

Article

Portuguese Youth Religiosity in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: Portugal has been a good example of sociocultural changes during the last decades which have influenced the levels of religiosity, namely among young people. In this context, this article studies Portuguese youth religiosity in a comparative perspective. First, it compares Portuguese youth religiosity with the other Portuguese age groups' religiosity. Second, it compares Portuguese youth religiosity over time. A supplementary analysis compares Portugal with Catholic Europe in both aspects. Portuguese youth are less religious than the other age groups, mainly the older group, and are becoming less religious over time. Comparing Portugal with Catholic Europe, differences in young people have decreased in the last two decades, reaching similar values in 2020. Quantitative analyses based on four religiosity dimensions (community, practice, belief, and norm), using the European Values Study, were applied. These data confirm secularization, including the theories of individualization and cohort replacement, in line with other studies.

Keywords: religiosity; youth; Portugal; age groups; rounds; Catholic Europe

1. Introduction

Portugal has changed a lot in the last decades with the end of 'parochial civilization', the Catholic sacred canopy that thoroughly dominated rural communities for centuries (e.g., Lambert 1985) and that guaranteed the reproduction of the lineages of belief over generations (e.g., Hervieu-Léger 1999). The opening to the global world, the socio-cultural effects of May 1968, the integration in the European Economic Community in 1986, the spread of mass communication, and the changes in the Catholic Church due to the Second Vatican Council have had great impacts on the Portuguese people and their religiosity. Socio-economic trends express this transformation very well: tertiary economy¹, average individual wealth², and schooling (in all grades)³ have grown significantly. From a society marked by rurality and traditional values, after 1974, Portugal is becoming a place where novelty, autonomy, and plurality are strong features (e.g., Teixeira 2019; Coutinho 2020).

These traits are generally associated with youth whose sense of insecurity and skepticism (Ferreira 2017, p. 34) influence their attitude towards religion. Nothing is perpetual, and everything is always shifting, so tradition is less and less significant, as studies have shown (e.g., Elzo Imaz 2019). The individual is the judge of his/her life; therefore, everything must pass through his/her mental and emotional filter. Indeed, for Denton and Flory (2020, p. 7), young people have a pocket God—a God who is helpful but controlled as they wish and so, with little power over them⁴. Moreover, with growing alternatives—religious, spiritual, and secular—religious tradition exerts less influence (e.g., Stolz et al. 2016).

Young people are the drivers of social change that point the way to the future. Studying youth, a prospect of the coming decades is revealed, even if religiosity may change throughout life due to age and/or time-period effects (e.g., Cavalli 2004, pp. 159–60). In Portugal, youth religiosity needs to be further studied. Duque (2022) explored the differences between youth (18–29 years old) and older groups using the European Values Study (EVS) 2008–2020 based on a few religiosity variables. However, he did not use all religiosity variables and all rounds available⁵. Coutinho (2019) analyzed the differences between



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youth (18–29 years old) and the older population (+29 years old) using the European Social Survey (ESS), EVS, and International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) diachronically based on some religiosity variables. Yet, his findings need to be updated with new rounds from the EVS. Both these studies ask for a different approach, which includes a comparison with countries with a similar religious matrix. As Portugal has a strong Catholic tradition, it is reasonable to compare with the other European countries from a Catholic tradition since Catholicism has specific religious traits. Yet, there is also a lack of studies on this issue. [Duque \(2014\)](#) compared Portugal with seven other Catholic European countries but used the EVS 2008. Although there are other studies that include Portugal, they did not focus on this country and/or on youth doing the analyses by country ([Burkimsher 2014](#); [Bullivant 2018](#); [PRC-Pew Research Center 2018](#)) or by aggregated countries ([Voas and Doebler 2011](#); [Molteni and Biolcati 2018](#)). Filling these research gaps, this article intends to analyze youth religiosity in Portugal by age group and round comparing with Catholic Europe⁶.

2. Theoretical Framework

Generations are “age groups imbedded in a historical-social process” ([Mannheim 1952](#), p. 292) belonging to a unique time that differentiates them from the others ([Cavalli 2004](#), p. 156). This unique time interrupts an earlier time through extraordinary political, economic, social, cultural, and/or technological events, whose experience is more impressive in the formative phases of life (15–20 years old) ([Cavalli 2004](#), pp. 158–59). It is during youth, mainly in its earlier phase, that the spirit of a generation is formed. Looking at Portugal, there have been a few transformations that support this idea. Politically, from an authoritarian regime that ended in 1974, which mainly marked silent and boomer generations, the other generations lived under democracy, with more instability, heterodoxy, and increasing globalization. Sociocultural and technological patterns have also been changing along these generations, mainly since generation X, with more income, education, and tolerance. Thus, these changes have been transforming youth across generations. As [Wilkins-Laflamme \(2022, p. 21\)](#) argues, while it was normal to silent and boomer generations to be independent in the early twenties, generations X and Y, especially the last, have been extending the emerging adulthood life phase, living in the dependence of their parents. Another important aspect is the globalization of today’s youth marked by three aspects: transnational migration, precarious employment, and cultural hybridization ([Feixa and Leccardi 2010](#), p. 199).

These long transformations must be seen through the lens of secularization. Secularization in Europe is one of the most consensual findings in the sociology of religion. The unsuitability of this paradigm in other realities, such as the US and the pertinence of the economic model instead, has been thoroughly discussed (e.g., [Stark and Bainbridge 1987](#); [Iannaccone 1992](#); [Berger et al. 2008](#)). As [Stolz \(2020, p. 300\)](#) shows in his recent synthesis of the secularization paradigm, it “is not that different from the neoclassical version of secularization theory—but its mechanisms are better spelt out and many of its elements have been tested empirically”. For [Stolz \(2020, pp. 299–300\)](#), modernization leads to more existential security, more education, more pluralism, and more secular competition, which decrease religious socialization and children’s availability to be socialized, leading to the decline of religiosity across generations through cohort replacement (e.g., [Voas and Crockett 2005](#); [Stolz et al. 2021](#)) or fuzzy fidelity (e.g., [Voas 2009](#)).

