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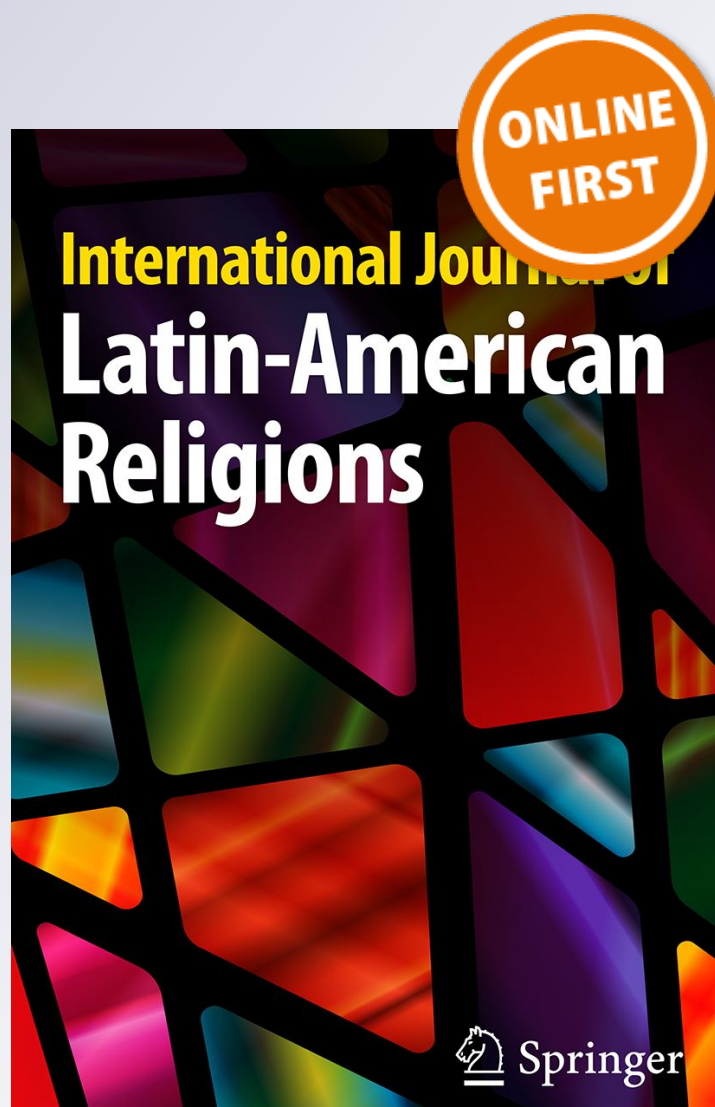
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**International Journal of Latin
American Religions**

ISSN 2509-9957

Int J Lat Am Relig

DOI 10.1007/s41603-017-0007-4



 Springer

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Transformations of Religious Affiliation in Contemporary Latin America: an Approach from Quantitative Data

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Received: 30 March 2017 / Accepted: 25 April 2017
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Abstract Over the last three decades, the production of social sciences regarding religion in Latin America has focused on the transformations of religious beliefs, practices, and identities in the region, with ethnographic studies being the prevailing methodological approach. This work aims at measuring the magnitude of the mutations in religious belonging and commitment to religious institutions in Latin America, identifying convergent and divergent profiles among the different countries of the region. For that purpose, the available statistical data both from official institutions and from research centers has been compiled and analyzed. The text further reflects on the epistemological assumptions underlying the construction of statistical information, on the contribution of quantitative studies to the sociology of religion and on their complementarity with qualitative approaches. It also explores the scope and implications of the secularization process in the region, based on changes in religious belonging and commitment. The existing surveys coincide in highlighting a declining tendency of Catholicism, with different intensities according to each country, a growth of evangelical adherents, and of those denominated “without religion,” a category that was unknown decades ago. It refers to those Latin American who consider themselves believers, although they do not feel identified with any religious framework, within the setting of a strong process of individuation of beliefs and religious deinstitutionalization.

Keywords Religion · Latin America · Quantitative data

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Introduction

Over the last three decades, the description and analysis of the transformations in religious belonging, beliefs, and practices has been a distinctive focus of research by the Latin American sociology and anthropology of religion (Pierucci and Prandi 1996; Parker 1996; Mariano 2004; De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2007; Mallimaci 2013; De la Torre and Martin 2016).

When social sciences undertook to review the premises of the theory of secularization and reconsidered the envisaged decline of religion, this paradigm shift gave rise to new studies about the religious phenomenon. Empirical research focused on the individual-institution relationship against the backdrop of believers' movements within and among religious spaces, which undermine the foundations of the processes whereby religious identities are historically shaped (Almeida and Monteiro 2001; Esquivel 2010; Frigerio 2012). At the same time, questions emerged about individuals' belief systems and modalities of religious practices, which transcended the frameworks of confessional institutions.

A number of studies thus ensued to explore the mutations in the forms of experiencing the relationship with the sacred, in which particularities were identified according to the population's age, social segment, gender or place of residence, among other relevant variables.¹ Such research has underscored the trend towards the diversification of the religious field, given the proliferation of multiple groups—the case of evangelicals being the most significant and visible one—which has broken the Catholic monopoly. In addition, specialized academic literature has highlighted the consolidation of an individualization process coupled by multiple belief communitarianisms. No analysis by sociologists or anthropologists of religion has overlooked the recomposition and reconfiguration of religious belonging and beliefs in the context of the pluralization of the Catholic field first, the Christian one later, and the religious one in general at present, and of a slow but enduring religious institutional deregulation. This translates into a reduced efficacy of the mandates and authority of “specialists” to regulate believers' everyday lives.

