JOURNAL FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION
JSSR 50TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

Changing Patterns of Attendance at Religious Services in Canada, 1986–2008

DAVID E. EAGLE
Department of Sociology
Duke University

According to the General Social Survey, the combined rate of weekly and monthly attendance at religious services in Canada has declined by about 20 points from 1986 to 2008. Approximately half of this decline stems from the increase in the proportion of people reporting no religion, who, for the most part, do not attend religious services. The other portion of this decline is attributable to eroding attendance rates among Catholics, particularly older Catholics, and Protestants in Québec. Attendance rates for Protestants outside of Québec show signs of increase. The reported increase in weekly attendance in Canada by the Project Canada surveys and cited by Bibby as a possible indicator of a religious renaissance is revealed as an artifact in the data due to an oversample of Protestants. I find another weighting problem in the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating that leads to underestimates of aggregate religious attendance rates.

Keywords: *religious attendance, secularization, trends, Canada.*

INTRODUCTION

Reginald Bibby, who has researched social trends in Canada since the mid-1970s, reports that the long downward trajectory in religious attendance has ended, and there is now an observable increase in weekly attendance at religious services in Canada (2004a:18, 22–23, 2004b, 2006:201–02). Bibby's findings stand in contrast to two other major national surveys, which report a continuing decline in attendance rates. His findings are also surprising, considering attendance rates in the United States have stayed flat over the same period—hovering around 35 percent (Presser and Chaves 2007). Because of the proximity of Canada to the United States, it is reasonable to hypothesize that similar trends might be evident in Canada. Reimer (1995, 2003) has demonstrated that among evangelicals there are strong similarities between the United States and Canada. However, the presence of a large Francophone minority and the larger proportion of Catholics *vis a vis* the United States (about 40 percent vs. 24 percent) suggests that differences between the two countries may exist.

My focus is to provide the most up-to-date answer to the question: "Is attendance at religious services in Canada increasing?" Given debates about secularization theory, the focus is more than trends at the aggregate level. The focus is also how patterns of religious attendance are changing in relationship to region of residence, age, religious tradition, sex category, and socioeconomic status (SES). Philpott (2007) predicts that in regions where religion is consensual, yet the political and church realms are poorly differentiated, secularization will occur more completely (the Catholic Church in Québec had such an arrangement). Norris and Ingelhart (2004) argue that greater levels of existential security will drive down participation in churches. The Canadian census reports that

Acknowledgments: An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Denver, CO in 2009. The author would like to thank Mark Chaves, Gerry Giesbrecht, and the three anonymous readers for their help improving the clarity and coherence of this research.
Correspondence should be addressed to David Eagle, ThM, Department of Sociology, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708. E-mail: david.eagle@duke.edu

the proportion of Canadians with a Bachelor's degree doubled between 1986 and 2006; likewise, Statistics Canada (2007) reports that median after-tax income in constant dollars for families in the workforce increased some 12 percent. Understanding these relationships provides a fuller picture of how the social organization of religion in Canada has changed over the past 22 years. Because of the lack of representative attendance data prior to 1986, the analysis is restricted to the period from 1986 to 2008.

Previous research (Clark 1998, 2000, 2003; Clark and Schellenberg 2006) indicates there is significant regional variation in religious attendance in Canada. Québec has experienced a dramatic drop in the rates of religious attendance since the 1960s, whereas attendance in the Maritime Provinces has remained relatively stable. The rest of Canada falls somewhere in between, with British Columbia often singled out as being particularly nonreligious (Clark and Schellenberg 2006). These differences are taken into account; analyses are run separately on Québec, the Maritimes, Ontario-Manitoba-Saskatchewan-Alberta, and British Columbia (to test if BC is exceptionally different).

Religious affiliation also has a major impact on attendance. "Religious nones" rarely attend church, thus increases in the proportion of "nones" will decrease aggregate attendance rates. We also have reason to suspect that there are differences between Catholics and Protestants given Hout and Greeley's (1987) findings in the United States regarding Catholic decline, but not Protestant decline. The "other" category in the GSS is too heterogeneous to examine, so my analyses stick to these three main groupings: Protestant, Catholic, none. This means ignoring other small but significant groups in Canada such as Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians.

Research has shown that in the United States age, education, income, immigrant status, and sex category have a strong differential relationship to religious attendance (see Fischer and Hout 2006). These effects are also examined.

Methods

Analysis is conducted using three major repeated cross-sectional datasets, the *Project Canada Surveys* (PCS), the *General Social Survey* (GSS), and the *Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (CSGVP). The basic characteristics of these surveys are summarized in Table 1.

The GSS, administered by Statistics Canada, was established in 1985 and is a series of random-digit-dialed telephone surveys conducted across the country of the adult, noninstitutionalized population with land-line phones. The sample is stratified to ensure that all provinces and cities are adequately represented. On the question of religious attendance, the survey interviewer asked to speak with an adult member of each household. The religious attendance question asked: "Other than on special occasions, (such as weddings, funerals, or baptisms), how often did you attend religious services or meetings in the past 12 months?" It allows the following responses: "At least once a week," "at least once a month," "a few times a year," "at least once a year," and "not at all."

The CSGVP began in 1997 as an add-on to Statistics Canada's *National Labor Survey* and is now administered by the nonprofit group, Imagine Canada. The sampling design is very similar to the GSS. The question about church attendance asked, "In the past 12 months, other than on special occasions (such as weddings, funerals, or baptisms), how often have you attended religious services or meetings?" and allows the following responses, "at least once a week," "at least once a month," "at least three or four times a year," "only once or twice a year," and "not at all."

