



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO  
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE SOCIALI E POLITICHE

*ISSR/SISR 34th Conference  
RELIGION, COOPERATION AND CONFLICT  
IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES  
Lausanne, July 4-7, 2017*

# **CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN EASTERN EUROPE (1990-2015)**

Ferruccio Biolcati, Marco Maraffi,  
Francesco Molteni and Cristiano Vezzoni

# Introduction

---

- **Religious change** in Eastern Europe
  - theoretical relevance
  - methodological relevance
- Focus on **church attendance**
  - specificity VS. reliability
- General aim
  - Defining a **macro-explanandum** (Goldtorpe 2000)
- Usual structure of the presentation

# Theoretical relevance

---

- **Three main school of thought** have dominated the academic discussion
- What **expectation** about Eastern Europe?
  - economic market thesis: increasing (natural experiment!)
  - Individualization: declining, but...
  - Secularization: declining, but...
    - e.g. modernization of economies
- Religious and political **identities**
  - Reconstruction of memory (Borowik 2002 and 2006)

# Research synthesis (Brenner 2016)

---

- **Religious resurgence** in Eastern Europe: early 1990s, Poland as paradigmatic example (Gaultier 1997)
- **Relative stability** for most Eastern European countries, declining attendance in Poland, **increasing attendance** in Russia and East Germany (Greeley 1994; 2003)
- **Pollack (2003)** found similar patterns in many Eastern and Western European countries, noting that the Czech Republic, East Germany, Estonia, and Russia are highly secularized and demonstrate very low and/or declining rates of attendance.
- Evidence for a **small, temporary reversal** – a period effect – for some Eastern European countries (Pollack 2003; Froese 2011)
- **Different patterns** (Burkimsher 2013)

# Research design: CARPE

*Church Attendance and Religious change Pooled European dataset*

---

- Providing highly **reliable** estimates obtained by **cumulating** different studies
- The dataset pools together the following **studies**:
  - Eurobarometer (Mannheim Trend File 1970-2002, Standard & Special, Central and Eastern Countries, Candidate countries)
  - European Social Survey (ESS)
  - European Values Study (EVS) and World Values Survey (WVS)
  - International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)
- Selection criteria
- The dataset (**version 3**) combines so far 102 survey editions carried out in 45 countries since the 1970s for a total of 1.950.862 cases.
- At the **individual level**, the dataset includes variables concerning church attendance, denomination and basic socio-demographics.

# Harmonizing response formats

- Weekly attendance
- Monthly attendance
- **Implied probability** of attending church in any given week (Hout and Greeley 1998)

