

## **RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS IN LOMBARDY: VALUES AND POLITICAL CHOICES<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the relationship between religious and political involvement in members of Catholic associations today in the northern Italian Region of Lombardy, which in last decades appeared to anticipate Italian political changes. Right through history religion has been intensely politicized in Italy, with religious associations always playing a prominent social/political role. This study draws on material from an original survey to focus on the associations themselves and their membership in order to flesh out their character and political orientation. It will then go on to use its findings to test the consistency of a hypothesis presuming a growing internal heterogeneity in electoral behaviour.

**Key words:** electoral behaviour, religious associations, Italian politics, Lombardy

### **Falls in church attendance and upholding religious values**

Religion in Italy has always been highly politicized, and the party system in the First Republic was in fact built up with explicit references to the existing religious cleavage. The network of religious associations was an important political actor with a high capacity for mobilization, in a role which is becoming increasingly incisive in the changing Italy of today (and abroad - see for instance Jevtic 2002, 2007 and 2011 on the relationships between religion and politics). Even though some scholars focused on religious associations political orientation (e.g. Marzano 1997; Contin 1992; Rusconi and Saraceno 1970), there is a lack of extensive quantitative studies on the electoral preferences

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2 The paper is based on a research project carried out in 2006 by PolisLombardia (University of Milan-Bicocca). It included a survey addressed to active association members in Lombardy and a telephone survey addressed to Lombardy population (funded by Coordinamento regionale dei Centri Servizi per il Volontariato della Lombardia). The research design followed on from a previous research (1992), made by IREF (Istituto di Ricerche Educative e Formative).

of religious associations members. Moreover, the social basis of the parties is now dwindling, and Catholicism itself is becoming a political instrument of unification based on values, so much so that both political debates and the literature often treat the Catholic vote as one. Lombardy is considered as a forerunner of Italian political trends (Biorcio 2001): basing on original survey data, this paper offers an overview of the growing electoral heterogeneity of religious associations, in order to argue for further investigation.

Quite a few studies highlight a falling level of worship all over Europe, with the rate of churchgoers progressively declining since the fifties (Inglehart and Norris 2004). Secularization theorists maintain in fact that there is an irreversible decline of religion in the European societies of today, and offer empirical evidence of the general decrease in worship as well as behaviour patterns distancing from religious morality (see Beckford and Demerath III 2007). Other scholars argue that contemporary religions cannot be reduced to traditional forms of worship alone, and underline that a spiritual dimension has been gaining strength in the last few decades (Hervieu-Léger 1999; Dobbelaere 1999; Wuthnow 1998; Davie 1994; for Italy, see Garelli, Guizzardi & Pace 2003). Indeed, they take into consideration the increase in non-regular churchgoers and other indicators of religiosity, plus the changing role of religion in contemporary societies as indirect indicators of a growing spiritual dimension. In the literature, these phenomena are known collectively as forms of non-traditional faith (see Hervieu-Léger 1999), a category that includes those who judge religion important in everyday life and uphold religious values and involvement. At the same time, they do not perceive church and clergy as the only intermediaries with the sacred, but promote a more individualized relation with religion<sup>3</sup>. All in all, it appears that although traditional indicators of religiosity record a decline, religion still plays an important role at both individual and public levels.

From a secularization perspective, scholars analyze the consistency of the 'religious cleavage' in contemporary European society and explore whether religious attitudes can still be considered indicators of political orientations (see Knutsen 2004). In some countries a direct relation emerges, while others reveal a more complex situation (Olson 2007). As is well known, the political opportunity structure influences the relations between religiosity and electoral behaviour.

In Italy Catholic church attendance and the vote proved to be closely linked, allowing predictions on electoral behaviours based on worship, during the First Republic 1948-1992 (see Ceccarini and Diamanti 2007; Segatti 1999).

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3 Scholars have been increasingly questioning the role of religion in pre-modern societies as it is traditionally framed, criticising, for example, the idea of an "Age of faith" as a myth (see for instance Ellison and Sherkat, 1999). Given the complex and multidimensional nature of the secularization debate, we shall be discussing here only the aspects related to the individual dimension of faith.

After the collapse of the Christian Democrats, who had always won the majority of regular churchgoers' preferences, the link was more tenuous. Churchgoers' votes were dispersed (Biorcio et al. 2008; Maraffi 2007; Segatti and Brunelli 2010) and since then, no matter their efforts no political party has yet been able to unify the diaspora (as scholars define it, see Marzano 1997). In spite of the differences in electoral behaviour and church going, however, Catholics have a common attitude towards values and ethical issues, which sometimes turns into a unified political orientation, especially when mobilized by political leaders (Biorcio et al. 2008; Segatti and Vezzoni 2008).

What now follows is a brief description of trends in church attendance and commitment to civic/religious associations in Italy, which will then lead on to a portrait of active members of religious associations and an inquiry into the interconnections between political and religious attitudes, in order to test the hypothesis of a growing internal heterogeneity in the electoral behaviour of religious associations members.

