CESifo WORKING PAPERS

9598
2022

February 2022

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CESifo

Impressum:

CESifo Working Papers
ISSN 2364-1428 (electronic version)
Publisher and distributor: Munich Society for the Promotion of Economic Research - CESifo GmbH
The international platform of Ludwigs-Maximilians University's Center for Economic Studies and the ifo Institute
Poschingerstr. 5, 81679 Munich, Germany
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Editor: Clemens Fuest
https://www.cesifo.org/en/wp
An electronic version of the paper may be downloaded
· from the SSRN website: www.SSRN.com
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CESifo *Working Paper No. 9598*

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Abstract

We analyze the effect of state visits by the Catholic pope on human rights in the host country to understand how a small theocracy like the Vatican can exert disproportionate political influence in international politics. Our theoretical model of the strategic interaction between the Catholic Church and host governments shows how the pope's use of conditional approval and criticism incentivizes governments to refrain from human rights violations. Drawing on a new dataset of papal state visits outside Italy and a novel identification strategy, we test for the first time whether governments react by improving human rights protection in anticipation of a papal visit. Our empirical analysis offers robust evidence in support of this causal effect.

JEL-Codes: D740, D780, F500, K380, P160, P260, P480, Z120.

Keywords: Catholic Church, human rights, international political economy, pope, repression, rewards, sanctions.

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1. Introduction

A popular assumption in international politics is that a country's political influence is roughly proportional to its size in terms of population, economy, and military. For a long time, the Vatican has been a startling exception to this rule. Even though it lacks the economic and military means of other nation states, the Vatican enjoys a reputation as an influential player in the global political arena.[1] This exceptionalism is due to the Vatican being home to the Roman Catholic Church, one of the oldest religious organizations and the largest Christian church with 1.3 billion members worldwide.

Among religious organizations, the Catholic Church is unmatched in its influence on global politics. It is credited as a catalyst for breakdowns of repressive regimes in the Eastern Bloc and Latin America and has served as a mediator in domestic conflicts as well as international disputes, such as that between Argentina and Chile in 1978 (Hanson 1987; Weigel 2003). Nevertheless, political economists and political scientists have paid little attention to the agenda of the Vatican and its potential effects on the political and economic performance of countries around the globe. This is the first quantitative empirical study of the worldwide political influence of the Catholic Church. We focus on papal state visits, one policy instrument used by the Vatican. More precisely, we analyze whether and how official state visits by the pope influence governance quality in the form of human rights protection in host countries.

Our study complements extant research on the persuasive power of the Catholic Church (Bassi and Rasul 2017; Farina and Pathania 2020; Deiana et al. 2022). However, unlike previous studies that are interested in attitude changes in the general population after a papal visit, we argue that politicians react rationally and in anticipation of the pope's visit. We introduce a theoretical model of the strategic interaction between the Catholic Church and the host country's government. It predicts, firstly, that governments improve human rights protection before papal visits. Secondly, papal visits are more likely where governments are more responsive to the prospect of approval or criticism by the pope, indicating that our estimated treatment effects are an upper bound for the treatment effect on the untreated countries.

[1] See, e.g., Boyle et al. (2017). Some have questioned this importance. Stalin, for example, famously asked tongue-in-cheek how many divisions the Vatican's military even had. Napoleon, in contrast, suggested one should deal with the pope as if he had 200,000 men at his command.

To test our hypotheses, we conduct the first empirical analysis of the political effects of official state visits by the pope on host countries. By addressing the endogeneity of the pope's travel itinerary, we also provide unique empirical evidence on the decision criteria underlying the pope's choice of destination countries. For this purpose, we have collected a novel dataset of papal visits and various indicators suited to explaining the selection into treatment. We use characteristics of the pope, Catholic Church calendars, proxies for the strategic interests of the Vatican, and characteristics of the host country as exogenous and excludable predictors of pope visits.

Our estimated causal treatment effect of papal visits indicates an increase in human rights protection. This effect sets in before the pope's visit. It can be explained by the pope's ability and frequently demonstrated willingness to voice approval (or criticism) of politicians for their (insufficient) efforts to protect human rights. Consistent with this explanation, there are no further improvements in human rights protection after the visit of the pope. Yet, there is also no sign that human rights protection reverts to its original level.

The salience of human rights during pope visits is supported by an event study of the global media coverage of national human rights issues. During a papal visit, international media pay significantly more attention to the human rights record of the host country, especially when the pope addresses the topic in his speeches. This supports a key element of our assumed causal mechanism.

So far, there is only a small literature on the political role of religious leaders, among them the Catholic pope. Fuchs and Klann (2013) study the effect of visits by the Dalai Lama on countries' trade relations with China. They find that officially receiving the Dalai Lama at the highest political level implies a punishment via a reduction of exports to China. Lin et al. (2019) show that this effect is driven by Chinese state-owned enterprises reducing their imports from host countries. Bassi and Rasul (2017) study the pope's visit to Brazil in 1991 regarding its effect on both the short-run intention to use contraception and long-run fertility outcomes in the affected population. Farina and Pathania (2020) find a sizable local reduction in abortions after papal visits to Italian provinces. Deiana et al. (2022) argue that the pope's visit to Lesbos in early 2016 shifted attitudes in Catholic countries and put pressure on the European Union to deal more effectively with its refugee crisis.

Our study contributes to a broader literature that uses political economy models to explain the strategic behavior of religious organizations. Barro and McCleary (2016, 2017) analyze how the Catholic Church uses saint-making to inspire more intense religiosity in targeted countries and to discourage secularization and conversion to Protestantism (see also McCleary and Barro 2019, p. 136). Ferrero (2002) argues that the competition for sainthood within the Catholic Church serves as an incentive mechanism for different factions to pursue religious innovations. Padovano and Wintrobe (2013) ask, more generally, whether the economic model of dictatorship is descriptive of historical Vatican politics and find empirical support for this conjecture.

We also add to a literature on how religious organizations can influence political outcomes. So far, this literature has focused on other channels of influence than pope visits, such as the Catholic Church's organization of opposition to the Nazi movement in Weimar Republic elections (Spenkuch and Tillmann 2018). Religious organizations are known to influence public policy (Grzymala-Busse 2015) and they can play an important role in political transitions, as the Catholic Church did in democratization processes after the Second Vatican Council (Andersen and Jensen 2019).

Finally, we contribute to a quickly growing literature on the use of rewards and sanctions in international politics (Aaken and Simsek 2021; Aidt et al. 2021). Aaken and Simsek (2021), for example, outline a theoretical mechanism with similarities to ours by describing how UN human rights bodies provide reputational rewards to governments for improving human rights and complying with their international treaty obligations. A part of this literature studies the effects of state visits by high-level representatives of the US government (e.g., Nitsch 2007). Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2009) show that visits by the US president or secretary of state influence public opinion in the host country about the United States and its foreign policy. Goldsmith et al. (2021) find more generally that high-level diplomatic visits increase public approval of the visiting leader's job performance and that the effect is particularly large when the visit is mentioned in the news media. Furthermore, their empirical evidence seems to suggest that states can generate soft-power capabilities independent of their military power.

In the next section, we outline the theoretical arguments for why and when papal visits should promote human rights protection in host countries. Section 3 introduces our data and presents the empirical analysis before Section 4 concludes.

2. Theory

2.1 The Catholic Church and human rights

We start this section by explaining the commitment of the Catholic Church to the protection of human rights. Then, we provide an overview of the organization of papal visits (Section 2.2) and introduce a game-theoretical model of how papal visits affect human rights (Section 2.3).

The Catholic Church is well-known as a global advocate for human rights, but like most religious organizations, it also holds missionary aspirations. With the pope being the head of both a religious body and a sovereign state, the Church is highly centralized and hierarchically organized. Its commitment to the protection of human rights was stipulated only some decades ago during the Second Vatican Council in 1965, after which human rights became part of the Church's social teaching (Troy 2009). Moreover, the Second Vatican Council led to a more interventionist approach of the Church in international affairs that not only made the Vatican endorse human rights, but also actively promote them across the globe (Andersen and Jensen 2019; Huntington 1991; Shelledy 2004).[2]

However, it was already in the papal encyclical Pacem in Terris, issued by Pope John XXIII in 1963, that the Vatican emphasized the importance of respecting human rights. Accordingly, "*man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life (…). He has a right to freedom in investigating the truth, (…) to freedom of speech and publication, and (…) to be accurately informed about public events*" (par. 11). The encyclical further outlined man's political rights and rights of association, in all of which it was clearly influenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Most importantly, it argued that "*any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them, would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force*" (par. 61).[3] Thus, the Church denied legitimacy to any government that does not respect human rights.

[2] Andersen and Jensen (2019) argue that the involvement of the Catholic Church in democratization processes since the Second Vatican Council was a means to promote the protection of human rights. Guiso et al. (2003) show that Catholics brought up after the Second Vatican Council have different cultural values, as they are more trusting, tolerant, and respectful of legal norms.

[3] Decisive in the approach of the Catholic Church to politics was the Declaration of Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) in the Second Vatican Council in 1965. It demands that all states protect the rights

Its commitment to human rights has given the Catholic Church an opportunity to develop an identity as a defender of societal interests. It can set standards of human rights, publicly call for their protection, and claim responsibility when improvements occur.[4] This image helps to cultivate support from adherents. Promoting human rights on a grand scale has become an essential part of the brand of the Catholic Church that sets it apart from smaller religious organizations. Papal visits constitute one major instrument the Church can use to visibly address human rights issues (see, e.g., Crespo and Gregory 2020; Golan et al. 2019). Anecdotal evidence suggests a positive effect of many papal visits on human rights. Ahead of Pope John Paul II's visit to the Philippines in 1981, President Marcos lifted the country's repressive martial law. Cuban authorities have released prisoners before papal visits in 1998 and 2012. These changes happened after the visits were publicly announced, indicating that governments reacted to anticipated papal visits.

2.2 The organization of papal visits

As the pope represents both a religious organization and a sovereign state, an official visit by the pope must be initiated by formal invitations from both the national conference of Catholic bishops and the national government of the host country (t_1 in Figure 1). In 2017, Pope Francis did not visit India along with Bangladesh, as the Indian Catholic Church failed to convince Prime Minister Modi to invite the pope. Eventually, Modi officially invited Pope Francis in 2021 to visit India at a later date. When the pope indicates his willingness to visit (t_2), the planning of the travel itinerary begins. It has to be concluded before the visit (t_4). After the parties have agreed on a date and the negotiations are closed, the Vatican at some point publishes an official announcement (t_3). Particularly in case of longer-distance travels, visits to multiple countries in close proximity are often bundled, which adds to the length of the planning period. The period between the invitation, a tentative agreement, and the visit can easily span several years. The pilgrimage of John Paul II to Cuba in 1998, for example, was preceded by a long-standing invitation by the Cuban bishops, intense negotiations, and finally a formal

of Catholics as well as of other minorities regardless of their religious observance. It was therefore interpreted as a religious call for promoting human rights (Weigel 2003).

[4] Many of the pope's public speeches to foreign audiences address the topic of human rights (Golan et al. 2019). The human rights discourse has been consistent across all popes since the Second Vatican Council (Troy 2019).

invitation by Cuban President Castro in 1996 (Weigel 2003, p. 806). Most tentative agreements at t_2 lead to a pope visit, but deviations from the travel itinerary can occur when the planning is suspended or a more spontaneous visit is added, such as Pope Francis' visit to Myanmar in 2017 in response to the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims. This explains why in the empirical analysis we identify factors that predict a visit in advance and independent of potentially endogenous short-term considerations.

