

# Patterns of Religious Attendance in Canada: 1986–2008

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**Abstract:** *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 over-sample of Protestants. I find another weighting problem in the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating that leads to under estimates of aggregate religious attendance rates.*

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## **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 (2006: 201-202; 2004a:18, 22-23; 2004b). 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 US, it is reasonable to hypothesize that similar trends might be evident in Canada. Reimer (2003; 1995) has demonstrated that among evangelicals there are strong similarities between the US and Canada. However, the presence of a large Francophone minority and the larger proportion of Catholics vis a vis the US (about 40 percent vs. 24 percent) suggests that differences between the two countries may exist.

In this article, I seek to provide the most up-to-date answer to the question, "Is attendance at religious services in Canada increasing?" Given debates about secularization theory, my interest is not only in trends at the aggregate level. I am also interested in how patterns of religious attendance are changing in relationship to region of residence, age, religious tradition, gender, and 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 the proportion of Canadians with a Bachelor's degree doubled between 1986 and 2006; likewise, Statis-

tics 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 twenty two years. I restrict my analysis to the period from 1986 - 2008 because of the lack of representative attendance data prior to this time period.

From previous research (Clark 2000, 2003, 1998; Clark and Schellenberg 2006), we know that there is significant regional variation in religious attendance in Canada. For example, 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 non-religious (Clark and Schellenberg 2006). In my analysis of regional variation, I take these differences into account and run analyses 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 - 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 US of Catholic, 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 - recognizing that I am ignoring other small but significant groups in Canada such as Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians.

In the US, age, education, income, immigrant status, and gender have also been show

to have a strong differential relationship to religious attendance (see Fischer and Hout 2006). I also examine the impact of these factors on religious attendance.

## **DATA**

I utilize 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. It is a series of random-digit-dialed telephone surveys conducted across the country of the adult, non-institutionalized 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 asks to speak with an adult member of each household and asks, “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 Labour Survey and is now administered by the non-profit group, Imagine Canada. Its sampling design is very similar to the GSS. The question about church attendance asks, “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 3 or 4 times a year”,

	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>GSS</b>		
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
<b>CSGVP</b>		
1997	78	18,301
2000	63	14,724
2004	57	20,832
2007	54	20,510
<b>Project Canada</b>		
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.

**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.

“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 ask a wide range of questions of Canadians, with a special focus on social issues, religion and intergroup relations. The PCS is stratified to ensure that adequate provincial representation is achieved. At the time of writing, the 2000 and 2005 cycles of the PCS have not been made public and, although I requested the relevant variables, I was unable to obtain them. The question on religious attendance in these surveys reads, “How often do you attend religious services?” with the possible responses given of, “Several times a week”, “every week”, “nearly every week”, “2-3 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.

There are several other surveys that measure church attendance at a single time point. I did not use these data, as I am interested in examining changes over time.

### **Non-Response Bias and Religious Service Attendance**

The GSS has traditionally achieved response rates of about 80 percent. However, in recent years they have declined and reached 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 US

Census CPS data 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 don't 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 (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 non-response 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, this is not likely to introduce additional error into the estimates of the correlates of religious service attendance.

## **METHOD**

First, I run simple comparisons between the three surveys, showing the differences in reported attendance rates. I deal also in this section with several weighting issues in the surveys that account for much of the differences. In the subsequent section of the paper, I explore the relationship of church attendance with its major correlates using GSS data. I use a multinomial logistic regression model with attendance as the outcome.<sup>1</sup> Multino-

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<sup>1</sup>I also investigated employing separate hierarchical logistic regression models with weekly and monthly church attendance as dichotomous dependent variables and time as the grouping variable. This approach did not produce significantly different results from running ordinary logistic regressions with the year of

mial 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. I split attendance into 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.

