Bulwarks Against Autocracy:
Churches, Education and Autonomy in sub-Saharan Africa

Kate Baldwin

Chapter 1. Liberal Democracy's Devout Advocates

Who will advocate for liberal democracy in the twenty-first century? Its core institutions – strong legislatures, independent judiciaries, neutral media, well-established opposition parties – are often targeted by rulers seeking to eliminate dissent *without* significant popular backlash.[1] Scholars and policy wonks often project fatalism in describing an unchecked rise of illiberal regimes.[2]

But liberal democracy has some brave advocates. Consider the case of one Zambian organization, which repeatedly stood up to President Edgar Lungu's attacks on liberal democratic institutions between 2015-2021, even as this advocacy exposed it to defamatory attacks from the ruling party. When the government introduced a bill to reduce the power of the legislature, it educated Members of Parliament about the bill's implications. When the administration shuttered independent newspapers, TVs and radio stations, it spoke out against the closures. When the police arrested the main opposition leader on charges of treason and threw him in jail for 6 months, it mobilized popular opinion against the arrest and facilitated talks between the president and the opposition leader that led to the latter's release. The organization did not mince words in its advocacy against the attacks on liberal democracy, pointing out to Zambians, "Our country is now all, except in designation, a dictatorship and if it is not yet, then we are not far from it."[3]

Which organization took this bold stance? Conventional wisdom is that trade unions, business associations, and university students are the main defenders of democracy. Indeed, they ushered in transitions to electoral regimes around the world during previous democratic waves, including in Zambia in the early 1990s. But they did not speak up forcefully in response to these attacks on liberal institutions. Instead, the organization that bravely advocated for liberal democracy was the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops.

From many theoretical perspectives, this activism by the Zambian Catholic Bishops is puzzling. Why would an organization that is primarily focused on saving souls stick its neck out in defense of political rights and liberal democratic institutions? The church would seem to have little to gain and much to lose from this involvement, insofar as rulers may try to punish the church for its activism through tactics that fundamentally impinge on mission-critical activities (i.e. denying church official visas, eliminating tax exemptions).

The fact that the Catholic church is a famously hierarchical and rigid organization, with a strong commitment to one particular world view, only makes democratic activism seem even more unlikely. Historically, many observers have viewed churches' political engagement as a detriment rather than a boon to democracy as a result of the presumed inflexibility of religious ideas.[4] Why would churches support democratic institutions as a means of law-making if religious laws and codes are believed to

---

[1] Bermeo (2016), Slater (2013), Graham and Svolik (2020).
[2] Zakaria (1997); Plattner (2019); Main (2022).
[3] Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (2017).
[4] To give just a few prominent examples, political philosopher Sidney Hook (1940) described Catholicism as "the oldest and greatest totalitarian movement in history" and John Rawls (1993) opposed religious arguments as a means of public reasoning.

provide the foundations of governance? Indeed, in 19th century Europe and Latin America, the Catholic church was one of the main opponents of the introduction of liberal democracy, with Pope Pius IX famously declaring that it was an error to think "that the Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to, and agree with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization."[5]

The puzzle is deepened when one considers that the Zambian Catholic Bishops are only one of many examples of church activism in defense of liberal democracy during the past 50 years. The National Council of Churches in South Korea and the Catholic Church in the Philippines mobilized against the introduction of martial law in their respective countries in the 1970s. The Catholic Church in Poland sheltered anti-regime dissidents and distributed opposition newspapers in the 1980s. The Catholic and Lutheran Bishops in Tanzania spoke out against the crackdown on opposition parties and journalists after the country's 2015 election.

In fact, in recent years, churches have been particularly active in defense of democracy compared to other organizations, as I will demonstrate for the case of sub-Saharan Africa in the next chapter. Trade unions, business groups and students have at times been powerful activists for the introduction of multiparty elections, but they have been much less active in defense of recent attacks on liberal democratic institutions.

