

Coping with Cross-Pressures: The Seamless Garment in Catholic Political Behavior

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The Catholic Church is the largest religious denomination in the United States, yet political science lacks a comprehensive account of how the cross-pressures created by its policy prescriptions structure Catholic political behavior. Because Catholicism's policy positions land on both sides of the contemporary partisan divide—its cultural concerns aligning with the Republican Party and its pro-social justice stance compatible with Democratic priorities—adherence to Church teaching creates electoral dilemmas for Catholic voters. By juxtaposing existing work on Catholic political behavior with the psychological literature on cognitive dissonance, we form expectations about Catholic adherence to Church policy prescriptions and its implications for electoral choice. We focus empirically on “Seamless Garment Catholics” (SGCs)—those Catholics who share the Church's policy positions—finding that seamless-garment views are uncommon among Catholic voters, are more common among religiously committed and Latino Catholics, and are discouraged by ties to the two major parties. SGCs are more likely than other Catholics to employ psychological coping mechanisms, such as avoidance and selective perception, to reduce Church-inspired cognitive dissonance. Our research provides insight into an important electoral bloc that is cross-pressured uniquely by its faith commitments.

KEY WORDS: Catholics, Catholic Church, cross-pressures, cognitive dissonance, partisanship, public opinion, political ideology, voting

“For all Catholics, including those seeking public office, our participation in political parties or other groups to which we may belong should be influenced by our faith, not the other way around... Thus, the particular judgments of the document may fall at various points along the political spectrum...”

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2020, pp. 6, 13)

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Faithful Catholics reading their bishops' guidance on U.S. presidential elections might find themselves a bit perplexed. In 2020, Catholics would be reminded that: "The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself... At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty" (USCCB, 2020, pp. 6, 7). Their attention would further be called to injustice endured by immigrants to the United States, the tragedy of gun violence, and threats to the understanding that family begins with the marriage of a man and a woman—among other issues.

Yet in 2020, as in many prior elections, the only two viable options for the presidency would each embrace only pieces of this agenda. The Republican nominee, incumbent President Donald Trump, articulated a strong anti-abortion position and implemented it by appointing a panoply of pro-life judges to the federal bench—most notably crafting a pro-life majority on the Supreme Court. On the other hand, Trump frustrated the expansion of social assistance, rolled back environmental regulations, and made anti-immigration policies such as mass deportations and a border wall a centerpiece of his administration. Meanwhile, Democratic nominee Joe Biden voiced staunchly pro-choice views on abortion that included a call to overturn longstanding policy (the Hyde Amendment) prohibiting the use of federal funds for abortion. However, he pledged a host of actions to advance economic and racial equality, fight climate change, and help undocumented immigrants attain American citizenship.

The bishops didn't tell Catholics which choice would best reflect their faith. However, just as in prior elections, other Catholic commentators spoke out with divergent opinions. For example, Catholic scholar Teresa Collett (2020) applauded Trump's record on abortion, noting that "the president has been faithful to his promises and delivered more than I hoped for when I voted for him in 2016." Meanwhile, Jesuit priest Bill McCormick (2020) declared, "A loss for Mr. Trump would bring a close to an administration that has consistently mocked and violated Catholic social teaching... Some Catholics argue that Mr. Biden is also preferable to Mr. Trump on... the economy, immigration, and racism."

From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, this was a choice that should have left Catholic voters feeling cross-pressured by the issue positions of the two candidates and their parties. The individual psychological stakes of such a choice have long been understood to be high—according to both well-established academic theory and popular wisdom. As E. J. Dionne has remarked, "On so many of the issues in American politics, being a Catholic liberal or a Catholic conservative inevitably means having a bad conscience about something" (2004, p. 254). Meanwhile, media accounts of "the Catholic vote" have portrayed Catholic voters' responses to these cross-pressures as having high stakes for the country. "Catholics blessed with pivotal vote: How they pick in battleground states may decide winner," read a representative headline during the 2020 campaign (Crary, 2020). Catholics thus continued to cement their reputation as "the ultimate swing constituency" (Green, 2020).

In the end, the 2020 election represented the retelling of a familiar tale—neither Biden nor Trump achieved a clear victory among Catholic voters. Instead, as they have in most elections over the last 40 years (Kellstedt & Guth, 2013), Catholics split their votes quite evenly between the Democratic and Republican candidates. According to the 2020 AP VoteCast Survey, 50% of Catholic voters cast their ballots for Donald Trump while 49% threw their support to Joe Biden.¹

What settled these Catholics' votes? How did they resolve the religious and political cross-pressures that faced them, not just in the lever they pulled, but also in the psychological sequelae associated with cross-pressures? These represent the central questions we tackle in this article. Accordingly, we address a relative lack of recent literature on how voters cope with cross-pressures, a dearth that may be somewhat surprising given that salient trends toward party polarization and

¹Results reported in <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/03/929478378/understanding-the-2020-electorate-ap-votecast-survey>.

partisan “conflict extension” across a range of issues (Layman & Carsey, 2002) likely intensify the experience of cross-pressure for affected individuals.

By focusing on U.S. Catholics—particularly on those Catholics who share their Church’s pro-life, pro-social justice orientation—we advance literatures on cross-pressures and on Catholic political behavior in two other notable ways. First, what we term “Catholic cross-pressures” may be qualitatively different from the types of cross-pressures scholars have previously studied. Cross-pressures typically flow from conflicts between voters’ political referents—conflicts between a voter’s multiple social identities (Berelson et al., 1954), between partisanship and issue preferences (Hillygus & Shields, 2008), or between the political preferences of people in a voter’s social network (Mutz, 2002). “Catholic cross-pressures” are unique in that the conflict emerges from a single referent—the Church itself takes both sides. That means that cues from the Catholic Church lack the partisan clarity of those emerging from other religious, social, or political groups. However, the Church’s claim to moral authority—especially for parishioners who adhere to its teachings—may outweigh that of other reference groups. Understanding how Catholic voters respond to these distinctive cross-pressures may give us a better appreciation of the variety of ways in which voters experience and resolve cross-pressures.

Second, this research represents a change of direction for scholarship on Catholic political behavior, which has focused increasingly on the rising partisanship and declining political distinctiveness of American Catholics (D’Antonio et al., 2013; Gayte et al., 2018; Heyer et al., 2008). Casting doubt on whether “Catholic cross-pressuring” actually extends to individual Catholic voters, research has found the influence of Church teachings and leadership on the political attitudes of Catholic parishioners to be relatively limited (Smith, 2008; Wald, 1992; Welch et al., 1993). Catholic voters, for example, typically do not adopt the full bundle of policy positions provided by the Catholic hierarchy (Cleghorn, 1986; Gray & Bendyna, 2008; Jelen, 1990; Perl & McClintock, 2001). This growing body of scholarship has testified to Dionne’s well-known quip that “there is no Catholic vote—and it’s important” (2004, p. 251).

Yet Catholics who share the Church’s spectrum of political views do exist. We call them “Seamless Garment Catholics” (SGCs), echoing a philosophy championed by Catholic Cardinal Joseph Bernardin in the 1980s. Referencing the seamless tunic that the Gospel of John describes Jesus as wearing before he was crucified, Bernardin confirmed the Church’s teaching that all human life is sacred and has inherent dignity, and that human life and dignity must be protected against all threats from conception to death. Advocating a “consistent ethic of life,” Bernardin argued that Church teachings on human life “constitute a ‘seamless garment’” (1984, p. 12). He contended that “Those who defend the right to life of the weakest among us must be equally visible in support of the quality of life of the powerless among us: the old and the young, the hungry and the homeless, the undocumented immigrant and the unemployed worker” (1988, pp. 8, 9). Despite their minority status within American Catholicism, SGCs are important for at least two reasons. First, in an era in which national-level competition between the two parties is extraordinarily close, even small swing constituencies may be of considerable electoral importance. If Catholics writ large are important for determining election outcomes, that segment of the Catholic electorate that actually is cross-pressured and may shift partisan directions depending on candidates, issue positions, and policy priorities may be of paramount importance.

Second, because SGCs most closely represent the Catholic Church’s perspective on issues of public policy, they may provide a particularly clear indication of how Catholicism and Church influence take shape in American political behavior. And because their maintenance of partisan-incongruent policy preferences bucks prevailing political trends, they may be more broadly interesting to political psychologists and scholars of voting behavior.

For all of these reasons, our focus in this article is on Seamless Garment Catholics, the factors that shape their policy perspectives, and the ways in which they cope with cross-pressures while

making electoral decisions. We begin by assessing the existing literature on Catholic political behavior, highlighting what it tells us about the Church's political influence on the laity and the prevalence of "Catholic cross-pressuring" in the Catholic electorate. Guided by the insights from literature in psychology and political science on cross-pressuring, we propose hypotheses about the prevalence of seamless-garment views among U.S. Catholics, the factors that predict them, and how SGCs cope with cross-pressures in their voting decisions.

The empirical portion of our article tests those hypotheses, using cross-sectional, time-series, and panel data collected by the Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES) and the American National Election Studies (ANES). We find that seamless-garment beliefs, while held only by a minority of Catholics, are most prevalent among religiously committed, young, low-income, and Latino Catholics. These policy views have declined in recent elections, discouraged by partisan persuasion of Catholic policy attitudes. However, we also find that Catholic religious commitment both reinforces and encourages seamless-garment perspectives. Finally, we examine how SGCs cope with cross-pressures while making electoral choices. We find that they are more likely than other Catholics to rely on coping strategies typically associated with cross-pressured voters: avoiding a vote choice, voting according to relative issue importance, and selectively and inaccurately projecting their personal policy views onto their chosen candidate.

CROSS-PRESSURES AND CATHOLIC POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Defined and studied in detail by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee in their 1954 book *Voting*, cross-pressures have long been addressed in the literature on political partisanship. Political scientists have traditionally described as "cross-pressured" individuals who are subjected to conflicting cues about the partisan direction of their vote. These are voters who are influenced by "combinations of characteristics which, in a given context, would tend to lead the individual to vote on both sides of a contest." They are "attracted to each party by one set of opinions and repelled by another" (Berelson et al., 1954, pp. 200, 283).

One reason why political scientists are interested in cross-pressured voters is because they seemingly are persuadable, open to voting for candidates of either party because of conflicting ideological positions or social group memberships; they might constitute the quintessential "swing" voters. These voters may be courted by both sides in a campaign, giving them the ability to alter election outcomes (Hillygus & Shields, 2008). Existing research also shows that cross-pressured voters are well-represented in the American electorate (Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Krasa & Polborn, 2014; Treier & Hillygus, 2009).

For political psychologists, cross-pressures imply internal conflict in decision-making, threatening to disrupt the state of "cognitive consistency" that individuals prefer to maintain (Krosnick, 2002). By supporting either the Democratic or Republican nominee, cross-pressured voters act incongruently with one or more of their attitudes, allegiances, or identities. This should induce the psychological state known as "cognitive dissonance." Fully defined first by Festinger, cognitive dissonance is "the idea that if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent... the word 'cognitive' simply emphasizes that the theory deals with relations among items of information" (1957, 1962, p. 93). The theory of cognitive dissonance has long shaped researchers' expectations about the behavior of cross-pressured voters.

Why Should Catholics be Cross-Pressured?

There are two primary reasons why observers often view Catholics as a cross-pressured constituency. First, the social teaching of the Catholic Church does not neatly align with either of the major U.S. parties. Second, Catholics' votes are closely divided in the aggregate.

Decades of research have established the profound role of religious identity in shaping a range of policy preferences—on issues such as the environment (Guth et al., 1995), immigration (Nteta & Wallsten, 2012), abortion (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003), social services (McKenzie & Rouse, 2013), and same-sex marriage (Olson et al., 2006). But in most cases, religious identity is not itself cross-pressuring. For example, evangelical Protestantism and Mormonism tend to push adherents in consistently conservative directions on multiple issues (Campbell et al., 2014; Castle, 2019; Layman & Green, 2006). Meanwhile, identifying as a Jew or as an atheist or agnostic is linked to consistent liberalism (Campbell, Layman, et al., 2021; Wald, 2019). By contrast, Catholic identity, in and of itself, produces partisan conflict. Church teachings push adherents in a clearly liberal, Democratic direction on some issues and in a clearly conservative, Republican direction on other issues. Catholic social teaching, in short, fits uncomfortably with the American two-party system.

The Catholic Church's staunch opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage puts it in sync with the Republican Party, as does its support for school vouchers and its increasingly vocal stand against perceived policy threats to religious liberty and conscience rights. However, Catholic social teaching also promotes aggressive efforts to combat climate change, opposition to the death penalty and most war, support for comprehensive immigration reform, and expansive social welfare programs (Heyer et al., 2008)—positions harmonious with Democratic Party priorities. On immigration specifically, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the governing body of the Catholic Church in the United States, has said that Catholics have a duty to “welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person... Persons have the right to immigrate and thus government must accommodate this right to the greatest extent possible” (USCCB, 2013). On climate change, it has called for “urgently find[ing] ways to care better for God’s creation,” (USCCB, 2020, p. 7), while Pope Francis has dedicated an encyclical to environmental protection as a moral imperative (2015: *Laudato si'*). In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis said the church’s approach to poverty must be “geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality” (USCCB, 2020, p. 27).

The awkward alignment between the Church’s policy priorities and the platforms of the major American parties means that Catholic voters seeking to cast faithfully Catholic ballots will always find themselves in a political and psychological quandary. The Church itself does not make things easier on its congregants as both U.S. Catholic leaders and the Vatican emphasize the full range of human life-and-dignity issues. While the USCCB has long prioritized abortion (Byrnes, 2014; Gayte, 2018; Sammon, 2008), it has continued to advance other issues and stress the responsibility of individual Catholics to decide on the most faithful electoral choice (Cochran & Cochran, 2008).

Pope Francis, meanwhile, has focused more on social justice issues while emphasizing cultural concerns less than his papal predecessors. Francis contends that Catholics “cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods” (Spadaro, 2013). In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, he says “Our defense of the innocent unborn... needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred... Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned, and the underprivileged... We often hear it said that... the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue... That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian” (quoted in Faggioli, 2018).

This echoes the spirit of Cardinal Bernardin’s consistent ethic of life and may reinforce cross-pressures on Catholics by emphasizing the unity of Catholic teaching over a single issue. Catholics also may encounter these cross-pressures at the parish level if they are led by a “mixed-emphasis priest” who emphasizes both the “personal morality” and “social justice” aspects of Catholic teaching (Smith, 2008).

American Catholics’ reputation as a cross-pressured constituency also stems from the closely divided character of the aggregate Catholic vote. In the first half of the 20th century, the Democratic Party,

with its embrace of religious and ethnic minorities and its New Deal social welfare policies, provided a natural home for Catholics, who tended to be more recent European immigrants and members of the working class (Berelson et al., 1954). The Catholic vote remained reliably Democratic through the 1976 election (Rozell, 2018). Over the last 40 years, however, the two parties have split the Catholic vote quite evenly, with the favored presidential candidate rarely winning by more than single digits. This pattern held in 2020 despite the Democratic nominee's devout Catholicism (Gallup, 2020).

One reason for what Prendergast (1999) describes as “the passing of the Democratic monolith” among Catholic voters was the rise of “cultural issues” such as abortion, feminism, and gay and lesbian rights in the 1970s and 1980s. When it first emerged in national politics, abortion was known as a “Catholic issue,” and the early energy for the pro-life movement came largely from Catholic priests and parishioners (Hanna, 1979). However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the evangelical Protestant-led Christian Right movement emerged and placed opposition to abortion atop an extensive cultural agenda. That eventually led culturally conservative Catholics into an alliance—though an “uneasy alliance” (Bendyna et al., 2001)—with evangelicals in cultural politics (Chelini-Pont, 2018). That alliance helped to push the Republican Party toward increasingly conservative positions on abortion, gay and lesbian rights, prayer in the public schools, and traditional family values while the Democratic Party was moving farther to the left on these issues. Consequently, many culturally conservative Catholics abandoned the Democrats and moved into the GOP (Green, 2007; Layman, 2001; Wilson, 2007).

Another reason for Catholics' declining Democratic attachments was their dramatic rise in socioeconomic status in the second half of the 20th century (Greeley, 1990; Wald, 2019). As Catholics moved from economic marginalization into the American middle class, their support for Democratic redistributive policies declined, and the Republican agenda of tax cuts and limited government grew more attractive (Mockabee, 2007). This rightward shift on economic matters contributed to Catholics' growing disenchantment with the Democratic Party and movement into the ranks of Republicans (Jelen, 1997).

That these trends primarily manifested among *White* Catholics prevented the overall Catholic vote from becoming clearly Republican. American Catholicism is growing less White. It increasingly comprises Latino Catholics, who, while typically conservative on cultural issues (Campbell, Kirk, et al., 2021), are more liberal on social welfare and immigration issues and align mostly with the Democratic Party (Kellstedt & Guth, 2013; Pantoja et al., 2008; Richomme, 2018).

