**Religions and Presidential Elections in the United States**

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**Conclusions  
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Paradoxes

Several paradoxes and changes were pointed out by the presenters :

1) Religion is not prominent in these elections. It is almost invisible and there is no obvious “God talk.” This past summer in the *Washington* *Post* and other papers, such as *New York Times*, there was more about the burkini in France than about religion in the US presidential election.

2) Another paradox has to do with inversed patterns. The Democratic candidate is a religious, practicing Methodist, whereas the Republican candidate has been, since the beginning of the campaign, perceived by voters as the least religious candidate, as the Pew research Center has shown. Hence, despite Donal Trump’s choice of Mike Pence as his vice presidential running mate, religion seems to be, a few weeks before election day, on the side of the Democratic candidate, a fact which concurs with Blandine Chélini-Pont’s suggestion that there may be an emerging new alliance between religious forces and the Democratic Party.

3) As emphasized by Mokhtar Ben Barka, the evangelical support of Trump has surprised commentators. It is indeed intriguing that white evangelicals should support a candidate with such a personal background, namely three divorces, little knowledge of, or concern for, religious matters, and even, in some cases, no respect for a particular denomination.

**Changes in American demographics and electoral patterns**

These paradoxes reveal a number of ongoing changes concerning American demographics, electoral patterns, the nature of evangelicalism, the future of the religious right, and more broadly, the complex relationship between politics and religion, as well as the processes of politisation and religionisation.

Evangelicals, who make up a very diverse constituency, are no longer what they used to be. Before the 2008 election, this diversity already surprised commentators. In 2007, in an article published in the *New York Review of Books*, entitled “The Evangelical Surprise,” Frances FitzGerald distinguished between evangelical traditionalits, centrists and modernists, the latter promoting social justice, and fighting climate change, which they said was human made. As the journalist put it, “During the past two years, a half-dozen prominent evangelicals have published books denouncing the religious right for what they said was its equation of morality with sexual morality, its aggressive intolerance, its confusion of church and state, and its unholy quest for political power.” Jim Wallis was an example, Gregory Boyd and Dr. Joel Hunter were others. It can be argued that evangelicals are playing a role in the current decline of the religious right. The fact that the Democratic candidate is a woman however may be considered central to the steady support of Donald Trump among white evangelicals.

The changes have to do also with the increasing diversity of the electorate, which several papers underlined, a diversity due to immigration, but also to processes of conversion, religious switching, and secularization.

It is hence difficult, even probably impossible to talk about a Catholic vote. Gerald Fogarty described the way the socio-demographic characteristics changed in the first half of the twentieth century, leading to more privacy in religious matters and a lesser sense of community. That partly explains the way Catholics vote today, and why they are divided between the two major parties. As pointed out by Douglas W. Kmiec, however,“*Catholics have been on all winning sides in the five past elections*.“

As suggested by Laura Hobson Faure, it is also becoming more difficult to talk about a Jewish vote despite the social pressure which weighs on Jews in term of voting behavior—to be Jewish is to be liberal. The Jewish population in the United States is changing. A few years ago, a Pew survey underlined the anxiety produced by the changes. There are more secular Jews, there are “half Jews,” there are also more orthodox Jews. The transformations are a matter of concern for the Jewish community in the United States, including the increasing number of orthodox jews, which may mean that more Jews now favor the Republican party.

Regarding Muslims, Dominique Cadinot argued that the idea of a Muslim vote was a political construct. He insisted on the diversity among Muslims. Among American Muslims, there are many African-Americans, people from a variety of countries—East Asia, the Middle East, Africa—and also converts.

Obviously, overlapping, or intersectionality has to be taken into account. It is difficult to identify a consistent Latino vote, because Latinos make up a diverse constituency too. We tend to identify Latinos to Catholics, because most Latinos come from Mexico, but this identification is no always relevant. A lot of Latinos convert once they have settled in the United States, or drop from the Catholic church. As Olivier Richomme pointed out, although a majority of Latinos tend to vote for Democratic candidates, what is important to Latinos is that the candidates are Latinos.

Politics, religion, and secularization

What the symposium revealed clearly is that, as Vincent Michelot put it, “*Voters do not base their votes on religious values exclusively*.” It seems that there is a growing disconnect between religious choices and voting behavior, and that it has become more difficult to associate religious affiliations and voting patterns. The Catholics are a good example of that, as Mark Rozell and Douglas Kmiec underlined.

The symposium also showed that American society was becoming more secular, and confirmed the attachment of the American people to the separation of Church and State, as defined in the First Amendment to the Constitution. One reason for the demise of the religious right is the rejection by conservative American voters of too close a link between religion and politics.

The symposium raised interesting questions about the relation between religion and politics. Marie Gayte told us about the increasing involvement of bishops in politics, despite the current disconnect between Catholic voters and the Church. The symposium confirmed, in Jeremy Gunn’s terms, that “*politics ends up controlling religion*,” a process which is one of the effects of secularization.

The symposium also provided some insight into differences between Catholics and Protestants as to the ways both groups relate to politics. It seems that we can speak of a form of polarisation. Carter Charles spoke about the Catholic/Mormon alliance against Trump, and Neil Young remarked that some Protestants would not join a particular anti-abortion organization because they did not want to be associated with Catholics. It may well be that the attraction to Catholicism, which Blandine Chélini Pont highlighted, has something to do with the somewhat clearer line Catholics draw between Church and State today, at least in the United States. Mark Rozell pointed out that the Catholic church hierarchy was reluctant to offer signals, and when it did Catholics ignored them.

**Between the lines**

It is interesting that no one spoke about the “Nones,” although 20% of Americans say they do not identify with any religious group. A Pew survey which was published this past summer showed that whereas evangelicals supported Trump, most nones backed Hillary Clinton. The fluidity of religious affiliations and religious switching must be taken into account when considering the relationship between religiosity and voting behavior.

More probably could have been said about civil religion, since it seems that civil religion is showing up again. As pointed out by Blandine Chelini-Pont, Barack Obama has “reinjected” some civil religion into political discourse. Robert Bellah’s 1967 article triggered a heated debate when it came out, with scholars saying that there was not such a thing as civil religion, and others saying that there was. Bellah defined civil religion as a set of symbols, beliefs, rituals, that cemented the nation, and emerged in times of crisis. Our times are times of crisis.

Moreover, two important themes have not been addressed, which is somewhat perplexing given their relevance to all of us, namely the future of our planet and the future of race relations in the United States. The question of the impact of creationism on environmental concerns could have been raised, as well as the repercussions of Black Lives Matter on the campaign and voting intentions.

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