



Religious and secular value divides in Western Europe: A cross-national comparison (1981–2008)

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Abstract

Studies on cultural divisions in Western European politics typically combine two different value divides. The first divide is moral traditionalism versus progressiveness, which pits the religious and the secular against each other on matters of procreation, family and gender roles. The second one is authoritarianism versus libertarianism, which captures the opposition between the high- and low-educated about basically secular attitudes towards matters of immigration and law and order. Since the first divide is religiously inspired and the second one is basically secular, this article systematically distinguishes between them and studies whether secularization in Western Europe affects them differently. We perform multilevel regression analysis using European Values Study data (four waves, 1981–2008) for 17 Western European countries. Our findings show that the divide between the religious and the secular about moral issues declines with secularization, while the divide between the high- and low-educated about secular issues becomes wider.

Keywords

Cultural value divides, secularization, moral traditionalism–progressiveness, authoritarianism–libertarianism, cultural cleavage, cultural politics, Western Europe

Introduction

While cultural issues have come to dominate political agendas of Western European democracies in recent decades, comparatively religious and secular societies tend to feature very different cultural conflicts. On the one hand, religious societies, best exemplified by Ireland and Northern Ireland, have been witnessing decades-long battles over same-sex marriage and abortion. On the other hand, the most secularized Western European countries, such as the Netherlands, appear to be divided over immigration and ways to deal with it. In this article, we contribute to the scholarly debate on the transformations of cultural politics (Bornschieer, 2010; Kriesi, 2010; Norris and Inglehart, 2019) and study whether processes of secularization in Western Europe lead to changes in the dominant cultural conflicts.

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Despite these notable differences in the types of cultural issues on political agendas, cultural political opposition on the level of the general public is typically conceived of as pitting culturally progressive individuals against their culturally conservative counterparts (see, for instance, De Witte and Billiet, 1999; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Houtman, 2003; Lipset, 1959). In doing so, however, two different value dimensions rooted in different social groups are combined. The first value dimension is moral traditionalism–progressiveness, which pits the religious and the secular against each other on matters of procreation, family and gender roles. The second one is authoritarianism–libertarianism, which captures the opposition between the high- and low-educated about basically secular attitudes towards matters of immigration and law and order (see, for instance, Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Given that the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide is religiously inspired, while the authoritarianism–libertarianism one is basically secular, in this article we take the two divides apart and study whether processes of secularization in Western Europe affect these two divides differently. In the next sections, we first differentiate between the moral traditionalism–progressiveness and authoritarianism–libertarianism value divides, and then theorize about how and why secularization is likely to affect them differently. In the empirical part, we apply multilevel regression analysis to the survey data from the four waves of the European Values Study (EVS) (1981–1990–1999–2008) for 17 Western European countries and study whether secularization makes (a) the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide between the religious and secular narrower; and (b) the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide between the high- and low-educated wider.

Cultural issues and cultural divides

Social class used to enjoy the dominant position in explaining differences in both values and voting choice among Europeans largely throughout the 20th century (Houtman, 2003; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). This ‘old’ dimension of European electoral politics largely revolved around redistributive issues: old leftist parties, relying on the working class, pushed for more redistribution and social protection while old rightist parties represented the upper classes in trying to hold back state involvement in the economy (Kriesi, 2010; Nieuwbeerta, 1996).

At the end of the 20th century, however, the role of class in political behavior was found to decrease rather dramatically (Nieuwbeerta, 1996), as it could not provide a satisfactory explanation for why Europeans voted for new types of political parties—those of the new left and the new right (Achterberg and Houtman, 2006). Unsurprisingly, further studies demonstrated that redistributive issues became less divisive at the end of the 20th century as both the elites and electorates of Western European democracies largely converged on the previously dividing topics of redistribution and the need for the welfare state (Adams et al., 2012a, 2012b).

The decreasing role of social class in political behavior is often attributed to the rise of cultural political issues (e.g. gender equality, minority rights, ecology) on political agendas of Western European democracies since the 1970s and the emergence of new types of political parties that rather straightforwardly built their programs on cultural issues (Bornschieer, 2010; Inglehart, 1977; Kriesi, 2010; Van der Waal et al., 2007). Since the 1970s, parties of the new left have been increasingly successful in putting culturally progressive ideas on Western European political agendas and in attracting progressive voters (Bornschieer, 2010). The authoritarian backlash of the 1980s and the 1990s, in contrast, brought parties of the new right to claim their spot in the political landscape of Western European democracies by successfully criticizing immigration and globalization—the great evils attributed to leftist policies (Ignazi, 1992; Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Despite the wide scholarly interest in cultural issues on political agendas and the new types of parties promoting these issues, cultural divisions in Western Europe have yet enjoyed far less

attention (see Nuesser et al., 2014 for a discussion). It is even more surprising given the intense scholarly debates on whether the USA is increasingly torn apart by ‘culture wars’ and is becoming more divided over, for instance, abortion (Hetherington, 2009). Studies in the field of European politics, however, do not pay a comparable amount of attention to cultural divisions, with existing research focusing on various cultural issues and arriving at largely confusing results. Contrary to the widespread idea of the growing importance of cultural issues, Nuesser et al. (2014) demonstrated that Europeans became even less divided on cultural issues than on economic ones between 1973 and 2012. Likewise, Munzert and Bauer (2013) found that divides over most cultural issues, even immigration, narrowed in Germany between 1980 and 2010, with gender roles being the only exception.