Figure 1: Timeline of a papal visit

The travel itinerary reflects both the political and pastoral nature of pope visits and includes consultations with the government, public sermons to local Catholics, and the serving of ecclesiastical matters. The sermons are given to promulgate Catholic Church values and they often draw large crowds. Human rights are one main topic of the pope's speeches, next to messages on family and fertility. The pope can express his approval or his criticism of changing human rights conditions also in other ways, for example, when he appears with government representatives or when he meets with political opposition groups or nongovernmental organizations critical of the government.

During the pope's trip to South America in 1987, the full range of his diplomatic toolkit was observable. In Chile, the dismal human rights performance of the government led the pope to label the government dictatorial. He called for democracy and human rights and met with opposition groups. Argentina showed a far better political development at the time and received praise from the pope.[5] Comparable positive or negative remarks on human rights protection, such as lecturing Paraguay's government in 1989,[6] condemning persecutions in Sudan in 1993,[7] or approving of President Marcos' lifting of martial law in

[5] The New York Times, April 12th, 1987, p. 3.
[6] The New York Times, May 17th, 1988, p. 11.
[7] The New York Times, February 11th, 1993, p. 3.

the Philippines in 1981,[8] are part of many papal visits. The public appearances of the pope during these visits are aimed at local audiences, but the Church also tries to transmit the Catholic moral teachings to an international audience. Public relations instruments, such as press corps, press conferences, and the dissemination of news via the Vatican's own media outlets, accompany pope visits and add to the comprehensive coverage in international media (Hanson 1987, p. 5; Weigel 2003, p. 491). In Section 3.6 we show that international media coverage during pope visits focuses on the human rights situation in the host country, especially when the pope draws attention to it.

2.3 Mechanisms linking papal visits to human rights

Researchers, so far, have attributed the influence of papal visits primarily to the use of persuasive messages (see, e.g., Bassi and Rasul 2017 or Farina and Pathania 2020) and political mediation by the pope. Of course, interaction with the pope during his visit can influence the religiosity and values of citizens and politicians, and the pope can act as a mediator in conflict-prone societies. Such arguments require assumptions about information provision or changes in preferences caused by the pope. We focus here on a more parsimonious explanation that does not necessitate assumptions about the pope having a unique ability to change peoples' minds or deescalate conflict in society.

Our argument is based on the ability of religion to serve as a legitimizing force for governments (see, e.g., Coşgel et al. 2012). A religious authority can endorse a political entity or actor and in exchange, it is rewarded with economic and political benefits. Historically, secular leaders relied frequently and systematically on religious authorities as a source of political legitimacy (Cantoni et al. 2018; Fox and Sandler 2004, p. 35; Rubin 2017). The Catholic Church has been a major player in the market for political legitimacy and was often rewarded generously, for example by being declared the official state religion of the country in question (Coşgel et al. 2018). In past centuries, the Church's side of the bargain was to declare the rule of political leaders divine. Since then, legitimation practices have taken a different form, such as appearing publicly with or praising a government and publicly supporting its policies.

[8] The New York Times, February 18th, 1981, p. 1. The pope's sentiment during his visit to the Philippines was generally more negative and reflected the Catholic Church's critical view of the government's other human rights abuses (Weigel 2003, p. 392).

Malis and Smith (2021) provide an alternative explanation for how a papal visit might help an incumbent government to stay in power. Accordingly, the pope would only invest in relations with a government that he expects to stay in power. A papal visit could, therefore, provide a signal of the incumbent government's strength to domestic political opponents with incomplete information. This informational mechanism can be seen as complementary to our theoretical model.

In the following, we model the strategic interaction between the pope and the government of a potential destination country. We set up a game with two players, called the government and the Church, and four decision stages.

(A) the players

The Church (or, synonymously, the pope) competes on a market for followers against other religious denominations. Its utility function (U) can be described as

$$U = U(X) \qquad (1)$$

where X is the number of adherents and $\frac{\partial U}{\partial X} > 0$ indicates nonsatiation. Religious organizations offer credence goods of salvation and consumers decide to follow a religion depending on the expected quality of these goods (Ekelund et al. 1996). The Church can offer other goods as well, such as social services, but these are not important for our argument here. As the utility impact of credence goods is unknown, consumers evaluate their quality based on the reputation of the supplier.

A good reputation is thus desirable for any religious organization, but it does not come for free. Advertising religious goods requires extensive and continued brand-building efforts. Since the Second Vatican Council, the reputation of the Catholic Church is closely linked to its public image as a promoter of human rights. The Church uses brand-building strategies to nurture that image. A better reputation raises the expectation among consumers regarding the quality of the offered religious goods and hence leads to more followers and more utility for the Catholic Church.

The brand-building effort of the Catholic Church has two additional reinforcing effects on the attractiveness of the religious goods offered. First, the prestige of a firm can reflect directly on its consumers (Becker and Murphy 1993). If the reputation as a human rights promoter translates into more prestige, consuming the religious good offered by this producer becomes more attractive. Secondly, its advertising can also signal the quality of

other (nonreligious) experience goods offered by the Catholic Church (Nelson 1974). If the Church uses the effort reflected in its human rights reputation to signal its commitment to protecting the safety of its followers, consumers will value membership in the Catholic Church higher.

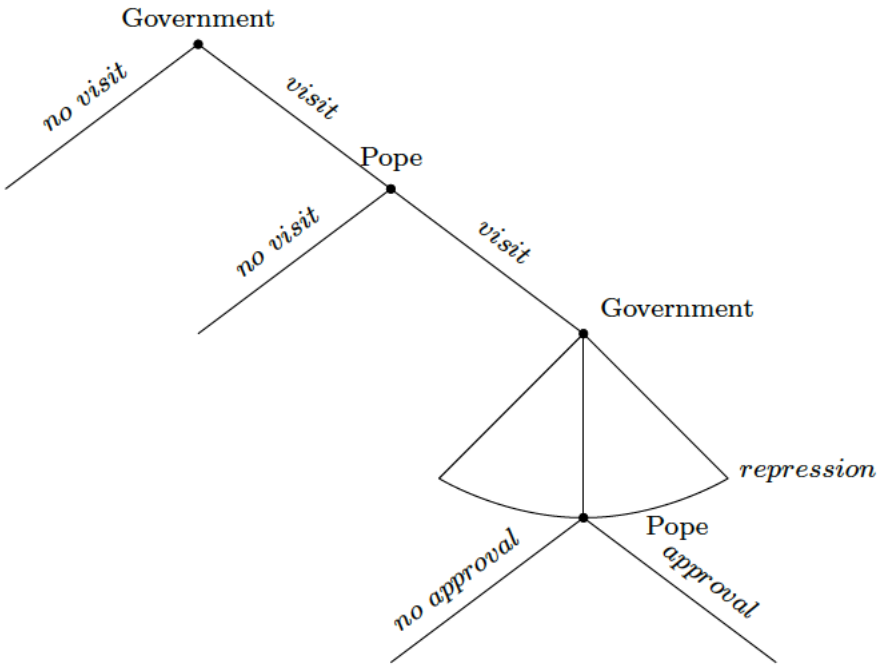
The second player in our game, the government, has the objective to remain in office while maximizing its own consumption of public resources (our modelling follows the seminal political economy model of Wintrobe 1998). To maximize the resources available for its own consumption, the government only spends a budget (B) that allows it to produce a minimum level of power (π_{min}), as required for staying in office:

$$\pi = \pi_{min} \qquad (2)$$

(B) the game

The timing of the game portrayed in Figure 2 is as follows: In the first stage (i.e., at t1, as portrayed in Figure 1), the government decides whether it invites the pope. If there is an invitation, the Church can accept or reject it in the second stage (at t2). If the pope accepts the invitation, the government chooses how much repression to use before the papal visit. In stage 4 (at t4), the pope decides whether he expresses approval of the government during the visit.

Figure 2: The game tree



(C) the actions

In *stages* 1 and 2 combined, the government and the pope either agree on a visit or the game ends with the payoffs of the outside option.

Stage 3 covers the period between the acceptance of an invitation and the visit. The government can use three inputs to build and maintain the required political power to stay in office. Loyalty (L) is bought from citizens. Repression (R) requires investment in repressive resources. It is aimed against political opponents and in more extreme cases even against the general population. Papal approval (ρ) affects the population's perception of the government. As the pope expresses his approval of a government, the latter is viewed as more legitimate, which increases its political power.[9] L and R are continuous variables, where higher values indicate more resources spent. For simplicity, ρ is a dichotomous variable that indicates approval by the pope. Politicians face a trade-off between channeling resources into loyalty or repression. As the input factors

[9] Papal approval could also increase the government's political power by improving its international standing or yielding economic benefits. Our parsimonious model does not account for this. We also do not model that the pope can criticize governments for not living up to his expectations, as this effect would simply be the inverse of praise and the conclusions of our model would remain the same.

repression, loyalty, and papal approval all generate political power, we can formulate the following production function

$$\pi = \pi(R, L, \rho) \qquad (3)$$

which is well-behaved with $\frac{\partial \pi}{\partial R} > 0$, $\frac{\partial \pi}{\partial L} > 0$, $\frac{\partial \pi}{\partial \rho} > 0$, $\frac{\partial^2 \pi}{\partial R^2} < 0$, and $\frac{\partial^2 \pi}{\partial L^2} < 0$. Increased use of the production factors L and R generates additional political power, but with marginally diminishing effectiveness.

The government's budget constraint

$$B = P_R R + P_L L \qquad (4)$$

encompasses the two input factors repression and loyalty and the respective per unit costs of repression (P_R) and loyalty (P_L). Papal approval is not part of the government's budget constraint, as it is not a tradable good.

In *stage 4*, the pope is visiting the country and can express approval of the government, for example in his public speeches. We assume that the pope rewards the government (i.e., $\rho = 1$), if the government decreases its level of repression R below a threshold $\bar{R}$ over the period between the agreement on a visit and the eventual visit.

$$\rho = 1 \; if \; R < \bar{R},$$

$$\rho = 0 \; if \; R \geq \bar{R} \qquad (5)$$

As explained above, the Church aspires to maximize its following by maximizing its positive reputation. We assume that the Church faces no relevant resource constraint. Its indirect utility function (V) depends only on the host government's use of repression and the pope's public reaction to it. The Church's indirect utility function is characterized by the following preference ordering:

$$V(\rho = 1|R < \bar{R}) > V(O) > V(\rho = 0|R \geq \bar{R}) > V(\rho = 0|R < \bar{R}) \approx V(\rho = 1|R \geq \bar{R}) \quad (6)$$

The Church's utility is maximized, if the host state's government reduces the use of repression before the pope's visit and the pope praises the government for doing so. The second highest utility is obtained under the outside option of no papal visit $V(O)$. Even less attractive from the point of view of the Church is the scenario in which the government continues to use repression and the pope does not approve of (or criticizes) this policy. The Church reaches the lowest utility level if the pope's reaction does not

match the government's actions, i.e., if a repressive government is praised or a government that reduces repression is not praised for it. This preference ordering implies that the pope's reaction will always match the government's actions and that the pope prefers not to visit a country if it is foreseeable that the government is not willing to make acceptable concessions regarding the use of repression.

