

## RELIGIOUS IDENTITY POLITICS IN GUATEMALA AND NICARAGUA: A RESEARCH REPORT<sup>1</sup>

*Identidad político-religiosa en Guatemala y Nicaragua: Un informe de  
 investigación.*

*por*

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### Abstract

The present article is based upon a research report of a project on religion, society, and politics in the two countries of Guatemala and Nicaragua. There are two aspects of the article we consider of interest for the readers. First, the project described is an example for social scientific inquiry of religious movements by means of HabitusAnalysis, a theory and method developed on the basis of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of praxis. In this sense, the article shows how to proceed in a praxeological study of religious actors and what the outcomes of such an approach can be. Second, in the chapter of "results" important findings are sketched so that there is a surplus as well in terms of empirical knowledge.

**Keywords:** HabitusAnalysis, Bourdieu, religious praxis, Central America, space of religious styles.

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the Research Project "Religious Identity Politics of the Pentecostal Movement in Guatemala und Nicaragua" (nov. 15, 2011 to nov. 14, 2014). Funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation)

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## Resumen

El presente artículo se basa en un informe de investigación de un proyecto sobre religión, sociedad y política en los dos países de Guatemala y Nicaragua. El artículo tiene dos vertientes que pueden ser de interés para los lectores. Primero, el proyecto descrito es un ejemplo de investigación científico-social sobre movimientos religiosos usando el HabitusAnalysis, una teoría y un método desarrollados a partir de la sociología de Pierre Bourdieu. En este sentido, el artículo muestra cómo proceder en un estudio praxeológico de los actores religiosos y cuáles pueden ser los resultados de tal enfoque. Segundo, en el capítulo de “resultados” se esbozan los más importantes hallazgos del estudio empírico.

**Palabras claves:** HabitusAnalysis, Bourdieu, praxis religiosa, Centroamérica, espacio de estilos religiosos.

## Introduction

Guatemala and Nicaragua are among those Latin American countries with the highest percentage of religiously active people. During the last decades, especially the Pentecostal movement made much headway in both countries, gathering between 40% and 50% of the population. The movement also diversified its inroads into different social classes and gains presently an increasing membership in the upper middle class and even the upper class. These developments have led to a growing influence of Pentecostal actors on social and political processes in these countries and to a more vigorous competition with other religious actors, such as the Catholic Church and its different groupings (from Opus Dei to Charismatics) or, in Guatemala, the indigenous revival. On the other hand, the Catholic Church has become more active, especially by the Charismatic revival and groups like Opus Dei. Finally, the Maya movement in Guatemala is strongly revitalizing since the counter insurgency war ended in the second half of the eighties. In contrast to the compensation hypothesis, both the continuing growth of the Pentecostal movement and the general religious recovery has even speeded up in times after the conflict. All these actors are confronted with precarious social structures—even in the upper middle class—and a strong common sense of crisis. To different degrees, they tamper in public life and in politics, building their strategies on their religious identity. In any case, the corresponding strategies of each group or movement depend upon subjective and objective conditions of action. These are, according to our sociological approach based upon Pierre Bourdieu, three major factors. First, the dispositions of the habitus embodied by the actors, that is, their convictions and feelings regarding to religion and any other issue of their life world; second, the position the actors maintain in the power relations of the overall social structure, the social space; third, the competition between religious organization in the religious field. These factors condition the identity politics of the different religious actors.

At the Center for the Interdisciplinary Research on Religious and Society (CIRRuS, Bielefeld University, Germany) we focused on this situation with a three-year research project (2011 to 2014), funded by the German Research Foundation. The project

Revista Cultura & Religión Vol. XI, 2017 N° 2 (julio-diciembre)

**Cómo citar este artículo:** Schäfer, H. W., Reu, T. & Tovar, A. (2017). “Religious identity politics in Guatemala and Nicaragua: a research report”. *Revista Cultura & Religión*. Vol. 11(2). pp. 93-112.

simultaneously was designed to test—once again<sup>2</sup> and thoroughly—the praxeological tools for the study of religious praxis we have been developing, based on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, during the last 35 years. The present text is based upon a project report. It outlines some major findings and is oriented quite narrowly on the methods we used for the inquiry.

## 1. Research questions, goals, and research logic.

The *research questions* of the present project combine empirical with methodological and theoretical concerns.

1) Considering the general context of social conflict, change, and inequality, what is the relation between the social positions of religious actors, on the one hand, and their religious and political identities and strategies, on the other hand?

2) How can Pierre Bourdieu's general social theory be developed into a theoretical framework and method that...

- ...provides for the sociology of religion an empirically rich and methodologically operationalizable theory of praxis of religious movements in the context of social inequality and conflict-ridden social change?

- ...contributes a praxeological theory of theology that is compatible with normative discourses?

These research questions translated into the following *goals* for empirical and methodological research that were systematically pursued in this project:

*Habitus, identity, and strategy:* Description of religious actors' identities and practical strategies, using a model that encompasses attributions of meaning and the orientation of action and locates them in their societal context. The reconstruction of attributions of religious meaning produces compatibility with normative theological discourses.

*Social space of religious styles:* Modeling of the social space of distribution of capitals, chances, limitations, and trajectory perspectives, as well as location of actors within this space. The model enables the interpretation of attributions of religious meaning and of social strategies (specifically theodicies and sociodicies) from the perspective of a sociology of domination.

*Religious field:* Representation and interpretation of the positions of religious actors within the field of religious competition. Taking heed of the social differentiation of the field, this

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<sup>2</sup> Hitherto, different aspects of the approach has been tested since 2006 in the following projects: Schäfer (2008), [Fundamentalisms](#); Schäfer and Seibert (2014), (DFG) interreligious [peace builders](#) in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Köhrsen (2013), [middle and lower class Pentecostals](#) in Argentina; Tews (2015) in economic sociology: „Is there a ‘Field’ of Social Business?"; Tancara (2016) on [construction of subjectivity](#) in Theology of Liberation; Schlerka (2016) [Secularization](#) as struggle. Current: Tovar, „Faith, identity and community“ in Mexico-City (CONACYT); Buitrago, religious habitus and „[Transnationalization](#) of Guatemalan Churches in the USA“. Candela, biographies and habitus in religious [peace builders](#) in Guatemala; Schlerka, “Religious change in [Muslim](#)“ residents in Germany.

model accounts for the relations between religious experts that provide the context for religious identities and strategies.

