

## Bridging Social Theory and Social Research:



Cross-National  
Comparisons of Religion  
and Authority in the US  
and Europe



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SPACE Workshop  
July 19, 2004

<http://real.geog.ucsb.edu/talks/space.htm>

## Outline of Talk

- Bridging theory and research
  - Social science's dichotomy
- Contemporary western religion
  - Secularization vs. resurgent faith
- The United States
  - Results of 2002 empirical study
- Comparison to Europe
  - "Exceptionalism" confirmed?
- Next steps
  - The "really hard sciences"

- Bridging theory and research
- Contemporary western religion
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## Social Research vs. Social Theory

- Social Research: Empirical (quantitative or qualitative) inquiry into human ideas & behavior
- Social Theory: Effort to develop systematic, cross-disciplinary framework to explain human ideas and behavior

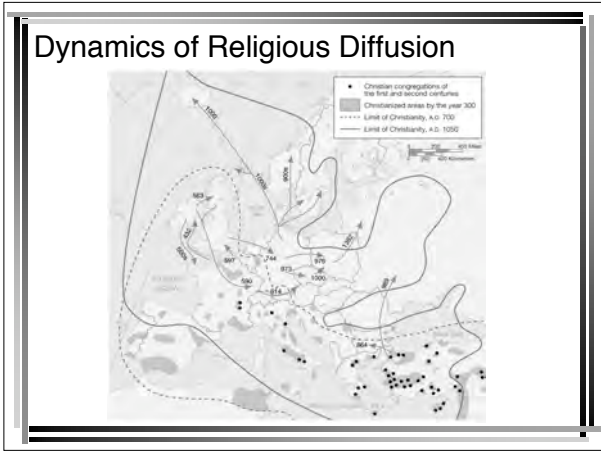
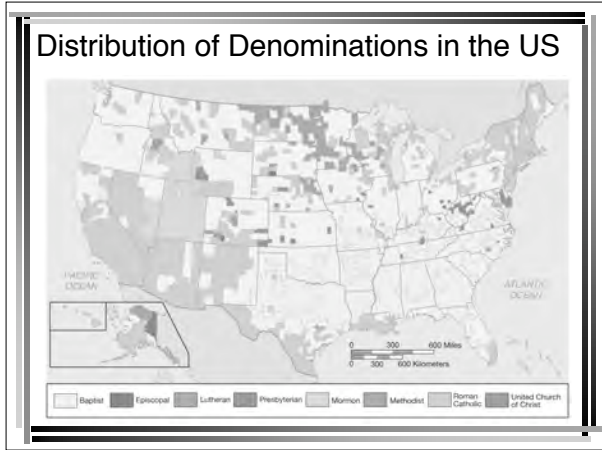
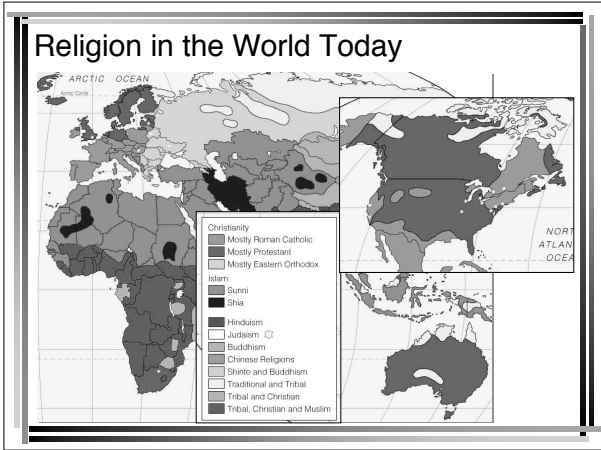
	Research	Theory
Questions	Focused	Broad
Proof	Data	Concepts
Emphasis	Behavior	Ideas

## The Theory-Data Dichotomy

Social Research ↔ Social Theory



- Bridging theory and research
- Contemporary western religion
- The United States
- Comparison to Europe
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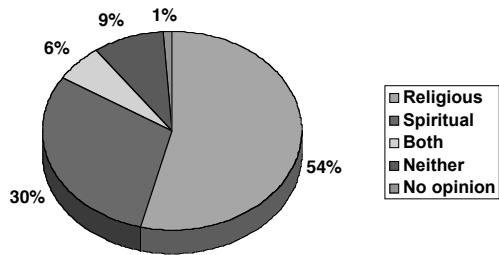


- ### Challenges in Spatial Approach to Religion
- “Religion” defined as world religions
  - Assumed homogeneity of regions in typical spatial representation
  - Assumed commonality of belief underlying commonality of behavior
  - Difficulty in addressing larger patterns and processes; best for restricted cases

- ### Some Larger Questions
- How does contemporary religion compare among western countries?
  - I.e., why is religion apparently dying in Europe, but growing in the US?
  - I.e., has secularization theory lost its explanatory and predictive power given the resurgence of religion in the US?



