

Are high levels of existential security conducive to secularization?

A response to our critics

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Abstract

In *Sacred and Secular* (2004), Norris and Inglehart argued that a major function of transcendent religions is to provide a sense of confidence and predictability in a threatening and uncertain world. This is not its only function, of course: since the dawn of history, theologians and philosophers have sought the meaning and purpose of life, often finding it in religion. But in subsistence economies, the great majority of the population lives at the edge of starvation; when survival is uncertain, transcendent religions claiming to provide infallible answers and reassurance about the afterlife have widespread appeal. In industrial societies, however, economic development and the emergence of the welfare state have enabled a large share of the world's population to grow up with high levels of existential security--which tends to diminish the importance of transcendent religions. Critics have argued that Norris and Inglehart have not demonstrated that feelings of anxiety and insecurity are linked *directly* with secularization, and they have pointed to the apparent anomaly of the U.S., as the world's richest nation which nevertheless has relatively high levels of religiosity. To address these points, and to update and expand the research, this paper examines new evidence concerning the link between security and secularization derived from the 2007 Gallup World Poll in 132 societies and from the 2005-2007 World Values Survey in 55 societies.

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During recent decades, religion became increasingly prominent in politics around the world. The persistence of church-going in the United States, the growing importance of liberation theology in Latin America, and the resurgence of identity politics in the Balkans—all suggest that religion remains a potent force in contemporary politics. These observations were reinforced by the events of 9/11 in the United States, growing European tensions over religious identities, and sporadic outbursts of violent conflict dividing faith-based communities in Nigeria, Sudan, and India.¹

What links these disparate events? One popular assumption is that they reflect a new worldwide religious revival.² Hence Rodney Stark and Roger Finke claim that it is time to bury the secularization thesis: “After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies 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.*’”³ But *Sacred and Secular* (2004) presented a theory of existential security, backed by empirical evidence from scores of societies, demonstrating a more complex picture; religious values remain strong in many developing societies, which also have rapidly growing populations, yet secularization is occurring in most advanced industrial societies.⁴ The erosion of church attendance, religious values, and beliefs has been most clearly established in Scandinavia and Western Europe.⁵ But this development is not simply confined to this region, as similar developments are evident in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Canada; even in the U.S., there has been a trend toward secularization, partly masked by large-scale immigration of people with traditional worldviews. Norris and Inglehart argued that *existential security* explained these divergent trends. This account emphasizes that the public’s *demand* for transcendent religion varies systematically with levels of vulnerabilities to societal and personal risks and threats.⁶

Nevertheless, with the evidence available at the time, *Sacred and Secular* was unable to address certain important issues. In particular, critics have argued that despite the wealth of indirect cross-national macro-level indicators, Norris and Inglehart did not establish a *direct* individual-level link between religiosity and either perceptual or experiential measures of existential insecurity. In addition, commentators have also often pointed to the apparent anomaly of the U.S., as one of the world’s richest nations which nevertheless has relatively high levels of religious participation and values. Accordingly this paper seeks to address these issues. *Part I* of this paper summarizes the theory of existential security and reviews what we know about this from the previous research literature. *Part II* summarizes the data sources and methods used in this study. We draw upon new evidence concerning from the 2005-2007 World Values Survey conducted in 55 nations, as well as from the 2007 Gallup

World Poll conducted in 132 nations. *Part III* presents the results of the analysis examining the impact of experiential security on religiosity, utilizing the Gallup Lived Poverty index. Building upon this foundation, *Part IV* pays particular attention to perceptual or subjective measures of security and risk, from the 5th wave WVS. The conclusion in *Part V* suggests that the dynamics of secularization is much more complex than the simple decline of religion proposed by some early theories, or a universal revival of religion worldwide, as suggested by many contemporary commentators. Instead, as we will demonstrate, rising existential security brings declining emphasis on religion in many post-industrial societies worldwide, and thus a growing religiosity gap worldwide.

I: The theory of existential security

One of the most popular contemporary approaches to explaining the strength of religiosity in any society draws upon rational choice theories which emphasize the ‘supply-side’ of religious markets.⁷ These accounts posit that religious institutions can be regarded as equivalent to firms competing in the economic marketplace. Mass religious participation depends in this view upon the degree of pluralist competition among diverse religious organizations. This process actively recruits members of mass congregations, at least in types of faith based on communal forms of worship. Hence the strength of religiosity in the United States is explained by the rich diversity of churches, sects, temples, synagogues and mosques actively striving to attract members.

Yet this approach assumes that the mass demand for religion is constant. To develop an alternative perspective, *Sacred and Secular* developed a revised version of secularization theory that emphasizes variations in the ‘demand-side’ of the equation. Norris and Inglehart argued, in particular:

“1. The publics of virtually all advanced industrial societies have been moving toward more secular orientations during the past fifty years. Nevertheless,

2. The world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before-- and they constitute a growing proportion of the world's population.

Though these two propositions may initially seem contradictory, they are not. As we will show, the fact that the first proposition is true helps account for the second—because secularization and human development have a powerful negative impact on human fertility rates.”⁸

The book theorized that transcendent religion is usually weakened by a sense of existential security—that is, the feeling that survival is secure enough that it can be taken for granted. We argue

that feelings of vulnerability to physical, societal and personal risks are a key factor directly driving religiosity and we demonstrate that the process of secularization – understood as a systematic erosion of religious values and practices -- has occurred most clearly among the most prosperous social sectors living in affluent and secure post-industrial nations. By ‘values’ we mean the importance of religiosity in people’s everyday lives. By ‘practices’, we mean the common rituals which express religious values in different faiths, such as prayer and attendance at churches, synagogues, mosques and temples.⁹

[Figure 1 about here]

As illustrated schematically in Figure 1, our parsimonious model assumes a simple sequential pathway where human development and societal modernization gradually reduces exposure to both socio-tropic (societal) and ego-tropic (personal) risks. In turn, this process diminishes anxiety and stress, promoting feelings of psychological well-being and existential security. And in turn, this process usually reduces the central importance of religion in people’s lives. The first steps in this model are widely established; inhabitants in poor nations often remain highly susceptible to unpredictable socio-tropic risks, exemplified by subsistence farmers facing sudden disasters from drought or flood, disease or landslides, crop failure or weather-related emergencies. Poor nations have limited access to the basic conditions of survival, including the provision of uncontaminated water and adequate food, access to effective public services offering basic healthcare, literacy, and schooling, and an adequate income. These societies also often have weak defense against external invasion, threats of internal coup d’etat, and, in extreme cases, state failure. The final link in the model remains controversial, however we reason that virtually all of the world's major transcendent religions provide reassurance that, even though the individual alone can’t understand or predict what lies ahead, a higher power will ensure that things work out. This belief reduces stress, enabling people to shut out anxiety and focus on coping with their immediate problems. Without such a belief system, extreme stress tends to produce withdrawal reactions. Under conditions of insecurity, people have a powerful need to see authority as both strong and benevolent-- even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Through strengthening feelings of security, process of human development and societal modernization therefore have significant consequences for religiosity; as societies transition from agrarian to industrial economies, and then develop into postindustrial societies, the conditions of growing security that usually accompany this process commonly reduces the importance of religious values. The main reason, we believe, is that the need for religious reassurance becomes less pressing

under conditions of greater security. These effects operate at both societal-level (socio-tropic) and at personal level (ego-tropic), although we suspect that the former is more important. Greater protection and control, longevity and health found in postindustrial nations mean that fewer people in these societies regard traditional spiritual values, beliefs and practices as vital to their lives, or to the lives of their community. This does not imply that all forms of transcendent religion necessarily disappear as societies develop; residual and symbolic elements often remain, such as formal adherence to religious identities and beliefs, even when their substantive meaning has faded away. But we expect that people living in secure advanced industrial societies will often grow increasingly indifferent to traditional religious leaders and institutions, and become less willing to engage in conventional religious practices. Contrary to the religious markets school, we therefore assume that the ‘demand’ for spirituality is far from constant; instead striking variations are evident due to experience of the basic living conditions common in rich and poor nations.