*Triangulation:* Transcending the boundaries of denominations, the combination of the models representing habitus, the social space, and the religious field enables the identification of religious actors with similar religious convictions and socio-political strategies.

*Cross-national comparison:* The model-based comparison of these relations in two societies with very different political situations (Guatemala and Nicaragua) yields an empirical description and an encompassing interpretation of the intersection of religious and political dynamics from the perspective of a theory of religion.

The *research logic* of the project was not designed to verify assumptions regarding the supposed functions of religion, such as compensation, secularization, etc. Rather, we based our research on a broad theory of society inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's praxeology. We approached religious praxis through an analysis of its practical logic, which is entangled with those of other, non-religious logics of praxis in the context of economic, cultural, political, and religious conditions of reproduction. On this understanding, religion is treated being driven by a specific [practical logic](#), and collective religious actors are regarded in a broad social context. Our analytic models allow us to identify attributions of meaning and identity formations, as well as religious competition and the positions of different religious actors within the social struggle for power. We furthermore arrive at empirically founded judgments regarding the social functions of different forms of religious praxis.

The analytic models used in this project are derived from our methodological research program titled [HabitusAnalysis](#), to the effect that our empirical findings feed back into the process of methodological development. We were primarily concerned with the evaluation – based in qualitative interviews – of how actors belonging to different religious movements process their experiences in religious terms and by drawing on their respective “practical sense” (Bourdieu). Our interviewing technique, which was tailored to the requirements of HabitusAnalysis, aimed at providing interviewees with sufficient space to communicate their social experiences as well as their religious interpretations as they deemed relevant and without being tied to specific contents. The analytic procedure of HabitusAnalysis, which was applied to the recorded and transcribed interviews, reveals the *modus operandi* of religious logic in the context of the societal challenges that the actors consider relevant. In this way, religious convictions were interpreted as operators and stratagems of the specific subjective stance that actors take toward the structural dynamics of religion, politics and society at large. Collective religious identities and strategies of the different groups were reconstructed as formations of religious meaning (habitus formations). The structural dynamics were additionally captured in surveys that enabled us to construct two objectivistic models (field and social space) in which to register habitus formations by way of scaled variables representing the distribution of power in specific modalities. Our model of the religious field was developed on the basis of Bourdieu's description of the field of art. It was first used in a project on [“The Ethos of Religious Peace Builders”](#) in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

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which was funded by the German Research Foundation. In Central America, the model was applied to two entirely different (national) religious fields. Through the representation of survey results on a scale, the model allowed us to locate the positions of important religious actors in the field of competition regarding religious capital and, most importantly, to collect data on the public credibility of these actors. A simplified model of Bourdieu's social space enabled us moreover to locate these actors within the space of social distribution of power. Finally, the triangulation of these three models facilitated the comparative interpretation of the praxis of the most diverse religious actors. This interpretation provides information not only about certain (factual) social functions of the religious movements under consideration, but also about how these functions are embedded in the meaningful praxis of religious actors.

### **1.1. Progress of the project**

The project was divided into the following three phases: 1.) Preparation and introductory training; 2.) Field work in Guatemala and Nicaragua (June, 2012 to May, 2013); 3.) Evaluation (June, 2013 to November, 2014).

*Preparation and introductory training:* From a methodological perspective, the main task consisted in the adaptation of the models developed in a previous project on peace-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the goals of the Central American project. Additional preparatory work focused on field research logistics and on introducing the new co-worker Tobias Reu to the theoretical and methodological framework on which the project was built.

*Field work in Guatemala and Nicaragua:* All in all, the fieldwork conducted for this project was highly successful, enabling us to capture the strongly competitive dynamics of the religious fields of Nicaragua and Guatemala through the expansion of the originally intended qualitative samples and the adaptation of the representative surveys. Moreover, co-operations were established with local academic institutions.

For the fieldwork, Mr. Tovar and Dr. Reu remained in Nicaragua and Guatemala for twelve months, each heading a local team. The director of the project visited both countries from August to October 2012 and from January to March 2013 to participate in the field research. In the first weeks of the fieldwork phase, local coworkers with excellent knowledge of the respective religious fields were recruited to support data collection and enhance the organization and thematic elaboration of the project with their expertise. Coordination meetings of the entire staff took place during the visits of the project director in September 2012 in Managua, Nicaragua, and in February 2013, in La Antigua, Guatemala. The purpose of these meetings was to evaluate the work in progress; plan further actions; adjust the methodology to warrant the comparability of the materials generated in Guatemala and in Nicaragua; debate tentative results; and exchange ideas with local scholars. The first meeting in Managua also marked the conclusion of a three-months pilot phase dedicated to testing the research instruments—especially the interview schedule for habitus interviews—and to the creation of a reliable sampling method on the basis of a first overview of the field. Both meetings were of great benefit to the design of the interview schedules and the conception of

the surveys, the execution of which was coordinated with partner organizations in each of the two countries.

In the course of the fieldwork phase, the data for the three key components of HabitusAnalysis—the analysis of the practical sense based on habitus interviews and the production of models of the religious field and the social space of religious styles—was generated as described in the following paragraphs.

## 2. Sampling

The project was designed to allow its complementation with a future project consisting in a diachronic comparison of the results with those obtained during fieldwork conducted in Central America by the project director in the 1980s. To achieve the comparability of the findings with those from previous research, the emphasis of the present project was originally placed on Protestantism and (Neo-)Pentecostalism. Just as it was done in the 1980s, we intended to draw on other religious communities merely as control groups. However, the pilot phase showed that a strong diversification of religious movements had occurred since the 1980s, leading us to the conclusion that it was advisable to put a greater weight on non-Protestant actors. The diversification of religiosity is particularly striking with regard to Maya spirituality in Guatemala, the revitalization of which was catalyzed by the fifth centenary of the conquest of the Americas in 1992. In addition, the Catholic charismatic movement has emerged as a strong competitor to the Pentecostal movement, and owing in parts to its social, political, and educational activities, Opus Dei has developed a significant presence. While we were maintaining our emphasis on evangelical groups, which have grown strongly over the last decades, we thus adapted our research design to include sufficiently large samples of these other movements and their respective actors. For the habitus interviews, we decided to revisit churches that had been part of the previous research conducted in the 1980s (e.g., Asambleas de Dios, Iglesia Presbiteriana, Iglesia Bautista, Elim) and to complement this sample with other churches that were particularly appropriate for synchronic comparison of the two national cases (e.g., Asambleas de Dios, El Verbo). In compliance with the requirements of our method, particular attention was afforded to producing contrasting samples with regard to the typical positions of members of the respective religious groups within the social space. The habitus interviews conducted across the religious groups provided the core sample for the elaboration of clusters of habitus identified through qualitative analysis, which were to be located in the religious field as well as in the social space. Additionally, we developed interview schedules for semi-structured interviews with experts and church functionaries with the aim of obtaining relevant information for the elaboration of models of the religious fields. The sample was also diversified with regard to distinctions between metropolitan areas and rural towns. In both countries, qualitative interviews were conducted in the capital cities (Guatemala, Managua) and in one small provincial town (San Pedro La Laguna, Matagalpa). The surveys were conducted in the capital cities, the aforementioned small towns, and, per country, in one larger provincial capital with a Catholic majority population (Quetzaltenango, León). The surveys are representative for each of these locales.

