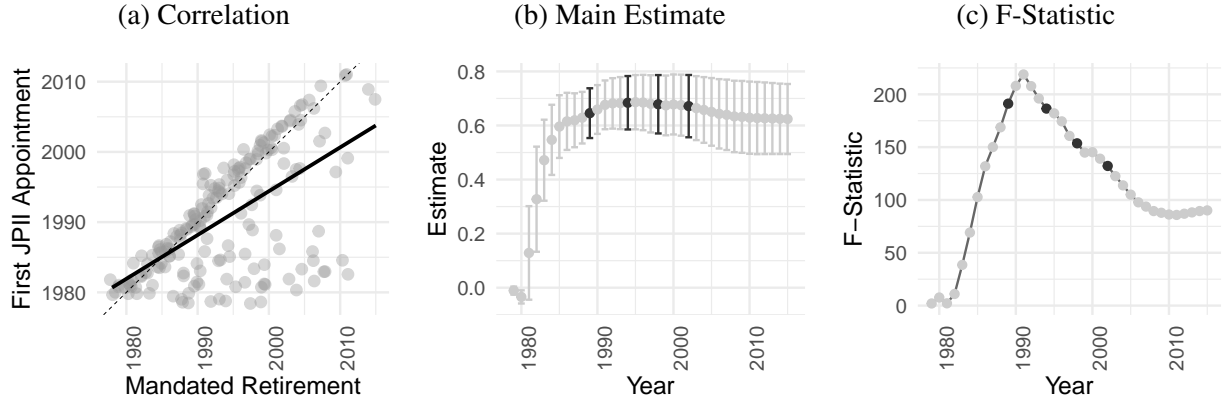
To estimate the effects of the length of exposure to progressive bishops, I employ an empirical strategy in which I exploit exogenous variation in the timing of progressive bishops’ retirement. JPII’s effort to replace Brazil’s progressive bishops with conservatives was constrained by the fact that bishops have stable tenure in office until their death or retirement at the age of 75, at which time they are “earnestly requested of their own free will to tender their resignation from office” (Paul VI, 1966).²⁸ As a result, the timing of progressive bishops’ 75th birthday or their death provides as-if random variation in the number of years until JPII was able to replace them. As shown in Panel (a) of Figure 2, JPII’s strategy was constrained by the mandated retirement rule—the correlation between the year of a progressive bishop’s mandated retirement and the year he was in fact replaced is .62.²⁹

I employ the as-if random variation in the number of years until progressives’ mandated retirement to identify the causal effects of the length of dioceses’ exposure to progressive bishops. I first

²⁸Bishops were appointed for life until 1966, when a decree by Paul VI introduced this requirement. In 1983, the age limit was incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law* (1983, 401).

²⁹While most bishops remained in office until their death or retirement, a small number of bishops left office early (those that fall below the 45 degree line). Appendix Figure B2 shows noncompliance disaggregated by the reason each bishop left office.

Figure 2: First Stage: Mandated and Observed Length of Exposure to a Progressive Bishop



The figure examines the strength of the first stage relationship between the year of mandated retirement and the observed length of exposure to a progressive bishop. Panel (a) shows a scatterplot of the raw variables—the year of mandated replacement and the year of the first JP II appointment for each diocese. The solid line marks the regression line; the dashed line illustrates perfect compliance. Panel (b) reports the main coefficient from the first stage regression for each year between 1979 and 2015. Panel (c) reports the corresponding F-statistic for each year. In panels (b-c), estimates for the years that are employed in the main analysis are highlighted in black.

estimate intention-to-treat effects using the following cross-section, reduced-form specification:

$$Y_{i,d,s,t} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Mandated Exposure}_{d,t} + \delta_s + \epsilon_{i,d,s,t} \quad (1)$$

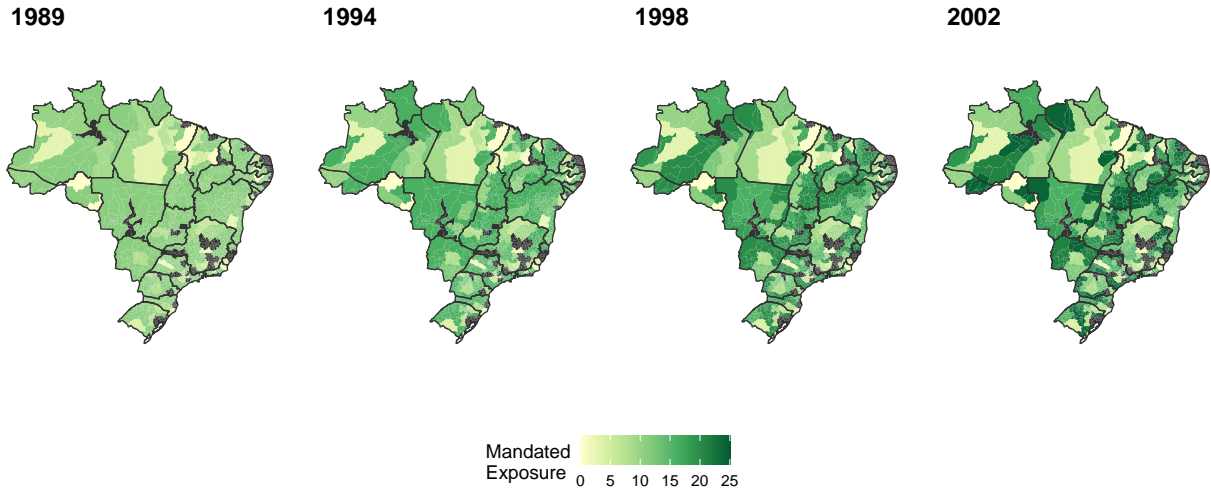
where $Y_{i,d,s,t}$ is the outcome of interest for municipality i located in diocese d in state s measured in year t . In the main analysis, the outcome of interest is the presidential vote share for the PT.³⁰ For diocese d in a given year t , the value of $\text{MandatedExposure}_{d,t}$ is a function of r_d , the year of death or of the 75th birthday of the bishop in diocese d at the time of JP II's appointment. For outcomes measured prior to the bishop's death or retirement, $\text{MandatedExposure}_{d,t}$ takes a value of $t - 1978$. For outcomes measured after the year of his death or retirement, $\text{MandatedExposure}_{d,t}$ is calculated as $r_d - 1978$. Such that:

$$\text{Mandated Exposure}_{d,t} = \begin{cases} t - 1978, & \text{if } t < r_d, \\ r_d - 1978, & \text{if } t \geq r_d. \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

³⁰Additional outcomes are described throughout the paper as they become relevant.

Figure 3 depicts the geographic distribution of $MandatedExposure_{d,t}$ at the time of each presidential election in the analysis. Finally, δ_s are state-level fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the diocese level (d), which is the level of treatment assignment. The higher the value of $MandatedExposure_{d,t}$, the longer the diocese was mandated to be overseen by a progressive bishop. Hence, I expect to find $\alpha_1 > 0$ when the dependent variable is a measure of PT electoral returns.

Figure 3: Mandated Exposure to Pre-JPII Bishops, 1989-2002



The figure shows the values of mandated exposure for the year of each presidential election included in the analysis. Darker shades indicate longer exposure to a progressive bishop. Archdioceses—which are excluded from the main analysis—are shaded in black. The black lines mark state borders.

I then turn to an instrumental variables (IV) approach in which the number of years until a progressive bishop’s mandated retirement serves as an instrument for the length of his tenure. To measure the effect of exposure to a progressive bishop on PT outcomes, I estimate the following 2SLS model:

$$Y_{i,d,s,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \widehat{Exposure}_{d,t} + \delta_s + \epsilon_{i,d,s,t} \quad (3)$$

where all terms remain as in Equation 1 except for the independent variable, $\widehat{Exposure}_{d,t}$, which indicates the predicted values for diocese d in year t from the first-stage regression of $Exposure_{d,t}$ on $Mandated Exposure_{d,t}$. $Exposure_{d,t}$ measures the observed number of years a diocese was led by its progressive bishop. Its calculation follows that of $Mandated Exposure_{d,t}$ summarized in

Equation 2, but uses e_d —the year of the appointment of the first JPPII bishop to diocese d —in place of r_d .

For the IV strategy to work, it is crucial that a strong first-stage relationship exists between the observed length of exposure to progressive bishops and the instrument. Panels (b) and (c) in Figure 2 report the estimated coefficient and the F-statistic, respectively, from the cross-section first-stage regressions of $Exposure_{d,t}$ on $Mandated\ Exposure_{d,t}$ for each year between 1978 and 2015. The results provide evidence that the relationship between these two variables is strong—by 1982, the estimate of the first-stage regression in Panel (b) is .23 and remains above .6 starting in 1988. The F-statistics associated with these regressions are between 110 and 230 during the 1987-2004 period.

