

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

METHODS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nonresponse Bias and Religious Service Attendance

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

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

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

Analysis Strategy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RESULTS

Aggregate Attendance Rates

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

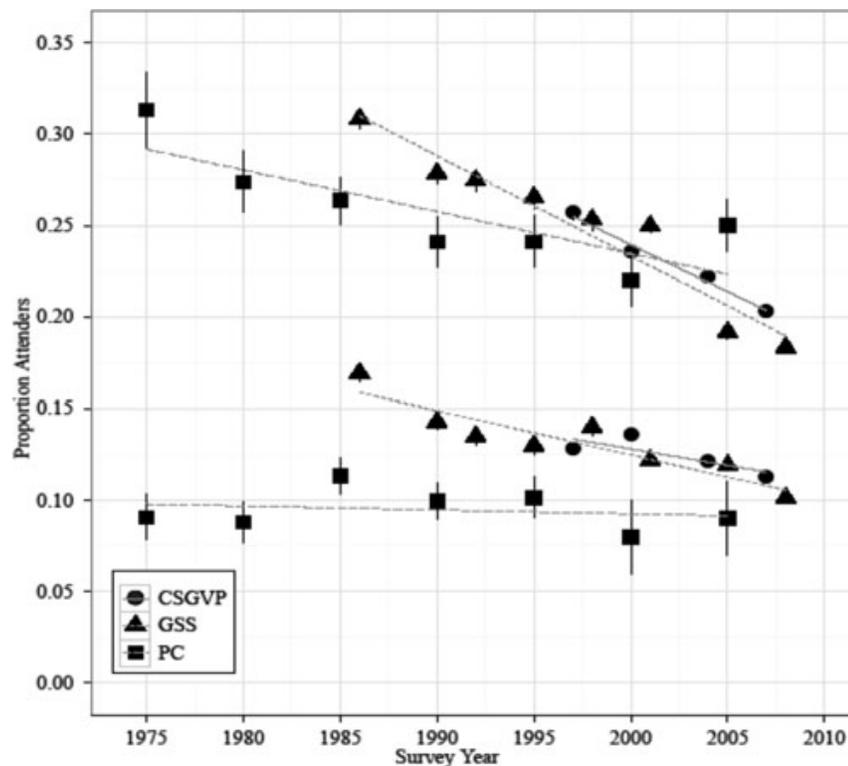
In terms of monthly attendance rates, the PCS consistently reports lower weekly attendance figures than the GSS. The CSGVP (unweighted) reports nearly identical monthly attendance numbers as the GSS. The question is, why the differences? In short, weights.

Issues with Weighting in the CSGVP and PCS

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

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

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



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

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

An Overabundance of Protestants in Project Canada

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Correlates of Religious Attendance

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

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

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

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

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

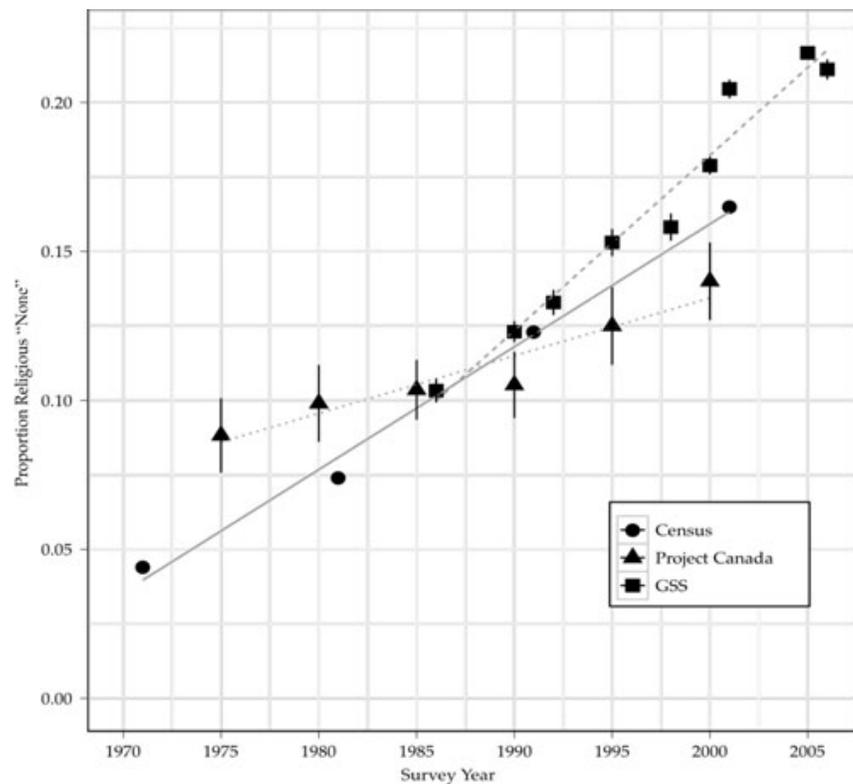
Note: N for the 2.7% Census = 801,055.

