Internal and external patchworks: the relevance of religiosity in political positioning for Italian and Brazilian Catholics

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In several Western countries the relevance of traditional social cleavages in explaining citizens' political orientations has been put to test (Elff 2007). Albeit with differing intensity, since long these societies appear characterised by a declining relevance of collective vs. individual aspects in political choice, so much that voting behaviour has become increasingly unpredictable on the basis of citizens' social characteristics (Dalton 2002a,b; Corbetta 2006). The erosion (though not the wholesome disappearance) of structural determinants – an individual thought politically according to what he was socially (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Guadet 1968) - seems to have made individuals freer to express a political choice on the basis of their personal values (Rose e McAllister 1986). With the fading away of structural determinants - among which "class voting" had a prominent position -- individual values and attitudes seem to be able to go beyond their perennial secondary contribution to the explanation of citizens' political preferences. Among emerging values and attitudes, the religious ones draw considerable attention, both in comparing countries, since secularization took on specific characteristics in each country, and to shed light within different nation-states, given that even among people who claim to belong to the same church/denomination individuals express a variety of religious orientations and behaviours. An increasingly individualized, multi-faceted and "liquid" religiosity. Among Catholics, in particular, the image is that of a "light" church peopled by autonomous believers (Pace 2009).

However, if in the Old Continent secularization appears widespread, this situation represents an exception when we look at other contexts. In the Americas a new religious effervescence is apparent (Davie 2002; Hervieu-Léger 2003; Berger, Davie, Fokas 2008). More specifically, in Latin America, class voting has never been so forceful as in Europe (Deegan-Krause 2006). Two different and distant contexts, which deserve a closer consideration of how religious values and attitudes, on the one hand, and socio-structural aspects, on the other, contribute in shaping political preferences.

To explore such complex aspects, our choice has been in the first place to restrict the analysis only to people belonging to a specific religious denomination, that is the Roman Catholic, the most widespread religion both in Europe and in Latin America. Within these macro-areas, the paper focuses on Italy and Brazil: these countries are of particular interest for their national specificities for what concerns religion. Italy is a country where Catholic religion traditionally is the almost exclusive denomination to which citizens belong, although at present a patchwork of diverse practices and beliefs characterizes the Catholic world. Brazil, on there hand, has the largest Catholic population in the world and is marked by an increasing plurality of religious denominations (especially since the 1980s and even more so the 1990s), to the point that Catholics, who exhibit more similar values and attitudes within themselves, have been confronted by a growing external religious patchwork.

Given the difficulty to compare two party systems which are considerably different from one another, the effect of different indicators of religiosity, and secondly of some social characteristics, will be measured with relation to the individuals' positioning along the left-right ideological axis. Although it is often difficult to extend the concepts of left and right beyond the Western context, the Brazilian case is nonetheless characterized by a

significant historical presence of working-class political parties, which contributed to introduce these political polarities within political language and discourse.

In particular, two linear regression models are presented: in the first the positioning of Catholics along the left-right axis is explained in each country by the variables that relate to religious values and attitudes; in the second model socio-demographic variables are included for each country, in order to control the first model.

The main research results show that both models in each country explain only to a limited extent the choice by Catholics between left and right. Nevertheless, it is empirically verified that, in the first model, religious values and attitudes are as a whole important in Italy and that greater religiosity is linked to an increased positioning on the right. This evidence disappears when the socio-demographic variables are introduced, showing some traces, though much faded, of the persistence of the relationship between social structure and ideological positioning. In Brazil, on the contrary, religious attitudes and values in the main are not significant in explaining the positioning on the ideological axis, while only age and residence in the most economically developed areas of the country are among the important socio-demographic variables. This adds evidence to the fact that socio-economic structure is not directly influential in shaping the political preferences of Brazilians.