And yet, churches are not always forces in support of liberal democracy. Certainly, they have not been historically. Even in the contemporary period, there is considerable variation in their involvement. For every instance of a church speaking out in favor of political liberties and democratic institutions, there are multiple instances of them failing to act. Thus an adequate explanation for the puzzle of churches' disproportionate involvement in defending recent attacks on liberal democracy will also explain variation in which churches are involved.

Liberal Democracy as an Institutional Guarantee of Church Autonomy

My answer to this puzzle focuses on what is specifically at stake in the *contemporary* struggle for *liberal* democracy. In recent decades, the struggle for liberal democracy has become increasingly distinct from advocacy for electoral democracy. Regimes have largely institutionalized elections as a means of selecting leaders but have failed to establish institutional checks or legal limitations on the power of rulers.[6] Although weak legislatures, censorship of the press and crackdowns on political opposition may eventually imperil electoral democracy, their immediate effects are to eliminate limits on rulers' power. In this way, the fight for electoral and liberal democracy has become unbundled. As a result, we cannot turn to historical struggles to adopt majoritarian rule in order to identify contemporary advocates for liberal democracy.

Who is likely to advocate for liberal democracy distinct from electoral democracy? The potential of liberal democratic institutions is that they provide a reinforcing mechanism for limiting the power of the ruler. Historically, liberal democracy's limits on the power of rulers were viewed as a means of securing property rights.[7] But in the contemporary period, I argue that institutional checks to prevent the

[5] Pope BI Pius IX (1864).
[6] Levitsky and Way (2010).
[7] North and Weingast (1989); Stasavage (2002).

grabbing hand of the state have become less important as capital has become increasingly mobile.[8] Instead, in the contemporary period, the great potential of liberal democratic institutions is that they check the power of rulers to gag dissent.

As a result, the economic actors who are so prominent in accounts of democratization in earlier periods –lower class movements, trade unions, industrialists and unemployed students – are unlikely to be strong advocates for contemporary liberal democracy.[9] These are not struggles over enfranchising the majority of citizens to decide economic and redistributive policy.[10] Neither are they fundamentally about creating political arrangements that ensure the state does not infringe on private property rights.[11] Instead, the most prominent stake in the struggle for liberal democracy in the 21st century is the right to dissent.

As a result, liberal democracy's most forceful advocates are likely to be actors with an interest in protecting the expression of ideas distinct from those espoused by the ruling authorities. Actors who are in the business of spreading ideas have a direct interest in liberal democracy per se, and may speak out even before the competitiveness of multiparty elections is threatened. Although actors seeking economic power may be the key players in struggles for electoral democracy, actors seeking ideational autonomy are likely to play a critical role in recent conflicts over liberal democracy.

Which actors attach greatest value to protecting the expression of independent ideas? In many contexts, I argue that it is churches. In particular, I focus on the interests and decisions of national church authorities, defined as the official leadership bodies of church denominations within countries. Throughout the book, I use the term church as a short-hand for these authorities.

My claim is that because churches' primary institutional goal is to spread their view of the world according to their interpretation of the gospel, they often have an interest in defending political systems in which ideas independent of those sanctioned by the ruling authorities can be expressed and acted on. In an argument that directly counters the claim that religious actors' deep commitment to particular worldviews poses a *risk* to democracy, I argue that churches' deep concern with protecting spaces for teaching their beliefs can provide unique *motivation* to speak out against autocracy. Indeed, insofar as all religious actors prioritize the ability to spread their worldviews, they are all *potential* activists for liberal democracy in the right setting.