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*Collective actors included in the sample for qualitative analysis:* While the selection of religious organizations was guided by the aforementioned criteria, it was limited by representatives' willingness to permit access; time constraints of the interviewees; traffic conditions; and the security situation (e.g., in marginal neighborhoods). With a considerable coordinating effort, a sample could be established that warrants a relatively good transnational comparability.

*Neo-Pentecostal actors in Guatemala:* *Fraternidad Cristiana de Guatemala* is representative of a class of so-called mega-churches. Although its size implies social diversity, its membership is characterized by relatively high levels of education, moderate to high levels of material wealth, and modernizing strategies. *Iglesia de Restauración Misión Internacional (Restauración)* is also classified as belonging to the Neo-Pentecostal religious movement, but it appeals mostly to a lower social stratum that lives at the urban periphery. In Nicaragua, we worked with the *El Verbo* and *Ríos de Agua Viva* churches, which are roughly equivalent with the Guatemalan ones. *El Verbo* is quite similar to *Fraternidad Cristiana* with view to the typical positions of its congregants, but as an institution, it does not share the same social and political influence with the latter. Unfortunately, we were not able to work with the Nicaraguan *Ministerios de Restauración Familiar Hossana*, which would have replicated *Fraternidad Cristiana's* profile more closely. *Ministerios de Restauración Familiar Hossana* is the subject of a series of very critical recent articles, to the effect that its functionaries declined our request for cooperation. Finally, the Nicaraguan *Ríos de Agua Viva*, resembles the Guatemalan *Iglesia de Restauración* in terms of style and position within society.

*Asambleas de Dios (Assemblies of God)* is a major *classical Pentecostal* denomination that has its origins in the United States and is active in both countries. In Guatemala, we worked with four different of its congregations with membership figures ranging from 50 to about 300 congregants. Traditionally rooted within rural populations and those at the urban margins, the *Asambleas* have lately achieved a certain upward mobility, which goes along with changes in worshipping styles. In Nicaragua, we worked mostly with two congregations of the *Asambleas*. Additionally, we conducted interviews in two mega-churches that appeal to the lower middle class and formally belong to the *Asambleas*, even though their style and organizational structures diverge from the rest of the denomination. These two mega-churches are *Ministerio Apostolar Centro Cristiano* and *Ministerios Restauración Centro Evangelístico*. Across these cases, we observed a strong social differentiation of religious habitūs.

The members of *small Pentecostal churches* of (mostly) national origin typically belong to marginalized sectors of society. In Guatemala, we worked with *Iglesia Cristiana Samaria Santa Luisa*, a small church in a lower class residential area of the capital city, and with *Iglesia Avivando la Fe (Ágape)* in San Pedro la Laguna. In Nicaragua, we conducted interviews with members of three groups with roots in marginal neighborhoods (*Tabernáculo Nacional Pentecostal del Nazareno, Chureca; Misión Pentecostal de Liberación Nueva*

Jerusalén, Chureca; Luz Eterna). As an exceptional case in the marginal social position, the conservative mega-church Iglesia Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús, which has its origins in Mexico, was included in the sample.

The control groups from the range of *Historical Protestantism* were exceptionally cooperative and displayed a strong stylistic diversification, which was partially owed to (Neo-)Pentecostal influences. In Guatemala, we worked with Iglesia Presbiteriana (Presbyterian Church), and in Nicaragua with the Convención Bautista de Nicaragua. The confessional difference (Presbyterians vs. Baptists) is justified by the fact that, due to decisions regarding mission strategy (Mission Conference, Panama 1916), Presbyterians in Guatemala and Baptists in Nicaragua occupy a similar position within the respective religious fields.

Within the *Catholic Church*, several of the relevant movements could only be covered through expert interviews (e.g., Acción Católica). However, significant numbers of habitus interviews were conducted with members of two Catholic movements. In Guatemala, we worked with the charismatic Grupo de Oración Jerusalén, which is affiliated with the parish Inmaculada de Tivoli. In Nicaragua, we interviewed members of Centro Espiritual Betania and of a group surrounding the priest “Joselito” (Hogar Zacarías Guerra). In both countries, interviews were also conducted with activists of Catholic base communities. The intended work with Opus Dei proved rather challenging as we were granted interviews with only three members in each of the two countries. In Guatemala, the public revitalization of indigenous *Maya spirituality* since the beginning of the 1990s has created a new collective actor in the religious field, which was accounted for with a small sample.

*Qualitative interviews:* Qualitative interviews with (mostly) common church members were based on an interview schedule that was elaborated in agreement with the method of HabitusAnalysis. Thematically structured interviews were conducted with functionaries of religious organizations, and expert interviews with an open thematic focus were conducted with observers of the religious field.

In Guatemala, a total of 145 individuals were interviewed on the basis of the final guide for habitus interviews. Of these 145 individuals, 98 were members of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal congregations, 23 were members of Catholic communities, 7 identified as belonging to Movimiento Maya, and 11 were Presbyterians. We moreover conducted interviews with 38 experts and specialists. In *Nicaragua*, a total of 157 interviews were conducted. Of these, 122 were habitus interviews with members of several Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches, 13 with members of different Catholic movements, and 8 with Baptists. In addition, we conducted 14 interviews with experts. All interviews were transcribed by native speakers in the two countries. At present, all interview transcripts are being revised for usage with computer software for qualitative text analysis. As compared to the initial provisions, which called for a total of 90 interviews per country, the qualitative sample was strongly expanded to account for an increased religious diversification and an unexpectedly strong competition in the religious field.

