

Religious Pluralism and Life Satisfaction: A Multi-nation Analysis

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In a post-industrial context like the United States or Canada, religious participation is known to have positive implications for life satisfaction. In this paper I argue that these findings may be extended beyond this limited context to nations as discrepant as France and the Philippines. Additionally, I use Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) and a large cross-national dataset to test for a moderating and direct effect of religious pluralism on life satisfaction. My findings suggest that religious environments may not function as religious markets when the environment is national in scope. This study moves us beyond the secularization debate by examining the impact of religious pluralism beyond its relationship to religious vitality; my findings suggest that the implications of religious pluralism extend beyond the pious individual. Directions for future research in the sociology of religion are discussed.

The future of religion, and religious vitality more specifically, is the “unanswerable question” (Gorski and Altinordu 2008: 75). According to Gorski and Altinordu (2008), it is time for scholars of religion to move beyond the secularization debate and begin looking at the tangible effects of religious contexts and religious participation. The “tangible effects” are more than supernatural compensators; the tangible effects are the actual rewards that religious organizations can provide (Stark and Bainbridge 1980). They likewise include the potentially disturbing qualities that stem from talk of “damnation” and the fear of the unknown (Geertz 2000; Orsi 2005). But, research on religious pluralism is overly fixated on secularization’s (presumed) threat to religious vitality and the anomaly of a high and stable membership in the religious institutions of countries like the United States and Ireland (Lipset 1991). This debate comes at the cost of uncovering the further implications religious pluralism may have for religious participants and/or religious “nones” (see, for exception, Borgonovi 2008).

Furthermore, research on religious participation and its consequences tends to focus primarily on the United States and Western Europe. In fact, the past three decades of research in the sociology of religion are disproportionately focused on the US context (Smilde and May).

But, it is reasonable to question whether religious participation in the United States or Germany has the same (positive or negative) consequences as religious participation in Singapore or South Africa. However improbable, we must consider the possibility that what yields increased life satisfaction in one social context may generate angst and perturbations in another. In that same sense, we cannot assume that religious pluralism is a proxy for religious choice. Persons of a particular race/ethnicity, gender, or social class are not always free to choose between competing religious (and secular) organizations simply because an alternative exists. Therefore, to presume that religious organizations compete for adherents in a free-market system is unfounded if you do not consider the social context, or brief, that these organizations must negotiate (Baxandall 1985).

Misguided assumptions like the ideas I discuss above limit our ability to fully account for the effect that religious pluralism has on religious participation and life more generally. In this paper I address these issues by examining the effect of religious pluralism on life satisfaction and on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction using a large, cross-national dataset. I test a series of hypotheses related to religious pluralism, life satisfaction, and life beyond the industrialized West, and I do so in a theoretical framework that takes account of religious participation as a cultural object (Griswold 1987). I find that some of these assumptions are not unfounded, but I also find that the measurable effects of religious pluralism may be more complex than previous research details. In light of my findings, directions for future research are discussed.

The Secularization Debate

Wendy Griswold's (1987) cultural diamond looks at the relationship between the creators and receivers of a cultural object as this relationship exists within a larger social world.

Religious organizations serve as the creators of a cultural object, religious participation, that is simultaneously consumed and (re)created by the religious participants who operate within the same social arenas. To borrow from the art historian Michael Baxandall (1985), it is the “charge” of religious organizations to increase their membership. Baxandall also suggests that the specific problem arises against a “brief” of specific circumstances. Free religious markets and religious monopolies pose two different sets of circumstances that religious organizations must attend to. There is much debate about how these different sets of circumstances alter levels of religious vitality.

Peter Berger’s (1967) notion of the “sacred canopy” brought the issue of religious competition and religious vitality to the fore of research in the sociology of religion.¹ Berger (1967) made clear that religious pluralism would be the death of religion because competition from religious alternatives serves to threaten the plausibility that any one religion is correct. Rodney Stark, Lawrence Iannaccone, Roger Finke and colleagues (Finke, Guest and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 1988; Iannaccone 1998), on the other hand, are responsible for the dearth of literature in support of a rational choice approach to understanding religion. According to the religious economies model, religious markets act like economic arenas. That is, competition among religious organizations increases the quantity and the quality of religious “products” and, subsequently, serves to increase levels of religious participation. The past two decades saw no shortage of support for either side of the coin (see Breault 1989a; Breault 1989b; Chaves and Gorski 2001; Finke, Guest and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 1988; Finke and Stark 1989; Olson 1998; Olson 1999).

