

The Faith Factor. How Scholars' Religiosity Biases Research Findings on Secularization

Valeria Rainero,^a Jörg Stolz^b, Ruud Luijkx^{a,c}

a) University of Trento; b) University of Lausanne; c) Tilburg University

Abstract: Secularization is one of the most debated areas of research in current sociology of religion. Despite hundreds of empirical studies, researchers do not even agree on the very existence of secularization in different parts of the world. This article investigates whether some of the variability in findings may be attributed not to the social reality investigated but to bias in the form of researchers' own religiosity. Specifically, we test whether researchers' religiosity is correlated with two outcomes: their personal belief in the secularization thesis and the likelihood of supporting secularization in their published articles. To address this question, we constructed an international database of scholars working on secularization and conducted a survey measuring their religiosity and beliefs about religious decline. We then coded their publications according to whether they supported the secularization thesis and linked the two data sets. We find significant evidence of a "(non-)religious bias." Either in their private attitudes or public writings, religious researchers find less evidence for the secularization thesis, whereas secular scholars find more. This result cannot be explained by differences in research methods, study quality, or the religious and geographic contexts under investigation.

Keywords: secularization; religion; bias in science

Reproducibility Package: A replication package with instructions, data, and STATA code is publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF): <https://osf.io/vcxnk/>.

Citation: Rainero, Valeria, Jörg Stolz, and Ruud Luijkx. 2026. "The Faith Factor. How Scholars' Religiosity Biases Research Findings on Secularization" *Sociological Science* 13: 154-177.

Received: October 30, 2025

Accepted: December 16, 2025

Published: February 10, 2026

Editor(s): Arnout van de Rijt, Andreas Wimmer

DOI: 10.15195/v13.a7

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This open-access article has been published under a Creative Commons Attribution License, which allows unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction, in any form, as long as the original author and source have been credited. 

THE secularization thesis is one of the most enduringly contested topics in the sociology of religion. Sociological classics such as Max Weber (1904) or Émile Durkheim (1912) understood religion as antithetical to modernity and destined to disappear. Building on these authors, the secularization thesis emerged, linking modernization to the long-term decline of religion (Berger 1967; Dobbelaere 1981; Wilson 1966). This view dominated the sociology of religion during most of the twentieth century. Starting from the 1980s, defenders of the individualization thesis and rational choice theorists sowed doubts on the disappearance of religion as an inherent feature of modernization processes. This debate has continued until today, with new defenders of secularization theory and new critics having emerged on the fore (Gauthier 2020; Kasselstrand, Zuckerman, and Cragun 2023; Müller 2020; Stolz 2020; Voas 2020).

The field has not been able to settle the debate on empirical grounds. Despite hundreds of empirical studies, researchers still do not agree whether secularization is occurring in various parts of the world—let alone whether modernization causally leads to secularization. One possibility is that these differences are not purely empirical but are influenced, at least in part, by researchers' own religiosity. Specifically, highly religious researchers might be so convinced of religion's enduring

significance that they overlook signs of weakening faith in their studies. Conversely, strongly secular scholars might be so eager to find evidence of religious decline that they unintentionally exaggerate such trends. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has systematically examined the presence of this bias or its potential effects. This article examines whether and to what extent the variability in findings surrounding the secularization controversy can be attributed not to the social reality being studied but to the religiosity of the researchers involved.

We constructed a database of international scholars in the social sciences engaged in the study of contemporary secularization, encompassing disciplines such as sociology, religious studies, political science, history, and anthropology. We then conducted a survey among these scholars to measure their religiosity and their belief in the secularization thesis. In the next step, we coded the articles of these scholars, both empirical and conceptual, published on the topic of secularization and religious change. Finally, we linked the two data sets of researchers' attitudes and coded publications. We performed logistic regression analysis to examine the effect of authors' religiosity on the two outcomes: (1) their personal belief in the secularization thesis and (2) the likelihood of finding evidence for secularization in their published work.

We find significant evidence of a "(non-)religious bias." Both in their private attitudes and in their published work, religious researchers tend to see less evidence for the secularization thesis, whereas secular scholars are more likely to affirm it. This result cannot be explained by differences in research methods—quantitative or qualitative—by variations in research impact, or by the specific religious traditions or geographical areas studied by the scholars.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

It is generally admitted that scientists should establish results independently of their personal beliefs or values (Merton 1973). The idea is that if somebody else, with different orientations and attitudes, replicated the study, they would find the same results. This intersubjective validity and methodical control of results is what makes modern science scientific. At the same time, it is equally recognized that the complete exclusion of personal beliefs and values from the research process is extremely difficult, especially in the social sciences (Becker 1967; Weber 1949). The formulation of research questions, the choice of concepts, and the selection of methods are inevitably shaped by the researcher's theoretical orientation, worldview, and normative assumptions, which may in turn influence the results.

This debate has given rise to clashing epistemological and methodological positions within the social sciences. Post-positivists, while acknowledging the challenges, argue that scholars should nonetheless strive for neutrality in their pursuit of truth (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Raub, Dirk de Graaf, and Gërkhani 2022). Constructivists argue that instead of aiming for unattainable objectivity, researchers should acknowledge their positionality and engage in reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). This debate remains ongoing (Burawoy 2005; Hammersley 2017). In this article, we sidestep the abstract epistemological debate between post-positivism and constructivism about what researchers ought to do and rather ask empirically,

whether researchers' beliefs and values actually correlate with their findings. Few empirical evidence exists testing the impact of ideological and moral values on research outcomes. Borjas & Breznau (2026) show that researchers' political ideology influences results in policy-relevant research on immigration. Sulik et al. (2024) report that scholars' cognitive traits and personality dimensions are correlated with preferences toward different schools of thought in psychology. Taken together, such findings suggest that academic disagreements on contentious topics cannot always be resolved by simply accumulating more evidence, as researchers may continue to hold fundamentally different positions despite exposure to the same data. To the best of our knowledge, no study to date has investigated whether religious beliefs may influence scientific conclusions about secularization.

The Secularization Debate: A Controversy about Findings and Biases

The debate on secularization in the social sciences of religion is vast, and here we can only highlight some of its most salient aspects (for a recent overview, see Stolz 2020). Classical secularization theory posits that modernization leads to a long-term decline in religion and religiosity (Wallis & Bruce 1995). This perspective dominated the social sciences until the 1970s. From the 1980s onward, scholars increasingly challenged this thesis, advocating for a "change not decline" perspective. According to this view, while some forms of religion were indeed waning, others were emerging and expanding, offsetting these losses. Rational choice theorists, for instance, pointed to the growth of new religious movements and upstart sects, such as evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal groups (Finke & Stark 1992; Stark & Bainbridge 1985). Meanwhile, proponents of the individualization thesis emphasized the rise of "diffused," "invisible," and "lived" religion—forms of less institutionalized but still socially significant religiosity (Ammerman 2013; Cipriani 2017; Davie 1990, 1994; Hervieu-Léger 2003; Luckmann 1967). Others argued for a "spiritual revolution," suggesting that esoteric, holistic, and alternative spiritualities were on the rise (Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Houtman & Aupers 2007). In addition, some scholars proposed the idea of "European exceptionalism," contending that secularization is largely confined to Western Europe, whereas religiosity remains strong elsewhere in the world (Berger, Davie, and Fokas 2008; Davie 2006). Criticism of secularization research has extended beyond empirical concerns to its underlying assumptions. Hadden (1987, P. 588) described secularization theory as a "taken-for-granted ideology rather than a systematic set of interrelated propositions." Similarly, Christiano, Swatos, and Kivisto (2002) argued that the secularization thesis had itself become a kind of religion, with claims of religious decline reflecting the personal ideological views of scholars rather than objective analysis. On the other side of the dispute, defenders of the classical secularization thesis responded to these critiques by arguing that the observed growth of new religious movements, upstart sects, and spirituality is insufficient to compensate for the decline of mainstream religions (Pollack & Pickel 2007). Research has shown how religiosity is declining across generations, with each new cohort being less religious than the previous one (Molteni & Biolcati 2023; Voas & Chaves 2016).

