

Religion in Ireland: Recent Trends and Possible Futures

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Three Aims

- **Irish Census data**
 - Summary findings from 2016: overall religious affiliation; regional breakdown
 - Historical trends (since 1961)
- **European Social Survey data (2002-14)**
 - Comparison with Census – why different?
 - More detailed picture of religiosity in Ireland – upbringing; attendance; prayer frequency
 - Comparison with 14 other European countries
 - Youth (16-35 year olds)
- **Census 2021**
 - Consultation re possible changes to (and/or expansion) of way Census asks about religion... *what you need to know.*

Religion in Census 2016

12 **What is your religion?**
Mark one box only

1 Roman Catholic

2 Church of Ireland

3 Islam

4 Presbyterian

5 Orthodox

6 Other, write in your RELIGION

7 No religion

12 **Cén creideamh atá agat?**
Marcáil in aon bhosca amháin

1 Caitliceach

2 Eaglais na hÉireann

3 Ioslamachas

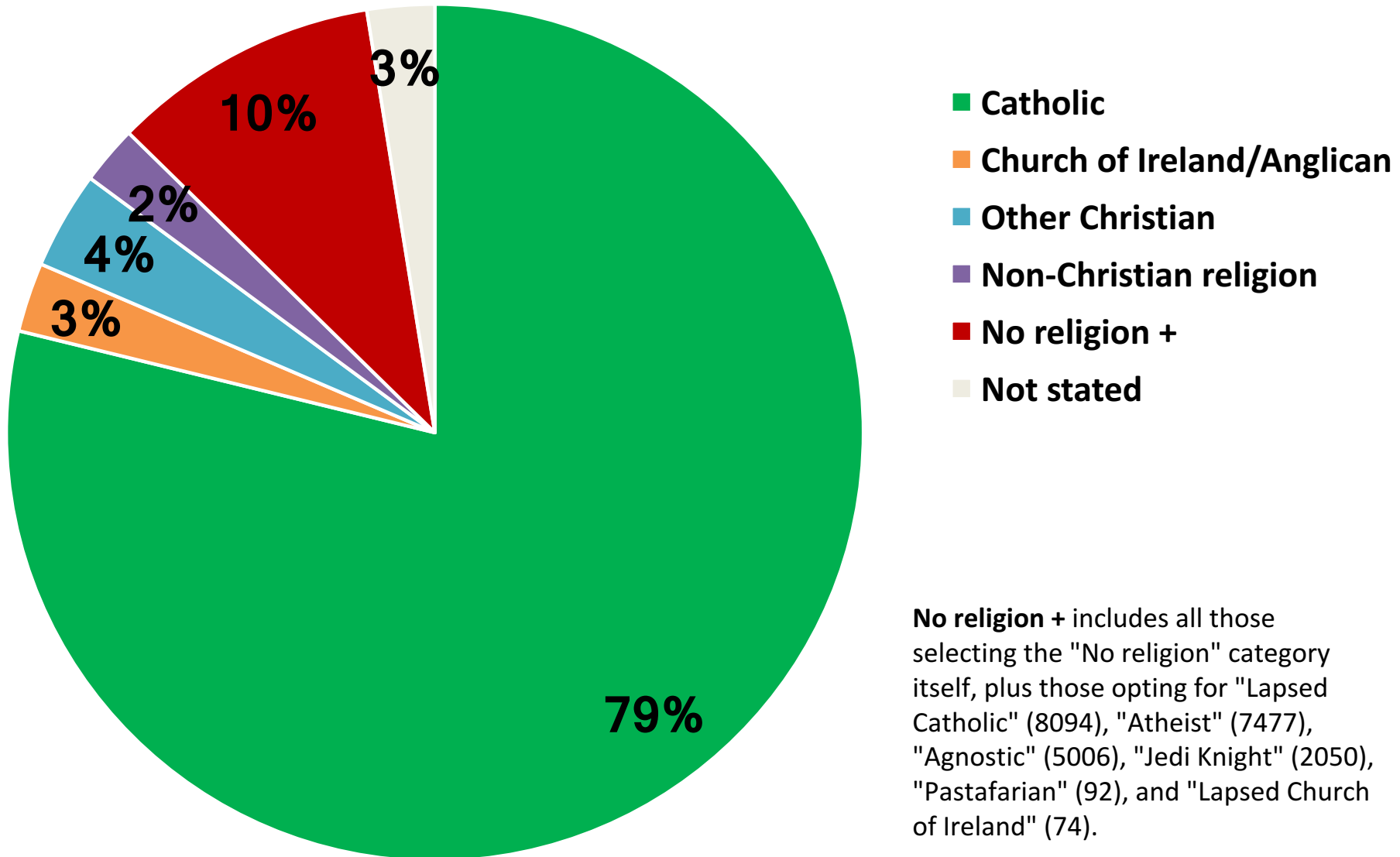
4 Preispitéireach

5 Ceartchreidmheach

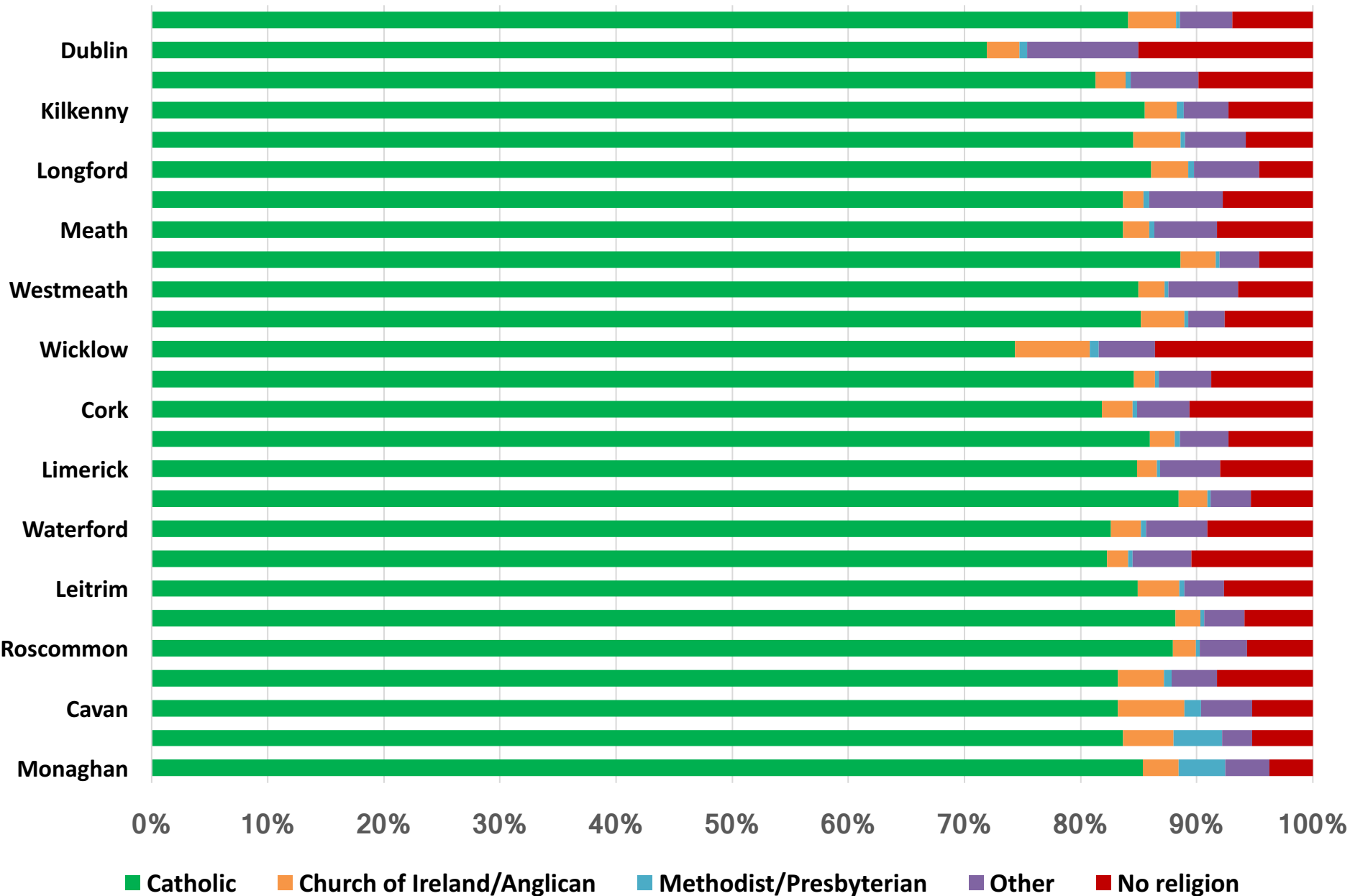
6 Eile, sonraigh do CHREIDEAMH

7 Níl aon chreideamh

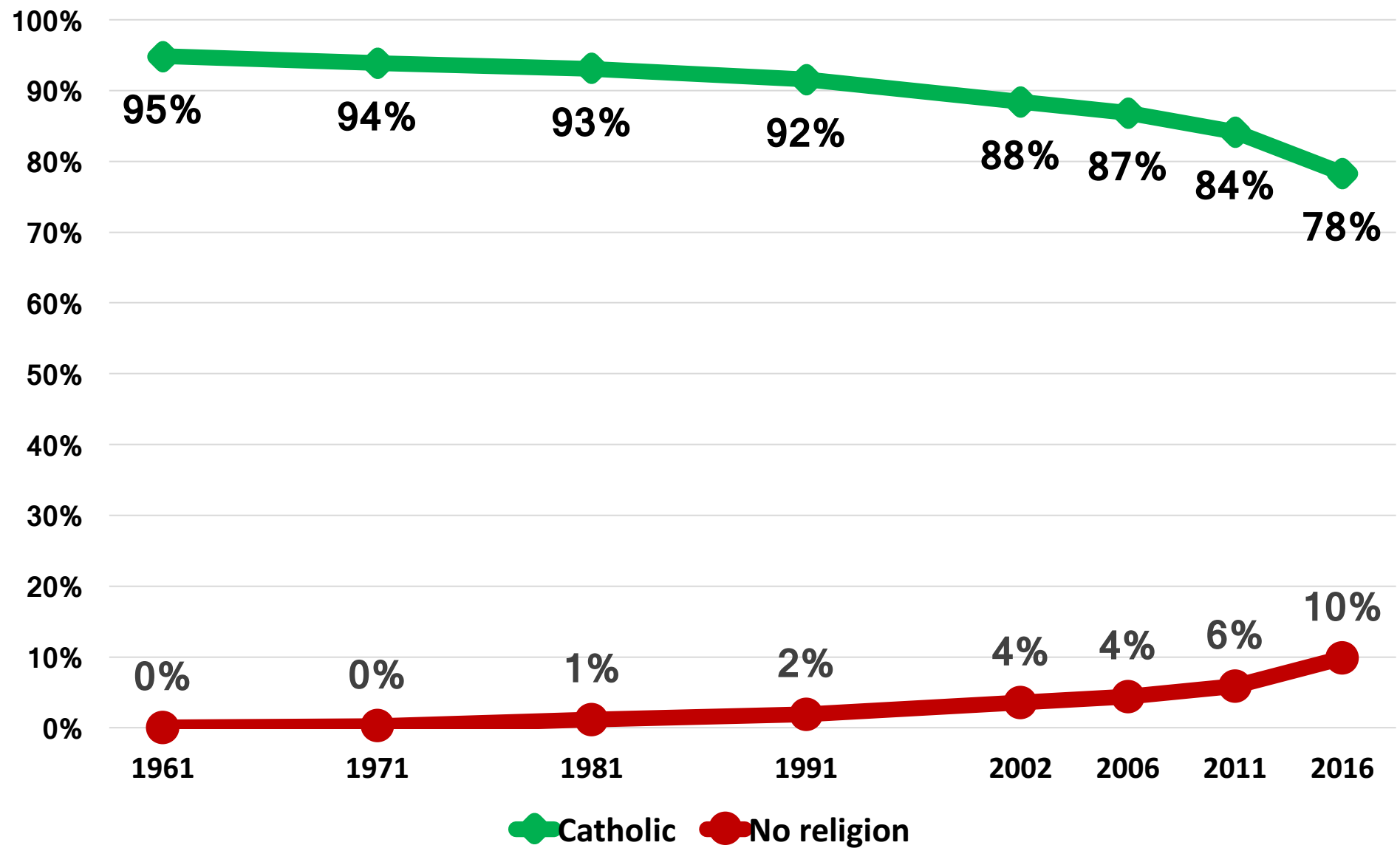
Religious affiliation of the population of Ireland (Census 2016)



