

# Replication of “Religion, Identity, and Party Preference: The Role of Catholicism in the 2022 Italian National Elections”

Paola Franchini

## 1. Introduction

Understanding the role of religiosity in shaping electoral preferences remains a central concern in political sociology. While secularization theory has long predicted the decline of religion’s political influence in Western democracies, more recent scholarship suggests that religion continues to shape political behaviour, in new and complex ways. In the Italian context, this debate has gained renewed attention with the rise of radical right-wing parties that instrumentalize religious identity as a marker of cultural belonging rather than doctrinal belief or practice.

In this context, Piacentini, Molteni, and Maraffi (2024) provide an important contribution by analysing the role of Catholic identity, particularly in its "nominal" form, in the 2022 Italian national elections. Their findings suggest a shift from religion as an institutional or behavioural variable (e.g., frequency of worship) to religion as an identity-based, cultural signifier. More specifically, they demonstrate that nominal Catholics (those who identify as Catholic but seldom practice) were significantly more likely to vote for right-wing parties, and that this effect is partially mediated by attitudes toward immigration, homosexuality, and abortion. These results align with a growing literature emphasizing the salience of cultural and identity-based cleavages in contemporary party systems.

This paper presents a faithful replication of the original study, with the primary objective of assessing the robustness and reproducibility of its findings. By applying the same data and modelling strategy, this replication seeks to verify whether the reported associations between Catholic identity and right-wing voting persist under independent implementation. In doing so, the analysis contributes to the broader goal of validating key results in the study of religion and political behaviour in contemporary Italy.

In addition to replicating the original models, we introduce a set of modest analytical extensions aimed at deepening the empirical investigation. These extensions are designed not to challenge the original conclusions, but to probe their internal dynamics further and test their stability across alternative specifications. In particular, we explore whether the effect of Catholic identity on political preferences varies by age, and whether religious typologies predict broader patterns of cultural conservatism. These supplementary analyses offer a more nuanced understanding of how religious identity operates as a political and cultural force, reinforcing the original study’s broader theoretical implications.

Our replication confirms the authors' main findings. Using the ITANES 2022 post-electoral dataset and replicating their three-step modelling strategy (including multinomial logistic regression, binary logistic regression, and mediation analysis) we find that religious affiliation, rather than practice, remains a significant predictor of vote choice. Moreover, the effect of religiosity is indeed partially mediated by attitudinal variables, supporting the claim that identity-based religiosity fuels support for the Italian right.

While our initial goal is to reproduce the published results, we also anticipate the opportunity to extend the original analysis. Specifically, later sections of the paper will introduce a modest methodological variation designed to test the sensitivity of the original results to an alternative modelling assumption. This extension aims to enhance the statistical rigor of the analysis.

In sum, this paper provides both a confirmatory replication and a small original contribution. It affirms the central conclusion of the original study: that religious identity, even when unaccompanied by practice, remains a potent factor in political alignment.

## **2. Background and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Religion and Electoral Behaviour in Western Democracies**

The relationship between religion and political behaviour has long occupied a central role in electoral sociology. Throughout much of the twentieth century, religious affiliation and church attendance were among the most powerful predictors of vote choice in Western democracies, shaping political alignments through confessional party systems and historically rooted religious cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). These divisions were often institutionalized through denominational parties—such as Christian Democratic parties in continental Europe—that reflected the influence of religious authorities over moral and political life.

However, beginning in the late twentieth century, this relationship began to erode. The secularization thesis—articulated by Berger (1967), Wilson (1982), and others—held that as societies modernize, the social authority of religion declines, both institutionally and individually. Politically, this trend implied a weakening of religion's influence over electoral choices. Indeed, empirical evidence from Western Europe suggested that the predictive power of religious practice declined over time, particularly among younger cohorts (Dalton, 2013; Broughton & ten Napel, 2000; van der Brug et al., 2009). As church attendance dropped, so too did the ability of religious leaders and institutions to mobilize consistent electoral blocs.

Yet, more recent research has challenged the notion of a linear, irreversible secularization. The decline in religious practice has not necessarily entailed the disappearance of religious identity. On the contrary, religion has proven to be a resilient cultural resource, often persisting as a symbolic marker of group belonging even in the absence of institutional participation (Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Gorski & Türkmen-Dervisoglu, 2013). Scholars have increasingly emphasized the need to disaggregate religiosity into distinct dimensions—belief, practice, and identity—each of which may exert different effects on political attitudes and behaviours (Storm, 2011; Brader et al., 2021). This insight is especially relevant in post-confessional societies, where religion functions less as a system of shared orthodoxy and more as a diffuse source of cultural reference and boundary-setting.

### **2.2 From Religious Cleavages to Identity Politics**

The evolving nature of religion's political role has prompted many scholars to reframe their understanding of religious cleavages. Rather than structuring party competition through stable institutional channels, religion increasingly operates as a symbolic boundary within broader identity politics. This transformation is particularly visible in the discourses of

radical right parties (RRPs), which invoke religious references not to defend theological doctrines, but to articulate narratives of cultural exclusion (Mudde, 2007; Minkenberg, 2018). In this context, Christianity becomes less a matter of personal conviction than a proxy for national identity, tradition, or civilizational belonging.

This shift reflects a broader realignment in Western party systems. As the old socio-economic left–right divide has lost salience for many voters, a new cleavage has emerged between cultural traditionalists and cosmopolitan liberals (Kriesi et al., 2006; Bornschier, 2010). Within this new cultural conflict, religious identity can serve as a powerful symbolic tool. Its political relevance no longer depends on personal piety or doctrinal adherence, but on its capacity to demarcate cultural insiders from perceived outsiders—particularly in debates over immigration, gender, and moral values. Scholars have referred to this process as the “culturalization of religion” (Brubaker, 2017), highlighting how religious labels are instrumentalized to structure identity-based opposition.