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

Changing Rates of Religious Affiliation

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

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

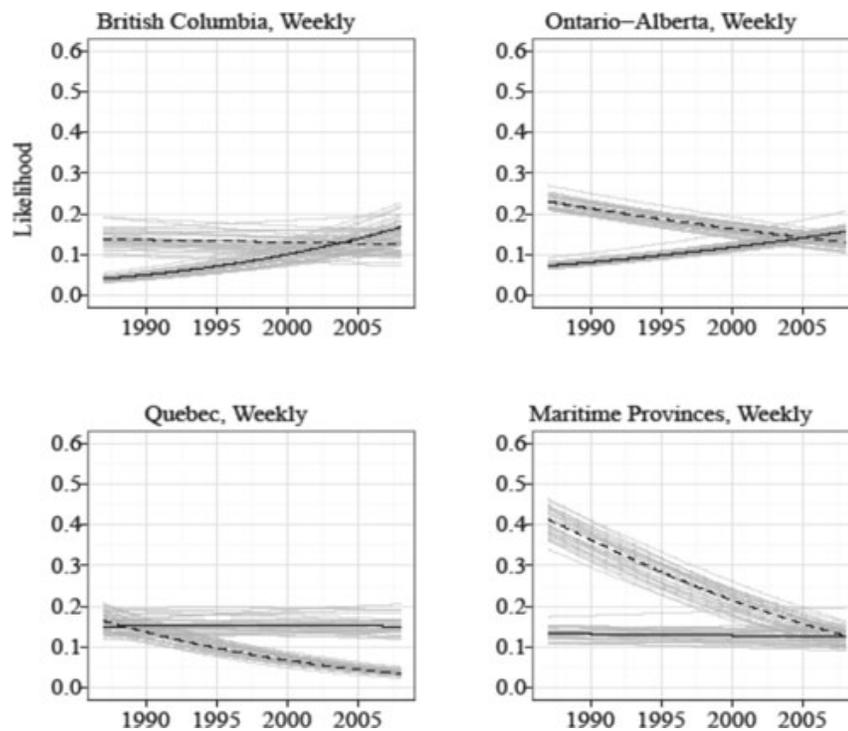


is based on data from the Census, the GSS, and the PCS. The proportion of religious nones has risen from about 11 percent in 1986 to about 21 percent in 2008. This is similar to the pattern found in the United States. Hout and Fischer (2002) report an increase from about 8 percent in 1986 to 15 percent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

Regional Variation

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

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



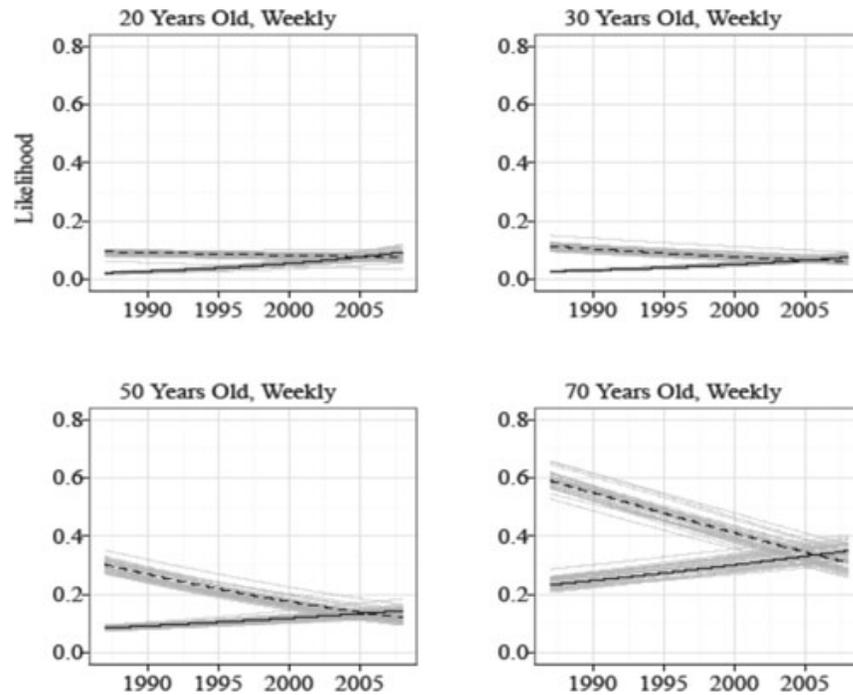
The most striking finding in Figure 3 is the convergence in rates of weekly attendance that has occurred among Catholics and Protestants outside of Québec. West of Québec, rates of weekly attendance for Protestants show signs of increase. The model predicts that the likelihood of attendance of the “average”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

