



Secularization or Alternative Faith?

Trends and Conceptions of Spirituality in Northern Europe

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Abstract

In the debate on European secularization, it has been argued that conventional religion has given way to *spirituality*, and that religion is thus *changing* as opposed to diminishing. Focusing on northern Europe, this study uses semi-structured interviews and survey data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) to explore meanings and trends of spirituality and religious beliefs. Findings highlight a movement away from both religiosity and spirituality. Moreover, individuals who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’ hold diverse beliefs about the supernatural and various interpretations of spirituality, some of which are in essence secular. Ultimately, this study suggests that current trends of spirituality are consistent with broader patterns of secularization in northern Europe.

Keywords

secularization – spirituality – religious beliefs – northern Europe – mixed methods

1 Introduction

Northern Protestant Europe is characterized by its low levels of participation in organized religion. Non-attendance at religious services is typical, importance of religion in people’s lives is low, religious disaffiliation is increasingly common, and fewer and fewer individuals believe in the traditional tenets of a Christian heritage.¹ Yet, scholarly opinions differ on the strength of alternative

1 See for example Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (New

forms of religious beliefs and behavior. Some literature refrains from speaking of European *secularization* in favor of the notion of religious *change*. In fact, works of several scholars, such as Peter Berger, Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke argue that low levels of active church attendance merely reflect a detachment from religious institutions and a change in the characteristics of personal beliefs.² This is exemplified by Davie's assertion that Europeans *believe without belonging*, which further assumes that individualized understandings of the supernatural, including *spirituality*, are replacing 'traditional' religious beliefs.³ Similarly, it has been argued that the presence of spirituality is numerically significant in the European context.⁴ Other research claims that we are seeing both secularization and a change in the substance of religious beliefs in contemporary society and that such processes are complementary.⁵

York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Isabella Kasselstrand, "Lived Secularity: Atheism, Indifference, and the Social Significance of Religion," in: Phil Zuckerman (ed.), *Religion: Beyond Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 2016), 37–52; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Pew Research Center, "Being Christian in Western Europe." <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe>; David Voas, "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe," *European Sociological Review* 25/2 (2009), 155–168; Phil Zuckerman, Luke Galen, and Frank Pasquale, *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

- 2 Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case; Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002); Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: SAGE, 2007); Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Rodney Stark, "Secularization RIP," *Sociology of Religion* 60/2 (1999), 249–273; Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Rodney Stark, Eva Hamberg, and Alan Miller, "Exploring Spirituality and Unchurched Religions in America, Sweden, and Japan," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 20/1 (2005), 3–23.
- 3 Davie, *Religion*; Davie, *Europe*; Davie, *Sociology*.
- 4 Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, "The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981–2000," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46/3 (2007), 305–320; Linda Woodhead, "Real Religion and Fuzzy Spirituality? Taking Sides in the Sociology of Religion," in Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman (eds.), *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 31–48.
- 5 Sarah Wilkins-LaFlamme, "A Tale of Decline or Change? Working Toward a Complementary Understanding of Secular Transition and Individual Spiritualization Theories," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 60/3 (2021), 516–539.

Of relevance to this inquiry, the expression ‘spiritual but not religious’ has been used to refer to individuals who identify as spiritual but typically who have abandoned organized religion. This category makes up one of four in a typology that also includes ‘spiritual and religious,’ ‘religious but not spiritual,’ and ‘neither religious nor spiritual.’⁶ While previous studies have devoted attention to distributions and trends within this typology, and while the meanings and characteristics of spirituality are complex, contextualized, and nuanced,⁷ spirituality is, in previous scholarship, habitually equated with beliefs in supernatural or otherworldly agents.⁸ What is not yet clear, however, is the extent to which ‘spiritual but not religious’ individuals in fact fit under the umbrellas of ‘believing without belonging’ or ‘alternative religiosity’ in a northern Europe that is characterized by a decline in conventional religion. In short, further attention is needed to address the question of whether a ‘spiritual turn’ is taking place and whether it can serve as evidence against secularization—or, if it is indeed fully compatible, or perhaps even a distinctive characteristic of, secularization processes.⁹

In the literature on religion and spirituality, religion is commonly defined in relation to institutionalized forms of worship. For example, Roof states that religion “refers to scripture, ritual, myths, beliefs, practices, moral codes, communities, social institutions, and so forth—that is, the outward and objectified

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- 6 Penny Long Marler and C. Kirk Hadaway, “‘Being Religious’ or ‘Being Spiritual’ in America: A Zero-Sum Proposition?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41/2 (2002), 289–300; Joey Marshall and Daniel Olson, “Is ‘Spiritual but not Religious’ a Replacement for Religion or Just One Step on the Path Between Religion and Nonreligion?” *Review of Religious Research* 60 (2018), 503–518; Brian Zinnbauer, Kenneth Pargament, Brenda Cole, Mark Rye, Eric Butcher, Timothy Belavich, Kathleen Hipp, Allie Scott, and Jill L. Kadar. “Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36/4 (1997), 549–564.
- 7 Nancy Ammerman, “Spiritual but Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52/2 (2013), 258–278; Wade Clark Roof, “Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis,” in: Michele Dillon (ed.), *The Handbook of Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137–148; Brian Steensland, Lauren Chism Schmidt, and Xiaoyun Wang, “Spirituality: What does it Mean and to Whom?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 57/3 (2018), 450–472.
- 8 E.g., Michele Dillon and Paul Wink, “Religiousness and Spirituality: Trajectories and Vital Involvement in Late Adulthood,” in: Michele Dillon (ed.), *The Handbook of Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179–189; Robert Fuller, *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Stark et al., “Exploring”; Zinnbauer et al. “Religion.”
- 9 For previous research that makes this case, see, e.g., David Voas and Steve Bruce, “The Spiritual Revolution: Another False Dawn for the Sacred,” in: Kieran Flanagan and Peter Jupp (eds.), *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 43–62.

elements of a tradition.”¹⁰ In contrast, spirituality is, in Roof’s words, “more elusive.”¹¹ Pew Research Center defines spirituality as the “beliefs or feelings about supernatural phenomena, such as life after death, the existence of a soul apart from the human body, and the presence of spiritual energy in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals.”¹² Religion has also been distinguished from spirituality by characterizing the latter as more intrinsic.¹³ This is in line with Heelas and Woodhead’s conceptions of ‘subjective-life spirituality’ and ‘life-as religion,’ where the former assumes that supernatural powers are located *within* individuals as opposed to the external forces more commonly associated with theistic religions.¹⁴ The subjective and intrinsic nature of spirituality also characterizes Houtman and Aupers’s ‘post-Christian spirituality,’ a concept that emphasizes a divinity of the self that is disconnected from Christian notions of spirituality.¹⁵