Reginald Bibby initiated the PCS in 1975, and conducted them every five years through 2005. The PCS were conducted through the mail and asked a wide range of questions with a special focus on social issues, religion, and intergroup relations. The PCS is stratified to ensure

Table 1: Comparison of the GSS, CSGVP, and Project Canada on response rate and sample size; the Project Canada 2000 and 2005 data were not available at the time of publication

	Response	
Year	Rate	*N*
GSS		
1986	80	16,390
1990	76	13,495
1992	80	9,815
1995	80	10,749
1998	80	24,310
2001	84	23,933
2005	59	18,820
2008	57	22,578
CSGVP		
1997	78	18,301
2000	63	14,724
2004	57	20,832
2007	54	20,510
Project Canada		
1975	32	1,917
1980	57	1,482
1985	45	1,231
1990	52	1,761
1995	44	1,985
2000	n.r.	n.r.
2005	n.r.	n.r.

that adequate provincial representation is achieved. The 2000 and 2005 cycles of the PCS are not available at this time. The question on religious attendance in these surveys reads, "How often do you attend religious services?" with the following possible responses: "several times a week," "every week," "nearly every week," "two to three times a month," "about once a month," "several times a year," "about once a year," "less than once a year," and "never." For the purposes of this analysis, the first three categories were combined to construct a weekly attendance variable, and the fourth and fifth categories combined for monthly attendance.

Nonresponse Bias and Religious Service Attendance

The GSS has traditionally achieved response rates of about 80 percent. However, in recent years response rates have declined, reaching a low of 57 percent in 2008. The CSGVP reports a similar decline from 78 percent to 54 percent (see Table 1). Apart from the 1975 survey, the PCS has maintained about a 50 percent response rate. The likely effect of declining response rates is that the samples are becoming increasingly biased towards those who report religious attendance. Abraham, Helms, and Presser (2009) demonstrate using data from the Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. census that response rates are inversely related to the proportion of people who report volunteering. They suggest that the same is true of other pro-social behaviors like giving to charity (for a similar finding, see Groves, Singer, and Corning 2000). While they do not specifically mention it, this is likely for church attendance as well. A further complication of these data comes from the fact that the PCS are mail surveys and the GSS and CSGVP are

telephone surveys. Dillman's (Dillman et al. 1996) analysis shows that telephone surveys are more likely to generate socially acceptable responses, potentially biasing the GSS and CSGVP estimates upward.

While decreasing response rates are likely to induce bias into estimates of the overall rates of attendance, Abraham, Helms, and Presser also demonstrate that nonresponse bias does not introduce major error into estimates of the correlates of volunteering. Therefore, while declining response rates may bias upwards the estimates of regular attendance, the lower response rate is not likely to introduce error into estimating the correlates of religious service attendance.

Analysis Strategy

Simple comparisons between the three surveys demonstrate differences in reported attendance rates. A comparison of weighting strategies accounts for much of the difference.

Using the GSS data, I explore the relationship between church attendance and the standard correlates using multinomial logistic regression.[1] Multinomial logistic regression is suitable when the outcome categories are unordered or difficult to place on a scale. Multinomial logistic regression allows the modeling of unordered categorical outcomes, without resorting to dichotomizing variables and potentially masking important variation. Attendance is split into four categories: weekly, monthly, yearly/several times yearly, and never attend. Because this regression uses a logistic link function, the results are expressed as the likelihood of a person occupying a particular attendance category.

Controls for religious affiliation, province of residence, education, income, age, whether children are present in the home, and marital status are included in the multinomial regressions. Age was imputed as a continuous variable from categorical age variables and then grand-mean centered to make the intercepts directly interpretable. Centering on the mean for each year of the survey did not produce significantly different results. Squared and cubed age functions were added to explore the possibility that age and religious attendance are related in a nonlinear fashion. Education is a three-category variable: university graduate, high-school graduate, and not a high school graduate. Income is also a three-category variable: less than $40k/year, between $40 and 100k, and more than $100k per year (in constant 2002 dollars). Religious affiliation was coded into four categories, Protestant, Catholic, other, and none.[2] A more fine-grained measure of religious affiliation is preferable (see Steensland et al. 2000); however, for the later years of the GSS, only these categories are available. In the GSS, the "other religion" category is difficult to interpret meaningfully as it includes a host of Christian and non-Christian traditions. I also included interaction effects for religious affiliation by province, province by year, province by wave, and age by wave (year the GSS data were collected).

Coefficients produced in the regression analysis are available upon request. Multinomial logistic regression coefficients are related to the dependent variable in a nonlinear fashion, and thus are difficult to interpret on their own. *P*-values are not reported. The likelihoods are calculated by adding several coefficients together, each with different standard errors. Posterior estimates of the uncertainty are calculated using an informal Bayesian procedure (Gelman and Hill 2007:142–44). These are plotted as gray lines or given as intervals on a table and represent 95 percent probability intervals around estimates of the dependent variable, given the uncertainty in the coefficients for the independent variables.

[1] Separate hierarchical logistic regression models with weekly and monthly church attendance as dichotomous dependent variables and time as the grouping variable did not produce significantly different results from running ordinary logistic regressions with the year of the survey included as a continuous variable. There was not a great deal of intra-year variation, suggesting that most of the variation in these data occurs over time.

