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# FRENCH RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL CHANGES SINCE THE 2010s: VOTE HYPOTHESIS BASED ON FOURQUET-LEBRAS 2014 REPORT

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**FRENCH RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL CHANGES SINCE THE 2010s:  
VOTE HYPOTHESIS BASED ON *FOURQUET-LEBRAS* 2014 REPORT<sup>1</sup>**

**November 2019**

**Blandine CHELINI-PONT<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Hervé LE BRAS and Jérôme FOURQUET J (2014) *La religion dévoilée. Nouvelle géographie du catholicisme*. Paris : éditions Fondation Jean-Jaurés, 2014, 132 p. <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/la-religion-devoilee-une-nouvelle-geographie-du-catholicisme>

<sup>2</sup> I warmly thank Alexis ARTAUD DE LA FERRIÈRE, who accepted to read my text and to correct its defects.

From the beginning of the 20th century to François Mitterrand's presidential elections, French political geography seems to have opposed Catholic territories and de-Christianized territories. When vote scores gained by the Right in the 1974 first presidential round are compared to the high religious practice rate mapped by Canon BOULARD in 1947, they show a striking correspondence, despite the lapse of some 25 years. However, this correlation – territories of high Catholic practice and right-wing voter turnout- was blurred from the 1980s, largely because Catholic faith practices collapsed, and Catholic membership sharply declined. In 1892, a census reported 98% of French residents as baptized people out of a population of 38 million (POULAT, 1956); in 1972, 87% were baptized. Today, it is estimated that only 67.7% French residents out of a population of 67 million are baptized. Moreover, only 30% of those born after 2010 are baptized, which is half less than in 1980 and three times less than in 1960.

A new religious map has emerged: the non-affiliated (people declaring themselves as non-religious) have significantly increased since the 1970s, reaching 40%, when they were 0.2% in 1872 (POULAT, 1956). Most of them were baptized in the Catholic religion but completely raised as secular. This population is present across the whole territory, with some large areas where they are the majority, in formerly social-republican or communist enclaves. The Muslim population, coming since the sixties and even before from the late French colonial Empire, rose from statistical non-existence to a relatively large size (estimated between 5 to 11%). Muslims are concentrated in non-Catholic or less Catholic territories (the southern Mediterranean, the Parisian belt, Lyon and its periphery, North East). Other religions, which cumulate 4% to 5% of the population, are differently distributed: Historical Protestants, 2% today compared to 1.6% in 1872, are still present in their traditional enclaves but at quite low rates, between 0, 5 to 4%, excluding the Bas-Rhin department (department is an administrative territory created by the Revolution), where Lutherans represent 17%. Historical Protestants are competing with Evangelical missionary churches - 1% in 2017, ten times more than in 1950- which reinforce their presence throughout the country. The North, Paris, Bas-Rhin department, Rhône department, Bouches-du-Rhône and Gard departments have the strongest concentrations of local Evangelical churches. French Jews, 0.7% of the population, compared to 0.1% in 1872, are

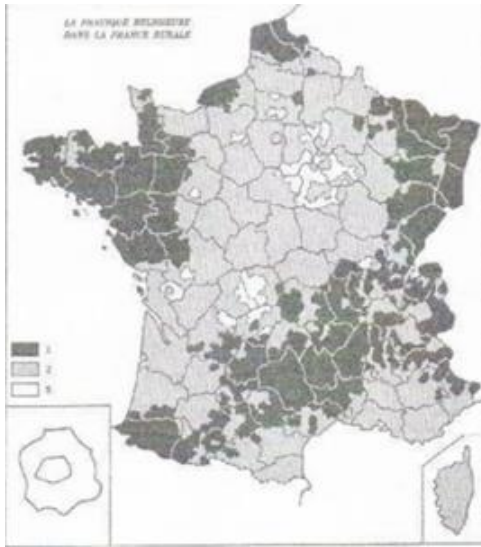
concentrated in Paris and its inner belt, plus the Mediterranean area. Orthodox Christians from Slavic, Romanian and Armenian origins, Eastern Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses and other small cults, statistically non-existent in 1872, are now living in urbanized areas, according to their specific immigration history. Thus, Armenian Christians and other Eastern Christians are particularly present in Paris but also in Marseilles area for different reasons: ancient trade French connections with Ottoman Empire, Armenian and Syriac First War massacres, Lebanese civil war, recent terrorist persecution in Egypt, etc...

With such a religious change, added to the deep secularization process of the Catholic French population, it seems obviously difficult to find the same correspondence between religious geography and French political orientations, as it was still possible during the 1970s. The aim of this small presentation, using the very stimulating research done by Jérôme FOURQUET and Hervé LE BRAS in 2014, will be to measure how far – according to their new maps-electoral geography retain a memory of the French religious-political past and whether they show us some current level of correlation between recent votes and present religions in France.

### **Catholic-Secular locations explaining Right and Left votes from 1870 to 1981**

Until recently, French religious and political geographies overlapped. When compared, the geographical distribution of votes for the Right in the first round of 1974 presidential election (2) and that of religious practice in 1947 (1) are strikingly similar: The Right and Catholicism in France cover the same bastions, with the great West, Alsace, Lorraine, Franche-Comté, one belt from Switzerland to the Basque country through the Southern Massif Central. Conversely, de-Christianized areas such as Limousin, the Mediterranean coast, most of the Paris Basin, the Garonne Basin tend to vote on the left. The only exception concerns Southern part of the Paris Basin, from Yonne to Sarthe, which voted more for the Right in 1974 than its historical religious tepidity would seem to suggest.