Individualization, by influencing socialization, reinforces the fracture in the chain of memory through discontinuity and the utilitarian and consumerist spirit that drives it ([Campiche et al. 1997](#), pp. 191–92), especially among young people (e.g., [Bréchon 2004](#), p. 203; [Woodhead 2010](#), pp. 239–40). The impact of individualization on the religious phenomenon is clear: first, on the decline of traditional religiosity, although dependent on the national religious culture ([Norris and Inglehart 2004](#), pp. 13–21); second, on the spiritual revolution, the change from the emphasis on the transcendent to the internal sources of meaning and authority ([Heelas and Woodhead 2005](#), pp. 3–4), to non-institutionalized forms of religion ([Inglehart and Welzel 2005](#), pp. 31–32); third, on the possibility of choice, the creation of religion a la carte—religious patchwork—also because of the increase in

the religious market's pluralization (Dobbelaere 1999, pp. 239–41). This religious untying is so relevant that Davie (2006, pp. 277–78) characterizes Europe as having 'vicarious religion' in which an active minority belongs, believes, and practices religion on behalf of the passive majority.

Human development closely linked to modernization shows diversity around the world. Although there are many non-European countries in the 'very high' level of the Human Development Index (HDI), Europe stands out. Due to its historical trajectory, the vast majority of Europe (about 90%) belongs to the 'very high' level of the HDI, both in terms of number of countries and population, clearly above the other continents⁷, which emphasizes the theory of existential security (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Although Portugal's HDI value is below the values of most European countries, it is no exception: its HDI increased from 0.701 in 1990 to 0.866 in 2021 with the highest average annual growth in Catholic Europe (0.68%; lowest: 0.34%)⁸. Besides modernization, today's secular environment, inserted in a pluralistic framework, competes against religion, namely in leisure time, influencing socialization, thus pushing people away (Stolz et al. 2016). Also, the decline of the traditional family, based on religious marriage, is another important factor for explaining religious decrease, namely among youth, since family is the main socializing agent (e.g., Campiche et al. 1997; Sherkat 2003; Guest 2011). In fact, family is changing in Portugal since it has been gradually guided by untying (fewer marriages and more children outside marriage), breakup (more divorces), infertility (fewer children), and postponement (more late marriages and late children)⁹. Finally, the progressive loss of resources of the Catholic Church in Europe, including Portugal, namely the number of priests¹⁰, and the sexual scandals make it harder to keep people within the Church through socialization.

Studies about Portugal and its closest countries geographically and culturally (Spain, France, and Italy) have been confirming secularization theory, although age groups, variables, and weights employed may vary. Studies from (or that include) Portugal show that religiosity in general and variables of belonging, practice, belief, and norm increase from younger to older age groups, although beliefs may have diverse patterns or little differences between age groups depending on the studies (Teixeira 2013a, p. 125; Duque 2014, pp. 112, 119, 128, 155; Coutinho 2019, p. 8; Stolz et al. 2021, p. 355; Duque 2022, pp. 46–62). In neighboring Spain, Catholic belonging increases from younger to older groups, but even though the older group has the highest percentage of weekly services attendance (32.7%), youth do not have the lowest percentage; between the 18–24 and 55–64 groups, percentages vary between 15.6% and 13.3%, having their lowest point (8.3%) at 35–44 (CIS-Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas 2021). In France, Catholic belonging and a few religious practices increase from younger to older groups, but belief in God has different patterns depending on the study: the highest percentage in youth in one study or in the older group in another study (Senèze and Vaillant 2015; IFOP 2021, p. 13). In Italy, the youngest group attends church weekly less than the oldest group (Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi 2015, p. 115). In a study based on the EVS 2008 in Catholic European countries (Portugal included), while religious self-definition and weekly church attendance increase from younger to older groups, this is also true in belief (God, Heaven, and Hell), but the three youngest groups have similar percentages (Molteni and Biolcati 2018, p. 426). In short, looking at Portugal and other close countries, while belonging and norm increase from younger to older groups, practice has the highest percentage in the older group (but generally lowest in youth) and belief has a more uncertain pattern. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) is:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Older groups are more religious than younger groups in Portugal*¹¹.

This gradual decrease across age groups, the cohort replacement, implies a decrease over time in youth. In fact, studies have been confirming this. The studies from Portugal show that religious/Catholic belonging, practice (frequency of religious service and prayer), norm (homosexuality/abortion), and religiosity in general decrease, while beliefs in hell and heaven increase (Coutinho 2019, p. 8; Duque 2022, pp. 46–62). Still, the first study

used data from the ESS 2002–2016, EVS 1990–2008, and ISSP 1998–2008. Moreover, the EVS data in 1999 is likely to have issues since its values are greater than 1990 values (except beliefs), falling in 2008. In fact, in 1990 (the first round of the EVS in Portugal), quota sampling was used, not a random sampling like in the following rounds¹². In neighboring Spain, Catholic belonging (González-Anleo Sánchez et al. 2020, p. 64), weekly services attendance, and beliefs in God, life after death, and sin, mostly the first, decrease over time (González-Anleo 2017, pp. 255, 261). In Italy, according to Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi (2015, p. 115), frequency of religious services attendance decreases over time. In short, looking at Portugal and other close countries, belonging, practice, and norm decrease over time, while belief has a more uncertain pattern. So, the second hypothesis (H2) is:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Youth religiosity decreases over time in Portugal.*

3. Method

The method addresses five issues: databases, dimensions, variables, age groups, and data analyses. The EVS was used since it has variables in all dimensions. The three last rounds in which Portugal participated in the EVS were used: 1999¹³, 2008¹⁴, and 2017¹⁵. 1990 was not used since it has reliability problems, as already referred. In fact, when analyzing data between 1990 and 2017, there is an increase between 1990 and 1999, with decreasing values from then until 2017, which is probably due to a sampling issue in 1990. The ESS and ISSP were not used since the ESS has only variables in two dimensions, and the ISSP has no data from the last round (2018) for Portugal.

Four dimensions were considered: community, belief, practice, and norm. Fichter (1951) was the first to produce a multidimensional approach to religion: creed (belief), code (norm), cult (practice), and communion (community). Later, Glock and Stark (1965) developed a model with five dimensions: experiential (experiences with the divine), ideological (belief), ritualistic (practice), intellectual (religious knowledge), and consequential (norm). From these two pioneering and always important models, six dimensions emerge (belief, experience, community, practice, norm, and knowledge). Both the experiential and the intellectual dimensions do not present variables in these databases, leaving the four dimensions mentioned above.