Sociologists and anthropologists of religion have thus coincided in noting substantive changes in the socio-religious map. Surveys have revealed increased affiliation to various evangelical denominations, simultaneously with the growth of the so called “without religion”—citizens who consider themselves believers but do not identify with any religion (Mallimaci 2013; Mafra 2013; Teixeira and Menezes 2013; Pew Research Center 2014)—and with the dissemination of new spiritualities, esoteric beliefs, and expressions of popular religiosity (Wright 2013; Ameigeiras 2008). The expansion of evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century posed such a challenge to analysts that a new religious hegemony was predicted (Stoll 1990). Multiple belonging has also been analyzed as a sign of individuals' shifts, flows, and movements within the religious field. The construction of religious identity seems to be an incomplete and fragmentary process (Bauman 2003).

This work intends to measure the magnitude of the transformations in religious belonging and commitment to religious institutions in Latin America, identifying

¹ Journals *Sociedad y Religión* and *Debates do NER* dedicated an issue to the analyses of the First National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Attitudes in Argentina and of the data about religion revealed by the 2010 Brazilian census: *Sociedad y Religión*, 32/33 and *Debates do NER*, 24.

convergent and divergent profiles among the different countries in the region. The selection of these analytical axes is due to the exhaustiveness of the available empirical information. On other relevant issues, such as beliefs and religious practices, the surveys are partial, and therefore, the comparative exercise is impossible.

We will use statistical data from secondary sources. Basically, the Pew Research Center and Latinobarómetro surveys will be analyzed and contrasted with population censuses, whenever possible, since not all countries include questions about religiosity in their census forms.

Though we are aware of the limitations involved in comparing census and survey results—margins of error being different in each case—the fact that some countries do not ask questions about religion in their censuses leaves us no other research option. However, the comparison and analysis of the available quantitative studies about the religious phenomenon uncover tendencies, particularities, and exceptionalities that would otherwise remain invisible. This is the justification of our line of analysis. In any case, caution in our final conclusions will compensate for any differences in the methods of the sources used.

Before moving on to analyze the figures, it is essential to reflect on the epistemological assumptions underlying the construction of statistical data, the contribution of quantitative studies to the sociology of religion, and their complementarity with qualitative approaches.

Problematizing the construction and scope of quantitative data

The stock of knowledge provided by the sociology and anthropology of religion through qualitative research tools set the foundation for consolidating this discipline in social sciences. In turn, the need to project at the macro social level the processes observed in communities and groups encouraged the construction of statistically supported data.

However, quantitative approaches to the religious phenomenon are at an initial stage in Latin America. As will be shown later, few countries in the region include questions about religion in their population censuses. Basically, the information available, which has been produced only recently, comes from scientific research conducted by universities, research centers, and private institutions, such as Latinobarómetro and the Pew Research Center, both of which completed an extensive study in all Latin American countries in 2013 and 2014.²

Since there are no previous studies, it is impossible to analyze data longitudinally. For the time being, we can only describe and analyze snapshots of the religious map. Since the empirical information available is synchronic—except for those countries with government statistics dating back a long time—no dynamics or movements can be detected.

At the same time, the preliminary stage of this research expertise also serves to explain the lack of studies that embody the coexistence of different paradigms, that is,

² Globally, the World Values Survey researches in almost a hundred countries the changes and continuities in values and citizens' opinions, as well as the role of religion and transformations in religiosity. For a comparative analysis of social beliefs and values, see Inglehart et al. 2008.

research that triangulates quantitative and qualitative data, based on the potential of each method and a cautious attitude towards the limitations of both. We have often become entangled in binary and antagonistic discussions about the advantages and constraints of each method, which stem from personal epistemological obstacles, as Bachelard (2000) would say, rather than from an accurate evaluation founded on the correct application of the procedures involved by each methodology. Muddled in such debates, we lost sight of the complexity of social reality, the complementarity of both approaches, and the need to think of a methodological convergence that may enrich our view of social processes. We thus block the possibility of creating tools to construct quantitative data from the emerging categories of qualitative studies and of using qualitative approaches to probe deeper into the findings of statistical generalizations.

The embryonic state of the art of quantitative research in Latin America results in the lack of a sociological *habitus* about quantitative studies, that is, a sort of sociology of quantitative methodology that may promote reflection on the significance of identifications when a citizen states his or her religious affiliation. Do identification and belonging refer to the same thing? How do they combine with the universe of beliefs and practices of the same citizens who state their affiliation to one religion or other? How to record affinity with certain religious spaces, such as those of African origin, when they are still affected by a “cost of dissent” in social imaginaries?

This sociology of quantitative research should also help to denaturalize the construction of data. Numbers are neither neutral nor objective, but respond to classification systems that we design ourselves, and depending on which certain expressions of social reality are made visible or invisible. Rather than mirrored by data, social reality is demarcated and shaped by them. Ultimately, when faced with a question, individuals choose a position among the options provided.

