

Religious Beliefs and Practices National Survey, Mexico 2016

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Abstract:

The 2010 Population and Housing Census of Mexico confirms that Catholics continue to represent a clear majority but also reveals a rapid and intense religious diversification. The religious field in Mexico is now comprised of myriad denominations which, though still a minority, are transforming the supposed socio-religious homogeneity of Mexicans. Among Catholics, novel practices often associated with new spiritualities, including neopagan and indigenous rituals, are another feature of this diversity, along with a trend towards religious deinstitutionalization. With public funding assistance, a team of researchers designed a national survey on religious practices and beliefs in order to do a comparative analysis of the main religious options (Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals, Paraprotestants and unaffiliated) and urban vs. rural dwelling. This paper describes the methodology design and the principal findings of the analysis of contemporary religious diversity in Mexico in order to facilitate international comparisons.

Conducted in 2016, the Mexican National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Practices¹ aims to identify the main trends in religious composition by comparing a range of dimensions of the population's religious behavior (shifts in religious identification, institutional commitment, religious practices, transcendental beliefs and opinions on topics of public interest related to religion). This article explores the reworking of religious identities in relation to territorial reconfigurations and shifts in religious identification. The sample is broad enough for a reliable comparison of the most representative religious groups in Mexico: Catholics, Evangelicals, Paraprotestants² and the unaffiliated. It considers regional features, dividing the country into five sections, each with its own religious composition profile based on the pace of religious change (Hernández and Rivera, 2009), and

¹ The survey was designed by Alberto Hernández, Renée de la Torre and Cristina Gutiérrez Zúñiga. Yasodhara Silva at Demoscópica México oversaw the sampling and application. The National Science and Technology Council of Mexico (CONACYT) funded the project and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, A.C. managed it.

² We use the term "Paraprotestants" to refer to a variety of non-Evangelical Christian denominations including Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists.

the percentage of urban vs. rural dwellers. Besides establishing the mean religious profiles for the general population, we also conducted a multivariate analysis for ethnic belonging, age groups, gender, educational level and socioeconomic status, aspects to be examined in upcoming studies.

This article presents a comparative analysis of the quantitative data of religious groups, revealing the specific profiles of each religious affiliation. It also explores the reconfigurations of religious belonging and affiliation, and new ways of believing and practicing religion in a historically Catholic country.

I. Methodological Challenges for the Study of Religious Reconfiguration in Mexico

In recent years, Mexico has experienced a rapid transformation of its religious field. This can mainly be seen in the country's religious diversification, which has become evident in country censuses (one example can be found in De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2007). Religious change can be noted in the drop in the Catholic population and the rise in non-Catholic denominations, especially Christians and Evangelicals, and in religious disaffiliation. However, this change is not limited to experiencing a religious conversion, like being "born again" or joining a certain denomination, because religiosity is increasingly practiced along the margins of institutional religion or outside its scope entirely. More attributable to globalization in late modernity than a result of secularization (Campiche, 1993), there has been an evident shift towards religious deinstitutionalization and religious subjectivism.

For several decades, we have formed part of a group of Mexican researchers studying religion in Mexico,³ participating in collective nationwide

³ The Religious Research Network of Mexico (RIFREM) is one of the most consolidated networks nationwide. Besides hosting an annual conference every year since its founding two decades ago, RIFREM serves as a platform for different collective projects that have received national and international attention as well as 20 collective publications. For more information on this network, see the website www.rifrem.mx.

research projects to offer a comprehensive overview on the dynamics of religious diversity and the changes in religious composition in different regions and towns.

Mexico's National Population Census provides data on religious affiliation and this information represents an important tool for considering sociodemographic trends nationwide (Gutiérrez & De la Torre 2017). However, due to the dispersion and minority status of non-Catholic religions, there is not enough data to grasp the changes taking place within denominations. Additionally, due to the lack of nationwide cross-sectional studies on religious identities, it is not possible to analyze internal changes in the religious composition of the religious groups at the national level or their principal features and regional trends. For this reason, it is important to analyze religious diversification tendencies in order to understand current processes of socialization and patterns of multiculturalism. The premise is that while there are regional differences in the religious shift in Mexico, territorial reconfigurations also contributes to such differences. The change is not limited to religious affiliations but also to beliefs, values and practices that are increasingly transversal, fluid and dynamic.

Studies on Religious Diversity in Latin America and Mexico

Latin America is generally defined as a Catholic region in atlases of world religions. However, religious scholars have noted the myriad forms of syncretic religion, commonly referred to as "folk religion" (Sanchis, 1994) and tucked behind the facade of Catholic unity.

During the 1990s, sociologists began to focus on one of Latin America's most noteworthy cultural transformations: the gradual shift from Catholicism to religious diversity (Berryman, 1995), specifically towards Protestantism (Stoll, 1990) and its third wave, Pentecostalism (Martin, 1990). The pace and intensity of this regional change varies from country to country.

In Mexico, the population remains overwhelmingly Catholic but is nonetheless experiencing gradual, sustained religious change. When designing the survey, it was thus essential to consider that, unlike the rest of Latin America, religious change in Mexico is framed within Catholic hegemony and coexists with a

Catholic majority. While Catholicism used to be an element of cultural unity and a feature of Mexico's historic identity, the field of religion is currently witnessing changes in its religious composition that challenge Catholicism's hegemony and the monopoly on religion it has enjoyed until recently (Bastian, 2011).

This religious shift can be seen in the decreasing number of Catholics and a noteworthy spike in those affiliated with Pentecostal denominations, a popular and emotional version of historic Protestantism. In the case of Mexico, this trend can be attributed to individual decisions to switch religions. In this regard, a particular concern has been how to classify this religious diversity across Latin American, particularly in Mexico. Any classification of this phenomenon presents several challenges:

- 1) categorizing the congregations;
- 2) detecting multi-religiosity (Negrao, 2008) i.e. taking into account the identity reconfigurations at work between affiliation on the one hand and practices, beliefs and value hierarchies on the other, challenging the assumption that a person's beliefs necessarily reflect his or her religious belonging;
- 3) capturing the dynamic shifts of religious identifications (Mafra, 2013);
- 4) confirming that the nomadic forms of belief are increasingly removed from organized religion (Mallimaci, 2011 and 2014);
- 5) distinguishing between diversity and religious pluralism (Frigerioy Wynczyk, 2008, Beckford, 2003);⁴ and
- 6) the tendency towards religious subjectivism and religious deinstitutionalization, which can be seen in the distance between beliefs and practices and religious affiliations/religious membership (Hervieu-Lèger, 1996 and Campiche, 1991; Cruz Esquivel 2017).

⁴ This is significant because countries with a Catholic majority do not operate according to the laws of an open market (Berger, 1963), given the preferential treatment the Catholic Church continues to receive and the constant mudslinging against religious minorities (Evangelicals, popular forms of worship, indigenous world visions and religions from Africa).

The analysis of the religious subjectivism and religious deinstitutionalization Mexicans are currently experiencing relies on a paradigm that appeared in the European sociology of religions in the 1990s (Cipriani, 2004). Belgian anthropologist Albert Piette (1993) has referred to this shift away from institutionalized religion as an "outbreak." However, the true pioneer in this new conceptualization of secularization—and thus, of changing religious composition—was the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1993 and 1996), who proposed revising theories of secularization and suggested that modernity produced its own religiosities. Beyond attempting to identify what direction this process was taking, it was necessary to note the changes in religiosity increasingly taking place outside of religious institutions and in an explosive, dynamic manner. This theoretical approach veers the study of religions towards the study of how the sacred and mystical are produced. It invites us to leave behind a focus on effects—such as ruptures—to appreciate changes in the continuities and discontinuities within the changes.