## American Religiosity



Source: Gallup Poll, Dec. 1999

## So...What is Religion??

- Is religion a “cultural natural kind”?
  - Unlike language, religion not necessary to culture
- Religion as religions
  - But “religion” a European construction...

Just like the notion itself, the most general questions concerning religion, its nature and definition, its origins or expressions, were born in the West. From there, they were transferred, much later and at the cost of daring generalizations, to all other cultures, however remotely prehistoric or exotic.

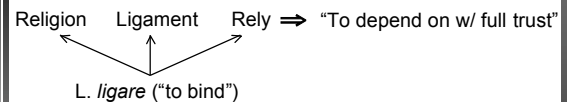
Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion* (Oxford 2000), 9

## Enter Social Theory (Adam Seligman)

- Modernity implies secularization as rational individuals rid themselves of religion as external authority
- But this presumes self as motivated purely by interests and rational choice...not so
- And the desecularization of the world now commonly recognized in many forms
- Perhaps empirical study of authority can thus shed light on contemporary religion?

## Religion Redefined

- An etymological approach...



- So, one can think of religion as
  - That which ultimately binds individual/social lives
  - Built on trust in authority

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“Scientific knowledge and the views of scientists”

“Insights gained from religion”

“Lessons we can learn from nature”

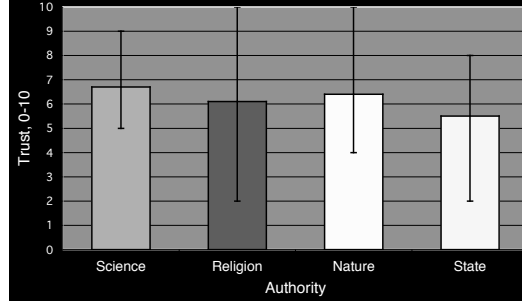
“The views of our country’s political leaders”



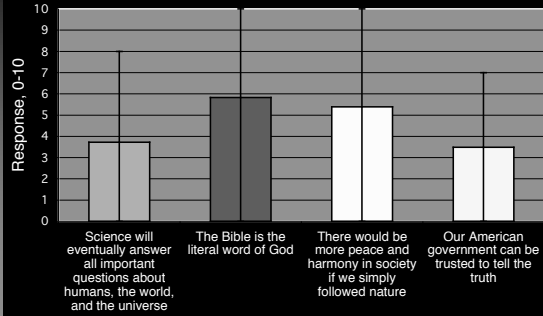
## Survey and Analysis Procedure

- Overview
  - Online pilot survey, 3-10/01 (N ≈ 250)
  - 25-min. phone survey of American adults, 4-6/02 (N = 1013)
    - Included issue- and authority-specific questions on trust
  - 30+ minute followup telephone interview, 7-8/02 (N ≈ 100)
- Factor analysis
  - Multivariate data reduction technique
  - Common in psychometric literature; but criticized by Gould (*Mismeasure of Man*) for problems of reduction, reification
  - Applied to 16 trust variables using orthogonal (varimax) rotation (results similar to oblique rotation with direct oblimin,  $\Delta = 0$ ) of PCA-extracted factors
  - Interviews (top/bottom quintiles) aided factor identification
- Correspondence analysis
  - Visualization technique to represent two related sets of var's
  - Prominent among French social scientists (e.g., Bourdieu)
  - Applied to "map" relationship ~ policy issues and authority

Mean Overall Trust in Four Authorities  
Error bars represent 10% and 90% quantiles



Mean Responses to Hypertrust Statements  
Error bars represent 10% and 90% quantiles



## Trust Factor Analysis Results

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Variance Explained	22.1%	17.9%
General trust in religion	0.787	—
Issue-specific trust in religion	0.748	—
Belief in Bible as Word of God	0.731	-0.234
General trust in state	0.709	0.227
Issue-specific trust in state	0.646	0.189
Belief in existence of God	0.624	-0.244
US a world leader for peace, freedom, and democracy	0.542	—
US government tells the truth	0.412	—
Issue-specific trust in nature	—	0.745
General trust in nature	0.101	0.723
Issue-specific trust in science	—	0.707
General trust in science	—	0.660
Science will eventually answer all questions	-0.105	0.511
More peace and harmony if we follow nature	—	0.501

- Factor Extraction: Principal Components Analysis  
- Rotation: Varimax (Kaiser Normalization)  
- Factor loadings under 0.1 omitted

## Factor 1 Top Quintile

I was raised to trust in God and I do, and again I think that our government is better than anywhere else that we could be and I would like to think that people are trying to do right.