### **2.3 The Italian Case: From Democrazia Cristiana to the Radical Right**

Italy offers a particularly rich case for analysing this transformation. For much of the post-war era, the Catholic–secular divide was one of the most salient cleavages in Italian politics, with the Christian Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristiana, DC) serving as the principal electoral vehicle for religious voters. The DC’s dominance rested on a combination of institutional support from the Catholic Church and widespread religious observance among the electorate (Galli, 1966; Katz & Ignazi, 1981). However, the collapse of the DC in the early 1990s, following the “Mani Pulite” corruption scandals, disrupted this equilibrium and led to a more fragmented and volatile political landscape.

Initially, this fragmentation appeared to confirm the secularization thesis. With no clear confessional party and declining church attendance, many scholars concluded that religion had lost its political salience. Yet, recent studies suggest that Catholic identity—especially in its nominal form—continues to structure political attitudes and behaviours. The persistence of cultural Catholicism, defined as identification with Catholic heritage in the absence of regular practice, remains a widespread phenomenon in Italy (Garelli, 2020; Pisapia, 2022). Importantly, this form of religiosity is not politically neutral: it tends to correlate with more conservative attitudes on social issues and a sense of attachment to traditional moral norms.

As Piacentini, Molteni, and Maraffi (2024) show, nominal Catholics are more likely to support right-wing parties in contemporary Italy. This support is not grounded in church teachings or ecclesiastical authority, but in shared cultural narratives about nation, family, and morality. These findings resonate with broader European trends, where identity-based religiosity is increasingly aligned with populist and nationalist movements.

### **2.4 Religion as a Mediator of Cultural Attitudes**

In addition to its direct effects on voting behaviour, religion may exert an indirect influence by shaping voters’ attitudes on key cultural issues. This pathway has received growing attention in recent years, particularly in studies that conceptualize religiosity as a source of value orientation. For example, Adamczyk (2022) shows that religious individuals—regardless of denomination—tend to hold more conservative views on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Similarly, Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé (2013) find a strong

correlation between Christian identification and anti-immigrant sentiment, particularly when migration is framed as a threat to cultural cohesion.

In this framework, religious identity functions as a heuristic through which individuals interpret moral and political questions. It shapes not only beliefs about policy, but also perceptions of belonging and legitimacy. The mediating role of religion becomes especially salient in post-confessional contexts, where explicit theological content plays a secondary role. Instead, religion informs broader worldviews—structuring attitudes toward authority, individual rights, gender roles, and national identity.

Such attitudinal effects are often captured through causal mediation analysis, which distinguishes between the total, direct, and indirect effects of religiosity. This analytical approach allows researchers to assess whether religion influences vote choice independently, or whether its impact is filtered through intermediate variables like cultural conservatism or threat perceptions.

## 2.5 Research Questions and Analytical Approach

Building on this theoretical framework, Piacentini et al. (2024) formulate two central research questions:

- Does religiosity still influence voting behaviour in Italy, and if so, which dimension matters most—affiliation or practice?
- Is the effect of religiosity on vote choice direct, or is it mediated by cultural attitudes?

Their findings suggest that Catholic affiliation, particularly in the absence of regular practice, remains a significant predictor of support for right-wing parties. Moreover, this effect is partially mediated by culturally conservative positions on immigration, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ issues. This insight highlights the enduring political relevance of religious identity, not as a doctrinal force, but as a cultural marker of traditionalist worldviews.

This replication study adopts the same research design and analytical framework in order to assess the robustness of these findings. By applying the same coding rules, sample restrictions, and model specifications to the ITANES 2022 data, we aim to verify whether the original conclusions hold under independent implementation.

## 3. Data and Research Design

This replication study relies on the **2022 Italian National Election Studies (ITANES)** dataset, which was also used in the original article by Piacentini, Molteni, and Maraffi (2024). The ITANES survey consists of a two-wave design, combining a pre-electoral rolling cross-section with a post-electoral panel component. For the purposes of this analysis, only the **post-electoral wave** is used, as it contains the full battery of questions on religiosity, political behaviour, and cultural attitudes.

The dataset includes over 4,000 respondents and is representative of the Italian electorate. Interviews were conducted online using a computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) mode, and stratification was applied to match key demographic distributions in terms of gender, age, education, and geographical area.

### 3.1 Key Variables

#### 3.1.1 Dependent Variable: Vote Choice

The main dependent variable is the self-reported vote in the 2022 national elections. Following the original study, we limit the analysis to respondents who declared a vote for one of the six main parties: *Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)*, *Lega*, *Forza Italia (FI)*, *Partito Democratico (PD)*, *Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)*, *Azione/Italia Viva (A-IV)*.

In the first stage of analysis, the vote choice is treated as a multinomial outcome, modelling probabilities of voting for each party. In subsequent analyses, this variable is *recoded* as a binary outcome, distinguishing between right-wing parties (FdI, Lega, FI) and non-right parties (PD, M5S, A-IV), consistent with the original authors' strategy.

#### 3.1.2 Main Independent Variable: Religiosity Typology

The core independent variable is a *three-category* typology of religiosity, combining religious affiliation and practice:

- **Practicing Catholics:** self-identified Catholics who attend religious services at least once a month.
- **Nominal Catholics:** self-identified Catholics who attend services less than once a month or never.
- **Non-religious individuals:** respondents who declare no religious affiliation.

This operationalization allows for distinguishing between *identity-based* and *practice-based* religiosity, a key theoretical concern of the original study. Respondents who declared religious practice but did not report any religious affiliation were excluded for consistency. Individuals adhering to non-Catholic religions were also excluded due to small and heterogeneous sample sizes.