In the multinomial regressions, I include controls for religious affiliation, province of residence, education, income, age, whether children are present in the home, and marital status. Age was imputed as a continuous variable from categorical age variables and then grand mean centered to make the intercepts directly interpretable (I also tried centering on the mean for each year of the survey, this did not produce significantly different results). To explore the possibility that age and religious attendance are related in a non-linear fashion, I investigated adding squared and cubed age functions. For education, I created a three-category variable, university graduate, high-school graduate, and not a high school graduate. Income was also coded into 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.<sup>2</sup> It would have been preferable to code religious affiliation in a more fine-grained manner (along the lines suggested by Steensland et al. 2000), however for the later years of the GSS, these are the only categories made available. In the GSS, the “other religion”

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the survey as included as a continuous variable. This indicated that there was not a great deal of intra-year variation, and that most of the variation in these data was occurring over time.

<sup>2</sup>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.”

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.

In my results section, where I present estimates of the relationship between the correlates of religious attendance and the likelihood of religious attendance, I report changes among an “average” member of the population. I define an “average” person as male, married (or common-law), of average age and income, high school educated, native-born, and without children at home. Changes in the attendance patterns of this “average” person mirror aggregate trends across the population and can be adjusted by adding the impact of other characteristics (female, foreign-born, etc.).

I do not report the coefficients of these regressions (they are available upon request). Multinomial logistic regression coefficients are related to the dependent variable in a non-linear fashion, and thus are difficult to interpret on their own. Also, I do not report p-values. The likelihoods are calculated by adding several coefficients together, each with different standard errors. Instead, when I report the likelihood of attendance, I present posterior estimates of the uncertainty using an informal Bayesian procedure (Gelman and Hill 2007:142-144). These are plotted as gray lines or given as intervals on a table and represent 95% probability intervals around estimates of the dependent variable, given the uncertainty in the coefficients for the independent variables.

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 service 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 US and Canada and found that religious attendance rates are significantly over-reported. 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 US (Chaves and Cavendish 1994) and in a small county in southern Ontario (Hadaway and Marler 1997). At present, the problem of accounting for over-reporting remains an issue that is not incorporated into my models.

## **RESULTS**

### **Aggregate Attendance Rates**

In Figure 1, I plot the rates of weekly and monthly religious attendance over time for the various surveys. 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. 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.

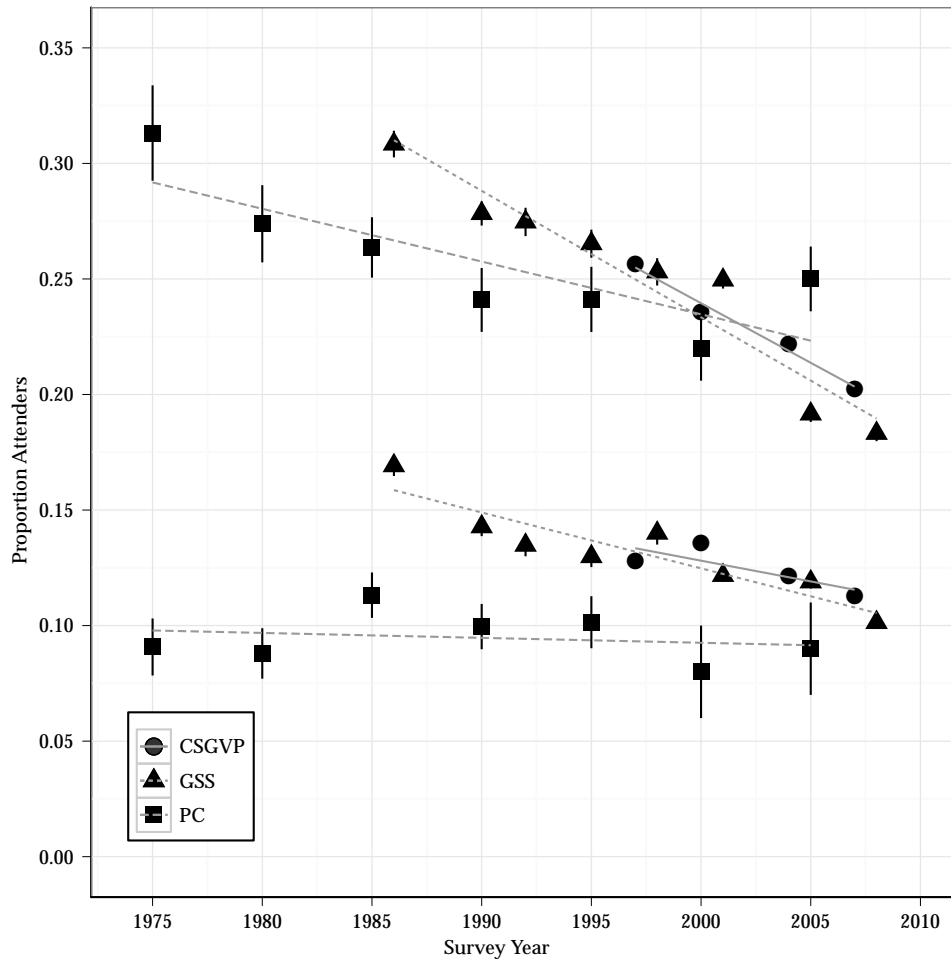
In terms of monthly attendance rates, the PCS consistently reports lower weekly attendance figures than the GSS. The CSGVP (unweighted) reports nearly identical monthly attendance numbers as the GSS. The question is, why the differences? In short, weights.