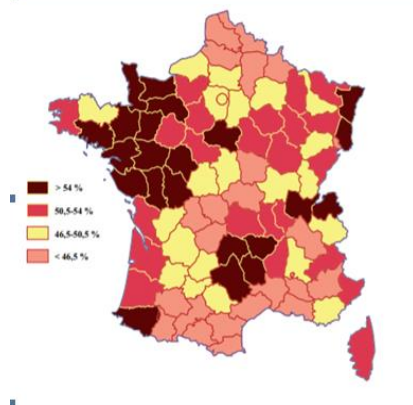
### 1. Catholic practice in 1947. Public source



1. Christian territories
2. Christian and secular territories
3. De-christianized territories

Historically, the Right-wing vote characterized Catholic areas under the Third Republic (1875-1940). During this long-standing period, compared to some others in French constitutional history since the Revolution, regular elections were held by male universal suffrage. The remarkable research on French electoral mapping, conducted by François GOGUEL, shows that Right and Left areas were the same in the 1902 elections as in the 1974 elections (GOGUEL, 1964).

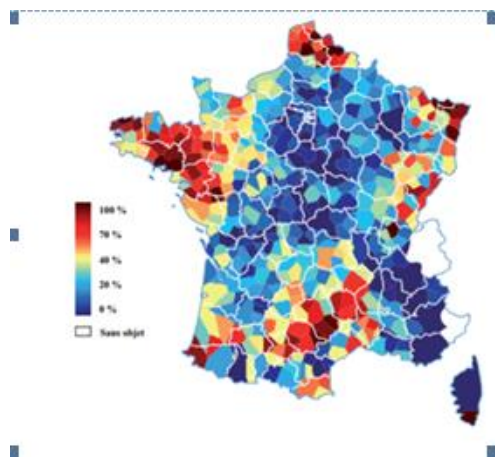
### 2. Rightist votes in 1974. Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (1)



Similarity between political and religious geography until the 1970s has its distant roots in the Revolution era. A detailed map, drawn by historian

Timothy TACKETT, shows the French territorial division in 1791, after the establishment of a national Catholic Church (TACKETT, 1986). On November 27, 1790, the *Assemblée Legislative* voted a law known as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which destroyed the thousand-year canonical Catholic Church organization. It introduced inner clerical elections for bishops and direct external elections by the people for priests, as civil clergy. This law then obliged each priest to take an oath to the new Constitution. Law enforcement in the French provinces was tumultuous and uneven. Certain territories refused to organize the vote. Most of the clergy refused to be elected and to swear fealty to the new regime. At the end, the elected priests or jurors remained in office. The refractory priests or non-jurors were forced into exile or became clandestine. After several changes, the new law punished them with death.

### 3. Rates of refractory priests in 1791. Tackett (1986)



France of the jurors takes shape vis-a-vis France of non-jurors. The refractory provinces were not initially opposed to the Revolution. Rather, they objected to the extension of parliamentary authority and the legal homogenization imposed by it in the name of the Nation (that form of vertical centralism later termed Jacobinism). Refractory provinces were peripheral, with their own peculiar history, which enjoyed certain privileges: Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comté had belonged to the Holy Roman Empire for many centuries; Artois and Flanders benefited from urban liberties before they were included to the Kingdom in the aftermath of wars; Provincial state assemblies existed since the middle age in Bearn, Bretagne, Provence, Languedoc, Dauphiné, and Bourgogne. Some of them became French very late, by wars or by royal marriages. In these regions, the refusal of refractory priests and the

lethal fate they could face, contributed to a rejection of the Revolution and the Republic. Over the long term, the geographical distribution of refractory priests corresponds to that of sustained Catholic religious practice and right-wing voting patterns, from the 19th to the first 20th century. On the other hand, the geographical distribution of juror or “constitutional” priests overlaps with less practicing regions, or with regions that began to be de-Christianized before the Revolution, as some part of Provence and the Paris Basin.

### **Catholic secularization, secular de-Christianization, religious newcomers (1980's-today)**

As demonstrated by the maps drawn in the FOURQUET-LEBRAS 2014 report, France presents a new religious profile today. The study was conducted as a collaboration between a pollster and a geographer. Pollster Jérôme FOURQUET provided 51770 individual questionnaires, from 51 cumulative IFOP surveys (French Institute of Public Opinion) between 2011 and 2014, at the department level; Geographer Hervé LE BRAS drew the maps. Questionnaires' tools (cellphone and internet), combined with cumulative waves of surveys, allowed them a very good coverage of the metropolitan territory. For all surveys, addresses of interviewed people were noted. 13,295 townships have been recorded. In addition, for the largest cities, interviews were randomly collected between neighborhoods or districts. Population in the cities become more precisely visible, especially in Paris.

What do new maps teach us? What do we learn from them?

The changing maps of French religious practice not only reveals the deep secular spreading among Catholics, joining the long-standing and enlarged dechristianization of non-religious people, but also its records some discernable Catholic retention in precise locations and some revival among historical Protestant and Jewish minorities. While they continue to reflect historical dividing, new maps are appearing too. They identify, for the first time, locations and practice rates of other religions in places that no longer fit the past religious geography of France.

