Abstract
This study analyzes two competing arguments about the role of the Catholic Church in state politics Oaxaca, Mexico in the 1990s and 2000s. One line of argument claims that progressive Catholic bishops supported and facilitated democratization in this state. Another line suggests that the church may have inadvertently facilitated ongoing authoritarian rule through its active support for the formalization of local customary political practices into law. Statistical analysis shows that the level of Catholic presence across Oaxaca’s municipalities only matters in some cases and not always in the direction expected. Specifically, in some indigenous communities high levels of Catholic presence facilitated the adoption of customary laws, declines in PRI support, and lower first place party margins. In other indigenous places, it had the opposite effect. The lack of systematic effect demonstrates the Catholic Church’s capacity to intervene in local political affairs in multiple direction and ways, as well as its often tacit support for existing political dynamics.

Keywords
Catholic Church, Political Institutions, Electoral Outcomes, Oaxaca, political parties, indigenous, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), democratization, transition, liberal democracy, pluralism.