To select the variables for the analysis, two steps were performed. First, the available variables in the EVS 1999–2017 that can be included in the four dimensions were selected¹⁶. They have the same questions and categories for all rounds. They are all dummy where category '1' refers to the categories in Table 1 and category '0' refers to the other categories. Second, a reliability analysis (RA) with Cronbach's alpha (CA)¹⁷ was applied to check the variables that needed to be deleted to increase its value. The only deleted variable was Q4/v9¹⁸, allowing a slight increase of CA from 0.902 to 0.908. To guarantee the correctness of this decision, a complementary analysis in each dimension based on RA and principal component analysis (PCA) was employed. In PCA, four measures were considered: KMO must be higher than 0.6 (0.6–0.7: reasonable; 0.7–0.8: medium; 0.8–0.9: good; 0.9–1.0: very good) (Pestana and Gageiro 2000, p. 397), loadings must be higher than 0.5 (Maroco 2010, p. 351), communalities must be higher than 0.3, and variance must be as high as possible.

Table 1. Selected variables and respective categories.

Variables per dimension	Categories
Community	
Q1/v6 Importance of religion in life	Very important + Quite important
Q13 Belonging to a religious denomination	Yes
Q17 Self-identification as religious	A religious person
Q38/v115 Confidence in the church	A great deal + Quite a lot
Practice	
Q15 Frequency of religious services attendance	More than once a week + Once a week
Q22 Frequency of prayer	Every day + More than once a week + Once a week
Belief	
Q18/v57 Belief in God	Yes
Q18/v58 Belief in Life after death	Yes
Q18/v59 Belief in Hell	Yes
Q18/v60 Belief in Heaven	Yes
Q20 Beliefs about God	There is a personal God
Q21 Importance of God in life	From 6 to 10 (very important) (scale 1-10)
Norm	
Q44/v153 Justification of Homosexuality	From 1 (never justifiable) to 5 (scale 1-10)
Q44/v154 Justification of Abortion	From 1 (never justifiable) to 5 (scale 1-10)
Q44/v155 Justification of Divorce	From 1 (never justifiable) to 5 (scale 1-10)
Q44/v156 Justification of Euthanasia	From 1 (never justifiable) to 5 (scale 1-10)

In the first dimension (community), in PCA, the only variable that stands out negatively is Q4/v9 which has a communality of 0.116 and a loading of 0.340. Excluding this variable variance increases from 50.6% to 61.4% while KMO is quite the same (0.788 to 0.782). This decision is confirmed by RA since this variable is the only one whose exclusion improves its value from 0.748 to 0.789. In the second dimension (practice), since there are only two variables, which are theoretically consistent together, they were kept (PCA is usually used for more variables; CA = 0.615). In the third dimension (belief), there are no variables to exclude (KMO = 0.845; Variance = 60.6%; CA = 0.869). In the fourth dimension (norms), there are no variables to exclude (KMO = 0.766; Variance = 59.7%; CA = 0.773).

There are a few options when choosing age groups, with dividing in two groups to dividing in groups of five years. They all have implications on results and their analyses. When choosing the number of age groups, two aspects are important. First, the fewer the groups, the simpler the analysis. Second, each age group must have at least 25–30 cases to apply the tests correctly (Hill and Hill 2009, p. 55). For this article, the best option should allow to distinguish young people from older people, where middle age group(s) confirm decreasing or increasing trends between young and older people. Therefore, three age groups are the best option for being simpler. The age of 34 is an increasingly used upper limit for youth (e.g., Ferreira et al. 2017; Sagnier and Morell 2021), mainly due to increasing delays in entering adulthood. The age of 65 is the minimum limit for older people, as it is the retirement age in the EU (66 in Portugal)¹⁹. In the middle are the middle-aged, though the limits of this group are also debatable, but they are roughly between 40 and 60 years old²⁰. Although youth are usually considered as beginning at 15 years old according to the United Nations and the Portuguese youth studies, the target population in the EVS is people aged 18 years and over, so the lower limit is 18 years old. Thus, the age groups are: 18–34 (young), 35–64 (middle-aged), +64 (older).

Based on SPSS 28, a few analyses were applied according to the two hypotheses:

- **H1:** Analyses of religiosity variables, dimension indexes, and religiosity index by age group in the last round in Portugal. Portugal was compared with Catholic Europe in terms of dimension and religiosity indexes in the last round²¹.

- **H2:** Analyses of religiosity variables, dimension indexes, and religiosity index by round in youth in Portugal. Portugal was compared with Catholic Europe in terms of dimension and religiosity indexes of youth²².

A few issues were considered in the analyses:

- Percentages of aggregated categories consider the total sample, including the missing categories ('don't know', 'no answer', etc.), to show their real weight in the total, not only in the valid cases.
- Indexes were created using 'Transform>Count values within cases' where only each variable's values (categories) equal to 1 were considered. Internal consistency of the indexes had been already verified with CA.
- ANOVA was used for variables and indexes. It can only be applied rigorously when two conditions are met: normality, verified by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with the Lilliefors correction or by the Shapiro–Wilk test ($n < 30$), and homogeneity of variances, verified by Levene's test (Maroco 2010, pp. 133–36). When homogeneity of variances does not exist, Fw of Welch can be used (Maroco 2010, p. 160). When normality or both conditions are violated, Kruskal–Wallis' test can be used, although for samples larger than 30, normality is accepted according to the central limit theorem (Maroco 2010, pp. 59, 227). Significant differences were verified through post-hoc tests²³.
- Weights were applied following EVS instructions: weight for Portugal's variables and equilibrated weight for Europe's variables. This last weight means that all countries are considered equal, regardless of their original sample sizes and country populations.