### **The slight fall in worship in Italy**

Since the fifties, there has been in Italy a gradual drop in regular (at least once a week) church attendance (Biorcio et al. 2008; Pisati 2000). At the same time, there has been an increase in both non-regular churchgoing and non-attendance. Between 1993 and 2007, regular churchgoing fell from 39 to 34 per cent, whereas non-attendance went up from 14 to 19 per cent (data Istat-Multiscopo; the figures refer to Catholicism, the most widespread religious group in Italy). While in other European countries the number of non-regular churchgoers is on the increase, the figure remains steady in Italy, and the rate of regular churchgoers is still one of the highest in Europe. According to the European Value Survey, at the end of the twentieth century only Slovakia, Poland and Ireland had higher regular church-going rates. These figures suggest that in Italy Catholics have a traditional attitude towards worship (the so-called religion-within-the-Church behaviour, see Cipriani 2003), and that individualized forms of believing as *bricolage* or *religion à la carte* (Hervieu-Léger 1999; Wuthnow 1998) are less present than elsewhere in Europe. Traditional religion has indeed deep roots in Italy, to the point of helping shape the culture. It is indeed very widespread, and reaches down into popular culture (Cipriani 1986 and 2003). Some forms of popular religiosity are still alive and common, indeed, especially in the southern regions (Nesti 2006). At the same time, there are charismatic movements and calls to Catholic awakening both as hybridizations within the traditional clergy, and as autonomous groups developing close to the Catholic church (Marzano 2009; Martelli 1990). However, local level trends of church attendance show several conspicuous differences (see Diotallevi 1999).

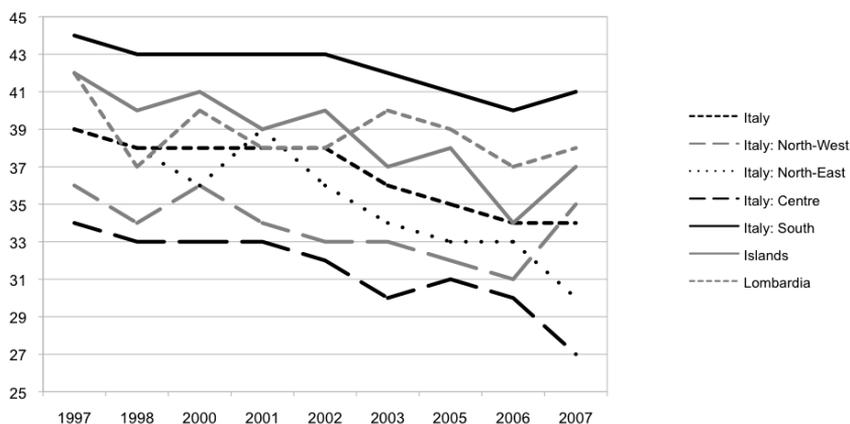


Fig.1: Trend of regular church attendance in Italy (Istat-Multiscopo 1997-2007).

The graph shows the 1997-2007 trends for regular Church attendance in Italy by macro-regions. As it can be seen, at a national level regular worship is slightly but steadily on the wane. Among the macro-regions (Southern Italy, the Centre, North-East, North-West and Islands), regular attendance deviates up to 7 per cent from the national average. This is the case of both Southern and Central Italy, which record a 14 per cent difference. In the former, the regular Church-attendance rate is higher than the national average, despite being on the decline. In the Centre (the line at the bottom), where Communist party was deeply rooted, the regular church going rate is the lowest, and further declining – faster than elsewhere. The case of the North-East is quite different. A heterogeneous area, composed of regions featuring a dense Catholic network, it also includes Emilia Romagna, where the Communist party used to obtain a very high electoral consensus. The high rate of regular church attendance recorded at the end of the nineties fell under the national average in the time span of a decade. Indeed, between 1997 and 2007 the regular church going rate fell by as much as 9 per cent. Differently, the North-West reports a slight decrease until 2003, followed by a steady growth of regular church-going, and in Lombardy alone, signals a potential inversion of the declining trend. Thus, the national average conceals several differences, with decreasing and increasing trends of regular church-going in the various regions.

There is no difference either in the composition of church-attenders. Research carried out since the fifties in various territories records no change in who goes to church. The highest rate of regular attendance is among women, the very young and the over 65's. Those who belong to the lowest or highest income/education levels are more likely to be regular church-goers than those with medium-incomes and medium-education (Martelli, 1990: 325). The 1997

and 2007 Istat-Multiscopo data record no noteworthy variation in the composition of congregations.

It can be concluded, therefore, that between 1997 and 2007 regular church-attendance in Italy shows a slight but steady decline, with no changes in the composition of worshippers. There are some differences however in the macro-regions: on the whole, regular church-attendance is on the wane in Italy, apart from the North-West, where there is some evidence of an increase.

### **The relation between religion and civic engagement**

Between 1997 and 2007 the Italian population involved in civic associations was stable in number. As indicated in international literature (De Graaf & Ruiters 2006; Lam 2002; Becker & Dhingra 2001; Wilson & Janoski 1995), regular churchgoers showed a high rate of participation, and were mainly involved in volunteering associations. Indeed, in both 1997 and 2007 this was their most popular choice. Though having a high rate of multiple affiliation, fewer opted for associations dealing with culture, leisure or environment, peace and rights.

Religion-based volunteer groups are mainly confessional (that is, they are formally connected with the church structure). On the increase since the seventies, they have been gaining in importance over the last few decades (see also Martelli 1990). Indeed, in the late eighties a radical reform of the welfare system took place, giving a new role for a wide range of non-profit organisations, which have been gradually included into the welfare state (devolution, cfr. Gori 2005). The Italian state is, in fact, traditionally weak in the area of civil society, its role taken over by many volunteer associations furnishing social services and leisure activities.

