Sellers or Buyers in Religious Markets? The Supply and Demand of Religion[1]

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart

Since the September 2001 terrorist attacks and their aftermath in Afghanistan and Iraq, public interest in religious pluralism has grown tremendously, and the debate about secularization theory and its recent critiques have become increasingly relevant to contemporary concerns. The religious landscapes in both Europe and the U.S. are increasingly diverse in different ways, but the overall trend on both sides of the Atlantic is toward greater secularization and a multiplicity of different approaches to religion. This diversity reflects centuries-old differences among Protestant and Catholic churches, Orthodox Christians, and long-established Jewish groups, combined with growing multiculturalism from immigrant populations adhering to Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other faiths, as well as those adhering to none. Many observers suggest that New Age spiritualities may also play a role, including the development of more individualized practices outside organized religion. Secular Western societies have experienced the influx of migrants and political refugees drawn from traditional cultures and developing societies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, which has highlighted contrasts over divergent religious values and beliefs. Some traditional

[1] This essay is adapted from Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Pippa Norris is the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In May 2006 she begins a two-year term as the new Director of the Democratic Governance Group at the United Nations Development Program in New York.

Ronald Inglehart is Professor of Political Science and Program Director at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. He helped found the Eurobarometer surveys and directs the World Values surveys. He has also served as a consultant to the U.S. State Department and the European Union.

political conflicts between religious communities have become more muted, notably among Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. At the same time, new forms of identity politics appear to have become more salient.[2] We are seeing a landscape in Western societies that is becoming both more secular and more diverse.

The idea of secularization has a long and distinguished history in the social sciences, with many seminal thinkers arguing that religiosity was declining throughout Western societies. The seminal social thinkers of the nineteenth century—Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society.[3] They were far from alone; ever since the Age of the Enlightenment, leading figures in philosophy, anthropology, and psychology have postulated that theological superstitions, symbolic liturgical rituals, and sacred practices are the product of a past that will be outgrown in the modern era. The death of religion was the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century; indeed, it has been regarded as *the* master model of sociological inquiry, where secularization was ranked with bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanization as the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations. As C. Wright Mills summarized this process:

> Once the world was filled with the sacred—in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.[4]

During the last decade, however, this thesis of the slow and steady death of religion has come under growing criticism; secularization theory is currently experiencing the most sustained challenge in its long history. Critics point to multiple indicators of religious health and vitality today, ranging from the continued popularity of churchgoing in the United States to the emergence of New Age spirituality in Western Europe, the growth in fundamentalist movements and religious parties in the Muslim world, the evangelical revival sweeping through Latin America, and the upsurge of ethno-religious conflict in international affairs.[5] After reviewing these developments, Peter L. Berger, one of the foremost advocates of secularization during the 1960s, recanted his earlier claims:

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2 Some examples are the assassination of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands and the bombings by foreign or indigenous Muslim groups causing mass casualities in Madrid and London.

3 See Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 170–94; Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) chapter 4.

4 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) 32–3.

5 "Fundamentalist" is here used in a neutral way to refer to those with an absolute conviction in the fundamental principles of their faith, to the extent that they will not accept the validity of any other beliefs.

> The world today, with some exceptions...is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled "secularization theory" is essentially mistaken.[6]

In a fierce critique, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke suggest it is time to bury the secularization thesis: "After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophesies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper 'requiescat in pace.'"[7]

Were Comte, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx completely misled in their beliefs about religious decline in industrialized societies? Was the predominant sociological view during the twentieth century totally misguided? Has the debate been settled? We think not. Talk of burying the secularization theory is premature. The critique relies too heavily on selected anomalies and focuses too heavily on the United States (which happens to be a striking deviant case) rather than comparing systematic evidence across a broad range of rich and poor societies.[8] We need to move beyond studies of Catholic and Protestant church attendance in Europe (where attendance is falling) and the United States (where attendance remains stable) if we are to understand broader trends in religious vitality in churches, mosques, shrines, synagogues, and temples around the globe.

There is no question that the traditional secularization thesis needs updating. This study develops a revised version of secularization theory that emphasizes the extent to which people have a sense of existential security—that is, the feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted. We build on key elements of traditional sociological accounts while revising others. We believe that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those living in poorer nations, facing personal survival-threatening risks. We argue that feelings of vulnerability to physical, societal, and personal risks are a key factor driving religiosity, and we demonstrate that the process of secularization—a systematic erosion of religious practices, values, and beliefs—has occurred most clearly among the most prosperous social sectors living in affluent and secure post-industrial nations.

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6 See Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999) 2. Compare this statement with the arguments in Berger's *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967).

7 Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 79.

8 For example, Roger Finke claims that "the vibrancy and growth of American religious institutions presents the most open defiance of the secularization model" (Finke, "An Unsecular America," in Bruce 148).

Secularization is a tendency, not an iron law. One can easily think of striking exceptions, such as Osama bin Laden who is (or was) extremely rich and fanatically religious. But when we go beyond anecdotal evidence, we find that the overwhelming bulk of evidence points in the opposite direction: people who experience ego-tropic risks during their formative years (posing direct threats to themselves and their families) or socio-tropic risks (threatening their community) tend to be far more religious than those who grow up under safer, more comfortable, and more predictable conditions. In relatively secure societies, the remnants of religion have not died away, but the importance and vitality of religion, its ever-present influence on how people live their daily lives, has gradually eroded.

The strongest challenge to secularization theory arises from American observers who commonly point out that claims of steadily diminishing congregations in Western Europe are sharply at odds with U.S. trends, at least until the early 1990s.[9] Here we focus upon how we can best explain "American exceptionalism."[10] We first describe systematic and consistent evidence establishing the variations in religiosity among post-industrial nations, in particular contrasts between the U.S. and Western Europe. We focus on similar post-industrial nations, all affluent countries and established democracies, most (but not all) sharing a cultural heritage of Christendom (although the critical cleavage dividing Catholic and Protestant Europe remains), and all being service-sector knowledge economies with broadly similar levels of education and affluence.[11]

This "most-similar" comparative framework narrows down, or even eliminates, some of the multiple factors that could be causing variations in religious behavior, allowing us to compare like with like. We examine whether the United States is indeed "exceptional" among rich nations in the vitality of its spiritual life, as the conventional wisdom has long suggested, or whether, as Berger proposes, Western Europe is "exceptional" in its secularization.[12] On this basis, we then consider systematic evidence to test alternative "supply" and "demand" explanations of variations in religiosity. *Religious market theory* postulates that intense competition between rival denominations (supply) generates a ferment of activity, explaining the vitality of churchgoing. We compare evidence supporting this account with the theory of *secure secularization*, based on the idea that societal modernization, human development, and economic inequality drive the popular

9 Berger, *Desecularization*; Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2003).

10 Further discussion of our larger project can be found in Norris and Inglehart.

11 Post-industrial nation-states are defined as those assigned a Human Development Index score over .900 by the UN Development Report. These countries have a mean per capita GDP of $29,585.

12 Berger, *Desecularization*. See also discussions of American cultural exceptionalism in Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of Canada and the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Graham K. Wilson, *Only in America? The Politics of the United States in Comparative Perspective* (Chatham: Chatham Publishers, 1998).