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*Participant observation:* Accompanying the interviews, participant observation, supported by audio and video recordings, was conducted in church services. As per the research design, the materials produced in this context were not systematically evaluated. However, the resulting archive of recordings and observations provides rich material for future analyses of religious styles using, among other methods, Multiple Correspondence Analysis.

*Media:* To document religious actors' participation in public discourse, a relational database containing press materials and internet sources was created.

*Data collection for models of the religious field and the social space:* To elaborate quantitative models of field and space, several types of data were collected (see below, 2.3): To model the *social spaces*, data on levels of education and on equivalized income were collected in habitus interviews and in the surveys. To model the *religious fields*, survey data was generated on the credibility attributed to a given institution by the general public, and the organizational complexity of the most important organizations was assessed. A field-survey developed for a prior project on religious peace makers<sup>3</sup> was adapted and tested during a pilot phase. Subsequently, representative surveys on the credibility of religious actors were conducted in three locales per country. In Guatemala, this was done by a company specialized in social scientific services (Sociecon Consulting) and monitored by ourselves. In Nicaragua, the survey was conducted by our local team in cooperation with the statistics department of Universidad Centroamericana. The net sample size was n=1,287 in Guatemala and n=614 in Nicaragua.

To collect data for the assessment of the *organizational complexity* of the actors participating in the religious field, the number of organizations included in the credibility survey had to be reduced for reasons of practicability. This was achieved in agreement with a criterion of how well known the organizations were among the general public, with their expected rating regarding credibility, and with their significance for our qualitative sample. Detailed fact sheets on the structural properties of the religious organizations were created on the basis of expert interviews, grey literature, pamphlets and information that the organizations publish on the internet. In Guatemala, this was possible for 11 organizations, and in Nicaragua for 8. Given some actors' lack of interest in reflexive accountability regarding their formal organization, these numbers that can be regarded as good results.

*Problems and deviations from the initial design:* Notwithstanding the long-term preparation of field access and the high quality of our local teams, we had to cope with several problems during fieldwork.

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3 Seibert, Leif Hagen. "Glaubwürdigkeit als religiöses Vermögen. Grundlagen eines Feldmodells nach Bourdieu am Beispiel Bosnien-Herzegowinas". *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 20.1 (2010): 89-117. Seibert, Leif Hagen. 2017. Religious credibility under fire. A praxeological analysis of the determinants of religious legitimacy in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. Wiesbaden: Springer VS (in print), aprox. 500 pp.

*Quantitative data collection:* Deviating from the work schedule provided with the project proposal submitted to the German Research Foundation, the realization of the surveys on the religious fields was postponed until the end of the field research phase of the project. This was due to the fact that the search for adequate service providers was only possible from inside the countries and caused problems that were not anticipated. The random walk method was refused by almost every company due to security concerns (marginal neighborhoods). Nevertheless, we favored – and eventually used – this method precisely because it enables the inclusion of the marginalized population that cannot be reached by other means. However, as a result of the delay, the survey data on the religious field was not available to guide our qualitative sampling in an early field research stage. This shortcoming was partially compensated by, on the one hand, the unexpectedly complete expert knowledge that our field assistants in Nicaragua and Guatemala contributed, and, on the other hand, by information obtained in expert interviews and in a pilot run with in-depth habitus interviews.

*Survey quality:* The first set of data that we received from our contractor for Guatemala City showed sever flaws resulting from surveying errors. Therefore, a second run was necessary for this sub-sample, including a subsequent verification of the results.

*Sampling:* Although the sampling strategy based on contrasting social positions was all in all successful, it was difficult to reach participants in the highest and lowest social positions. Because of the precarious security situation in large parts of Guatemala City, the work with residents of lower class areas entailed considerable risks. Even so, we were able to include congregations at the lower margins of the social spectrum. One church was discarded from the sample when the project director found out that it was a disguised drug-trafficking operation. In Nicaragua, the security situation was considerably better, albeit not entirely unproblematic. With respect to the upper classes, we experienced a lower degree of cooperation than in the lower and middle classes. Whereas in Guatemala we were able to work with a church whose membership belongs in large parts to the upper middle class (Fraternidad Cristiana), our team was rejected by a Nicaraguan church in a homologous social position (Comunidad de Renovación Familiar Hossana). The lack of interest in our study was particularly evident in Opus Dei. The comparative imbalances in the qualitative sample that result from these difficulties have to be compensated through interpretive means.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Empirical results**

Regarding the principal historic developments, the first thing to note is that the Protestant segment of the population has grown considerably since the 1980s (time of the project director's first research in Central America). Whereas in the 1980s, Protestants made up about 25 percent of the Guatemalan population and 18 percent in Nicaragua, the numbers are now at 41 percent and 40 percent respectively.<sup>4</sup> However, among the results of our project is

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4 Pew Research Center: *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region*, November 13th, 2014. [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), p. 14. Given that our own data only reflects the three

the recognition that this growth does not correspond with a downturn in Catholic religiosity. To the contrary, it can be observed that, over the last twenty years, a mobilization has also taken place among members of the Catholic Church (especially among Charismatics and Opus Dei, but also in the Basic Ecclesial Communities movement). Moreover, an ethno-religious revitalization has taken place among the Mayan population in Guatemala. In both countries, strong levels of religious mobilization through competing religious movements can be observed. This is consistent with the fact that, within Latin America, the Central American region is characterized by rapid religious change and the social significance of religious convictions, which stands in a positive correlation with the role that religious praxis plays within the national politics of both countries—albeit in very different ways.

