

Vol. 33, No. 9**July 2018****FEATURE STORY:****Jihadists pursue insurgent and decentralized strategies after Islamic State setback**

The global jihadi scene may be quieter due to the decline of the Islamic State (IS), but this setback will likely be temporary as al Qaeda is being regenerated and the jihadist movement in general is being decentralized, write political scientists Colin P. Clarke and Assaf Moghadam in the foreign policy journal *Orbis* (Summer). The structure of global jihadists so far has been largely bipolar, divided between IS and al Qaeda, and the authors note that these two players are likely to continue to vie for power with each other, a contest determining the jihadist landscape of the near future. Al Qaeda is in a period of recovery after the loss of several key leaders, with new fronts opening in Tunisia and India, and affiliated groups operating in Egypt, Libya, and Syria. The group's "long-game strategy," which has prevented it from imploding like IS and allowed it to avoid such divisive tactics as using violence against fellow Muslims, has involved shifting from a terrorist to an insurgent group and achieving incremental territorial gains. The group's successful operations in Yemen and Somalia illustrate its new approach, as it creates organizations under different names, such as al Shabab, and seeks to empower local leaders and tribes and to avoid enforcing harsh versions of Sharia (unlike IS). Eventually, the group can become a "shadow government," as in the case of Somalia, promising to fight for the poor and disenfranchised.

Meanwhile, Clarke and Moghadam write that IS will likely regroup, still having a cadre of operatives providing the glue of the organization. The movement is seeking to co-opt Sunni tribes and threatening revenge in their former haunts in Syria. The staying power of jihadi groups around the globe seems assured since they still carry appeal and will likely decentralize further, drawing on an assortment of actors and actions, whether it be engaging in nonviolent da'wa (proselytizing) activities in Europe or becoming "digital warriors" in cyberspace. The researchers predict a more multipolar structure to jihadist groups, as they develop regional hubs of mobilization and use proxy organizations, such as in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Jihadists will also increasingly use "informal actors," with some of them operating within the law. In Europe, there are informal jihadi networks represented by "Sharia4" movements that serve as important gateways for terrorism. The authors

note that jihadists will look for areas and countries where Muslims are perceived to be under siege, such as India and Myanmar. For all their differences and conflicts, it is also possible that new forms of cooperation between jihadist groups will develop; for example, the most prolific actors share a belief “in the objective of establishing a Caliphate... There is already compelling evidence that the movement is invoking the nostalgia of the Caliphate to begin framing its future strategy,” Clarke and Moghadam conclude.

(*Orbis*, <https://www.fpri.org/orbis/current/>)



ARTICLES

Unraveling the enigma of Pope Francis—views from Italy

Something that has become increasingly clear after more than five years with Pope Francis at the helm of the Roman Catholic Church is that he has strong pastoral reasons for addressing issues. He is also a pope who tends to launch processes and then waits to see what emerges from the ensuing debates. This may have played a role in recent developments summarized by journalist and Catholic affairs expert Sandro Magister in the Italian magazine *L'Espresso* (July 1). On three different occasions this year, according to Magister, Pope Francis gave the impression of backtracking, without making clear if it was a real change of mind or merely a tactical retreat. One of these concerned the document prepared by the German Bishops' Conference that seemed to pave the way toward allowing communion for Protestant spouses of Catholic believers. This

document drew opposition from seven German bishops, leading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to send a letter praising the efforts while stating that the document was not yet ready for publication. The bishops promoting the document had felt they had been following the same path as the pope, and that he had hinted support for the intercommunion proposal.

The perception of Pope Francis as reformist continues to cause alarm in some Catholic circles, despite their support for his determined stand on issues such as the sanctity of life. One reaction worth noting was the letter sent to the pope in 2017 by Fr. Thomas Weinandy, an American Capuchin who is a member of the International Theological Commission, claiming that “a chronic confusion seems to mark your pontificate” and stressing “the ambiguity of your words and actions.” Among the books with various viewpoints published during the past five years about Pope Francis, a recent volume in Italian, *Papa Francesco e il cattolicesimo sud globale* (Franco Angeli, 2018), edited by Verónica Roldán, attempts to offer social scientific insights and to emphasize the significance of the Latin American background and experiences of the current pope. Roberto Cipriani (University Roma Tre) sees a guideline for understanding Pope Francis’ actions in his concern for social justice and not just helping the poor. His support for the “theology of the people” needs to be distinguished from liberation theology, since it refuses the Marxist framework of class struggle but is linked to a great esteem for popular piety.

