

Introduction

The decline of popular involvement in the Christian churches in Europe has generally been accompanied by a shortening of the reach of religion. Churches can no longer plausibly command the population at large and indeed have difficulty exercising discipline over their own members. Although Bryan Wilson often pointed to a decline in such indices of personal religiosity as church attendance and church membership as evidence of secularization, he actually defined it as the decreasing social significance of religion (Wilson 1966: xiv). One important and common element of that loss of social significance is the retreat of religion from the public sphere. The details differ interestingly from country to country but most modern democracies have evolved a clear distinction between the private and public worlds. We have become increasingly tolerant of religious deviation in private (indeed the very phrase 'religious deviation' is passé) while expecting the public sphere to be largely secular.

There are two analytically separable elements to religion's loss of public presence: the loss of social functions and the loss of political power. A common characteristic of modernization is the expansion of the state's activities in important social fields such as health care, social welfare and education. That expansion has generally been secular either because churches have been unable to expand such provision or because religious diversity prevented any one church being able to act as a viable and legitimate conduit for state-funded expansion. Where churches have continued to provide social functions such as education and nursing care, the specifically religious content has generally diminished so that the education provided by Catholic and Anglican schools in Britain, for example, differs little from that provided by state outlets.

The second common characteristic of modernization is the expansion of universal rights or, to put it the other way round, rights are no longer allocated on the basis of religious identity. Until 1829 British Catholics were not entitled to vote. Until 1871 only conforming members of the Church of England were entitled to graduate from the University of Oxford. In 1860 Swedes were allowed to leave the national Lutheran Church but only to join another approved church. It was not until 1951 that Swedes were permitted to have no religion (Bruce 1999: 92-93). Such religious constraints on freedom are now unthinkable. The governments of modern liberal democracies may encourage churches as important actors in civil society but churches generally exercise very little political power.

In brief, modernization has generally been accompanied by the *privatization* of religion. It is worth adding, because it is relevant for our guesses about the future, that the privatization of religion was rarely a result of secularist animus towards religion. Scholars such as Talal Asad who wish to argue that contemporary church-state relations are a product of conscious secularism base their conclusions on too selective a genealogy of the current public/private divide (Asad 1993). The absence of a state church in the USA, for example, owes far more to the fact that the early colonies had a variety of state churches and hence could not agree on which it should be than it does to secularism among the founding fathers. Similarly in the UK the gradual loss of power and influence by the state churches resulted from there being two different state churches (Episcopalian in England; Presbyterian in Scotland) and a great deal of religious dissent. If diversity is one driver of a secular public sphere, the other (which church leaders neglect to mention when they complain about their current impotence) is the shrinking pool of the faithful. Even the once-hegemonic churches

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could appreciate that their claims to power could not be sustained once they had been abandoned by the majority of the population.

The De-Privatization of Religion

Despite indices of involvement in organized religion declining across Europe for the last 50 years (and starting to decline in the USA), the sociological secularization paradigm has been much criticised by sociologists of religion (Bruce 2010). Some of that criticism has been based on caricatures of what the secularization paradigm requires. More sensible attempts at refutation have concentrated on evidence for an enduring interest in religion (or spirituality) despite the decline of the churches. For example, Davie has argued that Britons are 'believing but not belonging' (Berger et al 2008) and Heelas and Woodhead (2008) have claimed that holistic spirituality is taking the place of religion. Until recently most critics of secularization (for example, Berger et al 2008: 13-4) accepted the general point of the privatization observation.

However, this too is now being questioned. One text that is frequently cited in the argument is Jose Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994) which brought together the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and Catholic liberation theology to make the case that since the 1980s religion has been re-asserting a public presence. One can question the relevance of Islamic fundamentalism to this debate. Most Muslim countries were never secular in terms of popular religiosity or the social functions of religious institutions and such privatization of religion as they displayed was the result of imposition by an unrepresentative elite pursuing modernization by imitating elements of Western secularity that suited their political strategies. More to the point is Casanova's argument that since the Catholic Church ceased to claim unique theocratic authority it has been effective in the public sphere as a representative of general human rights. But as Casanova's point can readily be re-phrased as religious organizations being effective in the public sphere when they play by secular rules, that seems confirmation, rather than refutation of, the privatization point.

