

---

# Religiosity and Demographic Events

A Comparative Study of European Countries

**Caroline Berghammer, Dimiter Philipov**  
**VIENNA INSTITUTE OF DEMOGRAPHY (VID)**

---

## Main research question:

What are the theoretical and empirical relations between religiosity and life events related to union formation and fertility in European countries?

## Demographic events:

- age at first intercourse
- age at leaving home
- cohabitation and marriage
- age at first marriage
- age at birth of first child
- **number of children**

# Theory:

## Why does religiosity have an influence on demographic events?

### 1. Religious teaching on fertility

Christianity: pronatalistic and profamilistic (Bible)

Differences between the denominations:

	<b>Catholicism</b>	<b>Protestantism</b>	<b>Orthodoxy</b>
<b>Value of children</b>	Highly estimated		
<b>Contraception</b>	No (only observing fertile periods)	Up to the individual	Up to the individual
<b>Abortion</b>	Exclusion from the sacraments	Voices against	Strong voices against

# Theory: Why does religiosity have an influence on demographic events?

## Further relevant teaching:

- **Role of women:** more traditional gender roles in Catholicism and Orthodoxy than in Protestantism
- **Education:** Reformation also was an education movement

## Are religious organisations able to communicate their teachings to their adherents?

- under the condition of **secularisation**: described as ideational changes on the cultural level by R. Lesthaeghe, D. van de Kaa
- considering the position of a religion: **majority/minority**
- **diversity** within a religion

## 2. Social networks in religious organisation

- gaining **social capital**, i.e., practical aid, financial help and emotional stability
- more frequently exposed to the **teaching** and to people who behave accordingly

# Theory: Why does religiosity have an influence on demographic events?

## 3. Religiosity

- Influence of **existing religions**: individuals do not invent a new religion but are heavily influenced by the religions they know
- Dealing with **contingent situations**:  
contingent situations are existentially meaningful and critical situations where the routine of life is interrupted: birth, serious illness, accident, divorce, death
  - contain considerable uncertainty and unpredictability
  - religion as an interpretation system is marked by the assumption of the existence of a higher power that the believer can rely on
    - confidence in a transcendent power
    - interpretation of these events as meaningful
  - decrease uncertainty

Note: positive influence of religiosity is dependent on the form of religiosity

## Fertility and Family Surveys

**Religiosity:** self-assessed (yes/somewhat/no)

- subjective category, but in the frame of a given religious context
- high correlations with more-item scales

**Affiliation:** Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox

- only asked if the question on religiosity is answered positively → non-religious people for whom the affiliation is a marker of cultural identity are missed