The relation between church going and civic involvement is in fact very important. Confessional organisations were reorganized back in the 1920s, when Pope Pio XI gave a formal structure to a wide range of religious organisations, and focused particularly on the pivotal role of Catholic Action (Verucci 1999). The organisations later diversified, forming a wide range with radical differences in terms of devotional practices and activities (Diotallevi 2002, Favale 1991). This dense and widespread network of associations, organized in terms of age (the Catholic Action), jobs (the Catholic Unions), or committed to specific fields of action (poverty, drink/drugs or immigration, etc), was originally seen as an important point of reference for collective action and building community ties.

As mentioned, the Catholic network was a political resource for the Christian Democrats during the First Republic, even if their relations were always full of tensions and deceptions on both sides (Contin 1992; Scoppola 2006; Marzano 1997). It was an instrument on the one hand for getting votes, on the other for socialising, with leaders moving frequently between associations and the party. Within Catholic civic involvement associations there has always

been a high degree of internal differences. It can be seen particularly in the mobilisations of the sixties and the Vatican Council II (1962-1965), which made deep changes to the Catholic world, partly fostering a modernisation of religious practices and culture. Vatican Council II started off a process of renewal within Catholicism concerning clergy involvement within society, the everyday life of believers and the status of the laity. The consequences were soon to be seen in Catholic associations, as for example in lay involvement in religious activities and organisations (Garelli 2006).

Among Catholic associations, political cleavages emerged more sharply and gave birth to different kinds of spiritual, social and political engagement (Favale 1991; Marzano 1997; Rusconi and Saraceno 1970). Highly politicised religious groups, more or less connected to the Marxist cultural milieu, sprang up and promoted a renewal of Christian practices and culture, lead by clergy sometimes in open conflict with the church itself (Tosi and Vitale 2009). At the same time informal communities and new confessional movements were started off, like Communion and Liberation, Opus Dei, the Focolare Movement and the Neocatechumenal Way.

The political orientation of the Catholic Church and its forms of action in modern society were at times put into doubt. Nevertheless, though the years passed, voting for the Christian Democrats was not seriously questioned until their 1992 collapse (Ceccarini and Diamanti 2007; Maraffi 2007). In the Second Republic, Catholicism has revealed a wide range of less easily traceable attitudes to the political changes.

Catholic commitment within Italian society takes the following forms: spiritual groups and movements; associations addressing specific social groups or focused on specific activities; political-religious groups; volunteer work<sup>4</sup>. Most of these groups have some connection with the clergy, even when they are formally autonomous. But they have huge differences in terms of practices and aims (Favale 1991; Marzano 2008; Garelli 2006). Some, like the outgoing Communion and Liberation, whose heartland lies in Lombardy, promote a religious community life embracing the spiritual and emotional, private and professional. More inward-looking groups, such as Catholic Action, are focused on a spiritual dimension. Finally, it is important to underline that at the local level priests play an important role in shaping parishes activities, either focusing on traditional church services or acting as reference points for religious groups and promoting civic engagement. A recent research points out territorial differences. While on the whole priests are especially concerned with families and the problems of the young, in the North-West they promote an 'environment parish style', reaching beyond the boundaries of their parishes (Bressan 2003), in a pastoral style which affects the civic commitment of their congregations (Becker and Dhingra 2001).

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4 Garelli (1991) and Marzano (1996) number nine areas of catholic groups/movements, while Pace (1988) accounts for four.

Because of the widespread and historically important network of religion-based associations, the present research looked into the relation between religion and civic engagement. It employed a logistic regression model in order to estimate the net causal effect of Church attendance. As controlling variables, socio-demographic variables that can affect both Church attendance and civic engagement were included. Namely, it was hypothesised that older women of a lower education level living in the South would be associated positively with Church attendance and negatively with civic engagement. A logistic regression model was then examined that included civic engagement as a dependent variable, religious attendance as an independent variable and socio-demographic variables as controls. The model estimated that in both 1997 and 2007 the odds of being involved in a civic association are significantly higher with churchgoers than non churchgoers. Furthermore, with regard to age, sex, education and origins<sup>5</sup>, regular churchgoers are more likely to be involved in volunteer associations than in leisure, cultural, or 'peace, ecology and rights' associations, in line with international studies (De Graaf and Ruiter 2010 and 2006; Lam 2002; Becker and Dhingra 2001; Wuthnow 1998; Wilson and Janoski 1995).

Church attendance is therefore generally associated quite strongly and positively with high rates of civic engagement, especially in the area of volunteering. The research then wondered whether this relation produces specific profiles within civic associations, especially in Lombardy, given the increase in regular church attendance in the last few years. The next paragraph will consequently deal with the role of religion and religion-based organisations in civic engagement in Lombardy.

### **Religion-based organisations in Lombardy: differences from other associations**

Lombardy records the highest rate of regular church attendance in the North, not far off those reported for the southern regions, which have a reputation for being highly religious. In 2007 it stood at 38 per cent and in the whole of Italy only Campania (45), Puglia (42), Molise (40) and Sicilia (39) recorded higher rates (data Istat-Multiscopo). Lombardy stands out for the way its decline in church-going is lower than elsewhere.

