



Wittgenstein Centre

FOR DEMOGRAPHY AND  
GLOBAL HUMAN CAPITAL

A COLLABORATION OF IIASA, VID/ÖAW, WU

# Religious intensity and beliefs in an urban context: the case of Vienna

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Religion in Vienna: urban trends in a European context

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# Religious change in urban context

- Largest cities tend to be more secular and religiously diverse
- City dwellers tend to be more secular due to
  - Compositional effects
  - Higher rationalisation, more open, liberal views
  - Looser social ties and less social control
  - More competing leisure opportunities
- Individualised forms and religious syncretism possibly more widespread in cities

# General and specific objectives

## General objective:

Analyse changes in religious intensity among religious groups in Vienna and compare the situation to the other federal states

## Specific objectives:

- (1) Compare levels and depict trends in religiosity in Vienna and the rest of Austria over 25 years (mid-1980s until 2010)
- (2) Investigate cohort trends in religious change
- (3) A typology based on a set of indicators of religious practice and belief
- (4) Analyse the interrelation between belonging, believing and practice

## Our approach:

Focus on comparisons between Roman Catholics and the Unaffiliated

Study Austria where case numbers do not permit a distinction between Vienna/other federal analysis

# Data

21 surveys with information on religiosity and religious practice:  
17 waves of ISSP, 3 waves of EVS

	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
ISSP	Blue	Grey	Blue	Blue	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Blue	Blue	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue	Grey	Blue	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Grey	Blue
EVS	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green	Grey	Grey



Affiliation and religious service attendance



More items (frequency of praying, self-assessed religiosity, ...)

Sample sizes for VIENNA: about 200 persons in ISSP, about 250 in EVS

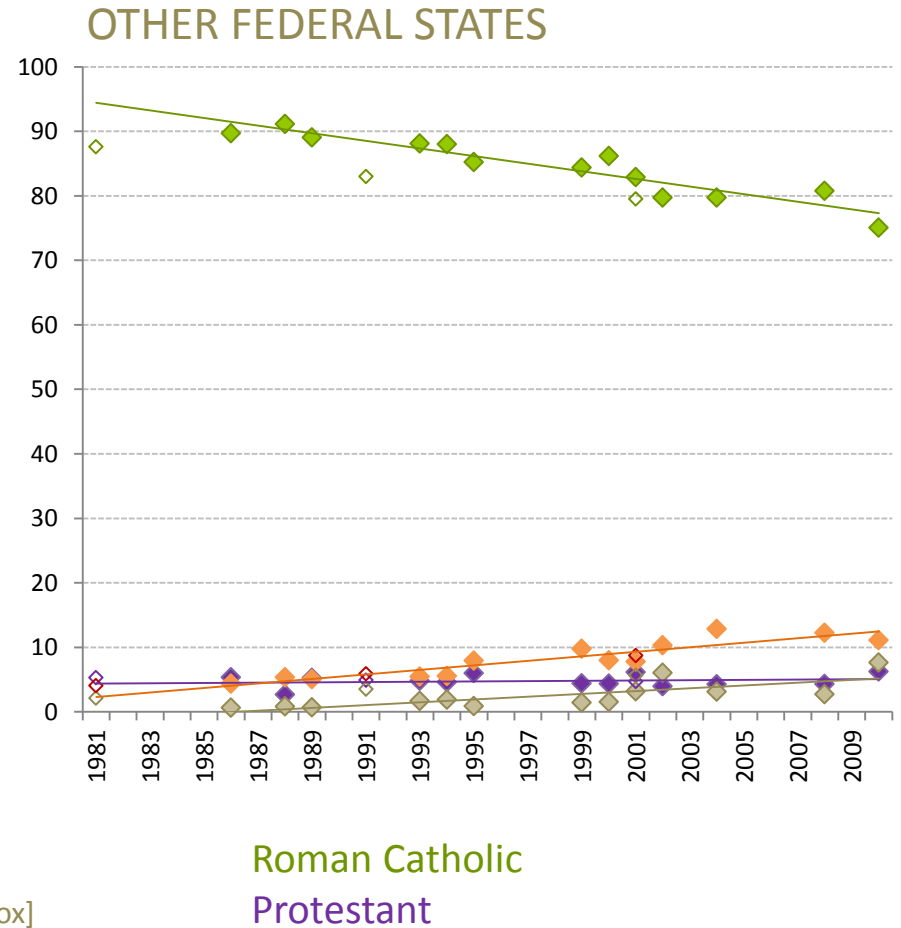
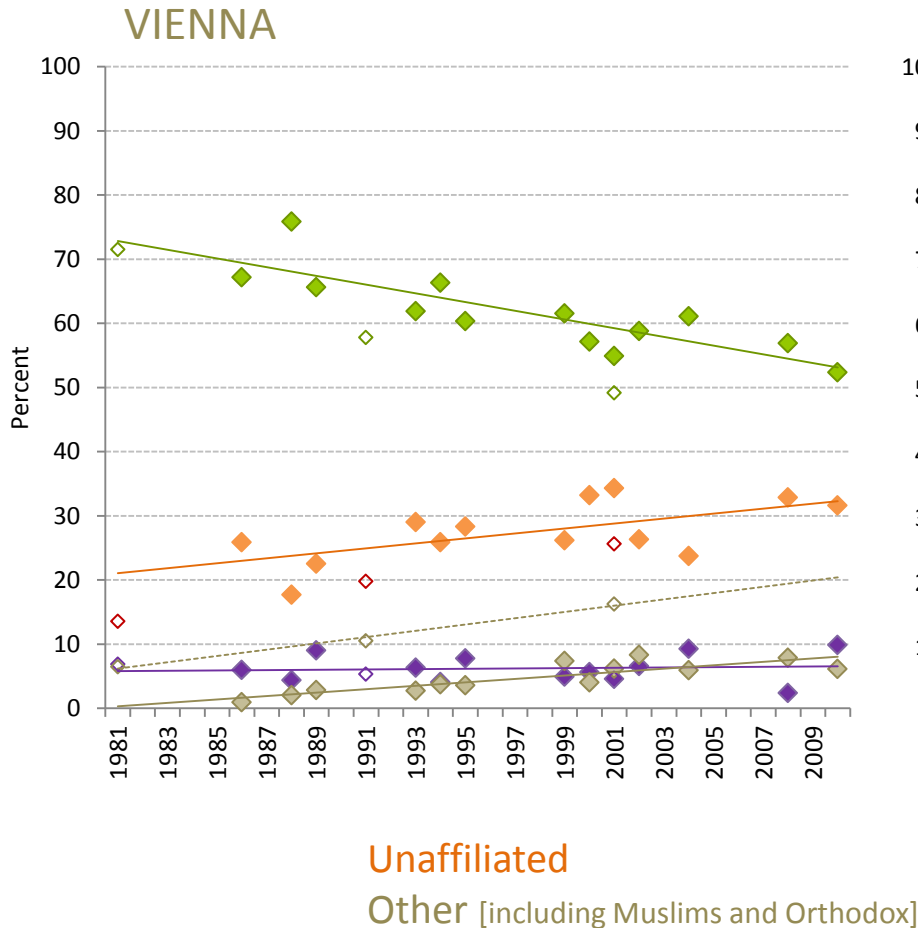
**Quality of Life in Vienna Survey 2012/2013** (Lebensqualität in Wien im 21. Jahrhundert)

