

Still religious parties in Belgium?

The decline of the denominational cleavage in the Belgian consociational democracy

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Abstract

The Belgian consociational model as it was instituted in the early 20th century was built along the denominational cleavage. It opposed three pillars: a catholic one, a socialist one and a (smaller) liberal one. The religious difference was not only observable in the political goals of each pillar, but also in the background and attitudes of their members. Catholics were hardly present in either the socialist and liberal organizations. Non-catholics were very rare within catholic organizations. Voting behaviours confirmed the religious base of Belgian politics and society.

From the 1960s onwards, the picture changed a lot. The ongoing process of secularization has reduced the religious division among citizens and has affected pillar organizations from parties to trade unions. Yet, not very much has been said on the consequences of this evolution. Scholars hypothesised a “secularisation of the minds”, while noting that pillar organisations remained very strong. Nevertheless, few empirical studies demonstrate whether or not the religious division is in practice no longer decisive in shaping the belongings and attitudes of Belgian citizens.

In this paper we aim at studying more accurately the salience of the religious cleavage in nowadays Belgium in two directions. First, electoral behaviours are studied to determine whether religion remains a decisive variable (with a new perspective of voting behaviours of Muslims). Second, party membership is analysed in order to verify whether contemporary Belgian parties remain or not religious- and pillar-based parties. This empirical evidence will help in determining whether Belgium faces a “believing without belonging” or a “belonging without believing” phenomena.

Introduction

The Belgian consociational model emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and was largely based on the religious cleavage. This model structured itself around traditional political parties (Liberals, Christian Democrats and Socialists). These parties incarnated three sociological worlds: the Catholic pillar, the Socialist pillar, and a smaller Liberal pillar (Seiler 1998). The pillars group together a number of social, cultural or economic organisations. The Socialist and the Liberal pillars are built on the lay or anticlerical side of the religious cleavage. The struggle for the separation of the Church and the State, the neutrality of the educational system, and ethic issues rank first amongst the elements that founded the party system and the pillars. The oppositions were not only reflected in the programme and the political project of the parties incarnating the pillars, but also in the sociological characteristics and the attitudes of the individuals integrated in the pillar.

Historically, until the 1960s, the borders of the pillars were supposed to be hermetic. The sociological belonging to a specific world was considered to be almost mechanically translated into electoral behaviours. The individuals were supposed to support the party personifying the pillar they belonged to. These hypotheses support the salience of the religious dimension in the Belgian society and political scene. However, the evolutions at stake since the 1960s seem to hinder the model. The secularisation of the Belgian society and the diversification of the religious landscape diluted the oppositions among citizens. The conflicts on the religious cleavage were less intense. Several elements, so as the opening up of the Liberals to the right-wing Catholics, testify for the decompartmentalisation of the pillars (Delwit & De Waele 1999). However, the reality of these changes and their consequences on the political behaviours remain to be studied. The authors hypothesise a secularisation of the minds, i.e. an attenuation of the religious opposition parallel to the preservation of pillarised organisations (Billiet & Dobbelaere 1985). However, few systematic empirical studies have been carried to support this hypothesis. The main goal of this contribution is to provide elements and data to verify the hypothesis. It aims at analysing the current salience of the religious cleavage in two complementary directions. On the one hand, the electoral behaviours are analysed in order to determine whether religion is (still) a predictive variable of the partisan preferences of the voters. On the other hand, data on party membership are mobilised to verify whether parties are (still) structured on a religious or pillarised basis. Together, these data should contribute to determine whether Belgium could be characterised by a situation of believing without belonging or belonging without believing (Davie 1994).

The genetic approach of political parties

The genetic approach of political parties aims at explaining the emergence of political parties and party systems in Western Europe. It developed at the end of the 1960s and insists on the role of parties as vectors of ideas, bearing political projects. Depending on the national context, one or several cleavages develop and give birth to political families.

Lipset and Rokkan are the founding fathers of a conflicting and multidimensional model that includes the notion of cleavage (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1970). Their goal is to understand how conflicts crossing societies translate into the party system. The authors identify two main revolutions that marked the political developments in Western Europe: the national revolution and the industrial revolution. These revolutions generated 4 cleavages: Church-State, Center-Periphery (stemming from the national revolution), Urban-Rural and Employer-Worker (stemming from the industrial revolution).

The Church-State cleavage stems from the national revolution. It opposes the clerical forces that aspire to preserve the influence of the Church in the society, the anticlerical forces in favour of a clear separation of the Church and the State. It marked deeper the catholic societies. The two sides of the religious cleavage are the Christian democracy and a secularist side.

The cleavages can present different layouts given the society in which they develop. They can cross-cut and generate multi-partism. They can also overlap and reinforce the existing oppositions, and thereby generate bipolar systems. Finally, one specific cleavage can dominate the others.

The analysis of the cleavage structure can take two different forms: diachronic or synchronic (Seiler 1980). The first approach allows identifying the cleavage that founded the party, the original heart of its doctrine, but also the evolutions, how the doctrine filled out over time and the potential shifts. The second approach authorises an in-depth analysis at a certain point in time of the nature of the electorate, the members and the leaders of the party on specific cleavages. Several authors observe that the criteria of historical position has to be completed by another criteria more based on sociological grounds in order to establish a classification of the political parties.

In this analysis of the saliency of the religious cleavage in Belgium, a combination of the two approaches is applied both to voters and to party membership.

Cleavages in the Belgian consociational state

Historically, Belgian politics has been dominated by three main cleavages (Seiler, 2003):

- religious: secular vs. catholic parties
- socio-economic: left-wing vs. right-wing parties
- linguistic: Flemish vs. Francophone parties

The relative importance of the three cleavages has changed in the 175 years of existence of the Belgian State. In its first years, Belgium was dominated by the opposition between Catholics and Liberals. The first were promoting good relations with the Church, the autonomy of Christian-based schools and hospitals and the respect of Christian values (Gerard 1996). For the Liberals, the main objectives were the strict separation between State and Church, the religious neutrality of the State, and the generalisation of State schools and hospitals (Rudd, 1988). Actually, the school issue was the main line of division on the religious cleavage. These tensions were realized inside the Parliament, but also and especially outside the chambers (Lefevre 1996). The first political families (Liberal and catholic) emerged on one side of the cleavage.

The Liberal party was the first to be set up. Its emergence was facilitated by the role of the freemasonry (Lorwin 1966). The freemason lodges developed a large network in close relationship with the Liberals. They constituted electoral associations (Witte 1973, Bots 1989) and favoured the emergence of the Liberal party in 1846 in Brussels (Delwit & De Waele 1999). Anticlericalism constituted the cement of the programme.

The process of formation of a party stemming from the Catholic movement was slower. The growing anticlericalism and the supremacy of the Liberals urged the Catholics to organise. The structure took first place at the societal level via Congresses organised in Malines (1863, 1864, 1867). The idea of a political organisation gained grounds. It was facilitated by the emergence of new trends in the Catholic movement and by the first “School war”. The Catholics united into one political movement after 1884 (Kalyvas 1996). At this time, the political landscape was bipolar and dominated by the opposition between Liberals and Catholics, mainly around the religious divide (Rudd 1988).

