



# Insecurity, demography, and religion

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**Synopsis:** Previous work suggested that rising existential security tends to bring declining emphasis on religion in post-industrial societies, an argument first presented earlier in *Sacred and Secular* (2004). This pattern—combined with the resurgence of religion in many developing countries—led to the emergence of a growing religiosity gap worldwide. Demographic trends, it was argued, have reinforced this gap, with the shrinking population living in secular Europe, while the growing population is located in developing societies. Nevertheless the data analyzed when *Sacred and Secular* was published was insufficient to address some important issues. It is now possible to present new evidence supporting this thesis. In this paper, Part I reviews the extensive body of literature in the social sciences examining how far feelings of existential security are associated with religiosity. Part II presents new data from the 2007 Gallup World Poll, demonstrating how the Lived Poverty Index, reflecting lack of many basic necessities of life, is a powerful predictor of adherence to religious values. Part III compares global trends in religiosity over time. The paper concludes that the dynamics of secularization are more complex than either the simple decline of religion that was proposed by some early sociologists, nor the universal resurgence of religion that has been suggested by many contemporary commentators. Instead, as the paper will demonstrate, the new evidence lends further support to the thesis that rising existential security tends to bring declining emphasis on religion in post-industrial societies.

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In recent years, debates about the role of religion have become increasingly prominent around the world. The persistence of high rates of church-going in the United States, the growing importance of liberation theology in Latin America, and religious conflict in the Balkans, demonstrated that religion had not faded as a potent force in many contemporary societies. That point was reinforced by the events of 9/11 in the United States, ethnic and religious tensions in Asia, and repeated outbursts of violent conflict between religious groups in Nigeria, Sudan, and India.<sup>1</sup> In the EU, as well, the rapid settlement of Muslim migrants into European societies has raised important challenges for how policymakers manage cultural diversity, maintain social cohesion, and accommodate minorities.<sup>2</sup> Events have intensified concerns about the integration of Muslim populations within Europe: (1) sharp ethnic tensions arose in The Netherlands after the murder of film-maker Theo van Gogh by Islamic extremists in November 2004; (2) heated protests broke out in many countries, following the September 2005 publication of the 'Muhammad' cartoons in Denmark: the cartoons were seen as blasphemous in Islamic countries, while demands for their suppression raised concerns about freedom of expression in Western countries; and (3) violent riots occurred a few months later in suburban Paris housing projects involving disaffected Franco-Maghrebi communities. Contemporary debates in Europe vividly demonstrate the continued relevance of understanding religious values, including arguments surrounding the role of visible religious symbols (headscarves) in public arenas in France, bans on the construction of new minarets in Switzerland, and the role of multiculturalism and *Leitkultur* in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

One widespread assumption is that these sorts of disparate events reflect a worldwide revival of religion.<sup>4</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke argue forcefully that the traditional secularization thesis has been discredited, and they are far from alone in holding this view.<sup>5</sup> This paper suggests that the picture is more complex and empirical evidence derived from scores of societies demonstrate growing religious divergence worldwide. On one hand, religious values and practices remain strong in developing societies, which have rapidly growing populations; and religion is making a comeback in many ex-communist countries, filling the vacuum left by the collapse of communism. But at the same time, secularization has been occurring in most advanced industrial societies, with dwindling populations. This erosion of church attendance, religious values, and beliefs has been most clearly observed in Scandinavia and Western Europe,<sup>6</sup> which has led some scholars to claim that Western Europe is the exception – not the United States.<sup>7</sup> The depth of change does vary across societies but the decline of religious values and practices is not confined to Western Europe, by any means. Similar developments are evident in comparable affluent post-industrial societies such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Canada; even in the U.S., a trend toward secularization is discernable, though partly masked by the large-scale immigration of people with traditional worldviews.<sup>8</sup>

New evidence presented in this study lends further support to the thesis that rising existential security tends to bring declining emphasis on religion in post-industrial societies, an argument first presented earlier in *Sacred and Secular*.<sup>9</sup> This—combined with the resurgence of religion in many developing countries—has led to the emergence of a growing religiosity gap worldwide. Demographic trends have reinforced this gap, with the shrinking population in secular Europe, and the growing population in developing societies. To develop these arguments, Part I of this paper reviews the extensive body of literature in diverse disciplines within the social sciences which lend plausibility to the theory linking existential security with religiosity. On this basis, Part II examines new evidence drawn from the 2007 Gallup World Poll, demonstrating how the Lived Poverty Index, reflecting lack of many basic necessities of life, is a powerful predictor of adherence to religious values. Using World Values Survey data, Part III then compares global trends over time. The paper concludes that the dynamics of secularization are more complex than either the simple decline of religion that was proposed by some early sociologists, nor the universal resurgence of religion that has been suggested by many

contemporary commentators. Instead, as the paper will demonstrate, the new evidence lends further support to the thesis that rising existential security tends to bring declining emphasis on religion in post-industrial societies.

### I: Previous studies on security and religiosity

The central thesis of *Sacred and Secular* argued that the emergence of high levels of existential security are expected to diminish anxiety and stress, promoting feelings of psychological well-being-- which, in turn, reduce the importance of *religious values* in people's lives. Although this hypothesis has been controversial, it can be argued that virtually all of the world's major *transcendent* religions provide reassurance that, even though the individual alone can't understand or predict what lies ahead, a higher power will ensure that things work out. This belief reduces stress and anxiety, enabling people to focus on coping with their immediate problems. Under conditions of insecurity, people have a powerful need to see authority as both strong and benevolent-- even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Through strengthening feelings of security, the processes of societal modernization have significant consequences for religiosity; the conditions of growing security that usually accompany the transition from agrarian to industrial societies, and then into postindustrial societies, tends to reduce the salience of religion in people's lives. These effects operate at both societal-level (socio-tropic) and at personal level (ego-tropic), although we suspect that the former is more important. The greater social protection, longevity and health found in wealthy postindustrial societies and welfare states mean that fewer people in these societies regard traditional spiritual values as vital to their lives, or to the lives of their community. This does not mean that all forms of religion necessarily disappear as societies develop; residual and symbolic elements often remain, such as formal adherence to religious identities and rituals, even when their substantive meaning has faded away. For example, the role of the church in marriage and funeral ceremonies remains common, even in highly secular societies. Similarly, in Britain, France and Denmark, people may well still provide a religious denomination on official census forms and household surveys, derived from their childhood upbringing even after they have given up active churchgoing. But we expect that people living in secure advanced industrial societies tend to become less obedient to traditional religious leaders and institutions, and place less importance on conventional religious practices.

What evidence supports these claims? A systematic review of the literature shows that much social psychological research generally endorses the idea that religiosity helps individuals cope with anxiety arising from uncontrollable life events, such as those caused by experience of a major health crisis. Thus, a comprehensive review of the scientific literature investigating to what extent religion provided effective coping mechanism for life stresses, based on evidence from survey or experimental methods, found that three-quarters of all such studies confirmed a relationship.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, another meta-analysis of almost fifty published studies concluded that people often turn to religion when coping with stressful events, such as severe ill-health and death, and this strategy is generally effective in reducing anxiety and psychological well-being.<sup>11</sup> But the evidence covers a limited scope: the bulk of these social psychological studies examined religiosity in the United States predominately Roman Catholic and Protestant communities in Western Europe, without examining the full range of societies and religions. This matters because the effects of religion on well-being may prove contextual; for example, its effect on bitterly divided religious communities in countries emerging from deep-rooted conflict might exacerbate rather than alleviate anxiety and stress.<sup>12</sup> The effects of religion on psychological well-being could also vary by type of faith.<sup>13</sup> Further systematic cross-national evidence is therefore needed to determine whether generalizations about the effects of religiosity on psychological well-being hold across diverse types of societies and religions.