(D) the decisions

To deduct the optimal decisions of the government and the Catholic Church, we solve the game by backward induction. In *stage 4*, the pope visits the host country and decides based on the preference ordering in (6) whether to express approval of the government.

In *stage 3*, the government chooses its level of repression for the time until the papal visit. In the absence of a papal visit or if the pope does not approve of the government's policies in *stage 4* (i.e., $\rho = 0$), the government maximizes the quantity of resources available for its own consumption by minimizing the budget spent on loyalty and repression, while being able to stay in power:

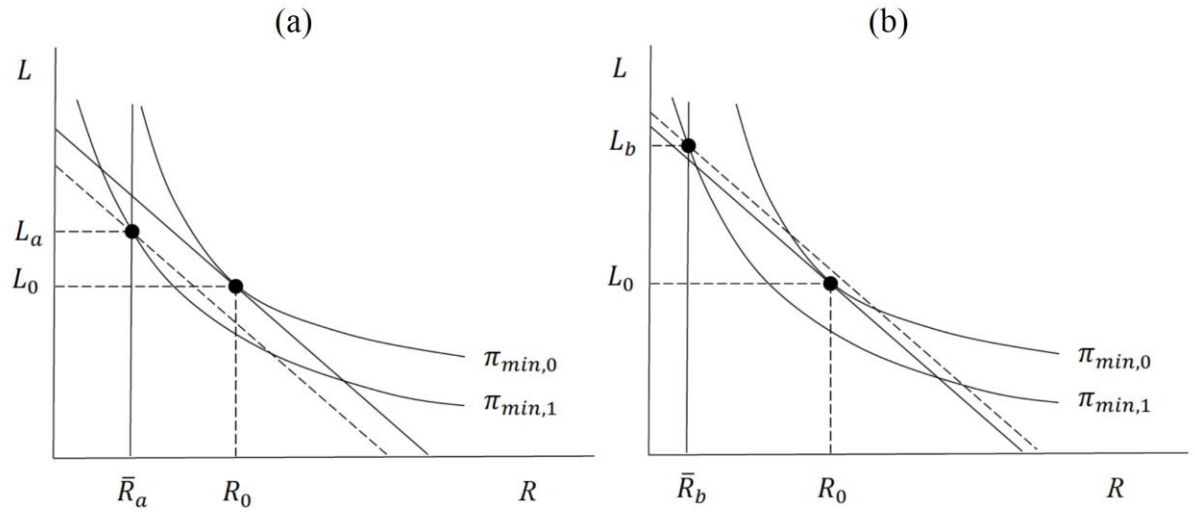
$$Min\mathcal{L}(R, L, \lambda) = P_R R + P_L L + \lambda[\pi_{min} - \pi(R, L)] \qquad (7)$$

At the optimum, the marginal cost of acquiring power through more loyalty equals the marginal cost of increasing power via the use of repression, or

$$\frac{\pi_R}{\pi_L} = \frac{P_R}{P_L} \qquad (8)$$

The cost-minimizing quantities R_0 and L_0 are depicted in diagram (a) in Figure 3. The minimized costs $B_0 = P_R R_0 + P_L L_0$ are displayed as the solid budget line, which is tangent to the isoquant $\pi_{min,0}$.

Figure 3: The government's cost-minimization problem with and without a papal visit



Note: The convex curves are isoquants that represent bundles of government policies that suffice to stay in power (π_{min}). $\pi_{min,0}$ is the isoquant for the case where either $\rho = 0$ or there is no papal visit; $\pi_{min,1}$ is the isoquant for the case where $\rho = 1$. The straight diagonal lines are budget lines with (dashed) and without (solid) the pope's approval. The vertical solid line ($\bar{R}$) represents the maximum amount of repression at which the pope is willing to approve of the government's policies.

A papal visit with approval ($\rho = 1$) shifts the isoquant inwards, because less loyalty and repression need to be acquired to stay in power. The size of the shift depends on how much legitimacy the government gains from the pope's approval. However, the pope only approves of the government's policies, if its repression level does not exceed $\bar{R}$. If $\bar{R} \geq R_0$, the government can choose its preferred policy mix corresponding to the point where the budget line is tangent to the new isoquant $\pi_{min,1}$. This might be the case for countries with an almost flawless human rights record. However, for most countries, the pope will see potential for improvement.

If $\bar{R} < R_0$, the government faces a trade-off. It gains from the pope's approval and the shift towards a lower isoquant. At the same time, the government cannot acquire its preferred policy mix and it, therefore, has to spend more money on loyalty than what would be minimizing costs given the new isoquant. The two diagrams (a) and (b) in Figure 3 illustrate this trade-off. The difference between $\pi_{min,0}$ and $\pi_{min,1}$ is the same in the two

diagrams, but the pope has different expectations regarding the level of repression that can be tolerated while commending the government ($\bar{R}_a$ and $\bar{R}_b$). In diagram (a), the government can meet the pope's expectations and, due to his approval, government expenditures can still be reduced, as illustrated by the dashed budget line. Diagram (b) shows a situation in which the pope's approval cannot compensate for the costs the government would have to incur to reduce repression to $\bar{R}_b$.

Figure 3 illustrates that the government's decision to lower repression to the level expected by the pope or to leave it at its own preferred level depends on the amount by which the pope demands repression to be reduced (i.e., the position of $\bar{R}$), the state's ability to substitute repression with loyalty (the slope of the isoquant), and how much legitimacy the government gains from papal praise (the size of the shift of the isoquant). This implies that not all governments are willing to meet the pope's expectations.

In *stage 2*, the decision of the Catholic Church to agree to a visit depends on the expected behavior of the government in *stage 3*. The pope's willingness to agree to a visit is higher, if he expects the government to be responsive and improve human rights protection to $\overline{\mathrm{R}}$ before his visit. This argument rests on the assumption that showing a positive sentiment is beneficial for the pope, for example in terms of political capital.[10] Once there is a visit, the pope will have to forego these benefits, if the government shows an unsatisfactory human rights record. If this outcome is to be expected, the pope will not agree to a visit in the first place. This has an important implication for the interpretation of our empirical results. When we are estimating an average treatment effect on the human rights performance of treated countries, the estimated effect should be considered an upper bound for the potential treatment effect on the non-treated countries. In other words, if the pope would choose to travel to more countries, one would expect a marginally decreasing effect of papal visits on these countries' human rights performances, as their governments can be expected to be less responsive.

In *stage 1*, the government compares the expenditures needed for producing $\pi_{min,1}$, a scenario with a pope visit, to the outside option of $\pi_{min,0}$, i.e., no pope visit. Technically, the government is indifferent in our model between not inviting the pope and inviting the

[10] Although not modelled here explicitly, the inverse is even more obvious. It is politically costly for the pope to criticize a government that increases or maintains a high repression level and it might thus not be in the pope's interest to visit such governments and risk confrontation.

pope but not conforming to his expectation of improving human rights. However, this is only because we made the simplifying assumption that the pope chooses between approval and no approval without the option to criticize the host. In the current model, all governments could invite the pope, but the pope would only visit governments that can be expected to improve their human rights protection. If we grant the pope the ability to criticize, our model changes only insofar that governments who are not willing to meet the pope's requirements would also not be willing to invite him.

To sum up the insights derived from our theoretical model: First, governments are expected to improve human rights protection before papal visits. Second, papal visits are more likely where governments are more responsive to the benefit of receiving the pope's approval. Third, governments should be more responsive where approval by the pope yields large gains in legitimacy. However, governments should be less responsive to the pope where it is more difficult to substitute repression with loyalty.

The development of human rights after a papal visit cannot be explained by our model. As long as the government's gain in legitimacy prevails, the level of repression remains on a lower level. Improvements in human rights protection could also have lasting consequences if, for example, investments are made into permanent infrastructure, institutions are reformed to change incentives in the public sector or government officers are retrained. However, as the pope's approval and criticism are less effective from afar, the inputs repression and loyalty may simply revert to their original levels.

3. Empirical analysis

3.1 Where does the pope travel?

One contribution of our research is to introduce the first global dataset on papal travels outside of Italy. Our dataset covers over 8,500 country-year observations since 1964, when the Pope resumed the practice of Papal state visits. Indeed, no pope before Paul VI had ever left Europe. As we account only for papal travels for which also human rights data is available, our dataset ends in 2019 and covers in total 283 state visits. Therefore, our analysis is unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which interrupted papal travels in 2020. Figure A1 in Appendix A visualizes the global distribution of papal state visits. The majority of those visits were during the papacy of John Paul II who held office for 25 years

– almost as long as the other three popes combined. The probability for a papal visit in a random country-year is around 3%, but there are notable differences in countries' likelihood of being visited by the pope.

Most pope visits outside of Italy have been to other countries in Europe (5% is the probability of a visit for an average country-year in Europe). The second most likely continent to be visited were the Americas (4%). Visits to Africa, Asia or Oceania have been far less common (2%). Given that popes are rather old, their health status is an important constraint on their traveling schedule. In years in which the pope was hospitalized, state visits were significantly less likely (2%). On the other hand, personal ties and preferences of the pope also affect his destination choice. The pope's country of birth has a substantially higher probability of being visited in any given year (27%).

The existence of formal diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the destination country favors a visit by the pope (4%). The pope is even more likely to visit countries at the time formal diplomatic relations are (re-)established (5%) or when there is an anniversary for the establishment of diplomatic relations (5%). Jubilees celebrating the anniversary of the evangelization of a country are frequently visited by the pope with increasing probability for 50- (9%), 100- (11%), or 500-year jubilees (21%).

