

Individualization in Europe and America: Connecting Religious and Moral Values

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ABSTRACT

After reviewing the major variations in how individualization is interpreted and explained, this article turns to the World Values Survey (WVS) data to empirically investigate one central aspect of individualization, namely, the connection between religiosity and moral values. That analysis demonstrates, first, that rates of decline in levels of religiosity in most advanced industrial states have been quite modest. The rate of change in moral outlooks, by contrast, has been much more striking. Those two core findings, we argue, draw attention to the question of what explains these cross-national and cross-time variations. The remainder of the article empirically explores a variety of plausible explanations. The results of that analysis reveal not only significant variations between European and North American publics, but also that associational behavior plays a significant role in gearing the dynamics of individualization.

I. Introduction

Studies of human values must at some point hitch themselves to a theory of “belief systems.” As Williams (1968) put it, “it is the rare and limiting case if and when a person’s behavior is guided over a considerable period of time by one and only one value . . . More often particular acts or sequences of acts are steered by multiple and changing *clusters of values*”

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(287: emphasis added). Examining discrete value dimensions can certainly answer questions about whether, say, support for free enterprise has gone up or down over time. But if people rarely make decisions based on a single value, then the theme of value change might be more productively explored from the vantage point of whether, and how, “clusters” of values change with the passage of time. The primary focus of this article is on two sets of values, religiosity and morality, that are often taken as significant dimensions of value change as states experience the transition from industrialism to post-industrialism (Apter, 1965; Bell, 1973; Huntington, 1974; Inglehart, 1977).

The investigation empirically tests hypotheses that are informed by the theory of “individualization.” Individualization refers to the decoupling of human values from such traditional value-generating institutions as family, work, politics and religion (Weber, 1958; Rokeach, 1973; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Baker, 2005). “With the multiplication of life chances and opportunities,” Weber (1978) wrote of modern society in the early twentieth century, “the individual becomes less and less content with being bound to rigid and undifferentiated forms of life prescribed by the group. Increasingly he desires to shape his life as an individual and to enjoy the fruits of his own abilities and labour as he himself wishes” (375). An observable implication of this theory is that individuals in advanced industrial states are taking fewer and fewer cues from religion in formulating their core moral values (Halman and de Moor, 1993). This hypothesis is tested using evidence from the World Values Survey (WVS).

The core finding is that the results are uneven: there are systematic and sustained variations between North American and European publics. The connection between religiosity and moral outlooks has weakened substantially in every European country for which we have data. The opposite pattern emerged in North America. The final part of the analysis investigates compelling explanations for these different patterns.

II. Conceptualizing Individualization

Different scholars use the term individualization to capture different concepts, while others label the same concepts with different terminology. According to Beck (2002), “one can hardly think of a word heavier with misunderstanding than ‘individualization’ has proven to have in the English speaking countries” (xxi). Some scholars, like Beck, approach the topic of individualization from a normative perspective (Lasch, 1979), while others adopt a more empirically grounded approach (Inglehart, 1977; Halman and de Moor, 1993; Halman and Petterson, 1995). That

said, both perspectives nonetheless emphasize different aspects of a common underlying theme. At its core, individualization refers to the declining salience of traditional value-generating institutions in the lives of people in post-industrial societies.

The first variant of individualization might be labeled “postmodern individualization” or what Beck (2002) calls “individualization” in the “social scientific sense” (xxi). Drawing on the canons of sociology, Beck defines individualization as a process of “high-level socialization” in highly differentiated societies. Communal integration is contingent on individuals recognizing their “self-*insufficiency*” and “the fundamental incompleteness of the self.” As Beck put it, “. . . human mutuality and community rests no longer on solidly established traditions, but rather, on a paradoxical collectively of reciprocal individualization” (xix). Citizens *must* choose their way through a myriad of complex incentives and pressures because the guidance from traditional social institutions and the certainties arising out of traditional social structures are longer in place (Beck, 2002).

The declining importance of traditional social institutions is not, however, a direct path to individual freedom. Rather it is associated with the highly problematic and “precarious” freedoms of what Beck calls the “do-it yourself biography”:

. . . certainties have fragmented into questions which are now spinning around in people’s heads. But it is more than that. Social action needs routines in which to be enacted. One can say that our thoughts and actions are shaped, at the deepest level, by something of which we are hardly or not at all aware . . . it is precisely this level of pre-conscious ‘collective habitualizations,’ of matters taken for granted, that is breaking down into a cloud of possibilities to be thought about and negotiated. The deep layer of foreclosed decisions is being forced up into the level of decision making (6).

These “precarious freedoms” overload the decision-making capacities of individuals as people struggle to navigate modern social environments replete with impossibly complex arrays of institutional incentives and constraints (Beck, 2002):² “. . . God nature and the social system are being progressively replaced, in greater and lesser steps, by the individual – confused, astray, helpless and at a loss. With the abolition of the old

² Beck (2001) argues that what he means by “individualization” is an entirely different concept than “individuation,” the term that Inglehart employs. Even so, both Beck and Inglehart use their respective terms to encompass the retreating influence of traditional social institutions on the lives of individuals.

coordinates a question arises that has been decried and acclaimed, derided, pronounced sacred, guilty and dead: the question of the individual” (8).

A second set of more empirically oriented conceptualizations of individualization resemble what Flanagan and Lee call “postmodernist libertarians” (Flanagan and Lee, 2003:267). In an account that resonates with Huntington’s (1974) conjectures about the shape of post-industrial politics, Flanagan and Lee depict a growing class of educated and affluent citizens whose underlying value set is premised on a broad conception of autonomy: an autonomy that extends well beyond a mere freedom from government interference to encompass a broader range of limitations on individual choice. “Although they are more tolerant of a plurality of different kinds of ethnic groups and lifestyles,” Flanagan and Lee point out, “they are also more dissatisfied with their personal lives and substantially more distrustful of virtually all social and political institutions. Not only is their loyalty to major social and political institutions eroding but also their willingness to make sacrifices for other individuals, groups, or even their nation” (Flanagan and Lee, 2003:267).

There is conceptual overlap between this interpretation and Inglehart’s (1977) emphasis on “postmaterialism” or what Nevitte (1996) calls the “decline of deference”. All of these accounts emphasize a growing resistance to constraints on individual choice and a decreasing adherence to traditional social and political institutions. Traditional family structures have given way to conscious decisions about whether and when to marry and have children, and religions have lost their hold on the moral values of their own adherents. Central to this variant of the individualization hypothesis is that “. . . values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are increasingly based on personal choice and are less dependent on tradition and social institutions” (Halman and de Moor, 1993:72). That transformation is consistent with Inglehart’s (1997) observations concerning “the postmodern shift away from both religious and state authority” (87). The unifying theme is that individuals are guided less by traditional institutions than they once were, and thus the necessity of individual decision-making has expanded.