*Similarities: Biblical law and the nuclear family*

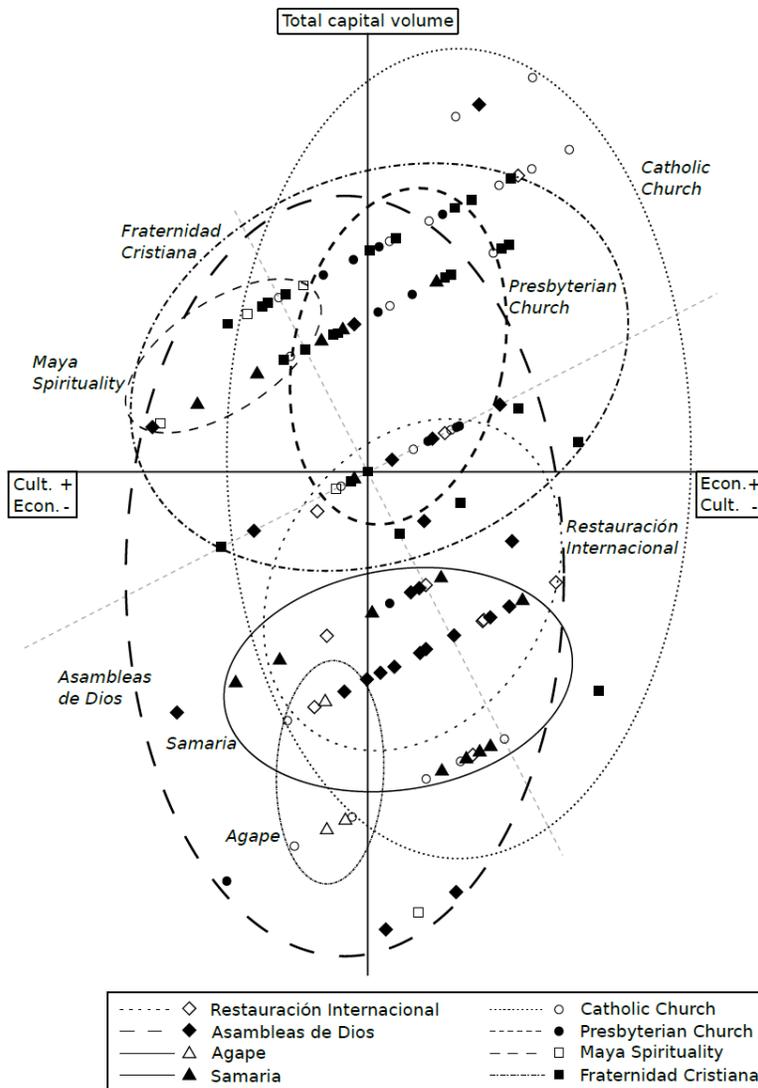
Before any differences can be discussed, the question needs to be pondered why the religious mobilization continued after the end of the civil wars of the 1980s, instead of decreasing in accord with the subsiding political and military crises as crisis theories of mobilization would have suggested. Our data on the overall societal development (social space) combined with that on religious convictions (*habitus*) suggest an interplay of the following factors: After the end of the military conflicts, neo-liberal reorganizations of the economies took place in both countries with differing paces and efficiencies (“structural development programs”). These reorganizations brought new opportunities of upward mobility, but also precariousness and the individualization of labor, affecting all segments of society up to the upper middle classes. There was, then, a structural change in the crisis itself. At the same time, alternatives for mobilization along socio-political lines (e.g., trade unions) have lost relevance, and political parties have become by and large discredited (corruption). In addition, a rise in crime particularly in Guatemala has led to extreme homicide rates, although this is a minor factor in Nicaragua. Under these circumstances, religious praxis has established itself as an attractive alternative providing normative orientation in private as well as public contexts. Our analysis of the practical religious sense expressed in the most diverse *habitus* formations casts into high relief an emphasis on biblical law as a guideline for private life and politics, and on the nuclear family as the central sphere of religious and economic life. This general orientation is modulated by socio-political differences between the two countries and by the specific religious identities and strategies pertaining to different *habitus* formations.

*National differences*

With regard to the political situation during the project duration, the difference between, on the one hand, a system characterized by a range of neo-liberal parties, drug trafficking related corruption, and military control in Guatemala, and, on the other hand, a patrimonial rule based on large popular support (60 percent in free elections) in Nicaragua is important. This difference is reflected in the divergent political strategies of religious actors (see below). For our interview partners, the security situation was generally of large importance. In correlation

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locales per country that were included in our sample, the numbers in this study provide averages for the entire countries.



with the much higher homicide rates, this was more so in Guatemala. With regard to the dynamics of the *religious field*, the Catholic Church occupies traditionally a more powerful position in Nicaragua than in Guatemala, resulting, among other things, in different social characteristics and an enhanced religious competitiveness for the Catholic Charismatic movement vis-a-vis Neo-Pentecostalism. Whereas the Neo-Pentecostal movement is well-established among the modernizing upper middle class in Guatemala, the Catholic Charismatic movement appeals more strongly to the equivalent social segment in Nicaragua. By the same token, and owing to the favorable conditions of reproduction that it enjoys since the Sandinista revolution in the 1980s, the Catholic Basic Ecclesial Communities movement is

quite present in present day Nicaragua. In Guatemala, the same movement was subject to military persecution during the civil war in the 1980s, to the extent that, at present, it remains in a position of social marginalization. To complement the religious field in Guatemala, the Maya movement has emerged toward the end of the 1980s as a new religious and political force of opposition. Our exploration of the field bears out that there are interesting relations of overlap and cooperation between Maya movement and Basic Ecclesial Communities. The celebrations at the conclusion of the great cycle of the Mayan Long Count Calendar (13 *Baktun*, December 21, 2012) provided these actors with an important opportunity for publicity during our fieldwork phase. Taking into account all other differences, the most important source of variations in strategies of religious identity politics lies in the distinct political regimes. However, the impact of these regimes on religious strategies is not mechanical. It is fully intelligible only through a consideration of the religious habitus of the respective actors.

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**Cómo citar este artículo:** Schäfer, H. W., Reu, T. & Tovar, A. (2017). "Religious identity politics in Guatemala and Nicaragua: a research report". *Revista Cultura & Religión*. Vol. 11(2). pp. 93-112.