Kaufmann (2006) and much of Western Europe's right-wing press suggests that the migration to the West of significant numbers of Muslims challenges the secularist accommodation that Western societies have evolved over the last hundred years. Conservative Muslims turn the logic of liberal democracy against the culture it has produced by claiming the freedom, for example, to maintain inequitable gender roles, to preserve their beliefs from public ridicule or criticism, and to make public displays of their faith. The assertiveness of some Islamic groups has encouraged some Christians to become correspondingly demanding. British church leaders have taken to complaining that the government is overly respectful of Muslim concerns and indifferent to Christian ones. The following is a selection of British new stories from 2009: a Christian Registrar refused to administer the civil partnership ceremonies for gay couples; a Christian bus driver refused to drive a bus that displayed an advert for agnosticism; an air hostess defied her airlines injunction against the wearing of conspicuous jewellery in order to display a crucifix; and a Christian social worker refused to vet gay couples for adoption. As Steve Kettell (2009) has pointed out, Christian church leaders have two very different stories about the public sphere. They disavow any interest in theocracy and claim they want no more than a voice proportionate to their numbers in the general population (though when setting a figure on that voice they do prefer the 71 per cent who ticked the Christian box in the 2001 census to the less than 10 per cent who regularly attend church services). Yet when they have lost some issue on numbers, they claim the right to ignore the result on the grounds of religious privilege. For example, in 2010 the Pope criticised the British government's equality legislation on the grounds that his God said Christians should discriminate against homosexuals (Butt 2010).

Conservative Christians hope that Christianity will regain influence as atheists and marginally Christian people react to Islamic assertiveness by becoming believers or becoming more active in their faith. As yet there is no evidence of such a revival in the ranks of the Godly, which makes the currently popular talk of a 'post-secular Europe' rather misleading, but there is no doubt that religion has become troublesome in a way that has not been the case in most of Western Europe since the nineteenth century.

Although Achterberg et al (2009) do not claim to identify a Christian revival, they find an interesting pattern in recurrent international survey data. Christian desire for religion to have a greater public role is highest in countries where Christians are relatively least numerous. Furthermore, Dutch data covering the period 1970 to 1996 suggests that the decline in the number of Christians in the Netherlands has coincided with 'a strengthening of the call for public religion among the remaining faithful' and with 'increased polarization about this with the nonreligious' (2009: 867).

That polarization suggests an alternative to deprivatization. While it is always possible that religion becoming contentious may encourage the faithful to become more assertive and may even shift a few marginal Christians into the committed Christian camp, it seems highly unlikely that people who have not been socialised into Christian beliefs and practice in childhood and hence who do not share a Christian perspective on public affairs will react to Islamic assertiveness by espousing a faith for which they have previously shown no interest or inclination. Instead of distinguishing between good and bad religion, it seems more likely that they will take the view that any religion taken too seriously is a threat to public order and become consciously committed to the public-private divide. To develop the title of the essay by Achterberg et al, it may well be that an increasing proportion of the diminishing number of Christians will wish to cancel 'the secularist truce' but that the unaligned majority of the population will oppose that wish.

Achterberg et al's talk of 'waning religious deprivatization' may be misleading or at least premature. Their data concerns attitudes and, as the English proverb notes, there is many a slip betwixt cup and lip. Privatization is a social phenomenon which results at least in part from unintended consequences. It did not come, and it certainly will not go, just because some people wish that end. First, they may wish their religion to be more publicly influential than it used to be but they may wish others things more. That is, this particular desire may be less salient than competing ones. Second, those who welcome de-privatization may be outnumbered by those who wish to see the privatization of religion strengthened. Third, numbers may not win the battle. As with such other issues as the death penalty, the will of a majority may be over-ruled by the political elites. Nonetheless, changes in public attitudes are interesting and we will explore them.

