SECULARIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION

AND LONG LIFE: A LONGITUDINAL

ANALYSIS

A Thesis

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Master of Arts

in

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by

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James Proffer

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APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

Sharon Barrios, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Nicole Sherman, Ph.D.  
Graduate Coordinator

Paul Viotti, Ph.D.  
Chair

Dr. Daniel Veidlinger, Ph.D.

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother,

Mona

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the faculty and staff of CSU, Chico for academic and personal support throughout this journey. I specifically thank Dr. Alan Gibson for his words of wisdom and personal efforts to keep my work focused and on track. His private words of encouragement and forceful support will remain with me always. I thank Mr. John Crosby for telling me to do pushups in class when I said something patently untrue and for always providing advice when I needed it. I thank Diana Dwyre for being my toughest critic. I may not have always wanted to hear it, but I always needed it. I thank Dr. Daniel Veidlinger for providing counsel on the multi-disciplinary scope of my work. Special thanks to my thesis chair Dr. Paul Viotti. Paul provided quiet support with encouragement and guidance through my most trying academic journey.

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# ABSTRACT

SECULARIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION

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ANALYSIS

By

© James R. Proffer 2023

Master of Arts in Political Science

California State University, Chico

Secularization theory suggests that over time, religion loses its social, cultural, and political significance as societies become more modernized, rationalized, and industrialized. The theory proposes that as societies become more secular, religious institutions lose their power and influence, and the role of religion in people's lives decreases. Key factors that contribute to secularization include technological advancements, economic development, urbanization, and increased education levels. I quantify the secularization process in a measurable and repeatable manner. I evaluate the hypothesis that there is a measurable and cognizable relationship between religiosity and human development. I examine the relationship between the individual component indices of human development and their relationship with religiosity. My research shows that religiosity has an inverse correlation with human development and the component indices. Education, Life Expectancy, and Income, in that order, have a negative correlation with religiosity.

# CHAPTER I

## Research Question

## Introduction

In Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide, Norris and Inglehart put forth a theory of secularization linked to personal security that they deemed “The Thesis of Secularization Based on Existential Security” (Norris and Inglehart 2011). A critical argument of this thesis is that rich and poor nations are fundamentally different in how their populations understand “human security and vulnerability to risk,” (2011, 17). To evaluate their theory, the authors compare World Values Survey (WVS) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) data. Utilizing WVS wave six and UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) data, Norris and Inglehart demonstrate a strong inverse correlation between the HDI and religiosity index (RI), RI created from WVS data.

The work conducted by Norris and Inglehart is important. I argue there is more to be learned as, in the results that all index-derived conclusions contain, index data provides results that do not compare individual variables. This begs the question of the specific relationship between individual variables. In this instance, both the RI and HDI are composites of other variables. The question addressed in this work is a step beyond the work of Norris and Inglehart. I break down the HDI into its individual indices to determine which of the individual indices provides the strongest inverse correlation with the RI.

This raises the question as to whether to break down the RI into its own component parts. In this instance, I argue that keeping the RI intact provides a better barometer of religiosity than the individual variable components could provide. Many scholars of religion have argued that individual components of religious belief, practice, and value do not provide a holistic understanding of the religious individual (Stark and Finke 2000; Nelson and Gorski 2014; Gaskins, Golder, and Siegel 2013). My focus in this work is how religiosity relates to human development. How religiosity manifests is certainly important for other studies but is beyond the scope of the relationship I propose to investigate.

The WVS, which goes back to the 1980s, provides a lens through which we can glimpse the religiosity of nations historically. The UNDP did not begin to measure and report HDI until 1990. The examination of this work will begin at that time. Wave two of the WVS begins in 1990. Thus, I will use that information to compare with the nation-state HDI to create a longitudinal examination of this relationship.

Secularization as a concept has been prevalent since the 1960’s and it is important to note that as this examination begins in the 1990’s much of the original impact of secularization may be missed. I contend that such an effort, even with the timeframe limitations, can not only provide further evidence of the validity of the general thrust provided by Norris and Inglehart, but also help to further the general academic understanding of secularization and its root causes (2011).

I contend that the HDI is a combination of variables that all have roots within the economics of a nation-state. I argue that nation-state-level variables of Income, Life-Expectancy, and Education are all highly impacted by the general economic condition of a nation-state. An economically prosperous nation is likely to have better health, education, and economic infrastructure, which allows its citizens at an individual level to attain higher levels of Income, Life Expectancy, and Education. I argue that Human Development and its associated variables do provide predictive capabilities regarding individual-level religiosity. I will test this hypothesis. I expect that the general economic conditions of a nation-state are among the primary determinants of its citizens’ ability to understand “human security and vulnerability to risk.” (ibid, 17). I hypothesize that the components of the HDI (income, education, and life expectancy) will have inverse correlations with religiosity. The impact of those variables is higher to lower in the following order: income, education, and life expectancy.

## Significance

The work by Norris and Inglehart provides a glimpse into the effect that general HD has on the general level of individual religiosity in a specific nation and nations in general. However, I argue that more specific results across time that are generalizable to multiple populations are more useful for policy creators, bureaucrats, and scholars. That is a major goal of this work. Here I provide a general background of secularization theory through the ages to its contemporary incarnation. I will further evaluate which composites of the HDI most strongly influence individual religiosity—LEI, EI, or II. It is my belief and hope that individual nations and policy experts within will find this information useful for the implementation of appropriate policy solutions for their populations.

I argue the work by Norris and Inglehart is ground-breaking in that it provides an empirically testable model for studying secularization; however, I note that they failed to address a possible confounding variable in the economic conditions of a nation-state. To that end, a longitudinal examination of individual-level religiosity compared with human development will offer a better contextual understanding of the role that the economics of a nation-state play on the impact of its citizens” attitude toward religious belief. I expect that a general model of individual religiosity will be of value to scientists, policy makers, and the public writ large. I hope to take a step in that direction with this work.

# CHAPTER II

## Literature Review

## Introduction

Religion is a powerful force in society. Thinkers and academics from the Greeks forward recognized the importance and power of religion. Seminal scholars in western political thought included religion in their theories of society (Plato 1997; 2021; Aristotle 2021; Hobbes 2017; Machiavelli 2021). Even secular societies continue to be influenced by their religious history (Ghatak and Abel 2013). As societies become more affluent and educated, people tend to rely less on religion to explain the world around them and instead turn to science, reason, and other secular sources of knowledge (Barker, Beckford, and Dobbelaere 1993). However, secularization theory has been a subject of debate among scholars. Some argue that it oversimplifies the complex relationship between religion and society and that it fails to account for the enduring role of religion in many parts of the world (Bellah 2005). Others suggest that while religion may lose its influence in certain areas of society, it can still play a significant role in shaping culture, morality, and individual identity (Berger 1990; Reaves 2012).

In Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide, Norris and Inglehart describe a colleague’s remarks regarding socio-religious socialization: “We are all atheists; but I am a Lutheran atheist, and they are Orthodox atheists.” (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 17). This pseudo-religious socialization is one of the reasons why some people hold certain values sacrosanct (Boyer 2002). Others see the religious socialization of children as evidence of religious indoctrination. Indeed, Hitchens has argued teaching children religion before the development of critical thinking is tantamount to child abuse (2007, 2012). Provocative, aggressive, disrespectful, or even actionable, this stance shows the power religion has for influencing humanity. Some religious individuals claim secular education is tantamount to secular indoctrination, education has demonstratable impact on how individuals view the world (Hunter 1992). Data from Bliedorn et al. supports the idea that being college-educated provides a life-time reduction in religiosity (2023). This is not the place and work to address the normative questions could raise but I am compelled to present the evidence all the same.

Religion touches every aspect of human life from private to public, sacred to profane, natural to supernatural, scientific to artistic. Religion can impact all facets of humanity. Driskell et al. describe how individual religious beliefs impact political participation. This research indicates the association is influential in both directions. Religious beliefs influence political beliefs, and political beliefs influence religious beliefs (Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008). Marx, Freud, Dawkins, Hitchens, and others argue that religion is a deleterious force in society (2008; 2011; 1990; 2007).  Others argue that religion, rituals, rites, and practices themselves have positive associations with other components of human existence that are considered valuable, such as security of self, love, and work (Clark 2006).

Secularization theory is defined, in the broadest sense, as a description of the decline or transformation of religion. This decline of religion manifests itself as a decrease in the social significance of religious authority, practice, and individual belief. Modernity is credited or blamed for these phenomena. Modernity is driven by, among other phenomena, industrialization, and rationalization (Parsons 1947). Rationalization is the process by which societies make decisions based on rational calculations as opposed to custom or emotion (Warner 2010). Champions of secularization theory, Norris and Inglehart suggest it is a “tendency, not an iron law” (2011, 5). Opponents of secularization theory, Stark and Finke articulate their argument utilizing the United States as an example of faltering secularization among industrialized nations (2000). Both groups of scholars suggest trends of social phenomena with different models, but they share a similar method. Despite the strenuous disagreements between the two groups of scholars, both groups take an economical approach to the topic.

Marxian and Freudian understanding of the origin of religion was also based on economics and development (Marx and Engels 2008). Populations with less material wealth have correspondingly less access to the associated benefits of wealth: healthcare, education, and social welfare (Warner 2010). Norris and Inglehart argue that populations with less access to such benefits are more likely to seek religion in comparison to their wealthier peers. They note that while economic development can assist with increasing human security, sudden and drastic events such as natural disasters, economic downturns, and other waypoints may halt or reverse such an increase (2011).

Scholars of Greece and Athens such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle understood the power of religious belief. Plato went as far as to build his Republic, at least partly, on a foundation of civil religion—the religion of the state. Western theorists often discussed religion, whether as a thing to be used as with Plato, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, as a thing of value as with Weber, Durkheim, Jung, and Eliade, or as a thing to be overcome as with Freud and Marx. That religion continues to be a topic of heated discussion suggests its importance as a social phenomenon. Beyond that, religion insinuates into political belief, and, as such, it can alter the course of human events (Gaskins, Golder, and Siegel 2013; Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008).

Secularization, as a phenomenon, can be applied to many different concepts, organizations, and levels of analysis: societal, organizational, and individual. Generally, there are three distinct levels of analysis that can be subjected to the secularization hypothesis: Macro, Meso, and Individual (Tschannen 1994). A Macro focus of secularization examines how religious institutions are differentiated from other important social institutions such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. This is generally seen through an expansion of the social safety net via governmental actions (Ghatak and Abel 2013). Meso secularization generally follows Macro as the authority and social power of religious institutions and organizations decrease (Tschannen 1994). There is still some debate among scholars of religion if these processes are connected or if one can occur without the others (Gorski and Altinordu 2008). However, there is a consensus that both Macro and Meso secularization is occurring, though Stark and Finke would limit this agreement to Europe only (2005; Norris and Inglehart 2011).

Most of the disagreement regarding secularization revolves around individual religiosity as measured by the beliefs, values, participation, and religious investment of the individual (Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005; Norris and Inglehart 2011). An interesting facet of the disagreement over individual religiosity is that both major arguments focus on the effects of the environment on the individual. They originate from radically different perspectives, with drastically different explanations and conclusions. Stark and Finke, focusing on an American vs. European comparison, conclude that religiosity is alive and well in America because of the separation of church and state, religious pluralism, competition, and lack of government regulation (2005). It is important to note exactly what is meant by religious pluralism: there must also be active engagement of a diverse religious community for pluralism to exist (Eck 2009).

Norris and Inglehart conclude that religiosity is prevalent because of a lack of existential security (2011). This is primarily caused by the lack of an extensive social safety net and pockets of elevated levels of poverty created by income inequality leading to the homogeneity of socioeconomic conditions and beliefs. However, before delving into that methodological maze of data, propositional logic, and scholarly discourse, more background is needed. Specifically, I must explain a point upon which both groups of academics agree: an objective interpretation of religion. Both groups argue that religious marketplace activity can be explained by terrestrial actions and consequences. See Appendix C for an in-depth explanation of this concept. However, Norris and Inglehart contest the agreement, arguing that Stark and Finke take a normative stance on the idea of religion (ibid).

The General Secularization Thesis

The concept of secularization has its roots in the Enlightenment era, which challenged traditional religious authority and emphasized the importance of reason and individualism. The theory gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, as sociologists observed a decline in religious participation and influence in Western societies. The secularization thesis describes the decline of religion in the age of modernity. Wilson describes modernity’s impact on religion as “the diminution in the social significance of . . . religious institutions, actions, and consciousness” (1982, 149). Current champions of secularization theory, Norris and Inglehart suggest it is a “tendency, not an iron law” (2011, 5). Original secularization theory predicted the end of religion through modernization, rationalization, industrialization, and globalization (Warner, 2010; Norris and Inglehart 2011). Research by Norris and Inglehart indicates the end of religion is unlikely to occur (2011). The current understanding of secularization theory suggests that as societies develop, the demand for religion decreases, but such a decrease may have diminishing returns (Yamane 1997).