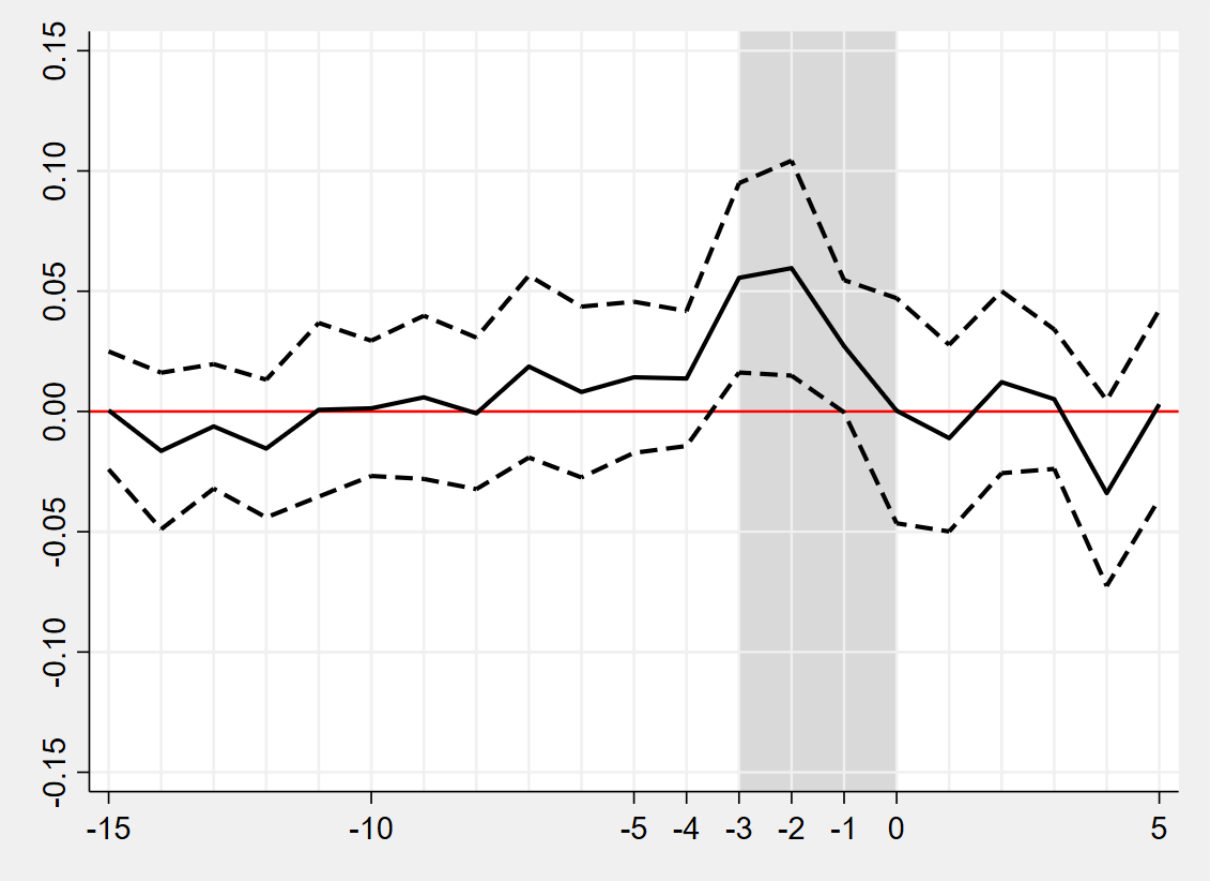
The pope is also likely to visit the major events and meetings of the Catholic Church around the world. Particularly the International Eucharistic Congress (46%), the World Youth Days (92%), the World Meeting of Families (67%), and the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (100%). In contrast, the pope does not travel to countries where coups have taken place (0%) and even if a coup attempt was unsuccessful, a papal visit in the same year is unlikely (1%). The pope is said not to visit countries in years of elections, but our data does not support that. In general, the pope is more likely to visit democracies (4%) than nondemocracies (2%).

3.2 Timing the effect of papal visits on human rights

In a first step of our analysis, we demonstrate the evolution of human rights around a typical visit by the pope. For this purpose, we estimate a linear regression model where the dependent variable is the first difference of a continuous latent human rights indicator by Fariss (2014, 2019). We include as independent variables the level of human rights

protection in the previous year, country- and year-fixed effects, and 21 dummy variables identifying the year of a visit as well as the fifteen years before and the five years after. Figure 4 illustrates the point estimates of these 21 dummy variables as well as the 95% confidence interval based on panel robust standard errors.

Figure 4: Changes in human rights before, during, and after papal visits



Note: Estimated lags and leads of papal visits with 95% confidence intervals (standard errors clustered on the country level). The dependent variable is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019).

Although the displayed coefficients only describe the evolution of human rights before and after a papal visit and not necessarily a causal effect of that visit, Figure 4 provides us with information on the potential timing of the effect on human rights. Accordingly, human rights improve significantly starting three years prior to the pope's visit and there is no more improvement (but also no reversal) after the visit. Most of the improvement in human rights occurs two to three years before the papal visit, which roughly coincides

with our assumed planning period. One possible concern with this observation is that the pope may simply choose to visit countries that are already on an upward trajectory regarding their protection of human rights. However, Figure 4 does not indicate that there are significant improvements in human rights in the period that is clearly before the planning horizon of a papal visit. The following empirical analysis will focus on demonstrating that the stylized fact presented in Figure 4 can indeed be interpreted (at least partially) as a causal effect of an anticipated papal visit.

3.3 Estimating the effect of papal visits on human rights – OLS

For all models estimated in this subsection, we modify our dataset such that the dependent variable and the covariates are collapsed for the year of a papal visit and the three years before the visit by taking the mean value. This leaves us with one observation per visit by the pope and the estimated coefficient (δ) on our treatment dummy measures the mean annual effect of a papal visit over a four-year period. All country-years without a visit by the pope and outside the three-year window before a papal visit remain annual observations. This manipulation of the data accounts for the fact that the collapsed years are not treated independently from each other. Simple panel data estimation with standard errors clustered on the country level would underestimate the standard errors of the treatment effect (see Bertrand et al. 2004 for a related estimation problem).

Our goal is to estimate the following equation (the *outcome model*):

$$\Delta y_{it} = \alpha y_{i,t-1} + x'_{it}\beta + \delta d_{it} + u_{it} \qquad (9)$$

where Δy_{it} is the first difference of the level of human rights protection, $y_{i,t-1}$ denotes the level of human rights protection in the previous period, x_{it} is a vector of covariates that potentially explain changes in human rights protection, and d_{it} is a binary indicator that takes the value 1 if a country is treated, i.e. if it is visited by the pope. Our parameter of interest is δ (the average treatment effect on the treated, or ATT). The vector x in the outcome model comprises six standard explanatory variables for changes in human rights (see, e.g., Davenport and Armstrong 2004; Poe and Tate 1994; Poe et al. 1999). From the Penn World Table 10.0, we include as socio-economic characteristics the growth rates of a country's population and of its income per capita (Feenstra et al. 2015). We further include magnitude scores for both civil and international warfare from the Polity IV

project (Marshall 2019) and another conflict indicator constructed from the Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem V11.1). Finally, we include a dummy variable for successful coups d'état based on Bjørnskov and Rode (2020). Note that in line with the choice of our dependent variable, we consider as covariates only factors that could explain changes in the level of human rights protection within a country and not differences in the level of human rights protection across countries. Thus, we do not control for indicators such as income per capita or the absolute size of the population, but rather for their respective growth rates. For the same reason we do not include country-fixed effects.[11] Table B1 in Appendix B describes the variables we use in our empirical analysis and their data sources. Table B2 provides descriptive statistics.

The results in Table 1 show that papal visits are associated with a significant improvement in human rights protection. Our baseline model includes 146 countries observed between 1964 and 2019 in 6,536 country-year observations. We include our vector of control variables x in model specifications (2) to (4). Model specifications (3) and (4) include a linear time trend and year-fixed effects, respectively. The OLS estimated effect of a papal visit remains very stable and statistically significant over these model specifications. Substantively, our estimates indicate that the positive human rights effect of a papal visit is about one third of the size of a coup d'état's negative effect on human rights. The estimated effects for our control variables are also highly plausible and consistent with the literature. Economic growth is linked to improvements in human rights. Population growth, conflict, and successful coups deteriorate human rights. The significant negative coefficient on the lagged level of human rights protection indicates conditional beta convergence in the level of human rights protection.

<< Table 1 about here >>

In a first attempt to challenge the causal interpretation of our estimated ATT, we run placebo tests (see Neumayer and Plümper 2017, p. 62). Their results are shown in Tables C1 to C4 in Appendix C. In our first placebo test (Tables C1 and C2), we vary the treatment assignment by replacing the year in which the pope visits a country by either a four-year-lag or a four-year-lead. This test serves to ensure that it is really the timing of the visit that matters and moving the time window forward or backward should lead to an estimate of

[11] All our results are, however, robust to controlling for country-fixed effects, which is equivalent to accounting for country-specific time trends in human rights.

the ATT that is close to zero and not statistically significant. Indeed, we find that our estimated effect of pope visits does not capture any broader country-specific time trends. After adding control variables, none of the estimated treatment effects are significant at the 5% level.

In another placebo test, we do not vary the treatment but the outcome of the treatment (Tables C3 and C4 in Appendix C). Specifically, we study the effect of a pope visit not on basic human rights but on women's rights. Given that the Catholic Church can hardly be called a role model in the promotion of gender equality (see, e.g., Boyle et al. 2017), we would not expect that women's rights improve before a visit by the pope in the same way as basic human rights do. We use two composite indices from V-Dem for the political empowerment of women and gender discrimination. We estimate the same models as in Table 1, only replacing human rights data with women's rights data. Our placebo tests do not show a statistically significant effect of pope visits on the protection of different types of women's rights. Overall, our placebo tests are consistent with a causal interpretation of the estimated treatment effects, as they cannot reproduce an equivalent significant and robust effect estimate.

3.4 Estimating the effect of papal visits on human rights – ETM

Next, we apply an empirical model that explicitly accounts for the endogeneity of the treatment in evaluating the causal influence of papal visits on target states' respect for human rights. Endogenous treatment models (ETM) allow for the identification of causal effects, even if the selection into treatment is based on unobservable factors that also affect the outcome of interest. Identification presupposes the availability of one or more variables that affect treatment assignment without being directly related to the outcome of interest.[12]

To account for the endogeneity of treatment assignment, the outcome model (9) estimated above using OLS is now complemented by a binary choice model that explains selection into treatment (the *selection model*):

[12] The ETM employed here was first introduced by Heckman (1976; 1978) and is closely related to the Heckman selection model. See Cameron and Trivedi (2005) for a thorough discussion and Gutmann et al. (2020) for an application to the human rights consequences of US sanctions.

$$d_{it}^{*} = z_{it}'\gamma + v_{it} \qquad (10)$$

where d_{it}^{*} is a latent variable, which is assumed to be standard normally distributed and if this latent variable is above a threshold, the respective country-year is treated. z_{it} is a vector of exogenous covariates that affect the likelihood of being selected into treatment. The vector z in the selection model does not have to overlap with the vector of covariates x employed in the outcome model. However, estimating the ATT requires at least one variable in vector z that is not also included in vector x. This variable (or variables) need(s) to be (jointly) significantly correlated with the likelihood of being treated, but uncorrelated with the error term of the outcome model. We refer to such a variable as a *treatment instrument*. All parameters that have to be identified to compute the ATT can be estimated simultaneously by maximum likelihood. In contrast to the OLS estimator used above, these ETM estimates are not based on the assumption that the treatment assignment can be considered random.

In our vector *z,* we include all control variables from the outcome model plus additional variables that are supposed to predict the probability of a country-year being treated. In other words, these treatment instruments indicate the probability that a country is visited by the pope in a particular year. We argue here that these variables are not directly related to changes in the level of human rights protection in a country. The following variables are our treatment instruments and unlike the variables in x they are measured in the year of the papal visit (i.e., without taking the mean value).

The first group of variables describes *characteristics of the pope* in office. As our sample covers the tenure of the last four popes, we include three dummies for the time in office of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. These capture differences in the popes' general propensity to travel due to their unobserved and time-invariant characteristics. To account for the popes' changing propensity to travel over the course of their tenure, we also control for their age and we include a dummy variable that indicates whether the pope was hospitalized in a given year. Finally, we include a dummy variable that indicates the birth country of the pope, as the pope might be more likely to visit his home country.

