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# Conservative parties and religious voting: a preliminary analysis

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# Two paradoxes of religiosity and voting

- First, conventional wisdom in the 1970s
- Arend Lijphart (1971)
  - “In six out of ten countries, religious voting was higher than class voting, and the indices of religious voting generally reached higher values than the Alford indices of class voting”.
- Richard Rose and Derek Urwin (1975)
  - “For 76 parties in 17 countries, religious divisions, not class, are the main social basis of parties in the Western world today”.
- Then, why do the religious factors emerge in so many countries when the actual business of politics seems to be focused on quite other, secular issues?

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# Two paradoxes of religiosity and voting

- Second paradox, conventional wisdom since the 1990s
- Mark Franklin (1992)
  - “Social cleavages had [finally] become irrelevant to partisanship”.
- Russell Dalton (1996)
  - “The religious cleavage has followed a pattern of decline similar to the class cleavage. The changing composition of the electorate is lessening the partisan significance of religious cues by decreasing the number of individuals for whom these cues are relevant”.
- Then, why is the association between religiosity and voting so relevant in countries where politicians apparently do not fight over religious issues and where electoral campaigns are conducted around issues other than the religious ones?

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# The religious cleavage in the 2000s

- The irreversible increasing of secularization
- The impact of secularization on...
  - the shrinking dimensions of religious groups,
  - the loosening bonds between religious organizations and religious electors, and
  - the lessening relevance of religiosity for the voting decision.
- The decline of the religious cleavage as a long-term voting factor, etc.

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# Some consequences

- **Structural similarities of secularization processes in time, space, and actors.**
- **Similarities also in outcomes and outputs.**
- **In comparative analyses, generalizations from a few cases.**
- **In empirical analyses, the non-inclusion of religious variables in models of electoral behavior.**

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# Our goals

- 1. A first attempt for systematically comparing *religious voting*
  - *Religious voting* refers to the tendency for voters in a particular denomination or level of religiosity to vote for a specific party or political candidate, rather than for an alternative option, compared with voters of another denomination (or denominations, or levels of religiosity).
  - In other words, religious voting simply describes a pattern of association between religiosity and vote.
  - (paraphrasing Evans, 2000)

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# Our goals

- 1. A first attempt for systematically comparing religious voting.
- 2. *To establish the phenomenon*
  - Merton (1987): “Before one proceeds to explain or to interpret a phenomenon, it is advisable to establish that the phenomenon actually exists, that it is enough of a regularity to require and to allow explanation”.
  - (vs. pseudo-facts which induce pseudo-problems and lead to false explanations)

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# Our goals

- 1. A first attempt for systematically comparing religious voting.
- 2. To establish the phenomenon
- 3. *To propose new measures of religious voting*
  - Congruent or consistent religious voting—how many voters cast their national votes in line with their religiosity.
  - Congruency indexes the predictability of voting decisions by citizens given their religiosity profiles (Sniderman and Bullock, 2004)



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# Variables, cases, and data

## ■ Variables

- Religiosity → church attendance (strong vs. weak)
- Parties classified according to the (mean) placement of their voters on the left-right scale (0-10, 1-10)

## ■ Cases

- Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America

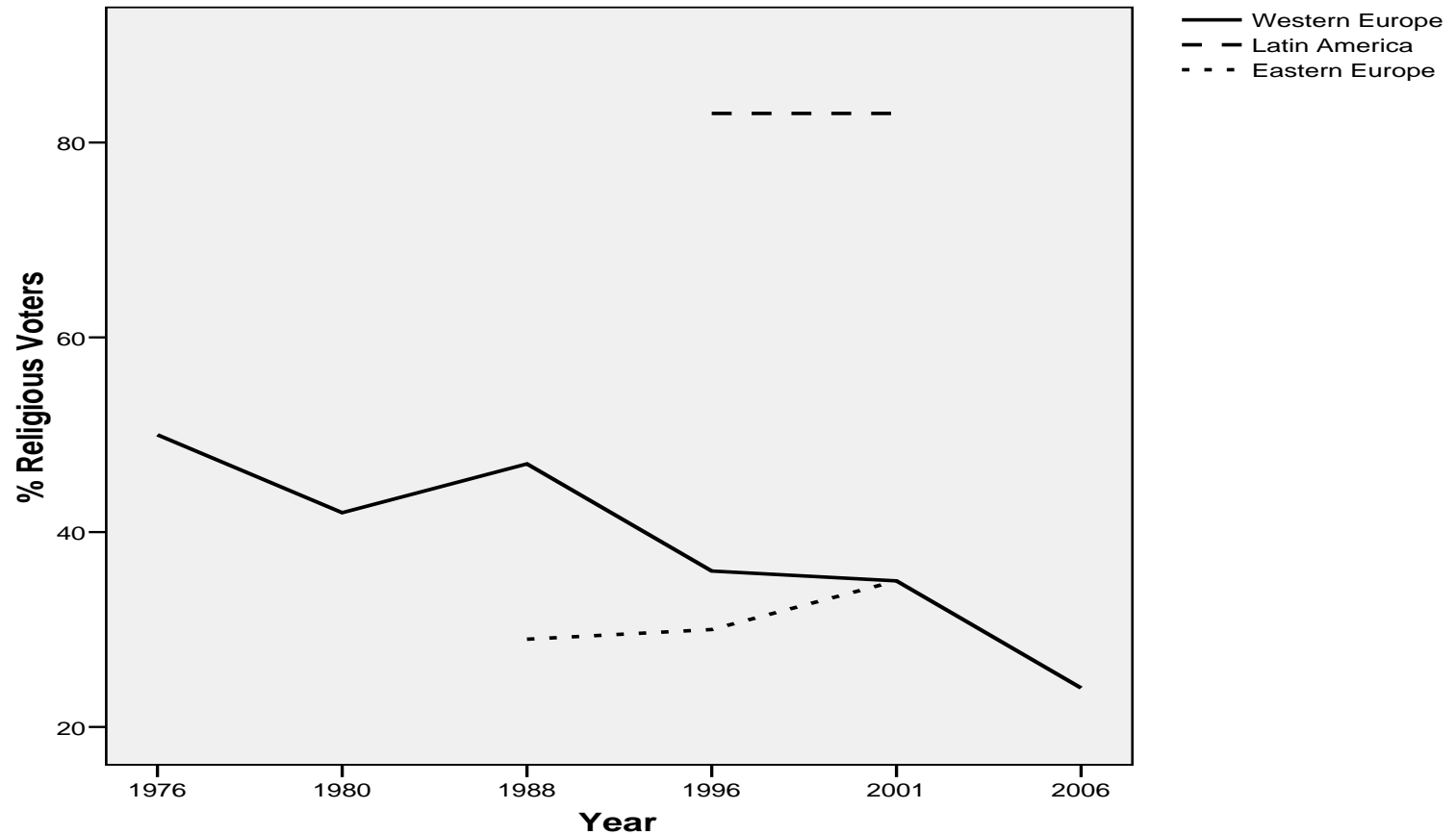
## ■ Data

- Eurobarometer (1976-1985)
- World Values Surveys, four rounds, 1980-2004
- European Social Survey, three rounds, 2002-2006
- Latinobarómetro, 1996-2004

# Establishing the phenomenon

- 1. Levels of religiosity
- 2. Congruent religious voting
  - Three regions
  - + 60 countries
- 3. Conservative and christian democratic parties
  - Electoral support and ideology
  - Religiosity
  - Religiosity and ideology

# 1. Religiosity in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (strong definition)



## An example: religious voting in Belgium

<i>Voting</i>	<i>Religiosity</i>	
	Religious	Non-religious
Conservative party	<b>370</b>	45
Non-conservative party	415	<b>101</b>

