

Fact sheet on:

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1. Translated Title

Power, Morals and Majorities: Political Catholicism in the Federal Republic of Germany and the USA since 1960

2. Abstract

The Second Vatican Council and its reception redefined the political role of Catholicism in many countries in a decisive way. For the first time, this scholarly study examines the political influence of Catholicism in the Federal Republic of Germany and the U.S. since 1960 in comparative perspective. It describes the changing internal structures -like the emergence of modern forms of bishop conferences and lay membership organizations- and analyses the impact of growing pluralism on the policy priorities of Catholicism in both countries. In the U.S. as well as in Germany, Catholicism and its various collective actors contribute to the political process constantly. The book concludes that under certain conditions they are able to influence public policies successfully. The book is based on a wealth of archival materials, published sources and personal interviews. 16 tables and 42 figures illustrate the central findings of the vividly-written investigation.

3. Study Description

The postdoctoral thesis ('Habilitationsschrift') examines political Catholicism in the Federal Republic of Germany and the U.S. in comparative perspective. The patterns of development of each form of political Catholicism since the beginning of the 1960s are presented. The focus of the thesis is therefore Catholicism in both countries as it emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and the societal upheavals of the



1960s and 1970s. The political role, resources of, and the actual influence of these two forms of national Catholicism in their respective democratic governmental systems and the transformation of political influence are examined in detail.

In addition to the status of research on this topic, the introduction discusses the normative and theoretical question of the status of religious groups and organizations in the political decision-making process of democracies. It is argued that churches, religious groups, and organizations are to be understood from a political science perspective in the context of an expanded structural-functional model as intermediate structures that can be analyzed -regardless of their own special understanding of their role in society and politics- as organized interests or interest groups. The term political Catholicism is defined as follows: One can speak of political Catholicism when Catholics, Catholic groups, or organizations as such deliberately and with suitable methods attempt to influence decisions regarding the distribution of immaterial and material values that are binding for all members of society, in other words, when they actively participate in the political decision-making process. According to this definition, political Catholicism is not per definition a predetermined, relatively solid unit. Moreover, its unity or disparity is influenced by internal consensus-forming processes in the Catholic Church, understood as a member-based organization of believers with respective organizational structures in different national political contexts.

In the first chapter, the external conditions to which both forms of Catholicism were and are subjected are described. These conditions are partly similar and partly different between both countries. The important changes in both forms of Catholicism that the Second Vatican Council initiated are emphasized. With the Council, the old position of the Catholic World Church against democracy as a form of state governance was finally overcome, and the relationship between church and the world was redefined. This also meant a new esteem for the political engagement of believers and the Church as an organization. Furthermore, the economic, social, and religious transformation in the Federal Republic and in the U.S. proved to be of utmost importance for the further understanding of the political role of both forms of Catholicism. Whereas the developments in both countries were quite similar until the middle of the 1970s, in the following decades the developments were in sum divergent and had noticeable implications for the political role of both forms of Catholicism.

The second chapter examines the structural transformation within both forms of Catholicism. The establishment and development of the present organizational structures are comparatively explored in a longitudinal perspective. In the center of this analysis is the question of the organizational prerequisites for political consensus-forming among Catholics and in the organized Catholicism of both countries. In both countries the national bishops' conferences, which, motivated by the experiences and the instructions of the Council, were fully developed into effective organizations in the 1970s in both countries, have experienced a considerable increase in significance. Large differences between both cases can be found in the question concerning the chances of a structured consensus-forming process that extends beyond the bishops. It is shown that the ability within German Catholicism to negotiate a consensus in internal church and political issues can be accredited to the mutual organizational efforts of the bishops

and leading personalities of the organized laity. In the American case, however, a considerably stronger polarization between different internal church currents and groups evolved, which has also been increasingly reflected in the Bishops' Conference since the end of the 1980s.

The third chapter focuses on the political goals and the available resources of both forms of Catholicism. In particular, it is asked which organizations of Catholicism are politically relevant, if there are effective mechanisms of political consensus-building in both forms of Catholicism that over time have become internally more differentiated and pluralistic, and which paths the actors of Catholicism take to be politically heard. In both cases the active lobbying of the bishops working through the bishops' conference and their lobbying offices, the 'Katholisches Büro' (Catholic Office) and the 'Office of Government Liaison', plays an important role. In contrast, the influence of Catholicism on the voting behavior of Catholics on the national level is relatively small. In comparison to American Catholicism, German Catholicism has politically important linkages between the organized laity in Catholicism and the parties, especially the Christian Democratic and Christian Socialist Unions, which in turn increases its chances of political influence.