The result of the various political, socioeconomic, and demographic trends in Catholicism is an electoral constituency that is indistinctive in its partisan tendencies. This is apparent in research showing that Catholic candidates are not perceived clearly as either Democrats or Republicans (Campbell et al., 2011; McDermott, 2007). It is exhibited politically by the hotly contested “Catholic vote,” which candidates of both parties court by emphasizing the issues on which they agree with the Church (Carsey, 2001). In theory, this creates a dilemma for the Catholic voter. In practice, extant literature offers several reasons why individual Catholics may not be affected by these competing partisan pulls.

EVIDENCE OF CATHOLIC CROSS-PRESSURES

Despite clear reasons why American elections should cross-pressure Catholics, the evidence for individual Catholics actually experiencing psychological conflict due to the Church's policy stands is murky. Political psychologists generally conceive of cross-pressures as an individual-level phenomenon (Brader et al., 2014). So, it is possible for the aggregate Catholic vote to be closely divided while little electoral ambivalence exists at the individual level. Suggesting that many Catholics may not experience cross-pressures are at least four pieces of evidence: Catholics' combinations of policy attitudes rarely mimic the Church's; many Catholics deny looking to the Church for political cues;

partisanship is increasingly linked to Catholics' political attitudes and behavior; and diversification and fractures within American Catholicism have greatly decreased the degree to which Catholics may be considered a unified political, social, or religious group.

Inconsistent Ethics of Life

Previous research has shown that only a minority of Catholics satisfy even a minimum condition for being cross-pressured by the Church's issue positions: actually holding pro-life and pro-social justice views. For example, on abortion, capital punishment, and antipoverty programs, Gray and Bendyna (2008) estimate that just 6% of Catholics support all of the Church's positions (see also Perl & McClintock, 2001). American Catholics are often referred to as "cafeteria Catholics," who, much like diners picking from a menu of food items, selectively choose which aspects of Catholic social teaching to support (e.g., Dillon, 2018; Fowler, 2013; Starks, 2013).

Catholics' issue attitudes tend to cluster along multiple dimensions, including "social welfare," "pro-life," and "diversity" components (Gray & Bendyna, 2008). This reinforces Jelen's conclusion that, "The attitudes of Roman Catholic respondents show virtually no relationship to the pronouncements of Cardinal Bernardin. Not only do Catholics fail to structure their attitudes around a 'pro-life' *gestalt*... Catholics do not even take 'life-affirming' positions on individual issues" (1990, p. 124; see also Cleghorn, 1986).

Resistance to Church Guidance

The second reason why Church teaching may not create psychological conflict for many Catholics is that few Catholics profess to look to the Church for political or social guidance. Studies of the sources Catholics consult when making moral judgments or major life decisions consistently find large majorities prioritizing their conscience or their own research over Church teaching, Church leaders, or the Bible (D'Antonio et al., 2013; Gecewicz, 2016; Gray & Bendyna, 2008). For instance, less than two-fifths in 2006 agreed even "somewhat" that they "seriously consider" the Church's statements on "social, political, and moral issues" (Gray & Bendyna, 2008, p. 78). A slim majority (53%) of Mass-attending Catholics in 2019 said they "generally agree" with what the priests at their church say about politics (Pew Research Center, 2019a). Smith (2008) finds little sign that priests directly shape their parishioners' political attitudes, although he does find signs of indirect influence via the laity's attitudes about Catholicism. In fact, American Catholics' failure to embrace Church teaching extends beyond politics and into doctrine. For example, only minorities agree with Church teaching that contraception is immoral (Pew Research Center, 2016) and that the sacramental bread and wine they receive at Mass is the real flesh and blood of Jesus Christ (Pew Research Center, 2019b).

There are several reasons why such patterns may not necessarily reflect conscious defiance of the Church. First, ignorance or misinformation may play some role in Catholics' disagreement with Church teaching, as suggested by a recent study of knowledge of religious doctrine (Pew Research Center, 2019b). While the wider society has secularized (Campbell, Layman, et al., 2021), the percentage of Catholics attending Mass weekly has been dropping for decades (D'Antonio et al., 2013), likely reducing Catholics' exposure to Church teaching. Second, self-reports of influence may reflect limited awareness of actual influences on opinion and reflect social-desirability bias, particularly in an American political culture that prizes individualism and has historically raised suspicion of Rome's control of Catholics.

Third, deprioritizing Church teaching may evince distrust of the Church's messengers: Only minorities of Catholics who attend Mass at least a few times a year have "a lot" of confidence in clergy to help them form their opinions on abortion (34%), immigration (16%), global climate change (8%), and various personal matters (Pew Research Center, 2019a). A final reason may be

the view that Catholicism can accommodate differences of belief, especially when disagreements derive from a sincere search of conscience in light of larger Catholic values. Among Catholics who openly dissent from Church teaching, Dillon (1999) detects a “democratized” notion of Catholicism as something the laity can join the hierarchy in shaping—with this view grounded in Church doctrine. The majorities of Catholics who profess that one can still be a “good Catholic” despite disagreement with Church teaching on political, moral, and even some theological matters attest to what D’Antonio and coauthors call the “Catholic ethos of inclusive dissent and loyalty” (2013, p. 56).

Rising Catholic Partisanship

As the Democratic and Republican parties have become increasingly distinct on practically every major issue, citizen partisanship and its influence on policy attitudes have strengthened (Hetherington, 2001; Layman & Carsey, 2002). Catholics are no different. They have joined other Americans in sorting themselves into increasingly homogenous and polarized partisan camps (Gray & Bendyna, 2008), while increasingly moving their policy views toward the consistent liberalism or consistent conservatism of the Democratic and Republican parties (Leege & Mueller, 2004; Streb & Frederick, 2008). Rather than rejecting candidates who do not fit the Church’s policy profile, Catholics—like other Americans—use party attachment as a heuristic when making vote choices and forming policy opinions (Kellstedt & Guth, 2013; Mockabee, 2007; Streb & Frederick, 2008).

Research suggests that, for some time now, party influence on Catholic political behavior has decisively trumped that of Catholic identity. In contrast to the groundswell of Catholic support for John F. Kennedy in 1960, there is no evidence that Catholic candidates for president (Gray et al., 2006) and vice president (Jelen, 2018) perform any better among Catholics than non-Catholic candidates do. That phenomenon, in fact, was repeated in devoutly Catholic Joe Biden performing no better among Catholic voters in the 2020 presidential election than Hillary Clinton did in 2016 (Campbell, Kirk, et al., 2021). In both policy attitudes and voting behavior, Catholic Democrats and Republicans have become so much like their non-Catholic copartisans—and so different from Catholics who identify with the other party—that scholars have pronounced that a “Catholic vote” no longer exists (Gray et al., 2006). According to Kellstedt and Guth, “Catholic distinctiveness [in a partisan sense] has truly disappeared” (2013, p. 637). Margolis (2018), in fact, argues that among Catholics and other religious people, party identification is now more powerfully shaping religious attitudes and behaviors than the other way around.

Diversity and Fracture

The likelihood that a large bloc of Catholics is politically cross-pressured in line with Catholic teaching is complicated by the great and growing diversity of those who identify as “Catholic.” Gray et al. pithily state: “The defining features of anything that one might call the ‘Catholic vote’ are in its fractures, not its wholeness” (2006, p. 203). Besides partisan identification, scholars have emphasized the Catholic fault lines of ethnicity, religious commitment, theological perspectives, and social-issue priorities. All of these factors affect parishioners’ receptivity to Church policy messages.

Ethnicity

As White Catholics have grown increasingly Republican, recent growth in American Catholicism has been fueled by immigration. That also was true a century ago, but instead of

Irish, German, and Italian Catholics coming from Europe, the most recent waves of heavily Catholic immigrants have come from Central and South America. As of 2014, Latinos represent one-third of the 21% of Americans who are Catholic (Pew, 2014). This has religious and political consequences, as there are important theological and political differences between White and Latino Catholics.

Latino Catholics' understanding of Catholic teaching and religious experience often differs from that of White Catholics, perhaps encouraging Democratic Party identification (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Liberation theology, "an interpretation of Christian faith out of the experience of the poor" (Berryman, 1987, p. 4), often imbues Latino Catholicism (Gonzalez, 2014), but it is not as present among White Catholics. Latinos' experiences with immigration and naturalization also encourage Democratic partisanship (Hajnal & Rivera, 2014; Huddy et al., 2016; Pantoja et al., 2001).

Latino Catholics' distinct faith experiences may make them more likely than White Catholics to support the full range of Church political stands—possibly increasing their vulnerability to political cross-pressures. While more conservative than Whites on moral issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and divorce (Kellstedt & Guth, 2013), Latino Catholics are more liberal on immigration and social welfare issues (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Latino Catholics are also more likely than White Catholics to support religious leaders' efforts to influence public affairs (D'Antonio et al., 2013), and Catholic churches appear to facilitate Latino political mobilization (Audette, 2016; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001).²

Religious Commitment

American Catholicism also is splintered along lines of religious commitment. Support for the Church's policy positions is strongest among the most-committed parishioners: those who attend Mass weekly, who are involved in church life beyond Mass attendance, who engage in devotions such as Bible study and faith sharing, and who accept guidance from the Church (Leege & Mueller, 2004; Smith, 2008; Wald et al., 1993; Welch & Leege, 1991). The influence of Catholic religious devotion is most evident in producing conservative attitudes on abortion and other cultural issues (Cook et al., 1993). The effect of Catholic commitment is weaker and less consistent for social welfare and other types of policy issues (Smith, 2008; Wald et al., 1993; Welch & Leege, 1991). However, some scholars find that social welfare liberalism is strongest among the most committed Catholics (Davison & Krassa, 2011; Perl & McClintock, 2001) and that frequent Mass attendance heightens the likelihood of combining a pro-life position on abortion with opposition to the death penalty and support for welfare programs (Perl & McClintock, 2001).

Theological Perspective

Differences in theological perspective shape Catholic views about Church moral and political authority, producing polarized responses when Church leaders speak out about political issues. Hofstetter et al. (2008) show that in 2004, exposure to a Church Doctrinal Note mandating opposition to candidates who oppose Church positions increased support for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, a pro-choice Catholic, among self-identified religiously "liberal Catholics" and decreased support for Kerry among self-identified "conservative Catholics." Likewise, levels of concern about climate change polarized more along liberal-conservative lines among Catholics aware of Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* encyclical than among those unaware of the encyclical (Li et

²Catholic ethnic, as well as racial, diversity extends beyond the Latino versus White distinction. For example, while a small minority, there is a robust and vibrant Black Catholic population in the United States. Many of these Black Catholics are exposed to messages that explicitly reflect the experiences of African Americans and incorporate many African American cultural elements (Davis & Pope-Davis, 2017).

al., 2016). On a related note, Catholics who identify as evangelical or “born-again” attach greater importance to religion and have more conservative views on cultural issues than do other Catholics (Leal & Patterson, 2013; Welch & Leege, 1991).

Social-Issue Priorities

Another fracture within Catholicism may result from the divergent social-issue priorities of parish priests. Smith (2008) finds that priests emphasize different themes in their preaching and other aspects of parish leadership. “Personal morality” priests emphasize cultural issues like abortion and homosexuality, “social justice” priests highlight aid to the poor, and “mixed emphasis” priests split their attention more evenly. Jelen (2003) finds a similar tendency among priests to prioritize particular issues or groups of issues along a “Christian Right” versus “social justice” axis.

Smith (2008) finds little evidence that priests’ issue emphases are associated with their parishioners’ issue priorities, net of parishioners’ demographic, religious, and political characteristics. However, political commentary assumes that ideological divides among the laity correspond to pastoral prioritization of morality or social justice issues (e.g., Dionne, 2008; Hudson, 2008), and Catholic Democrats and Republicans do have different policy priorities. Analyzing Catholics’ issue priorities in the 2016 election, Gray (2018) observes that Catholics supporting Hillary Clinton tended to rank health care as the most important issue, while terrorism and homeland security were higher priorities for Catholics supporting Donald Trump. Trump backers also ranked abortion, LGBTQ rights, morality, and religion in society higher than did Catholics supporting Clinton.

Expectations for Catholic Cross-Pressures

Our review of the literature suggests that individuals holding seamless-garment policy attitudes—a key prerequisite to experiencing political conflict from the Catholic Church’s partisan-incongruent teaching—should represent a minority of contemporary U.S. Catholics. Still, SGCs are an interesting and politically relevant group because they appear to most faithfully apply Church teachings to their own beliefs. Lacking an obvious partisan home, they may attract attention from candidates in competitive races and from Church leaders trying to rally the laity around their issue agenda.

Prior research also points to hypotheses about which Catholics are most likely to hold seamless-garment beliefs. First, devout Catholics—those who regularly attend Mass, frequently engage in other religious practices, and claim to attach great importance to their faith—are more likely than less committed Catholics to support the Church’s positions on key political issues. That is particularly true on abortion, but it is sometimes true on other issues in the seamless garment.

H1: Catholics with high levels of religious commitment should be more likely than less committed Catholics to hold seamless-garment policy positions.

Second, while issue positions can influence partisanship—and later hypotheses will specify our expectations for the influence of seamless-garment beliefs on Catholic partisanship and vote choice—partisanship can also influence issue positions (Carsey & Layman, 2006). Accordingly, as the Democratic and Republican parties have moved increasingly toward consistently liberal and consistently conservative policy bundles, identification with one of these parties should pull Catholics away from embracing the full spectrum of Church positions. Political independence itself does not encourage seamless-garment perspectives. However, buffered from the polarized partisan cues that compete with Church influence, political independents should be more likely than Democratic or Republican identifiers to embrace or retain the seamless-garment views.

H2: Catholic independents should be more likely than Catholic Democrats and Republicans to hold seamless-garment policy profiles.

Moreover, the growth of party polarization and the increasing impact of partisanship on Catholic attitudes should reduce the seamless-garment share of American Catholicism over time.

H3: Catholics' likelihood of holding seamless-garment policy positions should decline over time.

Although we do not include it among our formal hypotheses given the extent of its exploration in prior research, we expect that seamless-garment beliefs will be more common among Latino Catholics than among White Catholics.

COPING WITH CROSS-PRESSURES

Unstudied in the literature is how those Catholics who do adopt the Church's seamless-garment policy positions navigate American politics: How do they identify themselves politically? How do they vote? How do they make voting decisions that are likely to produce cognitive dissonance?

There has been relatively little recent attention paid to the voting behavior of cross-pressured Americans. However, we know that voting is important enough to produce cognitive dissonance, provoking voters to alter their preferences or employ coping mechanisms (McGregor, 2013). And a somewhat older body of research on cognitive dissonance offers rich insights into how Seamless Garment Catholics might resolve their electoral dilemma. In this section, we discuss five coping mechanisms commonly employed by cross-pressured voters: attitude persuasion, electoral persuasion, avoidance, prioritization, and selective misperception. We also consider similarities and differences between "Catholic" cross-pressures and those more commonly examined by political scientists.

Attitude Persuasion

One frequent response to cognitive dissonance is attitudinal persuasion: individuals reducing the conflict between their policy attitude and their vote choice by changing their policy preference to match that of their preferred candidate or party (Bartels, 2002; Berelson et al., 1954; Finkel, 1993; Markus, 1982; Markus & Converse, 1979). Although generally not framing it as a response to cross-pressures, political scientists recently have observed a long-term process of attitude persuasion in which individuals have brought their policy attitudes into line with those of their party (e.g., Layman & Carsey, 2002; Levendusky, 2009). Carsey and Layman (2006) show that when individuals are aware of incongruence between their party identification and an issue position, their likelihood of changing the issue position or their partisanship varies with the perceived importance of the issue. Individuals who attach relatively little importance to the issue are more likely to be persuaded, changing their position. Individuals who attach greater importance to an issue still may move their issue position closer to that of the party but are more likely to change their party identification to align with the policy position.

This same process likely has been unfolding among Catholics, facilitating a growing alignment between Catholics' party ties and issue attitudes, while putting downward pressure on the seamless-garment worldview. While support for a party and its candidates may discourage party-incongruent issue attitudes, devotion to the Catholic faith should enhance the importance adherents attach to its teachings. Catholic commitment, then, may promote retention of seamless-garment beliefs even in the face of partisan pressures. That points to the following expectations about attitude change among individual Catholics:

H4: Identification with either major party should increase the likelihood that Seamless Garment Catholics move their views in directions consistent with party positions. SGCs who identify with the Republican Party should be more likely than Democratic and independent SGCs to grow more consistently conservative, while Democratic SGCs should be more likely to become more consistently liberal. Independent SGCs should be more likely than partisans to resist party cues and thus maintain conservative views on personal-morality issues and liberal views on social justice issues.

H5: Seamless Garment Catholics with higher levels of religious commitment should be more likely than their less devout counterparts to maintain a seamless-garment political perspective.