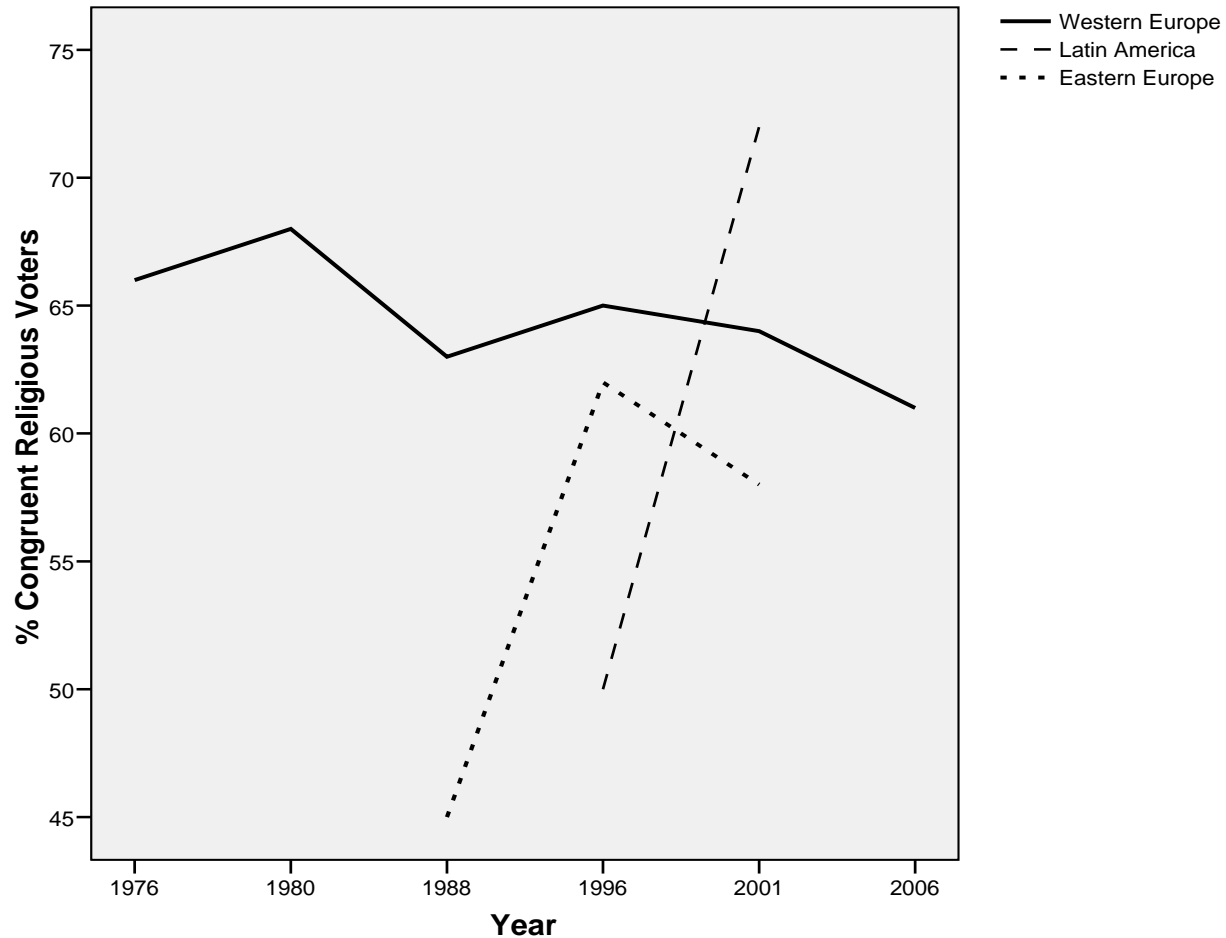
In bold, congruent voting with religious identity.

*Source:* European Social Survey, round 1, 2002-2003.

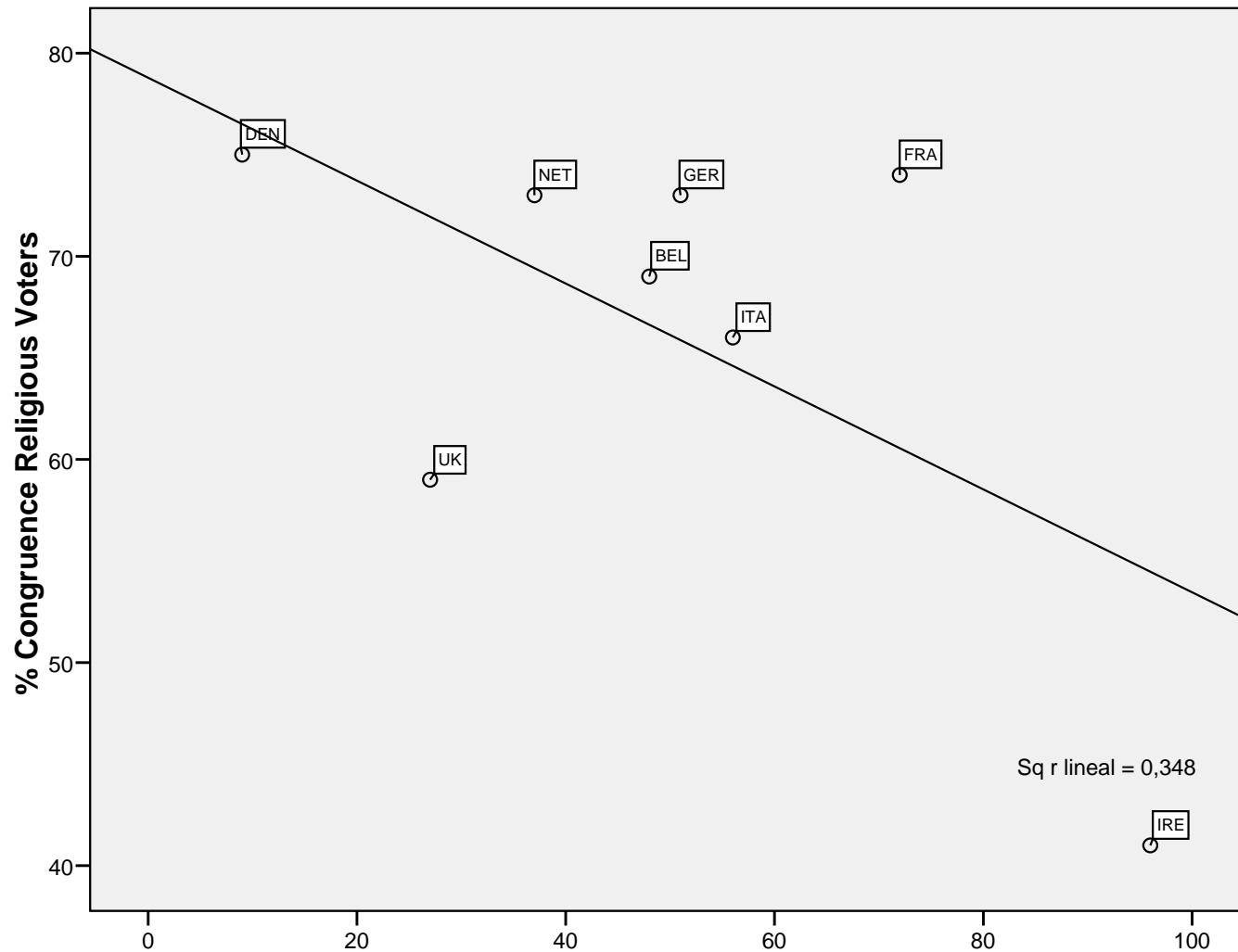
$100 * (471/931) = 51$  percent:

The 51 percent of voters in Belgium based their electoral choice on their religiosity.

