

# WORLD FAMILY MAP *2019*

## MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE AND CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

*Essay*

### THE TIES THAT BIND:

*Is Faith a Global Force for Good or  
Ill in The Family?*

*An International Report from*

*Institute for*

**Family** Studies  
*and*

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# THE TIES THAT BIND:

## Is Faith a Global Force for Good or Ill in the Family?

### *Executive Summary*

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*W. Bradford Wilcox, Laurie DeRose, and Jason S. Carroll*

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Does religion foster solidarity—or fuel conflict and inequality? Today’s headlines suggest the answer is “yes” to both. Yes, as Emile Durkheim taught us, religion can be and is a force for solidarity, but at the same time, as Max Weber taught us, religion can be and is also a force for conflict and inequality. In *The Ties that Bind*, we consider a more specific question: is religion a force for good or ill in families around the globe?

This report answers this question by looking at the relationship between religion and four important outcomes—relationship quality, fertility, domestic violence, and infidelity—in 11 countries in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. These questions are especially salient in an era marked by what the *New York Times* has called the rise of post-familism in developing countries, where marriage and childbearing are in retreat in most higher-income countries. Faith may buffer against this post-familial turn, both by attaching particular meaning and importance to family life and by offering norms and networks that foster family solidarity. But these questions are also important given that religion may be a force for ill—legitimizing gender inequality or violence in the family—a concern that has taken on particular salience in light of recent headlines about religion, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse.

Beyond the headlines, however, this report seeks to understand how religion is linked, on average, to four key family outcomes in 11 countries: Argentina, Australia, Chile, Canada, Colombia, France, Ireland, Mexico, Peru, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Drawing on data from the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS), this report suggests that:

- **When it comes to relationship quality in heterosexual relationships, highly religious couples enjoy higher-quality relationships and more sexual satisfaction, compared to less/mixed religious couples and secular couples.** For instance, women in highly religious relationships are about 50% more likely to report that they are strongly satisfied with their sexual relationship than their secular and less religious counterparts. Joint decision-making, however, is more common among men in shared secular relationships and women in highly religious relationships, compared to their peers in less/mixed religious couples.
- **When it comes to fertility, data from low-fertility countries in the Americas, East Asia, and Europe show that religion’s positive influence on fertility has become stronger in recent decades.** Today, people ages 18–49 who attend religious services regularly have 0.27 more children than those who never, or practically never, attend. The report also indicates that marriage plays an important role in explaining religion’s continued positive influence on childbearing because religious men and women are more likely to marry compared to their more secular peers, and the married have more children than the unmarried.

- **When it comes to domestic violence, religious couples in heterosexual relationships do not have an advantage over secular couples or less/mixed religious couples.** Measures of intimate partner violence (IPV)—which includes physical abuse, as well as sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors—do not differ in a statistically significant way by religiosity. Slightly more than 20% of the men in our sample report perpetuating IPV, and a bit more than 20% of the women in our sample indicate that they have been victims of IPV in their relationship. Our results suggest, then, that religion is not protective against domestic violence for this sample of couples from the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. However, religion is not an increased risk factor for domestic violence in these countries, either.
- **The relationships between faith, feminism, and family outcomes are complex.** The impact of gender ideology on the outcomes covered in this report, for instance, often varies by the religiosity of our respondents. When it comes to relationship quality, we find a J-Curve in overall relationship quality for women, such that women in shared secular, progressive relationships enjoy comparatively high levels of relationship quality, whereas women in the ideological and religious middle report lower levels of relationship quality, as do traditionalist women in secular relationships; but women in highly religious relationships, especially traditionalists, report the highest levels of relationship quality. For domestic violence, we find that progressive women in secular relationships report comparatively low levels of IPV compared to conservative women in less/mixed religious relationships. In sum, the impact of gender ideology on contemporary family life may vary a great deal by whether or not a couple is highly religious, nominally religious, or secular.

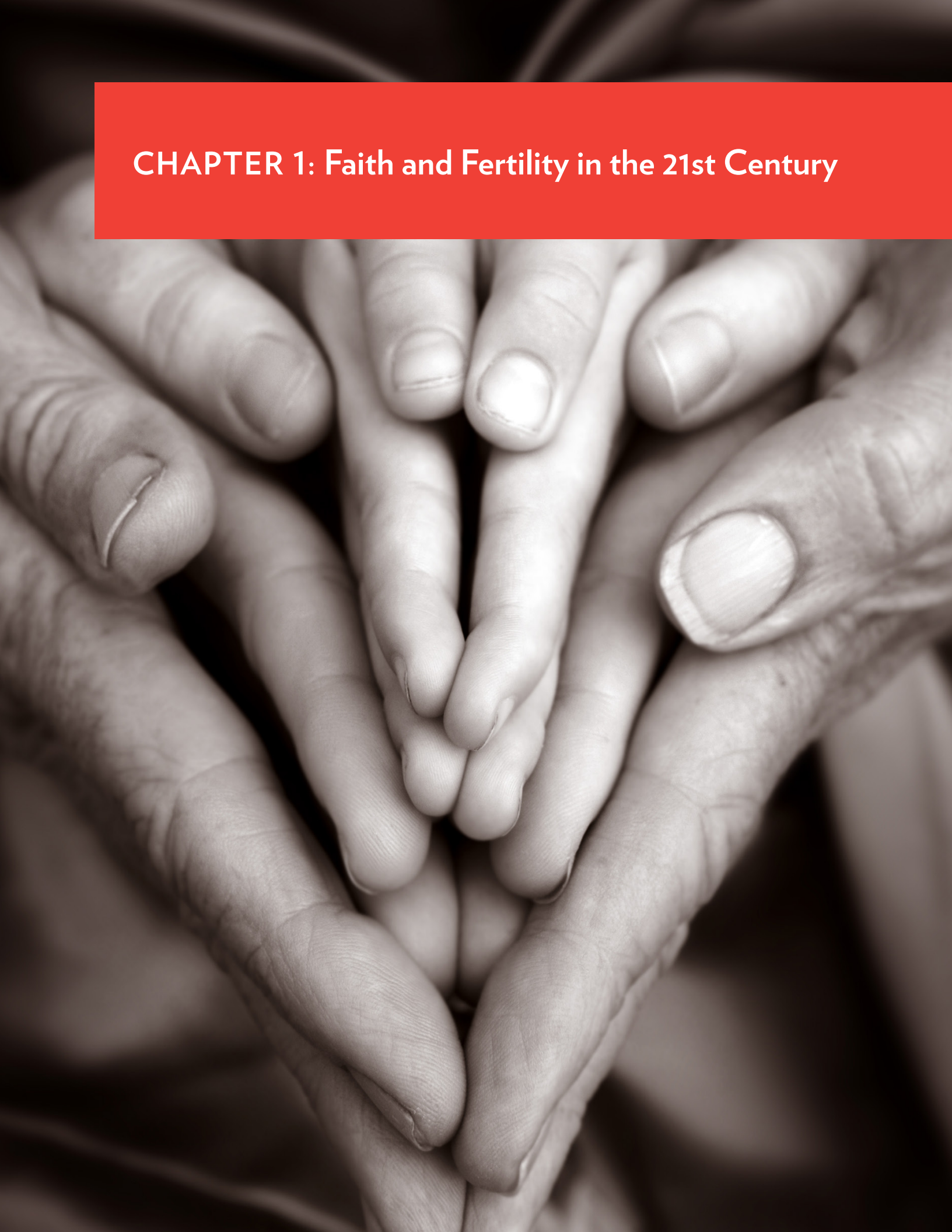
In many respects, this report indicates that faith is a force for good in contemporary family life in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. Men and women who share an active religious life, for instance, enjoy higher levels of relationship quality and sexual satisfaction compared to their peers in secular or less/mixed religious relationships. They also have more children and are more likely to marry. At the same time, we do *not* find that faith protects women from domestic violence in married and cohabiting relationships. Overall, then, this report suggests the family-friendly norms and networks associated with religious communities reinforce the ties that bind; the challenge facing those communities, however, is to build on these strengths to address families who are struggling—including the approximately one-in-five of their adherents who experience intimate partner violence.



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## CHAPTER 1: Faith and Fertility in the 21st Century



## Chapter 1: Faith and Fertility in the 21st Century

Laurie F. DeRose, *Georgetown University*

W. Bradford Wilcox, *University of Virginia*

Andrés Salazar-Arango, *Universidad de la Sabana*

Gloria Huarcaya, *Universidad de Piura*

Kuo-Hsien Su, *National Taiwan University*

Susana Ochoa, *Universidad Panamericana*

Javiera Reyes Brito, *Universidad de los Andes, Chile*

**Abstract:** *Gender equality is increasingly thought to be the new natalism—the force that will bring about the reemergence of sustainable fertility from below-replacement levels of childbearing. Women who anticipate taking on a disproportionate share of childrearing responsibilities are more likely to opt out of childbearing than those who anticipate involved partners. Because religion often fosters traditional gender attitudes, its pronatalist influence could diminish in a world where gender equality is emerging as the new natalism. We use four waves of World Values Survey data from low-fertility countries in the Americas, East Asia, and Europe to show that religion's positive influence on fertility has not, in fact, waned in recent decades. We suggest that marriage plays an important role in understanding religion's continued positive influence: those with egalitarian gender role attitudes are less likely to be married and have slightly fewer children. Religion has become a stronger positive predictor of marriage and childbearing over time in low-fertility countries. Gender ideology and faith have interacted differently across world regions over time, but we found no region where the pronatalism associated with religion was tempered by a positive association between religiosity and gender traditionalism.*

The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one in which almost every country on the face of the globe has seen a decline in fertility rates and where a “retreat from marriage” is almost a near-universal as well—delays in marriage, increases in cohabitation, increases in the proportion who never marry, increases in divorce, plus various combinations of these factors. Economic affluence in general, and women's economic independence in particular, reduce the “need” for families: individuals, both with and without state support, can live as individuals.<sup>1</sup>

This reality is a threat to sustainable fertility levels, currently manifested in a relatively small youth population. Fertility is well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman throughout most of the Americas, Europe, and East Asia. Ultimately, however, below-replacement fertility may prove to have been an “adjustment phase” in higher-income countries between unsustainable rapid population growth and long-term replacement fertility. That is, as countries become more egalitarian and adopt work-family policies that make it easier to juggle work and family responsibilities, fertility levels may rise to replacement levels.

This is exactly what leading population scientists thought was happening when fertility first dropped below two children per woman in Europe: below-replacement fertility was thought to be a temporary phase that might recur occasionally, but never continue for any extended period.<sup>2</sup> Half a century later, there is no longer any reason to expect replacement fertility to reemerge out of some natural homeostatic force. Despite the economic and other costs associated with a relatively small youth population, below-replacement fertility has persisted in Europe, and it has emerged in the Americas, Eastern Asia, and scattered higher-income countries in areas of the Global South.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Kotkin, A. Shroff, A. Modarres, & W. Cox, *The Rise of Post-Familialism: Humanity's Future* (Singapore: Civil Service College, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> N.B. Ryder (1967), “The Character of Modern Fertility,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 369, no. 1 (1967): 26–36.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision,” as found at: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>

The question then shifts from “when can we expect replacement fertility?” to “*how* can we expect replacement fertility?” If the current retreat from marriage and childbearing is in fact an “adjustment phase,” how do we need to adjust in order to emerge from it?

The leading answer to this question, at least in academic circles, is greater gender equality.<sup>4</sup> Gender equality used to be seen as a fertility suppressant because women engaged in paid work had fewer children than others, but we have reached a time when *most* women in Europe, the Americas, and Eastern Asia have few children. In modern societies where women typically have high demands in the public (paid work) sphere of their lives, support from partners is necessary to make bearing two children commonplace. Today, this support often comes in the form of a father involved at home with his family. If women commonly carry a “second shift” of work after they get home from paid work, they are more likely to retreat from childbearing than if they have a supportive partner on the home front.<sup>5</sup>

For this *World Family Map* report, we fully embrace the notions that sustainable fertility requires men’s involvement in childrearing and work-family policies that make it easier for families to handle the challenges of juggling work and family responsibilities. The question we add is whether religion remains a pronatalist force, despite its association with gender traditionalism.<sup>6</sup> If religion involves men in families by increasing their likelihood of marriage, decreasing their likelihood of divorce, and motivating them to be involved fathers, its positive effects on fertility may be much greater than its negative effects.

Also note that egalitarianism is not expected to be the new natalism if it means only workplace equality: it is men’s sharing of the second shift—their involvement at home—that is expected to support replacement fertility. Here religious men may have an advantage because their familism fosters involvement.<sup>7</sup> Even a traditional gender orientation has been linked to greater paternal involvement, but only among religious men.<sup>8</sup> In addition, domestic tasks like diaper changing are not necessarily incompatible with religious concepts like “male headship” that undergo reinterpretation in social contexts, even among those fully devoted to the concepts.<sup>9</sup>

We know that worldwide, people of faith have more children.<sup>10</sup> What we ask is whether this has become less true in low-fertility countries where gender equality may have become increasingly crucial for sustainable fertility.

We start by showing that even in low-fertility societies from the Americas, Europe, East Asia, and Oceania, people of faith have more children. We then test whether that association has weakened over time, as would be expected if religion depresses fertility by promoting traditional gender roles. Religion should have a dwindling pronatalist force if gender egalitarianism has become the dominant determinant of sustainable fertility. In fact, we find that religion supports fertility to a slightly *greater* degree than in the recent past. Low-fertility countries have experienced a profound retreat

<sup>4</sup> Even research emphasizing that overall development leads to reversals in fertility decline nonetheless notes that the absence of institutions that facilitate work-family balance and gender equality might explain countries that are exceptions to the rule. See, for example: M. Myrskylä, H.-P. Kohler, & F. C. Billari, “Advances in Development Reverse Fertility Declines,” *Nature*, 460, no. 7256 (2009): 741.

<sup>5</sup> F. Goldscheider, E. Bernhardt, & T. Lappegård, “The Gender Revolution: A Framework for Understanding Changing Family and Demographic Behaviour,” *Population and Development Review*, 41, no. 2: (2015): 207-239.

<sup>6</sup> R. Inglehart & P. Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003). L. Schnabel, “Religion and Gender Equality Worldwide: A Country-level Analysis,” *Social Indicators Research*, 129, no. 2 (2016): 893-907. S. Seguino, “Help or Hindrance? Religion’s Impact on Gender Inequality in Attitudes and Outcomes,” *World Development*, 39, no. 8 (2011): 1308-1321.

<sup>7</sup> F. Goldscheider, C. Goldscheider, & A. Rico-Gonzalez, “Gender Equality in Sweden: Are the Religious More Patriarchal?” *Journal of Family Issues*, 35 no. 7 (2014): 892-908.

<sup>8</sup> W. B. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*, (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> M. L. Denton, “Gender and Marital Decision Making: Negotiating Religious Ideology and Practice,” *Social Forces*, 82, no. 3 (2004): 1151-1180.

<sup>10</sup> C. Hackett, M. Stonawski, M. Potančoková, B.J. Grim, & V. Skirbekk, “The Future Size of Religiously-Affiliated and Unaffiliated Populations,” *Demographic Research*, 32, no. 1 (2015): 829-842.

<sup>11</sup> B. Arpino, G. Esping-Anderson, & Lea Pessin, “How Do Changes in Gender Role Attitudes Towards Female Employment Influence Fertility? A Macro-level Analysis,” *European Sociological Review*, 31, no. 3 (2015): 370-382.

from marriage, but religious individuals have retreated from the institution far less. In short, we show that religion maintains an important direct positive association with fertility, plus that its encouragement of marriage may be an important way it contributes to higher fertility levels. We unpack the complex associations between gender roles, religion, and fertility to understand the persistence of faith as a pronatalist force at a time when egalitarianism seems increasingly necessary for replacement fertility.<sup>11</sup>

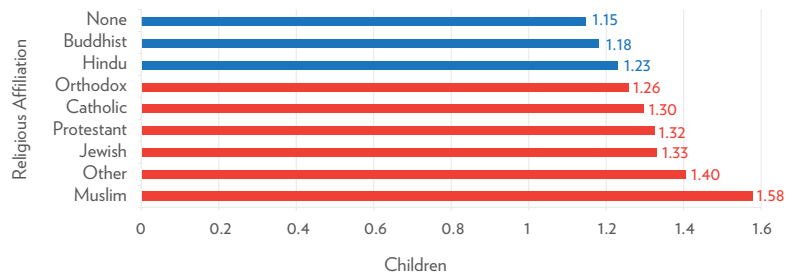
## People of faith have more children

Whether we measure religion by religious affiliation, religiosity (frequency of service attendance), personal piety (frequency of prayer), or religious salience (importance of God and importance of religion), people of faith have more children, even in contemporary low-fertility societies.<sup>12</sup> The figures below use data from 15 to 49-year-olds in the most recent wave of the World Values Survey (2010–2014) across countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia.<sup>13</sup> We predicted religious differences in fertility, controlling for age, education, and country. Individual faith matters for how many children people have.

## People of faith have more traditional gender role attitudes

We use attendance at religious services as the measure of faith in our subsequent analyses. All measures were strongly related to fertility, and we chose attendance to be consistent with the other chapters of this report that use data from

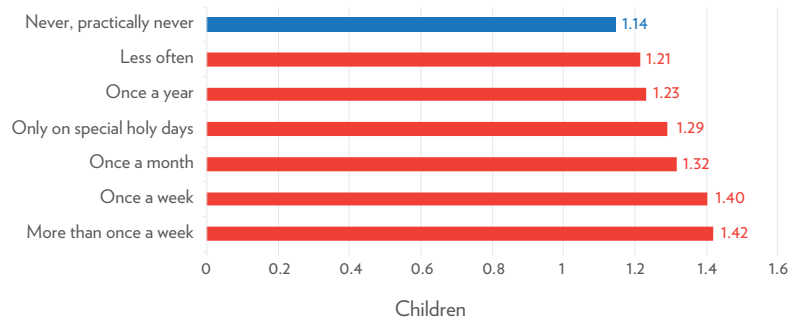
### Religion: Unaffiliated have the fewest children



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than no affiliation at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15–49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010–2014).

### Religiosity: Frequency of attendance matters for fertility



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than never attending at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15–49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010–2014).

<sup>11</sup> B. Arpino, G. Esping-Anderson, & Lea Pessin, “How Do Changes in Gender Role Attitudes Towards Female Employment Influence Fertility? A Macro-level Analysis,” *European Sociological Review*, 31, no. 3 (2015): 370–382.

<sup>12</sup> Almost all of the countries in our sample had fertility below replacement (2.1 children per woman) in the most recent WVS wave, but the number of children shown in our graphics is still lower because many respondents were still in their childbearing years and would ultimately have more children.

<sup>13</sup> **North America:** Mexico, United States; **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay; **Northern Europe:** Estonia, Sweden; **Western Europe:** Germany, Netherlands; **Southern Europe:** Slovenia, Spain; **Eastern Europe:** Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine; **Oceania:** Australia, New Zealand; **East Asia:** China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore (Hong Kong omitted because it did not collect children ever born).

the Global Family & Gender Survey (GFGS)<sup>14</sup> from countries where few people adhere to religious traditions that do not include corporate worship.

We therefore used service attendance when assessing the relationship between faith and gender traditionalism. Among various options for measuring gender role attitudes, we used responses to the statement: “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.”<sup>15</sup> Only respondents who disagreed with this statement fully supported workplace equality; others were likely sympathetic with the idea that men have a greater need to provide for their families than women do. Previous work has shown that people of faith express more traditional gender-role ideology in response to numerous WVS questions, including this one.<sup>16</sup> We confirmed that was true among the countries we focus on here: among those who reported attending religious services once a week or more, 53% to 55% endorsed workplace equality compared to 59% of those who never attended (values predicted controlling for age, education, and country).

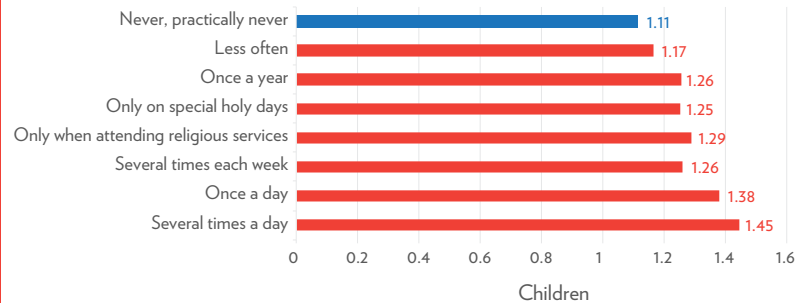
This means that religious people continue to be more likely to support traditional gender role ideology at a time when egalitarianism is emerging as an important component of sustainable fertility. It would then seem that faith might have a positive association with fertility *despite* common gender role ideologies among the faithful suppressing fertility. However, we show in the next section that traditional gender role ideology among individuals was not, in fact, associated with lower fertility.

<sup>14</sup> A full description of this survey will be provided in Chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> A measure of attitudes favoring workplace equality lacks explicit reference to our variable of greatest interest—men’s involvement at home. It is, however, the same variable that Arpino et al. (2015) used when they showed a curvilinear relationship between gender role attitudes and fertility at the national level, i.e., that greater acceptance of workplace equality was correlated with lower fertility only up to a point, after which higher levels predicted higher fertility. Our sensitivity analysis showed that our results did not depend on our choice of gender attitudes measures, though none of the alternatives directly measured men’s involvement at home.

<sup>16</sup> S. Seguino, “Help or Hindrance? Religion’s Impact on Gender Inequality in Attitudes and Outcomes,” *World Development*, 39 no. 8 (2011): 1308-1321.

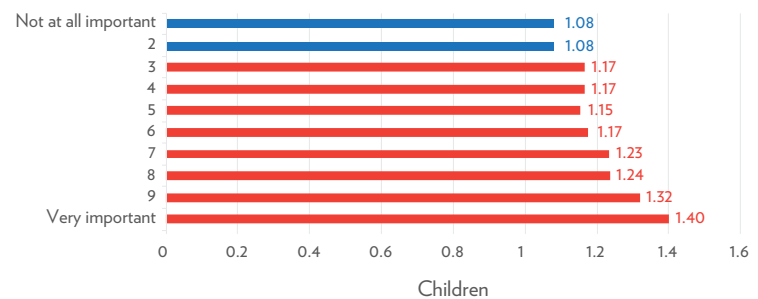
## Personal piety: Frequency of prayer matters for fertility



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than never praying at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014).

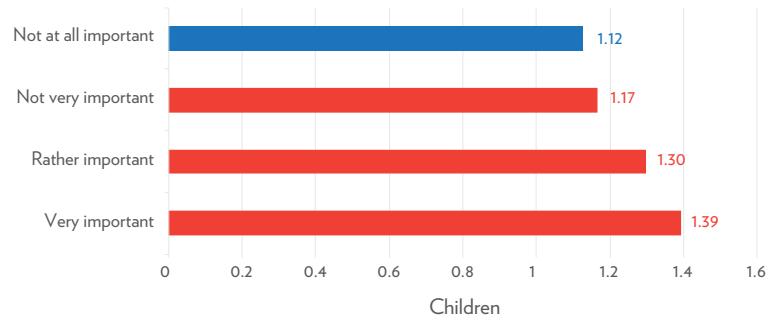
## Religious salience: Importance of God matters for fertility



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than not important at all at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014).

## Religious salience: Importance of religion matters for fertility



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than not important at all at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014).

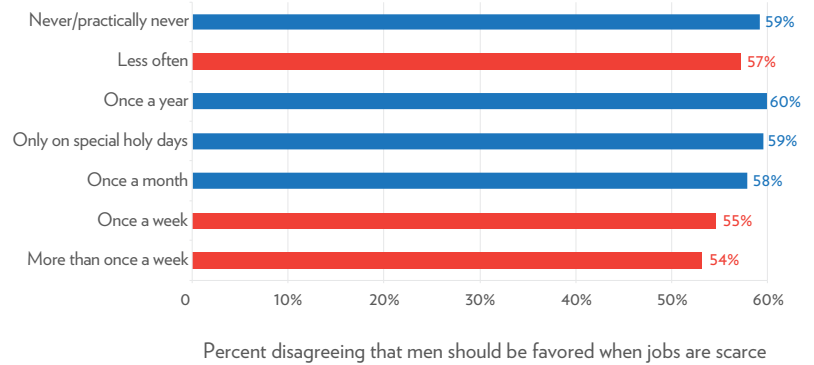
## Egalitarian gender role attitudes are associated with fewer children

Individuals who support workplace equality, those who embraced a progressive gender role ideology, actually had significantly fewer children than those who supported favoring men when jobs were scarce.

At first blush, this might seem to discredit the idea that gender equity is “the new natalism”: if progressive families were sharing paid and domestic work equally, this should make having children more practical than in more gender-traditional families, where children increase the length of the “second shift” for working women. However, across our sample, those who agreed with favoring men when jobs were scarce were 23% more likely to be married than those who disagreed.<sup>17</sup> This is an important explanation for the higher fertility of people with less egalitarian gender-role attitudes, as married people averaged 0.76 children more than their unmarried peers.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, we stress that both traditional gender roles and egalitarianism can be means of coping with the demands of childrearing. Couples adopting more traditional gender roles (she does less paid work) and couples adopting more progressive gender roles (he shares fully in domestic work) would be better positioned to have at least two children than couples in which the woman faces the prospect of an arduous second shift. This perspective

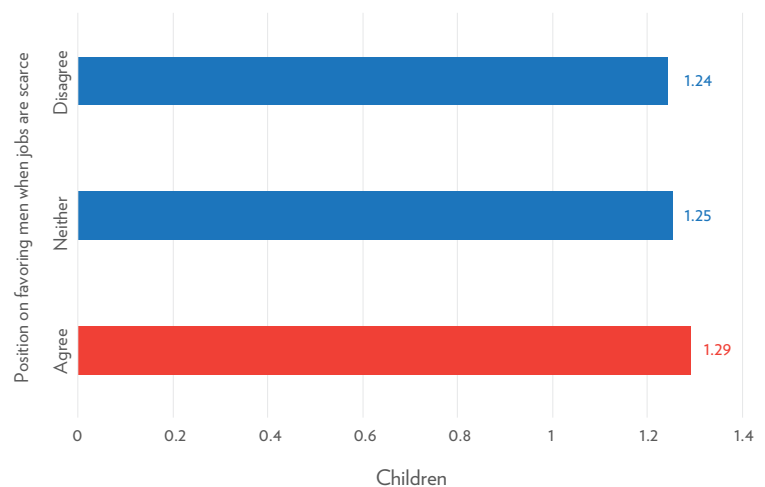
## Frequent religious attendance predicts more traditional gender role attitudes



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly fewer than “Never/practically never” at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014). Disagreement predicted controlling for age, education, and country.

## Individuals with progressive gender role ideology have fewer children



Notes: Red shading indicates significantly more children than “Disagree” at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014). Children predicted controlling for age, education, and country.

<sup>17</sup> Controlling for age, education, and country.

<sup>18</sup> Controlling for age, education, and country.

was also reflected in Austrian data showing that couples were more likely to proceed from the first birth to the second if *either* the woman specialized in childcare or fathers had higher levels of involvement at home.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that we have established that a higher frequency of traditional gender role attitudes among the more religious does not reduce their fertility. We have also suggested that gender egalitarianism would support sustainable fertility to a greater extent if it didn't contribute to the retreat from marriage.<sup>20</sup>

What about the opposite question: would religion be more pronatalist if it didn't contribute to gender traditionalism? Here the answer is no. Holding other variables constant, the most religious had 0.27 more children than the least religious, and that gap was not altered by statistically controlling for gender role attitudes.

## Religion has actually become more important for family size over time

Has the importance of religion as a determinant of fertility dwindled over time? Even though religious people today still have more children, that could be true even if faith had become increasingly less relevant for fertility over time, e.g. if the fertility differential of 0.27 children between those with low and high religiosity shown above was far smaller than in previous decades. Here, we use World Values Survey data since 1994 (Waves 3-6)<sup>21</sup> to describe whether the magnitude of the association between religion and fertility has changed across 57 countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia.

Fertility actually decreased the most among those who do not attend religious services over time. Overall fertility decreased by 0.25 children between Waves 3 and 6, but the decrease was greater among the less religious, resulting in a slightly wider gap (0.27 children in wave 6 compared to 0.24 in wave 3). The difference is too small to matter statistically, but religion certainly is not becoming less important for fertility, when its influence is growing slightly rather than shrinking significantly.

Marriage is part of this story. Service attendance (a measure for religiosity) became a significantly stronger predictor of marriage from 1994-2004. In wave 3, 50% of those with the lowest self-reported religiosity were married, compared to 59% of those who attended weekly or more—a 9 percentage point spread.<sup>22</sup> The retreat from marriage by 2010-14 (wave 6) was evident across all levels of religiosity, but the difference between groups grew enormously: 41% reporting low religiosity versus 57% reporting high religiosity were married.

Religion should have a dwindling pronatalist force if gender egalitarianism has become the dominant determinant of sustainable fertility. Instead, religion became a more important determinant of both fertility and marriage over this 20-year time period. We cannot tell whether this occurred *because* religion became a more important determinant of marriage, since having children can promote both marriage<sup>23</sup> and church-going.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the observed change over time is consistent with religion promoting fertility through encouraging marriage.

<sup>19</sup> F. Luppi, "When Is the Second One Coming? The Effect of Couple's Subjective Well-Being Following the Onset of Parenthood," *European Journal of Population*, 32, no. 3: (2016): 421-444. For similar findings from the U.S., see also: B. M. Torr & S.E. Short, "Second Births and the Second Shift: A Research Note on Gender Equity and Fertility," *Population and Development Review*, 30, no. 1 (2004): 109-130.

<sup>20</sup> Findings from the U.S. and Sweden indicate that men's egalitarianism contributes to the stability of marriage (Kaufman 2000; Oláh 2001), but in our data, less marriage seems to dominate any affect from more stable marriage.

<sup>21</sup> We do not use data from the first WVS wave, 1981-1984, because it did not ask the religious salience question; in wave 2, only 2 countries had comparable education data.

<sup>22</sup> Values predicted controlling for age, education, and country.

<sup>23</sup> B. Perelli-Harris, M. Kreyenfeld, W. Sigle-Rushton, R. Keizer, T. Lappegård, A. Jasilioniene, et al. "Changes in Union Status During the Transition to Parenthood in Eleven European Countries, 1970s to Early 2000s," *Population Studies*, 66, no. 2 (2012): 167-182.

<sup>24</sup> C. Schleifer & M. Chaves, "Family Formation and Religious Service Attendance: Untangling Marital and Parental Effects," *Sociological Methods & Research*, 46, no. 1 (2017): 125-152.

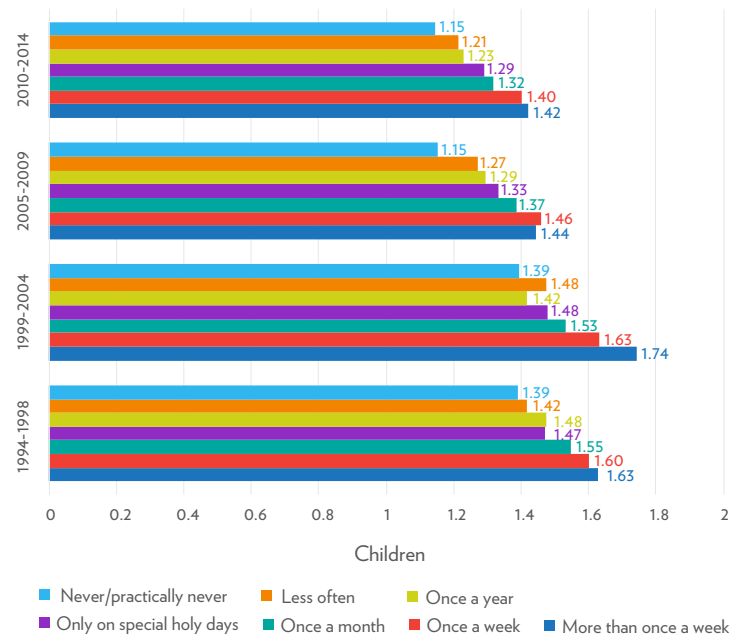
## Trends in religious salience over time

There is one final question to be answered in establishing that faith continues to be positively associated with fertility: Are highly religious people becoming an increasingly irrelevant minority with respect to total fertility production? Quite simply, no. Although particular denominations have seen declining numbers, the proportion attending services at least weekly has been fairly consistent across time. The proportion of never-attenders has, in fact, grown over time, but their share has increased at the expense of infrequent attenders rather than regular attenders.