We can draw a further distinction in Western societies between transcendent religions and post-Christian forms of spirituality.¹⁰ *Transcendent* religions acknowledge some supernatural forces or other-worldly powers, and emphasize belief in the existence of an afterlife or reincarnation. The way that faith provides reassurance against life-threatening risks is expected to be particularly important for these forms of religion. A wide range of post-Christian ‘New Age’ alternative beliefs and practices, which have become popular in Western societies, promise spiritual or material improvement in this world, such as yoga, astrology, healing rituals, channeling, and self-awareness meditation.¹¹ Theoretically these diverse forms of spirituality may also serve as a way to alleviate stress and anxiety arising from worldly suffering.¹² We suspect that similar orientations may lie behind both, although in this paper we cannot confirm (or indeed deny) whether motivations for transcendent religiosity and post-Christian forms of spirituality are indeed similar.

Previous empirical studies

What evidence from previous studies in the empirical literature help to evaluate the existential security theory? *Sacred and Secular* presented a wide range of data drawn in particular from the first four waves of the World Values Survey 1981-2001. The analysis of the evidence demonstrated that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those living in poorer nations, facing personal survival-threatening risks. Yet in the original study much of the macro-level evidence demonstrating the links between existential security and religiosity was indirect, such as

the significant correlations consistently linking multiple objective macro-level indices of human development, societal modernization and economic inequality with the strength of religious values and practices in any society (see, for example, *Sacred and Secular* Table 3.2).

Secondary evidence for the security thesis is also available from a wide range of studies published in social psychology, health care, and welfare studies which have demonstrated the final step in the model, confirming that religiosity helps individuals cope with stress and anxiety arising from uncontrollable life events. One thorough review of this literature by Pargament found that three-quarters of all empirical studies based on survey and experimental methods reported that religion usually serves to reduce life stresses, at least partially.¹³ Another meta-analysis comparing almost fifty published research studies concluded that people often turn to religion when coping with stressful events, such as severe ill-health and death, and this coping strategy proves effective in reducing anxiety and psychological well-being.¹⁴ At the same time despite the wealth of empirical studies, most previous psychological research has examined religiosity within predominately Roman Catholic and Protestant communities, notably in the United States. Yet any effects may well prove situational; at the most extreme, for example, tensions among bitterly divided religious communities in countries emerging from deep-rooted conflict may be expected to exacerbate anxiety and stress.¹⁵ Although religious ties may bond adherents together within ethnic communities, such as the Bangladesh and Hindu communities in Manchester and Bradford, nevertheless minorities often experience discrimination and prejudice in society at large. The effects of religion on psychological well-being may also vary by type of faith.¹⁶ Further systematic cross-national evidence is therefore needed to sort out whether competing claims for the effects of religiosity on psychological well-being hold in many different societal contexts, and across diverse social risks and types of religion.

Sociologists and economists have also reported similar research findings. Hence comparative survey research by Ruiters and Tubergen used multilevel analysis to examine contextual and individual factors contributing towards religious attendance in sixty countries. The study concluded that religious attendance is strongly affected by personal and societal insecurities; in particular, financial insecurities at individual level (measured by household income and unemployment status) are associated with greater religious attendance.¹⁷ Another study by Gill and Lundsgaarde examined the link between macro-level welfare state spending and religious attendance in almost two dozen nations, confirming a strong relationship, even after controlling for per capita GDP.¹⁸ The research concluded that the most

secure European welfare states with well-developed social safety-nets, exemplified by Scandinavian societies, tend to have the emptiest pews.

Part II: Evidence and measures

Therefore a growing body of literature, drawing upon diverse disciplines, methods and approaches, has generated a large body of findings which are certainly consistent with the existential security thesis. This lends further confidence in the core claims but nevertheless further work is needed to persuade agnostics. In particular, this paper can demonstrate more precisely the way that both attitudes towards existential security, and the experience of lived poverty, encourage faith in transcendent religiosity -- and thus the search for security and reassurance in the after-life.

Measuring religiosity

Fortunately both the 2005 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), as well as the 2007 Gallup World Poll (GWP), contain suitable indicators of religiosity and security, allowing us to investigate these questions with individual-level evidence about cultural values in many different societies around the globe. The use of two independent surveys also strengthens replicability – and thus tests the robustness of the findings – as well as expanding the cross-national comparative framework.

The longest time-series coverage is available from the pooled World Values Survey/European Values Survey (WVS), a global investigation of socio-cultural and political change conducted in five waves from 1981 to 2007. This project has carried out representative national surveys of the basic values and beliefs of the publics in more than 90 independent countries, containing over 88 of the world's population and covering all six inhabited continents. It builds on the European Values Survey, first carried out in 22 countries in 1981. A second wave of surveys was completed in 43 countries 1990-1991. A third wave was carried out in 55 nations in 1995-1996, and a fourth wave, in 59 countries, took place in 1999-2001. The fifth wave covering 55 countries was conducted in 2005-2007.¹⁹ The heart of our theory relates to religious *values*, understood as general motivational goals which transcend specific situations and which can be ordered in their relative importance. These are measured in the WVS survey by the importance of religion in people's lives, as monitored by the question: "*How important is God in your life?*" where responses use a scale ranging from not important (0) to very important (10). The primary indicator of religious *practices* analyzed in this study is measured by the standard behavioral question that is widely used in the literature: "*Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, how often do you attend religious services?*" Responses in the World Values Survey ranged on a 7-point scale

from *'never'* (scored 1) to *'more than once a week'* (scored 7). Based on this item, *'regular'* religious participation is understood to denote at least weekly attendance (i.e. combining either *'once a week'* or *'more than once a week'*).

The 2007 Gallup World Poll also provides data on living standards, social deprivation, exposure to societal risks, and religiosity among the publics living in 132 societies worldwide.²⁰ The GWP survey is conducted using probability-based nationally-representative samples among at least 1000 respondents of the adult population in each country, using a standard set of core questions. The total sample included 142,671 respondents. In developing societies, Gallup use face-to-face interviews, and they employ telephone interviews in countries where telephone coverage reaches 80% of the population. Two items contained in the Gallup World Poll are most useful to gauge religiosity. Hence religious values are monitored by: *"Is religion an important part of your daily life?"* (measured as a dichotomous 'yes/no' response). Since this does not refer to any specific concept, meaning, or definition of 'religion', or to any particular practices and beliefs, this item is the most suitable for cross-faith comparisons. In addition, religious practices are monitored by Gallup: *"Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?"* (also measured as a dichotomous 'yes/no' response). This is the conventional measure of religious participation used in studies of religions involving communal forms of worship in churches, temples, synagogues and mosques, although it is less useful when comparing types of faith which do not follow these collective practices, such as Confucian and Shinto religions.

Part III: Experiential security and religiosity

To go further, we need to clarify and operationalize the core concept of 'existential security' needs.²¹ *Sacred and Secular* compared the impact of objective developmental indices, such as those concerning health and wealth, but these are relatively blunt and imprecise instruments of human security.²² It could be argued that many social changes are associated with societal modernization – including growing individualism, and the expanded cognitive skills associated with the spread of education – which could provide alternative explanations to account for the decline of religious values and practices observed in post-industrial societies. Even at individual level, levels of income are only proxy measures for personal feelings of security; low income households with close support networks from extended families and the local community may have informal means of coping with humanitarian catastrophes and personal risks which are unavailable to more affluent but isolated individuals. As the

conclusion of *Sacred and Secular* acknowledged, psychological perceptions of risk and insecurity needed further analysis as the intermediary variables in Figure 1.

Yet the empirical challenges of operationalizing the concept of existential security remain challenging, especially for cross-national research. The core notion is complex, relating to multiple forms of vulnerability, whether arising from extreme poverty, hunger, disease, armed conflict, criminal violence, environmental degradation, state repression, natural disasters, or many other causes.²³ The threat of extreme poverty, ill-health and malnourishment are most severe and widespread in the world's poorest societies. This is most commonly measured by the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), combining life expectancy, income, and educational attainment.²⁴ Yet this may fail to capture exposure to varied societal risks arising from natural or humanitarian disasters, and even affluent post-industrial societies are not immune from certain terrifying forms of insecurity, exemplified by the perceived or actual threat of terrorist violence.²⁵ We use two distinct indices; the Gallup Lived poverty index can be understood as a summary objective measure of experiential insecurity, while the WVS measures attitudes towards security and risk, which reflects more subjective notions of perceptual security.

