

1 Introduction

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Background

In 1975, my grandmother, Myrtle Dible, gave me a copy of the first publicly available *National Basic Intelligence Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 1975). I am not certain how my grandmother went from teaching in a one-room Ohio schoolhouse to having her eye on publications from the CIA, but I am thankful that she did. Although I had read widely and deeply, this text was my first exposure to an almanac-style book of global information. The collection of basic intelligence in one volume was immensely appealing because it allowed for a rapid comparison of a vast array of data. Equally compelling was a recognition of the deep complexity of human experience. Combined, these factors revealed to me the truth that to “know thyself” necessitated learning as much as possible about others.

Several decades of reading later, the text spontaneously reentered my awareness. The memory spark occurred following a period of repeatedly encountering psychology of religion (PoR) colleagues who expressed the desire to explore questions at a global level. The challenge was that they were at a loss for fundamental information about the field’s characteristics and standard operating procedures in other locations. Frustrated at the lack of background knowledge, the course of action often defaulted to avoiding global questions; opportunities for expanding our collective knowledge were set aside in favor of convenience samples and “fish-in-a-bowl” correlational hypotheses.

Subsequent intentional conversations with colleagues in a variety of professional organizations (the International Association for the Psychology of Religion, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality [Division 36, American Psychological Association]) suggested that an almanac approach, such as I had encountered several decades before, could be useful. By assembling similar kinds of details about an array of contexts, scholars might be more likely to take the plunge into global collaborations that would intentionally and collaboratively develop projects to advance our level of understanding.

Our Goals

A primary objective of this project is to provide concrete, systematic information concerning the content and character of PoR in a global context. It represents an attempt to reveal what we know and don’t know about basic elements of psycholog(ies) of religion on a global scale. Current knowledge is fragmented and siloed by specializations, cultures, methodologies, preferred publication outlets, and even manners of reporting similar findings. The fragmentation results in the absence of a systematic, unified approach to comprehending what the field was, is, or could become. This is not to say that in all cases a unified approach is optimal. To the contrary, it could prove to stifle innovation.

Without some system, however, it is increasingly difficult to outline the field. It is not

unreasonable to speculate that the history of the field has experienced this problem several times over from its inception. Waves of interest and information crest then diminish as the great range of material proves difficult to reconcile. We certainly do not make any claim toward a kind of “grand unified theory,” but we do aim to take a step in that direction by consolidating some core knowledge about the past, present, and potential future state of the discipline across culturally discrete settings.

Beyond these issues, we recognize that much of the literature arises from a comparatively limited array of epistemologically driven conceptualizations evaluated in a narrow array of contexts. Even when this reality has been acknowledged, it was often in conjunction with an awkward combination of “parachutes and parasitic research” (The Lancet Global Health, 2018). These phenomena, while initially recognized as a global issue, can also pose problems within countries or even smaller zones of interest (Lambert et al., 2024). The result is artificial boundaries and biased perspectives to our knowledge that restrict the field’s development.

Although this problem has been apparent for many, many years, its presence and ramifications have only recently, and in some quarters begrudgingly, been acknowledged. One significant reason for this slowness of response is that the process of finding out what we don’t know in any domain is immensely challenging. Perhaps an even more compelling reason is a lack of collective intellectual humility that impedes the ability to admit a lack of knowledge. It is also the case that once the intention to address the problem is acted upon, we are instantly faced with a bewildering array of alternative paths and methodologies to explore.

Our Strategies

From among the vast ways to think about the content and global nature of the field, this project includes two primary strategies. The first is

to explicitly constrain the types of questions asked. The second is to provide a theoretical framework that includes important psychological constructs that are also of great interest to multiple other disciplines.