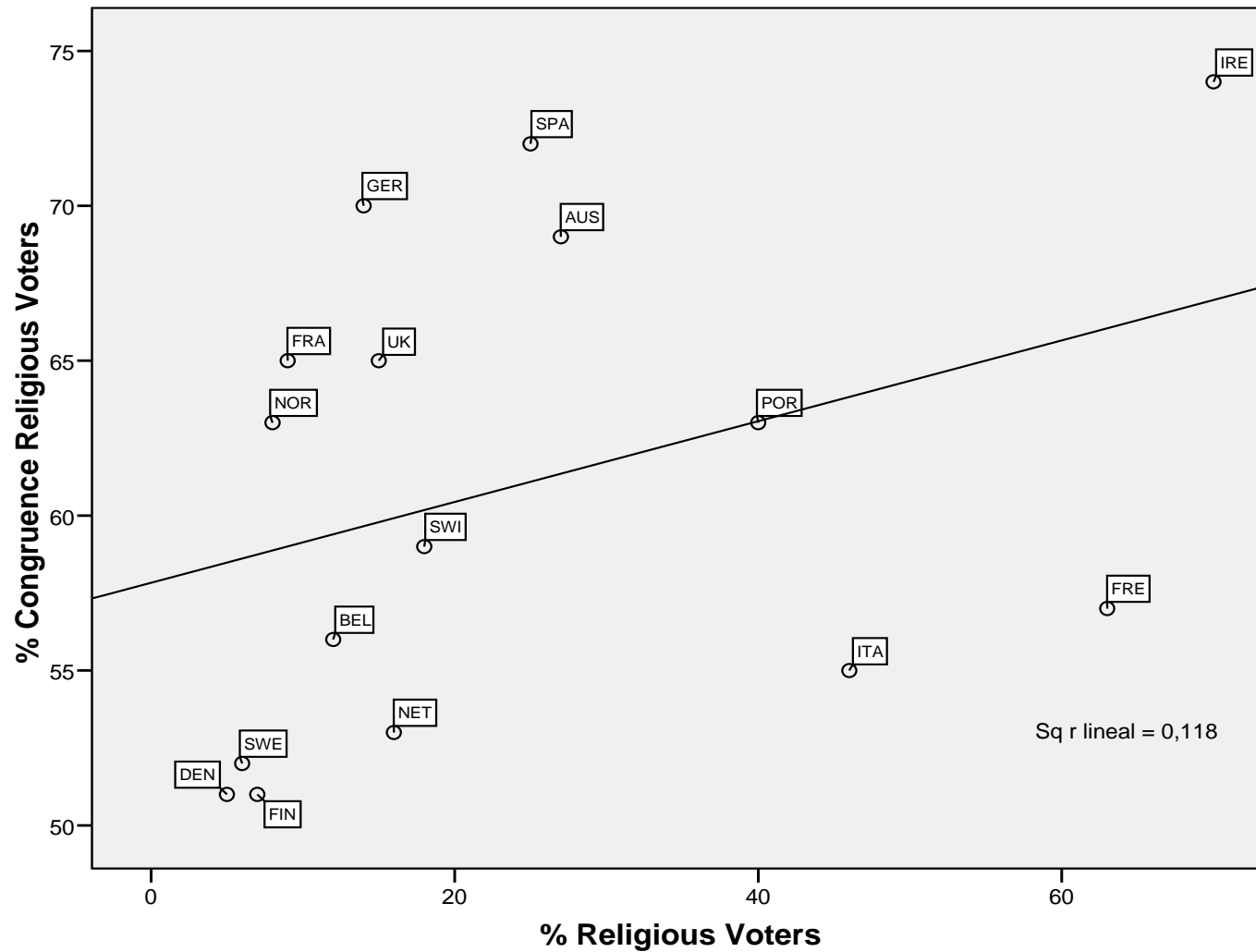
## 2. Congruent religious voters in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (strong definition)



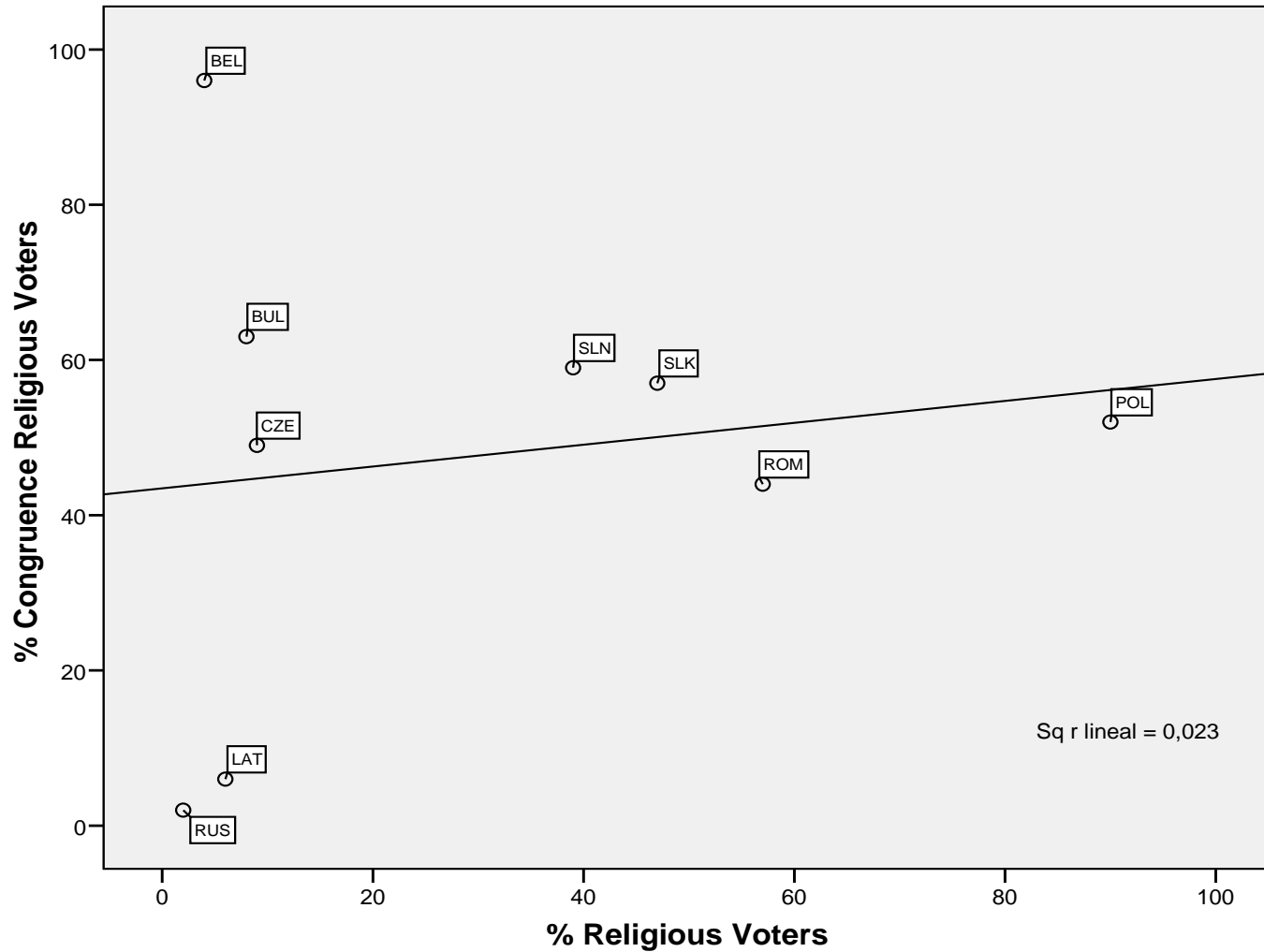
# Religiosity and voting in Western democracies, 1976