*Differences of habitus: Social space and religious sense*

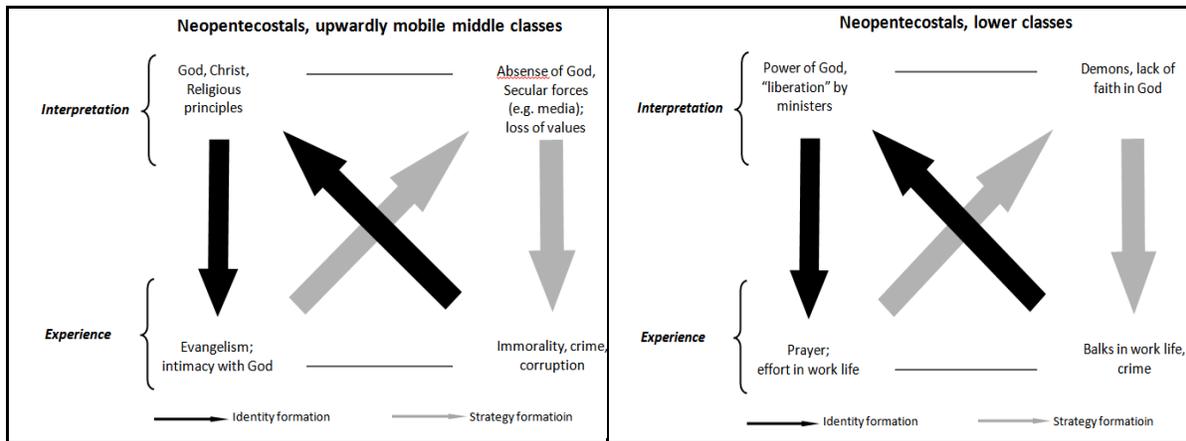
To exemplify our style of analysis, the following paragraphs provide a sketch of three habitus formations that are of particular relevance in Guatemalan politics and religion. The three formations are described with regard to their respective positions within the social space of religious styles. The *model of the social space*—constructed upon the axes of formal education and equivalized income in reference to our qualitative sample—shows that large organizations, such as the Pentecostal Asambleas de Dios and the Neo-Pentecostal churches Fraternidad Cristiana and Restauración Internacional, have left marginal social positions and conquered the center of society.

Here they compete with the Catholic Church and its movements to provide a religious orientation to the centric social strata and, therefore, to determine the orientation of a civil religion. It is worth noting that the extended Neo-Pentecostal presence is represented by two organizations with different social positions.

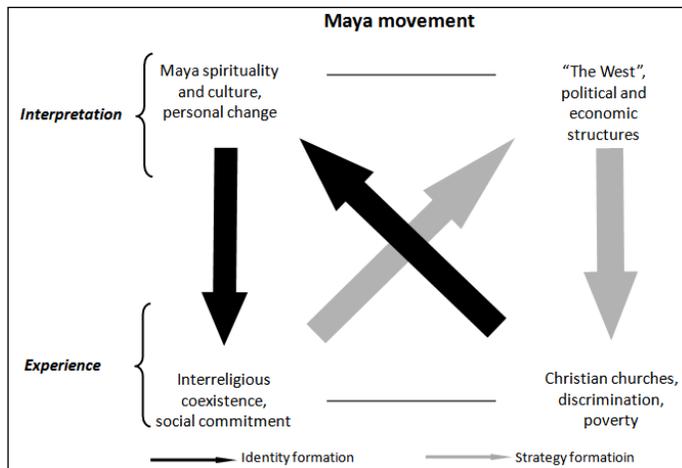
This raises questions regarding differences in habitus. And indeed, our analysis of the religious sense shows that, in agreement with the diversification and “downward” expansion of the Neo-Pentecostal movement, two very different religious habitus formations have emerged. The formations that are prevalent in the upwardly mobile upper middle class process the negative experiences of crime, corruption and immorality, all the while the ones prevalent in the lower-class process crime as well, but are additionally trained on concrete experiences of poverty, illness, constant pressure on families, and the lack of occupational opportunities. The former—industrialists, business executives, software engineers, mid- and upper-level employees, physicians, freelancing professionals such as architects, etc.—have significantly more opportunities of social and professional action than owners of small shops, low-level employees, cab drivers, street merchants, *maquila* workers, etc. Accordingly, upper middle-class believers trace their negative experiences to socio-religious phenomena, such as the lack of God in secular actors (e.g., the media) or a general moral decay. By contrast, lower class believers place a higher value on experiences caused at the personal level, such as the inhibiting and sickening presence of demons in their own environments or their personal lack of trust in God. Religious identity in the upwardly mobile formation is therefore anchored in rather general religious representations of the numinous and of moral values (God, principles). The corresponding positive experience and the strategy approach are conceived of as an intimate relation with power in its divine representation (God) and as evangelization of society—an anti-secularist socio-moral strategy. The lower class formation, by contrast, derives its religious identity very concretely from the divine power represented in the action of their charismatic specialists, and it allocates different weights in the production of strategies. Whereas evangelism is still a concern, the primary focus rests on personal action aimed at improving the individual situation (prayer, discipline and a change of lifestyle) and on symbolic action aimed at improving society (prayer).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A possible future project on diachronic developments since the 1980s would enable us to sketch interesting transformations.



Given these conditions, it might not surprise that the strategies that the different organizations pursue toward politics and the public are distinguished by a shift in focus between public exertion of social and moral influence and a spotlight on a disciplined private life under the rule of religious morals.

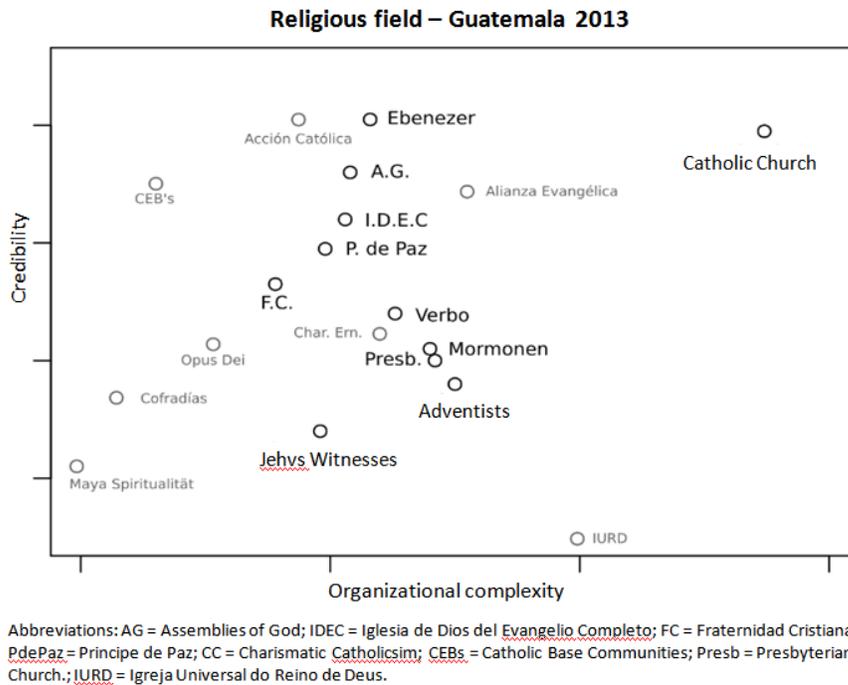


The Maya movement constitutes a third collective religious actor who, rising from a perspective of complete marginalization, has developed a religiosity that is by and large critical of the system. The model of the social space reveals that the actors of the Maya movement can be found in a position that is typical for mobilized intellectuals and also occupied by many activists from the Catholic Basic Ecclesial Communities movement (more

