

Casting off the chains of church: an analysis of the data of the 1981-2008 European Values Study

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This paper draws on the data of the four waves of the European Values Study, a pan-European survey initiated in 1981 at the University of Tilburg. Drawing on the Irish data of the four waves, in a comparative European context, this paper examines the nature and trends of change in Irish values over a range of social, religious and moral questions. The core question is one of secularization with the continuing fall in religious practice: while there is no significant diminution of 'spirituality' in what way does the shifting ground of values impact on Irish society currently and into the future?

In reflecting on some of the changes apparent in the data, the paper draws on a series of studies of religious and broader cultural changes, typically framed within a paradigm of modernization and secularization. It looks at some of the key propositions in theories of secularization and modernization, what alternatives have been suggested, and what model seems to provide the best fit to the patterns of religious and cultural change in Ireland over the last three decades.