



# A Sociological Perspective on Religious Identification in Spain: A Multidimensional Analysis Based on Empirical Data (Over 467,187 Individuals)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores patterns of religious identification in Spanish society, focusing particularly on the predominant religion, Catholicism, which constitutes 97% of the religious population. Over time, a declining trend in religious beliefs has been observed: in 2000, 80% of Spaniards identified as religious, a figure that decreased to 75% a decade ago, and further dropped to 59.5% in 2022. Simultaneously, the process of secularization has increased, impacting approximately 40% of the Spanish population. Non-believers are not a homogeneous group; rather, they constitute heterogeneous subgroups. Males tend to exhibit lower levels of religiosity than females, and the youth are less religious than the elderly. Additionally, individuals with higher education show lower levels of religiosity than those with lower education and left-leaning individuals tend to be less religious than their right-leaning counterparts. This article investigates and analyzes the profiles of religious identification in Spanish society, utilizing a comprehensive database that amalgamates 144 datasets from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), spanning from January 2013 to December 2023. The dataset comprises responses from 467,187 Spanish adults aged 18 and above. This extensive dataset enables a multidimensional descriptive analysis of secularization/religiosity based on respondents' demographic characteristics and ideological positions, functioning as a meta-analysis with secondary data. To further complement the study, a binomial logistic regression is also employed.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of religiosity has been approached from diverse academic perspectives, employing different methods and analyses. This article specifically focuses on the sociological analysis of religion, examining religious identifications from both believers and non-believers in demoscopic surveys of public opinion. The authors analyze this identification in relation to adscriptive variables such as gender, age, educational attainment, ideology, nationality, and the temporal context of the surveys. The objective is to delineate multidimensional profiles of religious and non-religious identification in Spain, capturing the dynamics of these variables over time. To achieve this, a comprehensive database is constructed by merging 144 data files from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), covering information from nearly half a million individuals between 2013 and 2022.

Methodologically, this article relies on quantitative empirical data collected through the merging of microdata files (surveys and barometers) from the CIS. Surveys were conducted monthly from January 2013 to December 2022, excluding August, and targeted individuals with Spanish nationality, potentially including those who also held a second nationality. The extensive nature of this database and its associated variables allows for a multidimensional analysis of religiosity, contributing to a nuanced understanding of its current situation in Spain in 2022, as well as its temporal evolution and the variability of the position of religious identity among the Spanish population.

This extensive dataset allows for the definition of a robust and multidimensional descriptive model, as well as a multivariate analytical model, identifying and showcasing the religious and non-religious positions of Spaniards over the last decade. The established framework contributes to ongoing analyses of the religious/secular dichotomy, rooted in Western European Christianity but extending beyond that binary image. The assessment of public opinion is relevant to debates surrounding secularization, the individualization of religion (spiritual or à la carte religiosity), and the secular nature of the State and its relationship with the Church and society.

The working hypothesis suggests that the 40% of non-believers in Spain imperfectly indicates secularization. The authors argue that secularization is closely linked to the educational attainment of Spaniards and the age of the interviewees, with variations influenced by gender, ideology, and time. In this context, individuals' educational backgrounds are strongly associated with their corresponding non-religious positions across all age groups considered. However, this association becomes even more pronounced when comparing young and older individuals across different years.

This study seeks to explore the complex relationship between religious and non-religious identities within the Spanish population, considering various demographic factors and ideological stances. By examining the interaction between educational achievement, age, gender, and religiosity, the authors aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of secularization in Spain and its implications for the broader social context.

Additionally, the presented analysis contributes to the ongoing academic discourse regarding the multifaceted nature of secularization, surpassing a simplistic binary view, and delving into the complexities that influence religious identification in contemporary Spain. The findings from this research are expected to stimulate informed discussions and foster a deeper understanding of the evolving religious landscape in the country.

## SECULARIZATION AND RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION IN SPAIN

Believers in Spain have reached their lowest recorded level in 2022, with approximately 60% of Spaniards identifying as believers, while non-believers reached their highest level at around 40% in the same year. At the beginning of the century, this percentage was at 80%, a decade later it was 75%, ultimately dropping to the indicated 60% in 2022. This marked decrease represents a noteworthy aspect in the time series of statistical data over the last 40 years, characterized by the abruptness of its decline and the short time span in which it occurred.

The term secularization can refer to different processes, according to Casanova (2012). In this article, secularization in Spain is understood as the gradual decline in religious identification in Spanish society: the decrease in the percentage of people who define themselves as religious (whether practicing or not). Consequently, this will be the sense attributed to the concept of secularization. The process of secularization has been consistently unfolding in Spain since 1980 (Davie, 2001). Before this period, almost the entire Spanish society identified as Catholic (95%). However, since the 1980s, this proportion has steadily decreased, gaining momentum in the early 21st Century (Pérez-Agote, 2014; Requena, 2019). Not only has the number of self-identified Catholics decreased, but there has also been a decline in the proportion of practicing Catholics, dropping from 74% in 1975 to 50% in the 1990s and early 2000s (Inglehart and Foa, 2010; Pérez-Agote, 2016, 2012, 2009, 2007; Pérez-Agote and Santiago-García, 2005; Ruiz Andrés, 2017). In 2010, religious identification in Spain was at 74%, decreasing to 70% in 2019, and, for the first time, falling below 60% in early 2022 (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2022a, 2022b). These exhaustive empirical records of Spanish society confirm a progressively secularized, less religious, and less practicing society, aligning with the theoretical concept of 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1990), as

suggested by Molteni and Biolcati (2018), and resembling the pattern observed in other secularized European societies (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, 2012).