Experiential security: The Lived Poverty Index

One way to operationalize the experience of insecurity is by monitoring vulnerability to multiple risks and forms of social deprivation. Since cash income is only a poor proxy, especially in subsistence economies, the Afro-Barometer pioneered the use of a Lived Poverty scale which measures how far people go without a range of basic necessities during the course of a year.²⁶ To construct a similar objective scale, the Gallup World Poll contains eight items which ask respondents to report multidimensional aspects of experiential poverty, including how far they have enough money to buy food or shelter in the previous year, how far they are satisfied with their standard of living and state of health, whether their home has basic facilities such as running water, electricity and a landline telephone, and whether they have experienced health problems.²⁷

1. *"Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money... To buy food that you or your family needed?"*
2. *"Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money...To provide adequate shelter or housing for you and your family?"*

3. *“Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of living, all the things you can buy and do?”*
4. *“Do you have any health problems that prevent you from doing any of the things people your age normally can do?”*
5. *“Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your personal health?”*
6. *“Does your home have... running water?”*
7. *“Does your home have... electricity?”*
8. *“Does your home have... a landline telephone?”*

These items were recoded and summed to form a consistent scale of Lived Poverty (Cronbach's Alpha =0.70), demonstrating internal consistency. The index it is also strongly correlated at macro-level with both per capita GDP (in PPP) (Pearson $R=0.884$, $P=.000$ $N.120$) and the UNDP Human Development Index ($R=0.673$ $P.000$ $N.123$), suggesting high levels of external validity.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

The scatter-plots presented in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the macro-level relationship between the Lived Poverty index and the distribution of religious values and practices across the nations where complete data is available. The results confirm that the Lived poverty index was strongly correlated with religious values ($R=0.541$ $P.000$ $N.128$); hence some of the poorest developing societies, such as Chad, Rwanda and Mali gave the greatest priority to religious values, while by contrast some of the most affluent post-industrial societies in the world, led by Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Britain, proved the most secular. At the same time, the cubic fit shows that there remain many moderate-income countries in the bottom right-hand quadrant with low levels of Lived poverty which are also highly religious in their values, notably the oil-rich Gulf states and some other countries with predominately Muslim cultures.

The comparison with religious practices, illustrated in Figure 2, shows a similar but marginally weaker relationship; thus the Lived poverty index proved to be a significant predictor of participation in religious services ($R=.497$, $P=.000$, $N.127$). Again the least developed nations such as Chad and Rwanda clustered together in the top right-hand quadrant, proving the most religious and poor, while Scandinavian and West European Protestant societies were the least engaged in church-attendance. But there was also a cluster of countries which were outliers to these general patterns; interestingly among the more affluent societies, although religiosity in the U.S. is commonly regarded as an anomaly (which

market theory explains in terms of religious pluralism), seen in a broader global perspective, it is far less so than countries such as Ireland, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, (all of which have minimal religious diversity).

[Figures 4 and 5 about here]

The geographic world map illustrated in Figure 4 presents the comparison in an alternative way visually, showing the strength of religious values across the African continent, as well as in South East Asia and Latin America. By contrast post-industrial societies are uniformly secular, including Scandinavia, Western and post-Communist Europe, and Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Another way to examine the data is to consider the way in which both religious values and practices rise steadily across the Lived Poverty index, as shown in Figure 5, where the trends show a remarkably uniform pattern. To make sense of these, they suggest that roughly nine out of ten people who lack the most basic necessities of life report that religion is an important part of their daily lives, but this proportion drops to just six out of ten people who have these basic needs met. Similar disparities can be observed for at least weekly religious participation, although behavioral indicators are always lower than the expression of religious values.

[Figure 5 about here]

Moreover important debate continues to consider the reasons for the growing transatlantic rift dividing secular Western Europe from church-going Americans.²⁸ One of the strongest challenge to secularization theory arises from observers who commonly point out that claims of steadily diminishing congregations in Western Europe are sharply at odds with American trends, at least until the early 1990s.²⁹ The theory of existential security is probabilistic, seeking to explain cross-national patterns and to predict long-term trajectories of societal value change, although inevitably there are both leaders and laggards in any social processes. Particular anomalies in survey results can be attributed to many well-established issues associated with measurement error – such as the equivalence and translation of cross-national survey questions, national differences of field-work and sampling practices, and levels of freedom of expression across diverse societies. Nevertheless we do not believe that religiosity in the United States is an anomaly; there is far too much cumulative evidence documenting the contrasts between America and Western Europe. Among affluent post-industrial societies, the theory of existential security can provide insights to account for certain important outliers, notably the persistence of relatively strong religious participation in Italy and Ireland, as well as the United States.

What matters for societal vulnerability, insecurity, and risk, that we believe drives religiosity, are not simply levels of national economic resources, but also their distribution. 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 postindustrial nations, and also reduced the vital role of religion in people's lives. Even relatively affluent nations have multiple pockets of long-term poverty and economic inequality. 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 ethnic minorities. As Gill and Lundsgaarde demonstrate, cross-national patterns of welfare spending are significantly linked with religiosity.³⁰ If feelings of vulnerability are driving religiosity, even in rich nations, then this should be evident by comparing levels of economic inequality and feelings of security within societies, for example to see whether religiosity is strongest among the poorer and least secure sectors of American society.

[Figure 6 about here]

Figure 6 illustrates that the patterns already observed globally, where Lived Poverty helps to predict religious values and practices, also hold consistently in the United States as well; far from an anomaly, the existential security thesis fits America as well. Hence the poorest sectors of American society almost all report that religion is important to their lives, compared with only six out of ten of the most affluent sector. Patterns of church-going are less linear, but nevertheless the poorest group of Americans, according to the Lived Poverty index, are also the most likely to fill the Sunday pews. It is thus the sharp inequalities in American society, which Milanovic demonstrates has a remarkably skewed income distribution compared with comparable OECD countries, which helps to explain its religiosity.³¹ Household income inequality, representing disposable income after taxes and transfers, is most simply compared by the Gini coefficient, ranging from 0 (the most equal) to 1.0 (the most unequal).³² In the mid-2000s, for example, the OECD estimates that after taking account of taxes and transfers, the United States had a Gini coefficient of 0.38, (and 0.035 in both Italy and Ireland) compared with 0.23 for secular Sweden and Denmark, 0.27 for the Netherlands, and 0.28 for France.³³

[Table 1 about here]

To subject these descriptive observations to more rigorous analysis, Table 1 presents the results of binary logistic regression models where the Lived Poverty index is regressed on both religious values and practices (coded 0/1), controlling parsimoniously for some of the most common demographic characteristics which have commonly been found to predict religiosity, namely age and gender. Further controls for macro-level economic development (per capita GDP or HDI) and micro-level socioeconomic status were considered but rejected for inclusion due to issues of multicollinearity, since the aggregate factors and individual-level measures of education and income were strongly correlated with the Lived Poverty index. The models were run both for all countries included in the Gallup World Poll, as well as just for the U.S., to see whether similar patterns held, as predicted, in the American case as well. It is well established that women tend to be more religious, and this is indeed what the results confirmed in the pooled model with all countries and concerning religious values (but not church-going) in just the US case. We see this as a natural extension of the security thesis, since women tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to problems of poverty arising from child-care, old age and lower wages, as well as other security threats arising for victims from violence. The age profile in the pooled model for all countries proved more unexpected, with older generations more religious by both indicators in America, although this appears to reverse in the pooled model, a pattern which requires further exploration. After controlling for these demographic characteristics, the Lived Poverty Index remained strong and statistically significant as a predictor of religious values and practices, in the pooled model for all countries as well as in just the American sample.