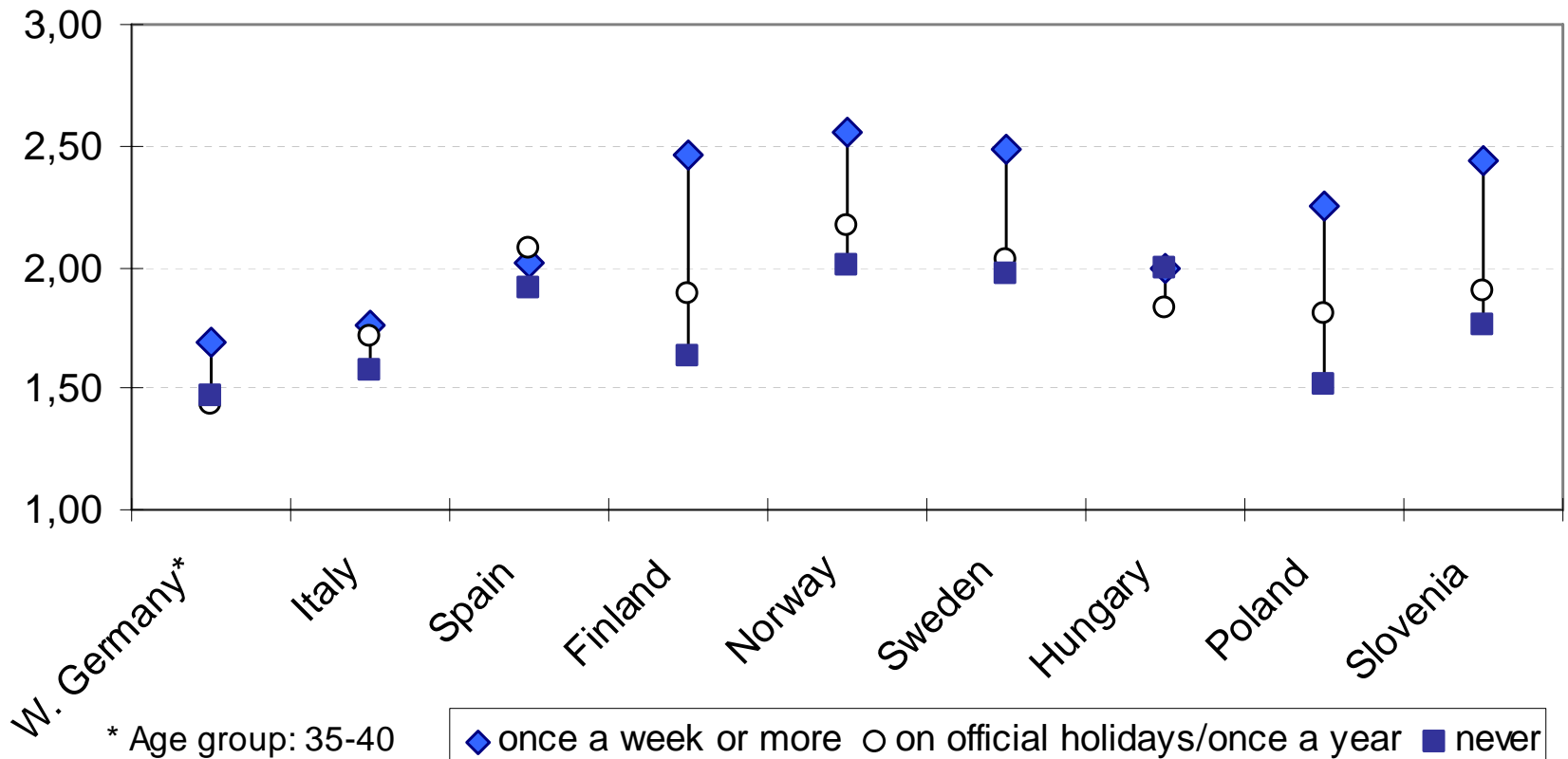
**Religious practice:** frequency of attending religious services

- measure for proximity to the church and exposure to the teaching
- different motivation: personal conviction, social convention ...
- different importance in the denominations

Not all variables were asked in all participating countries.

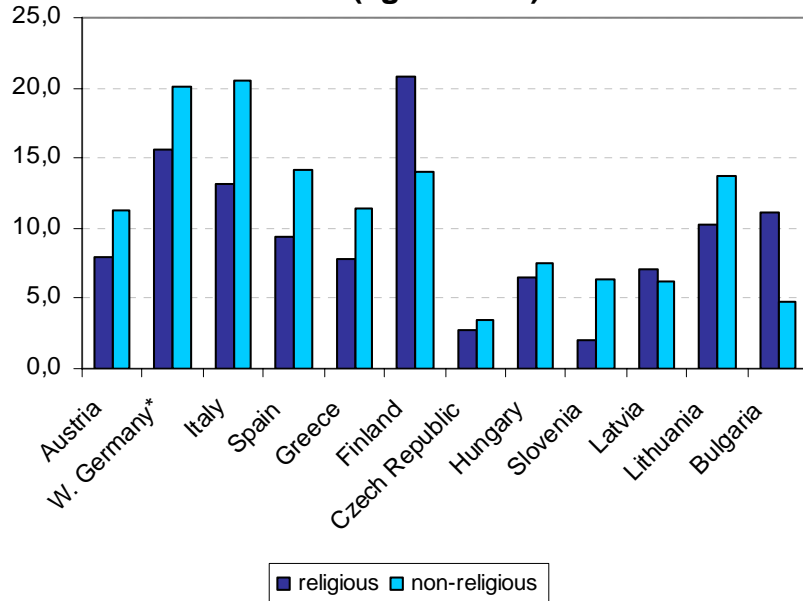
# Findings

Mean number of children by church attendance  
(women aged 35-44)