The remainder of this article tests the theory of individualization in two steps. First, we propose an operational definition of individualization. We then turn to an empirical examination of cross-national and cross-time survey data on value change in post-industrial Western countries. The empirical question to be explored is whether religion is losing its hold on the moral outlooks of citizens in Western countries. The central concern is not just the question of whether religion itself is losing ground in modern societies (secularization). Rather the question is whether people are becoming increasingly inclined to exhibit autonomy,

individualization, when it comes to making decisions about important moral questions. Are they becoming more or less inclined to take their moral cues from religion?

III. Measuring Value Change in Empirical Perspective

One of Converse's (1964) seminal observations is that "belief systems have never surrendered easily to empirical study or quantification. Indeed, they have often served as primary exhibits for the doctrine that what is important to study cannot be measured and that what can be measured is not important to study." (206) But Converse (1964) also cautioned that "... no intellectual position is likely to become obsolete quite so rapidly as one that takes current empirical capabilities as the limit of the possible in a more absolute sense" (206). Indeed, current research into patterns of human values benefits from an accumulation of systematic public opinion survey data, not the least of these are the broadly comparative data from the World Values Survey (WVS).

If values are the primal elements of human culture, and *individual* human beings are the beakers in which elemental compounding occurs, then direct, individual-level survey evidence of human values is a promising focal point for studies of individualization. The World Values Survey data come from nationally representative random samples of publics surveyed in 21 countries in 1981-1983 (N = 28 764), 43 countries in 1990-1993 (N = 59 169), 45 countries in 1995-1997 (N = 78 574), and 67 countries in 1999-2002 (N = 96 296). Many of the survey items from the 1981 wave of the survey are asked in precisely the same way in each of the successive waves and in each of the participating countries. To maximize the breadth and reliability of the longitudinal analysis, attention is focused only on those advanced industrial states for which there are data from at least three time-points beginning in 1981. The questionnaires used in each of these countries were screened to isolate those variables that met two important criteria for inclusion: first, identical question wording and, second, identical response categories across countries and time-points. This strategy yields 63 variables for analysis across 15 countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States and West Germany (See Appendix A).

To identify underlying structures in the responses to the 63 survey items that met these criteria for inclusion, the data from each of the 15 countries and four time-points were pooled and subjected to exploratory factor analysis (Principal Components). There are nine survey items which load heavily on the single component that we label "religiosity." These

items include questions about the importance of God and religion in the lives of respondents, whether respondents get comfort and strength from religion, beliefs in God, heaven, an after-life and hell. Measures of church attendance rates and confidence in the churches also load onto this “religiosity” dimension (see Appendix C for question wording and variable coding). Together, these items provide both a highly reliable and broad measure of religiosity (Cronbach’s Alpha = .910).³

Moral outlooks are captured by questions which ask about the justifiability of homosexuality, abortion, divorce, suicide and euthanasia. Responses to these questions comprise a highly reliable scale of moral traditionalism/permissiveness (Cronbach’s Alpha = .813). The underlying component captures the extent to which individuals are willing to tolerate deviation from precisely those kinds of moral values that have been at the core of traditional religious teachings. By focusing on the connection between religious and moral outlooks, our goal is to examine the influence of one the most powerful and traditional social institutions on precisely those moral values within its traditional sphere of influence. Given that these indicators are reliable, the analysis proceeds to test empirically the proposition that value change is occurring in the direction of “. . . free personal choices, which make human relations less bound by tradition, less prescribed by social norms and less enforced by social control” (Akker, Halman, de Moor, 1993:100).

IV. Value Change and Individualization: Evidence from the World Values Survey

Figure 1 highlights the trends in religiosity for each of the countries in our analysis as well as the weighted trend lines for Europe and North America.⁴ As the figure illustrates, the aggregate trends for Europe and

³ There is, of course, a conceptual distinction between institutional and spiritual dimensions of religiosity. But factor analysis and subsequent reliability checks within each country show that there is no statistical justification for treating these dimensions separately. The scale clearly measures a single component and is highly reliable in every country for which we have data.

⁴ Because the focus is on trends, lines of best fit are plotted through the values for those countries for which there are at least three time-points of data beginning in 1981. And because the samples are *nationally* representative, the trend lines for Europe and North America are weighted to capture population differences between the countries within each region:

$$\frac{\sum(\text{Population of } X_{1..n} \div \mu \text{ Population of Selected European | North American Countries} * Y_{1..n})}{N}$$

This weighting procedure ensures that the countries within Europe and North America affect the aggregate means to their relative share of the population.

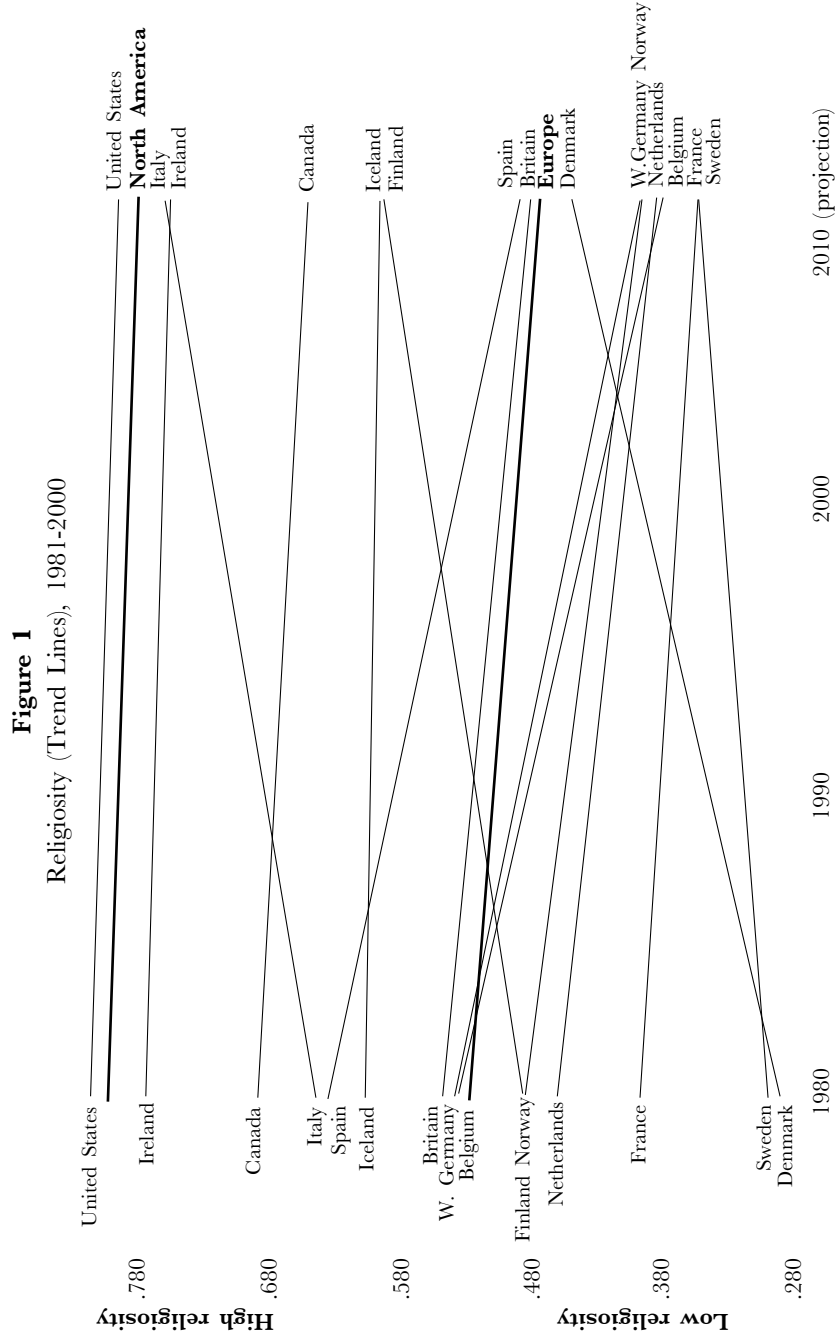
North America are relatively stable; there has been a marginal decline in levels of religiosity between 1981 and 2000. On the whole, Europeans and North Americans were almost as religious in 2000 as they were in 1981.