Italy
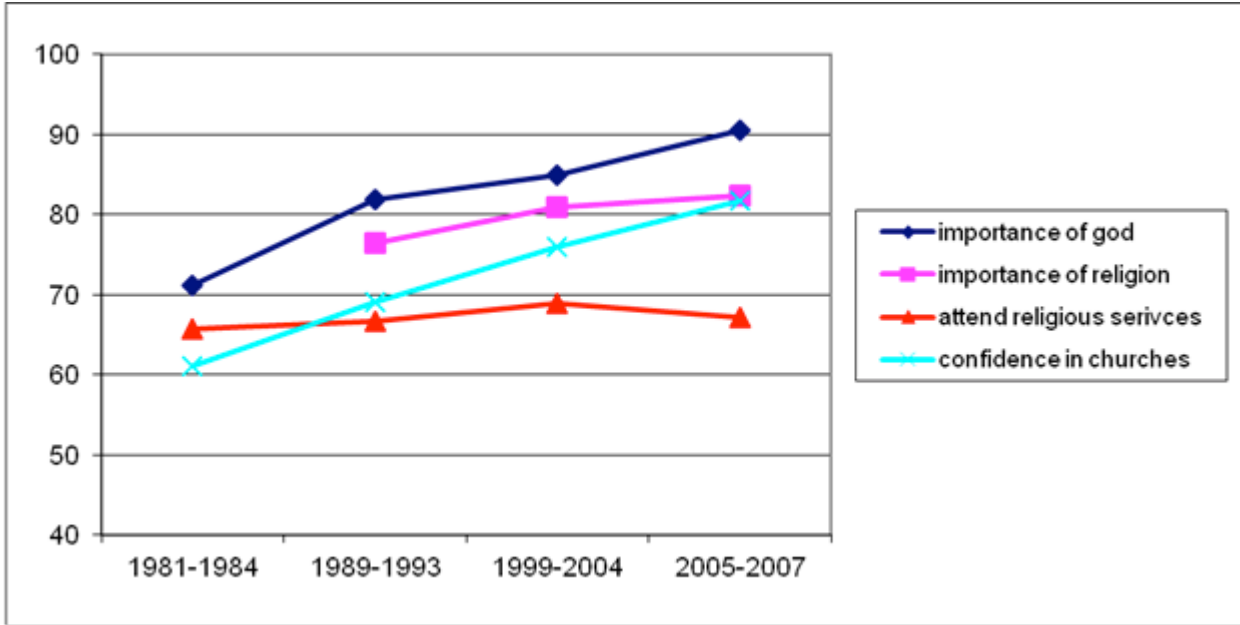
Brazil
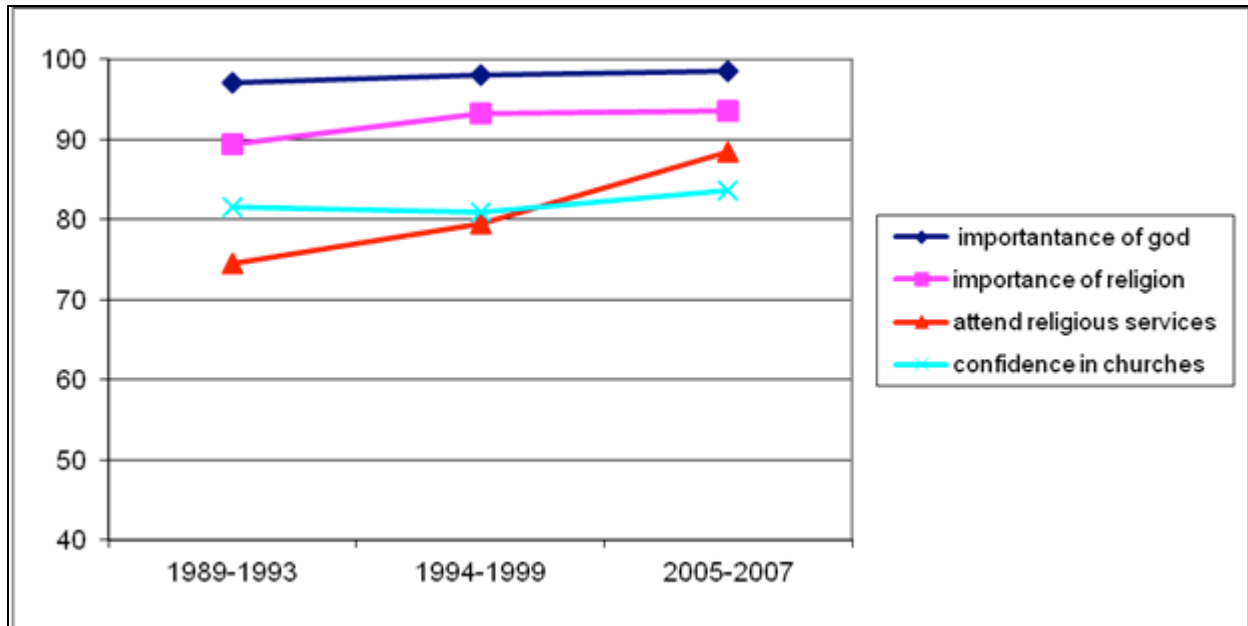
LEFT AND RIGHT: TWO POLES OF A STILL ALIVE CONTINUUM

