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## INFORME

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Translated by Timothy Ennis

### **HOW RELIGIOUS ARE WE CHILEANS? A MAP OF RELIGIOSITY IN 31 COUNTRIES\***

**Carla Lehmann**

This study presents the main results of a survey on religion conducted in 31 of the world's countries in 1998, as part of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which CEP joined in that year.

Generally speaking, levels of religious belief are relatively high in the countries covered by the study. In Chile they are particularly so, as its index of religious beliefs (in God, life after death, heaven, hell and religious miracles) is among the world's highest, exceeded only by the Philippines, the United States and Cyprus. According to information obtained by the World Values Survey, Chile is fifth in terms of religious belief, with only Puerto Rico showing a higher index among Latin American countries. No significant relation can be seen between a country's per-capita GDP and its level of religiosity. Poor countries such as the Philippines appear as highly believing, alongside rich ones like the United States.

Chile appears as one of the most conservative countries in the study on ethical issues. An index covering questions such as: acceptance of sexual relations before marriage, or with a person other than the spouse, or between two adults of the same sex; acceptance of abor-

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tion, cohabitation either before marriage or with no intention to marry, ranks Chile as the second most conservative country, surpassed only by the Philippines. Here again, the correlation between the values index and per-capita GDP is weak, which means there are both poor and rich conservative countries such as the Philippines and United States, and both poor and rich liberal countries like Russia and Switzerland.

In terms of beliefs and values, Chile is definitely closer to the United States than to European countries of catholic tradition such as Portugal, Italy and particularly Spain, whose beliefs and values index is below the average for all countries.

## Introduction

**T**his report presents the results of a study of religiosity carried out as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)<sup>1</sup> in 1998, covering 31 countries – 21 European and three from the Americas (Canada, the United States and Chile), together with Australia, Cyprus, Philippines, Israel, New Zealand, Japan and Russia. The research in Chile was conducted by Centro de Estudios Públicos. The results of the ISSP are complemented in this report by information from three additional sources: data for Latin America collected in research undertaken for the World Values Survey<sup>2</sup> in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998, and public opinion surveys carried out by CEP in Chile in September-October 1999<sup>3</sup> and in December 2001-January 2002.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) is an annual collaboration between countries for the purpose of conducting public opinion studies on important topics for social science research (such as family, national identity, work, religion, government). ISSP modules focus on issues relating to attitudes and behavior and also include a set of demographic variables for the participating countries. The program began with four countries in 1984 and today has a total of 38 participants. Centro de Estudios Públicos joined the program in 1998, representing Chile. Further information on the ISSP can be found at [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org).

<sup>2</sup> The World Values Survey is a worldwide research project that has the main objective of describing sociocultural and political change. It is carried out through public opinion surveys in over 65 countries from the six continents, covering about 80% of the world's population. So far three studies have been undertaken: 1990-1991, 1995-1996 and 1999-2001. Further information can be found at [www.isr.umich.edu](http://www.isr.umich.edu).

<sup>3</sup> The results of this study are published in *Working Paper* No. 300 (November 1999), Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, Chile.

<sup>4</sup> The results of this study will be published shortly in a CEP working paper.

## Religious beliefs

“Belief in God” certainly does not seem to be in retreat across the world. In general, all countries included in the ISSP study show high levels of belief in God (see figure 1), with rates varying between 100% and 40% of the population surveyed. The countries with the highest indices of belief in God are nearly all from the Americas, apart from Cyprus, Philippines and Poland. The countries recording fewest believers are all European except for Japan.

To systematize the information obtained from the different questions, a beliefs index was constructed covering beliefs in God, life after death, heaven, hell and religious miracles<sup>5</sup> (see figure 2). The index can take values between zero and 3 points; the higher the index, the more believing is the country in relation to the variables concerned.

In general, the countries included in the ISSP study display relatively high levels of religious belief. The value of the index for all countries studied is above the arithmetic mean (1.65). In Chile, religious beliefs – in God, life after death, heaven, hell and religious miracles – are among the strongest in the world, with rates surpassed only by Philippines, the United States and Cyprus.

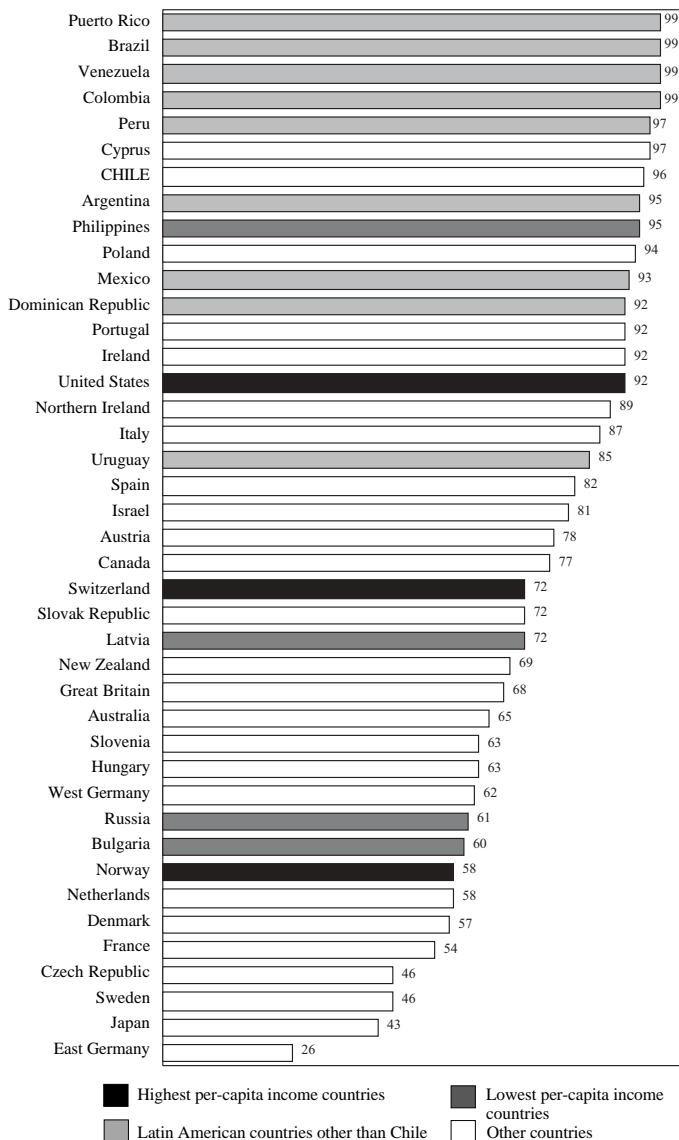
Chile is clearly closer to the United States, in this respect, than to European countries of catholic tradition such as Portugal, Italy and particularly Spain, which displays a beliefs index below the mean for all countries. Others such as Slovenia, Russia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and East Germany, all of which have a history marked by long years of Communist rule, are among the least believing countries in this study. They are joined by Norway, France, Denmark and Sweden. Japan also has a low percentage of believers, although, as we shall see, this country differs from the others on moral issues, where it proves to be extremely conservative.