A more detailed probing of these data, however, shows that this aggregate stability masks significant within country variations, particularly in Europe. Among European publics, levels of religiosity declined in seven countries, they were stable in two countries, and they increased in four countries (substantially so in three of them). Finns, Danes and Swedes turned out to be somewhat more religious in 2000 than 1981, while their counterparts in Norway became noticeably less religious over the same period. Indeed, Finns and Icelanders exhibit higher levels of religiosity in 2000 than the European average, whereas Swedes consistently remain among the least religious respondents. Scandinavians tend to be less religious than the European average, but the within group differences turn out to be larger than the difference between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe.

Spain, France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands seem to be on similar trajectories. Each of these countries experienced a significant decline in levels of religiosity. Britain followed the same general pattern even though the rate change was considerably less pronounced. These shared trajectories seem to point to a general pattern when it comes to religiosity in Europe, although this pattern is not replicated either in Scandinavian countries or in the highly religious and Catholic countries of Italy and Ireland. There is what might be called a core European trajectory, but there are important exceptions to that trajectory.

What about North America? According to the WVS data, North Americans are substantially more religious than their European counterparts. Although both Canadians and Americans became somewhat less religious between 1981 and 2000, the United States remained the most religious country in our analysis and Canadians in 2000 were well above the European average. Indeed, Italy and Ireland are the only European countries to exhibit higher levels of religiosity than Canada.

Similar cross-national variations in the pace and direction of secularization have been reported by other researchers (Halman and Petterson, 1995). The more surprising finding perhaps is the evidence of the relative stability in levels of religiosity between 1981 and 2000. Levels of religiosity have declined, but they are not plummeting and nor are they down everywhere.



Given the historical leadership of organized religion in providing guidance on the moral issues of the day, it is reasonable to speculate that levels of religiosity might well shape orientations towards other such value dimensions as “moral outlooks.” The empirical implication is that national changes in moral outlooks will simply track the changing levels of religiosity in each country; traditional moral outlooks would follow the same pattern as the levels of religiosity depicted in Figure 1.

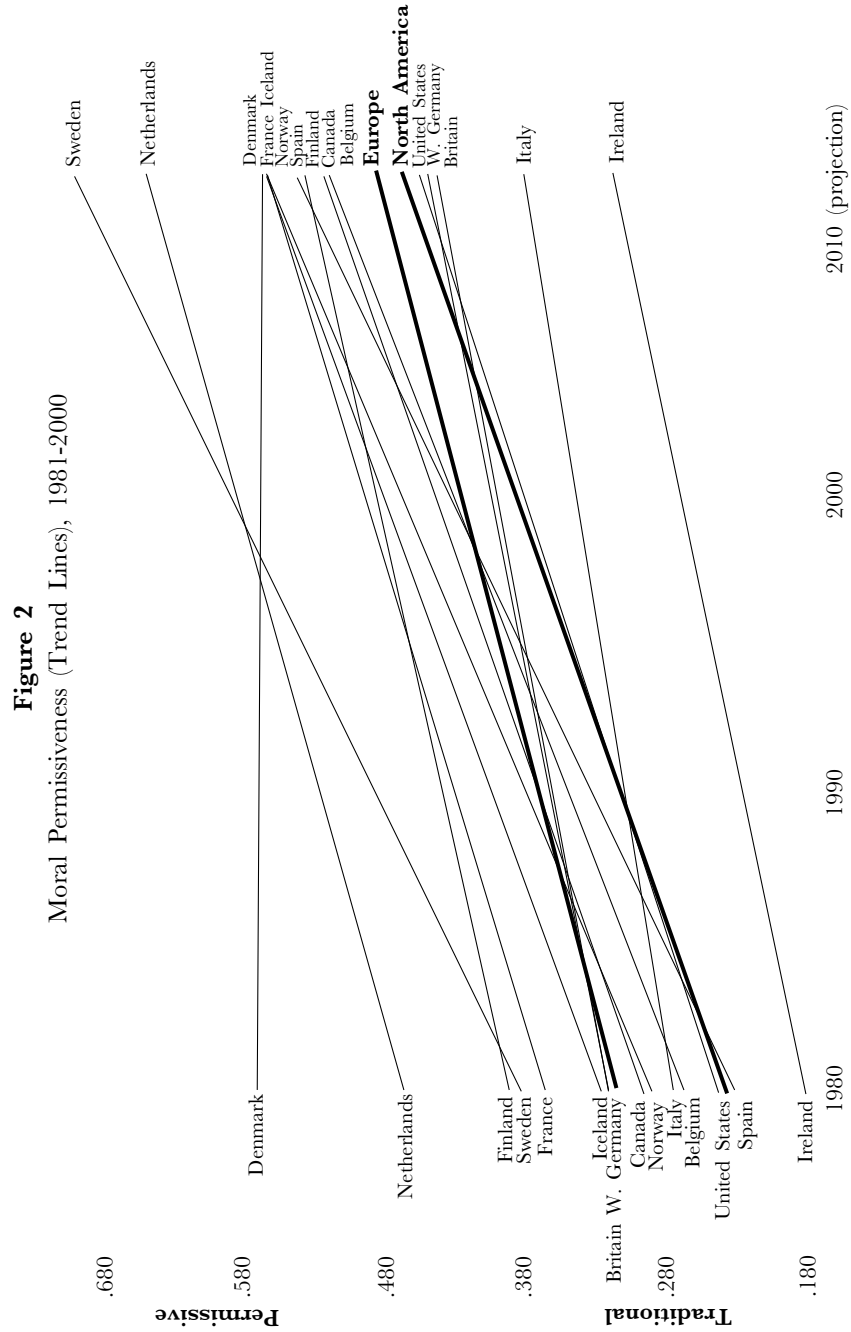
The data in Figure 2 summarize the shift in levels of moral permissiveness for the same set of countries over the same period. There is evidence of a clear pattern but a straightforward interpretation provides no clear support for the hypothesis that moral outlooks are simply a by-product of religiosity: publics in every country except one (Denmark) became progressively more permissive in their moral outlooks between 1981 and 2000.⁵

