

Article

Secularization in Europe: Causes, Consequences, and Cultural Diversity

Jorge Botelho Moniz 

Faculty of Social Sciences, Education and Administration, Lusófona University, 1749-024 Lisbon, Portugal; botelho.moniz@ulusofona.pt

Abstract: This paper explores the timeliness and relevance of secularization theories in Europe. It seeks to understand how the classical theories of secularization—rationalization, societalization, functional differentiation, and existential security—and their theoretical innovations—namely, cultural diversity—help describe religious phenomena in a specific set of European countries—Austria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain. In this context, cultural diversity shows the strongest negative correlation with religiosity. These findings arise from the correlation between the different theories of secularization, the independent variables, and an index of religiosity, the dependent variable. Cultural diversity, as a good predictor to explain secularization in Europe, shows how contact with different religious and non-religious worldviews enhances a mutual fragilization that can lead individuals from uncertainty to the rejection of religious beliefs.

Keywords: secularization; cultural diversity; Europe

1. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to test the theories of secularization¹, seeking to identify not only the place of religion in modern European societies, but especially which of these theories, if any, is currently most useful in describing socioreligious phenomena. I want to understand which processes of modernity have more (positive or negative) effects on religion. As many researchers have pointed out, we have come to a stalemate or dead lock in the secularization debate. Some are now suggesting, more assertively than in the past, that secularization theories be abandoned, namely, because of the phenomena of (public or private) (re)vitalization of religion on a global scale. Others still advocate that its assumptions are too rich to be lightly abandoned, and that secularization remains a good way to understand the place of religion in modern European societies. Despite these divergences, most social researchers converge in the same direction, namely, in the idea that to test the validity of secularization assertions, we need new methodological and conceptual strategies, new qualitative and quantitative analyses, and new analytical frameworks.

This article is, or tries to be, a step in that direction. To fulfill these objectives, I have organized it in two essential parts. In the first, I work the theories of secularization in a more inductive way, reconceptualizing and operationalizing them theoretically. Secularization theories are divided into four key layers and are analyzed within the paradigm of multiple modernities. Finally, a group of European countries not often studied and compared—Austria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain—is selected, following Moniz's (2016, pp. 191–207) approach on the European Catholic ultramodernity².

In the second one, secularization theories will be studied in a more hypotheticoductive way, through qualitative and quantitative analyses that allow for testing the assumptions of its internal layers. This is probably the most original contribution of this article since it proposes the creation of an index of religiosity (dependent variable) that correlates with secularization layers (independent variables). As independent variables, the indices of rationalization, functional differentiation, societalization, and existential



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security were chosen. Information was also included on the internal dimensions of each secularization layer, as well as the indicators that comprise them.

Due to the current dynamics of modern European societies, and based on some conclusions from previous studies, another internal layer will be included: *cultural diversity*. This layer is crucial for understanding the new dynamics of religion and its relation to this ineluctable phenomenon of modernity. For this purpose, an index of cultural diversity that correlates with our dependent variable will also be introduced.

2. Secularization Debate and Theories

In recent decades, academic discussions on the topic of religion have been characterized by a theoretical confrontation between two overlapping but seemingly opposing narratives. On the one hand, European social scientists who adhere to theories of secularization support the idea that the social importance of religion is diminishing. On the other hand, American scholars tend to defend the idea of the return (of social significance) of religions.

Following Casanova (2007, p. 3) and Moniz (2020, p. 239), this debate has become a “dead end”. Traditional secularization theory fits well in Europe³, but not in America. The narrative of the vitality of (deregulated) religious markets fits relatively well in America, but not in Europe⁴. Therefore, some scholars call for a change in the direction of current research (Halikiopoulou 2011), because, having reached a “dead end for the socio-scientific study of religion” (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2017, p. 144) the debate on secularization has become “unfruitful” (Casanova 2007, pp. 1, 3).

By and large, I agree with these propositions. Nevertheless, I recall that with the recognition and development of Shmuel Eisenstadt’s idea of multiple modernities in the secularization debate, a set of conceptual and epistemological innovations about the place of religion in the world emerged. In particular, the ideas of desecularization, post-secularization, multiple secularizations or secularities, and contextual secularization. The problem with the proliferation of concepts is that they still do not answer the most critical question in this debate, according to Pickel (2017); that is, what processes within modernity, if any, can describe the current mutations or displacements of religion in contemporary societies?

