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Special Issue Reprint

Religion and Politics

Historical Developments and Contemporary Transformations

Edited by
Andre P. Audette, Christopher L. Weaver and Mark Brockway

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Religion and Politics: Historical Developments and Contemporary Transformations

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Guest Editors

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Christopher L. Weaver
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About the Editors

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Andre P. Audette is currently an independent researcher and former Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science at Monmouth College. His research interests include religion and politics, political psychology, and political behavior, as well as constitutional law and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Recent work has been published in journals such as the *Politics and Religion Journal*, *Politics and Religion*, and the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. He now serves as the Director of Worship for four Catholic churches and teaches middle school religion classes.

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Mark Brockway is an Assistant Teaching Professor in Political Science at Syracuse University. His research centers on political identity and activism, religion and politics, and party politics. He investigates the consequences of changing political and social identities for politics, including the role of secular and religious identities in shaping partisan affiliation and participation. His primary research agenda focuses on the role of secularism and attitudes about science in shaping individual political identification and motivating partisan activism. In addition to his interest in party politics, his research examines comparative religion and politics, political polarization, comparative politics and development, and public opinion.

Preface

Religions, governments, and the relationships between them, are changing at a historic pace. These changes are a global phenomenon and cut across types of governments and religious traditions. But the changing links between religions and governments are also built upon deep histories and embedded religious and societal practices. In this Reprint, we have tried to create a picture of the scope of these changing and deeply rooted dynamics by offering examinations of connections in a variety of geographic areas and time periods. The articles in this Reprint also examine critical questions using a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches. From textual and historical analysis to quantitative or experimental social science research, the scholars in this Reprint illuminate how societies and people are influenced by religious beliefs and practices, rely on interfaith connections, manage tension between religious and secular spheres, explore the interplay between religion and technology, and rely on religion to guide political decisions.

Each study in this Reprint is a testament to the value of placing religious beliefs, practices, ideas, groups, and values at the center of studies of political institutions, attitudes, and processes. As a field of examination, religion and politics seems both ancient and new. The histories of political systems around the globe are suffused with religion from their earliest creation. But the study of religion and politics as a modern academic endeavor is still, arguably, just growing out of its infancy. As scholars pay more attention to the explanatory power of religion in research on politics and governments, the field will expand in scope and prominence. This Reprint builds a firm foundation for future research, especially for scholars of politics who are new to the study of religion. The alterations and transformations to the religious–political relationship are still increasing. Our scholarship must increase and expand to meet these changes.

Andre P. Audette, Christopher L. Weaver, and Mark Brockway
Guest Editors

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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue "Religion and Politics: Historical Developments and Contemporary Transformations"

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In the 1966 animated television special "It's The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown", character Linus Van Pelt infamously claimed that there are three things he learned never to discuss with people: "religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin" (Mendelson et al. 1966). Other adages at the time variably expanded the list to include other ostensibly taboo topics such as money, sex, or race. By the 1990s, a Miss Manners column in the Chicago Tribune addressed the growing list of impolite topics by saying the author "balks at the idea that we can all now be trusted to enliven our social lives by discussing important political, social and religious issues" (United Feature Syndicate 1998). Why, then, invite papers exploring exactly those two topics: religion and politics?

At one time, the study of religion and politics also seemed like a topic to avoid in academia (e.g., Fox 2001; Jelen 1998; Wald and Wilcox 2006). It was not until the 1980s that religion made a resurgence as a topic of study in the field of political science, and, even then, it was often a marginalized or isolated topic. This trend may be surprising to some scholars, given both the historicity of the topic (e.g., Bellah 2011; Durkheim [1912] 1995; Geertz 1973; Weber [1920] 1993) and the many modern applications that define global politics in the 21st century (e.g., secularization, religious nationalism and fundamentalism, religious conflict and culture wars, religious liberty and tolerance, colonialism, and multiculturalism). Indeed, religious actors are quite prominent in many political systems, and religion is a central component of daily life in many regions of the world. Yet, scholars are still "catching up" in our understanding of how religion influences politics, and, increasingly, how politics influences religion. This alone would be sufficient reason to expand the research field.

The salience of religion and politics as identities and ideological systems heightens the need for academic research on the topic. Religion and politics both offer a comprehensive system through which individuals can understand their role in society and the ethics of their actions and ascertain human meaning (e.g., Gentile 2006). When core beliefs and identities are defined by these ideologies, it is inevitable that they come into conflict with one another, as one may simultaneously identify with a particular religion and a particular political ideology. How might individuals reconcile the cognitive dissonance experienced when these ideologies conflict? Most scholarship over time has assumed that religious values take precedence, but scholars have increasingly recognized that religious and political identities have a reciprocal relationship: religious values inform political identities, and political identities also inform religious values (e.g., Campbell et al. 2018; Hafner and Audette 2023; Margolis 2018; Patrikios 2008). This dynamic interaction increases the intrigue and need for scientific rigor when understanding the complex relationships among competing ideologies. Beyond individual identities, this also translates to a reciprocal relationship

between religious and political institutions, which can further entrench ideological systems (e.g., Bossy 1985; Casanova 1994; Taylor 2007).

A third reason to expand the religion and politics literature is because of the tangible effect that many of these interactions have on the lives of people across the globe (e.g., Bowen 2003; Glass 2018; Toft et al. 2011). In this Special Issue alone, you will read accounts of threats to democratic governance, the ability to obtain credit to purchase necessary goods, attitudes toward the use of military force, schisms within religious traditions, and the freedom to practice one's religion, among other topics. The balance between religion and politics significantly affects the daily lives and liberties of most of the world's population, along with social forces such as demographic trends, migration patterns, and the formation of social communities. Religion and politics also help us understand everyday human behaviors and decision making.

Finally, one may wish to grow in their understanding of the relationship between religion and politics precisely because it is uncomfortable. Psychology tells us that "achieving personal growth often requires experiencing discomfort" (Woolley and Fishbach 2022). Though discussing religious organizations through a scientific or political lens may seem crass, the sometimes-uncomfortable interchange between religion and politics reveals much about power structures, the formation of identities and groups, the diffusion of social norms, how authorities gain legitimacy, and how culture acts as a method of social control, among other essential observations across many different academic disciplines. In short, the contentiousness of these topics expands our understanding of what is possible and desirable for human institutions.

This Special Issue was curated in a spirit of pluralism. To understand a topic as broad and fundamental as the intersection of religion and politics, we chose not to limit research contributions to a particular research methodology, geographic focus, academic discipline, or theoretical angle. Instead, we sought out high-quality contributions from scholars working across the entire field. The result is a truly pluralistic Special Issue. You will find research using case studies of religions or political issues originating in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. Some involve contemporary disputes, others historical developments. The articles utilize both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including a wide range within each of those broad categories. Very likely, readers and authors of the articles represented in this Special Issue could find much to disagree about, but we hope that all will agree that these articles represent a rigorous response to the call for novel research that advances the complicated study of religion and politics.

The first article in this Special Issue is Danielle N. Lussier's review article, which challenges scholars of religion and politics to find ways to compare phenomena across different religious practices and traditions. Lussier centers houses of worship as an often-overlooked variable for accomplishing this task. Scholars would do well to consider this intermediary variable in comparative studies of religion. Another review article by Ishama Medilien and Timothy John Steigenga challenges the prominent religious economy model, and, in particular, its application to the Catholic Church in Chile by scholar Anthony Gill. They offer new analysis of three Latin American countries to complexify and critique the theory, taking into consideration religious market forces and assumptions behind the application of the model.

In a related research analysis, Carlos Piccone-Camere examines how the Catholic Church developed its anticommunist stance in the region, as well as the implications of this stance for movements such as liberation theology. Historical analyses such as these are essential in understanding a region where religious market forces are more dynamic than ever. For example, another article by Fernando Adolfo Mora-Ciangherotti assesses how the growth in Protestant churches in Venezuela influenced the 2024 campaign of President

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Nicolás Maduro Moros, who campaigned directly to and with evangelical leaders. It is a fascinating case study of how political actors who have faced ethical controversies may nonetheless be accepted by a devoted religious population.

We are also pleased to include four articles that examine the historical development of Islamic legal and religious traditions. Mustafa Yasin Akbaş chronicles the intriguing history behind Shirwānī's ḥadīth methodology book in the Ottoman Empire, as well as its impact on subsequent scholarly life. Likewise, Birnur Deniz focuses on the Ottoman Empire and the development of sophisticated credit relations, often viewed as a paradox, given the prohibition of interest in Islam. The article examines how a financing transaction gained legal status in Hanafi jurisprudence, offering a commentary on the development of Islamic law in the Hanafi school. Also examining Islamic legal systems, Sümeyra Yakar and Emine Enise Yakar report results from their fieldwork focusing on the country of Saudi Arabia and how the role of judges and judicial procedure has changed over time, including recent developments and the codification of legal regulations. Finally, Esra Atmaca examines the historical rivalry among Muslim administrators over the kiswa, a cloth that is annually draped over the Ka'ba in Mecca. This has important implications for how religious and political leaders can try, and have historically tried, to legitimize their authority.

Two articles examine governance and political movements in predominantly Muslim countries. Arık et al. examine the 2023 election in Türkiye, which constitutionally protects the concept of laiklik, or secularism, but nonetheless sees a prominent religious influence in society. They explore the case study of an opposition presidential candidate "stepping/standing" on a prayer rug with his shoes on to describe how the media politicizes religion and influences religious discourse. Similarly, Harris S. Kirazli's article examines how leaders in Egypt and Türkiye crafted strategic political alliances with Islamic political movements, which were subsequently denounced by the leaders and excluded from political power. Like Mora-Ciangherotti's analysis of Venezuela, these articles demonstrate ways in which political leaders can capitalize on religious discourse for political gain.

Turning to analyses of other religious traditions, Xiaoshuang Liu reports results from a compelling historical analysis and fieldwork in Northeast China, examining how shamanism has developed after receiving protection from the state, which signed an international treaty to safeguard folk cultures in the early 2000s. The reciprocal relationship between religious practices and public benefit is on full display in the "generation of the public from the private" and the "promotion of the private by the public". Geoffrey A. Sandy's article on the current schism in the Anglican Communion, brought about by culture war issues such as the ordination of women and the blessing of same-sex unions, introduces a new framework to understand the divide: conservative and progressive mindsets. This framework has potential to explain divides in other religious communities and open up avenues for further research on how minoritized mindsets within religious communities adapt to their status. While looking for alternative frameworks to analyze contentious issues, readers may also explore Diego Pérez-Lasserre's article challenging legal interpretivism as the dominant paradigm in legal hermeneutics and suggesting mysticism as an alternative.

Finally, this Special Issue includes a series of four articles examining the interplay between religion and politics in the United States. Theodore Madrid provides an important historical example, in Archbishop John Carroll, of how Roman Catholics in the early United States thought about religious liberty and church–state relations. For a group that eventually grew to become the single largest denomination in the country, it was important to establish a philosophical basis for how to explain their accused dual allegiance between the Pope and the nation. Next, James Guth and Brent F. Nelson provide a sweeping analysis of how different religious groups view military intervention in American society. They

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find unique effects across different religious traditions, providing the springboard for more analysis about how religious groups discuss foreign policy issues and how political coalitions use these issues to appeal to religious voters. Arrenius et al. use a survey experiment to determine how different religious groups respond to a professor making political comments in class, analyzing punitive attitudes and how religious groups apply them in culture wars debates. The Guest Editors were also grateful to have our own article accepted for publication, in which we describe the ways in which religious conversion can have a mobilizing effect on immigrant groups in American politics through a process of identity adaptation and formation.

Although the articles address myriad topics, they are united by a unique focus on the reciprocal relationship between religion and politics. Some address this topic more directly, but all include acknowledgement of ways in which religion influences political attitudes, actions, or policies and the state or political actors influence religious values, practices, or development. Certainly, this is not the last word on this critical topic, and we, the Guest Editors, hope that readers will carefully consider the work here and how future research might further expand on the "historical developments and contemporary transformations" of the relationship between religion and politics. In particular, testing theories in different regions or historical eras or across different religious traditions would allow scholars to continue to refine and assess the generalizability of our current understanding of religion and politics. We are grateful to all who submitted research for consideration in this Special Issue, to reviewers, to the journal's editors, to Sandee Pan for the excellent editorial support, and, most of all, to readers who will learn from and expand on the research showcased here.

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Review

Reconceptualizing Houses of Worship to Advance Comparisons across Religious Traditions

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Abstract: The study of religion and politics has struggled to find concepts, methods, and approaches that advance productive comparisons of phenomena across different religious practices and traditions. Consequently, scholars who seek to understand the impact of religious practice on political outcomes across religious traditions encounter challenges in aggregating findings and advancing scholarly inquiry. A reconsideration of the role of houses of worship as an intermediary variable connecting religious practice to political outcomes yields a potentially fruitful avenue for comparative investigation. While social processes that take place within worship spaces are frequently presumed in the mechanisms linking religious variables to political outcomes, these worship spaces are generally undertheorized and overlooked within the study of religion and politics. A body of scholarship has substantiated the significance of congregational variation within the study of Christianity, yet the most commonly cited quantitative literature on religion and political participation omits discussion of this level of variation. Drawing on the shared conceptual space across worship domains from several religious traditions, this article examines houses of worship as an organizational concept that can be employed productively for theoretical and empirical analyses of religion and politics.

Keywords: house of worship; political participation; social diffusion; sacred spaces

1. Introduction

Within the study of religion and politics, most causal and analytical frameworks that seek to understand the impact of religious variables on political outcomes articulate a social process by which doctrinal beliefs and devotional practices become consequential to individual believers' political attitudes or behaviors, whether through interaction with clergy, family members, co-religionists, or media. While scholars have investigated multiple mechanisms connecting the divine and civic realms, most existing frameworks make a general assumption that these social processes take place at least partly in spaces that are specifically designated for worship.

The social scientific study of religion is a multidisciplinary field, and the discussion of worship spaces varies both across and within disciplines. At the most basic level, there is variation in whether the worship spaces are discussed explicitly, or rather their existence is implied within a broader discussion of religious institutions or networks. When worship spaces are incorporated into analytical frameworks engaging religion and political outcomes, different characteristics might be emphasized by scholars depending on the goal of analysis. For example, some scholars are interested in the spatial relationship between sites of worship and other spaces of political, economic, or social value. This particular focus is common in scholarship examining religiously based conflict. In a valuable contribution to the comparative study of religion and politics, Hassner (2009) conceptualizes "sacred spaces" as phenomena that exist across religious traditions and share the attributes of acting as places where worshippers can communicate with the divine, contain a permanent divine presence, and provide meaning to the faithful. As he describes, many sacred sites, over time, become institutionalized into formalized places of worship that are central to religious devotion. Hassner's conceptualization of sacred spaces is principally concerned with

understanding the process through which sacred sites become the location of intractable sectarian conflict.

For scholars investigating the relationship between religion and the state, the broader institutional structure of embeddedness for houses of worship within the same religious tradition is frequently emphasized. Comparative analysis of houses of worship is rarely the central focus of research in any discipline. As one scholarly review notes, meso-level units, such as houses of worship, are understudied in comparison to macro and micro approaches (Herzog et al. 2020). Most research on the role houses of worship play in mobilizing political action has focused on democracies in predominantly Christian countries (Campbell 2004; Greenberg 2000; Johnston and Figa 1988; McDaniel 2008). More specifically, scholars have extensively studied the relationship between participation in regular religious services and engagement in civic and political life in the United States (Johnson and Tamney 1986; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Morris 1984; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Wald 1992). Within this scholarship, several findings highlight churches' roles in fostering political engagement by: (1) providing a forum where individuals can be exposed to political messages; (2) strengthening individual capacity-building by teaching and practicing civic skills; and (3) expanding individuals' social networks, increasing the likelihood of political mobilization.

Outside of Christianity, however, houses of worship are underexamined in comparison to broader political and social movements or charitable organizations. Within the study of Islam and politics, for example, mosques are usually only discussed within the larger framework of Islamic organizations or the networks of specific political or religious leaders. Despite their general neglect in studies of Islam and politics, an emerging literature aims to consider mosques' role as mediators between religious practice and political participation. Much of the empirical work is focused on mosques in Muslim-minority countries (Smits and Ultee 2013; Fleischmann et al. 2016; Choi et al. 2011; Jamal 2005; Sobolewska et al. 2015; Dana et al. 2011; Westfall 2019). Within this scholarship, several findings point to the possibility that the functional role played by churches in serving as conduits for civic and political engagement may be present in mosques also. Chouhoud et al. (2019) and Westfall (2019), for example, find that mosque involvement is a positive predictor of Muslim political participation in the United States. In some of the few examinations of mosques in Muslim-majority contexts, Lussier and Ahnaf (2024) find that political messages within individual mosques in Indonesia are often inconsistent from week to week, while Butt's (2016) study of Friday prayers in Pakistan notes that the sermon can motivate worshippers to participate in political opportunities.

As Brenneman and Miller (2016) note, "religious buildings are objects that exert unique pressure on those who utilize the space" (p. 84). Yet our tools for productive comparison of these buildings—which are central to the broader social and political processes that appear to connect religion and politics—are limited. The lack of agreed concepts and measures for examining worship spaces across religious traditions limits our ability to compare similarities observed in different contexts, as well as more clearly identify the mechanisms responsible for variation that appears across faith traditions. Ultimately, without a better set of shared tools for comparison, our ability to aggregate findings from different contexts is severely hampered.

The goal of this review is to add to our scholarly toolkit by articulating a thicker conceptualization of houses of worship that can be productively applied in empirical analyses. It will start with a concise overview of the way that worship spaces are characterized within the dominant literature discussing religion and politics, followed by an analysis of the shared conceptual space that exists across denominational boundaries. I will introduce a thicker conceptualization of house of worship and will illustrate how this concept can be applied empirically. While the concept of house of worship developed here is meant to be inclusive of all faith traditions that engage in communal worship, for simplicity's sake, the forthcoming analysis will focus primarily on examples from Islamic and Christian religious traditions.

2. Explicit, Implicit, and Missing Worship Spaces

How does existing scholarship on religion and politics characterize the spaces in which worship takes place? Within political science, worship spaces are generally examined through the study of congregations, which emerged primarily in examination of American Christianity. In particular, the Little Rock Congregations Study (https://ualr.edu/lrcs/ accessed 26 June 2024) comprises one of the few longitudinal, comprehensive data collection efforts focusing on congregations. Findings from the American experience have inspired scholars to examine religious practice in predominantly Christian communities, particularly in Latin America and Africa (Smith 2019; McClendon and Riedl 2019; Brown and Brown 2003), fostering a broader comparative literature on religion and politics. A particular strength of this comparative and cross-national body of scholarship is its close attention to a range of interactions that take place among worshippers and between clergy and worshippers in religious settings. Scholarship on congregations has helped to problematize our understanding of how religion becomes an everyday experience. It has identified and clarified the mechanisms by which religious values, beliefs, and social expectations are being communicated to believers and how aspects of congregational organization shape worshippers' experiences outside of the devotional space.

Scholarship in which congregations are either the unit of analysis or are theorized and empirically measured for incorporation into broader studies, however, comprises a smaller proportion of the overall volume of work investigating religious practice as a factor influencing political outcomes. Despite the valuable contributions that research on congregations have made to the study of religion and public life, worship spaces are rarely integrated as a theoretical or empirical variable in broader quantitative analyses connecting religion and politics. One obstacle, undoubtedly, is lack of data. None of the publicly available public opinion surveys include measures of respondents' houses of worship, thereby limiting the extent to which we can consider them as a possible source of variation impacting individuals' political outcomes. Consequently, conceptualization of worship spaces within much of the quantitative scholarship on religion and politics is thin. Discussion of characteristics in which houses of worship may vary from each other is absent and the units are largely viewed as interchangeable or homogenous within a single religious tradition.

To better understand how worship spaces are represented within the quantitative literature that has had the greatest influence on the study of religion and political engagement, I looked closely at six heavily cited articles that appear when using the search terms "religion and political participation."[1] All of the articles draw on empirical samples taken from the United States. Three focus on Christians and three focus on Muslims. None of the articles examining Christians discussed houses of worship or worship spaces directly or tried to measure them empirically. Two of the three articles on Muslims deliberately discuss the role of the mosque, but do not measure it. In statistical terms, houses of worship are omitted variables in these empirical models. Table 1 provides a concise summary of the primary empirical measures in the six articles. The first row displays the number of Google Scholar citations for each article. The following three lines are information taken from the articles. In the final row of the table, I suggest how worship space likely reveals itself in the empirical models by conjecturing which included variables may be impacted by worship space characteristics that are left unmeasured.

Table 1. Summary of Empirical Measures in Quantitative Studies of Religion and Political Participation.

Article	Jones-Correa and Leal (2001)	Jamal (2005)	Djupe and Grant (2001)	Driskell et al. (2008)	Ayers and Hofstetter (2008)	Dana et al. (2011)
Google Scholar citations (as of 5 June 2024)	494	331	261	230	113	110
Data Source	Latino National Political Survey (1989); ANES (1990)	Survey of 335 Muslim Americans in NY area	Citizen Participation Survey	Baylor Religion Survey (2005)	Survey of 1846 American Muslims	Muslim-American Public Opinion Survey
Measures used to capture religious practice (IV)	Four measures: (1) religious affiliation; (2) church attendance; (3) centrality of religion in lives; (4) personal religious experience	Ordinal scale of mosque involvement beyond prayer	Sample limited to respondents who attend church at least 1x/month Measures Y/N practice a civic skill in church	Religious participation index comprising 9 different activities; level of engagement in them; religious denomination; and beliefs	Four dimensions of religious context: (1) raised or convert to Islam; (2) Muslim spouse; (3) importance of Islam in life; (4) frequency of mosque attendance, prayer and volunteerism	Two measures: (1) importance of religion in daily life; (2) level of involvement in local mosque
Measures used to capture political participation (DV)	Y/N to voting, being registered to vote and 7-item participation index	Index of 4 non-voting political activities	Y/N to any non-voting political activity	Index of 11 political activities	Index of 8 political activities	Index of four non-voting political activities
Worship space approximated **	Measure of religious denomination (Catholic, Protestant)	Captured within religious practice variable and measure of "foreign born" Muslims	Measure of different religious traditions (Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, African-American Protestant, Catholic)	Measure of religious denomination (Catholic, black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Jewish and other)	Captured within religious context variables	Measures of ethnic background and religious tradition (Sunni, Arab, Asian, Black, other race, foreign citizen)

See References for full citation information. ** Author's interpretation based on understanding of the published empirical findings.

This simple snapshot of six of the most frequently cited articles on religion and political participation reveals several interesting observations. First, while all six studies include broad and comprehensive measures of political participation, their measures of religious practice vary considerably. Djupe and Grant (2001) incorporate a scope condition of only examining individuals who attend church at least once per month, thereby limiting their study to regular adherents, looking narrowly at whether they practice a civic skill. Similarly, Jamal (2005) offers a narrow measure that is a higher bar than typically used by looking at mosque involvement beyond attending prayers. Dana et al. use two measures, one attitudinal and another looking at mosque involvement. In contrast, Driskell et al. (2008) employ a thicker measure of religious practice allowing for more variation of the independent variable by using a multidimensional index of activities and level of engagement. Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) and Ayers and Hofstetter (2008) include similar measures that fall between the leaner and more robust instruments.

Second, while none of the studies explicitly acknowledge or measure the independent effects of worship spaces on political participation, the mechanism of engagement within spaces designed for worship is implicit in all their analyses. Jones-Correa and Leal are specifically interested in understanding the associational role of churches. Djupe and Grant's focus on civic skills specifies that these skills are in use at a religious congregation. Many of the activities included in the index of activities of Driskell et al., such as religious education, choir practice, and prayer meetings, typically take place in spaces designated for worship. Likewise, the three studies examining mosques all include engagement in a mosque in their measure of religious practice.

The studies of Christians do not assume that all houses of worship are homogenous. Rather, they include variables to separate out distinct religious traditions or denominations, in expectation that there will be variation across how religion is differentially practiced within these different faith systems. Consequently, the statistical models used by Jones-Correa and Leal, Djupe and Grant, and Driskell et al. include variables to distinguish among religious traditions, which is where omitted congregational effects would be likely to appear. These statistical models allow for identification of differences across religious denomination but fail to consider variation across worship spaces within the same religious tradition. Likewise, they cannot account for ways that houses of worship across different denominations may affect worshippers similarly. This possibility is underscored in Jones-Correa and Leal's finding that religious denomination was not a statistically significant predictor of political engagement. They write, "Churches matter, but they matter because they function much like other associations, and they share associational characteristics across denominations" (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001, p. 763). These models may have the statistical effect of overestimating denominational differences and overlooking the significance of variation that occurs at the level of the worship community. The studies that look exclusively at Muslims lack measures that capture the details about mosque variation that may occur across the samples. Some of the samples include demographic variables that differentiate Muslims' ethnic, racial, or linguistic identities, which might correlate with how mosques are organized, but, in general, we have no way of knowing how differences across mosques affect the authors' findings.

The six articles examined in Table 1 are all based on samples taken from the United States, which is consistently overrepresented in the multidisciplinary social scientific study of religion. Even though much of the existing literature on the relationship between religious and political or civic engagement is drawn from empirical studies of the United States and is organized around concepts that presume both Christianity and democracy, relevant findings from this work should not be reflexively dismissed as irrelevant to the study of non-Western contexts. As Herzog et al. (2020) argue, much of the micro- and meso-level work on religious communities in the United States is well-designed and contextually appropriate for what the scholars seek to accomplish. The challenge is to consider the findings of the existing body of work and what elements can be applied to different contexts rather than assuming the universality of the American experience, which is characterized

by significant variation across Protestant denominations, as well as overlapping identity markers between race, immigrant status, and religious affiliation.

Sociological studies of religion, which emphasize the salience of local context in considering how individuals perceive religious content and act on it, problematize overly simplistic models that treat houses of worship within the same religious tradition as interchangeable. Edgell (2012) encourages the study of empirical variation in practices and the institutions that facilitate them. She advocates "a practice-oriented and contextual approach to religious identity and experience that recognizes their social embeddedness" (p. 257). Guhin challenges scholars to "stop thinking of religion as a category and start thinking of it as a site through which to propose and test theories of social life" (Guhin 2014, p. 582). He notes, in particular, that while "The centrality of practices and their complicated interactions with beliefs are certainly clear in the study of religions. . .there is nothing essentially religious about these processes or their interactions" (Guhin 2014, p. 585) that should prevent the comparative study of practices.

Brenneman and Miller (2016) offer one of the few sociological studies to take seriously the potential role of religious buildings in shaping social interactions in religious settings. They point out the distinct social role played by worship spaces, writing that:

> in worship, a group of people meets together at a certain time to interact in a very particular way, often claiming to interact with the transcendent or divine. Whereas a home provides a place for an individual or a small group to seek rest, shelter, and privacy, and to interact in patterned ways, in a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue, a group of people, most of whom are typically of no blood relation, gather to do something that can only be accomplished together. (p. 84)

Among their arguments for focusing greater attention on physical structures, they point out that buildings play a communicative role, drawing those who are part of the community in while also providing legible signs to outsiders about which community worships in the space (p. 84). A similar point is made by Wittenberg (2006), who notes that in communist Hungary the ornate church buildings that remained intact as religious practice and instruction were being actively repressed by the state served two valuable purposes, as a symbol of local resistance and as a physical alternative to state-controlled spaces. Wittenberg's observation supports Brenneman and Miller's (2016) reminder that space is both a product and producer of social relations (p. 96).

3. Shared Conceptual Space across Denominational Boundaries

An extensive body of scholarship has detailed churches' role in catalyzing the relationship between religious practice and political outcomes. As Verba et al. (1995) demonstrate, houses of worship can provide any number of resources for political participation. Scholars have documented the institutional role of churches in inculcating civic skills (Djupe and Gilbert 2006; Brown and Brown 2003; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001) and building social networks (Greenberg 2000; Johnston and Figa 1988; McDaniel 2008). As Lim and MacGregor (2012) and others describe, congregations bring people together socially, and the specific experience of shared social ties with co-religionists can help generate trust (p. 749). Djupe and Grant (2001) find support for several mechanisms that can draw worshippers into political engagement, including recruitment by a co-religionist, the presence of political meetings in church spaces, and perceptions of partisan leanings within a congregation. Any of these mechanisms suggest that worship spaces can foster political participation through forms of social diffusion.

Worship spaces play varying roles within local communities depending on the functions they are meant to serve in a specific religious tradition, as well as within the broader sociopolitical ecosystem in which they operate. For example, in his longitudinal analysis of local church networks following the development of a communist-party regime in Hungary, Wittenberg (2006) documents how religious instruction shifted over time from taking place in schools to occurring in churches as a response to party-level repression. Much of the

work that compares what happens in worship spaces tends to focus on variation within a limited range of religious traditions, such as denominations within Christianity.

Some might argue that comparing houses of worship across a broader range of faith traditions, such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, is unproductive, assuming that differences across devotional beliefs, practice and ritual render mosques, synagogues, and churches too distinctive to yield meaningful insights when examined together. Yet, an assumption that the known differences in the religious functions of worship spaces inherently yields differentiation in all potential (and possibly unknown) roles that houses of worship might play can cause us to overlook their similarities. Looking specifically within the Abrahamic religious traditions, at the most fundamental level of comparison, mosques, synagogues, and churches share the primary role of providing a space for worship. Friday prayers at mosques, Saturday morning Shabbat services in synagogues, and Sunday services in churches typically include a sermon by a religious leader. Mosques, synagogues, and churches regularly organize other activities related to ritual belief and practice, including religious education, celebrations of major religious holidays, and coordinating charitable programs connected to religious values. Accordingly, worshippers may become involved in auxiliary functions of houses of worship and undertake tasks that are separate from their devotional responsibilities as adherents to their faith. As such, houses of worship have the potential to serve as social settings where co-religionists engage in community building that can mediate how their religious values shape other aspects of their social, political, and economic identities and practices.

Additionally, mosques, synagogues, and churches share a distinction from other types of mass religious associations, including the political, social, and charitable organizations that are affiliated with faith traditions. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hillel International, and the Christian Democratic Union are associations comprised of individuals who consciously choose to join the group for any number of reasons. Individuals attending a house of worship—mosque, synagogue, or church—to fulfill devotional obligations are not necessarily signing up for active volunteerism as members of mass religious associations essentially do. While the populations of religious associations and houses of worship may overlap, they are distinct.

As Westfall (2019, p. 683) contends, the robust literature on Christianity demonstrates a broad consensus that attending church has at least some indirect effect on civic engagement and political participation, and that the mechanism behind this relationship comes primarily from group dynamics rather than specific denominational principles. Consequently, the theoretical connection between religious practice and political participation is independent of the content of religious beliefs, although research that accepts this premise and examines the relationship across religious traditions is limited. In general, there is little reason to expect that mosques, synagogues, and churches should look fundamentally different regarding the role they play in creating a local community of co-religionists who may encounter opportunities to build civic skills, encounter political messages, and be recruited into broader civic and political causes. While the structure of worship is different in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions, all practices emphasize communal worship and fellowship among co-religionists; all prize sacred texts as a source of guidance; and all include a sermon by a religious leader at a weekly worship service.

While houses of worship perform similar functions irrespective of religious tradition, there are important differences in worship rituals across all faiths, including the Abrahamic belief systems that share similarities in the ways worship spaces are utilized. Jewish tradition emphasizes domestic worship practices with public worship at synagogue an extension of these rituals. Christianity calls on adherents to attend a weekly Sunday service. Islam prioritizes the performance of five daily prayers that are conducted at specific time intervals each day. While observers of Judaism and Christianity tend to visit the same house of worship on a consistent basis, attachment to a specific mosque may be weaker among Muslims, particularly in a Muslim-majority context. Observant Muslims who do not spend their days at home will typically offer their prayers at different locations over

the course of the day, including at home, at a mosque, a prayer hall in a public building, or in another private location. Observant Muslims in a Muslim-majority context may affiliate primarily with the mosque that is closest to their house as this is the location where their family will typically fulfill obligations during Ramadan and celebrate religious feasts. Some mosques, however, will have a secondary and separate group of adherents comprised primarily of observant Muslim men employed or studying in the area who attend Friday midday prayers. These different levels of affiliation with houses of worship may contribute to variation in community norms and mechanisms of social diffusion among Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

In sum, while houses of worship vary in the significance that they may play within devotional practices and the full range of activities that take place within them, they share considerable functional similarities irrespective of denominational differences. When we look closely at the mechanisms that underpin most findings of interest in the study of religion and political engagement, they have little to do with specific rituals or doctrinal beliefs. Rather, the findings emphasize social processes and interactions that, while related to localized expectations about religious practice, also vary across time, place, and individual. There is little reason to reject findings from a predominantly American Christian experience as irrelevant to non-Christian contexts a priori simply because of the empirical origins from which they came to light. Social scientists, by definition, engage in comparison, and it is a matter of scholarly debate as to how to apply findings from one context to examine phenomena in another.

At the same time, the empirical foundations of congregational study as centered on American Protestantism raises several questions about how to apply relevant concepts and hypotheses effectively outside of the original field of study. For example, one of the most frequent—and extremely relevant—critiques of applying insights from the study of Christianity to non-Christian contexts is the common use of weekly attendance at worship services as a measure of piety in public opinion surveys (see Herzog et al. 2020). Indeed, no other faith tradition prizes weekly attendance at public worship to the same degree as Christianity. Similarly, the most used questions about religious practice that appear in prominent cross-national surveys, such as the World Values Survey, are frequently worded in a way that centers Christian practices, assuming monotheism and other beliefs commonly related to Christianity, such as a focus on the afterlife. For effective comparison between worshippers of different faith traditions, we need concepts that are sufficiently flexible to ensure neutrality across different devotional beliefs, together with measures that accurately capture details deemed significant within specified religious practice. If we can identify measures that are internally valid for the phenomena under investigation, these measures can serve as functional equivalents across different religious traditions to facilitate externally valid comparisons.

4. Conceptualizing Houses of Worship

To advance methodological tools for cross-denominational analysis, a thicker, more robust conceptualization of house of worship is warranted. I define house of worship as a permanent physical space where individuals of the same religious denomination come together with the primary purpose of fulfilling devotional duties related to their religious practice. This physical space has a consistent group of common believers who worship in it, as well as religious leaders who tend to the space and the worshippers who affiliate with it. Mosques, church buildings, temples, and synagogues are all examples of "houses of worship", even though the significance of worship space may vary across different religious denominations. I have intentionally chosen the language "house of worship", over "place of worship", to anchor the concept to the related semantic themes of residence, dwelling, and family, which connote a sense of intimacy and community that is absent from the more neutral sounding "place". The conceptualization of houses of worship proposed here is narrower in scope than Hassner's (2009) concept of "sacred spaces". Not all sacred spaces are houses of worship, and, depending on context and tradition, not all houses

of worship may meet the criteria to be considered sacred spaces. Thus, while there may be some overlap between these two concepts, for analytical and empirical purposes they are distinct.

Houses of worship are also distinct from organized communities of believers, who may—or may not—be affiliated with a house of worship. Organized religious communities that lack a permanent physical space whose primary purpose is worship, such as followers whose circumstances necessitate worshipping in ad hoc locations, virtual communities that congregate online, or groups that gather in spaces primarily used for other purposes (such as domiciles), are not houses of worship. My proposed definition of house of worship does not deny the existence or significance of these communities but sees them as a separate concept. Additionally, not all "places" of worship may be "houses" of worship. For example, hospital and airport prayer rooms and chapels are typically not houses of worship even if worship can take place in them. Similarly, places of worship situated within communities of people who have devoted their lives to religious practice and leadership and are not open to common believers, such as spaces within monasteries, are also typically not houses of worship. The conceptualization of house of worship advanced here conjoins a physical space where worship takes place, a consistent group of common believers who use it, and the leaders who tend to them. All are necessary attributes.

This conceptualization of house of worship is not very different from Chaves' (2004) definition of "congregation",[2] which is sufficiently neutral to apply to non-Christian contexts. In contrast to Chaves, the definition proposed here places fewer requirements on frequency and scheduling of activities, as these aspects can vary across religious traditions. Of greater significance, though, is a deliberate choice to move away from the term "congregation", which has etymological roots in Christianity. The Latin root of "congregation", *greg*, meaning "flock" took on a religious meaning in the 16th century when Protestant reformers began to use it as distinct from the term for "church", yielding to the modern understanding of local believers (vocabulary.com and etymonlin.com, 5 May 2023). The term is still commonly associated with Protestantism, and thus a shift to "house of worship" is an opportunity to reorient the study of religious practice away from a default Christian center.

In determining the conceptual space occupied by houses of worship, Sartori's (1970) ladder of abstraction is a helpful tool. Figure 1 offers a visual depiction of the ladder of abstraction for houses of worship. Figure 1 is illustrative of a general relationship between conceptual categories and is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive of all examples of houses of worship. Below the overarching concept of house of worship is Level 1, comprising categories that generally overlap with conceptual distinctions between faith traditions or branches of religion. We can compare houses of worship at this level, considering differences, for example, between mosques (Islam) and temples (Hinduism). Level 2 denotes houses of worship divided across denominations within faith traditions, such as distinctions between different houses of worship within branches of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc. Level 3 on the ladder specifies individual houses of worship. Houses of worship can be compared at any of these three levels, and the choice of level will depend on the research goal. There is no reason, in principle, why specific Catholic parishes cannot be compared with specific mosques, for example, if the goal of analysis is to understand variation in experience across faith traditions.

The ladder of abstraction articulated in Figure 1 exists separately from hierarchical structures that may be present within religious traditions. For example, many branches of Christianity, most notably the Catholic Church, have their own ecclesiastical structure in which houses of worship are embedded. This reality does not negate the conceptual space shared by these houses of worship and those of other religious traditions. Rather, by clarifying the role played by houses of worship in each analysis, scholars can sharpen which aspect of religious institutions or practice is most relevant to the research question.

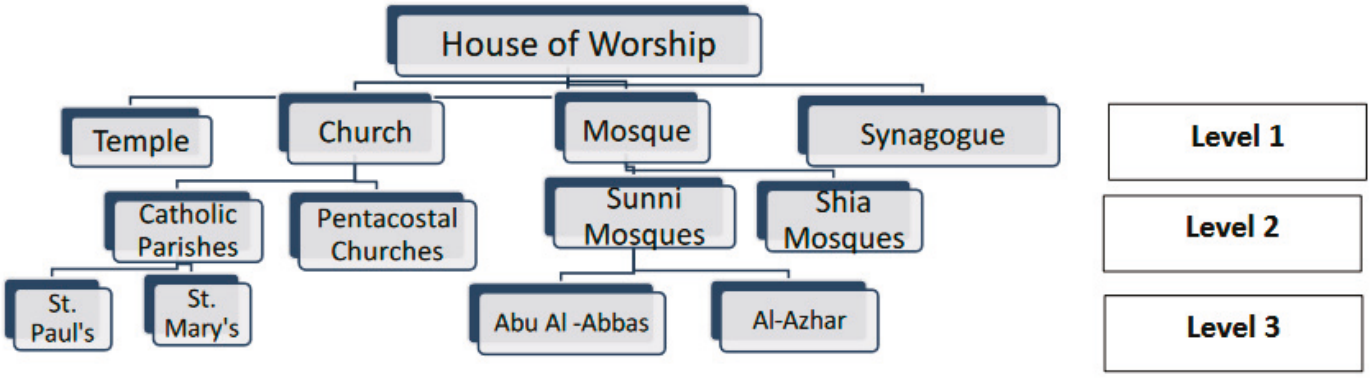


Figure 1. Houses of Worship Ladder of Abstraction.

A thicker conceptualization of houses of worship that is not attached to specific religious beliefs advances two methodological goals. First, it allows scholars to more deliberately build theoretical and empirical models that take seriously the role that houses of worship play in catalyzing religious beliefs into politically consequential outcomes. In other words, we cannot overcome the omitted variable bias of much of the extant quantitative literature on religion and political outcomes without having a clearer articulation of what variable is missing and why its omission is problematic. Second, a denominationally neutral conceptualization of houses of worship facilitates easier comparisons of individuals and communities belonging to different religious traditions. Cross-denominational comparisons are necessary if scholars seek to understand the power of religious concepts in general, and specific denominational differences, in particular.

5. Tools for Productive Comparison

The process of moving from abstract concept to empirical measurement necessitates consideration of a concept's dimensions. Table 2 outlines six distinct dimensions along which houses of worship could potentially vary: local context, regulation, level of autonomy, level of formalized organizational structure, access to resources, and worshipper profile. The boundaries between some of these dimensions may be fuzzy, but they reflect distinct attributes of houses of worship that likely impact how individual houses of worship function within a local and national context, as well as worshippers' experiences within them. Some sources of variation, such as level of autonomy, are partly endogenous to religious denomination. Other sources of variation are a product of a combination of factors that reflect the broader social and political structures within which houses of worship exist. For example, two different mosques, one situated in the United Kingdom and another in Saudi Arabia would both vary on multiple dimensions while still serving as worship spaces for individuals professing adherence to Islam. Alternately, a synagogue and a congregational church both operating in New York city would be situated in the same local context yet might be differentially impacted by that context.

Depending on the research question of interest, a scholar might choose to focus on one or more dimensions for analysis. Each dimension itself requires further elaboration to be empirically useful, and there are multiple ways each dimension could be operationalized. Tables 3 and 4 offer examples of how one might apply these dimensions to specific empirical cases. For illustrative purposes, I have used information I have gathered from three mosques and four churches in one Indonesian city to demonstrate how these dimensions may be applied in comparative analysis. Table 2 offers an example of how the level of formalized organizational structure could be developed into an ordinal scale that allows for empirical comparison across houses of worship based on evaluation of qualitative data gathered from each case.

Table 2. Dimensions for Comparing Houses of Worship.

Dimension	Potential Sources of Variation
Local Context	How pluralist is religious landscape in which HW operates? Does HW belong to a majority or minority religion in local context? In national context? What is the broader religious ecosystem in which the HW operates? Are there other religious organizations (charitable, educational, etc.) providing services to co-religionists? What is the geographic location of the HW? Does location create particular constraints or opportunities for HW?
Regulation	Who has jurisdiction to decide where HW can be built? How difficult is it to build a new HW? Who owns HW? To what extent are the activities that take place inside HW regulated by: (a) state actors; (b) religious hierarchies outside of the HW; (c) decision-makers within HW? To what extent are a HW's financial resources regulated by an external actor?
Level of Autonomy	Who has primary decision-making authority for HW over (a) worship/spiritual matters; (b) finances and budget; (c) personnel; (d) auxiliary activities? Is decision-making vested primarily in worshippers, in religious leaders within the HW, religious leaders outside the HW, or state authorities? How much autonomy does HW have vis-à-vis the religious denomination with which HW is affiliated? To what degree is a HW financially independent? Who preaches? Who decides who will preach? Which topics are forbidden from being preached?
Level of formalized organizational structure	Does the HW have a formalized organizational structure for making decisions and executing functions? Which functions are incorporated into a formal organizational structure? How broad is the constituency incorporated in the formal organizational structure?
Access to Resources	Does the HW have access to financial, property, or other in-kind resources from (a) the state; (b) an interdependent religious institution; (c) worshippers; (d) independent, autonomous revenue streams? What are the volume and variety of events (worship, educational, social, etc.) that take place within the HW?
Worshipper Profile	What is the size of the community using HW? What are the demographic characteristics of the worship community (age, ethno-linguistic composition, income level, socioeconomic status)?

Table 3. Ordinal Scale Measuring Level of Formalized Organizational Structure.

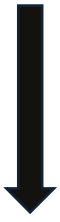
	Level of Formalized Organizational Structure	Scores for Houses of Worship in Sample
Lower (0)	No formal organizational structure for determining and delegating responsibilities.	
	Formal organizational structure for organizing worship events. Informal avenues or ad hoc committees determine remaining functions.	Mosque 2, Mosque 3
	Formal organizational structure delineates how most functions are carried out, but determination of most responsibilities occurs informally or through leader directives.	Mosque 1
	Formal organizational structure delineates how most functions are carried out, but some lines of responsibility remain unclear.	Pentecostal Church
Higher (4)	Formal organizational structure delineates how all functions are carried out. Regular meetings are held for various bodies with clear accountability mechanisms.	Catholic parish 1, Catholic parish 2, Presbyterian Church

Table 4. Aggregate Dichotomous Measures for Local Context.

Question	M1	M2	M3	CP1	CP2	Pent	Pres
Are there other equally accessible HW in the city for worshippers of same religious tradition?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Does HW belong to local majority religion?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Does HW belong to national majority religion?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Are other religious organizations providing services to co-religionists?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Is HW easily accessible to worshippers?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

While an ordinal scale is logical for a dimension that can be articulated in ordered categories, not all the dimensions described in Table 2 meet this criterion. For example, local context encompasses several characteristics that are typically measured on a nominal scale. Table 4 displays one approach to examine local context by using a series of yes/no questions asked of each house of worship. The cells in Table 4 reveal that the local context in which these houses of worship are situated is largely pluralist within an ecosystem in which other religious organizations provide services to co-religionists of both majority and minority religions.

6. Conclusions

While social processes taking place within worship spaces are frequently assumed within studies that connect religious causal variables to political outcomes, the specific role houses of worship play in analytical frameworks is often underspecified. Consequently, houses of worship are regularly treated as thin concepts that are interchangeable, homogenous units within the faith tradition to which they belong. Indeed, several of the most cited scholarly publications examining religion and political participation do not mention houses of worship and do not account for their potential independent effects on worshippers in their empirical models. Yet, scholarship that looks closely at the interactions taking place within houses of worship has consistently shown that individual houses of worship vary in meaningful ways that cannot simply be reduced to the individual-level characteristics of worshippers or clergy members.

This review has sought to expand our methodological toolkit for critically analyzing the role of worship spaces in our scholarship by articulating a thicker conceptualization of house of worship. The conceptualization advanced here is neutral with regard to religious denomination, allowing for a reorientation of discussion of worship spaces and the community of people who use them away from language and approaches that normalize Christian institutions and practices as a default. By clarifying the conceptual space occupied by houses of worship and the relationship between houses, faith traditions, and denominations, we see that houses of worship can be compared productively along six different dimensions at three different levels of analysis. Individual researchers can focus their comparisons on the levels and dimensions most relevant to their research question.

The conceptualization of house of worship advanced in this review initiates a conversation that will be enriched by refinements from scholars working on religious traditions not touched on or fully elaborated here, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism, and numerous others practiced across the globe. The tools suggested in this essay offer concrete suggestions for meaningful comparison across religious traditions, yet they do nothing to remedy the data limitations that have been a primary driver of omission of houses of worship from most quantitative studies of religion and politics. The operationalization recommended in Table 2 necessitates fine-grained, qualitative data about houses of worship that is absent from any publicly available survey of worshippers. In many respects, however, gathering some basic data about individual houses of worship

within a given geographic area is a feasible data collection task and something that could be undertaken effectively and productively by a group of committed scholars.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 I initially started this exercise using the top three most-cited articles that emerged from a Google Scholar search conducted in August 2023. A repeated search in June 2024 revealed two of the same three articles, all of which examined churches. Subsequent searches adding terms "mosque" and "Islam" helped identify the additional articles.

2 Chaves defined a congregation as "a social institution in which individuals who are not religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled intervals, for activities and events for explicitly religious content and purpose, and in which there is a continuity over time in the persons who gather, the location of the gathering, and the nature of the activities and events at each gathering" (Chaves 2004, pp. 1–2).

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Review

Understanding the Catholic Church's Behavior Under the Dictatorships of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil: Rethinking the Religious Economy Explanation

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Abstract

During the 1970s' military dictatorships in Chile and Brazil, the Catholic Church took the position of moral opposition to the authoritarian regimes, while in Argentina, the Church sided with the dictatorship. In his pathbreaking book utilizing the religious economy model, Anthony Gill theorized that the Church in Chile adopted a critical stance against the regime due to competition from Protestant Churches. Subsequently, Gill's specific arguments and the religious economy model in general have been widely applied but also critiqued by sociologists of religion. Through a deeper analysis of the three case studies of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, we support and extend theoretical critiques of the religious economy model. We argue that that the religious economy model as applied by Gill is an insufficient predictor of church and state behavior because it lacks specificity on the amount of competition necessary to warrant taking progressive action, lacks specificity about the timing of Protestant competition, ignores the pre-existing position of the Catholic Church, treats the demand side of the religious market as inelastic, assumes the Catholic Church intentionally implemented progressive policies in response to competition, presumes the Church is a unitary actor, and disregards the impact of a perceived Marxist threat on both church and state actors. Our critique of the religious economy model points to refinements of the model and alternative approaches to understanding church and state behavior in Latin America and elsewhere.

Keywords: Catholic Church; religious economy model; military dictatorships; church behavior; critiquing the religious economy model

1. Introduction

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the human rights violations of the military dictatorships in Latin America caught the attention of the international community as well as the Catholic Church. During this time, the Catholic Church famously took differing positions in response to the respective dictatorships. For instance, both the Chilean and Brazilian national Churches demonstrated a preferential option for the poor and opposed the dictatorships, while in other cases, such as Argentina, the Church sided with the military (Ruderer 2015, p. 469). The diverse responses of national episcopies attracted scholarly interest in attempts to explain the Catholic Church's behavior.

One such attempt was Anthony Gill's utilization of the theory of religious competition based on Finke and Stark's (1988) religious economy model. Gill argued that religious

organizations like the Catholic Church behave like firms in a market, assuming that demand for religion is constant (Bush 2010, p. 306; Finke and Stark 2003, p. 100). With more religious competition, religious firms will oppose the military regime to retain and expand membership (Gill 1998, p. 147). However, when there is low to no religious competition, the Church will side with the state because it does not have to compete with other firms for members (Gill 1998, p. 171). Gill's approach thus predicted that in the case of Chile, where the Catholic Church faced greater competition from Protestantism, the Church would adopt an oppositional position, while in Argentina (where religious competition was lower), it would side with the state.

The religious economy model (REM) (Bush 2010) and Gill's religious competition theory spurred new research and debate about the efficacy of treating religious institutions as unitary rational actors in religious markets. Penny Edgell (2012) summarizes some of the primary criticisms of the REM as:

> its inability to account for the social embeddedness of religious choice (Edgell 2005; Ellison 1995; Young 1997) and the cultural construction of rationality (Smilde 2007), for mistakes in assessing foundational empirical claims about the relationship between religious pluralism and religious adherence (Chaves and Gorski 2001; Voas et al. 2002), for its lack of attention to relations of power in the supply side of religion (Bush 2010; Wilde et al. 2010), for an unwarranted assumption that religious identification or belief has a strong and unitary effect on social action (Chaves 2010; Smilde and May 2010), and for a definition of religious strength that uncritically mirrors historically specific features of contemporary Protestant Christian orthodoxy (Bruce 1999; Cadge et al. 2011; Edgell 2005). (Penny Edgell 2012, p. 249)

We utilize a critical case study approach, undertaking a political and historical analysis of the Catholic Church's response across the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. Our analysis confirms some critiques of the REM and extends others. Overall, our analysis raises six key points that intersect with and extend previous criticisms of the REM. First, the REM fails to specify the level of religious pluralism needed to elicit a progressive response by the Catholic Church. Second, the pre-existing position of the Catholic Church in the cultural context has a greater influence on its responses than the REM accounts for. Third, the REM does not account for the fact that the Catholic Church's shift towards progressivism may not have been an intentional response to competition but rather was a response to an internal challenge, such as a priest shortage. Fourth, because the REM, as utilized by Gill, treats religious demand as inelastic, it ignores variations in demand, rendering it incapable of explaining why progressive policies were perceived as a successful competitive tactic in the first place. More recent iterations of the REM, such as Trejo's (2009) analysis of religious competition and indigenous movements in Mexico and Chesnut's (2007) analysis of the growth of Charismatic Catholicism, have reopened the demand side of the equation, providing a fruitful agenda for future research using a revised REM model. Fifth, the REM treats the Catholic Church as a unitary actor when it was divided in each case, which impacted the balance of power within the institution and who determined its overall institutional position. Lastly, the REM, as utilized in Latin American cases, assumes that the Catholic Church can rely on the state to oppose Marxism. However, as our cases indicate, there are instances where the state accepts Socialist influences, and the Church does not necessarily oppose them.

Morello et al. (2017) define an "enchanted modernity" as a landscape where religious affiliation is fluid and religion is incorporated into daily life (Morello et al. 2017, p. 318). While the REM, as utilized to explain church and state behavior in the Southern Cone, does factor in religious pluralism in formerly monopolistic markets, it does not sufficiently

disaggregate actors, identify religious demand factors that impacted religious suppliers, or consider the blurred boundaries of religious participation in the Latin American context. In such a context, static conceptions of church and state actors and religious competition are limited in their explanatory power. A more critical reading of the history of the case studies, the influence of global trends in the context of the Cold War and Vatican II, religious demand variables, and a disaggregation of the multiple actors within both states and churches provides a more accurate view of the choices made by churches to support or oppose authoritarian states.

2. Background

There is widespread scholarly consensus that the Catholic Church's global shift towards progressive policies stems from the Second Vatican Council of 1963 (Vatican II), held to discuss how to bring the Catholic Church into the modern era. To the Vatican, modernity meant that "the Roman Church not only [faced] the process of secularization" but also "the disestablishment [of the Catholic Church] at the hands of liberal government" (Escobar 1991, p. 27). To deal with this pressing issue as well as internal Church dynamics, Vatican II was called to order to discuss the Catholic Church's policies. Vatican II stressed an "ecclesiastical renewal and change in Catholicism's relationship to modernity" (Catoggio 2013, p. 140). The Vatican's new doctrine emphasized a new pastoral commitment to the poor, becoming the voice of the voiceless, tolerance for alternative ideas, and greater activism (Gill 1998, p. 36; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, p. 1). The doctrine demonstrated a prioritization of the needs of the masses over the state and elites.

The 1968 Second General Conference of CELAM (Episcopal Conference of Latin America), also known as CELAM II, applied the Vatican II doctrine to the Latin American context. CELAM II coined the term "preferential option for the poor" for this new praxis of prioritizing the common people. CELAM II noted that the poor have always had a preferential place in Catholic scripture; therefore, it was time the Catholic Church changed its policy to better reflect its scripture (Gill 1998, p. 37). Despite the conferences, not every Catholic episcopacy adopted the new doctrines. Some episcopacies, like those of Chile and Brazil, had a history of progressive tendencies and implemented the new policies; however, more conservative episcopacies, like Argentina, rejected the doctrine and were much slower at implementing progressive policies (Gill 1998, p. 37). The process of "modernizing" was complex, creating divisions within the Church and tension with repressive regimes that retaliated against the new doctrine (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, pp. 1–2).

In addition to the progressive shift in the Catholic Church, this period also saw the growth of Liberation Theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez explains in the foundational work, "A Theology of Liberation", that Liberation Theology argues that there are three areas in need of liberation: "(1) socio-political economic liberation from poverty, oppression, and dependency; (2) liberation in history of all dimensions of human freedom, with humans becoming responsible for their own destiny and living in solidarity; (3) liberation from sin, which is the ultimate root of injustice" (McGovern 2009, p. 10). Gutiérrez "challenged the church to accept the demands of God's words and to become involved [politically] in the struggles of the poor", citing biblical passages such as God's liberation of the people from "misery and oppression in Egypt" through political action (McGovern 2009, pp. 10–11). Gutierrez explained that the Catholic Church should not remain apolitical, as there is precedent within the holy text indicating that the Church's role is to take political action to liberate the people from suffering. While the messages of Liberation Theology reflected elements of Vatican II doctrines, critics believed it encouraged Marxist thinking and threatened Western hegemony over the periphery (Peritore 1989, p. 59). Therefore, Catholic policies connected to Liberation Theology were criticized for encouraging Marxism, placing the Church in

danger of being labeled subversive and potentially at risk of being targeted by right-wing regimes throughout Latin America.

3. Military Dictatorship of the 1970s: The Cases of Chile, Argentina, and Brazil

3.1. Chile

On 11 September 1973, the military staged a coup to depose President Salvador Allende, marking the end of Chile's democracy. The coup came three years after the 1970 presidential election, where Socialist candidate Allende won the plurality (Edwards 2022, p. 490). Allende's socialist policies, such as "land reform and nationalization of industry," were supported by working-class Chileans but were opposed by the upper and middle classes (Edwards 2022, p. 490). The military was anti-communist and supported the United States' Cold War national security program, leading some top officers to believe military intervention was necessary to stop Allende's socialist movement (Edwards 2022, p. 490).

Between US pressure and rising discontent, Allende became politically isolated, allowing the military and other militant groups to seize the government (Edwards 2022, pp. 491–92). After the coup, General Augusto Pinochet led the military government. Initial reception to the military government was positive, as the public and the Catholic Church believed the military intervention would end the growing Marxist influence and stabilize the country (Lowden 1995, pp. 2–3; Ruderer 2022, p. 326). However, as time passed, the public and the Catholic Church realized the Pinochet regime was not a temporary intervention, and the regime's policies were becoming increasingly oppressive. The Pinochet regime used the Dirección de Intelligencia Nacional (DINA) to arrest and abuse political opponents. A Chilean commission investigating human rights abuses reported that there were at least 40,018 victims held prisoner, and of those, 3065 were killed or forcibly disappeared (Amnesty International 2013, para. 13; BBC News 2011, para. 6–7). Once the regime's oppressive nature was apparent, the Chilean Catholic Church became a voice of moral opposition to the regime. The Catholic Church sided with the people and created religiopolitical organizations like the Vicaria de la Solidaridad, demonstrating its acceptance of the "preferential option for the poor" doctrine (Lowden 1995, p. 129). The Pinochet regime ended on 5 October 1988, after a national referendum voted to remove Pinochet from power (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training 2014, para. 2).

3.2. Argentina

In 1976, the military overthrew President Isabel Peron, beginning the "long-term project of restructuring Argentine society, known as the Process of National Reorganization" or the PRN under General Videla (Burdick 1995, p. 222). The PRN believed that there were "subversives" who infiltrated Argentina, putting the nation in danger, and it was the responsibility of the military to "save" the country. The military's concern about subversives led to a period of systematic oppression known as the Dirty War. It was estimated that as many as 30,000 people died due to the military's terror tactics. The majority were kidnapped, held in clandestine detention centers, tortured, disappeared, and killed. In addition, an estimated 500 babies were born under confinement and were taken away to be adopted by families of military officials (BBC News 2020, para. 11–16; Knudson 1997, p. 2; Worboys 2007, p. 149). The PRN targeted the victims because they were lawyers, students, labor organizers, members of human rights groups, community activists, influential artists, and educators whose "voices of conscience deplored Argentina's unjust social structure" (Knudson 1997, p. 2).

The Argentine Catholic Church largely welcomed the coup, believing it was worth the price to rid Argentina of the Communist threat against the Catholic Church (Ruderer 2022,

p. 328). The Church supported the military dictatorship in the entirety of its regime, which included dealing with its human rights issues "privately" and actively cooperating with the military during interrogations (Gill 1998, p. 164; Ruderer 2022, p. 328). The dictatorship ended in 1983 when Raul Alfonsín was elected (Worboys 2007, pp. 149–52). However, blanket amnesty laws passed in 1987 by Alfonsín meant to appease the military prevented the "prosecution [of] all members of the military except [for] top commanders" but were overturned in 2005 after a Supreme Court ruling (Human Rights Watch 2005, para. 5).

3.3. Brazil

On 31 March 1964, a coup removed Brazilian President João Goulart from office. Goulart's removal resulted from a coup comprising high-ranking military officers, Congress members, governors of the wealthiest states, and the Catholic Church. The coup resulted from long-term tension over Goulart's instatement into office. While Goulart was neither a communist nor a radical, he was perceived as being indecisive during periods of economic inflation. In addition, the military officers claimed that Goulart was putting Brazil on the path of a "Communist revolution" (Napolitano 2018, p. 3). While the coup was a successful seizure of power by the civil and military sectors, the coalition soon collapsed. The civil sector wanted to swiftly remove Goulart from office, repress the left, and hold a general election in a "sanitized political environment". Meanwhile, the military saw all politicians as "agents of political and institutional instability" (Napolitano 2018, p. 4). From 1964 to 1968, the two sectors clashed until only an authoritarian and bureaucratic military regime was left in power (Napolitano 2018, p. 4).

During the power struggle, the Brazilian Catholic Church began to change its stance. Initially, the Catholic Church hoped that the new government would be able to control the social turmoil created by the Goulart administration and stabilize the economy (Smith 1979, p. 79). However, the new regime's actions did not meet the Catholic Church's expectations, as it became apparent that the regime was using terror tactics. The Brazilian Truth Commission found that at least 434 people died or disappeared during the regime (Human Rights Watch 2014, para. 4). Similar to the Chilean case, once the regime's violent policies became apparent, the Catholic Church changed its stance and took an antiauthoritarian stance in opposition to the military's actions (Pope 1985, pp. 429–31). The São Paulo archdiocese was the most antiauthoritarian, establishing entities like the Justice and Peace Commission, which helped victims of human rights violations and informed the general population of the violations. Utilizing its influence, the São Paulo archdiocese mobilized "public opinion against the regime, thereby helping to corrode its legitimacy" (Pope 1985, p. 430).

4. Potential Explanations of Church Behavior

Gill notes that previous literature has attempted to find explanations for the differences in the behavior of the Catholic Church in these and other cases. The most common explanations emphasized the impact of chronic poverty, political repression, and internal church reform on the Catholic Church's policies (Gill 1998, pp. 42–46; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, p. 14).

The chronic poverty explanation argues that the Catholic Church had an awakening of its sense of social responsibility as its understanding of the impact of widespread poverty evolved. If this were the case, there should be a correlation between poverty levels and the Catholic Church's progressiveness. The logic is that the parishioners would pressure the Catholic Church to act on social issues in areas with widespread poverty. The conclusion would be that impoverished dioceses would have more progressive bishops. However, as Mainwaring and Wilde explain, "confronting social injustices [had] been central to the

mission of the progressive Church since Medellin," but the increases in poverty "were not so dramatic as to move the Church from its historical conservatism." Social inequalities and injustices were also not found to be "notably greater in countries where Church progressives [had] exercised great sway" (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, p. 14). Simply put, there was not a strong correlation between the presence of poverty and progressive Church policies, making poverty levels an inadequate explanation of the Catholic Church's behavior.

The explanation of political repression argues that in atmospheres of repression, churches become essential actors in the struggle for human rights, giving them no choice but to denounce repressive rules (Gill 1998, pp. 43–44; Smith 1979, p. 90). The Catholic Church's unique position as one of the few organizations left with some freedom gave it the capacity to serve as a "reliable [source] of information to the outside world" and use its international network to provide financial and material support to the people (Smith 1979, p. 116). This ability made the Catholic Church an ideal institution for the people to pressure into denouncing the authoritarian regimes. However, this explanation is also insufficient to explain the variation in outcomes between Argentina and Chile, since both countries experienced state repression. According to this explanation, the people should have pressured the Catholic Church to intervene, motivating it to denounce both regimes. Yet the Argentine Church took the opposite position.

The internal church reform explanation states that the Catholic Church's opposition to authoritarianism resulted from internal reform due to Vatican II, CELAM II, and liberation theology. While the messages of Vatican II, CELAM II, and liberation theology did affect the Church's behavior to an extent, this explanation fails to consider why the Catholic Church went through these reforms in the first place, nor does it explain why the acceptance of these doctrines was not uniform across national episcopies. Mainwaring and Wilde state, "... if changes in the international Church were an adequate explanation for the character of ecclesiastical change, then we would not expect sharp differences across national borders" (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989, p. 12). In other words, if internal reformation had been the cause of the variation in policies, then the Argentine and Chilean Catholic Churches should have adopted similar policies. Instead, other factors must have caused cross-national differences in Catholic Church policies.

5. Religious Economy Model and the Theory of Religious Competition

Based on the religious economy model, the theory of religious competition argues that the discrepancies in the Catholic Church's policies across cases resulted from the varying levels of religious competition that each country's Catholic Church faced. The presence of other religious institutions, mainly Protestantism, forced some Catholic episcopacies to change their "marketing strategy" to better compete for membership (Gill 1998, p. 7). A brief overview of the religious economy model provides a window into Gill's analysis.

The religious economy model states that religious institutions approach membership like a business firm and implement strategies to attract the most customers. As Finke and Stark state,

> ...the religious economy [consists] of all the religious activity going on in any society, including a 'market' of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s). Just as a commercial economy can be distinguished into elements of supply and demand, so too, can a religious economy. (Finke and Stark 2003, p. 100)

In other words, "religion" is supplied just like a good in the commercial economy. Each firm or religious institution wants to "sell" its religion to as many consumers as possible. Competition arises when the religious market is unregulated, just like in the

commercial economy. Finke and Stark state that the nature of the religious economy encourages religious groups to "cater to the special interests of specific market segments" (Finke and Stark 1988, p. 42). Pluralism in the religious economy naturally happens because there are various preferences that no single religious firm can meet within the religious market (Finke and Stark 2003, pp. 100–01). The religious competition theory is based on the religious economy model's assumption that religious institutions want to maximize membership while dealing in a pluralistic market.

In Anthony Gill's work, Rendering unto Caesar, he uses the religious economy model to conclude that the difference between the Catholic Church's actions in Argentina and Chile is due to the differing levels of competition from Protestant churches within each country. Gill explains that areas with higher levels of competition developed progressive policies such as antiauthoritarianism to maintain their position in society. Gill argues that in the 1970s, Protestantism was Catholicism's biggest competitor and that the competitive threat was more significant in Chile than in Argentina. In Chile, Protestantism experienced growth among native-born Protestants and the establishment of Protestant churches, while in Argentina, Protestantism was considered a foreign problem as the episcopacy believed that most Argentine citizens were Catholic (Gill 1998, pp. 130–33; Gill 1998, p. 149). Thus, Gill argues that to be competitive in a pluralist religious market, the Chilean Catholic Church had to side with the people as a "marketing strategy". The Argentine Catholic Church did not have to implement progressive policies because its hegemony was not threatened.

6. Re-Examining Factors Impacting the Catholic Church

Despite some correlation between the growth of Protestantism and Catholic Church behavior in the Chilean case, we argue that other factors besides Protestant growth concurrently impacted Church behavior. In the following sections, we examine each factor and evaluate how it impacted the Catholic Church's response to the authoritarian regimes of Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. We conclude with suggestions for a revised REM approach that incorporates variations in religious demand and the blurred boundaries of religious participation in the context of Latin America.

6.1. Lack of Specificity in the REM and Issues with the Timeline of Protestant Competition

One critique of the REM is that it fails to specify the degree of religious pluralism needed for religious institutions to feel threatened and adopt progressive strategies to combat competition (also see Philpott 2007, p. 513). Relatedly, there are contradictions with the timeline proposed by Gill and the timeline of events implied by the REM. According to Gill, Protestantism was practiced freely in Chile since 1818 and became a competitive force in the 1930s (Gill 1998, p. 131). While there was a Protestant boom involving several Protestant churches from the 1930s to the 1960s, the issue with claiming the 1930s as the beginning of serious Protestant competition is that the percentage of Protestant membership in Chile was meager compared to that of the Catholic Church at that time (Gooren 2015, p. 208). Split across several churches, Protestantism grew from 63,400 to 418,380 adherents between 1930 and 1960, while the Catholic Church grew from 4.2 M to 7.19 M within the same timespan (Gooren 2015, p. 198). In other words, the total Protestant membership across several churches grew from 1.5% of the size of the Catholic Church to 5% of its size. Given how small Protestantism remained compared to the Catholic Church by the 1960s, it is difficult to discern whether the Protestant churches were large enough to concern the Catholic Church at that time for it to begin implementing progressive policies.

Furthermore, the timeline implied by the REM contradicts the timeline of events in Chile. Starting in the 1920s, the Catholic Church had already allowed for the development

of progressivism, such as collective pastoral planning and the organization of national conferences (Adriance 1992, pp. S52–S53). However, according to Gill, Protestant competition became an issue in the 1930s, yet the REM implies that Protestant competition became a threat in the 1970s, as marked by the Catholic Church's antiauthoritarian position (Gill 1998, p. 131). If the 1930s marked the start of serious competition, then the REM fails to explain why the Chilean Catholic Church would wait 50 years to respond. Similarly, if the 1970s were indeed the beginning of serious Protestant competition, then the REM also fails to explain why progressive practices began as early as the 1920s in Chile.

In the case of Brazil, Protestant missionaries arrived in the mid-19th century, and Protestant churches experienced modest growth between 1940 and 1980, increasing from 2.6% to 6.6% of the population. Protestantism later experienced a boom in the 1990s, with the proportion of Protestants reaching 15.4% in 2000 (Potter et al. 2014, p. 126; Wood et al. 2007, p. 406). While individual priests were concerned about Protestantism in Brazil since the 1920s, the institutional Brazilian Catholic Church did not adopt an official anti-Protestant stance until the 1950s. In the 1950s, the Brazilian Catholic Church created the National Secretariat for the Defense of Faith and Morality to combat Protestantism and Spiritism as well as to watch over "the march of false religions, condemns movements, and false ideas" (Helgen 2020, p. 90; Mainwaring 1986, pp. 38–39). Similar to the Chilean case, the REM implies that the Catholic Church's antiauthoritarian stance in the 1970s was a result of Protestant competition in the 1970s; however, the Church had officially recognized a Protestant threat twenty years earlier in the 1950s. Furthermore, the Brazilian Catholic Church began adopting progressive policies such as Catholic Action in the 1920s, thirty years *before* what is suggested by the REM (Romero 2014, pp. 23–24).

In both cases, the REM fails to specify the adequate level of pluralism necessary for religious institutions to adopt progressive policies as a form of competition. In Chile, the first Protestant boom and adoption of progressive policies occurred around the same time, but the size of the competitive threat was small and did not necessarily warrant a shift in policy by the Catholic Church. In Brazil, the Catholic Church officially recognized a Protestant threat in the 1950s; however, it did so thirty years after it began adopting progressive policies. In both cases, Protestantism held roughly the same proportion of the religious market; however, for some reason, the Brazilian Church explicitly viewed it as a threat, while the Chilean Church did not. In Argentina, the Catholic Church officially requested the assistance of the state in the face of Protestant competition, but the Argentine Church never adopted progressive policies as a form of competing.

These discrepancies highlight the need for religious economy approaches to more specifically define the degree of competition that should trigger changes in church strategy. The differences across cases also suggest that there were other factors influencing when a religious institution feels sufficiently threatened by competition to change policy direction.

6.2. The Pre-Existing Condition of the Catholic Church

Another critique of the REM is that it fails to account for the influence the social context had on the policy options available to the Catholic Church. Previous literature has noted that the model is unable to account for the cultural construction of rationality (Smilde 2007) and "the social embeddedness of religious choices" (Edgell 2005, 2012; Ellison 1995; Young 1997). In other words, the REM does not account for how the social climate within a given country or region may impact Catholic Church policies. Mantilla (2010) explains that the Catholic Church's actions must be understood in terms of cultural frames where the pro-democratic and pro-social justice frames of Vatican II and the Medellin meetings were a "necessary condition for pro-democratic activism" because it inclined the Catholic hierarchy to oppose the dictatorship (Mantilla 2010, p. 557). Simply put, Mantilla argues

that the Catholic Church's behavior can partly be explained by accounting for the cultural context in which it was operating. The Vatican II doctrine's pro-democratic and pro-social justice frames encouraged antiauthoritarianism while legitimizing the episcopacies' actions, thereby increasing the likelihood of the Catholic Church opposing the regimes (Mantilla 2010, p. 558).

While Vatican II's influence cannot be downplayed, it is also important to note that it did not significantly change the political leanings of each national episcopacy's policies. Gill recognizes that "if all Latin American bishops were exposed to the progressive ideas of Vatican II, Medellin, and liberation theology, and if these ideas were of central importance in determining the Church's new political strategy, then change should have occurred uniformly across the nation" which was not the case due to the differing social contexts (Gill 1998, p. 46). Despite noting the effect that differing social contexts have on the Catholic Church's policies, Gill does not delve into the significance that each Church's respective history had on its decision-making, thus leaving the national social context (other than Protestant competition) out of the model. In each case, we found that the episcopacy's approach to their respective dictatorship reflected an extension of their pre-existing policies prior to Vatican II, prior to the dictatorship, and prior to Protestant competition.

In Chile, the Catholic Church has historically held a relatively weak position in society compared to the Catholic Churches of other Latin American countries since the colonial period (Pike 1968, p. 99). One reason was the limited opportunities for wealth and prestige; hence, the Chilean Church failed to attract as many churchmen as other countries. The Catholic Church's position continued to decline during the independence movement as it split between Spanish loyalists and patriots (Pike 1968, p. 99). After independence, the Church struggled for its position as the National and Liberal Parties pushed anticlerical programs meant to "curtail the wealth and eliminate the temporal influence of the Catholic Church" (Pike 1968, p. 100). The Catholic Church gradually lost its special privileges until, finally, in 1925, the Chilean constitution established the separation of church and state, ending the close relationship between the church and state (Pike 1968, p. 100; Ruderer 2015, p. 472). The separation did not lead to the persecution of the Catholic Church as some feared; instead, it "improved the bargaining position of the Church, reducing the control of an anticlerical bureaucracy over it" (Pike 1968, p. 103). In other words, the Chilean Catholic Church had greater independence from the state as it no longer needed governmental approval from an increasingly unfavorable state. The separation of church and state in the 1920s allowed for the development of progressivism, such as the implementation of collective pastoral planning and the organization of national conferences 13 years prior to Vatican II in the 1950s. During Vatican II, the Chilean bishops' experience with progressive policies allowed them to provide "input into conciliar document, particularly those concerned with social and economic development" and were instrumental in organizing CELAM II (Adriance 1992, pp. S52–S53). The Chilean episcopacy was also sensitive to the social concerns of the poor due to the shift left in the political system in the 1960s. Under the Frei and Allende administrations, the Catholic Church focused on issues concerning the poor and established base ecclesial communities, CEBs, as a "means of evangelization and as a vehicle for social action" (Adriance 1992, p. S57; Smith 1979, p. 92). By the time of the dictatorship, the Chilean Catholic Church had ample historical experience, cultural frames, and resilience to oppose the dictatorship well before Pinochet came to power. During the Pinochet regime, these experiences would culminate in the Church's anti-authoritarianism and engagement in numerous activities such as the Comité Por la Paz Chilean (Committee for Chilean Peace (COPACHI)) and the Vicariate of Solidarity (Mantilla 2010, p. 562).

In Argentina, the Catholic Church had been intertwined with the military for much of its history, to the point that this relationship was known as the "sword and the cross",

together serving as the "guardians" of the Argentine Catholic identity. Since the 1930s, this relationship has "[legitimized] various military coups and governments throughout the century" (Ruderer 2022, p. 328). In return, the military protected the Catholic Church's position in society. For example, during the first Peron regime, the Peronist military government suspended radio program broadcasts from Protestant denominations on behalf of the Catholic Church. The Peron government claimed that since the radio waves belonged to the state and Catholicism was the state religion, the radio could not be used to spread views contrary to the state religion, regardless of freedom of worship. Later, a communications director explained that the radio programs' suspensions were "in response to the petitions and protests of the Roman Catholic archbishop" (D'Amico 1977, p. 493). Towards the end of the Peron government, there were tensions between the Catholic Church and the Peronists, which led to issues with the Partido Justicialista, the political party behind the Peron government. In addition, the Catholic Church also had troubles with the other political party, the Unión Cívica Radical, due to the party's progressive position. Ultimately, the Catholic Church lacked institutional political allies, further reinforcing its relationship with the military (Mantilla 2010, pp. 565–66). In addition, the Church did not accept progressive doctrines like Vatican II and CELAM II. While the Argentine Church leaders signed decrees and constitutions, they did not participate in the deliberations (Deiner 1975, p. 74). Similarly, when a progressive moment known as the "Movement of Priests for the Third World" (MPTW) began arguing that the role of the Catholic Church should be to "awaken the conscience of the masses" and aid the poor in defense of "their rights to life and justice," the Argentine Catholic hierarchy staunchly opposed it. By late August 1970, the Argentine episcopacy issued declarations condemning the MPTW for being incompatible with Catholic belief and practice, as it called for a brand of socialism that was contrary to the teachings of the Church and called for a social revolution (Deiner 1975, p. 81). By issuing the declaration of condemnation, the Argentine Catholic hierarchy demonstrated an intolerance for progressive ideas that called for the Church to take a more active role in social issues. This history of conservatism, especially by the hierarchy, and the existence of such strong church–military ties meant that the Argentine Catholic Church lacked both the motivation and the means to oppose the military, even in the presence of a recognized threat from Protestant competition.

Finally, in Brazil, like Chile, the Brazilian Catholic Church had a history of independence from the state and progressiveness from before Vatican II and CELAM II. The creation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889 marked the separation of church and state and the beginning of the Catholic Church's independence from the political elites (Romero 2014, p. 23). While this allowed the Catholic Church independence in policy, it lost influence due to various factors, such as a shortage of priests (Cleary 1997, p. 256; Neuhouser 1989, p. 241). Dom Sebastião Leme da Silveira Cintra, the first Latin American cardinal, would begin to remedy this shortage in the 1920s. Dom Leme focused on "reorganizing the laical association" and "developing a Catholic intelligentsia" (Romero 2014, p. 23). The reorganization of the Brazilian Catholic Church led to the Church adopting progressive policies such as Catholic Action, which called lay people, young students, and workers to have a "more active role in the conservation and expansion of the Church" (Romero 2014, p. 24). By the 1950s, Catholic Action grew to the point that it resulted in "a generation of lay persons who would become a force for change in the church" and "[produced] a new breed of bishops. In the 1960s, those members of the episcopate who encouraged pastoral and social experimentation were most frequently former Catholic Action chaplains" (Adriance 1992, p. S55). This pattern of progressiveness demonstrates that before the dictatorship in the 1960s, the Brazilian Catholic Church was already implementing progressive policies that it would continue to implement during the dictatorship.

In each case, the Catholic Church's response to the dictatorships (progressive antiauthoritarianism or conservatism) was reflective of the pre-existing position of the Catholic Church created by the cultural context in which it existed at the time. The Catholic Church of Chile and Brazil, which are widely recognized for progressive policies during the dictatorships, already had the long-standing practice of favoring the poor and being sensitive to social issues. At the same time, the Argentine Catholic Church had a history of conservative policies and strong relations with the state and military. Each Catholic Church's response to the dictatorships aligned with a long-followed trend. According to the religious economy model, the Catholic Church's antiauthoritarian response in Chile and Brazil were caused by the growth of Protestantism that was occurring at the same time as the dictatorships in the 1970s. However, as we have demonstrated, all three Catholic Churches' responses to the dictatorships were continuations of policies that existed prior to the 1970s. The Catholic Church in Chile had begun implementing progressive tactics since the 1930s, the Brazilian Catholic Church began during the 1920s, and the Argentine Catholic Church continued its conservative practices from prior to the dictatorship. Since each national episcopacy followed a policy that existed well before the dictatorships, the notion that anti-authoritarianism was a strategy developed strictly due to Protestant competition in the 1970s appears questionable. Instead, as Mantilla (2010) has argued, the Catholic Church's actions must be understood in terms of its specific national cultural frame (Mantilla 2010, p. 554).

6.3. Church Reforms to Address Internal Weaknesses

Our third critique of the REM is that the model does not account for the fact that the Catholic Church's progressive shift may not have been an intentional response to Protestant competition but rather was an attempt to respond to an internal weakness, such as the priest shortage. The Catholic Church's greater attention to the lay people began, in part, as a by-product of it addressing an internal failure by using the resources available to it rather than being an intentional adoption of progressive practices. As Gill acknowledges, during the 1910s and 1920s, the Chilean and Brazilian Catholic Churches recognized a priest shortage in the rural areas of the state (Gill 1998, p. 85; Neuhouser 1989, p. 241; Yeager 2007, p. 233). In 1916, Dom Leme sent a pastoral letter to the northeastern dioceses of Brazil, recognizing that they were suffering from a priest shortage. In the letter, Dom Leme was concerned about the "insufficient religious instruction and the scant influence religious faith exercised on public life" due to the inability to match the growing population with the small number of men entering the priesthood (Cleary 1997, p. 256). The Chilean episcopacy recognized a similar shortage in the 1920s when it found several towns "over a thousand square kilometers with 10,000 parishioners to be ministered by a single priest" (Yeager 2007, p. 207). Bishop Rafael Edwards Salas created the Asociación de la Juventud Catolica Feminina de Chile (AJCFFCh) in Chile in 1921, which was an organization of young women who helped organize community worship in a way that "resembled prototypes of Christian Base Communities" and existed in rural towns that lacked a parish (Yeager 2007, pp. 209, 231). In Brazil, Dom Leme's solution was to begin organizations meant to revitalize Catholicism (Catholic Action), educate the poor, and implement church reforms (Cleary 1997, p. 257). In both cases, the Catholic Church recognized that there were internal deficiencies and sought to address them by relying on the lay people, because that was the primary resource available to them. By incorporating lay people into the Church structure through these programs, the Catholic Church also encouraged interaction between the lay people and the institution. These interactions would help lay the foundation of the Catholic Church's increased social awareness and create the prototypes of progressive programs used leading up to and during the dictatorships. In each case, the recognition of the lack of priests and

attempts to address it predate fears about Protestant competition, which began in the 1930s in Chile and the 1950s in Brazil (Gooren 2015, p. 198; Helgen 2020, p. 90). In other words, the Catholic Churches recognized internal issues preventing them from efficiently carrying out their duties. The national episcopies utilized the lay people because they were an easily accessible resource that could be repurposed. This had the potentially unintentional consequence of bringing the Catholic Churches into closer contact with the issues of the lay people and ultimately influenced Church policy prior to major upswings in competition from Protestantism. Again, the timeline is contrary to the REM, which posits that the Catholic Church's shift towards progressivism and adoption of progressive programs was intentionally for the primary purpose of counteracting Protestant competition.

6.4. Variations in Demand

A fourth weakness of the REM, as applied by Gill, is the assumption that religious demand is inelastic. By closing the demand side of the equation, REM provides little explanation for why progressive policies were becoming popular with large numbers of Catholics in Latin America in the first place. In her critique of the REM, Evelyn Bush (2010) explains that the inelastic demand assumption is contradictory because supply-side explanations assume that varying demand preferences lead to market segments (Bush 2010, p. 306). Chesnut (2007) expands the critique by explaining that while religious producers "can create demand for their new products through marketing", it is "consumer taste and preferences [that] often determine the development of new goods and services" (Chesnut 2007, p. 76). Religious consumers dictate what goods and services will be successful in the religious market. As previously mentioned, Vatican II occurred because the Catholic Church recognized a shift in religious demand that the Church needed to address to survive the modern era (Gill 1998, p. 37). This shift towards policies addressing the religious and material needs of the poor was prevalent throughout this period, from movements such as charismatic renewal,[1] liberation theology" and progressive policies like Catholic Action (Stoll 1990, p. 27). The REM's reliance on supply-side explanations fails to explain why progressive policies were deemed a successful competitive tactic in the first place, particularly given that they did not appear to improve Catholic market share in any of the cases. In the 1980s, 6.6% of Brazilians were Protestant, and by the 1990s, 1.3 M Chileans were Protestant, while Protestantism was beginning to "make inroads" in Argentina (Gill 2004, p. 47; Gooren 2015, p. 198; Wood et al. 2007, p. 406). Regardless, by treating the demand side as inelastic, the REM ignores religious demand variations that directly impact the Catholic Church's decisions, providing an incomplete explanation of its actions.

Recent scholarship in the REM school has started to more systematically address the role of religious demand. Trejo (2009) explains that the creation of a religious market empowers parishioners as there is now an exit option from their original religion. Religious membership is no longer a guarantee, and parishioners can now demand a new religious contract—a new interpretation of the scriptures to satisfy the needs of the people. Trejo argues that the Catholic Church's primary competitive strategy (at least in the case of Mexico, where he conducted his research) would focus largely on material rewards to maintain parishioners, as the Catholic Church cannot easily match the Protestant provision of ecclesiastic rewards (Trejo 2009, pp. 326–27). In short, the demand for a religious product that intersects with indigenous identity, local leaders, and material benefits is high. Religious producers such as Protestant missionaries and the Catholic Church will both innovate to meet this demand in such contexts, which can also lead to mobilization around ethnic identity (Trejo 2009). Trejo's approach of reopening the demand side of the equation in REM opens the door to revised and more accurate predictions from the REM approach

that not only address sub-state level variations in Catholic Church actions but also better explain the rapid growth of the charismatic renewal in Latin America.

6.5. Internal Church Divisions

The fifth problem with the REM explanation is that it takes a unitary actor approach when the Church faced internal divisions over its perception of a Marxist threat, which influenced its position on the dictatorship (Mackin 2003, p. 502). While Gill acknowledges the divisions within the national episcopies, he does not systematically incorporate such divisions into his REM model, instead preferring to focus on the Catholic Church's institutional position (Gill 1998, pp. 5–6). By focusing on the Catholic Church as a unitary actor, the REM misses how the perception of a Marxist threat interfered with the particular balance of power within each national episcopy, allowing one party to majorly influence the national Church's overall response.

In all three cases, the Cold War and concerns about Marxism influenced both the military and the Catholic Church. While the three militaries believed in their duty to eliminate Communism regardless of the violence, the Catholic Church was divided in its approaches to a Marxist threat. The militaries of Chile, Argentina, and Brazil were heavily influenced by the Cold War and believed their duty was to protect their nation from subversives. In Chile, the Pinochet regime thought that it was imperative that the military launch a "holy war" on the subversives (which included any Catholics close to liberation theology) to maintain the "purity of faith" (Aman 1986–1987, p. 460; Catoggio and Breña 2011, p. 28; Ruderer 2020, p. 7). Similarly, in Argentina, the PRN believed there were "subversive Communists" hidden in Argentinean society" (Soprano 2023, p. 4). The PRN believed that Argentina was facing a large-scale communist invasion, necessitating the indiscriminate neutralization of any person or institution attempting to overthrow its Catholic national identity (Morello 2015, p. 59; Ruderer 2015, p. 468; Scharpf 2018, p. 212). Similar sentiments were shared by the Brazilian military, which was influenced by both the Cold War and the United States' National Security Doctrine[2] (Napolitano 2018, p. 8; Romero 2014, p. 43). The Brazilian military believed that Communism would be spread by "brainwashing the people, particularly the youth," and that they could be found within universities, factories, and families (Romero 2014, p. 43). In all three cases, the military strongly believed it was only by indiscriminately neutralizing "subversives" that they could protect their nation. In addition to having motive, all three militaries had the experience and resources to carry out their repressive tactics (McSherry 1999, pp. 144–50; Romero 2014, pp. 43–44). In the end, all three military states believed in the need to eliminate Communism while having the experience and resources to do so.

The national episcopies, on the other hand, were not universally convinced of a Communist threat like the state was. In Chile, a minority of the Catholic Church did support the regime, such as the military clergy, who were military chaplains responsible for providing pastoral care to soldiers, and a minority of the bishops, such as Archbishop Emilio Tagle and Bishop Augusto Salinas of Linares, who provided the military with moral legitimacy. They praised the military for liberating the state from a Marxist government and even justified the civilian deaths as necessary "sacrifices" (Allen 2009, p. 78–80; Ruderer 2015, p. 483; Ruderer 2015, p. 481). The state media provided this sector with wide coverage while limiting coverage of the more critical voices within the Church, which was the more influential party within the Catholic Church (Allen 2009, p. 78). One of the most influential critics within this party was Cardinal Raul Silva Henríquez of the Santiago archdiocese. Under Silva Henríquez, the Catholic Church created the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and COPACHI, helping the relatives of the disappeared and sharing the human rights abuses with the press and international organizations (Aguilar 2003, p. 724). The programs were so

successful that they received international recognition and honor from the United Nations (Aguilar 2003, p. 727). Due to the strength of the Santiago archdiocese and Cardinal Silva Henríquez compared to the small and isolated military clergy, the Chilean Catholic Church ultimately adopted an antiauthoritarian stance overall.

In contrast, the majority of the Argentinean Catholic Church shared the regime's belief in a communist invasion. It served as a religious–political justification for the repressive regime, and those who did not share this belief largely kept quiet out of fear or complicity (Andersen 1993, p. 185). The Argentine Catholic Church went so far as to discipline its clergy members through arrests, ecclesiastical sanctions, institutional decommissioning, or suspension of ministerial licenses (Catoggio 2013, pp. 143–45). The Argentinean Church also ignored the deaths, disappearances, and imprisonment of clergy and lay people accused of being "subversives" (Andersen 1993, p. 185). Through these methods, the military and the Catholic Church were able to silence any dissenting clergy members, making it so there was not much possibility for progressive policies.

Finally, in Brazil, the Catholic Church was divided into conservative and progressive wings (Napolitano 2018, p. 10). The conservatives created institutions such as the Tradição, Família e Propriedade (TFP), which was financially supported by the elites of São Paulo and the political circles of the ESG (Romero 2014, p. 46). The TFP propagandized on behalf of the regime, making campaigns that claimed that Western Christian civilization was in danger of communism, inciting a red scare and rallying support for the regime (Romero 2014, p. 46). On the other hand, the progressives were concerned about Marxism but prioritized social reform, social programs, and anti-authoritarianism. As Adriance explains, "Brazilian bishops sought to defend the church against Marxism and against the proselytizing of evangelical Protestants by concentrating their main efforts in Catholic Action, rural organizing, and evangelization efforts in both urban and rural areas" (Adriance S55). Tension arose between the two sides when the progressive programs like Catholic Action placed the church in contact with students and other groups labeled "dangerous by conservatives" (Romero 2014, pp. 32, 40, 51). In other words, while both groups were concerned about Marxism, the progressive and conservative wings did not agree on the best method to combat Marxism, resulting in division in the Catholic Church. Despite the division, a slight majority of progressives allowed for the progressive policy of anti-authoritarianism to prevail in Brazilian Catholic Church policy (Napolitano 2018, p. 10).

In all three case studies, the Catholic Church was divided in its perception of a Marxist threat; however, the overall perception of its policy depended on which wing of the Catholic Church had the more significant influence and which allies were available. As Mantilla explains, "the political opportunity represented by democratization depended on the type of political parties operating in the political arena" (Mantilla 2010, p. 557). When churches face weak political allies and strong opponents, they are more likely to accept authoritarian rule; however, they tend toward antiauthoritarian tendencies when they have stronger allies (Mantilla 2010, p. 557). In the cases of Chile and Brazil, the progressive sectors had a majority influence and could oppose the regime. In Argentina, the conservatives had the majority and military support and could silence any clergy that opposed such a position.

6.6. State Acceptance of Socialism

A final critique of the REM arising from our case studies is that it primarily assumes that the Catholic Church will only distance itself from the state when the state refuses or fails to eliminate a potential Marxist threat (Gill 1998, pp. 73–78). However, this is not always true, as there are instances when the state embraces Socialist principles and the national Catholic Church maintains relations with them. For example, Chile began to embrace socialist policies with the election of President Allende. While elements of the

Chilean Church expressed concerns about President Allende and distanced themselves, they also sought "peaceful coexistence" with the Allende government (Gill 1998, p. 140). For example, Cardinal Raul Silva Henríquez of the Santiago Archdiocese attended several public events with President Allende, including a Chilean national holiday where workers and left-wing political parties held a public rally. In addition, before the coup, "the Cardinal had tried to bring together President Allende and opposition leaders at his house" to try to "persuade them to find a political solution to all division and hatred within a national political climate of increasing verbal violence and abuse" (Aguilar 2003, p. 718). Silva Henríquez's actions are significant because he was the Cardinal who led the progressive policies of the Chilean Catholic Church with his antiauthoritarian stance and the creation of the Vicaria de la Solidaridad (Aguilar 2003, p. 726). While the Cardinal cooperated with Allende, it was not without criticisms from those who called him the "Red Cardinal" for his sympathies with socialism (Aguilar 2003, p. 718). The example demonstrates that it is not always the case that religious institutions distance themselves from the state because of Marxist influences. While the center of gravity within the global Catholic Church historically remained opposed to socialism, as evidenced by the critiques of liberation theology by Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, the Chilean case demonstrates that the realities of the national level religious landscape are more complex than described by the REM.

7. Conclusions

When applied to cases that should have validated the religious economy model's predictive accuracy (Chile, Argentina, and Brazil), our analysis supports and extends theoretical critiques of the REM. In particular, a careful overview of the cases suggests that the way REM has been applied in some cases suffers from a lack of specificity on amount of competition necessary to warrant taking progressive action, a lack of specificity about the timing of Protestant competition, a failure to account for the influence of the national Catholic Church's previous ideological and practical positions, an assumption that the Catholic Church always intentionally implemented progressive policies in response to competition, downplaying variations in religious demand, a treatment of the Catholic Church as a unitary actor, and an assumption that the state and church will always ally together against Marxist influences.

While we focused on Latin American authoritarian regimes and the Catholic Church, further studies should focus on other government types, regions, and religious institutions. As Taylor Boas explains, many of the theoretical claims of the religious economy model are "less applicable to religious newcomers like Evangelicals in Latin America," therefore the core assumption that churches are sensitive to competitive threats and will collude with the state work "much better for dominant religions" like the Catholic Church due its long history with the state "than it does for upstarts" (Boas 2023, p. 18). In the same vein, religious institutions may behave differently under a democracy than in an authoritarian regime, as a dictatorship can influence the religious market in a way that a democracy cannot, thereby affecting the options available to religious institutions (Mantilla 2010, p. 554).

In the context of the Latin American religious landscape, the static unitary actor and inelastic demand assumptions of the religious economy model should also be relaxed. As Gooren (2007) explains, many individuals spend their lifetimes moving in and out of religious affiliations and mixing beliefs and practices from several ideologies into their daily lives (Gooren 2007, p. 54). Similarly, Smilde (2007) describes an "imaginative rationality" which is how individuals approach "lived experiences with innovative responses that imagine a desired future and orient action", resulting in a conversion narrative that evolves

over time in addition to engaging with the larger Latin American narrative (Penny Edgell 2012, p. 254). The fluidity of religious affiliations in the Latin American context complicates the model's strict approach to membership, as any individual may identify as Catholic, for example, while incorporating components of other religions and beliefs in a relatively short period of time. The REM's strict unitary rational actor approach restricts the model's capacity to interpret the actions of providers or consumers of religion in such a context of blurred religious boundaries.

Moreover, as Morello explains, the fluidity of the Latin American religious market and incorporation into daily life via perspectives of lived religion departs significantly from predictions of the religious economy model and secularization theory (Morello 2019, pp. 4–6; Morello et al. 2017, p. 316; Steigenga and Cleary 2007, pp. 13–14; Wilcox et al. 2008, p. 874). Morello posits that Latin America's religious landscape exists as an "enchanted modernity" requiring that we "[acknowledge] Latin America's history, the influence of global trends of modernization, and interest in the Latin Americans' daily life." (Morello et al. 2017, p. 318). These are precisely the types of factors we have identified in our case studies as impacting church behavior. In Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, the Catholic Church's actions were influenced as much by its history in the region and its previous relationship with each state and by the global context of the Cold War and anti-communism as they were by religious competition from Protestantism. Furthermore, each case was characterized by divisions rather than unity over approaches to the communist threat to Catholic Church prerogatives.

A revised REM approach should more carefully take these historical, timeline, cultural, and boundary factors into account for developing hypotheses on church and state behavior. As demonstrated by Trejo (2009, p. 326), the Catholic Church has multiple options for addressing competition and for meeting different types of religious demands. The choice to adopt strategies that mobilize poor or indigenous communities around their identities through religious institutions, practices, and beliefs is simply one option among many potential responses (state policies of religious restriction, coercion, material rewards, etc.). Greater specificity regarding the level of Protestant competition, when it occurs relative to responses, and what types of religious products are in demand in the first place, will strengthen the predictions of the REM for future studies.

In Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, the Catholic Church's policies (progressive and conservative) impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. As Morello points out, secularization theory continues to be disproved as "religion is still important and relevant for the majority of the world's population, and it seems likely to remain so for the near future" (Morello 2019, p. 9). While supply-side approaches still have a role in our toolkit for understanding church–state relations, a careful reevaluation of key case studies, such as those in this analysis, will point us to additional explanatory factors that predate religious competition and contribute additional layers of understanding of church behavior.

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Notes

1 The Catholic Charismatic movement (CCR) is a widespread movement in Latin America that has reinvigorated the Catholic Church. It emphasizes a deeper spiritual life, a greater sense of responsibility, increased attachment to the church, and greater concern for one's neighbors (Cleary 2007, p. 153).

2 The National Security Doctrine was the belief that there was a Communist conspiracy between Cuba, Russia, and China to unsettle the Americas to institute communist rule. The doctrine held that it was the state's military's responsibility to "guarantee the stability of the state" and "monitor society to counter the actions of communist 'infiltrators'" (Napolitano 2018, p. 8; Romero 2014, p. 43).

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Article

'Messianic Fraternity': Anticommunism in the General Conferences of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the development and consolidation of anticommunist discourse in the General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate (CELAM), from Rio de Janeiro to Aparecida. It adopts a critical perspective to examine the construction of the "messianic fraternity" myth—an ideological narrative contrasting Christian ideals of community and redemption with Marxist principles of class struggle and revolution, which served as a central axis for the Church's rejection of communism in Latin America. Grounded in a critical analysis of the CELAM's final documents, this study identifies the theological, political, and social underpinnings of this stance, situating it within the historical and geopolitical dynamics that positioned the Church as a key counterforce to Marxism in the region. It also examines how anticommunist positions shaped pastoral strategies, particularly in relation to social movements like liberation theology, and reinforced an episcopal identity centered on defending Christian values against a perceived global ideological threat. This analysis highlights the Church's internal tensions and contradictions and the broader impact of its anticommunist stance on Latin America's sociopolitical and religious dynamics in the twentieth century.

Keywords: Catholic Church; Latin America; communism; religion and politics; liberation theology

1. Introduction

The history of Latin America, like all histories, is best understood as a tapestry woven from the intricate interplay of political, social, and economic forces, in which religious and ecclesiastical institutions have played an active and transformative role. Far from being static observers, these institutions have continuously redefined themselves within the flux of the region's upheavals, responding to and shaping broader historical processes. As Marc Bloch insightfully noted in his classic yet still relevant *The Historian's Craft*, "a historical phenomenon can never be understood apart from its moment in time" (Bloch [1949] 1992, p. 29). The Catholic Church's stance on communism during the Cold War exemplifies this principle, as its responses were deeply embedded in the anxieties and power dynamics of the era, reflecting both resistance and adaptation to a rapidly shifting ideological landscape. In fact, during the Cold War, the rise of communist ideologies and regimes across the continent elicited profound concern within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, fostering an atmosphere of apprehension and shaping the Church's responses to perceived threats against its spiritual and institutional authority.

According to Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, one of the foremost scholars on Latin American anticommunism, "the Catholic Church, perhaps uniquely among non-state institutions, was arguably more committed to combating communism throughout the 20th century than

any other institution" (Patto Sá Motta 2002, p. 18). This early and steadfast opposition to communism within the Catholic Church unfolded across several distinct phases, each shaped by the changing theological, political, and social landscapes. Initially, prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church's doctrinal position was firmly entrenched in resistance to Marxism, strongly influenced by papal teachings, particularly Pope Pius XII's Apostolic Letter *Ad Ecclesiam Christi* (Pius XII 1955). This document reinforced the Church's ideological opposition to communism, framing it as a materialistic worldview in direct conflict with the Church's spiritual authority and teachings. However, this opposition was not solely a matter of theological orthodoxy; it was also a response to the broader sociopolitical context of the time, particularly the Cold War, which heightened the ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism. The Church's stance reflected the global tension between these competing ideologies, positioning the Church as a key actor in the ideological confrontation that defined much of the 20th century.

Simultaneously, a subtle yet significant process of secularization began to take root across Latin America, an underlying force that the Catholic Church initially resisted but eventually learned to incorporate into its broader strategies for interacting with modernity. This shift is evident in the Church's adaptation to secularization through initiatives that emphasized social justice, religious freedom, and interfaith dialogue. As Blancarte observes, although the Church initially opposed the secularizing trend, it ultimately absorbed and even promoted secularization as part of its broader engagement with contemporary society (Blancarte 2016, p. 331). In this analysis, secularization refers to the progressive reduction of religious institutions' authority in the public sphere, often manifested in the privatization of faith and the separation of Church and state. This evolution was decisively shaped by the Second Vatican Council, which introduced transformative changes in the Church's theological and pastoral orientation, fostering dialogue with modernity and emphasizing the primacy of human dignity. In contrast to its earlier, more rigid rejection of Marxism, the Church gradually began to engage more critically with the social and political issues of the time. The Church's shift was not merely a doctrinal adjustment but a pastoral reorientation that reflected a deeper understanding of its role in a world undergoing rapid and often disorienting transformation. No longer content with simply opposing Marxism, the Church began to address the economic and social dimensions of human suffering, particularly the struggles of the poor and marginalized, with a more nuanced and empathetic approach. This change was part of a broader transformation in the Church's approach to political ideologies, one that saw a move from ideological purity toward a more balanced and context-sensitive engagement with social justice issues. As exemplified by the later contributions of figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez, this evolution signaled a departure from a blanket condemnation of Marxism and toward a critical dialogue that sought to reconcile doctrinal concerns with the Church's pastoral mission. This shift in perspective is echoed in *Gaudium et Spes*, where the Council notably acknowledges that "not to be overlooked among the forms of modern atheism is that which anticipates the liberation of man especially through his economic and social emancipation" (Vatican Council II 1965, n. 20). Here, the Church explicitly recognized the importance of addressing the socioeconomic conditions of human liberation, thereby laying the theological foundation for a more comprehensive approach to Marxist ideas and the liberation theology movement that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century.

The second phase, emerging in the early post-conciliar period, saw a more complex engagement with issues of social justice, especially through the landmark Medellín and Puebla Conferences. In these gatherings, the Church acknowledged the importance of addressing poverty, inequality, and social injustice—issues that were also central to Marxist critiques of society. However, the Church consistently distanced itself from the revolution-

ary methods of Marxism, rejecting any form of violence, authoritarianism, or ideologies that threatened human dignity. During this period, liberation theology played a significant, albeit tempering, role, promoting a vision of social justice and equality while seeking to avoid the embrace of communist ideology.

The third phase, the mid to late post-conciliar period, was defined by a vigorous anticommunist stance under John Paul II, particularly in response to the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War. At the same time, the Church also condemned the excesses of neoliberal capitalism, signaling its broader concern for justice and human dignity in the face of both communism and unchecked market forces.

Finally, in the contemporary phase, the ideological battle that once pitted the Church against communism has largely dissipated, as communism has lost its ideological relevance in the region. However, new forms of ideological contention have emerged, with issues like gender ideology and social justice occupying the forefront of the Church's public discourse. In this context, the Church's relationship with Marxist thought has become less about direct political opposition and more about broader reflections on justice, human rights, and social morality in a rapidly changing world.

Building upon this historical evolution of the Church's stance toward communism in Latin America, anticommunism emerges as a central theme that runs through the official discourse of the Church, particularly within the framework of the General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). From the early resistance during the pre-conciliar phase to the more complex reflections that followed Vatican II, the Church's position became increasingly vocal and defined, culminating in the critiques found in documents such as the Final Document of Puebla. The term "messianic fraternity", for instance, crystallizes the bishops' opposition to Marxism, highlighting the ideological divide between a Christian vision of redemption and the materialistic, atheistic underpinnings of Marxist thought. This rejection of communism, however, cannot be seen as static. While anticommunism remained a core tenet, the Church's evolving position, especially as shaped by the influence of John Paul II and liberation theology, sought to balance its defense of Christian values with a critical engagement with social and economic injustice. Ultimately, the discourse formed at CELAM's conferences both mirrored and shaped the broader geopolitical tensions of the Cold War, positioning the Church as a key actor in the ideological battles of the region while underscoring its role as the guardian of Christian principles amidst the complexities of social transformation.

This analysis is structured around four main axes. First, it examines the role of the General Conferences as crucial forums for articulating the Church's voice in a continent profoundly shaped by political, social, and economic changes. From the consolidation of authoritarian regimes in the latter half of the 20th century to the transition toward neoliberal democracies in the 21st century, each conference reflects not only the Church's spiritual concerns but also its responses to the historical challenges shaping the region. Second, it explores the influence of the Cold War context on the first three conferences, while the last two were shaped by other phenomena, such as globalization and the advance of neoliberalism. Third, it analyzes the tensions between CELAM's anticommunist positions and the proposals of liberation theology. Under the leadership of figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez, liberation theology promoted a theological vision that challenged structures of social and economic oppression, critically positioning itself in favor of the poor (Klaiber 1988, p. 415). Gutiérrez argued that contemporary theology could not avoid a critical and enriching confrontation with Marxism, which, in his view, had deepened reflection on social transformation and human action in history (Gutiérrez 1975, p. 32). This analysis reveals how concerns over the "communist threat" led the ecclesiastical hierarchy to marginalize and even condemn pastoral initiatives that sought to empower the poor as

agents of their own liberation. Finally, it reflects on the contradictions inherent in CELAM's anticommunist discourse, particularly in its adoption of a language of "Christian solidarity" that, while denouncing structural injustices, avoided addressing their underlying causes. This approach highlights how anticommunism not only shaped the identity of the Latin American Episcopate but also constrained its ability to articulate effective responses to the social and political challenges facing the region.

Nonetheless, for didactic purposes, this study adopts a chronological–linear structure to facilitate a clearer understanding of the historical development of CELAM's anticommunist discourse and to contextualize the main axes of analysis at each stage. This approach also aims to offer a coherent framework for discussing the Church's evolving responses to CEBs, Charismatic Catholicism, and the broader sectarian challenges it faced. The analysis ends with the conference in Aparecida, which marked the end of the traditional format of CELAM meetings. Since then, the Church has opted for a more synodal model that promotes broader and more equitable participation from ecclesiastical sectors and society, aligning with Pope Francis's vision for a more inclusive, less hierarchical Church centered on dialogue and integration.

It is also relevant to acknowledge that even silence can carry meaning in the construction of ecclesiastical discourse. In certain concluding documents, communism is not explicitly mentioned; however, this omission should not be interpreted as a sign of diminished concern by the Church. Rather, silence can be understood as a deliberate strategy to manage public perception and relationships with governments, suggesting that the issue remains a source of unease for the Church.

This study seeks not only to contribute to the historical understanding of the Church's role in Latin America but also to problematize the theological and political implications of a discourse that, under the pretext of defending the faith, reinforced narratives that perpetuated unequal power structures. This reflection aims to offer a critical analysis of the Church's potential and limitations as an agent of social transformation in a context of deep inequality.

2. Rio de Janeiro Conference (1955): Anticommunism and the Construction of an Ecclesial Agenda

The First General Conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1955, solidified an anticommunist narrative that profoundly shaped the Church's pastoral praxis in Latin America for decades to come. This discourse not only expressed deep concern about Marxism but also reinforced an integrative vision in which anticommunism became a central pillar of ecclesial strategies. As stated in the Final Document, while the conference emphasized the need for a "broader and more intense social and charitable activity aimed at the poorest classes", it also underscored the duty to "sound the alarm about the insidious dangers of Marxist doctrines and communist propaganda." The bishops highlighted the imperative to "safeguard against these influences, especially in regions where such ideologies were most entrenched" (CELAM 1955, n. 83). In this way, Rio not only shaped the Church's theological and political stance in Latin America but also set the foundation for its ongoing ideological engagement during the Cold War, framing Marxism as a major threat to both social order and religious values.

The abovementioned Apostolic Letter *Ad Ecclesiam Christi* by Pope Pius XII (29 June 1955) is a clear testament to the central role anticommunism played in shaping Rio's agenda. In this document, the pontiff warns against the "perverse doctrines" that, "under the false pretext of social justice", seek to deprive the faithful of "the treasure of religion" (Pius XII 1955). This conceptual framework positioned communism not merely as a political

or economic threat but also as a spiritual enemy infiltrating the justice aspirations of the popular classes, posing an existential danger to the Catholic faith.

This narrative was echoed by Latin American cardinals and bishops on 4 August 1955, who highlighted that the scarcity of clergy had left many communities vulnerable to "enemies of the faith", including communist propagandists. In their declaration, the prelates underscored the urgency of countering threats that endangered "the best heritage of Latin America", namely its Catholic faith.

The conference's concluding text articulated concrete strategies to combat Marxist doctrines. On the one hand, it emphasized the importance of clergy formation to educate the faithful on the "truth of the Holy Religion" and refute the errors of "non-Catholics and enemies of the Church" (CELAM 1955, n. 20c). On the other hand, it reaffirmed the need to develop social and charitable activities for the underprivileged to counteract the appeal of Marxist solutions among vulnerable populations (CELAM 1955, n. 83). Thus, the Church's social action was not conceived as merely charitable but as a preventative and neutralizing instrument against the communist proposals.

A closer examination of this discourse reveals how communism functioned as the symbolic construction of an internal enemy threatening social order, "transforming into an organizer of political ideas", a category of analysis used by Marina Franco in her study of the cultural and ideological constructs in 1970s Argentina (Franco 2012, p. 200). This framework reinforced a Manichean worldview, positioning the Church as the sole viable moral and spiritual alternative. However, this position was not without internal contradictions. On one hand, the Church portrayed itself as a social integrator, capable of "mending the social fabric" in contexts marked by inequality and conflict. On the other, its unwavering condemnation of communism imposed ideological limits that restricted its ability to engage with the nuanced social and economic aspirations of the popular classes.

The tension between condemning communism and addressing social demands is particularly noteworthy. While the conference recognized the urgency of "broader and more intense social and charitable activity" (CELAM 1955, n. 83), this response was framed within a defensive strategy that subordinated social engagement to the fight against Marxist doctrines. This approach highlights the contradictions of a pastoral strategy that, while seeking to protect the faith, also limited its ability to articulate a discourse addressing structural inequalities in a more proactive and less polarized manner.

3. Medellín Conference (1968): The Church Amid Latin America's Transformation in Light of the Council

The Second General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America marked a turning point in the Church's reflection on the social, economic, and political realities of the continent. In this context, the condemnation of Marxism and communism emerged as a recurring theme, both in the interventions of Pope Paul VI and in the Final Document of the conference. However, this condemnation was not made in abstract terms; rather, it was embedded in a broader diagnosis of unjust social structures and ideological tensions permeating Latin America.

In his opening homily at the Synod of Bishops in 1968, Pope Paul VI emphatically rejected "atheistic Marxism" and its expressions of violence, describing them as contrary to the Gospel, the spirit of the Church, and the interests of the people. His statement, "We cannot choose either atheistic Marxism or systematic rebellion. . ." (Paul VI 1968), underscores a doctrinal continuity that perceives Marxism as not only an ideological threat but also a moral and spiritual one. However, it is crucial to nuance this condemnation within the broader context of the Pope's teachings, particularly his earlier encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), which was a critical reflection on the socioeconomic conditions of the

world. In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI expressed deep concern over the growing disparity between rich and poor nations, warning that "unless the existing machinery is modified, the disparity between rich and poor nations will increase rather than diminish; the rich nations are progressing with rapid strides while the poor nations move forward at a slow pace" (Paul VI 1967, n. 8). This encyclical, issued just a year before his homily, highlights the Pope's commitment to justice and peace, underscoring the need for structural change. While he condemned Marxist ideology, Paul VI simultaneously called for systemic reform to address the root causes of inequality, suggesting that the Church's opposition to Marxism did not preclude its concern for the poor and its call for social justice. Thus, his rejection of atheistic Marxism was not absolute but rather situated within a broader call for justice that sought solutions to inequality, albeit without endorsing solutions incompatible with Christian values.

The Final Document of Medellín reflects a stance that critiques both the capitalist system and the Marxist model: "Both systems violate the dignity of the human person", it states, emphasizing that capitalism prioritizes "the primacy of capital and profit", while Marxism leads to a "totalitarian concentration of power in the State" (CELAM 1968, n. I, 10). This balanced critique underscores Medellín's intent to reject the ideological polarizations that suffocate the continent and to assume a prophetic role in addressing systemic injustices. Furthermore, as Rafael Luciani observes, Medellín's approach effectively implemented the *sensus fidelium* of the faithful alongside the *munus docendi* of the hierarchy, creating a space where those in attendance could actively participate in decision-making and embody the Church's prophetic dimension (Luciani 2019, p. 194). This integration of the collective wisdom/intuition of the faithful and the teaching authority of the hierarchy not only enriched the Church's critique of the dominant systems but also reinforced its commitment to discerning and articulating responses rooted in the lived realities of the people.

Medellín introduced a categorization of three social actors—traditionalists, developmentalists, and revolutionaries (CELAM 1968, n. II, 5–8)—intended to simplify the underlying complexities of Latin America's social realities for didactic purposes. While this framework "within a dialectic of domination" (Dussel 1981, p. 240) sought to clarify the Church's stance, the bishops were fully aware of the intricacies involved. As in other ecclesial research, "categories may help to organize a study on the dynamic of Church trends, but individual positions are not always clearly delineated" (removed for peer review). Traditionalists are critiqued for their alliance with dominant elites and their defense of the status quo, which perpetuates inequality. Developmentalists, meanwhile, are faulted for their reductionist vision of progress, equating development exclusively with Western-style industrialization. Revolutionaries, often influenced by Marxist ideologies, receive the strongest condemnation, particularly when they justify violence as a means of social transformation.

This tripartite framework reflects the Church's inherent tensions. On one hand, Medellín denounces systemic social injustice and the "unjust exercise of power by certain dominant sectors" (CELAM 1968, n. II, 6). On the other hand, the Church deliberately avoids aligning itself with revolutionary movements that adopt Marxism as their ideological foundation. This critical distance from communism does not signify uncritical support for capitalism; rather, it reflects an attempt to navigate an intermediate position that transcends the binary opposition of these ideological systems.

In this context, Medellín's anticommunism can be understood as part of a broader effort to construct a distinctly Christian alternative to the crises afflicting Latin America. While this narrative reaffirms the Church's moral authority, it also exposes certain limitations. The condemnation of communism is multi-layered: it critiques Marxism for presenting itself as humanist while ultimately dehumanizing the individual by subordi-

nating them to the collective, and for its practical manifestation as totalitarian state power. In contrast, the critique of capitalism, while highlighting the dominance of capital, its unchecked power, and its tendency to prioritize profit at the expense of human welfare, lacks the same level of analytical clarity. This asymmetry reflects the Church's confidence in the existential and metaphysical realms, where it views itself as a consummate authority, but also signals a shift in its self-perception. While Medellín refrains from offering concrete socioeconomic prescriptions and instead advocates for principles such as a "truly human economy" (CELAM 1968, n. I,10), this restraint contrasts with the more assertive posture in *Mater et Magistra*. In that encyclical, John XXIII asserted that the Church was "ever powerful to offer suitable, effective remedies for the increasing needs of men, and the sorrows and anxieties of this present life" (John XXIII 1961, n. 262).