## Does religion matter consistently across regions?

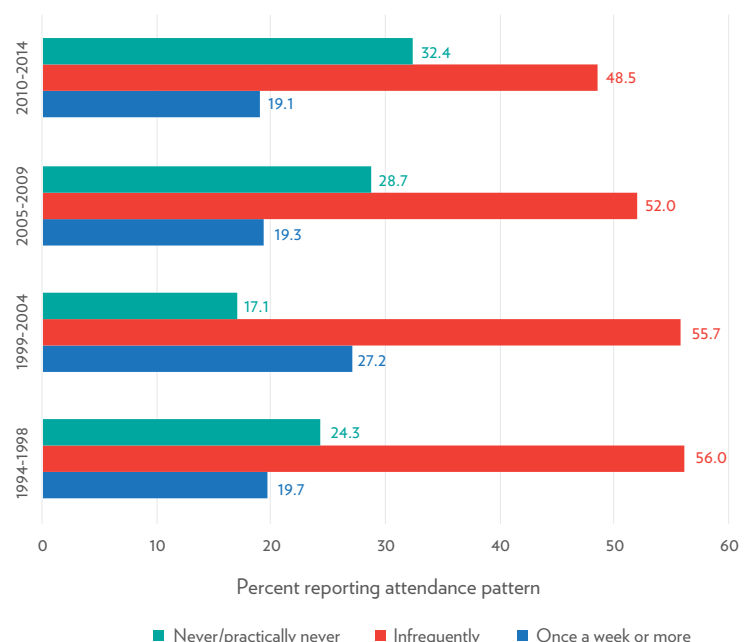
Research seeking to understand the determinants of low fertility in low- and middle-income countries is starting to develop as below-replacement fertility is not just emerging but becoming firmly established. Evidence already indicates that gender equity depressed fertility in the past, but seems to be producing a new natalism in Brazil.<sup>25</sup> We repeated our investigation of gender ideology, faith, and fertility separately for North America, Central and South America, Northern, Western, Eastern, and Southern Europe, East Asia, and Oceania to document whether gender

### Religiosity has the same relationship with childbearing over time



Note: Figure depicts trends among 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Waves 3-6 of the World Values Survey (1994-2014). Children predicted controlling for age, education, and country.

### Religiosity has not retreated



Note: Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Waves 3-6 of the World Values Survey (1994-2014)

ideology and faith interact differently in influencing fertility in these contexts that vary in multiple historical, religious, cultural, and economic ways.

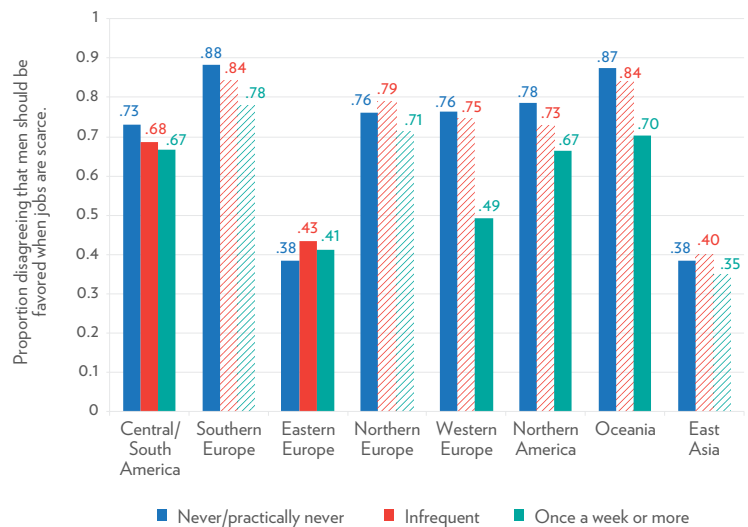
We uncovered marked regional variation, but we still find no evidence of a waning influence of religion on fertility. First, religiosity does not predict gender traditionalism everywhere. In the overall sample, those attending services once a week or more expressed less egalitarian attitudes, but this was not the case in East Asia, Northern Europe, nor Southern Europe. Higher religiosity actually predicts *more* egalitarian gender role attitudes in Eastern Europe.

Second, the association between religiosity and childbearing that grew only a little for the sample as a whole became significantly stronger in Western and Southern Europe as well as Oceania over time. Nowhere did it weaken significantly.

Finally, there was little evidence for the declining importance of religiosity within regions. Regular attendance became less common in the Americas and Southern Europe between waves 3 and 6; it became more common in Eastern Europe and East Asia.

Thus, gender role attitudes and faith have interacted differently across contexts over time. There is, nonetheless, no region where the pronatalist force associated with religiosity is tempered by a positive association with gender traditionalism. There were only four regions where religiosity even had a positive association with gender traditionalism: Central/South America, North America, Western Europe, and Oceania. In the latter two regions, the positive association between religiosity and childbearing strengthened rather than weakened over time. In the Americas, the share attending religious services regularly declined over time, but traditional gender role attitudes predicted more—rather than fewer—children.

### Regional differences in the association between religiosity and gender egalitarian attitudes



Notes: Solid bars significantly different from never/practically never at  $p < 0.05$

Figure based on data from 15-49 year-old respondents from countries in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and East Asia in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (2010-2014). Disagreement predicted controlling for age, education, and country.

<sup>25</sup> H.C. Castanheira & H.P. Kohler, "Social Determinants of Low Fertility in Brazil," *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 49, no.1 (2017): S131-S155.

## Conclusion

Across low-fertility countries in the Americas, Europe, East Asia, and Oceania, highly religious people are not decreasing in number, and neither are their more traditional gender role attitudes impeding their fertility. We have shown higher rates of childbearing among the more religious, and that religion has become *more* relevant for childbearing during an era when gender equity was supposedly emerging as the new natalism. The “fertility gap” associated with the extremes of religiosity increased 15% from 0.24 children to 0.27 children across the last two decades.

All of this analysis was conducted at the individual level—it did not touch questions about state supports for work-family balance, nor did it interrogate how the prevalence of egalitarian gender role attitudes might benefit even those who do not share them. Nonetheless, we have shown that people of faith contribute toward sustainable fertility in modern low-fertility societies.

The two-child family remains a common ideal,<sup>26</sup> but not one that couples, on average, are realizing. Religious people have previously been shown to be more likely to realize their fertility goals.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, married couples are coming closer to the widely shared ideal, and religion is increasingly associated with marriage. The story we tell about religion and fertility is not altered when we integrate gender role attitudes into our narrative. Despite traditional gender role attitudes being somewhat more common among the more religious, both marriage and fruitful marriages are more common among the religious. If anything, religion is gaining salience as a determinant of birth rates. In other words, faith remains an important force for natalism in the developed world.

<sup>25</sup> H.C. Castanheira & H.P. Kohler, “Social Determinants of Low Fertility in Brazil,” *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 49, no.1 (2017): S131-S155.

<sup>26</sup> T. Sobotka & E. Beaujouan, “Two Is Best? The Persistence of a Two-child Family Ideal in Europe,” *Population and Development Review*, 40, no. 3 (2014): 391-419.

<sup>27</sup> D. Philipov & C. Berghammer, “Religion and Fertility Ideals, Intentions, and Behaviour: a Comparative Study of European Countries,” *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 5 (2007): 271-305.

# Data and Methods

Findings in this report are based primarily on two sources: the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS).

The WVS started in 1981, and there are new waves every five years. Many questions are identical across waves. Participating countries comprise almost 90 percent of the world's population. The seventh wave (2017-2019) is still in the field, and our report utilizes data from the first six waves. See [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org) for a description of the global network of social scientists that makes the WVS possible. Their sampling methodology is detailed there as well.

The 2018 Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS) was conducted September 13-25, 2018, by Ipsos Public Affairs (formerly GfK) on behalf of The Wheatley Institution and the Institute for Family Studies. The survey used samples of adults ages 18 to 50 from KnowledgePanel® in the United States and Toluna (opt-in panels) in Australia, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Ipsos randomly recruited KnowledgePanel® members through probability-based sampling, and households were provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. Toluna is one of the largest and most diverse qualified online panels in the world. Individuals were recruited in real-time from a network of websites with which Toluna had developed referral relationships. This combination of sampling strategies means that, after weighting, the GFGS data from the United States are nationally representative of the 18-50-year-old population, but the GFGS data from other countries are not. Samples for other countries were weighted to match the distributions of age, gender, education, and region of the national population ages 18 to 50. We refer to levels of statistical significance in our description of the results to highlight effects of meaningful size throughout. This is technically correct for the United States sample, but it is only descriptive for the other countries that did not have probability samples.

Survey interviews were conducted online in English, Spanish, and French languages (depending on the languages used in each country). A total of 16,474 interviews were completed. Sample sizes for each country are as follows: Argentina—668, Australia—2,420, Canada—2,200, Chile—1,240, Colombia—620, France—1,215, Ireland—2,420, Mexico—677, Peru—645, United Kingdom—2,344, and United States of America—2,025. Our pooled regressions are most heavily influenced by Mexico and the United States because we weighted countries according to their relative population sizes.

For this 2019 *World Family Map* report, we addressed questions of relationship quality (Chapters 2 and 3) using 9,566 men and women in heterosexual relationships (6,104 married and 3,462 cohabiting). Men and women in LGBTQ relationships (n=589) were not included in the analyses. Processes of selection into and out of religious participation are likely to vary greatly with sexual orientation, and patterns of religiously assortative mating may also vary with sexual orientation.

Both chapters use the same definitions of couple religiosity and the same control variables when predicting outcomes.

## Couple religiosity:

- *Shared secular couples* are married or cohabiting men and women who report they “never” attend religious services and that their partner or spouse is “as religious” or “less religious” than they are.

- *Less/mixed religious* couples are defined as those who report that both they and their partner engage in fairly minimal religious service attendance (once a month or less), plus respondents who attend religious services regularly themselves, but have partners who are less religious than they are. Of these *less/mixed religious* couples, 87% reported shared minimal religious attendance, while 13% were couples where the respondent was a regular church attender partnered with a less devout spouse or partner.
- *Highly religious* couples are respondents who attend religious services regularly (2-3 times a month or more) and whose spouse or partner is as religious or more religious than they are.

## Control variables:

- *Individual characteristics at interview*
  - *Gender* is self-reported.
  - *Age* is measured in continuous years, 18-50.
  - *Education* uses four categories: less than high school; high school graduate; some tertiary education (whether college/university or vocational); and a completed degree (bachelor's or higher).
  - *Race/ethnicity*. US sample only. Five categories: Hispanics and four categories of Non-Hispanics (White, Black, Other, and two or more races).
- *Individual history*
  - *Native-born status*.
  - *Parental relationship* is whether or not the respondent lived with both biological parents at age 16.
  - *Ever divorced* measures whether the respondent has personally experienced divorce.
- *Couple/household/area characteristics*
  - *Legal status of current union* is married or cohabiting.
  - *Relationship duration* is how long the couple has been together in months (with durations of longer than 12 months reported in years and converted to months).
  - *Presence of children* means that a child under age 18 lives with the couple, regardless of that child's relationship to either of them.
  - *Financial circumstances* is measured by the respondent's subjective report using four categories: Don't have enough to meet basic expenses; Just meeting basic expenses; Living comfortably; and Living very comfortably.
  - *Country of residence*.
  - *Place of residence* is defined as rural or urban.

We used a linear regression model with all controls predicting the overall relationship quality index in Chapter 2. All of the other outcomes in Chapters 2 and 3—satisfaction with sexual relationship with current partner (strongly agreeing)<sup>1</sup>, joint decision-making, victim of intimate partner violence, perpetrator of intimate partner violence, and infidelity—used logistic regression, again with the full set of controls. Statistical significance is estimated by the p-values ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed tests) of the logistic regression coefficients.

For all three chapters, our figures show predicted probabilities from our regression models with control variables set at their means. Full regression tables for all chapters are available at <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>.

<sup>1</sup> Experimenting with different cut point yielded results consistent with what is reported in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2: FAITH, FEMINISM, AND MARRIAGE

*Institutions, Norms, and Relationship Quality*



## Chapter 2: Faith, Feminism, and Marriage

### Institutions, Norms, and Relationship Quality

Jason S. Carroll, *Brigham Young University*

Spencer James, *Brigham Young University*

W. Bradford Wilcox, *University of Virginia*

Richard Reeves, *Brookings Institution*

Laurie DeRose, *Georgetown University*

**Abstract:** *In this essay, we explore the links between religion and relationship quality for cohabiting and married couples. Our evidence from an 11-country sample suggests men and women in highly religious couples enjoy significantly higher levels of relationship quality and sexual satisfaction. Joint decision-making, however, is higher among men in shared secular relationships and women in highly religious relationships, compared to their peers in less/mixed religious couples. We also find a J-Curve in overall relationship quality for women such that women in shared secular, progressive relationships enjoy comparatively high levels of relationship quality, women in the ideological and religious middle report lower levels of relationship quality, and women in highly religious relationships, especially traditionalists, report the highest levels of relationship quality. Our results suggest that the association between gender ideology and relationship quality varies by religiosity.*

Across much of the developed world, marriage has been in retreat in recent decades. More adults are living on their own; others are choosing to cohabit, sometimes as a prelude to marriage, and sometimes as an alternative.<sup>1</sup>

“We are witnessing a shift to a new social model,” suggests the demographer Joel Kotkin, where “increasingly, family no longer serves as the central organizing feature of society.”<sup>2</sup> A growing share of adults are unpartnered in much of East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania—from Japan to the United States, from the United Kingdom to Chile.

In part, this has more to do with people marrying later rather than avoiding marriage altogether. It is important to note that most people, in the vast majority of countries across the world, still get married at some point in their lives. By age 40, almost eight out of 10 women in the United States, for example, have been married.<sup>3</sup> And while many men and women who marry will also divorce, the divorce rate has also stabilized, or even in some cases declined, in recent years in a number of countries around the world. The bottom line, then, is that even though marriage is in retreat, it still grounds and guides the lives of adult men and women across the globe.

### Marriage: Who Cares?

Why worry about marriage at all? If adults are choosing different paths through life that suit their own desires and preferences, then perhaps marriage can be seen as just one choice among many. Some do it, some don't. Some stick at it, others move on.

There are, nonetheless, three good reasons to pay attention to trends in marriage rates, solo living, and cohabitation. First, shifting family patterns can have profound economic consequences, fueling poverty, insecurity, and inequality. Single adults and especially single parents are at a much higher risk of poverty since they have similar costs to a married or cohabiting couple, but

<sup>1</sup> R. Lesthaeghe, “The Second Demographic Transition: A Concise Overview of Its Development,” *PNAS*, 111, no. 51 (2014): 18112–18115; E. Klinenberg, *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone* (New York: Penguin, 2013); B. De Paulo, *Singled Out: How Singles are Stereotyped, Stigmatized and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After* (New York: St Martins/Griffin, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> J. Kotkin et al., *The Rise of Post Familialism: Humanity's Future* (Singapore: Civil Service College, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> S. Martin et al., *Fewer Marriages, More Divergence: Marriage Projections for Millennials to Age 40* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2014).

only one breadwinner. Two adults can share costs, caring responsibilities, and earnings. Shifts in family structure have been an important driver of growing household income inequality in many countries.<sup>4</sup>

Second, committed adult relationships, typically expressed through and embedded in marriage, are strongly associated with a range of other social and economic outcomes, including employment, health, and happiness. There are selection effects here, of course. People who are happy are more likely to get married, for example. But marriage does seem to have a positive *causal* impact on some outcomes as well.<sup>5</sup> This may be one reason why marriage remains an important aspiration for most people across the globe.

Third, there is overwhelming evidence that children raised in stable families typically do much better in life, particularly in terms of education and employment.<sup>6</sup> Marriage certainly does not guarantee stability, given the risks of divorce today. Single parents, cohabiting couples, and grandparents can provide stability as well. But the overall picture is clear: children born to married parents are much more likely to have a stable upbringing than those born to unmarried parents.<sup>7</sup> This reflects a whole range of factors, including parental age, education, and earnings, as well as the very different chances that a child is born as a result of an intended, rather than unintended, pregnancy.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of both intergenerational equity and shorter-term income inequality, then, the strength and stability of adult couple relationships matter a great deal. Which means that, in most cases, marriage matters, too.

## Relationship Quality – Is a Good Marriage Hard to Find?

Beneath the surface of ongoing debates about the role of marriage in society is a deeper question about *relationship quality*. To the extent that marriage is able to act as a scaffold for the building of high-quality relationships, it will remain an important and attractive institution. But to the degree that it does not, it will decline as a valued social institution, which raises some important questions. Is marriage working in this way? Does marriage not only express, but also *enable* better relationships? What expectations, norms, or institutions act to deepen or dilute the link between marriage and relationship quality?

The quality of relationships within marriage—indeed, within all kinds of family relationships—is important, both in itself, in terms of getting the benefits of the relationship, and because it is likely to predict a longer-lasting partnership and, therefore, greater stability for children. But it may also matter in terms of whether people decide to get married in the first place. If young adults are skeptical that marriage does, in fact, deliver some of these relational benefits, they are likely to decide against marriage or perhaps to treat it less seriously. If a good marriage seems hard to find, why bother?

If relationship quality within marriage matters, and we believe that it does, an important question is what social institutions and social norms help? Are nations across the globe sustaining the cultural, economic, and social conditions where strong and stable relationships can form and flourish?

<sup>4</sup> C. Kollmeyer, “Family Structure, Female Employment, and National Income Inequality: A Cross-National Study of 16 Western Countries,” *European Sociological Review* 29, no. 4 (2013): 816–827; M. Martin, “Family Structure and Income Inequality in Families with Children, 1976 to 2000,” *Demography* 43, no. 3 (2006): 421–445; S. McLanahan & C. Percheski, “Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities,” *Annual Reviews* 34, no. 1 (2008): 257–276; A. Peichl, et al., “Does Size Matter? The Impact of Changes in Household Structure on Income Distribution in Germany,” *The Review of Income and Wealth* 58, no. 1 (2012): 118–141.

<sup>5</sup> A. Ahituv and R. Lerman, “How Do Marital Status, Work Efforts, and Wage Rates Interact?” *Demography* 44, no. 3 (2007): 623–647; D. Dinescu et al., “Is Marriage a Buzzkill? A Twin Study of Marital Status and Alcohol Consumption,” *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30, no. 6 (2016): 698–707; L. Waite and E. Lehrer, “The Benefits From Marriage and Religion in the United States: A Comparative Analysis,” *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 2 (2004): 255–275.

<sup>6</sup> A. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round* (New York: Knopf, 2009); P. Fomby, J.A. Goode, and S. Mollborn, “Family Complexity, Siblings, and Children’s Aggressive Behavior at School Entry,” *Demography* 26, no.1 (2016): 1–26; P. Fomby and C. Osborne, “Family Instability, Multipartner Fertility, and Behavior in Middle Childhood,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79, no. 1 (2017): 75–93.

<sup>7</sup> 2017 *World Family Map* (Charlottesville: IFS, 2017); K. Musick and K. Micheltore, “Cross-National Comparisons of Union Stability in Cohabiting and Married Families with Children,” *Demography* 55, no. 4 (2018): 1389–1421.

<sup>8</sup> R. Reeves and E. Krause, “Cohabiting Parents Differ from Married Ones in 3 Big Ways,” *Social Mobility Memo*, The Brookings Institution, 4/5/17.

In this essay, we use cross-national survey data to examine whether one major civic institution—religion—is a positive force for forming and maintaining such relationships. Also, given the ties between religion and gender traditionalism, we also extend these analyses to consider how religion interacts with gender ideology when it comes to relationship quality.

## Defining Relationship Quality

It hardly needs saying that relationship quality is difficult to measure and necessarily involves some strong normative judgments on the part of the measurer. In this paper, we use three main indicators of relationship quality, all based on self-reported answers to specific questions in the survey:

- **Global relationship quality.** We calculated an index of global relationship quality by adding measures of overall relationship satisfaction, emotional attachment, commitment, and perceived stability, and the mean value for this index is 15.66 for women and 16.07 for men. (This index is based on agreement/disagreement with the following four statements: “I am satisfied with my overall relationship with my partner”; “I feel close and engaged in our relationship”; “My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life”; and, “In the past 12 months, I have had serious doubts that my relationship will last.”).
- **Satisfaction with sex life.** This indicator consists of the predicted probability of respondents reporting that they “strongly agree” with the statement, “I am satisfied with my sexual relationship with my partner.” Across the whole sample, 34% of respondents reported this level of satisfaction with their sexual relationship (35% of women, 33% of men).<sup>9</sup>
- **Joint decision-making.** This indicator of relationship quality is the proportion of respondents reporting that “major household decisions” are jointly decided, rather than mostly by one partner (either the respondent or their partner): 60% of respondents were joint decision-makers on this metric (60% of women, 59% of men).

## Religion and Relationship Quality

Do the norms, rituals, and networks associated with religious communities—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, among other faiths—strengthen relationships or undercut them in nations across the globe? Specifically, do highly religious couples enjoy higher-quality relationships, better sex lives, and more joint decision-making in their relationships? Or, what does contemporary faith have to do with love in countries across the Americas, Europe, and Oceania?

Although most developed nations have taken a more secular turn in recent decades, the majority of couples still report some degree of religious observance and a significant minority of couples report high levels of religious devotion. The research to date on religion and relationships indicates that there is generally a positive association between these two institutions, but the scholarship has largely focused on the United States.<sup>10</sup> Here, we focus on two questions. Do the benefits of shared religious activity hold for modern couples in countries across Europe, Australia, and North and South America? Furthermore, in the contemporary context, a growing number of couples have high levels of similarity when it comes to their joint secularity—defined here as *not participating* in religious activities. Does this type of “secular similarity” produce the same outcomes for couples that we have seen for shared religious participation in previous studies?

<sup>9</sup> Experimenting with different cut points yielded results consistent with what is reported here.

<sup>10</sup> A. Mahoney, “Religion in Families, 1999–2009: A Relational Spirituality Framework,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 4 (2010): 805–827; J. Dew, J. Uecker and B. Willoughby, “Joint Religiosity and Married Couples’ Sexual Satisfaction,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (2018: advance online publication); C. Ellison, et al., “Sanctification, Stress, and Marital Quality,” *Family Relations* 60, no. 4 (2011): 404–420; W. B. Wilcox and N. Wolfinger, *Soul Mates: Religion, Sex, Love, and Marriage Among African Americans and Latinos* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

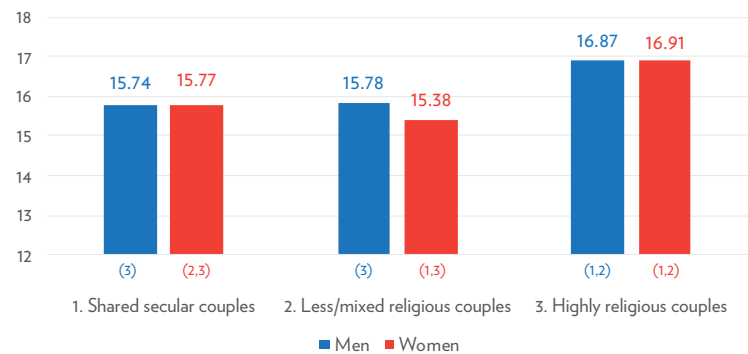
We address these questions with a sample of 9,566 men and women in heterosexual relationships in Australia, Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Ireland, Mexico, Peru, United Kingdom, and the United States drawn from the Global Family and Gender Survey, or GFGS (see the Data & Methods section for more details). All of our analyses control for a range of sociodemographic factors, including measures of education, income, gender, nativity, age, marital status, parental relationship status, and children in the home. We divided respondents into three religious categories:

- **Shared secular couples.** These are married or cohabiting men and women who report they “never” attend religious services and that their partner or spouse is “as religious” or “less religious” than they are. They make up nearly 19% of the GFGS international sample.
- **Less/mixed religious couples.** These are defined as those who report that both they and their partner engage in fairly minimal religious service attendance (once a month or less), plus respondents who attend religious services regularly themselves but have partners who are less religious than they are. Of these less/mixed religious couples, 87% reported shared minimal religious attendance, while in 13% of these couples, the respondent was a regular attender partnered with a less devout spouse or partner. Together, they make up 60% of our international sample.
- **Highly religious couples.** These are respondents who attend religious services regularly (2-3 times a month or more) and whose spouse or partner is as religious or more religious than they are. These couples make up 21% of the GFGS international sample.

There is a strong association between shared regular participation in a religious community and both relationship quality and sexual satisfaction in our sample of married and cohabiting heterosexual couples. For instance, women and men in highly religious couples were significantly more likely to report higher quality relationships than their peers in less/mixed religious couples or shared secular couples. While both women and men in highly religious couples reported significantly higher overall relationship quality and satisfaction with their sex life, the results in both cases were strongest for women in these couples. In fact, women in highly religious

## Relationship Quality

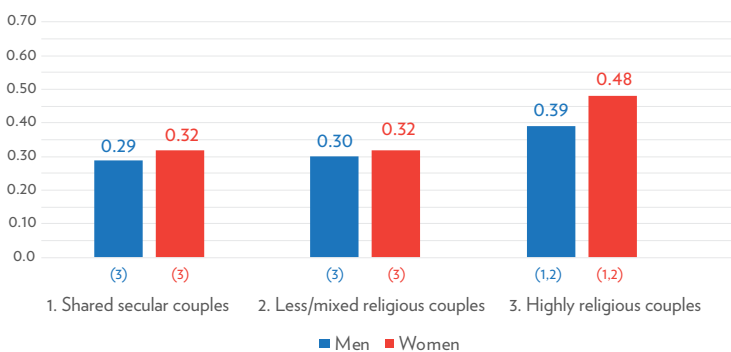
*Additive Index of Relationship Attachment, Commitment, Satisfaction, and Stability*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

## Sexual Satisfaction

*Probability of strongly agreeing that "I am satisfied with my sexual relationship with my partner."*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.



Both secular and religious couples report high levels of joint decision-making.

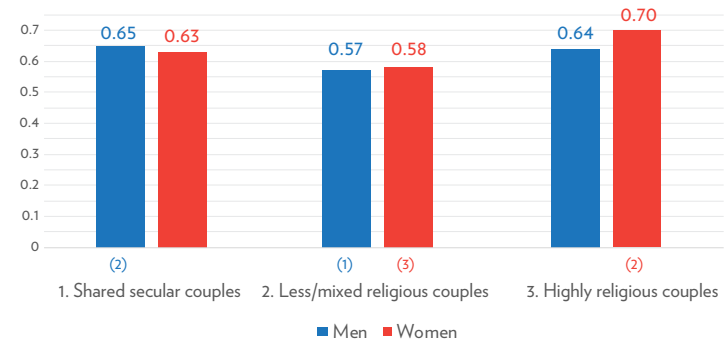
relationships are about 50% more likely to report that they are strongly satisfied with their sexual relationship than their secular and less religious counterparts in the GFGS.

While women in shared secular relationships had significantly higher overall relationship quality than women in less/mixed religious couples, there were no differences between these groups on sexual satisfaction. And no differences were found between men in less/mixed religious couples and men in shared secular couples on either overall relationship quality or sexual satisfaction. We also found that the benefits of religious participation for relationship quality are remarkably similar across individuals with different religious affiliations and are generally greater than for those reporting no affiliation or that are “spiritual, but not religious” (see Religious Affiliation Table below).

Similarly high levels of shared decision-making were reported in shared secular couples and highly religious couples, with slightly lower levels among the less/

## Shared Decision-Making

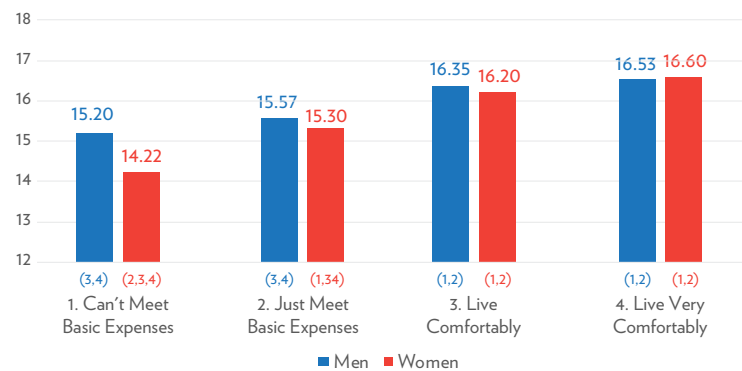
*Probability of reporting that major household decisions are made together.*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

## Relationship Quality

*Additive Index of Relationship Attachment, Commitment, Satisfaction, and Stability*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

## Religious Affiliation Table

	Overall		Religious Service Attenders		Infrequent/Never Service Attenders	
	Avg. Relat. Quality	N	Avg. Relat. Quality	N	Avg. Relat. Quality	N
Catholic	15.83	3471	16.70	628	15.53	2843
Protestant	16.36	1703	17.41	579	15.72	1124
LDS	17.24	89	17.19	58		
Orthodox	15.25	145			14.94	127
Muslim	15.83	278	15.82	97	15.83	181
Jewish	14.9	62			14.71	51
Hindu	14.96	176			15.16	137
Buddhist	15.12	128			14.84	108
SBNR	15.6	1189			15.49	1161
Not Religious	15.52	2820			15.53	2787
Other	15.62	432	16.64	69	15.36	363

Note: Outcomes only reported for categories with more than 50 respondents

mixed religious couples. Compared to less religious men, shared secular men were more likely to make decisions together with their partners, whereas highly religious women were more likely than their less religious counterparts to report making joint decisions.

It is worth noting that the controls used in our analyses are also linked to relationship quality. Specifically, as expected, we found that greater income is associated with higher levels of relationship quality. In fact, income predicts overall relationship quality about as strongly as religious attendance. The income figure on the following page is illustrative.

We also found that married couples reported significantly higher levels of relationship quality than cohabiting couples; and interestingly, couples with children in the home reported slightly *lower* levels of quality than couples without children in the home, perhaps reflecting the time and financial pressures on parents.

**Overall, faith is linked to higher quality relationships and more sexual satisfaction.**

## Egalitarianism and Relationship Quality

Many scholars and journalists have long expressed concern with how many religious traditions have lent legitimacy to the ideas that men and women are different, that women have a unique role to play in the care of the young, and especially that men have unique roles in the home or religious community.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, religion is viewed as a potential force for patriarchal relations that devalue women and undercut the possibility of high-quality relationships.<sup>12</sup> The counter belief is that rather than a shared commitment to religion, relationship quality might rely on shared commitment to equality or sameness between men and women—in other words, to an egalitarian approach to marriage rather than a traditional one.

In order to examine the influence of attitudes about gender roles on relationship quality, we segmented our sample into two groups, based on their agreement or disagreement with the statement: “It is usually better for everyone involved if the father takes the lead in working outside the home and the mother takes the lead in caring for the home and family.” The two groups are:

- *Traditionalists*, those who mostly or completely agreed with the statement (55% of our sample).
- *Progressives*, who mostly or completely disagreed with the statement (45% of our sample).

Our analyses found that there is no consistent link between gender ideology and the relationship outcomes we examined. We found that gender progressives are somewhat more likely to share decision-making in their relationships than gender traditionalists. However, when it comes to relationship quality, gender ideology makes no difference for either men or women. Finally, for sexual satisfaction, we find that traditionalists—both men and women—are more satisfied.

<sup>11</sup> W. B. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, J. McQuillan and M. Ferree, “The Importance of Variation Among Husbands and the Benefits of Feminism for Families,” in Alan Booth (ed.), *Men in Families* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1997); S. Rakoczy, “Religion and Violence: the Suffering of Women,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 18, no. 61 (2004): 29–35.

<sup>13</sup> Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men* (2004): pg 207.

## Religion and Egalitarianism: Friends or Foes?

What about the inter-relationship between religiosity and views on gender? It seems highly likely that more religious couples will also have more traditional views on gender (and that is, in fact, what we find). But it is also possible that the effects of gender traditionalism may *vary* by levels of religiosity in couples' relationships, or vice versa. Religion could reinforce patriarchal dynamics, casting a "veil of enchantment" over unequal family relationships.<sup>13</sup> But religion could also act in a protective fashion against possible negative effects of traditionalist views, by increasing respect or appreciation for the complementarity of a spouse. Sociologists Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead argue that religion can moderate "the ways gender ideology influences heterosexual relationship outcomes."<sup>14</sup>

In short, religion may channel gender traditionalism into a family-centered form of living that gives partners clear norms for their relationship and family life but does so in ways that are interpreted as solidarity-enhancing rather than as patriarchal. By contrast, gender traditionalism in more secular or only nominally-religious contexts may function

as feminist critics fear, giving men a license to treat their partners in more domineering and less considerate ways (see Chapter 3 by DeRose, Johnson, and Wang for more on this subject).