Public Religion In The United Kingdom

Detailed tests of Davie's assertion that the British are 'believing but not belonging' have failed to find any support (Voas and Crockett 2005). A more accurate assessment would be that the majority of Britons lack a personal faith but have a general sympathy for the idea of religion when it is seen as a source of comfort for the bereaved and as a source of moral values. This seems the best explanation of the fact that significant numbers of people who never watch religious programmes on television nonetheless think that television licence holders should continue to be legally obliged to make and air such programmes and significant numbers of people who say they do not believe in God nonetheless think that schools should have daily prayers. They are generally content to have religious leaders promote general social values but are not in favour of being badgered by the churches about their own behaviour.

It would be convenient to have data from the nineteenth century, when the major changes that we gloss as the privatization of religion began in Britain but the earliest reliable

surveys come from the post-war period. In 1947 the Mass Observation (MO summarised British attitudes to religion gleaned from a detailed sample survey of residents in a London suburb (N=500) augmented by the large body of material collected from regular MO respondents. The MO found that:

broad and uninterested tolerance of religion is common – much more so than hostile feelings. ... Many people look upon religion as something quite harmless and purely personal – an innocuous hobby, like collecting stamps. One of the results of this attitude is that these same people often feel that religion is exceeding its legitimate grounds if it ‘interferes’ with more practical matters. Religion to them is all right in its place, but shouldn’t get involved in everyday affairs outside the private life of believers. (Mass Observation 1947: 84)

The way the research is analysed and reported does not allow us to put a percentage on the proportion of respondents whose views are thus summarised but it seems a plausible account of the typical British attitude to religion in the 1940s.

Early Gallup polls contain a few relevant items. In 1956 Gallup asked ‘Should prominent members of the Church, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, take part in political matters or should they keep right out of politics?’. ‘Should take part’ was preferred by 18 per cent., 10 per cent didn’t know and 72 per cent chose ‘Should keep right out’ (Gallup 1978: 378). A slight change of wording the following year – ‘Should the Church keep out of political matters or should they (sic) express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?’ – softened the difference. ‘Keep out’ was chosen by 53 per cent and ‘Express views’ by 36 per cent. That change may be explained by the re-wording from politics to social issues and by the omission of the Archbishop of Canterbury removing the reason why most Nonconformists would prefer ‘Should keep right out of politics’. The ‘Express views’ option became even more popular when all mention of politics was dropped and a contrast drawn with introversion. A 1963 poll asked ‘Should the churches be mainly concerned with the spiritual life of the individual or should they express their views on day-to-day social questions?’. One third of respondents thought the churches should confine themselves to the spiritual life; two-thirds thought they should express views on social issues (ABC Television 1964: 123).

Just these few polls begin to raise important methodological issues. First, there is little or no value in such data unless we can compare the attitudes of religious and non-religious people. Second, the principle of public religion needs to be distinguished from specific interventions, both in question design and in analysing responses. Without that, we do not know to what extent respondents are more likely to support church intervention in public affairs when they believe the churches share their preferences. Gallup in 1956 should have realised that mentioning the Archbishop of Canterbury might polarise Anglicans and Nonconformists. The designer of the 2010 ComRes poll should have appreciated that, in a largely Protestant country, the proposition ‘The Pope and other religious leaders have a responsibility to speak out on political issues they are concerned about’ might have elicited very different responses had the first four words been omitted. But we could only know if approval in principle of public religion has turned into opposition to this imagined example by distinguishing respondents by denomination and that information is not given.

