

The Geographic Roots of Cultural and Liturgical Differences Amongst American Catholics

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the United States of America. *Ora Pro Nobis!*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

General Social Survey.....	GSS
American Community Survey	ACS
Official Catholic Directory	OCD
Catholic Pluralism Project	CPP
National Religious Attitudes Survey of Catholics	NRASC
Dei Verbum.....	DV
Lumen Gentium	LG
Catechism of the Catholic Church	CCC
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate	CARA
National Opinion Research Center	NORC
Faith Communities Today Survey	FACT
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	USCCB
Traditional Latin Mass.....	TLM

ABSTRACT

THE GEOGRAPHIC ROOTS OF CULTURAL AND LITURGICAL DIFFERENCES AMONGST AMERICAN CATHOLICS

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This paper addresses the geographic components of American Catholicism from 1972-2020. The study found significant, previously undiscussed geographic variations in the character and expression of the Catholic faith within the United States. This project fills a geography-sized gap in existing literature, which hitherto has only discussed regional differences at the broadest geographic scale. This paper found significant spatial variations amongst Catholic settlement and growth patterns, regional ancestral composition, age, rural/urban divisions, as well as inter-regional migration. Relationships and intersections between the variables were also examined, as well as the temporal evolution of these spatially distributed attributes. The study found that the modern Catholic Church in America was far from spatially uniform, varying across regions in a myriad of ways.

Additionally, an examination on sociopolitical attitudinal differences between Catholics of different regions towards controversies within the Church is conducted using statistics from studies undertaken throughout the late 20th and 21st centuries. Open-source data on the locations of parishes categorized by liturgical styles were examined to discern spatial differences in traditionalist and modernist approaches to the Mass, as well as the distribution of parishes offering the Traditional Latin Mass.

Data from the General Social Survey, Pew Research Center, county-level religious censuses of the United States, as well as a variety of survey data on Catholics from the previous thirty years were examined at the smallest geographic scale possible. The results of county, state, diocese, and census-division level analysis found that previous assessments of the geographic trends and characteristics of Catholics were missing key nuances which were only discernable by examining the data at these scales.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church in the United States is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by demographic change, internal migration of Catholics away from the traditional geographic hearths of American Catholicism, the decline in religiosity across the country, increasing divisions between “traditionalist” and “modernist” factions within the Church, and the echoes of older divisions between different cultural heritages that have not entirely faded away since the conclusion of the era of the immigrant church. As the country with the fourth largest Catholic population in the world, understanding the spatial characteristics of the Church in America is a crucial task. While previous research has thoroughly approached the issue from a sociological and historical angle, the spatial characteristics that drive the dynamics of the Church in America have gone sorely underdiscussed.

THESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary goal of this research is to identify and examine the spatial-temporal patterns and causes of the cultural and liturgical differences amongst Catholics in the United States, the divergences in the expression of Catholicism across the United States and to examine the spatial phenomena underlying and driving these trends. This approach will take special care to address the issue through both a quantitative and qualitative

approach, integrating statistical analysis and geographic information systems (GIS) into a debate where geographic inquiry has thus hitherto played a minimal role.

This thesis will engage with the primary research question by breaking it into three vectors of analysis. Firstly, an examination of how the geographic and demographic landscape of Catholicism has changed over the previous fifty years, and how that change varied across geographic regions. This vector of analysis will take special care to look at both internal and external migration patterns of Catholics across the country, painting a picture of the geographic distribution of Catholics, as well as demographic characteristics such as ancestry, age, income, and rurality.

The second vector will be an examination of how engagement with the Catholicism differs between regions in terms of outlook on the faith, prayer life, Mass attendance, engagement with the sacraments, and other characteristics. This slice will also examine the geography of the phenomenon of “cultural Catholicism” as an extension of the examinations of faith engagement. The third vector will be an analysis of the geographic characteristics of the unfolding Catholic culture wars, including debates over the liturgy, social teaching, and cultural outlook of the Church.

In sum, this project seeks to paint a picture of the differing regional characteristics of Catholicism in the United States, and the different realities the church faces across the country. This project proposes that there exist significant spatial divisions across the liturgical and cultural outlooks of Catholics across the United States, driven by spatial distributions in ancestral settlement patterns, rural/urban divisions, and an especially stark divergence between the American West and Northeast (Dinges, 2019).

The project also proposes that there is a geographic aspect to the culture war within Catholicism. This culture war can be broadly described as an ongoing rift between traditionally minded Catholics, and the more modern minded, “Vatican II” Catholics. While each of these groups is certainly not homogenous, the overarching ideals of each can be roughly summarized as follows: traditionalists are generally more inclined to defend the Latin Mass, traditional stances on social teaching (such as gender, LGBT issues, and priestly celibacy), favor more pre-Vatican II liturgical approaches (including a preference for older forms of liturgical music such as plainsong and Gregorian chant), and take a more hardline stance regarding ecumenism. On the other end of the spectrum are more liberally minded Catholics, who are more willing to bring in novel and innovative forms of liturgical celebration (Reidy & White, 1977) (Davidson, 2007) and possess more tempered stances on social issues (such as a less harsh stance on LGBT issues and are more open to doing away with priestly celibacy).

FITTINGNESS OF RESEARCH

While Catholicism is often seen as rigid, hierarchical religion with dogmatic viewpoints that leave little room for debate, this viewpoint is unfounded, both theologically and sociologically. Theologically, the varying levels of dogma assigned to different parts of the magisterium allow for debate over certain beliefs. Sociologically, the de-facto situation within the Catholic Church has always been highly decentralized, despite the best efforts of centralization-minded clergy through history. Regional saints, devotions, and feasts are as old as the Church itself. Although a higher level of uniformity was enforced through the reforms of the late Middle Ages, the Council of

Trent, and especially in the First Vatican Council, local variation in belief remains within the Catholic Church, especially on the peripheries. The extremely centralized and rigid church of the Vatican I era has been replaced with a more decentralized, bishop-centric hierarchy in Vatican II (Davidson, 2007). The papacy of Pope Francis has seen regional divisions amongst Catholics escalate, and a brewing cultural divide between traditionalist and progressive Catholics erupt into an open conflict, especially in the previous three years. A geographic examination of Catholicism is thus entirely warranted. The degree to which the Catholic Church is inexorably tied to geography will be examined more closely in Chapter 4.

Further, as this paper is not theologically oriented, it will operate under the pretense that the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of a religion is separable from the beliefs and practices of its adherents, as indicated by Davidson (2007). Without such a distinction, an examination of regional Catholicism would be meaningless; while the varying levels of dogma within the magisterium allow for variation in belief, an approach that accepts orthodoxy as uniform leaves little room for substantial regional variation and would preclude any spatial patterns within those debates. It is only through the influence of factors outside the Church that spatial patterns can emerge in practice and belief.

GEOGRAPHIC AND TEMPORAL SCOPE

The geographic scope of this paper is explicitly confined to the United States of America. Data will be analyzed on multiple geographic scales, with a preference for the most granular scale available per dataset. A further discussion of geographic scale will be provided in Chapter 3. In an effort fill in the massive geographic gap in the literature on

Catholicism, it is the intent of this paper to explore data on scales smaller than merely the four census regions (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West). Geographically, while some allusions may be made to the state of the Church outside of the United States, they will be made exclusively to provide either needed context, or to illustrate a short example.

The temporal scope of this paper is primarily confined to 1962 to the present. The cutoff date of 1962 corresponds to the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which in many ways ushered in the modern era of Catholicism. Alongside the dramatic changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council (intended or otherwise), the 1960's also corresponded to a dramatic geographic transformation of Americans, and especially Catholics, with the growth of suburban communities. By this point, American Catholics had by and large integrated into wider American society, no longer faced the same level of anti-Catholic prejudice endured by earlier generations of Catholics in the country, and the ethnic, "ghetto" neighborhood no longer played as central of a role in Catholic communities in the Northeast (D'Antonio, 2013).

A deeper examination of the parish will be provided in Chapter 4, and a more detailed explanation about the significance of the Second Vatican Council is contained in Chapter 4, with further elaboration in Chapter 7. As will be elaborated on later, Vatican II's shift away from extreme centralization (often referred to ultramontanist) towards a more decentralized church with an emphasis on the local authority of the bishop allowed for more geographic variation in practice than in the pre-Vatican II years.

This temporal limitation will be waived in Chapter 5, in which a background geographic history of the Catholic Church in America is provided. This background is

included merely to provide the foundational knowledge required to undertake the subsequent analysis of the post-conciliar Church in America and will not contain the same level of statistical analysis that will be seen later.

Limitations

With the enormous complexity of Catholicism, it is important to make clear what is outside the scope of this thesis, beyond the geographic and temporal restraints.

First, inferences and predictions about the future of the Catholic Church in America will not be contained in this thesis, both out of consideration to scope, and due to the intrinsic high levels of uncertainty present in any attempt to chart the future of religion.

Second, this is not a theological examination of Catholicism. While Catholic theology will necessarily be cited as foundational knowledge critical to the discussions in Chapters 6 and 7, it is outside the scope of this thesis to provide apologetics for the teachings of the Catholic Church or to provide a history of Catholic dogma, canon law, and teaching.

Third, while a pastoral attitude is central to the outlook of this thesis, providing prescriptive approaches to pastoral care with consideration to the changing geographic realities is not. While this paper will make every attempt to temper its academic focus with an outlook that treats its subjects as human beings made in the image of God - with all the dignity that entails – providing specific guidelines for responding to the realities outlined in this paper is outside its scope.

Fourth, given the temporal scope of this thesis, as well as a paucity of geographic data from the period, this thesis will not engage in a comparison between the geography of Catholic practice and engagement with the faith before and after the Second Vatican Council, instead focusing on the myriad changes that followed since. Background information that constitutes a prerequisite to discussing modern liturgical disputes will be provided in Chapter 7.

Fifth, and most regrettably, Eastern Catholics will not be covered in great depth within this paper. The Eastern Churches have tragically been overlooked in literature covering Catholicism in America – an oversight that is unfortunately representative of a wider neglect, especially within the Church. Had more data on the experiences of Eastern Catholics in the United States been available, this paper would readily engage in a deeper examination.

Sixth, and finally, although this paper will foray into the realm of highly controversial issues about religious practice, sexuality, and other contested sociopolitical debates, it is the goal of this thesis to avoid value judgements on the validity of the stances of differing sides of the debate. However, the official teachings of the Catholic Church will be cited during these discussions, especially in the analysis of defining the criteria needed to gauge an individual's adherence to Catholicism, the degree to which they can be considered in good standing, and the attributes of cultural Catholicism. These should not be construed as attempts to weigh in on cultural and religious controversies, but rather to establish metrics that are in line with the actual teaching of the Catholic Church. A further discussion on this distinction is present in Chapters 2 and 8.

ORGANIZATION

This thesis will be organized into eight chapters. Chapter 2 contains a literature review of existing research on the geography of Catholicism in the United States. Chapter 3 provides an overview and justification of the datasets used in this thesis. Chapter 4 provides basic information about the Catholic Church, terminology used throughout the thesis, and a foundation in the intrinsic geography of the Church. Chapter 5 provides a geographic history of the Catholic Church in America from the pre-colonial era through the 1950's, with special emphasis on settlement and immigration patterns. Chapters 6 and 7 will contain the bulk of the analysis, with Chapter 6 covering the first vector, and Chapter 7 containing the latter two. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, wrapping up and outlining potential avenues for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature specifically addressing the geography of the Catholic Church in America in the post-conciliar era is remarkably scarce. What has been written on the subject can be roughly divided into three overarching categories: Sociological essays on the demographic changes in Catholicism post-Vatican II, statistical reports on survey data (such as those produced by Pew Research or other statistically oriented organizations such as the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate), and those general histories of Catholicism that bother to touch on the contemporary situation in America.

HISTORICAL APPROACHES

One oasis in the desert of geographic research on Catholicism in America is Gaustad's 2001 *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Gaustad, 2001), which provides an outstanding overview of the spatial evolution of religion in the United States. The text is packed with full color, county level maps of the multiple religious denominations in the United States, with thorough text detailing the history of America's religious landscape. This text forms the backbone of Chapter 5, and the data sources used by Gaustad on county-level religious adherence data will also be utilized throughout the text. This text also provides a rare look at how certain ethnic groups and their unique settlement patterns shaped the distribution of Catholics. Some analysis is also given to the distribution of Catholic institutions such as colleges (Gaustad, 2001, p. 309), national parishes (those established by and for specific ethnic groups) (Gaustad, 2001, pp. 309-312), and the historic Spanish missions in the Southwest (Gaustad, 2001, p. 50).

While providing an excellent geographic foundation on the evolution of Catholicism in the United States, Gaustad's work does not go into much detail at about the specific dynamics of variations between Catholics in terms of belief systems, Mass attendance, or other metrics. The demographic data covered merely reflects the locations of congregations, the number of adherents, and textual descriptions of ancestry data – far from the depth this paper seeks. Additionally, while data visualizations for more recent decades are provided, the textual discussion of Catholicism ends with the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Morris (1995) provides outstanding historical context -- a necessary component of any examination of contemporary American Catholicism. The third section of his book delved into the post-conciliar church in the United States. Here, Morris suggests that Catholicism is far from a monolithic entity; rather, that it has “continually found room for an enormous variety of religious expressions and doctrinal positions” (Morris, 1995). He gives a sweeping overview of the divides in these expressions and positions among priests in the contemporary United States. Morris argues that far from a church in decay, as would be suggested by both conservative and liberal commentators, the American church is thriving, pointing to widespread engagement in the liturgy and parish life as reasons for optimism.

While a useful survey of the history of the church, the closest Morris gets to a geographic analysis of the liberal/conservative divide comes at the conclusion of a discussion of two regions that he identifies as exemplifying the traditionalist and liberal styles of Catholicism: the more conservative Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, and the more

liberal town of Saginaw, Michigan. In the conclusion of his comparison, Morris evaluates the claims that one approach is superior in producing higher rates of Mass attendance. Morris invokes a 1996 survey performed by D'Antonio and Davidson for statistics on Mass attendance, and concludes that given the higher rates of Mass attendance in Saginaw, the progressive approach seemingly produced a positive effect on Mass attendance rates.

This analysis was performed in a very crude fashion, which is seemingly insufficient to produce statistically valid conclusions. No formal statistical analysis is performed - no hypothesis testing, and certainly no regression analysis. He merely concludes that there is no difference between the approaches by eyeballing the statistics of two exemplary parishes. Morris comes close to acknowledging the shortcomings of his approach, noting that while there are numerous prominent conservative dioceses with low attendance (pointing to San Francisco, New York, and Newark), he raises the counterpoint of the low attendance of the liberal diocese of Seattle, Washington.

Additionally, in assessing the American Catholic scene, his definition of what constitutes a thriving parish seems to be a product of a liberal ontology: his criteria include higher lay involvement in the liturgy, greater engagement in parish life, and speaks highly of more contemporary approaches to worship, such as the inclusion of modern music rather than more traditional chants. Morris also fails to propose any theories as to what leads to a diocese becoming more traditionalist or more liberal or go into any examination of the geographic patterns of this divide. He briefly hints at a

rural/urban divide in attendance, yet this claim is presented without elaboration, and is seemingly contradicted by his earlier invocation of Seattle.

ANDREW GREELY

First amongst the sociological essays on the subject of Catholicism in America are the assorted works of William D'Antonio and Fr. Andrew Greeley. D'Antonio's work consistently takes a rigorous, quantitative, and statistical approach to Catholic sociology. These works provide an outstanding quantitative background to the field, but generally lack any geographic analysis of the statistics. D'Antonio's extensive corpus of academic work is heavily focused on examining the characteristics, opinions, and composition of the Catholic laity in America, especially in light of the rapid transformations facing the Church in America. Exemplary of D'Antonio's work are his 1989 work *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church*, his 2001 book *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment*, and his contributions to the 2013 text *American Catholics in Transition*. D'Antonio's works more follow the mold of statistical reports, summarizing recent surveys of the Catholic laity. These surveys are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Remarkably, despite personally spearheading the team, and presumably helping craft the survey questions, D'Antonio makes near zero note of the geographic distribution of responses in any of his summaries, despite the laity survey including geographic identifiers for respondents.

Greely (1977) provides a sweeping overview of the character of American Catholicism, with an emphasis on the plurality of ethnicities and opinions within the Church in the United States. Greeley attempts to show the differences and similarities

between ethnic groups within American Catholicism, and to highlight divergences between Catholics and Protestants in the United States. Importantly for this thesis, Greely ardently contests claims that increasing assimilation made ethnic differences amongst Catholics negligible; Rather, Greely contends that although the economic acculturation of Catholic ethnic groups has been “success beyond anyone’s expectations”, that this rise in socioeconomic status does not mean that “southern and eastern European Groups are becoming like British Americans” (Greely, 1977, p. 29).

Writing in the 1970’s, Greely’s analysis comes in the immediate wake of the Second Vatican Council, and at the close of the immigrant church era of American Catholicism. This window certainly shapes his analysis and the data he is working with. The memory of the Immigrant Church era was still fresh, first-generation immigrants from the late 19th and early 20th century were still a substantial share of the Catholic population, and the suburbanization of American Catholicism was only a recent phenomenon. However, later analysis in the 1995 Catholic Pluralism Project vindicated Greely’s predictions, showing significant ongoing differences in liturgical and cultural variables between Catholic ethnic groups (Davidson, 1995).

Reading between the lines, both Greely and D’Antonio’s works have a strong undercurrent of progressive Catholicism. While their statistical approaches are rigorous, and their reputation as sociologists is certainly deserved, the conclusions drawn by both authors suggest support for a democratization of the Magisterium. Perhaps this is an outgrowth of their lifelong focus on the opinions of the Laity; while it is possible that this

sentiment developed during their extensive tenure studying the Catholic laity, an investigation of their academic career and political involvement suggests otherwise.

The personal opinions of academics are never grounds for fully discounting their work; indeed, the high esteem in which D'Antonio's and Greeley's corpus are held in the field is certainly well deserved, and their role in popularizing the usage of statistics and a data-driven approach in studying the Catholic Church cannot be overstated. However, that these opinions begin to seep into the conclusions drawn by D'Antonio and Greeley puts a blemish on the otherwise rigorous and impartial statistical work.

That the conclusions are biased towards a more left-leaning outlook on the Church is not a major concern, as those biases can be noted and do not taint the prior analysis. More troublesome is that these books, while exemplary pieces of Catholic sociology, are also exemplary of the field's consistent overlooking of the role of geography in the transformation of the Catholic Church. That the works of two of the most significant authors on the field exclude any significant geographic inquiry from their work is exemplary of the large hole missing in the literature of American Catholicism. While acknowledging the importance of demographic factors such as age, ethnicity, and myriad metrics of social and religious outlook, their approach to geography is tragically superficial, examining only the general distribution of Catholics, and perhaps a minor mention of the broad strokes of migration patterns. The authors fail to recognize that all the factors they emphasize are intertwined with geography, and a geographic approach to their study is neglected. While it is unclear if this deficiency is one produced

out of neglect, or merely a gap that falls outside the scope of all prior research, it remains a major hole in the literature that ought to be rectified.

MODERN SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The previous seven years has seen a sudden explosion in interest in sociopolitical studies of Catholicism in the United States, building off the sociological tradition spearheaded by authors such as Greeley and D'Antonio. Two major collections of essays are particularly relevant: *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* (Zech, et al., 2017), and *The Future of Catholicism in America* (Killen, et. al, 2019). Unlike previous works, both essays contain at least some mention of geography as a factor, though their examination of the distinct regional characteristics of American Catholicism and the geography at the forefront the transformation of the Church in America remains limited. Nevertheless, by virtue of engaging in any sort of geographic inquiry, no matter how limited, their works are worth examining in greater detail.

Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century

The 2017 book and essay collection *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* produced by researchers at the Center for Applied Research at the Apostolate (CARA) contains the strongest geographic examination of Catholicism in America out of any literature on the modern Church. CARA, a research institute based out of Georgetown University, is the premier statistical research institute studying Catholicism. Given their previous work, it is no surprise that this book is filled to the brim with statistics and data.

The opening essay, *A Quarter Century of Change*, is perhaps the most relevant, as it provides a cursory overview of the demographic changes within Catholicism in the

United States, and does so by examining survey data (Zech et al., 2017). Their coverage of parish closures and consolidations contains the highest level of geographic granularity out of any of the reviewed sociological work, mentioning diocese-level statistics, and presenting a state-level choropleth map of parish closures.

Yet, despite this moment of strength, later analysis remains confined to more coarse geographic scales, with almost all geographic phenomena discussed in terms of the four census regions. This analysis is also limited by the paucity of surveys cited. Although the research makes good use of data from the Official Catholic Directory, this data is not supplemented by a wide array of sources. The 1983 Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life is notably load-carrying in this essay, despite the abundance of data that has been generated on American Catholics over the forty years following the study.

Catholicism Today: Adrift and/or Adjusting.

The introductory essay in the 2019 collection *The Future of Catholicism in America*, Dinges' essay "Catholicism Today: Adrift and/or Adjusting" represents an attempt at synthesizing the myriad of social studies of American Catholics conducted over the previous fifty years. This ambitious study has significant overlap with the research conducted in this project. Dinges' lays out his agenda in the opening pages, outlining the structure of his analysis. The examination begins with summary of contemporary demographic data, and then moves on to examining "Social science findings relating to Catholic institutional affiliation, sacramental participation, and identity construction" (Dinges, 2019, p. 28). Despite this seemingly high degree of overlap with this thesis, the study has numerous holes which need to be rectified through

the examination of primary source data, a layer of analysis which Dinges placed a low emphasis on, in favor of an examination of secondary source research. The findings of this primary source data have often been lost in translation, and his examination passes over several critical facets, especially lacking a thorough geographic analysis of the data.

As with many academic pieces on Catholicism in the post-conciliar era, *Catholicism Today* barely touches on the geography of the Church in America, instead focusing on broader, sociological trends. However, his synthesis of Catholic sociological research still provides a strong secondary source resource for understanding the wider phenomena. His examination touches on a handful of attributes and trends which will be addressed from a geographic perspective in this thesis.

The section on ethnicity consists only of a brief overview of the racial background of American Catholics along the major census categories: White, Hispanic, African American, and Asian. There is a cursory aside to subgroups of Hispanics (Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban), as well as Asians (Vietnamese/Filipino), but the characteristics of these subgroups are not examined. Entirely absent is any discussion of American/European ancestries. This does an incredible disservice to an examination of a country where the Catholic Church was so heavily shaped by ancestral traditions and cultural differences of Catholic immigrant groups.

Dinges (2019) includes a small, single-paragraph discussion of the modern geographic profile of Catholicism in the United States, which includes only the most surface-level of statistics. He notes the relative even spread of Catholics across the United States. On the topic of migration and internal geographic changes, he writes that over the

past fifty years, “the most significant drop ... has been in the number of Catholics in the Northeast ... with the real growth areas in the South and West” (Dinges, 2019, p. 33). He attributes the changes in composition to both the well-documented factor of increased Hispanic presence, but also to “the internal migration of northern Catholic retirees.” (Dinges, 2019, p. 33). This second hypothesis is presented without citation, seemingly begging for an evaluation – one which will be provided later in this thesis. While Dinges quickly moves on from this claim, this reversal is critical, especially given his earlier claim that age is “one of the strongest predictors of attitudes, practices, and beliefs among American Catholics.” (Dinges, 2019, p. 32). This statement is in direct opposition to the opinions of researchers at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, who, during a discussion, postulated that it was younger generations moving to the southern United States in search of opportunities were the primary driver of the exodus from the Northeast (Fr. T. Gaunt, personal communication, November 21, 2022).

Assessing the validity of these competing claims is a critical task that this thesis seeks to take on. Should it be demonstrated that it is the younger generations moving to the south and west has a greater impact on the trajectory of Catholic growth; as these younger transplants settle in the south and west, they will (presumably) raise families in these regions, accelerating and perpetuating the transformation. Meanwhile, the outflow of young Catholics from the Northeast results in a higher proportion of older Catholics, meaning an acceleration of decline as these older cohorts die out. However, if the opposite is true, and Dinges’ claim is vindicated, it would suggest that Catholic growth in

the South and West will be driven in the long term by Hispanic migration, given the older age of Northeastern migrants.

As with all sociological inquiries, a confluence of the two factors is likely at play; however, by taking a geographic approach, it may be possible to isolate regions in which one hypothesis is more valid than the other. Without the geographic approach, testing these hypotheses and producing results more thorough than simply resigning to an answer such as “*it’s a mixture of both*”.

Dinges (2019) concludes his analysis by addressing the topic of young adults in the Church. He makes note of the distinctive concerns held by young Catholics, and the unique challenges faced by a generation that is markedly different from their predecessors. The younger generation of Catholics, writes Dinges, is one that is seeking an escape from the modern world, and comprised of a significant number of converts, individuals from broken families, or are, as Dinges puts it, “refugees from liberalism and religious relativism” (Dinges, 2019, p. 61). This last qualifier is incredibly important paints a picture of a generation of Catholics who stand apart from their secular peers. This observation is unique among other commentators, who more often characterize the younger generation as more progressive, and use language that suggests they seek to bring the church into modernity, rather than escape modernity through the Church.

Dinges’ characterization of the younger generation seems somewhat out of line with survey data on opinions; however, it is in line with personal observations of younger Catholics, and the opinions of many young parishioners from around the Diocese of

Arlington. While perhaps anecdotal evidence, it does suggest that there is at least a subculture of young Catholics who fit the description given by Dinges.

Davidson's 2007 essay, "Catholicism in the United States", examines the changes in Catholicism from the pre-conciliar period to the modern church. Davidson's (2007) analysis heavily relied on citations from the major studies of Catholicism undertaken in the previous fifty years, with a special emphasis on the work of Greely and Morris.

Davidson (2007) begins his essay by suggesting that unlike in theological approaches to understanding Catholicism, where orthodoxy and orthopraxy are inseparable from the beliefs and practices of adherents, sociological examinations are at the liberty to treat them separately. He suggests that though the degree to which the beliefs and practices of adherents align with the doctrine and orthopraxy of the church at large fluctuates over time, there was a higher degree of correspondence between the two through the 1950's than what is seen now.

Davidson utilizes a distinction between two orientations towards Catholicism, first identified by Eugene Kennedy in his 1988 paper "Tomorrow's Catholics, Yesterday's Church": "Culture I" and "Culture II" Catholics. The culture I approach places high importance on the institutional Church and the authority of the Magisterium, emphasizing the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church. "Culture II" Catholics, on the other hand, approach the faith in a way more akin to Protestantism, emphasizing the importance of individual and personal faith, and placing more authority in the hands of the interior life of each Catholic (Davidson, 2007, p. 179). Davidson suggests that Culture I Catholicism was the dominant approach throughout most of the history of the

Church in America as the default mode of Catholicism. This distinction goes hand in hand with his prior separation of orthodox belief and the beliefs of adherents.

Beyond his reintroduction of “Culture I” and “Culture II” into sociological discussion on Catholicism in the United States, Davidson’s essay contributes little original analysis into the body of research, instead opting to synthesize and describe data and analysis performed elsewhere into a text accessible by a lay audience. No mention of the geography of the Catholic Church is made whatsoever, with all trends expressed on the national level. Though adding nuance through his emphasis on the separation between that of sociological de-facto Catholicism and theological orthodox Catholicism, Davidson’s essay is one without regional nuance – a nuance that should seem a natural outgrowth by the sociological/theological distinction. Geography introduces a third layer of examination. It is to the sociological approach what the sociological approach is to the theological approach. More than anything, it is Davidson’s silence on geography that is most relevant to this thesis.

The congruity between orthodoxy belief and the de-facto beliefs and practices of adherents contains implicit geographic information about the nature of Catholicism. Such a massive consensus on belief and practice, and a very high level of energy of engagement with the faith between social classes reduces the geographic heterogeneity of the faith. The fragmentation of this unity and the decline in adherence to orthodox belief is precisely what allows for a geographic examination of the Church.

Other Essays

Exemplary of the quantitatively driven sociological essays on the topic of cultural divides amongst Catholics, Reidy and White (1977) seeks to identify causal links between socio-locational and demographic characteristics of priests and their level of traditionalism (Reidy et al, 1977). They attempt to create a heuristic for traditionalism, develop a set of questions which could gauge the traditionalism of a sample of priests, and then find any potential causal variables that have a statistically significant impact on the traditionalism score of each priest. Reidy and White's examination of Catholicism is one of the first statistical inquiries into Catholicism in the United States, a prelude to further inquiry.

In their schema, Reidy and White (1977) identify two camps of thought: traditionalism and adaptive. These definitions diverge slightly from more widespread conceptions and are based more so on psychological responses to change than to set adherence to certain principles or beliefs. The study sampled 371 Catholic priests from Wellington, New Zealand. The questions measured proxy variables which Reidy and White deemed adequate to build a quantitative traditionalism scoring for each priest, upon which regression analysis was performed to identify links to causal demographic and socio-locational characteristics. The study found moderately strong connections between certain variables, with some individual predictor variables reaching R^2 values above 0.4. Additionally, the study performed a cluster analysis on the results, and was able to identify four clusters of statistically interconnected variables. The analysis found significant correlation values for the four clusters in the range of 0.6 – 0.71. The single

spatial variable examined – urban vs. rural – had a very weak statistical relation to the traditionalism score of the priest.

While this may suggest a lack of a spatial dimension to the topic, the narrow sample area is reason to forgo abandoning the spatial hypothesis. The model used by Reidy and White is a rigorous means to gauge statistical links; however, the input sample complicates the results. The lack of racial diversity in the sample (the only two demographics in the group were New Zealander and Irish), and the relatively homogenous physical and cultural landscape of New Zealand may have downplayed certain spatial and demographic linkages. The lack of inclusion of a wider range of ethnic groups makes the sample significantly different than that of the United States, in which ethnicity has previously shown some links to liturgical attitudes (Greely, 1977).

Regardless of the transferability of their results to the United States, this study demonstrates that quantitative statistical analysis of cultural divides can bear fruit. The usage of cluster analysis may prove to be an incredibly powerful tool in further studies of the cultural divide between Catholics in the United States. The ability for the researchers to find significant statistical clustering of variables is encouraging. Introducing the laity to the assessment may also provide deeper insights.

Pivoting towards sociological essays on the religious outlooks and faith participation of Catholics, Welch and Legee (1988) demonstrated a strong relationship between the region, judge, and consumption of Evangelical media towards sociopolitical attitudes. I hypothesize that the three explanatory variables Welch and Legee identified are all outgrowths of an underlying, unmeasured variable: exposure to Evangelical

Protestantism. Today, imagery of God as judge is highly prevalent amongst Protestants (General Social Survey, 2021), and especially evangelicals, likely as an outgrowth of Calvinist theology. We have also seen that Catholic disaffiliation rates are inversely linked to the Catholic proportion of the population, demonstrating a potential protestant pull factor. Assimilation into Protestant regional culture in the southeast and rural Midwest seems to be the real root variable. As professors of sociology and government, Welch and Leege likely did not identify the theological link between Calvinist Protestantism and imagery of God as Judge.

Though hinted at by the authors in relation to demographic variables, this potential explanation is not fully fleshed out, and their assessment does not include mention of the potential connection to the judge imagery – a potentially critical link.

The second major contribution comes from their rejection of Mass attendance as a useful predictor of Catholic sociopolitical attitudes. Leege and Welch cite their prior 1986 study which found that the frequency of Mass attendance “bore a statistically significant, but relatively low relationship” (Leege and Welch, 1988, p. 537) towards attitudes on a myriad of sociopolitical controversies. Breaking from previous literature which, according to the authors, “concentrated nearly exclusively on measures of Mass attendance as the principle independent variable of interest”, Leege and Welch conclude that “simple contact with Catholic subculture ... does not necessarily ensure that Catholics will internalize the teachings and value orientations it transmits” (Leege and Welch, 1988, p. 537).

Dean Hodge's (1998) piece "Get Ready for the Post Boomer Catholics" featured in *America Magazine* in March 1998 addresses a widening generational gap between the Catholics raised before and after the Second Vatican Council, with a special look at the differences in the then-emerging younger generations of Catholics. A professor of Sociology at the Catholic University, Hodge classifies the then-youngest generation of Catholics as "post-Boomers", and defines the generation as beginning in 1960 (with the oldest of that generation being 38 at the time of writing). Hodge (1998) notes a high level of similarity between the theological and moral views of the boomer and post-boomer laity, and a wide gap between the boomer and pre-boomer generations. Hodge utilizes data from James Davidson's 1995 study on Catholics, published in the 1997 book *The Search for Common Ground*.

Davidson's data, Hodge notes, suggests a wide gap in the theological attitudes of the post-boomer laity and the post-boomer clergy, with the latter being far more conservative than the former (Hodge, 1998).

Hodge's 1998 essay was penned before the generation of young Catholics who grew up during the Benedict XVI papacy, and whose outlook was increasingly shaped by the rapid decline in Catholic adherence in younger generations. This generation had a firsthand view of thinning pews, and watched as a large portion of their peers left the Faith. Additionally, growing up in an increasingly secularized culture where traditional sources of meaning and purpose were increasingly absent, the youngest generation of Catholics see their faith as a source of stability, hope, and tradition in a rapidly changing world.

The thinning out of Catholics in the United States engenders a question of how the attitudes of young Catholics ought to be measured. Statistics of the attitudes of Catholics only measure those who profess to be Catholic, leading to the exclusion of the voices of those who left the faith. The question must be posed if the exclusion of ex-Catholics from the analysis is a critical flaw.

CONCLUSION

In sum, while the fields of sociology and history have produced numerous works on the state of Catholicism in the United States, a large geography-sized gap remains in the literature. Sociological studies of the Catholic Church in the United States have gone from a niche field pioneered by a handful of researchers and met with skepticism by the Church, to a large, growing, and increasingly respected area of study. Spearheaded by Greely and D'Antonio in the 1980's, expanded upon with new survey data in the 1990s, and pushed forward by a rebirth in interest in the previous five years, the field is in a relatively strong position overall. Thanks to organizations such as CARA, statistical inquiry into the Church in the United States has taken off over the prior two decades, and quantitative inquiry into the Church has become much more respected by ecclesiastical authorities, especially as evidenced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) frequent citations of their research. Despite the positive signs for statistical analysis of the Church in America, the lack of robust spatial inquiry is a glaring issue in the field, and one that is compounded by how explicitly spatial the area of study truly is.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA

Surprisingly, while literature on the spatial characteristics of American Catholicism was scarce, data relevant to the topic is plentiful. Datasets frequently cited by sociologists and historians examining the Church in America all possess geographic crosstabs, which bewilderingly are almost never examined in research. Thus, while the data used in this thesis is not novel (indeed, many of these surveys and datasets will be immediately recognizable to those familiar with the field), the specific angle of analysis most certainly is. The data utilized in this study can be broken down into two thematic categories, that roughly correspond to the chapter structure of analysis: socio-demographic data, and religious engagement and outlook data.

Table 1 illustrates the geographic scale of the datasets to be used in this study:

Table 1: Dataset Geographic Scale

Survey	State	Diocese	Division (9)	Region (4)
GSS			✓	✓
OCD		✓	✓	✓
Pew 2007	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pew 2014	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pew 2015			✓	✓
Pew 2021			✓	✓
Priests		✓	✓	✓
CPP	✓	✓	✓	✓
NRASC			✓	✓
Gallup 2005	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gallup 2011	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fact 2000			✓	✓
Fact 2010	✓	✓	✓	✓

By and large, analysis will take place on the census division scale, which divides the country into nine geographic regions. Operating at this scale provides a strong level of geographic granularity, with nine culturally, historically, and geographically distinct regions, while still being large enough for substantial sample sizes. While state level statistics are desirable, the low per-state sample size for most state-level surveys made finding statistically significant distinctions difficult due to the high margin of error. Using division borders is not without flaws. The division borders are certainly anything but perfect; assigning Maryland and Delaware to the South Atlantic rather than Mid-Atlantic is a curious decision indeed. The naming of some divisions is also rather non-descriptive. When addressing these divisions in later analysis, four divisions will be renamed, as shown in Figure 1:

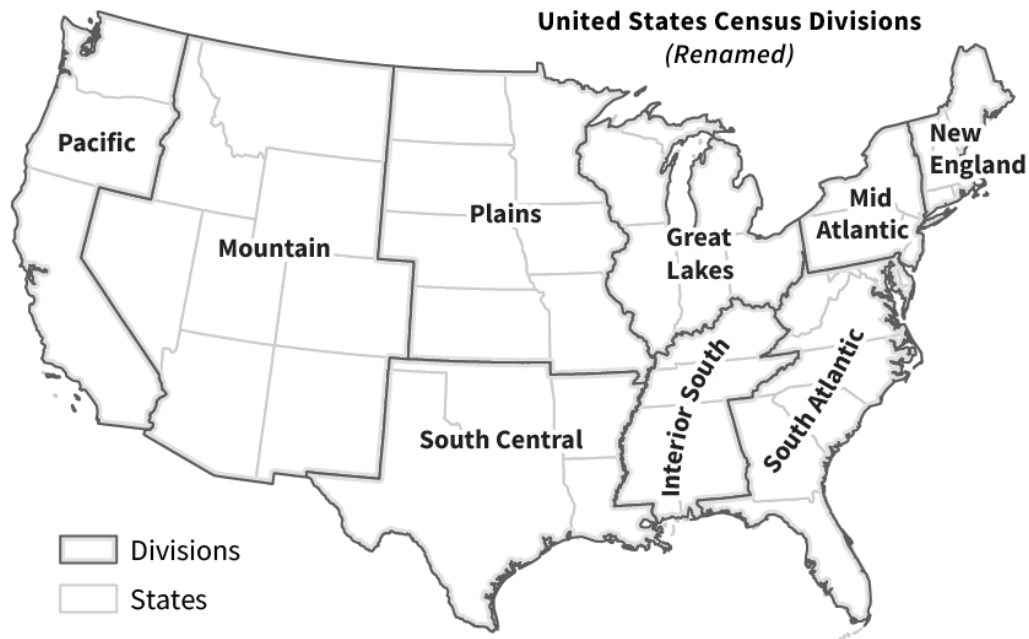


Figure 1: United States Census Divisions

Some may also argue that some of these divisions are far too internally heterogeneous to be suitable aggregations. However, these internal variations can be accounted for by utilizing other geographic and demographic constants (such as rurality, income, etc). Using divisions rather than regions puts the geographic granularity of this thesis head and shoulders above that of other examinations of modern Catholicism in America. Furthermore, wherever possible, state and even diocesan level data will be incorporated into the analysis, providing a previously unseen level of geographic precision.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The most promising dataset is the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. This survey is conducted every two years, with data going back to 1972. The cumulative data file has over 6,000 variables recorded, with a total N of just under 64,000 – though some variables have lower response rates. Since the data is downloadable in a non-aggregated form (i.e., the full anonymized list of respondents and their inputs are accessible), the user can group responses across any slice they desire.

As will be discussed later, this presents an obvious and encouraging opportunity for research. These responses have geographic locators as one of the variables, with the most granular being which of the nine U.S. Census divisions the respondent resides in. Other geographic variables include the size of the respondent's residence, broken down in a variety of ways. Relevant variables include religion, ancestry, age, mass attendance, time spent in prayer, outlooks on a variety of social questions, and more. This dataset will

be the primary source for Chapter 6 on the demography of the Catholic population in the United States, owing to the temporal scope of this dataset and the abundance of demographic variables, combined with the ability to slice the dataset along multiple lines, and the possibility of comparing these characteristics to the Protestant and general population.

However, the GSS dataset is of limited usefulness for the examination of Catholic engagement with the faith to be undertaken in Chapter 7 on the geography of the Catholic cultural and liturgical disputes in America; the only variables in the GSS relevant to these examinations are Mass attendance, time spent in prayer, and self-reported strength of affiliation. A variable for Catholic ideological self-identification was observed for the years 1998 and 2000, but the small sample size of this variable limits its usefulness.

Religious affiliation in the GSS is based off self-reported identification. This requires acknowledgement due to the phenomenon of *cultural Catholics*, who may check off “catholic” when asked their religion, but do not actively participate in the religion at all. While it may be possible to build a filter using responses of Mass attendance and other metrics, the validity of this filter would be dubious. Thus, for much of the demographic assessment of Catholics undertaken in Chapter 6, the regional profiles will make no distinction between cultural and practicing Catholics, as both contribute to the religious fabric of a region. Despite not being active members of the faith, and their status of Catholics seriously disputed, ignoring them entirely would leave a large gap in the description of the landscape of Catholicism in a region. Their lack of participation in the life of the church speaks just as much about the landscape of the religion in a region as

those who do. Indeed, as will be seen later, certain regions are defined by the low level of engagement by Catholics in the region.

A vast amount of county level data on religious affiliation and number of congregations (which for Catholics equates to parishes and missions) is available, which will be utilized throughout chapters 5 and 6, on the geographic history of the Catholic Church and the current demographics of the Catholic Church. Data for 2020, 2010, and 2000 comes from studies by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB)'s decennial census of religion in America. County level data at decennial intervals from 1906 to 1936 is available from the United States Census of Religious Bodies. 1952, 1972, 1980, and 1990 data is available from surveys undertaken by the National Council of Churches (1952) and the Glenmary Research Center (1972, 1980, and 1990).

As with the GSS data, the issue of self-reported adherence presents a potential issue for measuring number of Catholics in a county. However, unlike the GSS data, where this distinction is of low importance, the ability for county-level datasets to provide a count of actively practicing adherence is crucial, especially for gauging the decline in the strength of Catholic adherence in an area. The documentation of data from 1980 to 2020 reports that Catholic adherence rates were contributed by Catholic dioceses, and that the study emphasized measuring actual attendees and participants in the religion, rather than self-identification (*Frequently Asked Questions*, n.d.). While the methodology employed by individual dioceses remains opaque, these general guidelines provide at

least some measure of assurance that the issue of cultural catholic self-identification will not skew the data.

The strength of these datasets is attested to by multiple commentators. In the conclusion of their 1993 article *Church Membership Studies: An Assessment of Four Decades of Institutional Research*, Newman et al. note that despite potential incongruities in how denominations measure adherence, the religious censuses “offer a considerable level of internal consistency and comparability” between years, and that these studies are reliable data for measuring the geography of religion in America (Newman et al., 1993, p. 60). Thus, although the methodology of counting methods utilized by the Catholic Church are difficult to ascertain, one can be confident that historical data is at least consistent enough to measure the ebb and flow of the denomination over the years.

Observations on Catholic Mass attendance will be compared in Chapter 7, bringing in data from the GSS, Pew Research, and the Gallup Catholic Laity Polls. Existing literature points to disputes over the validity and strength of each of these datasets on measuring mass attendance. An alternative method for measuring Mass attendance was put forth by Chaves and Cavandish (1994), who proposed utilizing diocesan censuses of Mass attendance over national surveys. Beginning in the late 1980’s, dioceses began directing parishes to take head counts of mass attendees every October to gauge the attendance rate of parishioners in the diocese. Chaves and Cavandish proposed that these diocesan censuses would provide a better representation of attendance over self-reported statistics, overcoming response biases that may be present in the latter. Comparing attendance rates provided by 48 dioceses across the United

States, Chaves and Cavendish found that only 2 dioceses reported attendance rates in line with or higher than the attendance rates reported in contemporary Gallup and GSS data, and concluded that the average mass attendance in the country was half of what was previously thought.

In 1998, one year after the publication of the Chaves and Cavendish Study, Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout (1998) responded with a piece published in the *American Sociological Review* rejecting the diocesan count as a strong metric, pointing to flaws in the diocesan count methodology. Hout and Greeley (1998) contended that a simple weekend survey would not capture the actual level of Mass attendance, given the number of people who may be sick or otherwise unable to make it on any given weekend (Hout & Greeley, 1998). However, given that diocesan surveys are taken over the course of an entire month, with five masses sampled, this critique is not as condemning.

The greater issue with Chaves' and Cavendish's conclusion is a mismatch in how Mass attendance rates are calculated between the head count and in surveys of Catholics. In the former, Mass attendance rates are calculated by counting the number of attendees and dividing by the number of registered parishioners. In general surveys, Mass attendance is simply the number of Catholics who respond to making it to Mass every weekend, divided by the total number of Catholics surveyed. The difference in the denominator is critical; registered parishioner counts are not representative of the current population of a Parish, given that parish registration lasts until the parishioner explicitly removes themselves from the register. Thus, it is unresponsive to changes in the number of individuals who consider themselves Catholic, or the number of individuals who even

still live nearby the Parish. Catholics who leave the faith, or even move to a different part of the country but do not officially register at their new parish, are still counted as part of the Parish population. Given the difference in measurements (and the inability for this study to acquire updated diocesan census data), Mass attendance will be measured using data published in surveys of the Catholic population.

Pew Research has published multiple studies on the changing demographics of Catholics in the United States, data on how Catholics feel about a variety of subjects, and their adherence to Church teaching. However, the geographic crosstabs are almost never incorporated into these publications. Relevant Pew datasets include their 2021 American Trends Panel, which includes data on political outlooks among religious groups, including state level identification of respondents. The Pew 2007 and 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study provides a comprehensive dataset on religious attitudes, time spent in a variety of religious activities (including prayer, private meditation, and bible studies), as well as church attendance, all of which come with racial and geographic crosstabs (*Religious Landscape Study*, 2007; 2014). Finally, Pew's 2015 study on American Catholics provides an excellent examination of cultural Catholics in the United States. Unfortunately, the 2015 data only records the census region, not state or division of the respondent, leaving it with a low level of geographic granularity.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, a research group based out of Georgetown University dedicated to providing statistics on the Catholic Church has graciously given free access to their comprehensive Official Catholic Directory, which contains diocese level statistics covering upwards of thirty variables, including the

number of churches, priests, and parishioners, data on sacraments, and the number of religious institutions such as Catholic hospitals and seminaries. The 2021, 2011, 1991, and 1980 datasets have been made available for this project. However, as noted in discussions with researchers at CARA during the process of obtaining these datasets, the reliability of the OCD measurements is occasionally dubious, as a result of lazy diocesan record keeping – for example, respondents simply putting down what they reported last year, rather than taking new measurements (Fr. T. Gaunt, personal communication, November 21, 2022).

