

Political Opportunity and the Pope as a Broker in the Normalization of the U.S. - Cuban Relations

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Abstract

On December 17th, 2014, American president Barack Obama and Cuban president Raúl Castro announced the normalization of relations between their countries and future re-establishment of diplomatic ties after 56 years of enmity, while making a point of thanking Pope Francis for his role in the mediation. The aim of this thesis is to investigate why such a major shift in U.S. – Cuban relations occurred in 2014, and what the role of the Pope was in the normalization of the relations between 2008 and 2016. To investigate this question, I used a comparative method in combination with longitudinal analysis and process tracing. Building on the political opportunity structure, social network theory, and the theory of mediation, this thesis argues that the normalization of the relations occurred in 2014 because Pope Francis, who utilized a political opportunity structure presented to him after his anointment in 2013, was able to act as a broker and use his networks to bring the two disputant parties to the mediating table.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Scholarship and Contribution	5
1.1. Research Question	5
1.2. Literature Review	6
1.2.1. U.S. – Cuban rapprochement	6
1.2.2. Explanations of the USA – Cuban normalization and actors involved in it	8
1.2.3. Religious actors in international relations	10
1.2.4. Pope as an actor of International Relations	11
1.2.5. Pope as a mediator of international relations	12
1.3. Theory	13
1.4. Methodology	15
1.5. Data	17
1.6. Limitations	17
Chapter Two: Normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations	19
2.1. Historical Background	19
2.2. New presidents and the arrest of Alan Gross (2008 – 2009)	21
2.3. The Catholic Church as a mediator between the USA and Cuba, and Latin American pressure (2010 – early 2013)	23
2.4. Obama’s new strategy and Latin American Pope (2013 – 2014)	25
2.5. The new beginning for the U.S. – Cuban Relations (2015 – 2016)	29
2.6. Trump and the end of the political opportunity structure (2017 – 2021)	30
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	34

List of Abbreviations

HS – Holy See

JPII – John Paul II

MSSD – Most Similar System Design

OAS – Organization of American States

POS – Political Opportunity Structure

Introduction

On December 17th, 2014 Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced that the USA and Cuba would normalize their relations and re-establish diplomatic ties in the future.¹ The announcement was the first major shift in relations between these two countries since 1959, when Fidel Castro led a successful revolution to establish a socialist state in Cuba. Following the nationalization of all foreign assets in Cuba and trade deals with the Soviet Union by the newly created government, the U.S. administration imposed near-full trade embargo on Cuba and cut the diplomatic ties with the island.²

Throughout the Cold War, the successful Cuban revolution posed a threat to the hegemony of the United States and to the international security of the Western Hemisphere overall. The threat was derived from the Soviet military bases built on the island and the success of the revolution, which sparked activity among other leftist groups across Latin America.³

Although the end of Cold War brought the end of the main rationale behind the U.S. sanctions on Cuba, the island continued to be perceived as a threat by the USA due to its contacts with communist guerrillas in Columbia, and close ties to countries supporting terrorism.⁴ Therefore, the U.S. maintained its policy and even tightened the embargo further in 1992 and 1996,⁵ respectively.

Even though Cuba and the USA have had opportunities to mend relations—such as during Carter’s presidency⁶ and at the end of Cold War⁷—things remained largely unchanged until

¹ Peter Kornbluh and William M. LeoGrande, “Intimate Adversaries, Possible Friends,” in *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana*, 1, University of North Carolina Press, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469626611_leogrande.15.

² “U.S. – Cuban Relations: 1959 – 2021,” Timeline, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-cuba-relations>.

³ Piotr Lacinski, “Normalization of US - Cuban Relations: Obama Doctrine and International Security in the Western Hemisphere,” *Securitologia* 22, no. 2 (2016): 5 – 8, DOI:10.5604/18984509.1203722.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ William M. LeoGrande, “Normalizing US—Cuba relations: escaping the shackles of the past,” *International Affairs*, Volume 91, no. 3 (2015): 473–488, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12282>.

December 2014. The sudden announcement of the normalization of the relations by the Cuban and American presidents was accompanied by expressions of gratitude to Pope Francis suggesting his role in the agreement.⁸⁹ This prompts the following puzzle: What has changed in U.S. – Cuban relations that led to an agreement on both sides to normalize them after all this time, and what was the role of the Pope?

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of the Pope and the Vatican in the normalization of U.S. - Cuban relations, and how the Pope contributed to the decision. Since his 2008 election campaign, Barack Obama had advocated for a change in U.S. policy towards Cuba and started his first term in 2009 by making concessions towards the island. Similarly, when Raúl Castro was briefly given presidential powers in 2006 while President Fidel Castro underwent surgery, he announced his openness for dialogue with the USA, and continued to make such claims after he became president in 2008.

While both presidents signalled the possibility of change, the arrest of the USAID worker Alan Gross at the end of 2009 left relations at a stalemate.¹⁰ The only significant change in relations between 2009 and 2014 was the anointment of the new Pope Francis in 2013. This proved to be a far-reaching development, because Francis chose to become directly involved and lead mediation efforts between the two countries, eventually resulting in the normalization of relations.¹¹

Drawing on the political opportunity structure (POS), social network theory, and mediation theory, the thesis argues that Pope Francis capitalized on a political opportunity structure created by previous Popes and developments within the U.S. – Cuban relations. He then utilized his

⁸ Raul Castro, "Cuban President Raul Castro Speech." December 17, 2014, video, 5:00, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?323392-1/ral-castro-remarks-normalizing-relations-us>.

⁹ Elizabeth Dias and Zeke J. Miller, "How Pope Francis Helped Broker Cuba Deal," Time, December 17, 2014, <https://time.com/3637901/pope-francis-cuba-obama/>.

¹⁰ Peter Kornbluh and William M. LeoGrande, "OBAMA: A New Beginning," in *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana*, 368-401, University of North Carolina Press, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469626611_leogrande.14.

¹¹ Edward G. Stafford, "The Vatican's Role in the Reconciliation between the US and Cuba," *HEMISFERIO*, Revista del Colegio Interamericano de Defensa 2 (2016): 149 – 160, <http://publications.iadc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/THE-VATICANS-ROLE-IN-THE-RECONCILIATION-BETWEEN-THE-US-AND-CUBA.pdf>.

networks and position to become a broker in the relations to overcome the impasse produced by the imprisonment of Alan Gross. The impasse also allowed him to facilitate entrepreneurial behaviour and come up with ideas that resonated with both the USA and Cuba, thereby unlocking the stalemate, and causing willingness on both sides to engage in a dialogue once again. The result was an 18-month mediation which ended in December 2014 by announcement of the normalization of the relations.

This thesis also utilizes the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) comparative method as defined by John S. Mill.¹² It allows me to establish a causal link¹³ between the influence of the Pope—the independent variable, and the normalization of the relations—the dependent variable. To ensure that the observed correlation is a causal one, longitudinal analysis in combination with process tracing was employed.¹⁴ The longitudinal analysis looks at the same subjects of the study within U.S. – Cuban relations across the time by breaking it into time segments, allowing me to identify the changes taking place over time.¹⁵ Process-tracing enables me to determine the causal chain of issues and events within the relations leading to normalization of the relations and to assess the papal involvement in the outcome.

The thesis proceeds as follows: the first chapter starts by stating the research question and explaining why it is important to study this particular case of the papal foreign policy. It continues with the academic debate on the topic of the normalization of the U.S. - Cuban relations and the Pope as an actor of international relations. Following the literature review, the theory behind the argument of the thesis is further explained. The first chapter also discusses the research design of

¹² Carsten Ankar, “On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 5 (2008): 389, DOI: 10.1080/13645570701401552.

¹³ Charles C. Ragin, “The Distinctiveness of Comparative Social Science,” in *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, 3, University of California Press, 1987, accessed April 9, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnx57.5>.

¹⁴ Evan S. Lieberman, “Causal Inference in Historical Institutional Analysis: A Specification of Periodization Strategies,” *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 9 (November 2001): 1017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034009003>.

¹⁵ Elisabetta, Ruspini. “Longitudinal research,” in *The A-Z of Social Research*, ed. by John Brewer and Robert L. Miller, (London: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2003), 182.

this academic work, as well as the limitations of this work. The second chapter describes the relevant historical background and the different periods of the relations between 2008 – 2016. Next, the thesis discusses a brief overview of the regression in bilateral relations at the time of the Trump's administration, between 2017 and early 2021. The conclusion restates and answers the research question and recommends possibilities for future research on the topic.