They viewed spirituality only as an intermediate phase between religiosity and secularity (Voas 2009). While acknowledging that Western contexts have historically been overrepresented in studies, secularization defenders argued that an increasing body of quantitative research on non-Western societies continues to support the modernization–secularization link (Norris & Inglehart 2011; Stolz et al. 2023). Finally, they argued that religious and spiritual beliefs are weakening in substance, salience, and strength among affiliated and disaffiliated alike, disproving arguments of invisible religion (Voas 2025). Secularization scholars accused their critics of harboring their own ideological biases. They charged “change-not-decline” scholars with assuming that religion is a natural and universal phenomenon with inherently positive effects on civic life (Dromi & Stabler 2023). Moreover, they claimed that their adversaries were “moving the goalpost”: as soon as one of their counterexamples to secularization was disproved, they pointed to another one that allegedly showed the vitality of religion (Kasselstrand et al. 2023).

How (Non-)Religiosity Can Bias Beliefs and Research Conclusions on Secularization

In this study, we investigate how religiosity and secularity may bias two types of interlinked outcomes: the belief in the validity of the secularization thesis and the support found for secularization in researchers' publications. Religiosity or secularity may influence the belief in the validity of the secularization thesis in an *implicit* way. One possible mechanism is scholars' embeddedness in religiously homogeneous social environments. Religious scholars might be more often surrounded by individuals with similar levels of religiosity, which may make it difficult for them to imagine that religion is in decline. Conversely, secular scholars may tend to interact primarily with other non-religious individuals and may therefore find it equally hard to conceive that religion could persist or even thrive.

Similarly, religiosity or secularity can impact research practices and inferences through unconscious cognitive biases. Human judgment is inherently fallible, and systematic patterns such as confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and blind spot bias can distort the research process (Bishop 2020). Studies on scientific reasoning show that researchers are more likely to accept evidence that aligns with their preexisting beliefs while dismissing contradictory findings (Hom & Van Nuland 2019; Masnick & Zimmerman 2009). Religious and secular worldviews may also unconsciously shape which questions scholars ask, how they measure concepts, and how they interpret results (Honeycutt & Jussim 2020; Rooney 1992). This bias extends even to the evaluation of research quality: studies that challenge a scholar's worldview may be perceived as less methodologically rigorous, even when they adhere to the same empirical standards (Munro, Leary, and Lasane 2004). Consequently, religious scholars might be more receptive to evidence contradicting secularization, whereas secular scholars might be more inclined to confirm it.

Beyond these implicit mechanisms, religiosity and secularity may also shape research practices in more *deliberate* ways. Scholars may engage in activist research that either defends or challenges religion's role in contemporary society. For example, religious scholars may consciously avoid emphasizing religious decline,

whether due to personal convictions or institutional pressures. Conversely, secular scholars may exaggerate or overstate religious decline to advance a secularist agenda. Building on these insights, we posit the following two hypotheses:

H1: The higher the religiosity of a scholar, the lower their likelihood of believing in the validity of the secularization thesis.

H2: The higher the religiosity of a scholar, the lower their likelihood of supporting secularization in their published research.

We investigate these hypotheses while adjusting for three potential confounders: methodological preferences, research context, and research impact. First, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods may function as a confounder. Quantitative researchers may be more likely than qualitative researchers to find evidence of secularization. This is partly because quantitative studies can more readily adopt a longitudinal perspective, making religious decline easier to detect. They also tend to rely on traditional indicators of religiosity—such as church attendance or formal affiliation—which are especially likely to capture the decline of institutionalized religion (Houtman, Heelas, and Achterberg 2012). In contrast, qualitative approaches are often better suited for studying minority groups and holistic forms of spirituality, which can highlight religious persistence and transformation rather than decline. At the same time, selection effects may also be at play; for instance, more religiously committed scholars may have been disproportionately drawn to qualitative methods. In such a situation, the relationship between religiosity and scholarly findings on secularization could not be accurately assessed without accounting for the confounding influence of methodological orientation. Second, the religious tradition under study and the geographical area investigated may also act as confounders. For example, researchers who work in Western Europe, or mainline Christianity (or both), are more likely to encounter secularization than researchers who work on Africa, or Pentecostalism (or both), due to the differing religious trends in these contexts (Stolz & Novak 2023). Relatedly, researchers may have personal or regional ties to the traditions they study, which could subtly shape their interpretations. Thus, those working in predominantly secular or religious contexts may risk overgeneralizing the religious trends of their specific area. Finally, research quality may moderate the way religiosity can influence both beliefs about and findings on secularization. One may expect that higher research quality would mitigate biases.

Data, Method, and Measures

Creating a List of Scholars Working on Secularization and Their Publications

In the first step, we created a list of scholars working on secularization, as well as a matched list of their publications. The target population of the study is made up of scholars who conducted research on secularization in the decade 2011–2020. They were identified through a bibliographic search on the Web of Science Core Collection¹. Web of Science ensures coverage of research publications and citations,

enabling the user to advance high-quality and consistent bibliographic research. The complete list of all the research articles written in English about “secularization” or “secularisation”—this accounts for linguistic differences between American and British English—was retrieved. This query is applied to the title, abstract, author’s keywords, and “keyword plus”—a list of index terms automatically generated from the titles of cited articles. The result of this search, as of February 2021, retrieved a list of 1,664 articles and 2,015 authors and co-authors, and their meta-information, such as year of publication, authors’ institutional affiliation, emails, and research category. An online search was conducted for each author to check the accuracy of the institutional email, and we got an updated one in case it had changed. At the end of this work, after checking all the initial data set by eliminating 13 duplicates, finding 22 authors who passed away in the meanwhile, and discarding 33 authors for whom no email was found, the final list of participants who received an invitation to complete the survey consisted of 1,947 authors.

Administering an Online Survey to Scholars Working on Secularization

An online survey was administered to the 1,947 scholars found in step 1, between April 30 and June 8, 2021. 954 academics answered the survey, equivalent to a 49 percent response rate. Of these 954, 111 were excluded, because they did not answer “yes” to the initial mandatory filter question “Is religion one of your research interests?”. Moreover, 42 respondents who stopped the survey at the very first page were also eliminated from the analysis. The questionnaire contained a few questions of personal background (age, gender, and academic field), a few questions on religious practices, beliefs, and affiliation, and, finally, a question regarding the respondent’s belief in the validity of secularization thesis.