Enzo Pace (University of Padova) examines Pope Francis’ emphasis on synodality as a potentially strong force for reform, promoting decentralization in contrast with a monarchical principle. The synods are no longer supposed to be mere sounding boards amplifying papal decisions, but real participants in consultative processes. He adds that if this principle comes to be implemented like concentric circles at all levels of the Catholic Church, it might lead to a transformation of its entire internal organization. Regarding the Catholic opponents to Pope Francis, Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR) remarks that they are far from forming a united front, ranging from political opponents concerned not so much about theological issues as about things like immigration or Islam, to those who miss the pontificate of Benedict XVI and, less numerous, hardline traditionalists. Despite strong criticism of Pope Francis in some circles, it remains a minority phenomenon and there are no real prospects for the great revolt that some hardline traditionalists have been hoping for, Introvigne writes. At a February meeting at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Massimo Franco, political editor at *Corriere della Sera*, seconded the view that “a schism is not in sight.” Observing, however, that time was not working for the current pope’s reforms (or attempted reforms), Franco added that the real question mark concerned whether the future successor to this pope would continue his reforms or not, despite Francis’ efforts to shape the next conclave by selecting new cardinals from many different countries.

(For access to the audio and transcript of Massimo Franco’s talk, “Five Years of Pope Francis: The Catholic Church in the Modern World,” go to: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/five-years-pope-francis-catholic-church-modern-world>)



Evangelical men’s ministries face downsizing and stress community-building

The massive evangelical men’s gatherings of the 1990s have largely disbanded while women’s ministries have since flourished, but new forms of ministry to men have emerged that stress community-building and activities based on a common purpose, reports *Christianity Today* magazine (June). Large-scale men’s ministries and gatherings, such as Promise Keepers, have disappeared and congregation-based men’s groups have been less popular than women’s groups. Ministries targeting women “have grown into a national network of tightly connected events, books, and celebrity bloggers-speakers...And these events seem not to have taken the place of the local Bible studies, prayer meetings, and meal gatherings—if anything the big women’s events have only augmented the smaller ones,” writes Bob Smietana. Meanwhile, small-scale men’s ministries have emerged that tend to focus on loneliness and the building of strong friendships. The men’s ministry F3, short for Fitness, Fellowship, and Faith, blends exercise with fellowship, growing to about 1,300 “workouts” in 25 states, with 15,000 regular participants.

A sidebar article by Nate Pyle notes that as large movements like Promise Keepers waned, the so-called masculinity movement took their place in many churches in the 2000s. This movement preached that men were being “feminized” by their churches and tried to instill “manliness” among participants. “It became all about tattoos and motorcycles and cigars,” according to author Stephen Mansfield. Now the #MeToo movement and the growth of “male self-consciousness” is creating a new climate that can be seen in the ministries, such as in *Man in the Mirror*, which battles “toxic masculinity” by focusing on community-building (without the exercise) and helping men

rediscover their place in the community and in their families. Another article in the issue looks at churches that have been adept at drawing men to their services. Michael Zigarelli notes that in his research on man-friendly churches his most striking finding was that none of them had a formal “men’s ministry.” Rather, men were drawn to these churches because they found that they were fully integrated into the congregation. These churches included one pastored by a woman, who suggested that “plugging” men into the congregation by encouraging their particular gifts and talents worked best.



(*Christianity Today*, 365 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

Scholars and practitioners taking new interest in religion-sports connection

The interest of scholars in the relation of sports and religion is catching up to the level of attention that religious groups have given to athletes and sporting events in recent years, writes Nick J. Watson in the journal *Theology* (vol. 121, no. 4). In recent years, there have been major academic conferences on religion, theology and sports, as well as the establishment of several centers studying the sports-religion connection, such as Baylor University’s Youth, Spirituality and Sports Institute and the Center for the Study of Sport and Religion at the University of Tennessee. The 2019 Global Congress on Sports and Christianity (meeting at Calvin College) could act as a meeting point for leading scholars, politicians, clergy, and sports-faith practitioners to create a scholarly association devoted to the subject with its own journal. Watson writes that Pope John Paul II started much of the momentum of the religious interest in sports, but Pope Francis has followed in his footsteps by stressing the role of sports as a vehicle for the common good and social justice. In 2014, a group of theologians, social scientists, clergy, and sports practitioners drew up the “Declaration on Sport and Christian Life.” The growth of initiatives on sports can also be seen in the Church of England. [See June 2018 **RW** for a report on how the Russian Orthodox Church has engaged sports in recent years.]