Almanac Format

You will observe quickly that this text does not unfold in the same pattern that characterizes many “handbooks.” In some formats, authors are provided some general parameters to which they loosely respond, sometimes answering the questions they wish had been asked instead of the actual questions. Other approaches simply assign broad topics and word counts. While there is great value in those other ways of crafting handbooks, the goal of this text is more closely defined. Concerning the basic almanac structure of the work, we identified potentially informative elements that might reveal either unique or shared elements among people in diverse parts of the world. Our solicitation of data sought descriptions that allow us to gain insight into the origins and contemporary nature of psycholog(ies) of religion as they exist today. We believe that by cataloging the state-of-the-art thinking and practice in strategically selected locations, readers will be able to draw conclusions concerning the types of additional knowledge to pursue for the betterment of the field.

Structure of the Chapters

Readers will encounter the following common structure in each chapter:

- **Historical Background:** In this section, contributors present an overview of the emergence of the field of PoR in the regional context. Of particular importance is the inclusion of various intellectual schools of thoughts and their relations, whether harmonious or discordant. Likewise, the intent is to identify seminal thinkers, institutions, and other key elements.

- **Contemporary Status:** Here, authors comment on the current state of PoR. They were encouraged to reflect on factors (intellectual climate, educational context, infrastructure, access to collaborators, funding, etc.) either facilitating or inhibiting the study of PoR. This includes the identification of major journals used by scholars in the region, with special attention to more locally oriented publication venues when available, regardless of the language employed. Authors were also requested to use literature searches to identify common topics over the previous 20–30 years. In addition, we requested that authors present the best possible information regarding the prevalence of psychologists of religion, their areas of expertise (e.g., social or cognitive), methodologies preferred, and details concerning any established organizations or emerging networks devoted to PoR.
- **Future Development:** Next, the writers were requested to offer opinions concerning contextually critical topics. This is in order to reflect not only where the field has been but also where it may be heading. Both of these emphases may be useful for deepening insight into the discrete traditions while also simulating creative and useful research. You will find that the examples presented have a variety of foci. For instance, one author may describe prominent research findings. Another person might offer observations on the specific challenges potential researchers face within the identified context. Yet another writer could elect to reflect on theoretical concerns that are intensely localized. In this fashion, the handbook has sought to include information that is historical, forward-looking, and applied at various levels within each chapter.

It is important to note that the tasks given were not uniformly challenging for all of the contributors. Some had ready access to profoundly advanced databases and computerized resources, while others spent much time pulling

information from printed pages or other archival sources. Internet access was immediate and constant for many of the scholars, but in some settings, rolling power outages and other related challenges increased the effort required to complete the task. The result is that you will find the occasional note that “No information was available on this topic at this time.” Please do not by any means interpret that as a lack of effort on the part of the authors. Their due diligence in tracking down material was impressive and consistent. They have our gratitude for providing what could be provided.

Uniformity of Data Collected

The uniformity of data collected allows for direct comparisons of characteristics of PoR at the global level. Benchmarking information in this manner also offers the opportunity for developmental comparisons across time. The project thus at least partially establishes a knowledge network that will serve to expand itself, encouraging spontaneous growth of new information. The assembled data also serve to highlight areas where the field is prospering and areas where strategic investments of attention and funding have optimal chances to leverage the advancement of the field.

Diversity in Contributions

While psychological studies of religious beliefs and behaviors date to the beginning of the field, English language volumes on the topic typically have drawn from Western (especially the United States) perspectives. As demonstrated in the list of contributors, this work seeks greater diversity in contributions, with authors writing from an “inside” perspective whenever possible. This breadth serves several purposes. First, it will encourage close examination of culturally laden assumptions. Second, it will introduce readers to key questions emerging from multiple contexts. Third, it will bring new voices into the conversation,

setting the stage for fresh collaborative explorations. The network of authors represents a collegial information hub of scholars who are already on the same “intellectual page” and therefore are primed for productive collaborative efforts with readers.

Limitations to Our Approach

There are, of course, costs to this sort of approach. Providing a highly structured template for authors necessitated a significant level of abstraction, especially in places with long, deep, and rich histories of work. Decisions concerning this summation exercise are almost guaranteed to be controversial because as much as we see and feel all the important nuances of our own experiences, sifting and sorting history above and beyond our own biases and preferences is no mean task. To address this to the extent feasible, we encouraged authors to build teams capable of representing a suitably broad perspective by challenging each other.