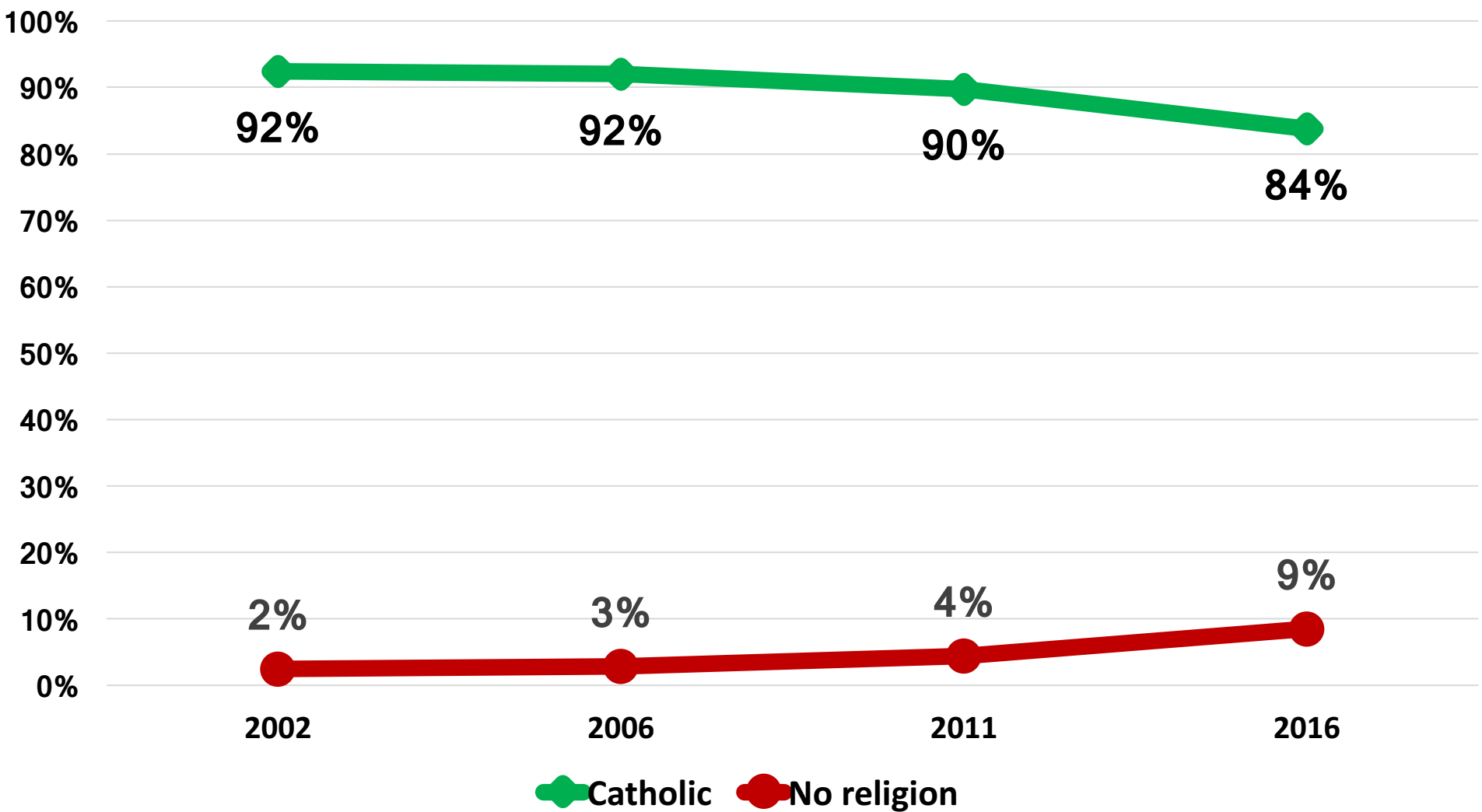
Religious affiliation by county (Census 2016)



Catholic and nonreligious affiliation in Ireland over time (Censuses 1961-2016)



Catholic and nonreligious affiliation of native Irish population over time (Censuses 2002-16)





- High-quality, academic social survey; same questions in 20-30 European countries every two years, since 2002.
- Face-to-face interviews, random sample of whole population, very high response rates; good sample size (i.e., $N = c. 2400$; response rate = 61%, for Ireland in 2014)
- Latest publicly available data is 2014; 2016 wave due for release in October 2017
- Several religion-related questions asked!
 - Two-stage identity/affiliation question
 - ALSO: Upbringing, Attendance, prayer, personal religiosity, etc.

C9 Do you consider yourself as belonging to²⁴ any particular religion or denomination?

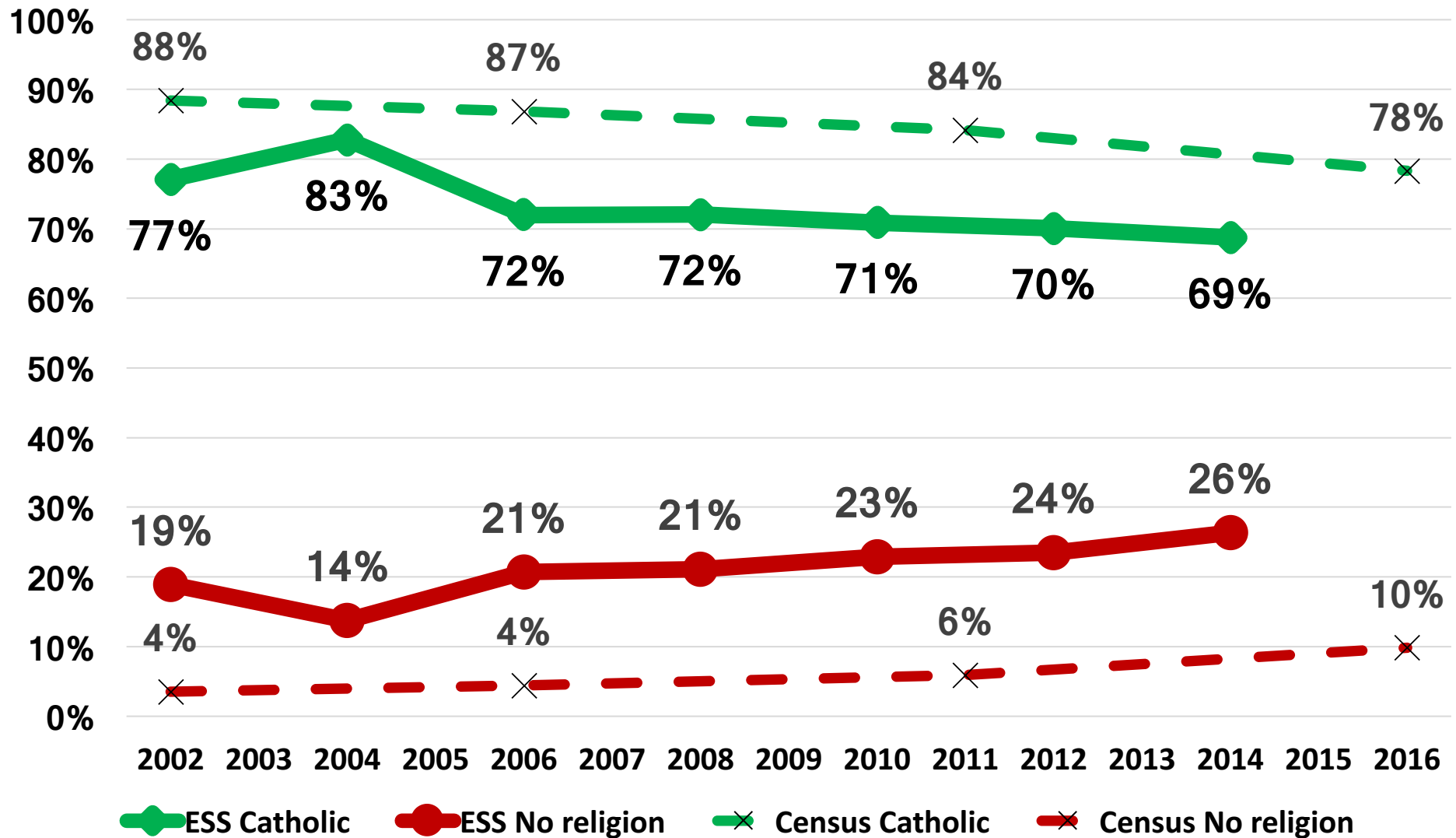
Yes	1	ASK C10
No	2	GO TO C11
(Don't know)	8	