The pattern in both Europe and North America is toward substantial increases in levels of moral permissiveness. American and European publics became more tolerant of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, suicide and especially homosexuality. Italy and Ireland are outliers on one end; publics in both of these highly religious Catholic countries remained relatively traditional in their moral outlooks. The Netherlands and Sweden stand as outliers on the other end. Swedes, the most secular public in Figure 1, experienced substantial increases in levels of moral permissiveness between 1981 and 2000 (Figure 2).

There is also evidence of distinct clusters of countries in Figure 2. The largest cluster occupies the higher end of the mid-range in Figure 2: Denmark, France, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Finland, Canada and Belgium. These countries are moving to roughly the same place when it comes to levels of moral permissiveness. Britain, Germany and the United States cluster on the lower end of the mid-range. Despite their substantial differences in levels of religiosity, the moral values trajectories of this set of publics are nonetheless converging.

The evidence of a consistent pattern of changing moral values presents an empirical challenge to the simple intuition that changing moral outlooks are simply a by-product of secularization, or vice versa. If levels of religiosity have been relatively stable over these two decades and if there has been substantial variability between countries, then what accounts for the uniform and substantial rise in moral permissiveness over the same period and in the same publics?

⁵ Denmark is the only exception. Because it is the lone exception to the trend, we include Denmark even though we only have Danish data on moral permissiveness for 1981 and 2000.

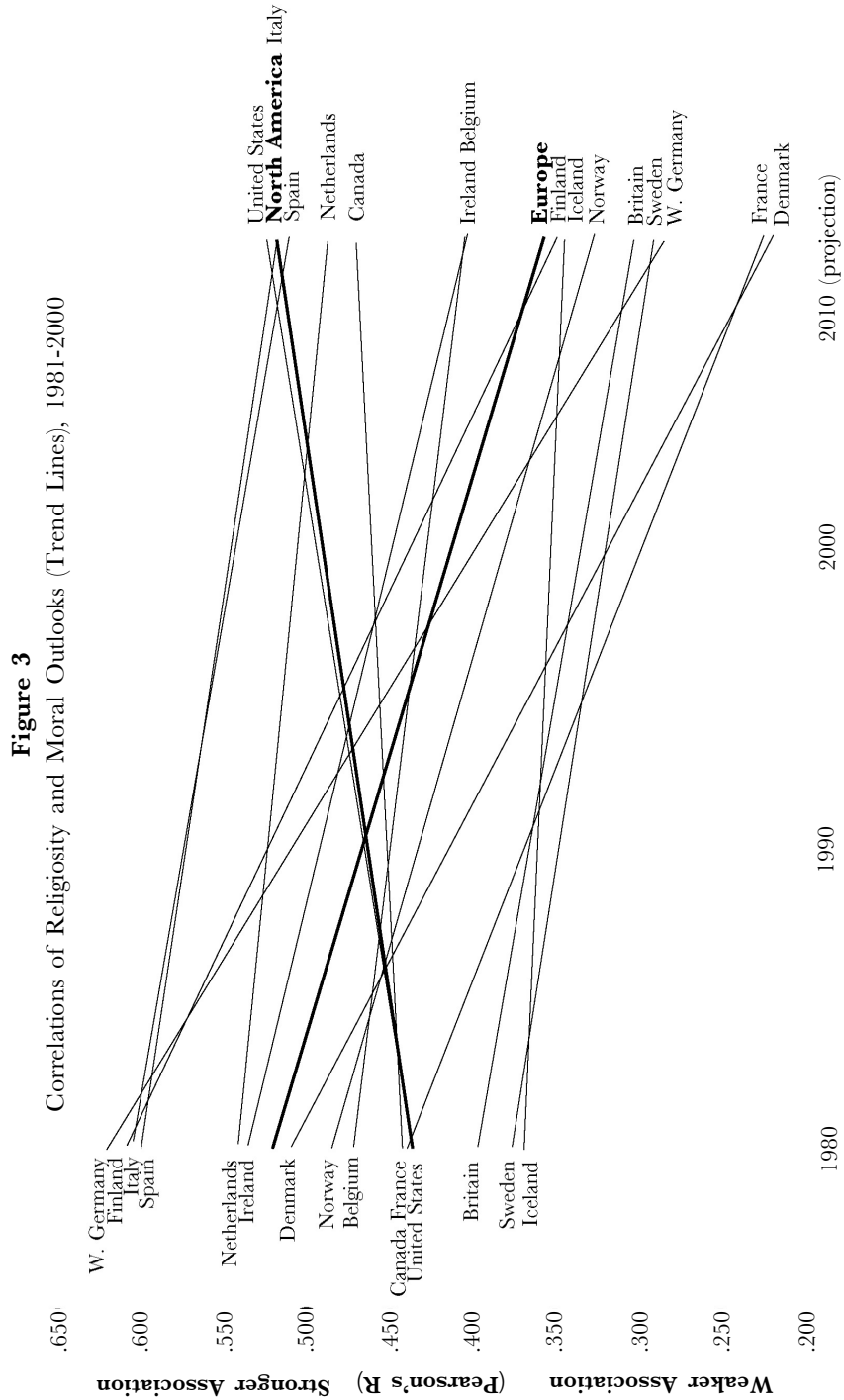


One obvious candidate explanation, of course, is the individualization hypothesis. According to the individualization hypothesis, aggregate stability and cross-national variability in religiosity might co-exist alongside evidence of substantial and across-the-board changes in moral outlooks because citizens are deferring less to religious authority when formulating their moral outlooks. In effect, religiosity and moral outlooks are coming increasingly decoupled. The observable implication of that line of argument is that there will be a declining correlation between the religiosity and the moral outlooks of citizens.