Respondent 584

## Factor 1 Bottom Quintile

I think it's accurate in so far as government and religion are hierarchies....Religion is a hierarchy. An ecclesiastical hierarchy. Government is a bureaucracy. Those types of entities, with my relationship and my recent history with them—I'm talking about the last half a century—are not credible. They are not truth-tellers. They are at times, but they are not purveyors of truth as much as they are formers of opinion and modifiers of behavior.

Respondent 466

### Factor 2 Top Quintile

Well, I mean science brings us the truth, as best as they can, and nature is the truth, and we need both to have a balanced way. To survive.

Respondent 561

### Factor 2 Bottom Quintile

Science doesn't necessarily have all the answers, although they may think so. You look at some of the scientists, and they think we all evolved from some exploding dinosaur, but I don't think so....I trust nature in the fact that nature's here and it's been provided by God, but I don't trust that for my source of being.

Respondent 28

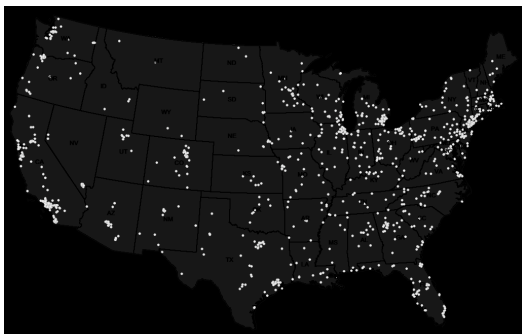
### Factor Description

- Factor 1: "Theocracy"
  - Hypertrust/distrust in religion linked with...
  - Trust/distrust in state
- Factor 2: "Ecology"
  - Trust/distrust in nature linked with...
  - Trust/distrust in science

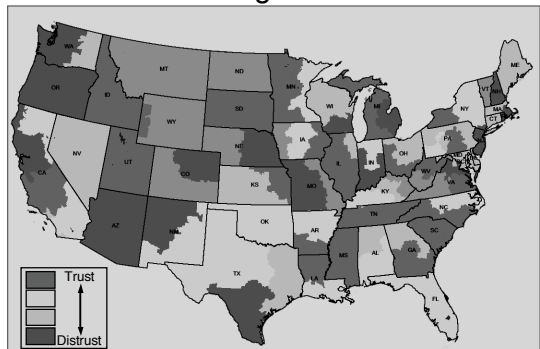
### Trust Factors: Demographics

R Values	F1	F2
Age	0.035	-0.016
Education	<b>-0.252</b>	0.041
Gender	-0.157	-0.045
Income	-0.145	0.000

