Religion and Democratic Attitudes

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November 13, 2012
Introduction

Why does religion sometimes promote democratic values and behaviors, but sometimes do just the opposite? Existing political research on the role of religion in democracy has produced diverging results: on the one hand, religion sometimes promotes democratic behaviors and attitudes (as in the resistance to the Soviet Union, see Ramet 1989); but on the other hand, it is often said to enhance authoritarianism (for instance, in the Iranian revolution). Even within the same religious tradition, this duality is present: while the Catholic Church was cited as a source of stability for authoritarian rule in Franco’s Spain (Philpott 2007; Johnston and Figa 1988), it was also an important source of anti-authoritarian mobilization in Latin America during the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991; Hertzke 2009). These contrasting trends are puzzling from a theoretical point of view: it is evident that the content of different religious traditions does not explain the variation in their impact on democracy. I aim to address the question of what does explain the ambiguous link between religion and democracy.

Motivation

Religion remains an important driver of political behavior, and particularly so in the developing world (Norris and Inglehart 2004). However, existing scholarship on the link between religion and comparative political behavior is rather limited: as Bellin (2008, p. 316) writes, “the subfield has still failed to reckon with the power of religion as an independent variable, the noninstru-
mental aspect of religious behavior, and the malleability of religious ideas, as well as their differential appeal, persuasiveness, and political salience over time.” This combination of the continued influence of religion in political life and the relative lack of attention paid to religion by scholars of comparative politics is problematic.

Moreover, the events of the Arab Spring highlight the continued importance of the attitudes of ordinary citizens; views toward regimes are of particular importance. The revolutions that have spread across the Arab World suggest that mass mobilization remains a significant potential threat to authoritarian regimes, in contrast to the claims made by much of the transitions to democracy literature, which focuses primarily on elite behavior (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). The uncertainty about the types of regimes that will succeed the now-deposed autocrats in several countries in the region makes understanding citizens’ attitudes about democracy all the more important: if the people were able to bring down entrenched dictators, what type of regime will they demand as a replacement?

The Arab Spring brings into focus the major topic addressed by this project: religion’s unclear impact on democratic attitudes and behaviors. Even within these protests themselves, observers and analysts have struggled to grasp the link between religion and pro- or anti-democratic behaviors. On the one hand, scholars have argued that religion was an indispensable motivator of anti-regime activity during these revolutions. Benhabib (2011) suggests that the Islamic notion of shahada, meaning both “witness” and “martyr,” played an important role in motivating anti-regime activity. Ardic (2012, p. 38) offers a different account of the role of religion in motivating the Arab
Spring, stating that “mosques...functioned as a locus of anti-government
agitation and logistical centers of preparation for demonstrations.” In each
of these explanations, religion is said to have provided tools for mobilizing
citizens against the regime, albeit through different mechanisms. Other ob-
servers, however, have downplayed the role of religion in motivating the Arab
Spring. Wright (2011) argues that protesters mobilized not only in opposi-
tion to the existing regimes, but in opposition to extremist ideologies as well,
suggesting that the Arab Spring was a largely secular phenomenon. Likewise,
Lynch (2012, p. 15) warns us to avoid claiming that some “essence of Islam”
was responsible for anti-regime activity in the region.

Taken together, these arguments reveal a fundamental uncertainty about
the pro- or anti-democratic nature of religion in the Arab Spring. I will sug-
gest that this uncertainty extends to many other contexts as well: scholars
of political behavior cannot assume that religion will always either promote
or inhibit democratic attitudes; nor can they find all of the answers to these
questions in the contents of individual religious doctrines. Rather, religious
groups (and individuals) must be considered in the context in which they
operate. The reason why religion has been shown to demonstrate contra-
ddictory effects on democracy, I suspect, is that incentive structures dictate
the link between religion and support for democracy. When incentives of
religious groups, leaders, or individuals align with those of pro-democratic
forces, religion will tend to promote democracy; when the opposite incentives
are present, we should expect the opposite effect.
Religion and Democracy

After decades of research, the impact of religion on individual-level political behavior remains cloudy. [Campbell (2004)] finds that American churches can either exhibit an effect conducive to civic involvement or exactly the opposite. [Smidt (1999)] finds that church attendance fosters involvement in civil society in Canada and the United States. [Driskell, Embry and Lyon (2008)] suggest that identification with a religious group reduces political participation, but religious practice per se increases political participation. As for political identities, [Putnam and Campbell (2010) p. 389] find that the relationship between church attendance and partisanship has varied considerably over time; in other words, the link between religiosity and political identities is context-dependent.