In the late 19th century, the religious cleavage gradually faded away without disappearing. The linguistic and socio-economic cleavages became more salient. The industrial revolution overturned the Belgian social and political life. The industrialisation generated tensions that

led in 1886 to riots (demonstrations, strikes, repression and arrests) (Mabille 2000). From these tensions emerged the Belgian workers party (POB), predecessor of the Belgian Socialist Party (PSB-BSP), in April 1885. The new party clearly anchored on the side of the defence of the workers, opposed to the bourgeoisie, fighting for more social equality, better working conditions, and for the universal voting franchise. It rallied (Walloon) workers organisations to the political struggle. From its origins, it opted for the anticlerical side of the religious cleavage. The new divide opposing workers and employers cross-cut the religious cleavage. Next to the rising socioeconomic cleavage, the first linguistic tensions emerged, opposing the Flemish movement to the central State personified by the French-speaking bourgeoisie. However, these tensions did not (yet) lead to conflicts mediated by political parties. These new lines of conflict transformed Belgium from a two-party system into a three-party system.

The Belgian political system also rests on the pillarisation of the society. At the end of the 19th century, two main socio-political worlds developed: the Socialist and the Catholic pillars, and a smaller Liberal pillar. Next to the pillar party, each pillar was made of a coherent set of organizations active in all sectors of public life: union, public health, insurance companies, socio-cultural associations, etc. The pillar organisations took charge of its members in all aspects of their life, from the cradle to the grave (Lijphart 1981). For instance, being a member of the catholic pillar, you were born in a catholic nursery, were educated in catholic school and later in a catholic university. You were member of the catholic scouts and were playing sport in a catholic club. Once starting to work, you can become member of the catholic trade union or of the catholic employers' organization. You were also most probably voting for the catholic party and were reading a catholic newspaper. The same hold true for Belgian citizens living in the socialist pillar, and to a lesser extent for the liberal pillar. The parties personifying the pillars took the form of mass parties (Duverger 2000), parties of social integration (Neumann 1956) or pillar parties (Luther 1999). The pillars were hermetic and the mobility across pillars almost nonexistent. But the three pillars were not only encapsulating their members. They were also in charge of adopting coalescent behaviours to seek consensus across pillars to maintain Belgium stable and pacified, even when strong conflicts emerged between them. In such circumstances, the solution was achieved through *pacts* negotiated by the elites of the three pillars with a proportional distribution of resources across pillars.

Precisely, the 1950s were a period of intense conflicts between pillars. Between *cléricaux* and *anti-cléricaux*, tensions were high especially on the issue of education. Finally, after several

marches and fierce debates among the political elites as well as the public opinion, the question opposing Catholics on the one hand and the secular camp (Liberals and Socialists) on the other hand was settled by *The School Pact* involving all major political forces..

During the 1960s and 1970s, political scientists analysed this model of government and decision-making. Lehmbruch speaks about *Proporzdemokratie* in the Austrian case, Lorwin evokes segmented pluralism, and McRae names it consociational democracy (McRae 1974). The Belgian case was also studied through this theoretical framework (Ladrière, Meynaud & Perin 1965, Lorwin 1974, Lijphart 1981).

After the School Pact, Belgium no longer experienced comparable disputes on the denominational cleavage. The weakening of tensions translated into the abandoning by the Liberals of their anticlerical identity at the beginning of the 1960s. They realigned on the right side of the socioeconomic cleavage. It allowed them to attract right-wing catholic voters.

The fading away of the denominational cleavage did not mean the beginning of a serene period for Belgian politics. Tensions arose along the socioeconomic cleavage. The centre-right government (Catholics-Liberals) was in strong conflict with the socialist trade unions. During months, strikes and demonstrations were organised. But once again, a consensual way out was found among partners instituting a permanent system of joint decisions between trade unions, business representatives and the government

The pacification of the two cleavages that dominated the political landscape since the birth of Belgium allowed the linguistic conflict between French-speakers and Dutch-speakers to become the new main issue on the agenda. As Lorwin stated: “the school pact, along with the secular trend of the erosion of old religious and class issues [...] left the way open for more intense confrontation on linguistic and regional issues” (Lorwin, 1971). The linguistic issue was not absent before that historical moment. Actually, it had been growing in success and activities since the mid-18th century. Yet, on the whole, it remained in the background in comparison to the two other dominant cleavages in Belgian political life. In the 1960s, the linguistic cleavage acquired a new status as the only major dispute that was not yet solved. From then on, most political events were talked about in reference to the ethnic division. As Léo Tindemans, former Prime minister, once said: “Even the price of milk takes on a linguistic coloration in this country”.

This “ethnicisation” of Belgian politics gradually transformed the political landscape. First, the three traditional parties split along the linguistic divide. In 1968, the Christian Democrats

split into the Flemish CVP and the French-speaking PSC. In 1971, the Belgian Liberals became the Flemish PVV and the French-speaking PRL. Finally, the Socialists split in 1978 into the Flemish SP and the French-speaking PS. From a three-party system Belgium became a six-party system. At the same time, new regionalist parties were created (van Haute & Pilet 2006): Volksunie (People's Union) in Flanders, RW (Walloon Rally) in Wallonia and FDF (Front for the defence of French-speakers) in Brussels.

Later on, in the 1980s, the Ecologists (Ecolo and Agalev, now Groen!) entered the political scene, followed by the Flemish extreme-right (Vlaams Blok, now Vlaams Belang) and by a small Francophone extreme-right (FN). The emergence of new parties was made even easier by the use of PR for all elections in Belgium. The lasting success of these new parties accelerated the fragmentation of the party system and questioned its structure around the pillar system.

Data & research questions

From one to three cleavages, from bipartism to three-party system, Belgian politics has been widely transformed since the mid-19th century when the religious cleavage was dominant.

On the one hand, one must admit that except in the 1950s, the religious cleavage in recent decades has faded away. Several evolutions at stake question its saliency: the secularisation of the society, the renunciation of the Church to impose her electoral preferences to believers, but also the fact that parties have tried to appeal beyond their traditional philosophical group. Since the 1960s, the Liberals have abandoned their anti-catholic stance to become a right-wing party open to all citizens, whatever their religious beliefs are. The Christian Democrats have also tried to widen their electorate. The French-speaking Christian Democrats transformed from the *Parti social chrétien* (PSC) to the *Centre démocrate humaniste* (CDH), leaving aside any reference to Christianity. Even the Socialists tried to seduce left-wing Catholics. Concerning the new parties (greens and extreme right), they have been open to both Catholics and non Catholics since their birth. Furthermore, the pillarized organisation of society is also questioned by the emergence of new types of associations or the electoral success of parties openly opposed to this organisation of society.

