

PUBLIC RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION:  
A COMPARISON OF THREE DISTINCT BIRTH COHORTS

by

DIANE M. PRATHER  
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2001

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research has demonstrated that many factors affect levels of religiosity in American religion. This study extends the research on the relationship between cohort membership and public religious participation and individual personal involvement. Most of the research pertaining to the effects of cohort on religiosity has been devoted to comparisons between the Depression Era and Baby Boom Cohorts. This study extends research in this area by including Generation X to the extent possible. Using the General Social Surveys, this analysis employs an age/period/cohort analytical framework to examine religious involvement. Sociodemographic variables that are associated with religiosity are included in the analysis. Directions for future research on variations in religiosity measures are discussed.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Religion is one of the most powerful and influential institutions in human society. The religious institution interacts with family, community, economic, and political life. Religion is a significant aspect of social life, and the social dimension is an important part of religion. As a social institution, religious systems are networks of statuses, roles, norms, and organizations similar to other social systems.

Social scientists use the term “religiosity” to indicate the intensity and commitment of an individual’s practice or participation in her or his religion. Clearly, there are several components as to what the term conveys (see Ellison, Gay and Glass 1989). First, affiliation or adherence taps the dimension of religiosity that addresses identity with a particular group or social category. For example, the American public has a propensity to report a self identity as Catholic, Jewish, Baptist, Lutheran, etc. (Roof and McKinney 1987). Second, religiosity includes an ideational or devotional component that is personal or an individual feeling of commitment and belief. Finally, religiosity includes a public dimension that can be described as participation which can take many forms, most frequently evidenced in the form of attendance at religious services or formal gatherings.

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of age, period, and cohort on religious participation.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide range of research literature has focused on religiosity and the effects of religious organizations on individuals and other social institutions. Research demonstrates that education, political arrangements, culture, as well as issues pertaining to standard demographic and sociological variables such as social class, education, age, race and ethnicity, and gender impact religious involvement and identity.

Research dating to Niebuhr's (1932), *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, has addressed the importance of social class and educational attainments as significant factors in the variation of religious involvement (Stark 1972; Stark, Bainbridge, and Doyle 1985). Niebuhr reported variation in denominational affiliation by social class and hence religious participation. Some researchers (Stark and Glock 1968) suggest that social class differences in religious involvement are a matter of kind rather than degree of religiosity by socioeconomic status. However, most of this difference in kind referred to churchlike versus sectlike religiosity. Churchlike religiosity is characterized by activities of the church, ritual involvement, social cosmopolitanism, and knowledge of formal doctrine while sectlike religiosity is portrayed as returning to purity of doctrine, that one's own group is the only means to salvation, religious experience, and high social density with other members of the same religious organization. Nevertheless, religious attendance is a component of religious involvement for all religious collectivities. The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of age, period and cohort on attendance at religious services.

The literature focusing on the relationship between educational attainment and experiences and religious involvement over the last thirty years or so has been relatively

inconsistent. During the 1960s and 1970s a negative relationship between educational attainment and attendance at religious services was well documented (Stark 1972). However, the following decades began to exhibit changes. Much of the research in the 1980s reported that a relationship between these two social institutions was no longer evident. That is, higher educational attainments did not lead to lower public religious participation rates. Conversely, throughout the 1990s the pattern began to show a positive relationship. One reason could be the increased educational attainments of fundamentalist Protestants. In the past, these denominational groups did not socialize their adherents to attain higher levels of education as much as more moderate or liberal Protestants. Catholic respondents have always demonstrated more variability in educational attainment, in part due to the “quasi-ethnic” nature of Catholics in American society. In addition, the members of the Jewish faith have consistently reinforced the importance of education. Hence, education has a varied effect on religious involvement across religious groups and over time.

The literature also demonstrates that region of the country, rural versus urban residence, and race and ethnicity are also important factors in assessing religious involvement. The “Bible Belt” of the south is characterized by high rates of religiosity as is residing in more rural areas. Residents in the pacific areas of the country have lower attendance and adherence rates (Sherkat 1998). In addition, regional variation in concentrations of various religious collectivities in American society play a role in differences of religious involvement (Glenmary Research Center 2000).