4244 respondents

religious affiliation and self-assessed religiosity

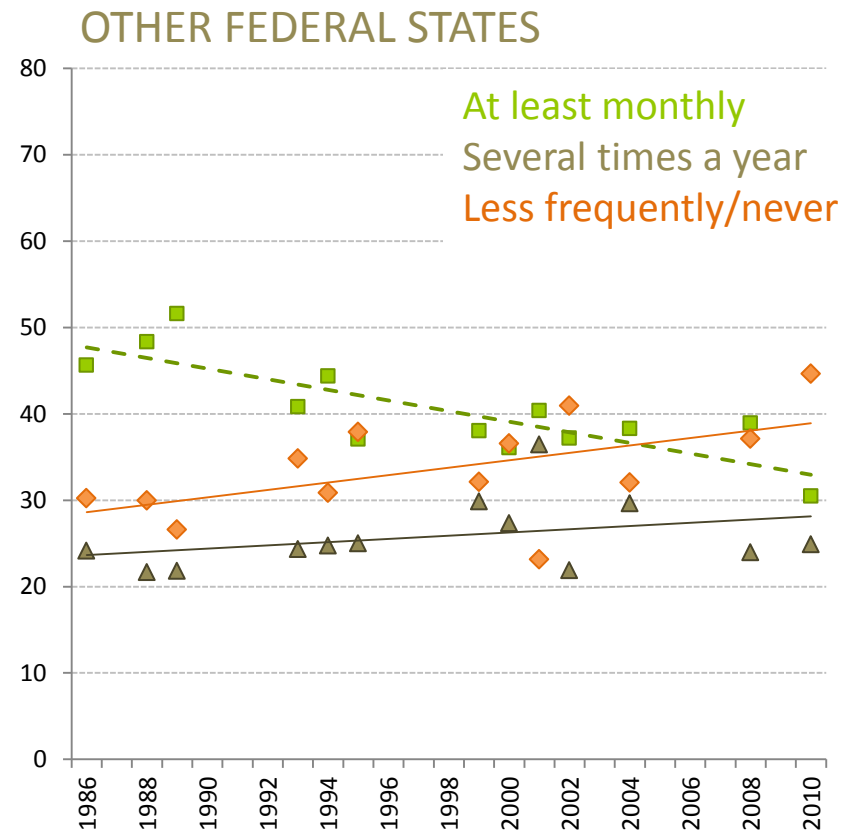
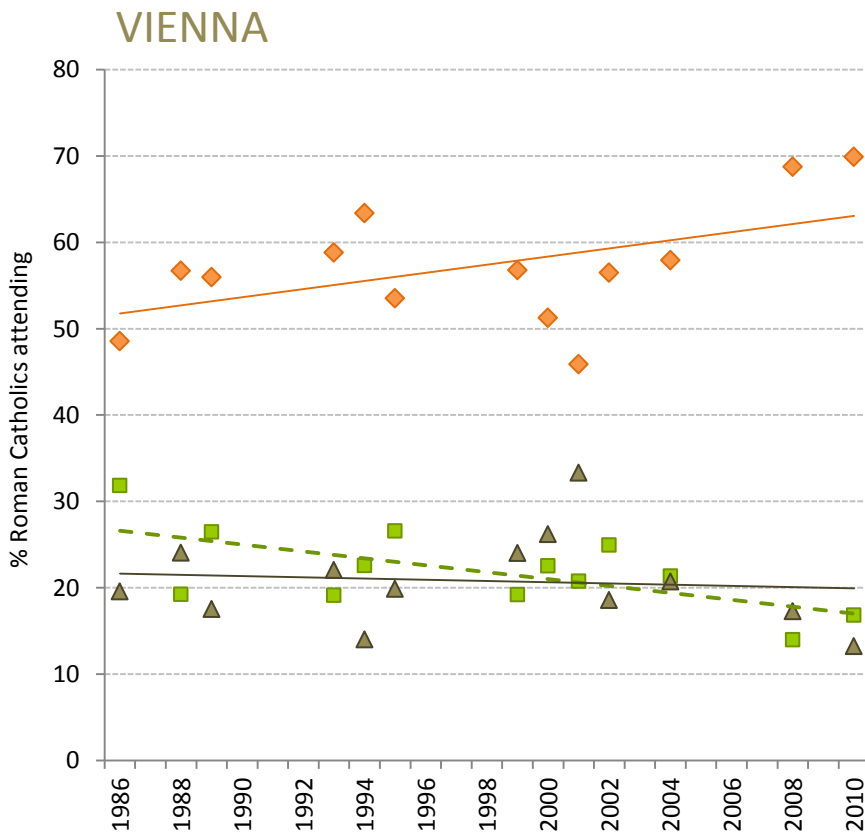
# Religious affiliation

