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Original scientific paper  
<https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1702299a>  
Date received: January 16, 2023  
Date accepted: June 27, 2023

## ARE CATHOLICS UNIQUELY CROSS-PRESSURED? POLICY BELIEFS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR BY RELIGIOUS TRADITION IN RECENT U.S. ELECTIONS

### Abstract

The Catholic Church's pro-life, pro-social justice policy agenda takes the sides of both major US political parties. This potentially cross-pressures Catholic voters' choice between those parties, but could alternatively legitimate a Catholic voter's personal partisan preference. This paper examines whether Catholic voters who share the Church's core policy positions are more or less likely than comparably cross-pressured non-Catholic voters to exhibit political behaviors associated with cross-pressures: avoiding identification with a major party, avoiding voting or a major-party vote choice, defecting from one's party in voting, and selectively misperceiving candidate issue positions. Analyzing data from the 2016-2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies and the 1992-2016 American National Election Studies, I find little evidence that Catholics are uniquely, strongly cross-pressured. If anything, cross-pressured (and other) Catholics are more likely than comparable non-Catholics—even those in faith traditions that are more clearly aligned with a single party—to embrace partisan politics. In some cases, partisan differences between Catholics in their responsiveness to cross-pressures exceed differences between Catholics and non-Catholics.

**Keywords:** Catholics, religion, partisanship, cross-pressure, opinion, voting

### Introduction

Though the Catholic Church is institutionally unique, scholars repeatedly conclude that the political behavior of its faithful in the United States is not. U.S. Catholic church leaders advocate a public policy agenda that cuts across the country's increasingly polarized two-party divide. It unites the global Church's moral traditionalism and commitment to protecting the "sanctity of human life" against abortion and other threats—positions closer to U.S. Republicans—with Democrat-friendly calls for defending human dignity against social injustice, including poverty, environ-

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mental degradation and hostility to welcoming immigrant “strangers.” U.S. Catholic voters and public officials, however, generally divide along party lines and largely, and increasingly, their views reflect their parties’ platforms.<sup>2</sup>

This division was exemplified by the roles of Catholic public officials surrounding the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, which, in withdrawing the constitutional right to abortion established in 1973’s *Roe v. Wade* decision, achieved what might have been the foremost policy goal of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy and the mass movement they helped to initiate. The Court’s majority opinion was written by a Republican-appointed Catholic, Samuel Alito, and joined in full or in part by five other Republican-appointed Catholic or formerly Catholic justices<sup>3</sup> whose antigovernment leanings on economic issues might in other cases disappoint Church leaders.<sup>4</sup> The dissenting opinion, which among other things bemoaned the poverty and inequality that it claimed women would face without a right to abortion, was penned by a Democrat-appointed Catholic justice, Sonia Sotomayor, whose distress about the Court’s action was quickly amplified by the sitting Catholic president and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Democrats Joseph R. Biden and Nancy Pelosi.

Recent research, however, identifies a segment of U.S. Catholics – many of them among the Church’s most devout – who share their Church’s cross-cutting pro-life, pro-social justice views. The authors call them “Seamless Garment Catholics,” borrowing a term used prominently by the late U.S. Catholic Cardinal Joseph Bernardin to convey his view of the wholeness of the Church’s policy agenda. The United States’ lack of a party or prominent national candidates that promote these views makes it impossible to observe the extent to which Seamless Garment Catholics vote in accord with Church guidance. But these Catholics may be indicating a desire to follow that guidance in their exhibition of signs of the psychological conflict in political decision-making typically attributed to “cross-pressured” voters.<sup>5</sup> If there is any distinctively “Catholic” political behavior – or if Church teaching wields meaningful influence over the political choices of its laity – it is most likely to be observed among “Seamless Garment” Catholics.

However, the identification of a distinctively Catholic political behavior requires comparison to similar citizens who are not Catholics, and this paper offers that comparison. It examines the seemingly unique kind of cross-pressure that Catholicism presents to those who closely adhere to the Church’s social guidance and assesses whether it elicits a stronger or weaker political response than the cross-pressures traditionally studied by political scientists. These traditional cross-pressures are

<sup>2</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 42, No. 51, 2021, pp. 195-240.

<sup>3</sup> For the religious affiliations of the 9 U.S. Supreme Court justices, see: “The Religion of the Supreme Court Justices”, available at: <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/391649/religion-supreme-court-justices.aspx> (accessed March 21, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, New York, 2022, p. 418.

<sup>5</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . .

derived from clashes of multiple identities, issue attitudes and/or interpersonal influences that come from different sources. As argued below, there are theoretical reasons to suspect that the Catholic Church's influence will be weightier and thus produce a stronger political response, though there are also compelling reasons to expect that it will be weaker.

Two different sets of analyses are conducted, mostly employing data from the 2016-2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies. The first compares cross-pressured Catholics to non-Catholics who are cross-pressured by the same pro-life, pro-social justice policy beliefs advocated by the Catholic Church. The second examines instances in which there is a conflict between religion and party that involves an issue attitude of special prevalence or concern within one's particular faith tradition, and then compares the extent to which these different cross-pressured Americans exhibit some political behaviors that the literature has posited as responses to cross-pressures. The behaviors examined include declining to identify with a party, declining to vote or to vote for a major party candidate, voting against the candidate of one's party, and selectively misperceiving an issue position of the chosen candidate.<sup>6</sup>

The resultant findings fairly consistently indicate that Catholic cross-pressures do not elicit a stronger political response than others, suggesting even that they may weigh less heavily on Catholic voters' minds. In fact, if there is anything unique about how Catholicism cross-pressures its adherents, it may be in the way that the Catholic Church's take-both-sides approach appears to *reduce* dissonance from voting for candidates who oppose Church teaching. Even then, the data reveal that pro-welfare Catholic Republicans appear to be more strongly affected by cross-pressures than pro-life Catholic Democrats.

### **Catholic Cross-pressures in Comparative Religious Perspective: Evidence and Expectations**

No other major U.S. religious tradition – whether mainline, white evangelical or black Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, or Mormonism – simultaneously supports strict bans on abortion and an expansive welfare state, much less the number and diversity of issues on which the Catholic Church takes clear stands and for which it lobbies. While other major religious denominational lobbies in the United States tend to work predominantly with a single party, lobbyists representing the Catholic Church work with and enjoy the respect of both Democratic and Republican officials.<sup>7</sup> And, as candidates, Democrats and Republicans alike aggressively seek Catholics' votes.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This list does not exhaust the list of tendencies scholars have attributed to cross-pressured voters. Data availability and correspondence with behaviors that have recently received attention from other scholars influenced selection of behaviors to examine.

<sup>7</sup> David A. Yamane, *The Catholic Church in state politics: Negotiating prophetic demands and political realities*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2005; See also: Paul A. Djupe, Laura R. Olson, & Christopher P. Gilbert, Sources of Clergy Support for Denominational Lobbying in Washington, *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 2005, pp. 86-99.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy A. Byrnes, The Politics of the American Catholic Hierarchy, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 108, No. 3, 1993, pp. 497-514; Marie Gayte, "The US Catholic Bishops: From Separationism to Public Intervention", in: *Catholics and US Politics after the 2016 Elections: Understanding the "Swing Vote"*, Marie Gayte, Blandine Chelini-Point, and Mark J. Rozell. (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018, pp.