These evolutions led some political scientists to examine the survival of the Belgian model, to question the religious factor as determining the structure of the political system, and to query on the maintenance of a pillarized society. Nevertheless, the few available data seem to show that citizens continue to join in priority the organisation of one unique pillar (Hooghe

1999), despite more frequent movements across pillars, and even though the basis of membership has evolved, especially on the Catholic side (Billiet 1984). Religious identities are supposed to be replaced by moral values. The integration into the pillar would operate on the basis of community belonging and not on the basis of a practising Catholicism or militant clericalism anymore. The pillars would then have maintained the fidelity of their members by providing them services via mutual health insurance companies (MHIC), schools, hospitals, unions, etc. (Huysse 1984). Such changes would confirm Blondel and Battezzore affirming that «by the 1990s, the notion of ‘pillars’ had ceased to have more than a historical significance» (Blondel and Battezzore, 2003:15).

However, few empirical studies strongly confirm or infirm these hypotheses. Besides, stating that the religious division and pillars have disappeared might be a too radical shortcut. The picture might be less straightforward. Some elements lead to doubt that the religious cleavage has simply faded away. For instance, the rainbow coalition formed in 1999 made of the Socialists, Liberals and Greens aimed had sending the Christian Democrats on the opposition benches and at building up the first fully secular government in about 40 years. Among the rainbow coalition’s main decisions one finds the legalization of euthanasia and of gay marriage. Other elements confirm that the religious cleavage is not yet fully obsolete. Several studies have demonstrated how in Flanders Catholics remain within the Catholic pillar (Billiet 1982; Hooghe 1999).

From then on, the question whether the religious variable still plays a determinant role on Belgian politics remains to be analysed. This paper proposes to tackle the question at two levels of analysis: electoral behaviours and party membership profiles. The first part of the paper investigates the impact of religious beliefs on voting behaviours in 2007. For that purpose, data from an “exit poll” survey are mobilised. The survey took place on the occasion of the federal elections that were held on June 10th, 2007 in Wallonia and Brussels (N= 2 807)¹. The second part analyses the impact of the religious and pillar variables among party members. Four parties have been investigated (CD&V, VLD, PS and Ecolo) for a total of 2 910 respondents. These four parties correspond to the dominant party of each political family in Belgium.

¹ 2 807 voters answered the survey on June 10th, 2007, between 8 a.m. and 12 a.m. in 30 localities of Brussels and Wallonia. The localities were selected in order to respect a balance between provinces, but also rural or urban localities. The survey was conducted by the Centre d’étude de la vie politique (Cevipol) and coordinated by Pascal Delwit, in collaboration with Régis Dandoy, Nicolas De Decker, Giulia Sandri, Jean-Benoit Pilet and Emilie van Haute.

Religious cleavage and voting behaviour

The first empirical part of the analysis aims at investigating the impact of the religious factor on attitudes and voting behaviour. The purpose is to determine whether French-speaking Catholics still massively vote for the Christian Democratic Party (CDH) despite the abandon of its Christian reference, and whether the traditional secular parties (PS and MR) have difficulties attracting these voters. A specific section is also devoted to the voting behaviour and political attitudes of Muslim voters.

Catholics vs. Non Catholics

Before looking at the voting behaviour of Catholics and Non-Catholics, one should first consider the distribution of the two groups in our sample. The sample counts 40,2% of 'Catholics', 14,3% of individuals identifying with 'other religions', and 45,5% of 'non believers'. The secularised group is dominant, confirming thereby the strong secularisation of the Southern part of Belgium (Hughey 1994). Regional differences can be observed between Wallonia and the Capital-Region of Brussels (Table 1). In particular, the size of the 'other religions' group is bigger in Brussels, due to a significant proportion of Muslims.

Table 1. Distribution of voters according to the believing in Brussels and Wallonia (%)

	<i>Catholic/Christian</i>	<i>Non-catholic</i>
Wallonia	44,3	55,7
Brussels	35,6	64,4
French-speaking Community	40,2	59,8

But what lie at the heart of our research is the voting behaviour of these groups of respondents. The analysis of the religious structure of the French-speaking electorate (Table 2) confirms that the historical print of the religious cleavage remains perceptible. The electorate of the CDH – heir of the Catholic Party and - is dominated by the Catholics (59,1%). On the other hand, the PS presents itself as the party of the non Catholics (mainly non believers). The third traditional party, the MR, is the only of the three that succeeded in freeing itself from its original (lay) anchorage on the religious cleavage. Ecolo stands back from its Christian origins (Delwit & De Waele 1996) and presents a distribution with a clear domination of the non Catholics (67,4%), whereas the FN mirrors a standard distribution.

Table 2. Religious structure of the electorate, French-speaking parties (%)

	<i>Catholic / Christian</i>	<i>Non catholic</i>
PS	32,2	67,8
MR	45,4	54,6
CDH	59,1	40,9
Ecolo	32,6	67,4
FN	40,3	59,7
Autre parti	27,0	73,0
Blank/Don't know	43,5	56,5
Total (N)	1 116	1 659

$Chi^2= 111,865 ; p=.000$

Up to now, Catholic voters have been treated as a homogenous group. Yet, the Lazarfeld's Columbia model showed that the more often one goes to Church or the firmer the religious beliefs are, the more one is inclined to vote for a religious party (Dargent 2004). This trend is confirmed for the Belgian French-speaking electorate (Table 3). One can clearly observe that the heir of the Christian democrats, the CDH, is by far the most successful party among Catholics attending mass every Sunday (39,2%). This score doubles its electoral results among the whole population. Concerning the irregular or non practising, the dealignment with regards to the Christian pillar party is more explicit. In these categories of Catholics, the MR arrives first party (respectively 34,7% and 22,1%).

Table 3. Religious practice of the Catholics and electoral behaviour in 2007 (%)

	<i>Regular practising</i>	<i>Irregular practising</i>	<i>Non practising</i>
PS	18,4	16,9	19,9
MR	17,7	34,7	32,1
CDH	39,2	18,9	13,5
Ecolo	13,3	16,3	12,8
FN	0,6	2,3	4,4
Other party	7,6	5,0	5,1
Blank/Don't know	3,2	5,9	12,2
Total (N)	158	662	289

$Chi^2= 91,647 ; p=.000$

The results show that religious affiliation and electoral behaviour are still correlated to a certain extent in Belgium. Not all parties are pluralist, some keep on being marked by their Catholic or secular past. Yet, further than voting, it would be interesting to determine if it has some link with political attitudes. Here again, electoral studies in the 1950s have

demonstrated the presence of a strong relation between religious beliefs and conservative political attitudes (Dargent 2004).

This hypothesis is confirmed if one observes the average position of the electorate on several indicators (Table 4). The first indicator corresponds to the self-placement on a left-right scale (0 to 9). The average self-placement of Catholic voters is almost perfectly centrist (4,65) but is more inclined to the right end of the spectrum than the other group (centre-left position).

Three other indicators have been built upon a series of policy questions². On the socioeconomic and the universalism-ethnocentrism scales, Catholic voters confirm their ‘radically centrist’ stance. Nevertheless, they are again positioned on average a bit more to the right end of the spectrum than the other group of voters. The indicator on which Catholic voters most significantly diverge from the rest of the electorate is the liberalism-conservatism scale. The average position of Catholic voters is clearly on the right (3,75).