These confusing findings on the changes in cultural value divides in Western Europe are in fact unsurprising given that most studies traditionally define cultural issues as all ‘non-economic’ ones¹ (Houtman, 2003; Inglehart, 1977; Kriesi, 2010). While a plethora of different understandings of cultural issues can be found in the literature (see, for instance, Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Hooghe et al., 2002; Inglehart and Baker, 2000), most approaches tend to blend together two different value dimensions that are rooted in different social groups. One of those dimensions is religiously inspired and represents the moral traditionalism–progressiveness value divide between the religious and the secular. The other one is predominantly secular and corresponds to the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide between the high- and low-educated (De Koster and Van der Waal, 2007). In the next section, we first distinguish these two pivotal types of cultural divides and then theorize about why we expect secularization in Western Europe to have different consequences for them.

Two models of social order: religious and secular

Cultural issues pertain to models of dealing with problems of social order (Pless et al., 2020). At least two such models—a religious and a secular—can be distinguished. The religious model inspires the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide, while the secular model inspires the authoritarian–libertarian divide.

The moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide pits religious and secular individuals against each other on matters of sexuality, life and procreation, family and gender roles. This value divide in Western Europe is typically linked to traditional Christianity in its various forms (De Koster and Van der Waal, 2007). For religious individuals on its traditionalist side, religion provides social cohesion by establishing group norms and offering shared meanings (Finke and Adamczyk, 2008; Storm, 2016). Religious individuals understand these norms and guidelines on how to live properly as pre-given by a higher divine authority, as having proven their efficacy over centuries, and as distinct from and superior to conventional and man-induced secular laws (De Koster and Van der Waal, 2007; McCullough and Willoughby, 2009).

Moral progressivists, on the other hand, tend to be secular. Since secular individuals do not ground their moral principles in religion and reject its claims of unquestionable authority and pre-defined social roles that need to be followed literally (Houtman et al., 2011), they are distinctively more permissive on matters of sexuality, life and procreation, family issues and gender roles than their religious counterparts (Nicolet and Tresch, 2009). In the realm of politics, moral progressiveness is often associated with the new-leftist political parties that have been challenging traditional views on matters of life/death and sexuality, and have been promoting individualism and alternative lifestyles from the 1970s onwards (Bornschieer, 2010; Inglehart, 1977). This moral progressiveness causes discomfort among religious moral traditionalists and encourages them to unite around conservative political parties, especially the Christian Democrats (De Koster and Van der Waal, 2007; Knutsen, 2004).

The secular model of social order refers to the authoritarian–libertarian divide, which pits the high- and low-educated against each other in their attitudes towards immigration, cultural diversity, and law and order (De Koster and Van der Waal, 2007; Houtman, 2003; Stubager, 2008). While the existing literature offers multiple understandings of authoritarianism, most studies associate it with a preference for cultural sameness and cohesion that leads to unwillingness to accept cultural diversity, not least the cultural diversity brought by immigrants in recent decades (Lipset, 1959; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Stenner, 2005). The low-educated are likely to value sameness and conformity over diversity, and hence embrace authoritarian stances towards immigration, cultural and ethnic diversity, and law and order (see, for instance, Houtman, 2003; Stubager, 2008, 2010). The highly educated, on the contrary, are more libertarian and, therefore, are more likely to embrace diversity and individualism. In the realm of politics, the authoritarian side of this value divide is typically represented by the new-rightist parties that have been increasing their presence in Western European political arenas since the 1980s (Akkerman et al., 2016; Ignazi, 1992). This ‘authoritarian backlash’ is said to be inspired by globalization, opening of national borders, and ‘failed’ policies of multiculturalism actively promoted by the political left (Kriesi, 2010; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Silva, 2018).

While many scholars blend the two value dimensions together to obtain one broad cultural opposition between culturally progressive and conservative individuals (see, for instance, De Witte and Billiet, 1999; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Stubager, 2008), others have criticized this practice, suggesting that moral traditionalism–progressiveness and authoritarianism–libertarianism need to be systematically distinguished both theoretically and empirically.

Stenner (2009) showed, for instance, that these two dimensions refer to different models of order, and that authoritarians do not necessarily share religiously inspired traditionalist sentiments. Providing more empirical support to this approach, Lakatos (2015) demonstrated that traditionalist and authoritarian items from Inglehart’s indices represent different value dimensions, instead of capturing one latent construct. While the principal reason to combine these two dimensions is the undeniable correlation between them, De Koster and Van der Waal (2007) offered a different perspective on why this correlation in fact occurs. In the largely secularized Netherlands, the two dimensions are correlated because both moral progressivists and secular libertarians value individual freedom. The traditionalists and authoritarians at the other ends of the scales, however, hardly show any overlap and as such tend to be two distinct groups. Another more recent study demonstrated that the link between moral traditionalism–progressiveness and authoritarianism–libertarianism is not universal but rather varies across Western Europe (Pless et al., 2020). More specifically, the two value dimensions are more correlated in the more secular and morally progressive Western European countries but represent distinct cultural dimensions in relatively religious ones.

This article contributes to the literature by studying the two divides separately since, as we claim, processes of secularization are likely to affect them differently. Indeed, given the decline in traditional Christianity in Western Europe in recent decades (Bruce, 2002; Halman and Draulans, 2006), how can one expect the religiously inspired divide to develop in the same way as the basically secular one? In the next section, we address this question and discuss how and why secularization is likely to have different consequences for the ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ cultural value divides.

Secularization and the two cultural value divides

According to Bruce (2002), secularization entails declining numbers of religious individuals, as well as declining social significance of religion. Traditional Christianity declined rather dramatically in the 20th century, albeit to a different extent across different countries in Western Europe (Halman and Draulans, 2006). Traditional churches, for instance, lost their former appeal and previously unquestionable authority while the population shifted away from traditional Christian

beliefs and practices (e.g. regular church attendance) to other options (e.g. more liberal forms of Christianity, spirituality, agnosticism, or atheism). Since the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide in Western Europe (or rather its traditionalist part) is inspired by traditional Christian religion, and the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide is basically secular, the two can be logically expected to go in different directions with secularization.