The transition from such a confident stance to a more cautious approach at Medellín reflects the impact of the Second Vatican Council, which redefined the Church's role as a guide rather than an omnipotent authority. The bishops' warning about the "temptation of the Marxist system" (CELAM 1968, n. I,10) thus reflects both a desire to maintain doctrinal independence amid ideological pressures and a recognition of the limits of ecclesial intervention in addressing systemic inequalities. This tension highlights the Church's ongoing challenge in balancing moral denunciation with effective responses to socioeconomic structures.

The Church's language in the Medellín Conference is prophetic yet constrained by its attempt to balance a sharp criticism of capitalism with a categorical rejection of Marxism. This position generates tensions within its discourse, as it denounces oppressive structures while refraining from endorsing transformative proposals that could be perceived as aligned with Marxist ideologies. Moreover, by portraying revolutionaries as potentially violent agents, the Church risks delegitimizing social struggles that, while not necessarily Marxist, advocate for urgent structural change.

At the same time, Medellin offered a novel interpretive framework (Luciani 2018, p. 53) that marked a rupture with the traditional understanding of the Church's evangelizing action and its mission in the world. It acknowledged that "until now, pastoral action has primarily relied on a pastoral of conservation, based on sacramentalization" (CELAM 1968, n. VI, 1). This recognition reflects an emerging openness to rethinking the Church's role in addressing the social realities of Latin America, even as it navigates the ideological complexities of the Cold War era.

Medellín's condemnation of communism cannot be fully understood apart from the broader struggles for social justice and peace in Latin America. This anticommunism, rather than being a purely reactive stance, was part of an effort to articulate a "third way" that sought to transcend the ideological polarizations of the time. However, as Donal Dorr observes, the viability of this "third way" as a realistic political alternative diminished during the 1970s. While initially associated with the Latin American version of Christian democracy, this approach lost credibility, leading influential Christian thinkers to reject the notion of a "Catholic social doctrine" as a sufficient framework for addressing the region's crises. Indeed, some argued that "committed Christians could no longer afford the luxury of standing on the sidelines" and instead needed to align with leftist movements while promoting Christian values from within (Dorr 2012, p. 246). This tension highlights the complexities inherent in Medellín's attempt to define a distinctively Christian response to the continent's inequalities and ideological conflicts—an idealistic vision that grappled with the limitations of remaining politically neutral in an era of profound social upheaval.

4. Puebla Conference (1979): Defending Christian Anthropology Against Modern Ideologies

The Puebla Conference marked a critical juncture in the Latin American Church's engagement with ideological systems, particularly Marxism, during the volatile context of the Cold War. Influenced heavily by the pontificate of Pope John Paul II—renowned for his unyielding opposition to Marxism and his critiques of certain strands of liberation theology—Puebla deepened the anticommunist rhetoric initially articulated in Medellín. This intensification reflected not only the geopolitical climate but also a recalibration of the Church's priorities, as it sought to address pressing social transformations while safeguarding its doctrinal integrity. However, as Jon Sobrino critically observed, this emphasis on orthodoxy risked overshadowing the praxis-oriented approach necessary for meaningful change in the lives of the marginalized, leaning "more toward orthodoxy than orthopraxis" (Sobrino 2008, p. 50).

Pope John Paul II's inaugural address set the tone for Puebla's theological orientation by underscoring the Church's independence from secular ideologies: "She therefore does not need to have recourse to ideological systems in order to love, defend and collaborate in the liberation of man" (John Paul II 1979, III, 2). Building on this premise, the conference documents articulated a systematic critique of Marxism, highlighting its "utopian unrealism" and its reliance on class struggle, which, according to the bishops, invariably fostered violence (CELAM 1979, n. 48, 544). Further, Marxist collectivism was condemned for stripping individuals of their interior freedom and spiritual dimension, reducing them solely to their social existence (CELAM 1979, n. 313). In the same passage, the concept of a "messianic fraternity" is rejected, as both true fraternity and messianism in Catholic thought require a transcendent foundation, rather than being purely material.

Puebla's anticommunism was neither simplistic nor one-dimensional. While it unequivocally condemned Marxism as atheistic and violent, it also critiqued the structural injustices perpetuated by liberal capitalism. The Final Document warned against allowing fear of Marxism to silence denunciations of capitalism's exploitative realities, acknowledging that both systems were "equally marked by sin" (CELAM 1979, n. 92). This dual critique revealed a profound tension within the Church's discourse, as it sought to reject materialistic ideologies while remaining faithful to its prophetic mission of confronting structural inequality. In this context, the Church faced the challenge of navigating ideological divisions without losing sight of its core commitment to social justice.

At the same time, as Boff observed, the ecclesial landscape in Latin America during the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s was undergoing profound transformations, marked by a resolute hope for ecclesial reinvention: "the emergence of a new form of the Church's presence among humankind" (Boff 1979, p. 95). The Church increasingly commanded attention "for its numerical importance, its evolving ecclesiological experiments, and the new stances of the episcopate regarding social issues" (Boff 1982, p. 13). This period witnessed the rise of a Church deeply rooted in the popular base, aligning itself more visibly with the struggles and aspirations of the marginalized. This pastoral shift not only embraced the lived realities of the poor but also implicitly challenged traditional ecclesiastical hierarchies, signaling a reimagining of the Church's role in society. However, this emergent vision complicated efforts to reconcile the Church's longstanding anticommunist stance with its growing commitment to social justice. The resulting tension—between critiquing both Marxism and capitalism while advocating for the oppressed—created a delicate balancing act. In this space, the Church endeavored to assert its moral authority, navigating the intricate interplay of political ideologies while remaining faithful to its mission of solidarity and evangelization.

Adding further nuance to this complex situation was Puebla's denunciation of the National Security Doctrine, a political ideology widely adopted by authoritarian regimes across Latin America in the name of combating communism (Campagnaro 2024, p. 40). The Church criticized this doctrine for its absolutization of the state and its suppression of individual freedoms, firmly positioning itself against the manipulation of religion by authoritarian regimes to justify oppression (CELAM 1979, n. 314). This rejection was not merely a political stance but a reaffirmation of the Church's commitment to remaining an independent voice, free from ideological manipulation, and dedicated to advocating for human dignity and the common good. Puebla's critique of both capitalist and Marxist systems, alongside its opposition to the National Security Doctrine, underscored the Church's determination to uphold a moral stance that transcended political polarization and aligned with its broader prophetic mission to challenge all forms of oppression.

At the heart of Puebla's theological and ideological framework was the reaffirmation of a "Christian vision of anthropology", which sought to transcend the prevailing political and ideological conflicts of the time, emphasizing the intrinsic dignity of the human person (John Paul II 1979, III, 2). This vision not only rejected the reductionist approaches of both Marxist and capitalist ideologies but also highlighted the importance of forming a generation that could critically engage with these systems. In this context, the bishops underscored the need for a robust education that would empower young people to resist ideological manipulation, particularly from the "liberal capitalist and Marxist" paradigms that were seen as threats to human freedom and spiritual integrity (CELAM 1979, n. 1197).

From a theopolitical perspective, the Puebla Conference represented an evolution in the Church's ideological positioning. While aligning with Pope John Paul II's anticommunist vision, it also sought to address broader systemic injustices, navigating the complexities of Cold War politics. As Budde notes, "the core of the progressive movement withstood reaction" during Puebla, reflecting the resilience of liberation theology's emphasis on the option for the poor (Budde 1992, p. 15). Rather than retreating from the incisive critique of Medellín, Puebla demonstrated the Church's capacity to balance doctrinal fidelity with a continued commitment to justice. Ultimately, the conference reaffirmed its rejection of Marxism and other ideologies incompatible with Christian anthropology while positioning itself as a prophetic voice against structural inequalities and oppressive systems in Latin America.

5. Santo Domingo (1992): From Temporal Messianism to Ideological Void and Resistance to Materialism

The General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate in Santo Domingo marked a renewed reflection on modern ideologies, reaffirming a critical stance toward Marxism and collectivism. This critique, however, emerged in a significantly different context compared to the earlier Puebla Conference, shaped by the seismic global transformations following the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe. John Paul II, in his inaugural address, explicitly referenced this historic shift, characterizing it as a demonstration of the "ephemeral value" of Marxist and collectivist ideologies. For the Pope, the crisis of Marxism was not merely an economic failure but also a profound existential issue: "the truth about man is intimately and necessarily tied to the truth about God" (John Paul II 1992, n. 11). This declaration reflected a broader theological and philosophical framework in which human identity and social order are inseparable from divine truth.

In this context, Gustavo Gutiérrez's reflection on theology is particularly pertinent: "Theologies necessarily bear the mark of the time and ecclesial context in which they are born. They live as long as the conditions in which they originated remain valid" (Gutiérrez et al. 1996, p. 13). Gutiérrez's insight underscores that theological responses are inseparable

from their historical and sociopolitical circumstances. Just as liberation theology was shaped by the specific struggles and realities of Latin America, the Church's response to Marxism in the 1990s had to be reevaluated within the new geopolitical landscape, responding not only to the fall of socialist states but also to a changing ecclesial context. Thus, while the critique of Marxism remained a constant in the official discourse, it was now framed within a broader context of the Church's evolving relationship with the modern world.

The Final Document of the Santo Domingo Conference reinforces this view from multiple perspectives. It emphasizes that, in interpreting Scripture, Jesus not only corrects "purely temporal messianism" but also challenges "all ideologies that enslave man" (CELAM 1992, n. 19). In this context, Marxism is situated within a broader critique of totalizing ideologies that restrict human freedom by imposing immanent, utopian structures. Here, the Church calls for the transcendence of these ideologies, advocating for a comprehensive Christian anthropology that acknowledges the inherent dignity of the person.

Moreover, the document acknowledges the new cultural and social circumstances of the time, describing them as marked by "materialism, the culture of death, the invasion of sects, and religious proposals of various origins" (CELAM 1992, n. 26). While Marxism is not explicitly named in this list, it is implicitly included in the category of negative influences. These are now contrasted with the "new values" of "solidarity, justice", and the "religious quest". This shift in discourse is significant: Santo Domingo does not merely condemn these ideologies but proposes alternatives rooted in Christian solidarity, offering a response to the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of collectivism.

Practically, the document advocates for discerning participation in institutions that support victims, provided they are not "instrumentalized through ideologies incompatible with the Church's Social Doctrine" (CELAM 1992, n. 168). This cautionary note highlights the importance of safeguarding the Church's identity, ensuring that its involvement in social action does not lead to ideological compromise.

The central challenge in the positions articulated at Santo Domingo lies in the delicate balance between critiquing totalizing ideologies and offering concrete, viable alternatives. While the Church adopts a more optimistic tone compared to Puebla, acknowledging "new values" in contemporary society, it simultaneously maintains a firm stance against Marxism and other ideologies. This dual approach raises pertinent questions regarding the Church's capacity to engage with an increasingly pluralistic world without resorting to doctrinal "totalization." In this context, one must consider the ambivalence that underpins the document's theological reflection and pastoral recommendations. As Parker observes, "there is a tension between a positive appraisal of autonomous sociocultural processes and the defense of the dogmas of the faith and of the Church" (Parker 2015, p. 67). The Santo Domingo Conference reaffirms the Church's anti-Marxist position while adapting it to a post-Cold War context, recognizing the historical exhaustion of Marxist collectivism. Nevertheless, its insistence on the incompatibility of these ideologies with Christian truth and the Church's social doctrine underscores a persistent effort to consolidate Christian anthropology as the cornerstone of its mission of evangelization and justice. Thus, while the Church acknowledges the pluralistic currents of modern society, it remains steadfast in its role as the custodian of divine truth, navigating the complexities of the contemporary world without compromising its doctrinal integrity.

In this context, one can detect an implicit reference to liberation theology, though the document avoids hinting at its ideological distortions or shortcomings, which had already been condemned by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI). In his 1984 intervention as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Ratzinger cautioned against the tendency to focus solely on liberation from earthly

and temporal enslavements, which risks sidelining the more fundamental liberation from sin. He noted that "some are tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind. They do so in such a way that they seem to put liberation from sin in second place, and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1984). This shift in pastoral tone and substance is evident in John Paul II's approach, which wisely avoided historical polemics by reclaiming potentially contentious terms and applying them to a pastoral model grounded in communion (Spinello 2012, p. 203). This approach was intended as a model for the churches in the Americas, reinforcing the pastoral mission of unity over ideological division (Piccone Camere 2020, p. 580).

In conclusion, the Santo Domingo Conference represents a pivotal moment in the Catholic Church's engagement with contemporary ideologies, particularly Marxism, within the rapidly changing global context following the collapse of the socialist bloc. While maintaining its critical stance towards totalitarian ideologies, the Church also embraces the opportunity to propose new, Christian-based alternatives that emphasize values such as solidarity and justice. This approach not only critiques materialism and ideologies that reduce humanity to immanent and utopian structures, but also invites a pastoral commitment grounded in human dignity and ecclesial communion. The Church's adaptation to the post-Cold War landscape underscores its ability to navigate the complexities of a pluralistic world without succumbing to the temptations of doctrinal totalization. Thus, Santo Domingo stands as a clarion call for the Church to remain faithful to its identity while engaging in the vital work of evangelization and social justice, all the while negotiating the tension between ideological relativism and doctrinal integrity.

6. Aparecida Conference (2007): From Silence on Marx to New Ideological Dehumanizing Threats

A closer analysis of key excerpts from Benedict XVI's speeches and the Final Document of the Aparecida Conference reveals a notable shift in the Church's approach to ideologies and their impact on society. In a curious departure from tradition, Marx—who had been something of a perennial attendee at previous General Conferences of Latin American bishops, where his ideas were routinely dissected and condemned—was conspicuously absent from the discussions at Aparecida. This absence is neither accidental nor insignificant. Instead, it signals a deliberate pivot in the Church's discourse, moving beyond the narrow focus on political and economic critiques to address broader ideological forces that shape cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of human life. Such a recalibration resonates with José Casanova's observation of Latin America's current reality as one of "religious pluralization with a relatively mild secularization" (Casanova 2018, p. 194). In this pluralistic context, the Church appears less preoccupied with old adversaries and more attuned to the multifaceted challenges of modernity, navigating an ever-expanding ideological landscape while engaging with diverse expressions of faith across the region.

In his inaugural address, Benedict XVI maintains a direct and explicit approach, pointing out the "great error of the dominant tendencies of the past century" (Benedict XVI 2007, n. 3), which include both Marxism and capitalism. He highlights their failure to promote a just order rooted in intrinsic morality. The Pope's critique extends beyond the structural and economic failures of these systems to their spiritual and ethical impact, emphasizing that both, by promising self-sufficient structures, neglected the need for a prior moral and spiritual foundation. In this context, his criticism of oppression and the degradation of human dignity—observed in both communist regimes and capitalist societies—serves as a call to reconsider the centrality of morality in social structures.

However, the Aparecida Conference adopts a more nuanced approach when addressing ideologies. While acknowledging the "failure of dominant ideologies" (CELAM 2007, n. 52) to address the search for the meaning of life, it does not explicitly mention Marx or specific political ideologies. This omission is significant and may be interpreted as the Church's attempt to move away from focusing on political ideologies as the center of its analysis, shifting instead to a broader critique of ideologies perceived as reductive and alienating to humanity. Instead of exclusively targeting Marxist materialism, Aparecida critiques a wider spectrum of ideologies, including "materialism, the culture of death", and other "exhausted ideologies" (CELAM 2007, n. 11), highlighting their inability to provide answers to the deeper questions of human existence.

The Aparecida Conclusive Document warns of the risks of "exhausted ideologies" and the "reduction of the Church to a political subject" (CELAM 2007, n. 99b), a caution that must be understood within the context of an ecclesial experience marked by the excesses of politics in previous decades. In the Latin America of the 1970s and 1980s, the Church played a complex role in its relationship with leftist and liberation movements. Liberation theology, rooted in Marxism and focused on social justice, had profoundly influenced the Church's pastoral and social reflection. Nevertheless, Aparecida's response marks a turning point: the need for a "better discernment of the seductive impacts of ideologies" (CELAM 2007, n. 99b) implies a departure from the political instrumentalization of faith, advocating for a return to a mission more spiritual in nature and less tied to specific ideological proposals.

The reflection on ideology in Aparecida raises important questions about the nature of faith and its relationship to social engagement. By avoiding explicit condemnation of systems such as Marxism and focusing on a broader critique of ideologies, the conference acknowledges that threats to human dignity and well-being no longer originate exclusively from a particular political–economic model but from a set of beliefs and practices that alienate humanity and reduce it to an object of consumption or utility. In this sense, the ideology of the "culture of death" and other manifestations of an increasingly dehumanizing materialism remain central concerns for the Church's mission in the modern world. The omission of any explicit reference to Marx in the Aparecida conclusive document can be interpreted as a deliberate response to the evolving historical and political landscape, where traditional ideological frameworks, especially those rooted in political doctrines, have diminished in influence or undergone significant transformation. Nonetheless, this shift does not signify the Church's abandonment of its critique of materialism and secularism. Rather, Aparecida expanded its lens to encompass a more comprehensive critique of contemporary ideologies—those that transcend the confines of political–economic systems like Marxism and manifest across cultural, social, and political domains.

This nuanced redirection in Aparecida's focus must also be understood within the context of evolving theological leadership. As Raúl Zegarra notes, the conference initially appeared unpromising, particularly given the lack of the "vigorous liberationist leadership" seen in Medellín and Puebla and the "already disappointing experience of Santo Domingo" (Zegarra 2023, p. 115). Yet, the outcomes of Aparecida were unexpectedly transformative, rooted in the enduring theological groundwork laid by figures like Gustavo Gutiérrez. Despite facing significant hostility over the years, Gutiérrez's theology managed to influence a minority within the hierarchy, who, while few in number, maintained considerable power.

As Zegarra explains, the alignment with liberation theology emerged naturally during the conference, highlighting the lasting influence of Gustavo Gutiérrez's vision. This shift occurred as a new generation of episcopal leaders actively diminished the influence of conservative appointees tied to Pope John Paul II, especially those aligned with Opus Dei. Among those who embraced this renewed theological direction was Cardinal Jorge

Bergoglio, later Pope Francis (Zegarra 2023, p. 115). From the outset of his papacy, Bergoglio made a clear and symbolic reclamation of liberation theology, exemplified by his choice of the papal name "Francis", evoking the saint who championed the poor and marginalized. His papacy has consistently underscored the Church's preferential option for the poor, a central tenet of liberation theology.

This reclamation was further emphasized by Pope Francis's visible endorsement of the English edition of *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*, co-authored by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Cardinal Gerhard Müller (Gutiérrez and Müller 2005). Originally published a decade earlier, the renewed prominence of this edition during Francis's pontificate served as a powerful affirmation of liberation theology's continued relevance. The collaboration between Gutiérrez and Müller not only underscored the enduring resonance of liberationist thought but also symbolized a bridge between theological and ecclesial divides, mirroring Francis's vision of a Church unwavering in its commitment to justice and solidarity with the marginalized. Pope Francis's critiques, such as the emphasis on the theology of the Good Samaritan and his condemnation of the "mentality of maximum gain at minimal cost" (Francis 2020, n. 71; 2023, n. 31), reflect his deepened commitment to the poor and the dispossessed. By invoking these themes, Francis positions the Church as a radical force for justice, echoing the prophetic message of liberation theology while navigating contemporary sociopolitical realities.

7. CEBs, Charismatic Catholicism, and Sectarian Challenges: The Church's Evolving Response

In completing our exploration of the evolving anticommunist discourse across the Latin American episcopal conferences, it is crucial to turn our attention to the broader religious dynamics that also shaped the Church's response. The topic of Protestantism—especially the rise of evangelical and Pentecostal movements—transcends the focus on communism, emerging as a key factor influencing the Church's strategic adaptations throughout the decades. Indeed, Protestantism, alongside sectarian movements and Charismatic Catholicism, is a recurring theme in the documents of the episcopal conferences, cutting across each of the major gatherings, from Rio de Janeiro to Aparecida. By delving into these religious shifts, we gain further insight into how the Church navigated ideological and spiritual competition within the broader context of political, social, and cultural transformation. This section aims to illuminate the Church's evolving response to Protestantism's growing influence, which, in many ways, paralleled the concerns about communism and called for strategic adaptations that would sustain the Catholic faith as a central pillar of Latin American identity.

The dramatic expansion of evangelical Protestantism, particularly Pentecostalism, has significantly reshaped the religious landscape of Latin America, presenting profound challenges to the Catholic Church's historically dominant influence. This growth has prompted strategic responses from the Catholic Church, which has sought to address the dual pressures of doctrinal competition and cultural transformation while reasserting its role as the spiritual and cultural foundation of Latin American identity. Evangelical Protestantism's rapid ascent in the latter half of the 20th century—fueled by its emphasis on accessible worship, emotive spirituality, and community-based ministry—coincided with the Catholic Church's internal struggles to balance tradition and reform. Pentecostalism, in particular, presented an unprecedented challenge by offering vibrant expressions of faith, including healing, glossolalia, and personal testimonies, which resonated deeply with marginalized populations. These practices, coupled with Protestantism's alignment with emerging political regimes and its critique of Catholic hegemony, forced the Church to reevaluate its pastoral strategies. In this

context, Thorsen's concept of the "Pentecostalization" of religion in Latin America is relevant, as it acknowledges the influence of Pentecostal practices not only on Protestant movements but also on Catholic expressions of faith, reflecting broader shifts within the region's religious landscape (Thorsen 2023).

Charismatic Catholicism emerged in the 1960s as a pivotal ecclesial innovation, blending elements of Pentecostal worship with Catholic orthodoxy to counter Protestantism's appeal. This movement integrated dynamic practices such as faith healing, speaking in tongues, and expressive worship, offering a spiritually enriching alternative while reaffirming Catholic doctrine. By addressing the unmet spiritual needs of the faithful, Charismatic Catholicism not only revitalized parish life but also positioned itself as a strategic bulwark against Protestant inroads. As Cleary notes, the rise of Charismatic Catholicism paralleled the declining institutional support for liberation theology and its associated base communities (CEBs). These communities, championed at Medellín and Puebla as grassroots instruments for social justice, faced conservative resistance by the 1990s (Cleary 2007, p. 15). The Vatican, wary of CEBs' political overtones and alignment with progressive movements, redirected its focus toward less contentious forms of renewal. Charismatic Catholicism, with its emphasis on personal conversion and devotional vibrancy, filled this institutional vacuum, marking a significant shift in the Church's pastoral priorities.

The Church's evolving stance on Protestant expansion is evident in the sectarian discourse of successive CELAM conferences. At Rio de Janeiro (1955), the tone was overtly defensive, depicting Protestantism as an external adversary threatening the region's Catholic heritage. The conference invoked the language of "spiritual crusades" and emphasized the urgency of converting Protestants to Catholicism (CELAM 1955, n. 70). This defensive posture, however, softened at Medellín, where the Church adopted a more propositive approach. Here, the language of "protest" and "liberation" was appropriated to frame the Church's mission as an agent of social transformation rather than direct confrontation with Protestant denominations (CELAM 1968, n. VII, 18b; n. X, 2).

By the time of Puebla (1979), the Catholic Church's response to Protestantism had taken a more nuanced turn. The discourse now reflected heightened awareness of Protestantism's dual threats: external sectarian movements and internal ecclesial fragmentation. Protestant expansion was characterized as a catalyst for "ecclesial estrangement", necessitating a "new evangelization" that emphasized spiritual renewal and pastoral innovation (CELAM 1979, n. 366). The need for renewal was framed as a defensive yet creative adaptation to the challenges posed by Protestant sects, whose growth seemed to threaten the very cohesion of Catholicism in Latin America.

By the Santo Domingo Conference (1992), the perceived threat of sects had reached what the bishops described as "dramatic proportions" (CELAM 1992, n. 139). The emphasis on CEBs as a countermeasure was tempered by directives to anchor these communities firmly within parish structures, reflecting concerns over their ideological and ecclesiological autonomy (CELAM 1992, n. 61–62). This pastoral recalibration, while aimed at safeguarding orthodoxy, arguably stifled the spontaneous evangelizing vitality of the CEBs, contributing to their decline in subsequent years (Tombs 2002, p. 275).

In this same conference, the bishops highlighted their concern over Protestantism, describing it as a "dramatic" phenomenon undermining the Catholic Church's cultural and religious foundations. As Protestant sects continued to gain ground, the Church sought to assert its relevance by emphasizing centralized oversight of the base ecclesial communities (CEBs), which had become a significant grassroots movement in Latin America. Simultaneously, the promotion of Charismatic Catholicism emerged as a key strategy, aimed at countering the allure of Protestant practices while revitalizing the Church's spiritual and doctrinal appeal (CELAM 1992, n. 61–62, n. 139).

In this broader context, the rise of liberation theology and its deep integration with the CEBs became a pivotal component of the Church's evolving response. As Rowland notes, the CEBs played a central role in shaping the ecclesial and political landscape, particularly in Brazil, where they fostered a "popular church" distinct from the more traditional hierarchies (Rowland 2007, pp. 5–6). The bishops' growing support for these communities underscored their importance as a counterforce to Protestantism, even as tensions persisted in dioceses less sympathetic to the movement. This grassroots engagement, rooted in struggles for justice and recognition, was integral not only to the Church's ideological defense against Protestant encroachment but also to its evolving identity in Latin America.

Finally, the Aparecida Conference (2007) acknowledged the profound demographic and cultural shifts reshaping the religious landscape of Latin America. Protestantism, now referred to predominantly through the lens of "sects and other religious groups", was identified as the foremost challenge for the Church in the early 21st century. The bishops noted the "exodus of the faithful" to non-Catholic movements, framing this phenomenon as part of a broader matrix of ideological, cultural, and pastoral challenges, including secularization, globalization, and the persistence of social injustices (CELAM 2007, n. 185).

The Protestant challenge extended beyond ecclesial boundaries, reflecting broader ideological and cultural tensions. As Stewart-Gambino (1992) observes, Protestantism's individualistic spirituality and alignment with right-wing regimes contrasted sharply with the collective, justice-oriented ethos of liberation theology. For Catholic progressives, this divergence underscored the need for a robust theological response to safeguard the Church's commitment to social equity. Conversely, traditionalists viewed Protestantism as a cultural invasion that threatened the historical integration of Catholicism with Latin American identity. These tensions were further exacerbated by Protestant critiques of Catholic rituals, which they dismissed as "idolatrous", and the socioeconomic appeal of Pentecostal networks among impoverished communities.

Amid these challenges, Charismatic Catholicism emerged as a spiritually vibrant and strategically astute response. By adopting elements of Protestant worship, it not only countered the appeal of Pentecostalism but also reenergized Catholic communities, demonstrating the Church's adaptive resilience. This movement bridged the gap between tradition and renewal, addressing the spiritual and pastoral needs of the faithful while reaffirming the Church's commitment to its doctrinal and cultural heritage.

Ultimately, the Catholic Church's responses to Protestant expansion underscore its enduring capacity to navigate profound societal shifts. From the defensive rhetoric of Rio de Janeiro to the pastoral innovations of Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo, the Church's evolving strategies reflect a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between theology, culture, and politics in Latin America's dynamic religious landscape.

8. Conclusions

The General Conferences have historically functioned as arenas where the interplay between global political tensions and regional pastoral priorities unfolds. While the Final Documents often present a unified narrative, much of the underlying complexity emerges in unofficial, informal spaces: late-night discussions, backroom negotiations, and candid exchanges among bishops. These unofficial settings expose the diversity of episcopal perspectives, the nuances in approach, and the power struggles that ultimately shape the Church's official stance. This dynamic reflects the intricate process of negotiation and compromise inherent in the drafting of such documents, revealing a Church that is as much a site of debate as it is of doctrinal unity.

This internal negotiation unfolds against the backdrop of the Catholic Church's enduring yet evolving influence in Latin America. Edward Cleary's 1992 observation encapsulates the adaptive nature of religion in the region: "Religion has not disappeared but flourishes with changing faces—many more Pentecostals are now evident and the Catholic presence is more vivid" (Cleary 1992, p. 218). However, over the ensuing three decades, the regional religious landscape has undergone both continuities and profound transformations. The latest available data from Latinobarómetro underscore the Catholic Church's continued centrality, encompassing 53.8% of the total population, with significant extremes ranging from 80.4% in Paraguay to 26.7% in Costa Rica. Yet, despite this numerical predominance, the Church's approval ratings have experienced a steady decline, reflecting a multifaceted erosion of trust (Latinobarómetro 2023). This decline is part of a broader trend seen across the region, notably in Brazil, where the number of Catholics has decreased by roughly 1% per year between 1991 and 2010, while Evangelical Christianity has experienced a significant rise, growing by 0.7% annually during the same period. This trend has accelerated in recent years, with a 2020 survey revealing that "Evangelicals now constitute the majority among Christians aged 16 to 44, marking a dramatic shift in a country that remains home to the world's largest Catholic community" (Hatzikidi and Dullo 2021, p. 14). These dynamics illustrate the broader religious diversification across Latin America, as the once-dominant Catholic Church faces increasing competition from Pentecostal and Evangelical movements, reshaping the religious and social fabric of the region.

Among the factors contributing to the Catholic Church's decline in Latin America are the diversification of religious affiliations, particularly the rapid rise of Pentecostalism, and the Church's perceived failure to effectively engage with pressing sociopolitical challenges. This decline is further compounded by the far-reaching impact of sexual abuse scandals and the subsequent institutional cover-ups, which have severely undermined the Church's moral authority, exacerbating public disillusionment and alienation (Lecaros and Suárez 2024, pp. 1–10). This stark contrast—between Cleary's depiction of a once vibrant Catholic presence and contemporary data highlighting the Church's multifaceted decline—underscores the urgent need for ecclesial reinvention. As the Church navigates a rapidly changing and increasingly pluralistic sociopolitical landscape, it faces competing priorities and ideological tensions, making its capacity to adapt and reimagine its pastoral strategies all the more critical for maintaining relevance in the region.

This dynamic shift resonates with broader historical patterns of religious practice, as Taylor suggests in his exploration of European religious history: "the apogee of Catholic practice in France comes around 1870, after the crisis of the Revolution with its 'dechristianization' campaigns, constitutional church, and other such traumas" (Taylor 2007, p. 424). Taylor's point is not one of straightforward cause and effect, but rather an acknowledgment that religious history often unfolds in unpredictable ways, marked by contradictions and surprises. Just as the French Catholic Church, following the upheaval of the Revolution, faced ideological and societal trauma yet experienced a resurgence in religious practice, so too does the Latin American Church find itself at a critical juncture. The struggle for the Church in both contexts is not only to recover moral authority but to adapt and reinvent itself in the face of modern challenges. In Latin America, this reinvention is not merely a theoretical concern—it is a matter of the survival of the Church, at least in its current structural form, as it grapples with the forces of secularization, competition from other religious movements, and a broader sociopolitical landscape that continues to shift.

Since its establishment in 1955, CELAM has been a key platform for pastoral reflection and action in Latin America, showcasing an evolution in its theological and political priorities. The Medellín Conference (1968) marked a watershed moment by applying

the reforms of the Second Vatican Council to the Latin American context, significantly reshaping the Church's pastoral and social approach in the region. Subsequently, the Puebla and Santo Domingo Conferences highlighted a shift towards the inculturation of the Gospel and a more explicitly anticommunist stance, reflecting the influence of changing historical and political contexts, including the height of the Cold War and the rise of leftist ideologies in the region.

While Marxism was consistently condemned, its symbolic prominence peaked at Santo Domingo, where Pope John Paul II's anticommunist agenda became particularly evident. However, as the decades progressed, the Church's focus began to shift to other issues. At the Aparecida Conference, anticommunist concerns waned, and attention turned to more contemporary issues, such as gender ideologies and the pastoral challenges faced by the Church in a rapidly changing world. The absence of explicit mentions of Marxism in more recent documents, such as those from the Synod on Synodality, reflects a shift in priorities and a recognition that the Church needed to address new global challenges. However, this analysis of the Synod extends beyond the chronological scope of this study and remains a potential area for future research.

The history of liberation theology, particularly through the figure of Gustavo Gutiérrez, powerfully illustrates the evolution of the Catholic Church's anticommunist discourse. While Gutiérrez is widely recognized as a foundational figure, he was not the sole architect of the movement. Liberation theology was shaped by a collective of theologians, including notable figures such as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Jon Sobrino, and others, whose diverse yet complementary contributions enriched its intellectual, theological, and pastoral framework, making it a multifaceted and dynamic response to the sociopolitical challenges in Latin America.

Initially, the Church's condemnation of liberation theology stemmed from its perceived alignment with Marxist critiques of the sociopolitical order, leading the ecclesiastical hierarchy to distance itself from the movement. This early opposition was grounded in the fear that its emphasis on class struggle and radical social change threatened the stability of the Church's social teachings. However, over time, the partial rehabilitation of liberation theology and key figures like Gutiérrez reflects a nuanced balancing act within the Church, where a critique of Marxism is juxtaposed with a renewed pastoral commitment to social justice, the dignity of the poor, and the liberation of the oppressed. This evolution underscores a persistent tension within the Church: while it upholds the ideal of social justice, it remains cautious of doctrinal conflicts that could arise from political ideologies.

Dillon's insight into Catholicism as a "living tradition" underscores the Church's ability to adapt while remaining anchored in its doctrinal commitments. He argues that Catholicism is "committed to tradition but open to change", capturing the dynamic interplay between faith and reason that allows the Church to stay relevant in an increasingly secularized world (Dillon 2018, p. 1). This adaptability has enabled the Church to reassess and integrate aspects of liberation theology, balancing its traditional teachings with evolving social realities. By navigating the complexities of modern political ideologies while remaining committed to its core principles, the Church demonstrates its capacity to remain vital and engaged in the ongoing pursuit of social justice.

As demonstrated by the evolving discourse across the General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate, the Catholic Church's response to Protestantism reveals the intricate interplay between religious adaptation and ideological challenges. This interaction, initially shaped by the specter of communism, ultimately transcended to address other dehumanizing ideologies. The Church's approach—from Rio de Janeiro's defensive posture to Medellín and Puebla's embrace of liberation theology and ecclesial base communities—highlights a complex negotiation of tradition, renewal, and geopolitical pressures. In

response to the rise of Protestant movements, especially Pentecostalism, the Church found itself navigating a broader ideological landscape, integrating Charismatic Catholicism as a strategic adaptation to both the internal and external challenges it faced. The Charismatic movement, blending emotive worship with Catholic orthodoxy, underscores the Church's resilience, addressing not only Protestant growth but also internal tensions caused by broader ideological and cultural shifts. This multifaceted response reveals the Church's capacity to maintain its theological and cultural influence amidst rapid transformations in the region.

The notion of "messianic fraternity", coined at the Puebla Conference (1979), represents a profound critique of Marxism. The bishops viewed Marxism, in its utopian version, as promoting myths and illusions of a redemptive future, contrasting with the reality of a present devoid of fraternity and authentic redemption. This "messianism without a Messiah" was seen as a dangerous idealism that diverted the Church from its true evangelizing mission and its call to build genuine and tangible fraternity. Thus, the Church positioned itself as an advocate for social commitment grounded in genuine solidarity rather than utopian dreams that risked leading to frustration and division.

The shift towards a pastoral approach emphasizing "messianic fraternity" and reconciliation with cultural and social realities has ushered the Church into a new phase where synodality and active listening have become central pillars. This transformation suggests a preference for a less ideological and more inclusive model, uniting CELAM's and the universal Church's priorities in a quest for unity and understanding. This approach paves the way for a paradigm that recognizes Latin America's cultural and social diversity, inviting the Church to act in a manner more attuned to contemporary challenges and less constrained by past ideological divides.

Thus, throughout its history, CELAM and the Church at large have faced numerous challenges that have shaped them into a "besieged fortress" (Borghesi 2021, p. 44), where internal and external tensions have tested their capacity for adaptation and resilience. From confronting political ideologies like Marxism to navigating questions about their role in social struggles and transforming into a space for synodality and dialogue in contemporary times, the Church has had to redefine its priorities and strategies. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that this fortress has also revealed its vulnerabilities, such as resistance to internal change and struggles to maintain unity amidst a broad and often polarized ideological spectrum. Past missteps, such as ambiguities in responding to liberation theology or its eagerness to act as a political agent without always doing so effectively, remain critical points of reflection that question its ability to serve as a prophetic voice and an agent of reconciliation.

This fortress, though besieged by diverse voices and internal critiques, has managed to emerge with a renewed sense of mission, adapting to the changing realities of Latin America and reinforcing its call for unity and fraternity. The Church has not only survived the trials of time but has also learned to transform itself, seeking a path of reconciliation and building a more inclusive and understanding community. However, to consolidate this role, it is essential for the Church to maintain an attitude of self-criticism and openness to self-transformation, recognized as crucial to addressing the new realities and expectations of its faithful and society at large.

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The Evolution of Venezuelan Evangelical Involvement in Politics: The Case of the 2024 Presidential Elections

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Abstract: After his questionable re-election in 2018, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro Moros (NMM) began a campaign to attract the attention of evangelical leaders, apostles, prophets, pastors, and church members to secure their votes for the 2024 campaign. The main reason for this move was the surprising growth of the evangelical population in the country, which reached almost 30% by the end of 2023. Several independent churches and denominations accepted NMM's invitation to meet and participate in government programs specifically targeted at evangelical churches. Despite allegations of human rights abuses, corruption, and violations of the Venezuelan constitution, some evangelicals created a narrative about NMM as the "protector of families" and as God's chosen one to usher in a new era of prosperity for the nation. Through acts of "identificational" repentance staged at the Miraflores Palace, a contrite NMM received prophetic declarations and prayers from apostles and pastors, and the country was cleansed of curses and satanic influences. This article seeks to document, analyze, and situate these discourses in relation to contemporary theological trends, as an important case of evangelical alignment with left-wing politics in Latin America. Moreover, the article also seeks to show how these events relate to the evolution of Venezuelan evangelical involvement in national politics, particularly under 25 years of socialist governments of Hugo Chávez Frías and Nicolás Maduro Moros.

Keywords: Venezuelan evangelicals; Venezuelan elections; Neo-Pentecostalism and politics; apostolic churches and politics

1. Introduction

A few decades ago, it was common to imagine evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Latin America as a network of small congregations in poor neighborhoods of growing cities, led by amateur pastors with minimal biblical training. The Catholic Church considered these evangelical groups to be undesirable sects, thus creating all kinds of difficulties for them to be legally registered by governments, to own property, to establish seminaries, to have access to mass media, to hold public crusades, and many other restrictions. Although evangelicals endured "social stigmatization and violent persecution" (Hartch 2014, p. 22) for several decades, they continued to expand (Semán 2019) and became a somewhat safe refuge for migrants from rural regions to metropolitan centers (Lalive D'Epinay 1968). These small communities helped migrants bear the burdens of city life, extreme poverty, homesickness, low-skilled jobs, and government indifference, providing discipline, strict moral standards, psychological and economic security, and the basic education to maintain a dignified life in megacities. Thus, migrants, displaced persons, and marginalized populations, affected by the cyclical political and economic crises in Latin America, joined thousands of these evangelical churches that sprang up in barrios and favelas, preaching a

new world vision, and new social and personal norms, with an escapist rhetoric and an apocalyptic discourse characterized by the search for purity, separation from worldly distractions, isolation from community participation, rejection of active political participation, and the constant expectation of the rapture or the second coming of Jesus (Parousia).

Over the years, evangelical congregations slowly adapted their message to address real-life issues such as addiction, violence, family conflicts, inadequate housing, homelessness, and others, making these everyday aspects part of their "religious quest" (Rubin et al. 2014). With the Pentecostalization of these congregations (Gooren 2010), through the experience of intense spiritual manifestations, the use of contemporary worship music, and the introduction of ministries of healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare, combined with the traditional evangelical quadrilateral message (biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, activism/mission) (Joustra 2019), Latin American evangelical churches prepared for the monumental numerical growth of the last two decades of the 20th century and throughout the 21st century. Today, evangelical churches in Latin America reflect the diversity of the population, including farmers, factory workers, housewives, executives, students, military officers, entrepreneurs, athletes, and politicians, representing all sectors and social classes of society.

A long, uneven process of religious deregulation began in the region in the 1970s, leading to an increase in the evangelical population from 4% in 1970 (the breakpoint of religious growth) to 19% in 2014 (with a steep slope), with a corresponding drastic reduction in the Catholic population to 69% (PRC 2014). In some countries, such as Venezuela, the numerical changes have been drastic, demonstrating the religious transformation of the country, albeit with a delay compared to other parts of Latin America, where the evangelical church is also expanding (Pérez Guadalupe 2017) and the Catholic Church is losing its hegemony and control (Bastián 1994). Figure 1 shows the changes observed in Venezuela from 1995 to 2023, based on data collected by Latinobarometro[1], a public opinion research NGO, which showing that the evangelical population went from 4.5% in 1995 to 31.4% at the end of 2023, with a rapid slope starting in 2018. The graph shows the growth of the evangelical population in the last 25 years, which corresponds to the four periods of socialist government under Hugo Chávez Frías and Nicolás Maduro Moros.

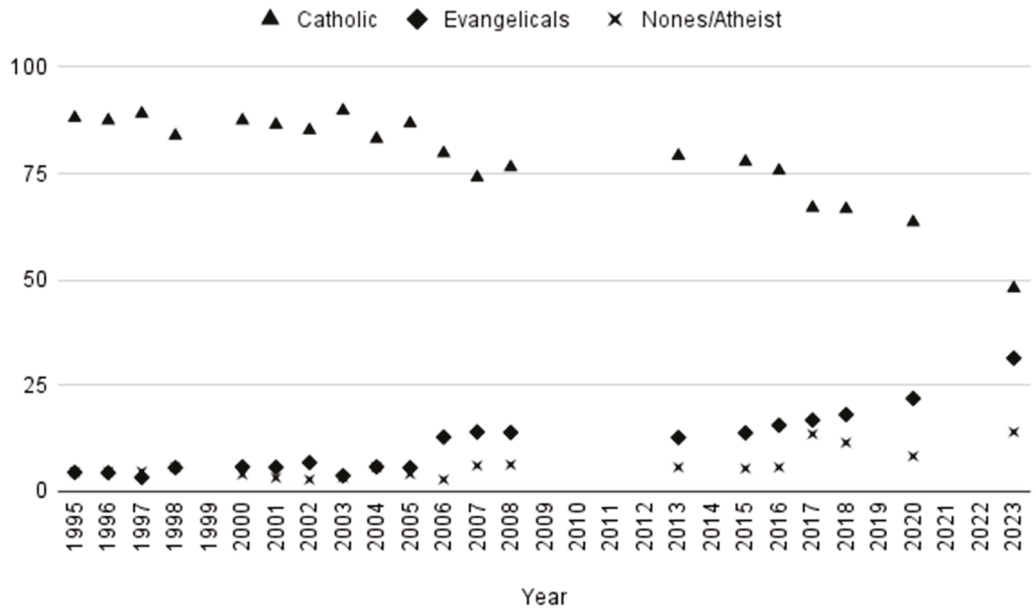


Figure 1. Graph of Latinobarometro data for religious affiliation in Venezuela (plotted by author).

Beyond their apparent numerical growth, Venezuelan evangelicals began to slowly undergo a process that Hilario Wynarczyk (2009) describes as a transformation from a "negative dualism", in which the church seeks to escape from a sinful world to a "positive dualism", in which the church is moved to establish God's kingdom in order to reverse the sinfulness of the nation. This transformation has been addressed from a theoretical standpoint by Joanildo Burity (2016), who proposed the concept of minoritization as a framework for understanding the recent emergence of evangelicals as new actors that make visible new visions of the world, new understandings of power, new demands, and new forms of socialization (Burity 2020), by claiming political representation against a backdrop of historical isolation, marginalization, and undervaluation. In other words, for Burity, evangelicals are an emerging minority:

> with its own voice, its own demands, and a sense of action that. . . uses a repertoire of collective action already tested in the context of modernity: the construction of a differentiated identity, self-assertion as a legitimate being or actor, articulation of a demand for rights, and coalition-building with other minorities (and dissident sectors of the majority). (Burity 2016)

Through minoritization, evangelicals create a new political subjectivity, challenging traditional secular views with Christian values or biblical ideals, claiming a place within the national identity from which they had fled for doctrinal reasons or had been relegated by the religious status quo to become part of the "pueblo" (Burity 2021), seeking to be recognized as social agents contributing to the deliberation of common national agendas in the different countries of the region (Panotto 2020a).

According to Panotto's (2020b) interpretation of Burity's proposal, this point of view has the virtue of not ignoring the heterogeneous religious identity of evangelicals and of not falling into the common error of classifying it as a conservative ideology, which tends to favor its affiliation only with extreme right-wing political parties. As we will see in another section of this article, the political engagement of Venezuelan evangelicals has gone through several stages in which we can observe a multiplicity of approaches, discourses, ideologies, groups, spaces, issues, and, finally, theologies: sometimes creating tensions among different evangelical groups and, at other times, collectively in tension with political actors who seek to undermine and delegitimize evangelical concerns.

With this openness in mind, this article seeks to document and understand the political involvement and minoritization process of a significant number of evangelical leaders in favor of Nicolás Maduro Moros (NMM) during the controversial 2024 presidential campaign. This involvement, represented by several public staged events that began in 2019, serves to understand the changes in the perception and characterization of Venezuelan evangelicals by the government, politicians, media, and the Catholic Church: how the different evangelical leaders gradually acquire a political identity, how their view of the Gospel serves to interpret and address the national crisis, and how they introduce pneumatic[2] rituals and performances and biblical-centered messages that convey an evangelical interpretation of the political moment. In order to better understand this context, let us now turn to an overview of Venezuelan evangelical involvement in politics since the 1980s, where important signposts of this evolution serve to characterize and understand the unprecedented role of evangelicals in the electoral campaign of a radical socialist candidate, in contrast to the generalized perception of Latin American evangelicals' alignment with right-wing politicians.

2. Evolution of the Political Involvement of Venezuelan Evangelicals

Evangelicals have gone from being a despised and underestimated group to become a population that claims to be an important and decisive factor in the political scenario of

each Latin American country (Pérez Guadalupe 2017). Several research works have been published to explain the growing involvement of Latin American evangelicals in politics during the 21st century (Boas 2020). However, despite the similarities in the evolution of evangelical political participation in the different countries of the region, the differences are also enormous (Freston 2008), and for this reason, each nation needs to be considered individually. Unfortunately, the specific case of Venezuelan evangelical involvement in politics has been somewhat overlooked in the literature, leading to the common assumption that the evangelical church in the country is aligned with the political right. As we will see in this section and in the case of the 2024 presidential elections which will be analyzed later, the process of minoritization of Venezuelan evangelicals has been markedly different from that of other countries in the region, particularly due to its orientation in favor of the left-wing revolutionary transformation initiated by Hugo Chávez Frías. Let us look at some of the turning points of this evolution in the following paragraphs.

After years of religious discrimination and rejection by the Catholic elite, one of the first political battles faced by the Venezuela's traditionally apolitical evangelicals was to defend the permanence of the New Tribes Mission (NTM)[3], which had been operating in the southern state of Amazonas since 1946. Several allegations against the US-based mission surfaced in the 1970s, prompting the Venezuelan Congress to launch an investigation into the NTM. During the investigation, which began in early 1980, the Venezuelan Evangelical Council (CEV)[4], an interdenominational body of churches, strongly supported the NTM and had to participate in debates, congressional sessions, and media interviews to testify in favor of the mission and raise the banner of religious freedom, leading to the dismissal of the charges by the Congress (Conaway 1980). For Venezuelan evangelicals, this marked the beginning of the process of minoritization, even though it involved defending a foreign mission that, at the time, was operating outside the purview of Venezuelan evangelical churches[5].

The CEV's success in defending the NTM by engaging government officials and political representatives in public meetings on the issue, lobbying and recruiting supporters, and raising funds in local churches suggested that the creation of an evangelical political party was possible. Following a regional trend of "translating religious demands into political parties" (Bastián 1999), based on the premise that "evangelicals vote for evangelicals" or "hermano vota por hermano", the party Organización Renovadora Auténtica (ORA) was registered with the Electoral Council in 1987. Professor Godofredo Marín of the UCV School of Chemical Engineering became the presidential candidate of the ORA in the 1988 general elections, with a platform based on "Bible-based democracy" and "social change through the family", which he described in several books. The party received less than 1% of the vote but secured two seats in Congress. ORA returned with the same candidate for the 1993 elections and later, in 1998, supported the candidate of the traditional social democratic party Acción Democrática (AD), a decision that drew criticism from evangelicals. The results for ORA were even worse and more disappointing each time, to the point of almost disappearing. In 2010, the party was revived with a controversial legal maneuver to promote a state–religion–people alliance with what was called a "pluralist Christology", and since then, without changing its brand name, ORA has supported both Hugo Chávez Frías (HCF) and NMM in the general elections, contributing around 40,000 votes in 2018.

However, the big change for the role of popular religion in Venezuelan politics came from HCF's public recognition of evangelicals as an important player during his first presidential campaign in 1998 and during his whole administration, which lasted from 1999 to 2012. David Smilde, a professor of political science at Tulane University, has written extensively on evangelical–government relations in a series of articles and books that cover this period in Venezuelan history, in which new approaches, new actors, and new

power relations emerged in the process of evangelical minoritization (Smilde 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2011). In some ways, many of the changes that occurred during this period laid the groundwork for understanding the evolution of the relationship between the socialist regime and evangelicals, even during the Nicolás Maduro Moros (NMM) government.

By the 1990s, evangelical and Pentecostal churches had spread throughout Venezuela's poor barrios, lower-class neighborhoods, and rural towns, the very social classes that had built HCF's enormous popularity and ultimately helped him win the 1998 presidential election by a landslide (Smilde 2004a). Because of its longstanding work among the poor, groups like the Unión Evangélica Pentecostal de Venezuela (UEPV) quickly came on board with HCF's candidacy in 1998, eventually proposing a "Bolivarian Liberation Theology" as a "revolutionary expression of the Christian faith" where socialism and the teachings of Jesus could find common ground (Quevedo 2009). Nevertheless, the UEPV was a very small denomination, somewhat disconnected from the mainstream Pentecostalism and the Neo-Pentecostalism that was spreading rapidly throughout the country.

Cleverly, Chávez gradually gained the support of evangelicals by keeping their needs and struggles, the Bible, and Christ as recurring themes in his messages and speeches, and by making public demonstrations of his faith that seemed authentic. This support has continued throughout the 25 years of the socialist revolution, despite evangelicals' dislike for the authoritarianism of some of its leaders (Steigenga and Coleman 2022). Evangelicals sincerely believed that the Lt. Colonel had received Christ as Savior while serving a prison sentence for his failed coup in February 1992, when he was visited by evangelical television celebrities who shared the Gospel with him and others (Placer 2015). In addition, Smilde (2004b) points out that Chávez did not betray the support he received from evangelicals during the elections; instead, during the first months of the government, several actions were taken that favored evangelical churches, such as speeding up the legal registration of churches.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the new socialist government in favor of evangelical growth was the change introduced in the text of the 1999 Constitution of the RBV, which expanded the 1961 Constitution, regarding freedom of religion. The new text included a full guarantee of freedom of religion and worship for all persons, in private or in public, and the independence of churches and denominations (Vargas Caña and Núñez Rivero 2015). While the wording appears to be similar to the previous constitution, the intervention of government authorities is guided by a more open view of religion, and in practice, the constitution and the laws derived from it would limit the entrenched interventionism of the Catholic Church, which would veto the registration and operation of any evangelical church or any non-Christian faith in the country[6]. At the same time, relations between the government and the Catholic Church became strained, beginning with verbal attacks and statements (Bolet and Barrera 2004) that continue to this day. To make matters worse, the revolutionary government tried to end the *modus vivendi* agreement signed between the Vatican and the Venezuelan state in 1964, which established the terms of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the government, including the salaries for priests, the construction of temples, and support for other activities (Aveledo 2012). As a result of these changes, the number of evangelicals (mostly independent Pentecostals) jumped from 5.8% to 12.7% during the 12 years of Hugo Chávez's government[7], creating a growth trend that is still ongoing, changing the weight of evangelicals in Venezuelan politics.

Other aspects to consider in these 12 years of continuous evangelical growth in Venezuela are the nature of the new churches being planted and the changes in the traditional denominations and independent churches that already existed. For the most part, Neo-Pentecostalism has been at the forefront of the expansion, with a variety of new doctrines and teachings that have made it very appealing to Venezuelans. As in

the rest of Latin America, prosperity theology, contemporary worship, spiritual warfare, healing and deliverance ministries, and cell groups became quite popular, attracting believers from traditional denominations or leading to the conversion of thousands of new believers. Not only did churches begin to grow numerically, but new churches were being planted every week in every corner of the country. Neo-Pentecostal churches also left their denominations and began to unite in national and global networks that introduced new paradigms of church government, such as the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) (Mora-Ciangherotti 2024). Pastors became apostles, prophets, or bishops, many of whom gained increasing popularity and economic power that could be channeled into the political sphere. In addition, a new eschatology replaced the old premillennial preaching of the imminent return of Christ to rapture the saints; this escapist theology was replaced by a post-millennial view that required the kingdom of God to be established on earth before Christ's return. This new hermeneutical key to understanding the Bible gave the newly formed church networks the impetus to engage in new areas, particularly the socio-political transformation of Venezuela. The involvement was no longer about defending religious freedom or defending evangelical groups like the NTM, but now apostles, bishops, and prophets saw themselves as active participants in bringing Christian rule to all spheres of society. The new interpretations of political involvement were quite different from those of a premillennial hermeneutic and led to bolder, more innovative and aggressive approaches by the churches in the public sphere.

Examples of this development are the Renacer network led by bishop Jesús Pérez Mata and the REDIMA apostolic network founded under the apostolic leadership of Guido Raúl Ávila, which today has more than 300 member churches (Mora Ciangherotti 2022). The apostles and bishops believed that HCF had been prophesied as a kind of modern-day Cyrus (Isaiah 45)[8], who acted as an emissary of God or as God's own hand to bring change to the land, and therefore, Christians should not "quarrel with the Creator" (Isaiah 45:9) by opposing his plans. This support from Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic networks to HCF also signaled a new pattern, in which evangelicals openly endorsed a socialist government. Thus, in addition to the bodies that have traditionally represented Venezuelan evangelicals in the country, such as the Consejo Evangélico de Venezuela (CEV) and the Confraternidad Pentecostal de Venezuela (CPV), new neo-Pentecostal and neo-Apostolic church networks have emerged with great force, changing the characteristics of Venezuelan evangelicalism in the 21st century.

One of the most striking differences in the development of Venezuelan evangelical participation in politics compared to the rest of Latin America is the involvement of the military sector. In the years following HCF's presidential victory, many high-ranking military officers who worked for the government in various capacities either became Christians or began to feel empowered to publicly demonstrate their faith[9]. The relevant aspect of the previous observations is that these influential high-ranking military officers, who became politicians during Chávez's government, in addition to having direct access to the president, were also part of the growing Venezuelan Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches, which they would help in many ways in the years to come, such as providing aid to foundations for the homeless, facilitating permits for radio and television stations, and providing important donations for rallies and crusades, as well as facilitating permits and the use of public spaces (Smilde 2011)[10], and some of these high-ranking officers have even planted Neo-Pentecostal or Neo-Apostolic churches[11]. Officers such as Liutenant Ronald Blanco La Cruz[12], Major Edgar Hernández Behrens[13], and General Gustavo Rangel Briceño, the first evangelical to become Minister of Defense in 2007, who created the Evangelical Pastoral Council of the Armed Forces[14], initiated a trend of evangelicals in the armed forces

that has continued and which has been fundamental to the NMM government's approach to the evangelical sector.

Another aspect that has not yet been explored is the impact among evangelicals of the Venezuela's relationship with the State of Israel and its recognition of the Palestinian National Authority. In January 2009, Hugo Chávez expelled the Israeli ambassador to Venezuela and broke off diplomatic relations. In the same year, the Venezuelan government, through its foreign minister, NMM, established diplomatic relations with the Palestinian National Authority, further straining Venezuelan–Israeli relations (Boersner Herrera 2021). Later, in June 2010, President Chávez cursed the State of Israel in a public act, saying, "I curse you, State of Israel. I curse you, terrorist and murderous state. Long live the Palestinian people" (KawsachunNews 2021), marking the end of diplomatic relations to this day (Figueroa Sepúlveda 2018). One of the most vocal evangelicals who tried to warn HCF about his decisions regarding Israel was the pastor and retired captain of the Venezuelan Air Force (FAV), Jaime Banks Puertas, founder and president of one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in the country, Organización Evangélica la Luz del Mundo (OELLM). In several public letters, he insisted that HCF should rectify his fiery rhetoric against Israel and reconcile with God (Mora Ciangherotti 2023b). Using scriptures such as Zechariah 14:12 and 2:8, he warned of the "terrible punishment for those who speak evil of Israel". In this warning, the fate of those who insult Israel is very dark, with deadly consequences.

These words from pastor Banks Puertas are very important for the formation of the collective imagination of the evangelical organizations in Venezuela. It is well known that shortly after these historic events, President HCF was diagnosed with terminal cancer, beginning with symptoms in his legs, as in the prophecy of Zechariah. After a period of convalescence and treatment in Cuba and Venezuela, he died on 5 March 2013. Hugo Chávez's death has become an illustration often used when evangelicals preach about Christian Zionism, because it represents a verifiable demonstration of what it means to curse Israel. For Venezuelan and Latin American evangelicals, Chavez would become a contemporary prototype of those rulers and kings who cursed Israel and were punished by God. Consequently, Venezuelan evangelical pastors began to refer to the event as "the curse that destroyed the country", adding that it could only be removed through repentance, something that will become more relevant during the 2024 election campaign, as we will see in the next section.

The idea of the existence of demonic spiritual strongholds that prevent the country from progressing socially and economically is present in the spiritual warfare theology of Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic networks. In this regard, one aspect that has been an obstacle for evangelical apostles and pastors to maintain their support for the socialist regime has been the alleged association of high-ranking officials, especially the late HCF, with occult practices such as Cuban Santeria and the Venezuelan cult of Maria Lionza (Placer 2015). Thus, in addition to the negative impact on Venezuela of HCF's cursing of Israel, evangelicals were also concerned about the consequences of the government's association with occultism, which, according to the theology of spiritual warfare, would open the doors to demonic strongholds and influences in the nation. To make matters worse, after HCF's death, a form of idolatry cult began to emerge among his followers, especially in Caracas. This idolatry began with the official rhetoric that coined the nickname "El Comandante Eterno" (The Eternal Commander) to refer to HCF, and the phrase "la siembra" (the sown) to talk about his death. The religious cult of HCF is still in its infancy, practically limited to popular areas near the mausoleum in his honor, located in downtown Caracas, but it could easily be assimilated into the syncretism of other popular spiritualist cults (Hernández 2018). All these spiritual practices, which evangelicals consider blasphemous

and prone to creating satanic possessions and strongholds because they go against God's commandments established in the Bible, began to alienate them politically from HCF's government. This led evangelicals to seek other alternatives to make their voices heard, to find new ways to become more influential, and to gain more power by gaining access to key positions in governmental institutions, so that these deviations, which according to their worldview were causing the destruction of the nation, could be reversed.

It should be noted that the idea of creating a confessional political party persisted, and several new organizations were registered between 2003 and 2018, with very limited success compared to the immense official Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) and a constellation of centrist and right-wing opposition parties. Nevertheless, the idea of "hermano vota por hermano" persisted among members and leaders of the larger churches and networks in the country. Along these lines, the Solución Party was founded in 2006 by Lorenzo Tovar, a politician who had recently become evangelical, with the idea of channeling the evangelical vote in the 2006 presidential election to an opposition candidate against HCF, who was seeking re-election for a second term[15]. Later, in 2010, the Movimiento Apostólico Iberoamericano convened a summit in Caracas with 70 apostolic leaders from all over Latin America and produced the document called the Pacto de Caracas (Mora Ciangherotti 2022), which in one of its sections on regional politics stated the following (Wojtowicz et al. 2011):

> As an apostolic church, we are called to educate ourselves and to engage in [...] the practice of politics... We must work for the formation of pious and just men and women who can occupy positions of authority in society and thus reflect the government of the kingdom of God on earth [...] We therefore encourage the children of God to accept the challenge of participating in politics, in the formation of electoral or political groups, in order to participate actively in popular electoral processes and thus be able to aspire to occupy positions as presidents of nations, governors, mayors, representatives in national assemblies and other councils. (pp. 14–15)

Following this declaration, in 2012, the apostolic networks REDIMA and UNICRISTIANA, together with other coalitions throughout the country, founded the "Christian nationalist" party NUVIPA (Nueva Visión para Mi País) (Poderopedia 2024). According to the founders (FederaciónCCN n.d.), the decision was made after hearing a prophetic voice that said to "take the necessary steps to enter the political arena" in order to "choose your ruler from among your brothers" (Deuteronomy 17:15), so that "when the righteous are in power, the people will rejoice" (Proverbs 29:2)[16]. In other words, Christians should elect national authorities from their own churches, and because of their special relationship with God, once they are in power, citizens will live happily. With these beliefs in mind, NUVIPA nominated Eusebio Méndez as its candidate in the 2013 presidential elections, right after the death of HCF, and he received 19,497 votes (0.13%). That same year, in the 2013 municipal elections, the party grew to 63,762 votes (0.57%) nationwide. Four years later, in the 2017 regional elections, the party nominated candidates in several states without much success. However, because NUVIPA did not participate in the 2018 presidential election, which was considered "illegitimate" by many opposing democratic organizations, the party was disqualified from participating in the 2020 election by the government-controlled Electoral Council.

In 2018, prosperity preacher and pastor Javier Bertucci, entered the electoral race to challenge Nicolás Maduro Moros for the presidency of the country. Bertucci is the senior pastor of the Maranatha megachurch in Valencia, Venezuela, which also has a network in the country and some international locations. He currently heads three legally constituted associations in Venezuela, a religious organization (Maranatha), a non-profit

civil association (El Evangelio Cambia), and a political party (El Cambio). Despite a series of questions and possible commercial scandals, including ongoing lawsuits, to support the projects of these three associations, there is a large network of companies in sectors as diverse as oil, agriculture, food and medicine imports, healthcare, books and stationery, and construction, with headquarters in several Venezuelan cities and other countries (Guerrero 2019). The civil association is responsible for direct social assistance and evangelistic outreach in slums and low-income areas.

Due to the illegitimacy of the electoral process called by Maduro's regime, Bertucci's nomination in 2018 was viewed with suspicion by other opposition candidates, suggesting that there was some kind of agreement to legitimize the electoral process. Despite these criticisms, in the 2018 presidential election, Bertucci's social and religious capital allowed him to obtain more than one million votes (11% of the total) against Nicolás Maduro (PSUV) and Henry Falcón (Avanzada Progresista), in what is considered an election with one of the highest abstention rates in Venezuelan history. Later, the Maranatha/El Cambio party managed to present 4430 candidates in 335 municipalities of the country in the municipal elections of 2019, surpassing the main traditional opposition party groups. Another achievement of the Maranatha/El Cambio party was to win four seats in the National Assembly in the December 2020 legislative elections, becoming the second opposition bench (Yáñez 2020).

The four Maranatha/El Cambio deputies have assumed an apostolic mission within the Venezuelan National Assembly. Through their actions, the Assembly created a permanent commission on "Families and Freedom of Religion and Cults"[17], including evangelical representatives of the ruling party (PSUV), to discuss, among other things, the pending law on religion. In 2021, they facilitated the presentation of a proposal by a group of apostles and pastors to the Commission for Dialogue, Peace and National Reconciliation (CDPR) of the Assembly (Mireles 2021), which appointed a sub-commission composed of pastors and parliamentarians, including pastors Javier Bertucci and retired FAV Lt. Colonel Alfonso Campos Jessurun both from Maranatha/El Cambio; PSUV representative Moisés García, pastor and director of the "socio-political" network called Movimiento Cristiano Evangélico Venezolano (MOCEV)[18]; PSUV representative Carola Chávez; and apostles Ignacio Yllaramendy (MOVIUC network) and Carlos Mendoza. Interestingly, the wide range of aspects proposed by the pastors to the CDPR expresses a combination of typical evangelical interests, while others pretend to be in line with the regime's policies, such as the following:

> To develop the Law on Religion and Cults; to recognize the Evangelical Church beyond that of a group of federations; to create a Commission on Morality and Spirituality by the National Assembly; to protect the original marriage; to avoid congressional bills that legalize abortion; to propose pastors as justices of peace in the communities; instill a more humane character in state security officials; strengthen and support the anti-blockade law previously approved by the National Constitutional Assembly in 2017; defend Venezuela's right to sovereignty over the Essequibo region; promote respect for the law; and promote the principles of honesty among public officials. (Mireles 2021)

After the 2018 elections, Bertucci and his party remained quite active in Venezuelan politics, even to the point of running again for the presidency in a deeply polarized and conflicted election in 2024. Bertucci's insistence on running again came even after he lost by a wide margin in 2021 in his bid to become governor of Carabobo state, where the main campus of his Maranatha megachurch is located. Critics saw the political action as a way to create an opposition front that could be manipulated by the NMM government. As expected, the results obtained in the fraudulent 2024 elections were negligible (0.19%), but

he ended up recognizing the initial results presented by the Electoral Council and later accepted the ruling of the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (TSJ), which declared NMM as the president-elect through a questionable judicial maneuver without corroborating the actual results of the polling stations (see next section).

Within the current hegemonic government of the PSUV, in which all constitutional powers—executive, legislative, judicial, moral and electoral—have been coopted by the executive branch of the government, other groups of evangelicals have found ways to access political power in the state structure. Thus, in parallel with the collective actions described in the previous paragraphs, a growing number of evangelicals have populated government institutions such as the state-owned oil company (PDVSA), and the judiciary as lawyers and judges; others have been elected in electoral processes to serve as congressmen, governors, mayors, city council members, and other positions. Many have risen through the ranks of the official party, the PSUV, to obtain nominations and other leadership positions in state-owned companies and organizations. Moreover, the number of evangelicals in the armed forces has grown to unprecedented levels, reducing the importance of the Catholic Church within the institution, as evidenced by the now customary blessing by evangelical chaplains during official military ceremonies and parades. The significance of this infiltration, which has been gradual over the last 25 years of the Bolivarian socialist government, became more apparent to the PSUV when the party lost one million votes to the pastor-candidate Javier Bertucci in the 2018 presidential elections. Immediately, several strategic actions were launched by the government, giving more importance to the growing evangelical electorate, which the PSUV could easily reach through the large base of believers who were already part of the socialist regime.

Immediately after the 2018 elections, NMM proposed to a group of evangelical pastors the creation of a new evangelical political movement. In early 2019, the Movimiento Cristiano Evangélico por Venezuela (MOCEV) was launched as a socio-political network with Pastor Moisés García as its main leader (@prmoisesgarcia). MOCEV soon issued a statement recognizing NMM as the legitimate president and calling on the opposition to do the same. MOCEV began organizing, creating branches in each state according to a hierarchical structure that allowed García to be elected to the National Assembly in 2020. In late 2019, MOCEV organized a meeting at the Military Officer's Club in Caracas attended by NMM, other government officials, and over 1700 evangelical leaders (EG 2019). The President promised to issue executive decrees to declare a National Day of the Evangelical Pastor and a National Bible Day, to create "Government Pastoral Councils" (CPGs) in each state, to initiate a program to provide aid for the construction and maintenance of churches, and to develop a large-scale agricultural program led by evangelical pastors. In March 2020, the first Consejo Pastoral de Gobierno (CPG) del Distrito Capital (Caracas Pastoral Council) was installed by the then Major of Caracas, Erika Farías (EG 2020), but the actual official incorporation of the CPG as part of the local government was not issued until June 2021. The Caracas CPG has grown with a variety of activities that include health campaigns, inner healing workshops, prayer and fasting meetings, evangelization, support for the March for Jesus 2023 and 2024, door-to-door visits (Ruta del Buen Pastor), rebuilding and restoring parks and squares, youth rallies, worship festivals, and much more.

The Caracas CPG was strongly supported by the deputy governor of the capital district, Nahum Fernández, a committed evangelical and the son of apostle Isabel Fernández, who has also been instrumental in the PSUV's outreach to churches throughout the country. Following the experience of the Caracas CPG, several other councils have been formed in states and counties throughout the country. The strategy aims at a socialist unification of state and religion, in which the churches become one of the arms of the government's social programs. This approach to the minoritization of evangelicals in national politics

seeks to build a path of public influence where the evangelical language is translated into the political language, leading to what Burity has called "the Pentecostalization of society" (Burity 2021), but the movement has been co-opted by the government or the PSUV party.

The content of this section serves to establish the context in which NMM's regime approached this important segment of the population, ahead of the 2024 presidential elections, to secure their support. In particular, NMM's government, whose legitimacy has been widely questioned nationally and internationally by many countries around the world since 2019, was looking for a strong internal validation from a respected and rapidly growing sector of the electorate. For this reason, in 2022, in anticipation of the re-election campaign, Nicolás Maduro Guerra (NMG), NMM's son, was appointed vice president of religious affairs of the PSUV, with the specific task of gaining the support of different religious groups, especially evangelicals (Figuera 2023). In one of the many activities with evangelicals, NMG candidly gives his testimony as follows:

> When the President called me, he said, "I want a direct connection with the people of God. Therefore, I want you to take on the task of religious affairs, to have a direct connection with the people of God who are on their knees asking for blessings for Venezuela". And in this task, the first opportunities I had to speak to the people of God, I must confess that I was intimidated. What am I going to say to the wise, to the people who communicate with our Lord? And a friend came up to me and said, "Open the Bible". And from that moment on, every time I must speak, I open the Bible, and the Bible answers me. (Maduro 2024a)

With the help of MOCEV, the CPGs, the ORA party, the large base of PSUV believers, and other groups, NMG would have ample space to secure evangelical support for the 2024 elections. In addition to the internal workings, lobbying, and offering of benefits, the campaign required the public display of this support, using state television, social media, and all available communication channels to gain further nationwide attention from churches and believers. In another section of this article, taking into account this highly complex context, four key public displays of evangelical support for NMM during the 2024 campaign will be documented and analyzed from a theological perspective. Let us now turn our attention to the complexities of the 2024 Venezuelan presidential electoral process.

3. The 2024 Venezuelan Presidential Election

Reviewing the last 25 years of Venezuelan history in a few lines is not an easy task. A dramatic change in Venezuelan politics began with the election of Hugo Chávez Frías (HCF) as president in 1998. His first task was to change the Venezuelan Constitution of 1961, which became a reality with the approval of the Constitution of the República Bolivariana de Venezuela (RBV) in December 1999, based on the idea of creating a "participatory democracy" in the country. Under these new rules, HCF won huge electoral victories in 2000, 2006, and 2012, following an amendment that allowed for indefinite re-election. During his 12 years in power, HCF developed what he called "Socialismo del Siglo XXI" (21st Century Socialism, 21CS), which was seen as different from the 20th century communist regimes of the Soviet Union and Cuba. With immense revenues from oil exports, Venezuela became a laboratory for socialist experiments, but it ended up wasting billions of dollars and effectively turning Venezuela into a failed economy. In 2011, however, HCF was diagnosed with cancer, which led him to seek medical treatment in Cuba. He returned for the 2012 election campaign, and the effort physically undermined him to the point that in December of that year, before his last trip to Cuba for medical treatment, he named Vice President Nicolás Maduro Moros (NMM) as his possible successor. On 5 March 2013, HCF died in Caracas, leaving behind a controversial legacy and a divided country.

In April 2013, NMM was elected constitutional president of the RBV after a close election against Enrique Capriles Radonski, who had run against HCF in 2012. NMM's government was marked by controversy and growing opposition to the violent imposition of the 21CS. The massive and violent protests of 2014 and 2017 marked turning points for the migration of millions of Venezuelans around the world, especially within the region in Colombia, Perú, Ecuador and Chile. In 2024, the estimated number of Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers reported by host countries reached 7.8 million, 84% of them in Latin America and the Caribbean (R4V 2024). In the 2015 National Assembly (NA) elections, NMM suffered a major setback, losing most of the seats in the new NA by a 2:1 margin. However, through legal and political maneuvering, NMM controlled the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (TSJ), sidelined the 2015 NA, and later issued an executive order calling for the election of a new Constitutional Assembly (CA) in 2017 to amend the 1999 Constitution. The CA eventually overturned the decisions taken by the 2015 AN and ordered the National Electoral Council (CNE) to call for presidential elections in 2018, which NMM easily won due to a boycott by the opposition bloc. The second term of NMM was considered illegitimate by most political parties in Venezuela, leading to their banning and the disqualification of their main leaders from running in future elections. These actions led to diplomatic tensions and the imposition of economic sanctions by the United States and the European Union, even during the pandemic. As a result, the country entered its worst economic crisis in history, with a drastic drop in oil production, sky-high inflation rates, and 90% of the population below the poverty line (ENCOVI 2024).

In an attempt to recover from a failed shadow government led by the 2015 AN president, Juan Guaidó, who had been sworn in as interim Venezuelan president by the AN in January 2019, a large group of Venezuelans led by Maria Corina Machado (MCM) organized primary elections in October 2023 without the help of the National Electoral Council. With an unexpected turnout of 2.4 million votes, 90% of which were for MCM, a new opposition presidential candidate and leader was elected. After a series of failed negotiations, the government finally agreed to call a presidential election for 28 July 2024, in accordance with the Barbados Accord of 2023. In the meantime, MCM was disqualified from the race and the opposition had to find a replacement in former ambassador Edmundo González Urrutia (EGU). Despite the government's questionable tactics, including the sponsorship of pro-government candidates, the short time allowed for the updating of the electoral registry, the shameless use of state resources for NMM's campaign, the intense political persecution of politicians and human rights activists, and the numerous obstacles placed in the way of a free and fair campaign by MCM and EGU, the elections were held peacefully on Sunday, 28 July.

Despite several exit polls showing a landslide victory for EGU over NMM, just before midnight on 28 July, Elvis Amoroso, president of the National Electoral Council (CNE), announced that NMM had won with 52% of the vote. On 29 July, an unexpected spontaneous protest began that led to several deaths and over 2000 arrests in the following week. Meanwhile, the MCM-EGU team had collected the printed tallies from 70% of the nation's polling stations and posted the results on an interactive website where any voter could check the results, showing an overwhelming 67% victory for EGU[19]. So far, the government has not been able to provide a detailed summary of the results, as required by the existing electoral regulations, which has led many countries to declare the official results fraudulent (Bull 2024) and have begun to declare EGU as the elected president of Venezuela. However, NMM appealed to the TSJ to protect the results announced by the CNE and requested that the court recognize him as the legitimate president, which was granted on 22 August after a controversial and unclear process (Wikipedia 2024). The days that followed were filled with uncertainty for the opposition candidate and the political parties that supported him,

including MCM, who had to go into hiding. In October 2024, the UN released a horrifying report that showed evidence of torture, killings, disappearances, and many other human rights violations in the aftermath of the election (Bull 2024). At the time of writing, EGU is in exile in Spain and MCM is still in hiding. The installation of NMM for a third term is expected to take place on 10 January 2025.

4. Discourses of Venezuelan Evangelicals During the 2024 Presidential Elections: A Theological View

Although NMM's government had already begun to reach out to evangelicals in 2018, the ruling party's strategy for the 2024 presidential elections deliberately intensified the relationship with apostles and pastors. What surprised many journalists, political scientists, religious scholars and theologians was the fact that in a very short period of time (March to August), evangelicals were summoned four times by the Venezuelan President, two in public spaces and two in the privacy of the Miraflores Palace, all of which were covered live on national television and social media. It was decided to limit the research for this paper to these four events between the evangelicals and NMM, in which the President took ample time to be present and to engage in active participation and interaction with a constellation of evangelical leaders. The chronology of these events in relation to the election process is shown in Figure 2.

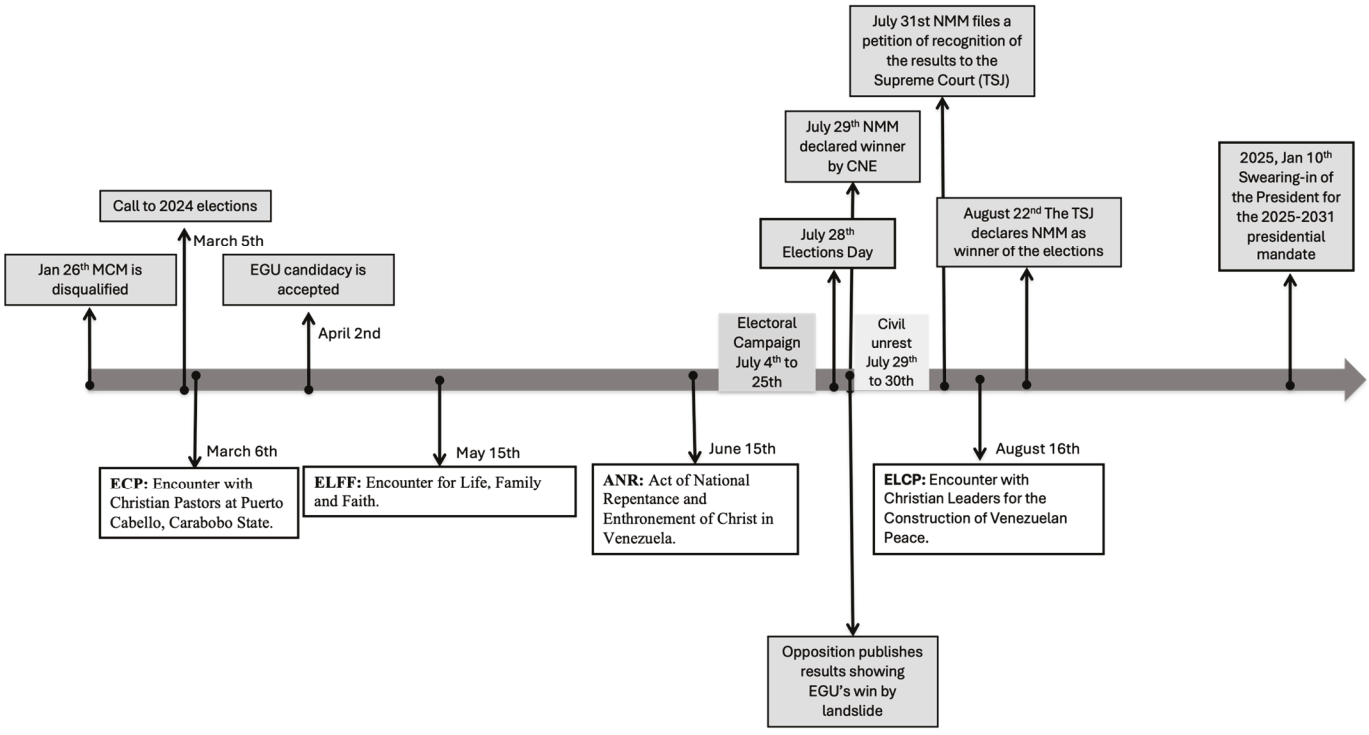


Figure 2. Chronological representation of the events being analyzed in relation to the electoral process (created by the author).

The analysis of these public meetings was made possible by the extensive coverage of the events by state television (Venezolana de Televisión, VTV) and many other state news agencies. For the research, 4 h and 48 min of complete high-quality videos of the following events, available on Youtube, were used:

1. CP Video 1 (V1): Meeting with Christian Pastors (Encuentro con Pastores y Pastoras Cristianos) on 6 March 2024 (Maduro 2024a). A large open-air gathering of pastors and leaders in the city of Puerto Cabello to follow up on some of the social programs for leaders and churches offered by NMM's administration that began in 2023. Supposedly

there were 17,000 leaders and pastors (Restrepo 2024), but the pictures show a smaller crowd. The number of participants, which was constantly repeated during the national television broadcast, was based on the number of beneficiaries of the "Buen Pastor" bonuses, one of the main social plans of NMM for evangelical pastors.

2. ELFF Video 2 (V2): Gathering for Life, Family and Faith (Encuentro por la Vida, Familia y FE), which took place on 15 May 2024 (Bracci Roa 2024a). A well-attended march in a park near the Miraflores Palace (El Calvario) was organized by evangelical leaders. There was a large crowd that came from different churches in the metropolitan area of Caracas. It was a lively event with music and prayer and a festive atmosphere.
3. ANR Video 3 (V3): Act of National Repentance and Enthronement of Christ in Venezuela (Acto de Arrepentimiento Nacional y Entronamiento de Jesucristo en Venezuela) on 15 June 2024 (Bracci Roa 2024c). This meeting was held at the Miraflores Palace 43 days before the election. The setting was formal. In a brief ceremony before the main event, the apostolic leaders anointed NMM and prayed over him.
4. ELCP Video 4 (V4): Meeting with Christian Leaders for the Construction of Peace in Venezuela (Encuentro con Líderes y Lideresas Cristianos en el marco de la Construcción de la Paz en Venezuela), 16 August 2024 (Bracci Roa 2024b). This event was broadcast from Miraflores Palace two weeks after the controversial election and proclamation of NMM as president by the Electoral Council. The meeting was set up as an informal home meeting with NMM and his wife Cilia sitting in the middle of a living room surrounded by evangelical leaders and apostles.

After watching the videos several times, as well as reviewing the numerous clips and shorter versions in social media, and the press releases about the events, AI-generated transcriptions of the totality of the videos in Spanish were obtained using the Video Highlight tool (https://videohighlight.com/ (accessed on 17 January 2025)), which also provided an AI-generated summary and outline of the key points in the video. A review of the transcriptions was carried out to determine their quality by reading through the transcripts while watching the videos. During the analysis, only those fragments that were to be used for this paper were translated into English by the author. Several other videos that serve as supporting material were processed in a similar way, but they were not considered central to this analysis, since the main point of interest was the interaction of evangelicals with NMM in the months leading up to the election.

There are several interesting aspects surrounding the events under analysis that will be briefly discussed, for example, the fact that the meetings resemble classical neo-Pentecostal or neo-Apostolic services, with contemporary musical worship at the beginning, Bible reading, preaching, prayer, prophecy, testimonies, announcements, greetings, a festive environment, and so on. This is a reminder that evangelical churches in Latin America have developed a Pentecostalized culture that is present in every aspect of their life. The use of the title "apostle" instead of "pastor" or "reverend" for the main leaders present is also interesting and reveals the immense influence of the apostolic movement in the leadership participating in these events. This was also confirmed in the ECP (V1), where apostle Dan Suárez, president of the so-called National Roundtable of Evangelical Pastors (MMN), which brings together the presidents of the local CPGs, gave the president a long list of 2024 evangelical activities. This list of events, supported by the MMN, included the visits to Venezuela of Florida (USA) megachurch pastor Guillermo Maldonado, a well-known NAR apostle, who was to hold a crusade in the new Caracas Metropolitan Stadium, and the crusades of Dr. Paul Enanche, apostle of the Dunamis Gospel International Centre, Abuja (Nigeria), who was to lead an "Apostolic Invasion to Venezuela" event. Suárez was also speaking on behalf of MOVIUC, which organizes a major one-day prayer event every year, which in 2023 was attended by over 25,000 prayer warriors. MOVIUC is a Venezuelan

network that promotes the dominion theology doctrine of the Seven Mountain Mandate (7MM), which is a feature of the global New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement (Mora-Ciangherotti 2024).

Given the obvious influence of the apostolic movement in the four events described above, the analysis of the discourses will focus on the identification and description of four theological dimensions that are dominant in the contemporary apostolic movement (Gagné 2024). These dimensions are Prayer and Spiritual Warfare (PSW), Identificational Repentance (IR), Prophecy (P), and Cultural Dominion (CD), the definition of which are given below. The choice of these dimensions is based on a careful observation of the structural elements that have contributed to the development of a new evangelical ecclesiology in the 21st century, especially the extraordinary involvement of apostolic churches in politics as reported in many different countries around the world. More specifically, the dimensions are related to the emergence and consolidation of the spiritual warfare movement (Holvast 2009), the prophetic movement (Mora Ciangherotti 2023a), the apostolic movement (Mora Ciangherotti 2022), and the doctrine of the Seven Mountains Mandate (Mora-Ciangherotti 2024). The selected dimensions are present in one way or another in all four events, so the first step is to identify them in each of the four transcriptions. Relevant passages were extracted, classified according to the corresponding dimension, and their content was analyzed and the fragments presented in this paper translated. Let us go through some of the findings in each of the proposed dimensions of analysis.

4.1. Prayer and Spiritual Warfare (PSW)

Prayer is a discipline that is taught to Christians from the beginning of their spiritual life at conversion. Typically, it should follow the pattern of Jesus' prayer in the Gospels. However, there are all kinds of prayer models and styles that are part of the history of the church. Prayer is also practiced when interceding for other people who are not believers so that they may hear, believe, and be converted to Jesus. In the 1980s, however, several missiologists pointed out the difficulties of reaching certain people groups because of what they called "spiritual strongholds" controlled by demonic forces. Thus, a new type of prayer was developed, called "spiritual warfare prayer". In a short time, the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches passionately embraced the spiritual warfare movement and began to map cities and regions to identify these spiritual strongholds that were working against the preaching of the gospel and the advancement of the kingdom. The movement expanded worldwide and contributed to the spread of the apostolic movement (Weaver 2020). With the recent involvement of the Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches in politics, spiritual warfare prayer events have been promoted to cleanse the regions of those demonic agents, identified through spiritual mapping, who are preventing the expansion of the kingdom of God through Bible-based laws and initiatives in those communities.

During the ECP (V1), six pastors and apostles prayed for NMM's government. However, it was Ronaldo Santos (@ronaldo.santos.oficial), Bishop of the Venezuelan branch of the Pentecostal Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD), who led an SW prayer asking for God's help to destroy all the commercial blockades, embargoes and sanctions that Venezuela is facing. In Santos' prayer, this spiritual battle took on a physical dimension, affecting the financial health of the country, which the bishop said was God's will. But the principalities and powers, represented on earth by imperialist governments such as the U.S. and the European Union, were preventing God's blessings from pouring down on the country:

> Bishop Ronald Santos (V1): Lord, my God and my Father, in this moment, as we raise our hands for Venezuela, we cry out to you. Because we may have sanctions,

> blockades from all over the world, but the heavens are open over this nation, over this country. So, Father, I ask you to remove the embargoes and the sanctions. Everything that has prevented this country from getting back on its feet, from moving forward.

No doubt the metaphor of spiritual warfare had taken hold, not only among evangelical leaders, but also among government officials[20]. At the ELCP (V4), which took place after the elections, NMM defined his electoral campaign and his government as epic because, in essence, "we are fighting a spiritual battle between good and evil" (V4). He made a reference to the physical dimension of this struggle saying that, in the days when the opposition rejected the published results and declared them false, "there were those who sought out young people, almost children, to burn and kill...we saw these acts of violence in which very young people...went out to burn...and they went around the world saying that this was a protest...". This was the context of that meeting, a conflict that was escalating, with several people killed and about 2000 people already in prison, many of them teenagers. For this reason, the organizers of the meeting felt it was important to open with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, led by apostle Isabel Fernandez, president of the National Network of Women in Authority and Government. Angels were called by the apostle to stop the demonic hosts that were influencing these protests and facilitating an invasion of the nation by a mercenary army, even threatening to kill NMM, as was rumored in those post-election days:

> We are releasing angels from all four corners. Warrior angels to fight for our nation, to fight every day in the mighty name of Jesus. And we bind death, we bind demons, we bind every spirit that wants to come, every invasion, and we cast them out in the name of Jesus.

4.2. Identificational Repentance (IR)

The concept of "identificational repentance" (IR) was introduced in the 1980s and 1990s by the spiritual warfare movement, which was the seed of the 21st century apostolic movement (Holvast 2009). In the practice of Identificational Repentance, the person praying acts as a substitute, asking forgiveness for the corporate sins of a nation, people group, or geographical area. During the prayer, the person acting as a substitute identifies himself or herself with the sins of that nation or people group, lists those sins, and then asks God for forgiveness. The spiritual practice is expected to bring healing to the nation by opening the doors for social, political and economic progress.

In the context of spiritual mapping, the ANR event held at the Miraflores Presidential Palace would have been very important if it had been determined that territorial spirits inhabited the place where the prayer of repentance was to be spoken. For this reason, apostle Enrique Villalba (@pastorenriquevillalba), leader of the Comunidad Cristiana Cuadrangular de Cumaná, emphasized the importance of the location and the spiritual implications of the presence of the President at the event, expressing his gratitude that "the President. . . allowed us to set foot here" (V3). He then took the Venezuelan flag and, on his knees, began to pray spontaneously. At some point, his IR prayer left politeness and protocol and went to an unexpected place:

> Apostle Enrique Villalba (V3): Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for turning our backs on you. Forgive us for following other gods. Forgive us for worshipping gods that were not you. Forgive us for our sin, our immorality, our corruption. Forgive our faults, Lord. Forgive our pride.... Forgive our hard, proud hearts. Forgive all witchcraft. Lord, forgive our immorality, forgive everything we have done that has offended You, that has grieved You. Forgive every foolish word. Forgive

> every bad attitude, every selfishness. Have mercy. Today we cry out to you and say, have mercy on us. We confess and acknowledge our sins; we turn to you.

Idolatry, immorality, corruption, pride, witchcraft, selfishness, slander, meanness, and offensive language are among the sins listed for repentance. They sound too general for those unfamiliar with Venezuelan politics, but for evangelicals, they describe the sins of the elites who have been in power, including the socialist regime. In particular, repentance from all "witchcraft", "pride", and "foolish words" is a reminder of the sins that have cursed the nation, such as the alleged use of the Miraflores Palace for pagan rituals (Placer 2015), and especially the cursing of Israel by the late President HCF (Mora Ciangherotti 2023b). After that, NMM, visibly moved by the prayers, read a statement in which he asked for forgiveness in the following terms:

> President NMM (V3): Lord, we repent of our sins. We ask forgiveness for the sins of our nation. As the authority of this country, I ask for your forgiveness on behalf of my government and my people for the sins of pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, laziness, and all the sins we may have committed as a nation. Forgive us. Heal our land. At the Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas, today, 15 June 2024, as President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I freely surrender my nation to Christ, so that He may be the absolute owner of this land. So be it.

Although the prayer began with what seems to be a textbook list of capital sins, without any personal confession of NMM's own mistakes as ruler, which include human rights violations, nepotism, and widespread corruption, some of which are still under investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC), the most important part for evangelicals was when the president committed the nation's destiny to Christ. In fact, they will soon remind him of this promise, as apostle Isabel Fernández did in the post-election ELCP meeting (V4). She first compared NMM to David, who was a man "after God's own heart", and then added, "You gave this nation to God... it was so beautiful how you made that declaration when you gave this nation to the Lord. And the Lord has fought and will continue to fight for Venezuela".

4.3. Prophecy (P)

The gift of prophecy was one of the main practices of Pentecostal spirituality. In the 1980s, however, the emergence of the prophetic office became part of the emerging apostolic movement in which apostles and prophets played a prominent role. Early Pentecostal churches were deeply involved in apocalyptic prophecy, interpreting biblical passages and real-life contexts from a premillennial hermeneutic that emphasized the expectation of the rapture of the church and the end of times. Beginning in the 1990s, however, this dark prophetic tone, which gave rise to countless predictions and conspiracy theories, began to gradually change in the Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches, and much more rapidly in the 21st century. The term "progressive millennialism" has been used to describe this radical change in prophecy (Wessinger 2011). Progressive millennialism is optimistic and full of hope that the kingdom of God can be established on earth before the second coming of Christ (Ashcraft 2011). The prophets see the possibility of a restoration of all things that could facilitate the return of Christ, emphasizing, through a creative perception of reality and social contexts, not only repentance, conversion, and sanctification, but also the restoration of dominion over various essential areas of society. This approach has made contemporary prophets more daring in prophesying to leaders, government officials and rulers from all over the world, creating a prophetic movement that can influence political objectives such as winning votes (Berry 2020).

Prophecy in the events under study follows the pattern that characterized the office of the prophet in the apostolic churches. Spiritual revival of the nation is consistently

prophesied, but this is a consequence of the growth of the church and the openness of the government to the church (a revival in politics). As a result, God will grant the blessings of economic growth, prosperity, restoration of moral values, abundance, and more, in front of the nations that have opposed, conspired, and blackmailed Venezuela. In the following prophecies, the prophets echo the rhetoric of the regime, which constantly blames the U.S., the European Union, and some Latin American leaders for the years of economic destruction that have led to the largest migration in the region's history. Despite all this, the apostle and prophet Dan Suárez (@apostoldansuarez) of the Ministerio Casa Global de Destinos and a member of the Renacer Apostolic Network predicts seven years of abundance in which NMM must act as a new Joseph in Egypt, wisely managing the God-given resources:

> Apostle Dan Suárez (V1): The world can say whatever it wants. They have conspired against Venezuela, but their counsel has not prospered. Here, God's counsel has prospered. 2024 is the first year of Venezuela's great economic upsurge until 2030 and even a little beyond, we will have times of abundance. Let us prepare to save, let us prepare to strengthen the economy of the nation, and I know that God will help you in this (speaking to NMM).

The same type of prophecy is found in the following event, spoken on national television in the midst of an intense election campaign. According to prophet Carlos Lombana (@apostolcarloslombana) of the Centro Cristiano para la Familia Vargas, the country will rise and shine because of NMM government's return to God and traditional family values:

> Apostle Lombana (V2): Despite the valleys of shadow and death that our nation has gone through, our nation is greening up, even better than before. Our nation will shine. Venezuela will rise, and it will rise with morals, and with values. It will rise, not by paying or selling out to anyone, but by understanding that we do not owe anything to any lobby, to any entity or to any other country, but that Venezuela is awakening... I want to tell you what is going to happen in this nation: If what we have seen so far has been an uprising, what is coming will not be comparable to what we have seen until now. Venezuela will be restored; do you know why? Because we are restoring and working for the greatest thing that exists, which is the family.

Even NMM seemed to receive the gift of prophecy when he was anointed by the apostles and pastors during the ANR (V3) when he said, "Our country will astonish the world with its strength and become the spiritual center of the world that is being born, I decree it today, 15 June 2024, you will remember it". It is difficult to measure the impact of these prophecies among evangelicals, because not all groups value this practice in the same way, and some even reject it. However, they were certainly politically useful for Maduro, who used the prophets' words at a campaign rally, and the moment went viral on Tik Tok (Noticiasvzlaoficial 2024).

4.4. Cultural Dominion (CD)

Several theologies converge within the apostolic movement. Two of these have been fundamental to the development of the Neo-Pentecostal churches: prosperity theology and the doctrine of the transfer of wealth. For the apostolic movement, however, the shift to a post-millennial eschatology has led to the development of a kind of dominion theology, in which Christians have a mission to re-establish God's dominion over entire nations and in every aspect of society and human expression. A pragmatic way of implementing this project, called the Seven Mountains Mandate (7MM) doctrine, has gained popularity among

the Neo-Apostolic churches. In formulating this doctrine, the church must metaphorically conquer seven mountains representing seven spheres of society: family, education, government, business, arts and entertainment, religion, and media. Conquering the family mountain requires efforts to protect traditional family values, reject gender equality and abortion, and limit LGBTQ+ rights. In education, conquest requires the reintroduction of Bible-centered Christian values into school and university systems. Crowning the governmental mountain begins with the election of officials who support biblically inspired regulations and standards. In the case of business and economics, Christians must engage in entrepreneurship, business development, and productivity initiatives. Influencing the arts and entertainment industry involves harnessing creativity and talent to produce works that promote Christian values. Controlling the religious sphere is related to fulfilling the mandate of Matthew 28: to make Christian every nation and people group in the world. Domination of the media sector is possible by controlling all information channels so that they operate with honesty and are based on Christian truth. In other words, the 7MM requires very active and involved evangelical churches, not only spiritually through prayer and evangelism, but also socially, economically and politically.

Many of the apostles, prophets, and pastors attending the events being analyzed have been exposed to the teachings of the 7MM and have participated in workshops and summits on the subject over the past 15 years. In fact, one of the speakers at the ELFF (V2), apostle Carlos Lombana, has led workshops on taking the mountain of government in the 7MM summits convened by the MOVIUC network. In the summit in the state of La Guaira, he explained that this mountain is controlled by a spirit that "represents fear, uncleanness, and laws that are against God, which is why the church keeps away from this mountain, leaving this sphere of influence empty so that Satan can continue to control it" (Lombana 2023). These summits, which are held throughout Venezuela, not only have classic preacher-centered sessions, but organizers also facilitate workshops and focus groups among regional apostles, pastors, and leaders who discuss the Seven Mountains in detail in their contexts and make plans to conquer them in each location.

For evangelicals, the growing number of elected evangelicals is a sign that the mountain of government is being conquered. But having direct access to other non-Christian key officials, as well as becoming spiritual advisors to executives of state-owned companies is also fundamental in the process of conquest. At the ECP, there were the governors of the states of Carabobo and Aragua, the deputy governor for the capital district, the major of La Guaira, the country's most important port city, and other majors from nearby cities. But to have direct access to NMM and to have him proclaim Jesus as Lord of Venezuela from the Miraflores Palace was certainly a great step forward in fulfilling the 7MM.

Further progress was made when NMM entrusted the evangelical church with the coordination of a large-scale national project (a mission, in the language of the government) on social equality and justice. Such a challenge, at least for a part of the evangelical church, means not only access to financial resources, but also connections with governmental offices at the local and national levels, which means new ways to conquer the mountain of government. In the words of NMM,

> NMM (V1): I want the pastors, churches, and people of Christ to embrace the great mission of equality and justice, to make it their own, to go to the humble, to give shelter to those who have none, to give food to those who need it, to embrace the youth and get them off drugs, to bring the salvation of Christ to the humble people you love and serve.

But there are two other mountains to conquer: the mountain of family values and the mountain of education. Following the 7MM agenda, evangelical leaders at the ELFF (V2) proclaimed NMM as the "protector of the Venezuelan family according to the principles

of the Word of God" and he vowed to protect the "original design of the family". This designation of "protector" is somewhat contradictory, since the presidential couple, both divorced and remarried, do not represent a family in the traditional sense. Despite this detail, they were celebrating the fulfillment of a prophetic word, as one of the speakers explained:

> Apostle Lombana (V2): A prophetic word said that God is raising up a revival in politics... the fact that you are here today, as the main defender of the Venezuelan family, speaks of what God is doing to bring revival to this nation.

Later in the same event, pastor Yosaphat Barazarte (@Yosaphatbarazarte), a lawyer and former NUVIPA candidate for the National Assembly, read a declaration in defense of traditional family values and of marriage between a man and a woman. She also proposed, on behalf of the evangelical church, other actions in the field of education, such as the creation of a University of the Family, "led by men and women with solid marriages, with their children in subjection". In addition, she asked the President to have access to the Ministry of Education to intervene in the study and reformulation of certain curricula that introduce sexual content contrary to biblical teachings and the "original design" of the family:

> Pastor Barazarte (V2): The Church of Jesus Christ is concerned... about a kind of comprehensive sexual education that has permeated... the educational system of our children... For this reason, we ask that competent authorities investigate the content of those school texts that explicitly promote sexual education... Likewise, we ask for your authorization to join the Ministry of Education to promote and adopt the teaching of a school subject on family principles and values, in which the roles, and the ethical, moral and spiritual values are taught...

Despite the passion with which Pastor Barazarte presented the petition for the protection of the original design of the family by NMM's government, it is well known that among the leftist governments in Latin America in the last 25 years, the least progressive regarding the decriminalization of abortion and the rights of sexual orientation and gender identity was the 21CS implemented by the combined governments of the HCF and NMM. Human rights activist Victor Molina has shown in a recent article that the influence of the evangelical churches on the socialist regime has been fundamental in delaying the discussion and, even more so, the proposal of legislation on these issues:

> the close relations between "chavismo" and the evangelical Christian churches, including the participation of members of the Pentecostal church as representatives of the National Assembly and as high-ranking judges, played a significant role in hindering the development of sexual orientation and gender identity rights, and girls, women, and birthing people's right to decide. Unlike institutionalized partisan-left governments and movement-left governments, such as Uruguay and Chile, populist-left governments, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, did not perceive feminists and diversity movements as potentially valuable allies. Moreover, leaders in Venezuela and Nicaragua prioritized their relations with Catholic or Evangelical religious leaders. Hence, they continued to promote traditional gender roles and heteronormativity and rejected or reversed abortion decriminalization. (Molina 2022)

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This article has shown that the process of minoritization of Venezuelan evangelicals began in the early 1980s with a political struggle for their faith, symbolized by the defense of the NTM. Soon after, there were several attempts to participate in partisan politics, with meager results, revealing the hard truth that "hermano *no* vota por hermano". However,

their rapid numerical growth created a critical mass that the government could no longer ignore, especially since many of its own functionaries and top officials were part of this emerging group. Gradually, the evangelicals gained public notoriety and the attention of the ruling party, the PSUV, which led to direct encounters and meetings with NMM and his team. At first glance, these meetings seemed to be an opportunity to present a rosary of demands and petitions, but they were also a sign of the will of these evangelicals to be considered as a serious political subject that could interact with politicians and propose projects and laws for the country. In addition, these Neo-Pentecostal apostles and leaders were learning a new post-millennial eschatology that gave them a new hermeneutic for reading and interpreting the Bible, concluding that the kingdom of God must be established on earth before the second coming of Christ. Therefore, political involvement was no longer a choice, but a mandate to dominate society.

In a short period of time, Venezuelan evangelicals moved from the political background to become active protagonists of NMM's second period, whose legitimacy was widely questioned nationally and internationally. However, despite all the benefits they received from the government, it has not yet been proven whether evangelicals ended up supporting NMM's presidential candidacy on 28 July 2024. Further research may be needed to clarify this aspect, as well as to follow up on the alliance between evangelicalism and socialism that is taking place in Venezuela. The events described in this article are unprecedented in Venezuelan political history. For the first time, a religious group that until recently was considered marginal has gained such prominence in a presidential campaign. In a sense, these large group of evangelicals can be considered "co-opted" by NMM's regime, using Schleutker's (2021) classification, where support for an autocratic regime is exchanged for the openness to the sacralization of society. The co-optation of Venezuelan evangelicals is occurring through formal and informal channels, as we have seen in this article, with considerable results in a short period of time. Evangelicals have obtained from the NMM government financial grants for nearly 40,000 pastors (Bono del Buen Pastor), materials and equipment for thousands of churches (Mi Iglesia Bien Equipada), permits for local radio and television stations, promises to reduce the time required to register new churches, tax exemptions at the national and regional levels, the allocation of land for agricultural projects, the creation of Pastoral Councils of Government (CPG) at the local level, and a National Ministry Roundtable (MMN), responsibility for the implementation of a state-sponsored program for equality and justice, the proclamation of 18 January and May 15 as the days of the Evangelical Pastor and of the Family, respectively, a delay in the discussion and approval of pro-abortion and same-sex marriage laws, the use of government spaces for crusades and conferences, such as the Metropolitan Stadium in Caracas, access to the Miraflores Palace once a month to wage spiritual warfare and cleanse the country of curses, and the declaration of Jesus as Lord of Venezuela by the President NMM himself, among other promises in the pipeline, such as the creation of a national evangelical university.

Evangelical involvement in political campaigns is not new to Latin America. As one researcher has described it, "Evangelicals came to stay, stayed to grow, and grew to conquer" (Pérez Guadalupe 2017, p. 214). Examples have quickly multiplied, with notorious cases such as the Colombian referendum on the peace accords, when megachurches campaigned for a NO vote based on the existence of an underlying gender ideology in the accords (Bartel 2024); the spiritual warfare campaigns for the candidacy of Fabricio Alvarado for the presidency of Costa Rica, supported by well-known apostles such as Ronny Chaves (Ruiz 2018); the prophetic war in Honduras during the 2021 presidential race (Silva 2021); the inner circle of apostles who advised and influenced President Alejandro Giammattei in Guatemala in the campaign to approve the *Law for the Protection of Life and the Institution-*

alization of the Family (Rodríguez 2023); or the extraordinary evangelical support for Jair Bolsonaro (Barreto and Chaves 2021), including his attempt to block a peaceful transfer of power in Brazil (ICJS 2024). Moreover, evangelicals also played an important role in some right-wing dictatorships in the second half of the 20th century, such as the case of Pinochet's Chile (Florez 2024) and the Rios Montt regime in Guatemala (Althoff 2019). However, in all of the aforementioned cases where Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches have played a prominent role in Latin American politics, the association has always been with right-wing governments or candidates (Melkonian-Hoover and Hoover 2021), something which has led some scholars to consider this association as a "perfect marriage" (Corrales 2018).

Contrary to the common idea of the association of evangelicals with right-wing political agendas which are socially very conservative and economically neocapitalist, the case of Venezuelan evangelicals' support for a left-wing political party and its political agenda, described in this article, becomes a very important starting point to consider the reasons for this alliance, in particular because these associations between leftist governments and evangelical groups are growing in the region, as recent examples of support to López Obrador in Mexico (Goldstein 2020), and to Petro in Colombia (Sarkar 2021) have shown. There are several possible questions that can be derived from the case described in this article and which could be considered as important to understand the reason for this mutual embrace between evangelicals and an autocratic socialist regime such as the 21CS led by NMM. The first and most obvious reason could be an association with the socialist government's conservative positions on the legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage, and even with traditional family values and gender roles. As noted in the previous section, the conservative positions of the socialist regime on issues of gender and sexuality have been present in both the HCF's and NMM's governments, which has led to the support of evangelicals. A second aspect which characterizes the Venezuelan case is the importance that the socialist regime gave to evangelicals who came from the lower classes of the society and who adopted the discourse of HCF and joined his party. In this process, evangelicals have infiltrated all the levels of the government, including the military, and truly supported and participated in government programs. In this regard, it is important to note that there is an adaptation of evangelical discourse to fit the rhetoric of the regime. Similarly, government officials have begun to use evangelical jargon more openly in their public speeches, even quoting the Bible[21].

The final aspect of the association is a more theological one. It is not simply an attempt to get close to power, but an application of the dominion theology of Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches within a socialist regime. As Burity (2020) has put it, there is first the evangelicals' demand to be included as a "legitimate part of the pueblo-nación (people's nation)", and secondly, there is the intention to redefine the pueblo-nación as pueblo-evangélico (people's evangelical). The application of the 7MM demands the domination of all the seven spheres of society: family, education, government, business, arts and entertainment, religion, and media. Therefore, any political gain is a step forward toward this objective. Thus, political activism is justified, and that is why Venezuelan evangelicals are no longer waiting for a sudden rapture that will take them to heaven in the blink of an eye. They want to see the kingdom of God established in their country, and they are working hard to make it happen. They envision a new nation made up of families according to the original design that will produce and raise honest people who can fight corruption, run social programs efficiently, educate society with Christian values, write laws based on the Bible, and conquer and govern the seven mountains of influence in society, thus transforming Venezuela into a truly "socialist and Christian" nation.

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Glossary

21CS	21st Century Socialism
7MM	Seven Mountains Mandate
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANR	Acto de Arrepentimiento Nacional y Entronamiento de Jesucristo en Venezuela
Banfoandes	Banco de Fomento Regional Los Andes
CA	Constitutional Assembly
CADIVI	Comisión Nacional de Administración de Divisas
CCN	Centro Cristiano para Las Naciones
CD	Cultural Dominion
CDPR	Comisión de Diálogo, Paz, y Reconciliación Nacional
CEV	Venezuelan Evangelical Council
CNE	National Electoral Council
CPG	Consejo Pastoral de Gobierno
CPV	Confraternidad Pentecostal de Venezuela
ECP	Encuentro com Pastores y Pastoras Cristianos
EGU	Edmundo González Urrutia
ELCP	Encuentro con Líderes y Lideresas Cristianos por ña Construcción de la Paz en Venezuela
ELFF	Encuentro por la Vida, Familia y Fé
FAV	Fuerza Aérea Venezolana
HCF	Hugo Chávez Frías
ICC	International Criminal Court
IR	Identificational Repentance
IURD	Igreja Universal del Reino de Deus
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and others
MCM	María Corina Machado
MMN	Mesa Ministerial Nacional
MOCEV	Movimiento Cristiano Evangélico Venezolano
MOVIUC	Movimiento de Unidad Cristiana
NA	National Assembly
NAR	New Apostolic Reformation
NMG	Nicolás Maduro Guerra
NMM	Nicolás Maduro Moros
NTM	New Tribes Mission
NUVIPA	Nueva Visión para mi País
OELLM	Organización Evangélica La Luz del Mundo
ORA	Organización Renovadora Auténtica
P	Prophecy
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela
PSW	Prayer and Spiritual Warfare
RBV	República Bolivariana de Venezuela
REDIMA	Red Internacional de Ministerios Amigos
SW	Spiritual Warfare
TSJ	Tribunal Superior de Justicia
UCV	Universidad Central de Venezuela

UEPV	Unión Pentecostal de Venezuela
UN	United Nations
UNES	Universidad Nacional Experimental de la Seguridad

Notes

1 https://www.latinobarometro.org (accessed on 17 January 2025).

2 Such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, divine healing, deliverance from evil spirits, rest in the Spirit (slay in the Spirit), dance in the Spirit, prophesy, laying of hands, and others.

3 Today known as Ethnos 360, https://ethnos360.org/ (accessed on 17 January 2025).

4 Presided by Luis Magin Álvarez, a Baptist pastor.

5 On 12 October 2005, HCF finally expelled NTM from the country, using similar arguments as those presented two decades before.

6 For many years, it was quite difficult for evangelicals to register churches and to obtain local permits for operations, as well as for crusades and conferences. However, the laws that should be derived from the new provisions in the 1999 constitution are still pending for approval by the Congress.

7 Using the same data as that of Figure 1.

8 See, for instance, this video of NAR prophet Cindy Jacob, where she prophesies about the Cirus for Venezuela: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo0Z5TGXTEE, accessed on 10 November 2024.

9 Some military officers were converted in the 1980s and 1990s when a Christian ministry was started to work with army cadets, officers and troops. Others were converted in prison after the 1992 coup.

10 Smilde analyses the gathering "A Million Prayers for Peace in Venezuela" on 31 July 2004, organized by bishop Pérez and apostle Ávila from Renacer and REDIMA networks, respectively, apostle Jorge Porras Benedetti from Maracaibo, and apostle Elias Rincón from UNICRISTIANA network. The event received the support of *Ministerio Apostólico Iberoamericano*, and participants from many Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal denominations in the country. The event was financed by BANFOANDES with the help of Major Edgard Hernández Behrens who was its CEO. It was attended by Hugo Chávez who gave a long speech with a style that reminded those present of evangelists or preachers.

11 This is the case of the National Guard General José Gregorio Almao who pastors Iglesia Casa de Oración built in the parking lot of UCV Stadium. Almao was CEO of Misión Negra Hipólita and occupied many important positions in both HCF and NMM governments.

12 Elected as a member of the Constitutional Assembly (CA) in 1999, governor of the strategic state of Táchira on the border with Colombia from 2005 to 2008. More recently, president of a public university that trains police and intelligence officers (UNES) from 2014 to 2017

13 Appointed by HCF, as CEO of CADIVI (the Venezuelan currency exchange control system), and as President of the Banco de Fomento Andino (BANFOANDES). Today, he is considered the most influential evangelical in the socialist regime, and as a result, he is frequently invited to give his testimony and speak about his prosperity theology book, on godly management and business, in Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Apostolic churches.

14 The main pastor of the Evangelical Council is Colonel Elyoner Delgado Carrillo, from the National Guard, who also has a TV program in the armed forces channel. The *Casa de Jehová de los Ejércitos* church functions in Fuerte Tiuna, the main military installation in the capital, near the Military Academy.

15 Tovar had a short-lived resonance when he tried to oppose the constitutional reform proposed by HCF in 2007, calling it "heretical" because it would restrict private property, in addition to allowing indefinite re-election for public elected officials (emol 2007). HCF's response condemning the evangelical politician was filled with religious language, appealing to his strong popularity among lower-class evangelicals: "I condemn you to hell, false leader, go with Satan, because this is a divine proposal, from Christ, the redeemer of the poor; long live Christ, father, leader and revolutionary!

16 An introduction to Nuvipa is offered in the School of Leaders of the CCN church in Caracas (Venezuela), which means that political training is introduced in the discipleship process of Christians.

17 It will deal with everything related to the protection of the family and its integral development, based on the common effort, the equality of rights and duties, and the mutual respect among its members, the protection of fatherhood and motherhood, the protection of marriage and stable unions, and everything concerning freedom of religion and worship (https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/, accessed on 8 November 2024).

18 Founded in January 2018, MOCEV was created, according to Moisés García, during the electoral situation of 2017, to give unconditional support to NMM, for his re-election, and to support the Bolivarian revolution. Its Telegram channel provides information related to the delivery of materials (chairs, construction materials, sound equipment) to evangelical churches through government programs, announcement of medical care days, food delivery in prisons, presence in marches called by the PSUV, political and socio-productive training, work meetings with the party's religious affairs team, with pastors from popular areas

such as La Vega (Caracas), the swearing-in of those responsible for religious affairs in the regions, as well as prayer rallies in churches, among other activities.

[19] The process for obtaining the results by the opposition had been designed months before the election, training poll witnesses on how to defend votes, then reclaiming the printed tallies, scanning and transmitting to a collection call center, where the QR codes that codified the results were read and converted into digital files. The original printed tallies were kept in a safe location and later collected. Their initial web page https://resultadosconvzla.com/ (accessed on 28 November 2024), which had millions of attacks in the following days, can still be accessed. Several mirror sites were started by independent developers to help with the traffic created, and one of them, https://macedoniadelnorte.com/ (accessed on 28 November 2024), has collected 84% of the results from 25,100 polling stations. This site also has the scanned printouts and videos from 1618 polling stations where the results were read to the public in the electoral site.

[20] Maria Corina Machado, the main opposition leader, elected in primary elections in 2023, used a similar language to describe the fight against the regime: "This is a spiritual struggle between good and evil, and good always triumphs" (Alvarado 2024).

[21] In his Christmas meeting with evangelical leaders on 23 December 2024, NMM said, "I am David, son of God. I have the blessings of God, and I have the blessings of the people. There has not been and there will not be a Goliath that can defeat me, or the people of Venezuela. We are the people of David... I am David, I have defeated and will defeat Goliath..." (Maduro 2024b).

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Article

The Adventure of a Book That Migrated from Shirwān to Istanbul: A Study of Ḥadīth Terminology Presented to Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror

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Abstract: The science and religion policies of the states affected the types of scholars, the understanding of science, the centres of science and the styles of teaching in the regions they dominated. While Timur made Samarkand and his grandson Ulugh Beg made Herat centres of knowledge, they tried to attract scholars to these cities. This was done by forcing the ulema to emigrate or by increasing the opportunities available to them. The Ottoman Empire, which was a candidate for the role of the central Muslim state, invited scholars to the cities under its rule, especially Istanbul. During the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror (1451–1481), one of the pioneers of this activity, many scholars came to Istanbul. As a result, renowned scholars in medicine, astronomy, mathematics and religious sciences; books in these fields; and their understanding of knowledge were transferred to the Ottoman Empire. This article analyses the still extant manuscript of the ḥadīth methodology book *Qawā'id al-usūl fī 'ilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl*, which Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shirwānī brought to Istanbul during the reign of Fatih and presented to the Sultan. The analysis examines the method and content of the work, whether it is an original book or not and the comparison of the information contained in it with similar books, taking into account the status of the science of ḥadīth in Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire. In particular, it questions the Ottoman political approach to the reception of religious sciences and the impact of this book on Ottoman ḥadīth scholarship, as the Ottoman Empire patronised knowledge and scholars from other regions through migration.