What is interesting is that the political attitudes of Catholic voters are closed to the traditional positions of Christian Democratic parties in Belgium. These parties have occupied the centre of the political spectrum since the 1960s, except on societal issues where their conservatism was more pronounced (see laws on euthanasia, gay marriage and adoption). Even if Catholic voters do no longer vote massively for the CDH, their political attitudes are still inspired by traditional Christian Democracy. And to attract them, the liberal MR tried to move towards the centre on these issues.

Table 4. Average positioning of the electorate by religious orientation

	<i>Catholics / Christians</i>	<i>Non catholics</i>
Left-Right scale (0-9)	4,65	3,99
Socioeconomic scale (1-5)	2,57	2,32
Universalism-ethnocentrism scale (1-5)	2,54	2,22
Liberalism-Conservatism scale (1-5)	3,75	3,11

If these elements authorize to think that the religious cleavage still structures the political landscape and determines the attitudes of the voters, it does not allow evaluating the exact weight of the religious determinant among other factors in the vote prediction. The

² Each indicator summarizes several items with regards to which the respondents had to position themselves. These indicators have been highlighted by a PCA (Principal Component Analysis). The first indicator sums up socio-economic items on a 1-5 scale (1=Left side; 5= Right side). The second indicator encapsulates immigration and security items, and was therefore labelled “universalism-ethnocentrism”. The last indicator groups cultural items, ranging from cultural liberalism (1) to conservatism (5).

discriminant analysis introduces such a hierarchy among variables (Kinnear & Gray 2005). It allows identifying the most predictive variables of electoral behaviour.

Table 5 presents the results of the discriminant analysis, by party³. For each party, a set of socio-demographic variables (level of education, age, religious convictions, and status) and attitudes (above-mentioned indicators) are integrated in the analysis in order to evaluate their capacity of prediction of the vote for the party (in opposition to the other parties). The results confirm the previous observations. The religious factor emerges as predictive variable for two parties: PS, but also and especially CDH. It is not the case for the Liberals or Ecolo.

The analysis by party reveals that the religious variable remains the first variable in predicting a Christian democratic vote, with a high level of correlation. Two other variables also play a significant role in predicting a vote for the CDH: the positioning on the universalism-ethnocentrism scale and on the liberalism-conservatism scale. It confirms the link between believing and attitudes. It is interesting to point out that the left-right positioning and the position on the socioeconomic scale do not allow predicting the vote for the party. It highlights the pluralist character of the party in that respect.

The liberal and socialist votes are rather characterized by the left-right dimension (self-placement and socioeconomic scale), the Liberals positioning themselves on the right side of the scales and the Socialists on the left side. This outcome attests of the primacy of the socioeconomic cleavage for these two parties. However, the prediction of the socialist vote distinguishes itself by the resilient influence of the religious factor. In the case of the Liberals, the average positioning on the liberalism-conservatism scale emerges as a voting predictor (with an average anchorage on the conservative side). This factor could be explained by the willingness and ability of the party to attract a large fringe of the catholic electorate.

Finally, the green vote distinguishes by the salience of the “new issues” variables, in the sense of a rather liberal and universalistic position. The socioeconomic variables also play in the prediction of the green vote, but in a weaker way than for the socialist or liberal vote. Lastly, the level of education (high) and the age (younger on average) also represent predictive factors for the ecologist vote.

³ The vote for the *p* party is dichotomized in opposition to other parties, with an equal probability to vote for each group in order to avoid disproportions.

Table 5. Discriminant analysis of the vote in 2007, by party

<i>Parties/Variables</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>MR</i>	<i>CDH</i>	<i>Ecolo</i>
Level of education	0,349 2 * Sec educ	0,192 3 * Sec / Higher educ	-0,001 - Sec / Higher educ	-0,335 6 * Sec / Higher educ
Catholic/non catholic	-0,265 4 * non catholic	-0,165 - catholic/non catholic	0,839 1 * Catholic	-0,261 - catholic/non catholic
Status	0,25 - Worker/Employ ee	0,173 - Employee	0,057 - Worker/Employ ee	-0,093 - Worker/Employ ee
Age	0,093 - 35-54 ans	0,064 - 35-54 ans	-0,217 - 35-54 ans	0,431 4 * 35-44 ans
L-R positioning (0-9)	0,886 1 * 2,94	0,857 1 * 5,71	-0,039 - 4,47	0,655 1 * 3,39
Univ-Ethno Scale (1-5)	0,123 - 2,24	0,169 - 2,50	0,205 2 * 2,17	0,587 3 * 1,81
Socioeco Scale (1-5)	0,535 3 * 1,97	0,675 2 * 3,16	0,148 4 * 2,35	0,470 5 * 2,08
Lib-Cons Scale (1-5)	0,189 - 3,26	0,249 4 * 3,65	-0,470 3 * 3,69	0,642 2 * 2,82
Wilks' Lambda	0,868	0,749	0,960	0,921
% of good ranking	67,5	73,2	63,6	66,4

*Remarks: for each variable and each party, the table indicates : the correlation between the variable and the discriminating function ; whether the variable is kept in the function, the rank of the correlation, and a * ; if the variable is not kept in the function, the table mentions a -; the average position of the voters on each variable (mean score mode for ordinal variables). The signs of the correlations are not to be taken into account.*

As a first conclusion, the analysis of voting behaviour and political attitudes of ‘Catholic’ and ‘non catholic’ voters in French-speaking Belgium delineated a mixed presence of the religious cleavage. It can no longer be said to be dominantly leading all Catholics towards voting for the CDH, heir of the Christian Democrats and towards leaving the other traditionally secular parties to represent the whole ‘non catholic’ group. On the contrary, the success of religiously plural parties is confirmed. The liberal MR is the most preferred party among both Catholics and non believers. Yet, some parties have not shifted to religious pluralism, even if they are willing to. The CDH remains mainly a party attracting Catholic voters more than all other voters; the socialist PS has difficulties in attracting Catholics that may be perhaps frightened by its remaining anti-clerical traditions.

The Muslim vote

More recently, the issue of religion and voting has been extended further than the classical relation between Christianity and votes. The electoral behaviour of the Muslim community emerges as part of the political and academic debate. The weight of this electorate increased due to growing figures of Muslim migrants and their access to citizenship, but also to the access of new Belgian to voting age.

In Brussels particularly, Moroccans and Turks, mainly Muslim, form a significant part of the electorate. No precise figures of the Muslim population are available, but they are usually estimated around 300,000 individuals in Belgium (Texier et al. 2006). In the last decade, Belgians of Moroccan or Turk origins have entered the political arena in Brussels. In 1994, there were 14 of them among all elected municipal councillors in the 19 municipalities constituting the Brussels-Capital Region (Martiniello 1998). Six years later, they were 86 (13,7% of the total). On the occasion of the 2004 regional elections in Brussels, 22 of the 72 elected Francophone regional MPs were either of Moroccan or Turk ascendancy, mainly affiliated to the two major left-wing parties: PS and Ecolo.