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

Variation by Age

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

Figure 4
Weekly attendance by Protestant/Catholic and age



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

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

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

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

Changes in SES

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Comment

Continuing the Conversation on Canada: Changing Patterns of Religious Service Attendance

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David Eagle's article on changing patterns of religious service attendance appeared in the March 2011 issue of Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. He presented a comprehensive analysis of three data sets that allow social scientists to estimate the rate of religious service attendance in Canada: Project Canada Survey (PCS), the General Social Survey (GSS), and the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (GSGVP). Reginald Bibby initiated the PCS in 1975, 10 years before Statistics Canada began conducting the GSS in 1985, and 22 years before the GSGVP began in 1997. He comments on the Eagle article, cautions scholars to be mindful of important methodological differences across samples, and offers his own analysis of trends in religious service attendance.

Keywords: *religious attendance, Canada, survey research.*

In his *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* article earlier this year, David Eagle (2011) provided an important contribution to an understanding of religion in Canada by examining attendance patterns since the mid-1980s. Such clarification is valuable not only to those who are studying religion in Canada, but to those who see Canada as something of a case study that potentially offers insights into religious developments in other settings, including the United States and Europe. I am flattered that he gave central attention to my Project Canada national surveys (PCS). However, those surveys have only been intended to be a modest means to the far more significant end of providing an enhanced reading of religion in Canada.

A personal confession and some brief background information may be of help to readers. I do not know about you, but I am not particularly interested in numbers. And I am certainly not very interested in surveys—not even all that interested in sociology as such. But I am extremely interested in how the world works. To the extent that sociology, surveys, and numbers can help me to understand what is happening “out there,” I believe they are worth coopting. Obviously, they never can tell the entire story. But they can help to clarify at least some parts of it. As we all know, that is why quantitative and qualitative information, along with a wide range of disciplines, play important complementary roles in seeing and understanding the world more clearly.

Trend-tracking was hardly a part of my career game-plan. What today is known as the “Project Canada Survey Series” began with one fragile, underfunded survey in the mid-1970s. During my doctoral studies at Washington State University under the tutelage of Armand Mauss, I was exposed to the landmark religion survey work in the 1960s of Charles Glock and Rodney Stark. Upon my return to Canada, I felt there was value in generating similar information on

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religion in Canada. The survey data that existed were pretty much limited to a handful of items on attendance, beliefs, and attitudes that Gallup had included in its omnibus polls.

I consequently drew heavily on Glock and Stark's "nature, sources, and consequences" themes in carrying out a national mail survey in 1975 from York University in Toronto, where I was a visiting professor for a year. The goal was to generate some very basic, pioneering data on religion. A number of items on diverse topics were also borrowed from NORC's General Social Survey (GSS) in the United States, to make some Canadian-American comparisons possible. The survey carried the innocuous title of "Project Canada" and was completed for \$13,000, cobbled together from a diverse collage of contributors consisting of the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Solicitor General of Canada, and the University of Lethbridge. Originally, the survey was intended to be pilot-like in nature, with a sample comprised of an equal number of people in the largest city in each of Canada's 10 provinces. A request from the United Church resulted in the inclusion of other community-size categories. Through the miracle of weighting—a concept mentioned to me in a brief hallway conversation by a prominent York colleague—the 1,917 respondents were recast into a sample of 1,200 people that was highly representative, socially and demographically, of the national population.