However, the overall depiction of an increasingly secular and less religious Spanish society requires important nuances. Concluding that 60% of the population in Spain identifies as believers (or 40% as non-believers), with 97% of them being Catholics, might inadvertently suggest a homogeneous society in terms of religiosity and secularity, with similar proportions of believers and nonbelievers. However, this is far from the reality. Multiple variables generate distinct religious-secular profiles within Spanish society. Pérez-Agote and Santiago-García (2005), based on data from 2002 (CIS-2443 study) (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2002), established a basic characterization of religious identification using independent variables such as gender, age, education, and ideology, conducting bivariate analyses to compare proportions. The findings reported by these authors reveal that females, older individuals, those with lower levels of education, and those with a right-wing ideological position tend to be more religious than their counterparts: males, young individuals, those with higher levels of education, and those with left-wing ideological positions, respectively.

These bivariate analyses have become outdated over time and are limited by their inability to provide a comprehensive multidimensional view, given the size constraints of the samples. They have not allowed for a joint multidimensional perspective to verify how females and males, young and older individuals, with varying levels of education and diverse ideologies, are more or less religious not just within age groups but for each age considered. Furthermore, they fail to capture how religious-secular identification changes over time within each of the subgroups examined. These bivariate analyses do not delve into how multiple adscriptive characteristics, when considered together, modulate and nuance the profile of believers and non-believers in Spain.

Brañas-Garza, García-Muñoz, and Newman (2011) conducted a study in 1981 utilizing a multivariate logistic regression model with 1,500 respondents (initially 2,500 but reduced to the final figure due to non-response). Several years later, Pérez-Agote (2012) undertook a more sophisticated statistical analysis using factorial and cluster analysis based on data from the CIS 2752 study conducted in 2008 (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2008), comprising a sample of 2,000 interviewees. This study improved upon bivariate analysis and provided contextualization of religion in Spain. From this data set, Pérez-Agote (Pérez-Agote, 2012) developed a typology of eight groups of individuals with distinct relationships with religion: softened anticlericalism, traditional Catholicism, achievement-oriented Catholicism, traumatized Catholicism, empty

Catholicism, disillusioned Catholicism, non-Catholics, and non-religious. This analytical proposal of religious-secular groups adds complexity to the multidimensional framework and becomes methodologically unfeasible when attempting to profile the dichotomized secular-religious groups, especially considering the limited sample sizes that restrict multivariate analyses involving numerous variables. This limitation has been the primary impediment to creating a comprehensive multidimensional image of secular and religious profiles in Spain.

Considering these challenges, this present study endeavors to bridge this gap by employing an extensive and merged database that allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis, conferring it a novel character. By considering multiple adscriptive characteristics simultaneously, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the religious and secular identities within Spanish society, examining how they interact and evolve over time. Utilizing advanced analytical techniques, the authors hope to shed light on the intricate patterns and relationships that underlie religious identification in contemporary Spain, contributing to a more comprehensive picture of the ongoing secularization process in the country.

Religious studies in Spain have predominantly taken a qualitative nature, lacking inferential capacity. Previous research has focused on religious minorities (Cornejo, 2012; Díez de Velasco, 2020, 2018, 2010; Estruch et al., 2007; Urrutia Asua, 2016), behaviors and religions of immigrants and non-nationals residing in Spain (Martínez-Ariño et al., 2011), and religious practices within institutions such as hospitals and prisons (Griera et al., 2015). The literature also encompasses theoretical and discursive studies, notably Martín Huete's doctoral thesis (Martín-Huete, 2015) on secularization and desecularization in Spain, which focuses on the model proposed by other authors and the debate regarding the evolution and religious crisis in European countries. Pérez-Agote (2009) conducted a study on religious evolution in Spain and its historical periods, while González-Anleo (2016) investigated the religious crisis among youth, who are increasingly becoming more secularized and participating less in religious practices.

Spanish researchers commonly center their work on the decline of religious practice and participation in Western societies at different historical moments, referencing the works of Palard (2002), Davie (2006, 2001), Berger (1999), Molteni and Biolcati (2023, 2018), and Inglehart and Foa (2010). Others analyze studies that examine the effect of the capitalist economic model on secularization and the individualization of religiosity (Molénat, 2014; Pollack, 2008). Some authors acknowledge certain reduced vitality in some Euro-American societies (Casanova, 2020, 2012; Díaz Salazar Martín de Almagro, 2007; Ferrara, 2019; Pollack, 2008), a

culturalization of religious studies (Astor and Mayrl, 2020; Obadia, 2014), and a multicultural egalitarian secularism (De Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez, 2013).