ASK IF YES AT C9 (code 1)

C10 Which one? [Can be asked as a country-specific question. To be recoded into the ESS coding frame below]

Roman Catholic	01	GO TO C13
Protestant	02	
Eastern Orthodox	03	
Other Christian denomination	04	
Jewish	05	
Islamic	06	
Eastern religions	07	
Other non-Christian religions	08	

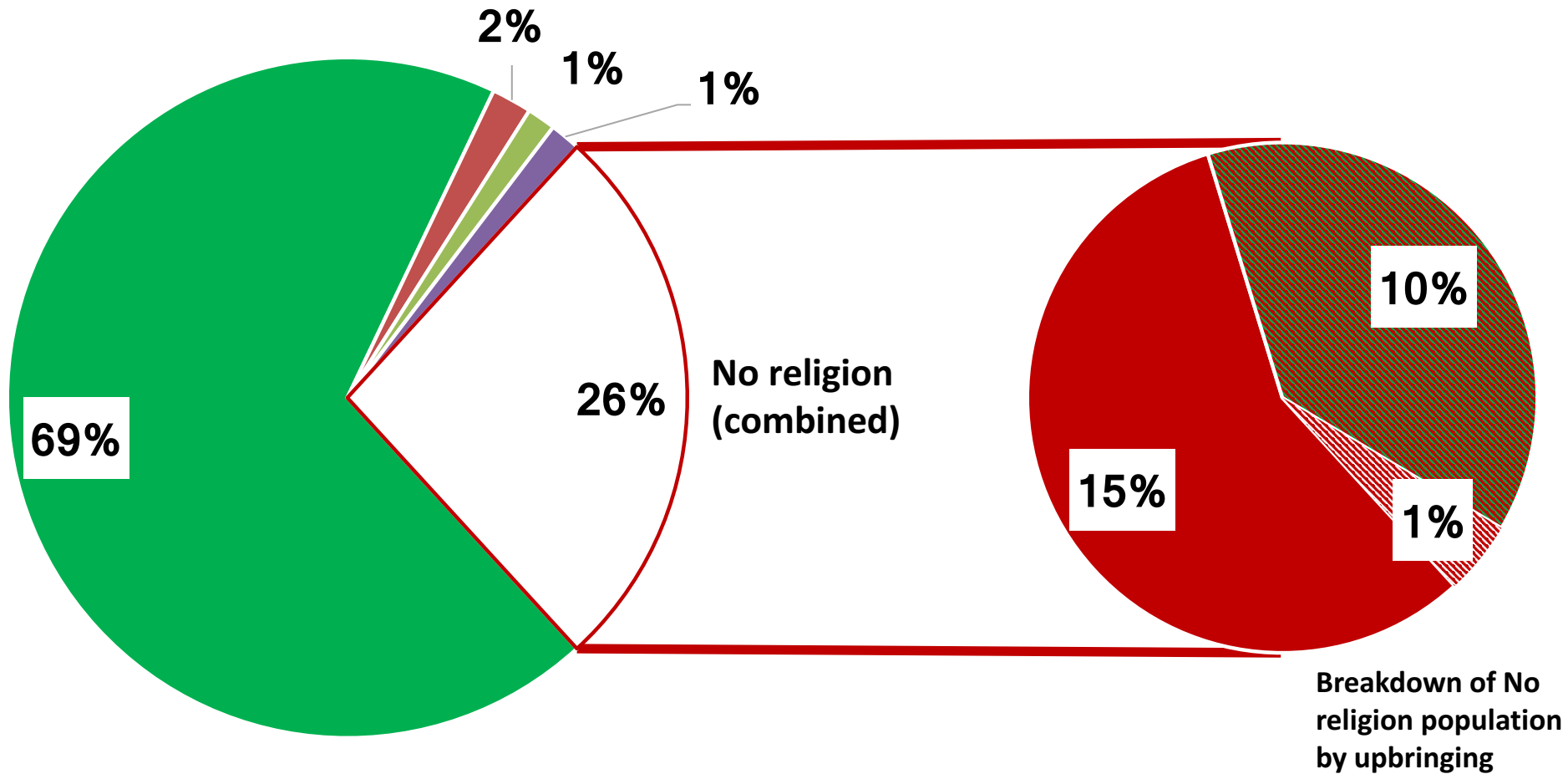
Catholic and nonreligious affiliation in Ireland over time: European Social Survey (2002-14) vs Census (2002-16)



Why the difference? Which question is “right”?

- Religious identity can be difficult to pin down:
 - Certain % unambiguously X; certain % unambiguously Y ... *but (potentially v substantial) % much more ambivalent*
 - EXAMPLE: baptized and raised Catholic, married and own kids baptized in RC; big part of family identity... but not sure what (if anything) still believe, haven't practised regularly in decades; deeply conflicted about 'good' of Church and role in society... **“Catholic”** or **“No religion”**?
- ‘What is your religion?’ questions consistently produce significantly higher religious responses than other, more nuanced ones.
 - Lots of interesting possible reasons...

