

MACROECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS NONAFFILIATION: A PANEL  
STUDY OF U.S. REGIONAL DATA

**Abstract**

*The United States has experienced a significant decrease in church affiliation over the past two decades. This paper attempts to measure the impact of macroeconomic variables such as unemployment, gross domestic product, and government expenditures on religious affiliation using panel data for U.S. regions over the time period 1976-2008. These variables are shown to be important components of an expanded version of the modern secularization theory of religious affiliation proposed by Norris and Inglehart (2005). We show that a significant percentage of the variation in affiliation is explained by the amount of government-sponsored welfare spending. Because churches historically provided social welfare, increased state expenditures may serve as a substitute for religious charity and thereby induce greater nonaffiliation among marginal religious consumers.*