Keywords: ḥadīth methodology; Ottoman Empire; Timurid Empire; Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shirwānī; scholarly migration; Islamic manuscripts

1. Introduction

In the Ottoman Empire, after the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, the claim to be the protector of Muslims became apparent. Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror established the Sahn Madrasah and invited scholars from the Timurid region to Istanbul, where there was political chaos. Ulema from the region under Timur's rule, especially from Harāt, accepted Fatih's invitation (Giv 2002). In addition to the knowledge transmitted through migration, the Ottoman ulema class was formed with the students who began to grow up in the newly established Sahn Madrasah (Lekesiz 1991).

The transfer of knowledge to Anatolia began under the Seljuks and Beyliks and continued under the Ottomans. Although the Fatih period was the most prominent, this transfer continued during the sultanates that followed. In addition to the transplanted sciences, renowned names in medicine, astronomy and mathematics migrated to the Ottoman lands for various reasons (Fazlıoğlu 2014). Another factor contributing to the Ottoman scholarly accumulation was the scholars who travelled to the Timurid state in the Transoxiana region between 1370 and 1507 and to the areas under Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria between 1250 and 1517. There were many names of people who travelled from the Ottoman lands in order to improve themselves and returned after studying science (Alan 2003). The scholars who arrived in Istanbul were appointed mudarris and doctors and received high salaries.

In addition to the spiritual climate created for Muslims by the conquest of Istanbul, the scientific structure that was to be established could be realised through these migrations (Ṭāshkubry zādah 2019).

This policy of the state ensured the formation of the ulema class in the regions under its control and created centres of knowledge. The transfer of knowledge and scholars played an important role in the establishment of a centralised structure for the activities carried out. In the period before Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, similar efforts were made in different regions. The fact that the founder of the state, Timur (who established the empire between 1370 and his death in 1405), and especially his grandson Ulugh Beg (who reigned from 1447 to 1449), turned the regions under his rule, especially Samarkand and Herat, into centres of science is also within this scope (Hodgson 1974). The sultans, sometimes through pressure and sometimes through encouragement and invitation, wanted the ulema to make the cities prosperous (Yüksel 2017).

With these migrations, the ulema class carried the scientific understanding of the regions in which they lived to the new cities from which they came. Depending on the attitude of the ruler and their own scholarly career, they gained a position within the scholarly caste. These migrations ensured the education of the people in the regions under the sovereignty of the state (Atcil 2019). In addition to the scholars who emigrated to the city, another important transfer was the arrival of works or copies of works in the city of origin to Istanbul. For example, Musannifak was one of the names with different scholarly personalities who came to Istanbul for various reasons during the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. Musannifak came to Istanbul at the invitation of Mahmud Pasha, the Vizier of Fatih from 1456 to 1466 and from 1472 to 1474, and brought many of his works to the Ottoman Empire, including the commentary of *al-Masābīh* (al-Baghawī's famous collection of ḥadīth) he had written before (Çelik 2022).

The examples of scholars who migrated from one region to another and the accumulation of scholarship they brought with them from the past to the present cannot be counted. This study analyses one work that can be used as an example of the intensive migrations during the Fatih period and the scholarly atmosphere in Istanbul. The author Ibrāhīm b. ʻAli al-Shirwānī, who travelled from Shirwān, dedicated his concise ḥadīth methodology work titled *Qawāʻid al-usūl fī ʻilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl* to Sultan Fatih. This book, which has survived as a manuscript, appears to be the first book on ḥadīth methodology written in the Ottoman Empire. There has been no study of the work and its author. This study analyses the originality, characteristics and content of the book.

One of the main questions of research is whether this manuscript book of Shirwānī is an original work or not. This is because, as will be discussed later, Shirwānī prepared his book largely with information taken from the book of al-Qāyinī (2018, d. 838/1434-35). However, al-Qāyinī also wrote his book largely on the basis of the information he had taken from al-Ṭībī's ḥadīth methodology titled *al-Khulāṣah*. Therefore, the similarities and differences between the three works will be discussed and the originality of Shirwānī's book, which was handed down to the Ottomans, will be emphasised. Another question to be answered in this article is whether this book and its author were valued by the Ottoman court and ulema circles, depending on Fatih's policy of protecting the ulema. Taking into account the Ottoman accumulation of religious sciences and the works written, the impact of this work on the ulema class and the books written will be examined.

First, Shirwānī and his work are introduced and information about the manuscript is given. Then, we will discuss why and where Shirwānī wrote his work. In this way, the effect of migration and the impact of knowledge and scholars on other countries will be determined. Whether the work is original or not will also be determined by the titles, which reveal the content of Shirwānī's book and the methodology he followed. In order to determine whether a book or a scholar has an impact on the region to which he migrated, the position of Shirwānī and his work will be discussed taking into account the development of the science of ḥadīth in the Ottoman period.

2. Ibrāhīm b. ʻAli al-Shirwānī and His Book Titled *Qawāʻid al-usūl fī ʻilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl*

The eighth treatise in a collection of 14 small risalas (24a–229b) in the Bayazıt Collection (no 88) of the Amasya Beyazıt Library is the short Arabic book on the ḥadīth methodology. The other treatises consist of small works of exegesis (tafsīr), theology (ʻaqāʾid), history (tabaqāt) and preaching (mawʻiḍah). At the end of the copy, which is written in taʻlīq calligraphy in 23 lines, measures 208 × 148–165 × 85 mm, and has a brown oak-covered cardboard binding with a small cover (miḳleb) that can be inserted between the pages, with a sun-shaped ornamental motif (şemse). In the manuscript, important topics are entered as headings in the form of maṭlab, and explanatory information in the form of Minhāwāt and notes from other sources are added in the margins.

This work of Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shirwānī, about whose life we have no information, is recorded in the manuscript with the note (See Figure 1) 'This risalah is the work of Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shirwānī, who lived in Shemah, titled *Qawāʻid al-usūl fī ʻilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl* (Shirwānī n.d., 104a) (See Figure 2). Shemah was one of the important cities of the Shirwānshahs at the time of the author's migration to the Ottoman Empire. The Shirwānshahs ruled Shirwān (in present-day Azerbaijan) from 861 to 1538, one of the most enduring dynasties in the Islamic world. From 1500, the region came under the rule of Shah Ismail. Fatḥ Allāh al-Shirwānī (d. 891/1486), a contemporary of the author from the same city and town, is credited with introducing the teaching of mathematics, astronomy and geography in Anatolia (Akpınar 1995). It is known that many names made similar journeys to the Anatolian interior during the period when the author migrated to Istanbul (Giv 2002). There is a record that it was written by 'Umar ibn al-Ḥāj Mustafa al-Uskūbī in the town of Nemja in Serm sanjak in the middle of the month of Jumaz al-Ḥājaluhra in the year 1033 AH (121b) (See Figure 3).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular work, it is essential to consider a number of factors, including the author's scholarly personality, their affiliation with a particular scholarly milieu, the madhhab they espoused and their other published works. By taking these factors into account, it is possible to gain a more accurate understanding of the work in question. However, there is no available information about Shirwānī other than his hometown and his journey. Nevertheless, the similarity of the work with al-Ṭībī's *al-Khulāṣah* and al-Qāyinī's book, which is based on this work, provides an opportunity to evaluate the work within the framework of these two works and the personalities of their authors. Therefore, this study will examine *Qawāʻid al-usūl* and then reveal its similarities and differences with the aforementioned works.

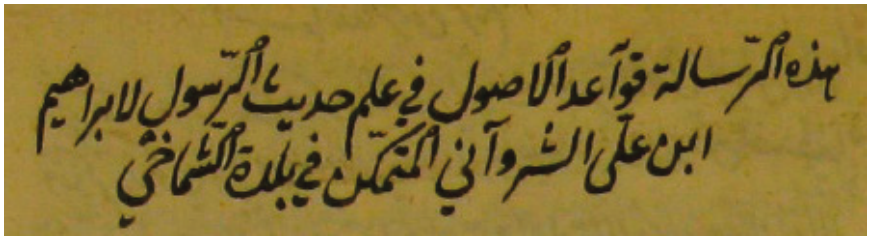

هذه الرسالة قواعد الاصول في علم حديث الرسول لابراهيم
ابن علي الشرواني المتمكن في بلدة الشماخي

Figure 1. Cover page of book (104a).

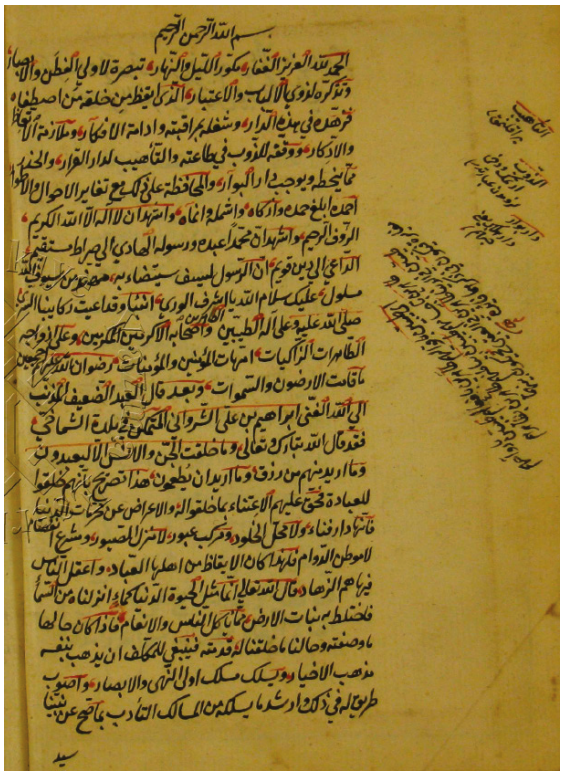


Figure 2. First page of book (104b).

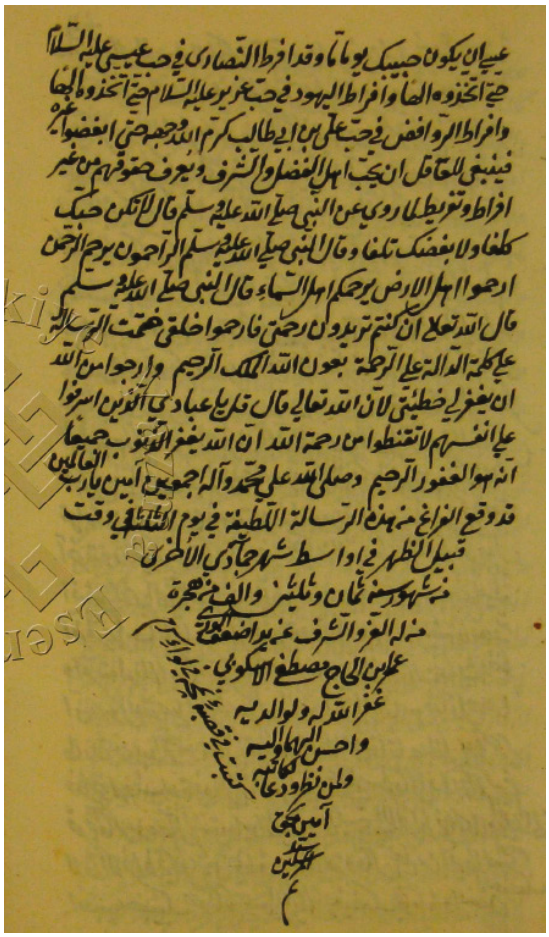


Figure 3. Last page of book (121b).

3. Place and Reason for Writing

Following the ḥamdalah and ṣalwalah, the author provided his name as it appears on the cover and proceeded to state that the path to eternal happiness is through following the Prophet. He also asserted that the most virtuous of the sciences is ḥadīth. Subsequently, he collated a number of accounts emphasising the significance of narrating ḥadīth. Shirwānī asserts that scholars of his era were preoccupied with superfluous pursuits, thereby divesting themselves of the research and teaching of ḥadīth. For this reason, he intended to collate the regulations pertaining to the science of ḥadīth in a manner that would be comprehensive enough to serve the needs of all students of Islamic sciences. The author states that he benefited from al-Nawawī's *Riyād al-Sālihīn*, *al-Irshād*, *al-Taqrīb wa't-Tayṣīr*, *Sharḥ Sahih Muslim* and other works (Shirwānī n.d., pp. 104b–5). Since he compiled the information that he considered important from the books he mentioned and created a separate classification, we can say at first glance that the present work is a work in the genre of talkhīṣ (abbreviation, summarising the book) (Durmuş 2020).

In his work *Qawā'id al-usūl fī 'ilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl*, the author dedicates it to Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror and indicates that it was written upon reaching Istanbul, which had been subdued through military means. In this section, the author pays tribute to Sultan Mehmet with prayers and laudatory remarks, characterising him as a just ruler of the Muslim community (105a–105b). Based on these statements, it can be inferred that the author arrived in Anatolia between 1453 and 1481, following the conquest and during the lifetime of Sultan Mehmet. Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether Shirwānī was a favoured figure at the court or whether he was appointed to any position, despite the dedication of the work. While numerous individuals from the Shirwān region are documented as having emigrated during this period, Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī is conspicuous because of his absence from these accounts.

The assertion that the ulema exhibited a lack of interest in the science of ḥadīth, which is cited as the rationale behind the composition of the work, is also evident in Qutb al-Din al-Iznīqī's *Talfīqāt al-Masābīh*, which is regarded as the inaugural ḥadīth work to be produced during the Ottoman era. Iznīqī notes that scholars of his era exhibited a paucity of interest in both ḥadīth and tafsīr and asserts that a dearth of literature on the science of ḥadīth existed (Akbaş 2022a).

4. Methodology

Shirwānī structured his work into six principal sections: an introduction (muqaddima), four main parts and a conclusion (khātima). Within the chapters, he addressed a range of topics and engaged in discourse on a variety of subheadings and issues. This approach to the work is not unique to him. This approach is reminiscent of the brief ḥadīth methodology presented by Ibn al-Athir in the introduction to *Jāmi al-Usūl* and the treatment of issues by al-Ṭībī in *al-Khulāṣah*. Ibn al-Athir divides the text into three sections: mabādī (introduction), maqāṣid (principles) and khātāma (conclusion). In contrast, al-Ṭībī classifies them as muqaddīma (introduction), maqāṣid (objectives) and khātāma (conclusion) (Demirci 2017). Shirwānī's book has similarities to al-Ṭībī's work beyond its methodology, as will be discussed later.

In the introduction, the initial ḥadīths included in the books of ḥadīth are examined, along with the conditions of narrating ḥadīth, the judgement of attributing a lie to the Prophet, the judgement and etiquette of writing ḥadīths, the number of ḥadīths and the etiquette of the ḥadīth meeting. In this section, he also provides information about the scholars who first wrote the ḥadīths, the necessity of offering salāt (prayers of blessing) when the Prophet's name is mentioned and the prohibition of writing salāt with abbreviations (105b–108a).

The first part deals with the text and related issues (108a–111b). The author analyses ḥadīth by dividing it into three types (authentic ḥadīth–agreeable ḥadīth–weak ḥadīth), and after defining each of them, he explains the concepts of supported ḥadīth; uninterrupted ḥadīth; isnad containing the word "from"; suspended ḥadīth; isolated ḥadīth; inter-

polated material into ḥadīth; well-known ḥadīth; loose ḥadīth; discontinued ḥadīth; cut-off ḥadīth; interrupted, problematic ḥadīth; anomalous ḥadīth; objectionable, defective ḥadīth; deceitful ḥadīth; disordered (muḍṭarib) ḥadīth; inverted ḥadīth; and fabricated ḥadīth. In this section, he also touches upon the issues of additions of reliable transmitters, text-related appendage, diverse ḥadīth, abrogating and abrogated ḥadīth.

In the second part of his book, which can be considered short, Shirwānī touches upon the issues related to the chain and narrator. The concepts of integrity and accuracy and their defects, ascending chain of transmission, adding to chain, deceit, peers transmitting from one another, the ornate ḥadīth and isnad containing the word "from" are discussed in this section (111b–112b). In the third part of the work, which deals with the ways of conveying and receiving of ḥadīth, the issues of the competence to convey ḥadīth, the ways of conveying ḥadīth, the writing of ḥadīths, the quality of ḥadīth narration and the etiquette of the narrator are discussed (112b–115a).

The last part of the book is devoted to the names of the narrators and the classes of the scholars. Companions; the followers; classes of narrators; names and tags; nicknames; concordant and discordant; non-Arab converts; ambiguous, trustworthy and weak narrators; the homelands of the narrators and the dates of their deaths; the authors of the books of authentic ḥadīth; and the seven retentive scholars who are the owners of the later useful classifications are among the issues covered in this section (115b–117a).

In conclusion, Shirwānī presents a comprehensive overview of the principles that guide the relationship between subjects and their rulers. He emphasises the importance of obedience insofar as it is not forbidden or sinful and outlines the virtues associated with jihad, the pursuit of knowledge, the merits of spending in the pursuit of knowledge, the etiquette of scholarly debate, the role of the qāḍī (judge) and the etiquette associated with this role and the honouring of virtuous individuals (117a–121b). It is noteworthy that in this section, the author makes extensive use of two key sources: Abu Layth al-Samarqandī's *Bustan al-ʿārifīn* and Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm al-Ardabīlī's *al-Anwāru al-Amāl al-Abrār*.

The author presents the terms in a systematic structure and provides fundamental explanations without delving excessively into the controversies surrounding them. To illustrate, the author defines the term "objectionable" as "the omission of a narrator who is not reliable or accurate". In addition to defining the various concepts, the author provides detailed information about the specific types of each concept. He elucidates the concept of interpolated material in ḥadīth as follows: 'the first form is the inclusion of the words of the narrators, which subsequent narrators adopt as the text of the ḥadīth; the second is when the narrator possesses two distinct texts with two disparate chains of transmission, or alternatively, is aware of a word of the ḥadīth within another chain but narrates both texts with a single chain. The third case is when the narrator hears the ḥadīth from a community with disparate chains and texts and narrates it without addressing the discrepancies between them. All three cases are regarded as equivalent and are therefore prohibited.' (109b).

In addition to al-Nawawī's books mentioned in the introduction, he also cites al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, al-Khattābī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Salāh, Ibn al-Jazarī and others. However, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Qāyinī, who lived in close contemporaneity with the author, and his work titled *Ishrāqāt al-usūl fī ʿilm ḥadīth al-Rasūl*, and Shirwānī's book are almost identical except for the introduction and conclusion.

5. Content

Given the similarities between Shirwānī's book and al-Qāyinī's work, it is necessary to consider both works in the analysis of its content. Nevertheless, al-Qāyinī also drew upon al-Ṭībī's *al-Khulāṣah* in the preparation of his own work. Accordingly, the pertinent details will be collated, and a comparative analysis of all three works will be conducted.

Al-Qāyinī served as the most famous preacher of his son Shah Rukh, who turned Herat into a centre of knowledge after Timur (Yüksel 2009). The information found in the analysis of the extant copy of this work written by al-Qāyinī, who was a student of Ibn

al-Jazarī, who was with Timur, shows that this work is not original enough and that it was largely prepared by using al-Ṭībī's *al-Khulāṣah* as a source.

Al-Qāyinī states that he compiled this book, which contains the basic topics of ḥadīth that every student of knowledge should know, when he arrived in Nishabur. He states that he benefited from al-Tirmidhi's *al-Jāmi'i* and *al-Ilāl*; the ḥadīth books of Hakim al-Nisābūri, al-Khatīb al-Baghdādi, Ibn al-Salāh and Ibn Jāma'a; and various works of al-Nawawī, especially *al-Irshād*, al-Ṭībī's *al-Hulāsa* and his teacher Ibn al-Jazarī's *al-Bidāye*. al-Qāyinī clearly states that all but a few of the phrases in his work belong to the scholars (al-Qāyinī 2018). As can be seen, al-Qāyinī points to a wide range of literature. However, among these works, al-Ṭībī's book constitutes the backbone of the work. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the author states that the information in the work is mostly compiled from these sources and that he has only a few statements of his own.

We will try to evaluate the content of Shirwānī's work, which presents a rich content, by showing it together with the works of al-Qāyinī and al-Ṭībī. The subject headings and order in the works are as follows (See Table 1):

Table 1. Comparison of subject headings in the books.

al-Ṭībī, *al-Hulāsa*	**al-Qāyinī, *Ishrāqāt al-usūl fī ʿilm ḥadīth al-Rasūl***	**Shirwānī, *Qawā'id al-usūl fī 'ilm ḥadīth al-Rasūl***
Introduction (muqaddima)	**Introduction (muqaddima)**	**Introduction (muqaddima)**
Basic definitions (chain, text, ḥadīth, report)	Introduction of ḥadīth books	Introduction of ḥadīth books
the mass-transmitted report and conditions	Writing of ḥadīths and the first compilers	Writing of ḥadīths and the first compilers
Solitary report/ḥadīth	About the salāt and salām	About the salāt and salām
	Number of ḥadīths	Number of ḥadīths
	The conditions of narrating ḥadīth	The conditions of narrating ḥadīth
	The judgement of attributing a lie to the Prophet	The judgement of attributing a lie to the Prophet
Principles (maqāṣid)		
The first part: parts ofḥadīth(aqsām)	**The first part: text and its parts**	**The first part: text and its parts**
Authentic ḥadīth-agreeable ḥadīth-weak ḥadīth	Type of ḥadīth (authentic ḥadīth-agreeable ḥadīth-weak ḥadīth)	Type of ḥadīth (authentic ḥadīth-agreeable ḥadīth-weak ḥadīth)
Common concepts in terms of authenticity	Common concepts in terms of authenticity	Common concepts in terms of authenticity
supported ḥadīth	supported ḥadīth	supported ḥadīth
uninterrupted ḥadīth	uninterrupted ḥadīth	uninterrupted ḥadīth
elevated ḥadīth	elevated ḥadīth	elevated ḥadīth
chain containing the word "from"	chain containing the word "from"	chain containing the word "from"
suspended ḥadīth	suspended ḥadīth	suspended ḥadīth
isolated ḥadīth	isolated ḥadīth	isolated ḥadīth
interpolated material into ḥadīth	interpolated material into ḥadīth	interpolated material into ḥadīth
well-known ḥadīth	well-known ḥadīth	well-known ḥadīth
rare ḥadīth	rare ḥadīth	rare ḥadīth
scarce ḥadīth	scarce ḥadīth	scarce ḥadīth
misread ḥadīth	misread ḥadīth	misread ḥadīth
ascending chain of transmission and its parts	chained ḥadīth	chained ḥadīth
chained ḥadīth	additions of reliable transmitters	additions of reliable transmitters
additions of reliable transmitters	analysis	analysis
analysis	diverse ḥadīth	diverse ḥadīth
diverse ḥadīth	abrogating and abrogated ḥadīth	abrogating and abrogated ḥadīth
abrogating and abrogated ḥadīth	ḥadīth difficult terms	ḥadīth difficult terms
ḥadīth difficult terms	ascending chain of transmission	ascending chain of transmission
discontinued ḥadīth	discontinued ḥadīth	discontinued ḥadīth
cut-off ḥadīth	cut-off ḥadīth	cut-off ḥadīth
loose ḥadīth	loose ḥadīth	loose ḥadīth
interrupted	interrupted	interrupted
problematic ḥadīth	problematic ḥadīth	problematic ḥadīth
anomalous-objectionable ḥadīth	anomalous-objectionable ḥadīth	anomalous-objectionable ḥadīth
defective ḥadīth	defective ḥadīth	defective ḥadīth
deceitful ḥadīth	deceitful ḥadīth	deceitful ḥadīth
disordered ḥadīth	disordered ḥadīth	disordered ḥadīth
inverted ḥadīth	inverted ḥadīth	inverted ḥadīth
fabricated ḥadīth	fabricated ḥadīth	fabricated ḥadīth
The second part: the qualifications of the narrators	**The second part: chain**	**The second part: chain**

Table 1. *Cont.*

al-Ṭībī, *al-Hulāsa*	**al-Qāyinī, *Ishrāqāt al-usūl fī ʿilm ḥadīth al-Rasūl***	**Shirwānī, *Qawā'id al-usūl fī 'ilm ḥadīth al-Rasūl***
Qualities of the narrators whose narrations are accepted and not accepted (integrity and accuracy)	Qualities of the narrators whose narrations are accepted and not accepted (integrity and accuracy)	Qualities of the narrators whose narrations are accepted and not accepted (integrity and accuracy)
Issues related to criticism and approval	Issues related to chain (ascending chain of transmission, low chain, additions to cohesive chain, deceit, etc.)	Issues related to chain (ascending chain of transmission, low chain, additions to cohesive chain, deceit, etc.)
The third part: the ways of conveying and receiving ofḥadīth	**The third part: the ways of conveying and receiving ofḥadīth**	**The third part: the ways of conveying and receiving ofḥadīth**
Qualification of ḥadīth conveying	Qualification of ḥadīth conveying	Qualification of ḥadīth conveying
The ways to receive ḥadīth (audition, reading, licensing, handing over, correspondence, announcement, finding)	The ways to receive ḥadīth (audition, reading, licensing, handing over, correspondence, announcement, bequest of books, finding)	The ways to receive ḥadīth (audition, reading, licensing, handing over, correspondence, announcement, bequest of books, finding)
	The writing of ḥadīths	The writing of ḥadīths
	The quality of ḥadīth narration	The quality of ḥadīth narration
	Etiquette of ḥadīth learner	Etiquette of ḥadīth learner
The fourth part: the names of the narrators and the classes of the scholars	**The fourth part: the names of the narrators and the classes of the scholars**	**The fourth part: the names of the narrators and the classes of the scholars**
Companions, the followers	Companions, the followers	Companions, the followers
Names, tags, nicknames	Names, tags, nicknames	Names, tags, nicknames
Issues related to ravi knowledge (concordant and discordant; non-Arab converts; ambiguous, trustworthy and weak narrators; the homelands of the narrators and the dates of their deaths; the authors of the books of authentic ḥadīth; the seven retentive scholars who are the owners of the later useful classifications)	Issues related to ravi knowledge (concordant and discordant; non-Arab converts; ambiguous, trustworthy and weak narrators; the homelands of the narrators and the dates of their deaths; the authors of the books of authentic ḥadīth; the seven retentive scholars who are the owners of the later useful classifications)	Issues related to ravi knowledge (concordant and discordant; non-Arab converts; ambiguous, trustworthy and weak narrators; the homelands of the narrators and the dates of their deaths; the authors of the books of authentic ḥadīth; the seven retentive scholars who are the owners of the later useful classifications)
Conclusion (khātāma)	**Conclusion (khātāma)**	**Conclusion (khātāma)**
Good manners		Obedience to leaders
Rules to be observed by the muhaddith, learner and writer		Jihad
		The demand for knowledge and its virtue
		Spending in the way of knowledge
		Scholarly debate
		Qāḍī (judgement) and its etiquette
		Honouring virtuous people

As we can see, the content of the three works is so similar that reading one of them does not make it necessary to read the others. The differences are concentrated in the introduction, the second part and the conclusion. It can be seen that al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī make use of different works in the introduction, especially al-Nawawī's commentary on Muslim. Both authors compiled the information in the second part of their books under the title of 'issues related to the chain' from Ibn Jalma'a's *al-Manhal*. The rules of caution mentioned by al-Ṭībī in the conclusion are discussed by al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī in the third part.

A notable divergence between al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī is evident in the concluding sections of the text. In this section, al-Qāyinī presents the significance of studying ḥadīth and provides valuable insights. In contrast, Shirwānī collates information that can be accepted in the aforementioned areas of jurisprudence and advice. The rationale behind the inclusion of these chapters at the end of the book on the methodology of ḥadīth remains unclear, despite the fact that they have been compiled by referencing the works of Abu

Layth al-Samarqandī and Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm al-Ardabīlī. The chapters based on ḥadīths on ruling with justice, obedience to rulers and jihad may be interpreted as evidence that the author was attempting to gain prestige in the court. However, this remains a conjecture, and it is not possible to confirm this hypothesis at this stage.

Upon examination of the texts, it becomes evident that al-Ṭībī addresses both the disputes and the core issues. While al-Qāyinī reproduces al-Ṭībī's content in a limited number of chapters, he largely avoids addressing secondary issues. In contrast, Shirwānī presents an abridged version of al-Ṭībī's information in the majority of the work. In comparison to al-Qāyinī, Shirwānī's more concise treatment of the issues typically excludes information about books written on related concepts or issues. To illustrate, the work of Shirwānī omits information about books on topics such as ambiguous narrators, reliable or weak narrators and brother narrators (116b).

Al-Ṭībī references the well-known definition of authentic ḥadīth as outlined by Ibn al-Salāh, providing a comprehensive analysis of its constituent elements. Subsequently, he addresses the initial works to compile authentic ḥadīths and the number of ḥadīths included in these works. Al-Ṭībī incorporates Ibn al-Salāh's classification of the most authentic ḥadīths and assesses the veracity of the ḥadīths included in al-Bukhari's work. In contrast, al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī do not provide any elaboration on the opinions but instead present a concise definition of Ibn al-Salāh, the initial books written by him, the total number of ḥadīths and the classification of the most authentic ḥadīths (al-Ṭībī 2009; al-Qāyinī 2018; Shirwānī n.d.).

Al-Ṭībī presents the concept of agreeable ḥadīth and offers a critical analysis of the various perspectives held by scholars on this matter, highlighting the discrepancies and nuances in their opinions. al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī provide a concise definition of the term "agreeable ḥadīth" and discuss its validity, as well as the manner in which al-Baghawī and al-Tirmidhī employ this term. In this section, al-Qāyinī presents a narrative from his teacher Ibn al-Jazarī, accompanied by the remark, "We heard it from our teacher". Shirwānī, in contrast, offers a direct quotation from Ibn al-Jazarī, omitting any reference to the source of the information (al-Ṭībī 2009; al-Qāyinī 2018; Shirwānī n.d.).

One example of similar content presented by al-Ṭībī and al-Qāyinī is the definition of inverted ḥadīth (maqlūb). While al-Ṭībī and al-Qāyinī include the account of al-Bukhārī being queried about a hundred ḥadīths with a mixed chain and text upon his arrival in Baghdad, Shirwānī does not reference this information (al-Ṭībī 2009; al-Qāyinī 2018; Shirwānī n.d.).

6. The Book of Shirwānī: An Original or Plagiarised Work?

In light of the sources, methodology and content of Shirwānī's work, it is challenging to view it as an original contribution to the field. The author may therefore be accused of plagiarism. This is because the work is largely composed of information derived from al-Qāyinī's book, rather than the sources referenced by the author in the introduction. The author does not present a unique methodology or a content-specific approach to the reader. It would be appropriate to evaluate this issue by taking into account the conditions of the period in question and the method followed by Muslims in composing books.

In the history of ḥadīth, it is a common practice to adopt the information or method presented in a given work or a small number of works and apply it in one's own work. It may not be necessary to cite a source when a work is merely influencing one's methodology. Indeed, al-Bukhārī's system of classifying chapters and books had a significant impact on subsequent sources (Demirci 2017). The method of directly working on a project without being influenced by external factors is not a practice exemplified by al-Bukhārī. In terms of content, the issue can be readily resolved by the author clearly stating the sources he intends to utilise. Otherwise, it is unethical to make minor alterations to the content of a work and to present the new book as entirely original by omitting certain sections (al-Sakhāwī 1999). The most illustrative example of this phenomenon is Ibn Abi al-Dam's

book, which he created by transferring material from Ibn al-Salāh's work without citing his name (Acar 2022).

It is essential to examine the circumstances surrounding al-Qāyinī, from whom al-Shirwānī significantly drew inspiration, in order to reach a well-founded conclusion on the matter. al-Qāyinī explicitly asserts that only a small proportion of the information presented in the work is original, while the remainder has been collated from the sources he cites. In this regard, it can be stated that his actions were in accordance with the prevailing norms of the time. Furthermore, among the sources he cites is al-Ṭībī's *al-Ḥulāsa* (al-Qāyinī 2018). However, the fact that the work is largely composed of al-Ṭībī's work can be considered to be inconsistent with his promise in the introduction.

In conclusion, al-Qāyinī states that he has granted permission for the transmission of this book to all Muslims (al-Qāyinī 2018). From this perspective, it is unsurprising that Shirwānī draws upon his work. However, it can be considered a problematic approach that Shirwānī focuses on al-Qāyinī's book instead of the various works he mentions in the introduction. Furthermore, Shirwānī made use of al-Qāyinī's work without mentioning his name, which is a breach of academic integrity. Al-Qāyinī speaks favourably of his teacher Ibn al-Jazarī in various parts of his work (al-Qāyinī 2018). However, Shirwānī directly quotes Ibn al-Jazarī's information, which al-Qāyinī included in his work by samā' (audition) from his teacher (al-Qāyinī 2018; Shirwānī n.d.). It seems plausible to suggest that Shirwānī was a student of Ibn al-Jazarī and may have received the same information from his teacher. Nevertheless, the absence of any reference to endurance in his work renders this hypothesis implausible.

Had Shirwānī complied with the conditions he set forth in the introduction, his work could have been accepted as a concise methodology for ḥadīth within the framework of talkhīṣ. However, the aforementioned issues pertaining to originality, the transmission of information and the utilisation of sources preclude the possibility of categorising the work as an original contribution by Shirwānī. This raises the question of whether it is possible to classify this work as plagiarism. At this juncture, while the extant evidence permits such an interpretation, additional data regarding other copies of the work and the relationship between Shirwānī and al-Qāyinī are required. It is possible that some situations not found in the copy under consideration may be inferred from other sources. It is possible that Shirwānī was one of al-Qāyinī's students and that he wrote a copy of Al-Qāyinī's work and dedicated it to the Padishah upon his arrival in Istanbul. It is similarly conceivable that in the copies that have thus far eluded identification, he asserted that he had created his work with the benefit of al-Qāyinī's oeuvre, in addition to the aforementioned works. The number of potential scenarios is, in fact, limitless. Nevertheless, irrespective of the aforementioned considerations, these scenarios may ultimately give rise to the emergence of further copies.

In any case, the manuscript under examination displays the hallmarks of a succinct ḥadīth methodology that made its way to Istanbul during the early Ottoman era. It would be beneficial to investigate the influence of this work on Ottoman scholarly life and the status of Shirwānī's book, as well as the roles of al-Qāyinī and al-Ṭībī, the primary sources for this book, in Ottoman madrasahs.

7. The Impact of the Book on Ottoman Scholarly Life

During the period of Ottoman conquest and the subsequent establishment of madrasahs, an emphasis on the study of fiqh (Islamic law) and kalām (Islamic theology) as a core aspect of education became prominent. The analysis revealed that only seven of the 234 works produced by scholars affiliated with Sahn madrasahs between 1470 and 1730 pertain to ḥadīth. Of these, six are commentaries on ḥadīth (Unan 2003). Consequently, there is a paucity of substantial works on hadith sciences during the period when Shirwānī came to Istanbul and the subsequent period. The fact that Bukhārī and al-Baghawī's compilations of ḥadīth were studied in the 15th-century madrasahs also corroborates this assessment (Baltacı 1976).

When it comes to the Ottoman Empire and especially Istanbul, the scholars who emigrated from different regions and the scholars who travelled to various countries, especially Egypt, and returned to the Ottoman Empire should be mentioned. During the period of Shirwānī's migration, scholars from a multitude of countries, particularly those hailing from Herat, made their way to Istanbul. Notwithstanding these peregrinations, with regard to the science of ḥadīth, we may speak of the accumulation of scholarship and of books transported as a consequence of journeys to Damascus, Hejaz and Egypt undertaken from the 17th century onwards (Ayaz 2016).

Prior to the advent of Shirwānī, no known instance of a ḥadīth methodology book had reached the Ottoman Empire through independent composition or transmission. It is thought that Shihāb al-Dīn Sivāsī's (d. 860/1455) work *Riyādu'l-Azhār*, which provides a summary of Ibn al-Salāh's *Muqaddima* and frequently cites al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī's *al-Jāmi'*, represents the first instance of a hadith methodology being compiled in Anatolia (Ayaz 2014). It can be reasonably argued that, with the exception of this work, which was composed during the Beyliks period and region, Shirwānī is the first author of the first ḥadīth methodology work to reach the Ottoman Empire. After him, in the 16th century, two more ḥadīth methodology works reached Istanbul. Qwam al-Dīn Yusuf b. Hasan al-Husaynī al-Shirāzī (d. 922/1516) from Baghdad and Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Khalebī (d. 956/1549) from Egypt came to Istanbul (Ayaz 2014).

It is of interest to enquire whether Shirwānī's ḥadīth methodology book, which was compiled in the early period, was received favourably in the madrasah and ulema circles despite its status as the first of its kind. As previously stated, it can be reasonably assumed that this work did not receive a favourable response, particularly in light of the prevailing scientific understanding and orientations during the period of conquest. There is no evidence to suggest that Ottoman madrasahs engaged with the hadith methodology or had any familiarity with the ḥadīth sciences during the 14th to 16th centuries (Ayaz 2016).

The existence of a copy of Shirwānī's work in Istanbul is of significant importance for the transmission of knowledge. Nevertheless, the extant evidence indicates that this work had no discernible impact on the study of ḥadīth methodology during the Ottoman period. It is possible to posit that the copy that reached the palace remained there for a period before being transferred to the libraries. Alternatively, it could be argued that the understanding of the period's ḥadīth science, and in particular the understanding of the writing-teaching follow-up, rendered such a procedural work unnecessary. Furthermore, in the 16th century and subsequent periods, works centred on Ibn al-Salah, particularly within the framework of ḥadīth methodology, are of note. However, the summary (ikhtiṣār) or rearrangement (tehzīb) of his work around Damascus and Cairo are of particular interest. Although Ottoman scholars benefited from al-Ṭībī's commentary on *al-Mishkāt* and his gloss on *al-Kashshāf*, they did not make much use of his *al-Khulāṣah*. Here, the fact that al-Ṭībī's work was put at the beginning of his commentary on *al-Mishkāt* and al-Jurjānī's revision of this work under the name of *Mukhtaṣar* also had an effect. In addition, we can also mention the effect of al-Ṭībī's living in Tabriz, which can be considered as a periphery, instead of Damascus–Cairo regions, which are considered as centres in terms of ḥadīth science (Demirci 2017).

It is evident that the Herat region exerted a considerable influence on the Ottoman humanities, particularly in the fields of mathematics, astronomy and medicine. However, the situation with regard to the science of ḥadīth is worthy of further discussion. It would be erroneous to assume that the corpus of ḥadīth produced in the Ottoman Empire was entirely derived from the Damascus–Qahira region. Indeed, the commentaries on al-Baghawī's *al-Masābīh*, which was extensively commented on by scholars of the Khorasan region during the 7th and 8th centuries, were predominantly composed in Anatolia from the 9th century onwards (Akbaş 2022b). Consequently, it can be posited that an interest in the methodology of ḥadīth within the Ottoman Empire emerged at a later period, with a particular focus on works originating from Damascus and Cairo.

In examining the impact of the copy that reached Istanbul on the Ottoman Empire, it is notable that there is currently a paucity of information available regarding the activities of Shirwānī and his work. The majority of the sources contain information pertaining to the ulema belonging to the upper echelons of society. While it cannot be definitively stated that Shirwānī was not included in this class at the time, the lack of a biography of him in the sources and the absence of records of his work can be considered evidence that he was not sufficiently appreciated. To this end, it is essential to identify other copies of the work and to evaluate the data on the relationship between al-Ṭībī, al-Qāyinī and Shirwānī in these copies, should any exist. Furthermore, it is essential to locate documentation pertaining to the fate of the work that Shirwānī dedicated to the Sultan and to ascertain whether it was received favourably by the ulema and the palace community. It seems plausible to suggest that the primary reason for these uncertainties is the possibility that the author did not remain in Istanbul but instead migrated elsewhere and did not assume any position. For the time being, our analysis will focus on the copy and the characteristics of the work. As new findings about the book and the author emerge, we will be able to reach a final conclusion about these possibilities.

8. Conclusions

The transfer of knowledge and ulema to the Ottoman Empire was achieved through a combination of migration from disparate regions and the existing accumulation in the lands under its sovereignty. Over time, this transfer of knowledge placed Istanbul in a central position, where ulema were patronised, science was valued, and books were transferred to libraries and madrasas. Consequently, Istanbul, with its structured madrasah system, offered a platform for the cultivation of the ulema class that the Ottoman Empire required, as well as the nurturing of qualified individuals who would contribute to the bureaucracy.

During the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, a considerable number of scholars, possessing a high level of expertise in a range of scientific disciplines, relocated to Istanbul from the Herat–Shirwān region. In addition to their expertise in religious sciences, these individuals were also esteemed for their knowledge of human sciences, particularly in the domains of mathematics, astronomy and medicine. One of the individuals who migrated was Ibrāhīm b. ʻAli al-Shirwānī. His work, *Qawāʻid al-usūl fī ʻilm ḥādīth al-Rasūl*, which he dedicated to Sultan Fatih in Istanbul, where he arrived after the conquest, represents the inaugural ḥadīth methodology work in the Ottoman lands, according to our analysis. It would appear that Shirwānī's book, which deals with basic issues in a concise manner and does not include discussions, did not attract sufficient interest within the Ottoman scholarly circle, according to the information available. The principal reason for this may be that there was no existing scholarly requirement for a book of this nature at that time.

Shirwānī's book represents a summary of al-Qāyinī's work, with the exception of the introduction and conclusion. The former lived in the same period as the latter. In the absence of clarity regarding the scholarly relationship between Shirwānī and al-Qāyinī, it would be premature to conclude that this book constitutes plagiarism. The original of Shirwānī's book, al-Qāyinī's work, is also largely based on al-Ṭībī's *al-Khulāṣah*, which presents the methodology of ḥadīth. However, in the introduction to his work, al-Qāyinī explicitly references al-Ṭībī and acknowledges the influence of his methodology. In contrast, Shirwānī does not cite al-Qāyinī by name in this enumeration, although he asserts that his own work will draw upon a range of sources.

It is our hope that the findings presented in this analysis, based on the single extant manuscript, will be enhanced with the discovery of additional manuscripts. Nevertheless, this work, which serves as a significant case study in the transfer of knowledge to the early Ottoman period, is valuable in demonstrating the transfer of a book from the Herat and Shirwān region, irrespective of whether it was plagiarised or not. Additionally, it represents a pioneering contribution to the field of ḥadīth methodology.

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Beyond Interest: The Legal Development of *Bayʿ al-Wafāʾ* in Hanafi Legal Thought

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Abstract

Credit relations in Muslim societies have attracted significant scholarly attention across disciplines due to the prohibition of interest. In the Ottoman Empire, renowned for its vast resources, the presence of sophisticated credit mechanisms alongside its strong Muslim identity has often been perceived as paradoxical. While this apparent contradiction has been extensively studied, the perception and legitimacy of these credit mechanisms within Islamic law, particularly in English-language scholarship, remains underexamined. This study addresses this gap by analyzing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, a significant financing mechanism in which asset ownership is temporarily transferred to a lender in exchange for a loan, with the understanding that the asset will be returned upon full repayment. This transaction, employed for centuries across diverse regions as an interest-avoiding solution, has been extensively debated within Hanafi jurisprudence. This research chronologically examines *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*'s integration into Hanafi legal thought from its emergence through the 18th-century Ottoman Empire, drawing on primary sources across various genres of Hanafi legal literature. The findings reveal that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* could not be categorized within existing Islamic contract frameworks. Instead, it is recognized as a contract with unique provisions deriving legitimacy from custom and necessity. This study illuminates both how this transaction achieved legal and legitimate status within Hanafi jurisprudence and, more broadly, demonstrates the dynamic evolution of Islamic law within the Hanafi school from the 10th to 18th centuries. Through this analysis, this study demonstrates how the paradoxical challenge of providing interest-free financing was resolved within the framework of Islamic legal principles.

Keywords: *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*; interest-free financing; credit transaction; Islamic legal history; Hanafi–Ottoman jurisprudence

1. Introduction

The dramatic transformation in global perspectives on religion has profoundly influenced connections to intellectual traditions, particularly within Islamic jurisprudence. The modern conception of Islamic law emerged largely as an attempt to recover lost traditions. According to this view, which draws heavily from orientalist scholarship, Islamic legal norms are perceived to be exclusively produced through the methodological framework of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This perspective has unfortunately led to a misconception that generating new Islamic legal norms in contemporary contexts through *furūʿ al-fiqh* is impossible. However, numerous scholarly studies examining the adaptability of Islamic law through fatwas have challenged this assumption by demonstrating its fundamental inaccuracy.[1] These investigations have fostered an alternative understanding that acknowledges the complementary roles of both *uṣūl* and *furūʿ* in Islamic legal development. This more accurate

view recognizes that a fatwa issued for a specific case, after being cited and endorsed by subsequent jurists and gaining scholarly consensus, gradually becomes incorporated into *furūʿ al-fiqh*, thus becoming an integral component of Hanafi doctrine.[2] Importantly, this process does not contradict *uṣūl al-fiqh* principles but rather operates within their broader framework. Even when explicit methodological explanations are not provided in discussions of derivative legal issues, references to concepts indicate that compatibility with fundamental legal principles is continuously maintained in the background. By applying this integrated understanding of legal development, this study will examine the operation of Islamic law through the compelling framework of credit relations, offering a practical illustration of legal adaptability within economic contexts.

Credit relations[3] in Muslim societies have long been a subject of scholarly interest, particularly due to the prohibition of interest (*ribā*), especially for Ottoman society.[4] Ottoman archival sources undeniably demonstrate the existence of vast and active credit networks among Muslims.[5] Simultaneously, the records on money foundations strongly support this observation. The authors of the initial studies on this subject could not conceal their astonishment that, despite the prohibition of interest, these foundations effectively met the financing needs of Muslim society (Barkan 1966; Mandaville 1979). Subsequently, numerous studies have examined the legitimacy and functioning of these institutions across different time periods and geographical regions (Çizakça 1995; Özcan 2003; Kaya 2003; Bulut 2019). This study approaches Muslim credit relations from a legal perspective, focusing specifically on one of the transactions utilized as a method of establishing credit relations: *Bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. This contract, which emerged as a legal solution or stratagem (*ḥīla*) against interest-based transactions, became so widely accepted and legitimized that, by the 19th century, it secured its place in the *Mecelle*, the product of the Ottoman Empire's codification processes. Furthermore, as a contract that was not originally included in the early works of the Hanafi school but was later incorporated into Hanafi jurisprudence, it provides an appropriate foundation for observing the process by which new transaction forms were integrated into Islamic law. Additionally, since it is not a recently developed contract, numerous scholars throughout history have expressed opinions on this matter, readily providing the necessary material for an in-depth study of the subject. For these reasons, I have selected *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as the subject of this study.

Bayʿ al-wafāʾ is a type of transaction designed to meet financial needs. Under this operation, ownership of an asset is temporarily transferred to a lender in exchange for a loan, accepting that the asset will be returned to its original owner upon full repayment of the borrowed amount. The transaction proceeds as follows: Individual A, who requires financing and owns a property, approaches Individual B, who is capable of providing the needed funds. Individual B purchases A's property, paying the amount upfront, with both parties agreeing that A may repurchase it by reimbursing the same amount at a predetermined maturity date. Upon maturity, if A repays the original sum to B, B is obligated to return the property to A. Through this mechanism, A secures immediate liquidity without permanent loss of the asset, as ownership is restored upon repayment. Meanwhile, B retains possession of and derives benefit from the property during the interim period until A exercises the redemption right. This arrangement effectively functions as a secured financing instrument, allowing A to address temporary liquidity needs while preserving long-term ownership rights and enabling B to obtain usufructuary rights as a form of compensation for the capital provided.

This transaction was not regarded as an outright sale (*bayʿ*) because, in a conventional sale, ownership of the asset transfers irrevocably to the buyer, who thereby gains full ownership rights over it. In *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, however, the buyer (financier) is contractually bound to return the property to the original owner upon repayment of the principal sum.

The term *wafāʾ* (fulfillment) itself denotes the seller's expected fidelity to this repayment obligation, while the buyer's reciprocal pledge to reconvey the asset effectively transforms the transaction into a credit instrument. For this arrangement to remain valid, the buyer must refrain from irrevocably alienating the property—whether through sale, donation, or other means—to any third party. Any such alienation would invalidate the contract, reflecting the constrained nature of the buyer's ownership rights and discretionary powers over the asset. Crucially, *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* also diverges from a pledge (*rahn*), as Islamic pledge law prohibits the pledgee from deriving usufruct (*intifāʿ*) from the collateralized asset, unless the owner permits use. By contrast, the economic rationale of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* hinges on the financier's temporary usufructuary rights (e.g., rental income or occupancy) during the contract period. Thus, the transaction serves a dual purpose: it provides liquidity to the seller while permitting the buyer to benefit from the asset's utility until redemption.

This transaction, which has been employed for centuries under various appellations across a wide geographical region, has been the focus of numerous studies concerning its origins and its rulings within Hanafi *fiqh*. Recent studies suggest that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* first appeared in Hanafi legal texts during the 4th/10th century.[6] Within the Hanafi madhhab, divergences concerning the juridical classification of the contract have persisted since its initial appearance in legal literature and have endured for centuries.[7] Notwithstanding its contentious status, *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* was not only utilized as a financing instrument within Ottoman society but also served as the foundation from which other contractual forms—such as *bayʿ al-istighlāl*, *ferāğ bi-l-wafāʾ* and *ferāğ bi'l-istiğlāl* —were derived. In the nineteenth century, it was codified as a distinct contractual category within the *Mecelle*. In the present era, it continues to draw scholarly interest, particularly in the field of Islamic banking.[8] While this research is firmly situated within the discipline of legal history and does not claim to make direct contributions to the field of Islamic finance, it nonetheless offers valuable insights for contemporary banking researchers. Scholars developing wafā-like financial products or determining their juridical status may benefit significantly from examining this millennium-old jurisprudential experience presented in a systematic manner. The comprehensive analysis of how Hanafi jurists addressed and classified this transaction over centuries provides a rich intellectual foundation that can inspire modern approaches to adapting contemporary financial instruments to conform with Islamic legal principles. This historical perspective offers banking practitioners access to a sophisticated legal tradition that confronted similar challenges of balancing commercial necessity with religious compliance, potentially informing innovative solutions to comparable tensions in contemporary Islamic finance.

While previous studies have addressed certain aspects of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding its development within the Hanafi school of thought, its treatment in Ottoman legal commentaries and annotations, and its presence in the fatwas issued by *Shaykh al-Islām*, who is the head of the Ottoman scholar group. This study addresses this gap through a systematic examination of primary sources. Methodologically, it follows a chronological approach, beginning with the initial appearances of this contract in legal texts. The primary sources examined include the *wāqiʿāt* compilations from the Transoxiana region, followed by *furūʿ al-fiqh* texts, commentaries on texts compiled in the Mamlūk region, and finally, the commentaries and annotations produced by Ottoman scholars, along with fatwa collections containing the legal opinions of *Shaykh al-Islāms.* Among the commentaries and annotations, this study focuses on four seminal works that have been extensively studied within the Hanafi school: *al-Hidāya sharḥ Bidāyat al-Mubtadī*, *Wiqāyat al-Riwāya fī Masāʾil al-Hidāya*, *Durar al-Ḥukkām Sharḥ Ghurar al-Aḥkām*, and *Multaqā al-Abḥur.* These texts were not merely academic references but formed the core of the educational curriculum for judges (*qādīs*) and jurisconsults (*muftīs*) in Ottoman

madrasas. Their significance extended beyond educational purposes, as particularly, *Durar al-Ḥukkām Sharḥ Ghurar al-Aḥkām* and *Multaqā al-Abḥur* achieved a quasi-canonical status within the Ottoman legal system.[9]

For fatwa collections, this study examines compilations from several prominent 16th-century *Shaykh al-Islāms*, including works by İbnü'l-Edhemî el-Mağnisavi (d. after 948/1541), Saruhani Lâlî Efendi (d. 971/1563), Bozanzâde Mahmud, Veli b. Yegan (d. 998/1590), and Boyabâdî Sağır Mehmed Efendi (d. 1066/1656). The incorporation of these sources addresses a significant gap in existing scholarship, as all 16th-century fatwa collections listed here—with the exception of Veli b. Yegan's work—remain in manuscript form and have not been comprehensively utilized in previous research on the *wafāʾ* contract. By integrating these unpublished collections into the present investigation, this study substantially expands the corpus of 16th-century Ottoman Hanafi sources specifically pertaining to the *wafāʾ* institution. For the 17th century, the analysis incorporates *Fetāvā-yı Yahyā Efendi*, *Fatāvā-yı Abdurrahīm, Fatāvā-yı Alî Efendi*, *and Fatāvā-yı Feyżiyye.* Among these sources, *Fatāvā-yı Alî Efendi* and *Fatāvā-yı Feyżiyye* have been published, while the remaining two collections exist only in manuscript form. The systematic inclusion of these fatwa compilations as integral components of a comprehensive analysis of the *wafāʾ* contract provides invaluable data for both Ottoman legal studies specifically and Hanafi jurisprudence more broadly. These sources offer direct insight into the practical application and dynamic interpretation of legal principles by Ottoman–Hanafi scholars, presenting evidence that is more immediate and practice-oriented than the theoretical discussions typically found in traditional *furūʿ* literature.

This study employs a distinctive methodological framework to systematically analyze the evolution of Islamic jurisprudence through the lens of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. By focusing on this particular contract, which emerged as a later addition to *fiqh* literature, this research provides a unique opportunity to observe the adaptive mechanisms of Islamic law when confronting novel issues. The Hanafi school serves as the primary analytical framework, with Hanafi legal sources constituting the core primary materials. To ensure chronological continuity across centuries of juristic development, this study examines the major centers where Hanafi legal thought flourished sequentially: Baghdad, Transoxiana (*Māwarāʾ al-Nahr*), Mamluk territories, and the Ottoman Empire. This geographical progression is complemented by an examination of the predominant legal genres specific to each region: *wāqiʿāt* literature in Transoxiana, commentaries (*shurūḥ*) in Mamluk territories, and both *Shaykh al-Islāms* fatwas and commentaries in the Ottoman context. This dual approach—chronological continuity coupled with genre diversity—maximizes source variety while enabling comprehensive comparative analysis across different juridical traditions within the Hanafi school. While this study's descriptive chronological investigation of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in these sources might suggest a purely descriptive approach, the comparative analysis between early and later juridical treatments reveals much more: it illuminates both the specific adaptation of the *wafāʾ* contract into Islamic law and the broader operational mechanisms of Hanafi jurisprudence when confronting novel legal questions. The central thesis argues that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*'s trajectory—from marginality to mainstream acceptance—exemplifies Islamic law's capacity for dynamic evolution, challenging static perceptions of juristic tradition. This chronological and comparative examination contextualizes legal transformations within their respective historical frameworks, making this study not merely a literature review on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* but an analytical and comparative investigation that connects these sources to their historical contexts while advancing a central argument about Islamic legal adaptability.

2. The Incorporation of *Bayʿ al-Wafāʾ* into Hanafi Jurisprudence Within the Transoxiana Fatwas and Authoritative Texts

Bayʿ al-wafāʾ is a transactional form that subsequently emerged as a legal solution to *ribā* (usury). Hence, it is absent from the foundational and primary texts of the Hanafi madhhab and does not appear in the compilations of *mukhtaṣar* (abridged) works that build upon these primary texts. Accordingly, no direct mention of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* is found in the doctrinal compilations representing the established views of the early school or in the legal writings rooted in the customary practices and juristic conventions of Baghdad and the Iraqi region. However, with the ascendancy of the Hanafi school in Transoxiana (*Māwarāʾ al-Nahr*), the earliest Hanafi legal opinions on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* begin to appear. Hanafi jurists in this region, while granting the highest authority to the foundational doctrines under the categories of *ẓāhir al-riwāyah* and *nawādir*, developed a new literary genre, i.e., *wāqiʿāt,* to facilitate the adaptation of Islamic law to evolving circumstances. This genre enables the legal reasoning (*ijtihad*) of the jurists who came after the founding figures to be integrated into the Hanafi tradition. Authority within the school of thought is established through the documentation of *ijtihad* in the form of fatwas, which gain legitimacy over time by being referenced and reaffirmed in subsequent fatwa compilations (Bedir 2014). This methodological innovation allowed Hanafi jurisprudence to adapt to new circumstances while maintaining doctrinal continuity, with *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* representing a significant case of such adaptation in Islamic law.

The historical development of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in Hanafī jurisprudence emerges through a textual genealogy beginning with 4th/10th-century references. Early attestations by al-Maydānī (d. 339/951) and al-Kamārī (d. 381/991) initially framed the transaction as *bayʿ al-muʿāmala* (Yılmaz 2023). The equivalence of this contract with *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* is clarified through another reference to al-Kamārī made by Ibn Māzah (d. 536/1141) in his *al-Wāqiʿāt* (Ṣadr al-Shahīd n.d.). The most authoritative early treatment appears in al-Nasafī's (d. 537/1142) Fatāwā, which documents the formative 5th/11th-century debate between Transoxianan jurists regarding its essential nature. Certain jurists, including ʿAtāʾ b. Hamza al-Sughdi (d. 461/1068), Sayyid Abu Shujāʿ, and Qādī Hasan Māturīdī (d. 511/1117), categorized this arrangement as a pledge (rahn). Conversely, Qādī Isbījābī (d. 480/1087) and ʿAlī b. Abī Sahl al-Zāminī (d. 494/1101) issued juridical opinions (fatwa) establishing the *wafāʾ* contract as a legitimate form of sale (Nasafī n.d.). This foundational divergence established the conceptual parameters for subsequent Hanafī discourse on the contract and will become increasingly apparent in works belonging to the *wāqiʿāt* genre.

Another perspective on the legal nature of the contract appears in *al-Hāwī* by al- Ḥaṣīrī (d. 500/1107). The significance of this text lies in the fact that its view would later be adopted by the Hanafi school, albeit in a slightly more developed form, as the foundational concept for the inkind contract:

> Some scholars of our time have stated the following: "If no stipulation is included in the contract, we regard it as a valid sale from the perspective of the buyer, allowing them to utilize the property as they would with any other asset. However, [if no condition is specified in the contract] we consider it a pledge on the part of the seller. In such cases, if the buyer wishes to sell the property, the qadi cannot authorize it, and whenever the seller repays the price, the buyer is obligated to accept it and return the property. This is because the sale represents a combination of two legal constructs—sale and pledge—similar to a grant on the condition of consideration or a grant in the illness of death. There are numerous contracts that embody dual rulings. We have accepted this practice due to its necessity for people, as it provides a means to avoid *ribā* (usury), particularly in cases involving vineyards. Renting vineyards is not an allowed practice. In

> Bukhara, it became customary for people to engage in long-term leases (*ijarah al-tawilah*), which could only be facilitated through the sale of the trees. This transaction is referred to as *bayʿ al-wafā*, which is why it was introduced. When a matter causes hardship for the people, its ruling is expanded. (Ḥaṣīrī n.d.)

During the same era, the juristic debate over the sentence of the *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contract not only persisted but also became increasingly complex. In addition to the prevailing legal opinions that classified *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* either as a pledge (*rahn*) or as a valid sale (*ṣaḥīḥ bayʿ*), further interpretations emerged, including the view that it could constitute a *fāsid* contract or, under specific conditions, even a null sale (*bayʿ bātil*). Simultaneously, the range of legal issues associated with this contract expanded significantly, growing more intricate and multidimensional. Jurists debated how to resolve disputes when one party asserted that the transaction constituted a final sale (*bayʿ bāt*), while the other maintained that it was a *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*.[10] Questions arose regarding whether the seller was entitled to claim compensation for the produce of a vineyard subject to *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* if the buyer consumed it before the property was reclaimed, or whether the original seller could recover the property from a third-party buyer if the original customer sold it through an absolute sale and subsequently disappeared. Further fatwas involved determining whether property sold under *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* was subject to inheritance laws before its return to the original owner, whether expenses incurred on the goods during the contract's term were eligible for reimbursement, and what legal consequences followed if the goods were damaged or destroyed while in the buyer's possession (Usrūshanī n.d.).

The legal discussion surrounding *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* is most vividly illustrated in the *Fuṣūl*, a genre of works that compile jurisprudential issues derived from the *wāqiʿāt* tradition. These 13th-century texts stand out for their comprehensive treatment of the subject: one authored by Abū al-Fath Majd al-Dīn Muhammad b. Mahmūd al-Mahmūd al-Usrūshanī (d. after 637/1240) and the other by Zayn al-Dīn al-Mergīnānī (d. around 550/1155), the grandson of the renowned author of *al-Hidāya*. These works not only provide the most extensive narration of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* but also became the most frequently cited references on the subject in subsequent *fiqh* literature.

While the issue of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* occupied a significant place in *wāqiʿāt* literature, it also began to appear in classical *fiqh* texts from the 12th century onward, particularly in works that sought to compile foundational views and jurisprudential debates within the Hanafī madhhab. One of the earliest examples of this trend is *al-Muhīt al-Burhānī* by al-Burhān al-Marghīnānī (d. 589/1193), who engages with the subject by incorporating quotations from *wāqiʿāt* works (Burhān al-Sharīʿa 2004). Another key text is *Badāʾiʿ al-Sanāʾiʿ* by al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191), who passed away just before the turn of the 13th century. In his chapter on *zakāt*, al-Kāsānī addresses the contract in question, stating that, in the case of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, a customary practice among the people of Samarkand, the issue arises as to which party is responsible for paying zakāt (Kāsānī 2003).

Following al-Kāsānī, al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197) also discusses the issue in his renowned work *al-Hidāya*, a commentary on *Bidāyat al-Mubtadī*. The inclusion of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in *al-Hidāya*, an influential text authored by al-Marghīnānī—who is often regarded as a central figure in the lineage of Hanafī jurisprudence—significantly elevated the prominence of the issue within *furūʿ al-fiqh* literature. In his discussion, al-Marghīnānī examines *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* within the context of *ikrāh* (coercion) and provides a concise yet comprehensive summary of the differing legal opinions regarding its classification. Specifically, he outlines four distinct positions on the legal nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*: as a *fāsid* (defective) sale, a *rahn* (pledge), a *bātil* (void) sale, or a *jāʾiz* (permissible) sale. In subsequent *fiqh* literature, discussions and interpretations of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* would be fundamentally shaped by these four juristic perspectives (al-Marghīnānī 2011).

3. The Trajectory of the Dispute in Mamlūk Commentaries

The incorporation of the *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contract into Ḥanafī *fiqh* literature, despite its absence from the foundational texts of the madhhab and the uncertainty surrounding its precise origins, can be broadly outlined as discussed above. In the subsequent period, the Mongol invasions in the Transoxiana region led to the displacement of its legal heritage to safer areas further west because the scholars preferred to take refuge in the lands under the protection of a politically and militarily powerful figure. Manuscripts that have survived from this period indicate that, during the 13th and 14th centuries, the Ḥanafī school of law experienced significant growth in the Mamlūk territories, fostering a strong tradition of commentary writing among scholars of this school (Bedir 2014). Central to this tradition was the text *al-Hidāya*, which served as a focal point for scholarly engagement. Hanafī jurists in the Mamlūk region, in their commentaries on *al-Hidāya*, addressed the contract of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, offering detailed explanations and analyses. Notably, even in commentaries on other *fiqh* texts that did not originally include discussions of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, some authors incorporated explanations of this contract as if they were commenting on *al-Hidāya* itself (al-Zaylaʿī 1315 AH; al-Musannifak n.d.; Ahīzāde n.d.). It is possible to trace the development of Hanafī legal thought on the contract of *bayʿ al-wafā* from the second half of the 13th century to the 15th century by examining these works.

The first notable difference in the commentaries of this period is their inclusion of an explanatory definition of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, aligned with the purpose of their composition. The *wāqiʿāt*-type works primarily focused on the specific wording used in the execution of the contract, such as the inclusion or exclusion of certain conditions, rather than providing a holistic definition. This was because their primary aim was to elucidate the legal nature of the transaction rather than to offer a comprehensive definition. In contrast, the commentaries compiled in the Mamlūk region in the 13th–15th centuries begin by explaining how *bayʿ al-wafā* is performed. These works typically identify two primary contractual variants: the debt-based formulation ("I am selling you this item in exchange for the debt I owe you, and whenever I repay the debt, it shall revert to me."), which predominated in Transoxianan sources (Ṣighnākī n.d.; Tāj al-Sharīʿa n.d.; Itqānī n.d.), and the price-based formulation ("I am selling you this item for a thousand, and if I repay you, you will return it to me.") that gained currency in later Mamlūk jurisprudence; while some authors include both definitions, most opt to provide only one (Kākī n.d.; Kurlānī n.d.; al-Bābartī 2007; al-ʿAynī and al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad 2000).

After defining *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, the authors elaborate on the four opinions presented in *al-Hidāya*, drawing upon quotations from works of the *wāqiʿāt* genre. The most frequently cited sources include Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's and Qāḍīkhān's *Fatāwā*, as well as Ushrushanī's *al-Fuṣūl.* Some authors also specify the names of the scholars associated with each opinion (Itqānī n.d.; al-Zaylaʿī 1315 AH). The careful attribution of opinions to specific scholars not only preserved the Hanafī tradition's characteristic pluralism but also demonstrated the Mamlūk jurists' self-conscious role as curators and interpreters of an established legal corpus.

There is still uncertainty regarding the ruling on the contract. Although a few works emphasize a single view, it will take more time for a general consensus to form around a particular perspective. The initial indications of the tendency for general impressions to concentrate on a particular view can be observed in the explanations of Marghīnānī's statement regarding *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. He cites it as the opinion of the scholars of Samarkand—one of the four opinions presented in his text. He describes it as "a valid sale that entails certain legal provisions, as is customary, due to necessity" (al-Marghīnānī 2011). Hanafi authors first seek to clarify these "certain legal provisions" specific to *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. They explain that, according to these, the buyer can benefit from the property acquired through

bayʿ al-wafāʾ, excluding the sale or donation of the property to another person (Tāj al-Sharīʿa n.d.; Itqānī n.d.; Kākī n.d.). These explanations are followed by an emphasis on the legal value of tradition. It is argued that a contract can be deemed permissible not only due to necessity but also because of "customary practices" in the al-Zaylaʿī's work. Also, it is referenced that the principle that rules can sometimes be adapted or set aside based on custom, citing the contract of *istisnāʿ* as an example (al-Zaylaʿī 1315 AH). This discussion then elaborates on what constitutes "*muʿtād*" (customary practice). It is noted that when people engaged in *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, they did not consider these transactions as irreversible and irrevocable in the same way as an outright sale. This, in turn, led the scholars of Samarkand to permit the seller to return the money to the buyer. Likewise, they maintained that the buyer was obligated to return the goods to the seller and to uphold the terms of the agreement (Itqānī n.d.; al-Bābartī 2007). These explanations were subsequently followed by the argument that the choice of wording in *al-Hidāya* indicates that its author, al-Marghīnānī, adhered to this view.

The most influential statements regarding the juridical verdict on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* were made by al-Bazzāzī immediately following this process, which lasted until the early 15th century. In his well-known fatwā collection, *al-Fatāwā al-Bazzāziyya*, he presents the various opinions on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in nine articles within the section on *fāsid* (defective) sales. At the conclusion of this discussion, al-Bazzāzī articulates his own position, which he refers to as *qawl al-jāmiʿ* (the comprehensive opinion). He employs a vivid zoological analogy, likening *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* to a giraffe (al-Bazzāzī 1310 AH). The giraffe analogy serves as an elegant metaphor to explain the distinctive nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. Just as the giraffe exhibits characteristics shared with other animals—with its head resembling a camel's, its horns similar to those of cattle, and its patterned hide reminiscent of a tiger's—yet remains a distinct species in its own right, the *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contract shares features with other contractual forms while maintaining its unique identity (Kaan 2018). From its defective sale aspects, the parties retain the authority to dissolve the contract at their discretion. From its valid sale characteristics, the contract permits the legitimate utilization of the sold item's yields, with the benefits accruing to the purchaser while the item remains in their possession. From its pledge elements, the purchaser is prohibited from selling or pledging the item to another party, the debt is nullified if the item perishes, and any diminishment in the item's value proportionally reduces the outstanding debt (Yelek 2014).

In the 16th century, this opinion was cited by Ibn Nujaym (d. 970/1563), who explicitly asserted that one should not deviate from Bezzāzī's *qawl al-jāmiʿ* when issuing a fatwa (Ibn Nujaym 1893). In another work, Ibn Nujaym, similar to earlier commentaries, grounds his legal explanations for the validity of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in the principles of custom and necessity. He relies on the maxims that "custom can be used as evidence in legal rulings" and "need is considered a necessity"(Ibn Nujaym 1983). As a result, these works continue to reflect the diversity of opinions on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. Over time, however, the view of the Samarkand scholars, as expressed in *al-Hidāya*—that the contract is valid and permissible to apply in accordance with custom—gained prominence. It is emphasized that this contract was recognized as a new and unique form within Hanafi jurisprudence, a hybrid of existing contracts, even though it shared certain similarities with them. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this development was specific to the Mamlūk region, while a different trajectory emerged within the Ottoman Hanafi school of law. During the same period, Hanafī scholars in the Ottoman region do not consistently adhere to a single clear position on the ruling of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*.

4. Transferring the Controversy to a New School: *Bayʿ al-Wafāʾ* in Ottoman Commentaries and Annotations

The tradition of writing commentaries among Hanafi jurists, which flourished in the Mamlūk region primarily focusing on Merginani's *al-Hidāya*, continued to thrive among Islamic legal scholars in Ottoman territories. While *al-Hidāya* maintained its significance for Ottoman ulema, *Wiqāyat al-Riwāya* emerged as the central text for commentary production during the 15th century. Although *Wiqāya* was essentially a curated selection from *al-Hidāya*, it excluded discussions of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. Consequently, most commentaries on *Wiqāya* did not address this contractual form. Nevertheless, certain scholars incorporated explanations of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in their *Wiqāya* commentaries, discussing it within the same context established in *al-Hidāya*, despite its absence from the original text.

The 16th and 17th centuries witnessed a shift in the commentary tradition, which became dominated by two influential texts authored by Ottoman scholars. The first was *Durar al-Ḥukkām*, composed in the latter half of the 15th century by Molla Hüsrev (d. 885/1480), who uniquely authored both the original legal text, *Ghurar al-Aḥkām*, and its commentary. The second was *Multaqā al-Abḥur,* completed by Ibrâhîm b. Muhammad al-Halebî (d.956/1549) in 1517 (Has 2020). These works gained preeminence as primary reference sources in Ottoman madrasahs and in judicial (*qazā*) and legal advisory (*ifta*) functions, particularly from the mid-16th century onward.[11] Their significance prompted the production of numerous commentaries, annotations, and talikas on these texts. While *Durar al-Ḥukkām* incorporated discussions of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, the author of *Multaqā al-Abḥur* excluded this topic. Despite this omission, subsequent commentators frequently addressed the issue in their analyses of *Multaqā*. Through careful examination of these commentaries, particularly those that include discussions of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, scholars can effectively trace the development of Hanafi jurisprudential thought on this contractual form throughout the Ottoman period.

Ottoman scholars inherited but critically engaged with earlier debates, as seen in their preference for the hybrid (*qawl al-jāmiʿ*) model in practice, despite doctrinal diversity. The 15th-century commentaries on *Wiqāya* generally present these disputes and their underlying legal rationales without explicitly favoring particular positions. However, by the late 15th and early 16th centuries, new perspectives and criticisms concerning *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* began to emerge in scholarly commentaries. One development addressed the contract's relationship to the right of option (*mukhayyar*). Scholars noted that conceptualizing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as a sale with the right of option was inadequate, as this would make the ruling of the contract contingent upon fulfillment of a condition. This interpretation would render the contract null and void prior to condition fulfillment, creating practical and theoretical difficulties (Ahīzāde n.d., c.n 99). Another area of scholarly debate during this period concerned the concept of jest (hezl) and its application to *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. This discussion stemmed from the proposition that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* might be rendered void, similar to transactions conducted in jest (*hāzil*). Through careful deliberation, scholars reached a consensus that the jester (*hāzil*) consents to the direct cause of the transaction but not to its legal consequences (Karamānī n.d., c.n 516). Based on this distinction, they concluded that sales conducted by a jester remained legally valid despite this partial absence of intent.[12]

The pattern of not choosing one opinion from four regarding the legal status of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, characteristic of 15th-century commentaries, persisted into the 16th century. Commentators and glossators during this period primarily focused on presenting the diverse juristic opinions on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* and referencing relevant precedents in earlier legal literature, without explicitly endorsing particular positions (Karā Çelebi n.d., c.n 789; Vānkulu n.d., c.n 65-002.). A shift occurred in the 17th century, when authors began incorporating explanations that either directly stated or implicitly suggested their own perspectives on the

contract's legal status. The predominant view that emerged, albeit with some exceptions[13], characterized *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as a valid (*ṣaḥīḥ*) sale with distinctive provisions, provided it was executed without explicit conditional clauses. In support of this view, scholars employed multiple strategies to reinforce their preferred interpretations. They cited authoritative statements in established legal texts, such as "the fatwa follows this opinion" (Shaykhīzāde 1998; Ḥādimī n.d.) and "one should not deviate from this view when issuing a fatwa" (Shurunbulālī n.d.), thereby lending weight to their position. Another approach involved asserting interpretive continuity by claiming that the original authors whose texts they commented upon shared their perspective on the matter (Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Halīm n.d.). Mostly, these scholars emphasized the critical importance of proper contractual structure—specifically advocating that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* arrangements should be executed without explicit mention of the repurchasing condition (*wafāʾ*) within the contractual language itself. This technical distinction allowed the transaction to maintain formal validity while still accommodating its practical economic function.

Beyond commentaries, the 17th century witnessed the emergence of specialized treatises as vehicles for expressing definitive positions on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. The comprehensive treatise authored by Kazerūnī, a Meccan scholar, is notable. In this detailed work, which systematically examined disputes and issues concerning *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* throughout the Hanafi legal corpus, Kazerūnī concluded that the prevailing view in both practice and formal legal opinions (fatwa) was that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* constituted "a valid sale that expresses certain provisions" (Yiğit 2020). This trajectory from scholarly ambivalence to emerging consensus reflects the dynamic nature of Islamic jurisprudence and its capacity for adaptive reasoning within established legal frameworks.

Ottoman legal scholars maintained a clear commitment to earlier Hanafi jurisprudential literature, as evidenced by their extensive references in commentaries and annotations by the 18th century. In discussions of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, Ottoman scholars demonstrated a notable preference for citing commentary authors such as al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384), Itqānī (d. 758/1357), and Ṣighnākī (d. 714/1314). Within the *wāqiʿāt* genre, Qâdîhan's (d. 592/1196) *Fatāwā* received the most frequent citations, followed by Necmeddîn al-Nasafī's *Fatāwā*, one of the earliest authoritative sources on the subject. The *Fuṣûls* and Bezzazī's *Fatāwā* also maintained significant prominence in these scholarly discussions.

A particularly noteworthy development was the transmission method of *wāqiʿāt* materials. Rather than directly citing primary *wāqiʿāt* texts, Ottoman scholars increasingly accessed these materials through authoritative commentaries that had incorporated them.[14] This pattern represents an important evolution in citation practices and textual authority. The Ottoman commentary tradition gradually distinguished itself from the Mamlūk approach to legal exegesis. While Mamlūk commentaries typically attempted to compile comprehensive collections of sectarian views, essentially creating extensive repositories of legal opinions, Ottoman commentaries adopted a more focused methodology. This distinctive approach resulted in commentaries of reduced volume that prioritized addressing specific legal questions rather than an exhaustive compilation. This transformation did not occur suddenly but evolved progressively over time. The development of the Ottoman school of jurisprudence and the distinctive character of its commentaries advanced in parallel, reflecting a broader evolution in legal methodology and scholarly priorities. This shift demonstrates how Ottoman legal scholarship maintained continuity with the earlier Hanafi tradition while developing its own distinctive approaches to legal interpretation and exposition.

5. *Bayʿ al-Wafāʾ* in the Ottoman Experience: Perspectives from the *Shaykh al-Islām* Fatwa Collections

The Ottoman scholar's legal discourse on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* extends beyond jurisprudential commentaries to include a rich alternative source: The fatwa collections of the chief muftis (*Shaykh al-Islām*). These collections represent an Ottoman adaptation of the *wāqiʿāt* genre first developed by the Transoxiana school of law and provide valuable insights into both the practical implementation and theoretical understanding of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* in Ottoman society. These compilations originated from the systematic collection of rough drafts of fatwas issued by Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islām*, carefully preserved by fatwa clerks or the head of the fatwa office and subsequently organized into comprehensive volumes (Özen 2005). This meticulous documentation process created an invaluable repository that illuminates how *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* functioned in daily practice and how contemporary jurists approached this contractual arrangement. While jurisprudential commentaries extensively examine the theoretical classification of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, the fatwas in these collections take a more pragmatic approach, focusing primarily on operational aspects such as contractual validity, parties' rights, and procedures for debt settlement and termination. However, these fatwa collections do not entirely neglect theoretical concerns, occasionally addressing questions of legal classification that dominate the commentary literature—thus creating a bridge between abstract jurisprudential principles and their practical application in Ottoman society. This dual focus on both practical application and theoretical classification makes these fatwa collections particularly valuable for understanding the complex interplay between legal theory and practice in the Ottoman implementation of *bayʿ al-wafā*.

Prior to Ebussuud Efendi's (d. 982/1574) tenure as *Shaykh al-Islām*, official legal opinions (fatwas) lacked definitive statements regarding the contractual nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* While certain practical issues—such as the permissibility of leasing the property back to its original owner or the buyer's rights over its proceeds—allow us to infer the *ʿulamāʾ*'s stance on the contract's provisions, even these references yield contradictory implications. Ebussuud Efendi, unlike his predecessors, provided explicit pronouncements on the legal status of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*, though his opinions appear diverse across different contexts. This diversity in Ebussuud Efendi's positions reflects his deliberate categorization of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as a sui generis contractual arrangement. As evidenced by the fatwa below, his reasoning hinges on the contract's dual nature—bearing functional resemblances to existing legal constructs (such as sale and pledge) while ultimately constituting a distinct, fourth category of transaction. This nuanced interpretation is exemplified in his response to a direct inquiry regarding the contract's classification, where he was asked explicitly whether *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* should be deemed a pledge (*rahn*), a void (bāṭil) sale, a defective (*fāsid*) sale, or an independent category. The question posed—in the original Arabic fatwa—is as follows: "Is *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* a pledge (*rahn*), a void (*bāṭil*) sale, a defective (*fāsid*) sale, or does it represent a fourth category? What is its exact ruling?" In his response, Ebussuud affirmed that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* represented a distinct, fourth category of transaction. He explained that the contract resembled a conventional sale that permitted the buyer to lease the purchased goods back to the seller after taking possession. Simultaneously, it resembled a mortgage in that the seller retained the right to reclaim the property upon repayment of the original sum. Ebussuud concluded his analysis likewise in *Fatāwā Bezzazi*, comparing the hybrid nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* to that of a giraffe—an animal with characteristics of multiple species, defying simple classification (Veli b. Yegan n.d.; Akgündüz 2018).

Despite the aforementioned fatwa, Akifzāde (d. 1223/1808), an 18th century Hanafi jurist, cited 17th-century *Shaykh al-Islām* Ankaravī Mehmed Emin Efendi's (d. 1098/1687) statement that Ebussuud—along with Ibn Kemal (940/1534) and Zekeriyazāde (d. 1053/1644)—considered this contract a pledge (*rahn*) (Kaya 2007; Yelek 2014). This

expression appears substantiated by another of Ebussuud's fatwas that explicitly states, "*bayʿ al-wafāʾ* is a pledge(*rahn*)"(Veli b. Yegan n.d.; Akgündüz 2018). However, contextual analysis suggests this statement may have been specific to the particular legal question at hand rather than a comprehensive classification. Indeed, Ottoman scholars generally agreed that damage liability for property under *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* followed the same principles as those governing pledges, without necessarily equating the two contract types entirely. This contextual interpretation aligns with Kaya's observation regarding 18th-century fatwas, namely, that "the provision in the relevant fatwa is the rule of the contract to which it pertains" (Kaya 2007).

Further evidence suggests that Ebussuud distinguished between pledges, and *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* emerges from two additional fatwas. In one, he provided distinct rulings for individuals who understood the difference between pledges (*rahn*) and *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* versus those who did not (Bozanzāde n.d.). In another fatwa addressing contractual disputes, Ebussuud established different standards of evidence: when claims of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* conflicted with claims of *bayʿ al-bāt* (irrevocable sale), the evidence supporting *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* would be accepted; conversely, when claims of pledge conflicted with claims of *bayʿ al-bāt*, the evidence supporting *bayʿ al-bāt* would prevail (Boyabādī n.d.). This differentiated evidentiary standard clearly indicates that Ebussuud recognized these as distinct contractual categories with different legal implications.

Following Ebussuud, the previously mentioned fatwa referencing the giraffe conceptualization reappears in 17th-century legal discourse, notably in *Fetāvā-yı Abdurrahīm*, a Turkish fatwa collection attributed to *Shaykh al-Islām* Minkarizāde Yahya Efendi (d. 1088/1678).[15] By the 18th century, this perspective—known as *qawl al-jāmiʿ* (the comprehensive opinion)—had become established in Ottoman legal circles. While not consistently appearing in official fatwa collections of the *Shaykh al-Islām* during this period, it featured prominently in compilations that sought to harmonize authoritative legal opinions designated as *muftā-bih* (suitable for formal legal opinions) and *maʿmūl-bih* (implemented in practice) (Kaya 2011). Akifzāde's authoritative fatwa collection, *Mecelletü'l-Mehâkim*, confirms that Ottoman jurisprudence generally ruled on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contracts according to this hybrid classification (Kaya 2007). This indicates that the giraffe analogy had transcended its origins as a creative explanatory device to become the dominant interpretive framework for addressing the complex nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* throughout Ottoman legal history.

The jurisprudential treatment of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as *qawl al-jāmiʿ* persisted in Ottoman legal discourse from Ebussuud's era through the codification of the *Mecelle* in the late 19th century. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Ottoman scholars unanimously agreed upon this position, as evidence to the contrary persists throughout subsequent centuries. In the 17th century, Bālīzāde Mustafa Efendi (d. 1073/1662) asserted that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* was treated as a pledge both in practical application and in formal legal opinions (Bālizāde n.d.). This perspective continued into the 18th century, with *Shaykh al-Islām* Dürri Mehmed Efendi (ö. 1149/1736) reportedly classifying *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* as fundamentally a pledge arrangement. The influential 19th-century jurist Ibn Ābidīn similarly maintained that the ruling on *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* is equivalent to a pledge (*rahn*) (Yelek 2014). The ambiguity surrounding *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* persisted within the *Mecelle* itself—the Ottoman civil code that represented the following centuries of Hanafi legal development. While the *Mecelle* generally appeared to adopt the *qawl al-jāmiʿ* approach, certain provisions contradicted this framework. Most notably, an article stipulated that the buyer could not derive benefit from goods acquired through *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* without the seller's permission—a restriction characteristic of pledge relationships rather than the hybrid classification. This internal inconsistency did not escape the attention of contemporary legal scholars. Mehmed Said Bey addressed this tension directly in a treatise titled "*ahkām-ı bayʿ al-wafāʾ*" submitted to the *Meshihāt* Office. In this work, he

attempted to reconcile the seemingly contradictory articles within the *Mecelle* by developing a harmonizing interpretation (Küçüksucu 2020). These dissenting viewpoints suggest that, despite the prevalence of the *qawl al-jāmiʿ* classification in formal doctrine, alternative interpretations retained significant scholarly support throughout Ottoman legal history.

While Ottoman juridical discourse primarily addresses the legal classification of the *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contract as discussed above, another closely related issue concerns the specific manner in which this contract is established. A consistent emphasis throughout this discourse was the directive that conditions of repurchase should not be explicitly stated during the transaction process.[16] Ebussuud's fatwas identify two distinct procedural approaches to *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* implementation. According to the first method, the sale of goods subject to *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* was not finalized at the outset. Instead, the validity of the transaction remained contingent upon the repayment of the borrowed sum secured by the goods. If the debt was repaid within the stipulated timeframe, the sale contract was considered null and void, effectively never having occurred. Conversely, if the debt remained outstanding beyond the specified period, the sale transaction was deemed valid, with ownership of the goods transferring permanently to the creditor (Bozanzāde n.d.). This procedural framework appears consistently in the fatwas of prominent 16th-century *Shaykh al-Islāms*, including Ibn Kemal (Saruhanī n.d.), Saʿdī Çelebi (d. 945/1539) (Saruhanī n.d.), and Ebussuud (Bozanzāde n.d.). Supporting evidence of its practical implementation can be found in the sharia court records (*sijils*) of Üsküdar from the same period. By the 17th century, this process had achieved standardization, typically formulated as "if I am unable to pay by the due date, let the sale between us become a final sale" (Bilge 2020). The crystallization of this procedural language is evident in contemporary fatwa collections, demonstrating how the theoretical framework articulated by 16th-century jurists evolved into standardized legal practice (Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Halīm n.d.; Menteshzāde 1243 AH; Çatalcalı 2021).

The second procedural approach to establishing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contracts in Ottoman practice reversed the conditional relationship between debt repayment and contractual validity. Under this framework, the sale transaction was considered immediately valid upon establishment. The condition of debt repayment was instead tied to the termination of the contract, rather than its initial validation. This structure stipulated that, if the borrower repaid the debt within the specified timeframe, the contract would be terminated, and ownership of the goods would revert to the original seller. Conversely, if the debt remained unpaid by the deadline, the condition for termination would become invalid, and the sale would stand as permanent and irrevocable (Bozanzāde n.d.). While this alternative formulation appeared less frequently in formal fatwa literature, evidence of its implementation can be found in Ottoman court registers (Bilge 2020). Interestingly, regardless of which procedural framework was employed, fatwa literature consistently maintained that the borrower retained the right to reclaim the goods upon debt repayment—whether before or after the stipulated deadline (Bozanzāde n.d.; Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Halīm n.d.; Menteshzāde 1243 AH; Çatalcalı 2021). This right of redemption extended even to situations where the goods had been transferred to third parties.[17]

To address the practical challenges posed by this perpetual right of redemption, Ottoman legal practice may have introduced an additional mechanism: the integration of agency contracts into *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* arrangements. Court records indicate that *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contracts were frequently constructed in conjunction with a power of attorney provision. Under this arrangement, the borrower appointed either the creditor or a third party as an agent authorized to sell the collateralized property in the event of default. This procedural innovation effectively circumvented the potential for transaction cancellation, as any subsequent sale of the property would legally be considered executed by the original owner

through their designated agent, rather than by the creditor independently. While documentation of this agency practice exists in court records from the 15th and 16th centuries (Habib 2023), its implementation notably increased during the 17th century (Bilge 2020).

The fatwa collections of Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islām* addressed not only the classification and establishment procedures of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contracts but also delineated the specific rights and restrictions afforded to each contracting party. These jurisprudential determinations formed a comprehensive framework governing the practical implementation of these complex financial instruments. The fatwa literature granted substantial protections to the individual who borrowed funds by selling property under *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* arrangements. These protections included the following: First, the seller retained the right to reclaim the property upon debt repayment, regardless of whether this occurred before or after the stipulated maturity date. This perpetual redemption right represented a fundamental characteristic distinguishing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* from conventional sales. Second, if the buyer transferred the property to a third party through sale or donation, the original seller maintained the right to invalidate such transfers. This protection prevented circumvention of the conditional nature of the arrangement. Third, the redemption right was inheritable, allowing the seller's heirs to exercise the same recovery privileges in the event of the seller's death before debt repayment. Fourth, the seller could claim compensation for damage sustained by the property while in the buyer's possession, recognizing the seller's enduring interest in the asset's condition. The buyer in *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transactions likewise received specific legal protections: The buyer held the right to terminate the contract and demand repayment at any time, whether before or after the maturity date, providing reciprocal flexibility in the arrangement. Regarding liability for property damage or destruction, the jurisprudence established a nuanced approach. The buyer bore compensation responsibility limited to the portion equivalent to the loan amount. Any value exceeding this amount was classified as a trust, for which the buyer incurred no liability absent negligence or misconduct. This balanced allocation of rights and obligations reflected the hybrid nature of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* contracts, incorporating elements of both sale and pledge arrangements while establishing distinct parameters tailored to this specialized financial instrument.

The question of income rights is another central matter in *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transactions. When individuals purchase goods through this arrangement, two primary scenarios emerge regarding benefit allocation: agricultural land generating crops and residential properties producing rental income. Ottoman legal scholars held divergent positions on this matter, as evidenced by contradictory fatwas issued by the *Shaykh al-Islām* authorities. Ibn Kemal and Ebussuud explicitly declared that income from goods under *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* belongs to the original seller. However, they disagreed on compensation requirements when buyers consumed this income. Ibn Kemal (Boyabādī n.d.) and Saʿdī Çelebi (Saruhanī n.d.), maintained that no compensation was necessary, while Fenārizāde (Saruhanī n.d.) and Ebussuud (Bozanzāde n.d.) ruled that buyers must provide compensation. Sunullah Efendi's (d. 1021/1612) fatwa introduced a nuanced position, stating that, if sellers permitted buyers to use the income, no compensation would be required for consumed proceeds (Ünaldı 2018). In the following century, Zekeriyazāde Yahya aligned with Ebussuud's position (Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Halīm n.d.), but other fatwa collections presented different rulings. The collections *Fetâvâ-yı Abdurrahīm* and *Fetâvâ-yı Alî* based their determinations on seller permission (Menteshzāde 1243 AH; Çatalcalı 2021). If sellers granted prior authorization—thereby legitimizing use—and buyers consumed products accordingly, no compensation would be required upon contract termination. Without such permission, compensation became mandatory. *Fatāvā-yı Feyżiyye* later modified this stance, declaring that compensation would not be required regardless of permission status (Feyzullah 2009). This complex legal issue directly relates to *bayʿ al-istighlāl*, another transaction type designed for obtaining

capital. Despite these scholarly disagreements, historical evidence confirms these financial instruments were widely employed throughout Ottoman society even before the 16th century (Habib 2023). A comprehensive resolution of these intricate legal questions would require further specialized research beyond the scope of the current analysis.

Another legal matter addressed in Ottoman jurisprudence concerns dispute resolution when parties disagree about the nature of their contract after its formation. Specifically, conflicts arise when one party asserts that a transaction constitutes an absolute sale, while the counterparty maintains that it represents a *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* arrangement. This issue appears consistently throughout Ottoman legal history, with virtually every *Shaykh al-Islām* providing fatwas on the matter. These rulings appear even in the earliest texts documenting *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*. The consensus position established in these fatwas is clear: when disputes arise regarding contract classification, the evidence presented by the party claiming *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* status receives preferential consideration. Beyond this core principle, Ottoman jurists addressed several additional requirements governing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transactions, though these generated fewer formal opinions. These supplementary conditions include the following: The property must not be common property; both the property and its price must be clearly established; the property must be properly delivered to the buyer; the contractual term must be explicitly determined. These requirements serve to clarify the procedural framework for validly executing *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transactions within the Ottoman legal system, ensuring proper documentation and execution of these specialized financial arrangements.

The fatwa collections of Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islām* from the 16th and 17th centuries provide extensive guidance on numerous aspects of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transactions. Unlike jurisprudential commentaries, which often focus on theoretical discussions of contractual provisions, these fatwa collections predominantly focus on practical implementation concerns that directly impacted Ottoman commercial activities, including rights and responsibilities conferred upon contracting parties, proper contract establishment and termination procedures, and damage compensation protocols for property subject to these arrangements. When comparing these legal opinions to historical registers documenting actual societal practices, both alignment and discrepancies emerge. While many fatwa rulings reflect real-world applications, certain elements appear inconsistent with documented commercial behaviors. This suggests an evolving relationship between formal jurisprudence and market practices. Furthermore, the fatwa collections reveal that prominent *Shaykh al-Islām* sometimes issued divergent rulings on identical matters or modified their legal positions over time. This judicial evolution indicates the adaptability of Ottoman legal thought in response to changing economic and social conditions. This pragmatic approach to commercial jurisprudence demonstrates how Ottoman legal authorities navigated the complex balance between theoretical principles and practical implementation in governing financial transactions throughout this significant period of imperial history.

6. Conclusions

The development of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* represents a remarkable case study in Islamic legal dynamism and the capacity of Hanafi jurisprudence to accommodate economic necessities while preserving religious principles. This study has traced the transformation of what began as a practical economic solution into a legitimized contract form within the Hanafi legal tradition. By examining primary sources across multiple genres of legal literature spanning nearly a millennium, we can observe how Islamic jurisprudence developed sophisticated mechanisms to integrate novel financial practices. The journey of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* from its earliest mentions by 10th century scholars to its full integration into mainstream Hanafi legal thought demonstrates how Islamic law responded to socioeconomic realities.

Initially viewed with suspicion as a potential circumvention of the prohibition against interest (*ribā*), *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* gradually gained legitimacy through its incorporation into the *wāqiʿāt* literature, which served as a crucial vehicle for introducing practical innovations into the established legal framework. The centuries-long debate among Hanafi jurists regarding the proper classification of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ*—whether as a sale (*bayʿ*), pledge (*rahn*), or hybrid contract—reveals the nuanced interpretive methodology that allowed for legal innovation while maintaining fidelity to foundational principles. This process of legitimization was not straightforward but involved sustained intellectual engagement across generations of scholars who recognized the economic necessity of such financial instruments.

This research not only fills a significant gap in English-language scholarship on Ottoman financial instruments but also enriches our understanding of how specific financial instruments were legitimized within Islamic law by offering broader insights into how religious legal systems evolve to address economic challenges without abandoning their foundational principles. The case of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* demonstrates that Hanafi jurisprudence possessed internal mechanisms for legal evolution and adaptation, allowing it to respond to changing economic circumstances while preserving its commitment to core Islamic principles. Moreover, by examining the discursive processes through which *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* gained legitimacy, this study contributes to broader scholarly conversations about legal pluralism, religious authority, and the relationship between theory and practice in Islamic legal history. It demonstrates variety in Islamic legal interpretations through differing opinions of the Mamlūk and Ottoman scholars regarding the issue.

The theoretical implications of these findings extend far beyond the specific case of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* and challenge prevailing assumptions about the rigidity of Islamic legal frameworks. This research contributes to theoretical debates on legal transplantation and adaptation by illustrating that the incorporation of novel practices into established legal systems involves more than simple adoption or rejection. Instead, it reveals a sophisticated process of juridical reframing, where new practices are gradually reconceptualized and fitted within existing doctrinal categories or, in some cases, prompt the creation of new hybrid categories altogether. The transition of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* from contested practice to codified contract form in the *Mecelle* demonstrates how legal consensus emerges not through sudden transformation but through sustained scholarly engagement across geographical regions and textual traditions.

Of particular significance to contemporary legal theory is the insight that religious legal systems can develop internal mechanisms for change that do not require external secularizing influences. The evolution of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* counters modernist narratives that portray religious law as inherently static or requiring external reform pressures to evolve. Instead, it showcases how internal juristic discourse can facilitate adaptation while maintaining claims to religious authenticity and continuity. For scholars of comparative law and legal history, this study suggests new methodological approaches to examining legal change within religious traditions. By tracing a single contract form across different geographical contexts, time periods, and textual genres, we gain insights into the complex interplay between theory and practice in the evolution of Islamic jurisprudence. This approach reveals that meaningful legal development occurs not only through formal doctrinal pronouncements but also through the accretion of practical solutions to everyday problems—solutions that may initially operate at the margins of established doctrine before gradually gaining theoretical legitimacy. The transformation of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* from contested practice to recognized contract form thus offers not merely historical insight but theoretical frameworks that can inform contemporary approaches to understanding legal change, religious authority, and economic adaptation within normative traditions. These theoretical implications resonate beyond Islamic legal studies and speak to broader scholarly conver-

sations about how legal systems balance continuity and change, principle and pragmatism, in responding to evolving social and economic conditions. The results of this study suggest that modern Islamic financial institutions and researchers should draw inspiration from the historical development of *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* when designing interest-free financing instruments today. For contemporary Islamic finance, this underscores the potential to innovate within sharīʿa-compliant frameworks by leveraging juristic tools, such as necessity (*ḍarūra*) and custom (*ʿurf*), and designing hybrid instruments that mirror the functional adaptability of premodern contracts.

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Notes

1 For significant scholarship demonstrating the adaptability of Islamic law through fatwas, see (Johansen 1993; Hallaq 2001; Masud et al. 1996). Regarding Ottoman Hanafi jurisprudence specifically, recent scholarly contributions analyzing the Sultan's influence on legal development include important works by Burak (2015), Ayoub (2020), Kahya (2021), Taylor (2023), and Kaya (2018). These studies collectively challenge traditional orientalist perspectives by demonstrating the responsive and evolving character of Islamic legal traditions within specific historical and political contexts. It is possible to substantially expand this list, as the body of scholarship on Islamic legal adaptability continues to grow rapidly across multiple academic disciplines.

2 This framework for understanding doctrinal evolution in Hanafi jurisprudence is explored in (Hallaq 1994; Powers 1990; Peters 2005), and a rigorous explanation of this jurisprudential phenomenon can be found in (Bedir 2014).

3 While the term "credit" is employed here for clarity and accessibility to contemporary readers, it should be noted that Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) encompasses more specific terminology for financial relationships. The concept of istirbāḥ (seeking profit or gain) might provide a more precise jurisprudential framework for understanding these economic interactions within Islamic legal tradition. However, the broader term "credit relations" has been retained throughout this analysis to maintain textual coherence and facilitate comprehension across diverse scholarly audiences, while acknowledging that Islamic financial practices operated within distinct legal and conceptual parameters that differ from conventional Western credit systems.

4 For an authoritative examination of credit and partnership relations in the pre-Ottoman period, see (Udovitch 1970).

5 Jennings presents a detailed study of credit relations in 16th-century Kayseri in (Jennings 1973). For parallel research on credit structures in 16th- and 17th-century Bursa, see (Gerber 1988). Pamuk developed more extensive analyses based on these regional studies in (Pamuk 2012).

6 For illustrative examples of this claim, see (Yılmaz 2023; Aksu 2024). Some studies identify comparable contractual practices in earlier Hanafi jurisprudence as well as in Uyghur and Roman legal traditions. For detailed analysis, see (Korkmaz 2022; Hüseyin 2022).

7 For examples of studies examining similar contractual arrangements under different names across various regions and legal schools throughout Islamic legal history, see (Oberauer 2024; Khaliyarov 2022; Kondo 2021; Boxberger 1998).

8 For some examination of how the principles of bay al-wafa are applied in contemporary Islamic banking practices, or the similarities between contemporary financial transactions and the wafāʾ contract, refer to (Hassan and Lewis 2007; el-Gamal 2006; Eriş 2021; Haron et al. 2022; Cherif and Noor 2023; Sudiarti et al. 2023).

9 For additional details on the curriculum of Ottoman madrasas and the significance of these legal texts, consult (Has 1988; Ahmed and Filipovic 2004; Yıldız 2017).

10 Yılmaz's meticulously constructed table illuminates the complex legal discourse surrounding bay al-wafa within Central Asian Hanafi scholarship during the pre-14th century period; see (Yılmaz 2023).

11 Moreover, certain Western scholars extend their analysis to argue that the work effectively functions as a state legal framework. For a comprehensive examination of how the discourse surrounding the Mülteka evolved in conjunction with emerging modern state legal perceptions, see (Kopuz 2023).

12 Among the Ottoman legal scholars of the early 16th century, Saʿdī Çelebi stands as a unique voice on this topic, diverging from the conventional scholarly interpretations of this topic; see (Çelebi n.d.)

13 Bālizāde Mustafa Efendi, who briefly served as *Shaykh al-Islām* in the mid-17th century, provides a critical insight into the legal consensus of the period. Despite ongoing scholarly debates surrounding the contract's interpretation, he affirms that the contract had achieved a settled status, being universally accepted as permissible both in practical application and through fatwa; see (Bālizāde n.d.).

14 Two precise examples illustrate this intellectual practice: First, a passage originally from Qadihan was integrated into al-Zaylaʿī's commentary and subsequently attributed to al-Zaylaʿī. Second, a phrase from Usrūshanī's Fusul was assimilated into Ṣighnākī's statement, becoming recognized as Ṣighnākī's own contribution. This practice demonstrates the dynamic nature of legal scholarship, where textual boundaries became increasingly fluid, and intellectual attribution evolved through collaborative commentary and recontextualization of established legal texts.

15 To explore the evidence supporting Minkarizāde's connection to this text, see (Çelik 2021).

16 A comprehensive analysis of Ottoman shari'ah registers from Bursa during the 15th and 16th centuries substantiates this interpretation. This study reveals a critical finding: none of the documented wafa contracts included explicit provisions or promises concerning the return of monetary sums or goods. For a detailed examination, see (Habib 2023).

17 Although Ibn Kamal had previously issued a fatwa stating that a *bayʿ al-wafāʾ* transaction would become irrevocable if the property involved was sold to a third party, Ebu's-Su'ud's view appears to have evolved. In one fatwa, Ebu's-Su'udargued similarly that the original seller's right of rescission was lost upon resale to a third party, rendering the transaction irrevocable; however, in another fatwa, he endorsed the view of several reputable scholars that such a third-party sale could be annulled, allowing the original seller to reclaim the property. Later *Shaykh al-Islām* also followed this latter opinion. See (Boyabādī n.d.; Bozanzāde n.d.; Feyzullah 2009; Menteshzāde 1243 AH).

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Article

Judicial Training in Saudi Arabia: From an Uncodified to Codified System

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Abstract: The precise description of the roles and qualifications of Saudi judges (*qāḍī*) in the legal process assist in understanding the actual practice of jurisprudence. This paper aims to shed light on the jurisprudential procedure and the responsibilities of judges in the past and present Saudi legal system. Although the Saudi judges had freedom to exercise independent reasoning in the process of evaluating cases during the uncodified period before the 2020s, they were required to follow the classical regulations that were transmitted by the previous Ḥanbalī scholars' textual sources. On the other hand, recent codification attempts provide Saudi scholars with a kind of set of systematized traditional rules and bring standardization in final decisions. Since the rules of codification are directly derived from the main sources (the Qur'an and Sunna) of Islamic law, the Saudi legal system is supposedly governed by the traditional framework of Islamic law, and this semi-independent nature separates it from its counterparts' dependent codified legal systems. This article elucidates the transformational process of the Saudi legal system from classical implementation to codification. In applying analytical and descriptive methods, the objective of this paper is to investigate the responsibilities and training process of the judges and the jurisprudential procedure in the Saudi legal system.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; Islamic law; jurisprudence; judge; legal training; appellate courts

1. Introduction

Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) is applied as a legal system in a few countries, which include Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Saudi identity, custom, and the legal system cannot be separated from each other either in theory or in practice, and also there is no clear-cut separation between the Saudi legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The Muslim countries implementing Islamic law mainly use codified regulations to pursue Islamic rulings in their legal system (Otto 2010, pp. 17–40). On the other hand, the codification attempt is quite a recent development for the Saudi jurisprudential system. Before the introduction of codification, the judges (*qāḍī*) mainly used the classical legal compilations of the Ḥanbalī school and their interpretations to adjudicate court cases. The classical legal compilations provided solutions to the judges in the form of codified rules, and this process considerably reflected the traditional implementation of Islamic law. With the announcement of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2021, Saudi authorities initiated a series of legal reforms, including the codification of the Civil Transactions Law, the Penal Code for Discretionary Sanctions, the Law of Evidence, and the Personal Status Law (Alhussein and Gade 2023). It is noteworthy to state that even if the Saudi legal system experiences the codification process, the codified rules are derived from the main sources of Islamic law and reflect the legal methodology of classical schools. Although the transformational process of the Saudi legal system that mainly started after 2020 is still continuing, the differences between the non-codified and codified system are discernible in the jurisprudential area.

The main sources (the Qur'an and Sunna) of Islamic law are immutable, but the law can be applicable and adjustable in accordance with different times and places (Yaman and Çalış 2021, pp. 20–32).[1] The changeability of regulation is also strictly connected with the direct or indirect origin of the ruling. The principle of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) provides legal scholars with an opportunity to make necessary changes and adopt regulations in harmony with the contemporary period (Kamali 2003, p. 247). The main purpose behind the possibility of alteration is linked to the protection and preservation of the primary objectivities of Islamic law—these objectives include the protection of religion, life, property, reason, and offspring (Al-Shāṭibī n.d.; Nas 2022, pp. 112–13; Ebu Zehra 2017, pp. 318–320; Al-Qaradavi 2020, pp.161–182).[2] The justification for this change was recently developed as a theoretical principle in Islamic legal methodology, and it reads as follows: "It is undeniable to change the regulations regarding the change of time". (Şimşirgil and Ekinci 2009, p. 79; Ebu Zehra 2017, pp. 321–331)[3] Regarding the principle, if the conditions and times of the society change, the previously existing regulations need alteration to achieve applicability and practicality in jurisprudence. Considering the necessity of adjustment and local conditions, Saudi judges either pursue the classical solutions or strive to produce new regulations regarding their own interpretation of the textual sources, as stated by Ibn Bāz and Ibn Uthaymīn. Their decision can advocate either consistency or change depending on the contextual factors, because Islamic law leaves room for the local practices and environmental parameters of the community. The consideration of context, therefore, gives flexibility, practicability, and adaptability to legal interpretations, and it also enables the judges to seek assistance from contextual factors that occasion the legal alterations. The Saudi judges who functioned under the uncodified system took advantage of this flexibility and adjudicated cases through their own interpretation. On the other hand, the nature of codification somewhat mitigates or restricts the interpretation ability of judges. Therefore, some scholars demonstrate their resistance against codification attempts through emphasizing its negative effects in comparison to the independent interpretation ability of judges and consider it as a legal impediment to the adaptability of rulings in accordance with changing times and places (Alhussein and Gade 2023).

A few studies focus specifically upon the legal system and religious institution of Saudi Arabia. For instance, Vogel's *Islamic Law and Legal System* is considered the first English contribution regarding the legal system of Saudi Arabia, but it does not provide court record samples examples from real court practice (Vogel 2000). Atawneh's book mainly engages in the official Islamic legal opinions (*fatwās*) issued by the official institution, which is known as the Dār al-Iftā' and is not relevant with the jurisprudential system (Al-Atawneh 2010). Since the legal system uses the classical Ḥanbalī rulings, the book assists in understanding the legal methodology of the contemporary judges. Yakar's *Islamic Law and Society* also provides a substantial contribution at this point because the book explains the process of transferring institutional *fatwās* into state regulations, which are transformed through Royal Decrees as referrable legal sources (E. Yakar 2022). Eijk and Yargı's works present a detailed explanation regarding the jurisprudential system and the legal hierarchy within Saudi jurisprudence, but they do not offer practical court records and do not explain the influence of the religious institution (Van Eijk 2010, pp. 139–180; Yargı 2014).

Apart from the above-mentioned valuable academic contributions regarding the general structure of the Saudi legal system and the influence of the religious institution, this article, as an example of an area study, specifically aims to shed light on the jurisprudential procedure and the responsibilities of judges within the scope of the Saudi legal system. This research also broadly examines how different conditions are treated within the Ḥanbalī legal tradition to analyze the interpretation level and educational background of judges in the jurisprudential procedure of the Saudi legal system. To what extent judges' decisions are linked to the classical Ḥanbalī regulations is the additional focus of this study.

The authors traveled to Saudi Arabia to conduct their area research in 2018. They observed trials for a period of 31 days to understand how a judge operates at the courts and how the legal system works. Sometimes, it was difficult to acquire research data,

being foreign women researchers, but the researchers did manage to acquire some data and to perform interviews with some Saudi judges and scholars in the Dār al-Iftā' through the assistance of Saudi citizens. The collected data and interviews are the main sources of this article, but the answers of judges were not directly quoted because of ethical and procedural reasons. Instead of putting direct quotations, the primary and secondary textual sources, which are in harmony with the explanation of the interviewers, are referred to in support of the collected data. Since the materials of this research are mainly comprised of written texts, critical reading of classical and modern sources with a descriptive and comparative perspective will be the fundamental methodology. In applying analytical and descriptive methods, this article intends to investigate the responsibilities of the judges and the jurisprudential procedure in the Saudi legal system. For future studies, the explanation of judges' educational stages and the jurisprudential procedure bring out the possible connection of their decisions with the classical legal texts.

2. The Features of the Saudi Legal System

Muslim countries generally implement Islamic law in their jurisprudential system, but some specific features of the Saudi legal system separate it from its counterparts' legal systems, and its hierarchical structure also has a distinctive character. Firstly, the legal system of Saudi Arabia is supposedly governed by the traditional framework of Islamic law, which includes the science of legal methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and the science of legal rulings (*furū al-fiqh*), and depends on the individual and independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) of judges. Article 46 of the Basic Law of Governance directly and explicitly states the implementation of Islamic law in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the article opened the way for the traditional implementation of Islamic law during the pre-codification period (*Al-Niẓām al-Asāsī li-Ḥukm* n.d.).[4] Secondly, the characteristic and semi-independent nature of the Saudi legal system makes it different from other existing national or codified Islamic legal systems that are seen in Jordan, Morocco, Indonesia, or Iran (Otto 2010, pp. 17–40; Temel 2020, pp. 13–18; *Majmūiy'iy-i Qawānīn* 2008). The voluntary usage of the classical legal compilations and the respect for these sources endow the Saudi system with an idiosyncratic semi-independent nature. Thirdly, the legal system encourages judges to improve their interpretation capacity and assists the flexibility of legal rulings, since there is no official separation between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (Van Eijk 2010, pp. 156–57). There is a correlation between the application of personal interpretation, the semi-independent nature of the system, and the absence of codification. Fourthly, only the Saudi legal system applies the Ḥanbalī school of law, which was established by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) (Vogel 2000, pp. 174–75; Al-Atawneh 2010, pp. 55–77; Melchert 2004, pp. 22–34). Strong adherence to the Qur'an and prophetic narration rather than personal interpretation and being critical against religious innovation (*bid'a*) are the main characteristic features of the school's methodology (Yakar 2020, pp. 219–46).

Fifthly, Saudi Arabia was neither colonized nor did it replace its legal system with a Western model constitutional and legal system until recent periods.[5] The negative approach of some scholars and judges toward codification distanced it from completely dependent codified Islamic legal systems until the 2020s. However, the opponent scholars to codification and their criticisms lost their influential power, and the Saudi government has recently begun to implement the codification process. It is important to note that the codified regulations of many Muslim countries closely resemble the classical rulings of Islamic law, since they are derived from the main sources of Islamic law. The rulings regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, property, financial transactions, criminal punishments, and agency are mainly derived from the traditional Islamic legal sources and integrated into the conditions of modern times. The codified regulations naturally reflect the modernized version of the classical Islamic legal rulings and hence are mainly in harmony with the classical legal resolutions. The outcome, therefore, particularly disappointed some supporters of the reform activities, since the codified regulations did not meet their expectations. In other words, some reformers were expecting to have secularized regulations through the codifi-

cation process, but the majority of these codified regulations reflected the transformation of classical rulings into the codes (*Amnesty International* 2024).

Lastly, during the pre-codification period, the Saudi legal system experienced a modernization process through state-issued Royal Decrees (*marsūm malakī*), which regulated the new legal provisions in the spheres of mainly international trade, medicine, or technology (Al-ʻUtaybī 1999, p. 407; Yaşar 2024, pp. 125–28).[6] The administrative enhancements, institutional developments, governmental initiations, financial situations, and reformation of the legal system also forced some of the existent Ḥanbalī elements in the Saudi system to be modified. Even with these changes, it can be claimed that the Saudi legal system protected its unique position among the countries that apply *sharīʿa* because its legal system presented itself as maintaining the implementation of the classical Ḥanbalī regulations in the field of jurisprudence (Vogel 2000, pp. 174–75). The judges, therefore, shared similar characters with those in the classical period, since they were required to derive their rulings directly from the main sources of Islamic law during the pre-codified period.

3. The Training Process of Saudi Judges

The fundamental skills and qualities for being a judge or jurist were established during the classical period of Islamic law, including being an adult Muslim and having a sound understanding of law, legal theory, linguistic analysis, the Arabic language, logical deduction of the law from its original sources, and methods of legal reasoning (Al-Shāfiʻī 2021, pp. 509–11; Al-Qaradawi 2012, pp. 17–49; Shabbar 2017, p. 14; Al-Shāṭibī n.d.; Ebu Zehra 2017, pp. 329–36).[7] Although these are the minimum requirements to be a capable judge, each school of law inserted additional criteria in harmony with the methodology of their school. Whereas the minimum level of the judge's skills or essential requirements may not vary among the Islamic legal schools, the highest level of qualities or the possibility of performing independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) may require different capabilities and qualifications in accordance with the methodology. The requirements of the Ḥanbalī school were outlined by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and he highlighted that a judge must be a specialist in Islamic knowledge, including the science of exegetics, the main principles of religion, the science of narration, the deduction of rules from narrations, the Arabic language with all grammar and linguistic regulations, and the science of Islamic jurisprudence and its methodology (Al-Faifi 2020, p. 928).

The contemporary Saudi legal system considers the classical requirements settled by the Ḥanbalī school necessary for present judges who are tasked with providing legal solutions to the problems of parties in the courts (S. Yakar 2022, p. 46). There are two alternative routes to be a judge in the contemporary Saudi courts. These include either having equal religious education or graduating from the Islamic law department of universities. In the first case, there are famous religious education centers near Riyadh that are mainly located around the Qāsimī region, and their curriculum is mainly based on the legal compilations of the Ḥanbalī school of law (Al-Ansi et al. 2022, pp. 105–12; Rahmayati and Alsaid 2024, pp. 1–8). The syllabus of the training center is mainly dominated by the legal contributions of prestigious Ḥanbalī scholars, including Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), Ibn Najjār al-Futūḥī (d. 971/1564), Manṣūr al-Buhūtī (d. 1051/1641), and Mūsā al-Ḥujjāwī (d. 968/1560). The graduates of these training centers can work as legal consultants after completing the necessary syllabus or obtaining the required certificate. If the graduates of these centers want to be a judge or jurist, they should complete additional courses at these religious education centers. In the second instance, upon graduating from the law department of any university, the person cannot be appointed as an official judge and jurist. The legal system does not accept this education compatible with the conditions that are settled by the classical Ḥanbalī scholars (Al-Jarbou 2007, p. 224; Yargı 2014, pp. 167–71). If the male student completes two or four years of advanced education in Islamic study centers after graduating from the law department of a university, he can obtain a certificate

to be a judge or a jurist. However, a person that has only graduated from a law department, either a male or female graduates, can work as a lawyer or consultant at the Saudi courts.