[Figure 7 about here]

It could be argued, however, that the patterns observed so far are actually confined to Catholic and Protestant Christianity, as the form of religion characteristic of most post-industrial societies, rather than a consistent trend across all forms of religion.³⁴ To examine this issue further we can also break patterns down by the individual's religious faith, and those without any religious beliefs at all. As illustrated in Figure 7, the results demonstrate that the Lived Poverty Index predicts religious values across nearly all categories, demarcating Muslims as well as Catholics, Buddhists as well as Confucian/Taoists, and Protestants as well as those of Orthodox faith. Therefore across many comparisons, using an independent Gallup World Poll survey to corroborate the findings in *Sacred and Secular* based on the first four waves of the WVS, and across multiple nations and types of faith worldwide, the results prove consistent and robust; the most vulnerable populations in the world -- who

lack the basic necessities of life such as food, running water and electricity -- are also far more likely to feel that religion is important to their lives, as well as engaging more fully in religious practices.

IV: Perceptual security: Attitudes towards security and risk

Still it could be argued that notions of lived poverty, while closer to capturing many important dimensions of human vulnerability than cash income or wealth, still do not tap fully into more subjective or psychological orientations towards threats. Do people believe that they live in a predictable and safe environment, or do they feel that the world is often a dangerous place? To examine these issues, we can analyze perceptual security, monitored by attitudes towards security and risk. This was measured in the 2005-7 wave of the World Values Survey as part of the Schwartz value scales.³⁵ These used the following questions:

“Now I will briefly describe some people. Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? V82: Living in secure surroundings is important to this person; to avoid anything that might be dangerous. V86. Adventure and taking risks are important to this person; to have an exciting life.”

[Figures 8 and 9 about here]

The results presented visually in Figures 8 and 9 for the 55 nations included in this wave of the WVS show the remarkably linear relationship; religious values (monitored by the 10-point important of God scale) rise sharply with attitudes towards security values; those who give the greatest priority to living in secure surroundings and avoiding danger also regard religion as important to their lives. By contrast, those who feel that it is important to take risks and experience adventure are the least likely to see religion as important to themselves.

Conclusions and implications

In recent decades public interest in religious differences around the world has grown tremendously, and the debate about secularization theory and its recent critiques has seemed become increasingly relevant to contemporary concerns. 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. Yet the precise reasons for this erosion of spirituality were never entirely clear. By the mid-1960s the popular claim that religion was in a state of terminal decline, rested upon flimsy evidence. Its proponents cited empirical evidence of declining churchgoing in Western Europe,

and a handful of case studies that fit the thesis, rather than a systematic examination of empirical evidence from many countries.³⁶

It was not surprising, therefore, that during the last decade American sociologists mounted a sustained counterattack on the basic premises of secularization theory.³⁷ This critique threw many former proponents on the defensive; Peter Berger recanted former claims, noting that many exceptions had accumulated that appeared to challenge the basic prophesies of Weber and Durkheim—pointing to the continuing vitality of the Christian Right in the United States, the evangelical revival in Latin America, the new freedom of religion in post-Communist Europe, the reported resurgence of Islam in the Middle East, or evidence that religious practices and beliefs continued to thrive throughout most of Africa and Asia.³⁸ Some of these reported phenomena may have been over-stated, but the simplistic assumption that religion was everywhere in decline, common in earlier decades, had become implausible to even the casual observer. Too many counter-examples existed around the world.

The religious market argument sought to reconstruct our thinking about the primary drivers in religious faith, turning attention away from long-term sociological trends in the mass public's demand for spiritual faith, and emphasizing instead institutional factors affecting the supply of religion, including the role of church leaders and organizations, and the role of the state in maintaining established religions or restrictions on freedom of worship for certain faiths.³⁹ The attempt to reconstruct the early twentieth century sociology of religion was long overdue but the religious market theory was, we believe, fundamentally mistaken in trying to generalize from the distinctive American experience to the world as a whole. It is clear that the U.S. public remains far more religious than the publics of most other postindustrial society, but we believe that this largely reflects other causes than those cited by religious market theory.

The results presented in this paper serve to refine, strengthen and further confirm the basic argument presented in *Sacred and Secular*, rather than modifying our original ideas. The evidence has further demonstrated that, with rising levels of existential security, the publics of virtually all advanced industrial societies are more secular in their orientations than those living in poorer developing nations. Earlier perceptions of this process gave rise to the mistaken assumption that religion was disappearing. "God is dead," proclaimed Nietzsche more than a century ago. A massive body of empirical evidence points to a very different conclusion. Yet as a result of contrasting demographic trends in rich and poor countries, the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before --

and they constitute a growing proportion of the world's population. The social and political divisions between those with religious and secular values, beliefs and identities are thus expanding – leading to some of the political tensions observed today in contemporary Europe. But it would be mistaken to conclude that this means that religiosity is strengthening in secure post-industrial societies, or indeed that these long-term developments will necessarily lead to growing conflict. If security is the driver of secularization, as we believe, then expanding human security through enabling the capacity for sustainable development around the world, and also strengthening economic equality and welfare safety nets within societies, are the keys to reducing tensions over religious values.

Table 1: Models predicting religious values and practices

| | All nations | | U.S. only | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Religious values (i) | Religious practices (ii) | Religious values (i) | Religious practices (ii) |
| INDIVIDUAL LEVEL | | | | |
| Demographic controls | | | | |
| Age (in years) | -.005*** (.000) | -.002*** (.003) | .013*** (.003) | .008* (.003) |
| Sex(male=1) | -.308*** (.013) | -.037*** (.012) | -.561*** (.120) | -.115 (.118) |
| Socioeconomic resources | | | | |
| Lived Poverty 8-pt index | .272*** (.004) | .146*** (.001) | .129* (.014) | .114* (.059) |
| Constant (intercept) | .708 | .362 | .115 | .663 |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .078 | .028 | .048 | .011 |
| N. respondents | 121,658 | 120,394 | 1,198 | 1,203 |
| N. nations | 120 | 120 | 1 | 1 |
| Percentage correctly predicted | 71.2 | 57.3 | 59.2 | 59.4 |

Note: Models present the results of the binary logistic regression models predicting religious values and practices including the beta coefficient, (the standard error below in parenthesis), and the significance. P.*=.05 **=.01 ***=.001. Significant coefficients are highlighted in **bold**. (i) Religious values: “*Is religion an important part of your daily life?*” (ii) Religious participation: “*Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?*”