The moral traditionalism–progressiveness value divide, being religiously inspired, is likely to become narrower with secularization, that is, the differences in values between the religious and the secular are likely to decline as traditional religion declines. While issues associated with moral traditionalism–progressiveness have been dividing political agendas of Western European democracies since the 1970s (Bornschieer, 2010; Kriesi, 2010), nowadays they are mainly visible on political agendas of the most religious societies of Western Europe (Evans and Tonge, 2018). In these societies, problems of social order are more typically framed in religious terms than elsewhere and, therefore, are more likely to be fiercely contested by non-religious groups that favor alternative lifestyles and non-traditional gender roles (e.g. the discussion about abortion in Ireland).

Besides a decline in the social significance of religion and in the numbers of religious individuals, secularization also entails privatization of religion, meaning that religion and morally traditionalist values associated with it are relegated to the private realm (Bruce, 2002). Because of that, vast non-religious majorities in highly secularized Western European countries are likely to consider both religion and its diminishing carrier group not only outdated and old-fashioned, but also socially and politically insignificant, marginalized, and no longer in need of protesting or fighting against (Achterberg et al., 2009; Ribberink et al., 2013). This might explain why secularized European societies do clash over other types of cultural issues, rather than those related to religion. The irrelevance of religion in secularized Western Europe can be illustrated by the political parties of the new left and the new right that, despite their major disagreements about how to deal with immigration, ethnic diversity, and law and order, basically agree about the need to defend the ‘secularist truce’—the modern social contract that bans religion from the public sphere of party competition to the private realm (Achterberg et al., 2009).

Highly secularized Western European countries are, therefore, likely to be less divided over moral traditionalism–progressiveness but tend to focus more on the basically secular issues associated with the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide. Issues of immigration and law and order started to conquer Western political agendas in the 1980s, not least due to the growing political presence and recent electoral success of the populist new right (Akkerman et al., 2016; Silva, 2018). Now these issues are most visible on the agendas of the most secularized countries of Western Europe (Green-Pedersen and Otjes, 2019), where the predominantly non-religious framing of problems of social order may be expected to rather give rise to the authoritarianism–libertarianism cultural divide, pitting the libertarian high-educated and the authoritarian low-educated against each other.

Based on this reasoning, we test empirically whether secularization indeed leads to different consequences for the two cultural value divides in Western Europe, making (a) the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide between the religious and secular narrower; and (b) the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide between the high- and low-educated wider.

Research design

To examine whether secularization in Western Europe leads to different consequences for the two cultural value divides, we apply multilevel regression analysis to EVS data (1981–2008) for 17 Western European countries. In the remaining part of this section, we first describe the dataset, then our method, and finally the composition of the variables.

Data

We work with the data from the EVS because this dataset (a) provides reasonably good indicators for both moral traditionalism–progressivism and secular authoritarianism–libertarianism (b) for a relatively extensive time span (1981–2008)² and (c) for countries with diverse levels of secularity (EVS, 2011). Since secularization serves as the explanatory variable here, we focus on Western Europe exclusively—countries that are traditionally predominantly Christian and did not experience Communist rule.³ The respondents in the sample are nested in four waves (1981, 1990, 1999, 2008) and in 17 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and Northern Ireland.⁴ The total sample amounts to 69,175 respondents from 64 contexts (i.e. country–year combinations) with an average of 1080 respondents per context.

Method

For each of the two value divides, we fit a separate set of three-level multilevel regression models with (a) the respondents nested in (b) country–year contexts nested in (c) countries.⁵ Individual levels of moral traditionalism–progressiveness and authoritarianism–libertarianism act as the dependent variables, while individual religiosity–secularity and educational levels indicate principal carrier groups of those values. The stronger the effect of religiosity–secularity on moral traditionalism–progressiveness, the larger the differences between the religious and the secular, and the wider this value divide is. Similarly, the stronger the effect of education on authoritarianism–libertarianism, the larger the differences between the high- and low-educated, and the wider this value divide is.

In both sets of models, we first examine whether a particular value divide is affected by time, and if so, we then test whether those changes in time can be accounted for by secularization. To do this, we focus on cross-level interactions. First, we introduce an interaction term between time and the group-variable relevant for a particular value divide (i.e. individual religiosity–secularity or education). Second, we add an interaction term between contextual secularity and the group-variable to the same model to test if the observed changes in time can be accounted for by secularization.

Measurement

To perform multilevel regression analysis, we require indicators of (a) individual moral traditionalism–progressiveness and authoritarianism–libertarianism (as dependent variables); (b) individual religiosity–secularity and education (as principal carrier groups); (c) time; (d) degree of contextual secularity (as secularization); and (e) a standard set of control variables. Descriptive statistics for all variables in use are available in the online Appendix.

The first dependent variable is a scale of moral traditionalism–progressiveness that is designed to measure attitudes towards matters of life and death, sexuality, family, and gender roles. The scale is comprised of five questions indicating whether a respondent finds homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, divorce, and suicide justifiable. To compose this scale, we take standardized items with equal weights and assign scores only to those respondents who have validly answered at least four out of five questions. The scale is highly reliable, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.82⁶ and ranges from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating strongest moral progressiveness.

The moral traditionalism–progressiveness value divide refers to the opposition between the religious and the secular, and individual religiosity–secularity serves as an indicator of its principal carrier groups in this divide. Since it is largely the traditional Christian type of religiosity (and the

opposition to it) that informs this value divide in the case of Western Europe, the scale of religiosity–secularity is constructed from the following questions: whether a respondent attends religious services at least once a month⁷ and believes in God, heaven, hell, sin, and life after death. To compose this scale, we take standardized items with equal weights and assign scores only to those respondents who have answered at least four out of six questions. The scale is highly reliable, with overall Cronbach’s alpha higher than 0.85 and ranges from 0 (religious) to 10 (secular).

