"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities"

A comparative study on the effect of secularity in European countries on Political trust among Christians

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Abstract

Where before politics in European countries were dominated by Christianity, with the rise of other religions and people losing their faith, Christianity is no longer that important in society and the political arena. In the high days of Christianity, political trust was natural. Members of the Christian community were politicians and took decisions in their best interests. Christians were seen as prosocial, since they were socialised into norms of trust. Nowadays, it is harder for Christians to have political trust. Their political representation has declined and liberal norms and values that form a threat to the Christian way of life became more important. In this thesis an attempt has been made to answer the question of to what extent Christians have higher levels of political trust than seculars, and if these levels of political trust are lower in the most secular countries. This is relevant, since political trust is important for policies to have the desired outcomes. A multilevel model is applied, using the available countries and waves of the European Social Survey. Data on the individual and country level is analyzed. The results indicate that Christians do indeed have higher levels of political trust than seculars. Societal secularity, though, does not influence this relationship negatively. Several explanations can be given for these unexpected results. Such as the possibility that because of the secular context they live in, believes weaken and Christians start to show similar behaviour to seculars.

Keywords: Christianity; Political trust; Prosociality; Societal secularity.

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To get to the desired outcomes of policies it is of utter importance for governments to receive trust from its citizens. When there is a high degree of political trust in a country it is more likely that the government will have a high quality of performances (Mishler & Rose, 2001). When political trust is low it creates an environment in which it can be challenging for political actors to make their work meaningful (Hetherington, 1998). Moreover, it is beneficial for the government to receive trust from all sorts of groups in society, instead of only one particular group, to prevent polarisation. Political trust works as an evaluative mechanism and as a cause of more or less support. It is about satisfaction with outputs and performances of political actors that, according to theory, people base their support on (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017). Therefore, it is or should be top priority for governments to keep their citizens happy and satisfied with the way they act.

Groups differ significantly in the trust they have in politicians and politics in general. A group from whom we expect to have high levels of trust are Christians (Traunmüller, 2011). According to the Bible the government is something God given, and God's people should be obedient because of this (New International Version Bible, 1973/2022). When the government is dominated by Christians it is easier to trust them, since they presumably hold the same norms and values (Pepper, Jackson & Uzzell, 2011). Moreover, according to Durkheim (1897) and Joppke (2015) there is an important relationship between politics and religion; and Christianity can therefore be expected to predict political trust. One can question however, that even if the Bible tells them to trust the government, how obedient Christians are if a country becomes more secular. Especially when the government becomes more secular. This process of secularisation is expected to have a significant effect on Christians, because before the secularisation process the religion dominated almost all the European societies (Bruce, 2008). Governments, previously worked according to the same norms and values as Christians. In a secular government other norms and values that are more liberal become important, which can lead to a mismatch between Christians and their governments. This can be argued to lead to less trust among Christians in a particular country (Campbell, 2006). These striking developments leave us with the question: *to what extent do Christians have higher levels of*

political trust than seculars, and are these levels of political trust lower in the most secular countries?

In what follows, I will first discuss the scientific and societal relevance of this research question. Then, the existing literature on the topic of political trust among Christians will be discussed and hypotheses will be deducted, followed by the research design, results and finally the conclusion and discussion with suggestions for future research.

Scientific and societal relevance

Many scholars already investigated the process of secularisation and the consequences it has for societies (Berger, 1999; Inglehart & Norris, 2004). Additionally, there is a lot of research on trust that Christians have in all sorts of specific domains. Such as trust in tax systems, trust in health care systems, and trust in others (Christians, 2017; Thunström et al., 2019; Chu, pink & Willer, 2021). In this thesis, I will perform comparative research between European countries by looking specifically at the political trust level of Christians versus seculars and how this is shaped by the extent to which they live in a secular country.

The social relevance follows from what I mentioned before. It is relevant to look at causes of polarisation. In this case we look at what secularity in a country does with the gap between Christians and Seculars. By doing so, governments can use these results as a base for policy on regaining trust and investing in trust from their citizens. Another phenomenon that makes this a relevant topic is the extent to which a certain group is taken seriously. For instance, the Islam is seen as a delicate matter. This group is seen as a minority group that, in the eyes of progressives, should receive the freedom to emancipate. Christians are overshadowed and their norms and values are not considered in many instances since they are seen as too conservative and intolerant (Drake, 1996).

Theoretical framework

Political trust can be defined as the degree of confidence in political institutions that citizens have. It is a crucial indicator for the legitimacy of the political area. It is about the belief in the fairness of these political systems and the regimes that belong to it. According to scholars, lower levels of political trust might have more negative consequences than seen at first glance (Almond & Verba, 1963; Marien & Hooghe, 2011). For instance, they might result in instability of the democracy, and it can shake up the balances in societies. They can cause disturbances

in peace and power. Moreover, it might undermine the legitimacy of political actions. Levi and Stoker (2000) add to this that trust is rarely unconditional, which is in line with Mishler and Rose (2001). They argue that political trust is rather something that comes into being through the rationale, based on outcomes and outputs that are visible to individuals. Furthermore, it is possible for citizens to trust "the government" as an object, for what it is (Easton, 1975; Jacobs, 1990). On the other hand, it is also possible to trust the government partially, in certain domains or only specific actors for what they do (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Easton, 1975). Important with the latter is that political actors can be replaced when they are not trustworthy, through elections. Systems on the other hand are implemented in a democracy and are not easily changed or replaced (Marien & Hooghe, 2011). This means that fundamental distrust in how the government works has the probability to be problematic. Easton (1975) describes this distinction as diffuse versus specific support. Diffuse support refers to the support in what the political system is, as stated above. Specific support refers to support or no support based on the outputs of specific actors, institutions or a specific part of the political system. This means that specific support can be seen as a reply to authorities, which in turn means that citizens need to be aware of those authorities (Easton, 1975). Additionally, according to Easton (1975), this type of support lays on the fundamentals of a stable society.