4. Results

Looking at Figures 1 and 2, older groups have higher percentages than younger groups in all variables, which confirms Hypothesis 1. The only exceptions occur in the eschatological beliefs (life after death, hell, and heaven), where the middle group has the lowest percentages or the differences between age groups are small, mostly in the first two, but still the older group has the highest percentages. In the norm dimension, divorce has the lowest level of rejection while abortion has the highest level of rejection among youth. In the practice dimension, prayer is clearly more practiced than religious services and the older group plainly practices more than the other age groups. In the belief dimension, variables about God have undoubtedly higher percentages than the eschatological beliefs.

As expected by looking at each variable, the indexes of each dimension and the index of religiosity have higher values in the older group and the lowest values in the young (Figure 3). In practice, young and middle groups have close values, although significantly different. Comparing with Catholic Europe, in general, Portugal presents higher values than Europe and the differences increase from young to older, with young Portuguese and young European Catholics having irrelevant differences.

Looking at Figures 4 and 5, all variables decrease gradually from 1999 to 2020, which confirms Hypothesis 2. The only exceptions occur once again in the eschatological beliefs (life after death and hell), where 2008 has the highest percentages. In the community dimension, importance of religion has small differences in 2008 and 2020. In the norm dimension, abortion has small differences in 2008 and 2020. In the belief dimension, between 1999 and 2020, while belief in life after death kept the same percentage, belief in hell slightly increased.

As expected by looking at each variable, the indexes of each dimension and the index of religiosity have the lowest values in 2020 and the highest values in 1999 (Figure 6). In belief, 1999 and 2008 have close values. Comparing with Catholic Europe, in general, Portugal presents higher values than Europe and the differences decrease from 1999 to 2020, with young Portuguese and young European Catholics having irrelevant differences in 2020, as already referred.

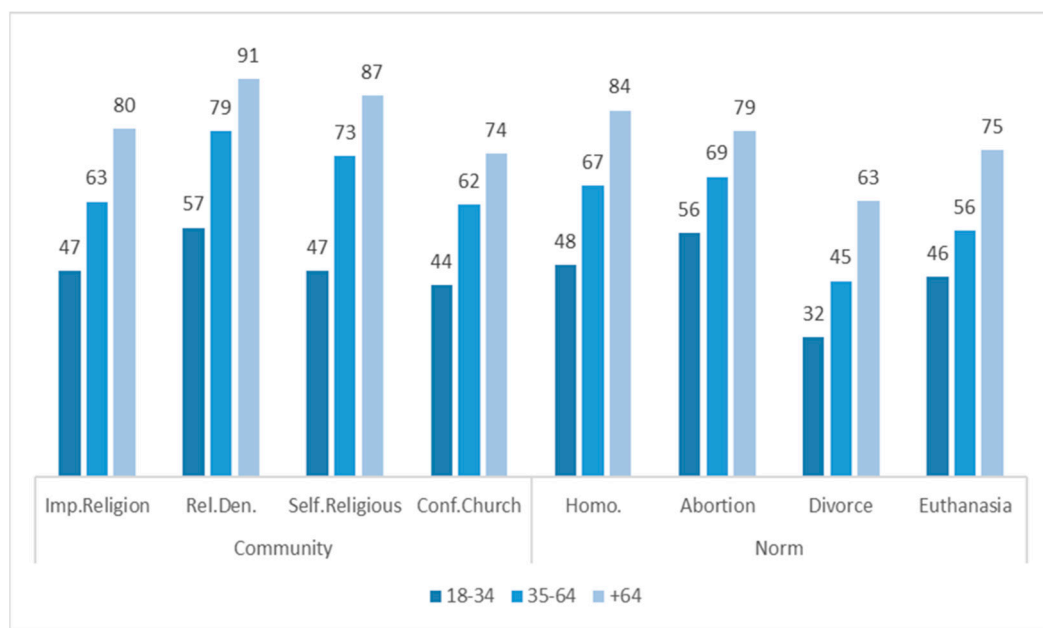


Figure 1. Community and norm variables by age group in Portugal in 2020 (%). Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Significant differences exist between all age groups. Tests: Imp.Religion—Fw (2) = 33.574, $p < 0.001$. Rel.Den.—Fw (2) = 49.106, $p < 0.001$. Self.Religious—Fw (2) = 52.876, $p < 0.001$. Conf.Church—Fw (2) = 27.968, $p < 0.001$. Homo—Fw (2) = 68.507, $p < 0.001$. Abortion—Fw (2) = 20.324, $p < 0.001$. Divorce—Fw (2) = 28.577, $p < 0.001$. Euthanasia—Fw (2) = 39.096, $p < 0.001$. In all, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed.