SOCIOLOGICAL & LITURGICAL DATASETS

For the analysis on the geography of Catholic engagement and the geography of Catholic cultural and liturgical disputes, a wide array of datasets were utilized. Many of these datasets contain measurements of similar variables, providing a redundancy in measurement, as well as data on different geographic scales. Rough agreement between some datasets has already been established. Though they dispute the usefulness of the surveys, Chaves and Cavendish note that mass attendance data from the 1990 GSS “yields results nearly identical” to contemporary Gallup polling on attendance (Chaves and Cavendish, 1994).

The earliest data measurements of Catholics religious and political outlook come from the oft-cited 1983 Notre Dame Study of Parish Life, which focused on liturgical styles, parish involvement, measured the opinions of Catholics about a variety of topics, and gauged the importance of different elements of the Faith to each Catholic (Welch, 1983). The first prominent survey of its type in the wake of Vatican II, the Notre Dame

study was based on a survey of active Catholic parishioners. This sample presents an obvious skew in the results, though perhaps a beneficial one. The exclusion of cultural Catholics from the analysis provides a clear insight into the opinions of actual, practicing Catholics in each region. Welch and Legee (1988) note that concerns that this sampling procedure may result in an oversample of more conservative leaning Catholics, the distribution of responses to several questions addressing controversies such as female ordination and priestly marriage suggest a more even sample.

Later data comes from Gallup's American Catholic Laity Polls conducted in 1987, 1999, 2005, and 2011, which provide data on Catholic individuals' views on issues pertaining to the church, church teaching, and provides crosstabs for church attendance, time spent in prayer, demographic background, and other characteristics. The state-level location of each respondent is recorded, allowing geographic analysis. Similar in scope to the Gallup Laity Polls is the data from the 1995 Catholic Pluralism Project (CPP), which measured the demographics, upbringing, engagement, and outlook of Catholics in the United States. The area code of respondents is included as a geographic identifier, which is aggregated up to the division level for this analysis (Davidson, 1995).

Whereas the previous datasets all measured the outlooks and background of the Catholic laity and population at large, any study of the geography of Catholicism would be incomplete without an examination of the clergy. The distinction between the opinions and outlook of the laity and the clergy is of special and growing importance, considering Hodges' observations of the growing disconnect between an increasingly traditionalist clergy and an increasingly modernist laity. The 2001 Survey of Catholic Priests by a team

based out of The Catholic University of America is the best source of geographic data on the outlooks of Catholic priests in the United States. The diocese of each respondent is recorded, which can be aggregated up to the state and division levels. Unfortunately, the most recent survey of Catholic priests, performed in 2020 by the Austin Institute, does not have geographic identifiers. The only geographic variable present in these datasets is a simple indicator of rurality, broken down into rural/urban/suburban. The 1993 survey also lacks any geographic identifiers.

Finally, the Faith Communities Today Survey (FACT) conducted in 2000 and 2010 by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary will be utilized in measuring characteristics of individual parishes across the United States, including date of parish construction, information about the liturgy at the parishes, the current needs of the parish, and the types of music used (Dudley and Rosen, 2010). The divisional sample size is unfortunately very small, limiting the usefulness of the dataset.

Given the clustering of most usable Catholic outlook and opinion data around the years 1993-2001, temporal comparisons of the change in the geographic distribution of these variables are difficult. Only the most general of questions – such as those few variables covered by the GSS or Pew Data – will be compared as a time series. Also utilized throughout the thesis will be comprehensive county level on non-religious demographic data covering a myriad of variables, including ancestry, is available through the United States Census Bureaus' American Community Survey (n.d.), across multiple years.

Finally, the Catholic sample size for each census division (where applicable) is provided below in Table 2. Note that certain questions may have lower response rates than others; potential issues with per-question sample sizes will be highlighted as relevant in later sections analyzing the data. Sample sizes in red indicate values under 30. Excluded is the Official Catholic Directory dataset, as it measures measuring per-diocese attributes, and thus a per division sample size does not make conceptual sense, other than to note the number of dioceses per division. The GSS sample size reflects the Catholic subset of responses.

Table 2: Catholic Sample Size by Dataset

Division	DEMOGRAPHIC				SOCIO-RELIGIOUS						
	GSS	Pew 2007	Pew 2014	Pew 2021	Priests	CPP	NRASC	Gallup 2005	Gallup 2011	Fact 2005	Fact 2011
	(Catholic)										
New England	1458	522	586	171	50	164	79	48	76	58	24
Mid Atlantic	3567	1643	1313	402	318	370	257	146	244	138	69
Great Lakes	3213	1464	1056	350	228	214	190	213	174	143	78
Plains	1004	708	577	134	139	38	68	78	91	127	82
South Atlantic	1701	990	1024	650	65	27	67	107	196	41	36
Interior South	253	208	143	48	22	5	114	29	21	27	26
South Central	1420	714	718	238	62	119	96	64	211	55	24
Mountain	863	496	521	151	23	21	40	56	104	55	20
Pacific	2195	1140	1138	348	52	100	158	124	325	75	30
Total	15674	7885	7076	2492	959	1058	1069	865	1442	719	389

CHAPTER FOUR: FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Before beginning the analysis of the geography of the Catholic Church in the United States, an overview of essential foundational knowledge is in order. This chapter will cover not only the pre-requisite information needed to follow the later analysis, but also the justifications for a geographic examination of the Catholic Church in the first place. The first discussion will describe the geographically-linked institutions of the Church, provide an overview of how the Church hierarchy is geographically organized, and illustrate the sources of regional variation within the Catholic Church. The second component of this chapter will provide background definitions for the aspects of the Catholic Church which vary across regions, an explanation of some of the metrics used later, as well as a mention of the importance of the Second Vatican Council as a temporal bookmark for the scope of this thesis.

THE GEOGRAPHIC HIERARCHY OF THE CHURCH

While certainly more hierarchical than most Protestant denominations, and more centralized than the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Catholic Church's organization, canon law, and tradition have always emphasized a high degree of regional flexibility in liturgical celebration and local veneration, within certain limits.

The organizational structure of the Catholic Church is highly geographic, with each level of authority within the church corresponding to a larger spatial jurisdiction. While a full examination of the rights, responsibilities, and duties of each level of the Church hierarchy is outside the scope of this thesis, and would require an entire thesis

unto itself to describe adequately, a few organizational principals and structures are critical to understand for the following discussion.

Given the geographic scope of this thesis being limited to exclusively the United States, a geographic breakdown of the higher levels of organization which transcend the borders of the United States is not relevant here. Additionally, since this paper focuses primarily on the Latin Rite Church, a breakdown of the organization of the Eastern Rite churches is also unnecessary.

Table 3 provides a simplified overview of the relevant levels of administration within the United States, in descending order of authority and geographic scale¹.

Table 3: Administrative levels of the Catholic Church

Division Name	Pastor	Rough Size
- The Catholic Church	The Pope	All of Creation
- Episcopal Conference	President	The United States
- Ecclesiastical Province	Metropolitan Bishop	Multiple States
- Dioceses/Archdioceses	Bishop / Archbishop	Fraction of a State
- Parish	Priest	Neighborhood to County

A diocese covers a portion or entirety of the territory of a U.S. State, and is administered by a bishop. Within each (arch)diocese are multiple parishes, which are home to a single congregation of Catholics, and vary in size from a city neighborhood to an entire county.

¹ This breakdown exclusively focuses on the Latin Church; the Eastern Churches follow their own structure.

Multiple adjacent dioceses are grouped into ecclesiastical provinces. Each province is overseen by a metropolitan bishop, who is himself the archbishop of one of the constituent dioceses², known as the Metropolitan Archdiocese, or simply Archdiocese (Canon 435). Canon 431 describes the purpose of ecclesiastical provinces as promoting “a common pastoral action of various neighboring dioceses”, and to “foster relations between diocesan bishops.”

The following example helps illustrate the geographic structure of the church. St. Robert Bellarmine’s Chapel at George Mason University is located within the Diocese of Arlington, which covers roughly a third of the state of Virginia. The Diocese of Arlington is, at the time of writing, administered by Bishop Michael Burbidge. The Diocese of Arlington, and the neighboring Dioceses of Richmond, Wilmington, and Wheeling-Charleston, as well as the Archdiocese of Baltimore, comprise the ecclesiastical province of Baltimore. In addition to directly administering the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archbishop of Baltimore (William Lori) also serves as the metropolitan archbishop of the entire ecclesiastical province. Figure 2 illustrates this breakdown, with county borders added for reference³. Parish boundaries are excluded due to the geographic scale.

² There are exceptions to this rule, however none of them are within the geographic boundaries of the United States.

³ Note that Washington D.C. and a number of surrounding counties in Southern Maryland are located within the Ecclesiastical Province of Washington.

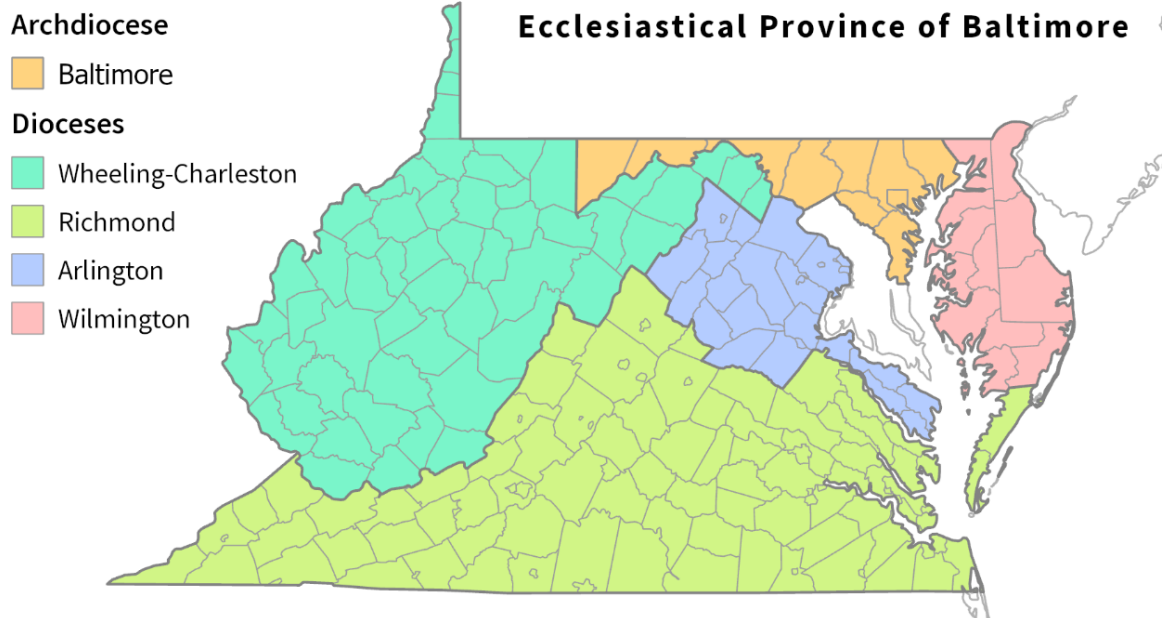


Figure 2: Map of the Ecclesiastical Province of Baltimore

Parishes

The fundamental unit of the Catholic Church is the parish. Parishes have a threefold nature: they are a community, a territory, and a local branch in the hierarchy (Adler, et. al). The Catholic Code of Canon Law succinctly defines the parish as a “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop” (Canon 515 §1). Roughly corresponding in geographic scope to anywhere in size from a few city blocks to an entire county, parishes are the means by which Catholics engage with their faith.

Though the word “parish” is colloquially used to refer to the specific church structure at which a Catholic worships, the term more precisely refers to the entire territory within a dioceses that is assigned to a certain congregation. Catholic parishes are

required to have strictly delineated geographic boundaries, and theoretically every inch of the earth is assigned to a parish. Thus, technically, all Catholics are linked to a parish. Interestingly, the requirement for parishes to strictly define their spatial boundaries was decreed at an ecumenical council (Trent), carrying with it one of the highest levels of authority. Thus, through institution of the Parish, Catholicism is inexorably tied to geography.

Traditionally, parishes normally have a single church within their borders, where Catholics go to attend Mass and engage with other ministries or programs the Church has to offer. In some cases, dioceses establish small, quasi-parishes known as “missions” within their borders, normally in outlying areas with a smaller, but perhaps growing, Catholic population, providing those populations with a more accessible place of worship. Missions are not self-supporting, and rely on funding from their parent organization (either a diocese or religious order). These missions do not have their own assigned territory, though given enough growth in the community, the mission may be upgraded to full parish status, carving out a slice of the diocese from existing parishes.

Though the majority of parishes are territorial, there exist parishes without territorial boundaries, known as “personal parishes”, which are typically dedicated to a specific immigrant community, a certain rite of the Mass, or language (Canon 518).

Parishes provide numerous community services, such as running Catholic Schools, providing day care, performing charity work, organizing community events and ministries such as bible studies, men’s and women’s ministries, and devotionals. Recent sociological research into Catholicism by Adler et al. (2019), has emphasized the role of

the Parish in Catholic life and suggest that understanding the Catholic Parish as a unit of study in and of itself is critical to understanding Catholicism, as parishes are “the direct link between Catholics and Catholicism” (Adler et. al, 2019).

Dioceses

Of the geographically defined levels of administration discussed prior, the second most relevant to this thesis is that of the Diocese, which is the lowest level of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and second smallest division within the Catholic Church. Each diocese is administered by a Bishop. Traditionally, dioceses are named after the city in which the bishop’s cathedral is located. These dioceses vary considerably in size depending on the Catholic population of the region; in the United States, dioceses almost exclusively align with state, county (and county equivalent) lines⁴. States with a considerable Catholic population are divided into multiple dioceses, with the average number of dioceses ranging from two to six.

Bishops are appointed directly from the Vatican, are selected from the priesthood, and do not necessarily need to be from the diocese they are assigned. Bishops are often shuffled around throughout their career as the need arises. This leads to some complication in the geographic examination of Catholicism, as the geography which shaped the outlook of a bishop may be entirely different from that of the diocese which he now presides over.

⁴ There are four exceptions within the United States. The Diocese of Wilmington encompasses the entirety of Delaware, along with all counties in Maryland and Virginia located in the Delmarva Peninsula. The Diocese of Washington includes the District of Columbia and parts of Southern Maryland. There are only a handful of cases where diocese borders do not follow county lines.

It is due to the local autonomy granted to dioceses that spatial examinations of the wider Catholic Church may be highly fruitful. As opposed to the First Vatican Council (1868-1870), which was dominated by an *ultramontanist* philosophy that emphasized the Pope as the ultimate head of the Church, the Second Vatican Council placed more importance on and emphasized the authority of Bishops as Vicars of Christ in and of themselves (*Lumen Gentium*: 42). *Lumen Gentium*, one of the documents produced at Vatican II, emphasizes the threefold offices of Bishops: The prophetic, priestly, and kingly office. As a thesis on geography, it is the latter of these three powers which is most important. *Lumen Gentium* writes that “Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them” (*Lumen Gentium*, #27). However, it maintains the perennial tradition of the Pope as the supreme head of the Church, elaborating that “This power, which they personally exercise in Christ’s name, is proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately regulated by the supreme authority of the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, #27).

Perhaps one of the strongest statements on the importance of the bishop comes later in *Lumen Gentium*: “The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter” (*Lumen Gentium*: #25-27). This passage explicitly elevates the College of Bishops to a similar level of authority as the Pope when acting unanimously⁵.

⁵ This qualifier is critical – only when acting collectively as the college of Bishops, and with other conditions met, does this authority arise.

A second source of local autonomy comes from Canon 87, which explicitly grants bishops sweeping autonomy in matters of canon law:

A diocesan bishop, whenever he judges that it contributes to their spiritual good, is able to dispense the faithful from universal and particular disciplinary laws issued for his territory or his subjects by the supreme authority of the Church. He is not able to dispense, however, from procedural or penal laws nor from those whose dispensation is specially reserved to the Apostolic See or some other authority. (Code of Canon Law, 1983, 87§1).

This elevation of the bishop is relevant in two ways to this thesis. Firstly, a decentralized authority structure allows for some level of spatial variation within the Church, further enabling the study of Catholic Church through a spatial lens: Just as the ability for states and counties in the United States to issue local legislation enables the study of an interior political geography of the United States, so too does the ability for Bishops to act autonomously enable the study of a politico-religious geography of Catholicism. Secondly, and more specifically, it feeds into the spatial dynamics at the heart of the liturgical disputes covered in Chapter 7.

Ecclesiastical Provinces

Less relevant to this thesis, Ecclesiastical Provinces are administrative groupings of dioceses, which cover roughly the geographic scale of one to three states, depending on the Catholic population in the region. In the modern era, ecclesiastical provinces possess limited administrative duties. The 1983 Code of Canon Law loosely outlines the administrative duties of a metropolitan as ensuing that “faith and discipline are carefully observed and to notify the Roman Pontiff if there be any abuses”, as well as highly delineated powers pertaining to redressing abuses. Beyond this, Canon Law dictates that

“the Metropolitan has no other power of governance over suffragan dioceses.” (Canon 436 §3)

ESSENTIAL CHURCH KNOWLEDGE

Sources and Regionality of Church Teaching

The teachings of the Catholic Church come from three sources:

1. Sacred Scripture: *The Old and New Testament*.
2. Sacred Tradition: *the perennial teachings of the Church, handed down by the Apostles*.
3. The Magisterium: *the teaching authority of the Church* (Dei Verbum, 1965, #10).

Key to the geographic diversity of the Church is the flexibility in Church teaching. The beliefs of the Catholic Church can be categorized into six levels of theological certainty, which each require differing levels of obedience. There are teachings which Catholics are free to disagree with, and those which they are not. Denial or rejection of teachings in the latter category come with varying levels of *censures* (penalties) depending on the grade of teaching being rejected⁶, with the rejection of the highest levels of certainty incurring an *in latae sententiae* (automatic) excommunication from the Church (Ott, 1945).

On teachings of lower levels, individuals are free to dissent to a certain degree, disagreements which, as most human phenomena go, should aggregate into spatial patterns – the crux of this thesis. Additionally, despite being dogmatically defined, due to

⁶ Note that merely disagreeing with these teachings does not in-and-of itself incur a censure. If a Catholic, by no fault of their own, does not know the proper teaching and has never been educated in it, they are not under any penalty. Only when a Catholic has full knowledge of what the church teaches, and still willfully dissents from is a censure incurred (Ott, 1945).

varying levels of catechesis (*religious instruction*) or other factors, the de-facto situation amongst Catholics is one where even fundamental dogma is disputed; these variations in the acceptance or education in Catholic teaching also produce spatial patterns. As we will see in Chapter 7, the spatially distributed controversies come from both categories. Many controversies, such as teachings on the death penalty, also include disputes over the level of assent owed to their sources. And, in the words of Morris, both sides of these debates can easily pick out quotes from the Second Vatican Council to lend credence to their stance (Morris, 1997).

The Second Vatican Council

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the temporal scope of this study is bookmarked by the opening of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1962. The Second Vatican Council was a watershed moment in Catholic history, and a brief explanation of its significance is in order before proceeding.

The Second Vatican Council, opened by for by Pope John XXIII in 1962, and concluded by Pope Paul VI in 1965, was the 21st and most recent ecumenical council.

These councils are constituted by the following five elements:

“They are a (1) Legally convened meeting (2) of members of the hierarchy (3) for the purpose of carrying out their judicial and doctrinal functions (4) by means of deliberation in common (5) resulting in regulations and decrees invested with the authority of the whole assembly.” (Wilhelm, 1908).

Ecumenical councils mark watershed moments in the history of the Catholic Church, to the degree that entire periods of Church history are defined using councils as their divisors. This is owed to their historical rarity and theological weight. The

proceedings of councils carrying the weight of dogma (Ott, 1945), and Vatican II had, by volume of text produced, the most of proceedings of any ecumenical council (Morris, 1997).

Only twenty-one councils have been called in the two-thousand-year history of the Catholic Church. The most recent council prior to Vatican II was the First Vatican Council (Vatican I), which was held from 1869-1870; before Vatican I, the most recent council held was Trent (from 1545-1563). Councils are generally held to address a major controversy within the church, providing closure and clarity on doctrine. The Council of Trent was convened to address the Protestant Reformation, and began the Catholic counterreformation which succeeded in stemming the reformation and even converting back many parts of Europe to Catholicism. Vatican I was convened in response to the rising tide of secularism and the enlightenment, and sought to reassert the independence of the Catholic Church from state power; to this end, the dogma of Papal Infallibility was formally articulated at Vatican I⁷. Trent definitively enforced uniformity, clarified contested teachings, and ushered in a five-hundred-year era in which doctrine, theology, and liturgy remained more or less unchanged until the mid-1950's (Morris, 1997).

The Second Vatican Council was called, in the words of Pope John XXIII, in order to address the Church's need to "come to grips, in a real and define way, with the spiritual needs of the present time" (Morris 1997). The present time of which Pope John

⁷ It must be noted that the verbiage of "articulation" and "defining" is intentional. Catholic theology holds that dogma is never invented and that teachings are never novel, but rather reclarifications and articulations of perennial teaching and divine revelation. Councils merely put the weight of dogma to existing teachings.

XXIII spoke of was one of great tumult. Second Vatican Council coincided with tremendous changes in American society, with the tumultuous social changes of the 1960's. It also coincided with Catholicism becoming more accepted by American society, the suburbanization of the faith, and the election of America's first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy. The Second Vatican Council attempted to address the rapid changes in the world, and discern the Church's place in the modern world, as well as to complete the unfinished tasks from Vatican I.

Whether or not it accomplished these goals successfully remains a matter of intense controversy – one which this thesis will not attempt to weigh in on. While the full ramifications of the Second Vatican Council are still unfolding, what is clear is that the Second Vatican Council led to far more questions being opened than were closed. A fuller examination into the post-conciliar factions on either ends of the debate surrounding Vatican II's legacy is provided in Chapter 7.

The Second Vatican Council also resulted in the formation of a committee tasked with revising the celebration of the Mass, which resulted in the proclamation of the Novus Ordo Mass, which was to be celebrated instead of the Tridentine Mass (Also known as the Latin Mass) promulgated by the Council of Trent. A deeper discussion of the differences between the Novus Ordo and the Tridentine Mass will be given in Chapter 7, alongside a deeper discussion of the spatial attributes of the controversies surrounding the Novus Ordo (the new rite of the Mass created in the wake of Vatican II).

Whereas Trent produced a five-hundred-year period of stability, Vatican II has produced a sixty-year period of controversy and turmoil. Going into the council, two

theological camps emerged, both vying to shape the future of the Church. Understanding Vatican II is critical not merely as its role as the temporal benchmark for this paper, but for the fact that it upended the era of uniformity and stability, and shaped the debates which will be examined in Chapter 8. The importance of Vatican II in shaping the current debates within Catholicism cannot be understated. In the words of Morris (1997):

“Almost all theological controversies can be understood, in one way or another, as competing glosses on Vatican II – whether on the authority of Rome, on the Church’s teachings on sexuality, on the role of laity and women in the Church, on the primacy of personal conscience, or on the interpretation of scripture.” (Morris, 1997, p. 323).

Three of those debates – that on the authority of Rome, the primacy of personal conscience, and the interpretation of scripture – allow for the emergence of geographic variations on teaching, outlook, theology, and engagement with the faith to emerge.

Regardless of its intent, the two decades following the Second Vatican Council saw a decisive shift in the liberal direction. Traditional symbols, architecture, vestments, and hymns were often replaced with more modern ones, matching contemporary cultural norms and styles. A greater degree of informality was embraced at the Mass (Avella, 2019). There was an intense energy among many priests to embrace the “spirit of Vatican II” and revolutionize the faith to more closely fit the changing circumstances of the modern world and to do away with what they characterized as a rigid and stagnant past.

Alongside opening a slew of theological debates, Vatican II also coincided with an abrupt shift in Mass attendance, the number of vocations to the religious life, and other areas of concern within the Church. Whether or not these can be attributed to the Second Vatican Council is also up for debate (with many conservative commentators suggesting

the affirmative, while others suggest that it was Pope Paul VI's 1968 condemnation of birth control which began the decline (D'Antonio, 2001)).

RECENT PAPACIES

The temporal scope of this thesis overlaps with five papacies:

- (Saint) Pope Paul VI (1963 – 1978)
- (Blessed) Pope John Paul I (August 1978 – September 1978)
- (Saint) John Paul II (1978 – 2005)
- Pope Benedict XVI (2005 – 2014)
- Pope Francis (2014 – Present)

The theological legacy of Paul VI is complicated, and evades classification as “liberal” or “conservative.” Overseeing the immediate wake of the Second Vatican Council, more liberal minded Catholics praise the rapid changes in liturgy and Catholic outlook which followed. More conservative Catholics point to his encyclical (A papal letter or decree) *Humae Vitae* which resolutely condemned the usage of birth control and contraceptives as a mortal sin (Avella, 2019)

The papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, however, are much more clearcut, ushering in a far more conservative era for the Church. Both worked energetically to reinforce the traditional teachings of the Church, and worked to for the gradual rehabilitation of the Latin Mass, culminating in Benedict XVI's 2007 apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum* which allowed for priests to celebrate the Latin Mass without needing any prior permission. John Paul II worked closely with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Later elected Pope Benedict XVI) to crack down on major liberal organizations within the Church. Many major progressive intellectuals, including Hans Kung were removed from their positions in Catholic universities, and investigations were

launched into the writings of post-councilor progressive figures. Conservative bishops were appointed to prominent dioceses, their choices of priests to consecrate as bishops and choices of cardinals to staff the Vatican offices reflected their traditional outlooks. Cardinal Ratzinger, a major voice for conservatism during the John Paul II years, was elected as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 following the death of John Paul II. Often lauded as one of the greatest theologians of the Modern era, Benedict continued to defend and reaffirm the Church's teachings on controversial issues, and was one of the premier intellectuals in the conservative camp (Avilla, 2019).

Pope Benedict XVI's resignation in 2014 and the subsequent election of Pope Francis abruptly ended this period of traditionalism within the Church. Francis' pontificate has emphasized a more liberally minded outlook on Catholicism, advocating for increased outreach to the marginalized and global peripheries. In 2021, Pope Francis issued the apostolic letter *Traditionis Custodes*, which abrogated Pope Benedict's *Summorum Pontificum*, and placed heavy restrictions on the usage of the Latin Mass. He has called for a reopening of debate on many Church teachings, but simultaneously reinforced the traditional stances on the same debates, drawing ire from conservatives for opening discourse in the first place, and ire from progressives for not pushing for liberal reforms. Francis' encouragement of debate reinforces the need for a geographic examination of a Church facing an uncertain future.

CHAPTER FIVE: A GEOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

In his paper “Remapping American Catholicism”, Timothy Matovina (2017) emphasizes that studies of the Catholic Church in the United States must move away from a “strong foci on the eastern seaboard and European settlers and immigrants” and recognize the critical role Hispanics played in the history of the Church.

In the decades following the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the establishment of a fledgling colony in the Caribbean, the Spanish would rapidly conquer vast swaths of the newly discovered continent. Missionary work was heavily intertwined with the Spanish exploration, settlement, and conquest of the New World. In the wake of the Spanish Conquistadors and Settlers came Franciscan, Jesuit, and Dominican missionaries seeking to spread the faith to the indigenous peoples. Missionaries were an essential component of Spanish exploratory parties, accompanying conquistadors and explorers as they trekked deeper into the continent (Matovina, 2017).

In both the heartlands and frontiers of the Spain’s New World domain, these missionaries established small, self-sustaining settlements called “missions”. These settlements were aimed as converting the indigenous peoples of the region, transforming them, as the Spanish saw it, into “good Spanish citizens” (Matovina, 2017, p. 12). Missions quickly became ubiquitous across the frontier lands of Spanish America. Within the borders of the modern United States, these religious settlements were distributed in four main clusters: the central coast of California, South-eastern Texas, the Sonoran

Desert in northwest Mexico and southern Arizona, and in the Rio Grande in New Mexico, particularly around Santa Fe (Gaustad et al., 2001).

The influence of these missions ebbed and flowed from the 17th to 18th centuries. Early mission attempts in Florida and Georgia quickly failed and were abandoned after intense warfare with the native peoples of the region. Though missionaries achieved temporary success in Texas in the early 1600's, those too failed to make substantial inroads. The New Mexico and California missions were by far the most successful, and by the end of the Spanish colonial era and Mexican Independence, New Mexico emerged as the most highly populated region in the American Southwest (and, by extension, the region with the greatest number of Catholics). Over time, the mission settlements, which were always intended to be temporary institutions, naturally gave way to more permanent diocesan parishes, serving the rapidly expanding population of permanent settlers (Matovina, 2017).

The legacy of the early Spanish settlement in the Southwest can still be seen on the religious and ethnic landscape of the United States today. While many states in the Southwest owe their Catholic populations to more recent Central American migration, New Mexico and Arizona remain distinct in its large ancestral Spanish population. New Mexico's importance as the most highly settled region of the *Provincas Internas* echoed throughout the decades; In 1890, New Mexico was the most Catholic of any U.S. State.

Today, even amidst an influx of immigrants from Mexico, the ACS (2020) estimates 15% of New Mexico's population still identifies as having "Spanish" or "Spaniard" ancestry⁸.

The Legacy of New France

As the Spanish began to make their mark on the American Southwest, a second nation began to plant the roots of the American Catholic Church farther north. While French fishermen had established outposts in Newfoundland as early as the mid-16th century, it would not be until the first decades of the 17th century that French settlement of the New World began in earnest. In 1611, the first French missionaries arrived in Nova Scotia, marking the beginning of French evangelization in the New World (Gaustad et al.).

Within the borders of the modern United States, the most permanent testament to French settlement is the substantial Catholic population of Louisiana. Settlement of Louisiana began in the 1600's as a myriad of French fur traders, merchants, and priests arrived in the New World (Allen and Turner, 1988). The latter made substantial inroads in converting the native peoples of the Mississippi river valley. However, unlike the Spanish, the massive displacement of the indigenous peoples of the region during the Jackson administration meant that impact of French missionary work is relatively unfelt in modern America (Gaustad et al., 2001).

Despite the failures of evangelization, Catholicism remains firmly entrenched along the Louisianan gulf coast. Here, the Cajun People, descendants of the original

⁸ "Other Hispanic" makes up another 30% of the population; it is possible and likely that sizable share of this population can also trace its ancestry back to the original settlement of the region.

Catholic French settlers in Louisiana, still make up a plurality in a swath of counties stretching along the Gulf Coast and the lower Mississippi river delta (Allen and Turner, 1988). This pocket of overwhelmingly Catholic counties remains an island amidst a sea of Southern Baptists in the American South. Owing to its massive Catholic Cajun population, Louisiana currently has the largest number of Catholic dioceses in the Southeast (seven), tied with Florida.

A Minority Among Minorities: Early Years in Anglo-America

In the English-speaking eastern coast of the United States, the sole hotbed of the Catholic faith was the state of Maryland. An oddity among the Thirteen Colonies, Maryland was unique in that it was established by a Catholic proprietor and held a substantial Catholic population. In 1632, Lord Baltimore, an English convert to Catholicism, was given a land grant for the lands north of the Potomac, which he named “Maryland” after the Catholic Queen of England, Mary. Quickly after the colony was established, Baltimore enacted religious tolerance acts, which unlike those established in other colonies, extended religious liberty to Catholics. While the burgeoning catholic population, the original leadership by a catholic, and unique religious tolerance would suggest a religious haven, Maryland was by no means a Catholic state. The original settlers of St. Mary’s City – the first established in the state (and the foci for the region’s Catholic population) - were majority protestant (Gaustad et al., 2001).

Widespread Protestant migration into the colony rapidly overshadowed Maryland’s Catholic population. From a peak of 25% of the population in 1641, by 1708, Catholics only comprised 9% of the population (Carroll, 2000). Catholicism remained a

religious minority confined to the area around St. Mary's city. Even in the most Catholic colony, Marylander Catholics comprised only 10% of the State's population in 1765.

Across the British colonies, Catholics were miniscule minority, and one with a very narrow geographic concentration. An estimate from 1795 pegged the number of Catholics in the country at roughly 50,000 (0.9% of the total population). Of these, the report estimated that about half of those 50,000 resided in the state of Maryland (Gaustad et al., 2001).

Other than Maryland, Pennsylvania was the most accommodating to Catholic settlement. The first chapel was opened by Jesuits in 1733, serving a tiny congregation of roughly 40 Catholics, the majority of whom were of German descent. By 1750, Pennsylvania housed 11 Catholic churches, the second most of any state. Still, Catholics only comprised a negligible share of Pennsylvania's population; in 1765, out of a total population of 200,000, Catholics numbered only 6,000 (3% of the population) (Gaustad et al., 2001).

The colonies only other major encounter with Catholics came in the form of French refugees from Quebec and Nova Scotia, fleeing the turmoil following the English takeover of the colony. These refugees originally settled in nearby New England, but quickly fled the region following intense persecution. They would go on to resettle in the French settlements of Louisiana (Gaustad et al., 2001).

The Immigrant Church

The years from 1820 to 1850 saw a radical transformation of the landscape and character of the Catholic Church in the United States. The reasons for this are threefold:

the famine in Ireland and the resulting mass-exodus of the Irish to the United States, the arrival of Germans fleeing political turmoil and seeking opportunities in the American Midwest, and the conclusion of the Mexican American War, where the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo resulted in the annexation of half of heavily Catholic Mexico.

1820 marks the beginning of the era of “The Immigrant Church”. This era can be roughly divided into two phases. The first wave of immigration, which spanned from roughly from 1820 to 1880, was primarily composed of immigrants from Northwestern Europe, including a massive number of Catholics from Ireland and Germany. The second spanned from 1890 and concluded in 1924 with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act and was comprised of mostly Southern and Eastern European immigrants, many of which came from predominantly Catholic countries such as Italy and Poland.

In 1830, Catholics comprised but 4.2% of the total population. By the end of the first wave of immigration in 1890, Catholicism was the single largest denomination in the country, with adherents making up 30.2% of the United States’ population (Gaustad et al., 2001).

This new era also completely upended the spatial distribution of Catholicism within the United States. Previously confined to the states of Maryland (with minor settlements distributed throughout the lower mid Atlantic) and Louisiana, by 1850 the Catholic faith was well established in every state except Utah. Maryland was overshadowed by the burgeoning Catholic populations in the industrial north, with Wisconsin and Massachusetts each outnumbering the Catholic population in Maryland, with even more in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York. While the Catholic transformation

of the religious landscape of the country was felt from coast to coast, three regions stand out in terms of magnitude: New England, the Mid Atlantic, and the Midwest (Gaustad, et al., 2001).

Prior to 1850, New England was notable for its ethnic homogeneity, inhabited almost exclusively by ancestrally American, Anglo-Saxons. The population was overwhelmingly Protestant, with a notably puritan and congregational bent that can be traced back to the earliest settlements in Plymouth. This was, more so than any other region in the United States, the domain of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS), and in particular, the realm of the Congregationalists. In 1830, every county in New England outside of Maine and Rhode Island⁹ was plurality Congregationalist. Sixty years later, in 1890, every county in Connecticut, two out of three in Rhode Island, and all but two in Massachusetts were plurality Catholic. Catholics comprised over 66% of the population in Massachusetts, 65% in Rhode Island, and 50% in Connecticut. Puritans and Baptists still held on in upper New England, but even there their dominance was eroding. While not achieving a full majority, Catholicism was now the plurality religion Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine (Gaustad, et. al, 2001).

While the mid-Atlantic region was always nominally pluralistic in religion and ancestry, Catholics never comprised any more than a small sliver of the population. Even in Maryland, Catholics remained confined to a small strip of land in the southeast along the Chesapeake, a somewhat notable but all together insignificant minority. However,

⁹ In Maine and Rhode Island, Baptists formed the plurality of the population. In the former, Baptists were the plurality in every county; in Maine, they were the plurality in all but 2.

because of predominantly Catholic migration, by 1890 first- and second-generation immigrants comprised 57% of New York's population, 48% of New Jersey's, and 36% of Pennsylvania's. In 1850, only 6 counties in the upper mid Atlantic were plurality Catholic – three in central Pennsylvania and 3 in rural Upstate New York. By 1890, the entire New York metro area was plurality Catholic, as with all but a handful of counties in Upstate New York. All but three counties in northern New Jersey were plurality Catholic. Large swaths of Pennsylvania were plurality Catholic, including the major cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. In Maryland, the ancestral hotbed of Catholicism, Catholics finally achieved plurality status in Baltimore by 1890. In neighboring Delaware, Catholics now comprised the plurality in the city of Wilmington (Gaustad et al., 2001).

Ethnic settlement patterns played a major role in shaping the spatial development of Catholicism in the United States, especially during the era of the immigrant church. These new arrivals were anything but homogenous. While nominally united by their common faith, the myriad of ethnicities comprising the immigration wave differed in nearly every way imaginable. These immigrant groups formed unique settlement patterns, driven by cultural norms, ambitions, and economic factors.

The 1800's saw the Irish establish themselves as the backbone of American Catholicism, and Irish bishops quickly engrained themselves in the Church hierarchy (Carroll, 2000). The 1820's marked the beginning of widespread Irish immigration to the United States, as well as a change in character of the immigrants (Allen and Turner, 1988). While Irish immigrants before 1820 were majority Protestant, Catholics comprised

roughly 60% of Irish immigrants after 1830 (*Irish-Catholic Immigration to America*, n.d.). While the Irish had always played a key role in the burgeoning Catholic Church in America, the massive influx of just under five million Irish to the United States resulted in Irish dominance of the American Catholic Church.

Unlike other immigrant groups of the era, the Irish were less concerned about where they were going to settle; rather, they were keen to settle anywhere if it meant escaping the English. They arrived with little to no money, and thus little ability to follow the conventional immigrant wisdom of the time to settle the Midwest frontier (Allen and Turner, 1988). Arriving primarily through the ports of New York and Boston, the Irish quickly found a niche in low-skill factory work. While anti-Catholic discrimination often forced them into the most dangerous and undesirable jobs, for a population which arrived destitute, any work was good work.

Work in canal construction led to an influx of Irish workers to the Ohio river valley and the coasts of the Great Lakes, where they would frequently settle after work was complete (Allen and Turner, 1988), bringing the Catholic Faith with them. Farther west, the Irish played a key role in the churching of California, where the 1848 gold rush saw a massive influx of migration to the Bay Area (Morris, 1997). Aside from the economic realities that often-precluded rural settlement, Irish Catholics were not enthused by farming and homesteading. While the Church made multiple attempts to establish rural Irish colonies, most failed within the first few years (Allen and Turner, 1988).

The Germans formed the second key component of Catholic expansion in the first immigration wave. By 1900, nearly a million Germans had arrived on the shores of the United States (Carroll, 2000). Unlike the Irish, who often arrived poor and destitute, German migrants arrived with enough money to go out to purchase land in the American frontier. Additionally, Germans had the support of planned colonization organizations, which provided financial backing to potential homesteaders. Germans established themselves across the rural Midwest, especially in states such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska. German settlement was especially prominent in the “German Triangle”, marked by Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Cincinnati (Carroll, 2000). However, unlike the Irish, the Germans were not as uniformly Catholic. Alongside the Catholic arrivals, a substantial proportion of these arrivals were Lutheran (Allen and Turner, 1988), contributing to the denomination’s prominence in the northern Midwest.

As the 19th century drew to a close, the religious map of America had mostly ossified into the familiar patterns of the 20th and 21st centuries. The closing of the American frontier precluded further transformation of the rural West. Catholics achieved dominance of the urban centers of the Northeast, the industrial Great Lakes region, and the rural Midwest. Catholics reached their ongoing plurality status in all the major metro centers of the Northeast by 1890 (Gaustad et al., 2001). Germans and early Polish settlers were ubiquitous in the frontier, with states such as Wisconsin taking on their iconic German character.

The Second Wave

The second wave of immigration, roughly beginning in the 1880's and 90's, saw a shift in immigrant origin to southern and eastern Europe. Italians, Poles, and others from a variety of Central European countries arrived in droves to the United States (Carroll, 2001).

Spatially, this immigration wave failed to radically transform the American landscape; rather, it merely entrenched existing Catholic dominance in the newly Catholic Midwest and Northeast. While cultural inclinations meant that these groups were less predisposed to rural settlement, the closure of the American frontier was the overriding factor confining them to the metropolitan Northwest and Great Lakes region (Allen and Turner, 1988). By the time of their arrival, most of the cheap land that had enticed their predecessors was already claimed and settled. What little land remained was prohibitively expensive. The end of the era of canal construction provided little opportunity for these new arrivals to find work beyond the industrial heartland.

Italians formed the largest Catholic group of the second wave, with 3.3 million Italians reaching America's shores by 1920 (Carroll, 2001). Like the Irish that came before them, the Italian immigrants had insufficient means to travel west, and even less of a cultural inclination to embrace the solitary life of a rural farmer. While many Italians hailed from predominantly rural Southern Italy, the character of Italian rurality was far different than that of rural America. Whereas Italian rural life was characterized by small self-sustaining towns with a highly communal culture, American frontier life was highly individualistic and isolated (Allen and Turner, 1988). Meanwhile, the lack of unskilled

laboring work in the American South dissuaded widespread Italian settlement to the region, further stymying the growth of the Church south of the Mason-Dixon.

Thus, most Italians remained near their New York port of entry, settling in a belt stretching from New Jersey to Rhode Island. The plentiful low-skill, labor intensive industries in the region were quickly dominated by Italian workers, who organized to crowd out existing Irish workers. Poles and other Slavs found few work opportunities in Italian dominated cities, and thus turned to the Midwest (Allen and Turner, 1988). Italian community organizations entrenched Italian interests in their new home cities, providing protection for new arrivals, providing gainful employment in factory work, and managing the settlement of new arrivals. Moreso than perhaps any other immigrant group, Italians were near universally Catholic, quickly establishing churches wherever they settled. Today, Italian Catholics remain the plurality population from North Jersey to Southern New England, one of the only majority Catholic regions in the country (Gaustad et al., 2001).

Polish arrivals split between urban and rural settlement. Many found plentiful work in the industrial centers west of the Appalachian Mountains, quickly establishing themselves in cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Chicago (Allen and Turner, 1988), where they faced less stiff competition from existing immigrant groups. Many more found gainful employment in the rapidly expanding railroad industry. Due to their earlier arrival (beginning in the 1850's but escalating in volume after 1890), many Poles still had the opportunity to buy land and take up farming. The widespread settlement of Poles in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota are testament to the Poles inclination for

land ownership over industrial work. Their lower levels of income meant they often could only afford lower quality land such as that in northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. Alongside earlier German settlers, Polish immigration solidified the Catholic character of these states. However, for similar reasons to the Italians and Irish, few Poles settled in the Deep South (Allen and Turner, 1988). The scarcity of settleable land likely further dissuaded the rurally inclined population from venturing into the region.

Despite their rapid growth in the north, Catholicism failed to make any substantial inroads in the American Deep South. Here, widespread anti-Catholic sentiment and the active targeting of Catholics by hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan created a hostile environment which precluded any substantial Catholic settlement in the region. Although Catholics faced immense hardship at the hands of nativist sentiment in the North, this paled in comparison to the magnitude of adversity awaiting them in the Deep South. Here, hate groups had institutional backing by state governments, racism permeated nearly every level of society, and law enforcement was plenty inclined to look the other way as Catholics were lynched. The lack of opportunities to work in the relatively impoverished south further dissuaded immigration to the region.

Meanwhile, the Church was also unable to make inroads with the South's substantial African American population, as it lacked the institutional resources and priests to pursue widespread evangelization efforts. Compounding these issues, the rigidity of Catholic worship did not mesh well with the population's religious heritage that emphasized more energetic, charismatic forms of worship (Gaustad et al., 2001).

By the 1930's, when the era of immigration had drawn to a close, the religious and ethnic landscape of the United States was utterly transformed from a century prior. The transformation of the Northeast was complete and Congregationalist dominance in New England was obliterated. Catholic ethnic groups that were barely a blip on the radar now comprised a massive proportion of the country's population. The rural Midwest had taken on a decidedly German character. Italians and Poles were ubiquitous in the factories of the Mid Atlantic and Great Lakes. The Irish dominated Massachusetts and the corn belt.

The Modern Church

The Catholic population in the United States continued to skyrocket in the decades following the end of the immigrant era, now driven primarily through internal growth rather than immigration (Gaustad et al., 2001). The faith was increasingly suburbanized in the 1950's and 1960's, resulting in a boom of church construction in the new suburbs in the northeast.

In Northeast and Midwest, Catholicism has changed little from the end of the immigrant era. However, in the South, immigration and internal migration has led to a rapid growth in the Catholic populations. Two parallel migrations are driving this growth: Hispanic immigration into the American Southwest and Florida, and wealthier, predominantly white-ethnic Catholic transplants moving to metro areas in the American South. Hispanic migration resulted in a boom in the Southwest's Catholic population, especially in California, Texas, and Arizona. Beginning in the 1980's, Catholics finally began to make inroads in the Deep South, primarily in the rapidly expanding metro areas.

