

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

THE PUZZLES OF RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON POLITICS

IN LATE 1988, A GROUP of Catholic bishops met privately with communist officials in a Polish parliamentary commission. Their purpose: to discuss a legislative proposal that would outlaw abortion.

Abortion was legal in communist-era Poland, but the regime was beginning to crumble, and the communist government hoped the proposal would divide its resurgent opposition. For the church, eliminating abortion was not a new priority, but an especially timely one—the hierarchy was keenly aware that public attention was elsewhere, focused on possible regime change and the Round Table negotiations between the opposition and the communist regime. And so, over the next few months, bishops and church lawyers drafted a bill that would unconditionally ban abortion in all circumstances and impose jail sentences on both patients and doctors for violation of the law. Parliamentary discussion of the proposed legislation began in May 1989, only a month before the communists were swept from power. Despite widespread public opposition (59% of Poles opposed the restrictions), the church bill remained the unquestioned basis for all subsequent debate in the democratic parliament, and for the final abortion law of January 1993.¹

The procedure was now limited to cases in which the mother's life was threatened, testing indicated severe and irreversible damage to the fetus, or the pregnancy was due to rape or incest. The law also required a consensus of doctors that one of the conditions had been met, and doctors commonly disagreed upon what constituted a threat to the mother's life or severe and irreversible damage to the fetus. What's more, in 1991 the National Association of Physicians forbade its members from performing the procedure, making the required consensus virtually unattainable. As a result of this law, the number of *legal* abortions performed annually in Poland fell a thousandfold, from over 100,000 in 1988, to only 312 a decade later. The official abortion rate plunged from 18% to 0.07% of all

¹ Gowin 1995, 104ff.

pregnancies. And today, despite legal challenges and unfavorable rulings by the European Court of Human Rights—in Polish cases involving the denial of abortion to a woman facing blindness as a result of pregnancy, and a fourteen-year-old victim of rape—the law remains unchanged. The Roman Catholic Church had effectively banned abortion in democratic Poland.

Churches² embody the sacred and the divine, but their interests and influence extend well beyond the spiritual realm. Many countries are “nations under God,” where churches are powerful political actors, shaping policy and transforming lives in the process. This book explores how and why some churches gained such enormous political power—and why others did not. It argues that churches ironically gain their greatest political advantage when they can appear to be above petty politics—exerting their influence in secret meetings and the back rooms of parliament rather than through public pressure or partisanship. A church’s ability to enter these quiet corridors of power depends on its historical record of defending the nation—and thus gaining moral authority within society and among politicians.

Church influence on policy varies widely from country to country. In some democracies, churches have succeeded in couching political debates in religious terms, vetting government appointments, and influencing legislation in domains ranging from education to abortion to the drafting of constitutions. In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church has achieved most of its policy goals, including the effective ban on abortion. The church is a major political figure. Priests have blessed soccer games—and they helped ensure Poland’s entry into the European Union in 2004.

But in other countries, religious representatives have been roundly ignored—or even castigated, by politicians and commentators alike, for even voicing their concerns. When in 2010 the Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet expressed his opposition to abortion (a stance the Roman Catholic Church has consistently advocated for decades) the public reaction in Canada was furious, with physicians declaring themselves “blue with rage” and one columnist wishing the Cardinal a “long and painful death.”³ Ouellet’s public comments—condemning the legality of abortion and indicating disapproval of government funding to clinics performing the procedure—were rejected as a wildly inappropriate attempt to influence state affairs.

²Since the focus of this book is on organized religion in predominantly Christian democracies, I refer to these denominations and organizations as “churches.” References to a “church” further mean its elites: the religious leaders, such as bishops, pastors, spokesmen, etc., rather than the vast masses of the faithful, whose views are considerably more nuanced and diverse than the hierarchy’s. Allies and proxy organizations are also identified separately.

³Gagnon 2010.

Surprisingly, stark differences in the extent of religious influence persist across countries that are otherwise similar in patterns of religious belonging, belief, and attendance. For example, Ireland and Italy are both “Catholic societies,” with close to 90% of the population identifying as Catholic. Yet the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland influenced the public debate and the eventual laws concerning abortion, divorce, and education far more (and for far longer) than it did in Italy, where the church has been markedly less influential, at times struggling against a tide of political opposition and popular indifference. Similarly, while the Roman Catholic Church in newly democratic Poland heavily influenced policy, the church in—equally Catholic—newly democratic Croatia failed to limit abortion (much less abolish it), forestall civil unions for gays, restrict stem cell research, or constrain divorce. If anything, religiosity in Croatia *increased* over the 1990s, with rates of “firm believers” doubling from around 40% in 1989 to nearly 80% in 2004;⁴ yet religious influence on policy actually *decreased*, with many politicians openly opposing the enacting of church preferences.

We also see disparities in church influence in more diverse religious settings. Both the United States and Canada have relatively high rates of belief and attendance, especially when compared to other developed democracies (96% of Americans and 90% of Canadians believe in God, and 49% and 36%, respectively, attend church more than once a month). Both are over two-thirds Christian, with a large Roman Catholic minority. Yet the degree to which religion has influenced policy differs dramatically. In the United States, religion has become a central political cleavage,⁵ and conservative Catholic and Protestant religious groups made considerable inroads toward their policy goals, especially in curtailing access to abortion, contraception and sex education, and stem cell research.⁶ In Canada, in contrast, public policy debates are rarely framed in religious terms, even when the policies in question have moral overtones and stand in clear opposition to religious doctrines. Despite the efforts of the Catholic Church and conservative Christian groups, abortion, for example, was not restricted and did not become a dominant political issue, at either the elite or popular levels. Table 1.1 summarizes some of these differences in influence.