Most current conceptualizations are scientifically sustained by the interpretation of historical factors, by sociological and/or philosophical reflections or by the description of socio-political phenomena. In opposition, there have been few studies relating these theoretical innovations to a more empirical–statistical approach that more carefully analyzes the evolution (positive or negative) of religious phenomena. Even where this has happened (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pickel 2017; Inglehart 2021), the studies were often based on univariate or bivariate variables, neglecting to systematize different theories of secularization and their theoretical alternatives. Thus, they were not able to understand and interpret religion’s displacement, revitalization, or decline in contemporary societies.

These scattered studies, although based on international longitudinal databases, not only fail to capture the dimensions of contemporary religiosity (individual and diffuse), but also fail to examine in depth the internal structure of theories of secularization. Due to this neglect, it is necessary to put these theoretical propositions into measurable empirical variables and correlate them with a comprehensive index of religiosity. I believe that it is only through such a methodology that the research question can be answered. This is one of the few ways to understand whether secularization theories or their theoretical alternatives are valid in justifying the mutations of religiosity, especially at the micro (individual) level.

Thus, this article focuses on secularization theories. What, then, does the term *theories of secularization* mean? First, it is important to note that there is not one single theory. The expression designates a set of notions that refer to the relationship between modernity and religion. However, its multidimensionality can lead to academic contradictions about its real meaning. This can generate epistemological misunderstandings that hinder its research value.

To circumvent such difficulties, a systematization of secularization theories is offered, namely through an analysis of its *internal layers*. This term should be understood in the context of the macrosocial sub-theories of secularization—the secondary theories that exist within the main theory of secularization. They are distinct from the concept of *dimension* used by Karel Dobbelaere (2002) or Mark Chaves (1994) because they always operate within the same level of analysis of secularization—the macro level. This methodological differentiation is necessary to create systematized concepts that group together their main theoretical streams.

In general terms, all layers of secularization claim that the process of modernization and its subprocesses cannot proceed without consequences for religious traditions and institutions. In other words, the structural properties of modernity, such as rationalization, functional differentiation, societalization (*Vergesellschaftung*), and existential security, pose problems for religion, at least in its traditional sense, and may reduce or extinguish its social significance. I have chosen these layers because they are often regarded as being the most consensual key factors of modernization that explain the declining significance of religion.

Within this theoretical framework, the most important level of analysis of secularization is the macro-social (Tschannen 1992, p. 61). Of all the analytical dimensions of secularization, the macro is the one that occurs in all Western societies and leads to real forms of change in institutionalized religion. It is mainly within this dimension that we must understand the layers of secularization.

To the classical theories of secularization will be added the theory of cultural diversity. First, it is currently pointed out as one of the most consensual key factors of modernity that explain the decrease in the microsocial significance of religion. Second, other studies (Moniz 2019a) have shown strong correlations between this variable and religion.

Due to the growing importance of this debate, it is indispensable to assemble theoretical arguments about diversity and secularization into empirical variables that also can be correlated with a multidimensional index of religiosity. Such an approach can help us understand whether secularization theories are relevant for interpreting and describing the mutations of religion at the micro (individual) level.

3. Materials and Methods

To test our hypothesis about the correlation between secularization and religiosity, a set of indices was constructed. To create the indices, the methodology used in the work of Grim and Finke (2006) was followed. Each variable in each dimension of the indices was rescaled to a range of 1 to 10 (e.g., corresponding to the minimum and maximum value of religiosity, respectively) and coded according to the scale created for each item.

The choice of a 10-value scale was mainly due to the need to maximize the differences between the selected countries. In effect, they were chosen based on the most-similar systems design, in which similar cases are compared. If, on the one hand, this provides coherence to our cases by reducing the number of potential disturbing variables to be kept under control; on the other hand, this may lead to imperceptible differences between variables. To maximize the variance of the independent variables but minimize the variance of the control variable, a 10-point scale was chosen.

