

Optimizing Survey Engagement: Factors Influencing Questionnaire Breakoff and Respondent Segmentation

GYÖRGYI DANÓ¹  – STEFAN KOVÁCS^{1,*}  – VIVIEN SURMAN¹ 

Received: 8 September 2025 – Revised: 21 December 2025 – Accepted: 6 March 2026

ABSTRACT: This study examines questionnaire breakoff – respondents’ early survey discontinuation – and its implications for data quality in marketing research. Using telephone interviews with three independent random sub-samples of Hungarian adults ($n = 1040; 1028; 988$), we applied K-means cluster analysis to segment respondents based on prior breakoff experiences and attitudes toward questionnaire characteristics. Chi-square, ANOVA, and Friedman tests identify the key drivers of discontinuation. Findings show that questionnaire length, perceived topic irrelevance, and poorly structured items significantly increase breakoff risk. Based on the results, three distinct respondent segments emerged – Discerning Evaluators, Experience Seekers, and Nonchalant Responders – each exhibiting different engagement preferences and tolerance thresholds. Trust in research, age, and educational attainment further shape breakoff propensities across segments. Practically, the results support segment-specific survey design strategies that optimize length, structure, and topic salience while incorporating trust-building elements. Conceptually, the study extends leverage-saliency theory by introducing a segmentation framework that accounts for heterogeneity in survey discontinuation risk and is adaptable to multinational research settings.

¹ Department of Management and Business Economics, Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary.

* Corresponding author: kovacs.stefan@gtk.bme.hu

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and the source.

KEYWORDS: questionnaire breakoff; survey design; respondent segmentation; data quality; nonresponse; Leverage–Saliency Theory.

JEL CODES: C83; C38; M31

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the pivotal role of data in organizational success has become evident (LaValle et al. 2011; Sundström 2019; Awan et al. 2021). Accurate and timely data underpin effective decision-making, innovation, and competitiveness, while suboptimal or incomplete data can lead to erroneous decisions and negatively affect long-term performance (Brynjolfsson et al. 2011; Fehrenbacher et al. 2023). In marketing research and related behavioral fields, surveys remain a core method of data collection; however, data quality is highly sensitive to survey errors such as missing responses, sampling issues, and measurement inaccuracies (Dillman et al. 2014; Hair et al. 2019). One particularly problematic form of error is survey breakoff, in which respondents abandon a questionnaire before completion (Barge–Gehlbach 2012). As a type of partial nonresponse, breakoff reduces data completeness, increases research costs, and can exacerbate nonresponse bias when discontinuers systematically differ from those who complete the survey, thereby distorting substantive conclusions (Daikeler et al. 2020; Becker 2023).

These challenges are particularly salient in marketing research, where survey-based data collection underpins critical managerial decision-making in areas such as customer experience management, brand performance tracking, and advertising effectiveness assessment. However, high breakoff rates undermine the reliability and applicability of survey insights, leading to misinterpretations of consumer preferences, satisfaction levels, and behavioral trends (Mittereder – West 2021). Thus, understanding why respondents discontinue surveys is essential for improving engagement, reducing data loss, and refining market intelligence.

Despite its importance, survey breakoff remains underexplored. As Kostyk et al. (2019) noted, most studies on survey participation were conducted before the rise of the internet and social media, which have significantly altered respondents' attention spans and digital behaviors. The fast-paced nature of contemporary life, characterized by digital distractions, multitasking, and chronic time pressure, warrants renewed attention to the drivers of survey breakoff. In Hungary, telephone and online surveys remain the two dominant data-collection modes, making it essential to understand breakoff patterns across both modes.

The available literature provides limited information on breakoff rates and their determinants, as research firms rarely publish such data. However, based on industry insights and previous studies, breakoff rates in telephone surveys

typically range between 10% and 20% (Emery et al. 2023). A Hungarian research company also reports, in its online panel, that the share of respondents completing questionnaires reached 71% in 2024 (up from 58% in 2020, reflecting targeted improvements despite the broader decline in survey participation) (NRC 2025). Breakoff rates vary based on survey methodology, interview techniques, questionnaire length, respondent demographics, and topic relevance. Nonetheless, the specific influence of these factors, particularly across different survey modes (telephone vs. online), remains insufficiently explored.

To address these gaps, our study examines (1) the key drivers of survey breakoff and the questionnaire features that most disrupt respondents; (2) perceptions of optimal questionnaire length and the respondent segments that differ in this regard; and (3) differences between telephone and online surveys in breakoff patterns; and the role of trust in public opinion research in discontinuation.

The study is structured as follows: The next chapter examines data quality and key questionnaire design issues, followed by a description of the methodology and sample. We then present our analytical results, and finally, the discussion and conclusion sections interpret our findings and their practical implications.

2. Data quality and errors in questionnaire surveys

Questionnaire breakoff (mid-interview termination) is not only a methodological concern but also a strategic issue: high breakoff rates increase costs, reduce representativeness, and bias insights and campaign evaluations (Nunan et al. 2020).

The Total Survey Error (TSE) framework provides a comprehensive map of survey errors, distinguishing sampling from non-sampling errors (Groves – Lyberg 2010; see also Malhotra 2020). Although both matter, non-sampling components – coverage, nonresponse, measurement, and processing – often dominate total error in practice because they arise at multiple stages and are harder to standardize (Biemer – Lyberg 2003; Groves 2004). Managing non-sampling error is complex: sources are varied, sometimes unpredictable, and shaped by contextual and human factors (Groves 2004).

Within nonresponse, it is helpful to distinguish unit nonresponse (sampled individuals do not participate at all) from item/partial nonresponse (participants skip specific questions or terminate early). Breakoff belongs to the latter: the respondent initially cooperates but stops before completion (Yan – Curtin 2010; Reimers et al. 2022; Choumert-Nkolo et al. 2023; Dutwin et al. 2023). While total nonresponse is often treated as the more severe threat (Yan – Curtin 2010), breakoff can reduce cooperation in subsequent surveys and increase nonresponse (De Leeuw 2012; McGonagle 2013; Steinbrecher et al. 2014).

Prior research indicates interdependencies between nonresponse forms. Prior item and partial nonresponse increase the likelihood of subsequent unit nonresponse and breakoff in later survey waves (Loosveldt et al. 2002; McGonagle 2013). Some authors distinguish between “good” and “bad” breakoff: the former may screen out unmotivated respondents and reduce measurement noise, whereas the latter stems from preventable design flaws and should be minimized through careful questionnaire design (Stieger et al. 2007; O’Neil et al. 2003). From a design perspective, prevention should therefore prioritize eliminating these avoidable forms.

Why do respondents break off? Prior research typically distinguishes between researcher-controllable determinants of survey breakoff and contextual or individual-level influences. (Nancarrow et al. 2004). On the questionnaire side, recurrent triggers include length, topic salience, timing (e.g., near holidays), cognitive burden (complex wording, long lists, recall/calculation tasks), logical flow and routing, clarity/completeness of response options, sensitive content, and usability/presentation in online modes (De Leeuw 2012; Yan – Curtin 2010; Kmetty – Stefkovics 2021). Length is consistently linked to higher attrition; monotony and abrupt transitions can also act as “exit points” (McGonagle 2013; Daikeler et al. 2020; Sandelin 2022; Steinbrecher et al. 2014).

On the respondent side, breakoff likelihood co-varies with demographics and life-stage time pressure, psychographic traits and motivation, prior survey experience, and trust in research; interviewer behavior can also matter in interviewer-administered modes (Yan – Curtin 2010; Reimers et al. 2022; Bernhardt – Wunnava 2023). Although prior research highlights several correlates of survey breakoff, less attention has been paid to how these factors may operate differently across age groups. Given the acceleration of the digitalization of everyday life, it is reasonable to expect that tolerance for survey burden may differ across age cohorts, making age a theoretically relevant factor in investigating breakoff. Topic interest is a consistent driver of cooperation and persistence (Shropshire et al. 2009). In telephone contexts, participants who consent differ from refusers in terms of trust, attitudes toward surveys, and sociodemographic profiles (Malhotra – Simon 2017). Attitudes toward market research and data privacy further limit survey behavior (Grandcolas et al. 2003).

These heterogeneities align with leverage-saliency theory (LST): survey attributes differ in leverage (direction/strength of impact on participation) and saliency (perceived prominence). The same feature (e.g., length, sensitive item) can deter one segment and be tolerated by another, depending on what respondents notice and value (Groves et al. 2000). LST implies that one-size-fits-all design rules are suboptimal; instead, designs should balance burdens and benefits for distinct respondent segments.

The literature consistently recommends preventive design to reduce partial nonresponse and breakoff. Core practices include concise, unambiguous wording; coherent flow and routing; careful placement of sensitive modules (typically later); and rigorous pre-testing to identify friction points before fieldwork (Stieger et al. 2007; Albaum et al. 2011; De Leeuw 2012; Kmetty – Stefkovics 2021). In online modes, attention to device usability and visual presentation is equally critical.

Set against this background, our study contributes in three ways. First, we quantify the relative importance of disruption drivers reported by respondents, with particular attention to length and topic salience. Second, we test whether perceptions of ideal questionnaire length differ by mode (telephone vs online), addressing an open question in practice. Third, we explicitly model heterogeneity via K-means segmentation based on breakoff-related attitudes and experiences, and we examine links to demographics and trust in research. This segmentation lens complements existing nonresponse work by moving beyond mean effects to actionable respondent profiles (De Leeuw 2012; McGonagle 2013; Steinbrecher et al. 2014; Daikeler et al. 2020).

Finally, we articulate four hypotheses that flow directly from the reviewed papers and their tensions:

H1: The primary factor contributing to survey breakoff is questionnaire length

This expectation is grounded in prior findings identifying questionnaire length as a central burden and a key correlate of disengagement in fast-paced digital contexts.

H2: Respondents perceive the ideal length of online surveys to be slightly longer (+10–20%) but not substantially longer (+30% or more) than that of telephone surveys.

Earlier evidence indicates that respondents tolerate substantially longer online questionnaires than telephone interviews. For example, Klenovszki (2016) reports typical limits of approximately 15 minutes for telephone surveys and around 25 minutes for online surveys. Since then, the pace of everyday life and the volume of digital content have increased considerably. Building on this context and industry experience, we expect the difference in ideal length across modes to be more modest today. Accordingly, we hypothesize that respondents tolerate slightly longer online questionnaires, but not substantially longer ones, than telephone surveys.

H3: As respondents' age increases, the likelihood of breakoff decreases, and tolerance for longer questionnaires increases.

Everyday experience and industry practice suggest that age groups differ in how they manage time and digital attentional demands. We therefore expect systematic age-related differences in breakoff likelihood and tolerance. Industry evidence aligns with this expectation: NRC (2025) reports that while 10–15-

minute questionnaires remain broadly acceptable and 20–30-minute surveys are feasible with incentives, breakoff increases sharply beyond 30 minutes – driven primarily by markedly higher dropout among younger respondents compared with older ones. Age and education are therefore treated not as causal determinants but as proxies for life-stage constraints, digital exposure, and survey literacy, which prior research links to persistence and burden tolerance.

H4: Greater trust in public-opinion research is associated with lower breakoff rates and a preference for longer ideal questionnaire length.

Prior studies show that trust, survey attitudes, and previous positive experiences shape respondents' willingness to participate and their persistence in survey tasks (Yan – Curtin 2010; Reimers et al. 2022; Bernhardt – Wunnava 2023; Grandcolas et al. 2003). Building on this pattern, we expect higher trust to reduce the likelihood of breakoff and to increase tolerance for length.

This framework guides our empirical design and the interpretation of results. Specifically, if questionnaire length and topic salience are major drivers of attrition and their impact varies across respondent segments, then reducing breakoff requires both global design principles (clarity, logical flow, pre-testing) and segment-aware tailoring, while safeguarding data quality and external validity.

3. Methodology

We fielded an omnibus survey (i.e., a multi-topic survey where independent question modules from different clients are fielded within the same questionnaire) with a public-opinion research institute to address our research questions and test H1–H4. Fieldwork took place in Q2 2021 (subsample 1, $n=1040$, and 2, $n=1028$ in April, subsample 3, $n=988$ in June). In total, 3,056 Hungarian adults participated. The findings presented in this study are based on three separately conducted surveys, with no overlap in sampling. In all three cases, data were collected via telephone surveys conducted using random digit dialing (RDD) on mobile networks (any mobile phone user had an equal chance of being selected). This approach was chosen because of Hungary's high mobile phone penetration rate (exceeding 100%), which allows for broad population coverage. In contrast, due to the country's digital divide, online surveys in Hungary still face significant limitations in terms of representativeness, particularly among older individuals and those with lower levels of education. To maintain a balanced sample composition, fieldwork included soft demographic limits, used only as upper bounds. To address potential sampling bias, we applied weighting adjustments using population benchmarks from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, KSH). Weighting was based on the most recent census data, with adjustments for gender, age, education level, settle-

ment type, and region to improve alignment with population benchmarks (Malhotra – Simon 2017). The weights were calculated using an iterative weighting procedure, a standard method in survey research to improve representativeness and reduce sampling bias (based on Malhotra, 2020). This approach ensured that the final weighted dataset more accurately reflected the target population. All results are based on the weighted data and are representative of the Hungarian adult population along these dimensions. Key distributions are as follows: gender (47% male, 53% female); age (18–29: 17%, 30–39: 16%, 40–49: 19%, 50–59: 16%, 60+: 32% (0.2% missing)); education ($\leq$ primary: 24%, vocational/technical: 21%, secondary: 34%, higher education: 21% (0.1% missing)).

Our focal behavior, survey breakoff, was captured through recall: respondents indicated whether they had previously participated in telephone or online surveys (the two dominant modes in Hungary) and whether they had discontinued any such survey mid-way. Recall-based measures entail limitations (memory inaccuracies and potential social desirability), but they are widely used to study motivations and behavioral correlates in survey methodology (Yan – Curtin 2010; Reimers et al. 2022; Choumert-Nkolo et al. 2023; Dutwin et al. 2023). We measured whether respondents had ever discontinued a survey, rather than the frequency of such events, to minimize recall error; future studies could incorporate repeated-measures designs or paradata-based indicators of response behavior (e.g., item-level timestamps or observed breakoff points) to capture the intensity and dynamics of survey breakoff. In line with this tradition, our objective was not to estimate the absolute frequency of breakoff but to identify its drivers and associations, which cannot be directly observed in survey research and therefore require recall-based measurement to capture broader patterns. Accordingly, our analysis focused on determining which attitudinal and demographic characteristics exhibit significant associations with the likelihood of breakoff. To mitigate bias, we complemented recall items with structured follow-ups and triangulated insights with expert interviews (researchers, interviewers, and a frequent online panelist) and prior literature.

To operationalize ideal questionnaire length, respondents reported (a) a general tolerable duration and, in a separate item, (b) preferred durations for telephone and online modes. Trust in public-opinion surveys was measured on an ordered scale and linked to both breakoff history and preferred length.