Second, practical limitations of space prohibited the inclusion of all possible contributors. While we are thrilled to have 32 author teams providing information on different regions of the globe, we realize that we have only 32 author teams providing information. Some locations with exceptional roles in the discipline are not represented in this volume. This unavoidable situation is absolutely our least favorite aspect of this effort. If there is any positive facet to be identified in this limitation, it is the knowledge that the field is larger than what may be contained in a single volume. There was a time when this was not the case, so this abundance is a reason for optimism about the vibrancy and relevance of the work of many excellent scholars across the globe.

Theoretical Framework

When developing the project, we wanted more than the ability to simply compare one

country to another. Our second strategy was to facilitate additional ways of thinking about the almanac-style data.

Selection of Countries

A considerable challenge always revolves around how to approach the global nature of the field. Books in the area often employ thematic or historical approaches that reflect a particular tradition or perspective as written by authors within that domain. A resulting dilemma is that there is rarely specific evidence to demonstrate the broad relevance of the selected themes or even the reading of history outside the chosen domain. Likewise, even within the tradition, the underlying assumptions of the themes and histories, or the positionality of the authors, do not always receive critical attention.

Another approach is to employ simple geographical space to divide up and represent regions. The difficulty with this approach is that physical proximity does not necessarily reflect intellectual similarity. Speaking of “North America,” the “Global South,” and so forth may or may not be exceptionally illuminating. This is especially dependent on the extent to which the author is writing from a position inside or outside of the area or tradition.

Yet another option is to contend that the most important facet to represent is the general position of psychology as opposed to the particular manner of understanding psychology in different contexts. While there is clearly merit in this high-level view of psychology, the present volume works with the assumption that there is great merit in understanding the particular characteristics of psychology. I draw one practical example from my first trip to China, having been invited to share my work on the topic of prayer. A few sentences into the presentation, my hosts gently observed that the word and concepts I was relying on

as the core of my work (e.g., prayer) did not have clear translations into their primary language. As another example, after presenting a paper at a wonderful conference in India, the very next speaker outlined how the American Psychological Association publication manual was detrimental to the ability to communicate certain types of Indian understandings of psychology. I was quickly learning that while it was good to be known simply as a “psychologist,” it was equally important to many to be known as a “contextual psychologist” because the nuances, the assumptions, and the practices matter deeply.

To address these and related predicaments, we chose to use a measure of intellectual space as outlined by Welzel (2013, *Freedom Rising*, Cambridge University Press). (I would be remiss if I neglected here to thank my friend and colleague, Professor Vassilis Saroglou of the Center for Psychology of Religion at the Université Catholique de Louvain for inspiring the adoption of this approach.) The framework in question draws from data collected as part of the World Values Survey (2015, www.worldvaluesurvey.org) and the European Values Survey (<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu>) to categorize nations along two value dimensions: Traditional vs. Secular and Survival vs. Self-expression. To fully explore these two dimensions, we refer readers to the early writing of Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and to the more recent summary provided by Welzel (2013). Note that the World Values Survey does include some variables related to participation in religious activities and the importance of religion to individuals.

The authors include in their mapping distinct regions drawn from dominant shared characteristics of the countries. Those regional groupings are not included here because it seems better to allow the data to be less constrained by those higher-order conceptualizations. This is not to deny the utility of the original labels, but it is hoped that the more

basic representation will provide researchers with a more open sense of possibilities.

These global cultural zones offer a systematic and distinct way to think about PoR while linking the disciplinary pursuit to a wider community of intellectual discussion. By employing this specific theoretical framework that has demonstrated significant utility across multiple disciplines, we are able to strategically pinpoint key global areas based not simply on geography but on the basis of intellectual characteristics highly relevant to PoR. The hope is that PoR scholars will be empowered and encouraged toward greater interdisciplinarity.

