Conclusion: Reassessing the Relation between Religion, Political Actors, and Democratization

(Article begins on next page)

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Abstract

This conclusion places the main findings of the special issue in a wider theoretical context. First, it examines the types of impact on democratization processes that different religiously oriented parties have, highlighting how the progressive and the conservative types are more favourable to democratization. Conversely, the religious nationalist and the fundamentalist types have a more detrimental influence on democratization, although the latter can evolve into a conservative party under specific circumstances. Second, there is a critical re-examination of the moderation through inclusion thesis, whose validity is problematised. Finally, the conclusion deals with the issue of party change and evolution from one type to another, providing a typology that is fluid and allows for parties to move across categories.

Religiously oriented parties and democratization processes

Despite suffering from significant criticism over the last decade or so, the democratization paradigm still holds considerable intellectual strength and provides very useful insights as to how processes of democratic change either succeed or fail. Most of the criticism laid at the door of the democratization paradigm has to do with its inbuilt teleology,[1] but once it is accepted that numerous transitions do not necessarily lead to the promised land of liberal-democracy, other insights of the democratization paradigm can emerge to help both scholars and policy-makers make sense of how the whole process works. One of the most enduring and useful contributions of the democratization literature is the way in which scholars can examine transitions as games where different players compete and/or collaborate in order to arrive at their most preferred outcome.[2] In this game, the actors have specific individual traits that inform their preferences, goals, and attitudes towards the process of democratic change. Political parties are among the most prominent actors in this game in so far as they aggregate individual preferences and through their activism they attempt to influence the direction of change. It is usually through their interactions, together with the choices of the security apparatus of the authoritarian regime, that the future institutions will be shaped rather than, for instance, through the dynamics of civil society activism.[3] In this context, parties with a dubious or non-existent commitment to democracy and individual rights are problematic because their ideological rigidity can prevent compromise, thus derailing the transition. This is the case, according to critics, also of religiously oriented parties, that are often perceived as extremist and therefore inimical to democratization precisely because, as highlighted in the introduction to this special issue, they are specifically regarded as not fully committed to democracy, intransigently ideological, and aiming to produce public policies in accordance with a religious view of society in an inherently illiberal conception of law-making.[4] Although this can be true in cases involving extremist fundamentalist parties, several case study analyses have proved that religiously oriented parties fully accepting of democratic pluralism can play a role in both processes of democratic instauration and consolidation.

However, a thorough comparative and systematic assessment of the role played by religiously oriented parties in democratization processes is largely absent in the literature, in part because religion and democratization never really meshed as recognized recently by Stepan and Linz.[5] To begin with, the broader field of studying the role played by religious actors in democratization

processes is very recent.6 In addition, existing works of religious actors and democratization have so far taken into account mostly social actors active in civil society, rather than political ones working in the political system. Thus, an examination of the latter's role in democratization processes is absent. In this special issue we fill, in part, this gap through the concept of religiously oriented parties. More specifically, we offer a categorization of religiously oriented parties and their diverse attitudes, whether ideological or organizational, towards democratic values and institutions. The overarching objective of this special issue has been to provide analysts with the nuance necessary to examine the relationship with democracy and democratization according to the specific category a party belongs to. This conclusion summarizes the findings proposed by the different contributions in relation to this. On the one hand, therefore, it assesses the role played by the different party types, as defined by Ozzano's contribution, in the different phases of democratization processes.7 On the other hand, assuming that some party types are more favourable than others to the instauration and the consolidation of a democratic system, it takes into account the issue of party change, evaluating the possibilities that parties can alter their identity, switching from one type to another, and thus changing their impact on democracy.