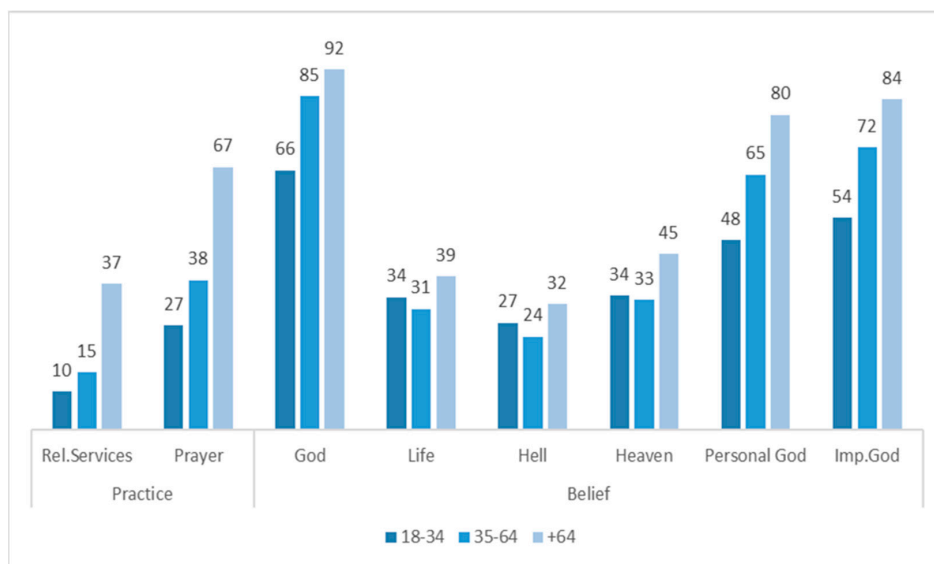


Figure 2. Practice and belief variables by age group in Portugal in 2020 (%). Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Significant differences exist between all age groups with the following exceptions: in Religious Services and beliefs in Life after death and Heaven, there are no significant differences between 18–34 and 35–64; in belief in Hell, there are significant differences only between 35–64 and +64. Tests: Rel.Services—Fw (2) = 28.328, $p < 0.001$. Prayer—Fw (2) = 53.217, $p < 0.001$. God—Fw (2) = 26.225, $p < 0.001$. Life—Fw (2) = 3.988, $p = 0.019$. Hell—Fw (2) = 4.231, $p = 0.015$. Heaven—F (2) = 8.330, $p < 0.001$. Personal God—Fw (2) = 30.240, $p < 0.001$. Imp.God—Fw (2) = 29.829, $p < 0.001$. In practice variables, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed. In belief variables, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed, except in Heaven where homogeneity of variances is assumed.

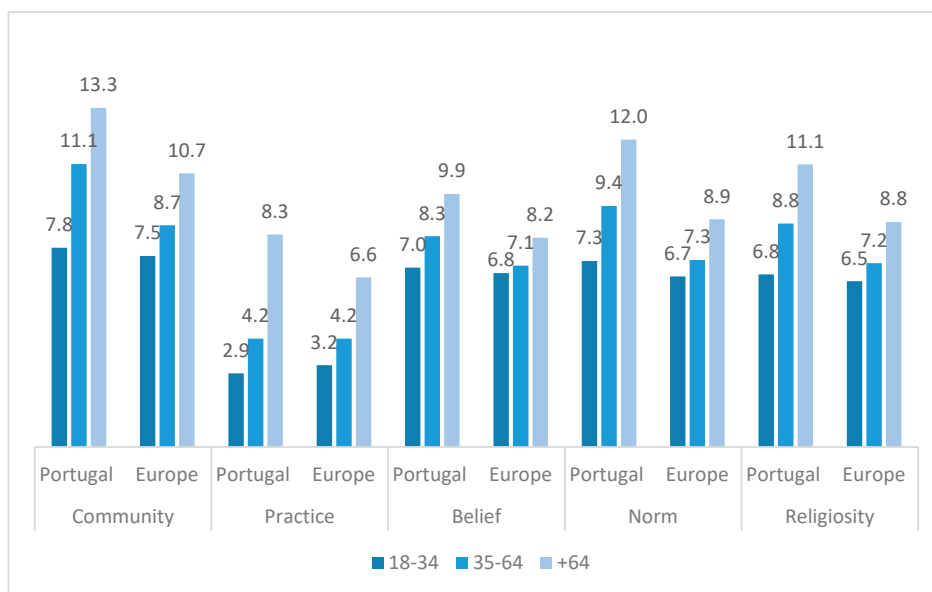


Figure 3. Indexes of Portugal and Europe by age group in 2020. Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Indexes (Portugal/Europe) vary between 0 and 16. Significant differences exist between all age groups in Portugal and in Europe in all indexes except in belief in Europe where there are no significant differences between 18–34 and 35–64. Tests: Community—Portugal—Fw (2) = 65.565, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 217.805, $p < 0.001$. Practice—Portugal—Fw (2) = 53.502, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 243.229, $p < 0.001$. Belief—Portugal—Fw (2) = 20.811, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 48.494, $p < 0.001$. Norm—Portugal—Fw (2) = 54.989, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 115.439, $p < 0.001$. Religiosity—Portugal—Fw (2) = 76.528, $p < 0.001$; Europe—F (2) = 190.798, $p < 0.001$. In all, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed, except in Religiosity in Europe where they are both assumed.

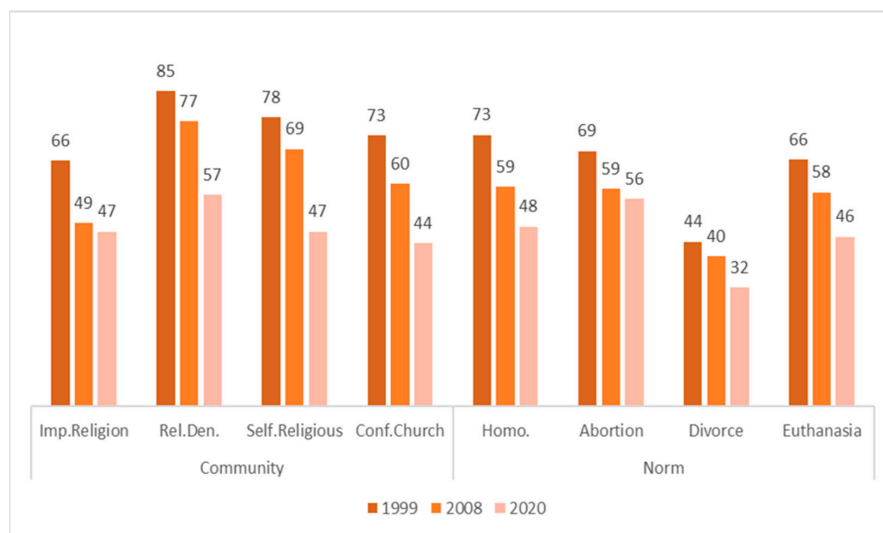


Figure 4. Community and norm variables by round in Portugal in 2020 (%). Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Significant differences exist between all rounds with the following exceptions: in Importance of religion and justification of Abortion there are no significant differences between 2008 and 2020; in justification of Divorce there are no significant differences between 1999 and 2008. Tests: Imp.Religion—Fw (2) = 17.408, $p < 0.001$. Rel.Den.—Fw (2) = 32.294, $p < 0.001$. Self.Religious—Fw (2) = 39.133, $p < 0.001$. Conf.Church—Fw (2) = 31.276, $p < 0.001$. Homo—Fw (2) = 24.654, $p < 0.001$. Abortion—Fw (2) = 8.219, $p < 0.001$. Divorce—Fw (2) = 6.242, $p = 0.002$. Euthanasia—Fw (2) = 26.133, $p < 0.001$. In all, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed.