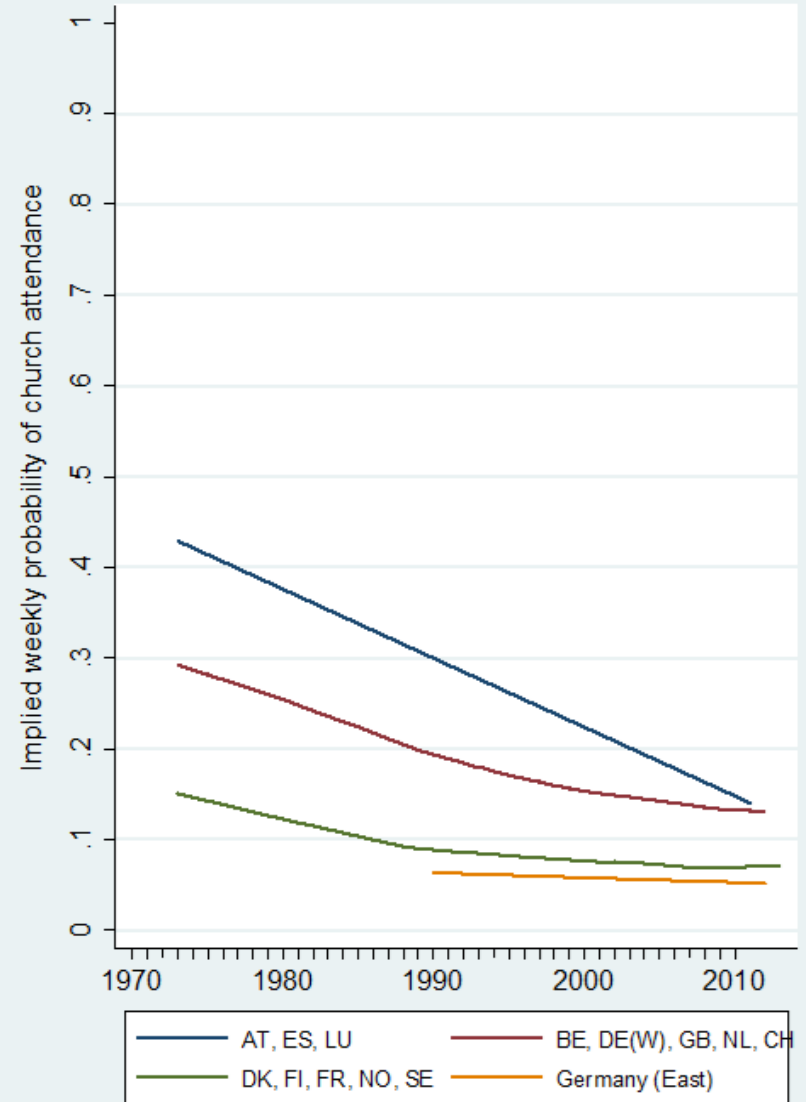
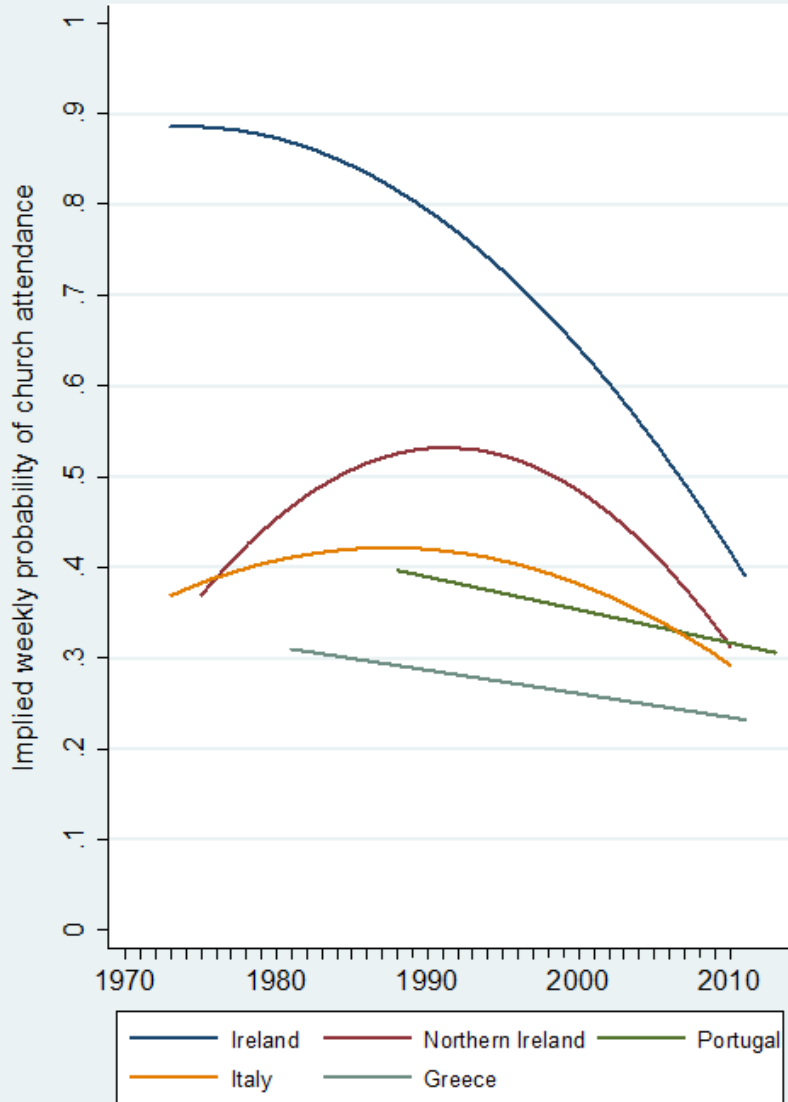
Dichotomy	Categories (ISSP 2004)	Probability
1	Several times a week	0.99
1	Once a week	0.99
0	2 or 3 times a month	0.58
0	Once a month	0.23
0	Several times a year	0.12
0	Once a year	0.02
0	Less frequently	0.01
0	Never	0.00