Religious affiliation in Ireland (ESS 2014)

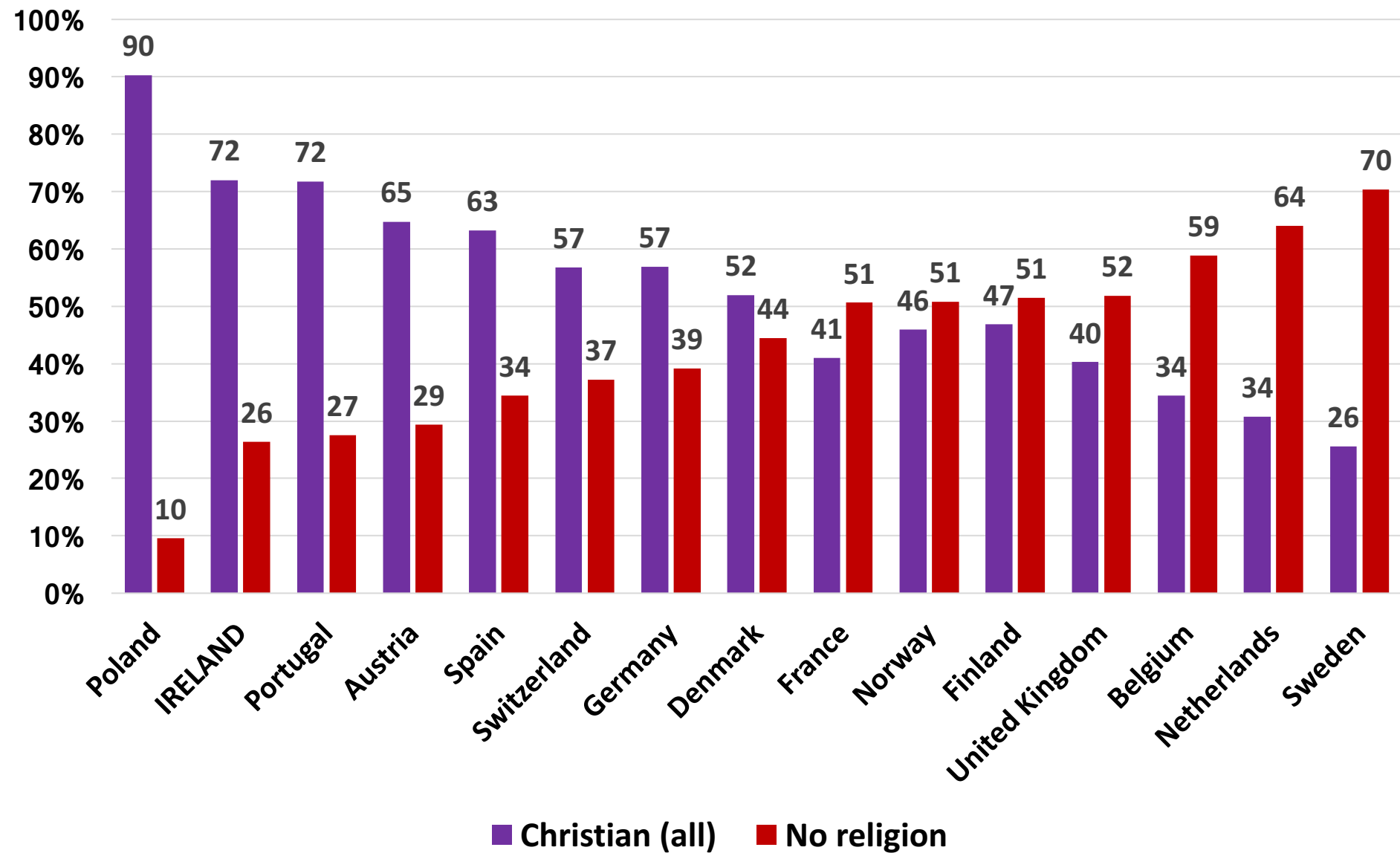


- Catholic
- Other Christian
- No religion (cradle None)
- No religion (ex Other)

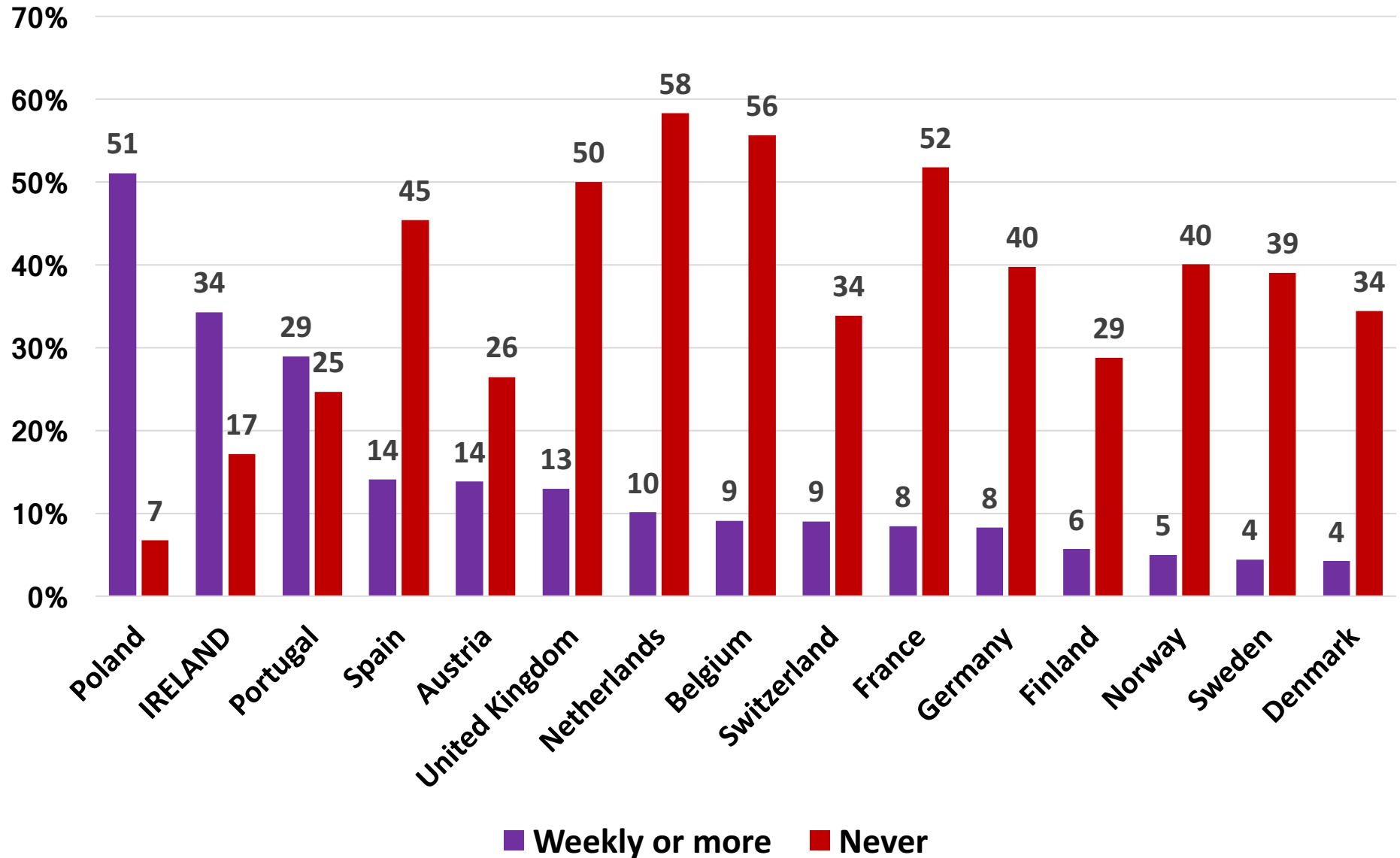
- Protestant
- Non-Christian religions
- No religion (ex Catholic)