- (1) Three-times higher share of Unaffiliated in Vienna throughout the period
- (2) Roman Catholics overrepresented in ISSP surveys



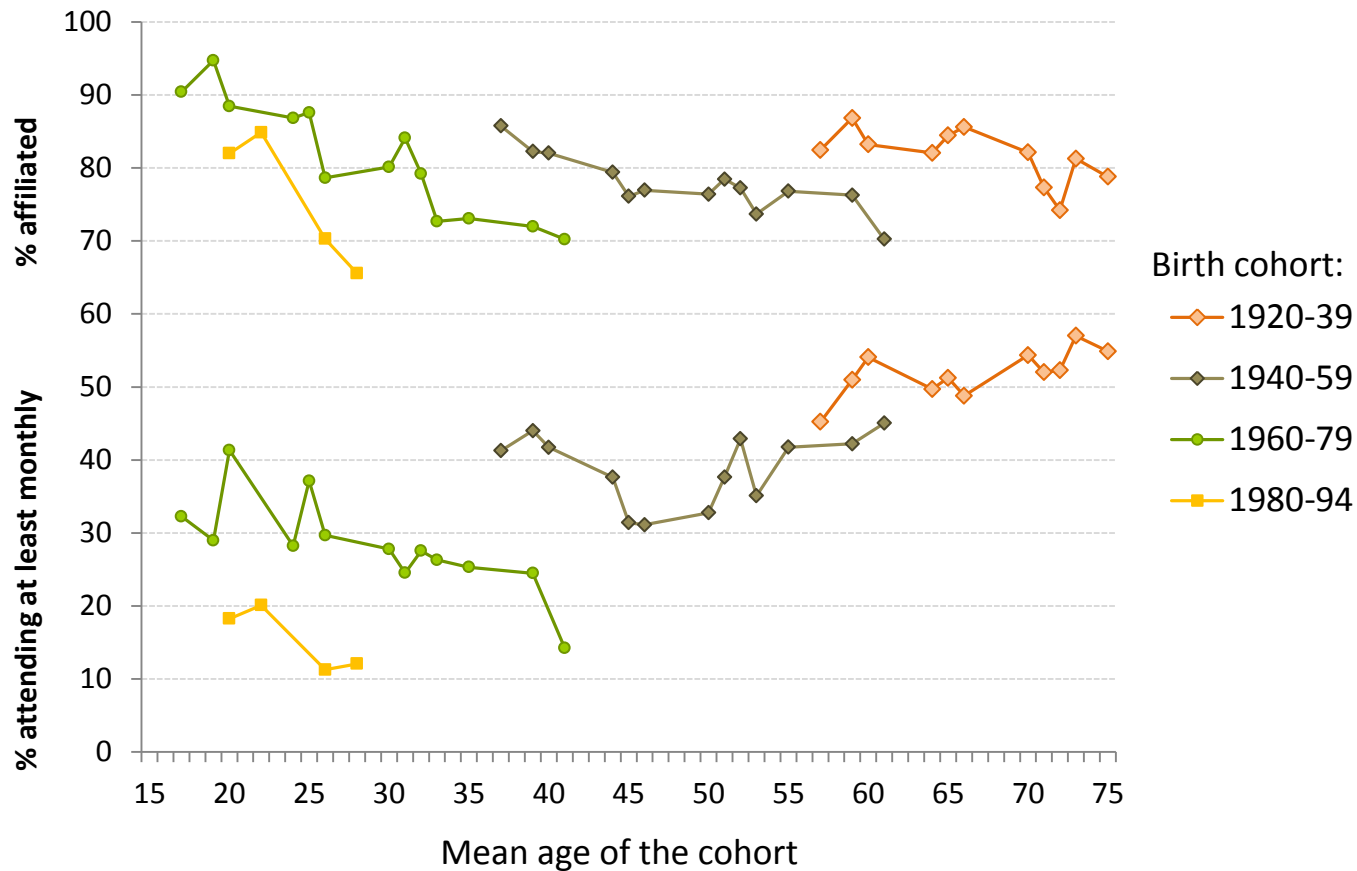
# Regular religious service attendance declining

- (1) Regular churchgoing declining in both Vienna and OFS
- (2) Very different – much lower – levels in Vienna