Theoretical and empirical studies in Spain have predominantly supported the secularization of society, emphasizing the consistency and continuity of religious disaffection over the past twenty years. This paper challenges the prevailing notion that the religious disaffection of Spanish society is a generalized phenomenon. Instead, it argues that the perceived disaffection is the outcome of a collective measurement of nonbelievers (currently around 40%), overlooking the religious heterogeneity among various social groups. In other words, this 40% of secular individuals is derived as a weighted average that fails to account for the polarization of the secular-religious effect within the population. Young individuals with higher educational attainment and left-leaning ideological positions, particularly males compared to females, exhibit significantly higher levels of secularization than their counterparts with lower levels of education within the same group. This pattern extends to older individuals, where those with higher levels of education are more secular than those with lower levels, consistently showing higher secularization among males than females across all age groups. This article aims to explore these dynamics and test working hypotheses based on a multidimensional and multivariate model, incorporating multiple variables significantly associated with religiosity as indicated in previous studies.

The CIS barometers (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2022c), along with their datasheets and questionnaires, exclusively focus on individuals with Spanish nationality. For example, the February 2022 barometer (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2022a) includes question P.0., inquiring about the respondent's nationality (*First of all, I would like to ask if you are...*) and provides options only for Spanish or other (Spanish nationality, Spanish nationality, and other, other nationality). This limitation implies that the dimension of religious minorities may not be adequately captured in the data collected by the CIS, despite their growing presence and study in Spain (as indicated by authors like Díez de Velasco (2020, 2018, 2010); Urrutia Asua (2016);

Martínez-Ariño et al. (2011); Estruch et al. (2007)). The population in Spain over 18 years of age consists of 47.3 million people, of which 7.2 million are foreigners (15.2%) representing diverse origins, culture, and religions (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2022).<sup>1</sup>

The majority of respondents in the CIS identify as Catholics (65.9%) or non-believers (31.3%), with only 2.8% identifying as believers of other religions. This trend remains consistent for those with Spanish nationality, where the percentages are 66.2%, 31.6%, and 2.2%, respectively. However, for individuals with both Spanish and another nationality, the figures are 57.8%, 23.5%, and 18.7%. In this group, the percentage of believers in another religion increased to 18.5%, approaching the percentage of non-believers, atheists, and agnostics (23.5%). Additionally, it is noteworthy that the percentage of individuals with Spanish and another nationality who identify as believers in another religion (18.7%) is almost 9 times higher than that of individuals with solely Spanish nationality (2.2%) (see Table 1).

The increase in the number of foreigners residing in Spain has coincided with a corresponding rise in studies on religious minorities, many of which are related to immigration (Casanova, 2012; De Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez, 2013). As the population of immigrants from diverse backgrounds and religious traditions has grown in Spain, researchers have paid more attention to understanding the religious dynamics and practices within these communities. Authors like Casanova (2020, 2012) and De Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez (2013) have addressed the complexities and implications of religious diversity resulting from immigration, shedding light on how various religious traditions interact and coexist within Spanish society.

## DATA AND METHODS

This study characterizes religious identification in Spain using a descriptive multidimensional model, considering the proportion of believers and non-believers, and employs a multivariate approach with a binary logistic regression model. The results offer an integrated view

RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION	NATIONALITY					
	SPANISH (%)		SPANISH AND OTHER (%)		TOTAL (%)	
<i>Catholics</i>	293,096	66.2	8,697	57.8	301,793	65.9
<i>Believers of another religion</i>	9,812	2.2	2,824	18.7	12,636	2.8
<i>Non-believers, atheists, agnostics</i>	140,002	31.6	3,531	23.5	143,533	31.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>442,910</b>	<b>96.7</b>	<b>15,052</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>457,962</b>	

**Table 1** Religious identification (Cases %) by nationality. Spain.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.

of religious identification, revealing the interrelationships and proximity between independent variables. With a substantial sample size of 467,187 individuals interviewed over the past ten years (from 2013 to 2022, inclusive), the study surpasses previous research with limitations in sample size.

The database for this study was compiled by merging microdata from CIS surveys and monthly barometers (from January 2013 to December 2022, excluding August) (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2022c), along with a specific macro-barometer of electoral consultations within this timeframe. The monthly files are publicly accessible and available on the CIS website.<sup>2</sup> The conducted meta-analysis, utilizing this secondary data, stems from the merging of data files obtained independently from the CIS, without any reservation of interviewees from one sample to another.

Between January 2013 and March 2022, CIS surveys and barometers were conducted through face-to-face interviews at the respondents' residences. Starting from April 2020, the surveys transitioned to telephone interviews, and the sample size also changed. In 2020, the number of interviewees increased to 4,000 (study 3277, March 2022) from the previous 3,000 (from September 2018 to February 2020) and 2,500 (from January 2013 to July 2018).

The increase in sample size implies a reduction in sampling errors. According to the technical specifications of each CIS study and barometer, assuming simple random sampling with a 95.5% confidence level (two sigma), the sampling errors for each study range from  $\pm 1.6\%$  to  $\pm 2.0\%$ . The technical specifications of each barometer include the study's scope, universe, sample size, type of fixation, weighting, sampling point, and procedure, data collection, sampling error, and completion date. These barometers sometimes include specific electoral studies with larger sample sizes, around 17,500 interviewees (CIS-3242, CIS-3245 and CIS-3263).

Ultimately, the fusion of the 144 data files resulted in a sample size close to half a million respondents ( $n = 467,817$ ). Therefore, the sampling errors are considerably smaller than previously indicated, ranging between  $\pm 0.5\%$  and  $\pm 1.0\%$  for the combined samples of each year.