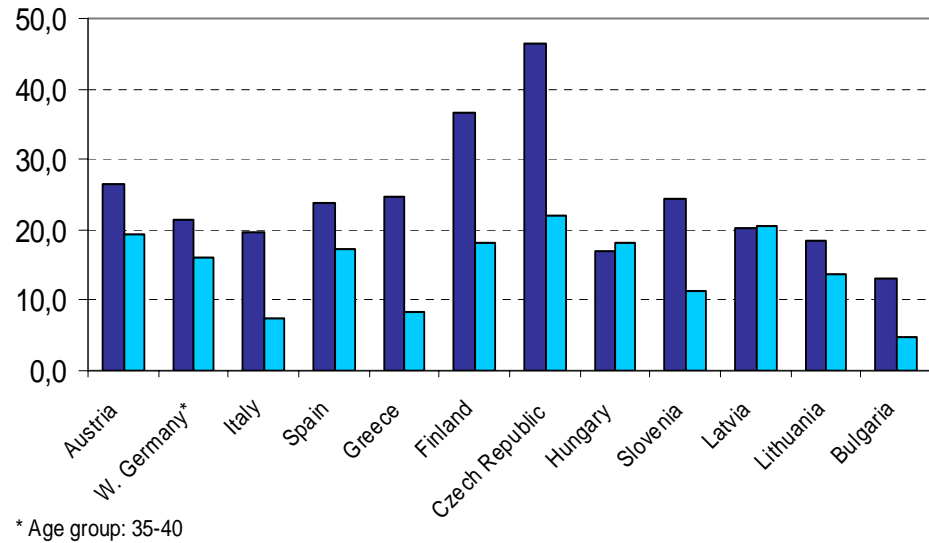


# Findings

**% of childless women by religiosity (ages 35-44)**



**% of women with 3 or more children by religiosity (ages 35-44)**



# Findings

## Linear regressions (female samples)

independent variable:  
**religiosity**

dependent variable:  
**number of children**

control variables:  
education, age,  
number of siblings at  
age 15

		Coef.
<b>Austria</b>	yes (base)	0
	no	- 0,19 ***
<b>Western Germany</b>		n.s.
<b>Italy</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	n.s.
	no	- 0,20 ***
<b>Spain</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	n.s.
	no	-0,18 ***
<b>Greece</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	- 0,16 **
	no	- 0,16 *
<b>Finland</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	n.s.
	no	- 0,26 ***

		Coef.
<b>Eastern Germany</b>		n.s.
<b>Czech Rep.</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	- 0,18 *
	no	- 0,19 **
<b>Hungary</b>		n.s.
<b>Slovenia</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	- 0,17 ***
	no	- 0,32 ***
<b>Poland</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	- 0,42 **
	no	n.s.
<b>Estonia</b>		n.s.
<b>Latvia</b>		n.s.
<b>Lithuania</b>		n.s.
<b>Bulgaria</b>	yes (base)	0
	somewhat	n.s.
	no	0,12 **

Note:  $p < 0.001$  is denoted with three stars,  $p < 0.01$  with two stars, and  $p < 0.05$  with one star.

# Summary

## Number of children

- differences between the regular and non-regular church attendees are especially pronounced in the Nordic countries, Poland and Slovenia
- no significant differences in the influence of religiosity on the number of children are found in Germany, Hungary and the Baltic countries

## Childlessness, parity 3+

- religious and non-religious people display very distinct patterns in the expected directions in Slovenia and Italy
- no differences in Hungary and Latvia
- exceptions are Bulgaria and Finland, where there is a higher share of childless women found among the religious
- in Greece, Finland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic large differences in the patterns where the progression to parity 3+ is considered

# Conclusion

Theoretical insights and empirical associations show that religiosity is of substantial explanatory power for union formation and fertility in Europe.

Theoretical insights are along three main lines:

1. people follow teachings of the religions
2. people gain social capital through religious social networks
3. religions provide help in dealing with contingent situations → decrease uncertainty

Empirical associations show that religious people:

- have a larger number of children
- are more likely to progress to parity 3+
- remain less frequently childless

However, these associations are of different intensity in different national and religious contexts.

---

**Thank you for your attention!**

dimiter.philipov@oeaw.ac.at

caroline.berghammer@oeaw.ac.at