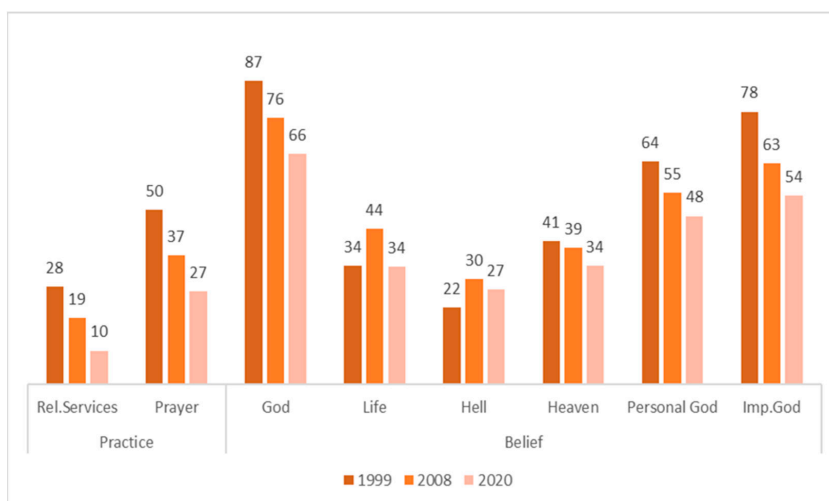


Figure 5. Practice and belief variables by round in Portugal in 2020 (%). Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Significant differences exist between all rounds with the following exceptions: in belief in Life after death, there are significant differences only between 2008 and 2020; in belief in Hell, there are no significant differences between all age groups; in belief in Heaven, there are significant differences only between 1999 and 2020; in belief in Personal God, there are no significant differences between 2008 and 2020. Tests: Rel.Services—Fw (2) = 20.242, $p < 0.001$. Prayer—Fw (2) = 19.593, $p < 0.001$. God—Fw (2) = 33.732, $p < 0.001$. Life—Fw (2) = 6.634, $p = 0.001$. Hell—Fw (2) = 2.491, $p = 0.084$. Heaven—Fw (2) = 3.012, $p = 0.050$. Personal God—Fw (2) = 7.872, $p < 0.001$. Imp.God—Fw (2) = 21.550, $p < 0.001$. In all, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed.

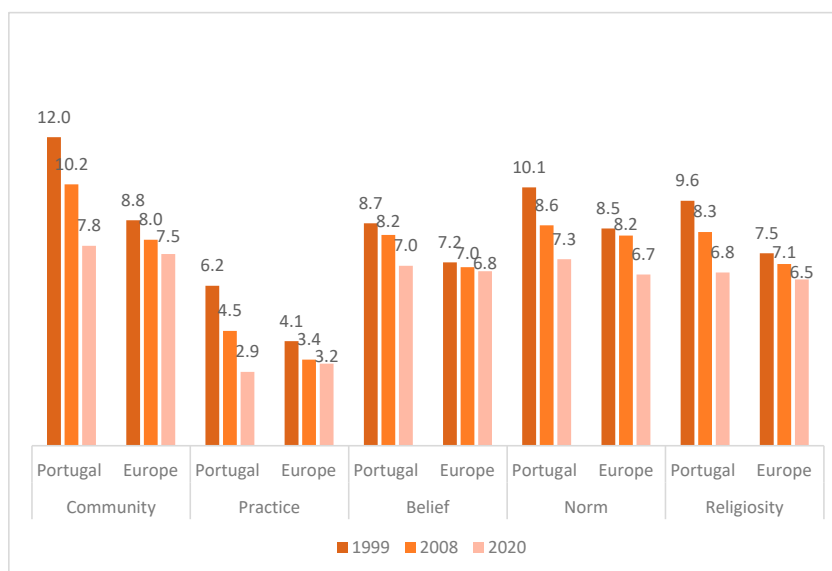


Figure 6. Indexes of Portugal and Europe by round in youth. Source: EVS (2021). Notes: Indexes (Portugal/Europe) vary between 0 and 16. Significant differences exist between all rounds with the following exceptions: in practice in Europe, there are no significant differences between 2008 and 2020; in belief in Portugal and norm in Europe, there are no significant differences between 1999 and 2008; in belief in Europe, there are significant differences only between 1999 and 2020. Tests: Community—Portugal—Fw (2) = 44.514, $p < 0.001$; Europe—F (2) = 37.391, $p < 0.001$. Practice—Portugal—Fw (2) = 25.977, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 20.667, $p < 0.001$. Belief—Portugal—Fw (2) = 8.350, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 2.977, $p = 0.051$. Norm—Portugal—F (2) = 20.121, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 76.676, $p < 0.001$. Religiosity—Portugal—Fw (2) = 37.861, $p < 0.001$; Europe—Fw (2) = 36.822, $p < 0.001$. In all, normality assumed, and homogeneity of variances not assumed, except in Community in Europe and Norm in Portugal where they are both assumed.

5. Discussion

The first issue to highlight is the chosen variables. In fact, they condition the quality of the results. From what was mentioned before, these variables seem to be adequate to express religiosity in all its dimensions, involving all aspects of religion, although with the constraints that exist in the use of a database. In other words, work is carried out with what is available. It would be interesting to include variables about religious experience, symbols, or knowledge, but these do not exist in the EVS.

The first hypothesis states that older groups are more religious than younger groups in Portugal. This is clear in all variables and of course in each dimension index and in the index of religiosity where all age groups differ significantly from each other. So, H1 is confirmed, agreeing with [Duque \(2014, p. 155; 2022, p. 62\)](#), though this author used much fewer variables in his studies. Community and norm dimensions have simpler patterns confirming previous studies ([Teixeira 2013a, p. 125; Duque 2014, p. 112; Coutinho 2019, p. 8; Duque 2022, pp. 46, 71](#)). In the practice dimension, young and middle groups differ more from the older group than between them, which agrees with [Duque \(2022, p. 50\)](#) and the [CIS-Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas \(2021\)](#), where only the older group (also +64) has clearly higher values than the younger groups, and it is close to [Senèze and Vaillant \(2015\)](#), where age groups up to 35–49 have similar percentages increasing gradually at 50–64 and +64²⁴.