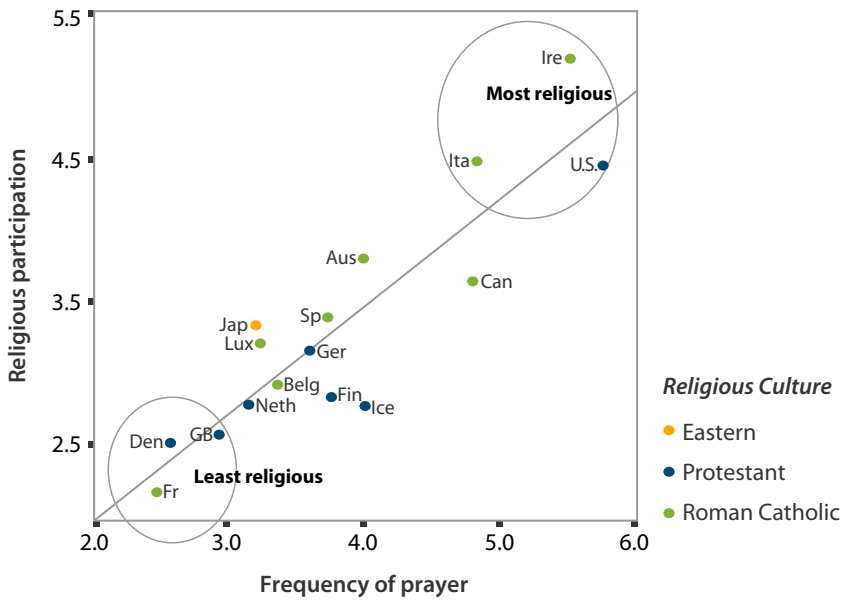

Figure 1. Religious behavior in post-industrial societies. Mean frequency of attendance at religious services per society is based on responses to the question "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week (7), once a week (6), once a month (5), only on special holidays (4), once a year (3), less often (2), never or practically never (1)." Mean frequency of prayer is based on "How often do you pray to God outside of religious services? Every day (7), more than once a week (6), once a week (5), at least once a month (4), several times a year (3), less often (2), never (1)." (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.)

demand for religion. The conclusions consider the broader implications of the findings for the role of faith in politics, and for divisions in the predominant cultures found in Europe and the United States.

Comparing Religiosity in Post-Industrial Nations

We can start by considering the cross-national evidence for how the indicators of religiosity apply to post-industrial nations. Figure 1 shows the basic pattern of religious behavior, highlighting substantial contrasts between the cluster of countries that prove by far the most religious in this comparison, including the United States, Ireland, and Italy. At the other extreme, the most secular nations include France, Denmark, and Britain. There is a fairly similar pattern across both indicators of religious behavior, suggesting that both collective and individual forms of participation are fairly consistent in each society. Therefore, although religion in the United States is distinctive among rich nations, it would still be misleading to refer to American "exceptionalism" (as so many do), as though it were a deviant case from *all* other post-industrial nations.

Figure 2. Religious participation in Europe. Mean frequency of attendance at religious services is based on responses to the question "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week (7), once a week (6), once a month (5), only on special holidays (4), once a year (3), less often (2), never or practically never (1)." (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.)

The marked contrasts within Europe are illustrated further in Figure 2, mapping secular Northern Europe compared with the persistence of more regular churchgoing habits in Southern Europe, as well as differences within Central and Eastern Europe. The "North-South" religious gap within the European Union is, admittedly, a puzzle that cannot be explained by the process of societal development alone, since these are all rich nations. More plausible explanations include the contemporary strength of religiosity in Protestant and Catholic cultures, as well as societal differences in economic equality.

Trends in Secularization in Western Europe

One reason for these cross-national variations could be that most post-industrial societies have experienced a significant erosion of religiosity during the post-war era, but that these trends have occurred from different starting points, in a path-dependent fashion, due to the historic legacy of the religious institutions and cultures within each country. Where the church is today could depend in large part upon where it started out.

Evidence in Western Europe consistently and unequivocally shows two things: traditional religious beliefs and involvement in institutionalized religion, first, vary considerably from one country to another; and, second, have steadily declined throughout Western Europe, particularly since the 1960s. Studies have often reported that many Western Europeans have ceased to be regular churchgoers today outside of special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, weddings and funerals, a pattern especially evident among the young. Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere, for example, compared the proportion of regular (weekly) churchgoers in seven European countries from 1970 to 1991, based on the Eurobarometer surveys, and documented a dramatic decrease in congregations during this period in the states under comparison. Overall levels of church disengagement had advanced furthest in France, Britain, and the Netherlands. "Although the timing and pace differ from one country to the next," the authors concluded, "the general tendency is quite stable: in the long run, the percentage of unaffiliated is increasing."[13] Numerous studies provide a wealth of evidence confirming similar patterns of declining religiosity found in many other post-industrial nations.[14]

Trends in recent decades illustrate the consistency of the secularization process irrespective of the particular indicator or survey that is selected. Figure 3 illustrates the erosion of regular church attendance that has occurred throughout Western Europe since the early 1970s. The fall is steepest and most significant in many Catholic societies, notably Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Spain. To conclude, as Greeley does, that religion is "still relatively unchanged" in the traditional Catholic nations of Europe seems a triumph of hope over experience, and sharply

[13] Wolfgang Jagodzinski and Karel Dobbelaere, "Secularization and Church Religiosity," *The Impact of Values*, ed. Jan W. van Deth and Elinor Scarbrough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 105.

[14] R. Currie, A. D. Gilbert, and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Sabino Samele Acquaviva, *The Decline of the Sacred in Industrial Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979); Sheena Ashford and Noel Timms, *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1992); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); F. Höllinger, *Volksreligion und Herrschaftskirche. Die Würzeln Religiösen Verhaltens in Westlichen Gesellschaften* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1996); L. Voye, "Secularization in a Context of Advanced Modernity," *Sociology of Religion* 60.3 (1999): 275–88; Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) chapter 3. For a challenge to this view, however, see Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1985): 230–52.