In theory, the Catholic Church's combination of support for, and opposition to, core elements from each major party's platform leaves faithful Catholics "cross-pressured" in their voting-decisions.<sup>9</sup> "Cross-pressured" voters have politically relevant attitudes or identities that pull them in opposite partisan directions, presumably inducing psychological conflict in their vote choice.<sup>10</sup> This conflict includes anticipation of the psychological state known as "cognitive dissonance," an awareness of inconsistency among a set of behaviors, beliefs, or perceptions that psychologists say humans work hard to avoid.<sup>11</sup> Research on cross-pressured voters supports, with some exceptions,<sup>12</sup> several claims about their behavior relative to other voters, including that they are less likely to vote and less politically engaged overall,<sup>13</sup> more easily persuaded to vote for candidates of a different party than their own,<sup>14</sup> more even in how they split their votes between parties,<sup>15</sup> and more prone to inaccurately project their personal policy position onto a preferred candidate.<sup>16</sup>

In the aggregate, Catholics look cross-pressured and persuadable. Members of most major religious traditions tend to cluster their presidential votes clearly on one side – Jews, Muslims, Black Protestants and people of no religious preference with the Democrats and white evangelical Protestants and Mormons with the Republicans – while Catholics join white mainline Protestants near a more competitive middle.<sup>17</sup> Similar patterns have been observed among the religious affiliations of members of Congress.<sup>18</sup>

This apparent centrism merely averages a politically, racially and ethnically di-

85-103; Jo Renee Formicola, Catholic Moral Demands in American Politics: A New Paradigm, *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2009, pp. 4-23.

<sup>9</sup> E. J. Dionne Jr., "There is No Catholic Vote - And It's Important", in: *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, Margaret O'Brian Steinfelds (ed.), Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2004, pp. 251-260; Donald L. Davison Michael A. Krassa, The Myth of the Catholic Vote: The Influence of Ideology and Theology on Catholics in Presidential Elections, 1972-2008, *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 39, 2011, pp. 1-21.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard R. Berelson, Paul E. Lazarsfeld & William N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, University of Chicago, Chicago, Midway Reprint ed., 1954; D. Sunshine Hillugus & Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1957; Leon Festinger, *Conflict, Decision, and Dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1964; Jon A. Krosnick, "Is Political Psychology Sufficiently Psychological? Distinguishing Political Psychology from Psychological Political Science", in: *Thinking about Political Psychology*, James H. Kuklinski (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 187-216.

<sup>12</sup> For a review, see Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . .

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Ted Brader, Joshua A. Tucker, & Andrew Theriault, Cross Pressure Scores: An Individual-Level Measure of Cumulative Partisan Pressures Arising from Social Group Memberships, *Political Behavior* Vol. 36, 2014, pp. 23-51.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., D. Sunshine Hillugus & Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. . .

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Mulligan, Partisan Ambivalence, Split-Ticket Voting, and Divided Government, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2011, pp. 505-530.

<sup>16</sup> Craig Leonard Briens & Steven Greene, Elections: Voter Support and Partisans' (Mis)Perceptions of Presidential Candidates' Abortion Views in 2000, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2004, pp. 412-419; Jeffrey A. Gottfried, "Cross-Pressured Partisans and Cognitive Dissonance in Low-Information Elections: An Experimental Study", Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2-5, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth D Wald. & Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, Rowman & Littlefield, Seventh edition, Lanham, 2014; David E. Campbell, James R. Kirk, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Religion and the 2020 Presidential Election: The Enduring Divide, *The Forum*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2021, pp. 581-605.

<sup>18</sup> James L. Guth, "Religion and Roll Calls: Religious Influences on the U.S. House of Representatives, 1997-2002", Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, 2007; John McTague & Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Voting from the Pew: The Effect of Senators' Religious Identities on Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Senate, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3, 2013, pp. 405-430.

verse Catholic laity. In addition to documenting that diversity,<sup>19</sup> the literature on U.S. Catholic political behavior concludes that trends in, and shapers of, Catholics' political behavior resemble those of non-Catholics' political behavior,<sup>20</sup> including the outsized role party identification plays<sup>21</sup>—even in driving *religious* behavior.<sup>22</sup> Catholics at best appear only modestly more likely than non-Catholics to hold combinations of policy views that correspond with the Church's partisan-incongruent "consistent ethic of life," and often only then when considering the most devout Catholics.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, U.S. Catholics who do share their Church's opposition to abortion and its predominantly liberal views on social justice issues like social welfare, immigration, and environmental protection look and behave very much like cross-pressured voters.<sup>24</sup> They are more likely than other Catholics to avoid making a decision between Democratic and Republican presidential candidates, either by voting for a different, nonviable candidate or by not voting at all. Their presidential votes, despite leaning Democratic, lean less overwhelmingly to one partisan side than do the votes of Catholics whose policy issue attitudes are more consistent with the Democratic or Republican parties. The most highly devout among them who did make a partisan choice appeared to make that choice in line with their prioritization of social justice issues relative to abortion. And, they were also much more likely than other Catholics voting for the same presidential candidate to misperceive that candidate's position on that issue where the candidate's position was inconsistent with the voter's (and the Church's). While such findings revive the prospect of some Catholic Church influence over its faithful, assessment of whether the Church's take-both-sides approach places special stress on its faithful at minimum requires showing that "Seamless Garment Catholics" exhibit behaviors characteristic of cross-pressure responses to a greater degree than similar non-Catholics who *hold the same policy views* or who face a different set of cross-pressures involving their own faiths.

No research appears to have explicitly examined the idea that some religions,

<sup>19</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . . ; *Catholics and US Politics After the 2016 Elections: Understanding the "Swing Vote"*, Blandine Chelini-Pont, Marie Gayte & Mark J. Rozell (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew J. Streb & Brian Frederick, "The Myth of a Distinct Catholic Vote", in: *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (eds.), Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 2008, pp. 93-112; Lyman A. Kellstedt & James L. Guth, Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012: Testing Alternative Theories, *The Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2014, pp. 623-640.

<sup>21</sup> Mark M. Gray, Paul M. Perl & Mary Bendyna, Camelot Only Comes but Once?: John F. Kerry and the Catholic Vote, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36 No. 2, 2006, pp. 203-222; Davison and Krassa 2011; Mark M. Gray & Mary E. Bendyna, "Between Church, Party, and Conscience: Protecting Life and Social Justice among U.S. Catholics", in: *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (eds.), Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., 2008, pp. 75-92; David C. Leege & Paul D. Mueller, "How Catholic is the Catholic Vote?", in: *American Catholics and Civic Engagement*, Margaret O'Brien Steinfels (ed.), Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2004, pp. 213-243.

<sup>22</sup> Michele F. Margolis, *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . . ; Paul Perl & James S. McClintock, The Catholic 'Consistent Life Ethic' and Attitudes Toward Capital Punishment and Welfare Reform, *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2001, pp. 275-299; James D. Unnever, John P. Bartkowski & Francis T. Cullen, God Imagery and Opposition to Abortion and Capital Punishment: A Partial Test of Religious Support for the Consistent Life Ethic, *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 71, No. 3, 2010, pp. 307-322.

<sup>24</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . .

or even that other sources of cross-pressures, may be systematically more influential than others. Increasing its plausibility, studies have shown that Americans with culturally conservative but economically liberal policy attitudes – views not unlike those of Seamless Garment Catholics – are not only less politically engaged and participatory than Americans with more consistently liberal or conservative attitudes but also, in some cases, than those Americans with culturally liberal but economically conservative attitudes.<sup>25</sup> There are also signs of variation across religious traditions in Americans' responsiveness to different identities, attitudes, or circumstances that may cross-pressure their religious identity,<sup>26</sup> even in a tendency to project attributes consistent with one's own political ideology onto Jesus (with Catholics less likely to do it than Protestants).<sup>27</sup>

Unique institutional features of the Catholic Church inspire the idea that cross-pressured U.S. Catholics may experience greater psychological stress in voting and greater pressure to preempt or resolve cognitive dissonance linked to their vote choice than cross-pressured U.S. non-Catholics do. The Church stands out from other faith traditions for its highly centralized authority structure<sup>28</sup> and the strength of its claims to moral authority and truth.<sup>29</sup> Further, the US Catholic bishops have increasingly framed the US Church's policy agenda as morally urgent.<sup>30</sup>

But there are also reasons to suspect that Catholics will be *less* burdened by difficulty and dissonance in voting than comparably cross-pressured non-Catholics. Elite political cues gain influence with the extent that they are clear and delivered with a unified voice, and their targets are sufficiently attentive to receive them.<sup>31</sup> Polls indicate that only small minorities of Catholics have heard of, much less read, USCCB voter guidance.<sup>32</sup> That complex guidance, in some scholars' eyes, charges Catholics with casting an impossible vote, while still morally mandating political participation. In the end, it may leave these confused voters feeling empowered to vote by conscience,<sup>33</sup> if they have even heard of the Church's "seamless garment" politics at all. Moreover, the laity may recognize many actors beyond the bishops, some of whom focus their work in different areas of the Church's teaching and missions, as representing the views of the Church. They may also hear them debating that teaching.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Edward O. Carmines, Michael J. Ensley, & Michael W. Wagner, "Issue Preferences, Civic Engagement, and the Transformation of American Politics", in: *Facing the Challenge of Democracy: Explorations in the Analysis of Public Opinion and Political Participation*, Paul M. Sniderman & Benjamin Highton (eds.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2011, pp. 329-353; Laura S. Hussey, Polarized Politics and Citizen Disengagement: The Role of Belief Systems, *American Politics Research*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2012, pp. 85-115.