Atlanta continues to balloon in Catholic population and church construction is failing to keep up with the rapid increase in adherents. The parking capacity has become a real constraint in many southern Churches (Fr. T. Gaunt, personal communication, November 21, 2022). The expansion of the DC suburbs brought Catholicism to Virginia, resulting in the creation of the Diocese of Arlington in 1974 (*The History of the Diocese*, n.d.).

The spatial patterns of the Catholic Faith remain shaped by the era of immigration, but newer trends are poised to transform the landscape of the Church in the United States. Though it may have been founded by a Protestant gentry, the church blossomed in the United States. Like the immigrants who founded it, Catholicism endured hardship and persecution, and through those hardships, it found a home in a faraway land.

CHAPTER SIX: CATHOLIC DEMOGRAPHICS

INTRODUCTION

The analysis in this chapter builds on itself, creating an ever more complex and fuller picture of the demography of Catholicism in the United States. The chapter begins with a look at spatial distribution the most basic demographic variable – the Catholic population - then proceeds to a discussion on the geography of conversion to and apostasy from Catholicism, Catholic migration, the dynamics of parish closure and construction, the rural/urban/suburban dynamics of Catholicism, and finally the ancestral composition of Catholics. At each step, statistics from prior sections will be combined with those being discussed, creating an increasing number of slices of analysis.

As a preliminary note, the terms *region* and *division* will often be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. As such, “region” should not be interpreted as referring to U.S. Census Regions without explicitly being qualified as such.

DISTRIBUTION

The fundamental vector of analysis is identifying the spatial distribution of Catholics in America. This can be accomplished by looking at two metrics: the population of Catholics by geographic unit, and the share Catholics make up of said geographic unit (the adherence rate).

The Situation in 1972

The distribution of Catholics in the United States in the immediate wake of the Second Vatican Council is mostly shaped by the history outlined in Chapter 5. The

Catholic population in the United States remained heavily focused in four clusters: The Atlantic North, the industrial Great Lakes region, Louisiana, and Texas/New Mexico. In the North, Catholics were most prominent in the heavily developed band stretching from Baltimore to Boston. The legacy of Catholic involvement in the Great Lakes' industrial boom can still be seen, and small clusters Catholic settlement dotted the northern Great Plains. In the South, Catholics were concentrated in the bayous of Louisiana, and along the Rio Grande from the Gulf of Mexico through Southern Colorado. Catholics had a moderate presence in Southern California and Florida. The Deep South was essentially devoid of Catholic adherents, owing to the history outlined previously in Chapter 5. Figure 3 shows the Catholic percentage of the population by county in 1972 utilizing data from the 1972 Glenmary Research Center dataset.

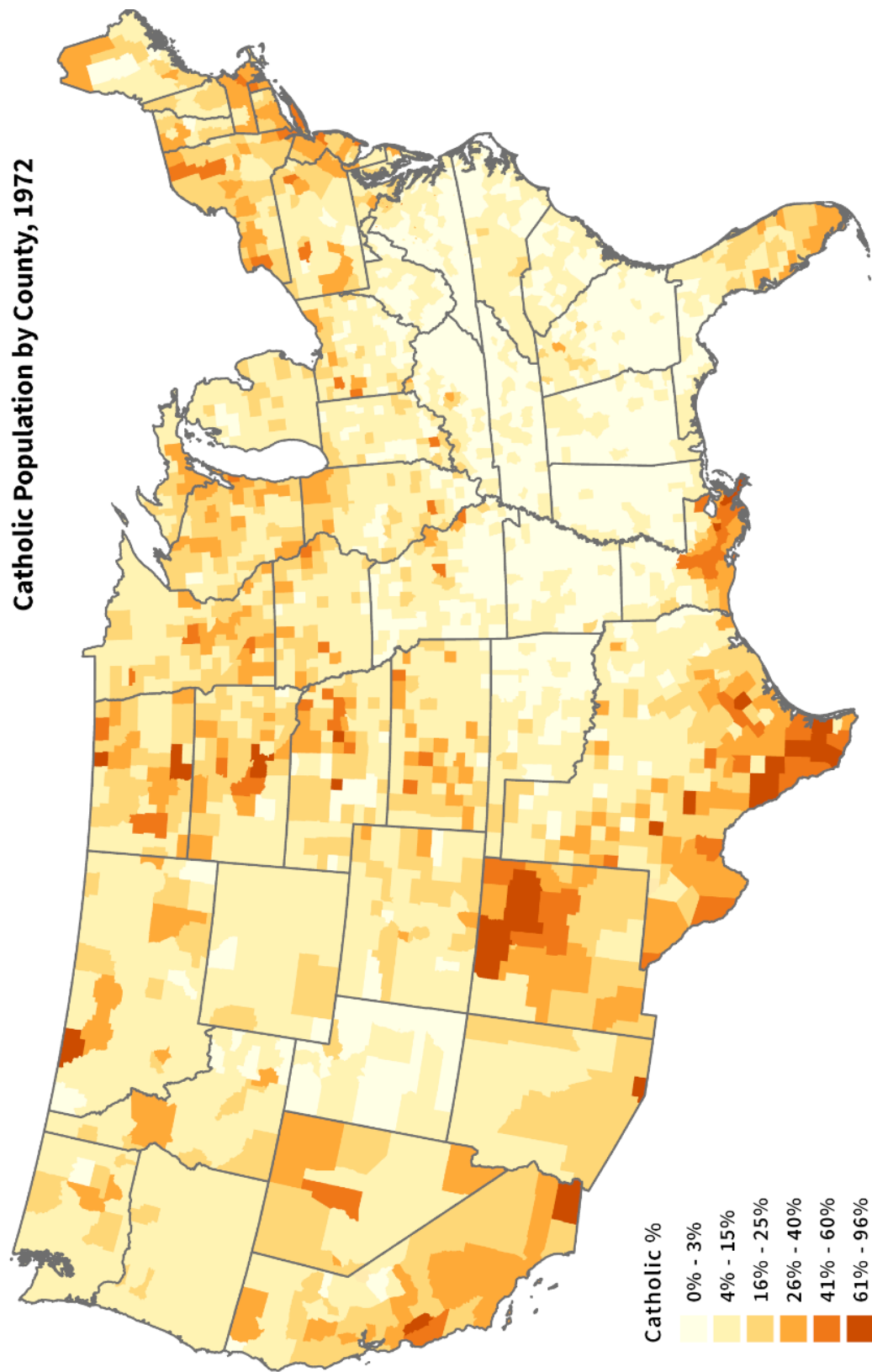


Figure 3: Catholicism by county, 1972

Distribution Changes from 1972 to 2020

American Catholicism has seen tremendous change over previous fifty years, not least in the distribution of Catholics. While existing literature has already documented the broad strokes of the geographic realignment of Catholicism in the United States, these attempts have thus far almost exclusively focused on the most coarse of spatial scales: the four U.S. Census regions. The lack of analysis at a smaller spatial scale conceals more localized trends which add nuance to the sweeping claims made in the literature.

Examples of this coarser geographic analysis can be found in Zech et al., (2017), which utilizes only the four census regions to examine the realignment. Zech et al. and others have noted that the Catholic population in the United States has shifted from being concentrated primarily in the Northeast to being spread evenly throughout the four census regions. This observation is perhaps the most cited geographic fact about the transformation of American Catholicism across all the literature examined. However, this statistical observation conceals the immense nuance and complexity of the situation. Even just breaking down the four census regions into the nine census divisions immediately shows the problems with this generalization. Figure 4 shows the change in each census division's share of the total Catholic population by year. This data was constructed by aggregating decennial county-level religious census data from 1916 to 2020.

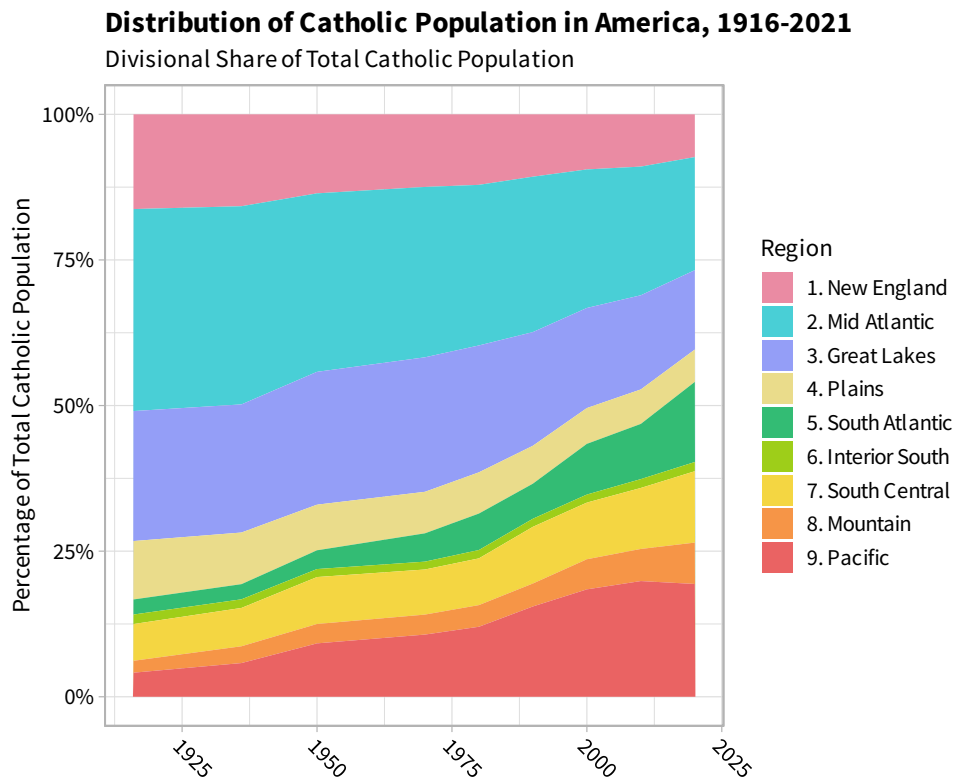


Figure 4: Divisional share of America's Catholic Population by Year

The magnitude of American Catholicism's geographic transformation is immediately apparent. In 1916, almost 75% of all Catholics resided in New England, the Mid Atlantic, and the Great Lakes region. By 2021, these regions amount to less than half of all Catholics, with the Northeast divisions alone shrinking from 50% to around 25%.

Figure 4 also reveals that the growth of Catholicism in the South and West is anything but uniform. Growth in the West has been primarily concentrated in the Pacific region; the Mountain region's share of Catholics has doubled, and now exceeds that of the Plains, but remains around only 5%. In the South, the South Atlantic has seen a massive transformation, growing from a measly 2.5% of the Catholic population to 14%.

Meanwhile, the Interior South has seen no budge in its Catholic population, perhaps owing to a general lack of opportunity and pull-factors, even in spite of the subsiding of anti-Catholic discrimination in the post-Vatican II era (Davidson, 2007).

Measuring Change

Two measurements are needed to understand the change in Catholicism in a region over time: the change in the raw Catholic population, and the change in Catholic percentage of the total population. Looking at one without the other produces an incomplete picture. Regions can have an increase in Catholic population, but if growth is outpaced by non-Catholics, the result would be a situation where the region was less Catholic, despite having more Catholics. Breaking down census divisions into an even smaller geographic unit, Figure 5 examines population and adherence statistics at the diocese level, which helps gauge the decline and fall of populations within larger geographic regions, and helps discern whether decline in urban and rural populations is being offset by growth in their suburbs, or whether Catholics are leaving the region entirely. For consistency, these statistics were sourced from the same religious census data as the previous division analysis. Note that no dioceses experienced a decline in Catholic population but an increase in Catholic share.

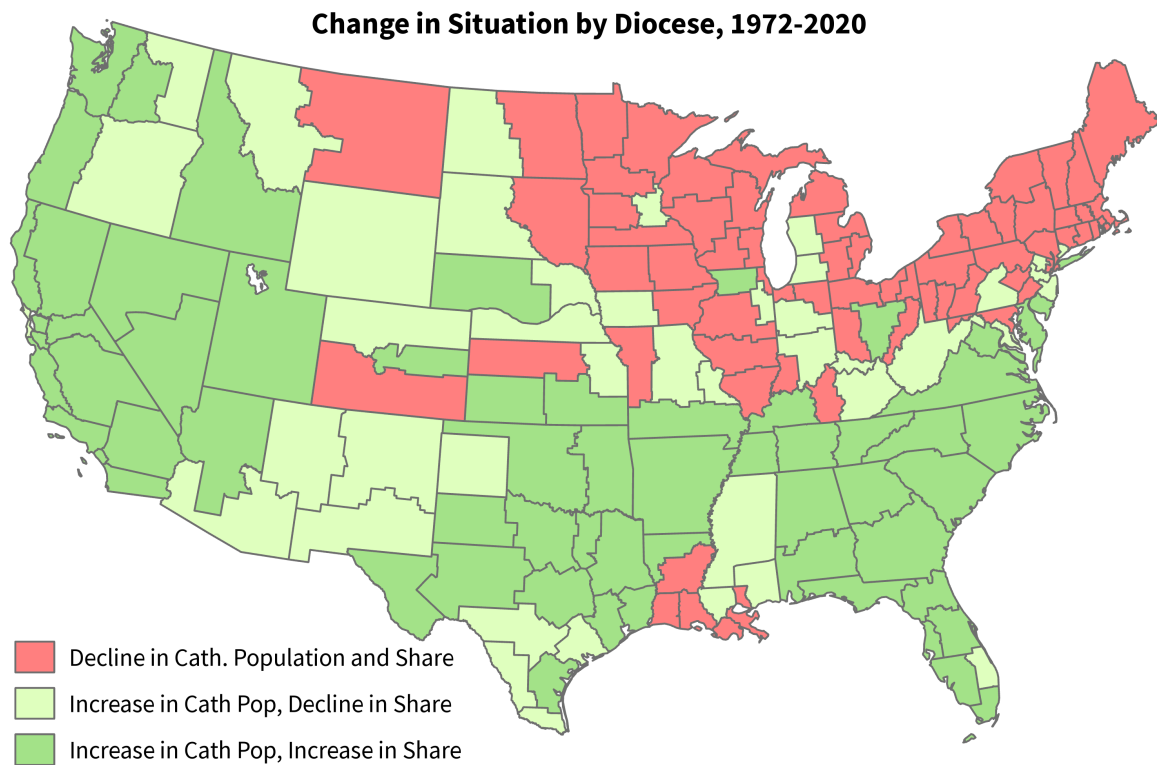


Figure 5: Diocesan Situation from 1972 – 2020.

Finally, county-level data provides the most granular geographic analysis available. Utilizing data sourced from the religious censuses discussed in Chapter 3, a county level examination of the shifts in Catholic demographics was conducted. The four maps that follow each depict different means of measuring the change in Catholic population. Figure 6 displays the net change in total Catholics, calculated by simply subtracting the raw Catholic population in 2020 by the raw Catholic population in 1972. Figure 7 helps normalize the data by displaying the relative change in the total number of Catholics. Moving on to measuring the changes in Catholic adherence by county, Figure 8 shows the percentage change in Catholic share of the population, and Figure 9 shows the point difference in Catholic share:

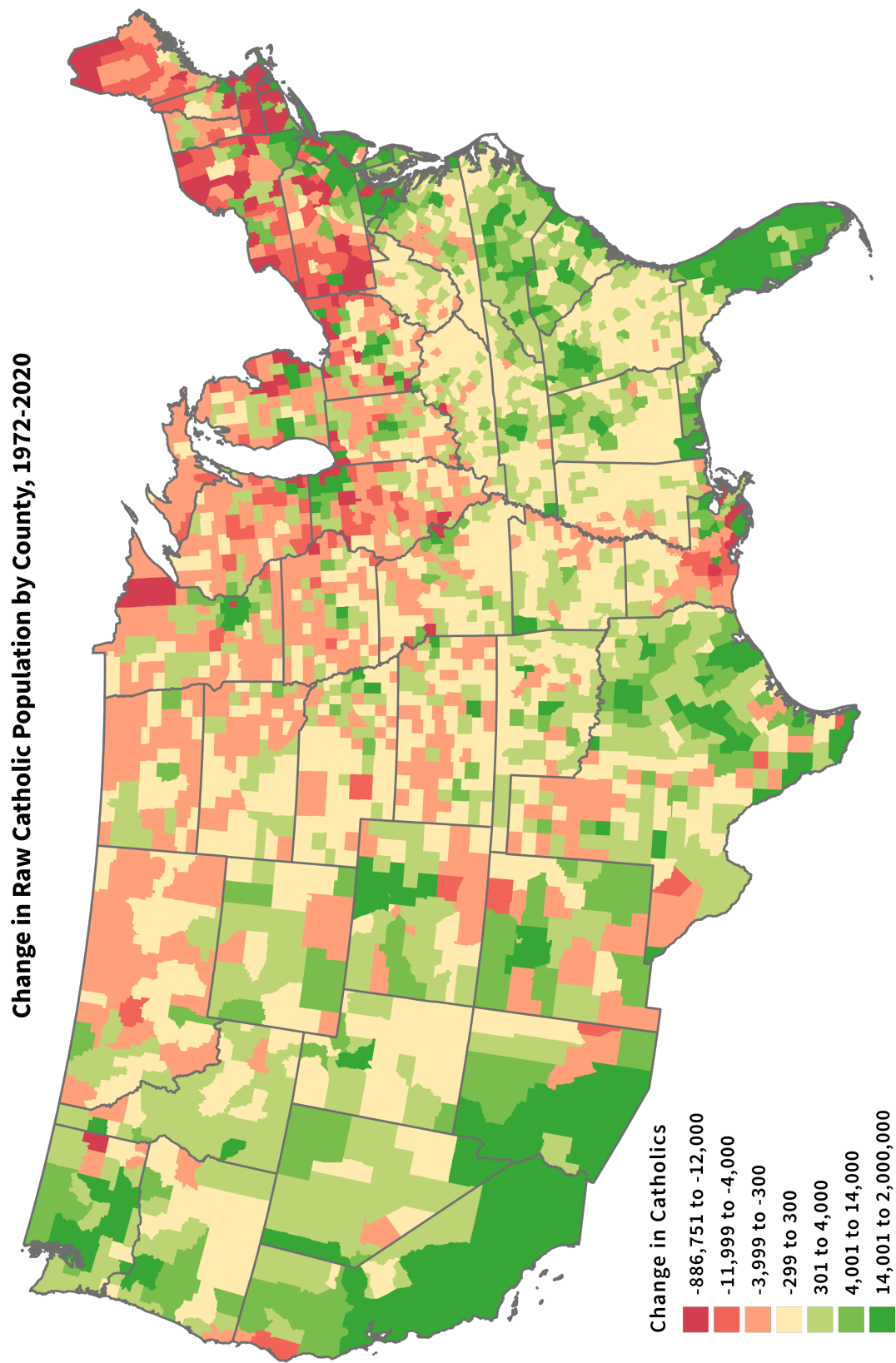


Figure 6: Raw change in Catholic population, 1972- 2020

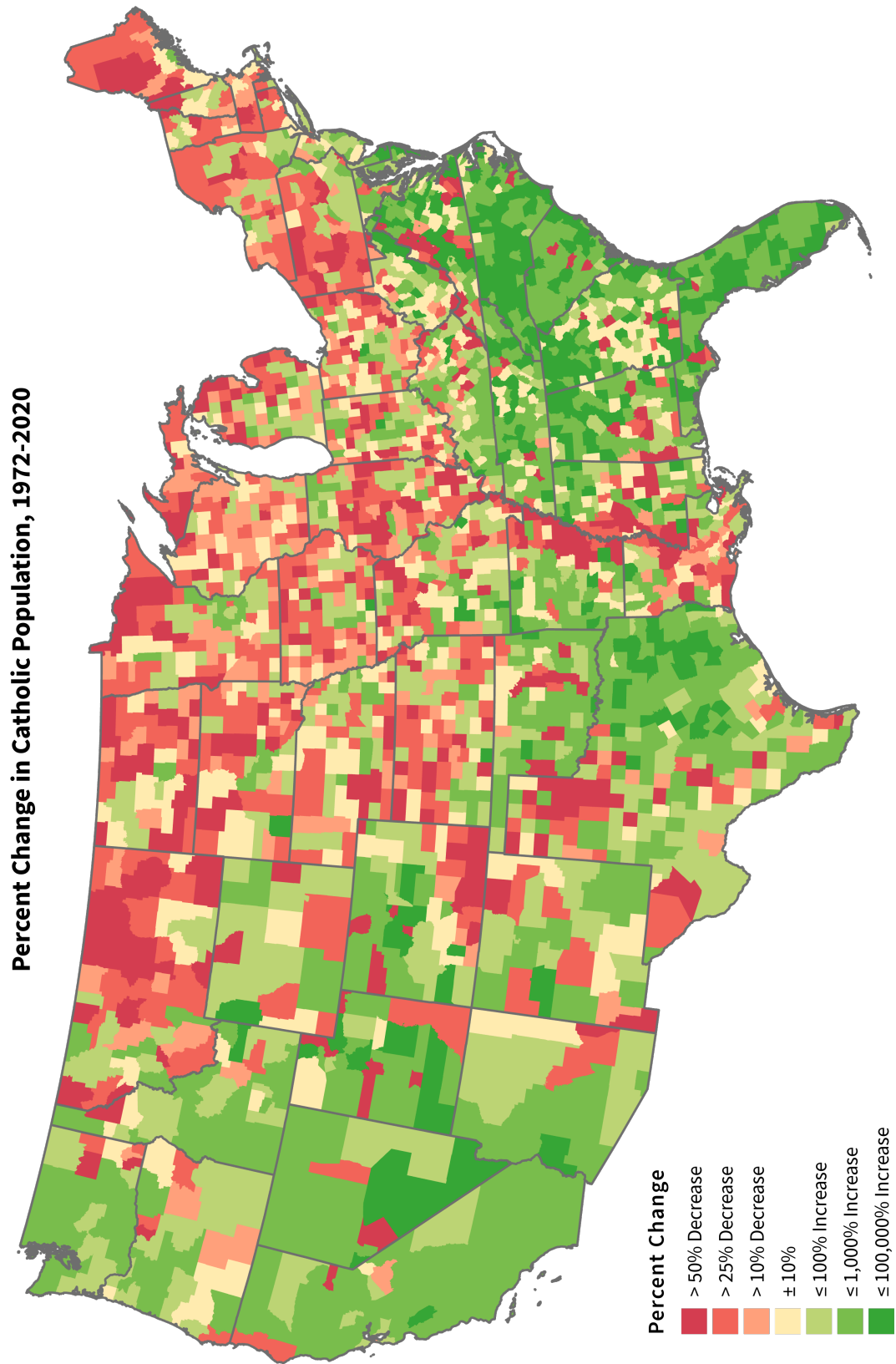


Figure 7: Percent Change in Catholic Population, 1972-2020

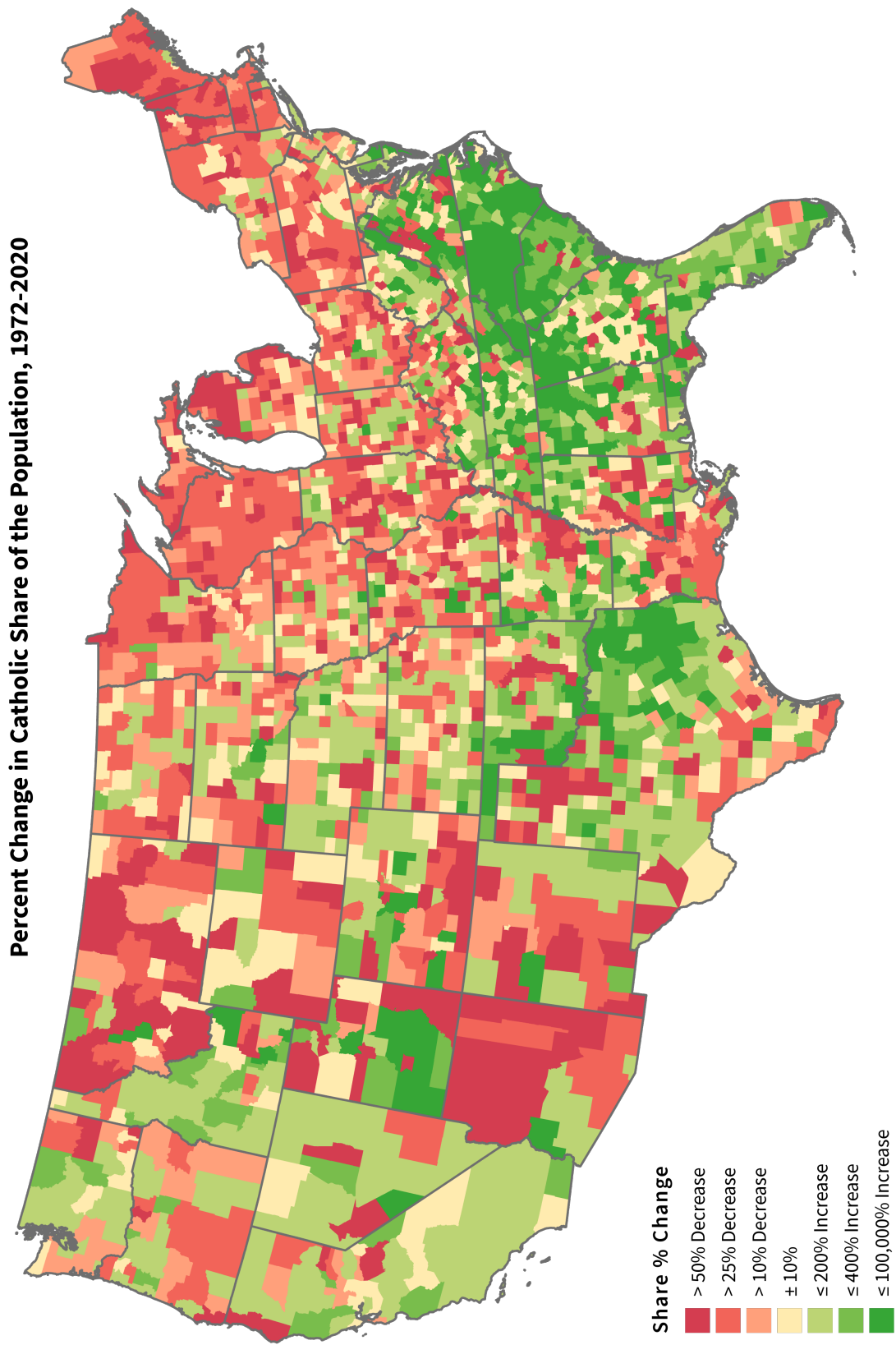


Figure 8: Percent Change in the Catholic Share of the Population, 1972-2020

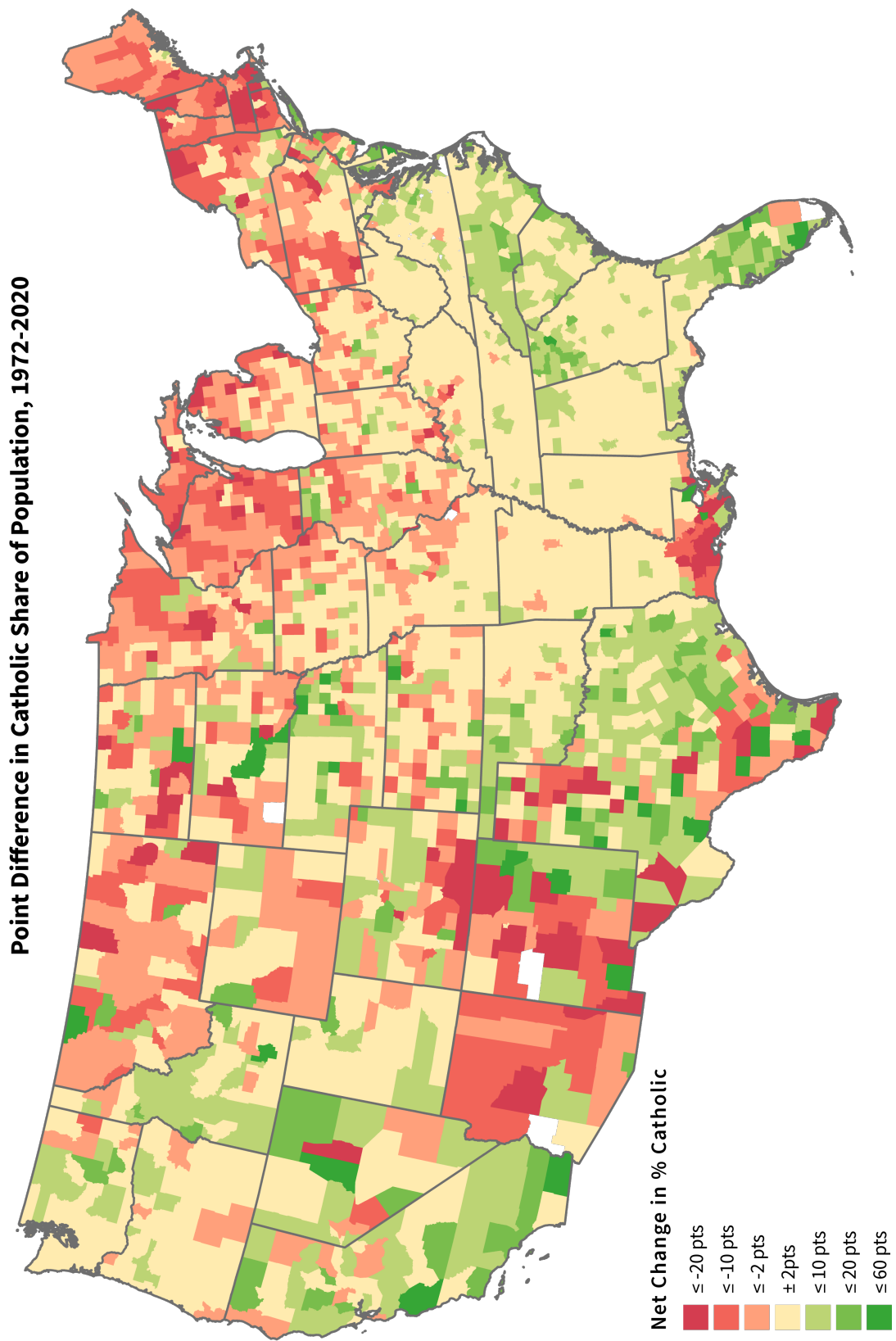


Figure 9: Point Difference in Catholic Share of the Population, 1972-2020

Of these maps, Figure 6 and Figure 9 are perhaps the most useful. Measuring the raw change in population is critical for understanding the magnitude of Catholic migration and disaffiliation. These measures are especially important for decision makers within dioceses, whose main concern is not the overall Catholic affiliation rate of the population within the diocese at large, but rather the number of individuals which they support.

Using a point difference map rather than a percent change to measure changes in adherence helps helpful in gauging the net results in changes in the religious landscape of the United States. The percentage change maps help view wider, regional trends (the South in both is almost entirely deep green); however, it obfuscates smaller trends, such as Catholic migration to Georgia being almost entirely centered on Atlanta. In the percent change maps (Figures 7 and 8), many counties showed a tremendous amount of growth, but the net result may only be a 1pt shift, given the small size of the Catholic Population.

Assessment

Putting these charts and maps together reveals the story of Catholicism over the previous fifty years. The commonly cited decline in Catholic population in the Northeast is shown to be an oversimplification, and appears to be only a phenomenon in the rural parts of the region such as western Pennsylvania, upstate New York, the interior of Maine, and western Massachusetts. While the inner cities and the Rust Belt may be seeing a decline in population, the suburbs have seen a net increase, one which is particularly dramatic in the metropolitan Mid-Atlantic. On Long Island and South Jersey, Catholic population growth is outpacing that of the general population. However, while

the suburban growth in the New York metropolitan area has resulted in some dioceses growing in population, the same cannot be said for any diocese in New England, except for the diocese of Bridgeport in Connecticut.

Similarly, in the Midwest, while the inner city and rural Catholic population has plummeted, most suburbs have grown in Catholic population. However, in some metro areas such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Milwaukee, this relocation to the suburbs has not offset the decline in Urban Catholic population, suggesting an exodus from the metropolitan area entirely. Indiana, Ohio, and parts of Southern Michigan have relative stability in the Catholic share of the population, and an absolute increase in numbers, presenting a rare exception to the overall decline in rural Catholicism in the North. Cities in these regions such as Columbus and Indianapolis also buck the trend of Northern urban decline.

In the Great Plains, the counties on and near the Mississippi River have seen a general decline in the Catholic share of the population, with relative stability in the interior, and slight increases closer to the Rocky Mountains.

Meanwhile, in the South, almost every county and diocese has seen an increase in the absolute number and relative share of Catholics. This growth is especially pronounced in Florida, the Atlanta metropolitan area, the western and central regions of North Carolina, and northern and central Virginia. Rural counties in the Gulf and Appalachian regions have lagged behind others, but nearly none have seen an actual decline in Catholic population. The glaring exception to this trend of growth can be found

in the predominately Cajun regions of Southern Louisiana, which has seen one of the most dramatic declines in Catholic population in the country.

In the Rockies, most states have seen moderate growth in their Catholic populations, though the Catholic share of the population is often stagnated or declining. Arizona and New Mexico have seen dramatic declines in the Catholic share of the population, despite the overall Catholic population growing incredibly quickly. The Pacific has seen a massive increase in the number of Catholics, however in the Pacific Northwest, this increase has been matched by an equal or greater increase in the non-Catholic population.

All-in-all, this adds critical nuance to generalized claims about the shifting geographic centers of American Catholicism. The widely reported decline in the Northeast and Midwest is real in terms of its overall share of the Catholic population, however, this may be more a result of migration of younger generations into the South from the exurban Rust Belt and rural Midwest. Meanwhile, the metropolitan Catholic population has seen dramatic growth within these regions, especially in the Mid-Atlantic. For reference, Figures 10 and 11 show the county-level Catholic adherence rate in 1972 and 2020 using religious census data source from ARDA.

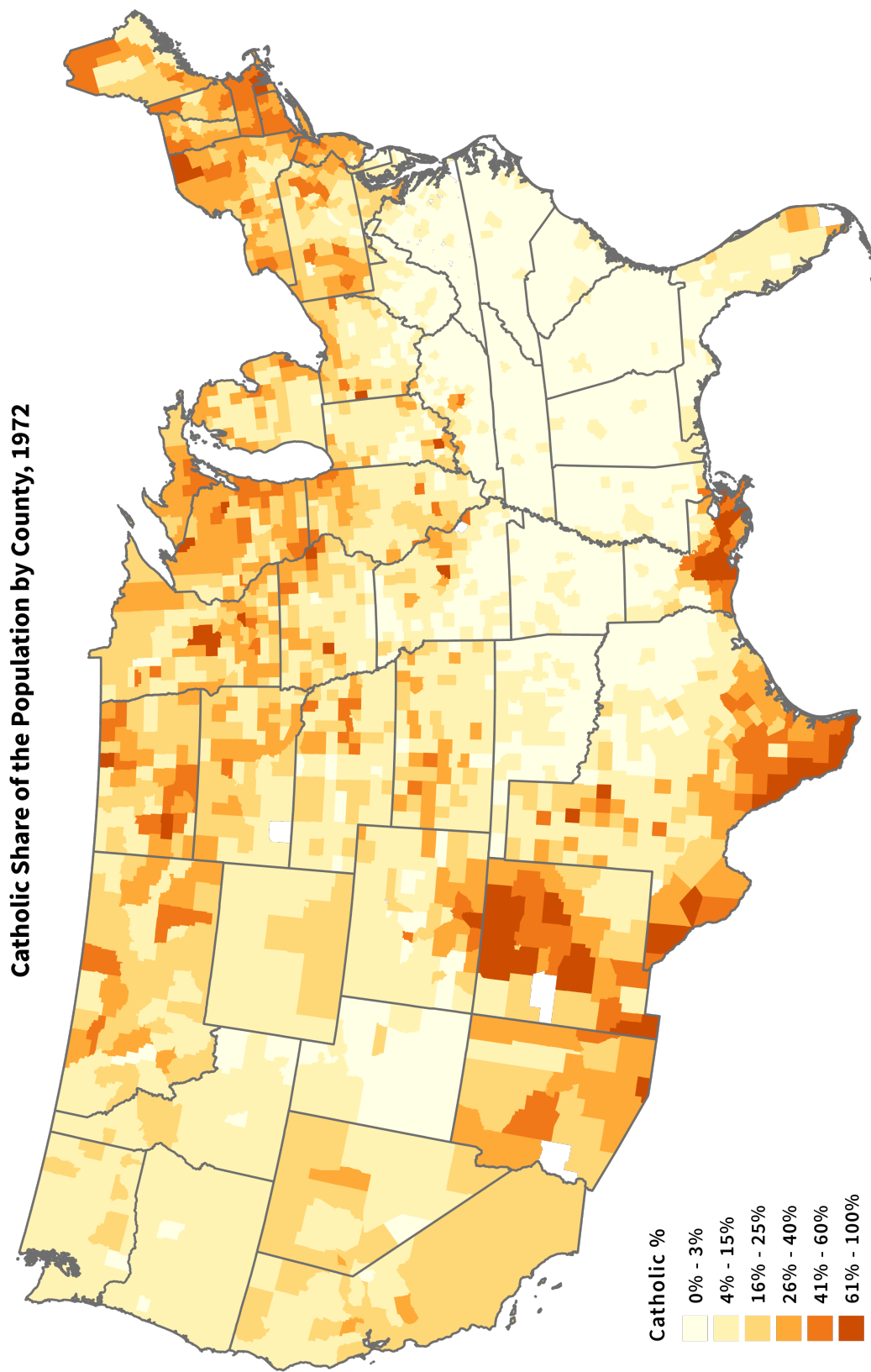


Figure 10: Catholic Population by County, 1972

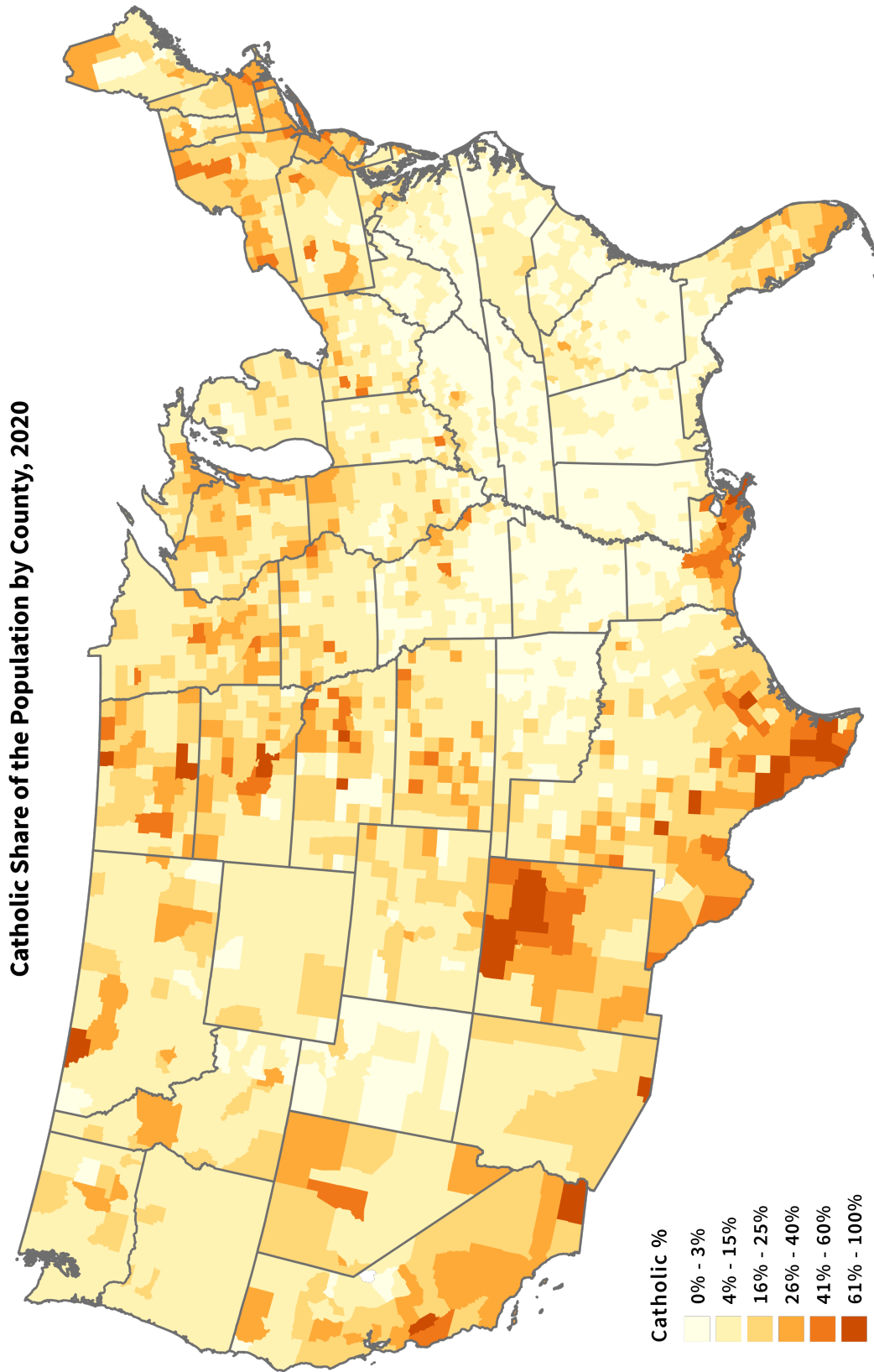


Figure 11: Catholic Share of the Population by County, 2020

CONVERSION, APOSTASY, AND MIGRATION

The next two attributes to cover are those which are immediately responsible for driving geographic shifts in the distribution of Catholics: the rate of individuals converting to and leaving Catholicism, and the geography of Catholic migration. Due to insufficient data, the other major driver – death and fertility rates – are not covered within this chapter¹⁰.

Retention Rate, Apostasy, and Region

General Social Survey (GSS) data was used to build a metric of converts and apostates (those who leave the faith). The GSS datafile includes the respondent's religion at age 16, and their current religion. Using these two variables, I categorized individuals into four groups: those who are not and never were Catholic, those who were Catholic as an adolescent but left the faith (apostates), those who were Catholic as an adolescent and remain Catholic (cradle Catholics), and those who converted to Catholicism sometime after adolescence (converts).

We can derive a retention rate by dividing the number of retained cradle Catholics out of the total number of those raised Catholic. To get a better geographic look at this distribution, Figure 12 maps the calculated retention rate by census division. Additionally, Figure 13 uses the GSS aggregate to map the percentage of Catholics in each census division who are converts.

¹⁰ Should geographic data on Catholic fertility rates in the United States emerge, a deeper examination of Catholic population dynamics and fertility rates will be in order.

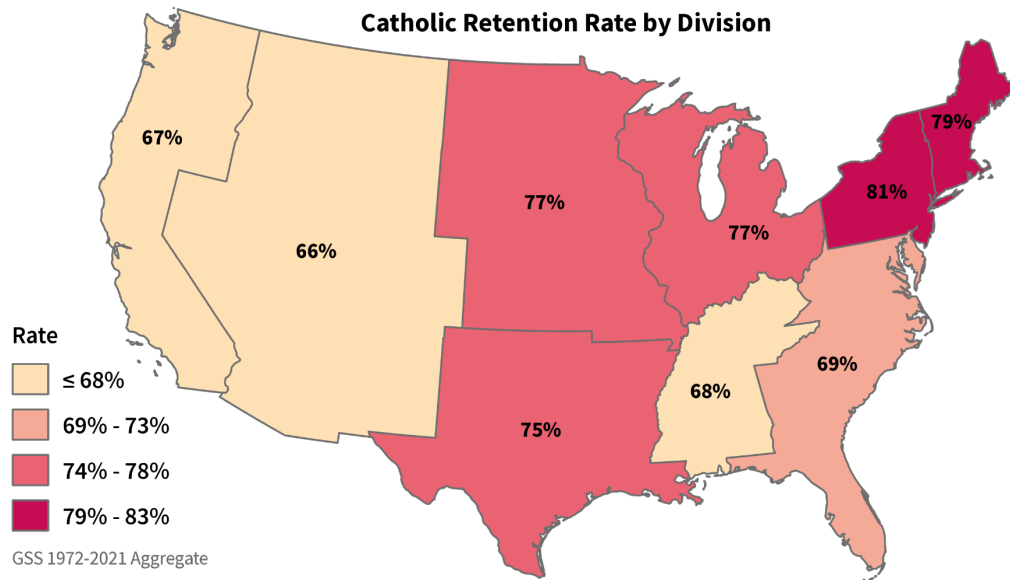


Figure 12: Catholic Retention Rate by Division.

