

The Transformation of Religious Cleavages in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis *

Ruth Dassonneville¹, Martin Elff², and Kamil Marcinkiewicz³

¹Université de Montréal

²Zeppelin Universität

³Universität Hamburg

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Abstract

Traditionally, religion is thought of as an important determinant of voting behaviour. The secularization of Western societies, however, has changed its role. Secularization not only limits the political relevance of religion, it likely affects the nature of religious cleavages too. Evidence from the United States suggests that a decrease of denominational differences goes hand in hand with *increased* relevance of religiosity. Specifically, a divide between the secular sections of the society and a cross-denominational coalition of the most religious voters has emerged. In this paper, we examine whether and how the role of religion for voting behaviour has changed in Western Europe. Combining data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and information on parties' positions from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), we study over-time changes in belonging and believing across Western Europe, examine changes in the positions that parties take on religious issues and dimensions, and assess the nature of over-time changes in the connection between religion and the vote choice. To gain insights on a likely transformation of the religious cleavage, we focus on changes in the role of religion for members of different birth cohorts. Our results show indications of a religious-secular polarization among the youngest birth cohorts.

Keywords: Religion; religiosity; social cleavage; vote choice; party competition.

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1 Introduction

Along with social class, religion is one of the most important factors structuring major divisions in societies and it is known to shape voting behaviour in important ways. The role of religion was already acknowledged in the early days of modern research on elections, as exemplified in the work of [Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet \(1944\)](#). However, over the course of the twentieth and early twenty first century, the presence and importance of religion in social life has strongly decreased in a process that is characterized as “a long-term and gradual generational decline” ([Bruce, 2011](#), p. 73). Across established democracies in particular, citizens’ membership in churches and their attendance of religious services have plummeted (see, e.g., [Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011](#); [Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016a](#)) and the decline has been argued to have further accelerated in the last twenty years ([Inglehart, 2021](#)).

The secularization that is observed in Western societies has motivated scholars to examine whether religion is still influencing citizens’ vote choices ([Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011](#); [Elff and Roßteutscher, 2017](#); [Goldberg, 2020](#); [Raymond, 2011](#)). This work has disentangled change driven by a decline in the number of religious citizens, change in the vote choices of those who are (still) religious, and change in the extent to which religious voters are turning out to vote ([Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011](#); [Knutsen, 2004](#); [Goldberg, 2020](#)).

What is mostly missing from the comparative literature on changes in the effects of religion on the vote, however, are efforts to disentangle the role of religious denomination on the one hand and religiosity on the other. Focusing on the U.S. context, [Putnam and Campbell \(2012\)](#) have argued that over time the bonds between specific religious denominations and parties have weakened and been replaced by an opposition between secular and religious sections of society. Along the same lines, [Wilkins-Laflamme \(2016b\)](#) has shown evidence of a growing attitudinal polarization between the religious and those without a religious affiliation in Great-Britain. If such changes characterize modern democracies more broadly, the social divisions between different denominational groups are expected to become weaker. Such a change, however, does not imply that religion is no longer structuring individuals’ political attitudes and party preferences. Rather, it implies a shift from religious denomination to religiosity guiding voters’ electoral choices. In this paper, we examine whether in a broad set of West-European democracies, religiosity has indeed taken the place of religious denomination in shaping electoral behaviour.

To shed light on the nature of the transformation of the religious cleavage, we assess societal patterns in religious denomination and religiosity, assess change in parties’ positions on religious issues, and examine differences in the effects of religion on the vote choice between members of different birth cohorts. Our analyses rely on data from the European Social Survey (ESS), which we combine with information on parties’ positions, covering the period between 2002 and 2018.¹ Even though the ESS data include information on countries in both Western

¹For part of our analyses, the time frame is restricted to the period 2006–2018. This is due to the availability

Europe and Central/Eastern-Europe, we limit the analyses to the former. We do so because that is the region where most of the evidence about the importance of religious denomination for explaining voters' choices originates (Knutsen, 2004; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Given that there is important between-country variation in the parties that appeal to religious voters, our vote choice analyses do not rely on a pre-determined classification of parties into party families. Instead, we use data from the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Jolly et al., 2022) that we combine with the individual-level ESS data to estimate the effect of parties' ideological positions for voters with different religious backgrounds by means of discrete choice models.

Our results show that the nature of the transformation of the religious cleavage in Western Europe is substantively different from processes observed in the United States. Rather than finding evidence of a shift from a denominational to a religious-secular divide, our results suggest that the political role of religion is in decline. Specifically, we find that individuals identifying with religious denominations and those who do not are converging in terms of their preferences with respect to the role of religious principles in politics. This finding parallels the notion by Bruce (2011, p. 19) who described secularization as “a slow process of generational change in which people gradually lose interest in things that mattered to their parents and in which the possibilities for beliefs and practice expand while the salience of any of those beliefs and practices declines.”

2 Previous work on change in the religious cleavage

Studying party systems and voting behaviour in established democracies in the 1960s, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) concluded that individuals' choices were to a large extent driven by their positions on social cleavages, such as their place of living, their social class, or their religious denomination. The observation that election outcomes are increasingly volatile (Chiaromonte and Emanuele, 2017), however, has led scholars to argue that social cleavages are no longer structuring voters' choices to the same extent (Franklin, Mackie and Valen, 1992).

Empirical studies that have investigated over-time changes in the effects of social cleavages on voters' behaviour, however, are far from conclusive. Work that has examined changes in the effects of class on the vote choice, for example, generally comes to the conclusion that the class cleavage is still politically relevant (Elff, 2007; Evans, 2000), even if party competition over different class groups has changed (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). Scholars that have more specifically focused on the effect of religion on the vote, have similarly nuanced the idea of a strong across-the board decline of its impact. Knutsen (2004, p. 108), who studied the impact of religious denomination on the vote choice in Western Europe between 1970 and 1997, found that the association between religious denomination and the vote choice is “fairly stable.” Elff (2007, p. 281), who analyzed over-time change in the role of class and religious cleavages in

of indicators on parties' positions on religious principles, as we detail below.

Western Europe, concluded that the latter are “more stable.” Work analyzing the role of religion in a more limited set of countries or single countries has similarly concluded that religion continues to structure voters’ electoral choices in important ways (Elff and Rossteutscher, 2011; Raymond, 2011; Tilley, 2015).

Such findings, however, should not be taken to conclude that religion still structures voting in exactly the same way as it did in the 1960s. Best (2011) has drawn attention to a distinction between changes in terms of the number of religious individuals and changes in how religious voters choose parties. The process of secularization has led to a decline in the number of citizens who still consider themselves religious or attend church regularly. As a result, even if the effect of religion on the vote among religious voters is constant, the drop in the number of religious voters implies a decline in the extent to which parties can draw on the support of a religious base. Goldberg (2020) makes a similar distinction between structural and behavioural effects and adds that changes in the role of cleavages can also be driven by different mobilization patterns. With regard to the religious cleavage, Goldberg (2020, pp. 72–73) argues that the broadening up of religious parties has “weakened their religious profile”², which “may result in a feeling among religious people that their values and opinions are less represented, which eventually may lead them to abstain.” That is, parties’ reactions to the change in their electoral fortunes as a result of secularisation may have a feedback effect on the patterns of voting that may further diminish the influence of religion on politics.

Clearly, the transformation of religious cleavages cannot be fully understood without accounting parties’ ideological positions. After all, for group voting to occur, it is essential that groups are able to identify which party is theirs—something parties can signal by means of their positions on issues and the political stance they take (Thau, 2019). The role of parties’ political positions has been highlighted by authors studying the impact of class on voting behaviour. Specifically, it has been argued that the decline in the influence of class on voting that observed in many countries is related to a programmatic convergence between centre-left parties and centre and centre-right parties (Elff, 2009; Evans and Tilley, 2012a,b; Goldberg, 2020).

While class differences in voting patterns may be related to parties’ positions on the economic left-right dimension, or on redistribution or the size of the welfare state, parties’ positions on other dimensions are more relevant for voting differences related to religiosity. A number of contributions have already provided evidence in this regard. For example, Jansen, De Graaf and Need (2012) has shown that the strength of the effect of church membership on the vote in the Netherlands is conditioned by the positions that parties take on traditional and moral issues. Combining data from the Eurobarometer with data from the Manifesto Project, Elff (2009) has provided comparative evidence showing that positions on traditional ways of life condition the influence of church attendance on voting in many West European countries. In a recent contri-

²This process parallels changes in the Christian churches which “have responded to the liberalization of the general environment by themselves becoming more liberal in doctrine (Bruce, 2011, p. 13)

bution, [Gomez \(2022\)](#) has furthermore shown that the divergence in parties' positions on moral issues can have long term effects. In particular, he found that the effect of religiosity on vote choice is stronger for individuals who were politically socialized at a time when parties took clearly distinct positions on moral issues.