<sup>26</sup> Brittany H. Bramlett, The Cross-Pressure of Religion and Contact with Gays and Lesbians, and Their Impact on Same-Sex Marriage Opinion, *Politics & Policy* Vol. 40, No. 1, 2012, pp. 13-42; Erin C. Cassese, Straying from the Flock? A Look at How Americans' Gender and Religious Identities Cross-Pressure Partisanship, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 1, 2020, pp. 169-183.

<sup>27</sup> Lee D. Ross, Yphtach Lelkes & Alexandra G. Russell, How Christians reconcile their personal political views and the teachings of their faith: Projection as a means of dissonance reduction, *PNAS*, Vol. 109, No. 10, 2012, pp. 3616-3622.

<sup>28</sup> John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis* . . . p. ix.

<sup>29</sup> Manlio Graziano, *In Rome We Trust: The Rise of Catholics in American Political Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Jo Renee Formicola, *Catholic Moral Demands in American Politics: A New Paradigm* . . .

<sup>31</sup> John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> Marie Gayte, "The US Catholic Bishops: From Separationism to Public Intervention" . . .

<sup>33</sup> Clarke E. Cochran & David Carroll Cochran, *The Catholic Vote: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Patricia O'Connell Killen, "Introduction: The Future of Roman Catholicism in the United States: Beyond the Subculture", in: *The Future of Catholicism in America*, Patricia O'Connell Killen & Mark Silk (eds.), Columbia University Press, New York, 2019, pp. 1-26.

Depending on which issues those actors emphasize, Catholics may come away with different impressions about where the Church stands politically.<sup>35</sup> This may be especially the case if they are taking cues from Catholic politicians, whose diversity in framing the political application of Catholic values sends the message that “There is indeed no one way to be Catholic.”<sup>36</sup>

Among the many ways to be Catholic in politics, scholars have noticed especially a bifurcation of issue emphases between personal morality and social justice camps. They have found this tendency to prioritize one subset of the Church’s issues not just among Catholic politicians<sup>37</sup> but also among Catholic priests, even when priests’ issue attitudes correspond closely with the bishops.<sup>38</sup> This specialization manifests itself visibly in preaching and social action and ministry of the local parishes that, for most Catholics, will likely provide their most regular, sustained, and direct exposure to the teachings of their faith.<sup>39</sup>

With this common, albeit not universal, tendency toward issue specialization, the Catholic Church offers resources that may not be available to non-Catholics with similar cross-cutting policy attitudes or who confront other cross-pressures that do not derive from a single source. First, Catholic priests and parishes may model (perhaps unintentionally) how to resolve the cross-pressures of Catholic teaching. Catholics may not know how their priests or other parish leaders vote, but may infer it (rightly or wrongly) from the issues emphasized.<sup>40</sup> Second, it provides many U.S. Catholics the opportunity to choose a parish that fits the social or political prism through which they want to experience the faith.<sup>41</sup> Catholics thus may seek and find what feels like Church legitimization of their partisanship, whatever that may be. Non-Catholics may also have opportunities within their religious traditions to find a place of worship whose leadership and teaching suit their own political inclinations. But the clear association of most other major religious traditions’ leaders and members with a single political party may limit how much legitimization a minority community within that tradition can provide.

Empirical testing is needed to resolve these competing theoretical perspectives on the relative strength of Catholic cross-pressures. This testing might logically begin by assessing whether Catholics are indeed more likely than non-Catholics to share the Church’s pro-life, pro-social justice perspective. If the theoretical perspec-

<sup>35</sup> Gene Burns, *The Frontiers of Catholicism: The Politics of Ideology in a Liberal World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Mary T. Hanna, *Catholics and American Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> Hanna 1979; Jo Renee Formicola, *Catholic Moral Demands in American Politics: A New Paradigm...*

<sup>38</sup> Ted G. Jelen, *Catholic Priests and the Political Order: The Political Behavior of Catholic Pastors*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2003, pp. 591-604; Gregory Allen Smith, *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests*, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Sean Everton, *For God and Country: The Political Activism of Religious Congregations in the United States*, SSRN, 2021; Gregory Allen Smith, *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests...*

<sup>40</sup> This is not strictly a matter of priestly influence on parishioners, which at best appears modest and indirect (Gregory Allen Smith, *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests...*). In choosing how to engage politics in their parish, priests consider the views of their bishops as well as their parishioners. See: Brian Robert Calfano, *A Matter of Discretion: The Politics of Catholic Priests in the United States and Ireland*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Killen 2019. Technically Catholics are assigned to a local parish based on geography, but the U.S. Church stopped enforcing these assignments decades ago. See these comments from a senior priest on the website of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, DC: <https://blog.adw.org/2019/08/parish-boundaries-still-matter/> (accessed March 22, 2023).

tive stressing the Catholic Church's authority—and thus the strength of its cross-pressures—is most accurate, one might expect:

H1. Catholics will be more likely than non-Catholics to oppose abortion while taking liberal positions on other social justice issues, especially among citizens to whom religion is very important.

But, if the theoretical perspective stressing the Church's diversity—and thus weakness of cross-pressures—is most accurate, one might expect no difference between Catholics and non-Catholics, or even the converse of H1. Likewise, if cross-pressures emanating from the Catholic Church carry *more* weight than comparable cross-pressures afflicting non-Catholics, we should also expect to observe:

H2. Cross-pressured Catholics will be more likely than cross-pressured non-Catholics to identify as independents.

H3. Cross-pressured Catholics will be more likely than cross-pressured non-Catholics to avoid voting for a major-party presidential candidate.

H4. Cross-pressured Catholic partisans will be more likely than cross-pressured non-Catholic partisans to vote for the opposite party's presidential candidate.

H5. Cross-pressured Catholics will be more likely than cross-pressured non-Catholics to inaccurately perceive their chosen candidate's position on the issue where they disagree.

If Catholic cross-pressures are no different in strength or are weaker than others, we should expect, respectively, that Catholics will be no different from, or else less likely than, non-Catholics in exhibiting these four signs of cross-pressure.

## Data and Methods

Nearly all of the data in this analysis is drawn from the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES). The nationally representative cross-sections surveyed in 2016, 2017 and 2018 were pooled to achieve the large sample size ( $n=142,293$ ) needed to conduct subgroup analysis of cross-pressured voters from many religious traditions.<sup>42</sup>

Respondents' religious traditions were measured using a modified version of the CCES' "Pew religion" (religpew), which presented 12 response options to the

<sup>42</sup> A name change of this project to the Cooperative Election Study took effect with the 2020 survey. Stephen Ansolabehere & Brian F. Schaffner, "CCES Common Content", 2016, Harvard Dataverse, V4, 2017; Brian Schaffner and Stephen Ansolabehere, "2017 CCES Common Content", Harvard Dataverse, V2, 2019; Brian Schaffner, Stephen Ansolabehere & Sam Luks, "CCES Common Content", 2018, Harvard Dataverse, V6, 2019.