Hervieu-Léger's contribution emphasized "the growing dissociation between an 'intensive' sociology of religious groups and an 'extensive' sociology of phenomenon of belief," (Hervieu-Leger, 2008:250) and it has had important repercussions for the designs of surveys on religious identifications. Some of the surveys that served as models for our design include: the study directed by Roland Campiche in Switzerland, who emphasized the processes of individualization in religion,⁵ though within a limited framework of certain social and cultural offerings (Campiche, 1993); the Quebec survey that introduces hermeneutic analysis to distinguish the signifiers from the meanings in order to understand the complex reconfiguration between the imagined and religious imaginaries (Lemieux, et al., 1983); the English study that, based on the analysis of a national survey,

⁵ Religious individualization refers to people gaining enough agency to put together their own "do-it-yourself" religiosity, patching together parts of different religions and other institutions that produce symbolic goods. This minimizes the mandatory and coercive power of religions while giving the individual freedom to construct and command her own religiosity. When speaking of individualization, then, it is necessary to talk about religious identification and not religious identity (Campiche, 1991).

introduced the concept of “believing without belonging” (Davie, 1990)⁶; the comparative studies based on the European Values Study (EVS), which noted how reconfiguration played out in each national context (Hervieu-Léger, 2004: 29-30). According to Bastian, the field of Catholicism has been progressively deregulated in late modernity, oscillating between “[...] the three principal poles of the religious field (magic-religious, bureaucratic and charismatic),” (Bastian, 2001: 29). The author reveals the goods of salvation in a new context of the transnational circulation of religious beliefs and practices.

In a similar approach, Cristian Parker returned to this category of being Christian “in my own way”—which defined the changing religious composition of Belgium—to define Latin American Catholicism. This, along with reflections surrounding the phenomenon of religious indifference among Spanish youth (Mardones, 2004).as we'll show here, prove very useful for the case of Mexico.⁷

The assessment of these different surveys and the trends recently noted in other Latin American countries contributed to our own survey script and a methodological design that proposes to consider:

- 1) patterns of religious mobility between affiliations and multi-religiosity;
- 2) degrees of religious commitment;
- 3) the reconfigurations of beliefs and affiliations;
- 4) the reconfigurations of practices and affiliations; and
- 5) the new and significant social spaces of religion: opinions and positions on secularity, secular freedoms, human rights and a culture of religious plurality.

Sample design

The sample was designed to ensure comparability between:

⁶ “Believing without belonging” is a category that describes a religiosity that is practiced with the need to belong to a church or outside church institutions (Davie, 1990).

⁷ “Believer in my own way” suggests how Catholics make changes—intensively incorporating beliefs, values and practices that the Catholic Church hierarchy not only dissuades but in fact sanctions (Parker, 2008)—without actually abandoning Catholic tradition or the church.

- a) the principal religious groups according to the INEGI 2010 census i.e. Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals, Paraprotestants (and the unaffiliated. Non-Christians (Muslims, Jews, etc.) were excluded due to their scarce statistical significance.
- b) The regions, defined according to their degree of religious change (Hernández and Rivera, 2009).
- c) The country's urban/rural proportions.

The Mexican population stands at 109,642,557. The universe of the study consisted in four population groups, divided according to their religious affiliations. Three thousand cases were used for the sample, with a reliability rate of 95% and a standard error of $\pm 2.5\%$. The sample covered 155 towns in the country's 32 federal districts. Stratified random sampling with probability proportional to size was used for the sample. The information was obtained through a face-to-face questionnaire conducted at households with anonymity assurance. The study was done from October 29-November 30, 2016.

The composition of the sample is as follows:

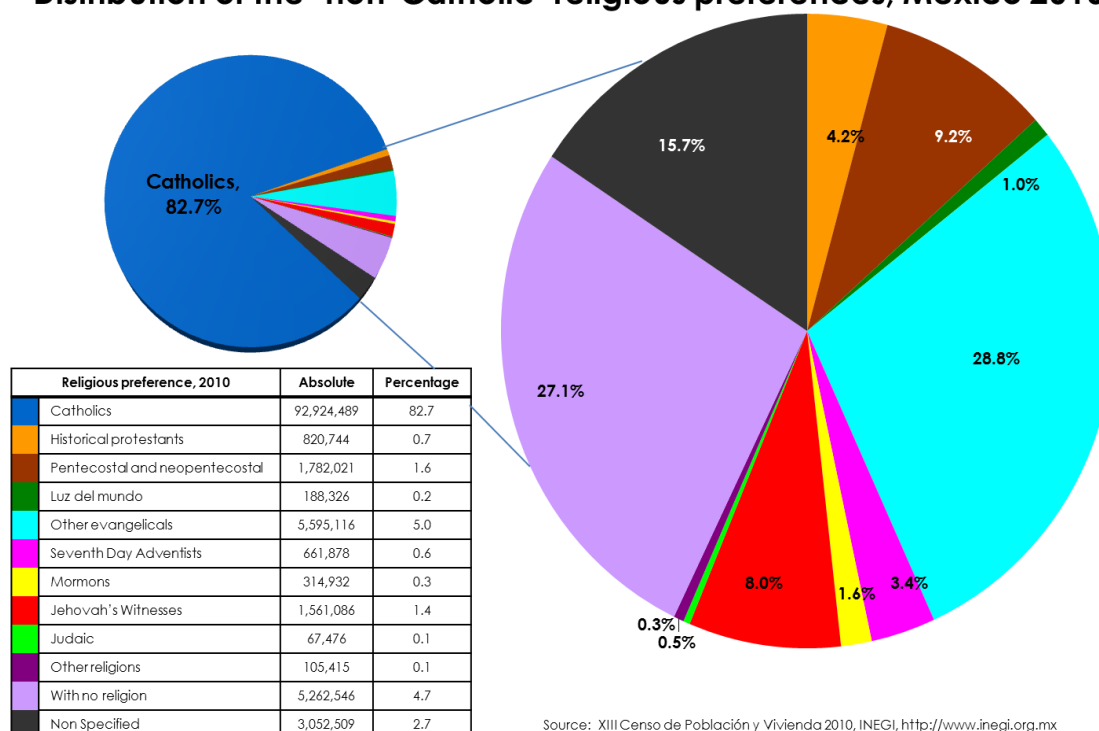
Chart 1. Distribution of the sample according to religious belonging and region.

Region		Catholic	Protestants and evangelical	Paraprotestant	Unaffiliated	TOTAL
1	Northwest mexico	353	72	77	98	600
2	North, northeast and gulf mexico	359	83	68	90	600
3	Central mexico	429	67	63	41	600
4	Western and north central mexico	441	64	46	49	600
5	South pacific and southeast mexico	329	83	106	82	600
	TOTAL	1911	369	360	360	3000

Oversampling was used to ensure the representativity of non-Catholic groups, generating statistically solid subsamples for the comparison between groups. The approximate distribution of religious belonging according to the most recent National Census data (from 2010) was contemplated in the report.⁸

Figure 1. Distribution of the Non-Catholic Religious Preference, Mexico 2010

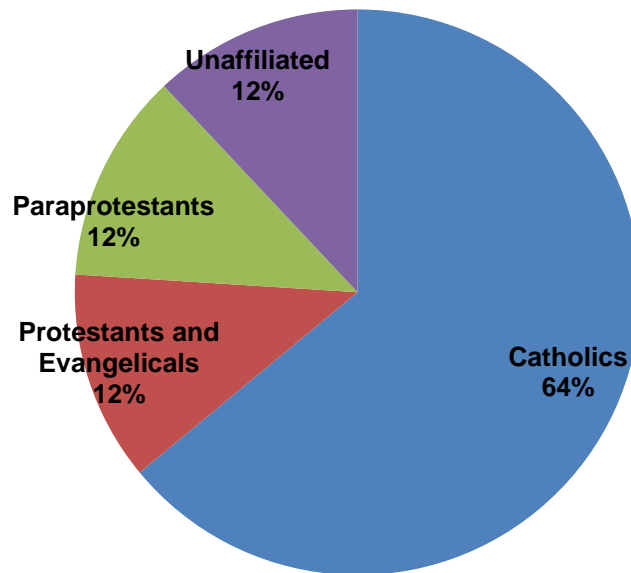
Distribution of the "non-Catholic" religious preferences, Mexico 2010



Source: XIII General Census of Population and Housing of Mexico, National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 2010.

⁸ The sample was designed to ensure representativity of both urban and rural districts, establishing similar percentages for each region, with the highest being the central region (urban population, 84%) and the southernmost region of the South Pacific-Southeast (urban population, 63%). For a more detailed description of the sample in terms of rural vs. urban dwellers, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age and education level, visit the website www.rifrem.mx, where the survey can be consulted and downloaded under the "Publicaciones" tab (in Spanish).