No significant relation is observed between a country’s per-capita GDP and its level of religiosity (see figure 3). Poor countries such as the Philippines, and wealthy ones such as United States, are seen to be highly believing. In fact, the correlation between the index of beliefs and GDP is insignificant and amounts to -0.063.

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<sup>5</sup> The results on these questions are published in *Working Paper* No. 325 (October 2001), Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, Chile.

FIGURE N° 1: PERCENTAGE OF BELIEVERS IN GOD

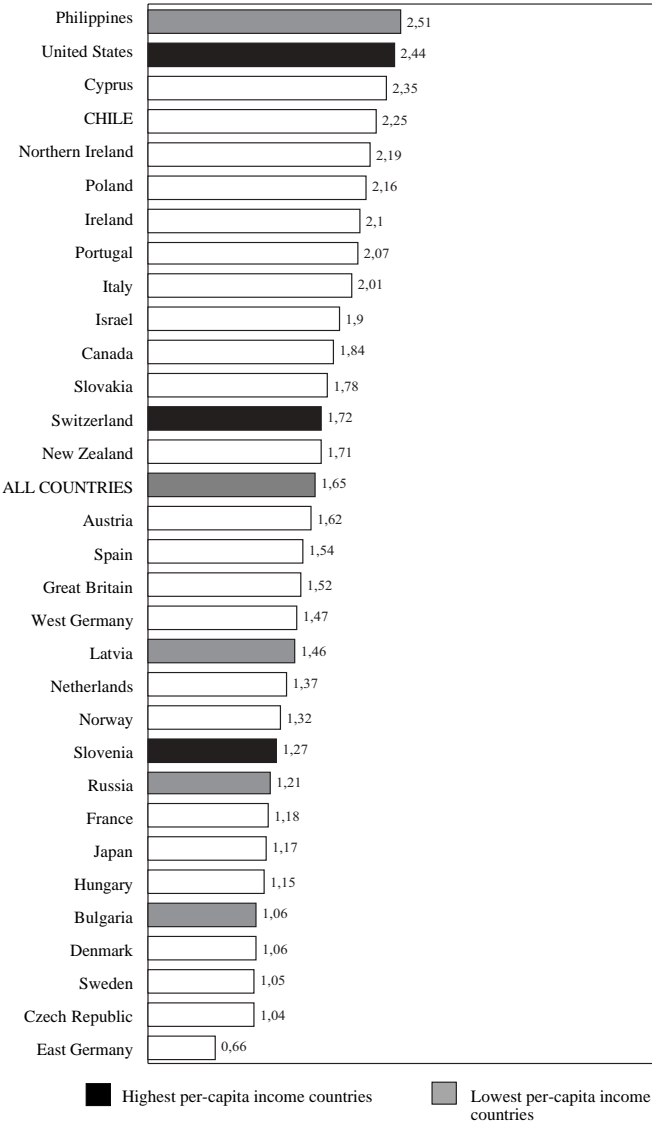


*Note:* In countries covered by the 1998 ISSP survey, percentages correspond to interviewees who replied with one these alternatives: "I believe in God now, but not before"; "I believe in God now and I always have done." In the case of Latin American countries, apart from Chile, the source is the World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98; and the question is: "Do you believe in God?" The reply alternative is "Yes".

Two surveys were carried out in Germany, one in the territory of the former West Germany and the other in the former East Germany.

*Source:* ISSP 1998 and World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98.

FIGURE N° 2: INDEX OF BELIEFS  
(Ranked from most to least believing)

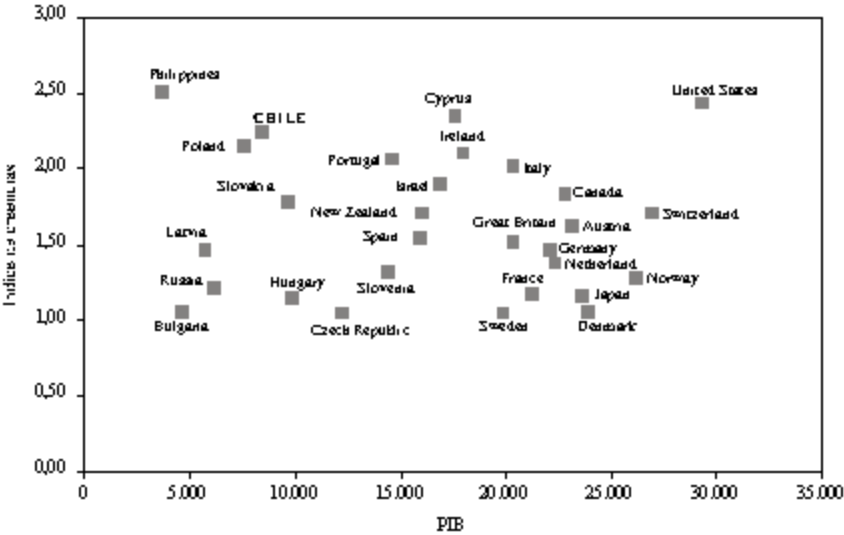


*Note:* This index has been prepared using factor analysis based on the following questions: belief in God, belief in life after death, belief in heaven, belief in hell and belief in religious miracles.

