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## Is There Religious Voting in France?

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## *Is There Religious Voting in France?*

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### **Political Tradition and 1997 Legislative Election**

The relationships between religion and politics :  
two centuries of history

The idea according to which a religious vote exists in France is based on a long tradition. Historians have shown that catholicism has been in conflict with the Republic all along the 19th century<sup>1</sup>. Religious and political choice overlapped thus very closely. Good catholics voted for the right and non catholics (or catholics turned away from their Church) for the left. Anyway the left - right cleavage widely overlapped the debate of the two France, with on one hand the France defending catholicism and on the other hand, the anti-religious France. The right wing voters were for a return to monarchy or for a conservative Republic which would recognize the Church's power. To be left wing meant both to militate in favour of secularism and to argue for less clerical power. The problem of Catholicism - which was the largest religion and which had a public status within the framework of the concordat negotiated between the Pope and Napoleon the first - was the major issue of the political debate at the end of the 19th century<sup>2</sup>. To build a political system based on democratic ideals, on the worship of progress and reason, the radical left of the Third Republic thought it was essential to remove Church's power and status. It notably consisted in removing its power concerning young people's education. And the Church should become a private institution, independent of the State.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Gérard Cholvy's works, *La religion en France du XVIIIème siècle à nos jours*, Hachette, 1991, and René Rémond, *La droite en France*, Aubier - Montaigne, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> See Jean Beaubérot, *Vers un nouveau pacte laïque*, Seuil, 1990; for a synthetic presentation, see Pierre Bréchon, « Institution de la laïcité et déchristianisation de la société française », in *Laïcité(s) en France et en Turquie*, Cahiers du CEMOTI n° 19, 1995, p. 59 - 78.

The 1905's law concerning the separation between the Churches and the State has realized this objective but with a great traumatism for Catholicism. We had to wait until the Liberation for this law, which was recognizing the individuals' religious liberty but removed to Catholicism its status of recognized religion and the financial supports it was receiving from the State, to be admitted by Catholicism. We must add that the enforcement of this law was done on a flexible manner<sup>3</sup> and that many arrangements were found along the time which give de facto a certain number of advantages to Catholicism (and sometimes to Protestantism and Judaism). For example, the system of the recognized cults (in French : « les cultes reconnus ») according to the concordat of 1801 has continued to function in Alsace-Moselle, a territory which was dominated in 1905 by Germany and which finally became French again after the first World War. In the same way, the clergy enjoys the Social security system and catholic schools are strongly subsidized by the State. Chaplains can operate in secondary schools ; in the armies, jails and hospitals, they are even paid by the State. The major religions are entitled to a few hours broadcasting on public television, with a subsidizing of a part of the programmes.

Nevertheless, we must notice that the intensity of the religious debates on the political scene has not produced a deep structuring of the party system around this question<sup>4</sup>. France has never had a large catholic party such as in Austria for instance and the Christian democracy has not had the same impact as in Italy. The French catholics who were active in the field of politics split into the different right wing parties and after the second World War, some of them have also made their way towards the non communist left and the socialist party. At the beginning of the fifties the electorates are yet very differentiated from a religious point of view as it is shown in Table I.

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<sup>3</sup> Emile Poulat well explains that the « secularism of cohabitation » (laïcité de cohabitation) has progressively prevailed on the « secularism of fight » (laïcité de combat). See *Liberté, laïcité. La guerre des deux France et le principe de modernité*, Cerf - Cujas, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la démocratie chrétienne : XIXème - XXème siècle*, A.Colin, 1980, 247 p.

Table I. The mass attendance of the different electorates in 1952  
(horizontal %)

	Devouts	Observers	weak mass attend.	no church attend. at all
communists	0	13	10	77
socialists	9	24	21	46
gaullists	50	26	12	12
independents	56	29	9	6
christian dem.	73	23	2	2

Source : an IFOP opinion poll on baptized Catholics, in *Sondages*, 14(4), 1952, p. 40.

The first works of electoral sociology, particularly this of André Siegfried<sup>5</sup> in 1913, have insisted on the stability of political dispositions. Each region has its political tonality and we can find it back in each election. And the right's areas of strength are also the areas where Catholicism is strong. For Siegfried, where the nobleman and the clergy control the social order, all the other explanatory factors collapse : the vote is massively directed towards the right wing. Very soon, the strong effect of the religious factor on the vote has been thus pointed out. But afterwards the tendency was to forget the phenomenon.

Mentalities change during the 20th century. The religious question is no more at the centre of the political debate and the Catholics seem to become more autonomous in their electoral choices. It seems that they are no longer waiting for Catholicism to impose them their political choices. In their eyes, the Church has not to tell them for whom they must vote. The vote expresses a political orientation, independent from the religious orientations. At the same time, some tendencies of active Catholicism develop themselves, mostly after the second World War, insisting on the necessary political commitment of the Christian and on the harmonics between faith in Jesus Christ's Gospel and left wing political commitment. Finally, after the Vatican II Council, the French bishops lead a reflexion on the links between religion and politics. This will issue on a declaration of the French episcopal conference<sup>6</sup> (in 1972) which recognizes the political

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<sup>5</sup> *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la IIIème République*, A. Colin, 1964 (1st edition in 1913)

<sup>6</sup> See Mgr Gabriel Matagrín., *Politique, Eglise et foi*, 1972, 204 p.

pluralism of the catholics, even if it is clear that this pluralism has its limits and that it is not admitted that a Catholic votes and commits himself to political leanings based on anti-evangelical values. The Catholic pluralism does not go as far as legitimating the communist vote insofar as this ideology implies the recognition of atheism.