Chapter One: Scholarship and Contribution

1.1. Research Question

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the question, *What role did the Pope play in the U.S. – Cuban agreement on the normalization of relations in 2014?* Since the thesis is also looking at the specific role of the Pope and the Vatican in the relations between 2008 – 2016, I ask:

- *What role did the Pope and the Vatican play in the U.S. – Cuban relations between 2008 – 2016?*
- *How did the Pope contribute to the agreement between the USA and Cuba to normalize relations in 2014?*

Research on the normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations is important firstly because it provides an unprecedented example of cooperation and agreement between two countries that had existed in a state of mutual hostility for decades. The announcement ended over half a century of enmity, during which no major improvements occurred, despite a series of opportunities. In light of recent backward developments in relations—such as the mysterious health episodes experienced by the US diplomatic personnel in Havana,¹⁶ and the Trump’s administration sanctions on the island¹⁷—it is essential to research the 2014 breakthrough in hopes that it can be replicated in the event the two sides encounter a similar POS such as the one evident between 2014 and 2017. This brief thaw in the relations and the conditions which allowed it to happen can serve as a crucial example for future foreign policy making of both countries.

Secondly, the Pope and the Holy See (HS) together are a unique actor within international relations because the pope is not only a religious leader but also a head of sovereign state, the Vatican. The Pope does not possess “hard power,” but has vast “soft power,”¹⁸ due to the HS’s diplomatic ties with nearly all nation-states in the world. The fact that the Pope represents roughly

¹⁶ Malcom A. Byrne, “ANN: Declassified Documents on “Havana Syndrome” Response,” H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online, last modified February 12, 2021, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/7258327/us-cuba-secrets-%E2%80%98havana-syndrome%E2%80%9999>.

¹⁷ The Editors, “Trump was Cuba’s Perfect Storm. What will Biden Bring?” World Politics Review, last modified February 12, 2021, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/27971/for-cuba-trump-is-a-perfect-storm>.

¹⁸ Jodok Troy, “The Catholic Church: An Underestimated and Necessary Actor in International Affairs,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2008): 68, accessed May 2, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43134169>.

1.3 billion¹⁹ Roman Catholics worldwide gives him authority that carries remarkable leverage in the form of access to political leaders. The papacy also confers significant characteristics on the pope such as moral legitimacy, access to international audiences and information networks, and neutrality, which make the Pope an effective mediator.²⁰ His assistance in mediation is not only requested by Catholic nations but also by non-Catholic ones, as was the case in Syria, Iraq in 1993, and Iran in 2015.²¹ Therefore, reflecting his importance as a mediator in international relations regardless of religious affiliation and his ability to act as a bridge between the secular and faith-based environments.²² Due to the unique characteristics of the papacy just described; it is important to conduct research on the Pope as a change agent in international relations.

As I will show in the next section, there is little existing research on papal foreign policy, especially in terms of direct papal involvement in the relations of foreign states. Conducting this research allows a closer look at the role of non-state actors, in this case a religious actor, and how they can use their networks and authority to move a seemingly impossible mediation forward. The next section points out the gaps in the literature on this topic and states the contributions this thesis hopes to bring to the scholarly debate.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. U.S. – Cuban rapprochement

The announcement of the normalization of relations in 2014 attracted a vivid academic discussion. For instance, Pickel studied how the U.S. - Cuban relations might work in the future by identifying key issue areas that are likely to advance due to the normalization of the relations.²³

¹⁹ “Vatican – Catholic Church Statistics 2020,” Agenzia Fides, Information Service of the Pontifical Mission Societies since 1927, last modified October 16, 2020, http://www.fides.org/en/news/68840-VATICAN_CATHOLIC_CHURCH_STATISTICS_2020.

²⁰ Thomas Princen, “Mediation by a Transnational Organization: the Case of the Vatican.” In *Mediation in International Relations: multiple approaches to conflict management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 171.

²¹ Amanda McFarlane, “The Holy See's Diplomacy: An Analysis of Papal Mediation in the Middle East,” *Florida Journal of International Law* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 168 – 169, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/fjil28&id=179&collection=journals&index=>.

²² Troy, “The Catholic,” 68 – 69.

²³ Andreas Pickel, “The End of a Failed Foreign Policy: The U.S. – Cuba System on the Threshold of a New Era,” *Implications of Normalization: Scholarly Perspective on U.S. – Cuban Relations*, (2015): 1 – 10,

Others focus on more specific policy implications, as is the case of Morris²⁴ and Torres,²⁵ who separately studied the effects of the normalization on the Cuban economic policies. In comparison, Fandl²⁶ and Argüellová²⁷ examine the significance of the normalization on the special status of Cuban migrants in the USA. However, there is only limited amount of work on the reasons why the normalization actually happened and what was the role of different actors in the outcome, in particular the Pope, which is the aim of this thesis.

The idea to reverse the foreign policy implemented in the U.S. – Cuban relations and move the countries toward normalization of their relations was not a new one in 2014. Since the end of the 20th century, numerous authors had been calling for the end of the hostility and had been claiming that the state of the relations was abnormal.²⁸ In 1980s, Dominguez argued that the antagonistic US policy towards Cuba had not brought any results the creators of the policy had hoped for, and so, it was necessary for the USA to engage in negotiations with Cuba.²⁹ In comparison, Weldes and Saco studied the persistence of the same ineffective US policy toward Cuba and suggested that the continuation of the hostility cannot be explained by conventional factors, because the policy is to a large extent based on the discursive and linguistic artefact of the “Cuban problem,” which ultimately enabled the persistence of the US policy.³⁰ Suchlicki took a

<https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/upload/2015-au-ssrc-pickel-us-cuba-system-final.pdf>.

²⁴ Emily Morris, “How will US – Cuban Normalization Affect Economic Policy,” in *A New Chapter in US-Cuba Relations. Studies of the Americas*, ed. Eric Hershberg and William M. LeoGrande, (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2016), 115 – 127, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-29595-4.pdf>.

²⁵ Ricardo Torres, “Cuban Economic Reforms and Rapprochement with the United States: A Comparative Perspective,” in *A New Chapter in US-Cuba Relations. Studies of the Americas*, ed. Eric Hershberg and William M. LeoGrande, (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2016), 129 – 142, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-29595-4.pdf>.

²⁶ Kevin J. Fandl, “Cuban Migration to the United States in a Post-Normalized Relations World,” *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 81-112, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/mjgt26&id=88&men_tab=srchresults#.

²⁷ Lucia Argüellová, “Normalization of U.S. – Cuban Relations: The End of the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” Policy – the End of Cold War?” in *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies; Prague* 11, no. 4 (2017): 134 – 152, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2137491302?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar>.

²⁸ Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, “Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of ‘The Cuban Problem’, 1960-1994,” *Millennium* 25, no. 2 (June 1996): 361–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298960250020601>.

²⁹ Jorge I. Dominguez, “US-Cuban Relations in the 1980s: Issues and Policies,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1985): 17-34, accessed February 23, 2021, doi:10.2307/165663.

³⁰ Weldes and Saco, “Making,” 361 – 95.

different approach and claimed that the influence of the US economic embargo on Castro's actions and his willingness to exchange commitment to internationalism for the normalization of the relations with the USA was a myth, and thus the established policy was unlikely to affect Castro's regime.³¹

Nevertheless, the state of U.S. – Cuban relations had been criticized previously, the situation remained static until 2014, suggesting that a new political opportunity must have arisen in the relations that had not been present before. This thesis aims to contribute to the research on the U.S. – Cuban relations by exploring this political opportunity structure created in the relations, and how it was utilized by the Pope to bring the two disputing parties to the mediation table, ultimately agreeing on the normalization of relations.

1.2.2. Explanations of the USA – Cuban normalization and actors involved in it

A few scholars attempted to give a complex overview of why the normalization occurred. LeoGrande and Kornbluh try to give a rundown of major events that took place between the USA and Cuba and led to the normalization of the relations.³² However, their work relies mostly on the US archives and so the significance of the other important actors such as the Pope are to some extent omitted. Besides, they don't show the appearance of the new POS, which emerged in the relations. By comparison, Zawatsky and Gemma analyse the causes of the previous US normalizations of the relations with Vietnam and China to identify key factors to the normalization process. They then apply these factors to the U.S. - Cuban case and claim that the normalization took place because key factors of the normalization process were realized, partially due to the international pressure, which created an opportunity for the normalization to occur.³³ Although they suggest that a new opportunity to normalize the relations emerged, they do not consider the

³¹ Jamie Suchlicki, "Myths and Realities in US-Cuban Relations," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35, no. 2 (1993): 103-13, accessed May 12, 2021, doi:10.2307/165946.