According to Finke and Stark (1988), religious participation increases under higher levels of religious pluralism. Because competition increases the quantity and the quality of the product

¹ Berger (CITE) has since recanted his previous stance on religious pluralism and religious vitality.

that religious organizations seek to “sell,” religious pluralism fosters growth in religious vitality rather than undermining it. According to Finke and Stark, religious competition leads to specialization, attracts a broader segment of the population, and raises the level of religious vitality in areas of higher religious pluralism. Finke, Stark and colleagues (Finke, Guest and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 1988) found this to be the case for the largest 150 US cities in 1906 and among a sample of 942 cities and towns in the 1855 and 1865 New York State Censuses. Others doubt these findings hold across different social contexts and under more careful methodological means (Chaves and Gorski 2001; Olson 1998; Olson 1999).

Breault (1989a; Breault 1989b) contests that Finke and Stark’s (1988) findings are not replicable. Breault and others (Olson 1998; Olson 1999) attribute support for the religious economies approach to a high degree of collinearity between percent Catholic and religious diversity. Breault suggests that the positive relationship between religious pluralism and religious vitality in Finke and Stark’s 1988 study is an artifact of the highly correlated (negative) relationship between percent Catholic and religious diversity that serves to reverse the sign of the zero-order correlation between religious diversity (or pluralism) and religious participation from negative to positive. Likewise, Olson (1999) shows that there is a negative relationship between religious pluralism and participation in contemporary US counties and using historical data on US church membership. These studies yield support for Berger’s notion that the spread of religious pluralism will mean the demise of religious vitality.

Neither side of the secularization debate, however, fully accounts for the effect of the context, or the degree of religious pluralism, on the experience of the event – religious participation. Whether competition fosters an improved quality in the product being offered or reduces the plausibility of any single religion, the residual effect on those that continue to

participate in their denomination should not be overlooked. The argument of religious economies proponents suggests that religious competition improves the quality of the religious product; this implies that the rewards of religious organizations in a competitive market will be greater than the rewards of religious organizations in a monopoly situation. On the other hand, the secularization theorists maintain that competition fosters doubt and decreases religious vitality. This implies a two-fold effect on religious rewards. First, people will cease to participate in religion and thus relinquish their claim to the rewards of religious organizations. Second, those who continue to practice their religion in a monopoly situation will find fewer rewards in their religious organization.

Life Satisfaction

The link between religion and quality of life is well documented. The work of Ellison and colleagues (Ellison 1991; Ellison, Gay and Glass 1989; Ellison et al. 2001) shows that religious participation increases life satisfaction, improves physical health, and raises overall subjective well-being. Ellison et al. (2001) find that church attendance shares a positive association with well-being and an inverse association with distress. In another article, Ellison, Gay and Glass (1989) conclude that both the private and public aspects of religiosity bear a small, but persistent positive relationship with life satisfaction. The findings of these studies are a shift from previous research that showed little evidence of a positive relationship between religious involvement and life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers 1976). However misleading its findings, Campbell and colleagues' *The Quality of American Life* sparked more than a decade of research refuting the negative association between religiosity and well-being in the United States and Canada. Many since conclude that religious participants enjoy no small mix of rewards from their religious organizations.

Others take a more pragmatic approach to understanding religious participation. In a study of Venezuelan Evangelicals, Smilde (2007) shows that religion can be a means to overcome addiction, resist violence, and combat other personal and social difficulties. Taking a pragmatic approach, individuals will seek out religious organizations for the this-worldly rewards that they provide. Although others (for example, Warner 1993) point out that there are a number of reasons why individuals might be slow to admit to “shopping” for religious organizations or choosing a denomination based on this-worldly rewards, I think this is irrelevant. Regardless of an individual’s motives, religious rewards are the real and measurable effects of religious involvement. Religious organizations provide more than supernatural compensators; religious organizations have the capacity to provide this-worldly rewards (Stark and Bainbridge 1980: 125).