However, our knowledge about the electoral behaviour of the Muslims in Belgium is relatively limited. One might expect three main voting behaviours. The first one would be for Muslims to vote for a religious party. As no Muslim-based party was running in 2007 after the failure of the Islamic PJM in 2004 (0,93% in Brussels), we could expect a vote for the CDH, a party that has abandoned its declared reference to Catholicism but remaining a party adopting Conservative-religious positions on societal issues. The CDH has eventually developed a new electoral strategy aimed at broadening its electorate by attracting the votes of other religions' affiliates, namely the Muslims and the African Protestants. The second would be a clear pattern of class voting for the main party of the left, the PS. And the third option would be a preference for either Ecolo or the PS, the two parties with the most pro-immigration attitudes.

The 2007 exit poll survey allows for a first exploration. In the sample, the proportion of voters declaring being 'Muslims' account for 7,5% (3,8% in Wallonia and 11,8% in Brussels). This means that Muslims represent today the third largest religious group in Belgium after non-believers and Catholics.

Given the fact that Muslims represent a minority group with regards to the overall Belgian electorate, one may not expect them to constitute the largest religious group within the specific electorates of each Belgian French-speaking party. However, for the socialists and the

CDH, Muslims represent an important element of their respective electorates. Among the socialist voters, 14,5% are Muslims and 10,2% among the CDH voters, whilst only 4,0% and 4,3% declared to belong to the Islamic religious group among the voters of the Liberal party (MR) and of the Green party (Ecolo) respectively. Consequently, one might expect the weight of that specific electorate on the political positions and actions of the two first parties to be higher (PS and CDH).

Table 6 offers a first insight on how they voted in 2007. The first observation is that the Muslim vote is for a majority a leftist vote. 53,6% of declared Muslim voters have supported either the PS or Ecolo, the socialists clearly coming ahead. However, one has to evaluate the distribution in relative terms with the electoral results of the party. Then, the left-right division is less obvious. Certainly, the PS is particularly successful among Muslim voters since the party has attracted 43,1% of them, or 16.3 points above its global result for the Senate. A second successful party is the CDH, who gathers 18,7% of the Muslim vote, against 14,7% of the total electorate. The least successful party is the liberal MR with only 14,8% of the Muslim vote, against 30,6% of the Francophone electorate. The difficulties of the Liberals can be explained by the combination of their secular tradition and, more importantly, by the rightist stance on both socioeconomic issues and immigration. The MR is also the party having the biggest difficulties to recruit candidates with a Moroccan or Turk ascendancy (Jacobs et al 2006).

Table 1. Electoral success of Francophone parties in the Muslim electorate in 2007 (%)

	<i>Electoral Results (Senate)</i>	<i>Distribution of the Muslim votes, French-speaking Community</i>
PS	26,8	43,1
MR	32,3	14,8
CDH	15,5	18,7
Ecolo	15,2	10,5
FN	5,9	1,4
Other parties	4,3	4,8
Blank/Don't know	-	6,7
Total (N)	100,0	100,0 (212)

When it comes to the impact of religious practise for Muslim voters, it appears that the variable cannot help discriminating the vote for the four main parties (Table 7). No specific gap can be observed in terms of electoral success of the four main parties given the level of practise. Actually, the most significant observation for the effect of religious practise is that

among Muslim voters declaring a frequent religious practise, the proportion of invalid and wasted votes is higher (about 10,8%). However, the analysis should be carried on a larger proportion of Muslim voters to offer stronger statistical results.

Table 7. Religious practise and votes among Muslim voters in 2007 (%)

	<i>Pratiquant régulier</i>	<i>Pratiquant irrégulier</i>	<i>Non pratiquant</i>	<i>Total</i>
PS	40,0	48,4	37,3	43,1
MR	12,3	15,1	17,6	14,8
CDH	18,5	19,4	17,6	18,7
Ecolo	12,3	8,6	11,8	10,5
FN	1,5	1,1	2,0	1,4
Other party	4,6	2,2	9,8	4,8
Blank/Don't know	10,8	5,4	3,9	6,7
Total (N)	65	94	51	210

The electoral success of the PS within the Muslim group (Table 6) seems to verify the hypothesis of a leftist Muslim vote. Nevertheless, this conclusion is opposed by the very poor results of Ecolo among Muslim voters in 2007. The pro-immigration parties vote appears, at first sight, to be less significant, at least if when one takes the bad performance of Ecolo. This party has been historically representing the avant-garde of the political positions over pro-immigration issues like granting legal status to undocumented immigrant workers and free borders. Finally, the hypothesis of a religious vote is partially confirmed by the good results of the CDH among Muslim voters.

Are Muslims, as their vote for the PS and the CDH is, both progressive on socioeconomic issues and conservative on societal and ethical ones? These hypotheses over the voting behaviour of Muslim voters may be clarified through an analysis of their political attitudes. The same four indicators identified for the analysis of the catholic voters' attitudes have been mobilized (self-placement on the left-right scale and positions on socioeconomic issues, on universalism-ethnocentrism issues and on moral issues).

On the basis of Table 8, one might conclude that to a certain extent, these expectations are confirmed. The data verify the leftist anchorage of the Muslim electorate. First, the self-placement of Muslim voters on the left/right scale is more leftist (3,79) than the rest of the electorate (4,29). On socioeconomic issues, their attitudes are also inclining more to the left (1,88), so is it on issues related to universalism vs. ethnocentrism (2,11). At the same time, on moral issues, the Muslim group is the most conservative, with an average score of 4,13 (the most conservative score being 5).

Table 8. Political attitudes of Muslim voters in 2007

	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Other</i>
Self-placement on the left-right scale (0-9)	3,79	4,29
Average position on the socioeconomic scale (1-5)	1,88	2,46
Average position on the universalism-ethnocentrism scale (1-5)	2,11	2,37
Average position on the liberalism-conservatism scale (1-5)	4,13	3,31

These scores confirm that the political attitudes of Muslim voters are actually inclining to the left with regard to the socioeconomic issues and to the degree of openness of society. Nevertheless, these leftist attitudes are coupled with a strong moral conservatism. The latter element allows us to explain the weak electoral success of the Greens among the Muslim voters, as this party usually grounds its electoral manifestos on cultural liberalism issues. Moreover, the analysis of the political attitudes of Muslim voters also allows to understand the fact that a significant part of the Muslim electorate voted for the CDH, considering that the latter is the most conservative party in the Belgian political space over moral issues. Finally, the weak penetration of the Muslim electorate by the Liberal party might be explained, on the basis of the data in Table 8, by the gap between the positions of the party on socioeconomic issues and the actual, often precarious, living conditions of the citizens belonging to this religious group. This gap might lead the Muslim voters to prefer left or centre-left parties, that usually claim to defend the interests of underprivileged social groups.