Previous work has brought important insights to understanding the political consequences of secularization, in all their complexity. However, one important type of change has not received much attention in the comparative political science literature on the topic: the possibility that differences based on religious denomination are disappearing while the contrast between religious and non-religious individuals gains in importance. In the U.S. context, [Putnam and Campbell \(2012\)](#) have drawn attention to the fact that distinctions between Protestants and Catholics have made place for a growing opposition between those who are religious and those who are not. Sociological studies provide more insights in the mechanisms that connect the larger trend of secularization with such a trend of polarization between religious and non-religious citizens. [Achterberg et al. \(2009\)](#) in particular show that as the number of faithful decreases, there is a growing polarization in public attitudes about the role that religion should play in public life. A similar pattern emerges from the work of [Wilkins-Laflamme \(2016b, p. 649\)](#). Analyzing British public opinion data, she concludes that the "population does appear to be cleaving more and more into two distinct groups when it comes to religion: an unaffiliated majority characterized by very low levels of beliefs and an actively religious minority generally more fervent in its beliefs and views." Such a polarization in citizens' views is also visible for other political attitudes. Focusing on "moral and cultural issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and the like", [Achterberg et al. \(2009, p. 699\)](#) argue that the growing opposition between religious and non-religious can be indicative of a broader polarization of political preferences.

3 Theoretical expectations

Despite the large and burgeoning literature on the topic, there is still much uncertainty about the effects of secularization on the nature and strength of the religious cleavages in voting. This uncertainty, we argue, results in no small part from the fact that secularization itself is a multi-faceted process that may involve different types of change. Specifically, at a societal level secularization could be consistent with one or several of the following scenarios:

1. The scenario of *compositional change*: The sizes of the religious groups decline, while the group of the non-religious increases in size. It should be noted that this scenario *per se* does not have any implications for individuals' political preferences and behaviour, but nevertheless has implications for politics: Religious groups are the main voter reservoir for confessional and Christian-Democratic parties, they are bound to decline electorally, unless they adapt to this change by broadening their appeal (more on that further below).
2. The scenario of *believing without belonging* becoming more widespread: People cling to

religious beliefs but become alienated from the traditional authority of the church, other develop novel religious beliefs that are not anchored in a larger church organization.

3. The scenario of *declining relevance of religiosity*: Religious values are of less behavioural and political consequences for religious people as they their beliefs are held less dogmatically of are viewed as a private, non-political matter.
4. The scenario of *belonging without believing* or *ritualized religious behaviour* becoming widespread: While science and education undermine the plausibility of beliefs in the transcendental, religious organizations continue to fulfill an important *social* function: Religious activities remain important occasions for social interaction, but lose their character as an obligation.
5. The scenario of *religious-secular polarization*: As traditional religious values and beliefs lose their dominance in society and politics, government policies and public institutions become more tolerant towards post-traditional lifestyles, by e.g. allowing divorce, pre-marital sex, and homosexual partnerships or marriages. Faced with an increasingly secular politics and society, citizens with stronger beliefs become politically radicalized.

These scenarios are not all mutually exclusive. In fact, they may apply to different sections of the citizenry at the same time. However, the degree to which these scenarios are prevalent leads to different empirically testable predictions about change over time. In what follows, we walk through these predictions, starting with general hypotheses about change at a societal level, and then moving to hypotheses that speak more directly to the connections between religion and voting. The changes that we are interested in are likely long-term processes, which we examine by means of a focus on differences between members of different birth cohorts. To the extent that “generational replacement is one of the main driving forces behind social and political change” (Hooghe, 2004, p. 311), such a focus should shed light on the long-term changes that large comparative datasets—given their more limited longitudinal coverage—cannot cover directly. In line with this empirical approach, our expectations are formulated with respect to differences between birth cohorts.

The first scenario—i.e., the scenario of *compositional change*—has a directly testable societal implication: The proportions of the Catholics and of the Protestants in the population should decline while the proportion of the non-religious increases. The first hypothesis that is tested in this article therefore reads as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (Decline of religious denomination) *The later individuals are born, the less likely they are member of the Catholic or Protestant Church—or to identify as Catholic or Protestant—and the more likely they are to identify as non-religious.*

The second scenario, of *believing without belonging* becoming more common implies that many citizens shift to a non-denominational category even though their level of religiosity

remains the same. Empirically, such a pattern would result in an increase of religiosity among the non-religious. Focusing on praying as a measure of religiosity, our second broad societal hypothesis is therefore the following:

Hypothesis 2 (Rise of unchurched belief) *Among those individuals who are not member of a church or do not identify with one, praying becomes more frequent the later they are born. That is, frequency of prayer has a positive relation with year of birth in this group.*

The remaining scenarios also have behavioural implications, and thus allow us to formulate hypotheses that connect religion to the vote choice. Under the third scenario, of *declining relevance of belief*, the political implications are self-evident. If religiosity loses political relevance, that should translate into a weaker association between religiosity and the vote choice.

Hypothesis 3 (Declining behavioural relevance of belief) *The relation between frequency of church attendance and support for religious conservative parties becomes weaker with the year of birth.*

The fourth scenario of *belonging without believing* has two empirically testable implications, one that is specific to religious behaviour and another that concerns voting behaviour. In both cases, the expectation is that belonging to a specific denomination translates less strongly into behavioural expressions of one's religious denomination.

Hypothesis 4 (Decline of religious behaviour among Catholics and Protestants) *Among Catholics and Protestants the frequency of church attendance and of prayer declines with the year of birth. The later a Catholic or Protestant is born, the less often they pray or attend church.*

Hypothesis 5 (Decline of religious politics among Catholics and Protestants) *Among Catholics and Protestants the support for religious conservative parties declines with year of birth and becomes more similar to the support for these parties among the non-religious.*

The scenario of *religious–secular polarization* also has an empirically testable implication for how different birth cohorts vote. Specifically, polarization implies that the effect of having a religious denomination (versus identifying as non-religious) and also the effect of religiosity, should become more pronounced among younger generations of voters.

Hypothesis 6 (Religious–secular polarization) *The relation between religious denomination, frequency of religious attendance and frequency of prayer on the one hand, and support for religious conservative parties on the other increases with year of birth. The later one is born, the stronger is the effect of religious membership and behaviour on whether one supports a party with religious-conservative or a party with secular-liberal positions.*

The scenario of religious-secular polarization also has an implication for the differences between religious voters. According to authors such as [Lipset and Rokkan \(1967\)](#) or [Madeley \(1982, 2003\)](#), the reformation was a major critical junction in the development of Western

European party systems. Its outcome determined whether a country ended up predominantly Catholic, predominantly Protestant, or denominationally mixed. Predominantly Catholic countries would develop party systems pivoting around the opposition between secular-liberal parties and christian-conservative or (later emerging) Christian Democratic parties. Predominantly Protestant countries (mostly in Scandinavia) would develop party systems where religious–secular differences initially played a minor role (in comparison to the centre–periphery and urban–rural lines of cleavage) only to be later challenged by religious revivalist fringe parties. The denominationally mixed countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland would develop party systems in which Catholics and Protestants initially would each have “their” party, i.e. Catholic and Protestant parties. However in the 20th century these parties would merge in to a cross-denominational Christian Democratic party. Much has been written about a decline of religious politics in terms of such denominational differences. If secularization mostly takes the form of religious–secular polarization, with religious Catholics and Protestants becoming allies in a struggle with their secular opponents, this would lead to a breakdown of Catholic-Protestant differences in voting behaviour. Small differences between the two main denominational groups could also result from a decline in the importance of religion and religious identities *per se*. That is, even though Catholics and Protestants used to differ in terms of *which* religious principles should play a role in politics and society, there is less of a difference between them in terms of *whether* they think religious principles should matter. This may have the following empirical consequence:

Hypothesis 7 (Irrelevance of denominational differences) *Political differences between Catholics and Protestants in terms of support for religious conservative parties are already relative weak and are further in decline. Catholics and Protestants systematically differ in the patterns of voting only in countries with parties that specifically target denominational groups and not just religious groups in general.*

A country that is rarely counted as a “typical” denominationally mixed country, but nevertheless is home to both Catholics and several variants of Protestantism is the United Kingdom. In terms of denominational patterns of voting the UK is quite unusual in so far as the Catholics used to support rather the Labour party than the Conservative party, a reflection of the link between Catholicism and Irish identity (Tilley, 2015). As a consequence, secularization is unlikely to weaken this link between religious denomination and voting.

As previous work has already pointed out, to understand over-time changes in group voting—based on class or in terms of religion—it is key that the positions of parties are taken into account as well (Elf, 2009; Evans and Tilley, 2012b; Evans and De Graaf, 2013). With regard to religion in particular the theoretical expectation is that the process of secularization, especially when it takes the form of the first or fifth scenario, forces religious parties to seek the support of other voters (Gomez, 2022; Jansen, De Graaf and Need, 2012). Accordingly, in a context of secularization Christian-Democratic and confessional parties are expected to moderate their

positions on religion and social lifestyles to reach voters beyond the religious ones:

Hypothesis 8 (Political moderation of Christian parties) *As time progresses Christian-Democratic and confessional parties moderate their political positions to more secular and more socially permissive ones.*

4 Data and Methods

4.1 Data and measures

We draw on two large-scale comparative datasets. For information on citizens, we make use of the data from the European Social Survey (ESS). We use all the available data when possible, covering the period 2002–2018. However, for some analyses the more limited time period that is covered by the party-level dataset leads us to restrict the analysis to the data from rounds three to nine (i.e., covering the time period 2006–2018).