Just as curiously, churches’ influence upon democratic politics often occurs despite broad opposition from the public. As Table 1.2 shows, in all the countries mentioned above, over two-thirds of survey respondents

⁴Jerolimov and Zrinščak 2006, 282.

⁵Layman and Carmines 1998.

⁶In contrast, the mainstream Protestant churches not only lost members but also were unable to either resolve their internal conflicts over issues such as gay rights or mobilize effectively in their pro-choice stances in the 1970s and 1980s.

TABLE 1.1.
Church Influence on Policy Outcomes

	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Croatia	USA	Canada
Abortion? ¹	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Divorce?	No ²	No	No	No	No	No
Religion in schools? ³	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Stem cell research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Same-sex marriage?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Church Influence on Policy Debates

	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Croatia	USA	Canada
Abortion?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Divorce?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Religion in schools?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Stem cell research	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Same-sex marriage?	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Summary Score	8	5	7	4	7	1

Note: Influence on policy outcomes is coded as a yes if changes to policy were compatible with church teachings and justified by the legislator as having a Christian character or compatible with church teachings. Influence on debates is coded as a yes if churches were protagonists in the national debate, first to frame the issue in religious terms, and national legislators then adopted the language.

¹ Abortion is defined as “unrestricted” if abortion is available freely up to twelve weeks of pregnancy.

² Divorce was unconstitutional in Ireland, and this provision was upheld by a 1986 referendum, but it was legalized in 1995 with support of governing party.

³ Either the state funds religious schools, or mandatory religion/ ethics classes are taught in public schools.

reject church influence on voting, and over half reject influence on politics more broadly. Figure 1.1 shows that this opposition is widely shared: majorities in all the polled countries, observant and not, oppose religious influence on politics. Across a larger set of democracies surveyed, an average of 72% of survey respondents oppose church influence on politics, 78% oppose church influence on voting, and 72% oppose church influence on government.⁷ They do so even where the church is highly

⁷ 2005 World Values Survey and 2003 International Social Survey Programme data, $n = 44$ and $n = 28$, respectively. Standard deviations are 9, 5.4, and 8.1, respectively.

TABLE 1.2.
OPPOSITION TO RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON POLITICS

	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Croatia	USA	Canada
% surveyed: religious leaders should <i>not</i> influence government	72%	70%	78%	79%	50%	71%
% surveyed: religious leaders should <i>not</i> influence votes	78%	70%	83%	84%	71%	78%

World Values Surveys, Ireland (1999), Italy (2005), Canada (2006), United States (2005), Poland (2005), Croatia (1999). The question was not asked in the 6th wave of WVS, 2008-2011.

influential among individuals:⁸ in Ireland, where 93% of the population declares itself to be Catholic and over half attends Mass once a month or more, over 79% of poll respondents do not want the church to influence government, and 82% do not want the church to influence votes.

Even very pious Christian electorates are unlikely to demand religious influence on politics. First, Christianity itself views the sacred and the profane as two distinct domains. Jesus commanded Christians to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”⁹ Second, individual experiences and priorities often conflict with religious tenets: Catholics and Evangelicals still get divorced (and at rates as high or higher than other Americans). As a result, the democratic societies examined here reject church influence on governments, voting, and policy, even when they are religious. Yet churches continue to shape politics even where vast popular majorities oppose such influence.

The odd outcome is that on the one hand, popular religious observance, faith, and belonging *do* in fact correlate with the influence of religion on politics, as we will see; on the other, this religiosity does not create a popular *demand* for religious influence on governments, voting, or policy. In other words, religion and religious influence on politics go

⁸ An average 50% of respondents wanted the church to have less influence on politics throughout the 1990s and 2000s in Poland, and 78% respondents did not wish the church to be politically active (CBOS. 2007. *Komunikat z Badań*. Warsaw, March 2007). In the United States, 70% of respondents do not want churches to endorse political candidates (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2002). Majorities believe it is wrong for churches to speak out on politics (51%) and for clergymen to address politics from the pulpit (68%) (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2000).

⁹ Mark 12:17.