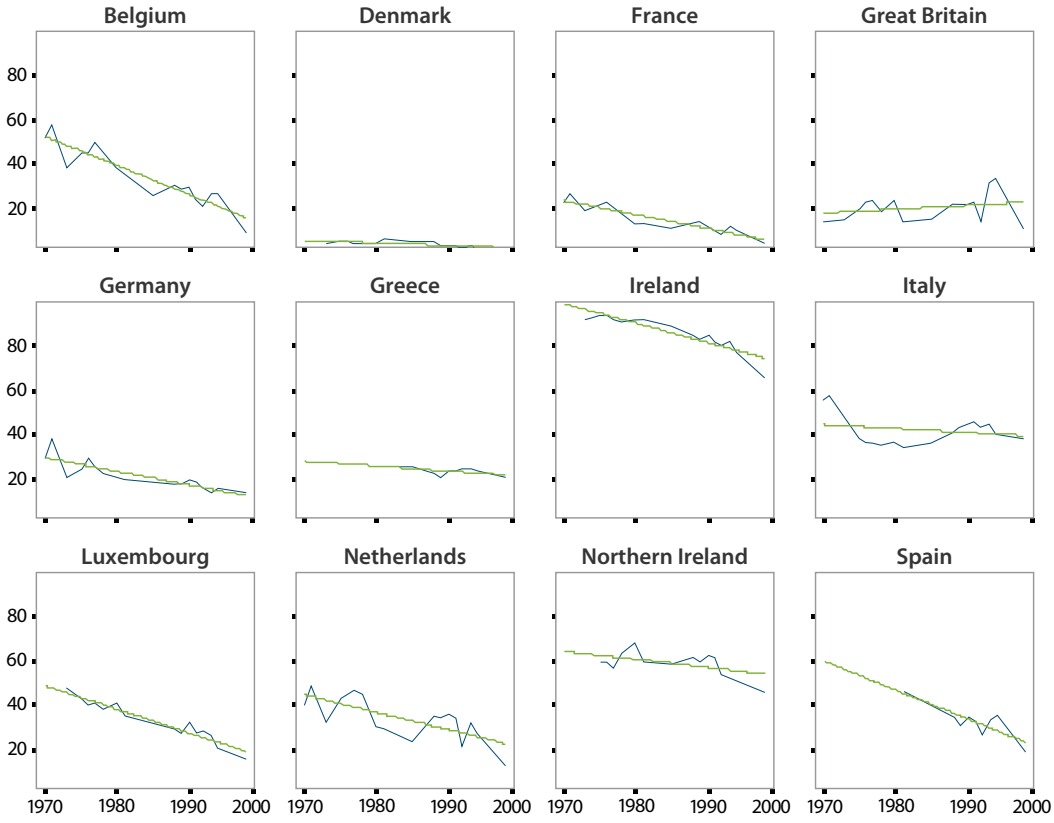

Figure 3. Religious participation in Western Europe, 1970–2000. Graphs represent percentage of the population in each society who said they attended a religious service "at least once a week" and the regression line of the trend. (The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File 1970–99.)

at odds with the evidence.[15] Marked contrasts in the strength of churchgoing habits remain clear, as between contemporary rates of religious participation in Ireland and Denmark. Nevertheless, all the trends point consistently downward. Moreover, the erosion of religiosity is not exclusive to Western European nations; regular churchgoing also dropped during the last two decades in affluent Anglo-American nations such as Canada and Australia.[16]

[15] Greeley xi.

[16] See Reginald W. Bibby, "The State of Collective Religiosity in Canada: An Empirical Analysis," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 16.1 (1979): table 3, which shows that in Canada church attendance fell from 67 percent in 1946 to 35 percent in 1978; Hans Mol, *The Faith of Australians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Ian McAllister, "Religious Change and Secularization: The Transmission of Religious Values in Australia," *Sociological Analysis* 49.3 (1998): 249–63.

Table 1. Belief in God, 1947–2001

Nation	1947[a]	1968[b]	1975[c]	1981[d]	1990[d]	1995[d]	2001[d]	Change[e]	β[f]	Sig.[g]
Sweden	80	60		52	38	48	46	-33.6	-.675	**
Netherlands	80	79		64	61		58	-22.0	-.463	*
Australia	95		80	79		75	75	-19.9	-.379	**
Norway	84	73		68	58	65		-18.9	-.473	**
Denmark	80			53	59		62	-17.9	-.387	*
Britain		77	76	73	72		61	-16.5	-.461	*
Greece		96					84	-12.3	-.364	
W. Germany		81	72	68	63	71	69	-12.0	-.305	n/s
Belgium			78	76	65		67	-11.2	-.487	n/s
Finland	83	83			61	73	72	-10.8	-.296	n/s
France	66	73	72	59	57		56	-10.1	-.263	n/s
Canada	95		89	91	85		88	-7.2	-.387	n/s
Switzerland		84			77	77		-7.2	-.277	n/s
India			98		93	94		-4.0	-.231	n/s
Japan			38	39	37	44	35	-3.0	-.016	n/s
Austria		85			78		83	-1.9	-.097	n/s
Italy			88	82	82		88	-0.1	.039	n/s
U.S.	94	98	94	96	93	94	94	0.4	-.027	n/s
Brazil	96				98	99		3.0	.056	n/s

Source: Gallup polls from Lee Sigelman, "Review of the Polls: Multination Surveys of Religious Beliefs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16.3 (1977): 289–94.

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of the public who express belief in God.

[a] *Gallup Opinion Index* "Do you, personally, believe in God?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[b] *Gallup Opinion Index* "Do you believe in God?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[c] *Gallup Opinion Index* "Do you believe in God or a universal spirit?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[d] *World Values Survey/European Values Survey* "Do you believe in God?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[e] The difference between the first and the last observation in the series. In the OLS regression models, year is regressed on the series.

[f] The unstandardized β summarizes the slope of the line.

[g] The statistical significance of the change in the time-series. N/s = not significant, *p<.05, and **p<.01 (2-tailed).

One interpretation of these patterns is offered by those who emphasize that trends in churchgoing are interesting but also out of date, if religiosity has evolved and reinvented itself today as diverse forms of personal "spirituality." Observers such as Wade Clark Roof, Robert Fuller, Grace Davie, and Danièle Hervieu-Léger suggest that the declining status and authority of traditional church institutions and clergy, the individualization of the quest for spirituality, and the rise of multiple "New Age" movements concerned with "lived religion" result in public engagement with churches being replaced by a

"private" or "personal" search for spirituality and meaning in life, making the practices, beliefs, and symbols of religiosity less visible.[17] Others, such as Greeley, propose that indicators of subjective beliefs in Europe, exemplified by faith in God or in life after death, display a mixed picture during the last two decades, rather than a simple uniform decline:

> In some countries, religion has increased (most notably the former communist countries and especially Russia) in others it has declined (most notably Britain, the Netherlands, and France) and in still other countries it is relatively unchanged (the traditional Catholic countries), and in yet other countries (some of the social democratic countries) it has both declined and increased.[18]

Given such divergence, Greeley suggests that simple attempts to discover secularization should be abandoned, and instead attention should focus on explaining persistent and well-established cross-national patterns—for example, why people in Ireland and Italy are consistently more religious than those in France and Sweden.

Yet we find that, far from divergent patterns, one reason for the decline in religious participation during the late twentieth century lies in the fact that during these years many common spiritual beliefs have indeed suffered considerable erosion in post-industrial societies. There is, in fact, a consistent link between the "public" and "private" dimensions of religiosity. We monitor trends in religious beliefs in God and in life after death during the last fifty years by matching survey data in the Gallup polls starting in 1947 to the more recent data where the same questions were replicated in the World Values surveys. Table 1 shows that in 1947, roughly eight out of ten people believed in God, with the highest levels of belief expressed in Australia, Canada, the U.S., and Brazil. A fall in faith in God occurred across all but two nations (the U.S. and Brazil). The decline proved sharpest in the Scandinavian nations, the Netherlands, Australia, and Britain. Table 2 illustrates very similar patterns for belief in life after death, where again an erosion of subjective religiosity occurs in thirteen of the seventeen countries where evidence is available. The greatest falls during the last fifty years are registered in Northern Europe, Canada, and Brazil, and the only exceptions to this pattern, where there is a revival of religious faith, are in the United States, Japan, and Italy.

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[17] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "The Case for a Sociology of 'Multiple Religious Modernities': A Different Approach to the 'Invisible Religion' of European Societies," *Social Compass* 50.3 (2003): 287–95.

[18] Greeley xi.

Table 2. Belief in life after death, 1947–2001

Nation	1947[a]	1961[a]	1968[a]	1975[a]	1981[b]	1990[b]	1995[b]	2001[b]	Change[c]
Norway	71	71	54		41	36	43		-28
Finland	69		55			44	50	44	-25
Denmark	55				25	29		32	-23
Netherlands	68	63	50		41	39		47	-22
France	58		35	39	35	38		39	-20
Canada	78	68		54	61	61		67	-11
Brazil	78					70	67		-11
Sweden	49		38		28	31	40	39	-10
Greece			57					47	-10
Belgium				48	36	37		40	-8
Australia	63			48	49		56		-7
Britain	49	56	38	43	46	44		45	-4
Switzerland		55	50			52	52		-3
W. Germany		38	41	33	36	38	50	38	0
U.S.	68	74	73	69	70	70	73	76	8
Japan				18	33	30	33	32	14
Italy				46	46	53		61	15

Source: Gallup polls from Lee Sigelman, "Review of the Polls: Multination Surveys of Religious Beliefs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16.3 (1977): 289–94.