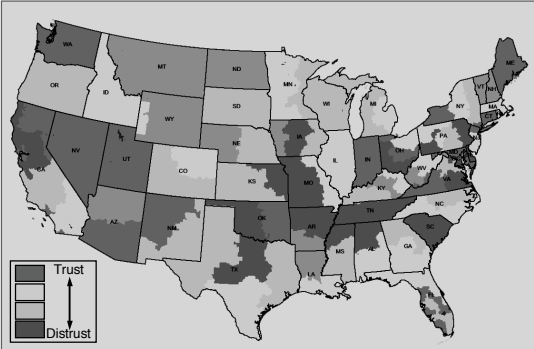
### Respondent Locations



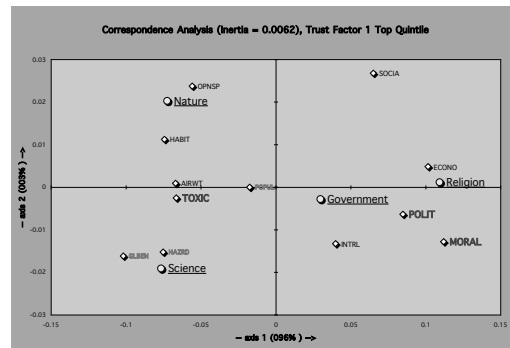
### Trust Model 1: Religion and State



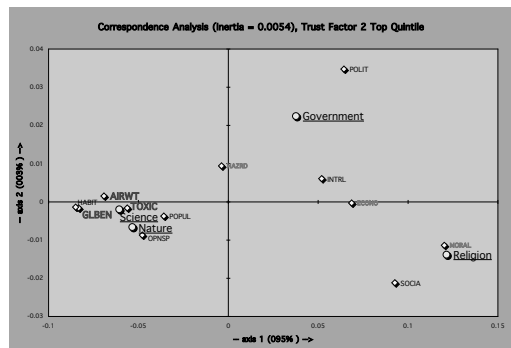
### Trust Model 2: Nature and Science



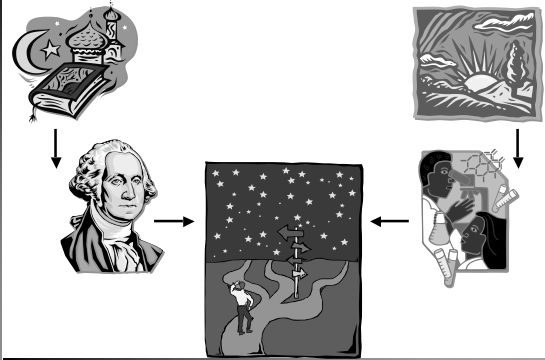
### CA Trust Factor 1 (Top)



### CA Trust Factor 2 (Top)



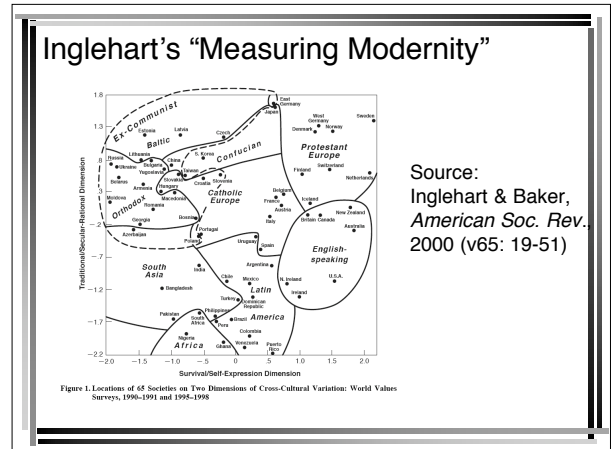
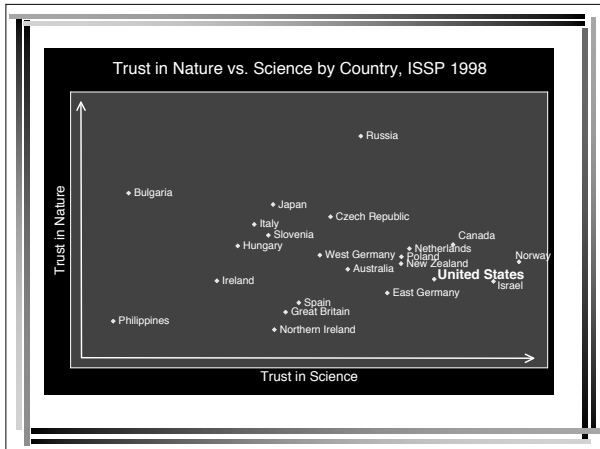
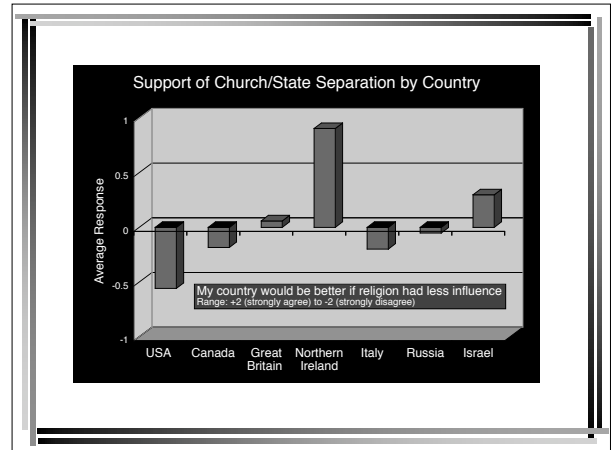
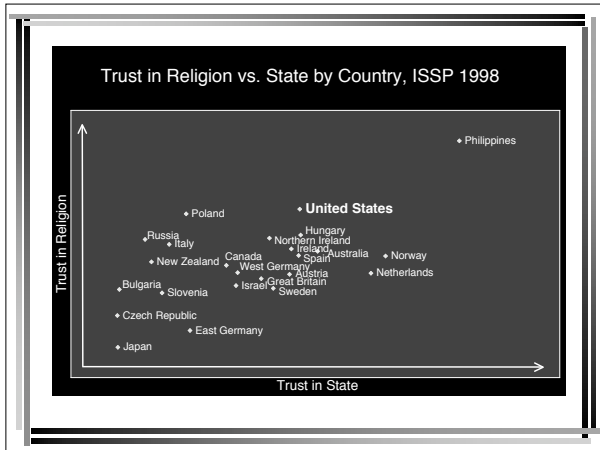
### Similarity in Models of Trust