The creation of a database through the merging of files with proportionate and non-proportionate assignments by province and/or regions required a final weighting process to ensure representativeness with respect to the reference population. Sample population data from each of the considered regions and population data for Spain obtained from available information from INE (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2022) were utilized for this purpose. Weighting coefficients were generated and applied, ultimately rendering the data representative of the Spanish population with sampling errors below  $\pm 0.5\%$  (99% confidence, three sigma) for annual samples and  $\pm 0.2\%$  for the general sample

(99% confidence) with  $p = q = 50\%$ . The sample size used ensures that, in any case, the weighting does not generate substantial changes in the integer values of the means and proportions describing the variables in the Spanish dataset; it merely adjusts descriptive statistics to decimal values and, at most, slightly alters global data by a few tenths. Nevertheless, the present results are derived from this weighted file.

In this study, religiosity is defined as the dependent variable, measured based on the respondents' religious self-identification obtained from the CIS surveys/barometers. Participants were asked, "How do you define yourself in religious matters?" ("*¿Cómo se define Usted en materia religiosa: católico/a practicante; católico/a no practicante; creyente de otra religión; agnóstico/a, indiferente o no creyente, o ateo/a?*") and presented with six response options: practicing Catholic, non-practicing Catholic, believers of other religions, agnostics, indifferent or non-believer or atheists ("*católico/a practicante; católico/a no practicante; creyente de otra religión; agnóstico/a, indiferente o no creyente, o ateo/a?*"). For the primary analysis, the variable of religiosity, the reference dependent variable, was divided into two categories: believers and non-believers. The independent variables used in the study include year, gender, age, nationality, ideology, and educational level. There is a clear limitation when working with CIS data since it only captures the opinions of individuals with Spanish nationality. Therefore, the opinions of residents in Spain without this nationality are not reflected in this data source. Thus, the nationality variable, defined in a dichotomous manner, distinguishes between those who have only Spanish nationality and those who, in addition to this, have another nationality. These variables were chosen based on the working hypothesis and theoretical framework, allowing for a multidimensional analysis of the data from different perspectives.

This study characterizes religious identification in Spain through a descriptive multidimensional model (proportion of believers and non-believers) and a multivariate approach employing a binary logistic regression model. The dependent variable, "Religiosity", was dichotomized into two categories: believers (Catholics and followers of other religions) and non-believers (non-believers, atheists, and agnostics). This religious-secular binomial allows for a precise and simplified definition of the believer-non-believer opposition, facilitating a better understanding of the general characteristics of each group concerning the various independent variables used. It is not the author's intention, through this reduction, to diminish the intricate study of religious beliefs that cannot be confined to two exclusive categories when exploring their meaning or historical context. The binary concept of sacred-profane, transcendent-immanent, religious-secular, and religious-post secular each holds a unique meaning and historical origin (Beriaín, 2015).

*Independent variables:*

**Year of study** (10 values): 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022

**Gender** (2 categories): Male and Female

**Age** (values): 18 to 19 years, recoded into six categories: [18 – 25]; [26 – 35]; [36 – 45]; [46 – 55]; [56 – 65]; and [66 – 98] years.

**Nationality** (2 categories): Spanish nationality and Spanish nationality with another

**Ideology** (10 values on a left (1) to right (10) scale), recoded into three categories (Left: 1 to 3; Center: 4 to 6; and Right: 7 to 10)

**Educational level:** Based on UNESCO’s ISCED 2011 classification (International Standard Classification of Education) (UNESCO (2011), with 4 categories: Primary education or less (ISCED 0 – 1); Lower secondary education (ISCED 2); Upper secondary education (ISCED 3 – 4); and Tertiary education (ISCED 5 – 6 – 7 – 8)

The aforementioned variables facilitated the analysis of the available data through two distinct approaches:

**A.** Descriptive multidimensional:

This model will be defined based on the variables: two dichotomous (religiosity and gender), educational level (4 categories), recoded age (6 categories), and recoded ideology (3 categories). This descriptive model with proportions (%) data considers five variables, defining a joint model with a total of 288 groups (144 groups of believers and 144 groups of non-believers). The table captures, for example, the proportion of female believers aged 18 to 25, with primary education and left-wing ideology. Based on the data shown in the table, it is easy to obtain the percentage of the opposing group, simply considering that the sum of both must be 100%. An Analysis of Correspondence was also conducted to complement the previous analysis, introducing variables such as nationality and year.

**B.** Binary logistic regression model:

This model is more comprehensive, including seven variables: three dichotomous (religious, gender and nationality), educational level (4 categories), ideology (subjective ideological scale from 1 to 10), year of survey (10 categories, one for each reference year of the CIS barometer), and age of the interviewee (continuous variable with values from 18 to 98 years).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### DESCRIPTIVE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

In this study, a descriptive analysis was conducted to explore the interrelationships among adscriptive variables, such as gender, age, education level, nationality, ideology, and year. The analysis delved into social positions within strata, providing statistical insights through an examination of various combinations of categorical variables. The substantial sample size supports the reliability of the results. Table 2 presents a summary of self-reported religiosity among interviewees, offering a descriptive context for the study’s findings.

The decline in religiosity is evident in Figure 1, illustrating the proportion of believers in Spain for each year from 2013 to 2022. The figure also incorporates a subjective ideological scale ranging from 1 (left) to 10 (right). Notably, the combined graph of ideology and religiosity over this decade reveals a consistent ideological position (mean values ranging from 4.5 to 4.8) despite the increasing secularization of Spanish society. This finding implies that secularization is occurring independently of ideological positions.