Of course, the historical record is replete with examples of churches (and other religious actors) opposing rather than supporting liberal democracy. If churches *are* the ancien regime, as they were historically in Europe, then they will not value the ability to express dissenting ideas and can be expected to actively oppose rather than support *liberal* democracy. In addition, in contexts where churches had huge landholdings and wealth through their alliances with monarchs, they had reasons to oppose *electoral* democracy, which would empower new actors to set economic and redistributive policy. As a result, churches have only come to advocate for liberal democracy well after its initial establishment in 19th century Europe and Latin America. The Catholic church in particular only officially

[8] Boix (2003); Eichengreen (1996).
[9] Moore (1966), Collier (1999), Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), Ansell and Samuels (2014), Mares (2015), Haggard and Kaufman (2016).
[10] Boix (2003); Acemoglu and Robinson (2006); Ansell and Samuels (2014).
[11] North and Weingast (1989); Olson (1993, 2000).

acknowledged the necessity of peaceful co-existence of religions in the mid-20th century, with the Second Vatican Council recognizing the right to religious freedom.[12] In the post-colonial era, churches have largely given up the goal of spreading their ideas through the state in favor of protecting their ability to express ideas independent of the state; the former is no longer a viable option for them in most places.

In these contexts, I argue that churches may become advocates for liberal democracy as a means of securing liberalism in the classic sense of limited government intervention in the activities they undertake to spread their worldview.[13] Limited government is difficult to achieve without democracy because lack of turnover in autocratic regimes makes it easier for rulers to centralize power and eliminate dissent.[14] This is something churches have learned over time, perhaps most pointedly through their experiences in Nazi Germany. In contrast, liberal democracy can be self-enforcing insofar as it gives multiple actors the ability to criticize and restrain the centralization of power.[15] As a result, churches have learned over time that liberal democratic political institutions are the best way to protect their autonomy.

Of course, even in the contemporary period, there is great variation in whether churches speak out in defense of democracy. Although most contemporary churches could be said to have an interest in the expression of autonomous ideas insofar as they are in the business of advancing their particular worldviews, in reality, churches' gospel-spreading activities are differently at risk of crackdown by autocrats depending on the spheres in which these activities take place. Depending on the activities through which churches spread the gospel, they are more or less likely to have their instruction impinged on by autocrats intent on centralizing power and eliminating dissent. As a result, churches are exposed to different *autocratic risk*, defined as risk that an institutionally uninhibited ruler could shut down a mode of disseminating ideas in which they have invested.

In particular, even under highly illiberal regimes, Sunday worship within established congregations is only rarely at risk. Churches that rely on services in houses of worship to spread their worldview have limited risk of having their mode of instruction squashed under an illiberal regime. In contrast, rulers are much more likely to assert control over instruction that takes place outside of congregations, both because it is easier to regulate and because it more immediately comes into conflict with regimes' goals of eliminating public dissent. Church-run media, health clinics and charity work are all subject to greater autocratic risk than worship within congregations insofar as uninhibited rulers are likely to try to take control of these activities first.

Church education systems are particularly at risk of having their autonomy squashed when rulers crackdown on dissent. Many churches place high value on providing formal education to young people due to the importance of forming the worldviews of the next generation. For overlapping reasons,

---

[12] Pope Paul VI (1965).

[13] Locke (1689); Mill (1859).

[14] Scholars who analyze the minimum conditions for electoral democracy generally acknowledge that competitive elections cannot be maintained without some respect for civil liberties, including freedom of information and the press; as a result, a political system must have some liberal checks in order to be considered a full electoral democracy. Dahl (1971), Przeworski (1999). Equally important, but less emphasized in recent scholarship, is the fact that multiparty democracies tend to protect liberalism by making it harder for regimes to accumulate power that restrict citizens' freedom. Plattner (1999).

[15] North and Weingast (1989); Stasavage (2002).

political rulers are also interested in the content of education for young people. For at least the past century, state authorities have viewed education as legitimately within their purview due to both the economic importance of education and its capacity to inculcate particular belief and value systems.[16] As a result, church education systems have often been sites of conflict between church and state. [17] Rulers have greater interest in and more tools for controlling church education as compared to most other activities undertaken by churches. As a result, churches that are more engaged in running schools have greater exposure to autocratic risk than those that have smaller educational investments. Without institutional constraints, rulers will usually try to increase their control over instruction in church schools for reasons elaborated in the third chapter.