³² Peter Kornbluh and William M. LeoGrande, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469626611_leogrande.

³³ Ashley Gemma and Ethan Zawatsky, "Diplomatic Normalization between the US and Cuba in Light of Recent Changes in US Foreign Policy More Generally," in *Senior Honours Projects*, Paper 427 (2015): 1 – 23, <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/427><http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/427>.

role of particular actors in creation and utilization of this opportunity, which is the aim of this thesis.

Lastly, only a handful of scholars focus directly on what the role of different actors was in the relations, and in particular, on the role of the Pope. For example, Laguardia Martinez et al. briefly list all actors involved in the US – Cuban relations and assess their impact on them.³⁴ LeoGrande, focuses on the role of a one particular actor, as he studies the gradual shift of US policy towards Cuba.³⁵ Stafford talks about the papal role in the normalization of the relations, but mostly in terms of the effect the anointment of the first Latin American pope had on the relations and the Pope's emphasis on diplomacy of dialogue and encounter.³⁶ Lastly, Gayte looks at the Vatican's approach vis-à-vis Havana in light of the papal mediation in the relations,³⁷ but she does not investigate the POS, which emerged as well, and does not emphasize the papal networks utilized to start the mediation.

Most of the literature on the normalization of the U.S. - Cuban relations focuses on what kind of policy implications this development will have, rather than attempting to explain why it happened in 2014. Furthermore, it suggests that despite longstanding criticism of the continuation of the same U.S. – Cuban foreign policy, nothing changed until 2014—suggesting the appearance of a new political opportunity structure. Literature discussing the reasons why the normalization happened omits the role of important actors, and in addition uses the concept of political opportunity in connection to the previous US normalizations of relations, rather than with regard to the utilization of this opportunity by a certain key actor. Lastly, the small body of work that looks at the role of different actors in the U.S. – Cuban relations and in particular the Pope, only

³⁴ Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez, Georgina Chami, Annita Montoute, Debbie A. Mohammed, "Factors and Actors Impacting Cuba-U.S. Relations," in *Changing Cuba-U.S. Relations* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 111 – 142, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20366-5_7.

³⁵ LeoGrande, "Normalizing," 483.

³⁶ Stafford, "The Vatican's Role."

³⁷ Marie Gayte-Lebrun, "Far from an Alliance: The United States and the Holy See's Approach vis-à-vis Havana since the Cuban Revolution in Light of Pope Francis's Mediation," *Religion, Diplomatie et Paix*, Jun 2018, Vatican, Vatican City, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03227107/document>.

examines the character of papal involvement or the steps the Pope took to start the mediation, rather than the social networks he used to utilize the newly created POS in the relations. To connect this oversight, this thesis explores the role of the Pope in the normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations and why the normalization took place in 2014.

1.2.3. Religious actors in international relations

As claimed by Fox³⁸ and Sandal,³⁹ religion and religious actors still remain an understudied area in International Relations. However, some authors do focus on the role of the religious leaders, especially in conflict and peace. Sisk, for example, presents a comparative analysis of the role of religious actors both in continuation of conflict and creation of peace.⁴⁰ Correspondingly, on the case of Northern Ireland, Sandel shows how religious actors influence public opinion and policymaking, thus contributing to conflict transformation.⁴¹ Johnston and Cox study how faith-based diplomacy combines the dynamics of religious faith with peace-making in order to reach reconciliation between disputing parties.⁴² Moreover, Bercovitch and Kadayifci argue that faith-based actors may have an important role to play in the peace-making process, because they bring particular dimensions of trust and legitimacy that create leverage in the process and foster interfaith dialogue.⁴³ This thesis aims to explore the importance of the religious actors in peace-making and mediation further, especially in terms of papal involvement.

³⁸ Jonathan Fox, “Religion as an Overlooked Element of International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (2001): 53-73, accessed May 15, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3186242>.

³⁹ Nukhet A. Sandal, *Religious Leaders and Conflict Transformation: Northern Ireland and Beyond*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 1 – 20. doi:10.1017/9781316676592.

⁴⁰ Timothy D. Sisk, ed. *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peace-making* (Georgetown University Press, 2011), accessed May 15, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt6tx>.

⁴¹ Sandal, *Religious Leaders*, 1 – 20.

⁴² Douglas Johnston, Brian Cox, “Faith-Based Diplomacy and Preventive Engagement,” in *Faith-Based Diplomacy Trumping Realpolitik*, edited by Johnston Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

⁴³ Jacob Bercovitch and Ayse Kadayifci, “Religion and Mediation: The Role of Faith-Based Actors in International Conflict Resolution,” in *International Negotiation* 14, no. 1 (2009): 175 – 204, DOI: 10.1163/157180609X406562.

1.2.4. Pope as an actor of International Relations

With its 1.3 billion followers,⁴⁴ the Catholic Church is the largest and oldest transnational organization in the world.⁴⁵ The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church and the Holy See is the legal term representing the Pope and his higher administrative staff (curia), who carry out the sovereign acts of the Church.⁴⁶ However, as Barbato argues, the HS does not only represent the legal framework of the Catholic Church's leadership, but also entails its legal and political status in diplomacy and gives the Pope the ability to run the territory of the Vatican City state. Thus, the Holy See is a multi-layered actor, represented at the international stage more effectively than any other actor.⁴⁷ The unique actorness of the Holy See is also explored by Martens⁴⁸ and Ryngaert,⁴⁹ who explain the difference between the HS and the Vatican. According to Ryngaert, the Vatican City state serves as a territorial base and fulfils the practical needs of the HS, while the Holy See deals with the more "spiritual and value-laden" matters. But the HS is not dependent on the Vatican City state to exercise its power, as was the case between 1870 and 1929, when the HS lacked a territorial base.⁵⁰

Rieck and Niebuhr argue that the resources of the Vatican's foreign policy power are derived from the ethically founded leadership of the Pope on certain issues and the papal ability to convey mediation and peace-making, thus enhancing papal international prestige and the leverage derived from the community of faithful across the world. Together, this amounts to a unique form of integrity that undergirds the Holy See's national and international agenda setting.⁵¹ Both Rieck

⁴⁴ Agenzia Fides, "Vatican."

⁴⁵ Jodok Troy, "The Catholic Church and International Relations," in *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2016): 1, accessed May 15, 2021, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.2.

⁴⁶ Mariano Barbato, "A State, a Diplomat, and a Transnational Church: The Multi-layered Actorness of the Holy See," *Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2013): 27-28, accessed July 12, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24624544.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 – 28.

⁴⁸ Kurt Martens, "The Position of the Holy See and Vatican City State in International Relations," *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review* 83, no. 5 (Summer 2006): 729-760, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/udetmr83&div=46&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals.

⁴⁹ Cedric Ryngaert, "The Legal Status of the Holy See," *Goettingen Journal of International Law* 3, no. 3 (2011): 829-860, https://www.gojil.eu/issues/33/33_article_ryngaert.pdf.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 835 – 836.

⁵¹ Dorothee Niebuhr and Christian E. Rieck, "Small" States in International Politics, report, edited by Wahlers Gerhard, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2015, 57, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10119.6>.

and Niebuhr,⁵² and Murphy,⁵³ agree that the direction of the Holy See's foreign policy is informed by the personality and experience of the Pope. According to Mathias, there are three ways the Pope can be involved in international relations, including direct political or diplomatic activity, taking a pronounced stance on a particular issue, and by intervention in world order through papal encyclicals.⁵⁴

1.2.5. Pope as a mediator of international relations

One way the Pope can get involved in international relations is through diplomacy and mediation. Papal effectiveness within mediation is assessed by Princen, who argues that papal ability to influence state leaders stems from his neutrality, moral authority, secrecy, ability to advance other's standing, international audience, and vast network of information of contacts.⁵⁵ There is, however, only a limited number of articles concerning the research any particular papal mediation. Lindsley discusses successful Vatican mediation of the Beagle Channel Settlement but concludes that in the future, the Vatican is only likely to take up the mediation in case of a threat of war, exhaustion of all other resources, and a request from both disputing parties.⁵⁶ McFarlane takes a more comprehensive approach to the papal mediation in the Cuban-USA case, emphasizing that the success of Pope Francis did not occur independent of his predecessors' efforts, and defining four stages in which the mediation took place.⁵⁷ However, McFarlane mostly describes the mediation itself and does not talk about the important issues that led to the mediation in the first place, which is what this thesis aims to do.