Previous research indeed conveys a wide variety of definitions of religion and spirituality, a fact that in itself underlines the complexity and breadth of these terms. Much like religiosity, spirituality encompasses a range of dimensions and distinct meanings. In addition to the mystical and what is commonly referred to as ‘New Age,’ where individuals use, for example, foundations of Eastern religions in their practices and world views, spirituality may also describe elements of religion in the West, such as a belief in God and the supernatural.¹⁶

Although the definitions of spirituality found in previous literature are varied,¹⁷ many refer to transcendent or supernatural forces, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. The emphasis on the transcendent can be seen, for example, in Fuller’s statement that both religiosity and spirituality “connote a belief in a Higher Power of some kind,”¹⁸ and Stark et al.’s assumption that “all forms of spirituality assume the existence of the supernatural.”¹⁹ However, previous

10 Roof, “Religion,” 138.

11 Ibid.

12 Pew Research Center, “Being Christian,” 119.

13 Steve Bruce, *British Gods: Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Bruce, *Secularization*; Houtman and Aupers, “Spiritual.”

14 Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*.

15 Houtman and Aupers, “Spiritual.”

16 Dillon and Wink, “Religiousness,” 180.

17 For an overview, see Ulrike Popp-Baier, “From Religion to Spirituality: Megatrend in Contemporary Society or Methodological Artefact? A Contribution to the Secularization Debate from Psychology of Religion,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3/1 (2010), 34–67.

18 Fuller, *Spiritual*, 6.

19 Stark et al., “Exploring,” 7.

research has found that not everyone who identifies as spiritual believes in the supernatural, and spirituality is not necessarily incompatible with atheism. Across fifteen European nations, 18 percent of individuals who identify as ‘spiritual but not religious’ do not believe in a “higher power or a spiritual force in the universe”²⁰ and in a study of the American context, Steensland et al. found that “9 percent of the responses described spirituality in exclusively immanent terms focused on self, other people, and/or the natural world.”²¹

Religion and spirituality also have a significant degree of overlap, as spirituality may be a complement or an alternative to conventional aspects of religion in the West,²² which depends on diverse interpretations of this term (i.e., whether spirituality is incompatible with traditional religion). Zinnbauer et al. discovered that three-quarters of their American respondents identified as religious *and* spiritual and that this group had qualitatively different interpretations of spirituality compared to the one in five respondents who identified as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Overall, the ‘spiritual but not religious’ hold more negative views of organized religion and are more likely to ascribe to nontraditional beliefs.²³ Marshall and Olson echo this finding and explain that, although Scandinavians are more secular given that they are more likely to be neither religious nor spiritual, the way respondents in each group are characterized in terms of beliefs and values remain remarkably similar for Americans and Scandinavians, despite cultural and linguistic differences.²⁴ However, Ammerman finds that Americans are more likely than Europeans to associate spirituality with a belief in God,²⁵ further highlighting the contextual divergences in the meanings of this term. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore what spirituality means to secular individuals, including atheists and agnostics, and to reveal the extent to which, in northern Europe, spirituality is accompanied by beliefs in the supernatural.

The context of this study is the secularized, Protestant, northern Europe, which encompasses areas of Europe where the most common religion is (or was) the Protestant strand of Christianity, which includes the United Kingdom, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, and parts of Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.²⁶ As noted previously, while Europe is

20 Pew Research Center, “Being Christian,” 123.

21 Steensland et al., “Spirituality,” 468.

22 Woodhead, “Real Religion.”

23 Zinnbauer et al., “Religion.”

24 Marshall and Olson, “Is Spirituality.”

25 Ammerman, “Spiritual.”

26 Roberto Cipriani, “Religion and Churches,” in: Stefan Immerfall and Göran Therborn

characterized as being highly secularized on a global scale, this is particularly true for Protestant nations. This, once again, demonstrates both the difficulties in describing meaningful patterns of religion in Europe as a whole, as well as the need for further research on secularization within this region specifically. Additionally, this region has been of interest in previous studies on spirituality, where it has been argued that spirituality is more common in northern than in southern Europe.²⁷

Various explanations have been put forth as to why this region is so secular, including theories on modernization and economic development,²⁸ the disenchanting and secularizing effects of Protestantism itself,²⁹ and the consequences of a long history of state churches.³⁰ Voas argues that secularization manifests itself primarily through generational decline, with each new birth cohort being further detached from religion than the previous one. This is in contrast with changes in religiosity across the individual lifespan and changes during specific time periods.³¹

For the purpose of this study on secularization, and in line with prior research,³² I adopt a substantive definition of religion (and by extension secularization) that centers around the belief in the supernatural. In short, this perspective assumes that beliefs are the primary dimension of religion and that nominal identification and practices are indicative of secularization when they are not linked to a belief in the supernatural. In the same fashion, spirituality is,

(eds.), *Handbook of European Societies: Social Transformations in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2010), 438–464.

27 Houtman and Aupers, “Spiritual”; Woodhead, “Real Religion.”

28 Steve Bruce, *God is Dead* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred*.

29 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

30 Isabella Kasselstrand, “Nonbelievers in the Church: A Study of Cultural Religion in Sweden,” *Sociology of Religion* 76/3 (2015), 275–294; Phil Zuckerman, *Society Without God*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

31 Voas, “The Rise and Fall.” For further discussion of age, period, and cohort effects see, e.g., Isabella Kasselstrand, “Statistical Approaches,” in: Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu Mantsinen (eds.), *Handbook of Leaving Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 278–291; Philip Schwadel, “Age, Period, and Cohort Effects on Religious Activities and Beliefs,” *Social Science Research*, 40/1 (2011), 181–192.

32 Bruce, *God*; Isabella Kasselstrand, “Secularity and Irreligion in Cross-National Context: A Nonlinear Approach,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58/3 (2019), 626–642; David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, “Secularization: The Orthodox Model,” in: Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8–30.

in and of itself, not evidence against secularization if the individuals who identify as spiritual, or who take part in yoga, meditation, or New Age practices for example, do not do so in reference to the transcendent. While criticisms exist of substantive definitions,³³ in order to examine the question that is posed in this study, it is imperative to establish the extent to which identification with the term 'spiritual' constitutes a form of alternative faith.

This study aims to highlight how changes in, and conceptions of, spirituality inform our understanding of secularization in the context of northern, Protestant Europe. This research problem is explored through three sub-questions:

- (1) How common is it to be 'spiritual but not religious' and to hold religious beliefs in this region and how has this changed over time?
- (2) What do 'spiritual but not religious' northern Europeans believe about God and the supernatural?
- (3) What does spirituality mean to atheists and agnostics?