Coding the Publications

The 801 researchers who participated in the survey published a total of 1,076 articles addressing secularization. These publications were downloaded, screened, and manually coded to extract relevant information. Articles were included if they either tested the secularization thesis or explicitly discussed it. No exclusion criteria were applied with respect to methodology, to include the widest possible range of research designs, from qualitative case studies to quantitative analyses and theoretical contributions, because the current study does not seek to perform a meta-analysis of numerical estimates of religious change. The coding procedure focused on four dimensions: (1) whether the article supported the secularization thesis (1 = yes; 0 = no); (2) the methodological approach (qualitative, quantitative, or non-empirical); (3) the religious tradition examined; and (4) the geographical context investigated. The operationalization of the dependent variable—support for the secularization thesis—was developed iteratively through engagement with the literature and refined as ambiguous cases emerged. We started by relying on a broad definition of secularization, widely accepted in the field, provided by Dobbelaere (2016). Dobbelaere defines secularization as a multidimensional process of religious decline at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. From this,

we developed our coding scheme described in detail below. The articles' support for the secularization thesis was coded dichotomously (1 = supports; 0 = does not support). A binary operationalization was chosen to reflect the central theoretical divide in the literature between defenders and critics of the secularization theory. Although we acknowledge that authors' position may exist along a continuum, the binary distinction ensures comparability across studies. Intercoder reliability was tested on a random subsample of 80 articles, resulting in an 83.8 percent agreement rate². The following paragraph provides a more detailed description of the criteria for operationalizing this dependent variable. The resulting coded data were merged with survey responses and anonymized prior to analysis.

Operationalization of Articles' Support of Secularization

1. Individual level

Articles were coded as supporting secularization (1) when they provided empirical evidence of declining religiosity or identified mechanisms contributing to this decline, such as educational expansion (Dilmaghani 2019; Schwadel 2014), socialization (Cragun et al. 2018), existential insecurity (Hayward & Krause 2015), or pluralism (Olson et al. 2020). Studies showing the weakening influence of religion on outcomes such as fertility (Cranney 2015; Matsuo & Matthijs 2016) or moral attitudes (Knill et al. 2020) were also coded as supporting secularization. Conversely, articles were coded as not supporting secularization (0) when they documented stability or revival of religiosity (Garelli 2013; Schoeman 2017; Voicu 2019), or when they empirically rejected central mechanisms of the theory, such as the relationship between secularization and education (Franck & Johnson 2016) or scientific advancement (McPhetres, Jong, and Zuckerman 2021). Studies advocating alternative frameworks, such as individualization (Ganiel 2019; Martínez-Arriño 2016), holistic spirituality (Altnurme 2011), implicit religion (Singler 2020), or the economics model of religion (Brik 2019), were likewise coded as not confirming secularization.

2. Organizational level

At the meso level, studies documenting internal secularization of religious congregations, such as declining vitality or adaptation to worldly concerns, were coded as supporting secularization (Reimer & Hiemstra 2015; Zängle 2014). In contrast, evidence of institutional resilience or renewal, such as charismatic movements (Alva 2016), adaptation strategies (Martínez-Arriño & Grier 2018), or persistent local traditions (Baldacchino 2014), led to a "not supporting" code (0).

3. Societal level

At the macro level, articles were coded as supporting secularization (1) when they documented the decreasing public significance of religion, such as in state-building and laïcité processes (Peker 2019) or the declining religious influence on politics (Ignazi & Wellhofer 2017; Raymond 2021). Conversely, studies emphasizing the continued public relevance of religion, for instance, in politics, welfare, or economics (Andreassen 2019; Davie 2015; Van Buren, Syed, and Mir 2020), were coded as not supporting secularization (0).

4. Theoretical contributions

Non-empirical or conceptual articles were classified according to their stance toward the secularization thesis. Works advancing or reaffirming secularization-based explanations (Aguas 2020; Cantoni, Dittmar, and Yuchtman 2018) were coded as supporting secularization (1), whereas those advocating alternative paradigms such as post-secularization (Arat 2017), multiple modernities (Casanova 2011), lived religion (Ammerman 2014), or diffused religion (Cipriani 2011) were coded as not supporting (0).

5. Critical cases

The iterative nature of the coding process was crucial for managing studies that presented mixed or nuanced findings. Articles were classified as supporting secularization (1) when reporting short-term religious revivals, provided that authors explicitly framed such phenomena as temporary or exceptional. For instance, Audette and Weaver (2016) acknowledged that church growth could occur under specific political circumstances but still described religion as operating in “a shrinking market.” Similarly, Molteni et al. (2021) reported a temporary COVID-19-related increase in religiosity while explicitly reaffirming ongoing secularization. Conversely, some studies showing empirical decline of religion were coded as not supporting secularization (0) when authors explicitly rejected the secularization framework despite their findings. For example, Hekmatpour (2020) observed religious decline but concluded that secularization theory could not explain recent resurgences. Likewise, Franck and Iannaccone (2014) found “much evidence of secularization but no evidence for secularization theory,” leading to a code of 0. Finally, works documenting religious polarization (Wilkins-Laflamme 2015) or simultaneous processes of secularization and desecularization (Fisher 2017, 2020; Vorster 2013) were coded as not supporting (0), as they conceptualized religious change as plural rather than unidirectional.

6. Exclusions

Publications were excluded from the final data set when: (1) they contained the term “secularization” but were not published in social science journals (14 cases), (2) the author’s position on secularization could not be reliably detected from the text (111 cases), and (3) neither the abstract nor the full text was accessible (two cases). After exclusions, the final analytical sample included 949 articles authored by 703 researchers.

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable is the respondents’ belief in the validity of the secularization thesis. Respondents were asked whether they generally find themselves in agreement with the secularization thesis as a binary question with response options being 1 = “yes” and 0 = “no”³. The second dependent variable is the article’s support toward the secularization thesis, measured through articles’ manual codification as a binary variable (1 = “yes” and 0 = “no”).

Independent Variable

The main independent variable is an additive religiosity scale ranging from 0 to 8. The scale includes eight items measuring religious practices, beliefs, and belonging (Billiet 2002; Voas 2007, 2009). The scale was constructed using the following items: a self-assessment of religiosity ("How religious are you?") on a scale from 0 to 3; four binary items (0 - 1) asking the belief in "Heaven," "Hell," "Life after death," and "God"; a more detailed question on the belief in God ranging from 0 to 4; and two questions measuring religious practice, including "How often do you pray?" (from 0 "never" to 5 "several times a day") and "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" (ranging from 0 to 6). All the variables were normalized between 0 and 1 to thus create a scale ranging from 0 to 8, with higher values indicating greater religious commitment. The scale is very consistent with high factor loadings (ranging from 0.72 and 0.91) and very reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 (for details, see Appendix 1). In our sample, 15.8 percent of respondents provided partial or no information on their religious beliefs and practices. Sensitive questions like these often have higher non-response rates, but they can become particularly challenging for researchers due to the perceived tension between science and faith in academic settings (Ecklund 2010). To address missing data on the religiosity scale, we apply multiple imputation using the predictive mean matching (PMM) method⁴. The imputation model includes a linear regression based on available individual-level variables: religious affiliation, gender, and age.