Figure 2. Distribution of the Sample by Religious Group

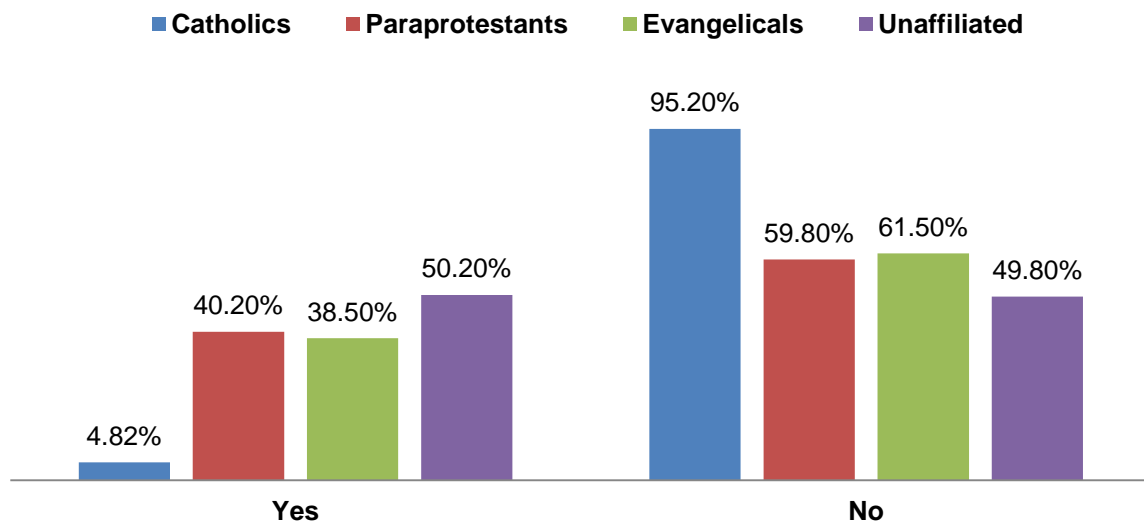


II. Overview of the Results

1) Switching Religion: Religious Mobility Trajectories and Multi-Religiosity

One measure of religious change is the percentage of people who state they have switched religion or abandoned religion, in the case of the unaffiliated. In general terms, this percentage is low, standing at 10.4% of the total population. More than half of the people who admitted to having changed religions used to be Catholic (57.1%), confirming that in Mexico, religious change principally involves abandoning Catholicism. The typical convert is a person who is born Catholic and then abandons Catholicism for another religion as an adult. There are few cases in which a person with another religion or a non-believer becomes Catholic. The typical trajectory of a person involved in religious change starts with Catholicism and ends in another Christian denomination, Evangelism or any other religious group (including the unaffiliated).

Figure 3. Have you switched religions or abandoned religion?



The contribution of converts to the growth of a new church varies significantly by religious group. Few become Catholics after being born into another church. Only 4.8% of current Catholics say they used to be a different religion. In other religious groups, however, conversion is an important source of new members: 40.2% of Paraprotestants and 38.5% of Evangelicals once professed another religion. Additionally, half of the unaffiliated (50.2%) had a religion they abandoned for one of the causes cited below.

There are diverse reasons for converting to a new religion but more than half of all converts gave one of the following four answers for the change: dissatisfaction with their previous religion (17%), the new religion's faithful interpretation of the Bible (16.8%), the search for truth (13.2%) and the conviction that their new religion is the true religion (10.5%).

The scarce mention of the reasons cited in the literature as important motives for religious conversion was worth noting. These include the economic assistance and solidarity that the convert encounters in the new religious community, the crisis that gave origin to the change and the struggle against addictions, which total just 6.4% altogether.

An interesting result that should be explored in upcoming research is that among people who convert to new religions, the reason they give for the change tends to determine which religious group they choose. Finding meaning in life

(19.2%) and dissatisfaction with their previous religion (19.1%) are the main reasons for religious conversions among those who become Evangelicals; among converts to other Christian denominations, the conviction that the new religion is the true religion (23.9%) prevails. For those who abandon religion, religious dissatisfaction is the main reason for converting, with 18.5% saying they weren't satisfied by their previous religion and 33.3% saying no religion satisfied them.

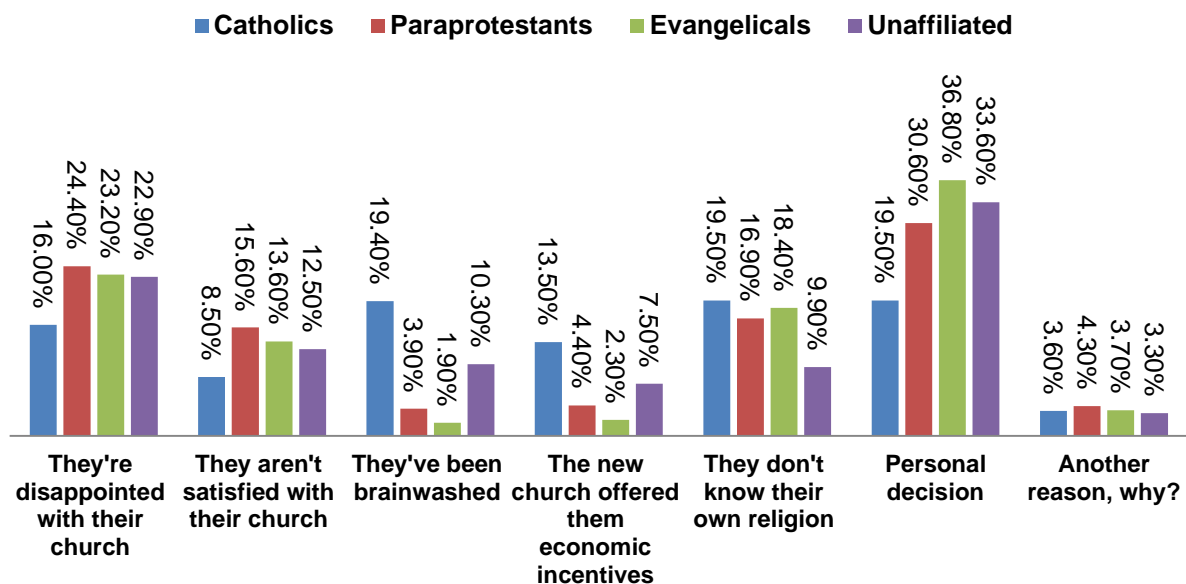
Chart 1. What was the main reason you converted to a new religion/abandoned religion?

Religious group	Catholic	Protestants	Evangelicals	Unaffiliated	Total
Not satisfied with your previous religion	15.2%	15.8%	19.1%	18.5%	17.0%
Found meaning in life in your current religion	6.1%	20.4%	19.2%		9.3%
Became convinced that this is the true religion	8.4%	23.9%	18.9%		10.5%
Experienced a crisis (emotional, economic, a divorce) and found God	5.1%	7.6%	7.0%		4.7%
Your current religion interprets the Bible more accurately	30.9%	11.0%	8.9%		16.8%
Your current religion provides economic assistance and solidarity	2.5%	2.5%			1.3%
Your new religion helped you recover from addiction		1.1%	1.3%		0.4%
Your family converted	9.4%	3.6%	10.7%		7.2%
No religion satisfies you	1.8%	1.2%	0.4%	33.3%	8.4%
You decided to seek the truth on your own.	10.4%	6.9%	5.7%	29.5%	13.2%
You are put off by the church's rules and dogmas	2.2%			6.8%	2.5%
Another reason, why?	8.2%	5.9%	8.7%	11.9%	8.9%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0

Independently of their experience with religious conversion, the survey respondents believe that people change religions mainly based on a personal

decision (21.7%). This is the reason most frequently mentioned in all four religious groups and it seems indicative of a growing awareness of religious conversion as a decision to exercise the right to religious freedom. Among Catholics, the answers often cast doubt on the reasons for conversion: "they're brainwashed" (19.4%) or "they are drawn in by economic incentives" (13.5%).

Figure 4. Why do you think people convert to a new religion?

