

# The Return of Secularisation: New Data and Evidence

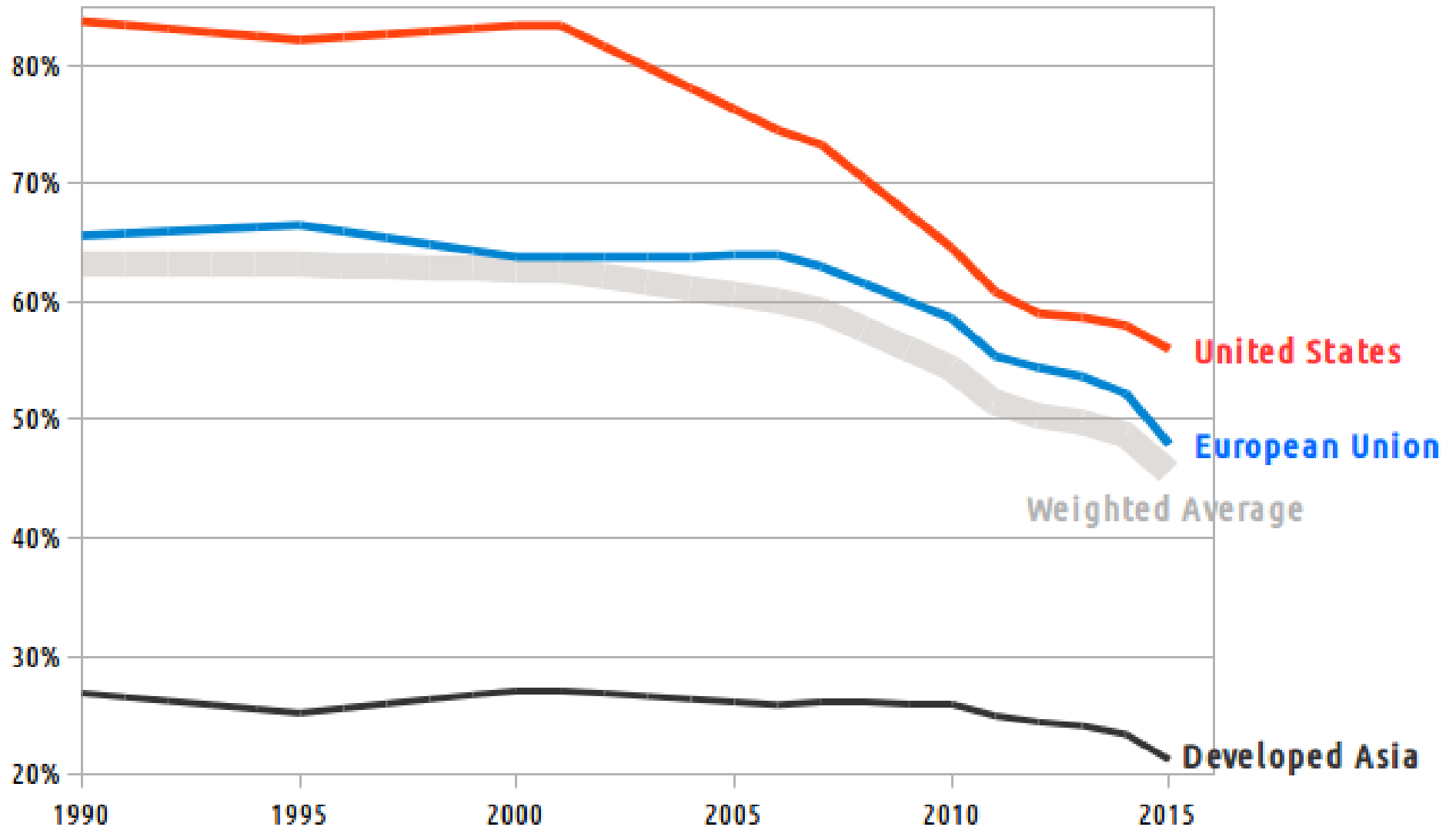
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