Party types and their influence on democratization

The introduction to this special issue and Ozzano's contribution more specifically put forward the hypothesis that different types of religiously oriented parties can have a different impact on democratization processes, both in newly democratizing countries and in more stable democracies where consolidation is the name of the game. This is an idea that is also found elsewhere, but mainly in terms of distinction between parties with a pluralistic and a proto-hegemonic worldview8; or, in other words, between parties accepting to change their identity, and parties only tactically engaging in democratic politics in order to get to power.9 This special issue proposed instead a more nuanced typology, which takes into account a greater number of features of political parties, such as their organization and their relations with interest groups. The outcome is a five-category typology, including the conservative, the progressive, the fundamentalist, the religious nationalist, and the camp types.

To begin with, Ozzano's contribution puts forward the idea that the progressive type of a religiously oriented party is potentially the more pro-democratic, since it is supposed not only to enthusiastically accept democratic pluralism, but also to promote reconciliation and harmony. Both characteristics are relevant for the democratization of the domestic political and social system. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by Luna, Monestier, and Rosenblatt's contribution on Chile.10 In that case, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) was indeed crucial in enhancing social harmony, and in allowing the formation of broad coalition governments after the end of Pinochet's regime in order to contribute to the consolidation of Chilean democracy. This role was made possible by the peculiar identity of the party, mixing religious values and social progressive orientation, which allowed it to bridge the gap between the Christian world and the leftist and Marxist forces. According to the authors this positive role has been also made possible by the evolution of the position of the Catholic Church – and more broadly the Catholic world – in the second half of the twentieth century in relation to the issue of both democratic pluralism and social equality. In this respect the broader point is that scholars should be aware of the theological debates that affect religious traditions because they do have implications for social and political actors that find legitimacy in that tradition. In addition, in the Chilean case, a more general secularization of society, which allows Christian political parties to take rather secular stances on several issues, contributed to the party's positive role in democratization. The consequent dispersion of religious votes across a number of different parties is therefore linked to increased pluralization and increases the chances of democratic consolidation through the progressive marginalization of the religious/secular cleavage as the most significant one in society.

Giorgi's contribution about Italy largely confirms these findings.11 In the Italian case, the growing secularization of society and the increasing pluralization of the Catholic world – together with other factors, such as the end of the Cold War and a new electoral law – renders the re-creation of a single Catholic party – as in the case of Christian Democracy (DC) – impossible. As a consequence, Italian democratic renewal since the mid-1990s has become more pluralistic, with a much greater number of political parties alternating in power in sharp contrast to the period between 1948 and 1994. The impossibility of a large Catholic party gathering the entire Catholic vote to occupy the political centre and therefore to prevent political alternation for a long time has paradoxically enlarged significantly the policy options available to parties in power. Thus, the progressive Catholic forces previously included in the DC or simply active in civil society have been able to create new parties allied with post-communist forces. Conversely, the more conservative Catholic strands have created parties or movements that have allied with centre-right parties. This situation, with Catholics distributed between the centre-right, the centre-left, and the centre, has also prevented any political side from exclusively representing religious values, thus reducing polarization along a religious/secular cleavage. This suggests that religious values, rather than disappearing, become contested in terms of their relative importance and emphasis. As already explained in Ozzano's contribution, the progressive is the less frequent type of religiously oriented party, and it is not present in other cases, except in some factions of the Northern Irish case described in O'Malley and Walsh's contribution.12 In this case, some of the Christian progressive factions have successfully engaged in the region's consociational system, although their positive impact has been partially hindered by a nationalist orientation and by the ethnic foundations of Ulster's political system. The case of Northern Ireland is particularly significant because it provides a warning to scholars looking at how religiously oriented parties and movements might be affecting democratization in so far as they might be overemphasizing the religious element and neglecting the nationalist one when the two can probably be disentangled and where the latter might be more dominant.