The main study group consists of the municipalities contained within all 189 dioceses that existed in Brazil at the time of JPPII’s appointment.³¹ In addition to these dioceses, there were 32 archdioceses. Due to their higher stature, popes often appoint older bishops to these districts than for regular dioceses. As a result, archdioceses may have a higher probability of experiencing shorter exposure to progressive bishops. As I show in the appendix, this was the case in Brazil at the time of the 1978 transition (See Figure B3). Because they are typically wealthier and more urban, the inclusion of these archdioceses could introduce bias in the cross-sectional analysis. In the Appendix, however, I show that the results are robust to their inclusion.³²

3.2 Identifying Assumptions

The validity of the IV design rests on two further identifying assumptions. The first is that the length of mandated exposure to a progressive bishop is as good as randomly assigned—that is, it is exogenous to underlying factors that might affect the electoral fortunes of the PT. This is a valid assumption for several reasons. First, the timing of progressive bishops’ retirement is strongly related to their age, specifically when they turn 75, or death. As such, their retirement was determined prior to the papal transition of 1978. Second, the papal transition itself was unexpected and was unrelated to the religious and political dynamics in Brazil generally and those of specific dioceses. Furthermore, prior to the death of Paul VI, the ideology of his would-be successor was unknown. The combination of these features makes it unlikely that the length of mandated exposure to progressive bishops is correlated with dioceses’ potential outcomes. Empirical analyses reported in the Appendix further support the claim that the length of mandated exposure to progressives is un-

³¹Where data limitations make it impossible to examine the full study group, I note this explicitly in text.

³²See Table C2 in the Appendix.

correlated with many predetermined diocesan and municipal characteristics. I first regress the year of progressives' mandated retirement on a host of pre-treatment covariates, including measures of Catholic institutional organization, religious competition, population, and electoral outcomes for the 1972 and 1976 elections held under the dictatorship (Table B1). I also estimate the main models, which study the effect of mandated exposure, using a key placebo outcome—vote share for the opposition to the dictatorship's party during the 1976 elections (Table B2). These tests provide support for the assumption that the length of mandated exposure to a progressive bishop is unrelated to other factors that may affect electoral outcomes.

Finally, a crucial assumption in the design is the exclusion restriction, which requires the instrument (the number of years of mandated exposure to a progressive bishop) to influence the outcomes of interest only through the observed length of exposure to a progressive bishop. A potential violation of this assumption stems from the fact that progressive bishops differ from those appointed by JPII not only in terms of their ideology, but also in terms of their age and experience—JPII bishops were younger and less experienced than their predecessors. A second potential violation of the exclusion restriction arises from the fact that dioceses that retained their progressive bishops do not only have longer exposure to these bishops, but also have not experienced a process of bishop turnover that could shape the Church's ability to influence the electoral performance of the PT (i.e., a “bundled treatment”). I address these dual concerns in Section 4, providing evidence that bishops' ideological differences drive the main results.

3.3 Data

Data on the names, appointment dates, vacancy dates, and reasons for vacancy for all bishops in office between 1978 and 2015 comes from the Catholic Church's Pontifical Yearbook (*Anuario Pontificio*). To account for changing municipal and diocesan borders in Brazil over time, I constructed a crosswalk between Brazil's municipal and diocesan borders for the years between 1970-2002 using data from the IBGE and the Brazilian Catholic Yearbooks (*Anuário Católico do Brasil*) from 1977 to 1997.³³ Data for the main outcome—the vote share for the 1989-2002 Presidential elections—comes from IPEA (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*). Data sources for all additional outcomes and variables are described as they become relevant in the paper as well as in Appendix Section A.

³³See section A.2.1 for more details.

4 Progressive Bishops and the PT's Electoral Success

In this section, I examine the relationship between the length of exposure to progressive bishops and electoral support for the PT. The main outcome of interest is the PT's presidential vote share from 1989, the first direct presidential election after Brazil's dictatorship, to 2002, the first election in which the party won the presidency. The results are presented in Table 1. Panel A displays the results from the IV estimation and Panel B reports the intention to treat effects from the reduced form analysis. Both the IV and the reduced form estimates show a strong, statistically significant, and positive effect of the length of exposure to a progressive bishop on the vote share for the PT across all four presidential elections. A one-year increase in exposure to a progressive bishop increases the vote share of the PT by .57 percentage points in 1989, roughly .4 percentage points in the 1994 and 1998 elections, and .23 percentage points in 2002.

These are large effects. Consider the following conservative calculation based on the smallest estimate of the treatment effect (a .23 treatment effect per additional year of exposure). Compared to a diocese which lost its progressive bishop by 1980, the predicted overall increase in support for the PT in a diocese that retained its bishop until 2000—and thus had 20 additional years of exposure to a progressive bishop—is 4.6 percentage points. That translates to more than a 10% increase from the mean of the PT's vote share for the 2002 election, which was 42.15.

These findings are robust to several alternative specifications. The estimation strategy I employ, in which the municipality is the unit of analysis, accounts for the fact that treatment is assigned to each diocese by clustering standard errors at the diocese level. In Appendix Table C1, I show that the results are robust to taking instead a more conservative, design-based approach where the diocese is the unit of analysis.³⁴ I also report additional results in the Appendix that demonstrate that the results are robust to the inclusion of archdioceses in the analysis (Appendix Table C2) and to considering the PT's vote share in Congressional rather than Presidential elections as the outcome (Figure D1 and Table D1).

One concern that might arise when interpreting these results relates to the bundled nature of the treatment. Progressive bishops are, by design, older and more experienced on average than those appointed by JPPII and hence may be better connected to the priests and parishioners in their dioceses. If these attributes increased the ability of a bishop to shape the political behavior of voters in his diocese, the observed results could reflect these differences in age and experience rather than different ideological leanings between progressives and their JPPII replacements. To evaluate this possibility, I run a placebo treatment test in which, for each election, I replace the

³⁴On the difference between these approaches, see [Dunning \(2012\)](#).

Table 1: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the PT’s Presidential Vote Share

Outcome: PT Presidential Vote Share				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
Exposure	0.571** (0.221)	0.430** (0.150)	0.400** (0.133)	0.235* (0.097)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Exposure	0.385** (0.138)	0.302** (0.100)	0.271** (0.090)	0.154* (0.064)
Outcome Mean	13.99	21.48	24.43	42.15
Num. Obs.	3593	4070	4489	4540
Num. of Clusters	189	189	189	189

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

treatment variable with the age of the sitting bishop at the time of the election.³⁵ The age of the progressive bishop and the length of exposure are highly correlated and hence, without further changes, this test would not be very informative. To address this, I restrict the sample to the subset of dioceses in which the progressive bishop had not been mandated to retire by the election year. This ensures the test considers dioceses with identical values of the instrument at the time of the relevant election.³⁶ Among those dioceses, we can estimate the effect of age on the vote share of the PT. I report the results of this analysis in Panel A of Appendix Table C3, which shows that older bishops do not increase the PT’s vote share. Panel B—which reports results from the same exercise when using bishops’ experience as the placebo treatment—similarly indicates that the PT did not benefit electorally from the presence of more experienced bishops. This analysis provides suggestive evidence that age and experience are not confounding the relationship between length of exposure to a progressive bishop and support for the PT.

An additional issue pertaining to the bundled nature of the treatment is that the replacement of progressive bishops with conservatives also implies turnover in diocesan leadership. If disruptions

³⁵On placebo tests, see Eggers, Tuñón and Dafoe (2023).

³⁶While this is necessary for the test to be informative, it has the undesired consequence of reducing the sample size of the placebo compared to that of the main test. See Eggers, Tuñón and Dafoe (2023).

related to bishop turnover had an effect on the ability of new bishops to influence their dioceses, the reader might be concerned that the observed results reflect this effect. I evaluate this possibility in two ways. I first restrict the sample to the set of dioceses in which bishops' mandated retirement occurred prior to the relevant election. Since dioceses in this group had all experienced turnover and only differ in terms of their length of exposure, any observed effect among these dioceses is not confounded by turnover. Appendix Table C4 shows that the main estimates remain largely consistent when the analysis is limited to this subset. Second, I present evidence from an alternative, reduced form specification that relaxes the linearity assumption in the main analysis by recoding the instrument into a set of binary variables that estimate the effect of each additional electoral cycle for which a progressive bishop was mandated to remain in office. If the effects of length of exposure are explained by bishop type, as my argument suggests, we would expect the effect to increase in magnitude with each additional electoral cycle. If the effects instead reflect disruptions related to turnover, the observed treatment effects would not increase linearly. Consistent with the claim that the treatment reflects exposure to a progressive bishop, the results reported in Appendix Table C5, show that increase with the number of electoral cycles that the bishop was mandated to remain in office. Moreover, the magnitude of the estimated effects is consistent with that of the coefficients from the linear specification. Overall, these additional results provide reassuring evidence that the observed effects are driven by bishops' ideological differences.

5 How Progressive Bishops Facilitated the Growth of the PT

The previous section demonstrated that places exposed to progressive bishops for a longer period of time experienced an increase in support for the PT. But how did they do this? I provide evidence in this section that progressive bishops underscored the importance of economic inequality as a political issue and the virtues of state-led redistribution in pastoral outreach to parishioners in their dioceses. I also show that they encouraged the development of local organizational networks related to these issues.