Previously, religion was the driving force behind cohesion in society and political trust (Durkheim, 1897) since collective behaviour and rituals were seen as the origin of cohesion and solidarity. This was also caused by the fact that a lot of Christians lived together in societies surrounded by other, like-minded, Christians. According to Heineck (2017) and Norenzayan and Shariff (2008) this is the reason why Christianity is related to prosociality and solidarity. Experiments demonstrate that there is a significant association between Christianity and trust as a result of this prosociality. Since Christianity was seen as the driving force of society, there was also a big association between Christianity and politics (Joppke, 2015). Christians were supposed to show elevated levels of trust in politics, and Christians not only dominated in society, but also in the political arena; a large part of the politicians were members of a Christian denomination, so they could be seen as ingroup members, members of their community, with whom they shared norms and values (Putnam, 2000; Traunmüller, 2011). That is one of the reasons that it was possible for Christians to trust the government according to what was written in their holy book: the Bible. According to Romans 13 God imposes men to obey the governing authorities, *"for there is no authority except that which God has established. The*

authorities that exist have been established by God" (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2022, Rom. 13:1-2). Therefore, humankind should trust the government because God is trustworthy. Additionally, according to Traunmüller (2011) and Putnam (2000), Christians are socialised into norms of trust in others at an early age in the first years of education. From this, the first hypothesis can be deducted:

H1: Christians, in general, show higher levels of political trust than seculars.

With the rise of the liberal, secular democracy, religion started to lose its salience within politics (Crouch, 2000). Religion and state are nowadays seen as two separate institutions, although the same authors argue that in practice they can never be seen as completely separate (Joppke, 2015; Crouch, 2000). Moreover, Christianity did not disappear completely, but it moved more to the private spheres. Additionally, the focus nowadays is much more on individualistic values instead of collective rituals and values. Without those shared values it becomes more difficult to secure cohesion, which leads to less trust in the fellow men (Goldberg, 2014). The change in how European democracies were shaped, was also a result of the increment of new religions that were brought into Europe through migrants and globalisation (Joppke, 2015). New religions had to find their way into the existing relationship between state and church and resulted in weakening of the dominance of Christianity. Trust in general became challenging for (Christian) citizens, since not all their neighbours had the same standards and beliefs (Joppke, 2015). Hence, the question arises if Christians still retain their higher degrees of political trust in secular times.

According to research, a crucial factor in whether a person trusts or distrusts the government is the context in which they live. Context effects are important because an individual's behaviour depends largely on their environment (Goldberg, 2014). In this thesis the focus will be on the extent to which Christianity is still dominant in European countries. The context effect of the degree of secularity in a country can determine how a religious person feels and what behaviours they display (Goldberg, 2014). Since Christianity is related to prosociality and solidarity according to scholars (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Heineck, 2017), they are used to living together in a society with other Christians. In those environments it is more common to trust others because they are socialised into norms of trust (Stark, Doyle and Kent, 1980; Traunmüller, 2011). In a Christian society members become socially conscious,

which makes them trust others and depend on others, instead of only depending on themselves (Pepper, Jackson & Uzzell, 2011). In a society that develops into being more secular and where it is not the norm to be Christian, these standards are not self-evident. This can be one of the explanations why trust of Christians decreases at a higher pace in a secular context, than the trust of seculars.

Secularity in a country can shape the gap between Christian and secular people. Especially when the government is also predominantly secular, Christians start to lose affinity with political actors and disagreements increase. People could get the idea that there are not enough actors that defend their interests (Bruce, 2008; Casanova, 2007). The gap between the ideologies of Christians and those of politicians widens, resulting in lower political trust and less support for the government. The more secular a country is, the more it threatens the Christian way of life (Campbell, 2006). Topics that are important for Christians disappear more to the background and liberal topics play the lead. For most Christians it is important to have a community, they rely on solidarity and spirituality. In a lot of secular societies individualism increases, and social and cultural diversity, globalisation and rationality are more important (Bruce, 2008). Topics like LGBTQI+ rights, abortion and termination of life and other ethical medical issues are profoundly important and tend to oppose the values of a lot of Christians or are seen as delicate matters.

Additionally, Traunnmüller (2011) argues that while Christians are socialised into norms of trust at an early age and therefore trust their communities, at the same time this (subconsciously) teaches them to do the opposite with outgroup members: the non-Christian part of the society. This mistrust can be based on the belief they have in the sinfulness of human nature, which is described in the Bible, and it is what a lot of Christians believe in. The reason for mistrust can also be attributed to the feeling of discrimination that Christians can experience when a large part of society and the government does not respect their norms and values (Traunmüller, 2011). Therefore, I expect that although the Bible tells Christians to trust the governing authorities, because they are God given, in practice it becomes a lot more difficult as the scope of religious authority is in a process of decline (Chaves, 1994). It makes it more difficult for Christians to obey political actors when their norms and values derogate completely from their own, when the authority of secular institutions increase, while that of religious ones are in decline (Bruce, 2002; Casanova, 2007). Additionally, in a more secular society trust and prosociality are no longer the norm (Pepper, Jackson & Uzzell, 2011). Thus, it

becomes a challenge for Christians to keep their trust in governmental institutions. For many Christians trust will diminish because of these developments, despite the clear statements in the Bible and the expected higher trust of Christians (hypothesis 1) (Stark et al., 1980). From this the following hypothesis can be deducted.