The first step was to build an index of religiosity (the dependent variable of this study)⁵. This index follows the model proposed by Moniz (2018a) where religiosity is conceptualized and measured through five dimensions—intellectual, ideological, ritual, devotional, and experimental. This multidimensional model is also based on developments within the sociology of religion, in particular Bellah's (1964) seminal work where it is stated that in the modern situation religion tends to evolve into a "much more open and flexible pattern of [religious] membership" (p. 373) and on the CRS—Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber and Huber 2012), which measures the centrality, salience, and influence of religious meanings on individuals' personality—feelings, cognitions, and actions. The religiosity index is therefore composed of 22 indicators and has already proven helpful in capturing

its contemporary (plural and diffuse) dimensions of religiosity. In constructing the index, the following databases were used: the World Christian Database (WCD), the European Values Survey (EVS), and the European Social Survey (ESS).

Each of these 22 items was calculated using a simple but proven-reliable process. First, the lowest figure of each item was multiplied by 100 and then divided by the highest. Once the value of X was reached, this difference was coded using the 10-point scale. The basic premise of this methodology is to match the percentage differences in the mean values of each indicator with the same difference on the scale (Moniz 2018a, pp. 208–13). In other words, each indicator was coded according to the 10-point scale but kept the proportion of the difference it had in the original database.

By choosing a non-predefined scale, which would immediately associate the original values of each item to a certain scale, it was possible to maximize the differences between the countries and ensure the proportionality of their fluctuations. Thus, by using this universally applicable method, the religiosity index could be compared and correlated with other relevant indices (rationalization, differentiation, societalization, existential security, or cultural diversity).

After the dependent variable was created, it was time to move on to the creation of the indices relating to the secularization theories—the independent variables.

For the variable rationalization, four essential internal dimensions were established: capitalism/consumerism, bureaucracy, education, and science/technological consciousness. From there, data (indicators) were collected in order to integrate and structure each of the four dimensions. A rationalization index was created with 32 indicators that helped maximize the reliability of each dimension, as in the methodology presented by Moniz (2018b, pp. 46–55). Data from four sources were used: World Bank Open Data, UNDP—United Nations Development Programme, Eurostat, and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In the variable societalization, four internal dimensions were also chosen, namely, urbanization, industrialization, digital mass communication, and geographic mobility (Moniz 2020, pp. 240–51). The indicators that make up each of the dimensions of societalization were taken from the same four sources as the rationalization index. In this case, an index with 22 indicators was created. This is because, within the available databases, it was more difficult to find indicators related to societalization for the selected countries. Despite this, the internal consistency of this index has proven sound in the past (Moniz 2020).

For functional differentiation, according to the state of the art, it is possible to identify two comprehensive internal dimensions: state-religion separation and autonomization, specialization and competition (Moniz 2019b, pp. 375–90). This variable, also with 22 indicators, was built based on data from three sources: Eurostat, OECD, and ARDA—Association of Religion and Data Archives.

The fourth independent variable is existential security. Regarding the formulation of its internal dimensions, Norris and Inglehart's (2004) methodology was followed; that is, four internal dimensions were established for existential security, namely, socioeconomic development, education and communication, healthcare, and demographics. The main difference is that the authors use only annual data for each indicator, while this paper uses the aggregate data from all available years, as in the work of Moniz (2018c, pp. 127–32). By using data from the entire analysis period, the risk of choosing exceptional years decreases while the consistency of the results increases. As for data collection, Norris and Inglehart's original model was followed as closely as possible. That is, the World Bank or UNDP databases were used, but OECD and Eurostat data were added to complete and enhance the analysis of the dimensions of existential security.

Finally, for the construction of the cultural diversity index, four dimensions were defined: ethnicity, language, religion, and place of birth, following Moniz's (2019a, pp. 81–86) model. For the construction of the dimensions of religious diversity and place of birth, the following databases were used: WCD—World Christian Database; ESS—European Social Survey; and OECD. In particular, the first two are commonly employed in studies by

authors who work with religious phenomena, particularly in Europe. In the dimensions of ethnic and linguistic diversity, data from *Encyclopædia Britannica* and *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, respectively, were used. This is an index with four dimensions and 21 indicators; all dimensions have five items, except for place of birth which is composed of six.

Considering the available databases, our period of analysis is 1999–2015. In fact, it is only from the last decades of the 20th century that databases managed to grasp the most modern (individualized and indeterminate) forms of religiosity. Only after this period did researchers demonstrate a greater understanding of the diffusion and diversity of modern religious practices. Indeed, until then, the available statistical data hardly contemplated dimensions of individual religiosity that could be correlated with independent variables such as those in this article. As will be seen below, this analysis period refers to the earliest and latest dates when, at the time of the original construction of the different variables, data could be collected for the selected countries.