The ESS provides us with detailed information on citizens' religious profiles, including their religious denomination (or reporting no affiliation). We also make use of two different indicators of religiosity: church attendance and the frequency of praying.³

Respondents who indicated that they belong to a particular religion or denomination by answering to a yes-no question were asked to specify which religious community they belong to. The country-specific responses are pre-coded by the ESS into a variable consisting of eight categories including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, other Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Eastern religions, other non-Christian religions. In the main results section, we focus on differences between Catholics, Protestants and those who do not have a religious denomination only. These are the groups for which our theoretical expectations are most clear and the groups for which there is a sufficient number of respondents to meaningfully interpret effects. For interested readers, the estimates for the additional categories are reported in the supplementary materials. Church attendance was coded on a seven-point-scale with response options coded as follows 1 "every day", 2 "more than once a week", 3 "once a week", 4 "at least once a month", 5 "only on special holidays", 6 "less often", 7 "never". The same response options were used in the question on frequency of praying. As an indicator of citizens' vote choice, we use a recall question referring to the most recent national election.

To assess the influence of parties' political positions on vote choices we use data from the Chapel Hill Experts Survey (CHES), in particular the 1999–2019 trend file (Jolly et al., 2022). We study the connection between religion and party support with a focus on two main indicators of parties' positions. In a first step, we make use of parties' positions on the GAL/TAN

³The data also include responses to several alternative questions of religiosity, including a subjective self-assessment of respondent's own religiosity: "how religious would you say you are?" Respondents were also asked to mark on a six-point scale how important is tradition to them and whether they try to follow customs handed down by their religion or family. While our focus is on church attendance and the frequency of praying we verify whether our conclusions hold when relying on these alternative measures of religiosity.

dimension. On this dimension, 0 corresponds to the most libertarian/postmaterialist position and 10 refers to parties that take traditionalist/authoritarian positions. Second, we consider parties' positions on religious principles more specifically. Third, we consider positions on social lifestyle issues. Because of data availability, our analyses of the GAL/TAN dimension cover the full dataset (2002–2018), while those that make use of information on parties' positions on religious principles and on social lifestyle are restricted to the post-2006 period. It is only from 2006 onwards that experts in the CHES were asked to position parties in terms of these principles and issues.⁴ Using these more detailed CHES variables restricts the analysis not only to a shorter line span, but also to a smaller set of countries. If we consider only the economic left/right and GAL/TAN dimensions, we can include the 15 countries Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. If we use the more detailed positional dimensions, we can only include 11 countries and have to drop Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.

4.2 Methods

To test our hypotheses and examine the nature of secularization and its political effects in Western Europe, we rely on a number of different analytical approaches. To assess changes in the denominational composition of society (H1) as well as over-time changes in religiosity (H2 and H4), we assess in a bivariate way the association between respondents' birth cohort and their religious denomination and indicators of religiosity (church attendance and the frequency of praying). Our expectation about change in parties' positions (H8) is also assessed by considering in a bivariate way the association between the positions of political parties—on different dimensions—and time.

Our other hypotheses involve changes in the effects of religious denomination and/or religiosity on the vote choice. To model the effects of the religious cleavage, we rely on discrete choice modelling (for a detailed description of the approach, see [Elff, 2009](#)). This has two main advantages. First, it allows comparing patterns of voting between countries and across time. The alternatives from which voters choose in elections vary between countries for obvious reasons: No party organization runs candidates in more than one country. In some cases there are even parties that compete only in a part of the country, e.g. SNP (only in Scotland, but not in the rest of the UK) or the CSU (only in Bavaria, but not in the rest of Germany). Furthermore, the set of alternatives often changes over time within countries, e.g. when new parties are formed, established parties decline into obscurity or are outright dissolved (such as the Italian Democrazia Cristiana) or when former competitors join forces in form of a party merger (such as the Dutch ARP, CHU, and KVP). A traditional way of dealing with this variation in the sets

⁴Religious principles were measured using a scale from 0 (Strongly opposes religious principles in politics) to 10 (Strongly supports religious principles in politics). Social lifestyle positions were measured on a scale from 0 (Strongly supports liberal policies) to 10 (Strongly opposes liberal policies).

of alternatives that present themselves to the voters is to group parties into party families. For an analysis of religious voting, a classification in christian and religious parties, on the one hand, and secular parties, on the other hand, could be used. Yet it is not always possible to unambiguously categorize parties in this way. Furthermore, the categorization of parties into one or the other category may have consequences for the results one obtains. Discrete choice analysis does not necessitate an a-priori categorization of parties and instead focuses on what attributes of the parties are relevant for voters' choice between them (Elff, 2009).

The second advantage of our modelling strategy is that can take into account over-time changes in the ideological profiles of parties (Elff, 2009). A religious conservative party of the past may transform itself into a more moderate party or the other way round. Such changes may occur gradually so that working with fixed party family memberships may lead to erroneous conclusions regarding voters' changing preferences when the parties rather than the voters change, while a re-classification of a party may exaggerate the pace of change or at least the abruptness of an ideological change.

The point of departure of our modelling strategy is McFadden's conditional logit model, which we extend by interaction terms that involve parties' ideological positions and voters' characteristics and by random effects that capture heterogeneity among the alternatives that are not captured by the ideological variables. To apply this modelling strategy, we transform the dataset in a long format, whereby the unit of observations are respondent-party dyads. The dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator that captures whether a respondent voted for a party or not.

The discrete choice models that we use take the following general form: (Agresti, 2002; McFadden, 1974):

$$\Pr(Y_{ij} = 1) = \frac{\exp(\eta_{ij})}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\eta_{ik})} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ij} is a dummy variable that indicates whether individual i has chosen option j from the set of alternatives (the choice set) C_i or another option and $\Pr(Y_{ij} = 1)$ is the probability that this dummy variable is equal to one. Since each individual is assumed to choose exactly one of the alternatives in C_i we have $\sum_{k \in C_i} Y_{ik} = 1$. Furthermore, η_{ij} in Equation 3 stands for a combination of independent variables, coefficients and, in case of our models, random effects. In the adaptation of this modelling strategy to our analysis, the systematic part η_{ij} of the models takes the form

$$\eta_{ij} = \sum_d \left[\alpha_d z_{dj}^2 + \beta_d z_{dj} + \sum_k \gamma_{dk} z_{dj} x_{ki} \right] + u_j + u_{ji}. \quad (2)$$

Here z_{dj} is the position of party j on programmatic dimension d (such as GAL/TAN), whereas x_{ki} is the value that individual i has on the k -th individual-level variable. α_d , β_d , and γ_{dk} are the model coefficients that describe the influence of these independent variables on vote choice and are our parameters of interest. We include quadratic terms in this specification to allow for proximity voting, in the presence of which α_d should be negative. u_j and u_{ji} are party-level

random effects and party-within-ESS wave-level random effects, which allow to circumvent the IIA restriction (see e.g. [McFadden and Train, 2000](#)). A more detailed derivation and explanation of these models is provided in the Supplementary Materials (see Appendix A).

Discrete choice modelling allows considering the effects of parties' positions on voters' choices, in terms of directional and proximity voting. By interacting parties' positions with citizens' individual level characteristics, furthermore, we gain insights on the extent to which party positions affect various groups differently. The model thus makes it possible to include both characteristics of individuals and characteristics of choice options—with a focus on parties' positions.

5 Secularization in Western-Europe

Before turning to the question of change in the connection between religion and voting, we shed more light on the nature of the process of secularization in Western Europe. As already argued above, one main aspect of the transformation of political cleavages as a consequence of secularization is the changing composition of the electorate in terms of groups related to religion ([Best, 2011](#)). In Western Europe this concerns the proportion of Catholics, Protestants, adherents of other beliefs, and the non-religious in the electorate. For historical reasons, the countries of Western Europe differ substantially in terms of the size of these groups to begin with ([Madeley, 1982, 2003](#)). Regardless of these different starting points, however, a more general process might apply across countries: The shrinking of the groups of the Catholics and of the Protestants and the growth of the group of the non-religious (H1). Given that religious orientations are stable at the individual level, we examine over-time change in the denominational composition of electorates by means of a focus on respondents' birth cohorts.

Figure 1 visualizes the composition of West European electorates in terms of their religious denomination, by their year of birth. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this Figure. First, in predominantly Catholic countries the proportion of Catholics declines while the proportion of Protestants declines in predominantly Protestant countries. In denominationally mixed countries both groups decline with the year of birth. On the other hand, the group of the non-religious increases in all countries with year of birth. Another group whose size is increasing are those with other religious memberships. This in part reflects immigration flows from non-Christian countries, but examining this further is beyond the scope of this article. Most importantly, focusing on the presence of Catholics, Protestants and non religiously affiliated citizens, the patterns that are shown in Figure 1 clearly support Hypothesis 1.