The second group of indicators describes *country characteristics* that might favor a visit by the pope. We use binary indicators for whether there is a 10-, 50- or 100-year anniversary of diplomatic relations with the Vatican in a country-year. We do not use an indicator for the year in which diplomatic relations are (re)established, as this is not

necessarily exogenous to the country's human rights performance. Another group of country characteristics includes the spatial, genetic, and religious distance between a country and Italy (which we use to proxy distance to the Vatican). We measure spatial distance as the log-geographic distance of a country's capital from Rome. Long-distance travel can be exhausting for the pope, making it less likely that the pope will visit far-away countries. As this effect should critically depend on the age of the pope, we add an interaction term between the pope's age and the geographic distance between the country's capital and Rome to our model. At the same time, the pope might be less likely to visit countries with a larger genetic or religious distance from Italy, which reflects relatively larger differences in preferences and higher barriers to interaction and communication between these populations and traditional members of the Catholic Church (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2016). How relevant these barriers still are is reflected in the frequently voiced criticism that the Vatican's leadership structure is Eurocentric and underrepresents developing nations in the Southern Hemisphere relative to their share of church members. Pope Francis, for example, is the first non-European pope since the eighth century.

The third group of indicators describes country characteristics that might be relevant for or descriptive of the *strategic interests of the Catholic Church*. These include the population shares of Catholics, other Christians, and Muslims (as the major competing monotheistic religion). We also control for the degree of religious pluralism (or competition) in a country, as measured by a Herfindahl index of adherence shares. These factors may be important for the decision of the Catholic Church to invest resources into competing for members in the respective country.

Still in the same group, we rely on a set of indicators derived from data on saint-making by the Catholic Church, which was collected by Barro and McCleary (2016). As their dataset ends in 2009, we have coded all canonizations and beatifications between 2010 and 2019 ourselves. Two of the indicators count the (log) number of individuals from a country that have become saints during the history of this country, as well as the corresponding number for the last ten years. These indicators are supposed to capture a revealed interest of the Catholic Church in competing for members in these countries. We also control for the number of new saints made on a continent over the last ten years as a proxy for the broader regional interests of the Church.

Finally, we include two binary indicators to control for whether a pope has visited the respective country during the last five years or during the five years before that, as well as two indicators for how often a pope has visited the respective region during these time intervals. Previous visits to the country itself should lower the probability that a pope visits the same country only shortly after. In contrast, previous visits to other countries in the geographic region might be reflective of the Church's strategic interest in terms of competition for adherents and should, thus, be linked to a higher probability for a papal visit.

Our fourth and last category is concerned with major *church events*. It comprises indicators for congresses, synods, and jubilees of the Catholic Church that increase the likelihood that the pope will visit a specific country or a specific region of the world. International congresses, such as the International Eucharistic Congress, serve as meeting points for representatives of the Catholic Church and bishops from a region regularly assemble at Episcopal Conferences.[13] These events give the pope the opportunity to personally address local leaders of the Catholic Church as well as large crowds of followers. The Holy Sea itself periodically hosts synods of bishops within its vicinity. They run over months and often require the presence of the pope in the Vatican, making it difficult for him to travel internationally. However, when a synod's theme focuses on a particular country or region, this could increase the probability of papal travels to that country or region in the same year. Jubilees are years of celebration in the Catholic Church and provide opportunities to amass its followers. National churches use the occasion of jubilees of the evangelization of a country to celebrate their existence. Thus, we control for 50-year, 100-year and 500-year anniversaries of national churches. We have collected information on all these church events from various sources.

The number of indicators used here to predict papal travels is rather large, because there is neither an established theory, nor any empirical evidence on the main factors responsible for the selection of the pope's destination countries and the timing of travels. While we start with a broad theory-driven exploration of many potential factors,

[13] We include the most important assemblies: the World Meeting of Families, the World Youth Days, the International Eucharistic Congresses, and the important regional episcopal conferences (Episcopal Conference of Latin America – CELAM, Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar – SECAM, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference – FABC, Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania – FCBCO).

robustness checks will show later that a much smaller subset of factors is sufficient to reliably predict a significant share of the papal travel itinerary.

3.5 Endogenous treatment model results

Tables 2 and 3 show the results for the selection model and the outcome model, which are estimated simultaneously by maximum likelihood estimation. Analogous to the outcome models estimated above using OLS, we gradually add the control variables (model 2), then a linear time trend (model 3), and finally year-fixed effects instead of the time trend (model 4). In the selection model, we find that Paul VI who was in office from 1963 to 1978 had, ceteris paribus, a lighter travel itinerary in terms of the number of countries visited than the popes that followed him. Not surprisingly, we find that increasing age significantly lowers the probability that the pope visits a country. An anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican as well as major church events in the country favor a papal visit. The pope is more likely to travel to countries if their population is genetically more similar to that of Italy. This is commonly interpreted as indicating cultural similarity between these populations (see Spolaore and Wacziarg 2016). The pope is less likely to visit a country that is geographically more distant, but only if the pope is above the age of 75. A country is more likely to be visited by the pope if he has visited other countries on the same continent in the past five years, but less likely if the respective country itself has been visited recently. Finally, we find that the pope is more likely to visit a country if human rights were not well protected in the past and if the country is not involved in an ongoing international war.

<< Tables 2 and 3 about here >>

The results of the outcome model in Table 3 take into account the endogeneity of the treatment assignment. We find the same positive and significant effect of pope visits already indicated by our OLS estimates in Table 1. However, the size of the coefficient estimates has more than doubled, suggesting that simple regression analysis underestimates the positive effect of papal visits on human rights, because the pope chooses travel destinations where human rights are otherwise not doing well. This is consistent with our significant and negative estimate of rho, which suggests that unobservables that adversely affect a country's human rights situation follow a pattern similar to unobservables that increase the likelihood of a visit by the pope. Substantively,

our estimates imply that a visit by the pope improves human rights by almost as much as they deteriorate following a successful coup d'état.

Although our endogenous treatment model estimates indicate a clear causal effect of anticipated pope visits on a country's human rights performance, the large number of treatment instruments in our selection model might raise concerns that each one of them is in fact exogenous and excludable from the outcome model. We validate these assumptions in additional estimations presented in Appendix D. First, we exclude all treatment instruments that could (even if it is unlikely) somehow be affected by the country's human rights performance in the five years leading up to the visit. These are six indicators in total. Two indicators measure whether the host country or other countries in the region had been visited by the pope in the past five years. Two indicators measure the log-number of Catholic saints from that country and the number of new saints from the past ten years. The last two variables measure the occurrence of Synods in the Vatican, which unlike major Church events abroad might not have to be planned for years in advance. The regression results in Table D1 show that even after omitting these potentially non-exogenous treatment instruments from the selection model, the effect of a pope visit is still highly statistically significant and of the same size. In a second step, we omit treatment instruments from the selection model that are potentially not excludable from the outcome model. In other words, these might have a direct effect on the human rights performance of the country even without a visit from the pope. For this purpose, we remove all Church celebrations (such as the World Youth Days or the International Eucharistic Congress) from our model – in addition to those variables we already dropped in Table D1. The results in Table D2 show that even then the effect of a pope visit is highly statistically significant and if at all the estimated coefficient size increases with the reduced set of treatment instruments. Overall, these robustness tests convincingly rule out concerns about the exogeneity or excludability of the treatment instruments and, thus, about the validity of our ETM results.

Having established a robust and plausibly causal relationship between pope visits and improvements in human rights protection, we next turn to the question of effect heterogeneity. It can be concluded from our theoretical model that the effect of a pope visit should depend on the share of Catholics in the population, the income level of the host country, and the political institutions of the host country. A higher share of Catholics

may make criticism voiced by the pope during his visit politically more costly for the host country government, which adds to its incentives to improve the human rights situation in advance. However, in Section 3.6 we study the coverage of pope visits and human rights by the international press, which might indicate that local Catholics are not the primary audience of the pope's human rights related criticism. The host country's income per capita may determine the resources at the government's disposal, which can be used to protect human rights and substitute repressive policies with redistribution (Davenport and Armstrong 2004). Governments of high-income countries might, therefore, be more responsive. Finally, being criticized by the pope may be more costly to democratic governments, as they are facing competitive elections (ibid.). Therefore, we would expect a larger effect of pope visits on human rights protection in democracies. To test these three conjectures, we interact the treatment indicator δ (1) with the share of Catholics in the population, (2) with a dummy variable for income per capita above 6,000$ according to Feenstra et al. (2015), and (3) with a dummy variable for democratic regimes as coded by Bjørnskov and Rode (2020). The results are shown in Tables E1 to E3 in Appendix E. The effect of pope visits on human rights does not depend on the share of Catholics in or the income of the host country's population. However, we do find our third conjecture confirmed. The positive effect of pope visits on human rights appears to be driven by the reaction of democratic regimes. There are no significant improvements in human rights protection in nondemocracies.

3.6 Media coverage of national human rights

Media attention might be a necessary precondition for approval voiced by the pope to be of value to the government (see, e.g., Eisensee and Strömberg 2007). The Catholic Church actively promotes media coverage of the pope's travels by offering regular press talks, for example during flights, and by using their own numerous media channels. On his travels abroad, the topic of human rights is a constant companion of the pope.

Here, we demonstrate that papal visits are not only associated with increased media attention to the host country, but that international media specifically increase coverage of the human rights situation in that country. We analyze data provided by Factiva, an open-source repository for print and web news articles. Our indicator of human rights media coverage counts the average number of articles that mention 'human rights' in

combination with the name of the host country over the course of the visit. The indicator is standardized by dividing it by the daily average of the total number of international news articles that mention human rights over the same time period, which also mitigates problems concerning its comparability over time. The Factiva data covers the time span from 1979 until 2019 and allows us to measure media coverage concerning human rights in the host country during 283 papal visits.

Figure F1 in Appendix F visualizes the level of human rights coverage of countries visited by the pope relative to the global coverage of human rights during the same time period. The boxplot in the middle illustrates media attention during the pope visit. The boxplot to the left and right of it show the human rights media coverage for the same countries relative to the global human rights coverage in the media, but one year before and one year after the pope visit (but otherwise for the same dates). The share of the global human rights related media reports that mention the host country roughly doubles during a visit by the pope compared to normal times. This effect would be amplified further if readers of news reports pay even more attention to human rights related media coverage that is related to a papal visit. This simple comparison lends support to our assumed causal mechanism that the pope can draw attention to governments' human rights performance.

To further strengthen this argument, we try to evaluate if media coverage of human rights is more pronounced for visits where the pope addresses the topic of human rights in his public speeches. For this purpose, we web-scrape the pope's speeches during state visits from the Vatican website. Based on this corpus of 3,045 speeches, we count how often terms associated with the topic of human rights are mentioned. This indicator is not standardized by the length of the speech, as we argue that the absolute number of times these keywords are mentioned is a better proxy for how much attention the pope pays to the topic of human rights. The resulting indicator is then used to explain variation in how much international media report on human rights during papal visits. Using a narrower set of search terms in Table F1 and a broader one in Table F2 in Appendix F, we show that visits during which the pope speaks more about human rights attract considerably more international media attention towards the country's human rights situation.

4. Conclusion

This article has tested a novel theoretical argument, which we have derived from a formal model of the strategic interaction between the Catholic Church and governments of countries that might be visited by the pope. We argue that on average host governments should improve their country's level of human rights protection in anticipation of a papal visit to avoid criticism from the pope and possibly even gain approval. Governments only invite the pope if they expect that their gains in terms of legitimacy outweigh the costs of the visit, including the risk of being criticized by the pope for the country's human rights record. We have tested the empirical validity of our arguments using simple regression and endogenous treatment models. Our results are robust to various robustness tests and supported by an analysis of a potential transmission channel.