The left wing militant tendencies of French catholicism are thus very active and the theme of the move to the left of catholicism develops itself among the French political life's observers. Certain arguments seem to attest of this movement. The left progresses in the electorate during the seventies and particularly obtains some very good results for the 1977 municipal elections, even in some cities of the West of France, renowned for being catholic lands. In fact, the analysis of the opinion polls of the period<sup>7</sup> mostly allows to conclude that catholics less and less often attend mass. If some traditionally Catholic lands evolve to the left, it is because catholicism is now less influential there. But during this period, the attending catholics massively remained orientated on the right<sup>8</sup>. Thus, we are in a situation where priests and bishops take less and less political positions in the electoral period, where believers think bishops would go beyond their role if they took such positions, but where left wing Catholic activists clearly display the links they do between their faith and a political orientation. At the same time, the catholic vote massively remains orientated on the right. To account for this apparent contradiction, some French politists<sup>9</sup> insist on the world's representations internalized by the Catholics. It is the Catholics' deeply conservative ideology that explains their rather constant and stable right wing vote. Other politists qualify this vision of things. They explain that the world's representations of the Catholics are increasingly various. There is a diversity in the manners to be Catholics

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<sup>7</sup> See Christel Peyrefitte, « Religion et politique », in *Sofres. L'opinion française en 1977*, Presses de la FNSP, 1978, p. 117-134.

<sup>8</sup> During the 1981 presidential elections, even in a left wing urban zone such as Grenoble, the attending Catholics majoritary vote for right wing candidates. See P. Bréchon and Bernard Denni, « L'univers politique des catholiques pratiquants. Une enquête par questionnaire dans huit assemblées dominicales grenobloises » in *Revue française de sociologie*, XXIV, 1983, p. 505 - 534.

<sup>9</sup> See Guy Michelat and Michel Simon, *Classe, religion et comportement politique*, Presses de la FNSP, 1977.

and in the manners to articulate religious, ethical and political representations <sup>10</sup>.

*Table 2 - The integration to catholicism measured by Church attendance*

	1974	1986	1994
Regular attending catholic	21	16	13
Occasional attending catholic	18	15	15
Non attending catholic	48	50	39
Other religions	4	3	8
No religion	10	15	24

Source : in 1974, a SOFRES opinion poll ; in 1986 a SOFRES opinion poll for *Le Monde, La Vie* and *France-Inter* ; in 1994, a CSA opinion poll for *Le Monde, La Vie* and *ARM*. Both the last studies have been realized under the scientific direction of Guy Michelat, Julien Potel, Jacques Sutter.

### **Unchurching and construction of a religious identity**

An element of the debate must not be forgotten. Some processes of loss of grip and influence of Catholicism on French people are at work. The part of French people having a strong catholic identity, standing out during all their life (and therefore their political and ethical choices), is increasingly limited, as shown in table 2. The indicator of practice remains a very good synthetic measure of the integration to catholicism <sup>11</sup>. It is strongly linked to the level of catholic beliefs (more linked than before). Only two French people out of three currently declare being catholic <sup>12</sup> and only 13 % of the French go to mass at least

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<sup>10</sup> See Jean - Marie Donegani, *La liberté de choisir. Pluralisme religieux et pluralisme politique dans le catholicisme contemporain*, Presses de la FNSP, 1993, 485 p. Pierre Briéchon and Bernard Denni have entered in this debate by adopting an intermediate position. If the articulation of religious, ethical and political positions is well done on a majority way according to a conservative pattern, some rather diversified minority models exist and differently link these three dimensions. See « L'univers politique des catholiques pratiquants », op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> See Guy Michelat, « L'identité catholique des Français », *Revue française de sociologie*, XXXI/3 and XXXI/4, July-September 1990 and October - December 1990, p. 355 - 388 and p. 609 - 631.

<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to say that, according to the way the question on religious belonging is asked, we do not exactly obtain the same results. The three surveys used in table 2 correspond to the following wording : « Can you tell me what religion, if any, do you belong to ? ». On the contrary, in the tradition of the Values surveys (and also of

once a month. The 1952's opinion poll, already quoted, indicated that 37 % of the Catholics attended mass each week (against 9 % today). Conversely an increasing number of French people (today approximately one out of four) declares being without religion. Sociologists both insist on the dilution of the religion and on its dissemination. There is an increasing in the number of persons with extremely floating beliefs and who build a universe of beliefs by borrowing both to an old catholic content and to other traditions. Non attending catholics only have floating beliefs that do not generate a strong identity modelling their daily life. The religious impact on the vote has therefore all chance to be felt on the extremes of a scale of integration to catholicism, among people with strong catholic beliefs and among those without religion. Today only a minority of French people builds a religious identity that marks all their attitudes. Furthermore it is necessary to add that the decline of the integration to Catholicism is largely a phenomenon of generation. Old generations remain far more catholic than young people (in 1994, the 18 to 24 years old are approximately 3 % to practice at least once a month while 36 % declare being without religion).

We must add a word on the other religions in France. The second religion is incontestably Islam, religion of the immigrants coming from countries of the Maghreb. They often escape opinion polls. They represent 5 to 6 % of the population, the Protestants 2 %, the Jews 1 % and all the others about 1 %. Catholicism's prominent position makes it is difficult for us to deal with the electoral behaviour of other religions from national opinion polls with representative sample <sup>13</sup>.

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Eurobarometers), the question is filtered : « Do you consider that you belong to a religion ? If yes, which one? ». The percentage of Catholics is then of 58% in 1990, while people without religion climb to 38%. This last wording more leads to reply according to a personal choice, while the first can probably more easily be understood as a simple declaration of a situation of fact, linked to one's baptism and to one's religious education in childhood. Cf. Yves Lambert, « Ages, générations et christianisme en France et à l'étranger », *Revue française de sociologie*, XXXIV, 1993, p. 525 - 555.