Two major dichotomies have shown for a long time in Western countries to have a broad significance in structuring citizens' political choices: religious vs. secular and left vs. right (Inglehart 1984; Dalton 2002a) [1]. Right and left are two antithetical and mutually exclusive concepts that have been used for more than two centuries to designate the conflicts of political thought and action. Not only, right and left are a dyad in which the two terms buttress each other, ie there is no right if there is no left and vice versa (Bobbio 1995). Born during the industrial revolution, left and right represent two opposite poles of the conceptualization of conflict with respect to economic inequality, the ownership of the means of production and the desirability, or not, of the market economy (Knutsen 1995). In fact, the main aspect of the right is the supremacy of the market in regulating the economy and society, the search for a weak state and opposition to government intervention. In contrast, the left prevails the notion of an active role of the state to achieve social equality, so that "regulation of markets and private enterprises, societal planning, government redistribution via progressive taxation and welfare reforms are necessary for obtaining important goals such as full employment and social equality "(Knutsen 1995, p. 161).

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[1] For an analysis of left-right materialistic value orientation see: Von Beyme 1985; Lafferty and Knutsen 1984; Inglehart 1984.

In the political universe, left and right thus do not represent only ideologies but opposite policy options. This structuring of political space, a consequence of the industrial revolution, however, has been gradually crossed by single issue politics, the different conformation of the new collective movements and more generally by post-materialistic values in post-industrial societies, which seem to render obsolete the right and left divide. It is not by accident that terms like "old left" and "old right" have been used in political debate to refer to the left-right polarization that showed tight overlapping with the structural characteristics of industrial society, while "new left" and "new right" to emphasize that this overlap has faded, up to the point of getting to class de-alignment (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984). Nevertheless, it is always right and left.

The emergence of post-materialistic values, however, has not erased the relevance of the left-right axis (se for example Dalton 2002a; Elff 2007), since even people with a post-materialistic value orientation is still required to take a position on left and right axis, which is still central to most of Western Democracies. And, not surprisingly, those who define themselves as the new left and the new right consider their political roots of the industrial period as structuring elements of their identity and political positioning (Knutsen 1995). Although the content of the two opposites has partially changed, left and right continue to be persistent categories that structure the political space. For this reason, occupation, social class, education and family income, although with a decreasing correlation over time, confirmed to be influential variables on the positioning along the left-right axis in Western democracies.

But to analyze the political space using the antithetical concepts of left and right in contexts other than Western democracies has always raised particular concerns. Particularly in Latin American countries, including in Brazil, the political space has been often characterized by "floating politicians and floating voters" (Conaghan 1995, p. 450), greatly contributing to destabilizing the possibility of permanent positions, both for parties and individuals, along the left-right axis. The great social heterogeneity of the electoral support enjoyed by the parties (Luna and Zechmeister 2005) and the high level of change of party affiliation on the part of politicians - something called *troca de camiseta* (change of shirt) in Brazil - confer a remarkable fluidity to the party system and make the relevance of ideological polarities fade away. Also Mainwaring and Torcal (2003) find a much weaker relationship in Latin America than in Europe between party choice and positioning on the left-right axis. Nevertheless, positioning oneself on the left rather than on the right is not empty of meaning in Brazil. In fact, Roberts (2002) finds in this country a stronger tradition of "class-voting" - compared to other Latin American countries - due to the presence of a "labour-mobilizing party system", which strengthened during the years of opposition to the military regime. To confirm this, Mainwarding and Torcal (2003) find that in Brazil class vote is statistically significant, and Carreirão (2007) shows empirically how in the 2002 presidential elections positioning oneself towards the left made the voter more inclined to support Lula .

The distribution of, respectively, Italian and Brazilian Catholics along the left-right scale is shown in the figures below. Data from the WVS — four waves for Italy and three for Brazil — display interesting differences between the two countries.

Italian Catholics distribute themselves along the left-right axis in a "normal" fashion in all surveys, showing an increasing concentration around the intermediate values of the scale. This distribution is also basically stable across time.