The index can take values between zero and 3; the higher the value, the more believing the country.

*Source:* ISSP 1998.

FIGURE N° 3: INDEX OF BELIEFS IN RELATION TO GDP



Note: The correlation between the beliefs index and GDP is -0.063.

Source: ISSP 1998.

The case of the United States, in particular, denies any relation between economic progress and secularization, understood as the process whereby religion loses influence in the various spheres of social life. Two leading sociologists of the nineteenth century, Durkheim and Weber, laid the foundations for conceptualization of the phenomenon that would later be called “secularization process”. These two authors believed that the advent of modern societies and progress in science and technology would set up a fundamental conflict between religion and science, in which the latter would eventually overwhelm the former. In the case of Durkheim, analysis of the conflict between religion and science was motivated by a desire to create a scientific morality. Sociology ought to found and reconstruct a morality responding to the requirements of scientific spirit. Weber, on the other hand, thought that modern society would tend towards an increasingly bureaucratic and rational form of organization (the “iron cage”). He feared that modern, bureaucratic and rational society would work to suffocate individual choice, awareness of responsibility, action and

TABLE N° 1: INDEX OF BELIEFS IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL CATEGORIES  
(Covering all countries in ISSP)

Sex			Religious denomination		
Men	Women	Total	Catholic	Protestant	Total
1,5	1,8	1,6	2,0	1,7	1,6

Age			Schooling		
Up to 24 years	55 years and over	Total	Primary complete	University complete	Total
1,7	1,7	1,6	1,7	1,4	1,6

Source: ISSP 1998.

ultimately faith. Nonetheless, Weber did not dream of a scientific ethic like his French colleague Durkheim.

Table 1 shows that for the countries in the sample, catholics, women and those with least education are the most believing groups.

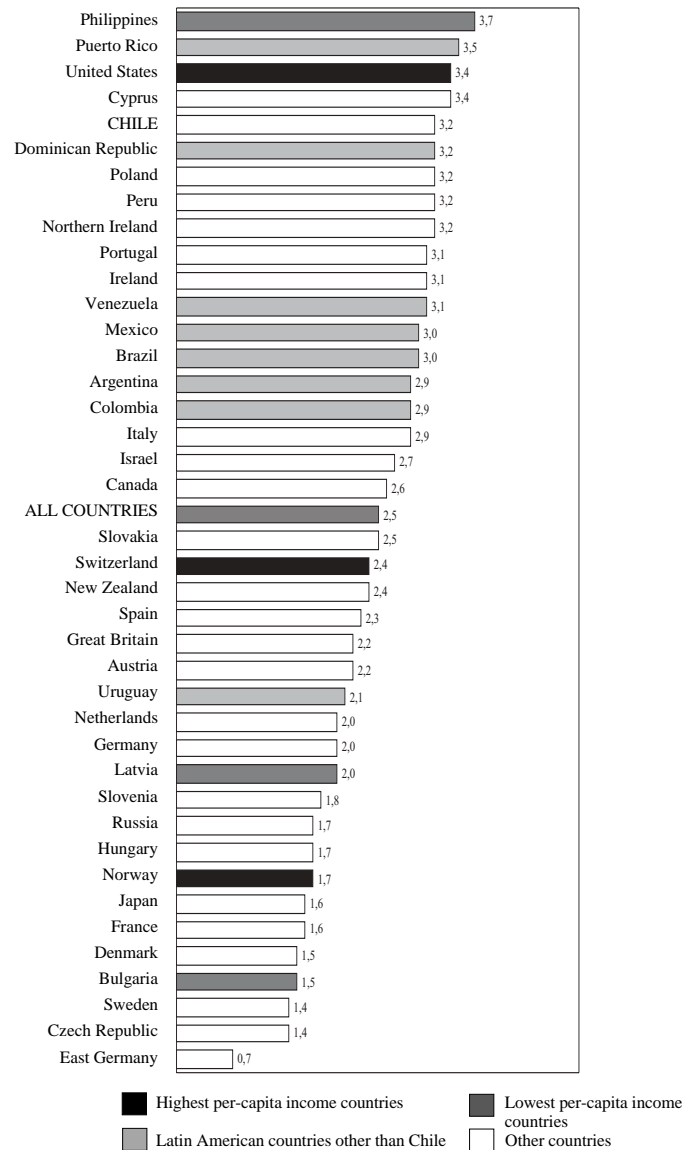
Chile appears also as a highly believing country in Latin America. Figure 4 contains a new index of beliefs and includes data from Latin American countries covered in the World Values Survey study. This index considers only four of the five questions of the previous index.<sup>6</sup>

Considering Latin American countries alone, Chile has the second highest beliefs index, along with Peru and the Dominican Republic, and is surpassed only by Puerto Rico. The other Latin American countries also show high levels of belief, above the average for all countries. The exception is Uruguay, whose beliefs index is below the average and very similar to that of European countries such as Holland, Germany, Austria and Great Britain.

Thus, America as a whole, including the United States, represents a nucleus of strong religious beliefs.

<sup>6</sup> It does not cover belief in religious miracles, since this question does not appear in the World Values Survey study.