In the UK, there have been several ecumenical efforts directed at Olympic and Paralympic games. This “mission-service-hospitality” model was found in a recent study to be “an effective way to do mission within complex relational sporting subcultures,” Watson writes. Most observers agree that it was Billy Graham’s use of sports stars in his crusades that led to the formation of parachurch

groups, such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Athletes in Action, and Baseball Chapel. There has been a divide between the more “evangelical approach” of American-based sports ministries and the more “pastoral mission focus” of ministries in the UK. “One clear trend, however, within the last decade is a reduction in the focus on ‘overt’ evangelism (especially the use of professional athletes in ‘platform ministry’) and a



realignment of strategy in which practitioners address the pastoral and holistic needs of athletes,” Watson adds. Critics have charged that sports ministry parachurch organizations have adopted a “utilitarian” approach to sports. Emerging issues that sports ministries and scholars in this field are starting to address include mental health in sports, concussion and other traumatic injuries from sports, and e-sports.

(*Theology*, <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/theology>)

Southern Baptist gathering suggests changing of guard?

The recent annual meeting of Southern Baptists suggests that a generational shift is taking place in the denomination that may moderate its longtime religious-right stance, writes Jonathan Merritt in *The Atlantic* (June 16). The election of 45-year-old pastor J.D. Greear from North Carolina as president of the denomination is viewed as a changing of the guard by some observers. In a campaign video, Greear called for “a new culture and a new posture in the Southern Baptist Convention.” According to Keith Harper, a Baptist historian, the recent termination of influential denominational and Christian-right leader Paige Patterson as president of Southwestern Seminary “closed the book on the Patterson-Pressler era” (referring to another embattled SBC leader, Paul Pressler). Greear has promised to lead the denomination down a path that would include efforts both to repent of a “failure to listen to and honor women and racial minorities” and “to include them in proportionate measures in top leadership roles.” Merritt adds that, “If the meeting in Dallas is any indication, his vision is resonating with a large number of the next wave of Baptist leaders.” The Patterson era’s statements on the subordination of women to men was replaced this year when the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the denomination’s public-policy arm, hosted a packed #MeToo panel discussion. Several leaders publicly suggested that women must be included in top levels of leadership.

“Multiple prominent leaders even insinuated that it may be time to elect a woman as SBC president, a notion that would have been considered unthinkable, if not heretical, even a decade ago,” Merritt writes. The SBC pastor’s conference, which takes place on the first days of the gathering, was led by a black pastor, and six out of 12 speakers were people of color. Three anonymous sources within the denomination also told Merritt that it is seriously considering a black candidate to become the CEO of the Executive Committee, which oversees the denomination’s day-to-day operations at its headquarters in Nashville. “By elevating women and distancing themselves from partisan engagement, the members of the SBC appear to be signaling their determination to head in a different direction, out of a mix of pragmatism and principle,” Merritt concludes. Even though the SBC’s inviting Vice President Mike Pence to address the gathering might be considered more in the mold of the Christian right, the *Nashville Tennessean* newspaper (June 13) reports that there were wide misgivings about mixing politics and faith. At about the time the speech ended, Greear tweeted that the denomination had sent a “terribly mixed signal...make no mistake about it, our identity is in the gospel and our unity is in the great commission. Commissioned missionaries, not



political platforms, are what we do.” Those reactions were in keeping with earlier efforts by some to prevent Pence from addressing the convention and to stop public officials from speaking at future meetings.

CURRENT RESEARCH

- *Newsweek* (June 17) reports that a recent poll finds that most LGBTQ adults in the United States are religious, the majority of these being Christian. Conducted by BuzzFeed and Whitman Insight Strategies, the survey, the most extensive of its kind, surveyed a sample of 880



members of the LGBTQ community nationwide in late May. The study found that although 39 percent of those polled said they had no religious affiliation, more than half of the respondents said they were regularly involved in faith organizations. A majority of those saying they were religious were Christian, with 23 percent of all respondents identifying as Protestant and 18 percent identifying as Catholic. Another 8 percent reported being Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist, and 8 percent specified some “other” religious affiliation. Five percent said they were “not sure” when it came to religion.