We examine the interaction between religion and gender attitudes in our international sample. Our analysis focuses, then, on six groups: "progressives" in each of our three religious categories, and "traditionalists" in each category.<sup>15</sup>

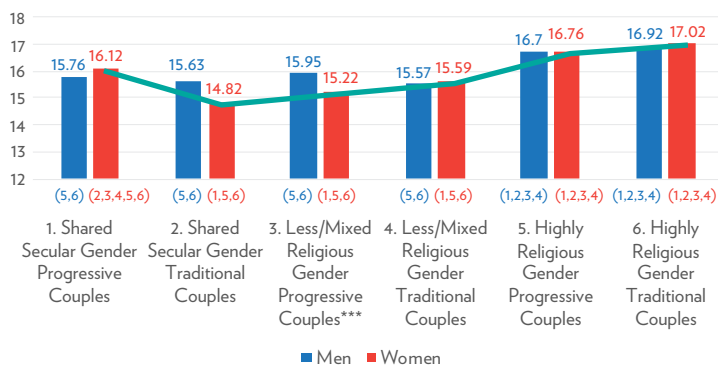
In general, there appears to be more variation among women across these groups than men. Self-reported relationship quality is highest among traditionalist women in highly religious couples and progressive women in highly religious couples. Shared secular progressive women reported higher levels of satisfaction

compared to women in less religious couples and shared secular traditional women. For women, then, there is a J-Curve in relationship quality, with secular progressive women doing comparatively well, women in the middle doing less well, and highly religious women reporting the highest quality relationships. Among men, highly religious traditional men were found to be significantly higher in relationship quality than men in shared secular progressive and less religious progressive relationships.

With sexual satisfaction, a different pattern emerged with highly religious traditional women being significantly more likely to be sexually satisfied than women in all other groups – including highly religious progressive women. This reveals that the higher levels of sexual satisfaction identified previously for women in highly religious

### Relationship Quality

*Additive Index of Relationship Attachment, Commitment, Satisfaction, and Stability*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

<sup>14</sup> S. Perry and A. Whitehead, "For Better or Worse? Gender Ideology, Religious Commitment, and Relationship Quality," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55, no. 4 (2017): 737-755.

<sup>15</sup> The proportion of our sample in each of the six groups is as follows: Secular Shared Gender Progressives (13%), Secular Shared Gender Traditionals (5%), Less Religious Gender Progressive Couples (34%), Less Religious Gender Traditional Couples (27%), Highly Religious Gender Progressive Couples (8%), Highly Religious Gender Traditional Couples (13%).

relationships are consolidated among traditional women and not shared to the same degree by progressive women in highly religious relationships.

Our analysis of shared decision-making patterns proved to be more balanced across relationship types and gender ideologies. However, the group reporting the highest levels of shared decision-making was progressive women in highly religious couples, while the lowest levels were among traditional men and women in shared secular and less religious relationships. Still, traditional women in highly religious couples reported similar levels of shared decision-making as their secular progressive counterparts.

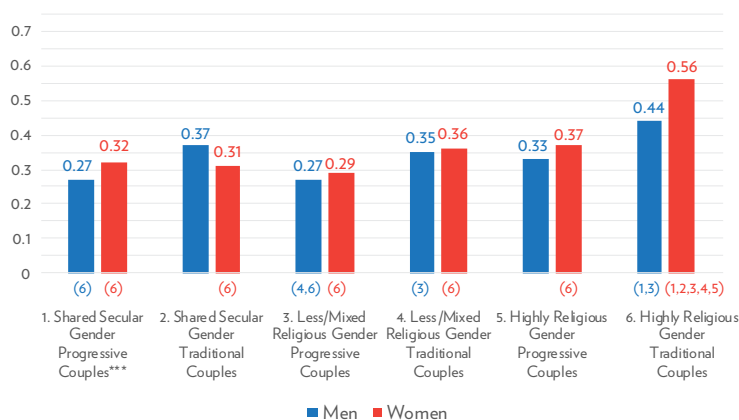
As with all of our findings, it is not possible to establish any causal relationship here. It is possible that simply *being* married is more important to highly religious women, which may raise their satisfaction ratings. They may be more likely to look at their relationship through a rose-colored lens. It is also possible that respondents with different attitudes towards gender and religion have different expectations of marriage, including of their sex lives. On the other hand, highly religious women may also enjoy higher levels of trust, emotional security, and perceived permanence, which redound to the benefit of their relationships.

Nonetheless, the findings on shared decision-making patterns do challenge stereotypes about religiously conservative couples. Scholars have often assumed that such couples do not treat one another equally.<sup>16</sup> But at least when it comes to decision-making, the comparatively high levels of shared decision-making among highly religious couples suggests that their views are not an obstacle to working together. But for more secular couples, gender traditionalism does seem to stand in the way of shared decision-making.

<sup>16</sup> Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 2004.

## Sexual Satisfaction

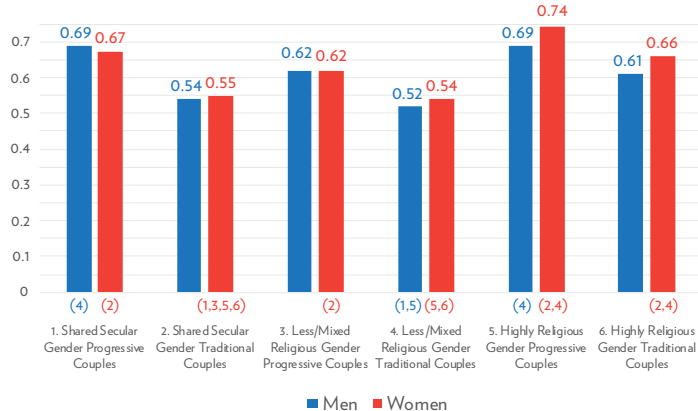
*Probability of strongly agreeing that "I am satisfied with my sexual relationship with my partner."*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

## Shared Decision-Making

*Probability of reporting that major household decisions are made together.*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

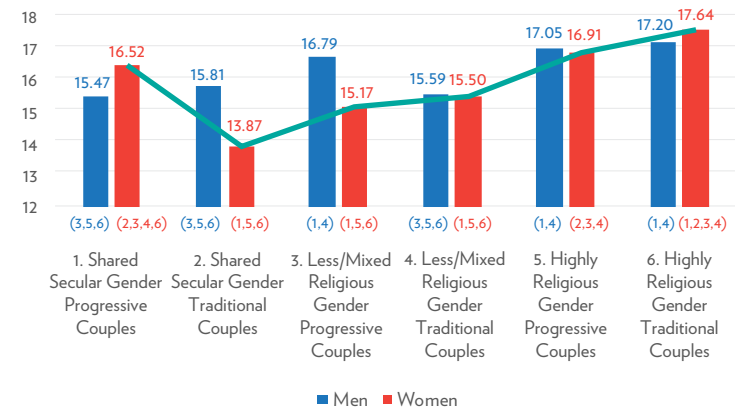
## Faith, Feminism, and Marriage in the U.S.

So far, we have examined the relationship between religion and gender attitudes in an international context. Country-specific results for relationship quality are found in the “Country Reports” section of this report, but should be interpreted as suggestive because we rely on opt-in samples for countries besides the United States. Here, we briefly share results for the U.S., which are based on a nationally representative sample. The proportion of respondents in each religious category was as follows: shared secular couples (20%), less/mixed religious couples (56%), and highly religious couples (24%). In terms of views on gender roles, the split was between 55% progressives and 45% traditionalists.

Overall, the U.S. findings are similar to those for the international samples, with men and women in highly religious relationships reporting higher quality relationships than those in secular and less/mixed religious relationships. When we look at religion and gender ideology together, for women again, there is a J-Curve, with women in shared secular relationships reporting comparatively high relationship quality and women in highly religious relationships indicating the highest quality relationships in terms of satisfaction, attachment, commitment, and stability.

### Relationship Quality: United States

*Additive Index of Relationship Attachment, Commitment, Satisfaction, and Stability*



Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly.

**The link between gender attitudes about the division of paid work and domestic work and relationship quality varies by the religiosity/secularity of the couple.**

## Conclusion

While the analyses presented here suggest clear links between religion and relationship quality, no claim can be made about a causal connection, or indeed, if there is a causal connection, in which direction. Part of the story here may be due to selection—men and women who take family life seriously may be more attracted to the family-centered way of life found in many religious communities. There are other underlying traits—optimism, hope, etc.—that could also help explain the associations documented in this chapter. As mentioned above, views of what makes for a satisfactory marriage may also vary by religiosity or views regarding gender roles. The interactions between religious beliefs and practices,

<sup>17</sup> D. Dollahite & L. Marks, “A Conceptual Model of Family and Religious Processes in Highly Religious Families,” *Review of Religious Research* 50, no. 4 (2009): 373–391.

<sup>18</sup> K. Curtis and C. Ellison, “Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict: Findings from the National Survey of Families and Households,” *Journal of Family Issues* 23, no. 4 (2002): 551–576.

<sup>19</sup> N. Wolfinger & W.B. Wilcox, “Happily Ever After? Religion, Marital Status, Gender and Relationship Quality in Urban Families,” *Social Forces* 86, no. 3 (2008): 1311–1387.

attitudes toward gender, and assessments of marital quality are necessarily complex and subjective. For some, marriage may be little more than a contract; for others, a deep personal commitment; and for some, a holy sacrament.

All that said, the analysis presented here suggests that we should at least take seriously the possibility that shared religious faith can help build higher quality relationships. In particular, the *beliefs*, *behaviors*, and *belonging* that shared religious participation provides for couples may foster more commitment, trust, respect, or generosity.

Religious traditions seek to foster norms—such as marital permanence and fidelity—that may strengthen or reinforce the ties binding partners to one another.<sup>17</sup> Religious teachings also place a strong emphasis on love, forgiveness, respectful behavior, and putting the needs of others above one's own. Taken together, these beliefs, as sociologists Kristen Taylor Curtis and Christopher Ellison have observed, may “reinforce beliefs about the sanctity of marriage, while helping to define appropriate marital conduct and assisting partners in fulfilling their familial roles.”<sup>18</sup> In today's world, the value of many of these beliefs may also extend to cohabiting couples.<sup>19</sup>

A second potential contribution is through the fact of shared activities and behavior. Since at least Durkheim, we have known that rituals have power to engender life with greater power and meaning—including our relationships and family life. Couples in which both members attend church are more likely to say that they often pray together.<sup>20</sup> Prayer and other shared religious activities may help men and women deal with stressful life events, envision better futures for their loved ones, and change destructive patterns of behavior<sup>21</sup> (see the Marks and Dollahite essay in the sidebar of this report for more on this subject).

Finally, religious communities may provide networks that can support couples, especially in times of trouble. One U.S. study found that almost half of jointly-attending religious couples form the majority of their friendships with fellow parishioners—and that such shared friendships played a major role in accounting for the link between churchgoing and higher relationship quality.<sup>22</sup>

It should be said that many other kinds of institutions and affiliations may provide these benefits and do for many people: secular civic institutions of one form or another, social networks formed through work, neighborhood proximity, or personal interests, and so on. But perhaps many religions are able to provide more of these benefits in the same local congregation, at least for some people.

It is also important to note that there is more than one path to relationship quality. The way that specific individuals negotiate their relationships and honor their commitments will vary, not only between couples but within the course of one relationship. This report, for instance, suggests more than one path towards marital bliss. Contra Tolstoy, happy families come in more than one variety.

<sup>20</sup> See Marks & Dollahite's essay in the sidebar of this report; Wilcox and Wolfinger, *Soul Mates*, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Also, M. Goodman & D. Dollahite, “How Religious Couples Perceive the Influence of God in Their Marriage,” *Review of Religious Research* 48, no. 2 (2006): 141-155; J. Olson et al., “Shared Religious Beliefs, Prayer, and Forgiveness as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction,” *Family Relations* 64, no. 4 (2015): 519-533;

<sup>22</sup> Wilcox and Wolfinger, 2016.

## Chapter 3: Religion, Intimate Partner Violence, and Infidelity



## Chapter 3: Religion, Intimate Partner Violence, and Infidelity

Laurie F. DeRose, *Georgetown University*

Byron R. Johnson, *Baylor University*

Wendy Wang, *Institute for Family Studies*

**Abstract:** *In this essay, we examine intimate partner violence (IPV) and infidelity among cohabiting and married couples with different levels of religious commitment and different beliefs about male headship. Although religious couples may face unique challenges in dealing with IPV after it happens, our evidence from an 11-country sample suggests women in highly religious couples are neither more nor less likely to be victims of IPV, and men in highly religious couples are neither more nor less likely to be perpetrators of IPV. Men and women in highly religious couples who believe in male headship are also similar to other couples when it comes to women's victimization and men's perpetration. These findings suggest that recent reports and scholarship about IPV in religious contexts are important to consider; IPV is just as prevalent in these settings as it is elsewhere, even though religious contexts do not seem to heighten the incidence of IPV. With respect to infidelity, we find that both men and women in highly religious couples are less likely to have cheated on their cohabiting partner or spouse than are those in less/mixed religious couples. Men in shared secular couples are also less likely to cheat than those in less/mixed religious couples. Joint religious commitment and a joint lack of religious commitment are associated with less cheating, suggesting that a clear, shared belief about the importance of religion—whether in favor of religion or against it—bolsters commitment to intimate relationships.*

Intimate relationships can be sources of joy and fulfillment. But they can also be the source of considerable suffering. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 30% of ever-partnered women around the world have experienced intimate partner violence (hereafter, IPV).<sup>1</sup> And although global numbers on infidelity are hard to come by, many couples deal with a cheating partner: even in the United States, where most adults disapprove of extramarital sex, about 15% of ever-married adults say they have cheated on their spouse.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, we explore whether and how religion is associated with these sources of pain within intimate partnerships.<sup>3</sup>

### Religion and Intimate Partner Violence

Public discourse about religion and IPV often highlights the ways that religion justifies abuse or encourages women to stay in abusive relationships. By proof-texting (i.e., selectively using scripture) from “patriarchal passages” of their scriptures, religions can provide frames that lead men to see IPV as a divinely-sanctioned expression of their patriarchal authority and women to accept abusive relationships as divinely-ordained trials to be endured rather than problematic situations from which to flee.<sup>4</sup> The idea that religion can legitimate abuse was spotlighted in a recent series of stories edited by Haley Gleeson and Julia Baird for the Australian

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, “Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence,” WHO, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Authors’ analysis of the 2018 General Social Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Infidelity may not be a source of pain in all relationship contexts, but vast majorities of adults around the world and in the United States believe infidelity is “almost always” or “always” wrong, as we discuss below. See: E. Widmer, J. Treas, and R. Newcomb, “Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries,” *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, no. 4 (1998): 349–358; Pew Research Center, “Morality Interactive Topline Results,” *Pew Global*, 2014; and D. Carr, “Cheating Hearts,” *Contexts*, 9, no. 3: (August 2010).

<sup>4</sup> L. Ross, “Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword,” *Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum*, 2, no. 3, Article 1 (2012).

Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).<sup>5</sup> These pieces illustrate in poignant fashion how scriptural passages and religious doctrine are sometimes used in relationships and religious bodies to foster and perpetuate abusive partnerships. The scope of the ABC investigative journalism was wide; Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh communities in Australia were all implicated.

These concerns about IPV among religious couples are not new. In 1998, after the Southern Baptist Convention released a statement calling on wives to submit to their husbands, journalists Steve and Cokie Roberts raised alarm bells, arguing that this kind of religious rhetoric “can clearly lead to abuse, both physical and emotional.”<sup>6</sup> Others have noted the potential for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to serve as “roadblocks” for victims when IPV does occur.<sup>7</sup> Sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark and her colleagues have maintained a 25-year research program detailing, in part, the many unique issues facing religious women who are abused, religious men who abuse, and the religious leaders and communities who respond to these individuals.<sup>8</sup>

These same scholars, however, have also documented how religion *helps* IPV victims and perpetrators.<sup>9</sup> Religion is a “double-edged sword” when it comes to IPV.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, religion provides resources that might discourage IPV in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Scholars of religion and family life often note the “norms, networks, and nomos” religious communities provide that encourage positive family functioning.<sup>12</sup> That is, religious organizations provide messages and understanding about the importance of good marriages and families, and how to achieve them. They surround their adherents with like-minded people who can offer emotional support and accountability should husbands or wives start to deviate from the straight and narrow. And they may engender what psychologist Annette Mahoney and colleagues referred to as the sanctification of marriage,<sup>13</sup> where marriages are imbued with spiritual character and significance. The norms, networks, and nomos associated with religious communities may be especially influential when both partners in the relationship are committed to their religious communities, privy to the same messaging, and embedded in the same social networks (i.e., shared religion has more potential to be protective than individual religion).

<sup>5</sup> See for example: H. Gleeson and J. Baird, “Exposing the Darkness Within: Domestic Violence and Islam,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 4/23/17; J. Baird and H. Gleeson, “‘Submit to Your Husbands’: Women Told to Endure Domestic Violence in the Name of God,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 7/17/17; H. Gleeson and J. Baird, “‘Their Cross to Bear’: The Catholic Women Told to Forgive Domestic Violence,” 11/3/17, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; D. Jopson, “The Secret Scourge of Family Violence and Murder in Australian Hindu and Sikh Communities,” 12/17/17, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson, “Chained Women: The Jewish Wives Being Held Hostage in Abusive Marriages,” 2/26/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson with J. Baird, “‘I’m Not His Property’: Abused Muslim Women Denied Right to Divorce,” 4/17/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation; H. Gleeson, “The Koran Verse Splitting Imams on Domestic Violence,” 8/28/18, Australian Broadcasting Corporation. There are numerous follow-up and related stories as well.

<sup>6</sup> Steve and Cokie Roberts, Rocky Mountain News, cited in W. B. Wilcox, “Religion and the Domestication of Men,” *Contexts*, 5, no. 4 (2004): 42–46.

<sup>7</sup> M. Fortune and C. Enger, “Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion,” National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, March 2005, [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org).

<sup>8</sup> N. Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing the Solutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Fortune and Enger, “Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion,” 2005; Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing the Solutions*, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, “Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword,” 2012.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to separate religion’s role in relationships after IPV occurs and its role in fostering or protecting against IPV. These are separate issues. Our analysis focuses on the latter.

<sup>12</sup> J. Bartkowski, X. Xu, and M. Levin, “Religion and Child Development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study,” *Social Science Research*, 37, no. 1 (2008): 18–36; W. B. Wilcox and N. Wolfinger, “Living and Loving ‘Decent’: Religion and Relationship Quality among Urban Parents,” *Social Science Research*, 37, no. 3 (2008): 828–843; C. Ellison and X. Xu, “Religion and Families,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*, edited by Judith Treas, Jacqueline Scott, and Martin Richards (John Wiley and Sons, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> A. Mahoney et al., “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships,” *Review of Religious Research*, 44, no. 3 (2003): 220–236.

Research using nationally-representative samples of U.S. adults generally finds that—within married couples—more religious men are less likely to be perpetrators of IPV, and religious women are marginally less likely to be victims of IPV.<sup>14</sup> Globally, higher religiosity is associated with being less likely to believe that wife beating is acceptable.<sup>15</sup> Religiosity, or religious commitment, seems to be the determining factor, not religious tradition, and it seems that nominal religiosity may present the most risk, with both the nonreligious and the religiously devout being less likely to perpetrate IPV than are those who attend religious services infrequently. For example, sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox has noted that conservative Protestant men in the U.S. who are active in a religious community are among the least likely to physically hurt their spouses, while conservative Protestant men who are not active in a religious community are the *most* likely to be abusive.<sup>16</sup> Sociologists Christopher Ellison, John Bartkowski, and Kristin Anderson similarly found that perpetration of IPV was lower only among men who attended religious services weekly or more.<sup>17</sup> Evidence from Canada suggests a similar pattern, with those who are infrequent attenders of religious services being the most likely to be abusive.<sup>18</sup>

These studies of religion and IPV are mostly limited to North America, and they make use of data that is now at least 25 years old. Furthermore, they focus on physical abuse, ignoring other aspects of IPV, particularly sexual violence, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors. Only one of these studies<sup>19</sup> considers religiosity as a couple-level variable—that is, taking into account how *shared* religious participation is associated with IPV.

Not only has couples' shared religiosity often been overlooked, but so, too, have beliefs about male headship in the family, despite the fact that this is often what people consider to be the belief used to justify IPV. These beliefs are often inferred (with, we suspect, a healthy dose of measurement error) from measures of religious affiliation. We consider both shared religiosity and beliefs about male headship as correlates of IPV in our 11-country sample, and briefly discuss their role among couples in the U.S. as well.

## Religion and Infidelity

Religion's role in infidelity is not often the subject of public discussion in the U.S., except, perhaps, when it comes to revelations of extramarital affairs among religious leaders. This lack of attention may be due to the fact that there are clear Judeo-Christian proscriptions against cheating on one's spouse (most prominently, the seventh of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not commit adultery"<sup>20</sup>), which make proof-texting justifications for infidelity nearly impossible.

Mainstream religious messages about sexual fidelity are very much in step with other mainstream messages. Indeed, the vast majority of people around the world believe infidelity is morally unacceptable,<sup>21</sup> and, at least in the U.S., that

<sup>14</sup> C. Ellison, J. Bartkowski, and K. Anderson, "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?," *Journal of Family Issues*, 20, no. 1 (1999): 87-113; C. Ellison and K. Anderson, "Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, no. 2 (June 2001): 269-286; C. Cunradi, R. Caetano, and J. Schafer, "Religious Affiliation, Denominational Homogamy, and Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, no. 1 (2002) 139-151; C. Ellison et al., "Race/Ethnicity, Religious Involvement, and Domestic Violence," *Violence Against Women*, 13, no. 11 (2007): 1094-1112.

<sup>15</sup> J. H. Jung and D. Olson, "Where Does Religion Matter Most? Personal Religiosity and the Acceptability of Wife-beating in Cross-National Perspective," *Sociological Inquiry*, 87, no. 4 (2017): 608-633.

<sup>16</sup> W. B. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Ellison et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" 1999.

<sup>18</sup> M. Brinkerhoff, E. Grandin, and E. Lupri, "Religious Involvement and Spousal Violence: The Canadian Case," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 31, no. 1 (1992): 14-31.

<sup>19</sup> Ellison et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?" 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Exodus 20:14, *The Holy Bible*: New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>21</sup> E. Widmer, J. Treas, and R. Newcomb, "Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries," *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, no. 4 (1998): 349-358; Pew Research Center, "Morality Interactive Topline Results," 2014.

number has been growing over time.<sup>22</sup> As marriages have become increasingly about intimacy, infidelity has become increasingly problematic.<sup>23</sup>

Even so, research on religion and infidelity typically finds that higher levels of religiosity are associated with a lower likelihood of cheating on one's spouse,<sup>24</sup> though that association may not extend to infidelity in nonmarital relationships.<sup>25</sup> Religious norms, networks, and nomos may heighten the importance of fidelity among religious adherents. As with research on religion and IPV, however, most of the research on religion and infidelity is limited to the U.S., and it also focuses on individual—not couple—religiosity. Beliefs about male headship have also not been considered as a source of infidelity. Patriarchal beliefs, however, could be used by some men as a license to cheat on their spouse.

## Data and Methods

We use data from the 11-country Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS) to examine how couples' religiosity (in terms of their religious commitment) and beliefs about male headship are related to experiences of IPV and infidelity in ongoing married and cohabiting relationships. We examine two measures of IPV based on the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, which includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors.<sup>26</sup> The first, which we refer to as victimization, is based on responses to four questions:

1. "How often does your partner physically hurt you?"
2. "How often does your partner threaten you with harm?"
3. "How often does your partner force you to have sex?"
4. "How often does your partner withhold money from you?"

We consider those whose partner has never abused them versus those whose partner has rarely, sometimes, fairly often, or frequently abused them.

The second measure of IPV, which we call perpetration, is similar and based on responses to the questions:

1. "How often do you physically hurt your partner?"
2. "How often do you threaten your partner with harm?"
3. "How often do you force your partner to have sex?"
4. "How often do you withhold money from your partner?"

We examine those who never abuse their partner versus those who rarely, sometimes, fairly often, or frequently abuse their partner.

We limit our analysis to women's victimization and men's perpetration. We do this to be consistent with prior research, because the conceptual relationship between religion and IPV is gendered, and because—as the WHO puts it—"the overwhelming global burden of IPV is borne by women."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Carr, "Cheating Hearts," 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> A. Burdette et al., "Are There Religious Variations in Marital Infidelity?," *Journal of Family Issues*, 28, no. 12 (2007): 1553-1581; D. Atkins and D. Kessel, "Religiousness and Infidelity: Attendance, But Not Faith and Prayer, Predict Marital Fidelity," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, no. 2 (2008): 407-418; J. Potter, "Reexamining the Economics of Marital Fidelity," *Economics Bulletin*, 31, no. 1 (2011): 41-52; J. Tuttle and S. Davis, "Religion, Infidelity, and Divorce: Reexamining the Effect of Religious Behavior on Divorce Among Long-Married Couples," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 56, no. 6 (2015): 475-489.

<sup>25</sup> A. Maddox-Shaw et al., "Predictors of Extradyadic Sexual Involvement in Unmarried Opposite-Sex Relationships," *Journal of Sex Research*, 50, no. 6 (Aug-Sept. 2013): 598-610.

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization, "Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women," *WHO Information Sheets*, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Respondents who answered “yes” to the question, “Have you ever had sex with someone other than your [spouse/partner] while you were [married/living with your partner]?” are considered to have cheated on their spouse or partner.

Our measure of couple religiosity is consistent with the measure used in the previous essay (see Chapter 2). We adopt their language as well, referring to couples where both respondents are not religious as “shared secular couples;” couples where one partner is highly committed and the other is less so, or where both are only moderately religious, as “less/mixed religious couples;” and couples where both are highly committed as “highly religious couples.”<sup>28</sup>

In Chapter 2, Carroll et al., examined how *separate spheres ideology* and couple religiosity predict relationship quality; here, we consider how *beliefs about male headship* in conjunction with couple religiosity predict IPV and infidelity. The male headship item asked the yes/no question, “Some people believe that the man is head of the family. Others may disagree. Do you believe that the man is head of the family, or not?” We refer to those who believe in male headship as, “patriarchal,” and to those who do not as, “egalitarian.”

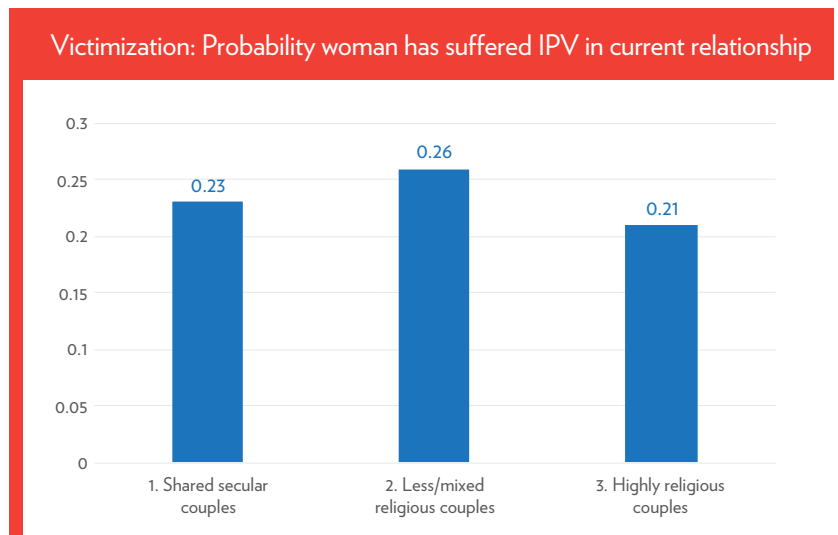
We present findings as predicted probabilities, setting all control variables equal to their mean.<sup>29</sup>

## Results from the 11-Country Survey

### Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

We begin by looking at reports of ever having been the victim of IPV at the hands of one’s current partner—either a spouse or cohabiting partner—by the couple’s religious commitment. The figure to the right reports predicted probabilities that women who are from shared secular couples, less/mixed religious couples, or highly religious couples have ever been victimized by their partner in the 11-country sample. Although women in less/mixed religious couples have a 26% probability of ever having been the victim of violence in their relationship, compared to a 21% probability for women in highly religious couples, and a 23% probability for women in shared secular couples, none of these differences are statistically significant.

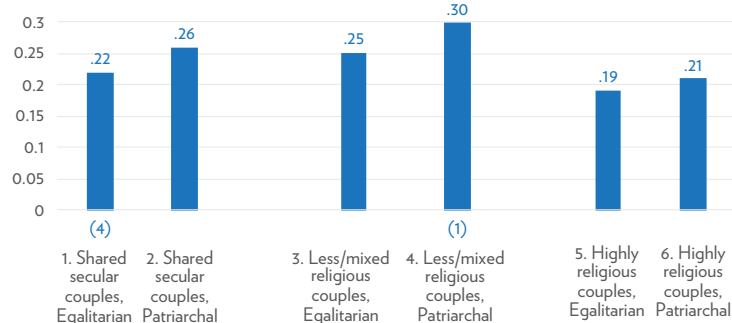
The figure below reports predicted probabilities of women’s victimization by couple religiosity and belief about male headship. Popular accounts suggest the idea that wifely submission to husbands provides theological cover for abusive relationships—or at least for men to abuse women. We see little evidence of this here, though. Women in highly religious couples, be they patriarchal or egalitarian, are not statistically different from any other group of women. The only significant difference is that egalitarian women in shared secular relationships are less likely to be victims of IPV (22%) than patriarchal women in less/mixed religious relationships (30%). Headship beliefs themselves



<sup>28</sup> The “less/mixed couples” category is quite diverse, but we did not find couples with mixed religious views and those with two, nominally religious partners to be statistically distinct.

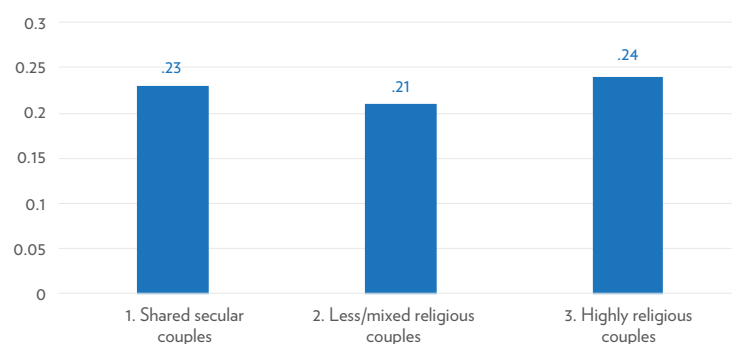
<sup>29</sup> See “Data & Methods” section for more details.

### Victimization: Probability woman has suffered IPV in current relationship

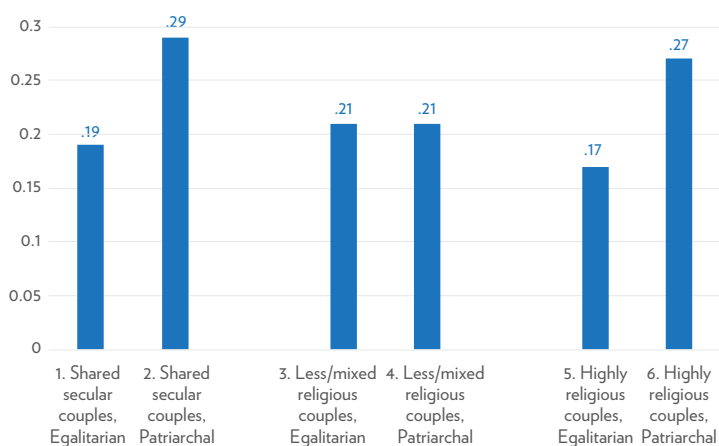


Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at  $p \leq 0.05$

### Perpetration: Probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship



### Perpetration: Probability man has perpetrated IPV in current relationship



(i.e., not in combination with couple religiosity) are not associated with women's victimization (results not shown).

### Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

The figure below reports predicted probabilities of men being a perpetrator of IPV in the global sample by couple religiosity. Findings for perpetration of IPV—whether the respondent has ever abused their current partner—also suggest no influence of couples' religious characteristics. Men are nearly equally likely to report being perpetrators of IPV across the three categories, with predicted probabilities ranging from 21% to 24%.

When we add beliefs about male headship to the picture, there are still no significant differences in men's likelihood of perpetrating IPV across these groups. The largest gap—between patriarchal men in shared secular couples and egalitarian men in highly religious couples—is not statistically significant. Headship beliefs do not predict IPV perpetration, neither by themselves nor in combination with couple religiosity.