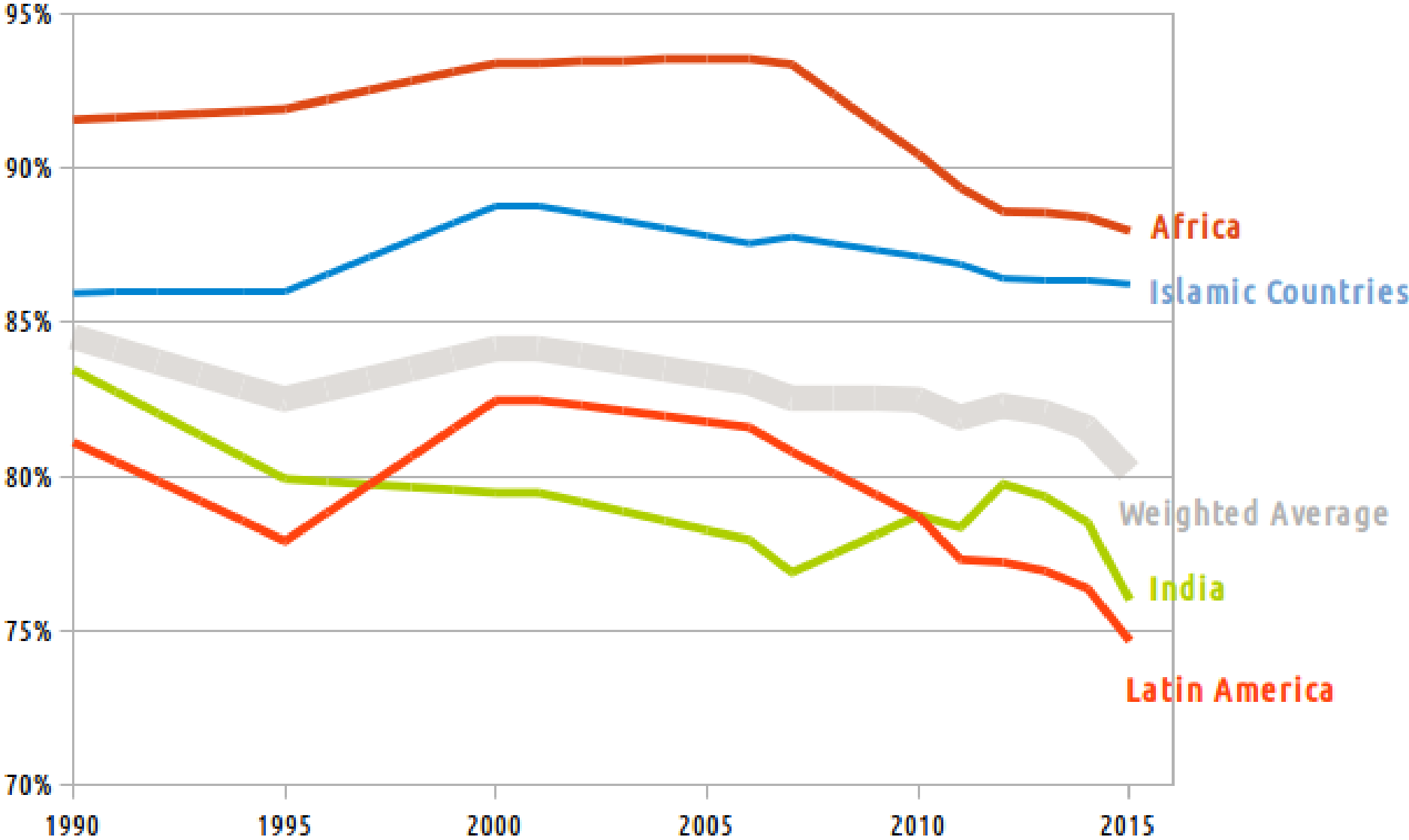
St. Jakobus Church. Apartment conversion by Zecc Architects, Utrecht, Netherlands.