Analytically, we first performed distribution checks (e.g., One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov) and then used parametric or non-parametric tests as appropriate: chi-square tests for categorical associations; ANOVA or Kruskal–Wallis for group differences in continuous/ordered outcomes; Friedman tests for within-respondent rankings; and Mann–Whitney / Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for pairwise comparisons across modes or subsamples. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$. In addition to bivariate tests, we employed an explora-

tory classification tree (CHAID) to identify irritation patterns most strongly associated with prior breakoff; implementation details and results are reported in the corresponding Results subsection.

To capture heterogeneity in perceptions and experiences, we conducted a K-means cluster analysis using the breakoff-related attitudes and disruptiveness ratings. The resulting segments were subsequently profiled in terms of demographics and trust in research to support interpretation and practical targeting. This segmentation complements mean-difference tests by revealing distinct respondent profiles associated with higher or lower attrition risk, consistent with the Leverage–Saliency perspective (Groves et al. 2000; Yan – Curtin 2010).

To ensure transparency, detailed distributions of the unweighted and weighted samples by key demographic variables are provided in the supplementary material.

4. Results

We first established respondents' prior survey experience to construct groups and test demographic differences. At contact, 42% reported that this was their first telephone survey and that they had never completed an online survey.² A further 7% were first-time telephone respondents but had previously taken online surveys. In contrast, 23% had only ever taken telephone surveys, and 28% had experience with both telephone and online surveys (0.3% gave no substantive answer).

Among those with any prior survey participation, 66% reported never breaking off a questionnaire. This proportion was 79% among telephone-only participants ($n = 705$), 61% among online-only participants ($n = 222$), and 55% among those experienced in both modes ($n = 846$). Group differences were statistically significant (chi-square $p \leq 0.05$; Cramer's $V = 0.365$).

When examining demographic differences, the following differences emerged. Patterns varied by age (chi-square $p \leq 0.05$; Cramer's $V = 0.211$). The highest share of first-time respondents occurred among people aged 60+ (48%). With age, telephone-only experience became more common (7% at ages 18–29 versus 35% at 60+). Online-only experience was concentrated among 18–29-year-olds (21%) versus 3–7% in older groups. Regular participation in both modes ranged from 31% to 37% under age 60, but only 14% at 60+. These findings reflect well-known communication habits: younger cohorts are more accessible online,

² This high proportion reflects the characteristics of RDD-based telephone sampling, which reaches the general population randomly and therefore naturally includes many individuals with no prior survey experience. Because respondent panels represent only a limited share of the adult population, RDD sampling tends to yield a substantially higher proportion of first-time respondents than panel-based approaches.

while many older adults are less digitally active. Education also differentiated experience (chi-square $p \leq 0.05$; Cramer's $V = 0.214$). As education increased, first-time participation fell, and dual-mode experience rose. For example, 61% with at most primary education were first-time respondents versus 24% among university graduates; 11% with primary education had dual-mode experience versus 51% among graduates. Finally, the share who had never broken off a survey varied with age (Cramer's $V = 0.108$) and education (Cramer's $V = 0.094$; both $p \leq 0.05$): never-breakoff was less likely at younger ages and slightly more likely at higher education levels, consistent with expectations for H3. In addition, settlement type also showed a significant association with breakoff (Cramer's $V = 0.156$; $p \leq 0.001$), although this likely reflects underlying socio-demographic differences between urban and rural areas rather than settlement type itself.

4.1. Reasons for breaking off the questionnaire

The first subsample comprised 175 respondents who had previously discontinued a telephone or online survey. On average, they named 1.9 reasons. The most frequent reasons were excessive length (39%), lack of logical structure (36%), lack of topic interest (32%), personal reasons (25%), boredom (23%), and external interruptions (23%); 16% cited other reasons. A Friedman ranking test showed significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$), supporting H1 that length is the principal driver of breakoff.

External interruptions were more often mentioned by women than men (27% versus 16%), though this difference was not statistically significant. Age differences were more pronounced, with a significant age-related variation in the association between questionnaire length and breakoff (chi-square $p \leq 0.05$; Cramer's $V = 0.387$). At ages 18–29, 60% cited length versus 15% at 60+. Respondents under 50 were also more likely to label surveys as boring. These patterns reinforce the age-related component of H3: impatience and time constraints are more salient among younger adults.

4.2. Confounding factors in the questionnaire

To move beyond post hoc explanations and capture general irritants, the second subsample rated 11 questionnaire characteristics on a five-point disturbance scale. Internal consistency for the 11-item battery was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.816$), indicating a coherent construct. Table 1 reports the item means.

Uninteresting topics ranked as most disturbing (mean 3.34; 37% rated “very disturbing”), closely followed by non-native or unnatural wording (3.29). Complex or lengthy questions and response lists (3.15) and monotony in otherwise

acceptable topics (3.08) also scored relatively high. Length, per se, was moderately disturbing (3.07). By contrast, the use of foreign or technical words was less problematic on average, and the opening placement of demographics was considered to be of relatively minimal disturbance. Formal versus informal addressing was of least concern overall, although 9% found informal style highly disturbing; 61% regarded both styles as acceptable.

Gender differences favored greater sensitivity among women: 8 of the 11 items showed higher disturbance means for women than men (ANOVA $p \leq 0.05$), notably for technical jargon, foreign words, length, and complex items. No item was rated as more disturbing by men. These results, together with Section 4.1, identify multiple design levers beyond length alone. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1. Factors that bother or would potentially bother participants

Confounding factors	Average (1-5)
Boring topic	3.34
Non-Hungarian wording	3.29
Complicated/long questions and answers	3.15
The topic itself is acceptable, but the questions are monotonous and boring	3.08
Length, much time to fill	3.07
There is no suitable answer for me	3.00
Use of foreign words	2.79
Use of technical words	2.61
The questionnaire begins with demographics, such as year of birth, and postal code	2.40
Informal register	1.73
Formal register	1.49

Source: authors.

To examine how irritation factors relate to survey breakoff, we first compared respondents who had ever broken off a questionnaire with those who had not using ANOVA and Mann–Whitney U tests. The results showed that respondents with prior breakoff experience were more sensitive to long questionnaires, boring topics, and situations where no suitable answer option was available ($p < 0.05$). To further explore which irritation patterns are more strongly associated with breakoff, we estimated an exploratory classification tree using the CHAID method. The dependent variable captured whether respondents had ever broken off a questionnaire (yes/no). The eleven irritation items (Table 1) were dichotomized (1–3 = low/no irritation, 4–5 = high irritation). Split selection was based on chi-square tests with Bonferroni-adjusted p-values ($\alpha = 0.05$), and prior probabilities were taken from the sample. The first and strongest splitter was boredom with the topic: respondents who reported high boredom were substantially

more likely to have broken off the questionnaire than those who did not. Within this broad group, the tree next split on irritation with technical wording: those bothered by such wording showed an elevated likelihood of breakoff. Finally, among bored respondents who were not irritated by technical wording, breakoff was further differentiated by irritation with the lack of suitable answer options: those who felt no answer option had fit their opinion were more likely to have broken off a questionnaire. These patterns are consistent with the mean irritation levels reported in Table 1, in which boredom, complex wording, and inadequate answer options are among the highest-rated problems.

4.3. Ideal questionnaire length

We measured ideal questionnaire length in general and by mode. Mean preferred duration times were 8.44 minutes overall ($n = 953$), 8.33 for telephone ($n = 933$), and 8.49 for online ($n = 731$). Distributions were non-normal (one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov $p < 0.05$), so non-parametric tests were used. Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests indicated no significant differences between modes, implying that perceived tolerable length is not mode-dependent in this context. Therefore, H2 is rejected.

To increase power in subgroup analyses, we combined overall and telephone length into one variable. Age differences were statistically significant but substantively small (ANOVA homogeneity $p > 0.10$; F $p < 0.05$; eta squared = 0.07). Respondents aged 40–49 reported the shortest ideal length (mean about 7.7 minutes), followed by ages 30–39 and 18–29, while 50–59 and 60+ preferred slightly longer durations (about 8.4–8.8 minutes). These differences are consistent with time constraints among 40-49-year-olds but are too small to support age-based targeting. No gender significant differences emerged. A Kruskal-Wallis test showed a tendency for higher-educated respondents to prefer shorter surveys. However, the mean gap between the lowest and highest education categories was modest at 1.28 minutes and was not consistent across age strata. In practical terms, age- and education-related contrasts do not justify different target lengths.

4.4. Confidence in poll results

We assessed whether trust in public-opinion results relates to breakoff and ideal length. As expected, higher trust was associated with lower breakoff and longer ideal length (both $p < 0.05$). Breakoff rates nearly halved between those who did not trust polls and those who fully trusted them (46% versus 26%). Ideal length rose from 8.01 to 9.42 minutes across the same trust spec-

trum. These findings support H4. See Table 2 for the joint distribution of trust, breakoff experience, and ideal length.

Table 2. Level of trust in public opinion polls and ideal questionnaire length

How much do you trust the results of public opinion polls?	Have you ever broken off a questionnaire? (telephone or online) n=1142, row%		Ideal questionnaire length (minutes)
	Yes	No	
Do not trust them	46	54	8.01
Rather than trust them	36	64	8.10
Rather trust them	31	69	8.16
Trust them	26	74	9.42
Do not know/ do not want to answer	44	56	8.87

Source: authors.

Summary of hypothesis tests. H1 is accepted: length was the most commonly cited driver of breakoff (39%; Friedman $p \leq 0.05$). H2 is rejected: preferred length did not differ between telephone and online. H3 is partially accepted: age correlates with breakoff-relevant patterns, but tolerance for longer questionnaires did not increase with age in a practically meaningful way (ANOVA $p < 0.05$; eta squared = 0.07). H4 is accepted: higher trust was associated with lower breakoff (46% versus 26%, $p < 0.05$) and a longer ideal length (9.42 versus 8.01 minutes).

4.5. Cluster analysis – development of character profiles based on the individual confounding factors examined

To capture heterogeneity, we first applied K-means clustering to the original item ratings, focusing on tolerance for questionnaire length, perceived topic relevance, and response styles (items on formal vs. informal addressing were excluded). This analysis yielded three distinct clusters. To validate the robustness, we also ran K-means on the dimensions obtained from multidimensional scaling (MDS). The fit indices (Stress = 0.058; D.A.F. = 0.94; Tucker = 0.97) indicated that MDS adequately represented the inter-item structure. Cluster memberships were highly consistent across the two approaches (91%, 82%, and 100%), supporting the stability of the three-cluster solution. The three-cluster solution was retained based on interpretability, stability across specifications, and clear separation on key irritation dimensions. Differences across clusters on the disturbance items are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Distinctions among scrutinized factors within identified clusters

In general, what bothers/annoys you about a questionnaire?	Discerning Evaluators (n=373) A	Experience Seekers (n=303) B	Nonchalant Responders (n=290) C
Length, too much time to fill out	3.6	3.9	1.5
Boring topic	4.1	4.1	1.7
The topic itself is acceptable, but the questions are monotonous and boring	3.7	3.7	1.7
Complicated/long questions and answers	3.9	3.5	1.7
The questionnaire begins with demographics, such as year of birth, and postal code	3.0	2.3	1.8
There is no suitable answer for me	3.8	3.1	2.0
Non-Hungarian wording	4.3	3.2	2.1
Use of technical words	4.0	1.7	1.8
Use of foreign words	4.1	1.8	2.1

Notes: Light gray shading: significantly different from the Discerning Evaluators segment ($p < 0.05$); Dark gray shading: significantly different from both the Discerning Evaluators and the Experience Seekers segments ($p < 0.05$). The deviation of individual averages in the examined clusters was analyzed with ANOVA.

Source: authors.

Discerning Evaluators ($n = 373$) display the most exacting quality standards. They are highly sensitive to wording quality, logic, and the completeness of response options, but are less affected by length than the other two groups. Experience Seekers ($n = 303$) prioritize the survey experience itself; boring topics and monotonous questions are particular pain points, and they show relatively low tolerance for long instruments. Nonchalant Responders ($n = 290$) have the lowest expectations and are least bothered by most features, including length.

Table 3 shows transparent gradients: compared with the other segments, Nonchalant Responders consistently rate topic boredom, monotony, length, complex items, early demographics, and wording issues as much less disturbing. Discerning Evaluators register the highest disturbance for non-native wording, technical and foreign words, and lack of suitable response options; Experience Seekers resemble Discerning Evaluators in topic boredom and monotony but show relatively less sensitivity to technical terminology.

The clusters were subsequently characterized demographically and geographically and analyzed with respect to behavioral differences. Table 4 summarizes these profiles and significant pairwise differences. Discerning Evaluators are more often women and appear more in middle-aged and older groups, with a concentra-

tion in Eastern Hungary. Experience Seekers skew younger and more highly educated and are overrepresented in Central Hungary, particularly Budapest. Nonchalant Responders have a mixed age distribution, tend to have medium or lower education levels, and are more prevalent in rural areas, small towns, and villages.

Table 4. Cluster profiles

Cluster profiles	Discerning Evaluators (n=373)	Experience Seekers (n=303)	Nonchalant Responders (n=290)
Male	41%	54%	58%
Female	59%	46%	42%
18-29	12%	29%	17% (b)
30-39	14%	23%	19%
40-49	21%	21%	20%
50-59	21%	12%	16%
60+	31%	15%	29%
Primary school or less	24%	14%	32%
Vocational school	22%	11%	31%
High school diploma	35%	40%	25%
University diploma	19%	34%	12%
West-Hungary	27%	23%	36%
Middle-Hungary	34%	54%	28%
East-Hungary	38%	24%	36%
Budapest	17%	36%	8%
The county seat, a city with county rights	23%	16%	19%
City	32%	29%	35%
Village, smaller town, homestead	28%	20%	39%
Average questionnaire length in minutes	7,71	7,63	10,21

Notes: Light gray shading: significantly different from the Discerning Evaluators segment ($p < 0.05$); Middle gray shading: significantly different from the Experience Seekers segment ($p < 0.05$); Dark gray shading: significantly different from the Nonchalant Responders segment ($p < 0.05$); Bold font: significantly different from both Discerning Evaluators and Experience Seekers ($p < 0.05$); Italic font: significantly different from both Experience Seekers and Nonchalant Responders ($p < 0.05$); Bold italic font: significantly different from both Discerning Evaluators and Nonchalant Responders ($p < 0.05$). The deviation of individual percentages within the clusters was examined using a Z-test.

Source: authors.

Experience also varied by cluster. Among respondents who had previously completed surveys, 75% were Experience Seekers, compared with 59% among Discerning Evaluators and 50% among Nonchalant Responders. Among those who had previously broken off a survey, Experience Seekers were again most common (39%), followed by Discerning Evaluators (36%) and Nonchalant Responders (21%). Preferred duration differed by cluster: Nonchalant Responders tolerated the longest instruments, with an average ideal of 10.2 minutes, whereas Experience Seekers and Discerning Evaluators preferred about 7.6 and 7.7 minutes, respectively. The Nonchalant Responders cluster reported a significantly longer average questionnaire length than both Discerning Evaluators and Experience Seekers.