question, “What is your present religion, if any?” The responses were modified by separating “Protestant” responses into traditions typically distinguished in the literature: black Protestants, white mainline Protestants, and white evangelical Protestants. All Protestants who identify racially as black were coded as black Protestants, while non-black respondents were categorized as mainline or evangelical Protestants based on their response to a question about whether they would “describe [themselves] as a born-again or evangelical Christian.” This is an admittedly crude approach, considering that some black Protestants attend churches that a more detailed coding scheme would place in the white mainline or evangelical Protestant tradition,<sup>43</sup> but arguably sufficient for the limited number of models that disaggregate non-Catholics. Table S1 in the supplemental appendix reports frequencies.<sup>44</sup>

Most of the analyses follows Antkowiak, Allen and Layman’s<sup>45</sup> approach to capturing cross-pressured Catholics who hold the Church’s pro-life, pro-social justice “seamless garment” views. “Pro-life” respondents were captured from a series of support-or-oppose questions regarding when abortion should be permitted or prohibited; these respondents were those who indicated abortion should either never be allowed or allowed only “in case of rape, incest or when the woman’s life is in danger.” For social justice views, multiple questions were used—which were similar if not identical across the three years—in the areas of social welfare, immigration, and environmental protection. First, a substantively meaningful cutpoint was established for identifying liberal as opposed to moderate or conservative views across each set of questions, and then respondents were labeled as “pro-social-justice” when their attitudes were scored to be liberal on at least two of those three issue areas. Table S2 lists the questions used in constructing these variables. These cross-pressured “Seamless Garment Catholics” are then compared to non-Catholics who hold the same cross-cutting policy views, frequently contrasting their behavior to that of Catholics and non-Catholics who do not face these particular issue cross-pressures.

A second set of analyses uses a different strategy to assess whether Catholic cross-pressures are associated with a stronger or weaker response than cross-pressures involving other religious traditions: here the political behavior of Catholics facing cross-pressures emanating from their faith are compared to those non-Catholics who are cross-pressured by a core teaching of their own faith tradition. An obvious practical challenge is the assumption with which this paper began: that the Catholic Church is unique in taking both partisan sides. Thus, the analysis returns to a more classic case of cross-pressures: church-party conflicts. Here I classify as subject to *Catholic* cross-pressures Catholic Democrats who oppose abortion and Catholic Republicans who take liberal positions on social welfare.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Haley Pilgrim, Wensong Shen & Melissa Wilde, A Complex Religion Approach to the Differing Impact of Education on Black and White Religious Group Members’ Political Views, *Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 9, 2020, p. 477.

<sup>44</sup> All supplemental appendices are available upon request.

<sup>45</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior. . .

<sup>46</sup> The analysis assigned those Independents who reported that they leaned to a political party to the ranks of that party.

In building a comparison group, a number of different U.S. policy issues were used in which some preponderance of leaders in other faith traditions had taken a stand that was inconsistent with their tradition's dominant partisan tendency. Many black Protestant pastors, for example, have not followed the Democratic Party in its growing embrace of same-sex marriage,<sup>47</sup> while in the mass public black Protestants have stood out from other Christians for their conservatism on this topic.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, white evangelical church leaders have been moving leftward on immigration issues, including endorsing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and, while white evangelicals still have very conservative opinions on immigration, they are also showing signs of cross-pressure.<sup>49</sup> If Jewish Americans are tempted to abandon their Democratic loyalties over any issue, it is often speculated – while the centrality of this issue to American Jewish politics is often exaggerated – to involve the United States' alliance with Israel. In a 2012 poll, this and the related issue of US policy on the Iranian nuclear program that Israelis perceive as a threat were the issues on which Jews assigned the smallest number of likes to the Democratic Party over the Republican Party.<sup>50</sup> For such individuals, party and religious identity are presumably fairly well aligned, but a wedge issue could be exploited by the out-party to cast doubt on how well the preferred party reflects a core value or concern of the faith.

In addition, I consider as vulnerable to cross-pressure those non-Catholics who share a core issue attitude commonly promoted by their faith leaders and associated with the dominant political party in their faith, but who do not identify with that dominant political party. Here, religious identity and a core issue attitude are in alignment, but their party identity pulls them toward a different candidate than their religious identity and the issue position do. Given the importance of party identity to a variety of political behaviors,<sup>51</sup> this is likely to be a more powerful cross-pressure than the prior one involving the wedge issue. My eventual analysis estimates separate coefficients for groups vulnerable to the theoretically stronger versus weaker form of cross-pressure within each religious tradition, to which estimates of Catholic responsiveness to Catholic cross-pressures can be compared.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth D Wald & Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* . . .

<sup>48</sup> Haley Pilgrim, Wensong Shen & Melissa Wilde, A Complex Religion Approach to the Differing Impact of Education on Black and White Religious Group Members' Political Views. . .

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Melkonian-Hoover & Lyman A. Kellstedt. Populism, Evangelicalism, and the Polarized Politics of Immigration, *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2019, pp. 50–67.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth D. Wald, *The Foundations of American Jewish Liberalism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2018.

**Table 1. Groups Considered in Tradition-Specific Cross-Pressure Analysis**

<i>Core religious issue vs. dominant religious-party identity (weak pressure)</i>	<i>Party identity vs. religious identity &amp; core religious issue (strong pressure)</i>	<i>Catholic cross-pressure (unknown strength)</i>
White evangelical pro-immigration Republicans (n=1,480; 6% of white evangelicals; 9% of white evangelical Republicans)	White evangelical pro-life Democrats (n=1,758; 7% of white evangelicals; 41% of white evangelical Democrats)	
Black Protestant anti-same-sex marriage Democrats (available 2016 only) (n=1,688; 42% of Black Protestants; 51% of Black Protestant Democrats)	Black Protestant pro-welfare Republicans (n=98, 1% of Black Protestants; 18% of Black Protestant Republicans)	
Muslim anti-same-sex marriage Democrats (available 2016 only) (n=164; 40% of Muslims; 53% of Muslim Democrats)	Muslim Middle East policy concerns Republicans (opposing proposed Muslim immigration ban and Syrian refugee ban (2016); opposing ban on select Middle Eastern countries' immigration and Syrian refugees (2017 and 2018); opposing movement of US embassy to Jerusalem (2018)) (n=37; refugee bans: 3% of Muslims, 24% of Muslim Republicans; embassy: 6% of Muslims, 53% of Muslim Republicans)	Catholic pro-life Democrats (n=2,838; 10% of Catholics; 23% of Catholic Democrats)
Jewish pro-Israel Democrats (support nuclear program sanctions on Iran (2016); recognize Israel as an "ally" and Iran as an "enemy" (2017); support US withdrawal from Iran nuclear agreement and movement of US embassy to Jerusalem (2018)) (n=1,032; 30% of Jews; 47% of Jewish Democrats)	Mormon culturally conservative/moderate Democrats (opposing same-sex marriage (2016 only) and/or abortion for personal choice) (n=263; marriage: 7% of Mormons, 39% of Mormon Democrats; abortion: 14% of Mormons, 68% of Mormon Democrats)	Catholic pro-welfare Republicans (n=871; 3% of Catholics; 9% of Catholic Republicans)

Table 1 reveals the full list of theoretically cross-pressured non-Catholic groups that CCES data enables me to include.<sup>52</sup> Adding them to the Catholic groups yields a sample of 10,229 individuals vulnerable to a religion-party cross-pressure. Forty-three percent of them are non-Catholics belonging to the dominant party of their faith tradition, 21 percent are non-Catholics belonging to the minority party in their faith tradition and the rest are Catholics (28 percent pro-life Democrats and 9 percent pro-welfare Republicans). Only H3 and H4 are appropriate for re-assess-

<sup>52</sup> White mainline Protestants are not represented. They are a complicated case because their religious leaders, clergy, and lobby groups are believed to be solidly liberal (Paul A. Djupe, Laura R. Olson, & Christopher P. Gilbert, *Sources of Clergy Support for Denominational Lobbying in Washington...*; Kenneth D. Wald, & Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States...*), but when considering their mass adherents (David E. Campbell, James R. Kirk, & Geoffrey C. Layman, *Religion and the 2020 Presidential Election: The Enduring Divide...*; Kenneth D. Wald, & Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States...*) and elected officials (James L. Guth, "Religion and Roll Calls: Religious Influences on the U.S. House of Representatives, 1997-2002"; John McTague & Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, *Voting from the Pew: The Effect of Senators' Religious Identities on Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Senate...*), there is no dominant party.

ment with this partisan-only sample.