Brazil's progressive clergy promoted class consciousness among their parishioners and emphasized taking political action to address economic inequality. One prominent channel through which these ideas were expressed was through the publication of educational pamphlets to inform parishioners of the structural causes of economic inequality and poverty and to encourage political action to address these issues.³⁷ As one pamphlet, issued in the state of São Paulo, described: "The living

³⁷Many of these pamphlets can be found in the "Brazil's Popular Groups" collection at the US Library of Congress ([Library of Congress, 1986](#)). For a description, see [Mainwaring \(1986, 166\)](#).

and working conditions of the great majority of the exploited and marginalized population can only be transformed if the popular classes are capable of influencing the centers of decisions and power” (originally cited in [Mainwaring, 1987](#), 21). A pamphlet from the archdiocese of Vitória stated, “There is no common good where people are marginalized,” and included a quote from the papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, written by progressive Pope Paul VI: “It is illicit to increase the wealth of the rich and the power of the strong by solidifying the misery of the poor and increasing the slavery of the oppressed.” Progressive clergy expressed similar themes in their sermons, ceremonies, and other printed materials (see e.g. [Mainwaring, 1986](#), 107). Through these activities, they framed economic inequality as morally unjust and encouraged the pious to combat it through political channels.³⁸

Progressive clergy also facilitated the growth of, and linkages between, local organizations committed to combating economic inequality, such as labor unions. For example, the Pastoral Land Commission—an organization of bishops whose mission was to address the roots of rural poverty and economic inequality—encouraged peasants to create rural unions to protect their interests from landowners ([Mainwaring, 1986, 1987](#)). Evidence from a set of government reports documenting bishop activism around land conflict in the late 1980s further illustrates progressive clergy members’ efforts to ameliorate economic inequality—progressive bishops were roughly twice as likely as conservatives to be identified in the reports as participating in organizations that promoted land and social activism (see Appendix Figure D2).³⁹ The bishops named in the 1987 report, for example, are described as working to raise awareness among rural workers about their rights to land and encouraging these workers to join “sociopolitical-union organizations with the goal of breaking with capitalist domination and conquer[ing] their rights.” ([SNI, 1987](#), 1). In the municipality of Tenente Portela, Priest Guido Taffarel was a member of the planning committee for the local union of rural workers. Other priests participated in the founding of local unions and provided space within their churches for union meetings and other events (see e.g. [SNI, 1974](#)). Throughout the country, progressive clergy were widely viewed as “an important agent” in fomenting rural unions ([Bruneau, 1974](#), 89).

Through the promotion of class consciousness and of local organizations supporting redistribution, progressive clergy facilitated the organizational growth of the left-wing PT. To demonstrate the influence of their activities on the growth of the PT, I examine the effects of progressive bish-

³⁸Contemporaries in Brazil took note of these activities. As members of Brazil’s military government observed, “In their activities among rural workers, progressive religious leaders prioritize ‘increasing class-consciousness with respect to their right to land, which they claim comes from the bible’”.

³⁹Reports were compiled by the Brazilian Intelligence Service (SNI) during the early years of Brazil’s democracy. See [SNI \(1987, 1989, 1990\)](#).

ops on the development of the “party on the ground,” or the direct-contact linkages that parties make with individuals at the local level (Handlin and Collier, 2011). Specifically, I focus on the party’s ability to recruit individuals to work for the party, measured using a panel dataset on new party affiliations between 1980 to 2002. based on data from Brazil’s electoral commission (TSE).⁴⁰ To assess the effect of the presence of a progressive bishop on PT affiliation at the local level, I estimate the following two-stage least squares regression:

$$\text{New party members}_{i,d,t} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \widehat{\text{Progressive_Bishop}}_{d,t} + \lambda_i + \theta_t + \epsilon_{i,d,t} \quad (4)$$

where $\text{New party members}_{i,d,t}$ is a continuous measure of the number of new party members in municipality i in diocese d and year t and $\widehat{\text{Progressive_Bishop}}_{d,t}$ indicates the predicted values for diocese d in year t from the first-stage regression of a binary indicator of whether the sitting bishop was appointed before JPPII became pope on a binary indicator of whether the progressive bishop is alive and under retirement age.⁴¹ The analysis suggests the presence of a progressive bishop significantly increased affiliation with the PT at the local level. Column 1 in Table 2 summarizes the results of the analysis. The presence of a progressive bishop had a positive and significant effect on the number of new party members at the municipal level, roughly 4.2 new affiliations per year. This effect is large—a 62.4% increase from the outcome mean of 6.77.

Among Brazil’s left-wing parties, the PT was uniquely positioned to benefit from the activities of progressive clergy. The party’s traditional dependence on urban labor unions meant it had ample experience relying on societal organizations to mobilize voters and recruit electoral support (Keck, 1995). As Samuels and Zucco (2015) describe, “the PT’s efforts to expand its local organizational presence is part of a . . . strategy to engage organized civil society at the grass roots.” Indeed, as shown in Table 2, the PT was the only left-wing party to benefit from increased exposure to progressive bishops.⁴² For all other major parties on the left, progressive bishops had no effect on local party growth.⁴³

The evidence presented in this section demonstrates the channels through which progressive

⁴⁰This data comes from Brazil’s electoral commission (TSE). See Appendix A for additional information on data sources and coverage.

⁴¹The analysis includes municipality and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the 1978 diocese level. I report both the reduced form and the two-stage least squares results.

⁴²I focus on the set of parties classified as left-wing by Power and Zucco (2009) and that received at least a municipal average of 0.5% of the vote in any of the Congressional elections that took place during the period under study.

⁴³Returning to the main analysis, in Appendix Figure D1 I show that results are similar when examining the effect of length of exposure to a progressive bishop on party vote share in congressional elections—among the major left-wing parties, the benefits of exposure to progressive bishops accrued to the PT. I focus on Brazil’s congressional elections because many of these parties supported the PT’s presidential candidate.

Table 2: Progressive Bishops and Local Party Affiliation

Outcome: New Party Members					
	PT	PDT	PPS	PSB	PC do B
Panel A: 2SLS					
Progressive Bishop	4.232+ (2.441)	0.373 (2.338)	-0.133 (0.946)	-0.229 (1.165)	0.141 (0.397)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)					
Mandated Progressive Bishop	2.035+ (1.177)	0.179 (1.125)	-0.064 (0.456)	-0.110 (0.560)	0.068 (0.191)
Outcome Mean	6.78	6.49	2.35	2.29	1.08
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	71 829	71 829	71 829	71 829	71 829
Num. of Clusters	189	189	189	189	189

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the 1970 municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include municipality and year fixed effects.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

clergy supported the PT. Progressives promoted state-led redistribution among parishioners and supported local networks of redistributive organizations that the PT could leverage to extend its territorial reach. Through their moral leadership centered the empowerment of the poor and the formation of local economically progressive organizations, they encouraged civic engagement, and provided the PT with key organizational resources.

6 Progressive Bishops and the Geography of Left-Wing Support

I have shown that progressive Catholic bishops improved the PT's electoral performance by emphasizing the moral need to address economic inequality and by supporting a local network of pro-redistributive organizations upon which the PT could rely to recruit voters. An observable implication of my theory is that left-wing parties are most likely to benefit from these resources

in places where they are unable to rely on pre-existing labor unions to mobilize workers.⁴⁴ This section evaluates this claim using information about the strength labor unions—a traditional source of support for left-wing parties generally and the PT specifically—across Brazil.

To examine how the strength of labor unions moderates the effect of the length of progressive bishop tenure on vote share for the PT in the 2002 Presidential elections, I use two measures of union strength in 1980: the share of workers in manufacturing and construction and the share of workers in agriculture, fishing and forestry.⁴⁵ To calculate the heterogeneous treatment effects I use a binning model that divides the share of the municipal population that is urban into three categories, one for each tercile of the overall distribution.⁴⁶ The model follows the reduced form intention-to-treat estimates in Equation 1 and adds each of the relevant variables as a moderator. I also report results from standard linear interaction models.

The results in Figure 4 provide evidence that the electoral benefits of longer exposures to progressive bishops were indeed concentrated in places where the PT could rely less on labor unions to mobilize electoral support.⁴⁷ The effect of exposure to a progressive bishop is almost indistinguishable for municipalities in the lowest (6.71% or less) or intermediate (6.71% - 13.1%) levels of workforce participation in manufacturing and construction—in these localities, each year of additional mandated exposure increased the party’s vote share by roughly .24 percentage points. The effect was much smaller and statistically indistinguishable from zero within localities in the highest tercile of the moderator (13.1% or more of the total population is works in manufacturing and construction)—around .031 percentage points for each year that a progressive bishop held office. The difference between these two estimates is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The estimated effects when using agriculture, fishing, and forestry mirror these results. Taken together, the results in this section provide evidence the PT benefited the most from greater exposure to a progressive bishop in places where it was more difficult to mobilize the poor through labor unions.

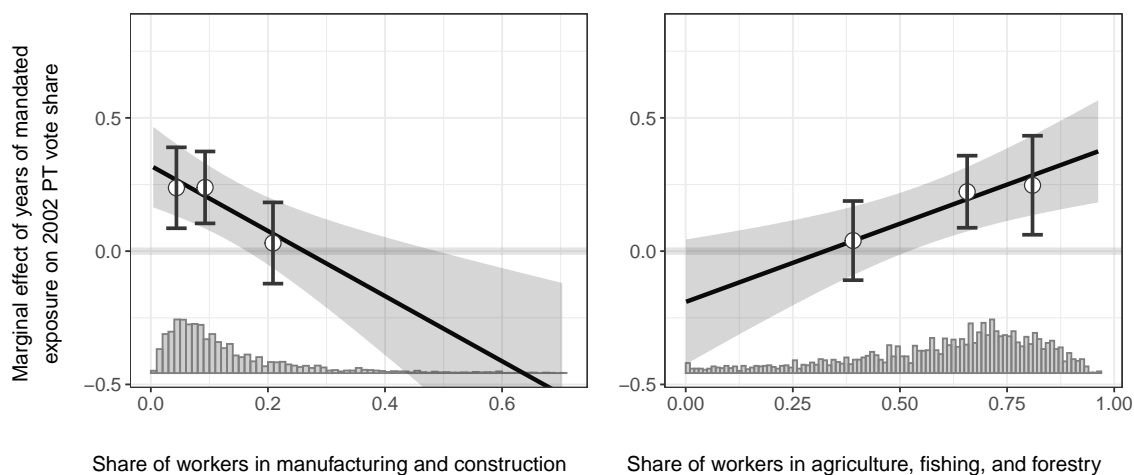
⁴⁴Following scholars of religious competition, we might expect progressive bishops to have a greater incentive to provide the PT with support in places where competition with other religious denominations is greater (see e.g. (Trejo, 2009; Gill, 1994)). As I show in Appendix Table D4, however, evangelical growth does not moderate the effect of the length of exposure to a progressive bishop on electoral support for the PT.