**The (still!) exceptional
religiosity of Ireland**

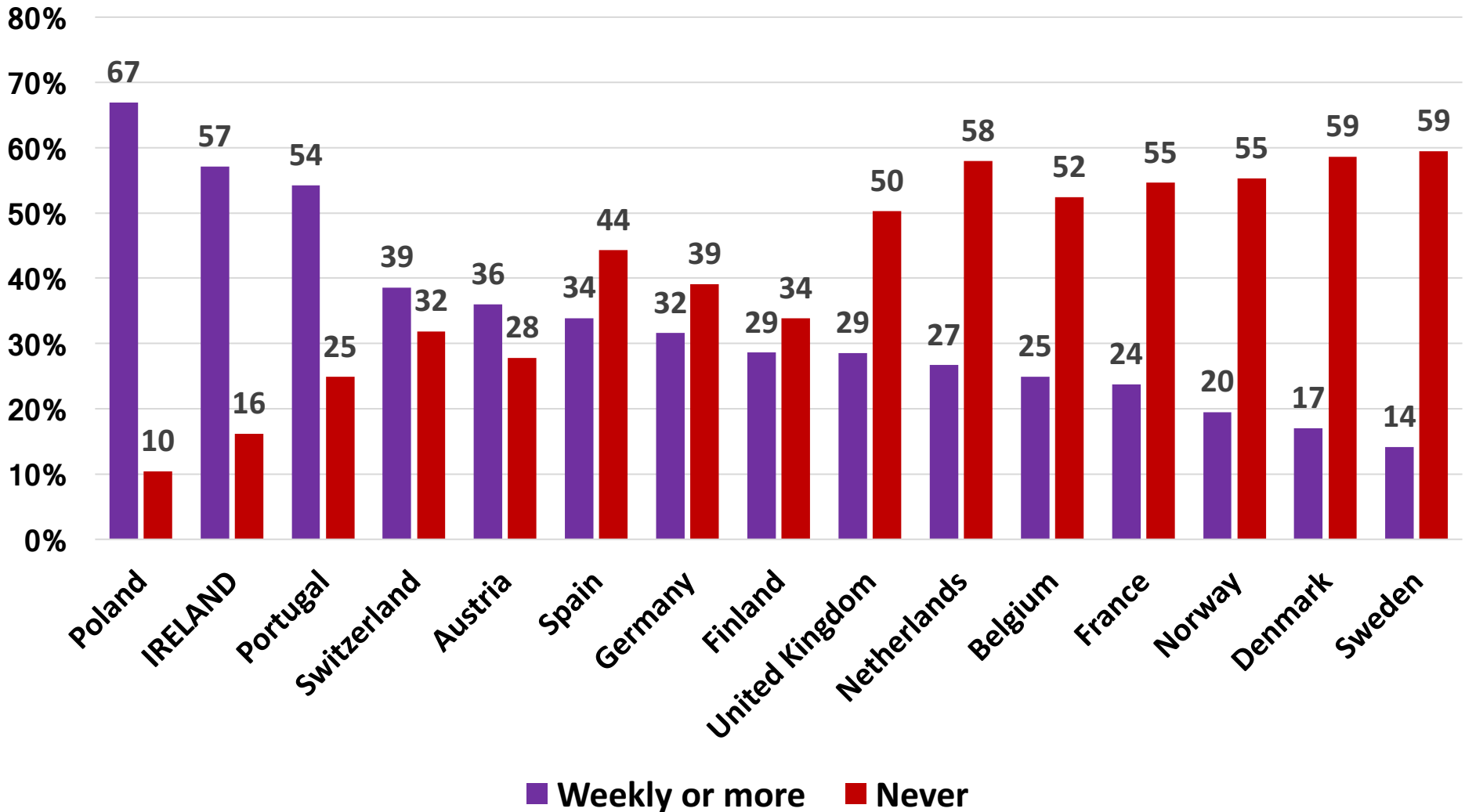
Christian (all) and nonreligious affiliation in selected European countries (ESS 2014)