[2] The question about religious affiliation on the GSS has consistently been worded: "What, if any, is your religious affiliation?" Likewise, the Census asks, "What is this person's religion?" and asks for a write-in answer; it also includes a check box for "no religion."

Mutlinomial logistic regression is also a helpful analytic strategy as it avoids examining only weekly attendance. Bibby (2008) takes issue with using only weekly attendance figures; he claims that they are too stringent a criterion to judge contemporary religiosity. He argues because people are more likely to report feeling excessively busy, the declines in weekly attendance may simply reflect increasing busyness. He advocates monthly-plus attendance as a better measure. A multinomial approach allows for comparison of weekly, monthly, yearly, and never attenders and avoids this problem all together.

There is an additional challenge posed by weekly religious attendance data. The social pressure (both negative and positive) to report regular religious service attendance is contextually dependent and it varies over time, thus making conclusions about trends provisional at best. Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves have conducted several studies in the United States and Canada and found that religious attendance rates are significantly overreported (see also Brenner 2011). They estimate actual attendance rates are about half of what is reported (Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves 1993). They confirmed this finding among a large group of Catholic churches in the United States (Chaves and Cavendish 1994) and in a small county in southern Ontario (Hadaway and Marler 1997). At present, the problem of accounting for overreporting remains an issue that is not incorporated into my models.

Results

Aggregate Attendance Rates

Weekly and monthly religious attendance is plotted over time for the various surveys in Figure 1. As these graphs make clear, there are differences between the three surveys, in particular between the PCS and the GSS. In 1986, the GSS reported the proportion of weekly attendance at 30.8 percent compared to the PCS's 26.3 percent. This difference persisted until 2005, when PCS began reporting a higher weekly attendance figure of 22.0 percent compared to the GSS, which reports 19.2 percent. In 2008, the GSS pegs weekly attendance at religious services at 18.3 percent. The CSGVP (unweighted—see below), matches GSS attendance rates within limits of standard error.

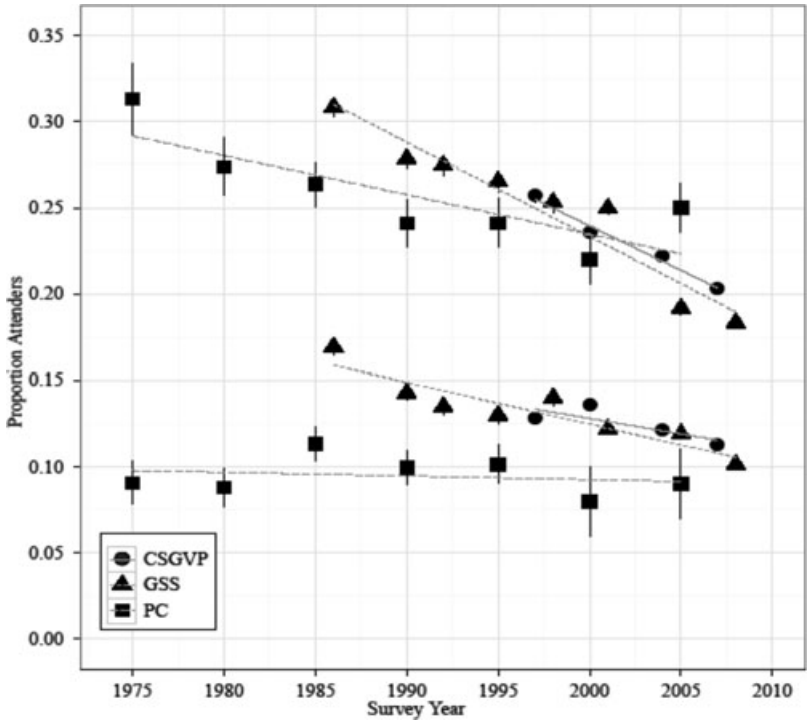
In terms of monthly attendance rates, the PCS consistently reports lower weekly attendance figures than the GSS. The CSGVP (unweighted) reports nearly identical monthly attendance numbers as the GSS. The question is, why the differences? In short, weights.

Issues with Weighting in the CSGVP and PCS

The data in all three of these surveys are weighted against the Census in an effort to make them nationally representative, particularly on sex category and region. These weighting factors cause problems, however, when used to analyze trends in religious participation. The weights do not correct for the oversampling of certain religious groups, leading to the artificial inflation of group size. For example, the CSGVP sample is biased towards those reporting no religion. When the weighting factor is applied this creates underestimates of church attendance rates.[3] The GSS achieved a relatively representative sample across the major religious categories (at least

[3] When the supplied weights are applied to the CSGVP data, this survey ends up reporting much lower rates of attendance than the GSS, despite similar sampling designs, question wording, and response rates. The source of this difference comes from the weighting factors in the CSGVP. In spite of having a nearly identical cumulative sample size as the GSS from 1998 to 2008, the CSGVP applies a much smaller weighting factor to religious attenders than the GSS (1,042 for the CSGVP vs. 1,279 for the GSS) whereas the weight applied to religious nonattenders is larger (1,508 vs. 1,386). For this reason it is better to use the unweighted values for religious service attendance when using the CSGVP. This artifact in the data has wider implications for interpreting the results of the CSGVP. The focus of this survey is on volunteering, and

Figure 1
Aggregate rates of weekly and monthly attendance based on various surveys: GSS, CSGVP, and PCS



Note: Error bars show standard errors for PCS. For the GSS and CSGVP, the error is contained by the size of the points.

when compared with the Census, which, although not perfect, is the best estimate of the religious preferences of Canadians available). For this reason, weights are utilized only in the GSS and not the CSGVP.