But there is a second aspect of churches' spheres of activity that also influence their likelihood of engaging in democratic activism. In some cases, churches depend on the state itself to provide operational financing for their activities. States may provide direct transfers to churches that can be used to support all of their operational activities; in a wider range of contexts, states subsidize particular church activities, such as their social services and educational wings. Churches whose activities depend on government subsidies will weigh the costs of reduced financial support against any benefits of mobilizing in defense of liberal democracy in deciding whether to speak out. There is little benefit in advocating for democracy in order to defend the medium-term autonomy of an activity if it will be squashed immediately through the withdrawal of state subsidies on which it depends.

As elaborated in this book's fourth chapter, my argument emphasizes the explanatory power of churches' operational activities – both their spheres and their financing – in explaining variation in church democratic activism. In making this claim, I emphasize that there are constraints on both factors that give them independent influence over outcomes, even if both churches and states can strategically shift their activities and budget allocations. In particular, there is institutional stickiness in the types of activities in which churches can engage. Over time, churches develop specialized staff, bureaucracies and clienteles around particular activities, entrenching their interests in them. State financing for church operational activities is less sticky than church interests in particular activities, but there are still important institutional and budget constraints on the amount of financing that can be provided to churches at any given time. As a result, churches who depend on instruction in the public sphere to spread their worldview are particularly exposed to autocratic risk and are potential advocates for liberal democracy. But this interest is mitigated in cases in which they depend on the state to finance these activities.

In making this argument, I have aspired to bring the study of church democratic activism into conversation with the broader comparative literature on the forces behind democratic and autocratic transitions. This literature has fiercely debated whether regime moderates, the middle class, the lower class or industrialists are the main forces behind democratization. Only rarely have comparative scholars of democratization noted that churches have become advocates for democracy in some recent contexts, emphasizing the change in Catholic political theology after the Second Vatican Council as a key

[16] Darden and Grzymala-Busse (2006), Ansell and Lindvall (2013), Paglayan (2021).
[17] For historical examples, see Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Kalyvas (1996) and Wittenberg (2006).

explanatory factor.[18] This book provides a framework for understanding the contexts in which religious versus economic actors are likely to play leading roles.

A largely separate literature has developed on religion and politics. Scholars have considered instances in which churches engage in broader forms of human rights activism, often emphasizing inter-denominational and inter-religious competition or diversity as a key factor.[19] There have also been important recent contributions on how the relationship between religious actors, the nation and the state influence forms of political participation in which religious actors engage.[20] My theoretical contribution to these debates is twofold. First, I emphasize how churches have a specific interest in *liberal* democracy in the contemporary world, and I focus on church leaders' activism for liberal democratic institutions distinct from activism for human rights more broadly. Second, I explain how different activities of churches expose them to different autocratic risk, which creates different levels of concern about attacks on autonomy across churches, but may also make them differently dependent on state subsidies to run these activities.

Operationalizing the Theoretical Variation: Church Education Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

I test my theory focusing specifically on how variation in church activities in sub-Saharan Africa affect the propensity of churches to speak out in defense of democracy. This is a context where we would expect to see some church support for democracy per the scope conditions elaborated above. In particular, the continent's first democratic wave came only in the 1990s, by which time churches around the world had largely given up ambitions of spreading their ideas by winning political power. This option was particularly closed in sub-Saharan Africa, where most countries are denominationally (and sometimes religiously) diverse due to inter-denominational missionary competition during the colonial period.[21] As a result, churches in sub-Saharan Africa have been operating in contexts in which they are likely to have the goal of autonomy from, rather than control of, state power.