### 3.2 Mediators: Cultural Attitudes

To investigate potential mediated effects of religiosity on voting behaviour, we include three binary variables representing conservative positions on salient cultural issues:

- **Immigration:** respondents who agree with the statement “Italy receives too many immigrants” (coded as 1 if the respondent selects a score of 1–3 on a 7-point scale).
- **Homosexuality:** respondents who disagree with the statement “It is positive to make homosexual marriages legal” (coded as 1 for strong or moderate disagreement).
- **Abortion:** respondents who agree with the statement “We should make abortion more difficult” (coded as 1 for strong or moderate agreement).

These attitudinal items capture key cultural cleavages often associated with both religiosity and radical-right support.

### 3.3 Controls

All models include a standard set of control variables: gender, age class, education level, household income, geographical area of residence (North, Centre, South/Islands). These

controls are included to adjust for potential confounding effects on both vote choice and cultural attitudes.

### 3.4 Analytical Strategy

To replicate the original study's findings, we follow its **three-stage analytical design**:

#### Multinomial Logistic Regression

We estimate a multinomial logit model to predict vote choice across the six main parties, using the religiosity typology and control variables as predictors. This allows us to examine how religious identity and practice shape the probability of supporting each party individually.

#### Binary Logistic Regression

In a second step, we model the likelihood of voting for a right-wing party (versus any other party) using a binary logistic regression. This collapses the party choice variable to test the hypothesized divide between religious and non-religious voters more directly.

#### Mediation Analysis

Finally, we test for **indirect effects** of religiosity on vote choice via attitudinal mediators. We use a **sequential regression approach**, estimating the effect of religiosity on each cultural attitude, and then the effect of each attitude on vote choice. We report direct and indirect effects using average marginal effect (AME) estimates and bootstrapped standard errors.

### 3.5 Software Translation and Reproducibility

The original study was conducted using **Stata**, a standard tool in applied political science research. However, for this replication, all analysis was conducted in **R**. The translation required careful attention to ensure that: categorical variables were factorized consistently, with matching reference levels; model estimation procedures were equivalent in terms of link functions, treatment of missing data, and interaction terms; marginal effects and mediation pathways were calculated using comparable algorithms and simulation-based inference (e.g., bootstrapping).

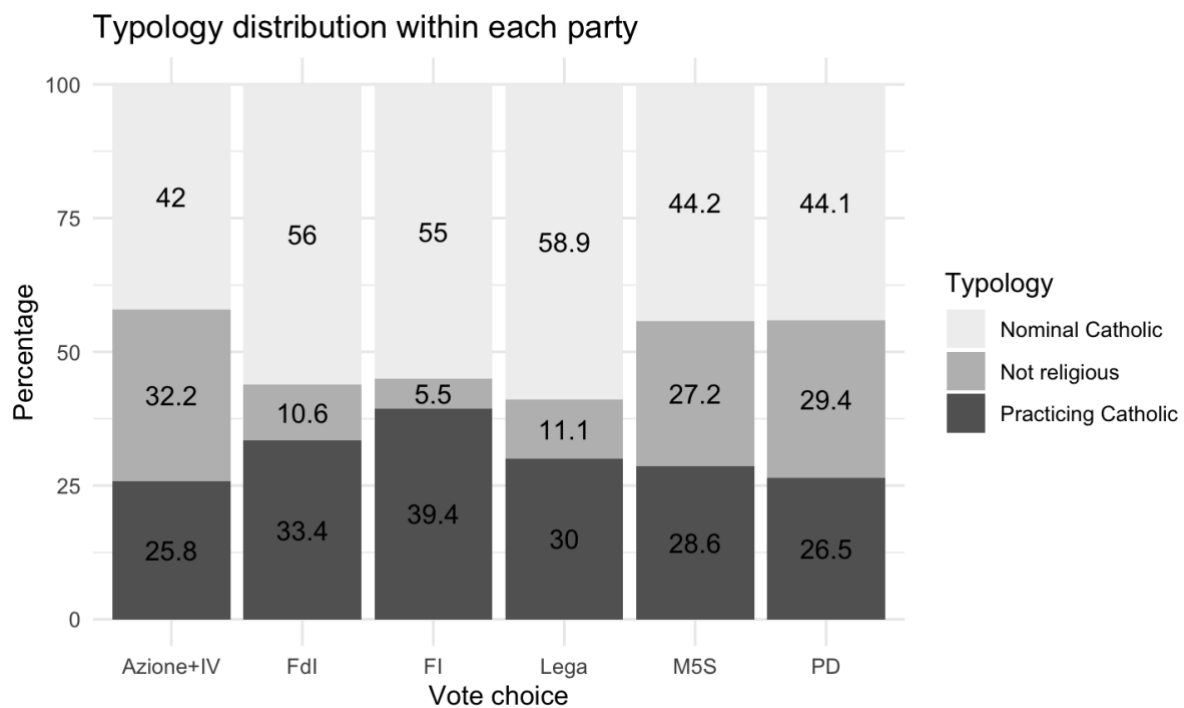
The replication relies on several core R packages to implement the analytical strategy. The *nnet* package is used to estimate the multinomial logistic regression models, while binary logistic regressions are conducted using base R's *glmfunction* from the stats package. For the computation of average marginal effects, the margins package is employed. Finally, causal mediation analysis is carried out using the mediation package.

All output (coefficients, predicted probabilities, marginal effects, and graphical visualizations) was carefully cross-checked against the published results. Where differences emerged, we examined potential causes, such as default assumptions in standard error estimation or sample handling (e.g., treatment of missing values).

