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## ***The Catholic Church, Political Institutions, and Electoral Outcomes in Oaxaca, Mexico***

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes two competing arguments about the role of the Catholic Church in state politics Oaxaca, Mexico in the 1990s and 2000s. One line of argument claims that progressive Catholic bishops supported and facilitated democratization in this state. Another line suggests that the church may have inadvertently facilitated ongoing authoritarian rule through its active support for the formalization of local customary political practices into law. Statistical analysis shows that the level of Catholic presence across Oaxaca's municipalities only matters in some cases and not always in the direction expected. Specifically, in some indigenous communities high levels of Catholic presence facilitated the adoption of customary laws, declines in PRI support, and lower first place party margins. In other indigenous places, it had the opposite effect. The lack of systematic effect demonstrates the Catholic Church's capacity to intervene in local political affairs in multiple direction and ways, as well as its often tacit support for existing political dynamics.

**Key words:** Catholic Church, Political Institutions, Electoral Outcomes, Oaxaca, political parties, indigenous, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), democratization, transition, liberal democracy, pluralism.

### **Resumen**

En este artículo, se analizan dos argumentos con respecto al papel que la Iglesia católica ha desempeñado dentro de la política estatal en Oaxaca, México, durante las décadas de 1990 y 2000. En el primero de ellos, se plantea que los obispos tienden a favorecer y a facilitar los procesos de democratización en este estado. En el segundo, se sugiere que la Iglesia pudo haber favorecido involuntariamente el autoritarismo gubernamental al apoyar con entusiasmo la legalización de usos y costumbres en la política local. El análisis estadístico presentado en este trabajo muestra que el grado de presencia católica en los municipios oaxaqueños sólo importa en algunos casos y no siempre en la dirección esperada. Más en concreto, la

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defensa de tal legalización en algunas comunidades indígenas donde la presencia del catolicismo preva- lece, ha disminuido el apoyo al PRI y a los partidos mar- ginales. En cambio, en otras comunidades indígenas, el efecto ha sido el contrario. Finalmente, se concluye que la falta de resultados sistematizados demuestra la capacidad de la Iglesia católica para intervenir en las políticas locales oaxaqueñas.

**Palabras clave:** Iglesia católica, instituciones políti- cas, resultados electorales, Oaxaca, partidos políticos, indígenas, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), democratización, transición, democracia liberal, pluralismo.

## Introduction

The effect of religion on politics has long been a popular topic for study for students of Latin American politics. The historic position of the Catholic Church and the region's recurrent problems with authoritarian political structures have led some scholars to conclude that the rise of Protestantism during the 1960's and 1970's facilitated the transition to democracy across the region thereafter. It has been argued that the Catholic Church and Catholicism represent tradi- tional ruling elites and in so doing help perpetuate traditional social and economic relationships, and undemocratic regimes.<sup>1</sup> The Protestant denominations and Protestantism, in contrast, are said to challenge traditional relationships, undermining authoritarian rule.<sup>2</sup> For these scholars, democracy is more likely where the Catholic Church is in decline, or is being challenged by alternative faiths.

Not all scholars agree that differences between Latin America's Catholic and Protestant churches re- flect a struggle between the traditional and the mod- ern. For example, some scholars focusing on the rise and dynamics of Protestantism have shown that these churches sometimes supported traditional clientelistic socio-economic and thus undemocratic political rela- tionships<sup>3</sup>. Others have argued that Catholic priests were often important in undermining authoritarian rule in their localities. Catholic progressivism, dating from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) but crys- tallizing their thoughts during the Second General Conference in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, spawned a redefinition of the mission of the Catholic Church from that of (implicitly) interacting with traditional political and socio-economic elites to helping solve the economic and political problems of the poor.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, New York, Basic Books, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Harrison, *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success*, New York, Basic Books, 1992; Edward A. Lynch, "Reform and Religion in Latin America", in *Orbis* vol. 42, num. 2, March 1998; David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protes- tantism in Latin America*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990; Eric Patterson, "Religious Activity and Political Participation: The Brazilian and Chilean Cases", in *Latin American Politics and Society*, vol. 47, num. 1, Spring 2005; Amy Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Modernization in Rural Guatemala*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998; David A. Smilde, "Venezuela: Nationhood, Patronage, and the Conflict over New Religious Movements", in Paul E. Sigmund (ed.), *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, Ossining, NY, Maryknoll/Orbis Books, 1999; Christian Smith, "The Spirit and Democracy: Base Communities, Protestantism, and Democratization in Latin America", in *Sociology of Religion* vol. 55, num. 2, Summer 1994. William H. Swatos Jr., "On Latin American Protestantism", in *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 55, num. 2, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Pierre Bastian, *Protestantismo y modernidad latinoamericana: historia de unas minorías religiosas activas en América Latina*, Mexico, FCE, 1987; R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1997; Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, London, Pluto Press, 1989; Christian Lalive d'Epinau, *Heaven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1969; Yvon Le Bot, "Churches, Sects, and Communities: Social Cohesion Recovered?", in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 18, num. 2, 1999; D. Martin, *op. cit.*; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998; Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, *The Progressive Church in Latin America*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.

For other scholars of religion in Latin America, competition between faiths fundamentally changed politics in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have noted that religions in competition with a dominant church, whatever that faith might be, have often formed civic groups and political parties to carve out social space and that this supports democratic political change.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have noted that in Latin America the Catholic Church only began to reach out to the poor and indigenous as a way of maintaining parishioners who were being lured to Protestant churches,<sup>7</sup> with those Catholic Churches under the greatest threat of religious encroachment also the most likely to denounce authoritarian regimes.<sup>8</sup> The implicit message is that the dominance of a single religion, regardless of its faith, can facilitate the survival of traditional, hierarchical and thus undemocratic socio-economic and political relationships. In contrast, religious competition supports competing ideas and with this democratic change.

The diverse findings about the role of religion in politics in Latin America raise questions about where Mexico falls within this debate. For some scholars of Mexico, the Catholic Church facilitated or at least remained wholly tacit during Mexico's longtime rule by a single dominant political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). It was only after the growth of Protestant churches that the nation underwent the transition to democratic rule. Yet, the effect of the Catholic Church and the Catholic-

Protestant balance of power on Mexican politics is more complex for others. Some scholars document how Mexico's Catholic Church incorporated numerous progressive bishops and supported liberation theology, especially in the late 1960's and during the 1970's, as well as developed extensive ecclesiastical base communities and social programs to reach out to the nation's poor, thereby carefully maneuvering against PRI rule.<sup>9</sup> Others, in contrast, suggest that the Catholic Church remained silent during the rise and strengthening of PRI rule in order to protect its institutional interests,<sup>10</sup> with the church's well known social activities enabling the PRI to survive because they helped diffuse potential social and political discontent.<sup>11</sup> Despite the ongoing presence of a few progressive bishops in Mexico, the Mexican Catholic Church became more conservative in the 1980's and 1990's, as a result of pressure from the Vatican and/or strategic maneuvering by the Mexican Episcopal Conference to protect its institutional interests and work to regain legal recognition from the PRI controlled national government.<sup>12</sup>

The variety of conclusions about the role of the Mexican Catholic Church in Mexican politics raises questions about whether this institution buttressed or undermined –whether actively, tacitly, or unwittingly– PRI rule during this nation's political transformation in the 1990's and 2000's. Specifically, I analyze the explanatory power of the two main competing arguments about the role of the Catholic

<sup>5</sup> Bryan T. Froehle, "Religious Competition, Community Building, and Democracy in Latin America: Grassroots Religious Organizations in Venezuela.", in *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 55, num. 2, Summer 1994; A. Gill, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Paul Freston, "Brother Votes for Brother: The New Politics of Protestantism in Brazil", in Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (eds.), *Rethinkink Protestantism in Latin America*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> A. Gill, *op. cit.*; Guillermo Trejo Osorio, "Indigenous Insurgency: Protest, Rebellion and the Politization of Ethnicity in 20th Century Mexico", Chicago, University of Chicago, 2004 (PhD Dissertation in Political Science).

<sup>8</sup> A. Gill, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Juan Manuel Lombera, "Civil Society, the Church, and Democracy in Southern Mexico: Oaxaca 1970-2007", Philadelphia, Temple University, 2009 (PhD Dissertation in Political Science).

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Javier Blancarte Pimentel, "Recent Changes in Church-State Relations in Mexico: An Historical Approach", in *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 35, num. 4, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> A. Gill, "The Politics of Regulating Religion in Mexico. The 1992 Constitutional Reforms in Historical Context", in *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 41, num. 4, Autumn 1999.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*

Church in Mexican democratization. Rather than studying the Catholic Church throughout Mexico, however, I study its political effects in a single state, the state of Oaxaca. Oaxaca is a convenient case in which to study the mechanisms through which religion affects politics in Mexico. The state of Oaxaca falls within a single archdiocese, controlling for the potential effect of variation in theological positions across archdioceses in the nation. Oaxaca also counts on considerable variation in the share of Catholic adherences and the presence of Protestant groups among its 570 municipalities. And, the state also counts on considerable cross-municipal variation in the level of PRI support. This variation on the principal explanatory variable under examination, the level of Catholic Church presence, and on the principal dependent variable at issue, the level of

democratization, will let me reveal the role of the Catholic Church in politics throughout this state.

The study proceeds as follows: First, I discuss prior research on religion and politics in Mexico to show the different positions taken on the role of Catholicism in this nation's democratization in the 1990s and 2000s. Second, I discuss studies of religion and politics in the state of Oaxaca more specifically, in order to account for any peculiarities in the Catholic Church's position in this state. From these two literatures, I extract and summarize the two main competing arguments for how the Catholic Church has been said to affect politics in Oaxaca. I compare the explanatory power of these arguments by conducting a statistical analysis of the effect of Catholic Church presence on various political outcomes across Oaxaca's 570 municipalities. I then conclude.