Almost fifty years later the context for attitudes to the public position of religion is very different. First, Britain has become markedly more secular. In the 1964 survey, 94 per cent of respondents claim a denominational identity and about a quarter attended church once a month or more often. More than half of the adults of the 1960s would have had some formal religious socialization through attending Sunday School (Brown 2001: 168). Now only about 50 per cent of the population claims a denominational identity and monthly or more frequent church attendance is at 18 per cent according to the 2008 British Social Attitudes survey. Clergy estimates that have been validated by neutral observer counts

suggest that typical Sunday church attendance is now less than 7 per cent. With Sunday School attendance now confined to the children of core believers and education about religion having replaced religious instruction in British schools, most young adults will have little or no familiarity with Christian religious beliefs or practices (Bruce 2010).

Second, the growth of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim minorities has changed what respondents can imagine when considering the public presence of religion. In the 1950s and 1960s, the religion that could be private or public was the respondent's actual or heritage faith. In the 1990s, it could be an entirely different faith. So in addition to contemplating the public presence of the familiar, contemporary respondents may consider the public presence of an alien faith. This may also make it easier for respondents to consider the issue in the abstract.

Third, the change in social and sexual mores since the late 1960s makes it much more likely that people will see public religion as a challenge to their preferences. On sex outside the confines of marriage, contraception, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality, the churches are now often at odds with a large part of the population (Brown 2001).

Fourth, a variety of events and tensions (such as the 1989 fatwa on Salman Rushdie, the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center, the 2005 London tube bombings, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and enduring conflict over religious dress and symbols) have made the public presence of religion far more controversial than it was in 1963. That has been reflected in the very large number of recent polls which have tried to assess attitudes towards the public presence of religion. Most are difficult to interpret because there is little consistency of question wording or sampling method and only very limited analyses of the data are made public. Furthermore, we can note without further comment that the published results of such polls often support the ambitions or agenda of the organization that commissioned the poll.

Nonetheless we can make a few general observations. First, there is still a strong preference in favour of religious leaders speaking out 'on political issues they are concerned about' (ComRes 2010), though we cannot know if this reflects likely agreement with church views or a principled commitment to free speech. Second, there seems little consistent patterning by age, gender, or class in such responses. Third, where we do find what seems to be a clear divide, it is in questions that directly address the public merits of religion. For example, another ComRes poll of February 2009 asked for reaction to the proposition that 'Religion has an important part to play in public life'. Though age, class, gender and regional differences were small, there was a considerable gulf between the responses of those who claimed a religious identity and those who said they had no religion. The half of the sample who identified as Christians divided 73 to 23 per cent in favour of the proposition. Those who claimed no faith divided 36 per cent in favour and 60 per cent against (ComRes 2009).

Finally we note the responses to a refreshingly blunt question asked by a YouGov poll in 2007. Respondents were asked 'Do you regard the influence of religion on this country as beneficial, harmful or neither?'. Only 17 per cent thought it beneficial, 27 per cent thought 'neither' and 42 per cent thought it harmful. The remaining 14 per cent couldn't choose among the three options.

Given all the technical reservations about such polls, what is required to address the basic question of whether increased controversy over religion in the last two decades has weakened or strengthened support for the privatization of religion is data from a quality recurrent survey that asks pertinent (and preferably identical) questions at appropriate time points.

British Social Attitudes Surveys 1998 and 2008

Few large-scale social survey series have the key property we require for our purposes: the same questions on religion and politics repeated at different time points. The cross-sectional European Values Survey (EVS), for example, conducted in 1999 and again in 2008, contains

only three relevant and common survey items. In all four sweeps of the EVS, which began in the 1980s, ‘confidence in the churches’ is perhaps the single common relevant item. Fortunately, as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a full module of questions on religion, with a sub-set of questions on religion and politics, formed part of the most recent survey in 2008, including the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey for that year. The previous BSA survey to include a module of question on religion was ten years earlier in 1998. Six questions relating to religion, politics and public life overlap in the BSA datasets for 1998 and 2008. These six items are listed in Table 1 with the results of our analysis to determine whether or not these could be regarded as forming a scale. We can reliably assume they do and that the scale can be taken as a general measure of people in Britain’s attitudes to the place of religion in politics and public life (i.e., $\alpha = 0.7$ for both the 1998 and 2008 BSA datasets).

