

Religious residue: The impact of childhood religious socialization on the religiosity of nones in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden

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Abstract

One of the distinguishing features of religious life in Western Europe in recent decades has been the sharp increase in the proportion of people who identify as unaffiliated with any religious tradition (religious nones). Non-affiliation entails a rejection of religious belonging, not the absence of all religious belief and practice; yet the determinants of religiosity among nones have not been fully explored. Drawing on data from the 1998–2018 ISSP surveys in four West European countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden), I test the impact of childhood religious socialization on the religiosity of unaffiliated adults by comparing lifelong nones, who were never religiously affiliated, with disaffiliates, who were raised within a religious tradition and have since exited organized religious life. Disaffiliates are consistently more religious than lifelong nones due to religious residue from childhood, with greater residue found among those who were more religiously committed as children. Religious decline among the unaffiliated over time, combined with the increasing proportion of lifelong nones and second-generation lifelong nones who lack even an inherited, minimal religious residue, suggest that secularization will gather momentum.

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KEYWORDS

conversion, disaffiliation, nones, religion, secularization

1 | INTRODUCTION

The last 30 years have witnessed a rapid increase in the religiously nonaffiliated population, with nones now constituting the world's third-largest "religion" (following Christianity and Islam) (Kosmin et al., 2009; Scheitle et al., 2018; Van Tongeren et al., 2020; Voas & Chaves, 2016; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016b). The proportion of Europeans who do not affiliate with any religious group tripled during this period to close to one-third of the total population of the continent (Balazka, 2020). Although the absence of religious affiliation is a strong common denominator of nones, substantial intra-group variations in religiosity exist among this demographic (Madge & Hemming, 2017; Smith & Cragun, 2019). This is true not only when religiosity is broadly defined to include New Age attitudes (Pollack & Pickel, 2007) and spirituality (Lee, 2014; Mercadante, 2014) but also when narrow definitions are used, focusing on traditional measures of religiosity such as faith (Kosmin et al., 2009; Storm, 2009), prayer (Bullivant, 2016), and attendance (Hackett, 2014).

Attempts to understand this heterogeneity divide nones into subcategories on the basis of belief as atheists, agnostics, and nothing in particular (Frost & Edgell, 2018), spirituality, such as those who are spiritual but not religious (Lindeman et al., 2019), and affiliation patterns in the recent past, comparing liminal with stable affiliates (Hout, 2017; Lim et al., 2010). Although socialization in childhood is one of the strongest predictors of religious outcomes in adulthood (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019; Stolz, 2009; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020), few empirical studies have explored this factor when investigating heterogeneity of religiosity among the nones. Socialization, whether intentional, a function of parental modeling (Zuckerman, 2012), or through social networks (Adams et al., 2020; Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012), is highly significant in determining religious choices later in life. Even when socialization fails and switching occurs, childhood socialization influences both adult affiliation choices (Babchuk & Whitt, 1990) and religiosity (Ebaugh, 1988).

The lack of attention paid to the role of childhood socialization on the religiosity of nones is probably due to the relative novelty of the study of nones in general (Smith & Cragun, 2019) and the small number of lifelong nones (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020). There is evidence, however, that disaffiliates do differ significantly from lifelong nones on a range of indicators related to religious identity such as health, wellbeing (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016), and political attitudes (Huang, 2020). Therefore, this paper addresses three key issues. First, it assesses the impact of childhood socialization on the religious commitment of adult nones by comparing the religiosity of disaffiliates (nones raised in a religious tradition) with those of lifelong nones (who were raised and currently identify as nones) in order to better understand the heterogeneity of religiosity among nones as well as the nature of disaffiliation. Second, it asks whether religiosity is declining among nones by comparing data from the 1998, 2008, and 2018 waves of the ISSP religion module, thus contributing to the debates surrounding the secularization and individualization theories. Third, it takes a comparative approach, focusing on four West European countries that have sufficiently large populations of disaffiliates and lifelong nones: France, Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden. By comparing disaffiliates with lifelong nones in different countries, the factors common to all cases can be isolated while the significance of local conditions in shaping religiosity among nones is assessed. Gaining a fuller understanding of patterns of religious engagement among the nones and of how these are shaped by childhood socialization is particularly important in assessing current and future trends in religiosity in Western Europe, with its increasing rates of non-affiliation and its growing proportion of lifelong nones.

2 | THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | The impact of socialization

Religious heterogeneity among the unaffiliated is well established (Madge & Hemming, 2017; Ribberink et al., 2018; Smith & Cragun, 2019). Existing research, however, has proposed dividing nones among several

lines, none of which take childhood religious socialization, or lack thereof, into account. Childhood socialization is a crucial determinant of religious preferences in adulthood (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019; Stolz, 2009; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2020). Children are socialized either into a religious tradition or as nones (Bengtson et al., 2018; Manning, 2013; Strhan & Shillitoe, 2019). The mechanisms of parental and indeed grandparental (Copen & Silverstein, 2008; Voas & Storm, 2012) socialization include intentional instruction as well as modeling (Zuckerman, 2012). Additionally, socialization occurs outside the family unit, in communities (Lim & de Graaf, 2020; Petts, 2014; Voas & Storm, 2021), schools (Strhan & Shillitoe, 2019), and peer groups (Adams et al., 2020; Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012). In some cases, socialization fails and disaffiliation, conversion, or denominational switching occurs; even then, childhood socialization influences affiliation choices (Babchuk & Whitt, 1990).

Furthermore, childhood socialization influences adult religiosity even in cases of religious switching, with signs of continuity across identity ruptures in the form of a persistent residue of the prior identity (Ebaugh, 1988).¹ Thus, converts raised as nones are less religiously committed than are lifelong affiliates, while those raised in strict traditions, such as Evangelical Protestant and historically Black Protestant denominations, tend to be more so (Beider, 2021). Childhood affiliation leaves an imprint on adult religiosity (Bullivant, 2016; Schwadel et al., 2021; Van Tongeren et al., 2021), with the effect perhaps more noticeable among disaffiliates. Indeed, in certain cases, disaffiliation is not accompanied by any change in religiosity (Dandelion, 2002; Hout & Fischer, 2002).