## Religion and politics in Mexico

Mexico's recent experience with authoritarian rule, where politics was controlled by the hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provided convenient fodder for scholars advocating the traditional-modern line of thought about how the Catholic and Protestant faiths affect society, economics, and politics. Specifically, scholars of Mexican politics have sometimes argued that Catholicism contributed to the survival of traditional socio-economic and political relationships while Protestantism fostered socio-economic and political modernization in this nation.<sup>13</sup> Mexico's democratization, beginning in the 1980s but gaining force in the 1990's and concluding in the 2000's, supported these views. Regional trends in the rise of Protestantism reflected regional challenges to

authoritarian PRI rule. Protestantism challenged the Catholic Church in the northern border states and in urban areas in the central part of the country during the 1960's and 1970's, with the growth of this religion in the western and southern states and in rural areas during the 1980's and 1990's.<sup>14</sup> Opposition parties were first able to win sizeable shares of support and make inroads into Mexican politics and government in the northern states and in the center's urban areas, beginning in the 1980's and 1990's, as well. Opposition parties only enjoyed success in building support against the PRI's hold on power in the more Catholic western and southern states and in rural areas beginning in the 1990's and 2000's.

Although the simultaneous decline of the Catholic Church and PRI across Mexico have led most

<sup>13</sup> Carlos Garma Navarro, *Protestantismo en una comunidad totonaca de Puebla, México*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1987; Enrique Marroquín Zaleta, *El conflicto religioso. Oaxaca 1976-1993*, Mexico, UNAM, CIICH/UABJO, IIS, 2007 (Colección Alternativas); Olga Montes García, "Movimientos religiosos en Oaxaca: sus características", in *Religiones y Sociedad*, num. 1, October-December 1997; Irene Sánchez Fanco, "Los presbiterianos tzeltales de Yajolón, Chiapas", San Cristóbal de las Casas, Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 1995 (BA Thesis in Social Anthropology).

<sup>14</sup> Toomas Gross, "Protestantism and Modernity: Implications of Religious Change in Contemporary Rural Oaxaca", in *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 64, 2003.

scholars to agree that religion plays an important role in Mexican politics, the mechanism through which this occurs is in dispute. Several scholars argue that Catholic doctrine and church institutions reinforced traditional socio-economic and thus political relationships, while Protestantism supported a more pluralistic and less hierarchical view of socio-economic relationships, facilitating democratization.<sup>15</sup> Religious pluralism leads to a transformation in citizen relationships with the state, often through demands for changes to state structures, leading to a rise in political competition and changes in the political regime.<sup>16</sup> For these scholars, religious conversion precedes democratization, though many also note that religious conversion that does not result in religious pluralism can end up reproducing prior socio-economic and political relationships under a new religious regime.<sup>17</sup> However, other scholars see a reverse causality. For them, the decision to convert to Protestantism in Mexico was triggered by rising political opposition to the PRI, with rising support for regime transition and liberal democracy preceding religious pluralism.<sup>18</sup> As such, although most scholars agree that religion and politics are somehow connected in Mexico, the direction of that connection is under debate.

Scholarship on the history of the Catholic Church as an institution in Mexico is no less complex than that focusing on an ideational approach, as outlined above. As mentioned in the introduction, several scholars have noted how Mexico's Catholic Church, through its Mexican Episcopal Conference, incorporated numerous progressive archbishops and bishops and actively adopted the church's new progressive approach resulting from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the Second General Conference in Medellín, Colombia in 1968<sup>19</sup>. Yet, this view of the Catholic Church in Mexico is complicated by its history during PRI rule. The Catholic Church remained silent during the rise and strengthening of PRI rule.<sup>20</sup> Some claim that this was done only insofar as to protect its institutional interests in a situation where anticlerical laws had given the Catholic Church no legal constitutional standing.<sup>21</sup> Either way, the church's social activities and antipoverty programs might have enabled the PRI to diffuse potential social and political discontent during the 1980's thanks to the government's neo-liberal economic reforms.<sup>22</sup>

Supporting this view is the Mexican Episcopal Conference's deliberate shift away from liberation theology to a more conservative stance in the 1980s and 1990's.<sup>23</sup> Some argue that this was the result of

<sup>15</sup> Gerardo Alatorre Frenk, "La empresa social forestal y sus asesores: avances y dificultades en la construcción de la democracia, la eficiencia y la sustentabilidad", Mexico, UNAM, FFyL, 1998 (PhD Dissertation in Anthropology); E. Marroquín Zaleta, *El botín sagrado: la dinámica religiosa en Oaxaca*, Oaxaca, UABJO, 1992; E. Marroquín Zaleta, "El conflicto religioso... op. cit.;" O. Montes García, *op. cit.;* I. Sánchez Fanco, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> O. Montes García, "Los conflictos religiosos en Oaxaca: una aproximación a su estudio", in E. Marroquín Zaleta (ed.), *Persecución religiosa en Oaxaca? Los nuevos movimientos religiosos*, Oaxaca, Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1995; O. Montes García, "Movimientos religiosos...", *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> T. Gross, *op. cit.;* D. A. Smilde, *op. cit.;* D. A. Smilde, "El clamor por Venezuela: Latin American Evangelicalism as a Collective Action Frame", in C. Smith and J. Prokopy, *Latin American Religion in Motion*, New York, Routledge, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Zongolica. Encuentro de dioses y santos patronos*, Mexico, FCE, 1992; Patricia Fortuny Loret de Mola, *Religión y sociedad en el sureste de México V*, Mexico, CIESAS del Sureste, 1989 (Cuadernos de la Casa Chata, 165); Elizabeth Juárez Cerdi, "Yajalón, ciudad confesionalmente pacífica", in A. Fábregas et al., *Religión y sociedad en el Sureste de México VII*, Mexico, CIESAS del Sureste, 1989 (Cuadernos de la Casa Chata, 167); I. Sánchez Fanco, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> A. Gill, "The Politics of Regulating...", *op. cit.;* J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.;* G. Trejo Osorio, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> R. J. Blancarte Pimentel, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> A. Gill, "The Politics of Regulating...", *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

pressure from the Vatican after the appointment of a more conservative pope.<sup>24</sup> However, others argue that only the Catholic Church has revised its position as a result of a strategic decision taken by the Mexican Episcopal Conference to improve its bargaining position against the PRI ruled national government in order to lobby for constitutional recognition of its

status, a reform that was eventually approved by the Mexican Congress in 1992.<sup>25</sup> Either way, the effect was the same: the church as an institution rolled back its progressive position and transferred many of its social and poverty relief activities to non-religious civil organizations during this period.<sup>26</sup>

## Religion and politics in Oaxaca, Mexico

Divisions between scholars over the role of the Catholic Church in Mexican politics are reflected in research on the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Oaxaca is one of Mexico's 32 states, including the Federal District, and lies along the Pacific Ocean in southern Mexico. It is well known for its high levels of poverty and multiple indigenous groups. It is also known for the influential social and political presence of the Catholic Church throughout the state, dating back to the colonial period. And it is known for having served as a longtime bastion of PRI rule, only transferring power to an opposition coalition after the 2010 gubernatorial election, with the democratic nature of this transition somewhat in doubt.<sup>27</sup> However, the state is also known for its growing Protestant religions, its progressive Catholic archbishops and bishops, as well as for growing social unrest and political conflicts in some of its localities, especially in the 1980's and 1990's. Oaxaca thus combines many of the elements characterizing Mexican socio-economic, religious, and political life more generally. And, it is thus not surprising that there is no consensus on how religion and politics interact in this state.

Generally speaking, arguments about religion and politics in Oaxaca take one of two main competing

lines: an authoritarian and a democratizing one. On the more "authoritarian" side, some scholars argue that the Catholic Church facilitated socio-economic and thus political domination in the state that can be traced from the colonial times until the modern era. The Catholic Church helped colonial authorities bring the state's various indigenous communities under spiritual and political control. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, PRI came to rely on the local forms of governance that the church helped put in place to maintain control in these localities and thus over the state government.<sup>28</sup> These forms of governance trace their roots to a combination of ancient indigenous practices, colonial organizational structures, and secular positions in the Catholic Church (dating from colonial times but more clearly integrated into the community hierarch in the 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>29</sup> Community leadership positions were only open to those (usually men) who had performed a series of unpaid jobs and held a series of unpaid positions in the community over the years, including both administrative and secular Catholic ones (mainly organizing religious festivals throughout the year), creating a system referred to as the civil-religious cargo system.<sup>30</sup> Elders' councils,

<sup>24</sup> J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> A. Gill, "The Politics of Regulating...", *op. cit.*; J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Lucinda Allyson Benton Sheldon, "Subnational Regime Dynamics After National Authoritarian Breakdown: When Political Competition and Turnover Don't Indicate Democratization", paper presented at *Workshop on Elections, Electoral Behavior and the Economy in Latin America*, held at Hotel Clarendon, Quebec City, Canada, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> David Recondo, *La política del gatopardo. Multiculturalismo y democracia en Oaxaca*, Mexico, CIESAS/Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> T. Gross, "The Other Side of Custom: Reinterpreting Usos y Costumbres in Rural Mexico", in *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, vol. 31, 2009; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

whose members had met all the requirements of the cargo system,, are often charged with selecting community leaders and often with making important community decisions.<sup>31</sup>

Thanks to the civil-religious cargo system, it is possible to argue that the Catholic Church had a hand in and benefitted from developing a closed and highly centralized ruling apparatus that has frequently been criticized for having facilitated the domination of local strongmen or caciques in these communities.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some scholars have noted cases where local leaders have used their political and social authoritarian control to sanction non-Catholic religious groups, destroy their churches, and expel their members from their communities.<sup>33</sup> And, the celebration of Catholic religious festivals are thought to reinforce social cohesion, community identify and, most important, power relationships.<sup>34</sup> The religious cargos required of community members to organize and pay for these celebrations have been described as creating and reinforcing the sense of inequality of economic positions in the community, as well as hierarchical political relationships among and between citizens and their authorities.<sup>35</sup>

It is also thought that the PRI benefitted politically through its capacity to harness these systems and integrate their leaders into their political apparatus, and thus to ensure political support in state and federal elections.<sup>36</sup> Seen in this way, the Catholic Church's support for reforms to the state's electoral institutions in the 1990s to allow the formal codifi-

cation of these forms of local governance in Oaxaca's municipalities, formally called Usos y Costumbres (UyC) systems, could be interpreted as an effort to shore up its preferential institutional position among aspiring and current municipal leaders, something that would perpetuate its influence over communities, purposefully or unwittingly resulting in ongoing authoritarian systems of governance. Indeed, that the PRI also advocated for, and the opposition National Action Party (PAN) to advocated against, the formal introduction of UyC systems in Oaxaca reveals that most expected these institutions to support ongoing antidemocratic political structures in the state, even if it turns out that these rules did not end up working to the benefit of the PRI over time.<sup>37</sup> However, that the opposition Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) advocated for their adoption might demonstrate that this party hoped that these institutions might let them gain entrance into these closed and hierarchical municipal community systems,<sup>38</sup> and perhaps even come to dominate them as well.