Existing studies of the relationship between religion (particularly, piety) and democracy have usually either ignored individual-level characteristics or cast fairly broad strokes about this relationship without paying attention to group and state-level characteristics that might influence the impact of piety on various political attitudes associated with democracy. Stepan’s (2000) well-known concept of the “twin tolerations” asserts that democracy requires a certain amount of independence between the political and the religious and casts doubt upon the claim that certain faiths are incompatible with democracy, but does not directly address the question of when and how religious piety makes for good or bad democrats. Using survey data from the Arab World, [Tessler (2002)] finds that Muslim piety has little effect on attitudes toward democracy (and less of an effect on political attitudes in
general than is commonly assumed). Ciftci (2010, p. 1442) likewise finds that “religiosity and Islamic values poorly predict support for democracy in the Muslim world.” In an impressive cross-national and multi-level study, Meyer, Tope and Price (2008) find that religiosity—in terms of both belief and practice—enhances support for democracy, provided that individuals continue to support separation between religion and politics.

What is clear from the extant literature on this topic is that the relationship between religion and democracy is complicated. Philpott (2007, p. 510) observes that even within the Third Wave of democratization, religion has played a tremendously important role in promoting democracy in some places (e.g. Poland, Lithuania, and Indonesia) but very little role in others (e.g. Argentina and Senegal). He attributes these differences to divergent patterns in political theology and religion-state relations: the degree of fusion between religious and political institutions as well as the level of tension between them. In this sense, the effect of religion on democratization appears to be conditional not only on the contents and political orientations of religious groups themselves, but also on these groups’ orientations toward the state.

If, indeed, religion plays an indeterminate—if not actually “ambivalent”—role in democratization, what factors push this role in one direction or another? In other words, what are the mechanisms by which religion comes to play a positive, negative, or neutral role in the process of democratization? Social capital seems to be a natural starting point. A common explanation of the transition to democracy in Poland following the fall of the USSR emphasizes the role of the Catholic Church in pushing for democracy and building
social capital. Communal religious practice would seem to be an especially potent force for building social capital: through structured, regular interaction with members of the same religious community, it seems plausible that communal practice could build trust and norms of reciprocity that might, under the right circumstances, aid in the functioning of democracy.

Clearly, however, this social capital-izing effect of religion is not always present. The Italian case leads (Putnam 1993, p. 107) to conclude that “organized religion . . . is an alternative to the civic community, not a part of it.” In fact, he finds that nearly every form of religious practice is negatively associated with most forms of civic engagement. He suggests that religion, at least in Italy, makes believers content with the political environment in which they live: “they seem more concerned about the city of God than the city of man” (Putnam 1993, p. 107). Putnam’s claims resemble other common conceptions about the role of religion in politics. These claims argue that by focusing believers’ attention on the other-worldly, religion “puts people to sleep” when it comes to politics. Such arguments often trace their intellectual heritage to Marx (1970 [1843]), who describes religion as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (emphasis in original). In this sense, religion either makes individuals uninterested in politics or actively supportive of the existing arrangement. In either case, it would appear that religion often does not provide the social capital necessary to uproot existing regimes in favor of democracy.

More recently, however, Putnam (2000) has suggested that religion has played a much different role in the United States. He finds that “religios-
ity rivals education as a powerful correlate of most forms of civic engagement,” and that “churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment” (Putnam 2000, pp. 66-67). Moreover, he argues that churches have played a crucial role in a variety of social movements, particularly for minority groups. American religious organizations it seems, play a starkly different role in building social capital than do their Italian counterparts. Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) argue that religious participation plays a similarly crucial civic role as does participation in other types of organizations. Norris and Inglehart (2004, p. 192) find that religious practice demonstrates rather complicated effects on social capital: it depresses political interest, political discussion, and social trust, but increases social tolerance and approval of democracy. Their evidence suggests that communal religious practice builds social capital, but only in certain ways.