An Overabundance of Protestants in Project Canada

The differences between the PCS and the GSS also stem from a weighting problem. Assuming that the characteristics of the PCS stay relative stable from 1995 to 2005, the reason for this difference is clear (in 1985/1986 the PCS is a minimum of 2.7 points lower than the GSS, in 1990 2.6 points lower, in 1995 .9 points lower, in 2000, no difference, but in 2005, the PCS reports weekly attendance at least 4.9 points higher). Table 2 makes clear that compared to the GSS and the Census (20 percent long form; see Panel 2 of Table 2), the PCS samples contain an inordinate number of Protestants and fewer Catholics.[4] These differences persist even after survey weights are applied (PCS surveys were weighted by region, sex category, and age, but not religious affiliation [Bibby 1987]). This explains why Bibby's weekly attendance numbers

if church attendance is indicative of a pro-social orientation, then this survey may underrepresent the level of charitable giving and volunteering in Canada.

[4] One reviewer suggested that the Census may underestimate the number of Protestants. The Census allows people to write in their religion or religious denomination (or check no religion); some people write "Christian," but in fact are part of a Protestant or Catholic group. This practice did not become a major issue until the 2001 Census. Less than 2 percent of the 1991 Census sample could not be classified into Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, or no religion.

Table 2: Comparison of proportion of religious affiliation in Canada in the GSS, PCS, and Census; the Census asks for the religion of all members of the household every 10 years

	Unweighted		Weighted		
1	PCS 1985	GSS 1986	PCS 1985	GSS 1986	
Protestant	.513	.273	.453	.314	
Catholic	.382	.554	.416	.460	
Other religion	.023	.096	.103	.123	
No religion	.081	.077	.127	.103	
2	PCS 1990	GSS 1990	PCS 1990	GSS 1990	Census 1991
Protestant	.508	.379	.444	.305	.316
Catholic	.370	.394	.418	.460	.456
Other religion	.039	.112	.036	.112	.105
No religion	.083	.116	.102	.123	.123
3	PCS 1995	GSS 1995	PCS 1995	GSS 1995	
Protestant	.535	.272	.440	.261	
Catholic	.340	.470	.392	.449	
Other religion	.034	.119	.042	.137	
No religion	.091	.139	.126	.153	

start lower than the GSS and then drift higher. As I show below, outside of Québec, Catholics are the only group to experience declines in weekly attendance; Protestants show signs of increase. From 1986 to 2005, the ratio of Catholics to Protestants attending religious services weekly went from 1.95 to 0.73. Bibby's reported increase, which he argues signals the possible beginnings of a religious renaissance in Canada, are increases *only among Protestant churchgoers* (2004b, 2006).

This finding has broader implications for the interpretation of the PCS. When the PCS are used to explore religion in Canada, the samples either have to be reweighted to account for the Protestant oversample (which could introduce problems with regional, sex category, and age representativeness), or a proportion of Protestants must be randomly removed from the sample to bring the proportion Protestant in line with GSS and Census estimates.[5] These concerns add to the growing list of critiques of the PCS (cf. Bruce 2002; Thiessen and Dawson 2008).

Correlates of Religious Attendance

The goal here is not only to understand how religious attendance patterns are changing at the aggregate level, but also to understand how religious attendance patterns are changing within the major subgroups of the population. Looking at time trends in factors highly correlated with attendance and how the relationship between attendance and these correlates are changing provides insight into how and why we observe aggregate changes. This section of the article focuses on shifts in the population of Canada that influence the organization of religion: religious affiliation, region of residence, age, sex category, and various measures of socioeconomic status.

Table 3 presents a summary of the population characteristics of Canada in 1986 and 2008 and provides a glimpse of how Canadian society has changed over this 22-year period. The greatest changes are in (1) education (a 17-point increase in people with a college and/or university degree and a 17-point decline in those without a high school diploma), (2) average income (almost a $9,000 increase, in constant 2002 dollars), (3) the presence of children in the home (an 8-point

[5] Calibrating the later years of the PCS against the Census is difficult because the 2001 Census contains a large number of "Christian—not otherwise identifiable" responses.

Table 3: Comparison of population characteristics in 1986 and 2008 based on the General Social Survey

	GSS	
	1986	2008
Religious service attendance		
Weekly or more	30.8	18.3
Monthly	16.9	10.1
Less than monthly	52.3	71.6
Demographic characteristics		
Average age, years	40.0	43.2
Child at home	48.0	40.1
Female	51.0	50.7
Not married	36.7	37.4
Foreign born	18.3	20.9
Religion		
Protestant	31.4	30.1
Catholic	46.0	38.6
Other religion	12.3	7.9
No religion	10.3	23.0
Income		
Mean (constant 2002 dollars)	$49,049	$57,791
Education		
No high school	36.4	19.6
High school	55.1	54.9
University	8.3	25.5
Province of residence		
Newfoundland & Labrador	2.2	1.6
PEI	.5	.4
Nova Scotia	3.4	2.9
New Brunswick	2.8	2.3
Québec	26.2	23.5
Ontario	36.4	38.8
Manitoba	4.2	3.5
Saskatchewan	3.8	3.0
Alberta	9.0	10.4
British Columbia	11.5	13.6