Comparative studies have reported findings that support the existential security theory advanced in *Sacred and Secular*. Hence Ruiter and Tubergen used multilevel analysis to examine contextual and individual factors contributing towards religious attendance in sixty countries. The study concluded that religious attendance is strongly affected by personal and societal insecurities. In particular, financial insecurities at the individual level (measured by household income and unemployment status) boost religious attendance.<sup>14</sup> Moreover Ruiter and Tubergen also found that both rich and poor people were far more likely to attend religious meetings if they lived in societies with marked income inequalities (measured by the Gini coefficient) and in those with lower per capita levels of welfare spending (measured as a percentage of GDP). A more modest effect is also produced by growing up in times of war. "In summary, the results of our study suggest that personal and societal insecurities play a critical role in explaining cross-national variation in religious attendance."<sup>15</sup> Another study by Gill and Lundsgaarde examined the macro-level link between welfare state spending and religious attendance in almost two dozen nations. The results also confirmed the existence of a strong negative relationship, with higher welfare being linked to lower church attendance, even after controlling for per capita GDP.<sup>16</sup> Gill and Lundsgaarde concluded that the most secure European welfare states with well-developed social safety-nets, exemplified by Scandinavian societies, tend to have the emptiest churches.

Recent years have also seen a resurgence of interest in understanding the individual-level links between values and religiosity. Schwartz and Huisman examined values in four Western societies, reporting that those who are more committed to religion attribute relatively high importance to avoiding uncertainty and risk.<sup>17</sup> In particular, religiosity was found to be positively linked with values that emphasize transcendence, social order, and protection against uncertainty-- and negatively with values that emphasize self-indulgence and favor intellectual or emotional openness to change. The Schwartz and Huisman article generated many similar studies by other scholars seeking to replicate the findings among several religious sub-populations. The results from a meta-analysis of the relationship between values and religiosity in fifteen countries were summarized by Saroglu, Delpierre, and Dernelle, who concluded that religious people tend to favor values that promote conservation of social and individual order (including tradition, conformity, and security) and, conversely, to dislike values that promote openness to change and autonomy.<sup>18</sup> Many effects were constant across different religious denominations (Christians, Jews, and Muslims) and cultures, but the magnitude of the effects depended on the socio-economic development of the countries concerned. Empirical analysis by another scholar finds strong evidence in support of our thesis; Zuckerman tested the hypothesis that religious belief would decline in economically developed countries having high levels of existential security, including income security (income equality and redistribution via welfare states) and various health indicators. Regression analyses of data from 137 countries that controlled for the effects of Communism and Islamic religion, indicated that religious belief declines as existential security increases, as predicted by our thesis.<sup>19</sup>

## **II: New evidence of experiential security: the Lived Poverty Index**

The empirical analysis presented in the first edition of *Sacred and Secular* also demonstrated strong correlations between religiosity and national-level indicators of social and economic security, such as health and wealth. But the evidence then available did not establish demonstrate a *direct* individual-level link between religiosity and measures of existential insecurity.<sup>20</sup> What additional evidence would provide further confirmation of the relationship between existential security and religiosity?

It is now possible to analyze new data which only became available after the 1st edition of *Sacred and Secular* was published. The 2007 Gallup World Poll (GWP) provides data on living standards, social deprivation, exposure to societal risks, and religiosity among the publics living in 132 societies worldwide.<sup>21</sup> The GWP survey is conducted using probability-based nationally-representative samples of at least 1000 adult respondents in each country, using a standard set of core questions. The total sample included 142,671 respondents. In developing societies, Gallup use face-to-face interviews, and they employ telephone interviews in countries where telephone coverage reaches 80% of the population. Two items contained in the Gallup World Poll are particularly useful to measure religiosity. Hence religious values are monitored by: *"Is religion an important part of your daily life?"* (measured as a dichotomous 'yes/no' response). Since this does not refer to any specific concept, meaning, or definition of 'religion', or to any particular practices and beliefs, this item is the most suitable for cross-faith comparisons. In addition, religious practices are monitored by Gallup: *"Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?"* (also measured as a dichotomous 'yes/no' response). This is the conventional measure of religious participation used in studies of religions involving communal forms of worship in churches, temples, synagogues and mosques, although it is less useful when comparing types of faith that do not follow these collective practices, such as Confucian and Shinto religions.

One way to operationalize the experience of insecurity is by monitoring vulnerability to multiple risks and forms of social deprivation. Since cash income is only a poor proxy, especially in subsistence economies, the Afro-Barometer pioneered the use of a Lived Poverty scale which measures the extent to which people have been forced to go without basic necessities during the past year.<sup>22</sup> To construct a similar objective scale, the Gallup World Poll contains eight items that ask respondents to report to what extent they had enough money to buy food or shelter in the previous year, how well they are satisfied with their standard of living and state of health, whether their home has basic facilities such as running water, electricity and a landline telephone, and whether they have experienced health problems.<sup>23</sup> These multidimensional items were summed and proved to form a consistent scale of Lived Poverty (Cronbach's Alpha =0.70), demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. The index is also strongly correlated at macro-level with both per capita GDP (in PPP) (Pearson R =0.884, P .000 N = 120) and the UNDP Human Development Index (R=0.673 P.000 N.123), suggesting high levels of external validity.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

The scatter-plots presented in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the macro-level relationship between the Lived Poverty index and the distribution of religious values and practices across the 128 nations where complete data is available, without any prior controls. The results confirm that the lived poverty index was indeed strongly correlated with religious values (R=0.541 P.000 N.128); hence some of the poorest developing societies in Africa, such as Chad, Rwanda and Mali, gave the highest priority to religious values. By contrast, some of the most affluent post-industrial societies in the world, led by Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Britain, showed the most secular values. But it was not only West European and Scandinavian societies that fell into this category, as some critics of the secularization thesis have claimed. Australia, New Zealand and Canada also showed strongly secular values, as did many of the relatively prosperous Asian societies such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. Many post-Communist states with relatively high levels of lived poverty were also located in this secular quadrant. Similarly, many moderate-income countries with low levels of lived poverty, are also highly religious in their values, notably the oil-rich Gulf states and other predominately Muslim countries such as Lebanon and Algeria.

The comparison with religious practices, illustrated in Figure 2, shows a similar and almost equally strong relationship; thus without any controls, the lived poverty index proved to be a significant predictor of participation in religious services ( $R=.497$ ,  $P=.000$ ,  $N.127$ ). Again the least developed nations, such as Chad, Uganda, Togo, and Rwanda, clustered together in the top right-hand quadrant, containing the poorest and most religious countries. By contrast, affluent Scandinavian and West European Protestant societies reported the lowest church-attendance, along with Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The U.S. is generally viewed as a deviant case, in that it is a rich country with higher church attendance than other affluent societies. But in a broader comparative perspective provided here, U.S. levels of religious participation are much closer to those found in Italy, Switzerland and Portugal than to many other countries with low levels of economic development.

[Figures 3 about here]

Another way to examine the Gallup data is to consider the way in that both religious values and practices rise steadily across the Lived Poverty index, as shown in Figure 3, where the trends show a remarkably uniform pattern. To make sense of these patterns, they suggest that roughly nine out of ten people worldwide who lack the most basic necessities of life report that religion is an important part of their daily lives, but this proportion drops to just six out of ten people who have these basic needs met. Similar disparities can be observed for at least weekly religious participation, although behavioral indicators are always lower than the expression of religious values.