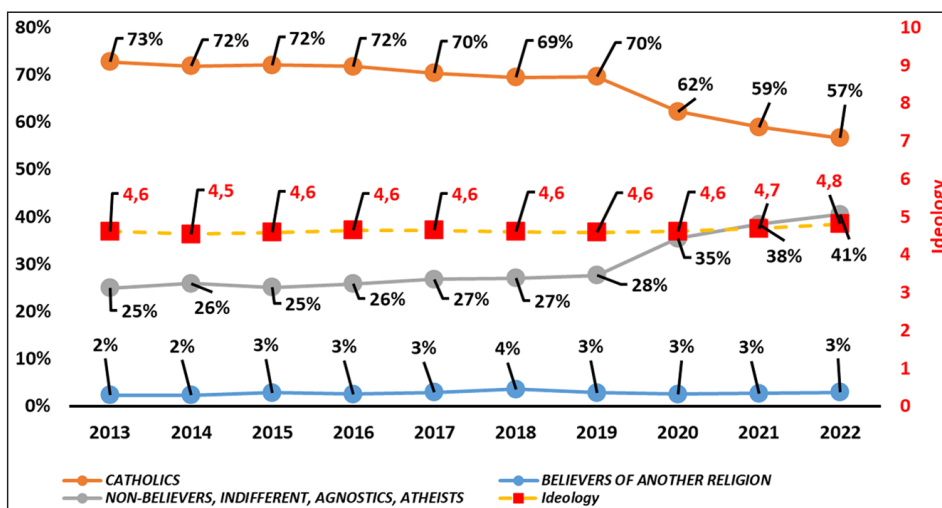
The trends in the religious identification of Spanish society over time reveal the following:

- A persistent decrease in Catholic religious identification, which, despite being the majority at 75% in January 2013, has declined to 60% in December 2022, with a more significant decrease in the last three years.
- An increase in non-religious positions (including atheists and agnostics), although still in the minority, rising from 25% in January 2013 to 40% in December 2022, with a substantial increase of 10% in the last three years.
- Stability in ideological positions that remains consistent throughout the considered period, with

RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION	CASES	%	VALID %
<i>Catholics and Believers of another religion (1)</i>	<b>314,430</b>	67.3	68.7
<i>Non-believers, atheists, agnostics (2)</i>	<b>143,533</b>	30.7	31.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>457,963</b>	98.0	100.0
<i>Missing values (No answer)</i>	<b>9,224</b>	2.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>467,187</b>	100.0	

**Table 2** Binary religious identification (Believers versus Non-believers) in Spain.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.



**Figure 1** Religious identification (%) and Ideology (Scale 1 [Left] to 10 [Right]) in Spain.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.

average values ranging between 4.5 and 4.8 on a scale from left (1) to right (10) from January 2013 to December 2022. The majority of the surveyed population holds centrist ideological positions, representing nearly 50% of the population. Leftist positions account for around 20% and rightist positions make up the remaining 30%. Consequently, it can be inferred that the stability of ideological positions over time contrasts with the variability in religious identification. This suggests that ideological alignment among the Spanish population is likely not the main driving factor behind the changes in their religious affiliation during the observed period.

The results presented in Table 3 illustrate the impact of selected independent variables on dichotomous religiosity. Chi-square tests indicate that each variable has a statistically significant effect on religiosity, as demonstrated by the variation in the percentage distribution concerning gender, age, educational level, and political ideological groups. The descriptive analysis highlights substantial differences among the various groups and underscores the importance of each variable. While some variables may exert greater influence, all of them have a notable impact on religiosity.

In particular, individuals aged 18 to 30 manifest significantly lower levels of religiosity in 2022 compared to 2013, a pattern observed in older age groups. However, the contrasts in religiosity levels between generations intensify between 2013 and 2022, resulting in a higher prevalence of non-believers and a growing divergence between the two groups. Additionally, gender disparities are evident in all comparisons, with males consistently exhibiting lower levels of religiosity than females.

The combined descriptive analysis of percentage variability, incorporating gender, educational level,

age, and ideology (the latter two being recoded), illuminates substantial diversity among individuals who self-identify as religious. This diversity is explored through an examination of the religious affiliations of 144 groups distinguished by their religious identification and demographic characteristics, including gender, education level, age, and ideology. The number of groups expands to 288 when considering both the percentage of individuals who identify as religious and the complementary percentage who do not.

Table 4 presents the proportions of believers versus non-believers among Spaniards, classified by their attained educational level, gender, age groups, and ideological profiles. A detailed analysis of all 288 groups is not practical. To facilitate comparison, the authors concentrate on comparing the young / older and male/ female categories.

An analysis of the data in Table 4 sheds light on the relationship between various demographic factors and the religious identification of Spaniards. When comparing the religious identification of young individuals versus that of older ones, as well as between males and females, significant differences emerged. The results indicate that, in both younger and older age categories, males with higher educational levels and left-leaning ideological positions tend to identify as less religious. These differences are statistically significant, ranging from 20% between groups with primary or low secondary education to 30% or more among those with secondary or tertiary education.