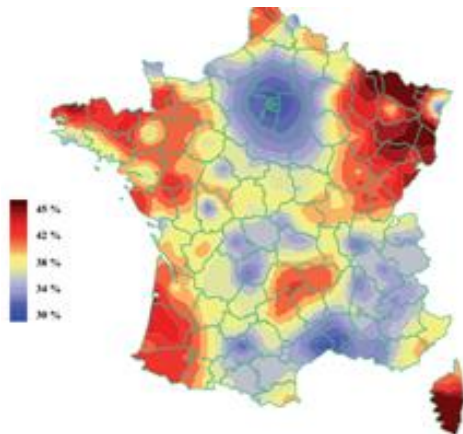
*Catholic–Secular division remains, Catholic practice collapse with local retention*

At first, Sunday mass attendance, which was held by the majority in many regions and had remained frequent in the others more secular, sharply declined. The decline already began in the 1960s. Since this decade, practice rates have dropped to levels three or four times lower, both by abrupt steps (the one first precisely in the 1960s and the other one in the early 2000s) but also by continuous decline. In *Comment notre monde a cessé d'être chrétien; Anatomie d'un effondrement* (How our world has stopped being Christian: anatomy of a collapse), historian Guillaume Cuchet reports how sociologist (and Canon) Fernand Bouvard was stunned by the decline he studied between 1965 and 1968, as one of "exceptional intensity" (BOULARD, 1971). Bouvard, was then the first to predict the coming collapse, based on his survey of the youth attendance (BOULARD, 1968): young people were already half as less likely to attend mass in 1968 than in 1954.

This fall primarily concerned Catholic regions. It also further reduced the already lower practice rates in the secular Republican and left-voting territories. In 2014, less than 15% of the adult population were classified as regularly practicing Catholics. The decline is particularly conspicuous between generations. In recent surveys, only 7% of young people, between 18 and 25, are identified as practicing Catholics, compared with 33% of older people over 75. In 2015, as we have indicated it in our introduction, 30% of the children belonging to the same class age were baptized, compared to 40% in 2000 and 80% in 1970. In some departments, such as Seine Saint-Denis, with high immigrant rates, only 10% of the children between birth and 7 years are baptized. Today, baby boomers are retired, and their children and grandchildren no longer feel as though they belong to the Catholic religion. Despite this trend, Catholic religion still retains a strong social presence with its educational, academic, media and charitable networks which maintain some Catholic ethos in French society.



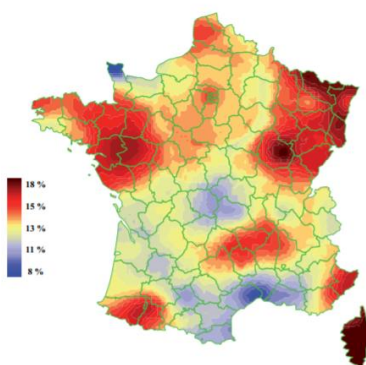
4. *Regular and occasional Catholic practice in 2012.* Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (6)



Sociologists François-André ISAMBERT and Jean-Pierre TERRENOIRE, members of the GSR research center (now GSRL) at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes de Paris, showed, with a large research team they gathered, that, more than Catholic territories vs secular territories, there was emerging a strong correlation between the rates of religious attendance and socio-professional classes. It was social difference that explained the voting divide between Right and Left: this longitudinal and collective sociological research established the growing gap in religious practice between social groups, regardless of territorial distribution (TERRENOIRE, 1994).

Nevertheless, Traces of the ancient two Frances, one 'secular' and one other Catholic, are still present. They are still visible, with some newness at the center of the system, in the secular heart of the Paris Basin. ISAMBERT and TERRENOIRE show that rates of Catholic practice there rose instead of declined because of more upper socio-professional classes.

5. *Practicing Catholics in 2012.* Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (7)



At first glance, Catholic practice areas are still visible. As said by Fourquet-Le Bras study's writers, like eroded geological layers, general physiognomy is preserved, even if the main peaks have lost their height. There is a clear distinction between Catholic strongholds of the inner West, Bretagne, the Basque Country, Béarn, Southern Massif Central (parts of Aveyron, Lozère, Ardèche, Haute-Loire, Cantal), rural fraction of the North and, finally, a vast Eastern bloc running from the Marne river to Alsace and from the Meuse river to Jura. Catholicism thus preserves the peripheral situation which it occupied in the years 1940-1960 and long before that, in 1791.

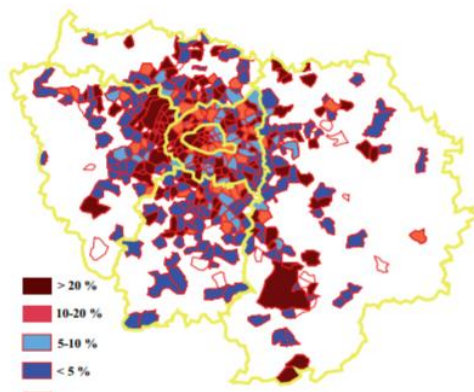
While, at first glance, the current distribution of practicing Catholics is in direct continuity with ancient Catholic bastions, a closer look reveals an attenuation and relative reinforcement over large areas. Practice has decreased less in the East than in the West, and the area of more assiduous practice now extends to a part of Burgundy. On the other hand, the whole South, from the Basque Country to Savoy, has experienced a faster decline than the rest of the territory. At an even finer level, we still find peculiarities such as the weak religious practice observable in Toulouse, Cornouaille and Normand Cotentin. But the remarkable difference between the past and the present concerns the South-East (Nice area and Corsica) and the Paris Basin: these locations are more practicing, relatively, than fifty years ago and for Paris, even more so, two centuries ago, when the city formed the heart of irreligion.