The political successes of both forms of Catholicism are examined in the fourth chapter. It presents two case studies concerning relevant policy fields, the protection of life and social welfare policy. In both countries the bishops and Catholic lay organizations have vehemently challenged the liberalization of abortion that took place almost simultaneously in both countries at the beginning of the 1970s. In the American case, the political successes in the fight for improved legal protection of unborn life according to Catholic propositions were modest. In contrast, the veto power of Catholicism was present in Germany and was able to force a compromise against the original 'Fristenmodell' (term limit model) passed by the Bundestag in the 1970s. Moreover, this initial success opened the chances of actively forming the present laws in the 1990s. However, the initial internal Catholic consensus shattered at the end of the 1990s. At the same time the question of issuing certificates of consultation ('Beratungsscheine') from religious counseling centers became a divisive one among Catholics.

In social welfare policy there are similar results: In both cases the demand for social justice was translated according to the traditions of the Catholic social teaching into a political engagement for the establishment and maintenance of welfare state structures. Due to the almost complete departure of the American public from the ideas and concepts of the 'Great Society' of the 1960s, the position of the American Bishops' Conference and the large Catholic charities and other Catholic organizations had no chance of being heard by the Republican Party and large parts of the Democratic Party. Thus, Catholicism had little chance of influencing the latest welfare legislation in the U.S. In the Federal Republic, it was a form of social Catholicism, mostly anchored in the CDU/CSU, that gave the German model of the subsidiary social security state its continuity and endurance through careful assimilations to the changing economic and social conditions. Lately, this consensus, which is an unstable one because it has been constantly renegotiated among Catholics since the establishment of the Federal

Republic, has suffered under the continuing high pressure for fundamental reforms in the German welfare system.

The conclusion systematizes the multitude of the empirical findings of the comparison and summarizes the newly-won knowledge in a generalized model for the explanation of religious groups' political successes in democracies that stems from the initial considerations on this theoretical problem in the introduction. The presented empirical findings illustrate the fact that such a model for the explanation of political success (or failure) must consider numerous factors. These factors can be summarized in four groups: external conditions for action such as socio-economic and cultural modernization, internal conditions for action like the extent for conflict and consensus in religious questions within a religious group, internal conditions for success such as the ability for successfully aggregate political interests, and finally external conditions like majorities and power constellations in the governmental system. These four groups are built upon each other and can enable the political success of Catholicism or explain it as a result of given constellations.

4. Summary of Major Findings

- The Second Vatican Council redefined the political role of Catholicism in both countries in a decisive way. The Council regarded the Church, for the first time, as a part of pluralistic societies and accepts and supports their democratic form of government.
- During the implementation of the Second Vatican Council, an unsettled and conflict-ridden relationship increasingly arose between the political roles of the Church hierarchy, groups of Catholic laity, and the single parishioner as a citizen.
- In both countries the in 1966 newly established national bishops' conferences became the central and, since the 1980s, increasingly contested political actors within political Catholicism.
- Clashes about the internal matters of the Catholic Church have noticeably increased in Germany and have heavily increased in the U.S.
- In contrast to the U.S., Catholicism in Germany has elaborate organizational structures of internal coordination, consensus finding, and decision-making. At the center of these structures are the German Bishops' Conference and the Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken (Central Committee of German Catholics).
- In the Federal Republic and the U.S., the Bishops' Conferences pursue broad and thematically similar political agendas. Country-specific differences are present in contextual issues and focus, especially in foreign policy.
- Because Catholics as voters have hardly acted as a voting bloc in both countries since the 1960s, the strategies of interest articulation through publicity, direct lobbying and issue-specific alliances with other actors play an increasingly important role within Catholicism. This development has advanced further in the

United States than in the Federal Republic of Germany due to the idiosyncrasies of the presidential system.

- The political Catholicism in the Federal Republic has had much more partial success in the issue of legally banning abortion than the political Catholicism in the U.S.
- Socio-political questions have been heavily contested since the 1960s in both forms of political Catholicism. As demands on welfare policies from the U.S. Bishops' Conference remained mainly without effect, the political Catholicism in Germany supported the subsidiary social insurance system since its new beginning in the 1950s/1960s and actively formed the decision-making process in this field of public policy through various collective actors until today.
- The political success or failure is next to the ability to internal decision-making dependent upon the respective political context, which is – more or less independent from public opinion – very much determined by the respective political leaders in the government and opposition. In a conducive environment, organized Catholicism can certainly bring its weight to bear. Standing alone, however, its chances of political influence are much lower.

5. About the Author

Antonius Liedhegener is a political scientist and historian teaching at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany. He is an expert in government and comparative politics. His special field of research is "politics and religion".

He studied history and Catholic theology in Münster/ Westfalen and social history at the University of Southampton. In 1991 he received a diploma in theology from the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. In 1996 he finished his dissertation on Catholics and Protestants in the process of urbanization in Münster and Bochum (1830-1930) and received a Ph.D. in history from the same university.

From 1996 to 1997 he was a research fellow at the Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Bonn. In 1997 he became an assistant lecturer (wiss. Mitarbeiter) and in 1999 an assistant professor (wiss. Assistent) in the department of political science at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. Currently he is working on a new research project on "American Catholicism and Civic Engagement".

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