

The Influences of Political Partisanship on a Student's Choice to Take a Class on Catholicism

Introduction

Religion, although a major part of Spanish society, has seen a divide among those who affiliate themselves with Catholicism or not, especially when it is involved in politics or the public sphere. Before the transition to democracy, the Franco regime was tightly integrated with the Catholic Church. Under Francisco Franco, Catholicism was the only officially and legally recognized religion in Spain, a result of *el nacionalcatolicismo*. It was determined that, in order to be Spanish, one must also be Catholic. The Catholic Church had complete control of education during this time and discouraged women from attending institutions of higher learning. By allowing the Catholic Church to control all aspects of public and private life, Franco was able to gain the support of the Church and strengthen the validity of his regime. However, international trade and the United States involvement in Spain exposed Spaniards to Western culture, and the Opus Dei Technocrats within the regime forced Franco to ease up on the repression of individual rights in Spain in order to undergo socio-economic policy changes.

With the death of Franco in November of 1975, a transition to democracy occurred under the new king, Juan Carlos, and Prime Minister, Adolfo Suárez. With the creation of the 1978 Constitution, Suárez and his centrist government tried to undo the strict repression cast onto Spaniards by Franco by ensuring personal liberties, such as freedom of religion. However, the Agreement of 3 January 1979 Concerning Education and Cultural Affairs between the Spanish State and Holy See required the teaching of the Catholic religion to be mandatory in all schools, but not obligatory for all students; instead, it is up to the parents and/or students to enroll themselves in this program, or take an alternative ethics class.

Since 2003, Catholicism class has been weighted the same as other core classes and has been counted towards students' final grades. Before the policy change in 2003 by the conservative *Partido Popular*, the class was not graded. Additionally, alternative classes tend to be more demanding than religion classes – a persuasive tool used by the Catholic Church to try to rise attendance levels of Catholic classes. These changes are tools used by the PP and the Church to promote religion and maintain strong Catholic values among the Spanish youth. However, the World Values Survey states that 49.3% of Spaniards age 29 and under do not believe religion is important at all, and there has been a decrease in the attendance of Catholicism classes (World Values Survey 2014). This begs the question: What makes students opt to take, or opt out of taking, a class on Catholicism.

Research Question

My research question is: how do political affiliations affect one's choice to take a class on Catholicism, or the alternative, specifically in Andalusia, Spain. Given that Spain has experienced economic advancement and secularization, have post-materialistic values, or principles related to self-expression and the improvement of the quality of life, risen in young adults? How do post-materialistic values align with political parties, and do political beliefs shape an individual's values? Can the principles of political parties affect religious affiliation? I will be looking at the basic demographics of the individuals being studied: gender, age, social class association, and religiosity, to understand how certain demographics influence political party affiliation. Additionally, how do a parent's political views affect the subject's partisanship? Is a parent's affiliation a driving force in whether or not a student chooses to take a class on Catholicism?

Rationale

It can be argued that a shift in the importance of religion in public schools is an outcome of left-wing political platforms that are in opposition to the Church and its conformities. For example, the Concordat of 1985 in Italy put an end to Roman Catholicism as the religion of the State. Like Spain, the Concordat ended compulsory Catholic instruction in all schools, and instead provided an optional class to students. The Concordat was a result of Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, and the Italian Socialist Party. Another example, *laïcité*, which is the French concept of secularism, rooted in Republican ideals, prohibits religion in all state-run establishments. As individuals immigrate to France and bring with them their religious practices, new laws form. Under *laïcité*, new laws must continue to be developed in order to keep religion out of state-funded institutions, like public schools. Thus, no form of religion can be shown by individuals or be a part of public school curriculum. However, classes on religion can be taken after school hours. If parents want their children to take classes on Catholicism, they can attend private institutions that are not funded by the state. *Laïcité* is an idea that being French is one's main identity, not religious association, and therefore the government and politics must be kept separate from religion. In all three countries, there has been a shift away from the Church and its values. As people become more liberated, they do not feel that the Church should remain in their private lives as intimately as it had been, and thus new political platforms develop around new individual values.

Theoretical Framework

Sociologists study how human priorities develop throughout history and generations as a consequence of economic and physical security. More specifically, these scholars have investigated the importance of religion from generation to generation, especially in communities that are deeply rooted in religion. According to Ronald Inglehart, people who live in an advanced, industrialized country are more likely to deviate from traditional, social norms because they feel that they are economically and physically secure and therefore focus on personal liberation instead of conforming to tradition. He argues that, as personal security increases, the importance of religion decreases (Inglehart 2018). Thus, the freedom to make one's own political choices trumps religion. An American political science professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Michele F. Margolis, states that individuals tend to move away from religion in early adulthood, but reconnect with it once they begin to think about a family and marriage. As religion fades, political choices and identity emerge. Because young adults are becoming more educated and marrying later in life, they have a greater opportunity to realize personal values (Margolis 2018). This theory can be related to Spain because there has been a generational shift in Spain in regards to the age of marriage and the number of children Spaniards have. Young adults are traveling more, becoming more educated, and living with their families longer, and thus starting families later.

Hypothesis

My preliminary hypothesis is that there is a division between political party affiliation of the student's parents – those who take the class will have parents who associate themselves with conservative parties, and those who opt for the alternative will have parents who consider themselves to be left-wing.

Research Design

The focus of my study is Andalusia due to its rich history of religion and religious plurality, relatively young population in comparison to the rest of Spain's demographics, and advanced economy.

Case Selection

Due to its location in the Mediterranean Sea and its close proximity to Africa, Spain has been conquered many times by different civilizations, each of them bringing with them their religious values. Andalusia, which was often the point of first contact for new civilizations, has a deep history of religion, particularly Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The impacts of these religions on Andalusian society can be seen to this day through architecture, religious communities, and public displays of traditions.

Spain is a constitutional monarchy with 17 autonomous communities. Each autonomous community democratically elects their own officials and practices limited self-government. Each autonomous community has its own cultural and political values. Spain is a predominantly Catholic country, but has experienced a recent revival of Islamic culture as Moroccans move into Southern Spain. Italy and France are comparable to Spain in that they all have similarities in their cultures, languages, and social values. Additionally, each country is overwhelmingly Catholic, but have seen Muslim influence enter the country because of their close vicinity to Muslim nations. A stronger Muslim influence, or religious plurality in general, could push Spain, France, and Italy to secularize the Catholic religion from public spaces even more in order to promote religious freedom.

Data

I will gather individual-level, primary data through an anonymous survey. I will use the platform Qualtrix to stack survey questions in order to understand why students chose to take a class on Catholicism or the alternative. I will utilize snowball sampling by first sending the survey out to my contacts in Granada, Spain, and asking them to share the link on their social media platforms. The survey will include basic demographic questions regarding gender, age, religion, and political identity, along with the income level, political partisanship, and religiosity of their parents. After, I will ask students if they take a religion class or an alternative, if they previously took the class on Catholicism and now they don't, and why. I will also ask if they feel that one class is easier than the other. The answers to these questions will lead into more personalized questions in order to gauge their personal values. Pros of using Qualtrix are that it gives flexibility in data analysis and helps me understand the individual choices of the subjects. The limitations of my survey are that it is dependent on getting shared on social media in order to achieve a representative sample size, and thus will possibly only reach a young generation that is active on social media.

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