Anticipated papal visits have a significant effect on the host country's human rights protection. The effect appears to be due to democratic governments anticipating increased media attention to human rights issues and approval by the pope for their effort to guarantee the protection of their citizens' human rights. Papal visits are, of course, only one mechanism through which the Catholic Church exerts influence on other countries. Followers of the Catholic belief can react directly to messages by the Holy Sea (Koukal 2020) and national churches can lobby for the preferred policy of the Catholic Church (Andersen and Jensen 2019). To better understand the political importance of the Catholic Church in modern nation states, it is essential that more research deals with these channels of influence. Moreover, our study is focused on one effect of pope visits, i.e., changes in human rights protection. Undoubtedly, the consequences of papal visits on the economy and other political outcomes also deserve more attention.

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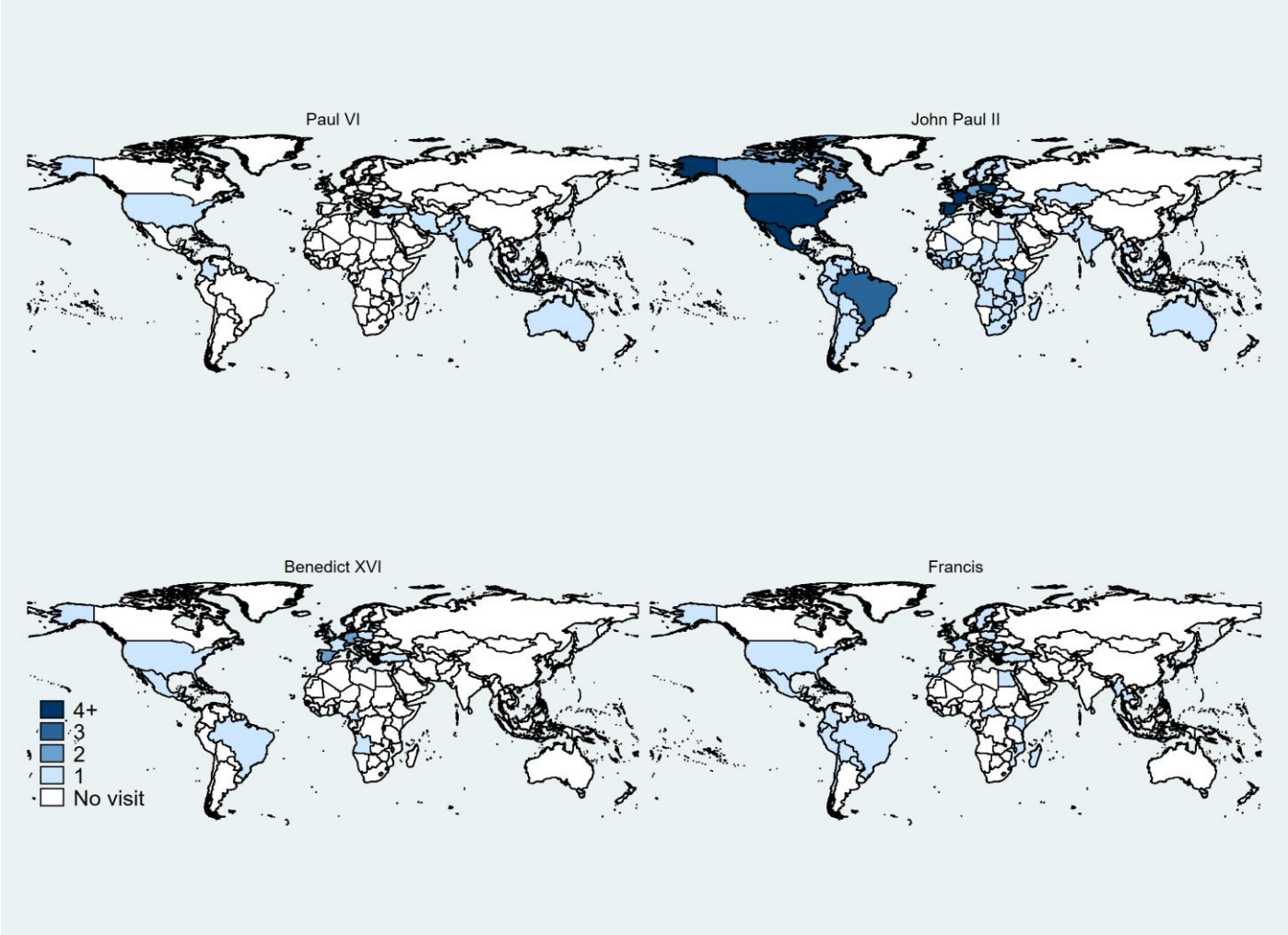
Appendix A: World maps

Figure A1: Number of international papal travels by pope and destination country



Appendix B: Description of data

Table B1: Description of variables

Variable	Description and source
Human Rights	Latent human rights protection score. Source: Fariss (2019), v4.01.
Pope Visit	Binary indicator for official visits by the pope. Source: www.vatican.va.
Population Growth	Growth rate of the population size. Source: Feenstra et al. (2015), v10.0.
Economic Growth	Growth rate of expenditure-side real GDP per capita at chained PPPs per capita. Source: Feenstra et al. (2015), v10.0.
Conflict (V-Dem)	Binary indicator coded 1 if e_civil_war, e_miinteco or e_miinterc are coded 1 in V-Dem, v11.1.
Int. War (Polity)	Magnitude score of episodes of international warfare. Source: Marshall (2019).
Civil War (Polity)	Magnitude score of episodes of civil warfare. Source: Marshall (2019).
Successful Coup	Binary indicator for whether there was at least one successful coup. Source: Bjørnskov and Rode (2020), v3.2.
Past Visits (t-1/t-5)	Binary indicator for whether the pope has visited this country over the last 5 years. Source: www.vatican.va.
Past Visits (t-6/t-10)	Binary indicator for whether the pope has visited this country between 6 and 10 years ago. Source: www.vatican.va.
Past Visits (t-1/t-5), regional	Number of countries on the same continent that the pope has visited over the last 5 years. Source: www.vatican.va.
Past Visits (t-6/t-10), regional	Number of countries on the same continent that the pope has visited between 6 and 10 years ago. Source: www.vatican.va.
Log-Total Past Saints	Log-number of all past Beatifications and Canonizations of nationals of this country. Sources: Barro and McCleary (2016), updated with manually collected data for 2010 to 2019.
Past Saints (t-1/t-10)	Number of Beatifications and Canonizations of nationals of this country over the last 10 years. Source: Barro and McCleary (2016) and manually collected data for 2010 to 2019.
Past Saints (t-1/t-10), regional	Number of Beatifications and Canonizations of nationals of countries on this continent over the last 10 years. Source: Barro and McCleary (2016) and manually collected data for 2010 to 2019.
Share Catholic	Share of Catholics in the population. Source: Brown and James (2018).
Share Other Christian	Share of other Christians in the population. Source: Brown and James (2018).
Share Muslim	Share of Muslims in the population. Source: Brown and James (2018).
Religious Competition	One minus the Herfindahl index (sum of squares of adherence shares) among persons who adhere to some or no religion. Own calculation, following McCleary and Barro (2006). Source: Brown and James (2018).
Church Jubilee (50 years)	Binary indicator for whether a country is in a (multiple of) 50-year jubilee of evangelization. Sources: Barrett et al. (2001) and www.vatican.va.
Church Jubilee (100 years)	Binary indicator for whether a country is in a (multiple of) 100-year jubilee of evangelization. Sources: Barrett et al. (2001) and www.vatican.va.
Church Jubilee (500 years)	Binary indicator for whether a country is in a (multiple of) 500-year jubilee of evangelization. Sources: Barrett et al. (2001) and www.vatican.va.
Int. Eucharistic Congress	Binary indicator for whether the International Eucharistic Congress took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.

World Youth Day	Binary indicator for whether the World Youth Day took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
W. Meeting of Families	Binary indicator for whether the World Meeting of Families took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
CELAM	Binary indicator for whether the Episcopal Conference of Latin America took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
SECAM	Binary indicator for whether the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
FABC	Binary indicator for whether the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
FCBCO	Binary indicator for whether the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania took place in that country. Source: Kasper (2006) and www.vatican.va.
Year of Synod	Binary indicator for whether the Holy Sea hosted a Synod of Bishops in that year. Source: www.vatican.va.
Synod Theme	Binary indicator for whether a Special Synod of Bishops on the country or the region where the country is located took place in that year.
Pope: Birth Country	Binary indicator for the birth country of the pope.
Pope: Age	Age of the pope in years.
Pope: Year Hospitalized	Binary indicator for whether the pope was hospitalized or died in that year. Source: www.vatican.va.
Pope: John Paul II	Binary indicator for whether John Paul II was the pope.
Pope: Benedict XVI	Binary indicator for whether Benedict XVI was the pope.
Pope: Francis	Binary indicator for whether Francis was the pope.
10 Years Dipl. Ties	Binary indicator for whether diplomatic relations with the Vatican have a (multiple of) 10-year anniversary. Source: www.vatican.va.
50 Years Dipl. Ties	Binary indicator for whether diplomatic relations with the Vatican have a (multiple of) 50-year anniversary. Source: www.vatican.va.
100 Years Dipl. Ties	Binary indicator for whether diplomatic relations with the Vatican have a (multiple of) 100-year anniversary. Source: www.vatican.va.
Distance: Geographic	Log-Distance of a country's capital from the Vatican. Source: Mayer and Zignago (2011).
Distance: Religious	Religious distance of a country's population from that of Italy. Source: Spolaore and Wacziarg (2016).
Distance: Genetic	Genetic distance (FST) of a country's population from that of Italy. Source: Spolaore and Wacziarg (2018).
Exclusion by Gender	Exclusion by gender index (v2xpe_exlgender). Source: V-Dem, v11.1.
Women Political Empowerment	Women political empowerment index (v2x_gender). Source: V-Dem, v11.1.
High income	Binary indicator for whether expenditure-side real GDP per capita at chained PPPs per capita is above 6,000US$. Own calculation based on Feenstra et al. (2015).
Democracy	Binary indicator for whether a country is democratic. Source: Bjørnskov and Rode (2020), v3.2.

Note: Different types of anniversaries/jubilees are mutually exclusive. A 100-year anniversary, e.g., is not also counted as a (multiple of) 10-/50-year anniversary.