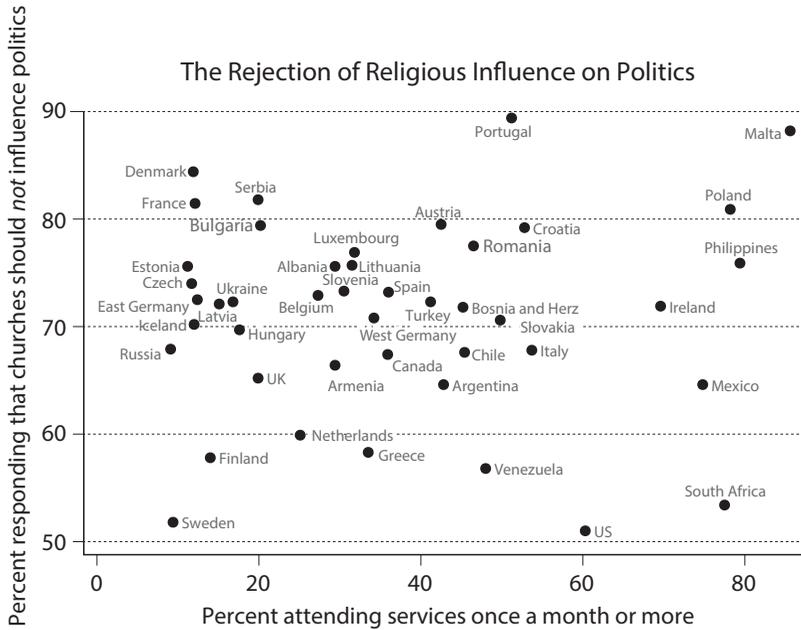


Figure 1.1. The Rejection of Religious Influence on Politics

hand in hand—but not because voters insist upon (or even desire) such influence.

The missing links between religion and religious influence on politics are the churches themselves—churches that serve not just as communities of faith, but as political advocates and actors. Many churches hold strong doctrinal commitments, and their leaders perceive an obligation to ensure that public policy reflects respect for God’s order. Divine agendas aside, churches want to ensure their own survival; apart from the obvious benefits of preferential tax and legal status, influencing policy is a way of disseminating and enshrining their religious values, fending off both secularization and potential competitors. Without the active politicking and involvement of the churches, we would be unlikely to see either the legislation of theological preferences into policy, or the broader prominence of religion in politics.

There is nothing new about churches attempting to manipulate public policy. Popes crowned the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, and Cardinals Richelieu and Wolsey served as advisors to kings in seventeenth-century France and in sixteenth-century England, respectively. With its enormous landholdings and an effective monopoly on education, the Roman Catholic Church in medieval Europe was a singularly powerful political and economic player (and has been accordingly analyzed as

such¹⁰). Whether legitimating monarchs, shaping public morality, exerting control over the welfare state, or simply securing favorable standing under the law, religious groups have a long history of intervention in politics.

Yet in the modern era, churches face considerable constraints on their political activity. Even in predominantly Christian countries, church and state are conceptually two distinct realms, separated by constitutions, legal precedent, and informal norms. Legal and institutional firewalls stymie even powerful churches with pews full of loyal adherents. In most modern democracies, clerics no longer hold secular office, and churches have no formal representation in most legislatures, governments, or administrative bodies. As a result, religious bodies seldom have direct access to policy making. Yet some organized religions continue to exercise considerable influence despite these impediments, while others are left to press their faces against the glass.

Since they cannot directly legislate, churches rely on secular proxies and intermediaries, and specifically, political parties. Churches often trade electoral mobilization on behalf of these secular political actors for subsequent policy concessions. Accordingly, a prominent set of explanations emphasizes the alliances between religious groups and political parties as the critical channel of church influence. These accounts examine electoral coalitions with political parties, asking when churches ally with parties and the policy consequences of these partnerships.¹¹

Yet coalitions with particular political parties can be as fraught and unreliable as reliance on public support, as we will see. Political parties and partisan representatives have interests of their own—and these are often much more diverse than (and contradictory to) the interests of churches. Contemporary public opinion, as already noted, is against overt church interference in politics, making attempts to mobilize voters a risky business. Finally, reaching out to the electorate necessitates persuasion and reframing of religious perspectives—and the compromises necessary to gain a broader electorate undermine the churches' own theological commitments, the very ones that led them to press for policy change in the first place. Rather than asking why churches ally with particular parties, perhaps we should ask why churches ally with parties at all.

Explaining Church Influence

We thus face a set of interlocking puzzles: (a) the differences in the influence of organized religion on politics, (b) the peculiar ability of religious

¹⁰ See Ekelund et al. 1996.

¹¹ Castles 1994; Gill 1998; Warner 2000; Htun 2003.

efforts to overcome widespread popular opposition, and (c) the mechanisms of this influence in the face of formal strictures and firewalls.

To answer these questions, this book argues that the most influential churches do not rely on pressure at the ballot box or on partisan coalitions. Instead, these churches gain direct *institutional access*, essentially sharing sovereignty with secular governments. Such access comprises helping to write constitutions and everyday legislation, having direct input into policy making and policy enforcement, vetting secular state officials, and even running entire swaths of government—typically welfare institutions such as hospitals, schools, reformatory institutions, and so on. The channels of institutional access may vary considerably. Besides actively participating in policy discussions and formulating legislative bills (special episcopal commissions, for example, formulated both the abortion law in Poland and school policy in Ireland), church officials have influenced personnel and organizational decisions within ministries (as was the case in Poland and Ireland) and taken part in national negotiations during regime transitions (as was the case in Poland and Lithuania). Institutional access gives churches tremendous political power, while obviating the need to appease an intermediary, whether a partisan ally or their own congregation.

If institutional access is valuable, it is also hard to come by. Not only do substantial legal and institutional impediments block church involvement in state affairs, but secular governments are also loath to share sovereignty, and few politicians willingly give away authority. Still, some churches *do* gain such access. How are they able to do so, and what separates them from the churches that do not?

The roots of present power are buried in the past, and to explain a church's contemporary policy influence, we must look to the historical role of that church in society. Conflicts between the "nation" and its secular opponents gave some churches the opportunity to act as defenders of national identity and cohesion. Where the church shielded the nation, patriotism became inseparable from religious loyalty. In the course of these fierce struggles (and even bloody battles) national and religious identities thus melded, forging a powerful form of religious nationalism.