cultural than economic capital, in a middling position overall with regard to the distribution of capitals in the social space). Their negative experiences are of an ethno-religious as well as social type, and they trace them to “the West” (including Christian religion) and to socio-economic causes. However, the movement's mobilizing identity is not focused in the socio-economic dimension (e.g. revolution), but in religion and culture; and it is associated with the notion of change and renewal in personal life. It is only at the level of experience that this spirituality generates social commitments, and it does not call for a complete refusal of Christianity, but for inter-religious coexistence. These religious convictions are compatible with a broad capacity for cooperation and with a politics that is critical of power, but focused on social reforms (not on revolution). The strategies diverge strongly from those of Neo-Pentecostal and other Christian organizations, as does the position within the religious field.

### *Differences of religious positioning: field*

The struggle for the center of society and the numerical growth of Pentecostal actors in both countries over the last 50 years suggest that the Catholic Church is slowly losing ground to Protestant alternatives. Our investigation of the religious fields has approached this supposition on the basis of representative surveys on the credibility that the general public attributes to certain religious actors. The survey data were combined with detailed information on organizational complexity, creating a two-dimensional model that yields insights on the position of each actor within the religious fields.



The models of the religious fields did not ascertain the decline in religious relevance of the Catholic Church that demographic data regarding confessional belonging and its shifting position within the social space would have suggested. This can be illustrated at the example of Guatemala, where the Catholic Church has lost

considerably more ground than in Nicaragua. Although the struggle for political influence and, in the last consequence, the definition of a civil religion has grown quite severe, the Catholic Church (with its many religious movements) still holds on to the position of the field's hegemon. This is due to a combination of high levels of credibility ascribed to it by the public (GW 2.79, GW = *Glaubwürdigkeitswert*, credibility index) with a traditionally complex and highly visible structure of organization. The charismatic mobilization, which has taken place over the last decades, may also have contributed to this overall position, albeit not as strongly as we would have suspected (GW 2.47 vs. Acción Católica 2.81). In sum, the regression graph represents a relatively stable and mature field. A middling position is occupied by a bloc of traditional Pentecostal organizations with a massive membership (Asambleas de Dios, AD; Iglesia de Dios, IDEC; and Principe de Paz). The Neo-Pentecostal churches have clearly caught up. With regard to these actors, the correlation of good credibility scores with low complexities of organizational structures is particularly striking (see especially the lower-class church Ebenezer, GW 2.81, and Fraternidad Cristiana, FC, GW 2.53), which suggests that the credibility scores of these actors are rooted in the media

exposure of their charismatic leaders. In spite of a low potential for religious mobilization residing in lower levels of structural complexity, media exposure provides an enhanced publicity that can be used for political strategies of cooptation and representation. The Catholic Church is able to counter such a politics of identification pinned to individual charismatic leaders through the diversity of styles of piety that it harbors and through corporative identification with the ecclesiastic institution. *Acción Católica*, characterized by its rich tradition, and even the Basic Ecclesial Communities score highly on credibility in spite of their low levels of organizational complexity. The Maya movement occupies the weakest position in Guatemala (GW 2.22). Clearly, this can be traced to its ethno-religious specificity, which is rejected for ethnic reasons by the many Guatemalans who subscribe to a racist worldview, and for religious reasons by indigenous Protestants. In Nicaragua, the Catholic Church relative position of the Catholic Church is considerably stronger. In many regards, this is an issue of politics.

*Politics: civil religion*

Given that religious convictions as well as positions within social space and religious field are of necessary importance for political relations, a triangulation of the three models guiding our research approach is the natural result of the project's focus on how religious identities are deployed in political strategies.

As seen from the political field, the difference between patrimonialism in Nicaragua and neo-liberal competition in Guatemala (with corruption in both cases) that is mentioned above is decisive for the relations between religious and political actors. Whereas in Nicaragua, the government co-opts religious actors and discourses, Guatemalan religious actors attempt to exert influence over political actors and on politics as a whole. Patrimonialism provides the Sandinista president Ortega with the material means to co-opt religious leaders, and his government makes ample use of religious language for a symbolic appeal to audiences that are motivated by faith. A skillful politics of religion bestows monetary benefits and construction sites onto potential political opponents emerging from the realm of Neo-Pentecostal mega-churches, who are also offered positions as consultants to the administration. Political advertising draws more and more heavily on typical Pentecostal vocabulary ("Nicaragua bendecida, prosperada y en victorias," "Nicaragua blessed, prosperous and victorious"). Even if many of our interviewees questioned the manipulative nature of this vocabulary, the religious discourse is more and more filled with the contents pushed by official politics. Both strategies serve to secure socio-cultural positions vis-à-vis the oppositional Episcopal Conference, which due to its strong position within religious field and social space is the only serious religious opposition that the government faces. Our interviews confirm that some Pentecostal leaders plan the "sanctification" of politics through the establishment of their own political party. However, the political incompetence of these leaders as well as their lack of support within the predominantly Catholic upper class has led to repeated failure. In sum, Neo-Pentecostal attempts at shaping "the world" in Nicaragua mostly amount to a simple acceptance of the government's offers of co-optation.

In Guatemala, the situation is very different. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, there were two governments led by Neo-Pentecostal politicians (Rios Montt, military dictator, and Serrano Elias, democratically elected but allegedly very corrupt). Both ultimately failed, and most of the other governments of the last 30 years did not make attempts to use religion in ways similar to Daniel Ortega's described above. For leading religious actors, it seems therefore more important to actively pursue a political influence on behalf of their constituencies. As the analysis of habitus and their position within the social space shows, the Neo-Pentecostal churches of the upwardly mobile middle class reveal a particular disposition to act in this sense. Particularly spectacular in this regard is the public Te Deum for the inauguration of presidential terms that Fraternidad Cristiana has now organized three times in a row. Here, the presidents arrive at the church to expose themselves to the pastoral exhortations. Interestingly, the Te Deum is merely the public ratification of a preliminary vetting that an informal body of Neo-Pentecostal leaders performs on the presidential candidates. The public Te Deums constitute prime evidence of the transformation of the competition with the Catholic Church in the religious field—the struggle for a legitimate “ecclesiodicy”—into a contest for a legitimate civil religion, which is to say a publicly recognized “theodicy” (Weber) of politics and society. Since theodicy turns into “sociodicy” (Bourdieu), the positioning of religious actors in the space of social domination serves as an indicator of the power resources that these actors can invest in this struggle. The fact that the identities and strategies that are rooted as theodicies within the religious habitus are always *also* social and political is borne out by a triangulation of our analytic models. In the present format, this could however be merely hinted at with the example of select findings.