⁵² Niebuhr and Rieck, "Small," 38.

⁵³ Francis X. Murphy, "Vatican Politics: The Metapolitique of the Papacy," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 384-385, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/cwrint19&div=24&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals.

⁵⁴ Mathias Albert, "Beyond Integration and Differentiation? The Holy See and the Pope in the System of World Politics," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15 no. 4 (2017): 22 - 23, DOI: 10.1080/15570274.2017.1392121.

⁵⁵ Thomas Princen, "Mediation by a Transnational Organization: the Case of the Vatican," In *Mediation in International Relations: multiple approaches to conflict management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 170.

⁵⁶ Lisa Lindsley, "The Beagle Channel Settlement: Vatican Mediation Resolves a Century-Old Dispute," *Journal of Church and State* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 435-456, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jchs29&div=39&id=&page=&collection=journals>.

⁵⁷ McFarlane, "The Holy," 167 - 194.

1.3. Theory

The term “political opportunity structure” was coined in connection to social movements.⁵⁸ However, in *Contentious Performances*, Tilly offers more complex explanation of the POS, which allows the concept to be used far beyond. According to him, political opportunity structures arise when a dispute appears between certain actors, either from a “campaign,” in the form of international influences, or resulting from a transformation of political economy.⁵⁹ A “campaign” consists of a series of uninterrupted and organized episodes including similar claims, on similar or the same targets.⁶⁰ The political opportunity structure can be altered by campaigns as they often foster new ties among actors involved in the claims, thus the changes in the “environment of political actors”⁶¹ create an opportunity for a certain claim to be realized.

Social network theory as outlined by Goddard argues that networks are constituted by the connections between actors, and form the foundation of political interactions. Networks reduce resources of actors, but at the same time permit them to use the resources available to re-establish structures to produce political change. The actor who possesses the resources to generate change is called the broker. Brokers function as crucial points in the networks because they connect actors which otherwise would not be connected. If the network becomes unstable and contention arises, a structural hole appears which may facilitate entrepreneurial behaviour by the broker. The broker then becomes a political entrepreneur and may come up with ideas and information which have a “switching effect” if they resonate with other actors within the network. This ultimately transforms the network structure by breakings some connections, while creating new ones.⁶² Essentially, brokers bridge structural holes, allowing them to act as an entrepreneur and promote the structural change. Brokers have greater leverage within networks, because they are more flexible, have

⁵⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1978), 349.

⁵⁹ Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 90.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁶¹ Ibid., 89 – 92.

⁶² Stacie E. Goddard, “Brokering Change: Networks and Entrepreneurs in International Politics,” *International Theory* 1, no. 2 (2009): 250–51. doi:10.1017/S1752971909000128.

capability to bring new ideas, and spread them across the network.⁶³ However, for a change in the network to occur, the broker must be able to create ideas that will resonate with other actors. The capacity of an idea to resonate with other actors depends on its cultural harmony, the thickness of the connections between the broker and the other actors, and the exclusivity of the brokers ties within the network.⁶⁴

Bercovitch defines mediation as a process of conflict management, where the disputing parties ask for or accept assistance from an individual, state, or organization with the aim to change their perceptions, without resorting to physical force or citing the authority of the law.⁶⁵ To start an effective mediation, the actors must have motivation to resolve the conflict, there must be an opportunity for the mediator to get involved, and the mediator must possess skills to mediate the conflict.⁶⁶ However, there are further five preconditions, which must be fulfilled before actual negotiation within a mediation can be successful. First, the disputing parties must accept their inability to resolve their issue themselves; second, the political or economic costs of outcomes different than agreement are too high; third, the disputing parties must be represented by someone with authority to speak on their behalf and commit to the agreement; fourth; there must be pressure from outside actors to agree; and finally, all sides must approve of the mediator.⁶⁷

Based on these theories, I argue that Pope Francis used his position and his networks to act as a political entrepreneur in the U.S. – Cuban relations and capitalized on a political opportunity created by previous Popes and developments within U.S. – Cuban relations. He played an important role as broker of relations by bridging structural holes, the impasse over the release of Alan Gross, thus connecting the two adversaries. Furthermore, the structural hole granted Pope

⁶³ Goddard, "Brokering," 268.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 269.

⁶⁵ Jacob Bercovitch, "The Structure and Diversity of Mediation in International Relations," in *Mediation in International Relations: multiple approaches to conflict management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 7.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Z. Rubin, "Conclusion: International mediation in Context," in *Mediation in International Relations: multiple approaches to conflict management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 251.

⁶⁷ Eileen Babbitt and Lawrence Susskind, "Overcoming the Obstacle to Effective Mediation of International Disputes," in *Mediation in International Relations: multiple approaches to conflict management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1992), 48.

Francis an opening to employ entrepreneurial behaviour, namely, to come up with ideas that resonated with both the USA and Cuba. By sending letters to Obama and Castro respectively, thus putting them in direct contact, he was able to unlock the stalemate, and initiate willingness on both sides to engage in dialogue. Since all five preconditions for successful mediation were fulfilled, the mediation was likely to be effective. This proved to be true when the normalization of U.S. – Cuban relations was announced on the 17th of December 2014.

1.4. Methodology

The normalization of U.S. – Cuban relations was chosen as a case study for two main reasons. First, it is an unprecedented reversal of foreign policy that was implemented for over a half a century by both the USA and Cuba. Second, during the announcement, both presidents personally thanked Pope Francis for his role in the mediation,⁶⁸ suggesting causal link between the papal involvement in relations and decision to normalize them.

I used the qualitative comparative method, in particular Most Similar System Design (MSSD), to establish a causal link between the dependent and independent variables of the study.⁶⁹ In the MSSD, the objects of the research system are kept as similar as possible, besides the phenomenon the study is to observe.⁷⁰ Between 2008 and 2016, the only significant actor that has changed within U.S. – Cuban relations was the Pope,⁷¹ and the other actors remained the same; therefore, I chose this time period to observe. The influence of the pope is the main independent variable of the study, while the announcement of the normalization of U.S. – Cuban relations is the dependent variable.

⁶⁸Raul Castro, “Cuban President Raul Castro Speech.” December 17, 2014, video, 5:00, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?323392-1/ral-castro-remarks-normalizing-relations-us>; Elizabeth Dias and Zeke J. Miller, “How Pope Francis Helped Broker Cuba Deal,” *Time*, December 17, 2014, <https://time.com/3637901/pope-francis-cuba-obama/>.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁰ Carsten Ankar. “On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 5 (2008): 389, DOI: 10.1080/13645570701401552.

⁷¹ Barry Moody and Philip Pulella, “Argentina’s Bergoglio elected as new Pope Francis,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-succession-idUSBRE92808520130313>.

However, to achieve a high level of confidence that the observed correlation—in this case, the Pope’s influence and the breakthrough is also a causal one, diachronic evidence is required.⁷² Therefore, I employed a longitudinal analysis that looks at the same subjects of the study within the U.S. – Cuban relations across the time by breaking it into time segments, allowing me to identify changes taking place in relations over time and to compare the data between periods.⁷³ The periodization of the case study was carried out according to Institutional Origins Strategy that divides the periods of study according to instances when existing institutions are rearranged in certain ways.⁷⁴ In my case, the periods were divided based on the reconfiguration of institutions, which shifted the stances and actions of actors involved in the relations.

To confirm or reject the causal link between the normalization of the relations and the papal influence in it, longitudinal analysis will be used in combination with process-tracing, which is a method that: “...attempts to identify the intervening causal processes—the causal chain and causal mechanism—between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable.”⁷⁵ It provides a way of evaluating the hypotheses regarding the causal relation proposed by the comparative method and thus ameliorates its limitations.⁷⁶ For this study the following hypothesis have been established:

- Main hypothesis: The unprecedented involvement of Pope Francis in the normalization of U.S – Cuban relations and his position in international relations provided a new and unique opportunity for both sides to discuss unresolved issues, resulting in the normalization of the relations.

⁷² Evan S. Lieberman, “Causal Inference in Historical Institutional Analysis: A Specification of Periodization Strategies,” *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 9 (November 2001): 1017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034009003>.

⁷³ Elisabetta, Ruspini. “Longitudinal research, „in *The A-Z of Social Research*, ed. by John Brewer and Robert L. Miller, (London: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2003), 182.

⁷⁴ Lieberman, “Causal,” 1020 – 1022.