### Infidelity

Religious commitment has consistently been found to reduce the incidence of infidelity in the U.S., but little research has been done on this topic outside the U.S. We examined the role of religious commitment in couples from 11 countries in the figure below. Among men, those in less/mixed religious couples have an 18% probability of ever cheating on their spouse or partner,

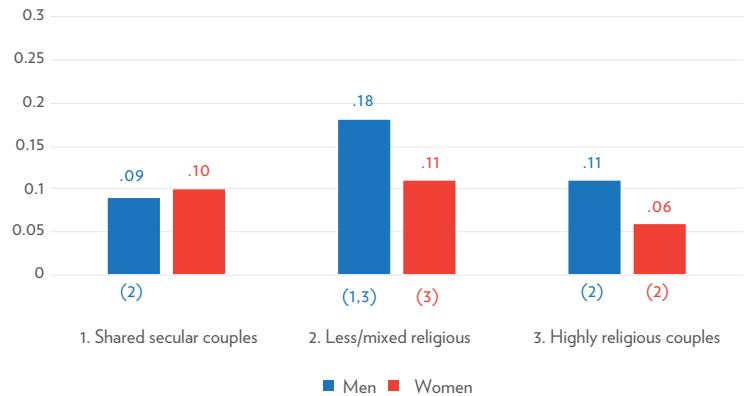
compared to probabilities of 9% for men in shared-secular couples and 11% for men in highly religious couples. Women in highly religious couples are also significantly less likely to have cheated on their partner than their less/mixed counterparts, with probabilities of 6% and 11%, respectively.

We then consider couple religiosity and beliefs about male headship jointly. Egalitarian men in shared secular relationships have the lowest probability of having cheated on their partner at 8%. This is significantly lower than men in less/mixed religious couples, whether egalitarian or patriarchal. Other differences among men, and all the differences among women, are not statistically significant. Headship beliefs by themselves (results not shown) do not predict infidelity among either men or women.

## A Note on the United States

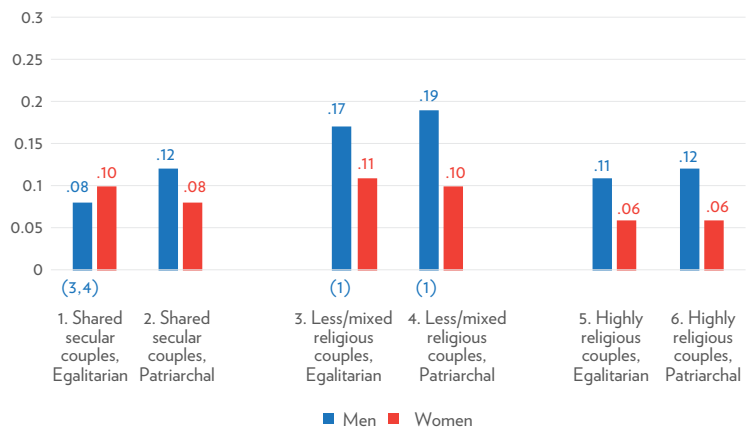
The findings from the U.S. indicate no differences in IPV with respect to couple religiosity, but when it comes to women's infidelity, religious commitment within the couple seems to matter. Women in highly religious couples have just a 2% probability of having cheated on their spouse, compared to a probability of 10% for women in less/mixed religious couples and 13% for women in shared secular couples.

### Infidelity: Probability of having cheated on current partner



Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at  $p \leq 0.05$

### Infidelity: Probability of having cheated on current partner



Note: Numbers in parentheses denote which categories the given category is statistically different from at  $p \leq 0.05$

## Conclusion

The evidence presented here from 11 countries suggests that highly religious couples, secular couples, and those in between are similar in terms of the violence occurring within their intimate partnerships. These similarities across couples with different levels of religious commitment are notable in light of recent media reports about IPV within religious couples.<sup>30</sup> On one hand, these findings validate the stories: religious couples experience and commit IPV just as nonreligious couples do. Religious participation itself does not safeguard against IPV.

Unfortunately, the resources religious traditions have at their disposal to discourage violence within intimate partnerships may not be tapped very often. The subject of IPV may not be frequently addressed in public religious settings. Congregational religious leaders would do well to change this and to confront the issue head-on in their sermons and programming. A significant minority of their congregants have experienced violence within their marriages and cohabiting unions, and many of them are likely suffering in silence. A significant minority have likely also *perpetrated* IPV and may pose a continued risk to their families and fellow congregants. Carroll et al.'s essay in this report shows the positive effects religion can have on relationship functioning; if these findings were to be made a point of emphasis, these positive effects might potentially be extended to IPV as well.

At the same time, it is important to note that congregational leaders often do not have the training, skills, or desire to navigate these conversations effectively or to provide appropriate help for those seeking it.<sup>31</sup> Denominational leaders, boards of religious organizations, and others in charge of hiring and overseeing the leaders of local congregations should address this issue in earnest. Victims and perpetrators of IPV often seek help from their clergy, and those clergy need to be ready to handle these situations in ways that not only protect victims and bring perpetrators to justice, but also tend to the spiritual health of all involved.<sup>32</sup> At the very minimum, religious leaders should be knowledgeable about the appropriate authorities or services available to assist them in dealing with dangerous situations. Sadly, many religious leaders remain woefully unprepared to deal with IPV.<sup>33</sup> Their congregants' safety is at stake, and so, too, is their spiritual well-being.<sup>34</sup>

Even though religion does not insulate people from abusive partnerships, highly religious couples in general are not *more* violent than other couples. Patriarchal ideas rooted in religious understandings do lead to abusive relationships in some instances, but couples in these relationships do not have elevated rates of IPV compared to other couples. Given the fact that we have measured IPV in *ongoing* relationships, if religious couples are more likely to remain together after their relationships become violent, we could very well be understating religion's protective influence on the incidence of IPV. So, while attention to IPV within religious couples is legitimate and important, these settings should also not be

<sup>30</sup> The country-level reports show that Australian men in highly religious couples are more likely to be perpetrators of IPV than those in shared-secular couples, suggesting the ABC stories were especially relevant for the Australian context. If such a pattern were to hold in nationally representative data for Australia (or any other country), the research imperative would be to identify the elements of context that condition the relationship between religion and IPV.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wood and M. McHugh, "Woman Battering: The Response of the Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology*, 42, no. 3 (1994): 185-196; N. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); C. Shannon-Lewy and V. Dull, "The Response of Christian Clergy to Domestic Violence: Help or Hindrance?," *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10, no. 6 (Sept.-Oct. 2005): 637-760; N. Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Best practices dictate that clergy themselves do not assist both the victim and perpetrator in these circumstances, but they can assist in helping both parties obtain the help they need.

<sup>33</sup> Shannon-Lewy and Dull, "The Response of Christian Clergy to Domestic Violence: Help or Hindrance?"; Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence*, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion of dealing with IPV in religious contexts, we highly recommend Nancy Nason-Clark and colleagues' book, *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions*. The online resources mentioned therein may also be helpful for religious leaders. See for example: [www.theraveproject.org](http://www.theraveproject.org), and [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org).

considered *especially* problematic, though IPV among religious couples does present some unique challenges. Violence against intimate partners is found within all types of couples, including religious ones.

With respect to infidelity, patriarchal religious couples also do not stand out from other couples. Across the 11 countries we surveyed, both highly religious and shared secular couples have lower rates of infidelity compared to their less/mixed religious counterparts. In the U.S., there is also a difference between highly religious and shared secular women, with the highly religious being the least likely to cheat. Given the focus of religious institutions (especially in the U.S.) on the importance of reserving sex for marriage, as well as the generally salutary influence of religion on relationships, it is a bit surprising that highly religious couples and shared secular couples behave similarly around the world. But cultural messages about the inappropriateness of extramarital sex are widespread, so secular couples have plenty of motivation to avoid infidelity as well.

Our data suggest religion's global influence on problematic aspects of relationships—violence against an intimate partner and infidelity—is perhaps more muted than it is for more positive relationship outcomes (Chapter 2). Especially in the case of IPV, these findings should serve as a(nother) wake-up call to religious institutions to take seriously the prevalence of relationship violence in their midst. But they should also serve as a useful corrective to those who might take reports of violence in religious couples to mean that religious couples are more violent than other couples.

## Sidebar: “The Family that Prays Together Flourishes Together”

Loren D. Marks, *Brigham Young University*

David C. Dollahite, *Brigham Young University*

Near the end of the Global Family and Gender Survey (GFGS), participants wrote open responses regarding “the most important way(s) religion helps or harms marriage and family relationships.” Myriad beliefs were mentioned—particularly the power of shared religious beliefs in marriages, couples, and families. The importance of attending faith community worship services—especially “together”—was also mentioned by many. However, when referring to the ways in which religion is “helpful,” participants most frequently mentioned praying and/or prayer (135 times).

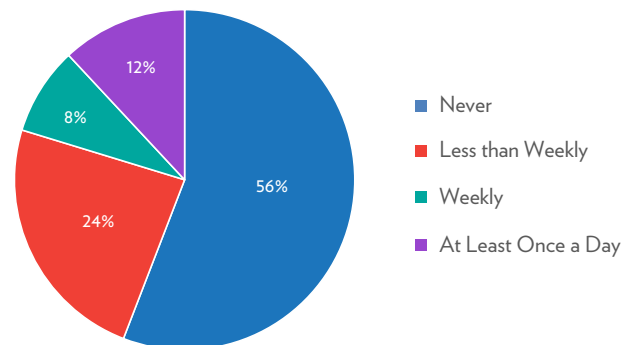
Consistent with previous empirical and conceptual work, many did pray and did so in relational ways.<sup>2</sup> Daily (or more frequent) family prayer “outside of attending religious services and not including at meals” was reported by 1,958 of the survey participants, while another 5,300 reported praying as a family occasionally, above and beyond worship services or saying grace.<sup>3</sup> At the other end of the continuum were 9,164 participants who did not report family prayer outside of services or in addition to prayer at meals (see below). However, even among this group, only nine (1 in 1,000) made explicitly negative references to prayer. Three such responses regarding prayer included:

*“[It] causes resentment when kids are forced to pray . . .”*

*“[I]t brainwashes people into believing there’s this magic man in the sky that if they put all their faith into him and give money to the church and pray, all their problems will be solved, instead of . . . doing stuff for themselves . . . without the intervention or help from the magic man.”*

*“[When] people believe that so long as they pray . . . they can have whatever they want, this completely eliminates self help.”*

Family Prayer



Note: Daily prayer includes prayer outside of religious services and not including meals.  
Source: 2018 Global Family & Gender Survey, unweighted data. N=16,474.

<sup>1</sup> Our description of open-ended responses is from five English-speaking nations (Australia, Canada, Ireland, United Kingdom, United States). Survey responses include the aforementioned nations as well as five Spanish-speaking nations (Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Mexico, and Peru) as well as France; Quebecois was also used in some Canadian surveys.

<sup>2</sup> A. Skipper, T.J. Moore, & L.D. Marks, “The Prayers of Others Helped’: Intercessory Prayer as a Source of Coping and Resilience in Christian African American Families,” *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 37, no. 4 (2018): 373–394.

<sup>3</sup> If praying in worship services and/or prayer at meals (e.g., grace) had been included, the number who engage in family prayer would have been much higher. Indeed, such prayer is so widespread that the Global Family and Gender Survey examined family prayer only “outside of attending religious services and not including at meals” to better tap into intentional family religious worship and practice.

Indeed, there were some who viewed family prayer as nonsense. There were others (including some persons of faith) who held the above concerns that prayer may lead to avoiding personal responsibility to “do stuff for themselves” or may prevent needed “self help.”<sup>4</sup> Even so, open-ended comments regarding prayer were typically positive. Most of the positive comments addressing prayer were also family oriented. In the GFGS data, perhaps due to the survey asking many questions about family, a majority (81 of the 135) of the positive references to the practice of prayer were relational and/or familial in nature. For many participants who valued faith in their familial lives, prayer was not only a religious practice that connected them “vertically” with God, prayer also reportedly served a relational or “horizontal” purpose—uniting partners with one another and parents with children. Indeed, three out of every five positive references to prayer referenced the horizontal nature and influence of this practice. Framed differently, for every negative reference to prayer, there were nine positive references to familial and/or relational prayer, and 15 positive references to “prayer” in a more general sense.

Social science research has previously established that prayer is the most common and prevailing religious act or practice. Even so, prayer is typically explored, examined, and discussed as an individual-level behavior. The GFGS data offers perspectives that supplement the individually-focused approach to prayer through one phrase that was repeated more often than virtually any other: “The family that prays together stays together.” This phrase was offered by participants from all five English-speaking nations. In some cases, participants moved beyond the statement to explain *why*, in their experience, praying together had connecting power. Explanations included:

*“[I]t can help to keep families together through prayer and feeling connected.”*

*“[W]hen you pray with your partner on issues that you both struggle with, the [prayer] brings you closer together with God and your partner.”*

*“Praying together builds the marriage and strengthens each other.”*

*“Praying together morning and night brings us closer together in all respects.”*

*“When families pray together they bond.”*

*“Pray[er is helpful] working out problems together.”*

In each of these responses, the participants directly linked prayer with the relational word “together.” Prayer, by its nature, often involves a vertical reaching for the Divine—a desire to connect with God. The connections being discussed in these explanations, however, are familial. In a world that is increasingly oriented toward individuals, “praying together” is reportedly a “connecting,” “bonding,” and “strengthening” activity for many couples and families.

Even when prayer was personal, individuals often reported relational and familial roots and motivations. One example is this quote from a survey participant:

*“Praying over the issues in my marriage and within my family has helped me find peace and strength to deal with the issues. It has given me answers when I couldn’t find them anywhere else.”*

<sup>4</sup> L.D. Marks, “Prayer and Marital Intervention: Asking for Divine Help...or Professional Trouble?” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27, no.7 (2008): 678-685.

While the majority of prayer references invoked horizontal or familial relationships, there were scores of implicit and even some explicit references to vertical connection with “God” or the Divine through prayer. As one participant put it:

*“We feel God answers our prayers and guides us when we don’t know what to do. He gives us hope when things are difficult.”*

Even in this vertical example that mentions God explicitly, horizontal and relational elements are still evident, as there are two “we” and two “us” references, as well as the phrase “our prayers.” This tendency to slip into the first-person plural (i.e., we, us, our) in spite of the fact that the survey participants were responding individually seems to indicate the deeply relational nature of prayer for some couples and families.

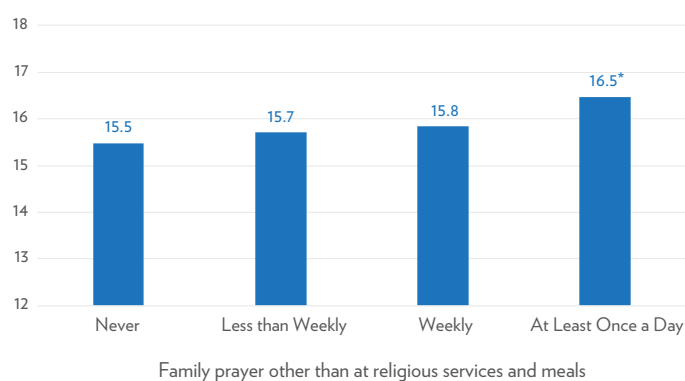
In summary, 9,164 of GFGS participants reported not having family prayer beyond worship services and meals. About 5,300 did report having additional family prayer occasionally, with another 1,958 reporting offering family prayers daily or more. Positive comments about prayer outnumbered negative comments by 135 to 9 (a 15:1 ratio<sup>5</sup>)—perhaps indicating that many who engage in daily family prayers feel disproportionately positive about the practice. About 20 respondents specifically claimed that “the family that prays together stays together” and many offered their perspectives on why.

The next figure presents correlations comparing global relationship quality (see definition on page 21) across families who pray: (a) never, (b) less than weekly, (c) weekly, and (d) daily or more. After controlling for age, education, gender, and family finances, participants who reported daily family prayer (above and beyond prayer at worship services and meals) also reported relationship quality scores nearly a full point higher than the “never” group. This modest effect, while statistically significant, does not offer sufficient support for a blanket statement that family prayer is—by itself—a powerful glue for family relationships. However, coupled with the more in-depth qualitative response data, there is (across the 16,000-person sample) some indication that family prayer is one factor that matters to those families who unite in this connecting practice on a daily basis. Given the myriad factors that influence family lives and relationships, finding a single practice that may help to measurably move the relational quality needle in a positive direction is something that warrants attention.

Previous research indicates that regular prayer provides families with time for family togetherness and interaction, space for social support, a means for intergenerational transmission of religion, and a way to reduce relational tensions and develop unity.<sup>6</sup> Families who wish to establish a pattern of prayer, or religious leaders who wish to help families in their congregations make regular family prayer a part of family life, might consider that for many families, prayer occurs as part of other family routines or rituals, such as at waking,

## Relationship Quality

Additive Index of Relationship Attachment, Commitment, Satisfaction, and Stability



Notes: \*Denotes significantly higher than all other categories. Relationship quality predicted controlling for age, education, gender, and family finances.

<sup>5</sup> Again, open-ended responses include the five English-speaking nations.

<sup>6</sup> J. Chelladurai, D. C. Dollahite, & L.D. Marks, “The Family that Prays Together: Relational Process Associated with Family Prayer,” *Journal of Family Psychology*, 32, no.7 (2018): 849-859.

bedtime, or mealtime. Thus, rather than trying to add a family prayer ritual on its own, many families might find it easier to begin or maintain regular family prayer as part of the natural rhythm of their family life.

Additionally, what occurs before and after family prayer matters. Family prayer is more likely to be a positive experience when family members come together in ways that promote joyful relationships. Examples could include speaking words of love and encouragement to family members before or after prayer, holding hands during prayer, embracing after prayer, or otherwise communicating love and support for family members as an aspect of family prayer. Families may also benefit from having a special location for family prayer. Thus, regular family prayer would help to sanctify both time and space in the family home.

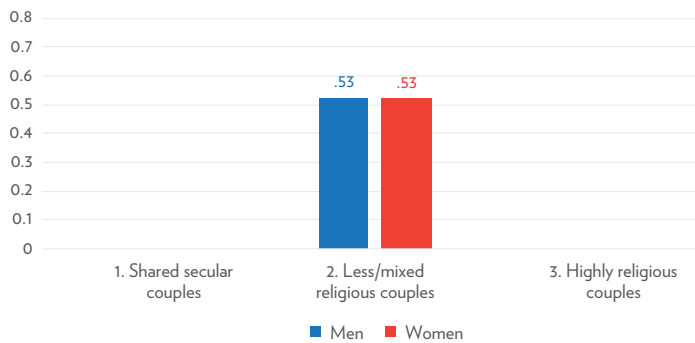
Finally, research indicates that family rituals and routines are more likely to be maintained over time, and to be a meaningful part of family life, if they happen on a regular basis rather than sporadically.<sup>7</sup> Relational benefits may occur from family prayer that occurs in positive, relationship-strengthening ways, but the Global Family and Gender Survey data seem to indicate a heightened influence when the practice of prayer is a daily one.

<sup>7</sup> J. Chelladurai, D.C. Dollahite, & L.D. Marks, "The Family that Prays Together...Relational Processes Associated with Family Prayer," *Journal of Family Psychology*, 32, no.7 (2018): 849-859. B.H. Fiese, *Family Routines and Rituals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

# Country Pages

## Argentina

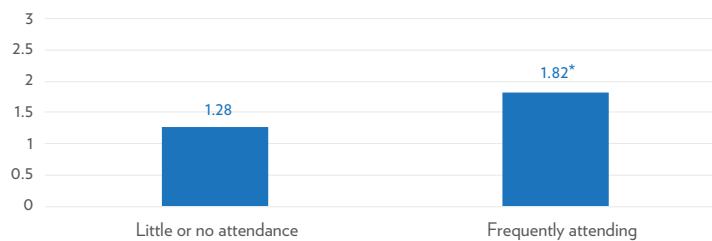
### Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent lived with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence.

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

### Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

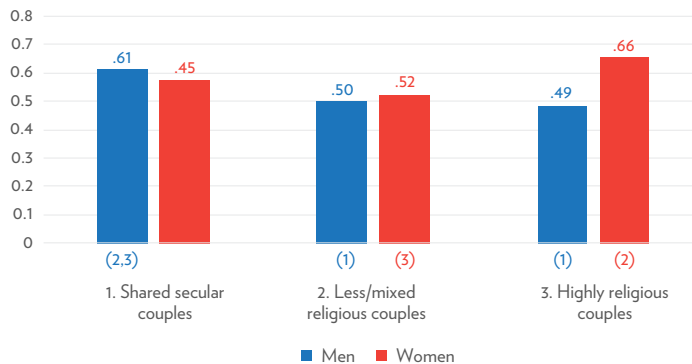
Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

In Argentina, there were not enough respondents in the highly religious or shared secular categories to compare with those in the less/mixed religious category.

Those Argentinians who did attend services regularly had 0.54 more children than others.

## Australia

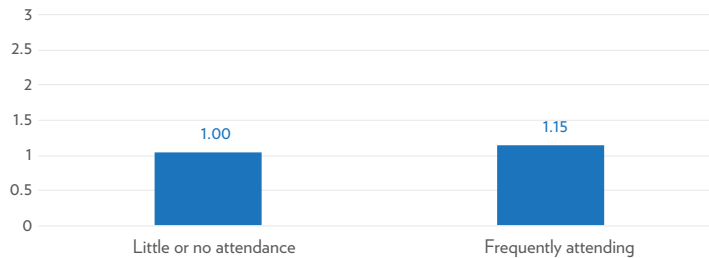
### Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Note: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

### Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance

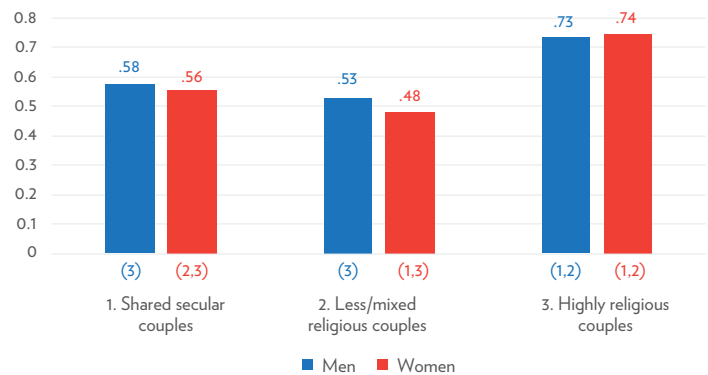


Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

In Australia, men in shared secular couples are more likely have above average relationship quality than men in either of the other two religious couple types. Among Australian women, however, those in highly religious couples have an advantage over women in less/mixed religious couples.

In Australia, those who attend religious services regularly do not have more children than those who do not.

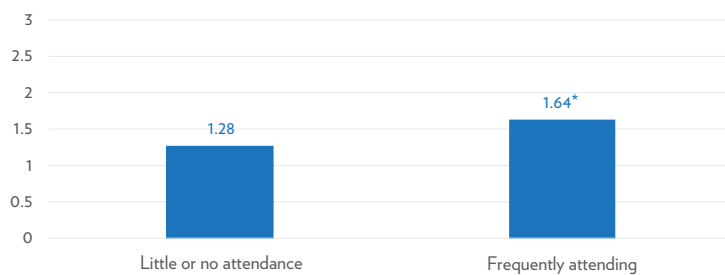
Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

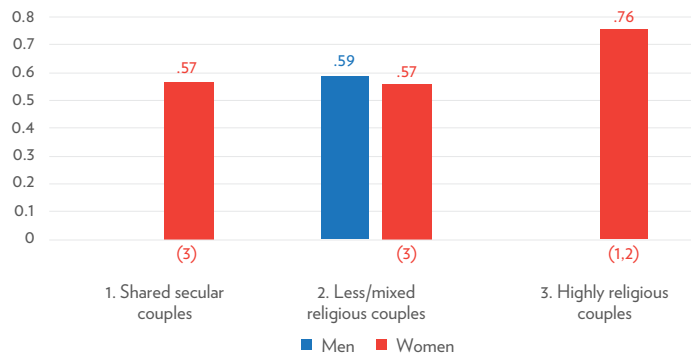
Source: World Values Survey Wave 5, respondents age 18-50

Canadian men and women In highly religious couples are more likely to have high quality relationships than either those in shared secular or less/mixed religious couples. Canadian women in shared secular couples also have an advantage over women in less/mixed religious couples.

Canadians who attend religious services regularly average 0.36 more children than those who do not.

## Chile

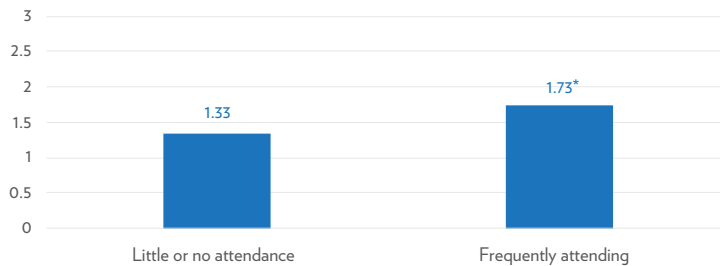
### Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

### Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

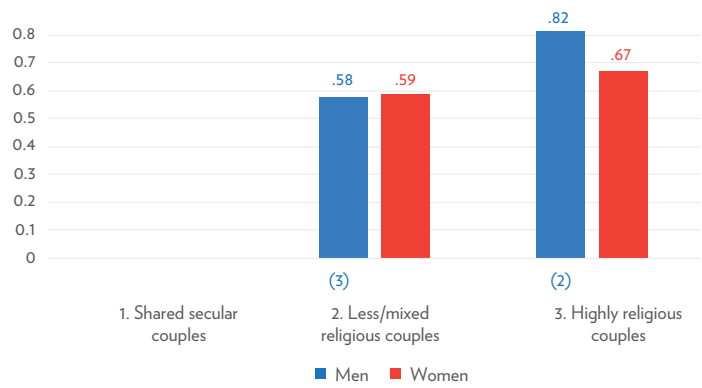
The Chilean sample had very few couples with two devout partners, as well as very few shared secular couples.

Among Chilean women, those in highly religious couples were more like to have above average relationship quality than women in either of the other two couple types.

People who reported attending religious services regularly averaged 0.40 more children than those who did not.

# Colombia

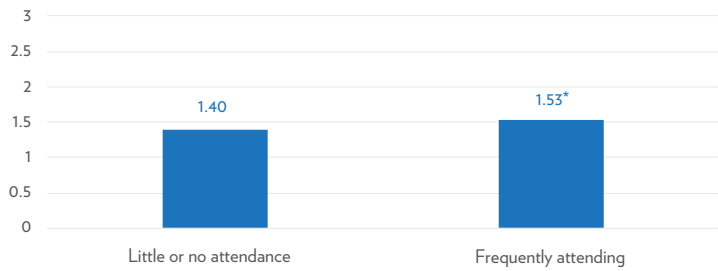
## Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p<0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

## Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p<0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

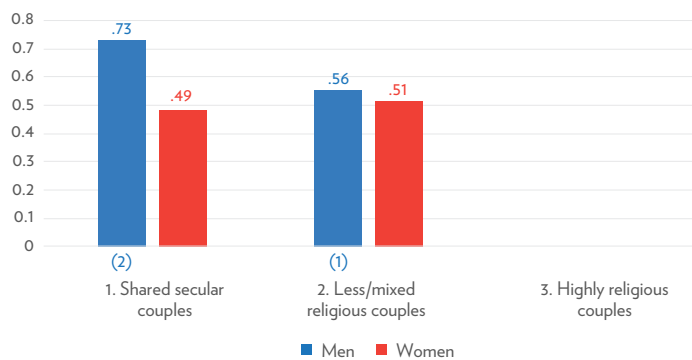
There are very few couples in our Colombia sample where neither partner is religious.

Men in less/mixed religious couples are less likely than men in highly religious couples to have relationships of above average quality.

Colombians who report attending religious services regularly averaged 0.13 more children than those who do not.

# France

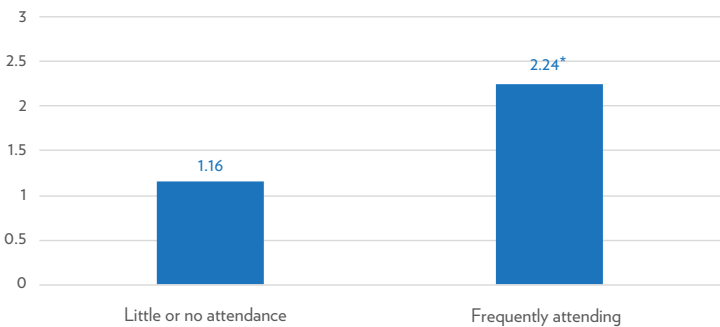
## Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

## Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 3, respondents age 18-50

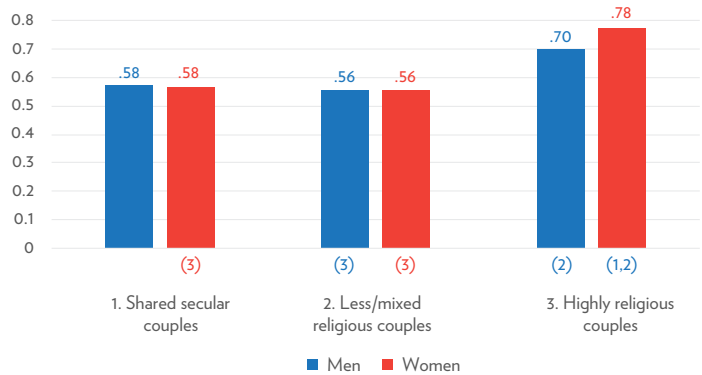
The French sample had very few couples with two devout partners, so comparisons between highly religious couples and others are not possible.

French men in shared secular couples are more likely to have above average relationship quality than men in less/mixed religious couples.

French people who reported attending religious services regularly had 1.08 more children than those who did not attend regularly.

Ireland

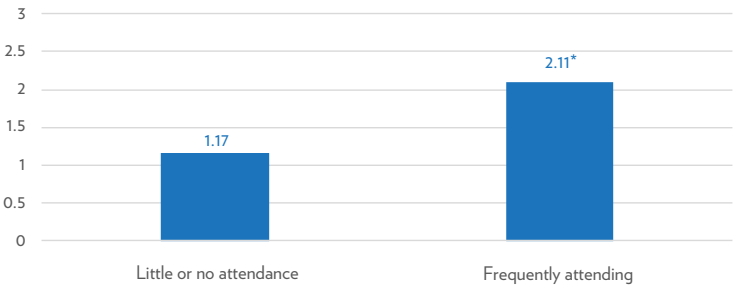
Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p<0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



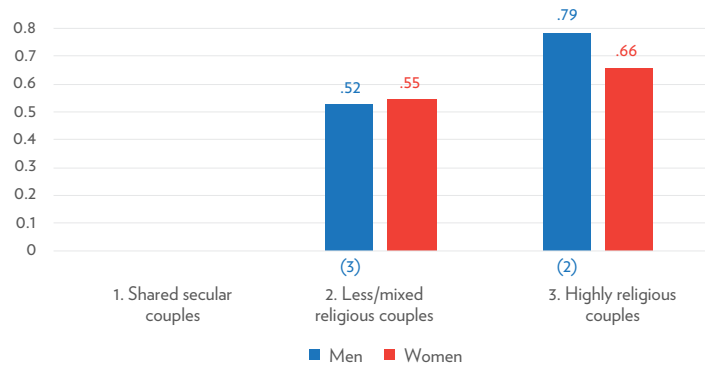
Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p<0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 3, respondents age 18-50

Irish men and women in highly religious couples are more likely to have high quality relationships than those in less/mixed religious couples. Irish women in highly religious couples also have an advantage over women in shared secular couples.

Irish people who attend religious services averaged 0.94 more children than those who did not.

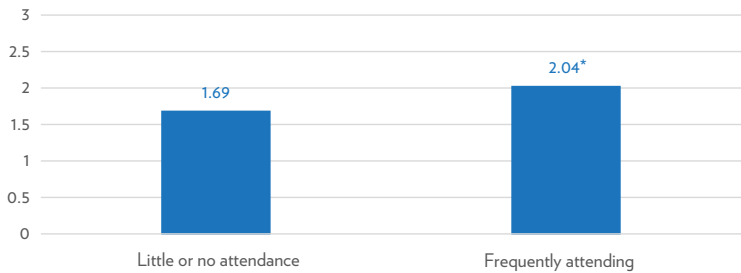
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Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

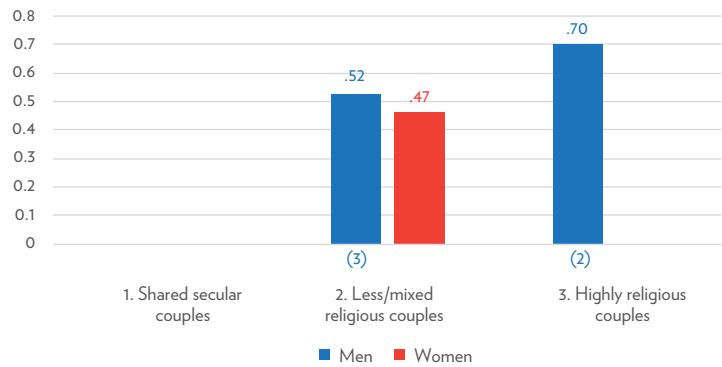
Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

There are very few Mexican couples in which neither partner is religious.