If Catholic religious practice has increased in Côte d'Azur and Corsica, while it sharply dropped in Catholic strongholds of the West and South, compared to the 1960s when rates were still at 40%, this is partly explained by the local population aging, and by the influx of wealthy retired people from across France (the most practicing age group today). Otherwise, the strong demographic growth experienced for years in the Mediterranean coast has accelerated the de-Christianization phenomenon, cumulating in growth of secular people, Muslims and other religions believers.

Moreover, by mapping religious practice rates in municipalities with populations above 5,000 inhabitants in Île-de-France, the FOURQUET-LE BRAS report shows that a new Catholic landscape is emerging in that region. In Paris *intra muros*, religious practice is positively correlated with the socio-economic profile of specific districts (arrondissements): the more bourgeois the district as

16<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> arrondissements, more the higher the rate of Catholic practice. In some districts like the 20<sup>th</sup> one, practice rates are lower than 10%. In the area surrounding the capital, rates are identical. Beyond the immediate periphery of the capital, the gap is similar between bourgeois and more popular cities. All those from north eastern part of Yvelines department to Saint-Germain-en-Laye and all those from the south western flow leading from Boulogne-Billancourt to Versailles, without exception, are characterized by an above-average Catholic practice, as well as Sceaux, Fontainebleau and Chantilly areas. On the other hand, the rest of Seine-et-Marne, Val-d'Oise, areas close to Trappes, those of Essone department center and south appear as Catholic desert. Only 28% of Seine-Saint-Denis inhabitants and 38% of those in Val-de-Marne department declare themselves Catholic today.

6. *Catholic practice in Île-de-France in 2012.* Fourquet- Le Bras 2014 (10)



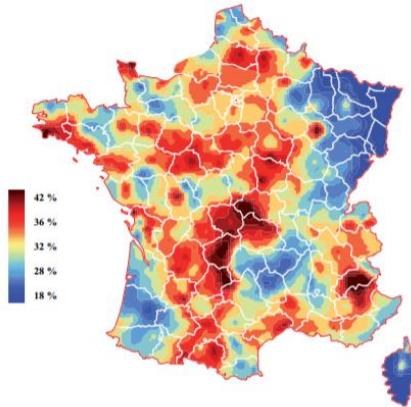
So, from an original provincial distribution, the geography of Catholicism has evolved towards general social distinction, what suggest that practice rates found throughout the national territory, with its relative increase in areas that were not "very" Catholic 50 years ago. A correlation could be made between the practice retention of wealthy Parisian France and Catholic.

*General non-religious growing*

What about non-religious people in France? Canon BOULARD's 1947 map seems still valid. At the South of the Loire river, the non-religious nearly surround the twin Catholic and Protestant bastions. That also correspond to "red peasants" areas, where the communist vote has long been important. At the North of the Loire river, the non-religious remain quite numerous in the Paris Basin. In the East, conversely, the closer you get to the Rhine river, the

more people claim to have a religion, even if they do not practice it, and the more people claiming to have no religious beliefs are also a minority.

#### 7. *Non-religious people in France in 2012. Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (14)*



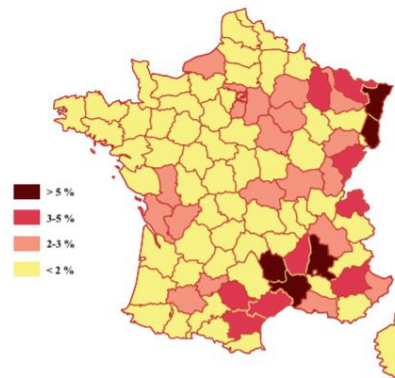
Nevertheless, general de-Christianization seems to overwhelm BOULARD's map. It continued and accentuated in the French center and spread along the largest western communication corridors. A large secular Paris Basin appears, expanding from the Somme river to the borders of the Sologne river and from Le Havre to Reims cities, with Île-de-France departments as epicenter. Further in the South-West, and less marked, remains another early focus of dechristianization, including Limousin, Bourbonnais, part of Poitou and Charentes.

#### *Historical Protestants retention*

Despite a smaller number of believers than for Catholics, the data provided by the IFOP surveys made it possible to draw up the contemporary geography of historical Protestantism in France (Reformed Church, Lutheran Church, French Evangelicals). Put in perspective with the geographical distribution of old bastions of safety for Protestants ensured by treaties at each truce of the religious wars in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, two historical areas still shelter 'native' Protestants: in the South, the Cevennes mountains and Ardèche (in majority from the Reformed Church). In the North, Alsace and Lorraine (more

of Lutheran origin). There are still 17.4% of Lutheran protestants living in Bas-Rhin department, 7.3% in Haut-Rhin. There are 7.2% reformed Protestants in Gard, 6.8% in Drôme, 4.2% in Ardèche. They declined throughout the South West. A nucleus subsists in La Rochelle wide area. In other regions, historical protestant presence is now residual: 0.5% in Côte d'Or or Côtes-d'Armor departments. Historical Protestantism has disappeared in the North of France.

#### 8. *Historical Protestants in 2012.* Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (13)

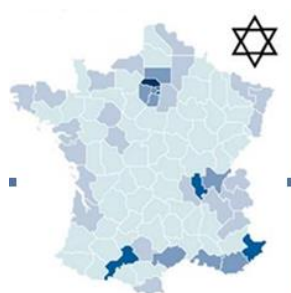


Historically, French Protestants became secularized sooner than Catholics. They are now even less practicing than Catholics, but they are joined by new parishioners, often of African origin, with greater attendance appearing in the Paris belt communities, bringing youth and momentum to those old white churches.