Electoral Persuasion

If Catholics maintain a seamless-garment policy perspective, how do they decide how to vote? A common perspective on cross-pressured voters is that they are persuadable—either across elections or over the course of a campaign. Indeed, cross-pressured voters take longer to choose a candidate and are more likely to split their votes evenly between the parties (Basinger & Lavine, 2005; Campbell et al., 1960; Fiorina, 1976; Lavine, 2001; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Mulligan, 2011). Cross-pressured voters are also less reliably partisan—partisans who disagree with their party on a personally important issue are typically more likely than partisans in policy lockstep with their party to vote for the opposite party's candidate (Hillygus & Shields, 2005, 2008; Smidt, 2017; but see Endres & Panagopoulos, 2019).

Following similar logic, cross-pressured voters should be less likely than voters with party-congruent policy attitudes to attach themselves to a party at all. In Hypothesis 2, we proposed an influence of party identification on Catholics' policy attitudes, noting that identification with either party should lead Catholics away from seamless-garment perspectives, leaving independents more apt to adopt or retain such views. Of course, policy attitudes also may shape party identification, with consistent liberals attaching themselves to the Democratic Party, consistent conservatives adopting a Republican identification, and cross-pressured voters more likely to be independents.³ That points to further expectations:

H6: Seamless Garment Catholics should be less strongly partisan and more likely to be independents than are consistently liberal and consistently conservative Catholics.

H7: Seamless Garment Catholics should be less likely than consistently conservative Catholics to vote Republican and less likely than consistently liberal Catholics to vote Democratic.

Avoidance

Early research on cross-pressured voters found that they were less likely than citizens with party-congruent attitudes to vote (Berelson et al., 1954). That is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory's recognition that avoiding the dissonance-producing choice or behavior is a common coping mechanism (Festinger, 1957).

Some subsequent research indeed finds that individuals cross-pressured by their social identities (Brader et al., 2014), social networks (Mutz, 2002), or party identification and issue positions (Endres & Panagopoulos, 2019) are less likely to vote or engage politically in other ways. Other analyses, however, do not find a reduced turnout likelihood among cross-pressured individuals (e.g., Nilson, 2002). In reporting such a null finding for the 1960 election, Pool et al. (1965, pp. 76–78)

³There is, of course, a voluminous literature on the causal direction of the relationship between partisanship and policy attitudes. Because assessing that direction is well beyond the scope of this article, we simply assume reciprocal partisan-policy effects over time.

propose that electoral context may moderate whether partisan incongruence prompts withdrawal from politics. In some elections, the candidate choice faced by cross-pressured voters might fail to attract them, producing alienation and therefore disengagement. In other elections, candidate choice might “pull” cross-pressured voters in a way that inspires “purposeful action.”

Other studies of policy cross-pressures find that the translation of cross-pressures into reduced voter turnout varies with the content of belief systems. Of particular interest given the issue profile of seamless-garment Catholics, two studies report a lower propensity to vote for culturally conservative but economically liberal Americans (relative to consistent liberals and conservatives), but not for culturally liberal but economically conservative Americans (Carmines et al., 2011; Hussey, 2012). These findings undergird our next hypothesis:

H8: Seamless Garment Catholics should be more likely than other Catholics to avoid an electoral choice between major party candidates, either by not voting or voting for a third-party candidate.

Voting for a third-party candidate may not be a logical or rational response to Catholic cross-pressures, since the most successful recent independent or minor-party candidates (e.g., Ross Perot, Ralph Nader, Jill Stein, Gary Johnson) have not offered a seamless-garment platform. However, third-party voting may be a possible expressive response—SGCs may use it to express dissatisfaction with the major party choices.

Prioritization

Cross-pressured individuals may minimize cognitive dissonance by prioritizing one element in a pair of dissonant cognitions over the other—attaching greater importance to the former and making it more salient than the latter for decision-making (Festinger, 1957). This suggests that while Seamless Garment Catholics adhere to Catholic social teaching on both “personal morality” issues such as abortion and “social justice” issues such as health-care provision, they care more about one type of issue and prioritize that policy agenda in making voting decisions. That Catholics might specialize in this way is seen in the prioritization of personal morality or social justice issues by many Catholic priests, with the relative importance of the two types of issues strongly predicting priests’ electoral behavior (e.g., Jelen, 2003; Smith, 2008). In fact, Jelen notes that “Political differences among Catholic priests... seem driven mostly by differences in *which* aspects of the Catholic agenda are perceived as most important, rather than differences in actual issue positions” (2003, p. 601). The electoral choices of SGCs may involve similar prioritization of Catholic policy agendas. Gray et al. (2006) find that Catholics who prioritize social welfare are more likely to vote Democratic, while those who prioritize abortion tend to vote Republican.

Of course, elevating one issue over other policy concerns and choosing candidates with preferred positions or perceived expertise on those issues is not the exclusive domain of cross-pressured voters. Scholars have long recognized “issue publics” that focus their political attention and behavior on a single issue—or policy domain—and tend to vote predictably on the basis of those issues (Aldrich et al., 1989; Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990a; RePass, 1971). However, because SGCs face more psychological stress through supporting a candidate who does not share one element of their—and the Catholic Church’s—policy views, they may be more likely than Catholics with consistently liberal or consistently conservative preferences to engage in this kind of issue agenda setting. Two hypotheses follow from this.

H9: A larger gap in the relative importance of morality and social justice issues should be found among Seamless Garment Catholics than among Catholics with consistently liberal or conservative views.

H10: Seamless-garment Catholics' voting decisions should be aligned with the relative importance of morality versus social justice issues. As the importance of morality issues increases (decreases) relative to social justice issues, the likelihood of voting Republican (Democratic) should increase.

Selective (Mis)perception

Another dissonance-reduction strategy is altering cognitions—for example, adjusting perceptions of situations (Festinger, 1957). This may be an attractive option for restoring cognitive consistency when an attitude—for example, a policy position or affect toward a political candidate—is too personally important to change (Berelson et al., 1954; Krosnick, 2002) or when a decision contributing to dissonance—such as a voting decision—has already been made (Festinger, 1964). The perceptual alteration achieves a view of the world that is comfortable for the perceiver, but that may not reflect objective reality. In an early linkage of perceptual distortions to political cross-pressures, Berelson et al. (1954) observed that cross-pressured voters identified presidential candidate policy positions with substantially less accuracy than other voters. Later, Brians and Greene (2004) found that pro-choice Republicans and pro-life Democrats, who are presumably cross-pressured, placed their party's presidential candidate's abortion position much closer to their own abortion positions than did pro-life Republicans and pro-choice Democrats. Similarly, Seamless Garment Catholics may confront cognitive dissonance by altering their perceptions about candidate positions on matters of concern to the Church.

Numerous studies find that some citizens, often inaccurately, view the policy positions of their preferred candidate as closer to their own than they really are (e.g., Conover & Feldman, 1982; Kinder, 1978; Markus & Converse, 1979; Martinez, 1988; Page & Brody, 1972)—a perceptual bias referred to as projection. The difficulty of empirically disentangling projection from other phenomena creates uncertainty about its magnitude in the electorate (Krosnick, 1990b, 2002), but recent studies provide evidence of projection and illuminate factors that facilitate it. As suggested in earlier research (Page & Brody, 1972), ambiguity in candidates' positions can nurture projection (Martin et al., 2021; Nasr, 2021), with the preferred candidate often getting the benefit of the doubt (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009). Exogenous increases in candidate or party affect also increase projection effects (Amira, 2018; Dinas et al., 2016).

Theoretically, projection originates in individuals' (largely unconscious) efforts to correct the cognitive inconsistency generated by supporting candidates with whom they disagree on policy, and its likelihood should increase after the decision of who to vote for has been made. Projection is enabled by selectivity of information exposure and retention in which information consistent with one's preferred perception is privileged. It also results from efforts to explain away information that is contrary to the preferred perception (Krosnick, 2002; see also Berelson et al., 1954; Festinger, 1964). Selective perception is widespread in political reasoning, creating biases in how individuals both collect and digest new information (Jacoby, 1988; Rahn, 1993; Taber & Lodge, 2006). A mountain of evidence suggests that, to maintain cognitive consistency, individuals slant interpretations of political facts, issues, and events toward their previously held convictions. This includes Campbell and colleagues' (1960) insight that party identification acts as a powerful "perceptual screen" that colors political information processing, Zaller's (1992, p. 241) observation that voters "tend to accept what is congenial to their partisan values and to reject what is not," and newer literature identifying partisan "motivated reasoning" as a contributor to attitude polarization and acceptance of conspiracy theories and misinformation favoring one's party (Flynn et al., 2017; Jerit & Zhao, 2020; Lodge & Taber, 2000; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). In fact, Flynn and colleagues (2017) identify such "directionally motivated reasoning" as individuals' "default" method of processing political information, and the leading cause of political misperception.

Projection of seamless-garment views onto a U.S. major party presidential nominee will result in misperceived policy positions, given that no recent nominee has represented this worldview. The likelihood of correctly perceiving candidate and party issue stances increases with political knowledge and the importance of the issues (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Henderson, 2014; Krosnick, 1990b; RePass, 1971). But these same variables have been associated with increases in the propensity to misperceive political information via directionally motivated reasoning (Flynn et al., 2017; Jerit & Zhao, 2020), and in the case of personally salient issues, projection (RePass, 1971; but see Krosnick, 1990b).

These perspectives might be reconciled by accounting for prioritization and vote choice. Cross-pressured voters may employ a “select-and-project” strategy in which they select candidates based on their highest priority considerations while resolving dissonance on less important matters with projection. For example, Gottfried (2010) finds that partisans cross-pressured by gender are more likely to defect from their party when electing a female candidate is important to them. These defectors to the out-party female candidate are then more likely than other voters to project their party’s ideology onto that candidate.

Seamless Garment Catholics may employ such a select-and-project strategy, combining prioritization of personal morality or social justice issues with selective misperception of the favored candidate’s stance in the less important issue area. Prioritization of personal morality issues should make SGCs more likely to vote for Republican candidates. Dissonance between that candidate preference and SGCs’ social justice issue views may in turn lead those voters to ignore, forget, or rationalize away signals of the Republicans’ actual social justice issue positions. In their place, SGC Republican voters may project their pro-social justice views onto Republican candidates, viewing them as more liberal on social justice issues than they really are. Similarly, prioritization of social justice issues should make SGCs more likely to prefer Democratic candidates, and then to perceive those candidates as more conservative than they really are on morality issues such as abortion. Because projection is more likely in the face of cognitive dissonance, SGCs should be more likely than Catholics with consistently liberal or consistently conservative positions to engage in it.

H11: Seamless Garment Catholics should be more likely than other Catholics to project their own views onto preferred candidates. SGCs who vote Republican should view Republican candidates as more liberal on social justice issues than do other Catholic Republican voters. SGCs who vote Democratic should view Democratic candidates as more conservative on morality issues than do other Catholic Democratic voters.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF CATHOLIC CROSS-PRESSURES?

Though we have grounded our hypotheses in the voluminous literature on cross-pressures in political science and psychology, it is possible that Seamless Garment Catholics represent a unique case. SGCs’ party-incongruent policy preferences are themselves hardly distinctive, but what may be unique is that the cross-pressures emanate from a single source: the Catholic Church. These “Catholic” cross-pressures do not represent the simple clash of religious versus partisan identity that has provided a classic example of cross-pressures (e.g., Berelson et al., 1954; Pool et al., 1965)—because the Church takes *both* partisan sides. Adoption of the Church’s full spectrum of apparent policy positions presents its own internal conflict.

This feature of Catholic cross-pressures might work to either intensify or dilute SGCs’ experience of and responses to cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, political cues from a Church that claims to teach authoritatively based on faith and morality may be weightier than cues from other sources. On the other hand, sorting out and applying the Church’s cues may prove difficult even for

Catholics who seek to do so. When citizens lack clear guidance on where someone with their loyalties should stand, they may be influenced by alternative cue givers (Zaller, 1992). Accordingly, Welch and Legee (1991) show that the influence of the Protestant-dominated Christian Right on the views of some devout Catholics is strongest on those issues where the Catholic position is least clear. Even for SGCs, whose views parallel those of the Church, the Church's lack of clarity may help to liberate them from feeling obligated to cast a "Catholic" vote.

Because of these potentially unique features, examining "Catholic" cross-pressures may enhance political psychologists' understanding of how cross-pressures relate to political behavior. It may help illuminate variation in the mix and magnitude of responses among individuals experiencing different types of cross-pressures.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

To evaluate the political behavior of Seamless Garment Catholics—a group we expect to represent a relatively small segment of American Catholicism—we need data on a sufficient number of Catholics to conduct extensive subgroup analysis. We do this by marshaling multiple years of data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and the American National Election Studies (ANES). We perform most of our analyses of contemporary SGCs with the 2016, 2017, and 2018 CCES cross-sectional surveys.⁴ These surveys offer large samples ($N = 64,600$ in 2016; 18,200 in 2017; and 60,000 in 2018) that when pooled include 29,030 Catholics. However, dating back only to 2006, the CCES can provide only limited historical perspective on the presence of SGCs among American Catholics. It also lacks appropriate questions for testing our selective-projection hypothesis. For those analyses, we turn to the 2016 ANES cumulative file.⁵ We employ data pooled from the presidential-election-year studies from 1992 to 2016, which include 4,599 Catholic respondents, and examine temporal trends using ANES surveys from 1980 to 2016. Finally, to examine movement toward and away from seamless-garment views among individual Catholics, we turn to the CCES 2010–14 panel study (Schaffner & Ansolabehere, 2015)—a study conducted during a time period in which we find noticeable drops in the presence of SGCs and including 1,870 respondents who identified as Catholic in all three waves of the study.⁶

Catholics in our analyses are simply respondents who identify their religious affiliation as Catholic. To identify Seamless Garment Catholics—those who share the Church's pro-life and pro-social justice views—we categorize Catholics' policy orientations based on four "seamless garment" issues: abortion, social welfare, immigration, and the environment.⁷ Abortion and social welfare traditionally have been the pillars of Catholic social teaching on human life and human dignity.

We identified all questions on these policy areas in our data sources and chose specific items and coding schemes to be as comparable as possible across different studies as well as reflective of positions taken by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2016/2020 election guide (USCCB, 2020). We coded responses as either consistent or inconsistent with Church teachings.

⁴The CCES studies interviewed all respondents online, selecting them from YouGov's opt-in panel after matching the characteristics of panelists to those of individuals in a random sample of respondents drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. More details about the CCES sampling methodology and response rates can be found in Ansolabehere et al. (2017, 2019).

⁵See the American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant numbers SES 1444721, 2014–17, the University of Michigan, and Stanford University.

⁶The 2010–14 panel study began with the 2010 CCES cross-sectional study, which interviewed over 55,400 respondents. The CCES Panel Study took a subset of 9,500 of these 2010 respondents and reinterviewed them before and after the 2012 election and again before and after the 2014 election. For information on the sampling methodology of the 2010–14 CCES Panel Study as well as the response rates and panel attrition rates, see Schaffner and Ansolabehere (2015).

⁷Abortion is the only personal-morality issue included consistently in our data sources.

Generally speaking, the policy positions we understand to be consistent with Catholic social teaching are:

- Opposition to legalized abortion;
- Support for generous public assistance, especially to vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, and for policies that promote jobs and fair wages;
- Support for immigration and the rights of immigrants, including undocumented immigrants already living in the United States;
- Support for environmental protection programs.⁸

We define Seamless Garment Catholics as Catholics who combine opposition to abortion in all or nearly all circumstances with support for the Church's positions on at least two of the other three issue agendas—in other words, the “social justice” issues. We follow similar procedures to identify four other “policy profiles” among American Catholics. Catholic “Liberals” share SGCs' left-leaning stands on at least two of the three social justice agendas—social welfare, the environment, and immigration—but are broadly supportive of legal abortion. “Conservatives” are pro-life on abortion but take conservative positions on at least two of the three social justice agendas. The “Libertarian” profile is diametrically opposed to seamless-garment positions, pairing support for legalized abortion with conservative stands on two of the three social justice policy areas. The “Moderate” profile captures all other Catholics. Moderates' policy views include being neither clearly pro-life nor clearly pro-choice on abortion and/or not being clearly supportive of or opposed to the Church's perspectives in two of the three social justice areas.

Three other key variables in our analyses are religious commitment, party identification, and presidential vote choice. Our primary measures of religious commitment capture the frequency of engagement in religious practices—attending worship services and praying—and the extent to which people seek guidance from faith. For example, “high commitment” respondents to the 2016–18 CCES surveys attend religious services at least weekly, pray at least daily, and describe religion as “very important” to their lives. By this definition, 19% of Catholics in the pooled dataset are “highly committed.”

In many of our analyses, we employ a 7-point scale of party identification that ranges from “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican.” In other analyses, we simply compare all Democrats, all Republicans, and independents. Here, we do not treat independents who lean toward a party as partisans because we view willingness to call oneself a Democrat or a Republican as theoretically significant for cross-pressured voters.

We undertake most of our analyses of presidential voting with 2016 CCES data. However, because the 2017 and 2018 CCES surveys also asked respondents about their 2016 presidential vote, we retain 2017 and 2018 respondents in our pooled dataset except when we note otherwise.