In conclusion, it could be asserted that the Muslim voters are divided in two groups: those who vote for a left-wing party, the PS, and those who vote for a traditional religious party, the heir of the Christian democratic party, the CDH.

More generally, one might conclude that in Belgium the religious cleavage at electoral level is becoming less clear than during the last decades. The main evidences that emerge from the above-mentioned data are that the growing pluralism of the Belgian society, exemplified by the electoral successes of the Liberal and the Green parties, is coupled with the opening of two mainstream parties, the PS and the CDH, to the Muslim electorate.

Religion, pillarization and party membership

The second part of this paper looks at the relation between religion and politics from another perspective than the classical electoral studies. Here, the intent is to investigate the impact of the religious cleavage on party membership. Party membership includes every person

integrated in the membership registers of the selected parties, without distinction on the basis of their respective positions within the party (passive members, activists, local or middle level elites, activists with electoral mandate).

The aim of the second part of the paper is to verify whether the Belgian parties are still structured on a religious or pillarized membership base. Therefore, it will be assessed, on the one hand, whether the membership base of the selected parties can be identified through specific religious profiles and, on the other hand, whether the statement of Blondel and Battezzorre, according to which “*by the 1990s, the notion of ‘pillars’ had ceased to have more than a historical significance*” can be verified for the Belgian case (Blondel & Battezzorre 2003: 15).

Party members are much less studied than voters even if their role in the political system is major. They are the ones that adopt the party manifestos before the election, the ones that elect party leaders, the ones that vote for or against the participation to a governing coalition, and the ones that are the first pool of recruitment for candidates and elected officials. In that sense, knowing who they are and whether they are still affected by the religious cleavage will tell more on the persistent impact of this line of division in Belgian politics, beyond what has been demonstrated in the previous sections of this contribution.

In order to address this issue, data from four postal surveys led in 2003 and 2006 are mobilized. Four parties have been investigated (CD&V, VLD, PS and Ecolo) for a total of 2 910 respondents. In each party, 2 500 questionnaires were sent out to a random sample of party members. Response rates vary from one party to another but nevertheless allow getting an original and significant database on party membership⁴. The results of these surveys are presented in three sections. First, the religious composition of the four parties is examined, both in terms of religious group affiliation and of degree of religious practise, verifying whether they are pluralist or still massively composed of party members originating from their historical pillar. In the second part, the remaining link between party members and the traditional pillarized organizations is investigated. Thirdly, the political attitudes of party members are detailed.

Through this analysis, the aim is assessing the existence of a potential gap between the electoral behaviour of Belgian voters, that is less and less affected by the religious cleavage as said above, and the social structure of party membership.

⁴ Response rates: 32,9% (PS-2003), 41,2% (Ecolo-2003), 18,6% (VLD-2006) and 24,2% (CD&V-2006).

Religious affiliation of party members

In terms of religious beliefs, the significant variations among party members appear to confirm the persistence of the traditional religious cleavage (Table 9). The Flemish Christian Democratic party (CD&V) remains strongly anchored in the Catholic segment, while the traditionally secular PS only attract a marginal group of Catholics among its members. The CD&V has almost no member declaring to be non-Catholic and 97,2% of all its members are Catholics. The party that decided to keep its Christian label remains anchored in a strong catholic substratum. Its francophone lay counterpart, the PS, still display a strong attachment to its original catch on the lay side of the religious cleavage. Two thirds of its members declare to be non believers (64,1%) and one third are Catholics (33,6%). Only 2,3% of the members of this party declared to belong to another religious group. This goes against what has been observed at the level of the electorate.

Apart from the CD&V and the PS, there are two pluralist parties: the Open VLD and Ecolo. For the Greens, it is not surprising that their members are divided almost equally between Catholics (42,3%) and non believers (54,2%). But for the liberal Open VLD, it confirms its legitimacy to claim being the only successful party transforming itself from a traditional secular anti-clerical party into a religiously plural one. The Flemish liberal party is now composed of a majority of members declaring to be Catholics (64,8%).

Table 9. Religious affiliations of party members (%)

	<i>Chrétien / catholique</i>	<i>Autre religion / autre tendance</i>	<i>Non croyant / libre penseur</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>
CD&V	97,2	1,7	1,2	100,0 (598)
Open VLD	64,8	7,0	28,2	100,0 (457)
PS	33,6	2,3	64,1	100,0 (777)
Ecolo	41,0	3,4	55,6	100,0 (985)

$\chi^2 = 697,034 ; p = .000$

When it comes to religious practise, the persistence of the traditional religious stances of the CD&V in Flanders and of the PS in French-speaking Belgium are marked more deeply (Table 10). Only considering Catholic party members, the CD&V is the only party to have a large proportion (40,3%) of regular Church attendees, and has a minor proportion of non practising Catholics (9,0%). This is indeed not surprising, especially considering that almost all of the CD&V members included in the sample declared to be Catholics. Their relationship with religion seems to be shaped into an identity belonging. On the other extreme, the PS, the few

Catholics being member of the Francophone socialist party are never (40,2%) or almost never (47,0%) attending mass. The Open VLD, the other party with a significant proportion of Catholic party members, has only a limited amount of regular Church attendees (11,6%) and more non practising Catholics (34,9%). The same holds for Ecolo, that displays 20,8% of non practising Catholic members and 48,8% of members almost never attending mass.

Table 10. Church attendance among Catholic party members (%)

	<i>Every Sunday</i>	<i>At least once a month</i>	<i>A couple of time per year</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>
CD&V	40,3	13,7	37,0	9,0	100,0 (586)
Open VLD	11,6	7,3	46,2	34,9	100,0 (301)
PS	8,6	3,7	46,8	40,9	100,0 (301)
Ecolo	18,9	12,1	48,2	20,8	100,0 (481)

$Chi^2=266,571 ; p=.000$

In other words, even more than for the voters, the analysis of the religious beliefs of party members depicts two groups of parties. The first one, composed of the CD&V and the PS, gathers two parties still corresponding to their historical image on the religious cleavage: a Christian Democratic party almost exclusively composed of Catholics party members and a secular socialist party with very few religious party members. The second group is made of two religiously plural parties: Ecolo and the Open VLD. For the Flemish liberals, the significant number of Catholic members shows its success in breaking up from its traditional anti-clerical stance.

Party members and pillars

In the consociational model of democracy prevailing in Belgium at least up to the 1970s, religion and politics were closely related to pillarization. Parties were not only marked by a religious colour but also by their link with pillars and pillarized organizations (Deschouwer 1999). In that respect, in this second part of the paper which is focusing on party members, the aim is verifying whether party members are still encapsulated in their pillar and its network of organizations. In order to answer this question, a lot of indicators could be mobilized. However, it is necessary to use indicators shared by a maximum of respondents. Therefore, three indicators have been selected: the educational background (official State school vs. Catholic school), the affiliation to a mutual health insurance company (Catholic vs. socialist vs. liberal), and the affiliation to a union (Catholic vs. socialist vs. liberal) of party members.