Even if religiosity does diminish, a religious residue remains, perhaps as a result of deeply internalized embodied practices, as occurs among recent Hasidic disaffiliates whose recitation of prayers remains part of their morning routine (Davidman, 2015) and former Mormons who refrain from drinking tea (Zuckerman, 2012). Others are more intentional, with some Amish disaffiliates wishing to pass on elements of their prior identity to the next generation or making a conscious decision to continue to observe specific practices such as not spending money on Sundays (Faulkner, 2017). There is evidence of continuity of elements that, while not explicitly religious, are associated with religion of origin among disaffiliates, be they psychological (Van Tongeren et al., 2020), political (Huang, 2020), or cultural (Faulkner, 2017).

Although some religious switchers retain elements of their prior religious identity, others undergo a more radical change. Religious transitions have traditionally been defined as wholesale and far-reaching transformations (Snow & Machalek, 1984), with converts (Olson, 2008; Suh & Russell, 2015), denominational switchers (Hoge & O'Connor, 2004), and disaffiliates (Fazzino, 2014; McGraw et al., 2018; Petts, 2009) strongly rejecting their prior religious attitudes and behaviors and enthusiastically adopting new ones. While Zuckerman (2012) distinguishes between shallow and deep, transformative forms of disaffiliation, the majority of the 87 people included in his study “became atheists or strong agnostics as the endpoint of their apostasy.” It may be that those who disaffiliate from high-cost religions or highly religious families are more likely to reject religion entirely rather than retain a residue of their prior identity (Bengtson et al., 2018; Hookway & Habibis, 2015; McGraw et al., 2018). This is probably due to the difficulty associated with disaffiliation from such communities, which ensures that only those who are highly motivated to pursue a non-religious way of life do so (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016a). Although the transformative form of disaffiliation is often, like the high-tension religious groups from which many of them are drawn, more visible to outsiders, it is probable that they constitute only a small minority of disaffiliates.

H 1 *Disaffiliates will be more religious than lifelong nones as a result of religious residue from childhood.*

2.2 | Religiosity among nones

The numerical increase in the non-affiliated population has been seen as the realization of developments predicted by secularization theory (Bruce, 2011; Bruce & Glendinning, 2010; Crockett & Voas, 2006; Voas &

Chaves, 2016). Although studies within this tradition recognize that not all nones are atheists who eschew any form of religious engagement, nevertheless, their religiosity is conceptualized as a temporary residue, a shadow of its former self, rather than a powerful, vital alternative to organized religion (Bruce, 2011; Voas, 2008). This approach, therefore, expects the continued decline of religiosity, predicated upon the diminishing of aggregate societal religiosity as the proportion of nones grows and exacerbated by an expected downturn in religiosity among nones as a group.

Individualization theory, in contrast, challenges the notion that an increase in the number of nones will have any effect on religiosity because it does not necessarily view nones as nonreligious (Lee, 2014). Rather, it sees the decline of religious authority and the increase in personal autonomy as driving the creation of new forms of personal religious engagement outside of organized religion (Davie, 1994; Glendinning & Bruce, 2006; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). According to this view, rather than religion being in decline, it is undergoing an alteration in form and content, incorporating elements from non-Christian religious traditions (Pollack & Pickel, 2007; Stark et al., 2005) and placing a greater emphasis on personal spirituality (Day, 2011; Stark et al., 2005).

The opposing conclusions of these two schools of thought appear to derive from their different definitions of religion and how to measure it. I therefore formulate two related hypotheses.

H 2a *Traditional forms of religiosity will decline over time.*

H 2b *Spirituality will remain steady over time.*

2.3 | The role of place

Local environment is a crucial determinant of religiosity (Kelley & de Graaf, 1997; Lim & de Graaf, 2020). This may be due to macro-level factors such as state intervention in religious life or micro-level forces such as social ties (Cheadle & Schwadel, 2012; Goldberg & Stein, 2018; Olson, 2019; Stroope, 2012). The four countries under investigation differ in significant ways, of which religion is one. France is the sole historically Catholic country included in this study. Typically, nones in Catholic countries have lower levels of religiosity than do those in Protestant-majority regions (Lim & de Graaf, 2020). This may be a result of either self-selection, as nominal Catholics tend to remain affiliated and only the least religious disaffiliate (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016a), or an indication of religious polarization consistent with disaffiliation as a wholesale rejection of religion (Ribberink et al., 2018). If France, with its long tradition of *laïcité* (Peker, 2019) conforms to patterns found in other Catholic countries (Bréchon, 2011), one would expect low levels of religious residue and similarity between disaffiliates and lifelong nones.

Sweden consistently ranks as one of the most secular nations in Western Europe (Stark et al., 2005), with low rates of belief and attendance combined with relatively high but declining affiliation (Dahl et al., 2019), labeled “belonging without believing” (Storm, 2009). Consequently, the act of disaffiliation in Sweden does not necessitate a radical reorientation and does not figure as a significant event in narratives of religious transition; instead, it is often viewed simply as part of the process of growing up (Zuckerman, 2012). As such, one might reasonably expect Swedish disaffiliates to closely resemble lifelong nones in terms of religiosity.

In Great Britain, in contrast, the affiliated constitute a minority (Woodhead, 2017) and “believing without belonging” is particularly prevalent (Davie, 1994; Storm, 2009), suggesting that nones retain a religious residue. Although the true extent of nonbelief may be higher than the “believing without belonging” paradigm would suggest (Voas & Crockett, 2005), perhaps due to a disinclination to identify as atheist, which is viewed as a somewhat aggressive identity label (Lee, 2015) Bullivant (2016) demonstrates that British disaffiliates are more likely to believe than are other nones suggesting a degree of religious residue. Furthermore, a direct comparison of disaffiliates from Anglicanism and Catholicism with lifelong nones finds that disaffiliates' political orientations are shaped by their childhood affiliations, differing greatly from those of lifelong nones (Huang, 2020).

