Rendering unto Caesar?
State Regulation of Religion
and the Role of Catholicism in
Democratic Transitions and Consolidation
in Predominantly Catholic Countries

Peter J. Schraeder

Observers of the complex relationship between church and state have noted throughout history that religious activity seems greater where religion is more free from state regulation.¹ Yet it is only recently that social scientists began systematically working out the mechanisms by which varying levels of church-state separation have contributed to enhanced religious vitality and religiously based political activism, most notably in support for transitions toward democracy. Indeed, the last quarter century has been marked by an increase in scholarship exploring the role and compatibility of various religious traditions with the spread and consolidation of democratic practices. Such research has included studies of democracy and Buddhism, Christianity (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestantism), Hinduism, Islam (Sunni and Shia), and Judaism.²

Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, research in this realm turned to the Islamic world and the question as to whether Islam is compatible with democracy.³ Less attention has been given within the discipline of political science and the social sciences in general to the relationship between Catholicism and democracy. A comprehensive analysis of the Catholic Church's impact on democratic
transitions, and its continuing involvement in post-transition democratic arrangements, has not been done.

The primary purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, the chapter explores the role of Catholicism in contributing to democratic transition and democratic consolidation in fifty-five predominantly Catholic countries in which Catholics make up more than 50 percent of the national population. This is unlike earlier studies that have focused on the role of the Catholic Church in specific countries, such as Poland,4 or specific regions, such as Africa,5 Eastern Europe,6 or Latin America.7 The second purpose of this chapter is to promote an interdisciplinary understanding of the above phenomenon by drawing on research from the disciplines of economics, international relations, political science, sociology, and theology.

**Catholicism and the Third Wave of Democratization**

Democracy and its global promotion emerged at the end of the twentieth century as two of the most important norms of international relations. Samuel Huntington captured this new trend in international politics in his seminal 1991 book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. The “third wave” refers to the dramatic surge in the number of democracies in the world during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Since the appearance of Huntington’s book, the “third wave of democratization” has become one of the most cited metaphors in the field of political science.

This wave of democratization began in 1974 with the downfall of dictatorships in southern Europe, such as Portugal, Spain, and Greece. The wave spread to Latin America, the African continent, and to Eastern Europe where communist regimes collapsed after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The 2011 “Arab Spring” that began in Tunisia went on to influence the downfall of dictatorships in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, representing the most recent manifestation of the trend to democracy in a region once thought impervious to such change.8

An important outcome of this global trend is that scholars and policymakers are increasingly prone to speak of democracy as a universal value that is shared throughout all regions of the world. This is a shift in discourse within the academic world and the world of policymaking. Earlier, the Cold War kept the discussion focused on whether democracy is the best form of governance. In the post-Cold War period, however, the discussion has turned to the degree to which the international community
should be actively involved in promoting democracy and what forms of intervention are appropriate to that end. Such forms range from standard interventionist tools like diplomacy and foreign aid, to the imposition of political conditions and economic sanctions, to directly coercive forms of intervention, such as military force.⁹

In both of these Cold War and post-Cold War discussions, the religious dimensions of democracy promotion have been either missed or misunderstood. This was true of early studies in the 1950s and the 1960s, as exemplified in Seymour Martin Lipset’s landmark book, Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics. Lipset, like many of his colleagues, made three errors as concerns the relationship between religion and politics. First, he ignored the role of religious groups in promoting democratic practices. An excellent example of this is discussed in Bren Ortega Murphy’s earlier chapter in this volume on the role Catholic religious women played in teaching democratic citizenship to immigrants. Second, he mistakenly assumed that the religiosity of a country’s population would naturally fade as that country became increasingly democratic. Third, he incorrectly assumed that certain religious faiths prevent the spread of democracy.¹⁰ Lipset noted in 2004, for example, that he and other scholars harbored serious doubts during the 1950s and the 1960s as to whether predominantly Catholic countries were compatible with democracy. This doubt is analogous to recent debates over the relationship between Islam and democracy. As argued by Huntington, however, history has demonstrated that Catholicism is compatible with democracy and also served as one of the engines of the third wave of democratization. Indeed, Huntington refers to the third wave as an “overwhelmingly a Catholic wave,” one that initially unfolded in predominantly Catholic countries.¹¹