Let us conclude this section on “Section 3” with the presentation and justification of our case studies. Six European countries—Austria, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, Poland, and Portugal—were chosen through broad and objective criteria.

The first is related to the separation between states and religions present in all countries. That is, a positive or passive secularism, in which the state promotes and allows the activity and visibility of religions in the public space. The second criterion concerns the typology of state–religion relationships. The case studies are close to the concept of *principled distance*, where the state is legally allowed to treat various churches and religious communities differently. This typology is based on separation with a special law (e.g., Concordat), hierarchization of churches, and religious freedom. Third, the countries were selected based on their socioreligious background. Most of the population self-identifies as Catholic, but there have been phenomena of religious mutation, in particular, with the growth of religious and non-religious minorities and the merging of the two—the phenomenon of believers without religion. Finally, the selected countries are all from the European continent, i.e., they are part of one of the regions in the world that has experienced the most changes in terms of migratory flows. Europe is, and is expected to continue to be, a place of growing cultural diversity, due to global migration phenomena. It is, therefore, a privileged region to analyze the strength of the impact of these movements on our dependent variable.

4. Discussion

“Secularization is not a myth”, said [Martin \(2011, p. 5\)](#) in one of his last works where he discusses the future of Christianity, democracy, religion, and secularization. In effect, secularization, in the selected countries and in this period of analysis, is something that has been happening. This should not mean treating secularization as a *master narrative*—a simple truth about the evolution of modern societies—as is often the case. However, secularization is occurring even if not in the ways and with the consequences traditionally advanced by secularization theorists.

In the case of our research, this seems clear. Especially, through the correlation of our variables, as shown in Table 1⁶.

Table 1. Arithmetic average of each variable (dependent and independent) and their correlation.

	Austria	Italy	Slovakia	Spain	Poland	Portugal	Correlation
Religiosity	6.0	8.1	7.2	5.8	9.7	8.1	
Rationalization	7.9	5.3	6.1	6.3	4.9	6.0	−0.825 *
Functional differentiation	6.5	6.2	6.2	6.1	6.0	7.2	−0.027
Societalization	7.5	6.4	4.3	7.2	4.3	5.9	−0.722
Existential security	7.9	6.9	6.3	7.7	6.1	6.5	−0.855 *
Diversity	9.0	5.3	5.8	7.7	3.1	5.1	0.960 **

* Level of significance 0.05 (two-tail). ** Level of significance 0.01 (two-tail).

The data in the table essentially present four general aspects of secularization. First, there is a negative correlation between all the independent variables and the dependent variable. In other words, secularization is not positively associated with religiosity; quite the opposite. Second, except for functional differentiation, all the independent variables correlate negatively and strongly with the dependent variable; that is, not only does secularization have consequences on religiosity; its impacts are also deeply harmful. Third, classical theories of secularization, namely rationalization and existential security, continue to be good predictors of (negative) variation in levels of religiosity. Finally, the most recent theoretical developments on diversity and the focus on this independent variable seem to have been successful. Of all the correlations observed, diversity has the strongest correlation with the dependent variable. At a correlation level of −0.96, the variable diversity is the only one at a very strong negative correlation level. It corresponds to an almost perfect negative correlation. In other words, more diversity corresponds to less religiosity—the basic formula of secularization theories.

Since this is the strongest, let us take a closer look at the correlation between religiosity and diversity. Our research provides support for the secularization theory which states that in Europe, more culturally differentiated societies are less religious. In effect, our findings show that cultural diversity explains about 96% of the (negative) variation in religiosity. Moreover, cultural diversity has in all its dimensions a negative impact on religiosity. The propositions about how diversity tends to disrupt cultural homogeneity and fragilize the plausibility structures of religion have empirical support.

If we analyze Table 2, concerning the correlation between the religiosity index and the internal dimensions of diversity, we can understand this argument better.

Table 2. Correlation between the religiosity index and diversity dimensions.

Religiosity	Diversity			
	Linguistic	Ethnic	Religious	Place of Birth
Pearson’s <i>r</i>	−0.780 *	−0.950 ***	−0.819 **	−0.840 **
Sig (2-tailed)	0.067	0.004	0.046	0.036
N	6	6	6	6

* Level of significance 0.10 (two-tail). ** Level of significance 0.05 (two-tail). *** Level of significance 0.01 (two-tail).