⁷⁵ George and Bennet, “Process-Tracing,” 214.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

- Alternative hypothesis 1: President Obama was freer to carry out his foreign policy goals during his second term because he did not have to face re-election, and that is why the normalization took place.
- Alternative hypothesis 2: Due to the worsening economic situation in Cuba, President Raúl Castro was forced to improve the relations with the USA in order to boost the Cuban economy, resulting in the normalization of relations.

1.5. Data

The data used for periodization of the case study and the process-tracing are secondary and mostly assembled from publicly available sources, due to the secretive nature of foreign policy making and restricted access to the various relevant archives. The starting point of the data gathering are the last two chapters of the book written by Kornbluh and LeoGrande in which they were granted special permit to research the US archives on this topic.⁷⁷ Similarly, the official websites of the US and Cuban governments as well as the Holy See were used to gather statements, speeches, and official documents. Other documents and articles produced by the media, such as the *New York Times* or ABC News, were used to contextualise the issues and add details about the functioning of papal networks.

1.6. Limitations

The comparative method poses a hindrance in that it is unable to provide definitive verification or invalidation of the causal link.⁷⁸ To ameliorate this limitation, the thesis employed longitudinal analysis to look at the change in variables over time. More importantly it uses process-tracing, which can point out causal paths and variables that would be otherwise omitted and validate the causal inference on the basis of few cases.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, *Back Channel*, 368 – 417.

⁷⁸ Daniel Druckman, “Comparative Case Study Approaches,” in *Doing Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2005), 211 – 212, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412983969>.

⁷⁹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, “Process-Tracing and Historical Explanation,” in *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 215.

Secondly, because the events at hand are so recent and diplomatic talks, are generally conducted at a high level of secrecy⁸⁰ there is a limited amount of data available to be utilized. However, these limitations do not mean the research is not valid, as when one looks at the data that are available in form of speeches, interviews, press statements, and previous academic work overtime, one can see the developments and can trace the processes between the actors.

Finally, I am not fluent in Spanish. So, the data used for the research come mostly from English sources. Nevertheless, the data that is obtainable in English is significant, because the U.S. – Cuban relations remain under the microscope at all times. If an important development in relations arises, either the Cuban officials or the USA typically translate that particular piece of information to English.

⁸⁰ McFarlane, “The Holy,” 4.

Chapter Two: Normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations

2.1. Historical Background

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 had an impact on Cuban relations with both the USA and the Vatican.⁸¹

After the revolution, the new Marxist Cuban government nationalised all U.S.-owned industries and developed close ties to the Soviet Union. The USA responded with an economic embargo and broke off diplomatic relations the following year. After the 1962 standoff over the installation of nuclear-armed Soviet rockets in Cuba,⁸² the U.S. requested that Cuba be excluded from the Organization of American States (OAS), a request that won support from the other member states.⁸³ Nevertheless, U.S. – Cuban relations reached a relative thaw in 1970s.⁸⁴ Afterward, relations oscillated between tensions and rapprochement until the end of the Cold War. After the Cold War, which had long justified the U.S. policies towards the island, the same generally hostile policies remained in place.⁸⁵ U.S. authorities even tightened the embargo in 1992 and 1996.⁸⁶

Cuban Catholic Bishops cautiously supported the 1959 revolution at first, but soon expressed their concerns over its direction. Accordingly, Fidel proclaimed his opposition to the Church on the island and closed seminaries and nationalised all church property, and around 3,500 priests and nuns were jailed or exiled.⁸⁷ In 1962, Cuba became an atheistic state and Fidel Castro was excommunicated by the Holy See. Out of 200 clerics who stayed on the island, the majority were sent to labour camps, including the future archbishop of Havana, Jamie Ortega. However, unlike U.S. – Cuban relations, which remained in stasis, the collapse of Soviet Union brought

⁸¹ Maria Gayte, “Cold war triangle? The United States, The Vatican and Cuba,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 47 – 48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2012.754200>.

⁸² Lacinski, “Normalization,” 6 – 7.

⁸³ Stella Krepp, “Cuba and the OAS: A Story of Dramatic Fallout and Reconciliation,” *History and Public Policy Program* (blog), December 18, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/cuba-and-the-oas-story-dramatic-fallout-and-reconciliation>.

⁸⁴ Gayte, “Cold,” 48.

⁸⁵ Lacinski, “Normalization,” 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gayte, “Cold,” 48.

change to Cuban relations with the Vatican.⁸⁸ The Cuban government hoped that the Catholic Church and its charities could step in to provide social services that the government was increasingly unable to provide due to the deteriorating Cuban economy. Therefore, in 1991 Cuban authorities amended the constitution to strike the part declaring Cuba an atheist state. The Holy See responded positively to these changes.

In the years immediately preceding that shift, the Catholic Church had been at risk of extinction in Cuba. Therefore, in 1985, the HS suggested a possible papal visit to Cuba. Washington did not like the idea, as they believed it would legitimise Castro's regime. The US responded in the same manner on the following occasion when the rumour resurfaced, and ultimately when the visit of John Paul II (JPII) took place in 1998.⁸⁹

The main aim of the papal visit was to revive the Church in Cuba and so JPII called for religious, rather than political freedom in Cuba, showing that its foreign policy towards the island is independent of the foreign policy of other states. During the visit, JPII asked Cuba to be more open, and criticised the Marxist ideology behind the Cuban regime. However, he also condemned the US embargo, calling it unfair and unethical. The Vatican's apparent tactic was to strengthen its ministry in Cuba while creating space for dialogue and reconciliation. Following the visit, Cuban government declared Christmas Day a national holiday; bishops were granted permits to build new churches; and the number of clergy increased.⁹⁰ The most important development of the visit, however, was that the Catholic Church became the only institution operating in Cuba independently of the regime.⁹¹

At the time, the US was following a doctrine of democracy promotion on the island. Once they realized the special standing of the Catholic Church on the island, the Bush administration used nearly every available contact to pressure church authorities to work toward political change

⁸⁸ Gayte, "Cold," 48.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 49

⁹⁰ Ibid., 49 - 50.

⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

in Havana.⁹² However, according to Gayte, diplomatic cables show that most of these pressures went unanswered by the Catholic Church. The Vatican was following its “national interest,” protecting the Catholics on the island. While the Church supported a more democratic Cuba, it was not its “battle” as its primary interest was to protect their “small space for operation in Cuba.”⁹³

2.2. New presidents and the arrest of Alan Gross (2008 – 2009)

In February 2008, Cuba elected new president Raúl Castro, who in his first speech stressed the importance of continuation of the revolution.⁹⁴ But the change in the leadership raised the possibility of the island changing its policy directions. During this historic time, the Vatican secretary of state was visiting Cuba to commemorate the 10th anniversary of JPII’s visit to the island, and while there he reiterated the late Pope’s message of hope and need for religious freedom.⁹⁵

At the same time, democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, in a speech at the Cuban American National Foundation, pledged to allow unlimited family travel and remittances to the island, but stated support for an embargo until Cuba took significant steps toward democracy.⁹⁶ Obama won 35% of the Cuban American votes in Florida, carried the state, and ultimately won the presidency in November 2008.⁹⁷

While both countries now having new presidents, Raúl declared his willingness to talk to the USA “without intermediaries,” but also stated that Cuba is not desperate or in rush.⁹⁸ In March 2009, the U.S. Congress approved easing of travel restrictions to Cuba and slightly loosened the

⁹² Gayte, “Cold,” 50.

⁹³ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁴ C-Span, “Cuban President Speech,” February 24, 2008, video, 1:50, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?202528-1/cuban-president-speech>.

⁹⁵ Tarcisio Bertone, “Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Cuba,” vatican.va, February 26, 2008, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/card-bertone/2008/documents/rc_seg-st_20080225_corpo-diplomatico_it.html.

⁹⁶ C-Span, “Obama Speech on Cuba,” May 23, 2008, video, 30:20, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?205628-1/obama-speech-cuba>.

⁹⁷ Peter Kornbluh and William M. LeoGrande, “OBAMA A New Beginning,” in *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 368, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469626611_leogrande.15.