Taken together, Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate that clusters differ systematically in sensitivities, behaviors, and socio-demographics. This heterogeneity explains why blanket rules are insufficient. For Discerning Evaluators, professional editing, clear logic, and complete response options are paramount; length is secondary. For Experience Seekers, topic selection and avoiding monotony are critical, with tighter time limits advisable. For Nonchalant Responders, moderate length is acceptable, but locally relevant content can improve engagement. These patterns provide actionable guidance for tailoring questionnaire profiles while controlling the principal breakoff risks.

To examine whether the three clusters differ in sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics beyond the irritation factors used for clustering, we estimated a multinomial logistic regression model. Cluster membership served as the dependent variable, with the Nonchalant Responders as the reference category. Predictors included gender, age, education, settlement type, region, subjective financial situation, prior breakoff experience, and preferred questionnaire length. A stepwise likelihood-ratio procedure was applied (entry criterion $p = 0.05$, removal criterion $p = 0.10$). Overall model fit was acceptable (model χ^2 $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.33$; deviance goodness-of-fit $p = 0.299$).

Relative to the Nonchalant Responders, several factors differentiated membership in the Discerning Evaluators cluster. Preference for a longer ideal questionnaire length was associated with a lower likelihood of belonging to this cluster ($B = -0.148$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.863$). Education also played a role: respondents with vocational education were significantly less likely to belong to the Discerning Evaluators compared to those with higher education ($B = -1.256$, $p = 0.002$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.285$). A similar negative tendency was observed among respondents with primary education, although this association did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($B = -0.812$, $p = 0.065$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.444$). Other predictors showed no clear differentiation, although respondents aged 30–39 exhibited a marginally lower likelihood of belonging to the Discerning Evaluators cluster ($B = -0.778$, $p = 0.049$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.459$).

A comparable pattern emerged for the Experience Seekers cluster with respect to preferred questionnaire length: respondents who considered longer questionnaires acceptable were less likely to belong to this group ($B = -0.156$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.856$). Education again proved to be a strong differentiating factor. Compared to respondents with a university degree, those with secondary education ($B = -1.081$, $p = 0.003$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.339$), vocational education ($B = -2.245$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.106$), or primary education ($B = -1.552$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.212$) were significantly less likely to belong to the Experience Seekers cluster. Age showed a clear positive association: respondents aged 18–29 were significantly more likely to belong to the Experience Seekers than to the reference group ($B = 1.213$, $p = 0.005$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.363$). Additional significant differences emerged for place of residence: living in Budapest ($B = 1.928$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 6.874$) or in a small town ($B = 0.902$, $p = 0.012$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.464$) increased the likelihood of Experience Seeker membership. Regarding subjective financial situation, respondents reporting a medium (rather than good) financial position were more likely to belong to this cluster ($B = 0.740$, $p = 0.017$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.096$), while other categories showed no significant differences.

When directly comparing the Experience Seekers and Discerning Evaluators clusters, education again emerged as a key differentiator. Respondents without a university degree were significantly less likely to belong to the Experience Seekers relative to the Discerning Evaluators: this applied to those with secondary education ($B = -0.786$, $p = 0.005$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.456$), vocational education ($B = -0.989$, $p = 0.014$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.372$), and primary education ($B = -0.740$, $p = 0.042$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.477$). Age also strongly distinguished the two clusters, with respondents aged 18–29 ($B = 1.737$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 5.680$) and 30–39 ($B = 0.772$, $p = 0.036$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.165$) being substantially more likely to belong to the Experience Seekers. Gender differences were also observed: men had a higher likelihood of Experience Seeker membership than women ($B = 0.677$, $p = 0.003$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.968$). With respect to settlement type, respondents living in Budapest ($B = 1.238$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.447$) or in small towns ($B = 0.828$, $p = 0.008$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.288$) were more likely to belong to the Experience Seekers compared to the Discerning Evaluators.

5. Discussion

From a marketing management perspective, our findings translate directly into better survey practice. Managers routinely rely on questionnaires for assessing customer satisfaction, brand tracking, effectiveness, and pricing; accordingly, reducing breakoff improves the reliability and actionability of insights. The three respondent segments we identified – Discerning Evaluators, Experience Seekers, and Nonchalant Responders – offer a practical basis for tailoring instru-

ments to segment-specific preferences. Such targeting, alongside attention to the major levers we document (length, topic salience, design quality, and trust), can reduce attrition, enhance data quality, and strengthen decision support.

Although we did not explicitly estimate breakoff rates by mode, our evidence and respondent narratives suggest that online questionnaires may be easier to abandon than telephone interviews. Respondents experienced in both modes also appear to be more critical and more frequent survey takers, an interaction that merits further study, especially as panel research expands, underscoring the importance of design vigilance online.

Consistent with prior work (Yan – Curtin 2010; Reimers et al. 2022), age and education are associated with item nonresponse: younger and more highly educated respondents are more likely to discontinue. This aligns with our expectation of decreasing breakoff with age and implies that studies targeting younger audiences should invest in engaging design elements, tighter pacing, and more explicit payoff cues.

We probed breakoff antecedents in two ways: reasons reported by confident respondents who had discontinued, and perceived disruptiveness of concrete questionnaire features. Consistent with prior work, multiple factors emerged as key drivers of breakoff, including survey length (Barge – Gehlbach 2011; Stefkovics 2022), topic relevance (Shropshire et al. 2009), and instrument quality – such as clarity, flow, and completeness (Yan – Curtin 2010; Albaum et al. 2011). While surveytainment is not yet common in Hungary and was not tested here, the literature indicates that it can offset the burden for specific groups; light-touch visual cues (e.g., emojis on mobile/web) may also help (Bosch – Revilla 2021). Looking ahead, AI offers opportunities to personalize item order, language, and examples to respondent profiles (Danó et al. 2025), potentially raising completion rates among younger cohorts.

Design guidance follows from these patterns. Concise wording, clear response options, and coherent routing improve data quality (De Leeuw 2012). Sensitive demographics should appear later (Biemer – Lyberg 2003), while the early placement of easy questions (Peytchev 2009) or high-interest topics (Plutowski – Zechmeister 2024) can build momentum and reduce early exits. Future work should quantify how question format and visual presentation trade off against completion time and measurement quality, and whether topic mixing produces interference effects.

In our context, the ideal survey length for the Hungarian population is roughly ten minutes. Length is especially consequential for younger and lower-educated segments, groups that are both harder to recruit and more attrition-prone, so parsimony is advisable. Cultural variation likely moderates these thresholds; cross-topic and cross-country comparisons of “optimal” durations

remain a useful agenda. Device proliferation further motivates examining data quality by smartphone versus larger-screen completion.

Trust emerged as a pivotal correlate: respondents with greater trust in research were less likely to discontinue and more tolerant of longer questionnaires. Prior positive experiences appear to cultivate trust (Szeidl – Tóth 2020). Practically, transparency about objectives, procedures, privacy, and data use – paired with visible quality signals – can bolster credibility and reduce drop-off.

5.1. Positioning within Prior Research

Situating our results within prior survey research, we corroborate classic findings on length (Barge – Gehlbach 2011; Stefkovics 2022) and topic relevance (Shropshire et al. 2009) as determinants of engagement, and we echo evidence linking demographics to nonresponse (Yan – Curtin 2010). However, our results challenge the assumption that younger respondents uniformly prefer and better tolerate longer online surveys (Bosch – Revilla 2021): we observed no significant difference in preferred length by mode, implying that perceived burden is mode-invariant under typical conditions. Our segmentation further extends the literature (Plutowski – Zechmeister 2024; Kostyk et al. 2019) by offering refined, actionable profiles for design targeting.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

The segmentation refines leverage–saliency theory (Groves et al. 2000) by demonstrating that salience and leverage cluster into stable respondent personas with distinct tolerance profiles for length, topic, and design features. Beyond feature-by-feature effects, a persona-based lens – bundling multiple attributes and preferences – provides a theoretically grounded explanation for heterogeneous engagement and an operational bridge to adaptive design. We also show that length tolerance is shaped not only by demographics (e.g., age) but by psychographics and prior experiences (notably, trust), enriching LST with an explicit credibility component.

5.3. International Relevance and Future Research Directions

Core breakoff mechanisms (length, salience, burden, motivation, trust) are likely universal, but thresholds vary culturally (Bosch – Revilla 2021; Daikeler et al. 2020; Sandelin 2022). As online panels and mobile surveys globalize, cross-cul-

tural work should test mode-invariance of preferred length, sensitivity to question types, and responses to surveytainment across regions (e.g., Europe, North America, Asia). Applying our three-persona segmentation internationally can reveal whether the same clusters recur or whether culturally specific variants emerge, refining best practices for multinational marketing research. Future work should (i) validate these segments internationally; (ii) test AI-assisted adaptive designs; and (iii) examine device-specific effects for mobile-first surveys.

6. Conclusion

This study identifies the principal determinants of survey breakoff on both the questionnaire and respondent sides. On the questionnaire side, risks cluster around: (i) length; (ii) topic salience and timing, for example proximity to holidays; (iii) editing and wording quality, including clarity, logical flow, completeness of response options, and absence of errors; (iv) sensitive items; (v) presentation and usability in online modes; and (vi) selective use of engagement elements, often called surveytainment. On the respondent side, breakoff varies with demographics and life-stage time pressure, psychographic traits and motivation, prior survey experience, and trust in research. Together, these factors provide a concise design checklist for reducing attrition while safeguarding data quality.

Building on this synthesis, we propose cross-disciplinary best practices that are mode agnostic: keep instruments short and tightly scoped, ensure professional structure and coherent routing, and prioritize the respondent experience, including topic relevance, precise wording, and logical flow. Alignment with the target audience is essential, and rigorous pre-testing, with feedback integrated before fieldwork, remains the most cost-effective safeguard of quality.

A key practical contribution is our three-persona segmentation (Table 5), namely Discerning Evaluators, Experience Seekers, and Nonchalant Responders, which translates heterogeneous tolerance for length, topic, and design into actionable targeting. These profiles serve as design-oriented lenses rather than a priori targeting tools, highlighting how different respondent groups tend to engage with various questionnaire features. Practitioners can use these personas as design-oriented heuristics when tailoring instruments: concise and professionally edited questionnaires for Discerning Evaluators; innovative and engaging elements for Experience Seekers; and locally relevant, community-anchored content for Nonchalant Responders. Across segments, visible trust-building through transparent purpose, privacy assurances, and credible sponsorship can meaningfully reduce drop-off. For marketing applications such as customer satisfaction, brand tracking, ad testing, and pricing studies, these strategies improve completion and sharpen inference.

Table 5. Created personas

Persona	July	Adam	Peter
Cluster membership	Discerning Evaluators	Experience Seekers	Nonchalant Responders
Degree of criticality	Most critical	Moderately critical	Low expectations
Expectations	A well-edited and carefully worded questionnaire; length is less salient than quality and structure.	Boring topics and monotonous questions are annoying	Hardly any
Length of questionnaire	Secondary to wording quality and structural coherence	Long questionnaires quickly reduce engagement if the topic is not stimulating	Does not bother him at all
Gender	Woman	Man	Man
Age	50 years	28 years	42 years
Education	Higher education	Higher education	Secondary education
Residence	East-Hungary	Central Hungary (Budapest)	Smaller town
Questionnaire topic	Intellectual and professional topics, e.g., surveys on quality	Less common, innovative topics, e.g., design thinking, gamification	Region-specific research, e.g., measuring satisfaction with local services
Family status	Family with adult children	Lives in a relationship	Family with children
Job	Intellectual work, management position	Holds a managerial position	Employed in a local business
Hobbies	Reading, visiting cultural events	Travel, cultural events, and entertainment	Visiting local events, fishing

Source: authors.

Our findings point to several directions for future research. Methodologically, adaptive designs and AI-enabled personalization (e.g., dynamic ordering, language tuning) could optimize burden and engagement in real time, especially for younger cohorts. Recent work also shows that digital interfaces and AI-mediated interactions increasingly shape respondents’ survey experiences (Danó et al. 2026), suggesting that future studies should examine how these emerging technologies may influence breakoff dynamics and engagement patterns. Cross-country studies should test cultural differences in survey length tolerance, question sensitivity, and engagement features. As mobile use grows, device-specific analyses can guide mobile-first design.

Several limitations temper interpretation. First, as the study relied on RDD-based telephone recruitment across multiple omnibus waves, precise AAPOR

response rates are not available. As is common in commercial omnibus surveys, contact and cooperation rates are managed by the fieldwork agency and cannot be reconstructed ex post.

Second, data were collected in Hungary. While many mechanisms, such as length, salience, and trust, are likely general, thresholds and topic sensitivities may vary with cultural norms and media environments. Our sampling approach offers strong population coverage locally, but panel populations, increasingly common in practice, may exhibit different patterns, including higher trust, greater tolerance for length, and more critical evaluation of flaws.

Third, the breakoff measures rely on self-reported recall. Memory error and social desirability may bias reports of past participation and discontinuation. Future longitudinal or diary studies could reduce recall bias and validate the pathways we propose. Because recall captures whether breakoff occurred but not its frequency or intensity, future studies should incorporate measures of breakoff extent as well. Experimental or longitudinal designs could further clarify mechanisms and reduce reliance on retrospective reports.

Fourth, accurate interpretation assumes a baseline understanding of survey research among respondents. In rare cases, commercial interactions may be mistaken for research, which could contaminate recall, although this is unlikely to be widespread in our context.

Finally, the omnibus design implies that preceding modules on unrelated topics could have primed fatigue or interest in ways we cannot fully observe. Although such ordering effects reflect real-world survey ecosystems, experimental control over sequence would help isolate pure design impacts. The study is associative in nature and does not establish causality.