⁴⁵Data for these variables comes from IPUMS.

⁴⁶Binning models limit some of the concerns about common support and nonlinearity in the data that are present when using linear interactions (Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu, 2019).

⁴⁷These results are reported in table format in Appendix Table D2, which also shows that they are robust to employing the level of urbanization as an alternative proxy for unionization. All tests are robust to including a control for population size (Appendix Table D3).

Figure 4: Marginal Effects of the Length of Exposure to a Progressive Bishop on the PT’s Vote Share



The figures show that the conditional marginal effects of the length of exposure to progressive bishops on the support for the PT are concentrated in municipalities where the left-wing party could not rely on labor unions for mobilization, as measured by the share of workers in manufacturing and construction (left) or agriculture, fishing, and forestry (right). The dependent variable is the vote share for the PT in 2002. The estimation follows the reduced form intention-to-treat model in Equation 1, adding each of the relevant variables as a moderator. The unit of analysis is the municipality. Standard errors are clustered at the 1978 diocese level. All specifications include state fixed effects. These results are reported in table format in Appendix Table D2.

7 JP II Bishops and Diocesan Re-organization

How did the appointment of JP II bishops stymie progressive priests’ activities at the local level? Bishops exercise extensive control over the assignment of priests to parishes within their dioceses, allowing them to ensure that local church activities align with their ideological perspective. They can reassign sitting priests to less desirable parishes, to other work within the diocese that does not involve direct contact with parishioners, and can remove priests from their dioceses entirely. Similarly to the dynamics in other bureaucracies, bishops can use transfers as a mechanism to control the behavior of priests.⁴⁸ In this section I provide evidence that the entry of a JP II bishop resulted in a significant increase in the probability of priest turnover in their diocese. I also find that priests in municipalities with progressive activity were more likely to be the target of these transfers.

⁴⁸See e.g. Iyer and Mani (2012) for a study of these dynamics in the Indian context.

To measure priest turnover, I constructed an original parish-level dataset that draws on the six Brazilian Catholic yearbooks published between 1965 and 1997.⁴⁹ This data includes the name of the priest leading each parish at the time of the yearbook and covers a total of almost 46,000 parish-year observations. Two issues make building a parish-level panel especially difficult: individual parishes have no unique identifiers and are sometimes referred to using more than one name. For this reason, I focus on the municipality as the unit of analysis and calculate priest turnover within each municipality from one yearbook to the next.⁵⁰

To estimate the effect of the termination of a progressive's control over a diocese on priest turnover, I modify the main independent variable in Equation 4 to focus on the effect of JPPII's appointees. For the outcome, I consider two measures of parish turnover at the municipal level: a binary indicator of whether any of the parishes experienced turnover and the share of parishes within each municipality that experienced turnover.

Table 3 reports the results of this analysis. I find that the presence of a bishop appointed by JPPII increased the probability that a municipality experienced priest turnover by almost 8 percentage points—a 12% increase from the outcome mean of 0.66.⁵¹

Because the municipality is the unit of analysis and the outcome indicates the existence of turnover if at least one parish priest was replaced, the reader may wonder if the results reflect that conservative bishops focused on replacing priests in more urban municipalities, which tend to have a large number of parishes. However, the estimated effect is very similar when considering the share of a municipality's priests that experienced turnover (column 2) as well as to considering only the subset of municipalities with a single parish in 1977 (column 3). These results provide evidence that replacements took place across municipalities. Finally, I show that the results are robust to the exclusion of municipalities with a parish led by a priest from a religious order, whose selection required bishops to consult the leader of the relevant religious order (column 4).⁵²

Evidence from the state of Rio Grande do Sul supports the argument that bishops specifically targeted progressive priests with replacement. While information on whether priests are progressive or conservative is not systematically available, I use a 1974 report about the activities of progressive Catholic clergy in the state to identify municipalities where progressive priests were

⁴⁹The yearbooks were published in 1965, 1970, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1993, and 1997. An additional yearbook was published in 1981, but it does not include data on the identity of the priest leading each parish.

⁵⁰I ensure a balanced panel by aggregating the data based on the municipalities in 1970 and limiting the study group to the set of municipalities that had at least one parish during the period preceding the 1978 Papal transition.

⁵¹Note that due to the frequency of the yearbooks, this is the turnover over 5.33 years on average.

⁵²While a bishop's power over the appointment and removal applies to all the priests within their dioceses, the replacement of priests who belong to a religious order requires the consultation of the leader of the relevant order (Cafardi and Hite, 2000).

Table 3: The Effect of JPII Bishops on Priest Turnover

Outcome: Priest Turnover						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: 2SLS						
JPII Bishop	0.079* (0.037)	0.070+ (0.037)	0.089* (0.044)	0.141* (0.056)	0.167* (0.059)	0.013 (0.044)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)						
Mandated JPII Bishop	0.042* (0.019)	0.037+ (0.020)	0.046* (0.022)	0.067* (0.026)	0.137* (0.056)	0.012 (0.040)
Outcome	Binary	Share	Binary	Binary	Binary	Binary
Sample (Nr of Parishes)	All	All	Single	Single	All	All
Sample (Priest type)	All	All	All	Secular	Progr.	Non progr.
Sample (States)	All	All	All	All	RS	RS
Outcome Mean	0.657	0.591	0.608	0.542	0.719	0.746
Municipality FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. Obs.	13 270	13 270	10 504	6440	345	780
Num. of Clusters	189	189	189	189	13	13

The table shows that JPII bishops increased priest turnover in the municipalities within their dioceses. Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the 1970 municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include municipality and year fixed effects.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

active prior to the 1978 papal transition.⁵³ I rely on a list of 84 priests who are described as engaging in progressive economic activities. These priests are described as raising awareness about economic injustices, encouraging parishioners to join local unions, and sharing church resources with unions and other economically progressive organizations. I combine this list with the parish data I obtained from the 1977 Catholic yearbook to identify the municipalities with progressive priest activity at that time. Within these municipalities, the presence of a JPII bishops increased priest turnover by 16 percentage points (Table 3, Columns 5). In comparison, the increase in turnover was less than two percentage points, and statistically indistinguishable from zero, in municipalities without progressive activity, as shown in Column 6. The difference between these two estimates is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. These findings provide evidence that JPII bish-

⁵³The intelligence report, which references 84 priests throughout the state, is housed in the Brazilian national archives (SNI, 1974).

ops leveraged their power over the appointments of priests' to curb progressive activities within their dioceses.

8 Discussion

I have argued that progressive religious leaders can increase support for left-wing parties. This is potentially quite valuable to these parties, who otherwise may be forced to compromise their redistributive preferences in order to expand their electoral coalition. Indeed, many scholars have highlighted left-wing parties' efforts to build cross-class coalitions to win elections, which generally involves moderating their policy position on redistribution to gain the support of a larger share of the electorate.⁵⁴ Progressive leaders provide an alternative path toward electoral victory for left-wing parties, one that may avoid costly redistributive compromises.

Notably, the presence of progressive religious leaders in a variety of contexts suggests this path may be more widely available than we might initially expect. Within the Catholic Church, for example, progressive bishops comprise a substantial share of many national Churches across the world and are particularly prevalent in Latin America, especially in the period following Vatican II (1962-1965).⁵⁵ Moreover, existing work on the region suggests that these leaders played an important role in supporting left-wing parties. Catholic bishops, priests, and lay leaders in El Salvador, for example, have been described as contributing to the growth of the left-wing FMLM (Wood, 2003). They also appear to have played a key role in the growth and success of the left-wing PVP in Costa Rica (Yashar, 1997), the MAS in Bolivia, the FSLN in Nicaragua, Pachakutik in Ecuador (Yashar, 2005; Van Cott, 2005), and various left-wing parties in Mexico and Guatemala (Trejo, 2012).

However, not all left-wing parties will benefit from the presence of progressive religious leaders. Religious voters tend to be socially conservative, even when they support economic redistribution.⁵⁶ Where left-wing parties have a history of opposing religious views on social issues—particularly those related to gender and sexuality as well as religious regulation—they may struggle to recruit the support of pious voters. More generally, left-wing parties face a tradeoff between recruiting the support of religious voters on the one hand and secular voters on the other. When the share of economically progressive religious voters is small, left-wing parties may be better off courting secular voters with *socially* progressive policy positions, even if these policies alienate re-

⁵⁴See e.g. Przeworski and Sprague (1986); Levitsky (2003); Dancygier (2017).

⁵⁵See Appendix Figure E1 for a cross-regional comparison on the prevalence of progressive bishops.

⁵⁶On the tendency of religious voters to be socially conservative, see e.g. Center (2014).

religious voters. In the context I study, socially progressive groups were relatively small, which limited the PT's incentive to embrace progressive social policy positions. In cases such as the United States, in contrast, the Democratic Party's support for issues such as abortion has constrained its ability to form an enduring coalition with economically progressive religious movements.⁵⁷ Future research might explore how these dynamics have evolved in Brazil, where social conflict over policies pertaining to gender, sexuality, and the family has recently increased and created a new cleavage between voters demanding progressive policies and more socially conservative—often religious—voters (Smith, 2016; Smith and Boas, 2023). This scholarship could shed light on the ways in which the PT has navigated the pressures posed by these conflicting demands and, more generally, how left-wing parties that emerged with a strong support from religious voters might adapt to this type of evolving setting.