[Table 1 about here]

Yet any correlations could always prove spurious. To subject these descriptive observations to more rigorous individual-level analysis, we can use binary logistic regression models where the Lived Poverty index is regressed on both religious values and practices (coded 0/1), controlling parsimoniously for some of the most common demographic characteristics that have commonly been found to predict religiosity, namely age and gender. It is well established that women usually tend to be more religious, as do more elderly populations. Further controls for macro-level economic development (per capita GDP or HDI) and micro-level socioeconomic status were considered but rejected for inclusion due to issues of multi-collinearity, since the aggregate factors and individual-level measures of education and income were strong correlated with the Lived Poverty index. The models were run for 120 countries where data was available in the Gallup World Poll, as well as for the U.S. sample, to see whether similar patterns held, as predicted, in the American case as well. The results of the analysis of the pooled model covering all countries confirmed the expected gender effects, where women proved more religious than men (although the effect on church-going in the US case remained statistically insignificant). We see the gender gap as a natural extension of the security thesis, since women tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to problems of poverty arising from child-care, old age and lower wages, as well as other security threats arising for victims from violence. The age profile in the pooled model for all countries proved more unexpected, with older generations in America more religious by both indicators, although younger populations are more religious in the pooled model covering all 120 nations. After controlling for these demographic characteristics, the results in Table 1 demonstrate that the Lived Poverty Index remained strong and statistically significant as a predictor of religious values and practices, in the pooled model for all countries, as well as in just the American sample.

In this respect, the United States is not an outlier. Figure 4 shows the descriptive relationship in this specific case, where the most deprived segments of American society (lacking many essentials on the Lived Poverty index) display both the strongest religious values and practices. As also predicted, the effects of the experience of lived poverty were greater on religious *values* than on religious *practices*:

many other factors, such as social affiliation and social networking, contribute towards church attendance or participation in services at mosques or temples. But the linkage between existential security and religious *values* is relatively strong and consistent. Far from being an anomaly, the existential security thesis applies to the U.S. as well as to most other societies. Hence, among the poorest segments of American society almost everyone reports that religion is important to their lives, but among the most affluent segment, only six out of ten do so. Church-going is less strongly linked with existential security, but nevertheless the poorest group of Americans, as measured by the Lived Poverty index, are also the most likely to attend religious services. Milanovic demonstrates that the U.S. has a remarkably skewed income distribution compared with most OECD countries. These sharp inequalities in American society help to explain its relatively high religiosity.<sup>24</sup> Household income inequality, representing disposable income after taxes and transfers, is measured by the Gini coefficient, ranging from 0 (the most equal) to 1.0 (the most unequal).<sup>25</sup> In the mid-2000s, for example, the OECD estimates that after taking account of taxes and transfers, the United States had a Gini coefficient of 0.38, (and 0.35 in both Italy and Ireland) compared with 0.23 for secular Sweden and Denmark, 0.27 for the Netherlands, and 0.28 for France.<sup>26</sup>

[Figures 4 and 5 about here]

It could be suggested that the patterns observed so far might apply only to Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian societies, but not to other religions.<sup>27</sup> But, as Figure 5 indicates, the Lived Poverty Index predicts religious values across nearly all religions, including Muslims as well as Catholics, Buddhists and Confucian/Taoists, as well as Protestants and those of Orthodox faith. Across many comparisons, using data from both the Gallup World Poll survey and the World Values Survey-- and across scores of nations and many types of faith, the findings are consistent and robust. The most vulnerable populations in the world -- those who lack the basic necessities of life such as food, running water and electricity -- are far more likely than others to feel that religion is important in their lives; and to participate more often in religious practices.

#### *Religious and security values*

It might still be argued that 'lived poverty', while providing a more direct measure of human vulnerability and insecurity than simple measures of cash income or wealth, still does not directly capture people's subjective orientations toward existential threats. Do people believe that they live in a predictable and safe environment, or do they feel that survival is uncertain? Direct evidence of people's perceptions of the importance of security is available from survey items monitoring security and risk values. Updating our previous analysis, we can now draw on the fifth wave of the World Values Survey, covering 55 countries, which was conducted in 2005-2007.<sup>28</sup> The survey included a question about emphasis on security as part of the Schwartz value scales.<sup>29</sup> WVS respondents were asked: "*Now I will briefly describe some people. Using this card, would you please indicate for each description whether that person is very much like you, like you, somewhat like you, not like you, or not at all like you? ... V82: Living in secure surroundings is important to this person; to avoid anything that might be dangerous.*"

The results from the 55 nations included in the fifth wave of the WVS are presented visually in Figure 6. They show the remarkably linear relationship; religious values (monitored by the 10-point importance of God scale) rise sharply with emphasis on security; those who give the highest priority to living in secure surroundings and avoiding danger, view religion as most important in their lives. Conversely, those who feel that security is unimportant are the least likely to see religion as important in their lives.

[Figures 6 about here]

This relationship could be spurious if it simply reflects the fact that both religiosity and emphasis on security are strongly correlated with some other characteristic. For example, women tend to be more religious than men, and older groups are more religious than younger people, and both groups could quite plausibly also feel more vulnerable to threats. To control for such factors, multilevel models were run predicting the impact of security values both on religious values and practices, controlling for the macro-level UNDP Human Development Index, as well as the standard social variables that are commonly associated with religiosity (age, sex, income, education, and work status). The data was available for 44 societies in the 5<sup>th</sup> wave of the WVS. Multilevel models are a useful technique to deal with both macro- and individual-level data. As is common in multilevel modeling techniques, all independent variables were first standardized around the mean (Z-scores), which also means that the relative strength of the estimated coefficients can be compared with each other. Similar models were run separately for the United States using OLS regression analysis.

[Table 2 about here]

The results presented in Table 2 confirm that in the pooled models for all countries, even after including all these controls, the emphasis on security values was strongly linked with religious values; individuals who thought that it was important to live in secure surroundings and avoid risks were far more likely than others to feel that religion was also significant to their lives. Moreover, at the macro-level, the Human Development Index was a very strong and significant predictor of religiosity, with higher levels of human development predicting more secular values. The control variables all behaved as expected, so that the elderly, women, lower-educated and lower-income groups, and those not in the paid work force, all placed more emphasis on religion, controlling for other factors. Similar patterns can be observed in the pooled sample for the effects of security values and human development on religious *practices*, although security values are weaker predictors of this behavior than of values, while the effects of education become insignificant, and the income variable reverses.

Moreover the indicators of both religious values and religious behavior are not simply correlated with experience of lived poverty; as shown in Table 3, they are also strongly related to a range of societal-level demographic indices. Hence there is a robust and consistent pattern; the most religious societies (defined by both the importance of religion and attendance at religious services in the 2007 Gallup World Poll) are also usually the ones which have the highest fertility rates for women, the greatest estimated population growth, and the highest proportion of young people in the total population. The global contrasts are stark; hence in some of the world's most affluent societies, such as Sweden, Japan and Russia, the average fertility rate for women is less than two, generating population decline. By contrast, in countries such as Chad, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, the average fertility rate for women is around six. Patterns of longevity dampen overall population growth in the poorest societies, but nevertheless the general tendency is for populations to grow most in the developing world, which is also the most religious, and to fall in more secular post-industrial societies.

### III: A Global Resurgence of Religious Values?

Lastly, what are the trends over time elsewhere in the world? Early versions of modernization theory, from Marx to Weber, held that religious beliefs were dying out and would disappear with the spread of education and scientific knowledge. More recently, it has become apparent that religion continues to play a prominent role, leading to claims of a "Global Resurgence of Religion".<sup>30</sup> The truth lies between these two extremes. When examined in the global longitudinal perspective provided by the World Values Survey, it becomes evident that religion has indeed become more important in many countries—but it has continued to decline in many others.