# Consider Self a “Religious Person”



Source: Combined WVS/WIN-Gallup dataset, 1990-2015

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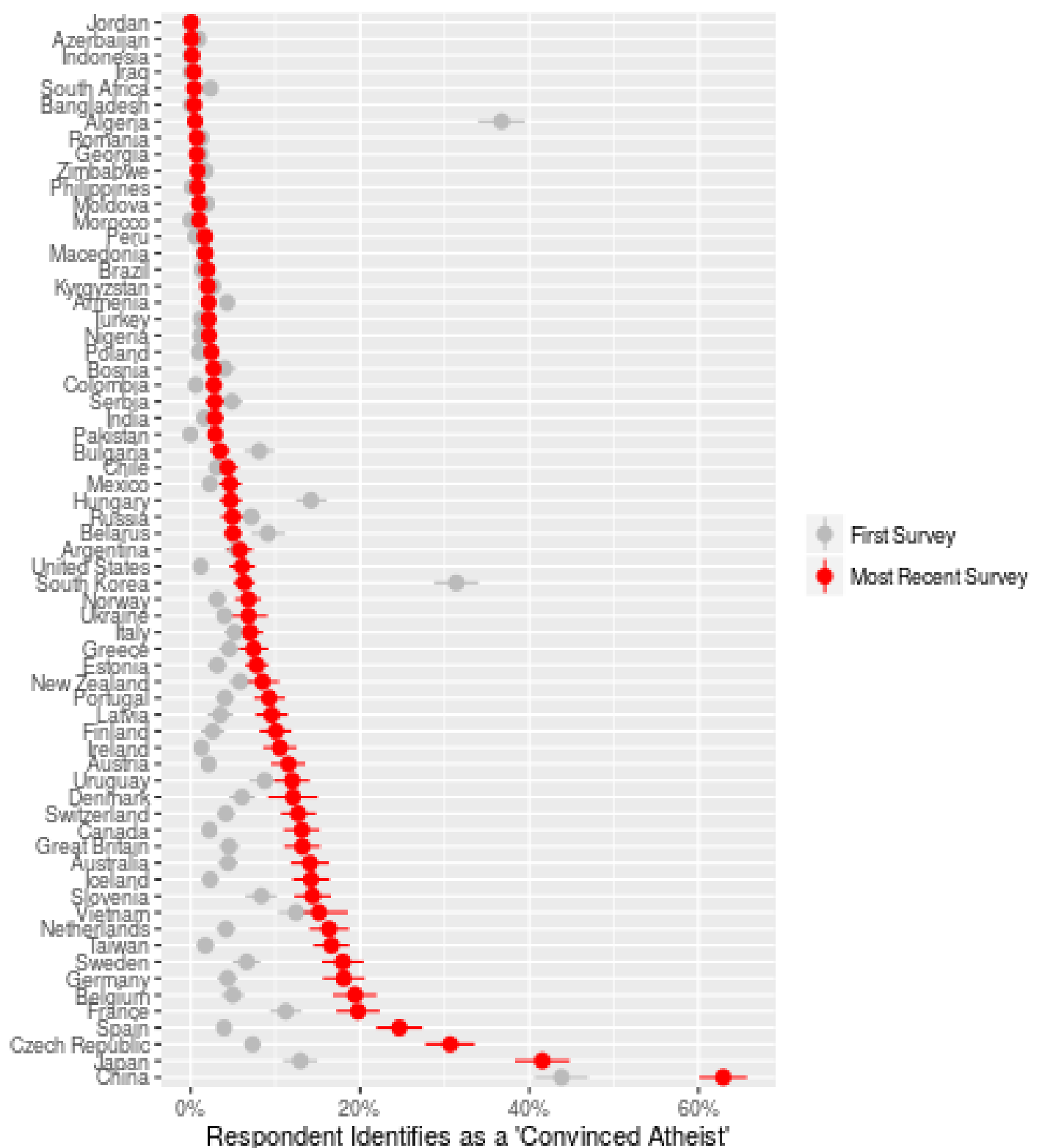
# Why is this Surprising?