The findings from the analysis reveal a consistent pattern regarding religious identification among Spaniards. The proportion of religious identification tends to increase with age and decrease with educational level, especially among females. This trend is evident across all ideological positions (Left, Center, Right), where religious identification becomes more frequent as age increases and educational

VARIABLE	CATEGORY	CASES	RELIGIOSITY (%)	SIGNIFICANCE
<i>Gender</i>	Male	221,179	63.0	<.0001*
	Female	235,784	74.0	
<i>Age (years old)</i>	18 to 25	42,352	47.7	<.0001
	26 to 35	64,208	53.1	
	36 to 45	88,632	62.4	
	46 to 55	87,076	70.7	
	56 to 65	74,119	75.2	
	66 and more	87,673	86.1	
<i>Educational attainment (ISCED – UNESCO)</i>	Primary or less	82,193	90.1	<.0001
	Lower secondary	95,528	76.2	
	Secondary	145,831	63.0	
	Tertiary	134,411	56.4	
<i>Nationality</i>	Spanish	442,910	68.4	<.0001*
	Spanish and another	15,053	76.5	
<i>Ideology (Scale 1 to 10)</i>	1	28,813	39.7	<.0001
	2	25,104	37.5	
	3	64,413	48.6	
	4	56,529	62.6	
	5	100,601	75.1	
	6	39,893	81.6	
	7	30,034	85.3	
	8	21,839	88.8	
	9	6,262	91.4	
	10	10,825	89.1	
<i>Ideology (recoded)</i>	Left	118,330	44.1	<.0001
	Center	197,024	72.8	
	Right	68,959	87.6	
<i>Year</i>	2013	29,142	75.1	<.0001
	2014	28,924	74.1	
	2015	34,327	74.9	
	2016	32,758	74.2	
	2017	30,810	73.2	
	2018	30,896	73.0	
	2019	82,964	72.4	
	2020	46,732	64.6	
	2021	71,564	61.6	
	2022	69,846	59.5	

**Table 3** Religious identification (N = 467,187) (% of Catholics and Believers of another religion) in Spain by gender, age, educational attainment, nationality, ideology and year. Tests  $\chi^2$  conducted. (\*) Fisher test conducted.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	GENDER	AGE (YEARS OLD)	IDEOLOGY		
			LEFT	CENTER	RIGHT
ISCED 0 – 1: Primary or less	Male	18 to 25	47.7	64.8	75.2
		26 to 35	47.7	66.5	81.6
		36 to 45	64.3	76.9	85.2
		46 to 55	72.9	85.5	93.1
		56 to 65	72.9	88.2	94.0
		66 and more	72.7	88.9	96.3
	Female	18 to 25	58.0	73.2	84.8
		26 to 35	71.8	81.7	81.4
		36 to 45	78.0	88.7	92.4
		46 to 55	83.4	92.2	94.9
		56 to 65	83.2	93.9	98.3
		66 and more	88.2	96.4	99.0
ISCED 2: Lower secondary	Male	18 to 25	36.3	54.9	67.4
		26 to 35	43.3	64.8	74.4
		36 to 45	48.0	71.4	82.8
		46 to 55	56.2	78.4	88.4
		56 to 65	60.4	81.2	92.6
		66 and more	59.3	84.8	94.6
	Female	18 to 25	43.7	65.1	74.0
		26 to 35	57.0	77.1	81.7
		36 to 45	64.1	82.1	90.4
		46 to 55	69.7	88.3	94.1
		56 to 65	71.1	90.3	95.5
		66 and more	74.1	92.2	98.3
ISCED 3: Secondary	Male	18 to 25	21.4	45.1	66.6
		26 to 35	26.2	53.0	69.8
		36 to 45	34.2	62.6	79.1
		46 to 55	40.9	70.2	83.9
		56 to 65	42.6	73.6	88.6
		66 and more	48.2	78.8	91.4
ISCED 3: Secondary	Female	18 to 25	27.5	56.0	77.2
		26 to 35	38.9	67.0	80.7
		36 to 45	45.5	75.4	86.3
		46 to 55	52.8	78.9	89.4
		56 to 65	55.6	82.2	93.5
		66 and more	60.8	86.9	96.3

**Table 4** Religious identification (%) in Spain by educational attainment, gender, age group, and ideology.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.

level decreases. The data used for this analysis are based on the examination of CIS surveys/barometers conducted in Spain from January 2013 to December 2022, excluding August, with a total sample size of N = 467,187 individuals.

### BINOMIAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION

A binomial logistic regression model has been established to assess the significance of the logistic algorithm and determine the statistical validity of the proposed model. The aim is to identify a logistic function that capture the

joint variability between religious identification among Spaniards and the considered independent variables.

The logistic regression model reveals that religiosity, treated as a dichotomous dependent variable, is influenced by various independent variables, including gender, age, nationality, educational attainment (according to the International Standard Classification of Education: ISCED – 2011, UNESCO) (UNESCO, 2011), and political ideology (measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 10). Additionally, the variable “year” is included, incorporating data from all surveys/barometers conducted by CIS from 2013 to 2022 (except August) (CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), 2022c), to account for the impact of time on religious identification along with other variables. This combined approach, analyzing the social, temporal, and religious space, aids in understanding the effect of time on secularization (Griera et al., 2021).

The logistic regression model is defined using the same variables as the previous Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) model, with some modifications. The dependent variable is religiosity, dichotomized, and the independent variables include gender, age (ranging from 18 to 98 years), educational level (categorized into four levels), nationality, political ideology (on a Likert scale from 1 to 10), and year (from 2013 to 2022). The estimated values of the logistic regression model are presented in Table 5.