### **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 gender and region. These weighting factors cause problems, however, when used to analyze trends in religious participation. The weights do not correct for the oversample of certain religious groups, leading to the artificial inflation of this group's 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.<sup>3</sup> The GSS achieved a relatively representative sample across the major religious categories (at least when compared with the Census, which, although not perfect, is the best estimate of the religious preferences of Canadians available). For this reason, therefore, I utilize weights only in the GSS and not the CSGVP.

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<sup>3</sup>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 1998-2008, the CSGVP applies a much smaller weighting factor to religious attenders than the GSS (1042 for the CSGVP versus 1279 for the GSS) whereas the weight applied to religious non-attenders is larger (1508 versus 1386). 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 if church attendance is indicative of a pro-social orientation, then this survey may under-represent the level of charitable giving and volunteering in Canada.



**Figure 1:** Aggregate Rates of Weekly and Monthly Attendance, GSS, CSGVP, PCS. Error bars show standard errors for PCS. For the GSS and CSGVP, the error is contained by the size of the points.

### **An Over-Abundance of Protestants in Project Canada**

The differences between the PCS and the GSS also stem from a weighting problem. And while the 2000/5 PCS data are not available, assuming that the characteristics of the PCS stay relative stable from 1995 to 2005, the reason for this difference is clear (in 1985/6 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 both to the GSS and the Census (20% long form, see Panel 2 of Table 2), the PCS samples contain an inordinate number of Protestants and fewer Catholics.<sup>4</sup> These differences persist even after survey weights are applied (PCS surveys were weighted by region, gender, and age, but not religious affiliation (Bibby 1987)). This explains why Bibby's weekly attendance numbers 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 1986-2005, the ratio of Catholics to Protestants attending religious services weekly went from 1.95 to 0.73. Bibby's reported increase, which he argues (2004b, 2006) signals the possible beginnings of a religious renaissance in Canada, are increases only among Protestant churchgoers.

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 re-weighted to account for the Protestant oversample (which could introduce problems with regional, gen-

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<sup>4</sup>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.

<b>1</b>	<b>Unweighted</b>		<b>Weighted</b>		
	<b>PCS 1985</b>	<b>GSS 1986</b>	<b>PCS 1985</b>	<b>GSS 1986</b>	
Protestant	0.513	0.273	0.453	0.314	
Catholic	0.382	0.554	0.416	0.460	
Other Religion	0.023	0.096	0.103	0.123	
No Religion	0.081	0.077	0.127	0.103	
<b>2</b>	<b>PCS 1990</b>	<b>GSS 1990</b>	<b>PCS 1990</b>	<b>GSS 1990</b>	<b>Census 1991</b>
Protestant	0.508	0.379	0.444	0.305	0.316
Catholic	0.370	0.394	0.418	0.460	0.456
Other Religion	0.039	0.112	0.036	0.112	0.105
No Religion	0.083	0.116	0.102	0.123	0.123
<b>3</b>	<b>PCS 1995</b>	<b>GSS 1995</b>	<b>PCS 1995</b>	<b>GSS 1995</b>	
Protestant	0.535	0.272	0.440	0.261	
Catholic	0.340	0.470	0.392	0.449	
Other Religion	0.034	0.119	0.042	0.137	
No Religion	0.091	0.139	0.126	0.153	

**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 ten years.

der 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.<sup>5</sup> These concerns add to the growing list of critiques of the PCS (cf. Bruce 2002, Thiessen and Dawson 2008).