Note: Figures indicate the percentage of the public who express belief in life after death.

[a] *Gallup Opinion Index* "Do you believe in life after death?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[b] *World Values Survey/European Values Survey* "Do you believe in life after death?" Yes/No/Don't Know.

[c] The difference between the first and the last observation in the series.

Trends in Religiosity in the United States

In light of these European patterns, many have regarded the United States as an outlier, although in fact the evidence remains somewhat ambiguous. At least until the late 1980s, analysis of trends in church attendance derived from historical records and from representative surveys commonly reported that the size of congregations in the United States had remained stable over decades. Studies published during the 1980s indicated that Protestant church attendance had not declined significantly in the U.S., and, while it fell rapidly among Catholics from 1968 to 1975, it did not erode further in subsequent years.[19] Gallup found that in March 1939, 40 percent of American

[19] Andrew M. Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Andrew M. Greeley, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1985); M. Hout and Andrew M. Greeley, "The Center Doesn't Hold: Church Attendance in the United States, 1940–1984," *American Sociological Review* 52.3 (1987): 325–45.

adults reported attending church the previous week—roughly the same figure given by Gallup more than sixty years later (in March 2003).[20]

The U.S. General Social Survey (GSS), conducted annually by NORC during the last three decades, also indicates that weekly church attendance in the U.S. hovers around 25–30 percent, with a significant fall in church attendance occurring during the last decade. According to the GSS, the proportion of Americans reporting that they attended church at least weekly fell to one-quarter in the most recent estimate, while at the same time the proportion saying that they never attended church doubled to one-fifth of all Americans (see Figure 4).[21]

Other indicators also suggest that traditional religious participation may have eroded in the United States, parallel to the long-term trends experienced throughout Europe. For example, Gallup polls registered a modest decline in the proportion of Americans who are *members* of a church or synagogue, down from about three-quarters (73 percent) of the population in 1937 to about two-thirds (65 percent) in 2001. The GSS monitored religious identities annually during the last three decades and found that the proportion of Americans who are secularists, reporting that they have *no* religious preference or identity, climbed steadily during the 1990s (see Figure 5). During this decade, the main erosion occurred among American Protestants, while the proportion of Catholics in the population remained fairly steady, in part fuelled by a substantial influx of Hispanic immigrants with large families. At the same time, changes have occurred among denominations within the religious population in the United States; many studies report that congregations for newer evangelical churches have expanded their membership at the expense of "mainline" Protestant denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, in part due to changes in the American population and also patterns of immigration from Latin America and Asia.[22] Moreover, Brian Wilson emphasizes that, even where we have reliable estimates

[20] March 1939 Gallup Poll—A.I.P.O. *"Did you happen to go to church last Sunday?"* 40 percent answered yes, 60 percent no. March 14, 2003, Gallup—C.N.N./*U.S.A. Today* Poll. *"How often do you attend church or synagogue—at least once a week* [31 percent]*, almost every week* [9 percent]*, about once a month* [16 percent]*, seldom* [28 percent]*, or never* [16 percent]*?"* Self-reported church attendance figures may well contain systematic bias towards over-reporting (C. Kirk Hadaway and P. L. Marler, "Did You Really Go To Church This Week? Behind the Poll Data," *Christian Century* [6 May 1998]: 472–5; C. Kirk Hadaway, et al., "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at Church Attendance," *American Sociological Review* 58.6 [1993]: 741–52). Yet this cannot explain the apparent discrepancy between reported churchgoing in the U.S. and Western Europe, unless some "spiral of silence" claims about the social acceptability of churchgoing in the U.S. are brought in. Other evidence based on cohort and period analysis of the GSS suggests that the apparent long-term stability of the aggregate levels of churchgoing in the U.S. in fact disguises two simultaneous changes occurring since the early 1970s: a negative cohort effect *and* a positive period effect. See Mark Chaves, "Secularization and Religious Revival: Evidence from U.S. Church Attendance Rates, 1972–1986," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28.4 (1989): 464–77.

[21] See Hadaway, et al.

[22] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Tom Smith, "Are Conservative Churches Really Growing?" *Review of Religious Research* 33 (1992): 305–29; Michael Hout, Andrew M. Greeley, and Melissa J. Wilde, "The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 107.2 (2001): 468–500.

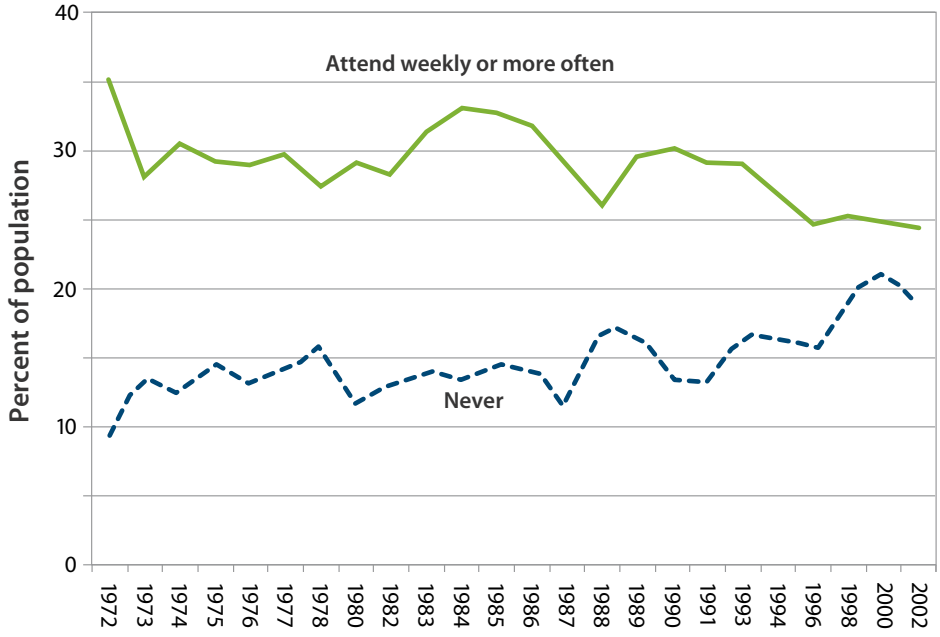

Figure 4. Religious participation in the U.S., 1972–2002. Lines represent responses to the question "How often do you attend religious services?" (U.S. General Social Survey 1972–2002.)

of churchgoing, little relationship may exist between these practices and spirituality—churchgoing may fulfill a need for social networking within local communities, or churches may have become more secular in orientation.[23]

Despite the overall popularity of religion in the United States, it would also be a gross exaggeration to claim that all Americans feel the same way, as important social and regional disparities exist. Secularists, for example, are far more likely to live in urban cities on the Pacific coast or in the Northeast, as well as to have a college degree, and to be single and male. By contrast, committed evangelicals are far more likely to live in small towns or rural areas, especially in the South and Midwest, as well as be female and married. These regional divisions proved important for politics: in the 2000 U.S. presidential election, religion was by far the strongest predictor of who voted for George W. Bush and who voted for Al Gore.[24] The election result reflected strongly entrenched