# Religiosity and voting in Western democracies, 2006

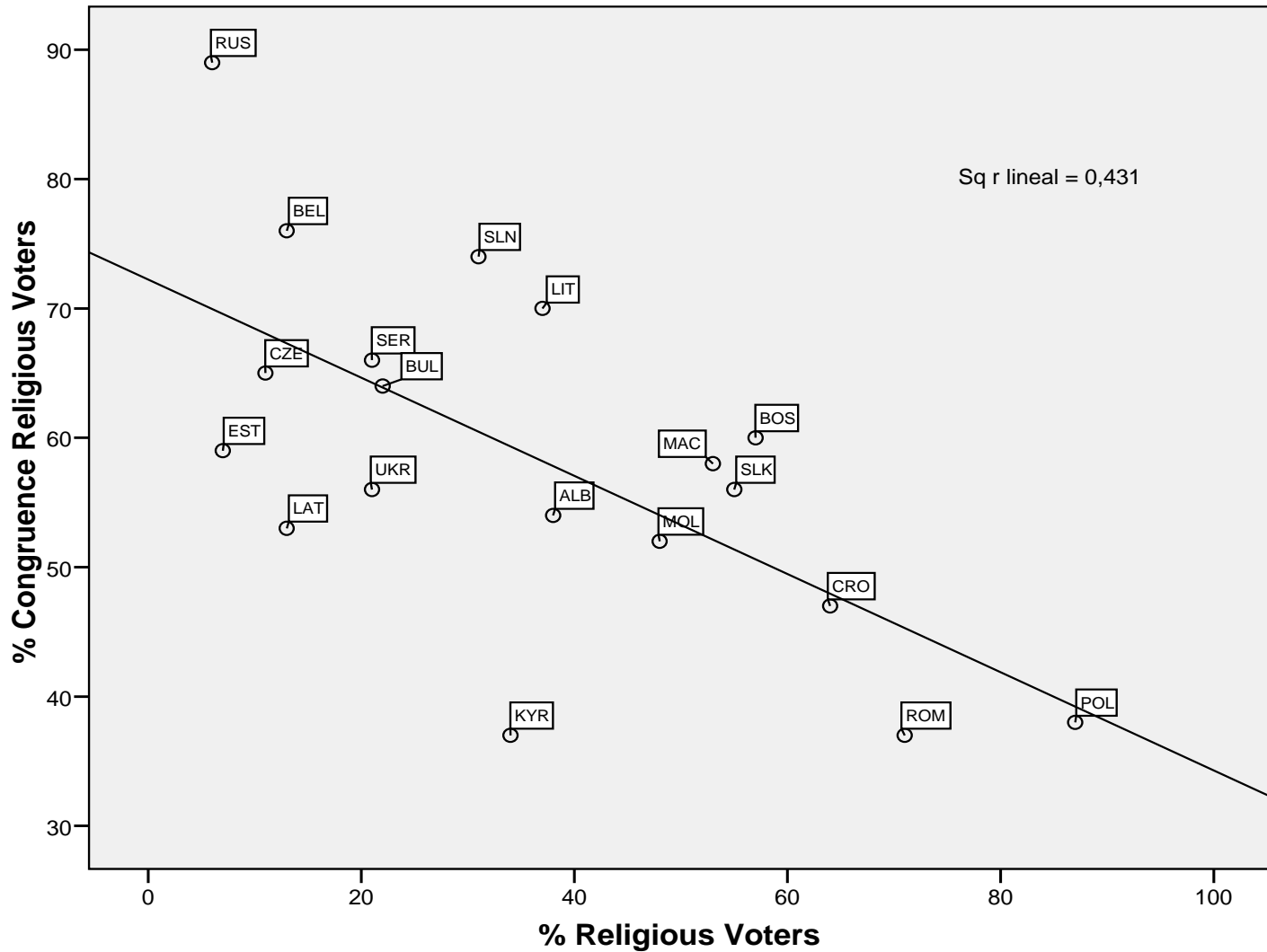


# Religiosity and voting in Eastern Europe, 1989-1993

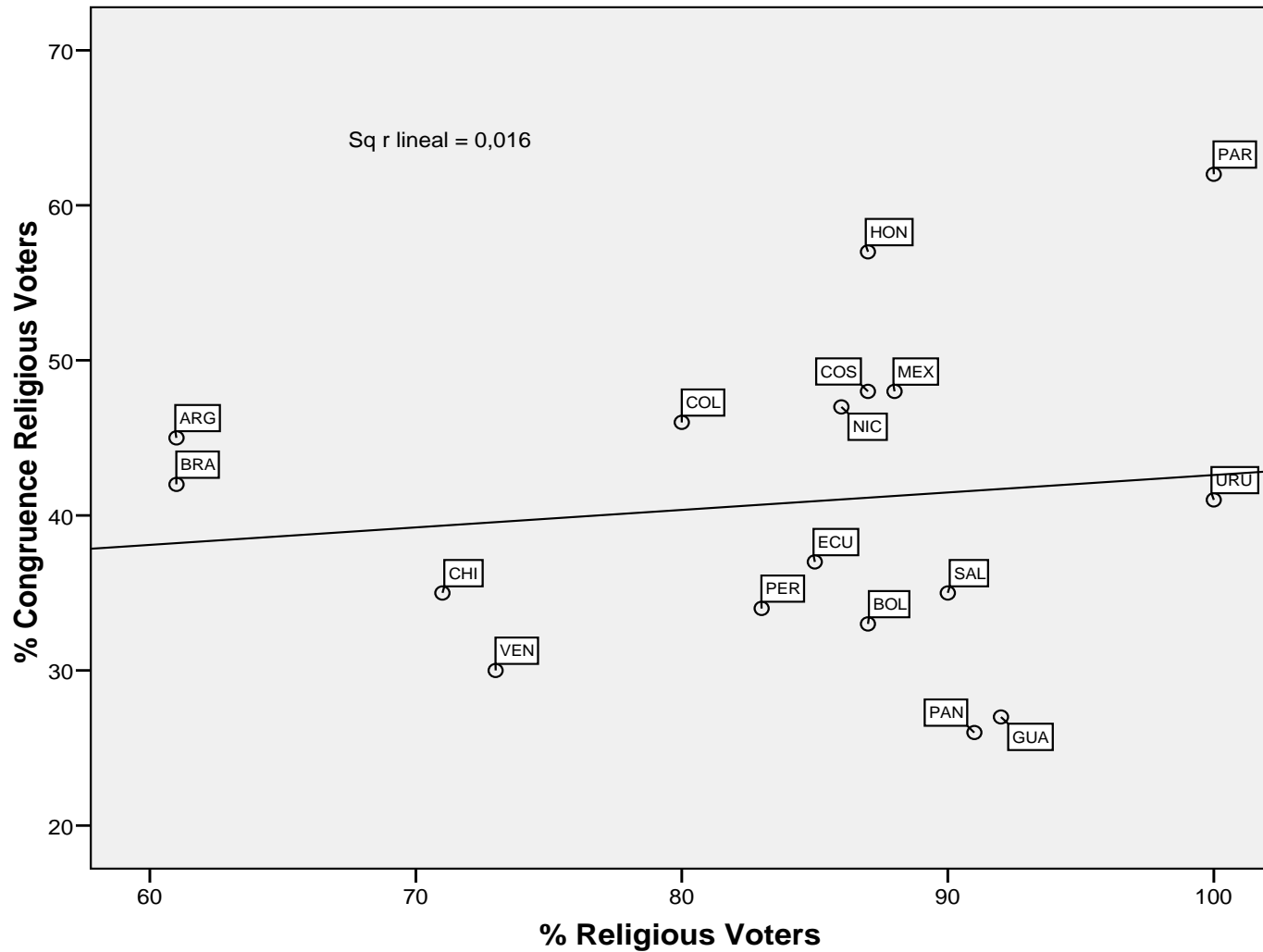