GRÁFICO N° 4: INDEX OF BELIEFS, INCLUDING LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES COVERED BY THE WORLD VALUES SURVEY STUDY  
(Ranked from most to least believing)



*Note:* The index was created on the basis of four questions: belief in God, belief in life after death, belief in heaven, belief in hell.

The index can take values between zero and 4; the higher the value, the more believing the country.

*Source:* ISSP 1998, World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98.



### Religious observance

In terms of religious observance, Chile appears as a relatively non-observing country, since only 19% of people surveyed practise their faith at least once a week. In this respect, Chile is at very similar levels to the European average, and below that of other Latin American countries except Uruguay. Latin American countries, on the other hand, head the ranking of religious observance, along with Ireland, Philippines, Poland and United States (figure 5).

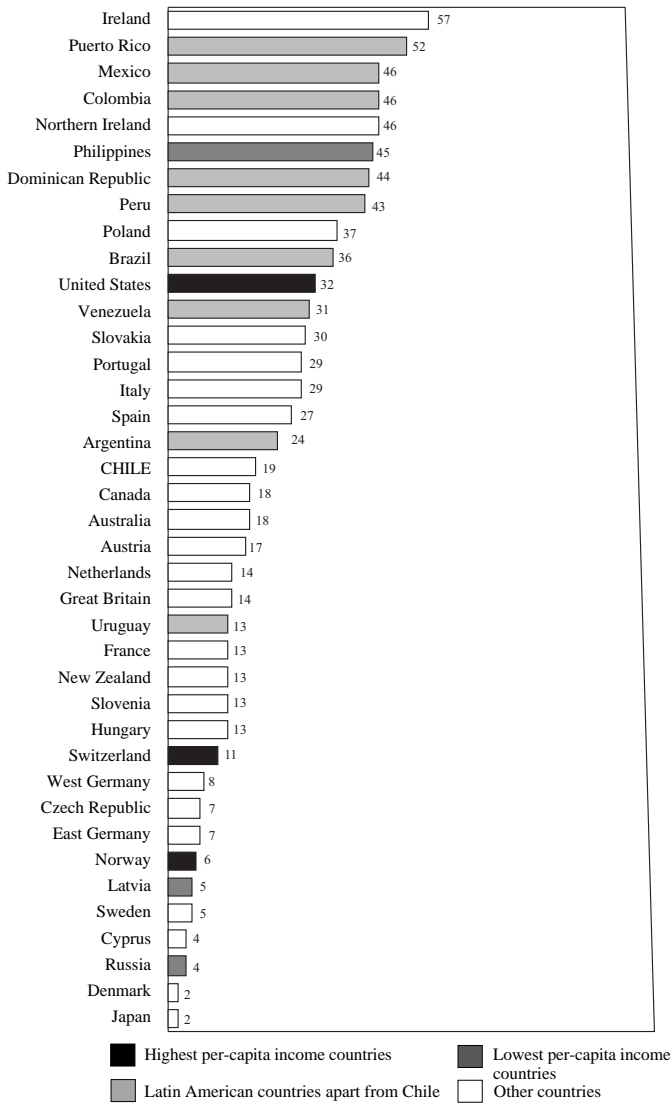
Considering only individuals who claim to be catholic, the case of Chile definitely stands out as an exception among the countries of the study and also within Latin America (figure 6). The level of religious observance by Chilean catholics is less than that among catholics in Holland, France, Germany and Switzerland. The case of France, for example, is quite astounding: 50% of French people claim to be catholic and 23% of them practise their faith. In Chile, 72% of the population claim to be catholic yet only 14% practise. Observance among Chilean catholics is the lowest of all countries in the study, except Latvia.

What explains this phenomenon? Certainly, many different variables are involved. What we do know is that in the upper socioeconomic groups in Chile, 82% claim to be catholic and one out of every three of them practise. In the middle income groups, 78% claim to be catholic and one in five practise; at the lowest socioeconomic level, the equivalent figures are 69%, and one in 10. A variable that might be affecting these results is the uneven distribution of catholic parishes in the different boroughs: the poorer boroughs have considerably fewer parishes in relation to the number of inhabitants than wealthier ones. This means that, measured by square metres of church per-capita, and by the number of priests in relation to the population, the poorer sectors are relatively deprived. Data show that at in the late 1960s the Catholic Church in Chile seems to have pursued a strategy of catering to the religious needs of poorer settlements by building numerous small chapels rather than large churches. The problem arises when the number of priests is steadily diminishing. Today, the local parish priest has to travel from chapel to chapel to serve his congregation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For further information on this topic, see *Puntos de Referencia* No. 249 (November 2001), Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, Chile.

FIGURE N° 5: HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES?  
(Percentage replying “at least once a week”)