<sup>13</sup> We can analyse their attitudes from specific surveys. On Islam, see an IFOP poll in *Le Monde* of 30th November 1989. On Protestants, see Pierre Bréchon, « Les spécificités des Réformés : enquête sociologique en Centre - Alpes - Rhône », *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, Vol. 73, January - March 1993, p. 39 - 65 ; Claude Dargent, *La foi, la morale et le conflit. Culture et comportements politiques et sociaux des protestants français*, thesis of doctorate, Paris I, 1994 ; « Les protestants, ces chrétiens trop méconnus », *L'Actualité religieuse*, n°137, October 1995 (from a CSA poll). On the

These last years, in France as in other countries, the paradigms of electoral analysis have evolved. The weight of variables so called heavy (cultural and social variables such as social class or religious identity) has increasingly been discussed. The vote would rather depend on short term factors and a rational appreciation of the voter in each electoral circumstance. The idea prevails that the weight of the heavy variables has not disappeared but that it is less and less important, the individuals determining themselves in an autonomous manner and not according to already made belongings. There is certainly some truth in this type of approach. Religious and social belongings do not automatically produce a political identity; the fact of having internalized a right or left ideology does not give more a guarantee on the vote that someone emits (or does not, because the abstention is important in certain elections) in each electoral situation. Nevertheless, the weight of the religious variable is far from having disappeared, as the following of this paper tries to show it.

### **Left wing vote and integration to catholicism since 1965**

If the religious variable had no more impact, Catholics should vote as the most French people do. The percentage of left vote among the Catholics, and notably among the attending Catholics, would come close to the average of French people. Table 3 allows to measure, for a long period, the most important elections of the Vth Republic, the left wing vote according to the integration to Catholicism. We clearly see that the integration to Catholicism remains an important factor of the vote all along the period. For the first ballot of 1995 presidential election, approximately one regular attending Catholic out of five has voted for the left, a very close proportion to the one that is observed in the seventies. At the other end of the scale, among people without religion, the left vote is on the contrary very dominant; often around 80 % of people without religion vote for the left.

Yet it is necessary to observe a fall of this level in the last period where this percentage rather turns around 60 %. This can be explained both by structural and circumstantial reasons. Circumstantial reasons : the left is at its lowest point in the beginning of the nineties

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Judaism, see Sylvie Strudel, *Votes juifs, itinéraires migratoires, religieux et politiques*, Presses de la FNSP, 1996, 373 p.



and a certain number of left wing voters, notably among the popular classes, are disappointed by fifteen years of socialism and are going to migrate towards abstention or towards other political forces, including the extreme right (for a peculiar vote or definitively?). There are certainly people disappointed with socialism also among the without religion. But we can also advance structural reasons : people without religion are far more numerous than in the past and are certainly a little less specific, ideologically speaking. Pretending to be without religion in a situation where Catholicism was far more dominant and where to be catholic was obvious indicated taking a strong stand, a will to assert ones opposition to a conservative and traditional religion. Pretending to be without religion has become easier nowadays in a climate of unchurching. People who declared in the past that they were without religion were persons who had also internalized a rejection of the traditional values and that were attached to secularism and to left wing values. The universe of the values of people without religion is more composite nowadays. Some, though not concerned by religious values, have not specially internalized an opposition to traditional values and to Catholicism.

*Table 3 - Percentage of left wing vote in French elections  
(according to post - electoral surveys)*

	Presi. 65 1st ballot	Legis. 73 1st ballot	Presi. 74 1st ballot	Presi. 74 2nd ballot	Legis. 78 1st ballot	Presi. 81 1st ballot
Mean	<b>43</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>47</b>
RAC	8	17	19	23	15	16
IAC	30	48	43	49	32	36
NAC	49	61	67	74	50	55
Without religion	72	79	79	86	70	76

N.B. - RAC means « regular attending Catholics », IAC « irregular attending Catholics » and NAC « non attending Catholics ». « Regular attending Catholics » are generally described as being attending at least once a month, excepted for 1965 and 1973 (attending once a week). For 1974, it was not possible to precise what sort of categories have been made. Irregular attending Catholics are going to mass several times during the year and non attending Catholics never go to mass.

	Presi. 81 2nd ballot	Legis. 86	Presi. 88 1st ballot A	Presi. 88 1st ballot B	Presi. 88 2nd ballot A	Presi. 88 2nd ballot B
Mean	<b>52</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>

*Is there Religious Voting in France?*

RAC	20	17	20	25	27	34
IAC	40	35	33	34	44	49
NAC	61	47	50	47	58	66
Without religion	88	75	69	60	75	86
	Legis. 88 1st ballot	Legis. 93 1st ballot	Presi. 95 1st ballot A	Presi. 95 1st ballot B	Presi. 95 2nd ballot A	Presi. 95 2nd ballot B
Mean	<b>49</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>48</b>
RAC	21	12	22	18	29	20
IAC	35	21	30	28	32	33
NAC	55	33	38	42	49	51
Without religion	80	50	55	60	69	71

These surveys are always the SOFRES post - electoral polls, except for 1965 (IFOP poll). For 1988 and 1995, two polls are presented to show there can be some differences in the voting recall according to the categories of practice (B polls are CEVIPOF post - electoral studies). The main reference used for this table is François Platone, *Les électors sous la Vème République*, Cahiers du Cevipof, 2nd edition, september 1995, 270 p. For the first ballot of the 1974 presidential election, only the votes for François Mitterrand are taken into account and not the whole left wing votes. Are missing 2.3 % for Arlette Laguiller (Extreme left), 1.3 % for René Dumont (this left man solicits votes for the development of the Third World) and 0.4 % for Alain Krivine (Extreme left). This deficiency does not probably modify the result of regular attending Catholics but effectively underestimates the left vote of the « without religion ».

*Table 3 bis - Percentage of left wing vote in the 1997 legislative elections (First ballot) (Sofres post-electoral survey for CEVIPOF, CIDSP, CRAPS)*

	Legislative 93 First ballot	Legislative 97 First ballot
<b>Mean</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>41</b>
Regular Attending Catholic	12	18
Irregular Attending Catholic	21	33
Non Attending Catholic	33	42
Without religion	50	59

The results of 1997 (table 3 bis) does not change the tendencies described above. The left has refound a part of its supports but the links with the integration to catholicism are identical.