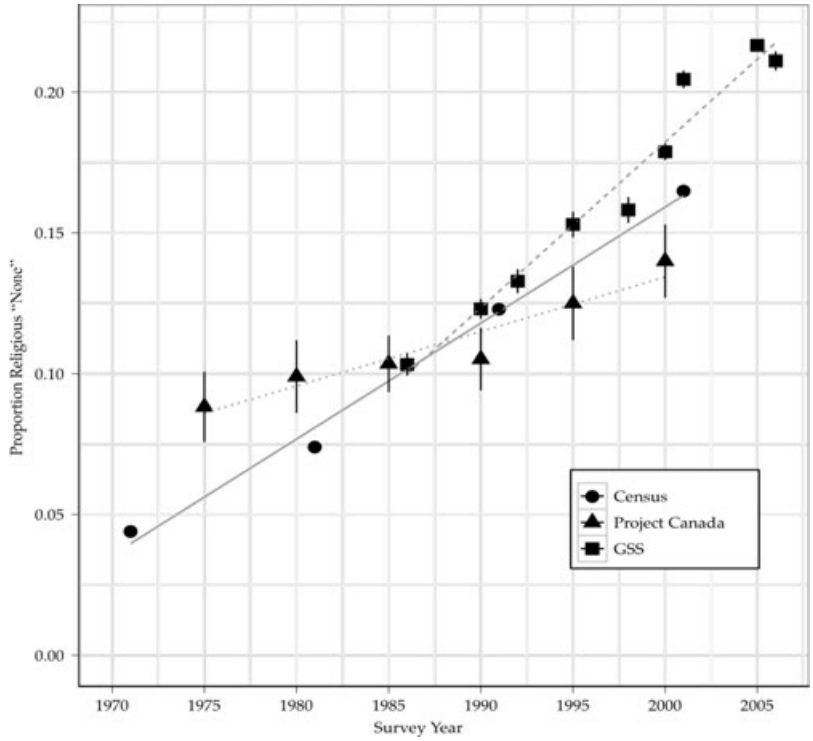
Note: *N* for the 2.7% Census = 801,055.

decline), (4) age (an increase of 3.2 years in the mean age), and (5) religious affiliation (a 13-point increase in those reporting no religious affiliation).

Changing Rates of Religious Affiliation

The number of people who report having no religious affiliation has risen dramatically in Canada since the 1970s, when the Census added a check box for "no religion" on the Census form (rather than only a write-in box). People who report "no religion" rarely attend religious services (across the GSS sample, 90 percent of people reporting "no religion" also report never attending religious services, 7 percent report attending yearly, and 3 percent report attending weekly or monthly). The number of religious nones in the population is plotted in Figure 2. The proportion

Figure 2
Proportion of people in Canada reporting "no religion" based on the GSS, PCS, and the Census (2.7 percent sample)

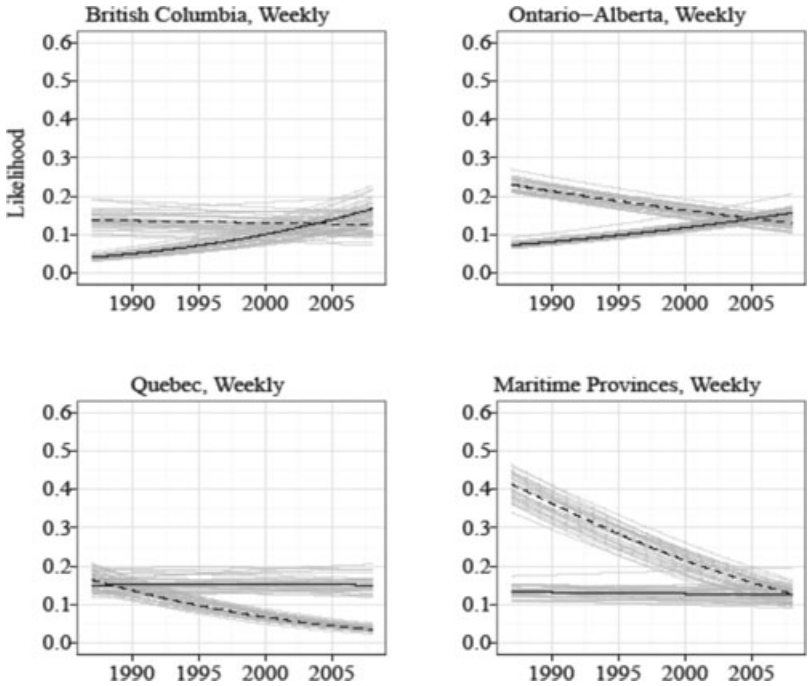


is based on data from the Census, the GSS, and the PCS. The proportion of religious nones has risen from about 11 percent in 1986 to about 21 percent in 2008. This is similar to the pattern found in the United States. Hout and Fischer (2002) report an increase from about 8 percent in 1986 to 15 percent in 2002; Kosmin (Kosmin and Keysar 2009) reports that nones comprised about 15 percent of the U.S. population in 2008. Given that the proportion of people who attend yearly has remained relatively constant in Canada (from 14 percent in 1986 to 16 percent in 2008), the category of religious none has grown at the expense of weekly and monthly attenders. Approximately half of the 19.3 percent drop in combined weekly and monthly attendance (from 47.7 percent in 1986 to 28.4 percent in 2008) is accounted for by the increase in the proportion of people reporting no religious affiliation. The rest of this decline is among people who claim a religious identity, most of whom are either Catholic (42 percent of the population) or Protestant (30 percent; less than 10 percent are from the "other" religious categories).