THE PREVALENCE OF CATHOLIC CROSS-PRESSURES

In Figure 1, we show the presence of our five ideological profiles among all Catholic respondents to the 2016–18 CCES surveys.⁹ We next present the distributions of those profiles among Catholics with low versus high religiosity. Finally, for comparison's sake, we show how well-represented the ideological groups are among non-Catholic respondents.

The most striking thing about the figure is that fewer than 9% of U.S. Catholics fall into our SGC category. This is consistent with past research on Catholics' policy opinion bundles (e.g., Gray &

⁸See Section 1 and Tables S1 and S2 of the online supporting information for question wording, coding, and other details.

⁹For this and all other analyses of the 2016–18 CCES studies, we apply CCES's common weights specific to each year. Whether we use the weights associated with the pre- or the post-election survey depends on the key variables being analyzed.

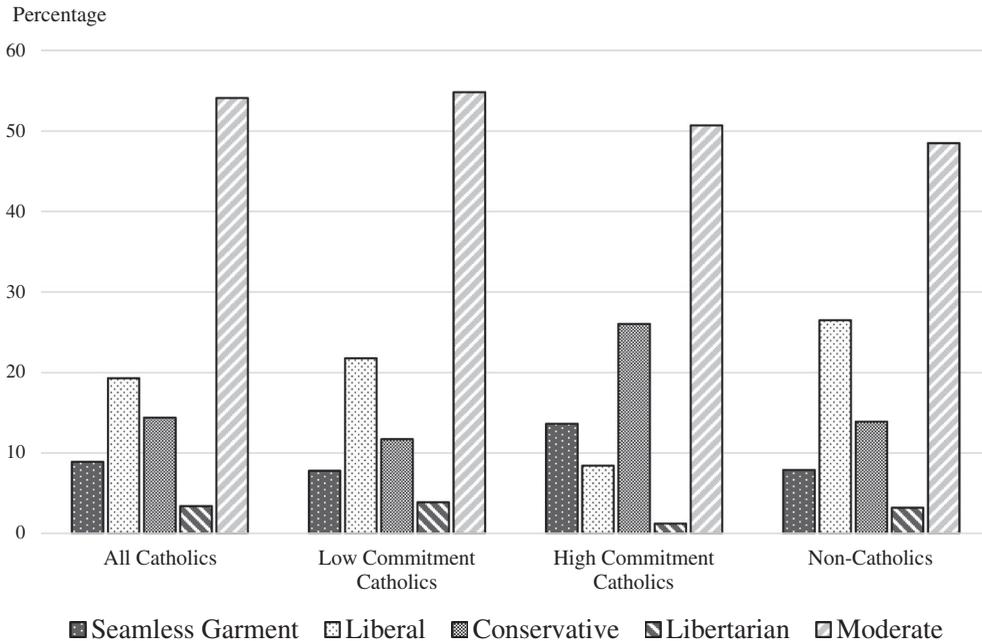


Figure 1. Policy profiles of U.S. Catholics, 2016–18. *Source:* 2016–18 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (pooled).

Bendyna, 2008), and, given the importance of party identification for American public opinion, it is not surprising that fewer Catholics fit a seamless-garment profile than the “Liberal” and “Conservative” profiles that are more consistent with the Democratic and Republican platforms. Also worth noting is that most Catholics, like the clear plurality of non-Catholics, are simply Moderates, reflecting the continued tendency of American public opinion to be centrist and resist organization along a single ideological dimension (Fiorina, 2017; Treier & Hillygus, 2009).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the relatively small percentage of Catholics supporting the full array of Church teachings is noteworthy. It is even more remarkable that the presence of seamless-garment views is not substantially greater for Catholics than for non-Catholics—perhaps indicating the decline of a distinctive Catholic political identity (Kellstedt & Guth, 2013).

At the same time, there is some evidence that the Catholic Church encourages seamless-garment perspectives among its faithful—committed Catholics are noticeably more likely (13.6%) than less committed Catholics (7.8%) to fit the SGC profile.¹¹ This is due primarily to the greater propensity of committed Catholics to oppose abortion (63.6% vs. 34.4% of less committed Catholics, $p < .001$). On the other seamless-garment (social justice) issues of social welfare, immigration, and the

¹⁰Of course, the high percentage of moderates also may reflect issues inherent in survey measurement of policy attitudes. Respondents without clear attitudes on policy issues tend to take the middle position on survey items, and confusing or ambiguous question wording can exacerbate this tendency (Weisberg, 2005). Some of the survey items we employ—for example, questions about fuel efficiency in automobiles and visas for overseas workers—may address issues to which many respondents have given little thought. The wording of other items may encourage ambivalent reactions among some respondents, leading them to either have mixed views on an issue or to retreat to the middle position even if they have clear opinions on the issue.

¹¹A chi-square test of independence, corrected to account for complex survey designs using Stata’s svy routine, indicated that the relationship between level of religious commitment and whether one holds SGC views was statistically significant at $p < .001$. Unless otherwise specified, this is the method we use for all other bivariate significance tests.

environment, devout Catholics are significantly *less* likely than their less committed brethren to take the liberal positions consistent with Church teaching.¹²

To test our hypotheses about the effects of religious commitment (H1) and party identification (H2) on the likelihood of holding seamless-garment attitudes, we estimate a multivariate model for our Catholic respondents only. This is a binary logit model in which the dependent variable simply distinguishes between SGCs and all other Catholics, while the independent variables are religious commitment, dummy variables for Democratic and Republican identifiers, and a host of demographic control variables (education, income, age, sex, and dummy variables for African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, with Whites as the racial comparison group). In Figure 2, we present the estimates in the form of marginal effects of each independent variable on the predicted probability of being a SGC, holding all other independent variables at their actual values (Hanmer & Kalkan, 2013). For our religious commitment dummy variable, the dummy variables for party identification, the dummy variables for race, and the binary gender variable, the marginal effects are simply the change in the predicted probability of being a SGC for a change from one discrete category to another. Because the continuous variables in the model—education, income, and age—are coded to range from 0 to 1, the marginal effects are the change in the probability of being a SGC for an increase from the minimum value to the maximum value of the variable.

Before turning to our variables of greatest interest, it is worth noting that, as we suspected, Latino Catholics are more likely than White Catholics to hold seamless-garment perspectives. African American Catholics, by contrast, are less likely than Whites to be SGCs. Both differences are statistically significant. Also significant are the effects of income and age. Wealthier and older Catholics are less likely than poorer and younger Catholics to be SGCs.

Our Hypotheses 1 and 2 posit that holding seamless-garment views is positively associated with religious commitment and negatively associated with Democratic and Republican party identification. We find strong support for Hypothesis 1. Highly committed Catholics are noticeably more likely than less devout Catholics to be SGCs, and the effect of religious commitment is both substantial (about 8 percentage points) and statistically significant. However, support for Hypothesis 2 is mixed. As we expected, Republican identifiers are significantly less likely than independents (the comparison category) to hold seamless-garment views. There is virtually no difference, however, between Democrats and independents in the likelihood of being SGCs.¹³

To assess Hypothesis 3, which anticipated a decline over time in the percentage of Catholics holding seamless-garment views, we turn to the ANES. There we find questions about abortion, social welfare, immigration, and the environment that were asked consistently from 1992 to 2016.¹⁴ We can extend the analysis of SGC presence back to 1980 if we classify SGCs based only on abortion and social welfare views—a strategy that may be appropriate for this longer time horizon given that Catholic leaders' activism on immigration and the environment began more recently.¹⁵ In Figure 3, we show trends in seamless-garment views using both measurement strategies.

¹²For low versus high-commitment Catholics in each issue area, the percentages taking the liberal view are 33.7 versus 24.7 for welfare, 33.8 versus 24.6 for immigration, and 61.0 versus 50.8 for the environment. All individual-level differences are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

¹³We also estimated a multinomial logit model in which the dependent variable was membership in our five categories of Catholic ideology. The effects of religious commitment and partisanship on the probability of being in the SGC group were nearly identical to those shown in Figure 2. We present that analysis in Table S5 in Section 3 of the online supporting information.

¹⁴There are differences in question wording and/or concrete topics covered in these issue areas between the CCES and the ANES. The online supporting information (Table S2, Section 1) identifies the questions. ANES did not ask our environmental question in 2004.

¹⁵The number of Catholic respondents who we are able to classify as SGCs or not in the 1980–2016 time-series ranges from 226 (in 2008) to 1,345 (in 2012).

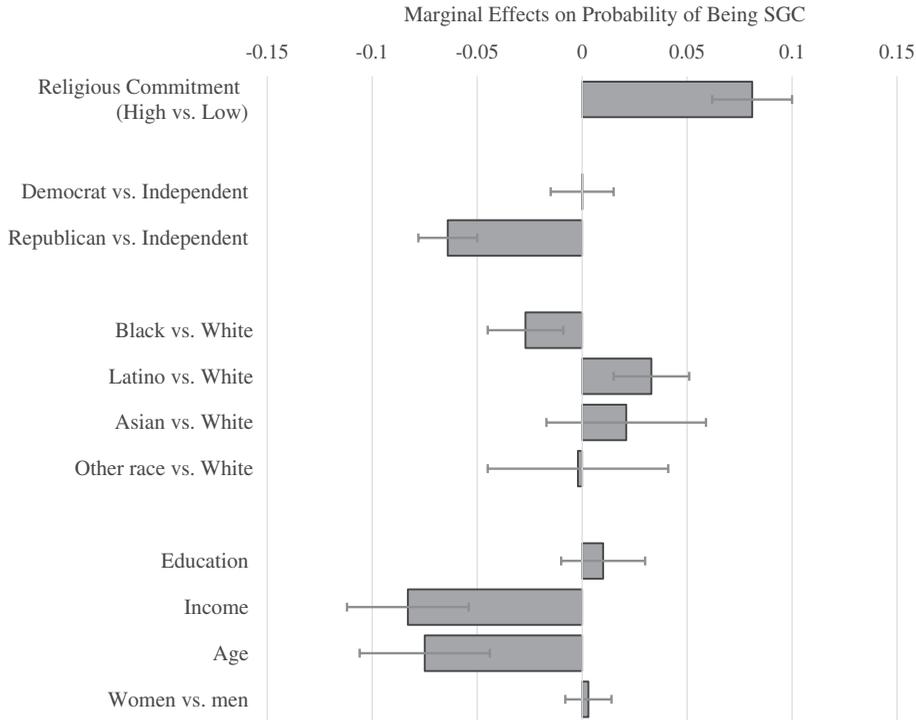


Figure 2. Marginal effects of religious commitment, party identification, and sociodemographic variables on the predicted probability of seamless-garment views among Catholics, 2016–18. The bars represent the marginal effects—estimated from a logistic regression model—of each independent variable on the predicted probability of being a Seamless Garment Catholic. The solid lines represent 95% confidence intervals around the changes in probability. Table S4 in the online supporting information contains full model results. *Source:* 2016–18 CCES (pooled).

Focusing first on the 1992–2016 timeline with our more comprehensive measure, the presence of SGCs is always small, but there is essentially no trend in their representation in American Catholicism.¹⁶ However, turning to the longer time series based only on abortion and social welfare attitudes, we see a noticeable decline over time in seamless-garment perspectives. Importantly, there also is no evident trend there from 1980 to 2004. But, SGC representation fell substantially, from nearly 17% of Catholics in 2004 to under 10% in 2016.

The relative stability that we see in SGC orientations using our broader measure may mask diverging trends among Catholic subgroups. Given earlier observations of differences by race, ethnicity, and religious commitment, we examine changes over time in SGC presence for low and high commitment groups among both White and non-White Catholics.¹⁷ Because of small single-year samples for these subgroups, we pool various years of ANES data and compare, in Figure 4, SGC presence for each group in the 1992–2000 and 2008–2016 time periods.¹⁸

¹⁶As in the CCES data, in every year, the majority of Catholics (and all respondents) are classified as moderates.

¹⁷As we have already seen, non-White Catholics' policy preferences are not monolithic. Black Catholics actually are less likely than White Catholics to be SGCs in our pooled 2016–18 CCES data. However, because Latinos are a substantial majority (over 64% in our data) of all non-White Catholics, non-White Catholics as a whole should be more likely than White Catholics to hold SGC views.

¹⁸In this figure and in all figures that use the overlap of confidence intervals to assess whether the difference between two proportions or probabilities is statistically significant, we employ 83.5% confidence intervals. We do so because other work shows that using 95% confidence intervals for such comparisons is an overly conservative test of statistical differences. Attaining a conventional type I error probability of .05 necessitates the use of confidence intervals of approximately 83.5% (Maghsoodloo & Huang, 2010; Payton et al., 2003).

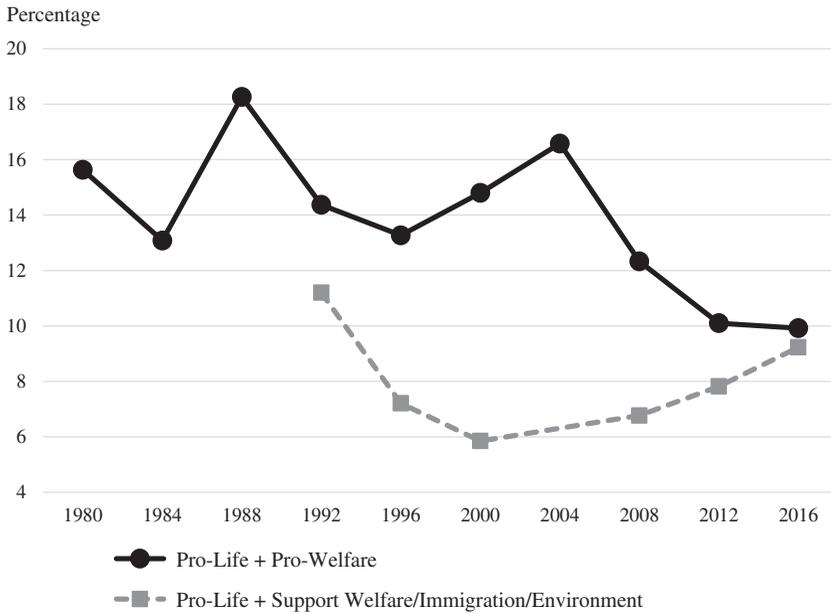


Figure 3. Percentage of Catholics expressing seamless-garment views, by year. *Source:* 1980–2016 American National Election Studies.

The data contain some surprises. Even though lower religious commitment is associated with a lower likelihood of holding seamless-garment views, low-commitment non-Whites actually grew more likely to take seamless-garment perspectives between the two periods, and the growth is nearly statistically significant. Meanwhile, high-commitment White Catholics became significantly less likely to be SGCs over time. The connection between commitment to the Catholic faith and the embrace of seamless-garment attitudes may be growing more fragile over time, at least among White Catholics.

We find more evidence that divergence in temporal patterns in SGC adherence has occurred along the lines of race. Seamless-garment views declined among both groups of Whites—a statistically significant decline among the devout but not among the less committed—but increased among both low-commitment and high-commitment non-Whites. Neither increase is statistically significant. But the data do suggest that the racial gap in seamless-garment views may be growing as Whites become less likely and non-Whites become more likely to be SGCs.