In this portion of the paper, I examine literature discussing secularization theory with the expressed goal of dismissing the secularization thesis. I dissect and dismantle the arguments of scholars, researchers, and philosophers to determine the most compelling arguments on all sides of the secularization debate. I distill the most common, lasting arguments and theories into more manageable bits of scholarly discussion. I reference authors, thinkers, and researchers as needed to elucidate a point more clearly, though dismiss arguments that are less compelling. I synthesize existing information to create a different, and hopefully clearer, understanding of the secularization thesis. I attempt to provide associations among scholars as I understand them. In deference to the masters of socio-religious study and because of the importance of their work, I will present the work of Freud, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as a base upon which to discuss the secularization thesis. Finally, as stated above I will provide the most compelling arguments against the secularization theory. I am compelled, however, to note that I ascribe to the basic secularization thesis.

## Classical Theory

Seminal thinkers, Marx, Freud, Durkheim, and Weber argued that religion is a human creation, not supernatural in origin (Paden 2003). These great thinkers fall into two distinct camps regarding the association between religion and society. Freud and Marx see religion as a reflection of the societal human condition—a one-direction reductionist association. Durkheim and Weber argue the association between humanity and religion is more complicated. Durkheim noted another explanation: that religion was truly supernatural in origin and thus is beyond the realm of science to investigate (ibid).

While worth noting, I put that explanation aside for this paper. A reductionist understanding assumes the nexus of religious belief is a natural phenomenon (Strenski 2005) (see Appendix C for a more detailed discussion on reductionist vs non-reductionist study). Weber and Durkheim believed that religion was important to the stability of society. Marx and Freud, both militant in their opinion of religion, anti-religion and reductionist, believed that religion was an obstacle to the true enjoyment of life (Marx and Engels 2008; Grelle 2015).

“In the critiques of Marx [...] religion is of strictly human origin and illusory, and its real social function is not at all what religious people think it is” (Paden 2003, 13). Marx’s hostility toward religion is well-known and, as such, it is not surprising that he concluded that religion itself was not worth studying. However, he thought the root cause of religion should be the focus of scholarly examination (Marx and Engels 2008). In Marxian thought, all eventually reduces to economics. Marx argued that economics is the base of society and thus the nexus of all societal appendages. Religion, like political, social, artistic, and other cultural productions, is part of the superstructure of society (ibid).

Marx argued that capitalist regimes create economic disparity (Marx 1994). This disparity leads to social division and alienation of social classes (ibid). This eventually leads to man’s alienation from himself (ibid). The alienation concept is central to Marxian thought about all things societal—including religion. Initial alienation of social classes from each other leads to the next alienation, and the next, etc. until man becomes alienated from himself. So too does Marx apply this logic to the concept of religion, arguing that God is a type of self-alienation. Geller argues that Marx first formed his critique of religion and then applied that logic to economics (2014).

“Thus, the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics” (Marx 1964, 28). Marx was not interested in the fact that heaven was, in his view, empty (Geller 2014). He wanted to show that heaven was filled with alienated images of humanity (ibid). These images were the byproduct of human economic disparity (ibid). Marx thought that man existed in a world inverted, a world in which man has “not yet found or has already lost himself” (Lyden and Leone 1859, 27). Alienated from itself, humanity instead projected its perfect self into the heavens. Marx argued this was the true source of religion, and that religion was linked to negative reality.

Contextually, negative reality is an existence in which people are inclined to be religious because of the bleak outlook of their lives, which does not permit full self-realization. Religion, in Marxian thought, is a by-product of humanity’s advancement through tiers of society until communism is reached and equality is effected (Marx and Engels 2008). In a capitalistic regime, however, it helps to maintain the status quo (ibid). It solidifies the false authority of the ruling, capitalist class. Lay-observers can readily point to religion’s “coercive, authoritarian elements” (Paden 2003, 24). However, the effects of religion are not limited to control. Marx thought religion was important as it provided relief for lack of material resources and comfort (Grelle 2015).

Marx argued the real-world economic status of individuals influenced adherence to religious authority and ritual. This theory is akin to secularization theory—as cultures gain more control and understanding of the real world via resources, they will become less religious (Norris and Inglehart 2011). This association of religiosity to economics is still common and continues to provide evidence for the behavior of individuals depending on their economic, educational, and health status (Anand and Harris 1994; Jeremy Reed Porter 2012). Secularization theory is by no means the same as Marxian thought. However, the parallels make a comparison both interesting and worth examining. At the very least, it exists as part of the base of secularization theory.

Marx and Freud agreed on many facets of the associations between religion, society, and the individual. Freud agreed that religion was, in part, a result of humanity’s advancement through the tiers of life and society, though he differed in the specifics of the association. Freud thought religion was a vestigial appendage leftover from our youth, both as a species and as individuals (Grelle 2015). Freud thought that supernatural belief and superstition was rational for undeveloped societies; farmers praying for a productive harvest and good weather was logical to Freud (Warner 2010). This line of reasoning extends into modern secularization theory, as Norris and Inglehart show that agrarian societies are more religious in comparison to industrialized societies:

“Overall, almost half (44%) of the public in the agrarian societies attended a religious service at least weekly, compared with one-quarter of those living in industrial societies, and only one-fifth in postindustrial societies” (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 57-58).

Freud thought that as humans evolved greater complexity of organization, from tribal to city-state and beyond, our primitive natures failed to adapt with our modern practices (Grelle 2015).

At an individual level, Freud thought the “derivation” of religion was an adult manifestation of childhood wherein a child sought safety and solace from a father figure (Freud 2013, 5). Freud thought, as children, we had parents to set things how they ought to be. As adults, we continue to crave solace and project that need unto the father of God that will: “make up to him in a future existence for any shortcomings in this life,” him in this case being said adult (ibid, 7). In this line of thought, Freud’s argument blends well with the Marxian idea that religion acts to mitigate the shortcomings of a negative reality in which things are not how they ought to be.

Freud’s greatest contribution to science was unveiling and popularizing the idea of the subconscious (Paden 2003). In this subconscious live ancestral memories. Among these memories lay the memory of the first sin: murder of the father by the youth of the tribe (2005). This act left a stain on the collective memory of humanity. Freud argues this ancestral sin is part of humanity’s need for religion (ibid). This sin left man with feelings of guilt for reasons that were unknown (ibid). This initial act of aggression left an impact on the psyche. However, it did not diminish young men’s desire to supplant their male leaders (Grelle 2015). Maintaining these conflicting desires leads to internal tension.

Freud coined the concept of subconscious tension between the primal instinctual side of man and the demands of civilization as the balancing act of the Ego (2013). This tension is a side-effect of the demands of civilization on the instinctual man who does not wish to behave in a socially acceptable manner. This internal tension furthers guilt and remorse, leading to a need for punishment or atonement. Freud believes religions have identified and targeted this sense of guilt as a tool to bring followers into their pews (ibid). He argues that Christianity speaks to the truth of his assertions by granting freedom from sin by the self-sacrifice of the father for the sins of the children.

This sacrifice is a mirror of the original sin of tribal man murdering the tribal father. Freud argues this is mirrored in the love and hate primitive man manifested for their fathers. How does humanity escape this mounting internal tension? The Ego, in Freud’s world, is the balance between the Id, wherein exists desires, needs, and instincts, and the Superego, wherein exists the cultural norms and sense of morality (Grelle 2015).

This idea reflects the Oedipus complex, which is the need for young men to supplant their male leaders. This is a practice that may have been required in a tribe, but modernity has removed such a demand (Warner 2010). Though much of Freud’s argument is cyclical, the most important theme for the secularization thesis is that religion offers solace in a world where such is rare. So, like Marx, Freud believed that religion served a useful purpose during the evolution of man, but in modernity where safety and security is prevalent, religious solace need not be sought.

Freud then mounted a final assault, arguing that modern adherence to religion is an abandonment of reason for the illusion of security (2001; 2005). He claimed that rational people in the modern world should not adhere to religion, and as such must be suffering from a type of neurosis (2005). Neurosis is a type of mental illness, which is benign in nature, but still impairs judgement and full development of the individual (Grelle 2015). While Freud’s concept of religion as neurosis misses the mark as a scientific statement, the idea that religion’s leading role for humanity is illusory security is central to the claims of current secularization proponents, a point I will return to later. Freud, as with Marx, believed realizing the entirety of human potential in modernity required a rejection of religion (Warner 2010). This view is a main point of division between Marx and Freud, and Weber and Durkheim, a point which Weber and Durkheim examine.

Durkheim was an innovator in social and behavioral thought. He was the first person to hold an academic position in sociology: head of Education and Sociology at the University of Paris. There he focused primarily on the study of religion and society (Grelle 2015). Durkheim is associated with structural functionalism, which explains how society functions by focusing on the relationships between social institutions, and structural differentiation, the process by which societies move from simple to complex as they advance (Rueschemeyer 1977; Grelle 2015).

Though Durkheim is a pioneer in structural differentiation, it became more popular and more widely studied after Marx joined the debate (Rueschemeyer 1977). Structural differentiation in the religious context describes how professionals, credentialed institutions, and governmental organs began to replace the religious institutions of education, healthcare, politics, and social welfare (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Marx thought religion reflected society. Durkheim thought “religion was society,” and if so, then “society is society” (Paden 2003, 30). While intriguing, as a scientific proposition it is not particularly useful as it is circular and unfalsifiable (ibid). Still, religion as society does provide a *Weltanschauung* (world view) for understanding the role of, and origin of religion in, society.

Central to this worldview is the importance of religion as a social bonding and unity tool (Grelle 2015). Durkheim argued that religion was important to the stability of a society and the health of its inhabitants (Paden 2003, 31). However, “[...] both Durkheim and Weber recognized that Western modernity appeared increasingly inhospitable to religion” (Warner 2010, 2). So, while Marx and Freud actively sought the end of religion, Durkheim found the secularization of society troubling. Freud thought religion was a collective neurosis, while for Durkheim, religion acted to sustain a collective conscious (2005; 2008).

This consciousness contains the sum totality of human knowledge including morals, customs, and taboos, etc. (Edles and Appelrouth 2014). It contains humanity’s emotional attachment to society, thereby binding us to society and instilling in humanity a desire to sustain society (Paden 2003). Without the stabilizing effects of shared religion, Durkheim thought there might be periods of instability followed by a revival of religion in new form.

“In short, the ancient gods grow old or die, and others are not yet born. Hence the futility of Comte’s attempt to organize a religion with old historic memories artificially reawakened: it is from life itself, and not from a dead, that a living cult can emerge . . . there are no immortal gospels, and there is no reason to believe that humanity is henceforth incapable of conceiving new ones” (Durkheim 2008, 322).

This point was also articulated by Wilson’s conclusions in Salvation, Secularization, and De-moralization, in which he argued that secularization had a dismantling effect and created a loss of support for society among the populace (2001).

An example of Durkheim’s association of religion with social stability is his 1897 study of the suicide rates in Western Europe. In Suicide: A Study in Sociology, Durkheim investigated the association between suicide rates and religious denominations, finding that Roman Catholics experienced lower levels compared to their Protestant peers (2013). Scholars have criticized these findings as confirmation bias on the part of Durkheim as he had a documented preference of communal religion (Warner 2010). Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Durkheim was incorrect about the comparative analysis, the association between religion and suicide rate is still a provocative concept, one that indicates a relationship that is not based just upon religion or lack thereof. If we allow for the premise that religion arises based, at least, on the type of society, we see how this creates an association with various consequences, higher levels of suicide among them.

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life is Durkheim’s most well-known work (Grelle 2015), in which Durkheim examines primitive forms of religion via ethnographic study of Australian Aboriginals. He searches for commonalities that all religions share, which he refers to as the “Totemic Principle” (Paden 2003, 30-31). The totemic principle describes how each religion is a construct of the society that created it (Edles and Appelrouth 2014). Religion is society. Durkheim thought totems took two distinct forms: one the symbol of the tribe, and one the tribe’s God (ibid).

The functional definition of what constitutes a symbolic totem is varied, but distilled to mean a plant, animal, or other force of nature that is sacred to a group of people because of an ancestral spiritual association (Paden 2003). This principle is not unlike Freud’s Oedipus complex, in that the tribes believed they were linked with their totem, though in this case the linkage is spiritual rather than biological (2005). Freud thought the supplanting of the leader was the force behind atonement rituals (ibid). Durkheim thought the totem was an important symbol of the tribe—damage or dishonor of the totem would demand spiritual atonement, as nothing in tribal life was more sacred (2008).