Table 1: Religion, politics and public life in Britain (scale construction). Source BSA 2008 and 1998.

Self-complete questionnaire – six items (Scores 1 → 5)
a. Religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections?
b. Religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions?
c. Looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace?
d. People with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others?
e. How much confidence do you have in Churches and religious organisations?
f. Do you think that churches and religious organisations in this country have too much power or too little power?

Notes:

Higher scores represent sympathy for religion and lower score represent antipathy.
 Scale construction via reliability analysis: 6-item scale = (a + b + c + d + e + f) / 6
 Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.72$, N = 1880 in 2008 and $\alpha = 0.72$, N = 769 in 1998.

To take one step back, Table 2 provides a more basic descriptive picture for two of the items which form part of the 6-item general scale in Table 1, and also for a separate question from the BSA in 2008, a question which was not asked in 1998. Tests show that overall people’s attitudes in the past decade have shifted. They are now even less sympathetic, for example, to the idea that religious leaders should influence elections or government policy. At least two-thirds of the BSA samples don’t like the idea (see Table 2X). And only about one-quarter of people in Britain seem to feel that law and policy making would ‘probably be better if more elected officials were deeply religious’ (see Table 2Y).

Table 2: Religion, politics and public life in Britain (descriptive statistics). Source BSA 2008 and 1998.

Column percentages	(X) 2008 & 1998				(Y) 2008 Only
	(I) Religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote...		(II) Religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions...		If more of our elected officials were deeply religious, do you think the laws and policy decisions they make would be...
	1998	2008	1998	2008	
1 Strongly agree	41%	45%	33%	39%	

2 Agree	32%	31%	32%	30%	Probably worse	45%
3 Neither/Undecided	12%	12%	14%	17%	Neither/Undecided	29%
4 Disagree	10%	7%	16%	10%	Probably better	26%
5 Strongly Disagree	5%	5%	5%	5%		
	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%
<i>N</i> =	793	1952	791	1930		2238

Notes:

(I) Chi-square(4) = 14.21, $p < 0.01$; (II) Chi-square(4) = 31.18, $p < 0.01$

It is not possible to cross-check inter-correlations between (X) and (Y) in 2008 because (X) was included only in self-complete questionnaire sub-samples 'A & B' while (Y) was included only in sub-samples 'C & D'.

Given that we can reasonably expect attitudes to the public place of religion to be related to personal religious commitment it is worth considering to what extent those commitments have changed over the decade. The data from the 1998 and 2008 surveys certainly show a changing pattern of religious identification, mostly likely explained by migration, which has overlain secularisation, but no corresponding change in levels of participation in organised religion. If anything, participation has declined: for example weekly attendance is down. At the same time, the numbers of people in Britain who say they belong to a non-Christian religion has doubled. Conversely, with the exception of the stability of Catholic numbers (most likely accounted for by new migrant groups), Christian numbers have continued to decline. Defection from the other Christian churches has continued without replacement, and the proportion of Britons who say they are Christians but do not identify with any particular denomination has doubled from five to 10 per cent in the period.

Table 3: Current religion and participation in organised religion in Britain. Source BSA 2008 & 1998

(I) Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion ...?			(II) Apart from special occasions, how often nowadays do you attend services or meetings connected with your religion ...?		
	1998	2008		1998	2008
No religion	46%	43%	Not religious at all	11%	12%
Christian (no denomination)	5%	10%	Never, practically never	50%	51%
Christian*	46%	40%	Less often	20%	19%
Non-Christian	3%	7%	Monthly but not weekly	7%	8%
			Weekly or more often	12%	10%
	100%	100%		100%	100%
<i>N</i> =	3103	4466		3072	4430

Notes:

*Proportion of total sample which is Roman Catholic was stable at nine per cent. (I) Chi-square(3) = 121.39, $p < 0.01$; (II) Chi-square(4) = 8.88, $p = 0.06$

In what follows, we consider whether attitudes to the involvement of religious leaders and organisations in politics and public life have shifted over the decade among particular religious and non-religious groupings. In Table 4 we report the results of our analysis of the mean scores of different groupings of respondents on the attitude scale which we constructed from the six items listed in Table 1.