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

Figure 1: Model of existential security and religiosity

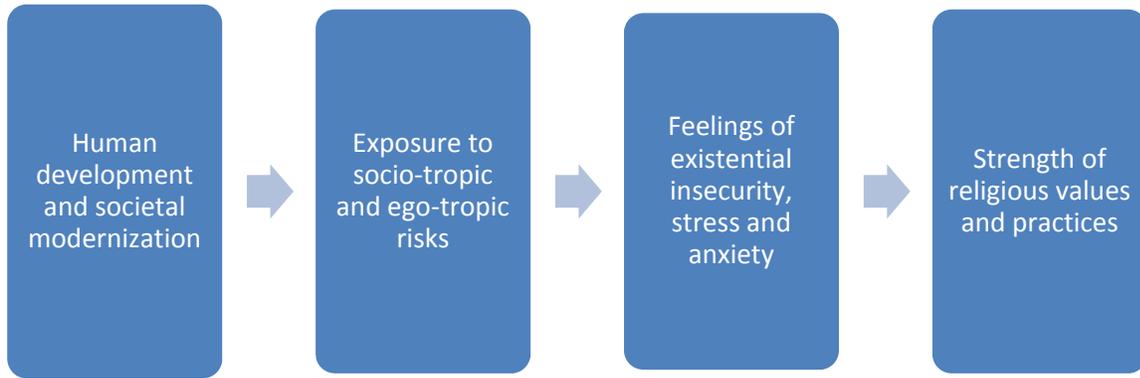
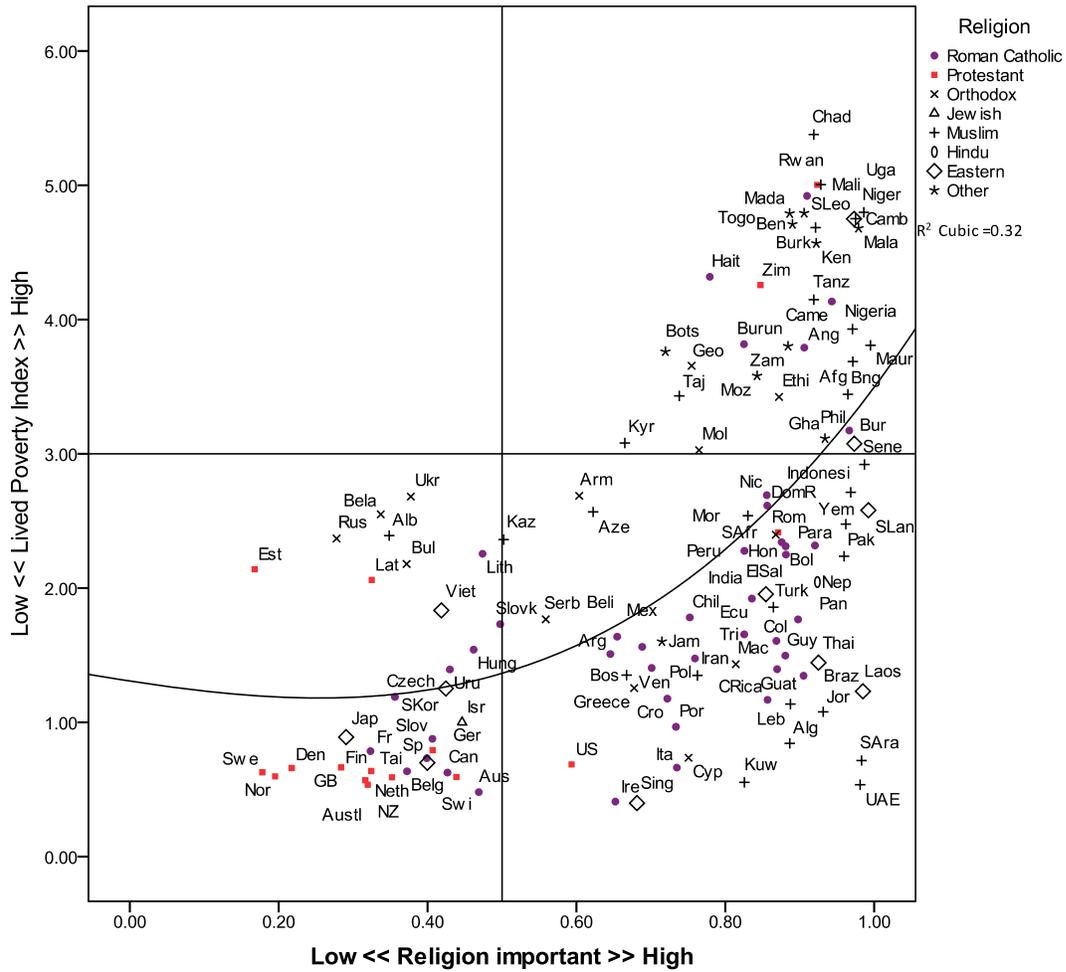


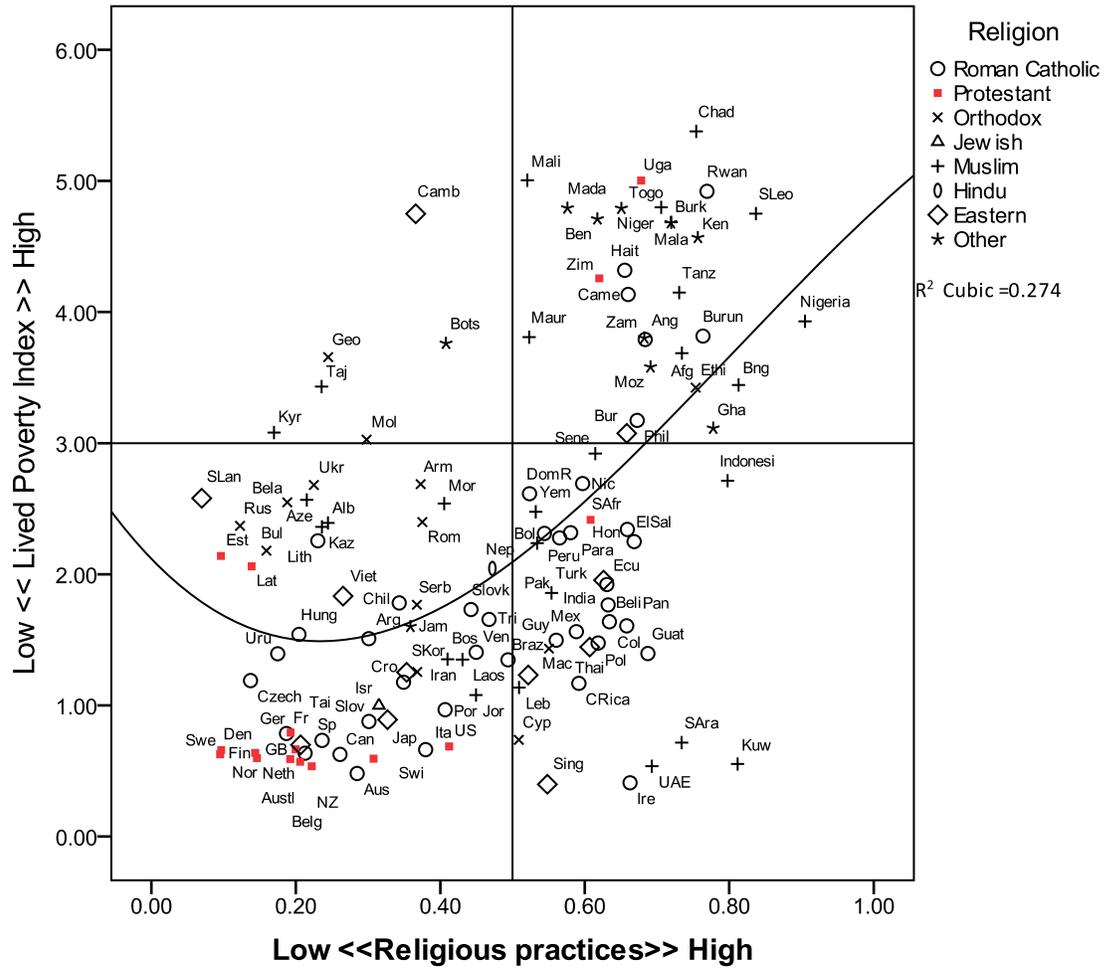
Figure 2: Lived poverty and religious values



Notes: Religious values: “Is religion an important part of your daily life?” See fn26 for the construction of the Lived Poverty Index.

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

Figure 3: Lived poverty and religious practices



Notes: Religious practices: “Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?”