For Freud, the totem was part of the collective neurosis of religion (2005). It bound a tribe together in shared responsibility for past wrongs. Durkheim saw totems as binding forces in that they brought about social bonding through mutual identification with sacred objects, ideas, times, places, and activities symbolizing the sacredness of the group (Grelle 2015). The sacredness of the group is derived from the group identity and is not an intrinsic feature of the objects, ideas, etc. (Paden 2003). Mutual identification served to reinforce the effects of sacred ritual in establishing, maintaining, or restoring the boundaries of the sacred and profane. This renewed solidarity both in-group and with sacred items (Grelle 2015). Durkheim worried that secularization would disrupt this in-group solidarity.

In modern days, many consider society a neutral stage on which individual actors perform their lives. Durkheim argues society is what allows individuals to take certain roles. “If one can become a wandering monk, independent artist, or great, self-generated individualist it is because society has allowed these categories of behavior” (Paden 2003, 30). The belief that social institutions are the building blocks of society that allow individuals to attain certain behaviors, professions, or levels of income is still prominent today, as President Obama stated during a speech in the 2012 presidential election:

“If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business—you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen” (Obama 2012).

Obama’s words were not intended to be taken at face value; the statement was rhetorical in nature. Loving and Teufel note that, taken in context, it is “pretty clear” that Obama was referring to government-sponsored activities such as roads, bridges, teachers, and other public goods that make business possible

This view of society and the role religion plays in sustaining it is challenged by another of Durkheim’s propositions: as Anomie increases, society will experience increased individualism, thereby leading to increasing respect for individual rights and human rights (Grelle 2015). Anomie is defined as the breakdown of social norms; moral confusion and malaise; lack of purpose and identity (Grelle 2015; Edles and Appelrouth 2014). Durkheim believed that as secularization continued to erode traditional religion, something must replace it. Bellah made an argument for the emergence of civil religion in America (2005). The concept of civil religion is often associated with Rousseau, but dates to at least Plato, if not further back in time (Weed, Weed, and Heyking 2010). Durkheim was unsure of what form replacements for traditional religion might entail. Weber had no such concerns.

Weber originally named the phenomenon of secularization (Swatos and Christiano 1999). Weber saw secularization as a by-product of the rise of rationalism over superstition. Rationalism is the concept most credited with the decline of religion. Indeed, it is an important facet of the views of Marx, Freud, Durkheim, and Weber (Paden 2003). For Weber, the rise of rationality also brought about the rise of the bureaucratic, a trend that also developed in religion. A new religious movement might coalesce around a charismatic leader, but the leader’s passing would necessitate reform around a bureaucratic structure to become a religious institution (Weber, Gerth, and Mills 2012). This leads to symmetry between society and religion, or as Durkheim would argue, religion is society (2008).

Weber argued the interaction of religion and society was complex and worked in both directions: religion impacted society and was influenced by society (Parsons 1947). Weber argued that this interaction between religion—Protestantism specifically—and society was the nexus of modern capitalism (ibid). He thought that the Protestant belief system legitimized the capitalist worldview that Marx decried as the source of alienation and aroma of religion (Marx and Engels 2008). Capitalism brought about increased economic and moral individualism, facets of rationalization and modernization that would have Durkheim agreeing with Weber (Grelle 2015).

Durkheim was troubled by the dismantling of religion at the hands of modernity. Weber saw the disruption as one that would permit the free study of religion in a scientific manner. This study, “methodological atheism,” was academia’s opportunity to observe objectively and test the why of religion in an empirical fashion (Warner 2010, 24). Weber, who had a Protestant background, declared himself to be nonmusical regarding religious practice or preference, and was quick to assuage the pious that religion continued to provide for their needs (Grelle 2015). For Marx, Freud, and Durkheim, the type of religion was not the focus of study, but for Weber, the type of religion was an expression of the type of society (Paden 2003). This suggests that, while Freud and Marx existed in one camp, and Durkheim and Weber in their own, Weber also existed in a realm of his own.

Weber categorized religions by the type of society in which they existed. Tribal religions lacked distinctness from the society in which they existed; religion reflected economics of life (Paden 2003). In these social situations, the difference between religion and politics was negligible. In larger human groups like city-states and medieval kingdoms, religion had a place akin to political powers; throne rooms existed in equality to residences of gods (ibid). Commoners served both political and religious power. Today, religious sub-groups within the greater populace are common. However, this was also possible in societies that had grown large enough to decentralize religion (ibid). A modern-day example is the 1925 US Scopes monkey trial which proved to be a social cleavage between biblical Christians and evolutionists (Weed, Weed, and Heyking 2010). This is Weber’s third classification of religious typology; this type requires that societies be large enough for religious enclaves to form. These enclaves could serve the diverse needs of many different sub-groups within a society (Paden 2003).

Weber, like Marx, thought that religion reflected the interests of society. Weber differed from Marx in which social class’s values were reflected, however. Marx thought the capitalist ruling class used religion to subjugate the proletariat (Grelle 2015). Weber thought the reflection was dependent on a substantial number of issues such as central tenets of the religion and socio-economic status of individuals making up the society, etc. (Paden 2003). In the medieval kingdom, the ruling class would have material wealth and thus no need for salvation. The underclass would have more desire for salvation, future compensation, and solace that their life of work would be rewarded (ibid). This belief in the compensatory function of work provides the basis for Weber’s theory about humanity and God in Protestantism (Grelle 2015).

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber concluded that Protestantism was self-destructive in an intrinsically secularizing manner: “[...] the advancement of science and knowledge which is an accompaniment of the secularization process under Protestantism [...] disintegrates the ties of the individual to the group” (1951, 14). This and Weber’s Economics and Society is cited as a foundational piece for secularization and rationalization by many theorists (Wilson 1969; Martin 1978; P. L. Berger 1990). Marx, Freud, and Durkheim all believed religion reflected society, history, and the individual. Weber breaks from those scholars again, arguing that religion could be an instrument of fundamental change in the Weltanschauung of society (Grelle, 2015). For Weber, religion could alter society. Weber’s analysis was highly influenced by the social movements he witnessed, such as the rationalization of Protestant theology to support capitalism (Warner 2010).

## Contemporary Works

The leading proponents of secularization theory are Norris and Inglehart. Norris and Inglehart are joined by Chaves, Porter, Bruce, Wilson, and others. Norris and Inglehart also claim sociological masters Weber and Durkheim among their number, though Stark et al. argue that Weber stands, at least in part, with them (2000). Norris and Inglehart argue that trends of religiosity are primarily explained by a demand-side market-based argument (2011). They suggest that economic and human development factors are a major influence on the demand for religion. Their primary antagonists are Stark and Finke (2000; 2005).

Stark and Finke are joined by Iannaccone, Bainbridge, and later Reaves in their criticism of secularization theory. These scholars articulate a supply-side market-based argument to explain exceptional US religiosity among industrialized nations (Iannaccone 1995; Stark and Bainbridge 1996; Stark and Finke 2000; Reaves 2012). Berger, originally a proponent of secularization, joins the general argument against secularization (1999). Their argument is focused on religious free-markets and is competition-driven. However, before this assault against secularization began, there were other forays into the field to evaluate the resilience of secularization. The secularization thesis has been evaluated many times and will continue to be evaluated throughout history, including here.

Secularization has been a foregone conclusion throughout the history of social science (Lenski 1961). One of the first serious challenges to the theory came in the form of Hadden’s address at the Southern Sociological Society’s Centennial Celebration (Hadden 1987). Hadden’s critique was not the first, but it was among the most famous and the most public. Hadden attacked secularization on several fronts, most of which have been dealt with and dispatched by proponents of secularization (Lechner 1992). Still, these critiques are important in understanding the evolution of the theory of secularization.

Hadden argued that, as the scientific community widely accepted secularization, it was never evaluated and reviewed in a manner that would have shaped the concept into a theory (1987). He asserts the concept of secularization is without a theoretical frame to confirm or deny its truth. Akin to, but different from, this attack, he argued that because of the wide acceptance of the theory, there was no further research to amass data supporting the concept. Indeed, the opposite was true (ibid). His final assault is two-pronged, arguing that the prevalence of New Religious Movements disputes the secularization thesis. He further argues that the secularization of institutions is refuted by the intermingling of religion and politics, specifically citing American politics and the Republican party (ibid).

Lechner provides a synopsis of the secularization proponent's rebuttal to all charges. He argues that secularization is a theory. Continued research and work by Dobbledare, Chaves, Yaname, and Casanova explain and describe the differing aspects of the theory (2009; 1997; 1994; 2022; 2023). Lechner notes that Hadden does admit the argument put forth by Martin is a coherent base of a theory (1978; 1991). Hadden’s argument about lack of data is correct. Religious participation was the accepted measure of religiosity at the time (1987). Much of that data gathered during the 1970’s and 1980’s suggested stability in religious participation.

At the time, proponents attempted to argue this away with theoretical discussion about the role of the church in selecting or coronating political leaders (ibid). However, we now have reason to suspect the data collected between 1970-1980 was faulty. Gallup, GSS and NES survey data was obtained using questions that may have caused respondents to affirm religious participation (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Bruce and Wilson argue the prevalence of New Religious Movements is not a repudiation of secularization theory but is a peripheral action of little consequence (2002; 1998). Bruce argues that these movements only become important if they are socially significant (2016).

The last charge leveled by Hadden was the lack of secularization of social institutions. Parsons also critiqued this facet of secularization by suggesting that while social institutions such as education, healthcare, and social welfare may have been differentiated from religious institutions, only a diminution of the existing religious institutions would support secularization (1978). Plainly, if religious institutions still maintain a high level of prestige and authority, the differentiation was irrelevant. Chaves answers this charge with a question: What is the scope of control exercised by religious authority? (1994). He argued that while religious institutions may maintain influence over individuals, they have lost the ability to influence other institutions and thus the secularization thesis remains intact.

Hadden was not the only scholar to attack the theory of secularization. Lyon echoed Hadden’s argument that secularization was assumed to be truth (1985). Duke and Johnson assault the thesis by arguing that secularization is not occurring. Religion is not decreasing, it is transforming (Duke and Johnson 1989). However, a careful reading of this argument leads one to realize this is a self-defeating stance that renders itself moot (Lechner 1992). Crippen defines religion as “a basic organizational and cultural component of every human society,” a universal quality (Crippen 1988, 319). Taking to a literal extreme, this merely indicates that secularization and this transformation occur and leave humanity with a secular religion (Lechner 1992).

A final charge is leveled at secularization: that it is a self-limiting process (Hadden 1987). Noting that even if this charge stands, it does not refute the secularization hypothesis, but rather demands a revisitation of it. Lechner addresses this by turning it on itself as he argues it is evidence of secularization (2005). Stark and Bainbridge argue that, as secularity continues, it will eventually influence religious groups, leading them towards secularity and low tension (1996). Secularization of these groups will lead to the formation of high-tension groups to meet the demand of religious consumers. Tension “refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism in the relationship between a religious group and the “outside” world” (Stark and Finke 2000). This logic is the beginning of the most serious charge against the secularization thesis in contemporary social science (Norris and Inglehart 2011).

Stark and Finke begin with their main work, Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion, by dismissing most social science related to religion. They claim that most of what has come before was not actually science, that objective social science had not “until quite recently” studied religion (Stark and Finke 2000). They argue that as social science is a product of the “Enlightenment,” it must be hostile to religion (ibid). They continue their assault with Hobbes, Feuerbach, and Sagan, and end by calling Durkheim a plagiarist (ibid). Stark and Finke finish off their opening salvo by attacking two major methodological approaches to social science: cultural and psychological as atheistic in nature. They argue such a nature undermines the ability of those who practice such approaches to consider fully the rationality of religious actions. Please see my thoughts on such an argument in Appendix C, Lens of Interpretation for my reasoning on that.

They continue by noting that traditional social science approaches to the study of religion are more likely to focus on “weird and obscure groups” than to focus on conventional churches and sects (ibid). While Stark and Finke pointedly do not argue social scientists should avoid studying these unconventional groups, they suggest a bias against the study of more conventional groups. They argue: a normative judgment by traditional social scientists in favor of groups that have relatively high levels of societal tension. This causes social scientists to avoid the study of groups that match their parent society’s values. Traditional social scientists display antagonism to more unconventional religious groups; and traditional social scientists ignore substantial portions of the religious community because those groups are more secular (ibid). This theme of labeling the proponents of secularization as normative is prevalent in much supply-side research (Stark and Bainbridge 1996; Stark and Finke 2000; Finke and Stark 2005)

Stark and Finke finish their criticism of previous social science study of religion with the analogy of “a blind man trying to talk about color” (2000, 21). In this instance, they call upon the words of Durkheim: “What I ask of the free thinker is that he should confront religion in the same mental state as the believer [...] He who does not bring to the study of religion a sort of religious sentiment cannot speak about it!” (ibid, 21). Acts of Faith stands as a repudiation of the previous social scientific study of religion. Stark and Finke argue that any human phenomena will have a human side to it. Reducing religion to solely that side is missing an important part of the picture. That lens of interpretation informs their description of the American religious marketplace.