The education system lies at the very heart of Belgian consociationalism. Two networks co-existed historically: the ‘official network’ of State schools and the ‘free network’ of Catholic schools. Up to the 1958 School pact, Catholic parties and secular parties (socialists and liberals) adopted opposed positions on the public financing of State and Catholic schools. This led to “school wars”, the first on primary education at the end of the 19th century, and the second on secondary education after World War II (Schreiber 1996). For the Catholic pillar and its party, the school system was a crucial issue. Traditionally, members of the Catholic pillar were educated in Catholic schools and citizens belonging to the socialist or the liberal pillars were educated in State schools.

In the early 21st century, this link between party members and education network remains strong, at least for what concerns the CD&V and the PS, but also to a lesser extent for the Open VLD (Table 11). CD&V party members have been educated for more than three quarters of them (77,8%) in schools of the ‘free network’ (Catholic schools). This network is dominant in Flanders, but these proportions demonstrate a strong socialisation in the network of the pillar. On the contrary, members of the PS have been educated in the ‘official network’ (State schools) for more than four fifths of them (82,8%). For the OpenVLD, it is interesting to note that, unlike religious beliefs, the educational profile of its members is still corresponding to the historical secular roots of the Liberal Party. Most OpenVLD members have been educated in State schools (48,8%) and less than one fourth of them have been educated exclusively in the ‘free network’ (22,8%). This under representation of Catholic schools is even more surprising considering that Catholic schools are dominant in Flanders. Diversity also characterizes the educational background of Liberal party members. 28,4% of them declare having studied in both networks. Finally, for Ecolo, the pluralist profile of the party and its members is once again confirmed when it comes to education and schools.

Table 11. School networks and party membership (%)

	<i>Official network</i>	<i>Free network</i>	<i>Other /Trans-networks</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>
CD&V	8,6	77,3	14,1	100,0 (383)
Open VLD	48,8	22,8	28,4	100,0 (285)
PS	82,5	11,3	6,2	100,0 (594)
Ecolo	35,3	54,2	10,4	100,0 (920)

*Chi*²=699,540 ; *p*=.000

Another indicator of the pillarization of party membership is the affiliation to one specific type of the mutual health insurance company (MHIC). The Welfare State in Belgium is a

combination of State-based and private organizations. Citizens have the obligation to be affiliated to a mutual health insurance company that will cover their health expenses mainly on basis of state funding. The three main mutual health insurance companies are related to a pillar (Catholic, socialist and liberal), and other neutral or independent companies also gradually emerged.

Table 12 details the affiliation to mutual health insurance companies of party members. Again, diversity is not on the agenda. The CD&V and the PS confirm the strength of the remaining encapsulation of their members on their historical pillar. Almost all CD&V members are affiliated to the Catholic MHIC (91,6%) while about three quarters of PS members are affiliated to the socialist MHIC (77,0%). For the OpenVLD, the traditional liberal MHIC remains the most preferred one (46,6%) but with some success for the dominant Catholic MHIC (29,3%) and for the neutral cross-pillar MHIC (16,2%). Finally, members of Ecolo confirm their cross-pillar position in their dominant affiliation to the Catholic MHIC (40,1%) and to the neutral MHIC (33,4%).

Table 12. Mutual health insurance company (MHIC) of party members (%)

	<i>Catholic MHIC</i>	<i>Socialist MHIC</i>	<i>Liberal MHIC</i>	<i>Neutral and independant MHIC</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
CD&V	91,6	1,2	1,5	4,90	0,8	100,0 (597)
Open VLD	29,3	6,7	46,6	16,2	1,1	100,0 (461)
PS	7,4	77,0	1,1	11,5	3,1	100,0 (816)
Ecolo	40,1	19,4	2,0	33,4	5,1	100,0 (1018)

$Chi^2=2659,678 ; p=.000$

The polarisation is even more marked in terms of union affiliation (Table 13). The CD&V or PS party members who are affiliated to a union are almost always affiliated to the union of the pillar. It is also the case for the Liberals. The liberal union is traditionally weaker and less established than the two others. However, the OpenVLD party members who are affiliated to a union are in two third of the cases affiliated to the liberal union (61,5%). Finally, the green party members depict a pluralist profile.

Table 2. Trade union affiliation of party members (%)

	<i>Socialist Union (ABVV/FGTB)</i>	<i>Christian Union (ACV/CSC)</i>	<i>Liberal Union (ACLVB/CGSLB)</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>
CD&V	1,8	95,7	1,8	0,7	100,0 (279)
Open VLD	7,4	26,7	61,5	4,4	100,0 (135)
PS	91,8	4,3	1,9	1,9	100,0 (513)
Ecolo	36,1	54,0	1,8	8,1	100,0 (454)

$Chi^2=1388,374 ; p=.000$

This second part of our paper focusing on party members has confirmed the remaining strong socialization process in the pillars, particularly on the Socialist and the Christian Democratic side. The religious cleavage and the pillarization are still deeply rooted among party members of the CD&V and of the PS. Even the OpenVLD has not fully become plural in that respect. Only Ecolo is a truly cross-pillars party.

Political attitudes and religious affiliation of party members

The analysis of the sociological profile of the members showed sharp differences between parties. From then on, it is interesting to check whether these characteristics are linked with political attitudes.

In order to measure attitudes, six indicators are mobilized. Four out of the six indicators are similar to those used for the analysis of voters, despite some differences in terms of scales: self-placement on the left-right scale (0-7), position on the socioeconomic, universalism-ethnocentrism and progressivism-conservatism scales (1-4)⁵. Two other indicators emerged from the factor analysis: a scale ranging from liberalism to authoritarian position, and a scale ranging from environmentalism to materialism.

First of all, from Table 14, one can observe that party members declaring being Catholics incline a bit more towards rightist positions than the others. Their self-placement on the left-right scale is on average 3,34, about one point more towards the right end than the ‘non believers’. They are also a bit more rightist on the socioeconomic scale. The main difference lies in their average score on moral issues. They are clearly more conservative (2,34) on such issues than other groups, and slightly less universalistic. On the two last indexes, they also point to the right (authoritarian and materialism). Our data do not show a trend of openness of the Christians towards new issues as immigration and environment.

⁵ Each indicator summarizes items on which respondents had to position. These indicators emerged from a factor analysis.

Table 14. Political attitudes of party members per religious affiliation

	<i>Christian / catholic</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Non believer</i>
Self-placement left right scale (0-7)	3,34	2,99	2,30
Progressism-Conservatism index (1-4)	2,34	2,10	1,60
Left-right Socioeconomic index (1-4)	2,24	2,36	1,91
Universalism-Ethnocentrism index (1-4)	2,29	2,26	2,00
Liberalism-Authoritarianism index (1-4)	2,73	2,61	2,51
Environmentalism-Materialism index (1-4)	2,46	2,35	2,42

These observations testify that religion and anchorage in one pillar strongly determine membership and the choice of the party. However, bivariate analysis does not allow evaluating the weight of these determinants in the prediction of the choice of the party of affiliation. Discriminant analysis introduces such a hierarchy. This method allows identifying the most predictive variables of the choice of party affiliation.