As a quick introduction to these ideas, the Traditional – Secular (vertical) dimension positions nations in relation to their modes of production. An important note is that while within-country differences obviously exist along these dimensions, the differences *between* countries are reported as distinctly more profound, hence the usefulness of the dimensions for this larger-scale purpose.

More traditional scores relate to more agrarian positions, while higher secular scores are linked to more industrial orientations. Inglehart and Welzel point out that religiosity, nationalism, respect for authority, obedience, and the favoring of marriage are associated with the Traditional portion of the spectrum; movement toward the Secular pole relates to a valuing of the opposite positions (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

The Survival pole on the horizontal axis demarcates a preference for security, heterosexuality, low levels of political activism, distrust of outsiders, and low reports of happiness. Self-expression, however, favors liberty, acceptance of homosexuality, and the general opposites of the other mentioned characteristics (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

The country positions represented in Figure 1.1 are based on the most current data available (Haerpfer et al., 2024). For a timeseries view of how the country positions

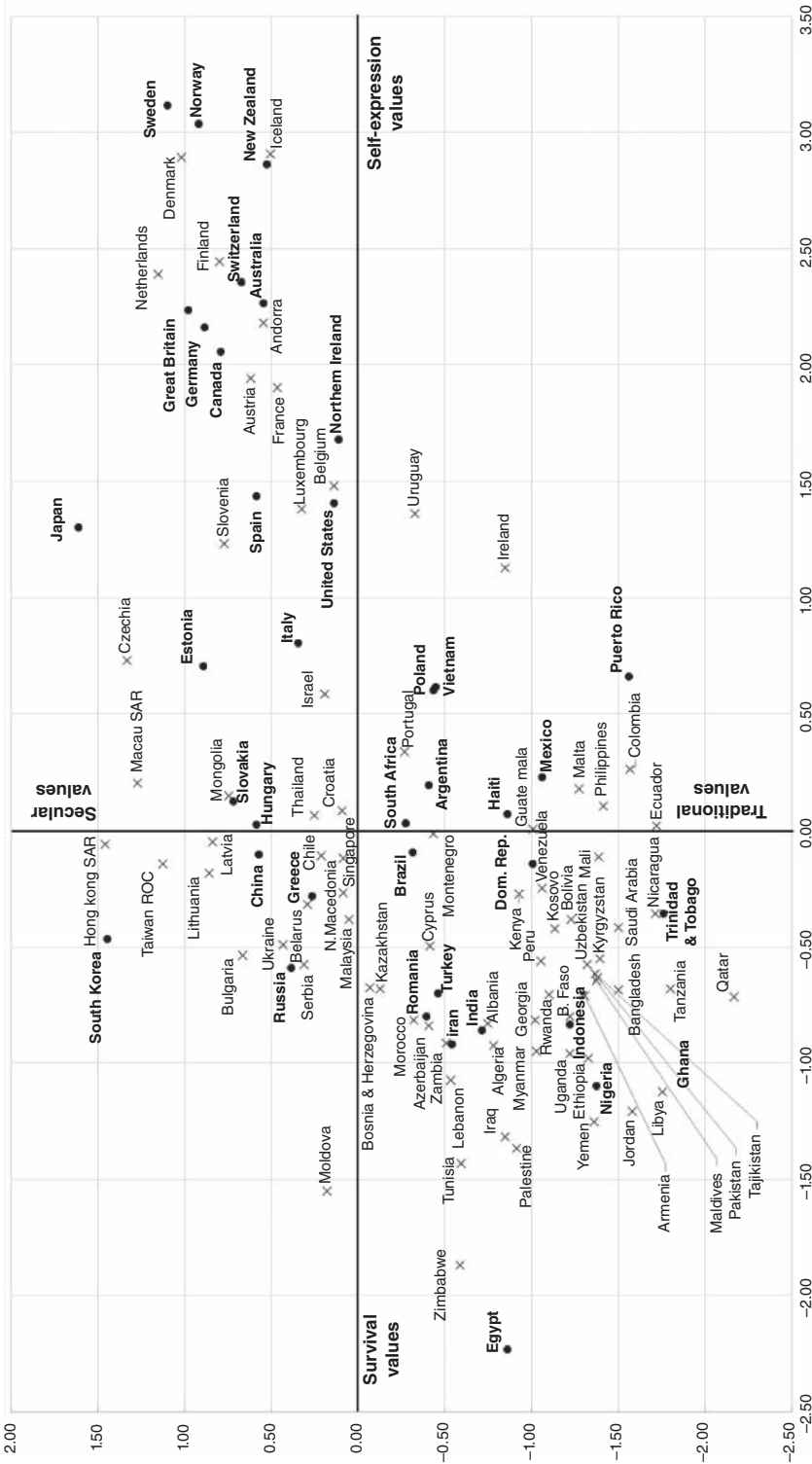


Figure 1.1 Scatter plot with countries plotted according to Inglehart–Welzel cultural values using the most current World Values Survey and European Values Study (Haerpfer et al., 2024). The countries are placed across four quadrants according to axes moving horizontally from “survival values” to “self-expression values” and vertically from “traditional values” to “secular values.” This graphic representation was created by A. M. S. Ladd for express use in this volume.

have shifted from 1981 through 2015, readers may consult a brief visualization (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABWYOcr7js&t=4s).

By employing the framework mentioned earlier, the organization of the book serves the dual purposes: (a) presenting basic information about countries, while simultaneously (b) offering the chapters as data points for comparison with each other along these useful dimensions. To maximize the utility of this approach, countries were selected to represent (as closely as feasible) the different quadrants of the values graph. A few of our original targeted countries ultimately proved unattainable despite repeated efforts; however, the overall representation covers the territory to a significant extent. To the best of our knowledge, this collection of data is unique in its scope and with regard to the consistency of the nature of the information included.