- Recent decades have not been kind to secularisation theory, due to:
- The outbreak of sectarian conflict in formerly “secular” societies such as Bosnia or Northern Ireland;
- The rise of religious movements and parties in India, Israel, Turkey, or the Arab Middle East;
- The return of religious faith to the post-communist world;
- The restructuring of global politics along the lines of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996)
- the rise of international terrorism and jihadist ideology (Toft et al. 2011).
- Scholars have attacked secularization theory was ethnocentric, limited to recent developments in the west, that were never applicable to Islamic or East Asian societies, or to the U.S. (Stark 2000); and even defenders of secularisation theory such as Inglehart and Norris (2004) argue that demography has counterbalanced societal secularisation.

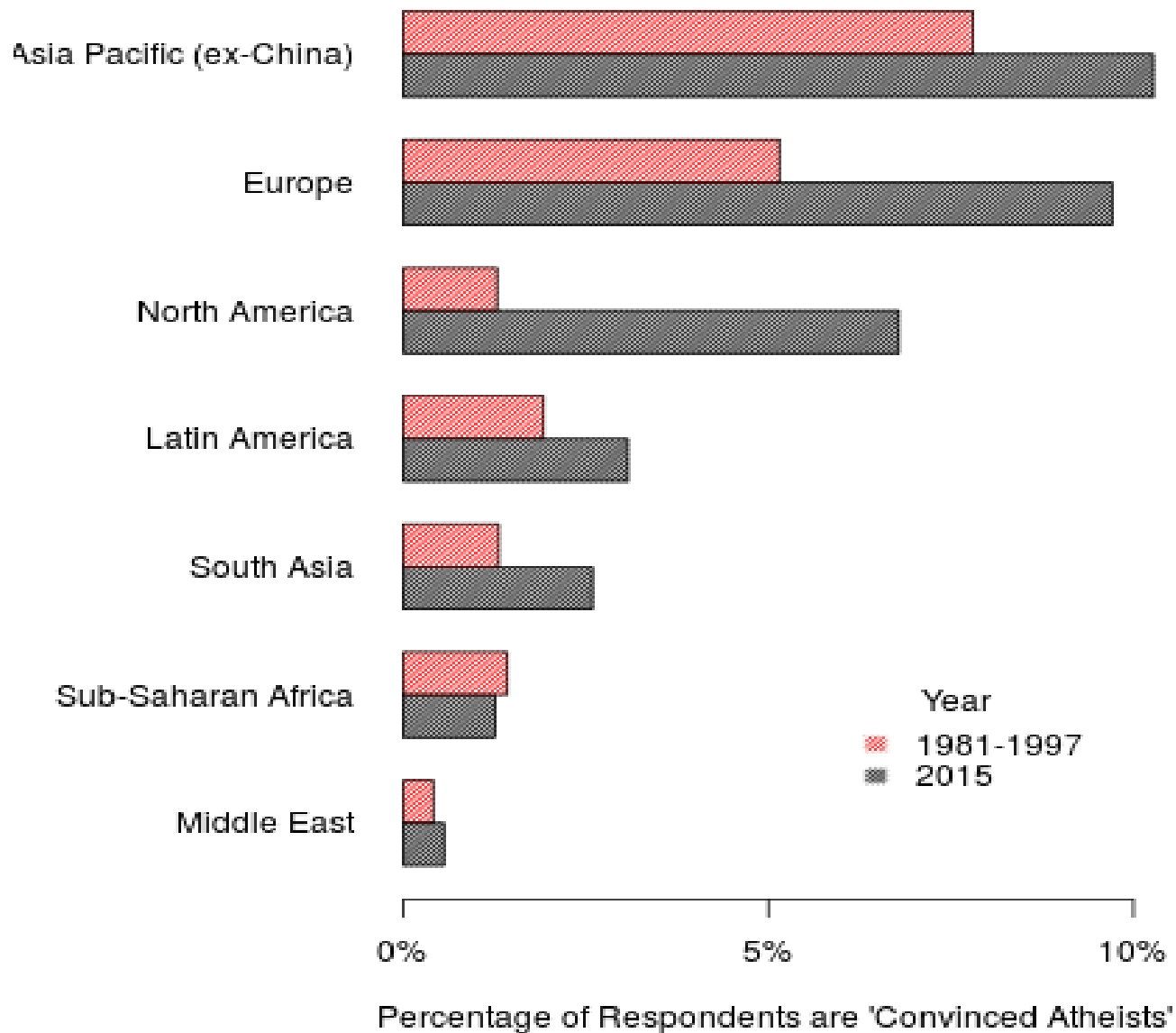
# The Rise of Atheism



# Rising Atheism Worldwide



# Rising Atheism by Region



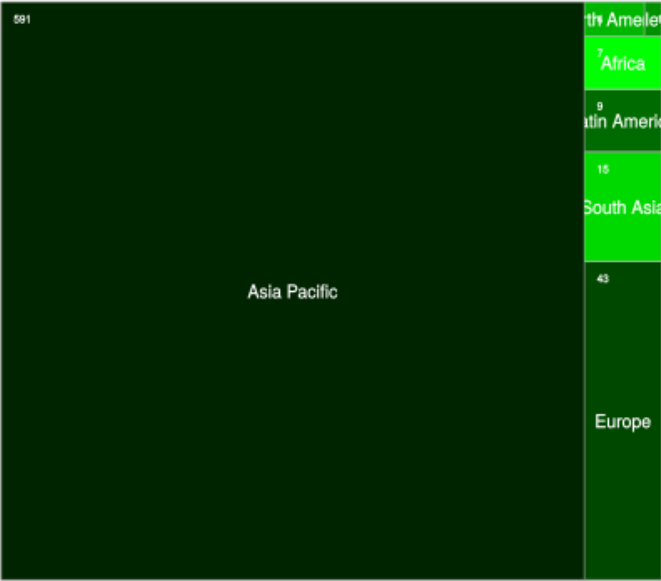
# Atheism by Absolute Numbers



# Rise in Global Atheist Population, 1990-2015

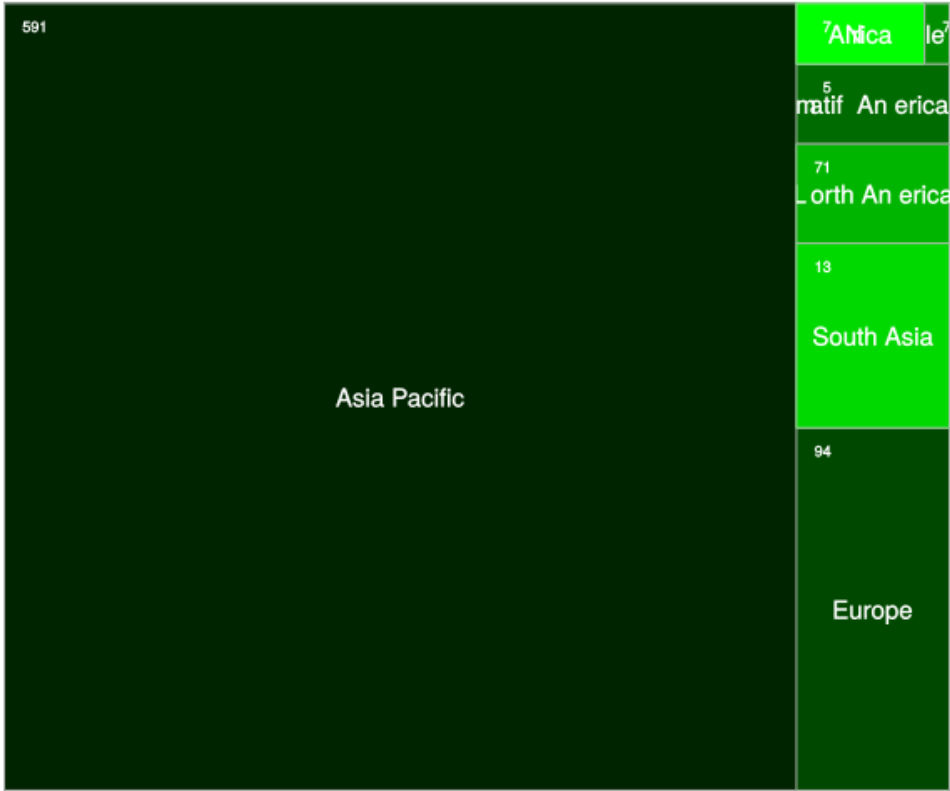
Distribution of World Atheist Population, 1990