Despite these constraints, the core message is robust: keep surveys short, make them salient, signal quality, build trust, and tailor to segments. Doing so can help reduce breakoff, improve data quality, and strengthen the strategic value of survey-based insights.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Kód Kft. for conducting the data collection for this study.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Albaum, G., Wiley, J., Roster, C., & Smith, S. M. (2011). Visiting item non-responses in internet survey data collection. *International Journal of Market Research*, 53(5), 687–703. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-53-5-687-703>
- Arce, C., de Francisco, C., & Arce, I. (2010). Multidimensional scaling: Concept and applications. *Papeles del Psicólogo*, 31(1), 46–56.
- Awan, U., Shamim, S., Khan, Z., Ul Zia, N., Shariq, S. M., & Khan, M. N. (2021). Big data analytics capability and decision-making: The role of data-driven insight on circular economy performance. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 168, 120766. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120766>
- Barge, S., & Gehlbach, H. (2012). Using the theory of satisficing to evaluate the quality of survey data. *Research in Higher Education*, 53(2), 182–200.
- Becker, R. (2023). The researcher, the incentive, the panelists and their response: The role of strong reciprocity for the panelists' survey participation. *Survey Research Methods*, 17(3), 223–242. <https://doi.org/10.18148/srm/2023.v17i3.7975>
- Bernhardt, R., & Wunnava, P. V. (2023). Does asking about citizenship increase labor survey non-response? *Journal of Population Economics*, 36, 2457–2481. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-023-00945-1>
- Biemer, P. P., & Lyberg, L. E. (2003). *Introduction to survey quality*. Wiley-Interscience.
- Brynjolfsson, E., Hitt, L. M., & Kim, H. H. (2011). Strength in numbers: How does data-driven decision making affect firm performance? SSRN Paper, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1819486>
- Bosch, O. J., & Revilla, M. (2020). Using emojis in mobile web surveys for millennials? A study in Spain and Mexico. *Quality & Quantity*, 55(1), 39–61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-00994-8>
- Bresciani, S., Ciampi, F., Meli, F., & Ferraris, A. (2021). Using big data for co-innovation processes: Mapping the field of data-driven innovation, proposing theoretical developments and providing a research agenda. *International Journal of Information Management*, 60, 102347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2021.102347>
- Cabooter, E., Weijters, B., Geuens, M., & Vermeir, I. (2016). Scale format effects on response option interpretation and use. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(7), 2574–2584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.10.138>
- Choumert-Nkolo, J., Tavera, G. S., & Saxena, P. (2023). Addressing non-response bias in surveys of wealthy households in low- and middle-income countries: Strategies and implementation. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 59(9), 1427–1442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2023.2217998>
- Daikeler, J., Bošnjak, M., & Manfreda, K. L. (2020). Web versus other survey modes: An updated and extended meta-analysis comparing response

- rates. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, 8(3), 513–539. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smz008>
- Davenport, T. H., & Harris, J. G. (2007). *Competing on analytics: The new science of winning*. Harvard Business Press.
- Danó, G., Kovács, S., & Surman, V. (2025). Challenges and opportunities of AI in market research: Virtual interviewers. *Tér – Gazdaság – Ember: Journal of Region, Economy and Society*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.14513/tge-jres.00413>
- Danó, G., Kovács, S., & Surman, V. (2026). AI meets marketing research: Virtual interviewers and the challenges of regional and demographic adoption. *International Journal of Information Management*, 86, 102985. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2025.102985>
- De Leeuw, E. D. (2012). Counting and measuring online: The quality of internet surveys. *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 114, 68–78.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Dutwin, D., Coyle, P., Lerner, J., Bilgen, I., & English, N. (2023). Leveraging predictive modelling from multiple sources of big data to improve sample efficiency and reduce survey nonresponse error. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, 12(2), 435–457. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smad016>
- Dwyer, K., & Linton, M. (2013). Unlocking the value of information. *IQ: The RIMPA Quarterly Magazine*, 29(3), 19–23.
- Emery, T., Cabaco, S., Fadel, L., Lugtig, P., Toepoel, V., Schumann, A., Lück, D., & Bujard, M. (2023). Breakoffs in an hour-long, online survey. *Survey Practice*, 16, 1. <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2023-0008>
- Fehrenbacher, D. D., Ghio, A., & Weisner, M. (2023). Advice utilization from predictive analytics tools: The trend is your friend. *European Accounting Review*, 32(3), 637–662. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2022.2138934>
- Goknil, A., Nguyen, P., Sen, S., Politaki, D., Niavis, H., Pedersen, K. J., Suyuthi, A., Anand, A., & Ziegenbein, A. (2023). A systematic review of data quality in CPS and IoT for Industry 4.0. *ACM Computing Surveys*, 55(14s), 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3593043>
- Grandcolas, U., Rettie, R., & Marusenko, K. (2003). Web survey bias: Sample or mode effect? *Journal of Marketing Management*, 19(5–6), 541–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2003.972>
- Groves, R. M. (2004). *Survey errors and survey costs*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Groves, R. M., & Lyberg, L. (2010). Total survey error: Past, present, and future. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74(5), 849–879. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfq065>
- Hair, J. F., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Black, W. C. (2019). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Klenovszki, J. (2016). Az online adatfelvétel. In Z. Veres, M. Hoffmann, & Á. Kozák (Eds.), *Bevezetés a piackutatásba*. Akadémiai Kiadó.

- Kmetty, Z., & Stefkovics, Á. (2021). Assessing the effect of questionnaire design on unit and item-nonresponse: Evidence from an online experiment. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25(5), 659–679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1929714>
- Kostyk, A., Zhou, W., & Hyman, M. R. (2019). Using surveytainment to counter declining survey data quality. *Journal of Business Research*, 95, 211–219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.10.024>
- LaValle, S., Lesser, E., Shockley, R., Hopkins, M. S., & Kruschwitz, N. (2011). Big data, analytics and the path from insights to value. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 52(2).
- Loosveldt, G., Pickery, J., & Billiet, J. (2002). Item nonresponse as a predictor of unit nonresponse in a panel survey. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 18, 545–557.
- Malhotra, N. K. (2020). *Marketing research: An applied orientation* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Malhotra, N. K., & Simon, J. (2017). *Marketingkutató*. Akadémiai Kiadó.
- McGonagle, K. A. (2013). Survey breakoffs in a computer-assisted telephone interview. *Survey Research Methods*, 7(2), 79–90. <https://doi.org/10.1556/9789630598675>
- Mikalef, P., Krogstie, J., Pappas, I. O., & Pavlou, P. (2020). Exploring the relationship between big data analytics capability and competitive performance: The mediating roles of dynamic and operational capabilities. *Information & Management*, 57(2), 103169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2019.05.004>
- Mittereder, F., & West, B. (2021). A dynamic survival modeling approach to the prediction of web survey breakoff. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smab015>
- Nancarrow, C., Tinson, J., & Evans, M. (2004). Polls as marketing weapons: Implications for the market research industry. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 20(5–6), 639–655. <https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257041324016>
- NRC. (2025). Hogyan hat a válaszadói élmény javítása az adatminőségre? <https://onlinekutatas.hu/egyeb-netpanel/hogyan-hat-a-valaszadoi-elmany-javitasa-az-adatminosegre/>
- Nunan, D., Birks, D. F., & Malhotra, N. K. (2020). *Marketing research: An applied approach* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.
- O'Neil, K. M., Penrod, S. D., & Bornstein, B. H. (2003). Web-based research: Methodological variables' effects on dropout and sample characteristics. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 35(2), 217–226. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03202544>
- Peytchev, A. (2009). Survey breakoff. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 73(1), 74–97. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfp014>
- Plutowski, L., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2024). Do question topic and placement shape survey breakoff rates? *Survey Methods: Insights from the Field*. <https://doi.org/10.13094/SMIF-2024-00005>

- Reimers, J. A., Turner, R. C., Crawford, B. L., Jozkowski, K. N., Lo, W.-J., & Keiffer, E. A. (2022). Demographic comparisons on data quality measures in web-based surveys. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 193, 111612. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.111612>
- Reynolds, N., & Diamantopoulos, A. (1998). The effect of pretest method on error detection rates. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(5–6), 480–498. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569810216091>
- Rowley, G., Barker, K., & Callaghan, V. (1986). The market research terminal and developments in survey research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 20(2), 35–39. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000004635>
- Sandelin, F. (2022). *The effects of questionnaire length on response rate, non-response bias, and data quality*. The SOM Institute, University of Gothenburg. [https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022-1%20Effects%20of%20questionnaire%20length%20\(Sandelin%202022\)%20v2_1.pdf](https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022-1%20Effects%20of%20questionnaire%20length%20(Sandelin%202022)%20v2_1.pdf)
- Salzberger, T., & Koller, M. (2019). The direction of the response scale matters: Accounting for the unit of measurement. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(5), 871–891. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-08-2017-0539>
- Shropshire, K. O., Hawdon, J. E., & Witte, J. C. (2009). Web survey design: Balancing measurement, response, and topical interest. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 37(3), 344–370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124108327130>
- Stefkovich, Á. (2022). Are you listening? Examining the level of multitasking and distractions and their impact on data quality in a telephone survey. *Survey Methods: Insights from the Field*. <https://doi.org/10.13094/SMIF-2022-00006>
- Steinbrecher, M., Roßmann, J., & Blumenstiel, J. E. (2014). Why do respondents break off web surveys and does it matter? Results from four follow-up surveys. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 27(2), 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edu025>
- Stieger, S., Reips, U.-D., & Voracek, M. (2007). Forced-response in online surveys: Bias from reactance and an increase in sex-specific dropout. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 58(11), 1653–1660. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20651>
- Sundström, M. (2019). Climate of data-driven innovation within e-business retail actors. *FIIB Business Review*, 8(2), 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2319714519845777>
- Szeitl, B., & Tóth, I. Gy. (2020). *Megközelíthetetlen csoportok elére: Hogyan lehet javítani a személyes megkeresésen alapuló empirikus adatfelvételek minőségén?* TÁRKI. https://tarki.hu/sites/default/files/2020-03/OTKA_kut_besz_megkozelithetetlen_csoportok.pdf
- Vaske, J. J., Beaman, J., & Sponarski, C. C. (2016). Rethinking internal consistency in Cronbach's alpha. *Leisure Sciences*, 39(2), 163–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2015.1127189>

- West, J., & Bogers, M. (2014). Leveraging external sources of innovation: A review of research on open innovation. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 31(4), 814–831. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12125>
- Yalaoui, M., & Boukhedouma, S. (2021). A survey on data quality: Principles, taxonomies and comparison of approaches. In *2021 International Conference on Information Systems and Advanced Technologies (ICISAT)* (pp. 1–9). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICISAT54145.2021.9678209>
- Yan, T., & Curtin, R. (2010). The relation between unit nonresponse and item nonresponse: A response continuum perspective. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 22(4), 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edq037>

Appendix

Table A1. Demographic Characteristics

		Unweighted %	Weighted %
Gender	Male	45	47
	Female	55	53
Age	18-29	11	17
	30-39	9	16
	40-49	17	20
	50-59	17	16
	60+	45	32
	Refuses to answer	1	0
Education	Primary school or less	11	24
	Vocational/technical	21	21
	Secondary	35	34
	Higher education	33	21
	Refuses to answer	1	0
Settlement type	Budapest	20	18
	County seat	18	20
	City	35	33
	Village	27	30
	Refuses to answer	1	0

		Unweighted %	Weighted %
Region	West-Hungary	29	30
	Central-Hungary	32	36
	East-Hungary	37	35
	Refuses to answer	2	0

Table A2. Questions asked in the surveys

Question		Answer options	Subsample
Have you ever participated in a telephone survey (i.e., a survey conducted by phone) and/or an online survey (i.e., a survey completed on an online platform)?		No, this is the first time I have responded to a survey Yes, telephone surveys only Yes, online surveys only Yes, both telephone and online surveys Don't know / No answer	1, 2, 3
Have you ever discontinued a survey before completing it?		Yes, a telephone survey Yes, an online survey Yes, both No Don't know / No answer	1, 2, 3 (If you have previously participated in a telephone or online survey)
Why did you discontinue this/these survey(s)?	It was too long	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	It was boring	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	Something came up	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	The questionnaire was illogical (questions, response options, errors)	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	Because of personal or sensitive questions	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	I did not like the topic	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
Why did you discontinue this/these survey(s)?	Other, please specify:	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
	Don't know / No answer	Mentioned Not mentioned	1
What do you consider to be the ideal questionnaire length (in minutes) in general?		Open-ended question	3

Question		Answer options	Subsample
What do you consider to be the ideal questionnaire length (in minutes) for a telephone survey?		Open-ended question	1
What do you consider to be the ideal questionnaire length (in minutes) for an online survey?		Open-ended question	1
In general, what tends to bother or annoy you in a questionnaire?	The questionnaire is too long / takes too much time to complete		2
	The topic is boring		2
	The topic itself is fine, but the questions are monotonous or boring		2
	The questions or response options are too complex or too long		2
	The questionnaire starts with demographic questions (e.g., year of birth, postal code)		2
	There is no response option that fits my opinion		2
	Poor or awkward wording		2
	Use of technical or professional terminology		2
	Use of foreign words		2
	Use of informal register ('tutoiement')		2
	Use of formal register		2
How much do you trust the results of public opinion surveys?			1, 2

Secular governance and religious diversity in Western, Central, Eastern Europe, and Latin America: Comparative challenges and emerging models

ERIC PERALTA¹ 

Received: 30 July 2025 – Revised: 8 December 2025 – Accepted: 4 February 2026

ABSTRACT: Europe and Latin America navigate religious pluralism through contrasting secular frameworks shaped by distinct historical trajectories. This analysis examines how Latin American secular states manage religious diversity differently from Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. Despite secularization theories predicting religious decline, both regions show religions maintaining public influence while states remain formally neutral. Migration, technology, and evangelical movements create region-specific challenges: Latin America faces growth in evangelical Christianity and indigenous revitalization; Europe confronts Islamic integration and Christian nationalism. The emerging framework of *pluri-confessional secularization*, in which secular states accommodate diverse religious traditions without privileging any denomination while religious institutions adapt to democratic frameworks, offers analytical tools beyond traditional secularization paradigms. This study provides strategies for managing religious diversity in interconnected societies.

¹ Doctoral School of International Relations and Security, Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary

* Corresponding author: erapergo@gmail.com

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and the source.

KEYWORDS: Secular Governance, Religious Pluralism, Europe, Latin America, Religious Freedom

JEL CODES: I13, K38, H70

1. Introduction

Freedom of religion, as guaranteed in international human rights instruments, emerged from Europe's sectarian conflicts as a legal principle designed to protect both belief and non-belief within plural political orders (Díez – Picazo 2021). While this right enjoys robust constitutional and judicial protection (Olmedo Bustos v. Chile 2001; Leyla Şahin v. Turkey 2005), its institutional realization has become increasingly complex under conditions of intensified religious diversity, public religious visibility, and the erosion of classical assumptions about religious privatization.

Across Europe and Latin America, secular democratic states are formally committed to religious freedom and state neutrality, yet they operate with markedly different historical legacies of church-state relations, nation-building, and religious pluralization. Western Europe developed secular governance through gradual institutional negotiation, shaped by Christian dominance and later transformed by migration-driven diversity. Central and Eastern Europe confronts a distinct configuration in which post-communist democratization coincided with religious revival and the politicization of confessional identity (Beaumont et al. 2020). Latin America assumed another trajectory, combining formally secular constitutionalism with historically entrenched Catholic privilege, rapid evangelical expansion, and the growing public recognition of indigenous spiritual traditions.