The first and most telling observation from both the 1998 and 2008 survey data is that the mean score for the entire sample is less than the neutral or indifferent midpoint score of 3. That is, general support for public religion was low in 1998 and it was low in 2008. Crucially,

although mean scores are significantly higher for those people who say they attend services on a weekly basis or more often, they are still less than 3.

Secondly, scores on our attitude scale have remained static or even declined slightly (see the ‘Total’ row in Table 4, $t = 3.10$, $N = 2548$, $p = 0.002$). There is no evidence here that the increased notoriety of religion in the decade between 1998 and 2008 has produced an increase in the desire to see religion occupy a place in politics and public life, even among those who regularly go to services.

Table 4: Religion, politics and public life and participation in organised religion. Source BSA 2008 & 1998.

Mean scores (1 → 5)	6-item scale ‘Religion, politics and public life’	
	1998	2008
Not religious / Never attend	2.1	2.1
Less often	2.4	2.4
Monthly but not weekly	2.6	2.5
Weekly or more often	2.9	2.9
Total	2.3	2.2
<i>N</i> =	763	1855
ANOVA F-test	54.31	113.26
p-value	< 0.01	< 0.01

Note:

A score of 5 represents strong sympathy for the role of religion in politics and public life while a score of 1 represents antipathy to the involvement of religion.

It remains to confirm our conclusions by conducting a multivariate analysis with the attitude scale from Table 1 as the dependent variable in a regression model, which controls for the gender, age-group and education level of respondents, and which also takes account of people’s current religion as non-Christians and Christians to make allowances for the changes seen in Table 3, and then to gauge the relative effects of participation in organised religion in 1998 and 2008 on people’s attitudes. In this, we set the group of respondents who attended a service ‘less often’ than monthly but more than ‘practically never’ in 1998 as our reference category. The results of our multivariate analysis are reported in Table 5 and displayed graphically in Figure 1. The other three ‘middle’ groups who attended services ‘less often’ or only on a ‘monthly’ basis appear to be little different in their attitudes to the reference group. It is those people who attend services ‘weekly’ who are more sympathetic ($B = +0.52$ in 1998 and $B = +0.50$ in 2008) while those who ‘never’ attend are correspondingly less sympathetic ($B = -0.20$ in 1998 and $B = -0.25$ in 2008) and these estimates from the regression model appear stable over the period. It may be there is less room for further hardening of attitudes among the non-religious because scores on our scale for this group were already ‘low’ at baseline in 1998, but there was certainly room for increased sympathy among the religious, but which we do not find. Finally, it worth noting that Christians seem just as likely as non-Christian to be relatively more sympathetic because of their faith ($B = +0.16$). In conclusion, our analysis of the survey data from the 1998 and 2008 BSA surveys do not reveal a polarisation of attitudes among different religious groupings towards the place of religion in politics and public life in the past decade. If anything, people continue to separate out religion from politics.

Figure 1: Regression model of 6-item scale (range 1 to 5) of attitudes to religion in politics and public life (controlling for gender, age-group and education level).
Source: British Social Attitudes (BSA) 1998 & 2008