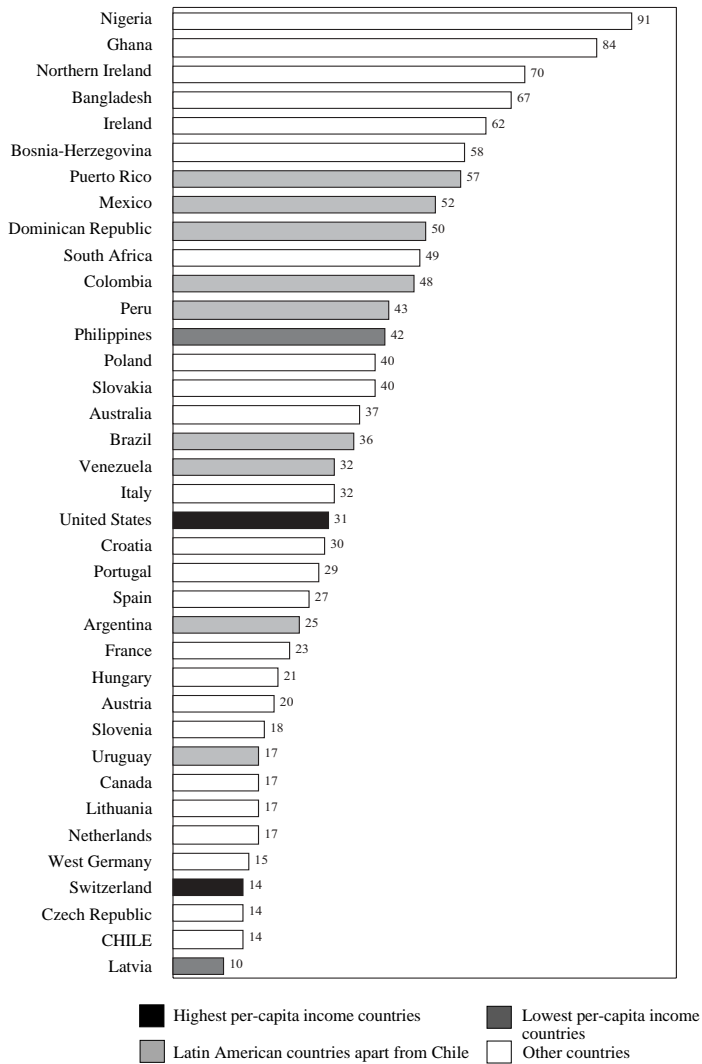


*Note:* Bulgaria and Israel did not include this question. In the case of Latin American countries apart from Chile, the question was: “Apart from marriages, funerals and religious festivals, how often do you attend religious services? The reply alternatives were: “More than once a week”, and “Once a week”.

The figure for Chile in the World Values Survey is 24%.

*Source:* ISSP 1988, and World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98 (for Latin American countries, apart from Chile).

FIGURE N° 6: HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES?  
(Percentage replying “at least once a week”) (Subsample: catholics)



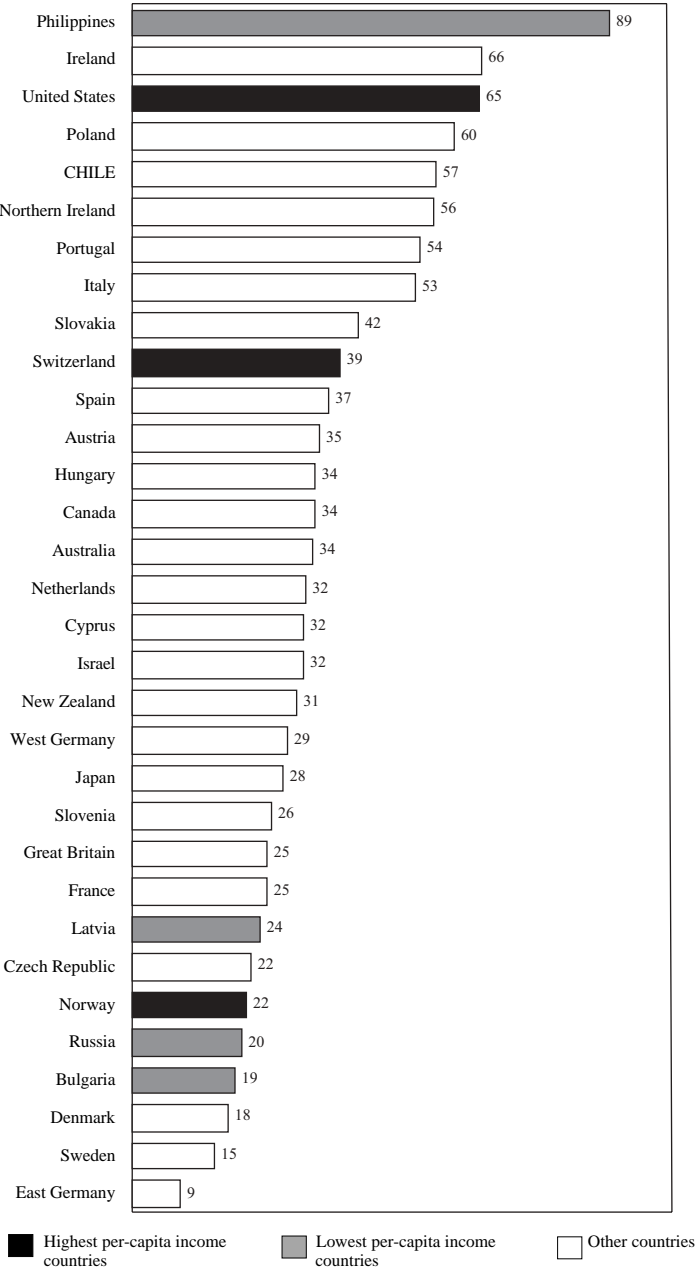
*Note:* Excludes countries that lack a sufficiently large catholic population for the analysis to be relevant.

The question in the World Values Survey was: “Apart from marriages, funerals and religious festivals, how often do you attend religious services? The reply alternatives were: “More than once a week”, and “Once a week”.

The figure for Chile in the World Values Survey is 21%.

*Source:* ISSP 1988, and World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98.

FIGURE N° 7:        CONSIDERING THE PRESENT TIME, HOW OFTEN DO YOU PRAY?  
(Percentage replying “at least every week”)



Source: ISSP 1998, World Values Survey 1995-96-97-98.

Nonetheless, regular attendance at religious worship is not the only indicator of a country's religiosity. In Chile, for example, people frequently attend religious festivals and make pilgrimages to the shrines of saints or beatified persons. This type of activity is a deeply rooted popular tradition in Chile. According to data from the most recent CEP survey of December 2001-January 2002,<sup>8</sup> one out of every four Chileans surveyed participates in religious processions in homage to the Virgin Mary, one in every three makes visits to shrines, one in every four makes religious vows, and one in five participates in the month of the Virgin Mary. Considering practising catholics only, these figures rise considerably, with 55% of them participating in processions in honor of the Virgin Mary, 68% visiting shrines, 49% making religious vows, 58% celebrating the month of Mary.