The first aspect that stands out is that all dimensions of diversity show strong negative correlations with religiosity. Regardless of the angle of analysis, the impact of the former is always strongly negative on the latter. The second part that deserves to be highlighted is the very strong negative correlation between ethnic diversity and religiosity. Note the proximity of the correlation on this particular dimension of diversity ($[r(6) = -0.950; p < 0.01]$) to the negative correlation of the overall diversity index. This could lead one to believe that the ethnic dimension alone could capture the essentials of the relationship between diversity and religiosity.

In contrast, linguistic diversity shows a less strong negative correlation with religiosity. This is because Italy, the second most religious country overall, is also the second most diverse in this dimension. In fact, if the Italian case was removed from this dimension, there would be an exceptionally strong negative correlation between the variables. Let us comment further on the two other dimensions of diversity. The religious one, contrary to what religious economy proponents point out, has a strong correlation with the dependent variable ($r(6) = -0.819$; $p < 0.05$). In other words, in Europe, more cultural diversity does not mean more religiosity, as in the American case. The addition of the place of birth dimension, suggested by [Dohse and Gold \(2013\)](#), also proved fruitful, as it is the second dimension that correlates most strongly with religiosity ($r(6) = -0.840$; $p < 0.05$). Similar to the other diversity dimensions, place of birth shows an exceptionally strong correlation with the dependent variable.

Based on these strong negative correlations, three essential points about secularization can be made. First, in the theoretical realm, these findings show that in any dimension of diversity, the relationship with religiosity is always negative, without exception. As mentioned earlier, this is the opposite of what the advocates of the theory of religious economy defend. According to classical theories of secularization ([Berger \[1967\] 1990](#)) or some of its more recent theorizations ([Taylor 2007](#); [Berger 2014](#)), this may mean that diversity leads to a contamination, differentiation, or undermining of social values that tends to weaken religious worldviews. Second, at the empirical level, these results do not support the theses that argue for a non-existent relationship between diversity and religion ([Voas et al. 2002](#); [Norris and Inglehart 2004](#)). On the contrary, our results show a strong negative correlation between diversity and religion. Third, our conclusions come close to the theses that argue that diversity tends to have negative effects on religiosity and that this is an inescapable variable for understanding the place of religion in contemporary societies ([Taylor 2007](#); [Berger 2014](#)). Therefore, this research does not provide evidence for the hypotheses that implicitly assume religion to be an anthropological constant that no process of modernity is able to undermine, but only to rearrange and adapt. Rather, our results suggest a general decline in religiosity as societies diversify culturally.

These findings are critical because they show that, under modern conditions, diversity has consequences for religions that go beyond the mere dislocation or recomposition of religiosity. While I do not agree with [Pickel \(2017, p. 289\)](#) on the idea that diversity causes a “creeping social loss of importance of religion”, these results allow us to affirm that diversity has negative consequences for religion. Recently, some authors ([Berger et al. 2008](#); [Berger 2014](#); [Vilaça et al. 2014](#); [Stolz 2020](#); [Inglehart 2021](#)) have shown more awareness regarding this theory. For instance, [Stolz \(2020, pp. 295–98\)](#) emphasized that the growth of pluralistic social environments (i.e., diversity) and the recomposition of geographical areas (i.e., migration) influence individuals’ normative choices. In analyzing the different secularization theories in the twenty-first century, Stolz concluded that more diversity tends to “depress religiosity” due to more frequent contact between “significant others” from other religious backgrounds. In the same vein, [Inglehart \(2021, p. 145\)](#) states that diversity is not in itself destabilizing to the sacred canopy. However, in relatively culturally homogeneous contexts, as in the countries analyzed here, rapid changes at the level of diversity “can trigger cultural anxiety” and that has consequences for mainstream religion.

Nevertheless, we should be cautious about these conclusions. First, these findings are the result of the analysis of a specific set of countries, located in a specific time and space. Moreover, the conclusions are drawn using a specific methodology created based on available data—often not as systematic or as longitudinal as one would like. The idea that the strong negative correlation between religion and modernity, and specifically diversity, is the *end of history* when it comes to secularization is not likely. Not in Europe or in the selected countries, let alone in other regional contexts. These results are a consequence not only of the way secularization theories were originally developed (as *subtraction stories*, in the Taylorian critique) but also of our (greater or lesser) sensitivity in the search for indicators for each variable.