#### *Jewish specific location and practice revival*

The 2014 study to which we refer, did not map Jewish population. It can nevertheless be found elsewhere, and it is possible to overlap other maps on Jewish population with the 2014 study questionnaires. This population is mainly located in Paris, in the Paris region, in Alsace, in Rhône-Alpes, in Midi-Toulouse and on the Mediterranean coast. The newspaper *La Croix* has drawn up one map based on a 2014 IPSOS survey (another survey French agency), that we reproduce here.

9. *French Jewish population in 2014. Source IFOP-La Vie-La Croix, 2014*



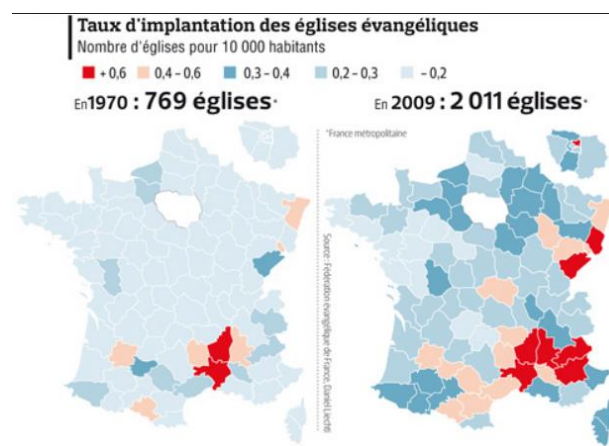
The Jewish population in France represents 480,000- 550,000 people or 0.7% of the population. Its profile has changed a lot since the Roman Empire. It almost disappeared after the royal expulsion decree in 1394 and since 1498 from Provence, then newly included in the Kingdom. Coming back from across German borders after the Revolution, the Jewish population grew anew due to migrations from Eastern Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century thirties. French Jews were mostly Ashkenazi before the Second World War. But Ashkenazi population was in turn decimated by Vichy complicity with German genocide: only 2,500 from the 75,700 Jews deported to concentration camps survived while the rest hid or fled by the coasts, Switzerland and to the South. 8,000 orphans survived as well, remaining hidden and entrusted to French families during the war. After the Second World War, the Jewish population was reconstituted by returning contingents or immigrant surviving refugees, then by Maghrebi Jewish immigration – All Algerian Jews were already French citizens when they left- at the time of decolonization. Descendants of Maghrebin Jews or Seferiades now represent 70% of the French community.

If there is no scientific survey on this population's religious practice, previously diversified and largely secularized, there are signs of de-Secularization and of religious revival in the face of growing antisemitism, diffuse acts of violence and Islamist terrorism in particular that affected this community (Toulouse 2012, Paris 2015).

## *Evangelical growth and strong practice*

"New" Protestants appear in 2014 report mapping, grouped under the label *Evangelicals*. If it is not possible to capture their precise membership in the IFOP questionnaires (as Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Methodists, small independent cults) and thus on the 2014 maps, we can see where they are located. Initially implanted in Protestant traditional regions (mainly Alsace, Southern Massif Central and lower Rhone Valley), the new Protestant Churches gradually spread over the territory and increased their presence in Paris, but also in the largest other cities, such as Lyon, Grenoble, Marseille.<sup>3</sup> We reproduce here two maps drawn by the *Fédération Evangélique de France*, which shows the growing presence of these Churches from 1971 to 2010.

### 10. *Evangelical new Protestants*. Le Figaro, 14.06.2010. Public source



The 2014 report and other surveys on Protestantism in France, for example that of 2017 by IPSOS<sup>4</sup>, count them as 1%. There have been closely studied by one remarkable team of sociologists in a study conducted since 2009 by Sébastien Fath and Martine Cohen, both belonging to GSRL of Paris:

<sup>3</sup> *Livret Cartographique de la Fédération Evangélique de France*

[http://www.1pour10000.fr/public\\_files/fck/etude\\_statistique\\_eglises\\_2010\\_daniel\\_liechti\\_cnef.pdf](http://www.1pour10000.fr/public_files/fck/etude_statistique_eglises_2010_daniel_liechti_cnef.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reforme.net/actualite/societe/sondage-les-protestants-en-france-en-2017-1-qui-sont-les-protestants/>

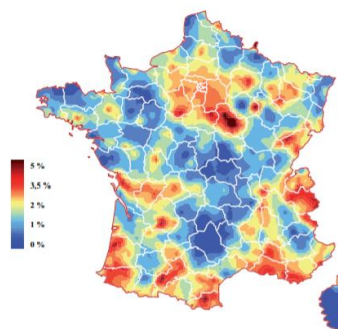


*Dieu change à Paris* (God is changing in Paris)<sup>5</sup>. This team tells us about emerging sensitivities: American-Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, ethnic Churches brought by North American, Caribbean, South American and African missionaries. They are particularly dynamic and active in Île-de-France, contributing to Protestant 'creolization', as Sebastien Fath's formula to describe this new Parisian Christianity. These new churches are converting young people, more willing to attend and to read the Bible than their age classes. The proportion of converts in these Churches reaches up to 48%, against only 11% among the Lutheran-Reformed protestants, who are overwhelmingly born in historical Protestant families<sup>6</sup>. New protestants represent 26 % of all Protestants in France today, compared to 17 % in 2010.