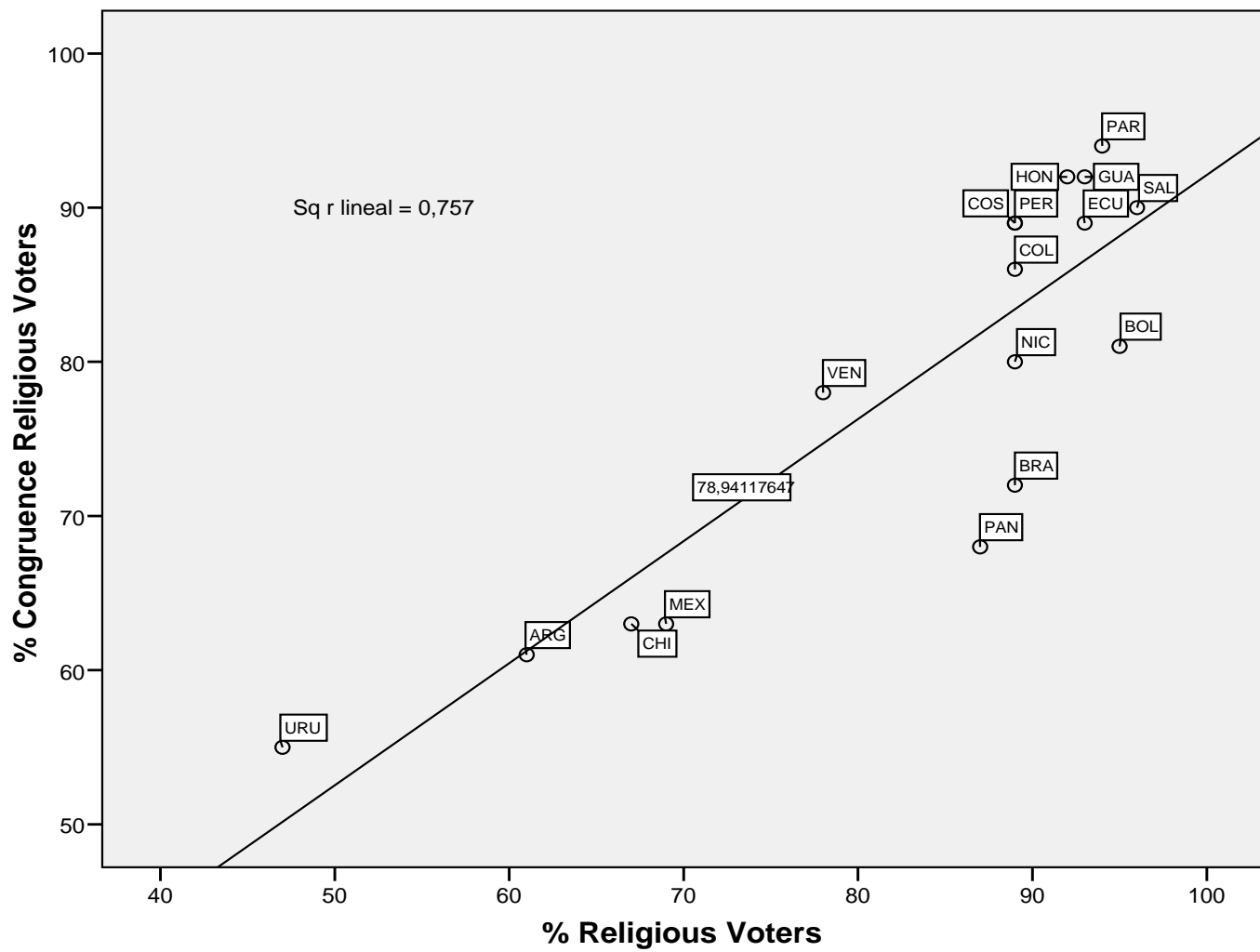
# Religiosity and voting in Eastern Europe, 2004



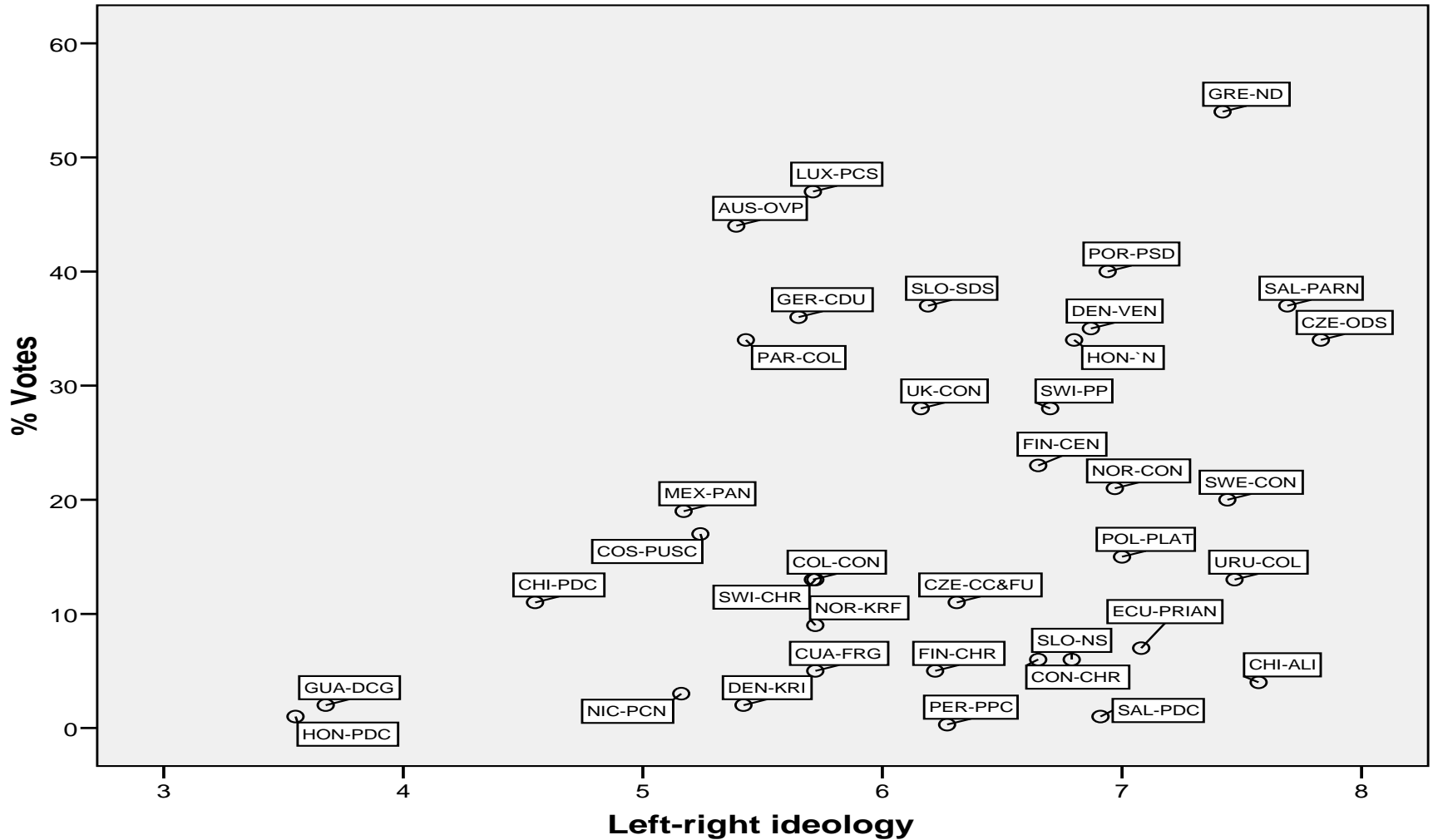
# Religiosity and voting in Latin America, 1996