Controls

Researchers' religiosity and their support for the secularization thesis may be influenced by the potential confounders: methodology, research impact, geographical context, and religious community investigated. Articles were coded to differentiate between quantitative, qualitative, and non-empirical studies. Articles employing a mixed-method approach were categorized as "qualitative" (this concerned roughly 2 percent of the articles). Information on the different religious traditions analyzed was collected and recoded into eight categories: Christian (encompassing several Christian denominations), Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, nonreligion, and spirituality. Numerically smaller religious groups analyzed in the study were grouped under the category "other." When an article's argument did not revolve around a specific religion, or when the analysis encompassed multiple religious traditions, such as in international survey designs, we labeled it as "not specific." Information about the geographical context examined in each article was collected. We distinguished six geographical contexts: North America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East (MENA), and Asia. If an article did not specify a particular context or involves an international analysis that cannot be easily categorized using the available labels, we labeled it as "not specific." Numerically smaller contexts analyzed in the study were grouped under the category "other." Finally, an indicator of research quality was constructed using research impact, which often reflects greater methodological rigor and peer scrutiny. This indicator combines the article's citation count and the author's H-index. This measure

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables collected from articles ($N = 949$)

Variable	Labels / Values	Mean	St. Dev.	% (N)
Research conclusion	Do not support secularization			54.06 (513)
	Support secularization			45.94 (436)
Methodology	Not empirical			44.89 (426)
	Qualitative			16.44 (156)
	Quantitative			38.67 (367)
Religious tradition analyzed	Not specific			37.49 (356)
	Christian			21.42 (202)
	Catholic			13.88 (127)
	Protestant			6.56 (62)
	Orthodox			2.08 (21)
	Muslim			7.32 (72)
	Nonreligion			3.61 (35)
	Spirituality			3.83 (38)
	Other			3.83 (36)
Context analyzed	Not specific			29.40 (279)
	North America			10.33 (98)
	Western Europe			37.72 (358)
	Eastern Europe			6.74 (64)
	MENA			4.43 (42)
	Asia			4.32 (41)
	Other			7.06 (67)
Research impact	0–4.46	1.92	0.91	

was log transformed to adjust for the highly left-skewed distribution of the variable. Additional control variables at the respondents' level include religious affiliation (unaffiliated, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim), gender, age, and academic field. Looking at the distribution of the articles' conclusions (Table 1), we see that the sample divides almost equally among supporters and opponents to the classical thesis of secularization. As shown in Table 1, 45.9 percent of the articles find support for the secularization theory, whereas 54.1 percent of the articles do not. Studies are almost perfectly split between empirical and theoretical papers. Among the empirical publications, approximately 70 percent consist of quantitative studies.

54.3 percent of the respondents belong to a religious denomination (Table 2), revealing that scholars engaged in the secularization debate are almost equally split in religiously affiliated and unaffiliated. This result is in line with previous research conducted in social sciences (Ecklund et al. 2016; Ecklund & Scheitle 2007). More than half of the affiliated respondents are either Catholic or Protestant, whereas minor religious groups represented in the sample include Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, and other religious denominations such as Hindu and Buddhism. A majority of respondents (57.3 percent) personally believe that secularization is occurring, while 42.7 percent do not, indicating that the scholarly community is itself divided on the very existence of secularization. For graphical presentation,

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the variables collected from authors ($N = 703$)

Variable	Labels / Values	Mean	St. Dev.	% (N)
Belief in secularization	Yes	3.22	2.94	57.33 (403)
	No			42.67 (300)
Religiosity	0–8			(592)
Religious affiliation	Unaffiliated	50.70	12.39	45.66 (321)
	Catholic			17.78 (125)
	Protestant			20.34 (143)
	Orthodox			4.27 (30)
	Jewish			3.56 (25)
	Muslim			2.99 (21)
	Other			5.41 (38)
Academic discipline	Sociology	50.70	12.39	31.72 (223)
	Religious studies			15.08 (106)
	Political science			16.07 (113)
	Philosophy			8.11 (57)
	History			11.66 (82)
	Anthropology			4.98 (35)
	Other			12.38 (87)
Gender	Male	50.70	12.39	71.69 (504)
	Female			28.31 (199)
Age	28–86			(703)

religiosity was also categorized into low, medium, and high levels based on ± 1 SD from the mean.

Analytical Strategy

To test our research hypothesis, we run logistic regression models on two separate dependent variables. We first model the belief in the validity of the secularization thesis and then the probability of finding evidence of secularization in published articles. Independent variables are added in a stepwise manner. In the first model, only the religiosity scale is added as an independent variable. In model 2, we include the study's methodology and research impact. Model 3 incorporates the religious tradition analyzed and the geographical area investigated. Finally, the last model of the regression table includes the rest of the control variables, including author's gender, age, religious affiliation, and academic discipline. 18.26 percent of the 703 authors in the sample have more than one research article included in the list retrieved. Similarly, 14.62 percent of the articles are authored by more than one scholar in the sample, whereas the rest consist of single-author papers. To account for the clustered nature of the data, the analysis is conducted using the articles as the unit of analysis and specifying standard errors clustered by author. All models are estimated using multiple imputed data for the religiosity scale, employing the PMM method. We generated 10 imputations to ensure the robustness of the estimates.

Table 3: Distribution of research conclusion on secularization by researcher's belief. Percentage distribution ($N = 949$)

Research Conclusion	Researcher's Opinion	
	Believe in Secularization	Do Not Believe in Secularization
Find evidence of secularization	54.95	31.40
Do not find evidence of secularization	45.05	68.60
Total	100	100

$\chi^2 = 50.03, p < 0.001$; Pearson's correlation = 0.23.

Results

The Link between Researchers' Beliefs and Research Conclusions on Secularization

In this study, two dependent variables are employed: scholars' personal opinion on secularization and the conclusions drawn in their academic publications. We first explore the relationship between these two measures. Their moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.23, p < 0.001$) shows that researchers' opinion and their research conclusions tend to align, although they remain distinct measures. As shown in the contingency table (Table 3), 54.9 percent of scholars who personally support the secularization thesis also report evidence of secularization in their research, whereas only 31.4 percent of those who do not support the thesis reach such conclusions in their publications. Conversely, among those rejecting the secularization thesis, 68.6 percent also produce studies that do not find evidence of religious decline. The association ($\chi^2 = 50.03, p < 0.001$) confirms a significant alignment between individual belief and research outcome. We do not make any causal claim here: personal beliefs and research outcomes may influence each other simultaneously. We therefore treat them as two complementary indicators of support for the secularization thesis: opinion reflects what scholars think, whereas conclusion reflects what they find and claim in their publications under academic scrutiny.

Religiosity, Secularity, and Support for Secularization

Our main results are visualized in Figure 1, which shows the predicted probabilities of supporting the secularization thesis for scholars with low, medium, and high levels of religiosity. Figure 1 combines results from both outcome variables: researchers' beliefs and publication outputs. Estimates are based on the full models with all controls (model 4 in Table 4). Figure 1 reveals a consistent pattern: as researchers' personal religiosity increases, the probability of endorsing secularization decreases significantly across both dependent variables. This holds true whether we examine what scholars publish or what they personally believe about religious decline.

Table 4 presents the estimated coefficients from the logistic analysis of support for secularization, measured both through survey opinion (panel a) and publication output (panel b). Average marginal effects (AMEs) are reported to facilitate

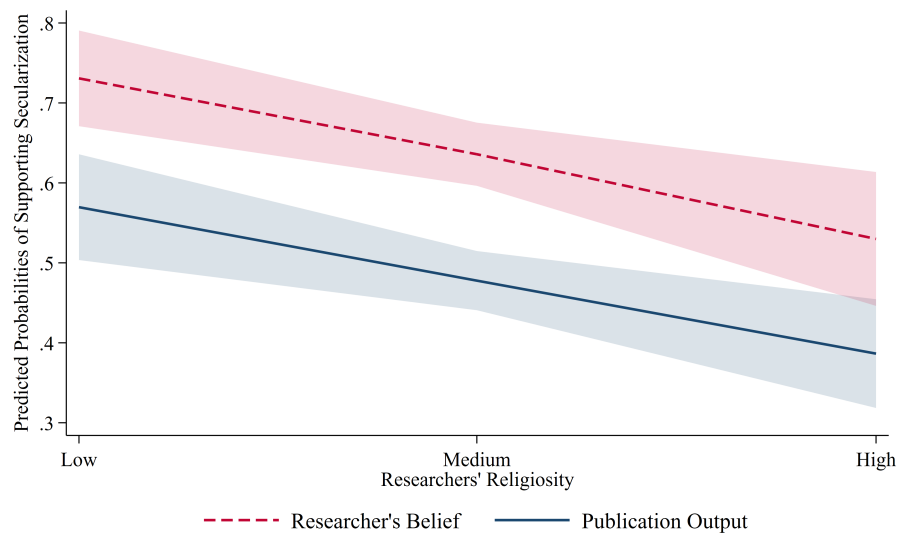


Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of believing in the validity of the secularization thesis and supporting it in published work, by authors' religiosity (95 percent C.I.). Estimates based on Model 4 in Table 4, including full controls.