## CORRELATES OF RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE

My goal in this article is not only to understand how religious attendance patterns are changing at the aggregate level. I am also interested in how religious attendance patterns

<sup>5</sup>Calibrating the later years of the PCS against the census suffers from the fact that the 2001 Census contains a large number of “Christian—not otherwise identifiable” responses, which makes using the Census as a calibration device more difficult for the 2000 and 2005 PCS.

are changing in 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. In this section of the paper, I focus on the correlates of attendance in Canada that point to important shifts in the population: religious affiliation, region of residence, age, gender and various measures of socio-economic status.

In Table 3, I present a summary of these correlates in 1986 and 2008 to provide a glimpse of how Canadian society has changed over this 22 year period. The biggest changes in the population are in 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), average income (almost a \$9,000 increase, in constant 2002 dollars), the presence of children in the home (an 8 point decline), age (an increase of 3.2 years in the mean age), and 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” report never attending religious services, 7 percent report attending yearly, and 3 percent report attending weekly or monthly). In Figure 2, I plot the number of religious nones in Canada from the Census, the GSS and PCS. This Figure shows that the proportion of religious nones has risen from about 11 percent in 1986 to about 21 percent in 2008.

	<b>GSS</b>	
	<b>1986</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Religious Service Attendance</b>		
Weekly or More	30.8	18.3
Monthly	16.9	10.1
Less than Monthly	52.3	71.6
<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>		
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
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant	31.4	30.1
Catholic	46.0	38.6
Other Religion	12.3	7.9
No Religion	10.3	23.0
<b>Income</b>		
Mean (constant 2002 dollars)	\$49,049	\$57,791
<b>Education</b>		
No High School	36.4	19.6
High School	55.1	54.9
University	8.3	25.5
<b>Province of Residence</b>		
Newfoundland & Labrador	2.2	1.6
PEI	0.5	0.4
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

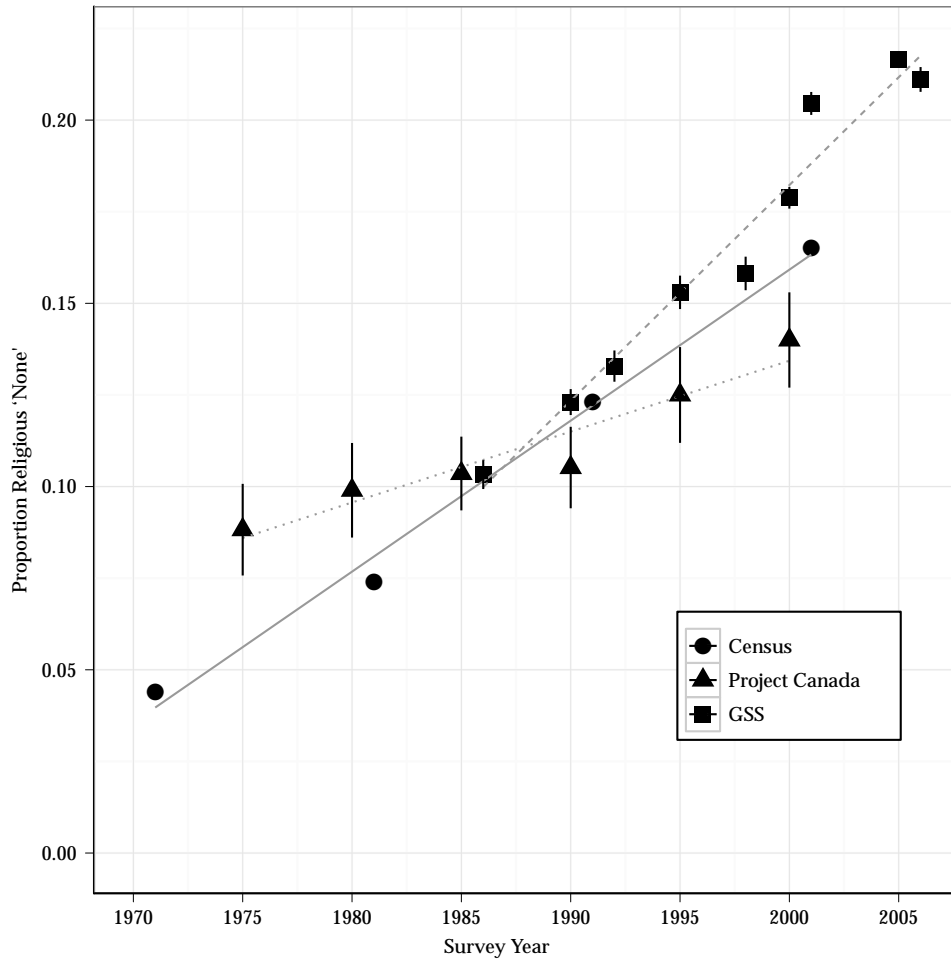
**Table 3:** Comparison of population characteristics in 1986 and 2008 based on the General Social Survey.