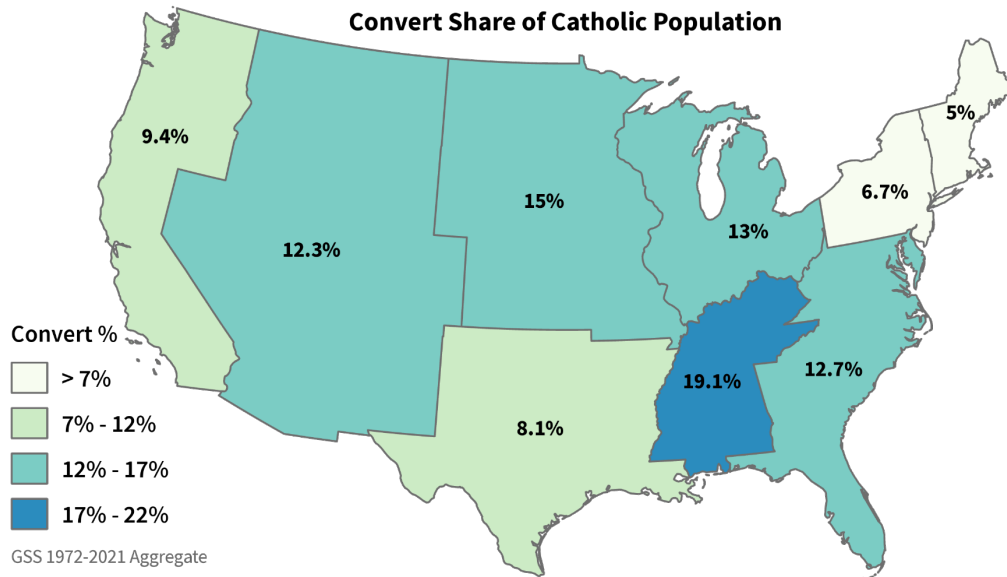


Figure 13: Convert share of Catholic Population by Region.

Running a regression analysis revealed a significant moderate relationship between retention rate and the Catholic share of the total population in a census division, at $\alpha = 0.1$, with an R^2 of 0.35. The South Atlantic stands as an outlier in retention rate, given its far lower retention rate relative to regions with comparable Catholic populations. Interestingly, as will be seen in Chapter 7, the South Atlantic is relatively similar to regions such as the Plains and South-Central in many characteristics, making the low retention rate a strange outlier. The West shows a very low retention rate – a theme which will become recurring in many statistics.

The statistics in the Northeast may be deceptive given the high rate of cultural Catholicism in the region, meaning many Catholics may have stopped practicing the faith altogether, yet due to a cultural link to the religion, still identify as Catholic. As will be discussed later, high rates of Catholicism and a long-standing Catholic population are highly conducive to cultural Catholicism. However, at this point it remains unclear whether the ease of cultural Catholicism explains the relationship to retention rate across all regions.

Apostasy and Geography

Next, I sought to identify whether being raised in a region results in a higher rate of apostasy than moving to it, essentially evaluating if the environment of an adolescent's upbringing impacts the likelihood of them sticking with the faith. A two-sample difference of proportion test was run to compare the percentage of those currently living in the division who are ex-Catholics to the percentage of those born and raised in the region who are now ex-Catholic.

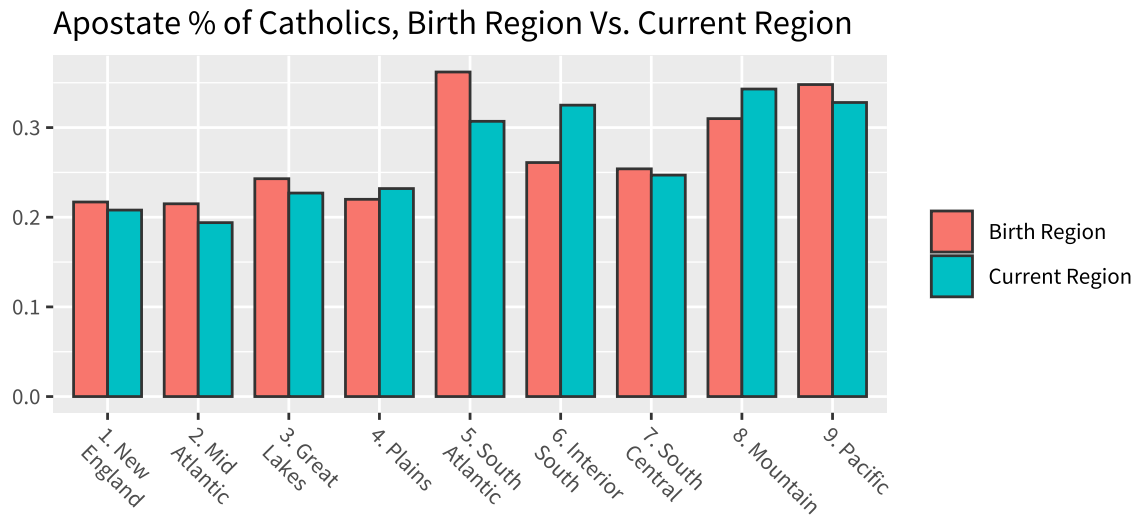


Figure 14: Apostate Rate by Divisional Nativity

In the Great Lakes, Mid Atlantic, and South Atlantic, the proportion of ex-Catholics was higher amongst those born in the region, at a point difference of 5pts, 2pts, and 1.5pts, respectively. In the Mountain region, the proportion of ex-Catholics was higher amongst those currently living in the division, suggesting an increased rate of disaffiliation rate amongst migrants. Running two-sample difference of proportions tests across each census division found that at $\alpha = 0.15$, there was no statistically significant difference in the apostasy rate between the current population and birthed population in New England, the Plains, Interior South, South Central, and Pacific.

Regional Differences in Apostate destination

Regional variations also existed in the religion that ex-Catholics converted to. Performing a difference of proportion test of destination religions by region between the 1972-1989 and 2000-2021 aggregates resulted in Table 4, with a significance factor of

0.15. Atheism grew in proportion across every division except New England, with the largest shift in the Great Lakes region. Interestingly, despite having one of the highest percentages of atheists, New England was the only region to see a shift towards protestant affiliation. One potential explanation is the predominance of cultural Catholicism – de facto atheists may be less likely to report a change in religion, meaning those who report leaving the faith are predominately those who

Table 4: Difference in destination religion of Ex-Catholics between historic and modern aggregates.

Point Difference of Ex-Catholic Destination Religions between the 1972-89 and 2000-2021 Aggregates.		
Region	Protestant Shift	Athiest Shift
New England	10.7	-10.8
Mid Atlantic	-11.5	9.6
Great Lakes	-15.5	15.4
Plains		
South Atlantic		
Interior South		
South Central		11
Mountain	-12.2	13.5
Pacific		
<i>Insig. differences at $\alpha = .15$ excluded. Pink indicates a shift towards a higher proportion of Athiests between the time periods. Blue indicates a greater proportion of Protestants.</i>		

are converting to a different religion and no longer identify with Catholicism even culturally.

Additionally, it is possible, but not yet tested, that the cultural Catholic phenomenon increases with the increased generational gap between the youngest generation and their first-generation immigrant ancestors.

MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

The second variable driving the geographic transformation of the distribution of Catholics in the United States is migration of Catholics within the country, and immigration of Catholics from outside the country.

Who is migrating?

Key to understanding the geographic situation of Catholicism in America, and formulating projections of the future, is evaluating the competing claims presented by Zech et al., (2017) and Davidson (2007). In their 2017 publication *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century*, Zech et. al postulate the main drivers of Catholic migration into the south are younger generations searching for opportunities. Davidson (2007), on the other hand, suggests that it is retirement age Catholics moving to Sun Belt states who are the impetus behind the regional realignment. While it is likely that at a national level, both factors are contributors, it should be possible to isolate regional differences in the age groups driving migration, as well as identify which group is the larger contributor nationwide.

Variables included in The GSS - the respondent's residence at age 16, and current region of residence – allowed for a comparison of migration between generations. A metric was created which assigned each individual a designation based on if they resided in the same region as their region at age 16, or if they resided in a different one. Figure 15 displays the generational composition of Catholic transplants (native born Catholics living in a region different from the region lived in at age 16) per year from 1972 to the present.

Additionally, a second approach was taken, this time plotting by age rather than year, to see the age at which Catholics tended to migrate, and help discern retirement migration from work related migration. The result is shown in Figure 16.

Generational Proportion of All Catholics Living Outside of their Home Region

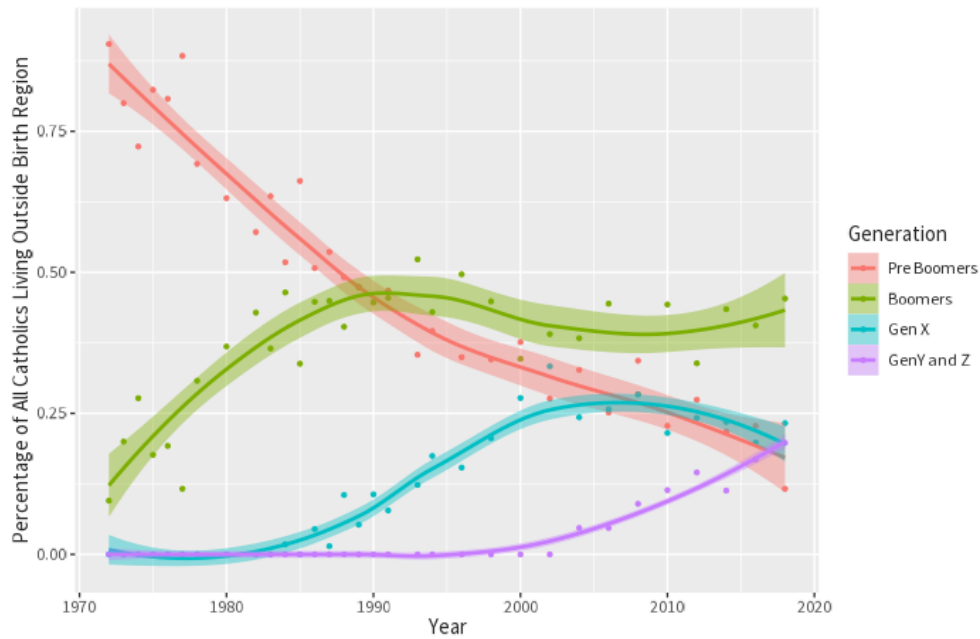


Figure 15: Generational Share of Catholic Transplants

Percentage of Catholics Living Outside Home Region by Age by Generation

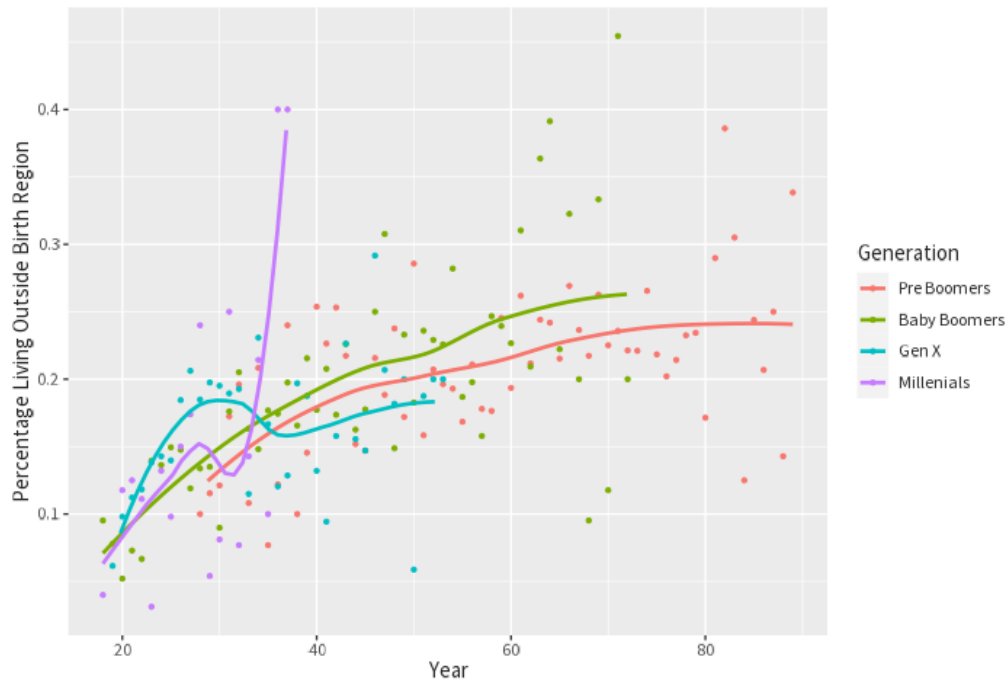


Figure 16: Transplant Share of Generation by Age

Examining the prior decade, Baby Boomers comprise the largest number of Catholics living outside their home region, whereas millennials show the highest rate of growth. A small rebound in the percentage of Baby Boomers living outside their home region began around 2010, which roughly corresponded to the first of that generation reaching retirement age. This lends some credence to Davidson's hypothesis. However, Millennials and Gen Z are making up an increasing share of the population living elsewhere.

Baby Boomers and Pre-Boomers followed a roughly steady increase in percentage living outside their home region. Gen X and Millennials both saw a dip in their percentages in the mid 30's and late 20's, respectively, which roughly corresponds to the advent of two major recessions, which likely stymied the ability for those who would otherwise have been purchasing a new property and moving elsewhere from doing so, resulting in a dip. The chart also reveals that Millennial/Gen-Z Catholics have the highest level of geographic mobility, with the largest proportion living outside their home region of any generation.

Where are people migrating to and from?

Thus far, this data still leaves us at the unsatisfactory conclusion of "it's a little bit of both". The broad strokes of Catholic migration can be derived from GSS data¹¹.

¹¹ An approach utilizing ACS data was considered, as it would give county-level analysis. However, due to the lack of the ability to filter ACS data to specifically Catholics, discerning Catholic-specific migration would require mathematical approximation of the proportion of migrants who were Catholic utilizing GSS data. This approach was deemed unsatisfactory as such an approximation had the potential to introduce a high level of error into the results.

Further attempts to discern spatial differences in age would require a more robust, county-level analysis, the data for which was currently unavailable.

Charting the region lived at age 16 by the current region of residence provides a rough overview of the origin-region of Catholic migrants, as shown in Figure 17. The reciprocal approach was also taken, looking at the region currently resided in based on each region of origin, showing the “destination” side of the equation, shown in Figure 18:

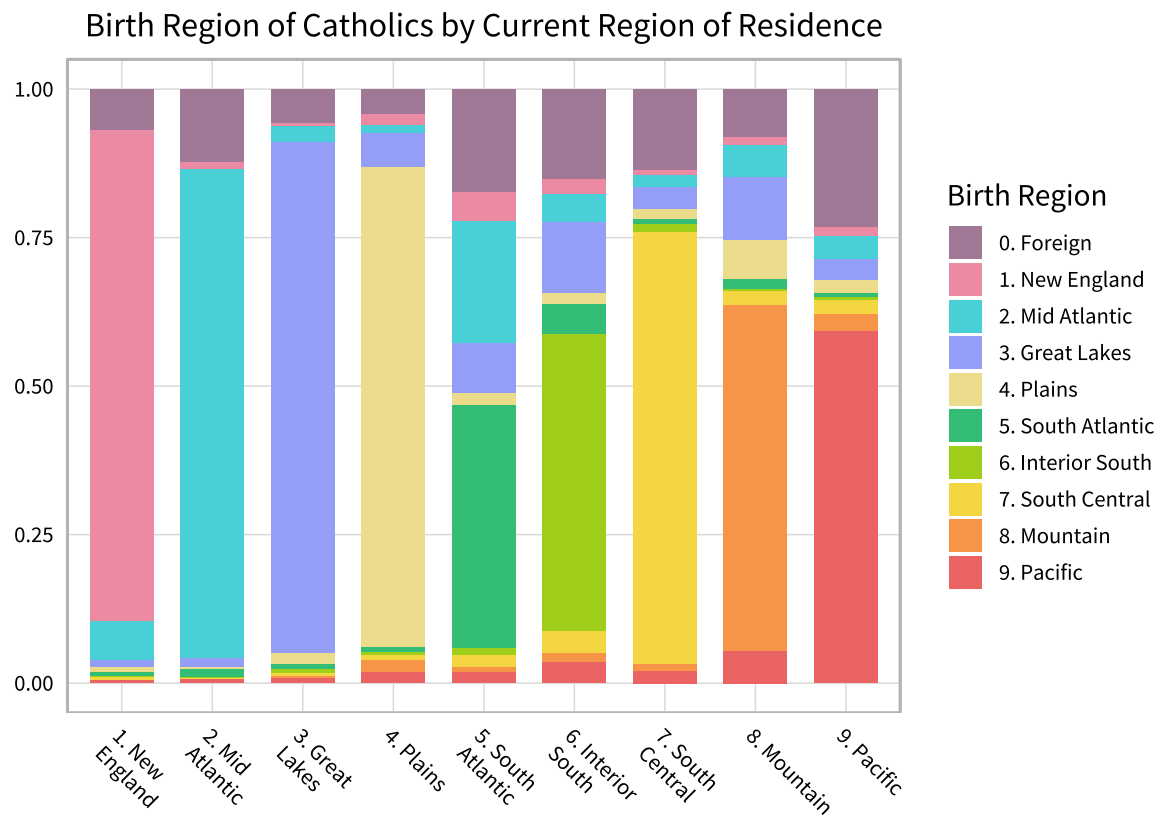


Figure 17: Birth Region of Catholics by Current Region of Residence

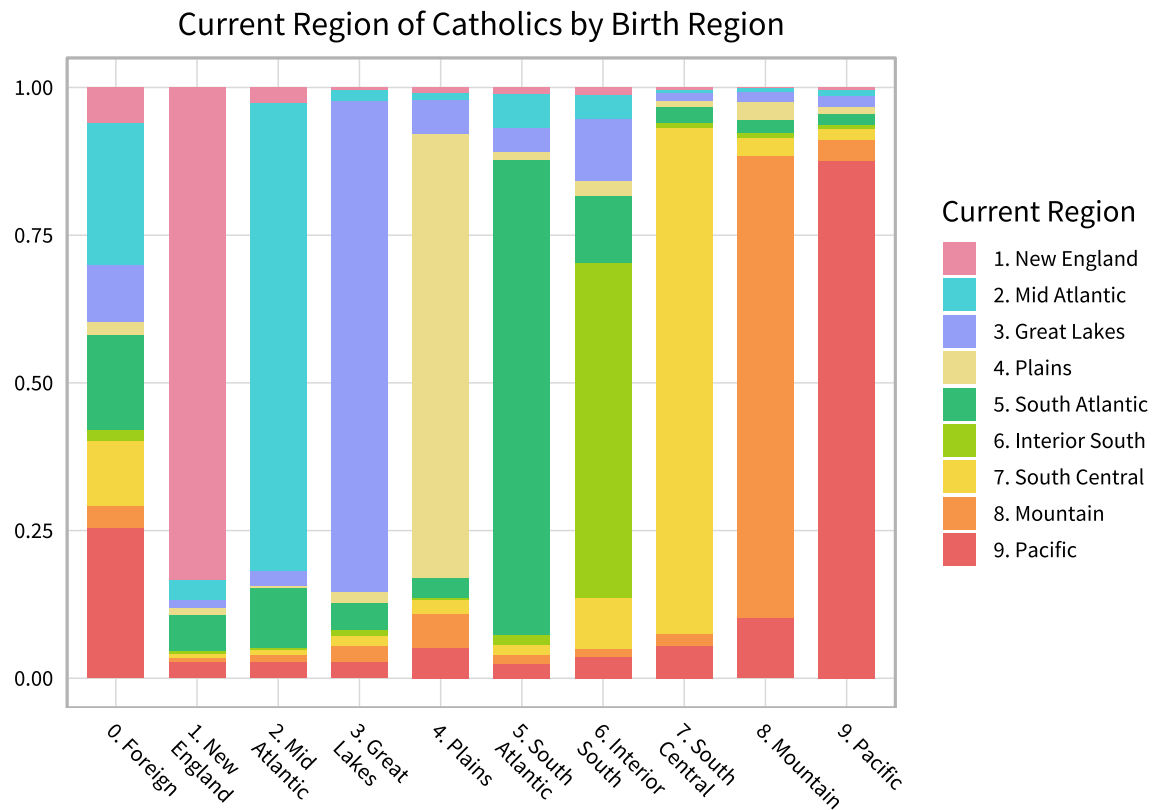


Figure 18: Current Region of Residence by Birth Region

Changes over Time: Migration

To measure the ebb and flow of migration to and from regions, the yearly proportion of Catholic transplants originating from each region was calculated. A two-sample difference of proportion test was run to verify that the proportion of transplants was significantly different from each region's proportion of the Catholic population at large. The test found that every datapoint was significant at $\alpha = 0.025$.

Figure 19 uses data to chart the birth region of Catholic Transplants, as well as the percentage of Catholics born in a region who end up departing after age 16. Although the results were significant, it is also helpful to normalize for the overall population to

visualize the rate at which Catholics leave each region – the push factor. Figure 20 does just that. Due to visual clutter, the standard error indicators are excluded. For reference, the margin of error for most years and regions is roughly $\pm 5\%$.

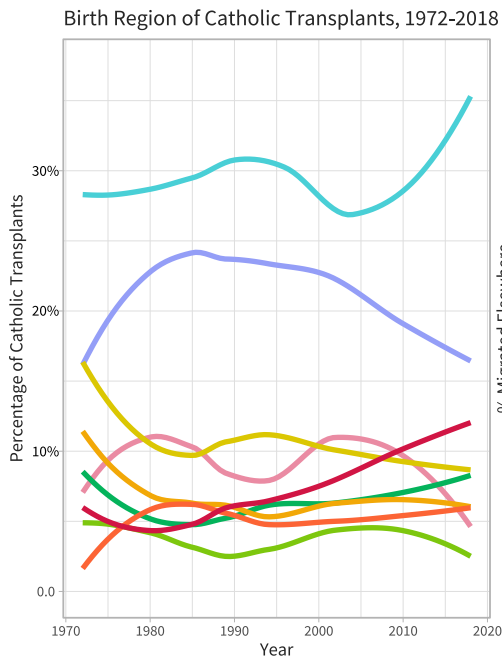


Figure 19: Change in Regional Share of Catholic Transplant Origin by Year.

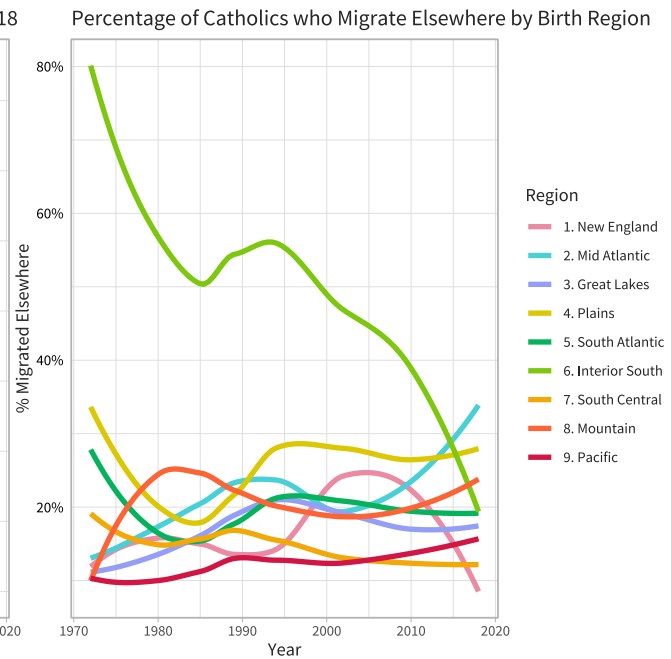


Figure 20: Percent of Catholics who later Migrate Elsewhere by Birth Region.

Early values from the Interior South are dubious, as a small sample size resulted in a massive margin of error of roughly $\pm 15\%$ until the previous three decades, when it became more in line with other regions. Regardless, even in a scenario on the low-end of the estimate would have more than half of all Catholics born in the Interior South end up moving elsewhere, a remarkable exodus rate. Given the lack of evidence of massive

Catholic population decline in the Interior South throughout the 20th century, either a high birth rate, a high rate of converts, or a similarly high rate of immigration into the must have been present to stabilize the population.

Migration rates also show another point of divergence within the Northeast – a region which previous literature has consistently given the impression of internal homogeneity – with the Mid Atlantic tied at the highest rate of outflow, and New England tied for the lowest. Figure 20 shows that the two regions had similar rates until the 1980s, when migration out of the Mid Atlantic began to accelerate. After catching up in the early 2000's, the two regions began to heavily diverge around 2008. At risk of a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, there may be possibility that this shift was a result of the Great Recession. Examining this thread further is outside the scope of this paper, but one which presents a compelling area for future research.

Migration and Rurality

Next, the composition of transplants was examined along rural, urban, and suburban lines to see which produced the highest number of transplants by region of origin. Figure 21 measures the number of the rural/urban/suburban residents which left out of the total Catholic population of the location type, as well as error bars at the 90% confidence interval.

Percent of Catholics Migrating Elsewhere, by Home Region & Residence

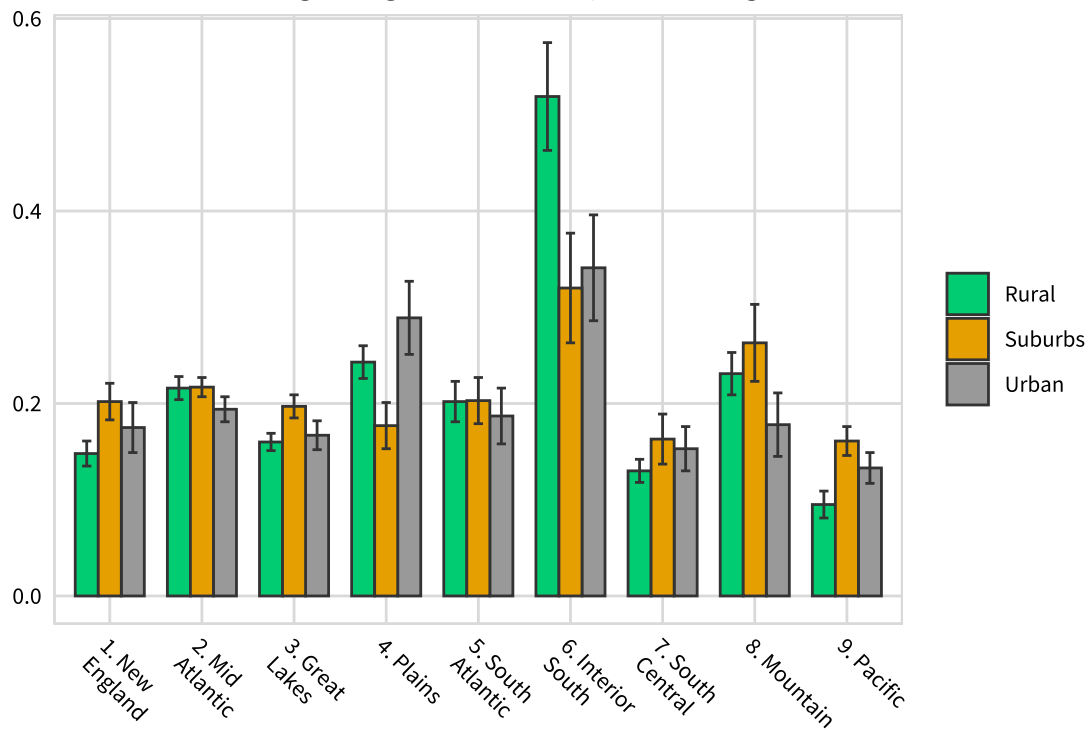


Figure 21: Percent of Catholics Migrating Elsewhere by Home Region and Area Type.

PARISH CONSOLIDATION AND PRIEST SHORTAGES

To parishioners, the two most easily observable and visceral measurements of the health of the Catholic Church are Mass attendance (thinning vs. burgeoning pews), and the rate of parish closures, consolidations, and construction, with the latter being directly tied to the former. Herein lies the starkest and most well documented geographic divergences within the American Catholic Church.

Writing on the realignment of Catholicism from the traditional hearths of the Northeast and urban Midwest, Zech et al., notes that “people move, but parishes and schools do not” (Zech et al., 2017, p. 9). While perhaps over-emphasizing the role of

migration, rather than conversion, the essay hits at a core issue facing diocesan administrators in the North: A large and widening disconnect between the physical edifices of Catholicism and the actual Catholic population. Zech et al. (2017) also notes that the majority of parish closures in these regions occur in urban areas, especially among parishes which were established to serve a specific immigrant group which has since assimilated or moved elsewhere. This thesis did not attempt to test this hypothesis.

Worsening the situation is the decline in ordinations to the priesthood. Many dioceses now face a worrying situation where the number of parishes far exceeds the number of priests. Figure 22 maps the ratio of priests to parishes:

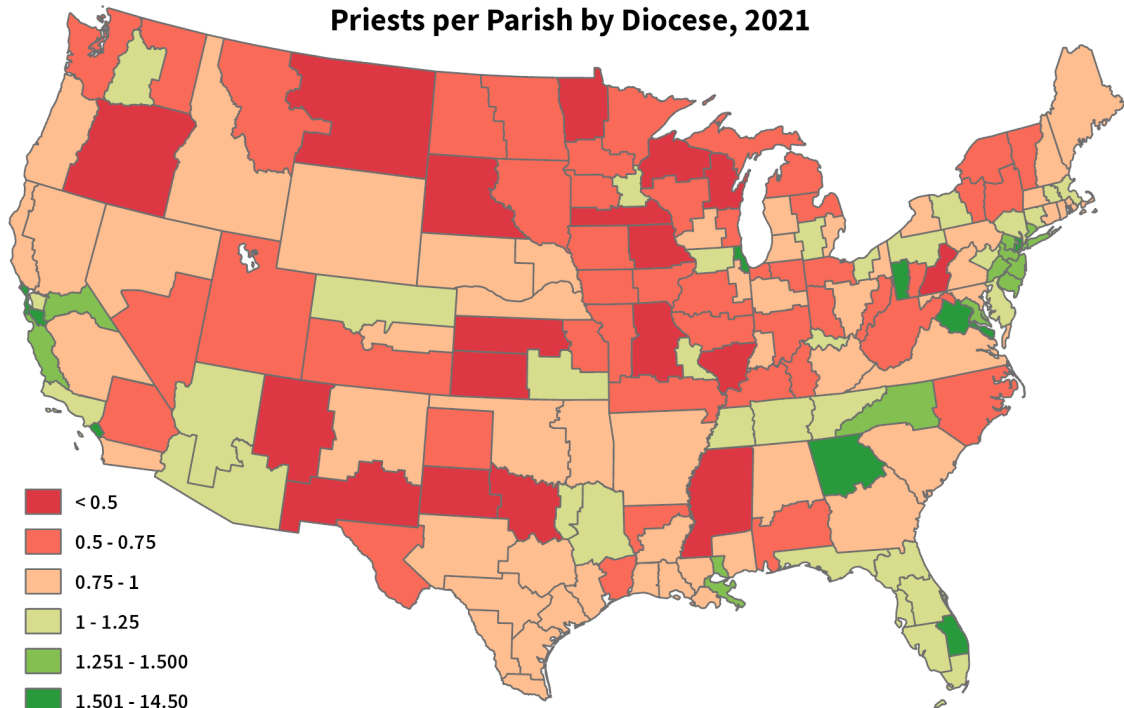


Figure 22: Priest to Parish ratio by Diocese.

In the wake of a declining and aging population, the priest shortage, and financial difficulties, Dioceses have often had to make the difficult decision to close parishes altogether, selling historic churches that have been home to generations of parishioners for over a century (Zech, et al., 2017).

Dioceses in decline have utilized different strategies in response to declining Catholic populations and the priest shortage. A common strategy that has become ubiquitous across the Northeast and Midwest is parish consolidation, where two or more territorial parishes are merged into a single parish, with a single priest assigned (Zech, et al., 2017). The congregations often move between church structures for Mass, alternating based on the day of the week. The 2011 Catholic Laity Poll, Catholics were asked their opinions on different strategies to combat the priest shortage, and found that 32.1% of Catholics responded favorably to parish consolidation. Catholics in the Northeast and Midwest – the regions where the Catholic population is declining the most - responded more favorably, whereas Catholics in the West – a region with a high rate of growth- responded the least favorably at 15% (American Catholic Laity Poll, 2011)

To illustrate spatial trends in parish closures and openings, accurate geographic data was needed. However, getting precise data on the change in Catholic parishes by year proved difficult. County level data from religious censuses provides only rough estimations, which have been shown to be off by a significant amount (when aggregated to the diocese level, the religious census data showed the Diocese of Arlington as having 10 more parishes than the actual amount). Data from the Official Catholic Directory only exists on the diocese level and has some consistency issues. Despite these issues, the

OCD was deemed the closest measurement of parish numbers. Unfortunately, this does preclude solid county-level analysis of parish changes.

With these limitations in mind, Figure 23 maps the change in number of parishes from 1981 to 2021.

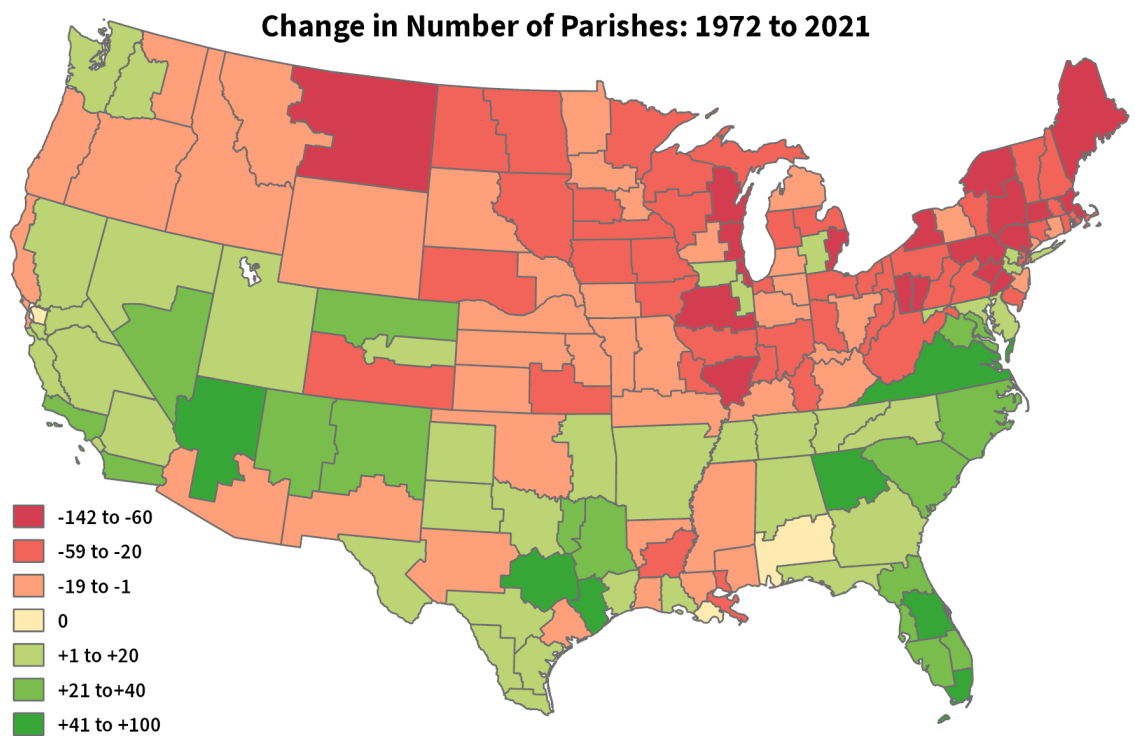


Figure 23: Change in number of parishes from 1972-2021

The intense decline in the number of parishes in the Northeast and Midwest is immediately visible. The American Midlands, Rust Belt, and New England were hit the hardest over the prior forty years. The situation is far bleaker than in the prior discussion of Catholic population growth, where there were some bright spots for the Northeast.

Every diocese in New England has seen a decline, as has every diocese in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa. The South Atlantic and Pacific have seen the most consistent and intense growth in parishes.

RURAL AND URBAN DISTRIBUTIONS

Another geographic variable to be examined is the rurality (or lack thereof) of Catholicism. The distribution of Catholics between urban, suburban, and rural locations was examined, differences between Catholicism and the general population, as well as the intersection between rurality and other demographic phenomenon such as migration. Later analysis will further examine these intersections by examining differences in ancestral composition between location types across census divisions.

Measuring Rurality

The General Social Survey includes two variables which measure the rurality of the location of the respondent: *xnorcsiz* (Expanded NORC Size Code) and *srcbelt*. Both divide respondents into differing sizes of cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas, with the NORC Size codes also incorporate whether the respondent is in a metropolitan statistical area. GSS data provides a decent insight into the location of Catholics within each census division.

County level assessments of rurality were difficult given the lack of a satisfactory urban/rural/suburban county classification scheme. The census definition of rural as being outside of a metropolitan area was deemed unsatisfactory, given its exclusion of counties most would consider rural (for example, Clarke County, VA) merely because they are within a metropolitan area.

Two approaches were considered for deriving the number of rural Catholics by county/diocese were considered, but ultimately what was decided upon was simply multiplying the total rural population of the county (derived from U.S. Census Data) by the county Catholic adherence rate derived from the county-level religion data. While this is not a perfect measurement, given Catholic adherence rates likely being higher in urban areas than in rural ones within the same county, it was deemed the best possible route. This study assumes that the error of this method is lower than trying to derive a complex multiplier calculated through studied attributes from the GSS, since those are only available at the division level scale. This study presumes that the internal differences within each county are smaller than those between the entirety of a census division.

Results

The Catholic experience in America is overwhelmingly an urban (and recently, suburban) one, with Catholics disproportionately located within urban areas compared to non-Catholics. Figure 24 breaks down the Catholic population in each division a consolidated version of the GSS's *xnorcsiz* variable with a consolidated number of factors. The difference between the Catholic and non-Catholic rurality rates were found to be highly significant at a 99.5% confidence level. This difference becomes even more dramatic when breaking down the religious affiliation of rural residents in the open country and in small towns, by region, as shown in Figure 25. Finally, Figure 26 shows the difference in Catholic residence type between a 1972-1989 and 2000-2020 aggregate:

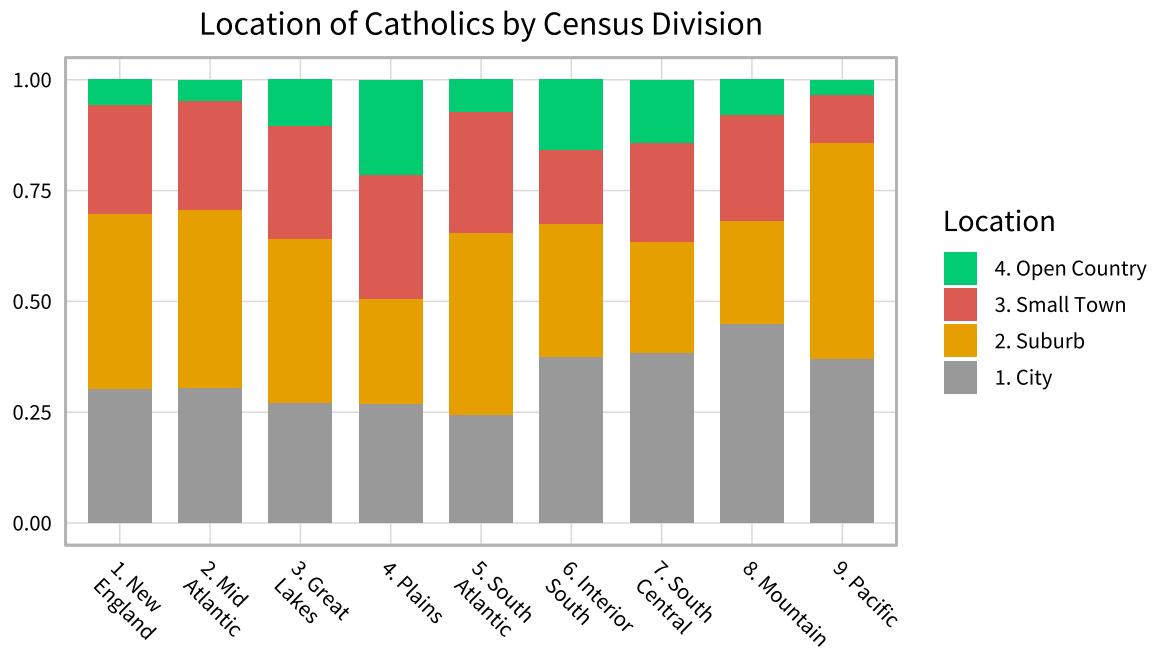


Figure 24: Residence location of Catholics by Census division.

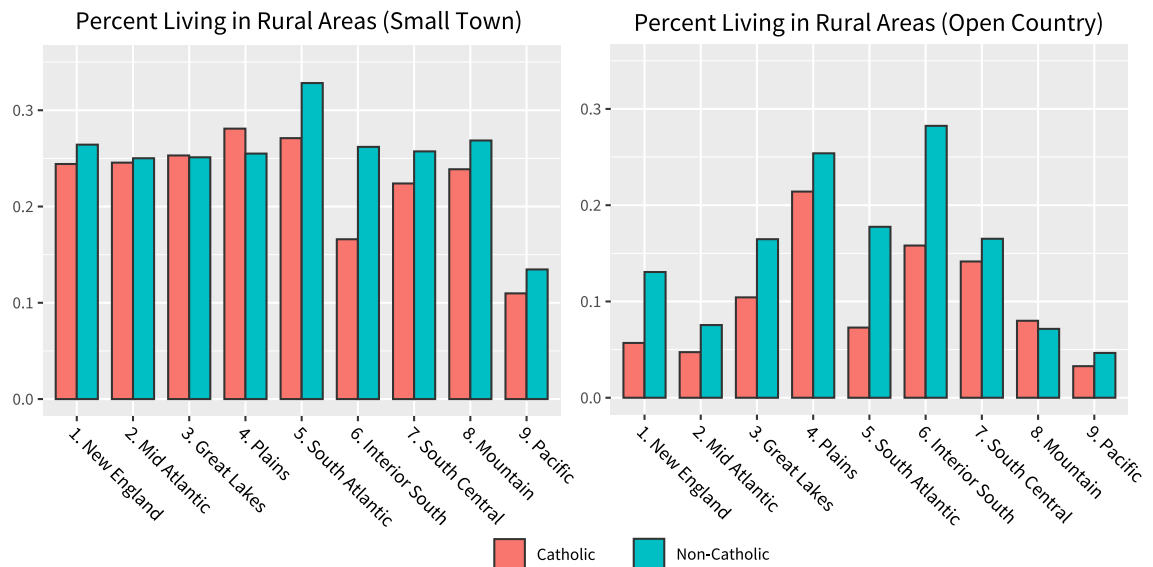


Figure 25: Percentage of Catholics living in small towns and open country by Census division.

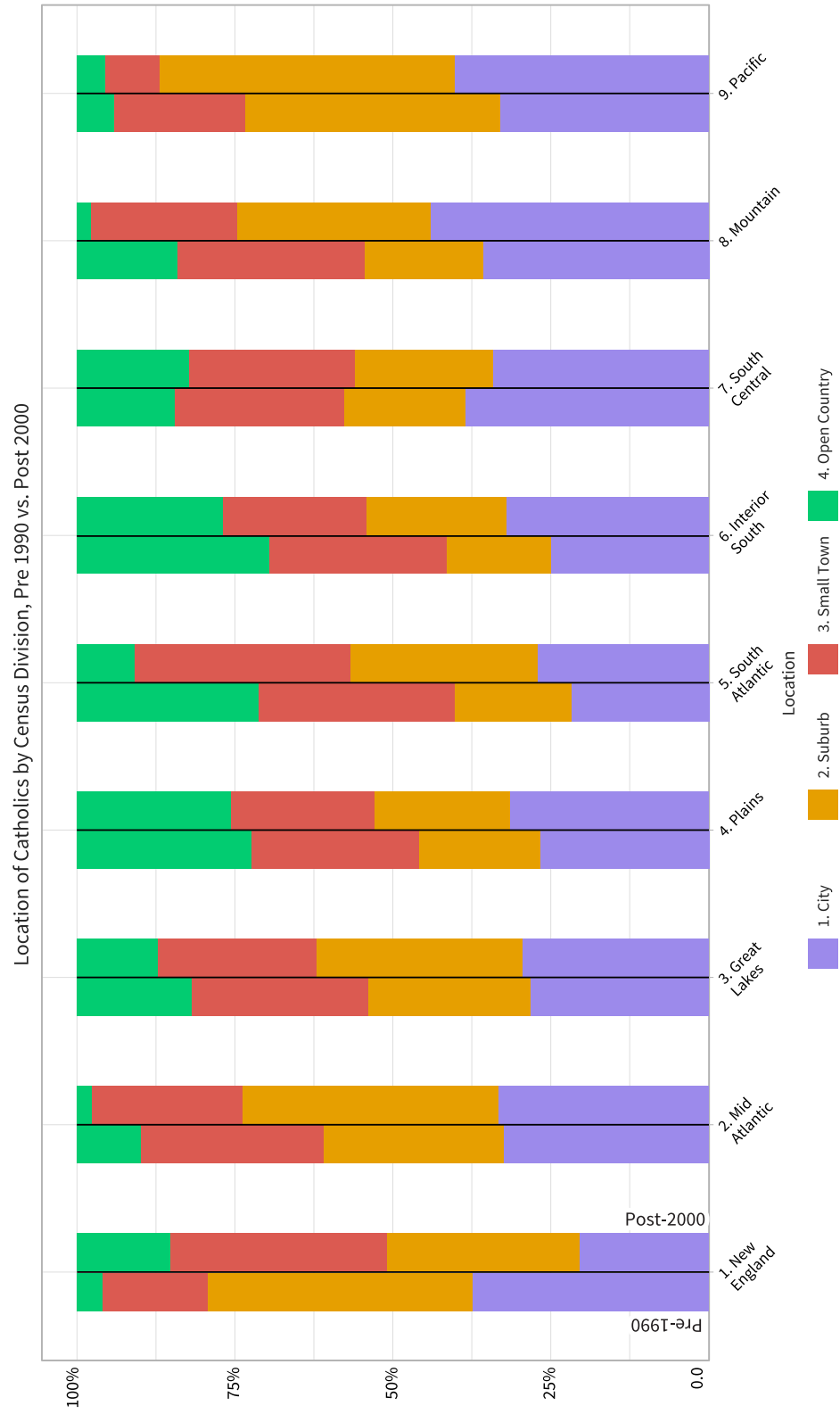


Figure 26: Residence location of Catholics by Census division (historical).