Table B2: Descriptive statistics

	Full				Treated			
	mean	sd	min	max	mean	sd	min	max
Δ Human Rights	0.01	0.22	-3.09	3.03	0.02	0.26	-2.95	1.22
Human Rights (t-1)	0.29	1.55	-3.46	5.34	0.38	1.46	-2.69	4.84
Pope Visit	0.03	0.18	0	1	1	0	1	1
Population Growth	0.02	0.02	-0.18	0.19	0.01	0.01	-0.03	0.08
Economic Growth	0.03	0.09	-0.81	1.43	0.02	0.06	-0.25	0.24
Conflict (V-Dem)	0.13	0.34	0	1	0.12	0.32	0	1
Int. War (Polity)	0.07	0.58	0	9	0.02	0.15	0	2
Civil War (Polity)	0.23	1.00	0	7	0.16	0.83	0	6
Successful Coup	0.02	0.14	0	1	0.00	0.00	0	0
Past Visits (t-1/t-5)	0.14	0.34	0	1	0.19	0.39	0	1
Past Visits (t-6/t-10)	0.10	0.30	0	1	0.13	0.33	0	1
Past Visits (t-1/t-5), regional	5.29	5.03	0	23	7.79	5.43	0	23
Past Visits (t-6/t-10), regional	3.84	4.52	0	23	4.17	4.35	0	23
Log-Total Past Saints	0.34	0.81	0.00	4.92	0.92	1.33	0	4.83
Past Saints (t-1/t-10)	0.45	1.92	0	30	1.77	4.20	0	29
Past Saints (t-1/t-10), regional	24.02	44.08	0	175	43.04	55.40	0	175
Share Catholic	26.91	31.63	0.00	98.01	42.53	33.90	0.00	95.31
Share Other Christian	23.24	26.68	0.00	98.61	21.36	23.82	0.01	95.75
Share Muslim	24.57	36.11	0.00	99.77	14.86	28.29	0.00	99.65
Religious Competition	0.41	0.21	0.00	0.82	0.43	0.20	0.01	0.79
Church Jubilee (500 years)	0.00	0.06	0	1	0.02	0.14	0	1
Church Jubilee (100 years)	0.01	0.08	0	1	0.02	0.14	0	1
Church Jubilee (50 years)	0.01	0.10	0	1	0.03	0.18	0	1
Int. Eucharistic Congress	0.00	0.04	0	1	0.02	0.14	0	1
World Youth Day	0.00	0.04	0	1	0.04	0.20	0	1
W. Meeting of Families	0.00	0.03	0	1	0.01	0.12	0	1
CELAM	0.00	0.02	0	1	0.01	0.12	0	1
SECAM	0.00	0.04	0	1	0.00	0.06	0	1
FABC	0.00	0.04	0	1	0.01	0.08	0	1
FCBCO	0.00	0.04	0	1	0.00	0.06	0	1
Year of Synod	0.46	0.50	0	1	0.47	0.50	0	1
Synod Theme	0.03	0.17	0	1	0.04	0.18	0	1
Pope: Birth Country	0.00	0.07	0	1	0.04	0.19	0	1
Pope: Age	75.07	6.87	59	85	72.77	7.62	59	85
Pope: Year Hospitalized	0.15	0.35	0	1	0.09	0.29	0	1
Pope: John Paul II	0.48	0.50	0	1	0.68	0.47	0	1
Pope: Benedict XVI	0.16	0.36	0	1	0.10	0.29	0	1
Pope: Francis	0.14	0.35	0	1	0.17	0.38	0	1
10 Years Dipl. Ties	0.06	0.24	0	1	0.10	0.30	0	1
50 Years Dipl. Ties	0.01	0.07	0	1	0.01	0.12	0	1
100 Years Dipl. Ties	0.00	0.05	0	1	0.00	0.06	0	1
Distance: Geographic	8.40	0.84	5.44	9.83	8.16	0.97	5.44	9.83
Distance: Religious	0.71	0.17	0.40	1.00	0.63	0.17	0.40	0.98
Distance: Genetic	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.07	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.07
Observations	8,708				283			

Appendix C: Placebo tests

Table C1: Effect of a visit four years earlier

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.008**	-0.019***	-0.019***	-0.019***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit (t-4)	-0.007	-0.009	-0.009	-0.011
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-0.889***	-0.879***	-0.831***
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Economic Growth		0.148**	0.148**	0.153***
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.076***	-0.075***	-0.077***
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.001	-0.001	-0.000
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.069	-0.068	-0.069
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,164	6,164	6,164	6,164

Note: The dependent variable is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). OLS coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Table C2: Effect of a visit four years later

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.008**	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.021***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit (t+4)	0.017*	0.015	0.015	0.013
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-0.677**	-0.633*	-0.578*
		(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Economic Growth		0.164***	0.162***	0.170***
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.092***	-0.088***	-0.091***
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Int. War (Polity)		0.000	0.000	0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.081	-0.079	-0.080
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,121	6,121	6,121	6,121

Note: The dependent variable is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). OLS coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table C3: Exclusion by gender

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exclusion by Gender (t-1)	-0.006***	-0.007***	-0.006***	-0.006***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.001	0.001	0.001	-0.001
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Population Growth		-0.017	-0.018	-0.018
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Economic Growth		-0.000	0.000	-0.002
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Conflict (V-Dem)		0.001	0.000	-0.000
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		0.006*	0.006	0.006
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,531	6,531	6,531	6,531

Note: The dependent variable is the first difference of the exclusion by gender index (v2xpe_exlgender). OLS coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table C4: Women political empowerment

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Women Empowerment (t-1)	-0.011***	-0.014***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.001	0.001	0.001	-0.000
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Population Growth		-0.031	-0.036	-0.035
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Economic Growth		0.002	0.002	0.003
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.002	-0.002	-0.003
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.010	-0.010	-0.010
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,431	6,431	6,431	6,431

Note: The dependent variable is the first difference of the women political empowerment index (v2x_gender). OLS coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Appendix D: Robustness to treatment instrument selection

Table D1: ETM estimates – reduced selection model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Outcome model				
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.007**	-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.086***	0.085***	0.084***	0.088***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Population Growth		-0.631**	-0.605*	-0.555*
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.23)
Economic Growth		0.185***	0.185***	0.188***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.072***	-0.070***	-0.071***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.000	-0.000	0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.089*	-0.087*	-0.088*
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Selection model				
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.083**	-0.106***	-0.106***	-0.106***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10)	-0.047	-0.049	-0.049	-0.050
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10), regional	0.000	0.002	0.002	0.001
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Past Saints (t-1/t-10), regional	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Catholic	0.008*	0.008*	0.008*	0.008*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Other Christian	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Muslim	-0.002	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Religious Competition	0.369	0.396	0.396	0.395
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Church Jubilee (50 years)	0.558**	0.568**	0.568**	0.568**
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Church Jubilee (100 years)	0.524	0.489	0.489	0.490
	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.27)
Church Jubilee (500 years)	0.934**	0.951**	0.951**	0.947**
	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.34)
Int. Eucharistic Congress	1.624***	1.607***	1.608***	1.603***
	(0.43)	(0.43)	(0.43)	(0.43)
World Youth Day	2.988***	3.019***	3.020***	3.016***
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
W. Meeting of Families	2.433***	2.415***	2.417***	2.419***

	(0.58)	(0.58)	(0.58)	(0.58)
CELAM	6.683***	7.240***	7.043***	7.243***
	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.33)
SECAM	0.699	0.724	0.724	0.729
	(0.64)	(0.65)	(0.65)	(0.65)
FABC	0.937	0.958	0.958	0.958
	(0.53)	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.51)
FCBCO	0.705*	0.721**	0.722**	0.723**
	(0.28)	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Pope: Birth Country	1.401*	1.396*	1.396*	1.396*
	(0.59)	(0.58)	(0.58)	(0.58)
Pope: Age	0.097	0.099*	0.099*	0.099*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Pope: Year Hospitalized	-0.132	-0.140	-0.140	-0.143
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Pope: John Paul II	0.789***	0.783***	0.780***	0.774***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Pope: Benedict XVI	0.514***	0.515***	0.511***	0.517***
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Pope: Francis	1.013***	0.997***	0.993***	1.004***
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
10 Years Dipl. Ties	0.282*	0.286*	0.286*	0.286*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
50 Years Dipl. Ties	0.636*	0.615*	0.615*	0.610*
	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
100 Years Dipl. Ties	0.136	0.133	0.133	0.125
	(0.46)	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.47)
Distance: Geographic	0.950*	1.013*	1.013*	1.016*
	(0.43)	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.42)
Distance: Religious	0.485	0.478	0.479	0.480
	(0.66)	(0.65)	(0.65)	(0.65)
Distance: Genetic	-9.465**	-9.160**	-9.151**	-9.148**
	(3.16)	(3.25)	(3.25)	(3.25)
Distance: Geo. * Pope: Age	-0.015*	-0.016**	-0.016**	-0.016**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-2.089	-2.111	-2.097
		(2.68)	(2.67)	(2.66)
Economic Growth		-0.085	-0.085	-0.082
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.056	-0.057	-0.057
		(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.233**	-0.233**	-0.232**
		(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.048	-0.048	-0.047
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Successful Coup		-0.250	-0.250	-0.258
		(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Rho	-0.143***	-0.150***	-0.148***	-0.156***
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: The dependent variable in the outcome model is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). The dependent variable in the selection model is a binary indicator for an official state visit by the pope. Coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Table D2: ETM estimates – reduced selection model w/o major celebrations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Outcome model				
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.007**	-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.103***	0.104***	0.103***	0.109***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Population Growth		-0.618**	-0.593*	-0.540*
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.23)
Economic Growth		0.186***	0.186***	0.188***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.072***	-0.070***	-0.072***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.000	-0.000	0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.088*	-0.087*	-0.088*
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Selection model				
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.087**	-0.105***	-0.105***	-0.106***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10)	0.021	0.018	0.018	0.018
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10), regional	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.001
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Past Saints (t-1/t-10), regional	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Catholic	0.008*	0.008*	0.008*	0.008*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Other Christian	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Muslim	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Religious Competition	0.428	0.457*	0.457*	0.456*
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Pope: Birth Country	1.468*	1.462*	1.462*	1.462*
	(0.61)	(0.61)	(0.61)	(0.61)
Pope: Age	0.084	0.086	0.085	0.085
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Pope: Year Hospitalized	-0.162	-0.167	-0.167	-0.171
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Pope: John Paul II	0.774***	0.769***	0.765***	0.758***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Pope: Benedict XVI	0.518***	0.513***	0.508**	0.515***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Pope: Francis	0.986***	0.971***	0.965***	0.979***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
10 Years Dipl. Ties	0.258*	0.262*	0.262*	0.262*

	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
50 Years Dipl. Ties	0.579*	0.555	0.555	0.550
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
100 Years Dipl. Ties	0.138	0.135	0.135	0.125
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Distance: Geographic	0.886*	0.931*	0.931*	0.936*
	(0.41)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Distance: Religious	0.253	0.226	0.226	0.223
	(0.65)	(0.64)	(0.64)	(0.64)
Distance: Genetic	-11.758***	-11.562***	-11.554***	-11.546***
	(3.25)	(3.30)	(3.30)	(3.30)
Distance: Geo. * Pope: Age	-0.013*	-0.014*	-0.014*	-0.014*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-1.269	-1.295	-1.283
		(2.67)	(2.66)	(2.65)
Economic Growth		-0.007	-0.007	-0.002
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.024	-0.026	-0.027
		(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.243**	-0.243**	-0.242**
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.043	-0.043	-0.042
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Successful Coup		-0.340	-0.340	-0.353
		(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
Rho	-0.173***	-0.185***	-0.184***	-0.193***
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: The dependent variable in the outcome model is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). The dependent variable in the selection model is a binary indicator for an official state visit by the pope. Coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Appendix E: Effect heterogeneity

Table E1: Endogenous treatment model, conditional on share of Catholics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Visit * Share Catholics	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.075***	0.076***	0.074***	0.077***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Control variables	NO	YES	YES	YES
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: Results analogous to Table 2, but with an added interaction term between the share of Catholics and the treatment indicator for a pope visit. Coefficient estimates except for pope visit and its interaction are omitted from this table. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Table E2: Endogenous treatment model, conditional on income per capita