In order to analyse the forms of civic engagement in Lombardy, this paragraph will focus on original data collected in 2009 through a telephone survey (1519 calls to Lombard residents), aimed at highlighting the differences between those involved in civic engagement and non participants. In Lombardy, in 2009, almost the half of the population was involved in some way.

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<sup>5</sup> Multinomial regression model.

Tab. 1 Civic engagement

Civic Engagement	%
Non participants	56
Involvement in religious associations	8
Involvement in secular associations	19
Involvement in both religious and secular associations	17
Total	100

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

With its long tradition in Lombardy, civic engagement has created a dense network, and now records a higher rate of participation than elsewhere in Italy (Biorcio 2001). Between 1997 and 2007 the rate was stable, while political involvement was on the wane. This points to a loss of interest in the political sphere as area of commitment, but not in civic engagement. Furthermore, in the last few years volunteer associations have been growing in number, especially in the field of solidarity, where religion-based associations are mainly present (La Valle 2006 and 2004) with key-roles (Gori 2005). Lombard civic associations have been always known for their pragmatism and market-oriented attitudes (Biorcio 2001). For instance, the networks of Compagnia delle Opere or Communion and Liberation promote a Catholicism that is heedful of economic and business interests.

During the last few years several differences have emerged especially because of the introduction of the subsidiary-system. In allowing associations to play a more important role in the welfare system and to be funded for services provided, competitive processes for resources have been triggered, as has happened in radically diverse welfare systems where competition is present (Scheitle 2009; Marwell 2004). Religious associations have consequently been affected by a huge change in their role and activities, without having a solid coordination or the old backing of the DC. Whatever their difficulties, their role is growing within the context of Lombard public life and civil society.

The involvement of Lombard inhabitants in religious civic engagement is quite high: 25 per cent, with 8 per cent participating in religious associations alone. For 'religious associations' we mean both church-related associations, and formal/informal groups with religion-inspired concerns. Civic engagement of a religious nature is clearly the most popular form in Lombardy.

#### A profile of participants: attitudes and composition

The rate of regular church-goers taking part in religious associations is quite high (70 per cent), more than the triple the rate in secular ones (22), and more than double the rate of those not belonging to any associations (29). The rate of regular church-attendance is 70 per cent among those involved

in both religious and secular associations. Belonging either exclusively to religious associations or to both religious and secular organisations, is therefore a key indicator of the kind of religious practice in civic engagement groups. Those taking part in religious associations alone are recorded as having the same church attendance rate as those belonging to both religious and secular organisations<sup>6</sup>.

Tab. 2 Religion and civic engagement

	Non partici- pants	Inv. in secu- lar associa- tions	Inv. in reli- gious asso- ciations	Involvement in both	Tot.
Never or hardly ever	37	45	3	6	30
A few times in a year	21	20	15	10	19
About once a month	13	13	12	14	13
Almost every week	29	22	70	70	38
Tot./N	(N: 851); 100	(N: 285); 100	(N: 129); 100	(N: 255); 100	(N:1520);100

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

With regard to the socio-demographic composition of members, there are more females than males in religious associations, with men being more involved in other kinds of groups. The elderly, who have a lower participation rate than other age groups, are mainly involved in religious associations. In contrast, the young (18-25), who are more likely to be involved in civic engagement, take part less in religious associations and are mostly likely to belong to secular groups. 30 to 44 year-olds are over-represented in religious associations. On the whole, people with a lower education level are over-represented among non participants or participants in only religious groups. On the contrary, those who have a high or medium level of education are more likely to belong to secular associations or both religious *and* secular associations. It follows that while religious associations mainly consist of elderly women with a low level of education, most members of secular associations are well educated youngsters.

The research then asked whether the socio-demographic differences signal differences in opinions or behaviour patterns, in order to assert whether the religious associations are different from other forms of civic engagement or whether the main differences should be traced out between those involved and those not involved.

According to some scholars, believers' opinions may converge towards some key ethical questions, such as medically assisted procreation, euthanasia (or abortion). Such convergences could, indeed, be manipulated by politicians (Ceccarini and Diamanti 2007; Maraffi 2007), who presume a convergence exists between regular church attendance, values and political preferences and

6 The phenomenon is consistent with spillover effect: regular churchgoers have a higher probability of being involved in both religious and secular civic associations than non churchgoers (De Graafe Ruiter, 2006).

use this to try to win votes. Indeed, church attendance apart, recent data show that values and the importance attributed to religion and belief in the church do affect political preferences (Biorcio et al. 2008).

At this point in the research, we felt it opportune to consider the attitudes of the Lombard population towards some actions openly and famously condemned by the Church, such as divorce and abortion to see what differences exist between members of religious and secular associations.

Tab.3 Values and behaviours

Admissibility of abortion (for self or partner)	Never	Under special circumstances	Always	Tot.
Non Participants	23	66	11	100
Involvement only in secular associations	14	71	15	100
Involvement only in religious associations	<b>49</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>4</b>	100
Involvement in both religious and secular associations	38	59	3	100
Total	26	64	10	100

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

The attitudes of non participants do not diverge from the average: the majority of interviewees accept abortion in special circumstances. Fewer accept abortion than divorce, which is socially deemed more acceptable.