### 3.2. Theoretical and methodological results

As it was planned from the outset, the project additionally constituted an opportunity to work on the methodological and theoretical development of HabitusAnalysis. The following paragraphs specify some impulses for future development that the methodological test run achieved by our research in Central America has yielded.

*Social space of religious styles:* In light of the difficulty to obtain sufficient data for a representative framework model of social class structures in countries with precarious structures of public administration, socio-demographic data derived from our own survey and from the habitus interviews (approx. n = 1,300 in Guatemala and 800 in Nicaragua) were used to construct the model relative to our sample.

*Religious field:* In comparison with the religious peace keeping organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina—the first test run of the field model—the field of religious actors in Guatemala and Nicaragua is extremely broad, entangled, and heterogeneous. The problems mentioned above with regard to the sampling procedure indicate that the sequence of “field survey first, and then the definition of a sample for the habitus interviews” should be kept if possible. Furthermore, the stark differences regarding the organizational structures of the different collective actors have led to a simplification of the items used to compute the levels of organizational complexity.

*Religious sense*: The format of the habitus interviews and the specific procedure during the interview situation has been improved. By the same token, the analytic procedure using QDA software was significantly enhanced. Finally, the development of an algorithm based program for semi-automatic HabitusAnalysis was initiated in cooperation with specialists on computational semantics.

#### 4. Projected further work

Whereas an immediate economic usability of the project's results was not to be expected, some important academic spin-offs should ensue.

*HabitusAnalysis 3: Models and methods*. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018. Co-authored by Leif Seibert and Adrián Tovar, the third volume of a trilogy on epistemology, theory, and method of HabitusAnalysis will provide a guide for working with this method. Volume 1 is published, volume 2 and 3 are in preparation.

Schäfer, Heinrich Wilhelm. *Charismatischer Sinn. Zur Praxeologie zentralamerikanischen Christentums*. Considerations on the theory of religion based on the empirical results of the present project (monography, in preparation, no publisher yet).

Reu, Tobias. *El modelo de Jesus: Neo-Pentecostal Leadership, Evangelism, and Citizenship in Guatemala City* (paper).

Tovar, Adrián. *Religious [Re]sources of the self. Popular religion and modern identity in metropolitan Mexico*. Elaboration of the field model in the context of a research question regarding individuation and the critique of secularism (doctoral dissertation, in preparation).

Tovar, Adrián; Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer. *Santos pleitos. Sobre el campo religioso en Nicaragua*. A field theoretical study focusing on the relation between empirical data and theory formation.

Follow-up project 1: *Digital HabitusAnalysis*. Development of an algorithm based program for semi-automatic HabitusAnalysis, in co-operation with computational linguists (CITEC, Bielefeld).

Follow-up project 2: *Diachronic development trends of Pentecostal religious identity politics*. Model-based historical comparison and longitudinal study on religious change in Central America, on the basis of extensive qualitative data produced in the 1980s and the data from the present project. The goal is further methodological and theoretical development of the praxeological theory of religion, focusing on socio-religious change (project proposal in preparation).

#### Conclusion

##### *Most important scientific advances*

An analysis of the religious field was conducted in Guatemala and Nicaragua, the two countries with the highest demographic percentages of people who self-identify as very religious and of Protestant Christians in Latin America. The analysis of religious competition between the different religious organizations generated new findings on contemporary power relations in the religious field. The identification of the positions of religious organizations within the model of societal structure revealed that previously marginal groups (with

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principal appeal to the upper middle or lower classes) have reached the center of society and that large organizations (e.g., established Pentecostal churches) diversify their religious styles strongly in agreement with an increasing variation within their social composition. Qualitative analysis of religious convictions (*habitus*) revealed that the aforementioned developments correspond with modifications in believers' attitudes as well as religious and non-religious conduct. As a result, religious styles realign as *habitus* formations that transcend the institutional boundaries of churches and confessions. Given the great significance for social and political action that the public attributes to religious convictions, this also means that the religious struggle for the center of society is time and again transformed into a struggle for political power positions. Due to the difference in political regimes, this means that, whereas in Nicaragua religion is co-opted by politics, Guatemalan politics becomes the object of religious strategies.

*“Surprises” during the project*

Beyond the findings that were anticipated, the following results caused some surprise: A lasting dominance of the Catholic Church in the religious field. In spite of the dominant trend in the academic literature to emphasize Pentecostal growth, the Catholic Church is characterized by high levels of public credibility, different revival movements, deep roots within society (e.g. *Acción Católica*), and Charismatic mobilization.

Consolidation of a post-denominational mainstream in the form of Neo-Pentecostal organizations with high credibility at the center of society, and simultaneous diversification of religious *habitus* among these groups because of an increasingly varied appeal to distinct social strata.

Socio-religious dispositions that transcend churches and confessions: Religious law as a normative standard for the public, in competition to corrupt political orders; the nuclear family as a critical operator of social integration, especially with regard to youth and economic stability.

Socio-religious function of mainstream Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism as sources of life coaching for the benefit of professional performance and everyday happiness.

Width of the Maya revitalization movement, which connects rural indigenous traditions with the mobilization of an urban intellectual middle class and cooperates with Catholic (and Protestant) communities.

High levels of political co-optation of the most diverse religious actors in Nicaragua; a strong influence of Neo-Pentecostal leaders on politics in Guatemala.

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Translation into English by Tobias Reu and Sebastian Schlerka

Revista Cultura & Religión Vol. XI, 2017 N° 2 (julio-diciembre)

**Cómo citar este artículo:** Schäfer, H. W., Reu, T. & Tovar, A. (2017). "Religious identity politics in Guatemala and Nicaragua: a research report". *Revista Cultura & Religión*. Vol. 11(2). pp. 93-112.