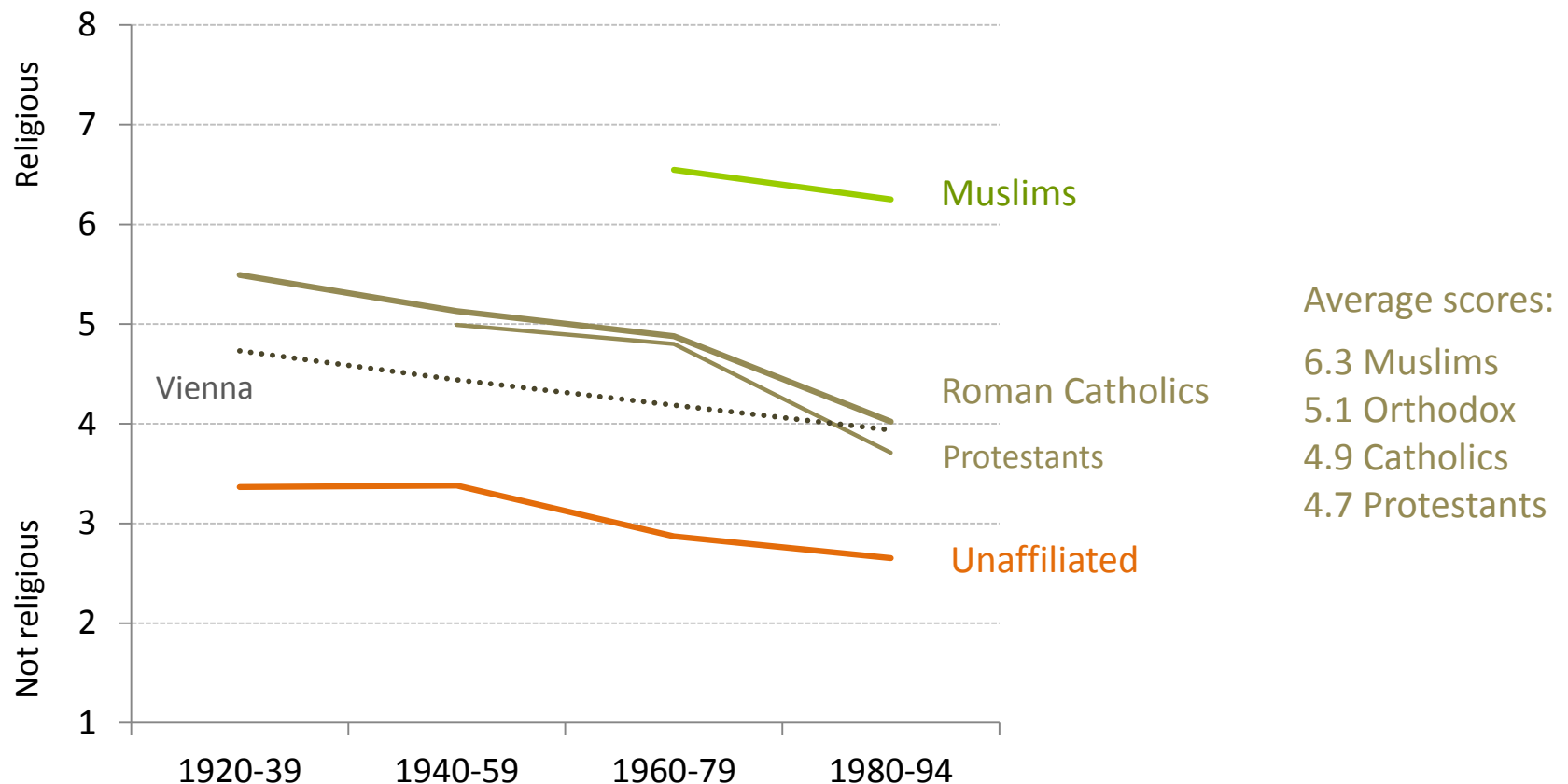
# Cohort trends in Austria

- (1) Religious belonging declines over the life course
- (2) Church attendance weakens along cohort lines due to less religious socialisation



# Cohort trends in religiosity, Vienna

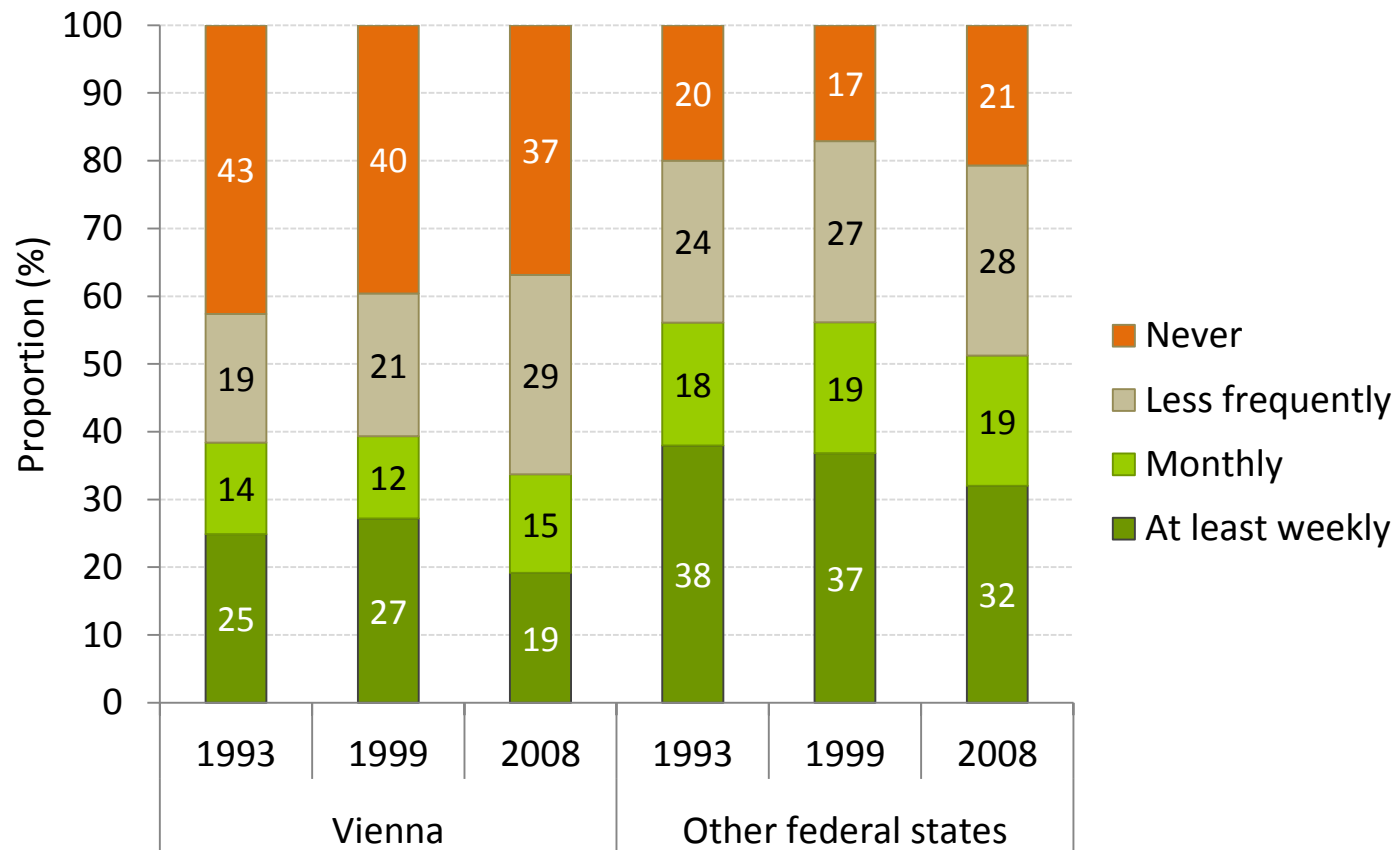
- (1) Self-assessed religiosity lower among younger persons across all religions
- (2) Roman Catholics and Protestants show very similar level and trends