- Bridging theory and research
- Contemporary western religion
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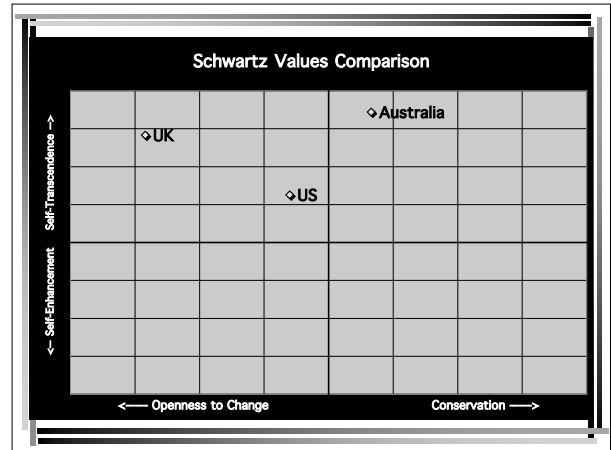
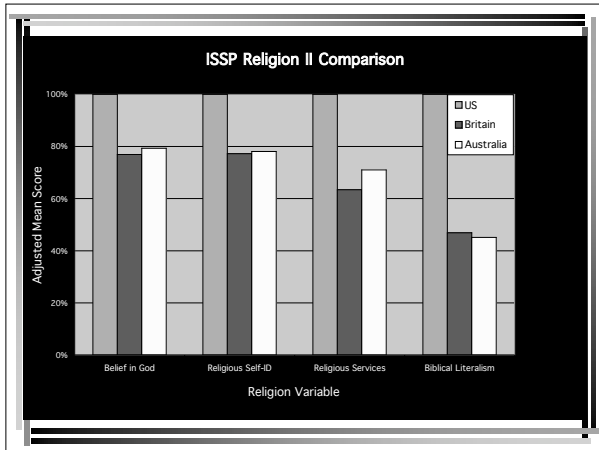
In America the family, in the Roman and aristocratic signification of the word, does not exist.... as soon as the young American approaches manhood, the ties of filial obedience are relaxed day by day; master of his thoughts, he is soon master of his conduct....When the condition of society becomes democratic and men adopt as their general principle that it is good and lawful to judge of all things for oneself, using former points of belief not as a rule of faith, but simply as a means of information, the power which the opinions of a father exercise over those of his sons diminishes.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1839)