Although an analysis and discussion of the differences between African Americans and their white counterparts is beyond the scope of the current analysis, differences in the rates and effects of religious participation of African Americans is well documented (e.g., Roof and



McKinney 1987; Blackwell 1991). A wide range of research literature addresses the importance of the sociocultural and historical uniqueness of the Black Church, and church's role for life experiences of African Americans.

Research consistently demonstrates that women attend religious services more frequently than men, are more actively involved in activities of the religious organization, are more likely to be church-affiliated, and close to God, and pray more than men (de Vaus and McAllister 1987; Cornwall 1989; Felty and Poloma 1991; Sherkat 1998). Himmelstein (1986) reports that women immerse themselves in religious groups through higher rates of attendance and participation in public activities than men. Ozorak (1996) contends that women "empower" themselves through religion and report benefits of religious involvement.

Time and again, age has demonstrated a positive relationship with religiosity. As people age and move through various life course transition periods or stages, religious participation and involvement has a tendency to change. For example, as individuals leave the family of orientation and establish independent adult lives, attendance at religious services tends to decrease. However, when people marry and have children, attendance at religious services increases. Clearly, a number of factors affect the likelihood of religious affiliation and participation over the life course. Nevertheless, the general pattern is that people increase religious participation as they get older.

What is unclear is whether the effect of age on religiosity is contingent on historical epoch (or time of measurement) or cohort membership. Studies indicate that membership in religious collectivities and attendance rates were at a peak shortly after World War II for all ages. That is, rates steadily climbed from the 1940s through most of the 1960s (Salisbury 1964). This is more than likely a result of the G. I. Generation coming of age during this time period. These

rates began to fall during the 1970s. The exception was the growth of conservative or fundamentalist religious organizations during this time period. Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens (1994) suggest a number of cultural, social structural and institutional factors as reasons for the decline. Some of these factors may be associated with the baby boom cohort that began to come of age (i.e., enter the labor force, get married, form families, etc.) during this time period. Recent research (Chaves 1989; 1991; Firebaugh and Harley 1991) employs an age/period/cohort analytical model to address changes in religiosity. According to Chaves (1989) age, period, and cohort effects reflect different social processes. One of the limitations of these studies is that they fail to isolate distinct cohorts based on qualitative characteristics of the cohorts examined.

This study examines the variation in attendance at religious services for three distinct cohorts across two time periods. The Depression Era/Baby Bust birth cohort of the 1930s or so, the Baby Boom cohort of the 1950s, and Generation X of the 1970s are the three birth cohorts identified for comparisons. The three cohorts experienced very different social and cultural experiences throughout the life course that more than likely reflect variation in the socialization processes. In essence, the depression era generation socialized the baby boom cohort, and the baby boom cohort socialized generation X. As a result, generation X are, to some extent, grandchildren of the depression era cohort. The analysis in this study avoids the difficulties associated with the standard age, period, and cohort model (Mason, Mason, Winsborough and Poole 1973; Smith, Mason and Rienberg 1982) by treating cohort in terms of sociocultural factors rather than including all cohorts possible in a dataset. That is, even though dummy variables are used to represent cohort, the dummies represent characteristics of the cohorts directly. The following section describes the sociocultural context of the three birth cohorts and the relationship with American religious institutions.

## Cohort Membership and Religiosity

In general, most of the literature focusing on cohort differences in religiosity focuses on variations between the Depression Era cohort, people born in the 1930's, and the Baby Boom cohort, people born in the 1950's (see Craig and Bennett 1997). More and more research is addressing the Generation X cohort born in the 1970's or so and their attitudes and experiences in general (e.g., Roof and Landres 1997; Trenton 1997; Williams, Coupland, Folwell, and Sparks 1997; Ortner 1998; Eskilson and Wiley 1999; Arnett 2000; Franke 2001). Some of the difficulty in cohort/generation studies is the operationalization of each cohort/generation. In many cases, there is widespread disagreement or at least differences in opinions concerning categorical strategies for cohort designations. In the sections that follow, the uniqueness of each cohort and the operational strategy used in this analysis is addressed.

### *The Great Depression Era (1930s baby bust birth cohort)*

This cohort was born during what was probably the worst economic condition in American history, the Great Depression (hence, the Depression Era designation). The members of this cohort were born during the time of the “Dust Bowl,” “Fireside Chats,” and the “New Deal” (Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil 1993). They were also a relatively small cohort in comparison to the cohort before them (i.e., the G.I. Generation) and the cohort they generated (i.e., the Baby Boom cohort). Easterlin (1978; 1980) contends that relative size of birth cohorts has significant effects on participation in society, views of social institutions, and overall lifetime outlooks and behaviors.