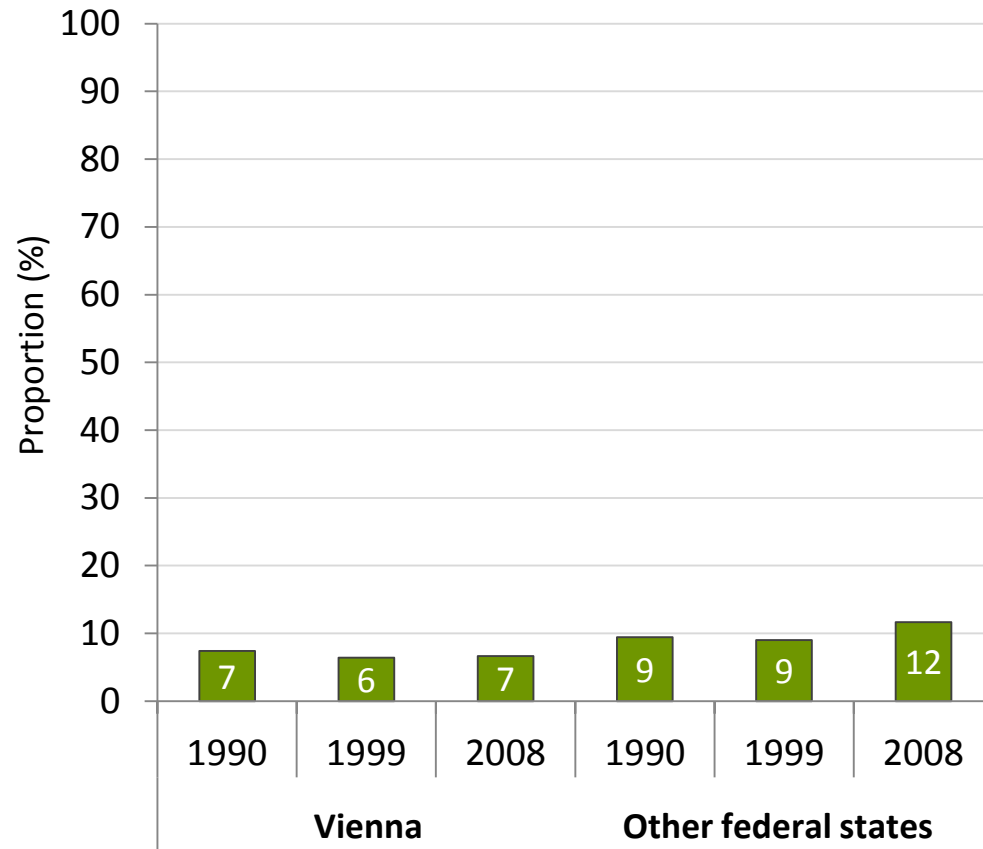


# Trends in frequency of praying

- (1) Private religious practice rather stable throughout the period
- (2) Viennese pray less frequently