This feature is present also in the case of Brazilian Catholics, although the distribution takes on specific characteristics: the majority of interviewees are concentrated around value "5", while two significant peaks are detected on the left end (1) and, even more so, on the extreme right end (10) of the scale[2].

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[2] However, it has to be observed that in the last wave of the WVS extreme values have been eroded in favour of central ones.

Italy
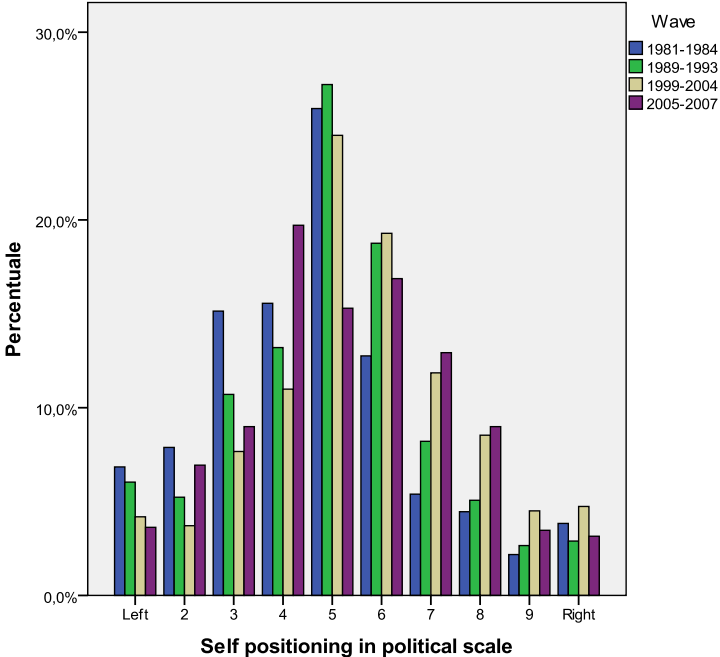
Brazil
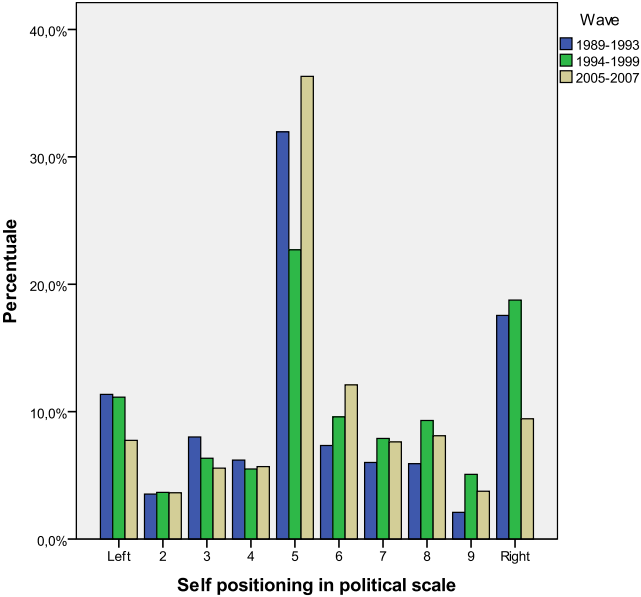
CONSTRUCTION OF THE MODEL: RELIGIOUS VARIABLES AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONTROL VARIABLES

Given the overall persistence of the distribution across time of Catholics along the left-right axis both in Italy and Brazil, the data of the different surveys are aggregated.

Two models of linear regression are presented: the first one takes into account only the religious variables; the second, instead, introduces the most important socio-demographic variables, as control variables of the first model.

Specifically, the first model explains Catholics' self-positioning on the left-right scale using as independent variables the attendance of religious services; the importance attributed to God and to religion in ones' own life; and the confidence in the Church as a moral institution.

The model is formalized as follows [3]:

Model 1: $Y = B_0 + B_1x_1 + B_2x_2 + B_3x_3 + B_4x_4$

Where:

Y =   Catholics' self-positioning on the left-right scale
B_0 =   constant
B_1x_1 =   attendance of religious services [4]
B_2x_2 = confidence in Church [5]
B_3x_3 = how important is God in your life [6]
B_4x_4 = how important is religion in your life [7]

Given the limited variance in religious values and attitudes expressed by Brazilian Catholics (see previous paragraph) — confirming a predominately *external* religious patchwork — the first hypothesis (H1) is that the proposed model has a greater ability to explain the positioning on the left-right axis in the Italian context, where a considerable *internal* patchwork has been observed.