The necessity of obtaining a religious education certificate is connected with the religious character of the legal system. The judges are, therefore, required to be a qualified jurist (*mujtahīd*)[8] adorned with inevitable legal authority and freedom of independent reasoning (Kamali 2003, pp. 315–16). They are not only supposed to know the law through their own investigation of the legal sources, but they also need to have the capability to exercise independent reasoning during the evaluation of cases in the court, which makes the nature of Saudi jurisprudence semi-independent (Gleave 2008, p. 235; S. Yakar 2022, p. 177). Although the recent developments provide an opportunity for using codified rules to judges, they are still supposed to know the origins of the rulings for better adjustment and explanation at the courts. Even if the judges refer to the modern codes, they automatically and intrinsically transfer the same solutions for similar cases. The nature of codification, therefore, has not led drastic changes for the educational process of the judges.

It is worth mentioning that before the introduction of standardized codes, contextual elements including education centers, living conditions, geographical factors, cultural values, and the customs of society undeniably emerged as considerable components in the process of decision-making by scholars and judges. In the pre-codified Saudi legal system, custom was accepted among the sources of jurisprudence to produce justifiable and practicable rulings for the areas that did not have a definitive or precise regulation in the fundamental sources. The stance of judges regarding the legal usability of custom or contextual factors at the court underlines that they all agreed with its legal validity. In particular, Shaykh Abdullah Abdulrahman al-Tuwayjirī, a contemporary Saudi scholar, states: "Customarily known things [customary knowledge] are treated like a legal rule." (S. Yakar 2022, pp. 31–4).[9]

The contextual factors and local influences were mainly used to provide legal solutions for familial issues in the civil courts (*maḥkama al-shahṣiyya*) and to enforce punitive sanctions in the criminal courts (*maḥkama al-jazā'iyya*) (Kamali 2003, pp. 155–57; Koç 2019, pp. 262–83).[10] The general courts (*maḥkama 'idāriyya*) and criminal courts are open for public observers, but the observers of the civil courts are required to obtain permission from the defendant, plaintiff, and the judge in order to attend to the trial. The design of the judgment hall for the civil court is more private and informal than the courtrooms of other courts, with sofas instead of formal seating arrangements. Additionally, the court hearings can be arranged online for the present period since the Ministry of Justice aims to digitalize all judicial procedures with the intent of accelerating the legal process and increasing the accessibility of legal solutions (Alhussein and Gade 2023). The arrangement of the courts reflects Saudi norms and local values, since there is no definitive instruction regarding the organization of these branches.

The absence of prescribed rules within the main sources (the Qur'an and Sunna) allows the integration of contextual elements in particular areas, such as the amount and payment method of dowry, maintenance, ransom, or custodial expenses. When the religious texts order believers to make the payment without stating a particular amount for the religious validity of some actions, the concept of custom plays a determinative role in fulfilling this mission. A relevant example in criminal issues is that the definition of theft (*sariqa*) evinces regional disparities according to the local structure and perceptions of the society (Kamali 2003, pp. 155–57, 132–33).[11] What type of activities are considered within the scope of theft, therefore, always requires re-evaluation. Even if there are strictly prescribed punishments for certain crimes, the interpretation, assessment, or evaluation of acts reflect the local circumstances of the region. Regarding this cultural intervention, if a person takes a personal belonging of a person from a table (which is occasionally used by the person) in their absence, the Saudi judge can find them guilty within the scope of theft crime. On the other hand, if the person takes a personal belonging of a person from a table (which is located at a restaurant), the Saudi judge cannot find them guilty due to the culture of the area. The outcome of the judges' evaluation, therefore, changes the nature

and category of the punishment. Another relevant example focuses on non-prescribed discretionary punishments (*ta'zīr*), which are not referred to either in the Qur'an or Sunna. These types of crimes emerge within society because of changing times or modernization, and include technological problems, cybercrimes, financial transactions, or medical issues (S. Yakar 2022, pp. 31–34). The alteration of classical rulings in the jurisprudential area regarding contextual factors is fulfilled through the collective *fatwās*, which were issued by the official *fatwā* institution, the Dār al-Iftā' (Yakar 2021, pp. 326–27). The King can also enact legal regulations through issuing Royal Decrees (*marsūm malakī*) in order to provide solutions to novel issues and standardize the legal procedure, upon obtaining a *fatwā* from the institution (Al-'Utaybī 1999, p. 407; Erdoğdu Başaran 2019, pp. 11–35). The punishments regarding drug dealers or traffic accidents can be relevant examples for the transformation of *fatwās* into legal regulations in the Saudi legal system.

The contextual elements and customary factors should satisfy specific criteria for their usability during the implementation process. Without fulfilling these criteria, the scholars and judges mainly hesitate to refer to them in their decision-making process. First, they should not violate either the textual sources (the Our'an and Sunna) or rulings directly derived from the textual sources. Second, there should not be any defined or prescribed solution in the textual sources regarding the problematic issues. However, if the local practices contradict the secondary sources of Islamic law, which include public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*), juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), and blocking the means (*sadd al-dharā'ī'*), the decision of the judge relatively represents and prioritizes the contextual factors. For example, the visitation days and times of children by their non-custodial parents in the case of divorce, the amount of maintenance, the monthly custodial payment for children after divorce, the selection of custodial parent, the status of marriage gifts after divorce, the division of inheritance (not the portion of heirs but the sharing style of the estate), or the governmental regulations regarding novel issues are the main areas that reflect the influence of contextual elements. The judges take occasional assistance from the contextual factors with the aim of not providing a solution but finding a method for the implementation of the prescribed ruling. However, the nature of codification as having strictly defined articles has possibly alleviated the influence of external factors and brought a kind of standardized easiness and consistency for the judges in the decision-making process.

The consideration of context and custom provided flexibility to legal interpretations, and it also enabled Saudi judges to seek assistance from contextual factors, which led to legal pragmatism (Yamani 2008, p. 139). Performing in the pre-codified period, judges improved their methodological understanding and maintained their connection with the classical jurisprudential methods (S. Yakar 2022, pp. 158, 250–60).[12] It is important to note that since the extensive and individual usage of contextual factors by the judges occasionally caused complexities and instabilities within the general jurisprudential system, the judges were relatively hesitative in applying contextual elements. They therefore tended to refer to the classical textual sources to support their arguments during the decision-making process. On the other hand, codification has curtailed the place of custom in the jurisprudential area and probably minimalized the instability among the decisions of contemporary judges (Alhussein and Gade 2023). One counter argument against codification among the opponent scholars emphasizes the inflexible and rigid nature of codification, because the codified laws do not leave enough room for the integration of contextual factors during the decision-making process.

4. The Responsibilities of Judges and the Sources of Law

In the pre-codification period, Saudi judges performed either independent reasoning or imitation (*taqlīd*) to give their judgment, whether the main sources of Islamic law (the Qur'an and Sunna) provided an explicit text for a problematic case or not. The responsibility of judges in finding a workable and applicable solution to the challenges provided them with greater freedom for adaptation, innovation, and flexibility in the uncodified legal

system. A Saudi judge, theoretically, had an opportunity to practice legal reasoning by issuing a unique and sound decision through relying on the Qur'an and Sunna for the case before him. However, the reflection and implementation of this theory in the court system might have been different, since the adaptation procedure included various elements. The interviews with the legal experts during the area research clarified that the judges had broad freedom to choose among the opinions of scholars belonging to the four schools of law (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, or Ḥanbalī), the opinion of well-known Ḥanbalī scholars (e.g., Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn Qayyim), or to use their own opinion. Ṣālih al-Lahaydān (d. 2022)[13] refers to this point when he states the following:

"The *qādī* of Saudi Arabia is not obliged or compelled to restrict himself to the school of Ibn Ḥanbal, but rather has the right to judge in the case in accordance with that to which his *ijtihād* leads, even if that is not the Ḥanbalī school. . .It is not said to him, perform *ijtihād* within the school or without it; rather he is requested to judge by that which he believes to be truth." (Vogel 2000, p. 83)

Although there was a broad spectrum regarding the applicable references, the main tendency among Saudi judges was to refer to the opinion of Ḥanbalī scholars (S. Yakar 2022, p. 133, 176; Akgündüz 2010, p. 285; Van Eijk 2010, p. 157). The Ḥanbalī school somewhat distinguishes itself from the other schools of law regarding its strict adherence and emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna (Melchert 2004, pp. 22–34; Fanani 2021, pp. 1–27).[14] Since Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's strong reliance on the revealed texts and his traditionalist character influenced the methodology of the Ḥanbalī school, the contemporary Ḥanbalī scholars tend to espouse the classical solutions rather than performing independent reasoning (Akyüz 1999, pp. 113, 124–28). The establishment process of the state, the hierarchy of governmental institutions, and the curriculum of education centers offer a reasonable explanation for the dominant character of the Ḥanbalī school within the Saudi society. The responses of judges and the analysis of court cases (S. Yakar 2022, pp. 257–64), therefore, basically indicate the following order regarding the legal references during the decision-making process:

1. If the case is examined and finalized with an applicable solution in the main sources of Islamic law (the Qur'an and Sunna), the judges mainly follow the same opinion rather than applying legal reasoning;
2. If there is a direct quotation from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, the judges mainly follow his opinion by demonstrating adherence to the Ḥanbalī school;
3. If there is an opinion quoted from the well-known and authoritative classical Ḥanbalī scholars, the judges mainly apply it to adjudicate the case, especially for civil matters. The authoritative classical compilations of the contemporary Saudi jurisprudence include the following:
    - Muwaffaq al-Dīn ibn Qudāma's (d. 620/1223) *al-Mughnī wa al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*;
    - Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) *al-Fatāwā*;
    - Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350) *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-Ālamīn* and al-*Ṭurūq al-Ḥukmiyya fī al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya*;
    - Ibn Najjār al-Futūḥī's (d. 971/1564) *Muntahā al-Irādāt fī Jam'i al-Mughnī ma'a al-Tanqīḥ wa al-Ziyādāt*;
    - Manṣūr al-Buhūtī's (d. 1051/1641) *Kashshāf al-Iqnā' 'an Matn al-'Iqna'* and *Sharḥ Muntahā al-Irādāt*;
    - Mūsā al-Ḥujjāwī's (d. 968/1560) *al-Iqnā' fī Fiqh al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Yakar and Yakar 2020, p. 277; Al-Atawneh 2010, pp. xviii, 71–76).
4. If the problem is not included in these classical sources (which comprises approximately 2% of the total court cases), the judge issues a verdict depending on either the opinions of the other schools of law or their personal interpretation. Regarding this option, if the case needs permission or additional explanation from religious authorities, the judge asks for a religio-legal explanation from Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' (Board of Senior Scholars or BSU) (E. Yakar 2022, pp. 39–46).[15]

Saudi judges occasionally tend to seek solutions following this order. In the first instance, if there is a verse from the Qur'an or a narration from the Prophet Muhammed, the judge espouses it rather than applying their legal reasoning. This is the main doctrine of jurisprudence for all schools of Islamic law. In the second instance, if there is a direct quotation from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, the judge mainly follows his opinion by demonstrating adherence to the Ḥanbalī school. This option is considered only if the case is not mentioned in the Qur'an or Sunna. In the third instance, upon not finding an applicable solution in these sources, the judge seeks a solution from the opinions of well-known and authoritative classical Ḥanbalī scholars and their legal texts. Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī's (1993, 1994) *Al-Kāfī fī Fiqh Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal* and *Al-Muqni' wa al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr wa al-Inṣāf*, Ibn Taymiyya's (1965) *Fatāwā al-Kubrā'*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (1998, 2002) *Zād al-Ma'ād fī Hadī Khayr al-'Ibād* and *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-Ālemīn*, Ibn Najjār's (1999) *Muntahā al-Irādāt fī Jam'i al-Mughnī ma'a al-Tanqīḥ wa al-Ziyādāt*, Manṣūr Al-Buhūtī's (1983) *Kashshāf al-'Iqnā' 'an Matn al-Iqnā'*, and Mūsā Al-Ḥujjāwī's (n.d.) *Al-Iqnā' fī Fiqh al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* are the most influential and prestigious scholars whose works and opinions are used in contemporary Saudi jurisprudence. In the last instance, if there is no solution in these categories for the problematic case, the judge has two options: either referring to the opinion of scholars from the different schools of law or applying their own interpretation. For the first option, if the case is related to controversial issues, the common approach amongst scholars is to search the opinions and methodologies from the different schools of law. Yakar states the following: "This has been done under the practice of determining the preponderant opinion (*tarjīḥ*) if the strongest proof (*dalīl*) is identified in another *madhhab*'s legal ruling or opinion." (2022, p. 175). As for the second option of referring to their personal interpretation, the judge asks for a religio-legal opinion from the Dār al-Iftā' or Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā', which is the highest authority within the structure of the official religious institution, the Dār al-Iftā' (Vogel 2000, p. 8; Van Eijk 2010, p. 158). Obtaining a pragmatic and applicable legal opinion from Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā', it becomes common among the judges to resolve similar problems in harmony with this opinion. In other words, after obtaining a *fatwā* from the official institution, the ruling can sometimes be standardized through the transformation of the *fatwā* into Royal Decrees within the legal system of Saudia Arabia. A relevant example may be given regarding the number of divorce pronouncements, because a formula of thrice-pronounced divorce on one occasion is officially counted as the usage of one divorce right (Vogel 2000, p. 266; Elgawhary 2019, pp. 101, 147).[16] It is worth mentioning that the opinion of Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' is taken to protect social stability and to control obedience to the ruler regarding the socio-political arrangements within the Kingdom (Yakar 2020, pp. 39–41, 45). Using the state-issued religio-legal opinions for unresolved cases not only provides unity of practice and but also offers a proposed solution to the judges. It can be expected that during the codification of rulings, the committee intimately pays attention to these fundamental sources and their methodological hierarchy.

5. The Official Restrictions of Judges

The normal structure of the court's final verdict (*ḥukm*) starts with the personal information of a plaintiff (*mudda'ī*) and a defendant (*mudda'a 'alayh*). After this preliminary statement, the final verdict briefly explains what the problem is, how the situation changed, who was involved, where the event took place, and when it happened. After detailed explanation of the grievance, the judge refers to the relevant verses of the Qur'an, the Prophetic narrations, and the quotations from knowledgeable Ḥanbalī scholars, and lastly announces their final decision (E. Yakar 2022, pp. 257–64; Yamani 2008, pp. 13–16).[17] Inserting quotations from the original sources of Islamic law provides a unique character to the Saudi verdicts and makes them different from the verdict of other counterparts' legal systems that implement Islamic law in their jurisprudence. The parties, upon dissatisfaction with the decision, have right to apply to the appellate court within thirty days in request of revision (E. Yakar 2022, pp. 262–64).

Each province has at least one appellate court consisting of a criminal chamber, a personal status chamber, a commercial case chamber, a distinct chamber for labor cases, and a chamber for other cases (Van Eijk 2010, pp. 160–61). The system of the appellate court functions to maintain uniformity in the judicial process, with the power of restriction or rejection over the verdicts of the judges. It is a common principle that when the litigant is disappointed by the judge's verdict, she or he has an opportunity to request the revision of the verdict by another judge, the ruler, the latter's agent, or extraordinary courts. The primary objective of the appellate court is to elucidate the determination of a decision's compatibility with Islamic law and to review its procedural stages (Al-Ghadyan 1998, pp. 239–40; Vogel 2000, p. 84–5; Van Eijk 2010, p. 160). Upon noticing incompatibility with the main sources of Islamic law or procedural mistakes, the appellate court returns the case to the same judge for re-evaluation. However, it must be noted that if the final decision depends on the judge's legal reasoning or rational interpretation rather than direct excerption from the revealed texts, the verdict must be used regardless of the other opinions.

The appellate court does not have the plenary right to change the verdict or to criticize the personal interpretation of judges. The appellate court, therefore, can examine the case regarding the procedural hierarchy, reliability of evidence, or evaluation of presented documents (Yargı 2014, pp. 239–42; Vogel 2000, p. 83). This preventive measure protects the independent reasoning capability of all judges and jurists who are considered equal in their qualifications, without priority. The acceptance of equality between the personal opinions of judges and jurists has been a unanimously approved cogitation since the period of the Companions of the Prophet, and Saudi legal authorities pay attention to this principle (Kamali 2003, p. 320). The statistics regarding the percentage of cases that are transferred to the appellate court from the Civil Court of Riyadh clarify that two to five cases out of a hundred go to the appellate court (*Al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya* 2016, pp. 24–28).

The decisions concerning cases regarding crimes that include cruelty, theft, robbery, fornication, or bribery, and their punishments, which include the death penalty, amputation, exile, or stoning, are mainly referred to the appellate courts for re-examination (Van Eijk 2010, pp. 159–61). After the inspection of appellate courts, the decisions regarding these criminal punishments need the King's approval for their validity and enforcement. Apart from these special cases related to penal law, the decision of the appellate court is generally in favor of the decision of the judges. If there is a mistake related to lack of evidence or the official procedure, the appellate court sends the case back to the same judge for reconsideration of the judgment with additional documents. However, the appellate court does not have the right to make a new decision by only evaluating or criticizing the personal interpretation of the judge.

6. Conclusions

The main sources (the Qur'an and Sunna) of Islamic law are immutable, but the law must be applicable and adjustable according to changing times and places. The justification of time and place is considered a meaningful and acceptable proponent of change in Islamic jurisprudence. It is important to note that although Saudi judges have freedom to exercise independent reasoning during the decision-making process, they are required to follow the classical methodologies, which were formulated by the previous traditional legal scholars and transmitted through the textual sources throughout generations. The previously existing classical legal works regarding court cases, therefore, functioned as codified articles for the judges in the pre-codification period. Throughout time, general methodological principles have been established regarding enhancements in the legal literature. These systematic methodologies have been followed and referred to as principles in guiding further analogical thought by the subsequent generations.

Regulations have also been produced by way of these methodologies, and these aspects reflect the practical side of Islamic jurisprudence. During the last period of the Ottoman Sultanate, scholars made the first attempts to codify these rulings to provide stability and unity in the realm of legal practice. In the contemporary world, the revised

and reformed version of this codified regulation, *Majalla*, is functional in many Muslim countries that apply Islamic law. However, until recent times, attempts regarding the codification of Islamic law were not supported by Saudi scholars, which made the Saudi jurisprudential system unique. Although the judges and jurists operated in a non-codified system for the solution of disputes, they referred to the classical Hanbalī sources as codified regulations. Since the nature of the legal system was independent regarding its non-codified structure, its nature seemed dependent regarding the application of classical methodologies and the usage of the textual sources. Since Saudi judges could espouse stability, consistency, flexibility, or predictability regarding the non-codified character of the legal system, their tendencies inevitably influenced the final verdict and the implementation of Islamic law in the court system.

The independent reasoning ability of the judges provides them a privileged position and practicality during the jurisprudential procedure as long as they pursue the methodology of the Hanbalī school. The requirement of graduating from the Islamic law department of a university or a religious education center to obtain a certificate for being a judge can be implicitly understood as the connection of contemporary jurisprudence with the classical Ḥanbalī textual sources. Saudi Arabia has continuously preserved the basic features of its constitutional system that are in accordance with Islamic doctrines and promoted the image of the state that functions to uphold the eternal divine law. Operating with this mechanism has endowed the state with religious credentials as well as a flexible and pragmatical legal system. However, the extensive usage of external factors, including custom and public interest, can lead to disputes and instability within the system, since the decisions are accepted as a verdict that has a religious dimension. The appellate courts, therefore, occasionally function to modify and alleviate the interpretational differences because of regional discrepancies. The descriptive analysis regarding the Saudi legal system explicitly brings out the substantial place of the main sources of jurisprudence and custom in the decision-making process; it also refers evidently to the importance of fulfilling the educational requirements to be a judge in the Saudi judiciary and evidences the hierarchical structure of the Saudi courts. This broad explanation of the legal system with relevant examples may open the way for new research that focuses on the implementation of regulations in specific areas.

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Notes

1 The classical approach divides the areas of Islamic law into three main sections: worship (*ʻibādāt*), social transactions (muʻāmalāt), and punishment (*ʻuqūbāt*). The regulations related to the worship area are mainly unchangeable, while the rulings related to the social transactions and punishments are changeable and adjustable according to time and circumstances. If the ruling is directly derived from explicit and clear texts excerpted from the Qurʼan, Sunna, consensus (*ijmā*), and analogy (*qiyās*), the ruling does not experience change and alteration. However, if the ruling relies on personal interpretation or secondary sources of Islamic law including public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), or blocking the means (*sadd al-dharāʻī*), these rulings are generally considered changeable and adjustable according to the preferences of the scholars and needs of the community. The justification of time and place are, therefore, meaningful and acceptable in Islamic jurisprudence because of contextual circumstances.

2 Abū Isḥaq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) conceptualized the theory of the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāsid al-sharīʻa*) to improve the pragmatical aspect of jurisprudence and he divided it into three categories: compelling necessity (*ḍarūriyyāt*), needs (*ḥājiyyāt*), and improvements (*taḥsīniyyāt*).

3 The necessity of alteration regarding time is stipulated as a general principle in the first codification attempt of Islamic law, *Majalla*. For further information see Article 39.

4 Article 46 reads: "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion; God's Book and the Sunna of His Prophet, God's prayers and peace be upon him, are its constitution, Arabic is its language and Riyadh is its capital."

5 There are ongoing reformation and codification activities, including in the legal system, but this study does not cover the period after 2018.

6 The initiations regarding codification and modernization of the legal system can be considered quite recent developments. Before these initiations, changes were obtained throughout marsūm malakīs that were special orders authorized on behalf of the ruler in the form of monarchical decrees.

7 Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), the founder of the Shāfi'ī school, listed the requirements for being a capable jurist and latterly descendent scholars improved the standards and inserted additional conditions in accordance with the changing circumstances. In the modern period, Al-Qaradawi, a prominent scholar, provides crucial criteria to perform independent reasoning by drawing the lines of restrictions: the scholar makes every effort to arrive at complete clarity on the problem at hand; the scholar should not make the definitive and prescribed issues subject of ijtihād; the scholar should not treat speculative and unclear texts as definitive rulings; the interpretation activity of the scholar should aim to protect the bridge between the juristic and tradition-based schools of law; and the scholar should put emphasis on beneficial new approaches that pay attention to the five fundamental values of Islam (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*). Al-Qaradawi summarizes the general instructions of the main schools of law for being a religious scholar, judge, and jurist.

8 *Ijtihād* means independent reasoning and continues to be the fundamental instrument of interpreting the divine message. It is a process of legal reasoning and hermeneutics through which the jurist derives and rationalizes law on the basis of fundamental sources of Islamic law, mainly the Qur'an and Sunna. *Mujtahid* is the person that performs ijtihād, competent to reason from the revealed texts, and rationalizes the pre-existent law.

9 The approval of its legal validity is formulated in Arabic language as "Al-ma'rūf 'urfan ka al-sharṭ shar'an." The terminological concept of custom, including contextual factors, refers to an applicable legal principle in Islamic law.

10 In Islamic law, crimes are divided into three categories: *qiṣāṣ* (retaliation), *ḥadd* (prescribed punishment), and *ta'zīr* (discretionary punishment). *Qiṣāṣ* refers to crimes involving bodily harm or physical injury inflicted upon another person or life, and receive life punishment. The ḥadd crimes refer to the fixed punishments that are explicitly and clearly defined in the Qur'an and Sunna. The crimes include *zīnā* (adultery), *ridda* (apostasy), *ḥirāba* (armed robbery), *baghy* (rebellion), *qadf* (false accusation), *sukr* (intoxication), and *sirqāt* (theft). The two types of crimes and their punishments are explicitly stated in the textual sources. On the other hand, *ta'zīr* refers to governmental punishments that are not directly mentioned in the sources but implemented by the governmental authorities according to contemporary needs of society. The judges with the approval of the governmental authorities can insert preventive measures regarding the context.

11 The basic definition of 'thief (*sarīq*)' refers to a person who steal things. However, there are disagreements over the scope of thief and the acts connected with their punishment. For example, what is the evaluation for a pickpocket or a person who steals the shrouds of the dead results in diversity of opinion among scholars. Therefore, the scholars indirectly refer to their contextual knowledge to evaluate whether the punishment is given depending on *ḥadd* or *ta'zīr*.

12 For instance, the lawsuit for returning marital gifts after dissolution was finalized by a judge considering the principle of maṣlaḥa and he combined the principle with the importance of harmony between the spouses. Additionally, the judge directly referred to the the opinion of a twelfth-century Mālikī scholar Ibn 'Arabī, who states: "The contracts amongst people should be conducted upon the basis of agreement, harmony and mutual kindness. In the absence of these elements, the contract becomes meaningless and the interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of both parties then requires separation with an agreement. This establishes the basis of a fair and equitable distribution of items between the husband and/or wife."

13 Shaykh Salih bin Muhammad al-Lahaydan is the president of the Permanent Board of the Supreme Judicial Council and a member of Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' (the Board of Senior 'Ulamā').

14 Ahmad b. Ḥanbal is accepted as one of the authoritative *ḥadīth* collectors and his knowledge and expertise in this science also resultedin him being evaluated amongst the traditionalist and textual scholars.

15 Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' (Board of Senior Scholars or BSU), with 21 scholars including the chairman, is considered the highest religious authority within the structure of the Dār al-Iftā' in Saudi Arabia. The BSU is responsible for delivering the ultimate religious decisions, advising on religious matters, and conducting religious services in harmony with Islamic law. The legal opinions of the BSU play a crucial rolein shaping legal, social, political, and educational approaches and it has a right to enjoy the approval of the King.

16 A husband has three divorce pronouncement rights for his wife. However, if the man wants to use all of his divorce rights on one occasion rather than using them separately, the question arises amongst scholars regarding the number of divorce rights. The opinion of well-known scholars counted a thrice-pronounced divorce formula as the usage of one divorce right and the Saudi judges refer to their decision for the relevant cases.

17 One sample from the final verdict of judge states: "[I]n addressing the issue God refers: 'And if you fear dissention between the two, send them an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire reconciliation, God will cause

it between them. Indeed, God is ever-knowing and acquainted. (Q4:35)' In addressing the case of women, Ibn 'Abbas states that myself and Mu'āwiya have been send for judgement. Ma 'mar said that I was informed that Othman sent those two for a judgement and he said: 'If you see fit reconcile them; if you see fit, separate them.' I therefore cancelled the marriage contract. . .."

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Article

The Cover of the Holy Building, the Symbol of Politics: The Historical Power Rivalry over the Kiswa of the Ka'ba

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Abstract: For Muslims, the Ka'ba holds immense significance as the destination of pilgrimage—an obligatory act of worship—and as the direction toward which prayers are performed. The kiswa is a cover that has been placed on the Ka'ba, the holiest place in Islam, since the Jāhiliyya period as an expression of respect for it. Although there are some exceptions in Islamic history, it is usually changed once a year and it was woven in different colours according to the period, and finally it became a tradition to be black. The kiswa of the Ka'ba is one of the most important religious and political symbols of Islamic history. This article analyses the role of the kiswa of the Ka'ba in the relations between Muslim rulers in the Islamic world throughout history. From the earliest periods of Islam, the kiswa has been recognized as a symbol of legitimacy and a means of asserting control over the administration of pilgrimage. Many states, such as the Abbāsids, Mamlūks, and Ottomans, expressed or reinforced their political legitimacy among Muslims by showing their influence over the Ka'ba through the tradition of the kiswa. In the medieval Islamic world, Muslim states or local administrators of these states especially used the kiswa as a symbol of sovereignty, thus increasing their influence in the regions they governed. Some Muslim administrators who wanted to send the kiswa to the Ka'ba competed with each other or prevented the other from sending the kiswa to the Ka'ba because each year only one kiswa was sent to Mecca. In this study, the position of the kiswa as a political symbol in the quest for the legitimacy of Muslim rulers in Islamic history and the historical development of this issue are discussed and analysed with examples.

Keywords: Islam; Mecca; Ka'ba; Kiswa; Islamıc states; religious authority; political authority; rivalry

1. Introduction

Throughout history, religious places and symbols have been more than just a part of the world of faith; they have also been attributed to political meanings. For example, Jerusalem, a city that has an important place and is considered sacred in all three divine religions, is still on the world agenda today with the religious and political struggles shaped around Al-Aqsā Mosque. Similarly, the Vatican is regarded as a centre of political as well as religious authority with the spiritual leadership of the Pope. The Vatican, which is the religious centre of more than one billion Catholics in the world, is very influential in world politics. The Pope, who is the spiritual leader, is also the president of the Vatican State (Poupard 1981; Şakiroğlu 2012). Just as religious places and symbols have political meanings today, there are symbols in the Islamic world that have similar meanings. In Islamic history, the cover (kiswa) of the Ka'ba went beyond being a religious symbol and became an indicator of legitimacy and political authority for Muslim rulers because the

Muslim ruler, who served the holy places, proved his power to other Islamic states and obtained respectability. For this reason, they often fought with each other to dominate Hejaz and thus to send the kiswa to the Ka'ba. Examples of this will be seen in the following pages of this article.

There are three cities that are considered sacred in Islam. These are Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.[1] Mecca[2] is the city where the religion of Islam was born, and is important because the Ka'ba and Masjid al-Harām, which is indispensable for worship such as pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage, is located here. Medina,[3] the city of migration (Hijrah) and the location of the Prophet Muhammad's mosque and tomb, holds value as one of Islam's two sacred regions (Haramayn) and as the capital during the Prophet's era and, except for part of Ali's caliphate, during the Rāshidūn Caliphate. Jerusalem,[4] on the other hand, is a city that Muslims value because of al-Aqsā Mosque, which is believed to be the place where the Prophet Muhammad experienced the miracle of Isrā and Mi'rāj (Q. 17:1), and which was the qibla of Muslims for about sixteen or seventeen months after the hijrah, although its status as a qibla was not clear before the hijrah (al-Bukhārī 2001; Ibn Sa'd 2001, vol. 1, p. 243).[5] It is also valuable because it is the city where many prophets (Abraham, Ishmael, David, Solomon etc.) lived, whose prophethood is equally believed and respected in Islam.

The most important place in the region, which Muslims call "al-Haramayn" in the sense of "two holy places" referring to Mecca and Medina, is undoubtedly the Ka'ba. Known as "the cubic object", the Ka'ba is mentioned twice in the Qur'an and referred to by names such as *Bayt* (House) and *Bayt Allāh* (House of Allāh) (Q. 5:95, 97; 2:125, 127, 158; 8:35; 106:3). There is a dispute as to who was the first builder of the Ka'ba, which is located in the middle of al-Masjid al-Harām in the city of Mecca. Although there are Israelite narrations with elements of exaggeration and legend that it was built by the Prophet Adam or his son Seth, or even that angels built it before them, the Islamic sources are dominated by the view that the first builder was the Prophet Adam[6] (al-Dīnawarī 2011; al-Azraqī 1979, vol. 1, p. 36–38; al-Kalā'ī 1420; Ünal 2001).

In order to enable more people to serve the Ka'ba, more than one duty was created even in the Jāhiliyya period. These were duties such as 'imāra, siqāya, hijāba, and sidāna. The verses (Q. 9:19) and the narrations related to the reasons for their revelation, which emphasize who will build the mosques, and that siqāya and 'imāra are not the same as faith in Allāh and the Last Day and jihad in the way of Allāh, reveal that carrying out these duties both in the Jāhiliyya period and in the first period of Islam was a means of pride and was considered superior to many deeds. For this reason, Muslims have been eager and diligent about serving the Ka'ba since the first Islamic period (Bozkurt 2000). Muslims have a great respect for the Ka'ba, which is the place of pilgrimage, one of the important pillars of Islam, the qiblah of their prayers, and which Allāh calls "my house" (Q. 22:26) in the Qur'an. This respect does not change among dignitaries such as caliphs and sultans, nor the people.

The services related to the Holy Ka'ba were carried out by the administrators, especially those who dominated the region. These services included the cleaning, maintenance, and repair of the Ka'ba, guarding its doors and keys, and odourising it. In the history of Islam, one of the responsibilities of the pilgrimage amīr (amīr al-hajj), who was in charge of ensuring that the pilgrimage was performed in accordance with the rules and in safety, and who undertook these duties, was the delivery and covering of the kiswa to the Ka'ba. The pilgrimage amīr, who travelled from Damascus during the Umayyad period (41–132 AH/661–750 CE) and Baghdad during the Abbāsid period (132–656 AH/750–1258 CE), has been travelling from Egypt to Mecca since the Mamlūk sul-

tanate (648–923 AH/1250–1517 CE), which re-established the Abbāsid caliphate in Egypt (Atalar 1995).

Although initially covering the Ka'ba with the kiswa was considered a religious ritual because it was the cover of a sacred structure, the act of covering it with the kiswa has acquired different meanings throughout history. Along with the khutba and the mahmal, it has been described as the most powerful symbol of a ruler's ascendancy or claim to ascendancy over the holy cities (Dekkiche 2015). However, some scholars argue that the respect shown by the Ottoman sultans to the Ka'ba was unrivalled by any previous ruler. They called themselves the rulers, not the rulers, of the Haramayn and were extremely pleased to bear the title of Khādim al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn (Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries) (Kazıcı 1999).

There are several studies on the Ka'ba's kiswa. One of these is a study conducted by Civelek titled "Kâbe Örtüsünün Değiştirilmesi Bağlamında Orta Doğu'da Osmanlı Dönemi Nüfuz Mücadelesi ve Bunun Arap Basınına Yansımaları" ("The Struggle for Influence in the Middle East During the Ottoman Period in the Context of the Replacement of the Ka'ba's Kiswa and Its Reflections in the Arab Press"). This study focuses on the historical development of the kiswa in general and how the Ottoman struggle for influence in the Middle East in the early 20th century was reflected in the Arab press (Civelek 2012). Another study indirectly related to the topic is Metin's article titled "Osmanlıların Kâbe ve Mescid-i Haram Hizmetleri" ("The Services of the Ottomans to the Ka'ba and the Masjid al-Haram"). This work examines not only the kiswa but also all forms of Ottoman services to the Ka'ba and Mecca (Metin 2015). A further study was conducted by Basahih under the title "Crafting the Kaaba's Kiswa: Context and Traditional Practices". This article particularly focuses on the weaving process of the kiswa, its decorative and aesthetic value, and the meticulous care given to its craftsmanship (Basahih 2018). Alashari, in his study titled "The Endowment Devoted to the Kiswa of the Kaaba: A Historical Study", examined the endowment allocated for the production of the kiswa and aimed to uncover the first founders of this system established for this purpose during the Islamic period (Alashari 2022). Although these studies refer to the historical significance of the kiswa, they do not adopt a comprehensive perspective on the subject addressed in this article, as their focus points vary.

There are other studies that are more closely related to the topic discussed in our article. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes' work "Le Voile de la Ka'ba" deals with the historical development of the cover of the Ka'ba (kiswa) and its applications in different periods (Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1954). It is observed that in different periods of Islamic history, the rulers did not only consider the kiswa as a donation or a tradition but also as an element that reinforced their political authority. Especially during the Umayyad, Abbāsid, Mamlūk, and Ottoman periods, the kiswa served to identify the ruler with the sacred and became an element of inter-state rivalry. This point is touched upon in Gaudefroy-Demombynes' study. However, our article additionally examines in detail, with chronological examples, the use of the kiswa as a sign of power in inter-state relations and its role in ensuring the legitimacy of power, emphasizing that kiswa is not only a cover but also a powerful symbol of how rulers in the Islamic world legitimized their political authority. It also shows how the political competition over the kiswa continued in the modern period and how Saudi Arabia monopolised the production of the kiswa. In this context, this study, which deals with the kiswa not only as a religious and historical object, but also as a concrete indicator of political power, religious authority, and legitimacy claim, aims to bring a new perspective to the existing literature and aims to open the door to new research on how the political competition over the kiswa continues in the modern period.

Malika Dekkiche, who evaluates the dominance of Hejaz between the Mamlūks and Timurids, two states that competed on the issue of kiswa, focuses on the religious supremacy of these two states in Hejaz (Dekkiche 2015). Dekkiche also includes developments regarding the kiswa between the two states in this study. It is seen that Dekkiche especially emphasizes that the disregard of the cover hung inside the Ka'ba was not taken into consideration and gives details about it. In this respect, the study provides important information for those researching the subject. What distinguishes this study from Dekkiche's article is that it focuses specifically on the debates about the kiswa and, chronologically, on the disputes of different states on this issue.

Another study on the subject is "Le serviter des deux saints sanctuaires et ses Mahmal. Des Mamelouks aux Ottomans" by Veinstein. The researcher touches upon the Mamlūk–Ottoman rivalry, which falls within the scope of our article, by focussing on the mahmal and the kiswa in general. It has been observed that it includes the findings and evaluations we have reached during our research. The subject has been examined in great detail, specifically in terms of the events between these two states, and has contributed to the field. This article differs from Veinstein's research in that it focuses on the many rivalries experienced between many political actors (Veinstein 2009).

After all of these evaluations, it should be stated that this article focuses on the religious and political meanings of the kiswa throughout history, its role in diplomatic relations and the conflicts that arose for this purpose by using chronological examples. In this way, the significance of changing the cover of a sacred place in the political arena will be revealed, along with its impact on relations between rival states and how a ritual that acquired religious meaning was also utilized as a political symbol.

In this study, both primary and secondary sources have been utilised on the historical and political symbolism of the cover of the Ka'ba. Primary sources include al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmiʿ al-sahīh*, which is one of the most important sources in the field of hadith, the books of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Taghrībirdī, famous historians of the Mamlūk period, and *Subh al-aʿshāʾ* by al-Qalqashandī, one of the historians of the same period, al-Azraqī's *Akhbār al-Makkah*, Ibn Fahd's *Ithāf al-Warā*, Ibn Hajar's biographical work *Inbā al-gumr*, as well as the works of Eyup Sabri Pasha, one of the late Ottoman authors, which is important for the study of the history of Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Bukhārī 2001; al-Maqrīzī 1997; al-Qalqashandī 1987; Ibn Fahd 1983–1990; Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992). These works contain information about the conflicts regarding the kiswa. These sources are examined to analyse how the kiswa was used as a symbol of power and legitimacy. Regarding secondary sources, although there are fewer direct studies on the kiswa, how previous academic studies and historical analyses that may be indirectly related to the research deal with the primary sources was examined, and a comparative analysis was made. As a result of the analyses of both types of sources, the importance of the kiswa in the political and cultural context was better understood.

In this article, firstly, the definition of the kiswa, the materials from which it is produced, and how it is financed will be briefly discussed, and then the history of the kiswa tradition will be brought to the present day, starting from the pre-Islamic period. Then, the use of the kiswa firstly as a religious symbol and then as a political symbol will be discussed under separate headings. Finally, the competing states within the Islamic states on the subject of the kiswa will be discussed separately, and the sultans who made diplomatic attempts on this issue, whether they could compromise or not, and the prominence of the meaning of the political authority of the kiswa in these relations will be discussed. In the end, evaluations will be made with the findings obtained and seminal suggestions will be made for future research.

2. Definition, Structure, and Financing of the Kiswa

Definition: Kiswa, which is derived from the Arabic verb "kasā", and means "one piece of clothing" (Ibn Manzūr n.d.), is a special term used in Islamic culture for the cover of the Ka'ba.

For centuries, including pre-Islamic times (*Jāhiliyya*), the services related to the Ka'ba were known as *hijāba* or *sidāna*. The maintenance of the Ka'ba and the safekeeping of its keys were carried out by officials called *hājib* or *sādin*. According to tradition, this responsibility passed from Prophet Ishmael to the Jurhum tribe,[7] then to the Khuzā'a tribe,[8] and then to Qusayy ibn Kilāb from the Quraysh tribe when he became the ruler of Mecca. During the conquest of Mecca by Muslims (8 AH/630 CE), the duty, held by 'Uthman ibn Talha at the time, was reaffirmed and entrusted to 'Uthman ibn Talha and his uncle's son Shaybah ibn 'Uthman by the Prophet Muhammad. After that, Banū Shaybah continued to fulfil this duty for centuries (Sarıçam 1998). In the early periods, the Ka'ba cover was not changed; instead, the new one was covered over the old one. Over time, this caused structural damage due to the accumulated weight. After the conquest of Mecca, when the duty of *hijāba*, which means being responsible for the cover and other affairs of the Ka'ba, was given to Banū Shaybah, the practice of removing the old covering and covering it with a new one was started (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Fākihī 1414; Ünal 2001). Additionally, the Ka'ba was covered both inside and out. While the interior covering was replaced less frequently as it was protected from external elements, the outer covering, subject to various conditions, was replaced more often (al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 281; Ünal 2001). Dekkiche argues that secondary sources on the debate about the outer and inner garment do not pay attention to the distinction between inner and outer garments and are therefore incomplete in their assessment (Dekkiche 2015).

The kiswa, as the Ka'ba's cover is called, traditionally consisted of the main cover called *hijāb*, and a sash called *nitāq*. It was customary to write Quranic verses related to the Ka'ba on this sash and include the sovereign ruler's name at the end (Metin 2015). The special cover for the door was known as a *burqū*. From the Abbāsid period (132–656 AH/750–1258 CE) onwards, the name of the caliphs and the date were placed on this cover. During the Mamlūk era (648–923 AH/1250–1517 CE), it was crafted in two colours: black and blue (Ünal 2001).

Structure: Since this article focuses on the religious and political aspects of the kiswa tradition, it is not necessary to give detailed information about its structure and physical characteristics. However, it would be appropriate to give some general information to understand the subject better. Before the first one-piece cover, i.e., the kiswa was put on the Ka'ba, and different covers were put on piece by piece. For example, when gifts such as the covers on the sacrifices, silk fabrics, shawls, embroidered mattress faces, etc. were delivered to the Ka'ba, they were covered. Later on, a single piece of cloth was put over it (al-Azraqī 1979).

Initially, the kiswa was made from white or colourful fabrics, but the black fabric was later adopted as a tradition, which continues today (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). Sometimes, multiple coverings in different colours were used in a single year. For example, red, white, and qabatī (Egyptian) silk coverings were prepared during the Abbāsid period: red for the Day of Arafah, qabatī silk for the start of the month of Rajab, and white for Laylat al-Qadr. In such cases, the covers were changed three times within a year (al-Azraqī 1979). In the Mamlūk era, the coverings were multi-coloured; for example, the kiswa sent by Sultan Khoshqadam (865–871 AH/1461–1467 CE) had a white silk covering for the eastern and northern walls of the Ka'ba (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). This information suggests that the west and south sides were of a different colour. The adoption of black fabric for the kiswa is often linked to the Abbāsids, as black was their dynastic colour. However, at the end of the 16th century, during the Ottoman era, the white cover was used for a while

because the black colour was quickly affected by the sun and the pale cover looked bad. The inscription on this cover was written in black letters. Nonetheless, this practice did not last long (Faroqhi 1995, p. 115). It is known that in 1806, the Wahhabis covered the Ka'ba with a red silk cover, followed by a black cover later on (Gouda 1989).

In both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, the Ka'ba was covered with various types of fabric, such as '*asb* (a striped Yemeni fabric), *wasāil* (a Yemeni fabric with red stripes), *melā* (soft, fine cloth), *Ma'āfir* (woven in Ma'āfir), and *hasf* (a coarse, thick fabric). Tubba[9] was the first person to cover the Ka'ba with a single piece of cloth of this kind. It is also known that he used felt and leather covers. During the Prophet Muhammad's time, the covering was made from Yemeni fabric; during Caliph 'Umar's (13–23 AH/634–644 CE) and 'Uthman's periods (23–35 AH/644–656 CE), qabatī silk from Egypt was used. Caliph 'Uthman was the first to use double layers of fabric. During the Umayyad era (41–132 AH/661–750 CE), the kiswa covered by Mu'āwiya, 'Abd Allāh ibn Zubayr, and other statesmen was described as an atlas cloth, and in the narrations of the Abbāsids, it was described as a silk cloth (al-Azraqī 1979; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 284; al-Fāsī 2000). The kiswa was decorated with very precious stones. The cover sent by Khoshqadam, one of the Circassian Mamlūk sultans (873–923 AH/1382–1517 CE), is made of solid silver on four sides and white silk on two sides and decorated with precious stones (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). Over time, it became customary to make the kiswa of black silk fabric and to write the word tawhid and verses about the Ka'ba on it with gold thread. In paintings of the Ka'ba from the 16th to 18th centuries, the kiswa has a rather plain appearance. Later, a strip of verses from the Qur'an was added to it, but this was abandoned after a while when the cover was trampled underfoot during the circumambulation of Muslims, and the verses were also trampled underfoot (Faroqhi 1995, p. 115).

According to an interview given in 2020 by Muhammad ibn Abdallah al-Bājawda, the director of the factory established for the production of the Ka'ba cover, 660 kg of pure silk, 100 kg of silver and 120 kg of gold are used in the production of the cover today. The embroidered belt, also called 'Ka'ba belt', consists of 16 pieces. There are also six pieces under it. Black colour is preferred because it expresses seriousness and this colour suits the sanctity of the Ka'ba the best. The inner cover, woven from green silk, is rarely changed as in previous centuries because it is not damaged by external factors. The last time it was changed was during the reign of King Fahd (1996) (Bājawda 2020).

Financing: Since the early Islamic period, resources were allocated for the kiswa. The costs of the cover were met from the state budget, also called *bayt al-māl*, and in the period of Four Caliphs (Rāshidūn Caliphate) (11–41 AH/632–661 CE), the cover was woven in Egypt (al-Azraqī 1979). Foundations, which were established to allocate certain revenues to ensure the continuity of charitable works, were also established for the cover of the Ka'ba. The first systematic waqf for the kiswa was established by the Mamlūk Sultan Al-Malik al-Sālih Ishmael (743–746 AH/1342–1345 CE) (Alashari 2022). He endowed the revenues of three villages in Egypt for this purpose. Later, Sultan Qalawun (678–689 AH/1279–1290 CE) added two more villages to these endowments (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018; al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 4, p. 183). After the Hejaz came under Ottoman rule, the number of villages endowed for the Ka'ba cover increased to nine (Kurşun 2017). It has been claimed that the cover hung inside the Ka'ba was changed less frequently because it was prepared and sent from the ruler's personal wealth rather than through the foundation (Dekkiche 2015). However, Ünal, citing Qalqashandī, states that the reason for this was that it was not needed because it was not damaged by the sun and other external factors (Ünal 2001).

During the 19th century, the foundations of the kiswa woven in Egypt were abolished during the reign of Mehmet Ali Pasha, and the production expenses were directly covered

by the state budget (Alashari 2022). Today, the Saudi Arabian administration carries out these works.

It was also in 1927 that King ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ordered the establishment of a factory in the Ajyad region to cover the Holy Kaʻba in Makkah al-Mukarrama. Most of the workers were Indian technicians and a few Saudis. In the same year (1927), the Kaaba was covered for the first time with the Saudi Kiswa. In 1977, a new coating factory was established, equipped with the latest equipment and capabilities required for coating production, while production continued to be done manually (Basahih 2018).

3. The History of the Kiswa Tradition

3.1. Pre-Islamic Period

The tradition of covering the Kaʻba with a kiswa dates back to the pre-Islamic period, known as the Jāhiliyya era, and developed as an expression of respect for the Kaʻba. (Wensinck 1977, vol. 6, pp. 9–14) According to tradition, the covering of the Kaʻba existed even before Islam, although it is not known exactly who first initiated it. However, several names are mentioned in this context. According to a narration from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet Muhammad prohibited insulting the Yemeni king, As'ad al-Himyarī, and stated: "Because he was the first man to cover the Kaʻba with a kiswa". Scholars have particularly noted that As'ad al-Himyarī was the first person to cover the entire Kaʻba (al-Azraqī 1979; Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018). In addition to As'ad, other names mentioned include Prophet Ishmael and Adnan, one of the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad (Ünal 2001).

3.2. Islamic Period

In the Islamic period, the tradition of covering the Kaʻba with a kiswa continued. Sources indicate that the Prophet Muhammad covered the Kaʻba with a kiswa made in Yemen (al-Azraqī 1979). After the Prophet Muhammad, the practice continued during the first four caliphs. For example, Caliphs ʻUmar and ʻUthman covered the Kaʻba with thin fabrics called *qabaṭī* from Egypt. The Umayyad caliph Muʻāwiya (41–60 AH/661–680 CE) started to cover the Kaʻba twice a year, one at the end of the month of Ramadān and on the day of āshūrā. According to some sources, on the day of ʻarafah, the upper part of the red kiswa, called *qamīṣ*, was not sewn but only hung from the top. The lower part of the kiswa, called *īzār*, to prevent it from tearing during their return from Mina, was hung after the pilgrims left on āshūrā. The silken kiswa sent by ʻAbd al-Malīk ibn Marwān (65–86 AH/685–705 CE) was first spread in the mosque in Medina and then brought to Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979).

During the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (198–218 AH/813–833 CE), one of the Abbāsid caliphs, the tradition of changing the kiswa three times a year was established. These three kiswas consisted of different colours or types: red, white, and qabatī. The red one would be covered on the eve of ʻarafah, the qabatī one at the beginning of the month of Rajab, and the white one on the 27th night of Ramadān or the first day of Eid al-Ramadān. Although it is said that Al-Ma'mūn was the first to do this, his grandfather, Al-Mahdi, had removed all of the heavy kiswas during his reign due to concerns that they would cause the Kaʻba's walls to collapse. Instead, three lighter kiswas made from qabatī, silk, and atlas were used. However, about 40 years later, the same problem occurred again. The covers that had been covered until then had begun to weigh again. For this reason, the Kaʻba was emptied again, and three new covers were put on. Over time, when the kiswas accumulated and became a safety hazard, they were taken down (al-Azraqī 1979; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 2, p. 45). Although the black kiswa became a tradition with the Abbāsids, it was not used during the early caliphs' reigns. From Al-Mamun to the time of Al-Nāsir li-Dīn Allāh (575–622 AH/1180–1225 CE), the colour continued to be white, but in 1183, the kiswa sent

by Al-Nasir was green, with red inscriptions. Toward the end of his caliphate, the kiswa was black with yellow writing. Thus, the white kiswa of al-Ma'mūn transformed into black, and this tradition continues to this day (Ünal 2001).

During the period of the Abbāsid Caliphate, the Buyids dynasty(334–447 AH/945–1055 CE), which controlled Iraq and Khorasan before the Seljuks (447/1055), also placed great importance on the service of Haramayn, and 'Adūd al-Dawla (367–372 AH/978–983 CE) even became a ruler remembered for these services. The Buyid ruler 'Adūd al-Dawla was successful against the Fatimids and performed very important services in the holy land. He abolished the road tax for all pilgrims, including those from Iraq, renovated the roads between the two cities, built water systems, and sent a kiswa to the Ka'ba every year (Doğan Turay 2022). The Seljuks also placed great importance on sending kiswas and made significant efforts for many years. For example, in 1074, the Seljuk vizier Nizām al-Mulk personally went on a pilgrimage and ensured that the kiswa covered the Ka'ba on behalf of Malikshah (465–485 AH/1072–1092 CE). Moreover, this kiswa was originally prepared by the Ghaznavid ruler Mahmūd (388–421 AH/998–1030 CE), but it was not possible to put it on the Ka'ba.[10] Finally, 40 years later, this service was performed by the Seljuks (Doğan Turay 2022; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 5, p. 96).

In the mid-13th century, during the Mamlūk sultanate, which dominated the Hejaz along with Egypt and Syria, great care was also given to the kiswa, and the tradition of sending black silk kiswas became established. Sultan Baybars (658–676 AH/1260–1277 CE) placed more importance on the ceremonies organized to ensure that these covers reached Mecca, and these ceremonies became an indicator of political authority. The Mamlūks utilized the workshops in Alexandria to prepare the silk kiswas (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992), and the kiswas were sometimes sent by sea and managed to reach the Ka'ba even in years when road security was not guaranteed (Ateş 1981; al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 7, p. 59). A sign of the importance given to the kiswa during the Mamlūk period was the careful selection of the person assigned to the task. The official in charge of preparing the kiswa was selected from among those known for their integrity and moral character (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 7, p. 59; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 43).

After the Mamlūks, the Ottoman Empire continued the tradition of covering the Ka'ba with a kiswa. When Sultan Selim I conquered Egypt (923/1517) and the territories controlled by the Mamlūks, the responsibility for governing the Hejaz and preparing the Ka'ba kiswa became a responsibility of the Ottoman sultans. The Ottomans generally had these covers woven in Egypt, but during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, while the fabric for the exterior and interior cover was still woven in Egypt, the interior cover began to be prepared in Istanbul. From the reign of Ahmed III (1703–1730) onwards, all fabrics were produced in Istanbul. During World War I (1914–1918), however, due to the Hejaz Rebellion, the kiswa was again sent from Egypt (Atalar 1991; al-Azraqī 1979; Ünal 2001). As mentioned earlier, the practice of having the kiswa woven in Egypt had been ongoing since the time of the Rāshidūn Caliphs. However, for some reasons, such as the weakening of the Abbāsids, the cover was brought from Yemen instead of Egypt (al-Azraqī 1979).

In the Ottoman period, the Ka'ba cover sent from Cairo was replaced in a special ceremony, and the old cover was sent to Istanbul. When the Ka'ba's kiswa and *nitāq* (belt) arrived in Istanbul, they were welcomed with a special ceremony, stored in a chest and displayed for public visitation, and then sent to the palace and delivered to the *Khirqa-i Sa'ādat* chamber (Uzunçarşılı 1972). The old kiswas were distributed to mosques or prominent individuals and were laid on coffins because they were regarded as sacred (Metin 2015). These are preserved especially in the Chamber of Sacred Relics in Topkapi Palace but are sometimes exhibited in different cities, mosques, or museums.

The most important item of the *surra*[11] sent by Muslim rulers to the Hejaz every pilgrimage season was undoubtedly the kiswa. The *surra processions*, first sent during the Abbāsid period, were continued by the Ayyubids and Mamlūks, who dominated Haramayn after them, and maintained their grandeur even after the Ottomans took over. Although a weak narration states that the first sultan to send the surras was Bayezid I, it is known that the surras were sent regularly starting from the period of Mehmed I/Çelebi Mehmed (Buzpınar 2009; Mekkī 1318). However, these early *surras* sent by the Ottomans contained material assistance to the people of the Hejaz and sometimes Jerusalem and to those working in the holy places because in those years, the Mamlūk sultan was in charge of changing the kiswa. The Ottoman sultans fulfilled this duty meticulously, believing that the Haramayn deserved the best of everything, and sent two surra processions to Mecca and Medina every year (Atalar 1991). The first *surra* was called "Mahmal-i Humāyūn" and was sent by the Ottoman sultans themselves, while the other was called "Mahmal-i Misrī", and sent by the khedive of Egypt (Uzunçarşılı 1972).

Although Muslim rulers aimed to send the Ka'ba's kiswa and mahmal regularly each year, these services were sometimes interrupted due to security concerns. This occurred particularly in 1806 due to the insults and disturbances of the Wahhabis against the pilgrims. That year, a decision was made not to send the sacred objects, and during the Wahhabi disturbances, the kiswas for both the Ka'ba and the Rawda-i Mutahhara were not sent. However, after the region was reclaimed from the Wahhabis, the sacred coverings were sent again, and in 1814, the kiswa was delivered to Mecca (B. Ayaz 2014; Buhl 1977).

In 1926, when the political relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia deteriorated, the shipment of the kiswa was stopped. Meanwhile, King 'Abd al-'Azīz of Saud had a special factory established in Mecca. The cover of the Ka'ba, which was woven in this factory until 1936, was woven in Egypt again from this year until 1962. In 1962, the cover sent from Egypt was turned back from Jeddah and from this year onwards it was produced in the factory in Mecca established by the Saudi government. After the factory previously established in Mecca, the production of the Ka'ba cover was started in the new factory established outside Mecca in 1974 (Gouda 1989; Ünal 2001).

Today, the Ka'ba's kiswa is traditionally renewed each year. Modern production processes, combined with traditional craftsmanship, ensure the continuation of this sacred tradition. The kiswa produced in Mecca today remains a significant symbol of aesthetic and spiritual values in the Islamic world (Basahih 2018). According to the information obtained from an interview conducted in 2020 with Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Bājawda, the director of the Kaaba Musharraf Cover Factory, a total of 200 people work in each unit within 8 to 10 months. People with manual dexterity, tailoring skills and sincerity are recruited through examinations, and the employees are entirely Saudis. This situation shows that Saud avoids employing a foreigner even in the production of cover. After all of the processes, a ceremony is organized at factory. The Riyāsat al-Haramayn Directorate receives the cover from the factory in this programme, which is also attended by the administrative authorities of Mecca. The Riyāsat al-Haramayn also gives this cover on the 1st day of Dhu al-Hijjah every year to the al-Shaybī family, which continues the sidāna/hijāba service today. This is because the duty of hijāba, i.e., covering the Bayt Allāh and keeping its keys, was given to this family by the Prophet Muhammad himself (Bājawda 2020).

4. The Kiswa (Ka'ba Cover) as a Religious Symbol

In the Jāhiliyya period, in order to authorise more people to serve the Ka'ba, duties such as imāra, siqāya, hijāba, and sidāna were created. These duties had very small political differences. As mentioned in the introduction, the verses[12] and the narrations about the reasons for their revelation, which emphasize who will build the mosques, and that siqāya

and ‘imāra are not equal to faith in Allāh and the Last Day and jihad in the way of Allāh, reveal that both in the Jāhiliyya period and the first period of Islam, carrying out these duties was a matter of pride and was considered superior to many deeds. The narrations about this in Islamic sources reinforced the desire of Muslims to serve the Ka‘ba in later periods (al-Muslim 1426).[13]

The change of the Ka‘ba cover (kiswa) has gained different meanings with the effect of political events that developed over time. Nevertheless, it has always been seen by sultans as a means of earning Allāh’s pleasure and serving religion. The female Mamlūk sultan, Shajarāt al-Durr[14] was characterized as a competent administrator and a pious philanthropist. This characterization of her is related to the fact that she was the first sultan to send the surra procession and to send the cover called *burqū* to the door of the Ka‘ba (Demir 2023; Tomar 2010; Ünal 2001).

The Ottoman sultans regarded serving the Haramayn and changing the kiswa annually as a significant responsibility. They expressed this duty with the title “Khâdim al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn” (Servant of the Two Holy Sanctuaries), previously used by the Ayyubid and Mamlūk sultans. Ottoman historian Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, while discussing the arrangements of Yavuz Sultan Selim, who took Egypt from the Mamlūks, stated that the sultan regarded his services to the Haramayn as a religious duty (Ahmet Cevdet Paşa 1974, vol. 6, p. 433; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 47; B. Ayaz 2014).

The Ka‘ba cover is an important symbol that emphasizes the spiritual value of the Ka‘ba, one of the most sacred places in the Islamic world, and represents profound respect. In Islamic history, the kiswa has been an indicator of both devotion to God and the unity of Muslims. This covering is not only a physical means of protection but also a tradition loaded with religious and spiritual meanings. This tradition, which existed in the pre-Islamic period, transformed into an Islamic obligation when the Prophet cleaned the Ka‘ba and covered it after the conquest of Mecca (al-Azraqī 1979).

Although the kiswa is not directly ordered by religion and its colour, structure, etc. are not determined by religion, it has gained a religious meaning due to the fact that it is worn on the Ka‘ba. When Muslims go to the harem region for pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage, they have to perform some tawāf[15] to complete their worship. During pilgrimage in general and tawāf in particular, people of all colours, cultures, ages, and wealth levels such as rich and poor, young and old, black and white, are on an equal level in a single form. Muslims from all over the world move and pray toward the same goal, in the same direction. Thus, Muslims realize equality and unity. The benefits of pilgrimage, which also means spiritual purification, are also mentioned in the Qur’an.[16] The Ka‘ba, which is the centre point for this worship, is always seen and visited in a covered manner. Therefore, the kiswa becomes a spiritual focal point during pilgrimage and minor pilgrimage worship. As a result, the kiswa has become identified with the Ka‘ba and has acquired a religious identity (Görgün 1996).

In the late Ottoman period, non-Muslims’ respect for traditions such as the pilgrimage and sending the kiswa is noteworthy. When Napoleon invaded Egypt, he announced that he would not interfere with the supplies allocated to the Haramayn and that the Ka‘ba cover produced in Egypt would continue to be sent regularly. Although this was intended to establish a friendly relationship with the Ottomans, at first glance, it was perceived as an example of respect for the sacred and religious tolerance (B. Ayaz 2014).

Similarly, in the early 19th century, the French commander’s attitude towards the kiswa after the war is also noteworthy. The Ka‘ba cover, which had previously been prepared by Kethüda Mustafa Ağa, was stored in the Hussein Mosque in Cairo but had been damaged by humidity. After the war, the French commander ordered the repair of the cover and sent it to Mecca when the time came. Although this attitude has been interpreted

as aiming to establish an alliance between Muslims and the French, it has been presented as respect for the sacred (al-Jabartī 1998; B. Ayaz 2014).

5. The Kiswa as a Political Symbol

The Ka'ba cover (kiswa) has not only been a religious symbol but also a powerful indicator of political authority and influence. As a symbol of dominance over the Haramayn, it has held great significance for every Islamic state claiming leadership. The inscriptions embroidered on the cover not only consisted of religious expressions but also included the name of the ruler of the time. This made the kiswa a tool for reinforcing political legitimacy. The kiswa sent to the Ka'ba with the surra procession is an important element that clearly expressed the caliph's or sultan's protective role over the Haramayn.

Political rivalries have had a direct effect on the sending of the kiswa. For example, in 971, the Fatimids sent an army to break the Abbāsid caliph's influence and dominate the Hejaz but were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in 974, they succeeded in having the sermon (khutba[17]) in Hejaz read in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Muizz and sent a very valuable cover to the Ka'ba as a sign of victory.[18] However, before this, the kiswa had been sent by the Abbāsids. During this period, the kiswa became a symbol of the political struggle for power (al-Maqrīzī 1996; Çelik 2010; Toqqoush 2001, pp. 232–33).

Like other Islamic states, the Mamlūk sultans, who ruled over Egypt about a century after the Fatimids, regarded the service to the Haramayn as a great source of prestige and honour, and through these services, they consolidated their influence in the Hejaz. The first mahmal and kiswa sent by Mamlūk Sultan Baybars from Cairo to Mecca in 1266 demonstrated the power of the Egyptian sultan and his authority over the Islamic world through the Abbāsid caliph (Ateş 1981; Buhl 1977; Erol 2020; al-Qalqashandī 1987, vol. 4, p. 58).

The ceremonies of sending the mahmal and the kiswa were not only a religious obligation but also a political demonstration that emphasised the Mamlūks' authority in the Islamic world (Aşan and Yuvalı 2011; Jomier 1972; Kopraman 1989). The Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun received a promise from the sharif of Mecca, Abū Numayy, not to send the cover to the Ka'ba from anywhere other than Egypt and made this symbol a part of his authority (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 2, p. 157; Küçükaşçı 2017). The Mamlūks strengthened their influence in the Haramayn and emphasized their superiority over their political rivals, especially during this period.

Atalar (1991) states that the mahmal ceremonies became a magnificent event reflecting the organizing ruler's authority over the Islamic world. Furthermore, the fact that the name of the ruler appears at the end of the verses written on the kiswa's belt section indicates that this service had a strong political meaning in addition to its religious aspect (Civelek 2012; Rubin 1986). Likewise, the inscriptions on the mahmal were used to increase the authority of the sultan, just like on the kiswa (Jomier 1972).

The conquest of Egypt by Yavuz Sultan Selim in 1517 and the transfer of the caliphate to the Ottomans marked the beginning of a new era in the kiswa tradition. The Ottomans continued the tradition of preparing the kiswa in Egypt as they had done before. From the reign of Qānūnī Sultan Sulaiman (1520–1566), they started to prepare the outer cover of the Ka'ba in Egypt and the inner cover in Istanbul, and later, from the period of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730), the kiswa was entirely produced in Istanbul. This change was aimed at increasing the influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Haramayn and boosting its prestige in the Islamic world. The sending of the kiswa to Mecca with the surra procession symbolically strengthened the Ottoman sultans' title of "Khādimu'l-Haramayn" (Servant of the Two Holy Sanctuaries). This practice, and the inscription of sultans' names on the kiswa, became a way for the Ottomans to assert their leadership in the Islamic world (Atalar 1991; Civelek 2012).

The Ka'ba cover also symbolized a diplomatic tool during times of war and conflict. For example, during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), the French continued the production and sending of the kiswa in an attempt to gain the support of Muslims. However, during this period the kiswa became not just a religious symbol but also a political battleground. During the subsequent Wahhabi movement, the political and military conflicts between the Ottomans and the Wahhabis had a direct impact on the sending of the kiswa. The Wahhabis rejected the kiswa and thus challenged the Ottoman authority over the Haramayn (Buhl 1977).

Also during the Saudi period, Egypt continued to send the cover of the Ka'ba every year after Muhammad Ali Pasha took over the rule of Egypt (1805–1848). There were times when it was interrupted due to the First World War and a crisis between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It was also in 1927 that King 'Abd al-'Azīz ordered the establishment of a factory in the Ajyad region to cover the Holy Kaaba in Makkah al-Mukarrama. Most of the workers were Indian technicians and a few Saudis. In the same year (1927), the Ka'ba was covered for the first time with the Saudi Kiswa (Basahih 2018). The kiswa, which was woven in this factory until 1936, was woven in Egypt again from this year until 1962. In 1962, the cover sent from Egypt was turned back from Jeddah and from that year on it was produced in the factory in Mecca established by the Saudi government (Gouda 1989; Ünal 2001).

In 1908, the news the Egyptian Khedive Abbas Hilmi Pasha had changed the Ka'ba cover on his own behalf was carefully monitored by the Ottoman administration, and this news was quickly refuted as it could potentially harm the Ottoman religious and political authority in the Islamic world. It seems that the Ottomans followed the news about the kiswa in the newspapers closely and intervened when necessary (Civelek 2012).

It has already been stated that the Ka'ba cover, beyond being a religious symbol in the Islamic World, is an indicator of the struggle for political authority and leadership. Islamic states such as the Fatimids, Abbāsids, Mamlūks, Timurids, Ilkhanids, and Ottomans have sought to establish or strengthen their authority over the Haramayn through the sending of the kiswa. This process shows that the Ka'ba and the Haramayn were not only places of worship but also politically significant centres in the Islamic world. In connection with this, the kiswa has continued to be a symbol of leadership and authority throughout Islamic history. There is a wealth of information and details in sources regarding the struggles between these states.

6. Competition Between Muslim Rulers over the Kiswa

6.1. Competition Between the Abbāsids and the Fatimids

The sovereignty over Hejaz and the privilege of sending covers to the Ka'ba were regarded as important indicators of political power during the Abbāsid period. The Fatimids (297–567 AH/909–1171 CE) endeavoured to end the Abbāsid supremacy and dominate the Hejaz, and they succeeded in this goal for a while. Over time, the khutbahs in Mecca began to be recited again in the name of the Abbāsid caliph. In the face of this situation, the Fatimid Caliph al-Muizz (341–365 AH/953–975 CE) took action in 971 by preparing an army. Although his first attempt was unsuccessful, he attacked the pilgrimage caravans by inciting some Arab tribes during the pilgrimage season in 974 and succeeded in having the khutbah in Haramayn recited in his name. Upon this victory, Caliph al-Muizz sent a very valuable cover to the Ka'ba, whereas this was previously done only by the Abbāsids (al-Maqrīzī 1996; Çelik 2010; Toqqoush 2001). But the Abbāsids also made attempts to have the khutbah recited in their name. They tried to attract the amir of Mecca, Sharif Abū al-Futūh al-Hasan ibn Ja'far, to their side (381/991). However, the amir not only rejected this offer but also declared that the khutbah would be read on behalf of the Fatimids and informed the Fatimid caliph about this development. In gratitude for this

loyalty of the amir, the Fatimid caliph sent him valuable gifts along with a kiswa (Çelik 2010; Surūr n.d.; Toqqoush 2001).

The Fatimids, rather than direct intervention, sometimes maintained their influence in the holy cities through other statesmen. For instance, when the khutbah began to be recited in the name of the Abbāsid Caliph al-Qāim Bi-'amr Allāh (422–467 AH/1031–1075), Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir (427–487 AH/1036–1094 CE) appointed the Shiite ruler of Yemen, Sulayhi to go to Mecca and have the sermon read in his name again, on the condition that no blood would be shed (455/1063). It is clearly stated in the sources that Sulayhi established his sovereignty over Hejaz, and it is also recorded that he covered the Ka'ba in a white cover (Çelik 2010; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 5, p. 73).

6.2. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Rasulids

The Mamlūk period was one of the most significant times for competition over the kiswa, and an important dimension of this rivalry was with the Rasulids in Yemen. The Rasulids (626–858 AH/1229–1454 CE), aiming to maintain their dominance over Hejaz, frequently clashed with the Mamlūks over sending the kiswa. Mamlūk Sultan Baybars' pilgrimage in 1269 was accepted as a demonstration that the right to dress the Ka'ba in a covering was solely the Mamlūks' privilege. However, in 1271, the King of Yemen attempted to seize Harameyn, and although he failed, he left traces of the rivalry against Egypt. After the death of Baybars, the Rasulids took action again in 1277 and continued their rivalry against the Mamlūks. In an effort to end these conflicts, the new Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun obtained a promise from the amir of Mecca, Sharif Abū Numayy, that he would only accept the kiswa sent from Egypt and would not accept kiswa from anywhere else. This period clearly demonstrates how the kiswa was used as a symbol of political power and dominance in the region (N. a.-D. 1983–1990, vol. 3, p. 114; Karakaş 2023). A similar declaration of loyalty was also sent in 1282. According to this, Sharif Abū Numayy swore an oath to the Mamlūk Sultan Qalawun that he would 'remain loyal to the sultan and his children, be a friend to the sultan's friends and an enemy to his enemies, not to leave obedience and not to take any opposing action, to cover only the kiswa sent from Egypt to the Ka'ba every year and not to accept any other cover from anyone else' and some other things. With this obedience, it was confirmed that the Rasulids had been eliminated and the title of "Khādim al-Haramayn" (Custodian of the Two Holy Sanctuaries) belonged only to the Mamlūk sultan (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 2, p. 157; al-Qalqashandī 1987; F. Y. Ayaz 1998; I. a.-D. Ibn Fahd 1986). In the following century, in 1379, the kiswa sent by the ruler of Yemen, Ashraf, to Mecca was met with resistance from the Egyptian pilgrimage amir, and the issue was resolved through the intervention of the sharif of Mecca (Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986).

6.3. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Ilkhanids

The rivalry between the Mamlūks and the Ilkhanids (654–754 AH/1256–1353 CE) reached a new stage with the conversion of Ghāzān Khan to Islam. This development changed the nature of the relationship between the two powers because they were no longer faced with a pagan, shamanic non-Muslim leader but with a Muslim ruler who introduced himself as "Sultān al-Islām" (the Sultan of Islam) (Uzun 2023). Ghāzān Khan had launched several attacks on the lands under Mamlūk control, and he succeeded in occupying Syria for three months. Additionally, he tried to strengthen his legitimacy in the eyes of the people by propagating that the administrators in Syria and Egypt had deviated from the faith. He took steps to ensure the security of the pilgrimage route, and in 1302, he sent gifts to the people of the Haramayn (the Two Holy Mosques) and arranged for the preparation of the mahmal and kiswa (cover of the Ka'ba), but the Battle of Shaqhāb thwarted this plan (Amitai 2005; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992; Irwin 2012; Uzun 2023). As seen, Ghāzān Khan's

plans were not limited to military strategy; he made various attempts to obtain religious authority in Mecca by intervening in issues such as the security of the pilgrimage route. The competition between the Ilkhanids and the Mamlūks turned into a struggle where elements such as the pilgrimage season, the Ka'ba's kiswa, and the pilgrimage routes were of strategic and symbolic importance. This demonstrates that dominance in the Islamic world was not only related to the military but also to religious and cultural authority. The Mamlūk Sultan al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, after his victory over Ghāzān Khan, used titles such as "al-Mujahid, al-Muzaffar, al-Mansur, Sultan of Islam and Muslims" as well as "al-Khādim al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn" (Amitai 2005; Uzun 2023).

Abū Sa'īd Bahadur, who succeeded Oljaitu Khan, who took over the throne after Ghāzān Khan, had some tensions with the Mamlūks, and sent gifts to the Hejaz in 1319 and included a kiswa for the Ka'ba. However, this attempt was prevented by the Mamlūks. Nevertheless, during these events, the amir of pilgrimage took the initiative and made a concession. The Ilkhanid vizier Tāj al-Dīn Ali Shah sent two rings adorned with precious stones to be hung on the Ka'ba to fulfil his vow (*adaq*).[19] Although it was initially stated that this was not possible without the sultan's permission, when it was emphasized that it was a vow, they allowed it to be hung for a short time and the vow to be fulfilled (Ibn Fahd 1983–1990, vol. 3, pp. 160–61; Uzun 2023).

After the peace agreement between Abū Sa'id Bahadur Khan and Sultan Nasir Muhammad in 1320, relations between the two parties became more stable. In the same year, seven pilgrim caravans from Egypt and a caravan from Iraq arrived, and although Abū Sa'id paid great attention to the mahmal, he could not attempt to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba due to the peace between them. The Mamlūks' dominance over the Haramayn, which began with Baybars, ceased to be a matter of dispute under the subsequent sultans, especially Sultan Nāsir Muhammad, and a period of consolidation of their authority began with him (Uzun 2023).

6.4. Competition Between the Mamlūks and the Timurids

This section of the article will focus on the issue of the Ka'ba's kiswa, which came to the fore in these conflicts, rather than the struggle between the Mamlūks and the Timurids (771–913 AH/1370–1507 CE) for the control of the Hejaz. However, it would be useful to discuss the relations between the two states in a general framework before entering this subject. After the Mamlūks stopped the Mongols and established their dominance over Egypt, Syria, and the Hejaz, they became the most powerful state in the Islamic world. However, over time, other powers also emerged who wanted to attain this status. One of them was Shahrukh, the ruler of the Timurids. Shahrukh, who took over the death of his father, Timur, was known as a sincere and devout Muslim. Unlike his father, he prioritized Sharia over the laws of Genghis Khan and sought to gain a reputation as both a political and religious authority in the Islamic world (al-Maqrīzī 1997; Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986; Kanat 1996; Uzun 2020). For this reason, Shahrukh repeatedly attempted to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba, but his requests were rejected each time. One of his serious attempts took place on 13 October 1429.[20] A delegation of envoys brought letters and gifts from both Shahrukh and his son, the ruler of Shiraz, Ibrahim Sultan. While presenting these letters, they also offered numerous valuable gifts to the sultan. However, this request was responded to with limited permission, and the requests for the outer cover of the Ka'ba were rejected. Shahrukh's demands included the construction of a waterway in Mecca and sending to him of Ibn Hajar's *Fath al-Bārī*, which he wrote as a commentary on *al-Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, and Al-Maqrīzī's *al-Sulūk li Ma'rifat al-Duwal al-Mulūk*. While his requests regarding books were accepted without any objection, those regarding the Ka'ba and the sacred places were rejected outright. The Mamlūk sultan's response was quite clear: "There is a special foundation for the kiswa of the Ka'ba, and there is no need for another sultan to send a

cover. As for the construction of the waterway, there is no need for that either; the existing ones are sufficient" (Aka 1994). Although the response emphasized that there was no need for the requests, as understood from the subsequent dialogues, these demands were rejected due to the religious and political significance of sending the kiswa to the Ka'ba. Another letter of Shahrukh containing the same request was delivered to Sultan Barsbay in Cairo on 21 January 1433 (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 7, p. 248; Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, pp. 200–1). These rejection letters angered Shahrukh, and he threatened that they would have to bear the consequences if their demands were rejected. However, Sultan Barsbay ignored these threats and displayed a harsh attitude. In this letter, Shahrukh addressed Sultan Barsbay as "amir" instead of "sultan", which further strained the relations. These letters were sent back and forth several times, but the sultan never responded positively. On the contrary, he sent harsh replies. Additionally, the envoys were not treated well. Sultan Barsbay's strong responses to Shahrukh increased the rumours among the people that the Timurids would attack Damascus. Nonetheless, Barsbay remained determined to maintain the Mamlūks' authority over the Ka'ba (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, pp. 200–1).

On 2 September 1434, Shahrukh made a new attempt with a letter in which he stated that he had vowed to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba and that he had spent 12,000 dinars preparing it. He wanted the Mamlūk sultan to send a man and receive the cover. This request, which had previously been rejected, sometimes with a milder reaction and sometimes quite harshly, sparked a new controversy this time. Because the fulfilment of a vow is a religious responsibility, it is not right to prevent a Muslim from fulfilling his vow. Due to the religious dimension of the situation, a meeting was held with the participation of the chief judges of the four Sunni schools of law on 11 September 1434, and the issue was discussed. In this meeting, Barsbay expressed his concern that accepting the kiswa would allow other states to send their own covers, potentially leading to further tensions (Düzenli 2021; Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986, vol. 8, p. 329). At the meeting, the Hanafī chief judge, 'Aynī, ruled that Shahrukh's vow was invalid, while the Shāfi'ī chief judge, Ibn Hajar, dismissed the request as impermissible because such requests could lead to similar tensions in the future (al-Malatī 2002, vol. 4, p. 363; Kanat 1996). As a result, despite the different reasons, a consensus was reached to reject Shahrukh's request, with Barsbay's guidance.[21]

The main reason behind Sultan Barsbay's rejection of the kiswa request was the political risks of allowing other states to send covers to the Ka'ba, which could strengthen their claims of political superiority. This request, which had a religious dimension due to the issue of vow, was rejected with the opinion and approval of religious authorities. Thus, it was hoped that Shahrukh, being a Muslim himself, would consent to the decision of the chief qadis (Düzenli 2021). This clash between Barsbay and Shahrukh brought the two sides to the brink of war, but the war did not take place due to some other developments (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 4/2, p. 962; Kanat 1996). Another notable point was that Sultan Barsbay accepted all of Shahrukh's gifts except the kiswa. He even made it very clear that his kiswa would not be draped on the Ka'ba in the following reply by his envoy, who left a month after the meeting (25 September 1434): "As it was the custom before and is the custom today, only the Mamlūks of Egypt can cover the Ka'ba. This custom has the force of law. The kiswa is made by foundations, and there is no need for any assistance in this matter. If the king wants to fulfil his vow, he should sell the kiswa and distribute the money to the poor in Mecca. This will benefit more people and bring greater reward" (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 239). This attitude disturbed Shahrukh so much that he allied with the Akkoyunlu against the Mamlūks (Kopraman 1992).

The Timurid ruler Shahrukh also conveyed his request to send a kiswa to the Ka'ba to Sultan al-Malīk al-Zāhir Sayf al-Dīn Chaqmaq (1438–1453), who succeeded Barsbay. On 27 November 1444, Shahrukh's envoy arrived with a group of one hundred people, in-

cluding an elderly woman who was Shahrukh's wife. The Mamlūk Sultan had given permission in the previous year's correspondence, and so the delegation had set off with the Ka'ba cover. In response to the reactions, Sultan Chaqmaq stated, "This is a form of closeness. Anyone can put a cover to the Ka'ba", which disturbed the Egyptians greatly (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 15, pp. 120–21). This year, Shahrukh's kiswa was sent with the Egyptian caravan and hung inside the Ka'ba. At this time, it was found that Shahrukh's cover was not the only cover inside the Ka'ba; it was hung together with the cover previously hung by Barsbay in 826/1423, and both covers remained hanging there until Ramadān 856/1452. After that, by the order of Chaqmaq, the covers were replaced with his own (Ibn Fahd 1983–1990; Dekkiche 2015). It is said that the alliance between Chaqmaq and Shahrukh had an effect on his success. Some even interpreted this development as Shahrukh was so pleased with the alliance of the Arab and Persian states that he sent a kiswa to the Ka'ba as a sign of gratitude (Eyüp Sabri Paşa 2018).

6.5. Competition Among Mamlūk Amirs

The issue of covering the Ka'ba with a kiswa was not only a matter of rivalry between heads of state but also led to disputes among the pilgrimage amirs. An incident that took place in 1342 is a remarkable example of such a rivalry. In that year, the Damascus pilgrimage amir, 'Alā al-Dīn ibn Gurlu, arrived in Mecca with pilgrims from Aleppo and Safed, and he covered the Ka'ba with the kiswa he brought with him. However, this was an interference with the Egyptian pilgrimage caravan and the duty of the amir. Moreover, the Egyptian pilgrims had covered the Ka'ba in their own kiswas the day before. The details of the event highlight that the number of Damascus pilgrims that year was greater than that of the Egyptians, which can be seen as an explanation for 'Alā al-Dīn ibn Gurlu's bold move (al-Jazīrī 2002; Erol 2020; 1994–1997). This conflict should be viewed not only as a division of sacred duties but also as a reflection of regional power struggles.

Although the role and meaning of the kiswa as a symbol of religious greatness has always continued, studies have considered the Mamlūk period more special. It is stated that the role and meaning of the kiswa increased even more and reached its peak in this period (Dekkiche 2015). The fact that the Mamlūk sultans were of slave origin also played a role in this because they needed some additional practices to ensure their legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims. Re-establishing the Abbāsid caliphate in Egypt was one of the steps they took for this purpose (al-Maqrīzī 1997, vol. 1, pp. 530–31).

6.6. The Competition Between the Ottoman and Certain Arab Groups

The Ottoman Empire dominated the Hejaz for centuries and, therefore, undertook the services of the Haramayn. However, various uprisings in the Arab world led to these services being used as a tool to challenge Ottoman authority. In this context, the Ottoman-Wahhabi conflicts serve as a striking example. The political and military tensions during the Wahhabi movement had a direct impact on the sending of the Ka'ba's kiswa, and the Wahhabis rejected the kiswa to challenge the Ottoman rule over the Haramayn (Ateş 1981).

Another significant event was the actions of the Egyptian Khedive regarding the kiswa. In 1908, the Khedive of Egypt aimed to send a political message by changing the Ka'ba cover sent on behalf of the Ottoman Empire to his name. This development drew the reaction of the Ottoman Empire and demonstrated once again that the kiswa was not only a religious ritual but also a tool of diplomacy. This initiative of the khedive was carefully monitored by the Ottoman administration and was quickly denied, as it could damage the religious and political authority of the Ottomans in the Islamic world. Particularly, such interventions underline that the kiswa was not only a matter of worship but also a symbol of prestige and authority (Civelek 2012).

7. Conclusions

In this article, after briefly discussing the definition of the kiswa, the materials from which it is produced and how it is financed, the history of the kiswa tradition is brought to the present day, starting from the pre-Islamic period, and then the cover's becoming a religious symbol and then a political symbol are discussed under separate headings. The article particularly focuses on the competing states within the Islamic states in terms of sending kiswa. The article deals with this issue separately, which sultans made diplomatic attempts on this issue, whether they could compromise or not, and the prominence of the meaning of political authority in these relations.

According to the findings obtained, the kiswa, as a cover that was draped over the Ka'ba before Islam, has been a unique symbol reflecting both the religious and political layers of Islamic history, to which the people of Hejaz have paid attention since the Jāhiliyya period and the entire Islamic world with the Islamic period. With its spiritual dimension, it represents the respect for the Ka'ba and devotion to Allāh, and with the verses embroidered on it, it is a tool that constantly reminds of the belief in tawhid. In addition to being a religious ritual, the renewal of the kiswa is also an expression of the efforts of the states representing the authority throughout history to present themselves as servants to the Islamic ummah. Examples of this are discussed in the article, and it is seen how diligent Muslim statesmen are in serving the holy cities.

In addition to its deep religious meaning, the kiswa has played an important role throughout history as a reflection of leadership claims, authority, and political rivalries. The kiswa has been a diplomatic tool that reinforces the power of states and leaders, rather than a means of obtaining Allāh's approval. Throughout various periods of Islamic history, especially from the Abbāsid period onwards when multiple political actors were on the scene, the sending and covering of the kiswa has been used by states to emphasize their religious and political influence. In this context, incidents such as the Abbāsids' conflict with the Fatimids, the Mamlūks' conflict with the Rasulids, the Ilkhanids, and the Timurids, the competition among the local amirs during the Mamlūk period, the struggle for leadership in the Haramayn services during the Ottoman period, and the Wahhabi movement, all illustrate the immense political significance carried by the Ka'ba's covering. As can be seen, the role and meaning of the kiswa in becoming a political symbol has always continued and reached its peak especially during the Mamlūk period. The fact that the Mamlūks were of slave origin and their concerns about establishing legitimacy over the Islamic society must have influenced them to attach particular importance to this issue.

In the research conducted, it has been observed that the sultans consulted with committees consisting of competent persons, especially chief qādī, instead of making the final decision directly when there was a religious issue in the cases related to the kiswa. An example of this is the Timurid ruler Shahrukh's sending the Ka'ba cover as a vow. At the meeting organized in this regard, the covering was not permitted, despite the fact that it was a vow. A similar situation had previously occurred with the vow of the Ilkhanid vizier Ali Shah. Ali Shah wanted to hang two rings on the Ka'ba on the grounds that it was his vow. Initially, there was hesitation regarding this request, but it was allowed for a short time. However, the same concession was not made for the vow of the kiswa. This situation shows that the political meaning attributed to the cover of the Ka'ba was far superior. Another issue that needs to be addressed here is the distinction between inner and outer kiswa, which Dekkiche draws attention to in his study. Dekkiche states that the hanging of Shahrukh's cover inside the Ka'ba is not taken into account by the secondary sources and that this is an important detail in understanding the subject. Although this distinction is recognised when the primary sources are carefully examined, it is noteworthy that the researcher examines it in detail and draws attention to it for modern research.

In conclusion, the kiswa appears to be a powerful tool that parallels examples such as the Vatican and Jerusalem, where religious symbolism is intertwined with political authority. Like these places, the Ka'ba has been used throughout history not only as a spiritual centre but also as a means of representation and legitimacy of political power. Investigating the local meanings that the kiswa has acquired in different geographies in the historical process and the effects of these meanings on the socio-political structures of Muslim societies offers a wide field for future studies. Such comparative and local analyses can open up a broader discussion on the effects of religious symbols on issues of social cohesion, representation, and authority in the modern world. The story of the kiswa should be seen as an important field of study in order to understand how this symbolism, which extends from history to the present day, shapes the relationship between religion and politics. It is believed that today's researchers examining the political meanings of religious symbols or rituals that have transformed over time will make it easier to understand the causes and consequences of many practices. It is hoped that this article will guide studies in this field.

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Notes

1 This sanctity is particularly associated with the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: 'One sets out to visit only three masjids: Masjid al-Harām, Masjid al-Aqsā and this mosque of mine' (al-Bukhārī 2001). In the section "Fadlu al-Salāti fī Masjid al-Mecca wa al-Medīna, 6" of al-Bukhārī's book.

2 The city of Mecca is located in a valley known as Batnimecca (Bekke) in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The real importance of Mecca and its surroundings, which are described in the Qur'an as 'a valley where crops do not grow' (Q. 14:37), stems from the fact that the Ka'ba, the first temple built for the purpose of worshipping Allāh, is located here. In the Qur'an, it is pointed out that Mecca and its surroundings, where the Ka'ba, which is accepted as the house of Allāh, is located, is a safe place protected from all kinds of encroachment and a place where people are spiritually cleansed and purified, and some provisions have been made regarding this area and its boundaries have also been determined (Bozkurt and Küçükaşçı 2003b). The area within these borders determined by The Prophet Muhammad was called "haram" because it was forbidden to kill any living creature except pests and to damage vegetation within these borders (Öğüt 1997).

3 In Islamic sources, Medina is referred to by several names, including *Tayyiba, Miskīna, Azra, Dār al-Hijra, Dār al-Iman, Dār al-Sunnah, Medīnat al-Rasūl, Madīnat al-Nabī, and al-Medina al-Munawwara*. These names generally emphasize the city's sanctity, its role as the destination of migration (hijra) and its capital, and the civilization that developed after the hijra. Medina, which is one of the two Haram (Haramayn) along with Mecca, is considered to have been conquered by the Qur'an because it was the land of migration and its people adopted Islam without any coercion, and after the migration, the city's harem status was declared by the Prophet Muhammad by saying "Ibrahim made Mecca sacred (haram), and I made Medina sacred (haram)" (al-Bukhārī 2001; Bozkurt and Küçükaşçı 2003a).

4 Jerusalem, located on the undulating surface of the Judean Plateau to the west of the area where the Dead Sea depression is situated, is considered a sacred city by all three Abrahamic faiths. In Judaism, it holds the highest value and symbolizes the greatest hopes due to being chosen by God. It is also the site of Jewish pilgrimage. The significance of Jerusalem in Jewish worship is based on the belief that the Messiah will establish the Jewish state in this land. In the Christian scriptures, the Gospels also place significant importance on Jerusalem. According to the Gospels, the earthly life of Jesus ends in Jerusalem, and the apostles receive the "Holy Spirit" there. In Islam, Jerusalem is regarded as one of the three holy cities. However, the name Jerusalem is not directly mentioned in the Qur'an; rather, it is referred to as the blessed surroundings of the al-Aqsā Mosque. Al-Aqsā Mosque is also mentioned in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad as one of the three mosques on earth that should be visited (Harman 2002).

5 In the section "Salât 31" "Tafsîr 18" of al-Bukhārī's book.

6 Yüksel has analyzed the narrations on this subject in detail. It is recommended that those interested consult the article, as it would exceed the limits of the subject (Yüksel 2023).

7 The Jurhums are an Arab tribe originally from the southern Arabs who lived in Mecca in the time of Ishmael, the son of Prophet Abraham, and who ruled the Ka'ba one generation after Ishmael (Önkal 1993).

8 Although there are some disputes about the origin of this tribe, it is more likely to be from the southern Arabs like the Jurhums, the Arab tribe that defeated the Jurhums and took over the administration of Ka'ba (Önkal 1998).

9 Tubba' is a title given to the kings of ancient Yemen (Harman 2012).

10 The covering is recorded to have been made of yellow silk (Ibn Taghrībirdī 1992, vol. 14, p. 43).

11 Surra is a term that refers to the goods and gifts sent to the Haremayn during the pilgrimage season (Buzpınar 2009).

12 "*Do you consider giving water to pilgrims and maintaining the Sacred Mosque the same as believing in Allah and the Last Day and striving in Allah's path? They are not equal in Allah's sight. Allah does not guide the unjust people*". (Q. 9:19) The meanings of this verse and the following verses are taken from Itani's *Qur'ān English Translation* (Itani 2012).

13 In the section "'Imāra 111" of Muslim's book.

14 The subject of the pilgrimage of Shajarāt al-Durr and the mahmal he sent has been the subject of a study and the appearance of women in this area has been examined with examples from Islamic history. For detailed information, see (Behrens-Abouseif 1997).

15 In pilgrimage, there is tawāf al-qudūm upon arrival in Mecca, tawāf al-ziyārah after 'Arafat as one of the three obligatory pillars of pilgrimage (entering ihrām, performing waqf at Arafat, and performing tawāf al-ziyārah), and tawāf wada' as the last tawāf before leaving Mecca. In minor pilgrimage, the tawāf of 'umrah is performed (Öğüt 2011).

16 "*(28) That they may witness the benefits for themselves, and celebrate the name of Allah during the appointed days, for providing them with the animals livestock. (29) Then let them perform their acts of cleansing, and fulfill their vows, and circle around the Ancient House. (30) All that. Whoever venerates the sanctities of Allah-it is good for him with his Lord. All livestock are permitted to you, except what is recited to you. So stay away from the abomination of idols, and stay away from perjury. (31) Being true to Allah, without associating anything with Him. Whoever associates anything with Allah-it is as though he has fallen from the sky, and is snatched by the birds, or is swept away by the wind to a distant abyss. (32) So it is. Whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah-it ise from the piety of the hearts. (33) In them are benefits for you until a certain time. Then their place is by the Ancient House*." (Q. 22:28–33)

17 The meaning of khutba is "a speech addressed to the congregation during the performance of some worship and ceremonies, especially Friday and Eid prayers" and it is important whose name is mentioned in these speeches. It is understood that the person whose name is mentioned in the sermon holds authority in that place (Baktır 1998).

18 This cover is described in detail. The square-shaped covering was made of red dibāj. There were twelve crescents on the edges. Inside each crescent there was a golden orange and inside each orange there were 50 pearls the size of pigeon eggs. This cover was decorated with red, yellow and blue rubies and there were verses about pilgrimage written in emeralds around it (al-Maqrīzī 1996).

19 Vowing (adaq) is a form of worship for which a person makes himself responsible with his own oath, even though he is not religiously responsible (Özel 1988).

20 However, according to a piece of information provided by Ibn Hajar regarding the events of 828 (1425), gifts were sent from Egypt to Shahrukh, and at the same time, a response was given to Shahrukh's previous request to send a covering for the Ka'ba to be hung inside (Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986). Researchers have identified that this narration does not appear in any other sources (Kanat 1996).

21 However, news reached Egypt in the month of Dhu al-Qa'dah that Shahrukh's covering had been sent. It seems that the covering was sent before the response to the decision made at the beginning of the year had reached him (Ibn Ḥajar al-Ásqalānī 1986, vol. 8, pp. 355–56).

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Article

The Historical Transformation of the Religion–Politics Relationship in Türkiye Through the Prism of Its Media Representation During the 2023 Presidential Elections

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Abstract: This study aims to examine how religion in Türkiye, beyond having social value, has been instrumentalized by political parties into a power dynamic and explore the role of the media in this process. Adopting an inductive approach, the study first examines how the boundaries between religion and politics have changed over the years, despite the Republic of Türkiye being constitutionally defined as a secular state, using a qualitative historical method. Then, in order to explore the current reflections of this transformation, focus is placed on the most recent presidential election, held in 2023. News reports about a widely circulated photograph of opposition presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu "stepping/standing" on a prayer rug, used by Muslims for worship, during his campaign are analyzed using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method. The findings reveal that religion has become a significant component of political strategies and propaganda tools in Türkiye. Religious values and symbols function as powerful instruments, shaping societal perceptions through political discourse. As a hegemonic apparatus, the media reproduces religious discourse in line with ideological tendencies and mediatizes religion as a political tool.

Keywords: religion and politics; religious symbols; power; ideology; hegemonic power; secular state; propaganda; media discourse; critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and politics is complex and multidimensional, varying according to social, cultural, and historical contexts. Throughout history, many political leaders have used religion to legitimize their power (Eliade 1987; Smith 2009). While religion provides a moral framework that binds societies together, it also serves as a mechanism of control for political leaders over the populace (Durkheim 1912). The relationship between religion and politics should be approached carefully, considering both individual freedoms and social order. Academic studies in this field highlight potential outcomes and demonstrate that imbalances in this relationship can undermine the functioning of democratic order (Casanova 1994; Juergensmeyer 2008; Esposito 2011). In contemporary times, the role of religion in ensuring social order and cohesion is often exploited by political powers and politicoreligious groups to legitimize their discourses and gain social

approval (Fox 2016; Johnson 2019). Religious discourse is frequently used by politicians to consolidate power, especially in countries where religion plays a dominant role in public life and national identity (Huntington 1996). The instrumentalization of religion by political leaders can transform religion from a unifying force into a tool of polarization (Habermas 2006). Political leaders employ religious rhetoric to mobilize mass support, a tactic that is particularly effective during times of social unrest or political instability (Fox 2008). The interaction between religion and politics has grown even more complex with the rise of political parties that use religious rhetoric to gain political support (Williams 2020). In contemporary politics, religion is increasingly being utilized as a tool of identity politics (Casanova 1994). The media is one of the most important actors in political communication and constructs the political environment in line with its ideology. According to Teun Adrian van Dijk, ideologies are socially shared beliefs that are related to a group's characteristic features such as its identity, place in society, interests and goals, relations with other groups, reproduction, and natural environment (van Dijk 2003). According to Stuart Hall, what gives the media its ideological power is its "ability to define the situation" (Shoemer and Reese 1997). Communication institutions and relations today define and construct the social sphere and help to construct the political sphere (Hall 1997).

The relationship between religion and politics in Türkiye has been one of the most significant and contentious issues on the political agenda throughout the country's history. With the proclamation of the Republic, religion was pushed into the background in the political sphere and was separated from state affairs by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye. The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), established by Atatürk as Türkiye's first political party, emerged as a carrier of modernization and reform policies. The CHP ruled Türkiye as a single-party government for 27 years. Following Atatürk's era, the transition to a multi-party political system introduced a competitive environment in which electoral strategies aimed at addressing the suppressed religious expectations of the public gained prominence. In this context, the Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP), which legitimized Islam and traditional values to garner the support of the "periphery", implemented significant changes in religious policies. This shift also marked the transfer of power from bureaucratic–political elites to commercial (economic) elites (Kongar 2006; Mardin 2006; Ahmad 2010; Koçak 2011). This situation, often described by theorists as a center–periphery conflict, persisted until the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power in 2002. However, the AKP's rise to power marked a significant transformation in this traditional equation. With the AKP, the periphery seized the power of the center, reflecting previously suppressed religious practices in the public sphere and imposing its dominance in areas previously secularized by the elite (Bora 1999; Şahin 2012). In the Republic of Türkiye, the media's perspective on the relationship between religion and politics has often operated within the orbit of the ruling power (Alemdar 1988; Koloğlu 1992; Eroğul 2013; Topuz 2003). After coming to power, the AKP swiftly institutionalized its own media, weakened or forced changes in opposition media, and established a media environment vastly different from that in the past (Sözeri 2015). As a result of these policies, the AKP's control over traditional media increased significantly. The party's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, assumed the authority to decide which news stories can or cannot be published, how they are framed, and which questions may or may not be asked (Feridunoğlu 2016; Saran 2014).

The interaction between religion and politics, mediated through the media, contributes to the consolidation of hegemonic powers, thereby strengthening and perpetuating dominant ideologies. This study, focusing on the relationship between religion and politics in Türkiye within the context of historical developments and transformations, is significant

for deeply analyzing the cultural and geographical context and contributing to the limited literature in this field. This research aims to examine how religion in Türkiye, beyond having social value, has been instrumentalized by political parties into a tool of political power and explores the role of the media in this process. Adopting an inductive approach, the study first investigates, through a qualitative historical method, the ambiguity of the evolving boundaries between religion and politics over the years, despite the Republic of Türkiye being constitutionally defined as a secular state. The historical background is elaborated in the following sections: "Religion and Politics During the Single-Party Era: Foundations of Secular Policies", "Religion and Politics in the Multi-Party Era: Transformation of Religious Policies", "Religion and Politics During the AKP Era: The Rise of Political Islam", and "Religion and Politics in Turkish Media: Ideological Structures and Representation". Subsequently, to concretely illustrate the contemporary reflections of this transformation, the study examines the 2023 presidential and parliamentary general elections. In the lead-up to the 2023 Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections, two main alliances played a significant role in the country's politics: The People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) and the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı). The People's Alliance is a coalition formed by the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP). Before the 2023 elections, the alliance expanded to include other right-wing and conservative parties, such as the Great Union Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi, BBP) and the New World Party (Yeni Dünya Partisi, YDP). This alliance supports the presidential government system and backs the candidacy of the incumbent president and AKP chairperson, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On the other hand, the Nation Alliance, established after the 2018 elections by the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Good Party (İYİ Parti, İYİP), represents an opposition bloc. Ahead of the 2023 elections, the alliance expanded to include parties with varying ideological backgrounds, such as the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP), the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi, GP), the Democrat Party (DP), and the Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi, DEVA), and is also referred to as the "Table of Six" (6'lı Masa in Turkish). The Nation Alliance opposes the presidential government system, advocating for a return to a parliamentary system, and supported the candidacy of the main opposition leader and CHP chairperson, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, for the presidency. In the run-up to the 14 May 2023 elections, during the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast and worship, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu attended a traditional iftar program. Following the event, organized by the Istanbul Platform, a photograph of Kılıçdaroğlu with Istanbul CHP Chair Canan Kaftancıoğlu and parliamentary candidates was shared on social media. In the photo, Kılıçdaroğlu appeared to be stepping on a prayer rug (seccade) in his shoes, which sparked controversy. This highly debated incident, which significantly occupied the national agenda, is significant for concretely illustrating the relationship between religion and politics in Türkiye. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's participation in the iftar program demonstrates how politics interacts with the cultural context in Türkiye, where Islam holds a crucial place in the social and cultural sphere. The media debates that followed the release of the photograph further highlighted the importance of analyzing the relationship between politics and religious symbols, indicating the significance of its political implications. In this context, examining the news coverage of this incident through the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method provides a valuable way of gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and politics and deciphering the social meanings of political representations. Media outlets with different ownership structures and ideological orientations were selected as samples. These included Cumhuriyet—one of the oldest newspapers in the country, aligned with Atatürk's principles and secularism; Yeni Şafak—a publication with a political Islamic stance; and Sabah—a newspaper known for its close ties to President Erdoğan. The news articles published on their websites regarding the incident

between 31 March and 6 April were analyzed. The research reveals that religion has become an integral part of political strategies and propaganda tools in Türkiye. Religious values and symbols serve as critical instruments, shaping social perception through political discourses. The study also demonstrates the efforts of political actors to dominate the media and how the media, as a hegemonic apparatus, reproduces religious discourses in line with ideological tendencies, transforming religion into a political tool through mediatization.

1.1. Religion and Politics During the Single-Party Era: The Foundations of Secular Policies

With the establishment of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, on the basis of secularism, took religion, as a personal form of belief, out of daily politics. In addition, the elements of religion affecting politics, which he had seen as a problem in the past, were deactivated. Türkiye's period of nation-state formation required a secular political structure that prioritized modernity. Kemalism's most revolutionary actions in the field of religion were the abolition of the sultanate, caliphate, and sharia law (Berkes 2016a). The abolition of the caliphate in March 1924 was the most important symbolic evidence of the new nationalist and secularist policies. It is no coincidence that the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM) passed the Tawhid-i Tedrisat (Unification of Education) Law, which put all educational institutions under the control of the state by ceasing the activities of the Islamic educational institutions of schools and madrasas, on the same day as the abolition of the caliphate. In April 1924, the Sharia courts were abolished; in 1925, the Hat Law was enacted, banning the wearing of headgear such as the fez and veil, items which were considered uncivilized; Swiss Civil Law was adopted in 1926 and the Latin alphabet was adopted in 1928; and, in the same year, the statement that Islam was the official religion of the state was removed from the Constitution, ending all institutionalization of Islam. All these nationalist and secular reforms gradually distanced the Republic of Türkiye from the political influence of Islam (Ete 2003).

Until 1945, the CHP government, which continued its de facto one-party rule, took serious and determined steps towards the secularization of the country, making no concessions to political Islam (Eroğul 2013). It can be said that not needing the popular vote to come to power facilitates the implementation of such a politics of religion. However, with the transition to multi-party life, the CHP—which needed popular votes to come to power—departed from this understanding of secularism and began to pursue a more compromise-based religious policy. This approach has brought political Islamist ideas to the surface and enhanced currents that had been suppressed in social life but were still active (Tunaya 1998). Political parties were also affected by this revival. As a matter of fact, most of the 24 political parties established between July 1945 and May 1950 included religion, tradition, and secularism in their programs; some of these parties even became representatives of political Islam (Kırkpınar 2018).

1.2. Religion and Politics in the Multi-Party Era: The Transformation of Religious Policies

With the victory of the DP in the 1950 elections, Türkiye began to rapidly move away from the strict secularist practices of the single-party era (B. Sayarı 1978). In this speech, Adnan Menderes, who announced the program of the new government in the parliament, divided Atatürk's reforms into those that were accepted by the people and those that were not and implied that the new DP government would only protect those reforms that were accepted by the nation. According to B. Sayarı (1978), what Menderes meant by 'reforms that were not accepted by the public' was secularism. As a continuation of this discourse, Menderes mentioned the power of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in a speech in 1955 and said, "Right now, if you want, you can even bring back the caliphate" (Işıklı 1997; Okutan and Tekin 2015). In the first month of the DP government, the ban on the

Arabic call to prayer was lifted with the support of some CHP deputies. The fact that CHP deputies themselves admitted that the reason for their support was their desire not to lose the 1954 elections is one of the most important signs of the political influence of religion (B. Sayarı 1978).

In the competitive environment created by the transition to multi-party political life, electoral strategies aimed at meeting the suppressed religious expectations of the people became more important. In this context, the DP, which gained the support of the "periphery" by legitimizing Islam and traditional values and enabled the transfer of power from the bureaucratic–political elite to the commercial (economic) elite, implemented important changes in the context of religious policies (Ahmad 2010; Karpat 2013; Koçak 2011). As a matter of fact, new regulations concerning religious life, such as the lifting of the ban by a parliamentary decision on 16 June 1950, the resumption of the call to prayer in Arabic, the re-inclusion of religion classes in the curricula of primary and secondary schools, the introduction of religious broadcasts on the radio, the resumption of Imam Hatip schools and an increase in their number, the acceleration of the construction of mosques, and the expansion of Quran courses, were implemented during the DP period (Şahin 2012).

In Türkiye, the official state ideology's removal of religion from the center of political debates led religious groups to look at political Islam as an outlet. This tendency, which partially manifested itself in the Justice Party (AP), became more visible with the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi, MNP) in the 1970s. Over time, the MNP evolved into the National Salvation Party (MS), the Welfare Party (RP), and the Virtue Party (Fazilet Parti, FP) and became the basis for the AKP's politics. The MNP was the first Turkish political party with Islamic references. The MNP was founded on 28 January 1970 under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. The İskender Pasha community of the Naqshbandi order strongly encouraged the establishment of an Islamist party. It is known that Erbakan and some of the other founders of the MNP belonged to this community. However, prominent members of other Islamic communities also joined the party. As a result of the political conjuncture created, the MNP was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in 1971 due to its anti-secularist activities (Özbudun and Hale 2010; T. Yılmaz 2015; Kalaycıoğlu 2007). Following the dissolution of the MNP, the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP), another representative of the National Vision Movement, was founded on 11 October 1972. Although the MSP had a "National Vision" and a nationalistic approach, it brought the ideal of the Islamic world to Türkiye's agenda through the "Islamic Common Market" discourse. Before 1980, this party, which drew attention with its anti-secularist actions, was also shut down by the 12 September coup d'état and its executives, particularly Necmettin Erbakan, were banned from politics (Kalaycıoğlu 2006; Erdoğan 2012; S. Yılmaz 2011b).

Following the 12 September 1980 military coup, Türkiye remained under military rule for an extended period (1980–1983). On 19 July 1983, the military administration allowed the re-establishment of political parties. After this date, with the support of Necmettin Erbakan, the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) was founded and quickly gained influence along an Islamist ideological line. With the 1987 referendum, the political bans imposed during the coup era were lifted, enabling Necmettin Erbakan to re-enter active politics, where he rapidly garnered significant mass support. The RP, which was constantly growing stronger, succeeded in forming a coalition government with the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) in 1996. The "Welfare–Path" government formed by Erbakan and Tansu Çiller lasted only eleven months and Erbakan was forced to resign in 1997 under intense pressure from the military and civil society organizations claiming to be pro-secularist. Among the developments that paved the way for 28 February were the iftar dinner given by Erbakan to sect leaders at the prime minister's residence, the "Jerusalem Night" organized by the Sincan Municipality, and Erbakan's efforts to improve relations with Muslim countries.

The event that led to the fall of the Erbakan government was the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK) meeting of 28 February 1997. In general, the MGK meeting and the decisions taken were referred to as the "February 28th process". The fall of the Refah-Yol government was followed by the closure of the party by the Constitutional Court in 1998 due to RP's anti-secular activities (Özbudun and Hale 2010; Acar 2010; İçer 2011). With the decisions taken by the MGK on 28 February 1997, Islamic civil society and capital were put under pressure. In addition, headscarved women were prevented from working in the public sector or accessing education and training, the middle sections of Imam Hatip schools were closed, and the coefficient application that would prevent young people graduating from Imam Hatip and other vocational high schools from entering universities was put into effect. In addition, through the February 28th process, the visibility of Islam in the public sphere was suppressed. Through this process, the Islamic press and publications began to be brought under control, and the groundwork was laid for the rise of national and secular media (Tunahan 2015).

When the RP was in power, it tried to realize the project of Islamizing society with state support. As a result of these developments, the RP was shut down and political bans imposed on its executive cadres. The FP participated in the 1999 elections as the successor of the RP (Arpacı 2020). In the local and general elections held on 18 April 1999, the FP received 18.4% of the local votes, 15.4% in general, and 23.7% in metropolitan municipalities. In particular, the victory in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul and Ankara marked a turning point for political Islam in Türkiye. With these results, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who won the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, emerged as a leader who would shape both Turkish politics and the future of political Islam. He was convicted of "inciting people to hatred and enmity on the grounds of class, race, religion, sect, or regional difference" for a poem he read at a rally in Siirt, and was imprisoned for 4 months and 10 days after being stripped of his title as mayor of Istanbul in 1999 (Karakaya 2010; V. Yılmaz 2011c). In the meantime, the FP was shut down. When the revolutionary fringe of the party failed to gain a majority in the party, it founded the AKP on 14 August 2001 under the leadership of Erdoğan. The National Vision tradition was thus divided into the AKP and the SP. Erdoğan and his team, who said that they "took off the shirt of the National Vision", approached their first elections with a discourse that emphasized the ideal of democracy in Western standards and the European Union, with less of a focus on political Islam. In the 3 November 2002 general elections, the AKP received 34.28% of the votes and gained power to form a government on its own; it has won all general elections since (SupremeElectionCouncil 2002; S. Sayarı 2020; Türk 2004; Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2009).

1.3. Religion and Politics During the AKP Era: The Rise of Political Islam

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has played a significant role in reshaping Türkiye's political and social structure. The party's political identity is largely based on Türkiye's conservative and Islamic values. The AKP's relationship with religion involves both advocating for traditional Islamic values and redefining the role of religion in the public sphere in a way that aligns with Türkiye's modernization process. The party's political success stems from its effective use of religious values to gain public support and establish sustainable governance (R. Yılmaz 2011a). In the first years of its rule, the AKP, which had kept its political Islamism at a lower level due to the law, the existing bureaucratic order, and state habits, gradually positioned its own cadres in all institutions of the state and made the ideals of the conservative sector more visible and effective in the public sphere. Especially with the end of the term of the 10th president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Erdoğan, who increased his influence in the country's administration, shaped the

power and ideological apparatuses of the state step by step, in line with his ideology, and enabled the representation of political Islam in the public sphere.

At the core of the AKP's religious policies lies an effort to balance the religious tradition extending from the Ottoman era to the Republic and the state's understanding of secularism during the modernization process. Upon coming to power, the party aimed to increase the visibility of religion in politics and transform it into a social force (Aslan 2015). The AKP's rise to power in all the elections it has contested has led to an increase in the number of bureaucrats aligned with it and has also pushed the national–secular bureaucrats of the past out of the system. With the appointments made, the structure of institutions was changed and all state institutions, especially the judiciary, police, army, universities, and national education, were aligned with the AKP's policies. After this time-consuming process of change, Erdoğan gained the power to freely implement any decision he wished, which led to the gradual transformation of the country's official ideology by political Islam. In the meantime, the Anatolian capital, the so-called 'green capital', has become stronger and stronger and has begun to compete with the traditional capital of Istanbul, implementing policies that prioritize its own values. Finally, in terms of the media, the influence of the exclusionary secularist approach was broken, media organs close to the AKP were brought to the fore, and the media's function of legitimizing the government's religious policies in public opinion while voicing the religious demands of the periphery was magnified (Akyüz 2017).

In this context, the headscarf ban was lifted in all public institutions and organizations, including universities and middle and high schools; the middle sections of Imam Hatip High Schools were reopened; faculties of theology were established in almost all universities and their quotas were kept at the highest levels; there was a large increase in the quota allocated to the Presidency of Religious Affairs; the opening of Quran courses was made easier, with a course opened in almost every neighborhood; and basic religion courses started to be taught in schools, along with elective Quran courses. In addition, the rights of students and public employees who were victimized during the February 28th process were restored; students who were expelled from universities were given the right to return to school and public employees who were dismissed from their jobs were given the right to return to civil service. During the AKP period, there has been a significant increase in the public visibility of religion and religious people. In this respect, the relationship of the state (regime) with religion and religious people was reshaped on a positive basis and the tension between the two was eliminated (Akyüz 2017). Meanwhile, a new Islamic elite has formed in Türkiye, including the businesses associated with the ruling party (Gürakar 2016) and civil society organizations that "periodically pledge their commitment to the government's political ideology in press releases" (Sarfati 2017).

1.4. Religion and Politics in Turkish Media: Ideological Structures and Representations

The Turkish media has often functioned as an ideological apparatus of the state, reflecting the dominant ideology, and has shaped discourse on the relationship between religion and politics within this framework. The Turkish press, which adopted a discourse in line with the ideology of the CHP during the single-party period, diversified its representations according to different perspectives on the relationship between religion and politics as the political environment pluralized. The Republic's modernization project's distance from religion was also reflected in representations in the press, and religious issues were filtered through a secular perspective, as reflected in discourses in all periods when the dominant ideology maintained its power, especially in the single-party period (Kılıç 2012; A. Yılmaz 2016).

From a comparative perspective, it is possible to see some similarities between the media system in Türkiye and Southern European countries in terms of the development of the press. For example, as in Italy and Spain, where journalists were also politicians, Türkiye has had journalists and even newspaper-owning MPs in parliament. Forty journalists, media owners, or columnists served as members of parliament in different periods until Atatürk's death. On the other hand, a point of difference is that, until 1957, the highest number of members of parliament in Türkiye were of military origin. The centrality of the state and the military are important parameters that reveal the specificity of the media system in Türkiye. Until 1945, during the single-party period, the press had already assumed the task of upholding the Kemalist regime and contributed to the establishment and consolidation of the modern Republic by promoting Western values and lifestyles. In the newspapers that became popular from the 1950s onwards, an emphasis on being 'independent' began to replace being seen as supporters or opponents of the CHP or the DP, as mattered in the past (Bek 2010).