*Table 4 - Table of the odds-ratios*

	ratio right/left for RAC	/	ratio right/left for no religion	=	odds-ratios
1965 Presidential election 1st ballot	(92/8=11.5)	/	(28/72=0,3888)	=	29.6
1973 Legislative elec. 1st ballot	(83/17=4.8824)	/	(21/79=0,2658)	=	18.4
1974 Presidential elec. 1st ballot	(70/19=3.6842)	/	(15/79=0,1899)	=	19.4
1974 Presidential elec. 2nd ballot	(77/23=3.3478)	/	(14/86=0.1628)	=	20.6
1978 Legislative elec. 1st ballot	(81/17=4.7647)	/	(13/81=0.1605)	=	29.7
1981 Presidential elec. 1st ballot	(81/16=5.0625)	/	(16/76=0.2105)	=	24.0
1981 Presidential elec. 2nd ballot	(80/20=4)	/	(12/88=0.1364)	=	29.3
1986 Legislative election	(81/17=4.7647)	/	(23/75=0.3066)	=	15.5
1988 Presid. elec. 1st ballot (A)	(76/20=3.8)	/	(27/69=0.3913)	=	9.7
1988 Presid. elec. 1st ballot (B)	(71/27=2.6296)	/	(19/73=0.2602)	=	10.1
1988 Presid. elec. 2nd ballot (A)	(73/27=2.7037)	/	(25/75=0.3333)	=	8.1
1988 Presid. elec. 2nd ballot (B)	(66/34=1.9412)	/	(14/86=0.1628)	=	11.9
1988 Legislative elec. 1st ballot	(78/21=3.7143)	/	(20/80=0.25)	=	14.9
1993 Legislative elec. 1st ballot	(76/12=6.3333)	/	(32/50=0.64)	=	9.9
1995 Presid. elec. 1st ballot (A)	(75/22=3.4090)	/	(39/55=0.7091)	=	4.8
1995 Presid. elec. 1st ballot (B)	(81/18=4.5)	/	(38/58=0.6552)	=	6.9
1995 Presid. elec. 2nd ballot (A)	(71/29=2.4482)	/	(31/69=0.4493)	=	5.4
1995 Presid. elec. 2nd ballot (B)	(80/20=4)	/	(29/71=0.4084)	=	9.8
1997 Legislative election first ballot	(75/18=4.1666)	/	(30/59=0.5085)	=	8.2

We can use the method of the odds-ratios (cf. table 4) and try to measure more precisely a weakening of the integration effect to Catholicism on the vote. This method consist in doing a « ratio of a ratio »<sup>14</sup>. In 1965, a regular attending Catholic has 29.6 more chances of voting for the right wing than someone without religion. Let us explain the simple calculation that is operated for each election, always taking 1965 as an example. A regular attending Catholic has 11.5 more chances of voting for the right than for the left wing whereas someone without religion only has 0.3888 chances of having the same behaviour. By dividing the two ratios, we obtain the figure of 29.6.

It appears that 1965 is a unique case, linked to a very high numerator (only 8 % of the attending Catholics vote for the left). For the 1967 legislative elections, 16 % of the regular attending Catholics have voted for the left while 79 % of the without religion adopted the same behaviour. The chances that a regular attending Catholic votes for the right rather than for the left are 20,1 more raised than for someone without religion<sup>15</sup>. The odds-ratios fort the first ballot of 1978 (29,7) and the second ballot of the 1981 presidential election (29,3) are also

<sup>14</sup> For these calculations, we have adopted two conventions : the green vote is not taken into account, the moderate right and far right votes are aggregated together.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bruno Cautrès, « Modèles log - linéaires et analyse comparative des données d'enquête, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, April 1997, forthcoming.

very particular. They are largely owed to the denominator : almost all the people without religion have voted for the left. If we put aside these particular cases, the odds-ratio in general remains between 15 to 20 until the middle of the eighties. For the 1988 presidential elections it appreciably declines due to a weak numerator. It is a circumstantial effect. Attending catholics are no more afraid of François Mitterrand for his re-election, Mitterrand is not anymore allied to the communists and on the contrary presents himself as an open-minded candidate, a candidate of consensus ; moreover he is the outgoing president and can therefore attract the « conformist vote » that is frequent enough among attending catholics. The odds-ratio is weak again in 1993, 1995 and 1997, by an increasing of the denominator, for reasons evoked higher in the text (the loss of political specificity of people without religion, that probably has both circumstantial and structural causes).

In fact we can see that the method of the odds-ratios is interesting because it allows to measure simply and on a synthetic manner the effect of religious integration. But it is a very sensible indicator and we must be careful in the interpretations. All the more so since we can see that for the same election, according to the considered opinion poll, we can have odds-ratios with noticeable differences. The most interesting seems to consider that since the seventies, the left-right ratio among attending catholics has not truly changed. These last remain very specific. If the general odds-ratios decline, it is essentially by the increasing of the denominator, therefore by an evolution of people without religion.

Let us have a clearer look on the available data concerning the vote for the first ballot of the 1995 presidential election <sup>16</sup> (table 5). The effect of integration to Catholicism is the same as what was observed in the post electoral survey mentioned in table 3 <sup>17</sup>. We could have thought that the young catholics, in a context of unchurching and individualism, would somewhat have lost their specificities in political matter. In fact it

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<sup>16</sup> I thank the IFOP institute for having authorized me to use these data, on 5467 individuals.

<sup>17</sup> In the IFOP opinion poll, attending catholics are defined in a more narrow manner : Catholics practising each week are concerned, what probably explains that the left wing vote is slightly rarer. Furthermore, a distinction is introduced between non attending Catholics « believers » and non attending Catholics « non believers ». This distinction seems to be relevant, it allows us to isolate a category of catholics almost completely detached of their religious denomination, that vote more to the left than the non attending catholics believers.

is clear that these specificities always remain such strong. The generation of the 35 to 49 years old, that were 20 at the beginning of the seventies, constitute the generation that most votes for the left. It is the generation that has probably been the most marked by the climbing of the left in the course of the seventies. The noteworthy evolution among people less than 35 concerns people without religion who less often vote left. This table therefore confirms what we have previously said.