The conservative case is also highlighted by Ozzano as potentially pro-democratic. This is in part due to its guarded but favourable attitude to pluralism and in part to its catch-all nature. The conservative type is usually connected to a wide and varied associational network, and open to access by different kinds of interest groups, thus contributing to prevent the "perils of polarization". In Tepe's contribution this element partially emerges in the analysis of the electorate of the religiously oriented conservative parties.13 Tepe also highlights that an important distinction has to be drawn between the elites' attitudes, and those of their constituencies. Studies of political parties and the majority of studies of democratization are traditionally concerned with the attitudes, stances, and strategizing of the party elites, but insufficient attention has been paid to the attitudes of the ordinary individuals within the party or sympathetic to it. More focus on the individual level and how this informs polarization is therefore necessary to outline what role the party plays in processes of democratization or democratic consolidation. For instance, according to Tepe, despite the pro-democratic attitude of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP), its constituency does not show a profile radically different from that of other parties belonging to the religious nationalist and fundamentalist types. This might be particularly true in consolidating democracies such as Turkey, but surely deserves more investigation, as does the tendency of this party type to occupy the centre, which can prevent political alternation. Specifically, it is not yet clear, in cases such as Italy, if the substitution of a wide conservative party occupying the centre – but marked by a strong internal dialectic process and factionalism – with several progressive and conservative parties on both sides of the left-right divide is actually positive in terms of democratization. The positive role that can be played by the conservative party type in the consolidation of a newly democratized country is also shown by Chile's Independent Democratic Union (UDI), described by Luna, Monestier, and Rosenblatt, while the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) represents today, according to O'Malley and Walsh, a cornerstone of Ulster's consociational system.14

As for the fundamentalist party type, Ozzano's contribution clarifies that it has a negative impact on democratization in the absence of a trajectory of moderation that can orient it towards the conservative type. This finding confirms the conclusions of most of the literature – the fundamentalist type is the subject of most of the existing works – where the incompatibility of this party type with democratic values and institutions is pretty well established.[15] The most striking feature of this special issue in relation to the fundamentalist party type is, indeed, its virtual absence or political marginality wherever democracy consolidates. In some cases, as described above, such forces turn into other party models; in others, such as those of Israel's Kach and several Islamist Turkish parties in the past decades, they are banned. In other cases still they only exist as fringe parties, barely influential on the wider political debate and often unable even to enter parliament, as in the case of Turkey's Prosperity Party, dealt with in Tepe's contribution.

On the contrary, the religious nationalist party type is alive and well. A number of contributions in this special issue testify to the vitality and importance of this party type. As described in the next section of this conclusion, this is probably connected both to the persistence of traditional ethno-cultural cleavages in several political systems and to the problems encountered by such parties in their path towards moderation because of their linkages to social movements that have maintained rather extremist views, which can prevent, as shown by Jaffrelot in the case of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), their transformation into another party model.[16] As highlighted by the author, the presence in India's political system of a wide religious nationalist party with a problematic attitude towards social pluralism and with strong ties to an extremist grassroots network has proven to be a negative factor for both the democratic stability and the social harmony of the country. Specifically, Jaffrelot highlights the oscillation of the party between phases of moderation during which it showed features of a catch-all conservative party and others of extremism and grassroots activism. While the former have enhanced democratization by facilitating coalition-building processes, also including parties with different ideological orientations and ethno-religious bases, the latter have engendered contentious and often violent events, with a negative impact on India's democratic stability.

As shown by Tepe's contribution, if an evolutionary trajectory is detectable in the case of the religious nationalist party type, it is not towards moderation, but rather towards more radical stances.[17] According to the data the author provides, in both the Israeli and the Turkish case, we can find an extremization of the religious constituency that has moved largely towards the right of the political spectrum with negative consequences for both countries' polarization levels. Coalition politics also seems not to have had a moderating effect on Italy's Northern League, which during the 2000s, as indicated by Giorgi's contribution,[18] increased its pro-religious orientation by actively engaging in "culture wars" on a number of religious and ethical issues and thus engendering, in turn, polarization processes in the Italian political system. In the Italian case, however, this was mitigated by the presence of Catholic forces in all the major coalitions. In any case, as shown in many contributions in this special issue, the religious nationalist party type rather than the fundamentalist one seems indeed to be the only religiously oriented party type with a negative attitude towards pluralism capable of thriving also in established democracies.