To make things worse, the lack of such *habitus* often makes us impatient, so we try to force methodological tools to make them uncover processes which they are not designed to apprehend. It is not through a questionnaire that we will be able to explore fluxes, circulation, syncretism, double belonging, or heterodox religious practices because, as already stated, elucidating the implications of religious belonging in settings of reduced institutional influence demands a different kind of reflection. It is not the point to overrate the scope of quantitative surveys, but to assess their potential and uses, which are marked by instantaneity and the generalization of multiple snapshots, the clarity of which is constructed by the camera itself. It is asking too much of statistical data to assume that they should “grasp” the dynamics of religious circulation or the complexity of the configuration of religious identities. These present-day phenomena can be examined more deeply by ethnographic research strategies, through which the analyses derived from aggregate data can be enhanced (Fig. 1). Although it is the hologram metaphor, rather than that of the map, that better reflects the changing contours of Latin American religious expressions (Mafrá 2013), it is methodological triangulation that will enable us to design religious holograms for each social stratum, age group, geographical area, etc.

Given the social credibility of statistical information in the collective imaginary, the utmost rigor must be exercised in developing and wording questions, defining the range of answers, gathering information, and interpreting the results. Since the widespread and naturalized notion prevails that statistical data are “the true reflection of social opinions and attitudes,” denaturalizing the process through which information is constructed is a necessary condition to guarantee the validity of the production of

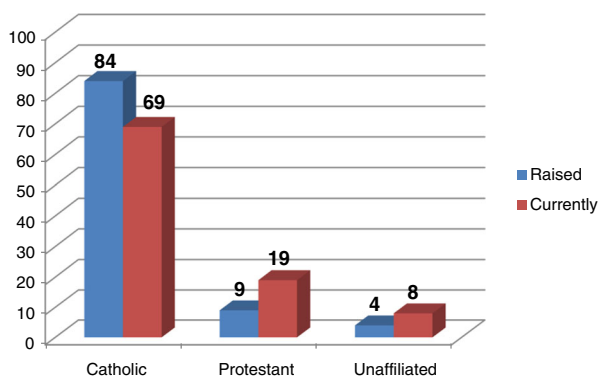


Fig. 1 Current religious affiliation of individuals and of their original family environment in Latin America (in %). In the Pew Research Center study, the “Protestant” category includes all the Christian movements that emerged from the Reformation. This encompasses the so called historical Protestants, such as Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians among others, as well as evangelicals, Pentecostals, Baptists, and Neopentecostals. Source: Pew Research Center 2014.

knowledge. If we are aware of the reification of instruments, we as researchers will be able to question the data, based on their contingent character.

As a final consideration about the dissemination of results, we should remember that numbers, as a reliable representation of social reality, have a strong political impact. As rightly pointed out by Clara Mafra, data “on paper are hardly ever ‘pure’ and ‘transparent’: they always come along with a narrative” (Mafra 2013: 13). The contents of this narrative are developed by institutions, groups, and actors in order to influence public policy, justify privileged positions, or change them to gain such privileges. To safeguard the legitimacy of our production of knowledge, it is paramount that we as researchers remain independent from sectors that have an interest in a biased interpretation of statistical data, even if these are the entities sponsoring the research effort.

Sources and data

In six countries in the region (Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Nicaragua, and Mexico) questions about religious affiliation are regularly included in population censuses (Table 1 and Fig. 2). In Uruguay, in 2006 and 2007, the National Institute of Statistics implemented the Households Ongoing Survey, which includes one question about religion. In Ecuador, a specific study about religion was conducted in 2012 by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses.

In the other Latin American countries, the available data come from scientific research carried out by universities or research centers (such as Argentina’s CEIL/CONICET,³ Colombia’s National University, and El Salvador’s University Institute for Public Opinion, of the José Simeón Cañas Central American University) (Fig. 3). Other sources are private institutions, such as Latinobarómetro and the Pew Research Center, both of which conducted a study in each country in the region, in 2013 and 2014, respectively. These studies included questions, not only about religious affiliation, but also regarding religious

³ A quantitative research about religious beliefs and practices in the Great Buenos Aires was carried out in 2001 (Esquivel et al. 2002) and about religion and social structure in 2008 (Mallimaci et al. 2015).

Table 1 Religious Affiliation by Country in Latin America (in %)

Country	Catholic	Country	Protestant	Country	Unaffiliated
Paraguay	89	Guatemala	41	Uruguay	37
Mexico	81	Honduras	41	Dominican Republic	18
Colombia	79	Nicaragua	40	Chile	16
Ecuador	79	El Salvador	36	El Salvador	12
Bolivia	77	Puerto Rico	33	Argentina	11
Peru	76	Brazil	26	Honduras	10
Venezuela	73	Costa Rica	25	Costa Rica	9
Argentina	71	Dominican Republic	23	Puerto Rico	8
Panama	70	Panama	19	Brazil	8
Chile	64	Chile	17	Mexico	7
Costa Rica	62	Peru	17	Venezuela	7
Brazil	61	Venezuela	17	Nicaragua	7
Dominican Republic	57	Bolivia	16	Panama	7
Puerto Rico	56	Argentina	15	Guatemala	6
El Salvador	50	Uruguay	15	Colombia	6
Guatemala	50	Colombia	13	Ecuador	5
Nicaragua	50	Ecuador	13	Peru	4
Honduras	46	Mexico	9	Bolivia	4
Uruguay	42	Paraguay	7	Paraguay	1

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

commitment and citizen attitudes towards contemporary public debate issues in which religions traditionally have active participation.