H2a: The level of political trust of Christians is low in relation to the level political trust of seculars as the level of societal secularity is high.

This hypothesis is made visible in figure 1. According to hypothesis 1 Christians have higher levels of political trust. With the secular context of hypothesis 2a it is expected that in countries with low levels of secularity, political trust is still high. Whereas, in the most secular countries political trust is low.
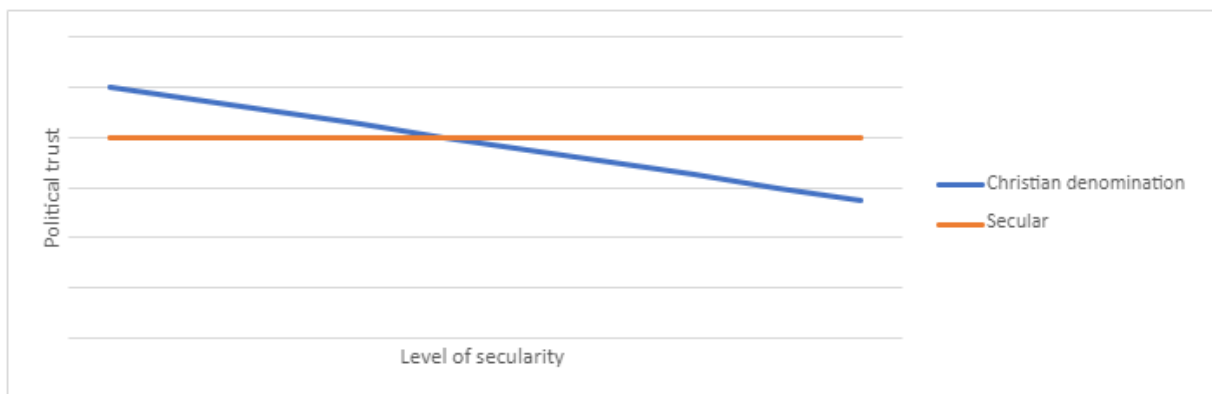

F*igure 1: expected effect according to hypothesis 2a*

Although denomination is one way to distinguish Christians from seculars, it is questionable whether it is an accurate way for the research problem at hand, especially since the decline in church attendance from the second half of the 20th century (Crouch, 2000). A lot of people still consider themselves to be a part of a denomination even though they don't practise their religion (anymore) and no longer attend church services. Accordingly, the expected relations may not apply to them as they do to Christians that are religiously committed (Wright & Young, 2017). Therefore, it can be beneficial to investigate other ways to measure Christianity. The second approach that is applied to measure religion is to look at church attendance (Goldberg, 2014). I expect that the extent to which one is religious is better captured with church attendance than it is with denomination. This leads to hypothesis the following hypothesis:

H2b: *The level of political trust of people that attend church services frequently is low in relation to the level of political trust of people that never attend church services as the level of societal secularity is high.*

This hypothesis is made visible in figure 2. The difference with figure 1 is that the line for Christians and seculars changed into one line for people that attend church services frequently and a line for those who do not. Additionally, there is a considerable possibility that this relationship is stronger than the relationship when we only look at denomination. Therefore, the slope is visualised steeper for hypothesis 2b.
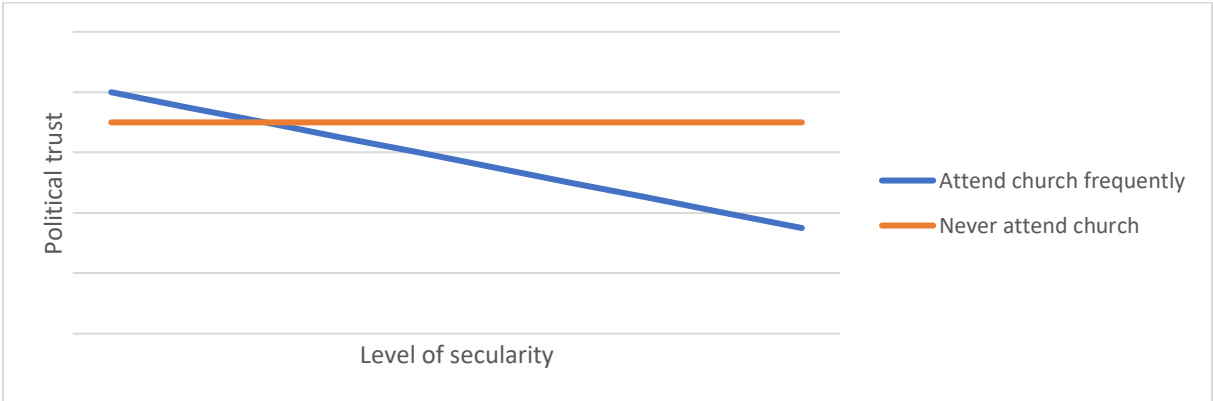

Figure 2: expected effect according to hypothesis 2b and 2c

The final approach that is used to operationalise Christianity is by looking at the extent to which people consider themselves to be a religious person. Religion is something very personal and therefore it is relevant to look at the scores someone gives to their own Christianity. I expect that if someone feels very Christian, the effects of secularisation have more impact on that person. The following hypothesis follows from this:

H2c: *The level of political trust of people that give themselves a high Christianity score is low in relation to the level of political trust of people that give themselves a low Christianity score as the level of societal secularity is high.*

For this, respondents are asked about the extent to which they consider themselves to be religious. For visualisation of this hypothesis, we can look at figure 2 again since I expect it to have a similar effect as church attendance.