This is similar to the pattern in the United States. Hout and Fischer (2002) report an increase from about 8 percent in 1986 to 15 percent in 2002; Kosmin (2009) reports that nones comprised about 15 percent of the US population in 2008. Given that the proportion of people who attend yearly in Canada has remained relatively constant (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. In terms of the aggregate rates, approximately half of the 19.3 point 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 of “other” religious categories).

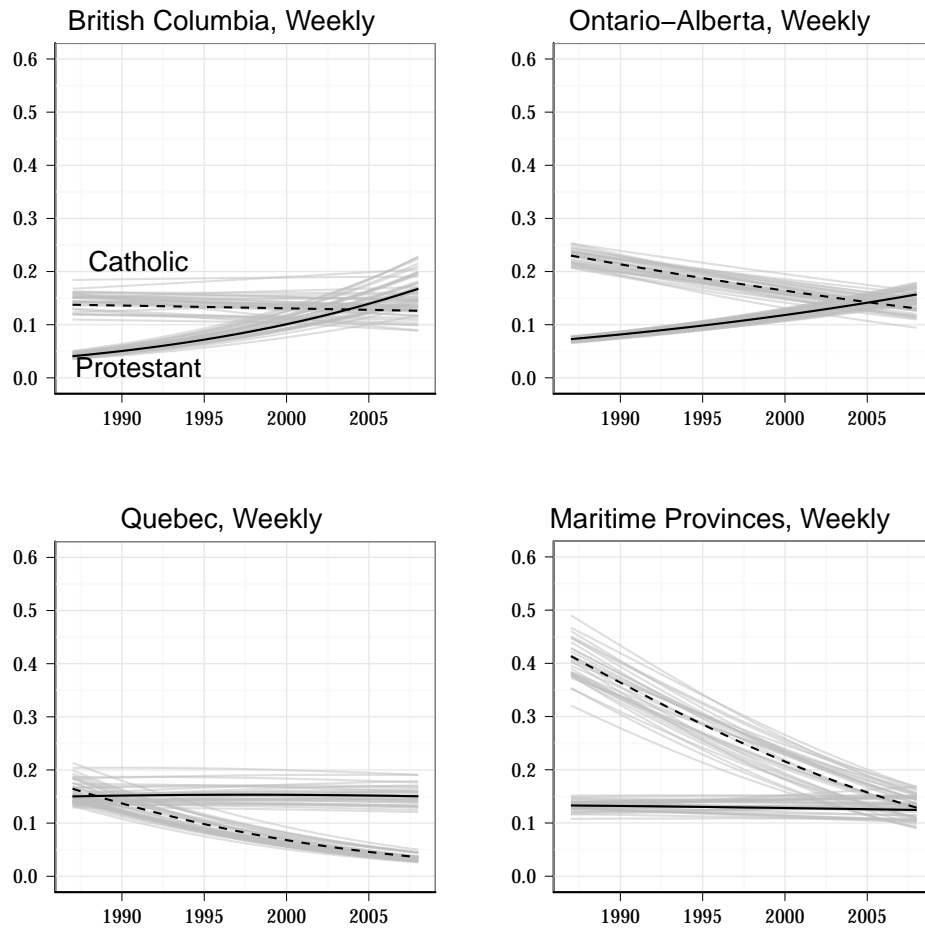
### **Regional Variation**

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. In order to explore these trends, in Figure 3, I use regression results to plot the probability of an “average” person attending religious services on a weekly basis, broken down by these four regional groupings over time. I explored plotting separate graphs by province, but the patterns in the Maritimes and in Western/Central Canada were similar. I left British Columbia separate to demonstrate that patterns in BC mirror closely those in the rest of Western/Central Canada, challenging the assertion that BC is more highly non-religious.