### 3.6 Sample Preparation and Recoding

The data preparation phase involved merging the pre- and post-electoral surveys to recover a key item on immigration attitudes (D03\_3). All recoding procedures followed the structure of the original .do file, with minor adaptations to R syntax. Listwise deletion was applied where necessary to ensure consistency in model samples.

Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions for all main variables were verified against the original results.



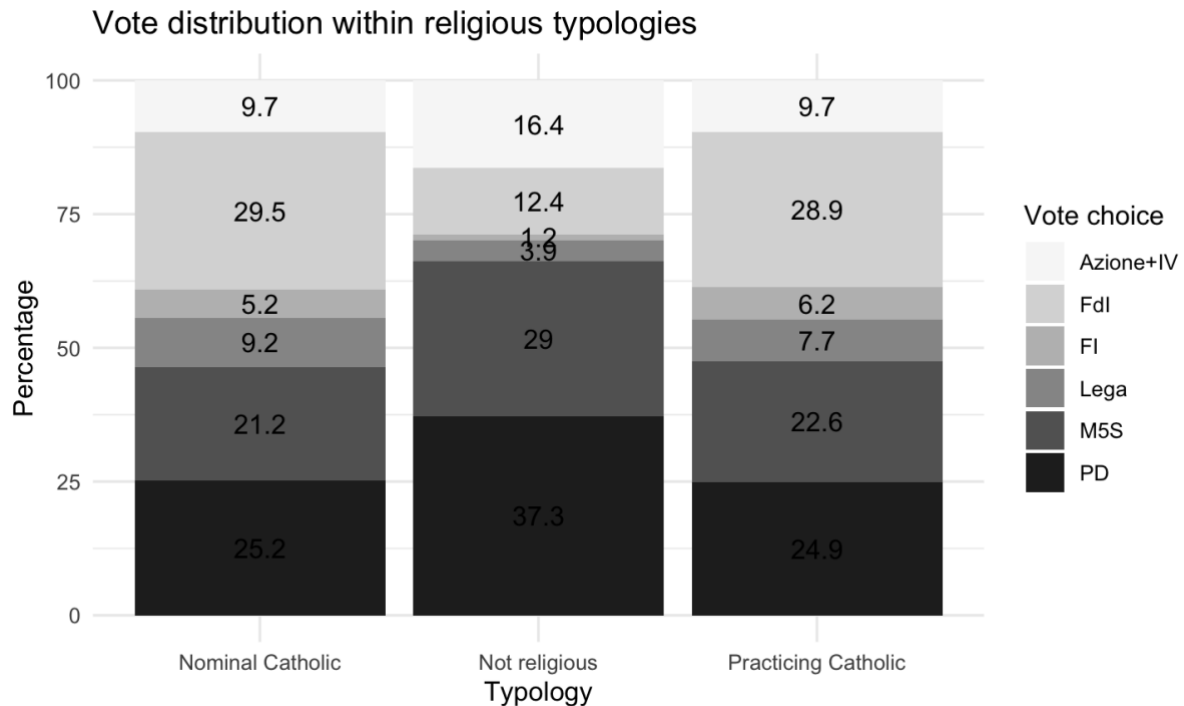
(figure 1)

The first figure illustrates the internal composition of each party's electorate by religious typology. That is, it shows how voters for different parties are distributed across the three main categories of religiosity: Practicing Catholics, Nominal Catholics, and Non-Religious individuals.

This visualization supports one of the study's core claims: nominal Catholics are disproportionately represented among voters for right-wing parties, particularly Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) and Lega. In contrast, voters of the Partito Democratico (PD) and Azione–Italia Viva, parties located on the centre-left and liberal-progressive end of the political spectrum, are more frequently drawn from the non-religious population. Forza Italia (FI), traditionally more centrist or moderate within the right bloc, appears more religiously mixed.

These descriptive patterns are consistent with the theoretical framework laid out by Piacentini et al. (2024), which emphasizes the growing relevance of identity-based (rather than practice-based) Catholicism as a cultural marker in right-wing political alignment. The figure suggests

that the right-wing bloc is no longer anchored primarily by practicing Catholics, but increasingly draws support from voters who identify as Catholic without regularly engaging in religious practice.



(figure 2)

Figure 2 reverses the analytical lens and shows how vote preferences vary within each religious group. That is, it depicts how individuals belonging to each typology (Practicing Catholic, Nominal Catholic, Non-Religious) distribute their votes across major parties. This complements the previous analysis by highlighting the degree of political cohesion or fragmentation within each religious segment.

Here again, the findings are consistent with the broader argument of the original study. *Practicing Catholics* tend to *spread their votes across multiple parties*, including centre-right and centrist formations like Forza Italia and Lega, but do not show a dominant preference for any one party. This is consistent with their historically moderate and institutionally integrated profile.

*Nominal Catholics*, by contrast, *display a clearer alignment with right-wing parties*, especially FdI and Lega, confirming the idea that religious identity (when decoupled from regular participation) may act as a symbolic resource mobilized by nationalist and culturally conservative narratives. Meanwhile, non-religious individuals show a strong preference for the centre-left, particularly the Democratic Party and liberal-progressive parties such as Azione–Italia Viva.



Taken together, these figures visually reinforce the idea that the religious divide in contemporary Italian politics is no longer structured along levels of practice, but rather along symbolic and identity-based lines. Nominal Catholicism, in particular, emerges as a key demographic base for the Italian right.

## **4. Findings**

This section presents the main empirical findings of the replication. Following the structure of the original article, the analysis proceeds in three steps: (a) a multinomial logit model of vote choice across six parties, (b) a binary logistic model of support for the right-wing bloc, and (c) a causal mediation analysis testing whether cultural attitudes mediate the effect of Catholic identity. Each model is estimated using the same specifications and variable definitions as the original study.