If religion does indeed demonstrate such a social capitalizing effect, this effect may only build within-group social capital—so-called “bonding” social capital (Putnam 2000). Uslaner (2002, p. 239) notes that “religion may mobilize people to take part in their communities, but perhaps only among their own kind” and that “religious beliefs may also lead people to distinguish more sharply between their own kind and others.” Moreover, as Jamal (2007) warns us, social capital can have both pro- and anti-democratic effects: social capital may, in fact, be regime-sustaining rather than pro-democratic. It is necessary to consider the contextual factors that impact the effect of the social capital potentially derived from communal religious practice.
Survey Experiment and Lebanese Case Study

The primary case that I plan to study in order to examine the link between religion and democracy more closely is Lebanon. One of my main data sources will be an original survey (including several embedded experiments) conducted on a nationally-representative sample in Lebanon. I hope to conduct this survey in the summer or early fall of 2013. Lebanon is an ideal candidate for inclusion in this study for several reasons. First, and most obviously, Lebanon’s sectarian divisions ensure that religion plays a crucial role in politics; Harris (2009, p. 9) states that religion is “the primary characteristic” of Lebanon. The importance of religion in Lebanese politics is beyond doubt, suggesting that a project focusing on religion’s political influence will not, at least, run into problems finding religious voices in public life. Religion is not only important because of Lebanon’s institutional structures, however. Religion, in its various forms, continues to play an important role in everyday life for a large number of Lebanese citizens. Deeb (2006, pp. 105-106) quotes a young Shi’ite volunteer in Beirut’s southern suburbs as saying the following about communal prayer: “Why is prayer in a group? Because you find everyone, poor, rich, educated, uneducated, all are standing in a single line praying together.” Religion has a powerful effect on social and political life in Lebanon independently of its institutional effects. Second, Lebanon’s semi-democratic history provides two important assurances: 1) citizens have some experience of democratic politics (or something like it); but 2) democracy is not, in the words of Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 5), “the

\[\text{Freedom House (2011) plainly notes that “Lebanon is not an electoral democracy.”}\]
only game in town.” Thus, there should be some genuine variation in support for democracy. Existing surveys in Lebanon suggest that, indeed, while a majority of Lebanese citizens express support for liberal democracy, strong democratic attitudes are far from unanimous. Lebanon’s torturous political history creates a useful setting for analysis of attitudes towards democracy; its history of relatively liberal policies sets it apart from virtually all of its neighbors, but Lebanon has also experienced some of the most violent civil strife in the region. Despite these challenges, Fawaz (2009, p. 33) suggests that Lebanon “might be the only ray of light coming out of this region.” Each of these factors makes Lebanon a useful area to study the ambiguous link between religion and democracy.

Table 1: Communal Prayer and Support for Democracy, by Sect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Strongly Supports Democracy</th>
<th>Prays at Mosque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.03%</td>
<td>50.97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.97%</td>
<td>49.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Strongly Supports Democracy</th>
<th>Prays at Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>47.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>52.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the first wave of the Arab Barometer, I have discovered a puzzling trend: communal religious practice is associated with higher levels of support for democracy among Lebanese Muslims, but lower levels of support among Lebanese Christians. Table 1 displays the levels of (strong) support for democracy comparing respondents who engage in communal religious practice with those who do not, separating by sect. Muslims who pray at mosque are over 18 percentage points more likely to support democracy than Muslims who do not pray at mosque. Conversely, Christians who pray at church are 14 percentage points less likely to support democracy than are Christians who do not pray at church. Thus, communal prayer appears to have opposite effects on the sects.

Figure 1 displays the changes in predicted probability of support for democracy due to communal religious practice from a basic logistic regression. As this figure demonstrates, the model predicts that Christians who pray at a church are about 15 percentage points less likely to support democracy than are Christians who do not pray at a church. On the other hand, Muslims who pray at a mosque are almost 20 percentage points more likely to support democracy than are their non-practicing coreligionists. Thus, when controlling for these basic characteristics of respondents, the results are at least as strong as a simple comparison of means across groups.