And the same table for 1997 (table 5 bis) confirms this analysis. The generation of "quadras" is always the most in favour of the left. Young attending catholics are always strongly voting for the right. The less than 35 old without religion less often vote for the left. The structure of table 5 bis is very near from this of table 5.

*Table 5 - Percentage of left wing vote according to integration to Catholicism and generation (IFOP exit poll - 1st ballot 1995)*

	Catholic attending once a week	Catholic attending irregularly	non attending Catholic believer	non attending Catholic non believer	without religion	Mean
18-24	19	15	30	40	51	37
25-34	16	22	31	38	51	37
35-49	24	32	32	45	63	42
50-64	12	22	28	43	67	35
65 +	18	11	24	40	64	28
Mean	17	23	30	42	57	37

*Table 5 bis- Percentage of left wing vote according to integration to catholicism and generation (1997 Sofres post-electoral survey for CEVIPOF, CIDSP, CRAPS)*

	catholic attending once a month	catholic attending irregularly	non attending catholic	without religion	Mean
18-24	19	26	46	57	43
25-34	20	33	38	53	44
35-44	35	40	48	60	49
45-54	18	36	36	65	39
55-64	13	36	42	66	39
65 +	18	24	41	61	33
Mean	18	33	42	59	41

**Integration to catholicism and social class, two heavy variables of the electoral behaviour**

In France, the integration to catholicism always constitutes the most predictive variable of the vote. We have just seen that it is a little less predictive than in the past, due to the fact that there is a less large specificity of people without religion. The electoral sociology has also shown that the social group clearly enough marked the vote. It is therefore important to wonder about the respective weight of these two variables. Catholics rather belonging to favoured social categories<sup>18</sup>, the importance of the religious factor could only be an appearance, the social variable only being explanatory. When we cross the results of the vote for the 1995 first ballot by social groups, we discover intense enough relationships, nevertheless without reaching the level of the links between religion and vote. But, for 1995, the vote is *de facto* more linked to the subjective class groups than to objective belongings. We are trying to appreciate the respective weight of the religious factor and of the subjective class, while controlling a possible age effect (cf. table 6).

The reflection will be driven on the right wing vote<sup>19</sup>. In order to not multiply the number of cells in the table and to keep a sufficient number of cases, the age is only split in two parts, the subjective class is appreciated in four categories<sup>20</sup> and integration to catholicism in three (concerning attending catholics, those that attend mass each week and the occasional attending catholics have been put together, similarly the two categories of non attending catholics have been put together). The effect of the age on the right wing vote is not very strong, even if people aged more than 50 vote a little more frequently to the right. The effect of integration to catholicism and of the subjective class are on the contrary very strong (and of an equal intensity). The most interesting is to notice that the two effects are independent and act simultaneously.

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<sup>18</sup> The link between social group and integration to catholicism is not very intense. In the IFOP survey used here, 20% of workers are catholics who attend at least occasionally, against 33 % of executives and professionals.

<sup>19</sup> We add the votes in favour of Jacques Chirac, Edouard Balladur and Philippe de Villiers. We do not take into account the extreme right vote, which is weakly linked to the integration to Catholicism.

<sup>20</sup> The respondents had to choose between six categories. « The privileged » and « well-off people » have been regrouped in the upper class, «popular classes » and « the disfavored » in the lower class, «upper middle classes» and « lower middle classes » remain separated.

When an individual declares being without religion and has the feeling to belong to the lowest part of the social scale, the chances that he votes for the right are very weak (approximately 10 % of vote for the right). On the other hand, if he is an attending catholic (even occasionally) and knows that he belongs to the favoured categories, he has approximately 80 chances out of 100 to vote for the right. Taking these two dimensions into account provides a very predictive indicator of the vote, while the effects of religion and social class on the vote, independently taken, slightly crumble away in the elections of the beginning of the nineties <sup>21</sup>.

*Table 6 - Percentage of moderate right wing vote for the first ballot of the 1995 presidential election according to integration to Catholicism, subjective social class and age (IFOP exit poll).*

age	class	attending Catholics	non attending Catholics	without religion	Mean
18-49	upper	79	56	33	57
	upper middle	66	48	27	47
	lower middle	54	43	23	39
	lower	36	30	14	26
50 +	upper	79	60	27	64
	upper middle	76	53	33	59
	lower middle	80	50	33	58
	lower	42	27	5	27
	Mean	63	43	24	44

*Tables 6 bis & ter - Percentage of moderate right wing vote for the first ballot of the 1997 legislative election according to integration to catholicism, social class and age (post-electoral survey).*

age	class	regular and irregular attending catholic	non attending catholic	without religion	Mean
18-49	privileged and well off	61	36	14	39
	upper middle class	61	30	17	36
	lower middle class	42	28	12	27
	popular and underprivileged	20	13	8	12
50 +	privileged and well off	72	48	0	53
	upper middle class	76	40	19	55

<sup>21</sup> Concerning the class voting, see Anthony Heath and Bruno Cautrès, « The decline of class voting in Britain and France », Congress of l'Association française de science politique, Aix - en - Provence, 1996, 29 p.