Men in highly religious couples are more likely to have above average relationship quality than their counterparts in less/mixed religious couples.

Mexicans who attend religious services regularly have 0.35 more children than those who do not.

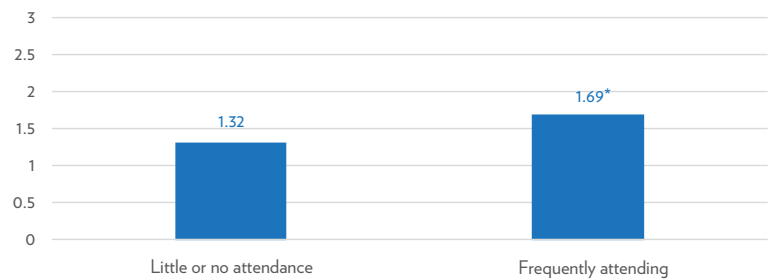
Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

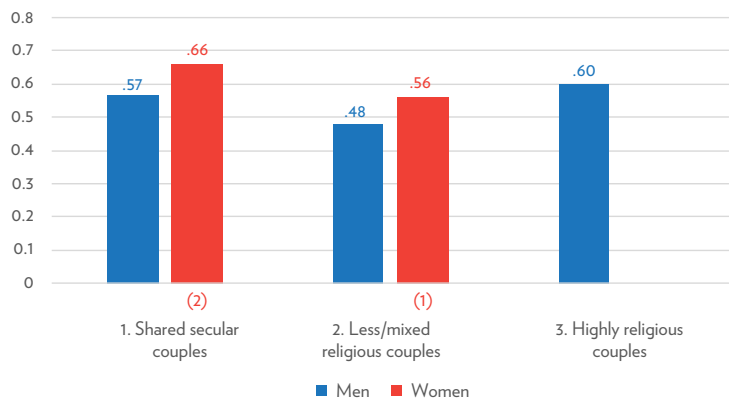
The Peruvian sample had insufficient couples with two secular partners and also insufficient women in highly religious relationships to include these groups when making comparisons.

Among Peruvian men, those in highly religious couples were more likely than men in less/mixed religious couples to have above average relationship quality.

Peruvians who attend religious services regularly averaged 0.37 more children than those who do not.

# United Kingdom

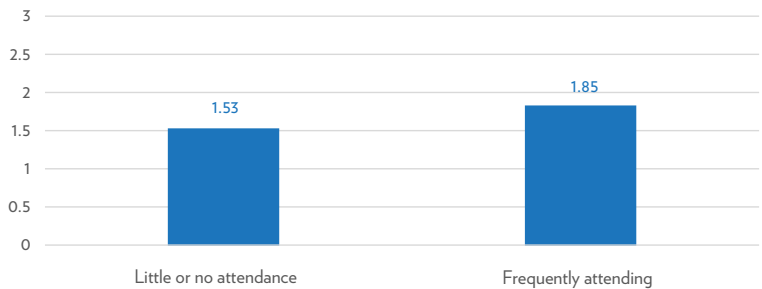
## Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

## Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Source: European Values Surveys Wave 3 from Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respondents 18-50

Women in less/mixed religious couples in the UK are less likely to have high relationship quality than those in shared secular couples. There were not enough women in shared highly religious couples in our sample to compare with women in the other two groups. Men’s relationship quality did not differ significantly among the three religious couple type.

Those who attend religious services in the UK regularly have 0.32 more children than others, but the difference is not statistically significant.

# United States

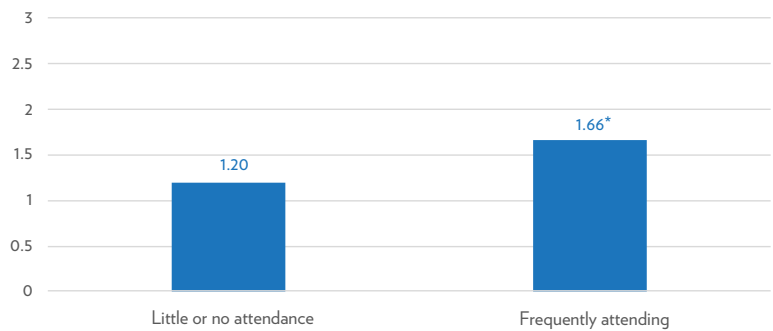
## Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

## Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

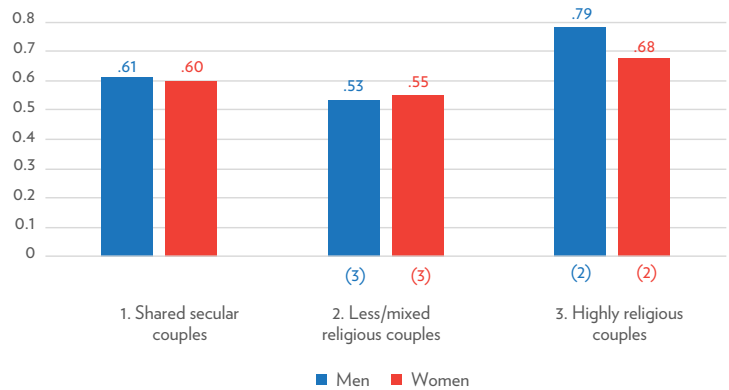
Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

Both men and women in highly religious couples in the US are more likely to have high relationship quality than either those in shared secular couples or those in less/mixed religious couples.

Regular attenders of religious services in the US average 0.46 more children than those who attend infrequently or not at all.

# Central/South America

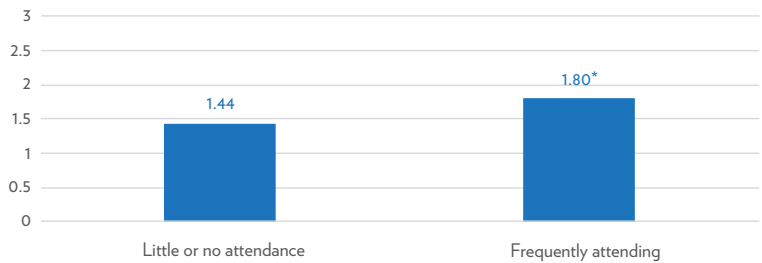
## Share Scoring Above Average on Relationship Quality Index



Notes: Probabilities predicted controlling for age, education, native-born status, whether respondent live with both parents around age 16, whether respondent was previously divorced, legal status and duration of current union, presence of children in household, household finances, and urban residence. Numbers in parentheses indicate other groups from which the marked group differs significantly at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Global Family and Gender Survey 2018

## Number of Children and Religious Service Attendance



Note: Asterisk denotes significantly greater ( $p < 0.05$ ) than among those with little or no attendance at religious services

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6, respondents age 18-50

Many of our individual countries in Central/South America did not have sufficient couples in particular categories for meaningful analysis. Here we have pooled the data across all five of our Spanish-speaking countries.

We find that both men and women in highly religious couples are more likely to have high overall relationship quality than those in less/mixed religious couples.

Those who attend services regularly in Central/South America averaged 0.36 more children than those who did not.





## WORLD FAMILY INDICATORS

*W. Bradford Wilcox and  
Laurie DeRose<sup>1</sup>*

This section of the 2019 *World Family Map* report provides information on 16 indicators of family well-being in four areas—family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture—across 49 countries that are home to a majority of the world’s population.

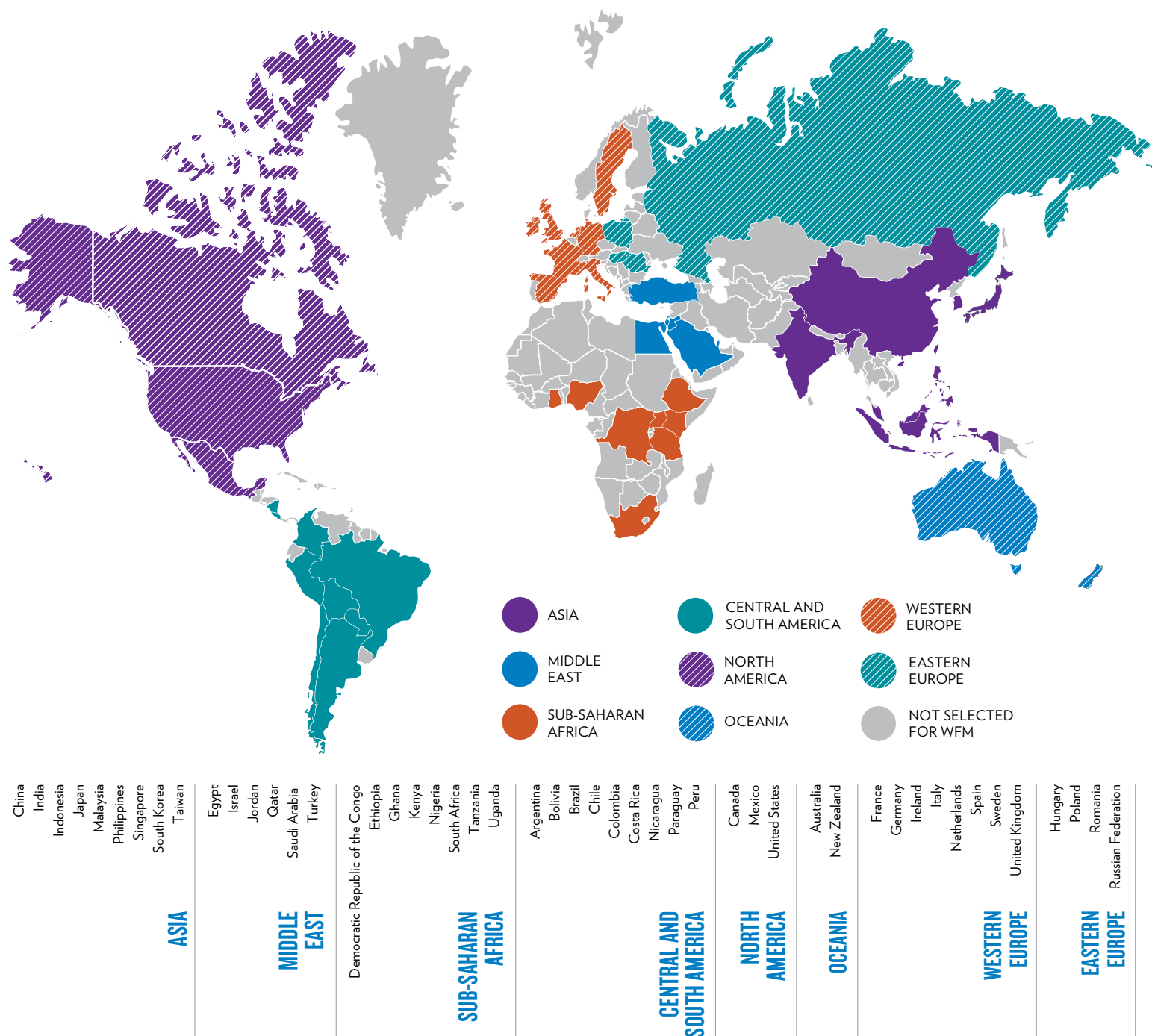
The indicators for the *World Family Map* 2019 demonstrate the diversity of families and nations in which children are being raised. Every region of the world is home to distinct patterns of family structure, socioeconomics, family process, and culture, and there is often variation within regions. Major changes in families are taking place around the world. Marriage is becoming less common almost everywhere, while cohabitation is becoming more common in select regions. The world has made progress toward the Millennium Development Goal for reducing malnutrition; however, families continue to face stressors such as extreme poverty and parental unemployment. Parents and extended family members have limited control over some of these problems, but one avenue through which they can directly facilitate strong family relationships and positive child outcomes is parent-child communication, which takes daily efforts and participation.

This report is updated annually with new data, as available. Here we present the same indicators as we did in the 2017 report, with updated indicators for children’s living arrangements, marriage and cohabitation, fertility, and nonmarital childbearing.

<sup>1</sup> Renee Ryberg and Laura H. Lippman contributed to sections of the “World Family Indicators” that have not been updated since our 2017 report.

## General Methods

**FIGURE A** Countries in the 2019 World Family Map



**SELECTING INDICATORS:** Along with advisors representing every region of the world, the study team selected indicators using a research-based conceptual framework of family strengths. We generated indicators in the following four domains: family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture. Indicators were chosen for each domain based on their importance to family and child well-being and on data availability, as well as a concern for regional representation and balance in the number of indicators across domains.

**SELECTING COUNTRIES:** When designing this report, it was necessary to select a set of countries for which comparisons could be made. While it was not possible to include all of the approximately 200 countries in the world, countries were selected to ensure regional representation of high-, middle-, and low-income countries. Data availability for the desired time period was also considered. These factors resulted in focusing on 49 countries—an increase from 45 countries in the original 2013 report—that account for over 75 percent of the world’s population.<sup>2</sup> **Figure A** displays the countries by region. As more data become available on key indicators of family well-being, the *World Family Map* will be able to include more countries.

**DATA SOURCES:** Numerous data sources track indicators of family well-being. The sources presented here, which are listed below, were selected for their quality, their coverage of countries, and their indicators. These sources have a reputation for using rigorous data collection methodologies across countries, or in cases where they collected data from individual country sources, such as censuses, they harmonized the data to ensure comparability across countries. In addition, we chose data sources in which multiple countries were represented; however, data from the same source may not be available for all countries or for the same year across countries, so caution is needed in making comparisons. For each indicator a primary data source was chosen. When data for a particular country were not available from that source, other sources were used to supplement. When data are available from the same source for multiple years, we note changes in indicators that are five percentage points or larger.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, DVD Edition.

## Data Sources

**Country-level sources:** When data were not available from an international survey, country-level data sources were sought. Examples include data from national statistics bureaus and country-level surveys.

**Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS):** DHS is a survey of more than 90 developing nations, focusing on population and health information. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 2005 to 2017.

**Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):** As part of the United Nations, FAO compiles statistics on food and agriculture-related indicators, including undernourishment. The most recent data are projected for 2014 to 2016 and were extracted from their statistical division’s online database FAOSTAT.

**Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-International (IPUMS):** IPUMS is a compilation of harmonized censuses from countries throughout the world. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 2000 to 2017.

**International Social Survey Programme (ISSP):** ISSP is a collaboration among annual national surveys to ensure data comparability on social science questions. This report uses their 2012 collection on family and changing gender roles. These surveys were fielded around 2012, but not necessarily in the 2012 calendar year.

**LIS (formerly known as the Luxembourg Income Study):** LIS is a collection of harmonized data on the income and wealth of individuals in middle- and high-income countries. Data from LIS used in this report date from 2002 to 2013.

**Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):** OECD’s Family Database provides cross-national statistics on the well-being of families and children throughout the member and partner countries of the OECD.

**Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):** PISA is an international tri-annual assessment of literacy in reading, mathematics, and science. PISA is administered in all OECD member countries as well as additional self-selected countries. This report uses data from the contextual part of the 2012 parent survey. Unfortunately, the items of interest were asked in a small group of countries in this iteration of the survey.

**United Nations (UN):** The UN’s World Marriage Data provides comparable data on the marital status of the population by age and sex for countries around the world (compiled from national sources and nationally representative multi-country surveys). This report uses the 2017 update.

**World Bank:** The World Bank provides a wealth of information on their databank at [data.worldbank.org](http://data.worldbank.org). This report utilizes their data on absolute poverty.

**World Values Survey (WVS):** WVS is a survey of political and sociocultural values in more than 50 countries. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, from the fourth through sixth survey waves, which date from 2001 to 2014.

For more information on specific sources, see e-appendix at <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>.

# Family Structure

## Key Findings

The global indicators of family structure that have been updated for the 2019 *World Family Map* report are the marital and cohabiting status of reproductive-age adults, children's living arrangements, fertility, and nonmarital fertility.

- Children in Asia and the Middle East are more likely to live with two parents than children in other regions around the globe, though this is still the majority living arrangement in almost all countries.
- Children in Africa and Central/South America are the least likely to live with two parents. In both regions, this results from a combination of nonparental childrearing and having only one parent in the household, but lone parenthood is the most common in Central/South America.
- The share of reproductive-age adults that are married is high in Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa.
- Cohabiting unions are particularly common in Central/South America and Northern Europe.
- Central/South America has the world's highest rates of nonmarital childbearing, while the lowest rates occur in Asia and the Middle East, where large proportions of adults are married and few are in cohabiting unions. Rates are moderate in sub-Saharan Africa, where most adults are in unions but a large share of these unions are marital.
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest fertility in the world. In the Middle East, Asia, and Central/South America, there are countries both below and above replacement fertility. Europe, Oceania, Canada, and the United States are all below replacement fertility, but levels are particularly low in Southern and Eastern Europe, and in some East Asian countries.

## Living Arrangements

In all of the countries represented in our data besides South Africa, the majority of children live with two parents—but “majority” means anything between 53 percent and 92 percent. South Africa represents an extreme in children's living arrangements due to the influence of the cultural legacy of family separation created by apartheid and sustained by labor migration (31 percent of children live with both biological parents). But it is also the case that children in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa more frequently live apart from both biological parents than in other regions of the world. African children are often “fostered” to other relatives, either for their own good—e.g., fostered to an aunt who lives near a good school—or for the benefit of their host family—e.g., fostered to a household in need of domestic or farm labor. Crisis fostering also occurs in response to parental illness or incapacity, but it represents a small part of all fostering. Early marriage also contributes to girls under age 15 living with husbands rather than parents.<sup>1</sup> More advantaged girls may attend boarding school in order to be able to continue their studies when their parents do not live near secondary schools.

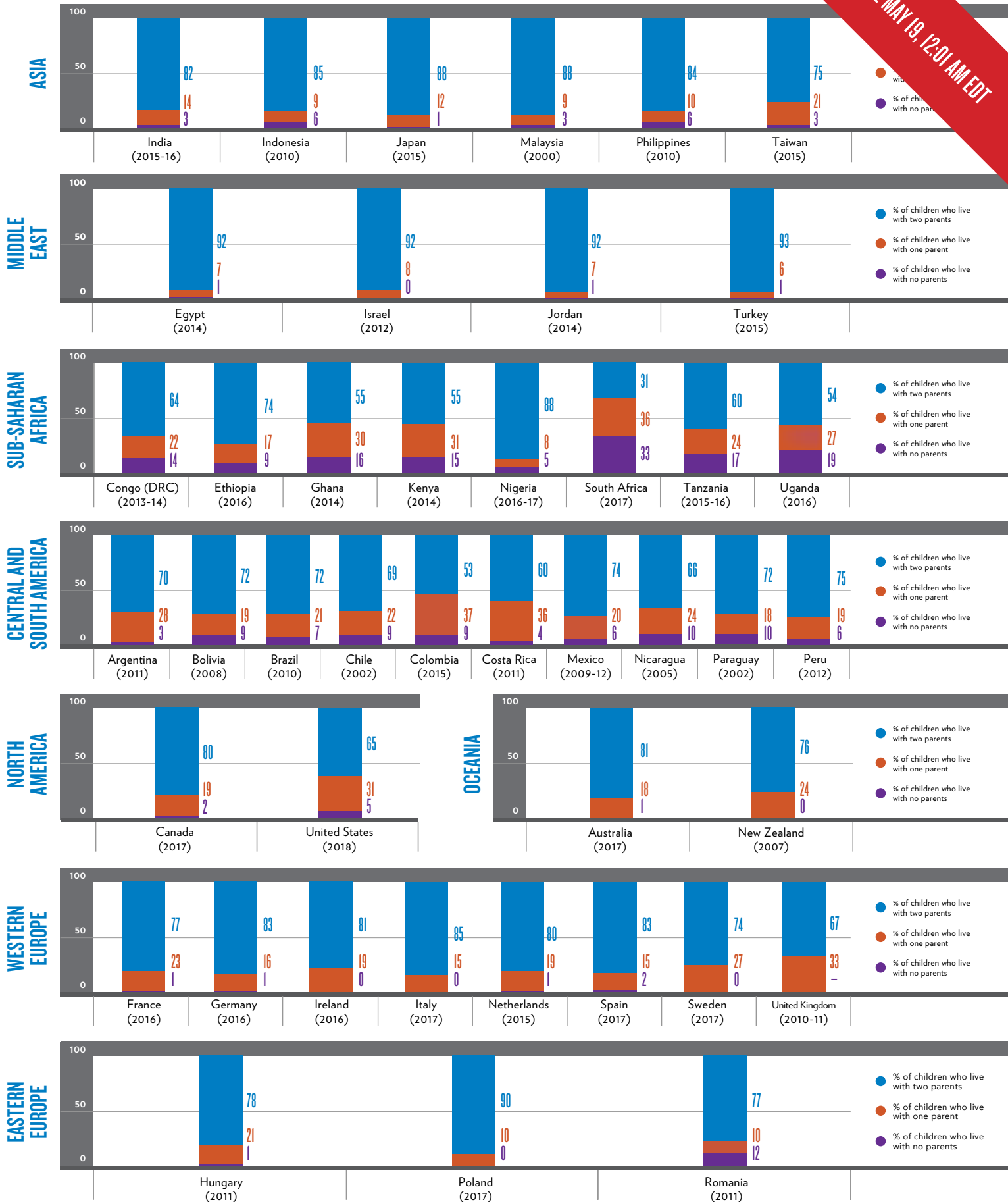
In this context with multiple sources of parent-child separation, Nigeria stands out with 88 percent of children under age 15 living with both biological parents. Few Nigerian children live with only one of their parents (8 percent, compared to between 17

<sup>1</sup> A. Mayyasi, “At What Age Do People Get Married Around the World?,” *Priceonomics* (2015), as found at: <https://priceonomics.com/at-what-age-do-people-get-married-around-the-world/>

# FIGURE 1 Living arrangements in 2018

Percentage of children living with two, one, or no parents

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– Means data on children living with no parents were not available

Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

and 36 percent in other sub-Saharan African countries). The high proportion of Nigerian children living with both parents resembles levels found in Asia and rivals levels found in the Middle East, and it attests to a relatively strong marriage culture. Data in the following sections on the proportions of reproductive-age adults who are married and cohabiting, as well as rates of nonmarital childbearing in Nigeria, support this interpretation.

Like sub-Saharan Africa, Central/South America also has small proportions of children being reared by both biological parents: between 53 (Colombia) and 75 percent (Peru). But living apart *from both parents* is far less common in Central/South America than in sub-Saharan Africa—the high proportions of children under age 15 living with only one biological parent drive down the share of children living with both parents.

The variation in children's living arrangements throughout the rest of the globe is also driven by the prevalence of children living with one parent (relatively few live apart from both). The numbers presented in [Figure 1](#) are not strictly comparable as some data sources count the number of parents with whom children live, whereas others specifically identify biological parents.<sup>2</sup> Despite this limitation, it is clear that children in Europe, Oceania, and North America are less likely to live with both of their parents than children in Asia and the Middle East. Children in the United States live less often with both parents than in all other OECD countries, reflecting union instability and lone motherhood.<sup>3</sup>

## Marriage and Cohabitation

[Figure 2](#) shows the percent of the population ages 15–49 that is married and—where available—cohabiting. We have standardized these percentages so that they can be directly compared despite enormous variation in the age structure across countries.<sup>4</sup>

Looking across regions, the share of the reproductive-age population in marital unions is generally higher in Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, but there is also much variation within regions. The Asian countries of China, India, and Indonesia have strong marriage cultures, resulting in about two-thirds of reproductive-aged adults being married. Among Middle Eastern countries, only Egypt approaches this level, but the region as a whole stands out because none of the countries represented have low rates: only in Israel are less than half of adults married (49 percent). In contrast, only about one-third of adults are married in Taiwan, and not much more than that in Japan. Sub-Saharan African countries, like Asian countries, have a large range of proportions of married adults: from 25 percent in South Africa to 63 percent in Nigeria. Nonetheless, marriage comprises a more normative part of adult life in most sub-Saharan countries than in most of the North (and West).

None of the countries in Europe, Oceania, or the Americas have even half of the reproductive-aged population married. Some countries of Eastern Europe come close to half, and the United States tops out the Western countries with 40 percent married. Our target countries in Oceania and the rest of Europe have 27 to 35 percent married. Marriage rates are even lower in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, with a low of 17 percent in Colombia.

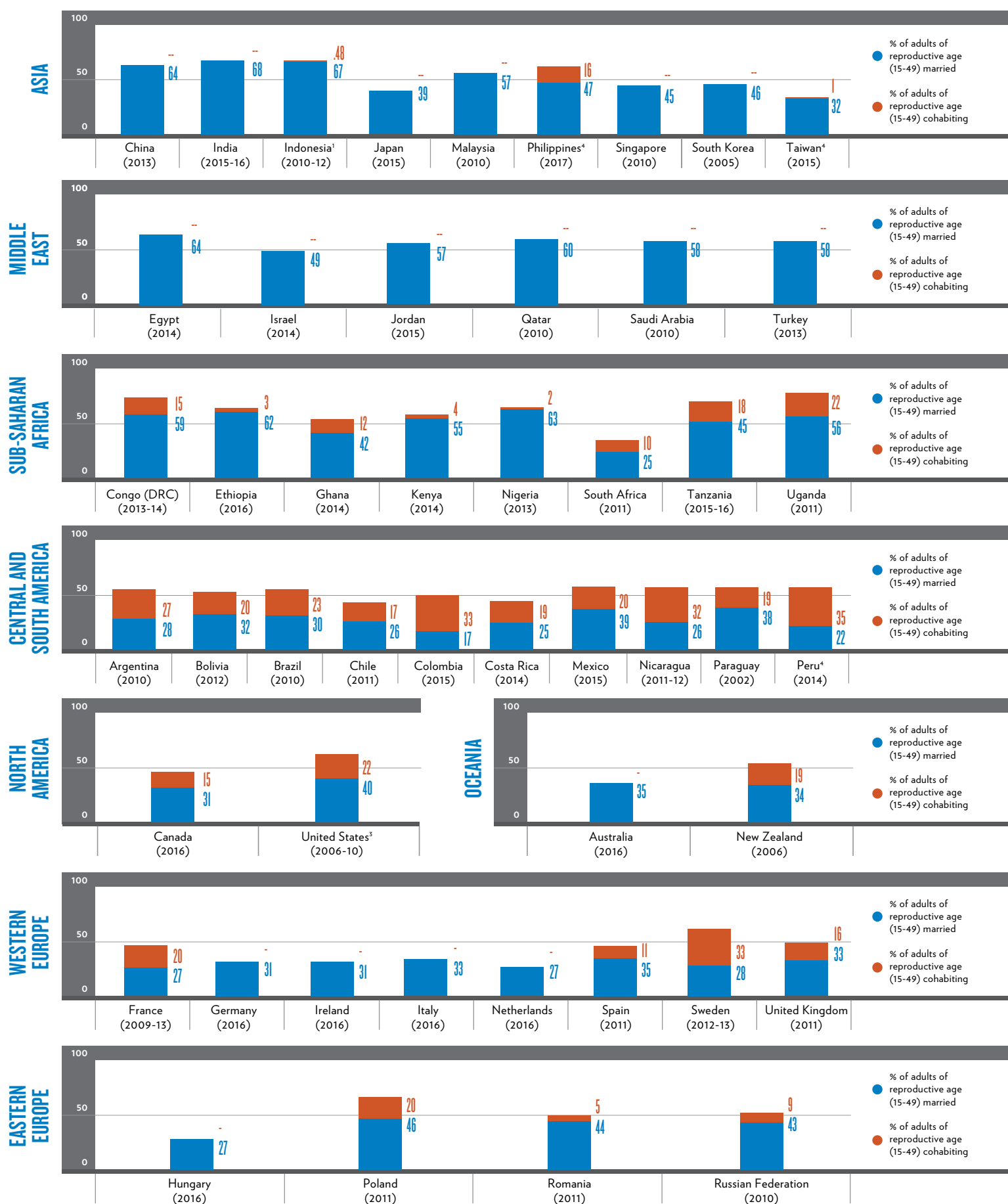
Information about the prevalence of cohabitation is less available. While the quantity and quality of demographic data generally improve over time, the 2017 release of the United Nation's World Marriage Data included little information about cohabitation that had not been in the 2015 release. For example, even though the 2016 Australian

<sup>2</sup> The appendix table shows figures based on biological parents in the household in bold. IPUMS data excludes some stepparents from its counts (those whose age makes them improbable parents), but does not exclude all stepparents.

<sup>3</sup> The Current Population Survey data identifies biological parents, but even using OECD data that does not identify biological parents, children in the United States are the least likely to live with two parents.

<sup>4</sup> Argentina was arbitrarily (alphabetically) chosen as the reference population for our standardized rates. We calculated the percentages married and cohabiting for all countries using their own marriage and cohabitation prevalences for 5-year groups from ages 15–19 to 45–49, but applied these prevalences to Argentina's age structure to generate a single estimate for ages 15–49. Please see the 2017 *World Family Map* report for a discussion of why standardization is necessary and desirable.

# FIGURE 2 Marriage and cohabitation, 2010-2017



– Means the data for cohabitation were not available

Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

Census identified spouses and “de facto partners” separately, data on cohabitation were not presented in the UN dataset.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, cohabitation was not included in 2016 data for many European countries. In Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the official data on “consensual unions” now seems to measure registered partnerships while in the past, it included informal unions.<sup>6</sup>

It is, nonetheless, still apparent that informal unions are most common in Central/South America and Western/Northern Europe. Most of the reason why data is lacking for the Middle East and much of Asia is that cohabitation is rare. In sub-Saharan Africa, high rates of marriage help explain moderate rates of cohabitation: Consider 1) the relatively small pool of those eligible to cohabit (unmarried adults), as well as 2) the “conversion” of informal unions to marriage happening more often where childbearing is more frequent.

Where recent trends can be observed, cohabitation has become more common everywhere. We stress, however, that this finding rests on little data: we were only able to update both marriage and cohabitation data for 11 of our 58 target countries between the 2017 *World Family Map* report and this report.<sup>7</sup>

We are on more solid ground asserting that the retreat from marriage has continued to progress across the globe where it was already underway. We were able to update proportions married in far more countries, and the only countries showing modest increases had some of the highest starting levels: Ethiopia, India, and Jordan. Israel maintained the same proportion married. Marriage declined from high levels in Saudi Arabia and Tanzania, and from lower levels everywhere else where we had new data.

## Childbearing

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region where women bear the most children by a large margin ([Table 1](#)). Fertility did not begin declining for the region as a whole until the early 1980s; declines in various countries began at different times and have proceeded at different paces.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, fertility declines have “stalled” in some countries, particularly those where economic hardship and economic restructuring have interfered with educational progress.<sup>9</sup> Together, these factors mean that the highest fertility region in the world also has a huge range in the number of children the average woman bears. To illustrate, the average is still 6.3 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but as low as 2.4 children per woman in South Africa.

The Middle East is the region with the next highest total fertility rates. Egyptian fertility at 3.4 children per woman falls between the sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern countries. Fertility remains above the replacement level of 2.1 throughout the Middle East besides Qatar where it has fallen to 1.9.

Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole have replacement-level fertility because both low and higher levels of fertility coexist. Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Costa Rica all have below replacement fertility, and the highest fertility country is Bolivia where the average woman still bears 2.9 children in her lifetime.

<sup>5</sup> Data on cohabitation from the 2006 Australian census are also omitted from World Marriage Data 2017, though they were included in World Marriage Data 2015.

<sup>6</sup> In our 2017 *World Family Map* report, we used cohabitation data from the World Values Survey for Sweden because the proportions in consensual unions were absurdly low. We have now encountered the same phenomenon in other countries' data on consensual unions with older data having believable rates and current rates being about 1 percent. The estimate presented in this report for Sweden is slightly older (2012-13 instead of 2013), and it comes from the Generations and Gender Survey, which is more highly regarded for the quality of its marriage data than is the World Values Survey.

<sup>7</sup> We don't count the improvement to the Swedish estimates as new data.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Population Fund, World Population Prospects 2017: Data Query, as found at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>

<sup>9</sup> DeRose, L. F., & Kravdal, Ø. “Educational reversals and first-birth timing in sub-Saharan Africa: A dynamic multilevel approach,” *Demography*, 44, no. 1 (2007): 59-77; Goujon, A., Lutz, W., & KC, S. “Education stalls and subsequent stalls in African fertility: A descriptive overview,” *Demographic Research*, 33 (2015): 1281-1296.