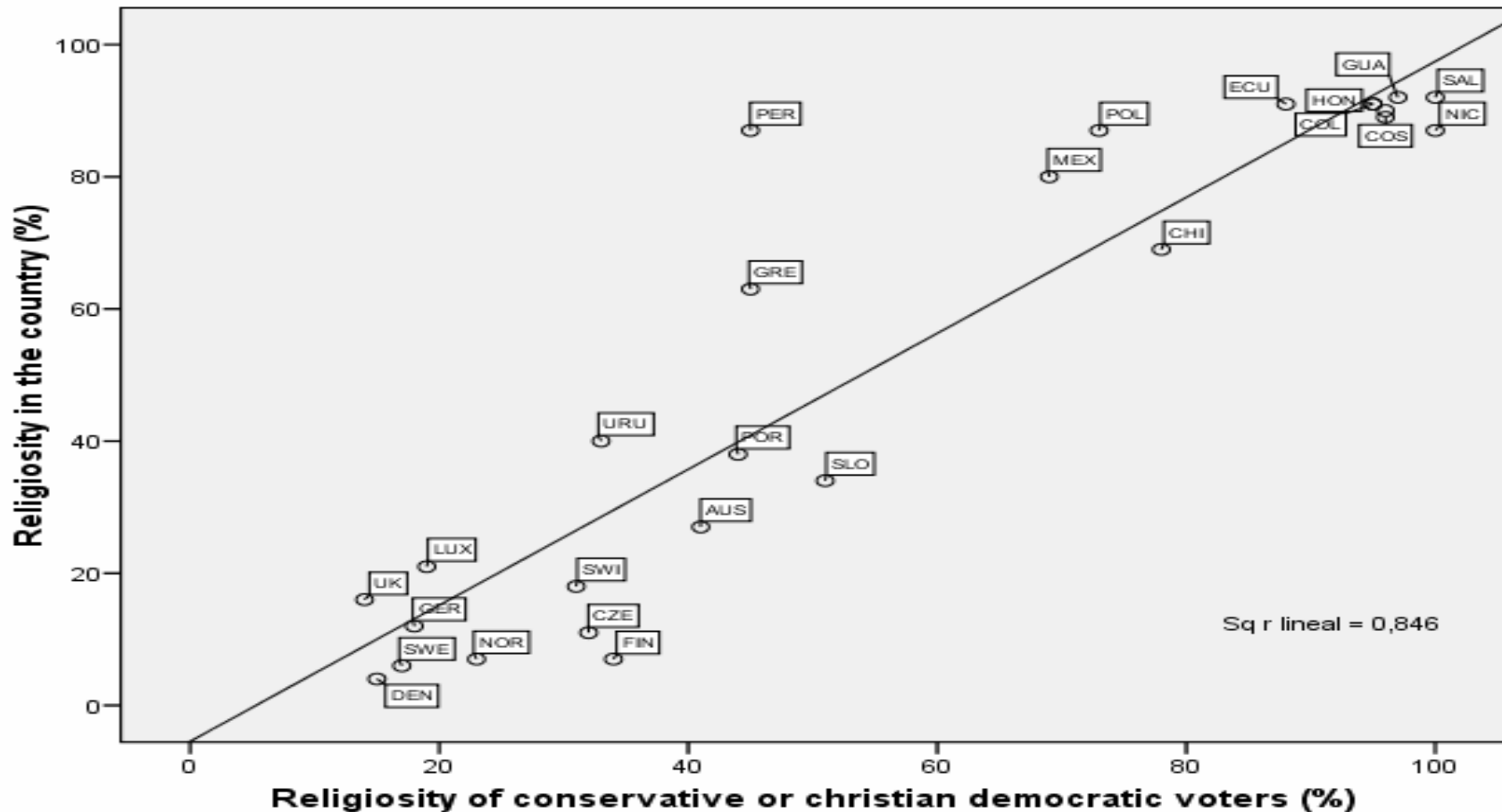
# Religiosity and voting in Latin America, 2002



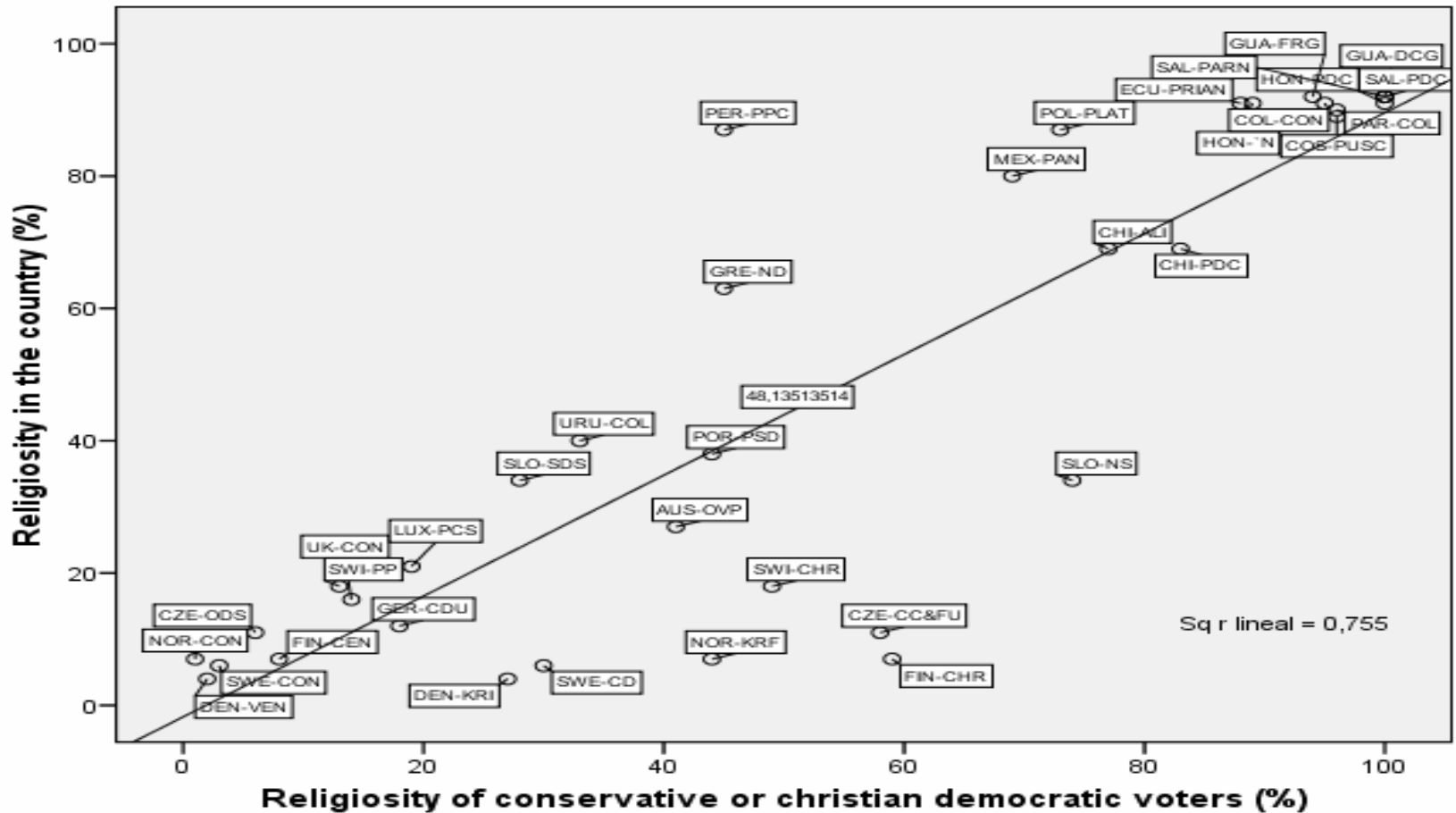
# 3. Electoral support and ideology, 2004