Contrary to the Marxian view of religion, research has shown that religion is not merely an alienating force. On the contrary, religious participation offers more than the promise of otherworldly treasures that make the realities of this world seem tolerable. Whether they are intentionally sought or simply the unintended bi-products of religious involvement, the “positive externalities” of religious participation serve as tangible rewards for the religious participant (Stark and Bainbridge 1980). Stark and Bainbridge (1980: 127) explain, “[R]eligious organizations are not merely ‘otherworldly’ purveyors of compensators. They also serve as a source of direct rewards.” But if this is true in the United States and Canada, is it also true in Latvia and India? How does the religious context shape the this-worldly returns of religious participation? In the following pages I develop and test a series of hypotheses that address these questions.

Hypotheses

Research on religion and life satisfaction tends to focus on the United States, Canada, and other industrialized nations. Even still, it is unlikely that religious participation manifests itself in opposite ways for the people of the developing world.

H1: Religious participation will increase life satisfaction regardless of national context.

Finke and Stark's (1988) assertion that competition between religious organizations improves the quality and quantity of religious participation suggests that there is an interaction effect between religious pluralism and religious participation when the rewards of religious participation serve as the dependent variable. Namely, religious pluralism has a positive effect on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction. But, because there is more evidence to refute Finke and Stark's findings than there is to support them, it is probable that any interaction between religious pluralism and religious participation should be a negative one.

H2: Religious pluralism will have a negative effect on the relationship between religious pluralism and life satisfaction.

Following that same logic, if religious participation reduces religious vitality than those who once sought the rewards of religious organizations will cease to participate in organized religion when those organizations fail to provide adequate rewards. Additionally, religious competition often manifests itself in conflict between divergent religious groups. As evidenced by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, competition between religious groups has implications for all persons irrespective of their religious identity or involvement. Put differently, religious pluralism is experienced by the religious and non-religious alike.

H3: Religious pluralism will have a direct and negative effect on life satisfaction.

Data and Methods

Sample

The data for this analysis comes from the pooled World Values Survey/European Values Survey (WVS/EVS) provided by the World Values Survey Association (WVSA). The WVS/EVS includes representative surveys of 97 nations and territories containing 88 percent of the world's population. The WVS/EVS includes five waves of surveys, from 1981 to 2007. Each survey is administered by a local field organization under the direction of a WVS associate. A random probability sample of each society's adult population was interviewed using a standardized questionnaire that measures changing values and beliefs about religion, gender roles, work motivations, democracy, government, social capital, political participation, tolerance of other groups, environmental protection, and subjective well-being (Norris and Inglehart 2004). At the time of this analysis, four waves of the WVS/EVS were available for use; this study uses data from only the fourth wave.

The fourth wave of the WVS/EVS (1999-2004) includes more than 100,000 cases across 68 countries. The 68 nations in the fourth wave of the WVS/EVS span the gamut from the very rich to the very poor, from the authoritative to the liberal, and cover all of the world's major cultural zones. My decision to use the fourth wave is a result of question inconsistency between waves and the inclusion of more agrarian, authoritarian, and Middle Eastern societies that were previously not included in the first three waves of the WVS/EVS.

Of the 68 countries in the fourth wave of the world values survey, 55 nations are included in this study. The 55 nations in this study represent those with available data on all of the religious participation variables utilized in my analysis; there is no reason to assume that the 13

missing countries are systematically different in any way from the 55 remaining nations.² The 55 nations included in this analysis amount to 80,739 cases; cases per country range from a low of 966 (Belarus and Iceland) to a high of 4604 (Turkey).³ The Appendix presents the total number of cases for each of the 55 nations included in this analysis. Missing data on the dependent variable, life satisfaction, results in a final N of 80,078. Missing data on control variables was imputed as is discussed below. The means and standard deviations for all of variables in the model are presented in Table 1.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Measures

Life Satisfaction: Life satisfaction is a measure of a respondent's overall satisfaction with her/his life. The fourth wave survey of the WVS/EVS asked respondents, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" Responses ranged from a score of (1) Dissatisfied to (10) Satisfied. Life satisfaction is the best measure of the worldly consequences associated with religious participation available in the WVS/EVS to test my hypothesis about the relationship between religious participation and the quality of life. Other variables that measure satisfaction in particular spheres of life (e.g. satisfaction with the financial situation of the household) contain large amounts of missing data.

