

# Religious Salience and Electoral Behaviour at the Voter Level. A Systematic Review of the Literature.

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## Abstract:

This poster presents the results of a systematic review of the literature on religious salience and electoral behaviour at the voter level. We seek to answer two research questions: 1) which factors significantly affect the probability that a study in our sample includes a measure of religious salience? 2) Which factors significantly affect the kind of effect (of religious salience on electoral behaviour) being reported? Our goals are then to (a) identify the distinguishing features of those studies that are very likely to resort to religious salience when explaining electoral behaviour, and (b) to give a summary, and an explanation of the variation in the kind of effect being reported.

For this purpose, we have assembled a sample of 244 academic articles published between 1956 and 2012; in French or English; comprising at least one measure of religion; and focusing either on partisan choice or electoral participation at the voter level.

We find that authors' discipline, being an Americanist, the target population, and the number of religious dimensions significantly affect the probability that a study contains a measure of religious salience.

Next, we find that the type of electoral behaviour, the kind of religious salience measure, the autonomy of the measure, and its theoretical role all contribute to account for the type of effect (of religious salience on electoral behaviour) that is reported.

We identify avenues for future research, e.g. in linking individual religiosity to electoral context, and conclude on how to make the best use of measures of religious salience.

# INTRODUCTION

❖ This is a systematic review of literature on the impact of religious salience (the importance of religion in a respondent's life) on individual electoral behaviour.

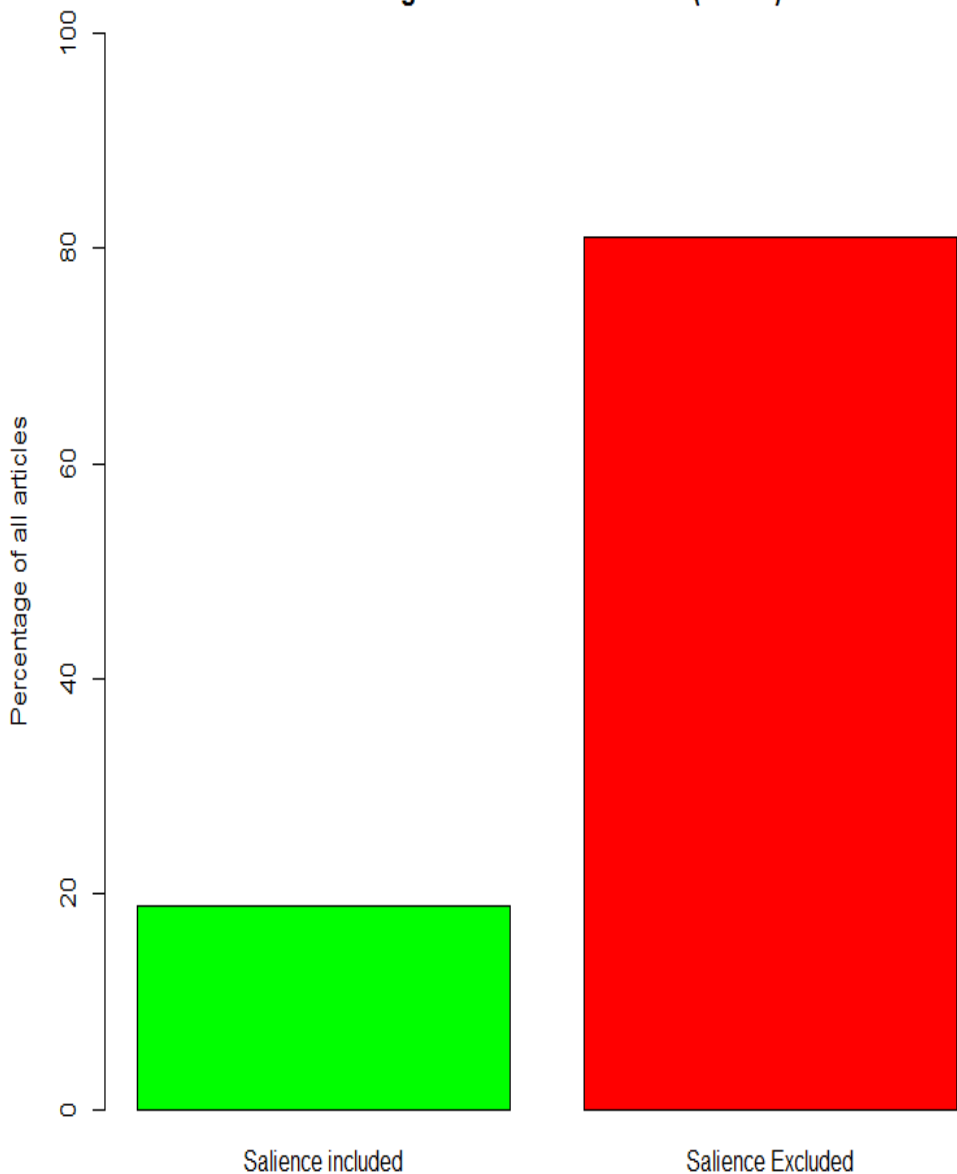
❖ Authors such as Kent Greenwalt (1987: 34) consider that when religion is very important in a citizen's life, then it most likely impacts his/her electoral behaviour. Other authors such as Karel Dobbelaere (1999: 241-242) consider that citizens usually "compartmentalize." In other words, even when a respondent declares that religion is very important in his /her life, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that it will have any consequence on his /her electoral behaviour.