In turn, the more nation and religion fused as a popular identity, the more churches gained *moral authority* in politics: the identification of the church with national interest, rather than with interests that are purely theological. Fusion is a societal identity; moral authority is a political resource. All churches wield authority over religious matters and morality—where religious and national identity are fused, such churches also gain a particular, *political*, moral authority: a voice in policy debates and a reputation as defenders of broad societal interests, above secular partisanship and petty politicking. Churches with such high moral authority are seen as impartial, trusted, and credible representatives of the *nation*, allowing them to mobilize society beyond purely religious observance and pro-

nouncements. This trust placed in a church does not equate demand for church influence on politics, but it indicates widespread identification of the church with the common good. For example, several Polish bishops acted as both mediators and national representatives during the Round Table negotiations in 1989, and their participation was widely accepted (and sought) by the communist party and by its democratic opposition.

Where, then, do we find the historical origins of this religious nationalism and subsequent moral authority? Churches responded to past national conflicts very differently: the Roman Catholic Church protected national identity and anti-communist dissidents alike in twentieth-century Poland, even as it had opposed national aspirations and democracy in nineteenth-century Italy. As a result, some churches have become far more closely identified with the nation than others. On the one end of the spectrum we have Poland or Ireland, where national identity and religious denomination fused as the Catholic Church sided with the nation against foreign-imposed regimes, whether communist (in Poland) or colonial (in Ireland). On the other end we find countries such as the Czech Republic or France, where national identity consists partly of *rejection* of a religion, as a result of the church siding with a discredited ancien régime, whether the Habsburg Empire or an absolutist monarchy. The United States lies closer to the “fused” end of the spectrum, but with a caveat. On the one hand, American national rhetoric is suffused with religion, such as the “Judeo-Christian ethic”—the postwar articulation of a generally held (if shifting) consensus that to be American is to be religious. The majority of Americans see atheism as foreign, and welcome religion as a source of moral values important in public policy and as a critical personal characteristic of their political representatives (a candidate’s atheism would make over 60% of Americans less likely to vote for him or her).¹² On the other hand, American religious diversity means that no one religion can claim credibly to speak for the nation—or present a coherent set of policy demands. Influence on policy then necessitates the formation of alliances among denominations, vulnerable to internal theological differences and subject to the vagaries of political coalitions.

These different levels of fusion then foster corresponding levels of moral authority, which gives churches indirect and direct influence over policy. First, the more religious and national identities fuse, and the greater churches’ moral authority, the more *all* politicians are wary of offending organized religion. Given their standing as trusted guardians of the national interest, churches can portray opposition as anti-patriotic. As a result, few politicians dare to criticize the church for fear of condemnation from the pulpit and backlash at the ballot box. Anxiously anticipating the churches’ reaction, many politicians will formulate policy with

¹²Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008.

church preferences in mind, even without any active politicking by the churches themselves. For their part, churches try to frame policy domains they consider important as moral issues—not merely as matters of doctrinal significance, but as crucial underpinnings of national moral character. When religious and national identities are fused, such framing resonates with the public—and even more so with anxious politicians.¹³ As a result, once the churches frame issues as moral imperatives, they can indirectly influence policy outcomes—regardless of which political party or secular politician is in power.

At lower levels of moral authority, there are fewer costs to offending religious sensibilities. The looser the alignment between nation and religion, the harder it is for churches to frame policy as a moral or religious issue, and the less likely it is that any attempts at such framing will resonate with the broader public. Churches are unable to rely upon the anticipatory anxiety of politicians, and politicians have greater freedom to pursue anti-clerical constituencies and agendas, without the fear of being painted by the church as enemies of national identity, and incurring the resultant electoral backlash. When moral authority is low, indirect influence is both unlikely and unreliable.¹⁴

Churches can also *directly* invest their moral authority, for instance by explicitly endorsing a particular political candidate or party. Here, they have to be careful; moral authority rests on the notion that churches represent *national* interests and identity, and churches are at their most influential when they appear above partisanship and petty politics. Electioneering and coalitions with political parties are explicitly (and publicly) partisan affairs, undermining that authority and soiling the churches' reputations. Churches may still obtain policy concessions by campaigning for parties, but because these alliances are explicitly partisan, churches pay a higher price in moral authority, and their influence then rests on the allied party's status. Such reliance on specific parties or politicians is thus costly. It is also risky: churches may campaign on behalf of parties that go on to lose elections.

Churches can instead obtain institutional access to policy making if their moral authority is great enough, and the political situation grave enough. Such access takes a variety of forms: joint commissions, vetting

¹³ Most research on framing effects focuses on the effects on the public (see Chong and Druckman 2007), but they also apply to uncertain politicians facing powerful societal actors, especially in new, volatile, or unstable democracies.

¹⁴ Where national and religious identities oppose each other, as in the Czech Republic, politicians have little to fear from offending a weak church and pursue their own policy preferences, knowing that offending religious authorities carries few costs. Churches become marginal political players and either do not get involved in politics or fail to attract coalition partners.

of bureaucrats and ministers, policy and legislative consultations, and sharing control over state sectors. This access is usually non-partisan (for example, taking over education), and/or covert (for example, government consultations with church officials). What church influence cannot be, if moral authority is to be preserved, is both partisan (or self-interested) *and* overt.