[23] Brian R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

[24] Pippa Norris, "U.S. Campaign 2000: Of Pregnant Chads, Butterfly Ballots and Partisan Vitriol," *Government and Opposition* 36.1 (2001): 3–26; VNS Exit Polls in "Who Voted," *The New York Times* (12 November 2000); Andrew Kohut, John C. Green, Scott Keeter, and Robert C. Toth, *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

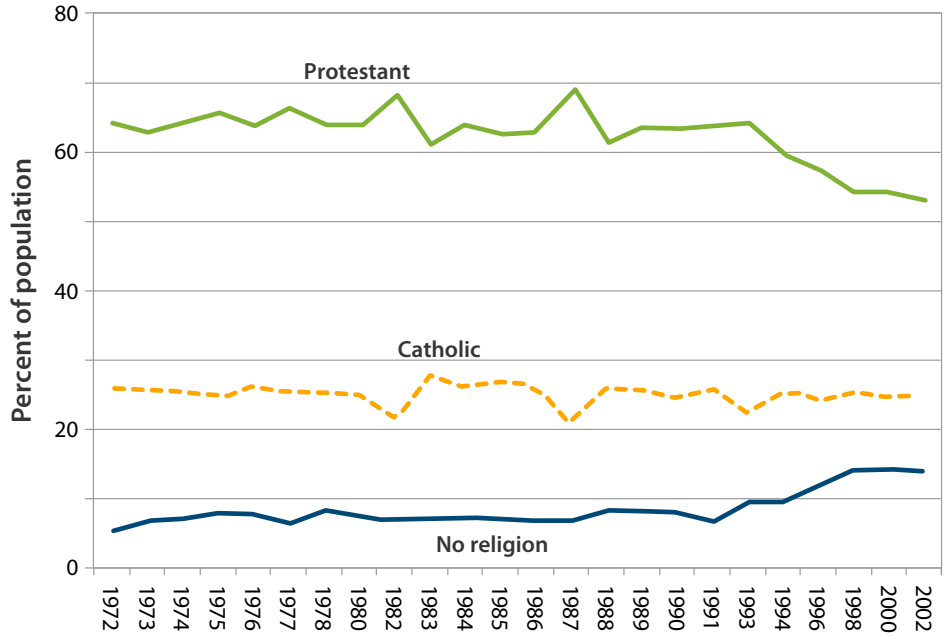

Figure 5. Religious identities in the U.S., 1972–2002. Lines represent responses to the question "What is your religious preference? Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?" The graph excludes religious identities adhered to by less than 3 percent of Americans. (U.S. General Social Survey 1972–2002.)

divisions in public opinion and values between social conservatives and liberals on issues such as the death penalty, reproductive rights, and homosexuality. The regional patterns of religiosity are important and may even have led to two distinctive cultures within the United States; Himmelfarb argues that one culture in the U.S. is religious, puritanical, family-centered, patriotic, and conformist, and the other is secular, tolerant, hedonistic, and multicultural. These cultures coexist and tolerate each other, in part because they inhabit different worlds.[25]

The United States remains one of the most religious in the club of rich countries, alongside Ireland and Italy, and this makes the U.S. one of the most religious countries in the world. The pervasive importance of these values is apparent in many American practices, especially in public life (even prior to the Bush administration and 9/11), despite the strict division of church and state. In the same way, American cultural values are more individualistic, more patriotic, more moralistic, and more culturally conservative than Europe. Nevertheless, there are some indicators that secular tendencies may have strengthened in the U.S., at least during the last decade, which may bring the United States slightly closer to Western Europe.

[25] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation: Two Cultures* (New York: Random House, 1999).

Explaining Variations in Religiosity: The Religious Market Model

Given the existence of important and consistent cross-national variations in religiosity, what best explains these patterns?

Religious Markets

Religious market theory provides the most critical and sustained challenge to the traditional secularization thesis. This account suggests that supply-side factors, notably denominational competition and state regulation of religious institutions, shape levels of religious participation in the United States and Europe. During the last decade many American commentators have enthusiastically advanced this account, and the principle proponents include Roger Finke, Rodney Stark, Lawrence R. Iannaccone, William Sims Bainbridge, and R. Stephen Warner, although the theory has also encountered sustained criticism. Market-based theories in the sociology of religion assume that the demand for religious products is relatively constant, based on the otherworldly rewards of life after death promised by most (although not all) faiths.[26] Dissimilar levels of spiritual behavior evident in various countries are believed to result less from "bottom up" demand than from variance in "top down" religious supply. Religious groups compete for congregations with different degrees of vigor. Established churches are thought to be complacent monopolies taking their congregations for granted, with a fixed market share due to state regulation and subsidy for one particular faith that enjoys special status and privileges. By contrast, where a free religious marketplace exists, energetic competition between churches expands the supply of religious "products," thereby mobilizing religious activism among the public.

The theory claims to be a universal generalization applicable to all faiths, although the evidence to support this argument is drawn largely from the U.S. and Western Europe. The proliferation of diverse churches in the U.S. is believed to have maximized choice and competition among faiths, thereby mobilizing the American public. American churches are subject to market forces, and depend upon their ability to attract clergy and volunteers as well as the financial resources that flow from their membership. Competition is thought to generate certain benefits, producing diversity, stimulating innovation, and compelling recruitment by congregations. For example, the National Congregations Study found that American churches commonly seek to attract new adherents by offering multiple social activities (or "products") beyond services of worship, including religious education, cultural and arts groups, engagement in community politics, and welfare services such as soup kitchens and babysitting cooperatives.[27] By contrast, Stark and Finke emphasize that most European nations sustain what they

[26] Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 88.

[27] Mark Chaves, "The National Congregations Study: Background, Methods and Selected Results," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38.4 (1999): 458–76.

term "a *socialized* religious economy," with state subsidies for established churches.[28] Religious monopolies are believed to be less innovative, responsive, and efficient. Where clergy enjoy secure incomes and tenure regardless of their performance, such as in Germany and Sweden, it is thought that priests will grow complacent, slothful, and lax. Stark and Finke believe that if the "supply" of churches was expanded in Europe through disestablishment (deregulation), and if churches just made more effort, this would probably lead to a resurgence of religious behavior among the public. In short, they conclude, "To the extent that organizations work harder, they are more successful. What could be more obvious?"[29]

What indeed? Leaving aside the strong normative thrust of the supply-side argument and concepts, derived from free market economics, what specific propositions flow from this account that are open to systematic cross-national testing with empirical evidence? We can compare four separate indicators to test the religious market model (see Table 3). Any one indicator may be flawed, due to the limitations of data or measurement error, but if all results from the independent measures point in a generally consistent direction then this lends greater confidence to the results.

Religious Pluralism

If the supply-side theory is correct, then religious pluralism and state regulation of religion should both be important in predicting rates of churchgoing in post-industrial societies: in particular, countries with great competition among multiple pluralist religious churches, denominations, and faiths should have the highest religious participation. Supply-side theorists use the Herfindahl index as the standard measure to gauge religious pluralism.[30] One important qualification, however, concerns the unit of comparison: since this study measures religious pluralism among the major world faiths at the societal level, which is necessary for cross-national research, it cannot gauge competition among religious organizations representing diverse denominations and sects at local or regional levels.