**TABLE 1 Total fertility rate, 2018**

*Number of children who would be born per woman if she lived to the end of her childbearing years and bore children at each age in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates*

**ASIA**

China	1.8
India	2.3
Indonesia	2.4
Japan	1.4
Malaysia	1.9
Philippines	2.7
Singapore	1.2
South Korea	1.1
Taiwan	1.2

**MIDDLE EAST**

Egypt	3.4
Israel	3.1
Jordan	3.2
Qatar	1.9
Saudi Arabia	2.4
Turkey	2.1

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Democratic Republic of the Congo	6.3
Ethiopia	4.4
Ghana	3.9
Kenya	3.9
Nigeria	5.5
South Africa	2.4
Tanzania	5.2
Uganda	5.4

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina	2.3
Bolivia	2.9
Brazil	1.7
Chile	1.8
Colombia	2
Costa Rica	1.7
Mexico	2.2
Nicaragua	2.2
Paraguay	2.5
Peru	2.4

**NORTH AMERICA**

Canada	1.5
United States	1.8

**OCEANIA**

Australia	1.7
New Zealand	1.8

**WESTERN EUROPE**

France	1.9
Germany	1.6
Ireland	1.8
Italy	1.3
Netherlands	1.6
Spain	1.3
Sweden	1.8
United Kingdom	1.8

**EASTERN EUROPE**

Hungary	1.5
Poland	1.4
Romania	1.4
Russian Federation	1.6

Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

Asia is, of course, a disparate region: it includes countries with relatively high fertility like India, Indonesia, and the Philippines (all above replacement but less than 3), and it also includes countries with “lowest low” (under 1.3) fertility: Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Japan, China, and Malaysia are also substantially below replacement despite not qualifying as “lowest low.”

All of our selected countries in North America, Europe, Oceania also have below replacement fertility, but Southern and Eastern Europe average 1.3 and 1.5 children per woman (respectively). None of the other countries besides Canada average less than 1.6 children per woman. Canada’s intermediate fertility level may result from a distinct policy regime in Quebec that increases the national average.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Nonmarital childbearing***

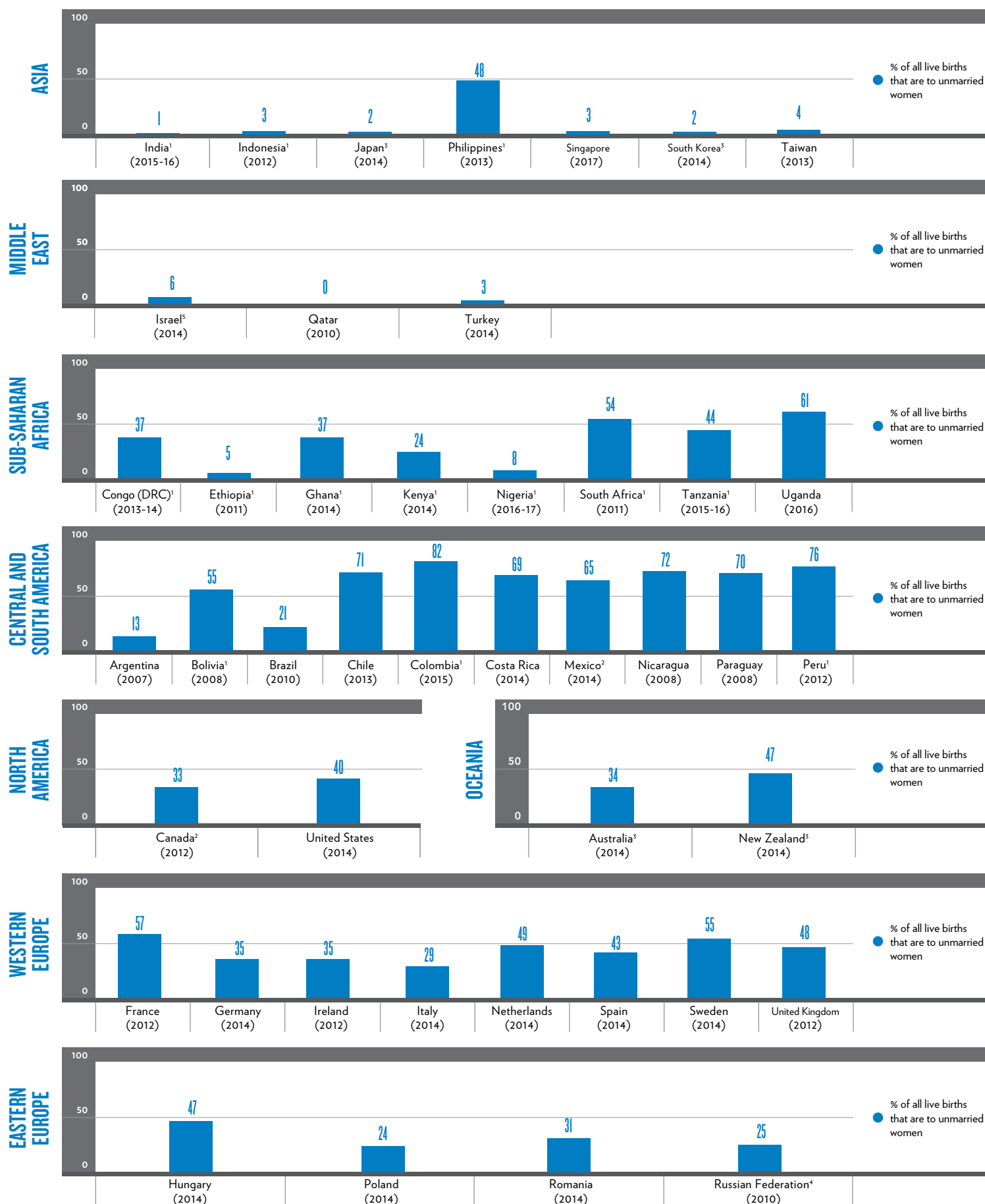
The global “retreat from marriage” is expected to produce higher rates of nonmarital childbearing. The clearest example of this comes from Colombia: only 17 percent of reproductive-age adults are married, and 18 percent of recent fertility occurred within marriage. Colombia has the highest share of nonmarital births among our target countries at 82 percent.

Patterns across the world illustrate that nonmarital childbearing is heavily influenced by both culture and economic development. Nonmarital childbearing has become much more common in North America, Europe, and Oceania over time, but the high levels in many Latin American and African countries also reflect traditional marriage patterns—not just affluence producing less need for marriage. In most Central/South American countries, more than two-thirds of children are born outside of marriage, and rates are especially high in subnational regions where cohabitation was an established institution even before colonization.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> R. R. Rindfuss, M. K. Choe, and S. R. Brauner-Otto, “The Emergence of Two Distinct Fertility Regimes in Economically Advanced Countries,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 35, no. 3 (2016): 287–304.

<sup>11</sup> Esteve, A., & Lesthaeghe, R. J. (eds.) *Cohabitation and Marriage in the Americas: Geo-historical Legacies and New Trends* (Springer, 2016).

**FIGURE 3** Births outside marriage, 2005-2017



More than one-third of children are born outside of marriage in most of our sub-Saharan African countries as well. The outliers are Ethiopia (5 percent) and Nigeria (8 percent), which have low rates of nonmarital childbearing by both African and world standards. The only other countries with fewer than 10 percent of births occurring outside of marriage are all in the Middle East or Asia (most fewer than 4 percent). The Philippines is quite unlike the other Asian countries in our sample with 48 percent of births outside of marriage; none of the Middle Eastern countries have double-digit rates. Even though childbearing outside of marriage is often characteristic of low fertility countries (with individualism sometimes posited as a common cause), Asian low fertility countries do not share this characteristic.

Among European countries, most of Eastern and Southern Europe have a smaller share of births that are nonmarital compared to Western and Northern Europe. Levels in North America and Oceania are similar to Eastern and Southern Europe.

While we are confident that [Figure 3](#) displays real variation across countries and regions in nonmarital fertility, we nonetheless conclude with a comment on the data that is similar to what we described with respect to cohabitation above: it is becoming harder to update what we know about the share of births outside of marriage. Most of the updates since our last report are from Demographic and Health Survey data where we've only approximated nonmarital fertility using the union status at interview among women having a baby in the last year. Two other key data sources do not have more recent data on nonmarital childbearing. First, OECD's most recent data on the share of births outside of marriage is from 2014. Second, the UN's World Fertility Report 2013 had an entire section on childbearing outside of marriage that was not included in the most recent (2015) World Fertility Report.

# Family Socioeconomics

## Key Findings

Socioeconomic indicators measure the material, human, and government resources that promote family and child well-being. To measure families' socioeconomic status, here we examine indicators related to poverty, undernourishment (as a marker of material deprivation), parental education and employment, and public family benefits.

- In this study, poverty is calculated as *absolute poverty* (the percentage of the population living on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars per day) and as *relative child poverty* (the percentage of children living in households earning less than half their country's median household income). The prevalence of absolute poverty in the countries in our study ranges from 0 in several countries to 88 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The incidence of relative poverty for children is between 6 percent and 31 percent, with the lowest rates found in Europe and Oceania and the highest rates found in Central/South America.
- In the Middle East, North America, Oceania, and Europe, less than 5 percent of the population is undernourished. Families in Africa, Asia, and South America face the highest risk of undernourishment.
- Levels of parental education, as shown by completion of secondary education, vary widely around the world. The lowest levels are found in Africa, followed by Asia, the Middle East, and Central/South America, while Europe boasts the highest levels of parental education.
- Between 38 and 97 percent of parents are employed worldwide, with the highest parental employment rates found in Asia. The Middle East shows consistently high rates, and medium to high rates are found in the Americas and Europe.
- Public family benefits across countries represented in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) range from less than 1 percent up to 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). According to the limited available data, Europe and Oceania offer the most generous benefits.

## Poverty

Children growing up in poverty face a higher risk of social, emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems than children from wealthier backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Children who are poor also score lower on cognitive tests and are less likely to be ready to enter school than their more affluent peers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Lempers, D. Clark-Lempers, and R. Simons, "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence," *Child Development* 60, no. 1 (1989); D. Seith and E. Isakson, "Who Are America's Poor Children? Examining Health Disparities among Children in the United States" (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> T. Halle et al., "Background for Community-Level Work on School Readiness: A Review of Definitions, Assessments, and Investment Strategies. Part II: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors to School Readiness" (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2000); K. A. Moore et al., "Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options," in *Child Trends Research Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009).

Poverty affects children differently depending on the age at which they experience it. Developmental differences between children who are poor and those who are not can be detected by the time the children turn two.<sup>7</sup> In adolescence, poverty can lead parents to be less nurturing and provide more inconsistent discipline, leading young people to feel lonely and depressed.<sup>8</sup>

Prolonged poverty is especially detrimental to healthy child development. In the United States, for instance, spending half (or more) of childhood in poverty is linked with an increased risk for teenage pregnancy, school failure, and inconsistent employment in adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

In the United States and elsewhere, poverty is often related to family structure: Children living in single-parent households, especially those headed by a woman, are more likely to grow up in poverty.<sup>10</sup> This report considers two measures of poverty as indicators of family socioeconomics: absolute poverty and relative poverty.

## ***Absolute poverty***

A measure of absolute poverty allows for a comparison of the living conditions of one country to those of others. Here we use the World Bank's international poverty line of living on 1.25 U.S. dollars a day in 2005 purchasing power, and we study the percentage of each country's population living below that line. One of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted in 2000, was to cut the global proportion of people who live on less than one U.S. dollar a day in half by 2015—a goal achieved in 2010.<sup>11</sup> But progress in reducing extreme poverty has been uneven. Sub-Saharan Africa, where the Millennium Development Goal is not expected to be met, continues to suffer from very high rates of extreme poverty.<sup>12</sup> Altogether, approximately 1 billion people, concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, still live in extreme poverty worldwide. Almost 60 percent of the people living in extreme poverty live in India, Nigeria, China, Bangladesh, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>13</sup> The United Nations' next set of proposed goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, includes eradicating extreme poverty entirely: ensuring that no person in the world subsists on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day.<sup>14</sup>

Data for this indicator come from the World Bank, which has compiled information from individual countries' government statistical agencies based on household surveys. Because individuals and countries themselves—not a more objective source—provide the information on poverty levels, it is possible that these numbers understate the true prevalence of absolute poverty.

Absolute poverty rates vary widely in Asia, but have decreased in recent years, ranging from 0 percent in Malaysia and Japan to 24 percent in India. The remaining Asian countries have absolute poverty rates between 6 percent and 19 percent, as shown in [Figure 4](#). China and India have achieved great progress on this indicator in recent years. In China, the rate of absolute poverty dropped from 23 percent in 2008 to 6 percent in 2011. In India, the proportion of people living on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day dropped from 33 percent in 2009 to 24 percent in 2011.

The selected Middle Eastern countries have relatively low levels of absolute poverty. Two percent of people at most live on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day in these countries.

<sup>7</sup> Moore et al., "Children in Poverty."

<sup>8</sup> Lempers et al., "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence."

<sup>9</sup> C. E. Ratcliffe and S. McKernan, "Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences" (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, "America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012).

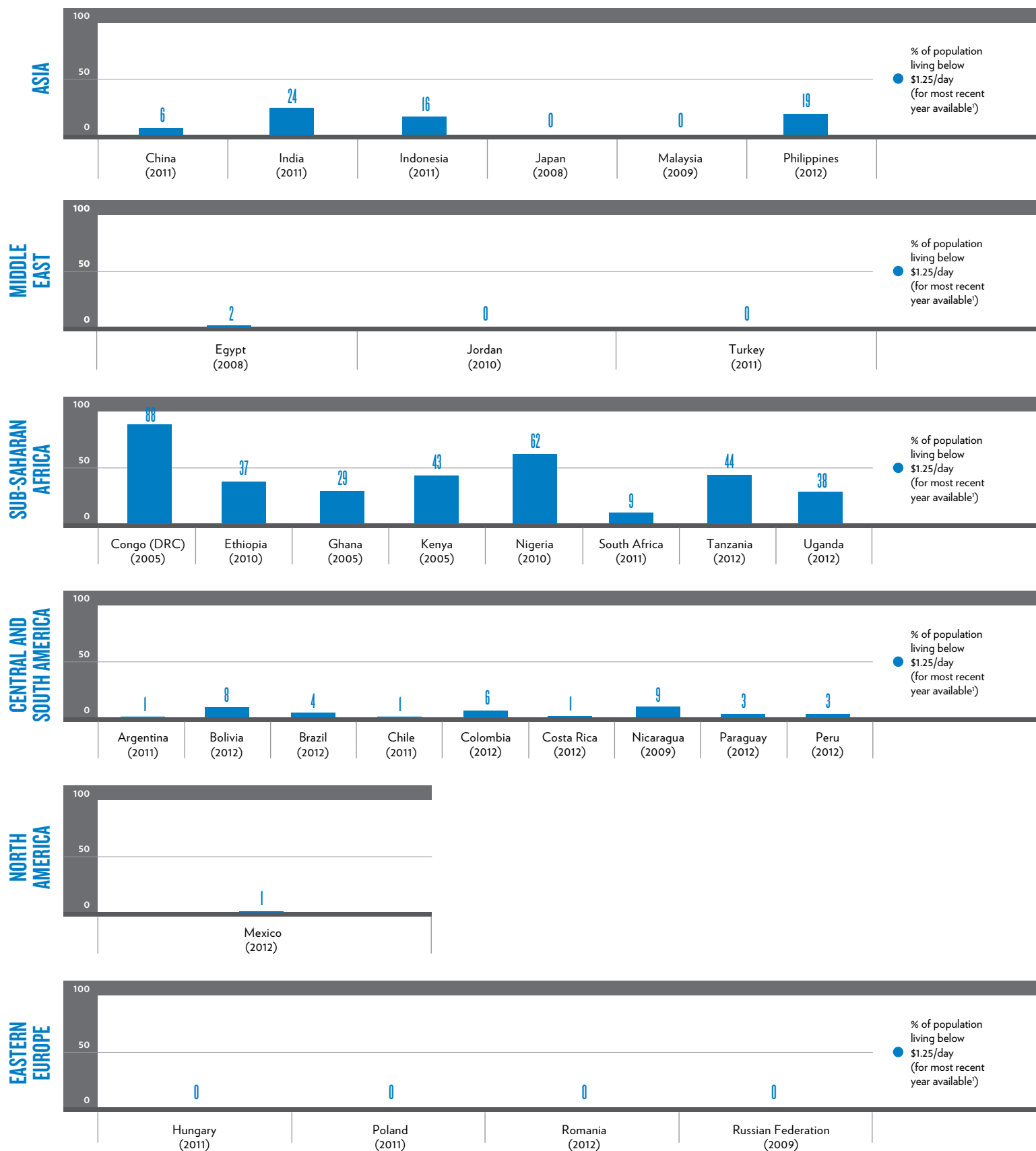
<sup>11</sup> United Nations, "The Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015" (United Nations, 2015).

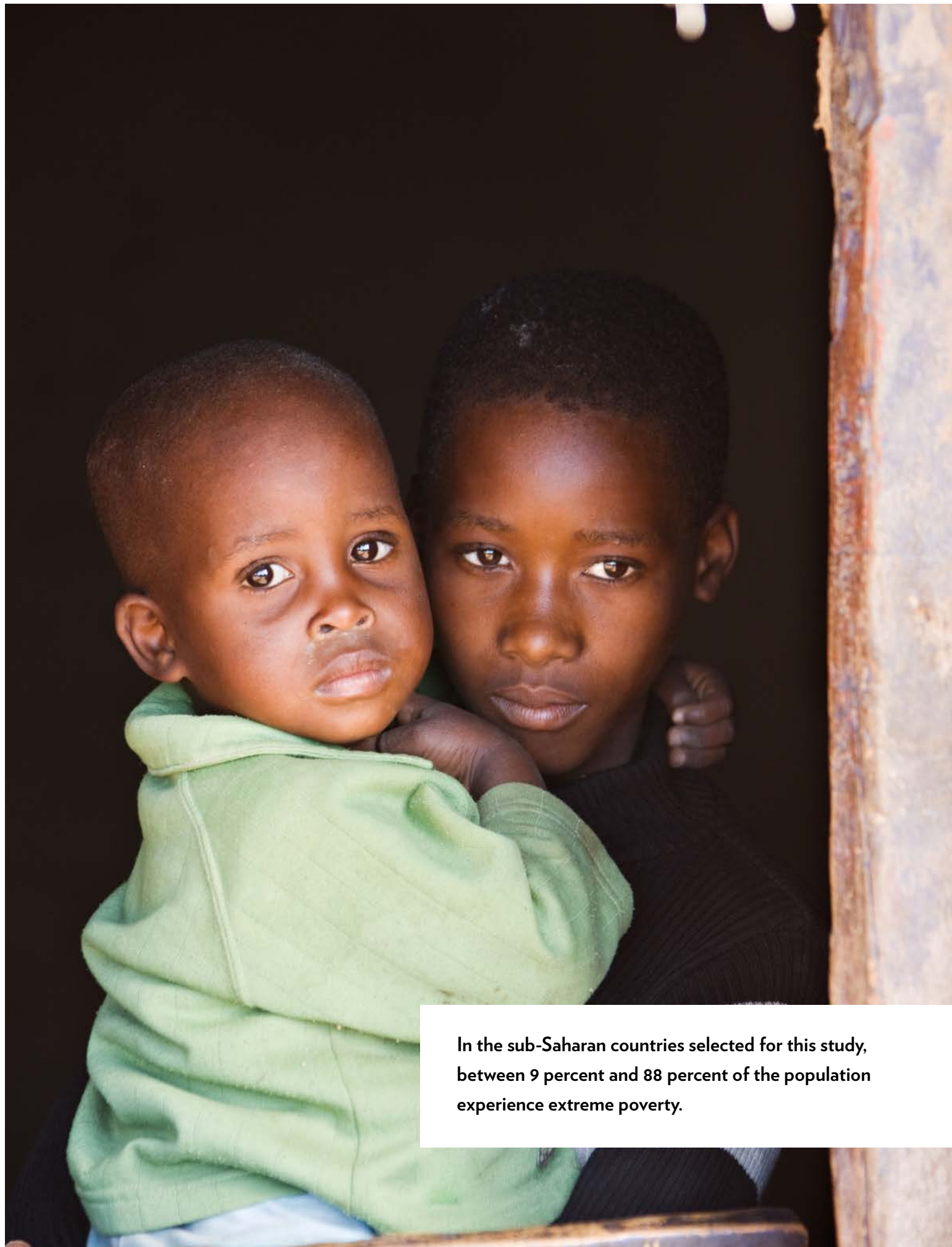
<sup>12</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015" (United Nations, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals" (United Nations, 2015), <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

**FIGURE 4** Absolute poverty, 2005-2012





In the sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 9 percent and 88 percent of the population experience extreme poverty.

The world's highest rates of absolute poverty are found in Africa. In the sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 9 percent and 88 percent of the population experience extreme poverty. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has the highest poverty rate: 88 percent of the population falls below the international poverty line. In Nigeria, 62 percent of the population does. Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania have the next highest poverty rates, at approximately 40 percent. South Africa is home to the lowest absolute poverty rate in sub-Saharan Africa at 9 percent in 2011, down from 17 percent in 2006. Other sub-Saharan countries have also reduced the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty. In Tanzania, for instance, there has been a remarkable decline in absolute poverty from 68 percent of the population in 2006 to 43.5 percent (still a high rate) in 2012.

In Central and South America, two countries (Bolivia and Nicaragua) have poverty rates that, at 8 and 8.5 percent, respectively, exceed those of the rest of the region. Bolivia, however, has recently reduced this rate significantly; it stood at 16 percent in 2006. In Colombia, 6 percent of people live on less than 1.25 USD per day. In the remaining Central and South American countries, less than 5 percent of people live in poverty.

In most countries in the remaining regions of the world—North America, Oceania, and Europe—less than 2 percent of people live on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day. Spain is the exception: 2.3 percent of people there live in absolute poverty.

### **Relative child poverty**

The *World Family Map* also presents rates of relative poverty to measure the well-being of children in middle- and high-income countries. These rates speak to the poverty experienced by children whose families are poor relative to other families in that country, rather than families in other countries. Specifically, the relative poverty indicator describes the share of children who live in households with household incomes that are less than half of the country's median income.<sup>15</sup> The higher the relative poverty rate, the more children live in poverty in comparison with the average household with children in that country. This indicator also speaks to the income distribution within a country.

Data for this indicator, which date from between 2002 and 2013, come from household surveys, as reported by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre's Measuring Child Poverty report card and LIS.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the countries for which relative child poverty was measured, between 6 percent and 31 percent of children live in households with incomes that are below half of the national median income. There is wide regional variation on this indicator, as [Figure 5](#) depicts.

The selected Asian countries have moderate rates of relative child poverty. In Taiwan and South Korea, 10 percent of children live in households with incomes that are below 50 percent of the population's median income. The rate is slightly higher for Japan, at 15 percent. Meanwhile, relative child poverty rates are much higher for China and India, at 29 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

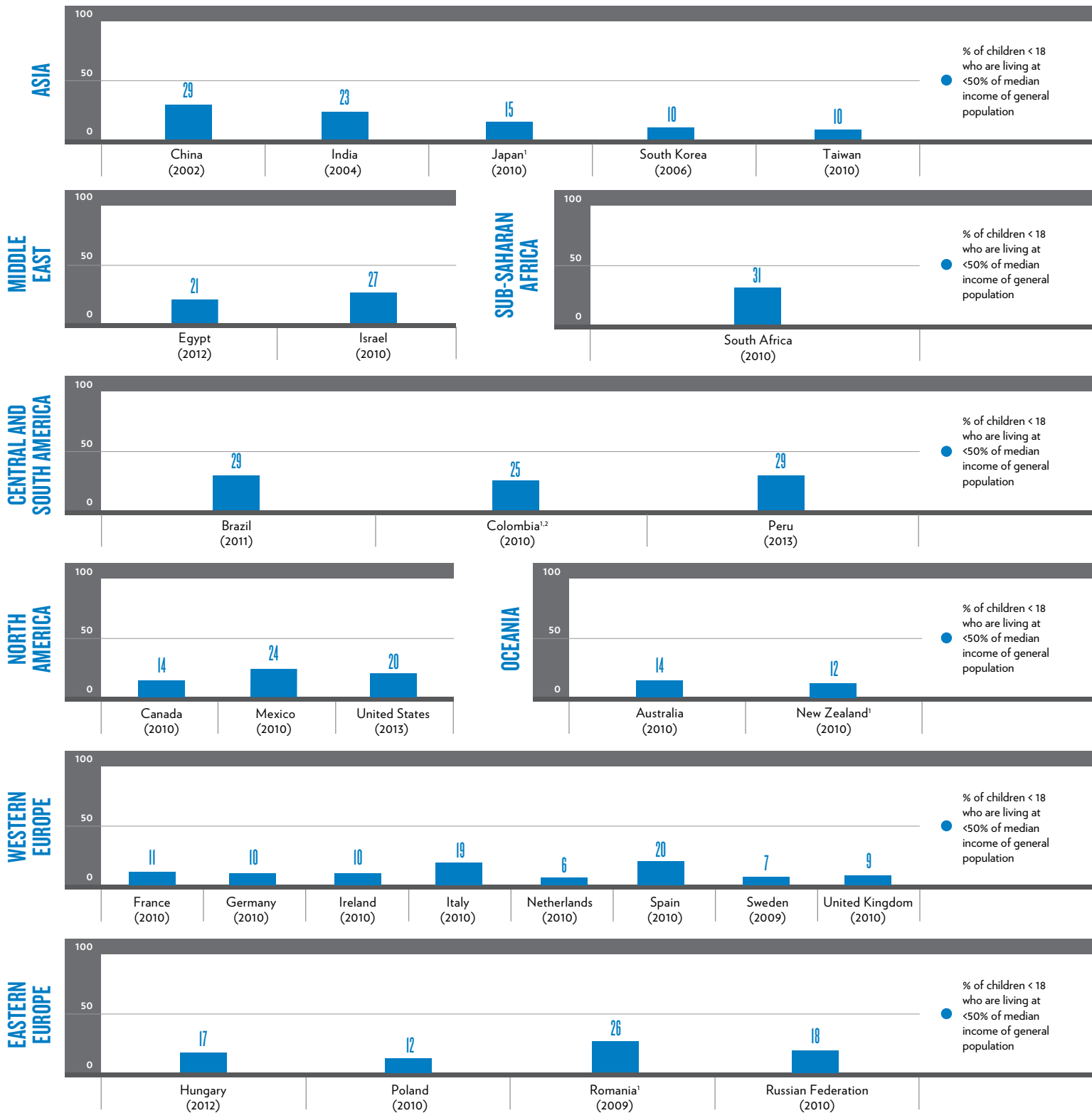
Israel, the sole representative of the Middle East on this indicator due to data limitations, has a relative child poverty rate of 27 percent.

Children in the three countries included in the study from South America have slightly higher relative poverty rates of 25 to 29 percent. The North American countries' relative child poverty rates fall between 14 percent and 24 percent. Canada has the lowest levels of relative child poverty in North America, with 14 percent of children living in households with incomes below half of the country's median income. The United States and Mexico have relative child poverty rates of 20 and 24 percent, respectively. In fact, the United States has one of the highest relative child poverty rates of the selected high-income nations.

<sup>15</sup> Income is adjusted according to household size and composition.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, "Measuring Child Poverty: New League Tables of Child Poverty in the World's Rich Countries," in *Innocenti Report Card 10* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012). Data come from EU-SILC 2009, HILDA 2009, PSID 2007, the Japanese Cabinet Office, Gender Equality Bureau (2011), and B. Perry, "Household Incomes in New Zealand: Trends in Indicators of Inequality and Hardship 1982 to 2010" (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Social Development, 2011).

**FIGURE 5** Relative poverty, 2002-2013



Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

In Oceania, Australia has a relative child poverty rate of 14 percent, and New Zealand one of 12 percent.

Western Europe experiences the lowest rates of relative child poverty of any region, led by the Netherlands and Sweden at 6 percent and 7 percent, respectively, which are the lowest rates in the world. France, Germany, Ireland, and the United Kingdom all have rates of approximately 10 percent. Italy and Spain have higher rates, around 20 percent.

In Eastern Europe, between 12 percent and 26 percent of children live in households with incomes below 50 percent of the country's median income. Poland has the region's lowest relative poverty rate, at 12 percent, whereas Romania has the highest, at 26 percent. In Hungary, where the relative poverty rate had been the lowest in the region at 11 percent in 2007, the proportion of children living in relative poverty increased by six percentage points to 17 percent in 2012.

## Undernourishment

Another of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals was to cut the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in half between 1990 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> While this goal has not been achieved, the percentage of people who are undernourished in developing regions decreased from 23 percent in 1990 to 1992 to less than 13 percent projected for 2014 to 2016. More than half of the monitored developing countries met their goal of cutting hunger in half.<sup>18</sup> Regions not projected to reach that milestone in 2015 include sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, southern and western Asia, and Oceania.<sup>19</sup>

The percentage of the population of each country that is undernourished is an indicator of material deprivation, which disproportionately affects families with children. In an effort to protect their children, mothers tend to go hungry before their children in some cultures.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, this practice means that undernourishment is passed from generation to generation, because pregnant women and their babies are especially vulnerable to the effects of hunger. For example, undernourished mothers are more likely to give birth to undernourished babies.<sup>21</sup>

Not having enough to eat and being poor are related in a cyclical fashion. Children growing up in families that lack the means to provide adequate and nutritious food are more likely to suffer physical ailments, such as blindness, stunted growth, iron deficiencies, and overall poor health. Children who are undernourished are also more likely to experience delays in mental development, to show symptoms of depression, and to have behavior problems. Academically, undernourished youth have lower achievement and lower IQs. All of these problems make it harder for young people to work and escape poverty later in life. Undernourishment is a factor in one in three deaths of children under five throughout the world.<sup>22</sup> In addition to causing a great deal of human suffering, undernourishment among children gives rise to a loss of productivity that can cost a country up to 3 percent of its gross domestic product.<sup>23</sup>

The *World Family Map* presents information on undernourishment for countries' entire population rather than for families with children specifically because the available data are limited. As it is, the data on undernourishment come from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Bank.<sup>24</sup> The FAO defines undernourishment as "a state, lasting for at least one year, of inability to acquire enough food, defined as a level of food intake insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements."<sup>25,26</sup>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Millennium Development Goals," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

<sup>18</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Meeting the 2015 International Hunger Targets: Taking Stock of Uneven Progress" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>20</sup> United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, "The Impact of High Food Prices on Maternal and Child Nutrition," in *SCN Side Event at the 34th Session of the Committee on World Food Security* (Rome: United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> E. Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children," in *Briefing Paper 7* (Washington: Bread for the World Institution, 2009).

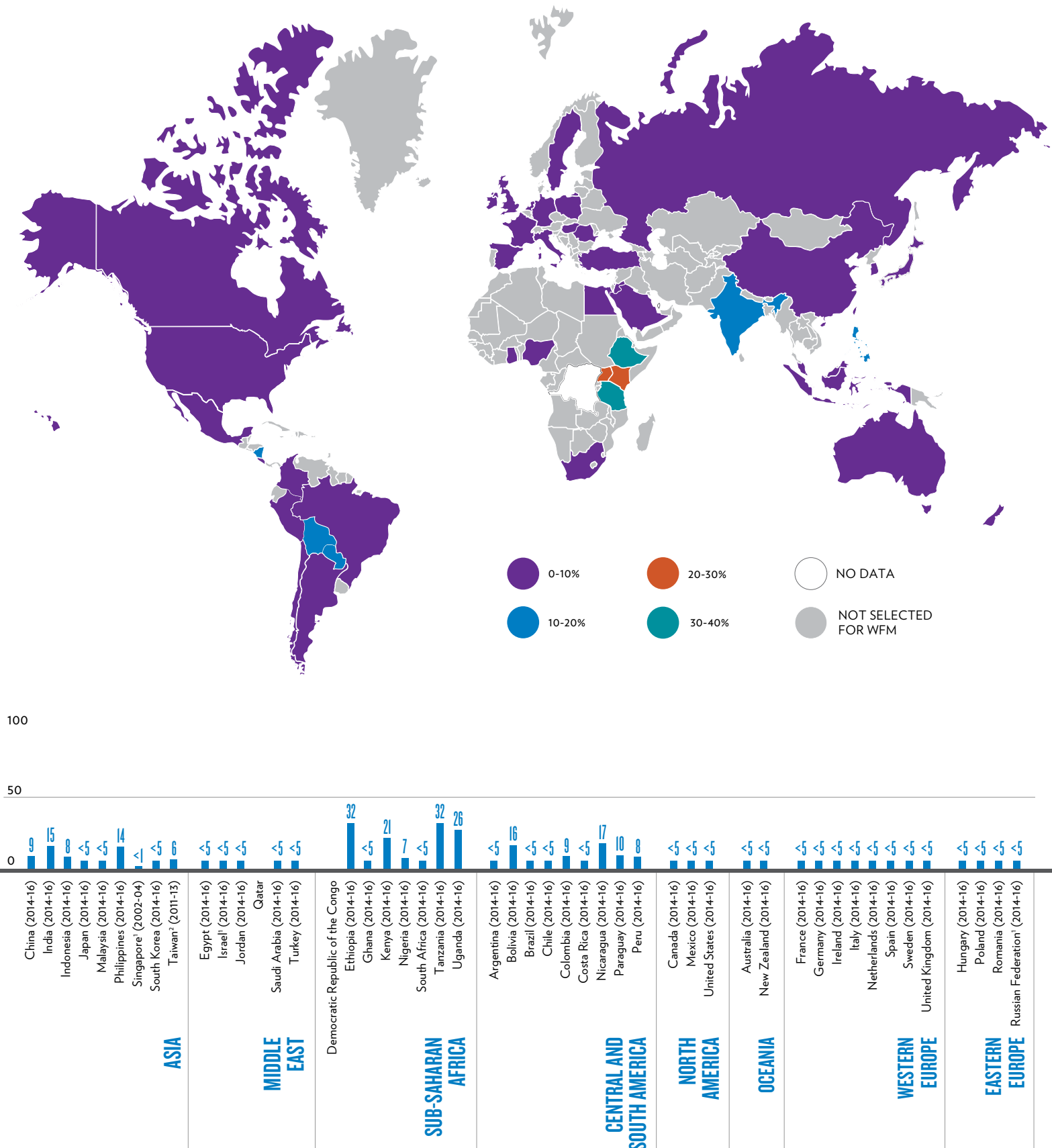
<sup>22</sup> M. Nord, "Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics," in *Economic Information Bulletin* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2009); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "The State of the World's Children 2012" (New York, NY: UNICEF, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children."