In essence, this study adds to the body of research that maintains that spirituality is broad, lacks clarity, or that it is, in some contexts, limited and inconsequential.³⁴ It further aims to address Woodhead's impression that much of this research is not empirical in nature³⁵ and Roof's statement that meanings of spirituality are understudied.³⁶ Ultimately, this article critically examines the idea that spirituality is increasing in northern Europe, that it, by definition, assumes a belief in the transcendent, or that it is incompatible with secularization. In the context of the secularized, northern Europe, the category 'spiritual but not religious' may remain limited and also encompass a range of meanings and interpretations, of which several may be entirely secular in substance.

33 See, e.g., Davie, *Sociology*; Taylor, *A Secular*.

34 See, e.g., Steve Bruce, *Secular Beats Spiritual: The Westernization of the Easternization of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Ryan Cragun, Joseph Hammer, and Michael Nielsen, "The Nonreligious-Nonspiritual Scale (NRNSS): Measuring Everything from Atheists to Zionists," *Secularism and Nonreligion* 2/3 (2015), 36–53; Eltica de Jaeger, Bert Garssen, Machteld van den Berg, Dirk van Dierendonck, Adriaan Visser, and Wilmar B. Schaufeli, "Measuring Spirituality as a Universal Human Experience: A Review of Spirituality Questionnaires," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51/2 (2012), 336–354; Frans Jespers, "The Scientific Study of Religious and Secular Spiritualities," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4/2 (2011), 328–354; Popp-Baier, "From Religion"; Voas and Bruce, "Spiritual"; David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging," *Sociology* 39/1 (2005), 11–28.

35 Woodhead, "Real Religion."

36 Roof, "Religion."

2 Methods

2.1 *Research Design*

The aim of this article is not only to examine patterns of spirituality, but also to give an account of the meanings and perceptions that northern Europeans attach to this expression. Therefore, a mixed methods approach is necessary to allow for deeper explanations of complex conceptions while simultaneously maintaining the ability to describe statistical trends in the larger populations. Mixed methods research is surprisingly underused in the field of sociology of religion. To my knowledge, there are very few studies of secularization and spirituality that use such a methodological approach.³⁷ The aim and reasoning behind the methodology was largely in line with Davie's assertion that "methods should be considered complementary: taken together they enable the researcher to build up as complete a picture as possible of the phenomenon that he or she is trying not only to describe but explain."³⁸ More specifically, this study consists of a secondary quantitative analysis of the International Social Survey Program's (ISSP) 2008 and 2018 data on religion³⁹ and semi-structured in-depth interviews carried out in 2012, in between the two survey data points.

Of the three sub-questions to the research problem outlined above, the question about the levels and changes of spirituality and religious beliefs requires quantitative survey data. The question of what those who are spiritual but not religious believe about the supernatural is explored with both survey and interview data. Finally, the question of what spirituality means to atheists and agnostics is studied with the interview data. In other words, the two types of data explore different dimensions of the research problem but with a degree of overlap. Such a design allows for a more comprehensive examination of the overall objective to better understand what spirituality can tell us about secularization.

2.2 *Survey Data*

Data from the past two waves (2008 and 2018) of the ISSP religion module were used to explore changes in spirituality and religious beliefs in northern Europe.

37 For exceptions, see, e.g., Ammerman, "Spiritual"; Jörg Stolz, Judith Könemann, Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, Thomas Englberger, and Michael Krüggeler, *(Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and Religious-Secular Competition* (London: Routledge, 2016).

38 Davie, *Sociology*, 111

39 International Social Survey Program Research Group, *Archive and Data*. <https://issp.org/data-download/by-topic>.

These two (but not previous) waves include a variable on how the respondent identifies in relation to both religion and spirituality. The ISSP collects nationally representative survey data of the adult populations in a range of countries around the world. There are a number of different themes of the surveys, of which religion is one. The religion survey includes a variety of questions about the respondents' religious beliefs, identity, values, and practices. The northern, Protestant European nations represented in the past two waves of the religion survey are Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Great Britain. The analysis presented in this paper thus focuses on these nations specifically. The total sample size for the two waves is 21,883 (10,368 for 2008 and 11,515 for 2018), with 3635 from Denmark, 2365 from Finland, 3430 from Germany, 2324 from Norway, 3012 from Sweden, 3579 from Switzerland, and 3538 from Great Britain. The data were weighted in the analysis.

The key items of interest in the survey data are the questions about the respondents' religious and spiritual identity and their religious beliefs. Using these two survey items at two time points allows for the examination of distribution and changes in religious and spiritual identities as well as the assessment of to what extent a spiritual identity is coupled with a belief in a god or a higher power.

The first item asks: "What best describes you?" with the following attributes: (1) I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural [religious and spiritual]; (2) I follow a religion, but don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural [religious but not spiritual]; (3) I don't follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural [spiritual but not religious]; (4) I don't follow a religion and don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural [neither religious nor spiritual]. Across the two waves, this survey item has 19,196 responses with 12.28 percent missing cases.⁴⁰

40 The percentage of missing cases in the variable on religiosity and spirituality ranges from 7.0 percent in Switzerland to 15.8 in Germany. A vast majority of the missing cases 'can't choose' as opposed to 'no answer.' Although the fairly high percentage of missing cases is a limitation in the data, a key objective of the study is to explore the changing beliefs among those who positively identify as a spiritual person as well as the move away from identifying with religiosity and spirituality more generally. Furthermore, similar patterns toward secularization can be seen in this variable as well as in the variable on belief in God (that has a small share of missing cases). Ultimately, the fact that more than 1 in 10 respondents 'can't choose' and thus do not identify themselves in relation to these concepts also poses a challenge to the typology of religiosity and spirituality; see the Section 3.3 for a discussion of the value of the term 'spirituality' in a secularized society.

The second item of interest instructs the respondents to “Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God.” This survey question has the following response options: (1) I don’t believe in God; (2) I don’t know whether there is a God and I don’t believe there is any way to find out; (3) I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind; (4) I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others; (5) While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God; (6) I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it. With 21,568 valid responses, this item has 1.44 percent missing cases. In order to condense categories to provide more meaningful results with regard to sample size and content, attributes (4) and (5) were combined as they both describe feelings of uncertainty and doubt.

2.3 *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-two married couples (64 individuals in total) in Scotland and Sweden.⁴¹ The participants were recruited through social media advertising, personal contacts, and snowball sampling. As part of a larger project, the selection of interview participants involved recruiting an approximately equal share of couples that had married in either a secular ceremony (civil or humanist) or a church ceremony. Because of this, the participants held various levels of attachment to institutionalized religion. However, a majority of the sixty-four individuals were largely nonreligious in that only a handful attended religious services or believed in the traditional tenets of Christianity. A range of nationalities from Protestant Europe were represented in the sample, including Northern Ireland, England, Finland, Germany, Norway, Scotland, and Sweden. The mean age of the participants was 33.8 years, and they were generally highly educated, with 66 percent having completed at least an undergraduate degree.