THE QUALITY OF THE PROJECT CANADA SAMPLES

What was rather remarkable about that first survey was the extent to which the sample—when weighed for provincial and community size, along with gender—mirrored the Canadian population on other variables, including religion (see Tables S1 and S2, Appendix S1, onlinelibrary.wiley.com). Catholics were slightly underrepresented. But, in light of the fact the sample so closely resembled the population, it might be a mistake to assume Catholics were not included. They may well have been a shade more likely than others to say they had "no religion" or to have ignored the question altogether, given this was not a mandatory government census but a self-administered questionnaire that offered a higher level of anonymity and virtually no coercion. That said, language undoubtedly left some immigrant Catholics out; the questionnaire was available only in English and French.

The first survey was followed by similar mail surveys every five years through 2005—seven in all—evolving into the Project Canada Survey (PCS) Series, complemented in time with national youth surveys in 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2008. Something unique about the adult surveys is that all of the samples from 1980 on were comprised of (a) people from previous surveys and (b) new participants. Consequently, the surveys simultaneously yielded cross-sectional, trend, and panel data. No survey was conducted in 2010; an eighth survey may or may not be carried out in 2015. The 1980 and 1985 surveys were supported primarily by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The surveys in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005 were funded by the Lilly Endowment and its Louisville Institute affiliate.

As typically happens with a program involving a series of surveys, the quality of the instruments and samples improved over time. It has been possible to progress from gathering basic information on things such as beliefs and practices to focusing on additional emerging issues, such as new religious movements, the nature of spirituality, and growing religious diversity.

With respect to the samples, in 1975, 30 Canadian communities were involved; by 2005, that number had swollen to more than 300. A cursory comparison of population and sample figures shows that the Project Canada samples, weighed down to approximately 1,200 cases to minimize the use of large weight factors, have been highly representative of the Canadian religious population as estimated by census and GSS figures (see Table S1).

Eagle (2011:192) maintains that the Project Canada samples have included "an inordinate number of Protestants"—a strong statement given how closely the PCS figures match the census figures. He could be right. However, the apparent greater presence in the PCS samples of Protestants and underrepresentation of Catholics, relative to the GSS, has been complicated by the

fact that the GSS—seemingly unaware of 2001 census findings—continues to ignore the growing “Christian unspecified” category. Such people may be buried in any number of the GSS categories. Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald (2007), for example, have found that among visible minority Christians the generic “Christian” affiliation is second only to “Roman Catholic”—suggesting, they say, that the self-designation is a distinctly Protestant phenomenon. Incidentally, “generic Christians” also are disproportionately young, with 75 percent under the age of 45, compared to 63 percent of the general population. But even if there are some possible distortions in the Project Canada aggregate figures, as Eagle claims, my analyses over the years have always included extensive Protestant and Catholic breakdowns of the data. Possible group variations have not been ignored.

THE NEED FOR CORROBORATION: THE GSS

Surveys, of course, never provide perfect readings of reality. Sampling and measurement errors are common, while the very nature of a survey—where it simply is a structured conversation—means that what people say and what we can learn is limited as with any conversation, complete with all kinds of evasiveness and distortion. That is why what we learn from survey conversations needs to be corroborated both with other surveys as well as other data collection methods.

I always have made it a practice to try to corroborate my survey findings with those of other surveys. Beyond that, as possible, I have attempted to link survey findings to real-life developments. For example, if I have found a pattern of decreasing participation in a given religious group, I have looked for corroboration in terms of a decline in something like financial resources. It would be unwise and precarious to do anything less.

The 1985 initiation of the GSS by the federal government agency, Statistics Canada, has been a tremendous resource for social scientists. In some ways, it is similar to the American GSS carried out by the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago since the early 1970s. The Canadian GSS has been conducted almost every year since 1985 with varying core themes including time use, education, work, family and friends, health, victimization, and social engagement. The surveys had very large samples of around 10,000 people through the 1990s that have been increased to 20,000 or so ever since. Most of the data collection has been by telephone, although samples sometimes have also included some face-to-face interviews. Questions about one’s religion and service attendance have appeared in every survey.

The General Social Surveys, along with the decennial census item on religious identification, have provided benchmark data on both religious affiliation and service attendance. Declining GSS participation rates serve to remind us that even these surveys do not provide perfect readings. But they—along with similar government surveys—typically provide the most reliable data we have.

Comparisons of survey results frequently have limitations. In addition to the methods of data collection (phone vs. self-administered), some pertinent GSS and PCS differences are worth noting (see Table 1).