The press played a very important role in the DP coming to power and supported the DP by presenting it to the public as a savior. However, the initially positive and liberating environment was eventually replaced by debates on repression, censorship, and a biased press. During the DP government of 1950–1960, some media outlets viewed the expanding influence of religion in the political sphere positively, supporting the DP, and the delivery of the news was skewed in this direction. Likewise, the opposition press represented the steps taken as an attack on the civilization project of the Republic. Following the 1960 coup d'état, the military regime that came to power granted some freedoms to the press but press organizations with a positive approach to religious issues were hesitant to express their opinions for a long time (Çakır and Yavalar 2017; Kaya 2010; Koloğlu 1992). The 1960 Coup, the 1971 Memorandum, and the subsequent 12 September 1980 Coup significantly shaped newspapers' perspectives on religious issues, generally aligning them with dominant values. Military scions, which often justified the coups by citing "secularism" and the "state being under threat", adopted an uncompromising stance towards the representation of religion in the media. After 12 September, the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) came to power, and its positive attitude towards conservatism and its definition of conservatism as one of the four tendencies constituting the party enabled pluralization in its representation in the press. The ANAP period was also a time when alternatives to the official ideology were given more space in newspapers and neoliberal winds shaped the media. During this period, press organizations were taken over by powerful conglomerates and newspaper owners, whose priority was commercial gain; they shaped their pages according to this ideology (Tuncay and Zürcher 2012; Koloğlu 1992; Arsan 2013).

The concentration of media ownership in Türkiye under AKP rule has led to a significant reduction in media diversity and increased government influence over editorial content (Kaya and Çakmur 2010). The AKP government restructured Türkiye's media landscape through privatization and alliances with pro-government business groups, undermining journalistic independence (Yesil 2016). To ensure the direct support of the media, ownership structures and capital shares in the media were changed. These changes started to be implemented in 2007. As media ownership was reorganized, the central media was constructed as a political tool that did not go beyond the discourse of the government. Large media groups were directed to align with the government against the threat of being economically weakened and discredited, because media organizations built on capital had a lot to lose (Saran 2014).

Since 2002, when the AKP came to power, the ownership structure of the media in Türkiye has changed to reflect the current arrangement of political power. Marx and Engels' observation that the class that controls the material means of production also controls the

mental means of production can be seen in the table below (Engels and Marx 1992). By controlling the means of intellectual production, the AKP, which controls the executive branch of political power, seeks to subordinate the thoughts of those who lack these means. To this end, the AKP government has reorganized the media industry, attempted to concentrate media outlets in the hands of those close to it, and sought to put pressure on and transform those it could not control. The government liquidated the Çukurova Group, bought its media organizations, and transformed the Doğuş Group. It is no coincidence that, shortly after coming to power, the AKP targeted the Uzan Group, its rival in the elections. It is noteworthy that the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu, TMSF), an institution under the Prime Minister's Office, was used effectively while the media industry was being reorganized. The companies seized by the SDIF were sold to people close to political power, sometimes even to people with direct ties to the government, and state facilities such as public bank loans were used in the sale process. On the other hand, it was observed that the media group that was not asked to buy the media outlet was forced to withdraw tenders on such grounds as "lack of competition" (Saran 2014). Legislation passed by the AKP government facilitated the consolidation of media ownership by pro-government entities, further eroding the diversity of viewpoints in the Turkish media (Christensen 2007). As of today, the Erdoğan government has succeeded in establishing domination over a very large part of the Turkish media.

2. Materials and Methods

Following the historical examination of the relationship between religion and politics in Türkiye, a case study was conducted to frame the current situation. During the campaign period preceding the 2023 presidential and parliamentary general elections, the media coverage of an incident involving Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug (used by Muslims for worship) in his shoes was analyzed using the CDA method. Critical discourse analysis is a methodological approach developed by pioneering academics such as Teun A. van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough, Theo van Leeuwen, and Gunther Kress, who focused on discourse as research material. CDA aims to reveal what is meant by and hidden in the discourse itself (Çoban 2024). It is assumed by critical discourse analysts that, beneath all discourses, there is a hidden fundamental thought or ideology (Eagleton 1991). CDA is a functional, non-positivist, interpretative mode of analysis that has been frequently used in media studies since the 1970s, offering researchers a wide range of possibilities in analyzing both texts and the ideology reflected in them. The most important difference from qualitative content analysis is that it deals with the text as a whole without dividing it into parts and reveals how the dominant discourse in the text is constructed (İrvan 2000). Every news item in the media is a process of reconstruction. In order to analyze the discourse reconstructed in the news, it is first necessary to consider the news as a discourse. This depends on analyzing the text created through language and discourse by addressing its production process and social and ideological context (İnal 1996). The journalists who create the discourse of the news are not only the spokespersons of the elite but are also part of the social power structure. The central question is how journalists reproduce or resist the ideologies they confront. Connections with sources, the style of the news, how it is presented, the quotations used, the dominant headlines, and associations produced in the text are the elements of discourse that constitute meaning and ideology in the news (van Dijk 2003).

To analyze the social and ideological meanings produced by the relationship between religion and politics in media discourse, we selected the case of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Chairperson of the CHP, Leader of the Main Opposition, and Presidential Candidate, stepping/standing on a prayer rug (used by Muslims for worship) in his shoes as a

focal incident. The selection criteria for this case included the intersection of religion and politics, the prominence of religious symbolism, the event's occurrence within an election campaign context, the extensive media coverage, and the diversity of discourse elements it generated. As a sample, newspapers representing different social and political segments in Türkiye were chosen: Cumhuriyet, Sabah, and Yeni Şafak. The selection criteria for these publications included national-level circulation, significant coverage of the incident, accessibility, and ideological diversity. Cumhuriyet, one of Türkiye's oldest newspapers, is owned by the Cumhuriyet Foundation, chaired by Alev Coşkun, a long-time member of the CHP. Cumhuriyet's editorial principles are stated as follows: "On the path of 'enlightenment' paved by Atatürk's revolutions and principles, it will strive for the independence of reason from bigotry, science from religion, and the adoption of the principle of secularism by society". Cumhuriyet is close to the current opposition, especially the main opposition party, CHP, and opposes government policies. Sabah, which adopted a more liberal discourse in the past, changed its ownership structure during the AKP rule. Sabah was seized by the SDIF due to its debts and bought by Çalık Holding, which is close to the AKP, through a tender; it has since adopted a discourse supporting AKP policies. Sabah is currently owned by the Turkuvaz Media Group. Serhat Albayrak, brother of Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan's son-in-law and the first Minister of Treasury and Finance of the presidential government system, is the Group's deputy chairman of the board of directors. Founded in 1995, Yeni Şafak operates under the Albayrak Media Group. This group is known to have close ties with the AKP and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Nuri Albayrak, a shareholder of Albayrak Yayın Holding A.Ş., is a friend of President Erdoğan from Istanbul Imam Hatip High School. The newspaper publishes on a conservative line and shapes its news with a discourse that criticizes the opposition, particularly the CHP.

The news articles published on the websites of Cumhuriyet, Sabah, and Yeni Şafak, selected as the sample, were collected for seven days following the incident on 31 March 2023. The data obtained were analyzed within the framework of Teun A. van Dijk's CDA approach. Having developed a systematic approach to analyzing news discourse, van Dijk argues that news can be analyzed in terms of macro- and microstructures (van Dijk 1983). Macrostructure analysis is carried out in two ways: thematic and schematic. Under the macrostructure heading, headlines, news entries, and photographs constitute the focus of thematic analysis. The presentation of the event, its outcomes, background, and contextual information, news sources, and the comments of the parties constitute the elements of schematic analysis. The purpose of a macrostructural analysis is to understand what the discourse is about and what the author of the news story is producing the news story for. It helps explain what information remains in the reader's mind after reading the news item. Headlines and news entries are the most important elements in determining the semantic framework of the news (van Dijk 2009). Macro propositions include methods of information reduction, generalization, and construction. To put it another way, the place and time of the event may not be given in the headlines or news entries. By making generalizations, some features of the event are covered up and the whole event can be described with a single concept, or different actions can be fictionalized by expressing a single action. Microstructural includes syntactic analysis, word choice, and news rhetoric. The aim of a microstructural analysis is the analysis of segmental meanings. This includes the meaning of words, as well as implicit or indirect forms of meaning. Thus, it is shown that the choice made in line with the ideology of the newsmaker has a function and that there is information that affects the stance of the receiver. Macro- and microstructures are the meanings that are most memorable and reproducible for the receiver (van Dijk 2009). The microstructures of discourse are the building blocks of meaning construction. They include word choices, syntactic structures, and the organization of sentences and

paragraphs, all of which collectively work to construct an ideological message (van Dijk 2009). In conducting such analyses, van Dijk considers social contexts and ideological factors, aiming to uncover the social meanings embedded in individuals' linguistic choices. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how language operates at both individual and societal levels (van Dijk 2001). Similarly, Fairclough emphasizes that micro-level analysis is conducted using ideological emphases, emotional connotations, subject–predicate relationships, active/passive structures, and textual coherence. According to him, discourse analysis at the micro level not only examines linguistic features but also reveals how power relations and ideologies are embedded in language (Fairclough 1992). Van Dijk's work on the micro-level analysis of discourse helps us understand how ideologies and power dynamics are not just reflected but also constructed through language. It focuses on the minutiae of language use, including word choice, sentence structure, and the subtle conveyance of power relations (Graddol and Swann 1989).

3. Results

Before the presidential and parliamentary general elections held on 14 May 2023, news about opposition presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes received extensive coverage, particularly in Cumhuriyet, Sabah, and Yeni Şafak. An analysis of the content published between 31 March and 6 April 2023 examined a total of 18 articles (Table 1). Of these, seven were published in Cumhuriyet (Cumhuriyet Newspaper 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f, 2023g), six were ran in Sabah (Sabah Newspaper 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f), and five featured in Yeni Şafak (Yeni Şafak Newspaper 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e).

Table 1. News articles included in the study.

Date	Newspaper	Headline
31 March 2023	Sabah	"Kılıçdaroğlu stepped on a prayer rug in his shoes! Strong reaction on social media"
1 April 2023a	Cumhuriyet	"Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's 'prayer rug' statement: 'I am very sorry. . .'"
1 April 2023b	Cumhuriyet	"Theologian Cemil Kilic: If it is not removed after the prayer, it is not a prayer rug!"
1 April 2023c	Cumhuriyet	"'Prayer rug' debate. . . Former minister İsmail Müftüoğlu, the host of the iftar, made a statement: 'Criticisms of Kılıçdaroğlu are far from common sense'"
1 April 2023a	Sabah	"They were 'silent' on the desecration of prayer rugs: Why are Kılıçdaroğlu's partners silent about the outrageous pose?"
1 April 2023b	Sabah	"Reaction against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu: CHP mentality itself. . .".
1 April 2023	Yeni Şafak	"Kılıçdaroğlu posed with his shoes on a prayer rug"
2 April 2023	Cumhuriyet	"Erdoğan, who entered the 'prayer rug' debate before iftar, after iftar: 'We do not pursue false agendas'"
2 April 2023	Sabah	"It's not the first time Kılıçdaroğlu stepped on a prayer rug! Here is the new image"
2 April 2023	Yeni Şafak	"President Erdoğan reacts to Kılıçdaroğlu and the prayer rug: They get their instructions from Pennsylvania"
3 April 2023	Cumhuriyet	"Ertan Aksoy says: The conscience of society did not accept the prayer rug slander"
3 April 2023	Sabah	"Citizens' reaction to Kılıçdaroğlu on 'Prayer Rug': Attack on our religious and spiritual values"

Table 1. *Cont.*

Date	Newspaper	Headline
3 April 2023a	Yeni Şafak	"Someone has seen the prayer rug!"
3 April 2023b	Yeni Şafak	"New chapter in the scandal: Another photo of Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes has emerged"
4 April 2023	Cumhuriyet	"The official at the venue where the 'prayer rug' photograph was taken speaks for the first time"
5 April 2023	Sabah	"Temel Karamollaoğlu's strange 'prayer rug' example: He tries to justify Kılıçdaroğlu's disrespect"
5 April 2023	Cumhuriyet	"The pro-government media had targeted him. . . The story of the 'prayer rug' photo revealed"
6 April 2023	Yeni Şafak	"MHP leader Bahçeli reacts to Kılıçdaroğlu: He stepped on the prayer rug in his shoes"

The analyzed articles were examined in detail under two main categories. Under the macrostructure category, the overall structures of the articles were analyzed. Thematic analysis was applied to headlines and introductions, while schematic analysis was used to evaluate the presentation of the news, background and contextual information, sources, and comments from involved parties. Under the microstructure category, the linguistic structures of the articles were thoroughly examined. This included a focus on syntactic analysis, word choices, and news rhetoric.

3.1. Macrostructure: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is crucial for deciphering the meaning of a text within its social and political context, as it identifies the themes around which the discourse is constructed and determines which social groups' interests it supports (van Dijk 2008).

Sabah, in its first news article on the incident, used provocative discourse, with the headline "Kılıçdaroğlu stepped on a prayer rug in his shoes! Strong reaction on social media". Cumhuriyet, on the other hand, featured Kılıçdaroğlu, who gave an apology stating that he was very sorry, as its first news article and adopted the narrative that the incident happened involuntarily. In contrast, Yeni Şafak reported the news with the headline "Kılıçdaroğlu posed with his shoes on a prayer rug", implying that there was conscious intent behind the incident.

Sabah published the following headlines in subsequent days: "They were 'silent' on prayer rug desecration: Why are Kılıçdaroğlu's partners silent on the outrageous pose?"; "Reaction against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu: CHP mentality itself. . ."; "It's not the first time Kılıçdaroğlu stepped on a prayer rug! Here is the new image"; "Citizens' reaction to Kılıçdaroğlu on 'Prayer Rug': Attack on our religious and spiritual values"; "Temel Karamollaoğlu's strange 'prayer rug' example: He tries to justify Kılıçdaroğlu's disrespect". The newspaper emphasized religious sensitivities, portraying Kılıçdaroğlu as a figure harming society's religious and moral values. By omitting Kılıçdaroğlu's public apology, this framing of the news centered on criticism of the opposition. Using exaggerated expressions such as "a flood of reactions" to reinforce its narrative, the newspaper employed divisive language attributing an individual act to an entire group with phrases such as "they remained silent". Furthermore, the generalization included other opposition leaders unrelated to the incident, thereby constructing a negative discourse against the opposition in the lead-up to the elections.

Yeni Şafak, on the other hand, published the following news reports on the subject: "President Erdoğan reacts to Kılıçdaroğlu and the prayer rug: They get their instructions from Pennsylvania", "Someone has seen the prayer rug!", "New chapter in the scandal:

Another photo of Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes has emerged", and "MHP leader Bahçeli reacts to Kılıçdaroğlu: He stepped on the prayer rug in his shoes". Yeni Şafak adopted a narrative suggesting that the act in question was carried out deliberately and portrayed Kılıçdaroğlu as a figure violating religious values. By using expressions such as "They get their instructions from Pennsylvania", the newspaper reinforced the ruling party's discourse and built a narrative linking the opposition to foreign powers, thereby undermining its credibility. With words such as "scandal", it fostered a divisive approach in subsequently published news articles.

Cumhuriyet published consecutive news articles on the same day with the headlines "Theologian Cemil Kilic: If it is not removed after the prayer, it is not a prayer rug!" and "Former minister İsmail Müftüoğlu, the host of the iftar, made a statement: 'Criticisms of Kılıçdaroğlu are far from common sense'". By featuring the statements of religious leaders, the newspaper instilled confidence in public opinion and developed its discourse that there was no disrespect shown towards religious values. In the following days, headlines were published such as "Erdoğan, who entered the 'prayer rug' polemic before iftar, after iftar: We do not pursue false agendas", "Ertan Aksoy says: The conscience of society did not accept the prayer rug slander", "The official at the venue where the 'prayer rug' photograph was taken speaks for the first time", and "The pro-government media had targeted him... The story of the 'prayer rug' photo revealed". Cumhuriyet frequently featured Kılıçdaroğlu's apology statement, labeling the incident as slander and portraying the opposition leader as a figure respectful of religious and moral values. By including the opinions of religious leaders and witnesses to the event, the newspaper reinforced its narrative and framed its coverage around the defense of Kılıçdaroğlu. Additionally, it criticized the government, using phrases such as "propaganda apparatus", and became part of a divisive discourse with expressions such as "the pro-government media had targeted him".

In all three newspapers, which represent different social groups, the news was constructed around an "us vs. them" narrative, with religion serving as the primary axis of division. Cumhuriyet referred to the AKP and its supporters as "AKP members" or "religious circles", while Yeni Şafak and Sabah described the CHP and its supporters as "CHP sympathizers" showing "the CHP mentality". Additionally, it was observed that some of the 5W1H questions, which are fundamental to journalistic practice, were left unanswered in the analyzed news articles. In particular, Yeni Şafak and Sabah were found to have distanced themselves from addressing the "how" of the incident. Therefore, it can be argued that the semantic framework of the news contains propositions, information reduction, generalizations, and reconstructions.

3.2. Macrostructure: Schematic Analysis

The schematic structure includes the presentation of the main event, conclusions, background, contextual information, news sources, and parties to the event. Background information points to the social and political aspects of events. When an event is reported, it necessarily undergoes change. News is always created according to a particular person's or group's perception. Meaning and background information are generally omitted in the news; the event being reported is detached from its context and presented to the reader by adding interpretation within certain patterns. Knowing the social, political, and historical aspects of the event makes the event comprehensible and helps to make sense of the ideology embedded in the news by establishing a cause-and-effect relationship (van Dijk 1988).

The religious/secular conflict in Türkiye involves a long-standing social structural code. The conservative governance approach of the AKP, which has been in power for

the last 25 years, has kept the conflict current. In this context, the context and background information of the news items analyzed in the research is as follows. During the 2023 Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections, the People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) and the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı) played a decisive role in shaping the country's political landscape. The People's Alliance was established under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Ahead of the elections, it expanded into a broader coalition with the participation of conservative and nationalist parties. The alliance advocated for the continuation of the presidential government system and aimed for the reelection of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On the other hand, the Nation Alliance was formed by the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Good Party (İYİ Party). Over time, it evolved into an opposition coalition, incorporating parties from both conservative and secular ideological backgrounds. The alliance supported a return to the parliamentary system and endorsed Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy for the presidency. During the election process, Kılıçdaroğlu's participation in an iftar program and the subsequent spread of a photo on social media allegedly showing him stepping on a prayer rug (seccade) triggered widespread public debate. The photo in question was first shared by Hamza Dağ, AKP Deputy Chairman, on his social media account with the following words: "The ground you step on with your shoe is the prayer rug used by Muslims when prostrating". Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu shared a post on the issue on his X account and said, "I am sorry, I am very sorry that I did not see the prayer rug. I would never want to hurt anyone in the world, especially my nation. From here, I leave those who abuse and the propaganda apparatus they use to the conscience of our nation". The CHP's press office also issued a written statement: "Due to the intensity of the photo shoot and the rush of those who wanted to have their photos taken, the prayer rug on the floor was not noticed. We would like to state that our President and Provincial Chairman, whose sensitivity towards such situations is known by everyone, are very sorry for this unfortunate situation".

When the schematic structure of the news items published by Sabah on the incident is analyzed, it is observed that background information is omitted and comments are added within certain patterns. Sabah headed every news item with the term "coalition of 7". This refers to the unification of 6 opposition parties to run a joint candidate, but the People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), which is not one of these parties and represents Kurdish identity, is implied as the 7th party. "Coalition of 7" is therefore a discourse encouraged by the government. Similarly, the newspaper did not include the apologetic statements of Kılıçdaroğlu, the subject of the incident. Instead, they pointed to other opposition parties that had nothing to do with the incident, saying, "They were 'silent' about the desecration of prayer rugs: Why are Kılıçdaroğlu's partners silent over the outrageous pose?" In this way, the newspaper distanced itself from the context by pointing to other opposition parties that were not involved in the issue. Moreover, both sides of the incident were not covered in a balanced manner, and those who supported the government discourse were selected as news sources. One of them is former AKP Minister Bekir Bozdağ: "Some people say 'Mujahid' Kılıçdaroğlu. We witnessed a mujahid stepping on the prayer rug with his foot. It would be wrong not to condemn this. We are doing the right thing. Those who abuse religion are those who go to iftar without fasting". In addition, vague expressions such as "reaction from citizens" and statements by anonymous X users were used: "If you really had Islamic sensitivities, you would have realized that there was a prayer rug on the ground you stepped on. You couldn't realize it because, for the sake of votes, you break the fast for the fast you didn't keep and go on Friday for the prayer you didn't perform for 5 h. Shame on Religion Merchants like you and those who

vote for you". Sabah revealed its ideology through comments such as "CHP mentality itself".

In the news articles published in Yeni Şafak, similar to Sabah, it was observed that background information was omitted and comments were added that fitted certain patterns. The newspaper referred to the statement made by Kılıçdaroğlu and the CHP on the issue, but did not include it in full and used the term "defense" instead of "statement". The phrase "he stepped on the prayer rug in his shoes" was repeated often in the news report, every few sentences. Descriptions such as "coalition of 7" and "table of 7" were preferred in the news articles and loaded expressions such as "disgrace" were used. Both sides of the incident were not covered in a balanced manner and those who support the government discourse were selected as news sources. President Tayyip Erdoğan was one of them. Erdoğan's speech also took the incident out of context: "Some may step on prayer rugs in their shoes because they receive instructions from Pennsylvania. My beloved nation will give the best answer to these on May 14th". Another source cited by Yeni Şafak was Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the MHP, the coalition partner of the government. "Stepping on a prayer rug in one's shoes is a violation of morality and ethics. That's a shame. Kılıçdaroğlu called the headscarf a piece of cloth and made the prayer rug a piece of carpet. He doesn't know our traditions and customs. He doesn't know our nation". Yeni Şafak framed the situation by using negative words such as "scandal" and "disgrace", thereby revealing their ideology.

The news reports published by Cumhuriyet on the incident show that background information was obtained from a single source. The newspaper frequently covered statements made by Kılıçdaroğlu and the CHP on the issue and did not report any critical discourse. On the contrary, it prioritized the 'expert' opinions of religious leaders who did not characterize the situation as disrespectful. The headline "Theologian Cemil Kılıç: If it is not removed after the prayer, it is not a prayer rug!" suggested that the religious meaning of the prayer rug was up for discussion. The way the incident was reported in the news implied that it did not involve disrespect towards religion. By featuring the statement of former minister İsmail Müftüoğlu, the host of the iftar, that "criticisms of Kılıçdaroğlu are far from common sense", Cumhuriyet did not give balanced coverage to all parties to the event, instead choosing to quote those who supported the opposition discourse as news sources. In the news, it was frequently repeated that Hamza Dağ was the first to share the photo, and the incident was characterized as an "operation", thereby implicitly accusing AKP members and Erdoğan of pursuing false agendas. On the other hand, Ertan Aksoy was quoted by Cumhuriyet as saying in an interview with an opinion pollster: "The opposition's task is to refer to the nearly 70 percent who stand against this slander. Staying connected to the concrete problems of society, rather than talking about how you unwittingly stepped on more prayer rugs. Because Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu has survived this slander thanks to his adherence to the advice given to him by his father". It has been observed that statements such as "My son, you stay straight and the crooked will find trouble" were taken out of context and comments were made that fitted within certain patterns.

3.3. Microstructure: Syntactic Analysis

In van Dijk's analytical model, syntactic analysis involves the examination of sentence structures in terms of length, simplicity, complexity, and active vs. passive constructions (van Dijk 1988). In active sentences, the subject who performs the action is known. In passive sentences, the subject performing the action is not clear. In news discourse, sentences with an active voice emphasize the righteousness of those who carry out the action, while those in the passive voice mostly function to legitimize the action.

It was observed that these three newspapers generally preferred short, simple, understandable sentences in their news articles on the subject. The use of active and passive sentences has been a determinant of the discourse of newspapers. Sabah printed active statements such as "Kılıçdaroğlu stepped on a prayer rug in his shoes!", "Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu received a strong reaction", "The photo of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the presidential candidate of the coalition of 7, stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes drew great reaction", and "Kılıçdaroğlu became the target of criticism with those shots" daily. In these sentence structures, the subject performing the action is clear. The sentences include negative expressions, and it is emphasized that the subject of this negative action is Kılıçdaroğlu. Similarly, the sentences "Temel Karamollaoğlu's bizarre 'prayer rug' example: He tries to justify Kılıçdaroğlu's disrespect" and "CHP supporters also attempted to cover up the scandal" are active and the opposition is the subject of the action. Like Sabah, Yeni Şafak also constructed active sentences such as "Kılıçdaroğlu posed with his shoes on a prayer rug" and "Another photo of Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes has emerged". Attention was again drawn to Kılıçdaroğlu as the subject who carried out the action. Cumhuriyet, on the other hand, actively conveyed both Kılıçdaroğlu's statements and the commentary of news sources. Headlines such as "CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu made statements after the photo of him standing on a prayer rug became a hot topic on social media", "The story of the 'prayer rug' photo revealed", and "Ertan Aksoy says: The conscience of society did not accept the prayer rug slander" defended the righteousness of the subject through active sentences.

Although the three newspapers, representing different ideologies, advocated opposing views, they used sentences with active structures to reinforce their meaning and influence public opinion, through both indirect and direct narratives based on the sources.

3.4. Microstructure: Word Choices

The choice of words in the news is the main point of ideological structuring and is therefore very important. Word choices represent the widespread beliefs held by social actors in society and the worldview of the particular journalist and news organization involved (Özer 2015). The frequently used words in the analyzed news articles are visualized using word clouds. The word clouds created for the three newspapers are presented in Figures 1–3. The colors were assigned randomly to the words. Words with higher frequencies appear larger compared to others.



Figure 1. Sabah word cloud.

The most frequently used words in Sabah are "prayer rug", "photo", "shoe", "reaction", "CHP", "Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu", "disrespect", and "stepped on". These word choices reflect the discursive framework of the news and the ideological orientation of the newspaper. The narrative that the photo of CHP candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a

prayer rug in his shoes was an act of disrespect and triggered widespread public reaction is clearly evident in the word cloud. Additionally, regardless of the frequency, the newspaper made religious references through words such as "prayer", "prostration", "iftar", "fasting", "Ramadan", "Sayyid", "Mujahid", "Muslims", "religioun", "pious", "taqiyya", "our religious and spiritual values", and "so-called clerics", reflecting its conservative worldview. It also sensationalized the incident with exaggerated word choices such as "scandal", "attack", "insult", "strong reaction", "posed", "shame on you", "dirty negotiations", "polemic is growing", "the middle is stirred", and "repercussions continue". The same newspaper generalized responsibility for the incident to the entire opposition, which was not the subject, with word choices such as "coalition of 7", "coalition partners silent", "partisan", "hypocritical politics", and "CHP mentality". With words such as "whitewash", "race to look innocent", "journalist close to CHP", "troll", "cover-up", and "social media hitmen", it directly accused opposition politicians of a crime.



Figure 2. Yeni Şafak word cloud.



Figure 3. Cumhuriyet word cloud.

The most frequently used words in Yeni Şafak were "prayer rug", "Kılıçdaroğlu", "shoe", "CHP", "stepped on", "reaction", "nation", and "these". These word choices reflect the discursive framework of the news and the ideological orientation of the newspaper. The words "Kılıçdaroğlu" and "CHP" directly place the incident within a political context, while "prayer rug", "shoe", and "stepped on" reinforce the impression that the incident harmed religious sensitivities. The words "reaction" and "nation" serve to amplify public responses and bring the incident into the political agenda, whereas the word "these" emphasizes social polarization. This choice of language demonstrates that the incident is framed not merely as an individual act but also as part of a broader social and political context. Additionally, regardless of the frequency, the newspaper made religious references through words such as "prayer", "prostration", "iftar", "fasting", "Ramadan", "Muslims", "pious", and "religious

people", revealing its ideological stance. With word choices such as "scandal", "disgrace", "big lies", "did not show sensitivity", "his apology doesn't match his misdemeanor", "he posed", "he attracted reaction", "shame on him", "these are not national", "exonerate", "defense", and "paranoia in CHP", the newspaper represented the opposition candidate Kılıçdaroğlu and his party as breaking from religious and national values.

The most frequently used words in Cumhuriyet are "prayer rug", "photo", "explanation", "nation", "CHP", "prayer", "target", and "Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu". These word choices reflect the discursive framework of the news and the newspaper's ideological orientation. Terms like "prayer rug" and "prayer" indicate that the incident was addressed through the lens of religious sensitivities, referencing social norms to construct a moral judgment. The word "photo" highlights the focus on the visual representation of the incident and how this image was placed at the center of the news coverage. The word "explanation" points to an effort to articulate a broader reality beyond the photo and to construct legitimacy around the event. The term "target" reflects how criticisms directed by a particular group were shaped within a narrative of victimization. Finally, the words "CHP" and "Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu" situate the incident within a political context, demonstrating the newspaper's ideological stance and its framing of the event on a political level. Unlike Sabah and Yeni Şafak, Cumhuriyet used the phrase "stood on the prayer rug" instead of "stepped on the prayer rug" and so constructed a discourse that was in favor of the opposition. It also emphasized that there was no intent behind the incident with word choices such as "made a statement", "crowd", "carelessness", "public conscience", and "background of the photograph". The same newspaper developed a discourse against the government by using the words "targeted", "target board", "slander", "religious circles", "ruling circles", "abusers", "prayer rug polemic", "accusation", "AKP members", "ruling media", and "operation". Unlike the other two newspapers, which frequently emphasized words related to religion in their news articles, it changed the interpretation of the event by criticizing the policies of the government through the words "economic crisis", "prayer rug politics", and "relied on".

When examining the word choices of the three different newspapers, it was observed that the same words, when used by the different newspapers, could produce different meanings depending on each newspaper's ideological context and discursive framework.

3.5. Microstructure: News Rhetoric

Plato's definition of rhetoric as "the power of deceiving judges in courts, members in assemblies, people at public meetings, and all citizens in councils through words" (Platon 1997) also applies to news rhetoric. News rhetoric involves the creation of desired effects through language and words, the alignment of the audience with a particular ideological perspective, and the persuasion of the public to adopt a desired stance. This process is shaped not only by the choice and form of language but also by the selection of evidence, visuals, news sources, and actors. Photographs, statements, and news sources shape the rhetoric of the news, while the way audiences interpret, accept, or reject these elements also plays a critical role. Therefore, the discursive structure of news serves as an important tool for guiding societal acceptance.

The news discourses of the three newspapers analyzed in this study clearly reflect their respective ideological stances, adopting an approach aimed at persuading the public. Yeni Şafak and Sabah, in their coverage of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, insinuated disrespect for religious values, thereby constructing a specific view of him. On the other hand, Cumhuriyet interpreted Kılıçdaroğlu's actions as "carelessness" and presented the situation within a framework of criticism directed at those who manipulate religious values for political purposes, creating a completely opposite perception. These differing approaches shape the

public's understanding of the incident based on each newspaper's ideological perspective. In this context, all three newspapers framed the incident through different ideological lenses, with their choice of language serving as a tool to reinforce their ideological stance. Rather than merely reporting events, each newspaper sought to steer public opinion toward a specific position through their choice of language and style. This goes beyond the act of reporting and demonstrates how newspapers function as instruments of propaganda. Each newspaper not only acted as a narrator of the event but also provided an interpretation aligned with its ideological orientation, aiming to shape readers' perceptions and public opinion. This discursive structure contradicts the claim of neutrality in news reporting and leads to deviations from one of the fundamental principles of journalism—objectivity. Consequently, the language of news is not merely a means of conveying an event but also becomes a tool for ideological influence and guidance.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

With the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye, a state structure was established based on the principle of secularism, and the relationship between religion and politics began to be regulated independently of theocratic elements. In line with Atatürk's understanding of secularism, reforms such as the abolition of the caliphate and Sharia, the closure of religious educational institutions, and the adoption of a modern legal system were implemented. Through these reforms, efforts were made to significantly limit the influence of religion on politics. However, with the transition to a multi-party system, the role of religion in politics began to re-emerge. During this period, religion became an important tool for political parties (Ete 2003; Berkes 2016a, 2016b). In particular, in the 1950s, the DP emphasized religious values in a societal context, gained public support, and came to power. The instrumentalization of religion in the political context, linked to social power relations, led to questioning of the principle of secularism and a reshaping of the role of religion in politics. From the 1960s onward, military coups and regimes of military tutelage deepened the tension between secularism and religion, increasing pressures on political Islam through interventions such as the 28 February 1997 process. Nevertheless, the RP and its successor, the FP, sought to revive the influence of political Islam in the public sphere, laying the foundations for the AKP. Coming to power in 2002, the AKP made religious elements more prominent in its political structures by integrating them with modernization efforts and the European Union harmonization process. Under the AKP's rule, religion in Turkish politics became not just a belief system, but also an important force shaping social structures and influencing political strategies. The party integrated religious values and Islamic identities into its political discourse, operating within the boundaries of the secular state while using religious elements as a source of political legitimacy. This approach earned the party broad public support but also created tensions due to secular transformation's association with Türkiye's modernization process (Ete 2010). The AKP, as a political power that reshaped the role of religion in Türkiye's social and political life, implemented significant structural changes in institutions, making religious values more visible in the public sphere. Similarly, the media became a crucial tool for shaping the government's political strategies and disseminating the ruling ideology. Through close relations with the media, the AKP promoted religious and conservative discourses while restricting the independence of media organizations, enabling the formation of a media structure aligned with the state's political power. During this period, the media underwent formal and content-based transformations to align with the government's policies and discourses (Kara 2015). The government's control over the media and the increasing concentration of media ownership narrowed ideological diversity and strengthened societal control by merging religious and political discourses (Kaya and Çakmur 2010).

This study examined the 2023 presidential elections in Türkiye to concretize contemporary reflections of the historical transformation of the relationship between religion and politics. News coverage from during the election process regarding opposition candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu "stepping/standing" on a prayer rug, used by Muslims for worship, in his shoes was analyzed using the CDA method. This case, which highlights how politics is shaped through religious symbolism and the context of the election period, was addressed by a sample of media outlets with varying ownership structures and ideological orientations. The thematic, schematic, syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical analyses of the news articles reveal how religion has been instrumentalized into a dynamic of political power and how the media reflects this process (van Dijk 1988, 2009). The language used in the news goes beyond merely reporting an event; it functions as an ideological tool that shapes public perception. Media discourses in Türkiye, particularly on topics concerning religion and politics, take on distinctly ideological forms. In this context, how religion and religious symbols are reflected in news language becomes a critical factor, shaping the country's overall political and social structure.

The newspapers analyzed in the study offered significantly different perspectives on the role of religion in the media. In particular, Yeni Şafak and Sabah emphasized a perceived lack of respect for religious sensitivities. In their coverage, incidents such as Kılıçdaroğlu stepping on a prayer rug in his shoes were framed with terms such as "disrespect" and "scandal", presenting violations of religious values as tools for societal criticism and political gains. This illustrates how religion's position in society is used as a mechanism to reinforce the ideological hegemony of certain groups. The way religion and religious symbols are handled in media discourse also highlights the persistent tensions between conservative and secular groups. Pro-government media outlets advance the narrative that religious values must be protected and that those who disrespect them should face societal condemnation. In contrast, opposition-aligned media amplify the perception that the inclusion of religion in politics exacerbates social conflict and poses a threat to democracy. Media discourse not only reflects societal values but also functions as a mechanism through which political interests are shaped and reinforced via religion (van Dijk 2003). The debates around religious symbols in the newspapers both reinforce the role of religion in its social and cultural context and ideologically support political structures. The constant emphasis on religious sensitivities and the repeated processing of reactions to these issues exacerbate societal divisions.

The discursive manipulations carried out by the media through religious symbols aim to steer society in a specific ideological direction (Arsan 2013). The religious emphasis in the language of all three newspapers serves as a tool, not only to reinforce their own ideological views but also to criticize opposing political structures, demonstrating how the media's role has evolved beyond mere news reporting into a mechanism for shaping societal thought within a particular framework. In this context, the relationship between religion and politics reveals a strong social structure shaped by media discourses. The rhetorical strategies employed by the media, combining narratives that defend religious values with those that target opposing political actors, significantly deepen societal polarization (Şener 2019; Furat 2019). Each newspaper's ideological stance, the ways they incorporate religion into politics, and the language they use illustrate how effective religion-based strategies can be in shaping political agendas. Ultimately, the relationship between religion and politics embodies a growing contradiction fueled by media discourses and manipulations, serving to exacerbate societal divisions. The findings of this article are consistent with the results of previous research, i.e., the relationship between religion and politics can hinder a society's pursuit of democracy (Casanova 1994; Esposito 2011; Juergensmeyer 2008).

The findings of the study indicate that religion has become a significant component of political strategies and propaganda tools in Türkiye, with religious values and symbols functioning as effective instruments for shaping societal perceptions. Additionally, the media plays a crucial role in this process by reproducing religious discourse in alignment with ideological tendencies and mediatizing religion as a political tool. The strengths of this study lie in its in-depth analysis of the relationship between religion and politics within a contemporary framework and its strong theoretical foundation, supported by the relevant literature. However, its limitations include the lack of quantitative data and the limited diversity of the media sample. Future research could enhance the current findings by employing quantitative methods to examine the impact of the relationship between religion and politics on voter behavior. Additionally, qualitative studies, such as focus group interviews, could provide a more detailed exploration of how media content influences societal perceptions. Comparative studies, conducted in other Islamic countries, would also contribute to a broader understanding of the interplay between religion and politics in media across different cultural and political contexts.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

Abbreviations	Turkish Full Name	English Equivalent
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi	Justice and Development Party
ANAP	Anavatan Partisi	Motherland Party
BBP	Büyük Birlik Partisi	Great Union Party
CDA	Eleştirel Söylem Analizi	critical discourse analysis
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi	Republican People's Party
DEVA	Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi	Democracy and Progress Party
DP	Demokrat Parti	Democratic Party
DYP	Doğru Yol Partisi	True Path Party
FP	Fazilet Partisi	Virtue Party
GP	Gelecek Partisi	Future Party
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi	People's Democratic Party
İYİ Parti	İYİ Parti	Good Party
MGK	Milli Güvenlik Kurulu	National Security Council
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi	Nationalist Movement Party
MNP	Milli Nizam Partisi	National Order Party
MSP	Milli Selamet Partisi	National Salvation Party
RP	Refah Partisi	Welfare Party
SP	Saadet Partisi	Felicity Party
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi	Grand National Assembly of Türkiye
TMSF	Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu	Savings Deposit Insurance Fund

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Article

From Partners to Threats: Islamic Alliances and Authoritarian Consolidation in Egypt and Türkiye

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of authoritarian governance in Egypt and Türkiye through the lens of two pivotal state–Islamist alliances: the early partnership and eventual rupture between Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and the strategic collaboration followed by confrontation between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement (GM). Despite operating in different historical and institutional settings—a postcolonial military regime in Egypt and an electoral, hybrid regime in Türkiye—both leaders allied with influential religious actors during moments of transition to gain popular support and dismantle entrenched power structures. These alliances were instrumental and temporary: once religious movements developed autonomous influence, they were recast as threats and suppressed through legal, institutional, and religious mechanisms. This study traces how religious institutions like Egypt's al-Azhar and Türkiye's Diyanet were co-opted to delegitimize these former allies and justify state repression. While the MB pursued overt political goals and the GM functioned through civic and technocratic channels, both were ultimately excluded from the political order once they had been considered as threats to the central authority of the regime. This comparison underscores the strategic use of religion in authoritarian statecraft and the enduring tension between religious autonomy and centralized political control in Muslim-majority polities.

Keywords: authoritarianism; state–Islamist relations; Islamic politics; Islamic movements; religious co-optation

1. Introduction

The political trajectories of Egypt and Türkiye[1] illustrate a recurring pattern in authoritarian contexts: the strategic alliance between rising political elites and Islamist actors during transitional periods, followed by the systematic marginalization of those actors once power is consolidated. This article offers a comparative, historically grounded analysis of two emblematic cases: the evolving cooperation and eventual rupture between Egyptian nationalist leaders and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and the alliance and subsequent breakdown between Türkiye's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and the Gülen Movement (GM). While both cases follow a familiar arc of alliance and repression, they differ markedly in structure, religious ideology, and historical context. One particularly important difference—often overlooked in comparative studies—is their divergent responses to repression. While the MB's brutal suppression in the 1950s contributed to the emergence of radical offshoots such as al-Qaida and inspired global jihadist discourses, the GM has not responded with violence, despite facing intense persecution over the past decade (Kepel 2002; Gerges 2018; Yavuz and Koç 2016). This contrast underscores the distinct theological orientations and civic strategies that define

each movement—both operating within Sunni Islam, yet diverging sharply in how they interpret political engagement, state confrontation, and moral authority (Yavuz 2013).

Islamism refers broadly to Islamic movements that seek to establish political systems or regimes guided by Islamic law (Shariʿa) and principles (Roy 1994). To clarify the conceptual framework, this article distinguishes between Islamist movements—defined in the literature as political projects seeking to establish an Islamic order or state (Kepel 2002; Wickham 2013)—and broader Islamic movements that are religiously inspired but do not articulate such political goals. The Muslim Brotherhood fits within the classic Islamist category, having explicitly declared the establishment of an Islamic state as part of its program. By contrast, the Gülen Movement has consistently rejected the aim of founding an Islamic state, presenting itself instead as a civil society–based religious network focused on education, service, and moral reform (Yavuz and Esposito 2003; Hendrick 2013). At the same time, the AKP itself emerged from Türkiye's Islamist political tradition (Milli Görüş) and is widely regarded as an Islamist-rooted party that strategically adapted its discourse to democratic and pro-European frameworks in the 2000s (Yavuz 2009; Tuğal 2009). Accordingly, in this study the GM is analyzed not as an Islamist movement, but as an Islamic ally of the AKP—an Islamist-rooted party that instrumentalized GM's networks for political ends. This conceptual clarification provides the theoretical grounding necessary for the comparative analysis that follows.

While this study compares two authoritarian trajectories—Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt in the 1950s and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Türkiye in the 2010s—it acknowledges that the significant temporal gap between these cases introduces both analytical advantages and limitations. On the one hand, this contrast allows for a broader understanding of how authoritarian strategies involving religious actors persist across vastly different historical, institutional, and technological contexts. It highlights the recurrence of elite–Islamist alliances and ruptures under changing global conditions—ranging from postcolonial nationalism to globalized civil society, and from Cold War bipolarity to post-9/11 securitization (Heydemann 2007). Such a diachronic comparison enables the identification of structural logic such as co-optation, ideological instrumentalization, and institutional centralization—that transcend specific eras (Levitsky and Way 2010).

On the other hand, the temporal distance also constrains direct equivalence. Nasser operated in a postcolonial, pre-digital, and largely bipolar international environment, where authoritarian rule was openly asserted and external pressures for democratization were minimal (Brownlee 2007). In contrast, Erdoğan governed in an era of multipolar globalization, under formal electoral competition, EU candidacy scrutiny, and pervasive digital media, all of which shaped both the nature and visibility of authoritarian practices (Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Aydın-Düzgit and Keyman 2017). The Muslim Brotherhood's role as a mass political movement in the mid-20th century differs fundamentally from the GM's technocratic, transnational, and "apolitical" posture in the 21st century (Wickham 2013; Yavuz and Koç 2016). Furthermore, repression in Nasser's time was often brutal and public, whereas Erdoğan's model—especially before 2016—combined legalism, media framing, and bureaucratic purges within a nominally democratic framework (Taş 2018; Esen and Gumuscu 2016).[2]

Therefore, while the two cases do not lend themselves to one-to-one comparison, their juxtaposition offers valuable insights into how different regimes adapt religious alliances to context-specific threats and opportunities. Recognizing these temporal asymmetries do not invalidate the comparison but instead deepens it by emphasizing how similar authoritarian patterns emerge under diverse conditions (Heydemann 2007; Gerschewski 2013).

In Egypt, the relationship between the MB and nationalist forces predates the 1952 revolution. Under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood supported anti-colonial efforts in the 1930s and 1940s, envisioning a significant role in shaping Egypt's

post-monarchical future (Mitchell 1969; Carré and Michaud 1983) through the establishment of an Islamic government grounded in Shariʿa as the guiding political regime (in the sense broadly used in the Islamism literature) (al-Banna 1999b). The Free Officers, including Gamal Abdel Nasser, initially welcomed the Brotherhood's support during the overthrow of King Farouk. Although the Free Officers articulated a commitment to republican reform, their consolidation of power gradually resulted in a centralized authoritarian regime. As the Brotherhood pressed for political inclusion, tensions escalated. Nasser ultimately turned against the movement through arrests, surveillance, and the suppression of its ideological influence (Gerges 2018; Wickham 2013). What began as a pragmatic alliance devolved into a prolonged confrontation over political authority and religious legitimacy. This repression radicalized certain factions within the MB and contributed to the ideological currents that would later inspire militant Islamist movements (Kepel 2002; Sivan 1990).

In Türkiye, a strikingly similar pattern emerged. The AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, rose to power in 2002 through democratic elections and formed an early alliance with the GM. Rooted in the teachings of Said Nursi and expanded under Fethullah Gülen, the GM operated through civil society, education, and media rather than formal political participation (Yavuz and Esposito 2003; Yavuz and Koç 2016). Like the Brotherhood in Egypt, the GM played a vital role in helping the ruling elite displace entrenched secularist forces, who were regarded as the archenemies of both movements—especially within the military and judiciary. However, unlike the Brotherhood, the GM consistently denied any ambition to establish an Islamic state, instead presenting itself as a religiously inspired civic movement—an "Islamic ally" of the AKP. As Erdoğan steadily consolidated control over key state institutions, particularly after the 2011 constitutional changes, his relationship with the GM grew adversarial. The 2013 corruption probes triggered a public rupture, and the failed coup attempt in 2016, blamed on Gülenist actors, led to a sweeping purge of the movement from all sectors of Turkish public life (Taş 2018; Altınordu 2017; Jenkins 2016). Yet, in stark contrast to the Brotherhood's history, the GM has not responded with violence or the formation of radical splinter groups. Its reaction has largely remained within the bounds of legal advocacy, international outreach, and passive resistance—even in exile (Turam 2007; Tekines 2024).

Despite their distinct historical and institutional contexts, both cases reflect the strategic instrumentalization of religious actors during transitional phases. In Egypt, the Brotherhood was a politically ambitious, hierarchical mass movement that openly sought a role in governance. In contrast, the GM was a diffuse, non-partisan religious network that emphasized moral reform, education, and bureaucratic presence (Yavuz and Koç 2016; Hendrick 2013). While Nasser governed a newly independent postcolonial state emerging from monarchy and imperialism, Erdoğan operated within a pluralist electoral system shaped by decades of Islamic political mobilization. Yet, in both instances, the religious actors became politically expendable once the regimes had secured sufficient control over the state apparatus. What followed in Egypt was the fragmentation and radicalization of segments of the Islamist field. In Türkiye, however, the GM's emphasis on service, dialogue, and Sufi-inspired pietism may have insulated it—at least so far—from similar trajectories of violent escalation (Michel 2005).

This study adopts a comparative, empirical approach rather than relying solely on theoretical abstractions. Nevertheless, it engages with relevant conceptual frameworks to understand the mechanisms at play. The alliances discussed here exemplify patterns of elite–movement collaboration, where ruling elites temporarily align with social or religious movements to gain legitimacy or weaken opponents during periods of institutional flux (Bosi et al. 2016). Over time, such alliances often give way to repression, a dynamic central to processes of authoritarian consolidation (Gerschewski 2013). The article also considers

how these trajectories relate to the broader phenomenon of competitive authoritarianism, where democratic institutions exist but are gradually hollowed out through informal power centralization (Levitsky and Way 2010; Esen and Gumuscu 2016).

By examining the specific historical, religious, and institutional configurations in each case, this article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of state–Islamist relations and the political uses of religion in authoritarian regimes. It challenges determinist accounts that treat such alliances as inherently doomed and instead shows how outcomes are shaped by the ideological character of religious movements, the strategic calculations of political elites, and the broader sociopolitical context. Through close comparison, it argues that while Nasser and Erdoğan operated in different eras and institutional environments, both followed a similar authoritarian logic—leveraging religion in the service of power, only to suppress it when it threatened the autonomy of the state.

2. The Case of Egypt: Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood

2.1. Background: The Fall of King Farouk and the Rise of Nasser

Despite formal independence in 1922, British political and military influence continued to shape Egypt well into the mid-20th century (Tignor 2010, p. 140; Abou-El-Fadl 2018). By the early 1950s, King Farouk's regime was widely viewed as corrupt, ineffectual, and overly dependent on British support. As Abir argues, the monarchy functioned effectively as a British proxy, lacking popular legitimacy and sovereignty (Abir 1977, pp. 295–313). Popular resentment grew in response to the monarchy's inability to achieve true independence, its repression of political opposition, and its failure to address deepening socioeconomic inequalities. Egypt's defeat in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War further undermined the monarchy's credibility (Vatikiotis 1991, p. 332; Tignor 2010).

Within this legitimacy crisis, the Free Officers emerged as the organized elite coalition that capitalized on widespread grievances and positioned themselves as agents of regime change. Driven by nationalist ideals and the postwar decolonization wave, the officers aimed to end foreign control, abolish the monarchy, and build a new order based on sovereignty and social justice (Kirk 2000, p. 2; Gelvin 2008; Cleveland and Bunton 2016, pp. 288–89).

This historical juncture can be understood through the lens of O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986) framework on transitions from authoritarian rule, which highlights the pivotal role of uncertainty and elite realignments during regime breakdown. In Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, a key leader of the Free Officers, strategically aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood—a powerful Islamist social movement with significant grassroots support and organizational capacity (Mitchell 1969; Carré and Michaud 1983; Hamouda 1994). This alliance provided Nasser with ideological cover and mass mobilization capabilities, enhancing the legitimacy of the revolution and facilitating the removal of King Farouk.

2.2. Religious Thought, Political Strategy, and Salafi Influences in the Muslim Brotherhood

To better understand the strategic convergence between Nasser and the Brotherhood during this transitional period, it is essential to examine the ideological foundations of the MB. Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the movement was based on the conviction that Islam constitutes a comprehensive system governing both private and public life. As al-Banna declared, Islam is "a perfect, all-embracing system that covers all aspects of this world and the next one" and should "control all matters in life" (al-Banna 1999a, p. 87; 1999b, p. 59). His foundational texts described Islam as *dīn wa dawla*—religion and state—an order intended to guide society as a whole (al-Banna 1978, pp. 7–9).

Al-Banna's interpretation of Islam was explicitly ideological. He believed Islam to be "a perfect, all-embracing system that covers all aspects of this world and the next one," one

that "should control all matters in life" (al-Banna 1999a, p. 87; 1999b, p. 59; 1999c, p. 173; 1999d, p. 2). However, al-Banna's vision went beyond personal piety: "Islam is an ideology and worship, country and nation, religion as well as government" (al-Banna 1999c, p. 173). This conception blurred the line between public and private life and shaped the Brotherhood into what he famously described as "a Salafi invitation, . . . a Sunni way of thought, . . . a Sufi truth, . . . [and] a political organisation" (al-Banna 1999c, pp. 177–78). Unlike quietist Salafi trends, the Brotherhood sought to influence state institutions, presenting Islam as both a moral framework and a political project (Mitchell 1969, pp. 207–10).

The movement's theological trajectory shifted with Sayyid Qutb, whose prison writings in the 1950s marked a radical turn. In *Milestones*, Qutb argued that Muslim societies had fallen into a state of modern *jāhiliyya* (ignorance), as they were ruled by "man-made laws instead of the Shariah" (Qutb 2005, pp. 10–16). He called for the creation of a disciplined vanguard to restore God's sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*) and resist secular authority. Qutb's claim that "contemporary societies exhibit *jāhiliyya* because they are organised on the basis of man-made laws" (Cheema 2006) resonated with later Islamist and even jihadi currents. While Qutb himself did not advocate widespread *takfīr*, his writings were later invoked by militant groups as religious justification for revolution (Gerges 2018, pp. 99–105).

The Brotherhood's ideological project directly shaped its political engagement with Nasser. In the early 1950s, the Brotherhood allied with the Free Officers, hoping to guide Egypt's new political order along Islamic lines. Yet the same religious networks that made the Brotherhood an attractive partner also positioned it as a rival. Once in power, Nasser viewed the Brotherhood's independent sources of legitimacy as a threat to his centralized rule, leading to arrests, executions, and the suppression of Islamist activism (Carré and Michaud 1983, pp. 59–63; Zeghal 1999). Qutb's writings, produced in prison during this repression, further radicalized parts of the Brotherhood, deepening the conflict between the movement and the regime.[3]

2.3. Nasser's Alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood

Building on this ideological context, the early relationship between the MB and Nasser's regime must be seen as both a product of shared anti-imperialist goals and a foreshadowing of later tensions. Despite their ideological differences, Gamal Abdel Nasser's Free Officers Movement and the MB shared a strategic objective: dismantling British colonial influence and overthrowing King Farouk. As Hasan al-Banna declared, Islam offered not only spiritual renewal but a political solution to Egypt's decline (al-Banna 1999c, p. 173). This conviction, captured in the enduring slogan "Islam is the Solution" (Mitchell 1969, p. 12; Milton-Edwards 2016, p. 3), framed the Brotherhood's activism as both religious duty and national liberation.

Al-Banna believed that Muslim decline stemmed from stagnation and foreign domination, and he stressed the necessity of an Islamic government grounded in social justice and national unity (Al-Abdin 1989, pp. 221–23). The Brotherhood's extensive social services—schools, clinics, and charitable institutions—enabled it to cultivate a formidable grassroots base, transforming it from a small association into a major sociopolitical force (Mitchell 1969; Carré and Michaud 1983). Yet this mass legitimacy, while enhancing its political leverage, also made the Brotherhood susceptible to co-optation by ambitious elites. Social movement theory underscores how transitional periods often generate elite–movement alliances—temporary coalitions designed to enhance mobilization and legitimacy (Tarrow 2011). In parallel, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) highlight that such pacts are particularly salient during moments of regime crisis, though they rarely rest on stable foundations. The Free Officers' collaboration with the Brotherhood was therefore less an ideological synthesis than a

precarious strategic alignment—one that secured short-term gains but carried the seeds of eventual rupture.

The Brotherhood's grassroots activism also translated into nationalist mobilization (Abdo 2011, p. 21–23). Its networks staged mass demonstrations and, in al-Banna's framing, national service itself became a form of *jihad* (struggle) for liberation: "Jihad is an obligation which cannot be ignored, until Muslim lands are freed" (al-Banna 1978, p. 42). This framing resonated with religious constituencies and secular nationalists alike, including the Free Officers (Abdo 2011, pp. 21–23; Mura 2012). During the 1940s, both movements participated in anti-British uprisings, and the Brotherhood's paramilitary wing—the Special Apparatus *(al-Nizām al-Khāṣṣ)*—fought colonial forces and supported the Palestinian cause in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War (el Zalaf 2022, pp. 22–25; El-Awaisi 1998, p. 110; Hamouda 1994). Their cooperation reached its peak when a Free Officers unit joined Brotherhood fighters against Israeli forces, underscoring the extent of their convergence (Mitchell 1969, pp. 96–104; Abou-El-Fadl 2018).

What appeared to be a promising partnership, however, was shaped more by pragmatism than shared ideology. For Nasser, the Brotherhood's organizational strength and mass legitimacy provided indispensable support in dismantling the monarchy; for the Brotherhood, the alliance offered a path to Islamizing the political order. In sum, the alliance represented a temporary convergence of interests under structural upheaval rather than a stable ideological alignment—an example of the fragile, interest-based coalitions that often dissolve once power is consolidated and agendas diverge.[4]

2.4. Nasser's Shift: From Alliance to Suppression

In the aftermath of the 1952 revolution, Gamal Abdel Nasser emerged as the central figure of Egypt's Revolutionary Command Council. At first, his regime maintained a cautious alliance with the MB, recognizing the movement's grassroots legitimacy and broad influence. For the Brotherhood, this revolutionary juncture offered an opportunity to shape a new political order based on Islamic values. Yet, as Nasser consolidated power, tensions deepened. His vision of a secular, Arab socialist republic stood in direct opposition to the Brotherhood's aspiration for an Islamic system of governance (Mitchell 1969, pp. 105–11; Carré and Michaud 1983, pp. 59–63).

The collapse of this alliance should not be seen as the cause of authoritarianism but rather as part of Nasser's broader strategy of political consolidation. As scholars of authoritarianism argue, regimes in transition often rely on selective inclusion, exclusion, and repression to stabilize their rule. Nasser initially experimented with co-optation by integrating some Brotherhood figures into state institutions, but this arrangement quickly unraveled as the Brotherhood's independent legitimacy and vast social networks threatened the regime's hegemonic project.

By 1953, all political parties—monarchist, liberal, and leftist alike—were banned, with the MB the only remaining mass movement. Unlike other actors, it embodied a rival source of authority rooted in Islamic ethics and reinforced by schools, mosques, and welfare services (Gerges 2018, pp. 15–16; Al-Anani 2016). Suppression thus became a political necessity, aimed at neutralizing an actor capable of mobilizing outside state control.

The turning point came in October 1954, when a failed assassination attempt on Nasser—blamed on a Brotherhood member—provided the pretext for mass repression (Carré and Michaud 1983; Krämer 2010). Thousands were imprisoned, and leading figures such as Sayyid Qutb were tortured and eventually executed in 1966 (Mitchell 1969; Calvert 2010). Beyond coercion, Nasser's strategy involved systematically purging Brotherhood influence from Egypt's educational and religious institutions.

One major front in this purge was al-Azhar University. As Skovgaard-Petersen notes, Law 818 "set up committees that were designed to purge al-Azhar of all faculty who were unwilling to support government control," cutting the faculty from 298 in 1959 to 215 by 1963 (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004, p. 162). This institutional purge mirrored efforts in the Ministry of Education, where Brotherhood-affiliated teachers, inspectors, and administrators were replaced by loyalists aligned with the regime's Arab nationalist project. Sayyid Qutb himself, who had worked nearly twenty years in the Ministry of Education "first as a teacher and later as an inspector and administrator" (Calvert 2010, p. 133), exemplified the rupture between Islamist reformism and state-led nationalism.

The 1961 al-Azhar reform law further transformed the institution by expanding its faculties and placing it under state supervision. This shift marked al-Azhar's conversion from a semi-autonomous religious authority into a centralized tool of regime ideology (Zeghal 1999, pp. 374–75; Aburish 2004, pp. 46–47). As Zeghal observes, "the state used al-Azhar to issue fatwas in support of nationalization and socialism, turning Islamic authority into a pillar of state legitimacy" (Zeghal 1999, p. 385). Curriculum revisions aligned religious education with Arab nationalist goals, while the merger of religious and civil courts consolidated state dominance over the legal domain (Zeghal 1999; Aburish 2004).

This institutional realignment was reinforced by ideological delegitimation. State-controlled media and official 'ulama portrayed the Brotherhood as "sectarian, backward, and heretical," undermining its religious legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Zeghal 1999, p. 386). Fatwas denouncing the MB proliferated, and education reforms redefined Islam along statist, modernist lines (Aburish 2004, pp. 200–1; Shah 2004). The effect was to marginalize the Brotherhood's alternative moral vision while constructing a state-sanctioned Islam compatible with Nasser's developmentalist and anti-imperialist project.

This campaign exemplified authoritarian upgrading: Nasser's regime did not simply crush the Brotherhood militarily but restructured the religious sphere itself. By purging rivals, reshaping al-Azhar, and delegitimizing the Brotherhood, the regime replaced pluralism with a state-controlled Islam that bolstered its authority. In conclusion, Nasser's shift from tactical alliance to suppression was a phased process of authoritarian consolidation. As the Brotherhood's autonomous influence grew incompatible with centralizing ambitions, inclusion gave way to exclusion, and alternative claims to moral and political leadership were eliminated.

3. The Case of Türkiye: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Gülen Movement

3.1. Background: The Rise of Erdoğan and the Islamic Movement in Türkiye

The ascent of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the broader Islamist movement—including reformist offshoots of Necmettin Erbakan's Milli Görüş tradition and faith-based civil society actors such as the Gülen Movement—reflects deep institutional and ideological shifts in Türkiye's political landscape. As in Egypt, where regime transformations have involved complex interactions between secular elites and Islamist challengers, Türkiye's trajectory demonstrates how political Islam re-emerged within a secular nationalist framework—especially after the 28 February 1997 "postmodern coup," which sought to suppress Islamist politics but ultimately facilitated their reconfiguration—and eventually played a central role in redefining it. This process can be contextualized within the broader literature on regime change and hybrid authoritarianism.[5]

Kemalist secularism,[6] established after 1923, subordinated religious institutions to the state through measures such as abolishing the caliphate, closing religious schools, and founding the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) (Mardin 1989, p. 155; Gözaydın 2008). While framed as modernization, this was also a form of authoritarian ideological control that marginalized religious actors and cast religiously inspired movements—whether

explicitly Islamist or more civic and faith-based in orientation—as existential threats to the secular republic. Such movements were subjected to varying degrees of state repression, particularly when they gained traction among rural conservatives and segments of the urban poor.[7]

The transition to a multi-party system in 1946 opened political opportunities for religious sentiment to re-enter public life. From the 1970s through the 1990s, Islamist parties—notably the National Salvation Party (MSP) and Welfare Party (RP)—articulated a counter-hegemonic Islamic political identity, appealing to underserved urban peripheries. Out of this wave emerged Erdoğan, who rose to prominence as Istanbul's mayor in 1994, combining effective service delivery with Islamic moral discourse to legitimize political Islam in governance. His political lineage lay in Erbakan's Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement, shaped by Naqshbandi Sufi networks (Cornell and Kaya 2015; Erturk 2022), and influenced by the ideas of transnational Islamist thinkers such as Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb (Altunisik 2022, pp. 22–23; Stein 2013, p. 6). While Erdoğan's style later diverged from Erbakan's doctrinaire Islamism, he nonetheless inherited the organizational networks and religious vocabulary of this tradition. He was personally affiliated with the İskenderpaşa Dergahı and has publicly acknowledged it as one of the four major influences on his personality and worldview (Rubin 2001, pp. 26–27; Heper 2013; Cornell and Kaya 2015).

The rise of the RP, culminating in Erbakan's premiership in 1996, provoked military intervention and the "postmodern coup" of 1997, which forced Erbakan's resignation and dissolved the party (Peterson 1998, p. 2; Jenkins 2007, p. 29; Özbudun 2000, p. 106). In response, a reformist faction (*Yenilikçiler*) led by Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül broke from Erbakan (the more traditionalist—*Gelenekçiler*), founding the AKP in 2001. Rebranding as "conservative democrats," they embraced market liberalism, EU accession, and democratic norms while distancing themselves from overt Islamism (Özbudun and Hale 2010, pp. 129–30; Yavuz 2009, p. 97).

The AKP's landslide victory in 2002 parliamentary elections, securing 34.2% of the vote (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Supreme Election Board) (2002)) and forming a single-party government, marked a critical regime transformation. Erdoğan's platform of economic reform, democratization, and EU integration resonated across ideological divides, enabling the AKP to build a broad coalition of devout Muslims, entrepreneurs, the Anatolian middle class, and disenchanted secularists (Akarca and Tansel 2008; Keyder 2004). This shift reflects a broader pattern of hybrid regime formation, in which democratic institutions are preserved in form but gradually hollowed out to entrench executive dominance (Levitsky and Way 2010, pp. 3–10).

Erdoğan's rise thus exemplifies how Islamist actors, once marginalized, can capitalize on political openings, adapt ideologically, and transform the regime from within. Far from signalling the collapse of secularism, the AKP's ascent reconfigured it into a new synthesis of religious identity, electoral legitimacy, and state authority—setting the stage for Erdoğan's later confrontation with other Islamic actors, particularly the Gülen Movement.

3.2. Religious Thought, Ritual, and Civic Practice in the Gülen Movement

To fully understand the dynamics of the GM, it is essential to examine the religious and organizational vision that underpins it. Inspired by the charismatic Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen (1941–2024), who left Turkey in 1999 citing medical reasons and remained in residence at a compound in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania until his death in 2024, the GM integrates classical Sunni theology with a strong emphasis on education, social responsibility, and interfaith dialogue (Tee 2021). Central to this vision is the concept of *hizmet* (service), which redefines worship not merely as ritual devotion, but as active engagement in the betterment of humanity through moral leadership, the dissemination

of knowledge, and public good. Gülen interprets this service-oriented ethic as a form of spiritual fulfillment and religious obligation grounded in Islamic principles (Gülen 2009, pp. 11–17). This emphasis on service as a form of lived piety became so central that adherents came to refer to themselves as the Hizmet (Service) Movement, signalling their shared goal of civic transformation through faith-inspired action.

At the heart of this project lies Gülen's ambition to cultivate a "golden generation"—a new cohort of morally upright, intellectually capable, and socially responsible individuals who could lead the transformation of society. This ideal became both the spiritual core and organizational driver of the movement. Gülen's theological vision is deeply rooted in the intellectual and spiritual legacy of Said Nursi (1877–1960), a prominent Kurdish Sunni scholar whose *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light) emphasized the compatibility of Islamic faith with reason, science, and modernity. At the core of Nursi's project was the revival of faith as the essential basis for building a just and ethically grounded society (Ünal and Williams 2000, pp. 25–27; Michel 2005).[8] Drawing heavily on Nursi, Gülen developed a civic-oriented Islam that prioritized education, ethical conduct, and dialogue over political confrontation (Yavuz and Esposito 2003). Complementing this rational framework is the spiritual heritage of Anatolian Sufism, particularly figures like Jalaluddin Rumi, Yunus Emre, Ahmad Yasawi, and Hacı Baktaşı Veli who emphasize inner purification, universal love, and tolerance (Gülen 2011, p. xvi; Ünal and Williams 2000, pp. 52–58; Tee 2021).

Gülen often refers to this synthesis as "Turkish/Anatolian Islam" or "Anatolian Muslimness"—a blend of Sunni orthodoxy, Sufi spirituality, and cultural pluralism (Gülen 2011, p. xvi; Ünal and Williams 2000, pp. 52–58; Aras and Çaha 2000). These foundations gave rise to the movement's overarching aim: the development of the ideal human (*al-insaan al-kaamil*), whose personal virtues would form the basis for an ideal society. As Gülen puts it: "Today, above all else, we are in need of a generation that is conscientious in fulfilling their duty toward God and we need ideal people who can guide society" (Gülen 2011, p. 95). Thus, the movement is structured not only around theological principles, but also around an aspirational anthropology that sees individual moral refinement as the key to broader social transformation (see Gülen 2011, pp. 81–130; 2009, pp. 123–28, 145–55; 2005, pp. 103–9).

Expanding on this vision, Gülen argues that the transformation of society begins with the formation of ideal individuals—those who are spiritually disciplined, morally upright, intellectually curious, and socially responsible. He describes such a person as "so humble . . . so rational and sagacious . . . so zealous, persevering and confident" (Gülen 2005, pp. 103–4), suggesting that they become living embodiments of service, love, and tolerance—core values at the heart of what he terms the "golden generation" (*al-insaan al-kaamil*) (Gülen 2011, pp. 81–130). When such individuals populate a community, Gülen envisions an ideal society: one characterized by compassion, interfaith harmony, justice, and a commitment to the public good. Through institutions founded on love, tolerance, and dialogue—such as schools and cultural initiatives—social reform, in his view, is achieved not through political coercion but through the collective influence of morally cultivated, educated individuals (Gülen 2004, pp. 202–9).

This vision of moral excellence does not remain theoretical; rather, it becomes actionable through a clearly defined set of ethical principles that guide both personal and communal life. To cultivate this new generation, Gülen outlines core values including love, forgiveness, peace, humility, service (*hizmet*), and self-criticism—virtues he regards as foundational to Islam, in contrast to more external or performative aspects of religious practice (see Gülen 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011). Complementing this moral vision is his conception of the ideal human as someone who combines spiritual devotion, ethical consistency, and intellectual depth. Gülen identifies eight core traits of such individuals: sincere faith,

boundless love, a rational engagement with science, a reimagined understanding of the universe, respect for freedom of thought, collective deliberation, clear reasoning, and aesthetic appreciation (Gülen 2009, pp. 5–10, 31–42). Altruism—living not for oneself but for others—lies at the heart of this moral formation, seen by Gülen as the highest realization of Islamic ethics (Gülen 2006, p. 10).

This ethical formation serves as the foundation for the movement's institutional expansion. The emphasis on personal transformation as a precursor to societal change helped foster the development of a vast transnational network of institutions. This informal civil society ecosystem encompasses educational academies, media outlets, interfaith platforms, charitable foundations, and business associations. Among the most influential are the *dershanes* (private exam preparation centres) and *sohbet* circles (small-group religious discussions), which serve as both pedagogical and spiritual spaces. These venues not only offer religious education but also cultivate mentorship, discipline, and upward mobility among youth—functioning as incubators for the "ideal human" Gülen envisioned (Hendrick 2013, pp. 92–7).[9]

Grounded in this ethos of moral reform and civic service, the GM does not position itself as a political actor. Its mission is articulated in terms of ethical renewal and societal uplift, rather than formal political engagement. This strategic orientation allowed the movement to maintain a degree of autonomy and avoid direct confrontation with the secular state for much of its history. However, it is precisely this autonomy—and the GM's growing influence within key state institutions—that would later lead to its framing as a political threat to Erdoğan's authority (Balci 2013; Taş 2018; Martin 2020). Its historical evolution and civic orientation set it apart from other religiously inspired movements—particularly those with explicit political agendas such as the Milli Görüş tradition and the Muslim Brotherhood—a distinction that became increasingly salient during the political conflicts of the 2010s.

3.3. Erdoğan's Alliance with the Gülen Movement

This model of faith-based civic engagement created the conditions for what would become one of the most significant political alliances in modern Turkish history. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP were significantly bolstered by a strategic partnership with the Gülen Movement (GM), a powerful civil society network with deep institutional presence in education, media, law enforcement, and the judiciary.[10]

Although their objectives were not entirely aligned, the AKP and the GM shared overlapping ideological and strategic goals. Both supported Türkiye's EU accession, economic growth, and the strengthening of democratic institutions—particularly where these weakened military guardianship (Tekines 2024; Balci 2013). Their shared roots in Islamic conservatism and Anatolian moral traditions emphasized social cohesion, religious values, and civic responsibility, but more importantly, they provided a cultural repertoire that made their cooperation intelligible and legitimate to broad segments of Turkish society. Unlike Gamal Abdel Nasser, Erdoğan is widely seen as a religious figure, shaped by Naqshbandi Sufi networks under the mentorship of Necmettin Erbakan, which enhanced his appeal among Türkiye's devout constituencies.[11] This personal religious capital strengthened the plausibility of Erdoğan's alliance with the GM by signaling authenticity to conservative voters.

Despite maintaining relationships with various religious communities—such as Sufi orders, traditional Sunni scholars, and Islamist NGOs—Erdoğan forged a uniquely close alliance with the GM. This choice reveals that the alliance was not simply one among many, but rather a calculated preference based on institutional leverage. In contrast to other religious orders fragmented by intra-Islamist rivalries and historical resentment

toward Erbakan, the GM had remained politically neutral and built a powerful presence in the judiciary and police. This neutrality, combined with a shared resentment toward the military-secularist establishment, made the GM an ideal partner for Erdoğan in his bid to dismantle the secular "deep state." While Türkiye hosts a diversity of religious actors, few matched the GM's institutional reach or capacity to influence state restructuring—making it both the most effective and, eventually, the most threatening religious ally (Yavuz and Koç 2016; Martin 2020; Tee 2021). What might otherwise seem like a conventional alliance thus becomes a textbook case of how political elites strategically privilege one movement over others to maximize regime transformation.

Yet, important differences in goals and public strategy persisted. The AKP aimed to capture state power and reshape governance along conservative-nationalist lines. The GM, by contrast, presented itself as a non-political actor, focused on moral renewal through education, interfaith dialogue, and bureaucratic engagement (Balci 2013). This divergence in institutional aspirations foreshadowed the fragility of the alliance and underscored the fact that elite–movement coalitions are rarely sustained beyond their immediate objectives.

Nevertheless, their mutual opposition to the secularist military's guardianship over civilian governance created a powerful strategic convergence. The AKP relied on the GM's influence in the judiciary, media, and police to weaken the so-called "deep state." The GM, in turn, relied on political cover to expand its educational institutions and media platforms (Aras and Çaha 2000; Aydıntaşbaş 2016; Martin 2020). This complementarity enabled both actors to reshape Türkiye's political landscape in the early 2000s, demonstrating how fragile coalitions can nonetheless have profound institutional effects.

The alliance manifested concretely through the GM's active presence in key state sectors. Gülen-affiliated actors played pivotal roles in shielding Erdoğan from judicial investigations and military challenges—longstanding barriers for Islamist politicians in Türkiye's secular republic (Aviv 2016; Taş 2018; Martin 2020). In return, the AKP facilitated the GM's institutional expansion and implemented reforms that weakened the military's political power, including the 2010 constitutional referendum (Balci 2013; Tee 2021; Tekines 2024). These mutual accommodations highlight the mechanics of exchange central to elite–movement alliances.

This episode exemplifies the broader logic of collaboration: the AKP leveraged the GM's grassroots and bureaucratic networks to consolidate its rule, while the GM gained influence and protection under the AKP's political umbrella. However, the alliance was ultimately tactical and fragile. As both actors pursued diverging visions of Türkiye's future—especially over political control and the role of Islam in the state—mutual distrust deepened. By the early 2010s, this rift had grown irreparable, marking the start of a highly polarized and conflict-ridden era in Turkish politics (Tol 2014; Toosi 2016; Martin 2020).

In summary, Erdoğan's alliance with the GM was a pragmatic coalition rooted in anti-Kemalist objectives and mutual institutional interests. It enabled the AKP to ascend by dismantling Kemalist-secularist dominance with the help of the GM's infrastructure. Yet its collapse underscores the instability of such coalitions when long-term goals diverge, and one actor seeks to outgrow its subordinate role. As in the Egyptian case, this trajectory demonstrates the double-edged nature of elite–movement alliances: they may be transformative in the short term but structurally unstable in the long run.

3.4. Erdoğan's Shift: From Alliance to Conflict

The deterioration of the alliance between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the GM marked a critical juncture in Türkiye's political trajectory, highlighting the dynamics of hegemonic consolidation within a competitive authoritarian context. What began as a tactical partnership grounded in shared opposition to Kemalist secularism devolved into open conflict

as Erdoğan sought to consolidate executive dominance and neutralize autonomous actors embedded within the state apparatus (Göl 2017; Baykan 2024). This shift exemplifies how alliances forged in transitional moments can later become obstacles to the centralization of authority.

By the early 2010s, Erdoğan's consolidation of power followed patterns consistent with hybrid regime models.[12] Although the GM had once been a strategic ally embedded in critical state institutions—particularly the judiciary and police—it increasingly came to be viewed as an autonomous and threatening actor. This reclassification of the GM as a rival was catalyzed by Erdoğan's subordination of the military and other secular strongholds, which had historically curtailed Islamist politics (Toosi 2016; Göl 2017; Baykan 2024). Once these constraints were diminished, Erdoğan's project shifted toward a more centralized, personalized model of governance, and tensions with the GM inevitably escalated.

The first visible rupture between the GM and the AKP occurred over foreign policy, revealing how ideological divergence can fracture tactical alliances. Gülen publicly opposed Erdoğan's confrontational international stance—especially his pro-Iran leanings, anti-Israel rhetoric, and Brotherhood ties. This divergence became visible during the May 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, when Gülen denounced the flotilla's attempt to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza as a violation of international law and Israeli sovereignty (Lauria 2010; Yavuz 2018). His critique signalled a clash between Erdoğan's populist, confrontational foreign policy and the GM's more cautious, internationalist orientation.

Soon after, the 2010 constitutional referendum became another turning point in Türkiye's institutional transformation. While presented as democratization, the Venice Commission and European Commission warned the amendments would undermine judicial independence and enable executive dominance (Venice Commission (European Commission for Democracy through Law) (2010, para. 23); European Commission 2010, p. 16). The GM supported the referendum, seeing it as a means of weakening military tutelage and advancing EU reforms. Yet this support created a contradiction: the movement, long committed to democratization, endorsed reforms that EU bodies themselves feared would foster authoritarianism (Yavuz 2013; Baykan 2024). This paradox underscored how alliances often force movements into positions that compromise their normative claims.

Following the referendum, the AKP's subordination of the military[13] was widely hailed as a democratic breakthrough. Erdoğan was praised across the Middle East and the West, and Türkiye was cast as a model demonstrating compatibility between electoral legitimacy, religious conservatism, and modern governance. During the Arab uprisings, Türkiye's prominence reinforced this perception (Tuğal 2016; Hamid et al. 2017). Yet what appeared as democratic ascendancy masked deeper fractures. The AKP's new confidence emboldened more assertive foreign policy moves, which Gülen openly criticized, further straining the alliance.

The second major confrontation came in early 2012, when a prosecutor allegedly linked to the GM summoned Hakan Fidan, head of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), over his covert PKK negotiations in Oslo. The AKP leadership saw this as an attempt to strike Erdoğan through one of his closest allies, framing it as a judicial coup by Gülenist actors (Yavuz 2018; Altınordu 2017). Around the same time, Erdoğan's office and residence were wiretapped, reportedly by GM-affiliated police (Yavuz 2018; Kardaş and Balcı 2019). These actions were interpreted not as institutional oversight but as betrayal, exemplifying how autonomy within the state can be redefined as subversion under consolidating authoritarianism.

Rather than interpreting such criticism as democratic pluralism, Erdoğan treated it as disloyalty. The GM's vocal criticism of his foreign and domestic policies, combined with its institutional autonomy, was reframed as a breach of their informal pact. As the AKP

distanced itself from earlier commitments to reform, the GM began to withdraw, and the alliance unraveled (Hendrick 2013; Tekines 2024). This sequence illustrates how alliances collapse once movements cease to be subordinate partners.

By 2013, confrontation escalated into Erdoğan's accusations that the GM had formed a "parallel state" (*paralel yapı*) within the judiciary, police, and education system (Jenkins 2014; Yavuz and Koç 2016; Taş 2018). The divergence extended to foreign policy: while the GM continued supporting EU accession, Erdoğan turned Eurosceptic, portraying EU institutions as biased and hostile toward Muslim-majority states (Yavuz 2013; Baykan 2024). This divergence shows how external alignments can deepen internal fractures.

Tensions intensified during the Gezi Park protests of May–June 2013.[14] Gülen publicly called for restraint and dialogue, insisting:

> "The people voiced democratic demands [during the Gezi Park protests] and, initially, there were innocent protests. . . Freedom of speech and expression cannot be restricted. While the views of the majority certainly deserve respect, the views of minority groups should be treated with the same level of respect as well".
>
> (Hürriyet Daily News 2014)

Such statements emphasized inclusion and nonviolence but were interpreted by Erdoğan as betrayal. He accused the GM of conspiring with foreign actors, again framing dissent as treason (Aviv 2016; Habervaktim 2013). Gülen, in response, rejected these accusations, lamenting that "pressure led to violence and a local issue turned into a national security issue" (Hürriyet Daily News 2014). These exchanges illustrate how rhetoric and symbolic positioning became central weapons in the alliance's breakdown.

Later in 2013, Erdoğan escalated by targeting the GM's dershanes—private prep schools central to its recruitment and finances (BBC News 2014; Jenkins 2014; Yavuz and Koç 2016). Their closure not only weakened the GM's grassroots infrastructure but also symbolized Erdoğan's determination to dismantle its societal base. The corruption probes of 17–25 December 2013, led by prosecutors allegedly linked to the GM, further deepened the rift. With cabinet ministers implicated, Erdoğan denounced the investigations as a "judicial coup" and launched sweeping purges of GM-linked officials (Jenkins 2016; The Guardian 2014; Balci 2023).

The January 2014 MİT trucks scandal escalated repression further. Prosecutors accused Turkish intelligence of supplying arms to Syrian jihadists, triggering mass dismissals, criminal charges, and seizures of GM-linked media and schools (BBC News 2014; Euronews 2021; Cagaptay 2017). As Baykan (2024, p. 182) argues, this episode "made the authoritarian characteristics of the AKP government more visible and undeniable." These developments illustrate how authoritarian regimes frame security crises to justify dismantling rivals' institutional networks.

In the following years, Erdoğan intensified repression: the GM was designated a terrorist organization, its media and schools were seized, and its companies placed under state trusteeship. These measures, presented as national security imperatives, consolidated Erdoğan's domestic support by recasting the GM as a foreign-backed subversive threat (Martin 2020; Kütahyalı 2024). The rebranding of the GM from ally to enemy reinforced Erdoğan's hegemonic control over civil society, media, and institutions.

This trajectory culminated in the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, which Erdoğan immediately blamed on the GM (Altınordu 2017). The coup became the final rupture in what had once been a mutually empowering alliance. In contrast to Egypt—where Nasser's clash with the MB was framed as ideological—Erdoğan's confrontation with the GM was rooted in institutional domination. Both cases, however, underscore how authoritarian consolidation often involves recasting former allies as existential threats to legitimize the monopolization of power.

3.5. The 2016 Coup Attempt and the Abolition of the Gülen Movement

The failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, marked a decisive turning point in President Erdoğan's escalating conflict with the GM, crystallizing the dynamics of hegemonic consolidation within a competitive authoritarian context. What had initially been a tactical alliance and later evolved into rivalry now entered a phase of full repression, demonstrating how fragile coalitions are redefined as existential threats once executive power is sufficiently centralized.

The coup, conducted by a faction of the Turkish Armed Forces under the name "Peace at Home Council" (*Yurtta Sulh Konseyi*), involved the occupation of state institutions in Ankara and Istanbul, attacks on the parliament, and an alleged attempt to assassinate Erdoğan. Erdoğan's survival and his dramatic FaceTime broadcast on CNN Türk became a symbolic rallying moment for the regime (Fırat 2016; Yeni Şafak 2016; Al Jazeera 2016). Yet the coup collapsed rapidly, lacking both broad military support and popular legitimacy (Pierini 2016; Kalafat 2016).[15] Erdoğan quickly framed the events as a divine opportunity to purge opponents and consolidate power, illustrating how authoritarian leaders can transform moments of crisis into vehicles for regime entrenchment. Alternative interpretations persisted: opposition parties[16] labelled the coup a "controlled coup," suggesting the government may have anticipated the uprising but allowed it to unfold as a pretext for repression (Artunç 2017).

In the coup's immediate aftermath, Erdoğan publicly declared: "This uprising is a gift from God ('Allah'ın lütfu') to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army" (Dolan and Solaker 2016; Fırat 2016, p. 159). This framing legitimized mass purges as providential necessity rather than political choice. He immediately blamed Fethullah Gülen and his followers, accusing them of decades-long infiltration of the state to seize power. While Gülen rejected any involvement and called for an impartial investigation (BBC News 2016; ABC News 2016; Hizmet News 2017), Erdoğan dismissed this outright, insisting: "It is obvious who is behind this...There is no need to debate it further" (quoted in Filkins 2016). Competing interpretations reflected broader uncertainty: Filkins (2016) notes that while some Turkish and Western officials believed Gülenist officers played a leading role, others denied affiliation, pointing to a coalition of anti-Erdoğan factions. Similarly, Şık argued the coup involved multiple networks within the military (Kalafat 2016). Despite this ambiguity, Erdoğan pursued Gülen's extradition and labelled the movement a grave security threat (Daily Sabah 2016; Coker 2016). This episode demonstrates how contested events can be instrumentalized to justify sweeping repression.

Capitalizing on the crisis, Erdoğan launched expansive purges across society. Tens of thousands of civil servants were dismissed within days, and thousands detained under emergency decrees. The crackdown extended beyond suspects to civil society, media, academia, and political dissent (Aydıntaşbaş 2016; Winter 2016; Human Rights Watch 2017). According to TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund), nearly 1000 companies worth more than $11 billion were seized (TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund of Turkey) (2023)). These measures reflected a strategy of authoritarian upgrading, where repression was paired with the appropriation of economic resources to reconfigure state–society relations.

To justify the purge, the regime formulated an official "July 15 Narrative." At its core was the depiction of the GM as a clandestine "Parallel State Structure" infiltrating the bureaucracy. Amplified by pro-government media, orchestrated commemorations, and ritualized public spectacles, this narrative legitimized authoritarian restructuring (Altınordu 2017, pp. 152–54; Filkins 2016).

A key pillar of this narrative was the instrumentalization of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). Under Erdoğan, the Diyanet was mobilized as a religious arm of the state, casting the GM not merely as political rivals but as heretics and existential enemies of Islam.

Official reports and Friday sermons labeled the group as a source of *fitne* (sedition), *fesat* (corruption), and treachery, alleging collaboration with foreign powers. Diyanet president Mehmet Görmez described the movement as "a movement of power and privilege, under the guise of religion," denying Gülen any claim to scholarly legitimacy (Kutlugün 2016). His successor, Ali Erbaş, condemned it as "a deviation in creed, practice, and morality… a great source of discord, division, and danger for the future of all Muslims" (Bozdoğan 2019). These statements reframed political repression as a religious duty, producing a moral consensus around state violence (Yilmaz and Albayrak 2021).

This sacralization of repression extended into extremist rhetoric. Abdulmetin Balkanlıoğlu, a Diyanet-trained imam, told democracy vigil (*demokrasi nöbetleri*) crowds that Gülenists' property was "war booty" (Yeni Akit Gazetesi 2021). Hüseyin Adalan, a columnist for the pro-government Milat and Yeni Söz newspapers, tweeted that it was "religiously permissible to kill" even the children of Gülenists (Turkey Purge 2017). Trabzonspor executive Veysel Taşkın described their wives as "spoils of war" (Ersoy 2016). Although some figures faced backlash, such discourse illustrated how state propaganda blurred into violent theological extremism.

Mosques[17] also became sites of mobilization. On the night of July 15, imams broadcast the *salâ*—traditionally a funeral call—over loudspeakers, summoning citizens into the streets. This transformed resistance into a spiritual obligation (Tremblay 2016). In the following weeks, the *salâ* was repeatedly broadcast to sustain nightly vigils, embedding the heroic narrative of July 15 within religious ritual (Altınordu 2017, p. 149). A state-backed study, *The Victory of National Will, July 15*, confirmed this, reporting participants found the *salâ* "100 percent effective" in mobilization (Enes 2017). Thus, religious ritual was fused with regime narrative to produce mass compliance.

Alternative interpretations of the coup were systematically suppressed. Public figures who questioned the official narrative—such as Genco Erkal and pop singer Sıla—were vilified, legally threatened, and cancelled (Diken 2016; Çıplak 2016; Yeni Şafak 2016; Cumhuriyet 2016). Live broadcasts corrected deviations in real time, underscoring the regime's tight control of discourse (Altınordu 2017, p. 155). The fusion of authority, religion, and nationalism marginalized dissent and reframed political plurality as disloyalty (Jenkins 2016).

The state of emergency, lasting until July 2018, institutionalized repression: more than 150,000 public employees purged, 50,000 arrested, and hundreds of institutions shut down (Amnesty International 2018a, 2018b; Human Rights Watch 2025). Accusations of terrorism were wielded against journalists, academics, and civil servants without due process (Yeşil and Sözeri 2017; Taş 2018). Since 2016, 390,354 individuals have been detained, of whom 113,837 formally arrested (Karar 2025). These numbers reveal the scale of authoritarian consolidation under the pretext of national security.

The consolidation culminated in the 2017 constitutional referendum. Abolishing the prime ministership and vastly expanding presidential powers, it weakened judicial independence and legislative oversight. Erdoğan justified the reforms: "The presidential system is not about me; it's about ensuring the strength of our state in the face of threats" (Hürriyet 2017; Ajansı 2017). Critics, however, warned the changes entrenched one-man rule (BBC News 2017; Çınar 2019; Reuters 2017). The referendum thus formalized authoritarian rule under the veneer of constitutional legitimacy.

In sum, the failed coup attempt functioned as both trigger and pretext for Türkiye's authoritarian transformation. The eradication of the GM, once a pivotal ally, exemplified Erdoğan's broader strategy: eliminate autonomous power centers, control discourse, and reconstruct the state in his own image. Through repression, narrative control, and legal engineering, Erdoğan consolidated a hegemonic regime where dissent is delegitimized, and pluralism systematically diminished.

4. Parallel Authoritarian Pathways: Comparative Analysis and Reflections on Nasser and Erdoğan

The trajectories of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's relationship with the GM and Gamal Abdel Nasser's engagement with the MB reflect a recurrent authoritarian logic: political elites temporarily align with influential religious actors to consolidate power, only to later suppress those same actors once their autonomy becomes a perceived threat. Both cases illustrate this cyclical pattern of co-optation and rupture, though they differ in regime structure, ideological context, religious institutional history, and the precise character of the alliances formed.

4.1. Strategic Alliance Formation

In both Egypt and Türkiye, ruling elites strategically aligned with Islamic movements during moments of institutional upheaval and political transformation. Despite differing contexts—Egypt emerging from colonial rule through military revolution and Türkiye navigating a constrained but competitive electoral system—the alliances followed a shared logic. Rather than being grounded in ideological affinity, they were driven by mutual political necessity. Political elites required grassroots legitimacy and institutional access, while Islamic movements sought protection, influence, and formal recognition. These were marriages of convenience, and both illustrate a broader pattern: religious movements are instrumentalized to dismantle entrenched orders but rarely integrated as enduring partners in governance.[18]

4.1.1. Common Strategic Logic: Alliance Against the Old Order

In both Egypt and Türkiye, Islamic movements were recruited not as co-rulers but as transitional allies capable of mobilizing popular support and challenging bureaucratic resistance. In Egypt, after the 1952 coup, the Free Officers turned to the MB, then the most organized Islamic force in the country. With its extensive networks in mosques, schools, unions, and charities, the Brotherhood supplied ideological legitimacy and mass mobilization (Mitchell 1969; Wickham 2013). Yet once Nasser consolidated power, the Brotherhood's ambitions clashed with his own, resulting in swift repression (Slater 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010).

In Türkiye, a parallel dynamic unfolded in a more incremental fashion. When the AKP rose to power in 2002, it lacked a bureaucratic base. The GM—a faith-based network rooted in education and moral reform—had cultivated cadres in the judiciary, police, and education sectors (Hendrick 2013; Taş 2018). Though publicly apolitical, its institutional reach was crucial for the AKP's struggle against secularist resistance. The alliance thus served reciprocal needs: Erdoğan gained bureaucratic leverage, while the GM expanded its societal reach (Yavuz and Koç 2016; Turam 2007). In both cases, leaders turned to religious movements not to share authority but to consolidate it—revealing the strategic logic of elite–movement pacts under transitional stress.

4.1.2. Divergence in Historical Contexts and Institutional Settings

Despite these similarities, the alliances unfolded in distinct political environments. Egypt in the 1950s was undergoing a military revolution with no functioning party system or constitutional legitimacy. The MB's support was therefore essential to stabilize the new regime, but once the Free Officers—especially Nasser—consolidated the state, the Brotherhood was dispensable (Kandil 2012).

Türkiye's setting contrasted sharply. The AKP came to power through elections under a tutelary secularist regime dominated by the military and judiciary (Yavuz 2009). To challenge this establishment, Erdoğan required allies embedded in the bureaucracy, and the

GM—with its quietist posture and deep institutional presence—was uniquely positioned (Taş 2018). Egypt's revolutionary upheaval allowed Nasser to eliminate the MB swiftly; Türkiye's semi-democratic structures forced Erdoğan to tolerate the GM for over a decade before repression became feasible. These contrasts show how regime type shaped both the tempo and durability of alliances.

4.1.3. Ideological Tensions and Strategic Asymmetry

The alliances also diverged in terms of ideological orientation. The MB had long envisioned an Islamic state governed by sharia. From Hasan al-Banna's founding vision in 1928, it operated as a political movement with overt demands for public Islamization (Mitchell 1969; Al-Anani 2016). Its political activism quickly collided with Nasser's secular nationalism, making confrontation inevitable (Wickham 2013).

By contrast, the GM deliberately avoided direct politics. Inspired by Said Nursi and led by Fethullah Gülen, it focused on education, interfaith dialogue, and moral reform (Ebaugh 2010; Hendrick 2013). Its declared aim was social transformation from below, not theocratic rule. This posture initially made it a more manageable ally for the AKP. Yet over time, the very features that delayed conflict—technocratic penetration and apolitical rhetoric—rendered it a covert rival once its autonomy seemed to exceed Erdoğan's control (Altınordu 2017). Thus, while Nasser repressed the MB for its overt ideological challenge, Erdoğan turned on the GM for its concealed institutional power.

4.1.4. Alliance Durability and the Role of Regime Type

The contrasting regime types also explain variation in alliance durability. Egypt's post-coup order hardened quickly into authoritarianism. With no legal protections, the MB was vulnerable and swiftly eliminated (Kandil 2012; Brown 2012).

Türkiye's semi-democratic framework provided buffers. The AKP could not purge the GM immediately without risking domestic and international backlash. As a result, the alliance endured for more than a decade, despite growing mistrust. Only once Erdoğan had consolidated control over courts, media, and bureaucracy could he move decisively against the GM, culminating in the post-2016 purges (Yavuz 2013; Taş 2018). This illustrates how hybrid regimes may delay repression but ultimately replicate authoritarian patterns once power balances shift.

4.1.5. Lessons in Co-Optation and Rupture

Both alliances followed the same arc: religious movements were instrumental in dismantling old power centers but discarded once consolidation was achieved. The mechanisms of rupture, however, differed. In Egypt, conflict was swift and violent, triggered by irreconcilable ideological visions. In Türkiye, rupture unfolded gradually and bureaucratically, driven by suspicions of covert autonomy.

A key insight is that even movements avoiding politics may become intolerable if their influence grows too large. The AKP–GM split was not about ideology but control. Once the GM's reach exceeded the AKP's tolerance, it was reframed as a threat (Tarrow 2011; Yavuz and Koç 2016). Historical memory shaped these dynamics: Erdoğan's cautious pragmatism reflected Turkey's legacy of Islamist repression, yet his eventual strategy echoed Nasser's—ally with religious actors to defeat secular elites, then restructure state–religion boundaries to ensure unchallenged rule (Altınordu 2017).

4.1.6. Conclusion: Alliances as Transitional Mechanisms

In both Egypt and Türkiye, alliances between state elites and Islamic movements were driven by political necessity, not ideological harmony. They reveal how religion operates as a strategic resource in transitional regimes—instrumental in opposition, dispensable

in consolidation (Slater 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010). Neither case supports the idea of durable pluralism. Instead, both demonstrate a recurrent logic in hybrid regimes: religious movements are tolerated only so long as they remain subordinate. When autonomy threatens executive dominance, repression follows—whether through Nasser's swift crackdown or Erdoğan's gradual purge. The comparative lesson is clear: alliances with religious actors provide authoritarian leaders short-term gains but also create long-term vulnerabilities, resolved through coercion and exclusion.

At the same time, the fragility of these alliances underscores their deeper function: they are not endpoints but transitional mechanisms of authoritarian upgrading. In both cases, rulers engaged in elite–movement co-optation, exploiting religious networks to weaken entrenched rivals and gain grassroots legitimacy. Yet once rulers secured coercive, institutional, and discursive dominance, these same movements were recast as existential threats and eliminated. Egypt's revolutionary setting enabled a swift and violent rupture; Türkiye's semi-democratic context produced a slower, more incremental breakdown. But in both trajectories, the pattern was the same: alliances served as scaffolding for consolidation, dismantled once rulers no longer required them. This comparative logic marks the hinge between coalition-building and authoritarian consolidation, preparing the ground for the next stage of regime entrenchment.

4.2. Authoritarian Consolidation

If alliances with Islamic movements represent the scaffolding of regime transformation, their collapse marks the onset of authoritarian consolidation. In both Egypt and Türkiye, once Nasser and Erdoğan no longer depended on the Brotherhood or the Gülen Movement to counter entrenched rivals, they moved decisively to dismantle these alliances and reconfigure state–religion relations on their own terms. This phase was not simply about repression; it entailed the systematic reorganization of institutions, the monopolization of religious authority, and the delegitimation of former allies as existential threats. Although both regimes followed this common logic, the pathways diverged significantly due to distinct regime types and historical contexts. Egypt, already authoritarian in the early 1950s, absorbed the rupture with the Brotherhood into an established framework of coercion. By contrast, Türkiye under the AKP shifted from a competitive electoral regime toward authoritarianism, with the Erdoğan–GM split marking a decisive turning point in democratic erosion (Levitsky and Way 2010). Yet these divergent trajectories ultimately converged on the same outcome: the subordination and eventual repression of once-powerful Islamic allies.

Despite these contextual differences, both cases reflect a common logic: Islamic movements are tolerated only so long as they remain subordinate to the ruling elite's monopoly on power and ideological authority. When these movements begin to assert independent legitimacy or accumulate institutional leverage, they are reframed as existential threats. This transformation from ally to enemy aligns with broader authoritarian patterns in which pluralism is permitted only to the extent that it remains non-threatening to elite control (Slater 2010; Levitsky and Way 2010).

4.2.1. Co-Opting and Instrumentalizing Religious Institutions

In both Egypt and Türkiye, authoritarian consolidation was reinforced by the instrumentalization of state-aligned religious institutions to delegitimize former allies and provide moral justification for repression. In Egypt, following the Brotherhood's alleged 1954 assassination attempt on Nasser, the regime mobilized al-Azhar's authority to portray the MB as a danger to national stability. Prominent clerics issued fatwas framing the Brotherhood as religious deviants and political subversives, thereby transforming theological

discourse into a tool of state repression (Crecelius 1966; Shah 2004). Similarly, in Türkiye, the AKP deployed the Diyanet—the Directorate of Religious Affairs—to denounce the GM after the 2013 fallout. Official sermons and statements cast the GM as a heretical sect undermining national unity and the *ummah*, thereby sanctifying Erdoğan's crackdown as a religious imperative (Yilmaz and Albayrak 2021).

While both regimes relied on religious institutions to erode public support for former allies, the institutional mechanics differed in ways that highlight their contrasting contexts. Al-Azhar, historically semi-autonomous, was gradually drawn into the post-revolutionary state as a legitimating device. By contrast, the Diyanet was already embedded within the Turkish state apparatus and functioned as a direct extension of executive power. In both settings, however, religious authorities were transformed into instruments of authoritarian legitimation rather than independent arbiters of moral or theological guidance.

4.2.2. Bureaucratic Purges and the Reconfiguration of State–Religion Relations

After rupture, both regimes initiated wide-scale purges of their former allies from state institutions, using exclusion not only to punish but also to restructure state–religion relations. In Egypt, the Brotherhood had embedded itself in key sectors, including al-Azhar, charitable networks, and professional syndicates. Following the 1954 crackdown, thousands of MB members were arrested or executed, and those in public service were expelled—transforming repression into a sweeping bureaucratic purge (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004; Al-Awadi 2004). This extended deeply into the Ministry of Education and al-Azhar, where Brotherhood members—many of whom had served as teachers, inspectors, or administrators—were systematically removed and replaced with cadres loyal to the regime's secular-nationalist project. As Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen notes, "from 1959 to 1963, the number of faculty at al-Azhar dropped from 298 to 215," due to Law 818, which "set up committees that were designed to purge al-Azhar of all faculty who were unwilling to support government control" (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004, p. 162). Sayyid Qutb, who had worked for nearly two decades in the Ministry— "first as a teacher and later as an inspector and administrator"—became emblematic of this ideological and bureaucratic purge (Calvert 2010, pp. 133–35). Al-Azhar's 1961 reforms expanded its educational mandate but subordinated it to the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Zeghal 1999), centralizing religious discourse and producing a state-sanctioned Islam aligned with Arab socialism.

In Türkiye, an analogous process unfolded after the 2013 corruption probes—widely believed to be led by GM-affiliated prosecutors—which targeted Erdoğan's inner circle (Balci 2023; Taş 2018). This marked the point of no return. The AKP began removing suspected Gülenists from the judiciary, police, and education ministries, escalating after the 2016 coup attempt, which the government attributed to the GM. Whether or not the GM orchestrated the coup, it gave Erdoğan the pretext to declare a state of emergency and initiate mass purges. Over 150,000 public servants were dismissed, thousands of institutions closed, and the constitutional framework altered through the 2017 referendum (Human Rights Watch 2025).

While the Brotherhood's repression occurred during the early consolidation of an already authoritarian regime, the GM's repression marked the authoritarian transformation of a nominal democracy. In both cases, purges were not only punitive—they were reconstructive, reshaping the ideological and institutional architecture of the state to ensure subordination of religion to political authority.

4.2.3. Divergent Paths: From Miscalculation to Strategic Rupture

Both the MB and the GM miscalculated the limits of their alliances, though in opposite ways. The Brotherhood believed the Free Officers—especially Nasser—would usher in

Islamic justice after the monarchy's fall. Many within the movement saw participation in the new regime as natural, given their mass legitimacy and history of anti-imperialist activism (Shah 2004; Al-Anani 2016). Yet Nasser's consolidation of power and embrace of secular Arab nationalism clashed with the Brotherhood's pan-Islamist vision. The rupture, solidified by the 1954 incident, transformed Nasser into a symbol of authoritarian nationalism and marked the beginning of a new state–Islam settlement (Crecelius 1966; Laub 2019).

By contrast, the GM assumed that avoiding overt politics would shield it from rivalry. Its emphasis on education, moral reform, and quietist religious activism enabled it to thrive within Türkiye's secular framework. But its deep institutional entrenchment—especially in the judiciary and police—eventually positioned it as a rival power center. The 2013 corruption cases shattered the AKP–GM alliance and provoked Erdoğan's campaign to eliminate the movement from the state (Martin 2020; Balci 2023).

Thus, while the Brotherhood overestimated its ability to shape a revolutionary state, the GM underestimated the risks of wielding institutional influence without democratic legitimacy. Both cases expose the fragility of alliances with authoritarian rulers whose tolerance of pluralism is conditional and revocable.

4.2.4. From Crisis to Authoritarian Recalibration

In both Egypt and Türkiye, moments of crisis were transformed into opportunities for authoritarian recalibration. Nasser used the assassination attempt to justify a one-party system and eliminate religious pluralism from politics. The Brotherhood was outlawed, and Islamic discourse centralized under state control.

Erdoğan followed a similar trajectory after the 2016 coup attempt. Emergency decrees enabled the dismantling of the GM's infrastructure, closure of opposition media, and constitutional shift to presidentialism. As with Nasser, the former ally was rebranded an internal enemy, with repression cast not only as necessary for state security but also as a sacred duty to protect Islam and the nation.

Yet important differences remain. Nasser's repression was ideologically driven and shaped by Cold War geopolitics, producing a rupture and re-foundation of state–society relations. Erdoğan's was bureaucratically methodical, rooted in regime preservation within a hybrid system. Türkiye's authoritarian shift evolved incrementally through legal and electoral mechanisms until the authoritarian threshold was crossed.

4.2.5. Strategic Rupture and Consolidation

In both Egypt and Türkiye, the trajectory from alliance to authoritarianism reveals a consistent authoritarian logic: religious movements are co-opted when regimes are vulnerable, tolerated while useful, and purged once they accrue independent power. Whether through ideological rivalry, institutional competition, or crisis exploitation, authoritarian leaders act decisively to neutralize allies who threaten hegemonic control.

Yet the sequencing, rhetoric, and institutional strategies diverged. Egypt's rupture was abrupt and justified by ideological antagonism in a revolutionary context. Türkiye's was gradual, legalistic, and catalysed by crises. In both settings, repression was not simply reactionary—it was recalibrative, redefining the permissible boundaries of religious engagement and embedding state-aligned Islam as a pillar of authoritarian rule.

These comparative insights caution against interpreting state–movement alliances as evidence of durable inclusion. Instead, they reveal how authoritarian consolidation is constructed through selective inclusion, strategic rupture, and the dismantling of alternative moral authorities. Authoritarianism, in these cases, was not merely an outcome but a

process, shaped by co-optation, crisis, and the systematic monopolization of religious and political authority.

4.3. State Control, Public Religion, and Political Legitimacy

In both Egypt and Türkiye, authoritarian consolidation relied not only on coercive repression but also on the systematic reconfiguration of religion. Rather than sidelining Islamic institutions, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remade them into instruments of political legitimacy. Through institutional restructuring, ideological messaging, and the marginalization of autonomous religious actors, both regimes sought to monopolize the meaning of Islam and fuse it with state authority. Although their ideological orientations—Arab socialism in Egypt and Sunni nationalism in Türkiye—differed, their deployment of state-aligned religion followed a convergent authoritarian logic: to legitimize repression, delegitimize rivals, and construct a durable political legacy.[19]

In Egypt, this logic was crystallized in Nasser's efforts to neutralize the MB while simultaneously elevating state-controlled Islam. Although the Brotherhood had initially supported the Free Officers during the 1952 revolution, their growing grassroots influence and organizational autonomy soon conflicted with Nasser's centralizing vision. The alleged assassination attempt by a Brotherhood member in 1954 provided the pretext for a sweeping crackdown (Carré and Michaud 1983; Krämer 2010; Gerges 2018). Thousands of members were imprisoned or executed, while figures such as Sayyid Qutb were purged from the Ministry of Education, where he had served for nearly two decades (Skovgaard-Petersen 2004; Al-Awadi 2004; Calvert 2010).

The repression of the Brotherhood was paired with the restructuring of Egypt's premier religious institution, al-Azhar. The 1961 reforms expanded its curriculum to include modern sciences while subordinating it to the Ministry of Religious Endowments, ensuring that clerics became salaried agents of the state. These institutional changes allowed the regime to mobilize al-Azhar in legitimizing state policies ranging from economic reform to foreign policy, as well as in justifying repression of Islamist rivals (Crecelius 1966; Aburish 2004; Moustafa 2000). The purge of Brotherhood-affiliated faculty was formalized under Law 818, which created committees to remove dissenting voices. As Skovgaard-Petersen notes, "from 1959 to 1963, the number of faculty at al-Azhar dropped from 298 to 215" (2004, p. 162). In effect, al-Azhar was transformed from a semi-autonomous religious authority into a bureaucratic arm of Nasser's Arab socialist project.

Beyond institutional capture, Nasser also sought to saturate public life with state-curated Islam. The expansion of mosques—from 11,000 before the revolution to more than 21,000 by 1970—was paired with compulsory religious education, new girls' Islamic schools, and Quran memorization competitions. Millions of Qur'ans and Islamic heritage texts were printed and distributed domestically and internationally through state publishing houses and radio broadcasts (Sabih 2022). These initiatives allowed the regime to claim guardianship of Islamic authenticity while undermining the Brotherhood's transnational appeal. Nasser's banning of gambling, closure of Baha'i forums, and regulation of public morality further defined Islam through state power. His personal attendance at Friday prayers reinforced his public persona as a pious reformer (Aburish 2004; Sabih 2022). As Amr Sabih (2022) observes, Nasser's "functionalist approach" cast religion as a vehicle for modernization and national unity, subordinated to the imperatives of centralized control.

In Türkiye, Erdoğan pursued a parallel strategy of religious instrumentalization, though adapted to the legacies of Kemalist secularism. Whereas the early Republic had curtailed Islam through the Diyanet (Mardin 1989; Gözaydın 2008), Erdoğan expanded and politicized the institution, making it a central organ of AKP ideology. The Diyanet's budget increased nearly 2000 percent, surpassing many ministries and enabling it to dominate

the religious public sphere (Duvar English 2021). Its Friday sermons were aligned with government priorities, emphasizing obedience, national unity, and moral conservatism (Çevik 2019).

As with Nasser, the education sector became the most visible arena for Erdoğan's project. His pledge to raise a "pious generation" materialized through the dramatic expansion of Imam Hatip schools (Butler 2018). Between 2012 and 2018, enrollment rose fivefold to 1.3 million, with disproportionate state funding: though only 11 percent of upper secondary students attended Imam Hatips, they received 23 percent of national education spending (Butler 2018; Cornell and Kaya 2015; The Economist 2017). Religious instruction reached up to 13 h per week, while secular schools were often converted into Imam Hatips against community resistance. National curricula were revised to remove Darwinian evolution and expand Quran, Hadith, and Sīrah (The Prophet's biography) studies, blending religious education with political indoctrination (Butler 2018).

The AKP's use of the Diyanet was also central to delegitimating former allies. Following the rupture with the GM, Erdoğan recast the movement as a deviant sect, particularly after the failed 2016 coup attempt. Gülen-affiliated schools, media, and civil associations were closed, over 100,000 civil servants dismissed, and the Diyanet framed these measures as a religious obligation. Fatwas and public statements portrayed loyalty to the state as a religious duty, while dissent was equated with heresy and treason (Çevik 2019; Yilmaz and Albayrak 2021).

Taken together, the trajectories of Egypt and Türkiye reveal a shared authoritarian logic. Independent religious actors were first instrumentalized in moments of regime vulnerability, only to be delegitimized and purged once their autonomy threatened centralized control. Fatwas, sermons, and curricula were transformed into weapons of political legitimation. Regime loyalty was redefined as a religious virtue; opposition became heresy.

Yet, divergences in institutional history shaped the costs of these strategies. In Egypt, al-Azhar's incorporation into the state apparatus eroded its legitimacy as an independent authority. In Türkiye, the Diyanet's overt politicization fueled polarization and skepticism among secular and religious constituencies alike. Both regimes succeeded in narrowing the domain of "acceptable Islam," but at the expense of pluralism and institutional credibility.

Ultimately, the comparative trajectories of Nasser and Erdoğan underscore how religion became not merely a cultural resource but a domain of authoritarian governance. By subordinating religious authority to political power, both leaders used Islam to discipline dissent, project moral authority, and engineer national identity. This fusion of state and religion produced cohesive yet constrained political orders—ensuring regime survival at the expense of religious independence. In comparative perspective, however, the two cases also highlight how different institutional contexts shaped the modalities of control: revolutionary Egypt absorbed al-Azhar through rapid centralization, while Türkiye's incremental transformation politicized the Diyanet over time. Despite these divergences, both regimes converged on the same outcome: the monopolization of religious authority as a cornerstone of authoritarian consolidation.

5. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that authoritarian consolidation in both Egypt and Türkiye was not only enforced through coercion but also enabled by the strategic co-optation and subsequent repression of autonomous Islamic movements. Nasser and Erdoğan each formed opportunistic alliances with religious actors—the MB and the GM—not from ideological alignment but from a shared need for legitimacy, institutional access, and social mobilization during formative stages of regime transformation. However, once these actors developed independent power, they were systematically marginalized. This trajectory—from alliance to

elimination—was not an aberration, but a predictable outcome of authoritarian logic in which loyalty, not faith, defines political acceptability.

A key insight from this comparison is that authoritarian regimes tolerate religious pluralism only insofar as it remains non-threatening. In Türkiye, unlike Egypt, other religious groups have continued operating under Erdoğan's rule because they have demonstrated loyalty to the ruling order and have not challenged its authority. In some cases, these groups have actively supported the regime's agenda. Among many religious actors, only the GM accumulated sufficient organizational autonomy and moral authority to be perceived as a threat—thus becoming uniquely expendable. The repression of the GM reveals the regime's red line: it is not religiosity but independence and disloyalty that provoke exclusion. Thus, authoritarian religious policy is not uniformly repressive but selectively exclusionary—permitting compliant actors while dismantling those who claim independent moral or bureaucratic legitimacy. These dynamics are consistent with the logic of competitive authoritarianism, in which democratic institutions remain formally intact but are manipulated to entrench incumbents and suppress challengers (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Taken together, these findings refine broader theoretical understandings of religious co-optation (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007), authoritarian upgrading (Heydemann 2007), and the instrumentalization of religion (Kuru 2009). They suggest that in Muslim-majority authoritarian settings, religion is not merely manipulated rhetorically but actively institutionalized to construct state-aligned moral authority. Institutions like Al-Azhar and the Diyanet were transformed from centers of religious scholarship into ideological instruments—delegitimizing dissenting religious actors while legitimizing repression in theological terms.

The divergent trajectories of the MB and the GM also shed light on how religious movements respond to authoritarian pressure. In Egypt, the Brotherhood's exclusion catalyzed long-term cycles of radicalization and fragmentation within the Islamist field. In contrast, the GM—despite facing widespread purges—has largely adopted a strategy of legal contestation, civic advocacy, and exile-based resilience. These outcomes underscore that repression does not uniformly produce violence; it may also result in passive endurance, strategic retreat, or the erosion of public religious voice. The specific response depends not only on the severity of state repression but also on the movement's theology, structure, and orientation toward violence.

These findings also carry important normative implications. For state actors, the instrumentalization of religion may deliver short-term political gains, but it often comes at the expense of institutional trust, civic pluralism, and long-term stability. For religious movements, survival under authoritarian rule does not hinge solely on theology or public support, but on their perceived loyalty to the state. Navigating this terrain requires religious actors to carefully balance moral autonomy and regime tolerance, preserving their identity without provoking existential exclusion.

Finally, these findings underscore the broader cost of authoritarian religious policy: the erosion of religious pluralism, the entrenchment of moral monopolies, and the narrowing of public discourse. A sustainable resolution to enduring conflicts—such as that between Erdoğan and the GM—would require more than pragmatic negotiation. It would necessitate a structural rethinking of how the state engages religious authority, allowing space for independent moral voices without politicized delegitimation. In the absence of such transformation, religious movements will remain either co-opted, repressed, or silenced—trapped within a system where their legitimacy is contingent on political subservience.

In sum, this comparative study affirms that in authoritarian contexts, religion functions not as a neutral domain of belief, but as a terrain of power. It is here—where faith

becomes a tool or a threat—that the boundaries of state authority, civic resistance, and pluralist possibility are drawn. Future research should continue exploring how regimes calibrate repression and co-optation in response to religious autonomy—and how religious actors adapt, resist, or retreat under such constraints. Similar patterns may be unfolding in other Muslim-majority contexts—such as Malaysia, Algeria, or Pakistan—where states strategically accommodate, marginalize, or instrumentalize religious authority. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for analysing regime survival, but for imagining pathways toward more inclusive and pluralistic governance.

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Notes

1 The Turkish government began an official rebranding campaign in December 2021 to adopt the name "Türkiye" instead of "Turkey" in international settings. The change aimed to assert national identity and dissociate from negative or trivial associations in English. The United Nations formally recognized the change on 2 June 2022, following a request from the Turkish government.

2 After 2016, however, Erdoğan's model of repression shifted significantly, marked by necropolitical practices and widespread impunity for violence against members of the Gülen Movement, as documented in Bargu (2019) and Yilmaz and Erturk (2023). See Bargu, Banu, ed. 2019. *Turkey's Necropolitical Laboratory: Democracy, Violence and Resistance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Yilmaz, Ihsan and Omer Erturk. 2023. *Populism, Authoritarianism and Necropolitics: Instrumentalization of Martyrdom Narratives in AKP's Turkey*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

3 While the Brotherhood was not a Salafi movement in origin, its later ideological evolution—especially through Qutb—intersected with politicized and militant Salafi doctrines, blurring the boundaries between reformist Islamism and revolutionary Islamism. This convergence contributed to the complex religious–political identity that shaped both the Brotherhood's strategies and the state's response to it.