[Figure 7 about here]

Figure 7 shows the extent to which the publics of given countries have come to emphasize religion more (or less) strongly since 1981. The graph shows the difference between each country's mean score on the "Importance of God" scale in the earliest and latest available survey for each country from which we have at least two surveys spanning a substantial period of time (the average number of surveys per country is 3.7 and the mean time span is seventeen years). For example, the mean score of the Bulgarian public (at the top of the graph) increased from 3.56 in the 1990 survey to 5.70 in the 2006 survey—a gain of more than two points on the ten-point scale. Russia rose from 4.00 in 1990 to 6.02 in 2006. And China started just above the bottom of the scale (point 1.0) in 1990, with a score of 1.62, but showed a large proportional gain, rising to 3.58 in 2007.

We do not find a global resurgence of religion, as some observers have claimed. Most high-income countries show *declining* emphasis on religion. Thus the publics of Norway, Spain, Northern Ireland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, East Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark and Australia all shifted toward saying that God was *less* important in their lives from the earliest available survey to the latest one.

But many countries show increases, and all six of those showing the greatest gains are ex-communist countries: Bulgaria, Russia, China, Belarus, Serbia, and Romania. Overall, the publics of 13 of the 15 ex-communist countries for which we have a substantial time series, increased their emphasis on religion. The sharp drop in economic, physical and psychological security experienced by ex-communist societies is what we suspect caused the resurgence of religion in most ex-communist countries.<sup>31</sup> This development has multiple components: the collapse of the communist ideology was a central part of this, leaving people disoriented and psychologically insecure and opening an ideological vacuum that, for many people, fills. Although religion has long been weak in these countries, Marxist ideology once filled the function of a religion, providing psychological security, predictability, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life for many people. It is impossible to understand the rise to power of communist movements in these countries without recognizing the motivating power that the communist worldview once had. Many thousands of true believers sacrificed their lives for the communist cause during the Russian revolution and civil war, during the Long March in China, and during the Vietnam War. For many decades, communism seemed to be the wave of the future. The belief that they were building a better society may have given a sense of purpose to the lives of many people. But during the 1970s and 1980s, Marxist ideology began losing credibility; fewer and fewer people believed that communist regimes were building an ideal society that represented the wave of the future. By 1990 communism was generally discredited, and communist regimes collapsed throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In China and Vietnam, hard-line communist regimes were replaced by more pragmatic communist regimes that have become increasingly market-oriented. In the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the collapse of communist regimes was accompanied by severe economic and social decline which left an ideological vacuum everywhere.

Moreover other factors contributing to sharply rising levels of insecurity experienced in many post-communist societies have been the social disruption caused by the transition to liberal market economies in the early-1990s, accompanied by drastic cuts in the welfare state, rising unemployment, and falling standards of living for many social sectors. Mean levels of growth declined sharply in the early-1990s before recovering, at least in some countries, as measured by per capita GDP, but accompanied by higher inequalities of income and wealth. The most vulnerable populations, such as the low-skilled unemployed, the retired and the disabled, lost out heavily from the transition to market economies.<sup>32</sup> In Bulgaria, for example, per capita GDP fell every year from 1990 to 1994, before starting

to recover, moving solidly into the positive category only from 2000 onwards, with unemployment only falling back into the single digits five years later. Similar trends were evident in Russia. The economic shocks were even greater in the early-1990s, with growth plummeting, in Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. Not surprisingly, some of the post-Communist countries which made the most successful economic transitions, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and East Germany, are also the ones where Figure 7 shows that religiosity eroded.

Lastly the liberalization of expression and religious freedom also probably contributed towards the more open expression of religious values and practices, particularly in the Chinese case. We have already argued that religiosity is influenced in part by how states regulate religious organizations and how far they respect rights to freedom of worship. In the past, communist regimes systematically repressed religion-- but during the last decade, religion has been making a comeback. It has not recruited equally from all strata: it has tended to attract the *least* happy people—those who feel the greatest need for security, reassurance, predictability, and social support. Inglehart examines the relationship between subjective well-being and religion in countries at different levels of economic development.<sup>33</sup> In the overwhelming majority of countries, he finds a positive correlation: religious people tend to be happier than those who are not. Virtually all of the high-income countries show positive correlations between religion and subjective well-being. But he finds weak or negative correlations between religiosity and subjective well-being in most ex-communist countries. It seems that in these countries, a disproportionate share of those who emphasize religion are new recruits who have been drawn to religion because they are unhappy and disoriented. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet successor states, the free practice of religion has emerged only since 1989-1991, and is only emerging now in China and Vietnam. In recent years, religion has been growing rapidly in many ex-communist countries. In part, this reflects a recent influx of relatively unhappy newcomers, seeking to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the collapse of communist ideology. This tends to create a negative correlation between religion and happiness in these countries. Accordingly, emphasis on religion increased most in countries with relatively *low* levels of happiness ( $r = 0.5$ ).

Religious values have indeed become more important in many countries—but this has continued to decline in salience in many others. And one finds a clear pattern underlying these changes. As Figure 7 demonstrates, in recent decades religion has become increasingly important in two types of countries: (1) developing countries and (2) ex-communist societies, where the collapse of communism has opened up new inequalities and insecurities, especially for vulnerable populations such as older women dependent upon state benefits. But this resurgence of religious values is by no means universal. Among the publics of high-income countries—who have grown up with high levels of existential security—the importance of religious values is low and has continued to decline.

### **Conclusions and implications**

In recent decades public interest in religious contrasts around the world has grown tremendously, and the debate about secularization theory and its recent critiques has become increasingly relevant to contemporary concerns. The idea of secularization has a long and distinguished history in the social sciences with many seminal thinkers arguing that religiosity was declining throughout Western societies. Yet the precise reasons for this erosion of spirituality were never entirely clear. Weber attributed secularization to the spread of education and scientific knowledge; our own interpretation emphasizes the role of existential security. But by the mid-1960s the claim that religion was in a state of terminal decline, rested on flimsy evidence. Its proponents cited empirical evidence of declining churchgoing in

Western Europe, and a handful of case studies that fit the thesis, rather than a systematic examination of empirical evidence from many countries.<sup>34</sup>

It was not surprising, therefore, that during the last decade American sociologists mounted a sustained counterattack on the basic premises of secularization theory.<sup>35</sup> This critique threw many former proponents on the defensive; Peter Berger recanted former claims, noting that many exceptions had accumulated that appeared to challenge the basic prophesies of Weber and Durkheim—pointing to the continuing vitality of the Christian Right in the United States, the evangelical revival in Latin America, the new freedom of religion in post-Communist Europe, the reported resurgence of Islam in the Middle East, or evidence that religious practices and beliefs continued to thrive throughout most of Africa and Asia.<sup>36</sup> Some of these reported phenomena may have been over-stated, but the simplistic assumption that religion was everywhere in decline, common in earlier decades, had become implausible to even the casual observer. Too many counter-examples existed around the world.

The religious market argument sought to reconstruct our thinking about the primary drivers in religious faith, turning attention away from long-term sociological trends in the mass public's demand for spiritual faith, and emphasizing instead institutional factors affecting the supply of religion, including the role of church leaders and organizations, and the role of the state in maintaining established religions or restrictions on freedom of worship for certain faiths.<sup>37</sup> The attempt to reconstruct the early twentieth century sociology of religion was long overdue but the religious market theory was, we believe, fundamentally mistaken in trying to generalize from the distinctive American experience to the world as a whole. It is clear that the U.S. public remains far more religious than the publics of most other postindustrial societies, but we believe that this largely reflects other causes than those cited by religious market theory.