The depression era birth cohort entered a very favorable labor market when they “came of age” in the 1950’s. The economic situation of the country had improved immensely after World War II, and it was essentially an employee’s labor market. That is, if a person had the appropriate skills, there was a high probability that the person would get a job consistent with their training and educational attainment. In addition, the 1950’s are marked by a very unique set of circumstances in American history. The suburban movement characterized this era along with unprecedented confidence in American institutions. Coupled with the confidence in American institutions was an unprecedented increase in denominational growth and participation in religious activities (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1994).

This cohort was concerned with familism and “other-directed conformity” (Collins and Coltrane 1991). As a result, members of this cohort have been characterized as very conservative politically and socially. It is not surprising that research demonstrates the goal of the ambitious middle-class husband fulfilled the “traditional” role of breadwinner. The suburban

“housewife” was seen as the socializer of the children. The family was viewed as the institution whose function was to integrate individuals into society in conjunction with value systems consistent with the religious institution. Research indicates that attendance at religious services increases when couples have children. This particular cohort is characterized by a preference for relatively large families. Do the attributes of this birth cohort lead to higher rates of religious involvement? This analysis attempts to shed some light on this question and examines the extent to which this cohort is similar or dissimilar to other cohorts included in the analysis.

What birth years identify this particular birth cohort? The birth years and the labels associated with this cohort vary quite a bit. For example, Bennett and Rademacher (1997) refer to this cohort/generation as the “Cold Warriors” born from 1930 to 1945, Owen (1997) refers to this category as the “Silent Generation,” Craig and Halfacre (1997) call the 1923-1937 birth cohort the World War II/cold war cohort, Mitchel (1995) considers the 1933-1946 birth cohort to be the “Swing” generation, and Gay and Campbell (1993) operationalize the “Baby Bust” cohort as a cohort born in the 1930’s. For the purpose of this analysis, the cohort born from 1928 to 1940 is used to identify this birth cohort. This cohort appears to clearly define the Depression Era without a great deal of ambiguity.

### *Baby Boom Cohort*

The label for the cohort born in the late 1940’s and 1950’s has never been ambiguous. It has always been the Baby Boom cohort. Exactly when it started and ended has been subject to some debate but most agree that it started in 1946 at the end of World War II. This cohort was socialized in a much different political, social, and economic climate than the cohort that

preceded them. The Baby Boomers witnessed and were often a part of social and political issues of the time such, as war protests, the feminist movement, and the civil rights movements.

Numerous studies (e.g., Bass 2000; Alwin 1998; Williamson 1998; Hill 1997; Miller 1994) document the differences in the social and political attitudes and behaviors between the Baby Boom cohort and their predecessors (basically their parent's cohort/generation).

The baby boom cohort also experienced changes in the relationship between the social institutions of family and religion. According to Roof and McKinney (1987) both of these social institutions have had to respond to changes in gender roles in our society. Women's labor force participation rates increased significantly for this cohort and this increase is evident net the effects of marital status. Divorce rates for the baby boom cohort are higher than those of the preceding birth cohort (i.e., their parents). Types of family forms or arrangements increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s (single parent families, cohabitation, etc.). As a result, changes in family patterns may have significantly affected religious involvement in American mainline religious institutions. "Unconventional" marriage patterns likely made participation in church activities awkward and contributed to lower participation. In addition, lower fertility rates and having children at later ages may also contribute to lower levels of denominational commitment due to the changing relationship between family and religion (Hoge et al. 1994).

A significant proportion of Baby Boomers questioned the relevance and legitimacy of a number of social institutions in society. Many members of this cohort began to question institutionalized religion and embraced subjective, voluntaristic approaches to religious beliefs and ideologies. As a result, research suggests that religious involvement for this cohort declined in their early adult years. This analysis reexamines this issue and addresses whether the relationship holds as this cohort moves into midlife.

Some suggest that Boomers have become proponents of attempts (and more than likely unforeseen) to make America more overtly religious as they have aged. Many have turned to fundamentalist Christianity as a solution to some of the very issues they addressed at earlier ages. While this view has its critics, they also argue that Boomers were much more protective as a cohort over their children than their more “social conservative” parents.