The second dependent variable is authoritarianism–libertarianism, which aims to measure attitudes towards matters of immigration and law and order. Since finding appropriate items for it in the early waves of the EVS is challenging, we choose the best available questions: whether one would not like to have (a) immigrants; (b) people of a different race; (c) Muslims; and (d) people with a criminal record as neighbors; and (e) whether one thinks that employers should give priority to the native-born when jobs are scarce.⁸ Because the first wave of the EVS does not include the questions about opposition to Muslims as neighbors and about privileging the native-born on the labor market, authoritarianism–libertarianism scores are assigned as mean standardized scores to all those who have responded validly to at least three of these five questions. We then transform the scores to range from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating strongest libertarianism. The resulting scale is fairly reliable, with an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.67.^{9,10}

Education is central to the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide. We measure it as the age when a respondent has completed their education: before the age of 16, between 16 and 17, between 18 and 20, between 21 and 23, and after 23.¹¹

To study whether and how the two value divides change over time and in response to secularization, we focus on the interactions between the two group-variables (religiosity–secularity and education) and time or contextual secularity. The wave of the EVS (1981, 1990, 1999, and 2008) serves as a linear time-variable. To construct a measure of contextual secularity for each country–year in the sample, we average individual religiosity–secularity scores within each context. This scale ranges from most religious (Malta in 1981 with a score of 0.73) to most secular (Sweden in 2008 with a score of 7.63).

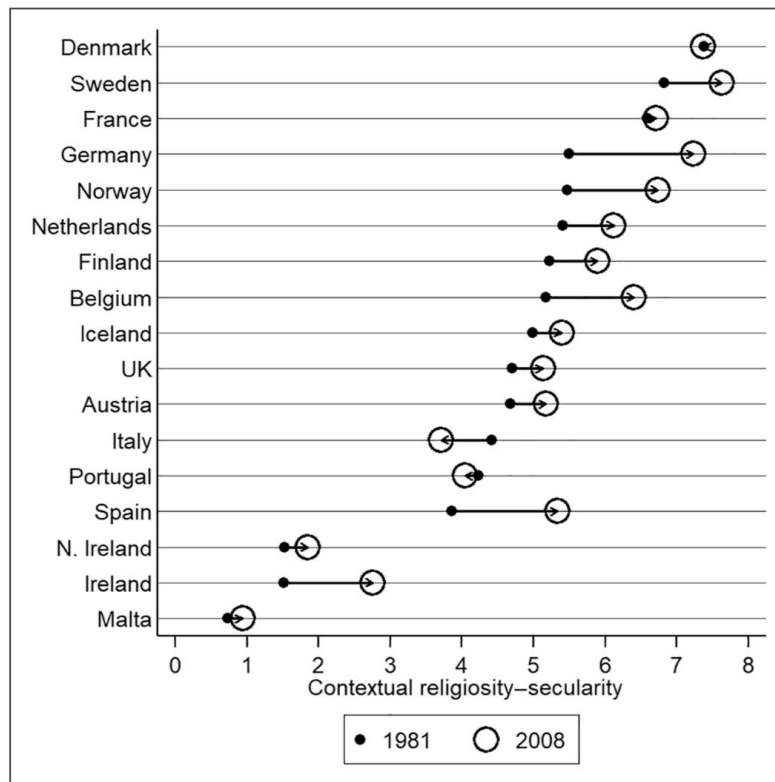
The control variables in all models are standard social demographics (age and gender), as well as education and individual religiosity. Since the two value scales are undoubtedly correlated (the overall correlation is 0.22), we control for the individual level of authoritarianism–libertarianism in models for the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide and vice versa (Pless et al., 2020).

Results

In this section, we first perform descriptive analysis of the overall changes in contextual secularity, moral traditionalism–progressiveness, and authoritarianism–libertarianism that occurred in Western Europe between 1981 and 2008. We then use multilevel regression analysis to study whether secularization narrows the divide between the religious and the secular over moral issues, and widens the other divide—between the high- and low-educated over secular issues of immigration and law and order.

Descriptive analysis of secularization, moral traditionalism, and authoritarianism

Since secularization serves as the explanatory mechanism behind the (alleged) changes occurring to the two cultural value divides, we begin the analysis by visualizing how contextual secularity in Western European countries changed between 1981 and 2008. Figure 1 demonstrates the levels of

Figure 1. Secularization in Western Europe (EVS 1981–2008).

contextual secularity in 1981 (black dots) and 2008 (hollow circles) for each country in the sample, with arrows indicating the direction of change.¹² The upper part of the graph portrays highly secularized societies of Northern Europe, while highly religious ones can be seen at the bottom of it. Almost all of these countries became more secular in the given period as significant changes in secularity can be spotted in such different societies as Germany, Norway, Spain, and Ireland. Only Italy became slightly more religious, and no major changes in contextual secularity occurred in Denmark, Portugal, and Malta.

A shift from moral traditionalism to moral progressiveness in Western Europe between 1981 and 2008 is even more obvious. Figure 2 shows that all countries in the sample became more progressive (i.e. all arrows that indicate the direction of change are pointing to the right). While only moderate changes occurred in Italy, Finland, or Denmark, others recorded a massive decline in moral traditionalism (e.g. Sweden, Norway, or Spain). Unsurprisingly, the most traditionalist countries, both in 1981 and in 2008, are also the most religious societies of Europe, which are predominantly Catholic (e.g. Malta and Ireland), whereas the most progressive countries represent the highly secularized societies of Northern Europe that are (or used to be) predominantly Protestant (e.g. Finland and Denmark).