Stark and Finke begin with the proposition that humans, based on their circumstances, make rational choices (2000). Building on this idea, they suggest that otherworldly or posthumous rewards are equivalent with future rewards; neither are verifiable (ibid). They note that humans will not seek otherworldly rewards for items that are cheap, efficient, and available (i.e., material goods) (ibid). One notable otherworldly reward could be protection from death. They suggest that individuals make deals with religious institutions and their patron deities for otherworldly rewards (ibid).

As with all bargains, Stark and Finke suggest that humans will attempt to pay as little as possible for the product they desire. However, they will pay more for a dependable, responsive, and powerful reward (ibid). They suggest that a long-term agreement of exclusivity could spread payment across time, reducing and delaying payment (ibid). Finally, they describe how a religious institution can create consumer confidence through clergy confidence and religiosity, mystical experience, and credit of miracles to the patron deity (ibid). Stark and Finke use these axioms to describe the rationality of the religious individual. See appendix A for a complete reproduction of the Stark and Finke propositional argument.

As truly interesting and internally cohesive as the arguments provided by Stark and Finke, the truest evaluation of a scientific theorem is the empirical test. Testing the propositions of Stark and Finke has provided reasons to question them. Spickard utilized computer modeling to examine aggregate effects of individual firm and state-level actions on religious marketplaces in simulations (2007). His results did not support the macro-to-micro effect provided by the arguments of Stark and Finke. He showed that religious competition does not produce religious participation. Religious firms must also provide advertising that is attractive to consumers (ibid). It is important to note that this work was simulation, not empirical. Empirical testing being the gold standard of science does not stand to reduce the usefulness of simulation and theory as explanatory devices. Much of the classical theory of secularization continues to inform debate.

I am not the only scholar to note the tone of Stark et al.’s work. Noting the tone of their work, Hak tests the work of Stark et al. in a structural functionalist manner, which highlights the differences of rational choice theory (2007). Hak argues that a functionalist understanding of religious conversation and reaffiliation can explain such activities just as well as the rational choice theory of religious marketplaces. The true strength of Hak’s contribution is the simple reality that individuals do not describe their own religious conversion and choices in a rational manner. A convert’s choice of language is one of plausibility and persuasiveness (ibid). Hak argues this provides more reason to trust that religious affiliation is a choice heavily influenced by the social context in which it exists. It is not wholly rational, but some mix of preference and context (ibid).

Other work building on the idea of America as an exceptionally religious nation does continue to provide an interesting foil for the proponents of secularization theory. One piece of work that is especially useful is provided by Schnsbel and Bock (2017). They argue, convincingly, that moderate consumers of religion are reducing in number in the US. Using General Social Survey datasets from 1989-2016, they show that the number of people who hold intense religious beliefs has remained relatively constant. They show that the major change in the religious landscape of America is among those with no strong affiliation and those with none. This work provides a deep dive into the religious behavior and beliefs of individual Americans. It concludes that the moderate consumers of religion are transitioning to nones (ibid). Nones in this context are individuals that proscribe to no religious tradition, they do not participate in the religious marketplace. What remains is an intensely religious consumer base: “We have shown that American religion is becoming increasingly exceptional in its intensity.” (Schnabel and Bock 2017, 697).

The work by Stark and Finke has been built and refined by scholars, including a rather holistic review by Brik that outlines the major strength and weakness of the argument, mainly that religious demand has always existed, and is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, and that actions of religious firms do have an impact on the religiosity of their communities (Brik 2020). An additional summary of the current secularization debate is provided by Stolz in the presidential address to the 2020 convention for *International Society for Science and Religion* in Barcelona. During his presentation, he covered the main arguments provided by supply-siders and demand-siders, falling squaring among the demand-siders in arguing that seven main areas are the primary factors in shaping a religious landscape in which individuals consume or avoid religious firms. He describes these areas as: insecurity, education, socialization, secular transition, secular competition, pluralism, and regulation (Stolz 2020). He articulates a basic functionalist argument that religion product cannot be rightly thought of as a commodity; it is not a car to be bought and sold. He concludes with an interesting idea, that of secular firms competing with religious ones for consumers, especially among men. He suggests this because most nations prone to experience secularization at high levels tend to have social contexts that expose men to industrializing influences at higher rates than women.

Norris and Inglehart argue that individuals in industrialized nations, including America, are moving away from religion (2011). Increased control and understanding of the natural world lead materially wealthy nations away from supernatural explanations for events (ibid). Thus, governments and institutions of industrialized nations are becoming more secular. However, that effect does not translate to the general population. The three levels of secularization as described by Tschannen help to differentiate these similar yet fundamentally different effects and levels of analysis. Marco secularization occurs at the governmental/national level and is generally accepted by both the supply-side and demand-side groups. Meso secularization is more fluid as it is a group level description as groups can be secular or religious in composition. However, many religious institutions have begun to adopt secular firm models of behavior in an effort to compete in the religious marketplace (Minton 2015). The crux of this discussion and the general argument centered on secularization is on the effect or disposition of the individual in society. Do individuals in a secularized society inevitably become more secular given the advantages such a society provides? Religious individuals may be those who fall through the social safety net and experience a personal security threat due to economic inequality. Norris and Inglehart argue this, in part, explains continued elevated levels of religiosity within the US (2011).

The authors used the World Values Survey (WVS) to gauge values, beliefs, and practices. WVSs are limited as they initially polled developed nations. Norris and Inglehart were able to utilize other polls, governmental surveys, and international social surveys to measure the thoughts and beliefs of some 5 billion people, or roughly 80% of the world's population. By combining older data from western nations with newer data from Sub-Saharan African nations, the authors could draw conclusions that have broad application and can be generalized in most populations (ibid).

There are several theoretical associations between religiosity and HD. The one presented by Norris and Inglehart in Sacred and Secular: “The Thesis of Secularization Based on Existential Security,” is one based on existential security (2011, 4). A critical argument of this thesis is that rich and poor nations are fundamentally different in how their populations understand “human security and vulnerability to risk” (ibid, 4). In contrast to the worldwide study conducted by Norris and Inglehart, Jeremy Porter examines the role that right-wing authoritarianism as a conservative value has in aiding or hindering HD at a sub-national level within the Southern areas of the US.

Porter’s research is valuable to our topic because of how Porter operationalized conservative values, as measured by religious and political affiliations (2017). LaMothe described how religious and political beliefs were intertwined via five different categories depending on how a person comes to their faith (2012). Areas with elevated levels of conservative values were found to have similar effects as countries that exhibit modern-day low levels of HD. The author contends that the right-wing ideology that focuses highly on the incorporeal leads to a lack of investment in the local communities’ well-being and an inability to take advantage of avenues of development. This theoretical model is in line with supply-side constructs. Porter concludes that elevated levels of conservatism are detrimental to HD (Porter 2017).

Data for Porter’s study was compiled from: the American Communities Project, the Private School Survey, the Negro Participation Survey, the Center for Disease Control, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Institute for Literacy, and summary files from the U.S. Census Bureau. Porter created the sub-national HD index by measuring health, education, and command of resources, closely mirroring the HDI. As the data is only gathered from within the United States, this study has weak external validity; however, this focus helps to strengthen the internal validity, as it does apply to individual American regions (Porter 2017).

Work by Gaskins, Golder, and Siegel that measured the relationship between HD, religion, and social conservatism is much like the work of Norris and Inglehart: a defense of the theory of secularization (2013). These authors contend that secularization is a valid theory at both the macro and individual level. They argue that their data and model show evidence linking individual net income with levels of religious participation. They assert that because HD leads to greater possible individual income, it may be a factor in reducing religious participation. The authors support the demand-side explanations of religious participation and link such participation with some utility or gain at the individual level, whether such gain is spiritual or utilitarian.

Gaskins et. al. operationalizes religious utility with four factors: participation, state pressure on religious activities, doctrinal strictness of the religious institution the individual chooses to associate with, and the ideal doctrinal strictness the individual would prefer (Gaskins, Golder, and Siegel 2013). This religious utility is linked to secular utility, which is operationalized via net income and which the authors define as individual income, social services gained through taxation. The authors contend that the secular utility of an individual improves as the society in which the individual lives become more developed, which provides a micro-link for HD to the individual need for religious utility. Indeed, the authors contend that individuals will offset a lack of secular utility with religious utility. However, unlike other proponents of secularization, these authors do not make the claim, nor does their model suggest that continued HD will be the end of religion (ibid).

One of the hypotheses put forward by Gaskins et al. explains the United States as a nation with high HD and excessive amounts of religious participation. They theorize that as HD drives down the need for religious utility, the general population becomes less conservative. The author's model is unusual as it captured information on the individual's religious participation, in addition to views on social policy. They found that while populations would become less religious in relation to HD, those who remained religious would become much more conservative in relation to the general population. They contend this phenomenon is evidence for the strength of secularization theory. They contend that, as HD increases the gap between the general populace and the religious, this will create cleavages that can be utilized to mobilize the increasingly smaller segments of the religious population to increase its political power. The prevalence of culture wars is evidence of secularization (J. Castle 2019; J. J. Castle and Stepp 2021). Savage expands on this logic:

“religious individuals are less likely to favour redistribution either because (a) religion provides a substitute for state welfare provision, or (b) it adds a salient moral dimension to an individual's calculus which induces them to act contrary to their economic interests.” (2020, 91)

Gaskins et al. also drew from WVSs and the HDI as published by the UNDP for their model. As the same methods were used, this research suffers from the same validity issues as the work by Norris to a greater degree, as this work lacks any attempt to account for those populations that were not reached by the WVS. Thus, this work is generalizable to larger populations and has a high external validity, but with that comes a low internal validity as this study is very general. The measurement validity of this study is superior, however, to the work done by Norris and Inglehart as the specificity of the operationalization is much clearer. The definition of secular utility lends itself easily to coding processes as monetary value of income, which is likely to have a high degree of intercoder reliability. Additionally, the possible impact of this study - that HD may lead to increased political power for a declining number of individuals - is worth exploring.

## Gender Impact

Females have been considered the more religious of the genders, including in the education of the young in religious ritual and knowledge (Young and Sapiro 1993; Holman and Podrazik 2018). Traditionally, women’s role was that of a nurturer and caretaker (J. Berger 2023). This role necessarily precluded any within it from a full-time, wage-earned role. Thus, Durkheimian structural thought asserts that divisions of labor by sex places the female into the religious role (Thompson 1991). Some have challenged this assertion by arguing that a feminine outlook is a more correct indicator of religiosity (Poole and Isaacs 1997). This is only a small piece of the religiosity-gender role puzzle as changes in gender roles. For example, some industrialized nations have experienced significantly reduced fertility rates among educated and working females (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Women who defy traditional gender roles and seek full-time employment are less likely to have children to whom they would pass on that tendency (ibid).

This change could have self-reinforcing effects on gender roles, as religion is a major source of gender-based distinctions (Li et al. 2020). Tying this with the commonly accepted notion that women tend to be more religious than men provides an interesting factor when considering religiosity (Thompson 1991). This factor may hold an important clue about the high religiosity of some developed nations, such as the United States (Norris and Inglehart 2011).

While the governments and institutions of industrialized nations are becoming more secular, this trend does not always translate to the general population. This institutional change, combined with fertility changes, helps explain why some secular-democratic nations continue to have highly religious segments of the population (ibid). Norris and Inglehart argue individuals may fall through the social safety net, feel a personal security threat due to economic inequality, and partially explain continued elevated levels of religiosity within the US (2011). Women remaining outside of secularizing influences in some areas of the US may also provide answers as to why religiosity in the US remains intense and prevalent (Stolz 2020). While the US is a highly developed nation, there remain areas of low development in which traditional gender roles are still prevalent and pervasive (Voicu 2019). These practices manifest in both economic and social effects; culture wars are increasing in the US and stand as an example of the research provided by Schnabel and Bock (2017). Work on these effects and their influence on politics is highlighted by Castle (2018). He shows that despite the prevalence of transgender rights vs religious liberty in media coverage, only a “substantial minority” of the population holds polarizing views on the issue (ibid, 670). This may suggest a backlash effect against social progressivism and a general decrease of political power of those intensely religious individuals described by Schnabel and Bock (2017). This serves to highlight the importance of understanding these social processes and trends.