Even though differences can appear in what Christianity looks like in different countries, I generally expect the same effects of secularity on the political trust amongst Christians in Europe. For instance, dominant denominations differ per country as traditions also differ per country. In some countries catholic denominations are dominant (Spain for instance), in other countries protestant (the Netherlands) or one of the orthodox denominations (Greece and Russia) are of more value. Religion and secularity can therefore turn out differently. Even though differences can appear and are important to notice, in this thesis I broadly expect the same effects for all Christian denominations, which is in line with the method that is used by a lot of scholars that included Christianity in their research (Achterberg et al., 2009; Pepper et al., 2011; Stark et al., 1982; Wright & Young, 2017). They all talk about 'Christianity' as one concept, but also acknowledge that there are differences between different denominations. Additionally, according to Liefbroer and Rijken (2019) it is rather the level of Christianity that is important than the denomination. Following these scholars, I include all Christian denominations as the concept Christianity.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationships between Christian religiosity, political trust and the impact of a secular context in a visual model. The country level variable is illustrated above the dotted line (Z). On the individual level I expect that a high level of Christianity (X) results in a high level of political trust (Y). The theoretical implications for this relation are presented in the round dotted boxes below, which are prosociality (Heineck, 2017) and norms of trust (Traunmüller, 2011). Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c all expect the variable on the country level, secularity (Z), to have a negative effect on the positive relationship between X and Y. The theoretical assumptions for this expectation are presented in de round dotted boxes at the top.
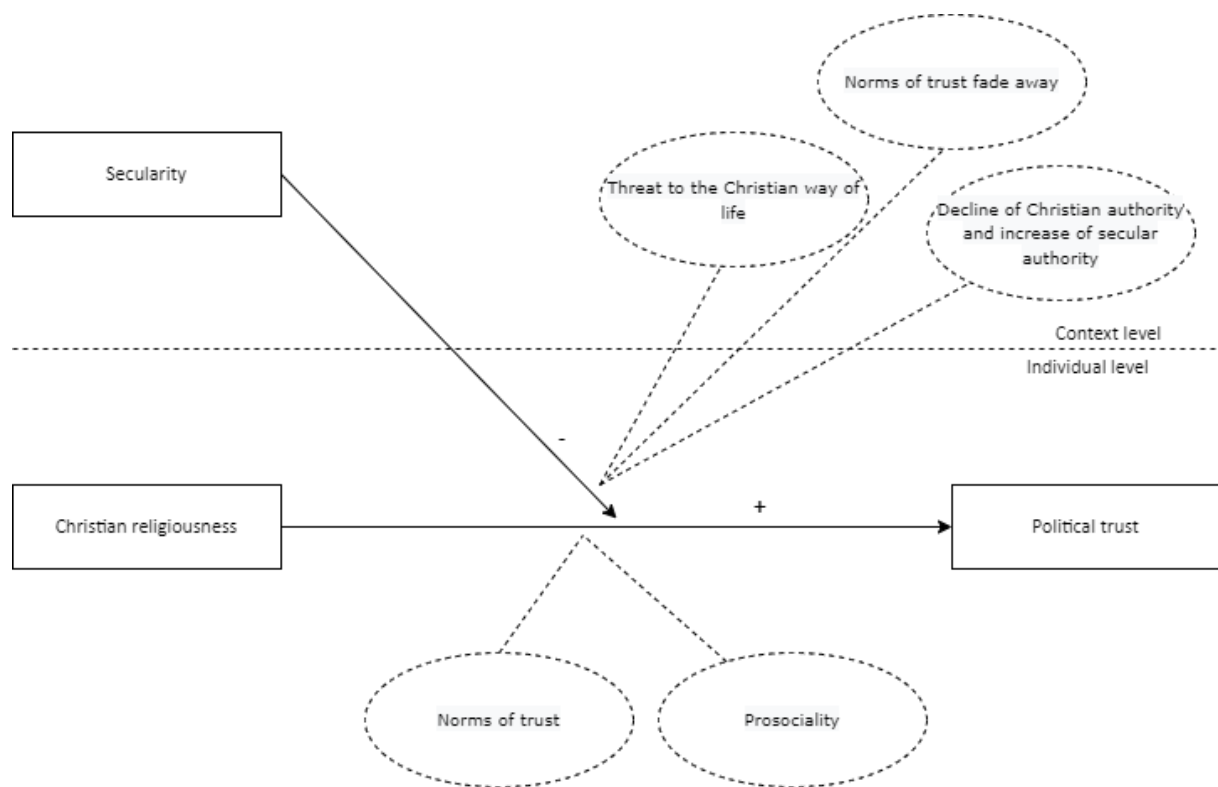
Figure 3: Conceptual model

Research design

Data

For the measurement of the variables, I will use the European Social Survey wave 1 till 9 (ESS9, 2018). The survey includes data from 30 European countries over a time period of 2002 till 2018 (n = 314,989). Because country level data is used, using only one wave of the ESS dataset would mean a small n (30) As a solution to this problem I used wave 1 till 9 of the ESS dataset to magnify the n when using country-wave combinations (207). Furthermore, for this thesis only people that indicated to comply with one of the Christian denominations or said to be secular (don't associate with any religion) are included in this research. Everyone that adheres to a different religion, such as Islam or Buddhism was excluded from the dataset, following Achterberg et al. (2009). These respondents are excluded, for the purpose of this research because I want to investigate the political trust of Christians specifically in contexts that differ in secularity.