Before proceeding, it is important to note several things about Oaxaca's formal UyC systems. Oaxaca is the only state that has codified this system of municipal governance into law through reforms to the state electoral code in 1995 and 1997. Out of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities, 412 chose to adopt UyC systems in 1995, with another six adding themselves to their ranks in 1997 to bring the total to 418. The remaining municipalities stayed with what is called the Political Parties (PP) system, whereby all citizens over 18

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> T. Gross, "The Other Side of Custom...", *op. cit.*; Jorge Hernández Díaz, *Ciudadanías diferenciadas en un estado multicultural: los usos y costumbres en Oaxaca*, Mexico, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2007; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> T. Gross, "The Other Side of Custom...", *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Stanley H. Brandes, *Power and Persuasion: Fiestas and Social Control in Rural Mexico*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988; T. Gross, "Farewell to Fiestas and Saints? Changing Catholic Practices in Contemporary Rural Oaxaca", in *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, vol. 3, num. 1, 2009; T. Gross, "The Other Side of Custom...", *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> T. Gross, "Farewell to Fiestas...", *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Fausto Díaz Montes, *Los municipios: La disputa por el poder local en Oaxaca*, Oaxaca, UNAM, IIS/UABJO, 1992; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Alejandro Anaya Muñoz, *Autonomía indígena, gobernabilidad y legitimidad en México*, Mexico, Universidad Iberoamericana/Plaza y Valdés, 2006; A. L. Benton Sheldon, "Bottom-Up Challenges to National Democracy: Mexico's (Legal) Subnational Authoritarian Enclaves", in *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming); D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> D. Recondo, *op. cit.*



years of age (universal suffrage) cast secret ballots for candidates for municipal governments presented by political parties. In contrast, Uyc candidate selection and elections formally revolve around what is called a General Communal Assembly (AGC). In most Uyc regimes, the AGC is the highest level of political authority, with its decisions/rulings adopted by the municipal government.<sup>39</sup> Those allowed to participate in the AGC vary by Uyc system, with sex, age, residency, and fulfillment of the stringent municipal cargo system requirements most often limiting participation.<sup>40</sup> Although Uyc municipalities are required to select a mayor and municipal council, as does the system PP, they can limit who is eligible for these posts according to sex, age, residency, and cargo system requirements as with AGC participation.<sup>41</sup> Most AGCs use public ballots for electing government or making decisions.<sup>42</sup> Uyc governments do not allow political parties to run candidates.<sup>43</sup>

Along the more “democratic” line of thought about the role of religion in Oaxaca, other scholars have documented the important role of the Catholic Church in reaching out to and advocating for the state’s impoverished indigenous communities in Oaxaca, especially in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>44</sup> The Catholic Church’s support for Uyc systems is the product of its progressive attitude toward its social mission, despite the Mexican Episcopal Conference’s decision to reign in the activities of several of its most outspoken progressive archbishops and bishops

during this same period.<sup>45</sup> As such, it could be argued that the Catholic Church’s support for the formal adoption of Uyc systems in Oaxaca was motivated by its interest in improving the socio-economic situation of the state’s indigenous population, and not in protecting its position in these communities.<sup>46</sup> More autonomous forms of local governance, as well as fraud-free elections, would help reduce the political domination of indigenous people by local caciques who had ruled up until that time with the blessing of the PRI support.<sup>47</sup> Although some scholars also attribute the Catholic Church’s support for Uyc systems to its pursuit of its more strategic interest in attracting indigenous parishioners and thus protecting itself from Protestant encroachment,<sup>48</sup> the political effect of this line of reasoning is the same: the Catholic Church was an active participant in the Uyc movement out of its interest in fomenting rising political plurality in the state.

There are many insightful case studies documenting the incentive for adopting Uyc systems, their complex internal workings, and their variety of effects on politics and society in particular municipalities.<sup>49</sup> Statewide cross-municipal studies have focused on explaining the political and social factors explaining Uyc institutions adoption, how these systems affected the incidence of post-election conflicts, and how they affect political participation and voting behavior.<sup>50</sup> Few scholars, however, have attempted to connect the Catholic Church systematically to Uyc adoption

<sup>39</sup> T. Gross, “The Other Side of Custom...”, *op. cit.*; María Cristina Velázquez Cepeda and Luis Adolfo Ménez Lugo, *Catálogo municipal de usos y costumbres*, Oaxaca, CIESAS del Sureste/Instituto Electoral Estatal de Oaxaca, 1995.

<sup>40</sup> M. C. Velázquez Cepeda and L. A. Ménez Lugo, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> J. Hernández Díaz, *op. cit.*; J. M. Lombera, *op. cit.*; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> G. Trejo Osorio, *op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Lourdes de León Pasquel, *Costumbres, leyes y movimiento indio en Oaxaca y Chiapas, México*, Mexico, CIESAS del Sureste/Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2001; T. Gross, “The Other Side of Custom ...”, *op. cit.*; J. Hernández Díaz, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Todd Eisenstadt, “Usos y Costumbres and Postelectoral Conflicts in Oaxaca, México, 1995-2004: An Empirical and Normative Assessment”, in *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 42, num. 1, 2007; D. Recondo, *op. cit.*

and subsequent politics in Oaxaca, even if many note that the church had a role in the construction of the civil-religious cargo system predating UyC systems and that the church advocated in favor of the adoption of these UyC regimes. The principle exception is work that notes and/or analyzes the impact of religious competition on the civil-religious cargo system or on UyC adoption, implying (but not testing) that this had the effect of undermining PRI rule in this state.<sup>51</sup>

I should mention here that the arguments presented above treat the Catholic Church as an institutional organization and not as a set of ideas. As other scholars of religion and politics have done before me, for the purposes of this study, I treat all churches –Catholic or otherwise– as institutional organizations that have formal structures, rules, and procedures for determining leaders and followers. I thus analyze the role of the Catholic Church as an institution on politics. This also means that I do not delve into issues of teachings or faith, that is, ideational analysis. Although ideational analysis is certainly an important topic of study for its affects on politics as well, and is probably relevant for the particular case of Oaxaca that has a variety of syncretistic religions throughout the state, I am more concerned with how the church's efforts to protect its interests, in the form of its institutional position in localities, affects the structure of politics in Oaxaca and Mexico. As such, I believe that treating the Catholic Church as an organizational structure in

order to understand its effects on the organization of politics is appropriate.

Returning to the competing arguments outlined above, we can develop several testable hypotheses to distinguish between their relative explanatory power. If the first "authoritarian" argument is true, then we should see higher rates of Catholicism in a municipality associated with greater chances of UyC adoption and higher first place party margins, and perhaps even higher levels of support for the PRI, especially in the UyC systems. Ongoing PRI domination is not necessarily a requisite of this hypothesis, however. While the PRI may have benefitted from Oaxaca's civil-religious cargo systems during the period of national hegemony, in reality it engaged in a complex system of accepting and supporting their leaders in order to keep them loyal.<sup>52</sup> As such, decline of the PRI's capacity to retain local loyalty would not necessarily mean that this led to a decline in local authoritarian control. Indeed, local leaders of UyC systems could easily retain authoritarian control and merely switch parties, leading to ongoing or even higher first place party margins but not necessarily directing these margins toward the PRI.<sup>53</sup> If the second "democratic" argument best explains the role of the Catholic Church in Oaxaca, then we should see higher rates of Catholicism associated with UyC adoption, given its campaign in favor of these institutions, but also lower first place party margins, and lower PRI support, especially in UyC regimes.