While Western Europe became more secular and more progressive between 1981 and 2008, there appears to be no clear trend for authoritarianism–libertarianism. Countries in the upper half of Figure 3 became more libertarian, whereas those in the middle part recorded no changes in mean levels of authoritarianism, and those at the bottom even became more authoritarian. The question is whether the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide follows the same (lack of) pattern or secularization rather makes this divide wider, as suggested in the theory. In the remaining part of this section, we use multilevel regression analysis to study if the two value divides indeed go in different directions with secularization.

Figure 2. Moral traditionalism–progressiveness in Western Europe (EVS 1981–2008).

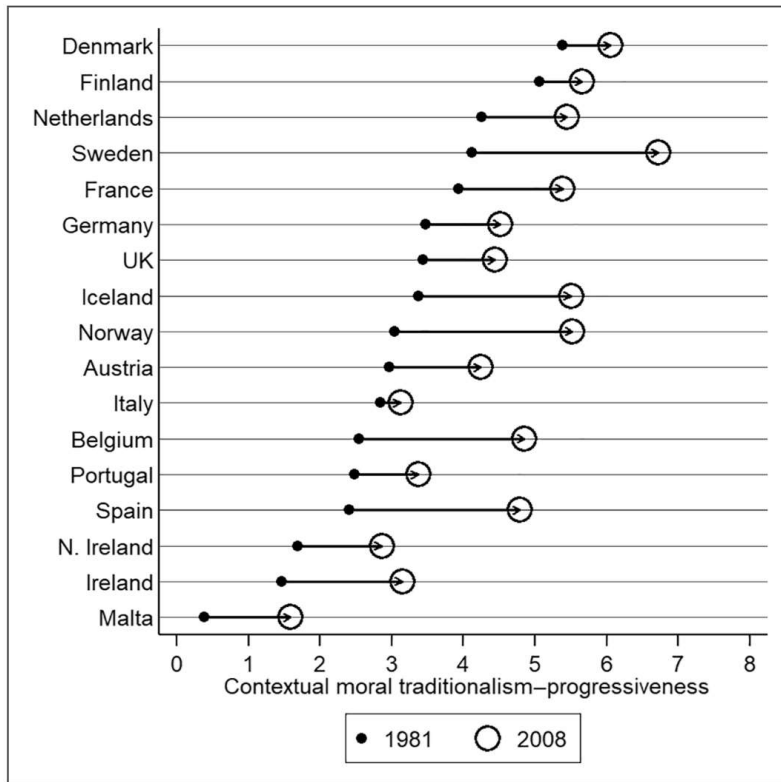
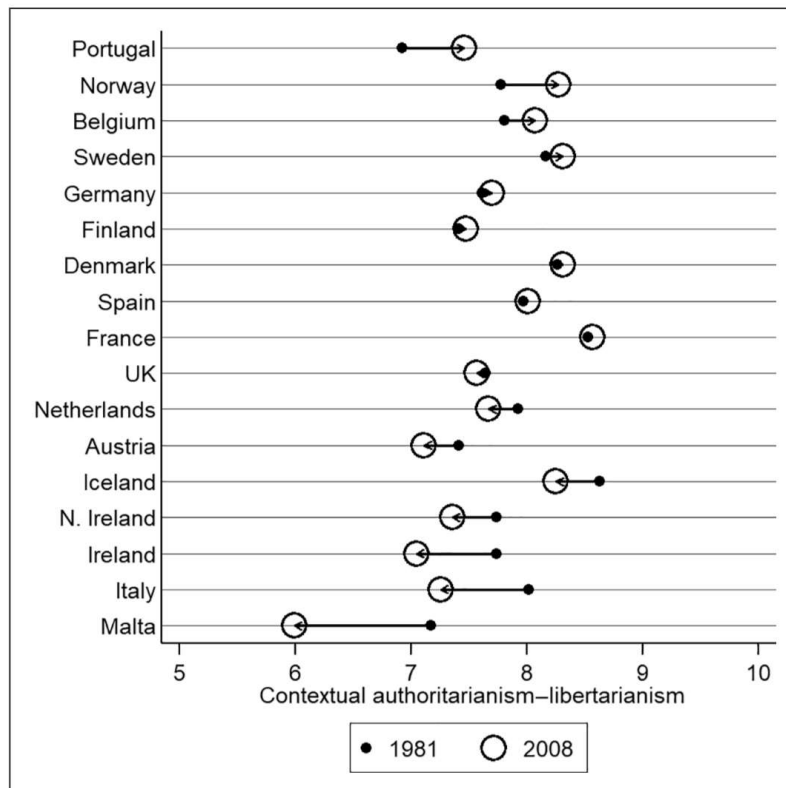


Figure 3. Authoritarianism–libertarianism in Western Europe (EVS 1981–2008).



Secularization and the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide

Models 1 and 2 in Table 1 examine the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide between the religious and the secular by means of multilevel regression analysis. In general, religious Europeans tend to be substantially more traditionalist than their secular counterparts, and individuals from more secular contexts are considerably less traditionalist than those from more religious societies (see the main effects of these variables in models 1 and 2). Supporting what we see in Figure 2, mean levels of moral progressiveness increase with time.

Model 1 shows that the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide between the religious and the secular narrows over time: the effect of religiosity–secularity on moral traditionalism decreases over time.¹³ The left-hand part of Figure 4 provides visualization for this interaction through average marginal effects. The smaller the distance between the line of average marginal effects and zero is, the smaller the effect of religiosity–secularity on moral traditionalism–progressiveness is, and the narrower the divide between the religious and the secular is.