After examining the dataset, for some country-wave combinations almost all respondents were excluded from the dataset, since they all adhere to a different religion than Christianity. Since this would mean that the means of those country-wave combinations would be based on only 3 respondents in some cases, I decided to eliminate these entire country-wave combinations from the dataset. This resulted in the fact that Israel and Turkey are not included in this research. After operationalising all the necessary variables, 207 country-wave combinations remained for the analyses (table 1).

Table 1: country-wave combinations

ESS round	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Austria	x	x	x				x	x	x
Belgium	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bulgaria				x	x	x			x
Croatia				x	x				x
Cyprus				x	x	x			x
Czechia	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Denmark	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Estonia		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Finland	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
France			x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Germany	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Greece	x	x		x	x				
Hungary	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Iceland		x				x		x	x
Ireland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Italy	x					x		x	x
Latvia				x					x
Lithuania					x	x	x	x	x
Luxembourg	x	x							
Netherlands	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Norway	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Poland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Portugal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Russia			x	x	x	x		x	
Slovakia		x	x	x	x	x			x
Slovenia	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Spain	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sweden	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Switzerland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ukraine		x	x	x	x	x			
United Kingdom	x			x	x	x	x	x	x

Ethics & Privacy

As for ethics and privacy considerations I have the advantage that I will be using secondary data, which is a completely anonymous data file. Therefore, there should be no problems with ethics and privacy (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, I filled out the ethics & privacy checklist, which is checked and signed by my supervisor (see appendix 1).

Operationalisation

Christian religiosity (X)

The independent variable is operationalised in three ways, as I already argued in the theoretical framework. The first measurement is done by following the operationalisation that Achterberg et al. (2009) used. To measure X_1 the variable *religion or denomination belonging to at present* is used and recoded as follows: the categories *Roman Catholic*, *Protestant*, *Eastern orthodox* and *other Christian denominations* are coded as 1, and the category not *applicable* is coded 0, because this means that a person is secular. Respondents identifying as *Jewish*, *Islam*, *Eastern religions* and *other non-Christian religions*, as well as *refusal* and *no answer* were coded as missing.

The second operationalisation is carried out by looking at the survey item *how often attend religious services apart from special occasions,* based on a 7-point scale (X_2). Answers to this question range from 1 (every day) until 7 (never). According to (Goldberg, 2014) the degree of Christianity can be measured by looking at church attendance and that is why I also operationalised the degree of Christianity as such. I first changed the direction of the item, because of which higher scores indicate a higher degree of Christianity (1 (never) till 7 (every day)).

The third manner to operationalise religion is to look at the survey item: how *religious are you*, this item considers the score a respondent gives to their degree of religiosity themselves, based on a 10-point scale (X_3), I will call this 'own Christianity score' in this thesis. The answers to this question are ranging from 1 (not at all religious) to 10 (very religious).

Political trust (Y)

With regard to the dependent variable, it was necessary to create a scale out of various variables concerning political trust: *trust in countries' parliament, trust in politicians* and *trust*

in political parties. All three of them use an 11-point scale, ranging from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). It is not necessary to recode these items since they all have an 11-point scale in the same direction. To create a scale, I performed a factor analysis to examine if the items fit the scale. The factor analysis indicated that all items load onto one dimension, which explains 84.98% of the variation. Factor loadings of the three aforementioned variables are 0.880, 0.947 and 0.937 respectively. Furthermore, the internal reliability of the scale was estimated by looking at Cronbach's alpha (Bryman, 2012). The scale for political trust is reliable, Cronbach's alpha for the three items yielded .909.

Control variables (X)

According to Mishler and Rose (2001) and Liefbroer and Rijken (2019) level of education, age and gender can have a strengthening or weakening effect on political trust. Therefore, following these scholars level of education, age and gender are included as control variables. Higher education is expected to be a predictor of more political trust in established democracies, as well as women over men (Cole, 1973; Schoon & Cheng, 2011). Furthermore, people with higher ages tend to be less trusting in the government (Cole, 1973). Gender was coded as 1 for male, 2 for female and 9 (no answer) is coded as missing. Education (EISCED) is measured as a scale ranging from 1 (low level of education) to 9 (high level of education). Additionally, 0 was coded as missing, since this category indicated *not possible to harmonise into ES-ISCED*, which means that this is not of value for the measurement of level of education. Lastly, age is measured in years.

Societal secularity (Z)

The context variable will be operationalised following the operationalisation of Achterberg et al. (2009), by looking at the percentage of secular citizens in a country. The means of secularity is measured per country-wave combination, by using the (created) X variables and recoding them into higher scores meaning more secular people in a country (Finke & Admaczyk, 2008; Jaime-Castillo, Fernández & Valiente, 2016). A visualisation of the level of secularity per country-wave combination is included in the form of bar charts in Appendix II. In the bar charts there are no big abnormalities to be noticed, since the level of secularity is in almost all countries going in an upward direction, so countries become more secular through time, with some exceptions. The countries that instead clearly become less secular are France, Russia,

Slovakia and Ukraine. For Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine is not hard to explain, since these countries were all part of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet Union period, religion was forbidden, after the Soviet Union fell, religion became again more and more important and is still growing ever since (Pelkmans, 2009). The decline of secularity in France on the other hand is more surprising, but since the decline is minor I decided to still include the country, as well as Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine in the dataset.