Even though there is much support for Hypothesis 1, there are a few exceptions to this general pattern. In Switzerland, the quite substantial proportion of Catholics declines only slightly with year of birth, and in East Germany and the United Kingdom it does not seem to decline at all. With respect to the United Kingdom it has been argued that Catholicism is closely associated with ethnic identity ([Tilley, 2015](#)), so that a Catholic identity might be less

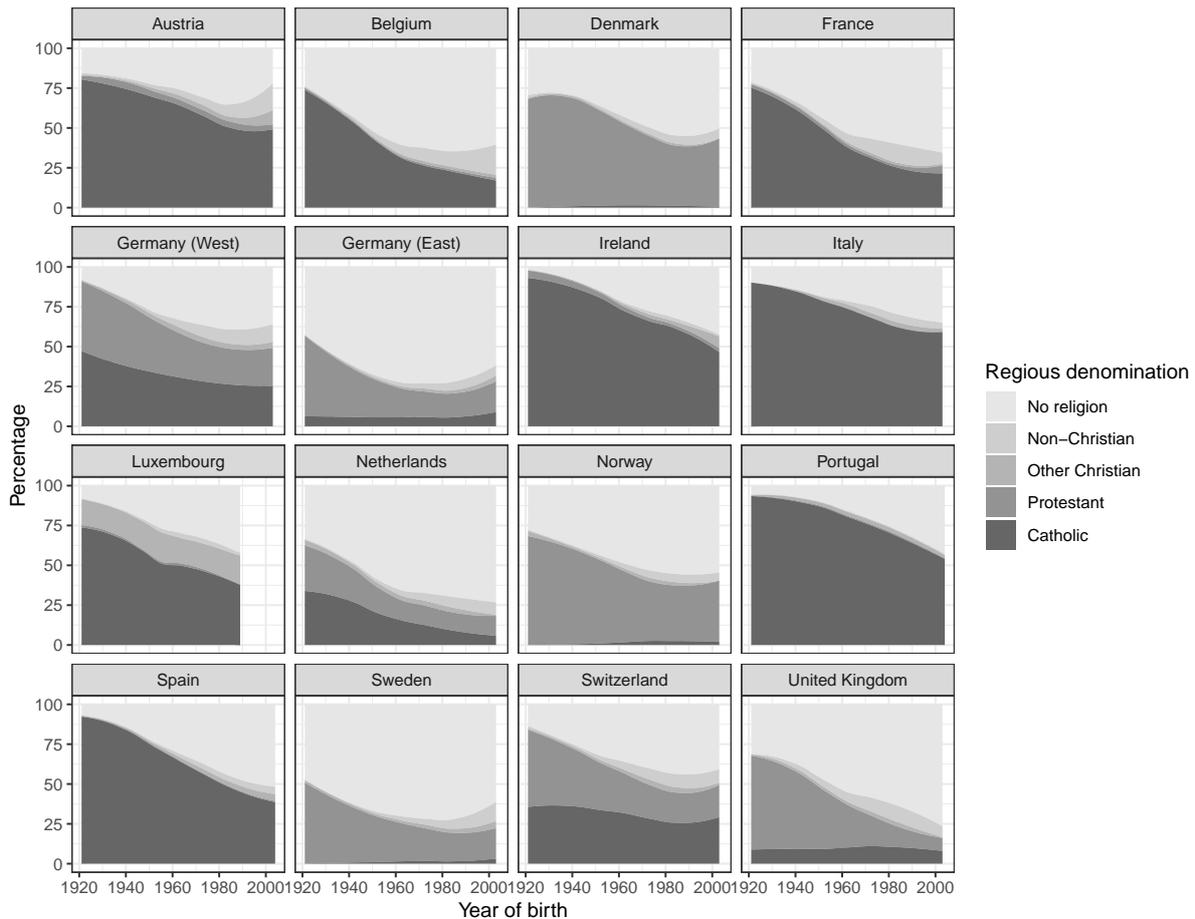


Figure 1: Religious denomination in Western Europe, 2002-2018, by country and year of birth. Percentages by year of birth, smoothed using local regression with automatic span selection (Cleveland, Grosse and Shyu, 2017). Source: European Social Survey Waves 1–9, post-stratification weights applied

affected by secularization.

Beyond the decline of the size of denominational groups, secularization may, as argued earlier in the article, also have consequences for the patterns of behaviour *within* denominational groups, namely that church attendance and prayer declines with the year of birth (Hypothesis 4). If the number of “unchurched believers” increases with year of birth, on the other hand, we should observe a change in the opposite direction among those who are neither Catholics nor Protestants (Hypothesis 2)

Figure 2 shows how the frequency of attendance to religious services is related with the year of birth among Catholics, Protestants, and those with no religion (or religious membership).⁵ It shows that religious attendance declines in particular among the Catholics where it is much more frequent in the older birth cohorts than among the older birth cohorts of the Protestants. Nevertheless a small uptick in church attendance occurs in the latest birth cohorts. Among Protestants we see a decline of church attendance up to those who are born in the 1960, there-

⁵We do not include those with “other” Christian or non-Christian identity or membership as these groups are quite small.

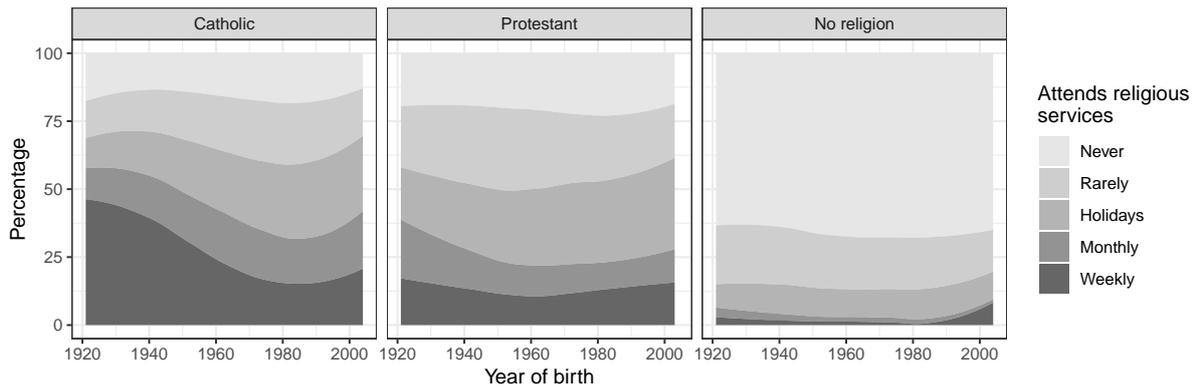


Figure 2: Religious attendance in Western Europe, 2002-2018, by religious denomination and year of birth

Percentages by year of birth, smoothed using local regression with automatic span selection (Cleveland, Grosse and Shyu, 2017). Source: European Social Survey Waves 1–9, post-stratification weights applied

after there seems to occur a very slight increase in church attendance. Turning to the right-hand panel in Figure 2, it is hardly surprising that the frequency of church attendance among those who do not identify with a religious group do not religious services very often. What is more noteworthy is that quite a few in this group attend religious services at all. It is likely that those people attend religious services for their social functions rather than for their religious functions. In the youngest birth cohorts there are even slightly more than in earlier birth cohorts who attend religious services at least weekly. Overall, the results in Figure 2 are somewhat ambivalent, supporting contradicting hypotheses for different ranges of years of birth. For those born before about 1960 or 1980 Hypothesis 4 appears corroborated. For the youngest generations, however, there is some evidence that is more in line with Hypothesis 2.

While attending religious services can be motivated in part by social needs that are independent from the expression of religious values, this ambiguity is unlikely the case with respect to whether and how often people pray. We therefore conduct an additional test of Hypotheses 4 and 2 that focuses on the frequency of praying.

Figure 3 shows how the frequency of prayer is related to year of birth in the different denominational groups. Among Catholics, there is an unambiguous negative relation between year of birth and frequency of prayer, without the uptick that we could see with respect to religious attendance. Among Protestants, the frequency of prayer declines with the year of birth among those born until about 1960, but this decline appears to have stopped among those born after 1960. Thus for the Catholics and for Protestants born until 1960 Hypothesis 4 is corroborated. Among the non-religious, we also find a decline with year of birth in the already low frequency of prayers. Considering the frequency of prayer instead of church attendance, thus, the available evidence contradicts Hypothesis 2 of a rise of unchurched belief.

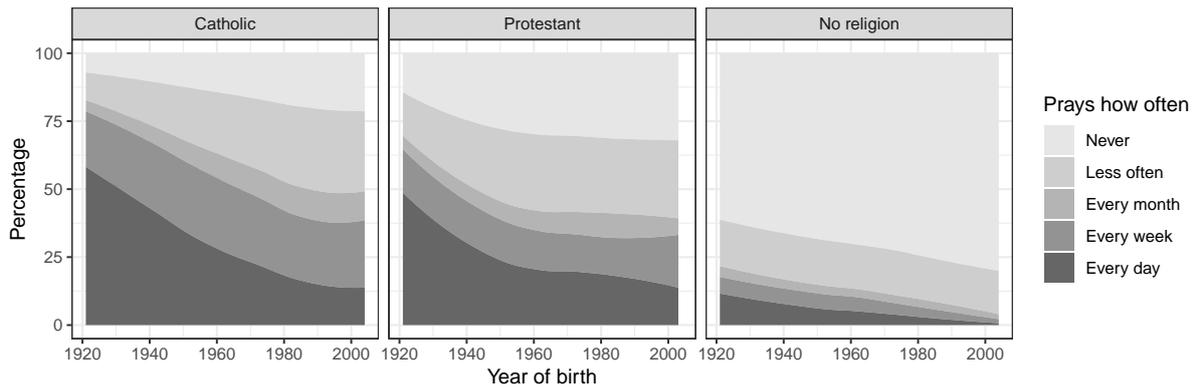


Figure 3: Frequency in which people pray in Western Europe, 2002-2018, by religious denomination and year of birth

Percentages by year of birth, smoothed using local regression with automatic span selection (Cleveland, Grosse and Shyu, 2017). Source: European Social Survey Waves 1–9, post-stratification weights applied

6 Parties' changing political positions on social values and religion

The results in the previous section have shown that membership in the major Christian religious groups—Protestants and Catholics—declines with year of birth, while religious attendance and the frequency of prayer are also in decline among Protestants and Catholics. If the link between religious membership and orientations and party preferences is fixed, then electoral fortunes for parties that rely on religious voters are bound to decline. However, as already argued, parties can try to limit their electoral loss by adjusting their political positions and appealing to a broader section of the electorate. Our party-specific hypothesis was therefore that religious parties would moderate their positions over time (Hypothesis 8).