Those involved exclusively in religious associations are more hostile than both those involved only in non religious associations and non participants. 49 per cent of Catholic association members reject abortion under any circumstances, 26 per cent higher than the average. Participants belonging only to secular organisations think quite differently: their acceptance of abortion is higher than the regional average. Those involved in both religious and secular associations have a similar attitude to that of religious association members: on the whole, they are against it.

In terms of attitudes and actions, the profile of religious association members is quite different from those involved in other areas of civic engagement and the non involved. The attitudes and actions of the church goers involved in civic associations are different from those of uninvolved churchgoers.

As regards more general topics, such as politics or public responsibility, religious associations members have their own orientations.

Tab.4 Attitudes towards general topics

	Non partici- pants	Involvement in secular as- sociations	Involvement in religious asso- ciations	Involvement in both religious and secular associations	Tot.
Priority of responsibility towards family	86	76	87	83	84
Immigrants are dangerous for national identity	43	23	40	31	37
Better safe than sorry	70	63	80	62	68
Most people can be trusted	40	53	35	55	44

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

On the whole, the profile of religious association members is similar to that of non participants, but very different from the profile of secular association members. Both religious association members and not participants have high levels of agreement over the statements about safety and family responsibility. Public responsibility seems to be defined in this case as ‘community responsibility’, namely, towards the private sphere. In the same way, those who are involved only in religious associations mostly maintain that immigrants can be a danger for the nation’s identity (which is evidently considered quite important). Collective responsibilities and civic commitment thus, have a ‘proximity’ character. On the contrary, secular association members are generally more confident, prefer public to community commitment, and do not agree that immigrants can be a danger for the nation’s identity. On the whole, this category prioritizes public responsibility towards society in general over the family and the private community.

In the analysis of the relations between civic engagement and collective responsibility, there emerges a need to consider the *culture* and *style* of associations. Group structure affects the relations between members and society: but the kind of influence can be in fact radically diverse (Lichterman 2006; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Moreover, studies focusing on the relations between religious and civic participation underline that the desire for commitment is strictly connected to religious belief, that is, to the role assigned to civic commitment within the faith (Wilson and Janoski 1995). More in general, dimensions of religiosity (worship, prayer, beliefs and values) have different effects on attitudes towards civic engagement (Lam 2002).

Defining values as Catholic or more generally as religious is not an easy undertaking. Some scholars maintain that in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, the secularization process has given rise to a more individual attitude towards religion, so that the sense of belonging to a religious denomination would have little influence on individual behaviour (Pace 2003). Others define this process as a more general change that affects religions on the whole. Faced by the deep changes in contemporary societies, religious leaders have been softening the elements of

doctrine related to specific religious duties and enforcing their support of more general and shared values. Like other institutions, the Catholic Church too is affected by a deep transformation of the forms of authority (Lagroye 2006; Martelli 1990). Therefore while the Church preserves its authority and assumes the role of guardian of values, its declarations indicate moral orientation rather than duty or obligation (Davie 2004). Moreover, in the analysis of the role of religion in Italy today, it must never be forgotten how Italian politics were transformed radically in the nineties, when the collapse of the Christian Democrats broke up the political horizon of many Catholics and set off a general re-configuration of the networks of religious associations.

The differences in values to be found in civic engagement emerge as being linked to more general transformations concerning both the roles of religion and politics.

### Attitudes towards politics

The differences between participants in religious and secular associations are even more evident when considering their attitudes towards politics.

Tab.5 Political self-positioning

	Left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Right	Don't know	Total
Non participants	14	12	7	17	15	35	100
Involvement in secular associations	22	23	6	18	9	22	100
Involvement in religious associations	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	100
Involvement in both religious and secular associations	8	19	11	21	15	26	100
Total	14	15	8	19	14	30	100

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

The first important result is the political distance between religious associations and other civic engagement groups, while the political orientation of non participants is consistent with the regional average. Thus, left and centre-left are over-represented in the participants of secular associations, and, quite symmetrically, centre, centre-right and right record lower percentages. On the contrary, the centre, the centre-right, and the right are over-represented in religious associations. Members of both religious and secular associations have a preference for the centre (including centre-right and centre-left). Therefore, religion-based groups seem to be right (and centre-right) oriented, whereas secular associations side with the left (and centre-left). With those involved in civic engagement, on the whole, the rate of non answering is lower than the average, which

can mean that the civic engagement, and therefore the assumption of some collective responsibility, can make political choices easier.

However, these are general data, related to the majority of religious association members. To indepth the profile of participants and the differences between civic engagement groups and explore differences in the Catholic world, the next paragraph will focus on *active* members of Lombard associations.

### **Activists and the religious sphere: different profiles**

The research sample focuses on some areas of civic engagement, not on the whole sphere. The sample-building process depended on a comparative rationale. It included 172 formal and informal associations and 1,064 surveys of professional and volunteer activists. The research design also included for each association a specific group survey aiming at collecting relevant data (such as the number of members, the year of foundation, the network). The associations sampled included both church-related and independent religious associations: the groups sampled were classified as religious or secular because of their confessional character or because of the explicit reference to religion in their statutes/presentations.