*Is there Religious Voting in France?*

lower middle class	65	47	13	50
popular and underprivileged	47	19	9	27
Mean	58	33	13	37

age	class	regular and irregular attending catholic	non attending catholic	without religion	Mean
18-49	farmer	74	35	0	63
	artisan, shopkeeper, industrialist	73	31	8	29
	executive, profesional	55	38	9	37
	intermediate profession	51	28	15	29
	clerk	44	23	12	25
	working class	35	22	12	22
50 +	farmer	83	51	54	73
	artisan, shopkeeper, industrialist	78	55	17	57
	executive, profesional	64	48	18	48
	intermediate profession	67	44	0	50
	clerk	56	34	13	39
	working class	52	23	9	29
	Mean	58	33	13	37

Table 6 bis shows that, in 1997, subjective social class and integration to catholicism are always two variables strongly related to voting. But with a slight weakening of the link : the right vote goes from 72 % among the old attending catholics of upper classes to 8 % among the young without religion of lower classes.

The new phenomenon for 1997 is the strenghtening of the objective social class (table 6 ter). In the beginning of the nineties, a conjonctural effect weakened the relation between objective social class and voting : popular classes were disappointed by the left and vote more frequently for the right. In 1997, the swing is particularly high for these categories : the right wing vote loses 13 points among the clerks and 9 points among the workers (compared with 1995) . And if we compare the impact of the subjective and objective class for 1997 <sup>22</sup>, we can say that this latter has an effect on voting almost as strong than the former.

**The effect of the integration to Catholicism on each electorate in 1995 and 1997**

<sup>22</sup> For this comparasion, it is better not to take into account farmers, artisans ,shopkeepers and compared only the four last categories, which are salaried.



Until now we have presented fragmentary results concerning the 1995 election. In fact there were nine candidates and it is interesting to have a look at the catholic vote for each of these candidates (table 7). Three candidates represented the left, Arlette Laguiller, on behalf of « Lutte Ouvrière », a small extreme left party, Robert Hue, national secretary of the Communist Party and Lionel Jospin, candidate of the Socialist Party. Arlette Laguiller has had a clearly highest result than for her previous candidatures, she has probably attracted people disappointed by the left, perhaps some protesting votes. However she obtains a very weak result among attending catholics, far stronger among people without religion.

The same phenomenon can be observed for Robert Hue. Catholics well integrated into their Church traditionally reject Communism and therefore it is not a surprise to observe this result. The largest part of the catholic left vote is therefore a socialist vote, for a moderate left.

*Table 7- The vote for the first ballot of the 1995 presidential election (IFOP exit poll) according to integration to Catholicism*

<b>Mean</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Integration to Catholicism</b>	<b>Laguiller</b>	<b>Hue</b>	<b>Jospin</b>	<b>Voynet</b>
Attending once a week	2	3	13	1
Attending irregularly	3	4	16	3
Non attending believer	4	7	19	2
Non attending (non believer)	5	10	26	3
other religion	5	9	35	4
without religion	9	17	32	5

  

<b>Mean</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Integration to Catholicism</b>	<b>Balladur</b>	<b>Chirac</b>	<b>De Villiers</b>	<b>Le Pen</b>
Attending once a week	40	21	11	9
Attending irregularly	26	27	6	16
Non attending believer	19	23	5	20
Non attending (non believer)	14	21	4	16
other religion	14	18	3	12
without religion	8	12	4	14

N.B. The eight above columns of the figures give the valid votes for each candidate, except for those of M. Cheminade (0.4 % of votes).

<b>Mean</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Integration to Catholicism</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Ecologist</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Ext. right</b>
Attending once a week	17	1	72	9
Attending irregularly	23	3	59	16
Non attending believer	30	2	48	20
Non attending (non believer)	42	3	39	16
other religion	49	4	35	13



Edouard Balladur. The explanation has to be sought in the legitimist and conformist vote of attending catholics (who are in majority old, and the age probably strengthens this tendency to the legitimist vote). In each election the Prime Minister in exercise seems to have an advantage among the catholic voters when they have to choose between the different right wing candidates.

*Table 8 - The right wing vote for the first ballot of 1988 and 1995 presidential elections*

1988 (BVA)	Chirac	Barre	Le Pen	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	
Attending Catholic once a week	40	30	12	
Catholic attending irregularly	26	23	17	
Non attending Catholic believer	21	14	17	
Non attending Catholic (non believer)	16	14	15	
Without religion	6	9	11	

  

1995 (IFOP)	Chirac	Balladur	De Villiers	Le Pen
<b>Mean</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
Attending Catholic once a week	21	40	11	9
Catholic attending irregularly	27	26	6	16
Non attending Catholic believer	23	19	5	20
Non attending Catholic (non believer)	21	14	4	12
Without religion	12	8	4	14

The situation on the right wing is even complicated in 1995 by the candidature of Philippe de Villiers, member of Parliament and president of the Regional Council of Vendée (Conseil général de Vendée), member of the Republican Party until the end of 1994 but already critical since several years towards his camp. He launches at the fall of 1994 the « Mouvement pour la France ». His programme is liberal in economy, nationalist and anti-european, and he is defending traditional values. He only obtains 5 % of valid votes but it is interesting to note that his electorate is old and that he collects 11 % of the vote of attending Catholics. Regarding Jean-Marie Le Pen, who collects 15 % of the votes, his electorate is nowadays very popular and is not marked from a religious point of view. If a large part of members and militants of the National Front (Front National) is constituted by traditional or traditionalists attending catholics, the electorate is on the contrary religiously very composite. Jean-Marie Le Pen is not henceforth really underrepresented among people without religion.

In the 1995 IFOP exit poll, several results confirm the conformist dimension of the catholic vote. The well integrated believers

into their Church are far more numerous than the others to have a positive judgement on the results of the Balladur government (67 % of the catholics who have a weekly practice judge these results very good or good enough against only 22 % of people without religion). They say they have made their electoral choice rather according to the candidate's personality and to the values he represents. While people without religion give greater importance to the political belonging in their electoral choice. Among a list of qualities which could have pushed to choose a candidate, the attending catholics give importance to his calm, his experience, his capacity to decide, all qualities which are those of a notable or of a statesman. Catholics prefer to vote for recognized men than according to a political program. This does not mean that the catholic vote has no ideological dimension. The attending catholics clearly support right wing values. For example, while social inequality is a theme that people without religion identify as very important in their vote, France's position in the world is strongly chosen by the attending catholics.