Another interesting figure is the frequency with which Chileans pray, compared to people from other countries: 15% of all Chileans pray every week or more frequently, and Chile is ranked fifth on this, in relation to other countries in the study (see figure 7). Among catholics the figure rises to 59%.

## Value issues

### *Divorce*

Divorce was not investigated in the ISSP questionnaire, because Chile is the only participating country that does not have a divorce law (in our country, people wishing to remarry have to request annulment of their previous marriage). The results presented below come from a public opinion survey conducted by CEP in September-October 1998.<sup>9</sup>

As can be seen in table 2, eight out of every 10 Chileans think the law should allow divorce "in certain cases". This opinion is also shared by two out of every three practising catholics and six out of 10 practising members of the evangelical church.

Respondents who replied "in certain cases" were then asked about three specific circumstances: (i) when both spouses request divorce by common agreement; (ii) when the one or other of the spouses requests divorce

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<sup>8</sup> The results of this survey will be published shortly in a CEP working paper.

<sup>9</sup> *Working Paper* No. 300 (November 1999), Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, Chile.

on the grounds of *de facto* separation; and (iii) when one spouse mistreats the other.

The replies to these questions are shown in table 3; on all three questions, the levels of acceptance of a divorce law are remarkably high. It is notable that the percentages are equally high among practising members of the catholic and evangelical churches.

TABLE N° 2: DO YOU BELIEVE THE LAW SHOULD AUTHORIZE DIVORCE?

	Total sample	Practising catholics	Practising evangelicals
In certain cases	79	66	60
In no circumstances	20	34	40
Don't know/No reply	1	0	0

Source: CEP, “National public opinion survey, September-October 1999”, *Working Paper* No. 300 (November 1999), Centro de Estudios Públicos.

TABLE N° 3: DO YOU BELIEVE THE LAW SHOULD AUTHORIZE DIVORCE?  
(Subsample: those who replied “in certain cases”)

	In which circumstances?					
	Total sample		Practising catholics		Practising evangelicals	
	Sí	No	Sí	No	Sí	No
When both spouses request it by common agreement?	97	3	93	7	95	4
When either spouse requests it on the grounds of <i>de facto</i> separation?	85	14	79	18	82	13
When one spouse mistreats the other?	96	3	97	2	99	1

Source: CEP, “National public opinion survey, September-October 1999”, *Working Paper* No. 300 (November 1999), Centro de Estudios Públicos.

### Values in Chile and in other countries

In order to crystallize the information contained in the ISSP study on values in a more simple and understandable form, a composite values index was constructed from attitudes towards seven issues: (i) sexual relations before marriage; (ii) sexual relations with someone other than the spouse; (iii) sexual relations between two adults of the same sex; (iv) abortion in the case of fetal malformation; (v) abortion in the case of a low-income family; (vi) couples cohabitation with no intention of marrying; and (vii) couples cohabiting before marrying.<sup>10</sup> The results of this index for the different countries are shown in figure 8.

The index takes values between zero and 3; the higher the index, the more conservative the country is on these issues.

Taken together, the countries surveyed generally tend to be liberal rather than conservative (the overall index for all countries (1.28) is less than the arithmetic mean of 1.5).

Chile is the second most conservative country, surpassed only by Philippines.

The correlation between the values index and GDP is low, although higher than that between GDP and the beliefs index (figure 9). Consequently there are both poor and wealthy conservative countries, such as the Philippines and the United States, as well as poor and wealthy liberal countries, such as Russia and Switzerland. An exception worth mentioning concerns acceptance of homosexuality. Generally speaking there is a positive correlation between a country's per-capita income and its acceptance of homosexuality – except in the United States and Japan, which display strong rejection (seven out of every 10 Americans and eight of every 10 Japanese reject homosexuality).

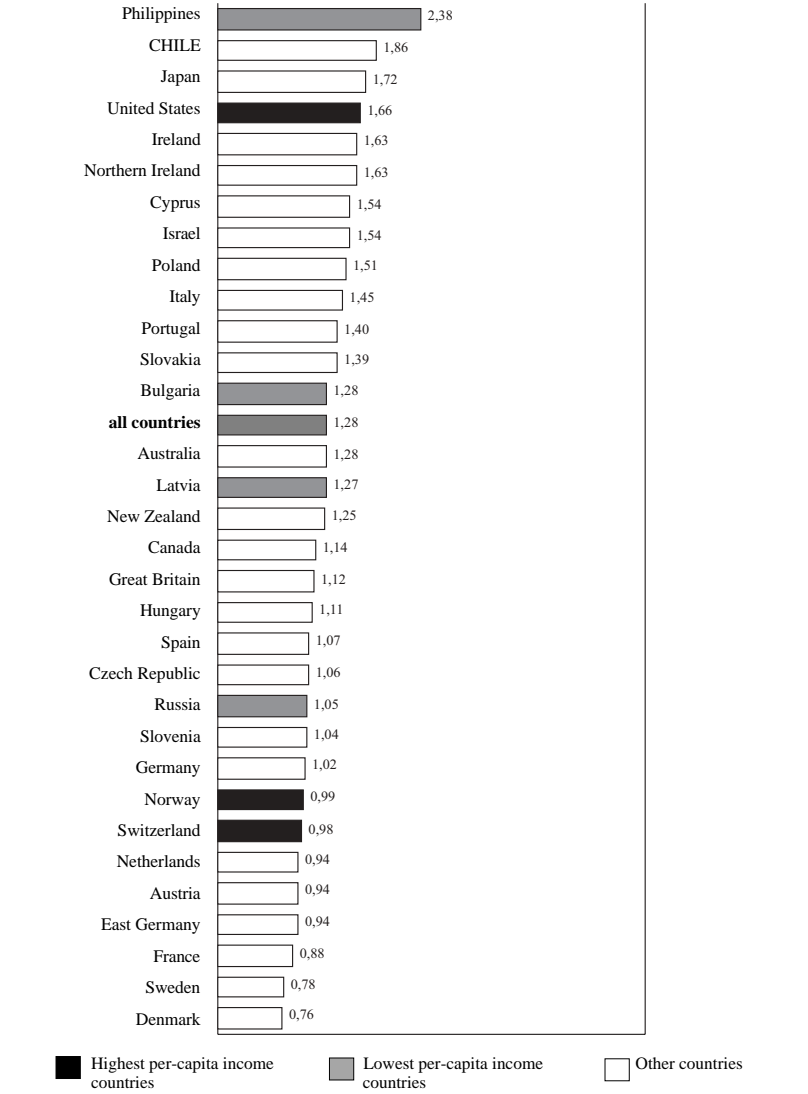
Considering the entire set of countries in the sample, it is Catholics, older people and those with least education that appear as most conservative. There are no differences between women and men in this regard (table 4).