The results of the logistic regression model emphasize the importance of all independent variables in explaining religiosity, providing a nuanced interpretation of religious identification among Spaniards. The odds ratios (OR) elucidate the proportional change of a category compared to its reference category. The highest value (3.472) is observed in the effect of educational attainment,

indicating that individuals with primary education or less are 3.5 times more likely to identify as religious compared to those with tertiary education (the reference category). The exponent values for all educational levels are greater than 1 and decrease as the level of education increases, suggesting a negative correlation between educational attainment and religious identification.

On the ideology scale (ranging from 1 to 10), a one-point increase is associated with a 54% increase in religious identification. Consequently, individuals with right-wing political ideologies are more likely to identify as religious compared to those with left-wing ideologies. The variable “age” also shows a similar trend, with a one-year increase associated with a 3.2 times increase in religious identification.

Conversely, the gender variable is negatively associated with religious identification, indicating that males are approximately 43% less likely to identify as religious compared to females. A similar percentage is obtained for the nationality variable. Those with solely Spanish nationality are 47% less likely to identify as religious compared to those with dual nationality (Spanish and other). The year variable is also negatively associated with religious identification, revealing that each additional year in the time series is associated with a 9% decrease in the odds of religious identification.

The comprehensive analysis of variables in this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing religious identification among Spaniards. Several authors advocate for a global perspective when reconsidering secularization, urging a departure from the limitations of Western societies and Christian religions. This perspective aims to transcend traditional discourses, including notions of the American exception and more recent European exceptions (Casanova, 2012). National demographic studies play a pivotal role in offering valuable insights into patterns within a country and profiles of religious and non-religious groups. Spain, being a multicultural country shaped by migration and diverse populations, offers a unique opportunity for this type of research. However, it is essential to note that this analysis does not encompass data on foreign populations, as explained earlier. Nevertheless, the significant shift in religious identification positions in Spain in recent years, characterized by a sharp decline, could be attributed to interactions between populations and the permeability of multiculturalism. Some local studies on religious minorities in Spain support this speculative hypothesis.

This national multidimensional quantitative study of public opinion and religious identification facilitates exploration and speculation on social change and the diverse stances that new and old generations adopt towards religiosity and its practice. This exploration is not solely due to the fact that we live in a more global and interconnected world where transnational spheres influence local societies, but also because individuals

VARIABLE	B	S.E.	SIG.	OR
Constant	188.8	3.019	<.0001	.000
Gender (1)	-.570	.008	<.0001	.566
Age	.032	.000	<.0001	1.033
<i>Educational attainment: Tertiary</i>				
Primary or less	1.245	.016	<.0001	3.472
Lower secondary	.833	.011	<.0001	2.301
Secondary	.342	.009	<.0001	1.407
Nationality (1)	-.632	.105	<.0001	.531
Ideology	.435	.002	<.0001	1.544
Year	-.095	.001	<.0001	.910

**Table 5** Logistic regression. Religious identification by gender, age, educational attainment, nationality, ideology, and year in Spain.

Source: Own elaboration (CIS surveys/barometers: Spain, January 2013 to December 2022, except August) N = 467,187.

adopt and adapt behaviors from partners and positions that extend beyond the local context, as suggested by Pérez-Agote (2016).

The proposed analysis incorporates temporality as a variable, utilizing annual statistical series from 2013 to 2022. This approach allows for the exploration of the impact of time on believer/non-believer identification, transcending generational boundaries. Changes in religious identification are not confined to just the youth, as emphasized by González-Anleo (2016). Rather, changes in religious identification are observed across all generations, resulting from mutual interactions and reciprocity between the young and the old, even independent of the ideological positions of Spaniards, which remain almost constant during the period from 2013 to 2022.

As suggested by Casanova (2012), Spanish society exhibits a growing trend of secularization, characterized by desacralization and a diminishing influence of religious institutions on individuals and groups. However, Gil Gimeno (2017) posits that multiple forms of secularization are occurring, as exemplified by the increasing equality between cultures and religions (De Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez, 2013).

What appears to be reflected in Spanish society is a decline in religious identification and practice, especially among Catholics, accompanied by an increase in “à la carte” religiosity (Molénat, 2014). This is a distinctive form of multiplicity of religious and secular identifications as proposed by Pérez-Agote (2012). This change is characterized by intimate spiritual behaviors (Cornejo, 2012; Flanagan and Jupp, 2007; Griera et al., 2021) without explicit religious affiliation; it represents a form of multiple religious ideology where a continuous interchange and interrelationship between religion, identity, culture, and politics are observed (Pérez-Agote, 2016).

The conclusions drawn by Pérez-Agote and Santiago-García (2005) regarding religious identification in Spanish society remain relevant in 2022. According to the CIS surveys/barometers, approximately 70% of the population identifies as religious, with almost all (96%) identifying as Catholics. However, those with dual nationality adhere to other religions at a rate of 20%, while this percentage does not reach 3% for those with only Spanish nationality. The analysis reveals that factors such as gender, age, level of education, and political ideology play a role in religious identification. Young males with higher education and left-leaning ideologies are less likely to identify as religious (16% compared to 20% in females), while those with primary education or less and right-leaning ideologies are more likely to identify as religious (77% compared to 83% in females). This complex interplay of factors contributes to the changing landscape of religious identification in Spanish society.