### *Urban location of other religions and small cults*

Finally, it is interesting to note that location of "other religions" (Orthodox and Eastern Christians, Buddhists, Hinduists, Jehovah's Witnesses, small cults) is the same: those religious groups are gathered in provincial cities and in Paris, bringing to light their urban implantation which reflects a double phenomenon of immigration and conversion.

### *11. Other religions and cults in 2012. Fourquet- Le Bras 2014 (16)*



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<sup>5</sup> Dieu change à Paris, programme de recherche du CNRS- GSRL <https://www.campus-condorcet.fr/La-recherche-et-la-formation/La-diffusion-des-savoirs/conference/43/Dieu-change-a-Paris>

<sup>6</sup> 62 % of converts are Catholic, 27% non-religious, 2% Muslim, 2017 IPSOS Survey on French Protestants, <https://www.reforme.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Ipsos-Enque%CC%82te-aupre%CC%80s-des-protestants.pdf>



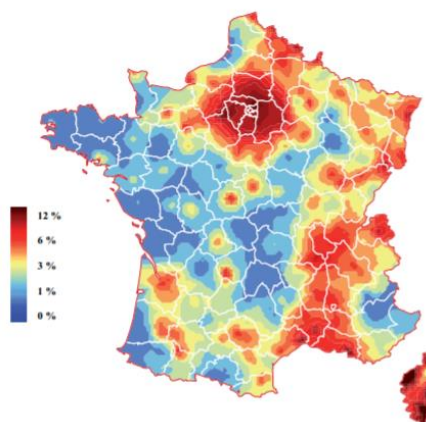
## *Muslims: Eastern and Parisian polarization*

The size of the Muslim population is the subject of public and scientific controversy in France. Given the current legal prohibition of collecting religious data for the state censuses and administrative documents, available figures vary from 4 to 8 million people (and even almost 9, as in the 2017 Pew Research Center poll on *Muslim Population Growth in Europe 2017*).

How to understand such a variation in estimates, which feeds the invasion fantasy and demographical-religious mutation fear in French opinion, both issues which carry important political consequences (notwithstanding the legitimate concern for Islamist terrorism)? According to an IFOP survey for *Le Figaro* newspaper conducted online in October 2012 among a representative sample of 1,736 people, 60% of French people consider influence and visibility of Islam in France too important<sup>7</sup>. It leads them to Western-Christian or reversely to secularist awakening that runs from the extreme Right to the extreme Left.

In the IFOP polls used by the 2014 Jean Jaurés Foundation report, only 3% of the respondents declared themselves as Muslim: compared to the total population, this total represents only 1.8 million people. This figure is then far below those usually published. Other IFOP surveys, carried out differently, give a result closer to 4.5% of Muslims, practicing AND non-practicing, in the total population.

### *12. Muslim population in France in 2012. Fourquet- Le Bras 2014 (15)*



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<sup>7</sup> *Les Français et le catholicisme, 50 ans après Vatican II*, <https://www.ifop.com/publication/les-francais-et-le-catholicisme-50-ans-apres-vatican-ii/>

The geographical distribution of Muslims appears in the 2014 study to center around large territorial poles, much wider than those of Protestants. They correspond to labor migration in employment pools, from the 1960s to 1980s, then followed by family reunification from the Maghreb and French-speaking Sahelian and Muslim sub-Saharan African regions: a very high concentration is distinguishable in the Paris belt, in the areas surrounding Lyon and Grenoble, the Rhone river corridor, the Mediterranean coast from Toulon to Sète, with Marseilles as epicenter and Corsica. Outside these areas, Muslims find themselves in the urban sets of the South-West. They have no statistical existence in the Alps core, in the great West, on the Atlantic Southern coast, nor in the Massif Central.

### **New religious map- new political map: what similarity?**

Given the long-standing relationship between Catholic or secular presence and political temper of French territories, could the Catholic religious decline, coupled with concomitant progress of non-religious and non-Catholic population be a direct cause, while scantily evoked, of political redistribution and furthermore, of the new contemporary divisions in French politics?

First, did the Catholic practice retraction put an end to the division between Catholic and non-Catholic territories inherited from history? The follow-up of the European Union treaties votes maps shows a rather remarkable continuity, which allows to conclude that this is not the case. The political divide still exists. However, in other elections, including presidential elections, a sort of transfer seems to have taken place, according to the results presented in FOURQUET-LEBRAS' study. The formerly Catholic regions, rather rightist, are drawn closer to the left, as the religious practice has weakened. The traditionally de-Christianized regions have slid to the right. However, this transfer movement has been blurred by the Front National party in several regions. This party has made an inroad into the left electorate in traditionally de-Christianized regions. It has also made an inroad into the right-wing electorate in the secularized Catholic regions. In both cases, its progression

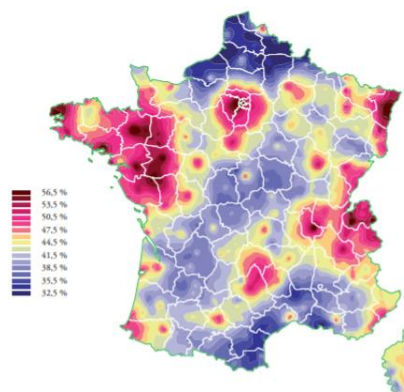
covers areas occupied by the Muslim population. Is it a coincidence? Has Emmanuel Macron's victory in 2017 recomposed the landscape?