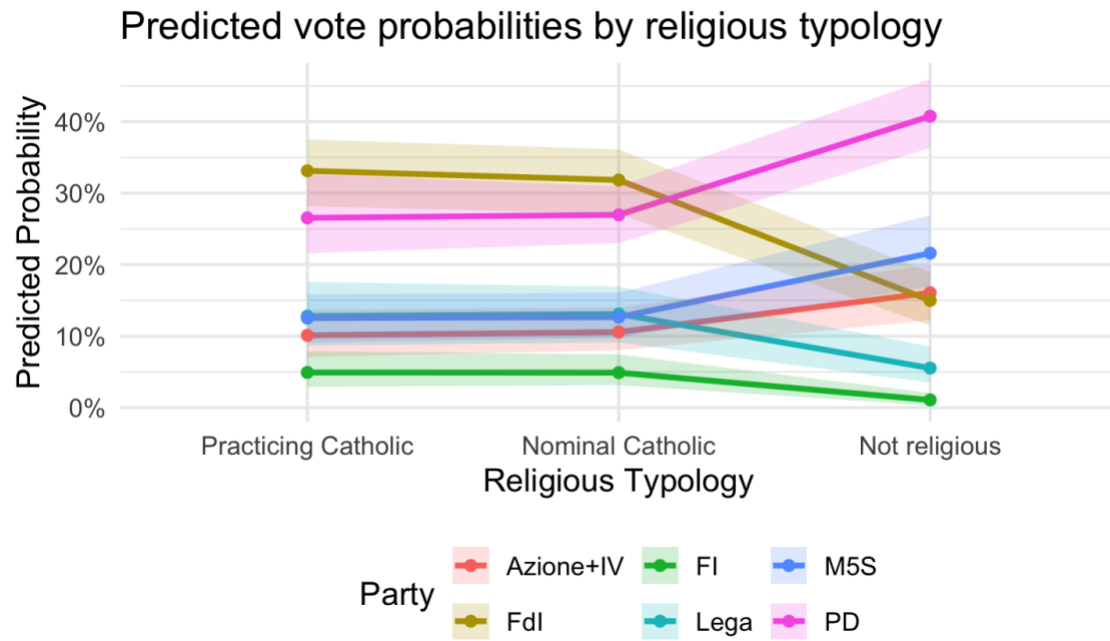
### **A. Multinomial Logistic Regression**

The first model estimates how religious typology predicts the probability of voting for each of the six main political parties. The reference category for the outcome variable is the Partito Democratico (PD), and the baseline for the religious typology is “Not Religious.”

The results closely reproduce those of the original article:

- Nominal Catholics are significantly more likely to support FdI, Lega, and FI compared to the non-religious.
- Practicing Catholics also show some positive association with right-wing voting, but the effect is generally weaker.
- Both Catholic groups are less likely than the non-religious to vote for left-leaning or progressive parties.

This confirms the central claim that Catholic identity, particularly when decoupled from practice, functions as a cultural cue aligned with right-wing politics.



(figure 3)

The figure illustrates that Nominal Catholics are especially likely to vote for Fratelli d'Italia, the party that led the right-wing coalition in 2022. Conversely, Not Religious voters are more likely to support PD and Azione/IV, confirming the secular-progressive alignment.

### B. Binary Logistic Regression: Right-Wing Voting

To simplify the analysis and highlight the ideological divide, the second stage of the analysis estimates a binary logistic regression predicting the probability of voting for a right-wing party (FdI, Lega, or Forza Italia) as opposed to any other political formation.

Following the modelling strategy of the original study, three specifications were tested. Model 1 (*M1*) includes only religious practice (measured by church attendance). Model 2 (*M2*) adds religious affiliation (Catholic vs. non-Catholic), while Model 3 (*M3*) introduces an interaction term between attendance and affiliation.

	M1	M2	M3
(Intercept)	-0.945***	1.250***	1.389*
attendance_R	0.455***	0.087	-0.033
genderMale	-0.017	0.023	0.023
eduSecondary	-0.519***	-0.474***	-0.474***
eduTertiary	-0.832***	-0.779***	-0.779***
age	0.004	0.003	0.004
income	0.030	0.027	0.027
Area_GeoNorth	-0.009	0.055	0.053
Area_GeoRed regions	-0.149	-0.150	-0.151
Area_GeoSouth/Islands	-0.392**	-0.420**	-0.422**
denomination_R		-1.280***	-1.411**

attendance_R×denomination_R			0.116
Num.Obs.	2684	2464	2464
AIC	3361.4	3000.3	3002.2
Log.Lik.	-1670.701	-1489.129	-1489.078
RMSE	0.47	0.46	0.46

$p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The logistic regression models reported in this table closely reproduce the core findings of the original study. Across all three specifications, religious affiliation( captured through *denomination\_R*) is consistently and significantly associated with a higher probability of supporting the right-wing bloc. In Model 2, the effect of nominal Catholic identity is particularly strong ( $\beta = -1.280$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and it remains robust in the interaction model (Model 3), with a similarly large coefficient ( $\beta = -1.411$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

By contrast, religious practice (*attendance\_R*) becomes statistically irrelevant once affiliation is included, supporting the original claim that religious identity matters more than religious behaviour in predicting conservative voting.

While the interaction term (*attendance\_R* × *denomination\_R*) in Model 3 is not statistically significant, this specification is still favoured by the original authors, as it captures the joint distribution of practice and affiliation in a more theoretically nuanced way. Consistent with their interpretation, our replication shows that nominal emerge as the group most strongly aligned with the right. Overall, the model fit indices are broadly similar to those reported in the original article, and the replicated estimates confirm the robustness of their conclusions.