interpretation. The effect of religiosity remains significant even after the inclusion of all control variables. When the article's methodology is added (model 2), the association between religiosity and secularization weakens slightly but remains statistically significant. A striking pattern emerges: researchers using quantitative methods are much more likely to report evidence of secularization ($AME = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$) and to state their support ($AME = 0.169$, $p < 0.001$), whereas qualitative or theoretical approaches show no significant differences. The model incorporates the impact of the study as well, which is not associated with the outcomes. Model 3 includes additional predictors, such as the focus of the study on specific religious traditions and geographic regions. The negative association between religiosity and secularization remains robust ($AME = -0.016$, $p < 0.05$ for both outcomes). The final model integrates authors' religious affiliation, academic discipline, and demographic controls (age and gender). The full specification is reported in Appendix 2. Religiosity emerges as a stronger predictor: for publication outcomes, the AME is -0.024 ($p < 0.05$), whereas for survey opinions, it is -0.030 ($p < 0.01$). Substantively, each one-point increase in religiosity corresponds to a 2.4 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of finding evidence for secularization in publications and a 3.0 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of personally endorsing the secularization thesis. This result supports our hypothesis: secular scholars are more likely to support secularization both in their stated opinions and in their published work, compared to their religious counterparts. The effect is substantial: moving from the lowest level of religiosity (0) to the highest (8) corresponds to an 19.2 percentage point decrease in the probability of supporting the secularization thesis in published research and a 24.0 percentage point decrease in the probability of personally believing in secularization. Studies employing quantitative methods remain significantly more likely to report evidence of religious decline ($AME = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4: Logistic regression models predicting support for the secularization thesis (0 – 1), measured as researcher's belief (a) and publication output (b). Average marginal effects. Observations: 949. Standard errors adjusted for 703 clusters (authors). Model 4 includes gender, age, researcher's religious affiliation, and academic discipline (for the full list of coefficients, see Appendix 2)

Variables	(a) Researcher's Belief in Secularization				(b) Research Conclusion on Secularization			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4 (with Controls)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4 (with Controls)
Religiosity (0–8)	–0.026*** (0.006)	–0.019** (0.007)	–0.016* (0.006)	–0.030** (0.010)	–0.025*** (0.007)	–0.018** (0.006)	–0.016** (0.006)	–0.024* (0.009)
Methodology (ref. = not empirical)								
Qualitative		0.010 (0.051)	–0.038 (0.051)	–0.026 (0.053)		–0.087 (0.047)	–0.127** (0.049)	–0.116* (0.051)
Quantitative		0.169*** (0.043)	0.128** (0.044)	0.135** (0.045)		0.275*** (0.041)	0.224*** (0.042)	0.218*** (0.043)
Research impact (0–4.46)		0.050* (0.021)	0.048* (0.021)	0.039 (0.022)		0.011 (0.021)	0.009 (0.020)	0.009 (0.021)
Religious tradition (ref. = not specified)								
Christian			0.058 (0.047)	0.058 (0.046)			–0.017 (0.046)	–0.015 (0.046)
Catholic			0.110 (0.061)	0.098 (0.062)			0.004 (0.054)	0.000 (0.056)
Protestant			0.005 (0.075)	0.008 (0.076)			0.043 (0.067)	0.036 (0.067)
Orthodox			–0.188 (0.133)	–0.203 (0.135)			–0.162 (0.127)	–0.166 (0.126)
Muslim			–0.041 (0.076)	–0.014 (0.077)			–0.240*** (0.058)	–0.220*** (0.063)
Nonreligion			0.200* (0.088)	0.212* (0.086)			0.107 (0.138)	0.139 (0.121)
Spirituality			–0.021 (0.090)	0.011 (0.089)			–0.238** (0.074)	–0.217** (0.078)
Other			–0.031 (0.093)	0.013 (0.104)			–0.170 (0.097)	–0.088 (0.106)
Context (ref. = not specified)								
North America			0.092 (0.064)	0.084 (0.065)			0.126* (0.061)	0.117 (0.063)
West EU			0.143*** (0.050)	0.128* (0.050)			0.141** (0.045)	0.135** (0.044)
East EU			0.067 (0.083)	0.065 (0.082)			0.045 (0.075)	0.051 (0.077)
MENA			–0.005 (0.108)	0.011 (0.110)			0.372*** (0.080)	0.376*** (0.080)
Asia			–0.061 (0.091)	–0.050 (0.100)			–0.003 (0.081)	–0.009 (0.082)
Other			–0.090 (0.087)	–0.090 (0.085)			–0.072 (0.070)	–0.070 (0.070)
Pseudo R ²	0.019	0.056	0.094	0.110	0.015	0.084	0.128	0.148

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Finally, robustness checks using alternative treatments of missing data confirm the consistency of these findings (Appendices 3.1 and 3.2). One could argue that conceptual papers, while not engaging in empirical analysis, are not directly comparable to quantitative or qualitative studies to answer our research question. To account for this, we replicated the analyses excluding theoretical contributions. The results remain substantively unchanged when considering empirical papers only (see Appendix 4.1). In addition, we analyzed only quantitative studies, as these rely on more standardized measures of secularization that may be less susceptible to interpretive biases. The main findings hold when restricting the analysis to quantitative research as well (see Appendix 4.2). Finally, we excluded articles studying Islam and spirituality, as they might present distinctive religious trajectories that could affect the analysis. The results remain robust to this exclusion (see Appendix 4.3).

Conclusions

Few terms have the ability to fire up conversations among sociologists of religion like secularization. Despite the amount of research produced on the topic of religious change, no consensus has been reached on the trajectory of religion facing modernity. In this study, we test whether the secularization controversy stems not only from disagreements over empirical evidence on religious decline but also from different religious and secular beliefs of researchers involved in the debate. We find that religiosity has a significant negative impact on both believing in the validity of the secularization thesis and finding evidence for it in published work. This effect size is non-trivial: researchers with the highest level of religiosity are 24.0 percentage points less likely to believe in secularization and 19.2 percentage points less likely to find evidence of secularization in their published work than their secular colleagues. This result cannot be explained by differences in methods used (whether qualitative, quantitative, or non-empirical), study impact, or by differences in the religious traditions or geographical areas under study. Importantly, we cannot determine who is responsible for the bias, whether religious scholars, secular scholars, or both. Nor can we assess to what extent this bias is explicit, intentional, and how much of it is implicit and unwanted. The precise mechanisms through which such biases emerge remain unclear as well. Is it the case that researchers make certain methodological choices to come up with a desired study outcome that is consistent with prior beliefs and orientations? Or is it the case that results that align with authors' ideological views are evaluated less critically than results disregarding their own personal beliefs? In our view, there is likely a confirmation bias at work: people tend to seek, favor, recall, and value evidence confirming their pre-existing beliefs while ignoring or downgrading disconfirming evidence (Bishop 2020; Chambers 2017). Such bias may also influence the trust placed in certain sources, the selection of supportive literature, or the formation of co-authorship networks that reinforce shared perspectives (Sulik et al. 2024). Moving further, we found a clear effect of the methodology adopted by the scholars. Scholars using quantitative approaches find significantly more evidence in support of the secularization thesis in their scholarly work than colleagues using qualitative

methods or writing theoretical pieces. There are different ways of interpreting this result. It might be that quantitative researchers' studies are biased by the fact that their surveys insufficiently capture alternative spirituality and therefore overestimate secularization (Houtman & Tromp 2021). On the other hand, it may be that qualitative researchers have trouble in observing religious change, because they rarely use longitudinal designs. Nevertheless, this result provides empirical evidence for the methodological divide in secularization research, in which support for the classical thesis of religious decline is more commonly found in quantitative studies than in qualitative or non-empirical ones. An important question is whether such biases can be mitigated. Greater emphasis on transparency, preregistration, and replicability could help reduce their impact, fostering a more self-correcting research process (Brezna 2021).