Upon compiling and analyzing all of these sources, we systematized and selected the information related to the topics surveyed. As a result, there is

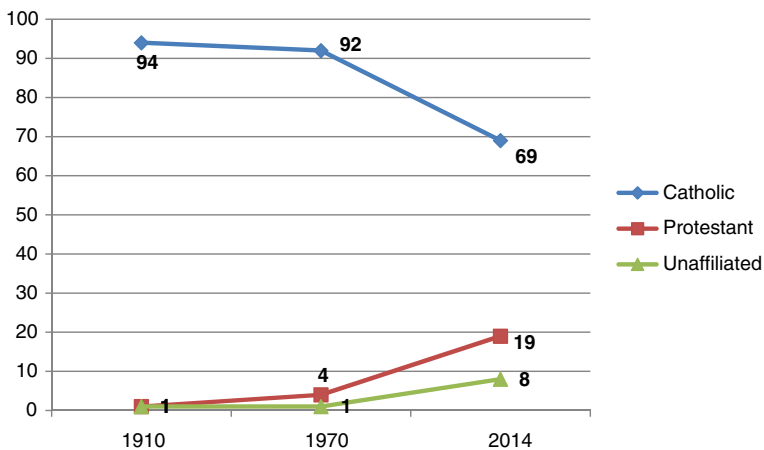


Fig. 2 Religious affiliation over time in Latin America (in %). Source: Pew Research Center 2014. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to not all religious options have been considered

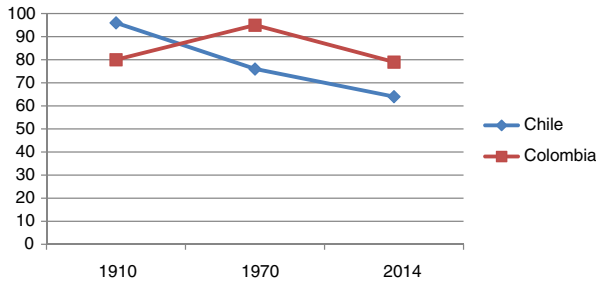


Fig. 3 Catholic affiliation over time in Chile and Colombia (in %). Source: Pew Research Center 2014

information available from all countries in Latin America. This will allow us to establish comparisons and to group countries according to the degree of similarity among their data and tendencies. In specific cases, due to the available census documentation, an in-depth analysis is carried out in the interior of the country, identifying differences in religious affiliations according to educational level, sex, or age group (Fig. 4).

Religious affiliation

Religious belonging in Latin American societies reflects a transition from Catholic hegemony to Christian supremacy. According to the Pew Research Center survey, while 69% of adults in the region identify themselves as Catholic, 84% were raised in a Catholic environment. In contrast, 19% claim to be Protestant, although 9% grew up in a family of that denomination. As can be seen, religious affiliation shows changes, but these mutations occur within a Christian atmosphere. The universe of Christianity's symbols and beliefs—where, admittedly, multiple expressions coexist—continues to permeate the religious representations and imaginaries of the vast majority of men and women in the region. Among Latin Americans, 88% claim to belong to a Christian religion. At the same time, the

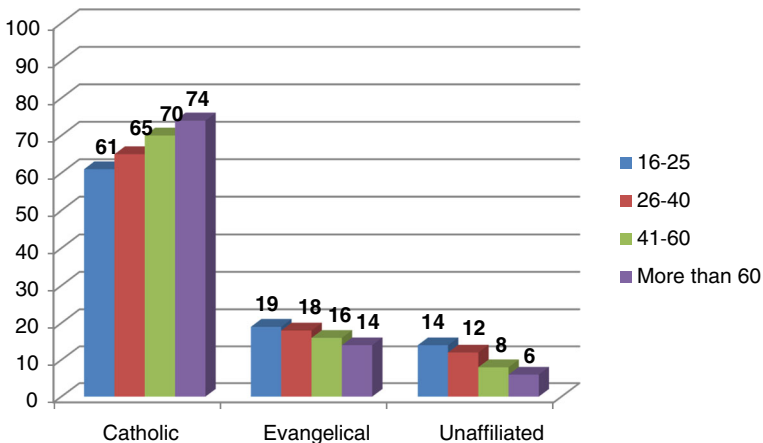


Fig. 4 Religious affiliation by age group in Latin America (in %). Source: Latinobarómetro 2014. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to not all religious options have been considered

percentages of those who report no religious affiliation (8%) double those of the respondents who stated having been raised in a family setting with no definite religious identity (4%).

In spite of these changes, Catholicism continues to be the reference framework for most people in the region. The long-dating Christian cultural matrix continues to be present, even if it contains innovative components. The expansion of evangelicals, with their multiple expressions, reflects a tendency towards the pluralization of the Christian universe of meaning. The concept of pluralization is brought into question when attempts are made to apply it to the religious field at large. Flavio Pierucci referred precisely to this when he questioned religious diversity, considering that in a country like Brazil, over 85% are Catholics or evangelicals (Pierucci 2004).

Now, the subcontinent cannot be considered as a unit, given the profound differences that become apparent upon comparison of the statistical information available in each country. A great part of the Andean countries of the South Cone, along with Mexico, Venezuela, Paraguay, and Argentina, show the highest Catholic affiliation. The opposite is evidenced by most of the Central American countries and Uruguay. The latter stands out precisely due to the large percentage of citizens without any religious affiliation. In the Central American nations and Puerto Rico, the Protestant group—given the dramatic growth of evangelical denominations—is more than significant, with affiliation levels coming very close to those of Catholicism. Latin America's map is much more plural and diverse than is often thought.

Table 2 summarizes the percentage difference between Catholics and Protestants in each country. The Andean countries of South America, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina clearly display the greatest asymmetry in religious affiliation to one denomination or the other. At the opposite end, it is not Uruguay—the least Catholic country in the region, but also the one with the highest percentage of individuals with no religious affiliation—but Honduras that shows the greatest balance between the numbers of Catholics and Protestants. Central America is the geographical area where the presence of Protestantism is the most significant.