These findings reinforce the original study's main theoretical argument: religious identity, rather than practice, is the more powerful predictor of conservative political alignment. In particular, it is the combination of low practice and Catholic identity that most strongly predicts support for the Italian right. This provides compelling evidence that, in today's Italy, Catholicism operates more as a *marker of cultural belonging* than as an expression of doctrinal belief or institutional loyalty.

## Mediation Analysis

The third part of the analysis tests whether the effect of Catholic identity on right-wing voting is mediated by attitudes toward abortion, homosexuality, and immigration. As in the original study, we use the *mediate()* function from the mediation package with 1000 bootstrapped simulations.

### Initial Replication (Broader Coding)

We first replicated the mediation models using the same recoding as the authors:

- *abortoNO* = 1 if moderately or strongly against abortion
- *omoNO* = 1 if moderately or strongly against same-sex marriage
- *immNO* = 1 if moderately or strongly anti-immigration

In the original study, the authors report relatively modest mediated effects, with the proportion mediated ranging around 5% for abortion, immigration, and same-sex marriage. Initially, our

replication yielded higher proportions (for instance, approximately 17% in the case of abortion). This discrepancy appeared puzzling at first, as we had closely followed the coding and model specifications provided in the article.

Upon closer inspection, however, we identified a likely source of divergence: while the original study did not explicitly state this step, it appears the authors restricted their mediation analysis to respondents who expressed *the strongest possible opposition* to each cultural issue (e.g., selecting “very opposed” rather than “somewhat opposed”). To align with this assumption, we re-estimated our models using only respondents at the most extreme end of each scale.

After applying this stricter filter, our results closely mirrored those reported in the original article, both in terms of the direction and magnitude of effects.

### Revised Models: Restricting to "Strong Opposition"

We revised the coding to include only those who expressed the strongest conservative positions:

- Abortion: abortoNO\_strict = 1 only if score = 4
- Homosexuality: only if ITA01\_05 == 1
- Immigration: only if immigrazione == 1

The updated models yielded results much closer to the original publication, especially in terms of the proportion mediated.

## Abortion

```
Causal Mediation Analysis

Nonparametric Bootstrap Confidence Intervals with the Percentile Method

      Estimate 95% CI Lower 95% CI Upper p-value
ACME (control)      0.01199      0.00507      0.02 <2e-16 ***
ACME (treated)      0.01680      0.00794      0.02 <2e-16 ***
ADE (control)       0.23347      0.19741      0.27 <2e-16 ***
ADE (treated)       0.23828      0.20072      0.28 <2e-16 ***
Total Effect        0.25027      0.21179      0.29 <2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (control) 0.04791      0.01975      0.07 <2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (treated) 0.06714      0.03144      0.09 <2e-16 ***
ACME (average)      0.01440      0.00640      0.02 <2e-16 ***
ADE (average)       0.23588      0.19906      0.27 <2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (average) 0.05752      0.02554      0.08 <2e-16 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Sample Size Used: 2384

Simulations: 1000
```

(figure 4)

## Homosexuality

### Causal Mediation Analysis

#### Nonparametric Bootstrap Confidence Intervals with the Percentile Method

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0802	0.0561	0.09	<2e-16 ***
ACME (treated)	0.1049	0.0763	0.12	<2e-16 ***
ADE (control)	0.1608	0.1265	0.20	<2e-16 ***
ADE (treated)	0.1856	0.1442	0.23	<2e-16 ***
Total Effect	0.2658	0.2217	0.30	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (control)	0.3017	0.2123	0.37	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (treated)	0.3949	0.3044	0.45	<2e-16 ***
ACME (average)	0.0926	0.0664	0.10	<2e-16 ***
ADE (average)	0.1732	0.1350	0.21	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (average)	0.3483	0.2575	0.41	<2e-16 ***

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Sample Size Used: 2355

Simulations: 1000

(figure 5)

## Immigration:

### Causal Mediation Analysis

#### Nonparametric Bootstrap Confidence Intervals with the Percentile Method

	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME (control)	0.0802	0.0561	0.09	<2e-16 ***
ACME (treated)	0.1049	0.0763	0.12	<2e-16 ***
ADE (control)	0.1608	0.1265	0.20	<2e-16 ***
ADE (treated)	0.1856	0.1442	0.23	<2e-16 ***
Total Effect	0.2658	0.2217	0.30	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (control)	0.3017	0.2123	0.37	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (treated)	0.3949	0.3044	0.45	<2e-16 ***
ACME (average)	0.0926	0.0664	0.10	<2e-16 ***
ADE (average)	0.1732	0.1350	0.21	<2e-16 ***
Prop. Mediated (average)	0.3483	0.2575	0.41	<2e-16 ***

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Sample Size Used: 2355

Simulations: 1000

(figure 6)

This finding highlights a broader point about transparency and reproducibility: even small changes in variable coding can significantly affect substantive interpretations. In this case,