9 Conclusion

This paper argues that religious leaders can critically shape the electoral effects of religion. Economically progressive leaders can increase parishioners' preference for economic redistribution and support local organizations that facilitate the growth of left-wing parties. In Brazil, progressive Catholic bishops played a crucial role in the electoral success of the left-wing PT. Using a natural experiment, I show that longer exposure to progressive bishops improved the electoral performance of the PT and played a critical role in the expansion of the party's electoral support across the country. I further demonstrate that progressive bishops increased the political salience of economic inequality and framed state-led redistribution as a just solution to this concern. They also supported local organizations focused on issues of economic inequality, promoting a network that served as the base of the PT's party-building efforts.

These findings challenge the conventional characterization of religion's influence in electoral politics as conservative and the idea that left-wing parties are fundamentally secular. Dominant theories of left-wing party development focus on European parties, which emerged in opposition to the Church.⁵⁸ This paper shows that in contexts where religiosity is high and secular labor organizations are limited in scope, religious voters can become a crucial component of the left's coalition. In these contexts, left-wing parties may succeed not by opposing but by seeking the support of organized religion.

Two main areas for future research emerge from this study. First, scholars might explore the

⁵⁷See e.g. [The New York Times \(2017\)](#).

⁵⁸See e.g. [Duverger \(1959\)](#); [Bartolini et al. \(2000\)](#).

degree to which the impact of religious leaders identified in this study extend to other religions and denominations within Christianity. While some denominations, such as the Eastern Orthodox Church, share Catholicism's hierarchical structure and territorial organization, many others differ on these and other dimensions. Examining the extent to which the impact of progressive leaders generalizes to these denominations would refine the scope conditions of the argument presented here.

Second, future research might also explore the ways in which a reliance on progressive religious leaders shapes the policy platforms of left-wing parties. In many contexts, left-wing parties have taken the lead in politicizing issues related to gender and sexuality as well as church-state separation, often taking positions that contradict the beliefs and interests of organized religion. When religious voters comprise a large share of their winning coalition, however, left-wing parties may be reluctant to take political positions that risk alienating these voters. More research is needed to understand how the presence of economically progressive religious leaders affects left-wing parties' policy platforms and overall policy outcomes beyond economic issues.

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Supporting Information

When the Church Votes Left

1. Section [A](#) describes the data sources and the data construction strategy and presents the summary statistics for all relevant variables.
2. Section [B](#) presents all the tests and figures related to the research design.
3. Section [C](#) reports all the robustness checks.
4. Section [D](#) reports additional results.
5. Section [E](#) presents cross-regional data on the prevalence of progressive bishops.

A Data Sources, Data Construction and Summary Statistics

This Appendix describes the data sources and the data construction strategy. I describe all data sources in Subsection A.1. Subsection A.2 details how the 1978 diocesan borders and the parish level panel were constructed. Subsection A.3 reports summary statistics.

A.1 Data Sources

Bishop Biographies Data on bishops' biographical information comes from the Catholic Church's *Anuario Pontificio* and was obtained from the Catholic Hierarchy Organization ([Cheney, Accessed October 2016](#)).

Catholic Administrative Divisions Data on the geographic coverage of the Catholic dioceses in 1978 comes from the *Catholic Yearbook of Brazil*, which details the municipalities that compose each diocese. Since 5 dioceses were created in 1978, I combined information from the 1977 and 1985 editions of the yearbook ([CERIS, 1977, 1985](#)). Due to changes in municipal borders over time, historical maps of the municipalities were needed to map dioceses onto the historical municipal boundaries and geolocate them. I used historical municipal shapefiles for 1970, 1980 and 1991 produced by the IBGE.

Diocese Characteristics Data on the pre-1978 diocese characteristics comes from Brazil's Catholic Yearbook of Brazil (*Anuário Católico do Brasil*) for 1977 ([CERIS, 1977](#)) and the *Anuario Pontificio per L'Anno 1980*, the 1980 yearbook published by the Vatican ([Città del Vaticano, 1980](#)), which has data for 1978.

Parishes and Parish Priests Data on parishes and parish priests for 1970, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1993, and 1997 comes from Brazil's Catholic Yearbook of Brazil (*Anuário Católico do Brasil*) ([CERIS, 1970, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997](#)).

Electoral Data Municipal level returns for the 1989, 1994, 1998, and 2002 Presidential elections were obtained from the Institute for Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada* - IPEA). Data on electoral candidates for the 1982-1992 municipal elections come from the State Electoral Courts and was complemented with data for 1996 from the TSE.

Party Affiliation Data on party affiliation for 1980-2002 comes from the Brazilian Superior Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral* -TSE).

Municipal Characteristics Data on religious affiliation comes from DataCEM (Plataforma de Extração de Microdados dos Censos Demográficos (1960-2010)). Data regarding workers participation by industry comes from IPUMS International.

A.2 Data Construction

A.2.1 1978 Diocese Borders

I reconstructed the boundaries of Brazil’s Catholic dioceses at the time of JPPII’s appointment by combining information from the 1977 and 1981 editions of the Brazilian Catholic Yearbook. The Yearbooks list the municipalities within each diocese at the time of their publication. I merged this information with historical maps of Brazilian municipalities from the same period to identify the municipalities within each diocese and produce a shapefile of the diocesan borders in 1978.⁵⁹

There were 48 municipalities that were under more than one diocese. To classify those cases, I first followed the following strategy. If all the parishes and Catholic institutions located in the municipality were under the government of the same diocese, I assigned the municipality to that diocese. A total of 34 municipalities were classified using this rule. If, instead, the religious facilities were divided between the dioceses, I assigned the municipality to the diocese which controls a majority of the facilities. I was able to classify the remaining 14 municipalities using this rule.

A.2.2 Parish Level Panel 1970-1997

The main challenge to construct the municipal-level panel of priest turnover was to identify the municipal location of each parish reported in the Catholic Yearbooks. To do this, I matched each parish to its contemporary municipalities using a combination of fuzzy matching (matching locality information reported in the yearbooks with municipality names) and web searches using addresses (when reported) as well as parish names. Because municipality borders have changed since 1970, I then use a historical crosswalk of municipality genealogies to assign all parishes to their 1970 municipality. This results in a 1970 municipality-yearbook panel dataset.

A.3 Summary Statistics

Summary statistics for all variables included in the analyses reported in the paper are included in Table [A1](#).

⁵⁹Historical shapefiles for the Brazilian municipalities were obtained from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

Table A1: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Year of Mandated Retirement	1993.33	8.26	1978	2015	221
Year of JPPII Appointment	1990.46	8.25	1978	2011	221
Retirement Years (1989)	9.45	2.87	0.00	11.00	221
Retirement Years (1994)	12.23	4.71	0.00	16.00	221
Retirement Years (1998)	13.72	6.08	0.00	20.00	221
Retirement Years (2002)	14.62	7.12	0.00	24.00	221
Exposure (1989)	8.25	3.43	0.00	11.00	221
Exposure (1994)	10.33	5.36	0.00	16.00	221
Exposure (1998)	11.47	6.69	0.00	20.00	221
Exposure (2002)	12.09	7.57	0.00	24.00	221
PT vote share 1989 (P)	14.43	9.99	0.77	63.37	4472
PT vote share 1994 (P)	21.43	10.21	3.05	63.84	5011
PT vote share 1998 (P)	24.77	12.87	1.16	72.71	5497
PT vote share 2002 (P)	42.42	12.05	5.78	79.79	5555
PSB vote share 1994 (DF)	2.15	7.94	0.00	79.99	5013
PSB vote share 1998 (DF)	2.99	9.22	0.00	85.32	5504
PSB vote share 2002 (DF)	3.50	6.83	0.00	73.39	5557
PT vote share 1994 (DF)	9.80	10.49	0.00	85.07	5013
PT vote share 1998 (DF)	8.91	10.41	0.00	91.71	5504
PT vote share 2002 (DF)	15.00	12.02	0.00	82.25	5557
PDT vote share 1994 (DF)	8.18	13.82	0.00	96.50	5013
PDT vote share 1998 (DF)	5.19	10.21	0.00	91.04	5504
PDT vote share 2002 (DF)	6.75	8.24	0.37	78.44	5557
PPS vote share 1994 (DF)	0.26	1.28	0.00	40.45	5013
PPS vote share 1998 (DF)	1.00	4.98	0.00	85.14	5504
PPS vote share 2002 (DF)	3.23	6.48	0.00	66.88	5557
PCDOB vote share 1994 (DF)	0.61	1.94	0.00	42.35	5013
PCDOB vote share 1998 (DF)	0.48	1.66	0.00	52.51	5504
PCDOB vote share 2002 (DF)	0.80	1.96	0.00	36.79	5557
Priest Turnover - Binary	0.66	0.47	0.00	1.00	13270
Priest Turnover - Count (IHS)	0.69	0.60	0.00	4.03	13270
Priest Turnover - Share	0.59	0.46	0.00	1.00	13270

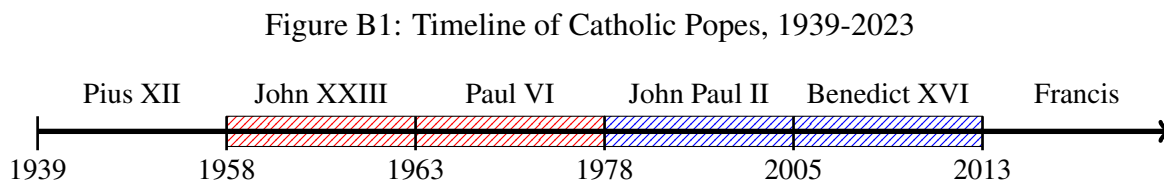
The table reports summary statistics for all the variables included in the analyses in the paper.