The data presented in Figure 3 track the across-time shifts in the strength of the correlation (Pearson's r) between religiosity and moral permissiveness among publics in Europe and North America. The results are somewhat mixed. On the one hand, the strength of the relationship between religiosity and moral values has clearly weakened throughout Europe. Intriguingly, the correlation between religiosity and moral permissiveness has declined in each and every one of the European countries for which we have data. The hold of religiosity on the moral values of Danes, Finns and Germans has changed the most, but slightly weaker versions of the same pattern are evident in all of the other European countries as well. Among North Americans, and particularly Americans, the pattern is completely different: the connection between religious and moral outlooks has actually become significantly stronger over the same time period. These North American data suggest an important caveat to the argument that individualization is a consequence of features that postindustrial countries share in common. The European findings are consistent with the individualization hypothesis; the North American findings clearly are not.

The correlation between religious and moral outlooks strengthened in North America and weakened in Europe as the gap in moral outlooks between religious and secular citizens widened in North America and shrank in Europe. Despite across-the-board increases in moral permissiveness in North America, opinions about controversial moral issues were more polarized along the religious/secular cleavage in 2000 than they were in 1981. In sum, these findings are consistent with the interpretation that religion is losing its hold on the moral values of Europeans. At the same time, however, the values divide between religious and secular Americans has widened considerably.

These comparative data appear to suggest that the straightforward intuition concerning the linkages between religiosity and moral outlooks needs to be reconsidered. Changing moral outlooks, clearly, are a consequence of far more than simply declining levels of religiosity. Religiosity has not declined in every country, yet publics have become uniformly



more permissive in their moral outlooks. These findings prompt a deeper investigation of the *connection* between religiosity and morality. The question that needs to be explained is why religiosity serves to insulate its adherents from wider national trends towards moral permissiveness much more effectively in some countries than in others?

V. Group Involvement and Individualization: Findings

Nearly a century ago, Durkheim (1947) claimed that a “. . . society cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is not in action unless the individuals who compose it are assembled together and act in common. It is by common action that it takes consciousness of itself and realizes its position; it is before all else an active cooperation” (418). Durkheim’s observation certainly resonates with contemporary perspectives on the cultural implications of interactions between individuals (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Baker, 2005). Debates about the causes, implications, or even the “decline of social capital” remain contentious (Hall, 1999). Nonetheless, a substantial body of empirical evidence suggests that people who spend their time interacting with others develop different social outlooks than those who do not (Putnam, 2000). A variety of theorists have argued that “social networks” and community involvement generate feelings of communal belonging and provide individuals with important avenues of social, emotional and even financial support (Durkheim, 1947; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The clear implication is that there is a connection between levels of associational involvement and individualization. That connection can be explored by asking: does active association in group-life serve to reinforce the hold of traditional social institutions over the outlooks of individuals in advanced industrial societies?

One possible explanation for different rates and directions of change in the connection between religious and moral outlooks might be that there are cross-national variations in how effectively religious institutions facilitate active interactions between like-minded individuals. Religion-based associational involvement is an example of what Putnam (2000) called “bonding social capital” (3). According to Putnam (2000), “some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups” (22). Interactions between comparatively like-minded individuals are precisely the type of mechanism by which norms and values are inculcated and reinforced (Durkheim, 1947; Hunter, 1991; Putnam, 2000; Baker, 2005). It is certainly plausible to suppose that moral values are reinforced, and more resistant to change, when people are surrounded by others who

share the same viewpoints on controversial moral issues. Active associational involvement in religious organizations, according to this perspective, may serve as a bulwark against broader trends towards value change in the country as a whole.

This hypothesis can be tested empirically with a simple multivariate analysis. The dependent variable in this OLS model is the rate of change (slope) in individualization which can be operationalized at each time point, and for each country, as the Product Moment Correlation (r) of the relationship between religiosity and moral permissiveness. The independent variable in the model is the percentage of religious respondents (religiosity > .75/1) who indicated that they were actively involved as unpaid volunteers in a church or religious organization. If active associational involvement in religious organizations shelters participants from broader trends towards moral permissiveness, then we would expect the connection between religious and moral outlooks to be stronger in those countries where religious people are actively engaged in associational life.

Before proceeding directly to that test, however, it is useful to consider the structure of the model more generally to explicitly identify how it can address some potentially important objections. One possibility is that declining associational involvement is but one aspect of the broader phenomenon of individualization. If individualization entails both a retreat from associational life *and* a decoupling of religious and moral values, then levels of associational activity would co-vary with the individualization of moral values because both capture different aspects of essentially the same process. The key explanatory variable, in other words, may not be truly “independent” of the dependent variable.

A second issue to consider concerns the problem of establishing the direction of causality. As people’s moral outlooks diverge from the value sets stressed in their churches, the consensus on moral values among parishioners may break down and reduce the incentives for these people to interact with one another in associational groups. The gist of this account is that norms of reciprocity cause associational involvement, rather than the other way around. People join groups because they trust and like each other; they do not trust and like each other because they happen to join the same groups (Putnam, 2000; Newton, 2001).

Another possibility is that the individualization of moral values is simply a by-product of secularization. As religiosity declines, so too perhaps does the connection between religious and moral outlooks. This possibility can be taken into account in the model by introducing controls for changing levels of religiosity.

Finally, there is the problem of over-determination to consider (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). There are reasons to suppose that levels of associa-

tional involvement may differ in Europe and North America. But there are many features other than levels of associational involvement that distinguish Europeans from North Americans. The threat, therefore, is that the model will “over-determine” the explanatory power of associational involvement.

Each of these conceptual concerns inform the specification of the regression model. First, the potential endogeneity problem can be addressed by predicting the slope of individualization between 1981 and 2000 with the level of associational involvement in 1981. This strategy strengthens the causal inference by establishing that the influence of associational involvement is temporally prior to individualization. Associational involvement predicts *future* levels of individualization.

Second, the possibility that associational involvement is an effect of individualization can be taken into account by introducing controls for the rate and direction of change in the associational involvement of religious people. If declining associational involvement is a by-product of the same broader phenomena that results in a de-coupling of religious and moral values, then the rate of change in associational involvement should be a powerful predictor of across-time changes in individualization.