## Statistical analysis of the competing arguments

Before beginning the statistical analysis, it is worth taking a look at some descriptive statistics to demonstrate the considerable variation in our principal explanatory variable, the strength of the Catholic Church, and our principal dependent variables, UyC adoption, PRI support, and first place party margins, across Oaxaca's 570

municipalities. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 (below), although Catholicism is by far the largest religion in Oaxaca, measured as the percent share population over five years of age claiming Catholic religious affiliation, there is considerable variation as to just how dominant it is by municipality, with rising competition from

<sup>51</sup> J. Hernández Díaz, *op. cit.*; G. Trejo Osorio, *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> D. Recondo, *op. cit.*,

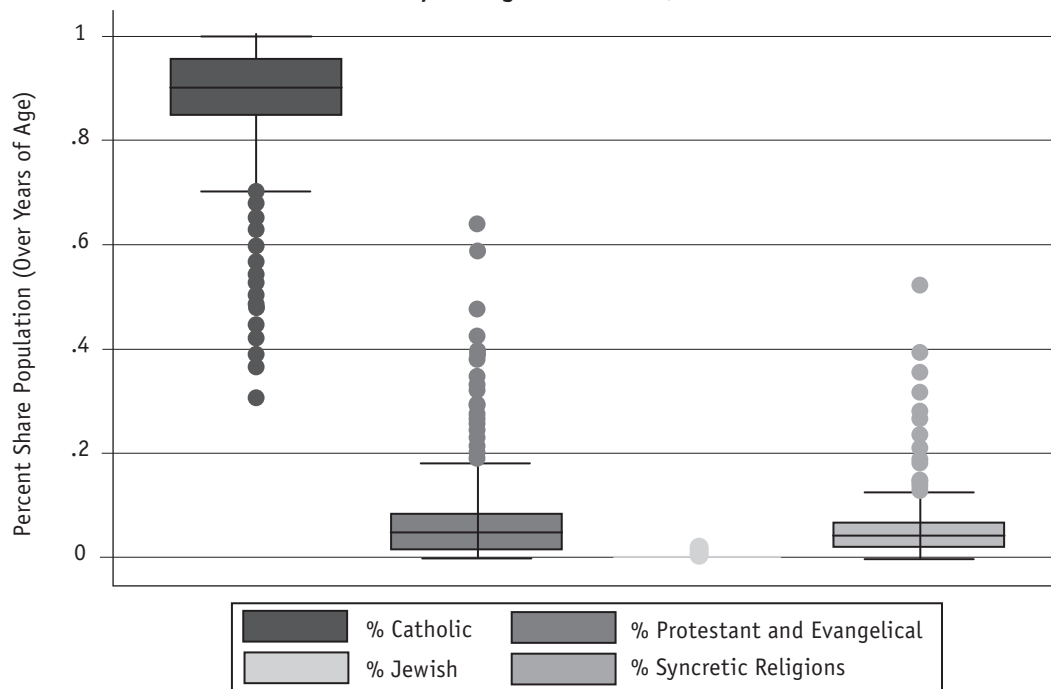
<sup>53</sup> A. L. Benton Sheldon, "Bottom-Up Challenges...", *op. cit.*

Protestant groups.<sup>54</sup> I count those people expressing affiliation to “other” or “no” or “unspecified” religions as likely affiliates of some form of Catholic syncretism.<sup>55</sup> I expect places where people identify themselves as Catholic to have a better sense of the church’s presence as an institutional organization compared to those people who identify with syncretistic versions of this faith, even if the church allows them to survive and may even embrace them (probably as a means of thwarting Protestant encroachment).

There are three main dependent variables under study here. The first variable is the choice of UyC or PP system, coded as a dummy variable (one for UyC and zero for PP systems).<sup>56</sup> If the Catholic Church matters, either for authoritarian or democratic ways, it must matter for the original selection of UyC systems. As mentioned, 418 municipalities adopted UyC systems by 1997, compared to 152 that maintained the PP system.

The second dependent variable is the percent share PRI support. I examine state elections, as municipal level election data is not available for the UyC systems because (starting in 1997) parties do not field candidates in municipal contests in UyC regimes. Municipal level state electoral data is from the Instituto Electoral Estatal de Oaxaca (IEEO). The final variable is the first place party margin won by any party coming in first in the municipality in state elections, measured as the difference in the share of votes won by the first place winner. Table 1 presents summary statistics of these last two variables for all municipalities in Oaxaca. PRI support and first place party margins stayed on average high over the years under study here but with considerable variation across municipalities, as demonstrated by the relatively high standard deviations around these means as well as by the range from minimum to maximum values.

**Figure 1**  
**Municipal Religious Affiliates, 1990**

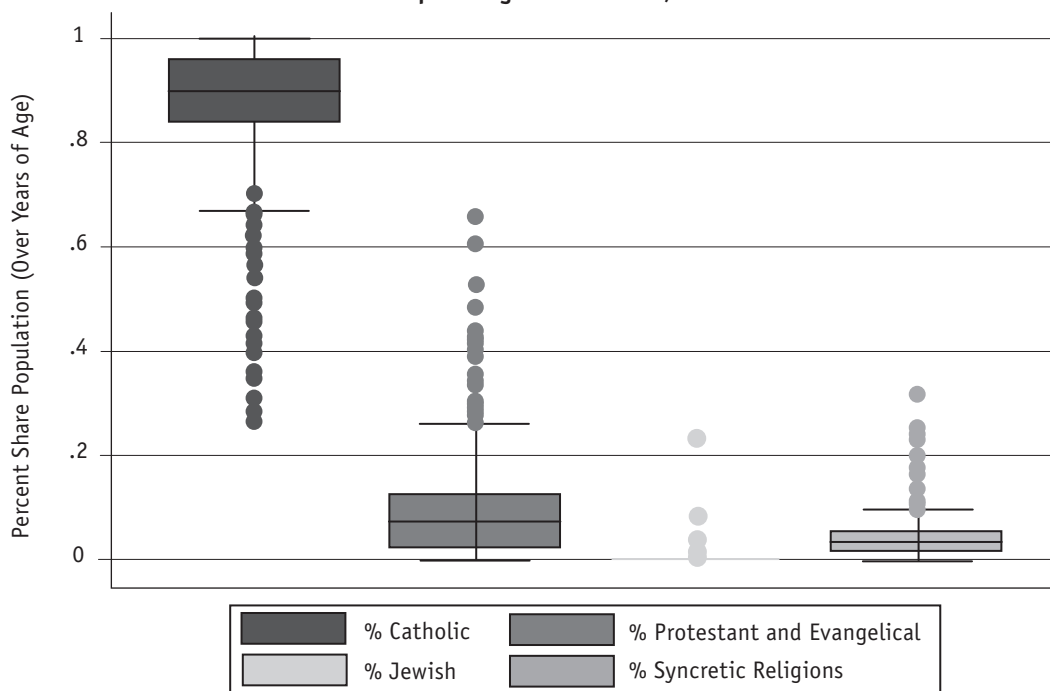


<sup>54</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI), *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Mexicanos*, Mexico, INEGI, 1991; *ibid.*, *Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos de Mexicanos*, Mexico, INEGI, 2001.

<sup>55</sup> G. Trejo Osorio, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> *Vid.* the web site <http://www.usosycostumbres.org/>

**Figure 2**  
**Municipal Religious Affiliates, 2000**



**TABLE 1**

Summary Statistics of Dependent Variables					
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
PRI Support 1998	567	0.516	0.162	0.031	0.997
PRI Support 2001	569	0.516	0.170	0.012	0.962
PRI Support 2004	569	0.521	0.144	0.102	0.960
PRI Support 2007	569	0.513	0.149	0.030	0.966
First Place Party Margin 1998	567	0.278	0.221	0.000	0.994
First Place Party Margin 2001	569	0.316	0.215	0.000	0.962
First Place Party Margin 2004	569	0.242	0.198	0.000	0.940
First Place Party Margin 2007	569	0.284	0.199	0.001	0.959

Note: Number of municipalities does not total 570 due to missing election data. Own calculations based on data from the IEEO.

It is also important to mention the series of control variables included in the models. Many things can affect the choice of electoral laws, levels of PRI support, and margins won by first place political parties beyond the level of Catholicism in the locality. I thus include the effective number of parties or prior levels or PRI support when potentially relevant for explaining outcomes on the dependent variable of interest. I also include controls for a series of spending, socioeconomic, and demographic factors, including municipal government spending per capita, a measure of municipal level poverty, total population, the percent share population living in rural areas –those with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants– and the percent share population living on communal *ejido* lands.<sup>57</sup> Poverty is captured by the Marginality Index.<sup>58</sup> Prior research also shows that election violence may have influenced the choice of UyC regimes, while post election violence after their formal adoption might affect leaders' capacity to retain control in their localities.<sup>59</sup> I include a dummy variable for the presence of post-electoral conflicts after state elections to control for the effect of social conflict on politics.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, I control for each municipality's indigenous (ethnic) makeup, measured as the percent share indigenous language speakers (over five years of age) in the municipality.<sup>61</sup> Various authors mention the variety of Oaxaca's indigenous groups, as well as their differing relationships with the Catholic Church and their varying interest in the promotion of UyC systems.<sup>62</sup> The Mixe, in particular, organized in favor of and in many ways spearheaded the formalization of UyC systems in the early 1990's,<sup>63</sup> whereas some other groups tended to be less interested in these systems.

It is beyond the scope of this study to develop specific testable expectations about their attitudes toward UyC or interactions with Catholicism. However, I do expect that their relationships with the Catholic Church might vary and I control for this possibility. I thus include a series of indigenous dummy variables in some models indicating whether the particular group accounted for over 50% of the municipal population or not. I also interact these dummy variables with the percent share Catholic adherents in the municipality and include those interaction terms in relevant models, in order to estimate any interaction between the type of indigenous group and the Catholic Church in their municipality on politics.

Specifically, I include dummy variables capturing whether the Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixe, Mixtec, and Zapotec groups account for a majority of the municipal population or not (1=yes, 0=no), as well as another dummy variable measuring whether another indigenous group held a majority. There are 15 indigenous groups with strong presence in Oaxaca. Four of these groups have held no majorities in any municipality<sup>64</sup> since 1995. Another six hold majorities in so few municipalities that it was not possible to estimate coefficients for their effects on UyC adoption. These groups include the Amuzgo (1 municipal majority), Chatino (7 municipal majorities), Cuicatec (6), Huave (2), Nahuatl (2), and Triqui (1). Despite possible variation among these groups in their attitudes toward UyC systems and their relationship with the Catholic Church, I group them into a single variable called "Other Indigenous Group Majority Municipality," coded in the same way as the separate indigenous group variables noted above. The excluded

<sup>57</sup> INEGI, "Sistema Municipal de Base de Datos (SIMBAD)", 2011, in <http://www.inegi.gob.mx>

<sup>58</sup> *Vid.* the web site of Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO), in <http://www.conapo.org.mx>

<sup>59</sup> F. Díaz Montes, *op. cit.*; T. Eisenstadt, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> T. Eisenstadt (*ibid.*) kindly shared this data.