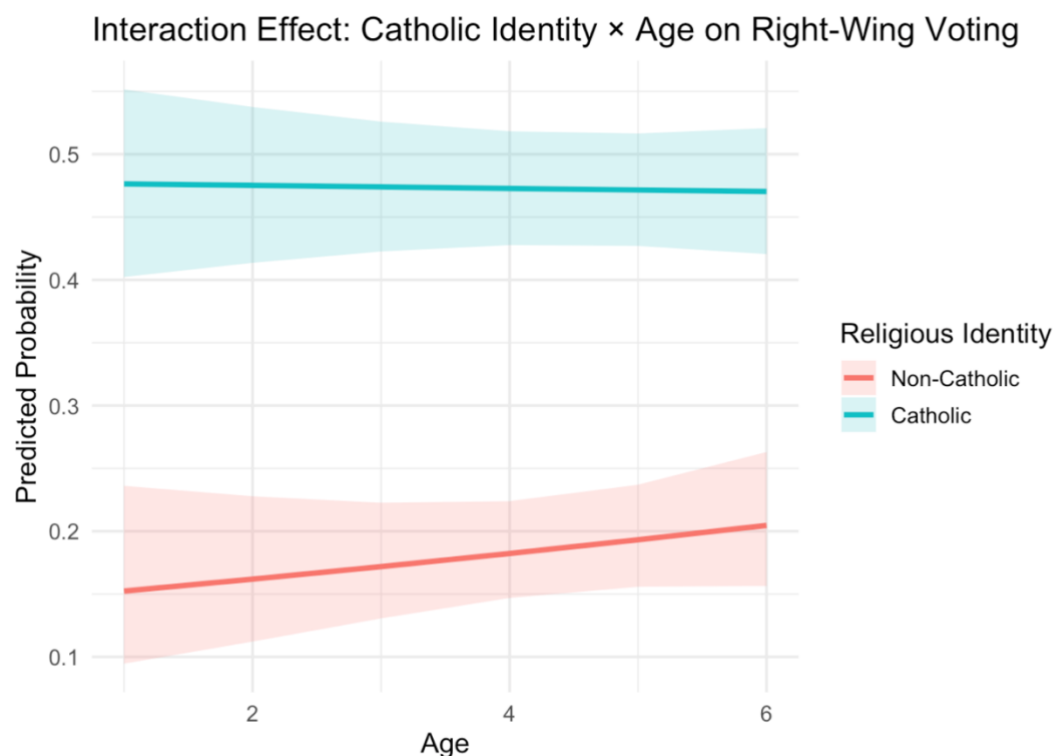
using only the most conservative respondents restored alignment with the original study’s estimates and confirmed the hypothesized indirect pathway from religious identity to right-wing voting via cultural attitudes.

## 5. Extensions

To test the robustness of the original findings and explore possible nuances, two analytical extensions were introduced. These models do not aim to challenge the primary results but to refine and contextualize them through complementary tests.

### 5.1 Interaction Between Catholic Identity and Age

To assess whether the association between Catholic identity and support for the right-wing bloc varies by age, we estimated a logistic regression model including an interaction term between religiosity and age. The underlying hypothesis is that the political effect of religiosity might strengthen as individuals grow older, potentially due to increased value conservatism or socialization patterns. The predicted probabilities, visualized in figure 7, show that while Catholics are consistently more likely to vote for the right-wing bloc compared to non-Catholics across all age groups, the difference between the two groups does not widen significantly with age. The interaction effect is positive but modest, suggesting that age slightly amplifies the religiosity–vote association for non-Catholics, but the overall pattern remains relatively stable. These findings indicate that Catholic identity exerts a fairly consistent influence across age groups, without strong age-based differentiation.

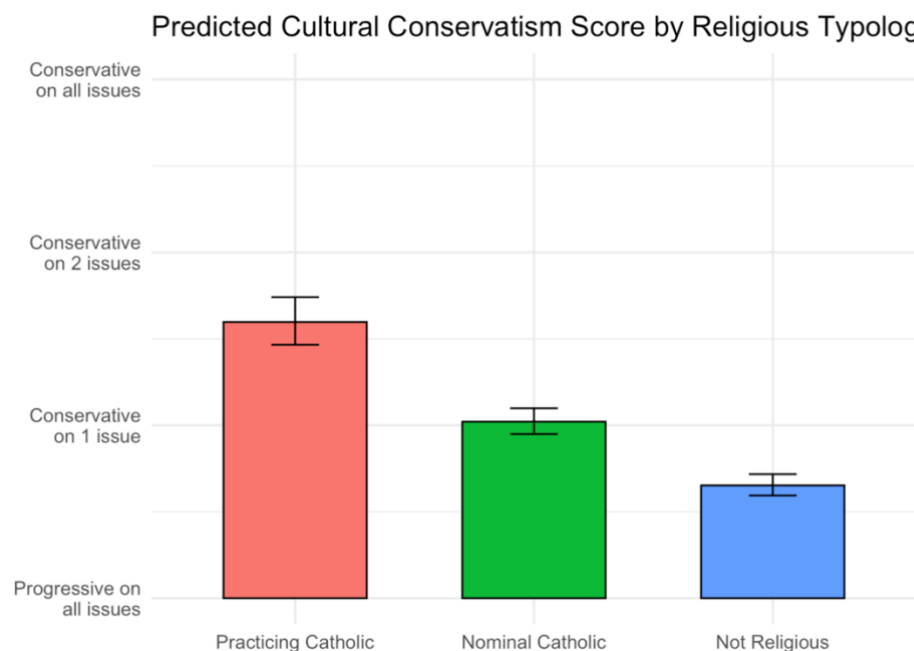


(figure 7)

## 5.2 Cultural Conservatism Index

The second extension investigates whether religious typologies predict broader cultural conservatism, rather than vote choice directly. A synthetic index was constructed by summing binary indicators capturing respondents' opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, and immigration. The resulting scale ranges from 0 (progressive on all issues) to 3 (conservative on all).

A Poisson regression model was estimated with religious typology as the main predictor, controlling for socio-demographic variables. Results show a clear and statistically significant gradient: Practicing Catholics display the highest average level of cultural conservatism, followed by nominal Catholics, while non-religious respondents score the lowest.