Let us have a look on table 7 bis. We can observe the same tendencies than in 1995 for the last election. Obviously, the attending catholics vote very often for the moderate right. When they vote for the left, they are in favour of a moderate left and not for the PCF. They rarely support the National Front. Concerning the non religion, they are very often for the left (PCF and PS), they also overrepresent the Greens and they are now frequently in favour of the far right.

### **Ideological representations and integration to Catholicism**

The links between the voters' ideological representations and integration to Catholicism also clearly appear through the data collected in the 1995 CEVIPOF post-electoral survey<sup>24</sup>. Table 9 presents some synthetic results. We have built six attitude scales :

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<sup>24</sup> This post - electoral survey of CEVIPOF (on 4078 individuals) is very rich. It allows notably to do some comparisons with the former surveys led in 1978 and 1988. These data are henceforth open to researchers. But they do not have to publish before the exit of the book, *L'électeur a ses raisons*, prepared by the authors of the survey. Data are available at the CIDSP - BDSP (sociopolitical data bank), IEP of Grenoble, BP 45, 38402 Saint-Martin d'Hères cedex. E - mail : [cidsp@cidsp.upmf-grenoble.fr](mailto:cidsp@cidsp.upmf-grenoble.fr)

- a scale of economic liberalism<sup>25</sup> where are isolated 47 % of respondents who judge in a very positive manner competition, profit and privatizations ;
- a scale of egalitarianism<sup>26</sup>, from two indicators : the negative or positive judgements associated to the words « equality » and « solidarity » ;
- a scale of xenophobia, from four questions : to feel French rather than European, to assert that we no longer feel at home as before and that there are too many immigrants in France, to refuse that Muslims living in France have mosques<sup>27</sup> ;
- a scale of authoritarianism, constituted of persons who enhance the value of the word « authority » (very much or positive enough), that wish the re-establishment of death penalty (strongly agree or somewhat agree) or who consider that school should before all give the sense of effort and discipline<sup>28</sup> ;
- a scale of civic moralism, concerning five acts of incivility and of distance to social norms. 38 % of the sample condemn these five practices : to do dud cheques, to settle in a unoccupied flat without having the right, to go through a red light, to steal in a shop, to cheat in public transport ;

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<sup>25</sup> It is an additive scale constructed on negative or positive judgments attributed to the words « competition » « profit » and « privatization ». Each word being judged from 1 to 4 (from very positive to very negative), the scale goes from 3 to 12. The liberal positions here isolated correspond to notes 3 to 6, and represent 47 % of the sample.

<sup>26</sup> It is also an additive scale. Judgements go from 1 to 4 for each word, from very positive to very negative. The scale therefore goes from 2 to 8 and here, the egalitarian attitude, shared by 37 % of the sample, corresponds to note 2 (i.e to people that judge the two words very positive).

<sup>27</sup> It is again an additive scale. The question on the French or European identity is a variable divided in 6 positions : to feel French only, more French than European, as much French as European , more European than French, only European, neither French nor European. The other questions are in four positions (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) with three assertions: « Now we do not feel at home as before », « There are too many immigrants in France », « It would be normal that Muslims living in France have mosques to practice their religion ». Results of the last question have to be inverted to allow the sum of the scores. The scale goes therefore from 4 to 18. The number of 41% of xenophobes here retained have notes equal or inferior to 8.

<sup>28</sup> The scale goes from 0 (persons that adopt none of the evoked positions) to 3 (those that hold simultaneously the three positions). We retain in table 9 those who are very little authoritative (having the note 0 or 1).

- a sexual liberalism scale, built on two questions (to think that homosexuality is acceptable and that resorting to abortion is normal) <sup>29</sup> and that isolates 50 % of the sample having the most liberal position.

These six ideological dimensions are correlated with the right - left dimension and with the party identification. We can see here that they also have links with integration to catholicism. People without religion are always rather different from the attending catholics. They rather feebly support economic liberalism but defend social egalitarianism, they are the ones who are less xenophobic, the most opposite to authority, the most relativists in sexual and civic matters. They therefore clearly defend the left wing values <sup>30</sup>.

*Table 9 - The ideological attitudes according to integration to Catholicism\* (post-electoral survey SOFRES-CEVIPOF 1995)*

	economical liberalism	egalitarianism	xenophobia
regular catholic	57	34	49
irregular catholic	55	32	54
non attend. cath.	46	34	52
other religion	43	42	39
without religion	35	50	36
Mean	47	37	48

  

	anti-authoritarianism	civic moralism	sexual liberalism
regular catholic	31	60	23
irregular catholic	33	43	39
non attend. cath.	36	37	53
other religion	53	38	45
without religion	59	24	71
Mean	41	38	50

<sup>29</sup> The two statements are : « Homosexuality is an acceptable manner to live ones sexuality » and « It is normal that a woman could choose to abort ». For each of these declarations, the individuals have 4 possibilities to reply, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The additive scale goes therefore from 2 to 8. The 50 % of people showing the largest sexual liberty have notes 2 or 3.

<sup>30</sup> This ideological specificity of people without religion can be verified, country by country, on European surveys. Cf. Pierre Bréchon, «Les valeurs politiques en Europe : effet du contexte national et des attitudes religieuses», *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, Vol. 93, January - March 1996, p. 99 - 128.