The sample included 29 per cent religious associations, which had mostly developed in the parishes, either informally or as local centres of a national confessional organisation like ACLI ( the Italian Association of Catholic Workers), either promoted by the clergy or founded by groups of church attenders. The activities are mainly at local level (parishes, neighbourhood, city), even if there is also evidence of associations operating at a national /international level (like AGESCI – the Scout organisation - and PIME – the Pontifical Institute for foreign missions).

Religious associations aim on the whole to spread and intensify education, social solidarity, relief for the needy, the defence of life and an international cooperation. Secular associations have partially different objectives with their emphasis on the defence of rights and wider focus (peace, alternative economies...). Furthermore, religious associations sampled are not involved in political activities, like presenting petitions or staging protest campaigns, but are very engaged in activities of informing and enlightening, even though their main group activity is described as providing services. Because of their local activities, religious associations have contact with city councils, but only a few have wider networks reaching other levels of public administration. This is in line with the findings of international analyses, which suggest a growing importance of the local level of politics (see Scheitle 2009; Marwell 2004). As for relations with other groups, religious associations seem to be divided into two areas: the first deploys a dense network of relations with other groups all over the country, whereas the second works with looser relations (Colozzi and Martelli, 1988, defined the configuration of the networks between religious associations as an *archipelago*). On

the whole, almost all Catholic associations are affiliated to a network of relations, at least with the local parish. At a national level, there are networks of formal confessional organisations (like AGESCI and ACLI). Other regional or national networks are the Families Forum, or the network focused on the defence of life (like the Life Movement, against abortion, or the Life and Science Committee – against medically assisted procreation). Some associations are affiliated to the Third Sector Forum, others are involved in the Peace Movement. None of the religious associations here sampled have explicit links or connections with political parties. The networks listed are very different from one another, either in their political orientation or in the kind of activities they promote.

Even though the leaders of the religious associations do not orient members, the question arose in our research whether there are differences within this archipelago, or alternatively the participants share a specific civic culture. Among the interviewees there is a balance in terms of religious participation. The rate of non church goers involved in civic associations (40 per cent) is close to the rate of weekly church-goers (39 per cent). The others are non regular church-goers (with some internal differences). On the whole, the sample is divided into regular church-goers and non church-goers, whereas the rate of non traditional religiosity is lower (this is consistent with international studies, see Lam 2002).

#### The composition of religious associations

Religious associations mainly consist of regular church-goers (76 per cent), while the rate of non church-goers is very low (7). On the contrary, secular associations have a certain rate of regular (22) and non regular church-goers (26), even though they are mostly composed of non church-goers (52). There is a quota of regular churchgoers involved in secular groups (*spillover effect*), concentrating on care giving, family support and fair trading.

A typology of members on the basis of church attendance and field of civic engagement was then constructed.

Tab. 6

Activists	Percentage	Numb.
Regular churchgoers in secular associations	16	240
Regular churchgoers in religious associations	22	330
Non-regular churchgoers in secular associations	18	270
Non-regular churchgoers in religious associations	5	75
Non-churchgoers in secular associations	37	555
Non-churchgoers in religious associations	2	30
Total	100	1500

Source: PolisLombardia Activists Survey (2007/8)

As can be seen, there is a clear link between religious practice and civic engagement: among members, 22 per cent are regular churchgoers involved in religious associations, and 37 per cent are non churchgoers involved in secular associations. Regular churchgoers also participate in secular associations (16 per cent), while non churchgoers rarely join religious groups. This suggests that religious associations are quite homogeneous in terms of members. As for gender and education, the composition is quite balanced, except for non regular churchgoers involved in religious associations. In this case, male participation is double the female one, which means that women involved in religious associations are mainly regular churchgoers. On the contrary, men are involved in religious associations even when they are not regular churchgoers. In line with the findings of the literature, members of religious associations are mainly recruited by relatives or parish members, while members of secular associations are recruited by friends (Wuthnow 1998).

The definition of a group's main activity is quite different in the various categories. On the whole, activists mostly define their associations as volunteering. Regular churchgoers belonging to religious associations also underline the social engagement aspect of what they do. Those who are involved in secular associations, especially non churchgoers, define their activity more as political or civic engagement. Finally, non regular churchgoers, either involved in religious or secular associations, highlight the aspect of service and social solidarity. For regular churchgoers affiliated to religious associations, the most important reason for their engagement is seen as the chance to help others. Civic engagement is mainly perceived as solidarity, as in the teachings of Social Catholicism (Ambrosini 2005; Becker and Dhingra 2005; Wuthnow 1998). Non regular churchgoers express a more general desire for friendship and human contact, while the non churchgoers focus on social, political and public engagement. The religious and secular give quite different reasons for choosing civic engagement.

### Activist attitudes towards politics

The analysis of civic engagement in Lombardy shows some differences between religious and secular associations, especially in terms of political attitudes and actions.

Tab. 7 Interest in Politics

	High interest	Low/No interest	
Non-participants	32	68	100
Involvement in religious associations	19	81	100
Involvement in secular associations	40	60	100
Involvement in both religious and secular associations	32	68	100
Total	32	68	100

Source: Polis Lombardia/CSV (2009).

While non participants have a low interest in politics, in line with the average, there are some differences between religious and secular associations. In the latter interest in politics is 8 per cent higher than the average, while in the former *non* interest is 13 per cent higher than the regional average. Political activities, like taking part in marches and political meetings, signing referenda or demands for the law to be changed, involvement in local political activities and political debates or joining political parties, have different degrees of participation. While with members of secular associations interest in politics goes hand in hand with political activity, participants in religious associations have a lower degree of political activity. Therefore, political and the civic engagement have different meanings for different participants. Religious associations focus specially on care giving in a pragmatic way and their members see themselves as distant from party politics (see also Ambrosini 2005).