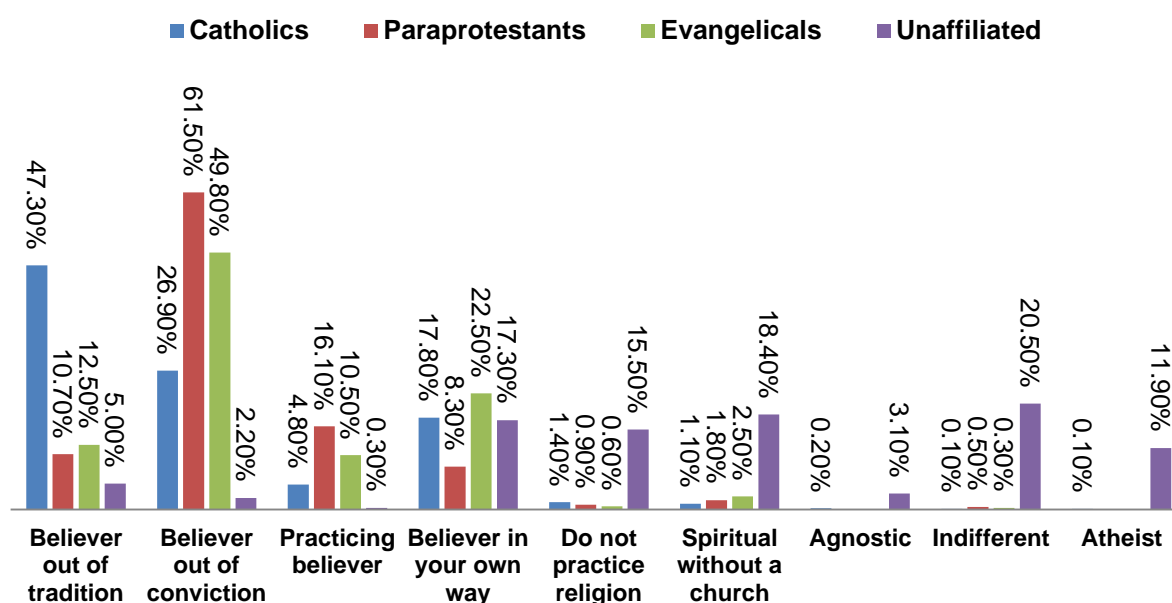


2) Identity and Religious Commitment:

Religious identity and commitment vary according to religious group. The majority of Catholics attribute their beliefs to tradition (47.3%) but Christians of other denominations and Evangelicals mainly attribute their beliefs to conviction (61.5% and 49.8%, respectively). These differences can be related to the longstanding nature of Catholic affiliation and the fact that Catholics are still a religious majority vs. the intensity of religiosity among the first generations of converts. However, it is noteworthy that the category of "believer in my own way" is not only present among Catholics but also among Evangelicals and Christians of other denominations, revealing a trend towards religious autonomization previously only seen among

Catholics. As for the unaffiliated, many in fact believe in something, though their identity is not quite as defined as the other groups. The fact that a significant number of the unaffiliated identify as believers in their own way (17%) and as spiritual without a church (18%) confirms the deinstitutionalized spiritual practices outside among those not affiliated with any church. In other words, unaffiliated is not only a category for atheists (11.9%) or for those who do not practice any religion (15.5%). Within this category, there are many individualized, out-of-the-box ways of practicing different types of deinstitutionalized spiritualities.

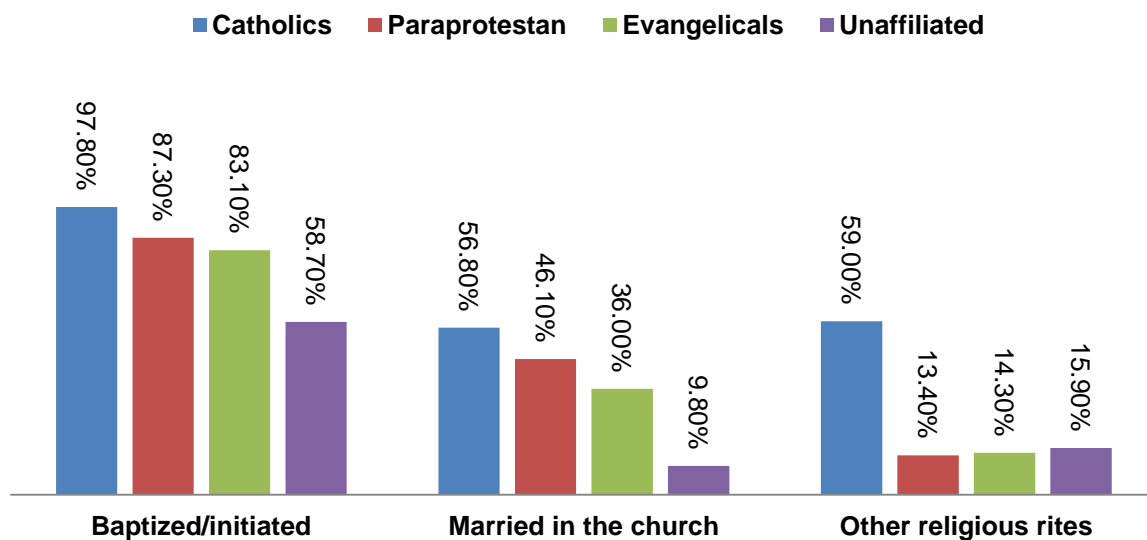
Figure 5. How do you identify yourself in religious terms?



The study of the frequency with which believers participate in or practice their religion is one of the indicators of religious commitment. Another sign of this commitment is whether or not they believe that fundamental life events (like birth and marriage) should be done in accordance with their church's norms and rites. Generally, Mexican society continues to consider religious rites important. The most common ritual is baptism or initiation, which 94% of the sample had done; however, over the course of individual lives, rites of passage are not viewed as quite so important. Only a little over half of those interviewed (52.3%) had opted for

a church marriage and less than half (46.1%) had participated in other rituals. In a comparison of all the religious groups, a higher proportion of Catholics get baptized and married in the church. In the case of baptism, this difference could be attributed to the fact that while Catholics baptize new members a few months after birth, baptism among Evangelicals and Paraprotestants is usually done during adulthood and after a person has been a member of the church for some time. The high percentage of baptisms among the unaffiliated confirms that this group is mainly comprised of people who professed a religion at some point in their lives or were born into a Catholic family. The same occurs with church marriage, done by more than half of Catholics but only by 9.8% of the unaffiliated.

Figure 6. Were you baptized/initiated and/or married in the church? (percentage who responded YES)



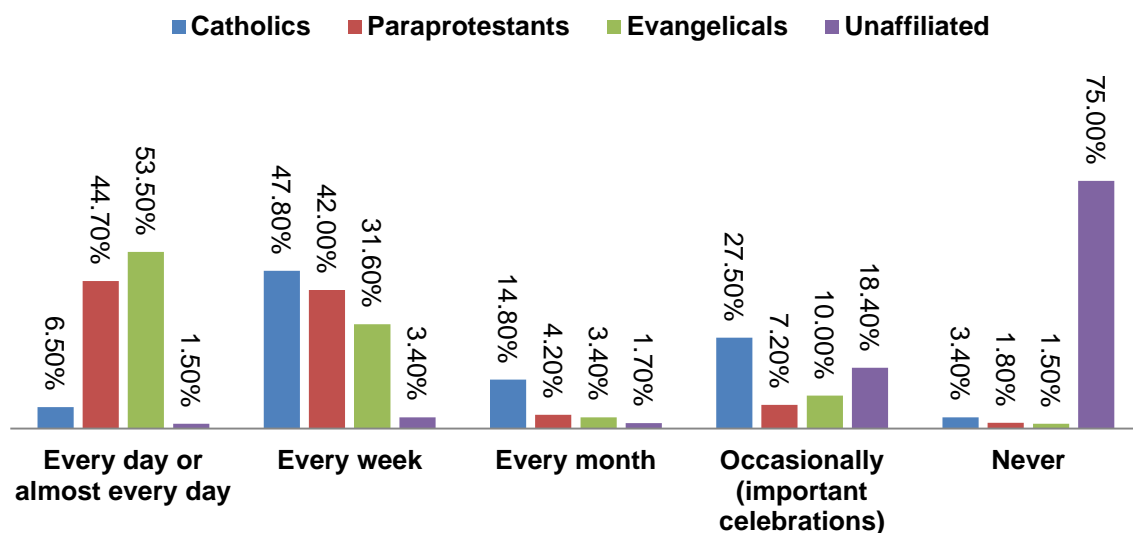
In addition to the rites of passage, another question sociologists use to gauge degrees of religious commitment is Saturday or Sunday attendance to religious services. All religions offer these services on a daily basis. In the case of Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, believers are required to attend Sunday mass. Unlike the inhabitants of most of Western Europe countries, which have experienced a secularization of religion, Mexicans continue to regularly attend religious services. Almost half (44.3%) responded that they attend church services