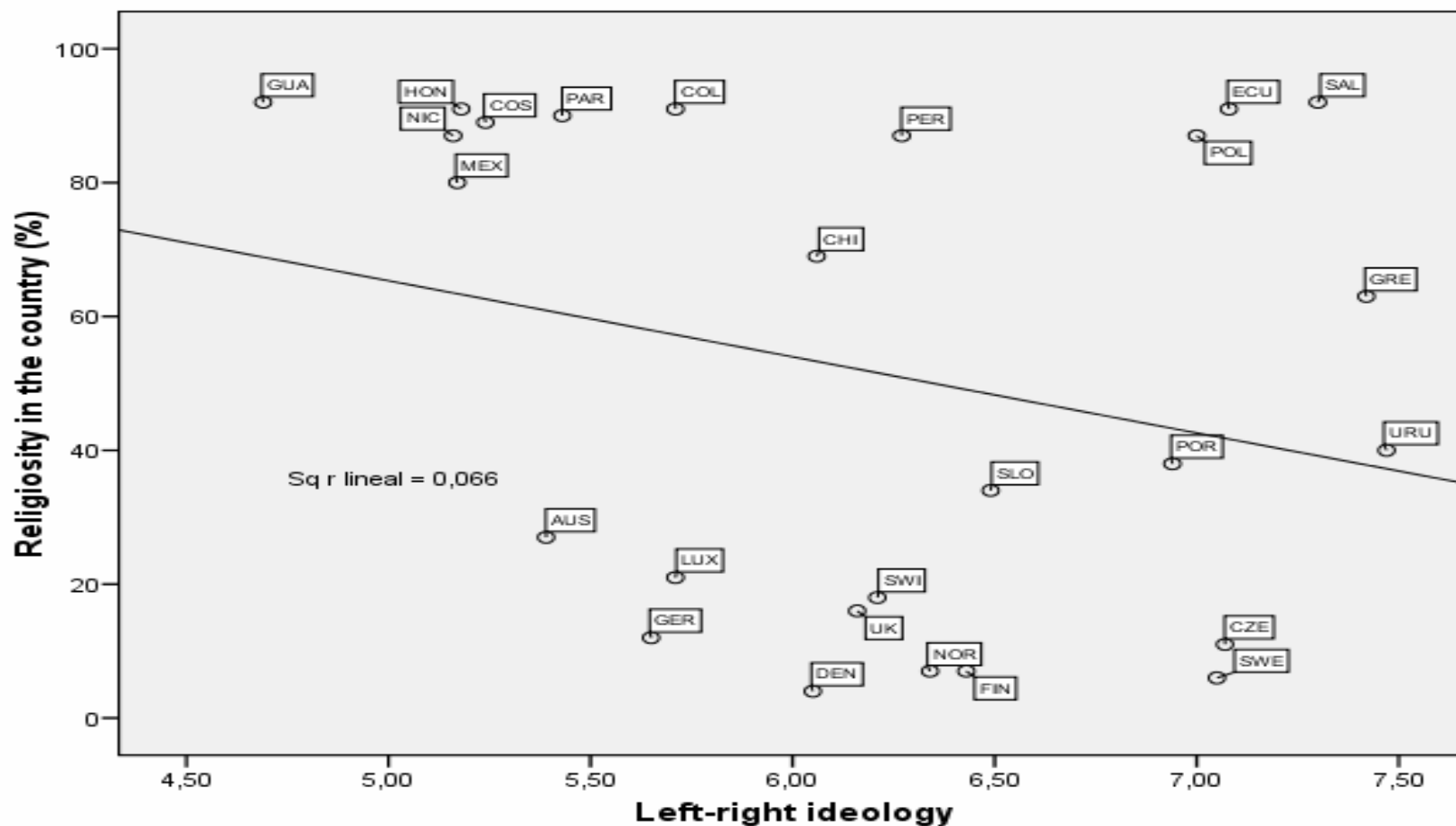
# Religiosity and parties (national level)



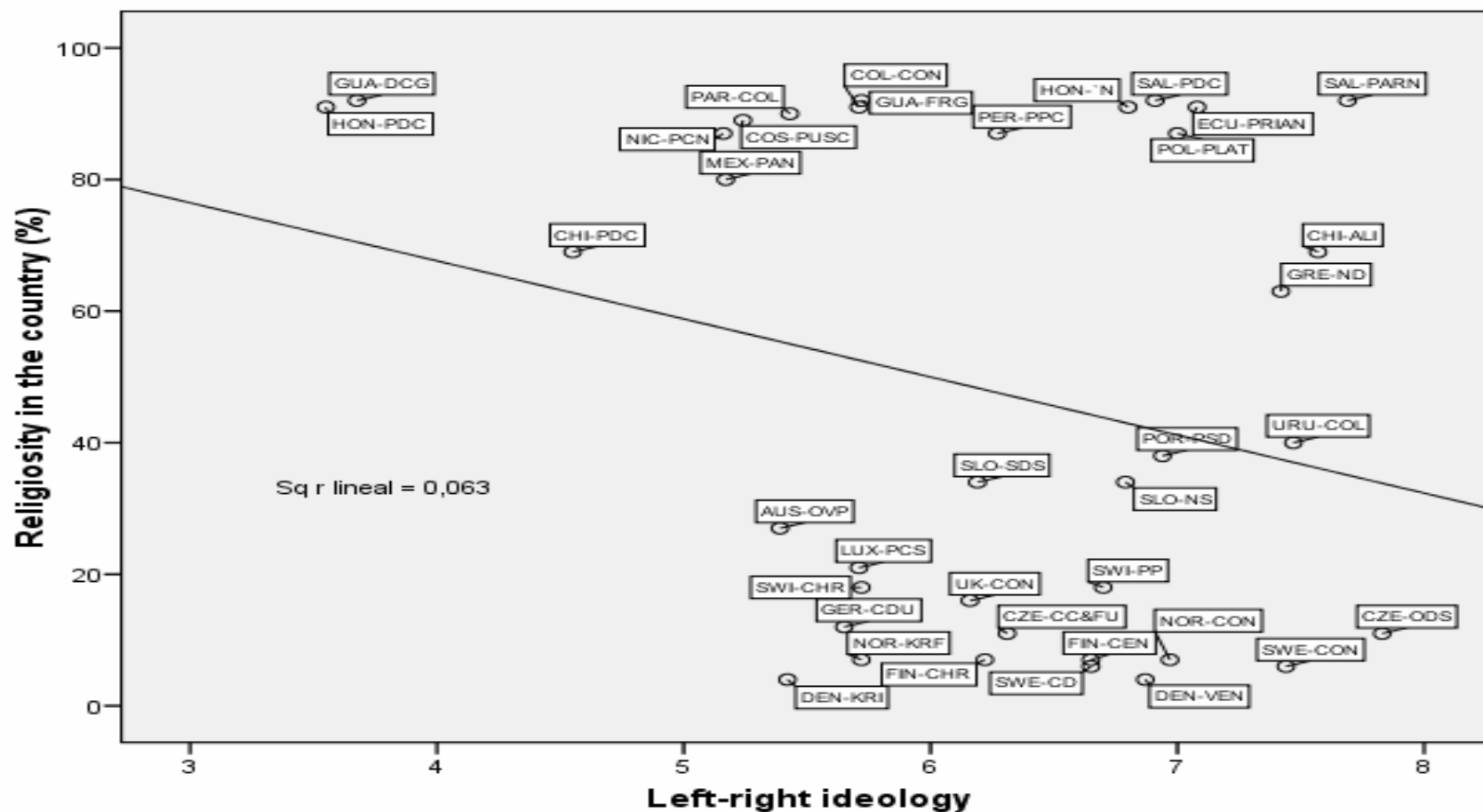
# Religiosity and parties (party level)