⁹⁸ “Raúl Castro offers direct talks with Obama,” France24, last modified January 3, 2009, <https://www.france24.com/en/20090103-raul-castro-offers-direct-talks-with-obama->.

embargo. The step was strongly opposed by some democrats in the Congress.⁹⁹ In an interview for CNN Obama stressed the need for Cuba to reciprocate US overtures by releasing political prisoners or decreasing fees on remittances. However, Cuban officials read the concessions as a campaign debt of the president to the Cuban Americans¹⁰⁰ and Castro urged the USA to release the Cuban Five held in US federal prisons, in exchange for political prisoners in Cuba.¹⁰¹ During the summit, some Latin American governments advocated for readmission of Cuba to the group.¹⁰² As a response, Obama said: “The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba ... I know there's a longer journey that must be travelled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps we can take toward a new day.”¹⁰³ After the summit, Cuba was accepted to OAS, but only under the condition it would agree to commit to democracy.¹⁰⁴

There is no apparent evidence that throughout this period HS initiated dialogue with the US on Cuba, not even during Obama's first visit to Vatican in June 2009.¹⁰⁵ However, according to Gayte, Washington did try to engage the HS on Cuba, as they still wanted to utilize the Catholic Church as a catalyst for democratic change on the island—but with no significant result.¹⁰⁶

At this point US foreign policy officials believed they have dramatically changed the U.S. policy towards Cuba. In fact, however, the new policies were still not as open as they were during Carter's administration and in addition the US had approved a foreign policy budget that included \$20 million to conduct a semi-covert operation focused on democracy promotion in Cuba.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, “OBAMA”, 371 – 372.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “Raul Castro Signals Thaw in US-Cuba Relationship,” Voanews.com, last modified November 2, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/archive/raul-castro-signals-thaw-us-cuba-relationship>.

¹⁰² “Cuba Figures Prominently in Summit of the Americas Opener,” Voanews.com, last modified November 2, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/archive/cuba-figures-prominently-summit-americas-opener>.

¹⁰³ Barack Obama, “Official Remarks of United States President Barack Obama at the Opening Ceremony of the Fifth Summit of the Americas,” Port of Spain, April 17, 2009, http://www.summit-americas.org/V_Summit/remarks_usa_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ “OAS General Assembly Resolution on Cuba,” International Legal Materials 48, no. 6 (2009): 1246-253, accessed May 28, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20695948>.

¹⁰⁵ Sunlen Miller, Jake Tapper and Karen Travers, “President Obama Meets Pope Benedict at the Vatican,” *ABC NEWS*, July 10, 2009, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/International/story?id=8049308&page=1>.

¹⁰⁶ Gayte, “Cold,” 50.

¹⁰⁷ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, “OBAMA,” 371 – 372.

At the end of 2009, Cuban dissident blogger Sánchez sent questions to both Obama and Castro with hopes to get answers on the status of U.S. – Cuban relations. Obama responded directly to her questions and he reiterated the need of reciprocal actions on the Cuban part.¹⁰⁸ Only few weeks later, the USAID contractor Alan Gross was arrested in Cuba for distributing satellite communications equipment to a small Jewish community on the island.¹⁰⁹ The U.S. officials at the U.S. interest section in Havana believed the arrest was a direct result of Obama's endorsement of the blogger.¹¹⁰ Shortly after the arrest, the USA declared no further developments in the relations would be possible until Gross was released, while Raúl called Obama's moves towards Cuba propaganda.¹¹¹

2.3. The Catholic Church as a mediator between the USA and Cuba, and Latin American pressure (2010 – early 2013)

In March 2010, Cuban officials banned the weekly protests of the Cuban group Ladies in White. Following the ban, Cuban Cardinal Ortega and Bishop Garcia appealed to the government to allow the protests to resume. Castro agreed, and he moved the discussion with Ortega to the broader issue of the political prisoners in Cuba.¹¹² The discussions brought results in July, when after a meeting between Castro, the Spanish foreign minister, and Ortega, the Catholic Church announced the release of 52 political prisoners, with more to be released in the coming weeks.¹¹³ This is significant, because it marked the first time the Cuban government had engaged with the Catholic Church as a mediator. Ortega expressed his belief that it may signal a new direction of the state-church relations;¹¹⁴ Cuba was ready to trust the Church.

¹⁰⁸ Jeff Franks, "Obama praises dissident Cuban blogger Sanchez," *REUTERS*, November 19, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-blogger-obama-idUSTRE5AI4T620091119>.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Crowley, "The American Prisoner Alan Gross and Cuban-American Relations," *New York Times*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/world/americas/alan-gross-cuba-and-the-united-states.html>.

¹¹⁰ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, "OBAMA," 377.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Marc Frank, "Vatican Say Cuba to Release Political Prisoners," *ABC NEWS*, July 8, 2010, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/cuba-agrees-release-52-political-prisoners/story?id=11116577>.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ United States Department of State. 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom – Cuba, accessed May 22, 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf2d0a48.html>.

Although Washington acknowledged the Cuban action, they were not willing to make any more moves until the Gross's release.¹¹⁵ Cuban authorities at the time, expressed that the cases of the Cuban Five and Gross were linked.¹¹⁶

January of 2011 brought further loosening of the travel and remittance restrictions to Cuba, but the efforts were marked as insufficient by Cuban officials.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, Raúl Castro began employing new economic policies including one which allowed Cuban citizens to buy and sell residential real estate.¹¹⁸ Although there were numerous attempts to free Gross by the US officials,¹¹⁹ he was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2011.¹²⁰

The sixth OAS summit took place at the start of 2012, but the disagreement between the USA and other Latin American countries on the Cuban involvement in the group stalled discussion of other issues at hand. The Latin American countries agreed that either Cuba would be invited to the next summit, or the Inter-American system with the longstanding U.S. dominance would not function anymore.¹²¹ By such a statement, the Latin American countries were pressuring the Obama administration to rethink its Cuba strategy.

During the papal visit to Cuba in March 2012, Benedict XVI advocated for religious freedom and frequently referred back to the stances of his predecessor.¹²² He claimed that Vatican “rejects immovable positions and unilateral viewpoints, which tend to make understanding more difficult and efforts at cooperation ineffective.”¹²³ Although Benedict XVI did not criticize the

¹¹⁵ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, “OBAMA,” 382.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 379.

¹¹⁷ “Cuba: US easing of travel rules “positive but limited,” *BBC*, January 17, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-12204363>.

¹¹⁸ Damien Cave, “Cuba to Allow Buying and Selling of Property, With Few restrictions,” *New York Times*, November 3, 2011, https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-news.

¹¹⁹ Kornbluh and LeoGrande, “OBAMA,” 374, 379.

¹²⁰ Randal C. Archibold, Cuba Gives -Year prison Term to American,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/world/americas/13cuba.html>.

¹²¹ Julia Sweig and Valerie Wirtschafter, “CUBA: A Whole New Ballgame,” Centre For Latin American Studies, UC Berkley, accessed May 22, <https://clas.berkeley.edu/research/cuba-whole-new-ballgame>.

¹²² “Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with Journalists During the Flight to Mexico,” Vatican.va, accessed May 22, 2021, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120323_incontro-giornalisti.html.

¹²³ Benedict XVI, “Words of His Holiness Benedict XVI.” Havana, March 28, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120328_congedo-cuba.html.

regime directly, he suggested that the Cuban Marxist structure “no longer corresponded with reality.”¹²⁴ Prior to the visit, the U.S. State department had asked the Pope to raise the case of Gross with the Castros. According to the Vatican spokesman, Benedict XVI did raise the issue regarding political prisoners, but he did not state if Gross was discussed in particular.¹²⁵

At this point, the stances of the Cuban American community on the approach of the U.S. government towards Cuba were changing. According to the decade-long polling of the Florida International University, in 1991, 80% of the respondents favoured tightening the embargo,¹²⁶ while in 2011 only 56% favoured its continuation.¹²⁷ The change in stances of Cuban Americans, the pressure of the Latin American countries, and the previous engagement of the Catholic Church with Cuba were slowly creating the new POS.

2.4. Obama’s new strategy and Latin American Pope (2013 – 2014)

In November 2012, Obama won re-election. The post-election reshuffle of his cabinet in 2013 portended the possibility of a new approach toward Cuba, with John Kerry coming on as secretary of state, who had previously opposed the problematic USAID democracy promotion program.¹²⁸ However, U.S. Democrats in Congress were still opposed to easing the Cuban restrictions.

In February, Pope Benedict shocked the world by announcing his resignation.¹²⁹ The conclave for the next Pope took place that March, and a Latin American cardinal, Jorge Bergoglio, became Pope. Following the conclave, Cuban Cardinal Ortega disseminated the speech given at

¹²⁴ “Interview.”

¹²⁵ “Pope Benedict Meets with Fidel Castro in Cuba,” Voanews.com, last modified March 27, 2012, <https://www.voanews.com/archive/pope-benedict-meets-fidel-castro-cuba>.