# CHAPTER III

## Methodology

The HDI is a composite of the Life Expectancy Index (LEI), Education Index (EI), and Income Index (II) normalized via a geometric mean to provide a standardized measure of Human Development (HD) across nations. The HDI was pioneered by the United Nation Human Development Project as a standard measure of development in nation-states (Nations 2015).

The RI is a composite of variables from individuals to specific survey questions. The WVS questions change from wave to wave; however, there are some questions relevant to this research that remain constant. I will also expand the longitudinal analysis to include all data available both prior to and post wave six.

Survey questions and individual answers are the basis of the RI for my examination as they have not changed in substance or style throughout the waves of survey (wave five is an exception in this regard, and I was forced to limit the number of variables in the index as a result). These questions and the variables they are linked to include (with value coding, and equivalent questions in other waves):

Table 1 World Values Survey Question Value Coding

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Value Coding | Wave 2 1990-1994 | Wave 3 1995-1998 | Wave 4 1999-2000 | Wave 5 2005-2009 | Wave 6 2010-2014 | Wave 7 2017-2022 |
| Importance of religion  1 = “very important”,  2 = “rather important”,  3 = “not very important”,  4 = “not at all important” | 1-4 | V9 | V9 | V9 | V9 | V9 | Q6 |
| Attendance at religious service  1 = “once+/wk”,  2 = “once/wk”,  3 = “once/mo”,  4 = “xmas/eas”,  5 = “holidays”,  6 = “once/yr”,  7 = “less”, 8 = “never” | 1-8 | V147 | V181 | V185 | V186 | V145 | Q171 |
| Is one religious.  1 = “yes”, 2 = “no”  3 = “atheist” | 1-3 | V151 | V182 | V186 | V187 | V147 | Q173 |
| Importance: God (recoded)  1 = “not at all”,  2 - 9, increasing up to  10 = “very” | 1-10 | V176 | V190 | V196 | V192 | V152 | Q164 |
| Child quality: religious  1 = “mention”, 2 = “no” | 1-2 | V234 | V22 | V22 | V19 | V19 | Q15 |
| Confidence: Church  1 = “a lot”, 2 = “quite”  3 = “not very”,  4 = “not at all” | 1-4 | V272 | V135 | V147 | V131 | V108 | Q64 |
| Sex  1 = “m”, 2 = “f” | 1-2 | V353 | V214 | V223 | V235 | V240 | Q260 |
| Age  1 = “<29”, 2 = “30-49”,  3 = “50+” | 1-3 | V355 | V216 | V225 | V237 | V242 | Q262 |
| Scale of incomes  1 = “lowest”, 2-9,  10 = “highest” | 1-10 | V363 | V227 | V236 | V253 | V239 | Q288 |
| Education level  1 = “none”, 2-8,  9 = “university degree” | 1-9 | V375R | V271R | V226R | V238R | V248R | Q275R |

With all survey-related data, missing or invalid values are a reality. I replaced all missing values with a series mean. Whenever a respondent’s actual answers were lost or mis-recorded, I instructed Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to replace those values with a value equal to the mean remaining answers. This is a procedure for dealing with missing datapoints. This action allows me to preserve the remaining data points for that survey respondent while limiting the impact of those missing values. These variables are all combined via an index and adjusted to be relative to each other and then averaged.

To evaluate my hypothesis, I used data collected in the WVS, Waves: 2-7. This data is gathered via surveys and interviews under the supervision of Principle Investigators (PI). PIs are social scientists and academics working with WVS Association who are "boots on the ground" in their respective countries. PIs gathered data from over eighty countries, compiling responses from over 85,000 individuals (WVS). The PIs for the US Wave-6/7 were the authors of Sacred and Secular: Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris.

PI’s raise capital at the local and national level to aid with their part of the research. The World Values Association, which oversees the survey, is a non-profit organization of social scientists, investigators, politicians, and other interested parties. International funding comes from nation-states such as: the Russian Federation, Libya, the Netherlands, and NGOs such as: International IDEA, Institute for Future Studies, the Electoral Integrity Project, and foundations such as: the National Science Foundation, and the German Science Foundation (ibid).

To measure the level of religiosity of a particular nation-state, I created an index of attributes that closely mirrors former work by Norris and Inglehart (2011, 41). These variables are responses from individuals to specific survey questions. These variables include important qualities in a child, confidence in churches, importance of God, attendance at religious services, and self-identification as a religious person or not. These specific questions were selected, in part, because they remained consistent throughout all waves of the WVS. Scholars continue to argue about the most accurate measurement of religiosity (Remizova, Rudnev, and Davidov 2022). Indeed, roots of western scholarship and Judeo-Christian tradition provide an immediate and difficult-to-combat bias to most scholarship concerning religion (Lemos et al. 2019). Given this, I attempted to utilize variables that touch all pertinent aspects of individual and societal religious life. These variables also capture both beliefs and practices, which should lead to a more encompassing outcome.

The values for most of the questions ranged from low to high with low being more religious and higher being less religious; however, the question about the importance of God ranged from low to high with high being most religious. For ease of graphing and general continuity of directional importance of religion or belief in an individual’s life, I recoded all the answers to have a low numerical value, matching a low importance of religion and high numerical value matching a high importance of religion. I thought it might be odd to see a scatterplot trending upwards to indicate a lowering of intensity of belief and practice.

These variables all had different values; thus, I compiled them via an index. This is an index of those variables adjusted to be relative to each other and then averaged. This religiosity index is the dependent variable in this examination. I ran reliability analysis to verify all selected variables could be indexed in a manner like the index described in Sacred and Secular:

Table 2 Reliability Statistics Prior to Recoding

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cronbach's Alphaa | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| -.350 | .500 | 6 |
| a. The value is negative due to a negative average covariance among items. This violates reliability model assumptions. You may want to check item coding. | | |

As expected, the value coding of the “importance of God” originally having a reversed order was causing an issue with internal reliability. While it would have been easier to recode that one variable, I wanted to put religiosity into a scheme wherein a lower value indicated a lower level of religiosity, as it may have been confusing to have it reversed in a chart. I recoded the other variables to match that coding format using an absolute value.

Table 3 Reliability Statistic Post Recoding

Running the same test again produces this result:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Reliability Statistics | | |
| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .807 | .863 | 6 |

This indicates a moderately high amount of reliability that the variables I selected for the index have internal consistency. This is important because it provides evidence the proscribed index makes logical sense in grouping all those variables as one value.

|  |
| --- |
| I doubled checked the interclass correlation coefficient using the original value coding: |

Table 4 Intraclass Correlation Coefficient

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Intraclass Correlationb | 95% Confidence Interval | | F Test with True Value 0 | | | |
| Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Value | df1 | df2 | Sig |
| Single Measures | -.045a | -.047 | -.044 | .741 | 81562 | 407810 | 1.000 |
| Average Measures | -.350c | -.365 | -.336 | .741 | 81562 | 407810 | 1.000 |
| Two-way mixed effects model where people effects are random and measures effects are fixed. | | | | | | | |
| a. The estimator is the same, whether the interaction effect is present or not. | | | | | | | |
| b. Type C intraclass correlation coefficients using a consistency definition. The between-measure variance is excluded from the denominator variance. | | | | | | | |

Table 5 Intraclass Correlation Coefficient with Recoded Variable

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Intraclass Correlationb | 95% Confidence Interval | | F Test with True Value 0 | | | |
| Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Value | df1 | df2 | Sig |
| Single Measures | .410a | .407 | .413 | 5.172 | 83102 | 415510 | .000 |
| Average Measures | .807c | .805 | .809 | 5.172 | 83102 | 415510 | .000 |

Both tests suggest the internal consistency of my proposed Religiosity index is valid.

Accounting for missing and lost values is a standard procedure for data analysis. Choosing a correct method for doing so is dependent on the data being analyzed, the sample size, and other factors. For this analysis, I elected to use an imputation model, which replaced missing values with a mean value for that variable. This allows for the use of all data available, while minimizing the impact of the replaced values on the mean value, as it matches the mean. Table six provides the replacement numbers

Table 6 Missing Values

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Result Variable | N of Replaced Missing Values | Case Number of Non-Missing Values | | N of Valid Cases | Creating Function |
| First | Last |
| 1 | Importance of religion | 2779 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V9) |
| 2 | Child quality: religious | 1153 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V22) |
| 3 | Confidence: Church | 5067 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V135) |
| 4 | Attendance at religious service | 4370 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V181) |
| 5 | Is one religious. | 11444 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V182) |
| 6 | Importance: God | 8932 | 1 | 77818 | 77818 | SMEAN(V190) |

At this stage, I have seven datasets with different waves of religiosity data. For the last step in each individual dataset, I created the individual wave Religiosity Indexes via a geometric mean.

I aggregated the religiosity data all on one data sheet and sorted it, so each country had corresponding data from waves two through seven. I note that, because of human events, the nation of Germany did not exist in the same manner in wave three as it did in waves four through seven. For that wave. it existed as German Federal Republic and German Democratic Republic. For that wave, I combined those values with a simple average as Germany. This value may not be as accurate as possible given the dramatically different economic situations of the two nations, however given that I also aggregated the data for that wave under the same label of Germany it does not alter the results of that comparison.

Human Development data is housed in UNDP datasheets, which are available for download online. I did exactly this. These datasheets are available in a time series broken down into composite indices. The formula for the HDI is below and I used this to recreate that index. HD is measured by reviewing progress on increasing life expectancy, education, and general standard of living, as shown via median income level. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created this formula, and it is accepted by the scientific community as a valid tracking method for measuring nation-state progress in human development (ibid). The formula for the Human Development Index (HDI) is as follows:

Table 7 Human Development Index

Life Expectancy Index (LEI) = \frac{\textrm{LE} - 20}{85-20}

Education Index (EI)= \frac{{\textrm{MYSI} + \textrm{EYSI}}} {2}

Mean Years of Schooling Index (MYSI) = \frac{\textrm{MYS}}{15}

Expected Years of Schooling Index (EYSI)= \frac{\textrm{EYS}}{18}

Income Index (II)= \frac{\ln(\textrm{GNIpc}) - \ln(100)}{\ln(75,000) - \ln(100)}

GNIpc = Gross national income relative to purchasing power parity per capita.

I then combine those indices via a geometric mean to normalize them with the above formula. The HDI is the independent variable in this research.

## Analysis

I created the following in SPSS, which helped me to visualize the data and I present it for the same reason. *A picture containing map, text, atlas

Description automatically generated*Figure 1 Human Development Index Map Wave 7*A map of the world

Description automatically generated*

Figure 2 Religiosity Index Map

These maps are formed with data from wave seven. Indeed, much of the following example SPSS outputs will be from wave seven; anytime they are from a different wave I will notate it. The other outputs will be available in the appendixes.

I completed a series of regression analyses. Important tables from a regression analysis are 1.4-1.6 Summaries and the 1.7 Sex and Human Development Index tables. The summaries determine the strength of the association between the variables utilizing the Adjusted R2 value. R-squared is a proportional representation between 0 and 1. The value .327 is read as 32.7%. This suggests that 33% of the variation in religiosity is caused by the variation in the HDI.

The following analysis is from WVS wave six and wave 7. It is limited in scope in that HDI data is included in the WVS data, which allows for much more detailed analysis without serious manual data entry.

Table 8 Human Development Coefficient

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | Coefficients | Std Dev |
| HDI | -.528 | .353 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), HDI

b. Dependent Variable: Religiosity Index

I also ran a regression analysis with the religiosity index, HDI and female religiosity.

Table 9 Religiosity by Sex

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | Coefficients | Std Dev |
| Religiosity Male | **-**.603 | .387 |
| Religiosity Female | **-**.540 | .335 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), HDI

b. Dependent Variable: Religiosity by Gender

These models are useful as they indicate variation in religiosity related to HDI and sex. By comparing the sex results, HDI is a stronger driver of religiosity among males than among females. The difference between the two results is .074 or 7.5% of the variation is based on the sex of the individual. It is a close comparison, which suggests the results are neutral, as the literature indicates that females are slightly more likely than males to be religious. However, it is interesting because it suggests female religiosity is less affected by the changes in HDI in comparison to that of their male counterparts. This could indicate that other factors are more determinative regarding religiosity for females and is a potential path for future research.

Chart, histogram

Description automatically generated

Figure 3 Religiosity Index by Sex Wave 2

This histogram is a view of religiosity of the genders in wave two. The means and standard deviations of both variables suggest the overall comparison between male and female religiosity is close rather than further apart. This supports my analysis above.