### *Pro and anti-European vote*

In 2005, the No vote in the referendum on the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was like an earthquake in French political life. The regions that voted Yes almost exactly match the traditional bastions of Catholicism. We find here a legacy of the post-war Christian-Democratic Party sensitivity – this party disappeared in the 1960's - which carried the European construction in the 1950-1970's and represented the permanence of traditional Catholic disdain for central State authority. Ancient Catholic lands had voted in favor of the referendum proposed by General de Gaulle in 1969 about his constitutional project to create major regions with elective institutions, while much of the country had refused them, leading to President de Gaulle's resignation. Strong regionalism of the formerly Catholic regions echoes in the defense of the European Union, as the Union of the Regions.

There is a similar geographical distribution for the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Referendum after referendum, the center of the Paris Basin joined the Catholic regions in this European choice. In Paris, the liberal sensibility of French economic elites met the European vibe of the French Socialist Party and the pro-European Catholic bias, when religious practice remains an important amongst a part of the French upper classes there concentrated.

### *13. The Yes vote to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005. Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (24)*



The presidential vote in favor of François Bayrou in 2012, leader of the centrist MODEM party, also mirrors the geographical distribution of Catholicism. In a recent book (LE BRAS, TODD, 2013), this phenomenon has been clumsily described as "zombie Catholicism". Although churches remain deserted on Sundays, populations of long-time Catholics regions recognize themselves in the MODEM party discourse, moderate, social and pro-European. Meanwhile, they are insensitive to the Front National discourse, which made exit of the Union one of its great political struggles.

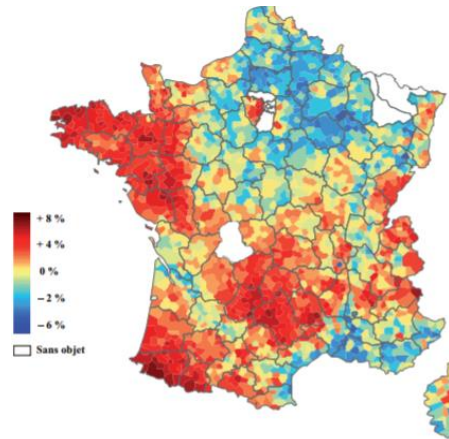
*Catholics turn left, the non-religious leave the Left*

The European overlap cannot hide that the two Frances, the Catholic and the secular, have permuted their political orientations since the 1980's: the great West and Massif Central turns to the Left, the Paris Basin, the Mediterranean and the Garonne valley to the Right. Pro-François Mitterrand votes compared to pro-François Hollande votes in the second round of 1981 and 2012 presidential elections is enlightening. Most of the leftist gains in 2012 concern historical Catholic areas: Léon, Morbihan, Île-et-Vilaine, Mayenne bocage, Cholet, Vendée, the Basque Country, Southern Massif Central. In the center and the south of the Massif Central, where the religious practice was strong and greatly diminished, the Left even sharply progresses. The great West, where the religious practice was very present and where its regression was fast, votes also turn left. Without doubt, the Socialist Party whose discourse has evolved since the late 1970's and early 1980's abandoning Marxist references, class struggle, school war, this party increased its audience significantly, in territories still marked by Catholicism but on secularization process. François Hollande even benefited from a better support by practicing Catholics in Christian-Democratic traditional regions, as Bretagne, the Basque Country, Alsace and Southern Massif Central.

However, the permutation is not fully verified, according to FOURQUET-LEBRAS' comments. The North-eastern border, a zone of strong traditional practice and then sharp decline, experienced only a slight push to the Left. Same thing in Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes where the gains for the Left

were better. In the region of Toulouse, in Gard and Hérault departments and in the whole Rhône-Alpes region, so three areas of Catholic tradition, all of them experienced a decline in religious practice. But there, the Left has strongly regressed between 1981 and 2012, while the Catholic collapse should have benefited it.

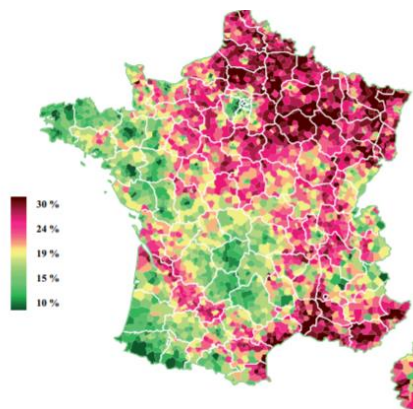
14. *Gains and Losses for the Socialist Party in 2012 Presidential elections.*  
Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (21)



*The Front National party, Muslim Presence: Present votes hypothesis*

The 2012 Presidential elections final map hides another map, which shows *Le Front national* extreme-rightist gains at the first round.

15. *The Front national 's vote in 2012 Presidential elections first round.*  
Fourquet-Le Bras 2014 (20)



This map - and it does not prejudice all other very relevant analyses made to explain this extreme right-wing rise, especially that of incomes and work gap in the country – seems to recover the map of Muslim population presence. France seems to split into two new and large West-East axes: a moderate Western axis, as right and left high scales without a powerful Front national: this axis has few pockets of Muslim population or, when it is massive, as in Paris, it is included in a consequent religious melting pot; a "reactive" Eastern axis, where the Front National wins votes from Right and Left: there, the Muslim population is more important, ranking from 10% to 20% in some focused areas and even 25% in Marseilles, in the face of Catholic or left-secular depression.