- The GSS samples and the census data consist of people who are 15 and older, while the Project Canada samples are comprised of individuals who are 18 and over. When the GSS and census data are limited to adults, 18 and over (excluding people age 15–17), the differences are only about 1 percent or less.
- The attendance item used in the GSS survey asks people to recall how often they attended services in the previous year; the comparable Project Canada item asks people how often they attend services.
- Prior to the 2008 GSS survey, if respondents indicated they had “no religion,” they were not asked how often they attended services, the assumption being that they never or seldom attended. Clearly, these people need to be included when computing national attendance levels, rather than treating their responses as missing values. For example, in 1986, when

Table 1: Sample size and response rates: Project Canada Surveys (PCS) and General Social Survey (GSS)

	PCS			GSS	
	Sample Size	Response Rate (%)	Weighted Sample Size	Sample Size	Response Rate
1975	1,917	52	1,200	–	–
1980	1,482	65	1,300	–	–
1985	1,630	60	1,231	11,200	83
1990	1,472	61	1,251	13,495	76
1995	1,765	61	1,239	10,749	81
2000	1,729	59	1,200	25,090	81
2005	2,400*	56	1,600	19,597	59
2009	–	–	–	19,422	62

*This total includes a supplementary sample of 495 people who were drawn from Alberta in keeping with funding requirements, weighted down to a national sample of 1,600 cases.

they are included in the service attendance computations, the results are as follows: weekly 28 percent, monthly 15 percent, less than monthly 57 percent. If they are excluded—as Eagle did in computing the GSS figures for 1986—attendance rises, respectively, to 31 percent, 17 percent, and 52 percent. In short, in 1986, the monthly-plus figure was 43 percent, not 48 percent as Eagle reported.

WHAT THE SURVEYS SAY ABOUT TRENDS BETWEEN THE 1980S AND NOW

The Project Canada (PCS) and GSS findings on service attendance are extremely similar over time—with the PCS results consistently within the error range of “plus or minus four percentage points, 19 times in 20.” In light of the “David and Goliath” difference in the scale of the two survey programs, such a revelation came as both a source of relief and gratification for me! What’s more, the results are highly consistent with the other polling results. Some have tended to be a bit higher (e.g., World Values Survey, Environics, Gallup, Ipsos), few have come in lower.

Overall, the various surveys point to a decline in monthly-plus attendance through the early 1990s that leveled off somewhat in the 1990s through about 2005. There are signs that attendance slipped a bit around 2006 but has remained fairly steady since then. The PCSs pointed to a slight attendance increase between 1995 and 2005—but so did the GSS (see Table S2).

In short, these findings indicate that there has been about a 15 percentage point drop in monthly-plus attendance in Canada since the mid-1980s. But, much of this decline occurred by the end of the 1990s. Things have not changed much in the last decade or so.

The extensive GSS data sets make it possible to explore some of the demographic and organizational factors associated with these patterns. What is immediately apparent is that the decline in monthly-plus attendance between 1989 and 2009 was far more pronounced in Catholic-dominated Quebec (40 to 19 percent) than elsewhere (38 to 28 percent; see Table 2).

- Among *Roman Catholics*, the decline in Quebec during the period was fairly dramatic (44 to 20 percent), and smaller yet noteworthy in the rest of Canada (53 to 43 percent).
- *Protestant* attendance over the past two decades has remained very steady (39 percent in 1989, 40 percent in 2009). Conservative Protestants have claimed monthly-plus attendance levels that have remained consistently high at around 60 to 65 percent. Mainline Protestants reported a slight decline between 1989 and the early 1990s. However, their collective level of monthly-plus attendance has remained steady at just under 30 percent since the