Table 15 presents the results of the discriminant analysis, by party⁶. For each party, socio-demographic variables (level of education, age, religion) and attitudes (above-mentioned indicators) have been integrated into the analysis in order to evaluate their predictive value for the affiliation to the party (opposed to the three other parties).

The results confirm the previous observations. The religious factor appears at two occasions as predictor of party membership: in the case of the PS and the CD&V. It is not the case for the Open VLD, or for Ecolo. Following the example of the electoral behaviour, the religious variable only plays a role for the parties traditionally opposed on the religious cleavage (Christian Democrats and Socialists). The pillar variables partly allow identifying the party of affiliation, especially for the MHIC.

Finally, the positions on indicators are also significant. On the self-placement and the socioeconomic scale, the average position of the Liberals is on the right side (4,34 and 3,02); on the centre for the Christian Democrats (3,95 and 2,43), and on the left for the Socialists (2,30 and 1,79) and the Greens (2,08 and 1,75). The green party members distinguish by their average position on the universalism-ethnocentrism scale (1,52) and the environmentalism-materialism scale (1,87). The Christian Democrats differentiate by their rather conservative average position on the progressism-conservatism scale (2,56).

Table3. Discriminant analysis of the 2007 vote, by party

⁶ The affiliation to party p is dichotomised towards affiliation to other parties, with an equal probability to join in order to avoid disproportions linked with real probabilities.

<i>Party/Variables</i>	<i>CD&V</i>	<i>Open VLD</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>Ecolo</i>
Educational level	-0,012 - Sec./sup.	-0,176 6 * Sec./sup.	0,202 - Sec./sup.	-0,178 - Sec./sup.
Religion	0,567 4 * Catho/Christian	0,240 - Non believers/catho	0,297 4 * Non believers	0,181 - Non believers/catho
Age	0,152 - 45-64	0,130 - 45-64	-0,009 - 45-64	0,127 - 45-54
Educational network	0,212 6 * Free	-0,010 - Official/free	0,338 6 * Official	-0,147 6 * Official/free
Mutualités	-0,509 2 * Christian	0,199 3 * Liberal	-0,047 - Socialist	-0,172 4 * Socialist/liberal
Self-placement left-right (0-7)	0,604 1 * 3,95	0,689 2 * 4,34	0,243 2 * 2,30	0,421 3 * 2,08
Universalism- Ethnocentrism scale (1-4)	0,219 - 2,40	0,500 4 * 2,76	-0,314 7 * 2,45	0,734 1 * 1,52
Socioeconomic scale(1-4)	0,304 - 2,43	0,834 1 * 3,02	0,248 5 * 1,79	0,321 7 * 1,75
Progressism-Conservatism scale (1-4)	0,575 3 * 2,56	0,323 - 2,30	0,092 8 * 1,87	0,352 8 * 1,64
Liberalism- Autoritarianism scale(1-4)	0,108 5 * 2,66	0,315 - 2,87	-0,329 3 * 2,86	0,475 5 * 2,20
Environmentalism- Materialism scale (1-4)	0,097 - 2,61	0,164 5 * 2,63	-0,539 1 * 2,94	0,681 2 * 1,87
Wilks' Lambda	0,662	0,702	0,552	0,480
% of correct placements	81,8	83,2	84,9	87,0

*Remarks for each variable and each party, the table indicates : the correlation between the variable and the discriminating function ; whether the variable is kept in the function, the rank of the correlation, and a * ; if the variable is not kept in the function, the table mentions a -; the average position of the voters on each variable (mean score mode for ordinal variables). The signs of the correlations are not to be taken into account.*

Interestingly enough, the basic socio-demographic variables (level of education, age) do not play in the prediction of the choice of party. On the whole, party members, no matter the party they belong to, present a rather similar sociological profile: high level of education, average age between 45 and 65 years old. These characteristics correspond to those highlighted by other national studies (Seyd & Whiteley 1996). These characteristics correspond to the resource model of participation emphasized by Verba and Nie (Verba & Nie 1972).

Conclusion

After decades behind the scene, religion is back in politics in Belgium since the late 1990s. The rainbow coalition constituted by the Liberals, the Socialists and the Greens has adopted more reforms on societal issues (euthanasia, gay marriage, adoption for gay couples) than all governments with the Christian Democrats as major coalition party in the previous 40 years. At the same, the debate about a potential reference to a Christian heritage in the European Constitution has been strongly rejected by the Belgian government.

In that sense, addressing the presence of the religious cleavage in Belgian politics constituted a pertinent research question. Precisely, this contribution proposed a two-fold analysis of the actual impact of the religious variable: on voters and on party members. If both confirm that religion is still there, it cannot be said to be dominant but it is not obsolete either.

For voters, the results are mixed. On the one hand, the French-speaking Christian Democrats do not have the leadership or the monopole on the catholic electorate. The same report can be made on the PS and the non believers. However, the religious cleavage still marks parties historically linked to it (CDH and PS) and determines attitudes of the voters on cultural or moral issues. However, the religious cleavage did not manage to blow with the new electors of Muslim confession. This new electorate favours the Socialists and the former Christian Democrats. In that sense, the lines of division crack. MR and Ecolo offer a pluralist face (Catholics and non believers), whereas PS and CDH open up to Muslims.

When it comes to party members, the analysis of their sociological and political profile nuances the former conclusions. For that specific population, the differences are pronounced. Parties stemming from the religious cleavage and the dominant pillars present very closed profiles, very hermetic in terms of believing, religious practise or belonging to a specific sociological world. The Flemish Christian-democratic party (CD&V) is also exclusively composed of Catholics, and most of them are still encapsulated in the Catholic pillar. The same holds for the PS, who is recruiting secular party members also encapsulated in the socialist pillar. Only the Liberals have known some success in becoming a cross-pillars party. These results show that dominant parties linked to dominant pillars still function on recruitment within the pillar.

Besides, religion plays also a role on attitudes. Catholic voters and party members are on socioeconomic issues and universalism-ethnocentrism occupying the centre of the political

spectrum. But on values, on societal issues, they remain more conservative than the rest of the population.

The religious cleavage has not faded away. It has declined but its imprints are still visible. The gap observed between the profile of the electorate and of the party members raises questions. Traditional parties still recruit members within their meadow, whereas they attract voters from diverse horizons. This gap can be interpreted as a sign of progressive depillarization of the Belgian society. It might be that this phenomenon first affects the less politically engaged, i.e. voters. Besides, this gap could harm parties in their exercise of their functions of participation and representation (Widfelt 1999), party members constituting an important component in the link between citizens and the State (Poguntke 2002). The difficulties parties face in exercising this key role can disturb the functioning of representative democracy.

Finally, the North-South comparison in terms of sociological profile of party members stresses the gap between the dominant poles in each community. The party memberships of the CD&V and of the PS are diametrically opposed. The overlapping of these divisions on the religious and linguistic cleavages reinforces the centrifugal trends working in the political system(s) in Belgium.

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