Figure C illustrates the positions of parties in different party families, using the categorization in families that is available in the CHES dataset. We are mainly interested in the positions taken by parties in the confessional and Christian-Democratic, conservative, and radical right families. We show positions with respect to three dimensions: a general GAL/TAN dimension, positions on religious principles and social lifestyle positions. The graphs in Figure C highlight that it is not so much the positions on the GAL/TAN dimension that set confessional and Christian Democratic parties apart from the other party families, but the positions on the religious principles dimension. On the GAL/TAN dimension, the confessional and radical right party families have similar positions, while the Christian Democratic party family is quite similar to the conservative party family. On the religious principles dimension, the confessional party family is clearly distinct from the other party families and until 2014 the Christian-Democratic party is also quite distinct from the conservative and the radical right families. In line with Hypothesis 8 parties in the Christian-Democratic family moderate their positions somewhat, but the same does not hold for parties in the confessional party family. The findings with regards

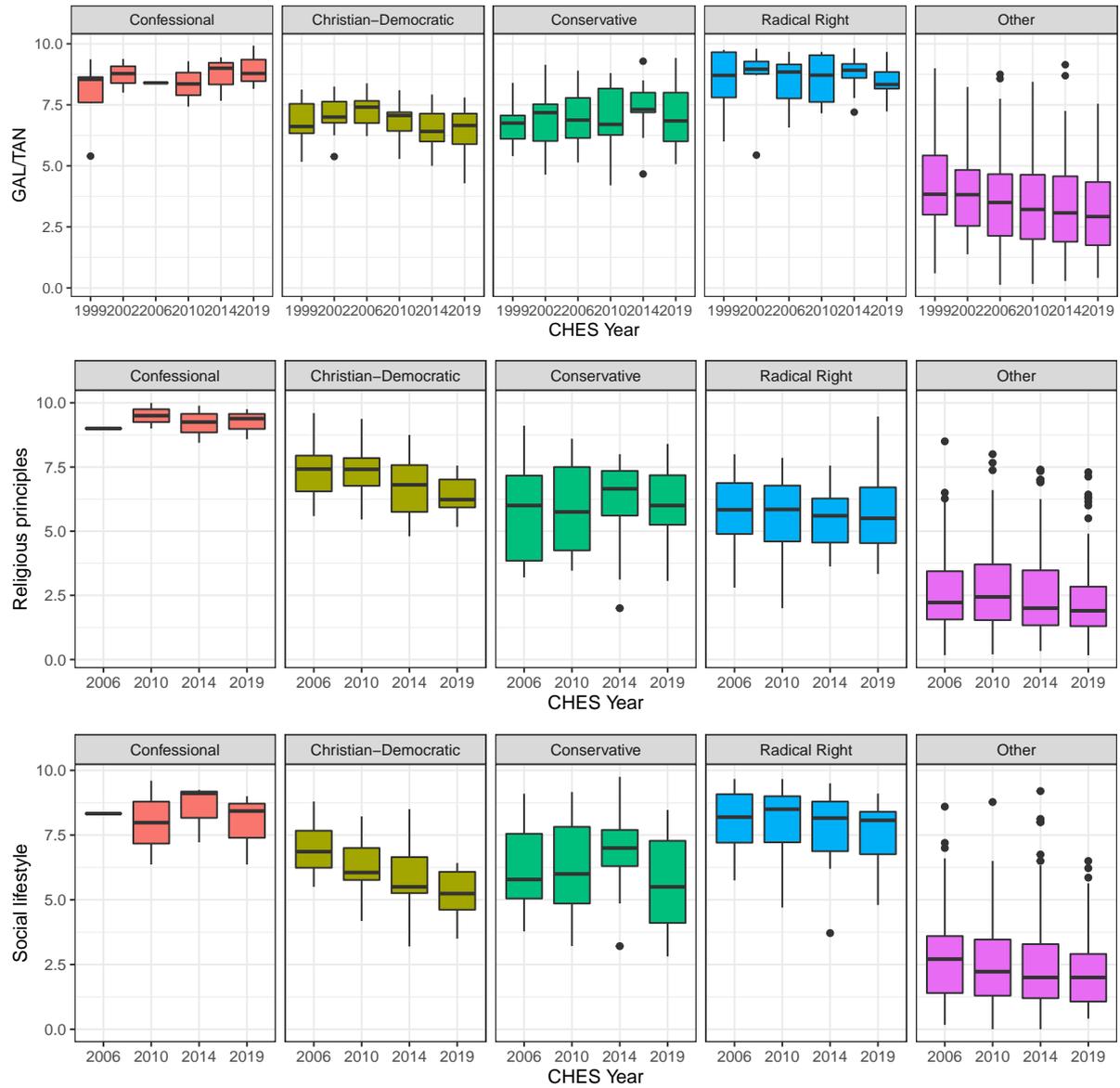


Figure 4: Distribution of political positions of the GAL/TAN, religious principles, and social lifestyle dimensions by party family.

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey data, 1999–2019 edition

to the social lifestyle dimension are more nuanced. The positions of the confessional and of the radical right party families are quite similar, while the Christian-Democratic family moves to the centre of this dimension, in a more pronounced way than with regards to the religious principles dimension. While in 2006 the Christian-Democratic family was somewhat more “conservative” on this dimension than the conservative family, while after 2014 it is at least as “liberal” as the conservative family if not more than that.

In summary, Figure C corroborates Hypothesis 8 but it only does so with respect to the Christian-Democratic party family. What the Figure also demonstrates is that there is considerable variation in the political positions that parties belonging to the same party family are taking. This underlines the importance of taking into consideration the positions of each of the parties when analyzing the influence of religion and religiosity on party choice.

7 The changing impact of religion and religiosity on voting

In the previous sections we looked at the immediate consequences of secularization: the dwindling membership in the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the decline in religious attendance and prayer, and the (rather limited) adaptation of the confessional and Christian-Democratic parties to these changes. In this section, we examine in more depth whether these changes are consequential for voting behaviour and whether the religious cleavage is being transformed.

Some of our theoretical expectations relate to the role of religious denomination, while others concern the effects of religiosity. We start by analyzing the association between religious denomination and vote choice. If there is a decline in religious politics (Hypothesis 5), the support for religious conservative parties among Catholics and Protestants should be weaker for younger birth cohorts. Catholics and Protestants should thus resemble the non-religious more in terms of their support for religious parties. Alternatively, the scenario of a religious-secular polarization implies that the effect of having a Catholic or Protestant denomination gains strength over time (Hypothesis 6).

Before inspecting patterns of change, though, we test the hypothesis of the irrelevance of Catholic/Protestant differences (Hypothesis 7). To this purpose we combine the data from the European Social Survey with the data from the Chapel Hill Exert Survey and apply the discrete choice modelling strategy described previously. Based on the appropriate discrete choice models, we conduct Wald tests of the interaction effects on party preferences between the Catholic–Protestant contrast and parties’ positions on the GAL/TAN dimension, with regards to Christian principles in politics and social lifestyle issues. We control for the interaction of the Catholic–Protestant contrast with positions on the economic left/right dimension as well as the interaction of social class with the relevant political dimensions in the formation of party preferences. The null hypothesis of these Wald tests is that Catholics and Protestants do not differ in terms of how GAL/TAN positions, positions with respect to religious principles and with respect to social lifestyle issues impinge on their party choices. For brevity we only show the results of

Table 1: Wald test results for the hypothesis of the irrelevance of Catholic/Protestant differences (Hypothesis 7)

	<i>W</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Protestant/Catholic × GAL/TAN	0.1	1	0.811
Protestant/Catholic × Economic left/right	13.8	1	0.000
(a) Results with GAL/TAN			
	<i>W</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Protestant/Catholic × Religious principles	2.2	1	0.137
Protestant/Catholic × Social lifestyle	1.0	1	0.316
Protestant/Catholic × Economic left/right	12.9	1	0.000
(b) Results with the religious principle and social lifestyle dimensions			

the Wald tests. The full set of model parameter estimates are presented in the supplemental material.⁶

The results of the Wald tests support Hypothesis 7, at least to some degree. Neither the interaction effect of the Catholic/Protestant contrast with the GAL/TAN dimension nor with the Religious Principles dimensions nor with the Social Lifestyle dimension are statistically significant at 5 percent level—in contrast to the interaction effect of the Catholic/Protestant contrast with the economic left/right dimension. That the latter interaction effect is statistically significant is a curious result that is difficult to understand given that the interaction effects with the non-economic dimensions are not statistically significant. This might be an effect of cross-national differences in the overall attractiveness of economic leftist or rightist parties, since the relative predominance of Catholicism and Protestantism varies considerably across European countries. However, an examination of this is beyond the scope of this paper as it is concerned with the consequences of secularization.

Having assessed change in the effects of religious denomination, we turn to evaluating change in the association between religiosity and the vote choice. The hypothesis that the behavioural relevance of belief is in decline (Hypothesis 3) would result in the effects of church attendance and praying weakening over time. The contrary hypothesis is that voting has become increasingly polarized along the religious–secular divide (Hypothesis 6), which would lead to larger effects of church attendance and praying on voting behaviour among younger generations. Both hypotheses are consistent with the existence of an interaction effect between religious behaviour (measured either in terms of religious attendance or frequency of prayer) and parties’ position on the relevant non-economic political dimension. Of course, if there were no such interaction effect, this could be interpreted that the effect of religiosity on voting has

⁶We should note that some ESS subsamples needed to be dropped from the analysis because of the dubious distribution of the religious denomination variable. In the French samples from up to 2005 in the UK samples between 2004 and 2007 all respondents appear to have reported to not have any religion.

already evaporated, in line with Hypothesis 5.