Several dependent variables are employed corresponding to H1-H5. In addition to H1's indicator of whether one holds pro-life, pro-social justice attitudes, these are:

H2 (Independence): Indicator of whether one's party identification is "independent" (including leaners).<sup>53</sup>

H3 (Vote avoidance): Indicator of whether an eligible voter declined to choose between the Democratic (Hillary Clinton) and Republican (Donald Trump) presidential nominees in the 2016 election, either because they voted for a different candidate or did not vote at all.

H4 (Vote defection): Indicator of whether a *partisan casting a major-party vote* (here including independent leaners as partisans) voted for the opposite party's presidential nominee in the 2016 election.

H5 (Selective misperception/projection): Two indicators, one for an analysis of citizens voting for a Democrat for president and the other for an analysis of citizens voting for a Republican for president. For Democratic voters, it marks whether they inaccurately characterized the Democratic nominee as opposing abortion rights in all cases or all cases but rape, incest or danger to the life of the mother. For Republican voters, it marks whether they inaccurately assigned the Republican nominee a position on the left side of a 7-point scale indicating how much the candidate wanted government to guarantee good jobs and living standards to everyone, versus leaving citizens to get ahead on their own.

Because the CCES does not offer perceived candidate issue position data, the American National Election Study data were used for the test of H5. To collect a sufficient sample of Catholics for subgroup analysis, data from the 1992-2016 presidential election year studies were pooled together for the analysis. Due to inconsistent data availability, social welfare liberalism alone represents pro-social justice attitudes. Table S2 details the measurement employed.

The hypotheses were tested by estimating multivariate logit models on either the full sample with indicators for Catholic and cross-pressured respondents, plus their interaction, or else on a subset of cross-pressured respondents. Some analyses originally performed on the full sample were rerun on a subset of respondents who, on a four-point scale tapping the importance of "religion in your life," chose the most devout response, "very important." In the full-sample analyses, this four-point variable was used as a control variable, as were various standard demographic characteristics: education, income, age, sex, racial/ethnic identification (white, black, Latino, Asian, some other race) and in some cases, residence in a southern (former Confederate) state. Analyses also typically controlled, as appropriate to the dependent variable, for placement on a 7-point party identification scale ranging from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican" and a 5-point ideological identifi-

<sup>53</sup> Here I include leaners along with pure Independents because rejection of a party label is arguably meaningful in the context of studying cross-pressures.

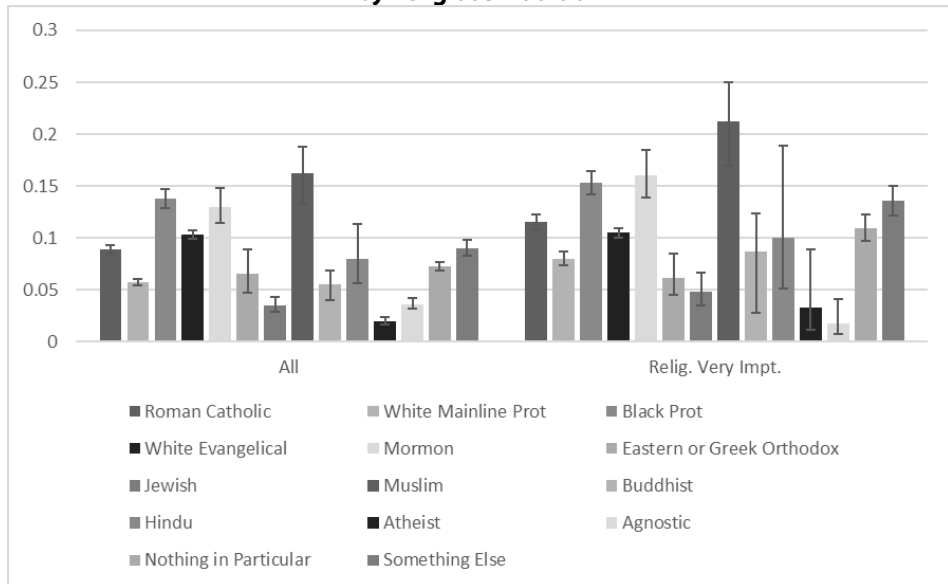
cation scale ranging from “very liberal” to “very conservative,” or for folded versions of these scales on which higher values indicate greater political independence or greater ideological moderation. The misperceptions model also controls for a political knowledge index and an indicator of whether the issue position being described (abortion or welfare) was sufficiently salient that the respondent mentioned it among attributes that are liked or disliked about the parties or their nominees, or on lists of the country’s most important issues.<sup>54</sup> All analyses are weighted with the standard CCES or ANES weights recommended by the user guides for the particular years or variables being used.

## Results

### Seamless garment issue cross-pressures

For each religious tradition identified in the CCES, Figure 1 sketches the percentage of adherents who combined opposition to legal abortion with a generally liberal stance on social justice issues.

**Figure 1. Proportion Holding Pro-Life, Pro-Social Justice Views, by Religious Tradition**



Note: Error bars in this and following figures mark 83.5 percent confidence intervals, which are the appropriate size for judging statistical significance through confidence interval comparison when aiming for a type I error probability of .05.

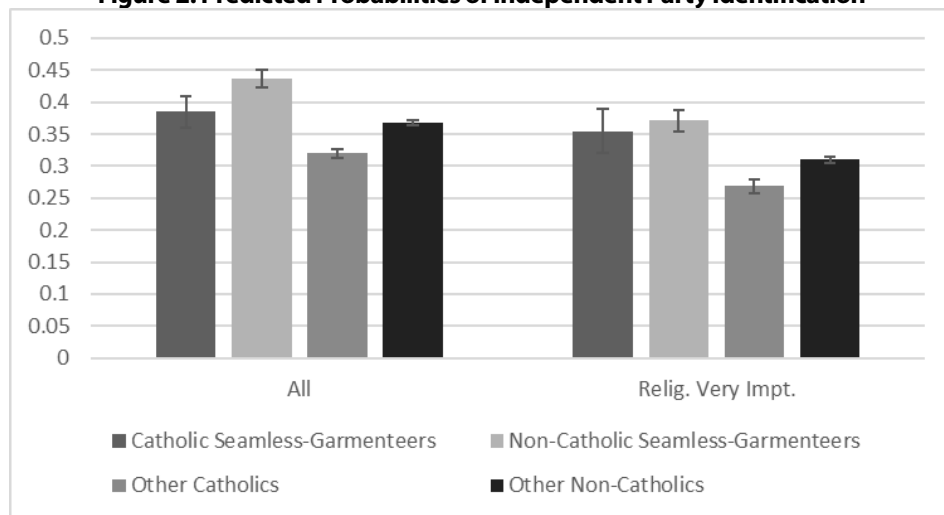
<sup>54</sup> For methodological details, see Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, *Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior...*

Figure 1 shows the percentage of Catholics holding these views (8.9 percent) is substantively similar to the prevalence of these views among Hindus (8.0 percent) and Americans identifying with a religious tradition other than those queried by the CCES (9.0 percent). Further, Catholics are exceeded in their adherence to these views by Mormons (13.0 percent), black Protestants (13.8 percent) and especially Muslims (16.2 percent) – in addition to the notoriously conservative white evangelical Protestants (10.3 percent). Though the percentage of Catholics holding these “seamless garment” beliefs increases among those Catholics who say that their religion is very important to them, this is also the case in most other religious traditions, so that Catholics again fail to look distinctive.

This general conclusion is also supported in a multivariate logit model of the likelihood of holding this attitude combination that further controls for party identification and demographics (see table S3 of the supplemental appendix). Even when considering only respondents who profess that religion is very important to them, members of certain other religious faiths (Mormons, black Protestants and white evangelical Protestants) emerge as significantly more likely than Catholics to hold pro-life, pro-social justice attitudes. H1 is not supported.

