

To Brussels via Rome: how Eurosceptical are British Christians?



*Catholics tend to have a more positive view of the EU than other Christians, write **Ekaterina Kolpinskaya (Swansea University)** and **Stuart Fox (Cardiff University)**, who have analysed Euroscepticism among different denominations. The religious are more likely to be Eurosceptic, with members of the Church of England and Presbyterians especially so. The authors attribute these differences to a deep-rooted suspicion of supranational institutions among Anglicans, as well as the Roman Catholic*

identification with the Papacy as a cross-national institution that constraints national sovereignty, but in which all share a commitment to common values and goals.

Religious beliefs and affiliation [have long been assumed](#) to play a minor role in explaining Euroscepticism, including support for Brexit in the EU referendum. Whether someone is religious or non-religious, as well as whether they are a member of a particular religious group, has a direct and significant effect on [their support for EU membership](#) and shapes [attitudes that themselves influence Euroscepticism](#).

The magnitude of these effects is smaller than that of traits more commonly associated with Euroscepticism such as education, age or social class. Nonetheless, they offer new insight into how public support for EU membership and integration is shaped by the shared history, identity and values of different religious groups.



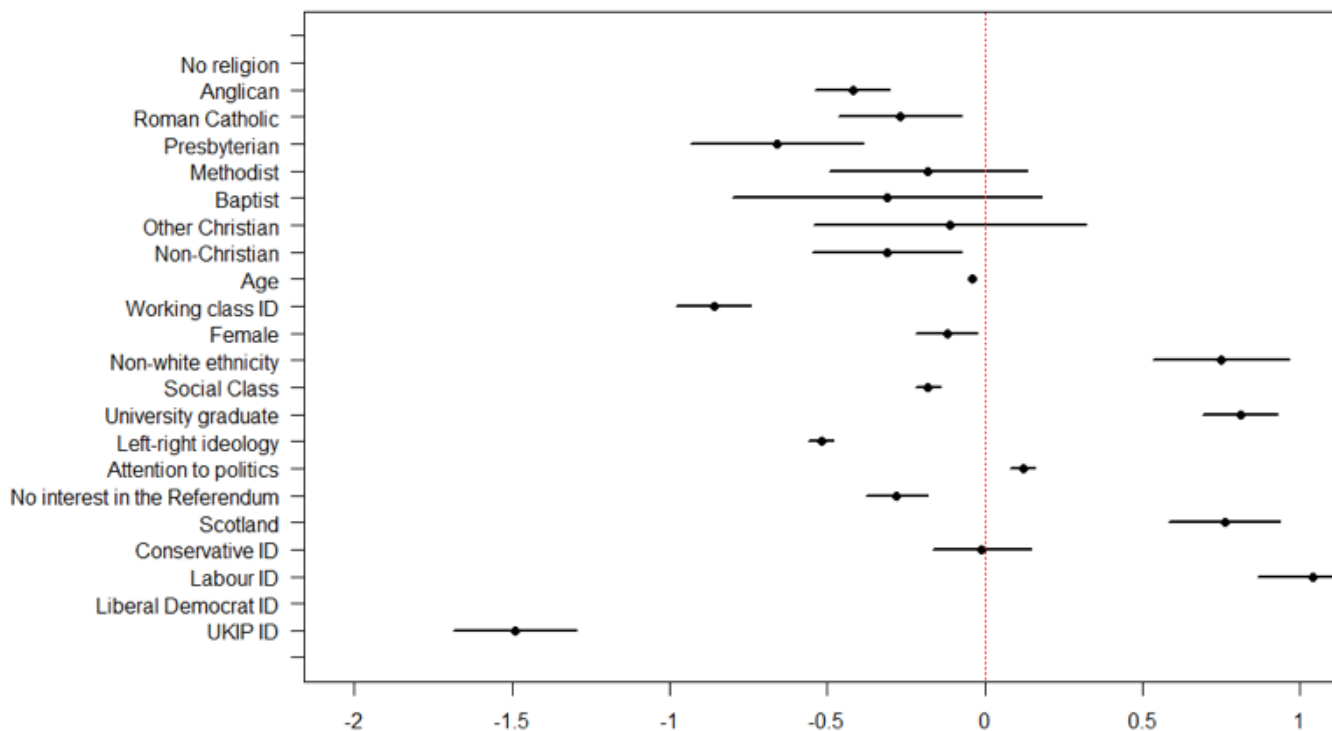
A pan-European church ... a priest of the Santa Maria sopra Minerva church in Rome attends the funeral mass of Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, September 2017. Photo: [Catholic Church England & Wales](#) via a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0 licence](#)