Eastern Germany's communist past forced the pace of secularization (Froese & Pfaff, 2005; Hardy et al., 2019). Thus, in 2000, only a quarter of the population of the former East Germany (GDR) were church members, in sharp contrast to membership rates of about four-fifths in western Germany (Pollack & Pickel, 2007). Early secularization via disaffiliation led to an increase in the number of children raised as nones, the majority of whom remained unaffiliated. In eastern Germany, over three-quarters of the cohort born in the 1960s identified as lifelong nones in 1992, as against none of those born in the 1940s and a third of those born in the 1950s (Stolz et al., 2020). The eastern part of Germany is now highly secularized and has been described as the “most atheistic society ever” (Froese & Pfaff, 2005) and it is from this part of Germany that the majority of lifelong nones in the country originate. Therefore, it seems likely that lifelong nones in that region would be particularly secular, differing greatly from disaffiliates, among whom the proportion of western Germans would be greater. This shift in the composition of the nonaffiliated population, combined with the lifting of religious restrictions in the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall, may, however, mitigate the decline in religiosity among nones in Germany as a whole.

H 3 *The gap between disaffiliates and lifelong nones will be smaller in France and Sweden than in Germany and Great Britain.*

3 | METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this paper is to explore the role of childhood religious socialization, or lack thereof, in determining adult religiosity among nones. It will thus help to explain religious diversity among the unaffiliated. The religiosity of disaffiliates (who were raised within a religious tradition) is contrasted with that of lifelong nones (who were raised as nones and continue to identify as such).

3.1 | Data

The study utilizes data from three waves (1998, 2008, and 2018) of the religion module of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden, the only West European countries included in all three waves of the survey that have sufficient numbers of both lifelong nones and disaffiliates. Unfortunately, there were too few lifelong nones in West Germany in the first two waves of the survey to analyze East and West Germany separately. My analysis focuses on religious nones, defined as those who selected “no religion” as their current religion. I further limit the sample to those raised either without a religion or as Christians (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or other Christian). Those currently nonaffiliated but raised in a non-Christian religion are very few in number and are excluded from the analysis. The application of these criteria yielded a sample of 6919 respondents.²

3.2 | Indicators of religiosity

Four different indicators of religiosity, measuring belief, behavior, a generalized notion of religiosity, and spirituality, are the dependent variables in a series of regressions. Belief in God is coded 1 if the respondent believes at all, 0 if he/she does not believe in God. As this research focuses on religious nones, the division between atheists and theists is most appropriate, as there are sufficient respondents in both categories. Behavior is measured through frequency of prayer which spans an 11-point scale from never to several times a day. Although attendance is more commonly used to measure religious behavior, rates of church service attendance among nones in general, and lifelong nones in

particular, in Europe are too low to allow for meaningful analysis, indeed the ISSP did not always ask lifelong nones about their attendance. Describing oneself as a religious person is measured on a seven-point scale from extremely non-religious to extremely religious. Finally, belief in life after death is included as an indicator of spirituality instead of traditional church religiosity and is measured on a four-point scale from certain nonbelief to definite belief. This variable is selected as a measure of spirituality because it touches on several aspects of this hard to define concept, such as meaning, mystery, transcendence, focus on self, and belief (Ammerman, 2013).

3.3 | Explanatory and control variables

The primary explanatory variable, religion raised, divides the sample into two groups: those raised as Christians (disaffiliates) and those raised as nones (lifelong nones) with the latter set as the reference category. Childhood affiliation contains two aspects that affect adult religiosity: identity and religiosity. To account for the role of varying levels of childhood religiosity beyond the simple identity dichotomy of Christian or none, I introduce an indicator of childhood religious practice—church attendance at the age of 11–12—distinguishing between non-attendance, less than annual, annual, monthly, and weekly attendance at church services.

All models control for current country of residence (Germany is the reference category) and year (1998 is the reference group). The socio-demographic control variables included in the analyses are age, gender, marital status, and education. Age is a continuous variable. Gender is coded 1 for male; female is the reference category. Marital status distinguishes between those never married, those married in the past (separated, divorced, or widowed), and those currently married (the reference group). Education includes high-school incomplete (the reference category), high-school complete, and university education. Sample weights are applied to all analyses to account for selection or response bias.³

Summary statistics of the explanatory and control variables are shown in Table A1.

3.4 | Models

A series of regressions (binary logistic for belief, ordinal for the other dependent variables) assess the religiosity of disaffiliates compared with lifelong nones. Model 1 includes only the primary explanatory variable, childhood affiliation, as well as survey country and year and control variables. Model 2 adds an indicator of childhood religiosity in the form of frequency of church attendance at age 11–12. Model 3 introduces interaction terms of disaffiliation and year and of disaffiliation and country of residence. Based on Model 3, I calculate predicted probabilities.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Mapping the population of religious nones

The unaffiliated population increased over time in all four countries, with significant variation in both the pace of the increase and the proportion of lifelong nones and disaffiliates (Figure 1). Growth in the number of religious nones was sharpest in Germany, followed by France and Great Britain with a mere 1.1% increase in Sweden (Figure 1A). In Great Britain, the percentage of religious nones accelerated noticeably between 2008 and 2018, whereas in France and Germany the increase was fairly steady across the entire period, and in Sweden there was virtually no increase at all.

The share of lifelong nones in the population in Great Britain, France, and Germany (Figure 1B) increased, in line with forecasts that lifelong nones would take the place of disaffiliates as the main driver of the increase in the proportion of nones in the population at large (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017). The increase was most marked