❖ Our systematic review of literature has two goals (two dependent variables)

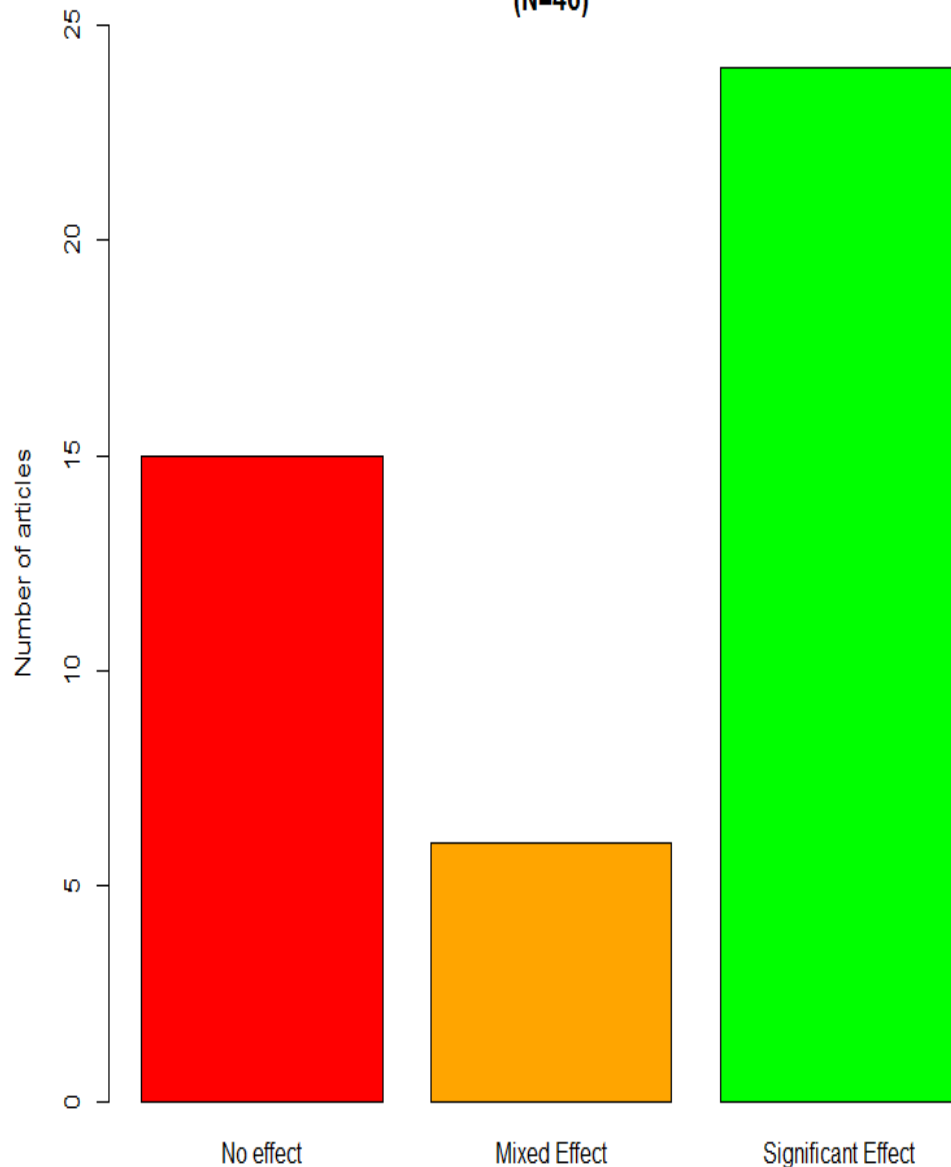
- **Explain the variation in the probability that an academic article within our database contains a measure of religious salience**
- **Summarize and comment on the effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour as it is reported by the literature.**