Contrary to the predictions of supply-side theory, the correlation between religious pluralism and religious behavior all prove insignificant in post-industrial societies, with the distribution illustrated in Figure 6. The results *lend no support to the claim of a significant link between religious pluralism and participation*, and this is true irrespective of whether the comparison focuses on frequency of attendance at services of worship or the fre-

[28] Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith,* 228.

[29] Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 257.

[30] Data on the major religious populations is derived from the *Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year 2001*, as compiled by Alberto Alesina, Arnaud Devleeschauwer, William Easterly, Sergio Kurlat, and Romain Wacziarg, "Fractionalization," *Journal of Economic Growth* 82 (2003): 219–58. The data set is available at <www.stanford.edu/~wacziarg/papersum.html>.

quency of prayer.[31] Among post-industrial societies, the United States is the exception in its combination of high rates of religious pluralism and participation: the theory does indeed fit the American case, but the problem is that it fails to work elsewhere. The scatter gram shows that other English-speaking nations share similar levels of religious pluralism; however, in these countries far fewer people regularly attend church. Moreover, in Catholic post-industrial societies the relationship is actually *reversed*, with the highest participation evident in Ireland and Italy where the Church enjoys a virtual religious monopoly, compared with the more pluralist Netherlands and France, where churchgoing habits are far weaker. Nor is this merely due to the comparison of post-industrial societies: the global comparison in all nations confirms that there is no significant relationship between participation and pluralism across the broader distribution of societies worldwide.

Of course the account could always be retrieved by arguing that what matters is less competition among the major faiths, since people rarely convert directly, but rather competition among or within specific denominations, since people are more likely to switch particular churches within closely related families. This proposition would require testing at the community level with other forms of data, at a finer level of denominational detail than is available in most social surveys, and indeed even in most census data. Nevertheless, if the claims of the original theory were modified, this would greatly limit its applicability for cross-national research. Irrespective of the extensive literature advocating the supply-side theory, based on the measure of pluralism of faiths and religious participation used in this study, no empirical support is found here for this account.

State Regulation and Freedom of Religion

An alternative version of religious market theory predicts that participation will also be maximized where there is a strong constitutional division between church and state, protecting religious freedom of worship and toleration of different denominations, without hindrance to particular sects and faiths. This is one of the explanations for American exceptionalism advanced by Lipset, who argues that the long-standing separation of church and state in the United States has given the churches greater autonomy and allowed varied opportunities for people to participate in religion.[32]

Three indicators are available to analyze this relationship. First, the state regulation of religion was measured by Mark Chaves and David E. Cann in eighteen post-industrial

[31] It should be noted that the proportion of adherents to the majority religion in each country was also compared as an alternative measure of religious diversity or homogeneity, but this measure also proved an insignificant predictor of religious participation, whether the comparison was restricted to post-industrial societies or to all nations worldwide.

[32] Lipset.

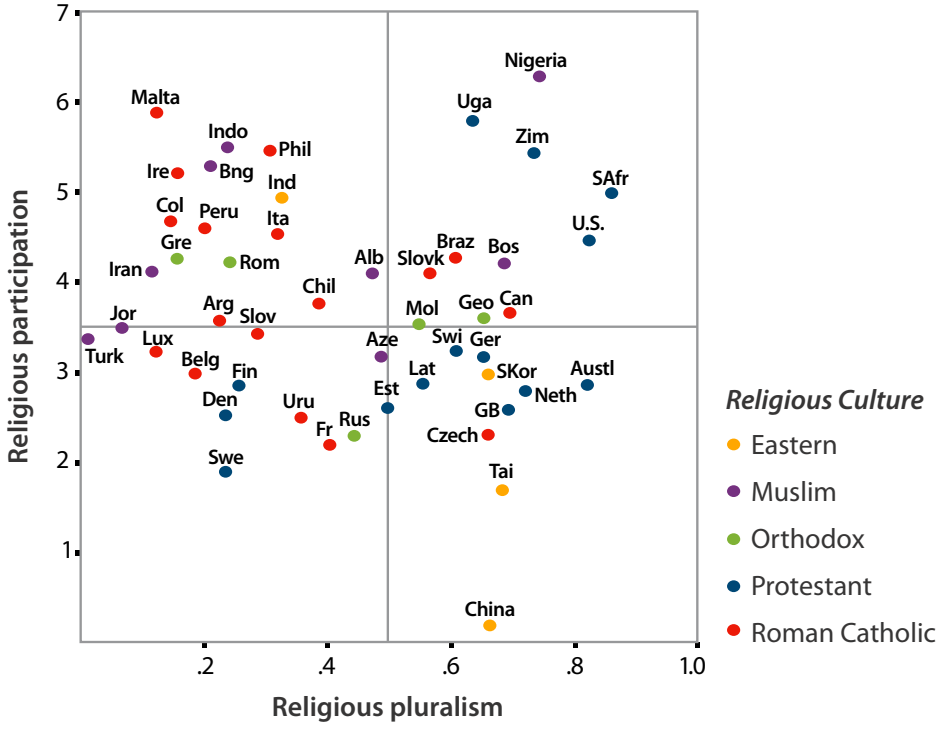

Figure 6. Religiosity and pluralism. Mean religious participation is based on responses to the question "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days? More than once a week (7), once a week (6), once a month (5), only on special holidays (4), once a year (3), less often (2), never or practically never (1)." (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.) Religious pluralism is based on Herfindahl Index. (Alesina et al. 2002.)

nations.[33] Second, these results were cross-checked against the Norris and Inglehart *Freedom of Religion Index.*[34] Third, comparisons can then be made with the summary analysis of religious freedom generated every year by *Freedom House*, which measures the freedom of houses of worship, humanitarian organizations, educational institutions; the freedom for individual religious practices such as prayer, worship, and dress;

[33] The 6-point scale was classified by Chaves and Cann using data provided by the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (1982) based on whether or not each country had the following characteristics: 1) there is a single, officially designated state church; 2) there is official state recognition of some denominations but not others; 3) the state appoints or approves the appointment of church leaders; 4) the state directly pays church personnel salaries; 5) there is a system of ecclesiastical tax collection; 6) the state directly subsidizes, beyond mere tax breaks, the operation, maintenance, or capital expenses for churches. See Mark Chaves and David E. Cann, "Regulation, Pluralism and Religious Market Structure," *Rationality and Society* 4 (1992): 272–90. The scale is reversed in this study, for ease of presentation, so that a low score represents greater regulation.

[34] See Norris and Inglehart. The 20-item scale was constructed by coding 20 indicators, such as the role of the state in subsidizing churches, constitutional recognition of freedom of religion, and restrictions of certain denominations, cults, or sects. It was then standardized to 100 points, for ease of interpretation, and coded so that a higher score represented greater religious freedom.

and human rights in general, where they involve particular religious bodies, individuals, and activities.[35]

Contrary to the supply-side theory, however, the results of the simple correlations of these three indicators (see Table 3) suggest that no significant relationship exists between any of these indicators of religious freedom and levels of religious behavior. Moreover, this pattern was found both within the comparison of post-industrial nations and also in the global comparison of all countries where data was available. There are many reasons why one might imagine that the spread of greater tolerance and freedom of worship, facilitating competition among religious institutions, might prove conducive to greater religious activity among the public. But so far the range of evidence using multiple indicators fails to support the supply-side claims.