*Example: Once a month: 12/52 weeks = 0.23*

# The selection for this analysis: 14 countries, 1990-2015, aggregate level

Country surveys	EB Standard	EB C&E	EB CC	ESS	EVS	WVS	ISSP	Total
Starts on	1990	1990	2000	2002	1990	1982	1986	1982
Ends on	2010	1993	2003	2015	2008	2013	2015	2015
Years of coverage	10	4	4	14	6	13	29	33
coverage/period	0,5	1,0	1,0	1,0	0,3	0,4	1,0	1,0
Total	107	25	100	63	37	33	173	538
(%)	(19.8)	(4.6)	(18.5)	(11.7)	(6.8)	(6.1)	(32.1)	(100.0)

# Estimated trends of weekly church attendance for single and clustered Western countries





# Implied probability of weekly church attendance in Eastern European countries (1990-2015)



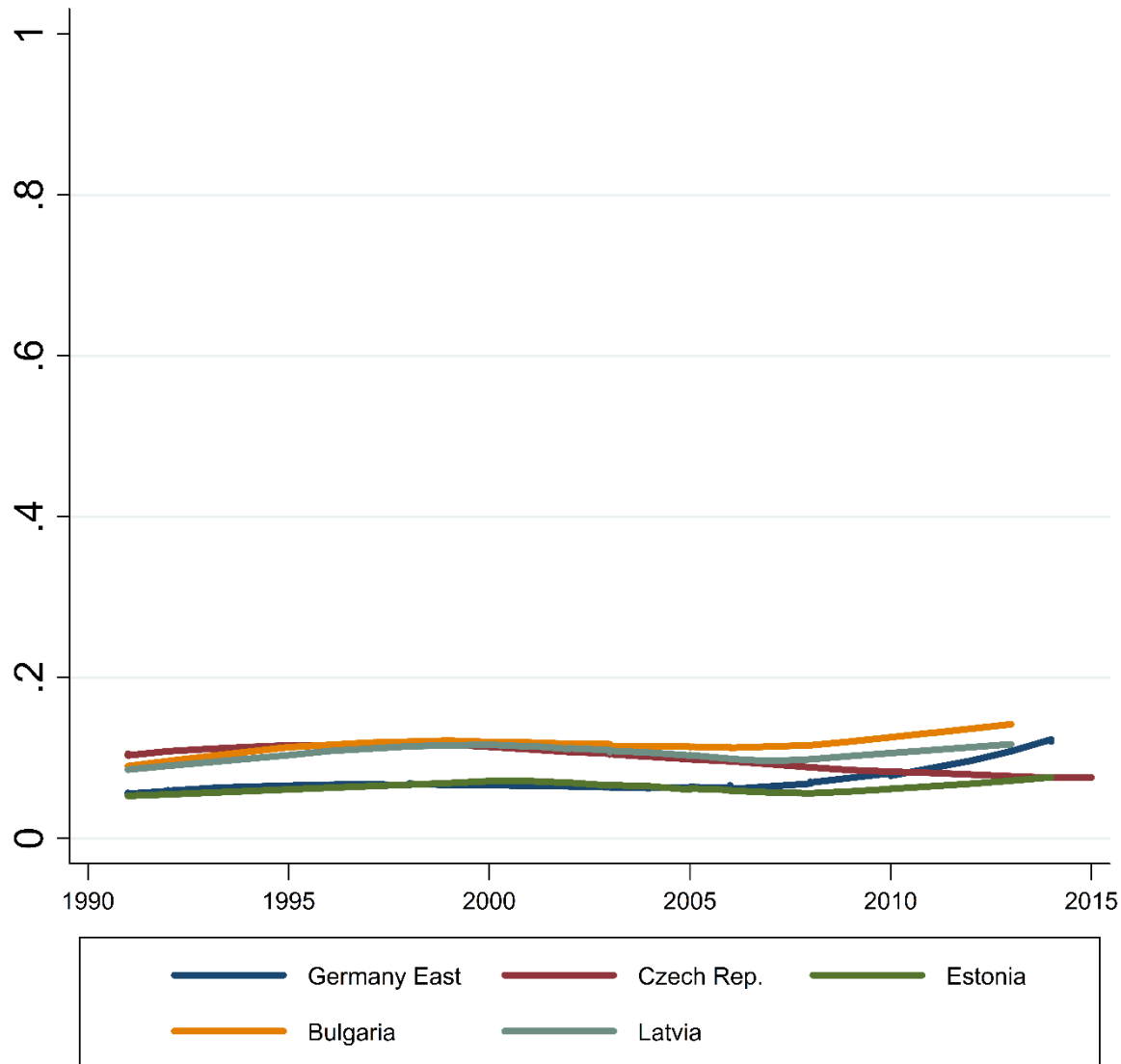
# Strategy in data analysis

---

- Parametric techniques
  - Parameters estimation
    - **Polynomial regression**: over-modeling?
- Non-parametric techniques
  - Exploratory approach, graphical representation
    - **Local weighted regression**