weekly; one-fourth (25.3%) occasionally, especially for important family celebrations; 13.1%, once a month; 10.8% daily; and only 6.6% says they don't attend religious services. This information confirms Mexico's ranking at the top of religious service attendance in world comparison surveys like the ISPP (data from 2008 and 2009). According to that survey, church attendance stood at 58.5% in Mexico, 20% higher than the average for all countries surveyed (Silva, 2014: 323). If those who attend daily and those who attend weekly are totaled, the amount of frequent churchgoers reaches 54.3%, a percentage that concurs with the findings of this survey.

In terms of most frequent church attendance, 86.7% of Paraprotestants and 85.1% of Evangelicals attend church either daily or weekly, 30% more than Catholics with this level of attendance. Surprisingly, a small percentage of the unaffiliated attend church services with a certain regularity.

In the comparison among groups, half of Catholics (47.8%) attend weekly mass, while 53.5% of the Evangelicals and 44.7% of the Paraprotestants report daily attendance. Among the unaffiliated, weekly religious practice is rare and 75% never attend services.

Chart 2. How often do you currently attend religious services (i.e. mass or prayer sessions)?

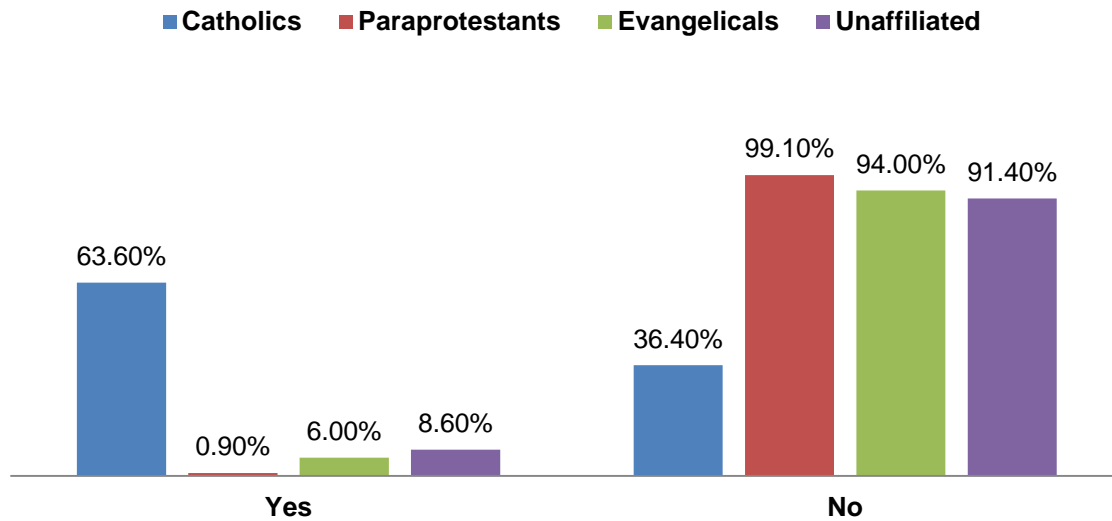


3) The Reconfigurations of Practices and Affiliations

In addition to the religious practices frequently used to gauge religious commitment, the survey explored practices among Mexicans that are independent from their church's mandatory activities and which often take place within the realm of the household. For example, a strong devotion to cult images has always characterized Mexican Catholicism, particularly images of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a syncretic icon which combines Catholicism with indigenous worldviews. This tradition of worshiping cult images is generally practiced outside the church at altars located at homes, workplaces or on neighborhood streets. The Virgen de Guadalupe devotion is part of the lives of approximately two-thirds of all Mexicans (59.4%), followed by altars dedicated to Christ (18.2%) and other Marian devotions. A tiny percentage practices the worship of patron saints (1.3%) followed by, in even smaller percentages, other popular traditions like Cuban Santeria, altars to the dead, and the worship of folk saints like Santa Muerte and Jesus Malverde.

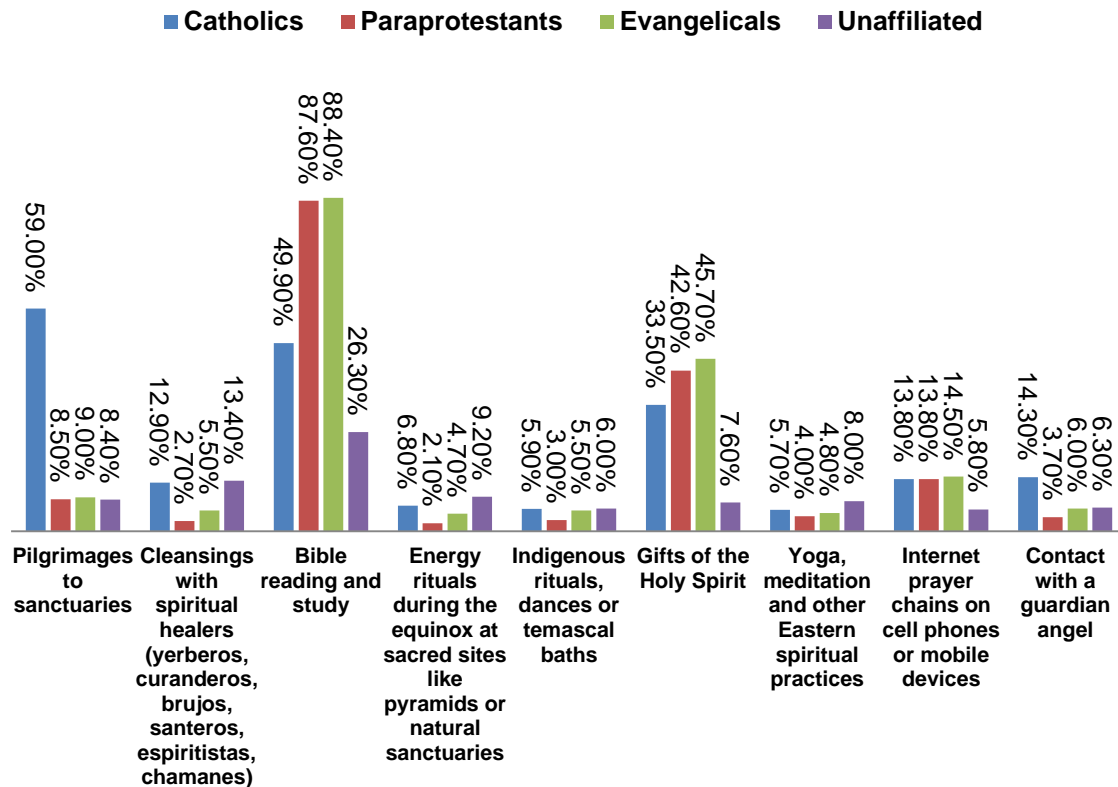
In summary, the survey reaffirms the Virgen de Guadalupe tradition among Mexican Catholics but refutes the belief that all Mexicans profess such devotion, as around 90% of Paraprotestants, Evangelicals and unaffiliated stated they do not.