These divergent trajectories have generated distinct challenges for secular governance. In Central and Eastern Europe, secular institutions have increasingly been drawn into conflicts where religious nationalism, democratic consolidation, and minority protection intersect. In Western Europe, secular governance has focused on recalibrating inherited legal frameworks in response to visible religious diversity. In Latin America, secular arrangements have evolved through layered institutional adjustments accommodating new religious actors and, in some cases, epistemological pluralism. Together, these contexts reveal that the management of religious diversity is not governed by a single model of secularism, but by regionally patterned configurations shaped by historically situated struggles over religious authority and public legitimacy.

This article examines how secular democratic states across Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America institutionally manage religious diversity, and how regional patterns of secular governance structure these responses. It asks: What are the primary challenges faced by secular states in

these regions in governing religious diversity, and how do historically embedded configurations of secular governance shape institutional strategies of accommodation, regulation, and contestation?

The article's contribution lies in advancing a comparative, regionally grounded analysis of secular governance that moves beyond national case studies and normative typologies. By placing Latin American experiences in systematic dialogue with Western and Central and Eastern European contexts, the study identifies patterned configurations of secular governance and introduces the concept of pluri-confessional secularization to capture the adaptive transformation of secular regulatory frameworks under conditions of intensified religious and spiritual plurality. Rather than treating secularism as a fixed institutional model or presupposing religious decline, the article approaches secular governance as a historically contingent and evolving field of political regulation.

2. Theoretical foundations and methodology

2.1. Theoretical frameworks: secularism, autonomy, and intersectionality

State neutrality and democratic principles shape religious governance models across Europe and Latin America. This research employs three theoretical frameworks:

Political Secularism: Modood and Sealy (2022) identify how states manage religious pluralism through political structures, institutional dynamics, and social integration methods. Rather than imposing rigid separation, secular states often incorporate religious traditions to promote social cohesion while maintaining democratic principles (Finke 2013). European states negotiate Islamic values within historically Christian frameworks, while Latin American states recognize indigenous spiritualities alongside Christian denominations. These patterns reveal secularism as a contextual negotiation between religious and democratic authority.

Twin Tolerations Theory: Stepan's (2000) framework establishes that democracy requires reciprocal autonomy, religious institutions cannot control state policy, while states must not suppress legitimate religious activities. This balance faces strain when European democracies accommodate Muslim minorities within systems designed for Christian churches, or when Latin American states balance Catholic privilege with evangelical growth and indigenous rights. Effective governance requires negotiating mutually acceptable spheres of influence rather than imposing rigid separation.

Intersectionality: Applying intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1991; Bilge 2013) reveals how religious governance compounds multiple marginalizations. Religion intersects with ethnicity, migration status, and socioeconomic position (d'Urso – Bonilla 2023). In Europe, Muslim women face discrimination that combines religious, gender, and racial dimensions (Cesari 2025). In Latin America, indigenous peoples experience marginalization at the intersection of religious, ethnic, and colonial categories.

These frameworks illuminate pluri-confessional secularization synergistically: political secularism assists in the institutional analysis, twin tolerations offer democratic guidelines, and intersectionality reveals how formal arrangements produce lived inequalities.

2.2. Methodology: Comparing Secular Democracies

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design oriented toward identifying patterned configurations of secular governance rather than establishing deterministic causal relationships. It draws on Mill's method of difference, as reformulated in comparative political research through the most similar systems design (Mill 1843; Gerring 2007). This guides the structured comparison of democratic contexts that share core constitutional commitments to secularism and religious freedom while differing in their historical trajectories and contemporary modes of religious accommodation. In this sense, Mill's method functions not as a strict causal-testing device but as a heuristic framework that informs the case delimitation and comparative focus.

The comparison is conducted at a regional level, examining Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America as macro-contexts that exhibit internally diverse yet structurally comparable challenges. These regions are selected because they combine formal secular constitutionalism with contrasting legacies of church–state relations, processes of democratization, and patterns of religious pluralization. Western Europe represents contexts of long-term secular institutional development shaped by negotiated settlements between church and state and by migration-driven diversification. Central and Eastern Europe reflect post-communist democracies in which religious revival is intersected with nation-building and democratic consolidation. Latin America is characterized by formally secular states historically marked by Catholic hegemony and, more recently, by evangelical expansion and the growing public recognition of indigenous spiritual traditions.

Empirical material is drawn from a focused selection of countries within each region to illustrate how shared analytical dimensions operate under different historical and institutional conditions. Western European cases include

France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy. Central and Eastern European cases encompass Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Serbia. Latin American cases include Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. These cases are not treated as discrete units for paired causal comparison but as analytically situated sites through which broader regional configurations of secular governance are traced.

The selection of Central and Eastern European cases is analytically driven by their shared experience of post-socialist transformation and religious reinstitutionalization. These contexts converge around four characteristics: the transition from officially atheist regimes to democratic orders in which religion reemerged as a public actor; the symbolic fusion of historically dominant Christian confessions with national identity narratives; the politicization of religion through defensive secularism or religious nationalism; and exposure to European Union normative frameworks, generating tensions between domestic religious policies and supranational legal standards. This convergence allows for a focused examination of how similar post-communist conditions yield divergent secular governance arrangements.

Other European contexts frequently cited in debates on secularism and religious diversity, including the Czech Republic, Albania, and the Baltic states, are not examined as focal cases. Their exclusion reflects methodological delimitation rather than analytical irrelevance. The Czech Republic represents an outlier of advanced societal secularization characterized by comparatively low levels of public religious contestation (Lužný – Navrátilová 2001). Albania's constitutional multiconfessionalism follows a distinct historical trajectory shaped by Ottoman legacies and post-atheist reconstruction (Clayer 2003). The Baltic states combine post-Soviet religious regulation with pronounced ethno-national dynamics that introduce central variables beyond the scope of this analysis (Karpov et al. 2012). Including these cases would have expanded the comparative universe in ways that would dilute analytical coherence and depth.

The empirical analysis applies thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework of familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. The textual corpus consists of constitutional texts adopted between 1990 and 2024, jurisprudence from national constitutional courts as well as the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and policy documents including concordats, religious freedom legislation, and official regulatory frameworks. These materials are examined to identify the recurring institutional logic, regulatory practices, and discursive constructions shaping secular governance across regions.

Six analytical themes structure the empirical sections of the article: concordat arrangements and inherited privileges; migration-driven diversifica-

tion; religious political mobilization; public space contestation; the accommodation of non-Western worldviews; and digital transformation challenges. These themes correspond to Sections 4.1 through 4.6 and provide a common analytical grid through which regional patterns are traced. The regions are compared across six constant analytical dimensions (legal legacies, modes of pluralization, political mobilization, public space regulation, epistemological accommodation, and digital transformation), while historical trajectories and governance responses constitute the primary axes of variation. The typology of secular governance models is theoretically anchored in Kuru's (2007; 2009) distinction between assertive and passive secularism and in the multiple secularities framework developed by Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt (2013), which emphasizes how societies articulate the religious-secular distinction in relation to specific reference problems.

From these frameworks, the analysis identifies four operative models of secular governance: assertive secularism, characterized by strict institutional separation of religion and state; cooperative neutrality, marked by regulated partnership arrangements; transitional secularism, reflecting the recalibration of inherited privileges under conditions of pluralization; and defensive secularism, where religious nationalism contests liberal secular principles.

Romania and Serbia are analytically positioned between cooperative neutrality and defensive secularism, reflecting the political salience of Orthodox revival since 1989, exemplified by extensive state-supported church construction and symbolic claims linking Orthodoxy to national identity. Bolivia is treated as an extension of cooperative neutrality toward epistemological pluralism through the constitutional recognition of indigenous worldviews (Constitute Project 2009 Art. 4), while Peru illustrates the coexistence of inherited Catholic privileges and constitutional protection of indigenous communities (Republic of Peru 1993 Art. 50).

Religious accommodation patterns are thus analyzed through six analytical constructs corresponding to the article's structure: concordat regimes and inherited privileges examined through political secularism frameworks (Modood – Sealy 2022); migration-driven diversification analyzed via the theory of twin tolerations (Stepan 2000); religious political mobilization; public space contestation and symbolic governance; the accommodation of non-Western worldviews examined through intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1991; Bilge 2013); and emerging challenges linked to digital religious mobilization. Across these constructs, constitutional documents, judicial decisions, policy frameworks, and scholarly analyses provide the empirical basis for tracing how divergent historical trajectories generate distinct but comparable configurations of secular governance.

3. Secular models in context: concepts and historical evolution

3.1. From secularization to laicity: clarifying key concepts

This analysis differentiates three related concepts. Secular denotes an epistemic category, involving modern spheres operating independently from religious authority. Secularization describes sociological processes through which religion's social significance transforms, including functional differentiation, the decline of practice, and the privatization of beliefs. Secularism constitutes a political doctrine that advocates particular religion-state arrangements.

This study examines secular governance, the institutional and policy frameworks through which states manage religious pluralism, rather than secularism as ideology or secularization as process, though all three intersect empirically. As Wohlrab-Sahr (2012) argue, understanding “multiple secularities” requires attention to the cultural meanings underlying distinctions between religious and non-religious domains in specific contexts.

Secularization thus represents a social evolutionary path through which religion evolves to compete against multiple fields in society rather than retain its dominant position (Casanova 2009). Public space thus experiences religious pluralism, where various traditions function simultaneously. Laicity governance promotes complete religious separation between state institutions and politics (Setton – Blancarte 2010), functioning to develop an unbiased public sector upholding religious tolerance while excluding faith-based input in state decision-making.

In practice, secularization and laicity intersect. Finke (1990) explains how U.S. Constitutional laicism established a religious marketplace that has stimulated competition among religious groups. Religious institutions often consider secularization as threatening national identity (Alcalá 2018), while public life features religious discourse campaigning for traditional morality and national principles (Boas et al. 2019). This tension shapes the divergent institutional responses examined below.

3.2. Historical divergence in Europe and Latin America

Secularism took divergent paths in Latin America and Europe because historical experiences combined with contemporary political issues. The Catholic Church has historically wielded both political and religious authority across Latin Amer-

ica since colonization. Despite secular constitutions, practical church-state separation remained limited, with the Church maintaining significant influence over politics, education, healthcare, and social welfare in countries like Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia (Hernández 2009). This relationship evolved through agreements including concordats and religious conflicts such as the Reform War and the Cristero War, which defined the region's approach to church-state interactions (Alcalá 2018; Jaksic 2011).

European secularization followed different timelines: France's 1905 *laïcité* legislation established strict separation after revolutionary anti-clericalism (Weisse 2016), while Germany maintained state-church financial partnerships for social service delivery (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2008). Post-war ecumenical movements and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) reshaped interdenominational relations without eliminating religion from political activity (Greenberg 2019).

These historical trajectories have crystallized into four contemporary challenges that test the adaptability of secular frameworks in both regions: the legacy of concordats, migration-driven religious diversity, the political mobilization of religious groups, and contested religious visibility in public spaces. Thus, while Latin America's secularism evolved within a framework of contested Catholic dominance, Europe's trajectory reflects the gradual legal formalization of religious plurality within state structures.

4. Comparative challenges in secular governance

4.1. Concordats and religious institutions: legacy and legal ambiguity

European states face a paradox, with religious institutions that vary across the continent's different regions. In CEE, Poland's 1993 concordat with the Vatican, negotiated during early democratization, granted the Catholic Church extensive privileges in education, military chaplaincy, and tax collection, creating a *confessional state in secular clothing* (Ramet 2014; Grzymała – Busse 2015; Krukowski 2014). Hungary followed similar patterns under Viktor Orbán's government, increasingly blurring the lines between state policy and Christian identity, while Slovakia's concordat negotiations have stalled precisely because of concerns about democratic compatibility (Vékony – Račius 2023).

Western European states inherited different but equally complex concordat arrangements. Germany's concordat-legitimized church tax system effectively transforms the state into a tax collector for Christianity, while Muslim com-

munities must rely entirely on voluntary contributions (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2008). Italy's 1984 concordat revisions marked a strategic retreat, shifting from establishing Catholicism as the state religion to preserving its role as cultural patrimony. Spain's 1979 concordat survived the entire transition to democracy precisely because its treaty status insulated it from legislative reform (Cesari 2025; Díez-Picazo 2021).

How can secular states sign privileged agreements while maintaining neutrality? As international treaties, concordats occupy a peculiar position, above ordinary legislation yet below constitutional principles. European concordats reveal a pattern of selective secularization; states maintain strict secular policies for minority religions while preserving historical Catholic privileges (Andersen – Jensen 2019; Ragazzi 2009).

Latin American experiences offer instructive contrasts. Despite facing similar Catholic dominance, countries like Mexico and Brazil developed different strategies. Mexico's radical anticlerical history, including the Cristero War, ultimately produced pragmatic accommodation where the Church maintains social influence without formal political power (Alcalá 2018). Brazil demonstrates another path: maintaining formal separation while allowing extensive Church involvement in social services, creating *relative laicities* that adapt to local contexts rather than imposing rigid separation (Esquivel 2008).

The persistence of concordats reveals how path dependence shapes contemporary religious governance. Historical agreements create institutional legacies that constrain present policy options. Yet Latin America's longer experience suggests concordats need not be immutable. Chile's gradual reform of its concordat system, involving moving from Catholic monopoly toward recognition of religious plurality, provides a model for incremental change that European states might consider (López 2016). The key insight is that formal agreements can evolve through reinterpretation rather than confrontation, allowing states to maintain stability while expanding religious freedom. These institutional legacies profoundly shape how states respond to contemporary challenges, particularly the religious diversity migration creates.

4.2 Migration, religious diversity, and national identity

Europe's response to migration-driven religious diversity reveals regional differences, illuminating challenges. Central and Eastern European governments frame religious diversity as a threat to national identity. Hungary's construction of border fences and Prime Minister Orbán's 2018 declaration that "We don't see these people as Muslim refugees. We see them as Muslim invaders" epitomizes this defensive posture (Barry 2019). Poland presents an even starker contrast:

while welcoming over 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees following Russia's 2022 invasion, Polish authorities maintain strict opposition to migrants from predominantly Muslim regions. During the 2021 Belarus border crisis, Poland deployed military forces to prevent Middle Eastern asylum seekers from entering, despite international humanitarian concerns (Zdanowicz 2023; Friedman 2024).

Slovakia follows similar patterns, with former Prime Minister Robert Fico's 2016 declaration that *Islam has no place in Slovakia*, reflecting widespread regional attitudes (Lorenz – Anders 2021). These policies stem from understanding national identity as intrinsically tied to Christian heritage, where religious diversity represents an existential threat rather than social enrichment (Helbling – Kalkum 2017; Balsam 2023).

Western European states, while generally more accepting, struggle with different aspects of religious diversity. Between 2010 and 2017, Muslim populations grew significantly, from 4.5% to approximately 7.7% (Pew Research Center 2017). France exemplifies Europe's most rigorous approach through its sequential restrictions: the 2004 Islamic headscarf ban in schools, the 2010 full-face covering prohibition, and the 2021 anti-separatism law, which intensified the oversight of religious organizations. These measures produced tangible socio-economic consequences: The *Trajectoires et Origines 2* study revealed that only 26% of hijab-wearing women living with partners and children were participating in the labor market, compared to 48% of those without hijabs (Beauchemin et al. 2016).