The interviews took place in the participants’ homes or in coffee shops and were between 45 and 105 minutes in length. Of the thirty-two interviews, seventeen were carried out in English and fifteen in Swedish. The interviews were subsequently recorded and transcribed. I used a combination of a theory-driven and a data-driven approach to code and analyze the interview data.⁴² A range of topics in relation to religion and secularity were discussed in the interviews. This article explores the theme ‘The Meanings of Spirituality.’

41 Prior to conducting the interviews, I carried out the ethics clearance at the institution I was affiliated with at the time. After data collection, all identifying information was removed from interview transcripts and pseudonyms were given to participants.

42 Graham Gibbs, *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007).

It is important to note that findings from the interview data are not intended to be generalizable to larger populations the same way that the survey data for each country are, but rather to provide a richer description of the meanings, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals who identify as spiritual but who are not religious. Nonetheless, the higher levels of education among the interview participants compared to the survey sample is a limitation of the data. As a response to this concern, supplemental quantitative analysis was conducted specifically among the highly educated, which demonstrated similar patterns of decline in this subsample as in the larger sample. Moreover, although the qualitative findings on this topic did not differ noticeably by nationality and the quantitative trends are relatively similar across countries as demonstrated in the next section, the narrow geographical context of the qualitative data collection remains a disadvantage. Therefore, any assumptions about whether the interview data is representative of spiritual northern Europeans more generally should be made with caution.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 *Recent Trends in Spirituality and Religiosity*

The overall distribution of religiosity and spirituality is presented in Figure 1. In 2018 the 'spiritual but not religious' make up a minority of each country's population, with between 17 and 28 percent of the respondents in each country identifying as such. 'Religious and spiritual' is the smallest group across all countries and the percentage of individuals who identify as religious (religious and spiritual or religious but not spiritual) is less than half in each nation. Furthermore, these broader distributions indicate that the typical northern European is secular in regard to their religious and spiritual identity, with 'neither religious nor spiritual' being the largest category in every country except in Switzerland.

When examining changes in religiosity and spirituality in the past decade, Figure 2 shows that, between 2008 and 2018, being 'neither religious nor spiritual' has increased in all countries, ranging from an increase of 1.7 percentage points in Germany to 7.5 percentage points in Denmark.⁴³ In just ten years, all countries have seen a significant decline in the 'religious but not spiritual' category, from a 3.2 percentage point decline in Sweden to 10.0 in Finland and Germany. In terms of changes among the 'religious and spiritual,' four coun-

43 See Table A1 in the appendix for more detailed information about the statistical significance and strength of the changes for each country and category.

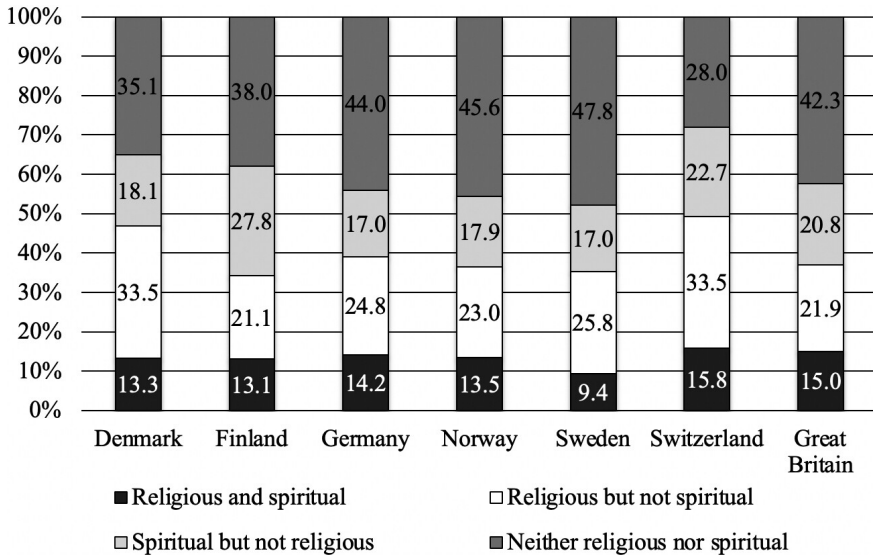


FIGURE 1 Distribution of spirituality and religiosity in 2018
SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2018)

tries have seen a decline (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland), one has increased (Germany) and two countries (Great Britain and Finland) show effectively no change (<1 percentage point).

The results are mixed regarding the question of whether the overall declines in the two 'religious' categories are offset by an increase in identifying as 'spiritual but not religious,' and thus, if northern Europeans appear to leave religion for spirituality. Switzerland, Germany, Finland, and Denmark have experienced an increase in the 'spiritual but not religious.' However, in both Denmark and Switzerland, the increase in the 'neither religious nor spiritual' far outweighs the increase in the 'spiritual but not religious,' leaving Germany and Finland as the only country where the rise in the 'spiritual but not religious' is higher than the rise in the 'neither religious nor spiritual.' In short, the overall patterns presented in Figure 2 suggest a trend toward secularization rather than a "spiritual revolution."⁴⁴

To address the question of whether traditional notions of God have been replaced by alternative beliefs, Figure 3 shows the respondents' beliefs about God. Findings suggest that in 2018 there is a relatively even distribution across the different attributes. The atheistic disposition ('don't believe in God') make

44 Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*.

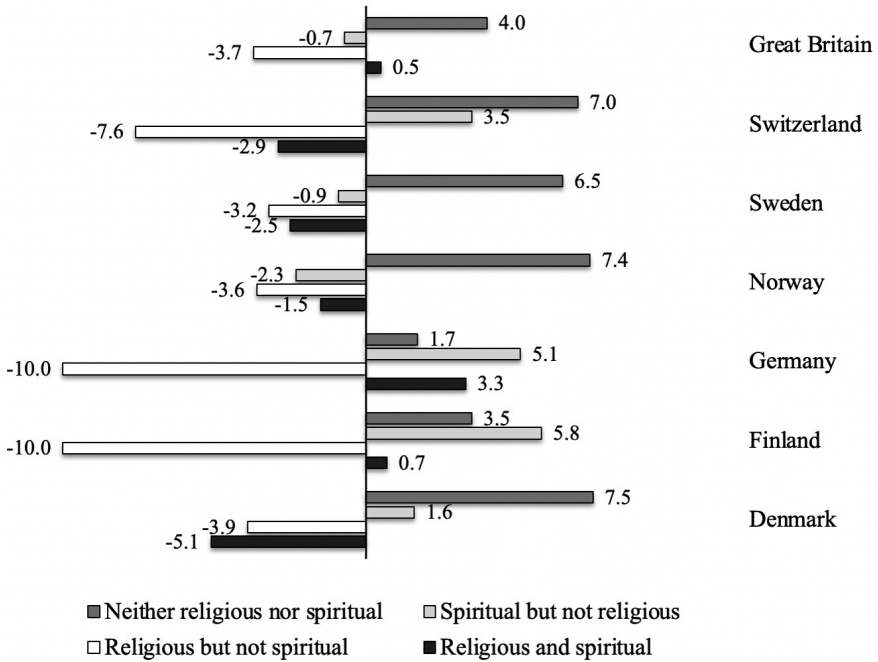


FIGURE 2 Changes in spirituality and religiosity between 2008 and 2018 (percentage points)
 Overall changes within each country are significant at $p < 0.001 - 0.054$, Cramer's $V = 0.050 - 0.123$
 SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2008 AND 2018)