Because the decline in seamless-garment perspectives is most evident for White Catholics with high levels of religious commitment, it is worth delving a bit deeper into the policy attitudes of this group. To do that, we isolated the four issue dimensions that form our measure of seamless-garment views, focusing on the percentage of committed White Catholics with views on abortion, the environment, immigration, and social welfare that are consistent with Church teachings (pro-life on abortion and liberal on the other three issues). We compared this percentage in the earlier years of our ANES data (1992–2000 for the environment and 1992–2004 for all other issues) to the percentage in the later years (2008–16). In these tests of weighted proportions, the changes in committed White Catholics’ views on abortion and immigration were small and statistically insignificant. There was a statistically significant, but modest decline of slightly less than 8 percentage points in the representation of liberal environmental views among devout White Catholics. However, the change on social welfare was statistically significant and substantial. The percentage of devout White Catholics with liberal positions on social welfare issues declined by over 18 percentage points. In short, the decline

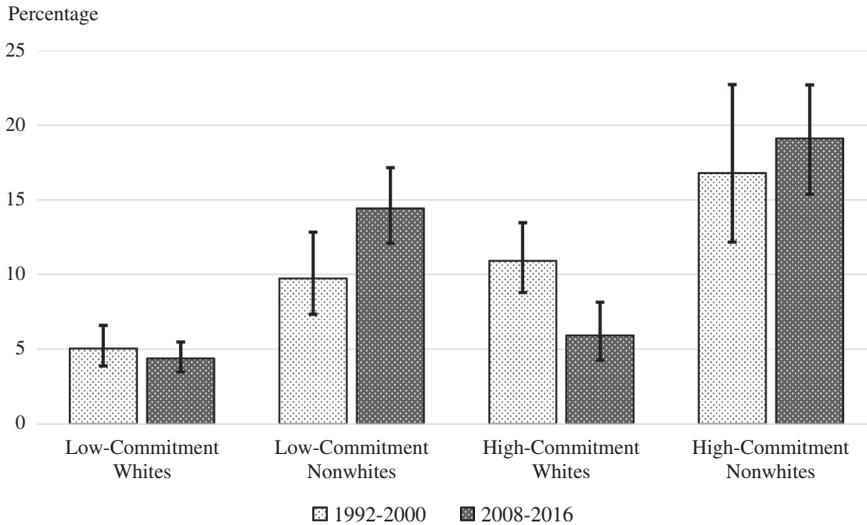


Figure 4. Catholics' seamless-garment views by race and religious commitment, 1992–2000 versus 2008–16. Bars represent percentage of each subgroup with seamless-garment policy preferences. Solid lines are 83.5% confidence intervals. *Source:* 1992–2016 American National Election Studies.

of seamless-garment perspectives in committed White Catholicism has been driven by a sharp increase in this group's social welfare conservatism.¹⁹

What accounts for devout White Catholics' sharp turn toward social welfare conservatism? In Hypotheses 4 and 5 (evaluated below), we suggested that religious commitment should encourage Catholics to maintain support for the seamless garment, while identification with one of the two major parties should reduce that support. For committed White Catholics, it appears that partisanship, particularly their growing identification with the Republican Party, may have grown more important than Catholic commitment for their social welfare attitudes.²⁰

RELIGIOSITY, PARTISANSHIP, AND INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL PATTERNS IN CATHOLIC POLICY ATTITUDES

Although Catholic commitment's encouragement of seamless-garment perspectives is modest and may be declining, at least among White parishioners; it still may encourage SGCs to remain SGCs—just as we posited in Hypothesis 5. By contrast, identification with one of the two major parties should—as we suggested in Hypothesis 4—make it more difficult for SGCs to maintain a seamless-garment perspective. Partisanship should exert persuasion effects, leading individual Catholics to move away from seamless garmentism and toward ideological consistency—issue

¹⁹The only other statistically significant changes in the proportion of Catholic subgroups taking Church-consistent positions were increases in liberal immigration views among low-commitment Whites and both low- and high-commitment non-Whites.

²⁰In the online supporting information (Section 3, Table S6), we show the estimates of a model in which we regress committed White Catholics' social welfare attitudes over the 1992–2016 period on party identification, a dummy variable for the later years (2008–16) of this period, and the interaction between party identification and the later-years dummy (controlling for education, income, age, and sex, and the interaction of education and income with the later-years dummy). Because religious commitment does not vary among high-commitment White Catholics, we do not include commitment in the model and thus cannot compare changes over time in the impact of partisanship and religiosity. However, the interaction term is positive and statistically significant, indicating that the connection between devout White Catholics' partisanship and views on social welfare has grown in recent years.

positions consistent with the policy packages offered by the two major parties. Independent SGCs should be more likely than partisans to remain SGCs.

To test hypotheses about change and stability in the policy attitudes of individual Catholics, we need data on the same individuals at multiple points in time, and we find that in the 2010–14 CCES Panel Study. The large size of the panel study ($N = 9,500$) gives us a sufficiently large sample of Catholics, and the issue questions in the panel study allow us to reconstruct our five Catholic ideological profiles.²¹

The 2010–14 CCES panel overlaps with important trends in U.S. politics and society—trends such as growing nonreligion, continued increases in political polarization and partisan incivility, and, perhaps related to these other patterns, the increasing ubiquity of social media—that may have effected change in Americans’ policy attitudes (e.g., Campbell, Layman, et al., 2021; Margolis, 2018). The 2010–14 period also witnessed several important episodes in Catholicism and its relationship to American politics that might have prompted U.S. Catholics to consider—or reconsider—how their policy opinions and party ties aligned with the Church and its goals. For example, Pope Francis, elected in 2013, called explicitly for increased Church and governmental attention to social justice issues. After lobbying against proposals to fund abortion in the March 2010 Affordable Care Act, the U.S. Catholic bishops and other major Catholic organizations became locked in legal battles with Democratic President Obama’s administration over mandates emanating from that law that employers and insurance companies cover contraception, which petitioners framed as threatening religious freedom. The 2012 presidential election featured Catholic vice presidential candidates—Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Paul Ryan—on both major-party tickets. Any and all of these occurrences may have influenced Catholics’ propensity to maintain, adopt, or discard seamless-garment perspectives.

To assess change and consistency in Catholics’ ideological profiles between 2010 and 2014, we estimate multinomial logit models in which 2014 ideological profile is the dependent variable. To capture the degree to which individual Catholics moved from one ideological profile to another—or remained in the same profile—and the degree to which that movement was encouraged or discouraged by party identification or religious commitment, our models include two main sets of independent variables. First, we include dummy variables for the issue profile groups in 2010. We make Moderates in 2010 the comparison category and include dummy variables for Seamless Garment, Liberal, Conservative, and Libertarian Catholics.

Second, the models include either party identification or religious commitment and the interactions between that variable and the ideological-profile dummies.²² These interaction terms capture the possibility that change and stability in ideological profiles varies by partisanship and levels of

²¹There were 2,125 respondents who identified themselves as Catholic in the 2010 wave of the panel. Only 1,919 of them still identified themselves as Catholic in the 2014 wave, while 1,870 respondents identified themselves as Catholic in the 2010, 2012, and 2014 panel waves. We analyze data from those 1,870 Catholics.

We did, however, assess whether our issue profiles in 2010 were associated with Catholics leaving the Church by 2014 or with non-Catholics becoming Catholic by 2014. We found a statistically significant relationship between 2010 issue profile and the likelihood of 2010 Catholics remaining Catholic in 2014 ($p < .0001$ based on a chi-square test from a crosstab of 2010 issue profile and the variable for remaining in or dropping out of Catholicism by 2014). SGCs were the group least likely to leave Catholicism (only 4.5% were no longer Catholic in 2014), and Liberals were the group most likely to leave the Church (17.7%). Drop-out rates for the other groups were 5.0% for Conservatives, 10.0% for Moderates, and 12.0% for Libertarians.

In contrast, the relationship between non-Catholics’ 2010 issue profile and their likelihood of becoming Catholic by 2014 was not statistically significant ($p = .09$). Non-Catholics with a seamless-garment profile in 2010 actually were the group least likely to become Catholic by 2014 (0.7%), but no other issue profile was much more likely to join the Catholic faith over the course of the CCES panel (Libertarians were the 2010 non-Catholic group most likely to identify as Catholic in 2014, at 2.4%). Based on these very simple analyses, it appears that agreeing with the Catholic Church on the full range of issues (as SGCs do) discourages dropping out of the faith, but it does not encourage joining it.

²²In this analysis, religious commitment and party identification are continuous variables. The reliability coefficient (alpha) for the religious commitment scale is .87 in 2010 and .88 in both 2012 and 2014.

religious commitment.²³ We also include standard demographic controls—race (a dummy variable for Whites), education, income, age, and gender—in our models.

Because the multinomial logit estimates for interaction terms are difficult to interpret, we focus here on the predicted probabilities from the models.²⁴ Specifically, we show the predicted probability of occupying each of the five ideological profile groups in 2014 by the ideological profile that Catholic respondents occupied in 2010 and either their party identification or their level of religious commitment.

In Figure 5, we show the predicted probabilities from the model in which party identification is interacted with the 2010 ideological-profile dummies.²⁵ The bars in the figure represent the predicted probabilities, and the solid lines at the top of the bars represent 83.5% confidence intervals around the predicted probabilities from the model.

The predictions for Seamless Garment Catholics in 2010 clearly support Hypothesis 4. Democratic SGCs are more likely than either Republicans or Independents to move from a seamless-garment perspective in 2010 to being Liberals in 2014. Republican identifiers are more likely than Democrats or independents to become Conservatives in 2014. Independents are more likely than either Democrats or Republicans to maintain seamless-garment perspectives by 2014, although the partisan differences in the likelihood of remaining a SGC are not statistically significant.

The patterns are similar for Catholics who were Moderates in 2010. As we would expect, Democrats are more likely than other partisan groups to become Liberals while Republicans are more likely to become Conservatives. Independents are significantly more likely than Democrats or Republicans to stay in the Moderate fold by 2014.

In terms of Catholics with other ideological profiles in 2010 moving into the SGC fold by 2014, the effects of partisanship are neither large nor consistent. However, Democrats who were Conservatives in 2010—admittedly a rather small group of Catholics—were more likely than either Republicans or Independents to adopt seamless-garment perspectives, moving in a liberal direction on social justice issues between 2010 and 2014.

A number of things stand out for Catholics with other ideological profiles in 2010. Not surprisingly, Democrats who were Liberals in 2010 were more likely than their Republican or Independent counterparts to remain liberal in 2014 while Conservative Republicans were more likely than either Democrats or independents with that ideological profile to remain Conservatives in 2014. Republicans who were Liberals in 2010 were more likely than Democrats to become Libertarians or Moderates. Among Libertarians in 2010, Democrats were more likely than Republicans or Independents to move into the liberal fold by 2014.

In Figure 6, we show the predicted probabilities from the model in which religious commitment is interacted with the 2010 ideological-profile dummies. Here, the results for 2010 SGCs provide support for Hypothesis 5. SGCs with high levels of religious commitment are more likely than less devout SGCs to remain in the seamless garment fold.

²³To reduce the levels of multicollinearity in the models, we estimate separate models for partisanship's and religiosity's interactions with 2010 ideological profiles. In each model, we control for the other variable (religiosity in the interactive partisanship model and party identification in the interactive religious-commitment model), but we do not interact it with the ideological-profile dummies.

²⁴We show the full set of estimates for each multinomial logit model in the online supporting information (Section 3, Tables S7 and S8).

²⁵To compute the predicted probabilities, we set each 2010 ideological profile dummy to equal either 1 for the prediction for that group or 0 for the predictions for any other group. In Figure 5, we set party identification—which ranges from 0 for strong Democrat to 1 for strong Republican—to 0 for the predictions for Democrats, 1 for the predictions for Republicans, and .5 for the predictions for independents. In Figure 6, we set religious commitment—ranging from 0 to 1—to its 10th percentile (.289) among Catholic respondents for low commitment and to its 90th percentile (.933) among Catholic respondents for high commitment. All other variables are held at their actual values.

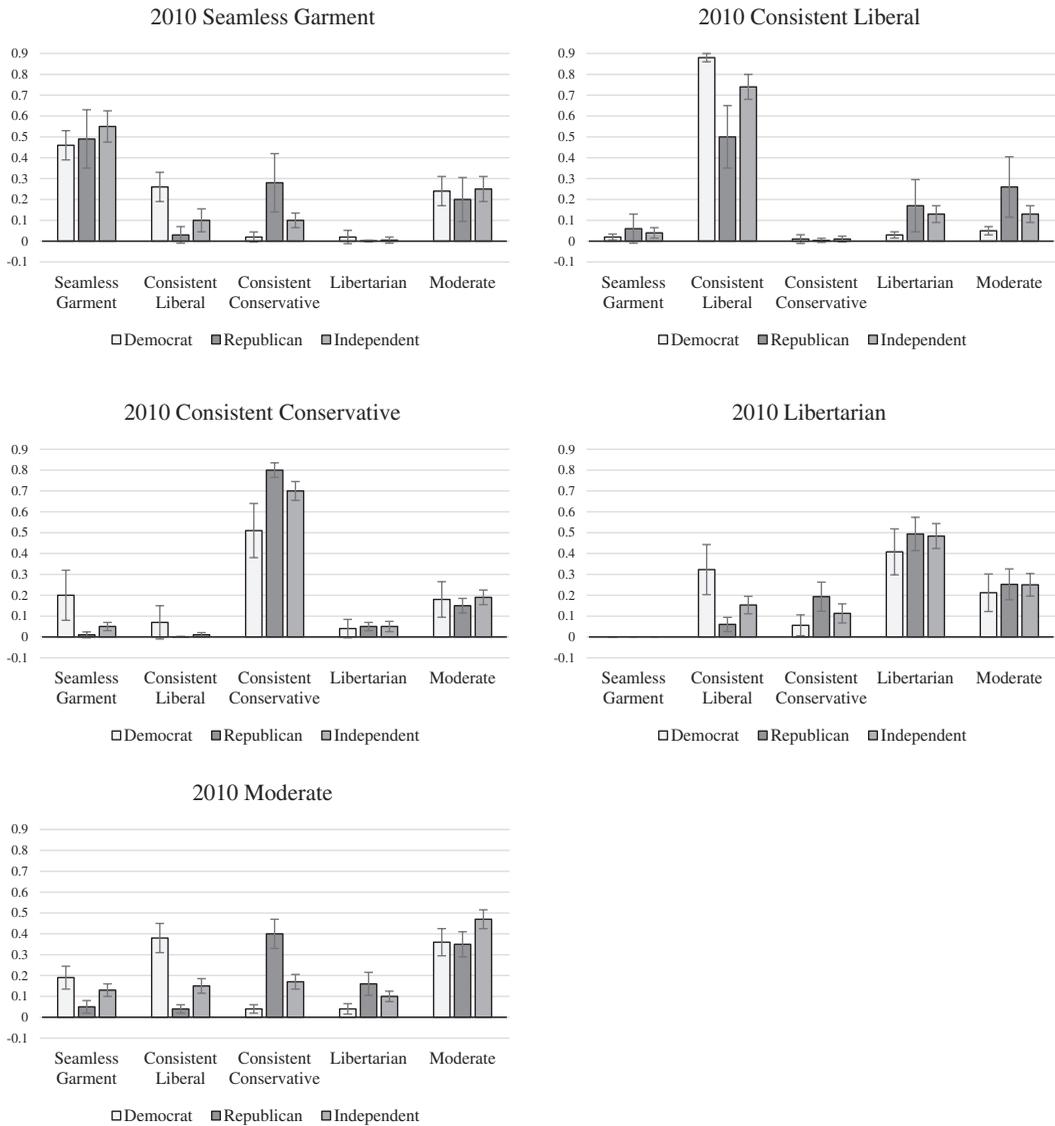


Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of having each ideological profile in 2014 by 2010 ideological profile and party identification. The bars are the predicted probabilities of being in each issue type in 2014. The solid lines represent the 83.5% confidence intervals around the predicted probabilities. *Source:* Estimated from a multinomial logit model using the 2010–14 CCES Panel Study (Catholic respondents only).

By contrast, less devout SGCs are more likely than religiously committed SGCs to move into the Moderate category. For Catholics who adhere to the full range of Church teachings, religious devotion solidifies their commitment to seamless-garment perspectives while a lack of religious devotion facilitates a move in the moderate direction on either abortion or social justice issues or both.

There was not a great deal of movement into the seamless-garment camp among either committed or less committed Catholics. However, highly religious Moderates were more likely than less

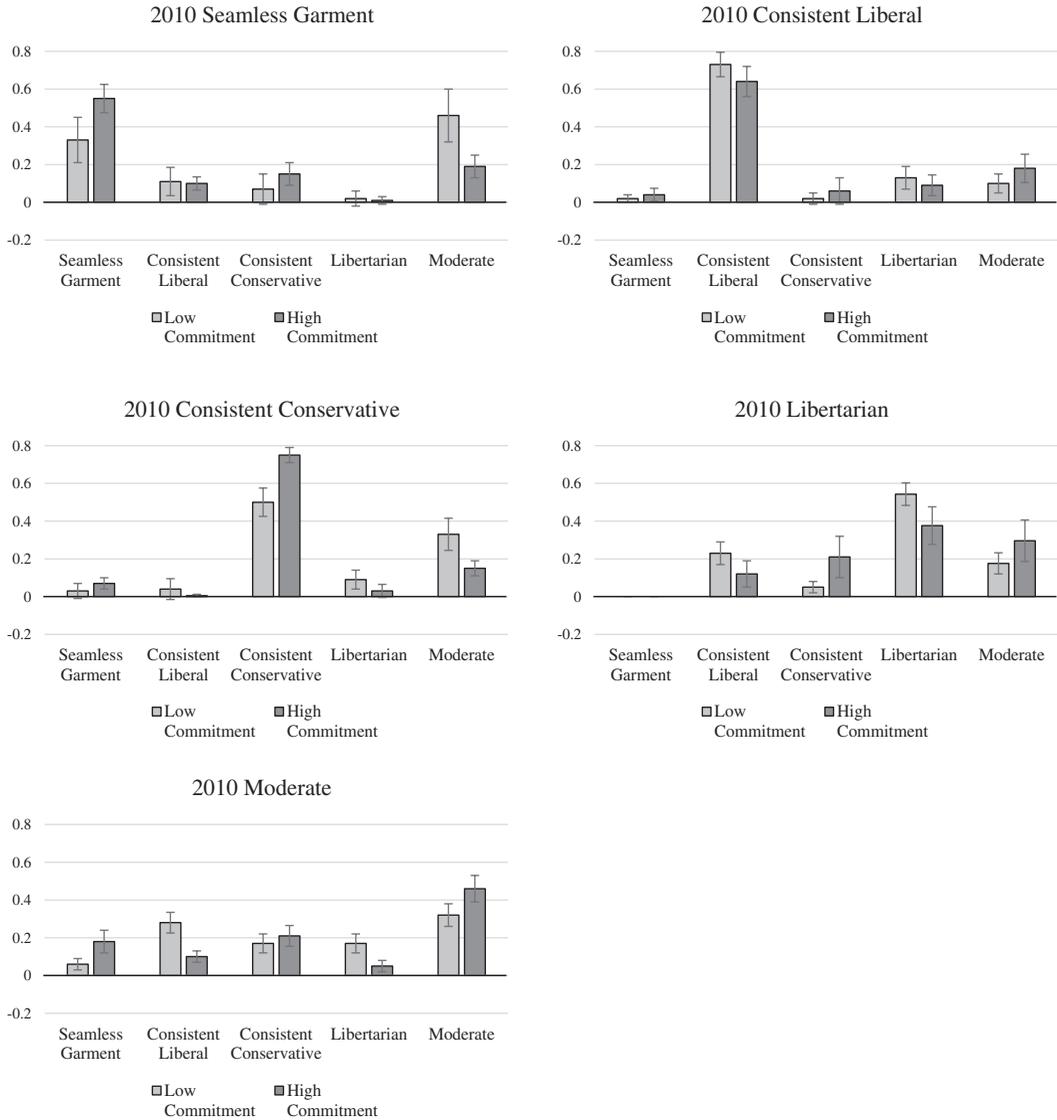


Figure 6. Predicted probabilities of having each ideological profile in 2014 by 2010 ideological profile and level of religious commitment. The bars are the predicted probabilities of being in each issue type in 2014. The solid lines represent the 83.5% confidence intervals around the predicted probabilities. *Source:* Estimated from a multinomial logit model using the 2010–14 CCES Panel Study (Catholic respondents only).

religious Moderates to adopt a seamless-garment perspective by 2014. Meanwhile, low-commitment Moderates were more likely than their more religious counterparts to become either Liberals or Libertarians. They were less likely to remain Moderates.