Third, the reverse causality argument can be addressed by controlling for the rate of change in moral permissiveness. Controlling for the rate of change in moral permissiveness makes it possible to gauge the predictive power of associational involvement *independent* of the effects of changing levels of moral permissiveness. If individualization is a consequence of changing moral outlooks, then introducing a measure of changing moral outlooks to the model should reduce the magnitude of the regression coefficient for religious association.

Fourth, by controlling for changing levels of religiosity, the model rules out the possibility that the relationship between active involvement by religious people and the individualization of moral values is endogenous to a broader phenomenon of secularization. Secularization is an important phenomenon in its own right, but it is conceptually distinct from the phenomenon of individualization. Recall that individualization is concerned with the *connection* between religious and moral values, and not the absolute levels, or rates of change, in religious or moral outlooks.

Finally, the potential problem of over-determination is dealt with in two simple steps. The first step introduces controls in the main regression model for a country’s location in Europe and North America. The second step entails running a background analysis that applies only to the European countries in the analysis. If Europeans and North Americans diverge in terms of individualization, then individualization may well correlate with any other variables on which Europeans and North Americans

differ. A more persuasive case can be made in these regards if the relationship between the independent (associational involvement of religious people) and dependent (individualization of moral and religious outlooks) variables extends beyond the differences between Europe and North America.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the overall analysis. The results in the first bloc of the model show that the differences between Europe and North America (summarized in Figure 3) are indeed statistically significant. The strength of the relationship between religiosity and moral outlooks declined more in Europe than in North America.

The second bloc of the model introduces the level of active associational involvement among religious people in 1981. According to these data, the associational involvement of religious people in 1981 is a powerful predictor of the rate of individualization between 1981 and 2000.⁶ Indeed, the relationship is so strong the differences between Europe and North America disappear when active associational involvement is taken into account. Indeed, the analysis shows that if religious people in Europe were as actively involved in associational groups as their counterparts in North America, the connection between religiosity and moral outlooks in Europe would have increased, rather than decreased.

The third bloc of the model introduces controls for the rates of change in associational involvement, religiosity and moral permissiveness. Here, the data indicate that only one of these variables, the changing levels of associational involvement, has an independent effect on the individualization of moral and religious values.⁷ Moreover, notice that the introduction of these variables has no effect on the predictive power of the level of associational involvement among religious people in 1981.

These findings provide supporting evidence for the contention that active associational involvement among religious people offsets the broader

⁶ To test the possibility that associational involvement in 1981 is a proxy for levels of involvement in 2000, we tested the predictive power of the involvement of religious people at both time points. Levels of associational involvement in 2000 do not have an independent effect on the rate of change in individualization between 1981 and 2000. As with any causal relationship, the relevant levels of the explanatory variable (associational involvement of religious people) are temporally *prior* to the observed effect in the dependent variable (changing rates of individualization).

⁷ This opens up the possibility that levels of associational involvement are at least somewhat a part – rather than exclusively a cause – of individualization. But this finding is not sufficiently strong to rule out our central contention that the effects of associational involvement are causally and temporally prior to the process of individualization. Indeed, associational involvement in 1981 more powerfully predicts the individualization of moral values in 2000 than does the level of associational involvement in 2000.

Table 1
 Predictors of Individualization, 1981-2000 (OLS Regression)

	Bloc 1 b (SE)	Bloc 2 b (SE)	Bloc 3 b (SE)
Europe	-.067(.026)***	.041 (.050)	.068(.051)
Active in 1981		.007 (.003)***	.007(.003)***
Active Slope (81-00)			.016(.009)*
Religiosity Slope (81-00)			.246(.279)
Moral Permissiveness Slope (81-00)			.438(.301)
Constant	.020(.024)	-.138(.069)**	-.189(.065)***
R-Squared	.341	.556	.763
Adjusted R-Squared	.290	.481	.631

**** p ≤ .01 *** p ≤ .05 ** p ≤ .10 * p ≤ .15
 Source: World Values Survey, 1981-2000

societal trends toward a decoupling of moral and religious values. In those countries where religious people are actively involved as volunteers in church or religious organizations, the individualization of moral values has either not occurred at all, or has proceeded at a much slower pace than in those countries where religious people are not actively involved as volunteers.⁸ Significantly, this finding is not simply a proxy for different levels of active religiosity or for differences between Europe and North America. Church attendance in Ireland, for instance, is far higher than it is in the United States. And it is far higher in Italy than in Canada. But the clear evidence is that while individualization of moral values has occurred in both Ireland and Italy, no such pattern is evident in the United States or Canada. Active associational involvement in religious groups turns out to be about four and six times higher in both Canada and the United States, respectively, than in either Italy or Ireland. Moreover, these statistically significant results emerge, and operate in the same direction and with about the same magnitude, when the same analysis is applied only to the European countries. The implication is clear: active associational involvement in voluntary religious organizations serves as a counterweight to the individualization of religious and moral values in a far more profound way than either passive spirituality or even such habitual, but generally non-interactive, forms of involvement as church attendance.

⁸ This aggregate level finding persists at the individual level as well. The correlation between religious and moral outlooks is higher among those who are actively involved as volunteers than among those who are not.

There are strong theoretical arguments that led us to conjecture about the existence of precisely this type of a relationship. Not the least of these arguments is that people who actively associate with like minded individuals are more inclined to maintain the values of the group than those who do not (Durkheim, 1947; Putnam, 2000; Baker, 2005). For this reason, it comes as no surprise to discover that levels of associational involvement in 1981 turns out to be a powerful predictor of the extent to which the relationship between religious and moral outlooks changed between 1981 and 2000.

VI. Concluding Discussion

There are at least two important political implications that follow from these findings. First, the rising level of moral permissiveness in the United States is mainly attributable to value change among a particular subset of Americans. Secular Americans experienced very substantial changes in their moral outlooks over the course of the last two decades of the Twenty-first Century. There were truly remarkable increases in levels of permissiveness. Second, a clear consequence of this pattern of value change is that secular and religious American became far more distinctive in their moral outlooks in 2000 than they were in 1981. Societies are more divided when the disagreements between people overlap than when they do not. Whatever the consensus Americans experienced in their moral values in 1981, that consensus had all but disappeared by 2000.

The North American data also suggest that religion was a more powerful cleavage in 2000 than it was in 1981, and that moral issues are becoming more, rather than less, divisive in both Canada and the United States. The obvious paradox is that as secularization *and* moral permissiveness increase in the United States, the salience of religious and moral outlooks as a dividing line in American society also increases.