Figure 2 summarizes predicted probabilities from the multivariate logit models used to test H2. Full-model results are in supplemental appendix table S4.

**Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of Independent Party Identification**

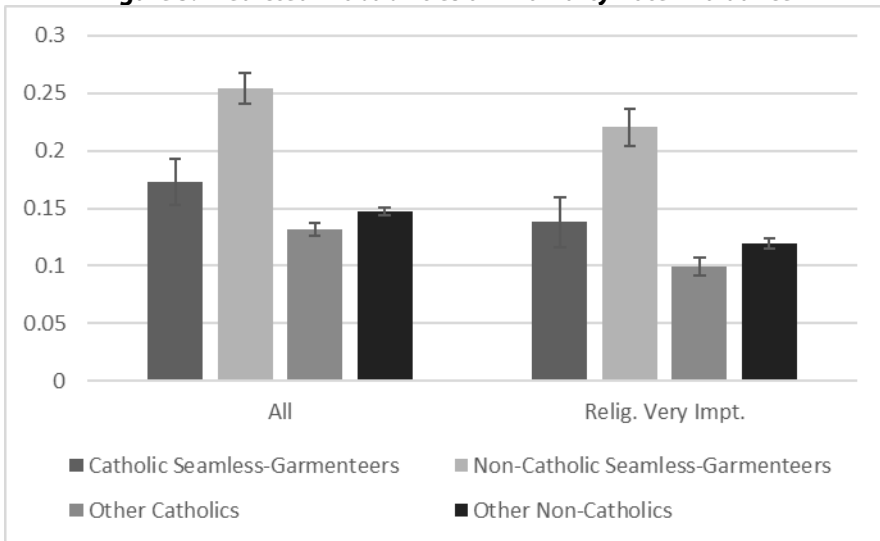


Starting with the general sample, both Catholics and non-Catholics who hold “seamless garment”-like beliefs are significantly, albeit modestly, more likely to identify as independents than those who do not hold such beliefs. But among people who hold seamless-garment beliefs as well as among those who don’t, Catholics are also significantly *more* likely to identify with the Democratic or Republican Par-

ty than as independents. The model predicts, at covariate means, that Catholics cross-pressured by seamless garment issue attitudes are about five percentage points less likely than non-Catholics cross-pressured by seamless garment issue attitudes to identify as independents. When the sample is limited to those people who say that religion is very important to them, the difference Catholicism makes among people cross-pressured by seamless garment beliefs shrinks while also changing direction, so that the modest difference in predicted probabilities at covariate means is not statistically significant. H2 remains unsupported.

We again see signs of Catholics' greater propensity to engage in partisan politics in figure 3. This presents predicted probabilities of avoiding a choice between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton, accomplished either by voting for some other candidate or (much more commonly) not voting at all. Full results are in table S5.

**Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of Two-Party Vote Avoidance**

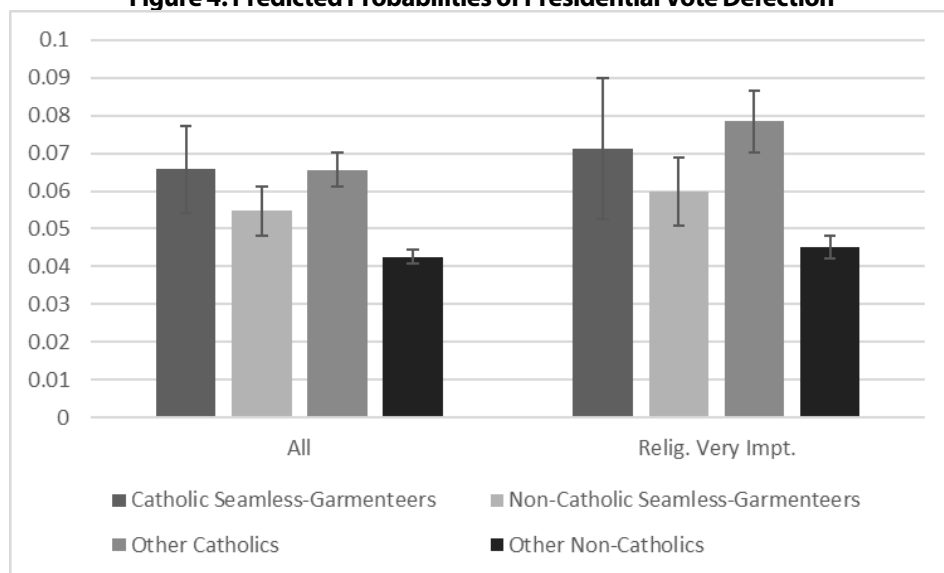


All three key logit coefficients are statistically significant, both when the model is run on the full sample and when it is run on the most devout. In the full sample, Catholics cross-pressured by seamless garment beliefs are significantly, albeit modestly, more likely than other Catholics to avoid this two-party choice—an estimated difference of about 3 percentage points in the full sample when covariates are at their means. The avoidance gap among non-Catholics is nearly three times larger. Non-Catholics without seamless garment beliefs have a slightly, yet statistically discernible, greater likelihood than Catholics without garment beliefs of avoiding the two-party vote. Among people with seamless garment beliefs, the predicted probability of avoiding a two-party vote soars among non-Catholics relative to Catholics:

from .17 to .25 with covariates at their means. People who say religion is very important to them are less likely across the board to avoid a two-party vote, but otherwise their pattern mimics the full sample's. Results reject H3.

H4 concerned the likelihood that partisans (and leaners) who did make a two-party vote choice actually defected from their own party. For both the full sample and the very religious subset, the coefficients marking Catholics and seamless garment cross-pressures are both positive and statistically significant (see table S6). The coefficients on their interactions are negative, approaching statistical significance ( $p < .119$ ) in the full sample and attaining marginal significance ( $p < .095$ ) in the devout subsample. At covariate means, shown in Figure 4, predicted probability of voting against one's party is consistently low.

**Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Presidential Vote Defection**



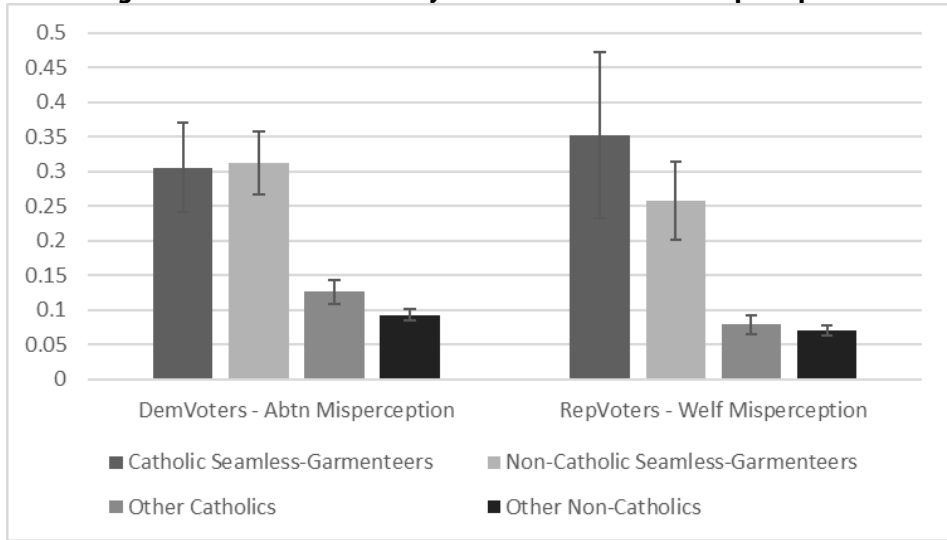
The model predicts that Catholics cross-pressured by seamless garment beliefs will be somewhat more likely than non-Catholics cross-pressured by seamless garment beliefs to defect from their party – but there is also a lot of uncertainty in those predictions and the difference in predicted probabilities at independent variable means is not statistically significant. The more striking and statistically significant difference between Catholics and non-Catholics is evident among those who are *not* cross-pressured (at least not by pro-life, pro-social justice views). Breaking with the thrust of previous results, Catholics are predicted to be more likely to vote against their party. In contrast to the case among non-Catholics, where the probability of partisan defection is significantly higher statistically among voters cross-pressured by seamless garment beliefs, those same cross-pressuring pro-life, pro-social justice beliefs among Catholics that I have assumed to emanate from their faith do not sig-



nificantly alter the likelihood of partisan defection. While there are signs of a greater likelihood of Catholics engaging in the presidential vote defection associated with cross-pressured voters, H4 is not strictly supported.