Religious Participation: Religious participation is a scale of two questions measuring participation in religious services and prayer outside of religious services. The first question, "How often do you attend religious services?" was recoded into a six-category ordinal variable that ranges from (1) Never or practically never to (6) More than once a week. The second

² The 13 omitted nations include Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Niger, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and Serbia and Montenegro.

³ Turkey is an exceptional case in the WVS/EVS; Turkey was included in both the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey for 2001 and the 4604 case represent the sum of these two surveys.

question, “How often do you pray to God outside of religious services?” was also recoded into a six-category ordinal variable ranging from (1) Never or practically never to (6) Everyday. Z-scores were obtained for each measure and used to calculate a scale of religious participation (Alpha = .71).⁴ The purpose of using a scale of religious participation is two-fold. First, including both attendance at religious services and prayer outside of religious services covers what each of the world’s major faiths deem religious and reduces the chances that a “religious person” will be overlooked by this study. Secondly, it has been shown that among the elderly, public religiosity plays a greater role in the lives of women, while private religiosity plays a greater role in the lives of men (Idler 1987). Including a multi-item scale of religious participation insures that no group is alienated by this study.⁵

Sociodemographics: Five demographic characteristics were taken into consideration: age, gender, marital status, income, and education. Age ranged from 15 to 101 and is represented as a continuous variable. Gender is a dummy-coded variable of the respondent’s sex; female is the omitted category. Marital status consisted of three categories: married, separated/divorced/widowed, and never married. Married is the reference category. Income is collapsed into a 10-point ordinal measure for ease of interpretation across nations in the WVS/EVS. The ordinal measure is coded (1) lower step, (2) second step, (3) third step, (4) fourth step, and so on. The first step is indicative of the number of persons living at/below the poverty line in each respective country. The tenth step is the equivalent to an annual income of US \$100,000 or more. The mean income for the sample is between US \$27,501 and US \$35,000. Education is a measure of the respondent’s highest level of education attained collapsed

⁴ Z-scores represent the number of standard deviations between the raw score and the mean. The scaled measure of religious participation is the sum of the two Z-scores: “How often do you attend religious services?” and “How often do you pray to God outside of religious services?”

⁵ Missing data for the independent variable *Religious Participation* was imputed using the multiple imputation procedure in STATA.

into an 8-point ordinal measure. Responses range from (1) ‘Inadequately completed elementary education’ to (8) University with degree/Higher education – upper-level tertiary certificate.’⁶

Religious Pluralism Index: The religious pluralism index is calculated as one minus the Herfindahl index of religious group shares. Scores on the religious pluralism index reflect the probability that any two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different religious groups. The formula is a measure of religious fractionalization:

$$\text{FRACT}_j = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N s_{ij}^2,$$

where s_{ij} is the share of group i ($i = 1 \dots N$) in country j (Alesina et al. 2003). Scores of zero indicate a religious monopoly where no two people belong to a different religious group. Scores of one indicate a religious economy where no two people belong to the same religious group. For the 55 nations in this study, scores range from a low of .0035 (Morocco) to a high of .8603 (South Africa). The religious pluralism index for each of the 55 nations in this study can be found in the appendix.

GDP: GDP is a measure of each nation’s annual Gross Domestic Product (in US dollars) taken from the UNDP Human Development Report 2000 (UNDP 2000). The GDP values of the 55 nations in this study range from a low of \$480 (Tanzania) to a high of \$33,505 (Luxembourg). The GDP for each of the 55 nations included in this study can be found in the appendix. I do not include more recent data on GDP because the fourth wave of the WVS/EVS was gathered between 1999 and 2004.⁷

⁶ Missing data for the control variables *Age* and *Education* was imputed using mean substitution. Missing data for the control variable *Income* was imputed using the multiple imputation procedure in STATA. Missing data for the dummy variables *Marital Status* and *Gender* was omitted with the reference category.