What explains this puzzling trend? I hypothesize that group interests explain the divergent effects of religious practice on attitudes towards democracy in Lebanon. Figure 2 displays the average monthly income of individuals in each of Lebanon’s three major sects using data from the Arab Barometer. As the figure demonstrates, Christians are substantially wealthier on average.
Figure 1: Change in Predicted Probability of Support for Democracy from Religious Practice

Note: Figure displays changes in predicted probability of support for democracy comparing an average respondent who engages in communal practice with an average respondent who does not, i.e. $Pr(\text{Support}|\text{Practice}) - Pr(\text{Support}|\sim \text{Practice})$. The predictions come from separate logistic regressions for each sect, controlling for age, education, gender, and internet use. Results are similar when controlling for personal piety (importance of spouse's prayer), income, and association membership. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

than are Muslims, with Shi’ites being slightly poorer on average than Sunnis. In fact, this figure indicates that the average Christian in the sample earns over $6,000 more per year than the average Muslim, a 40% difference. This inequality is magnified further by perceptions of inequality: Christians have historically been perceived (by both themselves and by others) as the privileged group in Lebanon, while Muslims have historically had less access

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2Following Horowitz [1985, p. 22], we can think of the confessions in Lebanon as “ranked groups” since there is considerable overlap between class and group identity.
to both wealth and social resources (Mackey 1989, pp. 13-14). Historical perceptions, of course, remain sticky – even if Muslim wealth were to increase relative to that of Christians, it would likely take some time before perceptions of inequality were updated completely, particularly since Christian “advantages” in Lebanon stretch back at least several centuries (Fawaz 2009, pp. 27-28). The prevalence of kin-based organizations as providers of social insurance likewise suggests that the economic fates of members of particular religious groups in Lebanon are linked together in significant ways (Baylouny 2010). Since these kin ties overlap considerably with sect, members of the same sect (usually in smaller communities) frequently rely on each other (through such associations) for social services. These structures provide a further incentive for Lebanese citizens to consider group rather than only individual interests.

Figure 2: Average Monthly Income, by Sect

Recent literature in the field of comparative democratization suggests
that democracies tend to redistribute more than non-democracies, and that wealthy elites therefore have incentives to prevent democratic transition while the poor have incentives to favor it (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). I hope to synthesize this literature with the literature on religion described above. Given the available evidence, it is understandable that religion might have a pro-democracy effect among Lebanese Muslims but an anti-democracy effect among Muslims. If religion promotes pro-in-group behavior, then it should also push individuals’ attitudes about democracy in a direction dictated by the status of their religious group. Since Muslims tend to be much poorer than Christians, religion should therefore induce pro-democratic sentiments among Muslims, while having the opposite effect among Christians.

My proposed survey will confront this claim in a more rigorous manner than is possible using existing data. Respondents will be asked about their perceptions of linked fate as well as the importance of religion in public life, in order to examine exactly how Lebanese citizens believe religion and politics to be related, and if religious piety (in its various forms) affects these perceptions. Moreover, the experimental portion of the survey will help to “exogenize” piety to some extent. While we cannot assign respondents to “religious” or “not religious” backgrounds, we can hope to trigger a limited, but considerable religious response in order to ascertain how religion causes certain political attitudes and behaviors. Thus, these new data will prove a much more thorough test of whether or not the proposed relationship is causal.

My questionnaire will include a more thorough battery of questions about
religious beliefs and behaviors than do existing surveys of Lebanon, including questions not only about individual religiosity, but also about characteristics of the respondent’s local religious community, their beliefs about the state of their religious group in the country, and notions of “linked fate” (Harris 1994). Furthermore, I will include several experiments in this questionnaire. The primary experiment for the purposes of this study will be a religious priming experiment. At its most basic level, this type of experiment attempts to “prime” respondents with religious cues, thereby inducing a more religious state of mind, in order to create exogenous variation in the religiosity of respondents. Existing studies employing religious priming frequently use simple word games to prime respondents: for example, respondents are told to unscramble sentences in which the order of words had been changed, or are told to identify which word among a set of words is not actually a word. In both cases, the control group is given neutral words (not clearly related to religion or any other concept), while the treatment group is given religiously-themed words. The aim of these treatments is to trigger a more “religious” state of mind in respondents. While religious piety is clearly endogenous to any number of political variables, and cannot be created or eliminated in a laboratory setting, a number of experiments in social psychology and behavioral economics have found religious priming to be effective. Wenger (2004) finds that religious priming “automatically” activates religious concepts, suggesting that the primes demonstrate the desired effect on respondents’ states of mind.