In the final comparison of how Catholics and non-Catholics respond to the same issue-based cross-pressures, figure 5 presents the likelihood of misperceiving the abortion or social welfare position of the presidential candidate for whom they voted in light of their comparison group’s likelihood of doing so (H5).

**Figure 5. Predicted Probability of Candidate Position Misperception**



The left side of the panel presents the predicted probabilities from a logit model run on respondents who voted for the Democratic presidential candidate, in which the dependent variable is whether they inaccurately characterized the Democrat as opposing abortion rights. Driven by the large and highly significant coefficient on seamless garment cross-pressures in table S7’s underlying results, Democratic voters holding pro-life, pro-welfare views are much more likely than Democratic voters with other combinations of attitudes on these two issues to assign a pro-life position to the Democratic candidate. But there are few differences between Catholics and non-Catholics of either issue attitude combination. The Catholic coefficient is positive and statistically significant, while the interaction of Catholicism and seamless-garment issue cross-pressures is negative and non-significant. This translates into a greater Catholic likelihood of using the cross-pressure coping strategy that has been called “selective projection” or “selective misperception,” but one that is only observed among those Catholic and non-Catholic Democratic voters who do not share the Church’s seamless garment beliefs. It could be a sign of Catholic Democratic voters generally showing a greater propensity than non-Catholics to project

the Church's pro-life beliefs onto their pro-choice candidate, but the failure to see a Catholic difference among cross-pressured voters is inconsistent with H5.

The right side of the panel presents the predicted probabilities from a logit model run on respondents who voted for the Republican presidential candidate, in which the dependent variable is whether they inaccurately assigned the Republican a pro-welfare position. The coefficient on seamless garment beliefs is again large and statistically significant (seen in table S7); neither the Catholic coefficient nor its interaction with seamless garment cross-pressures is statistically significant. At the means of independent variables, the predicted probabilities that Catholics versus non-Catholics who do not hold seamless garment beliefs misperceive are virtually identical. Among voters cross-pressured by seamless garment issue attitudes, Catholics' likelihood of assigning the Republican candidate a pro-welfare position looks to be somewhat larger, but the difference is not statistically significant; for H5, the null of no difference cannot be rejected.

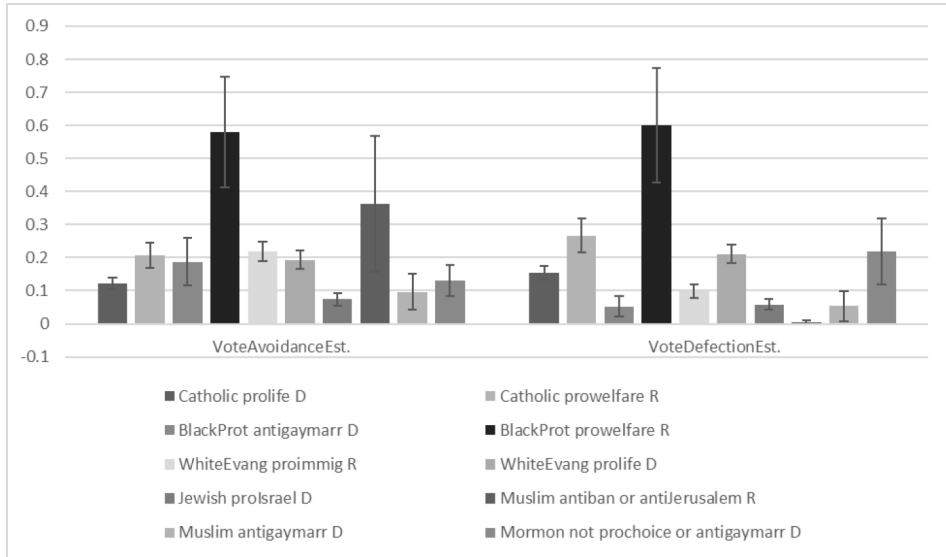
### **Tradition-specific cross-pressures**

We now shift to re-examine H3 and H4 using a tradition-specific measure of cross-pressures. Here Catholic cross-pressured voters are those Catholics who are pro-life Democrats and those who are pro-welfare Republicans. Though these two groups overlap imperfectly with those Catholics expressing seamless garment issue attitudes, they do capture those Catholics whose partisan identity points them to a different presidential candidate from that of a core Catholic policy belief that the respondent shares with the Church. The cross-pressured voters from other religious traditions also face a similar conflict of cues between their party and religion.

Before proceeding, it is worth revisiting Table 1 to note that Catholics do not look very different from non-Catholics in the share of their tradition facing one of the selected cases of church-party cross-pressures. If anything, among these cases, religious-partisan cross-pressures on an issue of key importance to the faith may be rarer among Catholics than they are in these examples from other traditions. About three percent of Catholics were pro-welfare Republicans and about 10 percent were pro-life Democrats. Welfare supporters constituted about 9 percent of Catholic Republicans, while abortion opponents constituted about 23 percent of Catholic Democrats. While not a direct re-test of H1, such observations again fail to testify to the strength of Church influence.

Figure 6 holds predicted probabilities from models (re)testing the vote avoidance and vote defection hypotheses. Due to some small subgroup sizes and the fact that patterns of findings among devout subsamples have tended to mirror those in the full sample, I only control for religion's high importance rather than attempting a separate model. Full logit model results with controls are found in tables S8 and S9.

**Figure 6. Voter Responses to Tradition-Specific Cross-Pressures, Predicted Probabilities**



Notably, statistically significant and substantial differences emerge *between* the two types of cross-pressured Catholics. In some cases, their difference in predicted probabilities is larger than the difference between one of these groups of Catholics and a group of non-Catholics. All else being equal, Catholic pro-welfare Republicans are considerably more likely than Catholic pro-life Democrats to exhibit the symptoms of cross-pressured voting: they are nearly one and three-quarters times more likely, in terms of predicted probability at covariate means, to abstain from a two-party vote and to defect from their party in presidential voting.

Catholic pro-life Democrats rank among the least likely of all the groups facing a religion-party cross-pressure to avoid making a vote choice between the two major parties. In the underlying logit model, only Jewish pro-Israel Democrats are significantly less likely than Catholic pro-life Democrats to do so, which makes some sense given that party differences on the US stance in Arab-Israeli affairs are much smaller than they are on abortion. All other traditions' cross-pressured groups are significantly more likely than Catholic pro-life Democrats to avoid voting for a major-party candidate except for three: black Protestant and Muslim Democrats who oppose same-sex marriage, and Mormon Democrats who oppose gay marriage and/or reject the position that abortion should be broadly legal for personal choice. Meanwhile, Catholic pro-welfare Republicans are significantly less likely only relative to black Protestant pro-welfare Republicans to avoid a two-party vote. Their avoidance rates are substantively comparable to multiple other non-Catholic groups, although significantly higher than Jewish pro-Israel Democrats, and marginally, though significantly, higher than for Muslim anti-gay marriage Democrats.

The presidential vote defection rates of Catholic pro-welfare Republicans exceed those of every other group except for black Protestant pro-welfare Republicans. They do so at a statistically significant level, except in the cases of white evangelical pro-life Democrats ( $p < .105$ ) and culturally conservative or moderate Mormon Democrats ( $p < .563$ ). Catholic pro-life Democrats' defection rates come in at a middling position. Black Protestant Democrats (and possibly also Muslim Democrats,  $p < .085$ ) who oppose same-sex marriage, white evangelical Republicans with liberal immigration views, Jewish pro-Israel Democrats, and Muslim Republicans who oppose the proposed Muslim or Syrian immigration bans or the movement of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem all have significantly lower defection rates, while black Protestant pro-welfare Republicans and white evangelical pro-life Democrats have significantly higher defection rates.