The results presented in this study provide further support for the basic argument presented in the first edition of *Sacred and Secular*. New evidence confirms the finding that, with rising levels of existential security, the publics of virtually all advanced industrial societies tend to move toward more secular orientations. Earlier perceptions of this process gave rise to the mistaken assumption that religion was disappearing. "God is dead," proclaimed Nietzsche more than a century ago. A massive body of empirical evidence indicates that he was wrong. As a result of contrasting demographic trends in rich and poor countries, the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before -- and they constitute a growing proportion of the world's population. The social and political divisions between those with religious and secular values, beliefs and identities are thus growing -- contributing to many of the tensions observed today in contemporary Europe. But it would be mistaken to conclude that this reflects the fact that religiosity is growing stronger in secure high-income societies. What has happened is that growing acceptance of divorce, abortion, homosexuality, gender equality and the spread of secular norms, have led to the political mobilization of those with traditional religious orientations. But this does not indicate that fundamentalists are becoming more numerous in high-income societies. Quite the contrary, precisely because their numbers are declining, people with traditional religious values see key religious norms as eroding-- and they have become more active, making religious issues increasingly salient. Conversely, in the long term, if high levels of existential security are conducive to secularization, then expanding human security through sustainable development around the world, and economic equality within societies, may contribute to reducing tensions over religious values.

**Table 1: Individual-level models predicting religious values and practices**

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

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

**Source:** Gallup World Poll 2007

**Table 2: Models predicting religious values and practices**

	All nations		U.S. only	
	Religious values (i)	Religious practices (ii)	Religious values (i)	Religious practices (ii)
<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</b>				
<b>Demographic controls</b>				
Age (in years)	<b>.249***</b> (.010)	<b>.218***</b> (.007)	<b>.295***</b> (.047)	<b>.224***</b> (.040)
Sex(male=1)	<b>.252***</b> (.009)	<b>.156***</b> (.007)	<b>.298***</b> (.048)	<b>.216***</b> (.042)
Income	<b>-.080***</b> .010	<b>.029***</b> (.007)	<b>-.136**</b> (.051)	.048 (.044)
Education	<b>-.031**</b> (.011)	.004 (.008)	<b>-.176**</b> (.056)	<b>.168***</b> (.048)
Work status	<b>-.079***</b> (.010)	<b>-.027**</b> (.007)	.025 (.054)	.011 (.046)
<b>Values</b>				
Importance of living securely	<b>.239***</b> (.010)	<b>.043***</b> (.007)	<b>.372***</b> (.046)	<b>.142***</b> (.040)
<b>MACRO-LEVEL</b>				
Human Development Index, 2005	<b>-.938***</b> (.191)	<b>-.827***</b> (.135)		
<b>Constant (intercept)</b>				
	<b>7.15</b>	<b>3.59</b>	<b>8.37</b>	<b>4.25</b>
Schwartz BIC	278,024	238,376		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>			.08	.038
N. respondents	61,396	61,404	2,675	2,696
N. nations	44	44	1	1

**Note:** The 'all nations' models use REML multi-level regression analysis, suitable for hierarchical data, including the beta coefficient, (the standard error below in parenthesis), and the significance. The U.S. models use OLS regression analysis, suitable for individual-level data, including the unstandardized beta coefficients. All independent variables were standardized using mean centering (z-scores). P.\*=.05 \*\*=.01 \*\*\*=.001. Significant coefficients are highlighted in **bold**. The dependent variables are (i) Religious values: *the 10-point 'importance of God' scale* (ii) Religious practices: *Frequency of attending religious services scale*.

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005-2007.

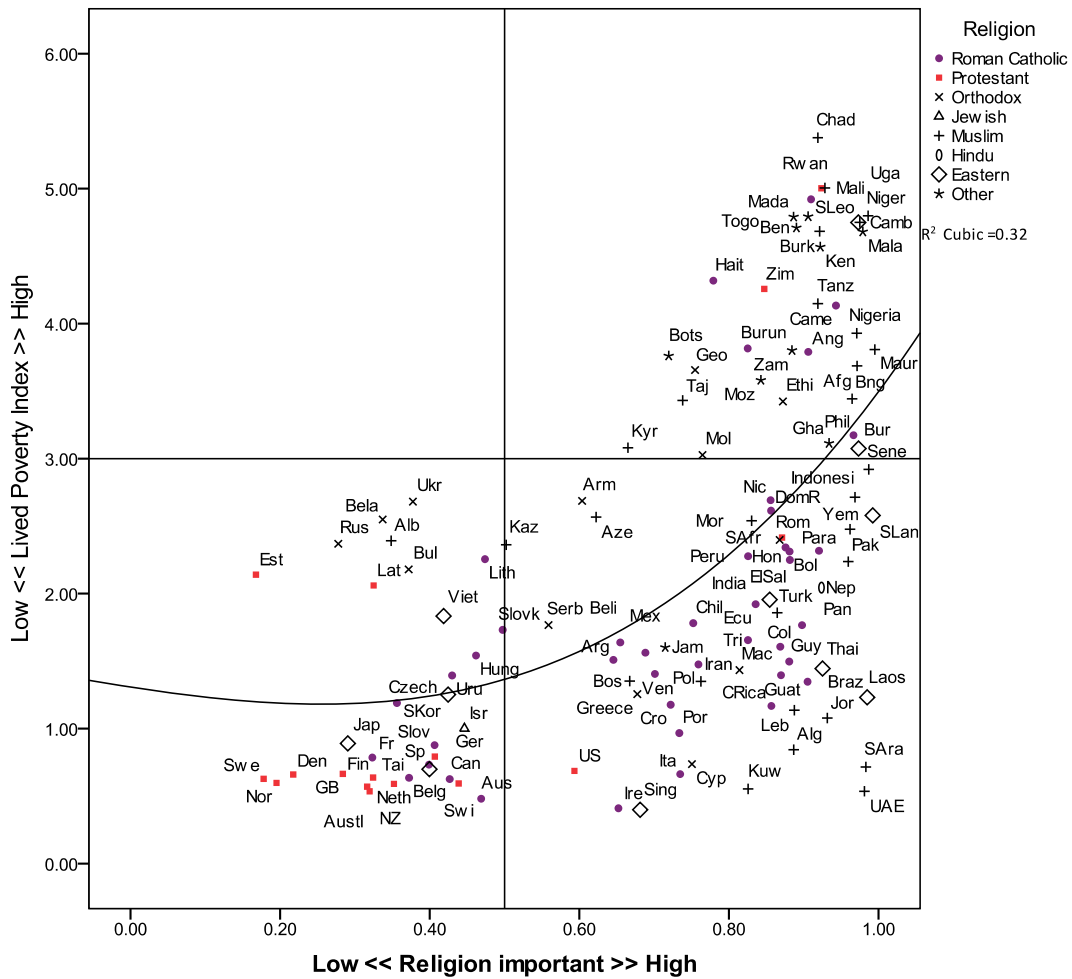
**Table 3: Demographic indices and religion**

	Importance of religion (Gallup poll)	Attendance at religious services (Gallup poll)	N of countries
Total fertility rate per woman, 2005 (World Bank)	.560 **	.553 **	122
Total fertility rate per woman, 2000 (World Bank)	.680 **	.699 **	124
Annual population growth rate 2002-2015 (UNDP)	.698 **	.687 **	120
Annual population growth rate 1975-2002 (UNDP)	.713 **	.694 **	125
Population ages 0-14 (% of total) 2006 (World Bank 2007)	.733 **	.712 **	125
Lived poverty index (Gallup Poll)	.541 **	.497 **	128

**Note:** All correlations are significant (\*\*) at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Sources:** Gallup World Poll 2007, World Development Indicators 2007 (World Bank), Human Development Report 2006 (UNDP)