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

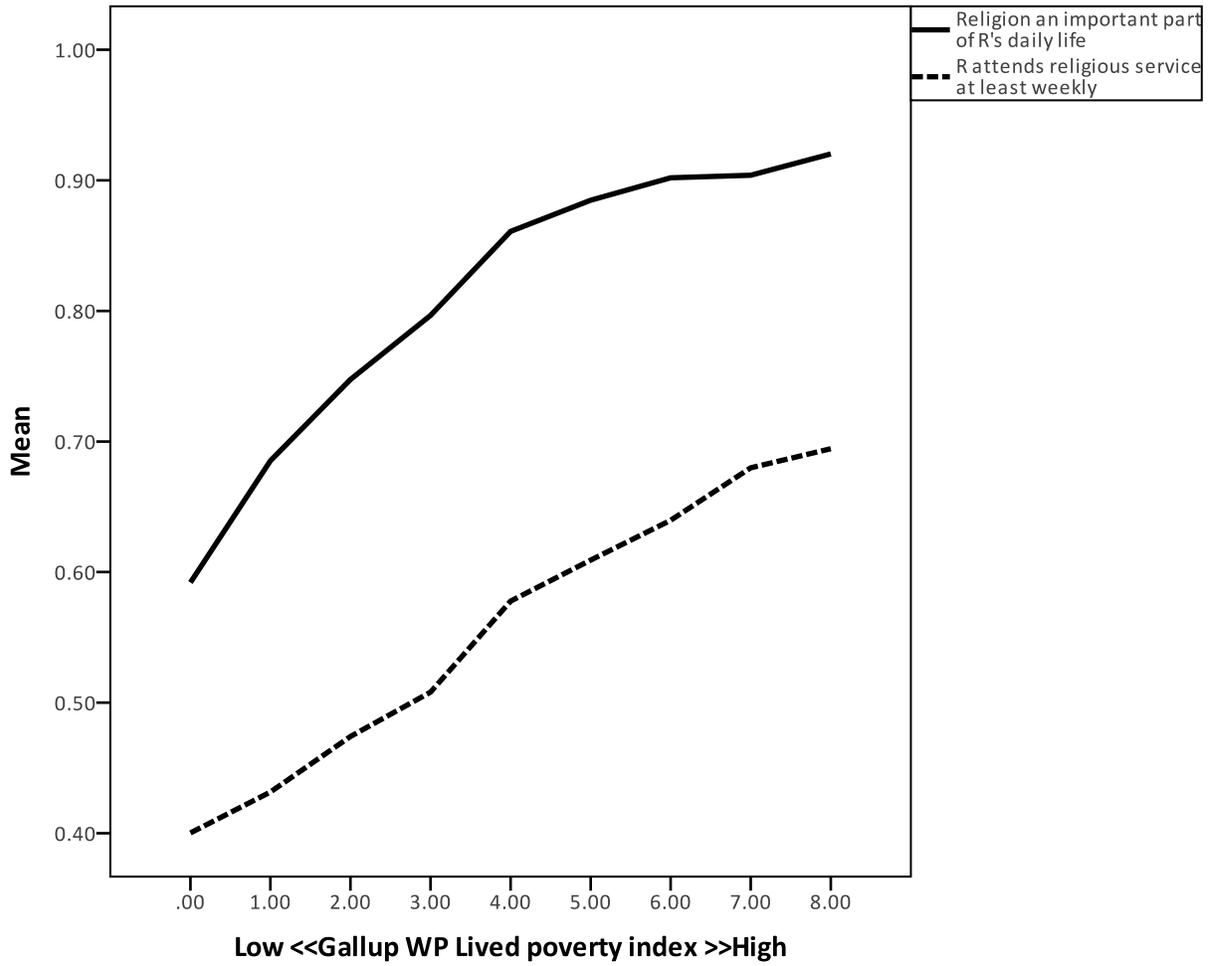
Figure 4: The world map of religious values



Notes: Religious values: *“Is religion an important part of your daily life?”*

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

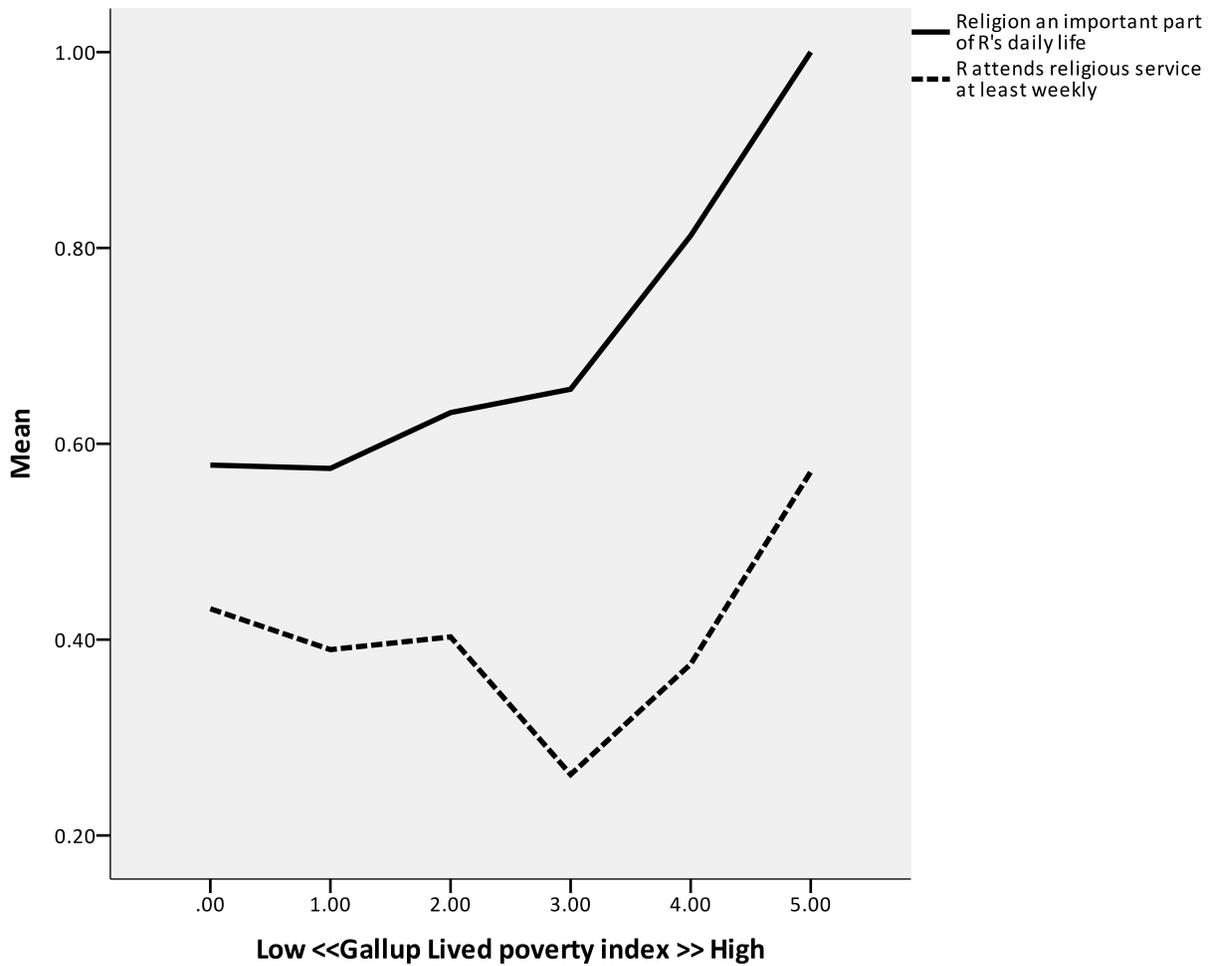
Figure 5: Lived poverty and religious values and practices



Notes: Religious practices: *“Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?”* Religious values: *“Is religion an important part of your daily life?”*

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

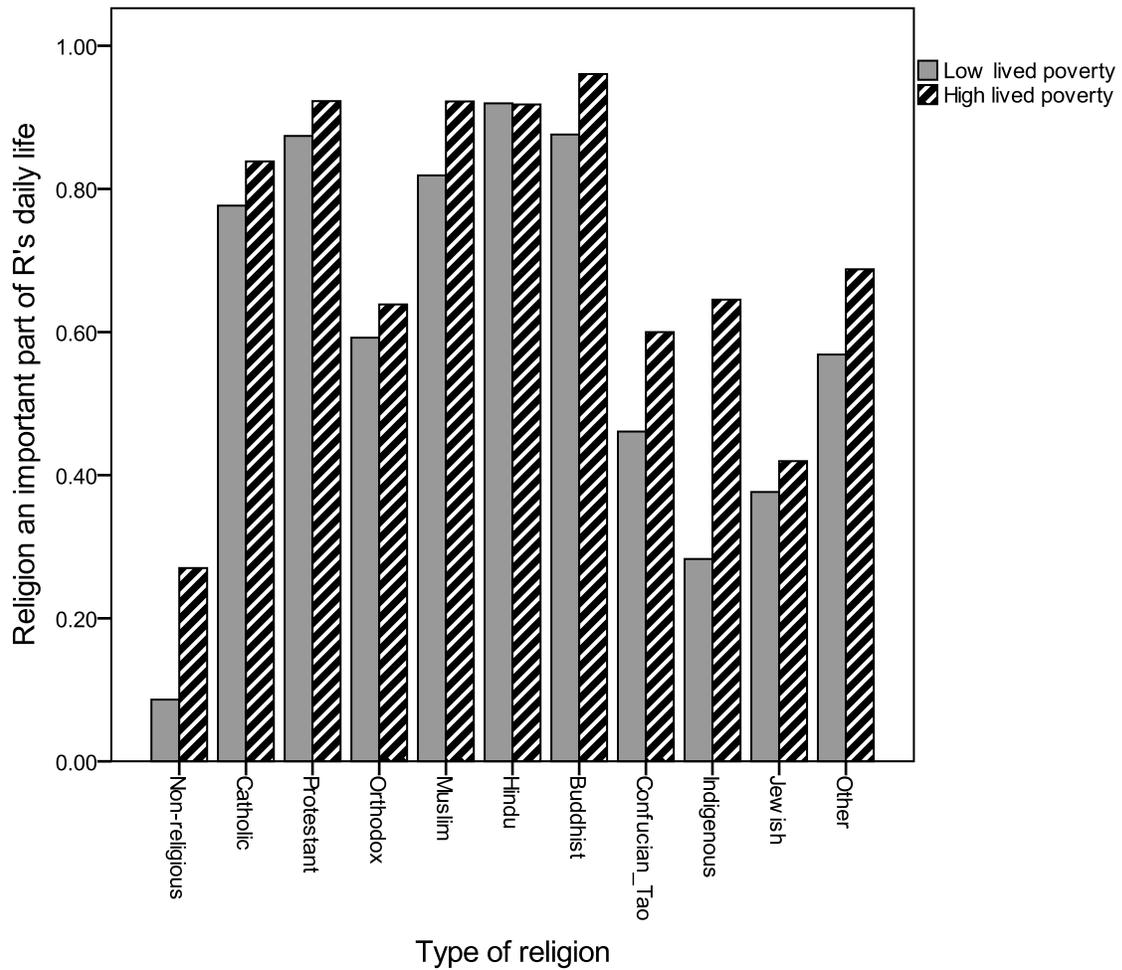
Figure 6: Lived poverty, religious values and practices, U.S. only