Regional Variation

Clark (2003), using GSS data, demonstrates that religious attendance in Canada can be broken into four major regional groups: the Maritimes, Québec, the Prairies and Ontario, and British Columbia. The trends are explored in Figure 3. Regression results are used to plot the probability of an "average" person attending religious services on a weekly basis, broken down by the four regional groupings. The patterns in the Maritimes and in Western/Central Canada were similar. British Columbia is plotted separately to demonstrate that patterns in British Columbia mirror closely those in the rest of Western/Central Canada, challenging the assertion that British Columbia is more nonreligious.

Figure 3
Weekly attendance at religious services by Protestant/Catholic affiliation and region; gray bars show posterior estimates of uncertainty



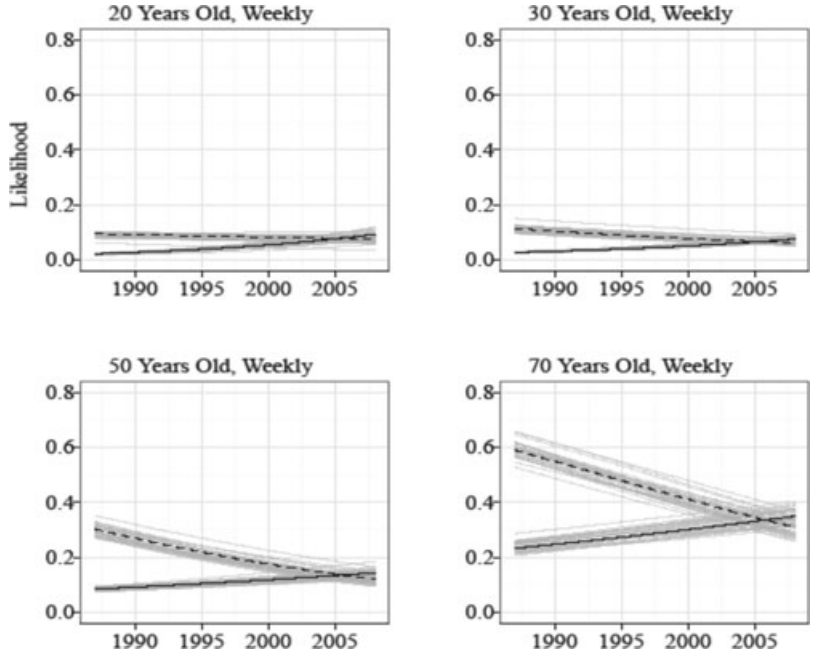
The most striking finding in Figure 3 is the convergence in rates of weekly attendance that has occurred among Catholics and Protestants outside of Québec. West of Québec, rates of weekly attendance for Protestants show signs of increase. The model predicts that the likelihood of attendance of the "average" Protestant has increased from .07 (.04 in BC) in 1986 to about .16 in 2008. Catholic weekly attendance has fallen sharply in all regions of Canada. The likelihood an "average" Catholic in Québec will attend church is now about .04, down from .41 in 1986. The Maritimes has also seen a dramatic drop in Catholic religious service attendance, with the likelihood an "average" person will attend weekly declining from .41 in 1986 to around .13 in 2008. Ontario has seen a smaller decline from .23 to .13. As is clear from this figure, the decline in religious attendance in Canada is largely a Catholic story. Hout and Greeley (1987) make a similar argument when they claim that the only group to experience an attendance decline in the United States is the Catholics, and only between 1968 and 1975. They connect this decline to Catholics rejecting official church teaching on sexuality. They find loyalty to the church prevented this decline from continuing past 1975. The continuing decline in Catholic attendance in Canada suggests that north of the border loyalty is not moderating the attendance slide.

The probability of monthly attendance has declined modestly in Québec and the Maritimes and for Catholics in the Prairies and Ontario (not shown). The trend for Protestants west of Québec is relatively flat. Because monthly figures show little change, the plot for never attenders is essentially the inverse of the weekly plots (also not shown).

Variation by Age

The effect of age on religious service attendance is highly nonlinear. Age squared, age cubed, the interaction between age and wave, and the interaction between age squared and wave were significant. In Figure 4, I plot the likelihood of this "average" person attending religious services

Figure 4
Weekly attendance by Protestant/Catholic and age



weekly at 20, 30, 50, and 70 years of age. Again, these data show that declining attendance is most evident among Catholics. For Protestants, there are signs of a modest increase. For example, a 20-year-old Protestant in 1986 had a .02 likelihood of attending services weekly (nearly zero for unmarried 20-year olds), which increased to about .09 (.06 for unmarried 20-year olds) in 2008. For 70-year-old Protestants, the likelihood has increased from .23 to .35. For 20-year-old Catholics, the likelihood has declined from .10 to about .08; for 70-year-old Catholics a decline from .59 to .31.

The other trend in these data is that as Protestants age, they are increasingly more likely to attend services. For instance, take a 20-year-old Protestant in 1986, with a likelihood of attending of .02. In 1996, a 30-year-old Protestant had the likelihood of attending of about .04; in 2006, a 40-year-old Protestant, .14. For Catholics there is little change from .10 to .09 to .12.