Table 2: Canadian religious service attendance, 1989–2009

	1989			1994 1999 2004			2009		
	Monthly	Some	Never	Monthly-Plus			Monthly	Some	Never
Nationally	38%	31	31	33	33	31	28	30	42
Outside Quebec	37	29	34	34	35	33	32	27	41
Quebec	40	35	25	32	26	22	19	38	43
Roman Catholic	49	34	17	42	38	40	32	38	30
Outside Quebec	53	32	15	50	50	50	43	34	23
Quebec	44	37	19	35	26	27	20	42	38
Protestant	39	39	22	37	41	45	40	29	31
Mainline	33	43	24	26	30	30	28	34	38
<i>United</i>	32	43	25	23	29	29	26	34	40
<i>Anglican</i>	31	43	26	26	29	26	26	35	39
<i>Presbyterian</i>	38	43	19	32	36	32	34	34	32
<i>Lutheran</i>	37	40	23	33	35	42	33	33	34
Conservative	59	26	15	64	61	64	62	18	20
<i>Baptist</i>	50	33	17	62	57	59	55	21	24
<i>Pentecostal</i>	-	-	-	-	73	73	74	13	13
<i>Other Protestant</i>	62	24	24	65	-	-	-	-	-
Other faith	44	38	18	44	47	46	42	34	24
Other	-	-	-	-	60	57	52	24	24

Sources: General Social Surveys 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009.

mid-1990s; their individual denomination levels of involvement have also changed little in the past decade or so.

- People identifying with diverse *other major world faiths* have exhibited a stable attendance level of 42 to 44 percent since 1989.

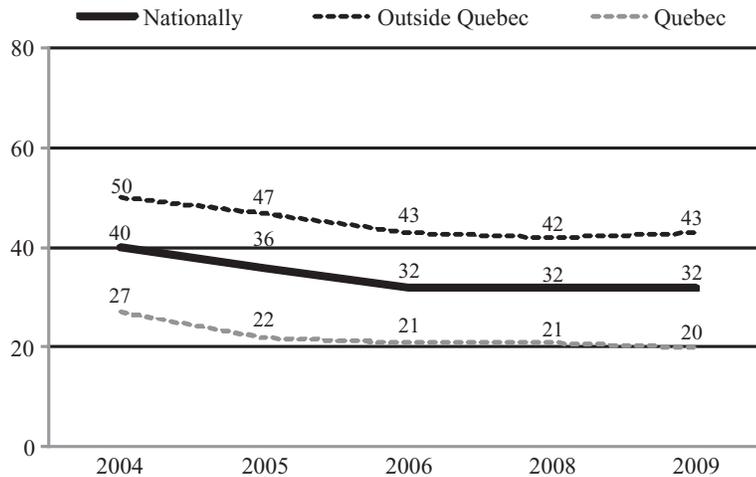
Eagle (2011:193) informs readers that my reports of an attendance increase—signaling the possible beginnings of a religious renaissance in Canada—“are increases *only among Protestant churchgoers*.” Actually, in *Restless Gods* (Bibby 2002:74ff), I supplemented my Project Canada data with findings from the 1990 GSS and the 2000 CSGVP (Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participation) to say the same thing.

The slight national increase in service attendance, however, was not due merely to Protestants. It also reflected a leveling off of Catholic attendance between about 1995 and 2005. The phenomenon was hardly just a function of too many Protestants in the Project Canada samples. Heavens, the GSS surveys documented the same “modest increase” (see Table 2).

When one looks at the quality of the Project Canada samples and the comparability of the PCS findings, it is clear that Eagle’s (2011:193) warning is excessive and unwarranted: “When the PCS are used to explore religion in Canada, the samples either have to be reweighed to account for the Protestant oversample, or a proportion of Protestants must be randomly removed from the sample to bring the proportion Protestant in line with GSS and Census estimates.” He situates his concerns among what he claims to be “the growing list of critiques of the PCS.” I personally am aware of very few such critical critiques, a point that needs to be underlined in view of the extensive use of the Project Canada findings.

The Roman Catholic situation warrants a closer look. The apparent pattern of linear decline, according to the GSS findings, appears to have halted—at least temporarily—both outside Quebec

Figure 1
Roman Catholic monthly-plus attendance, 2004–2009: nationally, outside Quebec, and in Quebec (%)



and in Quebec (see Figure 1). Since 2006, attendance levels have remained essentially unchanged. To some extent, this may reflect the infusion of Roman Catholic immigrants from countries and regions such as the Philippines, Latin America, Africa, and China. It also may reflect a measure of ministry rejuvenation within the Catholic Church. But, regardless, the data indicate that, at least in the short-run, Roman Catholic attendance in Canada no longer is in a free-fall.

CONCLUSION

In my book, *Restless Gods*, released in 2002, I argued that my PCS findings—corroborated with those of the GSS and CSGVP—pointed to considerable religious vitality in Canada. Conservative Protestants were growing. Attendance among mainline Protestants and Catholics outside Quebec was stable rather than declining, and I predicted that it would only be a matter of time before signs of Catholicism rebounding in Quebec would begin to appear. Other major faith groups, I noted, were also exhibiting new levels of visibility and life.