In model 2 of Table 1, we add an interaction term between individual religiosity–secularity and contextual secularity to the model. The divide between the religious and the secular is wider in more religious societies compared to more secular ones: the effect of religiosity–secularity on moral traditionalism–progressiveness declines when contextual secularity increases (see the right-hand side of Figure 4). While secularization narrows this divide, it does not fully explain the observed changes over time. When the interaction with contextual secularity is added to the model, the interaction with time demonstrates a small decrease in effect but remains significant.¹⁴ It suggests that while there is some overlap in the effects of time and secularization on the divide between the religious and the secular about moral issues, these factors rather complement each other.

Secularization and the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide

Finally, we study how secularization affects the predominantly secular divide of authoritarianism–libertarianism between the high- and low-educated. Models 3 and 4 in Table 1 show that the low-educated are considerably more authoritarian. Although authoritarianism demonstrated no clear rise or decline over time across Western Europe in Figure 3, multilevel regression analysis shows that Europeans become more authoritarian over time (i.e. the main effect of time in models 3 and 4 is negative).

Compared to the divide between the religious and the secular that declines over time and in response to secularization, the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide between the high- and low-educated demonstrates displays an oppost. Model 3, for instance, shows that the divide between the high- and low-educated widens with time: with each wave, the effect of education on authoritarianism–libertarianism increases. The left-hand side of Figure 5 visualizes this interaction effect through average marginal effects.

Moreover, contrary to what we observe with moral traditionalism–progressiveness, the divide between the high- and low-educated is wider in more secular societies than in more religious ones (Model 4). The interaction effect between education and contextual secularity is significant and positive (see the right-hand side of Figure 5 for visualization). When we add this interaction term to the model, the interaction with time demonstrates a small decrease in effect size and statistical significance. This suggests that the divide between the high- and low-educated becomes wider in response to secularization, which partially explains the effect of time.

Table I. Secularization and the two value divides: multilevel regression analysis results.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Traditionalism– progressiveness		Authoritarianism– libertarianism	
Interactions:				
Individual religiosity–secularity × wave	−0.005** (0.002)	−0.004** (0.002)		
Individual religiosity–secularity × contextual secularity		−0.003** (0.002)		
Education × wave			0.011** (0.005)	0.010* (0.005)
Education × contextual secularity				0.009*** (0.003)
Main effects:				
EVS wave	0.463*** (0.041)	0.462*** (0.041)	−0.146*** (0.037)	−0.143*** (0.037)
Contextual secularity	0.246*** (0.049)	0.257*** (0.049)	0.111*** (0.028)	0.090*** (0.029)
Individual religiosity–secularity	0.267*** (0.006)	0.283*** (0.010)	−0.013*** (0.002)	−0.013*** (0.002)
Education	0.256*** (0.007)	0.256*** (0.007)	0.109*** (0.015)	0.065*** (0.022)
Controls:				
Authoritarianism–libertarianism	0.127*** (0.004)	0.127*** (0.004)		
Traditionalism–progressiveness			0.096*** (0.003)	0.096*** (0.003)
Age	−0.021*** (0.000)	−0.021*** (0.000)	−0.010*** (0.000)	−0.010*** (0.000)
Female	0.338*** (0.016)	0.339*** (0.016)	0.063*** (0.014)	0.063*** (0.014)
Constant	−0.692*** (0.259)	−0.738*** (0.260)	7.286*** (0.164)	7.386*** (0.168)
Random effects (variance):				
Country	0.126 (0.054)	0.125 (0.054)	0.023 (0.017)	0.024 (0.017)
Country–year	0.107 (0.023)	0.107 (0.023)	0.085 (0.018)	0.084 (0.018)
Individual	4.100 (0.022)	4.099 (0.022)	3.086 (0.017)	3.086 (0.017)
N	69,175	69,175	69,175	69,175
N of countries	17	17	17	17
N of contexts	64	64	64	64

Unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The dependent variable is individual scale of moral traditionalism–progressiveness in models 1 and 2, and individual scale of authoritarianism–libertarianism in models 3 and 4. Based on the data from the EVS (1981–2008).

Figure 4. Conditional effects of religiosity–secularity on the moral traditionalism–progressiveness (MT-P) divide (based on model 2 of Table 1).