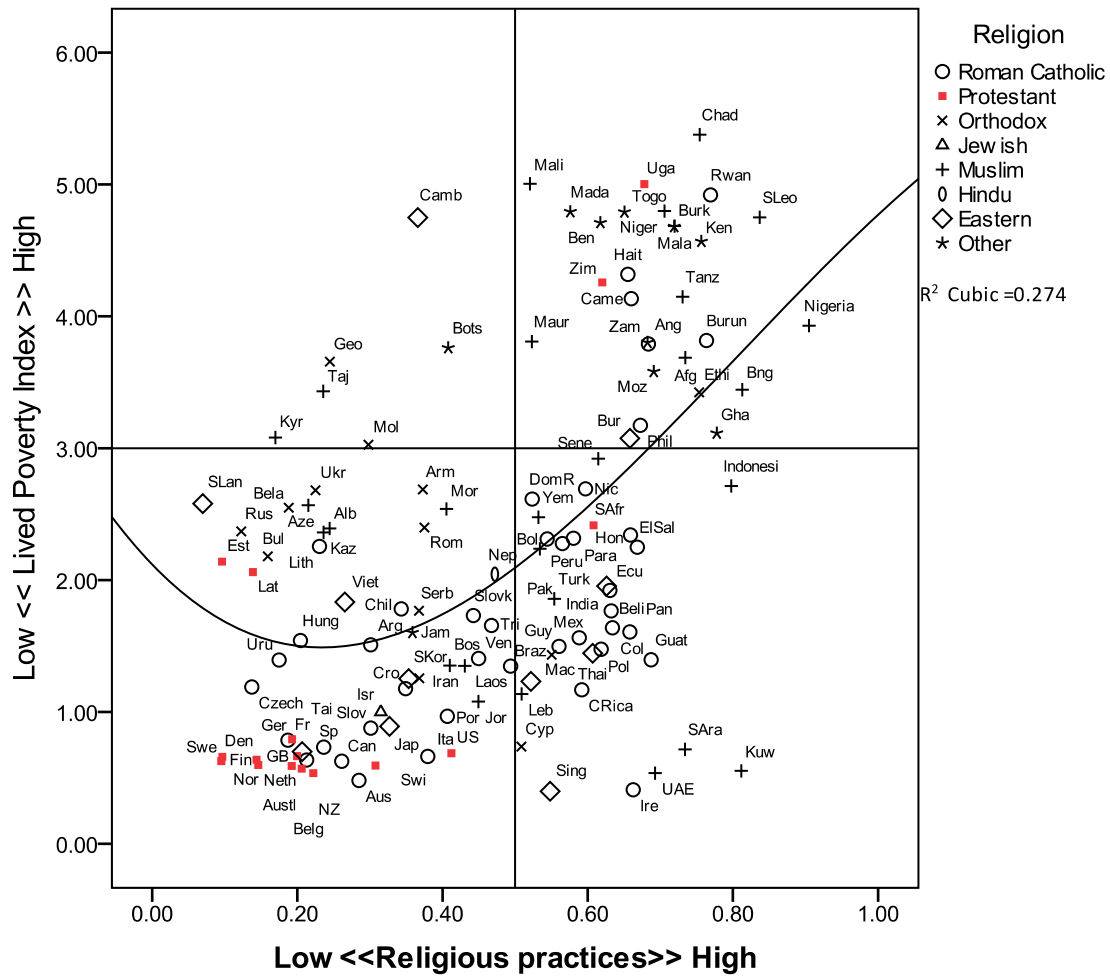
Figure 1: Lived poverty and religious values



Notes: Religious values: "Is religion an important part of your daily life?"

Source: Gallup World Poll 2007

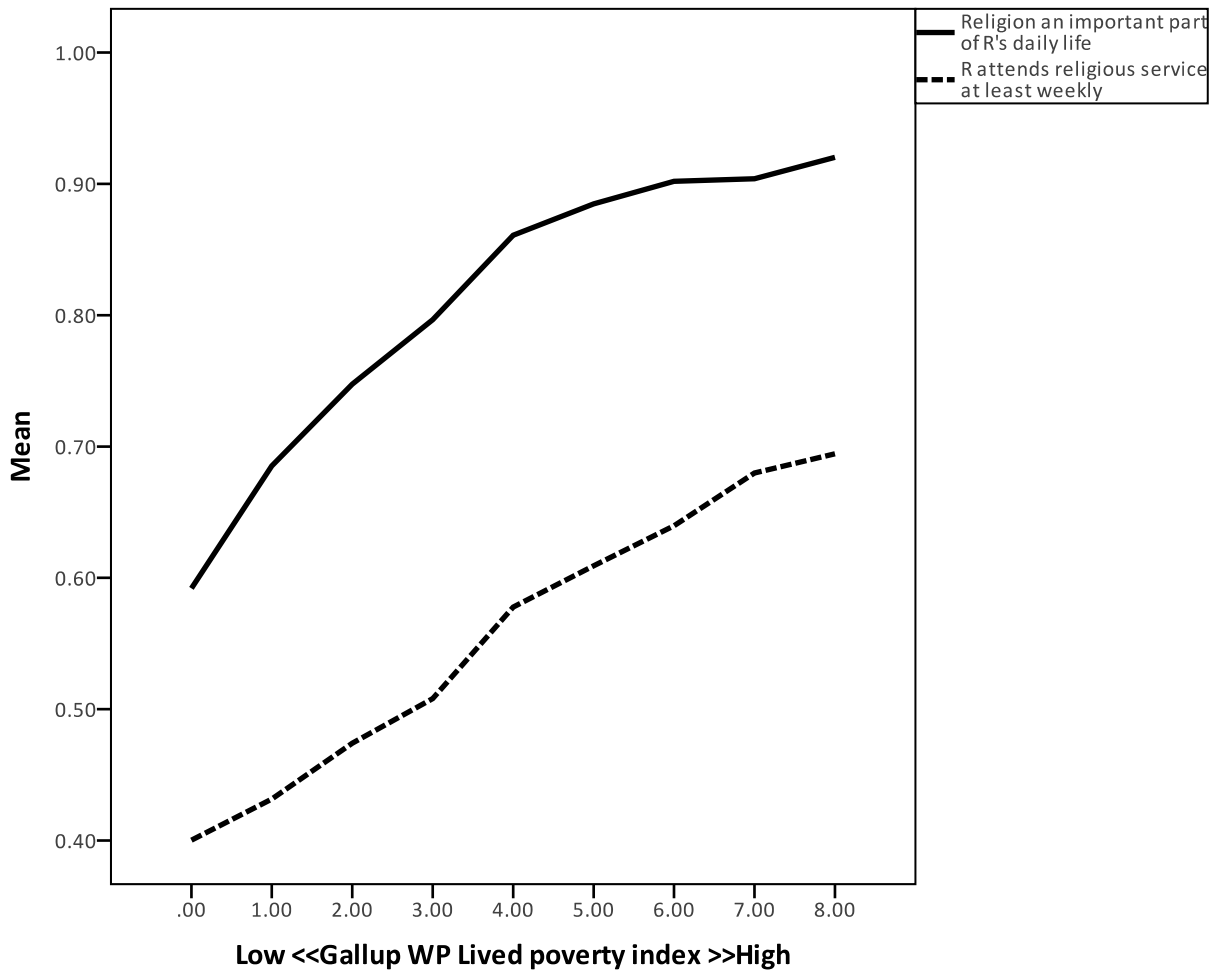
**Figure 2: Lived poverty and religious practices**



**Notes:** Religious participation: "Have you attended a place of worship or religious service within the last seven days?"