Unlike North America, the European trends point to a growing convergence in moral outlooks between religious and secular Europeans; religion commands less of a hold over the moral outlooks of religious Europeans. Compared to the polarization of North American publics, the moral outlooks of religious Europeans are more alike those of their secular European counterparts. There is clearly substantial empirical support for the individualization hypothesis in Europe. From Finland to Italy, European publics are all moving in the same direction when it comes to how they connect their religious and their moral outlooks.

The findings here also provide considerable support for the contention that active associational involvement with like minded individuals has a significant impact on the dynamics of individualization over the past 20

years. The focus of this particular analysis is confined to the linkages between religious and moral values. But the findings clearly raise a broader possibility, namely, that the dynamics of individualization in such other value domains as the family, or the work place, may be geared similarly by such associational factors as family structures or rates of unionization.

The findings also suggest that it may be fruitful to revisit our focus on religiosity and moral outlooks. One possibility to explore is that secularism may well turn out to be more akin to religiosity than to the *absence* of religiosity. The fact that secular and religious Americans are far more likely than Europeans to participate in the associational life of their country might explain both the slower rate of moral permissiveness among religious Americans *and* the hyper secularism of non-religious Americans. Some evidence seems to support this conjecture. In 1981, secular Europeans were far more permissive in their moral outlooks than secular Americans. By 2000, however, that pattern had completely reversed. The implication is that associational involvement reinforces the moral outlooks of secular people in much the same way it does for their religious counterparts (Hunter, 1991). That conclusion gives an entirely new meaning to Beck's (2001) aphorism that ". . . human mutuality and community rests . . . on a paradoxical collectivity of reciprocal individualization" (xix). It may turn out that books on "individualism", "individuation" and "individualization" belong on the same shelf at the library after all.

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Appendix A: Countries, Waves and Sample Sizes

	1981-1983	1990-1991	1995-1997	1999-2001
1. France	1 200	1 002	–	1 615
2. Britain	1 231	1 484	1 093	1 000
3. Germany (West)	1 305	2 101	1 017	2 036
4. Italy	1 348	2 018	–	2 000
5. Netherlands	1 221	1 017	–	1 003
6. Denmark	1 182	1 030	–	1 023
7. Belgium	1 145	2 792	–	1 912
8. Spain	2 303	4 147	1 211	2 409
9. Ireland	1 217	1 000	–	1 012
10. United States	2 325	1 839	1 542	1 200
11. Canada	1 254	1 730	–	1 931
12. Norway	1 246	1 239	1 127	–
13. Sweden	954	1 047	1 009	1 015
14. Iceland	927	702	–	968
15. Finland	1 003	588	987	1 038
Total	23 736	19 861	7 897	20 002

Appendix B: Rotated Factor Analysis (PCF)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
	Religiosity	Job Traits: Fulfillment	Political Protest	Institutional Confidence	Civil Permissiveness	Moral Permissiveness	Subjective Well-Being	Neighbors: Minorities	Job Traits: Economic	Military Nationalism	Family Life
1. V196: Importance of God	-.868	-.018	-.080	-.019	.066	-.157	-.045	.001	.025	.008	-.049
2. V197: Strength from Religion	.804	.018	.059	.052	-.057	.120	.022	.003	.003	-.040	.076
3. V191: Believe in God	.778	-.009	.094	-.003	-.060	.054	.015	-.004	-.020	.030	.090
4. V195: Believe in Heaven	.769	-.023	.039	.036	.010	.158	.025	-.004	-.058	.119	-.162
5. V186: Importance of Religion	.757	-.003	.105	.008	-.088	.056	.036	.009	.009	.002	.142
6. V185: Church Attendance	.700	.051	.040	.060	-.059	.253	.033	-.012	.013	-.069	.026
7. V192: Believe in After-Life	.706	.043	-.056	-.001	.007	.038	.001	-.042	.009	.013	-.103
8. V147: Confidence in: The Churches	.687	.007	.095	.243	-.034	.210	.047	.029	.012	.120	.054
9. V194: Believe in Hell	.640	-.003	-.042	.002	.038	.189	-.052	-.010	-.065	.125	-.209
10. V91: Job: Use Initiative	-.025	.723	-.096	-.017	-.029	-.066	.034	.004	-.059	-.018	-.041
11. V94: Job: Responsible Job	-.007	.654	.001	.036	.058	.055	.066	.048	-.146	.061	.019
12. V93: Job: Achieve Something	.077	.616	-.094	-.012	-.073	-.042	.052	-.012	-.057	.139	-.071
13. V96: Job: Meets Abilities	.056	.573	.007	-.001	-.061	-.071	-.037	.015	-.192	-.087	.115
14. V95: Job: Interesting	-.010	.525	-.097	-.009	.012	-.071	.051	-.022	-.177	.131	-.097
15. V89: Job: Respected by People	.089	.483	.074	.051	-.063	.032	-.018	.057	-.316	-.138	.067
16. V136: Attend Lawful Demonstrations	-.101	.085	-.745	-.008	-.034	-.146	-.010	-.082	.025	-.047	.048
17. V137: Join Unofficial Strikes	-.159	-.063	-.717	.014	.113	-.056	-.023	.019	-.064	-.029	-.014
18. V135: Join Boycotts	-.071	.094	-.709	-.047	-.022	-.186	.023	-.060	.029	.075	-.125
19. V138: Occupy Buildings	-.114	-.034	-.660	-.002	.148	-.059	-.052	.018	-.041	-.205	-.027
20. V134: Sign Petition	-.006	.164	-.567	-.039	-.083	-.157	.078	-.085	.083	.218	-.172
21. V155: Confidence: Parliament	.059	.054	.026	.745	-.039	.043	.049	-.017	.062	.032	.032
22. V156: Confidence: The Civil Service	.119	.008	.057	.717	-.034	.065	.054	-.009	.008	.087	.087
23. V149: Confidence: The Press	-.012	-.015	-.027	.601	.016	-.002	-.003	-.022	-.072	-.109	.048