For the purposes of this analysis, the Baby Boom cohort is operationalized as those who were born between 1948 and 1960. This operationalization clearly captures Boomers and eliminates birth years that may be questionable analytically.

### *Generation X*

Of the three cohorts, Generation X (or Gen-Xers) has received the least attention from the basic research literature. The people in this cohort have received considerable attention from other media outlets (see Thau and Heflin 1997). Some have referred to Generation X as the “overlooked” generation since they represent another cohort that is characterized by lower birth rates (Mitchel 1995). This cohort experienced a very different socialization experience than that of the Baby Boom cohort. Some research (e.g., Giles 1994) suggests that there are considerable attitudinal differences between Boomers and Gen-Xers. For example, on the one hand, Peterson (1993) contends that Baby Boomers are referring to Generation X as “apathetic.” On the other, Thau and Heflin (1997) document Generation X opinions that blame Baby Boomers for a number of society’s social ills. Hence, there are perhaps significant differences in a range of social and political attitudes and lifestyles.

Nevertheless, this cohort is no longer a spectator to the confrontational and protest style of achieving egalitarian objectives. In many respects, our society has made inroads in terms of racial, ethnic, political, and religious acceptance of diversity in attitudes and behavior. Our society has also experienced sizeable political and social movements toward employing modules of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in the American educational system and in the workplace. This in and of itself could affect Generation X's attitudes toward religious institutions and involvement.

There is no single expression of Generation X religion. Flory (2000) contends that five major characteristics of Generation X emerged from his study. First, Generation X religion emphasizes both the sensual and experimental, combining the sacred and the profane and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body as venues for the expression of religious beliefs. Second, Generation X religion is entrepreneurial in finding cultural and institutional space to create religious expressions that will accommodate their lifestyle interests. Third, Generation X religion is similar to boomer religion in emphasizing personal identity, religious experience, and spiritual seeking, however it differs in that it roots the quest for religious identity in community, rather than a more personal spiritual quest. Fourth, race, ethnic, and gender diversity is an explicit goal of Generation X religion. Fifth, there is an insistence on an "authentic" religious experience in Generation X religion, on the part of the individual as well as the religious communities that they choose to join, that acknowledge both the trials and successes of life. Therefore, Generation X may demonstrate patterns of religious participation and affiliation that are quite distinct in comparison to previous birth cohorts.

Some raise the question of what birth years constitute Generation X (Bagby 1998). The operationalization of Generation X varies widely in the literature. For example, Mitchel (1995)



consider those born between 1965 and 1976 as Generation X and Dunphy (1998) considers the time frame to be between 1963 and 1980 with 1973 as the “trough” or lowest birth rate year within that time frame. For the purposes of this paper, Generation X is defined as those respondents born between 1968 and 1980.

## Summary

Recent research has examined a wide range of attitudinal and sociodemographic factors that affect religious involvement. This study augments the existing literature by examining the extent to which three particular birth cohorts exhibit differences in religious involvement using a variation of the age/period/cohort analytical framework. As noted, this study avoids some of the standard problems with age/period/cohorts. However, a limitation is that Generation X can only be compared to the baby boom cohort at particular ages. Nevertheless, the study should provide promising directions for future research.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Data and Measures

Like many previous studies of differences in religious, social and political attitudes, data for this study are taken from the General Social Surveys (hereafter GSS). The data in these surveys were collected from nationwide samples. Each survey is an independently drawn sample of English-speaking persons eighteen years of age or over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the United States. The GSS is an appropriate data set because the data set contains survey items tapping religious participation, the item has been asked over the course of a number of years, and they contain a wide range of sociodemographic and background characteristics of respondents. For this study, the 1982, 1984, 2002, and the 2004 survey years of the GSS are employed to analyze the cohort variations because three distinct age/cohort categories for investigation can be identified at different points in time.

### *Dependent Variables*

Attendance at religious services is the dependent variable in the analysis. Religious attendance has been used in previous research to tap involvement in religious collectivities. The focus for the current analysis is the extent to which a respondent is involved in a religious denomination/category and is not concerned with the particular religious organizations. The GSS poses the question, "How often do you attend religious services?" Responses are coded as, Never (0), less than once a year (01), about once or twice a year (02), several times a year (03),

about once a year (04), 2-3 times a month (05), nearly every week (06), every week (07), several times a week (08), no answer and don't know (09). No answer and don't know responses are treated as missing.