In addition, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, I am able to gain traction on churches' autocratic risk exposure and dependence on state subsidies by narrowing my focus to one particularly important sphere of activity: church education systems. In this historical context, education has been the main point of contestation between church and state.[22] Churches provided a huge portion of formal education in colonial Africa, as chapter 3 details. In the newly independent, economically poor and administratively weak states of post-colonial Africa, most rulers had a great deal of interest and some

[18] Huntington (1991), Philpott (2004). On religious actors and pro-democracy advocacy in the Middle East, see Hoffman (2021).
[19] Gill (1998), Trejo (2012). On the religious marketplace approach to the study of religion, see Iannaccone, Finke and Stark (1997). Dowd (2015) provides an alternative explanation for the relationship between religious diversity and religious actors greater support for liberal democratic political culture: in diverse settings, he argues that religious leaders eventually come to adopt a "live and let live" ethic due to the necessity of social tolerance (pg 3).
[20] Toft, Philpott and Shah (2011), Grzymala-Busse (2015). Toft, Philpot and Shah (2011) specifically consider incidents of democratic activism as compared to other forms of political participation in one chapter in their book.
[21] Dowd (2015) also emphasizes how religious diversity encourages inter-religious tolerance in sub-Saharan Africa. Aside from the Catholic church in Burundi and Equatorial Guinea, no church's membership made up even a bare majority of their country's population in 1970.
[22] Conflict over education systems has obviously been salient in other contexts as well but, in periods of anti-clericalism in Europe and Latin America, regimes simultaneously attacked other privileges of churches, which had more wealth and landholdings than their counterparts in post-independence Africa.

capacity to control the formal education system, but limited interest and capacity to regulate church congregations. Insofar as independent educational activities are likely to be particularly at risk when rulers crack down on freedom of expression, I am able to capture the largest portion of churches' autocratic exposure by focusing on variation in their investment in formal education systems.

In addition, in sub-Saharan Africa, state subsidies to church educational systems are the most consistent financial transfer between the state and churches. States in sub-Saharan Africa provide minimal financial support for church operational activities outside of social services.[23] As a result, in this context, I am able to capture the greatest sources of variation in autocratic risk exposure and dependence on state subsidies by narrowing my focus to church educational activities.

It is well-known that early missionaries in Africa used "the school as the nucleus to church planting."[24] What is less appreciated is their high level of continued involvement in education in many countries. In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the majority of primary schools are still church-affiliated. Even in countries like Tanzania and Zambia, where governments successfully nationalized most former mission schools, churches often run a significant portion of the country's secondary schools due to gaps in the government's ability to fulfil demand. Furthermore, in countries where older churches have schools founded in the colonial era, newer churches have sometimes established education wings due to local expectations that education is a church matter.[25] As chapter 3 demonstrates, there is considerable variation across countries and within denominations in how much education particular churches provide.

Applying the book's theoretical argument to the educational sphere leads to the following predictions. Other things being equal, educational provision tends to increase the benefits of liberal democracy to churches. Churches with higher numbers of schools are more exposed to the risks of autocracy because rulers introduce regulations that restrict their educational autonomy more frequently than they restrict worship in congregations. As a result, liberal democratic institutions support mission-critical activities for education-providing churches.

But there is a second aspect of church educational systems that also influences the likelihood of engaging in democratic activism. In some cases, church schools' main source of operational financing is from parents, while in other instances, it is from the state. This varies by country and within-country over time due to both strategic and exogenous factors. Churches whose schools depend on state subsidies will weigh the costs of reduced financial support against any benefits of mobilizing against autocracy in deciding whether to speak out. As a result, churches with fiscally independent schools are the most likely to speak out against autocracy as a means for protecting their autonomy over education, while churches without significant involvement in schooling and churches with schools that are fiscally dependent on the state are less likely to do so.

---

[23] In contrast, in a number of European countries, churches continue to receive large operational subsidies from the state through church taxes. Pew Research Center (2019).

[24] Interview Ghanaian Pentecostal Church Leader, September 2021.

[25] Interview Ghanaian Pentecostal Church Leader, September 2021; Interview Ghanaian Pentecostal Church Leader, September 2021.