4 See Slater, Dan. 2010. *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Brownlee, Jason. 2007. *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Tarrow, Sidney. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Bosi, Lorenzo, Marco Giugni, and Katrin Uba, eds. 2016. *The Consequences of Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5 Hybrid authoritarianism refers to regimes that maintain formal democratic institutions such as elections, courts, and constitutions, but undermine their substance through informal mechanisms of control, allowing incumbents to concentrate power without abolishing electoral competition. See Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Authoritarian upgrading, on the other hand, describes how authoritarian regimes adapt to external pressures—such as globalization, democratization, or donor scrutiny—by selectively liberalizing some aspects of governance (e.g., economic reform or controlled political participation) while reinforcing central control. See Heydemann, Steven. 2007. *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. Analysis Paper 13. Washington, DC: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

6 Kemalist secularism refers to the state-centered model of secularism established under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Unlike liberal secularism, which often seeks to separate religion and state, the Kemalist variant sought to subordinate and tightly regulate religion within a modern, Western-oriented nation-building project. This involved sweeping reforms: the abolition of the caliphate, the closure of religious schools and Sufi lodges (tekkehs and zawiyehs), the adoption of Western legal codes, and the imposition of strict controls on religious expression in public life. Kemalist secularism was thus not merely about institutional separation but about actively reshaping Islam's role in society to ensure that religion could not serve as a competing source of political legitimacy. See Ayata, Sencer. 1996. "Patronage, Party, and State: The Politicization of Islam in Turkey." *Middle East Journal* 50: 40–56.

7 At the same time, some scholars have argued that such narratives of repression have, in certain contexts, been strategically amplified by Islamist actors to frame themselves as victims and thereby gain political leverage. For example, Erturk contends that although Islamist

groups have experienced state-imposed restrictions, their narratives of victimhood are frequently exaggerated and strategically deployed to construct a collective sense of grievance. This sense of shared injustice, he argues, has been instrumental in mobilizing support for Islamist political movements such as *Milli Görüş* and, ultimately, the AKP. See Erturk, Omer F. 2024. "The Myth of Islamist Victimhood: Unpacking the Myths of Realities Behind the Narrative" *Religions* 15, no. 12: 1555.

8 Saritoprak and Griffith (2005) argue that Said Nursi was influenced by prominent figures of the Islamic spiritual and intellectual tradition, including the renowned Anatolian Sufi Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi (d. 1276), as well as Indian scholars such as Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (1564–1624) and Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1703–1762), among others. See Saritoprak, Zeki and Sidney Griffith. 2005. "Fetullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 3: 331–332.

9 The GM's organizational form departs from the rigid hierarchies characteristic of many religiously inspired movements. Rather than operating with formal membership, it relies on decentralized, trust-based networks. Scholars note that this cohesion is maintained through moral discipline, interpersonal loyalty, and shared ethical commitments, which sustain unity across diverse contexts. This diffuse structure has allowed the movement to adapt to varied sociopolitical environments without losing its core identity. See Hendrick, Joshua D. 2013. *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World*. New York: NYU Press, 92–97; Yavuz, M. Hakan. 2013. *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 18–21.

10 This collaboration exemplifies what scholars term elite–movement collaboration which refers to tactical, interest-based coalitions between political elites and social movements during moments of political flux or institutional transformation. According to Bosi, Giugni, and Uba, such alliances are rarely based on full ideological alignment; rather, they emerge from mutual needs—elites seek legitimacy, mobilization, and societal reach, while movements gain institutional access and political protection. These partnerships are often temporary and fragile, dissolving once the balance of power shifts or strategic goals diverge. See Bosi, Lorenzo, Marco Giugni, and Katrin Uba, eds. 2016. *The Consequences of Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The significance of this partnership lies not only in its breadth but also in the GM's distinctive organizational capacity. Among various religious communities, the GM stood out for its ability to mobilize technocratic cadres and maintain a disciplined, transnational structure (Jenkins 2008; Yavuz 2013), illustrating how an ostensibly apolitical religious movement could function as a decisive actor in the restructuring of state power. While the AKP sought to consolidate authority and dismantle the entrenched Kemalist establishment, the GM pursued political protection to advance its civic initiatives and promote an interpretation of Islam compatible with modernity and democratic norms (Yavuz and Esposito 2003; Tee 2021). This complementarity helps explain why two actors with differing long-term projects nonetheless converged during a transitional moment.

11 See, for example, The Guardian. 2020. "Erdoğan Leads First Prayers at Hagia Sophia Museum Reverted to Mosque," The Guardian, 24 July 2020. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/24/erdogan-prayers-hagia-sophia-museum-turned-mosque (accessed on 9 September 2025); Hürriyet Daily News. 2015. "Symbolic 'Rabia' Sculpture on Erdoğan's Desk Draws Attention," Hürriyet Daily News, November 10, 2015. Available online: https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/symbolic-rabia-sculpture-on-erdogans-desk-draws-attention-90983?utm_source2 (accessed on 9 September 2025).

12 Levitsky and Way define hybrid regimes—specifically "competitive authoritarian" regimes—as systems in which democratic institutions such as elections, courts, and legislatures exist and are formally respected, but are frequently subverted in practice. Ruling elites manipulate these institutions to erode checks and balances, suppress opposition, and entrench executive dominance, all while preserving the external appearance of democratic legitimacy. See Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

13 The Kemalist military establishment was long regarded as the ultimate guardian of secularist orthodoxy. Yet, in hindsight, its subordination under the AKP also marked the removal of a key illiberal "check" that had historically constrained the influence of populist and religiously oriented politicians.

14 The Gezi Park protests were a series of mass demonstrations in May–June 2013, sparked by government plans to demolish Gezi Park, one of Istanbul's few remaining green spaces in Taksim Square, to build a shopping mall. Initially focused on environmental concerns, the protests quickly transformed into a broader movement opposing Prime Minister Erdoğan's authoritarianism and restrictions on civil liberties.

15 Scholars have noted that the putschists' failure was not only military but also symbolic: they remained anonymous, lacked coherent messaging, and failed to project legitimacy, while Erdoğan's televised appeal created a compelling performance of national unity. See Altınordu, Ateş. 2017. "A Midsummer Night's Coup: Performance and Power in Turkey's July 15 Coup Attempt," *Social Science Research Council*, pp. 147–48.

16 All opposition parties attached dissenting opinions to the report prepared by the commission established to investigate the coup attempt. In its dissenting opinion, the main opposition party CHP described the event as a "foreseen but not prevented coup attempt." According to the CHP, the government detected the approaching coup in advance but failed to take the necessary steps to stop or prevent it. In its dissent, the MHP called for the swift identification of the political wing of the coup attempt, warning that otherwise, sleeper cells could emerge. The HDP, another party that had representation on the commission, stated: "The commission's work has strayed from its aim of clarifying the coup process, resulting instead in a distortion of the facts to support the AKP's narrative about

the coup attempt." Artunç, Özge. 2017. "What Remains in the Dark About the Coup Attempt." *DW (Deutsche Welle) Turkish*, July 15. https://www.dw.com/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-giri%C5%9Fimi-karanl%C4%B1kta-kalanlar/a-39705368.

17 In Türkiye, mosques are administered and supervised by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). The Presidency also appoints and assigns mosque personnel—such as imams and muezzin (the person who calls Muslims to prayer from a mosque)—as salaried officials.

18 Elite–movement alliance theory suggests that political elites often form contingent alliances with social movements to secure popular legitimacy, mobilize supporters, and access hard-to-reach institutional domains. These alliances are typically asymmetric and fragile, with elites using movements to overcome regime rivals, and movements leveraging elites for political protection or influence. See Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley; David S. Meyer. 2004. "Protest and Political Opportunities," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 125–45.

19 This section primarily draws on Ahmet T. Kuru's theory of state instrumentalization of religion, which explains how authoritarian regimes in Muslim-majority countries institutionalize and mobilize religious institutions to consolidate state power, delegitimize rivals, and shape public morality. Rather than separating religion and state, leaders such as Nasser and Erdoğan subordinated religious authority—through al-Azhar and the Diyanet, respectively—transforming them into ideological apparatuses of the regime. Kuru's concept of *statist secularism* captures the way religion is not only controlled but actively employed as a political tool to project legitimacy and suppress dissent. See Kuru, Ahmet T. 2009. *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 122–52. In addition, this analysis engages with theories of authoritarian religious co-optation, which highlight how regimes integrate religious institutions into the bureaucratic state to maintain control while narrowing the space for independent religious actors. See Gandhi, Jennifer and Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, (11): 1279–1301; Brownlee, Jason. 2007. *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Finally, Levitsky and Way's theory of alliance formation and rupture helps explain how formerly useful religious partners—such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gülen Movement—were eliminated once they became autonomous threats to regime hegemony. See Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Contemporary Northeast Chinese Shamanism in the Interaction Between Public Heritage and Private Belief

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Abstract: Since China's accession to the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2004, private shamanism, centered around the sacred belief of "connecting heaven and earth", has for the first time been incorporated into the national heritage management system with legal legitimacy, becoming regulated public heritage on the condition of avoiding religious attributes. Through fieldwork and historical analysis, this paper examines the interaction between public heritage and private belief in contemporary Northeast Chinese shamanism. The research reveals the mutual influence between the public and private domains of shamanic ritual practices, with a new synthesis or symbiotic relationship emerging across these domains, which is manifested in two main aspects: first, the "generation of the public from the private", exemplified by the emergence of the public heritage associated with shamanism, and second, the "promotion of the private by the public", where the sacred private belief expands its existential space with the assistance of newly recognized public heritage. This bidirectional interaction model challenges the conventional notion that "heritagization leads to the decline of faith", offering a novel interpretive framework for understanding the contemporary transformation of ritual systems.

Keywords: contemporary Northeast Chinese shamanism; intangible cultural heritage (ICH); private belief; public heritage; interaction

1. Introduction

Since China became a signatory to the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2004, folk cultures have begun to receive China's state-level protection under the designation of ICH. In just over two decades, ICH protection has sparked a remarkable wave of cultural preservation and dissemination across the country. Academic circles often hold two contrasting views on this phenomenon. One perspective argues that ICH helps to showcase and protect the profound depth and uniqueness of Chinese culture, thereby more effectively promoting it as an essential component of global cultural diversity (Kurin 2004; Blake 2008, pp. 59–87). The other perspective suggests that the heritagization of culture may lead to the reconstruction of ethnic and folk cultures in ways that align with national or local government cultural policies, potentially causing them to lose their original local characteristics and cultural essence (Zhu 2015), which is reflected in the varying standards for ICH.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which specifically includes five aspects: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the ICH; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals, and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (e) traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO 2003). Among these, "knowledge and practices

concerning nature and the universe" highlights the spiritual colors of traditional cultures worldwide. However, the Chinese version of the ICH standards has expanded these five categories into ten, namely, folk literature; traditional music; traditional dance; traditional drama; folk arts; traditional sports; traditional crafts; traditional medicine; and folklore (Ma 2022, pp. 3–12). It is evident that in the Chinese version of the ICH convention, the spiritual dimension related to belief has nearly disappeared.

This largely stems from the distinctive cultural-cognitive paradigm shaped by China's atheistic ideological framework, which profoundly influences the official interpretation of religions and related cultural practices. Western academia often views shamanism as a universal archetype of the earliest religion rather than a localized "folk" variant (Francfort et al. 2001). Influenced by atheistic ideology, the Chinese government categorizes shamanism as part of folk beliefs, even subsuming it directly under broader folk cultural classifications during ICH processes (Sa 2021, p. 483). This state-led categorization, however, contrasts with the self-perception of many indigenous shamanic practitioners and communities, who often regard their traditions as an autonomous spiritual and religious system transcending the folk belief framework. This tension highlights the interplay between ideological governance and lived religious practice in China's cultural policy landscape. In China, shamanism often occupies an ambiguous space between folk belief (folk culture) and religious identity. Consequently, the ambivalent attitudes toward ICH are particularly evident in the heritagization of ritual practices such as shamanism in Northeast China.

Scholars recognize that the word *shaman*, now used worldwide, is derived from a word in the Tungusic languages of Siberia in N.E. Asia. In Northeast China and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region located in N.E. Asia, shamanism is practiced by different Mongol and Tungus "ethnic minorities" whose various languages belong to the Altaic family. Although the basic connotations of shamanic beliefs and healing practices among groups in Northeast China are largely similar, in reality, their internal differences far outweigh their superficial commonalities. Ritual ceremonies often differ markedly due to the domestic economy of the ethnic groups (such as fishing–hunting, nomadic pastoralism, etc.). The pantheons of spirits and the use of ritual implements among shamanism practitioners from different ethnic groups may also differ drastically. Among them, Northeast Chinese ethnic groups such as the Daur, Manchu, Evenki, Oroqen, and Mongolian—who have long-standing practices of shamanism—have seen numerous ethnic-specific projects related to shamanism inscribed on China's National List of ICH. Their living cultural practices have played a significant role in the safeguarding process of China's ICH.

Through an investigation of the shamanic religious system among the Tujia ethnic group in Qinghai Province, in Northwestern China, Xing and Murray (2018) found that the frequency of privately conducted shamanic healing rituals involving trance in the region has declined due to their exclusion from the officially protected cultural heritage list. They argue that in addition to material changes, socio-political and ideological variables are equally significant in shaping the trajectory of religion in China. Xuan (2014) even posits that the practice of ICH discourse in China can be understood as a confrontation between administrative discourse and cultural discourse, with administrative discourse dominating the ICH protection framework, while cultural discourse reflects the marginalized voices of heritage inheritors. For a long time, shamanism in Northeast China existed outside official discourse, practiced and transmitted privately within families and local communities, embodying spirituality, sacredness, religiosity, and a faith-based nature, and serving as a vital spiritual belief for local people (X. Liu 2023). However, when the Chinese state grants authorized recognition to shamanism under the designation of ICH, does private shamanism inevitably fall into a state of silence and concealment? Or rather, what strategies underlie this so-called "concealment", and against whom is it directed? What

is the relationship between the different contemporary groups' understanding of shamanism and the visualized space outlined as a result? This paper will attempt to answer these questions from the perspective of the ownership of shamanism in Northeast China.

To thoroughly explore the aforementioned questions, I consulted the classic historical analysis works related to Chinese shamanism (Chang 1983, 2010; Z. Li 2005; S. Li 2022). Moreover, I conducted a series of phased fieldwork from September 2024 to February 2025 in the shamanism-rich regions of Northeast China. Specifically, I conducted a seven-day fieldwork study in Hulunbuir municipality in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (7–14 September 2024) and a six-day investigation in Jilin province (10–16 December 2024). The field research in Hohhot demonstrates greater flexibility—I initiate relevant investigations immediately whenever opportunities arise to engage with shamanic practices. As of February 2025, the study cumulatively completed interviews with 12 individuals, distributed as follows: four shamans, (three of whom, including the stout shaman, are ICH inheritors), three ICH administrative officials, one ICH researcher, and four ordinary local people (notably the Daur gentleman, who not only imparted systematic shamanic knowledge but also proactively facilitated critical connections with relevant stakeholders). Due to the highly contingent nature of shamanic public performances in ICH contexts, this study successfully documented only one instance from the Changchun city-based ICH project—"*the Single Drum Dance* (*dan gu wu* 单鼓舞)". However, this observation carries significant implications: First, as one of the few shamanic ICH items inscribed on the "National Representative List," it completely preserves core shamanic cultural symbols in its performance system. Second, a core practitioner within the inheritance community (field pseudonym "the stout shaman") served as a key informant in this research. During the writing process, when encountering complex interpretive challenges, I consulted trusted fieldwork informants via telephone. Perhaps motivated by my dedication to independent research, these informants occasionally proactively shared newly acquired information through the WeChat application or phone communications. Due to the widespread use of Mandarin, all field communications were conducted in Mandarin language in these areas, except for some shamans using their own ethnic languages during solemn ritual occasions. These historical materials and fieldwork experiences provided substantial empirical material and profound conceptual foundations for the development of this article.

2. The Historical Transformation of Northeast Chinese Shamanism

The UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, adopted in 2003, aims to protect, transmit, and revitalize ICH worldwide. The convention defines ICH as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated there with—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage". China's ICH list includes not only folk beliefs like shamanism but also traditional foods such as Peking duck and stir-fried pork. In this nationwide wave of ICH, businesses have eagerly tapped into the cultural meanings behind their products, as if failing to do so would result in a loss of competitiveness in the fierce market. Since then, the social identity and cultural status of ordinary Chinese people have significantly improved. In the past, the social identity and status of ordinary people were frequently perceived as "lacking modernity" and out of sync with urban and elite cultures (Gao 2007). But now, as some "ordinary people" became ICH inheritors, they receive government funding to conduct transmission activities, train successors, and ultimately emerge as creators and guardians of China's cultural history. Simultaneously, ethnic and folk traditions once dismissed as "feudal superstitions" (*fengjian mixin* 封建迷信), have been transformed into integral components of Chinese traditional culture, and even regarded as valuable cultural resources

and essential for maintaining China's cultural identity and sovereignty. Public attention has shifted from focusing solely on the "material" aspects of culture to emphasizing the intangible cultural dimensions, such as the creative processes behind objects, as well as the wisdom, craftsmanship, emotions, and spirit they embody. Temporally, the "historicity" represented by ICH extends into the present and future (K. Liu 2020; K. Liu 2023, pp. 299–312). All of this has reshaped the polyphonic value system of contemporary Chinese society, one aspect of which is the construction of cultural and national identity through ICH.

The *Law of the People's Republic of China on Intangible Cultural Heritage*, enacted in 2011, explicitly states: "The protection of intangible cultural heritage is conducive to enhancing the cultural identity of the Chinese nation, safeguarding national unity and ethnic solidarity, and promoting social harmony and sustainable development" (Gov.cn 2011). However, a paradox arises: how can traditional cultures of a private nature, such as shamanism in Northeast China, which belong to individuals, groups, or localities, become shared cultural symbols of the Chinese nation and thereby serve the goal of national unity? What transformations have shamanism in Northeast China undergone during the process of heritagization? Discussions on the nature of ownership in "heritage" have become a critical entry point for understanding this issue. Some scholars have noted that the original meaning of "heritage" referred to an individual's inheritance from deceased ancestors, whereas the contemporary concept of heritage reflects a "collectivization" of its original meaning (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Peng (2013, p. 347) points out that this shift clearly involves the construction of "public heritage" from "private heritage".

Gao (2022, pp. 414–16) further concludes that when ICH is officially designated in China, its attributes manifest dual characteristics: on one hand, it develops a public dimension (encompassing public interest, public recognition, and shared access mechanisms), while on the other hand, since ICH remains inherently dependent on specific inheritors and specific communities, its private attributes persist. The essence of ICH safeguarding does not negate the original ownership of individuals or groups but extends public value upon this foundation—thereby establishing a novel ownership framework of "your thing remains yours but also becomes ours." (Gao 2022, p. 415) Another implication of the public dimension is that public heritage is managed centrally by the "state" or "government". People can identify with each other through participation in and sharing of the public heritage created by the state. From this perspective, we can understand how the ICH of originally private individuals, specific groups, or particular regions can become shared cultural symbols of the Chinese nation. This "both public and private" cultural form provides an important lens for understanding the artistic survival of folk beliefs like shamanism in the context of ICH. However, before exploring this issue, we must first examine the historical survival and corresponding ownership of shamanism in China.

2.1. Prehistoric Period (Before the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, 2070 BC–256 BC): Unity of Religion and Politics (Connecting Heaven and Earth)

Chang (1983, pp. 313–32) noted that in Chinese texts from the ancient civilization period (circa 1600–256 BCE), such as *Zuo Zhuan* (左传), *Guo Yu* (国语), and *Shan Hai Jing* (山海经), as well as in archaeological findings, there are frequent records documenting a stratified cosmology and accounts of shamans freely traversing between these layers. He argued that shamanic practices and the associated worldview of a stratified universe emerged in China as early as the Neolithic period (7000–2000 BCE). In other words, in the prehistoric era (before the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties), shamanism was already present in China. During this time, individuals could communicate with the sacred heavens and spirits using tools for connecting with the divine. This characteristic of traditional shamanism is sometimes referred to as "spiritual individualism" (Moondance 1994, p. 7).

Among them, shamans were often regarded as having a distinct advantage in communicating with the sacred (Christian 2004, p. 189). Shamans performed a wide range of functions, including healing the sick, divining auspicious or inauspicious events, conducting rituals for bountiful harvests, and averting disasters (Wu 2014, pp. 224–38). Historical records often describe this period as "Every household had its own shamans" (*jia wei wu shi* 家为巫史) and "connecting heaven and earth" (*Di tian tong* 地天通) (Guoyu 2016, p. 344). Shamanism became the dominant ideology of prehistoric Chinese society, and its relationship with society is sometimes summarized as "the unity of religion and politics" (Z. Li 2005, p. 28).

2.2. Ancient Civilizations (Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties to 1949): Religion Subordinate to Politics (Blocking the Passage Between Heaven and Earth)

As the social formation gradually evolved toward the early state stage, shamanism began to intertwine with politics. Shamans served the ruling class, becoming tools and appendages of imperial family culture (Humphrey 1994, pp. 191–228). The event of "blocking the passage between heaven and earth" (*juedi tiantong* 绝地天通), recorded in ancient texts, is often cited to illustrate this[1]. Chang (2010, pp. 4–18; 1983, pp. 313–30), in multiple writings, highlighted the role of the event of "blocking the passage between heaven and earth" in promoting the formation of civilized or class-based societies. He argued that before "blocking the passage between heaven and earth", everyone could potentially be a shaman. After "blocking the passage between heaven and earth," only professional religious officials like Chong and Li remained, serving the ruling class exclusively. People in the early state stage believed that "Heaven" and "spirits" were the sources of knowledge, and controlling the means of communication with "Heaven" and "spirits" equated to holding political power over others. The methods of connecting heaven and earth were monopolized by the ruling class, who began accumulating political power and wealth on this basis, leading to hierarchical changes in human relationships. Thus, civilized or class-based societies, or the initial concept of a "state," gradually emerged.

Z. Li (2005, p. 28) categorized the trajectory of shamanic activities after "blocking the passage between heaven and earth". He pointed out that, on one hand, and primarily, the rituals derived from prehistoric shamanic practices of connecting heaven and earth were elevated by Confucian rites and music, evolving into state ideology and serving the political activities of the monarch, becoming a spiritual bond supporting China's patriarchal relationships and communal consciousness. On the other hand, shamans who preserved the prehistoric ecstatic rituals of heaven–earth communication gradually moved into the folk sphere, focusing on healing and ultimately developing into non-institutional cultural modalities. These non-institutional cultural modalities, accompanied by myths, doctrines, and mystical experiences, were eventually integrated into folk beliefs, becoming an essential part of local religious activities. In summary, shamanism, which was widespread in prehistoric society and centered around communicating with spirits, was marginalized in ancient civilizations, relegated to private folk beliefs, with its survival space often dictated by the shifting tides of political discourse. For example, unorganized folk beliefs were often tolerated by local officials as "private worship" (*si si* 私祀). However, the state ideology represented by Confucian ethics and rituals set clear boundaries for tolerating ghost and spirit worship and shamanic practices, strictly prohibiting the use of such beliefs to deceive the public. Due to their conflict with official orthodoxy, folk shamanism as a non-institutional cultural modality was often suppressed as "heterodox worship" (*yin si* 淫祀) or "evil cults" (*xie jiao*, 邪教) during periods of strict political control, such as the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) (S. Li 2022, pp. 74–75). The relationship between shamanism and society during this period is often summarized as "religion subordinate to politics" (S. Li 2022, p. 123).

2.3. Communist Period (1949–1978): Religion in Opposition to Politics

In the early years after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party presented itself more as a revolutionary party rather than a firmly established ruling party. X. Li (2010, pp. 513–16) pointed out that the hallmark of the communist period in the PRC was the replacement of religious practices with revolutionary ideas, constructing a national state-building movement centered around revolutionary faith. As the Communist Party conducted land reforms and the People's Commune movement in rural areas, the penetration of this revolutionary faith extended into the folk sphere. Thus, the Communist Party tried to transform the faith in rites esteemed by the official ideology of ancient civilization and the popular folk belief in shamanism into a channel of faith in the Party and Chairman Mao Zedong. Furthermore, the Communist Party's thorough promotion of materialist atheism led to a further repression of the private existence of shamanism, which was viewed as a feudal superstition. Shamanism officially disappeared, but in some cases, people secretly continued to perform rituals. Xiao (2010, p. 61) indicates: "The time of strong administrative interference in folk beliefs often coincides with the founding period of a dynasty, clearly aimed at implementing the spiritual beliefs advocated by the rulers. Yet, curiously, these folk beliefs, no matter how harshly criticized or suppressed, have continued to be transmitted within traditional community". For instance, especially during times when revolutionary ideology weakened, the farmers residing in villages still maintained traditional customs, indicating that the spiritual concepts from shamanism persisted (Zhang 2012, pp. 84–86). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976, *wenhua da geming* 文化大革命), Chinese shamans secretly hid their Shamanic objects and quietly brought them out for sacrificial activities during festivals (S. Meng 2019, p. 155). Such religious resilience under state suppression is not an isolated case. During the Soviet collectivization period (1920s–1930s), while Siberian herders publicly professed atheism, many families secretly continued traditional shamanic rituals (see Vitebsky 2006; Sadomskaya and Dragadze 1990; Lane 1981). This reflects, to some extent, a shared logic of ritual transformation in socialist contexts: excising their religious core and remolding them into content that serves the state ideology. The dual survival strategy adopted by traditional ritual practitioners—superficial compromise coupled with private adherence to faith—demonstrates the flexible survival tactics of religious practices under socialist frameworks. The relationship between shamanism and society during this period can be characterized as "Religion in Opposition to Politics."

Throughout the historical changes of shamanism, its relationship with the political landscape and corresponding ownership nature can be summarized as follows: in the prehistoric period, "Unity of Religion and Politics" ("public–private unity" ownership); in ancient civilization, "Religion Subordinate to Politics" ("private" ownership); and during the communist period, "Religion in Opposition to Politics" ("private" ownership). In prehistoric times, the concept of the state had not yet emerged, and with every household having its own shamans, the ownership of shamanism in Northeast China was neither distinctly public nor private—it could be considered entirely public or entirely private. Traditional core shamanism emphasizes personal spirituality. Therefore, when collective notions of the state emerged (i.e., from ancient civilizations through communist periods), traditional core shamanism clashed with mainstream political systems, remaining marginalized. Its ownership and identity attributes have consistently maintained a private nature, subjected to state-level regulation and suppression. This ownership situation did not change until China embraced the preservation of ICH in the 21st century.

3. The Publicness of Contemporary Northeast Shamanism in China Within the Context of ICH

Since China's 1978 reform and opening-up, the Chinese Communist Party has shifted from revolutionary struggle to economic modernization governance, consolidating social forces for national development. This transition prompted a diversification of belief systems (X. Li 2010), enabling the coexistence of atheists and theists in socialist construction, with shamanism reemerging as practitioners metaphorically declared "the sky has cleared" (Fu and Zhao 2010). Although the state has shown increased tolerance towards religious practices since the reform and opening-up, "folk beliefs" such as shamanism are still regarded as "socially marginal beings" within Chinese society (Kister 1999). According to *The Beijing News*, shortly after the turn of the 21st century, the local government in Zhejiang Province, in Eastern China, demolished over ten thousand local shrines in its campaign against "feudal superstition" (Chen 2010, pp. 158–59). Zhou (2013) notes that despite the gradual public emergence of folk beliefs in contemporary society, their identity remains constrained by issues of legitimacy. A key resolution to this issue began in 2004 when China signed the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since then, shamanism—previously seen as a local folk belief in ancient civilizations, and denigrated as "backward superstition" during the Cultural Revolution—is now gradually moving towards legitimacy as an ICH and a valuable cultural resource, and is tolerated by the government to a certain extent. Northeast shamanism in China has also experienced a degree of revival as a result. Xiao (2010, p. 62) points out that "once folk beliefs become cultural heritage in the new era, they naturally have the opportunity to stand tall; we have finally acknowledged the legitimacy of folk beliefs (although the public has always considered them rightful). This is a circumstance that folk beliefs have never encountered in the thousands of years of historical society."

Under the designation of ICH, shamanism has begun to occupy a place in the national public discourse. Simultaneously, or as a prerequisite, in regions where shamanism is practiced, believers have relinquished certain ownership rights over shamanism, allowing it to become a public heritage managed collectively by the state, embodying the concept of the "generation of the public from the private". Within this newly added "publicness", a "contractual" relationship has been established between the applicants for shamanic ICH and the government. The applicants commit to viewing the protection and transmission of this heritage as their obligation, rather than merely regarding the knowledge, skills, and talents they possess as private property (K. Liu 2016). As an inheritor of the Manchu shamanism ICH project, Shi Guanghua has even been given a formal position, working at the Manchu Museum in Jilin province and employed by the state, becoming an official member of the system (He 2017, p. 87). Various levels of government serve as the guiding and leading forces in the protection of ICH, responsible for reviewing, approving, and publishing lists, while also recognizing and accepting the commitments of applicants and supporting them in their protective efforts[2].

Undoubtedly, the Chinese government has become the dominant force in the discourse surrounding ICH within this contractual relationship. Since the establishment of the state, politics has occupied a significant position in Chinese society. Even after the reform and opening-up of the 1980s, politics continues to hold absolute discourse in China. The core criterion for evaluating a Party member or even an ordinary citizen remains whether their political direction is correct. The transformation of shamanism in Northeast China into a public cultural heritage, partially owned and protected by the state, is also driven by current political considerations through the establishment of public heritage, creating a shared cultural identity, constructing political and national recognition, and promoting local economic development as a cultural resource. Supported by the gov-

ernment, established by the Oroqen people themselves, ethnic tourism such as "shamanic culture" (*saman wenhua* 萨满文化) is the most tourist-popular travel project in the Greater and Lesser Khingan Mountains of Heilongjiang Province, and has become an important income for the locality (Guan and Wang 2010, pp. 35–37). At the same time, the content of shamanism, in applying for ICH, must also undergo strategic adaptations to meet the state's criteria for such heritage. In fact, any folk belief system intended for inclusion in the heritage list and seeking legitimacy in the public sphere is compelled to implement certain modifications to some extent.

The "Dragon Tablet" belief revitalization project in Fanzhuang 范庄 Village, Hebei Province, serves as a representative case study. Centered on the spiritually potent "Dragon" spirit, villagers organized temple fairs for centuries through the Dragon Tablet Temple Fair to pray for blessings and avert disasters. However, this tradition was suppressed and disrupted during the 20th century due to sociopolitical transformations. In 2003, villagers innovatively adopted a dual-naming strategy—externally registering as the "Dragon Culture Museum" for ICH recognition, emphasizing cultural-educational functions, while internally preserving its ritual role as the "Dragon Ancestral Temple" (*long zu miao* 龙祖庙), thereby establishing a "museum-Temple duality" framework. This dual-naming framework allowed the community to circumvent religious sensitivities while leveraging state-sanctioned heritage recognition to legitimize faith-based practices, ultimately achieving the localized revival of the "Dragon Tablet" belief (Gao 2014). Shamanism also employs similar strategic adaptations when applying for ICH status.

As Qu and Meng have noted, all shamanic projects included in China's ICH list are emphasized as cultural and artistic elements rather than religious or spiritual elements such as "shamanic trance healing" or *chuma* (出马, initiation ritual that marks someone becoming a full-fledged shaman) (Qu 2024; H. Meng 2018, pp. 153–57). The listed shamanic ICH items are divided into three categories: Musical Art: Mongolian Boo dance (Inner Mongolia), Ning'an Manchu sacrificial music (Heilongjiang), etc.; Material Culture: Evenki shamanic costumes and tools (Inner Mongolia) and shamanic bone idol-making skills (Jilin), etc.; and Sacrificial Customs: Daur shamanic oboo sacrifice (Inner Mongolia), the Yang clan's shamanic eagle sacrifice (Heilongjiang), and the Shi clan's ancestor worship rite (Jilin), etc. (Qu 2020).

Naran (2021, pp. 214–25) points out that the current attitude of the Chinese government toward contemporary shamanism exhibits duality. On one hand, when shamanism presents itself in a folklorized and heritagized form that emphasizes cultural significance—aimed at enhancing cultural soft power and boosting regional economies—it often receives government recognition and support. On the other hand, when shamanism appears as a religious belief, it is viewed by the authorities as a potential threat. Although there is yet to be a national formal document regulating folk beliefs like shamanism, projects related to belief have generally failed to gain approval when applying for ICH (Sa 2021, p. 489). The application of folk beliefs such as shamanism for ICH remains a highly sensitive issue, forcing applicants to strategically adjust their representations of shamanism during the application process. The tendencies toward heritagization and folklorization that accentuate cultural hues have become novel hallmarks of contemporary North Chinese shamanism (Se 2015).

In addition to being packaged with cultural hues, Northeast Chinese shamanism actively seeks and emphasizes aspects that align with official mainstream discourse when applying for and showcasing its ICH project. On 12 December 2024, I was invited to the home of a Zhang family shaman, which serves as a shamanic cultural exhibition hall, to watch the performance of *the Single Drum Dance* from the Chen Han Military Banner in Ula Town, Jilin province, a national-level ICH project. The *Single Drum Dance* is an

important component of shamanic ritual belief in Jilin Province, passed down through generations by the Zhang family as inheritors of ICH. Before the performance began, one of the lean shaman inheritors proactively explained its meaning: "We, the descendants, must never forget our ancestors, because every family has its forebears. The *burning incense*[3] (*shao xiang* 烧香) in the ritual performance is simply an expression of piety toward our ancestors"[4] (Figure 1). In other words, from the outset, the shaman legitimized the inherited shamanic ICH project, emphasizing that their ritual acts are a form of ancestor worship accepted and recognized by the public or the state, rather than the worship of spirits. In fact, the entrance of the Zhang shaman's home displayed typical elements of ancestor worship. The couplets on either side of the gate read, "*In inheriting the land, we always cherish reverence; in the ritual hall, we never forget the aspirations of our ancestors*" (*chuanchengdi shenzhong changcun yipianxin, yanyitang zhuiyuan buwang xianrenzhi* 传承地慎终常存一片心，演仪堂追远不忘先人志)", accompanied by the character "德" (virtue), symbolizing their commemoration of ancestors and reverence for the past (Figure 2).

Inside the house, elements unique to shamanic rituals were evident, such as the altar in the center dedicated to various spirits. Later, when I inquired further about the altar of spirits with the shaman inheritors of the Zhang family, another inheritor, who was relatively stout, explained: "Among the spirits worshipped, the central tablet is dedicated to ancestors, while others are for Guan Gong (关公) and Erlang Shen (二郎神)[5]. Both Erlang Shen and Guan Gong are spirits from traditional Chinese culture, representing filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and loyalty (*zhong*忠), respectively—values highly promoted by the state."[6] I noticed that the altar also included spirits like the "Eagle Spirit", invoked during shamanic possession, but the shaman inheritors deliberately avoided mentioning them (Figure 3).



Figure 1. The shaman, an ICH inheritor, was burning incense to invite the spirits. Photograph by Liu Xiaoshuang, 12 December 2024.



Figure 2. The couplets of the gate: "In inheriting the land, we always cherish reverence; in the ritual hall, we never forget the aspirations of our ancestors" (*chuanchengdi shenzhong changcun yipianxin, yanyitang zhuiyuan buwang xianrenzhi* 传承地慎终常存一片心，演仪堂追远不忘先人志)", and the couplets of the gate and the character *De* "德" (virtue). Photograph by Liu Xiaoshuang, 12 December 2024.



Figure 3. At the very top hangs the sacred tablet of the spirit worshipped by the shaman. Photograph by Liu Xiaoshuang, 12 December 2024.

Furthermore, the stout shaman added: "In the past, when we conducted rituals, they were primarily to pray for the well-being of our family and clan members. However, in today's shamanic ICH performances, we have incorporated prayers for the stability and prosperity of the nation, as well as the flourishing of all families"[7]. For example, on the fifth day of the Lunar New Year in 2025, the Year of the Snake, Shi Zhongduo, a Manchu shaman and inheritor of ICH, performed a shamanic blessing ceremony at the Manchu Museum. The narration stated:

> In this prosperous era of China, we celebrate a joyful and harmonious New Year. On 2 February 2025, the fifth day of the Lunar New Year, the Jilin City Manchu Museum has prepared a special program—a shamanic blessing. This is not an ordinary performance or game but a solemn ancient ritual of faith, allowing visitors to experience the solemnity and mystery of traditional culture. The Manchu people believe in shamanic culture and hold shamanic blessing ceremonies during major festivals and important life events, both to express gratitude for all they have received and to seek blessings for future life. Citizens take the Manchu character for *Fu* "福" (fortune) home, which brings happiness to their entire family. Concurrently, the shaman extends his blessings for our nation's prosperity, the people's well-being, and the early realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation—the Chinese Dream.[8]

It is evident that even though folk beliefs such as shamanism enter the state-recognized legal domain through the "intangible cultural heritage (ICH)" designation, this recognition entails conditional tolerance—a point that becomes clearer when contrasted with the state's attitude toward the five major institutionalized religions. According to official Chinese policy, the government explicitly recognizes and financially supports the five major religions—Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—permitting them to publicly conduct traditional ceremonies that invoke Buddha, Jesus, Allah, angels, and spirits of different types. In contrast, the official ICH program grants shamans limited legal status only when they relinquish their core religious function of public spirit intermediaries, at least in public. This policy duality reveals a deeper governance logic: the functional incorporation of institutional religions (allowing the retention of religious essence within regulatory frameworks) versus the systematic decoupling of belief essence from folk practices (permitting only sanitized cultural forms into public spheres).

Nevertheless, despite Northeast Chinese shamanism adapting to official mainstream discourse in various ways during its (ICH) designation process, it remains at the lower end of the ICH funding hierarchy. China's ICH projects are distinguished between "protection" (*bao hu* 保护) and "preservation" *(bao cun* 保存). Article 3 of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China* states: "The state shall adopt measures such as identification, documentation, and archiving to preserve ICH, and for those that embody the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation and possess historical, literary, artistic, or scientific value, measures such as transmission and dissemination shall be taken to protect them." (Gov.cn 2011). Ma and Zhu (2018, pp. 76–77) argue that although the difference between "protection" and "preservation" is just one character, it reflects the Chinese government's "value orientation" in ICH practices—only those ICH items that embody the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation are given protection, promotion, and development. Naturally, for practices like northeast shamanism, which have long existed on the margins and in private spheres with religious connotations, the approach is preservation rather than active promotion or development. A Daur gentleman from Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, who lives in an environment of shamanic belief and has participated in the ICH application process for shamanic culture, once expressed his frustration to me: "The international ICH convention refers to all ICH as 'protection,' but

only China distinguishes between 'protection' and 'preservation'. Why can the indigenous religions that have existed on Northeast lands within China since ancient times only be classified as folk beliefs? Why can they only be 'preserved' and not 'protected'?" [9]

How do believers, with the shaman as the core representative, perceive shamanic projects as public heritage? I once asked this question to three shamans who are inheritors of ICH, and they all expressed their delight at being recognized as ICH inheritors. However, I was uncertain whether this sentiment originated from their contractual relationship with the government as ICH inheritors. An in-depth conversation with the stout shaman, however, dispelled my doubts on this matter. The stout shaman said: "Shamanism teaches people to revere heaven, earth, ancestors, spirits, and all things. Therefore, I strive to do good deeds and promote positive energy throughout my life. In fact, shamanism shares the same goal as the state—to promote positive energy. We are very grateful that the state is now legitimizing shamanism. Only when the country is strong can the people live in peace. Although we sometimes perform in the context of ICH, every action we take is carried out with reverence and follows ancient methods. It's just that you don't understand it."[10] This shows that even within the packaged framework of public heritage, shamans still convey the sacredness derived from prehistoric practices of connecting heaven and earth.

4. Public–Private Interactions in Contemporary Northeast Chinese Shamanism Within the Framework of ICH

Of course, becoming an ICH with "publicness" does not necessarily mean that the privateness of shamanism is entirely lost. The core practices of shamanic beliefs, such as connecting heaven and earth, still belong to the shaman inheritors and the local shamanic believers. In fact, the new identity of shamanism as public heritage is crucial to its private identity, and the two have developed a more nuanced interaction. In this process of interaction, different people perceive expressions of shamanism's diverse qualities, outlining its multifaceted image. This interaction is mainly reflected in two aspects: one is the "generation of the public from the private", represented by the emergence of public heritage associated with shamanism; the other is the "promotion of the private by the public", manifested in the fact that after certain shamanic practices gain recognition and support from the government in the form of ICH, they can, to some extent, protect the private practices of shamanic believers, preventing them from being labeled as "superstition". Among the contemporary Daur people in China, there is a shaman named Guo Baoshan. As an inheritor of ICH of shamanic culture, he is also referred to as a "licensed *Yadgan* (the daur term for "shaman")" due to his government-issued certificate as a cultural inheritor. Many individuals from other regions seek his assistance for medical treatment (S. Meng 2019, p. 180). In Daur Molidawa banner, in Hulun Buir, China, people seeking shamanic healing come in a steady stream, and shamanic rituals for healing are conducted normally without official interference or restrictions (S. Meng 2012, pp. 436–37). Nowadays, Daur people sometimes joke: the ancestral spirit "*хоʤог*" (霍卓日 *huozhuori*) knows it's a good day, and they are all coming out to *chuma* (Sa 2021, p. 493).

There is an old Chinese proverb saying, "It's easier to get things done when one has connections in the court (*chaozhong youren hao banshi* 朝中有人好办事)." The dual characteristics of contemporary Chinese shamanism vividly illustrate this point. The newly heritagized shamanism, emerging from the "private" sphere of shamanism, has become an officially privileged "courtly matter". With such a "courtly" connection, it provides some support for shamanism, which has existed on the margins of private life since ancient times. From this perspective, the publicness of Northeast Chinese shamanism does not necessarily replace or eradicate its privateness but can appropriately assist it. Thus, China's ICH policy can be seen as an artistic practice of Chinese politics. In this artistic practice, the

public and private aspects of Northeast Chinese shamanism mutually support each other to some extent, finding suitable spaces for expression, which not only meets the discursive needs of the authorities but also responds to the spiritual demands of private believers. Gao (2022, pp. 412–13) argues that ICH can only acknowledge the cultural and artistic dimensions of shamanism, as this is "a result of the inherent characteristics of the existing system, not merely a strategic approach but also the proper role of cultural work rather than religious work. However, understanding must be comprehensive..." In other words, ICH is only a strategic manifestation of the current system, but a complete understanding of shamanism must also include its private belief aspects. During one of my visits to the ICH-related departments in Hulunbuir, China, an administrative staff member told me, "We only handle the part of shamanism that applies for ICH status; the private part is not our concern."[11] He looked at me, his expression seemingly jesting about the political artistry of the state in its handling of shamanic ICH issues, hinting that the harmonious coexistence of the public and private dimensions of shamanism is an open secret and anticipating that I, too, would come to understand it.

Private shamanism, rooted in the tradition of connecting heaven and earth, represents the core embodiment of shamanic sacred beliefs. If shamans express sacredness in a "hidden" form during public heritage performances, they convey it more thoroughly in private settings. The inheritor, the stout shaman said: "We worship the spirits privately. During those times, the spirits return, and we perform rituals to invite and send them off. These things are incomprehensible; sometimes even we can't explain them—they just happen. That is the true setting for worship, and sometimes those watching our performances are moved to tears".[12] Given the sensitivity of private shamanism in China, it is almost never open to the public, except to specific groups such as insiders of the shamanic belief circle, patients, and certain scholars. For devout shamanic believers, the spirits have always existed, from prehistoric times to the present. Thus, whenever I asked the believers how they viewed shamanism as ICH, they often told me: "You must understand shamanism from its roots and beliefs." When I asked about the impact of being an ICH inheritor on the status of shamans, shamans replied: "For me, being a shaman means doing more good deeds." When I asked further questions about what spirits are, where they reside, and how they heal, even though the shamans might think some scholars are writing nonsense, they still refuse to disclose ultimate secrets, not even to their families. They often say, "Revealing too much is harmful for me and even worse for you, unless you are my disciple. Some things are divine secrets. Although we cannot fully explain them, they are effective nonetheless".[13]

However, there is a certain degree of contradiction within the public–private interaction. As a sacred belief system since ancient times, shamanism possesses its own unique characteristics. Firstly, shamans are often compelled to assume this role due to a divine calling. Once they become shamans, as sacred intermediaries between heaven and earth, they must undertake a sacred mission, such as praying for blessings and averting disasters for individuals and clans. If they do not become shamans or fail to fulfill these duties, they and their families often face spiritual punishment. Therefore, not just anyone can become a shaman, and shamans cannot perform rituals arbitrarily. Sa (2021, p. 476) points out: "(When shamans perform) rituals, there must be a reason for the rituals. Shamanic attire and drums are not things to be used casually; they are sacred objects that connect with the spirits". When embedded in the ICH context, an irreconcilable contradiction arises between private shamanism as a sacred representation and public shamanism as a heritage performance.

During fieldwork, the Daur gentleman told me about someone who, although not a shaman, became an inheritor of the ICH project for shamanic attire due to his ability to

make shamanic costumes. However, this inheritor passed away not long after. Locals widely believed it was spiritual punishment for his inappropriate performances wearing shamanic attire despite not being a shaman.[14] A renowned elderly Daur shaman also became a local ICH inheritor of shamanic culture. Once, while performing a spirit possession ritual in a park for an organization, her ancestral spirits refused to descend, citing that it was not for the community's benefit. After that, she never performed spirit possession in a decontextualized setting (Qu 2024). In contrast, consider the following example.

> Once, the Ulan Muqir (a cultural performance troupe) of Morin Dawa Banner in Inner Mongolia staged a large-scale performance titled The Sun God, which drew its themes and movements from shamanic rituals. As the actors began to perform, they started beating shamanic drums. Following the rhythmic drumming, the actors danced gracefully. When the drumbeats intensified and the performance reached its climax, one actor exhibited unusual symptoms, entering a state of spirit possession. Eventually, the actor collapsed on stage. After this incident, the actor never performed in the program again. This event became widely known throughout Morin Dawa Banner, and locals explained that the actor had "Hojoor" (the daur term for "root of ancestral spirits", in Chinese: *zu gen* 祖根). They believed that the spirits of his ancestors had sought him out, possessing his body, which led to his trance and subsequent collapse (S. Meng 2012, p. 75).

That is to say, the sacred possesses absolute authority, and the shaman, who is connected to spirituality and ancestral roots, serves as a representative of the sacred and cannot perform arbitrarily. An expert deeply involved in ICH work even expressed the following view: "Folk religious beliefs such as shamanism might not be suitable for inclusion in ICH. When you truly immerse yourself in the local communities, you will find that those who are not eager to be listed in heritage inventories are genuine shamans. It is there that true faith resides."[15]

Through an analysis of public–private interactions in the contemporary shamanism of Northeast China, it can be observed that there exists an intricate and intertwined symbiotic relationship network between the two. Within the framework of the "generation of the public from the private", shamanism acquires a state-tolerated public heritage identity by sacrificing its core spiritual beliefs. Nevertheless, real shamans strive to find hidden or state-compatible sacred expressions within public discourse. Within the framework of the "promotion of the private by the public", leveraging the legitimacy of public heritage status allows private sacred beliefs to be partially practiced and developed. It must be emphasized that the "connecting heaven and earth", as a core sacred belief of shamanism that has persisted from prehistoric times to the present day, continues to occupy a pivotal role in public–private interactions. If shamanic ICH performances in public discourse arbitrarily trample on sacred standards—such as casually performing the core shamanic practice of spirit possession in a decontextualized public setting, or non-shamans inheriting shamanic attire—they will face backlash from the prehistoric sacred essence of the "connecting heaven and earth". In contemporary shamanic practice, publicness and privateness manifest as mutually permeating, mutually constitutive symbiotic forms. This dialectical relationship not only reveals the inherent tension between the sacredness (privately) and performative nature (publicly) of shamanism as an ICH, but also reflects the mutual adaptive wisdom in the integration of shamanism with modern Chinese national governance. It is not a simple process of the "publicness" eliminating the "privateness". So why do some scholars believe that the sacredness of shamanism is weakened under the influence of ICH policies (Xing and Murray 2018; Xuan 2014). This requires an understanding of how different contemporary ethnic groups perceive shamanism and the spaces they delineate for it.

Through investigative research, I have discovered that different groups hold varying attitudes toward contemporary shamanism, which can be categorized into the following three types. Core shamanic believers: Represented by shamans themselves, these individuals steadfastly acknowledge the sacredness of shamanism. For instance, among the Manchu shamans of the Shi clan and their ritual assistants (*zaili* 栽力), shamanism remains fundamentally faith-centric. As explained by Shi Zongxiang, a shaman of the Shi clan: "Our Shi clan has spirits, but it's different from those who perform exorcisms and healings—those are the tricks of miscellaneous clans pretending to be spirits" (Yuan 2014, p. 213). General public: The general populace holds a skeptical yet partially believing attitude towards contemporary shamanism, including those who have lived within shamanic-believing communities. For example, with the passage of time, some members of the Manchu ethnic group in China have become less active in local shamanic rituals (Yu et al. 2019, P.166). Similarly, some Daur people now hold the view that Shamanism is "not entirely believable, but not entirely dismissible either". They believe that some phenomena are hard to explain, and the beliefs passed down by their ancestors should not be easily dismissed (S. Meng 2019, p. 156). The critics: Individuals such as government officials and intellectuals, who maintain a distance from shamanism, often hold a critical stance. They view shamanism as having transformed under new social conditions into a cultural symbol for national identity construction, a resource for economic development, or even a form of entertainment while avoiding discussions on its religious aspects. As mentioned earlier, officials from Hulunbuir exemplify this stance.

Through her research on shamanism among the Northeast ethnic groups of China, H. Meng (2018, pp. 164–65) also observed such phenomena and conducted statistical analyses on the numbers of people holding different attitudes. She pointed out that nowadays, a minority fully affirm shamanism; many hold a skeptical yet partially believing attitude, and a significant number hold critical or opposing views. It is evident that for the first category of core believers, whether in public ICH performances or private rituals, they are practicing and experiencing the sacred. For the third category, who maintain a psychological distance from shamanism, they are more inclined to recognize and promote a publicly presented shamanism packaged as an artistic and cultural form, while dismissing any aspects that carry religious connotations. The attitudes of the second category represent a transition between the first and third categories; they might perceive the public in private shamanism and the private in public shamanism, leading to them holding a skeptical yet partially believing attitude. Given that the second and third categories constitute the majority, and shamans remain reticent towards those who are distrustful or lack a connection, they avoid discussing the sacred meanings in public performances or prevent outsiders from participating in private rituals. This leads to the perception that, influenced by ICH policies, shamanism has been reduced to a culturally packaged public heritage image. However, the sacredness of shamanism in the private domain has not disappeared; it even influences shamanism as a public heritage—shamans practice sacredness in implicit or state-compatible ways in public, and non-orthodox performances in public may incur sacred punishments for the inheritors of shamanic culture. The diverse perspectives on shamanism arise because individuals with different attitudes automatically select different aspects of shamanism.

5. Conclusions

The ownership status of shamanism in Northeast China has undergone a historical evolution: from "public–private unity" (prehistoric times), to predominantly "privateness" (during ancient civilizations and communist periods), and then to a "coexistence of both public and private" (in the contemporary context of IHC). In contemporary society,

shamanism in Northeast China has developed a bidirectional interactive model between its dual identities as public heritage and private belief, characterized by the "generation of the public from the private" and the "promotion of the private by the public" This interactive model not only fulfills the needs of national identity and economic development (publicly) but also addresses the spiritual demands of the believing community (privately), demonstrating shamanism's adaptability and vitality in contemporary society, as well as the political artistry of China's ICH policies in dealing with religious issues. Although Chinese administrative discourse has taken the initiative in the ICH movement, within the public–private interaction of shamanism, the private sacredness inherited from the prehistoric belief of "connecting heaven and earth" has remained unchanged. This private sacredness even exerts a sacred influence on shamanism as a public heritage. This finding revises the previous view that ICH policies merely undermine the sacredness of shamanism, thereby providing a richer case perspective for a deeper understanding of the essence of shamanism, its transformations and constants, and its complex interactive relationship with contemporary society.

6. Limitations

Due to the significant unpredictability of shamanic ICH performances, this study's field observations successfully documented only a single case of the *Single Drum Dance* (a rare national-level ICH project) in Jilin Province. While the *Single Drum Dance* holds notable cultural value, the singularity of this sample may limit the interpretive depth regarding the public–private interaction mechanisms within shamanic cultural fields, potentially failing to fully unveil its multidimensional symbiotic relationships.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

1. Continue longitudinal observations of the Jilin Shamanic *Single Drum Dance*, focusing not only on officially recognized ICH exhibitions but also extending to ritual practices in private, folk contexts. Long-term ethnographic fieldwork could holistically map the interplay between publicness and privateness in shamanism.
2. Develop a comprehensive research framework across administrative hierarchies by systematically cataloging the four-tiered inventory system (national/provincial/prefectural/county-level) of shamanic ICH in Northeast China.
3. Through multi-level, multi-typological and long-term sampling, explore the establishment of a systematic public–private interaction mechanism for shamanic ICH preservation, while investigating the dynamic negotiation space between shamanic belief systems and contemporary Chinese governance.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] The blocking of the passage between earth and heaven is discussed in the Chinese classic Guoyu Chuyu II (国语·楚语下): At the time of the decline of Shaohao's regime, Jiuli ethnic group from the south brought moral chaos, the world becomes chaotic and gods intermingle with commoners. All turn themselves into shamans or shamanesses … The emperor Zhuanxu (颛顼) sends

two of his ministers, Chong and Li, to block the passage that connects heaven and earth. Order is restored, and commoners and gods separate again. Gods belong to heaven and commoners to earth. All was put back into order as before, and the mutual interference between gods and commoners was terminated. This is called the blocking of the passage between heaven and earth. (Guoyu 2016, p. 344)

2 The specific requirements are as follows: Applicants (typically individuals who fully master the core skills of a specific ICH project and hold recognized authoritative status within its designated cultural space) may apply through three channels: individual application, institutional recommendation, or expert nomination. The government conducts a multi-tiered review process to evaluate applications. Once officially designated as an ICH inheritor, they assume the following legal obligations:Conduct inheritance activities and train successors;Safeguard related physical artifacts and documentation;Collaborate with cultural authorities and relevant departments in ICH surveys;Participate in public-interest promotion of ICH.ICH inheritors are entitled to the following statutory rights:Provision of designated venues for inheritance activities;Financial subsidies to support apprenticeships, skill transmission, and cultural exchanges;Assistance in engaging in public welfare initiatives;Additional state-supported measures for inheritance and dissemination efforts (Gov.cn 2011).

3 *burning incense* is a significant part of Jilin shamanism, used to show respect and make prayers to spirits, carrying profound religious significance.

4 The data were from the lean shaman inheritors on 12 December 2024, in Ula Town, Changchun, China.

5 Guan Gong (Guan Yu 关羽)—The Exemplar of Loyalty and Righteousness. A renowned general of the Shu Han state during the Three Kingdoms period (220–280), Guan Yu was celebrated for his unwavering loyalty, bravery, and integrity. The Records of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo Zhi 三国志) documents his devotion to Liu Bei (Guan Yu's sworn brother, who later became emperor), stating that he "shared a bed with Liu Bei as brothers, bound by profound camaraderie."Erlang Shen (Yang Jian 杨戩)—A Case Study in Filial Piety. Yang Jian, the deity Erlang Shen, is a product of literary imagination. His legend of "Splitting the Mountain to Rescue His Mother" (from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) text 《*erlang baojuan* 二郎宝卷》) illustrates filial devotion.

6 The data were from the stout shaman on 17 February 2025, during a phone interview.

7 See note 6.

8 This document was published on the WeChat Video Channel: *Yangshu Yingxiang*.

9 The data were from the Daur gentleman on 19 September 2024, during a phone interview.

10 The data were from the stout shaman on 21 February 2025, during a phone interview.

11 The data were from the administrative staff on 10 September 2024, in Hulunbuir China.

12 See note 6.

13 The data were all from my personal fieldwork in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Jilin Province during the period from 2024 to 2025.

14 The data were from the Daur gentleman on 9 September 2024, in Hulunbuir China.

15 The data were from the expert of ICH on 12 December 2024, in Changchun, China.

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Mindset, Schism and the Contemporary Transformation of the Anglican Communion

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Abstract: The phenomenon of mindset provides a lens to understand more clearly the reasons for, the timing of and the resulting transformation of the Anglican Communion (AC) of its schism. It has been transformed by the interaction between those of a strong conservative mindset and those of a strong progressive mindset. The former are now in schism with those who remain in the AC. The schism is usually explained in terms of opposing doctrinal beliefs and values, which is valid as far as it goes. More fundamental is mindset because it explains why people hold these beliefs and values, which determine how they interact in society. The schism of the AC is chosen as a context or case study to which the scientific research behind mindset is applied. However, it is something that is general and fundamental, which operates in society for both the religious and secular domains.

Keywords: mindset; conservative mindset; progressive mindset; schism; Anglican Communion; Anglicanism

1. Introduction

1.1. Preliminary Comments

The Anglican Communion (AC) is in schism. This schism is like many other schisms in the Christian church since its foundation. In commonsense terms, a schism occurs when one section of a group disagrees with the others on matters of beliefs and values. They claim that their beliefs and values are 'true', and the others are not. As disagreement persists, acrimony builds over time, and usually so does the felt threat by the people whose beliefs and values are being criticized. Eventually, the felt threat is so strong they must respond. A common response is to separate from the existing group and for religious schismatics to describe themselves with terms like 'orthodox', 'authentic' or 'traditional'. They describe the continuing group as 'unorthodox' or 'heretical'.

There are many factors that may influence the decision to separate. For the religious domain, there are invariably differences in doctrinal beliefs and values. The schism in the AC is usually described in this way. A section of the AC, which may be described as strongly conservative, after much acrimony, decided to separate from the others. The major reason was doctrinal disagreement about the authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted. The AC traditionally holds that the Bible contains all things necessary for a believer's salvation. It also holds that the Bible should be read with reference to reason (and science) and tradition. On this, all Anglicans would agree. The disagreement, which ultimately led to schism, was the relative importance to be given to reason and the relative importance to be given to tradition, in discerning the will of God from the Bible. Progressive Anglicans give greater weight to reason and science and criticize what they call the biblical literalism of the conservatives. They call into question the acceptance of

much of the supernatural endemic in the scriptures and the relevance today of the Bible's worldview from thousands of years ago. Conservatives reject their weighting of reason and give greater weighting to tradition, formed from a similar worldview as the Bible.

It was these different views about the nature and authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted that were at the heart of the schism. This is reflected in the two most recent disagreements which were acrimonious. First is the 'correct' doctrine regarding gender equality in the church, particularly the ordination of women to holy orders. Second is the 'correct' doctrine regarding homosexuality and gender identity, particularly the blessing of same-sex unions, the ordination of openly gay persons and gender diversity. Disagreements like these are played out in other churches and secular politics.

1.2. Research Purpose

This paper covers several important questions. First, why has the Anglican Communion undergone a substantial transformation? Second, what have been the driving causal forces of the schism? Third, how have these forces worked out in history for the AC? Fourth, is the AC transformation unique or does it have relevance for other parts of the religious domain?

This paper is not primarily about rehearsing all the arguments and counter arguments of the opposing parties on matters of Anglican religious beliefs and values. Its main purpose is to use a different lens to answer the major research questions. The lens is the findings of a substantial body of scientific research, especially psychological and neurological, using the phenomenon called mindset, specifically, strongly opposed mindsets.

Mindset may be viewed as fundamental as it can be considered as the 'determinant' of the beliefs and values of a conservative and progressive mindset. It is not a binary phenomenon but a spectrum. For purposes of this paper, it is the strong conservative and strong progressive mindsets that are relevant, as will be argued.

1.3. Research Method

To answer the research questions, the accepted body of scientific theory on mindset was identified, analyzed and then applied to a particular religious context or case study of the AC. The body of received scientific research comes from researchers of many disciplines and from different parts of world. It consistently indicates the attributes of a strong conservative and strong progressive mindset. Whilst any research method usually fails to completely eliminate bias, which is usually unintentional, reference to a large body of received research can counter any individual bias. The author is confident that what is reported here reflects faithfully the findings of that body of research.

The Anglican schismatic make the claim that they are the orthodox Anglicans, with the obvious implication that the continuing Anglicans are not. To 'test' this claim, it was necessary to review authoritative sources on the hallmarks of Anglicanism and its history.

1.4. Research Contribution

At first glance, this paper, concerning the AC schism, describes what has been called 'culture wars'. This is a term that was attributed to James Hunter in his work titled *The Struggle to Define America* in 1991 (Hunter 1991). This is correct as far as it goes. The contribution of this paper provides a deeper, fundamental understanding of the battles to define Anglicanism using mindset. It explains why people hold the beliefs and values they have in the first place and how they view and interact with society. Some studies, as indicated later, have applied empirical research findings to the domain of secular politics. Little has been undertaken for the religious domain. This paper is offered as a modest contribution to fill that gap. It is anticipated that the case study will confirm the research received on mindset.

1.5. Paper Structure

This paper is structured in the following way. First, addressed in this paper, apart from this Introduction, are the reasons for and the reality of the AC schism. Second is an examination of the concept of a mindset and the attributes of a strong conservative and strong progressive mindset. Third is the relationship between biblical authority and mindset. Fourth is the relationship between gender equality and mindset. Fifth is the relationship between gender identity and acceptance and mindset. Sixth is the timing of the schism. Finally, is some commentary, including the likely future developments for the AC, other Christian bodies and non-Christian religions, in a changing religious and political world.

2. The Schism and Resulting Transformation

2.1. Pre-Schismatic

Prior to the schism, the AC was the third largest Christian communion after Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox (Wikipedia 2024c). It was founded in 1867 under the leadership of Charles Longley who was Archbishop of the ancient See of Canterbury. Member churches claim to be part of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church. It formed out of the continuing Church of England dating back to the first Christians (Garbett 1960, pp. 14–15; Maynard 1963, pp. xvii–x; Neill 1965). Anglican Christianity was taken to other parts of the world by British missionaries, trade and military interests during the time of the British Empire. The inheritance of British colonialism has been a decisive factor of the schism.

The Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops worldwide is called by the Archbishop of Canterbury approximately every ten years. At the Lambeth Conference in 1888, the bishops passed resolution 11 concerning four important principles which explain the Anglican identity: first, the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation, and it is the rule and ultimate standard of faith; second, the Apostles' Creed is an important Baptismal symbol, and the Nicene Creed is a sufficient statement of Christian beliefs; third, the primacy of two sacraments ordained by Jesus himself, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, using the words of institution of Jesus; and finally, the Episcopate, which can be locally adapted (Lambeth Conference 1888).

Historic Anglicanism has often been described with reference to four main hallmarks. First, it is both Catholic and reformed. Second is its comprehensiveness, which results from its greater tolerance of its adherents' different beliefs and values. Third is its appeal to sound reasoning and science. Finally is its reverence of tradition, especially some of the ecumenical councils of the undivided church (Bethel Agreed Statement 2022).

At the reformation, the ancient Church of England saw itself as a continuing Catholic Church. No new church was contemplated (Garbett 1960, pp. 114–17; Maynard 1963, pp. xviii–xx). There was continuity of dioceses and parishes. Most bishops and priests remained in their place. Careful provision was made to ensure Archbishop Parker and the other bishops were duly consecrated to ensure Apostolic succession. The Nag's Head fable was dreamed up by the 'Papists' to repudiate this preservation (Browne 1731). After the reformation, it held the Catholic scriptures, creeds, the two sacraments instituted by Christ himself and the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and Deacons (Garbett 1960, p. 16). It is reformed Catholicism adopting from Lutheranism and moderate Calvinism. The reformers freed the English church from foreign interference in its affairs both spiritual and temporal; it provided freedom to read and study the scriptures and provided a more open and inclusive worship (Garbett 1960, pp. 18–21).

Given its history, it is not surprising that it is a communion characterized by tolerance and comprehensiveness. Believers can hold different understandings of doctrine

and church practice. Historically, whilst other churches say you must, the Anglican church says you may (Garbett 1960, p. 19; Ferris 1964, pp. 9–33). The religious scholar (Neill 1965, p. 424) observed the following regarding historic Anglicanism: *treat the faithful not as children to be kept perpetually on leading strings and fenced around with endless rules, but as adult Christians, who must learn to choose and decide, as Before God and in reliance on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit*. Comprehensiveness and tolerance can test the fellowship of believers. Historically, the greater tensions have been between the Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals (Ferris 1964, pp. 223–43; Bindoff 1962, pp. 212–46). For five hundred years, the fellowship has been maintained, and commonly, the Anglican church was admired for it and described as a successful middle-way for Christianity. The largest group within the church has been described as the broad church which has had no strong alignment to the Anglo-Catholics or the strong Calvinist Evangelicals (Wolf 1979, pp. 155–57).

Anglicanism has always been open to the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing new interpretations of the fundamental Chistian truths. All Anglicans hold to the supreme authority of the sacred scriptures, often described as sola scripture. As God has given humankind the gifts of reasoning and scientific discovery, it believes science and religion are not opposed, as has been observed by (Toynbee 1971, pp. 44–45). The traditional Anglican position concerning the relationship between scripture, reason and tradition can be described with an analogy of a three-legged stool (Diocese of Melbourne 2024). The legs are scripture, tradition and reason. The analogy teaches that all three legs are needed, and if one is taken away, the stool topples over. If one is undervalued or overemphasized, the balance may not be right. All three must be held in a balanced way.

Finally, historic Anglicanism has always revered the traditions of the early church, and the deposit of faith summarized in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. This includes some of the earliest apostolic writings such as The Didache, the First Epistle of Clement and Ignatian Epistles. Also revered among the Church Fathers are Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine. As a reformed Catholic Church, it values the writings of the reformers, especially Thomas Cranmer, Martin Luther and John Calvin. Their mark is heavily imprinted on the 1662 Prayer Book and the 39 Articles of Religion published in 1571. In later times, Anglican Divines had an important influence on Anglican beliefs and values. These include Richard Hooker, Frederick Dennison Maurice and William Temple.

The AC may be said to have four main instruments of communion (Anglican Communion 2024): First, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The See is now vacant after the recent resignation of Justin Welby. A member church is said to be in communion with the Archbishop who is known as 'the first amongst equals'. Second, the Lambeth Conference. Third, the Anglican Consultative Council, consisting of bishops, priests and laity. It meets every three years and had its first meeting in 1971. Finally, the primates' meeting which was first held in 1979. The primacy of the See of Canterbury dates from the Norman invasion of England (Neill 1965, p. 140). None of these instruments are binding authorities. They are vehicles for consultation and persuasion. There is no central binding authority of the AC. Each province and diocese have the authority to act independently of any other. Historically, there has been a reluctance to do so for the sake of unity.

The AC is divided into provinces, each headed by a primate. Within a province, there are dioceses, and each diocese consists of a number of parishes. It is often said that each diocese is Episcopally led and Synodically governed (Grant 2010).

2.2. Post-Schismatic

The AC is now in schism. It is real, and discussion in terms of 'a rupture in fellowship' or a 'tear in the fabric of the church' or a 'realignment of the church' is unhelpful and belies

the truth. Some churches who have not 'officially' left the AC are schismatic by their words and actions.

To repeat, over the last forty years, there have been two main 'triggers' for schism. First was the issue of gender equality, and second was homosexuality and gender identity. The fundamental reason for the schism relates to the authority of the Bible and how it is interpreted. Conservatives hold the view that the Bible is the way God reveals his mind to the church, and as such, its words are infallible and inerrant. These words are divinely inspired, and by using a set of hermeneutical principles, the Holy Spirit will lead the church into knowing what the will of God is. Human reason and scientific discoveries together with tradition can never 'correct' scripture according to conservative scholars (Packer 1963; Hammond 1938). This claim goes to the heart of the matter and is challenged by progressives.

A protracted battle between conservatives and progressives over the issue of gender equality in the AC occurred, especially from the 1970s. However, it has had a long history in Christendom (Ranke-Heinemann 1990; Porter 1996), specifically, the ordination of women to holy orders. Resolution 67 of the Lambeth Conference in 1930 stated the order of Deaconesses, not Deacons, was the only one permitted for women. At the Lambeth Conference in 1948, resolutions 113 and 114 advised that the ordination of Florence Li Tim Oi was invalid and that no further discussion on women's ordination was required (Lambeth Conference 1948). The Lambeth Conference in 1968 passed resolutions 28 to 34 favorable to women's ordination. The Lambeth Conference in 1978 with resolution 21 recognized the autonomy of each member church the 'legal' right to ordain women as priests (Lambeth Conference 1968). At the Lambeth Conference in 1988, the 'issue' of women's ordination was the major debate with the conservatives bitterly opposed to those parts of the AC that had pursued their 'legal' right (Lambeth Conference 1988).

Most provinces of the AC now ordain women (Wikipedia 2024c). A diocese within a province may refuse to ordain or do so in a limited way. An example is the Province of Australia which allows its dioceses to ordain. Its largest diocese, Sydney, has steadfastly refused to do this. Giles (2018), for instance, presents the progressive theology for gender equality against Sydney and other conservative dioceses of the AC. During this protracted battle, some conservative parishes would refuse, as a matter of conscience, to attend the Eucharist presided over by a woman. At other times, provision was made for Episcopal oversight by a conservative bishop from another diocese to a parish of another (Brown and Woodhead 2016, pp. 87–88). Again, this was arranged on the grounds of conscience. This bitter dispute, half won by the progressives, prepared the grounds for the actual schism.

The issue the conservatives chose as the battle they must not lose concerned homosexuality in the church. They amassed money, mainly from the West, caucused voting numbers, especially from the large African dioceses, and its anti-progressive propaganda, mainly from the West, went into overdrive (Bates 2005; Brown and Woodhead 2016, pp. 144–15; Hasset 2011; Spong 2000, pp. 425–41). At the Lambeth Conference in 1998, resolution 1.10, *Human Sexuality*, specifically an amendment to it, passed 389 for and 190 against (Lambeth Conference 1998). The amendment confirmed that same-sex acts were a sin. It was a rout by the well-organized conservatives and their secular political backers. Despite resolution 1.10, parts of the AC begun to authorize same-sex union blessings and ordain openly gay clergy. At the time of the Lambeth Conference in 2008, the schism was a reality. The Lambeth Conference in 2008 passed no resolutions on anything. Regarding the issue of same-sex acts, it decided that this was a time of listening and for reflection (Lambeth Conference 2008).

A useful timeline is provided by (Wikipedia 2024b). During 2002, the Diocese of New Westminster of the Anglican Church of Canada authorized a rite of blessing for same-sex unions. As a result, nine conservative parishes attempted to withdraw from diocesan life. Two other parishes affiliated themselves with the conservative Province of Rwanda. In 2003, Jeffrey John, an openly gay priest with a long-term partner, was appointed as Bishop of Reading in the Church of England (Brown and Woodhead 2016, pp. 164–73). Eventually, Jeffrey declined his appointment because of conservative pressure on the Archbishop of Canterbury. Jeffrey commented 'we are now in a genuinely evil situation' (Bates 2005, p. 164). The attempt also resulted in several bishops and priests aligning themselves with other primates, including those of Nigeria, Rwanda and Boliva.

It was in North America that the schism significantly widened. During 2004, The Episcopal Church (TEC) in the United States ratified the appointment of Gene Robinson, who was an openly gay non-celibate priest, as Bishop of New Hampshire (Brown and Woodhead 2016, pp. 169–71). The Anglican Church of Tanzania declared itself as out of communion with TEC because of its action. So did four conservative dioceses of TEC itself. They joined the Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America, which was formed during 1981 and in 2014 was renamed as the Anglican Church of South America (ACSA). The schism dramatically intensified during 2007–2008 with the formation of the alternative Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). About twelve other jurisdictions broke from TEC and joined the ACNA. The ACNA (2024) refers to itself as 'authentically' Anglican.

The Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GAFCON) was established in 2008. It refers to itself as 'orthodox' Anglicans (GAFCON 2024a; GAFCON Australia 2022). Those who are members of and aligned with it represent the majority of Anglicans that existed pre schism. Its membership is overwhelmingly African, as they form the three largest provinces after the Church of England (Wikipedia 2024a). Its website (GAFCON 2024b) indicates it was established because *Christian values have been shunned with a substantial portion of the church forsaking the clear teaching of the Bible and conforming to the prevailing culture. This is particularly evident with sexual ethics*. . .

During 2010, the Province of the Indian Ocean declared that it was not in communion with TEC and the Anglican Church of Canada. Archbishop Ernest stated that this was the case until 'they reverse their theological innovation'. At a meeting in Singapore that year, representatives from twenty provinces demanded that these two churches show genuine repentance for their actions which they claimed contradicts the plain teachings of Holy Scripture. They were referring to the ordination of openly gay priests and the blessing of same-sex unions.

During 2017, GAFCON declared it would appoint a 'missionary bishop' to conservative Anglicans in Europe without recourse to the Church of England or the Scottish Episcopal Church. It may be said there was no subtlety in its contempt whatsoever. Also, the signal of 'black' African missionaries to 'white' Europeans was also devoid of any subtlety. In 2019, the highest church court in the Province of Australia, the Appellate Tribunal, ruled that a diocese may authorize the blessing of a same-sex union. In response, GAFCON Australia threatened a split and realignment within the Australian church. At the same time, the GSFA released a statement that because Canterbury Cathedral had appointed an openly gay man as Dean, it now had no fellowship with it.

GAFCON Australia carried out its threat. During 2022, it established the Diocese of the Southern Cross over the issue of same-sex blessings and progressive interpretations of doctrine (GAFCON Australia 2022). It invites the membership of conservative parishes and groupings not happy with their present affiliation to join it. It is not part of the Australian Anglican Church but has strong conservative support, especially from the dioceses of

Sydney and Tasmania. The importance of the ultra-conservative Sydney diocese is well documented by (Porter 2011).

The years 2023 and 2024 witnessed a substantial deterioration in relations between the schismatics and continuing Anglicans. In response to the decision of the General Synod of the Church of England to authorize same-sex union blessings, many dioceses of the AC, including ten from the GFSA, announced that they no longer recognized the Archbishop of Canterbury as 'first among equals' and questioned his fitness to lead the AC. The organization (GAFCON Australia 2023) described themselves as a 'holy remnant' and ended their communique with a paraphrase of Isaiah 60:1–3: To *God be the glory as a new light mercifully dawns on His church in the midst of the growing darkness*. This was followed in 2024 when twelve out of the twenty-four primates of the AC refused an invitation to meet with the then-Archbishop of Canterbury in Rome. This included the large African provinces. This was despite a statement by the Archbishop that the amendment to resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, declaring same-sex acts to be sin, remains the view of Lambeth and the Archbishop.

The latest development, if it comes to fruition, would considerably weaken the AC further, maybe fatally (Gomes 2024a, 2024b). Since 1896, and many years before, the Church of England, and then the AC, has attempted to persuade the Roman Catholic Church to abrogate (Apostolicae Curae 1896) of Pope Leo XIII. It declared Anglican orders to be absolutely null and utterly void. Historically, the request was strongest from the Anglo-Catholics (Maynard 1963, pp. 130–41). It is therefore surprising that the conservatives, predominantly Evangelical, who historically have been vehemently hostile to Rome, should be discussing union with it and the overturning of the century's old decision about Anglican holy orders. Ironically, one main issue for the Anglican conservatives is that of Fiducia Supplicans, the pastoral declaration of Pope Francis which permits priests to offer informal and non-liturgical blessing to same-sex couples (Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith 2023). This is the very issue that triggered the Anglican schism. The main issue for the Roman Catholic Church in recognizing Anglican holy orders is that it could not apply to those areas of the AC which have ordained women.

It is now opportune to apply the lens of scientific research and move beyond a discussion of the doctrinal reasons for and the reality of the schism which has resulted in the transformation of the AC.

3. Mindset

3.1. The Concept

The phenomenon of mindset and its sub-sets, the conservative mindset and the progressive mindset, has been the subject of much scientific research, especially in psychology, sociology and psychiatry. This research is critical to understanding why conservatives and progressive Anglicans think and act as they do. It is relevant to all societies and domains.

Important here is the understanding of the Anglican conservatives' response to progressive challenges to their religious beliefs and values which threaten their claim that only they can interpret God's will. Also important is the challenge that comes from secular society to conservative religious beliefs and values, a society which they view as evil and hostile. What heightens their felt threat is their belief that progressive Anglicans have adopted these sinful secular beliefs. Progressives are viewed as fifth columnists or a Trojan horse, as they are within.

A mindset may be described as a set of brain and behavioral affiliations (or attributes) held by a person or a group of like-minded people which influence how they view themselves and others within society (Mendez 2017). This can include culture, philosophy, beliefs, values, outlook and disposition. It is used to make sense of the world and them-

selves as they interact with it. Interactions require a response which is strongly influenced by the mindset. Often, the discourse on mindsets has been associated with politics, but it also applies to religion. The researchers (Garrett and Bond 2021) found that conservatives compared with liberals are worse at distinguishing truths and falsehood. They claim this is partly explained because the most widely shared falsehoods promote conservative positions. Common is the crossover from political to religion as conservative Christians have become very politicized since the 1980s. (Lienesch 1982). There is also the crossover of religion to politics (O'Brien and Abdelhadi 2020, pp. 474–503; Du Mez 2020; Novis-Deusch et al. 2022).

An overriding question is, what is the influence of nature and nurture on a person's mindset? Can we agree with Gilbert's libretto from the opera Iolanthe for instance?

I often think it's comical-Fal, la, la!
How Nature always does contrive-Fal, lal, la!
That every boy and every gal
That's born into the world alive
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little conservative

The answer to this rhetorical question is a guarded yes. Research suggests that genetics substantially forms a mindset, but not as strongly as suggested by Gilbert and other researchers (Denworth 2020; Hibbing et al. 2014). The researcher (Mendez 2017, p.86) states that *Conservatism-liberalism is also associated with differences in personality, attention, memory, perception, emotional reactions, problem-solving, and response choices. Although neurobiological mechanisms affecting conservatism-liberalism are not clearly deterministic, some investigators suggest an evolutionary protective origin, with some situations favoring more conservative orientations and others permitting more liberal ones.* Again, researchers (Ruish et al. 2020) identified a correlate of political ideology—taste sensitivity—finding evidence that political conservatives have a more sensitive sense of taste, suggesting it might be highly heredity. This may prove to be similar for religious conservatives and act a predictor of conservative religiosity. The literature also addresses fixed mindsets and the possibility they may be changed (Lassetter and Neel 2019; van der Linden et al. 2018; Acosta and Hemmelmeier 2022). If this be the case, it may prove hopeful for progressives in their discourse with conservatives about new interpretations of Anglican religious beliefs and values.

3.2. Brain and Behavioral Affiliations

Like most phenomena, mindset is envisioned as positioned on a spectrum. This paper is primarily concerned with people who have strong conservative mindset and those of a strong progressive mindset. People possessing a strong mindset will inevitably have the power to influence and command support from those of a more moderate view on that end of the spectrum, a case of followers and leaders. The same applies to a strong progressive mindset. In the context of the AC schism, those of a strong conservative mindset were able to persuade many moderate conservatives, mainly Evangelical, to support their schismatic actions.

A useful metaphor is to imagine that this spectrum is not fixed in space but has the ability to shift or be stretched back and forth over time. There appears to be widespread support, especially for the Western world, that is currently shifting or being stretched to the strong conservative end of the spectrum. Confirmatory religious examples may be the influence of Evangelical megachurches, support of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy for Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the support of male white Evangelicals of Donald Trump. Confirmatory secular examples may be the rise of autocratic and populist leaders and the electoral successes of 'right-wing' parties.

The following is a useful table for a discussion of strong conservative and progressive mindsets by (Mendez 2017, p. 87) (see Table 1). This table is adapted for the purposes of this paper, using the findings from other studies and the summary from (Minogue and Dagger 2024; Clifton 2023).

Table 1. Mindset Reported Behavioral Affiliations: Strong Conservative and Strong Progressive.

Cognitive	Negativity bias	No clear bias
	Psychological defense	
	High dispositional sensitivity to threat or loss	Sensitivity to cues for altering habitual response patterns
	Sensitivity to disgust	
Personality	Stability and opposition to change	Novelty
	Conformity	Unconventional and desire self-expression
	Tradition	New experiences and sensations
	Order, structure and closure	Flexibility and variability
	Favor less complexity and prefer harder categorization	Tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity
	Purity	Harm minimization
	Authority	Equality
	Conscientiousness	Empathy
	Distinction with out-groups	Universal community
	Expressions of power	Expressions of warmth
Physiological	Greater activation of the right amygdala	Greater conflict-related anterior cingulate cortex activity
Neuroimaging	Increased gray matter volume in right amygdala and other right anterior structures	Increased gray matter volume in anterior cingulate cortex

Cognitive studies reveal that conservatism is associated with a negativity bias (Nash and Leota 2022). Some studies emphasize that conservatism is a psychological defense against negative stimuli and events which conservatives experience (Jost et al. 2003; Jost et al. 2007; Jost and Amodio 2012). They desire order, routine and tidiness (Xu et al. 2020; Kanai et al. 2011). They prefer to maintain the status quo, revere tradition, and so are resistant to change (Xu et al. 2020). Faced with ambiguity and novelty, the conservative brain processes information with a strong emotional response (Kanai et al. 2011; Jost et al. 2003).

Other studies emphasize conservatism as a consequence of increased dispositional sensitivity to negative stimuli and events (Hibbing et al. 2014; Wright and Baril 2014). Yet other studies are able to confirm the integration of psychological defense and dispositional sensitivity (Nash and Leota 2022). Specifically, if the psychological defense fails, conservatives show heightened sensitivity to negative stimuli. Recently, (Clifton 2023) has speculated that the main belief which explains the differences between conservatives and progressives is that the former believe that strict division is an inherent part of life whilst progressives do not. This may supersede or soften the accepted idea that conservatives have a negativity bias. It is an area for future research.

3.3. Mindset and the Bible

A strong conservative mindset explains the reactions of Anglican conservatives, especially over the last forty years, as the threats to their belief system have increased. The progressive threat is primarily aimed at the lynchpin of their entire belief system, the largely literalist interpretation of an infallible and inerrant Bible which is equated with the Word of God. This has been challenged at the highest level in the AC and in parts of the wider church. Recent examples include the Doctrine in the Church of England (1938), a 1922 report of the commission on Christian doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922 and published in 1938, Bishop John Robinson and his 1963 publication of *Honest to God* (Robinson 1963), the debate which it generated (Edwards and Robinson 1963) and Bishop John Spong with his many publications which include *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (Spong 1988), *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (Spong 1991), *Why Christianity Must Change or* Die (Spong 1998), *Here I Stand* (Spong 2000) and *The Sins of the Scripture* (Spong 2005). Other Christian faiths also have their impressive progressive scholars, for instance, Marcus Borg's *The Heart of Christianity* (Borg 2003) and Huns Kung's *On Being a Christian* (Kung 1978). To employ the cliché, they stand on the shoulders of earlier progressive giants, including Kierkegaard, Barth, Bultmann, Dodd, Niebuhr and Tillich. The progressive challenge is not recent but goes back centuries.

Because of these threats to the most important part of their belief system, conservative Anglicans have redoubled their efforts to defend their view of biblical authority. Despite their power within the AC and their disposition to use it, they have suffered a series of defeats, as illustrated by Lambeth Conference decisions: allowing the use of contraception (Lambeth Conference 1930), relaxing the strictures on divorce and remarriage (Lambeth Conference 1958), a withdrawal of support for capital punishment (Lambeth Conference 1958) and the ordination of woman to holy orders (Lambeth Conference 1978). Lambeth has not approved same-sex union blessing and the ordination of openly gay priests. Same-sex acts remain a sin according to resolution 1.10 of 1998. These and many other decisions, at all levels in the AC, are in conservative eyes unbiblical, untraditional and a novelty.

In scientific terms, as this threat became stronger, the psychological defenses of Anglican conservativism were breached. This led to heightened dispositional sensitivity, so much so that many have declared they are no longer in communion and fellowship with continuing Anglicans. This is not surprising, as research shows that making distinctions with an out-group is a common characteristic for the conservative mindset (Strickland 2008; Mendez 2017, p. 87; Steward and Morris 2021). Those with a progressive mindset are often their own worst enemies in debates because they are more willing to compromise and even vote against resolutions, they favor for the sake of unity, goodwill or the maintenance of fellowship (Spong 2000, pp. 340–41).

Research also reveals that conservatives are characterized by what is called 'motivated reasoning' (Kahan et al. 2012). When confronted with convincing evidence that a belief or set of beliefs are mistaken or in error, the conservative response is often to 'knuckle down' even more and claim that the evidence is contrary to 'the Word of God'. A strong conservative mindset can be so closed that it loses the ability to concede any mistake or error (Obaidi 2020).

The researcher (Strickland 2008, p. 37) states that the reluctance to introspect may be viewed as a defense mechanism which allows conservatives to disregard any fear, anxieties or personal weakness. The conservative temperament displays an aversion to abstract argument or theorizing. They favor less complexity and adopt a much harder categorization in their discourse. This may help explain why they downplay the role of reason in interpreting the Bible preferring a more literal simpler interpretation. They

prefer a simpler style of thinking which minimizes complexity (Obaidi 2020). Reason is seen as a threat to conservative hermeneutical principles used to interpret the Bible. Conservative Anglicans actually categorize 'reason' as an alternative authority to the Bible or the Magisterium of Catholicism or tradition of the Orthodox (Packer 1963, pp. 46–51; Hammond 1938, p. 35). It is a false categorization because historic Anglicanism views reason and tradition as important in discerning the mind of God as revealed in the sacred scriptures. Ignoring reason and opposing science has resulted in the God of gaps and has inflicted irretrievable harm to Christianity (Bonhoeffer 1944; Coulson 1955). As reason and science demolished all the unnecessary and excessive claims made for the Bible, the conservatives shrank God and humanity. Progressives remind conservatives that the Bible is about Jesus Christ's call to follow him, not science, not history, not psychology, not psychiatry or any other branch of God-endowed knowledge of humankind.

Studies confirm the common observation that conservatives have a negative disposition towards humankind, whereas progressives have a more positive disposition (Dagger and Ball 2024; Obaidi 2020). Conservatives prefer conformity, purity, order and structure, authority and expressions of power. It is not surprising that conservative Anglicans embrace wholeheartedly the doctrine of Original Sin and the fall of humankind. Sometimes, they reference the associated doctrine of Total Depravity of strong Calvinism. It follows that conservatives are strong advocates of family, church and the law to control what they perceive to be humankind's base and destructive instincts. This is shared by political conservatives, for example, the founder of articulated conservatism, Edmund Burke, together with Joseph de Maistre (Britannica 2024). Burke had a view of human beings driven by passions and desires which lead to selfishness, anarchy, irrationality and violence. He argued for the need of restraint from institutions like family, church and school and learning self-discipline. If they fail to learn, then it is to be compelled by the law. Burke praised the Roman Catholic Church as the most effective barrier against radicalism. There is considerable truth in the claim that political conservatism derives from religion. Readers may wish to discover the close relationship by reviewing *Ten Conservative Principles* by Russell Kirk (Kirk 2024).

Conservatives favor expressions of power over expressions of warmth and empathy (Britannica 2024). A common conservative political view is that opportunities exist for people to make a living, and those who find themselves in poverty are likely to be so because they are lazy and shirk hard work. Kirk (2024) states that *conservatives feel affection for the proliferating intricacy of long-established social institutions and modes of life, as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and deadening egalitarianism of radical systems. For the preservation of a healthy diversity in any civilization, there must survive orders and classes, differences in material condition, and many sorts of inequality. The only true forms of equality are equality at the Last Judgment and equality before a just court of law; all other attempts at levelling must lead, at best, to social stagnation*. Progressives claim conservatives lack empathy with others who are victims of inequality and lack of opportunity. They claim this may explain why they are prone to pointing out other people's faults and attempt to curtail the use of a God-endowed free will.

The dominant theology of Anglicans with a strong conservative mindset is to emphasize one view of the life and work of Jesus Christ. Their preferred belief about the saving work of Jesus is the doctrine of the Penal Substitutionary Atonement. In common language, it postulates that since the fall of humankind, it is in a wretched state of sin in the eyes of a wrathful God. God's justice demands the penalty of death. It demands sacrificial propitiation. Thus, in the fullness of time, God the Father sends his Son to be sacrificed in our place. Often, conservatives will simply say Jesus died in your place or you killed Jesus by your sin or you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

The progressive mindset claims that this conservative emphasis is an inadequate understanding of the life and work of Jesus and lacks the balance against an equally acceptable view. It chooses to emphasize other biblical narratives. One alternative Anglican progressive view is best summed up by John 3:16–17: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved*. It notes the positivism that God was not condemning the world but through Jesus was saving the world. Jesus's death was not to propitiate an angry God but rather it was to heal and restore all creation, including humankind. The progressive view stresses expiation rather than propitiation, and this understanding has always been present in historic Anglicanism. It has always been the understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Communion (Ware 2015, p. 223). Progressives stress biblical passages like the Sermon on the Mount, the two great commandments, the fruits of the Spirit and the story of the Good Samaritan as a better discernment of the mind and character of God and the saving and healing work of Jesus. These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. What is telling, but consistent with the research, is the emphasis given to the 'negative'—sacrificial propitiation—over the 'positive'—healing and restoration.

3.4. Mindset and Gender Equality

Those of a strong conservative and strong progressive mindset read the same scriptures but discern the will of God on a doctrinal or moral issue differently; often, the outcome is diametrically opposed. Gender equality in the church is one such issue, as it is for political conservatism. Readers may like to refer to (Atkins 1975) and (Devereux 2023) as examples of conservative theology on gender. Their main argument against qualified women exercising leadership and teaching in the church is that God is 'male' and so is Jesus his son. It is noted that some conservatives offer a more nuanced argument than what follows but it is not changed substantially. When the Bible refers to God as 'Father' and Jesus as 'Son', these male terms are meant to be taken literally not metaphorically. Biblical affirmation is mainly from the writings of Paul, especially Ephesians 5:21–32, 1 Corinthians 11: 1–16 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. The head of every man is Christ. The head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God the Father. They argue that God wills this hierarchy of leadership. It follows that God has authority over the Son, he sent him into the world, but they are equality in deity (the Trinity). It also follows in marriage that the husband has authority over his wife though they are equal in personhood. It is a short step to conclude that God wills only males to exercise leadership and teaching in his church. In Catholic Churches, for example, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglo-Catholic, a woman cannot be a priest and preside at the Eucharist because only a man can represent Jesus offering himself as sacrifice to the Father because Jesus was male.

Progressive Anglicans (Lindsay and Scarfe 2012) and (Lee 2021) argue that both men and women have the same dignity, ability and leadership in the sight of God. Qualified women are permitted to exercise the same leadership and teaching in the church as qualified men. They remind all of the orthodoxy that God is everlasting, without body, parts or passions, and also that Genesis 1:27 states that man and woman are made in Gods likeness and image. They suggest that the Bible was written from within a strongly patriarchal society which abounded in sexism and misogyny. This does not have the same acceptance for contemporary society although much of that remains. Progressive secular counterparts argue that whilst much has been achieved through 'feminism', harms emanating from the acceptance of male headship still afflict society. They point to the strong link between male headship and domestic violence and the wind-back on women's reproductive rights and the inclusion of LGBTIQA+ people. A recent example reported in the press were

two 'Christians' displaying signs at a Texas University stating, 'Homo is Sin' and 'Women are Property' (Del Ray 2024).

3.5. Mindset and Homosexuality

Scientific studies reveal that conservatives have a strong disposition towards making moral judgements and possess a sensitivity to disgust (Wright and Baril 2014; Ruish et al. 2020). The researcher (Lakoff 1996) argues that conservatives and progressives hold two different conceptual models of morality. He describes them as the 'strict father' and 'nurturant parent'. The moral beliefs of conservatives have been linked to decreased cortical volume in the anterior cingulate cortex of the brain (Kanai et al. 2011). It is an area of conflict detection, negativity and pain. Often, these moral judgements are about others. Conservative Anglicans insist on moral behavior from thousands of years ago as God-given. The progressives argue much of this is irrelevant to the Christian today.

Progressives argue that sexual behavior has always been of utmost concern, perhaps even an obsession for conservatives, religious and secular. The church has used sexual behavior to exert power over Christians, especially women (Ranke-Heinemann 1990; Porter 1996). It is an area where the strong desire by religious and political conservatives for conformity, purity and restraint is dominant. So too is their desire for order, structure and closure. New experiences, self-expression and the tolerance of ambiguity by progressives are felt as a threat to conservatives. The conservative disposition for a lack of tolerance for ambiguity goes some way to explaining their intolerance of blurring gender identity and roles, such as for those people identifying as LGBTIQA+.

Specific moral behavior saturates the Bible, from thousands of years ago. Conservative Anglicans claim only they can discern what is relevant for Christians today. The religious scholar (Harrison 2016) is an example of defending conservative views on gender and marriage. It is this area, perhaps more than any other, where conservatives violate their own hermeneutical principles of interpreting the Bible. They pick and choose those biblical passages most compatible with their mindset and ignore others. Leviticus (Lev) is a great book to illustrate. It is a single sentence from that book, 18:22 and 20:13, that they claim strongly supports that same-sex acts are an abomination to God and that God requires those involved be punishable by death. In a literal reading of Leviticus, the following are unacceptable to God: breeding two kinds of cattle, sowing a field with two kinds of seed or making clothing with two different cloths Lev19:19; rounding off the hair of your temples or marring the edges of your beard Lev 19:27; or Lev 19:28 making cuttings in your flesh (tattoos). According to Lev 20:27, a medium or a wizard shall be put to death. Not to forget Deuteronomy 21:18–21, where God in a simplistic literal reading approves the stoning of a disobedient son. Now there would be few conservatives who would insist on the above commands. However, the literal reading of what appears to condemn same-sex acts is treated as an exemption. There is no justification for why it should be treated as such. There are dozens of other examples from the old and new testaments. The point here is that Anglican conservatives are inconsistent in what they claim God condemns and therefore they condemn. The scholars in (Wright 2012) examine the supposed texts condemning homosexuality and provide progressive and nuanced views on the relevant biblical passages.

The terms homosexual and homosexuality were never used by the writers of the old and new testaments. Bible translations that do use it are in error. The Bible does refer to Sodomites and Sodomy. Jesus certainly did not speak about homosexuality or Sodomy. Science informs us that some people are born with same-sex attraction. It is not a lifestyle; it is not a choice (American Psychological Association 2024a). It certainly not a mental sickness or disordered condition, moral depravity, deviant or evil as some

religious and political conservatives still claim. Progressives argue that same-sex attraction is God-endowed. Why would a loving God demand of a person they not act as fully human and demand they deny who they are? A book by (Keane 2001) presents the conservative view; its title is *What some of you were: stories about Christians and homosexuality.* It talks about Christians who do not wish to embrace a gay identity, p. 7, or adopt homosexuality as a lifestyle, p. 12. It does not accept the science. It supports the harmful practice of attempting to use drugs and/or the power of prayer to change a person's sexual orientation. Conservative politicians frequently support these practices, but due to progressive agitation, many Western jurisdictions now closely regulate or criminalize it.

Similarly, science explains that Gender Dysphoria results from hormones that trigger the development of biological sex not working on the brain, reproductive organs and genitals, causing differences between them (American Psychological Association 2024b). Progressives argue if a loving God is in control, why would a conservative Christian find any fault with any of these Christian brothers and sisters all made in God's image. They ask, is the conservative mind so fixated on order and hard categorization that it cannot cope with the challenge to the binary order of male and female? Again, why would a loving God demand of a person they not act as fully human and demand that they deny who they are?

Homosexuality and Transsexuality are a major part of the so-called culture wars, especially in the West. Despite the increased acceptance of science by society over the last few decades and the legislative provisions against the discrimination and vilification of LGBTIQA+ people, the political conservative often exhibits a bare tolerance through homophobia/transphobia. These hard-won rights by progressives are likely to be under threat in the future. Progressives are concerned about a reintroduction of civil criminality for homosexuality and that policies for greater inclusion will be wound back.

3.6. Summary

Genetics predisposes people to view and understand the world in different ways (Hibbing et al. 2014). Nurture has an influence. Ideally, conservatives and progressives should acknowledge in the other that they do see and understand differently. Any discourse between the two should respect the other with the mutual assumption that those beliefs and values are genuinely held. The unfortunate truth is that the strongly different mindsets may be irreconcilable if one group asserts that only they know the mind of God and claim they are the 'authentic' or 'orthodox' of this or that, for example, Anglicans. This means discourse is probably a waste of time. Perhaps all that is left for the progressives is to say what Oliver Cromwell said on 3 August 1650 to the General Assembly of Scotland, who were supporting Charles II: *I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken*. The AC schism is probably the result of that irreconcilability. Historic Anglicanism had tolerated different mindsets for 500 years with their inevitable tensions, but they have been held in balance until now. So why the schism now?

4. The Timing of the Schism

4.1. Introduction

To repeat, the schism in the AC is a reality, and there is every sign that it will widen. The question is, why has this happened now, that is, over the last forty years? It is because the threats to the conservatives' belief system have strengthened, and the conservatives have responded predictably. These threats are internal and external. Attention has already been given to internal threats, so little more is said here. The external threat arises from the seismic change occurring in contemporary society, especially for the Western world. This is often referred to as secularization.

4.2. Internal Threat

Despite having the power and the disposition to use it, the conservatives have failed to combat the progressives' influence within the AC, at least for most Western-world provinces. Recently, this has played out in regard to the particular issues of gender equality and homosexuality and gender identity in the church. After a protracted and bitter battle over gender equality, many parts of the AC, including moderate conservatives, chose to ordain women to holy orders. Yet it is a battle only half won by the progressives. Recently, the more protracted and bitter battle was over homosexuality and gender identity. Conservatives determined this was one battle they could not lose. They had the numbers and the money and were strong on threats to leave the AC. The conservatives won the battle, but it proved a pyrrhic victory. They were shocked when parts of the AC introduced a blessing of same-sex unions and ordaining and appointing openly gay persons as priests and bishops. It was a challenge to the traditional meaning of Christian marriage as only being between a man and a woman. Secular conservatives in the Western world also share this traditional meaning. It should be noted that the Bible appears to permit polygamy and concubine 'marriage'.

It may also be noted that it is politically easier for religious conservatives to fight 'proxy wars' than convict progressive priests and bishops on charges of heresy for challenging conservative interpretations of the Bible, although this was attempted against the American priest Walter Righter, for instance (Spong 2000, pp. 408–9). Proxy wars are a different matter. The proxy wars of gender equality and homosexuality and gender identity have witnessed religious hatred, and as (Graham 1994, p. 115) has observed, *Christian hatred is powerful because it arises out of deep convictions which really matter to the haters*. Again, homophobia, sexism and misogyny remain a problem within secular society, as well as for the church.

So why a schism now? Conservative fear reached its tipping point, although no province or diocese has officially 'overturned' the fundamentals of Anglicanism of sola scripture, the creeds and the 1662 Prayer Book. Progressives have argued that the words of the Bible, creeds and the Prayer Book require new interpretations, but this does not in their view represent the rejection of the fundamentals. What drives the conservative mindset is the heightened fear of these new interpretations. Their psychological defenses were finally breached, and they chose to separate out from those who they identify as the source of this fear.

4.3. External Threat

The decline in Christian church affiliation in the Western world is well documented. In many places, another tipping point has been reached with the prediction that a church or groups of churches will continue the decline, possibly to extinction. The Church of England is one of them (Brown 2001; Brown and Woodhead 2016). This has largely been brought about by powerful forces of change in contemporary society.

Conservative Anglicans, as well as those from other Christian communions and churches, respond to this external threat in three main ways, often in combination. The first way is to ignore it and claim that God will not let the church die. The second way is the call for a double down of effort and advocate for a return to 'biblical' Christianity. This refers to their interpretation. The third way is to blame progressives, who they claim to have adopted sinful secular values and beliefs and have 'sold out' the church. Progressives respond by claiming they have been made scapegoats for the poor mission record of conservatives.

Studies around the world reveal that church attendance has declined dramatically in the Western world (Peterson 2017; Inglehart 2021; Tickle 2012). Currently, numbers are holding or increasing in Africa, Asia and South America (Goodhew 2017; Stanton 2019).

The AC in the West has exhibited the steepest decline, including conservative congregations. Australia is an example and mirrors what is similar elsewhere. The Census of 1971 revealed Christian affiliation to be 86% of the population, which declined to 50% by 2021. Anglicans and Catholics are the largest Australian communions. Catholics declined from 30% in 1971 to 20% in 2021, whilst Anglicans declined from 30% in 1971 to 10% in 2021 (Bragger 2022). The seismic forces at work are predicted to accelerate in the future, and as a result, institutional Christianity may well be transformed beyond recognition. It may survive, even continue to grow, amongst the developing world, but eventually these same seismic forces will impact it in the same manner.

As mentioned, conservatives from all Christian communions and churches argue that the progressives are important contributors to the decline in numbers. The claim is that this is because progressives have forsaken 'true' Christianity and have accepted prevailing secular values and beliefs. Progressives view the conservative solution of a return to 'biblical Christianity' as naïve. They argue it is the prevailing conservative doctrinal beliefs and values which are the cause of the decline (Root 2022; Dickerson 2013; Stanton 2019). Ironically then, the argument may be put on its head. Conservatives have had, for a very long time, the power and influence in all the major Christian Communions. The sad state of affairs in the Western church should be viewed as their mission failure to the secular world. They have been a stumbling block for believers not the progressives. They need to embrace missio Dei, God's outward movement to humanity (Gibbs and Bolger 2005).

In the West, secular society has little to do with the institutional church; America may be an exception. They view it as being irrelevant to their lives. It is not because they are hostile to it; worse, they are simply indifferent to it. Despite this, conservative politicians still court and value religious conservative support. Many of these are likely to be not committed Christians and at best are loosely aligned with a church.

4.4. The Developing World

Conservative Anglicans proudly point to the thriving churches of the Global South, especially the African provinces. Here, conservative Anglicanism may last for many more decades. However, as incomes rise, security is established, opportunities for education increase, and there is a shift from pro-fertility norms to individual choice norms (Inglehart 2021, pp. 1–16), it is likely they will experience similar secularization as has happened in the West.

It may be noted that the African Anglican churches are deeply conservative and strongly opposed to homosexuality. Some provinces are homophobic. The primates of Uganda, Nigeria and Rwanda, for instance, publicly support some of the harshest and discriminatory legislation in the world against LGBTIQA+ persons. Criticism recently from the former Archbishop of Canterbury concerning the Primate of Uganda for supporting such harsh laws drew a rebuke, and he was told that the days of colonialism are gone and any advice from Canterbury was unwelcome (Guardian 2023).

Many Africans, like those Anglican primates, deny that homosexuality was, and is, prevalent in Africa. When it is pointed out this claim is patently untrue, a common response is that it was introduced by white men from the West (Msibi 2011; Bright 2021). In fact, the reverse may be true. Anti-homosexuality attitudes were introduced to Africa by the white conservative missionaries, not its promotion (Aranyev and Poyker 2021). Conservative Anglican missionaries were prominent in Africa.

Conservative African Anglicans have been very important in making the schism a reality. Their overwhelming numbers have been decisive in opposing the progressives and in ensuring the schism and the transformation of the AC into something it traditionally

never was. For some conservatives in the West, they are becoming an embarrassment to the cause (Brown and Woodhead 2016, pp. 136–39).

So why a schism now? Again, fear generated by secularization has reached the tipping point as conservatives experience a decline in the power and influence they once wielded in the church and society. Progressives argue that the conservative call to double down and return to 'biblical' Christianity will be their ultimate downfall as secular society in the West views them as irrelevant to their lives.

4.5. Summary

In summary, the churches of the Anglican schismatics possess little of the four hallmarks of Anglicanism. They are no longer Catholic and reformed but are now congregations of a strong Calvinistic theology. They no longer embrace tolerance and comprehensiveness but confess to a narrow range of Evangelical beliefs and values. Reason and science are undervalued and ignored where they appear to contradict biblical literalism. Finally, insofar as tradition is valued it is only that which again accords with their strong Calvinistic beliefs and values. As the internal threat from progressives and the external threat from secularization gather momentum, more parishes and dioceses will become schismatic. The schismatic congregations possess vestiges of the Anglican hallmarks. Their claim that they are the 'orthodox' Anglicans is false.

5. Commentary and Conclusions

There were four main questions addressed in this paper. The first question was, why has the AC undergone a substantial transformation? The schism is usually explained as a result of opposed doctrinal beliefs and values between progressives and conservatives. The latter felt so threatened that they eventually separated themselves out from the progressive threat and in their own words viewed themselves as a holy remnant. In doing so, they minimized the risk of pollution from those who held, in their view, unorthodox or heretical beliefs and values. Mindset provides an understanding that is fundamental. It explains why these beliefs and values are held in the first place and how people of different mindsets interact with each other in society. Genetics is very important but is supplemented by lived experience. Those who possess a strong conservative or progressive mindset find it difficult to engage in effective discourse. This is particularly because of the attributes common to a strong conservative mindset. This can lead to irreconcilable differences and the absence of effective discourse. The result is for those of each strong mindset to coalesce into broad groups, divided by their very different beliefs and values, competing for those of more moderate mindsets. Ideally, those of a strong mindset should recognize that science reveals that it is significantly determined by genetics. This means those of the opposing mindset should acknowledge that the others hold genuinely held beliefs and values which determine how they interact with society. Unfortunately, as the research reveals, this is difficult because those of a strong conservative mindset possess inherent attributes that may preclude the ability to reciprocate such acknowledgement. As the felt threat of progressive criticisms of the keystone of their beliefs and values, their Word of God, together with the external threat of secularization reached their tipping points, they reacted predictably.

People with a strong progressive mindset are often at a disadvantage compared to those of a strong conservative mindset. In the first place is having to often deal with a closed conservative mind. In the second place is the inherent attribute that conservatives seek expressions of power and are willing to use it. In the third place is the difficulty in acknowledging that conservatives really do see and interact with the world differently and that they hold genuine beliefs and values which should be respected. Although, where this is conceded, progressives claim this is seldom reciprocated. Finally is the greater readiness

of conservatives to accept that the ends justify the means, which inflicts harm which they often fail to see or which they minimize.

The second question was, what have been the driving causal forces of the schism? Applying the research about mindset, two main driving forces were identified. These constitute the threats, real or perceived, felt by those of a conservative mindset. Both threats have been gathering momentum for some time. In the first place is the progressive criticism of the how the conservatives viewed the Bible and how it should it be interpreted. Progressives deny that the Bible is simply the Word of God, claimed to be inerrant and infallible. Progressives also criticize the hermeneutics used by conservatives. They argue that a simple literalist interpretation is inadequate as it identifies as God-given beliefs and values, many of which are not relevant for today, and is incompatible with a loving and merciful God. Conservatives fear if this authority is weakened then the whole edifice of their belief system and its underlying values will collapse. As mindset predicted, the progressive successes within the AC were aggressively responded to by the conservatives. When against the odds these successes continued, a tipping point was reached, and any of the threatened conservatives separated themselves away from those who threatened them.

At the same time, those of a conservative mindset were threatened by powerful forces at work in a secular society they view as evil. It resulted in a dramatic fall in affiliations with the AC and other Christian communions and churches. Another tipping point was reached. Again, according to mindset, the conservatives acted predictably. They denied science. They called for a return to biblical Christianity, their brand, and they blamed the progressives for their own mission failure.

A third question was, how have these forces worked out in history for the AC? Our reference to Anglican history suggested that from the reformation there were inherent tensions between different groups. These traditionally have been identified as the Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals. In fact, the main opposing groups were those with a strong conservative mindset and those with a progressive mindset. The former comprised many Anglo-Catholics who preferred much of the 'old religion' as well as the overwhelming majority of protestant Evangelicals. Progressives were always represented within the 'broad church' group but had to wait for the Enlightenment to further their progressive beliefs and values. As has been mentioned, it has taken some time for this to gather momentum. These tensions were largely kept under control, and the Anglican church/Communion was often admired for its comprehensiveness and tolerance. The conservative schismatics display the opposite attributes. As has been argued, they have transformed/are transforming the AC into something different, and their claim to be 'orthodox' Anglicans cannot be substantiated.

As was discussed earlier in this paper, the Anglican Communion was characterized as a religious organization that was more open to progressive ideas than others. It was/is not a confessing church which is decentralized in structure. It insisted on a few doctrinal essentials and allowed great freedom to its adherents. It also had a more positive view of secular society than many other churches. It was also a church that historically insisted that the Bible be interpreted with due regards to science and tradition. It is not surprising that under the impact of the powerful forces of secularization it should experience schism compared to the other major Christian communions. The strong conservative mindset has a disposition to use power for its purpose, and that is what has happened recently.

A fourth question was, is the AC transformation unique or does it have relevance for other parts of the religious domain? The short answer is that the AC transformation is not unique. Reference was just made that given the nature of historic Anglicanism it was suspectable to the strong conservative disposition to use, and exercise, power when threatened. Progressives have a more formidable challenge against the highly centralized Magisterium of the Catholic Church or the strong ethnic and cultural identification of the

Orthodox, whether it be Russian, Greek or Serbian, for example. The application of mindset suggests that denominations are considerably less important now than in the past. What is now important is the strong conservative mindset and the strong progressive mindset. It is likely that progressives from all denominations will increasingly coalesce into some new arrangement. There is a future for progressive Anglicanism and progressive Christianity as a whole. The same coalescence will occur for conservatives. Substantial transformation is occurring now for Anglicanism. It has begun with other Christian communions and churches. The conservatives will be overwhelmingly superior in number to begin with. However, it may be argued that the conservative refusal to adapt and change will be their downfall and result in the continued decline in conservative church affiliation in the West. Over time, the forces causing the decline in Christianity in the Western world will impact the present-day developing countries as they achieve development. This may be decades into the future, but it is likely this will happen.

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Article

Law as a "Mystic Order": A Critical Approach to Legal Hermeneutics from the Perspective of Mysticism

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Abstract: This paper aims to challenge interpretivism as an inadequate approach to legal hermeneutics, offering a novel response to the issue through the lens of mysticism. We will follow the premise, developed by thinkers from the traditional philosophical canon such as Derrida, Schmitt and Gadamer (among others), that every act of legal interpretation contains an apophatic dimension. However, we will delve deeper into this notion from the perspective of mysticism itself (rather than deconstructionism or hermeneutics). That is, we will approach interpretivism from a perspective different from the one usually found in the legal-philosophical canon—namely, mysticism—with the aim of understanding and illuminating some of its dimensions. Specifically, we will explore the mystical idea that, while recognizing the dynamic and vital nature of existence is essential, it is even more fundamental to orient existential vitality toward truth through an act of concentration and will. This will allow us to justify that the concept of "mystic order", which we formulate and develop in this paper, is useful in addressing the challenges of juridical hermeneutics, as it combines conceptual rigor in approaching law (hence "order") with the vitality, immeasurability, ineffability, and dynamism inherent in concrete reality (the "mystical" aspect).

Keywords: interpretivism; hermeneutics; law; mysticism; mystic order

1. Introduction

In contemporary times, the idea that existence is a process of *becoming* is predominant. As Underhill aptly explains, the essence of reality, rather than any substantive normative order, has come to be understood as a dynamic flow of constant creation and movement as follows: "life is an eternal Becoming, a ceaseless changefulness" (Underhill 1911, p. 35). This shift has led to the disappearance of any solid foundations of the social and political fabric. We find ourselves, in Bauman's words, in a liquid modernity where "patterns and configurations are no longer «given», let alone «self-evident»; there are just too many of them, clashing with one another and contradicting one another's commandments, so that each one has been stripped of a good deal of compelling, coercively constraining powers" (Bauman 2000, p. 7).

This metaphysical-ontological premise has its epistemological counterpart. It is argued that, due to its inherent limitations, the human mind is incapable of formulating a holistic (conceptual) image of the ever-changing reality. In Kantian terms (Kant 2009, pp. A 236–60, B 295–315), since reality itself is inaccessible to us, the representations (conceptual image) of it we perceive have already gone through the distorting filter that is human finitude. This has led to the (correct) conclusion that human beings can only interpret reality in a way that is partial and incomplete by definition. While some optimists, such as Gadamer (2013, pp. 321–22), argue that dialogue (the fusion of horizons) allows us to gradually piece

together the puzzle of "the real" and thus avoid falling into total relativism, the prevailing tone remains consistent; there is nothing solid or static to cling to in this existence. We are creatures inevitably subjected to the randomness and chaos of life's advancing tide.

In summary, contemporary times are marked by the abandonment of the belief in the unifying and systematizing power of reason. Instead, there is a leap of faith into *becoming*, into the continuous flow of life. This has caused the individual to withdraw inwardly, becoming confined within the bounds of their subjectivity. It is perceived that the "screen" upon which the exceptional images provided by concrete reality are projected—the human mind or the self—is the only enduring element, the sole constant in life's flux. Therefore, the individual (knowing subject) has become the center of existence. Concrete reality, given its liquidity and inconstancy, is secondary.

The foregoing has its counterpart in the realm of law. Based on these metaphysical-epistemological premises, it is argued that law is a living phenomenon that is constantly evolving and that cannot be reduced to a few principles or written statutes (challenging, depending on the interpretation, the claims of both positivism and natural law theories). Derrida, for instance, argues that law is built over mystical foundations, since it lacks a fully rational or objective grounding. Differently put, the foundation—or the pre-juridical original situation—is constituted by an absence, a silence in which all possible institutionalizable orders present themselves as equally legitimate. This silence ceases once, through an authoritative and violent act, a specific legal order is established ex nihilo. In his words, "the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law [*droit*], making law, would consist of a coup de force, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contradict or invalidate. No justificatory discourse could or should insure the role of metalanguage in relation to the performativity of institutive language or to its dominant interpretation" (Derrida 1992, p. 13). Therefore, an apophatic or negative approach, commonly found in mystical negative theology, would be the appropriate tool for approaching the foundations on which law is built.

Similarly, authors such as Schmitt (2021a, pp. 51–53) and Dworkin (2013) assert that written statutes, due to their finitude and fragility, cannot account for the ever-exceptional cases that law must address. Consequently, it is the judge (the subject) who must bridge the gap between law and reality through interpretation. The focus shifts from *how* decisions should be made in law to *who* decides—a return to the perennial question of sovereignty, as Schmitt (2005) aptly notes. This is to say, the essence of law is identified with the arduous task of the judge of connecting the realm of what *ought to be*, where ideal descriptions of the world reside, with the realm of *what is*, which resists manifesting in a typical or regular manner (Schmitt 2021b; Husserl 1964, p. 295).

Fortunately, written laws or statutes present an interpretative openness that must be resolved by the judge in its application to specific cases. This gives the legal system a certain capacity to adapt and address an ever-emerging reality (Schmitt 2005), thereby avoiding the need for constant legislative reforms or a reliance on judicial activism. However, this same openness poses significant risks to the legal phenomenon, as it is easy to fall into two equally problematic hermeneutic extremes as follows: subsumptivism and interpretivism (Schmitt 2021a; Rosler 2020). In the first stance, the judge merely matches cases to the letter of the law, disregarding the richness and uniqueness of the specific situation that demands justice (Dworkin 1985, 1986, 2013). In the second, the judges understand law as a domain where they can project their subjectivity without restraint. This leads to the distortion of the meaning of words so that they align with what the judge believes law ought to say.