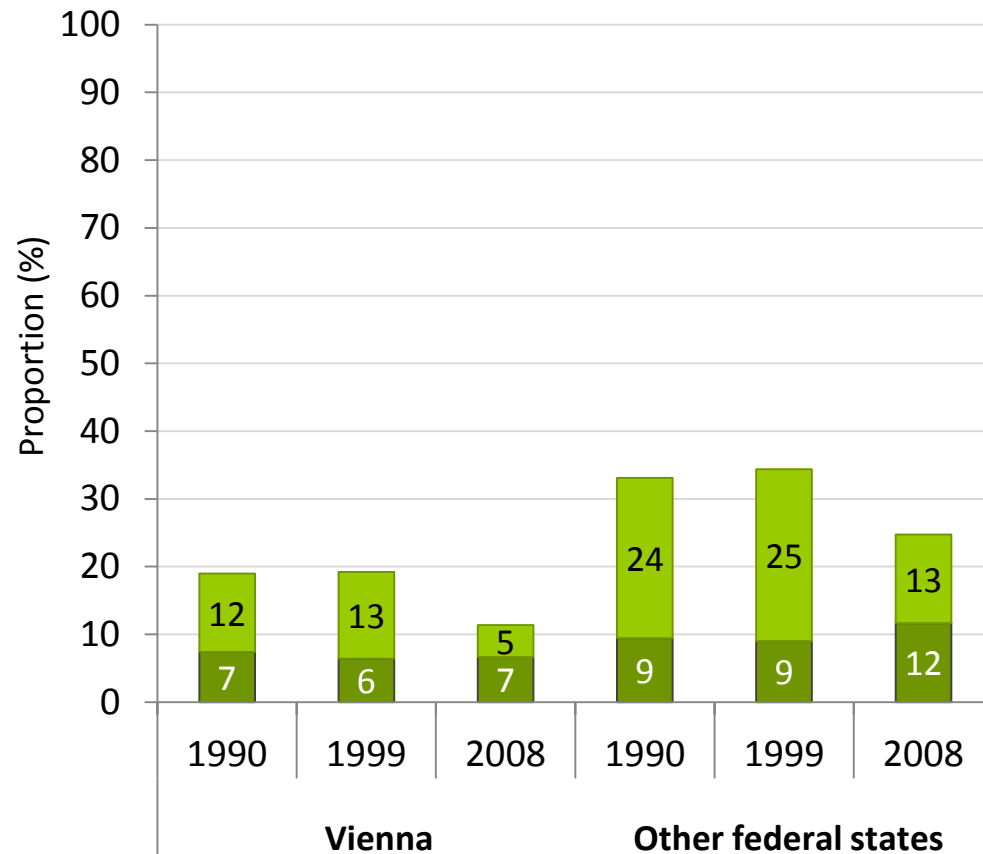


# Religious types: Traditional religious



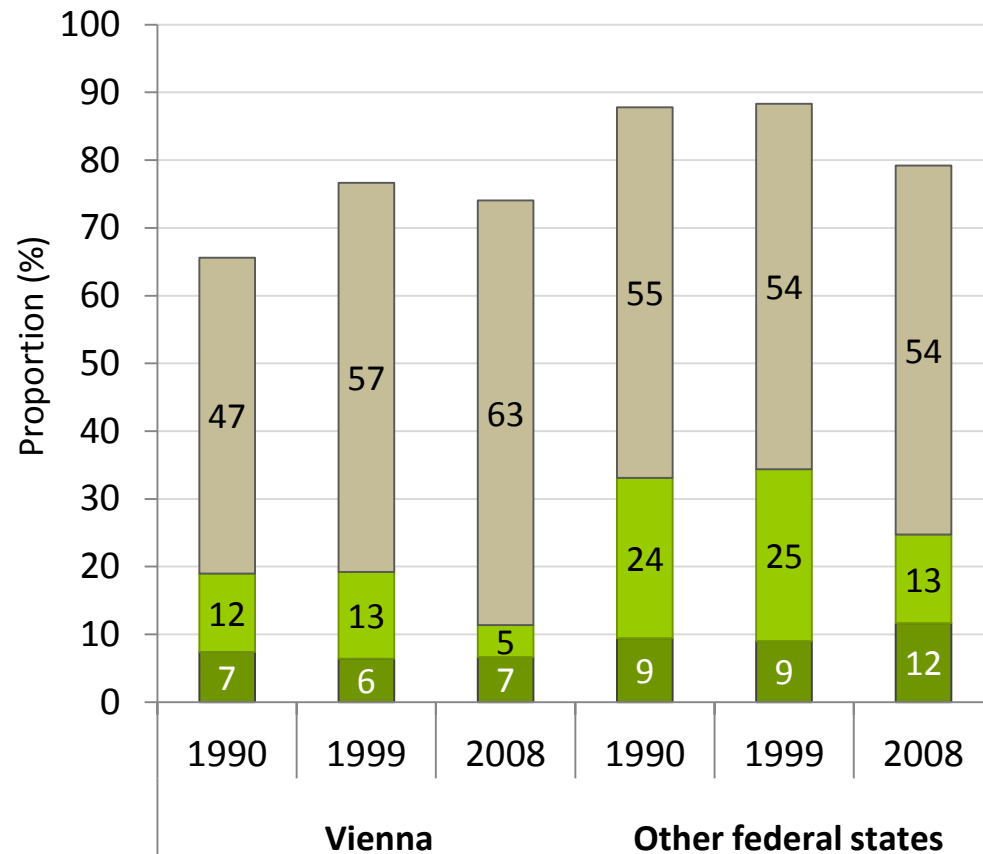
- All are religiously affiliated
- Attend church regularly, most of them weekly, and pray frequently
- The large majority grew up in a very religious parental home
- Sacraments important and believe in traditional Catholic concepts (sin, hell, heaven, afterlife)
- Tend to believe in a personal God and experience situations where God intervenes in their life.
- Religion is a source of comfort and strength for them.