Chart 3. Do you have a religious altar in your home?: Results by Religion



Mexican religious practice is not limited to attending mass. Bible reading is the most common practice among more than half (52.6%) of Evangelical Christians and Catholics. However, the Paraprotestants (7.6%) report even more bible reading as do Evangelicals, Protestants and Pentecostals (88.4%). It is interesting to note that the unaffiliated cannot be assimilated to non-practicing atheists. Instead, a good number could be defined as worshippers of new spiritualities without a church: more than a quarter (26.3%) of this group participates in neopagan practices promoted by the New Age movement like energy rituals during the winter and summer solstice and a smaller group (13.4%) does cleansings, rituals more closely tied to indigenous traditions.

Chart 4. Which of the following activities do you practice?



Another characteristic of Mexican Catholics is that they are highly ritualistic and, as Rodríguez Shadow has noted, Catholicism in Mexico is synonymous with pilgrimage. Nearly two-thirds of Catholics reported making regular pilgrimages to altars or temples of virgins, Christs or the saints viewed as miracle workers within Catholicism. This practice corresponds to folk Catholicism. Another that has recently taken root in Mexico's Christian tradition is the receiving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a practice particularly common among Pentecostals (45.7%) and Paraprotestants (42.6%) but also among one-third of Catholics (33.5%), since Catholicism has promoted this ritual as part of Charismatic Renewal. One striking finding from the survey is that information and communication technology (ICT) has not only become an important medium for the dissemination of religion, but also a novel space for prayer chains. This new practice is common among Catholics, Evangelicals and Paraprotestants—but not among the unaffiliated—and was reported by one-sixth of the population. Second is a practice introduced by esoteric movements but later adopted by Catholics (14.3%) of summoning a guardian angel

and present though not as common among the other religious groups; and old syncretic practices viewed as magical like the cleansings attended by nearly one-sixth of Catholics and some of the unaffiliated as well.

In terms of practices associated with novel New Age spiritualities and those promoted by *Neomexicanidad* (Neomexicanism⁹) or the neoindigenous movements, the most common are absorbing solar energy during the spring equinox at archeological sites and the temascal baths organized by traditional healers. As we will see, members of all different religions say they have participated in such activities, which are most popular among the unaffiliated followed by the Catholics and, though to a lesser extent, the Evangelicals. Among Paraprotestants, however, these practices are rare. Yoga and meditation, Eastern practices that the New Age movement has borrowed from Hinduism and Buddhism, are especially popular among the unaffiliated and, though to a much lesser extent, Catholics (5.7%), Evangelicals (4.8%) and Paraprotestants (4%). Altogether 15% of Mexicans are involved in practices and rituals that comprise emerging spiritualities, either because they are spiritual seekers without a church (Davie, 1996) or because they are Christians seeking to choose à la carte, practicing "in their own way" (Parker, 2008).

4) The Reconfigurations of Transcendental Beliefs and Affiliations

The way in which different religious and non-religious groups responded to the set of questions on mystical beliefs confirmed that the majority of unaffiliated are in fact believers, with the majority (71.4%) reporting they do believe in God but do not identify with any institution. When asked about other beliefs associated with religion, their affirmative answers ranged from 24-46%, as shown below.

Some of the survey questions brought up topics common to all Christian denominations but surprisingly, these same topics revealed subtle differences among the different Christian religious groups in Mexico. Among Paraprotestants

⁹ A hybrid creation that reinterprets the religious syncretism of indigenous Catholicism from a New Age perspective.

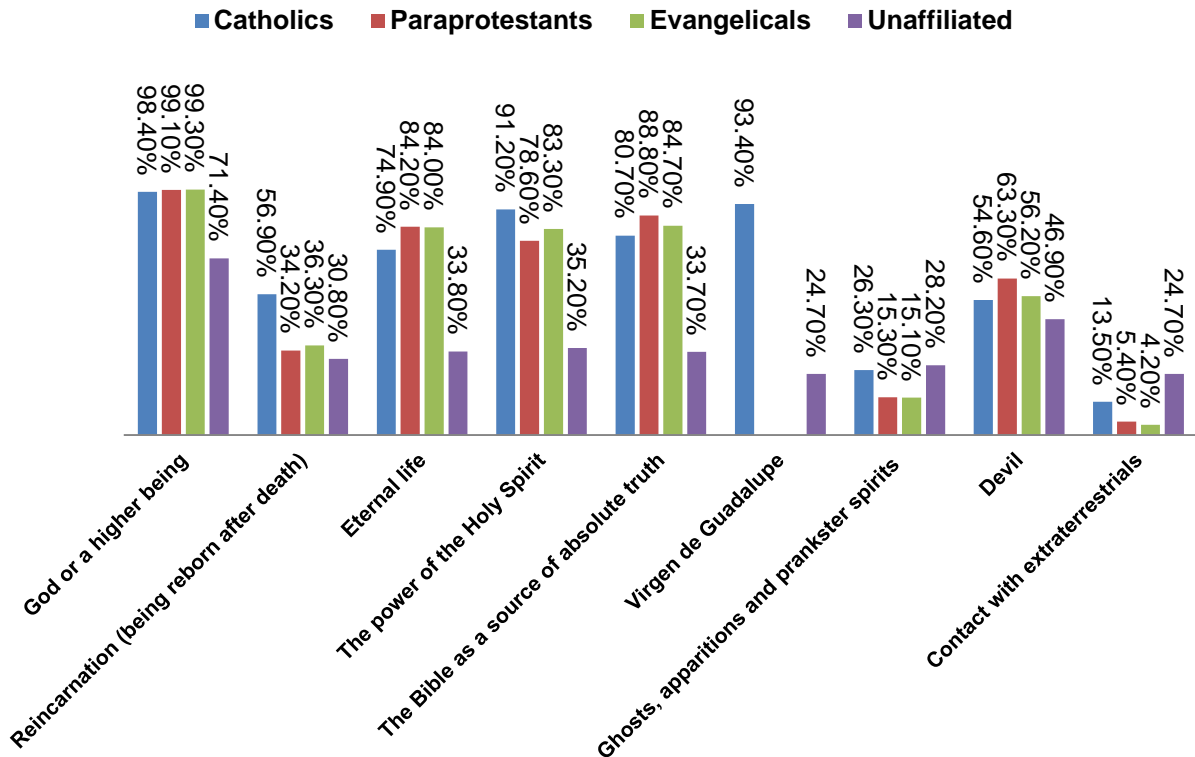
and Evangelicals, for example, 84% expressed their conviction in eternal life, with Catholics trailing 10% behind them in this particular belief. More than 90% of Catholics believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, a percentage that drops to 83% among Evangelicals and 78% among Paraprotestants, revealing the importance that this divine figure has acquired among Pentecostal groups and among followers of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Among Paraprotestants—particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, who position this belief at the core of their doctrine—88.8% believe in the Bible as a source of absolute truth. For this reason, this particular belief has often been associated with Christian fundamentalism. However, it is worth noting that the Bible's absolute authority is a common belief among all Mexicans, one even more widespread than belief in eternal life: 80% of Catholics and 84% of Evangelicals profess this belief, along with 33.7% of the unaffiliated. Belief in the devil is common for more than half of all the religious groups, but especially among the Paraprotestants (63.3%, more than 10% more than the national average).

One belief that is seen to define Mexican Catholicism is the figure of La Virgen de Guadalupe, with 93.4% of Catholics professing their belief in this divine figure—more than those who believe in the Holy Spirit. The opposition of Evangelicals and other Paraprotestants to the worship of this divine figure is common knowledge, and their survey responses confirmed this. Yet nearly one-fourth of the unaffiliated believe in this symbol, which is historically associated with the founding of Mexico.

The questions included in the survey about heterodox beliefs from the point of view of Christianity revealed that the unaffiliated are most likely to hold paranormal beliefs like contact with extraterrestrials (24.7%, double the national average) and ghosts, apparitions and prankster spirits (28.2% versus the national average of 25.3%). Catholics are the second most likely to believe in these heterodoxies, showing that the Christian minorities tend to adopt a harder line in response to these divine folk figures and/or figures taken from cultural industries. Another belief indicative of this trend is reincarnation. While more than half of

Catholics (56.9%) profess their belief in this rebirth, just 30% of Paraprotestants and Evangelicals would agree.