<sup>61</sup> INEGI, "Sistema Municipal de...", *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> D. Recondo, *op. cit.*; María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi, *El sol y la cruz: los pueblos indios de Oaxaca colonial*, México, CIESAS del Sureste, 1996.

<sup>63</sup> D. Recondo, *op. cit.*,

<sup>64</sup> Chocho, Chontal, Tzotzil, and Zoque.

group from the models includes those municipalities where not a single indigenous group accounted for a majority of the population. This can mean either that the municipality was not indigenous majority, or that it was indigenous majority but that this majority was split among more than one indigenous group. Investigation of the data shows that in 1995 only 8 municipalities fell into the category of having indigenous majorities but no single indigenous group accounting for that majority. I leave these 8 municipalities in the excluded group because the expected effect of an indigenous majority on Uyc adoption or politics in the municipality depends on their control over the municipality and capacity to internally organize. A single group of an indigenous majority should be better at coordinating than multiple ones.

I begin the statistical analysis with an examination of whether the strength of the Catholic Church in a municipality mattered for the original decision to adopt Uyc systems or not. Table 2 shows the results. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, I use logistic regression analysis. As shown in Model 1, the variable capturing the effect of the percent share Catholic population (% Catholic) was not significant, demonstrating that this variable had no general effect on the adoption of Uyc regimes across Oaxaca. Models 2 and 3 in Table 2 add the various indigenous majority variables and their catholic interaction terms. As shown in Model 2, Mixe majority municipalities were more likely to adopt Uyc regimes than municipalities with no indigenous or single indigenous group majority (the excluded group), as shown by the Mixe Municipal Majority variable's positive and significant coefficient. In contrast, Mazatec majority municipalities were less likely to adopt Uyc systems compared to non-indigenous majority municipalities, as shown by this variable's negative and significant coefficient. None of the coefficients for the other indigenous groups majority variables yielded statistically significant results.

Inclusion of the indigenous majority and % Catholic population interaction terms, however, paints a

somewhat more intricate picture of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the various indigenous groups in their respective municipalities. Several of the indigenous majority variables become significant when placed in models with their Catholic interaction terms, demonstrating the interactive effect of Catholicism and indigenous political behavior among some groups. Figure 3 presents a picture of these complex relationships, with the underlying data graphed in the figure found in Table 3. As shown, for the Chinantec, Mixe, and Mixtec majority municipalities (whose positive coefficients for the interaction terms in Model 3 were significant), rising levels of Catholicism was key for raising the chance of Uyc adoption in them.

The strength of this relationship, however, varied across these indigenous groups. In the Mixe majority municipalities there was already a strong chance of Uyc adoption with few Catholic adherents. This attests to the Mixe's strong commitment to Uyc institutions apart from any effort by the Catholic Church in these communities. Even so, stronger Catholic Church presence did raise this probability of Uyc adoption in these communities. For example, a Mixe majority municipality with 20% Catholic adherents already had a 49.7% chance of Uyc adoption, with this chance rising to 81.2% in places where 30% of the population was affiliated with the Catholic Church. The chance of Uyc adoption was near 100% in Mixe majority municipalities with at least 40% Catholic adherents. The effect of rising levels of Catholic adherents in Chinantec and Mixtec communities on Uyc adoption was also positive (and significant), but with higher levels of Catholic adherents necessary for raising the chances of Uyc adoption over 50% in these places.

The strength of the Catholic Church in a community thus wielded no general effect on the chances of Uyc adoption in Oaxaca. However, the church does appear to have wielded some influence in specific indigenous communities, namely in the Mixe, Mixtec, and Chinantec majority municipalities. In all other places, the level of indigenous presence,

**Table 2**

<b>The Catholic Church and the Adoption of UyC Regimes</b>			
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
PRI Support in 1992 (State)	5.4032***	5.4867**	5.2031**
	(2.0421)	(2.3302)	(2.2318)
Change in PRI Support (1991-94) (Federal)	-1.6248**	-1.4791*	-1.4096*
	(0.7066)	(0.7582)	(0.7841)
Abstention in 1992 (State)	0.1858	0.2312	0.2535
	(0.7215)	(0.7603)	(0.7654)
Effective Number of Parties	1.2737**	1.3366*	1.2525*
	(0.6364)	(0.7350)	(0.6895)
Post-Election Conflicts	-1.8259***	-1.9435***	-2.2084***
	(0.3766)	(0.4057)	(0.4326)
Marginality Index	0.3164	0.4544**	0.4644**
	(0.1981)	(0.2122)	(0.2214)
Municipal Expenditures	6.4787**	6.4603**	6.9034**
	(3.2615)	(3.2741)	(3.4682)
Population	-0.0001***	-0.0001***	-0.0001***
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
% Population on Ejidos	2.2321**	2.1839**	2.1274**
	(0.9885)	(0.8651)	(0.8634)
Number of Ejidos	-0.0724	-0.0841	-0.1105**
	(0.0472)	(0.0527)	(0.0499)
% Rural Population	0.8877**	1.1441**	1.0573**
	(0.4273)	(0.4848)	(0.4927)
% Catholic	-0.9371	-0.0511	-2.4585
	(1.6363)	(1.5544)	(2.3253)
% Indigenous	0.9090**	1.0898	1.3172
	(0.4175)	(0.8742)	(0.9583)
Mazatec Majority Municip.		-1.7674*	3.9336

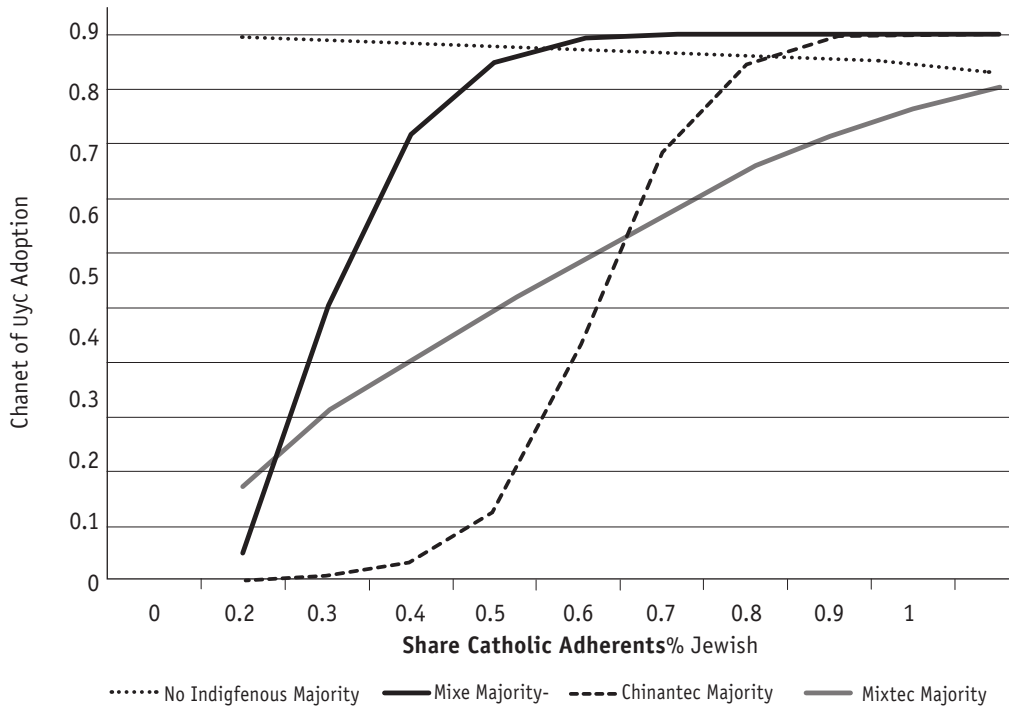
**Table 2**  
 (continuation)

<b>The Catholic Church and the Adoption of UyC Regimes</b>			
		(0.9591)	(11.5086)
% Catholic * Mazatec			-6.4477
			(12.4656)
Mixe Majority Municipality		2.1769**	-8.0207**
		(0.9443)	(3.3433)
% Catholic * Mixe			17.1831***
			(5.5220)
Chinantec Majority Municip.		-0.3438	-13.3156***
		(1.2291)	(3.4873)
% Catholic * Chinantec			18.3235***
			(4.8279)
Mixtec Majority Municipality		-0.8805	-6.6088**
		(0.7100)	(3.0100)
% Catholic * Mixtec			6.2352*
			(3.3986)
Zapotec Majority Municip.		0.7491	4.0079
		(0.7901)	(5.1455)
% Catholic * Zapotec			-4.0317
			(5.8104)
Other Indig. Group Maj. Mun.		-0.2096	-4.8642
		(0.9333)	(3.0429)
% Catholic * Other Indig.			5.1227
			(3.4597)
Constant	-5.5845*	-6.8437**	-4.1417
	(2.9906)	(3.2402)	(3.4716)
Observations	555	555	555
Pseudo R-squared	0.39	0.41	0.43

Note: Logistic regression analysis. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%



**Figure 3**  
**The Effect of Catholicism in Non-Indigenous**



**TABLE 3**

The Effect of Catholicism on the Chance of Adopting UyC Systems in Different Indigenous Majority Municipalities				
Share Catholic	No Indigenous Majority*	Mixe Majority	Chinantec Majority	Mixtec Majority
0	0.994	0.049	0.000	0.176
0.2	0.990	0.497	0.006	0.312
0.3	0.987	0.812	0.030	0.398
0.4	0.983	0.949	0.129	0.491
0.5	0.979	0.988	0.421	0.585
0.6	0.973	0.997	0.780	0.673
0.7	0.966	0.999	0.945	0.750
0.8	0.957	1.000	0.988	0.814
0.9	0.945	1.000	0.998	0.865
1	0.931	1.000	1.000	0.903

Note: \*When all indigenous majority dummy variables and their Catholic Adherents interaction terms held at 0. I exclude Mazatec, Zapotec, and Other Indigenous Majority municipality variables due to their lack of significance.

rather than the presence of the Catholic Church, mattered more for UyC adoption. This is shown in the positive and significant coefficient for the percent share indigenous population in the municipality (% Indigenous) on UyC adoption in Model 1. (Multicollinearity between the indigenous dummy variables and the % Indigenous variable prevented it from returning significant coefficients in Models 2 and 3.) Interestingly, several of the control variables also produced significant effects on UyC adoption. Municipalities that were more rural (% Rural Population), that had more people living on ejido lands (% Population on Ejidos), and that were smaller in size (Population) also tended to adopt UyC regimes at higher rates. Those that had higher prior levels of PRI support (PRI Support in 1992) but where that support had been falling in recent years (Change in PRI Support 1991-94) were also more likely to adopt UyC regimes. Municipalities with greater per capita fiscal expenditures (Municipal Expenditures) and fewer post election conflicts in prior state elections (Post-Election Conflicts) were also more likely to adopt UyC regimes than PP ones.