Lastly, there is a close relation between the belief level in a country and its degree of conservatism on moral issues – in fact, a positive correlation of 0.76. Japan, as a conservative but non-believing country, is the exception (see figure 10).

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<sup>10</sup> The results are published in *Working Paper* No 325 (October 2001), Centro de Estudios Públicos, Santiago, Chile.

GRÁFICO N° 8:     VALUES INDEX  
(Ranked from most to least conservative)



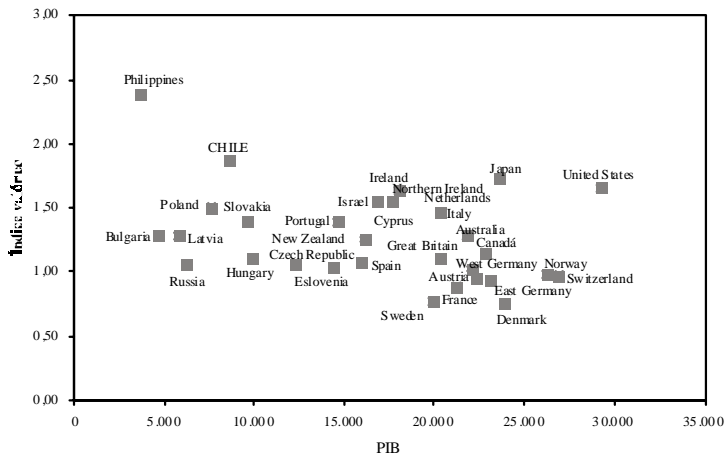
*Note:* This index was prepared using factor analysis and addresses the following seven issues: sexual relations before marriage; sexual relations with someone other than the spouse; sexual relations between two adults of the same sex; abortion in the case of fetal malformation; abortion in the case of a low- income family; couples cohabiting with no intention to marry; couples cohabiting before marrying.

The index may take values between zero and 3; the higher the value, the more conservative is the country on these issues.

*Source:* ISSP 1998.



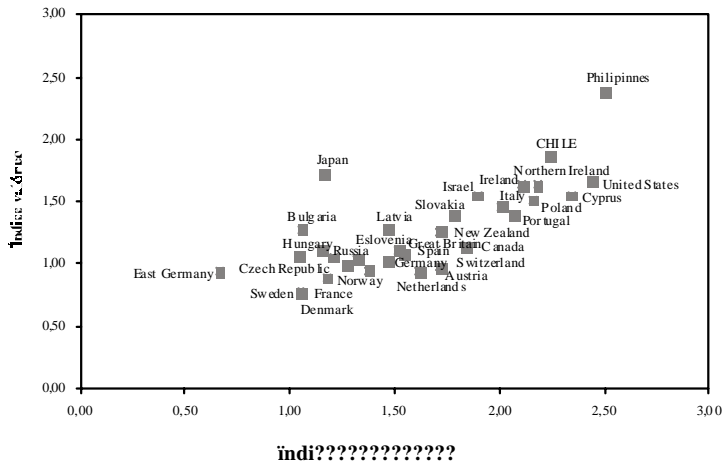
FIGURE N° 9: VALUES INDEX IN RELATION TO GDP



Note: The correlation between the values index and GDP is -0.37.

Source: ISSP 1998.

GRÁFICO N° 10: ÍNDICE DE CREENCIAS VERSUS ÍNDICE VALÓRICO



Note: The correlation between the values index and GDP is 0.76.

Source: ISSP 1998.

CUADRO N° 4:     VALUES INDEX IN DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC STRATA  
                      (All countries of ISSP)

Sex			Religious denomination		
Men	Women	Total	Catholics	Protestants	Total
1,3	1,3	1,3	1,5	1,2	1,3

Age			Schooling		
Up to 24 years	55 years and above	Total	Primary complete	University complete	Total
1,1	1,7	1,3	1,5	1,1	1,3