Among Catholics with other ideological profiles in 2010, religiosity works primarily to boost pro-life views on abortion, encouraging (consistent) conservatism and discouraging libertarianism. Among 2010’s Conservatives, more religious Catholics were more likely than less religious Catholics to remain Conservatives and less likely to become Moderates. In 2010s Libertarian camp, devout Catholics were more likely to become Conservatives and less likely to remain Libertarians than were less devout Catholics.

In short, our analysis of the 2010–14 CCES panel data provides strong support for Hypotheses 4 and 5. Religious commitment encourages SGCs to remain in the SGC camp (although not to abandon other ideological camps for the SGC camp). In contrast, party identification encourages individual Catholics to move away from seamless-garment perspectives and toward party-based ideological consistency.

VOTING WITH CROSS-PRESSURES: PARTISANSHIP AND VOTING BEHAVIOR OF SGCs

In the remainder of the article, we focus on how Seamless Garment Catholics experience and resolve the partisan cross-pressures potentially presented by their “Catholic” mix of policy attitudes. First, we examine the party identification and electoral behavior of SGCs, assessing Hypothesis 6 (SGCs should be less likely than consistently liberal or conservative Catholics to be strong partisans and more likely to be independents) and Hypothesis 7 (SGCs should be less likely than Liberals to vote Democratic and less likely than Conservatives to vote Republican).

In Figure 7, we show the relationship between our five Catholic ideological categories on the one hand and party identification and 2016 presidential vote choice on the other hand.²⁶ To get a clear sense of whether SGCs are more likely than Catholic Liberals and Conservatives to avoid identification with a major party, we group independents with respondents who identified their partisanship as “other” or said they were “not sure.” Supporting Hypothesis 6, SGCs are more likely than Liberals or Conservatives to be independent or otherwise unaffiliated with a major party. They also are much less likely than Liberals or Conservatives to be strong partisans. Whereas 47% of Liberals are strong Democrats and 44% of Conservatives are strong Republicans, only 27% of SGCs strongly identify with the Democratic Party and only 4% of SGCs identify strongly with the GOP. Not surprisingly, Catholic Moderates and Libertarians also are less likely than consistent liberals and consistent conservatives to be strong party identifiers.

Seamless Garment Catholics are not, however, neutral toward the two parties. They lean clearly in a Democratic direction, with over 48% of SGCs identifying with the Democratic Party (either strongly or weakly) and only 13% identifying as Republicans. This distinguishes SGCs from Moderates, who are more evenly split between the two parties (36% Democrats, 30% Republicans), and Libertarians who lean in a strongly Republican direction (56% Republican, 9% Democratic).

A similar pattern holds for the 2016 presidential vote. In keeping with Hypothesis 7, SGCs were less likely than Liberals to vote for Democrat Hillary Clinton and less likely than Conservatives to vote for Republican Donald Trump. They were more than twice as likely as either Liberals or Conservatives to vote for a candidate other than Clinton or Trump. However, SGCs were hardly undecided between the major party standard bearers. They supported Clinton by an overwhelming margin (75% to 19% for Trump). This separates SGCs from Libertarians, the vast majority of whom voted for Trump, and Moderates, who were relatively split between the Democratic and Republican nominees (44% for Clinton, 52% for Trump).²⁷

The patterns shown in Figure 7 remain when we control for various demographic factors. In Table S9 of the online supporting information (Section 3), we present the estimates of multivariate models of partisanship and presidential vote choice that control for religious commitment, education,

²⁶In Figure 7, the bars represent the percentage of SGCs and other ideological categories occupying each partisan category or voting for each presidential candidate. We cluster the bar by party identification or vote choice not because the bars represent the percentage of partisan groups or candidate electoral coalitions in each ideological category, but because having the bars proximate to each other allows for easier comparison of the partisan and candidate leanings of the ideological groups.

²⁷These patterns are not unique to 2016. In the ANES, Democrats receive at least 60% of SGCs’ presidential vote in every election year over 1992–2012. SGCs also lead every other group in the percentage who voted for someone other than the major party nominees over the full 1992–2012 period.

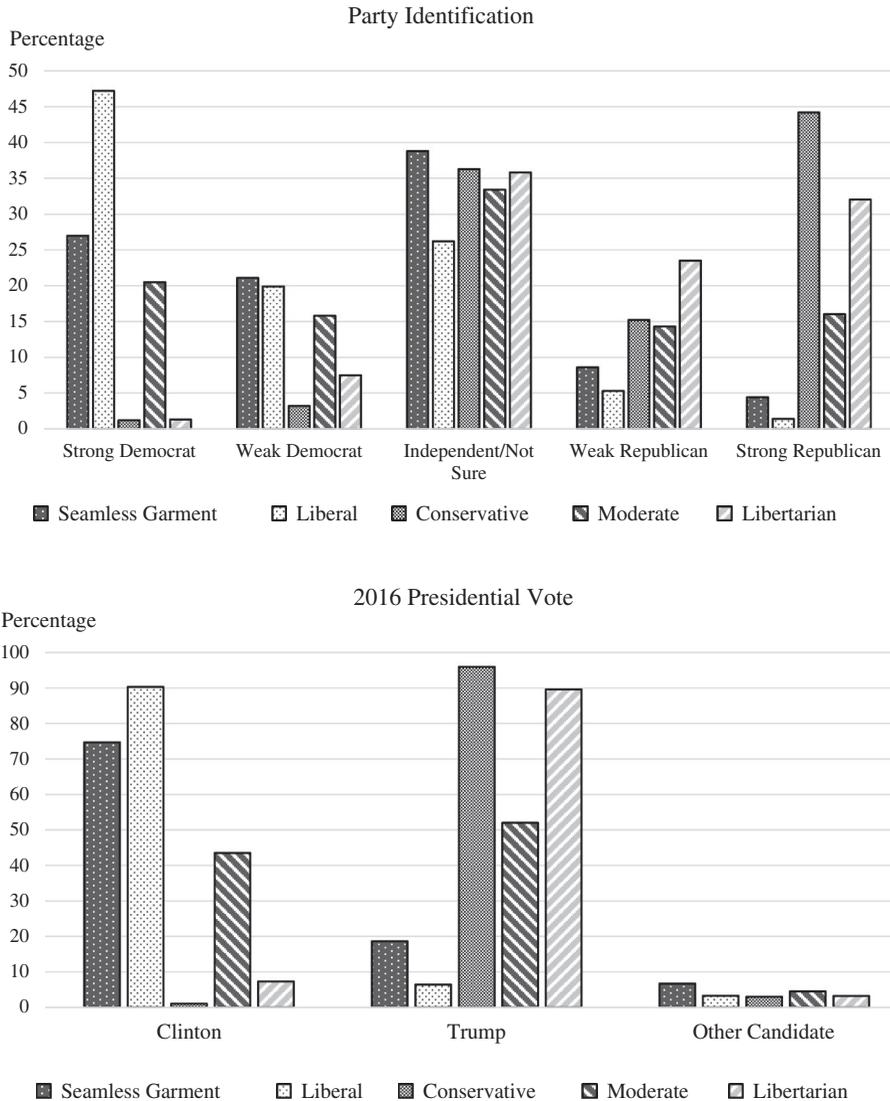


Figure 7. Party identification and 2016 presidential vote of Catholic ideological groups. The bars represent the percentage of SGCs and other ideological categories occupying each partisan category or voting for each candidate. *Source:* 2016–18 CCES (pooled).

household income, age, race, sex, and region. They confirm that SGCs are more likely than Catholic Liberals and Conservatives to be independent and to vote for non-major party candidates. They also confirm that, while SGCs are not as likely as Liberals to identify with and vote for the Democratic Party, they are more Democratic than every other Catholic ideological group.

These strong Democratic proclivities present a puzzle: Why do SGCs, despite sharing the anti-abortion stands that Catholic bishops have prioritized in their electoral guidance, break so heavily for pro-choice Democratic candidates? We suspect the answer lies in prioritization of social justice issues, a finding consistent with others’ observations that social justice issues outrank abortion in importance among Catholics (D’Antonio et al., 2013), especially those voting Democrat (Gray, 2018). Hypotheses 8–11 identify our expectations about the ways in which SGCs should employ this and

other dissonance-reducing strategies as they make voting decisions. In the next section, we discuss our tests of those hypotheses.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH CROSS-PRESSURES

Two-Party Avoidance

One way for Seamless Garment Catholics to forego the dissonance that comes from choosing a major party presidential candidate who supports only part of Catholic teaching on policy issues is to avoid making such a choice. Hypothesis 8 predicted that Seamless Garment Catholics would be more likely than Liberal and Conservative Catholics to avoid a two-party vote choice, either by supporting an independent or third-party candidate or by not voting at all. We already have verification of the first part—the SGCs who did vote for president in 2016 were at least twice as likely as Liberals and Conservatives to support independent or third-party candidates. What about abstaining from voting altogether? Our data suggest that SGCs also were less likely than other Catholic ideological groups to turn out to vote in 2016. Nearly 22% of seamless-garment adherents reported not voting in 2016. The next highest abstention rate was 16% for Moderates, with Liberals (12%), Libertarians (5%), and Conservatives (3%) following. Overall, well over one-quarter of SGCs in the 2016–17–18 CCES report either not voting in 2016 or voting for a candidate other than the major party nominees.

For a more rigorous test of our avoidance hypothesis, we estimated a logistic regression model with a dependent variable coded 1 for respondents who avoided voting for a major party nominee in 2016—either by voting for someone else or not voting at all—and 0 for major party voters. The model includes controls for demographic characteristics, religious commitment, and measures of the weakness of partisan and ideological identification—the 7-point party and 5-point ideological-identification scales folded and coded to range from strong party identifiers or people identifying themselves as “very” liberal or conservative to independents or moderates.

In Figure 8, we show the model’s predicted probabilities of avoiding two-party vote choice for the five Catholic ideological groups when all of the other independent variables are held constant at their mean values. The results clearly support Hypothesis 8 as Seamless Garment Catholics are more likely than any other Catholic group to either abstain from voting or vote for an independent or third-party candidate and the differences between the SGC probability and the probabilities for each of the other groups are all statistically significant. The contrast between seamless-garment adherents and Catholic Conservatives is particularly striking, with SGCs more than twice as likely as Conservatives to avoid a two-party presidential vote.

In short, our results make it clear that many supporters of the seamless garment pursued one of the common strategies for reducing the cognitive dissonance that comes with choosing a major party candidate who supports only some of your policy preferences. They avoided making the choice altogether.

Prioritization: Relative Issue Importance and Presidential Vote Choice

Although SGCs were more likely than Catholics with other ideological profiles to avoid a two-party vote choice, most SGCs voted for either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in 2016. How did they reduce the dissonance inherent in pairing their seamless-garment views with a vote for a major party standard bearer? One possibility is issue prioritization: accentuating the importance of the issue agenda on which their preferences align with the candidate they chose over that of the agenda on which they disagree with their chosen candidate. Our Hypothesis 9 posits that, because SGCs are cross-pressured by their policy views, they should engage in more prioritization than should

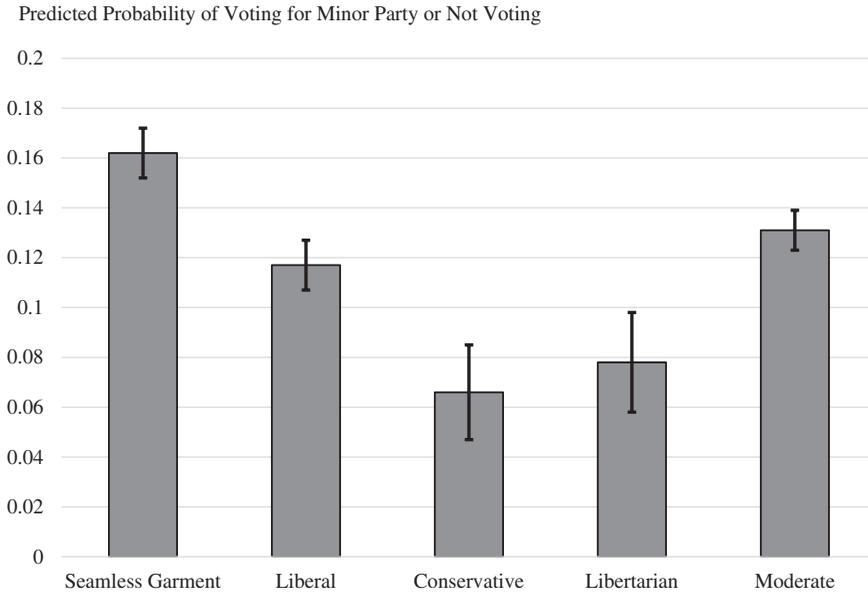


Figure 8. Avoiding two-party presidential choice by Catholic policy profiles. Bars represent predicted probabilities of abstaining from a choice between the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates, either by voting for some other candidate or not voting at all, predicted from a logistic regression model. Solid lines represent 83.5% confidence intervals. $N = 22,111$. Table S10 in the online supporting information contains full model results. *Source:* 2016–18 CCES (pooled).

consistently liberal or conservative Catholics—there should be a larger gap in the relative importance of morality and social justice issues for SGCs. Given the strong Democratic leanings of SGCs, it is likely that they will prioritize the issues on which they agree with the Democratic Party. Accordingly, we can refine Hypothesis 9 as follows:

H9a: On average, Seamless Garment Catholics should prioritize social justice issues over abortion and should do so to a greater extent than should Liberal and Conservative Catholics.

Hypothesis 10 holds that SGCs' vote choice should be linked to the importance of abortion relative to social justice issues. The probability of a Republican vote should increase as relative importance swings toward abortion, while decreasing as it swings toward social justice issues (social welfare, immigration, and/or the environment).

The CCES' issue importance measures offer a useful start for evaluating these hypotheses, but our results should be interpreted with caution because the measures were included only on the 2016 questionnaire, and then only for a nonrandom subset of respondents. About one-fifth of the 2016 CCES respondents (and 18.7% of Catholic respondents) received the issue-importance battery.²⁸ The questions asked respondents to rate the importance of various issues on a 5-point scale ranging from no importance at all to very high importance. The issues in the battery included

²⁸Communication with CCES staff revealed that the battery had been included for the survey's earliest respondents but was later removed to shorten the survey. Respondents who answered the issue-importance questions are somewhat older, more educated, and more likely to be White than respondents who did not. However, the two groups are very similar on income, sex, region, religious commitment, party identification, and ideology. Concerning our five Catholic policy profiles, SGCs are slightly underrepresented among respondents receiving the issue importance questions (6.6% vs. 7.5% of the full sample). Moderate Catholics also are underrepresented, while Liberals and Conservatives are overrepresented.

abortion and four issues in our social justice domain: immigration, the environment, health care, and Social Security.

To create our measure of relative issue importance, we identified the highest-ranking item among the four social justice issues and then subtracted its scale value from the scale value for abortion. Because higher values on the scales indicate greater importance, positive values on the relative-importance measure mean that the respondent rates abortion as more important than the highest-ranking issue out of immigration, the environment, health care, and Social Security. Negative values mean that the most important of those four topics rates higher than abortion in importance.²⁹ The measure ranges from -4 to 4 in theory, but from -4 to 3 in practice (with only a single Catholic respondent landing at 3).