Table 10 Sex and Human Development Index Coefficients

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | Coefficients | Std Dev |
| HDI | -.528 | .353 |
| Religiosity Male | **-**.603 | .387 |
| Religiosity Female | **-**.540 | .335 |

a. Dependent Variable: Religiosity Index, Religiosity Female, Religiosity Male

Considering Table 1.7 we can determine the regression coefficient for HDI is -1.887. For each percentage decrease in the HDI, there is a corresponding increase in the religiosity index of 1.887 percent. For males and females, the coefficient is -2.192 and -1.606, respectively. A null hypothesis indicates no association between variables, but the T value and Sig. values both show support for the association between female gender and religiosity, HDI and religiosity. To allow for visualization of the impact of HD on religiosity, I ran a scatterplot for the HD and Religiosity Indices.

This shows the one hundred nations that were surveyed in the WVS Wave-7 that I was able to gather HDI data about, and the mean religiosity average for each nation. The religiosity axis runs from 1 (atheistic) and 4 (extremely religious). The HD axis runs from .4 (low on HD) to 1 (very developed). I included a projected regression line that shows expected levels of the religiosity index. Clearly, there is a margin of error, but the chart shows the needed information. Specifically, the chart shows that as a nation experiences more HD, the people in said nation experience a decrease in the religiosity index, which supports my hypothesis and the literature.

A picture containing text, screenshot, diagram, line

Description automatically generated

Figure 4 Religiosity by Human Development Index Wave 7

A few smaller nations (former Yugoslavia, Taiwan, Puerto Rico, Macedonia, Macau, and the Dominican Republic) have values for HD in the period for wave 7, but due to real-world complications and sampling issues, are not represented in my data.

The results of the HDI and religiosity scatterplot closely mirror the results Norris and Inglehart included in Sacred and Secular. To continue their work and investigate my hypothesis that religiosity has a greater inverse correlation with the EI than other aspects of the HDI, I then ran scatter plots comparing those individual aspects of the HDI against the RI as follows:Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generatedFigure 5 Religiosity and Education Indices by NationThat equation: y = 5.1-3.05\*x.

Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 6 Religiosity and Life Expectancy Indices by Nation: Equation of the line: y = 6.53-4.41\*x

Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 7 Religiosity and Income Indices by Nation: Equation of the line: y = 3.31-2.26E-5\*x

Table 11 Regression Results for Religiosity (standard deviations from the mean)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Constant | Coefficients | Std Dev |
| Life Expectancy | -.689\*\*\* | .632 |
| Education | -.706\*\*\* | .417 |
| Income | -.672\*\*\* | .000 |
| HDI | -.754 \*\*\* | .482 |
| R-squared: .560 | N: 58 |  |

\*, \*\*, \*\*\* indicate significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively.

These are individual regressions to avoid collinearity issues.

Restating the hypothesis for reference:

**H0:** β1 = β2 = … = βk = 0; Human Development and/or its associated variables do not provide predictive capabilities regarding individual level religiosity.

**HA:** β1 = β2 = … = βk ≠ 0; Human development and/or its associated variables do provide predictive capabilities regarding individual level religiosity.

Significance level of α = 0.01, 0.05, 0.10; Reject the null hypothesis.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Coefficientsa** | | | | | | | | |
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | 99.0% Confidence Interval for B | |
| B | Std. Error | Beta | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | (Constant) | 5.659 | .651 |  | 8.695 | .000 | 3.919 | 7.399 |
| Income Index | -6.878E-6 | .000 | -.204 | -1.404 | .166 | .000 | .000 |
| Education Index | -1.511 | .615 | -.349 | -2.458 | .017 | -3.155 | .133 |
| Life Expectancy | -1.859 | .908 | -.290 | -2.048 | .046 | -4.286 | .568 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Religiosity\_Wave\_7 | | | | | | | | |

Figure 8 Regression Coefficients and Significance Levels

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ANOVAa** | | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 12.576 | 3 | 4.192 | 24.330 | .000b |
| Residual | 8.959 | 52 | .172 |  |  |
| Total | 21.535 | 55 |  |  |  |
| a. Dependent Variable: Religiosity\_Wave\_7 | | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Life\_Expectancy\_Index\_Wave\_7, Education\_Index\_Wave\_7, Income\_Index\_Wave\_7 | | | | | | |

Figure 9 Anova Table for Regression

At the α = 0.05 level of significance, there exists enough evidence to conclude that at least one of the variables is useful for predicting religiosity; thus, the model is useful. Taken individually, two predictors have p-values <.05: Education and Life Expectancy, which means both of those variables are useful in predicting religiosity.

# CHAPTER IV

## Discussion

Secularization theory, generally, holds that as cultures and societies become more advanced, those groups gain more influence, control, and understanding of their world. Given this increase in knowledge and power, such groups are less likely to seek out otherworldly goods and explanations of their world than those with less influence, control, and understanding. This is the situational context of the religious marketplace that individuals find themselves in. This religious marketplace and the rules that govern it are the stage on which the current discourse on secularization theory takes place.

There are two main schools of thought and theory for explaining how the religious marketplace functions. Each is an economic model. One model focuses on the supply of religious products, the other on the demand for religious products. Stark and Finke et al., hold to the supply-side theory arguing that, in each society or culture, demand for religious or otherworldly goods is constant (2000; 2005). Norris and Inglehart et al., argue that demand is the more important variable in the supply-demand equation. They argue that individuals seeking religious or otherworldly goods is situational and based on context. They argue in defense of the secularization paradigm above (2011).

Stark and Finke et al., use religious participation and religious firm activities to articulate an argument in which active religious firms attract the most consumers and thereby flourish (2000; 2005). Norris and Inglehart et al., focus on the situational context—the environment of the religious consumers as a primary factor in the religious activities of religious consumers (2011). For the purposes of this discussion, I use religious goods, otherworldly goods, and purchasing of those goods either via monetary donations or religious participation in an economical context. These activities signify a consumer purchasing the proffered goods of a religious firm and thus the demand of consumers for religious goods.

Measuring individual purchasing of religious goods through action alone has proven problematic as it fails to account for beliefs or societal pressure and generally fails to provide a holistic picture of the individual and how religion impacts them (Phillips 2004). Providing an accurate measurement of a variable is critical to any examination. Criticism aimed at older works on religiosity, which primarily utilized church attendance rates as an indicator variable, has caused serious doubt as to the efficacy of that measurement, and much research has been devoted to showing why such a practice fails to provide a sufficient understanding of religiosity (Durdona 2023). In this examination, I have selected a series of variables encompassing appropriate measures of religiosity, be they beliefs, actions, or values (Remizova, Rudnev, and Davidov 2022). See Table 6 for an in-depth explanation of the variables and their value coding.

In any examination, there are decisions that must be made to focus on one area at the expense of another. My research is no different. This examination is more focused on trends of religiosity rather than specific variable impacts on individual cases. This purpose provided the logic to choose a series of variables that provided longitudinal value over specificity in any single instance. This was also my impetus for choosing to be less specific to protect as much survey data possible by replacing missing data values with a series mean. In the methods section of this paper, I discussed these very ideas, but it is important to revisit that here. This work is less focused on the individual or even small groups. The focus here is to create a model of religiosity that is generalizable to larger groups. I seek to discover trends of religiosity that are as universal as possible, when situational context is applied to groups of people at a macro level.

I selected my variables with two goals foremost, I sought to examine variables that are consistent throughout time (WVS waves two through seven), and variables that minimized cultural differences to maximize generalizability. My variable choice is informed by the work of Norris and Inglehart, which has been tested and shown to be accurate and generalizable across five social dimensions: (1) Religiosity, (2) Neutrality, (3) Fairness, (4) Skepticism, and (5) Societal Tranquility (2006; Allison, Wang, and Kaminsky 2021). One component variable of the RI that may not have minimized cultural differences compared to the others is Confidence in Churches. However, I content that most major religious organizations that compete in a religious marketplace are likely to provide a reasonable facsimile—a house of worship. Those religious leaders may have called their place of worship something besides a church, but the idea remains the same: a place to gather as a group for religious product consumption.

The independent variables in this examination are the HDI and its component indices. The dependent variable is the RI. Both indices are composites of other variables. HDI and its progenitors are nation-level variables combined via a geometric mean. RI is a composite of five individual-level variables combined via a geometric mean. This was done to provide index variables that could be compared against each other to create a cognizable model of the change in religiosity based on human development in three areas. I expect that current trends in religiosity are not everlasting or irreversible. We know that disasters and other unexpected events can reverse the major trends of secularization (Norris and Inglehart 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to examine the effects of stress and anxiety on religious consumer activity (Rigoli 2021).

Much research has been directed towards the relationship between religiosity and mental health, specifically anxiety (Sanua 1969), the results of which are mixed (Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein 2004). Much of the research suffers from poor sampling and data collection (ibid). One study on the effects of religiosity on medical students” mental health found positive religious coping to be less impactful than effects of negative religious coping (Francis et al. 2019). Essentially, positive coping is the expectation that God or God’s favor will sustain a believer through challenges, while negative coping is articulated as punishment or divine retribution (ibid). Francis’ et al., work suggests that negative coping provides more impact than positive coping (ibid).

More recent work on the topic of religious networks shows a positive correlation with religiosity and the social networks such provides with positive mental health outcomes (Upenieks 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic provided a situation in which to investigate religiosity and its impact on mental health, with a meta-analysis showing a positive correlation between religious coping and mental health (Pankowski and Wytrychiewicz-Pankowska 2023). These studies provide multi-disciplinary support for my theoretical relationship between HDI and RI. Individuals with more control and understanding of their world and surroundings are less likely to seek out religious goods; were that control and understanding upset by unexpected or unexplained events, that religious demand would be likely to return. Tangentially related to this is the backlash effect. The backlash effect is the idea that, as society changes elements within, society resistant to such change will cleave to their beliefs and values in a more robust and at times, violent manner (Hout and Fischer 2014). People, generally, do not like change.

Backlash is interesting as a concept in the context of my examination as it may serve as a self-reinforcing capacity (Karner and Aldridge 2004). In the US, the most fundamentalist religious individuals tend to be conservative in their political beliefs (Jeremy Reed Porter 2012). Secular individuals tend to be liberal (Capucao 2021). This situation provides an impetus for conservative political actors to provide for political actions that reduce HDI (J. J. Castle and Stepp 2021). While political actions have intended effects, they also tend to have unintended consequences, and birth rates in the US are changing. The US joins many high-HDI nations in having low birthrates.

Porter theorized and articulated through simulations that areas of relatively higher levels of HDI tends to have lower fertility rates compared to areas of relatively lower HDI (Jeremy R. Porter 2017). This presents a situation wherein people who tend to be consumers of religious products tend to produce more offspring. Research from three continents supports this idea (Baudin 2015; Dilmaghani 2019; Malmir, Ebrahimi, and Sadeghi 2023). Religiosity and upbringing have a well-researched relationship (Norris and Inglehart 2006). This provides a theoretical framework in which secularization could have a pendulum effect across generations.

One of the main criticisms originally leveled at secularization as a theory was that it was a self-limiting process (Hadden 1987). If Porter, Castle, Stepp, Hout and Fisher are all correct, Hadden may have also been correct (ibid). I contend if this is borne out by empirical evidence in the future, it has little bearing on my current examination. I am attempting to determine if a model of economic purchasing of religion can be created from context clues and macro-level variables. Even if one day the demand of religion reaches a homeostasis wherein it cannot diminish further, that does not refute the theory; it only shows the resilience of humanity’s desires for religious product. Economies wax and wane.

Given that much of the theory and argument around religiosity is based in economic theory and modeling, I introduce one additional economic concept to explain what I expect from current situational changes around religiosity in the US. Elasticity is how the price of a product reacts to changes in supply or demand. Iannaconne was the first member of the Stark and Finke cohort to broach the idea of elasticity in their understanding of the religious marketplace (1998). He introduced the idea in the context of religious donations to religious firms based on individual income levels, a supply-side argument for consumers of religion. I utilize this concept in an entirely different manner. I argue that the central premise of the Stark and Finke group is probably correct: there is a base level of religious demand among the population that will never be extinguished or diminished beyond a certain level. However, I am interested in that group of consumers who are open to suggestions based on their situation and context. Individuals being open to suggestion is the central tenant of advertising, and Stark and Finke et al., argue actions by religious firms (e.g., advertising) play a significant role in the eventual consumption of religious goods (2005).