up the largest group in the three Scandinavian countries and in Great Britain. Certainty of God's existence is at 20 percent or lower in each country, ranging from 8.6 percent in Sweden to 19.8 percent in Switzerland. Individuals who believe in a higher power make up between 12.0 and 26.1 percent of each country's population, with the agnostic orientation ('don't know if there is a god; no way to find out') ranging from 11.7 to 19.1 percent. The findings in this chart show that alternative religiosity ('belief in a higher power') is numerically significant, but that Switzerland is the only country where it is the most common category.

Figure 4 reveals a clear pattern of secularization in all seven northern European nations.⁴⁵ Between 2008 and 2018 the 'don't believe in God' category has grown significantly in all nations, ranging from an increase of 3.0 percentage points in Germany to 9.8 in Sweden. The agnostic orientation ('don't know

45 See Table A2 in the appendix for more detailed information about the statistical significance and strength of the changes for each country and category.

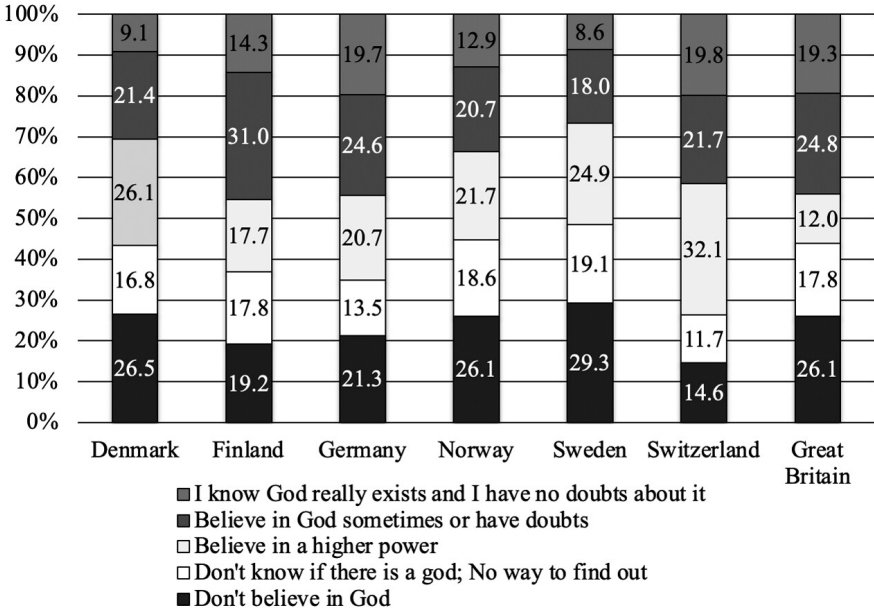


FIGURE 3 Distribution of religious beliefs in 2018
 SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2018)

if there’s a God; no way to find out’) appears to have increased marginally in all countries except in Sweden and Great Britain. In fact, in Sweden, the only category to increase is the most secular attribute ‘don’t believe in God.’ The category that best describes alternative religious beliefs, ‘belief in a higher power,’ has declined in Great Britain, Sweden, and Norway, with increases of between 0.8 and 4.6 percentage points in Switzerland, Germany, Finland, and Denmark. While this may show modest evidence of shifts toward alternative beliefs in some of these countries, it is important to note that in none of those nations does this increase outweigh the increase in the ‘don’t believe in God’ category. Overall, these findings do suggest that secularization is a more accurate description of current trends than religious transformation.⁴⁶

46 Supplemental analysis of the overall sample shows that although differences in nonbelief are apparent across birth cohorts, the data also show an increase in the atheistic orientation (‘don’t believe in God’) within all birth cohorts between 2008 and 2018. Although a more in-depth focus on this question is beyond the scope of this study, this trend indicates that, in this context, mechanisms of secularization may not be limited to a decline in the intergenerational transmission of religion.

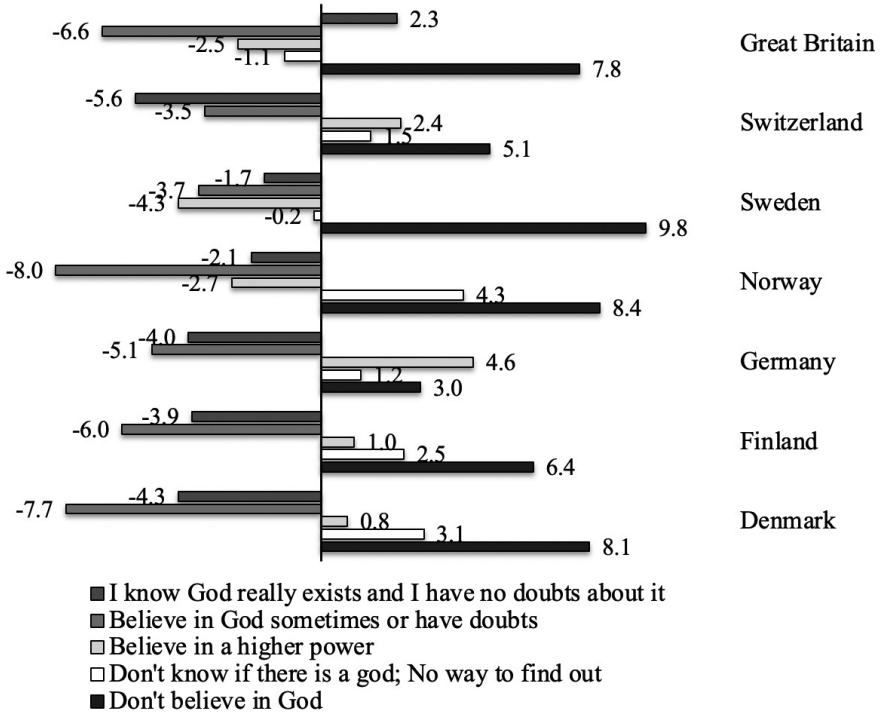


FIGURE 4 Changes in religious beliefs between 2008 and 2018 (percentage points)
 Overall changes within each country are significant at $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $v = 0.093 - 0.137$
 SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2008 AND 2018)