Now, these differences show a snapshot, but say nothing about the process of religious change. The fact that Protestantism, in its many expressions, attracts higher levels of affiliation in a region does not mean by itself that it is growing at the expense of other religions. The question about the individuals' current religious affiliation as compared to that of the family in which they were raised gives the possibility to analyze the magnitude of the fluxes and movements in religious belonging.

Uruguay and Nicaragua stand out as the countries where Catholic affiliation decreased the most, from the period when respondents (Table 3) were raised until 2014, when the field work was conducted. However, this does not imply that the Uruguayan and Nicaraguan society developed in the same way. In the former, the decrease in Catholic affiliation was the reverse of increasing religious disaffiliation, while in the latter, it was Protestantism that grew at the expense of Catholicism.

On the other hand, a certain correlation can be observed between a marked historical Catholic hegemony and a reduced process of religious change. Such are the cases of Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico, and Paraguay, where society preserves a long-standing Catholic matrix and changes of religious choice seem to occur at a lower scale than in other countries.

Table 2 Difference between Catholics and Protestants by Country in Latin America

Country	Percentage difference between Catholics and Protestants
Paraguay	82
Mexico	72
Colombia	66
Ecuador	66
Bolivia	61
Peru	59
Venezuela	56
Argentina	56
Panama	51
Chile	47
Costa Rica	37
Brazil	35
Dominican Republic	34
Uruguay	27
Puerto Rico	23
El Salvador	14
Nicaragua	10
Guatemala	9
Honduras	5

Source: Own elaboration based on Pew Research Center 2014

In contrast, Brazil emerges as a country that, having a consistent Catholic past in terms of religious identity, evidences mutations and shifts to other religious options. The same applies to Panama, where religious belonging seems to be more stable among the population even if, unlike in other countries, Catholicism is not dominant.

Brazil is one of the countries where census forms include the question about religious affiliation. With 123 million Catholics, it is recognized as the country with the greatest Catholic population in the world. However, according to the census data gathered by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the number of Catholics dropped by almost 10 percentage points between 2000 and 2010 (from 73.9 to 64.6%).⁴ In contrast, evangelicals grew from 15.4 to 22.2% during the same period. Those “without religion” went from 7.3 to 8% over the last 10 years. The tendencies recorded during the 2000–2010 period between censuses are not new: they confirm the changes in religious affiliation that have been taking place in Brazilian society for, at least, the last four decades (Teixeira 2013). In any case, the noteworthy fact is that, for the first time, the absolute number of Catholics in 2010 is lower than in 2000. In the past, despite the percentage drop and due to demographic growth, Catholics used to increase in absolute numbers from one census to the next (Table 4).

⁴ Please note that this percentage does not match the one recorded by the Pew Research Center, given the time difference between both surveys (the population census was in 2010 and the Pew Research Center research took place in 2014).

Table 3 Catholic affiliation of respondents at present and of their original family environment in Latin America (in %)

Country	Currently Catholic	Raised Catholic	Relative difference	Absolute difference
Uruguay	42	64	-34.4	-22
Nicaragua	50	75	-33.3	-25
El Salvador	50	69	-27.5	-19
Brazil	61	81	-25.0	-20
Honduras	46	61	-24.6	-15
Dominican Republic	57	75	-24.0	-18
Puerto Rico	56	73	-23.3	-17
Costa Rica	62	77	-19.5	-15
Guatemala	50	62	-19.4	-12
Argentina	71	86	-17.4	-15
Chile	64	77	-16.9	-13
Peru	76	90	-15.6	-14
Venezuela	73	86	-15.1	-13
Colombia	79	92	-14.1	-13
Ecuador	79	91	-13.2	-12
Bolivia	77	88	-12.5	-11
Mexico	81	90	-10.0	-9
Panama	70	74	-5.4	-4
Paraguay	89	94	-5.3	-5

Source: Own elaboration based on Pew Research Center 2014

In general, the data confirm that Catholicism has receded in all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, without this being a threat to its remarkable predominance in most of the region.

The statements above are confirmed when the distant past is examined, with the 1970s being the turning point from the Catholic monopoly to a relative religious diversity. According to the World Religion Database, Catholicism accounted for 94% of Latin Americans' religious choices in 1910. Protestants and those not affiliated to any religion were only 1%. In 1970, Catholicism started to experience a slight decrease while Protestants grew, as did those with no religious affiliation, though in the following decades. According to the Pew Research Center data, these trends have become steadily stronger.

The comparison by country of these fluxes and retreats through history also reveals analytically valuable nuances and particularities. The transformations of religious identities did not go in the same direction or were equally intense in all countries.

For example, as shown by the chart above, Catholicism in Chile experienced a greater loss between 1910 and 1970 than between 1970 and 2014. In contrast, in Colombia—as well as in Ecuador, Panama and Uruguay—Catholic affiliation increased between 1910 and 1970, although from then on, it followed the general trend of the region. In turn, no change in this regard is observed in Peru and Venezuela between 1910 and 1970.