As a result, institutional access is more palatable to the public, either because it appears to be concerned with national rather than partisan priorities or because most people are unaware of it altogether. Churches retain their reputation as unbiased moral arbiters—and preserve their moral authority, a resource they can then use in the future. In exchange, churches keep societal peace. They defuse potentially explosive political situations, keeping the incumbents in power not by endorsing their politics, but by advocating social quiescence in the name of national stability. Because it is non-partisan, institutional access is also less susceptible to shifting fortunes of political parties. Churches can thus exact not only short-term concessions but also long-term influence over institutions and joint policy making.

It is easy to see why institutional access is so attractive to churches. For their part, all else being equal, secular politicians would prefer coalitions, since sharing sovereignty via institutional access grants the churches not only specific policy concessions but also the authority and ability to gain others. Institutional access tends to multiply in a process familiar to anyone who has seen a bureaucracy burgeon and spill over into policy areas. But for the politicians who grant it, institutional access is often seen as the only way to ensure their survival. It is not a key to securing greater power, but to holding on to power at all.

The case of Poland illustrates how churches can gain access to secular institutions. Under late communism and during the regime transition in Poland, *both* the communist regime and the democratic opposition saw the Roman Catholic Church's moral authority in its role as a national representative as critical to maintaining social stability. The church exploited first the desperation of a threatened communist regime and later the instability of a fledgling democracy to take advantage of a joint state-church parliamentary commission, to formulate policy proposals, to veto government officials, and to subsequently obtain significant policy concessions. Much of this direct (and critical) access was covert; neither the church nor governments called attention to it. The gravest threat of destabilizing social conflict came immediately after the regime transition in 1989, precisely the moment when entire swaths of policies were being reevaluated and reformulated. If they were to preserve the new democratic order, vulnerable politicians felt they had no choice but to accede to church demands—even when the church prioritized its interpretation of natural

law over the principles of democratic rule.¹⁵ The fusion of national and religious identities empowered churches not just as moral authorities but also as guarantors of social peace. Church officials could urge patience or nonviolence on moral grounds, and in the interest of preserving national stability. Sharing sovereignty was a small price for the secular actors to pay.

In short, the fusion of national and religious identities on the societal level is a form of religious nationalism that gives rise to and fortifies a church's moral authority—and when that authority is great enough, it becomes a potent political resource that can be parlayed into institutional access, or shared control of the state. Churches with lower moral authority do not have that option and either rely on coalitions or have no influence at all. Figure 1.2 summarizes the relationship between fusion, moral authority, and institutional access.

Once we shift our focus away from popular religiosity to church moral authority, we resolve the puzzle of influence without popular demand. Religiosity, and the fusion of religious and national identities, is necessary for churches to exercise policy influence; popular demand for such influence is not, given mechanisms of influence—like institutional access—that bypass popular involvement entirely. Depending upon the historical roots of national identities, and the role of a church in shaping these identities, the same church can either exercise massive influence on policy or fail to obtain any footholds. We can now also explain differences in political influence among churches as reflecting the differences in the levels of their moral authority and thus the channels of influence available to them.

Focusing on moral authority also explains changes over time, as moral authority is brittle, and can erode. It is a valuable political asset for churches, but one that must be carefully tended and invested. To sustain their moral authority, churches must act as national representatives and as moral agents, in non-partisan and principled ways, respectively. Anything that smacks of partisan politics, church self-interest, or representing narrow interests belies churches' claim to act as *national* representatives. Similarly, defying moral standards set for the faithful through criminal, unethical, or impious behavior has the same effect, undermining the claim of *moral* authority. If churches fail to live up to these standards (which they themselves set out), they lose their moral authority.

This is not to suggest that moral authority is all powerful; even in countries where national and religious identities are strongly fused, individual behavior is frequently at odds with church teaching, and private individual preferences may be still more so. Both Irish and Polish commentators have noted their compatriots' ability to believe one thing and

¹⁵ Gowin 1995.

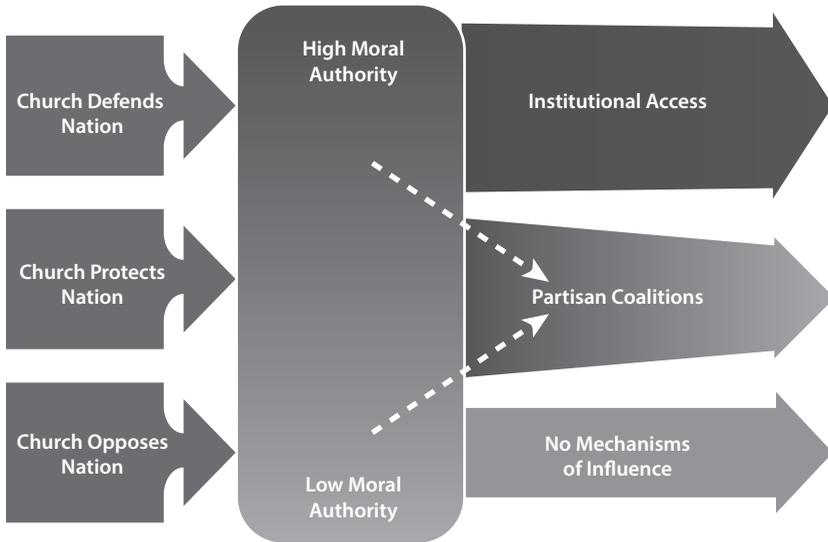


Figure 1.2. Summary of the Argument

Churches that defended the nation against a hostile regime or colonial aggression gain high moral authority. Churches that protected or aided national identity, without necessarily defending it against an alien aggressor, can also gain moral authority. Finally, churches that opposed the nation gain low moral authority. These levels of moral authority then translate into strategies of policy influence: churches with high moral authority gain institutional access, but can also enter partisan coalitions, as indicated by the white dotted lines. Churches that opposed the nation cannot gain institutional access, and generally have low influence: but they, too, can enter partisan coalitions under specific circumstances, indicated by the white dotted lines.