In providing evidence for my argument, I show that these two aspects of church education systems explain variation in church leaders' democratic activism across countries in sub-Saharan Africa. They explain cross-national variation in activism across churches that have similar political theologies or even belong to the same global church, as in the case of Catholics; it is true that the Catholic church tends to provide more education *and* to advocate for democracy more frequently than other churches, but characteristics of church education systems explain variation in democratic activism by the Catholic church across countries that is otherwise difficult to explain.[26] Church education systems also explain differences in democratic activism between churches that otherwise have similar numeric sizes and organizational capacity. In contrast, variation in religious competition matters little to whether churches speak out in defense of democratic institutions; although religious *monopoly* may discourage broader types of human rights activism in other contexts, variation in church-state relationships over education are much more important in explaining levels of church advocacy for liberal democracy in the religiously heterogenous context of sub-Saharan Africa.[27]

Throughout the book, I focus on variation in churches' involvement in formal education provision in sub-Saharan Africa. Islamic educational centers have also historically played an important role in many countries, but have historically had distinct relationships with the state. In particular, colonial and post-colonial rulers have not historically tried to coop or expropriate Islamic schools – they have sought to eliminate them.[28] Islamic schools were rarely historically subsidized by colonial administrations. States have only very recently begun to formally incorporate them into their education systems in large numbers, and there is little variation across countries in their dependence on state subsidies. As a result, although pioneering research on these schools suggests that their founders share the concerns I elaborate about defending educational autonomy, these education systems do not vary on the same dimensions as church education systems, and my theoretical predictions may not extend to them.[29]

Empirical Evidence and Plan of Book

The book is divided into three parts, with the first part of the book elaborating on the key concepts and theoretical claims regarding church educational systems and church advocacy for liberal democracy. The second part of the book tests the book's core theoretical predictions for when churches engage in democratic activism. The third part considers the implications of church democratic activism and church education systems for citizens' support for democratic institutions.

In conducting the research, I have been methodologically plural, seeking out information from diverse sources – including interviews, surveys, historical newspapers and church pastoral letters – and employing multiple types of analysis – including process tracing of historical episodes, difference-in-different estimation and conjoint experiments. The tests of the theories' main empirical predictions about the contexts in which churches engage in democratic activism draw on all relevant cases in sub-Saharan Africa.

---

[26] On Catholic advocacy for democracy, see Huntington (1991) and Philpott (2004).

[27] This contrasts with Gill (1998) and Trejo (2012)'s findings on the effects of denominational competition on other types of human rights activism in Latin America.

[28] Bleck (2015); Owusu-Ansah, Iddrisu and Sey (2013).

[29] Owusu-Ansah, Iddrisu and Sey (2013).

The cross-national research is complemented by a closer analysis of church education systems and political activism in three cases. The main case is Zambia, complemented by a second more religiously diverse country – either Ghana or Tanzania – in different chapters. Christians make up 85 % of the population in Zambia, 71 % of the population in Ghana and 55 % of the population in Tanzania. [30] Zambia and Ghana have both experienced multiple episodes of democratization and autocratization, providing opportunities for intertemporal analysis in each country drawing on historical sources. Zambia and Tanzania have both recently experienced democratic backsliding, permitting interviews and survey data collection on the recent effects of church activism. In each of the three countries, I have conducted interviews with church leaders and educationalists that illuminate their perspectives on church-state relationships and political institutions.[31]

The three cases also have important differences in their church education systems. Churches in Ghana provide the most education but also with the most state support. Churches in Tanzania had all schools fully nationalized in 1970 but have subsequently developed significant private school systems. The Catholic church in Zambia had all primary schools fully nationalized in 1974 but has consistently provided secondary education with varying levels of state support over time. I use within-country variation in these three cases to provide further evidence of the effects of democratic institutions on church education systems, church democratic activism on citizens' political attitudes, and church education systems on citizens' political attitudes.