<sup>24</sup> Data for Taiwan come from C. Y. Yeh et al., "An Empirical Study of Taiwan's Food Security Index," *Public Health Nutrition* 13, no. 7.

**FIGURE 6** Undernourishment, circa 2015

*Percentage of total population who are undernourished*



In the majority of countries throughout the world with available data, less than 5 percent of the population is undernourished. All countries in Europe, the Middle East, North America, and Oceania have undernourishment rates under 5 percent. Countries with higher levels of undernourishment are concentrated in Africa, Asia, and South America, as [Figure 6](#) illustrates.

Undernourishment rates vary significantly in Asia, from under 5 percent (Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea) to 15 percent (India). Following India, the Asian countries with the highest levels of undernourishment are the Philippines and China, at 14 and 9 percent, respectively.

The countries in sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available suffer the world's highest levels of undernourishment. In Ethiopia and Tanzania, almost one in three people is undernourished; in Uganda, one out of four; and in Kenya, one out of five. Rates are much lower in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, where less than one in 10 people is undernourished. Despite decreases in the percentage of undernourished Africans, the number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa has actually increased due to high population growth.<sup>27</sup>

In Central and South America, rates of undernourishment are also inconsistent. The highest rates of undernourishment are found in Nicaragua and Bolivia, where approximately 16 percent of people are undernourished. Paraguay also has a high undernourishment rate, at 10.4 percent. Colombia and Peru have more moderate rates, at around 8 percent of the population. In the remaining countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Costa Rica, less than 5 percent of people are undernourished.

As these numbers show, the percentage of the population that suffers from undernourishment varies widely throughout the world, and does not always follow the level of absolute poverty in a given country. Some countries manage to protect their populations from undernourishment despite relatively high levels of poverty. While the absolute poverty data predate the undernourishment data, the percentage of the population living in absolute poverty (on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day) is greater than the percentage of the population that is undernourished in almost all of the Asian and sub-Saharan African countries for which data are available: India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Strikingly, in Nigeria 62 percent of people live on less than \$1.25 a day while only 7 percent are undernourished. A similar, though less extreme, story holds in Ghana, where 29 percent of people live in absolute poverty and less than 5 percent are undernourished. South America shows the opposite pattern: a larger proportion of the population is undernourished than living in absolute poverty. Why these differences? Some countries are able to make combating hunger a high priority among expenditures; in addition, private-sector programs, international food aid, subsistence agriculture, food pricing differences, and a country's food distribution infrastructure may play a role.<sup>28</sup>

## Parental Education

Parents' level of education influences their parenting behaviors and their children's well-being. Better-educated parents are more likely to read to their children and provide them with extracurricular activities, books, cognitive stimulation, and high educational expectations. Such parents are also more likely to be active in their children's schools and are less likely to use negative discipline techniques.<sup>29</sup> Internationally, children of well-educated parents demonstrate

<sup>25</sup> FAO, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World."

<sup>26</sup> Note that dates are not comparable. See Figure 8 for detail.

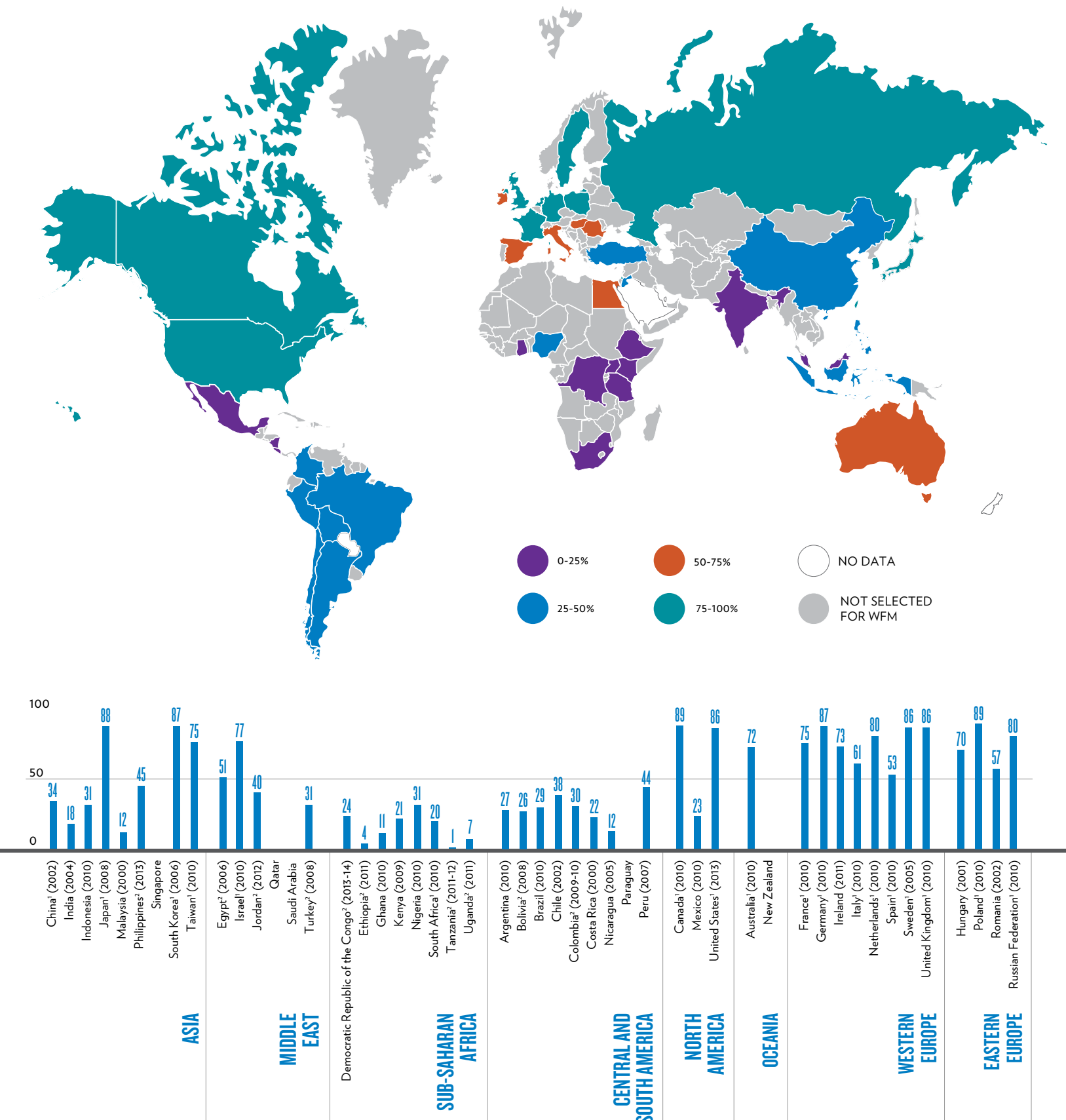
<sup>27</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>28</sup> FAO, WFP, and IFAD, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012: Economic Growth Is Necessary but Not Sufficient to Accelerate Reduction of Hunger and Malnutrition" (Rome: FAO, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> P. Davis-Kean, "The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment," *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005); E. Hair et al., "Parents Matter: Parental Education, Parenting and Child Well-Being" (paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, 2007); S. L. Hofferth and J. F. Sandberg, "How American Children Spend Their Time," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 2 (2001); K. R. Phillips, "Parent Work and Child Well-Being in Low-Income Families" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2002).

# FIGURE 7 Parental education, 2000-2014

Percentage of children in households in which household head has a secondary education



higher academic achievement and literacy.<sup>30,31</sup> Parents transmit their education, knowledge, skills, and other aspects of human capital to their sons and daughters, and parents' levels of education directly influence their access to social networks and well-paying jobs with benefits. They confer these advantages, in turn, to their children.

Due to data limitations, we use a proxy measure to gauge parental education: the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head has completed secondary education. [Figure 7](#) displays the results. The household head could be one of the child's parents, or else a grandparent (the most common non-parental head of household), or another type of relation. In Russia, 20 percent of children live in a household headed by their grandparents. In South Africa, 36 percent do.

In the United States, completing secondary education equates to earning a high school diploma or GED. Data for this indicator come from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International (IPUMS), the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), and LIS.<sup>32</sup>

Asian countries exhibit a huge range of parental education levels. In 2000, 12 percent of Malaysian children lived with a household head who had completed secondary education. Eighteen percent of children did so in India in 2004. In China, Indonesia, and the Philippines, between 31 percent and 45 percent of children lived with household heads who had completed secondary education. Education rates are much higher in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where 88 percent, 87 percent, and 75 percent of children, respectively, live with educated household heads. Children in Taiwan have grown more likely to live with educated household heads: the percentage of children living with household heads with secondary education increased from 67 percent in 2005 to 75 percent in 2010.

Of the Middle Eastern countries studied, Turkey has the lowest percentage of children living in a home with a household head who has completed secondary education, at 31 percent in 2008. In the remaining surveyed Middle Eastern countries, between 40 percent (Jordan in 2012) and 77 percent (Israel in 2010) of children live with a household head who has completed secondary education. The figure for Jordan increased by five percentage points between 2009 and 2012.

Parental education is lower in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions. In the sub-Saharan African countries studied, between 1 and 31 percent of children live in households in which the household head has completed secondary education. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Nigeria, at least one in five children lived in such households in 2007 to 2010.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, in Ethiopia, 4 percent of children lived in such households in 2011, and less than 1 percent of children did so in Tanzania in 2011 to 2012. The low education levels of household heads may reflect those of female household heads with little formal education, or, since living with extended family members is common in sub-Saharan Africa, the low education level of children's grandparents.

In Central and South America, there is great variation in the percentage of children living in a household in which the household head has completed secondary education, from 12 percent in Nicaragua to 44 percent in Peru. In many of the selected countries, between 26 and 30 percent of children lived with a household head with secondary education between 2008 and 2010. Notably, the percentage of Brazilian children who lived in a household in which the head of the household has completed secondary education increased almost 13 percentage points from 17 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2010.

North America also displays variation on this indicator. Twenty-three percent of Mexican children lived in a household in which the head of the household had completed secondary education in 2010, while 86 percent of American and 89 percent of Canadian children lived in such households in 2012.

Europe exhibits some of the highest rates of parental education. In Western Europe, between 53 percent (Spain) and 87 percent (Germany) of children live in a household in which the head of the household has completed secondary

<sup>30</sup> M. Lemke et al., "Outcomes of Learning: Results from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-Year-Olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> I. V. S. Mullis et al., "TIMSS 1999 International Mathematics Report: Findings from IEA's Repeat of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study at the Eighth Grade" (Boston: International Study Center, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> In this report, we generally present data for the most recent year available, giving priority to use the same source as much as possible, which differs across countries. As with other indicators, we caution readers to refrain from making direct comparisons between countries that have data from different years.

<sup>33</sup> In South Africa, 19.7 percent of children lived in such households.

education. Spain and Italy have the lowest levels of parental education in Western Europe, at 53 percent and 61 percent, respectively. In contrast, over 85 percent of children live in such households in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

In Eastern Europe, between 57 percent (Romania) and 89 percent (Poland) of children live with household heads with a secondary education, while in Hungary and Russia, the figures stand at 70 percent and 80 percent, respectively.

## Parental Employment

Researchers agree that poverty has detrimental effects on child and adolescent outcomes. Employed parents are more likely to be able to provide for their children, to connect their families to important social networks, and to serve as important role models for productive engagement. Having an employed parent gives children greater access to goods and services that are especially valuable during childhood, such as health care. In fact, adolescents of unemployed parents report lower levels of health.<sup>34</sup>

Parental unemployment can create stress in a family. The financial and emotional strain associated with it can lead to depression and lower levels of satisfaction with a spouse or partner.<sup>35</sup> The family conflict this strain creates, whether in the setting of an intact family or one separated by divorce, is detrimental to children's flourishing.<sup>36</sup>

Parental employment is also related to the number of parents present in a household. Children living with two parents are less likely to live in a jobless household than children living with one parent.<sup>37</sup>

Data limitations restrict the measurement of parental employment to the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head has a job. This measure is limited in a number of ways. It does not describe whether the employment is full-time or year-round, paid or unpaid, or say how many hours a day the provider is working. Again, the household head is not necessarily a parent of the child, but could be a grandparent or other relative. In addition, the measure does not shed light on what the parent's work means in the context of the child's life. For example, the data about parental employment do not reveal whether one or multiple adults in the household are working, where and with whom the child spends time while the parent is working, how old the child is while the parent is working, or what hours of the day the parent is working, all of which can impact child well-being.

The data we use to calculate parental employment are drawn from LIS and Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International (IPUMS) and date from 2000 to 2013. This indicator is very sensitive to country economic conditions and general economic climate, so comparisons across countries for different years should not be made.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the world, between 38 and 97 percent of children under the age of 18 live in households in which the head of the household is employed. See [Table 2](#) for more details.

As a region, Asia has the highest percentages of children living in households with an employed household head, ranging from 76 percent in Japan in 2008 to 97 percent in Taiwan in 2010.

Parental employment levels are slightly lower in the selected Middle Eastern countries. Israel, Jordan, and Turkey have parental employment rates of less than 80 percent. In Egypt, 85 percent of children lived in a household with an employed head of household in 2002.

The selected sub-Saharan African countries show the largest regional variation in parental employment rates. Thirty-eight percent of children live in a household with an employed household head in South Africa, whereas 87 percent do in Ghana and Tanzania. Reflecting the global recession, the percentage of children who live in a household with an employed household head decreased from 45 percent to 38 percent between 2008 and 2010 in South Africa.

<sup>34</sup> M. Sleskova et al., "Does Parental Unemployment Affect Adolescents' Health?," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, no. 5 (2006).

<sup>35</sup> A. D. Vinokur, R. H. Price, and R. D. Caplan, "Hard Times and Hurtful Partners: How Financial Strain Affects Depression and Relationship Satisfaction of Unemployed Persons and Their Spouses," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>36</sup> G. D. Sandefur and A. Meier, "The Family Environment: Structure, Material Resources and Child Care," in *Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being: Completing the Picture*, ed. B. V. Brown (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> OECD, "Doing Better for Families."

<sup>38</sup> Note that dates are not comparable. See Table 2 for detail.

**TABLE 2 Parental employment, 2000-2013**

*Percentage of children under 18 in households in which the household head is employed*

ASIA		MIDDLE EAST		SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA	
China (2002)	92	Egypt (2012)	85	Democratic Republic of the Congo	–	Argentina <sup>1</sup> (2010)	82
India (2004)	89	Israel (2010)	76	Ethiopia	–	Bolivia <sup>1</sup> (2001)	71
Indonesia <sup>1</sup> (2010)	93	Jordan <sup>1</sup> (2004)	72	Ghana <sup>1</sup> (2000)	87	Brazil (2011)	78
Japan (2008)	76	Qatar	–	Kenya <sup>1</sup> (2009)	85	Chile <sup>1</sup> (2002)	68
Malaysia <sup>1</sup> (2000)	88	Saudi Arabia	–	Nigeria <sup>1</sup> (2010)	92	Colombia (2010)	82
Philippines	–	Turkey <sup>1</sup> (2000)	77	South Africa (2010)	38	Costa Rica <sup>1</sup> (2000)	80
Singapore	–			Tanzania <sup>1</sup> (2002)	87	Nicaragua <sup>1</sup> (2005)	76
South Korea (2006)	93			Uganda <sup>1</sup> (2002)	75	Paraguay	–
Taiwan (2010)	97					Peru (2013)	90

NORTH AMERICA		OCEANIA		WESTERN EUROPE		EASTERN EUROPE	
Canada (2010)	88	Australia (2010)	83	France (2010)	88	Hungary (2012)	74
Mexico <sup>1</sup> (2010)	82	New Zealand	–	Germany (2010)	81	Poland (2010)	91
United States (2013)	74			Ireland (2010)	55	Romania <sup>1</sup> (2002)	63
				Italy (2010)	77	Russian Federation (2010)	73
				Netherlands (2010)	87		
				Spain (2010)	73		
				Sweden (2005)	90		
				United Kingdom (2010)	79		

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2019/ependix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2019/ependix)

Central and South America's parental employment rates exhibit a smaller range, from 68 percent in Chile to 90 percent in Peru. Notably, in Argentina the percentage of children who live with an employed household head increased from 68 percent in 2001 to 82 percent in 2010; however, these figures include those working even minimally in the informal sector.

In North America, parental employment rates range from 74 percent in the United States to 82 percent in Mexico and 88 percent in Canada. In Australia, the sole country for which we have data in Oceania, the parental employment rate was 83 percent in 2010.

In Western Europe, parental employment rates range from 55 percent in Ireland to 90 percent in Sweden.<sup>39</sup> In the majority of remaining selected countries in this region, approximately eight in 10 children live in a household in which the head of household is employed. In this region, between 2004 and 2010 the parental employment rate decreased by at least five percentage points in Ireland and Spain, while it actually increased in the Netherlands by five percentage points.

Eastern Europe's levels of parental employment, which fall between 73 and 91 percent, resemble those of Western Europe. Romania is an exception to these relatively high rates: 63 percent of children in the country lived in a household in which the head of the household was employed in 2002. In Russia, parental employment fell from 84 percent in 2000 to 73 percent in 2010, while in Hungary, parental employment rose between 2004 and 2010 from 85 to 91 percent and then fell back down to 74 percent in 2012.

## Public Spending on Family Benefits

Government spending on benefits for families provides them with many types of support. For instance, government benefits allow parents to take time off work to take care of a newborn, and help replace lost income during this time. As the children grow older, government-provided child care and education support parents' employment.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports family benefits, including child care supports, parental leave benefits, child allowances, and family tax breaks. Unfortunately, these data are only available for members of the OECD, which are middle- and high-income nations. These data are also limited because funding plans

<sup>39</sup> Interpret Sweden's rate with caution. More than 15 percent of data is missing.

differ between countries, and in certain places the measures may not include local expenditures.<sup>40</sup>

The level of public spending on family benefits serves as one potential measure of governmental spending priorities. Here, we focus on the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that a country allocates to family benefits. As presented in Table 3, governments spent between less than half of a percent and 3.9 percent of their GDP on benefits exclusively for families circa 2011. There were no changes in this indicator exceeding five percentage points between 2009 and 2012.

In Asia, Japan spent 1.4 percent of its GDP on family benefits and South Korea 1.2 percent. Israel spent 2.0 percent of its GDP on family benefits, despite a hefty military budget.

In North America, spending on family benefits hovers around 1 percent, ranging from 0.7 percent in the United States to 1.2 percent in Canada. Chile, the only South American country for which data are available, devotes slightly more government spending to families, at 1.4 percent of its GDP.

Oceanic countries place more monetary emphasis on family benefits: New Zealand spent 3.3 percent of its GDP in this area, and Australia spent 2.7 percent.

Western European countries are home to the highest levels of government spending on family benefits. Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom led the selected countries by spending approximately 4 percent of their GDP on family benefits. France and Germany also spent more than 2 percent of their GDP on family benefits, whereas the remaining European countries spent approximately 1.5 percent.

In Eastern Europe, Hungary spent more than 3 percent of its GDP on family benefits, whereas Poland and Romania spent 1.3 and 1.7 percent, respectively. Hungary's generous spending could help counteract the large rise in the rate of relative child poverty that it experienced between 2007 and 2012.

<sup>40</sup> OECD, "Public Spending on Family Benefits," [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF1\\_1\\_Public\\_spending\\_on\\_family\\_benefits\\_Oct2013.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF1_1_Public_spending_on_family_benefits_Oct2013.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Data reported for Romania are from 2007, as updated data were not available from the OECD.

**TABLE 3** Public spending on family benefits, circa 2011

*Public spending on family benefits in cash, services, and tax measures, in percent of GDP*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China –	Egypt –	Democratic Republic of the Congo –	Argentina –
India –	Israel <sup>1</sup> 2.0	Ethiopia –	Bolivia –
Indonesia –	Jordan –	Ghana –	Brazil –
Japan 1.4	Qatar –	Kenya –	Chile 1.4
Malaysia –	Saudi Arabia –	Nigeria –	Colombia –
Philippines –	Turkey 0.0	South Africa –	Costa Rica –
Singapore –		Tanzania –	Nicaragua –
South Korea 1.2		Uganda –	Paraguay –
Taiwan –			Peru –
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada 1.2	Australia 2.7	France 2.9	Hungary 3.3
Mexico 1.1	New Zealand 3.3	Germany 2.2	Poland 1.3
United States 0.7		Ireland 3.9	Romania <sup>2</sup> 1.7
		Italy 1.5	Russian Federation –
		Netherlands 1.6	
		Spain 1.4	
		Sweden 3.6	
		United Kingdom 4.0	

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2019/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2019/eppendix)

# Family Processes

## Key Findings

Family process indicators describe the interactions between members of a family, including their relationships, views on the roles of family members, time spent together, and satisfaction with family life. It is challenging to obtain data on family processes that allow for international comparisons, but there has been some improvement in this situation with the release of new data.

Here we discuss several indicators of family process that can influence child and family well-being: self-reported family satisfaction; views on partners' contribution to household income; how regularly parents and children discuss school; how often families eat meals together; and how much time parents and teenagers spend talking. There is wide variation on these measures across the few countries that have data available.

- **Between 30 percent (South Korea) and 78 percent (Argentina) of adults around the world are completely or very satisfied with their family life (17 countries with information).**
- **More than half of adults agree that both men and women should contribute to household income, with agreement ranging from 54 percent (Australia) to 92 percent (Philippines) (18 countries).**
- **Across surveyed countries, between 44 percent and 92 percent of 15-year-olds spend time just talking to their parents every day or almost every day. The percentage of 15-year-olds who eat the main meal with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 60 percent in South Korea to 94 percent in Italy (seven countries).**

## Family Satisfaction

Satisfaction with family life both influences and is influenced by family structure, economics, and culture. As in previous years, the highest levels of family satisfaction are found in South America, where 78 percent of Argentineans and 67.5 percent of Chileans report being completely or very satisfied with their family life, as seen in [Figure 8](#). Adults in Asia experience the lowest levels of family satisfaction, with only 30 percent of South Korean adults and 32 percent of Chinese adults expressing satisfaction with their family life. In India and the Philippines, however, adults report more family satisfaction, with 51.5 percent and 68 percent reporting satisfaction, respectively. The surveyed countries in North America and Eastern and Western Europe fall in the middle, with satisfaction rates between 34 and 66.5 percent.

There were some notable changes in levels of satisfaction with family life between 2002 and 2012. The reasons for these changes in satisfaction are not immediately apparent, and the changes may simply be due to methodological differences between years of the study.<sup>42</sup> In 2002, Eastern Europe had the lowest levels of family satisfaction of any region. In the past decade, however, the proportion of adults reporting being satisfied with their families increased by 18 percentage points in Poland. Similarly, the proportion of adults reporting satisfaction increased by almost 11 percentage points in the Philippines. Conversely, rates of satisfaction decreased by more than five percentage points in Chile and Ireland.

<sup>42</sup> For example, in Poland, only citizens were surveyed in 2002, whereas in 2012 adults of any nationality in Poland were sampled.

## Views on Contributions to Household Income

Around the world, one-half of all working-age women work. The percentage of women working remains highly variable by country and region.<sup>43</sup> Here, we are reporting the percentage of adults who agree or strongly agree that both the man and the woman should contribute to household income. Data come from the 2012 ISSP and are displayed in [Figure 8](#). In all countries with data available, more than half of adults agree that both partners should contribute financially, with rates of agreement ranging from a low of 54 percent in Australia to a high of 92 percent in the Philippines.

Regionally, the highest rates of support for dual-income families are in sub-Saharan Africa (represented by South Africa), South America (represented by Argentina and Chile), and non-English-speaking parts of Western Europe. In each of these regions, over 80 percent of adults say that both men and women should contribute to household income. Rates of agreement are similar in Eastern Europe, at 76 percent in Russia and Poland, and more varied in Asia, where they range from 67 percent in South Korea to 92 percent in the Philippines.

The lowest rates of agreement are found in English-speaking countries of several different regions: in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States, less than 65 percent of adults agree that both the man and woman should earn income for the family. In spite of this fact, over half of women are part of the labor force in each of these countries,<sup>44</sup> and support for working moms is moderately high (as described below). Though it may seem surprising, English-speaking countries tend to hang together with more traditional values.<sup>45</sup>

With all attitude-based indicators, it is important to keep in mind that attitudes and behaviors do not always align.<sup>46</sup> For additional information on the distribution of household labor and gender attitudes, see the essay in the 2015 *World Family Map* report.

## Discussions With Parents

Communicating with children, both generally and about school, is a positive family activity that any parent can do, and that can enhance parent-youth relationships as well as student academic outcomes.<sup>47</sup> Here we will report on two different indicators of parent-adolescent communication: how often they talk in general and how often they discuss school. Data for this indicator come from the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. The PISA sample contains primarily middle- and higher-income countries, and only eight countries included in the *World Family Map* chose to include questions on parental communication with students. PISA asks parents of 15-year-olds how frequently they discuss their son or daughter's school performance with them and how often the two spend time talking about anything. The indicators report the percentage of 15-year-olds whose parents report that they have such conversations every day or almost every day.

How often students discuss school with and spend time just talking to their parents varies widely throughout the world. In some regions, discussing school is more popular, while in others general conversation occurs more often. Across surveyed countries, between 44 and 92 percent of 15-year-olds spend time just talking to their parents every day or almost every day, and between 19 and 79 percent of teens discuss how well they are doing at school with their parents as frequently, as seen in [Figure 9](#).

<sup>43</sup> World Bank, "World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2" (World Bank, 2015).

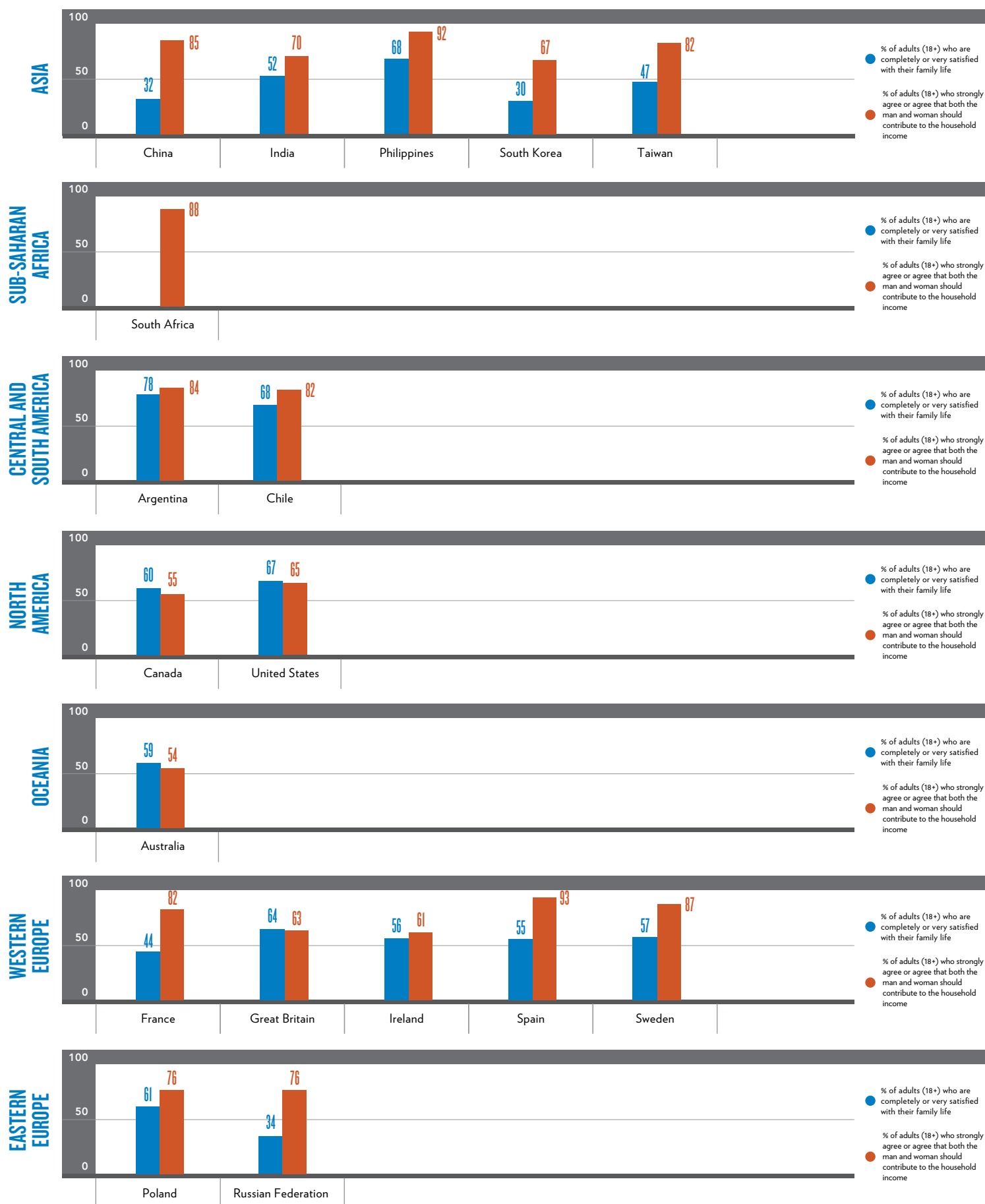
<sup>44</sup> World Bank, "World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2."

<sup>45</sup> B. Ebbinghaus, "Comparing Welfare State Regimes: Are Typologies an Ideal or Realistic Strategy?" in *European Social Policy Analysis Network, ESPAnet Conference* (Edinburgh, UK, 2012); G. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> B. A. Hopkins, "Gender and Provisioning under Different Capitalisms," in *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life*, ed. D. M. Figart and T. L. Varnecke (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> D. H. Caro, "Parent-Child Communication and Academic Performance: Associations at the within- and between-Country Level," *Journal for Educational Research Online* 3, no. 2 (2011); G. Hampden-Thompson, L. Guzman, and L. Lippman, "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2013).

**FIGURE 8** Family satisfaction and views on contribution to household income, 2012



In Asia, 15-year-olds from South Korea and from two Special Administrative Regions in China, Hong Kong and Macao, are less likely to discuss how well they are doing in school with their parents every day or almost every day than those in other parts of the world. In Macao, just 19 percent do so, while in South Korea 28 percent and in Hong Kong 31 percent do so. By contrast, students in these Asian regions talked to their parents frequently about more general topics at similar rates to students in other regions, from 39 percent in Macao to 66 percent in Hong Kong.

In the Americas, represented by Chile and Mexico, students are more likely to discuss school with their parents than to spend time just talking—a pattern unique to these regions. About 60 percent of students discuss school with their parents daily or almost daily, while about 45 percent of students spend time just talking to their parents with the same frequency.