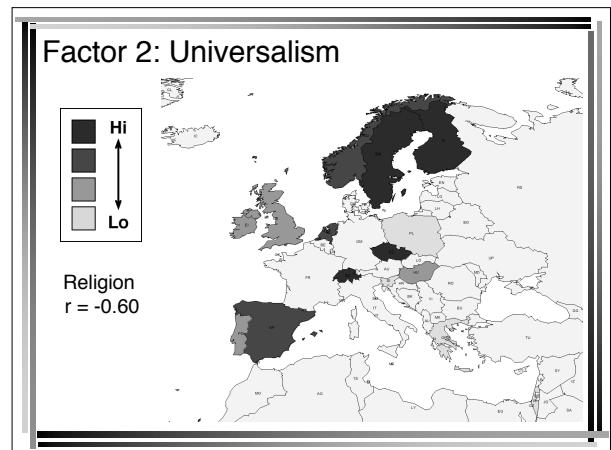
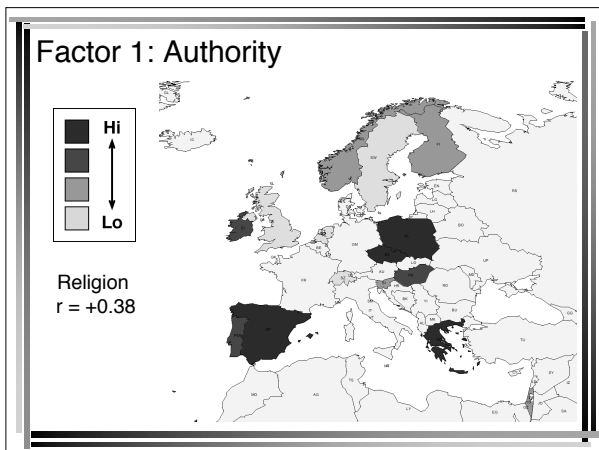
- ### Schwartz Values Axis 1: Authority
- Positive
    - Important to behave properly
    - Important to do what is told and follow rules
    - Important to follow traditions and customs
  - Negative
    - Important to try new and different things in life
    - Important to think new ideas and being creative

- ### Schwartz Value Axis 2: Universalism
- Positive
    - Important to understand different people
    - Important to care for nature and environment
    - Important to help people and care for others' well-being
  - Negative
    - Important to be rich, have money and expensive things
    - Important to be successful and that people recognize achievements
    - Important to show abilities and be admired



- ### European Social Survey: Schwartz Values
- N = 15 countries (~26K respondents, 2002-03)
  - 21 Portrait Values Questionnaire items
  - Used deviation from mean response
  - Most meaningful factor analysis = 2 factors
    - Factor 1: (+) = Respect for Authority/Tradition
    - Factor 2: (+) = Universalism/Concern for Others
  - Took weighted mean factor scores per country, plus weighted mean importance of religion

- ### Participating Countries...
- Czech Republic
  - Finland
  - Great Britain
  - Greece
  - Hungary
  - Ireland
  - Israel
  - Netherlands
  - Norway
  - Poland
  - Portugal
  - Slovenia
  - Spain
  - Sweden
  - Switzerland





## Cluster Analysis/Correlation Results

Country	F1-Auth	F2-Univ	ImpRel
Spain	0.16	0.07	4.71
Great Britain	-0.16	0.03	3.88
Hungary	0.06	-0.20	4.29
Ireland	0.10	0.04	6.19
Israel	-0.14	-0.48	5.82
Netherlands	-0.25	0.08	4.37
Norway	-0.05	0.11	3.69
Portugal	0.06	-0.10	6.31
Slovenia	-0.02	-0.24	4.63
<b>Average</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.08</b>	<b>4.88</b>
Czech Republic	0.50	0.40	2.65
Greece	0.36	-0.29	8.34
Poland	0.50	-0.21	7.26
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>6.08</b>
Switzerland	-0.55	0.37	4.52
Finland	-0.14	0.38	5.13
Sweden	-0.35	0.25	3.27
<b>Average</b>	<b>-0.35</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>4.30</b>

	F1	F2	Rel
F1	1.00	0.28	<b>0.38</b>
F2		1.00	<b>-0.60</b>
Rel			1.00

- F1/F2 clusters
  - Avg.F1 & F2
  - High F1 (~US?)
  - Low F1, Hi F2
- Correlations
  - Rel ~ +F1
  - Rel ~ -F2!

## Summary

- US more authoritarian than much of Europe, which itself displays variability
- Need true comparative US-Europe data on modernity-related values, plus fuller data on religiosity/spirituality
- Do the data “prove” Seligman and other social theorists? They do suggest that (institutional) religion thrives in societies that display certain anti-modernist values (authoritarian, non-universalist)
- Are spatial patterns/processes evident here? Hard to tease out of this data.

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## The “Really Hard Sciences”

- Caught between the natural sciences and the humanities, the good social scientist must grasp both
- Arguably everything the social scientist studies has been conceptually (vs. empirically) bounded, thus necessitating tremendous clarity wrto concepts
- The social scientist has many epistemological paradigms and methodological options to choose from, often necessitating plural/hybrid approaches
- Ultimately, social scientists cannot totally separate themselves from their objects of analysis (they are human, after all), necessitating tremendous reflexivity
- It is tremendously important to model a close two-way interaction between social theory and social research to our students, so the tail stops wagging the dog!