B Figures and Tests of the Research Design

This section provides additional descriptive information on the research design and reports results from a number of empirical analyses that support the claim that the length of mandated exposure to progressives is uncorrelated with many predetermined diocesan and municipal characteristics.

B.1 Timeline of Catholic Popes, 1939-2023

Figure B1 illustrates the timeline of Catholic Popes.



The timeline indicates the progressive period of the Catholic Church during the Papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI (1958 and 1978), shaded in red. The “restoration” period that followed and was led by John Paul II and Benedict XVI is shaded in blue. Pope John Paul I, not included in the timeline, was appointed in 1978 but died only a month after his appointment.

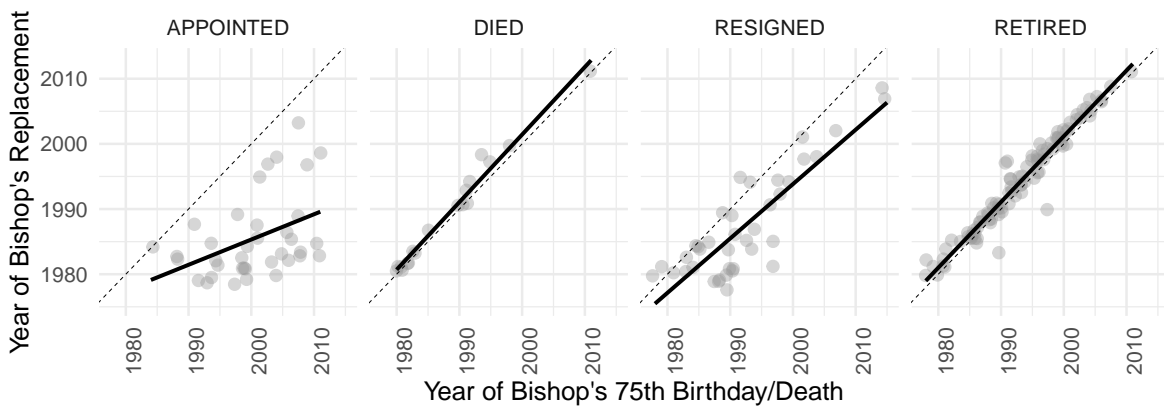
B.2 JPII Replacements by Type of Exit

Figure B2 shows the relationship between the year of a sitting bishop’s retirement and the date when the bishop was replaced by the reason the vacancy was created. It suggests that early exits are driven by cases where the bishop resigned shortly before his retirement age—likely due to health concerns—or cases where the bishop was appointed to a different office before the his age of retirement.

B.3 Age distribution of bishops and archbishops in office in October, 1978

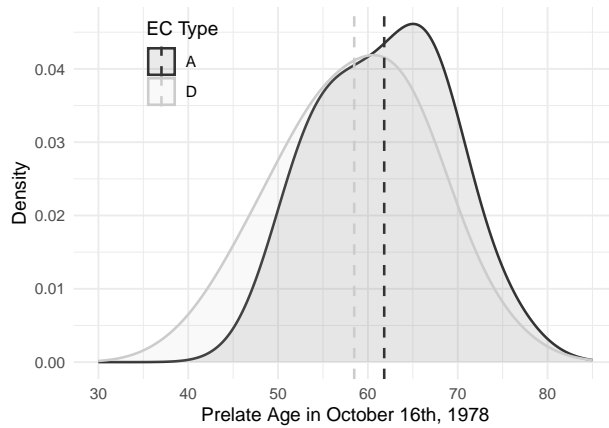
Figure B3 provides evidence for the claim made in the paper that, among all Brazilian prelates in office in 1978, archbishops were older than bishops. As a result, the mandated exposure for archdioceses was, on average, shorter than that for dioceses. Because they are typically wealthier and more urban, the inclusion of these archdioceses could introduce bias in the cross-sectional analysis. I hence exclude them from the main analysis.

Figure B2: Year of Retirement Age and JPII Bishop Replacements, By Type of Exit



The figure shows the relationship between the year the sitting bishop's vacancy was expected to occur when following the retirement rule (75th birthday/death, x-axis) and the date when the bishop was actually replaced (y-axis) by the reason that triggered the exit of the sitting bishop—his death, resignation, retirement, or transfer. The solid red line marks the correlation between the two variables. The dashed black line illustrates perfect compliance.

Figure B3: Age Distribution of Bishops by Type of EC, October 1978.



The figure reports the density of the age of Brazilian prelates in October 16th 1978 and shows that archbishops were systematically older than bishops. Vertical dashed lines mark the mean of each distribution. The density for Archbishops is shifted to the right, providing evidence that these prelates are, on average older than those ruling dioceses.

B.4 Balance Tests

To provide evidence of balance in the length of exposure to progressive bishops, I regress the year of progressives' mandated retirement on a host of pre-treatment covariates, including measures of Catholic institutional organization, religious competition, population, and electoral outcomes for the 1972 and 1976 elections held under the dictatorship. The results, reported in Table B1, show that the instrument is balanced on all these observable variables, providing evidence in favor of the claim of as-if random assignment.

Table B1: Balance Tests

		Estimate	Std.Error	p-value	N
Panel A: Diocese Characteristics					
1	Resident Priests	-0.024	0.071	0.734	189
2	Resident Priests (Not Incardinated)	-0.078	0.154	0.614	189
3	Non-Resident Priests	-0.232	0.245	0.345	189
4	Deacons	-0.046	0.197	0.816	189
5	Religious Priests	0.003	0.030	0.921	189
6	Nr. of Male Religious Houses	-0.019	0.102	0.855	189
7	Nr. of Female Religious Houses	0.004	0.056	0.945	189
8	Nr. of Parishes	-0.024	0.056	0.666	189
9	Nr. of Charity Centers	-0.004	0.011	0.665	189
10	Nr. of Charity Initiatives	-0.004	0.008	0.583	189
11	Nr. of Municipalities	-0.061	0.055	0.268	189
12	Municipal Parish Presence	-0.499	0.543	0.361	3990
Panel B: Social Variables					
1	Total Population (1970)	0.000	0.000	0.570	3949
2	Urban Population (1970)	0.000	0.000	0.926	3949
3	Rural Population (1970)	0.000	0.000	0.244	3949
4	% Catholic Population (1970)	-2.406	6.613	0.719	3949
5	% Evangelical Population (1970)	1.112	7.815	0.888	3949
6	% Catholic Population (1978)	-2.232	6.367	0.728	3948
7	% Evangelical Population (1978)	1.846	7.678	0.812	3948
8	Growth Evangelical Population (1970-1978)	-0.031	0.026	0.274	3617
Panel C: Electoral Variables					
1	Electorate (1976)	0.000	0.000	0.722	5483
2	MDB Vote Share (1976)	-0.001	0.010	0.917	3731
3	ARENA Vote Share (1976)	0.001	0.010	0.897	3731
4	Electorate (1972)	0.000	0.000	0.986	5445
5	MDB Vote Share (1972)	0.001	0.008	0.883	5292
6	ARENA Vote Share (1972)	-0.001	0.008	0.844	5292

In all models, the outcome is the year of progressives' mandated retirement. In Panel A and line 1 of Panel B the unit of analysis is the diocese. In Panel C and lines 2-4 of Panel B the unit of analysis is the municipality and I report clustered standard errors at the diocese level. The number of districts vary by specification because of missing information on the corresponding variable. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and include state fixed effects and robust standard errors.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

B.5 Placebo Outcome Test

Table B2 provides additional evidence in support of the as-if random assignment to treatment from a placebo outcome test (Eggers, Tuñón and Dafoe, 2023). The test estimates the model used for the main results, replacing the outcome variable (PT vote share) with vote share for the opposition to the dictatorship’s party during the 1976 elections.

Table B2: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the MDB’s 1976 Vote Share

Outcome: Opposition Vote Share in 1976				
Treatment Year	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
Exposure	0.078 (0.375)	0.004 (0.197)	0.039 (0.155)	0.044 (0.133)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Exposure	0.054 (0.257)	0.003 (0.141)	0.026 (0.104)	0.029 (0.087)
Outcome Mean	23.59	23.59	23.59	23.59
Num. Obs.	2932	2935	2937	2937
Num. of Clusters	189	189	189	189

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

C Robustness Checks

This appendix section reports results showing the robustness of the main results to a number of alternative specifications.

Dioceses as unit of analysis The estimation strategy I employ in the main analysis, in which the municipality is the unit of analysis, accounts for the fact that treatment is assigned to each diocese by clustering standard errors at the diocese level. In Appendix Table C1, I show that the results are robust to taking instead a more conservative, design-based approach where the diocese is the unit of analysis.⁶⁰

Table C1: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the PT's Presidential Vote Share - Diocese-level Analysis

Outcome: PT vote share				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
Exposure	0.503* (0.208)	0.373** (0.133)	0.316* (0.123)	0.177+ (0.103)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Exposure	0.320* (0.130)	0.252** (0.090)	0.212* (0.083)	0.117+ (0.068)
Outcome Mean	15.0	22.9	26.4	43.4
Num. Obs.	189	189	189	189

Robust standard errors in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Inclusion of archdioceses In Table C2 I demonstrate that the results are robust to the inclusion of archdioceses in the analysis.