● **A 52-country analysis of Catholic commitment finds considerable variation between national Catholic populations as well as significant influence of the historical legacy left by the Church in each country.** The study, conducted by sociologists Brian Conway and Bram Spruyt and published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (online in June), was based on an analysis of the European Values Survey (2008–2010) and the World Values Survey (2010–2014) that included indicators of the subjective importance of God, church attendance, and prayer. Conway and Spruyt found that “within-country differences related to social demographics” were modest, while variance at the country level was high. They found that Catholic identity and practice were “being eroded by modern society,” with “existential security” (such as the influence of the welfare state and health insurance) rather than competition and secularization driving such changes. Historical legacies, such as communism and colonialism, had a significant impact on

Catholic commitment, although more recent situations and crises, such as child abuse scandals, did not have a strong impact on these indicators.

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685906>)

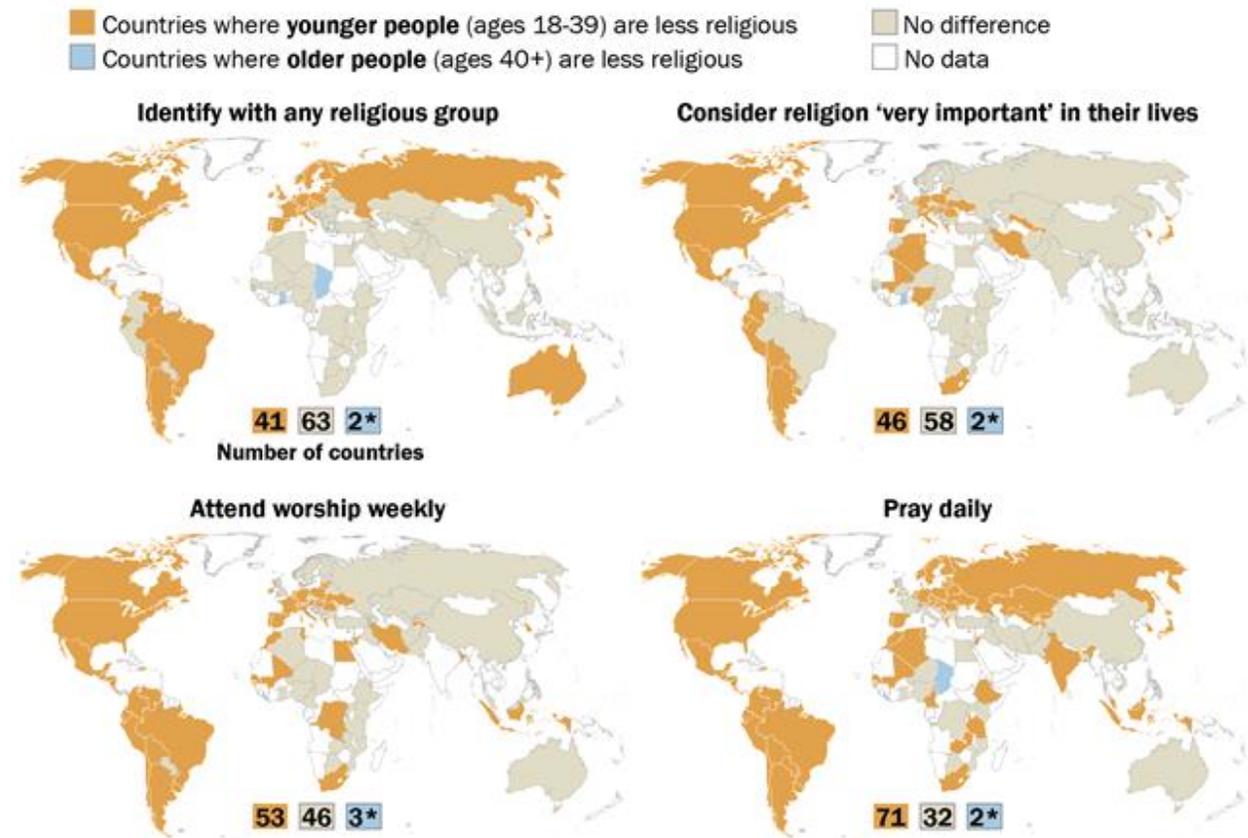


● **A lower level of religious observance among younger adults versus older ones is common around the world, according to a new analysis of Pew Research Center surveys conducted in more than 100 countries and territories over the last decade.** Though the age gap in religious commitment is wider in some nations than in others, it occurs in many different economic and social contexts—in developed and developing countries, and in secular and highly religious societies. For example, adults younger than 40 are less likely than older adults to say religion is “very important” in their lives not only in wealthy and relatively secular countries such as Canada, Japan and Switzerland, but also in countries that are less affluent and more religious, such as Iran, Poland and Nigeria. Yet this pattern is not universal. In many countries, there is no statistically significant difference in levels of religious observance between younger and older adults. In the places where there is a difference, however, it is almost always in the direction of younger adults being less religious than their elders. Just two countries—the former Soviet republic of Georgia and the West African country of Ghana—have younger adults who are, on average, more religious than their elders. In 41 countries, adults under 40 are significantly less likely than their elders to

have a religious affiliation, while in only two countries (Chad and Ghana) are younger adults more likely to identify with a religious group.

(The Pew study can be downloaded at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>)

Younger adults tend to be less religious than older adults in many countries



*Countries in which older people are less religious than younger people. Religious affiliation: Chad, Ghana. Importance of religion: Georgia, Ghana. Attendance: Armenia, Liberia, Rwanda. Prayer: Chad, Liberia.
 Note: The number of countries with available data varies by measure.
 Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008-2017.
 "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

● A study of environmental policy and actions in Germany appearing in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* (vol. 12, no. 1) finds planners drawing on religious and spiritual themes while also avoiding talking about their views and feeling embarrassed about them in a secular society. Scholars have argued that “dark green religion,” as Bron Taylor calls it, which includes perceptions of nature as sacred, strong feelings of connectedness toward nature, and the idea that nature has intrinsic value apart from humans (rejecting “anthropocentrism”), is becoming increasingly important in the environmental movement. Jens Koehrsen conducted a