Thus, in the great West, in the Western Pyrenees and the wide South-East of the Massif Central, the historically strong Catholic practice has greatly diminished, but the Muslim population is weak: the Left has gained a lot, the Right has maintained its scores and the Front National has gathered few votes. In long-standing de-Christianized territories, traditional bastions of the Left, part of Aquitaine, Poitou-Charentes, the Center region and Limousin, the Left has remained relatively stable, and the Right too: the Muslim population is there also little present.

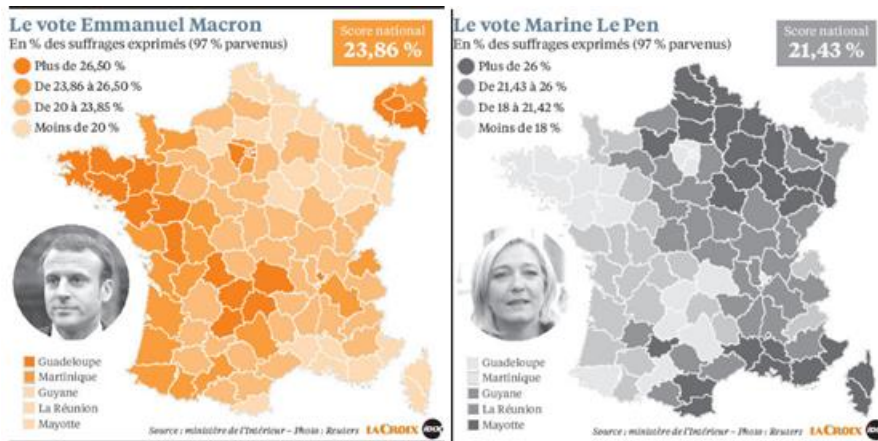
On the other hand, in areas where Catholicism remains important or even when it plays a modest role, Catholic votes remain to the Right and the Front national increase comes from ancient left-popular voters. This is the case in the Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Somme river area, Alsace, Corsica and Lorraine, but also in the wide Paris Basin, Roussillon and Provence. At last Paris and the Parisian belt: the Muslim population is important, but the Catholic population as we have seen, as well as other religious minorities and population without religion are important too: The Front National does not make an inroad.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let's continue our hypothesis with the 2017 presidential elections. France of Emmanuel Macron in the first presidential round faces that of Marine Le Pen. The two Frances we have just described confront each other. The result is again striking compared to the map of Muslim population drawn by FOURQUET and LE BRAS: the more the Muslim population is concentrated, the more Marine Le Pen gains votes. Macron's France overlaps with lesser or weak

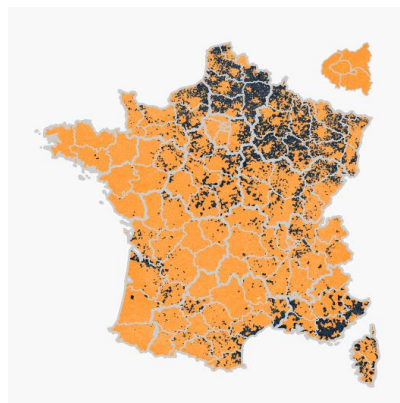
Muslim presence or a presence included in wider pluri-religious locations, where also practicing Catholics cohabit with a highly secularized population.

16. 2017 First Round Presidential vote. Source Ministère de l'Intérieur, *La Croix* ' mapping



In the second round, Emmanuel Macron won 66% of the voters and Marine le Pen 33.9%. However, the map established by the newspaper *La Croix* after the second round, shows in dark points all cities where Marine the Pen gained the best rates. The map draws a Frontist France still very present under Macron's victory.

17. Second round results of the 2017 French presidential elections. Source Ministère de l'Intérieur, *La Croix* newspaper cartography



At the end of this presentation, what could be ascertained? We started this description by the two-Frances historical landscape, divided between

Right-voting Catholic and Left-voting secular territories; we have seen a first switch between the 1980's and the 2000's, by Catholic left-turning secularization and non-religious voters' left-leaving turn. Then we have noticed that this second process was stopping in the 2000's, in territories with relatively high rates of Muslim population. The Front national party (called the Rassemblement national since 2018) gains votes from secularized Catholic and non-religious voters. By consequence, the last presidential elections drew two new religious-political landscapes of France: that one resisting to the Front national's growth, by adding Catholic-colored and non-religious voters in areas of extended religious pluralism with Muslim low presence. When Muslim presence is higher and concentrated, the Front national party wins votes.

The political future of France is not yet written. It could be paradoxically decided by the political turn of self-declared Catholics, as swift vote. They are either taking over the identity narrative - this narrative paints Christian civilization as soon submersed by Muslim migration and European Union liberalism- In this case, Catholics are finally getting closer to the Front National party - what they weren't in the recent past - and will give this party the Catholic voices it always failed to obtain... Self-declared Catholics will either keep their moderate center-right/right-wing votes, that characterized them in the past. Despite their disappointment over Macron, they can be that decisive part of a moderate 'right-left' coalition in the next elections. And this coalition will defend the European Union and its promise of prosperity and freedom. In truth, the self-declared Catholics don't seem to take this second path, but the contrary<sup>8</sup>. In this future or perhaps already accomplished swift, it will not be the last paradox of this story that the Republican future of France would held in the hands of the French Catholic (henceforth) minority.

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<sup>8</sup> Jérôme FOURQUET, *A la droite de Dieu : le réveil identitaire des catholiques*, Paris, Cerf éditions, 2018



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