⁶⁰On the difference between these approaches, see [Dunning \(2012\)](#).

Table C2: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the PT’s Presidential Vote Share - Results Including Archdioceses

Outcome: PT vote share				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
Exposure	0.236 (0.185)	0.373** (0.123)	0.379** (0.118)	0.229** (0.085)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Exposure	0.165 (0.127)	0.265** (0.085)	0.262** (0.083)	0.155** (0.059)
Outcome Mean	14.4	21.4	24.8	42.4
Num. Obs.	4472	5011	5497	5555
Num. of Clusters	221	221	221	221

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Bundled nature of the treatment and age, experience, and turnover as potential confounders

One concern that might arise when interpreting the main results relates to the bundled nature of the treatment. Progressive bishops are, by design, older and more experienced on average than those appointed by JPPII and hence may be better connected to the priests and parishioners in their dioceses. If these attributes increased the ability of a bishop to shape the political behavior of voters in his diocese, the observed results could reflect these differences in age and experience rather than different ideological leanings between progressives and their JPPII replacements. To evaluate this possibility, I run a placebo treatment test in which, for each election, I replace the treatment variable with the age of the sitting bishop at the time of the election.⁶¹ The age of the progressive bishop and the length of exposure are highly correlated and hence, without further changes, this test would not be very informative. To address this, I restrict the sample to the subset of dioceses in which the progressive bishop had not been mandated to retire by the election year. This ensures the test considers dioceses with identical values of the instrument at the time of the relevant election.⁶² Among those dioceses, we can estimate the effect of age on the vote share of the PT. I report the results of this analysis in Panel A of Table C3, which shows that older bishops do not increase the PT’s vote share. Panel B—which reports results from the same exercise when using bishops’ experience as the placebo treatment—similarly indicates that the PT did not benefit

⁶¹On placebo tests, see [Eggers, Tuñón and Dafoe \(2023\)](#).

⁶²While this is necessary for the test to be informative, it has the undesired consequence of reducing the sample size of the placebo compared to that of the main test. See [Eggers, Tuñón and Dafoe \(2023\)](#).

electorally from the presence of more experienced bishops. This analysis provides suggestive evidence that age and experience are not confounding the relationship between length of exposure to a progressive bishop and support for the PT.

Table C3: Effects of Bishop Age and Experience on the PT’s Presidential Vote Share

Outcome: PT vote share				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: Bishop Age				
Bishop Age	-0.180+	0.137	0.530	0.610
	(0.098)	(0.186)	(0.344)	(0.564)
Panel B: Bishop Experience				
Bishop Experience	-0.066	0.107	0.081	0.531
	(0.070)	(0.174)	(0.367)	(0.500)
Outcome Mean	14	22.6	27.1	43.9
Num.Obs.	2498	1812	1276	766
Num. of Clusters	129	84	57	32

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares and include state fixed effects.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

An additional issue pertaining to the bundled nature of the treatment is that the replacement of progressive bishops with conservatives also implies turnover in diocesan leadership. If disruptions related to bishop turnover had an effect on the ability of new bishops to influence their dioceses, the reader might be concerned that the observed results reflect this effect. I evaluate this possibility in two ways. I first restrict the sample to the set of dioceses in which bishops’ mandated retirement occurred prior to the relevant election. Since dioceses in this group had all experienced turnover and only differ in terms of their length of exposure, any observed effect among these dioceses is not confounded by turnover. Appendix Table C4 shows that the main estimates remain largely consistent when the analysis is limited to this subset. Second, I present evidence from an alternative, reduced form specification that relaxes the linearity assumption in the main analysis by recoding the instrument into a set of binary variables that estimate the effect of each additional electoral cycle for which a progressive bishop was mandated to remain in office. If the effects of length of exposure are explained by bishop type, as my argument suggests, we would expect the effect to increase in magnitude with each additional electoral cycle. If the effects instead reflect disruptions related to turnover, the observed treatment effects would not increase linearly. Consistent with the claim that the treatment reflects exposure to a progressive bishop, the results reported in Appendix Table C5, show that increase with the number of electoral cycles that the bishop was mandated to remain in office. Moreover, the magnitude of the estimated effects is consistent with that of

the coefficients from the linear specification. Overall, these additional results provide reassuring evidence that the observed effects are driven by bishops' ideological differences.

Table C4: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the PT's Presidential Vote Share - Only Dioceses With Mandated Retirement Prior to the Election

Outcome: PT Vote				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
Exposure	0.471 (0.467)	0.179 (0.172)	0.413* (0.181)	0.283** (0.109)
Panel B: Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Exposure	0.286 (0.264)	0.135 (0.122)	0.322* (0.143)	0.213** (0.079)
Outcome Mean	13.4	20.5	23.3	41.9
Num.Obs.	947	2114	3090	3657
Num. of Clusters	54	98	125	153

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the diocese level.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Table C5: Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on the PT's Presidential Vote Share - Flexible Treatment Effects

Outcome: PT vote share				
	1989	1994	1998	2002
Reduced Form (ITT)				
Mandated Retirement Due 1985-1989	1.261 (1.451)	0.034 (1.473)	0.197 (1.946)	2.064 (1.787)
Mandated Retirement Due 1989-1994		1.551 (1.273)	1.488 (1.357)	2.577+ (1.439)
Mandated Retirement Due 1994-1998			5.556* (2.564)	4.967* (1.940)
Mandated Retirement Due 1998-2002				5.162** (1.794)
Mandated Retirement Due Post-Election	2.904* (1.136)	3.644** (1.339)	3.779** (1.384)	3.296* (1.577)
Outcome Mean	13.99	21.48	24.43	42.15
Num. Obs.	3593	4070	4489	4540
Num. of Clusters	189	189	189	189

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares and include state fixed effects.
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

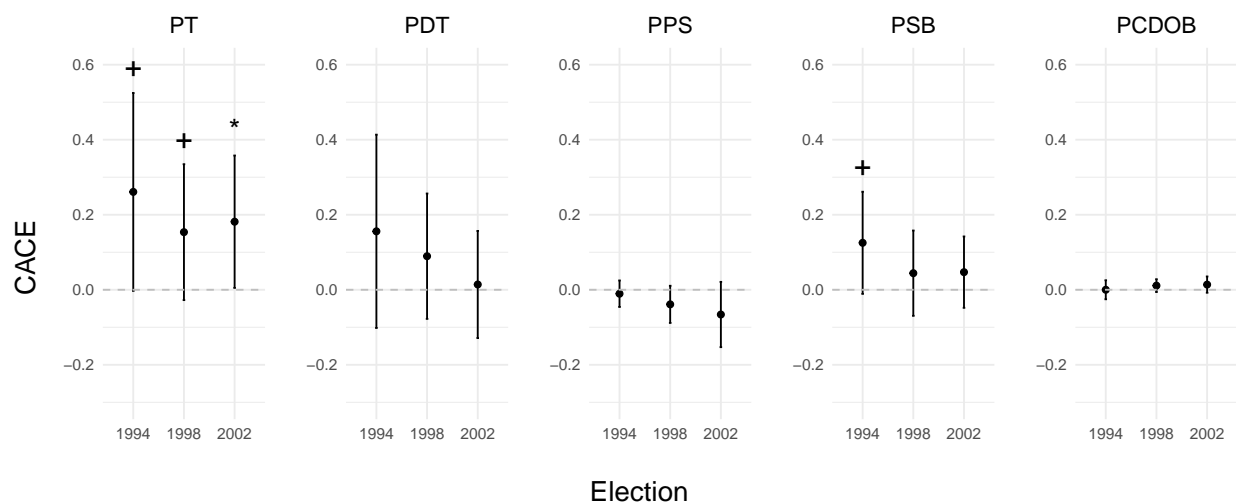
D Additional Results

In this appendix section, I present several additional results.

D.1 Effects of the Length of Exposure to Progressive Bishops on a Broad Set of Left-Wing Parties

Figure D1 and Table D1 report the results from an extension of the main analysis but studying the effect of progressive bishops on a broader set of left-wing parties beyond the PT. Since many of these parties supported the PT's Presidential ticket, the analysis focuses on congressional election vote shares. The results show that the PT was the only party to systematically benefit from longer exposures to progressive bishops.