⁷ The UNDP Human Development Report 2000 is the same source for GDP used by Norris and Inglehart Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. in their study of the cross-national trends in secularization using all four waves of the WVS/EVS data.

Secularization: Secularization utilizes the same measure of religious participation discussed above, but is aggregated to the national level. Including a society-level measure of religious participation is way to control for low levels of religious participation in countries where one religion has a religious monopoly. This fits with research that suggests religious organizations not only compete with other religious organizations for adherents, but religious organizations compete with secular alternatives as well (Miller 2002). Including a measure of secularization at the national level is a more conservative means of testing the assumption that alternatives to an individual's own religion threaten the sacred canopy and result in increased levels of religious doubt (Berger 1967).

Analytic Strategy

The analysis proceeds in 3 steps. Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), each step tests the between-group and within-group variance in life satisfaction. It is appropriate to use HLM when modeling individual-level outcomes from group-level predictors. Using cross-national data from the WVS/EVS, HLM allows me to demonstrate how national measures of religious pluralism interact with religious participation to influence life satisfaction. When addressing individual outcomes through multi-level data, OLS regression violates the assumption that the error terms will be uncorrelated across observations. HLM provides a better alternative to OLS regression because it accounts for differences both within and between groups.

Model 1 is a one-way ANOVA with random effects for life satisfaction. Model 2 tests the relationship between individual religious participation and life satisfaction controlling for age, gender, marital status, education, and income. Model 3 is the complete intercepts and slopes as outcomes model testing the relationship between individual religious participation and the

religious pluralism index controlling for individual and society-level characteristics. The interaction terms in Model 3 were included after an exploratory analysis at level-2 yielded T -ratios of 2 or greater for each of the respective interactions included in this analysis.⁸ Each of the continuous predictors at level 1 and level 2 are centered on their grand mean.

The one-way ANOVA with random effects in Model 1 provides a point estimate and confidence interval for the grand mean, γ_{00} . This same model also provides information about the outcome variability at each of the two levels. The combined formula for level 1 and level 2,

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j} + r_{ij},$$

is the estimation of the intercept Y_{ij} with grand mean γ_{00} ; with a group (level-2) effect, u_{0j} ; and with a person (level-1) effect, r_{ij} where u_{0j} is the random effect associated with unit j and is assumed to have a mean of zero and a variance of τ_{00} (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002: 24).

The random-coefficients regression model in Model 2 permits the estimation of the variability in both intercepts and slopes over level 2 units. The combined formula for level 1 and level 2,

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j}) + u_{0j} + u_{1j}(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j}) + r_{ij},$$

implies that the outcome Y_{ij} is a function of the average regression equation, $\gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j})$ plus a random error having three components: u_{0j} , the random effect of unit j on the mean; $u_{1j}(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j})$, where u_{1j} is the random effect of unit j on the slope β_{1j} ; and the level-1 error, r_{ij} (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002: 27).

Finally, while the random-coefficients model makes no attempt to model the variability over the level-2 units, the goal of the intercepts and slopes as outcomes model is to explain this

⁸ The interaction, *Religious participation x Pluralism index*, did not produce a T -ratio of 2 or greater but is included in this analysis because of its fundamental necessity to my theoretical argument.

random variation with characteristics of the level-2 units. The combined equation for level 1 and level 2,

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}W_j + \gamma_{10}(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j}) + \gamma_{11}W_j(X_{ij} - \bar{X}_{.j}) + u_{0j} + r_{ij},$$

where the slopes β_{1j} vary strictly as a function of W_j implies a cross-level interaction where the level-1 slope is conditional on the level-2 context (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002: 28).