This category of experiments has identified a number of interesting links between religion and various outcomes, both positive and negative. Shariff
and Norenzayan (2007) find that religious priming induces pro-social behavior in an economic game, a result that has been replicated elsewhere (Pichon, Boccato and Saroglou 2007). Randolph-Seng and Nielsen (2007) observe that religious priming reduces cheating, and Carpenter and Marshall (2009) find that religious priming reduces moral hypocrisy. However, Johnson, Rowatt and LaBouff (2010) find that priming Christian religious concepts increases racial prejudice, and Toburen and Meier (2010) note that priming God concepts increases anxiety (as well as task persistence). Likewise, Saroglou, Corneille and Van Cappellen (2009) observe that religious priming promotes submissive behaviors and attitudes. The wide range of findings regarding the impact of religious priming is surprising considering the relative weakness of the treatments involved. These findings suggest that religious priming techniques are powerful enough to demonstrate impacts on respondents for a variety of outcomes.

It is possible, however, that the effect of religious priming will vary across subgroups. Van Cappellen, Corneille, Cols and Saroglou (2011) find that religion’s tendency to promote “submissiveness” is only present for respondents who were already predisposed to submissiveness. Inzlicht and Tullett (2010) note an interesting result: religious priming decreases neurological response to errors among believers, but actually increases this response among non-believers. Likewise, McKay, Efferson, Whitehouse and Fehr (2011) find that religious priming increases punishment of unfair behavior, but only among subjects who had previously donated to a religious charity. These results indicate an important possibility: among respondents with low levels of religiosity, religious primes may demonstrate no effect or even the opposite effect.
compared to what would be present for high-religiosity respondents. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that religious priming may not have a universal effect across subgroups of respondents.

Studies employing religious priming that have paid attention to the potentially non-uniform effect of such priming have presented a number of findings that will be important in guiding this project. Johnson, Rowatt and LaBouff (2012) find that religious priming promotes both in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, suggesting that these primes do not simply lead to greater pro-social behavior across the board. Using a field experiment in Ghana in which respondents played an economic game, Parra (2011) finds that religious priming makes the religious affiliation of the other player a major factor in determining subjects’ behavior, leading to inter-group bias. Similarly, Blogowska and Saroglou (2011) note that religion promotes pro-social behavior only towards in-group members. These findings suggest an important consideration: religion appears to induce in-group favoritism, and should therefore lead to political attitudes more favorable towards in-groups than out-groups.

**Historical Cases**

While the survey experiment will be highly useful for identifying the causal effects of religion (as captured by religious priming), it is also important to consider the role played by religion in actual democratization processes. In other words, it is crucial to engage in some process tracing (Eckstein 1975; Gerring 2007) in order to understand how religion has led to different political
outcomes in real-world cases. As Coppedge (2012, p. 115) observes, most of what scholars of comparative politics know about democratization comes from in-depth analysis of particular cases. However, such techniques also pose inferential difficulties, so case selection must be done carefully (Coppedge 2012).

It is worth asking, therefore, how we might best approach the question of the Janus-faced nature of religion and democracy in the context of historical case studies. In order to minimize the methodological difficulties from small-N comparative analysis and maximize their analytical leverage, I propose a comparative study of a handful of Latin American countries during the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991). Such a design is ideal because of the considerable number of major factors that are held constant. First, and perhaps most importantly, the dominant religious tradition in these countries is Roman Catholicism; consequently, we can dismiss the possibility that different religious traditions led to different results in these cases.\(^3\) Second, “period effects” should be mostly equal: since several Latin American countries made transitions to democracy in a relatively short period of time, it is unlikely that the differential impacts of religion in each of these cases can be attributed to gradual change over time. Relatedly, this design eliminates the possibility that Vatican II was responsible for a complete overhaul of the Church’s approach to democracy: since all of these transitions occurred well after the completion of Vatican II, any remaining variation in the Church’s stance towards democracy cannot be explained by

\(^3\)As Hagopian (2009, p. 6) notes, “when the Latin American Catholic Church lays claim to a regional Catholic culture, it is essentially correct.”
the theological changes resulting from Vatican II itself.

It is important to note that in this section, as in all other sections of the dissertation, the outcome of interest is not democratization or democracy per se. Rather, I am interested in the determinants of the link between religion and democracy. Thus, for the Latin American cases, I wish to explain why the Catholic Church enthusiastically supported democratization in some countries, but was much more conflicted in others. This variation has been identified by a number of scholars, including Johnston and Figa (1988) and Mantilla (2010), but no consensus has emerged on why the Church actively supported democracy in some cases but not in others. Johnston and Figa (1988) cite Church resources/organization and the level of development of the country in question as the key determinants of Church behavior, while Mantilla (2010) argues that cultural frames, mobilizing resources, and political opportunity structures explain the Church’s response to democratization movements.