Figure D1: Effect of Exposure to Progressive Bishops for All Left-Wing Parties



Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table D1: Effect of Exposure to Progressive Bishops for All Left Wing Parties

		Outcome: Congressional election vote share		
		1994	1998	2002
Panel A: 2SLS				
PT	Exposure	0.261*	0.154+	0.181*
		(0.131)	(0.090)	(0.088)
	Outcome Mean	9.74	8.74	15.0
PDT	Exposure	0.156	0.089	0.014
		(0.128)	(0.083)	(0.071)
	Outcome Mean	8.03	5.12	6.80
PPS	Exposure	0.011	0.039	0.066
		(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.044)
	Outcome Mean	0.24	0.93	3.27
PSB	Exposure	0.125+	0.044	0.047
		(0.067)	(0.057)	(0.048)
	Outcome Mean	2.32	2.95	3.42
PCDOB	Exposure	0.000	0.011	0.014
		(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.011)
	Outcome Mean	0.54	0.45	0.72
	Num.Obs.	4070	4493	4540
	Num. of Clusters	189	189	189

Standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level in parentheses. In all models, the unit of analysis is the municipality. All specifications are estimated using ordinary least squares (ITT) and 2SLS (CACE) and include state fixed effects.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

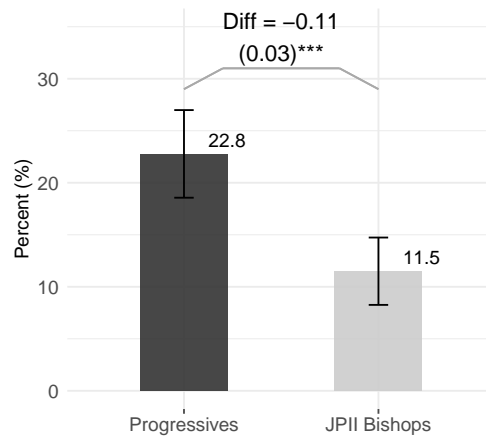
D.2 SNI reports

In the late 1980s, the Brazilian Intelligence Service (SNI) produced a set of reports that documented the bishops who engaged in activism around land conflict and social issues (SNI, 1987, 1989, 1990). For example, the bishops named in the 1987 report are described as working to raise awareness among rural workers about their rights to land and encouraging rural workers to join “sociopolitical-union organizations with the goal of breaking with capitalist domination and conquer[ing] their rights.” (SNI, 1987, 1). Similarly, the 1990 report focuses on bishops who emphasize human rights, the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, as well as access to land for the landless (SNI, 1990, 4). I collected data from the four reports, all published between 1987 and 1990, built a diocese-year panel across these years and constructed a dummy variable equal to one

if the sitting bishop in a given diocese was categorized as engaged in these activities.

Figure D2 documents the results of a descriptive analysis of the data in the SNI reports. It compares the rate at which bishops were recorded as participating in land and social activism. Across Brazil, progressive bishops were roughly twice as likely to be identified in the SNI reports as taking part in these activities. One caveat to consider is that the secret service might have spent more time and resources in overseeing progressive bishops and hence the difference reflects this differential attention. Overall, these results provide suggestive evidence that progressive bishops supported activities concerning social and economic justice and sought to reshape the social landscape in their dioceses at higher rates than JPPII's appointees.

Figure D2: Bishop Activism, 1987-1990



The figure shows the percentage of progressive and JPPII appointees reported in the SNI reports as engaging in activism around social and economic issues. The unit of analysis is the bishop-report. The estimate for the difference across progressives and JPPII bishops comes from a regression including report fixed effects. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

D.3 Binning Estimates: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Reduced Form - ITT) - 2002 Election

This section provides evidence that longer mandated exposure to a progressive bishop has the greatest effect on support for the PT in municipalities with lower presence of traditional labor unions, as proxied by the share of the workforce in manufacturing and construction, the share of the workforce in agriculture, and the level of urbanization. Table D2 reports the full results from 4 in table format. Table D3 reports the results of the same analysis when including population as a control variable.

Table D2: Binning Estimates: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Reduced Form - ITT)

Moderator	Moderator Interval	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Manufacturing and Construction (%)	L:[0.00407,0.0671]	0.238	0.077	[0.086-0.390]
	M:(0.0671,0.131]	0.239	0.069	[0.104-0.374]
	H:(0.131,0.703]	0.031	0.078	[-0.122-0.183]
Agriculture (%)	L:[0.000934,0.552]	0.040	0.076	[-0.109-0.188]
	M:(0.552,0.724]	0.223	0.069	[0.088-0.358]
	H:(0.724,0.963]	0.247	0.095	[0.062-0.433]
Level of Urbanization	L:[0.0192,0.277]	0.323	0.085	[0.156-0.489]
	M:(0.277,0.478]	0.178	0.070	[0.041-0.315]
	H:(0.478,1]	0.044	0.065	[-0.084-0.172]

The dependent variable is the vote share for the PT in the first round of the 2002 election. The unit of analysis is the municipality. The model includes state fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level.

Table D3: Binning Estimates: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects with Control by Population (Reduced Form - ITT)

Moderator	Moderator Interval	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Manufacturing and Construction (%)	L:[0.00407,0.0671]	0.237	0.078	[0.085-0.389]
	M:(0.0671,0.131]	0.237	0.069	[0.102-0.371]
	H:(0.131,0.703]	0.030	0.078	[-0.122-0.183]
Agriculture (%)	L:[0.000934,0.552]	0.038	0.076	[-0.111-0.186]
	M:(0.552,0.724]	0.222	0.069	[0.087-0.357]
	H:(0.724,0.963]	0.247	0.095	[0.061-0.433]
Level of Urbanization	L:[0.0192,0.284]	0.299	0.092	[0.119-0.480]
	M:(0.284,0.492]	0.165	0.072	[0.024-0.306]
	H:(0.492,1]	0.037	0.060	[-0.081-0.155]

The dependent variable is the vote share for the PT in the first round of the 2002 election. The unit of analysis is the municipality. The model includes state fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level.

D.4 Additional Binning Estimates: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Reduced Form - ITT)

Following scholars of religious competition, we might expect progressive bishops to have a greater incentive to provide the PT with support in places where competition with other religious denominations is greater (see e.g. (Trejo, 2009; Gill, 1994)). As I show in Table D4, however, evangelical growth does not moderate the effect of the length of exposure to a progressive bishop on electoral support for the PT.

Table D4: Binning Estimates: Heterogeneous Treatment Effects (Reduced Form - ITT) - 2002 Election

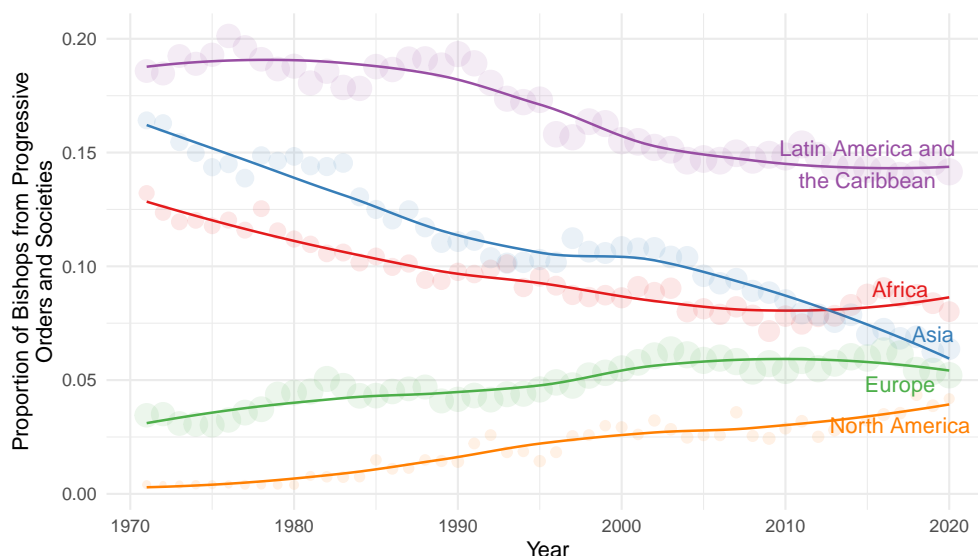
Moderator	Moderator Interval	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Growth of evangelical population 1970-1978 (log)	L:[-10.5,-0.848]	0.181	0.077	[0.030-0.333]
	M:(-0.848,0.184]	0.193	0.090	[0.015-0.370]
	H:(0.184,5.19]	0.096	0.092	[-0.085-0.276]

The dependent variable is the vote share for the PT in the first round of the 2002 election. The unit of analysis is the municipality. The model includes state fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the 1978 diocese level.

E Progressive Bishops: Cross Regional Prevalence

It is generally difficult to identify whether religious leaders are progressive or conservative. Even within the Catholic Church, a hierarchical organization with a global presence, this information is not recorded systematically. To illustrate the presence of progressives across the Catholic Church, I collected data for all Catholic bishops in office between 1970-2020 and developed a rough measure based on bishops' affiliation in a Catholic order or society.⁶³ Bishops and priests self-select into these orders and we can thus consider these affiliations to reflect their affinity toward and identification with the order in which they are members. I code as progressive those bishops who belong to a mendicant order or the Society of Jesus, historically among the most outspoken in their critiques of societal poverty.⁶⁴ As Figure E1 shows, there was notable heterogeneity in this measure across regions—while in North America fewer than 5% of bishops formed part of a progressive order and societies in any given year, as many as one in five bishops were members in Latin America.

Figure E1: Catholic Progressivism in Comparative Perspective



The figure shows the proportion of each region's territorial bishops who belonged to a progressive order or religious society.

⁶³Data on bishops' biographical information comes from the Catholic Church's *Annuario Pontificio* and was obtained from the Catholic Hierarchy Organization ([Cheney, Accessed October 2016](#)).

⁶⁴The complete list of Mendicant Religious orders was obtained from Catholic Hierarchy and includes the following orders: O.A.D. (Agostiniani Scalzi), O.M.D. (Discalced Mercedarians), O.F.B. (Betlemitas), O.A.R. (Augustinian Recollects), O.C.D. (Discalced Carmelites), O.S.M. (Servites), O.F.M. (Franciscans), O.F.M. Cap. (Capuchins), O.F.M. Conv. (Conventual Franciscans), O.P. (Dominicans), O. de M. (Mercedarians), O. Carm. (Carmelites), O.S.A. (Augustinians), O.M. (Minimi), O.S.S.T. (Trinitarians), T.O.R. (Franciscan Friars).