The Role of Security and Economic Inequality in Generating Demand

Supply-side religious market theory has therefore provided only limited insights into the diversity of religious participation found in rich nations. In post-industrial nations, no empirical support that we examined could explain the puzzle of why some rich nations are far more religious than others or establish a significant link between patterns of religious behavior and the indicators of religious pluralism, religious freedom, and the perceived functions of the church. But, of course, this still leaves us with the question that we considered at the start of the paper: why are some societies such as the United States and Ireland persistently more religious in their habits and beliefs than comparable Western nations sharing a Christian cultural heritage?

Our answer rests on patterns of human security and, in particular, conditions of socio-economic inequality. What matters for the societal vulnerability, insecurity, and risk that we believe drives religiosity are not simply levels of national economic resources but their distribution as well. The growth of the welfare state in industrialized nations insures large sectors of the public against the worst risks of ill health and old age, penury and destitution, while private insurance schemes, the work of non-profit charitable foundations, and access to financial resources have transformed security in post-industrial nations and also reduced the vital role of religion in people's lives. Even relatively affluent nations have multiple pockets of long-term poverty, whether afflicting unemployed African-Americans living in the inner cities of Los Angeles and Detroit; farm laborers in Sicily; or Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian émigrés in Leicester and Birmingham. Populations typically most at risk in industrialized nations, capable of falling through the welfare safety net, include the elderly and children; single-parent, female-headed households; the long-term disabled, homeless, and unemployed; and

[35] The survey criteria used by this organization develops a 7-point scale based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief; and the European Convention on Human Rights. See Paul Marshall, ed., *Religious Freedom in the World: A Global Report on Freedom and Persecution* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000).

Table 3. Human security, religious markets, and religiosity in post-industrial societies

Indicators	Religious Participation		Frequency of Prayer		*N* of nations
	R[a]	Sig.[b]	R[a]	Sig.[b]	
RELIGIOUS MARKETS					
Religious pluralism[c]	.018	n/s	.119	n/s	21
Religious Freedom Index[d]	.367	n/s	.477	n/s	21
State regulation of religion[e]	.427	n/s	.423	n/s	18
Freedom House religious freedom scale[f]	-.314	n/s	-.550	n/s	13
HUMAN SECURITY					
Human Development Index[g]	-.249	n/s	.077	n/s	21
Economic inequality (GINI coeffecient)[h]	.496	*	.614	*	18

[a] Pearson simple correlations without prior controls.
[b] Statistical significance. N/s = not significant, *p<.05, and **p<.01 (2-tailed).
[c] Data from the Herfindahl Index (Alesina et al. 2002).
[d] See Appendix C of Norris and Inglehart (2004) for details of the construction of this scale.
[e] Scale measured by Chaves and Cann (1992).
[f] Data from <www.freedomhouse.org> (2001).
[g] Data from United Nations Development Program, *World Development Report* (New York: UNDP/Oxford University Press, 2003), <www.undp.org>.
[h] Data from World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, <www.worldbank.org> (2002).

ethnic minorities. If we are correct that feelings of vulnerability are driving religiosity, even in rich nations, then this should be evident by comparing levels of economic inequality across societies, as well as by looking at the strength of religiosity among the poorer sectors of society.

We analyzed the distribution of economic resources in post-industrial societies by comparing the GINI coefficient, which measures the extent to which the distribution of income among households within a society deviates from a perfectly equal distribution.[36] Table 3 indicates that the Human Development Index fails to predict variations in levels of religious behavior within post-industrial nations, not surprisingly since all these countries are highly developed. Yet the level of economic inequality proves strongly and significantly related to both forms of religious behavior, but especially to

[36] The GINI coefficient ranges from perfect equality (0) to perfect inequality (100), estimated in the latest available year by the World Bank.

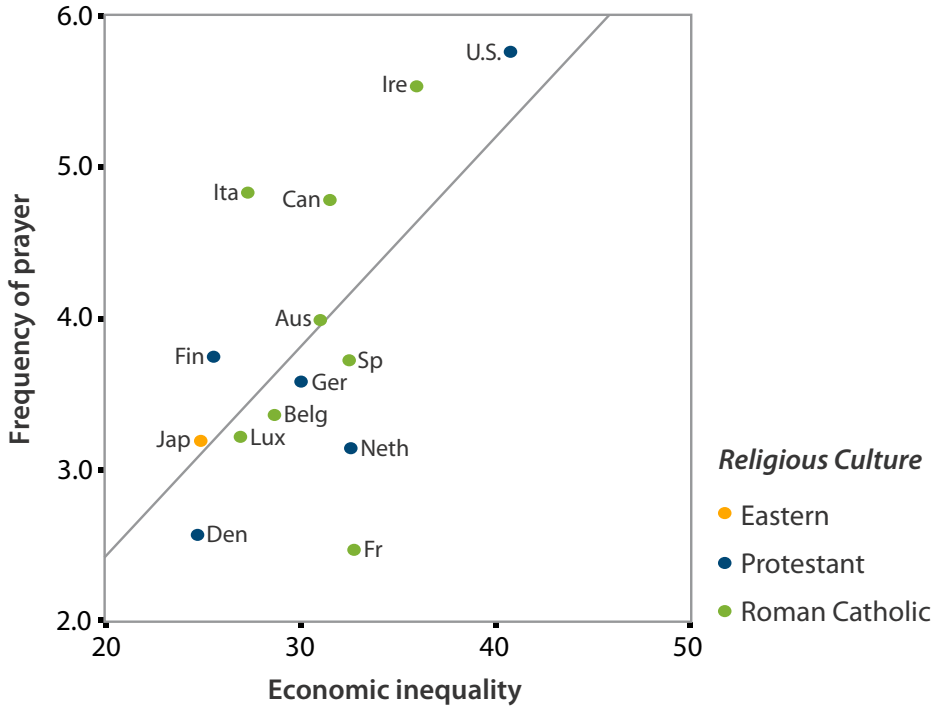

Figure 7. Religiosity and economic inequality. Mean frequency of prayer per society is based on responses to the question "How often do you pray to God outside of religious services? Every day (7), more than once a week (6), once a week (5), at least once a month (4), several times a year (3), less often (2), never (1)." (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.) Economic inequality is gauged by the GINI coefficient. (World Bank, *World Development Indicators,* <www.worldbank.org> 2002.)

the propensity to engage in individual religiosity through prayer. Figure 7 illustrates this relationship; the United States is exceptionally high in religiosity in large part, we believe, because it is also one of the most unequal post-industrial societies under comparison.

Despite private affluence for the well-off, many American families, even in the professional middle classes, face serious risks of loss of paid work by the main breadwinner, the dangers of sudden ill health without adequate private medical insurance, vulnerability to becoming a victim of crime, as well as the problems of paying for long-term care of the elderly. Americans face greater anxieties than citizens in other advanced industrialized countries about whether or not they will be covered by medical insurance, be fired arbitrarily, or be forced to choose between losing their jobs and devoting themselves to their newborn children.[37] The entrepreneurial culture and the emphasis

[37] For a discussion of the comparative evidence, see Derek Bok, *The State of the Nation: Government and the Quest for a Better Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

on personal responsibility has generated conditions of individual freedom and delivered considerable societal affluence, and yet one trade-off is that the United States has greater income inequality than any other advanced industrial democracy.[38] By comparison, despite recent pressures on restructuring, the secular Scandinavian and West European states remain some of the most egalitarian societies, with relatively high levels of personal taxation but also an expansive array of welfare services in the public sector, including comprehensive healthcare, social services, and pensions.[39]

If this argument rested only on the cross-national comparisons, then, of course, it would be too limited, as multiple other characteristics distinguish Western Europe and the United States. But evidence can also be examined at the individual level by looking at how far the distribution of income relates to religious behavior. The patterns in Figure 8 show that religiosity is systematically related at the individual level to the distribution of income groups in post-industrial societies: *the poor are almost twice as religious as the rich*. Similar patterns can be found in the United States (see Figure 9): two-thirds (66 percent) of the least well-off income group pray daily, compared with 47 percent of the highest income group.