¹²⁶ Guillermo J. Grenier, “The 1991 FIU Cuba Poll- Views on Policy Options toward Cuba Held by Cuban-American Residents of Dade County, Florida,” (1991): 3, Cuba Poll. 7., https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cuba_poll/7.

¹²⁷ Guillermo J. Grenier and Hugh Gladwin, “2011 Cuba Poll,” *Cuban Research Institute* (2011), <https://cri.fiu.edu/research/cuba-poll/2011-cuba-poll.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Paul Haven, “Could Kerry, Hagel drive reboot in US-Cuba ties?” *ARAB NEWS*, January 28, 2013, <https://www.arabnews.com/columns/could-kerry-hagel-drive-reboot-us-cuba-ties>.

¹²⁹ Benedict XVI, “Declaratio,” Vatican, February 10, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130211_declaratio.html.

the conclave by Pope Francis to Cuban parishioners, with Francis's permission.¹³⁰ Ortega stated in an interview for Radio Havana that prior to the conclave he had met with Bergoglio and reiterated to him that the Church in Cuba should not change the government, but the hearts of men, who would then change the world—also the stance of the previous Popes.¹³¹ This points out the close relationship between Ortega and Pope Francis as well as the papal interest on the issue.

In 2013, Obama approved secret talks between the USA and Cuba to address the Alan Gross case. The face-to-face meetings started in June in Canada, and continued in the following months.¹³² Meanwhile, Pope Francis announced that Archbishop Parolin, former nuncio to Venezuela and Archbishop Becciu, former nuncio to Cuba, would become secretary of state and deputy secretary of state, respectively.¹³³ This suggested that the HS's foreign policy would have a special focus on Latin America, and likely Cuba.

By December, the U.S. secret negotiations with Cuba had achieved no result. Cuban officials wanted to recover the Cuban Five, while the US wanted to free Gross, and in addition, use the exchange of the prisoners as an entry point to change the relations, which was creating a “structural hole” in the relations.¹³⁴ The same month, Obama met with Castro at the Nelson Mandela's funeral and they shook hands for the first time. As confirmed by one of the lead U.S. negotiators with Cuba in an interview, this gesture completely changed the atmosphere of the secret meetings. He further explained that Obama did not believe that the continuation of the failed policy would bring change towards democracy in Cuba, but rather engagement with people and opening of their opportunities would.¹³⁵ This statements suggest that Obama changed the strategy of

¹³⁰ Sandro Magister, “The Last Words of Bergoglio Before the Conclave,” *Chiesa.espresso*, translated by Matthew Sherry, last updated March 27, 2013, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350484bdc4.html?eng=y>.

¹³¹ Ivan Martinez, “Havana Archbishop Jaime Ortega Interviewed on TV Talk Show,” *Radio Havana Cuba*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.radiohc.cu/en/especiales/comentarios/67851-havana-archbishop-jaime-ortega-interviewed-on-tv-talk-show>.

¹³² Warren Strobel and Lesley Wroughton, “Secret talks in Canada, Vatican City led to Cuba breakthrough,” *REUTERS*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-reconstruction-idUSKBN0JV2DM20141217>.

¹³³ Elisabetta Povoledo, “Pope Appoints Diplomat as Vatican Secretary of State,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/world/europe/pope-fills-key-vatican-post.html>.

¹³⁴ “Ben Rhodes Explains Where Obama Stands on Cuba (Full Interview),” YouTube Video, 1:00, posted by The Atlantic, March 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8zL5DxNwn0>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10:00.

engagement with Cuba in his second term, shifting away from a goal of transforming the regime, and aiming toward creating more opportunities for Cuban people, who would then have opportunity to decide who they want to govern them, Thus, the POS was opening.

In March 2014, Obama travelled to the Vatican and met with Pope Francis. Although the contents of the meeting are not available to the public, it is quite likely they have discussed Cuba.¹³⁶ This is because in 2013, Ortega was visited in Havana by a specialist working with democratic senator Leahy, who asked him if Pope Francis would be interested to act as a broker between the two parties. Following Obama's visit, Ortega travelled to Vatican and was given two letters by Pope Francis addressed to President Obama and Raúl Castro, respectively. Ortega later said that Pope Francis used the letters to put the two presidents in direct contact,¹³⁷ thus he utilized his resources within his social networks to create new connections to bridge the structural hole in form of the impasse over the release of Gross and the Cuban Five, which emerged during the secret negotiations between the USA and Cuba in Canada.

Ortega carried out the wishes of the Pope and secretly delivered the letters, which were well received by both Castro and Obama.¹³⁸ As a result the secret meetings between the USA and Cuba moved to Vatican in October 2014.¹³⁹ According to a rare interview with Vatican Deputy Secretary Becciu, on this occasion, Cuba and the USA signed agreements dealing with the normalization of the relations, in the presence of Cardinal Parolin, who served as a guarantor of the decision on behalf of the HS and oversaw the signing of the agreements.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ John Hooper, "Barack Obama has first meeting with Pope Francis at Vatican," *Guardian*, March 27, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/27/barack-obama-pope-francis-vatican>.

¹³⁷ Ruadhán Mac Cormaic, "Cardinal's secret US visit paved way for Obama-Castro détente," *THE IRISH TIMES*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/cardinal-s-secret-us-visit-paved-way-for-obama-castro-d%C3%A9tente-1.3011667>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Peter, Baker, "U.S. to restore Full Relations with Cuba, Erasing a Last Trace of Cold War Hostility," *New York Times*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/world/americas/us-cuba-relations.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Giovanni A. Becciu, "Papa, mons. Becciu: "Cuba e USA hanno firmato disgelo davanti al Segretario di Stato Vaticano" [Pope, Msgr. Becciu: "Cuba and the US have signed a thaw in front of the Vatican Secretary of State"], "Tv2000it, September 18, 2015, 5:26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3OeaHhu7EM>.

On the 16th of December 2014, the Cuban and American presidents had a historic call, where they finalized the 18-month negotiations. On the Pope Francis's seventy-eighth birthday, Obama and Castro announced the future normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations.¹⁴¹ Although the papal office usually remains silent, this time HS released a statement: "The Holy See received Delegations of the two countries in the Vatican last October and provided its good offices to facilitate a constructive dialogue on delicate matters, resulting in solutions acceptable to both Parties,"¹⁴² confirming the papal involvement in the matter.

Based on the information provided above, the political opportunity structure that was presented to Pope Francis when he was asked to mediate relations between the U.S. and Cuba were the result of various factors that took place over time and culminated in 2014. Firstly, the diplomacy of his predecessors and the Vatican's engagement in Cuba created trust between the regime and the HS, thus the Cuban government was willing to accept the Pope as a mediator. Secondly, the pressure exerted by the other Latin American states on the USA to readmit Cuba to OAS contributed to a change of policy and thinking of the Obama's second administration. Thirdly, Obama was freer to carry out his foreign policy goals as he did not have to face re-election. Fourth, the U.S. domestic political issues were in favour of rapprochement, as the support of the Cuban American population for strict US policies toward Cuba was decreasing. Finally, the two disputing parties were not able to reach an agreement or consensus over months of negotiation and therefore needed the Pope and the HS to mediate the relations.

The inability of the USA and Cuba to resolve the issue over the release of prisoners created a structural hole in relations. This facilitated an entrepreneurial behaviour by Pope Francis who came up with the idea to send letters to both heads of governments to connect them directly. Thus, he connected the two parties, which would not otherwise be connected as the negotiations took

¹⁴¹ Stafford, "The Vatican's."

¹⁴² "Pope Expresses Joy for Historic Decision of United States and Cuba To Establish Diplomatic Relations," Vatican Information Service, last modified December 18, 2014, <http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2014/12/pope-expresses-joy-for-historic.html>.

place at lower levels. To send the letters he utilized his ties to Cardinal Ortega who could reach Obama and Castro alike. The Pope then used his diplomats such as the Secretary of State Parolin to facilitate further negotiations in Vatican. Since both parties accepted their inability to resolve their issues themselves, the political costs of outcome different than the agreement were too high, both Cuba and the USA were represented by officials who had authority to commit to the agreement, there was a pressure from other actors vested in the relations and finally all sides approved of the mediator, the U.S. – Cuban mediation was successful.