My working hypothesis in this portion of the project draws from the hypothesis I have proposed for Lebanon. In this case, I suggest that the variation in the Catholic Church’s support for democracy during the Third Wave in Latin America is attributable to interests: when the Church’s interests in a given country were better-suited to democracy, it would be more inclined to push for democratization. Thus, the logic outlined above can be applied at more than one level: leaders of religious communities may be influenced by similar considerations as their followers when it comes to support for democracy. In both cases, it is conceivable that individuals (and groups) will develop instrumental regime preferences; if a regime will benefit their group,
they will support it. Religion, therefore, has an ambiguous effect on support for democracy. When the interests of the religious community in question are aligned with those of democracy, then religion will promote democracy; and when the group’s interests clash with democracy, religion will impede democracy.

I expect that the mechanisms of this relationship will work somewhat differently in the Latin American cases, particularly because they are taking place primarily at the level of Church hierarchy rather than at the level of the individual believer. In these cases, the calculus made by Church leaders is as follows: will Church interests be so damaged by democratization that supporting the incumbent dictator will be worth the cost of alienating adherents? Gill (1998) has identified a similar choice facing Church leaders in these settings. On the one hand, Church leaders presumably wish to preserve the benefits in privileges they often receive through arrangements with authoritarian governments (such as state subsidies, special access to charities and media sources, and control over education; see Hagopian 2009 pp. 28-35). On the other hand, supporting repressive governments comes at a cost: such behavior may push members towards other faiths (Gill 1998). Under this framework, the decision to support or oppose the incumbent regime comes down to the relative costs of losing privileges or losing members.

This portion of the dissertation will consist largely of qualitative data gathered from secondary historical sources as well as relevant statements from Latin American bishops in and around the periods when democratic transitions were on the horizon. Since the goal of this section is different from that of the survey experiment, the techniques must also be different.
Tentatively, I plan to pair two cases in a “most-similar” design (Przeworski and Teune 1970). The motivation behind this design is to “control” for other variables as much as possible while maintaining variation on the dependent variable (in this case, the response of religious groups to democratization movements). Two likely candidates for case selection are Argentina and Brazil. Although these countries are not by any means identical in terms of other potentially confounding variables (no two countries could be), they share many key social, economic, and political characteristics, and have been paired together in other studies employing a most-similar systems design (see Manzetti 1999; Weyland 2002). Despite these similarities, the Catholic Church’s approach to democracy in these countries was quite different: while Brazilian bishops were outspoken in their opposition to the authoritarian regime, in Argentina the Catholic leadership was much more reserved and, in some cases, even vocally supportive of military rule (Klaiber 1998; Mantilla 2010). These divergent responses, I suspect, are attributable to the different incentives facing the Brazilian and Argentine churches.

**Conclusion**

My dissertation aims to shed light on the “big question” of religion’s support for (or opposition to) democracy in several contexts. While the issues facing individual countries are numerous and diverse, I believe that the logic outlined above can be applied usefully to a variety of cases. As a supplement to the survey experiment and case studies described in previous sections, I will conduct a cross-national statistical analysis examining how religion fuels
support for or opposition to democracy in various contexts, and how these contextual factors influence this relationship. Straightforward tests of the plausibility of the claims I have made are possible using data from the Afrobarometer as well as the World Values Survey. These datasets provide a considerable amount of public opinion data from countries where: a) democracy is not consolidated; and b) religion is politically salient. It is possible, then, to use these data in order to determine the external validity of my hypotheses, if not a perfectly rigorous test of their mechanisms.

Taken together, I believe that these different research strategies can combine in such a way as to contribute to several literatures. First, my findings will be relevant to scholars of democratization, who have so far only been able to speculate about the role of religion in mobilizing public opinion for or against democracy (see Linz and Stepan 1996). This project will also address some of the interests of political behavior scholars, who have long argued about the types of values that religion underwrites. Finally, I anticipate that this project will speak to the interests of scholars of ethnicity, since it aims to explain how social divisions can promote or undermine democracy. I do not aim to make any claims about the contents of any particular religions (in fact, I have suggested that such differences between faiths are perhaps less important than commonly claimed); rather, I wish to suggest that the incentives faced by religious groups in the political settings under which they operate influences their approaches to democracy in significant ways.
References