# Religiosity and ideology (national level)



# Religiosity and ideology (party level)





# In conclusion...

- The obituary of the religious cleavage seems to have been a bit premature: its decline is neither that general, nor that intense, nor that irreversible.
- The decline of the religious cleavage is a matter of degree and should therefore be empirically established before transforming it in an axiomatic premise to be proclaimed for every (Western) country.
- For religious cleavages, also political agency matters: religious conflicts are salient in a given society if, when, and only to the extent to which are instrumental to parties for activating religious or secular identities, and for mobilizing religious or secular citizens.
- As a consequence, even when political and social elites may converge in avoiding religion to become a major cleavage, they may foster religiosity to influence party choice in significant ways. Thus, religious voting can be found in contexts of weak or even non-existing cleavage.

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*¡¡Muchas gracias!!*

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## From here to ...

- More countries and years
- Slopes
- Explanation

## Some tentative answers (I)

- Social cleavages are not either a question of black-and-white, nor a then-and-now phenomenon: cleavage decline at the three (societal, attitudinal, and organizational) dimensions may and does usually entail its persistence through time and through generations.
- The **decline of the religious cleavage** is a matter of degree and should therefore be empirically established before transforming it in an axiomatic premise to be proclaimed for every Western country.
- The **persistence of the religious cleavage** depends upon relatively contingent circumstances at every cleavage dimension in every country: **religious interests and preferences** may remain relevant for specific social groups; some **religious identities** may be particularly resilient; and while some **organizations** (e.g., political parties) may find it worth to follow catch-all strategies, other **institutions** (e.g., national Churches) may adopt different paths.

## Some tentative answers (II)

- In determining whether there is a process of religious-cleavage decline or persistence, **political agency does matter**. More often than not, this outcome is contingent upon the strategies of political actors (the complex web of organizations, parties, elites, as well as their preferences, strategies, exchanges, discourses, decisions) to shape from above the religious conflicts.
- Following Sartori (1969), Przeworski and Sprague (1986), and Kalyvas (1996), **religious conflicts are salient** in a given society if, when, and only to the extent to which are instrumental to political parties for activating religious or secular identities, and for mobilizing religious or secular citizens.
- As a consequence, even when political/party elites and social/eclesiastical elites may converge in avoiding religion to become a major cleavage, they may foster religiosity to influence party choice in a significant way. Thus, **religious voting can be found in contexts of weak or even non-existent cleavage**.

## Some tentative answers (III)

- Following now Sani and Sartori (1983), Mair (1999), and Kistchelt (2003), it is likely that religiosity is no longer a **space of competition** – a relevant cleavage for the electoral competition among parties seeking for votes according to either the politicization of religious conflicts or the mobilization of Catholic or non-religious citizens in an attempt to channel their votes towards Catholic/conservative or non-religious/Left-wing parties.
- Religiosity may have become a **domain of identification** – possibly, but not necessarily, strongly associated with ideology, and therefore easily manipulated by party elites in the fields of symbolic politics, party identification, and policy-making.
- While parties compete in a limited number of spaces of competition, or cleavages, citizens may have many more domains of identification, among which the religious identities might have a relevant position. And this is **particularly relevant when these religious identities are in a way or another closely linked to ideological identities.**

## RELEVANCE:

**Empirical research on religious voting is based on finding statistically robust correlations between religiosity and voters' decisions. *But ...***

1. Severe problem of multicollinearity between ideology and religiosity
2. Omitted variable bias:  
Differences in the impact of religion on voting behaviour between two countries or two points in time might not entail that religion has played a different role, but that statistical models work better in one case than in the other
3. The slope of religious voting could be a function of changes in the relevance of religious issues and/or changes in the composition of electorates
4. The well-known indexes focused on class voting are not particularly useful for us

## Variables

- Church attendance as indicator of behavioral religiosity

*Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?*

- |                                      |                      |                      |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| • <i>01 Every day</i>                | <u>Religious</u>     | <u>Religious</u>     |
| • <i>02 More than once a week</i>    | <u>Religious</u>     | <u>Religious</u>     |
| • <i>03 Once a week</i>              | <u>Religious</u>     | <u>Religious</u>     |
| • <i>04 At least once a month</i>    | <u>Excluded</u>      | <u>Religious</u>     |
| • <i>05 Only on special holydays</i> | <u>Excluded</u>      | <u>Non religious</u> |
| • <i>06 Less Often</i>               | <u>Non religious</u> | <u>Non religious</u> |
| • <i>07 Never</i>                    | <u>Non religious</u> | <u>Non religious</u> |
| • <i>77 Refusal</i>                  |                      |                      |
| • <i>88 Don't know</i>               | <i>STRONG</i>        | <i>WEAK</i>          |
| • <i>99 No answer</i>                |                      |                      |



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## Variables

- We have classified parties as *religious/conservative* and *non-religious/non-conservative* according to the (mean) placement of their voters on the left (0) - right (10) scale:
  - Non religious parties: the mean position of their voters is below 5.0
  - Religious parties: the mean position of their voters is above 5.0

## Religiosity and voting behaviour in Europe, 2002-2003, (strong definition of religiosity)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Religious people (%)</i>	<i>National vote in line with religiosity (%)</i>	<i>National vote in line with ideology (%)</i>
Austria	27	69	69
Belgium	14	51	63
Switzerland	18	56	60
Czech Republic	11	55	80
Germany*	12	67	73
Denmark	4	50	77
Spain	29	66	78
Finland	7	54	77
France	10	68	84
United Kingdom	16	64	75
Greece	63	57	91
Hungary	16	63	83
Ireland	70	74	57
Israel	29	57	83
Italy	46	55	83
Luxemburg	21	58	62
Netherlands	16	53	72
Norway	7	54	76
Poland	87	64	74
Portugal	38	59	84
Sweden	6	59	84
Slovenia	34	76	72
<b>Mean</b>	26	60	75
<b>Standard deviation</b>	22	7	9

*Source:* European Social Survey, round 1, 2002-2003

## Religiosity and voting behaviour in Europe, 2002-2003, (weak definition of religiosity)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Religious people (%)</i>	<i>National vote in line with religiosity (%)</i>	<i>National vote in line with ideology (%)</i>
Austria	33	63	69
Belgium	19	50	63
Switzerland	23	59	60
Czech Republic	14	53	80
Germany*	18	64	73
Denmark	10	49	77
Spain	31	64	78
Finland	12	52	77
France	15	63	84
United Kingdom	19	62	75
Greece	55	55	91
Hungary	18	60	83
Ireland	67	70	57
Israel	26	52	83
Italy	43	50	83
Luxemburg	25	55	62
Netherlands	21	52	72
Norway	11	53	76
Poland	74	61	74
Portugal	44	58	84
Sweden	11	57	84
Slovenia	30	71	72
<b>Mean</b>	28	58	75
<b>Standard deviation</b>	18	6	9

\*First vote or the candidate vote

Source: European Social Survey, round 1, 2002-2003

# Congruent ideological voters in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and Latin America