study of the urban energy transition process in northern Germany, interviewing actors strongly participating in the process. Based on 37 interviews with the leading actors in the city of Emden's switch from conventional energy sources to wind and solar power, Koehrsen found some evidence of dark green religion in their views.

The interviewees used “religious semantics” to describe nature and to express their connection to it. They spoke of “being one with nature” and “receiving its energies.” Yet the study found no clear evidence of a rejection of anthropocentrism and of “supposed expansion channels of eco-religious worldviews in this particular environmentally engaged city.” The interviewees expressed hesitancy about speaking with their closest peers about their religious views and feelings toward nature. Koehrsen concluded that the “low acceptance of these topics point to the marginalization of religion/cosmologies and emotions in energy transitions. As energy transitions are often framed as technological and economic transformation processes, there is little space for these topics which



are likely to appear as irrelevant or even counterproductive. Even more so, public commitment to some sort of eco-religion that is not officially accepted could undermine the credibility and ascribed rationality of pioneering actors.”

(Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/JSRNC>)

ARTICLES

Evangelical-Orthodox initiatives result in on-the-ground unity and vitality in Middle East

Efforts to bridge the divide between evangelical and Eastern Orthodox churches in the Middle East are paying dividends of renewed evangelistic and missionary involvement for both traditions, writes Jayson Casper in *Christianity Today* (June). Much of the impetus behind this conciliatory mood is the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and its theologian Thomas Schirmmacher, who joined with Orthodox scholars in Turkey in recently producing a book on their common beliefs—the first-ever such volume issued in the Middle East (and just translated into English), if not the Christian world. The cooperative trend came out of conflicts and suspicions about competition between Orthodox and evangelicals. Together both groups set up procedures to handle such complaints and shortly thereafter, “Schirmmacher launched extensive religious liberty advocacy by the WEA for the Eastern Christian church,” Casper writes.

Schirmmacher sees the evangelical spirit present in Orthodox and other bodies, saying that “evangelicalism is the search for the DNA of Christianity. But then other churches take it over. Suddenly it is no longer a specific evangelical conviction, but a Christian one.” Such engagement has also provided political protection and benefits for evangelicals. Evangelical efforts to establish a satellite TV network for the Middle East in Turkey that were initially rejected by the Turkish



government were later accepted when a broader coalition of churches beyond “foreign” Protestant ones became involved. Today the station reaches 50 million Turks. Evangelicals have benefited from Orthodox spirituality and disciplines—with many converting to Orthodox churches—while Orthodox churches have become more mission-minded from contact with evangelicals. This influence could be seen in a 2015 survey of Orthodox Christians where respondents said they would consider giving more to their parishes if they paid more attention to missions, evangelism, and outreach.