According to [Martin \(2017\)](#), the evidence regarding secularization, as with any other theory, always depends not only on the different cultural spaces and times selected, but also on the assumptions followed or the methodologies applied. However, all is not chaos, and the social order is not completely malleable to be used at the whim of different hermeneutic strategies. The paths of secularization present some verifiable and intelligible regularities and there is sufficiently solid common ground for its assumptions to be discussed and revised.

On the one hand, I agree with the main argument of secularization theories, because, based on the results obtained, dimensions such as rationalization, existential security, or societalization continue to have a strong negative correlation with religion. However, on the other hand, this correlation does not lead to the inevitable and irreversible atrophy of religious beliefs and practices. Individualization theory has shown not only how religion has not disappeared, but also how it has taken on new forms.

For the group of selected countries, the negative correlation between the dependent variable (religiosity) and the independent variables (secularization theories) is clear, as is the decline of religious beliefs and practices. Religion has lost its *unquestioned status*. In my view, this is the main phenomenon of secularization that should be emphasized.

Especially because of the advance of diversity, we live in a different world, unrecognizable compared to other historical periods, a world marked by a diversity of worldviews—religious, irreligious, or nonreligious—and where countless concepts of truth or the good life proliferate. This world is consequently marked by the Bergerian and Taylorian concepts of *mutual fragilization* caused by contact and interpenetrations between different worldviews. This causes fragmentation of religious truths, as well as of non-religious and irreligious beliefs. Religious and secular worldviews now exist in an arena of social choices and preferences that can lead individuals from uncertainty to the rejection of any belief. However, religious beliefs can remain prominent, independent, and strong in modern European societies. Many of the normative choices individuals make in modernity are religious, as [Berger \(2014, p. 20\)](#) recalled.

The pressure that diversity places on modern democratic societies and the predominance of secular worldviews, nevertheless, lead states to advance an essentially secular agenda for the sake of balancing diversity, among other factors such as individual rights and liberties or functional differentiation. This agenda tends to become hegemonic and to cause religious isolation—a greater difficulty in transitioning into religious “finite provinces of meaning” ([Berger and Luckmann 1966](#), pp. 25–27). [Stolz \(2020, p. 18\)](#) exemplifies this when talking about the effects of modernization on religiosity. He states that modernity leads to greater existential security, education, and diversity, and that this has a negative effect on the “social structures” of religious socialization. The argument is that the increasing supply of different worldviews, especially secular ones, has a consequence on religious socialization: religious worldviews are transmitted “to every new generation with decreasing intensity”. With the pressure exerted by the hegemony of secular principles, sacred forces are gradually removed from the available social stock of knowledge and become more difficult to acquire. As religion is removed from everyday life and face-to-face interactions, it becomes more difficult to retain.

In this context, I agree with [Bruce \(2018\)](#) when he says that the result is a world where most people tend to care less and less about religion. Diversity promotes a certain marginalization of religion because there is much more consensus around secular beliefs and practices. However, I also disagree with [Bruce \(2018, p. 111\)](#) when he states that religion in the West is no longer “plausible, popular and powerful”; rather, it is currently seen as “eccentric, unpopular and powerless.”

In general, the results of this research are closer to [Taylor \(2007, p. 437\)](#) when he asserts that mutual fragilization, as a feature of societies with a high level of diversity, “certainly”, causes a decline in religion—“as a consequence, the proportion of belief is smaller and that of unbelief is larger than ever before.” This is because the arena where religious and secular choices compete is unbalanced in favor of the latter. On the one hand,

this causes a retraction of religion in the public space. In the Taylorian conception, this is inevitable and, under certain circumstances (for the protection of social cohesion, political ethics, or democracy), desirable. On the other hand, the resilience of religious normative choices challenges the *master narratives* of secularization. This is why many researchers have decided to abandon the concept of secularization and its idea of the decline of religion.