Latin America approaches religious diversity through migration differently via two mechanisms. First, rural-to-urban migration creates religious markets where evangelical churches compete with Catholicism by offering migrants spiritual and material support. Brazil's trajectory illustrates this dynamic: Catholic affiliation declined from 92% (1970) to 65% (2010), coinciding with exponential Pentecostal growth, transforming the religious landscape without the collapse of religious influence in politics (Pew Research Center 2013; 2014). This pattern, evident in tri-border cities such as Foz do Iguaçu, facilitates integration rather than division (Queiroz 2019). Second, emigration creates transnational religious networks. Brazilian evangelicals in the US and Europe maintain connections, generating circular flows of religious ideas and resources, strengthening social cohesion (Sheringham 2013). The contrast with Europe becomes stark in Chile: Santería, introduced by Afro-Caribbean migrants, has become the country's fastest-growing religion without generating the existential anxieties characterizing European responses to Islam, absent the civilizational narratives that frame the Muslim presence as incompatible with European identity (Orellana 2024).

The difference lies not in the religions themselves but in how states frame religious diversity: as enrichment or invasion, and as normal market competition or civilizational conflict? The Brazilian case demonstrates how initial Cath-

olic institutional resistance to evangelical growth in the 1970s and 1980s gave way to pragmatic coexistence by the 2000s, with both traditions competing through democratic mobilization rather than seeking state suppression. These trajectories suggest that states can move beyond defensive postures through sustained institutional adaptation. As religious communities establish themselves through migration, they inevitably seek a political voice and representation.

4.3. Religion in the political arena

Religious groups' political mobilization presents European democracies with challenges shaped by their distinct histories (Grzymała – Busse 2015). In CEE, after decades of suppressing religious political expressions under communism, states now face religious movements that view political engagement as both a right and a duty (Stan – Turcescu 2007). Poland's Radio Maryja and associated movements created a *Catholic-nationalist media empire* that has significantly influenced electoral outcomes (Wysocka 2008). Hungary's Fidesz party has masterfully instrumentalized Christian identity, transforming religious symbols into political weapons while claiming to defend *Christian Europe* against secularist threats (Vékony 2023). In Romania, the Orthodox Church influences debates on social policies and family issues (Stănescu 2022). In Serbia, the Orthodox Church aligns with nationalist narratives, shaping identity politics (Radić 2025). A Pew Research Center (2017) survey substantiates these patterns: majorities in Poland (64%), Hungary (57%), and Romania (74%) view their religion as central to national identity.

Western European states are witnessing varied religious and political mobilization, reflecting path-dependent institutional arrangements. Germany's churches maintain influence through social service provision partnerships (Becker 2018), while the UK's moderate secularism permits advocacy within formal separation (Nistor 2019). France's model of strict *laïcité* faces challenges from increasingly assertive religious communities, prompting the 2021 anti-separatism law to limit religious political influence (Yeung 2021). Southern Europe presents distinct patterns shaped by transitions from authoritarian rule: Italy's concordat enables Catholic influence through formal and cultural channels (Ascoli – Artoli 2019), while Spain navigates post-Franco democratization, transforming from church-state fusion to contemporary debates over religious symbols (Astor – Mayrl 2022).

In Latin America, Brazil's Evangelical Parliamentary Front expanded from 73 seats in 2014 to 191 in 2022, representing 32% of lawmakers (Alves 2022). This growth occurred through pragmatic coalition-building and constituent mobilization rather than civilizational defense rhetoric. During the 2022 elections,

evangelical churches operated as political machines, campaigning from pulpits and distributing materials through religious networks (Barros – Tavares 2024).

When Argentina debated abortion legalization in 2018, evangelical and Catholic lawmakers formed effective partnerships despite the historical tensions, demonstrating that religious political action need not be sectarian (Gudiño 2022). Costa Rica's 2018 presidential election saw support for evangelical candidate Fabricio Alvarado surge from 2% to 24.8% after campaigning against same-sex marriage, yet this occurred through democratic mobilization rather than authoritarian appeals (Pignataro – Treminio 2019).

The comparative evidence suggests that Latin American religious politics operates through different logics than CEE patterns. While Hungarian Fidesz and Polish PiS frame religious politics as civilizational defense, Brazilian evangelical parties pursue concrete material interests through coalition bargaining. This difference reflects institutional context: Latin American religious markets emerged through domestic competition, whereas CEE religious nationalism developed in response to perceived external pressures from the EU and migration. Guatemala's 2023 election, where evangelical networks supported progressive candidate Bernardo Arévalo against establishment parties, demonstrates that religious political engagement can transcend conservative-progressive binaries precisely because competitive religious markets produce pragmatic political actors rather than ideologically rigid blocs (OpenDemocracy 2023).

The economic dimensions of religious political power also differ significantly. Brazilian evangelical churches leveraged political influence for concrete material benefits: tax exemptions, debt forgiveness totaling \$190 million, and protective legislation (Página 12 2022). This transactional approach, while raising questions about corruption, operates within normal democratic interest group politics. In contrast, European religious politics often focuses on symbolic issues like crosses in public spaces or Christian preambles in constitutions, offering emotional satisfaction but limited material benefit to religious communities. This political mobilization extends beyond electoral politics into struggles over religious visibility in public spaces.

4.4. Public spaces and religious symbols: comparative visibility conflicts

Religious symbol management varies across Europe and Latin America. In Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Hungary, Christian symbols in government buildings, schools, and public squares are defended as cultural heritage integral to national identity. Poland maintains crucifixes in courtrooms and schools, with the Constitutional Tribunal framing them as consistent with cul-

tural traditions, while Hungary's Fundamental Law explicitly affirms the Christian heritage of the nation regarding religious expression (Vékony 2023). When EU institutions question these practices, responses frame resistance as defending sovereignty. Sites like Częstochowa in Poland illustrate why such resistance resonates: pilgrimage centers function as spaces where national and religious identity fuse, making EU criticism of religious symbols appear as attacks on national existence itself (Liro et al. 2022; Topidi 2019).

In Slovakia, debates over religious symbols in public schools echo such dynamics, with courts often ruling in favor of maintaining Christian symbols as part of national heritage (Vladár 2021). Likewise, in Romania, religious processions and icons are visibly integrated into public ceremonies, reflecting a model where religion and nationalism are intertwined within the public sphere (Stan – Turcescu 2021).

Romania and Serbia present distinctive patterns of religious symbol proliferation, illustrating the post-communist fusion between national and Orthodox identity. Romania has witnessed extensive Orthodox church construction since 1989, culminating in the People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest, at 127 meters, the world's tallest Orthodox church. Partially consecrated in 2018, coinciding with the centenary of the modern Romanian state, and fully consecrated in 2025, the cathedral has cost approximately €270 million, the majority coming from public funds. The Romanian Orthodox Church calls it a "symbol of national identity" and a post-communist "spiritual rebirth" (Associated Press 2025). As anthropologist Giuseppe Tateo (2020) documents, no fewer than 34 Orthodox cathedrals have been constructed in the past three decades in Romania. These cases demonstrate how the politics of religious symbols in CEE are interwoven with ethno-national assertions in ways distinct from heritage debates in Western Europe.

Western European approaches create *multiple secularities* (Wohlrab-Sahr – Burchardt 2013). France's assertive *laïcité* generates recurring conflicts: from removing crosses from public monuments to restricting mothers wearing headscarves on school trips (Agence France-Presse 2018; Teeple 2015). Germany's *open neutrality*, affirmed in the 2021 ruling permitting teachers' headscarves, explicitly rejects the French model (H'Madoun 2020). The UK's moderate secularism enables greater religious visibility, even overseeing Sharia-compliant banking through financial authorities (Cattelan 2023; Modood 2019). Spain exemplifies transitional secularization where religious symbols increasingly represent cultural heritage rather than living faith, a *culturalized religion* that maintains presence while diluting meaning (Astor – Mayrl 2022).

Latin America offers a radically different model. Despite constitutional secularism, religious symbolism saturates public life without generating European-style conflicts because states approach religious visibility pragmatically rather

than ideologically. Mexico hosts millions at the Basilica of Guadalupe, reflecting lived religion in an enchanted modernity where modernity transforms rather than eliminates religion (Da Costa et al. 2021). Brazil's debates focus on practical funding for religious monuments rather than principled opposition to visibility. Argentina negotiates crucifix placement through democratic dialogue rather than civilizational conflict (Vives 2018).

The key difference lies in how societies understand relationships between religious visibility and state neutrality. European states often operate with zero-sum logic: religious symbols either dominate or face exclusion. Latin America suggests a third option where religious symbols can be simultaneously sacred for believers and cultural for others, though this model comes with its own challenges around authentic religious freedom versus cultural reduction. Yet beneath these visible conflicts lies a deeper challenge: accommodating worldviews that reject Western secular categories entirely.

4.5. Indigenous spiritualities and postcolonial secularism in Latin America

While Western, Central, and Eastern Europe lack significant indigenous populations, the challenges that indigenous spiritualities pose to secular governance illuminate the structural tensions inherent in modern secular frameworks. The core issue is not simply the accommodation of additional religious groups, but the encounter between secular legal categories and worldviews that do not conform to Western distinctions between religion, culture, politics, and knowledge. Indigenous ontologies often integrate spirituality with territorial belonging, communal authority, and cosmological order, thereby challenging regulatory systems built upon the separation of belief from social and political life (De la Cadena 2010).

Across Latin America, constitutional reforms and judicial developments increasingly recognize indigenous spiritual traditions as collective systems of meaning and practice rather than as privatized beliefs. Bolivia's 2009 Constitution explicitly acknowledges indigenous cosmovisions within a plurinational framework, expanding secular governance toward epistemological pluralism (Constitute Project 2009 Art. 4). Colombia's Constitutional Court has recognized rivers and territories as rights-bearing entities grounded in indigenous spiritual worldviews, incorporating relational ontologies into secular legal reasoning (Cano 2018). In Guatemala, the state recognition of Maya spiritual authorities in family law reflects the emergence of legally plural arrangements in which indigenous religious practices acquire formal institutional standing (Sieder 2020). Mexico's post-San Andrés frameworks, Peru's protection of sacred sites, Ecua-

dor's incorporation of Buen Vivir, and Bolivia's inclusion of yatiris in state ceremonies further illustrate how Latin American states have begun to negotiate the limits of secular categories when confronted with indigenous spiritual claims (Díaz 2019; Caria – Domínguez 2016; Schilling-Vacaflor – Flemmer 2020; De la Cadena 2020).

These developments demonstrate that indigenous spiritualities challenge not only the neutrality of the secular state but also the epistemological foundations through which religion becomes legally intelligible. Indigenous claims frequently enter public institutions framed as cultural heritage, environmental protection, or collective rights rather than as matters of religious freedom, revealing the selective recognition produced by secular governance regimes (De la Cadena 2015). This translation process exposes how secular law privileges certain forms of religion shaped by Christian and European historical experience while marginalizing relational, territorial, and cosmological forms of spirituality.

From a comparative perspective, the analytical value of indigenous cases does not lie in their social equivalence to European minority religions, which emerge from fundamentally different historical and political conditions. Rather, they highlight the shared epistemological tensions that arise when secular governance encounters worldviews that resist the privatization of religion and the functional separation of spiritual authority from communal life (Tym 2024). In this sense, indigenous experiences illuminate the structural limits of secular regulatory frameworks without implying comparable social positions or policy prescriptions.

Processes of pluri-confessional secularization are visible here in an expanded form. Secular governance increasingly extends beyond the management of denominational plurality toward experimental accommodations of epistemological diversity. Indigenous claims compel states to renegotiate the conceptual boundaries of religion itself, prompting institutional responses that blur inherited distinctions between religion, culture, law, and politics. Rather than adding another confessional layer to plural societies, indigenous spiritual revitalization reveals a deeper transformation in which secular governance confronts ontological pluralism as a political and legal problem.

At the same time, these dynamics unfold within complex religious fields marked by internal contestation. The rapid expansion of evangelical movements within indigenous communities has generated conflicts over spiritual authority and social organization, as traditional practices are sometimes delegitimized as incompatible with Christian doctrine (Garrard – Burnett 2016). Latin American states have generally addressed these tensions through pluralistic legal frameworks that seek to protect competing religious claims without privileging a single religious actor, further illustrating the adaptive character of secular governance under conditions of intensified diversity.

Indigenous movements' refusal to separate spiritual, political, and ecological domains thus points to alternative configurations of governance in which relationships with land, non-human entities, and ancestral authority occupy a central place (De la Cadena 2015). Within the framework of pluri-confessional secularization, these cases foreground a dimension of secular governance in which the challenge is not only to accommodate multiple religions, but to recalibrate the epistemic terms through which religion is recognized, regulated, and governed in democratic legal orders.

4.6. Digital religion: transnational challenges beyond borders

The digital transformation presents European states with religious governance challenges that legal frameworks cannot adequately address. Traditional tools of concordats, registration requirements, and public space regulations become largely irrelevant when religious authority flows through Instagram stories and TikTok videos. This challenge affects all European states but manifests differently across regions.

In Central and Eastern Europe, digital platforms have amplified existing religious-political movements. Poland's *Radio Maryja* expanded the Church's influence exponentially through digital channels, spreading ultraconservative Catholic-nationalist messaging to Polish diaspora communities across Europe despite regulatory attempts in multiple jurisdictions (Wysocka 2008). Beyond radio, *Radio Maryja TV* and YouTube channels broadcast political sermons and religious commentary, reinforcing conservative positions on abortion and LGBTQ+ issues while mobilizing voters during elections (Płachecka 2022). In Hungary, religious content creators such as *777blog.hu* and YouTube channels linked to Fidesz-aligned Catholic groups reach audiences far beyond national borders with content that blends faith and nationalist narratives, actively shaping debates about migration and family policy (Andok et al. 2023).

In Slovakia, digital platforms have become central to the efforts of Marian pilgrimage sites to promote religious-national identity during political campaigns (Bielicki 2019). Meanwhile, foreign religious influencers, such as American evangelical YouTube preachers, shape domestic discourse in Romania by promoting conservative social values, despite having no physical presence (Stan – Turcescu 2021).

Western European states face different digital challenges. While CEE governments leverage digital platforms to amplify religious nationalism, Western states confront the opposite problem: regulating religious content they perceive as threatening secular values. France's 2021 anti-separatism law represents Europe's first major attempt to apply *laïcité* principles to online spaces,

monitoring religious content to combat separatism, yet complicating distinctions between legitimate religious expression and extremism (Yeung 2021; Robert – Kaya 2023). Germany and the UK face analogous dilemmas, struggling to regulate online hate speech that claims religious justification while protecting legitimate religious expression without clear criteria for distinguishing between them.