Individualized pilgrimage marks new Polish spirituality

A form of individualized and demanding pilgrimage for young adults has rapidly spread across Poland, replacing Marian-based pilgrimages and devotions, according to an article in the journal *Religion, State and Society* (vol. 46, no. 2). Known as the “Extreme Way of the Cross,” the spiritual discipline involves participants’ making exhaustive treks across designated routes as they read meditations on the Passion of Christ. Launched in 2009 by Father Jacek Stryczek, the practice has been called a “new form of spirituality” and has become a nationwide phenomenon, with more than 400 routes and 52,000 registered participants in 2017 (up from 11,000 in 2015), writes Konrad Siekierski. The devotion is based on Stryczek’s ideas about creating Catholic men and women (the practice was originally intended for young men) who display virtues such as “commitment, diligence, resourcefulness, asceticism, and striving for self-improvement.” Although Stryczek’s



teachings have been criticized for baptizing success and capitalism, the Extreme Way of the Cross has been supported by Church leaders and was actively promoted at World Youth Day in Poland in 2016, which featured Pope Francis. The Extreme Way of the Cross, held in its collective form during Holy Week or walked alone, is different from other pilgrimages as the accent is taken off its social and collective nature and put on the individual's journey and his or her spiritual life. The practice is similar to the Lutheran pilgrimages in Sweden, which share its rule of silence, meant to help practitioners "formulate their own theology," and it stresses the human body in movement and its exertion rather than arriving at a destination, such as with the popular Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. The Extreme Way of the Cross "is an example of a modern Catholic devotional practice that abandons the mediation of the Virgin Mary, who otherwise has become the main focal point of popular Catholic piety, particularly in times of crisis."

(*Religion, State and Society*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crss20>)

Orthodox Church in Georgia strengthens its political role amidst rivalry with Islam

It is not only in the Muslim world that attempts to legally repress blasphemy or other actions offending the feelings of believers take place. In the strongly Orthodox Christian Republic of Georgia, the commission on human rights of the Parliament has created a working group to draft a law for protecting the feelings of believers, reports *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (June). The Muslim Mufti of East Georgia has supported the project, claiming that religious feelings have been increasingly violated in recent years, and that such a law could prevent religious hate as well as physical violence. But there is also increasing rivalry and conflict between Islam and Christianity, particularly in the autonomous Republic of Adjara, in the southwestern part of the country. The Constitution of Georgia declares the complete freedom of belief and religion, while recognizing "the special role of the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state" (article 9). Muslims form the largest minority (10.7 percent), with some being Turkish-speaking Azeri mostly following Shia Islam, while Georgian Muslims in Adjara are Sunni. In another article in the same issue, Oliver Reisner (Ilia University, Tbilisi, Georgia) notes that the Orthodox Church (representing 83.4 percent of the population) enjoys by far the greatest level of confidence in the country compared to other institutions.

Some previous governments attempted to keep more distance from the church, but the current one respects its influence and knows that it might otherwise ally with opponents. The State Agency for Religious Affairs that was created in 2014 is controlled by people close to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Due to their ethnic closeness to Orthodox Georgians, there is a strong drive to convert Adjarian Muslims to Christianity. This has led to a reaction in the form of Islamic revivalism. Reisner describes a culture war going on in the Adjarian mountains, where local Muslims are

concentrated, with competing Orthodox Christian and Sunni Muslim schools. Turkish Islamic foundations are also active in the area. Reisner concludes that the strong and independent Orthodox



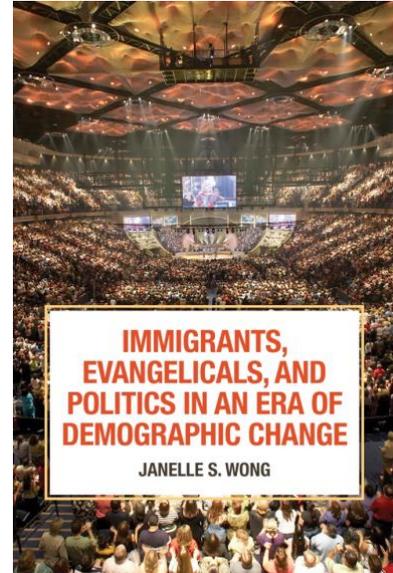
Church, currently dominated by conservative currents, has learned how to become a political actor and to stress the role of Georgian Orthodoxy as a key component of national identity. Since the state is not able to deliver as it should on social and economic issues, it needs the church to gain legitimacy.