Although the effect of the Catholic Church on UyC adoption was limited to Mixe, Mixtec, and Chinantec communities, the church may have affected politics in UyC communities other ways. Indeed, it is possible that the adoption of UyC institutions may have served to raise the church's level of influence in these municipalities, thanks to the way that UyC institutions helped formalize the traditional civil-religious cargo system in these places. Although the Catholic Church may have wielded little political control over the choice of UyC institutions, it may have seen its influence grow after UyC adoption and the formalization of their position within these communities. With this in mind, I turn now to an analysis of the effect of the level of Catholic Church presence on politics in Oaxaca's UyC municipalities. I analyze the effect of Catholic Church presence on the level of PRI support and on first place party margins in UyC municipalities.

Tables 4 and 5 show results for the effect of Catholic Church presence on PRI support across Oaxaca's UyC municipalities for state elections held in 1998, 2001, 2004, and 2007, after the formal adoption of UyC systems. As shown in Table 3, rising levels of Catholic Church adherents had a generally negative effect on PRI support in 1998, 2001, and 2007 across Oaxaca's UyC municipalities. The coefficients for this variable were negative and significant in the models for these years. In 1998, a municipality with 50% Catholic adherents could expect 7% ( $-0.1415 \times 0.50$ ) less support than if there were no Catholics ( $-0.1415 \times 0$ ); a municipality with 100% Catholic adherents could expect 14% less support ( $-0.1415 \times 1.0$ ). With the exception of 2004, greater Catholic Church presence was associated with falling levels of support for the PRI in UyC systems.

Table 5 shows the effect of Catholic Church presence on PRI support in different indigenous majority municipalities. In these models, the coefficients for the % Catholic Church have a different interpretation because, thanks to the indigenous group Catholic interaction terms, they measure something different. Specifically, they measure the effect of the Catholic Church in non-indigenous majority municipalities, that is, on the excluded group. As we can see from the models, this variable was negative and significant in 1998 and 2001, meaning that for every 10% rise in Catholic presence in a non-indigenous majority UyC municipality, the PRI counted on 1.668% ( $-0.1668 \times 0.10$ ) less support in 1998 and 1.437% less in 2001. In other words, 100% Catholic presence in non-indigenous majority municipalities reduced PRI support by 16.68% in 1998 and 14.37% in 2001. The effect of the Catholic Church in non-indigenous majority municipalities wore off by 2004.

As regards the effect of the Catholic Church in indigenous majority municipalities, the results are more complicated. The most systematic result is found in the majority Mixe municipalities. Although coefficients for the Mixe variables were not significant in 1998, they were in all remaining years. In 2001, increases

**TABLE 4**

<b>The Catholic Church and PRI Support in UyC Municipalities, 1998 – 2007</b>				
	<i>1998</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2007</i>
PRI Support in Prior Election	0.5414***	0.3568***	0.0081	-0.0559
	(0.0564)	(0.0734)	(0.0534)	(0.0638)
Effective Number of Parties	-0.0008	-0.0493**	-0.0031	-0.0168
	(0.0072)	(0.0213)	(0.0098)	(0.0214)
Post-Election Conflicts	0.0098	-0.0330	-0.0104	-0.0248
	(0.0161)	(0.0209)	(0.0190)	(0.0229)
Marginality Index	0.0241**	0.0183	0.0017	0.0313***
	(0.0114)	(0.0113)	(0.0105)	(0.0113)
Municipal Expenditures	0.0191***	0.0031***	0.0024	0.0033***
	(0.0066)	(0.0010)	(0.0016)	(0.0008)
Population	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000*	-0.0000*
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
% Population on Ejidos	0.0140	0.0537**	0.0039	0.0357*
	(0.0317)	(0.0258)	(0.0253)	(0.0201)
Number of Ejidos	-0.0038	0.0008	-0.0011	-0.0045
	(0.0030)	(0.0025)	(0.0021)	(0.0030)
% Rural Population	-0.0267	0.0400	0.0048	-0.0116
	(0.0234)	(0.0292)	(0.0237)	(0.0311)
% Catholic	-0.1415**	-0.2774***	-0.0735	-0.1675***
	(0.0578)	(0.0574)	(0.0675)	(0.0630)
% Indigenous	-0.0402*	-0.0470**	-0.0249	-0.0761***
	(0.0206)	(0.0226)	(0.0217)	(0.0237)
Constant	0.3685***	0.6458***	0.5944***	0.7525***
	(0.0798)	(0.0978)	(0.0873)	(0.1016)
Observations	399	407	415	396
R-squared	0.41	0.32	0.04	0.11
Adjusted R-squared	0.39	0.30	0.01	0.08

Note: Ordinary Least Squares Regression. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Total observations do not total to 418 municipalities due to missing data. \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**TABLE 5**

<b>The Catholic Church, Indigenous Groups, and PRI Support in Uyc Municipalities, 1998 - 2007</b>				
	<i>1998</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2007</i>
PRI Support in Prior Election	0.5510***	0.3373***	0.0085	-0.0344
	(0.0560)	(0.0752)	(0.0541)	(0.0647)
Effective Number of Parties	0.0010	-0.0580***	-0.0036	-0.0102
	(0.0072)	(0.0220)	(0.0099)	(0.0219)
Post-Election Conflicts	0.0151	-0.0344	-0.0100	-0.0289
	(0.0175)	(0.0216)	(0.0198)	(0.0223)
Marginality Index	0.0321**	0.0147	-0.0001	0.0358***
	(0.0126)	(0.0122)	(0.0111)	(0.0117)
Municipal Expenditures	0.0162***	0.0027**	0.0022	0.0030***
	(0.0061)	(0.0011)	(0.0016)	(0.0008)
Population	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0000
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
% Population on Ejidos	0.0359	0.0457*	0.0091	0.0459**
	(0.0298)	(0.0261)	(0.0260)	(0.0198)
Number of Ejidos	-0.0046	-0.0014	-0.0022	-0.0040
	(0.0033)	(0.0026)	(0.0025)	(0.0027)
% Rural Population	-0.0116	0.0330	0.0144	-0.0013
	(0.0243)	(0.0310)	(0.0253)	(0.0315)
% Catholic	-0.1668*	-0.1437*	-0.0538	-0.0676
	(0.0897)	(0.0856)	(0.0967)	(0.0943)
% Indigenous	-0.1063**	-0.0262	-0.0280	-0.0421
	(0.0499)	(0.0484)	(0.0464)	(0.0520)
Mazatec Majority Municip.	-0.2581	0.0778	-0.8148**	0.2975
	(0.4696)	(0.2870)	(0.4120)	(0.6746)
% Catholic * Mazatec	0.3567	-0.1234	0.9246**	-0.3472
	(0.5214)	(0.3302)	(0.4672)	(0.7553)
Mixe Majority Municipality	0.0729	0.3675***	0.2768*	0.2154
	(0.1457)	(0.1264)	(0.1435)	(0.1430)
% Catholic * Mixe	-0.0829	-0.3408*	-0.3930**	-0.3326*
	(0.2022)	(0.1758)	(0.1687)	(0.1756)
Chinantec Majority Municip.	-0.0799	0.1514	0.3490*	-0.4838

**Table 5**  
 (continuation)

<b>The Catholic Church, Indigenous Groups, and PRI Support in Uyc Municipalities, 1998 - 2007</b>				
	(0.3181)	(0.3664)	(0.1893)	(0.3117)
% Catholic * Chinantec	0.1687	-0.1223	-0.4006*	0.5287
	(0.3803)	(0.4777)	(0.2372)	(0.4298)
Mixtec Majority Municipality	-0.3220*	0.1663	-0.1176	0.2577
	(0.1746)	(0.1493)	(0.2233)	(0.1809)
% Catholic * Mixtec	0.3649*	-0.2045	0.1319	-0.3629*
	(0.1900)	(0.1655)	(0.2430)	(0.1998)
Zapotec Majority Municip.	0.0288	0.0733	-0.0073	-0.0534
	(0.1281)	(0.1384)	(0.1103)	(0.1336)
% Catholic * Zapotec	0.0639	-0.1254	0.0156	0.0604
	(0.1482)	(0.1610)	(0.1270)	(0.1634)
Other Indig. Group Maj. Mun.	0.2003*	0.1104	0.0619	0.2533*
	(0.1025)	(0.1083)	(0.2056)	(0.1420)
% Catholic * Other Indig.	-0.2323*	-0.1596	-0.0334	-0.3703**
	(0.1287)	(0.1391)	(0.2374)	(0.1622)
Constant	0.3604***	0.5716***	0.5684***	0.6170***
	(0.1026)	(0.1123)	(0.1073)	(0.1218)
Observations	399	407	415	396
R-squared	0.43	0.34	0.06	0.15
Adjusted R-squared	0.40	0.30	0.00	0.09