Latin America's earlier encounter with digital religion provides both warnings and models. Brazil's digital pastors, with millions of followers but no institutional affiliation, created a religious authority entirely outside traditional structures. Pastor André Valadão's 6 million Instagram followers make him more influential than many denominational leaders, yet when his sermons faced a hate speech investigation, authorities struggled to apply frameworks designed for physical pulpits to virtual platforms (Andrade – Dib 2024).

The Vatican's social media outreach connects millions across Latin America. Pope Francis's 2020 documentary statements expressed an openness to civil union legal protections for same sex couples (comments that emerged from a 2019 interview initially edited by Vatican communications), yet did not represent formal Church teaching, and were subsequently clarified by Vatican officials, nonetheless demonstrating how digital circulation may transform papal remarks into global political discourse instantaneously (Lynch 2018; Winfield – Verza 2020; Vatican Secretariat of State 2020).

Digital spaces also offer opportunities for marginalized religious communities. Mapuche communities in Chile use platforms to preserve sacred traditions while building global support. The #MachiLibertad campaign simultaneously defended imprisoned spiritual leaders and educated worldwide audiences about Mapuche cosmology (Schlosberg – Carruthers 2010; Millaleo 2020). Similarly, European minority religious communities (from British Muslims to Romanian Pentecostals) use digital platforms to maintain their identity and resist assimilationist pressures.

The emergence of religious *influencers*, new authorities operating outside traditional oversight, is the greatest challenge. Unlike institutional religious leaders subject to registration, taxation, and regulation, digital religious entrepreneurs operate in regulatory gray zones between protected religious expression and commercial activity (Campbell – Evolvi 2020). Their hybrid commercial-religious activities, selling courses, merchandise, and *blessings*, defy classification within frameworks designed to operate with clear institutional boundaries.

European attempts at regulation reveal the complexity of applying territorial secular principles to de-territorialized religious expression. The questions multiply: How can France maintain *laïcité* when French citizens receive religious instruction from global sources? How can Germany's church tax system function when believers increasingly follow online rather than institutional authori-

ties? How can Poland defend Catholic national identity when young Poles engage with globalized religious content?

Latin America's struggle offers no easy solutions but suggests that adaptation rather than resistance may be the only viable path. Attempts to strictly control digital religious expression often prove both ineffective and counterproductive. Instead, states might need new categories, thereby acknowledging how digital transformation is fundamentally altering religious authority and community. For European states (whether defending traditional arrangements in the East or managing pluralism in the West), this represents an uncomfortable reality: the digital era has already transformed religious landscapes in ways no border fence, concordat, or *laïcité* law can reverse. Collectively, these challenges, from concordats to cyberspace, reveal the inadequacy of classical secularization theory and demand new paradigms.

5. Pluri-confessional secularization: toward a new governance paradigm

5.1. Secularism beyond decline: redefining the religious presence in democracy

"Pluri-confessional secularization" emerges as an analytical framework for synthesizing three theoretical perspectives. First, Modood and Sealy's (2022) political secularism emphasizes the pragmatic accommodation of religious diversity within state frameworks. Second, Stepan's (2000) twin tolerations establish that consolidated democracy requires religious and political institutions to maintain minimum boundaries of mutual freedom of action. Third, the intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991; Bilge 2013) reveals how religious identities interweave with gender, ethnicity, and class in specific power configurations. Unlike French assertive secularism, pluri-confessional secularization does not seek religious exclusion from public spaces. Unlike German cooperative neutrality, it does not presuppose established national churches. Unlike British multiculturalism, it attends specifically to religious dimensions of diversity beyond ethnic cultural categories. The framework proposes five requirements for effective governance: (1) institutional separation without hostility toward religion; (2) the equitable recognition of multiple religious traditions; (3) the protection of individual rights within religious communities; (4) spaces for religious participation in public deliberation; and (5) mechanisms for managing conflicts between religious rights and other fundamental rights.

Classical secularization theory expected religion to fade from public life, but contemporary evidence challenges this linear narrative. Historical secularization, driven by capitalism and technological development, reshaped but did not eliminate religion's interaction with human rights and government systems (Mallimaci 2017). Religious institutions, once politically neutral to preserve their influence (Vallier 1970), now engage directly in political processes. Liberation theology pioneered this shift by linking faith to social justice activism (Levine 2009). While Catholic politics oscillated between collaboration and confrontation, Protestant and Pentecostal churches pursued increasingly direct political engagement (Boas et al. 2019; Freston – Cooper 2024).

This transformation manifests through religious activism that shapes politics and society across Latin America and Europe through three key mechanisms. First, democratic transitions have opened up spaces for religious pluralism, as seen in the rise of Pentecostalism in the Netherlands (Vermeer – Scheepers 2021), Hungary (Lavrič – Flere 2015), and Poland (Vékony 2023), forcing the Catholic Church to compete with other denominations (Hale 2017). Second, religious organizations have become strategic partners in social service provision, filling gaps in Germany (Becker 2018), the UK (Nistor 2019), France (Boudreaux 2006), Italy (Ascoli – Artoli 2019), and Sweden (Nordgren – Richert 2023). Third, they have gained moral authority through peacebuilding efforts in Peru, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Brazil, translating this into political capital (Alcalá 2018).

5.2. Balancing religious legitimacy and democratic authority

The growing involvement of religious institutions across the public domain creates hurdles for maintaining democratic legitimacy. While democratic legitimacy derives from electoral mandates, religious organizations base their legitimacy on divine command, sometimes leading to tensions in rational policy discussions (Gullco 2016). This tension becomes particularly acute when religious actors claim authority over legislative matters in which democratic deliberation requires openness to changing social consensus. Religious participation in civil life must find its equilibrium by upholding democratic standards.

European states are adopting divergent institutional approaches to handle these difficulties. Germany works with churches through its partnership system, while Sweden authorizes registered faith groups and France regulates public religious expression through its assertive *laïcité* framework. However, Fidesz in Hungary exemplifies the drawbacks of political power using Christian identity as an instrument for political objectives (Vékony 2023).

An alternative model, citizenship-centered secularism, is gaining traction. Inspired by the Universal Declaration for Laicity (2003), this paradigm prior-

itizes freedom of conscience as a fundamental value, the independence of institutional bodies from religious directives in policy formation, and equal rights for all citizens belonging to different religious groups.

Such an arrangement would support Latin American freedom of religion equality while adapting to European religious diversity (Roberts 2023; Esquivel 2008). However, implementation challenges persist. Kolenc (2018) critiques European secularism, suggesting that strict government control over religious expression risks undermining pluralism, particularly affecting minority communities seeking public recognition.

6. Conclusion: toward inclusive and adaptive secular governance

This comparative analysis has examined religious governance across Western, Central, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, revealing both regionally specific configurations and cross-regional patterns of secular regulation. Rather than proposing unidirectional policy transfer, the analysis identifies structural similarities and divergences that illuminate institutional options available to secular democracies confronting sustained religious pluralization.

For Latin America, the findings indicate that pluri-confessional secularization constitutes not merely a theoretical construct but an emergent governance reality. The region demonstrates how formally secular states have developed adaptive arrangements capable of accommodating rapid religious diversification without abandoning constitutional commitments to neutrality. Brazil's management of evangelical–Catholic competition through democratic channels, Chile's incorporation of Afro-Caribbean religious diversity, and Bolivia's constitutional recognition of indigenous cosmovisions illustrate how secular governance is being recalibrated in practice. At the same time, these cases expose persistent tensions, including the commodification of religion through digital platforms, conflicts between indigenous spiritualities and expanding evangelical movements, and the enduring institutional weight of historical Catholic privileges. Pluri-confessional arrangements thus appear less as settled constitutional end-points than as ongoing processes of institutional negotiation.

Situated comparatively, the Latin American cases highlight patterns of relevance across European contexts. For Western Europe, the analysis points to four dynamics: religious expansion managed through competitive fields rather than regulatory exclusion; the challenge of extending historical concordat regimes to new religious actors, particularly Muslim communities arriving through migration; growing strain on rigid *laïcité* models under conditions of visible plurality; and digitalization's destabilizing effects on territorially anchored regulatory

frameworks. Latin American trajectories thus function less as transferable solutions than as comparative indicators of emerging governance dilemmas.

The concept of pluri-confessional secularization provides a relevant analytical framework for Central and Eastern Europe, where secular governance remains entangled with post-communist nation-building, religious revival, and contested national identities. Defensive secularism grounded in Christian civilizational narratives risks eroding democratic legitimacy by recasting religious diversity as an existential threat. Comparative evidence suggests that concordat regimes sustain institutional stability when progressively recalibrated to include additional faith communities rather than mobilized as instruments of exclusion.

The accelerating digital transformation of religious life further intensifies these challenges. As authority and mobilization increasingly circulate through digital infrastructures rather than established ecclesiastical channels, secular states confront expanding tensions between protecting religious freedom and the politicization of faith. Perhaps most significantly, the constitutional incorporation of indigenous spiritualities in Latin America highlights that contemporary secular governance increasingly encounters epistemological limits embedded in European-derived models of religion and politics.

Taken together, these findings suggest that effective secular governance in plural societies depends less on rigid institutional formulas than on adaptive frameworks capable of mediating between historical religious establishments, migration-driven diversification, hybrid religious-political mobilizations, and challenges to secular categories posed by non-Western worldviews. For European democracies, the path forward lies neither in inflexible secularism that alienates religious majorities nor in religious nationalism that marginalizes minorities. The model of pluri-confessional secularization advanced here captures a dynamic equilibrium oriented towards protecting freedom of conscience, preserving institutional neutrality, and sustaining a plural public sphere in which diverse religious actors may participate without domination.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Dr. Eszter Kirs (Corvinus University of Budapest) for her insightful comments and guidance throughout the development of this article. The author also acknowledges the support of the Tempus Public Foundation, which has funded his doctoral studies.

Bibliography

- Agence France-Presse. (2018). *Pope Jean-Paul II statue moved to avoid French secularism laws*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/20180611-pope-jean-paul-ii-statue-moved-avoid-french-secularism-laws>
- Alcalá, F. G. (2018). La invención del espacio político en América Latina: Laicidad y secularización en perspectiva. ¿Por qué no podemos ver la diversidad religiosa? *Religião & Sociedade*, 38(2), 288–319. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0100-85872018v38n2cap04>
- Alves, T. (2022). *Evangelicals: The rising political base that could impact Brazil's elections*. Brazil Reports. <https://www.brazilreports.com/evangelicals-the-rising-political-base-that-could-impact-brazils-elections/2981/>
- Andersen, T. B., & Jensen, P. S. (2019). Preaching democracy: The Second Vatican Council and the third wave. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 47(3), 525–540. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2019.03.005>
- Andok, M., Szilczl, D., & Radetzky, A. (2023). Hungarian religious creatives—Comparative analysis. *Religions*, 14(1), Article 97. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010097>
- Andrade, M., & Dib, D. (2024, July 8). *Conservative evangelicals use social media to sway Brazil election*. Rest of World. <https://restofworld.org/2024/brazil-election-evangelical-youtubers/>
- Ascoli, U., & Arlotti, M. (2019). Religiously oriented welfare organizations in Italy before and after the Great Recession. In *Toward a more relevant role in the provision of social services?* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77297-4_3
- Associated Press. (2025). *Romanians flock to a new cathedral that is the world's largest Orthodox church*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/e06e3f-275ca32c8796934390fb385327>
- Astor, A., & Mayrl, D. (2022). Culturalized religion: A synthetic review and agenda for research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 61(1), 269–287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12661>
- Balsam, S. (2023). Refugee policy in Europe. *Political Science International*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.33140/psi.01.01.06>
- Barros, J., & Tavares, C. Q. (2024). The temple is also a place for politics. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 46, 1–20. [https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.46\(2024\).5796](https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.46(2024).5796)
- Barry, O. (2019). *In Orban's Hungary, refugees are unwelcome – so are those who try to help*. The World. <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-02-11/orban-s-hungary-refugees-are-unwelcome-so-are-those-who-try-help>
- Beauchemin, C., Hamel, C., & Simon, P. (2016). *Trajectoires et origines: Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France*. INED Éditions. <https://www.ined.fr/fr/publications/editions/grandes-enquetes/trajectoires-et-origines/>

- Beaumont, J., Eder, K., & Mendieta, E. (2020). Reflexive secularization? *European Journal of Social Theory*, 23(3), 291–309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431018813769>
- Becker, T. (2018). Religious organizations as providers of social services in Germany. In M. J. Gill (Ed.), *Religion and public policy: A German-American comparison* (pp. 155–170). American Institute for Contemporary German Studies. <https://americangerman.institute/wpcontent/uploads/2011/10/germanamerican9.pdf>
- Bielicki, A. (2019). Inconvenient national discourse and the people who walk to hear it. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 8(1), 35–54. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00801003>
- Bilge, S. (2013). Intersectionality undone. *Du Bois Review*, 10(2), 405–424. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000283>
- Boas, T. C., Kapiszewski, I. D., Levitsky, S., & Yashar, D. J. (2019). Expanding the public square. In S. Levitsky et al. (Eds.), *The inclusionary turn in Latin American democracies* (pp. 242–268). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108895835.012>
- Boudreaux, D. E. (2006). *The French Council for the Muslim Faith* (Master's thesis). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/a28e678a-a1ed-4916-9864-65aa39851c1e/content>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2008). *2008 report on international freedom of religion – Germany*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/usdos/2008/en/62035>
- Campbell, H. A., & Evolvi, G. (2020). Contextualizing digital religion research. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149>
- Cano Pecharroman, L. (2018). Rights of nature. *Resources*, 7(1), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/resources7010013>
- Caria, S., & Domínguez, R. (2016). Ecuador's Buen Vivir. *Latin American Perspectives*, 43(1), 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X15611126>
- Casanova, J. (2009). The secular and secularisms. *Social Research*, 76(4), 1049–1066. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2009.0064>
- Cattelan, V. (2013). *Islamic finance in Europe: Towards a plural financial system*. Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781002513>
- Cesari, J., & McLoughlin, S. (2005). *European Muslims and the secular state*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315255927>
- Clayer, N. (2003). *Religion et nation chez les Albanais, XIXe–XXe siècles*. Acta Ottomanica. <https://doi.org/10.25673/105093>

