

# Religion and the realization of fertility intentions

## A comparative study of four European countries

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### Research question

Religious persons have higher fertility intentions and a higher number of children than their non-religious peers. **We address the question whether religiosity also plays a role for the rate of realizing intentions:** either the higher fertility of religious persons is an outcome of their higher intentions or it is likewise produced by their higher intentions *and* their better ability to realize these intentions.

We include two measures of religiosity: **(1) religious affiliation** and **(2) frequency of church attendance.**



### Background

There is a clear relationship between religiosity and fertility. Differences in numbers of children persist mostly by level of religiosity (e.g. church attendance, importance of God) and less between members of different religions. This higher fertility corresponds well to higher fertility intentions and can largely not be attributed to higher rates of unintended pregnancy. The effect of religiosity is stronger at higher parities.

Studies have not yet focused on religiosity-specific differences in realizing fertility intentions. However, some previous studies have considered religion as one of the factors that foster or impede the realization of those intentions. These studies have reached mixed results. In Hungary, Catholics are more likely than their non-affiliated peers to realize their intentions rather than to postpone or abandon them (Spéder & Kapitány 2009), while no significant effects were found in the Netherlands (Balbo & Mills 2011).

### Country contexts

We compare four European countries – Austria, Bulgaria, France and the Netherlands – that represent different religious structures.

**Austria:** predominantly Roman Catholic (two-thirds of population) with a somewhat above-average level of church attendance in Europe

**France:** traditionally Roman Catholic but highly secularized with a low level of church attendance

**Netherlands:** bi-denominational structure with similar shares of Catholics and Protestants (mostly Calvinists) and a high share of non-affiliated; in terms of level of church attendance between Austria and France

**Bulgaria:** high concentration of Orthodox (three-quarters of population); church attendance is stable with a level similar to France

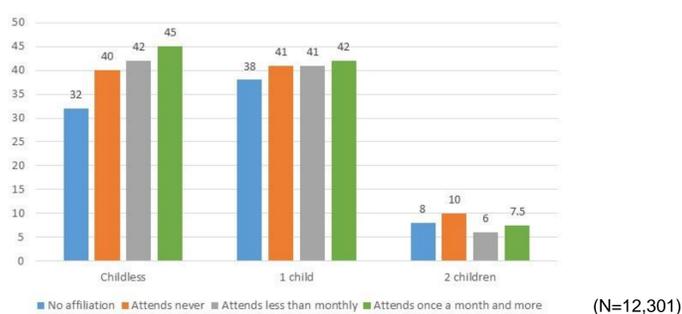


### Data and method

- Generations and Gender Surveys (waves 1 and 2)
- Sample: 12,301 panel respondents
- Probit regression model
- Dependent variable: realization of short-term fertility intentions within 3 years
- Explanatory variables: religious affiliation and church attendance
- Control variables: country, sex, age, parity, partner status at wave 1

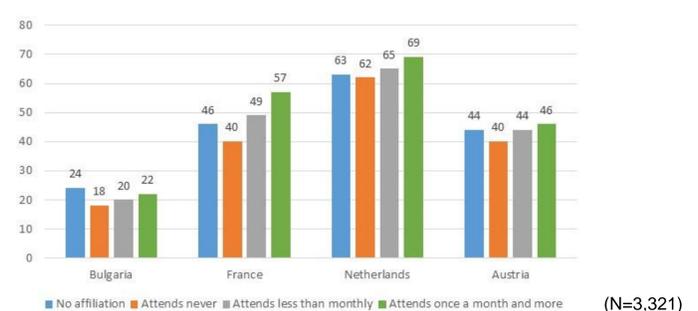
### Descriptive results

#### Intention to have a child within 3 years by affiliation & church attendance



Overall, 27% intended to have a child within the next three years. Childless and parents with one child: the higher the level of church attendance, the more often women and men intended to have a child in the near future. This association was especially pronounced among the childless.

#### Realization of short-term fertility intentions by affiliation & attendance



We find a U-shaped pattern for the realization of short-term intentions in all four countries (all parities combined). Non-affiliated persons and those who frequently attended church realized their fertility intentions most often. This pattern was strongest in France.

### Multivariate results

Probit regression for realization of short-term intentions

**Affiliation & church attendance**  
 No affiliation 0  
 Attends never -0.16\*  
 Attends less than monthly -0.08  
 Once a month or more 0.05

**Country**  
 Bulgaria 0  
 France 0.70\*\*\*  
 Netherlands 1.04\*\*\*  
 Austria 0.62\*\*\*

**Parity**  
 Childless 0  
 1 child -0.00  
 2 children -0.20\*  
 3+ children -0.10

**Partner status at wave 1**  
 Coresiding partner 0  
 Living apart together -0.58\*\*\*  
 No partner -1.09\*\*\*

**Sex**  
 Male 0  
 Female -0.04

**Age at wave 1**  
 18-24 -0.07  
 25-29 0.05  
 30-35 0  
 36-45 -0.27\*\*\*

Constant: -0.27\*\*  
 N = 3,317  
 R<sup>2</sup> = 0.1768

Affiliated persons who **never attended church services less often realized** their fertility intentions as compared to their non-affiliated peers. The latter, however, did not differ significantly in their rate of realizing short-term fertility intentions from persons who attended church services yearly or monthly and more often.

We find large **country differences:** the rate of realization was highest in the Netherlands and lowest in Bulgaria. Among the control variables, age, partner status and parity were associated with the realization of intentions.

#### References:

- Balbo, N. and M. Mills (2011). The influence of the family network on the realisation of fertility intentions. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 9.
- Spéder, Z. and B. Kapitány (2009). How are time-dependent childbearing intentions realized? Realization, postponement, abandonment, bringing forward. *European Journal of Population* 25.

### Conclusion

We find clear differences in short-term fertility intentions by affiliation and church attendance: the more religious, the more often men and women intended to have a child within three years. However, the rate of realization varied little by these measures of religiosity. After controlling for parity and other variables, (almost) no significant effects remained.

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