Catholics by and large avoid settlement in the open country, especially in the South. This likely owes to a history of targeted violence and discrimination against Catholics in the region, and a general lack of opportunities which would attract Catholic migrants in the years since the anti-Catholic sentiment subsided. Catholicism as a religion also lends itself towards a communal settlement pattern. Engagement with the Catholic Faith requires a parish to attend, with a Priest who can administer the sacraments, whereas other denominations or religions such as low-church¹² Protestants can sufficiently engage with their faith with merely a Bible and individual prayer.

Temporally, the documented shift of the Catholic population from urban centers into the suburbs also should be marked with a geographic asterisk. At a divisional level, the areas with the largest decline in Catholic population are open country rural areas, though even this varies geographically, as they have seen growth in New England. The suburban population has seen growth in nearly every region except New England and the Plains. Meanwhile, the urban share of Catholics has remained steady across regions.

This graph should be considered in light of the earlier look at county-level population shifts (Figures 6 through 9), which suggest that while the urban share of the Northeastern and Midwestern Catholic population may have remained relatively constant, this may be more of a result of a comparatively larger decrease in the rural population, which would be supported by the data in Figure 26.

¹² Referring to Protestant denominations with lower emphasis on liturgical ritual, such as Southern Baptists and Pentecostals.

ANCESTRY

The final and most complex demographic characteristic of Catholic geography to be examined is ancestry. This component is especially crucial for Catholicism in the United States, as the Catholic population is comprised nearly entirely of immigrant groups. Three topics will be examined: ancestral composition of each region, settlement patterns of each ethnicity, and the geographic variations in each ethnic group's adherence to Catholicism. This thesis' choice to statistically measure specific ancestries, rather than the simplified four census racial groups, when discussing geography is seemingly unprecedented in existing literature.

The first angle of analysis was to determine the spatial differences in the predominate ancestries of Catholics in the United States. Note that the following two sections use data aggregated from 1972 to 2022 to maximize sample size for each ethnic group and census division. A temporal breakdown will be undertaken afterwards. Data from the General Social Survey proved to be the best way to approach it, given its inclusion of an ancestry variable. Grouping respondents by region, and summing the number of each ancestry reported resulted in a census-division level breakdown of the ancestral groups comprising the Catholic population, illustrated in Figure 27.

Additionally, Figure 28 illustrates these breakdowns spatially by overlaying pie charts on a map of U.S. Census divisions¹³.

¹³ The GSS 'African' ancestry category does not differentiate between African Americans descended from the enslaved population and more recent immigrants from Africa. Second, the GSS category 'American' refers to the ACS ancestry category of the same name, comprising primarily of Scotch-Irish who have resided in the United States since the colonial period, primarily located in the Upper South and Appalachia. Finally, 'Other Spanish' includes all other Hispanic groups, including those from continental Spain - Brazil excluded.

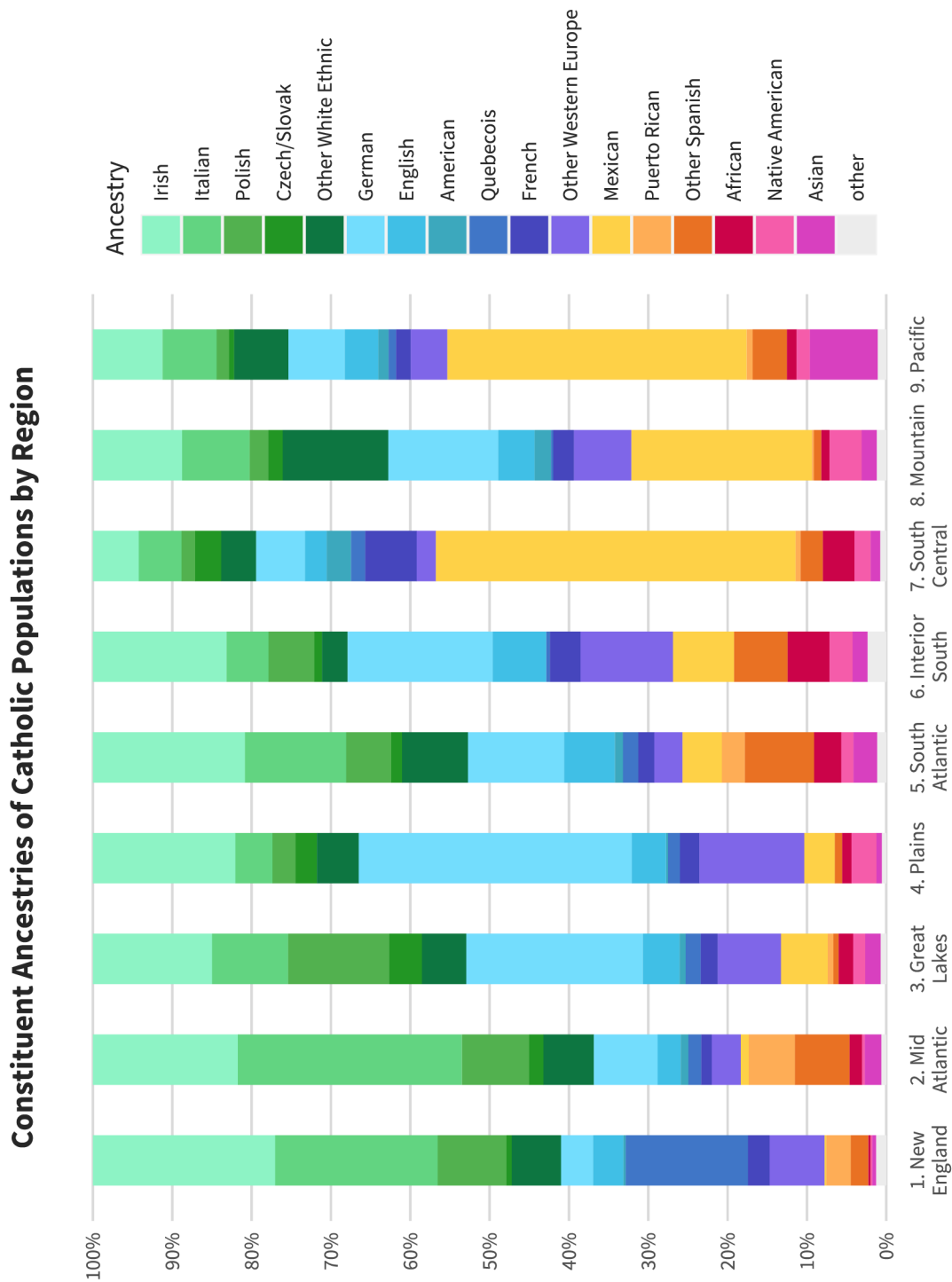


Figure 27: Constituent Ancestries of Catholic Population by Census Division.

Catholic Ancestries by Census Division

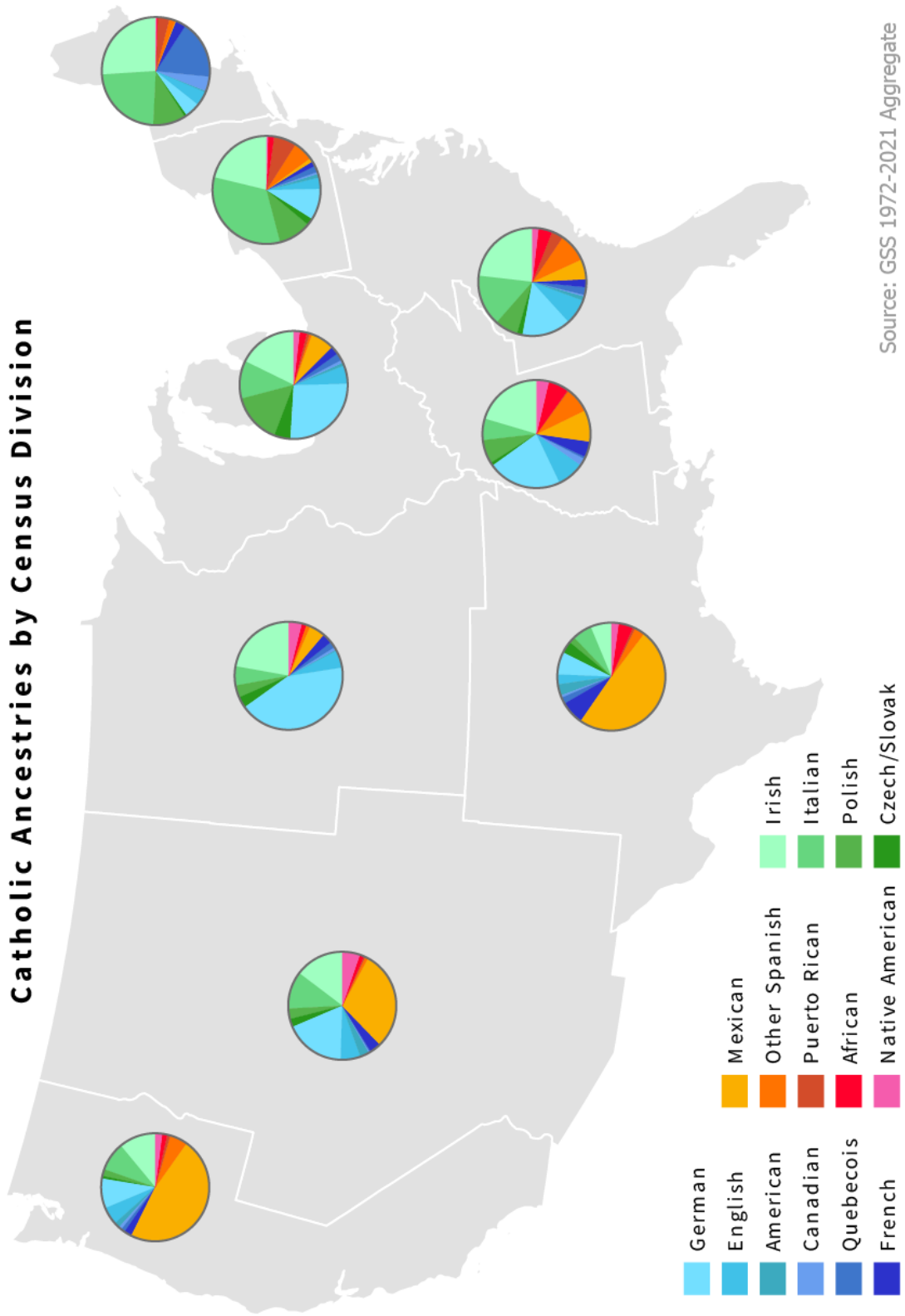


Figure 28: Constituent Ancestries of Catholic Population by Census Division.

While a myriad of geographic trends are immediately apparent, for the sake of brevity, only a handful of the most important trends will be highlighted here. See Appendix A for a tabular breakdown of the ancestral composition of Catholics by region.

White Ethnics make up the majority of Catholics in the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast, with their share of the population decreasing farther from the Northeast. Western Europeans (German, English, American, and Canadian) are strongest in the interior, especially in the Plains region. In the Atlantic coast, the predominant Hispanic groups are Puerto-Rican and other Hispanic groups, whereas elsewhere, Mexicans make up the majority of Hispanics.

The Irish form a sizable component of the Catholic Population across the entirety of the United States, showing a relatively even spatial distribution. The only regions where the Irish are not the 1st or 2nd largest ethnic group are the Interior South and Mountain regions, where they still rank 4th and 3rd, respectively. Where the Irish do geographically vary is in their overall adherence to Catholicism. Despite being the second largest ancestry group amongst Catholics (comprising 15.2% of Catholics from 1972-2020), only 36% of Irish Americans are Catholic. The only two regions where Irish are plurality Catholic are New England and the Mid Atlantic and are roughly tied with Protestants in the Great Lakes region (see Table 5 for a breakdown).

“White ethnics” such as Italians, Poles, and Czechs are primarily clustered in New England, the Mid Atlantic, and the Great Lakes. Italians comprise the largest ancestry group in the Mid Atlantic, tied with the Irish. These groups tend to be located primarily within urban and suburban areas.

Moving westward, Hispanic Catholics make up a massive share in the South-Central and Pacific regions, of which most are of Mexican descent. The Interior South and Mountain regions serve as a transition zone, where White Ethnics, Western Europeans, and Hispanic/other minorities make up roughly equal shares of the population, at roughly a third each.

In some regions, the Catholic character of a region is overwhelmingly the result of a single ancestral group. In the Plains, Germans comprise a substantial share of all Catholics in the Great Plains, at 35% of the population. The South Central, Mountain, and Pacific regions is defined by a massive Hispanic population. In the South-Central United States, a massive 45% of all Catholics are of Mexican ancestry, with the second highest group being the French, at only 6.5% - the single largest lead of any ancestry group in the country.

Similarly, certain ethnic groups comprise a substantial minority in only a single region, despite being almost entirely absent elsewhere. Filipinos make up over 7% of Catholics in the Pacific, but comprise less than 1% of Catholics in every other region. The Portuguese are almost exclusively found in New England, as are the Quebecois. French Catholics make up twice the share of Catholics in the South-Central region compared to elsewhere.

There is also a regional variation in the ancestry of Catholic Hispanic groups. Hispanics along the east coast of the United States are predominantly Puerto-Rican and non-Mexican Hispanic. In the Interior South, Mexicans make up roughly half of the Hispanic Catholic population, and in every other region, Mexicans make up the majority

of Hispanic Catholics, especially in the South Central and Mountain regions where non-Mexican Hispanics are nearly entirely absent.

Certain ethnic groups also tended to consistently reside near others. Figure 29 provides a correlation table of the Catholic populations of each ancestry group:

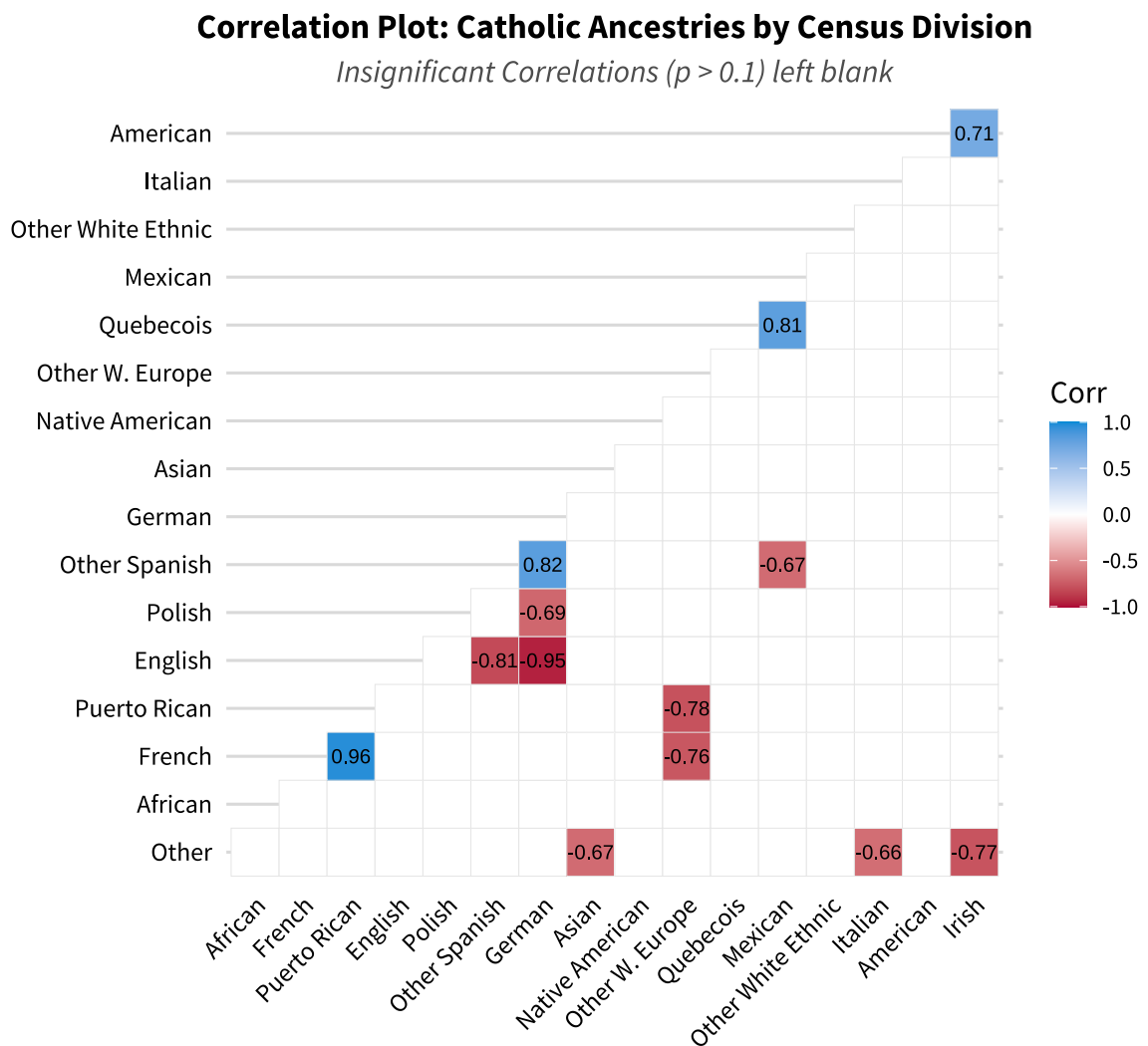


Figure 29: Correlation Between Ancestry Groups in Census Divisions

The majority of statistically significant correlations at $\alpha = 0.1$ identified between the proportion of an ancestry in a region were negative, with only four positive correlations found. The negative link between Polish share of a regions' population and the German share of a regions' population seemingly undermines previous historical assessments of linked settlement patterns of Poles and Germans in the rural Midwest. It is possible that a county-level analysis within the Midwest may identify a stronger link between settlement, or that the historical narrative simply overemphasizes a particular trend, while overlooking the wider demographic situation.

Adherence Rates

Having established the spatial breakdown of the composition of the Catholic Population by division, the next angle of analysis was determining how the adherence rate of each ethnic group varied by census division. Yet again, the GSS data proved to be the most useful. A table of adherence rates by ethnic group by census division was created by dividing the number of Catholic respondents of each ethnic group by the total number of respondents of each ethnic group, by division. This geographic breakdown of adherence rates is an entirely novel dataset, with no other like it in existence – a massive hole in the existing literature. Table 5 displays the results, with ethnic groups with a sample size of under 30 in the division excluded.

Table 5: Catholic adherence rates of selected ancestry groups by Census division (GSS Aggregate)

Catholic Adherence Rate, by Ethnicity, By Division										
Ancestry	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific	
African	6%	9%	8%	5%	4%	3%	11%	12%	8%	6%
American	15%	18%	9%	6%	4%	0%	20%	36%	23%	12%
Native American	10%	12%	13%	16%	4%	2%	8%	17%	16%	9%
Quebecois	76%	69%	59%	47%	50%	20%	62%	12%	40%	63%
Canadian	57%	46%	30%	29%	16%	75%	44%	17%	27%	38%
Czech/Slovak	46%	53%	60%	43%	48%	45%	51%	39%	25%	50%
English	15%	18%	12%	9%	6%	3%	6%	6%	10%	9%
French	47%	43%	35%	27%	18%	14%	43%	33%	36%	34%
German	32%	23%	26%	28%	14%	11%	13%	18%	17%	21%
Irish	68%	63%	43%	37%	24%	8%	14%	25%	27%	36%
Italian	76%	80%	67%	56%	56%	28%	52%	49%	46%	68%
Mexican	74%	78%	72%	72%	69%	70%	72%	61%	71%	70%
Other Spanish	68%	70%	52%	78%	45%	56%	50%	33%	55%	57%
Polish	76%	70%	74%	58%	55%	71%	53%	41%	31%	66%
Puerto Rican	58%	65%	53%	0%	48%	15%	49%	32%	46%	58%
Other	28%	27%	23%	17%	17%	11%	18%	22%	21%	21%

These tables reveal that the adherence rate of each ethnic group is not geographically uniform. Most ancestries show a higher adherence rate in the northeast, with a steep drop in adherence rate in the Interior South, with the other two Southeastern regions (the South Atlantic and South Central) also showing a substantial drop in adherence rate. Even ethnicities which are supermajority Catholic show a massive decline in the South. Italians, with an adherence rate of 80% in the Mid Atlantic, have only a 28% Catholic adherence rate in the Interior South.

Counting the regions with the highest, second highest, third highest, and lowest adherence rates for each region helps more precisely gauge the geographic trends of adherence and emphasizes the strength of Catholicism in the Northeast.

Half of the 15 groups examined have their highest adherence rate in New England, with another 4 having it in the Mid Atlantic; together, 11 out of 15 groups show the highest rates in the Northeastern United States. In 6 of the 7 groups where New England ranks 1st, the Mid Atlantic places 2nd. For 3 of the 4 groups where the Mid Atlantic places 1st, New England places 2nd. Together, only 3 groups have neither the Mid Atlantic nor New England in their top 2. Sorting in this fashion reinforces the low Catholic adherence rates in the Interior South, which ranks the lowest in 8/15 groups. The lowest adherence rate is in the Southeast for 12/15 groups, with 14/15 having a region in the Southeast in their lowest two.

Table 6 shows the point difference between Catholics and the second highest religion of each ethnic group by region. For every ancestry and every division, the second highest religion was Protestantism, with no groups (with a significant sample size)

showing atheism or other religions as the second highest. Cells in blue indicate a higher number of Protestants, and cells in gold indicate a higher number of Catholics.

The table reveals three groupings of Catholic ancestries – those ancestries which are overwhelmingly Catholic, those split between Catholics and other religions/atheism, and those which are predominately Protestant. Interestingly, despite making up a substantial share of the Catholic population in each region, the Irish are majority Protestant outside of the Northeast and Great Lakes. Likewise, Germans, though also comprising a large share of Catholics in nearly region, are predominately Protestant in every division. Notably for later discussions, 50% of Italians in the Interior South reported being Protestant, suggesting a heavy assimilation factor in the region, with a vast majority of Italian Americans adhering to Catholicism elsewhere, and only 0.3% of Italians in Italy adhering to Protestantism (Special Eurobarometer Report 516, 2021).

Table 6: Net Catholic vs. Protestant adherence rates by Census division.

	Net Catholic Adherence by Ancestry by Division (points)									
	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plain	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific	TOTAL
African American	-77	-60	-68	-73	-79	-87	-70	-55	-62	-72
Native American		-49	-65	-57	-79	-94	-52	-8	-34	-62
Quebecois		-49	-49	-48	-80	-87	-69	-27	-34	-61
Canadian	61	49	33		7		40		-7	39
Czech/Slovak	33	9	-21		-37				-18	-5
English		23	29	-7	25		13	4	-21	15
French	-52	-53	-62	-70	-76	-85	-77	-70	-55	-67
German	19	7	-13	-29	-47	-67	1	-18	0	-14
Irish	-21	-41	-36	-34	-59	-70	-63	-40	-36	-43
Italian	53	41	-2	-14	-42	-75	-62	-24	-19	-14
Mexican	66	71	48	35	33	-22	21	28	21	52
Other Spanish		65	57	56	53		54	37	56	53
Polish	44	54	22		15		14		30	32
Puerto Rican	69	63	59	33	37		14	13	-1	51
	29	45	26		15				19	32

Changes over time: Ancestry

To measure the change over time, the dataset was broken into two subsections: an aggregate of responses from 1972-1989, and an aggregate of responses from 2000-2021, giving a rough before and after picture. These two aggregates still span two entire decades, which means some temporal precision is still lost; however, breaking it down into smaller subsections resulted in too small of a sample size for most ethnic groups to be useful. Indeed, even with these large ranges, many ethnic groups lack a substantial enough population in some divisions to produce an accurate measure of change of adherence. First, Figures 30 and 31 show the ancestral composition of each census division using the 1972-89 aggregate and the 2000-2021 aggregate. Table 7 provides a tabular version, showing the calculated point difference between the two subsets:

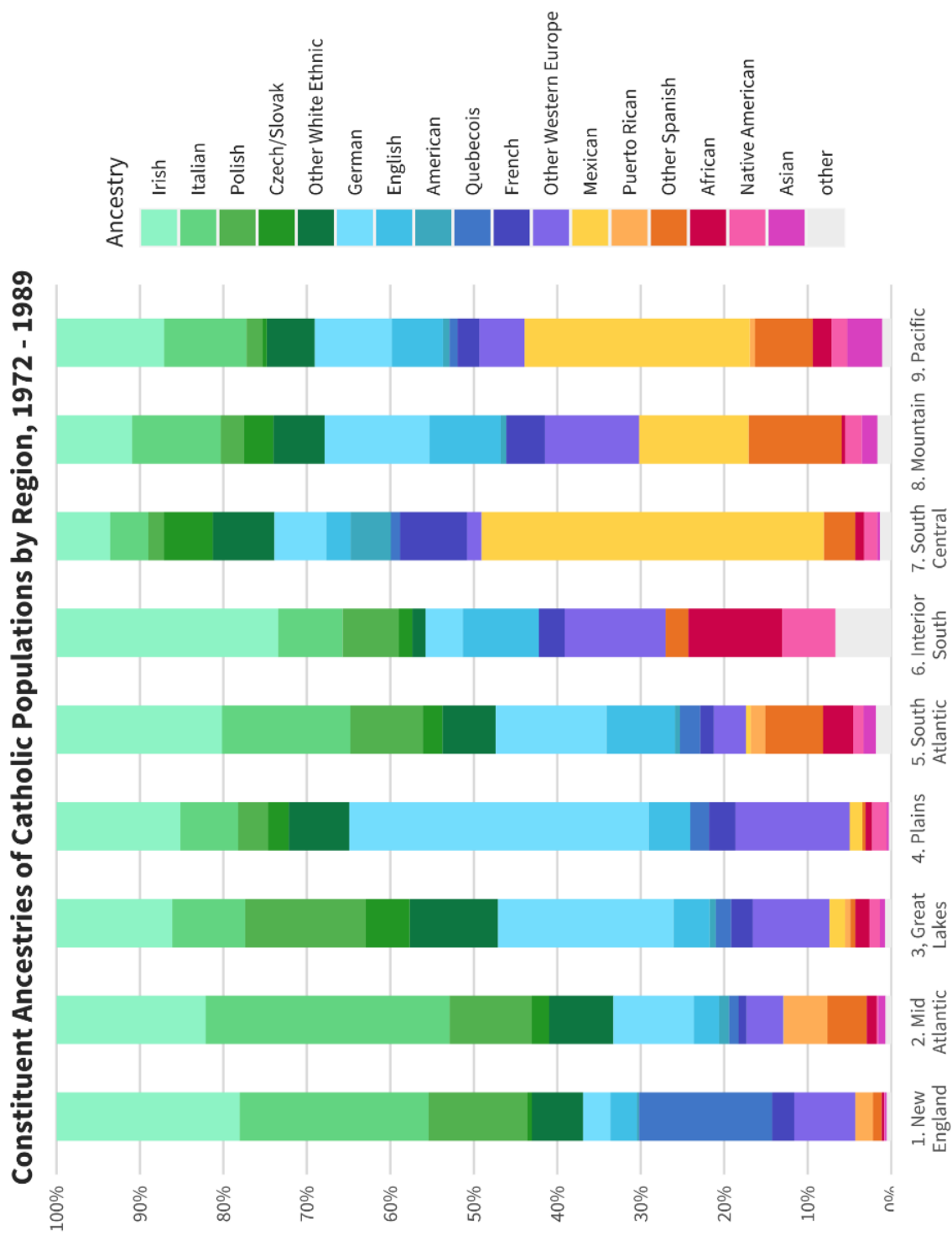


Figure 30: Catholic Constituent Ancestries by Division - Historical

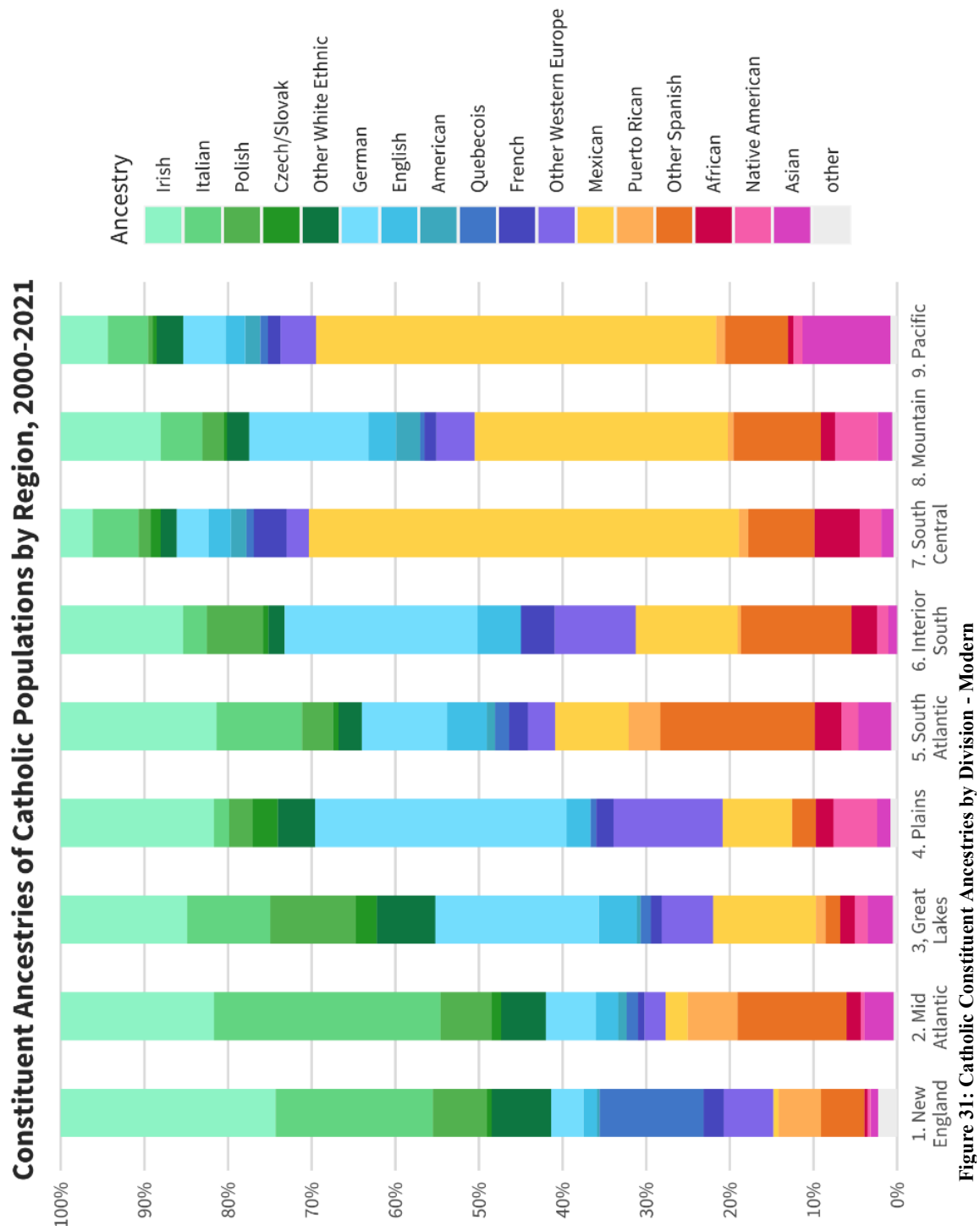


Table 7: Change in Ancestral Composition of Catholic Population by Census Division.

Change in Composition of Catholic Population Ancestry by Region																		
	New England		Mid Atlantic		Great Lakes		Plains		South Atlantic		Interior South		South Central		Mountain		Pacific	
	England	Atlantic	Atlantic	Atlantic	Lakes	Lakes	Plains	Plains	Atlantic	Atlantic	South	South	Central	Central	Mountain	Mountain	Pacific	Pacific
African	0.1%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	1.4%	-0.5%	-0.5%	-8.4%	-8.4%	4.4%	4.4%	1.3%	1.3%	-1.6%	-1.6%
American	0.0%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.3%	-0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	-3.2%	-3.2%	2.2%	2.2%	1.1%	1.1%
Native American	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	3.6%	3.6%	0.8%	0.8%	-5.1%	-5.1%	1.0%	1.0%	3.1%	3.1%	-0.8%	-0.8%
Quebecois	-3.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	-0.7%	-0.7%	-1.6%	-1.6%	-0.8%	-0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	-0.2%	-0.2%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Canadian	-0.7%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-1.0%	-1.0%	-0.9%	-0.9%	-0.8%	-0.8%	3.2%	3.2%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	-1.2%	-1.2%
Czech/Slovak	0.0%	-0.9%	-0.9%	-0.9%	-3.0%	-3.0%	0.6%	0.6%	-1.7%	-1.7%	-1.0%	-1.0%	-5.0%	-5.0%	-3.4%	-3.4%	0.0%	0.0%
English	-1.6%	-0.4%	-0.4%	-0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	-2.1%	-2.1%	-3.6%	-3.6%	-4.0%	-4.0%	-0.4%	-0.4%	-5.5%	-5.5%	-3.9%	-3.9%
French	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-1.4%	-1.4%	-1.1%	-1.1%	0.6%	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%	-4.6%	-4.6%	-3.4%	-3.4%	-1.2%	-1.2%
German	0.6%	-3.8%	-3.8%	-3.8%	-2.1%	-2.1%	-5.8%	-5.8%	-3.3%	-3.3%	18.6%	18.6%	-2.7%	-2.7%	1.3%	1.3%	-4.1%	-4.1%
Irish	3.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	0.8%	3.7%	3.7%	-1.6%	-1.6%	-12.3%	-12.3%	-3.0%	-3.0%	2.6%	2.6%	-7.3%	-7.3%
Italian	-3.8%	-2.4%	-2.4%	-2.4%	1.0%	1.0%	-5.3%	-5.3%	-5.5%	-5.5%	-5.0%	-5.0%	0.7%	0.7%	-6.0%	-6.0%	-5.1%	-5.1%
Mexican	0.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	10.6%	10.6%	6.9%	6.9%	8.3%	8.3%	12.3%	12.3%	8.6%	8.6%	16.8%	16.8%	21.0%	21.0%
Other Spanish	2.4%	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%	1.0%	1.0%	2.4%	2.4%	7.0%	7.0%	10.9%	10.9%	3.7%	3.7%	1.3%	1.3%	2.0%	2.0%
Polish	-5.4%	-3.9%	-3.9%	-3.9%	-4.7%	-4.7%	-0.8%	-0.8%	-5.2%	-5.2%	-0.1%	-0.1%	-0.5%	-0.5%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-1.4%	-1.4%
Puerto Rican	3.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	2.0%	0.4%	0.4%	1.1%	1.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.4%	0.4%
OTHER	4.5%	-1.2%	-1.2%	-1.2%	-1.1%	-1.1%	-1.1%	-1.1%	3.9%	3.9%	-10.5%	-10.5%	-0.4%	-0.4%	-11.4%	-11.4%	2.0%	2.0%

The most striking change between the two time periods is the growth in the Hispanic population, especially with non-Puerto Rican and non-Mexican Hispanics. Examining the more minute differences, we find that the groups which shrunk the most as a percent of the total Catholic population are white ethnics other than the Irish, which stayed stable in the North but experienced a sharp decline in the Interior South and Pacific. The Quebecois and French experienced moderate decline in New England and the Interior South, respectively - two regions where they are most concentrated. The Mexican share of the population grew tremendously in every region except for New England and the Mid Atlantic, where it stayed relatively stable. In the Northeast, Puerto Ricans and other non-Mexican Hispanics grew the most.

The strange case of the substantial drop in German population and spike in Irish population in the Interior South stands out among changes in European ancestry groups. The sample sizes are sufficient to rule out the possibility of it being a statistical error. At this point, no immediate explanation was able to be discerned.

These cases highlight the importance of discarding over-generalized census racial groups, as they conceal remarkable transformations within each category.

Ancestry and Adherence

A similar process was used to measure the shifts in adherence rates between the 1972-1989 and 2000-2021 GSS aggregates. However, due to limited sample size, and mismatches in sample sizes between the two subsets, only about half of the ancestry/division pairs had significant data. A matched two sample proportion test was run to test to see if the changes in adherence were statistically significant, resulting in the

following table, with non-significant results in gray italics, and those with sample sizes below 20 left empty. Table 8 displays the results.

Table 8: Point change in Catholic Adherence Rate by Ancestry by Census Division

Point Change in Adherence Rate by Ancestry by Region, 1972-89 to 2000-21									
	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific
African	-2%	-2%	-2%	27%	-6%	-2%	7%	0%	
American		-5%	-2%		1%		-10%	27%	
Native American		4%	-11%	-1%	4%	-2%	4%	5%	-3%
French Canadian	-9%	12%	-16%		-3%				
Canadian (Other)	-26%							21%	
Czech / Slovak		0%	-13%				-33%		
English	-6%	4%	1%	-3%	1%	1%	2%	-2%	0%
French	-24%	-1%	-28%	-1%	14%		-18%	-22%	11%
German	-9%	1%	-1%	-2%	3%	16%	-1%	2%	0%
Irish	-15%	-14%	-8%	4%	6%	0%	0%	2%	-5%
Italian	-16%	-12%	-21%		-16%		-18%	-25%	-22%
Mexican			-7%				-7%	-8%	-8%
Other Spanish		-5%			-17%			32%	
Polish	-30%	-4%	-17%		-30%			-12%	
Puerto Rican		-14%							
Other	-7%	-8%	-4%	1%	4%	0%	-4%	-7%	2%
Division/Ethnic pairs with n < 20 excluded. Results insignificant at $\alpha = 0.15$ in gray italics									

Of the groups with sufficient sample sizes, the declines were most numerous and severe in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions, with the highest in New England. Hispanic groups saw the largest point decline in the Pacific regions, while European ancestries generally remained stable in the West, except for Italians. There were no statistically significant changes in any measured ethnic group within the Plains region. Most ethnic groups saw an increase in adherence within the South Atlantic and Interior

South. Given the conversion discussed earlier, this is likely due to an influx of Catholics from other regions, rather than a conversion of existing populations to Catholicism.

Ancestry and Rurality

Some Catholic ethnic groups showed significant leans towards rural or urban settings, with some differing from their non-Catholic peers. Figure 32 separates the rural and urban Catholic populations, providing a comparison of the ethnic composition of each.

Rural areas tend to have a higher proportion of Western Europeans, especially in the Northeast and Midwest. As discussed in Chapter 5, Western European immigrants arrived earlier, allowing them to purchase land while the West was still open. The farming background of many German immigrants also attracted them to settle in rural areas (Gaustad, et. al, 2001). A geographic divide amongst Hispanic Catholics also becomes clear, with those in the West being more split between rural and urban areas, and those in the East being overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas.

Figure 32 does not allow for an easy comparison of the rate at which each ethnicity settled in rural vs. urban settings. To examine that, Table 9 displays the percent of the Catholic population of each ethnicity living in a rural area. Populations with a majority living in rural areas are shaded in green, and those with a majority in urban/suburban areas in purple, and those with statistically identical proportions living in rural and urban areas are in gray italics.

Constituent Ancestries of Rural and Urban Catholic Populations by Region

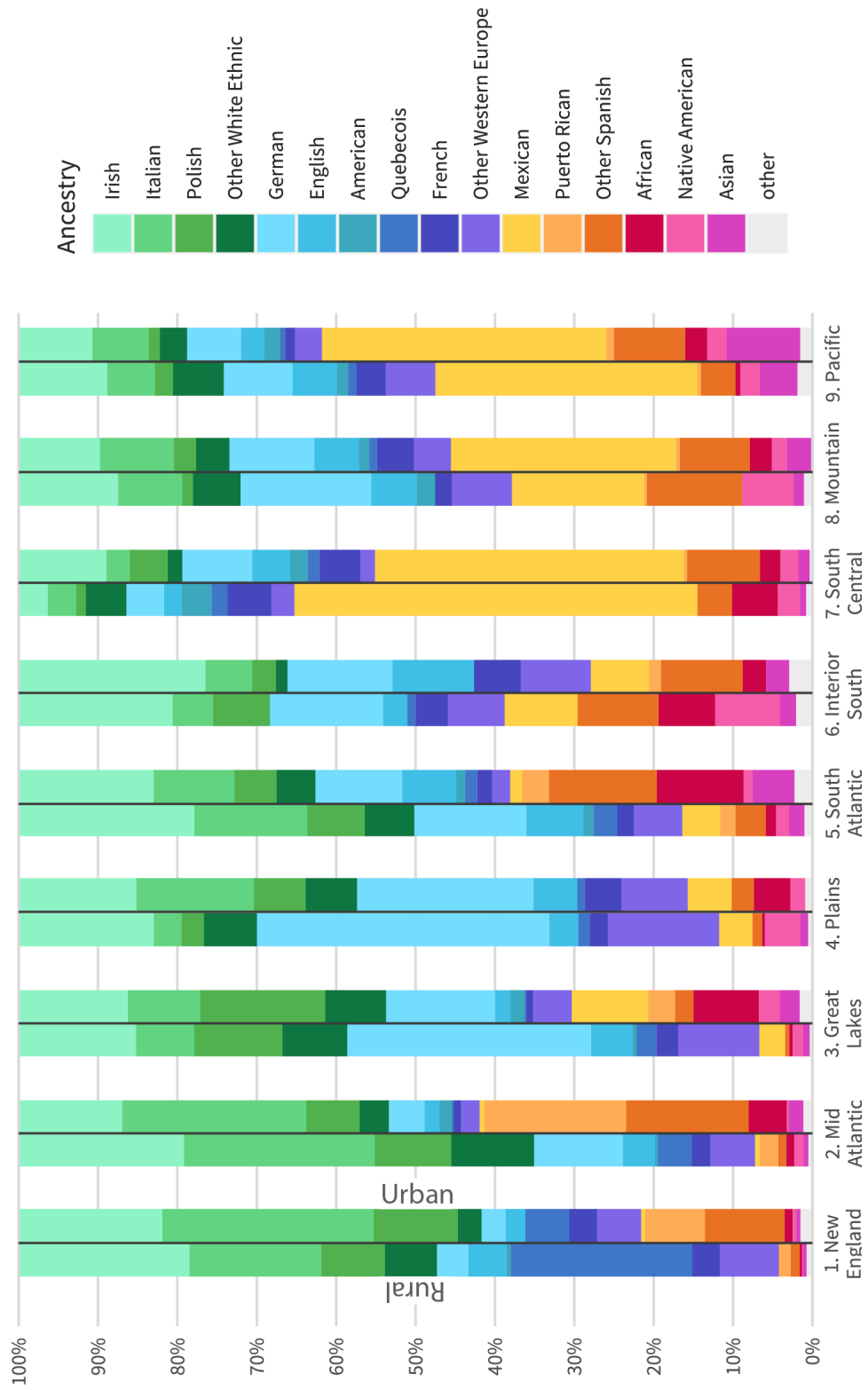


Figure 32: Catholic Constituent Ancestries by Division and Rurality

Table 9: Percent of Catholics living in rural areas by Census division, 1972-2021 aggregate.

Percent of Catholic Ancestry Living in Rural Areas, 1972 to 2021, by Division									
	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific
African American		12%	8%		14%		76%		9%
Native American		9%	32%				71%		23%
Quebecois	74%	61%	64%	83%	42%		72%	81%	28%
Canadian	64%		50%		69%		68%		23%
Czech/Slovak		35%	51%	56%	48%		83%		
English	70%	33%	57%	64%	44%		47%	54%	32%
French	62%	41%	60%		48%		55%		39%
German	57%	35%	63%	68%	49%	35%	42%	60%	27%
Irish	50%	29%	44%	64%	50%	45%	36%	56%	28%
Italian	44%	22%	35%	49%	44%		44%	47%	19%
Mexican		21%	29%	67%	45%		72%	40%	24%
Other Hispanic		2%			9%		10%		6%
Polish	48%	28%	40%	62%	50%		36%		31%
Puerto Rican	29%	9%	4%	29%					
Division/Ethnic pairs with n < 20 excluded. Rural/Urban differences insignificant at $\alpha = .15$ in gray italics									

Finally, to assess the differences in location type between Catholics and non-Catholics of the same ancestry, a two-sample difference of proportions test was run on GSS data. Those groups which showed significant differences in the proportion living in an area between Catholics and non-Catholics are displayed in Table 10, along with the point difference between the Catholic and non-Catholic proportion. The analysis was performed at $\alpha = .15$, using a 1972-2021 aggregate to maximize sample size.