Whether one agrees with these alternative perspectives or not, the questioning of secularization theories opens new possibilities for investigation. This is what the conclusions of this study point to—the revisitation of rationalization or societalization theories, or the construction of new explanatory hypotheses such as diversity. While a decline of religiosity in the secular age can be confirmed, the idea of *secularization as diversity* concedes that the persistence of religion is compatible with certain characteristics of modernity and is consistent with the process of secularization itself. It is not claimed that the changes described by the *master narratives of secularization* are unilinear, irresistible, and irreversible. On the contrary, secularization as diversity is no longer exclusively perceived as a mere cumulative and gradual (secular) process or as a simple fluctuation (the idea of displacement and recomposition) of religious practices and beliefs.

5. Conclusions

In sum, because of international migration and the fragmentation of hegemonic religious cultures, European societies have become culturally diverse places, which has had structural consequences that have transformed social psychology. This is the result of several elements, including (i) the processes of social and structural differentiation; (ii) the assertion and hegemony of secular principles that aim to replace religious ones; (iii) the removal of religion from the public space, especially at the level of control and reassertion of everyday interactions; (iv) the fragmentation of the plausibility structures of religion; and (v) the relativization of beliefs since the diversity of and competition between religious worldviews makes it difficult for any one of them to be declared as the true one.

This is also the conclusion of [Pickel \(2017\)](#) when he states, albeit with some caution, that religion is unlikely to be reinforced in European societies with a high level of cultural diversity. This seems to be a position that cuts across the current debate on secularization since several authors cite different negative effects of diversity in religion: from indifference to suspicion, from silencing to uncertainty to its elimination. However, the secularization of society does not necessarily lead to the decline or the end of religion. In a Weberian sense, individuals have difficulty living with religion in modern societies, but they cannot live without it. This represents the complexity of present times, where religion can simultaneously undergo decline, mutation, and resurgence.

We are sailing in uncharted waters to a destination that is difficult to predict. What is known is that the processes of modernity described by secularization theorists do not seem to have positive impacts on religion, quite the contrary. Diversity, in particular, tends to correlate negatively with religion, helping to diminish its social significance directly or indirectly. The fragmentation of absolute certainties caused by diversity, particularly but not exclusively in religion, increases the likelihood that individuals will choose secular options in their daily lives. This helps to deepen religious illiteracy and affects religion's individual and social significance.

There is no reason to think that, even with the spread and deepening of diversity phenomena, we will see a linear process of religious decline in Europe. Nevertheless, the idea of a religious revival seems even more unlikely in this context. Although, on the one hand, the results collected in this study make it clear that secularization is happening and has consequences for religion; on the other hand, they show that the outcome predicted by the master narratives of secularization, regarding the fatalism of the decline or perishing of religion, is also wrong.

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Notes

- ¹ We can start with a general definition of secularization, but with epistemological consistency. Secularization should be understood as the phenomenon of displacement, recomposition, revitalization, or decline of religion caused by modernization.
- ² The concept of ultramodernity, applied to religion, means the possibility of understanding secularization in a plural and contextual way, according to Willaime (2006, pp. 775–79). It accepts that modernization has consequences for religion. However, this does not imply that ultramodernity is less religious, it is religious in a different way. It admits different reconfigurations in the relations between religious and political institutions and individual religiosity, depending on national and cultural contexts and different historical pathways.
- ³ It is worth noting that even on the European continent, some alternatives to secularization theories, suggesting a certain continuity of the importance of religion, remain valid. In particular, theories of individualization such as *shrinking transcendence* (Luckmann 1990), *believing without belonging* (Davie 1994) or *the pilgrim and the converter* (Hervieu-Léger 1999). We can find this also in the more current phenomena of *believers without religion* or *spiritual but not religious*.
- ⁴ It is also worth noting that in the US there has been a shift in perception about the contemporary religious situation. As Barreto and Py (2022) show, since the mid-2010s, individuals and communities have been moving away from their former Evangelical identity in the country. In the future, this data may help to establish a rapprochement between the American and European religious landscapes.
- ⁵ In the case of the indicators related to our religiosity index, as well as the indicators of the other indices, there is no need to measure their internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha; the internal dimensions and indicators chosen for each variable are based on the assumptions previously defined by the state of the art, which guarantees their reliability.
- ⁶ The figures shown in Table 1 correspond to the arithmetic averages for each of the variables tested. The calculations can be further analyzed in the different papers mentioned throughout this article. For the purpose of systematization, these results could not be presented in more detail in this paper.

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