The emergence and spread of this Catholic wave is shown in the democracy rankings that Freedom House puts together on an annual basis for every country of the world and publishes as part of its annual Survey on Freedom.¹² Countries are annually ranked from the best score of 2 (high level of protection of civil liberties and political rights; therefore, a high level of democracy) to the worst score of 14 (low level of protection of civil liberties and political rights; therefore, a high level of authoritarianism). Focusing on the subset of fifty-five predominantly Catholic countries in which the populations are at least 50 percent Catholic (see Table 1), the Freedom House statistics are impressive. Whereas only fifteen Catholic countries could be classified as democratic in 1973 (the year immediately preceding the third wave of democratization), by 2013 an extraordinary thirty-five Catholic countries had emerged as democracies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percent Catholic</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>39,537,943</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Bolivia</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
<td>186,112,794</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>6,370,609</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>Cape Verde</td>
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<td>Colombia</td>
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<td>Congo-Kinshasa</td>
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<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
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<td>East Timor</td>
<td>1,040,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>13,363,593</td>
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<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>6,704,932</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Gabon</td>
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<td>Haiti</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Uruguay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vatican City</td>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>25,375,281</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
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There are three explanations for the success of democratic transitions in predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization. One explanation cites the impact of change in Catholic Church teaching toward recognizing democracy as the preferred form of political governance. This point has been made by John Langan, SJ, Cardinal Bernardin Chair in Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University. He explains that because of a shift in teaching, the Church changed "from being a vehement, conservative force in opposition to democracy, to a sturdy and reliable supporter of liberal democratic regimes during the second half of the 20th century."

As discussed in Barry Sullivan’s earlier chapter in this volume, key texts that communicated the new teaching were Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical Pacem in terris and the 1965 Second Vatican Council document Gaudium et spes. These texts influenced a change in thinking that filtered down to Catholic dioceses around the world and served as a basis for concrete action by Catholics against authoritarian regimes. Arunas Streikus’s chapter at the beginning of this volume emphasized this last point by noting how Church teaching uplifted and mobilized Catholics living in Soviet-dominated Lithuania.

Although this shift in Church teaching is important, it does not answer the following question: Why did the Church in some predominantly Catholic countries oppose authoritarian states and contribute to transitions to democracy, while the Church in other predominantly Catholic countries remained indifferent to or allied with authoritarian regimes? The answer to this question suggests a second explanation for the success of democratic transitions in predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization. Daniel Philpott persuasively demonstrates that when the Catholic Church in predominantly Catholic countries has a high degree of autonomy from state control, it is more likely to embrace the pro-democracy teachings of Vatican II and therefore pressure authoritarian states to democratize. This was the case in Spain where the Catholic Church’s decision to withdraw its support from the military dictatorship of Francisco Franco played an important role in Spain’s transition to democracy. By contrast, the lack of such autonomy from state control in Rwanda meant that the Catholic Church there failed to condemn the 1994 state-sponsored genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group and also participated in it in certain cases.

It should also be noted that autonomous Catholic Churches in predominantly Catholic countries were especially successful in supporting democracy when they coordinated their support with other organizations in society.
This was the case in Poland, where the Catholic Church effectively coordinated its opposition to communism with the actions of the Solidarity trade union to overthrow the pro-Soviet communist regime. It is also important to underscore the role of individual Catholic bishops in this process. Philippine Cardinal Jaime Sin, for example, emerged as one of the most influential leaders of a pro-democracy movement that led to the 1986 overthrow of the pro-Western dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. At a key moment in the "yellow revolution," Cardinal Sin called on Catholics to "surround the police and military headquarters in the nation's capital." More than one million Catholics took to the streets, "churched bibles and uttering prayers, in an outpouring that shielded anti-government rebels from attack."17

A third explanation for the success of democratic transitions in predominantly Catholic countries involves the degree to which religious competition exists within a society. Drawing on the discipline of economics and rational-choice theory, sociologists have developed a supply-side theory of religious behavior.18 This theory argues that religious "markets" function like economic markets. Religious participation should be higher in "free-market" systems in which there is low state regulation of religion and therefore greater possibility for religious competition. Religious participation should be lower in "closed-market" systems where certain religious institutions are granted monopolistic or oligopolistic privileges by the state.

