

ISSR Conference - Lausanne 4-7 July 2017

STS1. Religiosity: Analysis of international and national quantitative surveys

Does religion explain political attitudes?

Answers based on ISSP surveys in 8 Western European countries

Pierre Bréchon, professor of political science, Sciences po Grenoble, France

Two general antagonist theories are supported about the effects of religious attitudes on political ones:

- With the process of secularization, **no links between religion and politics**. The links would have disappeared. The number of religious affiliated is declining, and even these members are much more individualized. So they do not know and do not follow the norms and values of their church.
- There would be today forms of religious revival and **convinced members of religions would share a lot of values supported by their religions**. So the links between religiosity and political attitudes should always be strong.

Between these two main theories, many intermediate ones are possible.

We can also hypothesize that **the effects of religions on political attitudes are not the same for each religion.**

And the influence of religion could be **direct and indirect.** It would be possible to distinguish:

- A **personal effect** of the religious belonging of individuals and of the level of their believing and practices.
- A **cultural effect**: in each country, one religion or two religions were traditionally very dominant and have shaped the whole culture. This cultural effect of religions has marked more or less all the people, regardless of their personal religious identity (whatever without religion or regular attending member).

This test of the effects of religions on political attitudes will be done with **the ISSP data about the citizen module, carried out in 2004 and 2014. 8 Western European countries** are taken into account:

- 3 where Catholicism prevails (Austria, France, Spain),
- 3 where Protestantism prevails (Denmark Sweden, Finland),
- 2 essentially bi-confessional (Germany and The Netherlands).

For religion, we consider a **dimension going from the regular practicing Catholics and Protestants to the no religion (level of religious integration).** Due to the size of the samples in each country, it is not possible to test the effect of minority religions.

Table 1. Religious belonging by country

Vertical %	Countries of Catholic tradition						Countries of Protestant tradition						Bi-confessionnal coun.				Mean*	
	Austria		Spain		France		Denmark		Finland		Sweden		Germany		Netherlands			
	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014
Catholic attending	28	23	30	20	11	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	11	8	5	5	12	8
Not atten.	49	47	51	50	40	39	0	0	0	0	0	1	15	22	23	21	25	23
Protestant attending	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	4	7	6	6	5	6	5	12	7	5	4
Not atten.	4	5	0	1	1	1	81	77	75	64	63	65	26	27	12	10	29	31
Without religion	15	18	18	25	43	46	11	17	15	25	29	25	36	31	43	49	27	29

**European mean not weighted by the demographical weight of the country in this group of countries.*

Countries of **Catholic tradition**: much higher percentage of no religion for France (than Austria and Spain).

Countries of **Protestant tradition**: "belonging without believing" countries. Many people are members of the national churches, but few are practicing. These countries are strongly secularized but their belonging to the Lutheran church mainly means an identity attachment to the nation.

Bi-confessional countries: Germany is more religious than the Netherlands, as secularized as France.

For political attitudes, we take into account politicization, political participation in a first part and political orientation in a second part.

Politicization and political participation

Tableau 2. Political dimensions according to religious integration

<i>In %</i>		Attending Catholic	Not attending Catholic	Attending Protestant	Not attending Protestant	Without religion	Mean
Strong politicization	2004	41	42	58	46	56	48
	2014	44	46	63	49	56	50
Citizenship valorized +	2004	45	34	41	23	25	30
	2014	46	36	45	26	28	32
Voted last general election	2004	90	84	93	86	82	85
	2014	92	87	93	92	84	88
Strong potential of political action	2004	19	18	31	25	33	25
	2014	22	21	38	27	32	27
Trust in political elites/parties	2004	47	39	56	54	36	44
	2014	41	32	60	60	37	45

Index of politicization: the attending Protestants and the no religion are more politicized than the Catholics.

Valorizing citizenship: among the practicing Christians, the ideal of citizen is high, much more than for the no practicing and the no religion.

Vote: turnout is slightly stronger among practicing Christians, weaker among no practicing and no religion.

Potential of political action: attending Protestants have a strong potential of action, contrary to the Catholics who have a strong ideal of citizenship but do not seem implement it a lot. Conversely, the no religion who values not much citizenship are rather numerous to practice it.

Trust in politicians and parties: here again the Protestants show a higher confidence than the Catholics and the no religion.

To conclude on table 2, on all the dimensions:

- **the practicing Protestants are the most interested and involved in politics.**
- **It is partly the same thing for the without religion.**
- **Attending Protestant and Catholics are more active in politics than the no practicing.**
- **Differences are the same at a distance of 10 years.**

But is it sure that the observed differences are the product of different political cultures linked to religious identities? Perhaps it could exist some more explanatory variables which would give up the effect of the individual religious identity on political attitudes.

To answer this question, a regression analysis was carried out (table 3). Our dependant variable is an index of political involvement, adding politicization and potential of action. As explanatory variables, besides religion, gender, age, degree, subjective social position and country are taken into account. It is known by the results of many surveys that these variables can influence the links to polity. So the will to check them.

Tableau 3. Binary logistic regressions about political involvement in 2014

	Wald*	Exponent of B
Man	20	Ref.
Woman		1.1
18-24 years old	2	Ref.
25-34 years old		1
35-49 years old		1
50-64 years old		0.9
65 years and older		1.1
Only primary school	95	Ref.
Incomplete secondary		1.5
Secondary complete		0.9
Vocational post-secondary		1.1
Basic university degree		0.6
Master university level		0.3
Top of the social ladder 1-2	7	Ref.
Level 3-4		0.8
Level 5-6		1.1
Level 7-8		1
Bottom of the social ladder 9-10		1.4
Attending Catholic	21	Ref.
Not attending Catholic		1.2
Attending Protestant		0.6
Not attending Protestant		1.4
Without religion		0.9
Austria	18	Ref.
Denmark		0.7
Finland		1.6
France		1
Germany		0.8
The Netherlands		1.1
Spain		1.3
Sweden		0.8

* by degree of freedom.