Note that partisan coalitions are an option for churches at most levels of moral authority, depending on how badly the secular political actors need church support and how durable the church's moral authority is.

do another, honed by decades, if not centuries, of living with the strictures of the Catholic Church. What fusion does is to make religion powerful *politically*, in spite of individual disapproval or inconsistent behavior, by reinforcing churches' reputation as national representatives.

Examining Influence in Practice: Countries and Cases

To answer how churches in some countries are able to influence policy, I compare countries that are as similar as possible, eliminate some important confounding factors, and carefully trace the causal processes. First,

TABLE 1.3.
RELIGIOUS PROFILES

	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Croatia	USA	Canada
Belief: % believing in God.	96%	94%	97%	93%	96%	90%
Belonging: % belonging to a religious denomination.	91%	82%	95%	88%	79%	69%
Attendance: % attending services more than once a month	70%–50% ¹	54%	75%	53%	49%	36%
Pluralism: % Catholic	93%	88%	96%	91%	24%	43%

Data on popular attitudes, beliefs, and participation come from the most recent available World Values Surveys, Ireland (1999), Italy (2005), Canada (2006), United States (2005), Poland (2005), Croatia (1999). The CIA Factbook is the source for prevalence of Catholicism.

¹ *The first figure is for the 1990s; the latter for 2010. Church attendance has dropped significantly in the late 1990s.*

three paired comparisons help to unlock the puzzles of religious influence on politics: Ireland and Italy, Poland and Croatia, and the United States and Canada. Second, a formal model demonstrates the logic of church influence on politics, and the conditions under which we see various mechanisms of influence. Third, regression analyses show how countries beyond the six examined in depth demonstrate similar correlations between national identity and church influence. The model and the regressions help to translate the argument about the importance of fusion and moral authority into the language of logic and statistics, and are fully discussed in the Appendix. While references to their results appear throughout, the argument relies chiefly on the paired comparisons, and it is the discussion of these comparisons that makes up the majority of the book.

The paired countries are similar in their rates of religious belonging, belief, attendance, and diversity (as seen in Table 1.3). Importantly, all countries analyzed are ones where church and state have been historically separated, and where churches compete with other groups for policy influence. The argument presented here was not intended to apply to theocracies, or to cases where the formation of the nation-state never allowed for a distinction between religion and politics.

Despite their similarities, these countries vary considerably in the influence that religious authorities have had over policy debates and their

eventual outcomes. Each paired study seeks to examine why and how religious and secular actors chose and carried out their particular strategies given the available options, and each of these pairings illustrates a facet of the complex relationships between national-religious fusion, church moral authority, and the channels of policy influence. Chapter 3 presents the starkest comparison: Ireland and Italy. In these established and similarly very Catholic democracies, the role the Catholic Church played in the creation of the nation-state differed dramatically—the Irish church defended the nation in the face of colonial rule, while the Italian one objected to the very founding of Italy. As a result, the Irish and Italian churches had different levels of moral authority and became archetypes of influence via institutional access and influence via partisan coalition, respectively. Poland and Croatia, in contrast, both developed high levels of fusion and moral authority under the communist system, an autocratic regime hostile to religion. Once communism fell, however, these Roman Catholic churches invested their moral authority very differently, and wound up poles apart. The Polish church emerged triumphant and more powerful than ever, while the Croatian church was dragged into a costly and unreliable partisan coalition. This pairing, examined in Chapter 4, further emphasizes the importance of careful stewardship of moral authority on the part of churches and shows how both moral authority, and institutional access itself, can be acquired under autocracy. The final paired comparison, of the United States and Canada, demonstrates how fusion develops (or fails to develop) in religiously diverse societies. Religious pluralism can foster a particular type of diffuse fusion—of nation to religion per se, rather than to any one denomination. In the United States, abstract myths of the religious character of the nation took the place of a particular church in fusing nation to a broad religious sensibility—while in Canada, no such myth took root (with one critical provincial exception). As Chapter 5 argues, the United States can be described as a case of fusion without denominational monopoly, while Canada is a religious oligopoly without fusion (similar to Germany, where two robust religious traditions have precluded an easy identification of nation with a single religion).

Thus these are not randomly chosen cases,¹⁶ but rather ones that maximize the variation within the analytical and geographic boundaries of Western Christianity. These pairings are matched by religiosity, regime type, and economic development, meaning that we cannot simply attribute differences in policy influence or degree of fusion to these factors in these cases. As Table 1.4 shows, relevant aspects of societal and political context are also unlikely to explain the variation. Ethnic diversity is

¹⁶ Fearon and Laitin 2008; Freedman 2008.