*Table 9 bis - The ideological attitudes according to integration to catholicism (1997 legislative post-electoral survey SOFRES for CEVIPOF, CIDSP and CRAPS)*

	economical liberalism	xenophobia	anti-authoritarianism	in favour of Europe
regular catholic	49	52	25	51
irregular catholic	53	52	26	48
non attend. cath.	44	53	23	43
other religion	49	40	34	56
without religion	32	31	44	43
Mean	44	47	29	45

The intensity of the relationships is however different according to the dimensions taken into account. It is strong for the sexual liberalism and the civic moralism. The more someone is integrated to catholicism, the more someone adopts attitudes of moralism, even of civic « rigorism » and the less someone is relativist in sexual matter. It is on these ethical dimensions that catholics more clearly support the values of the right wing. There is also a relationship of average intensity with economic liberalism: integration to catholicism correlates with a stronger economic liberalism. On the contrary, the effect of integration to catholicism is rather weak for xenophobia, egalitarianism and the anti-authoritative attitude. On these three dimensions, there is no significant difference according to whether someone is practicing or non practicing. Perhaps we can see there the result of contradictory pressures and of cognitive dissonances for attending catholics. By their system of values oriented towards the right wing, they would have to be characterized by a high level in xenophobia and a low level in egalitarianism.

But these are dimensions for which the catholic speech has already displayed since a long time positions of social opening. The declarations of bishops and catholic associations are numerous on the share out of goods and work, as well as on the necessary welcome of the foreigner. These speeches did not produce a clearly favourable orientation of attending catholics towards egalitarianism or towards the refusal of xenophobia, but they seem to have had some effects. Let us finally notice that on all the dimensions of table 9, the followers of other religions come near to the left wing values showed by people without

religion. They are too little numerous<sup>31</sup> for this result to be validly interpreted.

The questionnaire of the last post-electoral study (1997) does not allow to build identical attitude scales. But it has been possible to build similar indices for economical liberalism<sup>32</sup>, xenophobia<sup>33</sup> and anti-authoritarianism<sup>34</sup>. Table 9 bis shows the links with integration to catholicism are stable. We add a scale of european attitudes<sup>35</sup>. As in another surveys, it appears that there is no link between support for Europe and integration to catholicism. This European scale is strongly related to the level of qualification (as xenophobia), fewly related to age and not related to catholicism.

### **Conclusion**

Everything shows that integration to catholicism keeps in France a very important weight on the electoral behaviour. Attending catholics have a scarcely different electoral behaviour than the one they had thirty years ago. The climbing of religious indifference simply leads to the fact that people without religion are a bit less clearly marked by a left wing ideology. To explain the electoral behaviour among attending catholics,

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<sup>31</sup> There are in this survey 2,3 % of Protestants, 0,4 % of Jews, 0,8 % of Muslims and 1,2 % people belonging to other religions. Muslims' underrepresentation is obvious, even if we take into account the fact that this survey was only completed by people saying they are registered on electoral lists.

<sup>32</sup> Likert scale with six indicators : to give priority in the next years to the competitiveness of enterprises, to find the word "profit" very or somewhat positive, the same thing for the words "privatization" and "liberalism", to wish a cut in the number of civil servants, a cut in the social expenditures of firms.

<sup>33</sup> Likert scale with five indicators : strongly or somewhat agree with : « Now we do not feel at home as before », "There are races less gifted than others", « There are too many immigrants in France », somewhat or totally disagree with : "People of the Maghreb who live in France will be in the future French people as others", strongly or somewhat in favour of maintaining the Pasqua-Debré law on immigration

<sup>34</sup> Likert scale with only two indicators : to wish to maintain the death penalty and to think the school must before all give the sense of effort and discipline. We isolate here people who refuse the two items.

<sup>35</sup> Likert scale with seven items : to be in favour of a single currency, to want for the future a strenghtening of the European political power, to think France benefited from his membership to the European Union, to think the pursuit of European unification will be rather positive for social security, way of life, economic grwth, to think the European Union protect our country from risks related to the mondialization of economy.



characterized by a very strong stability, factors of short term therefore seem to be of weak importance.

The paradigm of the rational voter perhaps functions for some electorates or categories ; but the model appears doubtful for categories of population having both a strong ideological and religious structure. We have seen that, even if catholicism holds a social speech and favorable towards immigrants, this only has limited effects on attending catholics. This last fact (a speech in favour of immigrants) probably protects attending catholics from the far right vote but don't convert them to the left. The political culture of a social group having deeply internalized religious and political attitudes is not modified on a short term thanks to some speeches of the pope or bishops. The individuals only slowly recompose their attitudes on a long term.

Laws that have made divorce easier and that have legalized abortion date from the middle of the seventies and have been prepared by a rightist government and passed both by the left and a large part of the right in Parliament, with besides the agreement of a part of the catholic electorate. These laws have launched opinion debates without being determining stakes (central issues) in the elections. We can simply think that the transfer of a small fringe of traditional catholics towards the party of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the beginning of the eighties or towards Philippe de Villiers at the beginning of the nineties has been favoured by the relative moral liberalism of a good part of the moderate right. Of course, our plea for a stability of the vote of convinced catholics on the long term would deserve a more thorough study.

It would be suitable to follow their itineraries of vote to see if they individually represent a far more stable electorate that the electorate of the non attending catholics. We could try to see which are the issues likely to have caused some small changes in the alignments of voters having a strong catholic identity. Following individual paths on the long term would perhaps prevent us from taking for stability the effect of evolutions in opposite senses compensating themselves.

*Table 10 - Rate of stability of the electorates  
(between 1993 and 1997 for the first ballot)*

	Regular attending catholic	Non attending catholic	Without religion	Mean
PCF and far left	74	73	75	70
PS and allied	82	87	82	83

*Is there Religious Voting in France?*

Green+ecologist	32	32	54	42
Moderate right	94	93	84	92
National Front	58	46	56	52

*Source* : 1997 SOFRES post-electoral survey for Cevipof, Cidsp, Craps. *Lecture of the table* : each cell of the table presents the percentage of 1997 voters who had already voted for the same political tendency in 1993.

Table 10 is a first essay to test the stability of the electorates according to their religious attitude. Contrary to my expectations, all the categories on the religious variable have about the same level of stability. I thought the non attending catholics would be less stable, because they have more floating attitudes. It is not the case. The way remains open for a more thorough confirmation.

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