Notes: US sample only. Religious practices: *“Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?”* Religious values: *“Is religion an important part of your daily life?”*

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

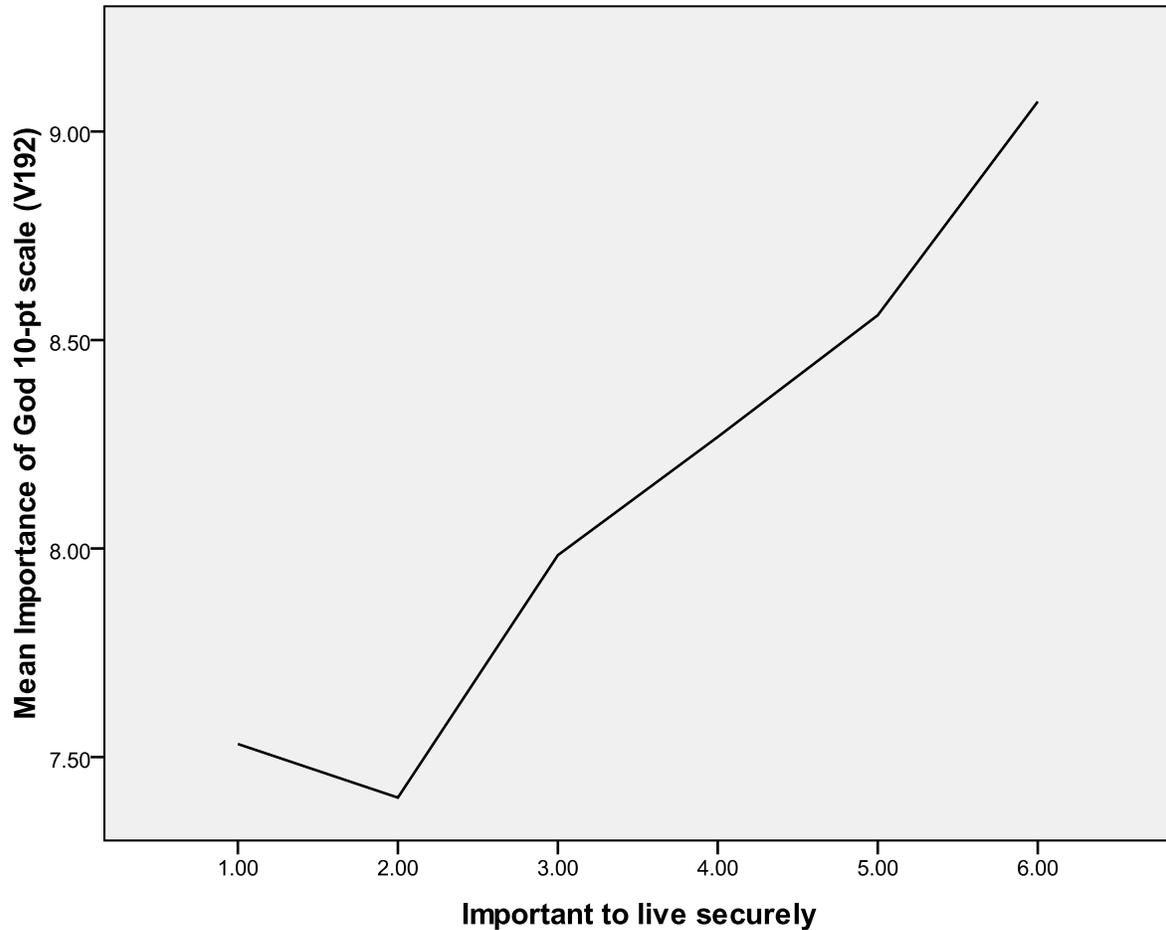
Figure 7: Lived poverty and religious values by type of faith



Notes: Religious values: *“Is religion an important part of your daily life?”* Type of religion is defined in the survey by the individual respondent.

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

Figure 8: Feelings of existential security and religious values

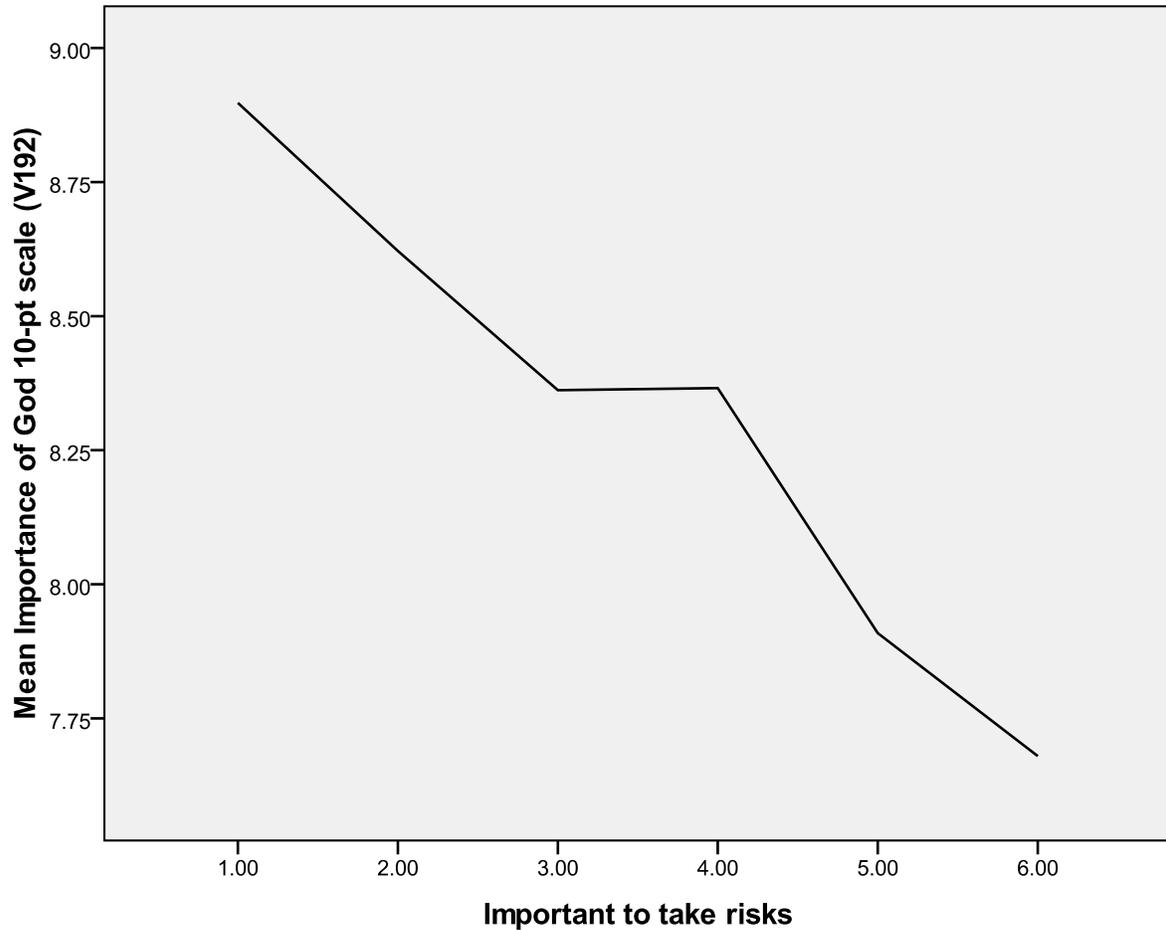


Note: “Now I will briefly describe some people. Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? V82: Living in secure surroundings is important to this person; to avoid anything that might be dangerous.”