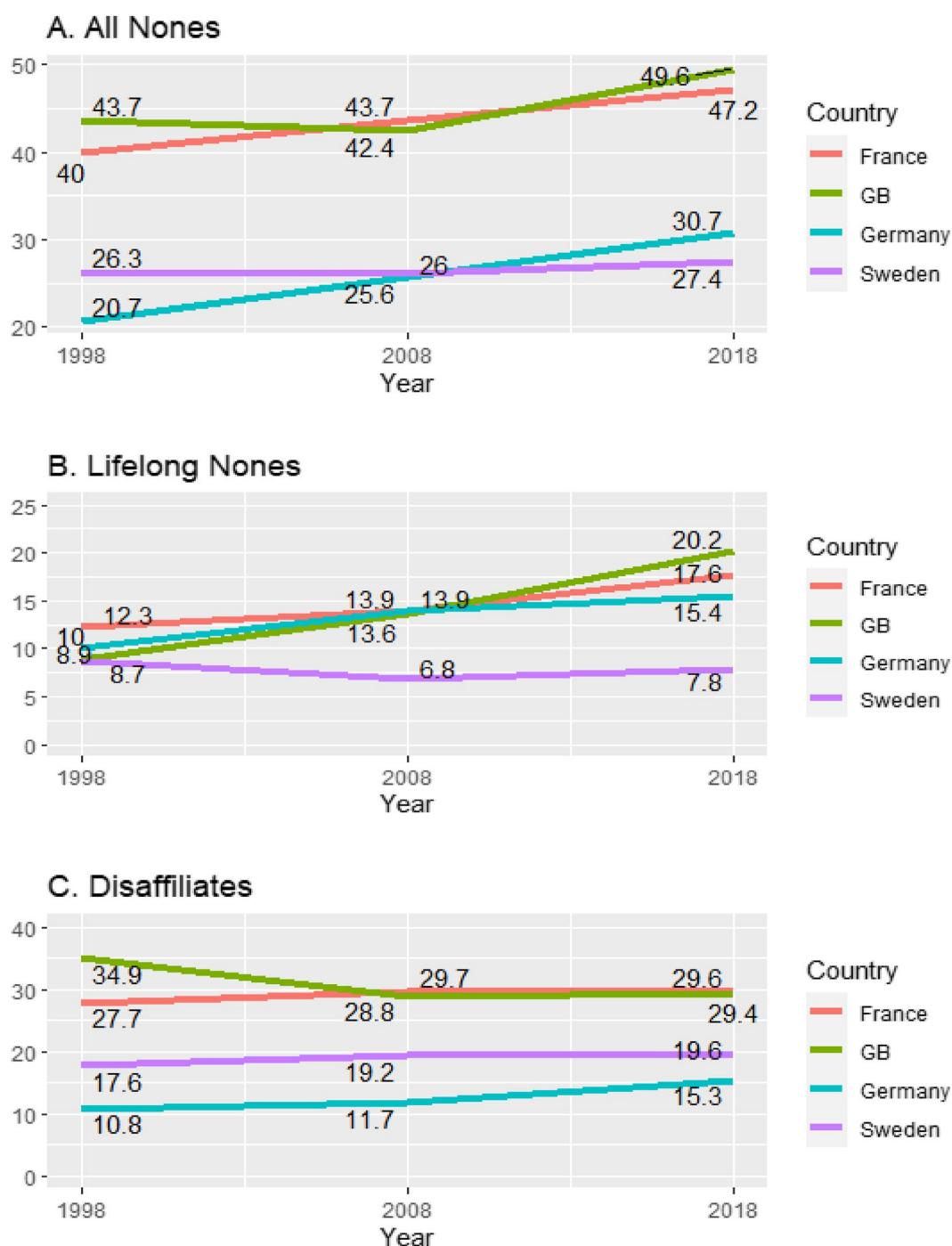


FIGURE 1 All nones, lifelong nones, and disaffiliates by year, in France, Great Britain, Sweden, and Germany (percentages) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

in Great Britain, which had one of the smallest proportions of lifelong nones among the four countries in 1998 (8.9%) and the largest in 2018 (20.2%), suggesting relatively late secularization. Early secularization in eastern Germany, on the other hand, explains why only in Germany do lifelong nones constitute fully half of the non-affiliated population.

Sweden, which combines secularity with high affiliation rates, actually saw a slight decline in the percentage of lifelong nones in 1998–2008.

The percentage of disaffiliates in the population increased most markedly in Germany, particularly in the period 2008–2018 (Figure 1C). The proportion of disaffiliates remained fairly steady in France and Sweden. The decline in the population share of disaffiliates in Great Britain in the period 1998–2008 is offset by the increase in that of lifelong nones, likely due to generational shifts and perhaps some differences in perceptions of childhood religion over time. In Sweden, the increase in the proportion of disaffiliates outpaced that of lifelong nones, and in Germany it almost matched it, but such growth was fairly moderate and affiliation rates remained relatively high in both countries. In fact, the percentage of nones, whether raised with or without religion, was remarkably stable in Sweden in 1998–2018. In Germany, the high rate of increase in the proportion of disaffiliates may be attributed to a desire to avoid paying the church tax (Stolz et al., 2021).

4.2 | The impact of childhood religious socialization on adult religiosity

The results of the regressions (Tables 1 and 2) support Hypothesis 1, which proposes that disaffiliates are more religious than lifelong nones. Disaffiliates score higher on all indicators of religiosity than do lifelong nones, demonstrating the significance of childhood religious affiliation, which leaves a residue even after organized religion is left behind. The effect of religious residue is stronger for traditional measures of religiosity than for spirituality. Traditional indicators of religiosity such as belief in God, prayer, and describing oneself as a religious person all declined over time, as suggested by Hypothesis 2a. However, in accordance with Hypothesis 2b, spirituality remained fairly constant over the 20-year period covered by these surveys, declining a little in the first decade and returning to its original level by 2018. Thus, the data support the secularization thesis with respect of traditional indicators of religiosity, but the individualization thesis holds true for indicators of spirituality.

Nones in Great Britain and Sweden are significantly more religious than those in Germany, although they do not pray more often, perhaps because prayer rates among nones are so low that there is little inter-country variation. The religiosity of nones in Great Britain supports the “believing without belonging” thesis, affirming that the nonaffiliated population there is not wholly secular. French nones are more similar to those in Germany, perhaps because the unaffiliated in those two countries are the most secular, although nones in France are more likely to define themselves as religious and less likely to pray.

Men and the university-educated are somewhat less religious than women and those who did not graduate high school, respectively. Non-married religious nones are more likely to believe in life after death than those who are married, which is somewhat surprising given the commonly found association between marriage and religion. The individualization thesis, which suggests that people are opting out of traditional religion in favor of more personalized forms of religion such as spirituality seems to be most applicable to those who opt to live as individuals.