The age gap in weekly attendance has declined, but only for Catholics. In 1986, the likelihood for a 20-year old and a 70-year old to attend weekly were .10 and .59, respectively; in 2008, .08 and .30. For Protestants the gap has remained relatively constant at around 20 points.

Monthly trends have remained relatively stable over time, with small increases for Catholics in the older age categories. For never attenders, there is roughly an inverse relationship with weekly attendance. Yearly attendance is relatively flat (none of these results are shown). Once again, this suggests that the primary source of movement in these data is between the weekly attendance category and the never-attend category.

Changes in SES

The likelihood that the "average" person will attend religious services in 2008 is presented in Table 4, along with the change in probability when certain characteristics are modified. An "average" person has an approximate likelihood of attending services weekly of .132 (see Table 4, first row, "weekly" column). An average woman has the likelihood of attending weekly of .179 (see row labeled "female.") This is a .047 increase or a 36 percent change when considering the

Table 4: Probability of attending services for an "average" person in 2008 (province = Alberta—Ontario, male, high school graduate, married, no children at home, native born, Protestant, $40–100k income) and the probability when certain characteristics are changed; posterior estimates of the error are shown in parentheses

	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never
	.132	.131	.244	.493
	(.159–.116)	(.152–.109)	(.280–.221)	(.511–.461)
Change religious affiliation to:				
None	.005	.005	.005	.983
	(.012–.003)	(.012-.003)	(.011–.003)	(.987–.975)
Other	.075	.174	.318	.433
	(.103–.059)	(.218–.132)	(.393–.261)	(.467–.380)
Change demographic characteristics to:				
Female	.179	.151	.254	.416
	(.205–.156)	(.172–.122)	(.278–.228)	(.438–.398)
Not married	.096	.107	.226	.572
	(.114–.08)	(.132–.089)	(.269–.2)	(.597–.54)
Child at home	.178	.162	.237	.423
	(.201–.155)	(.187–.139)	(.258–.208)	(.455–.397)
Foreign born	.167	.128	.237	.468
	(.194–.144)	(.162–.106)	(.266–.207)	(.496–.439)
Change level of education to:				
University degree	.174	.151	.244	.431
	(.198–.154)	(.177–.124)	(.279–.2)	(.453–.404)
No high school	.131	.121	.251	.498
	(.158–.103)	(.146–.098)	(.277–.217)	(.528–.466)
Change income, constant 2002 dollars to:				
$100K+	.104	.110	.228	.558
	(.127–.083)	(.147–.089)	(.285–.196)	(.584–.528)
<$40k	.152	.129	.225	.494
	(.178–.130)	(.148–.109)	(.252–.201)	(.515–.476)

sex category of the respondent. The average immigrant has a likelihood of .167 (see row labeled foreign born). This is an increase of .035, or a 27 percent change compared to the average person. Change effects cannot be added together to find the probability that a foreign-born woman would attend (as the correlates and the dependent variables are related in a nonlinear fashion). However, we are able to estimate how religious attendance is related to these characteristics.

Sex category and a college or university degree have the most significant impact on weekly attendance. Women are more likely to attend religious services, as are those with postsecondary education, who are married, have children at home, and were born outside of Canada. For monthly attenders, the correlates are similar as for weekly attenders; for yearly attenders there is very little variation. For never attenders, the pattern is the reverse of weekly and monthly attenders (not shown).

Summary and Conclusions

On the aggregate level, weekly and monthly religious attendance decreased by about 20 percentage points from 1986 to 2008 in Canada. Approximately half of this decline is attributable to the increase in the number of people reporting no religion, the vast majority do not attend

religious services. When the remaining decline is broken down by age and affiliation, it is clear that this decrease is largely a story about Catholics and particularly about older Catholics. Outside of Québec, Catholics are the main group to see major declines in weekly attendance, particularly among older adults. Within Québec, religious attendance has declined for both Protestants and Catholics. Older Catholics and younger Catholics now more closely resemble each other on religious attendance. In years past, older people were far more likely to attend regularly.

For Protestants, the story is one of stability and even increase. Across age groups, Protestants in Canada are now more likely to attend religious services. Whether a portion of this increase is related to systematic bias introduced by declining response rates cannot be determined. Also, these data do not allow us to disaggregate mainline Protestants from evangelical Protestants. This makes it impossible to determine whether the stability in attendance among Protestants is because of stability across Protestant denominations, or if evangelical groups have compensated for declining rates of attendance in mainline groups. Finally, these results demonstrate that the aggregate decline in attendance rates is due to attrition from the weekly and monthly attendance categories into the never attend category.

The weighting factors in the CSGVP and PCS lead to biased estimates of aggregate attendance rates, suggesting that researchers must exercise caution when using data that are weighted against region, age, and sex category, but not religious affiliation. This can lead to erroneous conclusions about the aggregate characteristics of the population with respect to religious beliefs, behaviors, and belonging. Because the Canadian Census tracks religious affiliation data, it is relatively easy to check individual surveys against the population (although that is becoming harder because Census responses to questions about religious affiliation are becoming more difficult to classify). In the United States this is a more challenging problem because of the lack of religious affiliation data in the census. With regards to the specific surveys, the CSGVP is best used without the supplied weights; the best course of action for the PCS is to apply a more sophisticated weighting scheme that corrects for religious affiliation along with other population characteristics.