Supporters of this supply-side theory have tested whether a state's direct financial aid to a religious institution promotes or inhibits the Catholic Church in states where Catholics are a majority. Mark Chaves and David Cann developed a measure based on answers to each of the following six questions:

1. Is there a single state church?
2. Is there official state recognition of some denominations but not others?
3. Does the state appoint or approve the appointment of church leaders?
4. Does the state pay church personnel salaries?
5. Is there a system of ecclesiastical tax collection?
6. Does the state directly subsidize, beyond mere tax breaks, the operating, maintenance, or capital expenses of churches?19

Anthony Gill also adopted the supply-side theory to explore why the Catholic Church was either willing or unwilling to confront authoritarian states in twelve Latin American countries. He found that Catholic Churches in states where competitive religious markets exist are more likely to pres-
sure authoritarian states to democratize. Conversely, Catholic Churches in non-competitive religious markets with a high degree of state regulation of religion are less likely to pressure authoritarian states to democratize.20

Catholicism and Democratic Consolidation

Less research has been conducted on the position of the Catholic Church in post-transition democracies. On this topic, the experiences of predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization raise an interesting question: What happens after the Catholic Church in a predominantly Catholic country has successfully pressured an authoritarian state to democratize? Does the Church subsequently retreat from politics or does it remain engaged in the post-transition political system? Looking at it from the side of government, does the state retreat from regulating the Church after the transition to democracy, or does it remain engaged in oversight of religious institutions? Many questions remain unanswered about the nature of church-state relationships in post-transition political environments where the Catholic Church played an important role in the transition.

Non-Catholic and Catholic Americans approach these questions from the standpoint of their own historical and cultural experiences. According to these experiences, American Catholics overwhelmingly reject theocratic models of governance where either the Church or the state claim hegemonic authority over the other. Non-Catholic and Catholic Americans overwhelmingly support the separation of church and state. These positions grew out of a historical clash between at least three different visions of social authority:

1. The anti-clerical Jacobin model of secularism that emerged out of the French Revolution of 1789 and led to the persecution of the Catholic Church.
2. The anti-clerical Bolshevik or communist model of secularism that emerged out of the Russian Revolution of 1914 and sought the extermination of the Catholic Church.
3. The Anglo-Saxon model of secularism, in which the state separates itself from the religious activity of the Christian churches but does so without engaging in anti-clericalism or rejecting religion outright.

American Catholics largely support the Anglo-Saxon model of secularism and assume that transitions to democracy will result in politics with a strong separation of church and state.
The reality of the new democracies within predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization offers a more complex picture of church-state relationships than the American experience might disclose. In fact, a number of possibilities exist between the two extremes of theocratic governance (where church and state are one) and secularist governance (where the state is not only separate from but also indifferent toward the church).

One way of sorting out this complex picture is to look again at the data provided by Freedom House (recalling that countries with high levels of democracy score 2 and countries with low levels of democracy score of 14). One would expect that transitioning democracies in predominantly Catholic countries would have lower levels of politically inspired restrictions on religious institutions. A dataset established by Jonathan Fox in 2004 is also helpful in this regard. Fox ranked countries from 1990 to 2002, according to each of the following questions:

1. Are there restrictions on religious political parties?
2. Is there arrest, continued detention, or severe official harassment of religious figures, officials, and/or members of religious parties?
3. Are there restrictions on formal religious organizations other than political parties?
4. Are there restrictions on the public observance of religious practices, including religious holidays and the Sabbath?
5. Are there restrictions on public religious speech, including sermons by clergy?
6. Are there restrictions on access to places of worship?
7. Are there restrictions on the publication or dissemination of written religious material?
8. Are people arrested for engaging in religious activities?
9. Are there restrictions on religious public gatherings that are not placed on other types of public gathering?
10. Are there restrictions on the public display by private persons or organizations of religious symbols, including religious dress, nativity scenes, and icons?
11. Are there other religious restrictions?

The yes or no answers to these questions were subsequently collated for each country into a "religious restriction" score that ranged from a high positive score of 0 (no religious restrictions by political authorities) to a low negative score of 33 (extensive religious restrictions by political authorities). The data showed that political restriction on religious authorities in
predominantly Catholic countries is inversely related to levels of democratization in post-transition countries (i.e., the higher the level of democratization, the lower the level of political restrictions on religion).

Additionally, Fox has data pointing to the fact that the processes of democratization in predominantly Catholic countries have resulted in greater levels of state involvement in the religious sphere. Fox ranked countries annually from 1990 to 2002 according to their responses to each of the following questions:

Does the state support dietary laws (restrictions on the production, import, selling, or consumption of specific foods)?
Does the state restrict or prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages?
Is the personal status of citizens defined by religion (i.e., can marriage, divorce, and/or burial only occur under religious auspices)?
Are laws of inheritance defined by religion?
Are there restrictions on conversions away from the dominant religion?
Are there restrictions on interfaith marriages?
Are there restrictions on public dress?
Are there blasphemy laws, or any other restriction on speech about religion or religious figures?
Are the press or other publications censored on grounds of being antireligious?