(*Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Institut G2W, Birmensdorferstrasse 52, P.O. Box 9329, 8036 Zurich, Switzerland - <https://www.g2w.eu/>)

Findings & Footnotes

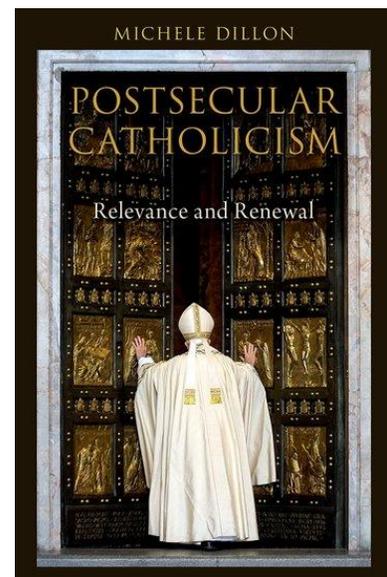
■ Political scientist Janelle S. Wong began writing her book *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change* (Russell Sage Foundation, \$24.95) firmly convinced that the rising tide of non-white and immigrant evangelicals was likely to reshape the evangelical political landscape, given the more liberal positions of these minority Christians on immigration and other social issues. The election of Donald Trump upended that thesis, showing the still enduring political effect of white evangelicals. Wong has reworked her book to now make the case that the white evangelical voting bloc is able to resist challenges

posed by demographic changes. Both whites and evangelicals still carry strength in swing states where most political contests are determined, and they are more highly mobilized and organized than ethnic evangelicals. Wong argues that minority evangelicals and the organizations they may support, such as the fledgling group Public Faith, have a mixed agenda, supporting immigrant rights while remaining traditional on abortion and LGBT issues, which does not resonate with either Republican or Democratic parties or their ideological bases. She adds that there is little coordination or centralized leadership among Latino and Asian evangelical organizations and activists. It is also the case that minority evangelical politics are not all cut from the same cloth: Asian-American evangelicals are far more conservative than African-American evangelicals on social issues.



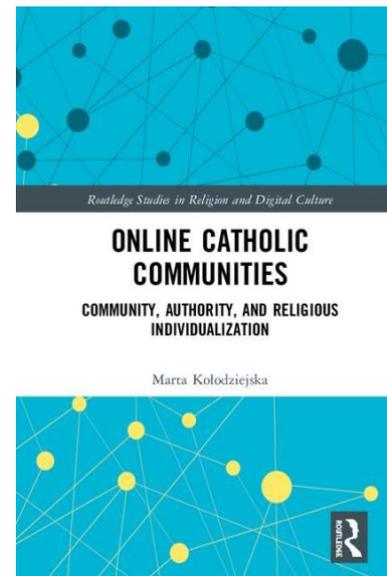
Among the most interesting parts of the book are the qualitative interviews with members of white and minority evangelical congregations about the political messages they hear from the pulpit and from fellow members. They tend to report not hearing much political content in sermons while noting that political information tends to be shared informally (during discussions or Bible studies). Even in predominantly minority evangelical congregations, Wong did not find uniform views even on issues such as support for a path to citizenship (with some supporting a strict stance on immigration control). One of the book's key findings, drawn from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-racial Post-Election Survey with 10,000 respondents (randomly selected from Internet voting and commercial mailing lists), was that white evangelicals feel they (and whites in general) are facing discrimination in American society—a view widely contested by minority evangelicals. Wong concludes that white evangelical political identity, combining fears of white endangerment with evangelical solidarity, will make minority evangelical influence limited for the near future.

■ “Post-secularism” has been viewed as a more confusing than clarifying way to refer to the return of religion in the public sphere even while it loses its authority in the same societies. But the new book *Postsecular Catholicism* (Oxford University Press, \$29.95) uses the term more as a way to explain the current conflicts and changes the Church is going through especially under the leadership of Pope Francis as he tries to make faith relevant to modern societies. Sociologist Michele Dillon makes the case that the way Francis has sought to emphasize dialogue rather than confrontation with secular society meshes well with the ideas of philosophers such as Jurgen Habermas, who have called on religious actors and institutions to “translate” their language on moral issues into secular terms while encouraging secularists to be more receptive to religious concerns and the contributions of religious actors. Dillon tends to view recent previous popes, such as John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as limited in their commitment to “mutual self-critique” and “interpretive diversity,” while seeing Francis pointing clearly in this direction through his statements on poverty and the environment and official and unofficial comments and actions on internal church matters, including divorce and remarriage and sexuality and women’s rights (stopping short of women’s ordination).