TABLE 1.4.
THE SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

	Ireland	Italy	Poland	Croatia	USA	Canada
Ethnic fractionalization ¹	0.12	0.11	0.12	0.19 ²	0.69	0.67
Religious fractionalization ³	0.16	0.30	0.17	0.21 ⁴	0.82	0.70
Church-state regime ⁵	Formal separation, informal privilege	Partial establishment: Lateran Pacts	Formal separation, informal privilege	Formal separation, informal privilege	Formal separation	Formal separation ⁶
Separation of church and state ⁷	4	4	4	4	1	2
State funding of churches ⁸	“The state guarantees not to endow any religion” (Art 44, Sec 2), but religious schools publicly funded	0.8% of income tax designated for supporting churches, religious teachers paid by state, exemption from property taxes	Church Fund ⁹ until 2014; then 0.5% of income tax to support churches, religious teachers paid by state	Some clerical salaries, pensions and health care. Religious teachers paid by state.	“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”	Clergy receive tax reductions and minor privileges. Six of ten provinces fund religious schools and pay teachers’ salaries.
Federal/unitary	Unitary	Unitary	Unitary	Unitary	Federal	Federal

National referenda	To amend constitution (and to pass bills, but these have not been held.)	To abrogate a law, or to amend constitution	On important matters touching all citizens. Three held after 1989: two in 1996 regarding privatization and government funding and in 1997, the constitution.	On issues within the purview of parliament, or on issues the President considers important for independence, unity, and existence of Republic. Three held: independence in 1991, EU accession in 2013, and gay marriage in 2013. ¹⁰	¾ of states ratify national constitutional amendments. In 25 states, bills can be repealed by referendum, 17 states allow citizen initiated constitutional amendments	Rarely used, three held so far: prohibition (1898), conscription (1942), division of powers (1992)
Political Institutions	PR-STV/Parliament	PR-SMD/Parliament	PR/Parliament	PR/Parliament	SMD/Presidential	SMD/Parliament

1. *Alesina et al. 2002 and Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005. Fractionalization indices measure the probability that two randomly selected individuals do not belong to the same group. Higher numbers are interpreted as indicating more diverse societies.*
2. *Measured in 2003–7, down from 0.37 in 1991, when the Wars of Yugoslav Succession broke out. Nauro Campos, Ahmad Saleh, and Vitaliy Kuzeyev, “Dynamic Ethnic Fractionalization and Economic Growth,” mimeo, October 2009.*
3. *Alesina et al 2002, Campos, Saleh, and Kuzeyev 2009.*
4. *Measured in 2003–7, down from 0.445 in 1991. See Campos, Saleh, and Kuzeyev 2009.*
5. *Minkenber 2003; Kabl 2010.*
6. *More precisely, state non-interference in religion. The Queen of England is Head of State and Head of Church of England and Defender of Faith in Canada. but Jonathan Fox and the RAS project classify Canada and the United States as having full separation of church and state. Fox 2008.*
7. *Fox 2008, 48, 114, chap. 6; Minkenber 2003. Lower values indicate greater separation.*
8. *US Department of State, 2012. “International Religious Freedom Report for 2012,” available at <http://www.state.gov/jdrl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#unappet>.*
9. *The Church Fund was established in 1950 by the communist government to compensate the church for the confiscation of church land holdings. It paid for priests’ pensions, to maintain church buildings, and so on.*
10. *A 50% quorum requirement was dropped in 2012.*

similar across the paired comparisons; religious diversity differs, but if proponents of the argument that religious competition makes for stronger, more active churches are right, we should see *more* religious influence in Italy and Croatia than in Ireland and Poland, respectively, while in fact we see quite the opposite. State funding of churches, and broader church-state relations¹⁷ are likewise not responsible for religious influence on politics in these cases; while Catholicism was not formally disestablished as the state church in Italy until 1984, and remains partially established, with special privileges accruing to both clergy and the institution, formal separation between church and state prevails elsewhere. Further, as we will see, the churches themselves have influenced the writing of constitutions and other legal aspects of the church-state relationship, making it difficult to argue that these aspects are the *source* of that influence. The formal legal codification of the church-state relationship is often at odds with reality. In the United States, the strict separation of church and state should make it especially difficult for religious groups to influence policy, and yet the level of religious political influence in the United States is quite high. And while it would be convenient to pin differences in access to channels of policy influence on different forms of governance, proportional representation and parliamentary regimes are found in countries with high and with low levels of religious influence on politics.

These specific pairings also minimize the possibility that a set of previously existing conditions could be responsible for *both* national-religious fusion/subsequent church moral authority *and* religious influence upon policy outcomes. As noted earlier, these pairings make it plain that neither piety nor denominational affiliation explains differences in the level of church influence. The European cases all underwent conversion to Christianity over a thousand years ago, meaning that the denominational framework was in place prior to differences in belief and participation and the foundation of national myths. “Europe” and “Christianity” are not proxies for the role of the churches in shaping policy; the paired countries share these characteristics, so something else must thus be responsible for the (very different) channels and outcomes of church involvement in politics. At the same time, comparison of post-communist and established democracies reveals how differences in regime and historical context affect the opportunities for church influence; for example, the Roman Catholic Church’s role in the newly independent Ireland of the early 1920s—before the Vatican II reforms spelled out greater ecumenism and respect for secular institutions—differed greatly from its role in Poland in the aftermath of the communist collapse in 1989.