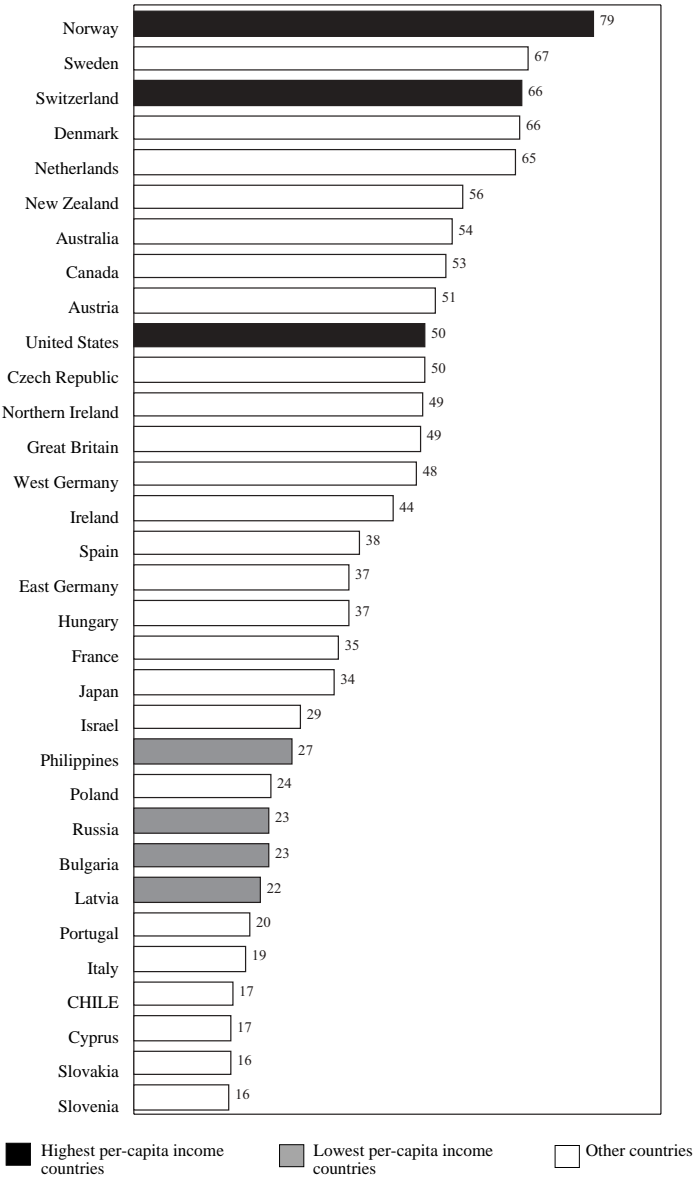
Source: ISSP 1998.

**Trust, modernity and religion**

Levels of interpersonal trust are generally positively correlated with a country’s per-capita income level, and the most developed countries show the highest levels of trust among people. The case of Chile is striking: only 17% of the population say that generally, or nearly always, people can be trusted (figure 11).

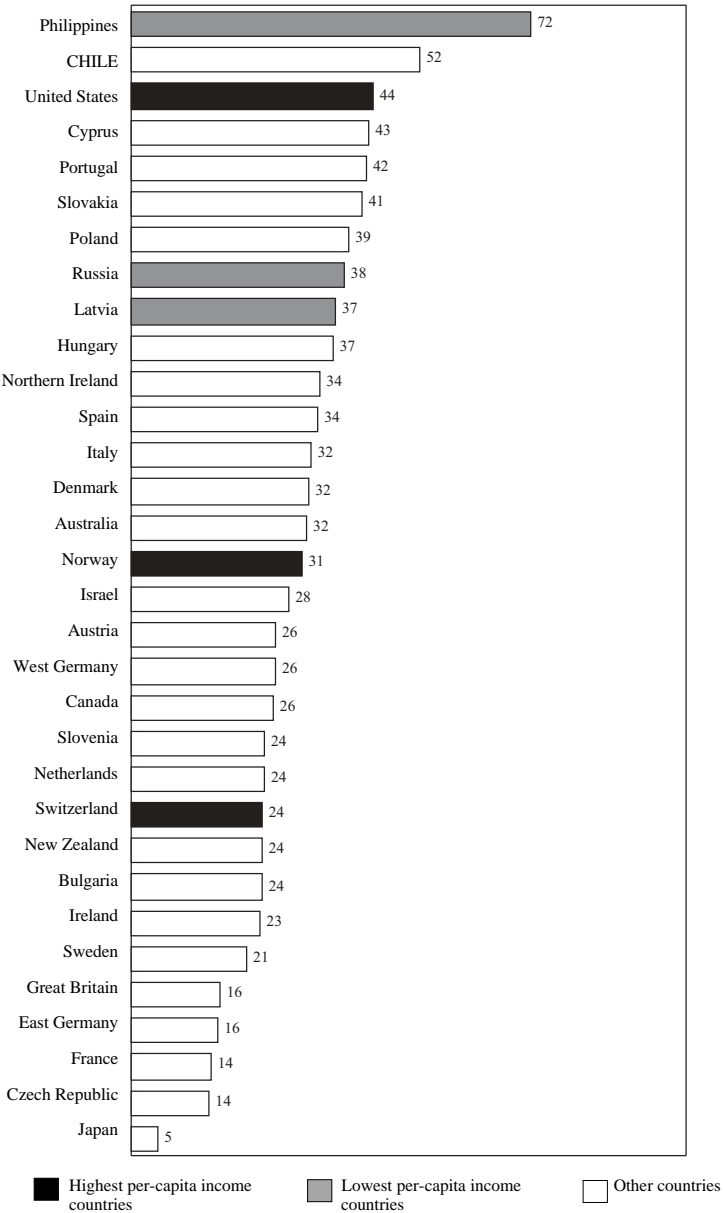
The same is not true as regards trust in institutions. Chile displays a low level of interpersonal trust and a relatively low level of trust in secular institutions, but a high level of trust in the churches (figure 12).

GRÁFICO N° 11: IN GENERAL, WOULD YOU SAY PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED, OR DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL IN DEALINGS WITH OTHERS?  
(Percentage of respondents answering one of these two alternatives: “Nearly always” or “Generally people can be trusted”).



Source: ISSP 1998.

GRÁFICO N° 12: HOW MUCH TRUST DO YOU HAVE IN THE CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS?  
(Percentage of respondents answering one of these two alternatives: “Total trust”; “A lot of trust”).



Source: ISSP 1998.