Model 2 introduces the effect of childhood religious behavior, measured by church attendance at age 11–12. Although the inclusion of church attendance in childhood does reduce the effect of childhood affiliation (disaffiliates vs. lifelong nones) on religiosity by more than half, the latter association remains statistically significant. The most religiously committed children are the most likely to be religious in adulthood, in marked contrast to the notion that disaffiliates who were highly religious as children tend to reject religion entirely (Zuckerman, 2012). Childhood religious belonging, even in cases of nominal affiliation that lacks religious engagement, is an important predictor of adult religiosity. The religiosity of Swedish nones increases when intensity of childhood religiosity is controlled for, as although most Swedes identify as Christians, the affiliated are characterized by low levels of religiosity, as the description “belonging without believing” suggests. Less intense childhood religious socialization tends to leave a weaker religious residue.

The increase of over around a half in the explanatory power of Model 2, relative to Model 1, for prayer and belief and by a quarter for defining oneself as a religious person demonstrates that childhood religiosity is a significant

TABLE 1 Logistic regression (odds ratios) of belief in god on childhood religious socialization, country of residence, time, and sociodemographic characteristics

	Belief in God		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Childhood religious socialization			
Religious trajectory			
Disaffiliate	2.445*** (0.055)	1.455*** (0.067)	2.907*** (0.153)
Childhood attendance			
Weekly		3.187*** (0.110)	3.171*** (0.111)
Monthly		2.946*** (0.088)	2.888*** (0.089)
Annually		2.574*** (0.076)	2.546*** (0.077)
Less than once a year		1.659*** (0.090)	1.656*** (0.091)
Country of residence			
France	1.021 (0.073)	1.002 (0.076)	1.671*** (0.116)
Great Britain	1.540*** (0.073)	1.603*** (0.077)	2.010*** (0.117)
Sweden	1.183* (0.083)	1.406*** (0.088)	2.133*** (0.141)
Time			
2008	0.727*** (0.068)	0.754*** (0.071)	0.779* (0.115)
2018	0.609*** (0.073)	0.667*** (0.077)	0.787* (0.119)
Interaction terms			
Disaffiliate × 2008			0.951 (0.145)
Disaffiliate × 2018			0.764 (0.148)
Disaffiliate × France			0.392*** (0.156)
Disaffiliate × Great Britain			0.594** (0.157)
Disaffiliate × Sweden			0.460*** (0.182)
Sociodemographic characteristics			
Age	1.000 (0.002)	0.996 (0.002)	0.996 (0.002)
Male	0.693*** (0.052)	0.693*** (0.054)	0.691*** (0.054)
Never married	1.089 (0.065)	1.069 (0.068)	1.063 (0.068)
Formerly married	1.093 (0.074)	1.079 (0.078)	1.067 (0.078)
High-school complete	1.072 (0.063)	1.025 (0.065)	1.001 (0.066)
University	0.934 (0.067)	0.834** (0.070)	0.805** (0.070)
Total (N)	6765	6478	6478
Nagelkerke R ²	8.9%	13.4%	14.2%

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: religious trajectory—lifelong none; childhood attendance—never; country—Germany; year—1998; gender—female; marital status—married; education—high school incomplete.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

driving force of adult religious residue. The increase in the explanatory power of Model 2 is much smaller for spirituality than for traditional religion, as spirituality is less correlated with attendance than are traditional indicators of religiosity.

The interaction terms in Model 3 of disaffiliates (relative to lifelong nones) by year demonstrate that the gap between disaffiliates and lifelong nones has remained constant over time for traditional indicators of religiosity,

TABLE 2 Ordered logit regression of prayer, religious self-description, and spirituality on childhood religious socialization, country of residence, time, and sociodemographic characteristics

	Pray			Religious person			Afterlife		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Childhood religious socialization									
Religious trajectory									
Disaffiliate	1.130*** (0.073)	0.515*** (0.085)	1.101*** (0.189)	0.917*** (0.051)	0.452*** (0.060)	1.234*** (0.142)	0.539*** (0.054)	0.306*** (0.065)	1.000*** (0.146)
Childhood attendance									
Weekly		1.383*** (0.118)	1.381*** (0.119)		0.977*** (0.093)	0.983*** (0.094)		0.619*** (0.101)	0.600*** (0.101)
Monthly		1.420*** (0.101)	1.408*** (0.102)		1.044*** (0.077)	1.037*** (0.079)		0.503*** (0.083)	0.475*** (0.084)
Annually		1.136*** (0.093)	1.120*** (0.094)		0.850*** (0.068)	0.835*** (0.069)		0.329*** (0.073)	0.310*** (0.073)
Less than once a year		0.558*** (0.119)	0.543*** (0.119)		0.422*** (0.083)	0.420*** (0.083)		0.238*** (0.089)	0.229* (0.089)
Country of residence									
France	-0.323*** (0.087)	-0.416*** (0.091)	0.217 (0.181)	0.925*** (0.069)	0.920*** (0.071)	1.513*** (0.116)	0.099 (0.072)	0.051 (0.074)	0.438*** (0.114)
Great Britain	0.083 (0.084)	0.093 (0.086)	0.487** (0.174)	1.214*** (0.069)	1.239*** (0.071)	1.634*** (0.117)	0.509*** (0.071)	0.482*** (0.073)	0.744*** (0.112)
Sweden	0.041 (0.094)	0.247* (0.099)	0.660** (0.201)	1.217*** (0.077)	1.383*** (0.080)	1.836*** (0.136)	0.465*** (0.080)	0.508*** (0.084)	0.835*** (0.0138)
Time									
2008	-0.314*** (0.074)	-0.237** (0.077)	-0.052 (0.163)	-0.305*** (0.060)	-0.260*** (0.061)	-0.215* (0.109)	-0.138* (0.064)	-0.120 (0.066)	0.014 (0.113)
2018	-0.447*** (0.082)	-0.302*** (0.085)	-0.307 (0.174)	-0.495*** (0.065)	-0.410*** (0.067)	-0.292* (0.113)	0.024 (0.069)	0.053 (0.071)	0.288* (0.116)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Pray			Religious person			Afterlife		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Interaction terms									
Disaffiliate × 2008			-0.237 (0.184)			-0.062 (0.131)			-0.196 (0.137)
Disaffiliate × 2018			0.002 (0.192)			-0.186 (0.134)			-0.367** (0.139)
Disaffiliate × France			-0.851*** (0.207)			-1.010*** (0.145)			-0.696*** (0.148)
Disaffiliate × Great Britain			-0.561** (0.200)			-0.731*** (0.146)			-0.530*** (0.147)
Disaffiliate × Sweden			-0.579* (0.231)			-0.794*** (0.168)			-0.596** (0.174)
Sociodemographic characteristics									
Age	0.001 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.028** (0.002)	-0.030** (0.002)	-0.030** (0.002)
Male	-0.589*** (0.059)	-0.567*** (0.061)	-0.573*** (0.062)	-0.282*** (0.046)	-0.260*** (0.047)	-0.261*** (0.048)	-0.577*** (0.050)	-0.570*** (0.051)	-0.570*** (0.051)
Never married	0.012 (0.076)	0.013 (0.079)	0.011 (0.079)	0.109 (0.059)	0.094 (0.060)	0.086 (0.060)	0.253*** (0.062)	0.260*** (0.063)	0.256*** (0.063)
Formerly married	0.177* (0.081)	0.184* (0.084)	0.176* (0.084)	0.044 (0.067)	0.045 (0.069)	0.033 (0.069)	0.339*** (0.072)	0.361*** (0.073)	0.348*** (0.074)
High-school complete	-0.050 (0.071)	-0.101 (0.074)	-0.113 (0.074)	-0.114* (0.056)	-0.189*** (0.058)	-0.208*** (0.058)	0.021 (0.060)	0.031 (0.061)	0.016 (0.061)
University	-0.092 (0.077)	-0.218** (0.080)	-0.235** (0.081)	-0.227*** (0.060)	-0.323** (0.062)	-0.350*** (0.062)	-0.338*** (0.064)	-0.365*** (0.066)	-0.390*** (0.066)
Total (N)	6669	6427	6427	6455	6232	6232	5996	5784	5784
Nagelkerke R ²	8.1%	12.4%	12.7%	14.6%	17.8%	18.6%	12.4%	13.1%	13.6%