3.2 Beliefs of the Spiritual But Not Religious

Although the figures presented in the previous section display recent changes in spirituality and religious beliefs, they do not reveal what those who are 'spiritual but not religious' believe about the supernatural or how they interpret the term spirituality. Table 1 presents the religious beliefs of all the northern European respondents who identified as 'spiritual but not religious,' showing that in 2018 only 7.1 percent believed in God without any doubts, a figure that declined from 9.0 percent in 2008. Those who believed but had doubts also decreased from 24.5 to 19.3 percent, with the remaining three categories all seeing an increase. Nonbelief in God increased from 11.4 to 14.3 percent, the agnostic orientation from 14.2 to 15.2 percent, and belief in a higher power from 40.9 to 44.0 percent. The 'higher power' category is clearly the most common among the 'spiritual but not religious,' although the atheist and agnostic dispositions represent close to 30 percent of this group. Overall, it appears as though the 'spiritual but not religious' are shifting away from holding traditional beliefs

TABLE 1 Beliefs about God among the spiritual but not religious (2008 and 2018)

	2008	2018	Change	Phi (pp)
Don't believe in God	11.4 %	14.3 %	+2.9	0.04**
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	14.2 %	15.2 %	+1.0	0.02
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	40.9 %	44.0 %	+3.1	0.03*
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	24.5 %	19.3 %	-5.2	-0.06***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	9.0 %	7.1 %	-1.9	-0.03**
N	1609	2028		

Overall changes between 2008 and 2018 significant at $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $v = 0.082$. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2008 AND 2018)

about God to both alternative beliefs and nonbelief. Further analysis by country indicates that in Sweden, Denmark, and Great Britain, the increase in the 'no belief' category outweighs the increase in the 'higher power' category, and in Norway, the 'higher power' category is declining, while nonbelief is growing. Such findings go hand in hand with the argument that the Scandinavian countries are the furthest down the path of secularization.⁴⁷

Generally, the survey data presented here correspond with the beliefs of the interview participants who identified as spiritual. Overall, they were highly secular, with most of them either being atheist, agnostic, or believing in 'something.' The interviews also provided a deeper understanding of how the largely secular but spiritual individuals interpret the term 'spirituality' and how their spirituality is and is not connected to transcendent beliefs.

3.3 *Spirituality Among Atheists and Agnostics*

As seen above, nearly 30 percent of the 'spiritual but not religious' fall into the atheist and agnostic dispositions in terms of their religious beliefs. For the interview participants who held similar beliefs, there was no apparent inconsistency between a lack of beliefs and a spiritual status, and most of the spiritual non-

⁴⁷ Kasselstrand, "Secularity"; Zuckerman, *Society*.

believers did not make a clear connection between spirituality and a belief in the supernatural. Instead, spirituality was frequently interpreted as an utterly secular phenomenon focused on: (1) nature, art, music, or poetry; or (2) inner strength or human powers.

Carolyn, aged 31, is a Scottish archivist who is married to Neil, aged 33, a Northern Irish postdoctoral researcher. Carolyn came across as one of the most outspoken atheists among all the interview participants; she expressed that she does not “in any way” believe in a supernatural power, and she also conveyed a secular take on spirituality.

Carolyn: I like our connection to the earth. That’s my only spiritual thing ... About us being connected because we evolved from it ... I love being out in the country and feel a connection to the world. To me that is a very nice, spiritual feeling, if you want to call it that.

Carolyn’s account of spirituality in relation to nature was reiterated by many interview participants, including several of those who also described spirituality as connected to the arts. Robert, a 33-year-old opera singer, is married to Jessica, aged 32, a violin teacher. They are both atheists and active humanists who are of the opinion that most people call themselves spiritual simply because if you say that you are not spiritual, you sound a bit “cold” or “shallow”.

Robert: I think it is difficult to find someone who says that they are *not* spiritual, because they think it sounds so negative: “I don’t believe in anything at all.”

Jessica: Yes. As if you are so flat. So cold. I think being spiritual can mean being touched by things. That you have deeper feelings.

Robert: Yes, I’m a musician. Of course I’m spiritual. That you are able to get carried away by a feeling.

A notion of spirituality as located *within* humans is exemplified by Lisa, aged 34, who is a physiotherapist from Scotland. She does not believe in God or a transcendent entity, but is open to the idea that there are intrinsic *human* powers that we might not (at least not yet) utilize or be fully aware of.

Lisa: Well, I don’t think that there is a god, but I think there is a lot that we don’t know. I mean there might be other things out there, and a universe that we don’t know about. For example, how some people say they’re telepathic and things like that, I wouldn’t say something like that doesn’t exist. I do think that there’s more that we don’t realize

about ourselves, so I'm not sure. I wouldn't bet all my money that there is nothing out there.

Interviewer: Would you call yourself spiritual?

Lisa: Yeah, I think I'm spiritual, but I wouldn't say I'm religious.

Ann, aged 48, a Swedish science teacher, expressed a similar mindset to Lisa, while her husband Fredrik, aged 40, an engineer, was more skeptical.

Ann: I have one of those "spiritual feelings." That I do. But I can't say I believe because that would be a lie ... There has to be something within me that can keep me calm. I would love to go to India. Maybe I'm a Buddhist.

Fredrik: They are Hindu there ...

Ann: Oh, okay. Maybe I can go to Nepal? Where are they Buddhist? I feel like there is something there, something that is a little beautiful.

Interviewer: But you don't know what this is?

Ann: Around Easter I saw this TV program about the Gospel of Thomas, that God is *us*. Maybe that's what it is? It is the *belief in ourselves*.

Interpreting spirituality as an awareness of one's inner strengths or emotions, as an appreciation of music, culture, or art, or as a connection to nature, is comparable to Steensland et al.'s participants with a 'this-worldly' referent of spirituality (self, other people, and nature),⁴⁸ Palmisano's 'inner-self spirituality',⁴⁹ Zuckerman's concept of 'awe-ism',⁵⁰ or Pasquale's finding that nonreligious group affiliates in the western United States and Canada interpret spirituality in relation to nature, wonder, awe, or gratitude.⁵¹ Several atheists and agnostics mentioned that the term 'spirituality' may be outdated in a secularized society, but that it is nonetheless the best expression that we currently have for describing the depth of our feelings and emotions. Hill et al. argue that it is not appropriate to equate secular phenomena, such as those described in this section, as spiritual because spirituality is then in "danger of losing the sacred."⁵²

48 Steensland et al., "Spirituality," 459.

49 Stefania Palmisano, "Spirituality and Catholicism: The Italian Experience," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25/2 (2010), 221–241.