This study has limitations⁵. First, as this is a cross-sectional study, causal relationships cannot be firmly established. Although it is highly likely that religiosity influences our two outcome variables rather than the other way round, reverse causality cannot be completely excluded. It is also possible that additional unmeasured variables act as confounders. Future research on the potential effects of ideological beliefs in scientific production can benefit from the adoption of an experimental design. Second, for the same reason, we are unable to draw conclusions about the probable causal direction between beliefs about secularization and the extent to which scholars report evidence for it in their publications. Third, we have not been able to elucidate the mechanisms leading to this bias. It remains unclear whether the bias lies with the more religious or the more secular researchers, we do not know how much of the bias is implicit (i.e., unwanted) or explicit (i.e., wanted by advocacy for a normative position), and we can only speculate as to what types of implicit biases are involved (e.g., confirmation bias, blind spot bias, and motivated science reception). Fourth, this study only touches on one specific debate in a specific period of time among mainly Western scholars. The generalizability of results to other debates or periods is therefore debatable.

Overall, our findings reveal that the research on secularization is significantly correlated with researchers' own religiosity. This suggests that the long-lasting controversy on religious change cannot be resolved only by bridging diverse data, methods, or standards of quality and rigor. Instead, individual differences not related to the research itself—such as scholars' personal beliefs and values—play a role in producing different schools of thought. Weber (1949) argued that the goal of social scientists is to discover true answers to factual questions while avoiding biased conclusions produced by value commitments and interests. Our findings reveal that the current state of the secularization debate significantly departs from the Weberian ideal⁶. We welcome further investigations into the mechanisms producing these biases. We also welcome suggestions as to how such bias could be prevented.

Notes

- ¹ The Web of Science Core Collection database includes the following indexes: Science Citation Index Expanded (1980-present), Social Sciences Citation Index (1980-present),

Arts & Humanities Citation Index (1980-present), Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Science (1990-present), Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Social Science & Humanities (1990-present), Book Citation Index-Science (2009–2014), and Conference Proceedings Citation.

- 2 Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa statistic, which measures agreement between coders while accounting for chance agreement. Kappa is calculated as the difference between the observed agreement (the proportion of cases where both coders made the same judgment) and the expected agreement (the agreement expected by random chance), divided by the maximum possible agreement beyond chance. The analysis yielded a Kappa of 0.65 (SE = 0.1112, $p < 0.001$), indicating substantial agreement between coders.
- 3 The exact wording of the item is: "Among scholars who address the secularization debate, many argue that the secularization process manifests itself in the overall decline of religious beliefs and practices. Independent of your research outcomes, do you find yourself in agreement with this thesis?"
- 4 PMM combines linear regression with nearest-neighbor imputation. It first estimates predicted values using a linear regression model, which are then used to identify the closest matching observed cases (potential donors). One of these observed values is randomly selected and assigned to the missing case. By drawing from actual data points rather than relying solely on model-based predictions, PMM helps preserve the original distribution and enhances robustness compared to fully parametric imputation methods (StataCorp 2023).
- 5 It is worth considering whether additional factors may act as confounding variables, simultaneously influencing both researchers' religiosity and their methodological preferences. Traits such as analytical thinking styles (e.g., intuitive versus rational), personality dimensions, philosophical worldviews (e.g., mechanistic/objectivist versus organismic/holistic worldviews), or cognitive traits (e.g., tolerance to ambiguity) could shape both an individual's religious orientation and their preferences toward different research questions, data, and measures (Babbage & Ronan 2000; Sulik et al. 2024)
- 6 Although Weber was concerned with protecting research from value judgments, he also recognized that certain values—epistemic ones—would, and indeed must, shape research in the form of value relevance. We are also aware that many scholars have questioned the very possibility of value-neutral research in the Weberian sense. From this perspective, researchers should not strive for shared or intersubjective objectivity but instead acknowledge their own positionality and the value-laden nature of knowledge production (Burawoy 2005).

References

- Aguas, Jove Jim S. 2020. "The Challenge of Secularization to the Christian Belief in God." *Philosophia (Philippines)* 20(2):238–52. <https://doi.org/10.46992/PIJP.20.2.A.6>
- Altnurme, Lea. 2011. "Changes in Mythic Patterns in Estonian Religious Life Stories." *Social Compass* 58(1):77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768610392725>
- Alva, Reginald. 2016. "The Role of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in Reigniting the Flame of Spirituality in Contemporary Christians." *Pneuma* 38(1–2):77–92. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-03801021>

- Ammerman, Nancy T. 2013. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199896448.001.0001>
- Ammerman, Nancy T. 2014. "Finding Religion in Everyday Life." *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 75(2):189–207. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru013>
- Andreassen, Bengt Ove. 2019. "The Norwegian Political Discourse on Prohibiting Muslim Garments. An Analysis of Four Cases in the Period 2008–2018." *Changing Societies and Personalities* 3(4):353–72. <https://doi.org/10.15826/CSP.2019.3.4.082>
- Arat, Alp. 2017. "“What It Means to Be Truly Human”: The Postsecular Hack of Mindfulness." *Social Compass* 64(2):167–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768617697390>
- Audette, Andre P. and Christopher L. Weaver. 2016. "Filling Pews and Voting Booths: The Role of Politicization in Congregational Growth." *Political Research Quarterly* 69(2):245–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916634896>
- Babbage, Duncan R. and Kevin R. Ronan. 2000. "Philosophical Worldview and Personality Factors in Traditional and Social Scientists: Studying the World in Our Own Image." *Personality and Individual Differences* 28(2):405–20. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(99\)00117-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(99)00117-8)
- Baldacchino, Jean Paul. 2014. "Contextualizing the Secular Public Sphere: Religious Ritual, Festa and Migrant Identity in Malta and Australia." *Ethnicities* 14(1):113–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796813497930>
- Becker, Howard S. 1967. "Whose Side Are We On?" *Social Problems* 14(3):239–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/799147>
- Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Doubleday and Company.
- Berger, Peter, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas. 2008. *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations*. Ashgate.
- Billiet, Jaak. *Proposal for Questions on Religious Identity. ESS Core Questionnaire Development*. European Social Survey, 2002.
- Bishop, Dorothy. 2020. "How Scientists Can Stop Fooling Themselves over Statistics." *Nature* 584:22. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-02275-8>
- Borjas, George J. and Nate Breznau. 2026. "Ideological bias in the production of research findings." *Science Advances* 12(1):1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adz7173>
- Breznau, Nate. 2021. "Does Sociology Need Open Science?" *Societies* 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11010009>
- Brik, Tymofii. 2019. "When Church Competition Matters? Intra-Doctrinal Competition in Ukraine, 1992–2012." *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 80(1):45–82. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sry005>
- Burawoy, Michael. 2005. "For Public Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 70(1):4–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000102>
- Cantoni, Davide, Jeremiah Dittmar, and Noam Yuchtman. 2018. "Religious Competition and Reallocation: The Political Economy of Secularization in the Protestant Reformation." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133(4):2037–96. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy011>
- Casanova, José. 2011. "Cosmopolitanism, the Clash of Civilizations and Multiple Modernities." *Current Sociology* 59(2):252–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392110391162>
- Chambers, Chris. 2017. *The Seven Deadly Sins of Psychology: A Manifesto for Reforming the Culture of Scientific Practice*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884940>