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: religious trajectory—lifelong none; childhood attendance—never; country—Germany; year—1998; gender—female; marital status—married; education—high school incomplete.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

although for spirituality the gap has narrowed somewhat. Separate regressions (Tables A2 and A3) demonstrate that when childhood religiosity is not controlled for, the gap between disaffiliates and lifelong nones narrows for indicators of belief in God and spirituality. These findings suggest that religiosity among disaffiliates may have declined over time as children who were socialized into the stricter form of Christianity that was more prevalent in earlier decades have a stronger residue and are therefore more religious as nonaffiliated adults, relative to those who were socialized into a more nominal form of Christianity, as is more common among more recent cohorts. Childhood religious socialization leaves a residue even after disaffiliation and the residue is stronger among those who were raised as more committed Christians.

The interaction terms between disaffiliates and country of residence demonstrate that the religiosity gap between disaffiliates and lifelong nones is narrower in France, Great Britain, and Sweden than in Germany. This lends partial support to Hypothesis 3, that the difference in religiosity between disaffiliates and lifelong nones is greater in France and Sweden than in Germany. However, nones in Great Britain seem to conform more closely to the pattern found in France and Sweden than to the German one. The majority of German lifelong nones are from the former East Germany and are highly secular, having been raised in a non-religious society, often by parents who were lifelong nones themselves. In contrast, a much larger proportion of disaffiliates are from the former West Germany, which secularized more recently and to a lesser degree. Consequently, the gap in religiosity between disaffiliates and lifelong nones in Germany is particularly pronounced.⁴

4.3 | Predicting religiosity

To aid the interpretation of these results, Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities based on Regression Model 3. For clarity of presentation, only the probabilities for the lowest response categories are shown (for belief—don't believe in God, for prayer—never prays, for religious person—defines self as extremely non-religious, and for afterlife—definitely does not believe). Thus, a higher predicted probability indicates a lower likelihood of being religious. The data partially support Hypothesis 3, as the gap in religiosity between disaffiliates and lifelong nones is greater in Germany than in France and Sweden, but not in Great Britain. In Germany, lifelong nones are twice as likely as disaffiliates to be atheists and to define themselves as extremely non-religious, they are 45.2% more likely to say they never pray and 39.5% more likely to be certain there is no life after death. This seems to be the result of the rapid secularization that took place in the Communist German Democratic Republic, from where the majority of lifelong nones in Germany today hail. Predicted religiosity among German lifelong nones is the lowest of any group included in this study. The population of lifelong nones includes a higher proportion of second-generation cradle nones from eastern Germany relative to other countries—people who were not socialized into religion by parents, grandparents, or even society at large, as the German Democratic Republic was a highly secular society. Therefore, this group may offer an indication of future religiosity trends, as the number of first- and even second-generation lifelong nones is on the rise across the Western world, as is secularity.

The religiosity gap between the two groups is smaller in Great Britain than in Germany, although larger than that found in Sweden and France. British lifelong nones 75.2% more likely to be atheists than disaffiliates, but only 26.3% more likely to never pray. Religion in Great Britain has often been characterized as “believing without belonging,” a phenomenon that may be better understood as a result of religious residue for two reasons. First, the religious-residue approach demonstrates that nones in Great Britain, who affiliate with no religion, not only believe but also practice. Second, they are much more likely to do so if they were raised within a religious tradition, with the effect stronger among those raised with high levels of religious commitment.

The religiosity gap between disaffiliates and lifelong nones is narrower in France and Sweden (e.g., in both countries lifelong nones are only two-fifths more likely than disaffiliates to be atheists) than in Germany or Great Britain, yet the impact is still strong. In Sweden, the difference in religiosity among affiliates, disaffiliates, and lifelong nones is less marked than in other countries due to religious homogeneity and low levels of religiosity. French disaffiliates have