50 Phil Zuckerman, *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014).

51 Frank Pasquale, "A Portrait of Secular Group Affiliates," in: Phil Zuckerman (ed.), *Atheism and Secularity* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 66.

52 Peter C. Hill, Kenneth I. Pargament, Ralph W. Wood Jr., Michael E. McCollough, James P. Swyers, David B Larson, and Brian J. Zinnbauer, "Conceptualizing Religiosity and Spir-

Yet, regardless of the criteria that Hill et al. have for what counts as spiritual, 'the sacred' has already been lost in the instances where interview participants themselves use the term 'spiritual' to describe phenomena that are not supernatural. Perhaps most importantly, the fact that some nonbelievers in a higher power describe themselves as spiritual does not necessarily make them any 'less secular' than those who do not, based on the interpretations described above.

3.4 *Spirituality among Believers in a Higher Power*

According to the results in Table 1, the most common type of belief among the 'spiritual but not religious' was nonbelief in God but belief in a higher power. Among interview participants who would describe themselves as believing in a higher power, the two most frequently reoccurring ideas when discussing the meanings of spirituality were: (1) fate; and (2) a sense that 'something' exists that cannot be explained scientifically. This follows Ammerman's idea of 'extra-theistic spirituality' that "may not come from a transcendent deity ... but it is nevertheless transcendent in nature."⁵³ Norwegian-Swedish teacher Emma, aged 32, mentioned that there is "something out there that we can't explain," that "things just fall into place," and "that there has to be a little spark of something else." Yet, she does not believe in God or an afterlife. She does not attend any religious services and would not call herself religious.

Several other participants expressed similar ideas. Swedish musician Richard, aged 42, feels that there are "forces out there" that we do not know of, while his German wife Anna, aged 42, who works in clothing sales, disagreed strongly.

Interviewer: But do you think there is something somewhere that can't be explained?

Anna: Nah ...

Richard: Well, yes, I do. Somehow.

Anna: But what would that be? I can't wrap my head around it.

Richard: Yes, but you're not supposed to. As we said, it can't be explained.

Anna: No, I don't believe in anything supernatural that has power over me.

Richard: But sometimes it feels like things just fall into place. In a way.

ity: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30/1 (2000), 64.

53 Ammerman, "Spiritual," 268–269.

Anna: And very often they don't fall into place.

Richard: No, but I believe, like you said, in ... something.

A similar conversation unfolded between Swedish couple Emilia, aged 28, a librarian, and Henrik, aged 31, an office manager. Unlike his wife, who does not hold supernatural beliefs, Henrik came across as open to the idea that there may be some kind of transcendent forces.

Henrik: I believe in fate or something that makes things happen, but I don't think it has a name. And 2000 years ago, you didn't know why things happened and maybe they needed a God to explain things. But now there are more complex explanations. Still, I don't think it is all by chance. Why would the phone ring right when you're about to step out into the street and get run over by a car?

Emilia: Many times the phone doesn't ring, you know.

Henrik: I know, but there is something to it ...

While an atheist herself, Emilia's take on spirituality was that we can interpret this term as either religious or secular phenomenon, but that it ultimately allows us to find greater meaning.

Emilia: I think spirituality is ... I believe in people's need to create meaning. We are so complicated with all the feelings. I think we create the feeling that something is bigger than ourselves. For some people that's God. It's more within us humans, but what it is, it doesn't really matter, as long as it works for each person.

Following Emilia's interpretation, it is clear that the interview participants understand spirituality in largely different ways, in line with Schutz's notion that spirituality is an "idiosyncratic concept" that has a wide variety of meanings.⁵⁴ What is further interesting is that to most of the participants, spirituality is not a 'religious' matter, but much more closely aligned with a secular indifference. None of the individuals who said that they were spiritual simultaneously expressed that this orientation or this intangible belief in 'something,' or in fate, in any way influenced their daily lives. Of the sixty-four interview participants, no one explicitly referred to holistic or New Age practices when discussing what

54 Amanda Schutz, "Organizational Variation in the American Nonreligious Community," in: Ryan Cragun, Christel Manning, and Lori Fazzino (eds.), *Organized Secularism in the United States* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 113–130.

it means to be spiritual. They do not worship, they do not pray, they do not regularly think about this *possible* transcendent power or why things play out the way they do. This sentiment was expressed by Martin, a 37-year-old draftsman, who is married to Sharon, aged 35, an accountant. He states that, "I'm open to the idea that there is something out there. I just don't ever think about it. I don't worry about it. If it's there, it's there, but I just get on with my life."

Given the interpretations described here, spirituality as a belief in 'something' or as a belief in 'fate' is not a convincing refutation of secularization or evidence of any sustained religious 'change,' especially when it is accompanied by feelings of indifference. In fact, this indifference may effectively be a definitive characteristic of secularization given that this form of spirituality is imprecise, highly individualized, and largely inconsequential to the participants' lives.⁵⁵

4 Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of levels and conceptions of spirituality in secularized, northern Europe, focusing on changes in supernatural beliefs and interpretations of spirituality among atheists, agnostics, and believers in a higher power. While the available data did not allow for a larger time span in the analysis of changing trends in spirituality, statistically significant changes have occurred, in all nations, in just ten years. With none of the interviewees engaging in New Age or holistic spirituality, and with limited survey data on the topic, this study does not explore spiritual *practices*. In the contexts where such phenomena are common, it would be of high relevance for future research to investigate what individuals who engage in these practices believe their participation signifies in relation to the transcendent. Additionally, while a more extensive examination of the characteristics of the spiritual but not religious, and in particular of the atheists and agnostics that identify as such, is beyond the scope of this study, further multivariate analysis on this topic would be of high value.

Although there have been critiques of scholarship that describes spirituality as broad, vague, or fuzzy,⁵⁶ the findings presented in this article show that this may be an appropriate description of this term, at least in the context presented here. Given the wide range of definitions provided in previous scholarship, the

55 See Bruce, *God*; Kasselstrand, "Secularity"; Zuckerman, *Society*.

56 See, e.g., Woodhead, "Real Religion."

diversity of religious (and secular) beliefs held by individuals who are ‘spiritual but not religious,’ and the fact that interview participants themselves regarded this term as vague, broad, and even secular, I argue that there are limitations to how the term ‘spirituality’ is used in current scholarship. With approximately half of the ‘spiritual but not religious’ survey respondents either not believing at all, being agnostic, or having some doubts, it is not constructive to equate the ‘spiritual but not religious’ to ‘unchurched believers,’ and the significant share of atheists among the spiritual also highlights the problem of assuming that spirituality is exclusively an indicator of transcendent beliefs.

