

Macro Roundup Article

Headline: [Opiates of the Masses? Deaths of Despair and the Decline of American Religion](#)

Article Link: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w30840>

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Tweet: The uptick in so-called "deaths of despair" was preceded by a decline in religious participation. @econburner @D_Hungerman @TamarOostrom offer evidence that the repeal of blue laws is associated with the rise of such deaths.

Summary: Put differently, a 10-percentage-point effect on religious attendance implies that following the blue law repeals, about 10,000 out of every 100,000 middle-aged adults stopped attending services weekly. If mortality grew by 2 per 100,000 as a result, and assuming that the subsequent increase in middle-aged deaths came from this group, about 1 out of 5,000 of these of "marginal attenders" would consequently die from suicide, liver disease, or poisoning annually. Our back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that declines in religious attendance can explain an important part of the initial increase in mortality due to deaths of despair. Of course, since the introduction of OxyContin in 1996, deaths of despair for middle-aged white Americans have increased dramatically both overall and relative to trend. The impact that we witness seems to be driven by the decline in formal religious participation rather than in belief or personal activities like prayer.

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