2.5. The new beginning for the U.S. – Cuban Relations (2015 – 2016)

Following the major breakthrough, Raúl Castro visited Vatican in April 2015, to thank Pope Francis for his help with negotiation.¹⁴³ In the same month, the USA endorsed Cuban participation in the OAS summit. On the occasion Obama talked about the achievements in the relations,¹⁴⁴ while Raúl stressed that this was only the beginning and asked the US to lift the embargo and remove Cuba from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism.¹⁴⁵ Shortly after, Cuba was removed from the list. Over the summer 2015 the countries reopened their embassies in Washington¹⁴⁶ and Havana. On that occasion, Kerry thanked Pope Francis for “supporting the start of new chapter” in bilateral relations and stressed his belief that the upcoming papal visit to Cuba and the USA was not “accidental.”¹⁴⁷

The papal visit took place in September 2015 and was, in the words of Cardinal Becciu, a “wish” of the Pope Francis.¹⁴⁸ Although, many people expected new developments from the visit,

¹⁴³ Jim Yardley, “Raúl Castro Meets with Pope Francis at Vatican,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/11/world/europe/raul-castro-meets-with-pope-francis-at-vatican.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Barack Obama at the First Plenary Session of the Summit of the Americas,” transcript of speech delivered at Panama City, Panama, April 20, 2015, http://www.summit-americas.org/vii/docs/usa_en.pdf.

¹⁴⁵ Raúl Castro, “Speech by Raúl Castro at the Summit of the Americas,” Transcript of speech delivered at Panama City, Panama, April 11, 2015, <https://www.liberationnews.org/speech-raul-castro-summit-americas/>.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Lewis, “Cuban embassy opens in Washington but important issues remain unresolved,” *Guardian*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/20/cuban-embassy-opens-washington-embargo-guantanamo>.

¹⁴⁷ John Kerry, “Secretary Kerry’s Remarks in Havana, Cuba,” U.S. State Department of State, August 14, 2015, 13:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JstgSy6g5PA>.

¹⁴⁸ Becciu, “Papa, 15:38.

Pope Francis maintained a diplomatic stance: he addressed political issues only in his speech at the arrival ceremony, when he urged the political leaders to continue the process of reconciliation.¹⁴⁹

In March 2016, Obama became the first sitting president of the USA to visit Cuba after almost 90 years. It took place shortly after direct mail and commercial flights and cruise ship travel between the USA and Cuba were resumed.¹⁵⁰ In his remarks he said that “Cuba’s destiny will not be decided by the USA or any other nation,”¹⁵¹ while reiterating his continual pressure on Congress to lift the embargo.¹⁵²

Prior to leaving the office, Obama ended the wet-foot-dry-foot policy, which gave Cubans who enter the USA as immigrants the right to become permanent resident. This decision was welcomed by the Cuban government.¹⁵³

2.6. Trump and the end of the political opportunity structure (2017 – 2021)

January 2017 brought the inauguration of new U.S. president Donald Trump. While Raúl Castro congratulated Trump on his win, the annual anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban revolution accompanied military parade, which signalled to Washington that Cuba is prepared for both dialogue and defence if necessary.¹⁵⁴ The Trump administration conducted a review of the previous policy on Cuba and ended up imposing some economic sanctions and tightening the embargo, but did not reverse the Obama’s policies completely.¹⁵⁵

That year, U.S. personnel at the Havana embassy began to experience symptoms of a weird illness. As a consequence, the US government reduced the staff of the Havana embassy by 60%

¹⁴⁹ Petra Kuivala, “Policy of Empowerment: Pope Francis in Cuba,” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 27 – 28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.13169/intejcubastud.9.1.0019.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A4cd1d89ec67db2d071de0767f7475d88>.

¹⁵⁰ “Brief Diplomatic History,” U.S. Embassy in Cuba, accessed May 23, 2021, <https://cu.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>.

¹⁵¹ Barack Obama, “Barack Obama’s speech in Cuba,” CBC News, filmed March 21, 2016, YouTube video, 5:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVZIJH29SHY>.

¹⁵² Ibid. 9:20.

¹⁵³ Serena Marshall, “Obama Administration Ending “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” Policy for Cubans,” *ABC NEWS*, January 13, 2017, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/obama-administration-ending-wet-foot-dry-foot-policy/story?id=44744274>.

¹⁵⁴ William M. LeoGrande, “Reversing the Irreversible: president Donald J. Trump’s Cuba Policy,” *Ideas* 10 (2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.2258>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

and issued a warning regarding travel to Cuba. The Cuban government criticized the decision and declared it would affect the bilateral relations.¹⁵⁶

The following year Miguel Diaz Canes succeeded Raúl Castro as president under the slogan “we are continuity,” thus suggesting the continuation in the footsteps of his predecessor.¹⁵⁷ However, in 2018, the US National Security adviser gave a speech in which he called Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela a “troika of tyranny,” saying they were a “sordid cradle of communism in the Western Hemisphere.”¹⁵⁸ This marked another turning point in the U.S. – Cuban relations. Trump subsequently signed sanctions on the Cuban state-run oil import/export company. In 2019, the administration suspended commercial flights and people-to-people travel for educational or cultural purposes. In 2020 the administration placed a cap on Cuban remittances, and certain individuals were sanctioned for violations of human rights, including Castro.¹⁵⁹ As one of his final presidential acts, Trump placed Cuba back on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism in January 2021.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, the political opportunity structure, which allowed the Pope to mediate the relations in 2014, diminished as the major players—both Obama and Raúl Castro—were replaced with Trump and Miguel Diaz Canes. Both countries no longer attempted to follow the course of the relations set out after the announcement of the normalization of the relations in 2014.

¹⁵⁶ “US cuts embassy staff in Cuba over “specific attacks”,” *DW*, September 29, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/us-cuts-embassy-staff-in-cuba-over-specific-attacks/a-40752213>.

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Cuba: U.S. Policy Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan (2021): 1, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10045.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Alex Ward, “John Bolton just gave an “Axis of Evil” speech about Latin America,” *Vox*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/11/1/18052338/bolton-cuba-venezuela-nicaragua-speech-troika-tyranny>.

¹⁵⁹ U.S., “Cuba,” 2.

¹⁶⁰ Matt Spetalnick, “Trump returns Cuba to U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism,” *REUTERS*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cuba-terrorism-list-idUSKBN29G1Y9>.

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to investigate the role of the Pope and the Vatican in the normalization of the U.S. – Cuban relations and how the Pope contributed to this outcome.

Drawing on the political opportunity structure, social network theory and theory of mediation I argue that the Pope Francis capitalized on a political opportunity structure, which emerged due to various factors over time and utilized his social networks and position to become a broker in the relations to overcome the impasse produced by the imprisonment of Gross and the Cuban Five. The inability of the two parties to resolve the conflict over the exchange of prisoners created a structural hole in the relations, which facilitated an entrepreneurial behaviour of Pope Francis and allowed him to come up with ideas that resonated with both parties. He used his networks, in particular cardinal Ortega, to deliver letters to Obama and Castro and so directly connected the two heads. The letters resonated with the presidents and so the Pope, managed to unlock the stalemate and caused willingness on both sides to engage in dialogue once again. The following 18-month mediation ended in December 2014 by announcement of the normalization of the relations. Although the Pope would not be able to play this role without the emergence of the political opportunity structure, the papal influence in the relations was an instrumental variable to the outcome, because the two parties had been trying to reconcile the relations in secret negotiations, but were unable to make any progress, until the Pope got involved. Therefore, the normalization of the U.S. Cuban relations took place in 2014, because the Pope acted as a broker and helped overcome the impasse in the relations.

Furthermore, this research found that the normalization of the relations would not have been possible without the emergence of a political opportunity structure, which consisted of various factors that culminated in 2014 and also shows that the small window of opportunity to normalize the relations was closed, once Donald Trump became president as well as Raúl Castro was replaced by Miguel Diaz Canes.

While this research faced some limitations, it expands the academic discussion on the role of non-state actors, in particular the religious actors and how they can utilize their networks and resources to move an impossible mediation forward. Moreover, the thesis shows how the direct papal involvement in specific relations may have far reaching impact on a particular outcome, as was the case in the normalization of the U.S. Cuban relations. Therefore, this thesis is opening pathways for future research to look at direct papal involvement in international relations and in particular the use of his networks to achieve a specific result. Furthermore, this thesis can help future researchers to utilize the concept of political opportunity structure not only while researching social movements, but also to investigate other outcomes in international relations. Last but not least the concept of political opportunity structure may prove useful for future researchers, who aim to assess the possibility of continuation of the U.S. – Cuban normalization set out by Obama with the newly elected Biden administration.

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