Beliefs are more complex. In fact, there are many dogmas and the Nicene/Apostles' Creeds are composed of many beliefs. Another interesting aspect is that the DK category in belief in God is low, decreasing from 18–34 to +64, while the other beliefs have relatively high percentages in the DK category with an opposite pattern²⁵. Even if 'yes' and the DK categories are added together, 15–34 and 35–64 groups remain close, differing from group +64. In short, the older group believes more than the other age groups. [Duque \(2014, pp. 119, 128; 2022, p. 59\)](#) found that, in Portugal, age groups have different patterns for each belief variable but, in general, differences between age groups are small, and the index of beliefs is slightly higher in the older group. In France, the [IFOP \(2021, p. 13\)](#) shows that the older group believes more in God than the other age groups, although [Senèze and Vaillant \(2015\)](#) found that the younger group has the highest percentage.

The second hypothesis states that religiosity decreases over time in Portugal. This is clear in almost all variables and of course in each dimension index and in the index of religiosity where all age groups differ significantly from each other. The exception exists in beliefs in life after death and hell where the middle group has the highest percentages, whereby 18–34 and 35–64 groups have close values in the index. So, H2 is generally confirmed, agreeing with [Duque \(2022, p. 62\)](#). These trends confirm previous studies in terms of community, practice, and belief ([Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi 2015, p. 115; González-Anleo 2017, pp. 255, 261; González-Anleo Sánchez et al. 2020, p. 64; Duque 2022, pp. 46, 50. Coutinho \(2019, p. 8\)](#), based on variables of the four dimensions studied here, found that community, practice, and norm variables generally decrease over time, while beliefs do not. In fact, the expression 'believing without belonging', although updated to 'vicarious religion' (e.g., [Davie 2006](#)), keeps its pertinence, where the hard variables of religiosity (practice) decrease, while the soft variables (belief) maintain their importance namely among youth (e.g., [Lambert 2004a, p. 38; 2004b, p. 320](#)).

These trends result from the changes that have taken place in Portuguese society in recent decades. In fact, the HDI raised from 0.791 to 0.863 between 2000 and 2020 which reflects the path of Portugal towards modernization. In the wake of modernization, individualization is a common process in Europe where people, mainly young, detach from religious institutions. This idea of continuous detachment across generations has been defended as cohort replacement (e.g., [Stolz et al. 2021](#)). Data from this study undoubtedly confirms this theory as well as data from the most recent study on Portuguese religiosity ([Teixeira 2013b](#)). These data show that socialization increases gradually from 15–34 to +64, although significant differences only exist between young people and other age groups²⁶. This reflects a substantial gap between youth and the other generations.

Still, the increasing loss of religiosity with modernization, including increased education, does not mean that religion and lack of education are biunivocal. It is expected that more education leads to a loss of institutional religiosity due to the reflexivity and the autonomy that it provides. However, as defended by Weber (2006, p. 169), religion serves the upper classes to calm their inner afflictions—the most elaborate questions of meaning. Looking for instance in the Portuguese religious field, there are many cases of youngsters with higher levels of cultural and financial capital that are extremely religious. Their presence is clear in many movements, such as Mission Country, a university movement that started twenty years ago and is growing substantially over the years, assembling nowadays more than three thousand students to the mission every year²⁷.

Comparing Portugal with Catholic Europe, differences in young people have decreased in the last two decades, reaching similar values in 2020. These slightly higher or close values were also reported by other authors regarding Catholic Europe, although with fewer variables and older data (Duque 2014, p. 119; Bullivant 2018, pp. 6–7; PRC-Pew Research Center 2018, pp. 64–66). These levels of religiosity, approximately close to or slightly higher than European ones, can be explained first by the degree of modernization. In fact, looking at the HDI between 2000 and 2020, Portugal has slightly lower values in both years and in the ratio of growth²⁸. Secondly, in terms of socialization, Portugal has higher values in youth than Europe²⁹. Individualization, through modernization, and socialization, although with only one variable, may help to explain these patterns.

Yet, comparing with the closest country (Spain), other factors, namely political, may be important. Although they have close percentages of Christian socialization in youth (89%/86%) and a close ratio of HDI growth (9.1%/9.0%), Spain has higher values of HDI in both years (0.825/0.899) and the index of youth religiosity is lower along the last two decades (5.86/5.23/4.53). As Martin (2011, p. 35) argues, Catholic countries where the Catholic Church has opposed the mobilization of the nation and liberal nationalism may fall into religious decline. First, the persecution to the Catholic Church was much harsher in Spain during the Second Republic (1931–1939) than in Portugal during its First Republic (1910–1926). This helps to explain the hard polarization during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) where many atrocities were committed on both sides and where the Catholic Church took a position in the nationalist side. Second, the conniving relationship with the Catholic Church during Franco's regime (1936–1975), becoming a national Spanish Church (Pérez-Agote 2010, pp. 227–29), was stronger or more problematic than during Estado Novo (1933–1975), not only because Catholicism was the official religion (until 1978), while in Portugal it was not since 1911, but also because the White Terror involved, in some cases, members of the Catholic Church, as in the case of the lost children.

6. Conclusions

This article confirmed the two hypotheses under analysis. First, older groups are more religious than younger groups in Portugal. Second, youth religiosity decreases over time in Portugal. Both these hypotheses confirm the secularization paradigm, including the theories of individualization and of cohort replacement, based on the decreasing levels of socialization across generations. It seems clear with these data that Portuguese young people are increasingly less socialized to become part of lineages of belief. All sociocultural factors that underlie individualization and socialization lead to the continuation of the current trends in Portugal. In general, there are no signs for the inversion of trends.