I went so far as to suggest that “there is something of a renaissance of religion in Canada” (Bibby 2002:90). The assertion was built on a solid theoretical foundation. Slightly editing the rational choice thinking of Rodney Stark, I maintained that the demand for religion persisted in Canada. But because of the tight religious market, Canadians were extremely reluctant to turn to new suppliers. Therefore, new life would involve the revitalization of the dominant existing groups—led by the Roman Catholic Church. Over time, they would be expected to “retreat, retrench, revamp, and resurface.” The data, I said, point to Canada’s well-established groups showing “signs of slowing, halting, and even beginning to reverse the downward numerical trends of the second half of the 20th century” (Bibby 2002:90).

Some observers have interpreted me as saying much more. Eagle (2011:87), for example, has me proclaiming that “the long downward trajectory in religious attendance has ended, and there is now an observable increase in weekly attendance.” Joel Thiessen (2012) describes me as making the “surprising assertion” that “a renaissance of religion is, or soon will take place in Canada.”

Actually, I never have been quite that dogmatic about an upward participation trend. In *The Boomer Factor* (Bibby 2006:201), I clarified my position:

Over the past decade or so . . . nationally, religious attendance is no longer spiralling downward. In the early years of the new millennium, the numerical decline has stopped. Moreover, there are some signs that attendance is increasing modestly. Does this signal the beginning of a major turn back to organized religion, or is it just a blip on the participation screen? Who knows for sure?

But in fairness to Eagle, Thiessen, and others, the *Restless Gods* subtitle, *The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, undoubtedly connoted more stridency about a turnaround than I had claimed in the book. Still, one should not judge a book by its cover—or title.

Further survey readings over the past decade have offered additional clues about the Canadian religious situation, and now I think I am closer to solving the puzzle. In my new book, *Beyond the Gods & Back: The Demise and Rise of Religion and Why It Matters* (Bibby 2011), I have maintained that the current Canadian religious situation is characterized—not so much by either *secularization* or *revitalization*—by *polarization*. A fairly stable core of people continues to value and participate in organized religion. That stability led me to think that a measure of revitalization (or “renaissance”) could be taking place. At the same time, the proportion of Canadians who do not value or participate in religious groups has been increasing—seemingly consistent with the secularization thesis.

What has been largely missed in all this is the fact that the two inclinations are co-existing, while the size of “the ambivalent middle” has been shrinking. Put another way, Canadians increasingly embrace or reject religion. Because life is dynamic and ever changing, movement in both directions on “the polarization continuum” will continue to take place. But neither inclination will disappear in the foreseeable future. What remains to be seen is the extent to which both will ebb and flow; what remains to be understood are the social and personal sources of such variations.

As I explain in detail with the help of emerging global data sets, there are good empirical reasons to believe that “the Canadian case” is far from unique. On the contrary, religious polarization is characteristic of most settings across the globe where neither religious monopolies nor secular monopolies exist—settings where religious inclinations will vacillate . . . beyond the gods and back.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The following supporting information is available for this article:

Appendix S1. Tables S1 and S2.

Table S1. Population and PCS and GSS sample characteristics, religion: 1971–2009

Table S2. Monthly-plus attendance: 1975–2009

Supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at wileyonlinelibrary.com.

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*Reply***The Loosening Bond of Religion on Canadian Society: Reply to Bibby**

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Interpreting social science data requires empirical rigor, but data never stand on their own. They require interpretive lenses. Sociologists spill a great deal of ink trying to determine the best framework through which to understand the social world. Here I will spill a little more and argue that the past 25 years of survey data on religion in Canada demonstrate a secularization process at work—not secularization as an inevitable process, where religion must decline until it meets its demise—but a historically and contextually conditioned process by which religion begins to loosen its grip on the social world. A variety of features of contemporary life lead to secularization. Most are things as mundane as declining fertility rates, increased social isolation, and a greater time squeeze felt by individuals and families. Occasionally, the more profound realm of competing epistemologies and the clash of worldviews rears its head. Two facets of the large collection of survey data on religion in Canada provide the most compelling evidence of secularization, the decline in rates of weekly (or near weekly) attendance at religious services and the proportion of people identifying with a specific religious tradition. I will tackle each in turn.

