Modernization Before Industrialization: Cultural Roots of the Demographic Transition in France *by* Guillaume Blanc, Brown University

Summary of results

– First to identify the cause of the early demographic transition in France: secularization

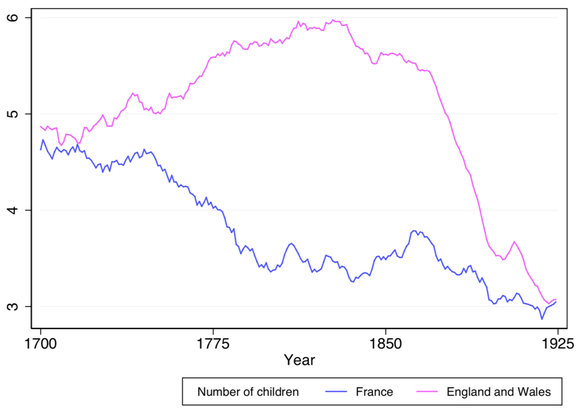
– Use of a novel crowdsourced individual-level historical dataset to identify a causal effect

Introduction

The puzzle

– Exceptionally early decline in fertility in France, in the 18th century and more than a hundred years before the rest of Europe, although:

- France: "*country of savages*" (Weber 1986)
- England: cradle of the Industrial Revolution



Hypothesis secularization (dechristianization) caused the early decline in fertility in France

Historical accounts important and early process of secularization starting around 1740-1750 (see paper): "*liberation of Frenchmen from the teachings, the restrictions, and the yoke of the Catholic Church*" (Braudel, 1986)

I find that, after secularization, religiosity and development are positively correlated ⟶ rural peasants secularized first!

Causes of secularization

– distrust of and backlash against the elites

– why: austere moral norms of the counter reformation imposed by elites - political and religious

– context: strong counter reformation after demise of protestantism in France + absolute monarchy

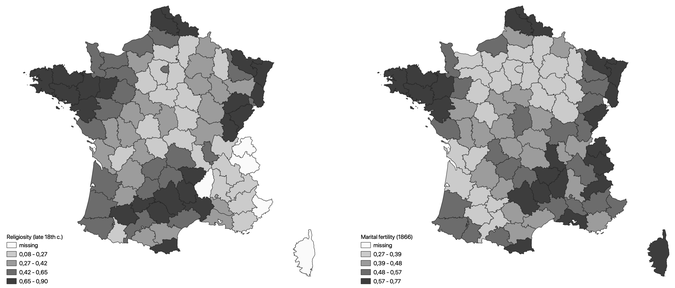
– see paper for more details + discussion of measures

Data

– marital fertility index I_g (Coale and Watkins 1986) *département* level

– individual-level: crowdsourced genealogies (Kaplanis et al. 2018, Blanc 2019)

– religiosity after secularization (Tackett 1986) at *département* and district levels + pre-secularization measures



(a) Religiosity (1791) **(b)** Marital fertility (1866)

Empirical strategy Cross-sectional regression of fertility on religiosity after secularization

→ Always control for pre-secularization religiosity in order to capture secularization and not pre-existing differences

Main empirical findings at the *département* level

⟶ Religiosity fully accounts for the early decline.
Robust to accounting for spatial correlation + omitted variables

	dep var: First year with fertility index I_g lower than .5						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Religiosity (1791)	98.180***	99.841***	120.265***	111.727***	112.623***	114.165***	115.143***
	(13.281)	(13.384)	(19.015)	(18.522)	(18.144)	(18.147)	(18.620)
Religiosity (pre-secularization)		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region fixed effects			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cultural and institutional factors				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education and schooling					Yes	Yes	Yes
Pre-industrial development						Yes	Yes
Contemporary development							Yes
Mean of dep var	1863	1862	1862	1862	1862	1862	1861
Standard deviation of dep var	34	34	34	34	34	34	33
Perc. 25-75 *Religiosity (1791)*	36	36	44	41	41	42	42
Observations	85	80	80	80	80	80	78
R-squared	0.40	0.45	0.62	0.74	0.75	0.75	0.76

Individual-level results

⟶ causal effect of secularization with historical individual-level data

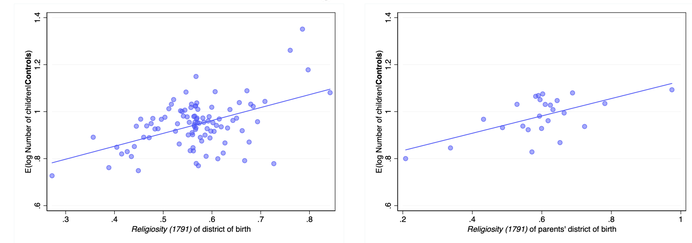
1- by accounting for time varying département-level unobservables w FE

2- second generation migrants analysis: district of birth FE absorb unobserved institutional characteristics

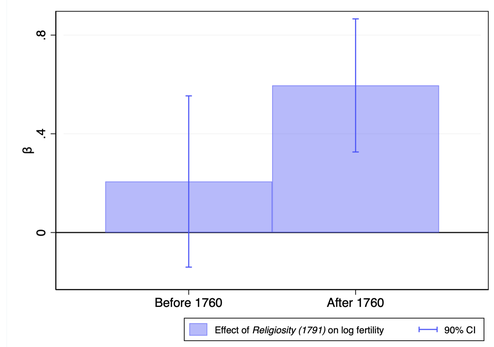
3- by comparing the effect of treatment (religiosity after secularization) before and after secularization (differences in differences)

– Without this: no data w/ spatial variation before 1831

Figure 2



(a) OLS with FE **(b)** Second generation migrants



(c) Effect before and after secularization (did)

Main References

Blanc, G. 2020. Demographic Change and Development. Work in progress.

Spolaore, E., and R. Wacziarg. 2020. Fertility and Modernity. Working paper.

Tackett, T. 1986. Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France. PUP