The results of the logistic regression model underscore the significant impact of education on religious identification. Individuals with a higher level of education have approximately three to four times more chances of identifying as non-religious compared to those with lower levels of education. Ideology also plays a notable role, showing a 50% increase in the probability of identifying as religious with each unit increase on the 1 to 10 scale. Age is another influencing factor, contributing to a 3.4% increase in the probability of identifying as religious with each year of aging. In terms of gender and nationality, the probability of religious identification decreases by 50% for males and individuals with only Spanish nationality. Additionally, the results reveal a decline in religiosity over the years in the surveys/barometers.

The data suggest that religious identification, especially Catholic identification, among Spaniards has more of a declarative nature than a demonstration of commitment. Only 30% of those who identify as religious attend religious services regularly, while half never attend and 20% rarely attend. This highlights a notable disconnect between religious identification and religious participation, pointing to a nuanced relationship between personal identification and active involvement in religious practices among the Spanish population.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study align with ‘believing without belonging’ thesis (Davie, 1990), as reinforced by the works of Molteni and Biolcati (2023, 2018). The results indicate significant variations in religious identification in Spain among diverse social groups. Non-believers are predominantly young males under the age of 30, left-leaning, and university-educated, with approximately 25% identifying as religious. Conversely, the most religious group comprises females over the age of 65, right-leaning, and with primary school education or less. Moreover, the passage of time reveals a growing intergenerational gap in the proportions of young and elderly individuals identifying as religious or non-religious in Spain. Between 2013 and 2022, within a mere ten years, the disparities between young people under 30 (80% non-believers) and those over 65 (20% non-believers) have widened, affirming what Molteni and Biolcati (2023) have found for Europe in general.

The study of religious identification in Spain uncovers a complex and dynamic landscape. While 60% of the population identifies as religious, with almost all identifying as Catholics. A closer examination reveals that religious identification is influenced by various factors, including gender, age, level of education, ideology, and time.

Young people, especially young males with a higher level of education and left-leaning ideologies, are less

likely to identify as religious. On the other hand, older individuals, especially those with lower levels of education or right-leaning ideologies, are more likely to identify as religious. The intersection of these factors results in a wide range of positions regarding religious involvement. Overall, the data suggests that the probability of religious identification in Spain is determined by a combination of personal characteristics and demographic factors, indicative of the changing religious landscape in the country.

The process of secularization in Spain has been strengthening over time, indicated by a continuous decline according to linear regression. However, in the last three years, the decline has been more rapid, and the 10% drop in religious identification appears to follow a curvilinear regression model. This change cannot solely be attributed to age differences within the population, as suggested by González-Anleo (2016). Recent studies propose that the new cultural condition of Spanish society, including increased cultural change and the presence of immigrants from other countries (Casanova, 2012; De Botton and Pulido-Rodríguez, 2013; Gil Gimeno, 2017), may be contributing factors. Despite this, ideological positions among Spaniards remain relatively stable over time. The causes of this sudden break in the religious decline and whether this trend will continue, potentially resulting in a drop below 50% in religious identification in the near future, are open questions.

The causes of secularization and the sharp decline in religious identification in Spanish society may be related to the complex relationship between religion, politics, and law in contemporary Spain (Griera et al., 2021). This challenges the linear and single-causal understanding of the role of religion in contemporary Western societies, which does not consider the temporal and multidimensional approach (Pollack, 2008). Personal positions and religious identification can change based on individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, nationality, and ideology, as well as social interactions with others of similar profiles (Griera et al., 2021). These results demonstrate the evolution of opinions and positions over time and their relationship with structures and movements, emphasizing the importance of considering the context in which religiosity is expressed and identified by individuals.

Additionally, the study sheds light on the evolving nature of religious identification in Spain and its intricate connections with social, cultural, and political dimensions. The observed trends, such as the widening intergenerational gap and the increasing diversity in religious positions, point to a nuanced and multifaceted process of change. The notion of 'believing without belonging' becomes particularly relevant in understanding the disconnect between religious identification and active participation in religious practices, emphasizing a

shift towards more personalized and flexible expressions of spirituality.

Moreover, the study's consideration of the role of immigrants and cultural change adds a layer of complexity to the narrative of religious transformation in Spain. The impact of globalization and multiculturalism on religious identification underscores the need for a broader, global perspective when analyzing secularization trends. The study's findings challenge traditional linear models and highlight the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach that considers the dynamic interplay of individual characteristics, societal structures, and cultural influences.

In conclusion, this study not only provides valuable insights into the current state of religious identification in Spain but also stimulates further exploration of the factors driving these changes. One potential avenue for improvement in the study could be the incorporation of the opinions of individuals residing in Spain without Spanish nationality, as their perspectives are not currently reflected in the analyzed data. The intricate interplay of demographics, ideology, and cultural shifts emphasizes the necessity for continuous research to comprehensively capture the evolving landscape of religiosity in contemporary Spanish society. This ongoing investigation is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interrelationships shaping religious identification and practices in Spain, ultimately contributing to a broader and more accurate portrayal of the complex socio-religious dynamics in the country.

## NOTES


- 1 [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es).
- 2 CIS Website: <http://www.cis.es>.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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