Again we examine the existence of interaction effects with the help of Wald tests. We conducted the Wald tests in six variants: Focusing on interaction effects of frequency of prayer with the (1) GAL/TAN and economic left/right dimension, (2) with the religious principles dimension, the immigration dimension, and the economic left/right dimension, (3) with the social lifestyle dimension, the immigration dimension, and the economic left/right dimension; and the interactions between frequency of religious attendance as indicator of religiosity and the three sets of party position indicators. Table 2 shows the results with frequency of prayer as indicator of religiosity. A table showing the results from the variants with religious attendance as indicator of religiosity is available in the Supplemental Materials (see Appendix X). Unlike in the test concerning religious denomination, we examine the interaction effects of religious principles and social lifestyle separately. We do so because in the analysis of religiosity both dimensions exhibit the symptoms of multicollinearity—in a model with both dimensions the social lifestyle dimension shows coefficients in the opposite direction (with an opposite sign) than in a model with the social lifestyle dimension alone. Such a change-of-sign effect does not occur if the immigration dimension is included or excluded. We use this dimension to be able to distinguish the dimensions that are potentially related to religion and moral traditionalism with the other non-economic political dimension that has become salient in West European politics.

As Table 2 shows, all interaction effects relevant for Hypotheses 5 and 6 are statistically significant: the interaction effect of frequency of prayer with positions on the GAL/TAN dimension, with positions on the religious principles dimension, with positions on the social lifestyle dimension, and the corresponding second order (or three-way) interactions with year of birth. Furthermore, the Wald statistics for the first-order interaction effects are greater than the Wald statistics for the second-order interactions effect. Also the Wald statistic of the interaction effect of the frequency of prayer with the religious principles dimension is greater than the interaction effects with the social lifestyle, with the GAL/TAN, the immigration dimension, or the economic left/right dimension. If the size of Wald statistic could be interpreted as the “strength” of the interaction, than this suggests that the religious principles dimension is the most important one for the political relevance of religiosity. The only Wald tests reported in Table 2 that turn out not statistically significant are those with regards to the second-order interaction of frequency of prayer with the immigration dimension and the year of birth, which suggests that the interaction of religiosity and parties’ positions on immigration are stable. Again, if the size of the Wald statistic can be interpreted as the “strength” of the corresponding interaction effect, the change in the interaction of religiosity with the religious principles or the social lifestyle dimension is not very pronounced.

The Wald tests in Table 2 can only indicate whether interactions are present and whether they change between birth cohorts, but they do not indicate the shape of the interaction or the direction of change. In order to assess whether Hypothesis 5 or Hypothesis 6 is supported, we need information on this direction of change. To obtain this information, we create plots that

Table 2: Wald test results for the hypotheses of the declining relevance of religiosity (Hypothesis 7). Religiosity is measured via the frequency of prayer.

	<i>W</i>	df	<i>p</i> -value
Prayer \times GAL/TAN	795.2	4	0.000
Prayer \times GAL/TAN \times Year of birth	39.4	4	0.000
Prayer \times Economic left/right	72.0	4	0.000
Prayer \times Economic left/right \times Year of birth	169.1	4	0.000

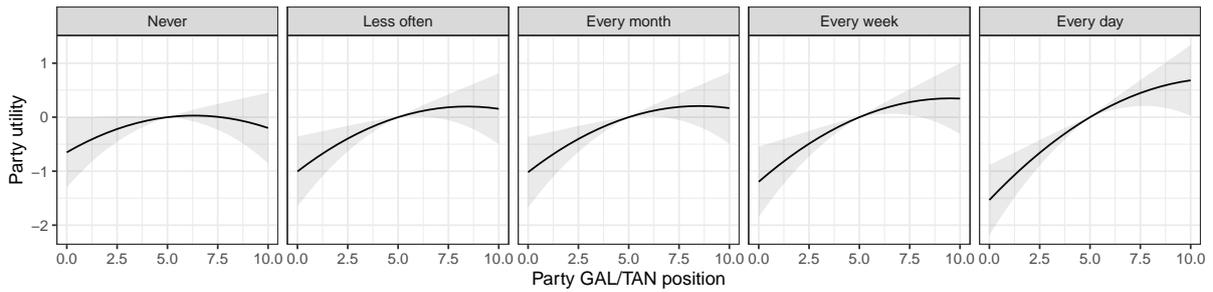
(a) Results with GAL/TAN

	<i>W</i>	df	<i>p</i> -value
Prayer \times Religious principles	1968.3	4	0.000
Prayer \times Religious principles \times Year of birth	17.7	4	0.001
Prayer \times Immigration	280.9	4	0.000
Prayer \times Immigration \times Year of birth	4.4	4	0.357
Prayer \times Economic left/right	49.2	4	0.000
Prayer \times Economic left/right \times Year of birth	153.0	4	0.000

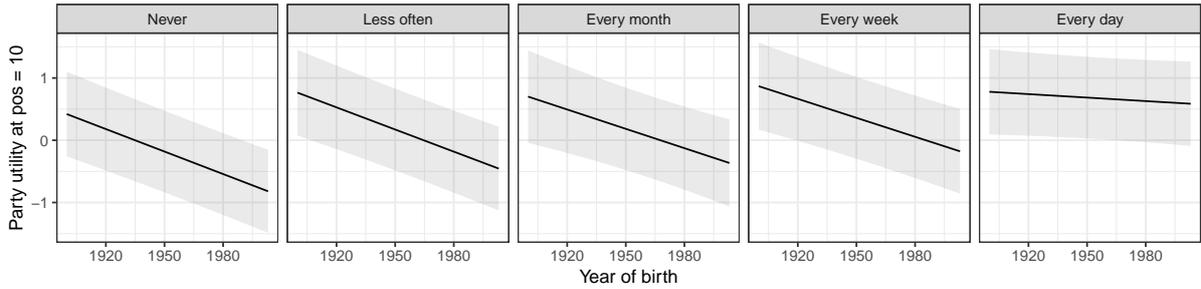
(b) Results with the religious principles dimension

	<i>W</i>	df	<i>p</i> -value
Prayer \times Social lifestyle	1254.8	4	0.000
Prayer \times Social lifestyle \times Year of birth	13.7	4	0.008
Prayer \times Immigration	441.9	4	0.000
Prayer \times Immigration \times Year of birth	1.4	4	0.843
Prayer \times Economic left/right	168.0	4	0.000
Prayer \times Economic left/right \times Year of birth	143.4	4	0.000

(c) Results with the religious social lifestyle dimension



(a) The utility for voters at the midpoint of the range of years of birth (around 1950).



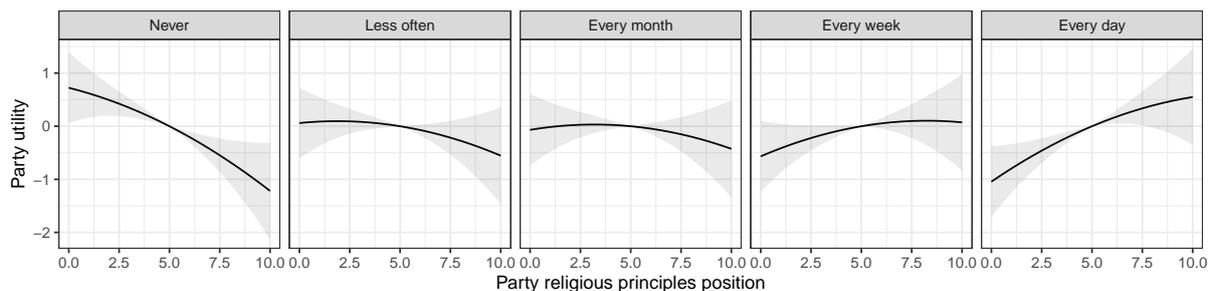
(b) The utility for voters of different years of birth of a party at the most “conservative” end of the GAL/TAN dimension.

Figure 5: How a party’s position on the GAL/TAN dimension affects the utility voters who never pray, pray less often, every month, every week, or every day.

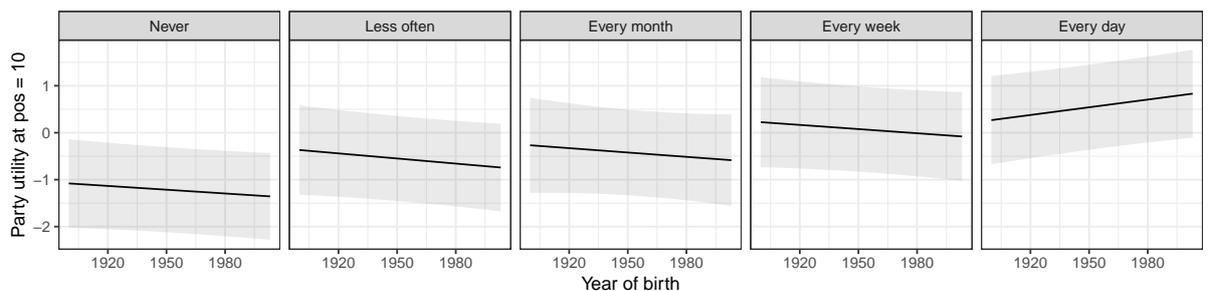
show how the utility of a party for voters who never pray, pray less often, every month, every week, or every day varies with their position on the GAL/TAN dimension, and on the religious principles dimension. Further plots with regards to the economic left/right dimension, the social lifestyle dimension, and the immigration dimension are available in the supplemental material.