In Europe, teens have comparatively more discussions with their parents. In Italy and Hungary, approximately three-quarters of 15-year-olds talk with their parents daily or almost daily both about their school performance and about other topics. German teens are less likely to discuss school with their parents (just 36 percent do so almost every day or daily) but are the most likely to spend time just talking to their parents on a daily or near-daily basis, with 92 percent doing so.

## Family Meals

When families eat meals together regularly, children can talk with their parents and share what is going on in their lives.<sup>48</sup> It is a direct measure of a positive family process.

In the United States, eating together as a family has been linked to myriad positive outcomes, ranging from reduced levels of substance and alcohol use to lower levels of depression, even after accounting for other family factors. Eating meals together is also associated with favorable educational outcomes, such as showing a commitment to learning, seeking and earning higher grades, spending more time on homework, and reading for pleasure.<sup>49</sup> After including controls for background characteristics, one study found that eating meals as a family was the most important predictor of adolescent flourishing.<sup>50</sup> Recent longitudinal research has found that the value of eating meals together as a family may dissipate as adolescents enter young adulthood, leaving only indirect effects on well-being.<sup>51</sup> The influence of sharing meals on young people's outcomes also depends on the quality of family relationships. While sharing meals in families with stronger relationships has been found to have positive associations with child well-being, sharing meals has been found to have less influence on children's development in families that are marked by poorer or conflict-filled relationships.<sup>52</sup>

Internationally, research has demonstrated that students who eat meals with their families more frequently are more likely to achieve high scores in reading literacy in 16 out of 21 examined countries. This relationship is more consistent than that between discussing general topics with parents and reading literacy.<sup>53</sup>

Families all around the world eat meals together, though the particular meal of importance may vary from country to country, and adolescents and their parents agree that eating together is important, although parents place more value on mealtime.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners VI" (New York: Columbia University, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> M. Eisenberg et al., "Correlations between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being among Adolescents," *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 158, no. 8 (2004); J. A. Fulkerson et al., "Family Dinner Meal Frequency and Adolescent Development: Relationships with Developmental Assets and High-Risk Behaviors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 39, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>50</sup> N. Zarett and R. Lerner, "Ways to Promote the Positive Development of Children and Youth," in *Research-to-Results Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2008).

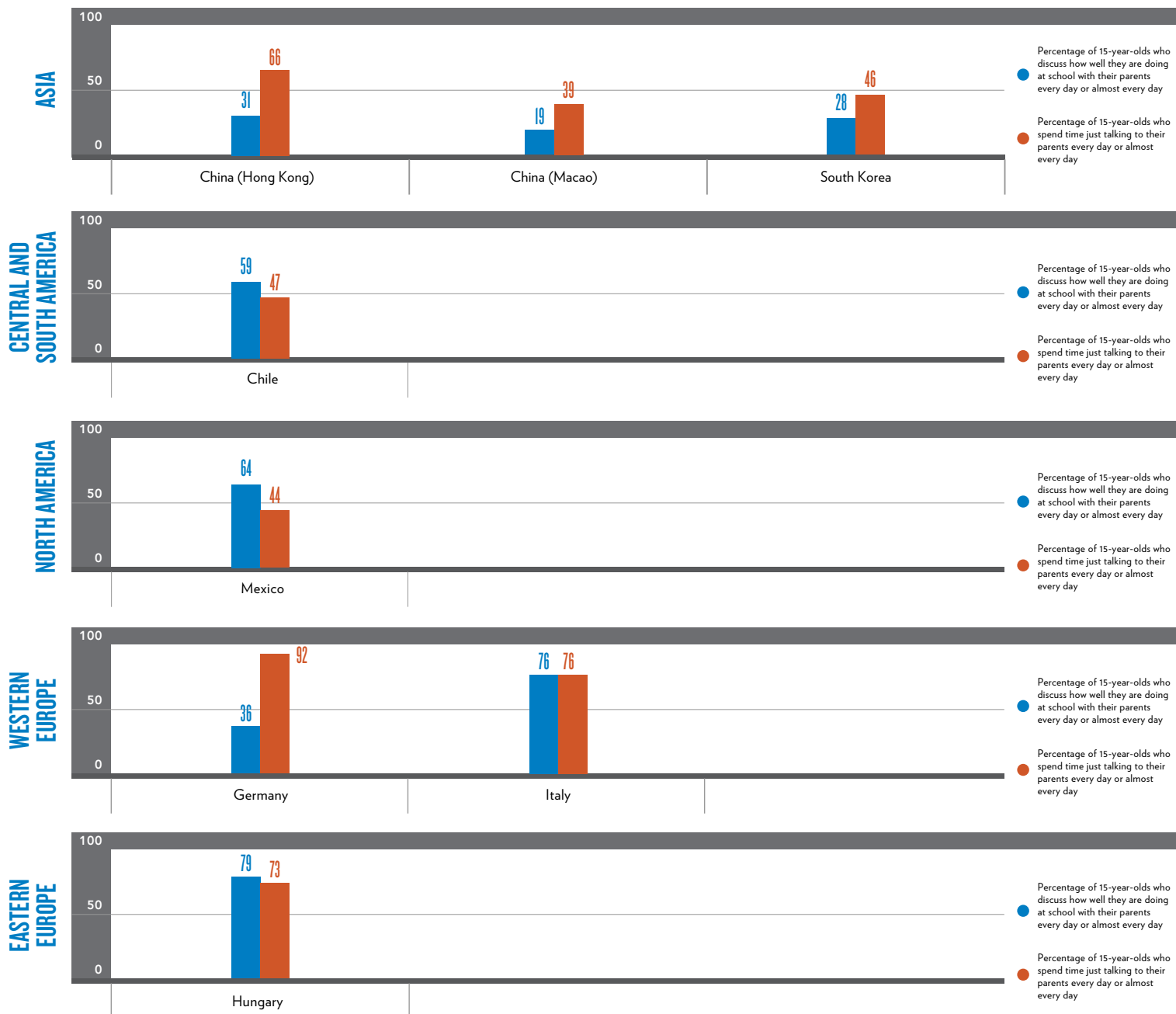
<sup>51</sup> K. Musick and A. Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Musick and Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations."

<sup>53</sup> Hampden-Thompson et al., "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy."

<sup>54</sup> J. A. Fulkerson, D. Neumark-Sztainer, and M. Story, "Adolescent and Parent Views of Family Meals," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106, no. 4 (2006).

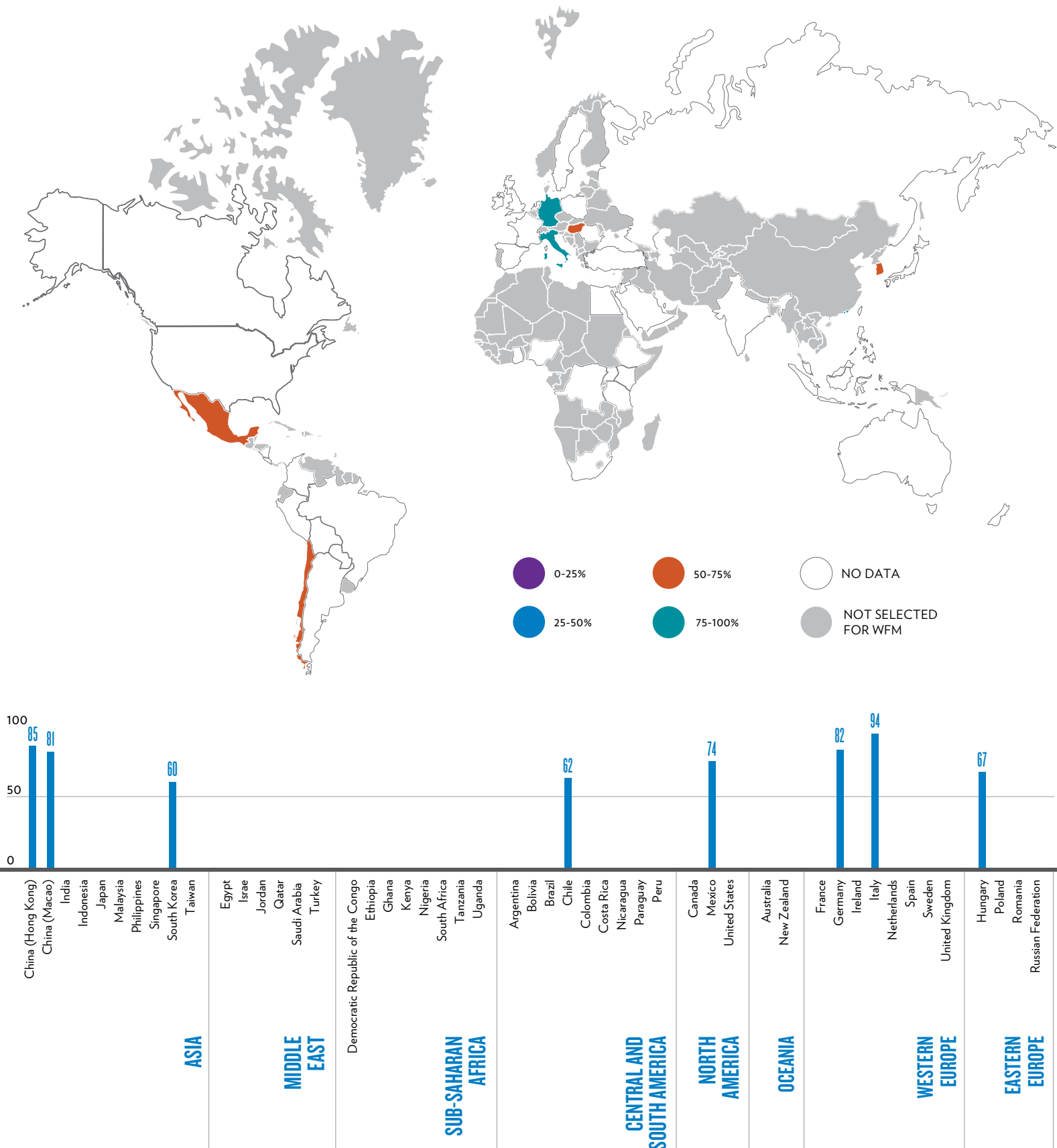
**FIGURE 9** Parental involvement, 2012



Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

# FIGURE 10 Family meals, 2012

Percentage of 15-year-olds who eat the main meal with their parents around a table every day or almost every day



The *World Family Map* presents the proportion of children who eat the main meal of the day with their families every day or almost every day as an indicator of family processes. The information for this indicator is drawn from the direct answers given by parents of 15-year-olds from a variety of countries participating in the 2012 PISA survey.

These data indicate that the percentage of 15-year-olds who frequently eat meals with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 60 percent in South Korea to 94 percent in Italy, as seen in [Figure 10](#).

In Asia, represented by South Korea and two regions in China, there is diversity in the number of teens who eat with their parents on a daily or almost daily basis. Sixty percent of teens in South Korea eat the main meal with their parents almost every day or daily, while more than 80 percent do in both Macao and Hong Kong. Around six in 10 teens (62 percent) eat the main meal of the day with their parents in South America, as represented by Chile. Rates are higher in North America and Europe, where between 67 percent (Hungary) and 94 percent (Italy) of teens eat the main meal with their parents every day or almost every day. Mexican and German teens fall in between, with 74 percent and 82 percent of teens, respectively, eating with their parents at least almost every day.

The differences in the frequency of families' eating meals together may reflect differences in family structure, time use, proximity of work and school to home, rates of female labor-force participation, and cultural patterns.



In Asia, represented by South Korea and two regions in China, there is diversity in the number of teens who eat with their parents on a daily or almost daily basis. Sixty percent of teens in South Korea eat the main meal with their parents almost every day or daily, while more than 80 percent do in both Macao and Hong Kong



# Family Culture

## Key Findings

Family culture refers to the family-related attitudes and norms a country's citizens express. Data suggest that adults take a range of progressive and conservative positions on family issues.

- Attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood differ from one region to another, with adults in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania leaning more toward acceptance (with a high acceptance rate of 80 percent in Spain), and those in Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa leaning more toward rejection (as evidenced by an acceptance rate of only 2 percent in Egypt and Jordan).
- About half of adults agree that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, with support ranging from 24 percent in China to 69 percent in South Africa.
- In all of the countries featured in this study with available data, most adults—from 52 percent in Chile to 84 percent in Taiwan—believe that working mothers can establish relationships with their children that are just as good as those of stay-at-home mothers.
- Most adults worldwide report that they completely trust their families; however, levels of trust vary by region and country, with 63 percent of adults reporting they completely trust their families in the Netherlands, and 99 percent reporting this to be the case in Egypt. It should be noted that the willingness of adults to affirm the term “completely” (regardless of the topic) varies across countries.

To shed light on adults' attitudes toward family life around the world, we relied on data from the World Values Survey (WVS), collected between 2000 and 2013, and the 2012 edition of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) surveys on four cultural indicators in 32 countries: 1) approval of single motherhood, 2) agreement that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents, 3) approval of working mothers, and 4) presence of family trust.<sup>55</sup> Given that respondents in different countries may interpret the questions and response categories somewhat differently, and that population representation of the surveys varies from country to country, the WVS and ISSP do not allow us to draw a perfect comparison between countries.

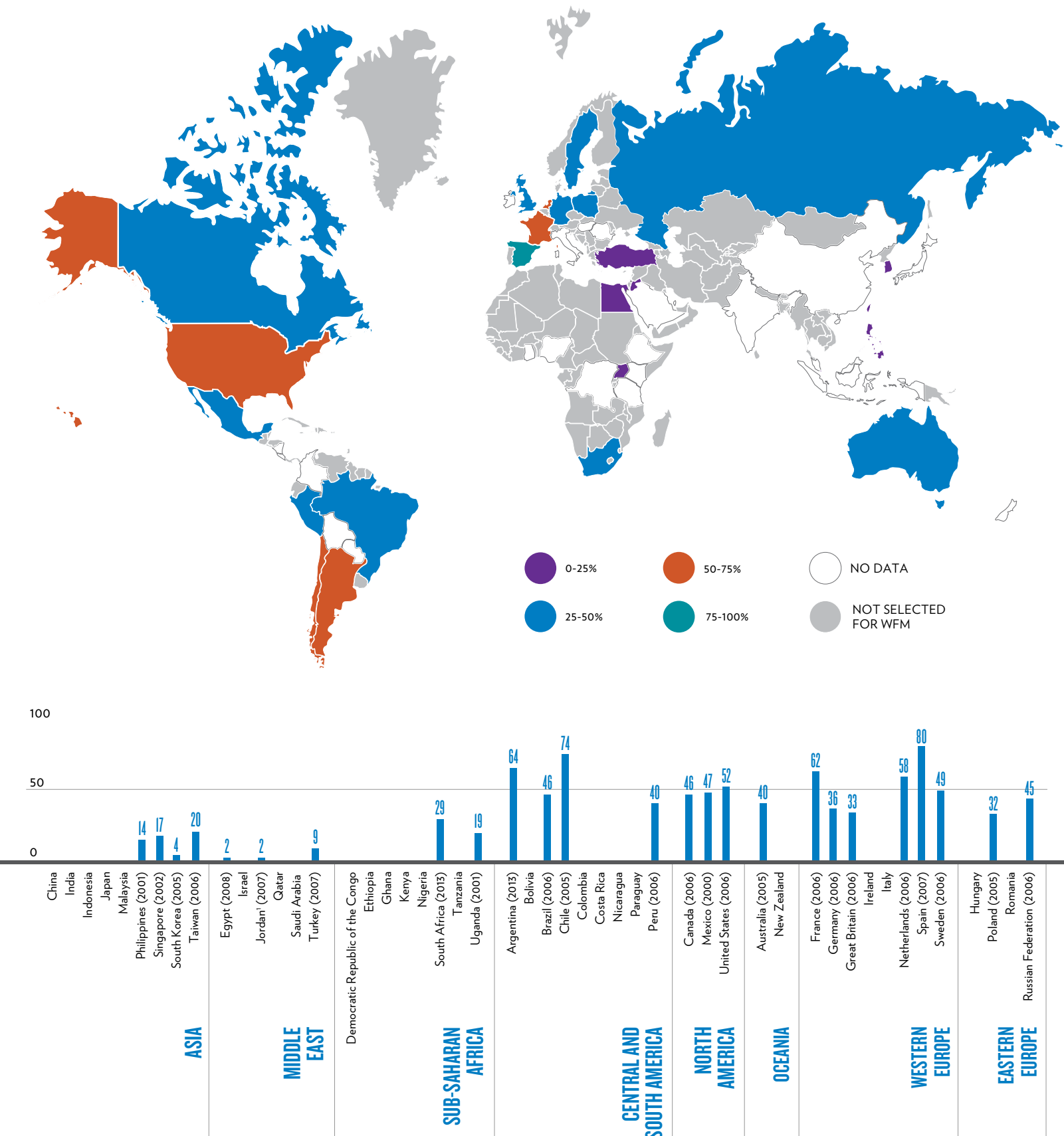
## Attitudes Toward Voluntary Single Motherhood

Adult attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood vary greatly by region, as seen in [Figure 11](#). The WVS asked adults if they approved of a woman seeking to “have a child as a single parent” without a “stable relationship with a man.” In Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, little public support exists for this type of single motherhood. Specifically, in Asia and the Middle East, support for this view ranges from a high of 20 percent (Taiwan) to a low of 2 percent (Egypt and Jordan). Support is also comparatively low in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 19 percent of adults in Uganda and 29 percent of adults in South Africa express approval of voluntary single motherhood.

<sup>55</sup> World Values Survey Association, “World Values Survey 1981–2008 Official Aggregate V.20090901,” [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org) (Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid, 2009); World Values Survey Association, “World Values Survey Wave 6 2010–2014 Official Aggregate V.20150418” (Aggregate File Producer: Asep/JDS, Madrid, 2015); ISSP Research Group, “International Social Survey Programme: Family and Changing Gender Roles-Issp 2012” (Cologne: GESIS Data Archive, 2014); Hampden-Thompson et al., “A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy.”

**FIGURE 11** Attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood, 2000-2013

*Percentage of adults (18+) who approve of a woman who wants to have a child as a single parent but doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man*



Support for voluntary single motherhood is markedly higher in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. Forty percent or more of adults living in Oceanic or American countries surveyed in the WVS accept it. For example, 52 percent of adults in the United States, 46 percent in Canada, 40 percent in Australia, and 74 percent in Chile indicate that they approve of unmarried women having children on their own. Views are more heterogeneous in Europe. Just 32 percent of adults in Poland express support for voluntary single motherhood, compared with 80 percent of adults in Spain. Overall, slightly less than half of the adults in most other European countries register their approval of voluntary single motherhood. In general, adults in countries with more affluence, lower levels of religiosity, and/or high levels of single parenthood prove to be more supportive of women having children without a husband or male partner. By contrast, countries with strong religious or collectivist orientations are less supportive of women who choose to be single mothers.<sup>56</sup>

## Attitudes About Whether Children Need Two Parents

Despite the considerable regional variation in attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood, there is relatively little variation among countries in attitudes about the value of a two-parent home. In most of the world, about one-half of adults believe that “one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together,” as [Figure 12](#) illustrates.<sup>57</sup>

Adults in Asia show the widest range of beliefs on this indicator. In China, less than one-quarter of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, whereas in India, the Philippines, and Taiwan, over one-half of adults think that one parent can. Data are very limited for sub-Saharan Africa, and South America, but where they are available, adults tend to believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two: in South Africa, 69 percent of adults affirm that, and in South America, as represented by Argentina and Chile, about 60 percent do.

Adults in North America and Oceania are more skeptical of single-parent families, with just under half of adults believing that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents in Canada, Australia, and United States. In both Western and Eastern Europe, about half of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, with agreement ranging from 39 percent to 60 percent.

For the countries with available data, attitudes about whether children need two parents generally align with behaviors. In South Africa, adults have the world’s highest level of endorsement for one-parent families, and more than half of children grow up living with a single parent. Single parenthood is less widespread in areas with lower levels of endorsement for single parents’ abilities to raise children alone. For example, in North America and Oceania, where less than one-half of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two, over three-quarters of children live with two parents (with the exception of the United States).

## Support for Working Mothers

Across the world, one-half of women aged 15 and older participate in the labor force.<sup>58</sup> In line with this trend, as [Table 4](#) indicates, a majority of adults in all countries surveyed around the globe believe that a “working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.”

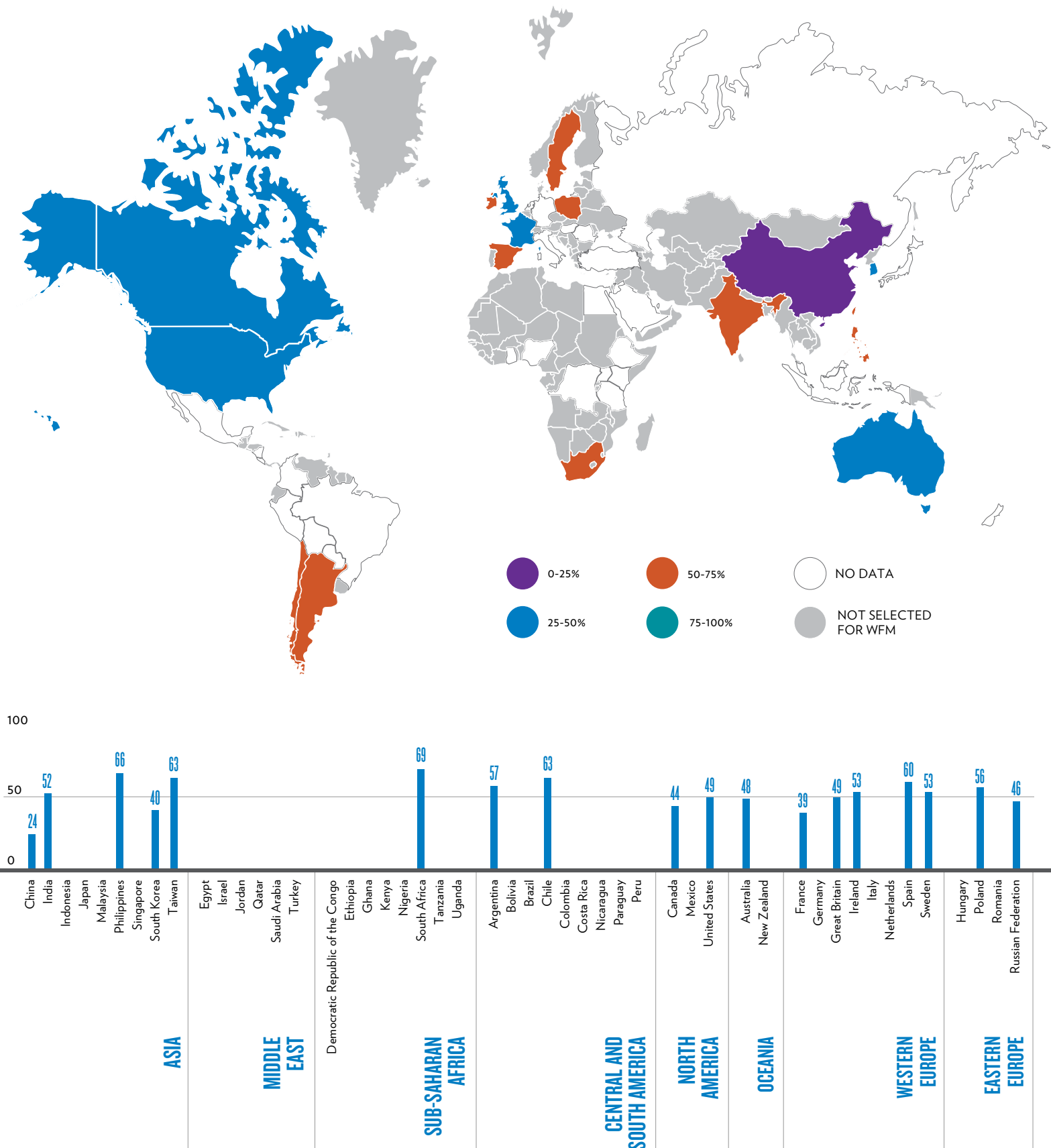
<sup>56</sup> R. Inglehart and P. Norris, *The Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World* (New York: Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> In previous editions of the *World Family Map*, this indicator was whether a child “needs a home with both a mother and a father to grow up happily.” This year, this indicator has been replaced with a non-gendered version, for which more recent data are available.

<sup>58</sup> World Bank, “World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2.”

**FIGURE 12** Attitudes about the need for two parents, 2012

*Percentage of adults (18+) who agree or strongly agree that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together*



This view seems to be particularly prevalent in Western Europe and North America, where more than two-thirds of adults in the surveyed countries agree that working mothers perform just as well as mothers who do not work outside the home. For instance, 72 percent of adults in the United States, 78 percent of adults in Sweden, and 81 percent of adults in France express the belief that working mothers can establish as good a relationship with their children as can stay-at-home mothers.

The available evidence in sub-Saharan Africa comes from South Africa, where 75 percent of adults agree that working mothers do as well as mothers who do not work outside the home.

Support for working mothers is more moderate in other regions of the world. In parts of Asia (including China, India, and South Korea) and Eastern Europe, about 65 percent of adults agree that working mothers can establish strong relationships with their children. Support is higher in the Philippines and Taiwan, though, at 72 percent and 84 percent, respectively. In Australia, 68 percent of adults hold similar views. Adults in South America express less support for working mothers than those in other regions. In Chile, 52 percent of adults believe that working mothers develop relationships with their children that are as secure as those of non-working mothers. In Argentina, 61 percent of adults feel the same way. Unfortunately, no Middle Eastern countries were included in this data source, but older findings for this region were reported in the 2014 *World Family Map* report.

In general, then, this somewhat limited global survey of attitudes towards working mothers suggests that in most regions, public support for working mothers is high. Despite the conventional wisdom that children do best when their mothers are caring for them full-time in the home, at least 50 percent of adults believe that working mothers can establish relationships with their children which are as strong and secure as those of non-working mothers in every surveyed country. In fact, recent research has found little relationship between the quantity of time that children or adolescents spend with their mothers and their educational and behavioral outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

## TABLE 4 Support for working mothers, 2012

*Percentage of adults (18+) who agree or strongly agree that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China 64	Egypt -	Democratic Republic of the Congo -	Argentina 61
India 64	Israel -	Ethiopia -	Bolivia -
Indonesia -	Jordan -	Ghana -	Brazil -
Japan -	Qatar -	Kenya -	Chile 52
Malaysia -	Saudi Arabia -	Nigeria -	Colombia -
Philippines 72	Turkey -	South Africa 75	Costa Rica -
Singapore -		Tanzania -	Nicaragua -
South Korea 67		Uganda -	Paraguay -
Taiwan 84			Peru -
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada 71	Australia 68	France 81	Hungary -
Mexico -	New Zealand -	Germany -	Poland 64
United States 72		Great Britain 77	Romania -
		Ireland 71	Russian Federation 66
		Italy -	
		Netherlands -	
		Spain 68	
		Sweden 78	

Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

<sup>59</sup> M. A. Milkie, K. M. Nomaguchi, and K. E. Denny, "Does the Amount of Time Mothers Spend with Children or Adolescents Matter?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 2 (2015).

**TABLE 5 Family trust, 2005-2014***Percentage of adults (18+) who completely trust their families*

ASIA		MIDDLE EAST		SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA	
China (2012)	90	Egypt (2013)	99	Democratic Republic of the Congo	-	Argentina (2013)	92
India (2014)	65	Israel	-	Ethiopia	-	Bolivia	-
Indonesia	-	Jordan <sup>1</sup> (2007)	97	Ghana (2012)	67	Brazil (2014)	70
Japan	-	Qatar (2012)	91	Kenya	-	Chile (2005)	83
Malaysia	-	Saudi Arabia	-	Nigeria (2011)	88	Colombia	-
Philippines (2012)	86	Turkey (2011)	94	South Africa (2013)	76	Costa Rica	-
Singapore (2012)	82			Tanzania	-	Nicaragua	-
South Korea (2010)	83			Uganda	-	Paraguay	-
Taiwan (2012)	83					Peru (2012)	79
NORTH AMERICA		OCEANIA		WESTERN EUROPE		EASTERN EUROPE	
Canada (2006)	83	Australia (2012)	82	France (2006)	80	Hungary	-
Mexico	-	New Zealand	-	Germany (2013)	76	Poland (2012)	70
United States (2011)	70			Great Britain (2006)	86	Romania (2012)	81
				Ireland	-	Russian Federation (2011)	88
				Italy	-		
				Netherlands (2006)	63		
				Spain (2011)	94		
				Sweden (2013)	89		

Sources: <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2019/>

## Family Trust

The family is an important social institution around the world. Most societies see the family as a fundamental source of socialization, the place that meets some of humankind's deepest needs for belonging, and the wellspring of the emotional and social support needed to flourish. What, then, does the global public believe about the presence of trust in their own families? The World Values Survey asked respondents if they trust their families, and the results suggest that trust remains high in most families around the world (see Table 5). Here the *World Family Map* records the percentage of respondents affirming that they "completely" trust their families,<sup>60</sup> the highest answer they could select, because there is a tendency for respondents to pick the top category in reporting on such a socially desirable indicator. However, differences across cultures exist in the degree to which survey respondents will affirm the category "completely." Evidence suggests that in the Netherlands and in Latin America, specifically, and perhaps in other countries, respondents often avoid choosing the highest categories on survey questions because these response options are not culturally acceptable.<sup>61</sup>

With these caveats, we find that family trust is almost universal among adults in the Asian, Oceanic, and especially Middle Eastern countries studied. In the Middle East, 91 percent of Qatari adults indicate that they completely trust their families, as do 94 percent of Turkish adults and a remarkable 97 percent of adults in Jordan and 99 percent of adults in Egypt. Likewise, 90 percent of adults in China express complete trust in their families, as do 82 to 86 percent of adults in other Asian countries, and 82 percent of Australians. India appears as an exception to the high rates of family trust in Asia, with just 65 percent of adults saying they completely trust their families.

Levels of family trust are more mixed in Europe and the Americas. In Europe, the proportion of adults who report completely trusting their families ranges from 63 percent in the Netherlands to 94 percent in Spain. Notably, the percentage of adults who completely trust their families decreased by five percentage points in Germany between 2006 and 2013, to 76 percent.

In the Americas, the proportion of adults who affirm that they completely trust their families ranges from 71 percent in Brazil to 92 percent in Argentina, with North American percentages falling between 70 and 83 percent. In sub-Saharan Africa, 67 percent of adults completely trust their families in Ghana, while 76 percent express this trust in South Africa and 88 percent do in Nigeria.

<sup>60</sup> Respondents could indicate that they trust their family "completely" or "somewhat," or that they "do not trust [their family] very much" or "do not trust [them] at all."

<sup>61</sup> *World Family Map* partner research institutions in the Netherlands and South America, email message to authors, October 2012.

Given the heterogeneous character of countries that register high levels of family trust—with at least nine in 10 adults completely trusting their families in Argentina, China, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Spain, and Turkey—we cannot be sure of the role factors like affluence, public policy, religion, and familism (the elevation of the family over individual issues) play in fostering high levels of family solidarity. Nevertheless, the varied character of nations scoring highly on the attitudinal measure of family trust suggests that different factors foster strong family solidarity in different regional contexts.

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While research consistently demonstrates that families exert a strong influence on child outcomes, our ability to monitor families and understand how to strengthen them, and thus improve child outcomes in many regions of the world, is hampered by a lack of data. For example, in many countries, even basic data—such as the relationship between a child’s parents, information on extended family members and non-residential parents, and the education level and employment status of both parents—are unavailable. Though improved, the need for data on additional countries for the indicators in the family process and culture sections is obvious, and the areas of family structure and socioeconomics would be strengthened if there existed more data allowing for comparisons across regions and countries of the world. To further understand the family dynamics underlying child well-being, we need comparable data for additional indicators of family well-being.



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## *About the Authors*

Jason S. Carroll is a professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University and Associate Director of the Wheatley Institution.

Laurie F. DeRose is the Director of Research for the World Family Map project and Research Assistant Professor in the Maryland Population Research Center (College Park); she teaches sociology at Georgetown University.

David C. Dollahite is a professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University and co-director of the American Families of Faith research project.

Spencer L. James is associate professor of Family Life, Africana Studies affiliate, visiting fellow of the Wheatley Institution, and Global Families Research Initiative director at Brigham Young University, and a senior fellow at the Institute for Family Studies.

Byron R. Johnson is Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University, the founding director of the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, and a Senior Fellow at the Sagamore Institute.

Loren Marks is a professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University and co-director of the American Families of Faith research project.

Richard V. Reeves is a Senior Fellow and Co-director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution.

Wendy Wang is Director of Research at the Institute for Family Studies and a former Senior Researcher at Pew Research Center.

W. Bradford Wilcox, professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, is a senior fellow of the Institute for Family Studies and a visiting scholar of the American Enterprise Institute.



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