### *Independent Variables*

The independent variables represent a combination of age, period, and cohort. Given the analytic strategy of the paper, a standard APC model could not be employed. That is, not all possible ages and cohorts are identified in the analysis. As noted earlier, certain age groups in 1982-1984 and 2002-2004 are identified because these respondents are a part of the cohorts of interest (i.e., Depression Era, Baby Boom, and Generation X). Six age/period/cohort categories are identified for the analyses: (1) Baby Boom cohort age 24-34 in 1982-1984, (2) Generation X age 24-34 in 2002-2004, (3) Depression Era cohort age 44-54 in 1982-1984, (4) Baby Boom cohort age 44-54 in 2002-2002, (5) Depression Era cohort age 64-74 in 2002-2004, and (6) the G.I. Generation cohort age 64-74 in 1982-1984. By operationalizing age/period/cohort categories in this manner, some of the standard problems of APC models that incorporate all age groups are avoided. Certain age groups are deliberately omitted in order to make comparisons that are less ambiguous than some of the previous studies.

### *Control Variables*

As noted in the introduction, studies demonstrate that a number of factors affect the probability or likelihood that people attend religious services and express an affiliation for a particular religious collectivity.

The impact of marital status, gender, race, education, income, and region of residency will be used as control variables. Marital status is an important variable in predicting religious attendance and affiliation. The GSS asks “Are you currently—married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?” Responses are coded married (01), widowed (02), divorced (03), separated (04), never married (05), and No Answer (09). Marital status will be represented by creating dummy variables for married respondents, and never married respondents. Respondents who are divorced and separated will be combined and collapsed as a dummy variable for those who have “broken up” and no longer live with their spouse. This coding strategy is frequently used in the literature since “separation” is a transitory state that has a very high likelihood of leading to divorced marital status. Widowed respondents represent the final marital dummy variable included in the analysis.

Research reports that women consistently score higher on religiosity measures. As a result, a dummy variable is constructed such that females are coded (1) and males are coded (0) to represent the differences between the genders in the analysis.

Race is also a significant predictor of religiosity and is included as a control. The GSS indicator of race is coded in the data as (1) white, (2) black, and (3) other. Due to the small sample size of the other category across survey years, these responses are not included in the

analysis. Hence, a dummy variable representing African Americans with whites as the reference category is constructed.

The GSS uses a 20 point scale for years of formal schooling. Coding is constructed by the use of actual years of formal education and is based on the assumption of completion of specific grade levels. No formal schooling is coded (00), 1<sup>st</sup> grade (01), 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (02), 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (03), and continues this pattern through 7 years of college (19). Eight or more years of college is coded as (20). Don't know (98) and No Answer responses are coded as (99) and are treated as missing data.

The GSS measures family income through the use of different scales depending on the survey year. The GSS asks "In which group did your family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes?" For years 1980 and 1982-1984 GSS coded income on a 17 point scale. Family incomes under 1,000 are coded (01), family incomes between 1,000 to 2,999 are coded (02), family incomes between 3,000 to 3,999 are coded (03), family incomes between 4,000 to 4,999 are coded (04), family incomes between 5,000 to 5,999 are coded (05), family incomes between 6,000 to 6,999 are coded (06), family incomes between 7,000 to 7,999 are coded (07), family incomes between 8,000 to 8,999 are coded (08), family incomes between 9,000 to 9,999 are coded (09), family incomes between 10,000 to 12,499 are coded (10), family incomes between 12,500 to 17,499 are coded (11), family incomes between 17,500 to 19,999 are coded (12), family incomes between 20,000 to 22,499 are coded (13), family incomes between 22,500 to 24,999 are coded (14), family incomes between 25,000 to 34,999 are coded (15), family incomes between 35,000 to 49,000 are coded (16), family incomes 50,000 or over are coded (17), Refused, (18) Don't Know, (98) No answer (99), and (BK) Not applicable. Income is

rescaled to percentages to standardize the measurement across years and ranges from 0 to 100 (Lynxwiler and Gay 1994).