Note: Ordinary Least Squares Regression. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Total observations do not total to 418 municipalities due to missing data. \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

in the percent share Catholics in Mixe communities reduced the level of support going to the PRI. Mixe communities started out with 36% more PRI support compared to non-indigenous majority municipalities (as shown by the 0.3675 dummy Mixe variable coefficient) but faced declining PRI support with rising levels of Catholic Church presence (as shown by the Mixe \* Catholic interaction term coefficient -0.3408). Adding the coefficient of the Mixe \* Catholic interaction term to that for the % Catholic variable gives us the effect of rising Catholic adherents on PRI support in Mixe communities compared to non-indigenous

majority places. Specifically, a rise of 10% in the level of Catholic adherents in Mixe municipalities lowered PRI support by 4.8% total votes (-0.4845 \* 0.10). This means that a Mixe majority municipality with 100% Catholic adherents could expect 48% (-0.4845 \* 1.0) lower PRI support than one with 0% Catholic adherents. A Mixe majority municipality with 50% Catholics could expect 24% lower PRI support than one with 0% Catholics (-0.4845 \* 0.5). Or, a Mixe majority municipality with 100% Catholics could expect 24% less support than one where Catholics only made up 50% of the population.

In contrast to the findings for Mixe municipalities, Mixtec communities changes their behavior toward the PRI over the years. In 1998, Mixtec communities started off with 32% less PRI support than that found in communities without any indigenous majorities but with the level of PRI support growing in across these municipalities with the presence of the Catholic Church. This is seen in the negative and significant coefficient (-0.3220) for the Mixtec dummy variable, which establishes the baseline point of divergence between these communities and those with no indigenous majorities, and in the positive and significant coefficient (0.3649) capturing the interactive effect of Mixtec and Catholic adherents on PRI support in the community. Adding this coefficient to that observed for % Catholics translates the effect of a 10% percent share increase % Catholics on PRI support in the municipality. For every additional 10% Catholics in a Mixtec majority municipality, we expect another  $0.1981 \times 0.10$  or 1.98% votes going to the PRI. This means that the PRI could expect 19.8% more votes in Mixtec municipalities where 100% of the population was Catholic than it could in municipalities where there were no Catholic adherents. In 2001 and 2004 the variables for the Mixtec communities were not significant, while in 2007 they reversed their effect. In that year, Mixtec municipalities started out with greater PRI support compared to non-indigenous places, with this support falling with greater Catholic Church presence.

All other variables measuring the effect of the specific indigenous groups or their interactions with the Catholic Church on PRI support were not systematic, only gaining significance in one year or not at all. I exclude interpretation of the variable grouping several indigenous group majorities together because of the problems of interpreting its results. This variable is only included for statistical purposes to great the non-indigenous majority excluded group point of comparison.

The variation in the findings for the specific indigenous group and Catholic interaction variables lead me to two conclusions. First, strong Catholic presence in non-indigenous majority Uyc municipalities generally undermined PRI support in the early years after formal Uyc adoption but this effect wore off over time. Second, the relationship of the Catholic Church with different indigenous communities varies across them and across time. In Mixe communities, strong Catholic Church presence nearly consistently hurt PRI support. In other indigenous majority places, in contrast, strong Catholic Church presence only occasionally mattered politically, and when it did it sometimes raised PRI support and sometimes diminished it. Although the statistical analysis cannot tell us whether these indigenous communities were sometimes using the Catholic Church to undermine (or raise) PRI support, or whether the Catholic Church was the one engineering this political outcome, we see that the interaction of the two groups produced nonsystematic effects on PRI support across most indigenous communities. This suggests some degree of occasional yet intentional coordination to change the election results for the PRI in selected years, with the church remaining passive –and thus tacitly approving of PRI state and usually local rule– in most years and in many places. This supports those authors who have highlighted the Catholic Church’s non-active, that is, passive role in delivering the PRI support.

Even so, it is not clear what any observed reductions in PRI support mean for the indigenous communities where they occurred. Did reductions in PRI support signify that the Catholic Church had something to do with democratization in these places? Or, might they signify something else, something less democratic? Scholars have documented the presence of potential pockets of ongoing authoritarian-type political dynamics across Oaxaca’s municipalities through analyses of first place party margins. Some

<sup>65</sup> A. L. Benton Shelton, “Bottom-Up Challenges ...”, *op. cit.*

have noted the ongoing presence of high first place party margins in Oaxaca's Uyc regimes compared to PP ones,<sup>65</sup> as well as the presence of municipalities that shift their support from year to year to and from the PRI but always generating high first place party margins.<sup>66</sup> Given that strong Catholic Church presence in some indigenous majority communities sometimes lowered support for the PRI but sometimes also raised it, it could be that shifts in support away from PRI merely reflect the transfer of this support to other parties directed by local authoritarian leaders rather than rising electoral competition and democratization.

To determine whether the Catholic Church played a role in state and local democratization, we thus must observe the level of political competition in Uyc regimes rising with Catholic Church presence. It is with this in mind that we turn to an analysis of first place party margins. Tables 6 and 7 show the results for models analyzing first place party margins between 1998 and 2007. As shown in Table 6, the effect of the percent share Catholic population in a municipality was only negative and significant only in 2001. It would thus appear that only in that year did any democratization really occur, given the impact of Catholicism on declining PRI support that year shown in Table 3, however, this effect was temporary at best. In all other years, the presence of a strong Catholic Church had no effect on reducing first place party margins in the municipality, suggesting the church's tacit acceptance of ongoing authoritarian dynamics across the state's Uyc municipalities. It is important to note that first place party margins are generally higher in Uyc as compared to PP systems, and that they averaged 31% in 1998, 34% in 2001, 23% in 2004, and 31% in 2007 in Uyc municipalities, compared to 17% (1998), 23% (2001), 25% (2004), and 20% (2007) in Oaxaca's PP municipalities. (Table 1 does not distinguish between Uyc and PP systems.) High first place party margins in Oaxaca have been linked to ongoing local authoritarian control.<sup>67</sup> As such, we conclude that, the Catholic Church only

aided in democratization in 2001, but rather supported the political status quo in Uyc systems in all other years.

In terms of the interaction of Oaxaca's different indigenous groups with the level of Catholic Church presence, we turn to Table 7. As with PRI support discussed above, the effect of the Catholic Church in different indigenous majority municipalities varies by indigenous group and by year, with no real systematic pattern apparent. Although Zapotec majority municipalities saw rising first place party margins in 1998 and 2004 associated with greater levels of Catholic Church presence, Mixe (in 2001) and Chinantec (in 1998) and Mixtec (in 2007) occasionally saw greater levels of Catholic Church presence associated with declining first place party margins instead. These results are seen in the positive Catholic\* Zapotec interaction terms in 1998 and 2004, and in the negative interaction terms for the other indigenous groups in a few years. For reasons of space I do not go into the precise calculations of the effects of these terms on first place party margins but the point is clear: rising levels of Catholicism are not systematically associated with rising or falling first place party margins in indigenous communities, leading us to conclude that the Catholic Church did not have any active systematic effect on Oaxacan politics.

To the extent that the Catholic Church mattered, the general lack of significance of the variables measuring either the Catholic Church presence in Table 6 or the interaction of Catholic Church presence with indigenous majority groups demonstrates the lack of impact that the church had on changing traditional first place party margins. In other words, the church tended to leave politics alone in these communities rather than actively intervene, though it certainly did on occasion. Given that many of these communities are known for local hierarchical patterns of control, this means that the Catholic Church did not play any systematic role in undermining the traditional civil-religious cargo system nor in challenging local hierarchical political

**Table 6**

<b>The Catholic Church and First Place Party Margins in UyC Municipalities, 1998 – 2001</b>				
	1998	2001	2004	2007
Effective Number of Parties	-0.0470**	-0.1046***	-0.0115	-0.0195
	(0.0206)	(0.0205)	(0.0096)	(0.0221)
Post-Election Conflicts	-0.0779***	-0.0735***	-0.0204	-0.0608**
	(0.0279)	(0.0266)	(0.0241)	(0.0285)
Marginality Index	0.0693***	0.0479***	0.0087	0.0515***
	(0.0152)	(0.0143)	(0.0129)	(0.0133)
Municipal Expenditures	0.0238**	0.0065***	0.0013	0.0042***
	(0.0101)	(0.0015)	(0.0031)	(0.0010)
Population	-0.0000***	0.0000	-0.0000*	-0.0000***
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
% Population on Ejidos	0.0411	0.0359	0.0064	0.0360
	(0.0564)	(0.0322)	(0.0307)	(0.0265)
Number of Ejidos	-0.0068	-0.0022	-0.0031	-0.0005
	(0.0046)	(0.0032)	(0.0031)	(0.0030)
% Rural Population	-0.0224	0.0429	0.0205	-0.0295
	(0.0460)	(0.0367)	(0.0305)	(0.0352)
% Catholic	-0.1135	-0.2482***	-0.1001	-0.0930
	(0.1117)	(0.0764)	(0.0817)	(0.0845)
% Indigenous	-0.0294	-0.0175	-0.0335	-0.0217
	(0.0313)	(0.0274)	(0.0278)	(0.0280)
PRI Win Current Election	0.0935***	0.1172***	0.1272***	0.1625***
	(0.0237)	(0.0271)	(0.0166)	(0.0202)
Constant	0.4962***	0.6475***	0.2777***	0.3088***
	(0.1258)	(0.0896)	(0.0820)	(0.0995)
Observations	399	407	415	396
R-squared	0.27	0.25	0.13	0.21
Adjusted R-squared	0.24	0.23	0.11	0.18

Note: Ordinary Least Squares Regression. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Total observations do not total to 418 municipalities due to missing data.