❖ Graphs 1 & 2 (see next page) show univariate distribution of our two dependent variables

**Graph 1 – Distribution (percentage) of reviewed articles given presence or absence of a religious salience measure (N=244)**



**Graph 2 – Frequency distribution of reviewed articles by category of reported effect (of religious salience on electoral behaviour) (N=46)**



# Hypotheses, Data & Methods

**Analysis 1:** Explaining the probability that a study contains a measure of religious salience (“general salience” or “religious relevance” [Guth & Green, 1993: 158])

Hypotheses	Detail
<i>Time</i>	<b>H1:</b> recent studies are more likely to comprise a measure of self-reported religious salience than older studies, all things being equal.
<i>Category of journal</i>	<b>H2:</b> articles published in religious studies journals are more likely to contain a measure of self-reported religious salience than articles published in other types of journals, all things being equal.
<i>Authors' discipline</i>	<b>H3:</b> articles written by sociologists are more likely to contain a measure of self-reported religious salience than articles written by political scientists, all things being equal.
<i>Country</i>	<b>H4:</b> the probability that a study contains a measure of self-reported religious salience depends on the country studied and the country in which the authors reside, all things being equal.
<i>Research design</i>	<b>H5.1 (space&amp; time):</b> Studies that deal with only one country are more likely to contain a measure of religious salience than studies that deal with several countries, all things being equal. So are cross-sectional studies when compared to longitudinal studies, all things being equal. <b>H5.2 (population studied):</b> Studies dealing with sub-groups of voters are more likely to contain a self-reported measure of religious salience than studies dealing with the general population of voters, all things being equal. <b>H5.3 (theoretical place of religion):</b> Studies placing religion in a prominent theoretical role are more likely to contain a measure of self-reported religious salience than studies controlling for the effect of religion, all things being equal. <b>H5.4 (studied behaviour):</b> Articles in which the dependent variable is the probability of voting differ significantly from articles in which the dependent variable is partisan choice in terms of their respective likelihood to contain a measure of religious salience, all things being equal. <b>H5.5 (# of religion measures):</b> the higher the number of religious dimensions, the more likely the presence of a measure of religious salience, all things being equal.