Table 10: Difference in Rurality between Catholics and Non-Catholics by Ancestry

Point Difference in Proportion of Ethnicity Living in Location Type, Cath vs. Non Cath			
Ancestry	Rural	Urban	Suburban
African	-0.062	0.061	
American		-0.09	0.106
Native American	-0.065		0.047
Quebecois	0.07	-0.063	
Czech/Slovak		-0.06	
English	-0.113		0.098
Finnish	-0.187		0.228
French	-0.05		0.056
German	-0.087		0.085
Irish	-0.185	0.027	0.158
Italian	-0.113		0.088
Japanese			-0.3
Lithuanian	0.303	-0.285	
Mexican		-0.032	
Other Asian	-0.148		
Other Spanish	-0.049	0.078	
Filipino	-0.095		
Polish		-0.048	
Portugese	-0.16		0.239
Puerto Rican	-0.088	0.159	-0.07
Romanian	0.23	-0.222	
Russian	0.282	-0.191	-0.09
Scottish	-0.169		0.177
<i>Insignificant Differences at $\alpha = .15$ excluded. Gold indicates greater proportion of Catholics. Blue indicates greater proportion of Non-Catholics</i>			

Almost all groups with significant differences had a higher proportion of all non-Catholics living in rural areas than the proportion of Catholics living in rural areas. There were four notable exceptions, of which three are eastern European groups with an incredibly low overall adherence rates to Catholicism (Lithuanians, Romanians, and Russians), and the other being the predominately Catholic Quebecois. Catholics lived in the suburbs at a far higher rate than non-Catholics, for all groups except Japanese, Puerto Ricans, and Russians.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The demographic landscape of American Catholicism is changing. While previous literature has given the broad strokes of the geographic patterns of this transformation, this analysis fleshes out the details and adds spatial nuance to a complex situation.

The Northeast and Midwest are no longer the center of Catholicism in America, but their decline is not geographically uniform, with many suburbs in the North gaining in both raw Catholic population and Catholic share of the population. The West and South are growing, but cities and suburbs are seeing the largest share of growth, with an actual decline in some parts of the rural South. The overall number of priests is in decline, but most urban dioceses still maintain a strong priest to parish ratio. The growth in parishes in the south is not uniform, with the heavily Hispanic Rio Grande Valley seeing a large drop in the number of Parishes from 1981 to 2021. While conventionally Catholics are considered a highly urban population, this pattern has exceptions – in the

Mountain and Pacific regions, Catholics and non-Catholics make up similar shares of the population living in the open countryside.

Catholics are increasingly transplanting to other regions of the United States, but where they migrate to depends on their birth region, with most of the growth in the South Atlantic coming from areas along the Atlantic Coast. The new wave of foreign-born migrants to the United States are not equally distributed, and this analysis gave nuance to previous generalizations about their settlement pattern; the Interior South has seen very little foreign migration, nor has the Mountain West.

Hispanic Catholics make up an increasing share of the Catholic population, but the ancestry of those Hispanics varies by region, and regions such as New England have seen very little growth in their Hispanic population. Meanwhile, while European-ancestry Catholics have seen an overall decline, the magnitude of this decline varies by ancestry and by location, both between and within ethnic groups.

This analysis only begins to scratch the surface of the dramatic changes in the Catholic population in the United States. Limitations in the spatial scope of the GSS data still obfuscates even smaller scale trends. However, by moving past previous generalizations about Catholicism which utilized only the four census regions, this analysis takes the geographic study of American Catholic demographics to a promising new level.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CATHOLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONTROVERSIES

The second realm of geographic variability of Catholicism within the United States is the differences in the mode, frequency, and style of Catholics' engagement and participation in their faith, as well as their viewpoints on moral, theological, and liturgical controversies. This chapter will cover variations in the participation in basic modes of Catholic worship such as Mass attendance, time spent in prayer, reading scripture, praying the Rosary and various devotionals, and frequency of receiving the sacraments.

Geographic variations in how Catholics weigh in on various controversies and differences in the style of the Mass will be examined in the second half of this chapter¹⁴. Using data sourced from various years throughout the temporal study area also allows for an examination on how these geographic differences varied through time. Additionally, analysis will be performed to demonstrate that not only do these variables vary geographically, but that geography is a strong predictor variable for these metrics, as alluded to (but not expanded upon) by Welch & Leege (1988).

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Any discussion of religious engagement must logically be prefaced by a discussion of religious identity. Dinges (2019) emphasizes that the critical issue at the core of the debate over the nature and future of Catholicism and the crises facing the

¹⁴ As an obligatory note, the analysis of this chapter necessarily involves categorizing Catholics into ideological camps. It must be stressed that this act is not an endorsement of division – that these divisions exist at all is a tragedy. Regardless, it is undeniable that these divisions do exist, and as such, they are worth analyzing; acknowledging and understanding the problem is the first step towards healing it.

Church is “not that of maintaining a Catholic identity” nor is it the degree to which Catholics “hold to core beliefs regarding the death, resurrection, and salvific role of Jesus Christ”, but rather on “the imperative of Catholic institutional affiliation and involvement as prerequisites for doing so” (Dinges, 2019, p. 35). That is, while many identify as a Catholic, and profess core Christian doctrine, they do so not regard with necessity adherence and deference to the institutional Church, which is the core criteria for being a Catholic

These statements by Dinges allude to the phenomena of what are colloquially referred to as *cultural Catholics*. Despite its frequent use in Catholic discourse, the term *cultural Catholic* has no universal definition. Most definitions contain some mention of those who identify with Catholicism as a cultural or ancestral identity, rather than a religious one. In their 2015 report on Catholicism in America, the Pew Research Center acknowledges the ambiguity in the term but provides a working definition of cultural Catholics as “those whose primary religious identity is something other than Catholic but who nonetheless say they consider themselves Catholic or partially Catholic in some way” (Pew, 2015, p.30). Using this definition, Pew identifies roughly 9% of the total U.S. Population as being “culturally Catholic”.

This definition leads to some issues, as later statistics in the report suggests the number of cultural Catholics being far higher than 9%, noting that 49% of Catholics (those who checked off Catholic as their religious affiliation) view Catholicism as “mainly a matter of ancestry or culture”, not religion. If these individuals, who seemingly meet many criteria of cultural Catholicism, are counted as such, then cultural Catholics

would comprise nearly 19% of the population, outnumbering the practicing Catholic population.

Further complicating efforts to pin down a definition is Pew's findings that a third of cultural Catholics attended Mass at least once in the prior year (Pew 2015). Further condemning for the study's conclusions is that an examination of the Pew dataset revealed roughly 26% of those deemed cultural Catholics believed Catholicism was "mainly a matter of religion." Cultural Catholics may attend Mass (indeed, the Pew study found that nearly 30% do), but do so as a cultural practice. They may fast during Lent, but not out of a belief in the theology behind it, but rather as partaking an ancestral or cultural tradition.

This potential decoupling of metaphysical religious devotion from the physical participation in these activities and their demotion to merely cultural practices raise serious concerns for the utilization of measurements of engagement with many common Catholic practices as means of understanding the geography of real engagement with Catholicism as a religion, and certainly compromises their ability to provide meaningful insights into religious devotion and institutional affiliation. Regardless, as will be discussed later, these metrics still tell us *something* about the geography of the Faith, and it behooves any paper assessing Catholic geography to address them spatially.

Two means to measure geographic variations in commitment and engagement with Catholicism were selected. Firstly, as noted by Dinges (2019), the foremost concern is gauging the affiliation of Catholics with the institutional church; this will be addressed through examining the geography of targeted survey questions drawn from a variety of

studies undertaken in the past thirty years. Second, engagement will be measured by the engagement of Catholics through the most specifically Catholic modes: engagement with the Sacraments and participation in uniquely Catholic devotions such as the Rosary, as well as assessing the degree to which Catholics retain a metaphysical worldview.

Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace each with a particular rite, consisting of certain words and actions, bestowing a particular grace. The Catholic Church formally names seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders (ordination), Eucharist (communion), Penance (confession), and Anointing of the Sick (CCC 1113). The first three of these are partaken in only once in a Catholics' life, with Holy Orders (ordination) typically only being partaken in twice¹⁵ leaving an indelible mark on the Catholic. Catholics are required to partake in the sacrament of the Eucharist at least once a year (Can. 920 §1), as well as the Sacrament of Penance (Can. 989).

Of the sacraments to be discussed, engagement with the Eucharist through metrics of Mass attendance will be addressed in the greatest detail, both out of the abundance of data, and to reflect the degree of importance in which this sacrament holds.

The centrality of the Mass to the Catholic life makes it uniquely suitable as a metric for engagement with the faith. Basing it off any other practice either results in too narrow of a definition (in the case of using specific Catholic devotionals as the metric) or

¹⁵ Once for ordination to deacon, then for ordination as priest. Should a priest be elevated to bishop, he receives the sacrament of Holy Orders again. Holy Orders are only partaken in by a tiny slice of the Catholic population.

too broad of one (for example, time spent in prayer does not reflect active participation in specifically Catholic activities).

Using Mass attendance as a metric presents numerous advantages. In a country such as the United States, where churches are (generally speaking) relatively accessible and Catholics face no threat of violence for attending, Mass attendance represents a relatively low-cost activity with nearly zero barrier to entry, one which is required by the Church, and one which comes at the cost of traditional weekend leisure activities for at least two hours of ones' weekend. This is not to ignore the potential downsides. It does not account for the potential of inattentiveness during Mass or those who attend Mass but habitually leave early, and as noted earlier, it does not account for those who attend merely out of routine rather than a true appreciation for the sacrifice. However, in the absence of any stronger, consistently measured metric, Mass attendance should suffice as strong baseline metric of the bare minimum engagement with the Catholic faith.

The other sacraments will then be discussed in turn to further develop the geography of Catholicism. Earlier discussions on priestly ordinations in Chapter 6 allowed a glimpse at the sacrament of Holy Orders, and this discussion will be expanded in this chapter through the examination on ordination and seminarian numbers across the country. Data from the Official Catholic Directory allows insights into the number and nature of baptisms, confirmations, and marriages per diocese. While intrinsically difficult to measure, some data on the Sacrament of Penance provides some degree of insight into the degree to which engagement varies spatially.

THE SACRAMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

Mass Attendance & the Eucharist

Mass attendance is the first metric of basic faith engagement to be examined. The centrality of Mass to the Catholic faith cannot be understated. At Mass, Catholics witness and offer up the eternal sacrifice of Christ at calvary, and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Catechism of the Catholic Church writes that the Eucharist as “the source and summit of Christian life” (CCC, 1324). A full theological explanation of the importance of the Eucharist and Mass is outside the scope of this paper.

Catholics are under obligation to attend Mass every Sunday, as well as on holy days of obligation (select days which celebrate an especially important event, such as Easter, Christmas, Pentecost – or the feast days of especially important saints, such as Mary, Joseph, and Peter and Paul), barring health or other serious impediments, under the penalty of mortal sin. Attending Mass binds parishes together, forming communities in faith. Thus, measuring the rate at which Catholics attend Mass is crucial for understanding regional variations in Catholics’ engagement with their faith.

While the Catholic Church requires weekly Mass attendance, this obligation is frequently ignored, with Mass attendance declining year over year since the 1960’s. Two thresholds will be used to measure regional Mass attendance: the percentage of Catholics who attend at least weekly, and the percentage who attend at least monthly – the upper bounds of what can feasibly be described as a committed Catholic.

Nearly every data set examined contained some measurement of Mass attendance. However, they all corroborate the same general spatial patterns, though the rates have

seen a decline over the decades. The Pew 2007 Religious Landscape Study provides the best snapshot of modern Catholic Mass attendance, with state level data available, mapped in Figure 33.¹⁶ To increase sample size – though at the expense of lower geographic granularity, Figure 34 provides a division-level breakdown of Mass attendance frequencies using data from the 1972-2019¹⁷ General Social Survey aggregate.

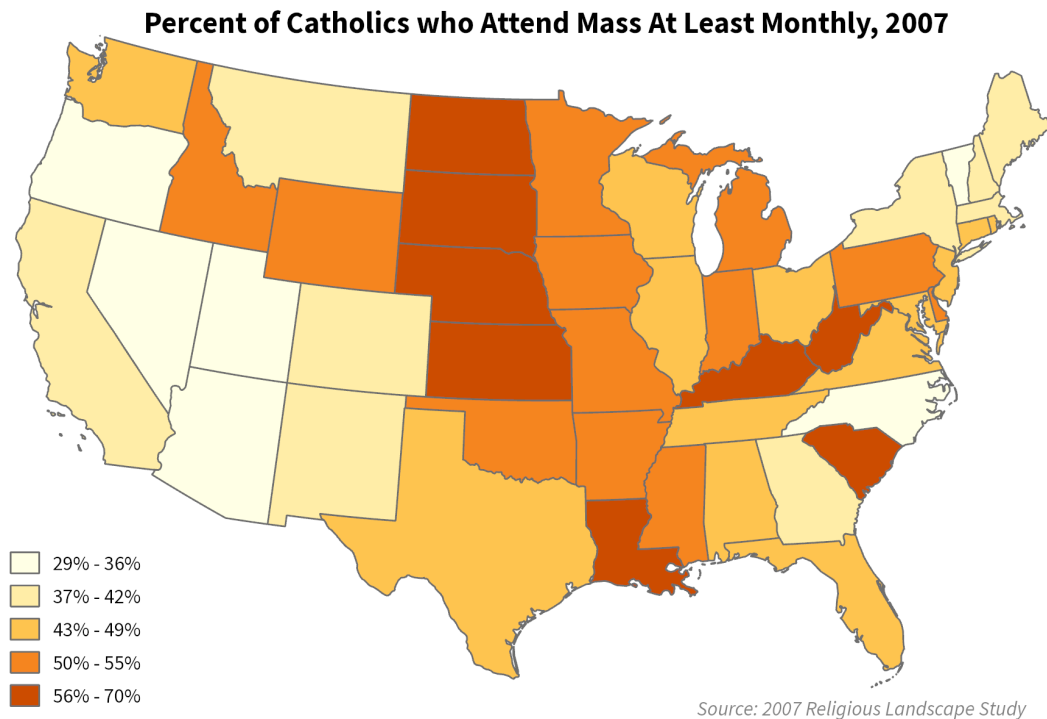


Figure 33: Percent of Catholics who attend Mass at least Monthly by State.

¹⁶ Though 2014 data exists, the per-state sample size for Catholics is generally lower than that of the 2007 survey.

¹⁷ 2020-2022 was excluded given the massive drop due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and geographically irregular restrictions on in-person gatherings.

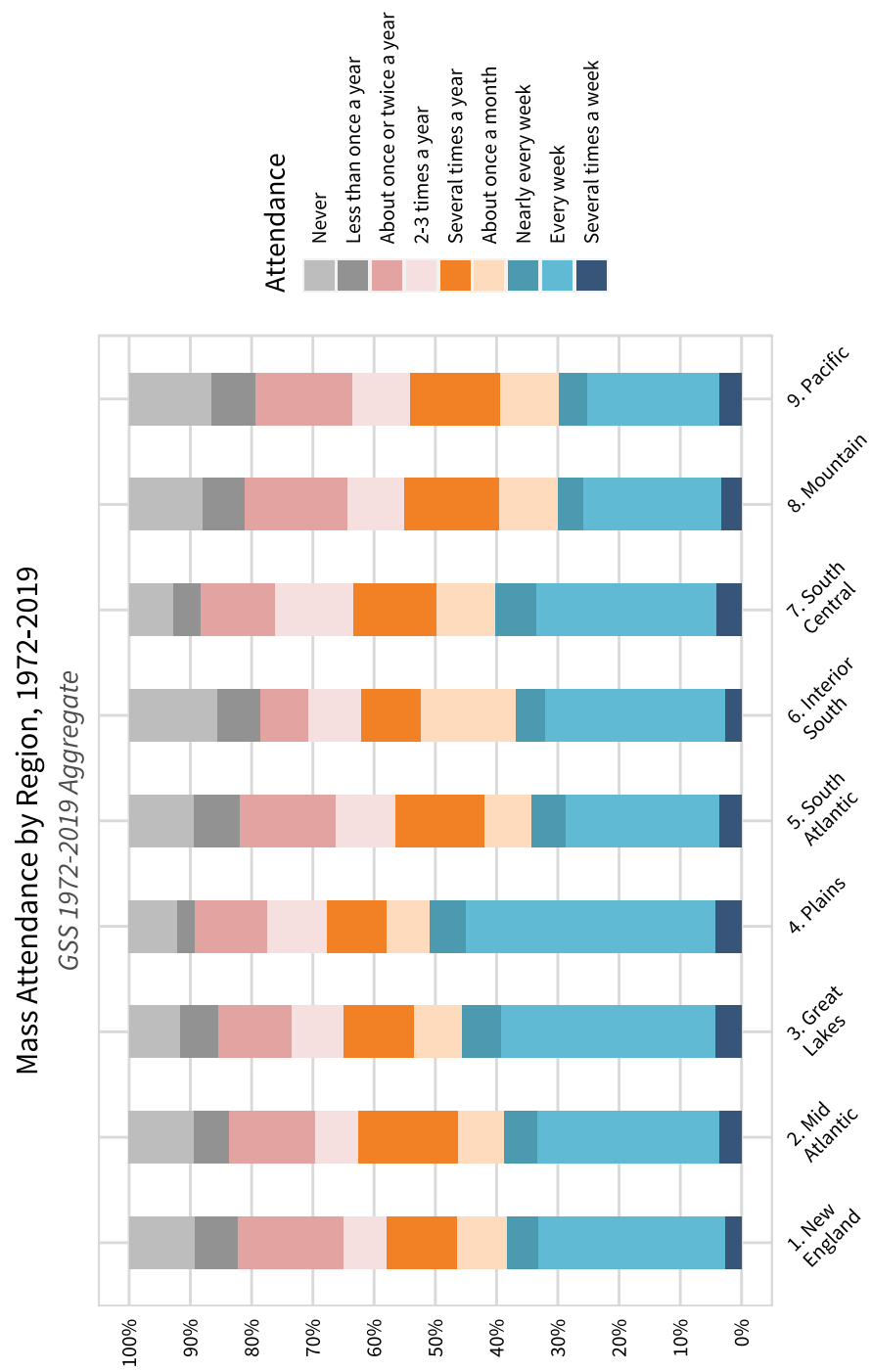


Figure 34: Mass attendance by Census Division

To see how the decline in Mass attendance has varied by region, GSS data was used to produce Figure 35, showing the percentage of Catholics in each region who attend Mass at least weekly, and Figure 36 shows a simple bar-chart comparison between the 1970's and 2010's averages by region, again using the GSS data.

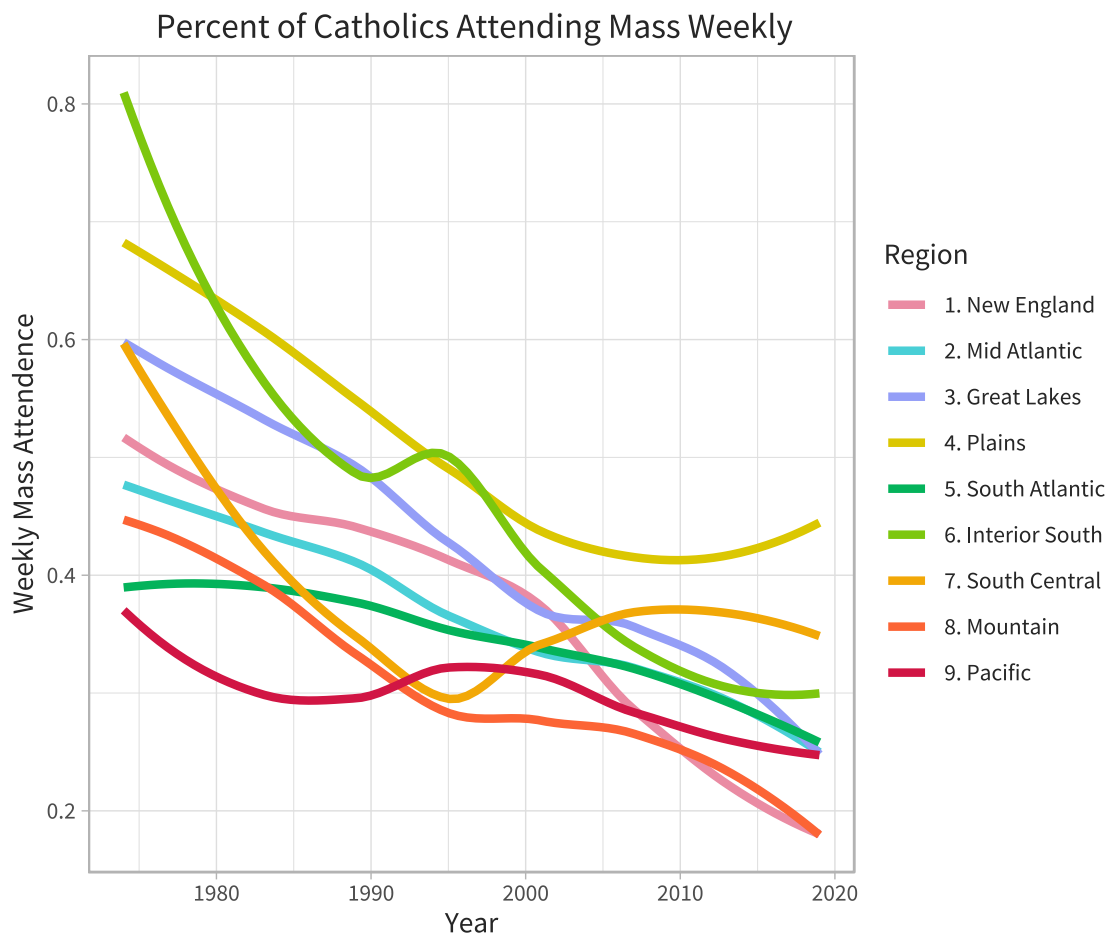


Figure 35: Change in Catholic Weekly Mass Attendance by Census Division.

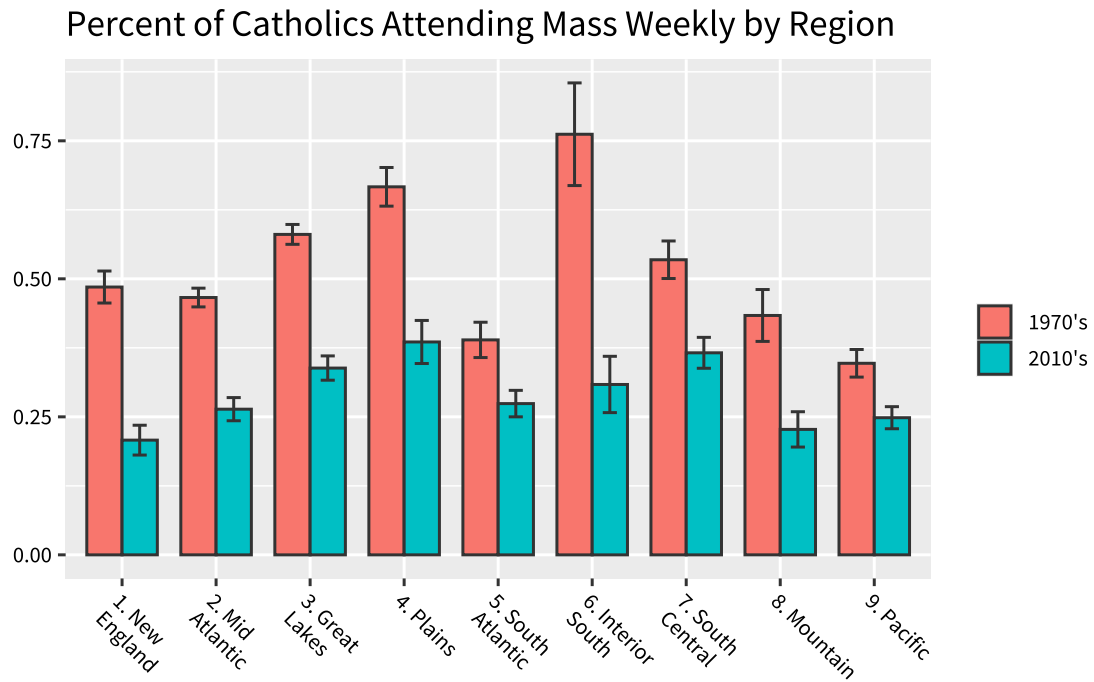


Figure 36: Comparison of weekly Mass attendance rates by division, 1970's vs. 2010's.

Though the overall rates have gone down, the general spatial patterns remain relatively unchanged. The predominately rural Plains region retains the highest Mass attendance, though the Interior South has dropped from having the highest to being more in line with other regions. Overall, the geographic variation in attendance rates has dropped since the 1970's, hinting at a convergence to a baseline low rate of engagement. Finally, Table 11 breaks down Mass attendance by ancestry and regional lines, drawing from the GSS data.

Table 11: Weekly Mass Attendance by Ancestry

Weekly Mass Attendance by Ancestry Group by Region, 1972-2021 Aggregate									
Ancestry	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific
African	20%	25%	29%	30%	14%	0%	40%	13%	15%
American	50%	28%	23%	100%	29%	0%	35%	7%	23%
Asian	33%	39%	46%	43%	33%	75%	50%	33%	44%
English	28%	39%	42%	33%	38%	29%	39%	34%	38%
French	41%	35%	31%	39%	26%	50%	40%	20%	33%
German	37%	40%	45%	53%	40%	33%	29%	28%	28%
Irish	36%	40%	40%	46%	36%	52%	35%	29%	30%
Italian	27%	29%	33%	51%	26%	73%	32%	21%	18%
Mexican	33%	21%	25%	36%	17%	6%	27%	18%	21%
Native American	25%	15%	24%	10%	29%	22%	24%	16%	21%
Other	33%	22%	50%	40%	20%	75%	63%	0%	24%
Other Spanish	28%	26%	27%	8%	20%	0%	26%	23%	27%
Other W. Europe	37%	43%	40%	45%	33%	17%	31%	33%	22%
Other White Ethnic	34%	40%	41%	50%	27%	33%	62%	38%	18%
Polish	37%	41%	44%	54%	34%	36%	28%	44%	17%
Puerto Rican	15%	18%	22%	0%	22%	0%	38%	0%	0%
Quebecois	36%	30%	36%	38%	38%	100%	41%	50%	23%
<i>Total</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>25%</i>

Ancestry/Region Pairs with $n < 20$ in gray italics.

Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism and Confirmation mark pivotal moments in the life of Catholics. The Catechism of the Catholic Church writes that each Catholic's journey, though varying in all manner of characteristics unique to each individual's situation in life, will always contain certain elements, including the "proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion" (CCC 1229). The final three – baptism, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (confirmation), and admission to Eucharistic Communion – all refer to sacraments. While other reports have focused on national numbers of baptisms and other sacraments (the geographic complexity of their distribution has yet to be covered).

The Official Catholic Directory lists the number of baptisms, broken down by the age of the Catholic being baptized (infant, minor, and adult). These age breakdowns help gauge the number of converts per region. Figure 36 shows adult share of all baptisms per diocese:

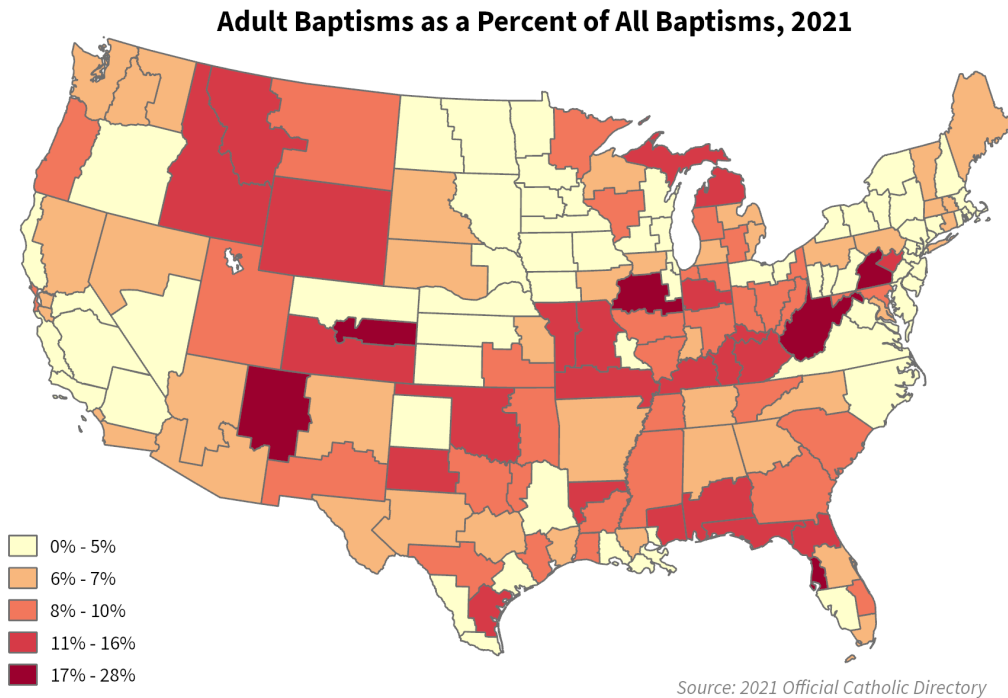


Figure 36: Adult baptisms as a Percent of all Baptisms.

Unsurprisingly, the highest rates of adult baptisms can be found outside the major, predominately Catholic metropolitan areas of the northeast, and the already heavily Catholic northern Great Plains. Logically, the regions with the most converts are those with the most non-adherents.

While the OCD does contain data on the number of confirmations per diocese, these measurements on their own tell very little without a matched pair to a dataset on earlier baptisms. One would need a specific measurement of the number of baptized Catholics who then go on to be confirmed, and the number which do not, which is impossible to derive from yearly datasets since confirmation numbers are not broken down by the time between the confirmation and baptism.

Other Sacraments

Penance

Though it is the second most frequently engaged in sacrament, official data on the Sacrament of Penance is difficult to come by, likely owing to strict canon law surrounding the confidentiality and privacy of the Sacrament. The 1995 Catholic Pluralism Project was the only identified source of geographic data on the Sacrament of Penance. Unfortunately, the small sample size of the dataset meant that no significant findings were available for the Interior South and Mountain Regions. The results are shown below in Figure 37:

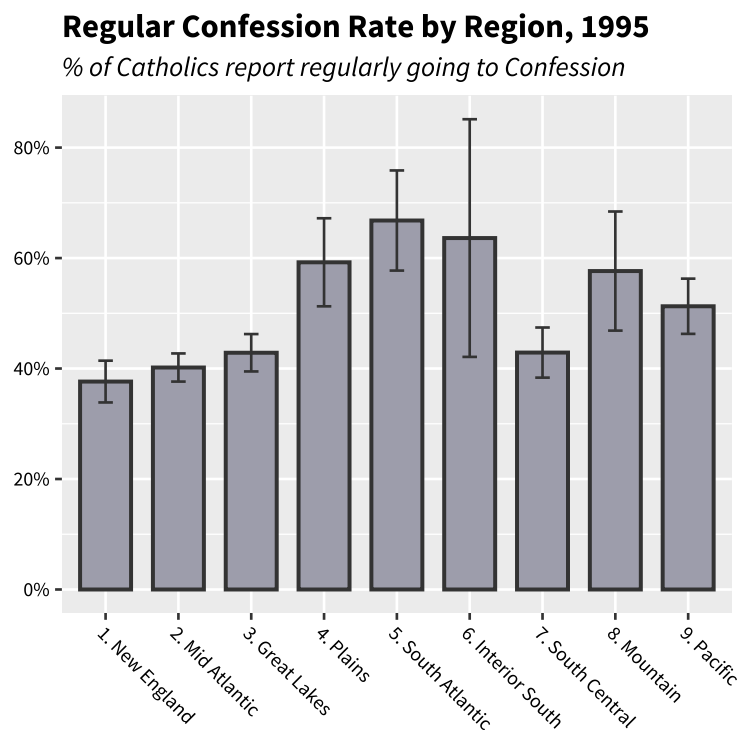


Figure 37: % of Catholics ‘regularly’ going to Confession.

The Northeast and Great Lakes – the Catholic “hearth” – show the lowest rates of confession. The Pacific and Mountain regions buck their usual tendency to show lower commitment, surpassing the northeast. These findings should be tempered with the acknowledgement that the wording of the question very may have skewed the results; the survey options did not list specifically defined frequencies, but rather the vague categories of “regularly, sometimes, rarely, and never”, the first three of which are entirely up to the respondent’s interpretation. Thus, regional variations in what amounts to regularity very likely altered these results. It is possible that in the Northeast, the expectations are set higher by the memory of an older, established Catholic population and a culture steeped in the legacy of the pre-conciliar Church.

Ordination and Marriage

Ordination and Marriage represent the two Catholic vocations, both of which are typically undertaken between the ages of 25 to 35. As such, they are roughly comparable, and we can get a sense of the geographic distribution of call to certain vocations by taking the ratio of ordinations to marriages using data from the 2021 Official Catholic Directory, as shown in Figure 38:

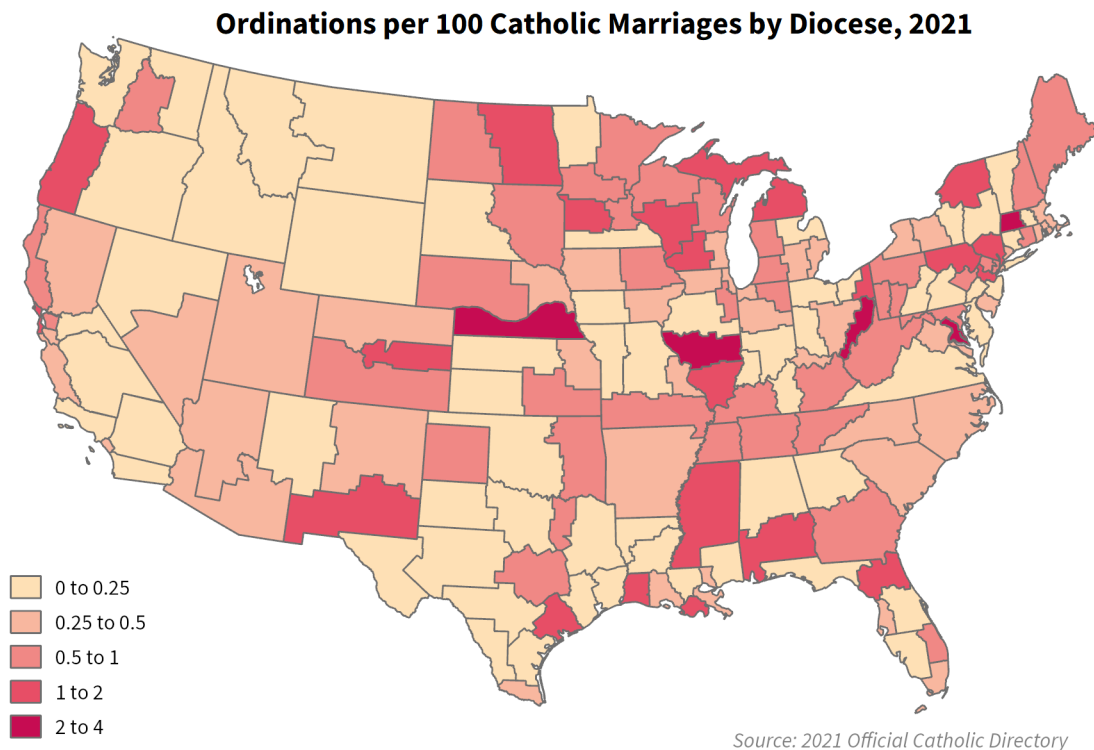


Figure 38: Ordinations to the Priesthood and Diaconate per 100 Catholic Marriages, 2021

The irregular shapes of dioceses make geographic patterns slightly difficult to ascertain, but they are present nonetheless. The West, and Northwest particularly, have generally far lower rates of ordinations. Diocesan cultures and programs encouraging young men to enter Seminary certainly play a large role in shaping these rates, meaning geography may have a far lower impact than it would for other measurements. The Official Catholic Directory also contains data on the number of men entering seminary from each diocese, shown in Figure 39:

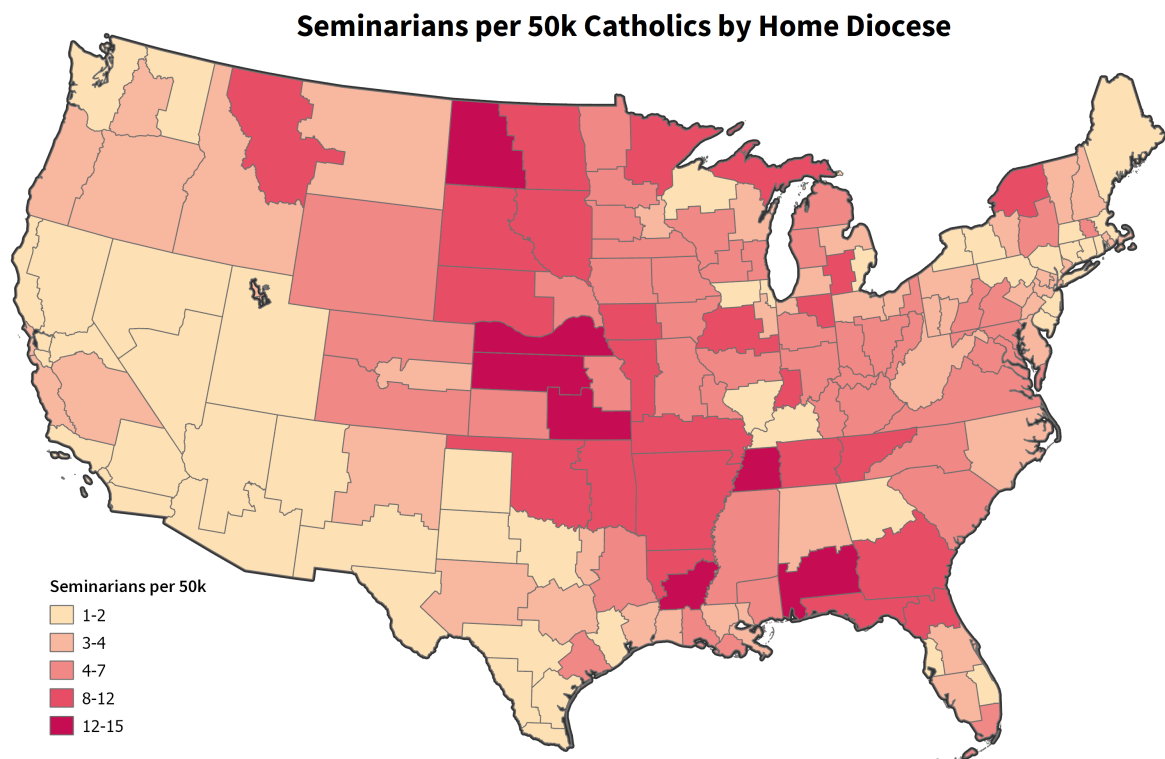


Figure 39: Number of Catholics Enrolled in Seminary per 50k by Home Diocese.

Here, geographic trends are far more visible, with the rural regions of the Great Plains and South producing a far greater number of seminarians than elsewhere in the country. The Southwest produces the lowest rate of seminarians, especially in areas where Hispanics make up a large share of the Catholic Population – note that in Texas, the dioceses with the highest number of seminarians are those containing the growing cities with a larger number of White Catholic transplants. The urban Northeast also produces a far lower share of seminarians.

Regressions were run to determine if certain demographic or other variables had any correlation, using data from the 2021 Official Catholic Directory, county level data

aggregated to the diocesan level from the 2020 Religious Census for statistics on the Catholic population, and data from the American Community Survey for ancestry. The regression analysis found very few significant relationships between the rate of seminarian enrollment and other measured demographic and diocesan variables. The only noteworthy results from the regression were a moderate positive correlation between the rate of seminarians and the priest-per-Catholic ratio ($R^2 = .246$), and between the number of Catholics enrolled in Catholic Schools ($R^2 = .175$).

Further regressions between other diocesan measurements revealed more promising insights. The Catholic proportion of the population within the borders of a diocese showed a strong relationship with the ratio of priests per Catholic ($R^2 = .214$), Catholic marriages per Catholic ($R^2 = .236$), and adult baptisms ($R^2 = .294$), as well as a slew of other variables.

Prayer, Scripture, and Metaphysical Worldview

While Catholicism is a communal religion, individual devotions still play a large role. The two most basic individualistic forms of engagement with the faith are spending time in prayer and reading scripture (the Bible). As with Mass attendance, these metrics were measured in nearly every data set used. Figures 40 and 41 draw from the Pew 2007 to show the rate of daily private prayer and weekly scripture reading by state, respectively.

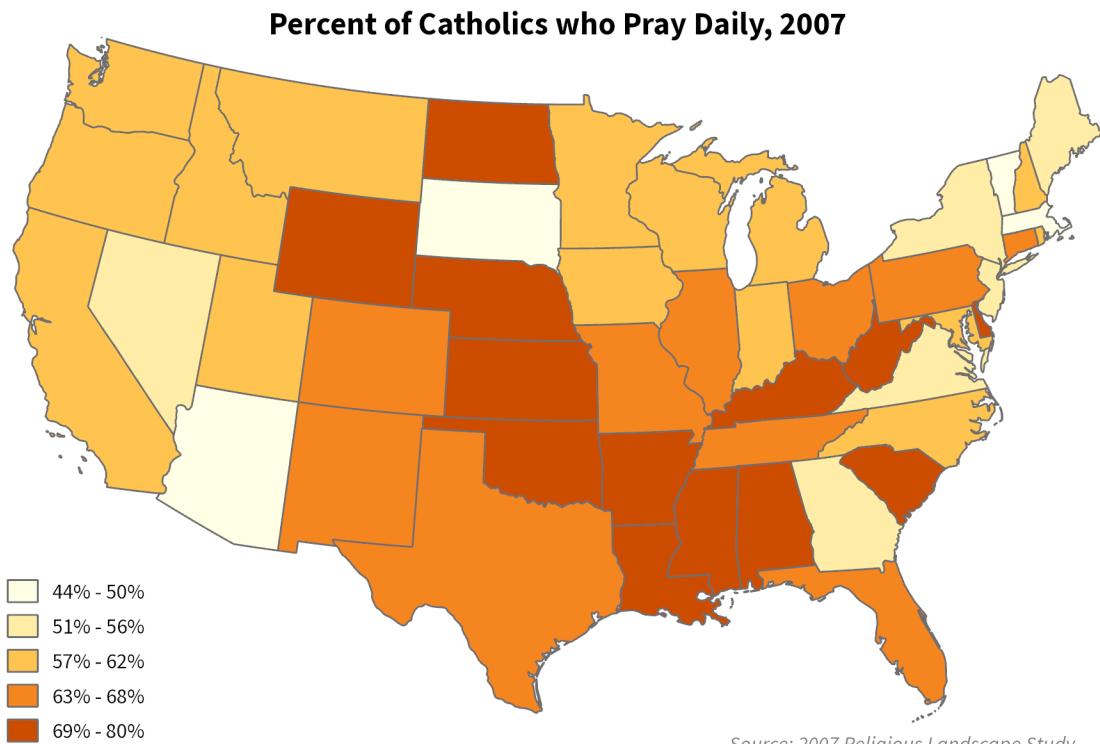


Figure 40: Percent of Catholics who Pray Daily by State, 2007

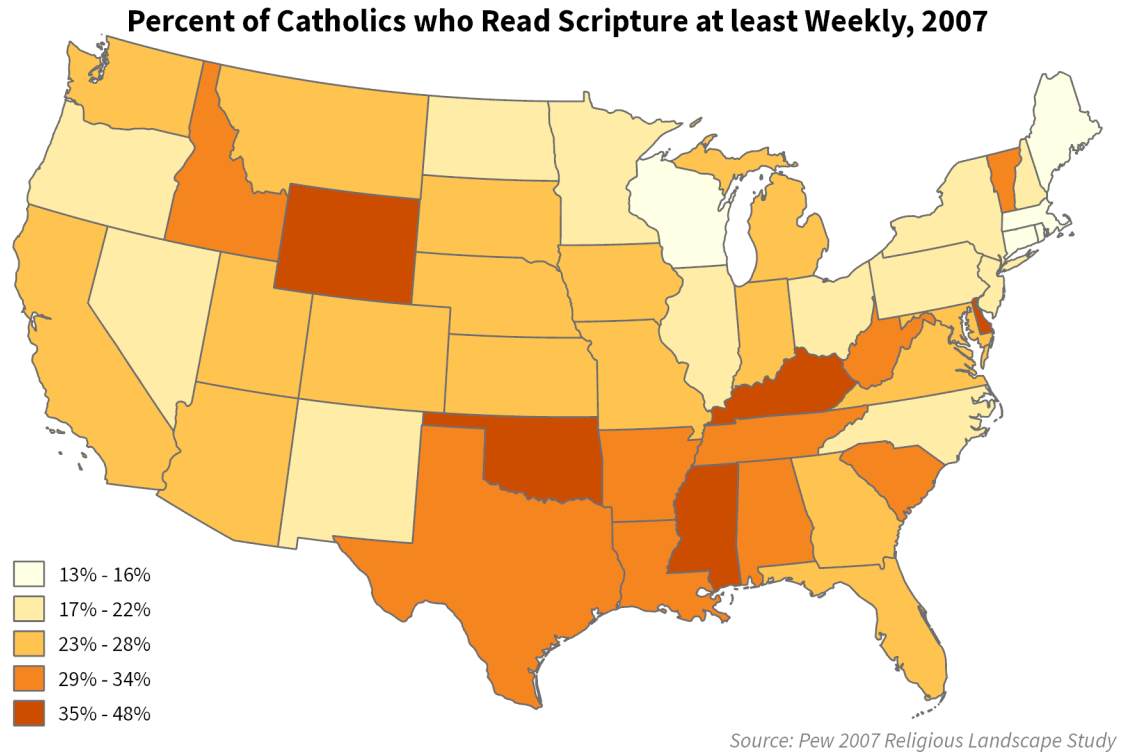


Figure 41: Percent of Catholics who Read Scripture at Least Weekly, 2007.