The top panels in Figure 5 show that the utility to vote for a party that has a liberal position on the GAL/TAN dimension for a voter decreases the more often they pray, while the utility of voting for a party with a conservative position increases with frequency of prayer. Furthermore, for a voter who prays every month, every week, or every day, the utility of a party increases, the more conservative it is, with the utility increases most strongly among voters who pray every day. The bottom panels in Figure 5 show how the utility of a conservative parties varies with a voter’s year of birth and their frequency of prayer. Obviously the utility declines with the year of birth within all groups, except those who pray everyday. As a consequence, the later voters are born, the more it makes a difference for the utility of a conservative party how often they pray. Thus Hypothesis 6 gets support in contrast to Hypothesis 5.

Figure 6 leads to similar conclusions as Figure 5 but shows stronger differences based on the frequency of praying. It illustrates the role of positions on the religious principles dimensions instead of the GAL/TAN dimension. As can be seen in the upper panel of the figure, for those who never pray, a party’s utility gets lower the more conservative it is, while for those who pray every day the utility increases. The lower panel indicates that the utility of a conservative party decreases with the year of birth, except for voters who pray every day. For them,



(a) The utility for voters at the midpoint of the range of years of birth (around 1950).



(b) The utility for voters of different years of birth of a party at the most “conservative” and of the religious principles dimension.

Figure 6: How a party’s position on the religious principles dimension affects the utility among voters who never pray, pray less often, every month, every week, or every day.

the utility increases with the year of birth. It has to be conceded however, that the confidence intervals are too wide to make with certainty statements about whether the utility increases, stagnates or decreases within the frequency of prayer categories, however the Wald test indicates that those who never pray or pray less often than daily diverge from those who pray daily in terms of the utility of a conservative party. Thus again the result better supports Hypothesis 6 than Hypothesis 5. That is, it appears that the polarization along the religious–secular divide increases.

8 Summary and discussion

The present paper provides important insights into the process of secularization and its political consequences. Firstly, we find that the share of the religiously unaffiliated increases with the year of birth at the expense of the share of the Catholics or of the Protestants, respectively, depending on which of these two groups is predominant in a country. If however, the Catholics are a substantial minority as in the UK or East Germany, their share seems to remain more or less stable. Secondly, among the Catholics, the Protestants, and even among the religiously unaffiliated we find that the frequency of prayer declines with the year of birth. With regards to frequency of religious attendance, the findings are somewhat different. There is a clear decline of religious attendance only among Catholics but not among the Protestants. Among the religiously unaffiliated there is a small uptick of religious attendance among the latest birth

cohorts, but the overall level of religious attendance is quite low nevertheless. By and large, these results suggest that religious services may fulfill social needs for the nonbelievers, but there is overall little evidence that “unchurched belief” is a growing phenomenon.

While religious membership and behaviour is in decline this does not mean that the level of religiosity (in terms of religious behaviour) loses its consequences for political behaviour. While Catholic–Protestants differences in voting behaviour may have already disappeared, at least with respect to how they evaluate parties with different positions on the religious principles and social lifestyle dimensions, differences related to the level of religiosity have not. To the contrary, there are signs that religious–secular polarization increases the later voters are born.

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Supplementary Materials

“The Transformation of Religious Cleavages in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis”

The Supplementary Materials include the following information:

- A (p. 2): Details on the conditional choice specification.
- B (p. 4): Additional evidence on the process of secularization.
- C (p. 7): Positions of party families.
- D (p. 9): Detailed model estimates.

A Details on model specification

The general form of Mcfadden's conditional logit model is shown in Equation 3 (Agresti, 2002; McFadden, 1974):

$$\Pr(Y_{ij} = 1) = \frac{\exp(\eta_{ij})}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\eta_{ik})} \quad (3)$$

where Y_{ij} is a dummy variable that indicates whether individual i has chosen option j from the set of alternatives (the choice set) C_i or another option and $\Pr(Y_{ij} = 1)$ is the probability that this dummy variable is equal to one. Since each individual is assumed to choose exactly one of the alternatives in C_i we have $\sum_{k \in C_i} Y_{ij} = 1$. Furthermore, η_{ij} in Equation 3 stands for a combination of independent variables, coefficients and, in case of our models, random effects.

Then, for any pairs of alternatives j_1 and j_2 (e.g. pair of parties) in the choice set (e.g. the parties that compete in a country at a given point in time) the log-odds ratio of being chosen is shown in Equation 4:

$$\ln \frac{\Pr(Y_{ij_1} = 1)}{\Pr(Y_{ij_2} = 1)} = \eta_{ij_1} - \eta_{ij_2} \quad (4)$$

The simplest form of a conditional logit model would contain only a single independent variable that varies not between individuals but *between alternatives*. Such an independent variable could be, for example, the ideological left-right positions of the parties (if one could assume that party competition were indeed uni-dimensional) or the (squared) distance between the individuals' ideological position and the parties' positions. If x_{ij} denotes the squared distance between party j and individual i then such a model would have $\eta_{ij} = \alpha x_{ij}$ where the coefficient α describes how much the distance influences choices between parties. If both the parties' and the voters' positions were known, respectively, as z_j and v_i , we have $\eta_{ij} = \alpha(z_j - v_i)^2$ and we can reformulate the model as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(Y_{ij} = 1) &= \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j - v_i)^2)}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_k - v_i)^2)} \\ &= \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j v_i + v_i^2))}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_k^2 - 2z_k v_i + v_i^2))} = \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j v_i)) \exp(v_i^2)}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_k^2 - 2z_k v_i)) \exp(v_i^2)} \\ &= \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j v_i))}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_k^2 - 2z_k v_i))} \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

Note, however, that we only have information about the parties' positions (from CHES), but not about the positions that individuals take on the same dimensions. As a result, we have to consider group-specific averages instead of individuals political positions. Suppose we have $v_i = \beta r_i + \gamma$, where r_i is a variable that describes the individuals group membership⁷, then

⁷Note that for the sake of simplicity, this equation does not contain an error term.

substituting into Equation 5 leads to

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(Y_{ij} = 1) &= \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j v_i))}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j v_i))} = \frac{\exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j[\beta r_i + \gamma]))}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha(z_j^2 - 2z_j[\beta r_i + \gamma]))} \\ &= \frac{\exp(\alpha_1 z_j^2 + \alpha_2 z_j r_i + \alpha_3 z_j)}{\sum_{k \in C_i} \exp(\alpha_1 z_k^2 + \alpha_2 z_k r_i + \alpha_3 z_j)} \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

whith $\alpha_1 = \alpha$, $\alpha_2 = -2\alpha\beta$, and $\alpha_3 = 2\alpha\gamma$. In this model, the coefficient α_2 of the interaction term $p_k r_i$ describes the impact of group membership r_i on how voters evaluate parties based on their political positions. In the context of our study, z_i could represent parties' positions with respect to the role of religion in politics and r_i voters' religiosity, religious attendance, or religious denomination.