Finally, the contributions of this special issue show that the camp party type is quite rare and typical of contexts – such as Israel and Ulster – where deep and unresolved cleavages prevented the creation of a civil society – and a political constituency – with some core shared values. However, both cases also show that the impact of such parties on democratization is not necessarily negative, since – in order to pursue the interests of the communities they represent – they can take part in consociational agreements and, in the case of Israel, also participate in governments with left-wing forces. As highlighted by Tepe's contribution, the major problem in this case is probably the tunnel vision that such a narrow-minded party model can engender in its base, thus hindering its political socialization and its opening up towards wider society.[19]

Party types transformations and trajectories

As already highlighted above, the possibility of party change seems to be a crucial factor in relation to the role played by religiously oriented actors in democratization processes. The fact that all contributors used the typology Ozzano designed in his article enables us to provide a much clearer picture of the dynamics that such parties engender in processes of regime change away from anecdotal evidence. In addition, the categories that Ozzano offers and the findings in the contributions offer powerful insights into the relationship between the political moderation of religiously oriented parties and democracy and democratization. The categories in Ozzano's analytical framework, as mentioned earlier, are not watertight, fixed, and exclusive, but are constructed with the implicit assumption that over time parties might and do move from one category to another. In some cases this move might be synonymous with moderation (acceptance of democratic mechanisms, social pluralism, and individual rights), in others it can lead instead to further radicalization, and/or to an accentuation of a nationalist identity, or even lead to cyclical patterns, as shown by the BJP case in India. Most of the contributions to this special issue deal with such dynamics with a specific focus on the mechanisms that might lead parties to choose the path of political moderation, meaning the acceptance of democracy, social pluralism, and individual rights. Political moderation, and in particular the "twin tolerations"[20] between democracy and religion, is an important asset for democratization and enhanced democratic stability and it is therefore incumbent upon scholars to analyse the ways in which it might come about or, alternatively, how it is prevented. A number of interesting and at times surprising findings emerge.

First, the moderation through inclusion thesis, dominant in the literature, does not find much confirmation in some of the cases examined. In the Tunisian case, we find that the moderation of the Islamist party and its "move" from the fundamentalist type to the conservative one has largely occurred because of exclusion rather than inclusion. Both repression from the authoritarian regime, but more significantly, the shunning of large sectors of society and other opposition parties forced the Islamist party to go through a process of internal ideological renewal that culminated in its moderation and subsequent inclusion in the pro-democracy front. In some ways this finding runs contrary to the idea that progressive inclusion into the political system or in cross-ideological alliances brings moderation about and, interestingly, it suggests that marginalizing an extremist actor does not necessarily lead to its radicalization. Quite the opposite can actually occur. In terms of the wider debate on democratization, it suggests that not all political movements and forces should be afforded a chance to participate in the construction of a new political system if specific democratic engagements are not undertaken. Haqqani recently sounded a similar note of warning when discussing the relationship between Islamist parties and democracy in Pakistan.[21] The moderation through inclusion thesis comes under question in the Indian case as well in so far as Hindu nationalist parties have not moderated entirely despite their long inclusion in the democratic political system of India. Whereas the finding in itself is not entirely surprising given the inability of these parties to completely detach themselves from the extremist social movements they were generated from, it is surprising in so far as this absence of moderation has not resulted in the collapse of Indian democracy. While India might have consolidated more strongly had the moderation of such parties occurred, authoritarian regression has been largely avoided. In terms of the wider debate on democratization this suggests that the strength of democratic institutions can be found outside institutional politics or in institutions other than political parties.