## Analysis 2: Explaining the effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour

Hypotheses	Detail
<i>Country effect</i>	<b>H6:</b> the effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour varies among countries.
<i>Studied behaviour</i>	<b>H7:</b> the effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour varies with the particular type of electoral behaviour being studied.
<i>Type of religious salience measure</i>	<b>H8:</b> articles relying on a “religious relevance” measure are more likely to report a significant effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour than articles relying on a “general salience” (Guth & Green, 1993: 158) measure.
<i>Model specification</i>	<b>H9:</b> articles in which religious salience is used as a variable in its own right are more likely to report a significant effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour than articles in which religious salience is part of an index.
<i>Theoretical role of religion</i>	<b>H10:</b> articles in which religious salience is a key explanation are more likely to report a significant effect on electoral behaviour than articles that merely control for its effect.

# Data

Our research is restricted to electoral articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals and displaying the four following features:

- ❖ The dependent variable measures the probability of voting or the partisan choice at the individual level (articles with party preference as a dependent variable are excluded);
- ❖ The article must use at least one religious measure as an independent or control variable;
- ❖ The article has the individual voter as unit of analysis;
- ❖ The article has to be written in English or French.

In our database, the unit of analysis is *the academic article written in English or French about individual electoral behaviour and containing at least one measure of religion*. The database comprises 244 articles published between 1956 and 2012. We retrieved the articles after extensive research in the following search engines: *ISI Web of Knowledge, World Political Science Abstracts, International Political Science Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts* and *ATLA Religion Database*. Data collection took place between June and August 2012. Several combinations of key words were been used (list available upon request at [ronanteyssier@gmail.com](mailto:ronanteyssier@gmail.com)). These combinations yielded thousands of references. We assessed all of them.

## Methods (Statistical models)

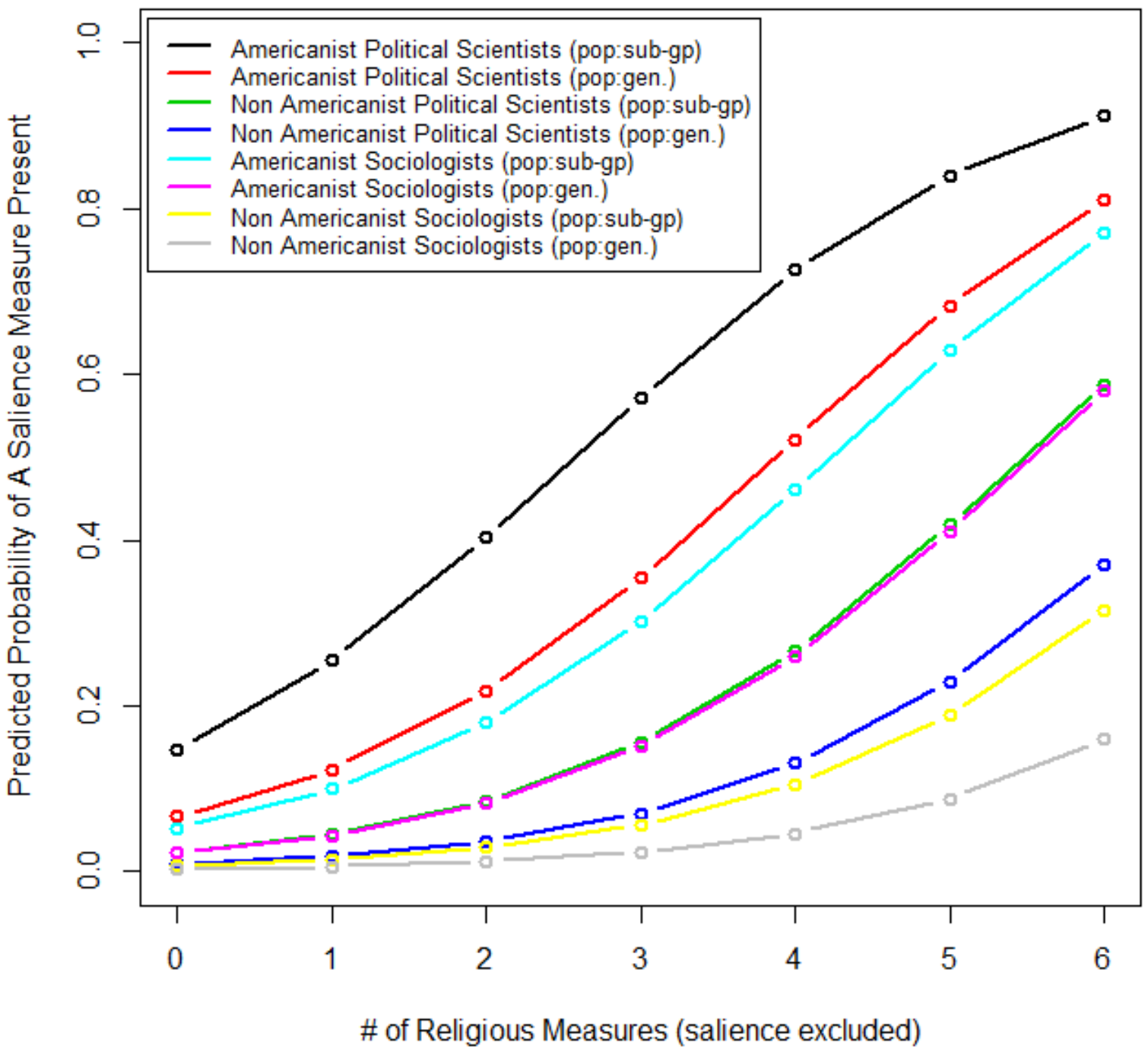
The analysis of our first dependent variable (presence of a religious salience measure) requires logit or probit modelling. We report results obtained with the former but very similar results are obtained with probit analysis.