Table 4 Catholic affiliation over time in Latin America (in %)

Country	1910	1970	Difference 1910–1970	2014	Difference 1970–2014
Argentina	97	91	–6	71	–20
Brazil	95	92	–3	61	–31
Bolivia	94	89	–5	77	–12
Chile	96	76	–20	64	–12
Colombia	80	95	+15	79	–16
Costa Rica	99	93	–6	62	–31
Ecuador	88	95	+7	79	–16
El Salvador	98	93	–5	50	–43
Guatemala	99	91	–8	50	–41
Honduras	97	94	–3	46	–48
Mexico	99	96	–3	81	–15
Nicaragua	96	93	–3	50	–43
Panama	84	87	+ 3	70	–17
Paraguay	97	95	–2	90	–5
Peru	95	95	0	76	–19
Puerto Rico	100	87	–13	56	–31
Dominican Republic	98	94	–4	57	–37
Uruguay	61	63	+ 2	42	–21
Venezuela	93	93	0	73	–20
Average	94	92	–2	69	–13

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

The bold entries indicate the most significant values

As to the Central American and Caribbean countries, along with Brazil, they are the geography where Catholicism has dropped the most between 1970 and 2014, with a negative percentage difference of as much as 48% in Honduras. Except for Brazil, in the rest of South America, Catholicism has receded as a religious option over the last four decades, though to a lower extent. Mexico's figures resemble those of the South Cone.

The emerging category of those with “no religious affiliation” deserves some attention. It should be remembered that this does not imply by itself a lack of beliefs (Esquivel 2013). The introduction to this article mentions the impact of the individuation and deinstitutionalization processes in religious affiliation. The deregulation of the market of salvation goods entails the configuration of religious *bricolages* by individuals who challenge the normative frameworks of religious institutions. The social sciences of religion have developed new concepts to reflect more accurately the reconfigurations that have occurred in the religious field: religious self-reliance, believers without religion, believing without belonging, diffuse religion, Catholics without church. In this context, Latin America shows that a remarkable percentage of its population does not identify with any religion.

The prevailing component in this category—and this is the new development—are believers without religion, that is, those who believe in God, express some kind of

religious practice, but whose faith is not found in or channeled through any particular institution. Agnostics and atheists are the smallest fraction of those with “no religious affiliation”.

Except, mostly, for Uruguay and, to a lesser extent, for Chile, Argentina and Mexico, the population with no religious affiliation is practically made up of believers without religion. It includes a percentage of atheists and agnostics only in these countries (Table 5).

Variables such as social stratum, age group, sex, and ethnicity should be explored to determine to what extent each one of them correlates with religious affiliation. Since quantitative studies are at a too early stage in the region, it is difficult to make a comparative analysis that may go beyond descriptive statistics and that may advance towards bivariate and multivariate analysis.

The *Latinobarómetro* research study (2014) provides relevant information in analyzing the distribution of the religions that individuals belong to according to different age groups and educational levels (Figs. 5 and 6). The results confirm that Catholicism grows as age increases, as well as that the opposite is true for evangelicals—as non-Catholics Christians have been termed—and for those without religion.

In educational terms, the percentages of Catholic affiliation grow as the formal educational level increases. Conversely, evangelicals show stronger numbers among the population with lower levels of education. In the case of those without religion,

Table 5 Believers without Religion among those with “No Religious Affiliation” by Country in Latin America (in %)

Country	Unaffiliated	Believers without religion
Uruguay	37	24
Dominicana Republic	18	18
Chile	16	11
El Salvador	12	12
Argentina	11	6
Honduras	10	9
Costa Rica	9	8
Brazil	8	7
Puerto Rico	8	7
Nicaragua	7	6
Panama	7	6
Venezuela	7	6
Mexico	7	3
Guatemala	6	6
Colombia	6	5
Ecuador	5	4
Bolivia	4	3
Peru	4	3
Paraguay	1	1

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

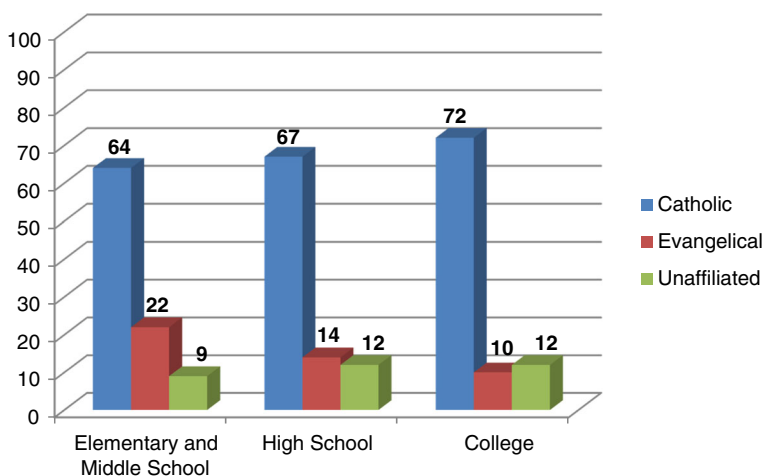


Fig. 5 Religious affiliation by educational level in Latin America (in %). Source: Latinobarómetro 2014. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to not all religious options have been considered

there is no definite trend that could be correlated to education. It should be noted that, among the most educated, they exceed evangelicals (12 vs. 10%).

At the country level, in Chile, the National Institute for Statistics updated the data on the religious affiliation of Chilean citizens in the 2012 population census and matched the information with the different age groups. A medium intensity correlation is observed, since Catholicism concentrates mostly among the older age groups. On the contrary, the numbers of Protestants and those “without religion” are greater among the youngest. Although the difference between these two groups is not the same in the entire population (16.62% for Protestants and 11.58% for those without religion), their figures are practically equal in the 15–29 age interval. This particularity is explained by a lower variability in the numbers of different age groups in the case of Protestants. Catholics and those without religion go up or down more sharply as age increases or decreases.