Conclusions and Implications

Secularization is not a deterministic process, but one that is largely predictable, based on knowing just a few facts about levels of human development and socioeconomic equality in each country. The levels of societal and individual security in any society provide the most persuasive and parsimonious explanations and predictors, despite the numerous possible explanatory factors that could be brought into the picture, from institutional structures to state restrictions on freedom of worship, the historical role of church-state relations, and patterns of denominational and church competition.

Conditions that people experience in their formative years have a profound impact upon their cultural values. Growing up in societies in which survival is uncertain is conducive to a strong emphasis on religion; conversely, experiencing high levels of existential security throughout one's formative years reduces the subjective importance of

[38] A recent detailed study comparing the levels of household income after government redistribution through tax and welfare transfers, based on the Luxembourg Income Study database, found that the GINI coefficient for income inequality was greatest in the United States compared with thirteen other advanced industrial democracies. See David Bradley, Evelyn Huber, Stephanie Moller, Francois Nielsen, and John D. Stephens, "Distribution and Redistribution in Postindustrial Democracies," *World Politics* 55.1 (2003): 193–228.

[39] Katherine McFate, Roger Lawson, and William Julius Wilson, eds., *Poverty, Inequality, and the Future of Social Policy: Western States in the New World Order* (New York: Russell Sage, 1995); Alexander Hicks, *Social Democracy and Welfare Capitalism: A Century of Income Security Policies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

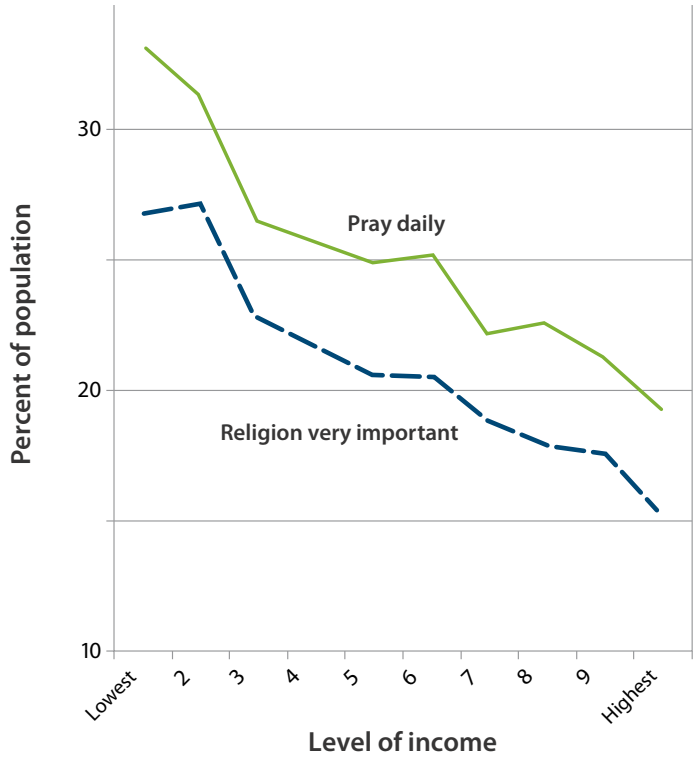

Figure 8. Religiosity by income in post-industrial societies. The percentage of the public who pray daily and who regard religion as very important by decile household income group (counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes before taxes and other deductions) in post-industrial societies. (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.)

religion in one's life. This hypothesis diverges sharply from the religious market assumption that demand for religion is constant. On the contrary, our interpretation implies that the demand for religion should be far stronger among low-income nations than among rich ones, and among the less secure strata of society than among the affluent. As a society moves past the early stages of industrialization and life becomes less nasty, less brutish, and longer, people tend to become more secular in their orientations. The most crucial explanatory variables are those that differentiate between vulnerable societies and societies in which survival is so secure that people take it for granted during their formative years.

What must be included is that, although rising levels of existential security are conducive to secularization, cultural change is path-dependent: the historically predominant religious tradition of a given society tends to leave a lasting impact on religious beliefs and other social norms, ranging from approval of divorce, to gender roles, tolerance of homosexuality, and work orientations. The citizens of historically Protestant societies continue to display values that are distinct from those prevailing in historically

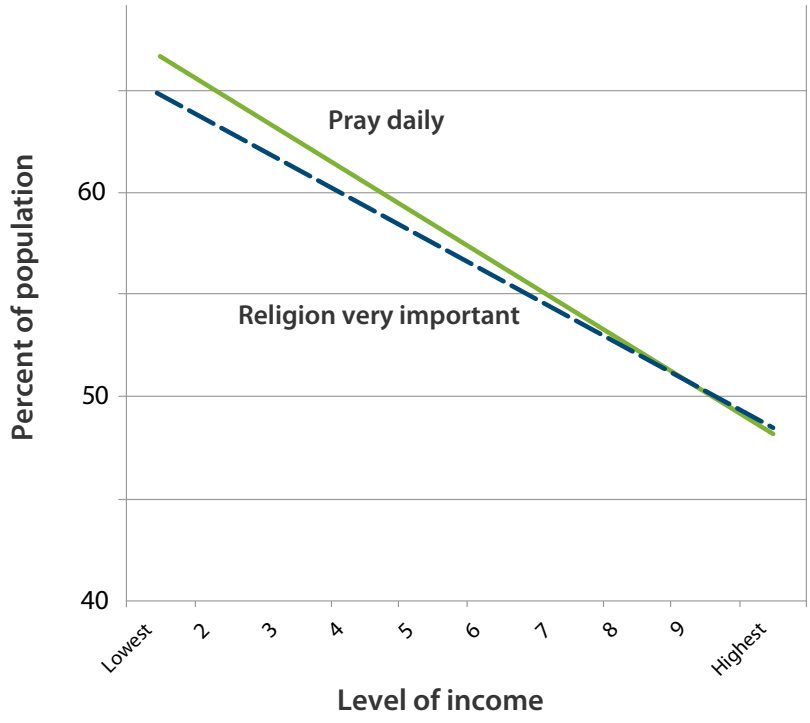

Figure 9. Religiosity by income in the U.S. The percentage of the American public who pray daily and who regard religion as very important by decile household income group (counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes before taxes and other deductions). (World Values Survey, pooled 1981–2001.)

Catholic, Hindu, Orthodox, or Confucian societies. These cross-national differences persist even in societies where the vast majority no longer attends church and reflect historical influences that shaped given national cultures. Thus, within the Netherlands, Catholics, Protestants, and those who have left the church all tend to share a common national value system that is distinctive in global perspective.

Thus, while economic development brings systematic changes, a society's cultural heritage continues to influence cultural direction. While secularization started earliest and has moved farthest in the most economically developed countries, little or no secularization has taken place in the low-income countries, meaning that the cultural differences linked with economic development not only are not shrinking, but are growing larger. This expanding gap between sacred and secular societies around the globe has important consequences for our current religious and political landscapes, our cultural change, and our new forms of identity politics.