The analysis of the second dependent variable (type of reported effect) would ideally be treated through multivariate analysis. Due to small sample size (N=45) and the exploratory nature of this article, we used simple cross-tabulations instead. As we will see, our findings are interesting nonetheless.

# Results

**Analysis 1** (regression tables are available upon request ([ronanteysier@gmail.com](mailto:ronanteysier@gmail.com))).

**Graph 3 – Predicted Probabilities of a Salience Measure (based on logistic regression estimates)**



**Analysis 2** (cross-tabulations are available upon request ([ronanteysier@gmail.com](mailto:ronanteysier@gmail.com)))

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Statistical significance</b>	<b>Substantial significance</b>
<i>Country</i>	No	No
<i>Religious salience measure</i>	No	Yes (studies that use “political relevance of religion” are more likely to report a significant effect than studies that use “general salience”)
<i>Autonomy of salience measure</i>	No	Yes (when salience is part of an index, increased likelihood of significant results)
<i>Studied behaviour</i>	Yes	Yes (studies of partisan choice more likely to report significant effect)
<i>Theoretical role of religion</i>	Yes	Yes (studies with religion as a key explanation more likely to report significant effect)



# SHORT DISCUSSION

## ❖ Measures of religion

- Number of measures: more is better because religion is multidimensional (Billiet, 2002: 350).
- In favour of salience not as part of an index, so we can distinguish between compartmentalization and influence.

## ❖ Authors' characteristics

- Salience should be used by other researchers than American specialists of electoral behaviour because it matters in most countries.

## ❖ Theoretical aspects of research design

- Studied behaviour and theoretical role of religion have an impact on the effect of salience but not on the probability that a study contains a salience measure.
- Implications: subjective religiosity affects vote choice; publication bias?

## ❖ Overall, we have two major results and one recommendation:

- **Result 1:** Studies on the effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour are mostly conducted by American political scientists. Other researchers should pay more attention to religious salience when they study religion and electoral behaviour.
- **Result 2:** The effect of religious salience on electoral behaviour seems not to reflect a law-like pattern. It is more context-specific (it depends on the election being considered).
- **Recommendation:** use “general salience” AND “political relevance of religion” measures (Guth & Green, 1993; Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt, 1996) to account for compartmentalization.

# (Very short) Bibliography

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