# Religious types: Religious



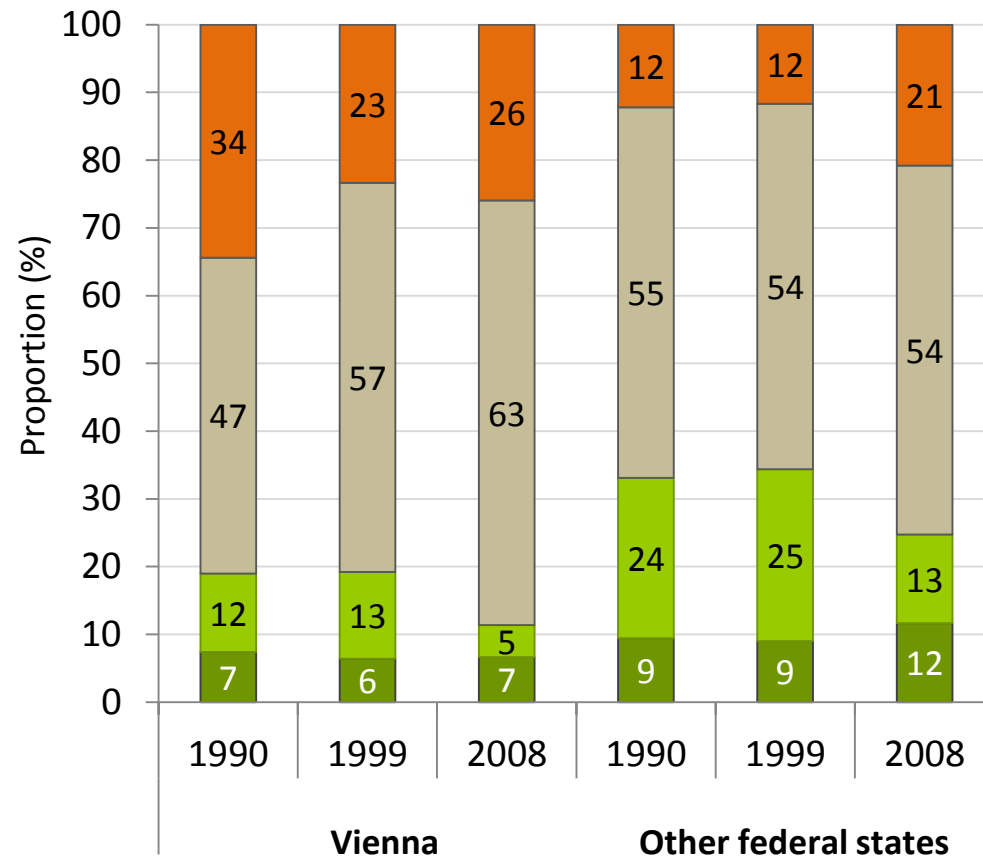
- All are religiously affiliated
- Regularly attend religious service and pray
- Theological beliefs are less traditional
- Majority believes in personal God, but 42% imagine the sacred as some sort of spirit or life force
- Agree that other religions also contain some truth
- Get as much comfort from religion as their traditional religious counterparts but experience fewer situations where God intervenes in their lives

# Religious types: Fuzzy



- **Affiliated (89%), unaffiliated (11%)** persons
- Religion was less important in their childhood, many describe **their socialisation as rather religious or not very religious**
- **Believe more in a sort of spirit (61%)** or life force than a personal God
- **Have their own way of connecting with the divine**
- **Reject the idea of only one true religion**
- **Religion is much less central for them than in the two previous groups**

# Religious types: Non-religious



- Half and half of affiliated and unaffiliated persons
- Experienced a rather or not very religious upbringing
- God is not important in their lives and they do not pursue any religious practice
- 34% believes in some kind of spirit or life force, 43% does not believe in God/spirit/life force and 22% indifferent
- 75% never experienced a situation of God intervening on their lives

# Belonging without believing:

## Nominal membership in Roman Catholic Church

- In 2008 about 13% nominal members in Vienna and OFS

	1990	1999	2008
Vienna	19	15	12
Other federal states	8	9	14
Austria	10	10	13

- Twice as many nominal members among younger cohorts

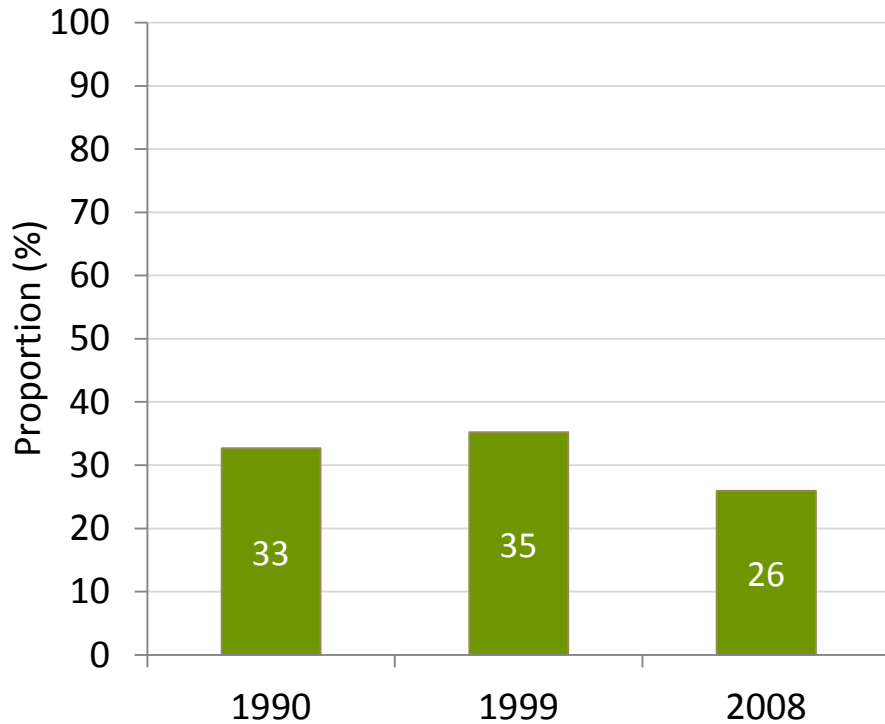
	1990	1999	2008
Austria 1960-1989	17	13	18
Austria 1920-1959	8	7	8

Data sources: EVS 1990, 1999, 2008

- Reasons: cultural tradition, ethnic identity, aspirational (conformity)