Most historical research on the relationship between religiosity and advertising has focused on utilizing religion to entice consumers of other products. One such study focused on how religiosity affected individuals” willingness to purchase “controversial” products (Shyan Fam, Waller, and Zafer Erdogan 2004). Another describes the impact of religious attitudes on the effectiveness of advertising (Minton 2015). A more recent article by Waller and Casidy provides a meta-analysis showing a dearth of information on the multi-directional relationship between religiosity and consumer activities in the religious marketplace (2021). There is not enough evidence to provide anything but theory on the effects of religious firms in advertising. Where gaps in empirical evidence exist, theory provides suggestions. Stark and Finke et al. argue that, in a free market, religious firms compete with each other for the patronage of the religious consumer (Iannaccone et al. 2007).

Purchases of religious products by consumers can be through religious beliefs, activities, or through direct monetary contributions. Religious firms compete for consumers in their marketplace. In a religious marketplace as conceived by Stark and Finke et al., the activities of the religious firms are the primary factor in determining which firms receive the most consumer activity (2005). In the same marketplace as conceived by Norris and Inglehart et al., the primary factor for determining religious consumer activity is context and situational. They argue that human development and the accompanying changes it brings will naturally cause a decrease in the demand for religious goods.

Presuming there are individuals who will always provide a demand for the religious, that demand level will always be relatively constant and thus is not very useful in the context of my examination. Work from Gill and Lundsgaarde shows that, in situations where governmental organizations take on the social welfare role traditionally held by religious organizations within the Western world, individuals tend to accept such without complaint (2004). Individuals with elastic preferences for the religious aspects of those services will reduce religious participation and their consumption of religious and otherworldly goods (Gill 2021). This is in line with my theory regarding the change of RI in relation to HDI and its component indices. I expect like all economic changes based on situation, were the situation to reverse in a fundamental and opposite manner, the changes in RI would be reversed and revert to previous situational context. If the negative correlation between RI and HDI and its components is true, then the reverse should also be true. In this instance, the graphs above are both descriptive and provide a theoretical template for a backslide in HDI and its component indices.

The slopes of each line provide useful data for this specific area of my examination. Slopes of each line provide a value change for the dependent variable by the change in the independent variable. While the last line slope seems radically different than the other two, utilizing the scientific notation of -2.26E-5 yields -0.0000226. Looking above to the Income Graph, 100,000 is the top value for the II. So, after putting line 3 in terms of line 1 and 2, we get y = 3.31-2.26\*x. With all, the slope values of each line provide the three slopes of -3.05, -4.41, and -2.26. We know that, based on the graphs, RI drops x number based on the index it is compared with; 4.41 points for the LEI, 3.05 points for EI, and 2.26 points for the II. This provides a value of change based on the life expectancy, education, and income of the individual in a society. These independent variables are not strictly for an individual level of analysis. Life expectancy is a value that is set at birth, but changes occur based on circumstances and life choices. Education is an independent variable but is impacted by the education infrastructure of a society. Income is similar.

The coefficients of -.706 for EI, -.689 for LEI, and -.672 for II. Income is the least crucial factor for influencing religiosity. The standard deviations of LEI and EI suggests that LEI has a larger variance than the other components. Life expectancy requires more change in value for a similar level of impact as the other components. Taken together, this all suggests my hypothesis is not correct in a generalizable fashion. Education provides more impact on RI than Life Expectancy or Income. These components all support the general secularization thesis that more developed areas and societies tend to have less demand for religion.

One hypothesis down. Comparing the slopes and coefficients of the regression graphs and analysis does provide interesting insights. For both sets of values the LEI and EI are the primary or secondary factors for RI. This shows my hypothesis that Income was a primary factor for RI is falsified. The primary factors for RI are life expectancy and education. We know that anxiety and religiosity have a still undetermined relationship; however, we know much of the research suggests positive religious coping can and does provide for positive mental health outcomes, even in the presences of otherwise aggravating contexts. Even when other factors might suggest a negative mental health outcome, those with positive religious coping skills sometimes have positive outcomes (Pankowski and Wytrychiewicz-Pankowska 2023).

Integrating the concept of elasticity with the slope and coefficient values provides a possible model for sensitivity of religious demand among a population. Taking the coefficient values of HDI and its component values -.706 for EI, -.689 for LEI, and -.672 for II and combining them with RI can provide a model for estimating changes of religious demand. With this, we can estimate that for every point of EI we can expect a RI change of -.706. Likewise, we can expect a change of RI by -.689 and -.672 for LEI and II, respectively. The HDI coefficient shows that taken together each point of HDI can be expected to provide a change in RI of -.754.

My stated goal is to create a general model of religious demand based on the situational and contextual information of a population. With the values provided by my regression analysis, I expect that I have started a process that will take the time and effort of a great many minds. I have little doubt there are impactful factors that I have not considered for the general model of religiosity by developmental variables. This work will require input from a multi-disciplinary set of minds providing ideas and analysis beyond this work. It is my hope that operationalizing a model of secularization though change in religious demand is an effort worthy of academia. Such an effort like all scientific efforts most account for all datapoints, including those that appear outside common trends. Stark and Finke et al. would note that this model appears not to address the outliers of secularization theory, mainly the US (Iannaccone et al. 2007).

A topic of debate in the secularization discourse has always been the unusual case of the general level of religiosity in the United States. Stark and Finke et al. have continued to point to the US as a failure of the secularization paradigm. They correctly argue the US remains highly religious despite high levels of HDI, and such could be a problem for proponents of secularization theory. Outliers to trends must be addressed. Outliers existing do not disprove a theory or concept. Outliers that continue to exist without proper consideration and discussion can prove to an insurmountable concern for an idea. The US is not the only outlier in the secularization discussion.

It is also clear that in the context of religiosity and human development, there are several countries that are outliers. One of the primary, long-standing criticisms of secularization theory is that it cannot account for the continued religiosity of the United States. This trend does not appear to end with my work. My research also indicates China, the US, and Singapore have low RI values when compared with II that do not mirror the data trends. China is a repressive state regarding religion and seems to have a markedly lower religiosity score than one would expect based on its HDI (Dobbelaere 2009). Unfortunately, as with many repressive nations data and information is hard to come by for the internal workings of China. The US has more available data and is much more utilized as an example to articulate an argument against the secularization thesis; therefore, my focus of discussion will be on the US. My research, combined with the work by Porter; Schnabel and Bock, provides a good contextual understanding for the American religious landscape.

The US, like most legal contexts, is one rooted in tradition and respect for precedent. As a construct for which to discuss why America’s religious traditions and contemporary situations exist as they do, such is a fitting place begin this discourse. The founders of the US are spoken of in a holistic fashion as though they all shared the same beliefs and ideas about what America was and should be. This is false, but in the vein of religious liberty, there seems to have been general agreement if not complete parity. In: *Religious Liberty and the American Founding*, Munoz explains that despite the founders” disparate beliefs on several issues, they found common ground and a building block from which to expand further agreements in religious liberty (Muñoz 2022). He shows this via individual writings, early drafts, and ratified colonial and state constitutional documents, which he calls “Founding Constitutions” (Muñoz 2022, pt. 2). The founding was not without serious disagreement; many of the most controversial issues about religion of today were also contentious during that time.

The founders agreed that all had religious freedom to practice out of conscience, but they had serious disagreements about how the state would interact, or not, with religious institutions and individuals. They fell into two camps (Muñoz’s terms): “Expansive liberals” and “Narrow Republicans.” The liberals in his description tended to have expansionist views on religious liberty, which placed severe restrictions on the state in curtailing the actions of the religious. Narrow Republicans were the opposite. They believed the state could favor or discriminate based on religious affiliation and belief (ibid). These debates and arguments still fill the halls of state houses and the courts. However, current American society tends to be permissive towards religious freedoms and views restrictions on the religious with general suspicion. There is a general laissez-faire stance toward religion: if it is not causing active and provable harm, let it be. This is one way to consider a separation between church and state. To be clear, it is not the only one. France takes a much more forward and aggressive stance toward the separation of Church and State, for example.

The US conception of separation of Church and State is not without controversy as one of the main political parties in the US currently has benefited from a politico-religious realignment (Schwadel 2020). This by itself causes issues for the general secularization thesis. If one of two main political organizations has tied itself to religion as a means of support and integration into mainstream life, how can true secularization be occurring at even an institutional level, not to speak of an individual level? I make the argument that such a realignment of socio-politico and religious values is evidence for the secularization thesis. I am not the first examiner of US politics to make such a claim. Hunter made a similar claim in *Culture Wars*, arguing that culture wars were in fact the result of political elites utilizing polarizing issues to mobilize their constituencies to gain governmental power and office (Hunter 1992).

These political actions would be short-term at best if secularization were occurring at any considerable rate in the US. Politicians post-1980 have begun to think in shorter and shorter terms than they used to. Increasingly out-of-power politicians focus less on legislative accomplishments as a manner to remain in office and instead focus on diminishing their opponents via messaging and other partisan tactics that have little to do with their jobs as proscribed by the voters (Curry and Lee 2019). Extensive study has recently focused on polarization in the US Congress, which articulates a body more that has always been concerned with reelection (see Mayhew 2004), but increasingly sees the path to power as one that involves creating clarity between themselves and their competition (Lee 2016). Revivals of religious belief and practice are not new to the US, and their continuing existence helps to support the religiously pious in attracting new bodies for their pews. They also serve to provide bodies for the politico-religious party. Fundamentalist beliefs tend to be conservative, no matter the religious affiliation or sect, so such a realignment between fundamentalists and the conservative American party makes sense (Wahba 2022, chap. 3). Examples from around the world show that temporary revivals are a natural and expected backlash to the general secularization trend. I would expect similar or even greater revivals in the US (Stolz et al. 2023).

Stark et al., will continue to argue that the US is an exceptional example of the success of the religious marketplace, and to a certain extent they are correct (Stark, Rodney, and Bainbridge 1996). Religious pluralism and liberty have allowed religious firms unrestricted access to individual consumers of religious products. Their logical internally coherent argument for the rational-choice model of the religious market is in the Appendix. I do not agree with it, but it is certainly an interesting way to look at religious firms, if not their customers. I suggest that we accept the central argument: religious freedom exists in America. That means that individuals are free to purchase or not to purchase religious products as they so choose. As people are free to make this choice, they will do so based on the circumstances in which they find themselves. This is the root of the secularization thesis: in a world in which humanity has control or elevated levels of influence over our world, we have less need to seek out other means of influencing our fate. Stark et al. will argue that religious demand is constant and unchanging, but they drastically overestimate the number of people who will cleave to religious goods when other more tangible goods exist that can provide the same level of comfort and security. These factors in religious goods consumption are manifest in the HDI.

Life expectancy is a measure of health outcomes, safety, and security. It suggests a level of trust in medical systems and relative security from pathogens and diseases. Education contributes to understanding the nature of things. We know why storms happen, and we can forecast them. Education can provide answers that religion used to; the god of the gaps can be bridged with education. Income is manifest in all manner of security and control of our lives. People with adequate finances are better able to access all aspects of development and the fruits that come with it. We know from Porter’s works that areas of the US with lower levels of development tend to be more religious. Norris and Inglehart operationalized an Axiom of Secularization through Existential Security in which the less likely a person was to meet an untimely end, the less likely they were to seek religious goods (Norris and Inglehart 2011). I argue this nuanced understanding of individual-level religiosity is a fitting conception of the reality of the secularization thesis, and how to understand its scope and limitations.

Recent scholarly work about life expectancy shows that the current and outlook is bleak based on where a person lives. Montez et al., show that life expectancy is dependent on a number of factors including regulation of tobacco, labor, immigration, civil rights and the environment (Montez et al. 2020). This work shows that state-level regulation plays a large role in the variance of life expectancy across the nation, and that states with liberal policy preferences have 2.8 years for women and 2.1 years of expectancy above states with conservative policy preferences (ibid). This advantage that liberal leaning states have over conservative leaning states does not diminish the very real diminishing of life expectancy for the general population.

Life expectancy is a general measure of development because longer life is by all metrics a normatively good thing. Researchers point to many factors influencing life expectancy including those mentioned above and a number of strictly health related issues including opioid overdose deaths, suicide, homicide and Alzheimer’s disease (Harper, Riddell, and King 2021). These scholars note that life expectancy increases are expected to have diminishing returns at a certain point. They suggest that is not the cause of the US current stagnation regarding life expectancy; instead, they suggest that three major factors play significant roles in the US turn on life expectancy, those being deaths of despair, economic conditions, and the opioid epidemic. For my research, the most interesting and important facet is those deaths of despair. As they note:

“Our analysis provides some evidence consistent with the “deaths of despair” narrative. Deaths from drug overdoses, suicide, and alcohol-related causes have increased, and there is some evidence that low-educated populations and non-Hispanic whites have been disproportionately affected.” (ibid, 393-394)

These authors used data provided by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, National Center for Health Statistics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Center for Health Statistics to calculate life expectancy tables. Their regression models showed that less educated and non-Hispanic whites have worse life expectancy at birth and worse outcomes respectively. This is of concern as it may create issues of collinearity in future works. For the purposes of my work, I expect that my results are not significantly affected, as the data I worked with was collected before this research. It also serves to highlight the importance of economic conditions in relation to life expectancy. There is not much literature on the direct effects of a decline in life expectancy on a population or on its effects on the religiosity of the individuals in a nation experiencing such a decline.