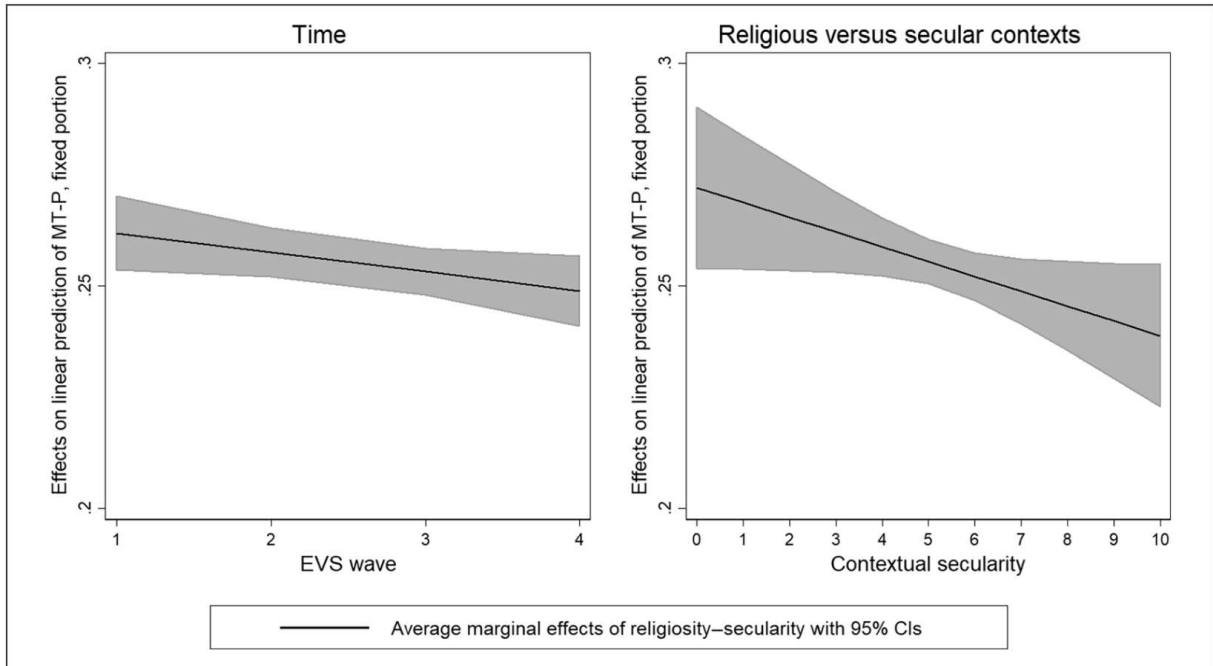
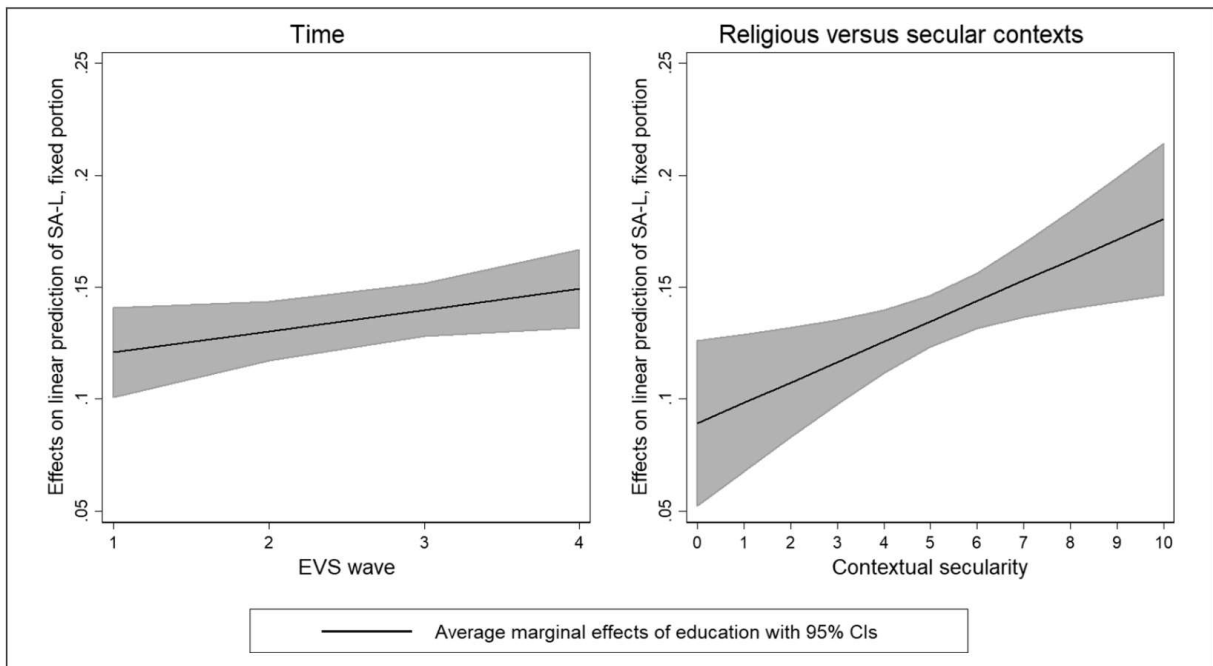


Figure 5. Conditional effects of education on the authoritarianism–libertarianism (SA-L) divide (based on model 4 of Table 1).



Discussion

This article has examined whether secularization in Western Europe leads to different consequences for the two cultural value divides—the moral traditionalism–progressiveness divide between the religious and the secular, and the authoritarianism–libertarianism divide between the

high- and low-educated. Our findings demonstrate that the two divides, indeed, moved in opposite directions between 1981 and 2008. The divide rooted in moral issues between the religious and the secular narrowed in the period under study as Western societies became more secular and less traditionalist. On the contrary, the education-based divide about secular issues of immigration and law and order rather grew wider in the same period and shows greatest division of values in the most secularized societies of Western Europe.

Most importantly, our findings suggest that blending the two value dimensions together, as is often done to address the broad opposition between cultural conservatism versus cultural progressiveness, is likely to produce misleading results. Where and when the religiously informed divide about moral issues narrows, the secular divide based on education widens. The secular divide is, thus, widest where the religious one has declined the most—in the most secularized societies of Western Europe. Moreover, this study shows that religious and secular societies of Western Europe are divided by different cultural issues, and the cultural dividing line itself does differ: dividing the religious and the secular in the religious societies, while pitting the high- and low-educated against each other in the most secular ones.

Secularization, thus, appears to affect where the cultural dividing line goes. As the religiously inspired moral dimension is becoming increasingly irrelevant to Western European politics, the education-based divide, on the contrary, becomes only more influential in pitting those with authoritarian and libertarian values against each other. This trend is reflected in the rise of both new-leftist and new-rightist parties in the political arenas of Western European democracies in recent decades.

While we have found theoretically sound differences in how the two value divides have changed in recent decades, this study has some potential limitations concerning the data in use. First, the earliest wave of the EVS took place in 1981 but the most progressive societies of Western Europe witnessed a significant decline in religion a couple of decades earlier (Bruce, 2002). Second, the early waves of the EVS feature a plethora of questions on religion and morality, but the topics related to authoritarianism and education were insufficiently covered, making it more challenging to tap into the secular value divide. Third, to spot changes in time, we could only rely on the four data points (i.e. waves) of the EVS because the integrated longitudinal dataset including the fifth wave (2017) was not available at the time this study was conducted. With only four data points, we still find consistent changes in time, as well as significant differences between the societies with different levels of contextual secularity. However, once the longitudinal EVS dataset for 1981–2017 is available, we invite scholars to study if the patterns observed in this study hold true or become even more pronounced in the longer time frame.

