**Can the Holy See influence the Outcome fo American Presidential Elections?**

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The relations between the Holy See and the United States in relation to presidential elections or other issues has varied over the last two centuries. In 1797, the United States established consular relations with the Papal States and, in 1846, established diplomatic relations with the Papal States, because Pius IX appeared to be progressive and open to republican government. This lasted until 1867 when Congress cut off funding for the mission because the pope had addressed Jefferson Davis as “Mr. President,” and thus recognized the Confederacy. Technically, diplomatic relations remained, but without funding. The attitude of the American government toward the papacy fluctuated in relation to the attitude of the American public toward American Catholics, who, as will be seen, were primarily immigrants or descended from immigrants and, thus, foreign in origin and in their religious leadership. In 1919, Woodrow Wilson became the first sitting president to visit a pope, Benedict XV, but only because Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore convinced him that, if he did not visit the pope when he passed through Rome on the way to Versailles, this would a slight to the American Catholics. Catholic loyalty to the pope was a major part of anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century and later. In 1928, it contributed to the defeat of Al Smith, a Democrat and first Catholic nominated to the presidency. In 1960, John Kennedy had to declare his opposition to establishing diplomatic relations with the Holy See, because the controversy surrounding the Senate approval of any ambassador would undermine that person’s future effectiveness. As World War II approached, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Myron Taylor as “personal representative” to the pope, a position that did not need Senate approval. In 1950, Taylor resigned, and the State Department closed his office without any notice to the Vatican. In 1951, President Harry S. Truman nominated General Mark Clark as ambassador to Vatican City, but Clark withdrew his name. In 1970, in the midst of the Vietnam War, President Richard Nixon reestablished the office of personal representative, and his successors continued that practice until the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1984.

In the meantime, the American Catholic people had changed. Since so many of the nineteenth-century immigrants were poor, they rapidly entered the working class and labor unions, as the United States underwent the Industrial Revolution. They joined and became leaders of labor unions. In 1887, James Gibbons, who was in Rome to receive the red hat of the nation’s second cardinal, urged the Holy See not to condemn the Knights of labor, the first labor union and not to condemn the writings of Henry George, a socialist thinker. Instead, he urged Leo XIII to issue an encyclical on the social question. The result was *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. The pope listened to Gibbons’ plea, because the American Church was almost alone in preserving the loyalty of the working class. In 1932, Roosevelt appealed to *Quadragessimo Anno* during his first campaign for the presidency. But the socio economic status of American Catholics dramatically changed in the decades following World War II. Catholics profited from the GI Bill of Rights that guaranteed college tuition for returning veterans. By 1950, the mainline Catholic population had shifted from being working-class urban dwellers to being middle-class occupants of the suburbs, where religion was essentially private. A symbol of this new identity was dissent of several prominent, conservative Catholics from *Mater et Magistra* in 1961. This was but an early sign of a new development among the Catholic laity, who for so long had been seen as loyal to Church teaching and the Democratic Party. Increasingly, the laity were becoming private in their religion and more conservative in their politics. The issue of abortion became central in presidential elections as the Democratic Party officially proclaimed a woman’s right to choose abortion and the Republican Party proclaimed a campaign to end or at least restrict abortion. Some moderate bishops, such as the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago reminded Catholics of the “seamless garment” of life in Catholic social teaching. In the current campaign, abortion has not been central. What has been central has been a vocal Catholic minority stating that Pope Francis became “political” when he challenged that, instead of Donald Trump’s proposal to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, he should build a bridge.