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%



**TABLE 7**

<b>The Catholic Church, Indigenous Groups, and First Place Party Margins in UyC Municipalities, 1998-2007</b>				
	<b>1998</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2007</b>
Effective Number of Parties	-0.0448**	-0.1145***	-0.0124	-0.0217
	(0.0208)	(0.0214)	(0.0101)	(0.0225)
Post-Election Conflicts	-0.0819***	-0.0713***	-0.0162	-0.0646**
	(0.0286)	(0.0266)	(0.0250)	(0.0282)
Marginality Index	0.0684***	0.0429***	0.0008	0.0553***
	(0.0160)	(0.0151)	(0.0134)	(0.0140)
Municipal Expenditures	0.0210**	0.0061***	0.0014	0.0041***
	(0.0097)	(0.0015)	(0.0031)	(0.0010)
Population	-0.0000***	-0.0000	-0.0000**	-0.0000**
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
% Population on Ejidos	0.0594	0.0179	0.0020	0.0365
	(0.0573)	(0.0315)	(0.0318)	(0.0266)
Number of Ejidos	-0.0077	-0.0049	-0.0038	-0.0007
	(0.0050)	(0.0038)	(0.0034)	(0.0031)
% Population Rural	-0.0300	0.0484	0.0257	-0.0272
	(0.0458)	(0.0390)	(0.0319)	(0.0362)
% Catholic	-0.2973*	-0.1949	-0.1826	-0.0031
	(0.1637)	(0.1247)	(0.1285)	(0.1286)
% Indigenous	-0.1050	-0.1093*	-0.0614	-0.0382
	(0.0662)	(0.0633)	(0.0574)	(0.0637)
Mazatec Majority Mun.	0.1529	0.5286	-1.5391***	0.0067
	(1.0667)	(0.4543)	(0.5418)	(0.9137)
% Catholic * Mazatec	0.0629	-0.5955	1.7381***	-0.0458
	(1.1643)	(0.5247)	(0.6147)	(1.0067)
Mixe Majority Municip.	-0.4550	0.4417**	0.0946	0.1144
	(0.3376)	(0.1722)	(0.2746)	(0.1461)
% Catholic * Mixe	0.5445	-0.2240	-0.1095	-0.0939
	(0.4090)	(0.2172)	(0.3258)	(0.2025)
Chinantec Majority Mun.	0.9119***	0.1493	0.0788	-0.4249
	(0.3370)	(0.3996)	(0.2279)	(0.3675)

**Table 7**  
 (continuation)

<b>The Catholic Church, Indigenous Groups, and First Place Party Margins in UyC Municipalities, 1998-2007</b>				
% Catholic * Chinantec	-0.9838**	-0.0216	-0.0419	0.5725
	(0.4274)	(0.5403)	(0.2763)	(0.4959)
Mixtec Majority Mun.	-0.2844	-0.0427	0.1124	0.5156***
	(0.2700)	(0.2254)	(0.1559)	(0.1979)
% Catholic * Mixtec	0.3816	0.1332	-0.0400	-0.5688**
	(0.2967)	(0.2487)	(0.1720)	(0.2331)
Zapotec Majority Mun.	-0.3019	0.0299	-0.2404*	-0.0854
	(0.2117)	(0.1736)	(0.1430)	(0.1740)
% Catholic * Zapotec	0.4262*	0.0372	0.2807*	0.1208
	(0.2483)	(0.2060)	(0.1653)	(0.2058)
Other Indig. Group Maj.	0.4663***	0.1250	0.0841	0.5135***
	(0.1607)	(0.1457)	(0.2599)	(0.1285)
% Catholic * Other Indig.	-0.5627***	-0.0591	-0.0191	-0.5858***
	(0.1906)	(0.1791)	(0.2966)	(0.1712)
PRI Win	0.0938***	0.1180***	0.1246***	0.1620***
	(0.0242)	(0.0267)	(0.0173)	(0.0206)
Constant	0.6714***	0.6399***	0.3572***	0.2318*
	(0.1715)	(0.1221)	(0.1197)	(0.1343)
Observations	399	407	415	396
R-squared	0.31	0.29	0.16	0.23
Adjusted R-squared	0.26	0.25	0.12	0.18

Note: Ordinary Least Squares Regression. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Total observations do not total to 418 municipalities due to missing data.  
 \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

relationships. This undermines arguments about the church's role in the state's democratization. The fact that the church sometimes mattered for reductions in first place party margins, sometimes mattered for raising them, but usually did nothing to intervene also highlights the inherently political role and varied local church across Oaxaca. When it did get involved in local political issues, it did so according to the local factors, not state or diocese level Catholic Church doctrine.

The results of the statistical analysis show that the Catholic Church wielded no statewide effect on politics in Oaxaca. The church did, however, often affect local political dynamics in a way that indicates intentionality of decision. Stronger Catholic Church presence led to greater chances of UyC adoption in Chinantec, Mixe, and Mixtec municipalities, but nowhere else. It also generally undermined PRI support in Mixe municipalities across several years,

but only occasionally did so in Chinantec and Mixtec ones, where it in fact appears to have played a role in raising PRI support one year. Analysis of first place party margins reveals that such reductions in PRI support belie ongoing authoritarian structures in many places, with the effect of the Catholic Church on first place party margins nonexistent in most years but, importantly, occasionally raising and occasionally lowering first place party margins in some indigenous dominant places.

Taken together, these results suggest that neither argument about the deliberate and systematic role of the Catholic Church in Oaxacan democratization or authoritarian rule is correct. The data analysis demonstrates that there was no statewide effect of the Catholic Church among Oaxaca's Uyc regimes, either in terms of their initial adoption or in terms of later patterns of political behavior. Instead, the effect of the Catholic Church appears to vary according to local dynamics and be limited to those Uyc places

with indigenous majority populations. In some of these places, the church occasionally facilitated what appears to have been some form of political competition through falling first place party margins. However, in other places it sometimes it appears to have actively facilitated ongoing authoritarian control through rising first place party margins. What is perhaps most interesting is the lack of effect of the Catholic Church on politics in most years. The occasional but significant role that the Catholic Church appears to have played, both in fomenting and in actively undermining democratization in some places and in some years, suggests that the church could and did wield political influence when it chose to do so but that it tended not to intervene in local political affairs. The analysis cannot reveal the reasons for the lack of intervention but the effect is clear: local church officials took no part in seeking to change local political dynamics and instead tacitly supported the local political status quo in Uyc systems.

### Concluding remarks

The principle point of focus of this study was to discern between two competing interpretations of the role of the Catholic Church in politics in Oaxaca, Mexico in the 1990s and 2000s. One line of argument holds that the progressive Catholic Church successfully advocated for the adoption of Uyc political systems in many of the state's indigenous municipalities in order to help indigenous groups gain autonomy from the state hegemonic PRI, implying that they were successful in this endeavor. A competing view holds that the Catholic Church's historic role in the initial development of the hierarchical civil-religious cargo system structuring municipal politics since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, if not before, meant that the church was either purposefully or unwittingly helping the continuation of ongoing local authoritarian rule across Oaxaca's municipalities.

To evaluate these competing arguments, I analyzed religious, indigenous, political institutional,

and electoral data in Oaxaca's municipalities. Statistical analysis shows that the Catholic Church did not deliver any systematic effects across this state, in either the democratic or authoritarian direction, but rather only occasional did so, leading me to reject both hypotheses about the role of the Catholic Church in Oaxaca. As such, even if we begin with the view that the Catholic Church may have been originally altruistic in its efforts to help Oaxaca's indigenous groups by supporting the adoption of Uyc systems, we see that the dominant position of this church in highly indigenous communities did not work to help these groups oppose their hierarchically organized municipal institutional structures once and for all. And, if we begin with the view that the Catholic Church was mainly interested in crowding out other religious groups and thus preferred to dominate local politics to help them in this regard, we see that this church sometimes actively supported local

democratization, even if it often tacitly accepted the traditional, ongoing hierarchical political rules of the game.

This leads me to two conclusions about religion and politics in Oaxaca. First, although the church wielded no statewide systematic influence on politics, it does wield power at the municipal level on occasion, although this power varies in direction and by indigenous group. Second, although the church has sometimes actively supported democratization in some places, it has tended to allow the status quo to prevail on most occasions, demonstrating its tacit support for ongoing local hierarchical and thus authoritarian dynamics in the state, even if it does not always actively work to reproduce them. Although religious domination or competition may not produce any system-wide or structural effects, it can have important local effects that are moderated, aggravated, or countermanded by other local factors.

In the end, although this study was designed to analyze the role of the Catholic Church in Oaxaca, the findings here speak to the wider literature on religion and politics in Latin America more generally. First, it raises questions about the capacity of

the Catholic Church to implement country-level, or even archdiocese or diocese level, policies in these countries, especially in highly heterogeneous ones. The analysis here reveals the inherently local and highly varied effects of religion on politics, something that undermines the conclusions of research taking a state or country level approach. However, the study here also raises questions about the generalizability of locality-specific case studies of the role of religion on politics as well. Although this literature certainly enriches our understanding of how these dynamics might work in individual instances, the statistical findings here demonstrate that these effects can weaken, strengthen, and even reverse in these same places over time, as well as across local communities. This does not mean to say that both research approaches are ill conceived, for they each lend important insights into the study of religion and politics. But, it does highlight the importance of appreciating the limits of their application. The research here suggests that state or country level analyses as well as case study research should be contextualized by way of cross-case comparisons like the one conducted here.

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