The most striking thing Figure 3 displays is the convergence in rates of weekly atten-



**Figure 2:** Proportion of people reporting "no religion" in Canada over time for the GSS, PCS, and the Census (2.7 percent sample)..



**Figure 3:** Weekly attendance at religious services by Protestant/Catholic and region. Grey bars show posterior estimates of uncertainty.

dance that has occurred among Catholics and Protestants outside of Québec. Also, it is significant that west of Québec, rates of weekly attendance for Protestants show signs of increase. West of Québec, 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 for an “average” Catholic to attend church in Québec is now about .04, down from .41 in 1986. The Maritimes has also seen a dramatic drop in Catholic church attendance, with the likelihood of an “average” person attending 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 about the US when they claim that the only group to experience an attendance decline in the US were 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**

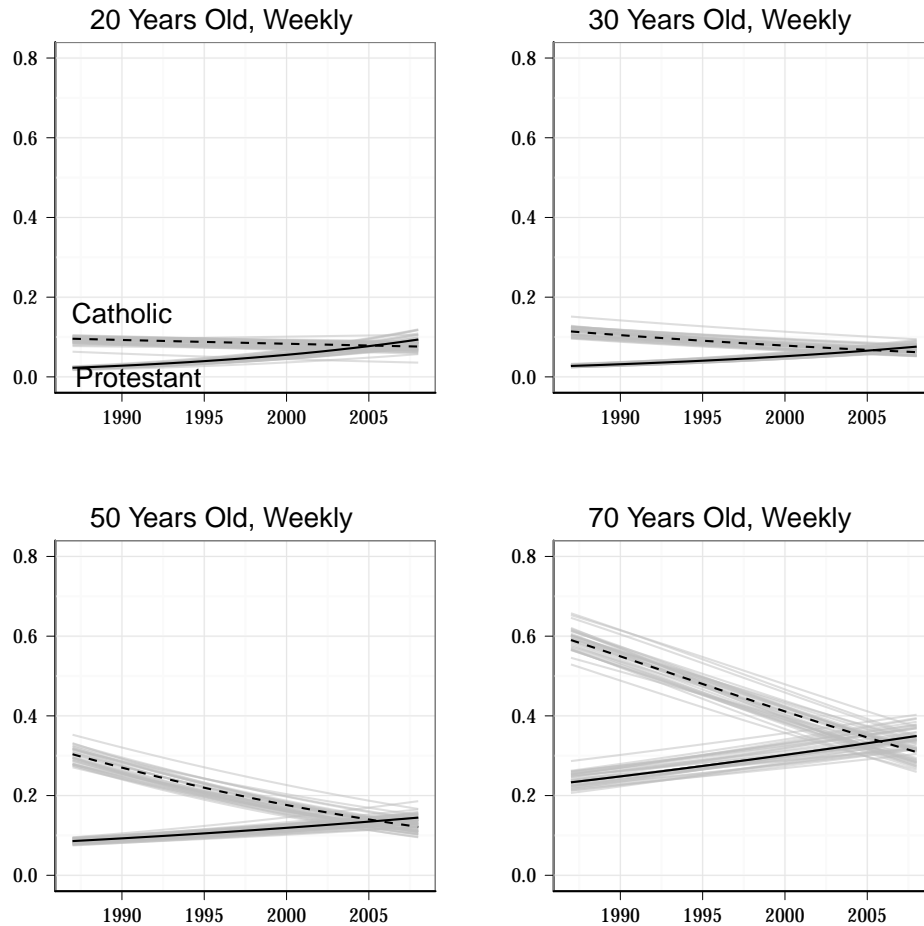
Religious attendance also varies considerably by age and has a highly non-linear relationship with attendance. In the final regression model, age squared, age cubed, the interaction between age and wave, and the interaction between age squared and wave were significant. In Figure 4, I plot the likelihood of this “average” person attending religious services 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 a 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 rela-

tionship 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 are between the weekly attendance category and the never-attend category.