For Catholics in the 2016 CCES, the mean value of this measure is -1.3 , meaning that, on average, Catholics view either social welfare, immigration, or the environment as somewhat more important than abortion.³⁰ In the top part of Figure 9, we show the means of our relative-issue-importance measure for our ideological profile groups. To assess Hypothesis 9 that, regardless of whether abortion or social justice issues are prioritized, the relative importance gap should be larger for SGCs than for Liberals and Conservatives, we also show the mean of the absolute value of the relative-importance measure. In the bottom part of the figure, we treat relative issue importance as a categorical variable and show the percentage of each profile group that places greater weight on abortion, greater weight on social justice issues, and equal weight on the two policy areas.

Our expectation that SGCs would prioritize social justice issues is clearly borne out in the data. Seamless-garment supporters, on average, rate their most important social justice issue nearly a full-scale point higher in importance than abortion. Moreover, 60% of SGCs rate social justice as more important than abortion, while less than 7% of SGCs attach greater importance to abortion than to social justice concerns.

However, our expectation that the gap between social justice importance and abortion importance would be greater for seamless-garment adherents than for other Catholic profile groups is thoroughly refuted. Both the absolute gap between abortion and social justice issue importance and the degree to which social justice concerns are prioritized over abortion are smaller for SGCs than for any other group besides Conservatives. And, the differences between the mean scores—on both the importance gap and its absolute value—of SGCs on the one hand and Liberals, Libertarians, and Moderates on the other hand are all statistically significant. Moreover, more than 68% of the Liberal, Libertarian, and Moderate groups rate social justice as more important than abortion and 3% or fewer rate abortion as more important. Not surprisingly, Catholic Libertarians attach the least significance to abortion as no one in that group rated abortion as more important than social justice issues.³¹

²⁹Recall that we classify respondents as liberal or conservative on social justice issues based on whether they were liberal on two of the three issue domains (social welfare, immigration, and environment) or conservative on two of the three domains. That means that a respondent's position on one of the four social justice issues for which we have importance ratings may be inconsistent with their ideological profile. Consequently, we only treat an issue as the most important social justice issue for the respondent if their position on that issue is consistent with their policy profile (e.g., a Church-consistent position for Liberals and SGCs).

³⁰On individual issues, Catholics assigned the highest importance to health care (mean = 4.5) and Social Security (4.5), followed by immigration (4.3), then the environment (3.7) and abortion (3.6).

³¹We estimated multivariate models in which both the relative-issue-importance variable and its absolute value were the dependent variables, and dummy variables for our Catholic ideological profiles, weakness of party identification, moderation of ideological identification, religious commitment, and demographic characteristics were the independent variables. The estimates of those models (in Table S11 of the online supporting information) confirm the results in Figure 9. They show that SGCs have smaller gaps in the importance they attach to social justice issues and abortion than do Liberals, Libertarians, and Moderates. Importantly, they also show that religious commitment is strongly and significantly associated with prioritizing abortion relative to social justice issues.

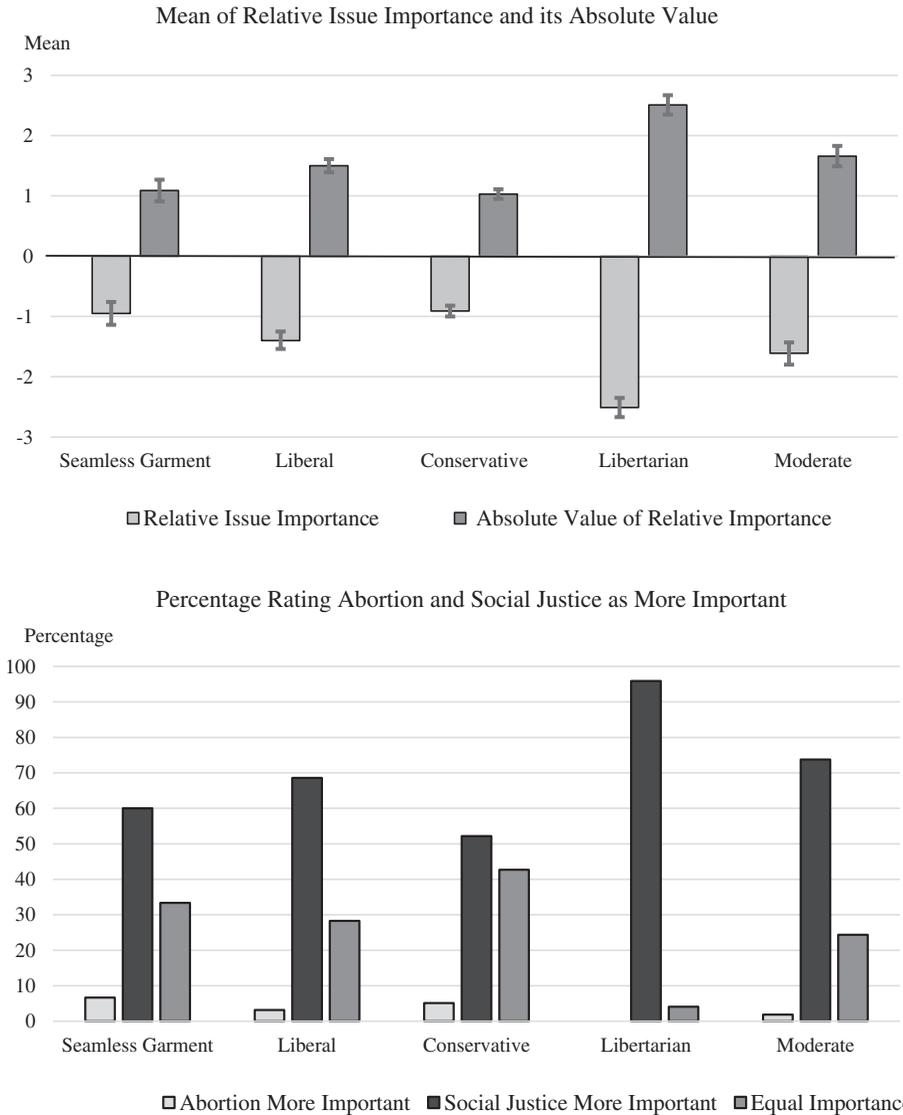


Figure 9. The relative importance of abortion and social justice issues by Catholic ideological profiles. The total number of observations for both parts of the figure is 1,710. The bars in the top part of the figure are 83.5% confidence intervals. *Source:* 2016–18 CCES (pooled).

In short, the evidence clearly forces us to reject both Hypothesis 9 about the relative importance gap for SGCs and Hypothesis 9a about SGCs’ prioritization of social justice issues over abortion. Catholics of all stripes, including those with a seamless-garment policy profile, place considerably more emphasis on issues in the social welfare, environmental, or immigration policy realms than they do on abortion. This suggests clear limitations to the influence of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, who have highlighted abortion as the most important of all Catholic concerns for several decades, on the political priorities of their flock. However, if there is any support at all for the Bishops’ policy priorities, it comes from the two groups who share the Church’s opposition to abortion: Seamless Garment Catholics and Catholic Conservatives.

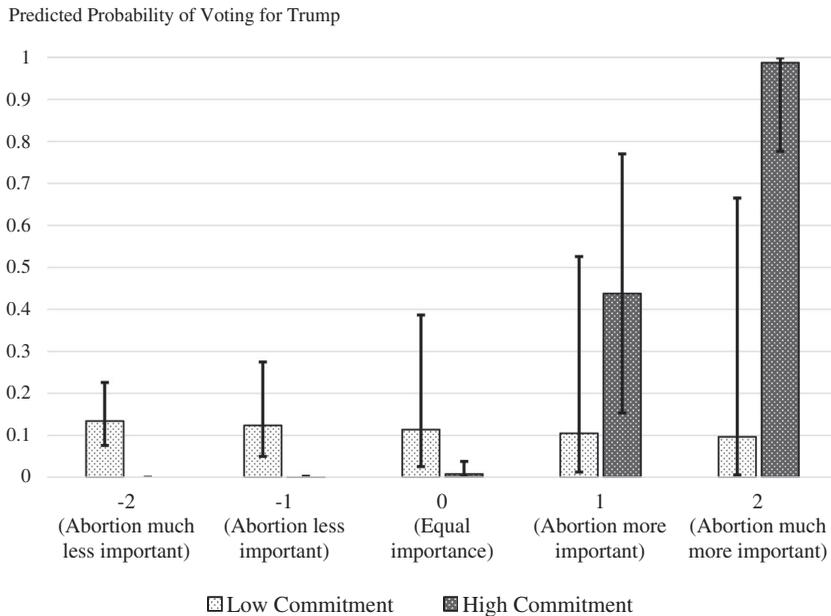


Figure 10. Seamless Garment Catholics’ two-party presidential vote, by relative issue importance and religious commitment. Bars present predicted probabilities of voting for Donald Trump in 2016. Solid lines represent 84% confidence intervals, computed with end-point transformation to ensure 0–1 bounds, on the predictions. $N = 100$. *Source:* 2016–18 CCES (pooled).

That the evidence runs counter to Hypothesis 9 (and H9a) does not mean, of course, that Hypothesis 10—on the linkage of relative issue importance to presidential vote choice—does not hold. To assess Hypothesis 10, we make our relative-issue-importance variable the key independent variable in a logit model of two-party presidential vote choice (coded 1 for Trump supporters). Because we have issue importance data on only 115 Seamless Garment Catholics, we use a slimmed-down set of controls: party identification, education, income, age, sex, race, and a dummy variable for SGCs with high levels of religious commitment.

In this model, we interact the commitment dummy with relative issue importance, and we do so for three reasons. First, our multivariate analysis of relative issue importance (see footnote 31) found that religious commitment is strongly associated with attaching greater weight to abortion relative to other seamless-garment issues. This should create greater variation in relative issue importance among the committed and, accordingly, may map it more closely to presidential preference.³² Second, because rating abortion as more important than social justice concerns is relatively rare among the Catholic laity but is commonplace among U.S. Bishops, doing so may signal that individuals take cues from the hierarchy and more committed Catholics may be especially likely to take such cues. Third, Catholic parishes’ tendency to specialize in either social justice or morality issues may cue the laity on how to prioritize those dimensions of Catholic teaching in their political behavior. These cues should be received most clearly by devout parishioners.

The estimates of this model, provided in Table S12 (Section 3) of the online supporting information, include a small coefficient on relative issue importance that is not statistically significant and a

³²Indeed, among high-commitment SGCs casting a two-party vote, we see less uniformity in which issue is most important (56% social justice, 13% abortion, 31% equal) than among their low-commitment counterparts (75% social justice, 10% abortion, 15% equal).

statistically significant positive coefficient on the interaction between relative issue importance and religious commitment. This indicates that relative issue importance is unrelated to the presidential vote choice of SGCs who are less religiously committed, but it is strongly associated with the vote choice of devout SGCs. We illustrate this in Figure 10, which displays how predicted probabilities of a vote for Trump vary across the five middle values of relative issue importance for more and less religiously committed seamless-garment adherents.³³

Due to our very small sample size, these findings should be treated with caution. What the figure shows, however, is that among SGCs who are highly committed to their faith, there is a stark polarization of presidential votes based on respondent-rated importance of abortion relative to social justice issues. For abortion to have a chance of swinging these Catholics' votes toward the Republican, however, it is not sufficient for abortion to be equal in importance to a social justice issue. The predicted probability of voting for Trump climbs from 0 to just .01 as the relative importance score changes from -2 to 0. Supporting Hypothesis 10, once abortion gains a 1-point edge on the 5-point importance scales, the vote becomes competitive but still favors Democrats (at a 0.44 probability of a Trump vote). With a 2-point advantage favoring abortion, a vote for Trump is virtually assured at a predicted probability of 0.99.

Meanwhile, among less religiously committed SGCs, there is no effect of relative issue importance on presidential vote choice. The probability of voting for Trump hovers between 0.10 and 0.13 regardless of the relative importance of abortion and social justice issues. Consequently, when abortion is less important to SGCs than are social justice issues, there is a statistically significant negative effect of religious commitment, spurring SGCs to be less likely to vote Republican. However, when abortion is deemed much more important than social justice, there is a statistically significant positive effect of religious commitment, spurring SGCs to become more likely to vote Republican.

When Seamless Garment Catholics do make a choice between major party presidential candidates, their selection closely aligns with the relative importance of their cross-pressuring issue dimensions, conditional on religious commitment. SGCs do not elevate social justice concerns over abortion any more than other Catholics do—if anything, the opposite is true—but, like Catholics as a whole, they generally do deem those issues more consequential than abortion, and this surely contributes to the group's strong Democratic leanings.

This analysis further suggests that abortion must be markedly more important than social justice to have any chance of pulling the votes of SGCs away from their Democratic default. Part of the reason for that may lie in SGCs' use of another cross-pressures coping strategy: selective misperceptions of candidate issue positions.

Assessing Selective Misperception

The final dissonance-reduction strategy we investigate is “selective projection” or “selective misperception.” Hypothesis 11 posits that Seamless Garment Catholics should be more likely than other Catholics who share their candidate choice to inaccurately perceive those positions of their candidate that conflict with the seamless-garment worldview. In other words, SGCs who vote for Democrats should be more likely than other Catholic Democratic voters to (falsely) perceive that the Democratic candidate opposes abortion. SGCs who vote for Republicans should be more likely than other Catholic Republican voters to (falsely) assign their Republican candidate a left-leaning

³³The probabilities were computed while holding other covariates at their means. A combination of the small sample size and the model predicting presidential vote choice exceptionally well for highly committed SGCs results in confidence intervals around the probability estimates that vary greatly in size and are less than 0 or greater than 1 when the predicted probabilities are very small or very large. The confidence intervals presented in Figure 10 thus were estimated using end point transformation in *SPost* (Long & Freese, 2006), leading to the compression of some intervals.

position on a social justice issue. If Seamless Garment Catholics are manipulating perceptions of candidate positions as part of a dissonance-reduction strategy, we should expect to find that SGCs have higher levels of misperception only on issues on which the positions of the favored candidate and the voter conflict.

The CCES lacks data on perceived issue positions of presidential candidates. However, the ANES has long asked respondents to place presidential nominees' positions on abortion and a key social welfare issue: whether government should guarantee that citizens have jobs and a good standard of living. We pool data from the presidential-year ANES surveys from 1992 to 2016 and create dummy variables indicating whether a respondent misperceived candidates' abortion and social welfare positions. The positions we count as misperceptions include identification of the Democrat as opposed to abortion in all cases or all cases except for rape, incest, and danger to the life of the mother; identification of the Republican as supporting legal abortion as a "matter of personal choice"; placement of the Democrat at one of the three right-of-center positions on social welfare; and placement of the Republican at one of the three left-of-center positions on social welfare.³⁴

Because our misperception variable only involves abortion and social welfare, we return to defining seamless-garment Catholics as Catholics who combine opposition to abortion with social welfare liberalism (as we did in the longer time series in Figure 3). An initial look at the data provides strong evidence of selective projection among pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics. Forty-five percent of Democratic voters in this group misperceived the Democratic candidate's abortion position, compared to 17% of other Catholic Democratic voters and 22% of SGCs who voted for the Republican. We see a symmetrical pattern of misperception for SGCs who voted Republican: 46% of pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics who voted for the Republican misperceived his position on government ensuring jobs, compared to 9% of other Catholic Republican voters and 12% of SGCs who voted for the Democrat.

For a more rigorous test of Hypothesis 11, we estimate multivariate logit models for six different dependent variables:

- Democratic voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Democratic candidate's abortion position
- Republican voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Republican candidate's social welfare position
- Republican voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Democratic candidate's abortion position
- Democratic voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Republican candidate's social welfare position
- Republican voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Republican candidate's abortion position
- Democratic voters' likelihood of misperceiving the Democratic candidate's social welfare position

Seamless Garment Catholics in the first two analyses face a conflict between their own issue position and that of their candidate; SGCs in the remaining four analyses do not. The models control for party identification, education, income, age, sex, race, and factual political knowledge.³⁵ They also include dummy variables for respondents who mentioned abortion or social welfare in open-ended responses about their most important problems or their likes and dislikes of the two parties and their candidates.³⁶ We include these variables because individuals should

³⁴Others (e.g., Briens & Wattenberg, 1996) consider the centrist positions on abortion and government-guaranteed jobs to also be incorrect. However, we gave voters the maximum benefit of the doubt in our coding since candidates' campaign messages are often ambiguous (Briens & Greene, 2004; Page & Brody, 1972).

³⁵Factual knowledge is the number of correct answers respondents supplied to three questions detailed in Table S3 of the online supporting information.

³⁶See the online supporting information (Table S3) for coding.