- Christiano, Kevin J., William H. Swatos, and Peter Kivisto. 2002. *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*. AltaMira Press.
- Cipriani, Roberto. 2011. "Diffused Religion and Prayer." *Religions* 2(2):198–215. <https://doi.org/10.3390/re12020198>
- Cipriani, Roberto. 2017. *Diffused Religion: Beyond Secularization*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57894-1>
- Cragun, Ryan T., Joseph H. Hammer, Michael Nielsen, and Nicholas Autz. 2018. "Religious/Secular Distance: How Far Apart Are Teenagers and Their Parents?" *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 10(3):288–95. <https://doi.org/10.1037/re10000205>
- Cranney, Stephen. 2015. "The Association Between Belief in God and Fertility Desires in Slovenia and the Czech Republic." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 47(2):83–89. <https://doi.org/10.1363/47e2915>
- Davie, Grace. 1990. "Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?" *Social Compass* 37(4):455–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776890037004004>
- Davie, Grace. 1994. *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*. Blackwell.
- Davie, Grace. 2006. "Is Europe an Exceptional Case?" *International Review of Mission* 95(378–379):247–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2006.tb00562.x>
- Davie, Grace. 2015. "Welfare and Religion in Europe: Making the Connections." *Theology* 118(1):10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X14551678>
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2005. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." Pp. 1–32 in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dilmaghani, Maryam. 2019. "Education and Religious Decline: Evidence from the Canadian Compulsory Schooling Laws." *Education Economics* 27(3):287–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2019.1580349>
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 1981. "Trend Report: Secularization: A Multi-Dimensional Concept." *Current Sociology* 29(2):184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001139218102900203>
- Dobbelaere, Karel. 2016. "Secularization." Pp. 1–10 in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by R. Ritzer. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeoss064.pub2>
- Dromi, Shai M. and Samuel D. Stabler. 2023. *Moral Minefields: How Sociologists Debate Good Science*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226828176.001.0001>
- Durkheim, E. 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Free Press.
- Ecklund, Elaine H. 2010. *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. Oxford University Press.
- Ecklund, Elaine H., David R. Johnson, Christopher P. Scheitle, Kirstin R. W. Matthews, and Steven W. Lewis. 2016. "Religion among Scientists in International Context." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 2:237802311666435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023116664353>
- Ecklund, Elaine H. and Christopher P. Scheitle. 2007. "Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics." *Social Problems* 54(2):289–307. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2007.54.2.289>
- Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. Rutgers University Press.

- Fisher, Netanel. 2017. "Fragmentary Theory of Secularization and Religionization - Changes in the Family Structure as a Case Study." *Politics and Religion* 10(2):363–88. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048316000730>
- Fisher, Netanel. 2020. "Secularization of Immigration Policy vs. Religion's Influence on Integration: Israel's Non-Jewish Jews' Immigration in a Comparative Perspective." *Nations and Nationalism* 26(1):221–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12473>
- Franck, Raphaël and Laurence R. Iannaccone. 2014. "Religious Decline in the 20th Century West: Testing Alternative Explanations." *Public Choice* 159(3–4):385–414. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-013-0103-9>
- Franck, Raphaël and Noel D. Johnson. 2016. "Can Public Policies Lower Religiosity? Evidence from School Choice in France, 1878–1902." *Economic History Review* 69(3):915–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12277>
- Ganiel, Gladys. 2019. "Religious Practice in a Post-Catholic Ireland: Towards a Concept of 'Extra-Institutional Religion.'" *Social Compass* 66(4):471–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768619868418>
- Garelli, Franco. 2013. "Flexible Catholicism, Religion and the Church: The Italian Case." *Religions* 4(1):1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel4010001>
- Gauthier, François. 2020. "(What Is Left of) Secularization? Debate on Jörg Stolz's Article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems." *Social Compass* 67(2):309–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620917327>
- Hadden, Jeffrey K. 1987. "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory." *Social Forces* 65(3):587–611. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2578520>
- Hammersley, Martyn. 2017. "On the Role of Values in Social Research: Weber Vindicated?" *Sociological Research Online* 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.4197>
- Hayward, R. David and Neal Krause. 2015. "Aging, Social Developmental, and Cultural Factors in Changing Patterns of Religious Involvement Over a 32-Year Period: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis of 80 Countries." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 46(8):979–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115597066>
- Heelas, Paul and Inda Woodhead. 2005. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Hekmatpour, Peyman. 2020. "Inequality and Religiosity in a Global Context: Different Secularization Paths for Developed and Developing Nations." *International Journal of Sociology* 50(4):286–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2020.1771013>
- Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. 2003. "Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity." Pp. 161–175 in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, edited by R. K. Fenn. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470998571.ch9>
- Hom, Harry L. and Abigail L. Van Nuland. 2019. "Evaluating Scientific Research: Belief, Hindsight Bias, Ethics, and Research Evaluation." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 33(4):675–681. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3519>
- Honeycutt, Nathan and Lee Jussim. 2020. "A Model of Political Bias in Social Science Research." *Psychological Inquiry* 31(1):73–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2020.1722600>
- Houtman, Dick and Step 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):305–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2007.00360.x>

- Houtman, Dick, Paul Heelas, and Peter Achterberg. 2012. "Counting Spirituality? Survey Methodology after the Spiritual Turn." *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* 3:1–21. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047429470_003
- Houtman, Dick and Paul Tromp. 2021. "The Post-Christian Spirituality Scale (PCSS): Misconceptions, Obstacles, Prospects." Pp. 35–57 in *Assessing Spirituality in a Diverse World*, edited by A. L. Ai, P. Wink, R. F. Paloutzian, and K. A. Harris. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52140-0_3
- Ignazi, Piero and Spencer Wellhofer. 2017. "Territory, Religion, and Vote: Nationalization of Politics and the Catholic Party in Italy." *Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica* 47(1):21–43. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2016.20>
- Kasselstrand, Isabella, Phil Zuckerman, and Ryan T. Cragun. 2023. *Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society*. New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479814305.001.0001>
- King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry. Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400821211>
- Knill, Christoph, Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, Emma Budde, and Stephan Heichel. 2020. "Religious Tides: The Time-Variant Effect of Religion on Morality Policies." *Regulation and Governance* 14(2):256–70. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12203>
- Luckmann, Thomas. 1967. *The Invisible Religion*. MacMillan.
- Martínez-Arinõ, Julia. 2016. "'Being Jew Is like Travelling by Bus': Constructing Jewish Identities in Spain between Individualisation and Group Belonging." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9(4):324–49. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-00904002>
- Martínez-Ariño, Julia and Mar Griera. 2018. "Catholic Chaplains in Public Institutions: Contextual Opportunities and Institutional Inertia in Spanish Hospitals and Prisons." *Journal of Religion in Europe* 11(2-3):138–60. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-01102004>
- Masnick, Amy M. and Corinne Zimmerman. 2009. "Evaluating Scientific Research in the Context of Prior Belief: Hindsight Bias or Confirmation Bias?" *Journal of Psychology of Science and Technology* 2(1):29–36. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1939-7054.2.1.29>
- Matsuo, Hideko and Koen Matthijs. 2016. "Women's Age at Last Childbearing and Its Determinants: A Case Study of Antwerp (Flanders, Belgium) on the Basis of the Multi-Source COR* Historical Sample." *History of the Family* 21(2):175–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2015.1090326>
- McPhetres, Jonathon, Jonathan Jong, and Miron Zuckerman. 2021. "Religious Americans Have Less Positive Attitudes Toward Science, but This Does Not Extend to Other Cultures." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 12(4):528–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620923239>
- Merton, Robert K. 1973. "The Normative Structure of Science." Pp. 267–78 in *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. University of Chicago Press.
- Molteni, Francesco and Ferruccio Biolcati. 2023. "Religious Decline as a Population Dynamic: Generational Replacement and Religious Attendance in Europe." *Social Forces* 101(4):2034–58. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soac099>
- Molteni, Francesco, Riccardo Ladini, Ferruccio Biolcati, Antonio M. Chiesi, Giulia Maria Dotti Sani, Simona Guglielmi, Marco Maraffi, Andrea Pedrazzani, Paolo Segatti, and Cristiano Vezzoni. 2021. "Searching for Comfort in Religion: Insecurity and Religious Behaviour during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy." *European Societies* 23(S1):S704–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1836383>