**Source:** Gallup World Poll 2007

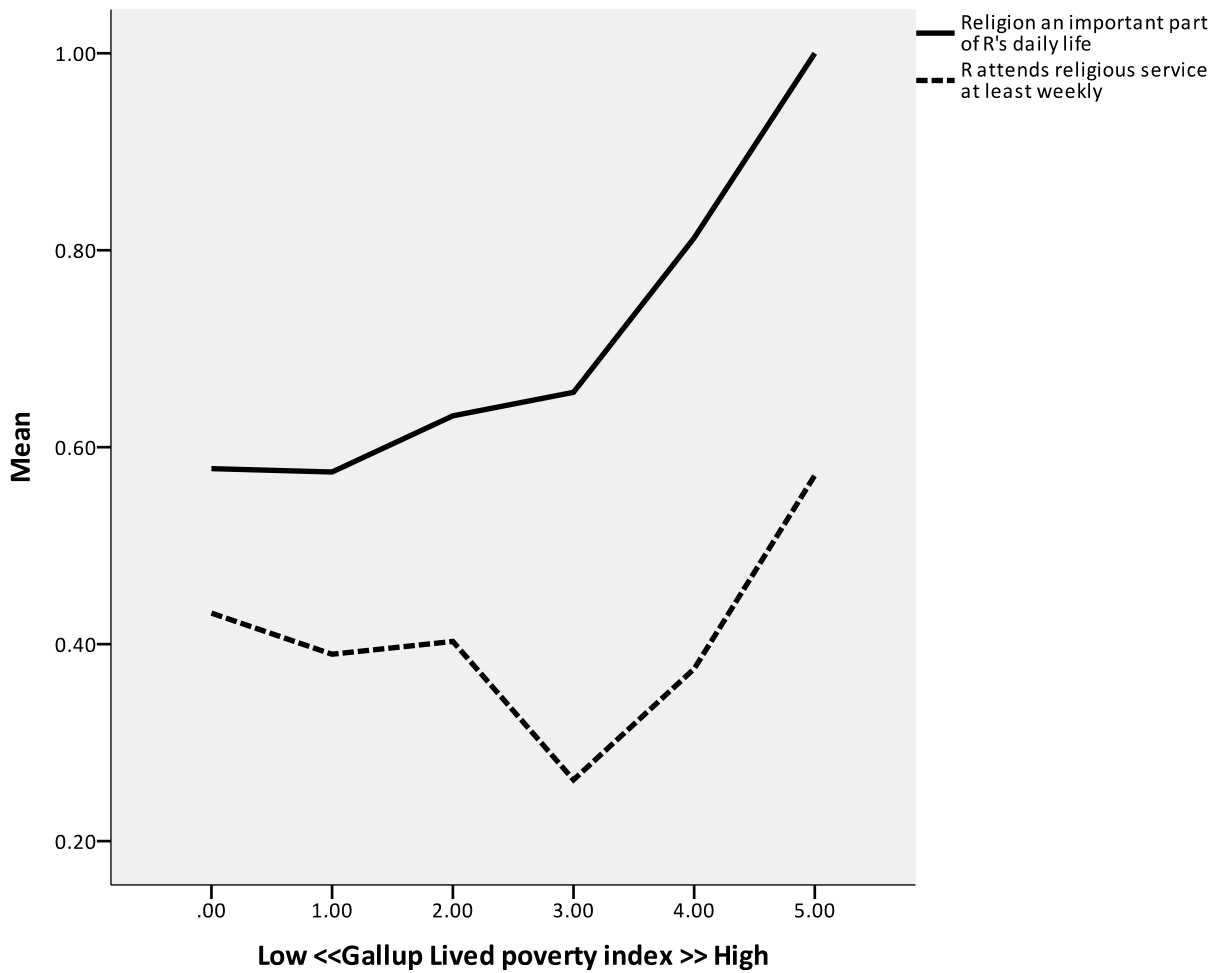
**Figure 3: Lived poverty and religious values and participation**



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

**Source:** Gallup World Poll 2007

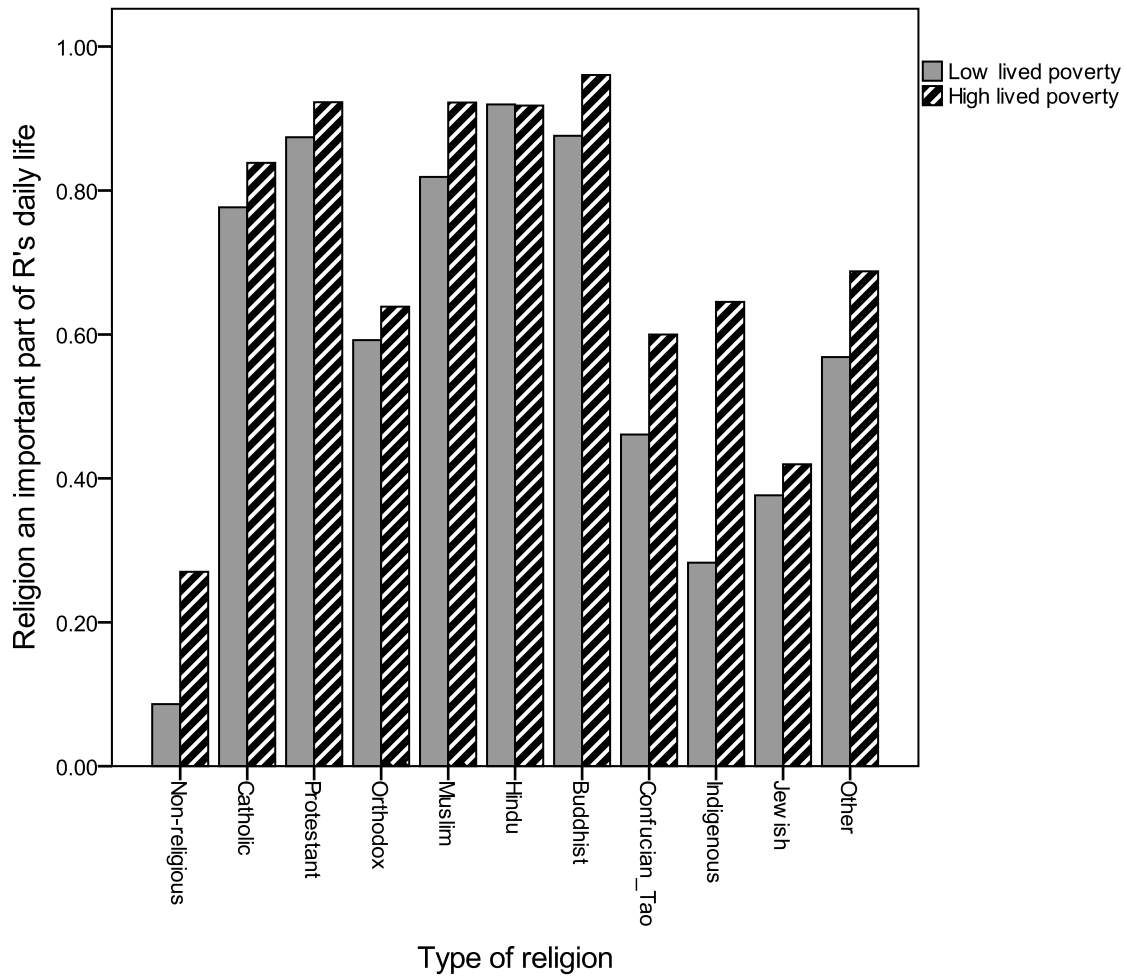
**Figure 4: Lived poverty, religious values and participation, U.S. only**