B Additional evidence on the process of secularization

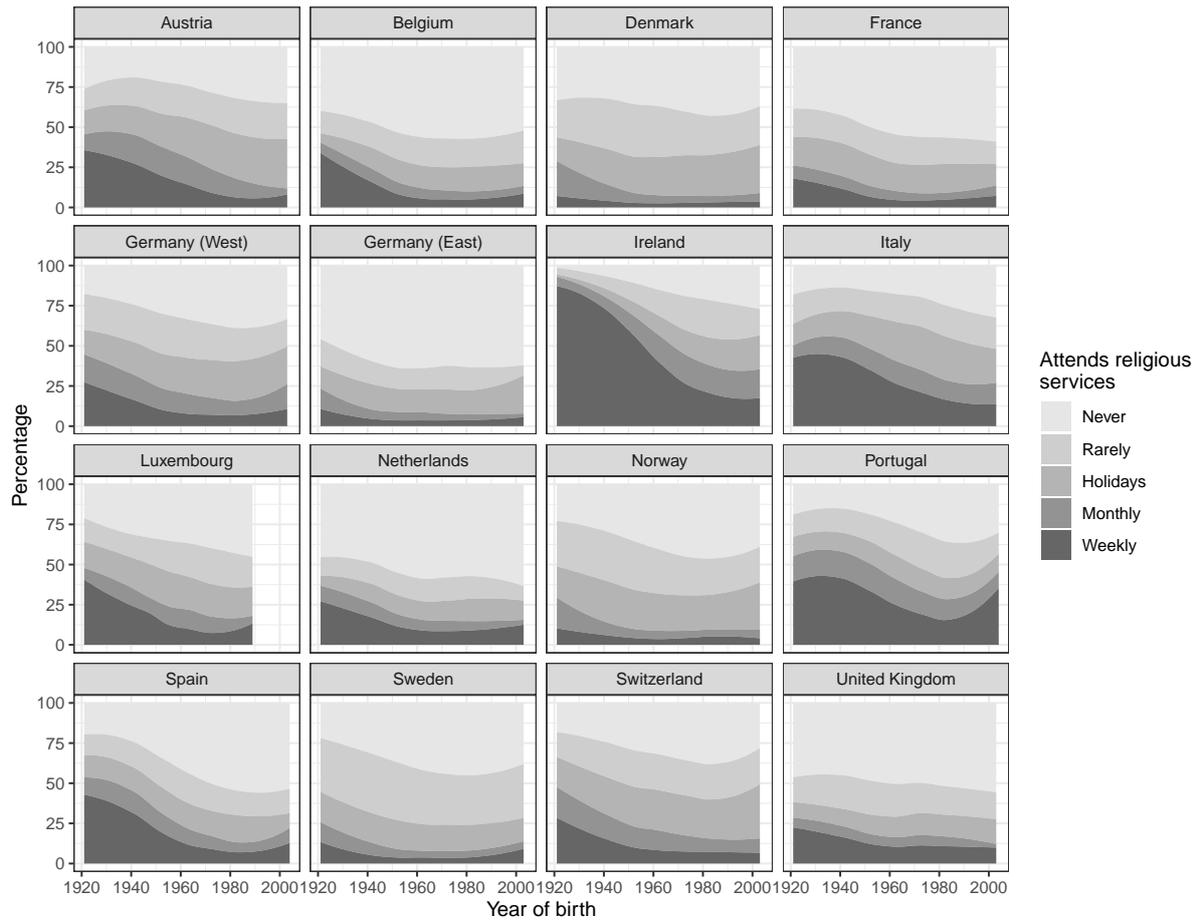


Figure A: Religious attendance in Western Europe, 2002-2018, by country and year of birth
 Percentages by year of birth, smooth using LOWESS [CITATION] with automatic span selection. Source: Euro-
 pean Social Survey Waves 1–9, post-stratification weights applied

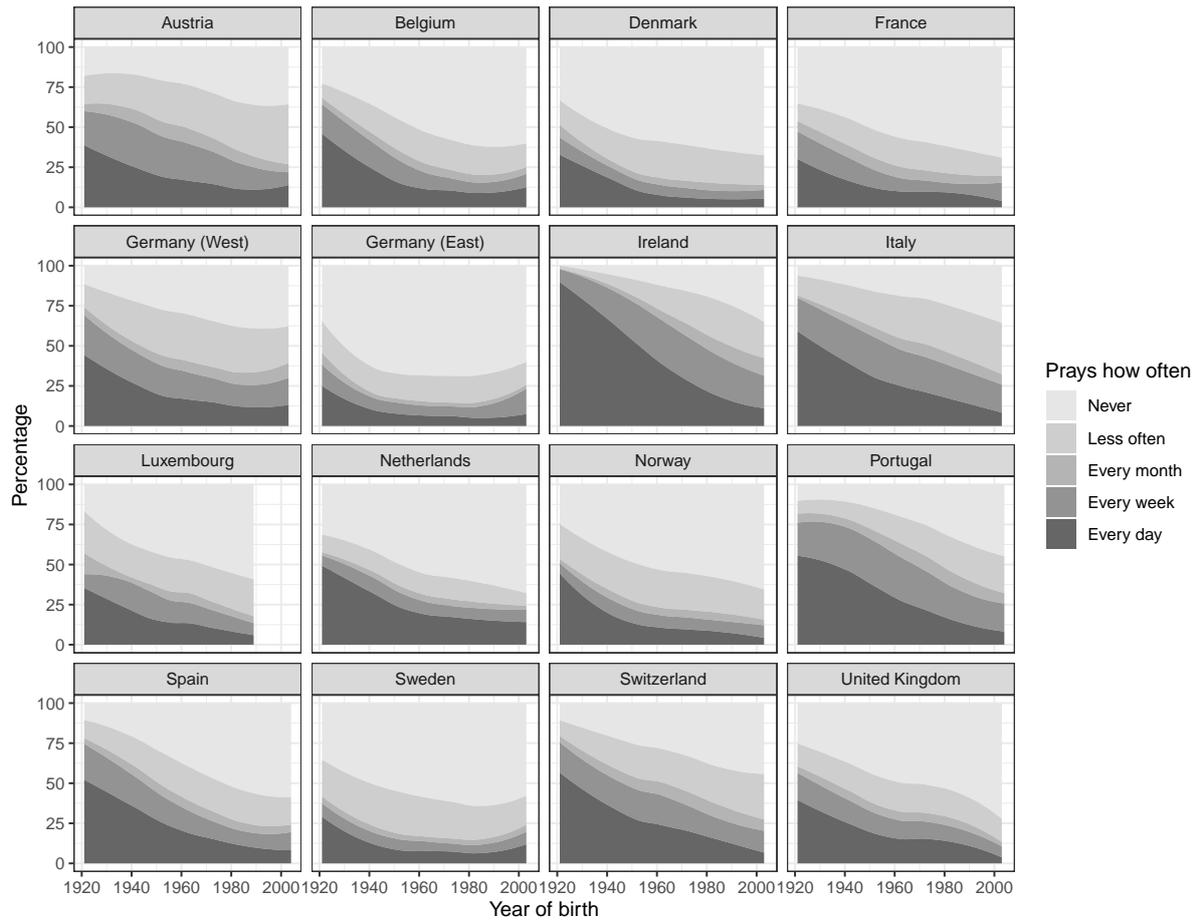


Figure B: Frequency of prayer in Western Europe, 2002-2018, by country and year of birth
 Percentages by year of birth, smooth using LOWESS [CITATION] with automatic span selection. Source: Euro-
 pean Social Survey Waves 1–9, post-stratification weights applied

C Positions of party families

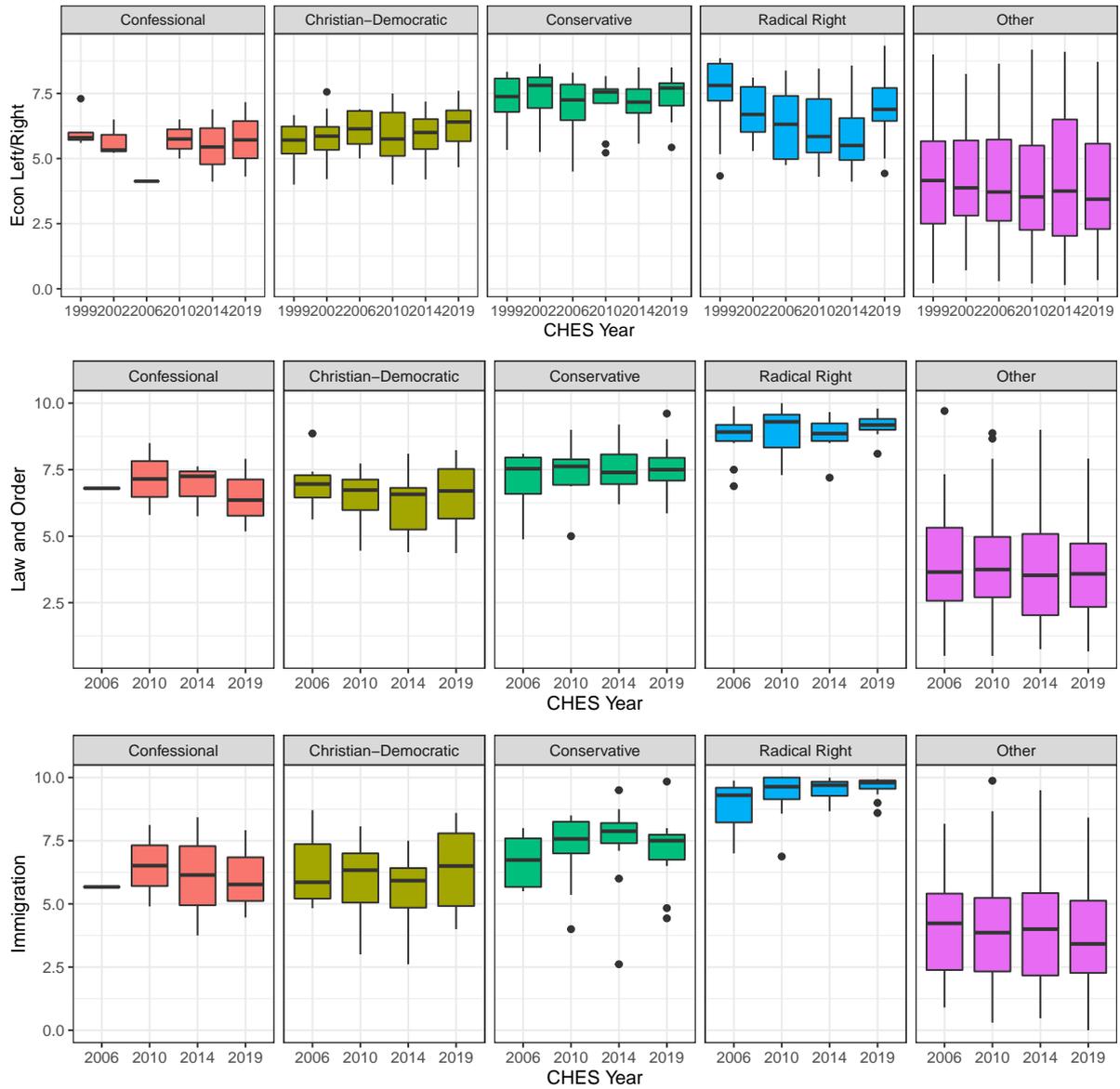


Figure C: Distribution of political positions of the economic left/right, religious civil liberties/law and order, and immigration dimensions by party family.

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey data, 1999–2019 edition

D Model estimates