This paper challenges interpretivism as an inadequate approach to legal hermeneutics, offering a novel response to the issue through the lens of mysticism. We will follow

the premise, developed by thinkers from the traditional philosophical canon such as Derrida and Gadamer (among others), that every act of legal interpretation contains an apophatic dimension—that is, one that cannot be grasped through intellect or thought and, since any description imposes limitations, can solely be approached through negation (Cf. Plotinus 1984, *Enneads V*, 3.13)—but we will delve deeper into this notion from the perspective of mysticism itself (rather than deconstructionism or hermeneutics). That is, we will approach interpretivism from a perspective different from the one usually found in the legal-philosophical canon—namely, mysticism—with the aim of understanding and illuminating some of its features. Specifically, we will explore the mystical premise that, while recognizing the dynamic and vital nature of existence is essential, it is even more fundamental to orient "existential becoming" toward truth through an act of concentration and will. This will allow us to justify that the concept of "mystic order", which we formulate and develop in this paper, is useful in addressing the challenges of juridical hermeneutics, as it combines conceptual rigor in approaching law (hence "order") with the vitality, immeasurability, ineffability, and dynamism inherent in concrete reality (the "mystical" aspect).

We resort to mysticism for this endeavor because this tradition is paradigmatically aware of the oxymoronic stance that we seek to introduce into the legal hermeneutic discussion through the concept of "mystic order". As Underhill explains, mysticism recognizes that "we shall find in emotion the power which drives the mental machinery", while at the same time arguing that such "a power [is] as strong as steam, though as evanescent—unless it be put to work" (Underhill 1911, p. 57). In other words, blindly surrendering to the strong and violent emotional oscillations of existence's vital dimension is insufficient; it is necessary to employ reason as an instrument to channel the ever-exceptional and unfathomable reality. This rigorous understanding of mysticism, as opposed to the interpretation of the term "mystical" as referring to magical or esoteric matters (Underhill 1911, pp. 178–99), holds a dual virtue. On the one hand, it acknowledges and values the vitality and uniqueness of concrete life. On the other, it recognizes the importance and necessity of attributing some order, however provisional and incomplete, upon alterity. The concept of mystic order, which we elaborate and develop in this paper, allows us to adequately encompass both dimensions.

Given the breadth of authors and perspectives within the mystical tradition, we have chosen to focus on a single thinker, namely, David Hawkins (1927–2012). We will argue that Hawkins' work is particularly valuable in the hermeneutic–legal context due to its dual virtue as follows: on one hand, it counters the risk of interpretivism by defending a robust conception of truth and its centrality (i); on the other, it avoids a naive approach to truth by advocating a hermeneutic path (ii). Moreover, the mystical dimension of Hawkins' thought serves as a fundamental resource for addressing the hermeneutic–legal problem, as he identifies a position analogous to interpretivism in the theological–spiritual domain—what he terms *religionism*. Following the logic of political theology (Schmitt 2005), Hawkins applies his reflections and conclusions on religionism to the legal and political domains. This leads him to a stark analysis of the current state of legal hermeneutics and to propose criteria and tools for addressing its shortcomings. In summary, the aim of this paper is to argue that Hawkins' mystical hermeneutics provides elements to rescue interpretation from the interpretivism that is dominant in contemporary legal hermeneutics.

The approach proposed here is novel, necessitating its inclusion in the current philosophical and legal discourse. For this reason, we will provide the reader with an overview of the foundational elements that will be utilized throughout the paper, as well as the way they will be interconnected. First, we will offer a brief overview of contemporary existential hermeneutics to justify that the retreat into individual subjectivity—paradigmatic

within this philosophical tradition—establishes the foundation upon which interpretivism is constructed (2). Next, we will outline the hypothesis we aim to substantiate as follows: that certain reflections by David Hawkins on truth and human understanding are valuable for addressing the problem of relativism that challenges hermeneutics in general, and legal hermeneutics in particular (3–4). Before proceeding to the points outlined, we find it important to address the potential skepticism of the readers. While this proposal may initially seem unconventional, it is firmly rooted in profound philosophical and academic works. Heidegger himself, in Heidegger (1966) and Heidegger (2011), highlights mysticism as a line of thought that allows a return to reality (facticity or concreteness) while acknowledging the influence of human subjectivity in shaping the world. Similarly, as previously noted, Derrida (1992) identifies a connection between the foundational force of law and mysticism. Finally, Herrero (2015) sees in Carl Schmitt's legal and political thought—centered on the exceptional nature of existence—the proposal of a mystical nature. Thus, this paper does not aim to disruptively incorporate foreign ideas into the fields of law and philosophy but rather to deepen and enrich the arguments offered by these authors.

2. Existential and Legal Hermeneutics: The Horizon as a Condition for Human Understanding

Hermeneutics, or the art of interpretation, in its existential dimension, posits that human understanding is finite and projective. This means that human beings are denied the possibility of unmediated and pristine access to truth. Language, culture, and personal life experiences, among many other factors, create what can be understood as a screen between the subject and concrete reality.[1] Gadamer (2013, pp. 313–14), following Heidegger, refers to this filter that stands between the subject and factual reality as the *horizon*. In his winter semester lectures of 1925–1926, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, Heidegger illustrates the concept of horizon with the following striking example:

> "Before going on with our discussion, let's take some examples of deception and the covering-over of beings. Say I am walking in a dark woods and see something coming toward me through the fir trees. «It's a deer», I say. The statement need not be explicit. As I get nearer to it, I see it's just a bush that I'm approaching. In understanding, addressing, and being concerned with this thing, I have acted as one who covers-over: the unexpressed statement shows the being as something other than it is" (Heidegger 2010, p. 158).

This example of confusion, Heidegger tells us, reveals at least three key points. First, for an idea of an entity to present itself to someone, it is necessary for an entity susceptible to being apprehended in some way to first present itself to a person's senses. This requires "an a priori disclosure of world" (Heidegger 2010, p. 158). Second, a certain interpretative act of understanding by the perceiving agent is required. In other words, it is necessary that "as I approach the thing, I take it as something" (Heidegger 2010, p. 158). Put differently, the mind must seek to conceptually articulate what is presented to the senses (interpreting it as a "deer" and not as a "rock", for instance). Third, Heidegger (2010, pp. 158–59) points out that we always operate within a pre-existing framework of understanding that determines how we interpret things. I could not have stated "this is a deer" if it were not plausible within a prior interpretative horizon to imagine such entities wandering through a forest. This prior framework through which we apprehend and understand the world is known as the *horizon* (whose influence on human understanding, as we will explain later, creates significant challenges for legal hermeneutics). The horizon thus constitutes both the condition of possibility for human understanding and a filter that distorts what is perceived through the lens of the individual's prejudices (pre-judgments) when understanding reality.

The foregoing allows us to recognize that one of the central problems of hermeneutics is as follows: if everyone has their own horizon, then there are infinite possible appropriations (interpretations) of the world. If this is the case, it raises the following critical question: how can we distinguish a true interpretation (aligned with reality) from a false one? In other words, how can we distinguish truth from falsehood? Therefore, the relevance of the issue at the core of the hermeneutic discussion—truth, the possibility of knowing it, and communicating it to others—leads us to recognize that, as Volpi (1998) rightly states, the hermeneutic–existential discussion, far from being merely theoretical, has significant implications for practical knowledge. It highlights the need to reassess and understand the essential characteristics of knowledge related to action, particularly by drawing on the model of *phronesis* or prudential knowledge (Volpi 1998, pp. 384–85). Consequently, the implications of these matters for law—an area where prudence is essential to apply general rules to specific cases—are quite clear, since the ability to navigate the tension between individual interpretative horizons and the demands of universal justice are crucial for a legal system to properly function.

Approaching the problem of truth and its various modes of being unveiled from law, while seemingly unusual at first glance, has both a clear rationale and practical significance. Gadamer, a disciple of Heidegger, asserts that legal hermeneutics is not only a valuable discipline for lawyers but also for philosophers, as it serves as a paradigm for the operation of practical knowledge (Gadamer 2013, p. 345). The German philologist argues that the interpretation of legal texts provides insight into the functioning of the human mind since it is evident that, when reading a text, an individual does not merely grasp the meaning embedded in it by the author. For better or worse, every reader brings themselves into the act of understanding a text, projecting their prejudices and prior knowledge onto it (which is why we often trust the interpretations of experts in their respective fields). At the same time, it is undeniable that a reader who approaches a text, with a genuine interest in expanding their knowledge, does not limit themselves to merely seeing a reflection of their prejudices in it—except in cases where a dogmatic or coercive approach seeks to impose their perspective onto the text. Instead, every act of textual understanding generates a tension between what the text conveys and the conceptual categories from which the interpreter engages with it (Grondin 2022, p. 27; H.-G. Gadamer 2013, pp. 349–50). Gadamer observes that every act of text interpretation involves at least three poles in tension as follows: the real pole, representing the specific case that demands justice (or salvation); the ideal pole, representing the network of meanings that give coherence to the words in the text; and the interpreter, who occupies a complex existential position as they mediate the collision between these two worlds while simultaneously participating in each. Legal interpretation, he argues, is paradigmatic in this regard because a legal (and also theological) understanding is not aimed at grasping texts in the abstract, but applies them practically to concrete circumstances. This entails that all these elements—the real and ideal poles and the interpreter—engage in a relational dynamic that Ollero, commenting Kaufmann's works, articulates as follows: "when law is «applied», it is realized. A mediation occurs between two worlds: the world of everyday reality with its legally relevant life circumstances and the world of law with its norms that contain an ought to be. Through the realization of law, the *ought to be* and the *is* come into contact; law is the correspondence between what *ought to be* and what *is*" (Ollero 2006, p. 10).

By conceptualizing law as a paradigm for the functioning of practical knowledge in general (H.-G. Gadamer 2013, pp. 318–49), it becomes clear that a judge resolving a specific case must do more than merely apply legal categories mechanically. Such an approach would lead to the neutralization of the world (Schmitt 2007), as it is evident that no law (statute or precedent), regardless of how well written or carefully conceived,

can fully encompass the richness of concrete existence. Likewise, judges should not base their decision exclusively on the contingencies of the concrete world. In such a scenario, justice would become a slave to the ever-changing real pole, making a relatively rational and forward-looking perspective impossible. Instead, the judge's role is to address the specificities of the case at hand in light of the abstract conceptual categories provided by the legal system (Alexy 2022). At the same time, however, the judge must avoid the mistake of disregarding the real pole or assuming that being—in the sense of what actually occurs in concrete reality—always aligns seamlessly with what ought to be—in this case, the dictates of statutes (Kögler 2021, p. 294). In other words, understanding a text in this context is not a matter of first grasping it abstractly, detached from the particularities of the case requiring a legal or theological solution, and then applying it. On the contrary, understanding such texts inherently includes their application.

The hermeneutic tradition therefore emphasizes what the subject contributes to the act of knowledge rather than what reality presents to the senses in the context of human understanding—though, as Vigo (2005) notes, this varies depending on whether hermeneutic thought leans toward suspicion or charity. On the one hand, this is a positive insight, as it allows us to recognize that the image of the world perceived in our minds is neither identical nor even remotely similar to reality itself—if such a thing even exists. It is merely an image (representation) of reality, and, as such, it can only capture limited aspects of what it represents. On the other hand, this stance is epistemologically dangerous, as it can easily lead to the claim that the world is constituted by human subjectivity. In other words, it may suggest that we create the world through our horizon, thereby asserting that truth is an arbitrary human construction projected onto reality (it is important to note that Gadamer specifically rejects relativism and actively argues against it). In the legal realm, understanding legal hermeneutics in relativistic terms has disastrous consequences. The danger lies in such a position's propensity to devolve into what Rosler (2020) calls interpretivism, a perspective characterized, as Sáez notes in his commentary on the Argentine jurist's work, by "placing the judicial function on the same level as the legislative function. As a co-author, the judge, provided they justify their interpretation under the best light, may modify the work that has been handed to them. Consequently, the judge no longer applies the law but may also create law" (Sáez Almonacid 2022, p. 39). This raises significant concerns, since the consequences of semantic relativism in the interpretation and application of the law are more harmful than those arising from the production of laws within a relativist paradigm—as Montesquieu aptly points out, despotic judicial power affects the lives of concrete individuals, and, if it lacks a proper system of checks and balances, it has the potential to destroy them (Saralegui 2022, p. 126)

In summary, the hermeneutic tradition sheds light on what the subject contributes to the act of understanding. This is particularly valuable for legal knowledge, as it provides tools for the law to address the ever-changing nature of reality. However, this line of thought raises the following critical issue: the establishment of criteria to determine the correctness of an interpretation. That is, it intensifies the following question: how can we differentiate an interpretation that aligns with reality from one that does not? In the legal domain, this challenge becomes even more complex because the hermeneutic openness of legal texts makes it all the more pressing to provide a concrete answer to the question of the conditions under which a legal interpretation can be considered correct. As we will see in the next section, David Hawkins' hermeneutic-mystical thought directly addresses this question, making it prudent to attempt to address this formidable problem from the theoretical framework he provides.

3. Mysticism and Its Critique of Semantic Relativism

Before examining Hawkins' thought, we find it useful to contextualize our proposal within a broader philosophical background that seeks to establish mysticism as a valuable framework for finding a middle ground between extreme rationalism, which dismisses facticity due to its irregular and atypical unfolding, and contemporary vitalism, which reduces the essence of reality to the flux of the mundane (Underhill 1911, p. 49). The virtues of this tradition, particularly when addressing the problem of the exaltation of human subjectivity, are at least twofold. First, individuals often categorized as "mystics" tend to show a profound concern for the conditions of the possibility of human understanding.[2] At the same time, however, this tradition remains focused on reality itself. In other words, mysticism seeks to elucidate the conditions under which human beings can achieve clearer and deeper access to reality. This perspective leads Underhill, a prominent 20th-century scholar of mysticism, to define mysticism as "the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union to a greater or less[er] degree" (Underhill 1914, p. 3).[3] Similarly, Heidegger, in his later works, views mysticism as "a discourse that fruitfully responds to a cultural crisis of increasing fragmentation and a perceived lack of contact with reality" (O'Regan 2013, p. 666). In this sense, mysticism functions as a remedy for the contemporary subject's disconnection from reality. This is the context in which the legal and political reflections of David Hawkins, a contemporary mystic, are incorporated into the hermeneutic–legal discussion. Mysticism's dual emphasis on subjective conditions and an unwavering focus on reality offers a unique perspective for addressing the challenges posed by the interplay between subjective interpretation and objective legal norms.

Hawkins,[4] like Heidegger and Gadamer, acknowledges the hermeneutic structure of human understanding. In his thought, we can identify two interconnected premises that, when combined, yield a syllogistic conclusion. These are the following:

a. Human beings lack the intuitive capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood. In other words, humans are finite and precarious creatures, requiring time and the use of complex methods to approach truth, even if only distantly.
b. The image of the world we perceive in our minds is not necessarily a faithful reflection of reality. Our perception is distorted by prejudices (pre-judgments) that reside within our minds. Thus, human understanding is inherently hermeneutic (interpretative) in nature.[5]
c. By linking these two premises, we arrive at the conclusion that we (human beings) cannot ascertain whether the interpretation of the world presented to our minds in any given situation is correct or not (i.e., aligned with reality).

According to Hawkins, this issue—the inability to intuitively distinguish truth form falsehood—lies at the root of all human conflict and carries profound legal and political implications. In the following discussion, we will examine how Hawkins develops each of these points.

For Hawkins,

> "all definitions and terms include presumptions about semantics as well as the dialectics of logic, epistemological premises, and perceptions, all of which end up at the impasse of the conundrum: How do we know, or how do we even know that we know? The conundrum then continues on into discussions of theology, metaphysics, and, eventually, the epistemological dilemma of differentiation between the subjective and the supposedly objective categories of argument and experience" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 13).

This suggests that any approach to a phenomenon is accompanied by a set of pre-suppositions, often taken for granted, which shape the horizon from which perceptions

are interpreted. In other words, Hawkins acknowledges that human understanding is projective in nature. Before encountering reality, our minds are equipped with a series of pre-existing concepts that we project or "throw" onto what we perceive. These a priori concepts, often unconscious, act as a filter through which reality is perceived. Like any filter, the resulting image is not a faithful representation of what it portrays but a distorted version of it—much like the filters applied in modern social media platforms like Instagram. Hawkins argues that the wise person is one who can discern between what is being projected, which is contingent and always subject to change, and what is real, which is constant and unchanging

Hawkins also acknowledges the finitude and precariousness of the human mind. He argues that, while human beings have the potential to know truth, they lack the innate ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. The error we consistently make, he asserts, is attributing truth to our perception of reality (the image presented to our minds) rather than to reality itself. As we can see, Hawkins' argument closely aligns with that of authors in the hermeneutic tradition, though there is a specific difference as follows: the American thinker unambiguously states that some interpretations of the world are closer to the truth than others (Hawkins 2021c, pp. 37–38), and that some are definitively beyond the bounds of what Kant (2009, pp. A 235–36, B 294–95) would describe as the "island of knowledge". Furthermore, he emphasizes that inadequate interpretations of the world are far more prevalent, warning against naivety when confronting diverse hermeneutic perspectives on the same phenomenon. Also, Hawkins (2021c, pp. 48–53) cautions humanity about the existential, political, and legal dangers inherent in relativizing truth through hermeneutics, advocating instead for a vigilant and discerning approach to the interpretation of reality.

In addressing relativism, Hawkins, after summarizing twelve key points encapsulating the essence of contemporary hermeneutic–semantic relativism (Hawkins 2021b, pp. 245–46), argues that this perspective is grounded in the idea that "language is structuralized social myth, the product of repressive forces, such as logic, politics, law, science, medicine, psychiatry, religion, etc.", and that " meaning is a consequence of conceptual framework and linguistic/semantic/cultural structure and therefore reflects prejudicial empowerment of repressive elements" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 245). In other words, hermeneutic relativism takes the idea that human understanding is inevitably interpretative and mediated by language and concludes that this recognition legitimizes and validates every individual's interpretation of the world—the notion that each person possesses "their own" truth. According to Hawkins, the fundamental error of this line of thought lies in the failure to discern the various levels of abstraction or meta-layers from which a topic can be approached. This failure, he explains,

> "results in the substitution of emotionalized wishful thinking for the strict dialectic requirements of higher-mind intellection and logic. When separation for the levels of abstraction versus concrete breaks down, there is a collapse between res interna (mentalization) and res externa (the world as it is), resulting in confusion, disorder and incapacitation (as in schizophrenia). The hallmark of higher mind and maturity is the capacity for the discernment that differentiates between reality and emotionally motivated fantasy. While all understanding of communication entails hermeneutics (i.e., interpretation), interpretation itself is based on logical premises and the rules of syllogistic logic in contrast to emotionalism" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 237).

Simply put, Hawkins' critique highlights the dangers of conflating subjective interpretation with universal truth, emphasizing the necessity of grounding interpretation in logical and rational principles to avoid collapsing into confusion and relativistic chaos.

In summary, according to Hawkins (2021b, p. xviii), "by virtue of its innate structure, the human mind is naïve, blind to its limitations, and innocently gullible". That is, the inability of human beings to distinguish truth from falsehood, the inherently projective and interpretative nature of understanding, the tendency to adopt an emotionalized approach, and the failure to recognize the multiple layers from which an entity or subject can be examined create the perfect conditions for a hermeneutic disaster. In the next section, we will see that, far from being harmless, these tendencies have the potential to dismantle the very foundations upon which a community is built.

4. From Religionism to Interpretivism: Legal Hermeneutics Through the Lens of Mysticism

At this point, Hawkins' connection to the mystical tradition becomes particularly relevant. For Hawkins, the fundamental hermeneutic problem, namely, that of truth and the diverse representations of it that can be made, finds its root in the following theological–spiritual issue: the distinction between religionism and religiosity—concepts that trace back to Meister Eckhart's differentiation between God (*Gott*) and the Godhead (*Gottheit*) (Eckhart 2009, pp. 263–64). The problem with what Hawkins calls religionism (Hawkins 2021a, pp. 194–96) lies in the error of venerating religion and its institutional forms rather than God itself. In his words,

> "religion provides inspiration, spiritual facts, and important information, [but] it is only a linear, time-located body of concepts and not the [divine] Reality itself. This results in the commonly observed violation of the essential truth of the religion in the name of the religion itself (e.g., Christian and Islamic crusades, the Inquisition, putting nonbelievers to death, slaughtering the innocent in the name of the religion, political piracy of religion by theocratic totalitarianism, and rationalization of nonintegrity in the "name of the faith", etc.)" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 265).

In other words, in religionism, what is venerated is the idea (the conceptual representation) of God and the way this idea has been appropriated within a specific cultural and historical context. Given the concrete nature of human existence, transcendence must necessarily be appropriated in a specific manner by a particular culture. Therefore, the problem of religionism is not the cultural distortion of religious truth, but the fact that it forgets that such a distortion inevitably exists. Religiosity, on the other hand, which would be the correct stance to take towards religious truth, is an unreserved openness of the mind to truth and transcendence. It has no prejudices or expectations about what transcendence should be according to preconceived normative frameworks. It is, in fact, a total immersion into the unknown (Watts 2011, p. 24). By contrast, religionism is a subtle form of idolatry that places the religious institution above God (Hawkins 2021b, p. 365), as it confines transcendence within predefined conceptual categories.

Hawkins notes that the problem arising from the distinction between religionism and religiosity is not due to an issue inherent to religious truth, but rather to the fact that the human mind tends to confuse, in virtually every field of knowledge, the concept of something (its representation) with the reality to which it refers. Law, Hawkins argues, is no exception to this tendency. In the legal sphere, this confusion often arises between an individual's (or more specifically, a judge's) concept of justice—frequently driven by sentimentalism or dogmatism—and what would actually be just or fair in a specific situation according to the established legal system. In legal hermeneutics, this confusion manifests through what Rosler calls interpretivism. Rosler describes this phenomenon in the following manner:

> "we have become accustomed to believing that legal reasoning is no more and no less than moral (or political) reasoning by other means—a set of rights and principles that no reasonable person can deny, despite their absence from any legal rule, and for that reason must be identified by judges through «interpretation». Today, judges no longer appear mandated to trace law exclusively to its sources—Constitution, Congress, its routes—but are essentially expected to make decisions that they, as co-authors of the law, consider morally or politically appropriate, as though judicial independence today requires judges to arrogate legislative power" (Rosler 2020, p. 13).

Rosler highlights the following critical problem: many judges today tend to confuse the idea of justice in their minds—laden with personal, preconceived notions—with what the law actually states. In other words, just as in religionism a believer confuses and venerates the human appropriation of the divine (*Gott*) rather than the Godhead (*Gottheit*), in interpretivism, a judge venerates their appropriation (interpretation) of the law rather than the law itself.

Hawkins notes that this problem, with its theological–spiritual origins, manifests in law through the relativization caused by the conflation of language with the reality it represents. Deconstructionism—referring primarily to Foucault (2007) and Derrida (1992)—has, according to Hawkins, significantly contributed to the spread of interpretivism, which "instituted the concept that the common law should conform to the feelings and demands of the community, «whether right or wrong», which resulted in politics' influencing what had previously been the «rule of law» (logic)" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 171). This aestheticization of law (Hawkins 2021b, p. 237) results in judicial interpretations that yield outcomes contrary to the law, not based on what the legal framework stipulates, but due to moralizing, contingent positions that gain popularity in specific historical periods. A practical example of this is what Hawkins describes as the *vilification of the police and enforcement of law and order* as follows: "a suspicious truck is stopped and found to be hauling three tons of marijuana. The arrest is later deemed illegal because the drivers were black (therefore arbitrarily «racial profiling», which does not arise if the police officers are black and the criminals are white)" (Hawkins 2021b, pp. 241–42). This demonstrates a distortion of the letter of the law under the influence of prevailing prejudices (pre-judgments) at a given time and society, causing legal decisions to be shaped more by dominant sociocultural narratives than by the objective application of legal norms.

It should be added, even though this matter requires further development, that interpretivism is characterized by its rejection of tradition and a messianic or heroic tendency aimed at correcting and delivering justice for the errors of the past (that law, insofar as it is an instrument of oppression and limitation that restricts individual freedom, is allegedly a symbol of). The problem with this, as Hawkins rightly points out, is that "inasmuch as everyone now living can be conceived of as suffering real consequences of some past condition, there could be constructed, therefore, a defensible view that all persons currently living are «entitled» to recompense for the past ignorance and mistakes of a more primitive Civilization. Injustice can be cited anywhere in past times" (Hawkins 2014a, pp. 128–29). That is, in interpretivism, we can identify a mechanism that, by employing the logic of the present's victimization due to past events, grants a veil of legitimacy to any disruptive legal interpretation—that is, one that diverges from and opposes the traditional foundations of laws and institutions. In other words, it is a way of providing a justification for the free interpretation of law in light of past injustices that the present—presumed to occupy a position of moral superiority over history—is tasked with rectifying.

In summary, the danger with semantic relativism and its interpretivist variant is what Schmitt already pointed out in his Constitutional Theory, namely, the moralization of law

(Schmitt 2008). For Hawkins, this translates into law becoming a stage for the unrestricted display of a judge's subjectivity, a blank canvas on which, through the distortion of the meanings of the words in the law, the judge creates works of art without any creative constraint. Just as in religionism, unjustifiable actions are legitimized in the name of faith, in interpretivism, notoriously unjust and unlawful decisions are justified through an unrestricted redefinition of legal concepts, all in the name of justice.

5. Final Reflections: Law as a Mystic Order

The arguments developed in the preceding sections highlight David Hawkins' sharp ability to identify the existential, legal, and political hermeneutic problems we face today. For this reason, we believe it is reasonable to consider that Hawkins' work is a useful tool in exploring solutions that distance legal praxis from interpretivism. Specifically, we believe that the following four aspects of Hawkins' thought—which were dealt with in supra—illuminate the plausibility of our hypothesis:

1. Hawkins asserts that until humanity discovers a reliable mechanism to distinguish truth from falsehood (adequate or inadequate interpretations of reality), systems must be established to exclude interpretations harmful to the political community. In his words, until a way to distinguish truth from falsehood is found "the average human has been [and is] at the mercy of prevailing belief systems, the influence of memes, propaganda, and the persuasiveness of Popular Extraordinary Delusions and the Madness of Crowds" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 252).
2. A remedy for this hermeneutic–semantic ailment lies in a prudent return to interpretation grounded in the meaning of words. In other words, it is necessary to return to the premise that, "semantically, a term means just what it is defined to be (i.e., res interna), [. . .]. What was overlooked in the redefinition of deconstructionism is that a term also refers to verifiable facts (res externa)" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 243).
3. However, this does not entail a denial of the hermeneutic and interpretive nature of human understanding. His proposal merely seeks to recognize the mutability of concepts in light of the concrete conditions to which they are applied, as conceptual history does,[6] while establishing mechanisms to align such concepts with reality (truth).
4. Hawkins insists that if a political community does not orient its existence toward the search for interpretations aligned with truth, the results will be disastrous. In his words, "a society without intellectual, moral, or ethical structure and discipline becomes not free, as implied by the promises of deconstructive relativism, but instead collapses by degeneration into chaos, civil disorder, and behavioral infantilism. The whole deconstructive theory is the child's game of pretend" (Hawkins 2021b, p. 243).

Hawkins' thought, therefore, allows us to justify that an oxymoronic balance between order and openness—if we may put it this way—is a necessary condition for the healthy development of law and the political community. On the one hand, it is imperative that legal concepts are clear and precise; that is, that semantic relativism is excluded from law and that the meaning of the words shaping the political institutions upon which the community is built remains unambiguous. On the other hand, it is equally crucial that these institutions are not blind to the singularity of the ever-changing reality to which they refer. Social peace and legal certainty do not emerge in a vacuum but within concrete reality. Therefore, the law must maintain a certain openness to effectively produce tangible effects in everyday life. Considering law as a mystic order, which is the idea we have sought to defend in this paper, offers a symbol that encapsulates the necessary tension of opposites required to maintain the delicate balance that law seeks to uphold. It embraces conceptual rigor in approaching law (hence, order), while simultaneously incorporating

the vitality, immeasurability, ineffability, and dynamism inherent in concrete reality (the mystical aspect).

Finally, it is crucial to clarify that these reflections do not pretend to deny or suppress the subjective and visceral dimension of law and legal argumentation (H.-G. Gadamer 2013; Ojakangas 2006) or to dismiss the wealth of insights that law can gain by broadening its horizons and reflecting on the legal phenomenon in light of aesthetics (Wieland 1998; Douzinas and Nead 1999). Rather, the aim is to highlight the dangers of an overemphasis on the human being as an unbound creative subjectivity and to provide mechanisms that allow us to find a prudent middle ground in hermeneutic–legal matters. If we do not at least try to strive towards this goal—a prudent balance in the interpretation of law—then not only interpretivism, but, as Jung says, many other types of *isms* will achieve the "goal of lowering the level of our culture by restricting or altogether inhibiting the possibilities of individual development" (Jung 1980, p. 349).

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Notes

1 (Heidegger 2008; H.-G. Gadamer 2013; Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017; Arendt 1998; Crowell 2013; Dilthey 2002; Grondin 1994; Vattimo 2002), among others. In the legal field, several authors address the influence of human subjectivity on hermeneutic activity, either constructively or critically, including: Derrida (1992); Betti (2015); Bobbio (1993); Dworkin (1986); Finnis (2011); Kelsen (2005); Kaufmann (1988); Larenz (1995), among others. Even though there are significant differences between the proposals of these authors, there is a common element, namely, the recognition of the fact that the perception a subject has of reality is inevitably distorted since the human mind (or spirit) operates as a filter that either selects what enters the mind or exaggerates (or omits) certain aspects of reality.

2 O'Regan (2013, pp. 313–14), for example, argues that Hegel sees in Eckhart an epistemological proposal that entails overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. Underhill (1914, p. 27) asserts that point of departure for any mystical journey is "the game of give and take which goes on between the human consciousness and the external world". Even Hawkins (2013a, p. 211) himself asserts that "it is we ourselves who create stressful reactions as a consequence of what we are holding within us. The suppressed feelings determine our belief systems and our perception of ourselves and others. These, in turn, literally create events and incidents in the world, events that we, then, turn around and blame for our reactions. This is a self-reinforcing system of illusions. This is what the enlightened sages mean when they say, «We are all living in an illusion». All that we experience are our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs projected onto the world, actually causing what we see to happen".

3 For a thorough analysis of Underhill's thought on these matters, see (Pérez-Lasserre 2024).

4 See (Hawkins 2013a, pp. 211 & ff.; 2013b, p. xlix; 2014a, pp. 195 & ff.; 2014b, pp. 36–7; 2015, pp. 313 & ff.; 2021c, pp. 80 & ff).

5 We interpret and attribute meaning to things and people we encounter in the world in light of the prejudices that inhabit our mind.

6 (Fernández Sebastián and Capellán de Miguel 2011; Capellán de Miguel 2011; Koselleck 1982), among others.

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John Carroll and Religious Liberty: Catholicism, Liberalism, and Church–State Rapprochement in Early America

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Abstract

This article aims to provide an account of the political thought of Archbishop John Carroll on the topic of religious liberty as a core principle of the American founding. It examines the relationship of Church and State through the lens of a developing self-understanding in the American and Roman Catholic identities. American Catholic colonists were accused of having a divided allegiance that made them dangerous to the social compact, divided between papal authority and the authority of the republic. Further, the place of the Catholic Church in a more pluralistic religious landscape following the Reformation demanded a reexamination of the traditional Catholic teaching on religious liberty. One man in particular stands out as a seminal figure in the development of a rapprochement between the American liberal understanding of religious liberty and that of the Catholic tradition. This man was Archbishop John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic Bishop in America. Carroll's theoretical and practical approach to the highly contentious issue of religious liberty is a noteworthy example of simultaneous commitment to the Catholic faith and responsiveness to the exigencies of the moment and the perennial demands of political life. Carroll's example is useful for Catholics and all others, as a model for Church–State separation.

Keywords: religious liberty; John Carroll; American founding; religious pluralism; Church–State relations; political integration; freedom of conscience; Catholic citizenship

1. Introduction

Roman Catholicism has a storied and at times turbulent history with American political life. In the colonial era, many Catholics were denied various civil liberties, including religious liberty, and struggled to harmonize their faith with the demands of political life in the new and diverse world of American politics. While legal penalties subsided in the wake of the Constitution's First Amendment, religiously based animosity lingered long after. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anti-Catholic political movements, such as the Know-Nothing movement, continued to view American Catholics with suspicion and act against their full inclusion in political and social life. With several waves of migration bringing large numbers of Catholics from Europe, the percentage of Americans who were Catholic dramatically increased. So too did the representation of Catholics in American political life, with a majority of the Supreme Court, numerous senators, congressmen, and governors identifying as Catholic today.[1] The recent election of the first American Pope in history further elevates the role of Catholics in American public life. These remarkable developments highlight the success of reconciliation, which merits examination.

Throughout this history, the question of religious liberty has been a consistent point of contention for the integration of American Catholics into the American political order,

both as a right to be secured for Catholics and as a fundamental social good to be endorsed by them. Historically, the Catholic tradition arising out of a religiously unified medieval Europe made little room for religious liberty. The issue of papal authority has likewise been a matter of public debate from the colonial era through the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who had to defend himself publicly against charges that he would be an agent of the papacy.

One of the most historically significant, clear-sighted, and regrettably too little-known figures in the history of Catholicism's developing relationship with the American political order is America's first Roman Catholic bishop, John Carroll of Baltimore. Carroll helped set the course for American Catholicism at the time of the American Revolution in a mode that was emphatically patriotic while self-confidently Catholic. Carroll's chief contribution was his harmonization of Roman Catholicism with the burgeoning American political order. He was a strident champion of the revolutionary cause and a constant supporter of religious liberty. Understanding John Carroll's thought and legacy will provide a new insight into the genesis of the posture of American Catholics in public life and an example of effective integration.

The existing scholarly literature on John Carroll is limited. Several biographies and other historical works that focus on the details of his life form the bulk of the literature. In several other works, Carroll is briefly discussed as one among many American Catholics of the founding era. Carroll is discussed in several brief articles, which indicate his place in American history and provide a high-level explanation of his thought, though without substantial analysis. Numerous histories have been written that tell the story of the Maryland colony (of which the Carroll family was a highly influential part), the experience of American Catholics in the colonies and young republic, the history of the Carroll family, and other themes, which incidentally include discussions of John Carroll as a secondary figure. These texts are helpful in establishing a clear picture of the facts of Carroll's life, and they provide glimpses into his thought. However, they do not thoroughly examine John Carroll's political thought nor do they typically focus on Carroll individually. This article seeks to fill that gap by examining Carroll's thought in a concentrated manner from the perspective of political theory.

In his 2021 book *Our Dear Bought Liberty,* the historian Michael Breidenbach (Breidenbach 2021) makes the most substantial analysis of the political theory that influenced Carroll's thinking, though this work too does not treat Carroll as a primary focus. Breidenbach identifies the conciliarist tradition as an especially prominent influence on Carroll, a thesis which this article will agree with and seek to further expound. Because Breidenbach's analysis of Carroll is fairly limited, this article will serve to further substantiate and clarify the evidence for this position. Blanchard likewise demonstrates Carroll's ongoing connection and correspondence with advocates of conciliarism (Blanchard 2018). Blanchard's work helps to verify this intellectual genealogy, which will be explained here in new detail as well as specifically identified in the key texts of Carroll's writings (Blanchard and Lehner 2021).

Nicholas Pelligrino (Pellegrino 2015) aptly situates John Carroll's efforts to reconcile Catholicism with the broader Christian umbrella in order to establish that Catholics fit into the concept of America as a Christian nation The theme of Christian unity and the evolving sense of a shared identity between denominations indeed played a crucial role in Carroll's support for religious liberty. O'Donnell (O'Donnell 2011) provides another valuable contribution in her analysis of Carroll's organization and governance of the Church and the way this aided integration O'Donnell focuses on the practical motivations that indeed drove much of Carroll's decision making. Joseph McShane likewise emphasizes the pragmatic elements of Carroll's endeavors, asserting that he was "above all a realist (McShane 1988,

p. 304). It is true that Carroll understood the practical necessity of reconciliation, though such presentations neglect the substantial theoretical convictions that undergirded Carroll's endeavors. To see only the influence of pragmatic motivations on Carroll would be to miss the thoughtful synthesis he achieved and to draw suspicion on the sincerity of his positions. This article will complement such practical analysis with an explanation of the theory underlying Carroll's praxis.

This article thus seeks to fill the gap in the scholarly literature by providing a novel analysis of Carroll's thought from the perspective of political theory while building on earlier scholarship. Such an understanding of Carroll's thought will make a valuable contribution to the study of such topics as the history of religious liberty in America, changing religious ideas in times of political change, the relationship of Catholicism to the American political order, and interfaith cooperation in politics. Carroll's place in American history and his unique prominence among American Catholics merit a more detailed and thorough treatment of his thought than has thus far been provided.

Exploring John Carroll's thought at the intersection of political theory and political theology allows for treating him not merely as a pastoral figure or historical actor but as an implicit political theorist navigating a moment of doctrinal and civic tension. In particular, Carroll's thought illuminates a core problem in Western political development: how a tradition rooted in theocratic hierarchy and doctrinal exclusivity could engage meaningfully with the emerging liberal order built on pluralism, natural rights, and individual conscience. To frame this analysis, it is helpful to outline three broad models of Church–State relations operative in Carroll's intellectual environment:

1. The papalist–scholastic model, dominant in post-Reformation Catholic thought, which asserts the superiority of spiritual over temporal power (as in Bellarmine or Suarez), often endorsing the coercive enforcement of religious orthodoxy in Catholic states.
2. The Lockean–liberal model, which grounds political legitimacy in the consent of the governed and separates civil authority from religious jurisdiction, emphasizing individual rights and toleration.
3. The conciliarist or Gallican model, a more decentralized, often overlooked alternative within Catholic political theology, which affirms the authority of councils over papal supremacy and limits ecclesial interference in temporal affairs.

Carroll's political theology draws on this third model while adopting the rhetorical and legal language of liberal republicanism. His writings suggest an effort not merely to accept religious liberty as a matter of expedience but to rearticulate Catholic ecclesiology in terms compatible with American liberal principles. The result is not a full synthesis—Carroll remains committed to Catholic truth—but rather a strategic rapprochement, one that foreshadows the position later formalized in the Second Vatican Council's Decleration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae,* which recognized the right to religious liberty (Vatican Council II 1965).

Establishing this understanding of Carroll provides greater context for the debate over the compatibility of Catholicism with the American political order. Many authors have written on the question in the last two hundred and fifty years. John Courtney Murray's (Murray [1960] 2005) 1960 book, *We Hold These Truths; Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition,* stands as a landmark defense of the pro-compatibility thesis, which has influenced many later writers. Other figures arguing in favor of compatibility include Orestes Brownson in the 19th century, and Richard John Neuhaus, John C. Rager, Michael Novak, Robert George, and many others in the 20th and 21st centuries. There has been no shortage of opponents in this debate, including such figures as Michael Hanby (Hanby 2015) and Christopher A. Ferrara (Ferrara 2012).

More recent authors have been proponents of the anti-compatibility thesis, promoting versions of post-liberalism, integralism, and other political theories that are taken as more properly aligned with Catholic principles than the liberalism of the American founding, which they reject. This debate has been approached from many angles, including the historical, philosophical, and theological. Numerous arguments and counterarguments have set much ink to the page and thereby render the debate robust and complex. Far too complex, indeed, to be settled here. Nonetheless, allowing Carroll's voice to speak does serve to bring forth the perspective of a scholar and pastor who was recognized for his commitment to Catholic teaching, outspoken in his praise of the American political project, and uniquely positioned as a firsthand witness to the history of the nation's birth.

2. Results

The finding of this research has been that John Carroll helped shape America's tradition of religious liberty and foster the inclusion of American Catholics in the revolutionary cause and the political life of the new republic through a synthesis of conciliarist thought with political liberalism. Carroll departs in some surprising ways from the predominant political principles common in the Catholic tradition as an early and consistent supporter of the American Revolution. Carroll's thought was shaped most significantly by the history of religious liberty in the Maryland colony, his decades of studies as a Jesuit academic, and especially by the conciliarist tradition.

3. Discussion

3.1. Carroll's Biographical Details

John Carroll was born in 1735 in Maryland. His family was of Irish Catholic lineage and played a very significant role in the development of the Maryland colony and in the course of the American Revolution. At the age of thirteen, Carroll left Maryland for France to pursue his studies as a Jesuit, being ordained a priest in 1761. There, Carroll was immersed in humanistic studies encompassing the classical liberal arts, spanning from classical Greek and Roman sources to the humanism of his time. During his years abroad, Carroll became intimately familiar with trends in French theological and political thought, which were highly contested and one of the reasons why the Jesuits were suppressed. Of particular consequence were the principles of Gallicanism, which included the clear distinction of the spiritual and temporal orders and retained the primacy of the government in matters of the temporal order. Carroll imported many of these ideas to America when he returned. Carroll remained abroad for over a decade, teaching at Jesuit institutions.

When the Jesuit order was suppressed by Rome in 1773 (the suppression lasting until 1814), Carroll lost his station and returned to the family estate in Maryland as a place of refuge. Having returned to his family home in Maryland, he took up the care of ministering to the local Catholic population and organizing the sparse clergy there. His leadership and vision led to him quickly becoming recognized by his fellow priests as a natural and capable leader. A series of appointments culminated in Carroll being named Archbishop of Baltimore in 1789. During all this time, Carroll wrote frequently in defense of American Catholics, insisting that they would make as good of Republican citizens as anyone else. Carroll was first and foremost a pastor, not a political ideologue. As he noted in a 1776 letter, "I have observed that when the ministers of Religion leave their duties of their profession to take a busy part in political matters, they generally fall into contempt; & sometimes even bring discredit to the cause, in whose service they are engaged (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 46). Nonetheless, his pastoral duties demanded of him a serious consideration of and response to the question of religious liberty in his day. In a letter, he noted that "willing

to suppose liberality in the framers of your Constitution, I endeavored to reconcile it with Catholicity (ibid). This endeavor was a constant theme of his career.

Responsible for the organization of ecclesial life in the United States, Carroll shows his indebtedness to both the scholastic tradition and American sensibilities about representation. He was constant and careful in his insistence on the limited scope of the papal power in secular affairs and the prerogative of the local Church against Rome or any foreign ecclesial entity. Further, he established the mechanisms for internal Church governance in a representative manner, giving the local clergy significant say in the affairs of the Church and her leadership, including the selection of Carroll as their head. In their letter to the Pope requesting the appointment of Carroll as the superior of the American Church, the committee expressly offered their petition as a representative act on behalf of the entire body of American priests. Further, they specifically cited the delicate Church–State relationship in America as a primary reason for the selection of Carroll, who would mollify the suspicions of undue influence by foreign potentates on account of his status as a native of Maryland. Likewise, his known patriotism and defense of religious toleration made him a candidate well suited to the demands of the political context in which the Church was living. Carroll articulated his own understanding of the duty imposed upon him in a letter to the Pope, saying,

> In these United States our religious system has undergone a revolution, if possible, more extraordinary than our political one. In all of them free toleration is allowed to Christians of every denomination; and particularly in the States of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, a communication of all civil rights, without distinction or diminution, is extended to those of our religion. This is a blessing and advantage which it is our duty to preserve and improve, with the utmost prudence, by demeaning ourselves on all occasions as subjects zealously attached to our government and avoiding to give any jealousies on account of any dependence on foreign jurisdictions more than that which is essential to our religion, an acknowledgment of the Pope's spiritual supremacy over the whole Christian world. (Carroll and Hanley 1976)

Fulfilling this duty to preserve the blessing of liberty was a hallmark of Carroll's career.

3.2. The Influence of Anti-Catholicism on Carroll

One of the primary influences on Carroll's thought, which strengthened his advocacy for religious liberty and the American Revolution generally, was the history of dissension and persecution, which had marked the experience of his native home of Maryland. Carroll was familiar with this history and had learned from it that the best path to the flourishing of peace in civil society and authentic faith in the Church was that of toleration and mutual respect between sects.

The quest for religious liberty was a hallmark of the American experience from the earliest settlements, such as the famed Mayflower voyage to the Plymouth colony. Violent sectarian strife and persecution in the Old World led many to seek freedom in the New World. At times, this inspired a pluralistic vision, such as that of Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, or the Calverts in Maryland, where people of various faiths could live together in peace and harmony. At other times, religious groups sought freedom for themselves but denied it for other religious groups. Typically, larger and more established Churches were prone to exert their influence in their own interest and tolerate less religious pluralism, such as the Puritans in Massachusetts and Connecticut or the Anglicans in Virginia. Smaller religious groups—such as Catholics, Jews, Baptists, and Quakers—that suffered the sting of intolerance more acutely tended to favor toleration and pluralism.

The landscape of religious pluralism and tolerance in colonial and revolutionary America was intricate and diverse, manifesting differently across various groups and regions. Given the complexity in the relations of the many interrelated groups approaching the issue, it is difficult to say how Protestants as any kind of homogeneous bloc responded to Carroll and his ideas and on what grounds. Nevertheless, Carroll was recognized by various prominent Protestants, including some of the Founding Fathers, who celebrated his stance on religious liberty and his commitment to the cause of patriotism. Despite the limitations noted, it is clear that Carroll's position fit well with the dominant consensus on religious liberty and pluralism that coalesced into the policy adopted in the First Amendment. This consensus was recognized as politically expedient, a requirement of natural rights, and consonant with the Christian faith shared by the members of the various denominations who together composed the vast majority of the citizens of the country. Carroll's greatest contribution to this debate was to ameliorate political concerns about the possibility of Catholics integrating into American political life and rallying Catholics in support of liberty.

From their earliest arrival in America, Catholics in the New World faced fierce opposition. This relentless animus constantly threatened their freedom and erected barriers to their full integration into society. As Cogliano notes, "Anti-Catholicism, or anti-popery to use the contemporary term, was one of the most prevalent characteristics of New England culture before the American Revolution." (Cogliano 1995, p. 2). Shea recognizes in *The Life and Times of John Carroll*, "Such were the conditions which prevailed in Maryland during the boyhood of John Carroll. The temper of the times was bitterly anti-Catholic . . .The Maryland colonial records are filled with gravamina against the Catholics, and the note sounded most often is the fact that . . . 'children of Popish parents are sent to St. Omer's." (Shea 1888, pp. 12–13). St. Omer's, where John, along with many other members of the Catholic community in Maryland, studied. Farrelly has captured the breadth of this hostility in his book *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620–1860*, where he writes, "Fears of popery were a standard part of the rhetoric that fueled the cause of independence." (Farrelly 2018, p. 84). Haydon, likewise, in *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth Century England*, asserts that "for vast numbers of people there had never been the slightest doubt that papists represented the most dangerous element in English society."(Haydon 1993, p. 118). These anti-Catholic sentiments were longstanding in the English and American minds and remained prominent up to the time of the revolution. John Carroll complained in a 1799 letter, "we dwell among unfriendly non-Catholic sects." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.2, p. 276). This long-standing anti-Catholic sentiment in Maryland and the other colonies was a decisive influence on Carroll's thought.

Two primary reasons led Protestant Americans to doubt the capacity of Catholics to be good citizens. First, they feared that Catholic obedience to the Pope entailed a split allegiance on the part of American Catholics between Rome and America that, in a moment of conflict, would follow the foreign power of the Pope against the American government. This could prove fatal if American Catholics, especially those entrusted with the powers of government, defected from their duty to the United States and followed conflicting orders from Rome to the advantage of the Pope, European monarchs, or some other foreign power. English history in the preceding centuries was rife with the consequences of this conflict, which remained fresh in the minds of Anglo-Americans.

The second reason for fear was the Catholic Church's claim of being the one and only true Church and therefore having supremacy over all other religions. It was feared that this claim to supremacy would be the cause of the persecution of Protestants, as it had been at times in the Old World. At the very least, this claim to superiority would be an insurmountable source of disunity and bigotry, which would preclude the possibility of

Catholics living harmoniously as citizens of the Republic with their Protestant American fellows. To grant religious liberty to Catholics was thus seen as a two-fold danger to the political order.

Samuel Adams presented the issue of Catholicism in America in the 1772 *The Rights of the Colonists*, where he said

> The Roman Catholics or Papists are excluded by reason of such doctrines as these, that princes excommunicated may be deposed, and those that they call heretics may be destroyed without mercy; besides their recognizing the Pope in so absolute a manner, in subversion of government, by introducing, as far as possible into the states under whose protection they enjoy life, liberty, and property, that solecism in politics, imperium in imperio, leading directly to the worst anarchy and confusion, civil discord, war, and bloodshed. . . . By the charter of this Province, it is granted, ordained, and established (that is, declared as an original right) that there shall be liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God to all Christians, except Papists. (Adams 1906)

John Jay, in the *Address to the People of Great Britain* by the First Continental Congress in 1774, (which he penned,) wrote, "Nor can we suppress our astonishment that a British Parliament should ever consent to establish in that country [Quebec] a religion [Catholicism] that has deluged your island in blood, and dispersed impiety, bigotry, persecution, murder, and rebellion through every part of the world." (Jay 1774). Alexander Hamilton, in his 1774 *A Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress*, asked, "Does not your blood run cold to think that an English Parliament should pass an Act for the establishment of arbitrary power and Popery in such an extensive country? . . . Your loves, your property, your religion are all at stake." (Hamilton and Syrett 1961). He warned that the Canadian tolerance in Quebec would draw Catholics from throughout Europe, who would eventually act as a fatal influence in America.

The thoroughgoing anti-Catholic sentiments discussed above stretched far back in colonial history. A fear of papal tyranny and a distrust of the divided allegiance of Catholics formed a prominent part of English and American political thought from the English Reformation onwards. This hostile climate deprived Catholics of religious toleration in most of the English colonies. The Maryland colony stands out as a stark exception. Led by Catholic proprietors, the Catholic colonists of Maryland sought to buck the bigotry that oppressed them and establish a regime of religious toleration for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. As Breidenbach argues, "The central problem for Catholics in America, as in England, was to prove their civil loyalty, and early American Catholics followed Cecil Calvert in denying certain principles of papalism that made their faith uncivil." (Breidenbach 2021, p. 89). Maryland's experiment directly countered the prevailing idea that Catholicism was incompatible with American liberty. This fascinating and rich history was marked by a commitment to religious toleration throughout the reign of the Lords Baltimore.

From 1642 to 1688, the control of Maryland by the original Catholic line of Baltimore began to be challenged, and in 1691, King William transferred the control of the colony into new hands. The new government established the Church of England as the official State Church. By 1702, Catholics were excluded from voting and holding office and lost the right to worship in their own Churches, while other non-conformist sects suffered no such penalty. The policy of religious discrimination against Catholics continued from that time to the American Revolution. The fall from the robust protection of liberty maintained by the Calverts to tyranny and intolerance was swift and harsh.

The collapse of the successful regime of religious tolerance in Maryland deeply impacted John Carroll's own understanding. The early legacy of the colony had been one of religious liberty. As Krugler states, "The Calverts' bold experiment was a refreshing oasis in an age when the state advocated coercion and persecution to achieve religious uniformity and secure political allegiance. It also stood as a stark testimonial to a family's ability to prosper as English Catholics." (Krugler 2004, p. 11). This was undone by the sectarian feuding and intolerance that prevailed for nearly a century. Looking back at both of these eras, Carroll took the former as a model. He sought to reconcile Catholicism with American political principles and thus ameliorate the anti-Catholic attitude that had stripped Maryland of its freedom. Like the Calverts, Carroll avoided keeping past grievances alive and sought harmony wherever possible. Carroll was able to see in the history of his own people both the promise of religious liberty and the dangers thereto. From this perspective, he was able to champion the cause of religious liberty in a principled and effective manner.

Carroll saw all this clearly and recognized the need for conciliation. In 1784, he said, "we must use extreme circumspection in order not to give pretexts to the enemies of Religion to deprive us of our actual rights. It is very important that the prejudices entertained for so long against Catholics be eradicated." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 153). This attitude marked Carroll's entire career, demonstrating that he was intimately familiar with these attacks. He once remarked that "a popish priest was thought to be the greatest monster in the creation. . . . The horror, which was associated with the Idea of a Papist, is incredible; and the scandalous misrepresentations, by their ministers, increased the horror." (ibid, v.1, p. 505). This animosity can be traced from the beginning of the English Reformation through to the American Revolution.

This sectarian strife stemmed in part from the specifically religious or theological dimension of the dispute. However, the conflict was not merely theological. One of the most consistently cited and intractable issues was the more properly political problem of divided allegiance. Catholics were accused of being slavish agents of tyranny because of their obedience to the Pope. This obedience, when set in opposition to the secular power, would render Catholics traitors to their country. If Catholics claimed to be obedient to both the Pope and the government, they would have to choose which to follow in the event of a conflict. The Pope's claim to superiority and the threat of eternal damnation would incline Catholics to choose their faith over their country. English history after the separation of the Church of England showed the dramatic possibilities this entailed all too well. The Catholic Empires of France and Spain kept the specter of Popery in the minds of American Protestants as they sought to compete with England for control of the New World.

Among the many voices who made such arguments in the colonial era was the leading thinker, John Locke. Locke, though known as a champion of religious toleration and disestablishment, nonetheless saw Catholics as uniquely unfit for toleration. Locke directly addresses the issue that Catholicism presents for civil society, saying,

> That church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate, which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby, ipso facto, deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince. For by this means the magistrate would give way to the settling of a foreign jurisdiction in his own country, and suffer his own people to be listed, as it were, for soldiers against his own government. Nor does the frivolous and fallacious distinction between the court and the church afford any remedy to this inconvenience; especially when both the one and the other are equally subject to the absolute authority of the same person; who has not only power to persuade the members of his church to whatsoever he lists, either as purely religious, or as in order thereunto; but can also enjoin it them on pain of eternal fire. (Locke and Shapiro 2003, p. 246)

In 2019, a previously unknown manuscript of Locke's was discovered, bearing the title *Reasons for Tolerating Papists Equally with Others*. Here, he considers the consequences for religious toleration when Catholics do not hold to the problematic views listed above. In this brief text of only a few pages, Locke again addresses the issue of Catholics' divided allegiance. He says,

> I doubt whether upon Protestant principles we can justifie punishing of Papists for their speculative opinions as Purgatory transubstantiation &c if they stopd there. But possibly noe reason nor religion obleiges us to tolerate those whose practicall principles necessarily lead them to the eager persecution of all opinions, & the utter destruction of all societys but their owne. soe that it is not the difference of their opinion in religion, or of their ceremonys in worship; but their dangerous & factious tenents in reference to the state which are blended with make a part of their religion that excludes them from the benefit of toler-ation·who would thinke it fit to tolerate either presbiterian or Independant, if they made it a part of their religion to pay an implicit subjection to a forraigne infallible power Severity to Papists only, cannot make them unite with any other party. nor toleration disunite them among themselves. (Walmsley and Waldmann 2019, p. 1115)

Here, Locke makes it clear that it is not on account of 'speculative opinions' that Catholics pose a danger to the commonwealth. A subject who holds the Catholic view on transubstantiation will on that account alone be no visibly different in his outward behavior and respect for the rights of others than any other person. Likewise, if a Catholic worships in Latin rather than his native tongue, this has no direct impact on his relationships with his countrymen.[2] Such 'speculative' religious opinions are entirely interior or private. They have no bearing on one's behavior in public life. They do not bear upon the natural rights of men, which the government exists to protect, and therefore fall outside the ambit of government interference.

However, Locke sees in Catholicism a penchant for persecution, such that these speculative opinions that ought to be private in fact become the pretext for 'persecution' and the 'utter destruction' of one's neighbors.[3] Elsewhere in the same text, Locke does consider how Catholics might be tolerated, despite these worries. He says, "If Papists can be supposd to be as good subjects as others they may be equally tolerated." (ibid, pp. 1111–12). In essence, if they deny the claims of papal authority and refrain from persecuting those with whom they disagree, they pose no threat to the peace and wellbeing of the political community and thus can be tolerated.

Variations in this line of thinking were widespread during Carroll's time and presented an urgent challenge to which American Catholics needed to respond. Carroll stated clearly that "A foreign temporal jurisdiction will never be tolerated here; & even the spiritual supremacy of the Pope is the only reason why in some of the United States, the full participation of all civil rights is not given to the R.C." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 78). Elsewhere, he says, "The Catholics, therefore, desire that the adversaries of our religion be given no handle for incriminating us on the grounds that we depend more than is proper on a foreign power." (ibid, v.1, p. 171). On the crucial issues of papal power and persecution, Carroll did adopt principles that would satisfy the Lockean criteria.

Near the end of his life, Carroll complained that Catholics were often deeply misunderstood. He argued that fear of 'Popery' was based on misunderstandings and misrepresentations more than an accurate assessment of what Catholics believe. He wrote,

> Protestants carefully avoid reading books, which might disabuse them and believe every absurd tale concerning the tenets and practices of Roman Catholics. The Catholics in this country have very little fear of reading the controversial works of their adversary. I have sometimes had the curiosity to examine both their public and private li-braries, but, I have never discovered any traces of our ablest Theologians the Bellarmins, Bossuets, Fetaus, Sismond, Arnauds, Bedes, Fleure's ecclesiastical History &c, whilst their shelves are filled with all the ribaldry of defamation and Ignorance against Popery as they call it. (ibid, v.3, p. 149)

Carroll always sought to avoid giving offense to his neighbors and did not engage in polemics. For example, he lobbied strenuously for the removal of a line in the oath he took when he was consecrated as a bishop, the line being a promise to persecute heretics. He did, on the other hand, see it as a constant necessity and serious duty to present the beliefs of Catholics in their fullness and in a manner that was compelling and acceptable. Carroll thought his faith was misunderstood more than it was truly hated. He thus made it a special focus of his efforts to dispel such misunderstandings and present the faith in a manner amenable to his countrymen.

As Patrick Carey recognizes, "perhaps more than any other group in the early republic Catholics recognized, and wrestled with, the tensions between religious liberty at large and the need to preserve dogma and discipline with a church." (Carey 1989, p. 323). This duty was in part a religious one, the work of evangelization, but Carroll also saw the crucial political implications to which he often referred.[4] In the education of priests, Carroll placed a special emphasis on their being conversant in these topics. He recognized that "they [priests] will be placed amongst strangers and bitter enemies to our faith and Church, who will often seek opportunities of engaging in controversy, and not unfrequently with much dexterity." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 504). In order to overcome these obstacles, he suggested that they "study our constitution, our laws, our customs." (ibid, v.2, p. 105). Carroll followed this model himself and often spoke in praise of the Constitution and the government. Carroll, as the spiritual head of the Catholic Church in America, always sought to dispel the misunderstandings about Catholicism and to show how his faith was compatible with American political principles.

John Adams acknowledged that Carroll was "a Professor of the Roman catholic religion, yet a warm, a firm, a zealous Supporter of the Rights of America." (Adams 1776). Indeed, Caroll confessed," I have contracted the language of a Republican." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 65). Carroll denied that the power claimed by some of the Popes to interfere in secular affairs was a legitimate doctrine of the faith. He likewise denied the claim of papal infallibility, instead adopting the 'conciliarist' position. The conciliarists argued for infallibility residing in the *whole* Church gathered at a council.[5] In this view, it was not the Pope alone who was infallible. In adopting this position, Carroll was able to quell the fear of 'popish' tyranny and assert a Catholic identity unburned by the problematic beliefs that he denied. On this account, Carroll asserted that "In these United States our Religious system has undergone a revolution, if possible, more extraordinary than our political one." (ibid, v.1, p. 80) Carey explains that, "in the United States . . . these traditional principles began to be interpreted in new ways as the American experience itself became a testing ground where the principles were reinterpreted and reapplied." (Carey 1989, p. 332).

In 1784, John Carroll engaged in a public written debate with Charles Wharton, a former Jesuit priest who converted to Protestantism. This debate provides one of the most robust and insightful windows into Carroll's mind. Wharton wrote a public *Letter to the Roman Catholics of Worcester*, in which he defended his renunciation of Catholicism (Wharton 1784). Carroll responded to this letter with his own letter, *An Address to the Roman*

Catholics of the United States of America by a Catholic Clergyman. In this letter, Carroll responds to many of the arguments made by Wharton, which echo the same claims made by Locke.[6] Here, one can see Carroll directly wrestling with many of these issues. Carroll explains his motivation for entering this public debate saying,

> When I found that he [Wharton] not only had abandoned our faith and communion, but had imputed to us doctrines foreign to our belief, and having a natural tendency to embitter against us the minds of our fellow-citizens, I felt an anguish too keen for description; and perhaps the Chaplain [Wharton] will experience a similar sentiment, when he comes coolly to reflect on this instance of his conduct. It did not become the friend of toleration to misinform, and to sow in minds so misinformed the seeds of religious animosity. Under all these distressful feelings, one consideration alone relieved me in writing; and that was, the hope of vindicating your religion to your ownselves at least, and preserving the steadfastness of vour faith. But even this prospect should not have induced me to engage in the controversy, if I could fear that it would disturb the harmony now subsisting amongst all christians in this country, so blessed with civil and religious liberty; which if we have the wisdom and temper to preserve, America may come to exhibit a proof to the world, that general and equal toleration, by giving a free circulation to fair argument, is the most effectual method to bring all denominations of christians to an unity of faith. (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 140)

Here we see several key features of Carroll's understanding of the relationship between the Catholic faith and American government. First, Carroll is deeply concerned with distinguishing the true beliefs of Catholicism from the unfair depictions of them, which so often embittered other Christians against Catholics. He identifies the embitterment of his 'fellow citizens' as the primary motivation of his efforts. This concern was typical of Carroll's mind. He clearly understood the delicate relationship between the public understanding of Catholicism and the possibility of harmony and toleration between Catholics and their fellow citizens.[7] Second, Carroll proclaims himself a proponent of toleration, harmony, and open discourse. In so doing, Carroll defied the claim that 'Popery' was synonymous with slavish obedience and cultivated ignorance. Rather, he planted himself and the Church which he represented on the side of liberty. Third, Carroll was at once a staunch defender of the doctrines of the Catholic Church and an ardent patriot concerned with the welfare of the political community. He consistently maintains both commitments throughout his career.[8]

Carroll's first concern in this debate is to rebut Wharton's argument that the infallibility of the Church entails a blind and ignorant faith. In his response to this accusation, he argues that

> The Chaplain goes on to tell the catholics of the city of Worcester, that "if a man's belief be not rational, if he submit to human authority without weighing or understanding the doctrines, which it inculcates, this belief is not faith. It is credulity, it is weakness." Who doubts it? . . . And yet amongst these tenets, there are some beyond the reach of human comprehension. The Trinity, the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, his being conceived of the Holy Ghost, his crucifixion and death, his descending into hell, are, I presume, those doctrines of christianity, which the Chaplain deems fundamental; for they are all contained in the apostle's creed. He is certainly unable to weigh or understand them. Nevertheless he acts rationally in admitting and believing them, because he conceives them to be revealed by an infallible guide. Can it then be folly and

> credulity in you to believe for a similar reason these and all other articles of your religion? (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 93)

Here, Carroll argues that the belief in the infallibility of the Church itself is open to rational inquiry and examination. Once one has been convinced of the reasonableness of this idea, one has a foundation *in reason* to accept the authoritative pronouncements of the Church. In this way, a Catholic is no less reasonable in heeding the teachings of the Church than any man is for taking the authorities' teaching of an expert, especially in areas of such complexity or subtlety as trinitarian theology or soteriology. Carroll argues that it would be quite unreasonable to expect a farmer or laborer to dedicate the time and careful study that a cleric is able to dedicate to these issues in order to determine for himself the truth of every doctrine and every sentence of scripture.

This response also meets Locke's criticism of faith, which is coerced by an outside power. In the case of the Catholic faith, the Church does not impose a dogma to be accepted without the possibility of any rational inquiry. Rather, having come to a reasonable conviction of the truth of Christianity and the infallibility of the Church, one reasonably assents to the teaching of this authority. Being told what true doctrine is and what is to be believed is far from tyrannical coercion.

Carroll also refers to a papal bull that banned reading certain heretical texts. He argues that the bull is not valid because it was not received by most of the local ecclesial communities.[9] Here, he is employing a Gallican principle, responding to the claim that the Church intentionally makes Catholics ignorant, and clarifying that not all papal pronouncements are necessarily binding. He says, "May I not then say with confidence, that rational investigation is as open to Catholics, as to any other men on the face of the earth?" (ibid, v.1, p. 68). Far from the caricature of darkened medieval superstition, Carroll's faith was influenced by the Christian humanism of the modern era. Carroll again addressed the issue of papal power in a 1786 letter, where he wrote,

> It has been always the uniform endeavor of the open and secret enemies the Catholic Church to represent this spiritual supremacy of Christ's Vicar the most odious light; and I was not surprised to hear, that the turbulent men, who foment the present disturbances, have declared themselves independent of it, as of a foreign jurisdiction. By using these words, they not only manifest the spirit, by which they are governed, but they hope to rend obnoxious to our fellow-citizens, an essential tenet of our religion, and all of us, who profess it: a tenet, which is the bond of our union. ... There would indeed be a foundation for the reproach intended by the words, foreign jurisdiction, if we acknowledge in the Successor of St. Peter, any power or prerogative, which clashed in the least degree with the duty, we owe to our country, or its laws. To our country we owe allegiance, and the tender of our best services and property, when they are necessary for its defense: to the Vicar of Christ we owe obedience in things purely spiritual. Happily, there is no competition in their respective claims on us, nor any difficulty in rendering to both the submission, which they have a right to claim. Our country commands and enforces by outward coercion the services, which tend to the preservation and defense of that personal security, and of that property, for the sake of which political societies were formed, and men agreed to live under the protection of, and obedience to civil government. The Vicar of Christ, as visible head of his Church, watches over the integrity and soundness of doctrine, and makes use of means and weapons, that act only on the souls of men, to enforce the duties of religion, the purity of worship, and ecclesiastical discipline. (ibid, v.2, p. 460)

Carroll's articulation here fits perfectly with Locke's caveat in *Reasons for Tolerating Papists Equally with Others*. Carroll's consistent effort to disabuse his countrymen of this misunderstanding and present an authentic understanding of papal power in its true light aided in dispelling the fear of tyrannical 'Popery.'

Carroll celebrated the achievement of religious toleration in America many times throughout his life. In his Commemoration of American Independence, he said "God has visited you in particular by a signal instance of his mercy in removing those obstacles, which heretofore cramped the free exercise of our religious functions." (ibid, v.3, p. 460). This accomplishment was a constant theme in Carrol's discussion of the American Revolution and the new form of government. He never failed to express gratitude and happiness that the right to religious liberty had been enshrined in law and protected by the government. "What perfect freedom Catholics enjoy nearly everywhere in these states; and how all classes of Americans abhor any form of annoyance merely because of difference in religion." (ibid, v.3, p. 472) In order to attain this accomplishment, these anti-Catholic attitudes had to be refuted. This was a difficult task because the scholastic tradition of Catholic political thought did provide a basis for these claims. Carroll understood this tradition, though he was not constrained by it and did not consider it representative of genuine Catholic doctrine.

There is no doubt that John Carroll was recognized and respected by his fellow countrymen across denominational lines. As quoted above, John Adams explicitly recognized both Carroll's Catholicity and his zealous support of the rights of America. Carroll was even sought after by the Continental Congress when he was invited to participate in leading the 1776 delegation to Canada, which sought to form an alliance with the predominantly Catholic population. The delegation included Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, and John's cousin Charles, the sole Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. Though the mission was unsuccessful, the confidence placed in John Carroll by inviting him to participate demonstrates that his efforts were known to the leaders of the revolution and appreciated as politically significant and effective. In reference to this episode, Adams described Carroll as "A Roman Catholic but an ardent patriot." (Adams 1776). General Charles Lee, in a letter to John Hancock, likewise described Carroll as "a man of liberal sentiments, enlarged mind and a manifest friend of Civil Liberty," the kind of figure whose service "would be worth battalions." (Melville 1955, p. 44). George Washington himself was familiar with John Carroll and expressed his "very great esteem and regard" for him in a 1792 letter (Washington 1792). These expressions of admiration for Carroll by leading men and the confidence placed in him by the Continental Congress illustrate Carroll's success in overcoming the widespread anti-Catholic animosity and effectively presenting a vision of Catholic integration into and support of the new American political order.

3.3. Scholasticism and Religious Liberty

As a member of the Society of Jesus (commonly referred to as the 'Jesuits') whose membership included many of the most prominent scholastic authors of the post-Reformation era, Carroll could easily be expected to adopt their political principles, which included a generally negative attitude towards religious liberty. However, Carroll in many ways worked beyond his Jesuit heritage and approached these issues from a different position.

One does not have to look far for language in the Catholic tradition that could reasonably give the impression that Catholic political theology was incompatible with American liberalism and that Catholics were opposed to religious liberty (C.F. Gregory 1832; Leo 1888). Thomas Aquinas [1225–1274], to whom the entire scholastic tradition looked to as a preeminent authority, argues that "wherefore if forgers of money and other evil-doers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even

put to death." (Aquinas 1920, II.II.Q.11A.3.Sed Contra). Far from disestablishment and toleration, there were many advocates of an official State religion and varying degrees of enforcement.[10] These arguments present an obstacle at the center of Carroll's project by giving confirmation to suspicions about Catholics and casting religious liberty as a policy to be avoided. The following cursory glance at three major figures of the scholastic tradition will serve to exemplify the presence of these tendencies throughout the tradition.

This attitude presents itself consistently in many of the scholastic texts, which show a strong preference for some form of integration or cooperation between Church and State and for significant limits on religious toleration. Robert Bellarmine [1542–1621], a Jesuit Cardinal and one of the most prominent counter-Reformation authors, wrote extensively on the question of papal power and the relation of the secular and sacred powers. Carroll identifies Bellarmine by name in writing, suggesting a familiarity with his work. Even in the absence of such evidence, it is scarcely imaginable that Carroll could have been ignorant of the greatly famous Bellarmine. Bellarmine advanced the papalist position in a more moderate form than some. He argued that the sacred power (contained in the Church) was distinct from and higher than the secular power (contained in the State) and that the former could command the latter insofar as spiritual ends were concerned. This would be referred to as 'indirect' authority over temporal affairs. Bellarmine, like many Catholic theologians during this era, argued outright against religious liberty. Indeed, he states clearly that "without a doubt the Christian princes are obliged not to grant their subjects freedom of belief but to see to it that the faith that the Catholic bishops and especially the Supreme Pontiff teach to be the true one is preserved." (Bellarmine and Tutino 2012, p. 83). In a Christian commonwealth, all the baptized were considered members of the Church and thus under her spiritual jurisdiction. A Christian prince, wielding the lesser secular power, was obliged to cooperate with the higher sacred power in achieving its end, the salvation of souls. To grant the freedom of belief was seen to be a dereliction of this duty, which harmed both the spiritual welfare of Christians and their temporal wellbeing. Bellarmine again states clearly that "dissension in faith is, therefore, the destruction of the Church. Accordingly, princes must on no account allow this freedom if they want to perform their duty." (ibid, p. 85). It is not only permissible, in Bellarmine's view, for heretics to be punished, but it is in fact a duty of the prince to punish them.

Francisco Suarez (1548–1617) was another major figure in the education that Carroll received at St. Omer's. No less than Roger Filmer, the great foil of Locke's *First Treatise*, attacked Suarez. Why? Suarez affirms that "Coercive power over wicked kings does indeed reside in the Pope. For in the first place, it clearly follows from what has been said above that there does reside in the Pope coercive power over temporal princes who are incorrigibly wicked, and especially over schismatics and stubborn heretics." (Suárez and Pink 2015, p. 781). He goes on to say that "This same papal power may extend to the coercion of kings by means of temporal punishments, and deposition from their thrones, if necessity so demands." (ibid) Suarez teaches that a heretical king who has been condemned by a declaratory judgment by the Pope ipso facto loses his legitimacy, becomes a tyrant if he remains in power, and "may be put to death by any private individual whatsoever." (ibid, p. 819). The power to render such a judgment is said to lie with either the State or the Pope. Indeed, the Pope may "command and compel the said kingdom to take this course, when he shall have concluded that such an act is necessary for the spiritual welfare of the realm, and, especially, for the avoidance of heresies and schisms." (ibid, p. 822)

Because the scholastics viewed the spiritual authority of the Church as a binding and preeminent power, the possibilities for religious liberty or toleration are rather distinct from that put forward by such liberal thinkers as John Locke. Suarez held that "the character of baptism is an indelible sign of subjugation to the Church."[11] (Suarez and Berton 1858,

p. 496). This view was likewise held by the other authors discussed in this section. As a consequence of this principle, the Church had an authority and claim to obedience over members of the Church on account of which it could legitimately exercise spiritual and temporal influence. A member of the Church would be anyone who was baptized. This membership did not cease when one removed themselves from obedience via heresy or apostasy. A distinction was therefore made between the right to religious toleration for heretics—members of the Church who failed to fulfill their duty of obedience—and religious toleration for non-Christians who had not yet entered into the jurisdiction of the Church. "Suárez did not believe that a Catholic state could force infidels to convert because the temporal power of the state is ordered to a natural end. Therefore, the state lacks the authority to punish subjects who do not accept the Catholic faith. Suárez was so committed to this principle of religious freedom that he believed non-Christians would be justified in waging a just war against Catholic invaders who sought to convert them by force." (Fastiggi 2022, p. 4).

Domingo De Soto (1494–1560) was a founding member of the famous and widely influential Salamanca School and held a similar vision of the relationship between the Church and the State. For De Soto, where the salvation of souls and the wellbeing of the Church are at stake, the Pope can and ought to exercise his superior power over the political power. He says,

> If, for example, the Christian king were to make laws to the detriment of the faith; namely, laws adverse to the sacraments, or to the Christian religion in any way, or if the Pope were to call a council, which the king impeded wrongly and contrary to right, or if he were to furnish aid to heretics, and infidels opposing our faith, or to schismatics, or move any other sort of mischief against the Apostolic see or the Church, then the Pope would be able to act against him, not only with the spiritual sword but also with the temporal. (De Soto and Wilson 2021)

While innumerable similar examples could be identified from the intellectual heritage in which Carroll was formed, these representative instances suffice to showcase the radically distinct character of these principles and those adopted by Carroll. This distinction being established, it is necessary to look elsewhere than the scholastic tradition for a recognizable intellectual source of influence in the formation of Carroll's mind.

The language of the American founders and their philosophical inspirers could scarcely bear a more distinct tone than these scholastic documents. The fundamental claim of the liberal political theory on which the American order is premised is the natural equality of all men. All men are equally free inasmuch as no other man has a right to rule over another, including to rule over his religious belief and practice. Because religious liberty is a natural right that all men possess, it was held that the government had no role in dictating a man's religious beliefs or worship. So long as his religion did not prevent him from being a good and peaceful citizen capable of living in peace with his fellow men, no man should be persecuted on account of his private beliefs. From the founders' perspective, it is not the State's domain to adjudicate religious disputes, and certainly not the fundamental disputes between religions. "Government is no longer in the business of defining the one true religion." (West 2017, p. 407). Thus, religion should be left to the individual as much as possible.

Thus, for the founders, religious liberty is an inalienable right that cannot be wholly ceded to any other authority. Further, the government exists for specific purposes—i.e., the protection of the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—which do not include defining the best way of life, the identification of the true religion, etc. Governments ought to abstain "from defining and compelling a particular vision of the highest life" in order to allow the liberty necessary for the attainment of that very life (ibid). John Carroll

consistently adopted the 'language of a republican' and advocated for the protection of religious liberty as a natural right, in the fashion of the Founding Fathers. However, Carroll was not simply a classical liberal. He did believe in the spiritual authority of the Church hierarchy, with the Pope at the apex. He rejected deism and indifferentism and insisted on the necessity of orthodox belief for society's fullest flourishing. While Carroll's political vision was similar in its construction to the liberal view, it was rooted in a distinct intellectual tradition and set of principles. These principles were necessary for overcoming the politico-theological dilemmas that Carroll faced on account of his Catholicism because political liberalism does not address these questions.

Having reviewed the positions taken by the scholastics on the issues of Church–State relations and of religious liberty, it is manifest that John Carroll was not a dyed-in-the-wool adherent to the scholastic tradition. Indeed, Carroll was emphatically opposed to these principles. Where the scholastics taught the supremacy of the sacred power over the secular and the subsequent authority of the Church to intervene in political affairs, Carroll sought a separation of Church and State. Where the scholastics taught a narrow approach to religious toleration, Carroll supported and celebrated the much more expansive grant of religious liberty found in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Consequently, it is clear that whatever the Catholic tradition Carroll drew on in the formation of his political thought was, at least in respect to these issues, it was something other than scholasticism. This alternative influence can be found in the conciliarist tradition.

3.4. Conciliarism

Among the centuries-long scholastic debates on the issues of political theology and political philosophy spanning roughly a millennium, one in particular has a surprising bearing on the thought of John Carroll. This is the debate surrounding two primary questions: the place of ultimate authority in the Church and the scope of that authority. Carroll was clearly influenced by the conciliarist school of thought, largely overlapping with the Cisalpine position, arising out of this debate. He can be seen deploying such principles throughout his career.[12] As Blanchard affirms, "in the central theo-political issue of religious liberty, Carroll remained essentially allied to the Cisalpines." (Blanchard 2018, p. 24).

The conciliarist school of thought, whose roots can be clearly seen in such figures as John of Paris [c. 1255–1306] and Marsilius of Padua [1274–1342] and which found preeminent expression in the Councils of Constance [1414–1418] and Basel [1431–1449] and the Assembly of the French National Clergy in 1682, argued that the supreme authority of the Church lay not in the Pope alone, over and above the rest of the faithful and hierarchy, but rather in the Church gathered together in a general council.[13] This greater emphasis on the diffused episcopal authority likewise led to an elevation of the prerogatives of local bishops and the national bodies of bishops and clergy and a diminution of papal supremacy. Such conciliarist principles are seen as operative in Carroll's thought as he led the formation of the nascent American Church, eager to retain as much independence and self-sufficiency from Rome as possible.

On the question of the legitimate scope of ecclesial power, the conciliarist tradition generally held that this scope was limited to matters of a spiritual nature and therefore did not include matters of a political or otherwise non-spiritual nature. The Church was thus held to be responsible for faithfully preaching the gospel, administering the sacraments, and doing everything else God had commanded for the salvation of souls. The papal deposition of kings and other forms of direct or indirect interference in political matters, however, were not integral to the salvation of souls and thus exceeded the legitimate scope of the purely spiritual power of the Church. This principle, which can rightly be identified as a principle of separation between the Church and State, creates a framework in which

religious liberty can be secured and promoted. The Church, on the one hand, has no authority to coerce the subjects of the State with political authority and power, while on the other hand, the State's purpose and authority do not extend to purely spiritual matters. In this gap, where neither a worldly Church nor a spiritualized State could interfere, lay religious liberty.

A more specific form of this position, known as Gallicanism, was very prominent in France, when and where Carroll was a Jesuit academic. The aforementioned Assembly of the French National Clergy in 1682 gave expression to the principles of this position in the Four Gallican Articles. Carroll would have had ample exposure to the Gallican tradition given his geographical and professional proximity. Evidence indeed exists to demonstrate that Carroll was aware of and influenced by these debates. Many of Carroll's ex-Jesuit colleagues with whom he maintained correspondence became major figures arguing on various sides of this debate in writing and other public forums. This school of thought can be seen clearly reflected in Carroll's approach to the relationship of the American Church to the Roman Pontiff and in his desire for equal religious liberty for all sects.

3.5. Carroll's Theory of Religious and Civil Authority

John Carroll celebrated the American understanding of religious liberty on numerous occasions, saying in one place,

> Thanks to the genuine spirit of christianity! the United States have banished intolerance from their systems of government, and many of them have done justice to every denomination of Christians, which ought to be done to them all, of placing them on the same footing of citizenship, and conferring an equal right of participation in national privileges. Freedom and independence, acquired by the united efforts, and cemented with the mingled blood of protestant and catholic fellow-citizens, should be equally enjoyed by all. (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 259)

Elsewhere, Carroll said, "I receive additional pleasure from the diffusion of liberal and tolerating principles, which overlook diversity of Religious sentiment." (ibid, v. 1, p. 193). At first blush, it may indeed sound as though Carroll had adopted novel ideas discordant with his Roman Catholic commitments. He made an admission which could be interpreted in this light, when he said "I have contracted the language of a republican." (ibid, v. 1, p. 65). He said, further, "I am glad . . . to inform you that the fullest and largest system of toleration is adopted in almost all the American states: public protection and encouragement are extended alike to all denominations." (ibid, v.1, p. 53).

Carroll recognizes unhesitatingly "that the Catholic church possesses a spiritual jurisdiction, so transmitted thro every age, is her distinguishing and glorious prerogative." (ibid, v.1, p. 263) However, he adopts a position on the "two-swords" question, which long preceded the American experiment. This position held that the temporal and spiritual powers identified in early and medieval periods were both genuine and legitimate powers but distinct and operative within unique spheres. The spiritual or religious authority of the Pope was the ultimate and final authority within its sphere. Matters pertaining to salvation fell under the purview of ecclesiastical authority, but other matters of political life did not; such fell into the direction of the State. The two powers can, and indeed ought, to cooperate harmoniously in the promotion of the integral development of man in his temporal and spiritual wellbeing. Nonetheless, the two spheres were distinct. Therefore, the supremacy of papal authority and the claim to unique standing as the means of salvation could be maintained while the political order refrained from making a dispositive legal commitment on the issue. This position is central to the Gallican and conciliarist arguments, which closely mirror Carroll's own position here. His understanding was clearly neither simply

derived from classical liberalism nor from the scholastic tradition but shows a great debt to the conciliarist tradition.

Such an understanding was crucial for the American context. Carroll noted that "a foreign temporal jurisdiction will never be tolerated here; & even the Spiritual supremacy of the Pope is the only reason why in some of the United States, full participation of all civil rights is not granted to the R.C." (ibid, v. 1, p. 78). If Catholics had their allegiance split between patriotism and ultramontanism, the latter would inevitably win out on account of its higher claims, it was thought. This would be sufficient to render Catholics unreliable members of the political community and a danger to their countrymen, especially in times of conflict with Catholic European powers that might well have the support of the Pope. Evidently, Carroll's approach was informed to no small degree by the exigencies of the moment in which the lives and wellbeing of his flock were at stake.

In a letter regarding exclusionary religious test oaths for public office, Carroll emphatically defends religious liberty, using the language of liberalism. There, he says,

> Every friend to the rights of conscience, equal liberty and diffusive happiness, must have felt pain on seeing the attempt made by one of your correspondents . . . to revive an odious system of religious intolerance.—The author may not have been fully sensible of the tendency of his publication, because he speaks of preserving universal toleration. Perhaps he is one of those who think it consistent with justice to exclude certain citizens from the honors and emoluments of society, merely on account of their religious opinions, provided they be not restrained by racks and forfeitures from the exercise of that worship which their consciences approve.—If such be his views, in vain then have Americans associated into one great national union, under the express condition of not being shackled by religious tests; and under a firm persuasion that they were to retain when associated, every natural right not expressly surrendered. (ibid, v.1, p. 78)

Carroll's claim to have adopted the language of a republican is verified by statements such as these. While his thought also has a connection to the older discussions of the 'two swords' and other notions, it is expressed primarily in terms of the liberal understanding. This shows quite clearly that Carroll was attempting, both in theory and practice, a synthesis. Having briefly outlined the Roman Catholic and American Liberal approaches to religious liberty and noted Carroll's affirmation of both, it must again be asked if he was guilty of some incoherence in his thought or if he was able to truly work out a *rapprochement* between the two.

In his sermon preached on the occasion of his ascendance to the Episcopal See of Baltimore in 1790, Carroll exclaimed,

> How much reason have I not to fear for myself, when I view the extent of my duties which include to preserve their faith untainted amidst the contagion of error, surrounding them on all sides; to preserve in their hearts a warm charity and forbearance towards every other denomination of Christians; & at the same time to preserve them from that fatal & prevailing indifference, which views all religious as equally acceptable to God and salutary to men: Ah! When I consider these additional duties, my heart sinks almost under the impression of terror that comes upon it. (ibid, v.1, p. 477)

Evidently, Carroll himself thought that the balance was a delicate one, yet it was something that he had a genuine hope of achieving. In a letter written just a few months before his death, Carroll said "let the individuals follow the opinions, which they deem most consonant with the practice of former ages under the best and most enlightened Popes, & most useful to the preservation and extension of pure religion, and this liberty

of opinion should be maintained, till the Head of the Church has spoken definitively on the subject." (ibid, v.3, p. 340). As Breidenbach notes, Carroll's Jesuit background placed him in the middle of the stream of French Gallican and Jansenist thought, which sought a conciliarist position in relation to papal authority. In examining his own words on the matter, it is clear that this claim bears scrutiny.

4. Conclusions

Speaking of critics among his peers who saw no place for Catholics in America due to their supposed divided allegiance and bigotry, Carroll asserted that "these principles of our theology are so different from the common misrepresentations of them." (ibid, v.1, p. 89) By applying what Breidenbach characterizes as "paradoxical Jesuit conciliarism [Carroll] not only offered a Catholic tradition that could justify American independence and republicanism but also soothed Protestant fears of papal domination so that Catholics could become equal citizens." (Breidenbach 2021, p. 118). This was achieved primarily by way of emphasizing that fears of imperium in imperio and anti-republican bigotry were misplaced. Obedience to the Pope was a binding reality for Catholics but only with respect to purely spiritual matters and not in the realm of politics. Resolving these fears was necessary for the integration of Catholics into the political community, which depended on enshrining the principles of religious liberty that left citizens free to follow their consciences in religious matters. Under this system, Catholics could integrate into a religiously pluralistic society, united as citizens despite the barriers of different forms of worship, doctrines, etc.

Carroll achieved this synthesis by adopting and deploying both the conciliarist principles of political theology and elements of the liberal republican tradition. In doing so, Carroll attempted to navigate the delicate political circumstances of his time and carve out a path forward that satisfied both the demands of faith and of citizenship. His achievement provides insight into the history of Catholicism developing self-understanding in relation to political liberalism and religious pluralism. It likewise stands as a useful tool for thinking about these issues in our own day.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council promulgated its teaching on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, which reflects an understanding very much aligned with Carroll's. There, it says, "the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old." (Vatican Council II 1965). The document further clarifies that

> Religious freedom, in turn, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ. . . . This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. . . . This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right. (ibid)

This document mirrors many of Carroll's principles from the perspective of theological orthodoxy. These same principles are no doubt vindicated from a political perspective in the rich history of religious liberty, which America achieved. John Carroll was not the originator of these principles, yet he stood at a crucial historical nexus point between the theological and political aspects of ideas about religious liberty. He anticipated a development of the Catholic Church's teaching on religious liberty, striking a tone not

found in the Vatican documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which still disfavored religious pluralism. His historic significance and the accomplishment of the synthesis that he brought about are thus rather unique and keenly interesting.

Carroll was neither a statesman nor an originator of altogether novel ideas, yet he was the man present at the critical place and time who guided a *rapprochement* of crucial theological and political principles, which is of great importance for American and Catholic history.

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Notes

1 On a recent trip to the Vatican, the vice-president (a Catholic) conscientiously avoided the customary honorary practice of kissing the papal ring, as had Presidents Kennedy and Biden before him (both Catholics.) They avoided this practice on the grounds that doing so would have been discordant with the demands of their office. This brief episode and the attention it generated indicates that the relationship of the papacy and the American government remains a matter of sensitivity and contemporary political interest.

2 Carroll wrote in a letter of the reasons why Catholics struggle to obtain union with non-Catholics in America, saying "The first is, the ascertaining of the Extent and Boundaries of the Spiritual Juridiction of the Holy See. The other the use of the Latin Tongue in the publick Liturgy. I consider these two Points as the greatest Obstacles, with Christians of other Denominations, to a thorough union with us; or at least, to a much more general Diffusion of our Religion, particularly in N. America." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.1, p. 148) The issue of Latin in the liturgy does not present a political issue but as a matter of culture and ritual it did alienate many non-Catholics. Carroll would advocate the use of the vernacular in the liturgy in order to overcome this obstacle. So thorough was his desire for harmony.

3 Carroll discusses the issue of heresy at various points. In his response to Charles Wharton, he advances a conception of heresy far more lenient than what is typically imagined. Carroll clearly states that non-Catholics of goodwill and sincere conviction who remain in doctrinal error can be excused for a number of reasons and are not precluded from salvation. This distinction in moral theology is often described in terms of 'formal' and 'material' heresy.

4 In his Commemoration of American Independence, Carroll said "The impressions made by your conduct will be lasting impressions; and the opinion, favourable or unfavourable to our holy religion, which shall result from observing your manners, will have consequences extending down to the remotest times. I cannot therefore but lament, that some untoward circumstances have disturbed that tranquillity & harmony, the preservation of which would have encreased your happiness & been singularly advantageous to the promotion of piety and truth. Of the causes and circumstances of past misunderstandings I wish to be entirely silent; and may the memory of them never be revived." (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.3, p. 160).

5 Councils often promulgate teachings on what Locke would call 'speculative opinions' but are far less prone to weigh in on particular matters of politics. Such an effort would, at the very least, strain the possibility of consensus among ecclesiastical leaders spread throughout the world with conflicting allegiances to their various governments.

6 Carey notes that "Catholics accepted neither the Protestant evangelical nor the exclusively rationalist arguments for religious liberty; nonetheless, they shared much with both traditions in the United States." (Carey 1989, p. 331) Carroll's principles for accepting religious liberty were not fundamentally identical with Locke's though they shared similarities at the level of policy.

7 John Carroll to Hyacinth Gerdil, 1795: "The peculiar form of our government, the frequent contacts of Catholics with sectaries in the discharge of public duties, the contacts too in private affairs, the need to conform with others whenever it is possible without detriment to faith and the precepts of the Church,—all this postulates uninterrupted care, watchfulness and prudence in the pastor of souls. They must be on guard lest the faithful be gradually infected with the so-called prevailing indifference of this country; but they must likewise take care lest unnecessary withdrawal from non-Catholics alienate them from our doctrine and rites, for, as they outnumber us and are more influential, (Carroll and Hanley 1976, v.2, p. 160).

8 In this debate with Wharton, Carroll defends such doctrines as transubstantiation, purgatory, and sacramental confession at some length.

[9] 'Papal Bull' is the term for a kind of official public decree made by the Pope.

[10] Significant scholarly debate has wrestled with the possibility of reading Aquinas as ultimately being open to some forms of religious toleration, especially for the unbaptized. For present purposes, it is sufficient to note that Aquinas did advocate for *some* form of establishment and enforcement of religion.

[11] De fide, tract. I, disp. XIX, sect. 5 n. 6 reads in the original latin "character baptismi est indelebile signum subjectionis ad Ecclesiam." (Suarez and Berton 1858).

[12] Cisalpine, meaning 'this side of the alps,' was the termed used to denote those who denied hyper-papalist claims. The term was used in reference to those on the north side of the alps, in contrast to Rome which lay to the south. Ultramontanism, meaning 'beyond the mountains,' denoted the contrary view which emphasized the authority of the Pope in Rome.

[13] The Gallican "declaration stated: (1) the pope has supreme spiritual but no secular power; (2) the pope is subject to ecumenical councils; (3) the pope must accept as inviolable immemorial customs of the French Church—e.g., the right of secular rulers to appoint bishops or use revenues of vacant bishoprics; (4) papal infallibility in doctrinal matters presupposes confirmation by the total church." (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018).

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Religious Influences on American Public Attitudes Toward Military Action, 2008–2022

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Abstract: Analysts of American politics have given only modest attention to the way religious factors shape public attitudes toward foreign policy, including the use of US military force. The Cooperative Election Studies from 2008 to 2022 provide an excellent data source for such analysis. Attitudes toward different uses of the military are well measured and the massive sample permits examination of even small ethnoreligious groups. We find that American religious groups vary greatly on overall willingness to use the military but also respond in distinctive—and predictable—ways to each type of intervention. Although religious influences differ somewhat by racial group and are partly mediated by ideology and partisanship, they often play an independent role, even under stringent statistical controls for other variables commonly found to influence public attitudes.

Keywords: public opinion; militarism; ethnoreligious tradition; religiosity; partisanship

1. Religious Influences on Uses of Military Force

Scholars have long debated the role that public opinion plays in shaping American foreign policy. After World War II, most political scientists argued that Americans had little interest in foreign policy, were woefully uninformed about international affairs, and lacked any overarching framework for making sense of such matters, an assessment often summarized as the "Almond–Lippmann consensus" (Holsti 2004, pp. 28–40). In this view, public opinion exerted little, if any, influence on key foreign policy actors, including the president, his foreign policy advisors, and congressional leaders.

While Americans remain primarily concerned with domestic policy issues and their store of information about foreign affairs has probably not grown, scholars have discovered that attitudes on many foreign policy issues are shaped by structured and relatively stable beliefs, allowing citizens to be "cognitive misers" (for a review, see Holsti 2004). The most influential approach has been the "Wittkopf–Holsti–Rosenau" typology of *militant internationalism* and *cooperative internationalism*. Although not subsuming every foreign policy issue confronting the United States, these orientations have survived substantial changes in the international agenda (Wittkopf 1990; Holsti 2004; Eichenberg 2007). Each has a very different perspective on the role of military force: "militant internationalists" see it as the primary instrument of American foreign policy, while "cooperative internationalists" prefer diplomacy and resort to force only for "altruistic" purposes such as supporting democracy, preventing genocide, or backing UN peacekeeping efforts.

Scholars have identified many social, ideological, and demographic influences on these attitudinal structures, but much variation remains unexplained. Religious factors have been largely neglected, at least until recently, despite the growing literature on their

role in domestic politics (Smidt et al. 2009). Indeed, one extensive review of Americans' attitudes concluded that there was nothing to study: "with the exception of policy toward Israel, religion has little bearing on how they think about international affairs" (Kohut and Stokes 2006, p. 94). That perspective has been challenged by scholars from disciplines other than political science, who have made strong claims both for religion's influence on Americans' foreign policy views and the resulting impact on political leaders (for a brief review, see Guth 2013a). And some recent work in the discipline has argued for the influence of domestic religious influences on presidential foreign policy (Buckley 2024; Guth and Nelsen 2024).

A review of this growing body of work reveals two major themes on the role of religion in American foreign policy. A *hegemonic* theme argues that religion fosters attitudes of unilateralism, moralism, and nationalistic assertiveness, consistent with a militant internationalist interpretation (cf. Buckley 2024). A competing *altruistic* theme focuses on religious support for human rights and religious freedom, protecting the global environment, expanding international relief and rescue operations, combatting AIDS in Africa, and working for economic development (Wuthnow 2009). The altruistic approach minimizes the utility of military force, reflecting the core approaches of cooperative internationalism.

Unfortunately, even the scholars who examine the influence of religious factors on foreign policy often use simplistic assessments of American religion. First, they sometimes focus on religious elites, rather than those in the pews, despite some enormous opinion gaps between organization leaders and the rank and file (Guth et al. 1997). Second, much work has been preoccupied with white Evangelicals (Barker et al. 2008; Baumgartner et al. 2008; Froese and Mencken 2009; Page and Bouton 2006) and has neglected the other 80 percent of the public. This creates an artificial analytic dualism pitting Evangelicals against "secular" opinion (everyone else), despite evidence that many religious groups have distinctive attitudes toward foreign policy, especially on the use of military force (Hero 1973). This should not be surprising: Catholic bishops, Mainline Protestant officials, and Jewish leaders have long sought to influence both the mass public and policymakers on such issues (Hanson 1987; Wald 1992; Rock 2011; Kurtz and Fulton 2002). Such dualism also neglects the possibility that the growing ranks of religiously unaffiliated Americans—especially agnostics and atheists—may have distinctive preferences (Hansen 2011; Campbell et al. 2021, p. 157). Thus, the existing literature often overstates the distinctiveness of one religious group, ignores the potential influence of others, and generally treats American religion simplistically.

Another deficiency is the failure to include all the significant dimensions of religion, especially religiosity and religious beliefs, which are often more powerful predictors of political variables than mere affiliation. Indeed, a few recent works using sophisticated religious measures have discovered substantial differences among religious groups on foreign policy issues, including the use of military force. Analyses of surveys by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the American National Election Studies, and the National Survey on Religion and Politics have demonstrated that religious tradition, religious beliefs, and religious behavior all have a substantial influence on citizens' positions on the militant and cooperative internationalist dimensions (Guth 2009, 2013a). In another study, Gries (2014, p. 122) not only found substantial differences among religious traditions in the proportions of "hawks and doves" but also discovered that religious beliefs and behaviors influenced such attitudes. Such findings suggest the need for careful measurement of religious variables in analyzing public support for military action. To understand the theoretical context for such analysis, we turn to the dominant theoretical perspectives on the "politics of American religion".

2. Religious Groups in American Politics

In considering theoretical perspectives from which to understand the role of religion in American politics, we draw on two alternative views, one drawn from the work of American historians and the other from the sociology of religion. The "ethnocultural" historians emphasized the role of competing ethnoreligious groups in the structuring of American politics. They argued that nineteenth-century electoral contests entailed assembling the winning coalitions of contending ethnoreligious groups. Although partisan religious alignments were often complex, the Republican Party (GOP) drew from historically dominant Mainline Protestant churches, such as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists, while Democrats spoke for religious minorities: Catholics, Jews, and southern Evangelicals (after the Civil War).

Although the class-based politics of the New Deal added an economic overlay to this pattern, the religious alignments remained largely intact for a time. But by the 1980s, changes were underway: Mainline Protestants had dwindled in numbers, Evangelicals had moved toward the GOP, the ancient Catholic–Democratic alliance had frayed, and Black Protestants had become a critical Democratic bloc (Kellstedt and Guth 2013). Growing religious diversity has added Latino Catholics and Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and many others to the equation, usually on the Democratic side. But even today, many analysts think in ethnoreligious terms, referring to the "Evangelical", "Catholic", "Jewish", or "Muslim" vote. Although the underlying assumptions were often incompletely articulated, historians usually argued that ethnoreligious groups held differing worldviews, cultural preferences, and negative reference groups—all shaping their views on public policy (Swierenga 2009).

The "ethno" part of ethnoreligious suggests that influences on foreign policy attitudes may well be more the result of racial differences than of religious factors. Indeed, some recent studies have found striking differences among American racial groups on questions of military power and its use. Smeltz et al. (2023) argue that Asian Americans are most supportive of military actions, followed by white Americans, with "Native Americans, Black Americans, and Hispanic Americans" reporting "the least comfort with the use of force" in various scenarios. This finding confirms much earlier findings by Wittkopf (1990, pp. 44–45) and Holsti (2004), who found that by 2000, the racial gap between white and Blacks was "emerging as one of the more powerful sources of foreign policy cleavages" (p. 228). As ethnoreligious perspectives suggest, however, race and religion often intersect in various combinations. Thus, we expect that Latino Catholics differ from Latino Evangelicals, who in turn differ from white Evangelicals. In the same vein, white Catholics will differ from Latino Catholics, and so on. This suggests the need to incorporate controls for race in any analysis using ethnoreligious traditions. If ethnoreligious differences persist after controls for race, that may demonstrate the independent impact of religion.

Historians of American foreign policy have chronicled a number of distinctive influences by ethnoreligious groups and many contemporary controversies also suggest their power. The strong antipathy of Irish-American Catholics toward any American alliance with Great Britain, the isolationism of German Lutherans and Catholics during World War I, and the powerful support of American Jews for Israel since 1948 are just three examples of ethnoreligious influence. American Catholic anticommunism in the 1950s and 1960s was shaped not only by Church condemnation of that "Godless" system but also by ethnoreligious solidarity with Eastern European brethren under Soviet domination. Support by Palestinian Americans, both Muslim and Christian, for their brethren in Gaza, the interest of Black Protestants in policy toward Africa, and the persistent lobbying of public officials by Armenian Americans over events in their homeland are just three examples of distinctive contemporary concerns of a host of American "ethnoreligious fragments" (Uslaner 2007;

see also Holsti 2004, pp. 227–31). Indeed, some critics fear that American foreign policy might be unduly influenced by ethnoreligious "diasporas", especially Latino Americans (Huntington 2004, pp. 285–91). Other observers see the numerical growth of ethnoreligious minorities preparing the way for a more "cooperative" internationalism, as these citizens might bring wider global sensitivities to public opinion.

Sociologists of religion focusing on contemporary changes in American religion have suggested an alternative perspective on religiopolitical alignments: the *religious restructuring* (Wuthnow 1988) or *culture wars* theory (Hunter 1991). Both Wuthnow and Hunter saw new religious battles emerging *within* old traditions, based on theology. Although their terminology differed slightly, they saw "orthodox" or "conservative" believers adhering firmly to traditional doctrines on one side of the battle, with "progressives" or "liberals" who jettisoned old religious tenets in favor of new ones based on personal experience or scientific rationality, on the other (Hunter 1991, p. 44). Although defined primarily by religious belief, the orthodox are usually more observant than progressives, complicating efforts to distinguish the effects of belief and behavior. More recently, progressives have been joined politically by a burgeoning secular population that sees morality in a similar vein (Hansen 2011; Campbell et al. 2021).

Whatever the differences among ethnoreligious traditions, some recent studies have shown the strong influence of restructuring (belief and behavior) measures on attitudes toward foreign policy generally, and military affairs in particular. Orthodox believers and the observant in most religious groups tend to be more supportive of a wider range of military actions than the religiously progressive and less observant (Guth 2009, 2013a, 2013b; Gries 2014). Even "specialized" beliefs, seldom tapped in standard academic surveys, such as Protestant dispensationalism, often have an important impact on key foreign policy and military issues, such as support for Israel or willingness to support UN action (Barker et al. 2008; Ruotsila 2008). Similarly, framing policy choices in "providential" terms may shape religious responses to policy (Glazier 2013). One unresolved question is whether religious influences have direct impact on such attitudes (Taydas et al. 2012) or are almost entirely mediated by education, partisanship, and ideology (Wittkopf 1990; Roy 2016).

3. Data and Methods

Although the influence of religious factors on support for the American military is a fascinating one, empirical analysis has been hindered by the paucity of surveys including both extensive batteries on military action and adequate religious measures. Ideally, a survey should have queries about a variety of military actions, reflecting the reality that citizens differ substantially on what circumstances should activate U.S. forces. It should also include sophisticated measures of religious belonging, behavior and belief (the "Three Bs" of religious analysis). Few academic surveys combine these traits.

Our analysis uses a pooled sample from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study series (now the Cooperative Election Study), drawing on a battery of items found in seven surveys from 2008 to 2016, 2020, and 2022. This massive data set (N = 323,707) has several advantages for our purposes but also some limitations. Militarism was well measured: respondents were asked about seven items which ascertained whether they would support use of American military force: to ensure oil supplies, destroy terrorist camps, end genocide or civil war, assist in spreading democracy, protect American allies, and help the UN uphold international law—or not permit any of these. Items such as attacking terrorists and securing oil supplies might seem to tap Wittkopf's militant internationalism, but others appear more attuned to cooperative internationalism, such as providing support for the UN or preventing genocide. Unfortunately, however, response categories are dichotomous,

"yes" or "no", without measuring the strength of attitudes, thereby limiting variation on each item. Nevertheless, all the options are obviously relevant to American foreign policy.

Like the military items, CES religious measures have both strengths and weaknesses. First, the full battery of affiliation questions allows precise assignment of respondents to ethnoreligious traditions, the *sine qua non* of religious measurement (Smidt et al. 2009; Steensland et al. 2000). And the huge sample permits the study of groups that are too small to matter in the typical 800- or 1000-respondent survey. For example, the pooled sample has 5018 Latter-day Saints, 3396 Latino Protestants, 2878 Buddhists, 1744 Eastern Orthodox, 1337 Muslims, 1144 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 859 Hindus. As we shall see, this produces a much richer picture of the increasingly diverse American religious community. The CES also has measures of religious service attendance, the importance of religion, and the frequency of prayer. Combined, these produce a highly reliable *religiosity* measure (*alpha* = 0.81). The useful measures of affiliation and behavior are not, unfortunately, matched by sophisticated belief questions; the survey asks only if the respondent is a "born-again or Evangelical Christian". We use this as an admittedly limited proxy for theological orthodoxy among sample Christians. In this sense, it substitutes for the Biblical literalism item that Gries (2014) found as a powerful influence. These two items typically correlate at about $r = 0.50$, depending on the wording.

Although the CES usually lacks questions on broader foreign policy attitudes, like those in the Chicago Council of Global Affairs (CCGA) surveys and, sometimes, the American National Election Studies (ANES), the series has consistent measures of many demographic variables, such as race, gender, income, and education, often found to influence attitudes on military issues (Eichenberg 2007, 2016, 2017; Wittkopf 1990; Holsti 2004; Page and Bouton 2006). The CES also asks about the respondent's connections to the American military, of obvious interest here (Jost et al. 2022). The survey also taps political interest, identifying the "attentive public", which often has attitudes distinct from those of less engaged citizens (Almond 1960). Finally, the survey has standard items for partisan and ideological identification, which are increasingly powerful influences on foreign policy attitudes generally (Holsti 2004; Gries 2014). As the surveys have different numbers of respondents, we have weighted them by the average survey size (46,244), and to account for differences by year of administration, we included dummy variables for the earlier and later years in the series, but do not report the results here.

All in all, the CES provides more than adequate raw material. We proceed as follows: First, we provide an overview of how ethnoreligious factors, including religious tradition and race, structure responses to the military items, noting some clear bivariate patterns. Then, we use logistic regression to examine the impact of ethnoreligious tradition, race, demography, and political influences on each item, starting with the most-supported use, defending allies under attack, and moving toward the least approved, spreading democracy abroad. As several of these items have been used elsewhere, especially in Page and Bouton (2006), we also note how our findings comport with, add to, or challenge earlier findings, especially on the influence of religious and racial variables, much better measured in this data set. We find some distinctive religious and racial responses to these items. And although religious and racial influences are mediated in part by partisanship and ideology, they often retain an independent role, even under stringent statistical controls.

4. Results and Discussion

How do Americans regard various uses of the military? As the first line of Table 1 suggests, Americans give quite varied responses to hypothetical uses of U.S. armed forces. Almost 9 in 10 are in principle willing to use the military in at least some circumstance, rejecting a thoroughgoing pacifist stance. Seventy-three percent would support allies under

attack, almost two-thirds back action against terrorist camps, but slightly less than half were willing to enforce UN actions, and only four-tenths would use the military to stop genocide. Just over one in five would countenance using American forces to protect oil supplies and less than one-fifth would use the military to help build democracy abroad. Of course, real-world events might alter these findings in any particular survey, but the responses are fairly stable over the period from 2008 to 2022. Most responses fluctuated somewhat from survey to survey, although willingness to hit terrorist camps declined more or less monotonically from 2008 to 2022. Even considering the temporal variation, the limited range of responses certainly suggests fairly stable levels of "permissive consensus" for these military actions (cf. Page and Bouton 2006, p. 46).

Table 1. Religion, race and uses of the American military.

	Mean Uses	Some Use	Assist allies	Destroy terrorists	Help UN	Stop genocide	Secure oil	Assist democracy
Total	3.53	0.89	0.73	0.64	0.45	0.41	0.22	0.18
Religious Tradition								
Latter-day Saints	3.82	0.93	0.81	0.73	0.40	0.46	0.24	0.23
Jews (non-Orthodox)	3.80	0.93	0.76	0.69	0.52	0.52	0.21	0.16
White Evangelical	3.77	0.93	0.80	0.74	0.35	0.41	0.30	0.22
White Mainline	3.73	0.93	0.78	0.71	0.47	0.40	0.25	0.18
Orthodox Jews	3.71	0.91	0.76	0.75	0.30	0.45	0.33	0.21
White Catholic	3.64	0.91	0.74	0.70	0.43	0.39	0.27	0.19
Agnostic/Atheist	3.53	0.90	0.73	0.55	0.62	0.50	0.11	0.11
All Others	3.42	0.88	0.70	0.60	0.44	0.42	0.20	0.18
Black Protestant	3.35	0.87	0.66	0.52	0.47	0.40	0.20	0.23
Latino Evangelical	3.30	0.86	0.67	0.59	0.35	0.41	0.22	0.21
Eastern Orthodox	3.30	0.87	0.63	0.62	0.38	0.37	0.24	0.19
Buddhist	3.26	0.86	0.63	0.47	0.57	0.47	0.12	0.14
Latino Catholic	3.16	0.86	0.61	0.53	0.41	0.38	0.18	0.20
Hindu	3.16	0.85	0.51	0.52	0.47	0.35	0.21	0.24
Nothing in Particular	3.13	0.83	0.64	0.53	0.45	0.37	0.17	0.14
Muslim	2.84	0.82	0.45	0.36	0.43	0.42	0.15	0.21
Jehovah's Witnesses	1.77	0.48	0.34	0.31	0.21	0.23	0.12	0.08
Born-Again Status								
Born Again	3.64	0.91	0.76	0.69	0.36	0.40	0.29	0.24
Not Born Again	3.48	0.89	0.72	0.62	0.48	0.42	0.20	0.16
Religiosity								
Very High	3.70	0.88	0.77	0.71	0.36	0.43	0.27	0.24
High	3.61	0.88	0.74	0.67	0.41	0.40	0.26	0.22
Moderate	3.51	0.89	0.72	0.65	0.43	0.39	0.24	0.19
Low	3.43	0.91	0.70	0.62	0.47	0.40	0.21	0.15
Very Low	3.41	0.91	0.71	0.56	0.57	0.45	0.14	0.12
Race								
White	3.62	0.91	0.75	0.67	0.45	0.42	0.24	0.18
Asian	3.26	0.85	0.63	0.52	0.49	0.40	0.17	0.20
Black	3.19	0.84	0.62	0.49	0.46	0.38	0.18	0.21
Latino	3.13	0.84	0.61	0.52	0.41	0.39	0.17	0.19

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Studies, 2008–2016, 2020; Cooperative Election Study, 2022. N = 323,707.

Whatever the overall levels of public support, how do members of America's diverse ethnoreligious and racial communities respond to these "uses" of U.S. armed forces? Table 1 reports our findings for ethnoreligious groups—ordered from those most willing to use force to those least willing to do so. We also note results for different levels of religiosity and "born-again" status. Finally, we show data for the four largest racial groups, which overlap the religious categories in complex ways.

The findings provide some fascinating insights into both strong general tendencies and interesting peculiarities. First, Latter-day Saints, non-Orthodox Jews, and white Evangelical Protestants are most sympathetic to military action overall, followed closely by white Mainline Protestants and Orthodox Jews. White Catholics trail at some distance, with agnostics and atheists just above the sample average. Virtually all the ethnoreligious minorities fall below the sample average, as do respondents claiming "Nothing in Particular" (NIPS). Jehovah's Witnesses are the least "militaristic" of all, followed by American Muslims. Religiosity also shows a clear pattern: the most observant are the strongest supporters of a range of military actions, while the least observant are the most resistant. There is a similar gap between "born-again" Christians and those not taking that label, with the former approving more military actions. And as some scholars have suggested, the racial gap is fairly substantial: white Americans are substantially more like to approve military action than are Asian Americans, Blacks, or Latinos, who differ only modestly from each other. We note that this order differs slightly from that in Smeltz et al. (2023): Asians in that study were more militaristic than whites; here, they are similar to Blacks and Latinos.

Although reactions to the individual items naturally tend to fall in the same pattern as the cumulative score, there are some clear variations. Among the ethnoreligious groups, Jehovah's Witnesses invariably appear as the least willing to engage in military action, living up to their pacifist roots. Muslims react in predictable ways, being less likely to support American forces supporting allies (perhaps Israel?), attacking terrorist camps, or seizing oil resources. As Page and Bouton (2006) discovered, white Evangelicals tend to be quite positive about a range of military actions, but are least supportive of action supporting the UN, exceeded in their distrust only by Orthodox Jews. The greatest support for UN assistance comes from agnostics and atheists, who with the two Jewish groups are also the most likely to favor action in cases of genocide or civil war. White Evangelicals and Orthodox Jews also far exceed the sample average in willingness to seize oil supplies by force. Born-again Christians are usually more willing to use force—except in support of the UN or to stop genocide—with a similar pattern appearing among the most observant. And although whites are much more inclined to support allies and destroy terrorist camps than other racial groups, differences on other items are relatively modest. And the minority racial groups do not usually differ much from each other in their relative hesitancy to use military force.

To explore the ethnoreligious and racial sources of attitudes, we now turn to a multivariate examination of each of the six occasions for military action. We use logistic regression to parse the impact of ethnoreligious and racial factors, applying controls for a variety of demographic and political variables shown to influence public attitudes on military matters. Although the CES does not tap the general foreign policy orientations used by Page and Bouton (2006) to explain those attitudes, we do have partisanship and self-identified ideology, thought by many scholars to have an increasingly strong influence on contemporary foreign policy orientations (Holsti 2004; Gries 2014).

We report four models in each table: the first incorporating only religious variables, the second adding race, the third adding demographic traits, and the final model, two political variables. Each equation also controls for year of administration. For ethnoreligious groups, the omitted reference category is "All Other Religions", a group close to the mean on most of the individual items (and theoretically of less interest). For race, the omitted reference category is "All Other Races or More than One", also a substantial group collectively close to the mean on most items. To facilitate a focus on ethnoreligious influences, we order the groups in each table from the one with the largest positive coefficients in the first model to that with the largest negative tendency (always the Jehovah's Witnesses).

4.1. Occasion One: Defending Allies Under Attack

As we have seen, the scenario eliciting the widest approval for military action is to "protect American allies under attack by foreign nations". Despite this broad consensus, there are still clear religious differences here. As the first column in Table 2 shows, the strongest support comes from Latter-day Saints, Evangelicals, and Mainline Protestants, with both Jewish groups, agnostics/atheists, and white Catholics trailing. Most ethnoreligious minorities are distinctly less supportive, especially Hindus and Muslims. Religiosity provides some modest additional support for allies, but born-again status drops out completely.