Pop: 670m  
12.7% of World Population



Distribution of World Atheist Population, 2015

Pop: 1.17bn  
16.2% of World Population



Notes: surveys represent 95% of world population; missing cases imputed from regional Averages. Aggregation population-weighted by year.

# Rise in Global Atheist Population, 1990-2015

Distribution of World Atheist Population, 1990  
(Excluding China)

Pop: 131m  
3.2% of Population



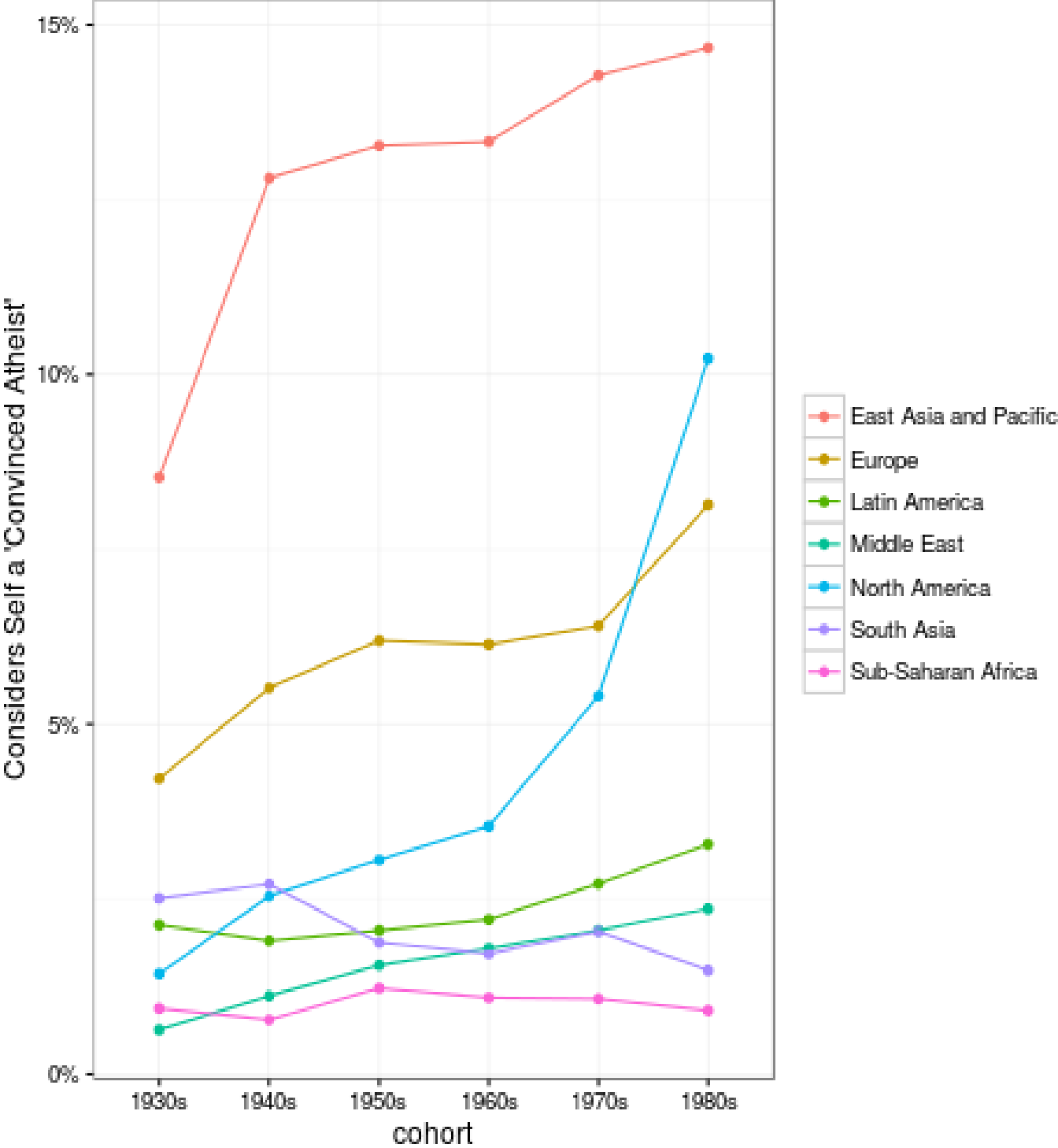
Distribution of World Atheist Population, 2015,  
(Excluding China)