The measurement of Christian religiosity is carried out by using denomination, church attendance and how religious are you. For the measurement of Z a scale was created out of these items, but with higher scores reflecting more secularism in a country. That's why I first had to recode denomination and own Christianity score for church attendance I used the original item. From these (created) variables aggregate levels were generated. Since the three items were built out of distinct categories, they were first standardised and checked for reliability (α = .798). Additionally, factor analysis was carried out and this indicated that all items can be reduced to one dimension, since it explains 89.37% of the variance. Factor loadings of the aforementioned variables are 0.945, 0.937, 0.954 respectively. After all these steps were carried out the items were computed into one scale. By doing so, there is now only one measurement of societal secularity (Z) that will be included in the analyses.

Analysis

Multilevel regression analysis will be performed to test the hypotheses. The mixed model analysis has been built up stepwise. First the direct effect of Denomination (X_1) on Political trust (Y) is measured. Subsequently, the direct effect of Denomination on Political trust is measured with the added context variable societal secularity. Finally, the moderation effect of societal secularity is added, by interacting denomination with societal secularity. These steps are done three times whereby the X is swapped for the other two operationalisations of Christianity. In table 2 the above-mentioned variables are presented in an overview.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of all variables included in the main analysis

	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Dependent					
Political trust scale	373,017	0	10	3.820	2.278
Independent					
Individual level					
Denomination	377,187	0	1	.587	0.492
Church attendance	374,903	1	7	2.565	1.501
Own Christianity score	373,840	0	10	4.590	3.013
Gender	377,033	1	2	1.540	0.498
Education level	322,563	1	7	3.820	1.821
Age	377,187	14	105	48.720	18.607
Societal level					
Secularity	207	2.13	4.69	3.500	0.560

Results
Statistical assumptions

A few checks had to be carried out before conducting the main analyses. First checks were carried out to inspect if there were any outliers in the dataset, using boxplots. By doing so, only three outliers were detected with an extreme high age (110, 114, 123). I decided to filter them out of the dataset because they are too unlikely. There are also outliers detected for church attendance, four respondents indicated that they go to church every day. Since this can indicate that these respondents identify as very Christian, I decided to keep them in the dataset. Multicollinearity tests were also carried out and they showed that the highest VIF is 5.042 for the context level denomination variable. All the other variables show a VIF lower than 5, so I conclude that, overall, it indicates that no multicollinearity exists between the variables.

Correlations

Pearson's correlations were carried out for the ranked individual level variables that are included in the analyses and the coefficients are shown in table 3. These results show a very weak coherence between the dependent and independent variables, which suggests that the strength strongly depends on different contexts, as is expected. Additionally, the correlations between the three operationalisations of Christianity are strong (>0.5), which suggest that broadly the same outcomes of the multilevel regression models can be expected for all three operationalisations.

Variables	Political trust scale	Denomination	Church attendance	Own Christianity score	Gender	Age
Denomination	-0.013** (n = 373,017)					
Church attendance	0.002 (n = 370,895)	0.573** (n = 374,903)				
Own Christianity score	0.056** (n = 369,941)	0.568** (n = 373,840)	0.628** (n = 372,252)			
Gender	-0.028** (n = 372,866)	0.094** (n = 377,033)	0.136** (n = 374,752)	0.176** (n = 373,689)		
Age	-0.017** (n = 373,017)	0.173** (n = 377,187)	0.149** (n = 374,903)	0.204** (n = 373,840)	0.041** (n = 377,033)	
Education level	0.110** (n = 319,035)	-0.091** (n = 322,563)	-0.064** (n = 320,587)	-0.098** (n = 319,717)	-0.008** (n = 322,432)	-0.162** (n = 322,563)

Table 3: Pearson's coefficients of all ranked individual level variables included in the main analysis
** Correlation is significant at the level <0.001 (2-tailed).

Multilevel regression models

After the preliminary analyses were carried out, multilevel regression models will follow. As mentioned before, the analyses are done for all three operationalisations of Christianity, and they will also be reported as such. To start off with the operationalisation of Christianity as denomination (X_1), the results are presented in table 4. To be able to find out how being part of the Christian denomination would influence political trust the first model is generated. The coefficient simulates the mean of political trust without any independent variables.

In the second model the predictors (fixed effects) are added to make visible how the means of the populations of countries are affected by a different context (Field, 2017). In the third model the random slope for denomination is added to see if the effect of denomination on political trust varies across countries.

Finally, in the fourth model the interaction effect 'denomination*societal secularity' is added to the equation to see if the variation in political trust in different countries can be explained by the level of secularity in those particular countries.

Hypothesis 1 read *Christians, in general, show higher levels of political trust than seculars* and can be supported. The coefficient for denomination is significantly positive (0.332). Hypothesis 2a read *the level of political trust of Christians is low in relation to the political trust of seculars as the level of societal secularity is high,* but the results, instead, lead to rejection since the coefficient for the interaction effect of 'societal secularity*denomination' is (slightly) positive and not significant.

Continuing with the second operationalisation of Christianity, the build-up of the model is done in the same way, but with church attendance (X_2) instead of denomination. To test hypotheses 1 and 2b the former steps are repeated with X_2, which means they simultaneously serve as robustness checks. The results are shown in table 5. The direct effect of Church attendance on political trust again shows a significant positive result (0.175), although the effect is not as strong as it was for the model with X_1 (hypothesis 1). Hypothesis 2b read *the level of political trust of people that attend church services frequently is low in relation to the level of political trust of people that never attend church services as the level of societal secularity is high,* as well as was the case with hypothesis 2a, the results show a non-significant (slight) positive coefficient for the interaction effect of 'societal secularity*church attendance' (0.010). This opposes hypothesis 2b, which means it must be rejected.