Second, the absence of political moderation of a religious nationalist type party vis-à-vis a competing one which is the expression of a different and opposing religious community does not necessarily prevent the emergence of collaborative agreements. The case of Northern Ireland is particularly important in this respect because it suggests that the construction of consociational democratic agreements can take place in fact only when strong religious nationalist parties from opposite sides strike a deal: which, paradoxically, marginalizes the moderate factions within each camp. In terms of democratization this might suggest that there are specific conditions that allow for

agreements between extremist parties, but this can only in fact occur, as in the case of Northern Ireland, when the nationalist element seems stronger than the religious one as O'Malley and Walsh suggest.22 The case of Israel provides a corollary to this, in the sense that religious nationalist parties can contribute to the stabilization of democratic structures through participation in government coalitions. While this may marginalize citizens of different religious communities – in this case Christian and Muslim Palestinians – the stability of democratic mechanisms is ensured precisely because there is a nationalist shared element – Zionism – that has more overarching relevance than the purely religious one. In short, Jewish religiously oriented nationalist parties in Israel can overcome the religious/religious cleavage and form coalitions with secular parties because the nationalist ideology of Zionism is stronger.

Third, the special issue strongly indicates that the issue of polarization and political moderation is not only about parties. Constituencies of reference have a considerable importance in two ways. On the one hand, party elites might be more committed and divisive than their constituents. In this case, democratization and democratic stability might not be in danger because constituents at the individual level are capable and willing to build cross-ideological bridges across cleavages in their everyday interactions. On the other hand, constituents might be more divisive and/or ideologically sectarian than party elites. This is an issue that Tepe emphasizes in her contribution about Israel and Turkey – where, according to her findings, the stances of the constituencies of parties such as the AKP might be more extremist than those of their leadership – and that Jaffrelot also stresses in his contribution about India's BJP, forced into a cyclical oscillation between moderate and extremist phases by its ties to a strong social movement.23 In these cases democratic stability and democratization can be in danger because party elites, despite their more moderate views, might have to "go after" the more extremist views of the constituents to remain politically relevant.

Such findings, both in terms of parties' trajectories of change and in terms of their influence on democratization processes, are a first systematic attempt to examine the role of religiously oriented parties in relation to democratization and democratic stability. This work thus hopes to begin a new line of inquiry that has tremendous relevance for today's politics throughout the world.

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Notes

1. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm."
2. O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.
3. Langhor, "Too Much Civil Society."
4. Rosenblum, "Religious Parties," 42.
5. Stepan and Linz, "Democratization Theory and the 'Arab Spring.'"
6. Künkler and Leininger, "The Multi-Faceted Role"; Philpott, Shah, and Toft, "From Faith to 7. Freedom"; Brocker and Künkler, "Religious Parties."
7. Ozzano, "The Many Faces of the Political God."
8. Günther and Diamond, "Types and Functions of Parties."

9. Brumberg, "Rhetoric and Strategy"; Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*; Schwedler, "A Paradox of Democracy?"
10. Luna, Monestier, and Rosenblatt, "Religious Parties in Chile."
11. Giorgi, "Ahab and the White Whale."
12. O'Malley and Walsh, "Religion and Democratization in Northern Ireland."
13. Tepe, "The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties."
14. Luna, Monestier, and Rosenblatt, "Religious Parties in Chile"; O'Malley and Walsh, "Religion and Democratization in Northern Ireland."
15. See for example Günther and Diamond, "Species of Political Parties"; and Brumberg, "Rhetoric and Strategy."
16. Jaffrelot, "Refining the Moderation Thesis."
17. Tepe, "The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties."
18. Giorgi, "Ahab and the White Whale."
19. Tepe, "The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties."
20. Stepan, "Tunisia's Transition."
21. Haqqani, "Islamists and Democracy."
22. O'Malley and Walsh, "Religion and Democratization in Northern Ireland."
23. Tepe, "The Perils of Polarization and Religious Parties"; Jaffrelot, "Refining the Moderation Thesis."

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