Results

The results of the two-level HLM analysis are reported in Table 2. The table lists the regression coefficients and their standard errors (in parentheses), first for variables in the between-country model and then for variables in the within-country model. In both instances, life satisfaction is the dependent variable. Model 1 is the fully unconditional model of life satisfaction across all 55 nations. The grand mean life satisfaction is 6.46 indicating that the average person is slightly more satisfied than dissatisfied with her/his life. The variance component for the level-2 intercept is significant indicating significant between-country variability in life satisfaction. In fact, the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) reveals that 21% of the variation in life satisfaction is between countries.⁹ Furthermore, a 95% confidence interval for the fixed effect indicates that the true value of life satisfaction falls somewhere between 6.14 and 6.76. Likewise, the plausible values range indicates that 95% of the sample means fall between values of 4.13 and 8.77 on the measure of life satisfaction.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Model 2 is the random-coefficients model testing the effect of religious participation on life satisfaction. The coefficient for religious participation is .09 indicating a positive and

⁹ The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) measures the proportion of variance in the outcome that is between groups as is calculated by dividing the variance of the random-intercept model by the sum of the variance and the level-1 effect for the same model.

significant ($p < .01$) relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction when controlling for age, gender, marital status, education and income. This model gives support to *Hypothesis 1* where I hypothesize that religious participation has a positive and direct effect on life satisfaction. Furthermore, this finding implies that the positive relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction reported in previous research is not unique to the United States and Canada, but that it can be extended beyond the post-industrial world. That is, regardless of the national context, religious participation has a positive effect on life satisfaction. The model's significant variance component suggests, however, that much of the variability in life satisfaction is not accounted for in the model.

The interaction effects included in Model 3 are the result of an exploratory analysis at level 2 and are a test of my key hypotheses. Model 3 includes the interaction *Religious participation x Pluralism index* and controls for interactions between gender and my measure of national religious participation, marital status and GDP, and income and GDP. The interaction *Religious participation x Pluralism index* is a test of *Hypothesis 2: Religious pluralism will have a negative effect on the relationship between religious pluralism and life satisfaction.* *Hypothesis 3* is tested by measuring the direct effect of religious pluralism on life satisfaction in Model 3. Model 3 also controls for the direct effect of the sociodemographic variables age, gender, marital status, education, and income on life satisfaction.

Model 3 is a test of *Hypotheses 2 and 3*. Because the interaction term *Religious Participation x Pluralism index* is not significant in the model we must reject the hypothesis that the degree of religious pluralism has a moderating effect on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction. Religious pluralism at the national level has no significant moderating effect, positive or negative, on the relationship between positive relationship between

religious participation and life satisfaction. Religious pluralism, however, does have a significant ($p < .01$) and negative direct effect on life satisfaction net of the Level-1 and Level-2 controls. Interestingly, in countries where religious participation is high, this also has a significant and negative direct effect on life satisfaction. The results reported in Model 3 also provide further support to Hypothesis 1. Net of individual and society-level controls, religious participation displays a positive association with life satisfaction.

The findings of this analysis suggest that religious participation does have a positive effect on life satisfaction. However, the findings of this analysis also show the relationship is more complicated than that. Using HLM reveals that much of the variance in life satisfaction (21% to be exact) is between countries. Indeed, the single largest effect on life satisfaction reported in this analysis is religious pluralism (-1.24 ; $p < .01$). Religious pluralism has no moderating effect on the experience of religious participation, but my analysis does show that religious pluralism has far broader implications for the experience of life in general.

Discussion

Using data from the pooled WVS/EVS, the present study shows that religious participation is positively associated with life satisfaction across a sample of 55 nations. This finding expands the life satisfaction literature beyond the United States and Canada to areas previously understudied by quantitative analysis on religion and the quality of life. This study also shows that religious pluralism does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction. Although this negates my *Hypothesis 2*, this does not lend support to a supply-side theory of religion. In fact, because religious pluralism fails to produce a significant and positive moderating effect on life satisfaction there is evidence against

market theories that argue religious competition brings about a better quality in the religious rewards.

This study also shows that religious pluralism has a direct and negative effect on life satisfaction. This suggests that regardless of an individual's level of religious involvement, s/he will be negatively affected by competition between religious groups. This is further evidence in support of secularization theorists like Berger (1967) that argued religious pluralism would have an inverse effect on religious vitality. A negative association between religious pluralism and life satisfaction suggests that individuals may be less likely to reap the benefits of religious participation (a positive association with life satisfaction) when religious pluralism is high. It also suggests that the availability of multiple religions may serve to increase tensions between religious groups that result in suicide bombings or political decisions that have negative effects on participants and non-participants alike.