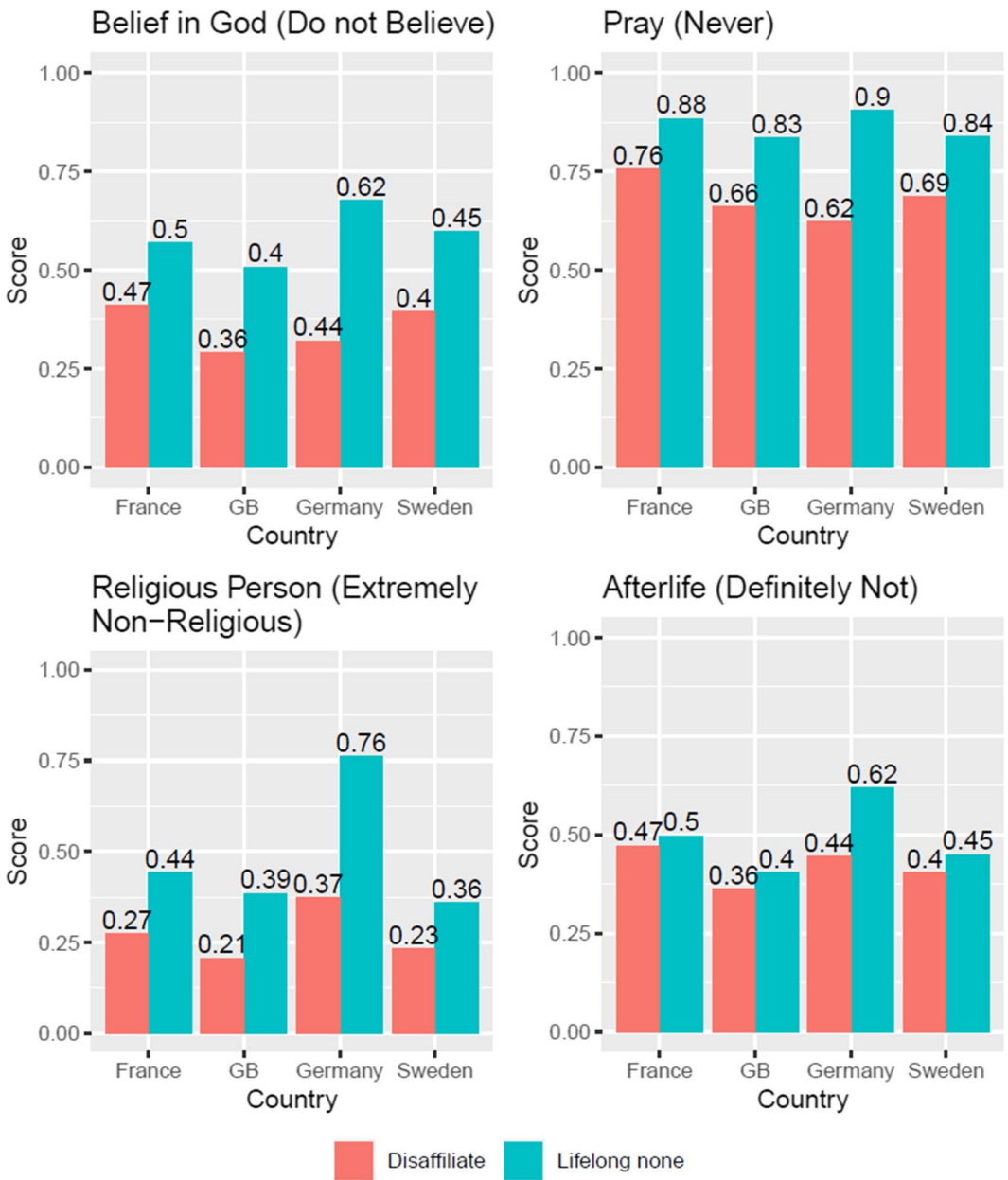


FIGURE 2 Predicted probabilities of religiosity by country and childhood religious affiliation [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the weakest religious residue due to self-selection, as only the most secular disaffiliate. Although local conditions determine the strength of the religious residue, the very existence of a residue is common to disaffiliates regardless of their location. Similarly, the difference between disaffiliates and lifelong nones tends to be greater for traditional indicators of religiosity such as belief in God, prayer, and considering oneself to be religious than for spirituality.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The self-definition of religious nones as having chosen not to affiliate with any religious tradition gives rise to expectations of non-religiosity. Although true, there is enough variety in the nonreligiosity of nones to pose a challenge to sociologists of religion. Attempts to differentiate among nones on the basis of distinctions in current beliefs (Frost & Edgell, 2018; Lindeman et al., 2019) are useful sorting tools, but do little to unravel the puzzle of religious heterogeneity among nones. I argue that this phenomenon can best be understood by taking account of religious residue and drawing a distinction between disaffiliates and lifelong nones.

The distinction between disaffiliates, who were raised within a religious tradition, and lifelong nones, who were raised and continue to identify as nones is crucial in understanding religiosity among nones. Disaffiliates are consistently more religious than lifelong nones due to religious residue from childhood that influences adult religiosity even in cases of disaffiliation. Although there are individuals who experience religious change as a radical, wholesale transformation—a total repudiation of their prior identity—it is more common to find a significant degree of continuity across identity ruptures.

Childhood religious affiliation contains two elements that contribute to religious residue even after disaffiliation. First, religious residue is certainly stronger among those who were more religiously committed in childhood, almost all of whom were raised within a religious tradition. Second, the very fact of having been affiliated in childhood leaves an imprint on adults irrespective of childhood religiosity. Thus, even among those who were only nominally Christian in childhood, childhood religious belonging remains significant in determining adult religiosity, with disaffiliates more religious than lifelong nones. Belonging itself is a significant aspect of religiosity, leaving a residue that distinguishes disaffiliates from lifelong nones.

The findings presented above provide support for the secularization thesis in several important ways. Traditional indicators of religiosity such as belief in God and prayer are diminishing among nones, fueling secularization as the proportion of nones among the general population grows. The existence of religious residue can best be understood within the secularization paradigm, rather than through the individualization thesis as disaffiliates' religiosity is a pale imitation of the religiosity of the affiliated and is temporary in nature, lasting only a generation. Disaffiliates tend to raise their children without religion, with many of those children then remaining unaffiliated in adulthood, joining the ranks of the lifelong nones. As the proportion of lifelong nones among the nonaffiliated rises, the share of disaffiliates shrinks, further decreasing the religiosity of nones as a group. This effect is compounded by the finding that stronger religious commitment in childhood leaves a greater residue. Declining religiosity among the affiliated leads to increased secularity among those who disaffiliate. Overall, at the societal level, the increase in the number of nones, the rising proportion of lifelong nones among the nonaffiliated population, and the waning religious residue among later cohorts of disaffiliates who were brought up with lower levels of religious engagement, all contribute to secularization.