Why weekly attendance? Bibby argues that monthly, rather than weekly, attendance ought to define “regular” attendance at religious services. However, Christian traditions (and Christianity is still the major player in Canada) have long emphasized weekly attendance as the expected norm. The fact that modern life has created a situation where attending religious services 12 times a year is now “regular” attendance is indicative of a secularization process at work. If the bonds of religion are loosening, we would expect, and do in fact observe, weekly attendance rates to falling rapidly.

In terms of attendance data, Bibby is right to point out that the GSS made the decision between 1985 and 2008 not to ask people who identified as “no religion” a question about their attendance at religious services. In the Project Canada surveys, the attendance question was asked of every respondent. Missing data present a dilemma. In my previous article, I chose to take a conservative approach—and one that brought the more recent waves of the GSS into closer agreement with Project Canada—and treated these nonresponses as missing. Opting for the alternative approach and coding religious nones as never attending religious services, weekly attendance in Canada has dropped significantly, decreasing from 27.6 percent in 1986 to 18.9 percent in 2005. The proportion of Canadians who report never attending religious services has gone from 18.0 to 43.7 over the same period. Canada has transitioned from a country where less than one-fifth of the population would not set foot in the door of a church or other religious venue in a given year to one where this is the norm for almost half of the population. This change occurred over a mere 22 years.

These trends mirror those in religious affiliation. From fewer than 10 percent in the 1981 census, now nearly one-quarter of Canadians claim no religious affiliation. These are major changes in just a generation. Although signs may indicate that the steep drop in attendance rates

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has slowed (in large part because attendance rates in Quebec, which holds about a quarter of the population, cannot go much lower), the increase in those claiming no religion continues to climb steadily. Once again, these trends fit best within a secularization framework, which posits the loosening of the bonds of religion on society.

I stand by my earlier assertion that due to lower response rates and the nature of updated panel surveys, the Project Canada samples have drifted away from being representative of the religious makeup of the Canadian population. While Bibby asserts that the Project Canada Surveys are highly representative of the population religiously and demographically, my original analysis shows that the raw Project Canada data have a much higher percentage of Protestants and relatively fewer Catholics, which even weights cannot correct. In the unweighted samples, over one-half of the respondents are Protestant (compared to census estimates of about 30 percent of the population). Weights are not a panacea. If regional and gender representation are also desired, then weights may not fully compensate for religious bias in the sample. For instance, in 1990, the weighted Project Canada survey reports the number of Protestants in Canada as 44.0 percent, compared to 30.5 percent in the General Social Survey and 31.6 percent in the 1991 census; (likewise for Catholics, 41.8 percent as opposed to 46.0 percent and 45.6 percent, respectively). This artifact in the data leads to an understatement of the degree of change in religious affiliation and attendance (because Protestants have the most stable characteristics). Here, I should also note that Table 1 in my original article (Eagle 2011:189, Table 1) reported the response rates and sample size of several of the Project Canada surveys incorrectly. Table 1 of Bibby's response contains the correct sample size and response rates.

To summarize, nearly half of all Canadians never attend religious services, a figure that has more than doubled in 22 years. Almost one-quarter claim no religious affiliation, a three-fold increase over the same period. Most of these declines are among Catholics, particularly Catholics in Quebec and in the Maritime Provinces. For a country where an active Catholic religious majority has played a definitive role in politics, culture, and education, these changes signal major societal shifts.

Bibby softens his claim that a religious renaissance might be beginning in Canada. Instead, he argues for a middle ground between the demise of religion and a religious renaissance—polarization between the religious and the nonreligious. To call the combination of an increasing proportion of people who neither identify with, nor participate in, religious services along with a *declining* proportion of those who identify with a religious tradition and attend services regularly polarization is not entirely accurate. Excepting a rapid, drastic fall in religion, what we observe is more accurately secularization. Polarization implies two parties becoming more entrenched in their respective camps. Polarization results when two parties become less tolerant of one another. The data on religion in Canada do not show entrenchment. There is little evidence to suggest that the majority of those who are exiting religious identification and attendance are doing so from a strong and principled reaction against religion. More likely, people are drifting away, not becoming ardent anti-religionists. By the same token, the religiously active are not becoming more strident and less tolerant of their secular neighbors, again something that polarization implies. The bonds of religion on Canadian society are loosening. Secularization, not renaissance, not polarization, best defines the past 25 years of religion in Canada.

REFERENCES

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