Furthermore, while the Roman Catholic Church is an important policy actor in these cases, it alone is not responsible for religious influence on pol-

¹⁷Kahl 2014; Minkenberg 2003 and 2013.

icy. It is true that until the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church viewed natural law as taking priority over secular law, and actively entered the political arena—supporting certain monarchs and states, fomenting religious wars, and so on—while many Protestant churches deliberately isolated themselves from politics on doctrinal grounds.¹⁸ Yet as American history shows, Protestant churches can also be active political players. Moreover, we find divergent levels of influence among primarily Catholic countries, from Poland, to Italy, to France. These Catholic churches share a formally identical doctrine and a centralized organizational hierarchy that culminates in the Vatican—and the Pope. Nonetheless, the same political actor, the Roman Catholic Church, has had very different levels of impact, both across countries and across policy areas.¹⁹ These policy domains—education, divorce, abortion, stem cell research, and same-sex marriage—are elaborated further in the next chapter. They illustrate how church tactics have varied over time and from place to place—and how church influence on politics is not simply a result of popular piety or religious doctrine, but of a conscious exercise of formidable power.

Implications

This story of fusion, moral authority, and how they open the doors to corridors of secular power recasts several prevailing understandings of religion and politics.

First, scholars have focused on partisan coalitions as the key vehicle for translating church preferences into policy. Yet as we will see, such

¹⁸The Protestant Reformation did not have the same effect everywhere, and even where it did, no clear consequences followed for policy influence. The Reformation had little impact in Italy, Spain, Poland, and Ireland, yet their subsequent levels of the influence of religion on politics vary.

¹⁹In all the cases examined, the Catholic churches share theological commitments, many initially developed in the nineteenth century, that support traditional morality: an opposition to abortion or to stem cell research as ending life, a concern with the content of education, an opposition to divorce and to same-sex marriage as negating the true meaning of family (and its role as a basic unit of society). The vehemence with which the church pursued these commitments varies across the countries to some degree, but the biggest changes occurred over time. In the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church simply assumed that natural law trumped civil legislation, and further assumed that it would be the ultimate authority on morality: “the churches could not conceive that civil law could differ from moral law, still less contradict it. They considered themselves guardians of moral law; it was up to legislators to build it into the rule of law which was imposed on everyone” (Rémond 1999, 71). The church has softened this position, especially after the reforms of Vatican II in the 1960s, in that it fully recognizes secular authority and repeatedly asserts that its goal is not the establishment of religion. Nonetheless, in all the cases discussed here, the church not only shares a set of moral preferences but also a willingness to defend them, passionately and vociferously.

alliances are often ineffective and costly. Better options exist for some churches, and those that are able to avail themselves of institutional access are more influential, and for far longer. This quiet access to the state is not the churches' goal alone; business interests, trade unions, and other organizations have all sought it.²⁰ But in contrast to these interest groups and lobbies, churches gain access and shape policy against the wishes of their own adherents.

Second, an exciting body of research in economics, political science, and sociology has given us new insights into the role of religious competition in creating vibrant religious landscapes. This literature on the "political economy of religion"²¹ argues that religious competition unfettered by state regulation, such as the one found in the United States, is the source of religious vigor and religious influence, and religious monopolies are inherently weak—the etiolated creations of state subsidies and fiats.²² Yet the fusion of national and religious identities can support vibrant religious marketplaces and also sustain powerful religious monopolies, often in the face of state *opposition*.

We thus need a richer account of how nations, states, and religions interact. For example, political economy accounts view the state as a regulator of religious markets that privileges certain religions over others. "State regulation" is inevitably measured as the state support *for* a given church, but not as the *active repression* of denominations. Yet state repression can make national martyrs out of religious bodies—and subsequently powerful political actors. More fundamentally, we simply should not take for granted the "nation-state" as a coherent entity; the political entity may oppose the national aspirations of the people, as communist states were accused of doing.²³ Religion can then protect the nation, defend national interests against a hostile state—and provide resonance to subsequent political claims by religious authorities.

Finally, an august scholarship has mined the histories of nations, and analyzed forces, ranging from the homogenizing effects of "high culture," to notions of "invented tradition" and "ethno-symbolism" that help to create powerful and durable "idioms of nationhood."²⁴ Yet with a few notable exceptions,²⁵ this tradition has tended to neglect religion as a source and cement of national identities. This book partly remedies this oversight by focusing on one particular aspect of national identity—the

²⁰ Culpepper 2011; Hacker and Pierson 2010.

²¹ Stark and Finke 2000; Gill 1998; Gill 2001; Clark 2010.

²² Yet, as Olson 2002 points out, it is not clear what level of competition would engender pluralism and vibrancy.

²³ Grzymala-Busse and Jones Luong 2003.

²⁴ Breuilly 1982; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1998; Brubaker 1992 and 2004.

²⁵ Hastings 1997; Smith 2003; Juergensmeyer 2008.

fusion of religion and nation—and how religious nationalism gives the churches such a powerful hand in shaping policy. If scholars of religion have focused on the *social* aspects of religiosity, its diversity, and its ebbs and flows, this book instead examines the *political* manifestations of religion. It explains how churches obtain moral authority and how they can continue to influence politics and retain adherents despite unpopular policies. The key to answering these questions lies in the fusion of national and religious identities and the moral authority it grants the churches.