Again, the steps are repeated for the third operationalisation of Christianity. In these steps own Christianity score (X_3) is used to test hypotheses 1 and 2c. The results of these models are presented in table 6. These results also show a significant positive effect of own Christianity score on political trust (0.089), although the effect is less strong than with the first two operationalisation of Christianity. Hypothesis 2c read *he level of political trust of people that give themselves a high Christianity score is low in relation to the political trust of people that give themselves a low Christianity score as the level of societal secularity is high,* the results show a (very slight) negative coefficient for the interaction effect of societal 'secularity*own Christianity score', which is in line with the hypothesis (-0.003). Although, the coefficient is not significant and too minor which results in the rejection of hypothesis 2c.

So, overall and checked by all three operationalisations for Christianity, Christians show higher levels of political trust than seculars. Although, their level of Political trust vis-à-vis non-Christians is not lower in contexts that are highly secular than in contexts that have low levels of secularity. Hypothesis 1 is accepted and hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c must be rejected.

Table 4: Multilevel regression models for hypotheses 1 and 2a

Parameter	Model 1		Model with fixed effects		Model with fixed and random effects		Full model with Interaction	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Fixed								
Intercept	3.643**	.204	3.138**	0.189	3.153**	0.179	3.153**	0.179
Denomination			0.355**	0.008	0.332**	0.036	0.332**	0.036
Gender (female)			-0.042**	0.007	-0.041**	0.007	-0.041**	0.007
Age			-0.002**	<0.001	-0.002**	<0.001	-0.002**	<0.001
Education level			0.119**	0.002	0.119**	0.002	0.119**	0.002
Societal secularity			0.323*	0.141	0.327*	0.138	0.327*	0.138
Societal secularity * Denomination							0.003	0.036

	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE
Random								
Residual	4.043**	0.010	3.977**	0.010	3.967**	0.010	3.967**	0.010
Intercept level 1 variance (country-wave)	0.166**	0.020	0.166**	0.020	0.165**	0.020	0.165**	0.020
Denomination level 1 variance (country-wave)					0.011**	0.003	0.011**	0.003
Intercept level 2 variance (country)	1.254**	0.337	1.053**	0.299	0.946**	0.270	0.946**	0.270
Denomination level 2 variance (country)					0.035*	0.011	0.035*	0.011

Dependent variable: Political trust. *$p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5: Multilevel regression models for hypotheses 1 and 2b

Parameter	Null model		Model with fixed effects		Model with fixed and random effects		Full model with interaction	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Fixed								
Intercept	3.644**	.204	2.967**	0.193	2.984**	0.182	2.983**	0.182
Church attendance			0.177**	0.003	0.174**	0.011	0.175**	0.011
Gender (female)			-0.076**	0.007	-0.074**	0.007	-0.074**	0.007
Age			-0.002**	<0.001	-0.002**	<0.001	-0.002**	<0.001
Education level			0.121**	0.002	0.120**	0.002	0.120**	0.002
Societal secularity			0.337*	0.142	0.323*	0.142	0.317*	0.142
Societal secularity * Church attendance							0.010	0.012

	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE
Random								
Residual	4.038**	0.010	3.942**	0.010	3.933**	0.010	3.933**	0.010
Intercept level 1 variance (country-wave)	0.167**	0.020	0.166**	0.020	0.176**	0.022	0.176**	0.022
Church attendance variance (country-wave)					0.002**	<0.001	0.002**	<0.001
Intercept level 2 variance (country)	1.252**	0.336	1.096**	0.312	0.969**	0.283	0.971**	0.284
Church attendance level 2 variance					0.003*	<0.001	0.003*	0.001

Dependent variable: Political trust. *p < 0.05. ** p < 0.001.

Table 6: Multilevel regression models for hypotheses 1 and 2c

	Null model		Model with fixed effects		Model with fixed and random effects		Full model with interaction	
Parameter	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Fixed								
Intercept	3.646**	.204	3.069**	0.187	3.077**	0.186	3.077**	0.186
How religious are you?			0.091**	0.001	0.089**	0.005	0.089**	0.005
Gender (female)			-0.103**	0.007	-0.102**	0.007	-0.102**	0.007
Age			-0.003**	<0.001	-0.003**	<0.001	-0.003**	<0.001
Education level			0.123**	0.002	0.124**	0.002	0.124**	0.002
Societal secularity			0.354*	0.140	0.347*	0.141	0.350*	0.141
Societal secularity * How religious are you?							-0.003	0.006

	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE	Variance component	SE
Random								
Residual	4.037**	0.010	3.933**	0.010	3.922**	0.010	3.922**	0.010
Intercept level 1 variance (country-wave)	0.166**	0.020	0.166**	0.020	0.168**	0.021	0.168**	0.021
How religious are you? variance (country-wave)					0.001**	<0.001	0.001**	<0.001
Intercept level 2 variance (country)	1.251**	0.336	1.027**	0.292	1.018**	0.292	1.017**	0.291
How religious are you? level 2 variance					<0.001*	<0.001	<0.001*	<0.001

Dependent variable: Political trust. *$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.001$.*

Conclusion and discussion

In this thesis an attempt has been made to dig into the observed difference in political trust between Christians and seculars. With the expectation that Christians have higher levels of political trust than seculars and that this political trust is lower in case of higher levels of secularity in a country (Campbell, 2006). In other words, the question that was used as a starting point was: *to what extent do Christians have higher levels of political trust than seculars, and are these levels of political trust lower in the most secular countries?* The first part of this question was based on assumptions following theories of Norenzayan and Shariff (2008) and Heineck (2017). They argue that there is an important association between Christianity and prosociality. Christians were socialised into norms of trust at an early age through education, where they were taught to be prosocial (Putnam, 2000; Traunmüller, 2011). So, being prosocial was related to higher levels of trust in each other. Since politics was dominated by Christianity, this could, according to theory, also mean high levels of political trust (Durkheim, 1897; Joppke, 2015). Nowadays, politics are not naturally dominated by Christianity and that was reason to produce the second expectation, based on the threat on the Christian way of life (Campbell, 2006) and the opposite of natural trust. Because politicians are no longer seen as ingroup members (Traunmüller, 2011): political trust of Christians is low as a country is more secular.