The geographic distribution of prayer frequency closely resembles that of Mass attendance, with the highest rates found in the rural South and Great Plains region, and the lowest in New England. Unlike Mass attendance, rates of private prayer remain moderately high in the Mountain region, with comparable frequency to the states in the Great Lakes region. A regression analysis between daily prayer rate and weekly Mass attendance found a significant correlation at $\alpha = 0.01$ with an adjusted R^2 of 0.542, when filtering out states with $n < 30$. Daily private prayer rates remained higher than Weekly Mass Attendance in every state, though the net difference varied geographically, as shown in Figure 42:

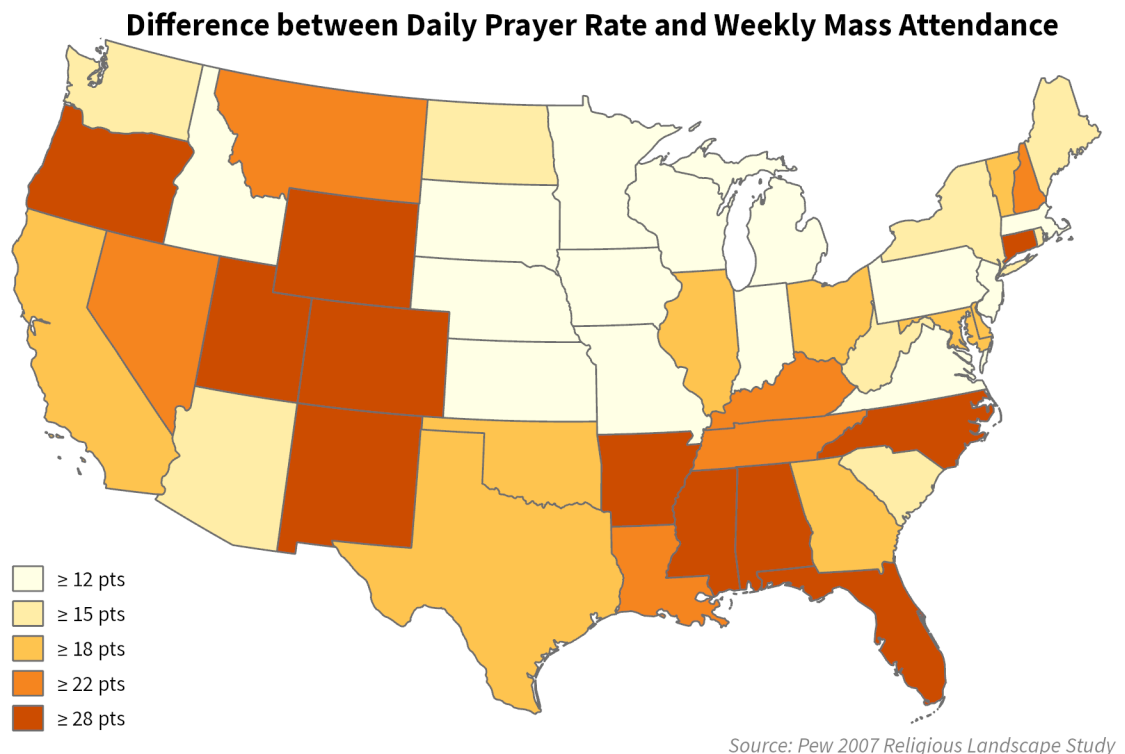


Figure 42: Net difference between daily prayer rate and weekly Mass attendance rate, 2007.

The individualistic nature of Catholicism in the Mountain West becomes readily apparent, in stark contrast to the Midwest where prayer and Mass attendance go roughly hand-in-hand.

The 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Study contains two unique variables that help ascertain the metaphysical worldview of respondents: whether respondents believed that miracles still took place in the world today (Figure 43), how strongly they believe in the existence of angels and demons (Figure 44), as well as their belief in heaven and hell (Figures 45 and 46).

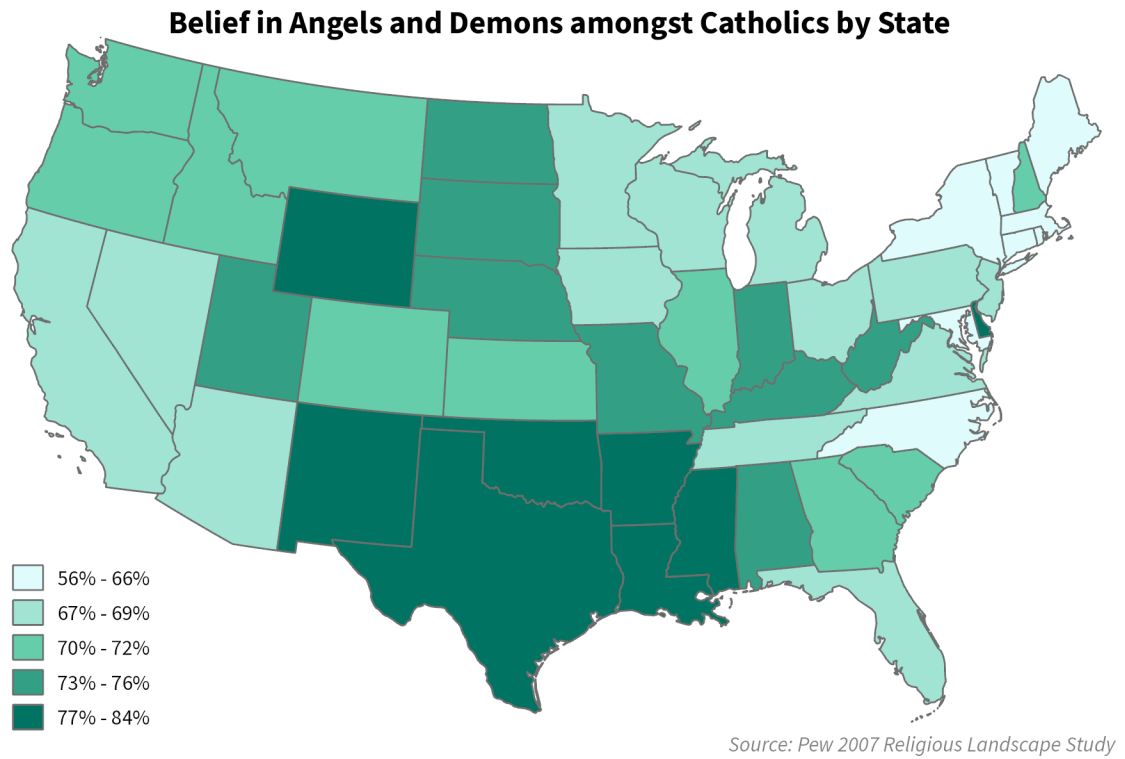


Figure 43: Belief in Angels and Demons amongst Catholics by State, 2007

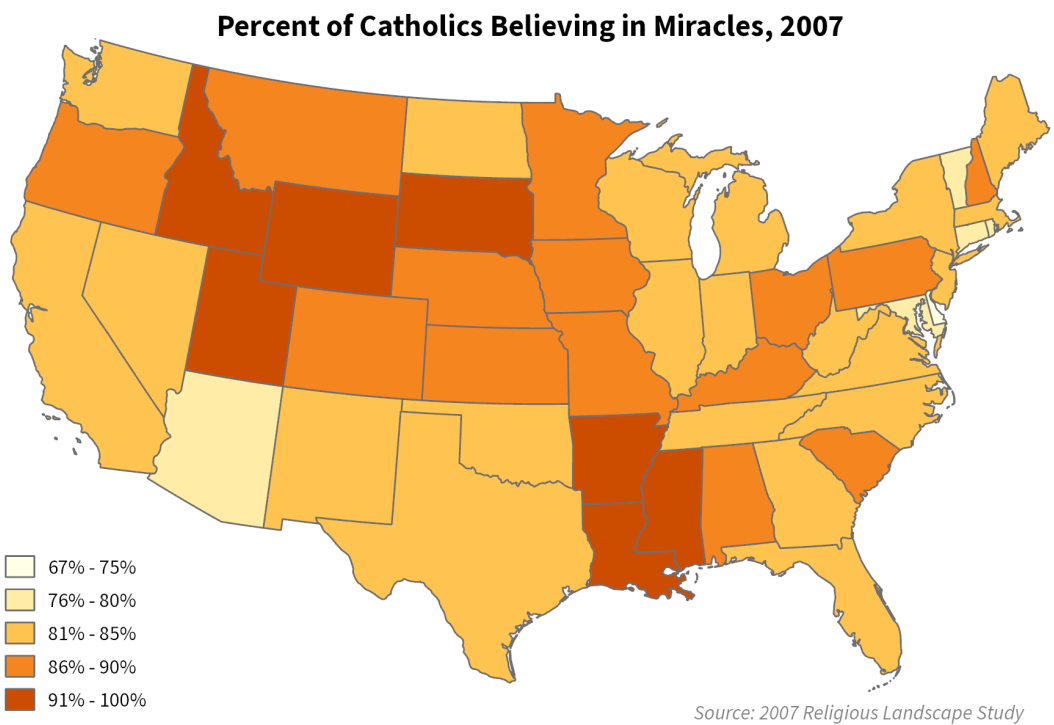


Figure 44: Percent of Catholics believing in Miracles by State, 2007

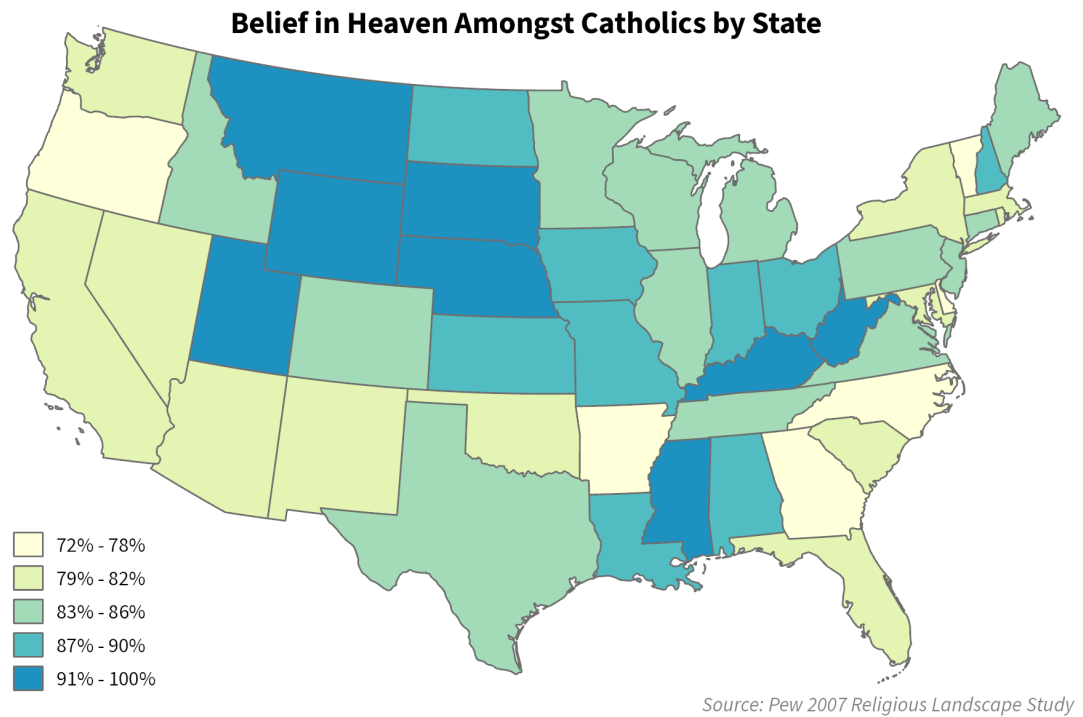


Figure 45: Belief in Heaven amongst Catholics by State, 2007

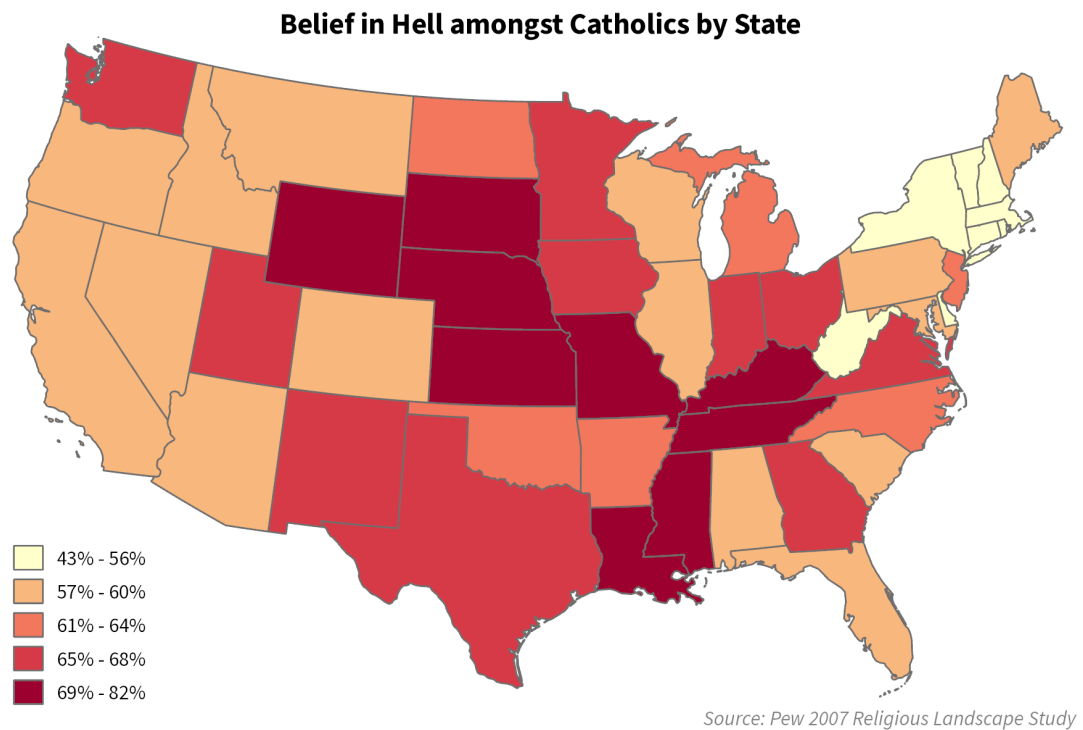


Figure 46: Belief in Hell amongst Catholics by State, 2007

Of these, the angels/demons map provides the most unique geographic pattern. While the some of the normal trends are still present – a very nonspiritual New England, with a slightly more traditional/spiritual Mid Atlantic and Great Lakes, the South Central is uniquely fervent in its belief in angels and demons, and unlike in other metrics, exceeds that of the Great Plains region. The deep south is also divided along an east/west divide, with a gradual decrease in importance with increased distance from the center of the country. Interestingly, despite having the highest rate of belief in demons and angels, the South-Central region is not the highest in belief in miracles; rather, the northern great plains and the predominately Mormon regions of the northern Rocky Mountains rank highest. The most urbanized of the Northeastern states again rank lowest.

Combining these metrics with those on Mass attendance, as well as later data on ideology, reveals a unique culture in the Rocky Mountains that remains highly spiritual, but does not engage with the Catholic institutional structure or put a high degree of weight on traditional teachings. This individualistic approach to the faith stands in contrast to other regions with low Mass attendance like New England, which while comparable in metrics relating to engagement with and trust in the organized Catholic institutional religion, lacks the same degree of spirituality as found in the Mountain region, and has a much more progressive bent. Despite this distrust in the hierarchy, the retention rate discussion in Chapter 6 shows that Catholics are far more likely to remain affiliated with the religion on, albeit perhaps through disengagement with the faith while retaining a culturally catholic identity. Meanwhile, Catholics in the West are far more likely to disaffiliate entirely with Catholicism.

CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

At last, we now return to measurements of how closely Catholics identify with the institutional structure of the Church. One of the more direct measurements of institutional affiliation came from the General Social Survey, which measured the level of faith individuals had in organized religion. Filtering this to Catholics provides some degree of measurement of faith in the institutional structure of the Church; while not necessarily a measure of identity with the institutional church itself, it should provide some insights regardless. Figure 47 displays the percent of Catholics in each region who expressed “a great deal of confidence” in organized religion:

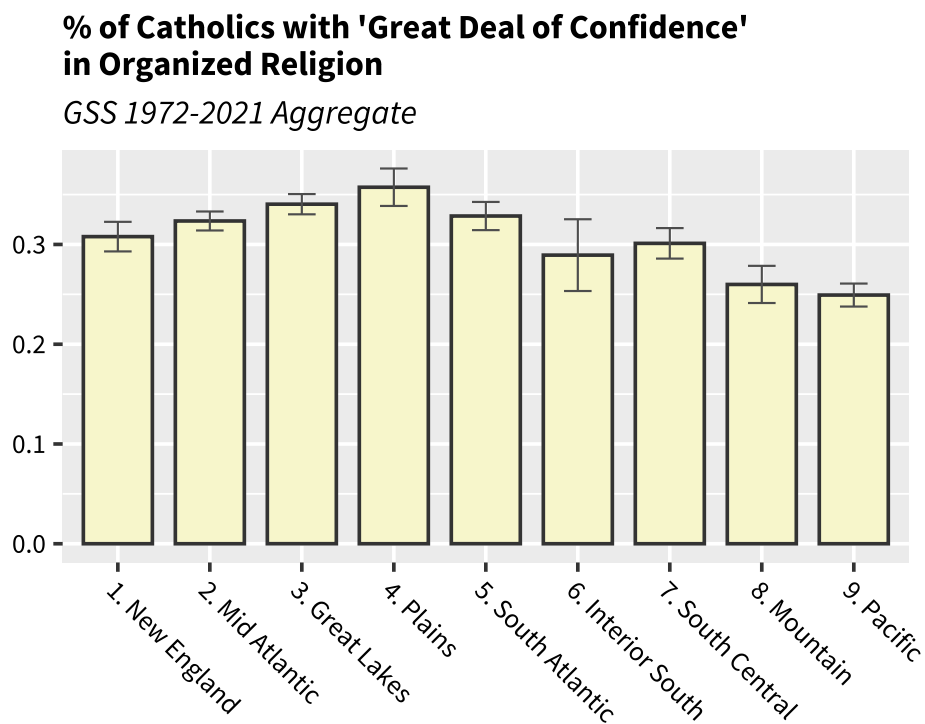


Figure 47: Percent of Catholics who have a ‘great deal of confidence’ in Organized Religion by Division.

These results closely mirror those of the net prayer-Mass attendance rates discussed earlier (see: Figure 33), with confidence in organized religion lowest in the Mountain and Pacific West. New England, though similar to the Mountain and Pacific West in regard to its more liberal character and generally lower rate of engagement with the faith, retains a significantly higher level of confidence in the institutional Church than its western counterparts. The Great Lakes and Plains show the highest rates of affiliation. These results cut to the core of the analysis encouraged by Dinges (2019).

Confidence in institutional affiliation can also be approximated through less direct lines of questioning, which hint at different aspects of this institutional affiliation, drawn from various surveys. Two measurements from the Catholic Pluralism Project proved uniquely useful: the degree to which Catholics believed it important to obey Church teachings even if they did not understand them (Figure 48), and the degree to which they believed the Pope is the Vicar of Christ (Figure 49). The 2011 Gallup Poll of Catholic Laity asked Catholics how important the teaching authority of the Papacy is to them, the regional results of which were broken down and shown in Figure 50:

Church Obedience by Region, 1995

% agree that one should obey the Church even if not understood

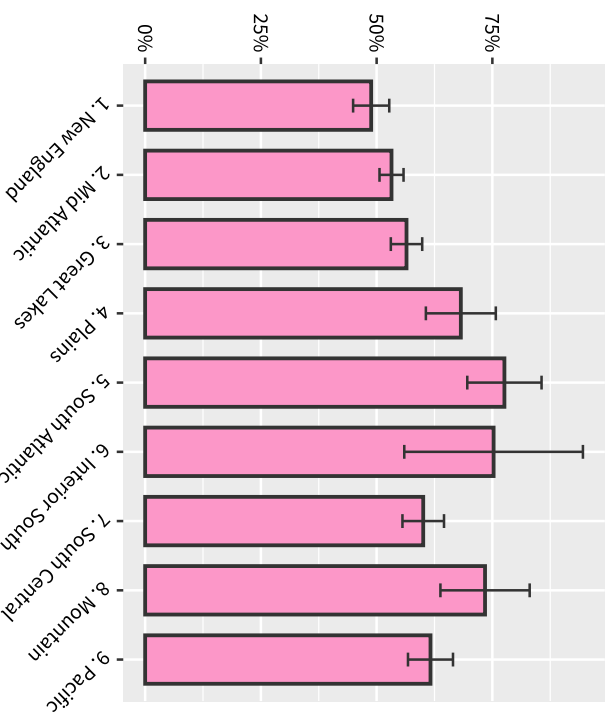


Figure 48: Percent of Catholics who agree that one should obey Church teaching, even if they do not understand it.

Belief in the Vicar of Christ, 1995

% of Catholics agree Pope is the Vicar of Christ

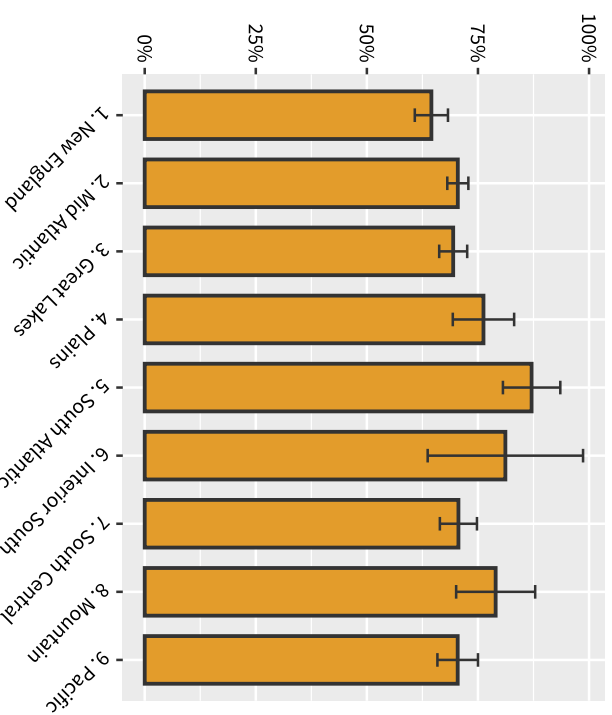


Figure 49: Percent of Catholics who agree that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ.

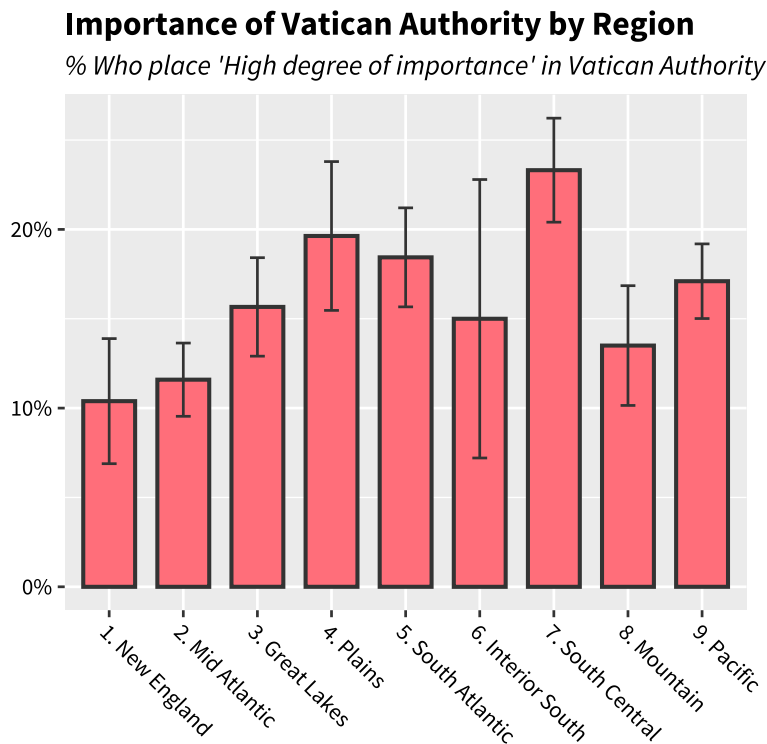


Figure 50: Importance of Vatican Authority by region

The Pluralism Project results tended to follow a similar geographic dispersion, with the lowest rates found in the Northeast and South-Central regions, and higher rates found in the Southeast and Mountain regions, with a similar pattern emerging in the Gallup 2011 results.

Similarly, the Pew 2007 Religious Landscape Study polled individuals on whether they believe there are multiple ways to interpret the teachings of their faith. This proved to be a somewhat adequate measure of Catholics' deference to the magisterium of the Catholic Church, but this should be tempered with the understanding that, as discussed in Chapter 4, there are some teachings which Catholics are formally allowed to dissent. The data was broken down by census division in Figure 51

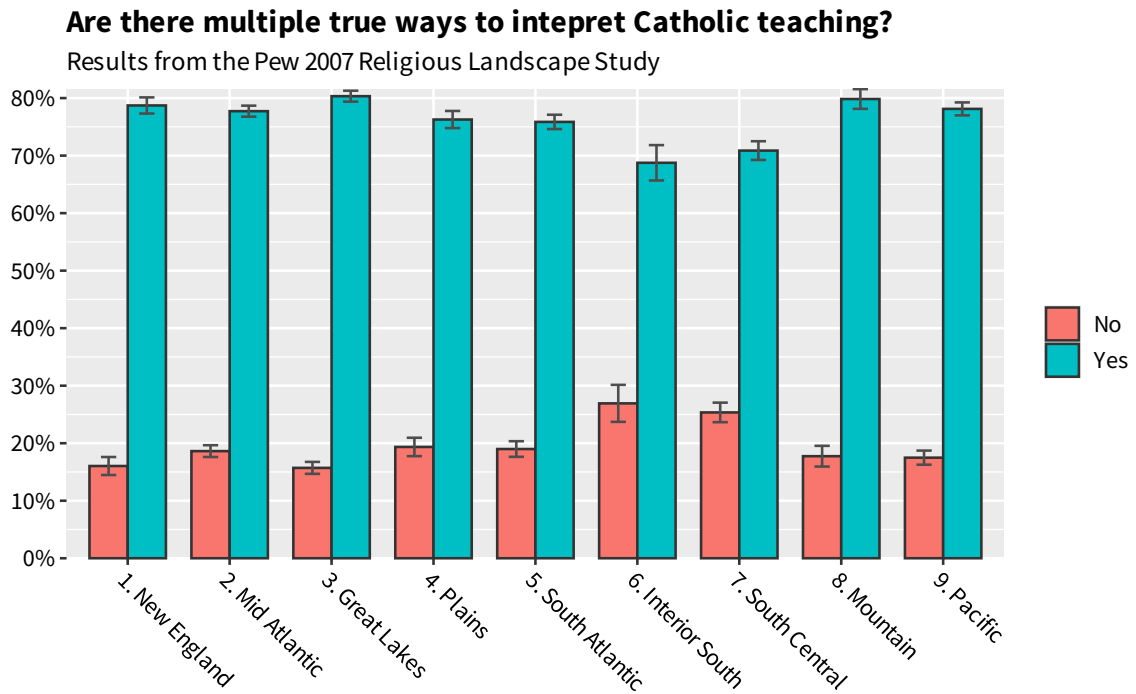


Figure 51: Whether there are multiple ways to interpret Catholic Teaching by Census division.

Despite the nuance intrinsic to the question, the results still reflect the same geographic pattern that has been repeatedly established throughout the chapter, with the South having the highest rate of Catholics stating that there was only a single way to interpret Church teaching.

LITURGICAL VARIATIONS & POST VATICAN II CONTROVERSIES

Operational definitions are required before undertaking the spatial examination of the culture wars between traditionalists and modernists. Morris (1997) contends that though the usage of simplistic phrases such as “liberal” and “conservative” often draws ire, these terms are suitable enough for describing the theological camps debating the legacy of Vatican II. He notes that these terms “were often used enough by the protagonists themselves”, and that despite their ambiguity and baggage, that he “hasn’t

found any that are considerably better” (Morris, 1997, pp. 323). Morris goes on to provide the provide an outstanding outline of the viewpoints that define each side of the debate. Traditionalists, Morris writes, tend to subscribe to a cluster of beliefs including:

“commitment to a broad definition of a changeless deposit of faith, a tendency to treat teachings of the Pope and the encyclicals as nondebatable; great attachment to Marian devotions; a ‘teleological’ view of sexuality that does not admit artificial birth control, a commitment to a celibate, male priesthood; ... distinguished male and female roles in both family and Church; and a devotion to Thomistic philosophy” (Morris, 1997, p. 323).

Liberal Catholics and theologians, on the other hand, tend to adhere to a contrasting set of beliefs, as listed by Morris (1997):

“[The acceptance of] a changeless deposit of faith but are more willing to reinterpret it in light of history. They place greater emphasis on dialog with the laity as opposed to hierarchical dictate ...; adopt a more intellectualized devotional model that downplays Marian and other ‘cultic’ devotionals; are more open to a non-celibate priesthood and women priests; [and] stress the primacy of conscious in ethnical matters, including sexual ethics” (Morris, 1997, p. 324).

Geographies of Controversies

The most direct mode of gauging regional differences in traditionalism is through the usage of surveys that directly ask respondents about their outlook. The 1995 Catholic Pluralism Project (Figure 51) and the 2007 and 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Studies asked respondents to what degree they agreed or disagreed with the statement “the Church should put more emphasis on traditional teachings”. The 2007 Landscape data is visualized below in Figure 53. Additionally, the GSS briefly fielded a question asking Catholics if they identified as traditional, moderate, or liberal (Figure 52).

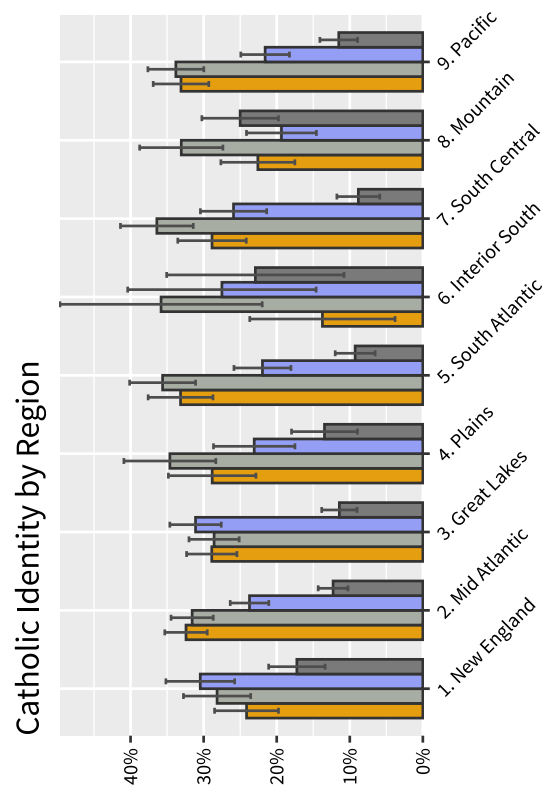


Figure 52: Catholic Ideology by Region, GSS 1972-2021 Aggregate

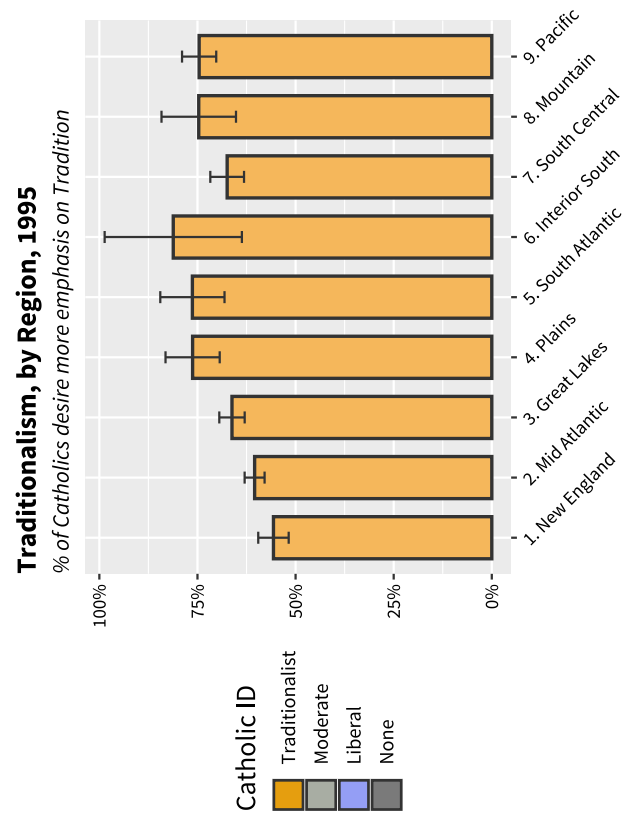


Figure 51: % of Catholics who desire more emphasis on tradition by region, 1995

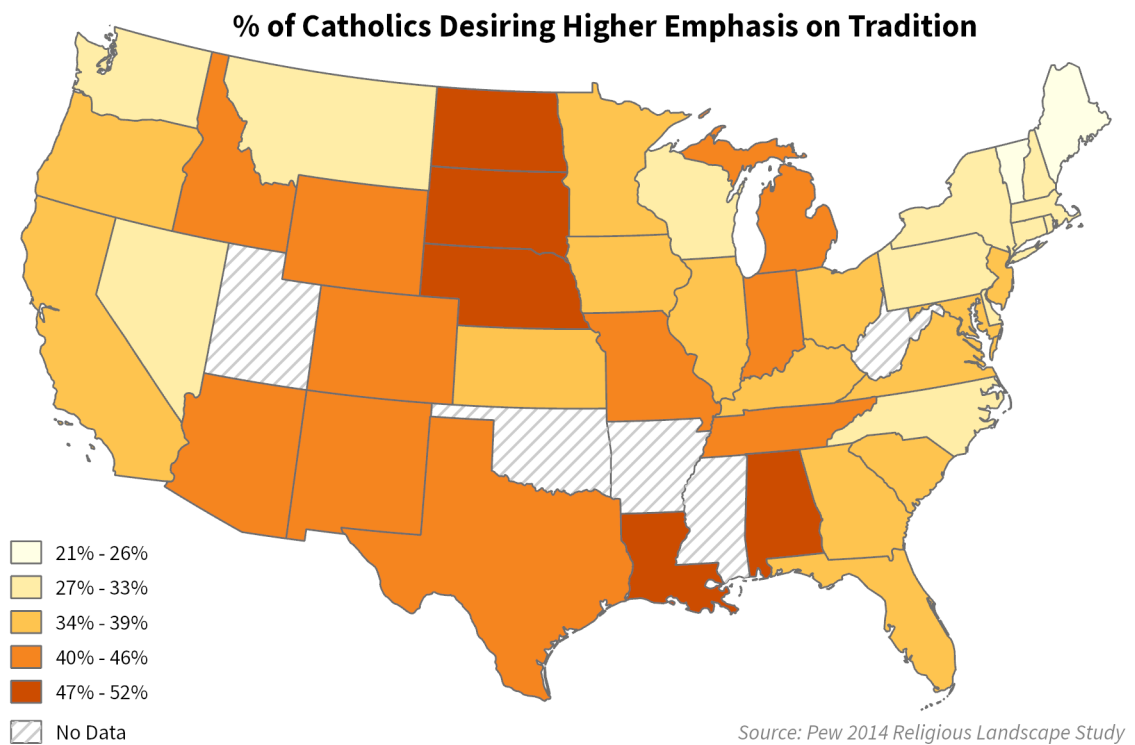


Figure 53: Percent of Catholics who Desire a Greater Emphasis on Tradition, Pew 2014

Given the relatively small sample size of the GSS Catholic ID variable, the margins of error make it difficult to ascertain significant geographic differences in ideology across region. The addition of the option to identify as moderate further complicates comparisons between the Pew and CPP data.

Additionally, we can examine the geographic spread in responses to surveys asking Catholics their opinions on a variety of controversies, such as female ordination, birth control, priestly celibacy, and outlook on the Second Vatican Council. Table 12 shows a breakdown of responses to these issues by region, incorporating responses from a variety of datasets.

Table 12: Catholic Opinions on Ordination by Region across datasets.

Percent of Catholics who Oppose Female Ordination by Region									
Survey	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific
Gallup 2011	31%	40%	44%	40%	50%	71%	42%	40%	54%
Gallup 2005	29%	29%	35%	41%	38%	59%	39%	30%	41%
NRASC, 1997	26%	35%	33%	46%	34%	<i>insig.</i>	40%	38%	34%
Pluralism, 1995	38%	37%	37%	26%	21%	32%	46%	21%	30%

Percent of Catholics who Support Celibate Clergy by Region									
Survey	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	Interior South	South Central	Mountain	Pacific
Gallup 2011	17%	26%	26%	31%	28%	33%	39%	26%	39%
Gallup 2005	11%	22%	26%	24%	22%	52%	33%	23%	23%

Although the Catholic Pluralism Project does include a survey question on the respondent's feelings towards Vatican II, the per-division sample size of individuals who had an opinion on the matter was too small in a majority of divisions for a meaningful geographic comparison to be made.

While there are countless more variables which were examined, all generally reflected the same geographic pattern demonstrated throughout the chapter: a more liberally minded New England and Pacific, a generally more conservative Interior South and South Central, and Plains regions, with the Interior- South and South-Central varying depending on the issue at hand. A handful more graphics on a variety of controversial issues are provided in Figures 54, 55, 56, and 57, all sourced from the 1997 National Religious Attitudes Survey of Catholics (NRASC):

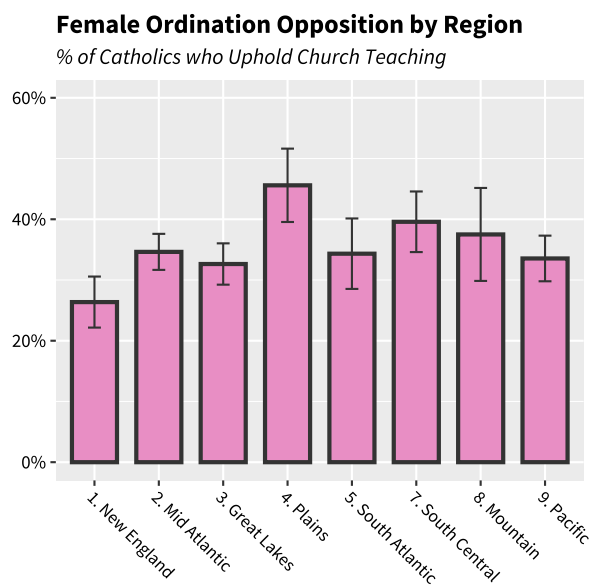


Figure 54: Opposition to Women Priests by Region, 1997.

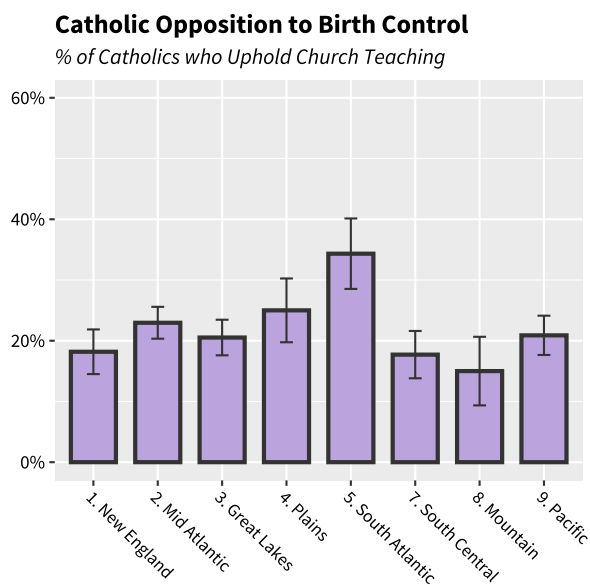


Figure 55: Catholic Opposition to Birth Control by Region, NRASC.

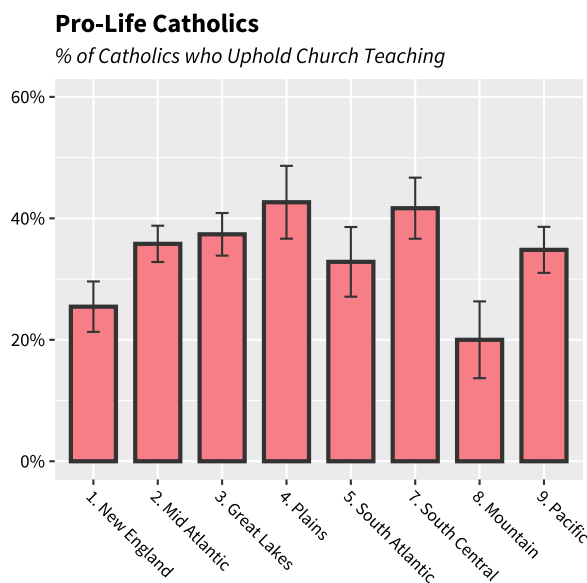


Figure 56: Percent of Catholics who are Pro-Life by Region, 1997

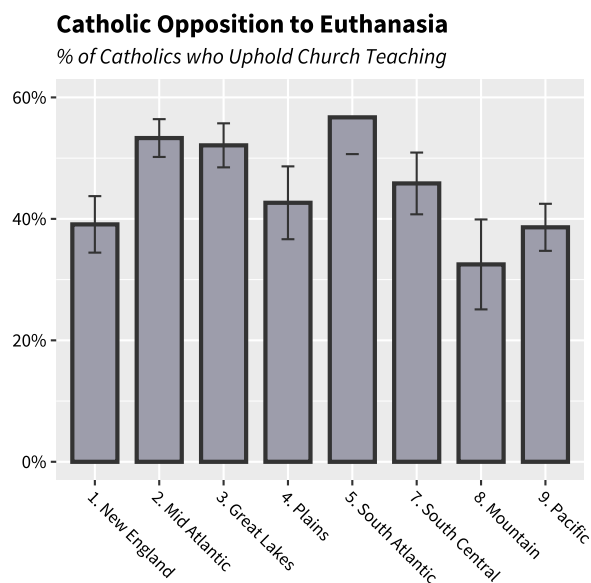


Figure 57: Catholic Opposition to Euthanasia by Region, 1997.

Finally, it is worth noting that Catholic ideological identity does not always translate to a more conservative or liberal political identity. Figure 58 breaks down political ideology by Catholic identity using data from the GSS:

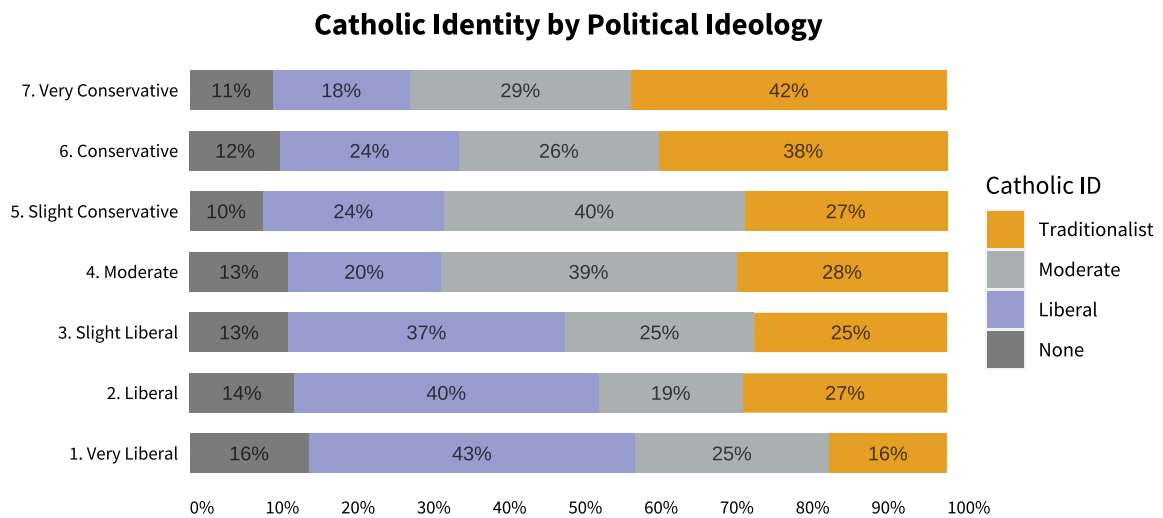


Figure 58: Catholic Ideology by Political Ideology

While there certainly is a relationship, it is far from 1:1, with less than half of Catholics who identified as very conservative also identifying as traditional, with roughly the same proportion of those saying they're very liberal identifying as liberal when it came to their faith. A regression analysis found an R^2 of 0.14, suggesting a weak correlation.

Liturgy Wars and Geography

The most visible manifestations of these disputes come from differing outlooks on the liturgy. The Novus Ordo mass allows for a certain degree of variation in how it is

celebrated, including different choices as to the degree which incense is used (if at all), whether the Priest faces *ad-populum* (towards the congregation) or *ad-orientum* (towards the Tabernacle), what music is used (contemporary praise and worship music or more traditional hymns), the style of vestments, and other aspects of how the liturgy is celebrated (Avella, 2019). Furthermore, in the absence of strict enforcement of liturgical norms, liturgical abuse (adding or removing elements of the Mass which are outside proscribed norms) creates even more (unsanctioned) variety in the liturgy.