- Constitute Project. (2009). *Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia* (Art. 4). https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Bolivia_2009.pdf
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- d’Urso, A. S., & Bonilla, T. (2023). Religion or race? Using intersectionality to examine the role of Muslim identity and evaluations on belonging in the United States. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, 8(2), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2023.7>
- Da Costa, N., Morello, G., Rabbia, H. H., & Romero, C. (2021). Exploring the non-affiliated in South America. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 89(2), 562–587. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab045>
- De la Cadena, M. (2015). *Earth beings: Ecologies of practice across Andean worlds*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375265>
- De la Cadena, M. (2020). Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual reflections beyond “politics.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 34(4), 545–569. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x>
- Díaz, J. C. (2019). Review of *Kuxlejal politics: Indigenous autonomy, race, and decolonizing research in Zapatista communities*. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 108, Article Rev. 2. <https://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10517>
- Díez-Picazo, L. (2021). *Sistema de derechos fundamentales* (2nd ed.). Tirant lo Blanch. <https://editorial.tirant.com/es/libro/sistema-de-derechos-fundamentales-2-edicion-luis-maria-diez-picazo-9791370107307>
- ECtHR. (2005). *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* (Application No. 44774/98). HUDOC. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-70956>
- Esquivel, J. C. (2008). Laicidades relativas: Avatares de la relación Estado–Iglesia en Brasil. In R. Blancarte (Ed.), *Los retos de la laicidad y la secularización en el mundo contemporáneo* (pp. 13–41). El Colegio de México. <https://books.google.hu/books?id=lv92Kqb1GfwC>
- Finke, R. (1990). Religious deregulation: Origins and consequences. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29(3), 363–378. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/32.3.609>
- Finke, R. (2013). Presidential address: Origins and consequences of religious freedoms: A global overview. *Sociology of Religion*, 74(3), 297–313. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srt011>
- Freston, P., & Cooper, T. (2024). *Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Latin America*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195174762.001.0001>
- Friedman, E. M. (2024). *Refugees or migrants: Polish reception to Ukrainian and Syrian refugee crises (2015/2022)* (Senior thesis). Fordham University. https://research.library.fordham.edu/international_senior/149

- Garrard-Burnett, V. (2016). Living with ghosts: Death, exhumation, and reburial among the Maya in Guatemala. *Latin American Perspectives*, 43(6), 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X15570881>
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316848593>
- Greenberg, U. (2019). Catholics, Protestants, and the violent birth of European religious pluralism. *American Historical Review*, 124(2), 511–538. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz252>
- Grzymała-Busse, A. (2015). *Nations under God: How churches use moral authority to influence policy*. Princeton University Press. <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691164755/nations-under-god>
- Gudiño Bessone, P. (2022). Discursos y repertorios de acción colectiva del activismo antiabortista: Emociones y producción de subjetividades contra la ley de IVE (Argentina, 2018). In M. A. Peñas Defago, M. C. Sgró Ruata, & M. C. Johnson (Eds.), *Neoconservadurismos y política sexual: Discursos, estrategias y cartografías de Argentina* (pp. 181–214). Ediciones del Puente. <http://hdl.handle.net/11336/233758>
- Gullco, H. (2016). *Libertad religiosa: Aspectos jurídicos*. Ediciones Didot. <https://www.edicionesdidot.com/sitio/uploads/archivos/20200624-123926.pdf>
- Hale, C. (2017). Religious institutions and collective action: The Catholic Church and political activism in indigenous Chiapas and Yucatán. *Politics and Religion*, 10(4), 700–727. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048317000426>
- Helbling, M., & Kalkum, D. (2017). Migration policy trends in OECD countries. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(12), 1779–1797. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1361466>
- Hernández Sandoval. (2009). Book review. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 89(1), 199–200. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-2008-079>
- H'madoun, M. (2020). *Case watch: German court sides with Muslim women teachers over discriminatory headscarf ban*. Open Society Justice Initiative. <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/voices/case-watch-german-court-sides-with-muslim-women-teachers-over-discriminatory-headscarf-ban>
- IACoHR. (2001). *Case of Olmedo-Bustos et al. v. Chile* (Series C No. 73). https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_73_ing.pdf
- Jaksic, I., & Posada Carbó, E. (2011). *Liberalismo y poder: Latinoamérica en el siglo XIX*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-65682011000300025>
- Karpov, V., Lisovskaya, E., & Barry, D. (2012). Ethnodoxy: How popular ideologies fuse religious and ethnic identities. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 51(4), 638–655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2012.01678.x>

- Kolenc, A. B. (2018). Religion lessons from Europe: Intolerant secularism, pluralistic neutrality, and the U.S. Supreme Court. *Pace International Law Review*, 30(1), Article 43. <https://doi.org/10.58948/2331-3536.1372>
- Krukowski, J. (2014). Funkcje stabilizacyjne konkordatu między Stolicą Apostolską a Rzeczpospolitą Polską z 1993 r. w procesie normalizacji stosunków państwo–kościół. *Politeja*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.12797/politeja.11.2014.29.15>
- Kuru, A. T. (2007). Passive and assertive secularism: Historical conditions, ideological struggles, and state policies toward religion. *World Politics*, 59(4), 568–594. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2008.0005>
- Lavrič, M., & Flere, S. (2015). Divergent trends in legal recognition of religious entities in Europe: The cases of Slovenia and Hungary. *Politics and Religion*, 8(2), 286–304. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048315000140>
- Levine, D. (2009). The future of Christianity. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 41(1), 121–145. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X08005130>
- Liro, J., Sołjan, I., & Bilska-Wodecka, E. (2022). Symbolic religious landscape: Religious and patriotic symbolism in the pilgrimage centres in Poland. *Religions*, 14(1), Article 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010033>
- López, Á. L. (2016). La asistencia religiosa a las fuerzas armadas en América Latina. *Revista Latinoamericana de Derecho y Religión*, 2(2), 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.7764/rldr.3.29>
- Lorenz, A., & Anders, L. H. (Eds.). (2021). *Illiberal trends and anti-EU politics in East Central Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54674-8>
- Lužný, D., & Navrátilová, J. (2001). Religion and secularisation in the Czech Republic. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 37(1), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2001.37.11.13>
- Lynch, A. (2018). Digital Catholicism: The Internet and the Vatican. In *Digital religion* (pp. 31–46). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7802-6_3
- Mallimaci, F. (2017). Modernidades religiosas latinoamericanas: Un renovado debate epistemológico y conceptual. *Caravelle: Cahiers du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien*, 108, 15–33. <https://doi.org/10.4000/caravelle.2218>
- Mill, J. S. (1851). *A system of logic, ratiocinative and inductive* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). John Parker. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26495/26495-pdf.pdf>
- Millaleo, S. (2020). Digital activism and the Mapuche Nation in Chile. In *Digital activism in Latin America* (pp. 221–243). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45394-7_11
- Modood, T., & Sealy, T. (2022). Developing a framework for a global comparative analysis of the governance of religious diversity. *Religion, State and Society*, 50(4), 362–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2022.2117526>
- Modood, T. (2019). *Essays on secularism and multiculturalism*. Rowman & Littlefield International / ECPR Press. <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/essays-on-secularism-and-multiculturalism>

- Nistor, R. (2019). The faith-based organization in the post-secular society. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Social Sciences*, 7(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenss/07>
- Nordgren, J., & Richert, T. (2023). “A free position in midfield”: A qualitative study of faith-based social work with people who use drugs in Sweden. *European Journal of Social Work*, 27(2), 401–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2023.2227774>
- OpenDemocracy. (2023, August 25). *How Guatemala elected a progressive president*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/guatemala-bernardo-arevalo-presidency-politics-candidates-election/>
- Orellana, F. (2024). Catholicism, religious diversity, and syncretism in the Latin American religious field and the immigrant religion contribution. *Social Compass*, 71(4), 641–657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686241291693>
- Página12. (2022, August 17). *Brazil: The government expands tax exemptions for pastors amid an election campaign targeting evangelicals*. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/474139-brasil-el-gobierno-amplia-la-exencion-de-impuestos-a-los-pas>
- Pew Research Center. (2013). *Brazil’s changing religious landscape*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/07/18/brazils-changing-religious-landscape/>
- Pew Research Center. (2014). *Religion in Latin America: Widespread change in a historically Catholic region*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>
- Pew Research Center. (2017a). *Religious belief and national belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>
- Pew Research Center (2017b): *Europe’s Growing Muslim Population*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>
- Pignataro, A., & Treminio, I. (2019). Reto económico, valores y religión en las elecciones nacionales de Costa Rica 2018. *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 39(2), 239–263. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2019000200239>
- Plachecka, A. (2022). Radio Maryja as an example of a Catholic fundamentalist environment. *Krakowskie Studia Małopolskie*, 1(33), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ksm20220109>
- Queiroz, C. (2019, December 19). *Public faith: Researchers around the world are attempting to understand the growth of evangelicalism in Brazil, where it is rising faster than in any other country*. *Revista Pesquisa*. <https://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/en/public-faith/>
- Radić, R. (2025). From 1990 to present: Church and state in Serbia. *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta SANU*, 73(3), 107–131. <https://doi.org/10.2298/GEI2503107R>

- Ragazzi, M. (2009). Concordats today: From the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II. *Journal of Markets & Morality*, 12(1), 113–151. <https://scispace.com/pdf/concordats-today-from-the-second-vatican-council-to-john-3boipbk91f.pdf>
- Ramet, S. (2014). The Catholic Church in post-communist Poland: Polarization, privatization, and decline in influence. In *Religion and politics in post-socialist Central and Southeastern Europe* (pp. 25–52). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137330727_2
- Republic of Peru. (1993). *Political Constitution of Peru (1993), Article 50*. Congress of the Republic. https://www.congreso.gob.pe/Docs/files/CONSTITUTION_27_11_2012_ENG.pdf
- Robert, M. V., & Kaya, A. (2023). Political drivers of Muslim youth radicalization in France: Religious radicalism as a response to nativism. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 32(3), 625–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2193734>
- Roberts, L. (2023). How exceptional is the West? An investigation of worldwide trends in societal-average levels of religiosity, 1981–2020. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 62(3), 648–671. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12860>
- Schilling-Vacaflor, A., & Flemmer, R. (2020). Mobilising free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from below: A typology of Indigenous peoples' agency. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 27(2), 291–313. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02702008>
- Schlosberg, D., & Carruthers, D. (2010). Indigenous struggles, environmental justice, and community capabilities. *Global Environmental Politics*, 10(4), 12–35. https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00029
- Setton, D. (2010). Los retos de la laicidad y la secularización en el mundo contemporáneo [Review of the book *Los retos de la laicidad y la secularización en el mundo contemporáneo*, by R. Blancarte]. *Sociedad y Religión*, 20(32–33), 246–251. https://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1853-70812010000100017
- Sheringham, O. (2013). *Transnational religious spaces, faith and the Brazilian migration experience*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137272829>
- Sieder, R. (2020). “To speak the law”: Contested jurisdictions, legal legibility, and sovereignty in Guatemala. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 43(2), 334–351. <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12374>
- Stan, L., & Turcescu, L. (2007). *Religion and politics in post-communist Romania*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048310000234>
- Stănescu, I. (2022). The curious story of the 2018 Romanian traditional family referendum: Buck-passing and the failure to mobilise voters. *Sociologie Românească*, 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.18.2.3>
- Stepan, A. (2000). Religion, democracy, and the “twin tolerations.” *Journal of Democracy*, 11(4), 55–57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2000.0088>

- Stepan, A. (2012). Religion, democracy, and the “twin tolerations.” In *Rethinking religion and world affairs* (pp. 55–72). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199827978.003.0005>
- Tateo, G. (2020). *Under the sign of the cross: The people’s salvation cathedral and the church-building industry in postsocialist Romania*. Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781789208580>
- Taylor, C. (2011). Why we need a radical redefinition of secularism. In E. Mendieta & J. VanAntwerpen (Eds.), *The power of religion in the public sphere* (pp. 34–59). Columbia University Press.
- Taylor, J. B., Gershon, S. A., & Pantoja, A. D. (2014). Christian America? Understanding the link between churches, attitudes, and “being American” among Latino immigrants. *Politics and Religion*, 7(2), 339–365. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048314000042>
- Teeple Hopkins, C. (2015). Social reproduction in France: Religious dress laws and *laïcité*. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 48, 154–164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.09.002>
- Topidi, K. (2019). Religious freedom, national identity, and the Polish Catholic Church: Converging visions of nation and God. *Religions*, 10(5), 293. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10050293>
- Tym, C. (2024). Indigenous knowledge and ontological difference? Ontological pluralism, secular public reason, and knowledge between Indigenous Amazonia and the West. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 66(2), 267–293. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417523000440>
- Vallier, I. (1970). Catholicism, social control, and modernisation in Latin America. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12(2), 210–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627039200140>
- Vatican Secretariat of State. (2020). *Vatican Secretariat of State provides context of Pope Francis’s civil union remark*. Catholic News Agency. <https://www.catholic-newsagency.com/news/46431/vatican-secretariat-of-state-provides-context-of-pope-francis-civil-union-remark>
- Vékony, D., & Račius, E. (2023). Governance of religious diversity in Central Europe: A religious nationalism inspired illiberal turn in Hungary and Slovakia? *Ethnicities*, 24(2), 270–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968231209517>
- Vermeer, P., & Scheepers, P. (2021). Church growth in times of secularization: A case study of people joining evangelical congregations in the Netherlands. *Review of Religious Research*, 63(1), 43–66. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-020-00434-x>
- Vives, J. M. (2018). Freedom of religion without equality? Religious minorities and the establishment of religion in Argentina. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 33(3), 450–464. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2018.32>

- Vladár, V. (2021). The legal regulation of religious symbols in the public sphere in Slovakia. In P. Sobczyk (Ed.), *Religious symbols in the public sphere: Analysis on certain Central European countries* (pp. 171–210). Studies of the Central European Professors' Network. <https://doi.org/10.54237/profnet.2021.psr6>
- Weisse, W. (2016). Religious pluralization and secularization in continental Europe, with focus on France and Germany. *Society*, 53(1), 32–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-015-9969-0>
- Winfield, N., & Verza, M. (2020, October 23). *Pope Francis' civil union quote was filmed—but not aired—in 2019, broadcaster says*. *America Magazine*. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/10/23/pope-francis-civil-union-quote-was-filmed-not-aired-2019-broadcaster-says/>
- Winslow, A. M. (2016). Shifting immigration policies in response to the Syrian refugee crisis across the European Union: A case analysis of Germany, Hungary, and Lithuania. *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union*, 2016(1), 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.5642/urceu.201601.09>
- Wohlrab-Sahr, M., & Burchardt, M. (2013). Multiple secularities: Religion and modernity in the global age—Introduction. *International Sociology*, 28(6), 605–611. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580913510540>
- Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2012). Multiple secularities: Toward a cultural sociology of secular modernities. *Comparative Sociology*, 11(6), 875–909. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111254005-045>
- Wysocka, O. (2008). Populizm i Radio Maryja. *Znak*, 640(9), 61–74. <https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/10127/calosc/populizm-i-radio-maryja/>
- Yeung, P. (2021, February 15). *La controvertida ley sobre el “separatismo” en Francia: Siete aspectos clave*. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/15/frances-controversial-separatism-bill-explained>
- Zdanowicz, M. (2023). The migration crisis on the Polish–Belarusian border. *Białostockie Studia Prawnicze*, 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.15290/bsp.2023.28.01.06>