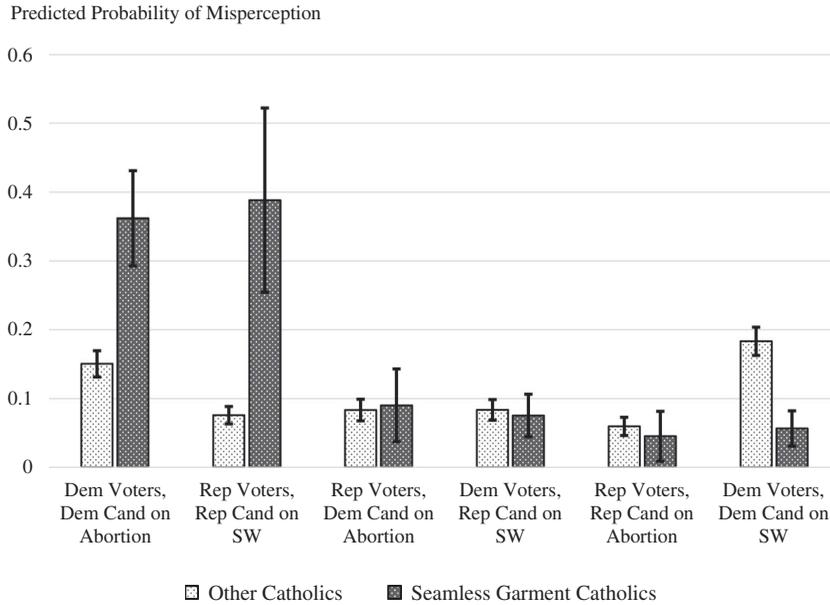


Figure 11. Misperception of candidate issue positions among Seamless Garment Catholics and other Catholics. Bars represent predicted probabilities of incorrectly perceiving a particular candidate’s position on a particular issue (abortion or welfare). Solid lines represent 84% confidence intervals around each prediction. Table S13 in the online supporting information contains full model results. *Source:* 1992–2016 ANES (pooled).

have more accurate knowledge of candidate positions on issues that are particularly consequential to them (Krosnick, 1990b).

In Figure 11, we show the predicted probabilities of misperception from these models—comparing pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics’ predicted probability of misperceiving a candidate’s position to that for Catholics with other policy views who voted for the same party’s candidate. Supporting Hypothesis 11, we see that pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics who voted for the Democratic candidate are significantly and substantially more likely than other Catholics voting for the Democratic candidate to falsely identify the Democrat’s abortion position as pro-life. Pro-life, pro-welfare Catholics who voted for the Republican candidate are even more likely than other Catholic Republican voters to inaccurately assign that candidate a pro-welfare position.

These results do not appear to result from any greater ignorance among SGCs versus other Catholics about candidate positions or politics generally. Our models control for factual political knowledge, and, more importantly, none of our other models show significantly greater inaccuracy of perception for Seamless Garment Catholics. In fact, SGCs voting Democratic are actually significantly *less* likely than other Catholic Democratic voters to get the Democrat’s welfare position wrong. That SGCs’ candidate position knowledge deficit relative to other Catholics emerges only with respect to the chosen candidate, and only then with respect to the issue on which the chosen candidate’s position conflicts with the position held by the SGC and Catholic teaching strongly suggests that perceptual biases linked to cognitive dissonance are present.

This strong support for Hypothesis 11 not only is consistent with expectations for cross-pressured voters’ handling of cognitive dissonance but also adds an important final piece to the puzzle of Seamless Garment Catholics’ strongly Democratic leanings. A large share of SGCs are pulling the Democratic lever in line with the heavy importance that they attach to the “social justice” relative to the “morality” threads in the seamless garment. But they also appear to be doing so while

having convinced themselves that the Democratic candidate shares their pro-life views on abortion. In other words, through selective perception and projection, many appear to have freed themselves of feeling very conflicted at all.

DISCUSSION

The Catholic Church boasts the most comprehensive body of politically relevant social teachings in Western religion. It communicates those teachings to its American flock through a well-defined religious hierarchy, a politically engaged group of American prelates, a clergy whose homilies do not sidestep controversial political topics, and quadrennial teaching documents designed to remind the laity of their civic and electoral responsibilities as faithful Catholics. Despite all of that, we find that the combination of policy attitudes consistent with the “seamless garment” of Church social teaching is relatively uncommon among American Catholics and may be declining further still.

Church leaders may take heart that seamless-garment attitudes are most common among the most devout Catholics and that Catholic commitment is associated with the maintenance of such attitudes. They also might find it encouraging that in our 2016–18 data, younger Catholics were more likely than older Catholics to support the seamless garment. Moreover, it appears that Seamless Garment Catholics are growing as a share of Latino Catholics,³⁷ and Latino Catholics are growing as a share of the American Church. Whether Latino Catholics maintain their seamless garmentism as they are caught between the pulls of their Catholic commitment and their (typically) Democratic party identification is another matter. Although Latinos show greater deference to Church authority than non-Latino Catholics, the importance they attach to it is not large in absolute terms. They are also about equally likely as non-Latino Catholics to profess to value the idea that one can be a “good Catholic” despite disagreement with the Church (D’Antonio et al., 2013). Of course, it is also possible that, like White Catholics, Latino Catholics, may grow less liberal on social justice issues as they move up the socioeconomic ladder.

More discouraging to proponents of the seamless garment is that devout White Catholics have become noticeably less likely to hold seamless-garment views. This trend is due primarily to the increasingly conservative social welfare attitudes of committed White Catholics, which in turn are related to their growing alignment with the Republican Party. The impact of partisanship on Catholic attitudes creates a conundrum for the Church. Catholicism’s staunchly pro-life position and the prioritization of abortion by the U.S. Catholic Bishops encourages devout Catholics—at least devout White Catholics—to affiliate with the pro-life party on abortion. GOP identification, in turn, may push Catholic devotees away from the Church’s liberal stands on social justice issues.

In contrast to this growing Republicanism, and despite the issue cross-pressures they theoretically face, Seamless Garment Catholics are strongly Democratic in their party loyalties and presidential voting behavior—although not as Democratic as Liberal Catholics. Among the most religiously committed SGCs, presidential voting is sharply polarized by the relative importance of abortion versus social justice issues. SGCs are not, in relation to other Catholics, unusually focused on social justice issues; our evidence suggests just the opposite. However, social justice issues do eclipse abortion in importance for SGCs, as for Catholics generally, and most SGCs seem to vote in accord with their social justice liberalism. Replication of our analysis on a larger sample of Catholics with better issue-importance data is needed for greater confidence in these conclusions. However, based on the evidence at hand, it appears that as long as social justice issues are at least equal with abortion in importance, Seamless Garment Catholics are unlikely to flock to the GOP.

³⁷We need larger samples of Latino Catholics to be confident about the growing share of SGCs within this group.

This does not mean that SGCs do not experience some level of psychological conflict in their voting decisions. In fact, they are more likely than other Catholics to engage in political behaviors consistent with mechanisms commonly used by cross-pressured voters to fend off cognitive dissonance. One such behavior is avoiding the dissonance-producing choice between major party candidates by either abstaining from voting or voting for a third-party candidate. Another is altering their perceptions about the choice—in this case, candidate issue positions—in order, it appears, to rationalize a vote for a candidate with a position that conflicts with the policy preferences of the voter and the Catholic Church.

The percentage of SGC voters misperceiving candidate positions—nearly half—may be startling, given that the parties' stands on nearly every issue have grown more distinct and the electorate has become more likely to recognize party differences (Levendusky, 2009). This should prompt further investigation, ideally with large samples of Catholics and research designs suited to causal inference and to better ascertaining whether projection is the process producing those misperceptions. Future research might dig more deeply into the sources of those misperceptions, asking, for example, what may be happening within Catholic parishes and other Catholic networks to encourage selective misperception of candidate positions among SGCs. Such a line of research, especially if extended to cross-pressured voters at large, could join this article in speaking to open questions about the individual and contextual characteristics that facilitate political misinformation and motivated reasoning (Jerit & Zhao, 2020).

Our findings have implications for the study of Catholic political behavior as well as the study of cross-pressures. They also may offer food for thought for Catholic religious and political leaders as they battle for the allegiance of the laity. For example, our findings suggest that as Catholic Liberals and Catholic Conservatives criticize each other for nonadherence to Church teachings, they both might look inward for evidence of Catholic apostasy. Conservatives, for instance, have critiqued the seamless garment as a “political comforter,” bestowing on “Catholic officeholders and their supporters... a free pass on abortion” (Uhlmann, 2004). In other words, seamless garment teaching may provide “moral cover” for pro-choice Democrats as they campaign for Catholic votes on the basis of social justice issues, while ignoring Church teaching on abortion (Byrnes, 1993, p. 510). Our evidence suggests that the pass that seamless-garment adherents give to Democratic candidates may be even freer than previously believed given SGCs' tendency to selectively misperceive the Democratic candidates they support as sharing their opposition to abortion.

At the same time, our evidence points to Conservative Catholics moving farther away from Church teachings, especially on social welfare issues, and they have been growing more conservative on environmental protection at the same time that Pope Francis has prioritized it. While Conservative Catholics seem to follow the U.S. bishops' call to elevate abortion above other issues by voting almost unanimously Republican, our data indicate that they attach greater importance to social justice issues—the very issues on which they disagree with the Catholic Church—than to abortion.

To what extent might ignorance or misinformation about, rather than disagreement with, Church teaching drive some of the recent growth in the ranks of liberal and conservative Catholics? It likely is a contributing factor given downward trends in Mass attendance (D'Antonio et al., 2013) and recent evidence of gaps in Catholics' theological knowledge (Pew Research Center, 2019b). However, scholars often imply that Catholics know the Church's positions well, particularly on highly salient issues like abortion. Miller argues, for example, that “the issue of abortion has come to define, and in many ways divide, the Roman Catholic Church” (2015, p. 152).³⁸ We

³⁸Relatedly, signals of the Church's opposition to abortion are ubiquitous in Catholic parishes. In a 2020 survey of Mass-attending Catholics, respondents were four times as likely to report recently hearing an anti-abortion homily as to recall recently hearing a message sympathetic to the pro-choice perspective (Pew Research Center, 2020).

doubt, therefore, that ignorance of Catholic teaching contributes very substantially to Catholics' support for abortion rights.

There may be a stronger case for Catholic ignorance of the Church's stands on social justice issues. That fewer than one-third of U.S. Catholics indicated having heard about *Laudato Si* soon after the encyclical's release (Li et al., 2016) suggests a lack of familiarity with the Church's emerging environmental teaching. Meanwhile, the Church's concern for the poor is among the aspects of Catholicism that the laity says it considers most personally important (D'Antonio et al., 2013, pp. 55, 56). However, debate has long existed over whether Catholicism's commitment to caring for the poor means that government must provide that care—an early study of the prevalence of seamless-garment views excluded social welfare issues for just that reason (Cleghorn, 1986). A principle of Catholic social teaching termed “subsidiarity” calls for social needs to be addressed by the lowest, most intimate levels of social organization that are capable of meeting the need, and can be applied to either limit or expand the role of the government in particular cases (Cochran & Cochran, 2008). We thus cannot eliminate the possibility that, whether out of ignorance, misinformation, or an ambiguity-enabled effort to cope with faith-related cognitive dissonance, Catholics other than SGCs may be projecting their policy views—or at least their belief in Church comfort with diverse moral perspectives (D'Antonio et al., 2013)—onto the Church. Psychological theories could fruitfully be applied to such puzzles of institutional loyalty and purported interest representation, not only in the Catholic Church but conceivably with other interests or identities that citizens may claim in their political engagement.

In an earlier discussion, we speculated that issue cross-pressures might manifest themselves differently among Seamless Garment Catholics than among other Americans with partisan-incongruent policy views. The Catholic Church claims a unique degree of authority. But in partisan terms, the Church clashes with itself—it takes both sides. That may muddy the Church's electoral cues or signal that it has left voting decisions to the personal conscience of its faithful, thus reducing the political influence of Church teaching relative to secular influences such as partisanship.

Our evidence pointed more to muddied cues from the Church than to weightier ones. Most importantly, SGCs for whom Church influence should be strongest—those who regularly pray, attend Mass weekly, and profess that religion is important to their lives—are more likely than less devout SGCs to identify with a major party and vote for major party presidential candidates. Devotion to the Catholic faith thus seems to engage SGCs more deeply in partisan politics rather than alienate them from it. This is consistent with general patterns among religiously active Americans and also, perhaps, with *Faithful Citizenship's* call for Catholics to participate fully in American political life.

Future research might assess this idea empirically by comparing the political behavior of Seamless Garment Catholics to that of other Americans who share their pro-life, pro-social justice policy profile. If Catholicism's tendency to occupy both partisan sides and to fracture into communities that prioritize either social justice or morality issues encourages a unique response to political cross-pressures, then we should see differences in the political behavior of SGCs and non-Catholics with a seamless-garment issue profile. Beyond the study of religion and politics, our research suggests that political behavior scholars may productively apply the insights of dissonance theory to understand the prevalence, choices, and perceptions of cross-pressured voters. It is surprising that more recent research has not done so, considering that escalating partisan polarization potentially intensifies cross-pressured voters' dilemma. It may also be normatively important to explore how American politics can be inclusive of cross-pressured voters: Such voters appear to moderate the increasing emotional combativeness of American politics, yet they seem to be dwindling as a percentage of the electorate (Mason, 2016).

An intriguing question for future research is whether we might find similar patterns in the behavior of Catholic voters in other countries, given cross-national differences in party and electoral systems, the size of the Catholic population, and the relationship between church and state. We suspect that we might.

Even in majority-Catholic countries, political parties that are formally Catholic are rare. More common are parties that might be called Catholic because they “appeal to voters’ Catholic identity, incorporate elements of Catholic doctrine, and/or maintain partnerships with Catholic associations in civil society, in order to compete in elections” (Mantilla, 2019, p. 90). Yet such parties run the ideological gamut, including by representing only pieces of the Church’s policy agenda. SGCs may enjoy more partisan choices in the proportional representation electoral systems that are common outside the United States, potentially lessening the temptation to avoid voting and perhaps also reducing attitude persuasion. However, despite more plentiful party choices, larger percentages of citizens in other developed countries than in the United States say that no party or no candidate fully represents them (Dalton, 2020), thus leaving the door open to party-based cognitive dissonance for SGCs. Moreover (although not specific to Catholics), studies also indicate that projection (Nasr, 2021) and misperception of political facts (Flynn et al., 2017, pp. 129, 130) are common around the globe. A further step in cross-pressures research might explore their prevalence and resolution across different types of party and electoral systems, although identifying cross-pressured voters in a multiparty system may pose a methodological challenge.

Our research has offered little to disrupt the theme of fracture that is ubiquitous in the literature on Catholic politics. It may be that fracture, as Madison argued in Federalist No. 10 (Hamilton et al., 1787), is intrinsic to human nature, particularly in a transnational institution like the Catholic Church. If the seamless-garment philosophy represented an attempt to forge Catholic unity across competing religious and political factions in the United States, that effort was stymied by the failure of political elites, even Catholic ones, to adopt it and perhaps by the failure of many Catholic religious elites to embrace it.

Yet the electoral dilemma faced by those Catholics who can best claim to have followed Church teaching in their political views—the “Seamless Garment Catholics” we have studied here—does not appear to be as difficult in practice as it is in theory. Some SGCs avoid electoral politics altogether, but the most religiously committed among them dive right in, using the psychological coping strategies commonly employed by cross-pressured voters. Their efforts actually may be facilitated by the Church itself. While the unity of Catholic social teaching may appear to pose an electoral choice problem, the behavioral Church that takes both sides also may offer a comfortable solution—ironically, in its own divisions.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web site:

Table S1. Question Topics Used in Policy Profile Measurement, by Data Source

Table S2. Question Wording and Response Options for Policy Profile Measurement

Table S3. Question Wording and Response Options for Key Variables other than Policy Profile Variables

Table S4. Estimates of Logit Model of Holding Seamless Garment Beliefs (Figure 2)

Table S5. Estimates of Multinomial Logit Model of Catholic Issue Profiles (see footnote 13)

Table S6. Estimates of OLS Regression Model of Committed White Catholics’ Social Welfare Attitudes over Time (see footnote 20)

Table S7. Estimates of Multinomial Logit Model of the Effect of Religious Commitment in 2010 on Catholic Policy Profiles in the 2014 Wave of the CCES Panel (Figure 5)

Table S8. Estimates of Multinomial Logit Model of the Effect of Party Identification in 2010 on Catholic Policy Profiles in the 2014 Wave of the CCES Panel (See Figure 6)

Table S9. Estimates of Multivariate Models of the Relationship between Catholic Policy Profiles and Party Identification/ Vote Choice (augmenting descriptive data in Figure 7)

Table S10. Estimates of Logit Model of Major Party Vote Avoidance (Figure 8)

Table S11. Multivariate Models of Relative Issue Importance (see footnote 31)

Table S12. Estimates of Logit Model of Issue Importance, Religious Commitment, and the Two-Party Presidential Vote (Figure 10)

Table S13. Estimates of Logit Models of Misperception of Candidate Issue Positions (Figure 11)