Expanding on the idea of offering the chapters as data points for comparison with each other, we invite readers to not simply read from A to Z. Instead, consider reading entries that fall close together in the figure to see what sort of research questions emerge with regard to shared characteristics. Alternatively, select several countries that are as far apart as possible and explore those with an eye toward collaborative possibilities. Note that sections in each chapter explicitly mention what type of work there is to do in the area, what sort of resources might be useful, and some tips concerning how to avoid faux pas that might otherwise hinder the opening moves in a collaborative relationship.

As noted earlier, we are well aware that there remain numerous gaps; all countries are not represented and even those that are represented undoubtedly have areas of reporting that will require modification in ensuing years. Having perused the general format of this project, if you would like to have information from your country included in any subsequent editions of

this text, please do not hesitate to correspond with the lead Editor. We would be especially grateful for the ability to connect with countries where PoR traditions have not been widely accessible or are only now emerging.

Our Future

One path forward for the global PoR entails codifying and disseminating basic contextual knowledge. Documenting the landscape of the field can provoke creative responses, as scholars consider the history and future that are embodied by the present. In the absence of such a benchmark, responses are less than systematic and often work at odds with each.

One of our hopes is that this work can effect change by providing a concrete starting point for systematic discussions and collaborations. By increasing awareness of fundamental elements of the field in these different locations, those discussions can fruitfully occur well in advance of actual research. Considering the detailed contexts, the needs, and the perspectives of our global peers may not be the fastest way forward, but it promises to be exceptionally authentic and respectful.

Achieving this sort of change may be facilitated by adopting the general principles of Open Science (UNESCO, 2021, 2023). This systematic movement to increase the transparency of methods, procedures, data, and related facets of the research process inherently promotes increased communication among teams well before any projects are fully launched. An outcome is that team members have more opportunities to clarify their positions, which is especially important when working across multiple intellectual and cultural boundaries. Though often considered primarily for use with quantitative, hypothesis-driven work, it is the case that frameworks also exist to guide Open Science in qualitative projects (DeHaven et al., 2020).