Pop: 280m  
4.7% of Population



# Intergenerational Change

# Atheism, by Region and Cohort



# Age-Period-Cohort Regression Results

	<i>Atheist</i>	<i>Religious</i>
Period effect – after 2001	0.015 *** (0.001)	-0.032 *** (0.002)
Cohort effect – baby boomer (born 1940s or 1950s)	0.001 (0.001)	0.011 *** (0.002)
Cohort effect – millennial (born 1970s or 1980s)	0.015 *** (0.001)	-0.047 *** (0.002)
Age effect – aged 65 or above	-0.008 *** (0.001)	0.08 *** (0.002)
Respondent: university educated	0.017 *** (0.001)	-0.017 ***
Sex (Female)	-0.026 *** (0.001)	0.089 *** (0.001)
Income	0.001 *** (0)	-0.002 *** (0)
Constant	0.01 . (0.005)	0.851 *** (0.01)
n	380391	380391
Adj. R-square	0.09	0.20

Note: also includes country fixed effects (not reported).

	<i>Atheist</i>	<i>Religious</i>
<b>Atheism +1.5% pts worldwide in surveys post-2001</b>		
Period effect – after 2001	0.015 *** (0.001)	-0.032 *** (0.002)
<b>No increase among baby boom generation</b>		
Cohort effect – baby boomer (born 1940s or 1950s)	0.001 (0.001)	0.011 *** (0.002)
<b>Atheism +1.5% pts worldwide among millennials</b>		
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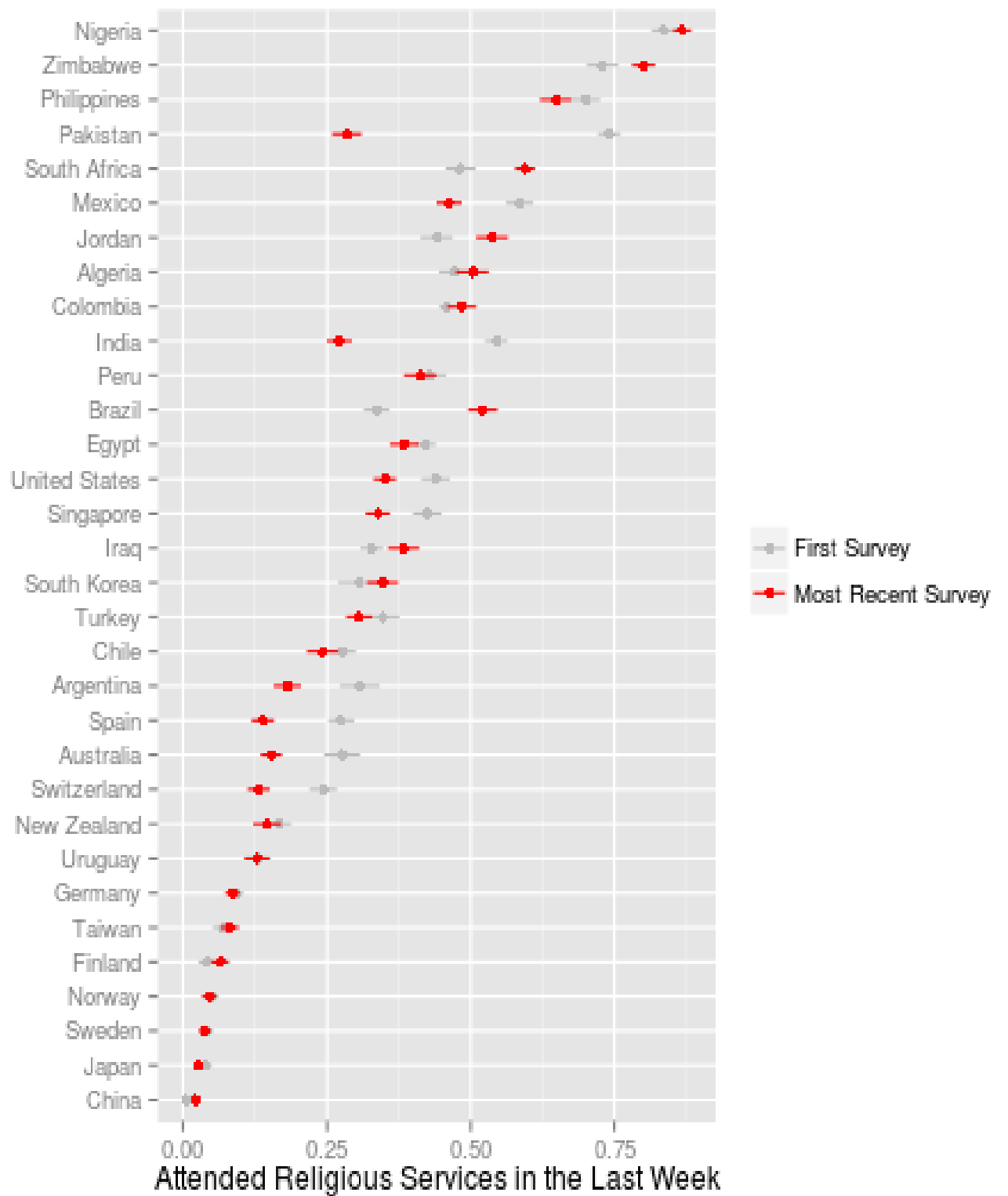
# Explanations for the Return of Secularisation

- Even controlling for education and income, clear global post-2001 period effect and cohort effect (came of age during 2000s)
- Evidence not only in the US and Europe, but also Middle East, East Asia, Latin America.
- Why? While in part it may be a continuation of longstanding forces driving societal secularization, such as rising income, education, and access to media
- Also plausible explanation for this “punctuated equilibrium” is increasing salience of religious conflict in global affairs, leading to societal rejection of religious identity.
- That religious conflict may lead to secularization may seem paradoxical - yet possibly true elsewhere historically (e.g. in Europe, countries with early modern sectarian conflict, such as Netherlands and Switzerland now among most secular)
- Suggests the sectarian conflicts of the contemporary Arab Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, at least as likely to produce long-run secularisation as the deepening of religious identity.





**THE END**



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18 – 22 апреля, 2016 – НИУ ВШЭ, Москва.

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