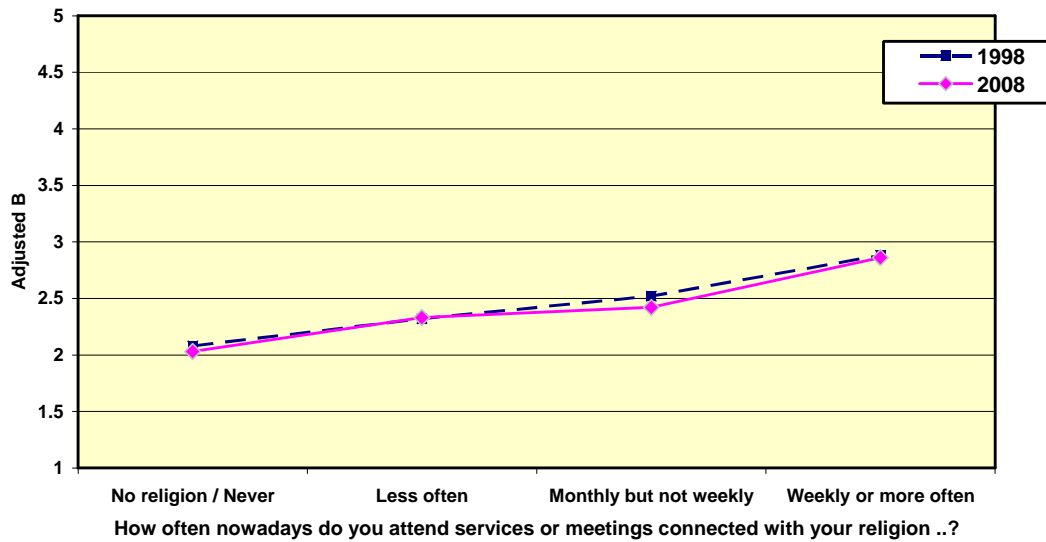


Table 5: Regression analyses (OLS) of attitudes to the place of religion in politics and public life. Source BSA 2008 and 1998.

6-item scale 1 → 5	B	Std. Error	P value	N =
Constant	2.18	0.07		
Gender: Male	'reference category'			1131
Gender: Female	0.09	0.02	< 0.01	1306
Age-group: 18-34 years	0.02	0.03	0.44	692
Age-group: 35-54 years	'reference category'			942
Age-group: 55+ years	-0.08	0.03	0.01	804
Education: Advanced	-0.01	0.03	0.71	752
Education: School level	'reference category'			1113
Education: No qualifications	0.06	0.03	0.05	572
Current Religion:				
Belongs to a Christian religion*	0.16	0.03	< 0.01	992
Belongs to a non-Christian religion	0.16	0.06	< 0.01	132
Participation in Organised Religion x Year:				
1998 No religion / Never	-0.20	0.05	< 0.01	462
1998 Less often	'reference category'			148
1998 Monthly but not weekly	0.15	0.09	0.10	58
1998 Weekly or more	0.52	0.08	< 0.01	91
2008 No religion / Never	-0.25	0.05	< 0.01	1062
2008 Less often	-0.02	0.06	0.78	334
2008 Monthly but not weekly	0.07	0.07	0.33	132
2008 Weekly or more	0.50	0.07	< 0.01	150

Notes:

*Excludes those who self-identify as Christian but do not specify a denomination.
Adj. R-square = 0.18, N = 2437.

Conclusion

As we have noted, the privatization of religion identified by the secularization paradigm was not simply a result of changing attitudes. Significant steps in the marginalization of religion were often grudgingly accepted as the least bad option only after competing groups had failed to achieve domination. Likewise any de-privatization will not simply result from increasing desires for such an outcome (especially if such changes are desired only by a minority). Nonetheless attitudes are important and it is difficult to see why (or how) any significant de-privatization could occur without a considerable groundswell of opinion pushing elites in that direction.

What our analysis clearly shows is that most Britons are not in favour of religion having a powerful public presence. If anything, it shows a slight hardening of attitudes to public religion. We certainly find no evidence of increasing sympathy for public religion, even among regular churchgoers.

Given that the survey questions do not tie attitudes to specific events, we cannot be certain that British support for the privatization of religion is a result of the sense that religion has become increasingly troublesome in recent decades. However, we can be certain that the best representative data we can find shows no support at all for the idea that either the British people in general, or regular churchgoers, favour the de-privatization of religion.

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