**Figure 4:** Weekly attendance by Protestant/Catholic and age.

**Changes in SES**

In Table 4, I present the likelihood that the “average” person will attend religious services in 2008, along with the effect of changing various characteristics of this person (I looked at these trends over time, but there is little change, results not shown). Because this table is different from many regression tables, I will walk through an example of how to use this table. Start with the “average” person, who, from the top line of the table, has a likelihood of attending services weekly of about .132. Now, imagine we were curious about an average woman. We move down the table to the “female” row and find the new likelihood of .179 (a .047 increase, about a 36 percent change). Similarly, for the average immigrant their likelihood is .167 (a .035 increase, or a 27 percent change). These changes 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 non-linear fashion). However, they do give a sense of how religious attendance is related to these characteristics. They also provide a feel for what projected changes in these characteristics are likely to do to religious attendance rates.

Gender 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 a post-secondary, 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).

	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Yearly</b>	<b>Never</b>
	0.132	0.131	0.244	0.493
	(0.159 - 0.116)	(0.152 - 0.109)	(0.280 - 0.221)	(0.511 - 0.461)
<i>Change religious affiliation to:</i>				
<b>None</b>	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.983
	(.012 - .003)	(.012-.003)	(.011 - .003)	(.987 - .975)
<b>Other</b>	0.075	0.174	0.318	0.433
	(.103 - .059)	(.218 - .132)	(.393 - .261)	(.467 - .380)
<i>Change demographic characteristics to:</i>				
<b>Female</b>	0.179	0.151	0.254	0.416
	(0.205 - 0.156)	(0.172 - 0.122)	(0.278 - 0.228)	(0.438 - 0.398)
<b>Not Married</b>	0.096	0.107	0.226	0.572
	(0.114 - 0.08)	(0.132 - 0.089)	(0.269 - 0.2)	(0.597 - 0.54)
<b>Child at Home</b>	0.178	0.162	0.237	0.423
	(0.201 - 0.155)	(0.187 - 0.139)	(0.258 - 0.208)	(0.455 - 0.397)
<b>Foreign Born</b>	0.167	0.128	0.237	0.468
	(0.194 - 0.144)	(0.162 - 0.106)	(0.266 - 0.207)	(0.496 - 0.439)
<i>Change level of education to:</i>				
<b>University Degree</b>	0.174	0.151	0.244	0.431
	(0.198 - 0.154)	(0.177 - 0.124)	(0.279 - 0.2)	(0.453 - 0.404)
<b>No High School</b>	0.131	0.121	0.251	0.498
	(0.158 - 0.103)	(0.146 - 0.098)	(0.277 - 0.217)	(0.528 - 0.466)
<i>Change income, constant 2002 dollars) to:</i>				
<b>\$100K+</b>	0.104	0.110	0.228	0.558
	(0.127 - 0.083)	(0.147 - 0.089)	(0.285 - 0.196)	(0.584 - 0.528)
<b>&lt;\$40k</b>	0.152	0.129	0.225	0.494
	(0.178 - 0.130)	(0.148 - 0.109)	(0.252 - 0.201)	(0.515 - 0.476)

**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.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

To summarize my findings, on the aggregate level, weekly and monthly religious attendance has decreased by about 20 percentage points in Canada from 1986 to 2008. Approximately half of this decline is attributable to the increase in the number of people reporting no religion, the vast majority of whom 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 from these data 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 are due to attrition from the weekly and monthly attendance categories into the never attend category. My finding that the weighting factors in the CSGVP and PCS lead to biased estimates of aggregate attendance rates suggests that researchers must

exercise caution when using data that are weighted against region, age, and gender, 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 US, this is a more challenging problem because of the lack of Census religious affiliation data. 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 had 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 are 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. This points to the need for researchers, in light of these data, to continue to refine current theories of secularization—or religious renaissance—in Canada.

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