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

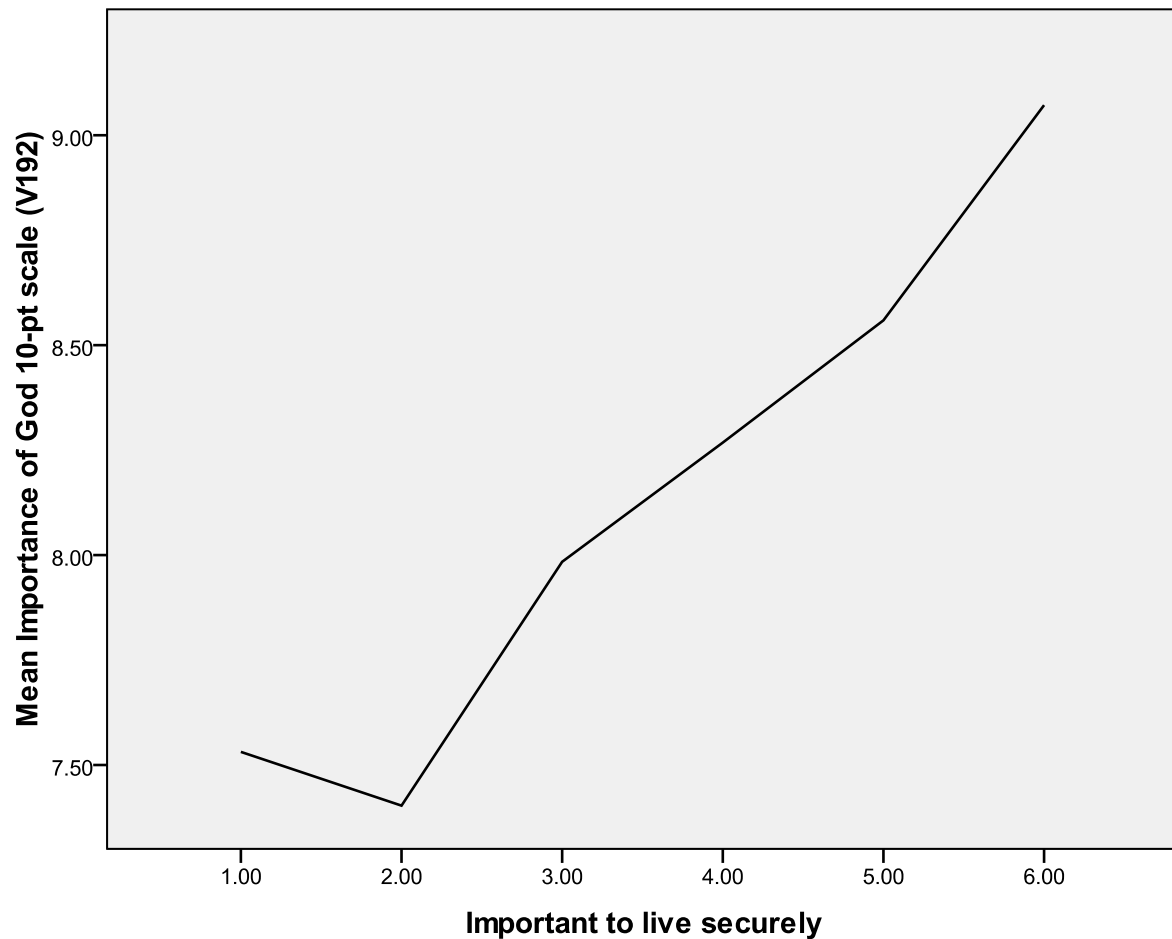
**Source:** Gallup World Poll 2007

**Figure 5: Lived poverty and religious values by type of faith**



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

**Source:** Gallup World Poll 2007

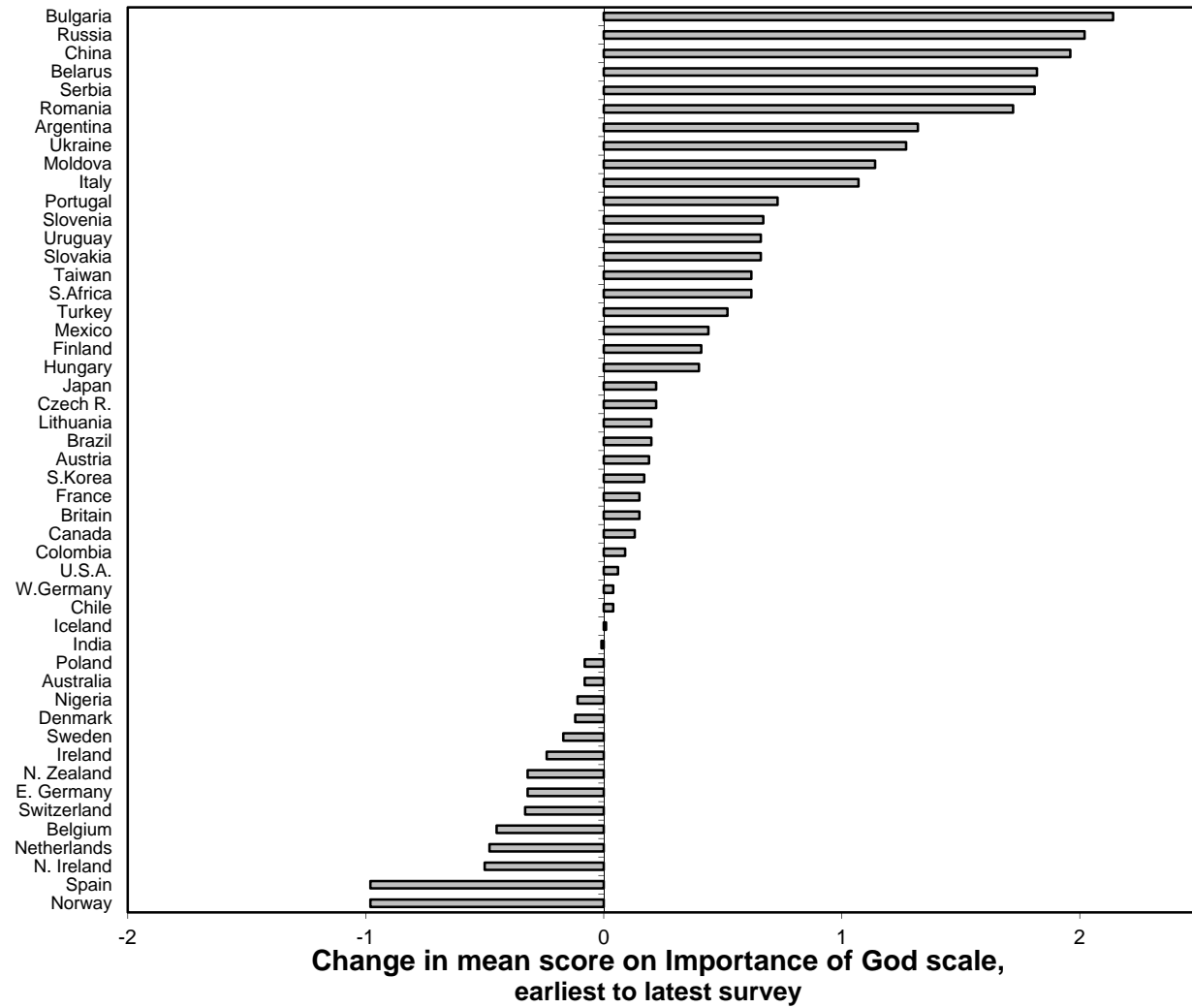
**Figure 6: Feelings of existential security and religious values**

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

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

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005-7

**Figure 7: Changes in level of religiosity from earliest to latest available survey, 1981-2007**



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

**Source:** World Values Surveys and European Values Study, 1981-2007.

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