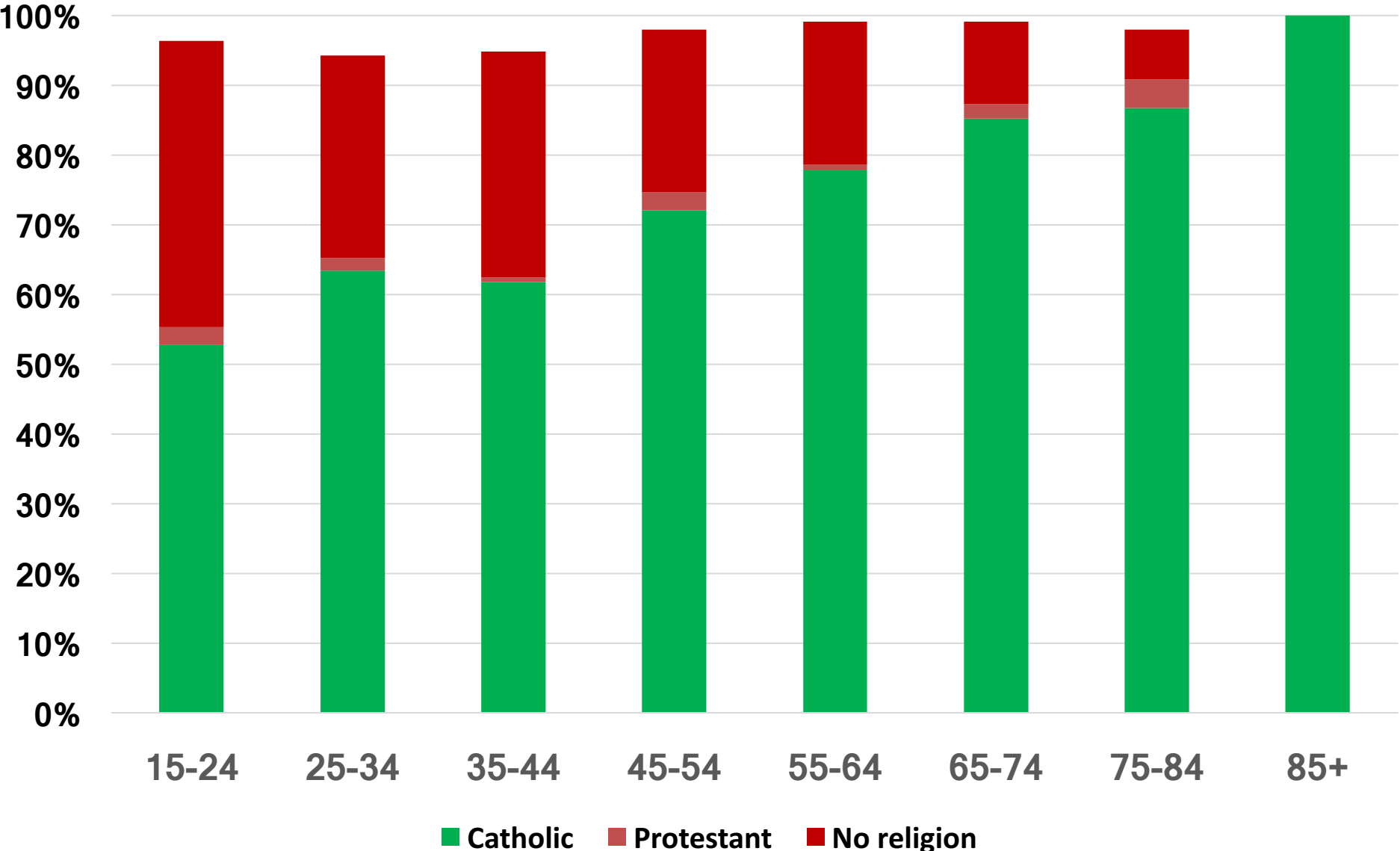
Religious attendance in selected European countries (ESS 2014)



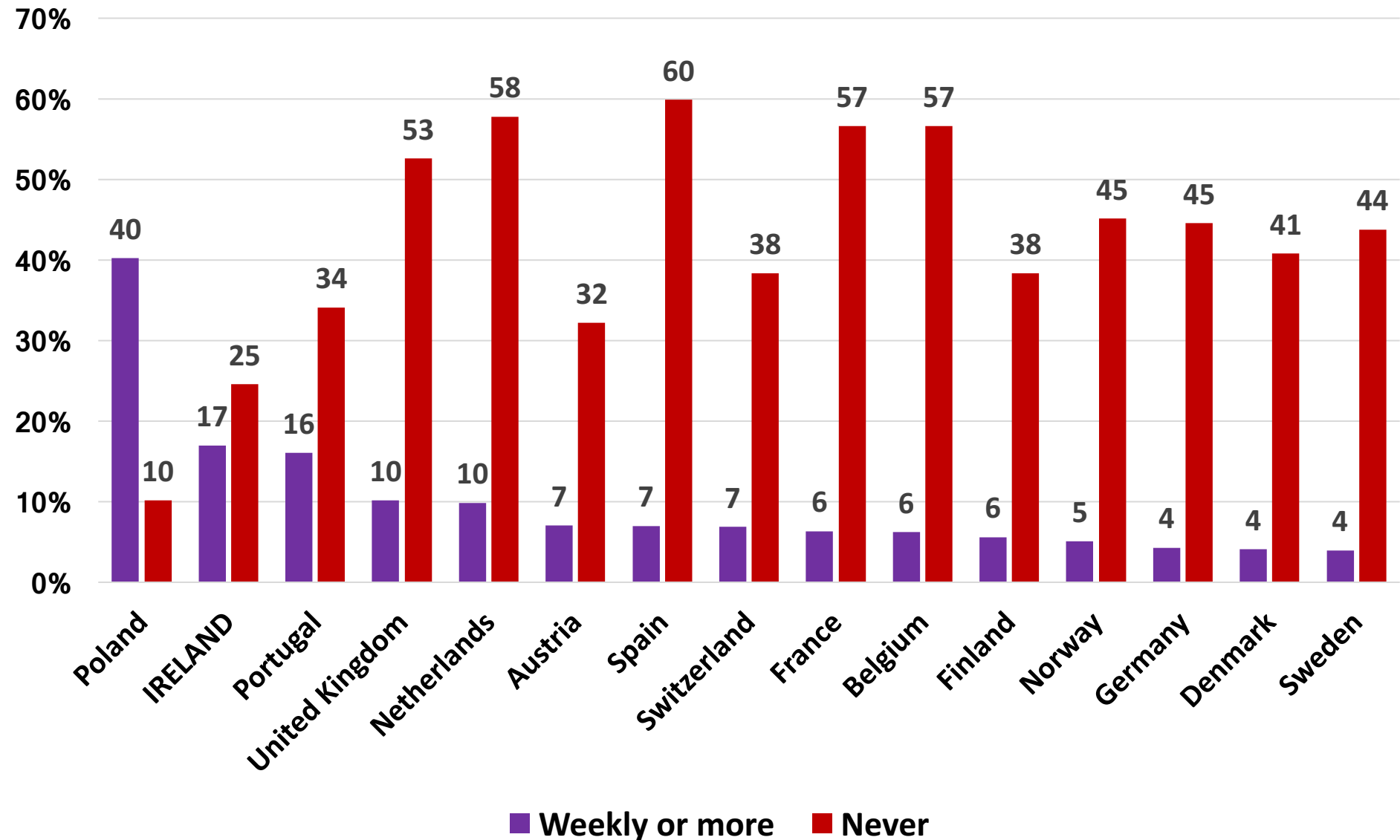
Prayer frequency (outside religious services) in selected European countries (ESS 2014)