Conclusion

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) of 55 nations in the pooled WVS/EVS reveals that religious participation does have positive externalities for religious participants across divergent social contexts. Furthermore, religious pluralism has a large and negative effect on life satisfaction although religious pluralism does not appear to alter the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction. Although religious pluralism has no effect on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction, these findings provide some evidence to suggest that religious pluralism may not result in the improved quality of religious participation. In fact, the likely scenario that individuals experiencing the negative effects of religious pluralism will cease to participate is evidenced in this study's finding that religious pluralism has a direct and negative effect on life satisfaction. This also provides mild evidence

against the assumption that religious organizations will work to maximize participation by offering better rewards when the threat of competition exists.

But, in concession to those who argue that religious pluralism serves to increase that quality of religious products it should be pointed out that this study measures religious pluralism at the national level while many before it measure religious pluralism at the city or county levels. To conclude that religious pluralism definitely has no effect on the relationship between religious participation and life satisfaction from this study alone is misleading. Future research should use HLM to test for a moderating effect between religious pluralism and the participation-life satisfaction relationship at a more local level. In fact, there are many instances at the national level where pluralism is high but does not indicate the sort of free market pluralism where competition between religious organizations provides individuals with the ability to choose among religious alternatives. Consider, for example, Iraq where pluralism is high (.4844) but where religion is quite constrained by ethnic background. It is often the case that race/ethnicity, gender, social class, or other sociodemographic variables prevent individuals from switching religions even though pluralism is high.

Future research should also seek to unravel why living in a highly religious area seems to be a detriment to life satisfaction despite the fact that religious participation has a positive association with life satisfaction. In a separate analysis I test for an interaction between participation at the individual level and the national level and find no significant relationship to exist. This indicates that religious participation does not have a greater effect on life satisfaction when the people around that individual are not engaging in participation, but only that religious participation at the national level serves to lower life satisfaction net of the individual's

participation. This again points to the potential for conflict when religious involvement is high and diverse and should be examined at the local level by future research.

Due to limitations with the data, this analysis does not account for several of the known predictors of life satisfaction, most notably subjective well-being. Future research should seek to test the robustness of this study's findings under the rigor of additional controls. Likewise, future research should also examine the relationship between religious pluralism and the other positive externalities of religious participation. This study focuses on only one aspect of life satisfaction, but Ellison et al. (1989) demonstrate that satisfaction varies from one domain to the next (i.e. family life, work life, leisure activities, friendships). Levels of distress and overall mental health (Ellison et al. 2001) should also be considered as possible outcome variables.

The results of this analysis are a step toward understanding the relationship between religious participation and religious pluralism, but they are just that, a step. Using a cross-national sample of more than 80,000 respondents, this study demonstrates that religious pluralism does not appear to have a moderating effect on the religious experience. But, it is clear that the direct effects of religious pluralism on life satisfaction are noteworthy in themselves. It seems unlikely that with the ever-increasing globalization of cultures, that even the most remote communities in this 55-nation analysis are not subject to the knowledge of religious alternatives. Although I urge future researchers to test the effects of religious pluralism at a more local level, the contribution of this study is to move us beyond the secularization debate and to a more clear understanding of the ways that religious pluralism impacts our lives.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for
Variables in the Analysis

Variable Names		
Individual-level Variables		
Life satisfaction	6.45	2.55
Religious participation	-0.02	1.70
Age	41.63	16.54
Sex		
Male (female)*	0.48	0.50
Marital status		
Separated/divorced	0.13	0.33
Never married (married)	0.25	0.44
Education	4.32	2.24
Income	4.53	2.26
Country-level Variables		
Pluralism index	0.42	0.22
Religious participation	-0.04	0.94
GDP	11558.11	8831.67