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Visit * High Income	0.045*	0.030	0.030	0.032
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pope Visit	0.045	0.056*	0.055*	0.057*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Control variables	NO	YES	YES	YES
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: Results analogous to Table 2, but with an added interaction term between a dummy variable for high income countries and the treatment indicator for a pope visit. Coefficient estimates except for pope visit and its interaction are omitted from this table. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

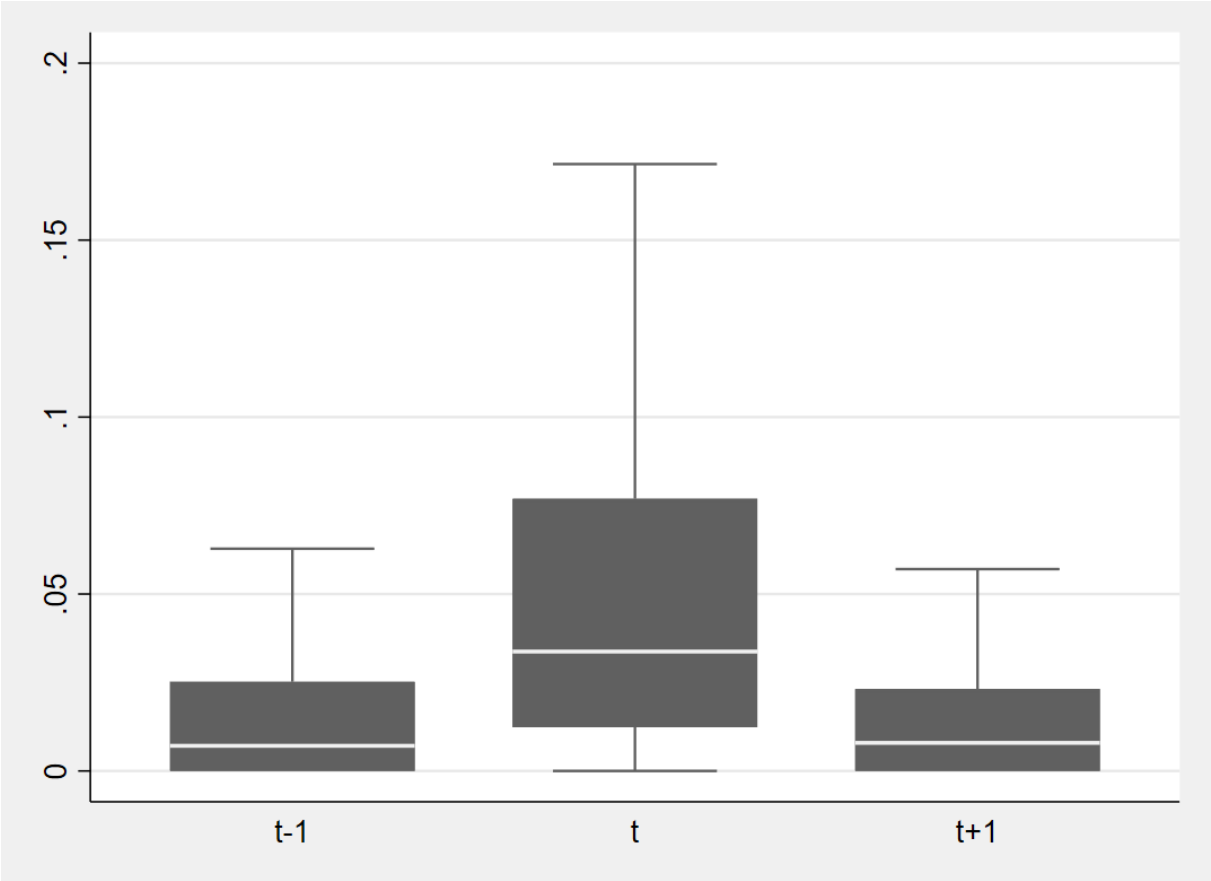
Table E3: Endogenous treatment model, conditional on democracy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Visit * Democracy	0.068***	0.060**	0.060**	0.055**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pope Visit	0.025	0.033	0.032	0.038
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Control variables	NO	YES	YES	YES
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: Results analogous to Table 2, but with an added interaction term between a dummy variable for democratic countries and the treatment indicator for a pope visit. Coefficient estimates except for pope visit and its interaction are omitted from this table. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Appendix F: Media coverage of human rights during papal visits

Figure F1: Human rights media coverage during papal visits



Note: Box plots indicate the distribution of the share of global human rights media coverage that also mentions the country visited by the pope. The box plot at time t is based on the period of the papal visit. The box plots at t-1 / t+1 are based on the same time period, but exactly one year before / after the visit.

Table F1: Human rights in speeches and media coverage during papal visits

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
HR in Media, Previous Year	0.474***	0.482***	0.516***	0.532***
	(0.051)	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.059)
Human Rights in Speech	0.008***	0.008***	0.010***	0.009***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Pope: Benedict XVI	-0.006		-0.018	
	(0.019)		(0.022)	
Pope: Francis	0.011		-0.009	
	(0.021)		(0.024)	
Year	-0.001		0.000	
	(0.001)		(0.001)	
Year-fixed effects	NO	YES	NO	YES
Estimator	OLS	OLS	Tobit	Tobit
R^2 / Chi^2	0.33	0.45	96.02***	148.44***
Observations	277	277	277	277

Note: The dependent variable counts the number of times media in Factiva mention the host country in the same article as 'human rights' as a share of all articles that mention 'human rights'. The count of human rights mentions in papal speeches is based on the search terms 'human rights', 'human dignity', 'political rights', and 'civil rights'. Tobit models account for left-censoring at zero (43 cases left-censored). Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Table F2: Human rights in speeches and media coverage during papal visits

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
HR in Media, Previous Year	0.457***	0.469***	0.496***	0.516***
	(0.052)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.060)
Human Rights in Speech	0.002***	0.001**	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Pope: Benedict XVI	-0.009		-0.021	
	(0.019)		(0.022)	
Pope: Francis	0.006		-0.014	
	(0.021)		(0.024)	
Year	-0.001		0.000	
	(0.001)		(0.001)	
Year-fixed effects	NO	YES	NO	YES
Estimator	OLS	OLS	Tobit	Tobit
R^2 / Chi^2	0.33	0.44	92.96***	140.59***
Observations	277	277	277	277

Note: The dependent variable counts the number of times media in Factiva mention the host country in the same article as 'human rights' as a share of all articles that mention 'human rights'. The count of human rights mentions in papal speeches is based on the search terms 'rights', 'liberty', 'freedom', and 'dignity'. Tobit models account for left-censoring at zero (43 cases left-censored). Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Tables

Table 1: OLS estimates – outcome model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.006**	-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.028**	0.026**	0.025**	0.026**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-0.670**	-0.642**	-0.599*
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Economic Growth		0.183***	0.183***	0.187***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.071***	-0.069***	-0.071***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.001	-0.001	0.000
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.090*	-0.088*	-0.089*
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: The dependent variable is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). OLS coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Table 2: ETM estimates – outcome model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Human Rights (t-1)	-0.006**	-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Pope Visit	0.076***	0.077***	0.076***	0.080***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Population Growth		-0.636**	-0.610*	-0.561*
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.23)
Economic Growth		0.185***	0.185***	0.188***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.072***	-0.070***	-0.071***
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.000	-0.000	0.001
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.004	-0.004	-0.004
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Successful Coup		-0.089*	-0.087*	-0.088*
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Time trend	NO	NO	YES	NO
Year-fixed effects	NO	NO	NO	YES
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: The dependent variable in the outcome model is the first difference of a continuous indicator for the level of human rights protection by Fariss (2019). ETM coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Table 3: ETM estimates – selection model

Human Rights (t-1)	-0.072*	-0.101**	-0.101**	-0.101**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Past Visits (t-1/t-5)	-0.648***	-0.671***	-0.671***	-0.669***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10)	-0.257*	-0.272*	-0.272*	-0.272*
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Past Visits (t-1/t-5), regional	0.038***	0.037***	0.037***	0.037***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Past Visits (t-6/t-10), regional	-0.003	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Log-Total Past Saints	0.156	0.155	0.155	0.155
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Past Saints (t-1/t-10)	0.030	0.030	0.030	0.030
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Past Saints (t-1/t-10), regional	-0.003	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Catholic	0.009	0.009	0.009	0.009
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Share Other Christian	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Share Muslim	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Religious Competition	0.253	0.300	0.300	0.299
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Church Jubilee (50 years)	0.485*	0.502*	0.502*	0.502*
	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Church Jubilee (100 years)	0.477	0.437	0.437	0.438
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.27)
Church Jubilee (500 years)	0.982**	1.008**	1.007**	1.004**
	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Int. Eucharistic Congress	1.828***	1.824***	1.825***	1.822***
	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.47)	(0.47)
World Youth Day	2.790***	2.827***	2.828***	2.824***
	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.51)
W. Meeting of Families	2.312***	2.286***	2.287***	2.291***
	(0.55)	(0.56)	(0.56)	(0.56)
CELAM	6.809***	6.742***	6.693***	7.045***
	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.33)
SECAM	0.891	0.921	0.921	0.925
	(0.67)	(0.68)	(0.68)	(0.67)
FABC	1.181*	1.212*	1.213*	1.212*
	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
FCBCO	0.958**	0.980***	0.980***	0.978***
	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.29)
Year of Synod	-0.014	-0.014	-0.014	-0.009
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Synod Theme	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.017
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Pope: Birth Country	1.270	1.263	1.263	1.263
	(0.68)	(0.67)	(0.67)	(0.67)

Pope: Age	0.145*	0.148**	0.148**	0.147**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Pope: Year Hospitalized	-0.140	-0.150	-0.150	-0.151
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Pope: John Paul II	0.745***	0.758***	0.755***	0.747***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Pope: Benedict XVI	0.562**	0.567**	0.564**	0.567**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Pope: Francis	0.974***	0.971***	0.967***	0.975***
	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
10 Years Dipl. Ties	0.300**	0.305**	0.305**	0.306**
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
50 Years Dipl. Ties	0.709*	0.686*	0.686*	0.683*
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
100 Years Dipl. Ties	0.151	0.142	0.142	0.136
	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Distance: Geographic	1.371**	1.437**	1.437**	1.439**
	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)
Distance: Religious	0.596	0.593	0.594	0.595
	(0.78)	(0.78)	(0.78)	(0.78)
Distance: Genetic	-10.005**	-10.125**	-10.114**	-10.123**
	(3.34)	(3.50)	(3.51)	(3.51)
Distance: Geo. * Pope: Age	-0.021**	-0.021**	-0.021**	-0.022**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population Growth		-1.950	-1.970	-1.952
		(3.08)	(3.07)	(3.06)
Economic Growth		0.075	0.075	0.078
		(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Conflict (V-Dem)		-0.116	-0.117	-0.117
		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Int. War (Polity)		-0.246**	-0.247**	-0.246**
		(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Civil War (Polity)		-0.041	-0.041	-0.040
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Successful Coup		-0.140	-0.140	-0.144
		(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Rho	-0.124***	-0.134***	-0.132***	-0.138***
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Countries	146	146	146	146
Observations	6,536	6,536	6,536	6,536

Note: The dependent variable in the selection model is a binary indicator for an official state visit by the pope. Coefficient estimates are shown with standard errors in parentheses clustered on the country level. Constant omitted. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.