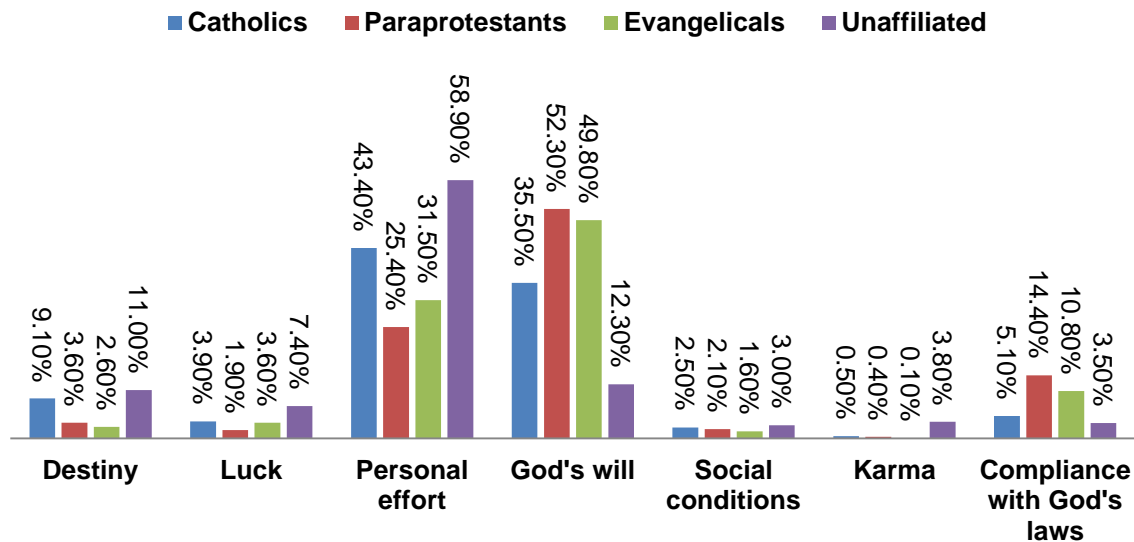
Chart 5. Do you think XXX exists...?



One of the most important aspects of religious beliefs is, according to Max Weber, their capacity to provide explanations on one's success and suffering during life. The explanations they offer have varying degrees of magical or fortuitous elements but they can also reveal logics compatible with rational thought. They can reflect a belief in the ability to control one's destiny, on the one hand, or full dependence on higher forces. The responses to the question, "To what do you attribute your stability, success or failure in life?" reveal that unlike the Evangelicals, the Paraprotestants view life events as more fortuitous, with 52.3% (compared to a national average of 35.9%) attributing their success/failure in life to God's will and 14.4% (versus a national average of 5.7%) to living according to God's laws. An individualistic, meritocratic profile is most common among the unaffiliated, with 58.9% saying that success/failure depends on personal effort. Catholics were the

second most likely (43.4%) to give this answer. It could be said, then, that those without religion are the most secularized but also the most permeable to magical conceptions like luck or destiny, though these believers still represent a minority among the unaffiliated as a group.

Chart 6. To what do you attribute your stability, success or failure in life?



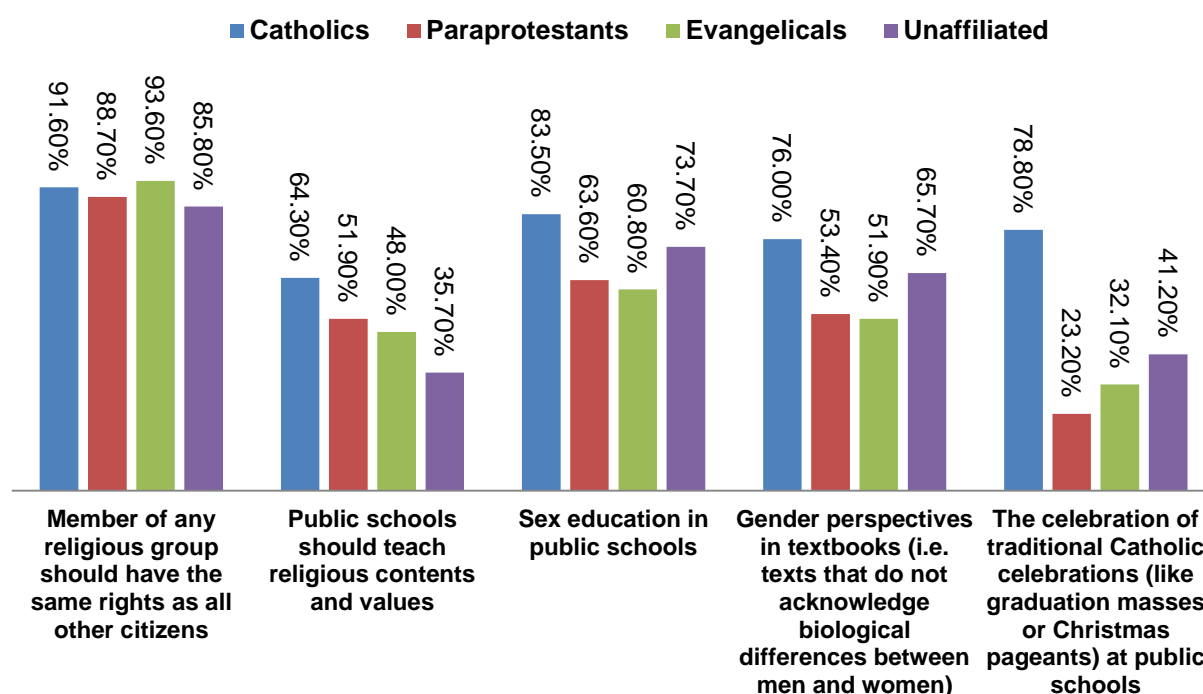
5) Perceptions on Religion and the Public Sphere: Secularity, Secular Freedoms, Human Rights and a Culture of Religious Plurality

Although Mexico has a high percentage of Catholics and religious diversity is only a recent phenomenon, the majority of the survey respondents—regardless of their creed—believe that the member of any religious group should have the same rights as all other citizens. This is indicative of the country's pluralistic values (Beckford, 2003).

Mexico is characterized by contrasts since, in spite of the influence of Catholicism on local culture, it has been a constitutionally secular country with strict laws on the separation of church and state since the mid-19th century. One of the historic topics of dispute among conservative Catholics and liberals has been public schools. Catholics regularly launch campaigns to incorporate religious values in the national education system. When asked about whether religious

values or contents should be taught at schools, 64.3% of Catholics agreed, followed by 51.9% of Paraprotestants, 48% of Evangelicals and 35.7% of the unaffiliated. On the other hand, however, although bishops and other conservative movements have expressed their opposition to sex education being included in school textbooks, the majority of Mexicans would disagree: 80.8% say they agree with sex education. Paradoxically, Catholics are the group most likely to agree with sex education (83.5%), followed by the unaffiliated (73.7%), the Paraprotestants (63.6%) and in a lower percentage—but still a majority—the Evangelicals (60.8%).

Chart 7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements or situations?



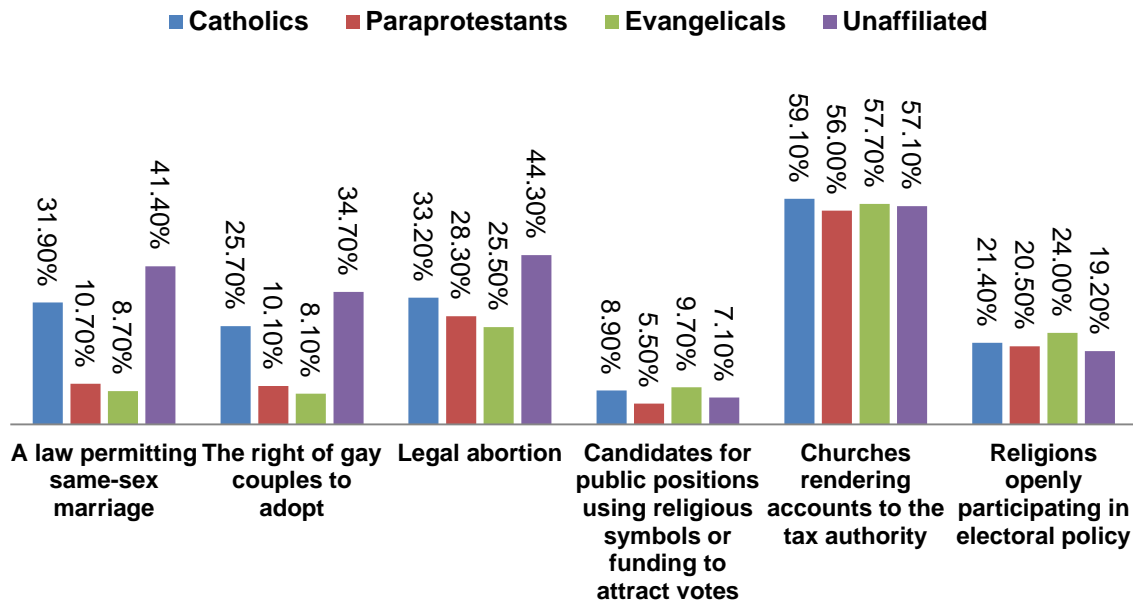
Similarly, Mexicans in general do not frown upon teaching gender perspectives at schools (73.2% say they agree with it). Once again, Catholics are the group most in favor of it (76%) even though the same year the survey was conducted, this same group launched nationwide crusades against what they referred to as "gender ideology." In contrast, Paraprotestants (53%) and Evangelicals (51.9%) are more reactionary on this topic.