These results again fail to indicate that Catholic cross-pressures are uniquely strong. While results are largely consistent with H3 and H4 in the case of Catholic Republicans whose pro-welfare views point away from their party, the relative weakness of Catholic pro-life Democrats' responses to cross-pressures is not. Further, this large partisan difference among Catholics contradicts the spirit of the hypotheses derived from theory about the uniqueness of Catholicism.

This partisan asymmetry among Catholics may have some relationship to a general pattern in figure 6 in which, across traditions, avoidance and especially defection rates tend to be lower when the cross-pressured voter belongs to their faith tradition's dominant party than when they do not. Catholicism in the aggregate lacks a dominant party, but it did have one once in the Democrats, it still may have one at the local parish level, and it has two dominant parties when disaggregating its adherents by race: the Republican Party for whites and the Democratic Party for nonwhites, including Latinos in the latter.<sup>55</sup> Needing further research, the seemingly greater responsiveness to cross-pressures found among Catholic pro-welfare Republicans compared to Catholic pro-life Democrats might reflect differences (or similarities) in how members of these groups perceive Catholicism's dominant party, and thus difference in their social locations relative to that perceived dominant party. Put differently, pro-welfare Republican Catholics might be more likely to be situated in a more heavily Democratic-leaning Catholic social context than Catholic pro-life Democrats are to be situated in a Republican-leaning Catholic social context.

Since Latino Catholics are more likely than non-Latino white Catholics to hold seamless garment views,<sup>56</sup> we might expect to find large concentrations of them among Catholic pro-welfare Republicans and pro-life Democrats. If Latino identity is an important lens through which they experience Catholicism, perhaps especially within a parish, it seems likely that the (Latino) Republicans would perceive less Catholic social support for their partisanship than the (Latino) Democrats. In my

<sup>55</sup> David E. Campbell, James R. Kirk, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Religion and the 2020 Presidential Election: The Enduring Divide...

<sup>56</sup> Laura S. Antkowiak, Levi G. Allen, & Geoffrey C. Layman, Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior...

data, Latinos constitute 18 percent of pro-welfare Republican Catholics, compared to only 10 percent of all Republican Catholics, and they are 32 percent of pro-life Democratic Catholics, compared to 28 percent of all Democratic Catholics. Other identities and social contextual variables may similarly moderate the extent to which Catholic voters show signs of wrestling with cognitive dissonance.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The findings reported here reinforce a salient theme in the literature on Catholic politics – namely the absence of a distinctively Catholic pattern of political behavior, though in this case related to Catholic cross-pressured voting. There is little evidence to suggest that the Catholic Church’s cross-cutting public policy agenda – which is neither commonly nor uniquely embraced by U.S. Catholics – weighs more heavily on Catholics’ minds in making their voting decisions than comparable cross-pressures do for non-Catholics. Rather than hide from partisan politics in the face of their church’s opposition to pieces of each party’s platform, Catholics appear to embrace it, even perhaps to a greater extent than citizens in faith traditions that are more clearly aligned with a single party. In doing so, the piece of Church political guidance that Catholics seem to be following with the most unity (seen in the rejection of H3) is its pronouncement of a moral duty to participate.<sup>57</sup>

Discernment as to why Catholics, even those who share the Church’s views, appear to experience less cognitive dissonance in their partisan choice than comparable non-Catholics requires more research. I have suggested it could involve conflict and ambiguity in the political cues that most Catholics perceive from the Church as well as the way in which many actors within the Church, who may be more visible to the laity than the bishops, apply their Catholic values to public life. The tendencies to elevate only a piece of the Church’s agenda by Catholic priests and parishes<sup>58</sup> (as well as by those Catholics within both parties who rank among the country’s most powerful government leaders<sup>59</sup>) may not only mask, but help to legitimate, areas of partisan disagreement with the Church. Although Church leadership takes *both* sides, many of its clergy and others who contribute to the culture of a parish may emphasize one side, and, in so doing, have the effect of absolving their faithful from any “Catholic guilt” concerning their partisanship. Catholicism thus may enable its cross-pressured voters to resolve cognitive dissonance without abandoning their party more easily than cross-pressured non-Catholics can, a fact consistent with the findings presented here of lower vote avoidance and defection rates among Catholic pro-life Democrats relative to evangelical pro-life Democrats, and among Catholic pro-welfare Republicans relative to black Protestant pro-welfare Republicans. In fact, partisan differences among Catholics run so deep, they were even evident in the extent to which Catholics holding different partisan identities responded to cross-pressures.

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<sup>57</sup> Jo Renee Formicola, *Catholic Moral Demands in American Politics: A New Paradigm* . . .

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Allen Smith, *Politics in the Parish: The Political Influence of Catholic Priests* . . .

<sup>59</sup> Manlio Graziano, *In Rome We Trust: The Rise of Catholics in American Political Life* . . .

Catholics dismayed by these findings might ask whether their bishops' political approaches have contributed to this situation. Very early, Hanna<sup>60</sup> observed that the Catholic leaders did not greatly publicize their narrative connecting abortion and social justice issues. In the years covered by the data analyzed here, the Republicans advocating the Church's anti-abortion position appear to have been hurt more by the choices of Catholic cross-pressured voters than the Democrats advocating its social justice positions. This may surprise many, given the stress that recent USCCB voter guides have placed on abortion and given that some bishops over the past couple of decades have moved to deny communion to Catholic politicians who support legal abortion. Still, the reality is that only a minority of bishops support such communion denials<sup>61</sup> and Pope Francis has also signaled his disapproval.<sup>62</sup>

Future research should check whether the greater abstentions and defections of Catholic pro-welfare Republicans relative to pro-life Democrats reflected some unique aversion to Donald Trump. In addition, it should explore the potential individual and contextual moderators of Catholics' responsiveness to church-party conflicts. The latter should also include an examination of the extent to which Catholics are aware of conflicts in the first place. Furthermore, the bishops may well contribute to Catholics' partisan behavior by strategically playing both parties.<sup>63</sup> And the fact that neither religious nor lay Catholic leaders have made any obvious effort to encourage an alternative party may also give the impression of Church leaders' tacit approval of the status quo. But, breaking this party duopoly, as US history has shown, has been virtually impossible to do, and Catholics certainly are not unique in simply going along.

<sup>60</sup> Mary T. Hanna, *Catholics and American Politics* . . .

<sup>61</sup> Marie Gayte, "The US Catholic Bishops: From Separationism to Public Intervention" . . .

<sup>62</sup> John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis* . . .

<sup>63</sup> Implied by Manlio Graziano, *In Rome We Trust: The Rise of Catholics in American Political Life* . . .

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## ДА ЛИ СУ КАТОЛИЦИ ПОД УНАКРСНИМ ПРИТИСЦИМА? ВЕРОВАЊА И ГЛАСАЧКО ПОНАШАЊЕ ПО ВЕРСКИМ ГРУПАМА НА ПОСЛЕДЊИМ ИЗБОРИМА

### Сажетак

Католичка црква је про-живот и про-социјална правда и као таква може бити на страни обе доминантне партије у САД. Ова ситуација може потенцијално да утиче на католичке гласаче као унакрсни притисак да бирају између једне од две партије, али може и да легитимише личне партијске преференције католика. У овом раду истражујем да ли су католици који деле главне црквене ставове, у односу на не-католике, више или мање склони да имају политичке ставове који су повезани са унакрсним притисцима: избегавање идентификације са доминантним партијама, избегавање гласања за доминантне партије, отклон од гласања за једну партију, и селективно прихватања ставова партијских кандидата. На основу података из 2016-2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies и 1992-2016 American National Election Studies, налазим мало доказа да су католици под посебним унакрсним притисцима. Чак, они католици који су под притисцима су склони прихватању партијских политика. У неким случајевима, партијске разлике између католика у односу на њихове одговоре према унакрсним притисцима надилазе разлике између католика и не-католика.

**Кључне речи:** католици, религија, партије, унакрсни притисци, мишљење, гласање