Appendix B (cont.)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
	Religiosity	Job Traits: Fulfillment	Political Protest	Institutional Confidence	Civil Permissiveness	Moral Permissiveness	Subjective Well-Being	Neighbors: Minorities	Job Traits: Economic	Military Nationalism	Family Life
24. V151: Confidence: Labor/Trade Unions	-.017	-.114	-.204	.600	-.039	-.024	.019	-.040	-.134	-.044	.013
25. V152: Confidence: The Police	.137	.037	.153	.569	-.093	.062	.102	-.015	.045	.304	-.057
26. V204: Justifiable: Illegal Govt. Benefits	.075	.047	.069	.006	-.720	.033	.046	.010	.017	.063	-.020
27. V207: Justifiable: Accepting Bribe	.077	.029	-.028	.028	-.698	.130	.042	-.029	.014	.008	-.055
28. V206: Justifiable: Cheat on Taxes	.169	-.003	.072	.115	-.683	.123	.007	-.047	-.003	.010	.018
29. V211: Justifiable: Divorce	.244	-.009	.115	.053	-.027	.766	.027	.050	.018	-.021	.077
30. V210: Justifiable: Abortion	.347	-.022	.110	.016	-.057	.735	.013	.009	-.007	-.032	.008
31. V212: Justifiable: Euthanasia	.259	-.002	.074	.080	-.098	.687	-.018	-.045	-.016	-.060	.000
32. V208: Justifiable: Homosexuality	.174	-.066	.170	-.003	-.014	.683	-.030	.117	-.030	.160	.120
33. V213: Justifiable: Suicide	.206	-.031	.099	.008	-.186	.587	.063	-.024	-.064	.139	.108
34. V81: Life Satisfaction	-.060	-.033	-.024	-.054	.077	-.035	-.828	.017	-.007	-.008	.011
35. V11: Happiness	.038	.002	.004	.039	.002	.025	.774	-.014	.002	-.003	-.006
36. V82: Freedom & Control	-.051	-.076	.040	-.049	-.030	.067	-.639	.039	.000	-.092	.082
37. V69: Neighbors: Different Race	.000	.009	.042	-.004	.020	.033	-.026	.863	-.040	-.004	.030
38. V73: Neighbors: Immigrants	-.016	.019	.041	-.029	.013	.028	-.015	.861	-.039	.011	.022
39. V90: Job: Good Hours	.046	.102	-.015	-.004	.007	.007	.033	.027	-.723	-.018	-.035
40. V92: Job: Generous Holidays	.007	.190	-.007	.018	.044	.032	.008	.086	-.664	-.149	-.010
41. V87: Job: Not too much Pressure	.040	.220	.034	.015	-.064	.022	-.046	.065	-.571	-.174	-.003
42. V86: Job: Good Pay	-.003	.040	-.024	-.039	.105	-.006	-.020	.010	-.564	.192	.039
43. V88: Good Job Security	.056	.104	.025	.021	-.064	.038	-.051	.020	-.533	.335	.039

44. V126: Fight in War	.007	.081	-.025	.122	-.047	.033	.049	.002	.078	.624	-.061
45. V148: Confidence: The Armed Forces	.237	.009	.152	.394	-.004	.114	.035	.068	.025	.514	-.090
46. V109: Child Needs Mother & Father	.027	-.003	.055	.019	.005	.188	.008	.038	-.001	.005	.663
47. V110: Women Need Children	.038	-.023	.071	.016	.095	.109	-.126	.080	.021	-.079	.668
Eigenvalue:	7.36	3.34	2.72	2.45	1.86	1.66	1.50	1.38	1.22	1.20	1.10
Alpha:	.910	.731	.764	.708	.579	.813	.556	.703	.672	.408	.365

Appendix C: Question Wording, Variable Coding and Scale Construction

I. Religiosity (Scale) = $([v196/9]+v197+v191+v195+[v186/4]+[v185/6]+v192+[v147/3]+v194)/9$

1. V196 HOW IMPORTANT IS GOD IN YOUR LIFE

How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate – 10 means very important and 1 means not at all important.

- 1 (0)⁹ Not at all
- 2 (1)
- 3 (2)
- 4 (3)
- 5 (4)
- 6 (5)
- 7 (6)
- 8 (7)
- 9 (8)
- 10 (9) Very

2. V197 COMFORT AND STRENGTH FROM RELIGION

Do you find that you get comfort and strength from religion?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

3. V191 BELIEVE IN GOD

Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Believe in God.

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

4. V195 BELIEVE IN HEAVEN

Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Believe in heaven.

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

5. V186 RELIGION IMPORTANT

For each of the following aspects, indicate how important it is in your life: religion.

- 1 (3) Very important
- 2 (2) Rather important
- 3 (1) Not very important
- 4 (0) Not at all important

⁹ Values in parentheses represent variable re-coding where different from the original.

6. V185 HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

- 1 (6) More than once a week
- 2 (5) Once a week
- 3 (4) Once month
- 4 (3) Only on special holy days/Christmas/Easter days
- 5 (3) Other specific holy days
- 6 (2) Once a year
- 7 (1) Less often
- 8 (0) Never practically never

7. V192 BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Believe in life after death.

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

8. V147 CONFIDENCE: CHURCHES

I am going to name a number of organisations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? The churches.

- 1 (3) A great deal
- 2 (2) Quite a lot
- 3 (1) Not very much
- 4 (0) None at all

9. V194 BELIEVE IN HELL

Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? Believe in hell.

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

II. Work Motivations (Scale): A. Fulfillment =

$$(V91+V94+V93+V96+V95+V89)$$

$$B. \text{ Comfort} = (V90+V92+V87+V86+$$

Here are some more aspects of a job that people say are important. Please look at them and tell me which ones you personally think are important in a job.

Mentioned 1 | Not Mentioned 2 (0)

Personal Fulfillment:

- 10. V91** An opportunity to use initiative
- 11. V94** A responsible job
- 12. V93** A job in which you feel you achieve something
- 13. V96** A job that meets one's abilities
- 14. V95** A job that is interesting
- 15. V89** A job respected by people in general

Economic Comfort:

- 39. **V90** Good hours
- 40. **V92** Generous holidays
- 41. **V87** Not too much pressure
- 42. **V86** Good pay
- 43. **V88** Good job security

III. Protest Potential (Scale) = $(v136+v137+v135+v138+v134)/5$

Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances, do it:

Have Done 1 | Might Do 2(1) | Would Never 3(0)

- 16. **V136** Attending lawful demonstrations
- 17. **V137** Joining unofficial strikes
- 18. **V135** Joining in boycotts
- 19. **V138** Occupying buildings or factories
- 20. **V134** Signing a petition

IV. Moral Permissiveness (Scale) = $(v211+v210+v212+v208+v213)/5$

Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between:

1(0)	2(1)	3(2)	4(3)	5(4)	6(5)	7(6)	8(7)	9(8)	10(9)
Never									Always
Justifiable									Justifiable

- 29. **V211** Divorce
- 30. **V210** Abortion
- 31. **V212** Euthanasia
- 32. **V208** Homosexuality
- 33. **V213** Suicide

V. Technical Notes

- Data are weighted using standard national weights.
- There are only two time-points of data (1981 & 2000) for moral permissiveness in Denmark. There are at least three time-points of data beginning in 1981 for the other countries in Figures 1, 2 and 3.