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[3] Among the variables relating to attitudes and religious values in the different waves of the WVS, these, (in addition to tapping fundamnetal dimesnions), are technically the only ones present in several waves in both countries.

[4] The variable was recoded as a dichotomous: value 0 (those who practice less than once per month); value 1 (those who practice at least once a month).

[5] The variable was recoded as dichotomous: value 0 (those who have little or no confidence in the Church); value 1 (those who are fairly or very confident in the Church).

[6] The variable is a ten-point scale.

[7] The variable was recoded as dichotomous: value 0 (those who believe that religion has little or no importance) value 1 (those who believe that religion is fairly or very important).

In line with the literature cited above, moreover, the hypothesis (H2) is put forward that those who attend religious services more frequently place themselves in more rightist positions in Italy, while in Brazil the opposite happens, given the role that Liberation theology has played for a long time in the country. The same relationship — opposite in the two contexts — is hypothesized for the other variables included in the model as well.

Table 1 Explaining self-positioining on the left-right scale. Religious variables

	Italy				Brazil		
	B	Standard Error	Sig.		B	Standard Error	Sig.
How often attend religious services	0,256	0,093	0,006		-0,118	0,149	0,208
Confidence in churches	0,304	0,106	0,004		0,244	0,168	0,145
How important is God in your life	0,079	0,021	0,000		0,102	0,051	0,047
How important is religion	-0,034	0,123	0,781		0,44	0,246	0,074
Constant	4,366	0,152			4,286	0,526	
R square	0,023				0,006		
N	2795				2062		
Model significance			0,000				0,018
Durbin-watson	1,81				1,925		
VIF	no col.				no col.		

Model 1, both for Italian and Brazilian Catholics, is statistically significant and is not invalidated by problems of collinearity and (temporal) correlation among variables. The first hypothesis is verified: the model has a greater explanatory power of the placement on the left-right axis more among Italian than among Brazilian Catholics.

However, it has to be noticed that in both cases the value of R^2 is very low, pointing to the fact that in both contexts religious variables explain little of the dependent variable.

As to the specific hypotheses, for Italy's case a significant relationship has been shown to exist between higher church attendance and, after controlling for the other variables, place themselves in more rightist positions on the ideological axis. On the contrary, this variable (service attendance) does not have any *significant* impact in Brazil, possibly because it is more important the *type* of practiced cult — especially if charismatic or inspired by Liberation theology — rather than attending religious services as such.

In the Italian context having confidence in the Church and deeming God important for one's own life are very significant elements as well to explain Catholics' positioning themselves toward the right end of the spectrum. On the other hand, deeming religion important in one's own life is not significant.

Among Brazilian Catholics, on the contrary, the importance of religion plays a significant role. As it does, albeit to a limited extent, deeming God important in one's own life. Both variables show a positive relationship with the dependent variable: that is, the more the importance of God and of religion in life, the more Catholics place themselves on the right. Confidence in the Church, an institution rather far away from Brazilian land, does not appear to have a significant effect (after controlling for other variables).

The next step is to test the capacity of religious variables to explain Catholic political-ideological positioning in the two settings. Introducing those socio-demographic variables which have shown to be able to better explain individual propensity toward the two ideological polarities does this: occupation, education, gender, income, subjective social class, and geographical location [8].

The model is formalized as follows [9]:

Model 2: $Y = B_0 +$ variables in Model 1 +

Where:

Y = Catholics' self-positioning on the left-right scale
$B_0 =$ constant
$B_5 X_5 =$ non manual work (reference dummy: executive work)
$B_6 X_6 =$ manual work (reference dummy: executive work)
$B_7 X_7 =$ middle education (reference dummy: lower education)

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[8] In Italy the North is more developed economically than the center and south, while in Brazil, by contrast, the areas of south-east and south are the more developed parts of the country.

[9] The number of cases decreases both in Italy and in Brazil, compared to the first model, because: in Italy the variable "education" has been registered only in the last two waves (on which the analysis is developed); in Brazil on the other hand the variable " subjective social class ", traditionally important for positioning on the left-right axis at least in Europe, has not been registered in the 1989-1993 wave. Therefore, also for the Brazilian case analyzes are carried out on the two most recent waves (1994-1999 and 2005-2007).