These results emphasize the strong influence that institutional, regional, and temporal factors exert on rates of religious attendance in Canada. Catholics in Canada, particularly in Québec where the church and provincial government have a poorly differentiated relationship, have seen the largest drop in participation rates. These results are at least suggestive of Philpott's (2007) connection of low state-church differentiation and a voluntaristic religious environment to declines in participation rates in religion. Future research should determine whether there are major differences in attendance among the various Protestant denominations; whether Protestant and Catholic decline in Québec is driven by similar underlying social dynamics; and whether the factors leading to the decline in Catholic attendance rates are similar in Québec as in other parts of the country.

These findings also challenge, to a certain extent, the notion of Canada as a highly secularized country. Several significant trends point to the erosion of the role of religion (at least institutionalized religion). Catholic participation has fallen sharply and religious nones have risen dramatically. However, for Protestants these data suggest that they are managing to hold their own. They are even showing signs of increase. In light of these findings, researchers should continue to refine current theories of secularization, considering the possibilities of a religious renaissance in Canada.

References

Abraham, Katherine, Sara Helms, and Stanley Presser. 2009. How social processes distort measurement: The impact of survey nonresponse on estimates of volunteer work in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology* 114(4):1129–65.

Bibby, Reginald W. 1987. *Fragmented gods: The poverty and potential of religion in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Irwin Publishers.

——. 2004a. *The Future Families Project: A survey of Canadian hopes and dreams*. Ottawa, ON: Vanier Institute of the Family. Technical report.

——. 2004b. *Restless churches: How Canada's churches can contribute to the emerging religious renaissance*. Kelowna, Canada: Woodlake Books.

——. 2006. *The boomer factor: What Canada's most famous generation is leaving behind*. Toronto, Canada: Bastian Books.

——. 2008. The perils of pioneering and prophecy: A response to Thiessen and Dawson. *Studies in Religion* 37(3–4):417–25.

Brenner, Philip S. 2011. Identity importance and the over reporting of religious service attendance: Multiple imputation of religious attendance using American Time Use Study and the General Social Survey. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(1):103–15.

Bruce, Steve. 2002. *God is dead: Secularization in the West*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Chaves, Mark and James C. Cavendish. 1994. More evidence on United-States Catholic-Church attendance—A research note. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33(4):376–81.

Clark, Warren. 1998. Religious observance, marriage and family. *Canadian Social Trends* 50:2–7.

——. 2000. Patterns of religious attendance. *Canadian Social Trends* 59:23–27.

——. 2003. Pockets of belief: Religious attendance patterns in Canada. *Canadian Social Trends* 68:2–5.

Clark, Warren and Grant Schellenberg. 2006. Who's religious? *Canadian Social Trends* 81:2–9.

Dillman, Don A., Roberta L. Sangster, John Tarnai, and Todd H. Rockwood. 1996. Understanding differences in people's answers to telephone and mail surveys. *New Directions for Evaluation* (70):45–61.

Fischer, Claude S. and Michael Hout. 2006. How Americans prayed: Religious diversity and change. In *Century of difference: How America changed in the last one hundred years*, pp.186–211. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Gelman, Andrew and Jennifer Hill. 2007. *Data analysis using regression and multilevel and hierarchical models*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Groves, Robert M., Eleanor Singer, and Amy Corning. 2000. Leverage-saliency theory of survey participation: Description and an illustration. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64(3):299–308.

Hadaway, C. Kirk and Penny L. Marler. 1997. Religion in a Canadian county: A case study of church attendance overreporting. Presented at a conference of the Association for the Sociology of Religion. Toronto, Canada.

Hadaway, C. Kirk, Penny L. Marler, and Mark Chaves. 1993. What the polls don't show: A closer look at U.S. church attendance. *American Sociological Review* 58(6):741–52.

Hout, Michael and Claude S. Fischer. 2002. Why more Americans have no religious preference: Politics and generations. *American Sociological Review* 67(2):165–90.

Hout, Michael and Andrew M. Greeley. 1987. The center doesn't hold: Church attendance in the United States, 1940–1984. *American Sociological Review* 52(3):325–45.

Kosmin, Barry and Ariela Keysar. 2009. *American nones: The profile of the no religion population*. Hartford, CT: Program on Public Values, Trinity College. Technical report.

Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Philpott, Daniel. 2007. Explaining the political ambivalence of religion. *American Political Science Review* 101(3):505–25.

Presser, Stanley and Mark Chaves. 2007. Is religious service attendance declining? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46(3):417–23.

Reimer, Samuel H. 1995. A look at cultural effects on religiosity: A comparison between the Unites States and Canada. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34(4):445–57.

——. 2003. *Evangelicals and the continental divide: The conservative Protestant subculture in Canada and the Unites States*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Statistics Canada. 2007. Income in Canada. Catalogue no. 75–202-X.

Steensland, Brian, Jerry Z. Park, Mark D. Regnerus, Lynn D. Robinson, W. Bradford Wilcox, and Robert D. Woodberry. 2000. The measure of American religion: Toward improving the state of the art. *Social Forces* 79(1):291–318.

Thiessen, Joel and Lorne Dawson. 2008. Is there a "renaissance" of religion in Canada? A critical look at Bibby and beyond. *Studies in Religion* 37(3–4):389–415.