When we look deeper into the relationships between religious affiliation and [different dimensions of Euroscepticism](#), namely support for the utilitarian case (essentially based on a cost-benefit analysis of the EU membership) and affective case (the level of emotional attachment to European institutions), we find stark differences in support between believers and others. We examined these relationships using the [British Election Study Referendum Panel](#), which provides enough respondents from a range of Christian denominations to sustain reliable analyses of differences between them.

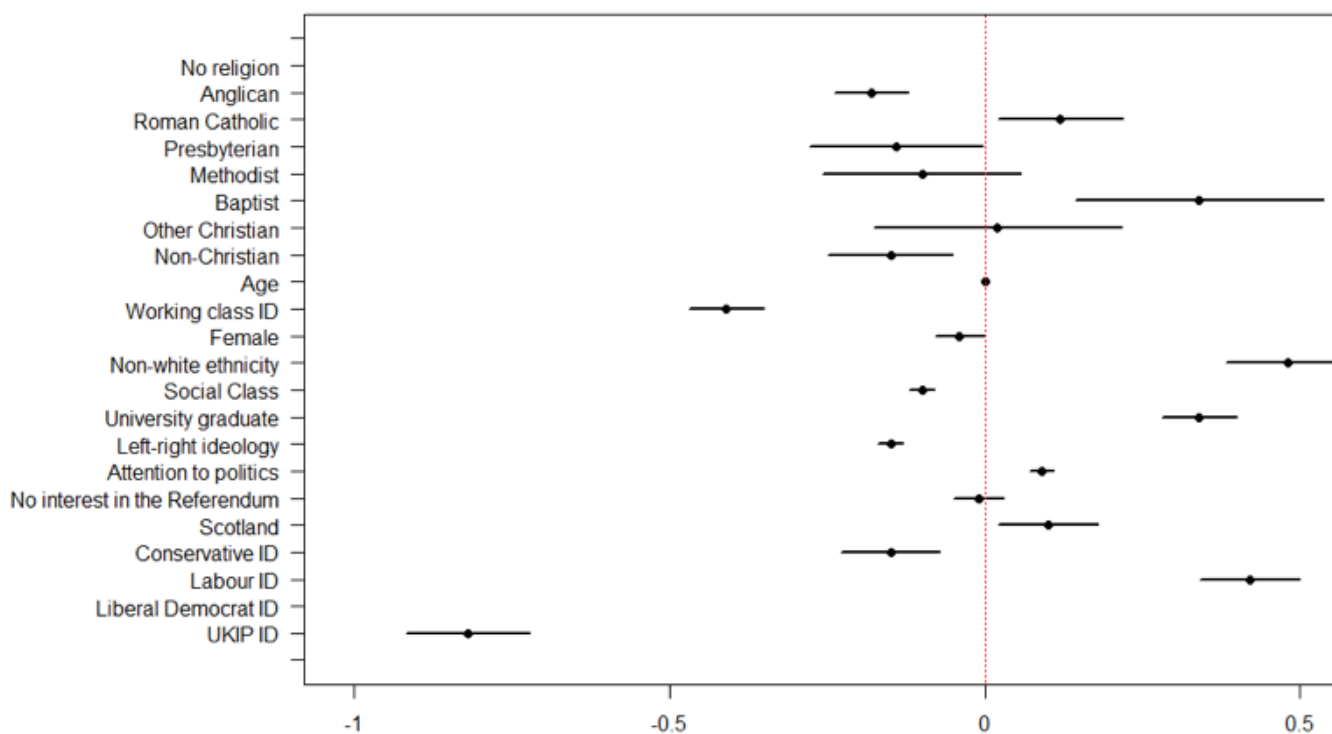
We found

- religious affiliation has a small but notable effect on Euroscepticism, even after other determinants of support have been accounted for;
- being affiliated to a specific religious group influences people's support for (or hostility towards) EU membership by shaping their assessments of the costs and benefits of EU membership, the performance of the EU in achieving policy objectives, and their affective attachment to the institution.

Explaining utilitarian support towards the EU



Explaining affective attachment to the EU



Source: BES, Wave 7-9. Note: Circles indicate random-effects GLS regression coefficients, and bars around them indicate standard errors. If a bar crosses the line through zero the effect is not statistically significant at 95% confidence level. "No religion" is a reference group.

There are significant differences in Euroscepticism among the various Christian denominations. The most Brexit-supporting groups are members of the Church of England and Presbyterians, while Catholics are typically the most supportive of EU membership. Other Protestant groups (Baptists and Methodists) sit somewhere in between. These findings closely resemble the relationships between religious belief and Euroscepticism [identified](#) in other European countries.

For the most part, this is a result of Catholics' greater propensity to assess the EU's policy performance and the benefits of EU membership positively, and to identify with the Union and perceive it as a legitimate institution. This trait probably [stems from](#) the history of Catholicism, which [values](#) international co-operation within a supranational institution – i.e. the Papacy – that constrains the sovereignty of national governments, as well as from the [belief](#) in universal social, moral and political values and a tendency to view universalism as the means by which shared goals and objectives can be achieved.