For the years 2000-2004, GSS measured family income on a 23 point scale. Family incomes under 1,000 are coded (01), family incomes between 1,000 to 2,999 are coded (02), family incomes between 3,000 to 3,999 are coded (03), family incomes between 4,000 to 4,999 are coded (04), family incomes between 5,000 to 5,999 are coded (05), family incomes between 6,000 to 6,999 are coded (06), family incomes between 7,000 to 7,999 are coded (07), family incomes between 8,000 to 8,999 are coded (08), family incomes between 9,000 to 9,999 are coded (09), family incomes between 10,000 to 12,499 are coded (10), family incomes between 12,500 to 17,499 are coded (11), family incomes between 17,500 to 19,999 are coded (12), family incomes between 20,000 to 22,499 are coded (13), family incomes between 22,500 to 24,999 are coded (14), family incomes between 25,000 to 29,999 are coded (15), family incomes between 30,000 to 34,999 are coded (16), family incomes between 35,000 to 39,999 are coded (17), family incomes between 40,000 to 49,999 are coded (18), family incomes between 50,000 to 59,000 are coded (19), family incomes between 60,000 to 74,999 are coded (20), family incomes between 75,000 to 89,999 are coded (21), family incomes between 90,000 to 109,999 are coded (22), family incomes 110,000 or over are coded (23), Refused is coded (24), Don't Know is coded (98), No answer is coded (99), and Not applicable is coded (BK). Again, income is rescaled to percentages to standardize the measurement across years (Lynxwiler and Gay 1994).

Another control variable used in this study is the respondents region of residency. The GSS researcher documents the region of the interview, coded as the following: New England (01), Mid Atlantic (02), East North Central (03), West North Central (04), South Atlantic (05),

East South Central (06), West South Central (07), Mountain (08), and Pacific (09). South Atlantic (05), East South Central (06) and West South Central (07) will be used to create a dummy variable to represent southern residence.

### Analytical Strategy

Multiple regression is employed to examine the effects of age, period, and cohort on religious participation. The analysis controls for marital status, gender, race, education, income, and region of residence.

The analysis generates three tables. Table 1 includes means and standard deviations for the dependent and control variables for the years 1982, 1984, 2002, and 2004. Table 2 displays the age/period/cohort specific means for attendance at religious services. Table 3 reports the multiple regression results for effects of the age/period/cohort model with and without controls.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Table 1 exhibits the means, standard deviations, and sample size for the dependent and control variables. The mean for attendance for the entire sample is 3.87. This translates into an average attendance rate of about once a month for the entire sample of 5660. Fifty-six percent of the respondents in the sample are females, and sixty-three percent are married respondents. The mean educational attainment is 13.07 years. Seventeen percent of the sample is African American, thirty-six percent are southern residents (using the Census designation for southern states), and thirty-six percent of the sample have children under the age of eighteen living at home.

Table 1  
 Descriptive Statistics: Attendance at Religious Services and Control Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Deviation
Attendance at Religious Services	3.87	2.677	5660
Female Respondents	.56	.496	5660
Married Respondents	.63	.483	5660
Educational Attainment	13.07	3.091	5660
Family Income	56.15	29.952	5660
African Americans	.17	.38	5660
Southern Residence	.36	.479	5660
Children Living At Home	.36	.480	5660

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for specific age/period/cohort categories. The table shows that baby boomers age 24-34 in 1982-1984 have a mean attendance score of 3.67 with a standard deviation of 2.56. Generation X of the same age in 2002-2004 exhibits a mean of 3.46 with a standard deviation of 2.73.

Table 2

Attendance at Religious Services: Means and Standard Deviations by Age/Period/Cohort

	1982-1984	2002-2004
<u>Age</u> <u>24-34</u>	<u>Baby Boom</u> <u>1948-1960</u>	<u>Generation X</u> <u>1968-1980</u>
Religious Attendance	3.67 (2.56) N = 1391	3.46 (2.56) N = 1229
<u>Age</u> <u>44-54</u>	<u>Depression Era</u> <u>1928-1940</u>	<u>Baby Boom</u> <u>1948-1960</u>
Religious Attendance	4.26 (2.64) N = 704	3.73 (2.73) N = 1175
<u>AGE</u> <u>64-74</u>	<u>G.I. Generation</u> <u>1908-1920</u>	<u>Depression Era</u> <u>1928-1940</u>
Religious Attendance	4.62 (2.70) N = 584	4.28 (2.87) N = 577
TOTAL		
Religious Attendance	4.03 (2.64) N = 2679	3.73 (2.70) N = 2981

\* Standard Deviations are in parentheses.