Most Mexicans (75.4%) are not bothered by the tradition of keeping altars to the dead (though 41.2% of the unaffiliated, 32.1% of Evangelicals, and 23.2% of

Paraprotestants do take issue with this practice). A similar quantity of Mexicans (72.2%) is not opposed to traditional Catholic celebrations (like graduation masses or Christmas pageants) that are frequently organized at schools, although some Paraprotestants (23.2%), Evangelicals (32.1%) and the unaffiliated (41. 2%) are against them. The data reveals that although secularism is established in the Mexican Constitution, it needs to be applied to values and practices at public schools, where traditional Catholic celebrations do little to contribute to a pluralistic culture. This is task that remains for Mexican secularism.

With regards to the most recent controversies over new legislative bills on the regulation of religion in the public sphere, more than half of Mexicans approve of laws demanding that churches render accounts to the tax authority. Only one-third (33.1%) said they were in favor of legalizing abortion and a similar number was in favor of legalizing same-sex marriages (30.1%). When asked about whether churches should be able to own media outlets (they currently cannot under Mexican law), 28.4% said they approve; 21.4% are not against religions openly participating in electoral policy (also prohibited). A minority (8.8%) would approve of political candidates using religious symbols in their political campaigns. In short, this analysis shows that the majority of Mexicans are against the new laws proposed by both politicians and conservative religious sectors, with the exception of requiring churches to render accounts to the tax authority. However, it also reveals us that a significant number approves of the new trends in sexual liberation and pluralism (around one-third) while most oppose religions getting involved in politics. However, interesting differences appear in the comparison of religious group: the unaffiliated are more liberal and favor secular culture, followed by the Catholics, while the Evangelicals and Paraprotestants are more conservative and less sympathetic to a political culture that monitors the actions of religions in the public sphere.

Chart 8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements or situations?



III. Conclusions

This survey has allowed us to statistically compare religious groups which comprise a religious field in Mexico that tends towards diversity in spite of Catholic hegemony. It also evidences the reconfigurations of religious affiliation and self-identification through forms of believing and practicing religion outside of religious institutions. At the same time, the survey contributes to a better understanding of the religious change in Mexico and a consideration of the shifts between religious diversity and pluralism.

As the findings of the survey are supported by census data on religious affiliation, we can affirm that religious change in Mexico is characterized by an overall weakening of Catholicism. Yet this is not only due to the growing number of Mexicans who state they are now unaffiliated or belong to other, mainly Christian churches, but also because the remaining Catholics are increasingly drifting away from their church's norms, opting to be Catholics in their own way. Catholics are more and more ritualistic, receptive to other religious matrixes and increasingly autonomous in the positions they take on the church's guidelines. Although nearly half of Catholic respondents reported daily or weekly religious service

attendance—a high attendance rate in comparison to other countries—their religious commitment pales in comparison to Evangelicals and Paraprotestants. An important number of Catholics fit with a profile could be described as "belonging but not believing." This type of Catholicism is an inherited tradition, a religious belonging bound by an identification with a social majority or a cultural inheritance, but not out of a conviction regarding Catholic beliefs. Instead, these are "Catholics in their own way", a phrase that suggests their receptiveness to heterodox beliefs and practices like the belief in reincarnation or the practice of indigenous or esoteric ritual cleansings. They continue to be attached to the collective rituals of Catholic affiliation—like the worship of saints and virgins and pilgrimages to their altars or temples—though such rituals are not necessarily connected to the institution of the church. Catholics identify these rituals as part of Mexican culture, which is why they are the least concerned with the observance of such celebrations in the public sphere (like schools). This feature of deinstitutionalized religiosity is also evidenced in the opposition Catholics express to conservative positions in the church on topics like sex and gender diversity education at schools, abortion and same-sex marriage.

We can say that religiosity is increasingly practiced along the margins or directly beyond the reach of institutions or religions. As a result of globalization in the late modern age, beliefs, values and practices are becoming more transversal, fluid and dynamic.

However, this trend towards more fluid beliefs does not apply in the same way to Mexico's most important religious groups (like the different Christian denominations that comprise Evangelicals and Paraprotestants), which have expanded in great part due to new converts. The religiosity typical of a first generation of religious minorities can be found among the members of these groups, which reveal greater institutional commitment, high participation in rituals, less receptiveness to beliefs or practices viewed as heterodox within their institution and a solid self-identification as believers "out of conviction."

At the same time, we have seen how the group identified as unaffiliated cannot be assimilated to "non-believers" but instead corresponds to a profile of "believing but not belonging" (Davie, 1990). The figures on atheism within this group are minimal. Within this category, there are many individualized, out-of-the-box ways of practicing different types of deinstitutionalized spiritualities, though these are also sporadic. The unaffiliated are undoubtedly the most receptive to practices identified with Eastern philosophies, New Age spiritualities and especially indigenous ceremonial practices resignified by a cosmopolitan spirituality movement that yields new hybrids like the so-called neo-Indian spiritualities. This phenomenon, however, affects members of all the different religious affiliations. The traditions that establish ancestral bonds or lineage are currently very popular, part of what Hervieu Léger (2009) has characterized as the emergence of new ethnic-religious identifications.

In this context where religious affiliation and self-identification are reconfigured through way of expressing and practicing religiosity outside of church institutions, it is important to avoid minimizing religion's social significance or jumping to conclusions on religion disappearing. Collective rituals, strongly tied to Catholic tenets, remain strong in the sphere of the household and in the social realm in Mexico. Practices associated with this folk Catholicism include the worship of virgins and saints, with syncretic rituals like the days of particular saints, altar worship and pilgrimages, and the devotional relationship within a cosmology comprised of elements from different religious matrixes. Both are very common among Mexican Catholics. Given the growing religious diversification, transcendental beliefs are not the main feature of the array of identities among affiliates of the different religions. Instead, it is these daily folk practices that reveal Catholicism's continued hegemony, where Catholic is still seen as synonymous with Mexican and thus a source of tension between Catholics and the Evangelist and Paraprotestant minorities.

However, in public affairs like reproductive rights and family models that touch on the ethic stances of churches, Evangelicals and conservative Catholics

supported by high-ranking church officials are finding common ground and forging alliances. This has to do with the ideological affinities that are forming, but also to a shared perception of common enemies (like feminists and the LGBT movement). We are witnessing what could be the rekindling of an alliance between Catholic, Evangelical and Paraprotestant churches for their actions in the public sphere, although they continue to compete for believers on the market of salvation.

Based on the survey data, we can say that religious diversity in Mexico entails the challenge of transitioning to a culture of religious plurality. This creates a need for narratives and rituals which incorporate the new religious diversity which, though overwhelmingly Christian, entails important differences in devotional practices. However, it also requires a new secularism that is not so much about separating church and state but about creating the values and institutions capable of ensuring state autonomy while promoting a pluralistic culture, fostering an awareness of the new religious diversity among Mexicans.

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