Yet, there are a few aspects that would be wise to consider. First, as some authors are arguing, countries may reach a baseline and stay there (e.g., Kaufmann et al. 2012, p. 85; Burkimsher 2014, p. 444). Portugal can reach a minimum level and stay there. Second, there are signs showing a faith resurgence or maintenance among young people in Portugal. Dozens of youth movements and other lay movements with youth sections, as well as parish groups, in Portugal have been crucial in this process. World Youth Day, which will take place in 2023 in Lisbon, will also help in pushing youth religiosity, as authors have explained (e.g., Mariz et al. 2018, p. 412; Mercier 2020, pp. 425–47). Third,

the future is unpredictable and uncertain. Strong upheavals can always change trends in the long term. Giddens (1996, p. 171) refers to four major risks: growth of totalitarian power, collapse of economic growth mechanisms, ecological decay or disaster, and nuclear conflict or large-scale warfare. The recent pandemic and the war in Ukraine have spread poverty. Thus, religion can be a support for many Portuguese due to the lack of existential security (Norris and Inglehart 2004), including young people who are too affected by job precariousness (Tavares et al. 2021).

Although the questions raised in this article welcome new rounds to keep updating trends, it makes some contributions. First, it used the most suitable database for religious analyses along with the ISSP (Portugal did not participate in 2018), four dimensions, and recent data whose conjugation is a novelty. Second, it used all religious variables available in the EVS that are comparable between rounds, which is also a novelty. Third, it used indexes for each dimension and for all religious variables, which is also a novelty. Fourth, it offers an updated, diachronic, and comparative perspective of Portuguese youth among other age groups and countries with the same major religion.

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Notes

- 1 In 1974, the employment in the three sectors had practically the same weight (primary-34.9%, secondary-33.7%, and tertiary-31.4%) while in 2021 the percentages were 2.7%, 24.6%, and 72.7%, respectively. Source: Pordata (accessed on 24 November 2022).
- 2 Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at constant prices more than doubled between 1974 and 2021: from €8.611 to €19.030. Source: Pordata (accessed on 24 November 2022).
- 3 The actual schooling rate went from 8.3% (pre-school), 84.9% (1st cycle), 26.0% (2nd cycle), 17.8% (3rd cycle), and 4.9% (upper-secondary) in 1974, to 90.4%, 97.4%, 89.0%, 91.9%, and 85.1%, respectively, in 2021. The number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 81.582 to 433.217 between 1978 and 2022 (0.83% and 4.19% of total population, respectively; data for total population: 1978 corresponds to 1981, 2020 corresponds to 2021). Source: Pordata (accessed on 24 November 2022)/INE (<https://tabulador.ine.pt/indicador/?id=0011609>).
- 4 Although it is important to consider the context where the study was produced—USA—marked by a peculiar religious field.
- 5 Findings by Duque (2022) and the other studies in the introduction will be presented further ahead when pertinent.
- 6 To simplify, from now on the 12 countries in this study will be named as Catholic Europe.
- 7 Link: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks> (accessed on 17 January 2023).
- 8 Link: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads> (accessed on 24 November 2022).
- 9 Data from 1960/2021. Crude marriage rate (%): 7.8/2.8. Live births outside marriage (%): 9.5/60.0. Crude divorce rate (%): 0.1/1.7. Crude birth rate (%): 24.1/7.7. Mean age on first marriage: M—26.9/34.3, W—24.8/32.9. Mean age of the mother at birth of first child: 25.0/30.9. Source: Pordata (accessed on 25 November 2022).
- 10 Except Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, in the other countries the ratio priest/inhabitant is decreasing in the last decades, looking at the values between 1981 (the first round of EVS) (Croatia and Slovenia since 1991, Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1993) and 2019 (SSRGE-Secretaria Status-Rationarium Generale Ecclesiae 1983, pp. 98–99; 1993, p. 99; 1995, p. 99; 2021, pp. 107–8).
- 11 To simplify, the eventual exceptionality of beliefs is not addressed here and in the second hypothesis but only in discussion.
- 12 This problem was confirmed by email by a member of EVS in March 2022.
- 13 Data were collected in 1999 in all Catholic European countries, including Portugal.
- 14 Data were collected in 2008 in Portugal and in 2008–2009 in the other Catholic European countries.
- 15 Data were collected in 2020 in Portugal and in 2017–2019 in the other Catholic European countries.
- 16 Justification of Suicide/Having casual sex/Prostitution (Q44/v157/v158/v160), associated also with life and sexuality, as the other four norm variables, were not included because the differences between rounds are quite irrelevant in youth (first two) or there are no values in 1999 (last) in Portugal.
- 17 Unacceptable < 0.5; poor > 0.5; questionable > 0.6; acceptable > 0.7; good > 0.8; excellent > 0.9 (George and Mallery 2003, p. 231).
- 18 Q4 Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organisations and say which, if any, do you belong to? v9 Religious or church organisations.

- ¹⁹ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/retirement> (accessed on 7 December 2022).
- ²⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/science/middle-age> (accessed on 7 December 2022).
- ²¹ Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain. Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Malta were not included since there are no data in the most recent round (2017).
- ²² In this analysis only the countries with data in 2017 were included, therefore Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Malta were excluded. Plus, there are no data for Slovenia in prayer in 1999 and for Italy in justification of homosexuality in 2008.
- ²³ There is no consensus on the most appropriate test, but LSD, Bonferroni, Scheffe, and Tukey are pointed out when variances are equal (in fourteen tests available in SPSS) (Maroco 2010, p. 161). When variances are not equal, four tests are available in SPSS so all may be used to match the number of the previous tests.
- ²⁴ Since Coutinho (2019) and Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi (2015) used only two age groups, it is not possible to compare.
- ²⁵ 18–34/35–64/+64 (% in 2020): God (6.0/3.5/2.3), Life after death (10.4/18.3/21.4), Hell (8.0/15.2/20.4), Heaven (10.9/15.3/19.4).
- ²⁶ 15–34: 2.59^a; 35–64: 3.08^b; +64: 3.16^b (scale 0–4); significant differences between (a) and (b). $F_w(2) = 54.846, p < 0.001$.
- ²⁷ Link: <https://www.missaopais.pt/> (accessed on 17 January 2023).
- ²⁸ Portugal/Catholic Europe: 2000—0.791/0.805; 2020—0.863/0.882; Growth (%)—9.1/9.7. Source: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads> (accessed on 22 December 2022).
- ²⁹ This variable refers to the percentage of young respondents (18–34 years old) that were raised as Christian during childhood: 89.1% (Portugal)/77.6% (Catholic Europe except Slovenia). Sources: PRC-Pew Research Center (PRC-Pew Research Center 2015–2016, 2017); weights applied.

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