The Depression Era cohort in 1982-1984 have a mean of 4.26 with a standard deviation of 2.64 and a mean of 4.28 with a standard deviation of 2.87 when they were 64-74 in 2002-2004. For the most part, it appears that there is very little change for this cohort across the twenty year period. The baby boom in the 2002-2004 time period shows a mean of 3.73 with a standard deviation of 2.73. Much like their Depression Era counterparts, Baby Boomers demonstrate minor changes.

An initial look at means for all age/period/cohort categories reveal that the G.I. Generation exhibits the highest religiosity mean score (4.62).

Table 3 presents the analysis of the religious attendance differences between specific age/period/cohort groupings with and without controls. Dummy variables in regression Models I and II represent Generation X, older Baby Boomers, Depression Era age groups in their 40s-50s and 60s-70s, and the G.I. Generation. Baby Boomers 24 to 34 in 1982-1984 serve as the comparison group or omitted category.

Model I is statistically significant and explains 2.0 percent of the variance in attendance at religious services. The model exhibits gross differences between the dummy variables and the reference category. The model also indicates that Generation X shows no significant differences from boomers of the same age. In addition, there is no evidence that Baby Boomers participate in religious services as they age. The model also indicates that both dummy variables representing the Depression Era cohorts demonstrate higher religiosity scores than do Baby Boomers and Generation X. For example, the regression coefficient for Depression Era respondents age 44-54 (.602) demonstrates a significantly higher adjusted mean attendance than the reference category controlling for other age/period/cohort groups in the model. The G.I. Generation exhibit higher attendance levels of public religious participation. This particular

cohort shows the highest level of religious involvement as is indicated by the standardized regression coefficient. Hence, the analysis in Model 1 demonstrates a cohort effect between Baby Boomers and Depression Era respondents. Drawing from the extant literature, one would assume that Baby Boomers would return to their religious “roots” as they age, however, this cohort does not demonstrate that particular age trend. This analysis can not address whether this cohort will increase religious attendance once they are in their sixties or beyond.

Table 3  
Multiple Regression Results: Effects of Age, Period, Cohort, and Sociodemographic Variables on Attendance at Religious Services

Independent Variable	Model I	Model II
Generation X Age 24-34 Year 2002-2004	-.197/-.030 (.107)	-.133/-.020 (.104)
Baby Boom Age 44-54 Year 2002-2004	.077/.012 (.108)	.062/.009 (.106)
Depression Era Age 44-54 Year 1982-1984	.602/.705** (.123)	.527/.066** (.121)
Depression Era Age 64-74 Year 2002-2004	.632/.072** (.133)	.711/.081** (.136)
G.I.Generation Age 64-74 Year 1982-1984	.952/.110** (.132)	1.088/.125** (.141)
Female Respondents		.786/.146** (.070)
Married Respondents		.882/.159** (.082)
Educational Attainment		.081/.093** (.013)
Family Income		.002/.021 (.002)
African Americans		.983/.139** (.096)
Southern Residence		.608/.109** (.238)
Children at Home		.227/.041** (.081)
Intercept	3.668	1.006
N	5660	5660
R <sup>2</sup>	.020	.107

Note: Cell entries are given as unstandardized regression coefficient/standardized (beta) coefficient with the standard error given in parentheses. (\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01)

Model II is also statistically significant and explains 10.7 percent of the variance in attendance at religious services. The model exhibits differences between the dummy variables and the reference category (i.e., Baby Boomers age 24-34 in 1982-1984) controlling for other factors shown in the literature to affect religious involvement. The pattern for the net effects of the dummy variables in the model reveals the same pattern found in the model for gross effects. That is, the introduction of additional variables does not affect the importance of the independent variables in the analysis.

Concerning control variables, most of the indicators were consistent with the extant literature. Females show higher attendance rates than men. Married respondents attend more frequently than their unmarried counterparts. Families with children under the age of eighteen living at home are more likely than families without children at home to attend religious services. Educational attainment exhibits a positive relationship with religious involvement while family income shows no effect on attendance.