Moving this one step further, Liu and colleagues (2025) present a metareview of a research workflow identified as Registered Reports. Beyond using the clarifying principles of Open Science, the Registered Report process submits introduction and methodology for peer review prior to data collection. If reviewers and authors concur that the work is accepted “in principle,” then the data collection begins. A very positive aspect of this approach is that the precision of theory and method is enhanced, very limited resources are conserved, and the potential for publication is dramatically increased (see Liu et al., 2025 and Center for Open Science, n.d., www.cos.io/initiatives/registered-reports for additional details).

While Open Science and Registered Reports do not necessarily align perfectly across all contexts or for all purposes, where they are applicable and utilized, they increase the extent to which diverse materials can be readily evaluated. An expanding number of journals with PoR have committed to engaging these principles (*Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, *Journal for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, and *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*), and they welcome submissions accordingly.

A second hope is that this project will foster an ongoing envisioning and re-envisioning of the future. When the current status is made clear, the baseline tendency of scholars is to immediately begin considering how to improve the situation. In short, knowing the present well helps to articulate potential futures. This collection of knowledge seeks to serve as an intellectual stimulus encouraging the creation of new knowledge about the psychological and related principles that underlie the present and future of human experience in the domain of beliefs, whether characterized as religious, spiritual, or in some other manner. Close examination of what “is” has the power

to stimulate theoretically rich reflections about “what might have been” or “why this instead of something else” and “what might happen if.” Those new paths of thinking can serve as guidelines to revise long-standing notions and introduce fresh ways of organizing existing literature in novel patterns.

Conclusion

In sum, we believe that this systematic, closely defined almanac approach to global PoR will reveal more of what we know and some of what we don't know. To the extent that this is realized, we also believe that the field can expand through fresh collaborative efforts in thoughtful, useful directions we have not even imagined.

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2 Argentina

The Psychology of Religion up to 2020

Hugo Simkin and Hugo H. Rabia

Historical Background

Origins

Even though topics regarding religion and spirituality have been present in the scientific literature in Argentina, mainly since the end of the 1960s (Artiles, 1970), the psychology of religion (PoR) has never become a consolidated discipline within Psychology. Despite lacking disciplinary specificity in terms of journals, conferences, graduate and postgraduate courses, or research groups, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in Argentina's researchers addressing the numinous as a central line of research. For example, the number of published papers went from 3 to 4 per year to 8 to 10 articles per year since 2015 (Rabbia & Simkin, 2021). It is also relevant to note the number of practitioners and training groups who have adopted spirituality as a pivotal concern in their therapeutic practices since 2000.

The present chapter aims to address the state of the art of PoR in Argentina, considering it as an emerging field. We explore its roots in the country and describe the current situation of the disciplinary field, understood from a broad perspective in terms of the psychological study of religious and spiritual issues.

Formative People and Places

Psychology of religion in Argentina finds its roots in the late nineteenth century when the

work of several pioneers problematized religious phenomenon from psychological perspectives. For example, in 1895, José María Ramos Mejía, a physician who specialized in “nervous diseases,” published the book *La locura en la historia*, with the subtitle *Contribuciones a la psicopatología del fanatismo religioso y sus persecuciones (Madness in History: Contribution to the Psycho-Pathological Study of Religious Fanaticism and Its Persecutions)*.¹ This work, now almost forgotten, inaugurated two conflicting trends regarding psychology and religion in the country: a pathologizing view of religious experiences, which often associated religion with fanaticism and violence, and the assumption of Catholicism as a key component to nationhood and the formation of national character.

The almost absence of references to the intersections between psychology and religion during much of the twentieth century is striking, especially since many of the first undergraduate programs and departments of psychology in the country were chaired by recognized leaders in the Roman Catholic Church, both lay and clergy, who adopted perspectives from the Neo-Thomist psychology and Christian anthropology (Ferrari, 2013; Ferrero & Altamirano, 2011; Piñeda, 2005). Catholicism-inspired psychology held strong

¹ Please note: As we are trying to emphasize the international aspect of the handbook, we present the titles of works in their original languages (when possible), followed by an English translation.