$B_8 X_8$ = higher education (reference dummy: lower education)

$B_9 X_9$ = male

$B_9 X_9$ = age

$B_{10} X_{10}$ = for Italy: Centre (reference dummy: North)

$B_{11} X_{11}$ = for Italy: South (reference dummy: North)

$B_{12} X_{12}$ = for Brazil: Southeast

$B_{13} X_{13}$ = income scale [10]

$B_{14} X_{14}$ = subjective social class[11]

Considering that – as seen before – the literature maintains that the relationship between social structural variables and self-positioning on the left-right scale is much more volatile and less significant in Latin America than in Western Europe, the general hypothesis is that introducing socio-demographic factors in the model improves the power to explain the dependent variable more in Italy than in Brazil.

In both countries it is expected that a manual job, a low level of income and subjective social class push individuals towards more leftist positions on the scale. On the other hand, ceteris paribus, living in the economically most developed areas drives individuals towards rightist positions.

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[10] As defined in the WVS, this is a ten-point scale.

[11] As defined in the WVS, this is a five-categories scale.

Table2 Explaining self-positioining on the left-right scale. Religious and socio-demographic variables

	Italy			Brazil		
	B	Standard Error	Sig.	B	Standard Error	Sig.
How often attend religious services	0,194	0,154	0,207	-0,422	0,22	0,056
Confidence in churches	-0,07	0,178	0,693	0,179	0,221	0,42
How important is God	0,076	0,034	0,025	0,073	0,066	0,268
How important is religion	-0,048	0,201	0,812	0,088	0,358	0,806
Non manual work	-0,332	0,164	0,043	-0,09	0,253	0,724
Manual work	-0,424	0,196	0,03	0,016	0,238	0,946
Higher education	-0,334	0,223	-0,069	-0,277	0,273	0,311
Middle education	0,212	0,177	0,23	-0,291	0,201	0,149
Male	0,258	0,131	0,05	0,097	0,166	0,562
Dummy Centre	-0,282	0,159	0,076			
Dummy South	-0,295	0,153	0,054			
South-East/South				-0,598	0,196	0,002
Income scale	-0,006	0,019	0,736	-0,007	0,042	0,862
Subjective social class	0,045	0,02	0,026	0,089	0,087	0,306
Age	0,004	0,005	0,346	0,022	0,006	0
Constant	4,804	0,415		4,941	0,887	0
R square	0,035			0,033		
Sig. model.			0,001			0,001
Durbin-watson	1,879			1,941		
ViF	No col.			No col.		
N	1038			1058		

Data analysis shows that the explanatory power of Model 2 also remains very low, and it has a greater increase in Brazil, contrary to what assumed previously. It should however be noted that the increase is very limited in both cases

With respect to the previous model it can be seen that for Italian Catholics the only religious variable which remains significant, once the socio-demographic controls are included, is the importance of God in life: the more a person considers God important, the more it fits into the rightist pole along the ideological axis.

In Italy education is not a discriminant variable in placing oneself on the left rather than on the right, or closer to or away from these two poles, while almost all socio-economic variables are significant, contrary to what happens in Brazil. This shows that perhaps the Italian social structure might still retain some degree of influence in choosing between left and right. In particular, self-perceived social class is fully significant and, as in the literature, the higher the social class of the Catholics interviewed in Italy the more they tend to move to the right. Not secondary is the fact that those who have a manual or non-manual job, compared to those who hold an executive one, are less likely to place themselves on the right.

Other conditions being equal, even the areas of residence of respondents show timid significance. In fact, living in the Centre or in the South, rather than in the North of the country, decreases the likelihood for Italian Catholics to move to the right of the ideological axis.

In contrast, in Brazil living in more economically developed regions, controlling for other variables is very significant and lowers the probability to move toward the rightist pole. The socio-economic variables are not significant, reflecting a persistent and rooted mismatch between social structure and political ideology. On the other hand, it is rather interesting to observe that age is a very significant variable, so much that the higher it is the more Catholics place themselves on rightist positions. Young people therefore, other things being equal, are more progressive in political-ideological terms.

On the whole, the religious variables are not significant in explaining the overall ideological position of Catholics in Brazil, except for attendance at worship. This variable was not significant in Model 1, after controlling for other variables, shows a modest significance. It seems that those who attend mass at least once a month are less likely to place themselves in conservative positions than those who do not attend. Perhaps this reflects some inspiration from Liberation theology, but the data do not allow to confirm it fully.

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