Spirituality, a more individual and less Christian form of religion, does not appear to be in decline among nones, implying that some people reject religious authority but embrace their own, more spiritual version of religion. However, the bolder claims of the individualization thesis, which posit that religion is transforming into something more individualized rather than declining and that spirituality represents a vital alternative to traditional religion, are not supported by the data. Stable levels of spirituality among nones do not compensate for the decline of both religiosity and spirituality in society, as occasioned by the increase in the proportion of nones.

Finally, pronounced differences in the religiosity of disaffiliates and lifelong nones in Germany as compared with counterparts in France, Great Britain, and Sweden attest to high levels of secularity among lifelong nones in the former East Germany, many of whom are second-generation lifelong nones. This demonstrates the importance of grandparental and broader social influences on religiosity. The East German model of little social or grandparental support for religion offers a template for likely future trends in religiosity among lifelong nones in other countries. This study, however, is limited to the four West European societies in which there are sufficient numbers of disaffiliates and lifelong nones to support the inquiry. As such, it gives a sense of a general model of further secularization

trends across the continent but does not provide enough data to map possible trajectories for regions or groups of countries. Further research may yield a more nuanced picture of religious trajectories across Europe and beyond.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The ISSP dataset is available on the GESIS website <https://www.gesis.org/en/issp/home>.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Indeed, Ebaugh (1988) coined the term 'religious residual'. I refer to 'religious residue' as do Van Tongeren et al. (2021).
- ² For further information on the ISSP methodology see <https://www.gesis.org/en/issp/modules/issp-modules-by-topic/religion>
- ³ For further details on the survey methodology, see https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA3190 (1998), https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA4950 (2008), https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA7570 (2018).
- ⁴ The results of regression analyses in which East and West Germany are separated, demonstrate that West German nones conform to the pattern of nones in France, Great Britain and Sweden for traditional indicators of religiosity, although the interactions of disaffiliation and West Germany is in some cases only significant at a level of $p < 0.1$. However, due to the small number of lifelong nones in West Germany, these data must be treated with a degree of caution.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1 Definitions and summary statistics for analysis variables

Variable	Percentage/mean (SD)
Childhood religious socialization	
Lifelong none	36.7
Disaffiliate	63.3
Childhood attendance: Every week	9.2
Every month	17.2
Annually	21.7
Less than once a year	10.3
Never	39.2
Country	
France	30.4
Germany	22.1
Great Britain	30.3
Sweden	17.3
Time (year)	
1998	24.5
2008	41.1
2018	34.4

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Variable	Percentage/mean (SD)
Socio-demographic characteristics	
Age	45.2 (16.7)
Gender: Female	46.5
Male	53.5
Marital status: Never married	33.3
Formerly married	16.0
Married	49.4
Education: High school incomplete	41.1
High-school complete	30.2
University degree	27.2

TABLE A2 Logistic regression (odds ratios) of belief in god on religious trajectory, country of residence, time, and sociodemographic characteristics

	Belief in God
Religious trajectory	
Disaffiliate	5.424*** (0.141)
Country of residence	
France	1.633*** (0.112)
Great Britain	2.087*** (0.112)
Sweden	2.128*** (0.134)
Time	
2008	0.786* (0.110)
2018	0.731** (0.114)
Interaction terms	
Disaffiliate × 2008	0.884 (0.139)
Disaffiliate × 2018	0.741* (0.142)
Disaffiliate × France	0.407*** (0.150)
Disaffiliate × Great Britain	0.515*** (0.150)
Disaffiliate × Sweden	0.352*** (0.173)
Sociodemographic characteristic	
Age	1.000 (0.002)
Male	0.688*** (0.052)
Never married	1.083 (0.066)
Formerly married	1.079 (0.075)
High-school complete	1.047 (0.063)
University	0.897 (0.067)
Total (N)	6765
Nagelkerke R ²	9.9%

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: religious trajectory—lifelong none; country—Germany; year—1998; gender—female; marital status—married; education—high school incomplete.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE A3 Ordered logit regression of prayer, religious self-description, and spirituality on religious trajectory, country of residence, time, and sociodemographic characteristics

	Pray	Religious person	Afterlife
Religious trajectory			
Disaffiliate	1.878*** (0.174)	1.773*** (0.132)	1.310*** (0.136)
Country of residence			
France	0.225 (0.175)	1.458*** (0.113)	0.484*** (0.112)
Great Britain	0.666*** (0.168)	1.680*** (0.114)	0.833*** (0.110)
Sweden	0.778*** (0.191)	1.803*** (0.131)	0.925*** (0.134)
Time			
2008	-0.089 (0.156)	-0.231* (0.106)	0.016 (0.111)
2018	-0.459** (0.166)	-0.358** (0.109)	0.261* (0.113)
Interaction terms			
Disaffiliate × 2008	-0.290 (0.176)	-0.111 (0.127)	-0.223 (0.134)
Disaffiliate × 2018	0.005 (0.185)	-0.222 (0.130)	-0.369** (0.136)
Disaffiliate × France	-0.817*** (0.201)	-0.939** (0.141)	-0.719*** (0.146)
Disaffiliate × Great Britain	-0.829*** (0.193)	-0.852 (0.142)	-0.645*** (0.143)
Disaffiliate × Sweden	-1.009*** (0.219)	-1.001*** (0.161)	-0.804*** (0.168)
Sociodemographic characteristic			
Age	0.001 (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	-0.028*** (0.002)
Male	-0.599*** (0.060)	-0.287*** (0.047)	-0.581*** (0.050)
Never married	0.007 (0.076)	0.101 (0.059)	0.248*** (0.062)
Formerly married	0.167* (0.081)	0.029 (0.067)	0.324*** (0.072)
High-school complete	-0.060 (0.072)	-0.133* (0.056)	0.003 (0.060)
University	-0.116 (0.077)	-0.256*** (0.060)	-0.370*** (0.065)
Total (N)	6669	6455	5996
Nagelkerke R ²	8.7%	15.5%	13.1%

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: religious trajectory—lifelong none; country—Germany; year—1998; gender—female; marital status—married; education—high school incomplete.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.