Dillon cites survey research suggesting that American Catholics embrace a similar form of moderate Catholicism as they question Church teachings on a host of issues while affirming basic teachings and viewing the Church and its sacraments as important in their lives. She also notes that these same Catholics may praise the pope but remain indifferent and uninformed about his social teachings, even while these are received more enthusiastically by non-Catholics (she does not mention immigration). She acknowledges the tensions and complications of this dialogical approach in that it could soft-pedal or dilute issues central to Catholic identity, such as the importance of the complementary roles of the sexes in Church and family life and its organizational freedom in the face of secularist challenges (such as dissenting on gay rights and contraceptive and abortion policies). Dillon thinks the Church has done better in translating its concerns about abortion to secular society than issues of sexuality and religious freedom, but is nevertheless convinced that the “cat is out of the bag” on many of these matters. Francis has unleashed expectations and institutional energies favoring a non-confrontational approach and recognizing secular realities that correspond to lay Catholic experiences (here Dillon does not differentiate much between active and inactive Catholic views). By the same token, she argues that the “post-secular turn means that the public relevance of religion cannot be denied and contemporary society must adjust to it.”

■ Marta Kolodziejska’s new book *Online Catholic Communities* (Routledge, \$119.96) seeks to challenge the view that religious involvement on the Internet is detrimental to institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church while acknowledging that such technology does have democratizing and individualizing effects. Much of the debate that Kolodziejska chronicles at the beginning of this slim book (141 pages) is similar to that concerning secularization, with proponents arguing that religious authority is being weakened by modern forces such as technology and critics responding that such destabilizing influences may only change rather than secularize religion. Because the book focuses on Catholicism in Poland, where religious authority is still invested in the Catholic Church and its leaders, the researcher has a unique vantage point from which to examine and challenge these well-worn arguments. She studies the activities and discourses of online Polish Catholic forums that have emerged in the last decade, finding that context is important in determining if such technology undermines or reaffirms established communities and authorities. After a long windup introducing communications and sociological theory, Kolodziejska reports that these Internet forums show a definite turn to religious individualism but that the diverse views on these sites did not necessarily have negative effects on religiosity, such as undermining the convictions of the vast majority of users.



Most participants valued these forums as a way to exchange knowledge and to receive and offer support to others. But on the Internet, those who are seen as authorities are “informal experts” who have demonstrated having the most knowledge (and posting the most); being a priest or nun doesn’t necessarily have much clout in this context. While some users did see their forum involvement as an alternative to Catholicism, most did not seek to replace their offline religious involvement with an online version. Kolodziejska concludes that online religious forums and offline religious institutions each supplemented rather than competed with each other—“the informal experts were the translators of (religious and other) knowledge...[but they] did not usually present themselves as more knowledgeable or competent than offline or top-down forms of authority....”

On/File: A Continuing Record of People, Movements, Groups, and Events Impacting Religion

The Modeling Religion Project uses computational models and simulations to evaluate the role of religion in societies under stress. The project, run by the Center for Mind and Culture in Boston, led by Wesley Wildman, the Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center at Old Dominion University, and the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway, uses a virtual environment to study the real world's complex systems. To explore these human dynamics with a computer, the researchers designed an artificial world populated by computer-controlled characters, called "agents," programmed to follow rules and tendencies identified in humans through psychological experiments, ethnographic observation and social analysis. These agents and their environment are tested against real-world examples, such as the data gathered on church attendance before and after an earthquake. In the model's virtual world, the researchers found patterns in how different types of groups use religious rituals to manage their terror. It was found that "culturally diverse groups whose members dealt with hazards fairly well preferred coping through rituals with small groups of friends, which were unlikely to explode in violence. But culturally homogeneous populations whose members had low tolerance for hazards preferred rituals on a very large scale, and those kinds of rituals had the potential to be quite dangerous." (Source: *The Conversation*, July 11).