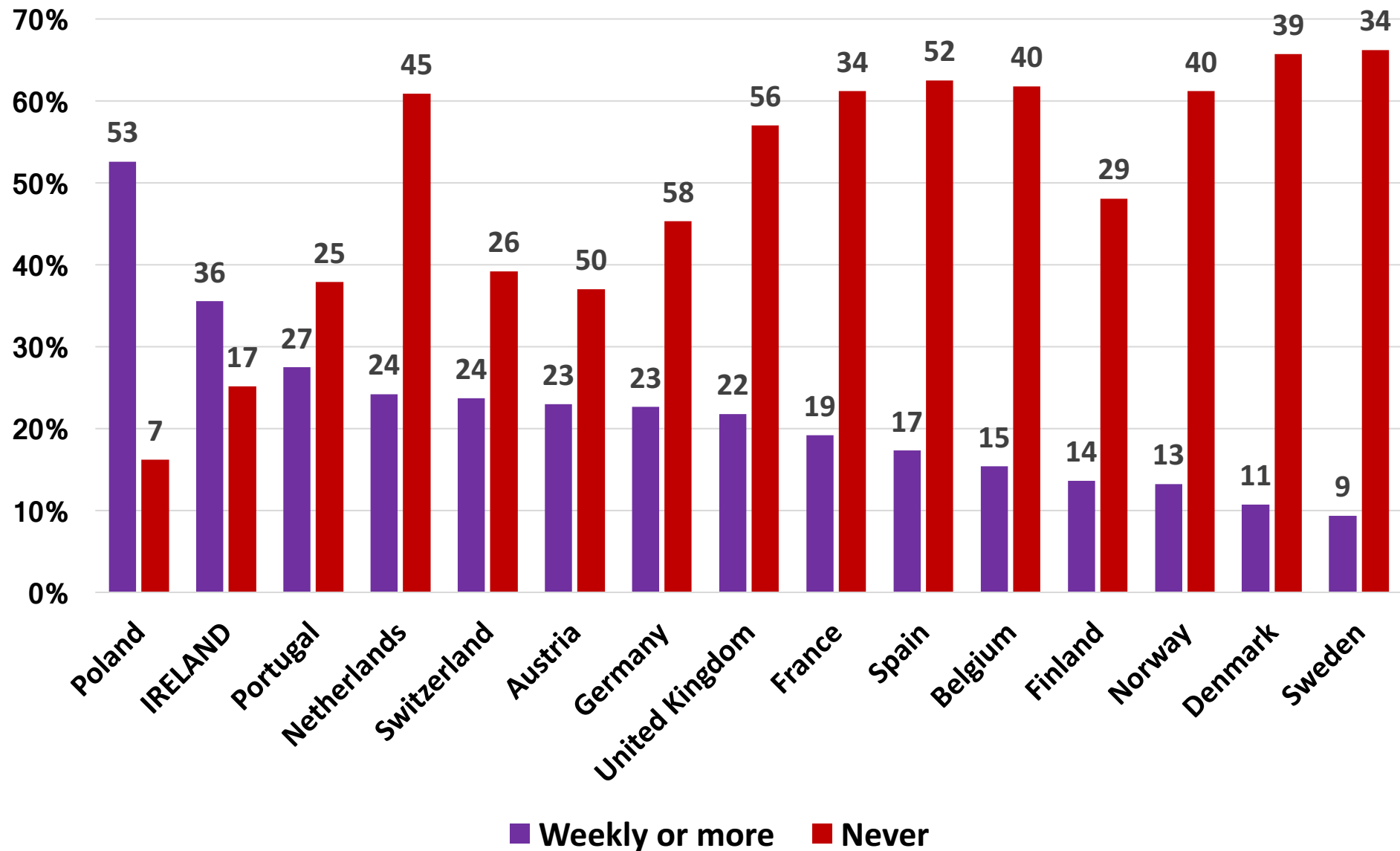
Religious affiliation in Ireland by age group (ESS 2014)



Religious attendance of 15-34 year olds in selected European countries (ESS 2014)



Prayer frequency of 15-34 year olds in selected European countries (ESS 2014)



Census 2021

- 5 July: Census 2021 announced, with funding for new questions
 - *Speculation* (e.g., in *Irish Times*) that religion q. could be revised, based on criticism of bluntness ('too binary') nature.
- **Important for two reasons:**
 1. Accurate data is important... quantity (and quality) of religiosity in Ireland of intrinsic interest.
 2. Census data used in all sorts of ways, by all sorts of stakeholders, to inform policy/practice etc. – government policy, but also (and rightly) used to support all kinds of ideas, lobbying etc.
 3. All the more important given very large *significance* of religion in Ireland.

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Census 2016 will get religion all wrong

Millions of careless ticks can be used later to justify the Catholic Church's near monopoly on the state's schools.

© Mon, Apr 18, 2016, 00:02

Richard O'Leary

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THREE – tentative, initial - PROPOSALS...

1. Current question ('What is your religion?') must be kept.

(Disclaimer: I'm **not** a fan of current question; and if designing Census from scratch would ask q. differently. HOWEVER...)

- Even seemingly minor changes in way religious affiliation questions are asked can produce very different results.
- Different questions *not* directly comparable.
- Significant changes to wording of q. would mean no ***meaningful*** comparison could be made to previous Censuses.
 - If trying to track religious identity over time, no way of telling what % of any change 'real' or due to different question
 - However, inevitable that figures **will** be used in this way (*even with caveats being made*)

2. Addition of question regarding regularity of religious practice.

- Religious practice – i.e., actually giving up time out of one's week – most robust indicator of religiosity
- Allows distinction between active members, and those identifying for other (cultural, family reasons); accurate data on this useful to all 'sides'
- Census allows for *very* detailed analysis of religious practice (by age, sex, local area, ethnic background, etc., etc.!)
- Esp. useful to have 'weekly (or more)', 'occasional', and never attenders
- Census already asks about practice in relation to Irish-speaking:

14 Can you speak Irish?

Answer if aged 3 years or over

1 Yes

2 No

If 'Yes', do you speak Irish?

Mark the boxes that apply

1 Daily, within the education system

2 Daily, outside the education system

3 Weekly

4 Less often

5 Never

3. Addition of question regarding religious (or not) upbringing.

- ‘In what religion, if any, were you brought up?’ or similar
- Helps to address some of ambiguity in ‘What is your religion?’ q – e.g. allows people to affirm fact of Catholic background, even if no longer feel it.
- Accurate gauge of growth/decline of different religious categories due to conversion or ‘nonversion’
 - What proportion of ‘No religion’ increase due to formerly religious ‘leaving’, vs. immigration from less religious countries?

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