A question that arose from the research was whether religious associations could be considered specific areas, different from other civic associations, or whether there are internal differences. It is an important question, especially for analyzing the effects of the Christian Democrats collapse on the relations between politics and Catholic associations.

When considering association members' attitudes towards actions explicitly condemned by the church, the differences between churchgoers and non churchgoers become more evident. The sample does not allow any generalizations, but it can offer some suggestions. Regular churchgoers are more likely to be against homosexuality<sup>7</sup>, divorce and abortion, while the non regular churchgoers are more liberal. As regards abortion, the rate of non admissibility with regular churchgoers is 74 per cent and the rate of those who consider abortion always admissible is only 9 per cent. On the contrary, with non churchgoers, the rate of admissibility is 67 per cent.

A typology of churchgoers was built on the basis of church going and accepting abortion: CERB (Civic Engagement, Religiosity and Beliefs)<sup>8</sup>.

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7 For a discussion on religion and homosexuality see Hunt 2010.

8 Wilson & Janoski (1995) show that in the same religious tradition (they consider Protestantism) differences between conservative/libertarian views are linked to civic engagement in terms of both choice of commitment and the kind of associations.

Tab. 8 C.E.R.B. (Civic Engagment, Religiosity and Beliefs)<sup>9</sup>

Religious Practice	Regular churchgoers	Non regular churchgoers	Non churchgoers
Admissibility of abortion			
Non admissibility of abortion	Traditional 34 % (N: 339)	Non traditional conservatives 12 % (N:122)	Conservative 11 % (N: 105)
Admissibility of abortion	liberal 4 % (N: 44)	Non traditional liberals 9% (N: 85)	Liberal 30 % (N. 293)

Source: PolisLombardia Activists Survey (2007/8)

The majority in the sample are *traditional churchgoers*, who attend church on a weekly basis and have values and attitudes in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church. The area of *liberal churchgoers* covers the few who attend church services regularly without sharing the Church’s condemnation of abortion. A high percentage of non churchgoers consider abortion admissible (*liberal non churchgoers*), while the percentage of *conservative non churchgoers* is lower. The area of *non traditional religiosity* is mainly composed of *non traditional conservatives*, who condemn abortion and a small percentage of *non traditional liberals*.

Religious associations are mainly composed of traditional churchgoers, while non religious associations consist of liberal non churchgoers. Going into depth, and considering the distance from the average, we see that *conservatives* (against abortion) prefer to join religious associations. On the contrary, *liberals* are more involved in secular associations, except for liberal churchgoers who are mainly involved in religious associations, as noted by international studies (Becker and Dhingra 2001; Wilson and Janoski 1995).

Tab.9 C.E.R.B. within associations

	Traditional church goers	Liberal church goers	Non traditional conservatives	Non traditional liberals	Conservative non church goers	Liberal non church goers	Total
Secular associations	39	50	74	85	87	98	70
Religious associations	61	50	26	15	13	2	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PolisLombardia Activists Survey (2007/8)

9 The labels of Liberals and Conservatives are assigned with respect to individual attitudes towards abortion. In tab. 8, these labels are combined with individual religiosity (worship), in order to build a typology. Tab.8 shows both percentages and number of respondents. Then, we consider the typology distribution within associations (tab.9).

The relation between the commitment group and values seems to be really high. We wondered whether it happens also for political attitudes. The members of associations are very interested in politics and quite committed, on the average. The commitment group makes the difference: whatever the church attendance, their different degree of interest in politics depends on their civic engagement. Hence, members of religious associations are less interested than members of secular associations. The rate of political commitment of non churchgoers involved in secular associations is double the political commitment of regular churchgoers involved in religious associations. On the contrary, interest in politics is widespread, except for non churchgoers involved in religious associations, who express rage and diffidence towards politics.

Tab. 10 CERB and politics

	Traditional church goers	Liberal church goers	Non traditional conservatives	Non traditional liberals	Conservative non church goers	Liberal non church goers	Total
Left	25	46	27	52	43	81	47
Centre	60	44	51	37	43	16	41
Right	15	10	22	11	14	3	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: PolisLombardia Activists Survey (2007/8)

In our sample, the interviewees express a preference for the left (47 per cent); the centre is quite widespread too (41), while 12 per cent are on the right. Some differences emerge in the typology. Firstly, liberals are mainly left-oriented, both non churchgoers and non regular churchgoers, while regular churchgoers are mostly centre-oriented. On the contrary, conservatives are mainly centre or right-oriented: regular churchgoers mostly prefer the centre, while non regular churchgoers are nearly double the average on the right.

The outcome suggests that political distances depend on value differences more than church attendance, which is in line with the results of recent studies on the Italian population (Biorcio et al. 2008; Maraffi 2007). The choice of vote is related to beliefs more than to religious practice.