Moreover, the findings presented here that the number of ‘neither religious nor spiritual’ are overall increasing at a faster pace than the ‘spiritual but not religious’ and that atheism and agnosticism is increasing among the ‘spiritual but not religious’ themselves are in clear contrast to the argument that we are not witnessing “religious decline, but rather the emergence of a new, qualitatively different way of being ‘religious.’”⁵⁷ In other words, the trajectory presented here does not support the notion that religion is not declining, but simply changing. To be clear, with the deinstitutionalization of religion, we may be seeing new ways of being religious, but we are undoubtedly observing a stronger trend of religious decline at the same time. To sum up, such findings are in line with the argument put forward by Voas and Bruce that a move away from organized religion toward individualized forms of spirituality is a symptom of secularization rather than a sustained alternative to conventional religious beliefs and practices.⁵⁸

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57 Marshall and Olson, “Is Spirituality,” 505, citing, e.g., Davie, *Religion*; Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*.

58 Voas and Bruce, “Spiritual.”

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Appendix

TABLE A1 Spirituality and religiosity in percent: 95% confidence intervals

	2008	2018	Phi
Great Britain			
Religious and spiritual	12.86–16.24	13.07–16.84	0.01
Religious but not spiritual	23.55–27.73	19.75–24.12	–0.04**
Spiritual but not religious	19.54–23.47	18.65–24.94	–0.01
Neither religious nor spiritual	35.97–40.63	39.70–44.93	0.041**
N	1678	1377	
Switzerland			
Religious and spiritual	16.51–20.99	14.24–17.32	–0.04**
Religious but not spiritual	38.21–43.86	31.56–35.54	–0.07***
Spiritual but not religious	17.01–21.54	20.91–24.44	0.04**
Neither religious nor spiritual	18.60–23.27	26.10–29.89	0.08***
N	1169	2161	
Sweden			
Religious and spiritual	9.90–13.85	7.93–10.81	–0.04**
Religious but not spiritual	26.19–31.72	23.68–28.00	–0.03*
Spiritual but not religious	15.52–20.19	15.12–18.83	–0.01
Neither religious nor spiritual	38.31–44.32	45.35–50.28	0.06***
N	1036	1579	
Norway			
Religious and spiritual	12.66–17.34	11.51–15.51	–0.02
Religious but not spiritual	23.66–29.45	20.56–25.49	–0.04*
Spiritual but not religious	17.59–22.85	15.62–20.11	–0.03
Neither religious nor spiritual	35.04–41.40	42.69–48.51	0.07***
N	900	1125	
Germany			
Religious and spiritual	9.26–12.50	12.39–15.97	0.05***
Religious but not spiritual	32.34–37.29	22.62–27.06	–0.11***
Spiritual but not religious	10.28–13.65	15.08–18.95	0.07***
Neither religious nor spiritual	39.77–44.90	41.41–46.52	0.02
N	1431	1458	

TABLE A1 Spirituality and religiosity in percent: 95% confidence intervals (*cont.*)

	2008	2018	Phi
Finland			
Religious and spiritual	10.33–14.51	11.02–15.08	0.01
Religious but not spiritual	28.13–33.99	18.66–23.57	-0.11***
Spiritual but not religious	19.39–24.64	25.15–30.55	0.07***
Neither religious nor spiritual	31.49–37.51	35.07–40.91	0.04
N	962	1063	
Denmark			
Religious and spiritual	16.64–20.24	11.56–15.02	-0.07***
Religious but not spiritual	35.14–39.64	31.15–35.97	-0.04**
Spiritual but not religious	14.81–18.26	16.07–19.99	0.02
Neither religious nor spiritual	25.56–29.71	32.69–37.56	0.08***
N	1784	1479	

Strength and significance generated from chi-square tests of changes in each category between 2008 and 2018. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2008 AND 2018)

TABLE A2 Beliefs about God in percent: 95% confidence intervals

	2008	2018	Phi
Great Britain			
Don't believe in God	16.53–19.96	23.91–28.32	0.95***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	17.14–20.61	15.90–19.75	–0.01
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	12.90–16.03	10.40–13.67	–0.04**
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	29.32–33.44	22.57–26.91	–0.07***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	15.36–18.70	17.30–21.27	0.03*
N	1950	1524	
Switzerland			
Don't believe in God	7.82–11.12	13.20–16.10	0.07***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	8.50–11.92	10.42–13.05	0.02
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	27.11–32.27	30.21–34.03	0.03
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	22.79–27.69	20.00–23.37	–0.04**
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	22.93–27.85	18.19–21.45	–0.06***
N	1209	2301	
Sweden			
Don't believe in God	17.24–21.68	27.18–31.42	0.11***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	17.08–21.51	17.28–20.95	0.00
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	26.64–31.74	22.92–26.96	–0.05**
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	19.43–24.07	16.25–19.84	–0.05**
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	8.60–12.00	7.29–9.91	–0.03
N	1223	1768	
Norway			
Don't believe in God	15.36–19.96	23.64–28.52	0.10***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	12.15–16.37	16.48–20.80	0.06***
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	21.77–26.95	19.39–23.97	–0.03
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	25.98–31.44	18.47–22.97	–0.09***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	12.86–17.17	11.02–14.74	–0.03
N	1059	1250	
Germany			
Don't believe in God	16.48–20.19	19.41–23.31	0.04**
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	10.70–13.84	11.94–15.19	0.02
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	14.33–17.85	18.80–22.66	0.06***
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	27.45–31.82	22.62–26.71	–0.06***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	21.63–25.71	17.79–21.57	–0.05***
N	1677	1705	

TABLE A2 Beliefs about God in percent: 95% confidence intervals (*cont.*)

	2008	2018	Phi
Finland			
Don't believe in God	10.79–14.70	16.99–21.42	0.09***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	13.16–17.39	15.63–19.93	0.03
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	14.52–18.89	15.54–19.83	0.01
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	34.17–29.84	28.44–33.65	–0.06***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	16.00–20.54	12.32–16.25	–0.05***
N	1118	1216	
Denmark			
Don't believe in God	16.71–20.16	24.35–28.64	0.10***
Don't know whether there is a god; don't believe there is a way to find out	12.18–15.24	14.98–18.62	0.04**
Don't believe in a personal god, but believe in a higher power	23.39–27.25	23.99–28.53	0.01
Believe in God sometimes or have doubts	27.10–31.14	19.42–23.41	–0.09***
I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it	11.89–14.92	7.76–10.52	–0.07***
N	1947	1629	

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Strength and significance generated from chi-square tests of changes in each category between 2008 and 2018

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAM (2008 AND 2018)