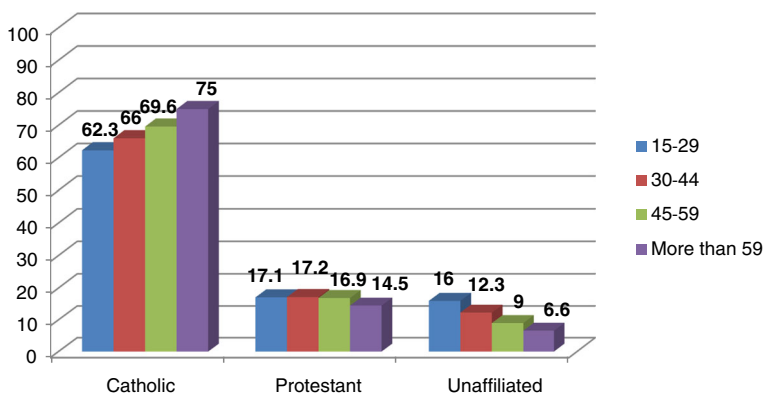


Fig. 6 Religious affiliation by age group in Chile (in %). Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Chile 2012. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to not all religious options have been considered

In Peru, the last population census was carried out in 2007. In 2008, the country's National Institute of Statistics and Information Technology released "Peru's Social-Demographic Profile," which includes a section on religion. Sex, one of the variables of the report, is conspicuously associated to religious affiliation (Fig. 7). Those who belong to any religion are mostly women (in the case of evangelicals, this difference becomes more pronounced, with 46% men vs. 54% women). In contrast, men clearly prevail among those "without religion" (61.5 vs. 38.5% of women).

Religious Commitment

The way religious beliefs translate into everyday life reveals their historical and contingent character. Immerse in the individuation processes already mentioned, believers express various forms of religious practice, not necessarily rooted in institutional configurations (De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2011). The Pew Research Center study combined three variables—praying daily, attending religious services weekly and assigning a very important role to religion in personal life—as an indication of religious commitment. Certainly, such analytical dimensions do not cover all of the multiple forms of religious practice. However, it is relevant to compare the different behaviors of Catholics and Protestants in terms of these "religious commitment" indicators, as well as to analyze the data recorded for each country's society in general.

In general, evangelical denominations promote a strongly anchored congregational model, based on "the principle of conversion, abandonment of previous sociability points of reference and the reconstruction of ties of belonging based on a new symbolic and value universe" (Mafra 2013: 19). Although these communities are also affected by the dynamics of circulation among religious spaces and institutional detachment, these factors seem to have a reduced, or at least less immediate, impact.

The chart evidences the strong correlation between religious affiliation and commitment, given that in all countries, greater proportions of Protestants report praying daily, attending religious services weekly and assigning a relevant role to religion in their everyday life.

With this common denominator, other findings emerge when countries are compared. The greatest gap in religious commitment between Protestants and Catholics is observed in the countries where the adherents of the Catholic Church show the lowest

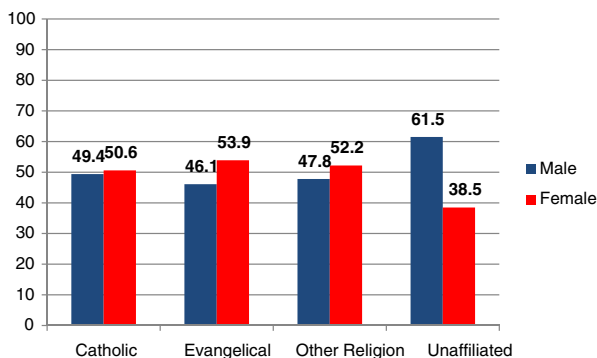


Fig. 7 Religious affiliation by sex in Peru (in %). Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas e Informática de Perú 2008

religious commitment. The greatest differences between Catholics and Protestants in this regard are presented by Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, and Chile, that is, almost all of South America. On the contrary, the countries where the contrast is less apparent are those where commitment is generally high (Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala).

A global look at religious commitment rates opens a new line of interpretation. Central America and the Caribbean (including Colombia) display the highest percentages, regardless of believers' religious belonging. This fact may be examined in more depth by further qualitative studies, but religious institutions and individuals' ties to them seem to be more solid in these societies. On the contrary, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay rank lowest in terms of religious commitment. Religious individuation processes appear to be more robust in the southernmost end of the South Cone, and even though they have a more profound impact on Catholicism, they also affect Protestants, since less than 50% of this religious group reports praying daily, going to church weekly and considering religion important.

The Mexican case is also to be highlighted, due to the country's low religious commitment. It should be stressed again that these results do not imply that religious practices are nonexistent in the countries mentioned: if anything, they reflect a greater detachment from the behaviors mandated by religious institutions.

Attitude towards Same-Sex Marriage

The distribution of opinions about public debate issues (same-sex marriage, abortion, use of contraceptives, changes in priesthood, among others) provides a glimpse into the degree of consistency between personal beliefs and institutional religious guidelines. In other words, it shows the extent to which social world views are influenced by religion.

Religion is not an irrelevant variable as regards the opinion about same-sex marriage⁵; on the contrary, both are significantly correlated. Countries with the lowest levels of institutional religious commitment in Table 6 appear here with the largest percentages of approval of marriage regardless of sexual orientation. Uruguay and Argentina stand out with an approval rate over 50%. Percentages in Mexico, Chile, and Brazil, even though below that figure, also set these countries apart from the rest of the subcontinent. At the opposite end, countries that rank higher in religious commitment (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) express greater rejection of same-sex marriage.