Again, consistent with the literature African Americans attend religious services more often than their white counterparts and southern residents attend more often than respondents who reside outside of the southern region of the country.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to exam the effects of age, birth cohort, and period of measurement on religious involvement. Research suggests that as people age, they become more religious. In this analysis, this would mean that people attend religious services at a greater rate regardless of birth cohort. This study does not confirm this finding. In contrast, this analysis demonstrates that attendance at religious services remains constant for two cohorts. The Baby Boom cohort in 2002-2004 does not attend at a greater rate than the Baby Boom cohort in the early 1980s. The Depression Era cohort also demonstrates consistency across the age groups. That is, Depression Era cohort members in their forties and fifties in the 1980s are still more likely to participate in public religious participation than their Baby Boom counterparts in their forties and fifties in 2002-2004. The attendance rate of Depression Era respondents remain consistent on in to their sixties and early seventies. This study then demonstrates a cohort difference between Baby Boomers and Depression Era respondents.

An explanation of the difference could be the result of the time period that the two cohorts entered adulthood and began to form families. On one hand, the Depression Era cohort began their adult lives in a very unique American environment. The country emerged “victorious” from a major world war, and there was a heightened confidence in America and American institutions. Attendance at religious services in general was relatively frequent during this time period. It is likely that these experiences (i.e., frequent attendance) became a part of an overall lifestyle for this cohort. On the other hand, the Baby Boom cohort experienced a very different cultural environment. Boomers were more likely to question existing social institutions (including the religious institution) and their impact on society in general. This cohort was



socialized during a very different “wartime” era. The United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War was not evaluated in the same way as the U.S. involvement in World War II and many of the civil rights issues prominent during the 1960s and early 1970s likely affected this cohort’s general attitudes. Due to this cohort’s questions regarding social institutions, religious involvement may have been significantly affected over the life course.

A unique contribution of this research is the inclusion of Generation X. Research suggests that this cohort may exhibit levels of religiosity that run contrary to Baby Boomers. Indeed, the literature draws a number of differences between Generation X and their Baby Boom counterparts on a number of social, political, and religious issues. However, this analysis reveals no difference between Generation X and Baby Boomers concerning attendance at religious services when they were both in their twenties and thirties. This cohort experienced dissimilar socialization content than did the two cohorts before them.

The study does show that the general population exhibits lower public participation rates after the turn of the twenty-first century. The extent to which this is a pattern toward secularization in our society or a reflection of the ebb and flow of the importance of religious involvement in society can not be addressed in this study. The secularization thesis is clearly not new, but should remain a topic of investigation as our society becomes more culturally diverse.

These patterns among the independent variables remain consistent once controls are introduced into the model. There are no sign or levels of significance changes in the full models. In addition, the effects of the control variables are consistent with the extant literature. These effects suggest examining the age/period/cohort within these various sociodemographic categories may prove useful in understanding the impact of age and cohort on religious involvement.

This analysis is limited in that certain age groups for particular cohorts can not be included due to the restrictions of the data. For example, Generation X is not old enough to examine their religious involvement patterns in their forties or beyond. In addition, the Baby Boom cohort in this study in the 2000s have not reached retirement age, and the effect of age may still be important as the Boomers get a little older. Life expectancy projections suggest that Baby Boomers will spend several years in retirement, and as a result, may reconsider their religious involvement.

The study also can not address religious involvement of the Depression Era cohort when they were in their twenties and thirties. Further, information concerning the G.I. Generation is only available for one age group at one point in time.

This study does contribute to the extant literature in at least two important ways. First, the analysis demonstrates a consistent cohort effect between Baby Boomers and the Depression Era cohort. Second, the study examines the comparison between Baby Boomers and Generation X when the two cohorts were in their twenties and thirties. Interestingly, no significant differences emerge concerning the attitudes of Generation X as suggested by the literature.

Further research in this area should look at the variation of religious involvement by religious family/denomination. It is likely that among certain religious categories, patterns of attendance at religious services may vary from the general cohort population. That is, Baby Boomer fundamentalist Protestants may show differences in religious involvement over time when compared to liberal Protestants, African American Protestants, Catholics, etc. Gender and marital status are also important factors associated with religiosity and should be examined in more detail in conjunction with birth cohort. In conclusion, the study demonstrates the

importance of the age/period/cohort analytical framework in addressing religious involvement in American society.

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