From this perspective, it is interesting to analyze organised voting: while having their internal differences, Catholic associations, considered close to the Christian Democrats until 1992, have had to redefine their political representatives in a system where the local level of politics is gaining in relevance. Religious associations affirm their values at a national level<sup>10</sup> and at the same time

10 Consider, for instance, the 'Family Day', organized by the Forum of Family associations together with other church-related movements in order to promote the value of the traditional family. The mobilization took place for the first time 12 May 2007, against the proposed law on the recognition of homosexual couples.

deal with local political representatives for resources.

On the whole, members of religious associations are mainly centre (54 per cent) or right (16) oriented, while members of non religious associations are mostly left oriented (54). In order to explore internal differences, we isolated religious associations and analyzed the political orientation of their members.

Tab. 11 CERB and associations

	Traditional church goers	Liberal church goers	Non traditional conservatives	Non traditional liberals	Conservative non church goers	Liberal non church goers	Total
Left	23	54	29	70	12	86	30
Centre	59	32	54	20	75	14	54
Right	18	14	18	10	13	0	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Source: PolisLombardia Activists Survey (2007/8)*

Firstly, it emerged that non believers involved in religious associations are mostly centre oriented, higher than traditional believers and conservative non regular churchgoers. On the contrary, liberal non churchgoers involved in religious associations are left oriented, as well as liberal non traditional believers and liberal churchgoers. Even in this case, value preferences affect the political attitudes of members.

This is an important fact for the analysis of Catholic associations and the vote of their members, and confirms our hypothesis of internal differences within catholic associations. Within religious associations, there are some liberal and left oriented groups which differ from those mainly centre or right oriented associations more in line with the church's teaching.

### **Beyond religious involvement: religious associations heterogeneity**

The analysis of the relations between religion and civic engagement leads to some interesting results. First of all, in a contest of a general decline of regular religious worship, Lombardy emerges as the only Northern region where traditional religion maintains an important role in the everyday life of inhabitants. Moreover, the relation between church attendance and civic engagement has always been very close. Regular churchgoers are more likely to be involved in associations than non churchgoers.

Religious associations seem to constitute a specific area within civic engagement, both in terms of composition and in terms of politics and values.

Nevertheless, some differences appear, going to from that Catholic archipelago (Colozzi and Martelli 1988), where the diversity of activity goes hand in hand with political diversity.

This data confirm the hypothesis of a progressive heterogeneity within religious associations in terms of political behaviour. Rates of church attendance are therefore no indication of political orientation. Values and ethics are a more reliable and meaningful indicator of political orientation. As the most recent analyses on civic engagement suggest, the culture of the group affects the attitudes of the individual (Lichterman 2006; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Wilson and Janoski 1995). Catholicism is famously a collective faith, based on testimony and solidarity, so that public commitment and civic engagement have key roles (Lagroye 2006; Perniola 2001). Nevertheless, 'acting religiously' can have several meanings, among both the clergy and the congregation. At least two religious styles can be identified (Lagroye 2006). The first is based on the relevance of tradition and attributes enormous importance to church attendance and traditional values and to the mediatory role of priests between the profane and the sacred. The second is closer to civic engagement and its concern with the needy both within and outside the community. In this case, priests are mainly a point of reference for the community (similarities can be found with Protestantism in the US, see Wilson and Janoski 1995).

Religious associations closer to the first style mainly focus on their community, in family support associations or parish youth centres and express a right-wing political orientation. Those of the second style promote social responsibility and focus on the broader society are left-oriented<sup>11</sup>. On the whole, the latter have a long history of exchange and relations with leftist movements (Tosi and Vitale 2009).

In the last few decades religious associations have been redefining their political role, which is sometimes not in line with Church thought. A deep dissatisfaction towards the political sphere has recently emerged, causing a re-configuration of role of religious associations within the political field. This indeed, could be a fruitful field of study. After the collapse of the DC, its acolytes were dispersed through the right, left and centre, and likewise the religious associations. Moreover, we should analyse the role of specific associations in Lombardy, such as Communion and Liberation, which have an important role in shaping the relationship between religion and local politics. In general, religious associations divide between a neo-collateralism close to the political lobbies, and advocacy activities focusing on pragmatic relations with local politics. The hypothesis of a growing internal heterogeneity in religious associations has been confirmed by this study, noting also that while these different religious styles sometimes blur, in other cases they trigger distancing and therefore reconfigurations in the wide catholic archipelago.

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11 On the influence of religious culture on associations structure and electoral behavior, see also Liu et al. 2009.

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**Алберта Гиорги**

**РЕЛИГИОЗНЕ АСОЦИЈАЦИЈЕ У ЛОМБАРДИЈИ:  
ВРЕДНОСТИ И ПОЛИТИЧКИ ИЗБОР**

**Резиме**

Циљ овог рада јесте да анализира односе између религиозног и политиког учешћа чланова католичких асоцијација данас у северној Италији и региону Ломбардија, који у последњим деценијама представља политичке промене у Италији. Кроз историју религија је била интензивно политизирана у Италији, са религиозним асоцијацијама која су одувек играле важну друштвено/политичку улогу. Ова студија извлачи закључке из оригиналног истраживања које се фокусира на ове асоцијације и њихово чланство са циљем да укаже на њихов карактер и политичку оријентацију. Онда ће наставити са тестирањем тачности хипотезе која претпоставља увећавање унутрашње хетерогености у изборном понашању.

**Кључне речи:** изборно понашање, религиозне асоцијације, Италијанска политика, Ломбардија

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