In addition, a comparison among Catholics, Protestants, and those with no religious affiliation shows variability within each country. Although in some cases no percentage was available due to the size of the sample, the population with no religious affiliation is the most prone to approving of marriage regardless of sexual identity. However, in those countries where same-sex marriage is ostensibly rejected, people with no religious affiliation do not express a favorable opinion either, being absorbed by an opposition atmosphere.

⁵ As of October 2015, only about 20 countries in the world have passed legislation allowing same-sex marriage. In the Americas, they are Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Canada, United States, and Mexico (only in the Federal District and in some hinterland states). In Europe, they are the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Luxembourg, Ireland, the United Kingdom (except Northern Ireland), and Slovenia, and in Africa and Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, respectively.

Table 6 Religious commitment by religion per country in Latin America (in %)

Country	Catholics	Country	Protestants
Guatemala	58	Guatemala	75
Honduras	55	El Salvador	71
El Salvador	48	Dominican Republic	65
Dominican Republic	41	Honduras	63
Costa Rica	40	Colombia	62
Nicaragua	37	Brazil	60
Colombia	37	Nicaragua	59
Puerto Rico	28	Puerto Rico	56
Panama	24	Bolivia	56
Ecuador	23	Costa Rica	55
Brazil	23	Peru	51
Bolivia	20	Ecuador	50
Peru	19	Panama	49
Paraguay	19	Venezuela	49
Mexico	16	Paraguay	45
Venezuela	10	Argentina	41
Argentina	9	Uruguay	38
Chile	8	Chile	37
Uruguay	7	Mexico	37

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Catholics are more likely than Protestants to accept same-sex marriage (Table 7). Even so, it is only in three countries (Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil) that approval rates are over 50%. In the case of Protestants, approval is low across the entire subcontinent, but especially in Ecuador, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Guatemala, being less than 10%.

The Recomposition of Religious Configurations as a Sign of the Times

The available statistical data about religiosity in Latin American societies—from population censuses and research centers—coincide in noting a decline of Catholicism as well as the preservation of a long-standing, historically and socially dense Christian culture. The growth of evangelical affiliation is an indication of the end of the Catholic monopoly and of a tendency towards pluralization, especially, within the Christian world. Such processes are more noticeable in the Central American countries and Brazil and less intense in the Andean countries of South America, and in Paraguay, Argentina and Mexico.

Another common denominator of quantitative surveys is the increase of the so called “without religion,” a category that was unknown decades ago. These are individuals who consider themselves believers, but do not feel identified with any religious framework.

Table 7 Opinions in favor of same-sex marriage by religious affiliation per country in Latin America (in %)

Country	Unaffiliated	Catholics	Protestants	Total
Uruguay	77	59	35	62
Argentina	75	53	32	52
Mexico	65	50	35	49
Chile	67	46	26	46
Brazil	54	51	25	45
Puerto Rico	49	39	20	33
Costa Rica	45	32	14	29
Colombia	n/d	29	14	28
Venezuela	n/d	33	14	28
Peru	n/d	29	11	26
Dominican Republic	32	29	12	25
Panama	n/d	26	17	23
Bolivia	n/d	25	10	22
Ecuador	n/d	17	9	16
Nicaragua	25	21	10	16
Paraguay	n/d	15	8	15
Honduras	20	14	10	13
Guatemala	n/d	16	7	12
El Salvador	20	12	7	11

n/d no data

Source: Pew Research Center 2014

Contemporary studies about the religious phenomenon in the region have reported processes of individuation of beliefs and religious deinstitutionalization, which become manifest in the detachment of the faithful from religious institutions' norms and prescriptions, and in religious self-reliance, which consists of believing in one's own way, without turning to institutional mediations (Esquivel and Mallimaci 2016).

Secularization does not entail here the privatization or demise of religion (Berger 1967) but the reconfiguration of the ways in which it is experienced, the mutation in the shaping of religious identities and the reformulation of individual everyday practices. Several forms of relationship between believers and the sacred emerge. The development of social-religious *bricolages* reveals fluxes, circulation, movements of individuals across different religious spaces, as they build their own belief systems, attached to and detached from institutional regulations. They believe without belonging and belong without believing, following religious paths without necessarily dropping anchor once and forever.

In turn, the diversity of religious beliefs, rituals and manifestations requires a deeper study of religious practices in Latin American societies. Historically, the religiosity of a population, group or individual could be evaluated through attendance to worship services. Given the transformations in the ways of experiencing the religious, institutionalized worship habits do not cover the entire universe of believers' practices.

Ultimately, the religious dynamism of Latin American societies combines Christian predominance as a prevailing symbolic point of reference with the fragmentation and pluralization of religious choices, products, and consumption. This landscape translates into hybrid belonging and identities, with borders which do not always fit rigid classification systems.

Religious “mobility” challenges quantitative research to adjust its instruments to the abovementioned transformations, but this does not invalidate the potential and scope of the findings derived from this methodological approach in the social sciences of religion. Quantitative approaches are important and relevant to the religious phenomenon, as proved by the possibility of assessing the magnitude of the processes observed in ethnographic studies and of differentiating modalities of religious beliefs, practices and belonging by social strata, age, sex, place of residence, and many other correlated variables.

In any case, this dynamism calls for greater intellectual efforts and imaginative skills in order to make questionnaires more robust, using new resources for framing questions that make it possible to focus on and depict the different moments and variants of the contemporary religious situation in Latin America.

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