Table 2. Religious, demographic and political influences on military support for allies.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
Latter-day Saints	0.564 ***	0.455 ***	0.427 ***	0.360 ***
White Evangelical	0.512 ***	0.363 ***	0.325 ***	0.266 ***
White Mainline	0.441 ***	0.300 ***	0.211 ***	0.194 ***
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.355 ***	0.241 ***	0.155 ***	0.180 ***
Agnostic/Atheist	0.279 ***	0.219 ***	0.179 ***	0.141 ***
Orthodox Jews	0.240 **	0.145	0.133	0.113
White Catholic	0.233 ***	0.091 ***	0.049 *	0.031
Black Protestant	−0.179 ***	0.220 ***	0.212 ***	0.267 ***
Nothing in Particular	−0.180 ***	−0.196 ***	−0.095 ***	−0.051 **
Latino Evangelical	−0.193 ***	0.147 ***	0.120 **	0.120 *
Buddhist	−0.225 ***	−0.232 ***	−0.275 ***	−0.250
Eastern Orthodox	−0.274 ***	−0.372 ***	−0.419 ***	−0.449 ***
Latino Catholic	−0.384 ***	−0.035	−0.039	0.018
Hindu	−0.752 ***	−0.665 ***	−0.704 ***	−0.663 ***
Muslim	−1.026 ***	−0.932 ***	−0.863 ***	−0.840 ***
Jehovah's Witnesses	−1.528 ***	−1.450 ***	−1.345 ***	−1.181 ***
Other Religious Factors				
"Born Again"	0.004	0.002	0.033 **	0.017
Religiosity	0.068 ***	0.085 ***	0.086 ***	0.035 ***
Race				
White		0.031	0.106 ***	0.127 ***
Asian		−0.237 ***	−0.072 *	0.030
Latino		−0.461 ***	−0.290 ***	−0.216 ***
Black		−0.519 ***	−0.385 ***	−0.246 ***
Demographics				
Male			0.472 ***	0.366 ***
Higher Education			0.103 ***	0.068 ***
Higher Income			−0.001	−0.001 ***
Age			0.006 ***	0.001 ***
South			0.073 ***	0.070 ***
Married			0.067 ***	0.024 **
Active Military Duty			−0.277 ***	−0.358 ***
Family			0.171 ***	0.119 ***
Veteran/Family			0.293 ***	0.240 ***
Politics				
Political Interest				0.253 ***
Conservative/GOP				0.159 ***
Constant	0.568 ***	0.679 ***	−0.486 ***	−0.790 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.032	0.037	0.075	0.084

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Studies, 2008–2016, 2020; Cooperative Election Study, 2022. N = 323,707. Controls for the year of administration included in each model. The omitted religious reference category is All Other Religions; for race, it is All Other Races or More Than One. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. + indicates the addition of a new set of variables to the equation.

Adding race to the equation nudges up the R squared from 0.032 to 0.037. Whites do not differ from the omitted reference group, but Asians, Latinos, and Blacks are less

likely to support allies. The controls for race, however, have an interesting impact on the ethnoreligious coefficients, reducing but not eliminating those of most "white" religious groups. But the impact of religious affiliation among some racial minorities is revealing. When race is controlled, Black Protestants are actually *more* supportive of allies than other African Americans (bivariate data show 66 percent of Black Protestants approving, versus 56 percent of other Blacks). A similar effect occurs among Latino Evangelicals, whose coefficient becomes *positive* once race is controlled. And the negative coefficient for Latino Catholics disappears when race is controlled. Thus, among these Christian ethnoreligious minorities, membership in a religious community produces more support for allies than is present among their non-religious brethren.

In the third equation, we introduce demographic variables found previously to be influential on military policy: gender (Page and Bouton 2006, p. 122), education, income, age, region (Holsti 2004, pp. 224–29), marital status (Shafer and Spady 2014), and military connections (Jost et al. 2022). Page and Bouton argue that women are consistently less militaristic, but "most other demographic factors do not" matter (2006, p. 122). To the contrary, we find that men are indeed more likely to support allies, but higher education also contributes to support, as does age, southern residence, and being a veteran or member of a veteran's family. Interestingly, active-duty personnel have the more skeptical attitude toward military action discovered in some surveys (Jost et al. 2022), although their families lean a little the other way. Contrary to Page and Bouton's findings, the introduction of demographic variables adds substantially to the variance explained, but leaves coefficients for religious variables virtually unchanged, if modifying those for racial groups a bit. This finding also differs from Wittkopf (1990, p. 45), who found that religion and race drop out of the equation once education and other demographic factors are controlled.

To this point, we have seen that religious, racial, and other demographic traits influence public attitudes toward military action. We also expect that "political mobilization", measured here by political interest (Inglehart 1970), should have an impact, tapping the effects of being in the "attentive public", long the focus of foreign policy opinion studies (Almond 1960). We also suspect, of course, that ideational factors will have a major influence, being closer in the "causal order" (Miller and Shanks 1996, p. 190ff) to military policy options. In recent years, scholars have increasingly stressed the role of ideology and partisanship in shaping foreign policy attitudes. Some analysts stress ideology (Gries 2014), others emphasize partisanship (Holsti 2004), and yet others argue that there is little difference between these factors in contemporary American politics, as parties are largely sorted by ideological preferences. In our sample, partisanship and ideology are so highly correlated ($r = 0.71$) as to warrant combining them in the analysis. We anticipate that their influence may run in different directions, depending on the military use. Republicans and conservatives should favor "militant" uses, while Democrats and liberal should prefer "cooperative" ones.

As Table 2's last column shows, adding political factors boosts the explanatory power of our analysis. High political interest increases the likelihood of supporting action in defense of allies, as does being strongly "conservative/GOP." Not surprisingly, inclusion of political variables reduces somewhat the coefficients for the ethnoreligious traditions, but most remain solid and in the same direction as the bivariate tendencies as modified by race. Thus, even though Latter-day Saints and white Evangelicals are massively conservative and Republican in identification, their religious location still *adds* to their willingness to support allies under attack. For white Catholics, however, religious membership adds nothing to that propensity, once politics are taken into account. On the other side, many ethnoreligious groups that lean heavily to liberal/Democratic do not move much from Models 2 and 3 to Model 4, suggesting sustained *religious* influence on the "non-military" side. Thus, even

on this widely approved use of the American military, the residual ethnoreligious impact still tends to reinforce GOP willingness to support allies under attack—and pull Democrats and liberals in the other direction.

4.2. Occasion: Destroying Terrorist Camps

As we noted above, military action "to destroy terrorist camps" is the second most "popular" use of American forces, although that support declined steadily after the first survey in 2008. Table 3 reports an analysis of responses to that item. With more variation in the dependent variable, we naturally expect to be able to explain more. Indeed, the patterns are primarily somewhat "sharper" replicas of those in the previous analysis. Evangelicals, Orthodox Jews, Latter-day Saints, other Jews, and White Mainline Protestants and Catholics are all above the mean on support for such use, while ethnoreligious minorities line up on the other side, with Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses most opposed. Once more, religiosity bolsters the approval of military use, here with an added push from "born-again" status. Ethnoreligious variables alone explain 5 percent of the variance.

Table 3. Religious, demographic and political influences on military anti-terror actions.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
White Evangelical	0.601 ***	0.523 ***	0.465 ***	0.296 ***
Orthodox Jews	0.651 ***	0.606 ***	0.608 ***	0.512 ***
Latter-day Saints	0.566 ***	0.513 ***	0.484 ***	0.270 ***
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.472 ***	0.415 ***	0.341 ***	0.421 ***
White Mainline	0.462 ***	0.389 ***	0.275 ***	0.219 ***
White Catholic	0.457 ***	0.383 ***	0.316 ***	0.238 ***
Eastern Orthodox	0.128 *	0.084	0.050	−0.038
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.013	−0.028	−0.062 **	−0.051 *
Latino Evangelical	−0.110 **	0.222 ***	0.188 ***	0.131 **
Nothing in Particular	−0.183 ***	−0.154 ***	−0.042 *	−0.034
Latino Catholic	−0.248 ***	0.090 **	0.068 *	0.119 ***
Hindu	−0.267 ***	−0.177 ***	−0.196 **	−0.041
Black Protestant	−0.354 ***	0.120 ***	0.122 ***	0.239 ***
Buddhist	−0.422 ***	−0.400 ***	−0.451 ***	−0.352 **
Muslim	−0.923 ***	−0.808 ***	−0.732 ***	−0.642 ***
Jehovah's Witnesses	−1.234 ***	−1.112 ***	−1.052 ***	−0.922 ***
Other Religious Factors				
"Born Again"	0.072 ***	0.067 ***	0.083 ***	−0.001
Religiosity	0.063 ***	0.076 ***	0.087 ***	−0.017 **
Race				
White		−0.119 ***	−0.047 *	0.015
Asian		−0.319 ***	−0.088 **	0.020
Latino		−0.531 ***	−0.329 ***	−0.188 ***
Black		−0.673 ***	−0.519 ***	−0.240 ***
Demographics				
Male			0.707 ***	0.555 ***
Higher Education			0.054 ***	0.040 ***
Higher Income			0.000	−0.001 ***
Age			0.011 ***	0.006 ***
South			0.089 ***	0.069 ***
Married			0.137 ***	0.057 ***
Active Military Duty			−0.130 ***	−0.194 ***
Family			0.180 ***	0.101 ***
Veteran/Family			0.268 ***	0.203 ***
Politics				
Political Interest				0.254 ***
Conservative/GOP				0.424 ***
Constant	0.243 ***	0.437 ***	−0.936 ***	−1.245 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.050	0.055	0.120	0.155

See Table 2 notes for details. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

When race is added, the variance explained rises a little, with all the large racial groups more skeptical than the "miscellaneous" omitted reference group. Once again,

controls for race flip the signs for Black Protestants and both Latino groups, suggesting that religious membership has a "militarizing" effect even in these racial groups. With race in the equation, religiosity's impact actually rises a little, while the "born-again" coefficient is somewhat reduced.

The demographic and political variables also largely replicate the patterns in Table 2: men, the highly educated, older citizens, southerners, the married, and veterans or their families tend to support such action, with active-duty personnel again moving in the other direction (but not their families). Strong political interest supports action against terrorists, as does conservative/GOP identification. And although the political variables essentially absorb the influence of religiosity and born-again status, the coefficients for most of the ethnoreligious groups remain in the same direction as in the earlier models, though occasionally reduced in magnitude. With everything in the mix, white and Asian Americans are not distinctive, although Latinos and Black Americans are still somewhat more skeptical of military action against terrorists. All variables together account for 16 percent of the variance, a very respectable result. And a comparison of Tables 2 and 3 suggests that the basic structure of opinion on these two issues is quite similar.

4.3. Occasion: Supporting the UN

As Page and Bouton note, "'Dovish' uses of military force for multilateral peacekeeping and other humanitarian purposes often evoke patterns of demographic support that are muted or reversed compared with those for 'hawkish' uses" (2006, p. 129). Certainly, support for helping the UN "uphold international law" falls within this rubric. And their suspicion about the unique sources of support for such action is warranted.

As Table 4 demonstrates, support for UN action comes from a very different ethnoreligious, racial, demographic, and political coalition than our previous cases of support for allies and attacking terrorists. To begin with, support for the UN comes from different ethnoreligious groups, with agnostics/atheists, Buddhists, and Black Protestants leading the way, followed at some distance by non-Orthodox Jews and Mainline Protestants. On the other side, most ethnoreligious groups that favored support for allies and attacks on terrorists are less supportive of this purpose, with Orthodox Jews most critical (aside from the Jehovah's Witnesses, of course), followed by the Eastern Orthodox, both Latino groups, white Evangelicals, and "NIPS". More significantly, both high religiosity and born-again identity work powerfully against support, suggesting that religious traditionalism still produces opposition to the UN, based no doubt on some combination of historic theological objections by conservative Protestants and contemporary resistance by religious traditionalists to a panoply of liberal social policies long supported by UN agencies (cf. Ruotsila 2008; Page and Bouton 2006, p. 128; Gries 2014, pp. 241–249).

When race is incorporated in the equation, we add only modestly to the variance explained (0.040 to 0.043) but see some significant changes in many religious group coefficients: those for most of the "supporting" ethnoreligious groups are reduced substantially, but those for some in the "opposing" coalition are actually enhanced. At the same time, religiosity and born-again status retain solid negative coefficients. All this confirms a role for religious traditionalism in limiting support for the UN across most racial groups.

The demographic variables also reveal a somewhat different pattern from earlier analyses. Men are *less* likely to support US military action supporting the UN, as are southerners, married people, and wealthier citizens. Military status has much less impact on this option, but higher education still produces more support for military action. Finally, political interest has a mildly supportive effect and conservative/GOP identity has a massive negative one, as might be expected. The incorporation of the political variables mediates much of the influence of the "supporting" religious traditions, with the coefficients

for agnostics/atheists, Buddhists, and Black Protestants substantially reduced—but still positive—and that for non-Orthodox Jews "flipping signs". On the other side, notably, the political variables substantially reduce the strong negative coefficient for white Evangelicals and for religiosity, although born-again identity retains some independent influence. And inclusion of the political variables almost triples the variance explained from Model 3. On the whole, the configuration of the supporting and opposing coalitions on this usage looks much different from those on the two more widely supported uses.

Table 4. Religious, demographic and political influences on military support for the UN.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
Agnostic/Atheist	0.432 ***	0.291 ***	0.248 ***	0.122 ***
Buddhist	0.370 ***	0.256 ***	0.212 ***	0.018
Black Protestant	0.326 ***	0.274 ***	0.251 ***	0.082 **
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.195 ***	0.025	−0.055 *	−0.196 ***
White Mainline	0.136 ***	−0.067 ***	−0.073 ***	0.043 **
Hindu	0.072	0.000	−0.039	−0.202 ***
Muslim	−0.061	−0.109	−0.085	−0.233 ***
Latter-day Saints	−0.097 **	−0.268 ***	−0.263 ***	0.119 ***
White Catholic	−0.099 ***	−0.301 ***	−0.282 ***	−0.126 ***
Nothing in Particular	−0.143 ***	−0.275 ***	−0.242 ***	−0.158 ***
Latino Evangelical	−0.155 ***	−0.114 *	−0.108 *	0.061
White Evangelical	−0.164 ***	−0.375 ***	−0.342 ***	−0.065 ***
Latino Catholic	−0.178 ***	−0.126 ***	−0.108 ***	−0.091 *
Eastern Orthodox	−0.305 ***	−0.460 ***	−0.501 ***	−0.361 ***
Orthodox Jews	−0.611 ***	−0.759 ***	−0.784 ***	−0.580 ***
Jehovah's Witnesses	−1.046 ***	−1.142 ***	−1.046 ***	−0.912 ***
Other Religious Factors				
Religiosity	−0.127 ***	−0.116 ***	−0.126 ***	−0.011
"Born Again"	−0.304 ***	−0.298 ***	−0.253 ***	−0.098 ***
Race				
White		0.450 ***	0.452 ***	0.377 ***
Asian		0.342 ***	0.282 ***	0.342 ***
Latino		0.196 ***	0.200 ***	0.070 *
Black		0.291 ***	0.283 ***	−0.028
Demographics				
Male			−0.099 ***	0.015
Higher Education			0.122 ***	0.062 ***
Higher Income			−0.004 ***	−0.003 ***
Age			0.001 ***	0.000
South			−0.050 ***	0.003
Married			−0.124 ***	−0.037 ***
Active Military Duty Family			0.011	0.009
			−0.040 **	0.018
Veteran/Family			0.012	0.046 ***
Politics				
Political Interest				0.098 ***
Conservative/GOP				−0.642 ***
Constant	−0.300 ***	−0.549 ***	−0.891 ***	−0.970 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.040	0.043	0.055	0.141

See Table 2 notes for details. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4. Occasion: Preventing Genocide or Civil War

Another "dovish" use of the American military might be to "intervene in a region where there is genocide or a civil war". Like support for the UN, this item almost divides

the American public in half, with only 41 percent of the pooled sample approving this use. As Table 5 shows, the response to this usage falls along somewhat similar lines as that for UN operations but is less well explained by religious variables—or for that matter, by all the usual predictors, even in combination. The modest explanatory power of the analysis below probably reflects the "double-barreled" nature of the question, conflating the very different cases of "civil war" and "genocide". Questions referencing "genocide" alone elicit much higher levels of support (Page and Bouton 2006, p. 276). Here, it seems likely that various religious groups may focus on different sides of the question.

Table 5. Religious, demographic and political influences on military action to prevent genocide.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.436 ***	0.390 ***	0.336 ***	0.293 ***
Agnostic/Atheist	0.406 ***	0.375 ***	0.295 ***	0.193 ***
Buddhist	0.248 ***	0.242 ***	0.192 ***	0.116 **
Latter-day Saints	0.155 ***	0.109 ***	0.024	0.168 ***
Orthodox Jews	0.120	0.081	−0.020	0.081 ***
Muslim	0.005	0.038	−0.043	−0.091
White Evangelical	0.003	−0.053 **	−0.006	0.093 ***
Latino Evangelical	−0.014	0.002	0.015	0.089
Black Protestant	−0.044 *	0.078 **	0.105 ***	0.055
White Mainline	−0.050 **	−0.103 ***	−0.076 ***	−0.029
White Catholic	−0.108 ***	−0.162 ***	−0.134 ***	−0.063 ***
Nothing in Particular	−0.166 ***	−0.185 ***	−0.149 ***	−0.068 ***
Latino Catholic	−0.177 ***	−0.158 ***	−0.129 ***	−0.084 *
Eastern Orthodox	−0.198 ***	−0.237 ***	−0.330 ***	−0.266 ***
Hindu	−0.248 ***	−0.207 ***	−0.323 ***	−0.362 ***
Jehovah's Witnesses	−0.877 ***	−0.869 ***	−0.746 ***	−0.540 ***
Other Religious Factors				
Religiosity	0.044 ***	0.049 ***	0.063 ***	0.087 ***
"Born Again"	−0.072 ***	−0.072 ***	−0.037 ***	0.032 **
Race				
White		0.047 *	0.103 ***	0.069 ***
Asian		−0.065 *	−0.171 ***	−0.065 *
Latino		−0.025	−0.028	−0.029
Black		−0.131 ***	−0.102 ***	−0.149 ***
Demographics				
Male			0.160 ***	0.124 ***
Higher Education			0.151 ***	0.096 ***
Higher Income			−0.002 ***	−0.002 ***
Age			−0.009 ***	−0.014 ***
South			−0.065 ***	−0.048 ***
Married			−0.017 *	−0.005
Active Military Duty			−0.118 *	−0.183 ***
Family			0.072 ***	0.064 ***
Veteran/Family			0.090 ***	0.072 ***
Politics				
Political Interest				0.301 ***
Conservative/GOP				−0.203 ***
Constant	−0.519 ***	−0.513 ***	−1.234 ***	−1.234 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.010	0.011	0.036	0.064

See Table 2 notes for details. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

However the question is interpreted, the main supporting constituency for such action are, understandably, non-Orthodox Jews, agnostics/atheists, Buddhists, and Latter-day Saints—groups with historical sensitivities, perhaps, to religious or racial oppression. Here, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and White and Latino Evangelicals all fall in the middle of the spectrum, with no significant leaning either way. Most other ethnoreligious groups have mild inclinations to oppose such intervention, with Jehovah's Witnesses once again at the far end. Here, religiosity and born-again identity work in different directions, with the former being positive and the latter being negative. But all the religious variables in combination explain very little of the variation in attitudes, nor does the addition of racial identity have much explanatory power, with white Americans slightly more inclined to intervene and other racial groups leaning the other way. The addition of demographic and political variables provides a little more explanatory power. Men, the highly educated, the less well-off, young people, non-southerners, and veterans are more likely to support action, but once again the active-duty personnel are inclined the other way. High political interest once again produces more support for action, but the partisanship measure reveals greater liberal/Democratic support, but not at a level characterizing support for the UN. Once again, the incorporation of demographic and political variables modifies the strength of the direct religious influences but seldom changes their direction. The only notable "sign flip" is for white Evangelicals, who become modestly pro-action when everything is in the equation.

4.5. Occasion: Assuring Oil Supplies

Another item taps more "self-interested" motives for the use of the American military: "to ensure the supply of oil". Although surveys in 2002 showed that almost two-thirds of Americans supported such use, this had declined to just over half by 2004 (Page and Bouton 2006, pp. 106, 278). By the 2008 CES survey, this had declined to around one-quarter, dropping slightly to around one-fifth in 2014 and remaining fairly constant thereafter.

As Table 6 shows, the "militaristic" coalition in this case looks much more like that in the first two occasions (supporting allies and attacking terrorists) than that on supporting the UN and preventing genocide. Orthodox Jews, white Catholics, white Evangelicals, the Eastern Orthodox, Mainline Protestants, and non-Orthodox Jews form the support base for this use, with most ethnoreligious minorities and agnostics/atheists on the other side. Higher religiosity also contributes to support for such action, as does born-again identity. The addition of race adds little to the explanation and has only modest and inconsistent effects on the religious group coefficients, sometimes reducing them a little, but just as often boosting them, an effect most notable among Latino Evangelicals and Catholics, as well as Black Protestants. Among both Latinos and Black Americans, religious affiliation produces more militaristic opinions.

As usual, the demographic and political variables boost the power of our equations. Men are much more likely to approve this use, as are those with more modest educations, southerners, married citizens, and in a change from earlier usages—active-duty military personnel and their families. Interestingly, political interest provides only a modest push for military use, but conservatives and Republicans are much more willing to undertake such action. Still, even the inclusion of demographic and political variables in the equation leaves most of the supporting and opposing ethnoreligious group coefficients operating in the same direction, sometimes reduced a little, but often actually increased. All this suggests a strong underlying influence of religious factors.

Table 6. Religious, demographic and political influences on military action to secure oil supplies.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
Orthodox Jews	0.702 ***	0.733 ***	0.679 ***	0.534 ***
White Catholic	0.444 ***	0.478 ***	0.435 ***	0.317 ***
White Evangelical	0.410 ***	0.446 ***	0.386 ***	0.165 ***
Eastern Orthodox	0.312 ***	0.346 ***	0.326 ***	0.206 ***
White Mainline	0.312 ***	0.347 ***	0.313 ***	0.218 ***
Latter-day Saints	0.239 ***	0.276 ***	0.207 ***	−0.087 *
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.221 ***	0.254 ***	0.297 ***	0.429 ***
Hindu	0.159	0.144	0.121	0.309 ***
Latino Evangelical	−0.025	0.227 ***	0.209 ***	0.073
Nothing in Particular	−0.027	0.028	0.047 *	0.017
Latino Catholic	−0.049	0.202 ***	0.179 ***	0.180 ***
Black Protestant	−0.114 ***	0.063	0.118 ***	0.272 ***
Muslim	−0.254 ***	−0.211 **	−0.264 ***	−0.108 ***
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.421 ***	−0.380 ***	−0.389 ***	−0.296 ***
Buddhist	−0.513 ***	−0.489 ***	−0.485 ***	−0.311 ***
Jehovah's Witnesses	−0.604 ***	−0.510 ***	−0.567 ***	−0.502 ***
Other Religious Factors				
Religiosity	0.077 ***	0.078 ***	0.112 ***	−0.006
"Born Again"	0.250 ***	0.247 ***	0.198 ***	0.078 ***
Race				
White		−0.150 ***	−0.095 ***	−0.009
Asian		−0.092 *	0.035	0.112 **
Latino		−0.367 ***	−0.306 ***	−0.126 **
Black		−0.292 ***	−0.241 ***	0.139 ***
Demographics				
Male			0.602 ***	0.484 ***
Higher Education			−0.060 ***	−0.043 ***
Higher Income			0.000	−0.001 ***
Age			0.000	−0.003 ***
South			0.151 ***	0.117 ***
Married			0.129 ***	0.037 ***
Active Military Duty			0.201 ***	0.166 **
Family			0.075 ***	0.012
Veteran/Family			0.069 ***	0.019 *
Politics				
Political Interest				0.060 ***
Conservative/GOP				0.555 ***
Constant	−1.631 ***	−1.515 ***	−1.771 ***	−1.814 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.037	0.038	0.066	0.118

See Table 2 notes for details. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.6. Occasion: Spreading Democracy

The final item in the CES battery is a little difficult to characterize in Page and Bouton's hawkish vs. dovish dichotomy or in Wittkopf's cooperative vs. militant internationalism scheme. The use of American troops to "assist the spread of democracy" abroad might be thought of in liberal internationalist terms or, alternatively, as a part of the second Bush administration's "war on terror". Whatever the case, it musters the least support of all the options in the CES battery over the decade and a half of surveys: 25 percent supported this purpose in 2008, dropping gradually to 17 percent in 2022.

The ambiguity of the item (like that of the genocide/civil war item) is perhaps reflected in the unusual pattern of support and opposition, both on the ethnoreligious variables and the other predictors. As Table 7 reveals, ethnoreligious support here includes Hindus,

Latter-day Saints, Latino Catholics, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims. Other groups provide more modest backing, including Black Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, non-Orthodox Jews, and both white Protestant groups. The strongest opponents are agnostics and atheists. Both higher religiosity and born-again identity provide a boost for support. Adding race does little to boost the explanation: white Americans are somewhat less likely on balance to favor this use, but Asian and Black Americans are more approving. Including race in the equation also modifies the ethnoreligious coefficients, with the religiously affiliated often showing stronger support than their non-affiliated racial brethren.

Table 7. Religious, demographic and political influences on military action to promote democracy.

	Religion	+ Race	+ Demographics	+ Politics
Religious Tradition				
Hindu	0.538 ***	0.306 ***	0.310 ***	0.369 ***
Latter-day Saints	0.266 ***	0.382 ***	0.353 ***	0.263 ***
Latino Catholic	0.256 ***	0.240 ***	0.238 ***	0.258 ***
Orthodox Jews	0.249 **	0.350 ***	0.333 ***	0.259 **
Muslim	0.243 ***	0.169 *	0.121	0.169 *
Black Protestant	0.197 ***	0.061	0.092 **	0.155 ***
White Catholic	0.188 ***	0.324 ***	0.319 ***	0.284 ***
Eastern Orthodox	0.155 *	0.257 ***	0.252 ***	0.219 ***
Jews (non-Orthodox)	0.133 ***	0.251 ***	0.306 ***	0.339 ***
White Evangelical	0.101 ***	0.241 ***	0.226 ***	0.152 ***
White Mainline	0.090 ***	0.226 ***	0.234 ***	0.209 ***
Latino Evangelical	−0.004	−0.014	−0.013	−0.053
Nothing in Particular	−0.029	0.032	0.024	0.037
Buddhist	−0.050	−0.078	−0.074	−0.022
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.123 ***	−0.039	−0.036	−0.031
Jehovah's Witnesses	−0.937 ***	−0.922 ***	−0.956 ***	−0.851 ***
Other Religious Factors				
"Born Again"	0.264 ***	0.262 ***	0.230 ***	0.197 ***
Religiosity	0.180 ***	0.173 ***	0.193 ***	0.149 ***
Race				
White		−0.113 ***	−0.094 ***	−0.062 *
Asian		0.339 ***	0.380 ***	0.444 ***
Latino		0.040	0.033	0.115 **
Black		0.165 ***	0.149 ***	0.279 ***
Demographics				
Male			0.195 ***	0.118 ***
Higher Education			−0.037 ***	−0.047 ***
Higher Income			−0.002 ***	−0.002 ***
Age			−0.003 ***	−0.005 ***
South			0.063 ***	0.052 ***
Married			−0.018	−0.053 ***
Active Military Duty			0.436 ***	0.410 ***
Family			0.108 ***	0.076 ***
Veteran/Family			0.046 ***	0.017
Politics				
Political Interest				0.124 ***
Conservative/GOP				0.173 ***
Constant	−1.916 ***	−1.940 ***	−1.797	−1.972 ***
Nagelkerke R square w/o controls	0.025	0.026	0.032	0.040

See Table 2 notes for details. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Demographics also play a role. Men are somewhat more likely to approve this use, as are citizens with less education and a lower income. Young people and southerners are also more likely to back such action, as are active-duty personnel. Political interest and conservative/GOP identification also provide a very modest push in favor of support for democracy. The incorporation of political variables eliminates neither the independent effect of religious group membership nor the pro-military influence of religiosity and born-again status.

4.7. Conclusions and Implications

What can we learn about the connection between religion and attitudes toward militarism from this analysis? Although the CES studies have some limitations—especially the absence of religious belief items—we can still discover a good bit about the way religious factors influence the American public's attitude toward the use of force, especially in discovering the varied ethnoreligious coalitions supporting different purposes, in analyzing the impact of religiosity, and identifying the impact of "born-again" status.

First, we see a general tendency for America's historically dominant ethnoreligious groups to be more supportive of military action than most ethnoreligious minorities. On an overall score, Latter-day Saints, Jews, white Evangelicals, Mainline Protestants, and Catholics approve a broader range of military actions, while most ethnoreligious or "new" religious minorities are much more selective in their willingness to use American force. This pattern is also broadly evident on the most "popular" uses of armed activity, supporting allies and fighting terrorism, as well as on the less-favored seizing of oil supplies, but almost completely reverses on support for the UN. Finally, the two opposing coalitions are seemingly "scrambled" in reaction to cases of genocide/civil war and on military action designed to promote democracy.

The positioning of the non-religious "Nothing in Particular" and the explicitly "religion-rejecting" group of agnostics and atheists is also of interest, given their rapid growth in numbers in recent years and their political importance, especially in the Democratic Party. Campbell et al. (2021, p. 157) find these two groups—especially the latter—on the liberal side of almost all issues, including defense spending. Although they hug the national mean on overall willingness to use the military, they vary significantly on specific uses: the "NIPS" are fairly consistent in their preference to avoid US military action, whatever the rationale. Agnostics and atheists, on the other hand, do take consistently "liberal" approaches: supporting allies, strongly backing the UN, hoping to prevent genocide, and opposing both the seizure of oil and the promotion of democracy. These findings show the importance of sorting out various contingents of the "non-religious".

Second, we see a fairly consistent pattern of influence for religiosity to promote support for military action, except in the case of helping the UN, where it has a solid *negative* impact. The effects of religiosity usually survive the addition of demographic and political variables to the analysis. The influence of "born-again" identity is a little more varied, having little influence on support for allies, but a solid positive effect on fighting terrorism, and a major impact on seizing oil and promoting democracy. On the other hand, born-again status works against fighting genocide and, especially, supporting the UN, two "dovish" purposes, according to some analysts. This suggests that better measures of theological traditionalism might have even more powerful effects.

Third, we see that many of these religious effects survive the addition of demographic and political variables to the analysis. The racial, demographic, and political variables, for the most part, behave as predicted on the basis of previous studies, but they do not eliminate the direct effect of religion. Although coefficients for the ethnoreligious group, religiosity, and born-again variables are sometimes reduced by the addition of race, other

demographics, and political factors, they usually retain significant direct effects. Even contemporary partisanship, strongly structured by religious factors, does not entirely mediate the impact of religion.

All this suggests that scholars studying attitudes toward the military and, more broadly, Americans' foreign policy orientations ought to take religious factors more seriously. This is especially true for religious beliefs, usually unmeasured in most public opinion surveys on foreign policy. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs' popular surveys of public attitudes have actually *reduced* the religious measures available to a very crude measure of religious affiliation, with no religiosity measure or any kind of belief item, *despite* studies showing considerable (if varied) religious impact on foreign policy questions (Page and Bouton 2006; cf. Gries 2014).

In this analysis, we have demonstrated the value of adding religious measures to the study of opinion on military questions, confirming earlier findings that religious factors influence not only the overarching attitude structures that Americans use to assess foreign policy but also opinions on specific foreign policy issues. Here, we find that even in the presence of other variables that are often thought to be much more powerful influences, religious factors make a substantial contribution, sometimes indirectly through political orientations, but often as direct forces in their own right. In some instances, such distinctive attitudes can be understood as a function of membership in a particular ethnoreligious tradition (e.g., Jewish support for ally Israel and for action to stop genocide, Jehovah's Witnesses' negative reaction to all warfare). In other instances, one suspects that attitudes reflect the influence of specific beliefs not often measured in political surveys (e.g., Evangelical eschatology leading to opposition to any action supporting the UN). Or, as Peter Gries (2014) has argued, religious influences may reflect deeper psychological or moral orientations (see also Kertzer et al. 2014). In any event, future studies should take care to incorporate the various dimensions of religious faith and practice in their surveys. Indeed, such inclusion is especially warranted as the policies of the Trump administration appear likely to scramble both the political and religious sources of foreign policy attitudes in the American public (Guth and Nelsen 2024).

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Article

Classroom Culture Wars: Experimental Evidence of the Influence of Religion on Educational Content Regulation and Punishment

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Abstract

The intersection of religion and education in the United States dates to colonial times, as do attempts by religious institutions and individuals to regulate educational content. After a prominent retreat by religious fundamentalists following the Scopes Monkey Trial, conservative Christians have once again entered political debates about educational content in the form of modern culture wars issues. Both conservatives and liberals have attempted to punish educators for political comments made in class, but the influence of religion on individual attitudes has yet to be examined. In this article, we use an original survey experiment to examine individuals' propensity to punish a professor who makes politically charged comments in class. We also assess whether religious individuals are more likely to punish professors for comments disparaging conservatives or liberals. We find that high-attending religious individuals, including both Evangelicals and Catholics, are more likely to support punishing the professor. However, we find that the propensity to punish is not related to the target of the professor's comments. These findings suggest a resurgence of religious interest in education as a cultural issue at the individual, and not just institutional, level and a coalition between Evangelicals and Catholics on this issue.

Keywords: culture wars; education; free speech; punitive attitudes; Evangelical; Catholic; academic freedom; experiment

1. Introduction

From the early days of the United States, religious individuals and organizations have been heavily involved in education (Fraser 2016; Smith 1987; Wood 1972). Some of the earliest universities and even primary schools were founded and operated by religious groups, following the "European pattern" of church-dominated schools (Wood 1972). Indeed, religion has long been intertwined with education, both as facilitator and occasional foe. The United States has seen consistent battles about the proper role of religion in the education system, such as debates over prayer in public schools, the teaching of evolution, and the use of voucher programs to pay for private school tuition. For these reasons, scholars have long included education in the list of "culture wars" issues (e.g., Fraser 2016; Hunter 1991; Martin 1996; Wilcox and Robinson 2011).

In recent times, education has opened up "new fronts" in the culture wars, including debates over LGBTQ+ rights, book bans, debates over whether and how to teach Critical Race Theory, sex education, civics, and "classical" education, and more (e.g., Adler 2016; Castle 2019; Coley 2017; Kaufmann 2022; Perry et al. 2023). Conservative Christians, in

particular, have been active in attempts to police curricular matters. They have responded by running for school board openings (Deckman 2004; Wilcox and Robinson 2011), passing legislation or adjusting standards on curricular matters (Gibson 2004; Perry et al. 2023), and even opening their own institutions of higher learning to promote a particular agenda (e.g., Hollis-Brusky and Wilson 2020). Attempts to regulate instruction have faced political backlash, with critics believing that conservative Christians and other groups are attempting to indoctrinate children and that regulations are a violation of academic freedom (e.g., Shepard and Culver 2018; Williams 2006).

The policing of academic instruction and discourse may be deeply rooted in the psychology of conservative Christians, however. Highly conservative Christian nationalists, who make up a minor but very vocal subset of the conservative Christian coalition, including both Catholics and Protestants, draw rigid boundaries around group membership (e.g., Whitehead and Perry 2020), which shapes views about policing and discrimination (e.g., Broeren and Djupe 2024; Davis 2018; Perry et al. 2019). This predisposition to punish among conservative Christians more broadly also draws from theological commitments across the religious spectrum, such as a supernatural system to reward or punish individuals for norm-transgressing behavior (Beller et al. 2021), belief in divine retribution (Grasmick et al. 1992a), and belief in transcendent religious evil like Satan (Baker and Booth 2016), though research also suggests that there may be a link between religion and forgiveness attitudes (e.g., Applegate et al. 2000; Mullet et al. 2003). Punishment attitudes extend to educational sectors in debates over corporal punishment (Grasmick et al. 1992b) and the firing of teachers because of political debates (Natanson and Balingit 2022). However, the mechanism behind the punitive attitudes of religious groups and their relationship to political coalitions and attitudes has yet to be explored. As of yet, it is unclear whether punitive attitudes are derived more from attitudes about in-group and out-group membership or from generalized attitudes about punitive action that may come from theological doctrine, religious practices, and internal group norms.

To examine this individual-level propensity to punish in modern educational culture wars debates, we employ an original survey experiment in which a fictitious professor makes politically disparaging remarks, manipulating the target of the remarks to include Republican students, Democratic students, or students in general. We examine how religiosity and religious affiliation influence propensity to punish the professor and whether punishment attitudes are related to the boundaries of in-group and out-group targets. We find that increasing church attendance is correlated with higher propensity to punish and that both Evangelicals and Catholics are more likely than other respondents to support punishing the professor. However, punishing attitudes are not consistently higher when Republicans (the in-group) are the target of the political comments, suggesting a generalized propensity to punish that is not related to specific political content that may offend the sensibilities of religious groups; rather, punitive attitudes seem to be drawn from characteristics internal to religious traditions in the U.S. While most previous studies examine religious activism at the group level, these findings extend the literature to individual religious respondents, demonstrating the power of elite political discourse on education issues. Additionally, our findings suggest that Catholics have united with Evangelicals and other conservative Christians in these values, contrasting with the interdenominational battles of decades past (e.g., Hunter 1991; Rozell 2008; Shields 2011).

2. Religion, Education, and the Culture Wars

Although, at its founding, the U.S. was the only state that constitutionally prohibited the establishment of a state religion (Wood 1972), religion was fundamentally integrated into important social institutions, including education. Elite private institutions of higher

education like Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and others were founded by religious groups as seminaries for the training of ministers. For example, what was then called Harvard College was founded by Puritan colonists "dreading to leave an illiterate Ministery [sic] to the Churches" (Lee 2020). The curriculum had obvious religious influences in the study of Biblical languages and robust religious departments. Primary schools and public institutions were no stranger to religious influences either. Debates over teaching religious morality in public schools were not so much about whether to teach it, but how (Green 2012, p. 7). Prayer and Bible readings were common occurrences, but religious organizations fought to control which passages and versions of the Bible would be used (Green 2012; Hunter 1991).

Curricular matters of religious debate continued and intensified in the early 20th Century as public schools weighed how to teach theories of human evolution. Fundamentalist Christian groups, in particular, advocated against biology curricula including evolution, promoting instead the teaching of "creation science" (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Marsden 2022). This culminated in the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 where a teacher, John T. Scopes, was put on trial and charged with teaching human evolution in violation of state law. Former presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, though successful in the prosecution, was widely mocked in the national media for his fundamentalist beliefs, leading some fundamentalists to retreat from their active and public involvement in American politics (e.g., Hart 2002; Wilcox and Robinson 2011). However, the push to regulate biology curricula continued, as the courts continued addressing major questions about the teaching of "creation science" (Binder 2002).[1] The issue even became an important part of how fundamentalists and other conservative Christians built boundaries around their group interests against seculars and religious liberals (Guhin 2016).

Aside from evolution, religious issues centering on schools also found their way before the courts (Green 2012). A growing Roman Catholic population gave rise to debates over funding for parochial schools. Catholics viewed public educational institutions as largely Protestant, leading Catholics to emphasize alternatives for their children and to develop their own subculture of schools (Hunter 1991; Wood 1972). Protestants, meanwhile, opposed efforts to expand support for Catholic schools and instead supported Blaine amendments to forbid aid to (especially Catholic) church-run schools (DeForrest 2003; Green 2022). Both groups also developed their own political homeschooling agendas (Rozell and Wilcox 2003) and continued debates over prayer and morality in public schools (Oldfield 1996; Martin 1996; Smith 2000). Ultimately, both religious groups wanted to regulate the types of curricular matter that wide swaths of young people would be exposed to (Shields 2011). This, too, was the goal of secular proponents of public education, who have variously cited compulsory education as necessary for good citizenship but have also been critiqued for using public education to deculturize historically marginalized populations (e.g., Cajete 2020).

Given the history of religious and cultural debates over education in the U.S., it is perhaps unsurprising that Sociologist James Davison Hunter included education as one of the "fields of conflict" in American culture wars (Hunter 1991). In the battle for the heart and soul of America, various religious groups have sought to establish their own beliefs as worthy of cultural transmission to younger generations. However, Hunter notes that the Protestant–Catholic divide that defined religious debates for decades has instead been replaced by a divide between the orthodox, who oppose "secular humanism" and "moral relativism" being taught in American schools, and the progressives, who want nonsectarianism, individual autonomy, and academic freedom (Hunter 1991, pp. 201–7). The battle for moral authority in schools leads the drive to police and punish behaviors that deviate from the religiopolitical coalition's vision.[2]

In recent years, the culture wars have expanded to encompass new issues, beyond the classic issues like abortion and same-sex marriage that have defined modern moral debates for decades (e.g., Castle 2019; Putnam and Campbell 2010) or the McCarthy-era goals of rooting out communist sympathizers (Adler 2016; Wilcox and Robinson 2011). Within debates over education, orthodox and progressive camps debate how to teach issues like race, gender and sexuality, sex education, history, and more, in addition to religious issues proper (e.g., Coley 2017; Kaufmann 2022; Perry et al. 2023). Just as before, the debate tactics include regulation of teachers, textbooks, and school policies, often conducted through public debates before courts and school boards (Martin 1996). More recently, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has used funding for research grants to attempt to control how universities respond to cultural issues (e.g., Brooks and Shakil 2025), and college presidents have been called to testify before Congress, resulting in some high-profile resignations after discourse about free speech on political topics failed to satisfy critics of the educational administrators (e.g., Associated Press 2024). However, the extant literature has yet to determine how likely different (religious and non-religious) groups are to attempt to police these issues, particularly at the individual, rather than group, level (that is, among individual Americans rather than religious denominations or interest group organizations).

3. Religion, Identity, and Punitive Predispositions

The propensity to punish the behavior of others varies significantly at the individual and societal level. For example, the U.S. is one of few industrialized democracies that retains the use of capital punishment, but religious groups vary in their support for this policy and individuals within those religions vary in their acceptance of the religion's doctrine (e.g., Bjarnason and Welch 2004; Mulligan 2006; Unnever et al. 2005). Attitudes also vary among those with different levels of religious salience in their lives (Evans and Adams 2003). As another example, religious traditions and religious individuals have conflicting attitudes when it comes to the use of torture on terrorism suspects (Malka and Soto 2011). Specific theological beliefs and religious behaviors may also vary in the population (e.g., Laurin et al. 2012). The psychology of punishment attitudes within religious and non-religious spheres is thus ripe for evaluation.

American values of retributive justice are prevalent and often rooted in Judeo-Christian religious traditions (Grasmick et al. 1992a). Fundamentalist Christians, for example, tend to be more correctional, retributive, and support harsher punishments than non-fundamentalists (Applegate et al. 2000; Evans and Adams 2003). Moreover, there is a strong predisposition from religious individuals to punish behavior outside of the mainstream and to avoid justifying antisocial behavior (e.g., Atkinson and Bourrat 2011; McKay et al. 2011), though that tendency may decrease at the highest levels of belief in powerful and intervening gods (Laurin et al. 2012) or with compassionate visions of God (Unnever et al. 2005). Religion, at a base level, defines what is sacred and profane (e.g., Durkheim 1912), and often outlines consequences for deviations from tradition. Religion has been pivotal in crime and punishment in dealing with "evils," from witch hunts and into more modern understandings (Baker and Booth 2016; Dillinger 2004; McKay et al. 2011; Monteith 2023; Morone 2003). Religious groups themselves have engaged in "church discipline" by accusing, trying, and sometimes imposing punishments like excommunication, banishment, or other theological corrections; some scholars even correlate these historical practices with the more modern development of "cancel culture," relevant to present debates about policing speech activities (e.g., Schelin 2021).

Religious congregations and leaders themselves also play a significant role in reinforcing punitive attitudes and behaviors. Pastors and co-religionists are influential sources for

how religious groups develop their morals in this area (e.g., Bjarnason and Welch 2004; Mulligan 2006). Religious schools and family units, too, reflect punitive ideologies of various denominations. For example, American Protestants tend to favor corporal punishment more strongly than other religious groups (Beller et al. 2021; Grasmick et al. 1992b). This is especially the case for fundamentalists, who may enroll their children in schools with a fundamentalist ideology because of their belief that schools should utilize corporal punishment for students (Grasmick et al. 1992b).

Alternatively, or in tandem with the religious values that contribute to punitive attitudes outlined above, these attitudes may also be related to religious boundaries of in-group and out-group membership.[3] Social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979) supposes that individuals develop their sense of self from their group memberships and identities. Even in minimally salient group identities, humans are naturally predisposed to favor their in-groups over out-groups. This is even more so in salient identities, such as religion. Kinder and Kam (2009) expand on this, with their theory of ethnocentrism, by suggesting that humans not only show favor towards their in-groups but express negative affect towards out-groups, developing a cultural hierarchy that they are willing to support through public policy or attitudes toward others. This negative affect is particularly evident in partisan polarization in the U.S. (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2019).

Christian nationalists, the aforementioned group of politically active religious individuals who make up a subset of conservative Christians, are one group that notably generate strict boundaries around American and Christian identities (e.g., Marsh 2021; Whitehead and Perry 2020). These boundaries are influential in the enforcement of legal policies and the rule of law and shape attitudes about the prevalence of discrimination in the U.S. (Broeren and Djupe 2024; Davis 2018; Monteith 2023; Perry et al. 2019). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that Americans are self-sorting themselves into these religious traditions based on political and identity-based predispositions (e.g., Hafner and Audette 2023). Consistent with findings in social identity theory and ethnocentrism (e.g., Kinder and Kam 2009), Broeren and Djupe (2024) find that Christian nationalists do have in-group preferences but do not inherently denigrate out-groups, as this is conditioned on belief that their religious group is facing persecution and the perceived existence of threat. However, Christian nationalism is linked to a desire to dominate other worldviews (Djupe et al. 2023), which may include classroom environments. As Christian nationalists represent a politicized segment of conservative Christians, and who feature prominently in American political discourse, it is plausible that the findings related to social identity and predispositions to punish could extend to others in their political coalition, though these findings may also be tempered in less nationalistic religious traditions.[4]

Other psychological predispositions, too, contribute to partisan sorting and affect. For example, the personality trait of "openness to experience" is commonly associated with liberalism, while "conscientiousness" is associated with conservatism (e.g., Carney et al. 2008; Haidt 2012). If religious groups have indeed begun sorting themselves on political lines, this would lead conservative Christians to value conscientiousness and order and perhaps be more likely to punish deviations from the social order (Roberts et al. 2013). On the other hand, liberals and the non-religious would be more open to new experiences and ideas and perhaps less likely to try to punish perspectives that differ from their own.

In all, religion serves as an agent of social control, outlining specific codes of moral behavior and a system of rewards and punishment for human behavior (Durkheim 1912). It further develops group cohesion and provides legitimacy for institutional hierarchies (Durkheim 1912). Religious groups thus have a significant interest in maintaining and shaping the institutions, like educational institutions, that socialize the civic behaviors of new generations (Wuthnow 1989). In educational settings, however, it is unclear if

punitive attitudes are related to the ethnocentric tendencies of religious groups. That is, does political in-group favoritism and political out-group antipathy motivate additional punitive attitudes by religious individuals? Or are punitive attitudes generalized across religious traditions, regardless of the group target of political speech?

4. Data and Methods

To examine the individual effect of religion on the propensity to punish a professor for political incivility, as well as whether this is derived from generalized punitive attitudes or from ethnocentric group biases, we conducted a survey experiment on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The survey had 1192 respondents and took respondents an average of 25 min to complete. The sample was limited to adult users in the United States who could complete the survey in English. Respondents came from 46 U.S. states. Respondents were paid a token USD0.35 to complete the survey, which was about equivalent compensation to other similar tasks available on MTurk at the time. A "long" instructional manipulation check was included to measure the attentiveness of respondents (Morren and Paas 2020; Oppenheimer et al. 2009). 70.8% of respondents "passed" the instructional manipulation check, which is a lower rate of failure than other surveys employing a similar attention check (Morren and Paas 2020). The results below include all respondents, though the results do not differ substantially when excluding those who failed the manipulation check. Moreover, there are no statistically significant demographic predictors of manipulation check failure. As such, we are cautiously confident in the quality of the sample.

The use of MTurk has become widespread across social science disciplines, including for research on religion and politics (e.g., Audette and Weaver 2015; Bleich et al. 2022; Clifford and Gaskins 2016; Lewis et al. 2020; Swank 2020). Although there are drawbacks to the convenience sample framework, some research suggests that it compares favorably to other commonly used sample types, such as college student panels (Berinsky et al. 2012). Still, the sample should not be considered fully representative of the adult U.S. population. When comparing our demographics to the American Community Survey and other national surveys, our sample tends to over-represent white Americans, women, and the well-educated, and tends to lean to the political left. The sample does include a large non-religious population but also includes a number of Christians and actually over-represents Catholics (compared to Lewis et al. 2015).[5] Moreover, the randomization process was effective and biases in demographics did not statistically affect experimental results. Especially given the experimental framework, we can be relatively confident that the results represent a meaningful sample of Americans.

The experiment vignette centers on a fictitious economics professor, Charles Miller, who made disparaging comments about students' intellect and work ethic. The full text of the vignette appears in Appendix A with the experimental manipulation in bold. Although the comments may appear harsh (that is, a strong treatment), they are similar to actual events at U.S. campuses of higher education that occur with some regularity (e.g., Phernetton 2025, reporting on a professor who flipped a table staffed by College Republicans, or Quinn 2023, reporting on a professor who referred to members of a political group as "idiots" in class). To examine whether religious groups are more sensitive to comments made about particular political groups, two experimental groups include comments made specifically about liberal Democrats or about conservative Republicans. The comments also reference the parties' 2024 presidential candidates, Joseph Biden and Donald Trump. This follows similar research that has demonstrated the importance of partisan cues in academic and social "canceling" (e.g., Cook et al. 2021; Deither et al. 2024). To increase external validity, the professor is in the economics discipline, which has historically had

greater ideological diversity than other academic disciplines but may still have reason for a professor to make comments based on political ideologies (e.g., Rothman et al. 2005).

To examine our question about group affect, the professor, in the treatment, makes comments about partisan groups. Comments disparaging partisan groups, rather than targeting specific religious groups, are likely more common and more commonly accepted in American society. While laws have protected against discrimination on religious grounds for decades, there is no federal law protecting students, workers, or other classes of people from discrimination based on political affiliation. Methodologically, this also gives us the advantage of being able to test responses to a common in-group identity, as opposed to testing responses to each individual religious affiliation, which would require a significantly larger sample (though, this would be a natural next step in the research). The extant literature supports the idea that Christians, especially those from conservative traditions, and those who attend worship services would identify the Republican Party as an in-group, while those who are non-religious and do not attend worship services would identify the Democratic Party as an in-group (e.g., Campbell et al. 2011; Claassen 2015; Hafner and Audette 2023; Patrikios 2013; Putnam and Campbell 2010). The phenomenon that religious people tend to support Republicans and non-religious people tend to support Democrats is commonly referred to as the "God gap" in American politics and is a significant contributor to culture wars debates.

The dependent variables include a series of questions about whether Miller should face disciplinary action, what type of disciplinary action he should face, whether the comments should be regarded as academic freedom, and how respondents perceive Miller after reading about his comments. They are measured either dichotomously or through a five-point Lickert scale of support or opposition. This allows us to test for a respondent's willingness to support intervention against the professor for their comments, as well as whether punishment is contingent upon the political target of his comments.

The experimental framework of this analysis helps us to better determine factors that cause changes in the dependent variables. Across the treatment and control groups, the only non-random difference is whether the respondent is exposed to a professor who critiques students in general, Republican students, or Democratic students. As such, we can attribute changes in the dependent variables causally to the treatment effect. Moreover, by examining heterogeneous treatment effects and dividing the sample across demographic groups, we can determine whether the treatment is received differently among different religious groups, for example. While this does not tell us precisely why religious groups might differ in their reaction to the treatment (which would require a separate survey experiment), we can identify whether there are latent differences worthy of additional analysis and theoretical development.

5. Results

To begin our analysis, we first examine respondents as a whole across our three treatment groups. We do so to test a generalized propensity to punish, regardless of the target of the professor's comments. In particular, we seek to examine whether particular religious or political traditions are more likely to want to punish the professor (and with certain disciplinary actions), as well as whether church attendance affects punishment attitudes. Because the dependent variables are non-linear, we use ordered logistic regression analyses. These results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Religion, church attendance, and propensity to punish.

	Discipline	Lose Job	Apology	Punish (vs. Defend)
Church Attendance	0.08 * (0.04)	0.09 * (0.04)	0.10 ** (0.04)	0.16 ** (0.06)
Catholic	−0.64 ** (0.25)	0.51 ** (0.24)	0.22 (0.24)	0.85 ** (0.34)
Mainline Protestant	−1.71 (1.13)	−0.57 (1.13)	−1.61 (1.22)	1.70 (1.49)
Non-religious	−0.71 * (0.37)	0.02 (0.35)	0.38 (0.36)	−1.02 (0.69)
Atheist	−0.16 (0.41)	0.07 (0.42)	−0.13 (0.41)	0.32 (0.57)
Republican	0.40 ** (0.15)	0.48 ** (0.15)	0.53 ** (0.15)	0.30 * (0.18)
Independent	−0.20 (0.23)	0.01 (0.22)	0.45 ** (0.22)	−0.77 ** (0.35)
Man	−0.05 (0.12)	0.04 (0.13)	0.03 (0.12)	0.29 * (0.16)
White	−0.70 * (0.37)	0.52 (0.37)	−0.76 ** (0.38)	1.16 * (0.64)
Age	−0.02 ** (0.01)	−0.01 ** (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Income	0.14 ** (0.07)	0.10 (0.06)	0.15 ** (0.07)	0.18 ** (0.09)
Bachelor's Degree	−0.66 ** (0.17)	−0.40 ** (0.17)	−0.30 * (0.16)	0.61 ** (0.23)
Pseudo R^2	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.05
N	1099	1105	1098	1081

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$. The reference category is Evangelical/Born Again Protestants. Other religious groups included in model but omitted from table. Results are ordered logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors.

The table presents four different dependent variables: the extent to which the respondent supports or opposes the professor facing disciplinary action from the university for his comments, whether they support or oppose the professor losing his job for his comments, whether they support or oppose the professor being told by the university to make a public apology for his comments, and whether they more believe that the university should punish the professor's actions (1) or defend his actions (0).[6]

Notably, church attendance is positively correlated with punishing attitudes across all four dependent variables. This suggests that religious involvement may in fact promote a generalized propensity to punish, at least in this educational setting. This is consistent with sociological theories that indicate that religion as a whole, and Christianity in particular, promotes doctrines of punishment. Of course, the particular religious tradition that the respondent represents may influence these attitudes as well. Evangelical Protestants (the reference category) tend toward a greater likelihood of punishing attitudes, although inter-

estingly, we see Catholics being significantly more likely than even Evangelicals to support the professor losing his job and being punished rather than defended by the university.

Unsurprisingly, given recent culture wars over education in the U.S., we see that Republicans across the board are more likely to support punishing the professor than Democrats. Additionally, we find that those with higher incomes are more likely to want to punish the professor, while those who hold a bachelor's degree are less likely to want to punish the professor. Although education and income are statistically correlated, the model measures the unique effect of each variable. As such, this may reflect experiences with academic freedom or the politics of higher education among the well-educated, holding income constant, while those who are wealthy may view the university through a business model lens and be more likely to punish an employee, holding education constant.

While we find evidence of a generalized propensity to punish, this may also be related to the respondent's evaluations of in-group and out-group members. Therefore, we next examine whether punishing attitudes are predicated on the target of the professor's comments being associated with the respondent's political in-group. While religion may promote a punitive ideology, that ideology may either be generalized or based on support for one's in-group and antipathy for out-groups (e.g., Kinder and Kam 2009). Indeed, some research on Christian nationalist ideologies posits a high degree of boundary setting related to group membership (e.g., Whitehead and Perry 2020); whether to the same degree as Christian nationalists or not, punitive attitudes may be based on these ethnocentric tendencies in other conservative Christian groups. To determine whether the respondent's willingness to punish is based on affronts to political in-groups, we turn to our survey experiment where the professor makes comments about Democrats, Republicans, or students in general. We test the four dependent variables above to determine if differences between the control group and treatment groups lead to differences in punitive attitudes, particularly based on church attendance (given the findings in Table 1 that church attendance is related to punitive attitudes).

Across multiple analyses, the results consistently demonstrate little to no effect of varying the target of the comments. Church attendees and different religious traditions are generally equally as likely to support disciplining the professor if he makes comments about Democrats, Republicans, or about students as a whole. A sample of these results are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Experimental bivariate regression coefficient summary.

	Discipline	**Lose Job**	**Apology**	**Punish (vs. Defend)**
Attend—control	−0.03	0.05	0.17 **	0.17 *
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.10)
Attend—Republican critique	0.29 **	0.08	0.08	0.23 **
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)
Attend—Democrat critique	0.02	0.09	0.14 **	0.12
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$. Results are ordered logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors.

In Table 2, we summarize bivariate ordered logistic regression coefficients examining the four dependent variables from the prior analysis. By and large, there are few significant differences across the categories. There is some indication that those in the highest attending category (those who attend church more than once a week) are statistically more responsive to critiques of Republicans, but this seems to be more of an outlier than a consistent trend. There is a desire among the churchgoing sample to discipline the professor and to

punish him instead of defending him, but there is no general agreement about what this punishment should look like. Indeed, when the professor critiques Democratic students instead of Republicans, the sample is more likely to want him to issue an apology, which is true, too, of the control group. Moreover, when comparing the effect size differences across the groups and accounting for the standard errors, the trend washes out in all but the general desire to discipline the professor for critiquing Republican students.

Table 3. Sample means for religious traditions by treatment group.

	Evangelical	**Catholic**	**Non-Religious**
Discipline—control	3.11 (0.19)	2.70 (0.05)	2.88 (0.18)
Discipline—Republican critique	3.09 (0.22)	2.75 (0.05)	2.86 (0.16)
Discipline—Democrat critique	2.89 (0.20)	2.75 (0.05)	2.77 (0.18)
Lose job—control	2.41 (0.19)	2.64 (0.05)	2.44 (0.21)
Lose job—Republican critique	2.54 (0.29)	2.73 (0.05)	2.55 (0.20)
Lose job—Democrat critique	2.22 (0.18)	2.71 (0.05)	2.23 (0.18)
Apology—control	2.82 (0.18)	2.63 (0.06)	2.72 (0.19)
Apology—Republican critique	2.43 (0.26)	2.66 (0.05)	3.07 (0.16)
Apology—Democrat critique	2.30 (0.24)	2.69 (0.05)	2.27 (0.18)
Punish—control	0.07 (0.05)	0.28 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)
Punish—Republican critique	0.19 (0.09)	0.34 (0.03)	0.14 (0.06)
Punish—Democrat critique	0.22 (0.08)	0.30 (0.03)	0.20 (0.09)

Results are experimental means with robust standard errors.

This is further illustrated in Table 3, where we provide sample means for the four dependent variables across the three treatment groups for the three largest religious traditions (Evangelicals, Catholics, and the non-religious). Table 3 should be read as comparisons within like-grouped-dependent variables on the left column for a single religious tradition. For example, one would compare Evangelical Protestants across the control and two treatment groups for the "discipline" dependent variable (whether Miller should face disciplinary action), accounting for the standard errors around the means estimates.

Here, we find no significant difference across the three treatment groups for any religious tradition, considering the overlapping error measurements; the only differences are across religious traditions rather than within the tradition. Ultimately, this suggests that the propensity to punish the professor found in Table 1 is due to a generalized support for punishment rather than a specific target (Republicans or Democrats) of the comments. Thus, when examining punitive attitudes in educational culture wars debates, we should examine the attitudinal foundations of these religious groups rather than assuming that they are responding only to unique attacks against their political in-group. This further suggests

that culture wars issues are deeply embedded into the political ideologies of religious groups and that attempts by conservative religious groups and individuals to regulate educational content may continue even past removing ostensibly objectionable content.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Educational issues have always been polarized in the U.S., including along religious lines. With a recent resurgence of debates over education in contemporary culture wars skirmishes, we can likewise expect to see an increased focus on education among religious groups and their progressive counterparts. This study suggests that conservative Christians, especially conservative Catholics and Evangelicals, will lead the charge in attempting to discipline and punish educators who may deviate from social or political norms in their classroom speech. In the case of the U.S., this may at times include protected speech, coming into conflict with existing protections of academic freedom (e.g., Ben-Porath 2023). Antiliberal movements opposed to academic freedom are not unique to the U.S., however, and may be on the rise across the globe (Darian-Smith 2024). Religious groups may wish to be conscious of these movements within their ranks, particularly as some religious groups have positioned themselves as supportive of civil liberties or who wish to protect academic freedom at their own learning institutions.[7] On the other hand, some religious groups have historically critiqued liberalism as antithetical to their religious doctrines, and resurgences of this form of political and religious thought may pose challenges to societies currently predicated on liberalism (for a brief review, see, for example, Wolkenstein 2025). Regardless of the political stance and involvement of religious groups, individual congregations may need to address growing polarization on these issues among their adherents (e.g., Henderson 2025).

This study also has implications for political coalitions in the U.S. As Hunter (1991) identified, historical divisions between Catholics and Protestants, including on divisive educational issues, have given way to unity on orthodox cultural issues opposing secular progressivism. This is reflected in growing support among white Catholics for Republican politicians (Smidt 2022). Educational issues like LGBTQ+ rights, Critical Race Theory, and textbook content can serve as wedge issues to reinforce group norms, and this research suggests that they are salient to individual Americans and not only at the elite or group level. While conservative Christians have likely not yet reached a level of "issue ownership" over academic regulation as a political issue (Petrocik 1996), punitive speech policies seem to be more salient to their coalition and are more likely to be part of the policy agenda of politicians sympathetic to the coalition's cause.

Interestingly, however, these appear to be generalized punitive attitudes among Evangelicals and Catholics in particular, which may be culturally transmitted through religious participation. As the literature previously cited explores, religious groups can transmit punitive attitudes through their doctrine, practices, and framework of group norms. Our research suggests that this causal mechanism is driven more by these factors internal to these groups than by responding to criticism of one's own political in-group by a member of the political out-group. Our model does not test the specific means through which this occurs, but we do not find evidence for the hypothesis that punitive attitudes are related to evaluations of in-groups and out-groups. Further research is needed to determine precisely why and how conservative religious groups pass on these punitive ideologies or what self-motivates individuals to join such religious traditions. Nonetheless, this is significant to understanding how different groups of Americans, and religious groups in particular, process the norms and values at conflict in the culture wars (Deither et al. 2024). Future research might also extend this to specific religious traditions and denominations, including those outside of Christianity.

While this study offers a high-level overview of punitive attitudes in one educational setting, there are many extensions that would further elucidate how religious groups engage in this culture wars issue. For example, this study was intentionally placed at what appears to be a regional state university; there may be different responses to professors at well-known research institutions or at private or religious institutions. Given the politicization of identity in the U.S., the professor's race, ethnicity, gender, or other identity characteristics would likely affect respondents' responses. Results may also be different in primary or secondary educational settings; indeed, we suspect that punitive attitudes would be heightened, as post-secondary students are traditionally given greater rights of expression and have fewer boundaries placed on the types of expression they may be able to receive (though Fenton 2023 suggests that this is not always the case before the law). Moreover, differences might be observed in the types of language used or if other groups, beyond partisan identities, are targeted by the expression in question, such as religious groups being the target of the remarks rather than political groups. These differences could be exacerbated further by drawing in the remarks of specific media organizations or interest groups that have a history of adding remarks like these to the public issue agenda.

In sum, we observe significant differences in how individuals from different religious and non-religious groups respond to a case of academic political incivility targeting students based on political identities. These cases are not uncommon in the U.S. educational system and may indeed be more frequent in occasion given the heightened polarization surrounding education in the U.S. As such, we encourage greater research on this topic as an issue of public opinion, public policy, and laws regarding academic freedom and rights. We also suspect that this issue may be "bundled" with other issue attitudes and identities by religious and political elites, such as gender, sexuality, abortion attitudes, and others. As such, education can serve as a culture wars issue tied to deeply held political beliefs or core values than may be easily activated by political elites hoping to reach out to religious voters, particularly among conservatives.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (or Questioning), plus other self-identifications for sexuality or gender
MTurk	Amazon Mechanical Turk

Appendix A

The Franklin Gazette

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Charles Miller, a Professor of Economics at Middle Creek State University, has come under fire for controversial comments made in class and in professional meetings.

A video caught on cell phone by an anonymous student shows Miller stating: "These [Biden snowflake, participation trophy/Trump snowflake, basement dweller/lazy] college students today just don't know how to put in any real intellectual effort. I ought to fail every one of them, but I don't only because then the bigwigs from the university will be breathing down my neck."

In another statement, Miller reportedly said, "I hate teaching real economics to all these idiotic [liberal/conservative] students. There's no thought put into it. They are going to seriously destroy our country. Come talk to me when you have real problems to solve and you're not just repeating some low-intelligence conspiracy your roommate told you."

More students at MCSU are sharing comments made in class by Miller about [liberal/conservative] students [and Democrats/Republicans] on social media.

Paul Langston, the president of the mid-sized university, said that Miller's comments do not reflect the values of the institution, especially as it tries to support students and promote critical dialogue in its programs.

Due to the rising number of complaints, Miller is on a temporary leave of absence as the university's personnel committee reviews his statements.

Note: In the vignette treatment above, the bracketed text is randomly assigned to the respondent. The "Democrat critique" treatment group includes the phrases "Biden snowflake, participation trophy," "liberal," "liberal," and "and Democrats." The "Republican critique" treatment group includes the phrases "Trump snowflake, basement dweller," "conservative," "conservative," and "and Republicans." The control group includes the phrase "lazy" and omits the emboldened and bracketed words.

Notes

1 Also see, for example, U.S. Supreme Court (1987), where the Supreme Court ruled that a Louisiana creationism law was intended to advance religion in violation of the Establishment Clause, or U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania (2005), which found that "creation science" was inherently religion and not science.

2 In popular media, one could examine religious groups' rhetoric in comparing William F. Buckley's (1951) *God and Man at Yale* and the 2014 film *God's Not Dead*, both of which center on professors attempting to challenge students' religious beliefs and favoring moral relativism.

3 An example of generalized punitive attitudes working in tandem with in-group and out-group attitudes is the belief that the "elect," or members of one's own religious tradition, deserve special or exclusive reward, while those outside of the tradition deserve less. See, for example, Disley (1991).

4 Scholars have identified different names for and subgroups of conservative Christians. Referenced here are fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Christian nationalists. Fundamentalists tend to be more militant in their opposition to the forces of modernity than other Evangelical Protestants. Most fundamentalists would be considered Evangelical Protestants, but not all Evangelical Protestants are fundamentalists. Similarly, Christian nationalists are a modern movement that emphasizes Christian dominance in matters of governance. Christian nationalists come from many different religious traditions, among whom there are several prominent Evangelical Protestants and Catholics. However, not all Christian nationalists are Evangelical Protestants or Catholics. These groups are nonetheless salient for discussing the history of conservative Christianity as they are among the more prominent and vocal adherents to and proponents of conservative Christianity (e.g., Wilcox and Robinson 2011; Whitehead and Perry 2020).

5 For example, the sample is predominantly white (97.8%), and thus we are limited to making inferences about white Americans. It over-represents women (69.2%), those with a bachelor's degree (83.8%), and Democrats (71.5%), as well as Catholics (78.9%).

Other demographic variables are more representative. The average age of our sample is 35 and the modal household income is $50,000–$75,000. While the results should not be viewed as representative of the U.S. population, research suggests that a convenience sample like this one is considerably similar to effects produced by national population surveys (e.g., Mullinix et al. 2015) and that causal inference can still be made even when using non-representative samples (e.g., Mutz and Kim 2020).

[6] Results for a fifth dependent variable, the professor being told by the university to attend sensitivity training, are not significant and not displayed here. This may reflect attitudes about sensitivity training as a whole among conservative groups, who may view the training as ineffective (e.g., Thurman 2021) or promoting a "woke" agenda in conflict with their values and beliefs (Madigan 2023).

[7] For example, in one of his first public comments after being elected the leader of the global Catholic Church, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed the virtues of free speech and his hopes that societies would protect the "precious gift of free speech and the press" (Winfield 2025).

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Religious Conversion and Political Incorporation: An Event-Based Model of Immigrant Political Socialization

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Abstract: Political socialization in the United States is circuitous and influenced by numerous outside sources, including parents, teachers, and peers. Moreover, civic organizations and political parties often work directly to recruit and mobilize citizens into politics. However, many foreign-born immigrants are denied these opportunities to acquire socialization. Immigrants are also often further overlooked or ignored by the civic and political organizations that incorporate most native-born Americans into politics. While a range of previous scholarship has sought to demonstrate and explain these disparities, few studies have examined alternative routes to political socialization or reconsidered the paradigm of incremental socialization as it applies to foreign-born populations. We argue that immigrants may instead become involved in the U.S. political system through religious conversion—a pivotal event in their lives. Using surveys of the two predominant U.S. immigrant groups, Asian Americans and Latinos, we show that religious conversion can catalyze the socialization process. Among both groups, religious conversion in the U.S. is associated with increased rates of political participation. These results suggest that immigrant socialization may follow different pathways than those of native-born populations, and that scholars should take into greater consideration the role of critical life events when modelling political socialization among foreign-born populations.

Keywords: religious conversion; immigration; political socialization; political incorporation; Asian Americans; Latinos

1. Introduction

As the foreign-born population of the United States has increased nearly fourfold over the last fifty years (Pew Research Center 2015), immigrants are an increasingly critical and politicized segment of the American electorate. Despite their potential numerical influence, however, a significant portion of the immigrant population has yet to be politically incorporated: both native- and foreign-born Asian Americans and Latinos are less likely to identify with a political party or vote in an election than native-born whites (Hajnal and Lee 2011). These gaps in political identification and participation are at least partially explained by immigrants' relative lack of political socialization. In addition to the myriad challenges facing immigrants to the U.S., many are also deprived of the traditional socializing processes that spur political engagement. Native-born Americans develop political values and attachments throughout an extensive period of socialization in their formative years under the influence of family, peers, educators, and political actors, but those born and raised abroad often lack such socialized ties to the American political system and, consequently, are often far less likely to participate in politics (e.g., Li and Jones 2020).

However, alternative pathways of political socialization may exist, as prior research has shown that immigrants from both Latin America and Asia may form partisan attachments as the result of religious conversion (Audette et al. 2017; Weaver 2015). The preceding shift in these immigrants' religious identities as an adaptive response to the American religious environment facilitates the subsequent formation of attachments to other distinctly American institutions, such as political parties. Even without decades of exposure to American political messages during their formative years and the political knowledge and experience gradually acquired over that period, significant and relatively sudden changes in one's life in the U.S. may serve to propel the socialization process.

Major events in an immigrant's experience in the U.S. may range from relatively mundane changes such as educational attainment, employment, home ownership, or marriage to rarer events such as major illness and interactions with the criminal justice system. Even immigration and relocation within the U.S. may constitute a major shift in one's life sufficient to spark political interest and lay the foundations for future political attachments. Many of these events also encourage political action by directly generating a desire for political change. Such events may be disruptive, but discontinuities also allow for redirection. Whereas many native-born Americans develop political interests slowly via exposure and social pressure over a long period of time, foreign-born Americans may be jolted to political attention, so to speak, through events that both change their lives and provide some link to politics.

We expect this to be especially true for a critical event and adaptation in an immigrant's identity in response to the religious marketplace of the U.S.: religious conversion. Though it is seemingly apolitical in nature, American religion has long been politicized (Layman 2001; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that individuals in the U.S. may choose to join a church for political purposes (e.g., Hafner and Audette 2023; Margolis 2018; 2022; Higgins and Djupe 2022). Thus, converts are not only undergoing a significant change in their core beliefs and identity, but are doing so by joining organizations with both direct and indirect political ties and beliefs. In this way, we contend that conversion serves as a potential catalyst in the process of immigrant political socialization. Prior work on the effects of conversion has focused exclusively on the formation of partisan attachments (Audette et al. 2017; Weaver 2015), but while partisanship can be crucial in navigating the American political system, full political incorporation requires broader participation in politics beyond the adoption of a partisan label. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether immigrant conversion is similarly associated with increased political participation.

To test this theory, this article examines the relationship between religious conversion and political participation among immigrants to the United States. Using data from the 2006 Hispanic Religion Survey and the 2012 Pew Asian-American Survey, we show that among both Asian-American and Latino immigrants who have attained citizenship, those who convert in the U.S. are significantly more likely to register to vote in U.S. elections. Beyond simply identifying with the two major parties, voter registration represents a much more substantial step toward full electoral participation. This suggests an alternative model of immigrant political socialization and incorporation, by which a major life event such as conversion can serve as a shortcut in the path of political socialization. While there may be no substitute for a lifetime of engagement with the American political system, these life events can serve as useful stepping stones.

2. Immigrants and Traditional Sources of Political Socialization

The concept of political socialization has been ascribed a number of definitions over the years (Sapiro 2004; Sigel 1995), but it is essentially the process by which individuals

acquire attitudes, beliefs, values, and attachments relating to the political system under which they live (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell et al. 1960; Easton 1968; Hyman 1959; Langton 1969; Niemi and Hepburn 1995). Some political systems have mechanisms for teaching part of the requisite knowledge of the governmental process to their citizens, such as mandatory civics classes or a citizenship exam, but the primary process for political learning occurs through long-term interaction with less formal sources (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Campbell 2006; Popkin and Dimock 1999). For example, children in the U.S. often learn the social patterns of citizenship over time, through social interactions with their family, school teachers, peer groups, and perhaps even complete strangers. These micro-interactions with American politics combine with formal education to prepare individuals for political participation (Almond and Verba 1963; Dahl 1998; Dalton 2009; Pateman 1970; Verba et al. 1995).

Among the different sources of political socialization, one's immediate family is often recognized as the most influential in determining political outcomes (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell et al. 1960; Langton 1969; Urbatsch 2014). Formal education is often recognized as being a close second in terms of socializing agents. Scholars have long pointed to schools and civics programs as helping to develop democratic citizens, and faulting them when research fails to show better civic outcomes (Callahan and Muller 2013; Campbell 2006; Galston 2001; Settle et al. 2011). Whether directly through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities or indirectly through increasing socioeconomic status and social standing, education is believed to transmit the political information and values necessary for political action (Callahan and Muller 2013; Campbell 2006; Galston 2001; Settle et al. 2011). In addition to the formal opportunities available at one's educational institutions, schools also form the primary social environment for America's youth. Peers from school, neighborhoods, religious organizations, work, or other social groups also have a significant effect on an individual's political socialization and participation (Campbell 2006; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Settle et al. 2011; Verba et al. 1995).

Of course, the decision to engage in politics is furthermore derived from non-social sources: self-motivation and personal preferences also influence one's politics (Cassel and Lo 1997; Coppock and Green 2015). However, as Popkin and Dimock (1999, p. 142) suggest, "[n]onvoting results from a lack of knowledge about what government is doing and where parties and candidates stand, not from a knowledgeable rejection of government or parties or a lack of trust in government." Voters and nonvoters are differentiated not so much by their desire to participate, but by having the requisite skills and knowledge necessary to do so. Indeed, Galston (2001) compares wanting to participate and having a lack of civic knowledge with the experience of trying to follow a sports competition without knowing the rules of the game. As a result, groups who lack such information due to a lack of political socialization are at a distinct disadvantage.

The traditional model of socialization posits an environment where small social interactions accumulate over the course of several years beginning in early childhood. While socialization continues to occur throughout one's life, adult socialization primarily serves to reinforce the values and norms learned at a young age. As many immigrants spend childhood and adolescence in a different social and political environment, they are unfamiliar with the rules, norms, and procedures of the receiving country (Li and Jones 2020; Tam Cho 1999). Due to their relative lack of socialization within the U.S. political context, immigrants often lack the skills, resources, and attachments that drive political participation. Even immigrants who come to the U.S. at an early age experience socialization differently from their native-born counterparts, largely due to differences in language acquisition, educational barriers, and citizenship status (e.g., Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009).

The two largest populations in the U.S. affected by these challenges to political socialization are immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Asian immigrants are proportionally the fastest growing immigrant group in the U.S., while Latinos are numerically the fastest growing group (Wong 2006). The growth of these populations is of enormous consequence for U.S. politics, yet the influence held by these groups may be somewhat inhibited by comparatively low rates of political participation. Scholars of U.S. political participation have consistently observed significantly higher levels of political participation among native-born Americans than among immigrants (e.g., Bloemraad 2006; Ramakrishnan 2005; Tam Cho 1999; Wong et al. 2011). Compared to other major racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., Latinos and Asian Americans are the least likely to engage in a host of participatory acts (Tam Cho 1999; Verba et al. 1995; Wong et al. 2011). This is the result of many factors, including lack of representation and outreach by U.S. politicians and political parties, barriers resulting from lack of citizenship or social discrimination, and individual-level factors such as income, education, or language differences. However, one cannot overlook the obvious challenge brought on by having to adapt to a considerably different political environment.

This is not to say immigrants arrive in the U.S. as blank slates; political experiences and socialization in one's sending country can significantly impact one's politics in the U.S. (Wals 2011). Many international migrants continue to follow or even participate in politics in their home countries, which tends to actually increase the likelihood of participation in U.S. politics (Ramakrishnan 2005; Wals 2011; Wong 2006). These opportunities may be made available through hometown associations, which promote connections to sending countries and (occasionally) their political systems. Moreover, these hometown associations tend to promote participation in the U.S., not detract from it (Ramakrishnan and Viramontes 2010).

However, participation in the social and political life of one's sending country does not fully replace the political socialization necessary to participate in U.S. politics. Short of planning to participate in politics prior to arrival, post-migration participation necessitates some adaptation and learning. For example, while one may know they are ideologically conservative and vote that way in their sending country, it will take time to learn which U.S. candidates represent conservative ideals, how those ideals are articulated specifically on the range of issues unique to the U.S., and how to vote or otherwise support their candidates.

Furthermore, traditional sources of socialization often function differently for immigrants. While the family is still a broad source of socialization for immigrants, the opportunities for long-term socialization into the U.S. political system are limited by family members' lack of socialization (e.g., Raychaudhuri 2020). Similarly, because many immigrants move to ethnic enclaves or areas concentrated with persons of the same national origin or ethnic background (due to increased economic and social opportunities), immigrant communities may have fewer opportunities to learn about U.S. politics from those who have spent more time within the U.S. political system. Schools provide a number of opportunities for the children of immigrants to experience political socialization, but this varies based on time spent in the U.S. and the quality of the schools (Callahan and Muller 2013). The workplace, too, may provide some opportunities for migrants to develop political skills and socialization, but these opportunities may be comparatively low in number; many individuals who migrate to the U.S. begin work within the lower strata of occupations, which generate fewer civic skills (Verba et al. 1995). Thus, immigrants may find many traditional paths to socialization steeper or even closed altogether.

3. Life Events, Socialization, and Political Participation

The field of psychology, however, offers some insights into the process by which immigrants may adapt to the political system of a receiving country. In their study of learning and induction, Holland et al. (1986) suggest individuals are "triggered" to revise their knowledge structures under two conditions: "the failure of a prediction and the occurrence of some unusual event" (p. 80). Applied to political socialization, experiencing new phenomena (through a cycle of fulfilled or unfulfilled predictions) is one means of generating political knowledge, but little attention has been paid to the "unusual events" that bring people into the political process. The usual events have received some attention as means to socialization—Sears and Valentino (Sears and Valentino 1997; Valentino and Sears 1998) proposed a form of event-based socialization surrounding a presidential election—but we seek to extend this to the unusual (that is, non-routine and/or non-political) events that influence levels of socialization.

Life events, as defined by psychologists utilizing longitudinal life-span survey designs, are noteworthy or impactful occurrences during one's life (Reese and Smyer 1983; Baltes 1987). The events range from the relatively mundane, such as a minor injury, to the extraordinary, such as the birth of a child (Holmes and Rahe 1967). These pivotal occurrences in an individual's life are also shown to affect psychological outcomes (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend 1974; Block and Zautra 1981; Abbey and Andrews 1985; Garnefski et al. 2001). Importantly for the present study, Henderson et al. (1981) note the uniqueness of events such as "[experiencing] a religious conversion or a real deepening of faith."

In addition to psychological outcomes, life events may also influence an individual's political views and participation (Hatemi 2013). Although they are rarely characterized as such, life events and processes are already at the center of examinations of political socialization. Education, marriage, and social network exposure are just a few examples of attributes psychologists might classify as certain types of life events, which have been reliably demonstrated as having an impact on political participation. Other events that occur in adulthood have also variously been shown to influence political participation. Mothers, for example, quickly undergo significant transformations in their political attitudes after motherhood (Greenlee 2014), as do divorcees (Fahs 2007). In a cross-regional study of crime exposure and political participation, Bateson (2012) shows that exposure to a crime event can motivate political participation, instead of hindering it, as did knowing a victim of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Hersch 2013; see also Walker 2020). Being incarcerated also significantly affects political attitudes and engagement (Gerber et al. 2017), as did being drafted into the military (Erikson and Stoker 2011), and experiencing psychological trauma (Marsh 2023). This impact extends to other governmental contact; involvement in welfare and other social programs may also influence rates of political activity (Swartz et al. 2009; Bruch et al. 2010). These disparate events demonstrate the potential link between events and participation. Each is also highly contextual; their positive or negative impact on participation depends on the group affected and the nature of the event. However, the effect of long-term life processes on political participation can be interrupted by relatively sudden events.

Major disruptive events such as childbirth, divorce, and crime exposure can form, reshape, and dissolve our attachments to other people and institutions, and they can also reorient how we view ourselves. Political attachments and identities are included in this reorientation. Becoming a parent leads one to view political issues through a new lens redefined by one's new responsibilities and priorities. Labels such as "parent" and "crime victim" can quickly become part of our identities, and our relationship to institutions such as schools, police, etc., are altered—or formed for the first time if they were absent before—by these new roles. Major disruptive life events can suddenly up-end our sense of self,

but they can also serve as catalysts for the development of new identities and attachments distinct from those we had before and rooted in how we now see ourselves. Rather than a slow, passive process of socialization, this form of political socialization can happen quickly and much later in life.

Figure 1 illustrates two potential processes for political socialization. In a piecemeal process, individuals develop political proclivities slowly over time, beginning early in life. This process consists of numerous minor activities and mechanisms that develop slowly over time and accumulate to produce the necessary motivation and skills for political participation. Again, this process in the American context is germane to native-born individuals as it requires continual, extended interactions between the individual and the sociopolitical context. Because many immigrants lack exposure to the process of piecemeal political socialization experienced by native-born Americans, we suggest that they are particularly susceptible to the effects of marker life events, which can serve as potential supplements for lower rates of life process socialization in the U.S.

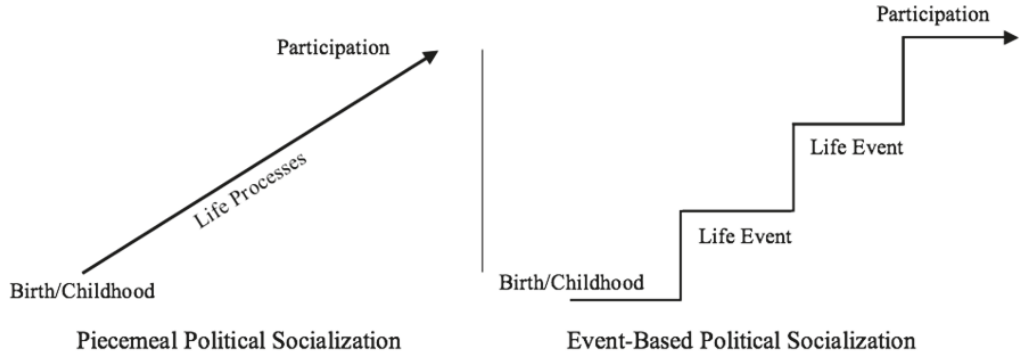


Figure 1. Models of political socialization.

The differences in immigrant experiences of socialization are rooted in the unique psychological relationship between immigration and contextual events and processes. In response to the typology of stressful events developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967), Cervantes et al. (1991) develop a scale of stressful life events particular to the Latino immigrant experience. Many of these items examine the effect of discrimination, for example, which has been shown to have a negative impact on immigrant well-being and subsequent political participation (see also Rodriguez et al. 2002). Among all immigrant groups, the process of acculturation into a new context carries psychological challenges that have a predominantly negative impact on cultural and political socialization and political participation.

Yet these studies overlook the potentially positive role of transformative life events. Immigrants may marry, purchase a home, have children, own a business, or expand their social circle. Such life events may serve to facilitate socialization and participation. This alternative model of event-based political socialization is depicted in Figure 1. For many immigrants, reorienting life events can serve to rapidly establish connections, provide information, or motivate political action. Although this may be no true substitute for the traditional, circuitous socialization process, these events may represent "shortcuts" in the path to political incorporation.

4. Religious Conversion and Immigrant Political Participation

We focus on one transformative event, religious conversion, to demonstrate the potential influence of singular life events on political participation. Religious conversion is common around the world, and it entails the adoption of a new religious identity, which can include a change in beliefs, religious practices, and associations. While conversion

can be driven by a number of unique individual motivations, the most common factors in voluntary conversion are spiritual experiences, moral commitments, and social pressure from peers and family (Barro et al. 2010). While conversion can sometimes be gradual, it typically involves a specific decision point wherein one formally begins identifying as a member of a new religion. This can be relatively sudden.

In essence, religious conversion signifies a significant shift in an individual's religious orientation. Taken broadly, conversion and other life-changing events may be one key to unlocking the process of political socialization when few other options exist. Religious conversion has a well-documented impact on psychological orientations, life outlook, stress adaptation, and general acculturation but its impact on political socialization and participation has yet to be examined among immigrant populations.

Our focus on the conversion event among the many possible life events is motivated by the accessibility and transformative nature of religious conversion to immigrant populations, along with its function as a form of cultural adaptation. Unlike life events such as purchasing a home, marriage, opening a business, or having a child, religious conversion can be easily and freely attained by any new immigrant from early in arrival in a new context. Conversion certainly depends on contact and availability but does not require monetary costs. This allows us to isolate the impact of a transformative event independent of socioeconomic considerations. Furthermore, religious experiences and conversion can have sudden, transformative impacts on an individual's psychological makeup (James 1985; but see also Stronge et al. 2021). In addition to one's identity, religious transformation may in turn influence feelings, attitudes, and behaviors connected both directly and indirectly to one's religion (Burge 2021; Paloutzian et al. 1999; Holman et al. 2020).

Religious identification itself is often linked to political participation, political identification, policy attitudes, and candidate evaluations (Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Harris 1999; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Verba et al. 1995). Churches and centers of worship assist in the development of civic skills, social connections, and social capital, which shape political orientations (Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Harris 1999; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Verba et al. 1995). Churches and religious organizations are particularly important for immigrants as they are geographically widespread, more egalitarian than other social institutions, and proximate to the daily lives of immigrants through their provision of social services (Harris 1999; Huckle and Silva 2020; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Sterne 2001). Their role is all the more critical given the relative lack of political party outreach to immigrant and racial or ethnic minority populations (Bloemraad 2006; Huckle and Silva 2020; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Sterne 2001).

Although some differences exist in the relationship between different immigrant groups, religions, and political orientations, religious affiliation and churches play significant roles in the formation of political identity and political involvement in every major immigrant ethnic group. For example, immigrants who attend church more frequently are more likely to participate in politics (Lien 2004; Wong et al. 2011); religious tradition can impact ideology and partisanship (Wong and Iwamura 2006; Wong et al. 2008); and churches were highly significant factors in the immigrants' rights protests of the mid-2000s (Gonzalez III and del Rosario 2009; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Rim 2009). Churches have also long been agents of socialization through their efforts to fill the gap between sending country context and the U.S. context, effectively reinforcing and facilitating additional long-term incorporation into a new society.

However, religious affiliation and involvement alone do not completely explain the impact of immigrant religious orientations in a new context, nor do churches fully make up for disparities in immigrants' rates of political participation. Staying in a familiar church may ease the transition to a new country, but it does little to influence the psychological

orientation of a new citizen. If religions are important in immigrants' political lives, then changes in religious orientations among immigrants must also be important.

The potential for the conversion event to positively impact political participation rests on the psychological relationship between attachment to a new religion and openness to greater participation through socialization. Religious conversion must be impactful in a way that facilitates adaptation to a new context for immigrants. In the American context, religious conversion has a well-documented impact on general socialization through the acquisition of knowledge about American culture and the psychological impact of identity alteration (Hang Ng 2002; Yang 1998; Yang and Ebaugh 2001; Gans 1994; Lofland and Stark 1965; Buckser and Glazier 2003). The influence of the conversion event among immigrants is also shaped by the new and less-familiar context of American culture (Yang and Yang 2023). In other words, among native-born populations, religious conversion does not itself facilitate socialization into the American context because native-born populations experience socialization through the standard piecemeal process.

Immigrants, who lack the typical process of cultural socialization, are susceptible to the effects of the conversion event because there is a "vacuum" of identification within their new social location. About 23% of foreign-born Latinos in the U.S. were raised Catholic but have converted (Pew Research Center 2023a). Similarly, around 30% of foreign-born Asian adults in the U.S. have converted (Pew Research Center 2012). Latinos have largely converted from Catholicism to Evangelical Protestantism, and Asian-American converts are most likely to have converted to Christianity and converted from Buddhism.

Immigrants may utilize religious identification to structure the process of political and social incorporation, especially if that identification is the result of conversion into a new religious tradition germane to the U.S. context (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2012). However, conversion is not necessarily motivated by politics. The vast majority (90%) of Latino Evangelical converts say they converted due to a desire for a more direct, personal experience of God (Pew Research Center 2006). Most Latino converts said they first heard about their current religion from family members or friends, but 81% of Latinos also say church in the U.S. is at least somewhat welcoming to immigrants (Pew Research Center 2006). Exposure to Christianity in particular is an almost unavoidable part of American culture. Among Asian Americans, 18% said they felt close to Christianity even though they did not identify as Christian (Pew Research Center 2023b). A new religion more associated with American culture makes it easier to view oneself as fitting into American culture and politics.

Conversion often also requires changing behaviors to fit in. Compared to their religions of origin, majorities of Latino and Asian-American converts describe their new faith as having different, more engaging worship styles and typically attend worship services more often (Pew Research Center 2006; Pew Research Center 2012). Among Asian-American Buddhists, 63% say they have an altar or shrine in their home, and only 17% say they attend religious services outside their home at least once a month. In contrast, 55% of Asian-American Christians attend worship services, and only 39% say they have an altar or shrine at home (Pew Research Center 2023b). While religious practices need not necessarily be mutually exclusive, 87% of Asian-American Protestants do not have a home shrine.

The impact of this change in religious identification is compounded by what can be a relatively sudden or rapid religious conversion for certain immigrant populations. While there are few studies on the exact process of immigrant religious conversion, ethnographic work by Wang and Yang (2006) points to the "declaration" and "baptism" of immigrants into Evangelical Christianity as conversion event markers. Importantly, these events often occur among immigrant populations with little previous exposure to Evangelical Christianity (Kivisto 2014). Given the association of Evangelical Christianity with conservative

politics, conversion to this type of religion, in particular, seems to have obvious political consequences. Indeed, the effect of conversion may be specific to conversion to Christianity or a major American Christian denomination due to the preexisting associations these religious traditions have within American politics. Conversion to a tradition less common in the United States and without any political connotations may not have the same effect on political identity and participation, as the converts' new identities cannot be easily connected to political institutions or practices.

In the American context, religious conversion also has a well-documented impact on immigrant cultural socialization through the acquisition of knowledge about American culture and the psychological impact of identity alteration (Hang Ng 2002; Yang 1998; Buckser and Glazier 2003). The influence of conversion among immigrants is also shaped by the new and less-familiar context of American culture. In other words, religious conversion among native-born populations does not facilitate socialization into the American context, because native-born populations experience socialization through the standard piecemeal process.

Prior studies have also identified religious conversion as a factor that may facilitate adaptation to new political systems among both Latinos and Asian Americans (Audette et al. 2017; Weaver 2015). Taken broadly, religious conversion may be one key to unlocking the process of political socialization when few other options exist. This allows us to isolate the impact of religious conversion independent of socioeconomic considerations. Because of the political importance of religious conversion for immigrant populations, we hypothesize a positive relationship between religious conversion and political participation for immigrant populations. We also suspect that this relationship does not exist for native-born populations with similar ethnic backgrounds. If true, this pattern would be evidence that religious conversion may help bridge the gap of socialization for immigrant groups.

5. Data and Methods

To examine the relationship between religion, conversion, and political incorporation for American immigrants, we utilize both the Pew Research Center's 2006 Hispanic Religion Survey of Latinos and its 2012 Asian-American Survey (Pew Research Center 2006; 2012). The former included a nationally representative sample of 4016 Latino adults and was conducted through bilingual telephone interviews from August 10 to October 4 in 2006, while the latter surveyed a nationally representative sample of 3511 Asian-American adults and was conducted via multilingual telephone interviews from January 3 to March 27 in 2012. The Hispanic Religion Survey was offered in both English and Spanish, while the Asian-American Survey was offered in English, Cantonese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. These two surveys uniquely provide both large samples of immigrants and a sufficient range of religious variables to explore the relationship between religious conversion and political participation among immigrant populations. Ideally, the surveys of immigrant populations would have been conducted simultaneously in the same time period, but no other datasets exist that track religious conversion and political participation among these immigrant populations. Moreover, while changes did occur in the intervening years, these changes ought not to have impacted the primary relationship between conversion and socialization we examine. In the analyses that follow, the data are weighted to ensure representativeness, and the survey groups (2006 and 2012 respectively) are modeled separately.

To identify religious converts, we compare the religion in which the respondent was raised to the religion with which they currently identify, which is identical for both surveys. Furthermore, due to issues of sample size, we focus on the largest conversion groups. Among Latino immigrants, 74% were lifelong Catholics, 9% were lifelong Evangelicals, and

5% converted to Evangelical Protestantism. Therefore, among Latino immigrants, we direct our analyses towards conversion from Catholicism to Evangelical Protestantism. This is a notable and growing segment in the Latino population (Mulder et al. 2017). Among Asian-American immigrants, we focus on conversion from Buddhism (the largest sending tradition) to any Christian religious tradition (the largest receiving tradition). In this sample, 35% of those who no longer identify with their childhood religion were raised as Buddhists. Excluding those who left religion altogether, the largest receiving religions are Evangelical Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, and Catholicism, which received approximately 36%, 21%, and 17% of the converts, respectively. We compare converts to the control category of lifelong Buddhists (Asians) and lifelong Catholics (Latinos) as well as other religious adherents, and the nonreligious. All other religious categories lack the requisite number of respondents to make meaningful inferences.

We have opted to focus our analyses on the most prevalent conversion routes for each immigrant group, but we acknowledge the experience of converting to a different Christian denomination is likely quite different from converting to Christianity from a non-Christian religion, but both involve converting within the U.S. to a religious tradition that is a minority within their country of origin. The overwhelming majority of Latin Americans are raised Catholic, and Protestants comprise less than 20% of the population (Pew Research Center 2014). Similarly, Buddhism is a popular religion in East Asian countries, while Christians are a minority (Pew Research Center 2024). Buddhism was also the only religion aside from Christianity practiced by at least some respondents from each Asian nationality group in our sample.

To measure electoral participation, we use voter registration for both groups. Because we are specifically examining ethnic groups that vote at consistently lower rates, we chose a lower threshold for political participation. Moreover, the gap in time and specific differences in elections between 2006 and 2012 make voting or vote intention a less comparable measure across our two samples, while registration is a more static measure of political participation over time. While not a perfect measure of political socialization, registration is an easily accessible form of political participation and a common proxy for political socialization in groups with lower voter turnout rates. Since registration may reflect general civic socialization, we also account for whether immigrants engage in civic behavior using a measure that asks if respondents had worked with other members of their communities to solve a problem. Our analyses demonstrate significant variation in rates of registration, giving credence to the importance of examining registration as a measure of political participation. Because voter registration is measured in the data dichotomously, we estimate binomial logistic regression models.

In addition to religious affiliation variables, our analyses include a range of controls for church attendance rates, political partisanship, income, home ownership, education, gender, marital status, age, geographic location, and English language proficiency. Because of the potential for the context of sending countries to influence socialization, we also control for country of origin, including Cuban background for Hispanic immigrants and Chinese ethnicity for Asian-American immigrants. Furthermore, we have included proxies for respondents' integration into the American Latino and Asian-American communities, respectively, by including controls for whether respondents adopt these panethnic labels. Similarly, we control for whether respondents have experienced discrimination as a proxy for alienation.

6. Results

Table 1 shows the results of binomial logistic regression models for Latino immigrant and native-born respondent groups. These results demonstrate that Latino converts to

Evangelical Protestantism are more likely than unconverted Catholics to register to vote. Since voter registration is the first step toward voting, this result indicates converts are more likely than their non-convert counterparts to participate in the electoral system—a key indication of political socialization. However, as suggested above, religious conversion only influences electoral participation for immigrants. The positive relationship for immigrants and the negative (but statistically non-significant) relationship for native-born Latinos is direct evidence for our theory of event-based immigrant socialization. Both immigrants and native-born experience the same conversion event; however, religious conversion only served as a catalyst for resocialization among immigrant populations due to their relative vacuum of political socialization. In other words, event socialization requires two elements: the socializing event itself and a lack of previous socialization through a piecemeal process.

Table 1. Religion, conversion, and Latino voter registration.

	Foreign-Born	**Native-Born**
Catholic→Evangelical	1.29 **	−0.42
Evangelical	0.36	−0.17
Mainline	1.22	0.37
Other religion	0.70	0.52
Nonreligious	−0.19	−0.38
Attendance	0.10	0.07
Partisanship	−0.31 **	0.02
Income	−0.12	−0.08
Homeownership	0.75 **	−0.10
Education	0.71 *	1.00 **
Married	−0.28	0.99 **
Female	−0.08	0.88 **
Age	0.06 **	0.06 **
West	−0.13	0..46
English	0.50 **	0.78 **
Panethnic ID	0.31	−0.19
Cuban	0.61	0.21
Discrimination experience	−0.44	−0.89 **
N	819	650
Pseudo-R^2	0.21	0.23

Source: 2006 Pew Changing Faiths Survey; Note: Entries are logit coefficients. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, two-tailed.

Table 2 displays the results of two separate logistic regression models for foreign-born and native-born Asian Americans. As shown, converts are more likely to register to vote than any group except Mainline Protestants when compared to lifelong Buddhists. As with Latino immigrants, Asian-American immigrants who change their religious identities are more likely to participate in the electoral process. The results for Asian-American immigrants persist even when controlling for variables typically associated with socialization and incorporation such as education, income, marital status, and age. This relationship also does not exist among native-born Asian Americans, which again is strong evidence for the importance of socializing events among immigrant populations.

This tendency is a signal that religious conversion plays an important role for immigrants in the process of political incorporation. The role of conversion may reflect the transformation from a religion germane to the immigrant's sending country (Buddhism and Catholicism) to a religion germane to the U.S. context (Christianity and Evangelicalism). Conversion into a new religious framework that is closely linked to the American context seems to facilitate political participation. The impact of the conversion event on political participation may be further established by the religiosity of American politicians, who tend to be overwhelmingly Christian. Asian-American immigrants who transform

their religious identities are more likely to identify with politicians who reflect their new identities, which in turn makes immigrants more likely to participate in electoral politics. As suggested by the link between conversion and socialization outlined above, this new identification with an American religious group allows new immigrants to feel like part of the American culture, which includes political participation.

Table 2. Religion, conversion, and Asian-American voter registration.

	Foreign-Born	**Native-Born**
Buddhist→Christian	1.12 **	0.59
Hindu	0.32	1.83**
Evangelical	−0.34	0.60
Mainline	1.04**	0.70
Catholic	0.47	0.43
Other religion	0.98*	10.80 **
Nonreligious	0.08	0.41
Attendance	0.05	−0.03
Partisanship	−0.06	−0.11
Income	−0.02	0.11 *
Homeownership	0.25	0.25
Education	0.36 *	0.44
Married	0.26	−0.21
Female	0.00	−0.21
Age	0.04 **	0.04 **
West	−0.07	0.11
English	0.41 **	—
Panethnic ID	0.05	0.70 **
Chinese	−0.24	—
Discrimination experience	−0.13	−0.30
N	1517	679
Pseudo-R^2	0.11	0.13

Source: 2012 Pew Asian-American Survey. Note: Entries are logit coefficients. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, two-tailed.

Moreover, these results do not seem to be driven by a generic increase in civic participation. Using a measure of whether the respondent worked with other people from their neighborhood to fix a problem or improve a condition in their community for the Asian-American dataset and a measure of whether the respondent was a member of a neighborhood organization for the Latino dataset, we included a measure of civic participation in each of the models. As shown in Table 3, conversion remains a significant predictor of increased political participation even when civic participation is included as a control variable. Although the effect of civic participation is positive and statistically significant (indicating that civic participation predicts political participation), its effects are distinct from those of conversion.

As the interpretation of the magnitude of logistic regression coefficients may be unintuitive, we calculated the predicted probabilities of electoral participation among Latino immigrant religious groups. Latino immigrant converts from Catholicism to Evangelical Christianity are 14 percentage points more likely to register to vote than their lifelong Catholic counterparts. Asian immigrants are 17 percentage points more likely to register to vote than lifelong Buddhists. In both Asian and Latino groups, converts are more likely to register to vote than any other religious group. These probabilities are displayed in Figure 2. The consistency of the relationship between religious conversion and political participation across the two largest groups of immigrants to the U.S. is good evidence for the role of religious conversion in facilitating political participation, and it also offers evidence for the potential of conversion to influence the process of political socialization.

Table 3. Religion, conversion, and voter registration (controlling for civic participation).

	Foreign-Born Latinos	**Foreign-Born Asians**
Converts	1.34 **	1.09 **
Evangelical	0.28	−0.34
Mainline	1.14	1.01 **
Other religion	0.42	0.98 *
Nonreligious	−0.35	0.08
Hindu	—	0.26
Civic participation	0.86 **	0.52 **
Attendance	0.04	0.03
Partisanship	−0.34 **	−0.07
Income	−0.10	−0.01
Homeownership	0.77 **	0.20
Education	0.59	0.31
Married	−0.26	0.27
Female	−0.07	0.01
Age	0.06 **	0.04 **
West	−0.14	−0.07
English	0.45 **	0.40 **
Panethnic ID	0.18	0.07
Cuban	0.67	—
Discrimination experience	−0.45	−0.12
N	819	1517
Pseudo-R^2	0.22	0.12

Source: 2006 Pew Changing Faiths Survey, 2012 Pew Asian-American Survey; Note: Entries are logit coefficients. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, two-tailed.

While we have demonstrated the significant impact of conversion on political participation, our theory also suggests that religious conversation has a substantive effect comparable to other important influences like homeownership or speaking English. Figure 3 compares the effect of conversion to other factors that might influence socialization for the two immigrant groups. For both groups, religious conversion has the largest effect size of common predictors of political socialization.

Another potential explanation of our results is that registering to vote instead facilitates religious conversion. If, for example, an individual becomes involved in politics, that individual may be more likely to acculturate into American society more generally, which may include changing religion. Given the nature of the data, we must remain agnostic about this possibility; however, when we include a measure of civic participation, our results remain unchanged. Moreover, there is no interactive effect between conversion and civic participation—religious conversion has a similar effect for active and non-active immigrants.

We do not suggest that the mechanism of the conversion event works precisely the same for all immigrant groups; different sending and receiving contexts certainly shape the exact process of political incorporation due to the conversion event, but the identity transformation that occurs during religious conversion and the subsequent changes in attitudes, feelings, and behaviors seem to open the door for increased political participation. Interestingly, when accounting for conversion, church attendance does not seem to predict increased participation in either group, suggesting that simple involvement in a religious tradition does not influence political participation. Furthermore, our results reveal no interactive effect between conversion and participation, which indicates the effect of conversion is likely not due to an increase in civic participation through the church.

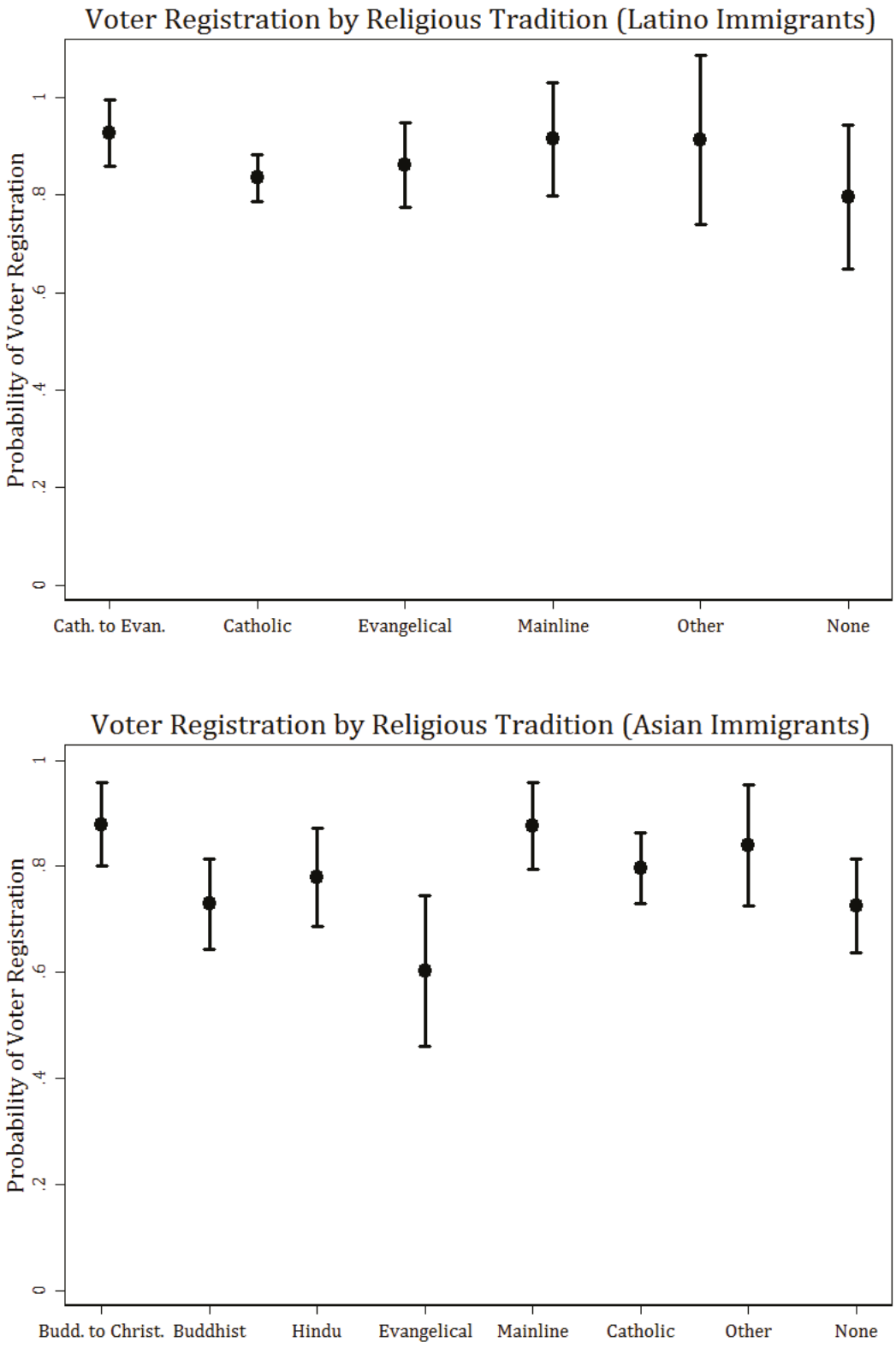


Figure 2. Predicted values of the impact of religious conversion on registration.

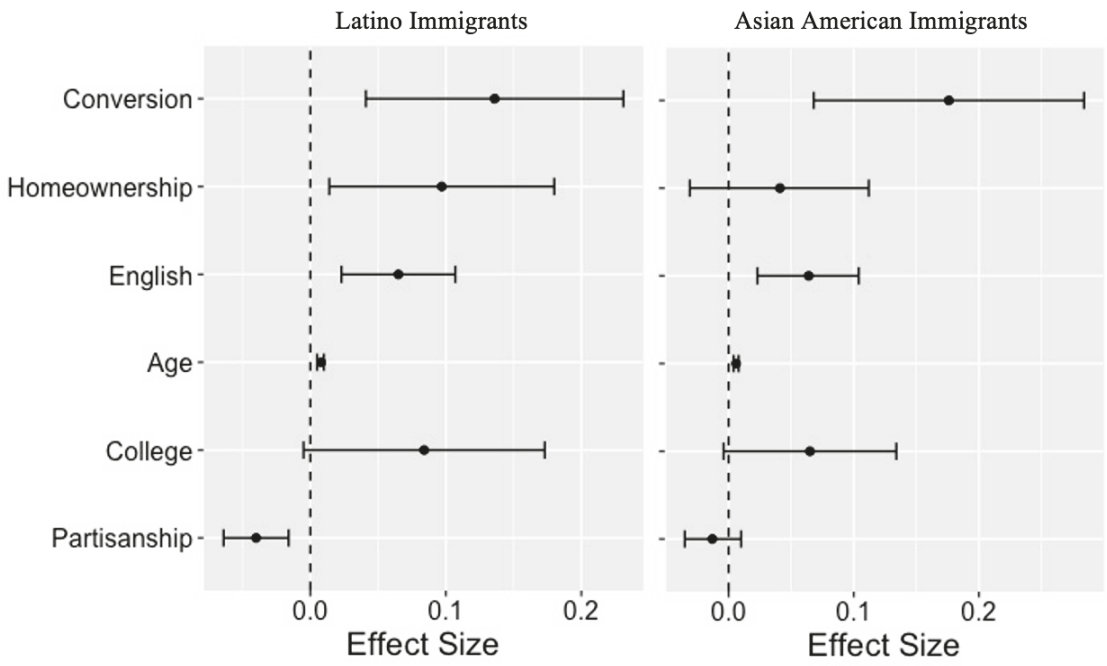


Figure 3. Comparison of effect size of conversion and other factors.

We also examine the impact of other potential life events, but these results are mixed. As shown in Table 1, homeownership, a potential socializing event, has a positive impact on electoral participation for Latino immigrants. We also include a measure of whether respondents are married, as marriage is another major life event and is often a major factor in religious conversion (Sherkat 2004; Barro et al. 2010). Indeed, 14% of Latino converts in our sample said they converted due to marriage (Pew Research Center 2006). However, marriage has no impact on Latino immigrant electoral participation. The conflicting nature of these two results suggests that reliance on these measures as proxies for event socialization may be problematic. For example, data limitations prevent analysis of the exact nature of the marriage event. Marriage outside of an individual's race or ethnic background may have a socializing impact whereas marriage within an individual's background may have the opposite impact. Tellingly, neither relationship (homeownership or marriage) persists in the model for Asian Americans shown in Table 2, which underscores the difficulty in using these rough measures of important life events in predicting electoral participation.

The large impact of religious conversion on voting behavior among both Asian and Latino immigrant groups is good initial evidence of the potential for socializing events to impact the political socialization of immigrants into the American political context. The event-based model is further supported by the lack of conversion as a socializing influence among native-born populations. If religious conversion itself were the driving force behind socialization, then the relationship between conversion and participation would exist equally for native-born populations. Immigrants and native-born populations in the U.S. are subject to different socialization *processes* as well as different socialization *contexts*. Our examination of one possible mechanism in this process for Latino and Asian immigrants is a step forward in the development of a positive theory of immigrant political socialization and participation.

7. Conclusions

The observed relationship between religious conversion and voter registration among both Asian-American and Latino immigrant groups is initial evidence of the potential for religious conversion to impact the political socialization of immigrants into the American

political context. Significant life events such as conversion can serve to simultaneously realign immigrants' identities within a new context while providing a new pathway for the acquisition of political knowledge and attachments. Immigrants and native-born populations in the U.S. are subject to different socialization processes as well as different socialization contexts. Our examination of one possible alternative process for Latino and Asian immigrants is a step forward in the development of a positive theory of immigrant political socialization and participation.

Despite their growing size as a population and increasing prominence as a focus of political debates, U.S. immigrants remain relatively alienated from the American political system. No democratic system can afford to overlook or exclude such a wide swath of those subject to its laws, but this exclusion may be particularly problematic for U.S. immigrants who face broader social and political marginalization. As it is primarily through political participation that marginalized groups work to mitigate their legal disadvantage, obstacles to political engagement—including a lack of political socialization—prevent progress and may even serve to exacerbate existing disparities. Thus, the cultivation of political ties and the acquisition of political skills that facilitate political participation may be crucial to U.S. immigrants.

In this article, we demonstrate one potential pathway by which immigrants' disadvantages in acquiring political socialization may be offset: religious conversion. We contend conversion serves as merely one example of a significant, impactful life event that can facilitate the process of political socialization for new immigrants. These events shape immigrant adaptation in a new political context. Conversion is particularly important for immigrants, as alterations in religious attachments associated with the culture of sending countries, coupled with the proximity of religion and religious traditions to immigrants, represents an important change in their psychological orientations and life cycle.

Although churches may serve immigrants to the U.S. regardless of conversion, those who change their religious affiliation upon entering the U.S. undergo a transformative experience unique to their new environment. In addition to immediate personal changes, such experiences in a receiving country can help provide a broader foundation for the construction of other ties and facilitate subsequent adaptations. Prior work has shown the acquisition of partisanship to be one such potential adaptation, but the findings above go even further to demonstrate that conversion directly increases participation in the electoral process. Taken together, these findings suggest conversion and other transformative life events can mitigate both inherent and imposed obstacles to immigrant inclusion in the U.S.

Nevertheless, further research is necessary to examine the potential impact of other such life events. How do education, marriage, parenthood, home ownership, career changes, and other events in the U.S. affect immigrants' subsequent experiences? Our theory posits that such events would also affect political and social integration, but we lack the longitudinal data on these changes necessary to test our theory more broadly. It may be that only certain changes, such as conversion, produce these effects. If so, this may be due to the relative prominence of religion in American politics.

Additionally, these data only allow us to examine the effects of religious conversion to Christianity, which is a well-established religion with existing political associations in the U.S. context. The relatively small samples of converts to other religious groups precludes us from drawing definitive conclusions about the potential effects of religious conversion to other traditions less common in the U.S. context. While it may be the case that conversion facilitates political socialization regardless of tradition, it is also quite likely the formation of a new identity without preexisting ties to political institutions does little to form political attachments or spur political participation.

Indeed, a full understanding of immigrant political socialization requires better longitudinal data on the experiences of immigrants over time both before and after migration. While scholarship has given increasing consideration to the ways in which factors in immigrants' sending countries affect experiences in the U.S. (e.g., Wals 2011), surveys rarely ask immigrants to fully compare the two, and no large-scale panel studies have yet tracked respondents moving across national borders. Though such limitations may be unavoidable, understanding how immigrants' experiences differ over time and across countries can provide insights into ways these experiences may be improved. As our findings suggest, there may exist relatively low-cost shortcuts in the socialization process. Though conversion may not be a desirable change for all immigrants, it may represent a larger set of transformative life events that increase individual participation, which may cumulatively transform the role of immigrants in American politics more broadly.

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