All things being equal, degree plays the most fundamental role. People are above all involved in politics if they studied for a long time (Wald by degree of freedom at 95).

But religious identity and country have also a significant influence:

- the attending Protestants have the highest propensity to political involvement, followed by the no religion, the attending Catholics, the non attending Protestants.

- Results by countries show that some national cultures stimulate political involvement. The Danish, the Swedish and the German value more politics while the Spanish and the Finnish value it much less. The religious matrix of cultures can be an explanation. In the Scandinavian countries of Protestant origin, literacy was very early a great aim to can read the Bible and these Churches are rather in advance about internal forms of democracy. And the links between the Churches and the States are strong.

No problem to explain the Spanish case by the Catholic and hierarchical culture.

The Finnish figures are more astonishing for a country with a very high level of education.

Last points on this regression analysis: age has no effect and that of subjective social position is very weak.

Gender keeps an impact, women being slightly less involved in politics, according to the classical scheme on the gender roles.

Political orientation

Obviously political orientation is a central dimension of politics which can be measured by the support of leftist or rightist values. Here we use a question about the party of which the interviewee is close (2004) or the party for which he voted in the last general election. We present results for the rightist and center parties.

Tableau 4. Closeness with right and left, according to religious integration and country

In %	Attending Catholic		Not attending Catholic		Attending Protestant		Not attending		Without religion		Mean	
	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014	2004	2014
Austria	70	67	51	60	67	70*	46*	52*	31	47	52	57
Spain	71	77	51	53	-	-	-	-	31	30	52	54
France	67	69	51	56	-	-	50*	-	24	37	41	47
Denmark	-	-	-	-	75	54	62	58	49	45	61	56
Sweden	-	-	-	-	75	62	46	51	43	49	47	51
Finland	-	-	-	-	83	84	51	67	22	41	49	62
Germany	69	73	47	50	57	54	48	40	34	41	45	46
Netherlands	67	69	53	62	77	88	50	69	36	48	47	56
Mean	70	72	51	56	73	69	52	57	34	42	49	54

**The small number of interviewees for this group needs to be careful in interpretations.*

All countries together, differences in political orientations are weak between Catholics or Protestants but much larger between attending and not attending. And people who do not follow a religion are much more oriented towards the left wing. **The more people are integrated to a religious universe, the more they are turned towards the right or center wing.**

The global similarity in political orientation for Catholics and Protestants is not verified for each country. **In Germany, the Catholics are more rightist than the Protestants while in the Netherlands, the contrary is observed: the Protestants are more rightist than the Catholics.** These national differences can be explained by the history of relations between the churches, the State and the political forces, but also by the forms of Protestantism (and probably Catholicism) established in the country. According to the theology of each denomination, the links with politics can change.

The patterns of answers are close at the two dates. The only difference consists of a **small reduction** in the differential (rightists going from 73% to 34 % in 2004, i.e. a gap of 39 points; and from 72 % to 42 % in 2014, i.e. a gap of 30 points).

Finally we present a regression analysis (table 5), with the same variables that in the previous one.

Tableau 5. Binary logistic regressions about political orientation in 2014

	Wald*	Exponent of B
Man	20	Ref.
Woman		0.9
18-24 years old	15	Ref.
25-34 years old		1.2
35-49 years old		1.2
50-64 years old		0.8
65 years and older		0.9
Only primary school	3	Ref.
Incomplete secondary		1.1
Secondary complete		1
Vocational post-secondary		1.2
Basic university degree		0.9
Master university level		0.8
Top of the social ladder 1-2	22	Ref.
Level 3-4		3.1
Level 5-6		2.1
Level 7-8		1.5
Bottom of the social ladder 9-10		1.1
Attending Catholic	60	Ref.
Not attending Catholic		1
Attending Protestant		1.4
Not attending Protestant		0.8
Without religion		0.5
Autria	23	Ref.
Denmark		1
Finland		2
France		0.9
Germany		0.7
The Netherlands		1.6
Spain		0.9
Sweden		0.9

* by degree of freedom.

For the political orientation, the level of religious integration is the most explanatory dimension (Wald=60). All things equal, the attending Protestants are the most rightist (1.4) and the no religion the most leftist (0.5).

But countries where people live have also a role, pointing out that Finland and the Netherlands are more rightist (2 and 1.6).

The subjective social position has also an influence. Curiously, the two extremes of scale seem to be more leftist and the middle more rightist.

And also age, the 18-49 years old being a little more rightist than the 50 years old and over.

Conclusions

The strong integration to Catholicism and Protestantism continues to have an effect on the political attitudes, even if this impact seems to be slightly declining for these countries.

These effects on political involvement and orientation depends both on the general religious position (attending, non attending, without religion), on the denomination and according to the national culture of the country.

But strong **relationships mainly exists for the extremes**, among individuals well integrated to a religious system (around 15 %) and among those who reject religion (around 15 %), the first group being more and more shrinking, the second more and more large. **For the floating religious people and for persons indifferent to religion, links are much more dubious.**

How can we explain these differences in political attitudes according to religious identities?

Mainly **by the process of socialization**. During socialization of the young members and in the groups that the core members and the anti-religious people frequent during their life, certain value systems are internalized and maintained. **Through these value systems which support on one hand to be submit to a divine authority, to defend traditional family, social order, lawful authorities, the consensual spirit, on the other hand the autonomy of individuals, moral permissiveness, critical mind, social change, citizens decide their political behaviors and their votes.**