*Omitted dummy variables in parentheses

Table 2. Country and Individual-level Predictors of Life Satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Intercept	6.46 ***	6.61 ***	6.61 ***
<i>Individual Life Satisfaction</i>	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.09)
<u>Level-2 Between-Country Controls</u>			
Pluralism index			-1.24 ***
			(0.32)
GDP ^a			0.82 ***
			(0.00)
Religious participation			-0.19 **
			(0.08)
<u>Level-1 Individual Controls</u>			
Religious participation		0.09 ***	0.09 ***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
<i>Pluralism Index</i>			0.08
			(0.04)
Age ^b		-0.01	-0.01
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Male		-0.08 **	-0.08 ***
		(0.03)	(0.03)
<i>Religious Participation</i>			-0.09 ***
			(0.02)
Separated/divorced		-0.46 ***	-0.47 ***
		(0.04)	(0.04)
<i>GDP^a</i>			-0.09 **
			(0.00)
Never married		-0.10 **	-0.10 ***
		(0.04)	(0.04)
<i>GDP^a</i>			-0.19 ***
			(0.00)
Education		0.04 ***	0.04 ***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Income		0.20 ***	0.20 ***
		(0.02)	(0.01)
<i>GDP^a</i>			-0.08 ***
			(0.00)
<u>Random Effect</u>			
	<i>Variance Component</i>		
Level-1, σ^2	5.245	4.884	4.884
Level-2, Intercept, τ_{00}	1.400 ***	1.289 ***	0.495 ***

Note: Numbers in parantheses are standard errors. ^a GDP multiplied by 10,000 to reduce places to the right of the decimal. ^b Age multiplied by 10 to reduce places to the right of the decimal.

** (p < .05); *** (p < .01).

Appendix. Values for Religious Pluralism Index and GDP for Countries in the Sample

Country	Pluralism			Country	Pluralism		
	N	Index	GDP		N	Index	GDP
Albania	998	0.4719	2,804	Latvia	1010	0.5556	5,728
Argentina	1268	0.2236	12,013	Lithuania	1000	0.4141	6,436
Austria	1517	0.4146	23,166	Luxembourg	1201	0.0911	33,505
Bangladesh	1479	0.2090	1,361	Macedonia	1052	0.5899	4,254
Belarus	966	0.6116	6,319	Malta	1001	0.1223	16,447
Belgium	1897	0.2127	23,223	Mexico	1506	0.1796	7,704
Bulgaria	982	0.5965	4,809	Moldova	977	0.5603	1,947
Canada	1929	0.6958	23,582	Morocco	2261	0.0035	3,305
Chile	1193	0.3841	8,787	Netherlands	1003	0.7222	22,176
Croatia	997	0.4447	6,749	Peru	1490	0.1988	4,282
Czech Republic	1900	0.6591	12,362	Phillippines	1200	0.3056	3,555
Denmark	1015	0.2333	24,218	Poland	1085	0.1712	7,619
Estonia	991	0.4985	7,682	Portugal	995	0.1438	14,701
Finland	1033	0.2531	20,847	Romania	1119	0.2373	5,648
France	1605	0.4029	21,175	Russia	2480	0.4398	6,460
Germany	2022	0.6571	22,169	Singapore	1512	0.6561	24,210
Greece	1133	0.1530	13,943	Slovakia	1318	0.5655	9,699
Hungary	995	0.5244	10,232	South Africa	2995	0.8603	8,488
Iceland	966	0.1913	25,110	Spain	2379	0.4514	16,212
India	1980	0.3260	2,077	Tanzania	1145	0.6334	480
Iran	2504	0.1152	5,121	Turkey	4604	0.0049	6,422
Iraq	2325	0.4844	3,197	Uganda	1002	0.6332	1,074
Ireland	1006	0.1550	21,482	Ukraine	1157	0.6157	3,194
Italy	1982	0.3027	20,585	United Kingdom	1981	0.6944	20,336
Japan	1316	0.5406	23,257	United States	1200	0.8241	29,605
Republic of Korea	1173	0.6604	13,478	Venezuela	1198	0.1350	5,808
Kyrgyzstan	1043	0.4470	2,317	Vietnam	992	0.5080	1,689
				Zimbabwe	1000	0.7363	2,669

Note: Countries are listed alphabetically; number of countries = 55.