With that in mind, the research I have conducted suggests that a macro-level decrease in life expectancy would influence the individual level religiosity displayed by a population. There is research that shows religiosity can play a role in the psychological stresses caused by negative health outcomes in a population (DeAngelis, Upenieks, and Louie 2023). This research shows that, when institutional and developmental efforts to provide positive health outcomes fail, individuals can turn to otherworldly goods to reduce psychological stress. These authors suggest such replacements provided by religion may function better for certain groups. They note that black women especially appear to have better religious coping methods than black men, white woman, and men. In the context of my work, this suggests that a lower life expectancy should cause a relative increase in individual religiosity.

Otherworldly goods may provide some psychological comfort which can provide a hold on some individuals; therefore, I suggest secularization theory has diminishing returns. Religious demand may continue to diminish for a time, but revivals can and will occur. Even putting those aside, I do not expect the demand for religion ever to disappear fully. Rationalism may be a path through the wilderness, as Pinker suggests in Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined, but it is one that not all people or cultures will cleave to with the same rigor (2012). If there is a benefit to cleaving to religion for individuals, we will continue to see it.

My research shows that religiosity has an inverse relationship with human development and the component indices. Education, Life Expectancy, and Income, in that order, have a negative relationship with religiosity.

My work expands on that of Norris and Inglehart to show that Education and Life expectancy are primary drivers in this decrease in religiosity (2011). I suggest that education plays exactly the role I listed above: it provides a nexus of control and understanding for individuals. Life Expectancy is no different, though I expect it will manifest more generationally than education. Children raised by loved ones (be they parent, grandparents, aunts or uncles, or siblings) who rarely see their caregivers perish early from disease or illness with no explanation are less likely to seek otherworldly comfort to prevent death. This is the crux of Stark et al,’s argument. They suggest all humanity strives for immortality via religious goods purchase. I do not disagree with the general premise, however, I suggest temporal control and understanding reduce the saliency of the issue of immortality to one bearing little impact on daily living.

# CHAPTER V

## Conclusion and Future Research

In our increasingly interconnected world, the study of what drives individuals to adhere to religious practices is important to political competition and the results of that competition. Politics is the competition of resources and values. Beliefs about how the world works and what we can and should value impact beliefs on the allocations of resources. Other research indicates an individual’s religious belief can have a significant impact on their political persona (LaMothe 2012; Cheung 2022). Research by Anand and Ravallion indicates that one of the most prevalent drivers of HD is the use of economic capital through governmental expenditures (1993). This compounds the importance of religious belief, as the association between religiosity and HD through political belief becomes cyclical.

Pei and Kasper state the US is the most active nation in international nation-building activities. This type of action is taken on the premise that investment of economic capital into the target nation can and will lead to results desirable to US interests (2003). Despite this theory, there is but one unifying characteristic of US attempts at nation building have been a “complete failure” (ibid, 3). Indeed, including all international efforts at nation building draws the following response from Pei and Kasper: “Historically, nation-building attempts by outside powers are notable mainly for their bitter disappointments” (ibid, 3).

If Porter is correct in his argument that social cleavages created by increasing HD give disproportionate political power to small constituencies of individuals, then is nation building likely to lead to culture wars in targeted countries? If not, will it lead those who remain deeply religious to partake in non-conventional means of political participation such as violence? Such an outcome seems plausible, and evidence from the past decade seems to support this.

Scholars have studied the relationship between religion and politics for many years. Even in western democracies the secular political realm is not free from the effects of religious belief. Future research must take this into account. Following Porter’s recommendation in examining the possible association between ideology and HD is a path worth taking. This research must also, hopefully, include more than fifty-eight countries. A query must be made to determine how secular versus religious education affects religious and political belief. Given the changes to the economic and health landscape noted above, further investigation into the effects of a decline in life expectancy on the religiosity of different socio-economic groups in US society and how that alters their political and religious consumer actions must be fully investigated. Generations just coming into political power in 2023 have a reduced life expectancy when compared to their progenitor generations. If my theory is correct, this will influence the individual level religiosity of incoming political participants and their leaders. Porter’s research shows a trend between religiosity and direction of governmental funds towards human development (2017). Governmental funds are a primary factor in human development (ibid). An increase in religiosity for a generation may inhibit growth in metrics of human development, further leading to an additional increase in generational religiosity. This may create a self-reinforcing cycle of decreased attention to metrics of human development and a corresponding increase in religiosity. In a world of increasing international economic competition such a slip in development and human infrastructure could prove disastrous to a nation and its people.

# APPENDIX A

## Religiosity by Human Development Indices

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## Religiosity by Education Indices

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## Religiosity by Life Expectancy Indices

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## Religiosity by Income Indices

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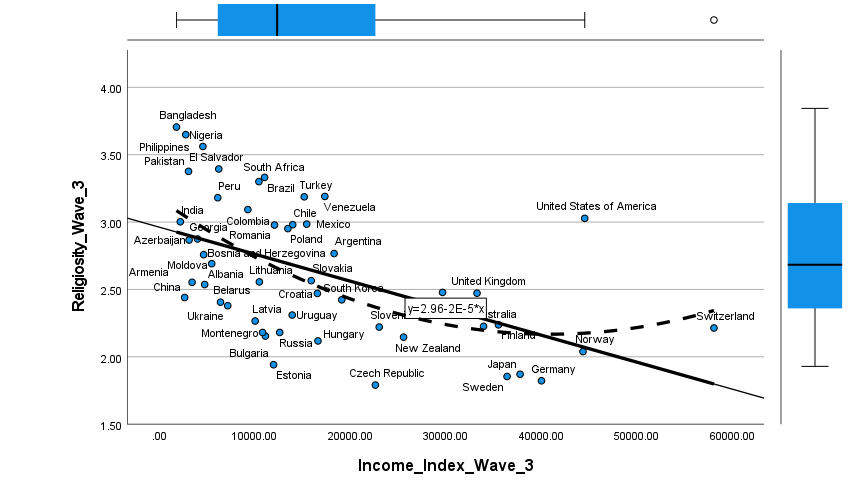
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# APPENDIX B

## Stark and Finke’s propositional argument

The Stark and Finke argument for individual rational choice is built upon a series of propositions. The following is from their book: *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion.* Due to the nature of the argument put forth I thought it prudent to reference an exact wording of their argument to remain as true to the author’s intent as possible. What follows is a copy of their argument (Stark and Finke 2000, chap. 4).

* Within the limits of their information and understanding, restricted by available options, guided by their preferences and tastes, humans attempt to make rational choices.
* Humans are conscious beings having memory and intelligence who are able to formulate explanations about how rewards can be gained, and costs avoided.
* Humans will attempt to evaluate explanations on the basis of results, retaining those that seem to work most efficiently.
* Rewards are always limited in supply, including some that simply do not exist in the observable world.
* To the degree that rewards are scarce, or are not directly available at all, humans will tend to formulate and accept explanations for obtaining the reward in the distant future or in some other non-verifiable context.
* In pursuit of rewards, humans will seek to utilize and manipulate the supernatural.
* Humans will not have recourse to the supernatural when a cheaper or more efficient alternative is known and available.
* In pursuit of rewards, humans will seek to exchange with a god or gods.
* The greater the number of gods the lower the price of exchanging with each.
* In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be more dependable.
* In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay prices to the extent that the gods are believed to be more responsive.
* In exchanging with the gods, humans will pay higher to the extent that the gods are believed to be of greater scope.
* The greater their scope (and the more responsive they are), the more plausible it will be that gods can provide otherworldly rewards. Conversely, exchanges with gods of smaller scope will tend to be limited to worldly rewards.
* In pursuit of otherworldly rewards, humans will accept an extended exchange relationship.
* In pursuit of otherworldly rewards, humans will accept an exclusive exchange relationship.
* People will seek to delay their payment of religious costs.
* People will seek to minimize their religious costs.
* A religious organization will be able to require extended and exclusive commitment to the extent that it offers otherworldly rewards.
* Magic cannot generate extended or exclusive patterns of exchange.
* Magicians will serve individual clients, not lead an organization.
* All religious explanations, and especially those concerning otherworldly rewards, entail risk
* An individual's confidence in religious explanations is strengthened to the extent that others express their confidence in them.
* Confidence in religious explanations increases to the extent that people participate in religious rituals.
* Prayer builds bonds of affection and confidence between humans and a god or gods.
* Confidence in religious explanations will increase to the degree that miracles are credited to the religion.
* Confidence in religious explanations will increase to the degree that people have mystical experiences.
* Confidence in the explanations offered by a religion will be to the extent its ecclesiastics display levels of commitment greater than that expected of followers.
* Vigorous efforts by religious organizations are required to motivate and sustain high levels of individual religious commitment.

# APPENDIX C

## Lens of Interpretation

Integral to the scientific study of religion is how to interpret religion. Eliade argued religion was intrinsic to human experience (Studstill 2000). He suggested that man was homo-religious (Grelle 2015). Schleiermacher thought that man had a “sense and taste for the Infinite” (Crossley, Jr. and Society of Christian Ethics 1991, 152). Pals, echoing Muller, suggested humanity maintained the capacity for religion through the faculties of sense and reason (1987, 259). For Eliade and his followers it was not that humanity and religion were simply linked, but rather that they were the same. For one to study humanity without religion is akin to a biologist claiming to know what an elephant is by studying the cells of one under a microscope (Grelle 2015). A full study of an elephant would not be complete without a cellular, physical, and environmental examination, and to them that same should apply to religion.

Study of religion, religious practice, rites, and ritual is rife with words such as sacred, profane, totem, taboo. These are among the building blocks of religion. These terms are important for understanding religion as a thing unto itself, but are not without issues themselves, as I will explain shortly. Studying religion as religion is a central tenet of the Eliadean non-reductionist academic study of religion. Eliade and his followers suggest a truer understanding of religion comes only from a comparative framework in which religion is measured against religion. I will outline, briefly, the arguments for and against the non-reductionist study of religion.

Non-reductionist study of religion seeks to understand religion *sui generis*—a thing unto itself (McCutcheon 2001, 13). This lens presupposes something about religion that makes the study of it in its own context a worthy enterprise. It suggests there are underlying themes around which all religions are built that speak to humanity such as reverence of water, sun, eternal life, etc. Eliade is the main proponent of this perspective (Grelle 2015). Rennie, Otto, Wach, Bleeker, and Muller also contribute to non-reductionist understanding of religion (Rennie 1998, 1). Many of the proponents of the non-reductionist study of religion put forth the proposition that religion is integral to human experience. Studying humanity without religion reveals only a portion of the picture to these thinkers.

Pals argues this perspective only requires the same as the academic disciplines of “English language and literature” (1987, 276). He notes those academic pursuits would be hamstrung without English literature traditions for reference. Pals likens non-reductionist study of religion to English in a provocative way. He suggests that thinkers such as Eliade, Otto, and Bleeker have muddled the understanding of their approaches with concepts associated with religion rather than science; revelation, sacred, profane, totem, taboos, and other *a priori* claims, rather than letting the simple truth reveal itself. He suggests a single perspective for understanding religion is dogmatic as opposed to scientific (Ibid).

McCutcheon, a forceful, leading reductionist, suggests that Eliade and his followers insist on a *sui generis* study to insulate religion from other forces such as power, influence, and authority (2012, 22). He argues these concepts are among the most important phenomena social scientists can study (Ibid). He insinuates pro-religion bias on the part of the non-reductionist thinkers (Ibid). McCutcheon argues that non reductionists view religion as intrinsically valuable, and thus their opinion is by default not objective (Ibid). McCutcheon argues that real, contextual, and usable scientific information about religion is attainable through a reductionist approach (2012, 22).

Reductionist study of religion seeks to understand religion in terms of other natural phenomena. Reductionist perspective presupposes that religion is another phenomenon reflected. Marx, Freud, Durkheim, Weber, McCutcheon, Stark, Finke, Norris and Inglehart are associated with this perspective. Marx argued that religion is a symptom of economic and social disparity (Paden 2003, 13). Durkheim thought religion is an expression of society (1951, 14-17). Weber built upon Durkheim by asserting the sect of religion was dependent on the type of society, famously arguing that Protestantism helped to legitimize capitalism (1946, 42-43). These scholars argue that society drives religion. The secularization thesis assumes the very same. I authored this paper with a similar frame of mind.

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