- Müller, Tobias. 2020. "Secularisation Theory and Its Discontents: Recapturing Decolonial and Gendered Narratives. Debate on Jörg Stolz's Article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems." *Social Compass* 67(2):315–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620917328>
- Munro, Geoffrey D., Scott P. Leary, and Terell P. Lasane. 2004. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Biased Assimilation of Scientific Information in the Face of Commitment." *North American Journal of Psychology* 6(3):431–44.
- Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2011. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511894862>
- Olson, Daniel V. A., Joey Marshall, Jong Hyun Jung, and David Voas. 2020. "Sacred Canopies or Religious Markets? The Effect of County-Level Religious Diversity on Later Changes in Religious Involvement." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59(2):227–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12651>
- Peker, Efe. 2019. "Bringing the State Back in Secularization: The Development of Laïcité in the French Third Republic (1875-1905)." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58(4):813–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12625>
- Pollack, Detlef and Gert Pickel. 2007. "Religious Individualization or Secularization? Testing Hypotheses of Religious Change - The Case of Eastern and Western Germany." *British Journal of Sociology* 58(4):603–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00168.x>
- Raub, Werner, Nan Dirk de Graaf, and Klarita Gërkhani. 2022. Pp. 2–19 "Rigorous Sociology." *Handbook of Sociological Science: Contributions to Rigorous Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789909432.00007>
- Raymond, Christopher D. 2021. "Religious Diversification Reduces the Number of Religious Parties over Time." *European Political Science* 20(3):465–82. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-020-00256-z>
- Reimer, Sam and Rick Hiemstra. 2015. "The Rise of Part-Time Employment in Canadian Christian Churches." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44(3):356–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008429815595811>
- Rooney, Phyllis. 1992. "On Values in Science: Is the Epistemic/Non-Epistemic Distinction Useful?" *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*:13–22. <https://doi.org/10.1086/psaprocbienmeetp.1992.1.192740>
- Schoeman, Willem J. 2017. "South African Religious Demography: The 2013 General Household Survey." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73(2):1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i2.3837>
- Schwadel, Philip. 2014. "Birth Cohort Changes in the Association Between College Education and Religious Non-Affiliation." *Social Forces* 93(2):719–46. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou080>
- Singler, Beth. 2020. "'Blessed by the Algorithm': Theistic Conceptions of Artificial Intelligence in Online Discourse." *AI and Society* 35(4):945–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-020-00968-2> <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520341340>
- Stark, Rodney and William S. Bainbridge. 1985. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. University of California Press.
- StataCorp. *Stata 18 Multiple-Imputation Reference Manual*. Stata Press. College Station, TX, 2023.
- Stolz, Jörg. 2020. "Secularization Theories in the Twenty-First Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems. Presidential Address*." *Social Compass* 67(2):282–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620917320>

- Stolz, Jörg and Maruša Novak. 2023. "The Three Religious Revivals. Pentecostal, Islamic, and Orthodox Upswings in the Context of Long-Term Secularization." *Journal of Religion and Demography* 10(1-2):138–61. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2589742X-bja10020>
- Stolz, Jörg, Alexi Gugushvili, Francesco Molteni, and Jean-Philippe Antonietti. 2023. "A Counterexample to Secularization Theory? Assessing the Georgian Religious Revival." *The British Journal of Sociology*:1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13009>
- Sulik, Justin, Nakwon Rim, Elizabeth Pontikes, James Evans, and Gary Lupyan. 2024. "Why Do Scientists Disagree? A Study of the Psychological Sciences." <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/9bd8k>
- Van Buren, Harry J., Jawad Syed, and Raza Mir. 2020. "Religion as a Macro Social Force Affecting Business: Concepts, Questions, and Future Research." *Business and Society* 59(5):799–822. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650319845097>
- Voas, David. 2007. "Surveys of Behaviour, Beliefs and Affiliation: Micro-Quantitative." Pp. 144–166 in *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607965.n8>
- Voas, David. 2009. "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe." *European Sociological Review* 25(2):155–68. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcn044>
- Voas, David. 2020. "Is the Secularization Research Programme Progressing? Debate on Jörg Stolz's Article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems." *Social Compass* 67(2):323–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620917329>
- Voas, David. 2025. "Invisible Secularity: American Theism beyond Belief." *Social Forces* 104:1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soaf018>
- Voas, David and Mark Chaves. 2016. "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?" *American Journal of Sociology* 121(5):1517–56.
- Voicu, Malina. 2019. "Religious Supply, Existential Insecurity and Church Attendance in Post-Communist Romania." *Review of Religious Research* 61(4):365–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-019-00381-2>
- Vorster, Nico. 2013. "Christianity and Secularisation in South Africa: Probing the Possible Link between Modernisation and Secularisation." *Studies in World Christianity* 19(2):141–61. <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2013.0049>
- Wallis, Roy and Steve Bruce. 1995. "Secularization: The Orthodox Model." Pp. 693–715 in *The Sociology of Religion*, edited by S. Bruce. Elgar.
- Weber, Max. 1904. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Scribner's Press.
- Weber, Max. 1949. "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy." *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Free Press.
- Wilkins-Laflamme, Sarah. 2015. "How Unreligious Are the Religious 'Nones'? Religious Dynamics of the Unaffiliated in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 40(4):477–500. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs21830>
- Wilson, Bryan R. 1966. *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*. C. A. Watts & Co.
- Zängle, Michael. 2014. "Trends in Papal Communication: A Content Analysis of Encyclicals, from Leo XIII to Pope Francis." *Historical Social Research* 39(4):329–64. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.4>

Acknowledgments: We sincerely thank everyone who provided valuable comments and suggestions during presentations of this article at the University of Milan (2023), the SSSR Conference in Pittsburgh (2024), and the Institute for Social Sciences of Religions at the University of Lausanne (2024). We also wish to thank Eduard Ponarin and Dominik Balazka for their contributions to the earlier version of the research design and Jeremy Senn for conducting the inter-coder reliability test.

Valeria Rainero: Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento.
E-mail: valeria.rainero@unitn.it.

Jörg Stolz: Institute for Social Sciences of Religion, University of Lausanne.
E-mail: joerg.stolz@unil.ch.

Ruud Luijckx: Department of Sociology, Tilburg University & Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento. E-mail: r.luijckx@uvt.nl.