Anglicans, conversely, are more likely to feel that the costs of EU membership are greater than the benefits and to reject a European identity. This is [probably a reflection](#) of their attachment to the notion of a sovereign, independent nation-state, and historic scepticism regarding supranational institutions promoting universalist values and threatening their own distinctive identity. Moreover, the history of Protestantism is one in which the various groups have been dependent upon a strong nation state and national government to protect them from the dominance of a supra-national institution promoting Catholic universalism; and the values of Protestantism [promote](#) localised collectivism based around common local and/or national identities to achieve common objectives, rather than unification with a supranational institution. It seems likely that the history and values of Protestantism predispose its affiliates towards more negative views of the EU's policy performance and weaker attachments to it, and to the notion of a European citizenry, than their Catholic counterparts.

The differences in attitudes towards the EU, and support for it, were also reflected in slight differences in voter choice patterns between members of different religious denomination in the 2016 referendum. Protestant groups, and particularly [those with a historically close relationship with the UK national government](#) and who consider themselves integral to the preservation of British (or English) national identity (such as the Church of England), were more likely than Catholics and those of no religious affiliation to vote for Brexit. Catholics were slightly more likely to vote for Brexit than those with no affiliation, but were nonetheless typically more pro-EU than the Protestants. Some of these differences remain substantial and statistically significant even after a wide range of controls for individual-level determinants of Euroscepticism are included in the model. This confirms that while religious affiliation may not have had a particularly strong impact on one's propensity to support Brexit during the referendum – compared with age or social class, for example – it was nonetheless a significant one.

This post represents the views of the authors and not those of the Brexit blog, nor the LSE.

[Ekaterina Kolpinskaya \(@DrKolpinskaya\)](#) is a Lecturer in Political and Cultural Studies at Swansea University. Her research interests include political participation and representation of under-represented groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities in Western democracies.

[Dr Stuart Fox \(@stuarte5933\)](#) is a Quantitative Research Associate at the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods, Cardiff University. His research focusses on the political and civic engagement, values and participation of young people in Western democracies.