The next chapter of the book describes church activism in defense of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. It begins by describing the nature and breadth of democratic activism by churches in the contemporary period, emphasizing the leading roles they have played in protecting liberal democratic institutions compared to other potential organizational advocates like trade unions. It then compares this activism to their involvement in the earlier period of transition to multiparty democracy in the 1990s, where churches often played supporting but not leading roles, typically advocating for political liberalization above multipartyism.

Chapter 3 provides a brief background of the history of church education provision in sub-Saharan Africa. It outlines the importance of church-state conflicts over education over time, emphasizing disagreements over the power to appoint teachers and to define the moral education curriculum. It provides empirical evidence that regimes are more likely to devolve power to churches when countries' liberal democratic institutions are stronger.

Chapter 4 concludes part I of the book by providing a deeper explication of the book's theory. It explains how liberal democratic institutions provide a solution to the problem that states cannot otherwise commit to reducing church autonomy in the education sector. As a result, churches with significant education wings have an incentive to speak out in support of liberal democratic institutions, although this incentive is mitigated when their schools are fiscally dependent on the government to operate.

---

[30] Throughout the manuscript, I rely on statistics on the size of churches and other religious communities from the Christian World Database. The year of the statistic is 2015 unless otherwise indicated.

[31] In total, I conducted 45 interviews with church leaders. Some of leaders were very senior, including two Archbishops and two individuals who had led their countries' Christian council; as a result, many of them were at the table for key decisions related to church schools and democratic activism. However, for reasons of confidentiality, I have opted not to refer to the seniority of leaders in referencing their interviews.

Part II of the book empirically tests the book's main theoretical predictions about the effects of church education systems on church democratic activism. Chapter 5 draws on original data on church activism in defense of democracy and church education systems to demonstrate that churches with more involvement in pre-tertiary education are more likely to speak out against autocratic actions across sub-Saharan Africa, independent of country-level or denominational trends, but the effects are mitigated when churches receive large public subsidies for their schools. This trend is observed both in the last decade – when churches have often played a leading role in advocating for liberal democracy – and also in the 1990s – when churches often joined coalitions in support of multiparty democracy but rarely led them.

Chapter 6 shows that Catholic churches' decisions to speak out against autocracy depend on their reliance on state fiscal transfers. This chapter draws on a novel data set that measures churches' annual pro-democracy activism through an examination of their public pastoral letters and a quasi-exogenous policy intervention that increased church schools' dependence on government transfers in some countries but not in others – the introduction of universal primary education policies across sub-Saharan Africa between 1994 and 2008.

Chapter 7 concludes part II of the book by taking a more detailed look at how liberal democratic institutions protect and advance church educational autonomy drawing on episodic analysis in Zambia and Ghana over time. It shows that the educational autonomy of churches is more likely to be reduced in periods with weaker liberal democratic institutions, and it explains how liberal democratic institutions protect the autonomy of churches in teaching their worldviews.

Part III of the book considers the effects of church democratic activism and church education systems on citizens' support for democracy. Chapter 8 considers the effects of churches' pro-democracy stances, contrasting the effects of church activism in Zambia and Tanzania between 2016 and 2021. Drawing on interviews, survey data and combination endorsement/conjoint candidate experiments in both countries, I show how churches in Zambia have galvanized public opinion in support of democratic institutions, while churches in Tanzania have not.

Chapter 9 then considers whether church education itself makes a difference to citizens' democratic attitudes. Parochial schools are often thought to be inferior to public schools in inculcating democratic citizenship. However, drawing on evidence from the handover of Catholic primary schools to the Zambian government in the early 1970s, I draw on survey evidence and oral histories to show that Catholic primary schools foster more religious – but also more politically engaged – citizens, especially among women.

Chapter 10 concludes by discussing patterns of service provision and democratic activism by religious actors more broadly and in other regions of the world. The contribution of this book is to show that church education systems influence church leaders' democratic activism and citizens' democratic engagement, but it is important to recognize their implications for minority rights and inequality as well. Insofar as the democratic ideal requires equality and autonomy for all citizens, church education systems have complex implications.