Is there mandatory closing of some or all businesses during religious holidays, including the Sabbath or its equivalent?
Are there restrictions on activities during religious holidays, including the Sabbath or its equivalent?
Is religious education standard in public schools; is it possible to opt out of this portion of the education?
Is religious education mandatory in public schools?
Is there government funding of religious schools or religious educational programs in secular schools?
Is there government funding of religious charitable organizations?
Does the government collect taxes on behalf of religious organizations (religious taxes)?
Do clergy occupy official government positions, receiving government salaries or other government funding?
Is there funding for religious organizations or activities other than those listed above?
Do religious speeches in public or in places of worship require government approval?
Are some official clerical positions made by government appointment?
Is there an official government ministry or department dealing with religious affairs?
Are certain government officials given an official position in the state church by virtue of their political office?
Do certain religious officials become government officials by virtue of their religious position?
Are some or all government officials required to meet certain religious requirements in order to hold office?
Do religious courts have jurisdiction over some matters of public law?
Are seats in the legislative branch and/or government cabinet made by laws or customs granted, at least in part, along religious lines?
Are there prohibitive restrictions on abortion?
Are there religious symbols on the state's flag?
Is a citizen's religion listed on their state identity card?
Must religious organizations register with the government in order to obtain official status?
Is there an official government body that monitors "sects" or minority religions?
Are there restrictions on women other than those listed above (i.e., restrictions on education, jobs that they can hold, or on appearing in public without a chaperone)?
Are there other religious prohibitions or practices that are mandatory according to the government?

The yes or no answers to these questions were collated for each country into a "religious legislation" score that ranged from a low religious legislation score of 0 (no religious legislation by the state) to a high religious legislation score of 32 (extensive religious legislation by the state). It is fascinating to note that state adoption of religious legislation in predominantly Catholic countries is positively related to higher levels of democratization in post-transition countries (i.e., the higher the level of democratization, the greater the level of state involvement in the religious sphere).

**Full Catholic Embrace of Democracy?**

An overarching theme of this chapter is that Catholicism is compatible with democracy and has served as one of the engines of the third wave of democratization. On the matter of Catholicism in post-transition democracies, data suggests that while post-transition states are legislatively involved with religion, the nature of this involvement is not predominantly restrictive in
the majority of cases. It would appear that most post-transition states with historic ties to Catholicism legislatively seek to protect, not delimit, the freedom of religious expression in the public sphere.

At the same time, one cannot expect Catholicism to embrace every result of the democratic process in newly created democratic states. This point has been made by Thomas Michel, SJ, former secretary for interreligious dialogue for the Society of Jesus. “Although there are a variety of reasons for this,” explained Michel, “one in particular stands out: the skepticism associated with the fact that the democratic process often leads to political outcomes that run counter to Catholic moral norms in the areas of sexual morality and family law.” According to Michel, this will not lead to a per se rejection of democratic procedures and values by the Catholic Church, but it will lead Church leaders to look at the consequences of democracy with a critical eye when these include such things as the legalization of abortion and the recognition of same sex marriage. Nerija Putinaite’s chapter in this volume on the situation in Lithuania gives evidence to this point.

Catholic support for democracy as a political principle and a political practice emerged in the twentieth century. This support has been given concrete manifestation in the third wave of democratization and in post-transition contexts. The future test for this mutuality between democratic states and the Catholic Church will be its maintenance during periods when fundamental principles dear to both institutions are debated in government and in the public square.

NOTES


2. See the April and July 2004 issues of the Journal of Democracy.


14. John P. Langan, "Theological Perspectives on the Evolving Role of International Democracy Promotion and the Rule of Law in Catholicism" (paper presented at The Cross, the Crescent and the Ballot Box: Catholic and Islamic Perspectives on Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law, conference organized by Loyola University Chicago and the John Felice Rome Center, Rome, Italy, March 1–2, 2008).


22. Thomas Michel, discussant comments made at a panel on Theological Perspectives, at The Cross, the Crescent and the Ballot Box: Catholic and Islamic Perspectives on Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law, a conference organized by Loyola University Chicago and the John Felice Rome Center, Rome, Italy, March 1–2, 2008.