A full examination of the history of Catholic liturgical reform is outside the scope of this paper. However, a general comparison of the liturgy before and after the Second Vatican Council is required for understanding the ongoing disputes between traditionalists and modernists over the liturgy and the spatial aspects thereof. The Tridentine Mass (also referred to as the Traditional Latin Mass, or Extraordinary Form) was promulgated at the Council of Trent to make uniform the myriad of variations in the Latin Rite which were emerging in the 15th and 16th centuries (Walsh, 2019). The *Novus Ordo*, or Ordinary Form, was established immediately following Vatican II. A full comparison of the two liturgies is outside the scope of the paper (given the vast number of changes), but the major ones include the translation of the Mass into the vernacular, the option of celebrating the Mass facing the congregation rather than towards the Tabernacle (the ornate edifice containing the Eucharist and unconsecrated hosts), the removal of many of the prayers throughout the Mass (such as the prayers at the foot of the Altar), the addition of the sign of peace, as well as making incense optional, allowing and encouraging lay people to perform a variety of liturgical roles including the readings,

and the introduction of alternative Eucharistic prayers. Many other elements of the Mass were either simplified or removed entirely.

While performing the Novus Ordo Mass, more traditional priests often opt to add in as many traditional elements as possible, such as incense, using the Latin form of the prayers, additional altar servers, and use Gregorian chant or other traditional hymns (Walsh, 2019). Locally, this type of celebration can be found at parishes such as Saint Rita's in Alexandria, Virginia. More progressive parishes may opt to exclude the incense and many of the now-optional elements, and use more contemporary folk hymns.

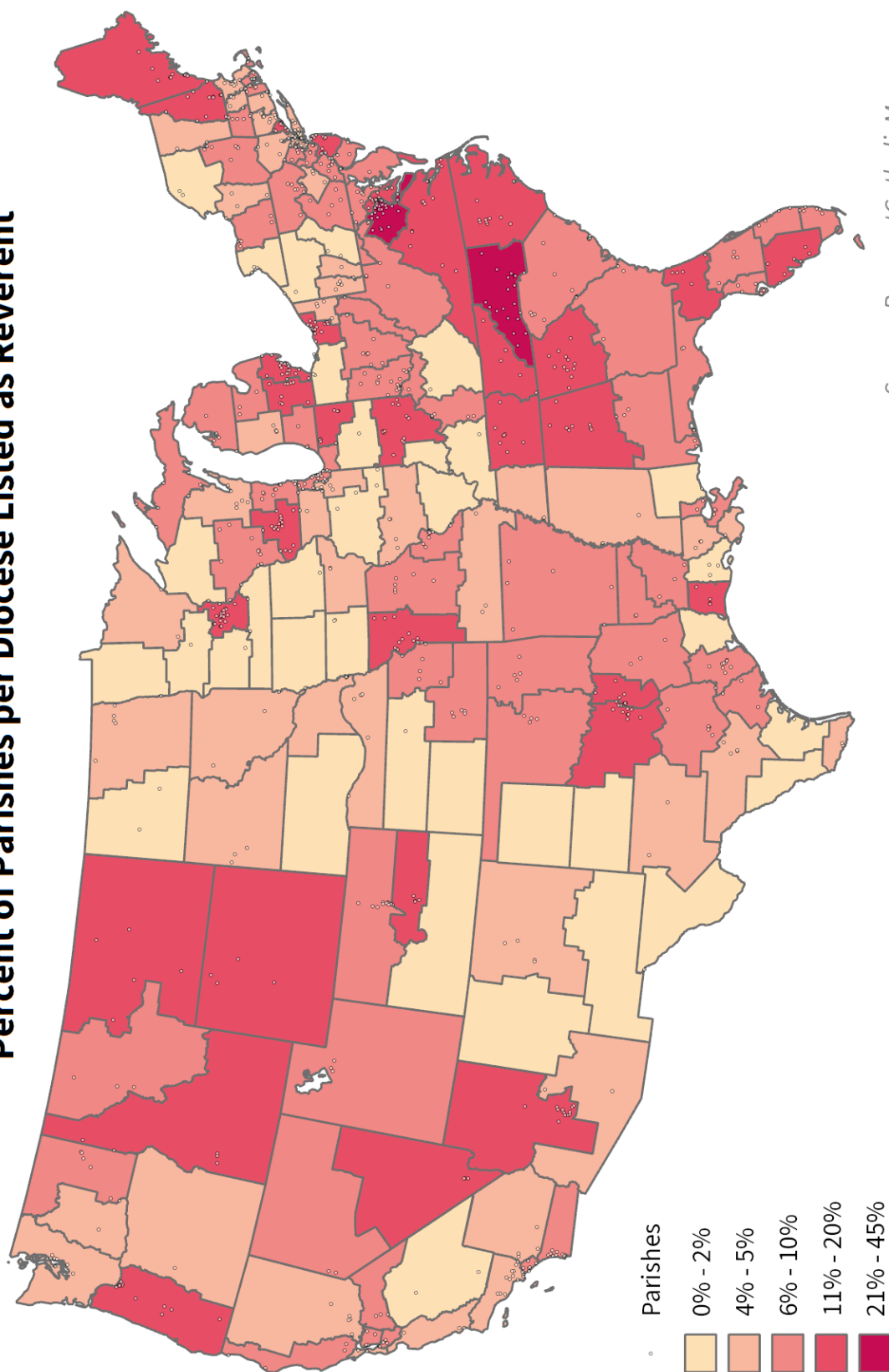
Unfortunately, there is no definitive source, listing, or criteria for traditionalist/modernist Mass locations. The best approximation comes from web resources cultivated by traditionalists and progressives to map parishes that meet their respective tastes. On the traditionalist side is the website "reverentcatholicmass.com". Table 13 provides a screenshot from their website which outlines their criteria:

Table 13: ReverentCatholicMass.com Criteria.

Indicators Found on Church Websites or in Bulletins				
Mass	Sacrament Indicators	Ministries Keywords	Misc. Keywords	Disqualifiers
Ordinary Form / Novus Ordo	Confession Available More than 1 Time Per Week	Pro-life	Catholic Medical Directives	Tabernacle Not in Sanctuary
Extraordinary Form / Tridentine Mass	Adoration Available More than 1 Time Per Week	Courage International	Extraordinary Minister	*Altar Girls
Ordinate Mass	Perpetual Adoration Available	Natural Family Planning	St. Michael Prayer	Controversial Ministries
Dominican Rite	Altar Rail in Use	Schola, Sacred Music, Chant, Polyphony	Latin	Controversial Parish Teaching Programs
Byzantine Divine Liturgy	Communion on the Tongue Encouraged	Classical School	Hell	Drums (Roman Rite)
Ad Orientem	Cohabitation before Marriage Discouraged	Home School		Other
Armenian, Maronite, Syro-Malankar, Chaldean, Syro-Malabar, Alexandrian, Coptic and Ethiopian Rites	Christ the King Procession	Religious Liberty		

A web-mapping application on the website maps the location of parishes which meet their criteria, with the data based on both the work of those hosting the website, as well as open-source submission by users. Given the partially open-source nature of the dataset, the issue of completeness does raise concerns, and it is possible that certain areas are neglected in reporting. However, this may also prove to be a strength, since over-reporting may reflect a more engaged, traditionalist population in the area who are more likely to submit data, while less engaged areas with fewer traditionally minded Catholics may underreport data. Thus, while the extremes may be exaggerated, the overall picture of the distribution should be close enough to the reality. Figure 59 shows the proportion of parishes classed as reverent by the website of the total number of parishes within a diocese.

Percent of Parishes per Diocese Listed as Reverent



Source: ReverentCatholicMass.com

Figure S9: Percent of Parishes per Diocese listed as Reverent by ReverentCatholicMass.com

Examining the distribution of traditional-style Masses across the United States reveals some noticeable incongruencies with other previously identified regional characteristics. The Plains region has a far lower proportion of Masses classified as reverent than regions which typically were characterized as more liberal, such as the urban Northeast, and regions which have been characterized as individualistic, such as the Mountain Northwest. The lack of Masses in the more heavily Hispanic Southwest may either reveal a difference in liturgical styles amongst Hispanic Catholics, or that Hispanic Catholics are less inclined to contribute to a website produced in English, or perhaps that the creators were unable to assess Spanish-speaking parishes.

Interestingly, dioceses in rapidly booming tech corridors such as Arlington (Virginia), Charlotte (North Carolina), Dallas (Texas), and Phoenix (Arizona) scored relatively high. Unfortunately, given the lack of diocese-level data on Catholic age distribution, a link between age and proportion of traditional-style Masses could not be determined. Should data emerge, this seems to be a potentially correlated variable.

Unfortunately, an equivalent website or listing for progressive Catholic parishes could not be found, meaning that these geographies will for the most part be defined by mapping the traditionalists. This unfortunately also naturally leads to the analysis overlooking the middle-of-the-road parishes.

Latin Mass: Locations

The next component of the geography of the traditionalist/liberal cultural divide is an examination of the spatial distribution of parishes celebrating the Latin Mass. Spatial data on the location of Latin Mass parishes was provided by the website “tradvillage”,

which contained a web map of locations celebrating the Latin Mass. In anticipation of the creation of this thesis, the website administrators were immediately contacted the day Pope Francis announced the Latin Mass restrictions, and generously gave access to their dataset. While not comprehensive, the website provided the most thorough list out of all the Mass Locator sites available, and should be thorough enough for these purposes.

The type of parish celebrating the Mass was also noted, distinguishing between normal diocesan parishes, and those administered by specific religious orders. Also worth noting is the presence of parishes run by the Society of Saint Pious X (SSPX) which is a religious order in a complicated canonical standing. Frequently described as a *sedevacatantist*¹⁸ organization¹⁹, the SSPX sits at the extreme end of the traditionalist camp. Innumerable editorials, blog posts, and Twitter threads have debated over the organization's validity *ad-nauseum*, and it is outside the scope of this paper to address the controversy beyond noting that the SSPX comprises a substantial share of the parishes celebrating the Latin Mass, regardless of the validity of their organization.

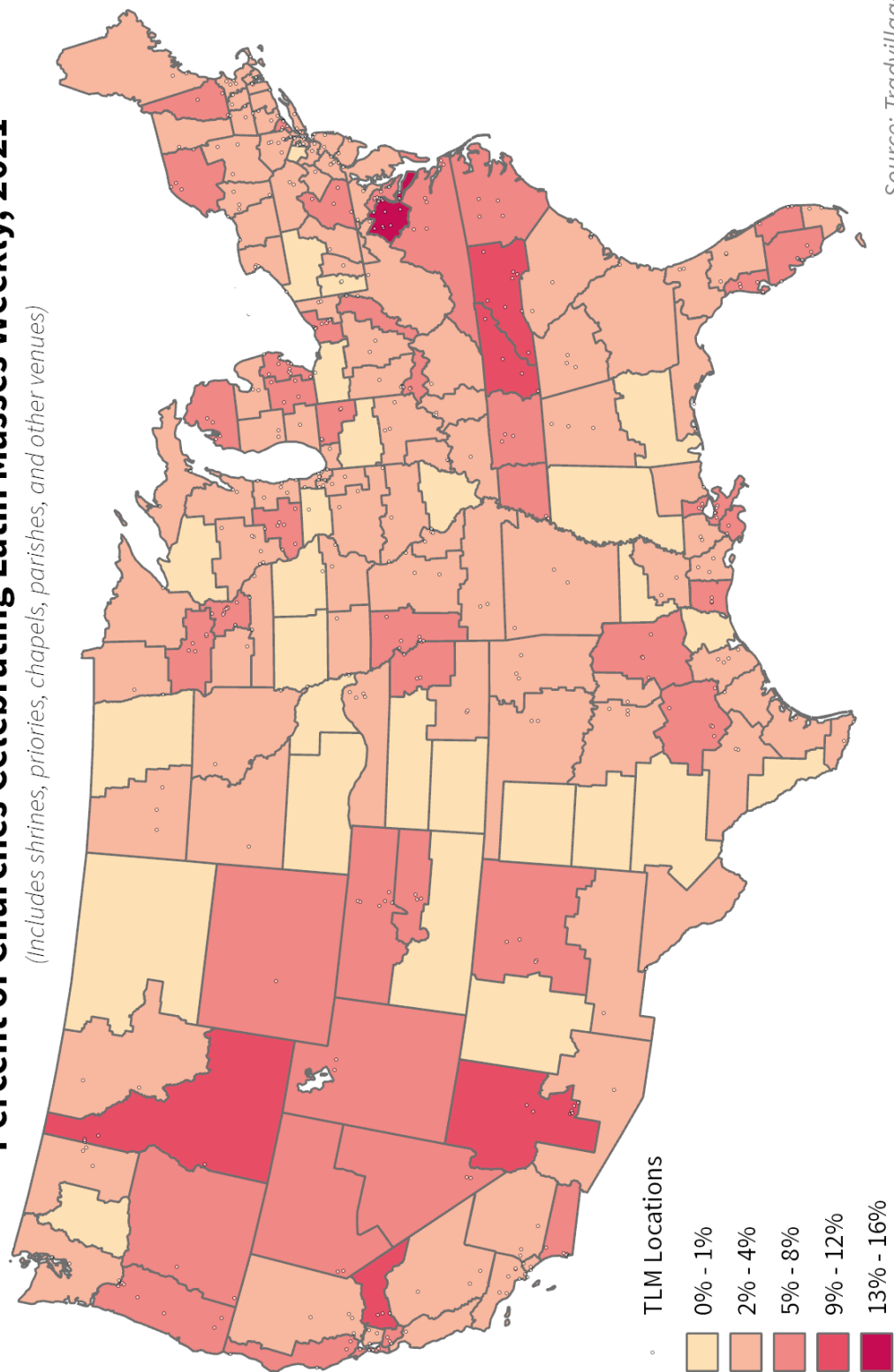
The Latin Mass location data was ported into ArcGIS, which was used to produce the following map in Figure 60, illustrating the percentage of diocesan parishes celebrating Latin Masses.

¹⁸ A radically traditionalist ideological camp which holds that the Second Vatican Council was an illegitimate and heretical ecumenical council, and that there has been no valid pope since Pope Pius VI.

¹⁹ Whether or not the entirety of the SSPX can be written off as a “sedevacatantist organization” is also a matter of heated debate.

Percent of Churches Celebrating Latin Masses Weekly, 2021

(Includes shrines, priories, chapels, parishes, and other venues)



Source: Tradvillage

Figure 60: Percent of Churches per Diocese celebrating the Latin Mass weekly, Spring 2021

Naturally, there is a high degree of overlap between Figure 59 and Figure 60, given that all parishes celebrating the Latin Mass were included in the reverence criteria. Arlington in Virginia and Charlotte in North Carolina are again highly pronounced, as is the Northwestern United States. The rural interior is generally barren of Latin Mass venues, as is the Deep South.

Latin Mass: Restrictions

In 2021, Pope Francis issued a *motu proprio* (a Papal letter penned and personally signed of his own initiative) titled *Traditionis Custodes* which heavily restricted the celebration of the Latin Mass, reversing Pope Benedict XVI's efforts to encourage its celebration (Francis, 2021). *Traditionis Custodes* declared that it is the bishop's "exclusive competence to authorize the use of the 1962 Roman Missal in his diocese" (Francis, 2021, Art. 2), opening the door for local restrictions on its celebration, along with numerous other restrictions that were not at the prerogative of bishops. Thus, the implementation of these decrees varied by diocese. More liberal bishops such as Cardinal Gregory of Washington issued wide reaching restrictions (Gregory, 2022), while some conservative bishops such as Bishop Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois invoked Canon 83 to abrogate elements of the decree entirely within their diocese (Paprocki, 2021).

Pew Research's 2021 American Trends Panel contains the best data available gauging Catholic reactions to Pope Francis' restrictions on the Latin Mass. The data thankfully includes the census division of the respondent, as well as their residence in a metropolitan area, allowing for a sufficiently granular spatial analysis of the results. The study was conducted just under a year after Pope Francis issued restrictions on the Latin

Mass. The survey included questions gauging whether the respondent was aware of the new restrictions, whether they approved of them, as well as data on Catholics approval of Pope Francis. Figure 61 provides a divisional breakdown of Catholics' approval of Pope Francis' restrictions on the Latin Mass. The data does not, however, inquire about whether the respondent had ever attended a Latin Mass, and with what frequency.

Every region with a response rate outside the margin of error had a net negative reaction to the new restrictions, with two regions reporting ambiguous results. The percentage approving and disapproving is illustrated graphically in Figure 61. The percentage responding 'unsure' is not shown. Table 14 displays the results in a tabular form with high- and low- end estimates of the net approval using the margin of error.

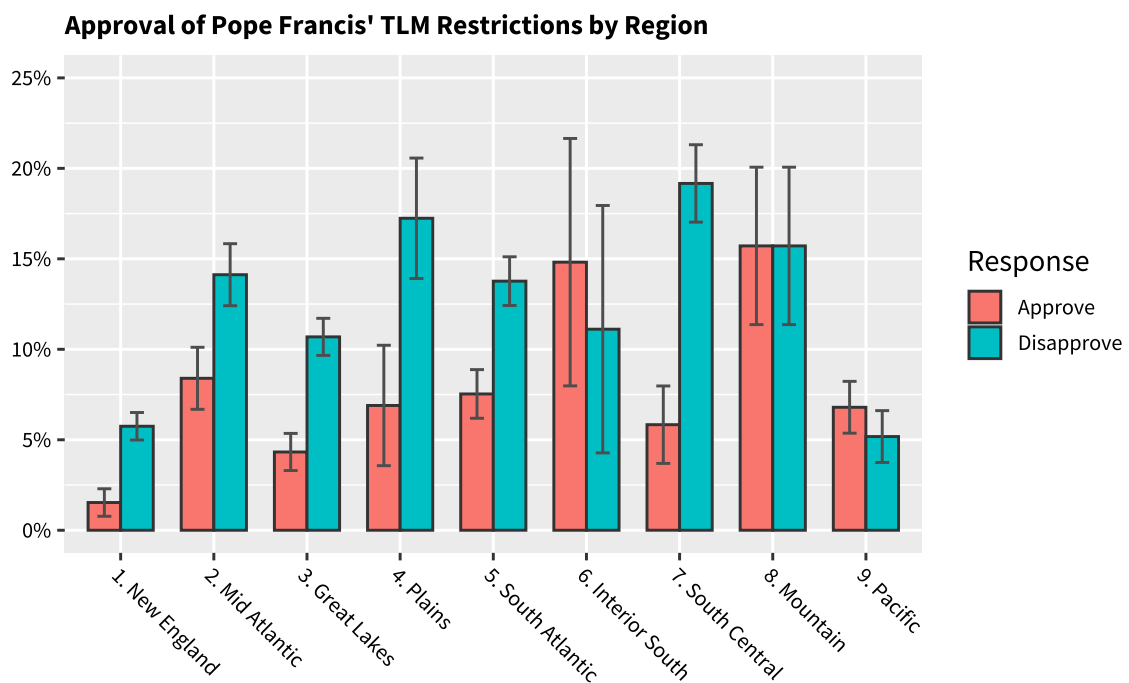


Figure 61: Approval of Pope Francis' restrictions on the Latin Mass (Pew, 2021)

Table 14: Net Approval of Pope Francis' TLM Restrictions by Region

	Estimated Net Approval of Pope Francis' TLM Restrictions (pts)					
	New England	Mid Atlantic	Great Lakes	Plains	South Atlantic	South Central
High Estimate	-2.7 pts	-2.3 pts	-4.3 pts	-3.7 pts	-3.5 pts	-9.1 pts
Low Estimate	-5.7 pts	-9.2 pts	-8.4 pts	-17.0 pts	-8.9 pts	-17.6 pts

These results roughly follow the overall trends examined previously: New England and the Pacific, unsurprisingly, had the highest approval the Latin Mass restrictions (though still net negative), with the South Central and Plains regions having the lowest. Given that two regions' results were within the margin of error, it is unclear whether any region has a positive net approval of the policy. Interestingly, these results do not align with the actual geographic distribution of parishes celebrating the Latin Mass weekly across the United States.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Sixty years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, The Catholic Church continues to face increasing divisions within its ranks regarding its legacy. The rigid uniformity of the 19th and early 20th century has given way to factionalism, which has been demonstrated to have a geographic element. Catholic ideological identity spatially varies throughout the United States, with regions such as the Plains and Southeast home to more conservative and traditionalist Catholics, though this does not always translate into a higher proportion of more traditional-style Masses.

Engagement with the sacraments also varies between regions, as does identification with the institutional church. Amongst regions with low engagement with

the sacraments, geographic variations in their regional character are still present, with New England showing more attachment to its Catholic legacy through the phenomena of cultural Catholicism, whereas Catholics in the Mountain West tend to detach entirely. How these trends will continue to develop in an increasingly secularized culture and the remaining pontificate of Pope Francis and beyond remains to be seen, but we can be confident that geography will continue to play a role.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

American Catholicism is in transition. Though Catholic sociologists have documented the national strokes of these changes at a broad level, the geographic nuances of the transformation of Catholicism in the United States have been lost. This thesis has attempted to provide a preliminary geography of the demographics, engagement, outlook, and movement of Catholics in the United States. It has found that while the trends described by previous literature are, on the aggregate, true, they are missing key details which can only be found through a more focused geographic approach.

While the decline in Catholic population in the Northeast and Midwest discussed by Zech et al. (2017) is real, it overlooks the many areas within these regions that are still experiencing growth, especially in the suburbs of the coastal Mid-Atlantic. Looking at the county-level shifts, the largest declines are confined almost exclusively to the Rust Belt and rural regions. The Catholic population in the South is booming, but it is not a uniform phenomenon, with the Interior South and other rural counties seeing barely any change in their Catholic population.

The explosive growth of the Hispanic Catholic population in the United States, as documented by Dinges (2019), Zech et al. (2017), and countless others is a real phenomenon, the magnitude and character of this growth is geographically varied, with regions such as New England seeing very little growth in the share of the Hispanic proportion of the population, and the origin country of Hispanics varying by region. The

share of Catholics of European ancestry is declining overall, but the Irish have seen a moderate increase in their share of the population in nearly every region.

In terms of beliefs and controversies, Catholics are divided across regions. Catholics in the Plains and Interior South are generally of a more conservative bent, whereas those in New England and the Pacific and Mountain regions lean towards more liberal outlooks on the Faith.

The characteristics of ex-Catholics vary across regions as well, with the Mountain West seemingly taking on a more individualistic Catholic identity, and one which can be easily dropped entirely when one leaves the faith. Meanwhile, Catholics in New England are more likely to cling onto their Catholic identity, but reframe it as a cultural rather than religious one. Trust in organized religion remains higher in the Northeast than the Mountain and Pacific West, though both pale in comparison to the high levels of adherence to the institutional Church found in the predominately German Plains region.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis only begins to scratch the surface of geography-driven inquiries into Catholicism in the United States. At this point, three areas were identified as particularly promising for future research.

Firstly, this thesis admittedly has primarily focused on a descriptive approach to Catholic geography, and due to the limitations of its scope and the timeframe in which it was to be produced, an explanatory approach was undertaken. A deeper look into the data analyzed in this thesis, combined with more advanced statistical techniques, may yield promising insights as to the underlying factors behind the development of regional

characteristics in American Catholicism. Further examination into predictive models of Catholic ideological behavior is also of interest. The historical and sociological factors behind the development of regional divides in Catholic ideology that spatially vary with some degree of independence from political ideology remain obscure.

Second, expanding the literature on regional geographies of Catholicism in the United States may prove to be a fruitful approach to uncovering those predictive factors, especially with a focus on their current characteristics; there already exist numerous high quality historical regional case studies of Catholicism such as *Commonwealth Catholicism* by Fogarty (2001). Original proposals for this thesis included a potential regional case study on the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, to develop insights as to how it evolved into one of the most conservative dioceses in the country, despite the politically liberal bent of the area it covers.

Third, more targeted demographic and socio-political data on Catholicism would be a great boon to understanding the Church's modern dynamics, especially if gathered with small-scale geographic identifiers. It would behoove future surveys of Catholic behavior to include at least state-level designators for respondents. While it would be a massive undertaking, if an organization with sufficient funding was able to carry out a survey with substantial sample size for most states, the potential benefits to the field would be innumerable.

Fourth, this study has focused almost entirely on the Catholic laity. While datasets on priest opinions do exist, they lack sufficiently granular geographic identifiers for the small-scale geographic analysis that this thesis aimed to achieve.

Fifth, the differences amongst ethnicities across regions in terms of engagement and opinions was not thoroughly explored, though there are countless intersections to look at. Differences across regions in prayer regularity, Mass attendance, and stances on controversial opinions between members of the same ancestry group have not been researched at this point, though this presents the most likely path for immediate further research and will likely bear fruit in the near future. Given that intra-ethnic differences in adherence rate to Catholicism were demonstrated, it is possible that geographic variations exist for other variables.

CONCLUSION

The future of American Catholicism remains uncertain, and the need for rigorous geographic inquiry into these transformations has never been greater. While the uptick in literature focusing on these transitions is highly encouraging, it remains lacking in this nuanced spatial analysis, the first fruits of which have been demonstrated in this paper. Whether one is a Bishop needing to learn about the changes facing his diocese, a parish minister looking to understand the future of their community, youth ministers yearning to better adapt their ministry, or an ordinary lay Catholic seeking answers in a changing world, or a sociologist documenting the changing face of American society, understanding the geographic realities of Catholic transformation is not only useful, but necessary. There is much to be done, but it is my hope that this thesis may serve as a solid foundation for a new generation of literature on the Catholic Church.

APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table 15: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, 1972-2020

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
Irish	23.0%	18.3%	15.0%	18.0%	19.2%	16.8%	5.8%	11.2%	8.8%
Italian	20.5%	28.3%	9.6%	4.6%	12.8%	5.3%	5.4%	8.5%	6.8%
Polish	8.7%	8.5%	12.7%	2.9%	5.7%	5.9%	1.7%	2.4%	1.6%
Czech/Slovak	0.6%	1.8%	4.1%	2.7%	1.4%	0.8%	3.3%	1.9%	0.6%
Misc. White Ethnic	6.0%	4.9%	5.2%	4.7%	3.1%	0.7%	1.2%	3.4%	3.7%
German	4.0%	8.1%	22.3%	34.5%	12.1%	18.2%	6.2%	13.9%	7.1%
English	3.8%	2.9%	4.6%	4.3%	6.4%	6.7%	2.7%	4.5%	4.2%
American	0.3%	1.0%	0.8%	0.3%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%	2.1%	1.3%
Quebecois	15.4%	1.6%	1.9%	1.5%	1.9%	0.5%	1.8%	0.2%	0.9%
French	2.7%	1.3%	2.1%	2.5%	2.0%	3.9%	6.5%	2.6%	1.8%
Other W. Europe	6.9%	3.7%	8.0%	13.2%	3.6%	11.6%	2.4%	7.2%	4.6%
Mexican	0.2%	1.0%	5.9%	3.8%	5.0%	7.8%	45.3%	22.8%	37.8%
Puerto Rican	3.1%	5.8%	0.7%	0.0%	2.9%	0.2%	0.6%	0.3%	0.7%
Other Spanish	2.5%	8.3%	1.1%	1.6%	13.9%	9.2%	6.1%	10.8%	7.5%
African	0.3%	1.6%	1.8%	1.1%	3.4%	5.1%	4.0%	1.0%	1.2%
Native American	0.2%	0.4%	1.5%	3.2%	1.5%	3.0%	2.0%	4.0%	1.7%
Asian	0.5%	2.1%	2.0%	0.7%	3.0%	1.9%	1.2%	1.9%	8.6%
Other	1.3%	0.6%	0.7%	0.5%	1.1%	2.3%	0.7%	1.2%	1.1%

Table 16: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Condensed, 1972-2021

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
White Ethnic	35.8%	43.4%	31.6%	15.0%	23.0%	12.7%	11.6%	16.2%	12.7%
Western European	33.2%	18.5%	39.7%	56.2%	27.0%	41.0%	22.7%	30.5%	20.0%
Hispanic	5.8%	15.1%	7.7%	5.4%	21.8%	17.2%	52.0%	33.9%	46.0%
Asian	0.5%	2.1%	2.0%	0.7%	3.0%	1.9%	1.2%	1.9%	8.6%
Black & Indigenous	0.5%	1.9%	3.4%	4.3%	4.9%	8.1%	6.0%	5.0%	2.9%

Table 17: Catholic Ancestral Composition in the United States, Nationwide, by Subset.

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>All Catholics (1972-2021)</i>	<i>Historic (1972-89)</i>	<i>Modern (2000-21)</i>	<i>Urban Catholics</i>	<i>Suburban Catholics</i>	<i>Rural Catholics</i>
Irish	15.2%	15.1%	15.3%	12.3%	17.0%	15.3%
Italian	14.2%	11.4%	10.2%	13.5%	18.5%	10.7%
Polish	6.7%	8.8%	4.7%	6.3%	7.1%	6.6%
Czech/Slovak	2.1%	3.8%	1.4%	1.3%	1.9%	2.7%
Misc. White Ethnic	4.2%	5.8%	2.8%	2.8%	4.8%	4.4%
German	12.6%	17.4%	14.8%	8.1%	10.9%	16.7%
English	4.1%	5.0%	3.6%	3.0%	4.0%	4.8%
American	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.3%	1.0%	1.1%
Quebecois	2.8%	4.4%	3.6%	0.9%	2.1%	4.6%
French	2.4%	3.1%	2.8%	1.9%	1.8%	3.2%
Other W. Europe	5.7%	8.4%	7.3%	3.5%	4.9%	7.7%
Mexican	13.2%	9.8%	20.2%	16.3%	10.8%	13.6%
Puerto Rican	2.3%	0.2%	1.3%	6.3%	1.6%	0.7%
Other Spanish	6.4%	2.3%	3.2%	11.0%	7.5%	2.7%
African	1.9%	0.7%	1.6%	4.2%	1.1%	1.2%
Native American	1.4%	1.2%	2.9%	1.4%	0.8%	2.0%
Asian	2.8%	0.5%	2.1%	4.5%	3.4%	1.3%
Other	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	1.2%	0.7%	0.8%

Table 18: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Urban, 1972-2021

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
Irish	16.3%	12.6%	13.7%	13.6%	16.1%	22.4%	10.3%	12.1%	8.3%
Italian	28.0%	24.1%	8.6%	16.3%	9.7%	4.5%	4.1%	9.4%	5.7%
Polish	8.9%	6.5%	14.7%	5.7%	5.7%	3.0%	3.8%	3.1%	1.3%
Czech/Slovak	0.0%	0.5%	2.9%	5.2%	2.6%	1.5%	0.9%	1.5%	0.7%
Other White Ethnic	2.8%	3.0%	4.6%	2.7%	2.7%	0.0%	0.9%	3.1%	2.1%
German	3.7%	4.4%	14.2%	20.1%	10.8%	11.5%	7.5%	10.2%	6.1%
English	1.8%	1.9%	2.5%	5.4%	5.0%	9.0%	4.7%	3.7%	3.0%
American	0.0%	1.6%	1.8%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	1.3%	0.9%	1.3%
Quebecois	6.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.6%	1.8%	0.0%	1.6%	0.8%	0.6%
French	3.4%	0.8%	0.9%	4.3%	2.0%	4.2%	5.0%	4.8%	0.9%
Other W. Europe	5.7%	2.2%	4.8%	8.8%	1.7%	12.7%	1.0%	4.3%	3.3%
Mexican	0.2%	0.7%	11.5%	5.8%	1.9%	9.1%	40.7%	30.4%	39.4%
Puerto Rican	8.5%	16.6%	2.9%	0.0%	3.6%	0.8%	0.3%	0.4%	0.7%
Other Spanish	12.1%	17.7%	2.6%	3.6%	14.8%	11.5%	10.5%	8.6%	9.1%
African	0.7%	3.9%	6.3%	6.2%	11.4%	4.4%	2.9%	2.5%	1.9%
Native American	0.3%	0.2%	3.3%	1.1%	2.0%	0.0%	2.1%	1.4%	1.8%
Asian	0.3%	1.7%	2.8%	0.0%	6.3%	3.1%	2.2%	2.9%	12.4%
Other	1.1%	1.2%	1.8%	0.5%	1.4%	2.3%	0.4%	0.0%	1.6%

Table 19: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Suburban, 1972-2021

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
Irish	16.3%	12.6%	13.7%	13.6%	16.1%	22.4%	10.3%	12.1%	8.3%
Italian	28.0%	24.1%	8.6%	16.3%	9.7%	4.5%	4.1%	9.4%	5.7%
Polish	8.9%	6.5%	14.7%	5.7%	5.7%	3.0%	3.8%	3.1%	1.3%
Czech/Slovak	0.0%	0.5%	2.9%	5.2%	2.6%	1.5%	0.9%	1.5%	0.7%
Other White Ethnic	2.8%	3.0%	4.6%	2.7%	2.7%	0.0%	0.9%	3.1%	2.1%
German	3.7%	4.4%	14.2%	20.1%	10.8%	11.5%	7.5%	10.2%	6.1%
English	1.8%	1.9%	2.5%	5.4%	5.0%	9.0%	4.7%	3.7%	3.0%
American	0.0%	1.6%	1.8%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	1.3%	0.9%	1.3%
Quebecois	6.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.6%	1.8%	0.0%	1.6%	0.8%	0.6%
French	3.4%	0.8%	0.9%	4.3%	2.0%	4.2%	5.0%	4.8%	0.9%
Other W. Europe	5.7%	2.2%	4.8%	8.8%	1.7%	12.7%	1.0%	4.3%	3.3%
Mexican	0.2%	0.7%	11.5%	5.8%	1.9%	9.1%	40.7%	30.4%	39.4%
Puerto Rican	8.5%	16.6%	2.9%	0.0%	3.6%	0.8%	0.3%	0.4%	0.7%
Other Spanish	12.1%	17.7%	2.6%	3.6%	14.8%	11.5%	10.5%	8.6%	9.1%
African	0.7%	3.9%	6.3%	6.2%	11.4%	4.4%	2.9%	2.5%	1.9%
Native American	0.3%	0.2%	3.3%	1.1%	2.0%	0.0%	2.1%	1.4%	1.8%
Asian	0.3%	1.7%	2.8%	0.0%	6.3%	3.1%	2.2%	2.9%	12.4%
Other	1.1%	1.2%	1.8%	0.5%	1.4%	2.3%	0.4%	0.0%	1.6%

Table 20: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Rural, 1972-2021

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
Irish	22%	21%	14%	17%	22%	16%	3%	11%	11%
Italian	17%	24%	8%	3%	14%	5%	4%	6%	8%
Polish	9%	11%	11%	3%	7%	5%	1%	2%	2%
Czech/Slovak	1%	3%	4%	2%	1%	0%	4%	1%	2%
Other White Ethnic	5%	8%	4%	5%	4%	0%	1%	5%	4%
German	4%	12%	31%	36%	15%	14%	5%	8%	16%
English	5%	4%	6%	4%	8%	3%	2%	5%	5%
American	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	4%	1%	3%
Quebecois	21%	4%	3%	2%	3%	1%	2%	1%	0%
French	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	4%	6%	3%	2%
Other W. Europe	7%	6%	11%	15%	5%	9%	3%	6%	8%
Mexican	0%	1%	3%	4%	6%	9%	52%	39%	17%
Puerto Rican	1%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Other Spanish	1%	1%	0%	1%	4%	13%	4%	3%	11%
African	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	8%	5%	0%	0%
Native American	0%	1%	1%	4%	1%	6%	2%	2%	7%
Asian	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	5%	2%
Other	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	4%	1%	1%	2%

Table 21: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Historic, 1972-1989

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
<i>Irish</i>	19.2%	20.3%	13.9%	22.1%	28.8%	2.9%	15.3%	14.1%	8.3%
<i>Italian</i>	19.6%	22.9%	7.7%	15.8%	5.6%	1.3%	7.3%	4.4%	6.0%
<i>Polish</i>	14.8%	13.7%	10.4%	11.3%	6.4%	1.5%	1.6%	2.9%	2.5%
<i>Czech/Slovak</i>	1.2%	3.6%	6.3%	2.2%	0.0%	7.3%	0.8%	1.0%	2.1%
<i>Other White Ethnic</i>	5.2%	11.4%	4.8%	6.1%	0.0%	1.9%	6.7%	4.5%	2.9%
<i>German</i>	2.6%	12.5%	31.2%	14.1%	3.2%	3.2%	7.7%	39.3%	15.2%
<i>English</i>	2.5%	3.5%	4.2%	12.0%	8.1%	2.3%	9.4%	5.7%	8.2%
<i>American</i>	0.4%	0.3%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Quebecois</i>	23.1%	0.8%	3.1%	2.6%	0.0%	0.7%	0.9%	3.1%	0.0%
<i>French</i>	1.9%	0.9%	4.3%	1.9%	3.1%	5.3%	2.7%	4.3%	4.0%
<i>Other W. Europe</i>	7.2%	6.0%	11.3%	5.1%	4.4%	2.0%	6.8%	16.4%	13.9%
<i>Mexican</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.5%	0.0%	56.8%	28.6%	1.7%	11.6%
<i>Puerto Rican</i>	0.3%	0.9%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Other Spanish</i>	0.8%	0.7%	0.1%	1.4%	4.8%	4.4%	5.2%	0.0%	17.8%
<i>African</i>	0.3%	0.9%	0.4%	0.3%	16.9%	1.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Native American</i>	0.0%	0.6%	0.6%	1.6%	11.1%	1.0%	2.1%	1.9%	3.5%
<i>Asian</i>	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	1.0%	0.0%	0.6%	1.8%	0.4%	1.6%
<i>Other</i>	0.5%	0.6%	0.1%	1.7%	7.6%	2.0%	1.6%	0.3%	2.5%

Table 22: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, Modern, 2000-2021

<i>Ancestry</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>Mid Atlantic</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Plains</i>	<i>South Atlantic</i>	<i>Interior South</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Pacific</i>
<i>Irish</i>	28.9%	23.9%	13.4%	18.7%	22.0%	7.2%	3.2%	5.9%	13.6%
<i>Italian</i>	14.9%	27.4%	7.3%	2.6%	13.8%	3.2%	5.9%	4.0%	6.3%
<i>Polish</i>	4.6%	7.0%	11.2%	3.3%	4.0%	5.7%	1.0%	0.9%	2.5%
<i>Czech/Slovak</i>	0.5%	2.6%	2.3%	3.1%	0.4%	0.0%	1.5%	0.3%	0.7%
<i>Misc. White Ethnic</i>	5.3%	2.8%	2.8%	2.1%	2.7%	0.0%	0.7%	3.9%	4.2%
<i>German</i>	3.8%	11.9%	27.7%	30.9%	14.0%	19.2%	4.2%	7.8%	17.6%
<i>English</i>	2.5%	3.8%	6.3%	1.8%	5.4%	0.0%	2.4%	1.8%	3.9%
<i>American</i>	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	2.3%	1.5%	4.9%
<i>Quebecois</i>	19.4%	4.3%	2.0%	0.3%	3.7%	0.0%	1.1%	1.4%	0.0%
<i>French</i>	3.9%	1.5%	2.0%	2.4%	3.4%	4.7%	4.2%	3.0%	0.3%
<i>Other W. Europe</i>	6.9%	5.0%	11.3%	13.8%	5.4%	14.0%	3.6%	6.8%	5.1%
<i>Mexican</i>	0.0%	2.1%	6.8%	8.3%	9.9%	15.4%	54.4%	50.9%	21.7%
<i>Puerto Rican</i>	3.5%	2.6%	0.1%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	0.3%
<i>Other Spanish</i>	1.4%	2.1%	1.3%	2.3%	4.2%	21.8%	3.8%	1.6%	7.1%
<i>African</i>	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.7%	1.2%	4.1%	6.9%	0.4%	0.0%
<i>Native American</i>	0.4%	0.9%	2.2%	6.6%	1.8%	3.6%	3.6%	1.3%	9.9%
<i>Asian</i>	0.5%	1.2%	2.7%	1.8%	2.5%	1.0%	0.8%	5.7%	1.4%
<i>Other</i>	3.1%	0.4%	0.1%	1.1%	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%	1.1%	0.3%

Table 23: Catholic Ancestral Composition by Region, 1972-2021, Sorted:

New England		Mid Atlantic		Great Lakes	
Irish	23.0%	Italian	28.3%	German	22.3%
Italian	20.5%	Irish	18.3%	Irish	15.0%
Quebecois	15.4%	Polish	8.5%	Polish	12.7%
Polish	8.7%	German	8.1%	Italian	9.6%
German	4.0%	Puerto Rican	5.8%	Mexican	5.9%
Canadian	3.9%	Other Spanish	5.1%	English	4.6%
English	3.8%	English	2.9%	Czech/Slovak	4.1%
Puerto Rican	3.1%	Czech/Slovak	1.8%	French	2.1%
French	2.7%	Quebecois	1.6%	Quebecois	1.9%
Other Spanish	1.6%	African	1.6%	African	1.8%
Czech/Slovak	0.6%	French	1.3%	Native American	1.5%
American	0.3%	Mexican	1.0%	American	0.8%
African	0.3%	American	1.0%	Canadian	0.8%
Native American	0.2%	Canadian	0.5%	Puerto Rican	0.7%
Mexican	0.2%	Native American	0.4%	Other Spanish	0.6%
<i>Other</i>	11.6%	<i>Other</i>	14.0%	<i>Other</i>	15.5%

Plains		South Atlantic		Interior South	
German	34.5%	Irish	19.2%	German	18.2%
Irish	18.0%	Italian	12.8%	Irish	16.8%
Italian	4.6%	German	12.1%	Mexican	7.8%
English	4.3%	Other Spanish	7.2%	English	6.7%
Mexican	3.8%	English	6.4%	Other Spanish	6.3%
Native American	3.2%	Polish	5.7%	Polish	5.9%
Polish	2.9%	Mexican	5.0%	Italian	5.3%
Czech/Slovak	2.7%	African	3.4%	African	5.1%
French	2.5%	Puerto Rican	2.9%	French	3.9%
Quebecois	1.5%	French	2.0%	Native American	3.0%
African	1.1%	Quebecois	1.9%	Canadian	1.8%
Other Spanish	1.0%	Native American	1.5%	Czech/Slovak	0.8%
Canadian	0.7%	Czech/Slovak	1.4%	Quebecois	0.5%
American	0.3%	American	1.0%	Puerto Rican	0.2%
Puerto Rican	0.0%	Canadian	0.4%	American	0.0%
<i>Other</i>	19.0%	<i>Other</i>	17.2%	<i>Other</i>	17.7%

South Central		Mountain		Pacific	
Mexican	45.3%	Mexican	22.8%	Mexican	37.8%
French	6.5%	German	13.9%	Irish	8.8%
German	6.2%	Irish	11.2%	Filipino	7.2%
Irish	5.8%	Italian	8.5%	German	7.1%
Italian	5.4%	English	4.5%	Italian	6.9%
African	4.0%	Native American	4.0%	English	4.2%
Czech/Slovak	3.3%	French	2.6%	Other Spanish	4.2%
American	3.1%	Polish	2.4%	Spanish	3.2%
Other Spanish	2.8%	American	2.1%	Portuguese	1.9%
English	2.7%	Czech/Slovak	1.9%	French	1.8%
Native American	2.0%	African	1.0%	Native American	1.7%
Quebecois	1.8%	Other Spanish	0.7%	Polish	1.6%
Polish	1.7%	Puerto Rican	0.3%	American	1.3%
Puerto Rican	0.6%	Canadian	0.3%	African	1.2%
Canadian	0.6%	Quebecois	0.2%	Scottish	1.2%
<i>Other</i>	8.2%	<i>Other</i>	23.6%	<i>Other</i>	10.1%

APPENDIX B: CATEGORIZATION

For the sake of clarity and conciseness many of the smaller ancestry groups present within the GSS data were condensed into single categories, shown in Table 23:

Table 24: Definitions of Grouped Ancestry Categories:

Condensed Category	Constituent Ancestries
<i>'Other Western Europe'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canada (Non-French) - Scottish - Austrian - Dutch - Belgian - Danish - Norwegian - Swedish - Finnish
<i>'Other White-Ethnic'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hungarian - Lithuanian - Russian (USSR) - Russian - Romanian - Greek - Yugoslavian - Other European - Portuguese
<i>'Asian'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chinese - Japanese - Indian - Philippines - Arabic - Other Asian
<i>'Other Spanish'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spain - West Indies - Other Spanish <p><i>GSS's 'ethnic' variable used for ancestry did not include breakdowns of specific 'other Spanish' Hispanic groups. Starting in 2000, an additional variable was created to record these. Due to the lack of pre-2000 data, an advanced breakdown incorporating this other variable was not performed to maintain consistency in definitions across years.</i></p>

Chapter 6 briefly included a discussion on generational compositions, particularly in relation to migration. These generation categories were created by grouping respondents based on birth year. This thesis utilized the following definitions for generations:

Table 25: Definitions of Generations.

Generation	Birth Year
<i>Lost Generation</i>	Pre-1990
<i>Greatest Generation</i>	1990-1927
<i>Silent Generation</i>	1928-1944
<i>Baby Boomers</i>	1945-1964
<i>Gen X</i>	1965-1980
<i>Millennials / Gen Y</i>	1981-1996
<i>Gen Z</i>	1997 –

Note that due to the GSS only surveying adults (those ages 18 and older), all respondents in the current release of the GSS were born before the year 2004. Should this research be continued decades down the road, the cutoff date for Gen Z will likely be defined as somewhere between 2009 and 2012.

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