This article also calls for future research in two additional directions. First, because we have shown here that secularization changes the cultural dividing lines on the level of the general public, further research is needed to study whether secularization shapes party competition in Western Europe as well. Since the 1980s, electoral programs of Western European political parties have become increasingly dominated by cultural issues (Achterberg, 2006), but so far (and to the best of our knowledge) no research has focused on whether religious cultural issues in those programs have given way to secular cultural issues as societies become more secular. Since political elites are typically more divided than masses (Adams et al., 2012a, 2012b), our findings also lead to the question of whether the growing authoritarianism–libertarianism divide pushes elites to take even more extreme stances on the matter of immigration.

Second, more research is needed to study the consequences of secularization and of the changes in the dominant value divides for voting behavior across Western Europe. Following the logic of this study, the next step is to investigate whether secularization leads to a decrease in religious cultural voting (i.e. voting for Christian-democratic or rather secular parties driven by the

opposition between the religious and the secular) and an increase in secular cultural voting (i.e. voting for the new-leftist rather than new-rightist parties driven by the education-based divide). While research on cleavage politics often tends to focus on either individual values or structural characteristics as drivers of electoral choice (Elff, 2007; Knutsen, 2004), this study highlights the importance of cultural value divides in politics and thus calls for bringing in both values and their principal carrier groups when exploring changes in voting patterns across Western Europe.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Various studies address the following issues as representing the cultural dimension in politics: respect for authority and order, importance of religion and particular religious beliefs, justifiability of abortion and homosexuality, tolerance of diversity and change, family values, support for democratic freedoms and involvement in democratic procedures, national pride (Bornschieer, 2010; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Stubager, 2008).
2. While the integrated cross-sectional dataset for the fifth wave of the EVS (2017) has been released recently, the longitudinal dataset that covers all participating countries in the whole period of 1981–2017 is not yet available. We, therefore, opt to work with the 1981–2008 waves only since the quality of the merged data for this period is ensured by the EVS team.
3. Post-Communist European countries are excluded from the sample since they were not present in the early waves of the EVS and processes of secularization there are likely to differ substantively from the West (for details see Norris and Inglehart, 2004).
4. The UK and Northern Ireland are studied separately because their cultural contexts differ dramatically (e.g. abortions have been legal in the UK for a long time, unlike Northern Ireland).
5. The use of multilevel modeling for both sets of models is justified as the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) in models for moral traditionalism is 17% for country-level and 25% for contexts; and 5% for country-level and 7% for contexts in models for authoritarianism.
6. For separate contexts, Cronbach's alpha for the moral traditionalism scale exceeds 0.7 in 58 cases out of 64, and is below 0.7 in only six cases. The lowest score is for Malta in 1981 (0.61), which is still fairly high.
7. Religious attendance is measured through a question on how often one 'attends religious services apart from weddings, funerals and christenings' with the following response options: more than once a week, once a week, once a month, Christmas/Easter day, other specific holy days, once a year, less often, never. We recode the answer to 1 if a respondent attends services at least once a month, and to 0 for all less frequent options.

8. Since our way of operationalizing authoritarianism mainly focuses on types of individuals that a respondent does not want to have as neighbors, this measure might underestimate the actual diversity of individual opinions on the matter, thus underestimating the differences between the high- and low-educated in levels of authoritarianism. We have chosen these questions because they form a fairly reliable scale together, and other potential indicators of authoritarianism are absent in the first wave of the EVS.
9. The authoritarianism–libertarianism scale is undoubtedly reliable in 55 contexts out of 64, with nine contexts showing Cronbach’s alpha between 0.3 and 0.5. The lowest score is for Ireland in 1981 (0.35).
10. Factor analysis supports the separate use of moral traditionalism and authoritarianism items and suggests a two-factor solution as best fitting the data with these factors having eigenvalues of 3.53 and 1.96, together explaining 90% of the variance. After rotation, all authoritarianism items load on the first factor, and all traditionalism items on the second, and the correlation between the two factors is 0.24. Details can be obtained from the first author.
11. We assign these age intervals on the basis of correlations between one’s age when completing education and the highest educational level attained as reported in the last two waves of the EVS (this variable is absent in the first two waves). For example, those who have completed education before the age of 16 are most likely to have only elementary education, while those finishing after the age of 23 are more likely than other groups to have a university education. Though this measure of education may be quite ‘noisy’ (e.g. older individuals receiving additional vocational training later in life), it still allows us to capture the differences between the high- and low-educated, and the results are likely to underestimate the effect of education and not overestimate it.
12. In Figures 1 to 3, scores of 1990, instead of 1981, are used for Austria, Finland, and Portugal since these countries did not take part in the 1981 wave.
13. While the interaction effects in our models might seem comparatively small in terms of size, note that both religiosity and education are used as continuous variables. This approach tends to *underestimate* the differences in values between the principal carrier groups, especially underestimating the interaction effect because the relationship is assumed to be linear. If we divide the respondents into groups based on their religiosity or education levels, the differences become more pronounced and are easier to visualize. Since this would require choosing some arbitrary cutoff points that can potentially bias the results, we choose to underestimate the effect rather than risk overestimating it.
14. The interaction effect of time might seem to be substantively larger than the one of contextual secularity but note that we only have four waves in the analysis, while contextual secularity ranges from 0.73 to 7.63, meaning that potential differences between the most and least secular contexts are larger than those between the first and the last wave.

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