Religious values: “How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate. 10 means “very important” and 1 means “not at all important.”

Source: World Values Survey 2005-7

Figure 9: Feelings of existential security and religious values



Note: *“Now I will briefly describe some people. Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? V86. Adventure and taking risks are important to this person; to have an exciting life.”*

Religious values: *“How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate. 10 means “very important” and 1 means “not at all important.”*

Source: World Values Survey 2005-7

¹ Jyette Klausen. 2009. 'Why religion has become more salient in Europe: Four working hypotheses about secularization and religiosity in contemporary politics.' *European Political Science* 8(3): 289-300.

² Peter L. Berger. Ed. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World*. Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Scott Thomas. 2005. *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

³ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. P.79. See also Rodney Stark. 1999. 'Secularization, RIP.' *Sociology of Religion*. 60(3): 270.

⁴ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ See for example, Olav Aarts, Ariana Need, Manfred te Grotenhuis and Nan Dirk de Graafo. 2008. 'Does belonging accompany believing? Correlations and trends in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000.' *Review of Religious Research* 50(1): 16-34.

⁶ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. 'A supply-side reinterpretation of the 'secularization' of Europe.' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 33: 230-52; Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge. 1987. *A Theory of Religion*. New York: Peter Lang; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America*. New Brunswick, NJ: The University of Rutgers Press; Roger Finke and Lawrence R. Iannaccone. 1993. 'The illusion of shifting demand: Supply-side explanations for trends and change in the American religious market place.' *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science*. 527: 27-39; R. S. Warner. 1993. 'Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm in the Sociology of Religion.' *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (5): 1044-1093; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.

⁸ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 5-6.

⁹ The term 'secularization' can refer to many developments. In this regard, we do not examine other forms of secularization, such as any decline in the authority of religious leaders and ecclesiastical

institutions in social life and the public sphere. For a discussion of these broader features, see Jose Casanova. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰ We are most grateful to Dan Silver for emphasizing this distinction. See Dan Silver. 2006. 'Religion without instrumentalization.' *Archives Europeennes De Sociologie* 47 (3): 421-434.

¹¹ For a discussion, see Sarah M. Pike. 2006. *New Age and Neo-pagan Religions in America*. Columbia Contemporary American Religion. New York: Columbia University Press; Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers. 2007. 'The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981–2000.' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46(3): 305 – 320.

¹² For further discussion, see Dan Silver. 2006. 'Religion without instrumentalization.' *Archives Europeennes De Sociologie* 47 (3): 421-434.

¹³ Kenneth I. Pargament. 1997. *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford.

¹⁴ G.G. Ano and E.B. Vasconcelles. 2005. 'Religious coping and psychological adjustment to stress: A meta-analysis.' *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61(4): 461-480.

¹⁵ Kenneth I. Pargament. 2002. 'The Bitter and the Sweet: An Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Religiousness.' *Psychological Inquiry* 13(3): 168-181.

¹⁶ Kenneth I. Pargament. 1997. *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford.

¹⁷ Stijn Ruiter and Frank van Tubergen. 2009. 'Religious Attendance in Cross-National Perspective: A Multilevel Analysis of 60 Countries.' *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3): 863-895.

¹⁸ Anthony Gill and Erik Lundsgaarde. 2004. 'State welfare spending and religiosity - A cross-national analysis.' *Rationality and Society* 16: 399.

¹⁹ Full methodological details about the World Values Surveys, including the questionnaires, sampling procedures, fieldwork procedures, principle investigators, and organization can be found at: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com> .

²⁰ More details about the methodology, fieldwork and sampling practices, and questionnaire can be found at <https://www.gallup.com>. Gallup World Poll Master Questionnaire 2007 May 2007.

²¹ Ahmet T. Kuru. 2005. Book review. *Comparative Political Studies*; Manuel A. Vásquez. *Book review. Sociology of Religion*

²² Dan Silver. 2006. 'Religion without instrumentalization.' *Archives Europeennes De Sociologie* 47 (3): 421-434.

²³ United Nations Development Program, 1994. *New Dimensions of Human Security*. New York: Oxford University Press; Gary King and Christopher J. L. Murray. 2001. 'Rethinking Human Security.' *Political Science Quarterly* 116(4): 585-610; Edward Newman. 2010. 'Critical human security studies.' *Review of International Studies* 36: 77-94.

²⁴ UNDP. Human Development Reports. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/hdi/>

²⁵ C. Kinnvall. 2004. 'Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security.' *Political Psychology* 25(5): 741-767

²⁶ Robert Mattes. 2008. 'The Material and Political Bases of Lived Poverty in Africa: Insights From the Afrobarometer.' In *Barometers of Quality of Life Around the Globe: How Are We Doing?* Edited by Valerie Møller, Dennis Huschka & Alex Michalos. Springer Publications.

²⁷ The Gallup Lived Poverty index is constructed from the following items:

1. "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money... To buy food that you or your family needed?"
2. "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money...To provide adequate shelter or housing for you and your family?"
3. "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of living, all the things you can buy and do?"
4. "Do you have any health problems that prevent you from doing any of the things people your age normally can do?"
5. "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your personal health?"
6. "Does your home have... running water?"
7. "Does your home have... electricity?"
8. "Does your home have... a landline telephone?"

These items are all coded in the survey as 'Yes/No' statements. Each is recoded consistently to negative responses and summed to generate an 8-point scale, where high=poorer.

²⁸ Eva Bellin. 2008. 'Faith in Politics New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics.' *World Politics* 60: 315-47.

²⁹ Peter L. Berger. Ed. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World*. Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Andrew M. Greeley. 2003. *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

³⁰ Anthony Gill and Erik Lundsgaarde. 2004. 'State welfare spending and religiosity - A cross-national analysis.' *Rationality and Society* 16: 399.

³¹ Branko Milanovic. 2005. *World Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

³² The Gini coefficient is based on equivalised household disposable income, after taxes and transfers. The Gini coefficient is defined as the area between the Lorenz curve (which plots cumulative shares of the population, from the poorest to the richest, against the cumulative share of income that they receive) and the 45° line, taken as a ratio of the whole triangle. The values of the Gini coefficient range between 0, in the case of "perfect equality" (*i.e.* each share of the population gets the same share of income), and 1, in the case of "perfect inequality" (*i.e.* all income goes to the individual with the highest income).

³³ OECD Stats Extracts. <http://stats.oecd.org/>

³⁴ Dan Silver. 2006. 'Religion without instrumentalization.' *Archives Europeennes De Sociologie* 47 (3): 421-434.

³⁵ For more details, see Shalom H. Schwartz. 2001. 'Extending the Cross-Cultural Validity of the Theory of Basic Human Values with a Different Method of Measurement.' *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32(5): 519-542.

³⁶ Jeffrey Hadden. 1987. 'Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory.' *Social Forces* 65 (3): 587-611.

³⁷ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. See also Rodney Stark. 1999. 'Secularization, RIP.' *Sociology of Religion*. 60(3): 270.

³⁸ Peter L. Berger. Ed. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World*. Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center.

³⁹ R. Stephen Warner. 1993. 'Work in progress toward a new paradigm in the sociology of religion.' *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (5): 1044-1093.