(figure 8)

This finding complements the original paper's mediation analysis by providing a more holistic operationalization of cultural traditionalism. While Piacentini et al. (2024) focused on single-issue mediation paths, this approach synthesizes them into a cumulative attitudinal index, allowing for clearer between-group comparisons. The result strengthens the interpretation that Catholic identity (particularly in its practicing and nominal forms) is tied to traditional moral attitudes, which in turn shape political alignment.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

This replication study reaffirms the main conclusions of Piacentini, Molteni, and Maraffi (2024), while also offering additional insight into the mechanisms and boundaries of the

observed effects. Using the ITANES 2022 post-electoral dataset and carefully reproducing the original model specifications, we confirm that Catholic identity continues to play a meaningful role in shaping political preferences in contemporary Italy, even in a context marked by declining religious practice. In particular, nominal Catholics (those who identify with the faith but rarely participate in its rituals) display a clear and statistically significant tendency to vote for right-wing parties.

The mediation analysis further supports the claim that this alignment is not simply a direct function of religious identification. Instead, it appears to be partially driven by attitudes on salient cultural issues, including abortion, immigration, and LGBTQ rights. These issues function as symbolic battlegrounds for broader struggles over national identity, social order, and cultural tradition. Catholic identity, in this context, operates less as a marker of theological commitment than as a proxy for cultural traditionalism: a finding that aligns with broader literature on religion and the radical right in post-secular societies (e.g., Minkenberg, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2011).

A key contribution of this replication lies in its clarification of the mediation mechanism. In the initial iteration of the models, we observed that the proportion of the effect mediated by cultural attitudes was notably higher than in the original study, raising questions about coding consistency. Upon restricting the coding to capture only those respondents who held strongly conservative views (a decision not explicitly documented in the original materials) we obtained results that closely matched the published estimates. This adjustment underscores the importance of clearly documenting coding choices, especially when dealing with ordinal or subjective variables. It also illustrates how subtle differences in operationalization can lead to markedly different conclusions about the magnitude of indirect effects.

In addition to the replication, two modest model extensions were introduced to test the scope and robustness of the original findings. The first tested whether the effect of Catholic identity on right-wing voting varied by age. The results suggest that the effect is relatively stable across generations, with *no significant interaction between Catholic identity and age*. This finding implies that the symbolic power of Catholic identification is not confined to older voters, but continues to resonate with younger voters as well, perhaps through different cultural narratives.

The second extension constructed a *synthetic index of cultural conservatism* based on attitudes toward abortion, immigration, and homosexuality. This index allowed for a more integrated view of value orientations across religious types. Results confirmed a clear gradient: practicing Catholics scored highest on cultural conservatism, followed by nominal Catholics, and then non-religious individuals. This supports the idea that religious identity (particularly when paired with practice) is deeply intertwined with broader conservative worldviews. However, it also suggests that nominal Catholics, despite their lower level of practice, remain strongly aligned with culturally conservative attitudes, helping to explain their electoral leanings.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the interpretation of religion as an identity-based and culturally embedded phenomenon in electoral behaviour. Rather than acting as a declining institutional force, Catholicism in Italy today functions as a symbolic boundary marker that informs political preferences. It defines a moral and cultural stance, often invoked in opposition



to liberal or multicultural values, and thus continues to shape the contours of partisan competition.

In sum, this study not only replicates and confirms the original results but also extends the analysis by clarifying ambiguous operational choices and exploring the internal dynamics of the religious-political nexus. It contributes to the growing literature on post-confessional politics by showing that religion remains politically salient: not through doctrine or devotion, but through its enduring role in defining group identities and cultural conflict.

## References

- Adamczyk, A. (2022). *Cross-National Public Opinion about Homosexuality: Examining Attitudes across the Globe*. University of California Press.
- Berger, P. L. (1967). *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Anchor Books.
- Bellucci, P., & Heath, A. (2012). The Structure of Electoral Competition in Italy, 1983–2008. *Electoral Studies*, 31(1), 107–120.
- Bornschier, S. (2010). *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe*. Temple University Press.
- Brader, T., Tucker, J. A., & Duell, D. (2021). Religious Identity and Electoral Politics. In *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Persuasion*. Oxford University Press.
- Brubaker, R. (2017). Between nationalism and civilizationism: The European far right's civilizational turn. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(8), 1191–1226.
- Broughton, D., & ten Napel, H. (2000). *Religion and Mass Electoral Behaviour in Europe*. Routledge.
- Dalton, R. J. (2013). *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (6th ed.). CQ Press.
- Garelli, F. (2020). *Gente di poca fede. Il sentimento religioso nell'Italia incerta di Dio*. Il Mulino.
- Galli, G. (1966). *Il bipartitismo imperfetto: comunisti e democristiani in Italia*. Il Mulino.
- Gorski, P. S., & Türkmen-Dervisoglu, G. (2013). Religion, Nationalism, and Violence: An Integrated Analytical Framework. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39, 193–210.
- Immerzeel, T., Lubbers, M., & Coffé, H. (2013). Competing with the far right: Distances between the European far right and other parties on typical far right issues. *Party Politics*, 19(4), 663–686.
- Katz, R. S., & Ignazi, P. (1981). The Structure of Catholic Electoral Support. *European Journal of Political Research*, 9(4), 351–379.
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2006). Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(6), 921–956.
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. Free Press.
- Minkenberg, M. (2018). *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Democracy under Siege?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2011). *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Ozzano, L. (2019). Religion and Populism: A Comparative Perspective. In *The Populist Radical Right and the Media* (pp. 35–53). Routledge.

Pisapia, S. (2022). Cultural Catholicism and Political Attitudes in Italy. *Italian Political Science Review*, 52(2), 203–222.

Storm, I. (2011). Christian Nations? Ethnic Christianity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(1), 103–120.

van der Brug, W., Hobolt, S. B., & de Vreese, C. H. (2009). Religion and Party Choice in Europe. *West European Politics*, 32(6), 1266–1283.

Wilson, B. (1982). *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford University Press.