

Abstract

Rationale: The issue of the relationship between church and state has played a central role in several political theories and models for millennia. Institutions and narratives of the churches are key elements in the process of transforming religious views to actual political preferences. **Objectives:** The aim of this research project is to help understand the role that churches play in contemporary democracies by exploring the causes of church elites' decisions on political goals to be pursued and strategies used to achieve these goals. **Methods:** I focus on the different patterns of political participation among the national branches of the Roman Catholic Church. The central question of this research project follows from the puzzling divergence, asking: what factors cause the differences in the political strategies of the contemporary national Roman Catholic churches. I will use in-depth case studies to trace the trajectories that the churches move on and to uncover intra-church processes of strategy formation. I will use medium-N qualitative comparative analysis to supplement the case studies and generalize their results. **Expected results:** (1) The more the Church prefers involving the resources of the state while pursuing its objectives, the more it wants to participate in party politics. (2) The more important the cultural ideas are vis-à-vis the social dimension for the Church, the more it will orient towards rightist political forces. (3) The intra-church dispersion of power has decisive effect on the political participation of the church.