To construct robust results the analyses were repeated with three different operationalisations of Christianity, based on denomination, church attendance and own level of Christianity. The results show support for the higher levels of political trust among Christians, but they oppose the low political trust as a country has high levels of secularity. Therefore, the results raise questions about how this can be explained. In what follows some possibilities will be presented.

As is the case in many research projects, this thesis project knows several limitations. For instance, since it was difficult to find literature on the specific topic of Christianity in combination with political trust, some of the theory on political trust is based on scholars that wrote about social trust (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Traunmüller, 2011; Heineck, 2017). It can lead to results that are not significant if it turns out that general trust cannot be directly applied to political trust.

Another explanation for insignificant results can be based on the moral communities thesis (Stark et al., 1980; Stark, Kent & Doyle, 1982). According to this thesis the behaviour that

Christians display depends for a large part on the environment they are in. According to this thesis, it is more likely for Christians that must deal with a secular context, that their beliefs weaken. It becomes harder to hold onto their traditional norms and values because of the non-Christian environment they live in (Ruiter & de Graaf, 2006). A lot of interaction with secular citizens contribute to the merge into more secular norms and values. Following from this, the results might not be as expected because one part of the Christian population show increasingly more similarities with seculars. (Stark et al., 1980; Stark et al., 1982; Ruiter & de Graaf, 1982). On the other hand, another part of the Christian population possibly becomes more religiously conscious, hold on to their believes and experience religious threat, which results into a decline of political trust (Campbell, 2006). Two groups of Christians moving into two different directions can result in a net score of zero change and is a feasible reason for non-significant results. Looking at the presented theory I would expect that especially for people that attend church services often or give themselves a high Christianity score would follow the scenario of becoming more religiously conscious and hold on to their believes, since the effect of secularity is expected to be stronger for them (Wright & Young, 2017). Nevertheless, the absence of an interaction effect doesn't allow to interpret it in that way following the analyses. For future research I would suggest take a closer look these different 'coping mechanisms' of Christians, to see if this explanation is indeed feasible.

Continuing, in this research project there was, unfortunately, not enough time to be sensitive towards divergent denominations that exist within Christianity, which I acknowledge as another limitation of this research project. For future research I would suggest making it a priority to take these differences into account, since there is a large diversity within the overall denomination that are included in this research. It could for example be the case that in more "strict" denominations trust plays a different role than in a less strict denomination. Not only are there viable differences in denominations, but also differences between how the same denominations appear in European countries, due to cultural differences. It would be interesting to dive deeper into contrasting denominations within the same religion (such as Rereformed Protestants, Evangelicals, and the Lutheritarian church (Bekkers & Schuyt, 2008)) play a role within the levels of political trust.

Furthermore, there are many circumstances in which people lose faith in politics and you do not have to be a Christian for that to happen, as we take into consideration that political trust is a rational process (Jacobs, 1990). As I mentioned before political trust is conditional and

it depends for a large part on the performances and outcomes of the political system and its actors (Levi & Stoker, 2000). When big societal or political events happen, such as crises and scandals, it can shake up the balance of trust. This may be another explanation for non-significant results, as it might have affected Christians and non-Christians alike. In some periods of time, the political trust of an entire population declines simultaneously and not only for particular groups, even though according to theory this shift in trust only applies to a certain population. This possibly leads to the fact that there appear to be no differences between the Christian and non-Christian population. For future research I would suggest to select two periods of time: one in which no big societal events took place, and one in which there was (for instance, the Covid-19 pandemic), to see if the results indeed show that these are of influence.

Altogether, from this research project can be concluded that, irrespective of the level of secularity, in the European countries included in this project, Christians do indeed have relatively higher political trust than seculars. Although, the moderation of societal secularity does not have a significant negative effect on this positive relation.

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Dataset

European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9 (2020). Data file edition 1.0. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway - Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. doi: 10.21338/NSD-ESS-CUMULATIVE.

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities", a comparative study on the effect of secularisation on political trust among Christians.

Name, email of student: Elise Boon (510436), 510436eb@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Jeroen van der Waal, vanderwaal@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 01-02-2022, 5 months.

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   NO

        If 'NO': skip to part V.

        If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   NO
        Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).

2.   Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
        that will not involve identification of participants.   NO

        If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3.   Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
        data that has been anonymized by someone else).   YES

        If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

European Social Survey wave 1-9 (ESS, 2018)

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

n= 314,989

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

N= 745.000.000, the population of Europe (2017). Although, in the dataset there are only participants from 15 and older included.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

The data will be saved in Microsoft Onedrive

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I will be responsible.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Because of the use of Microsoft Onedrive, the data will be updated and saved automatically.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Not applicable.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Elise Boon

Name (EUR) supervisor: Jeroen van der Waal

Date: 19-03-22

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Appendix II: bar charts secularity per country-wave combination