# How religious are the unaffiliated in Austria?

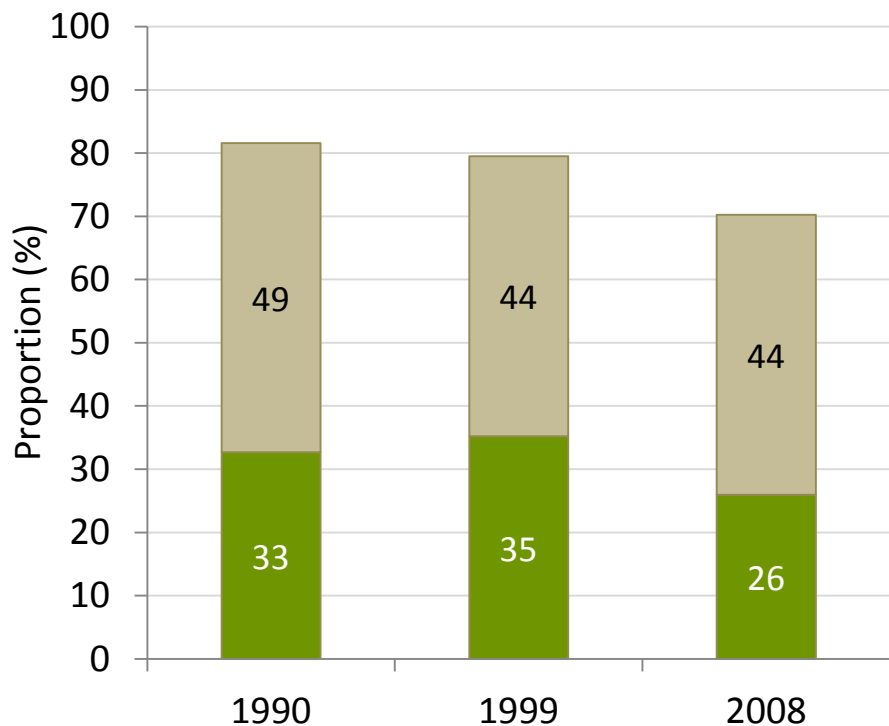
- unaffiliated increased from about 10% to 15%



- ***Believing without belonging*** (practicing religious) believe in a personal God or some sort of spirit or life force and take moments of prayer, meditation, or reflection

# How religious are the unaffiliated in Austria?

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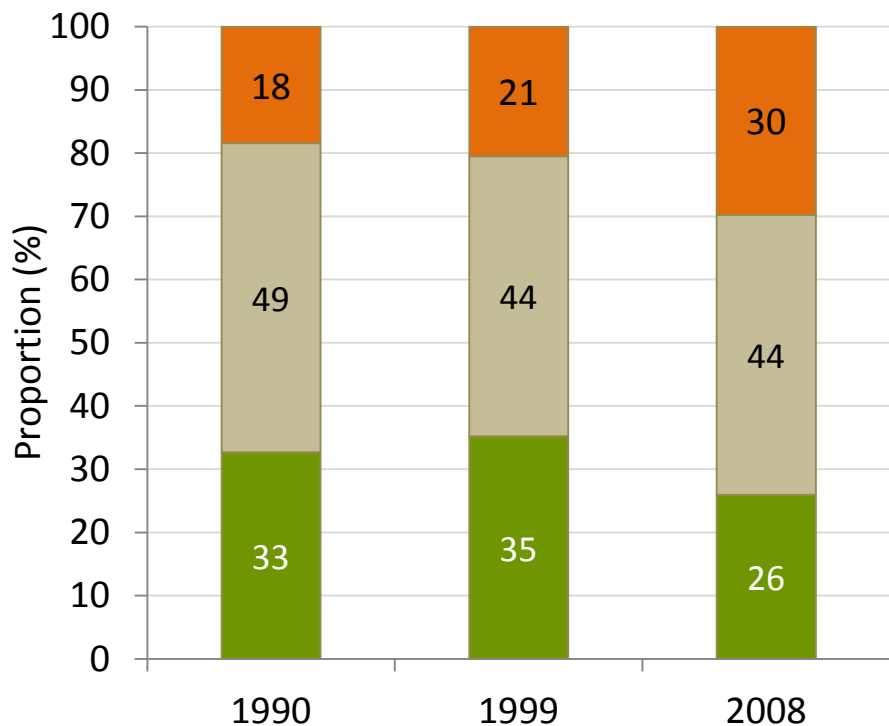


- *Passive believers* either believe but do not practice or – less often – the other way around
- *BWB (practicing religious)* believe in a personal God or some sort of spirit or life force and take moments of prayer, meditation, or reflection



# How religious are the unaffiliated in Austria?

- unaffiliated increased from about 10% to 15%



- **Secular** group does not believe in God, a spirit, or life force and does not practice
- **Passive believers** either believe but do not practice or – less often – the other way around
- **BWB (practicing religious)** believe in a personal God or some sort of spirit or life force and take moments of prayer, meditation, or reflection

# Summary & conclusions

- Religiosity differs strongly between Vienna and other federal states
- Austria still predominantly Catholic, but tradition is eroding fast
- Younger cohorts less religious among all religious groups
- In Vienna Muslims the most religious group
- The gap between religious membership and practice widens over successive cohorts
- Irregular churchgoing signals weaker embedment within the religious community and is further leeway for leaving the church
- Religious upbringing matters for keeping religiosity throughout life course
- Nominal church members not likely to raise children religiously
- Further decline inevitable? Vienna a forerunner of the change in the rest of Austria?

# Summary & conclusions

- Trends towards **privatisation and individualisation of religious practice and belief**
- Praying more stable but decline in frequent, regular praying
- **More than half of the population inconsistently religious:**
  - practices irregularly,
  - tends to believe in higher power instead of personal God,
  - has own way of connecting with divine and
  - is open to other religious traditions
- **Only a shrinking minority of the unaffiliated believes without belonging** and the share of non-religious is increasing

Book chapter forthcoming in Lukas Pokorny & Gerald Hoedl  
(2014, eds.): Religion in Austria, Volume 2. Praesens Verlag

## QUESTIONS, COMMENTS...

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