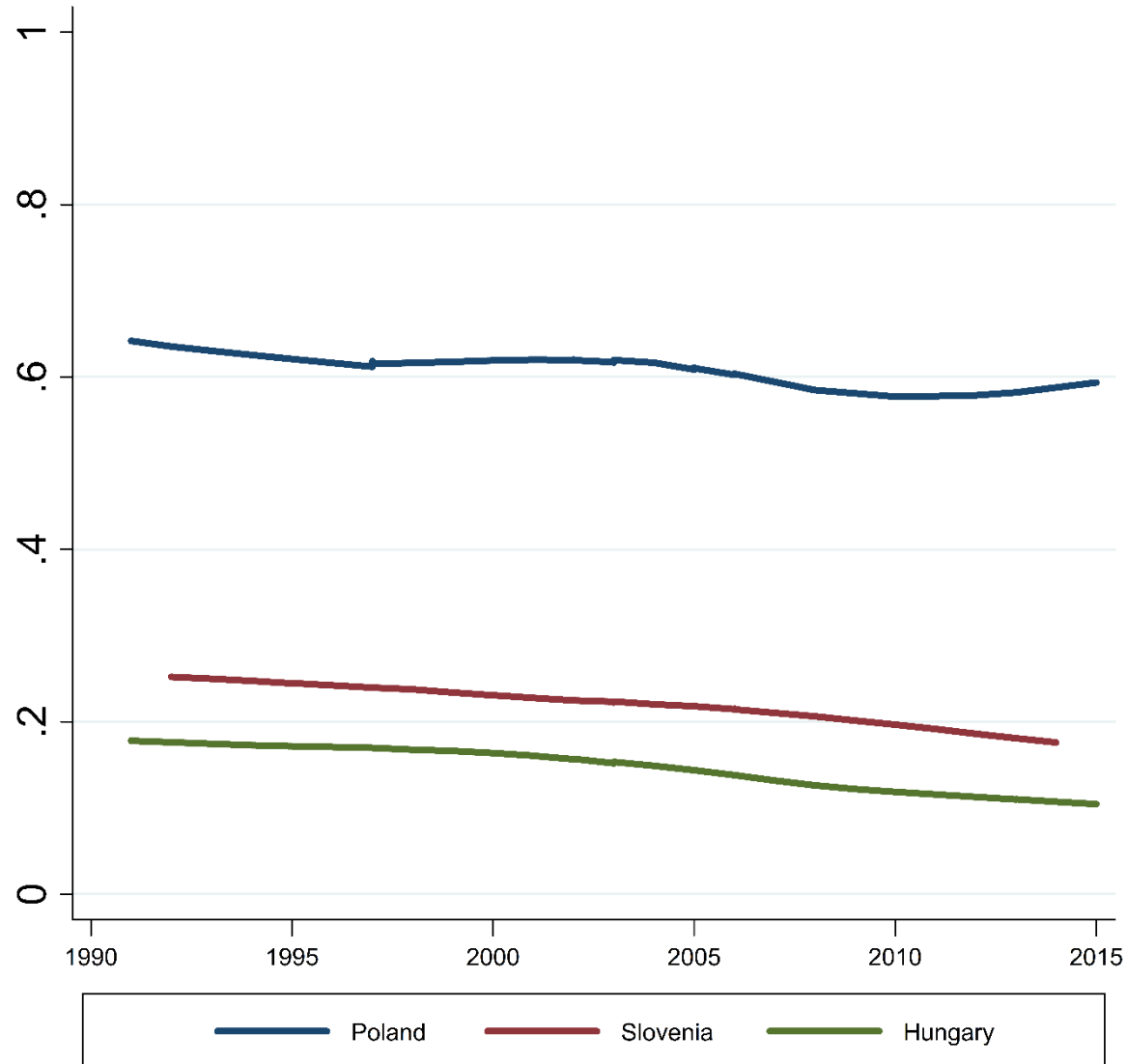
# A Western European pattern:

## 1. *Low and stable trend*



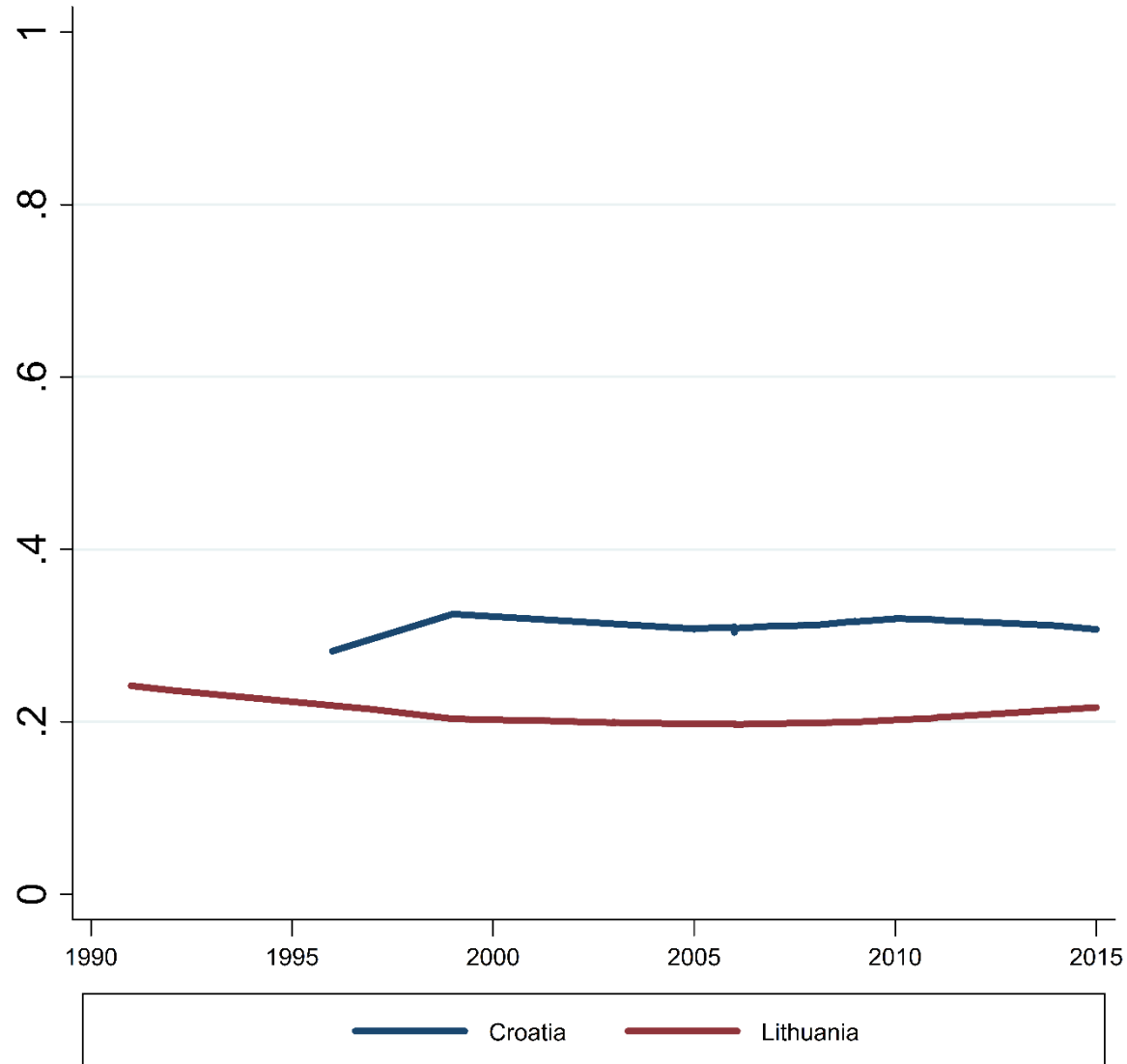
# A Western European pattern:

## 2. *Declining trend*



# An Eastern European pattern:

## 3. *Medium and stable trend*



# Implied probability of weekly church attendance in Eastern European countries (1990-2015)



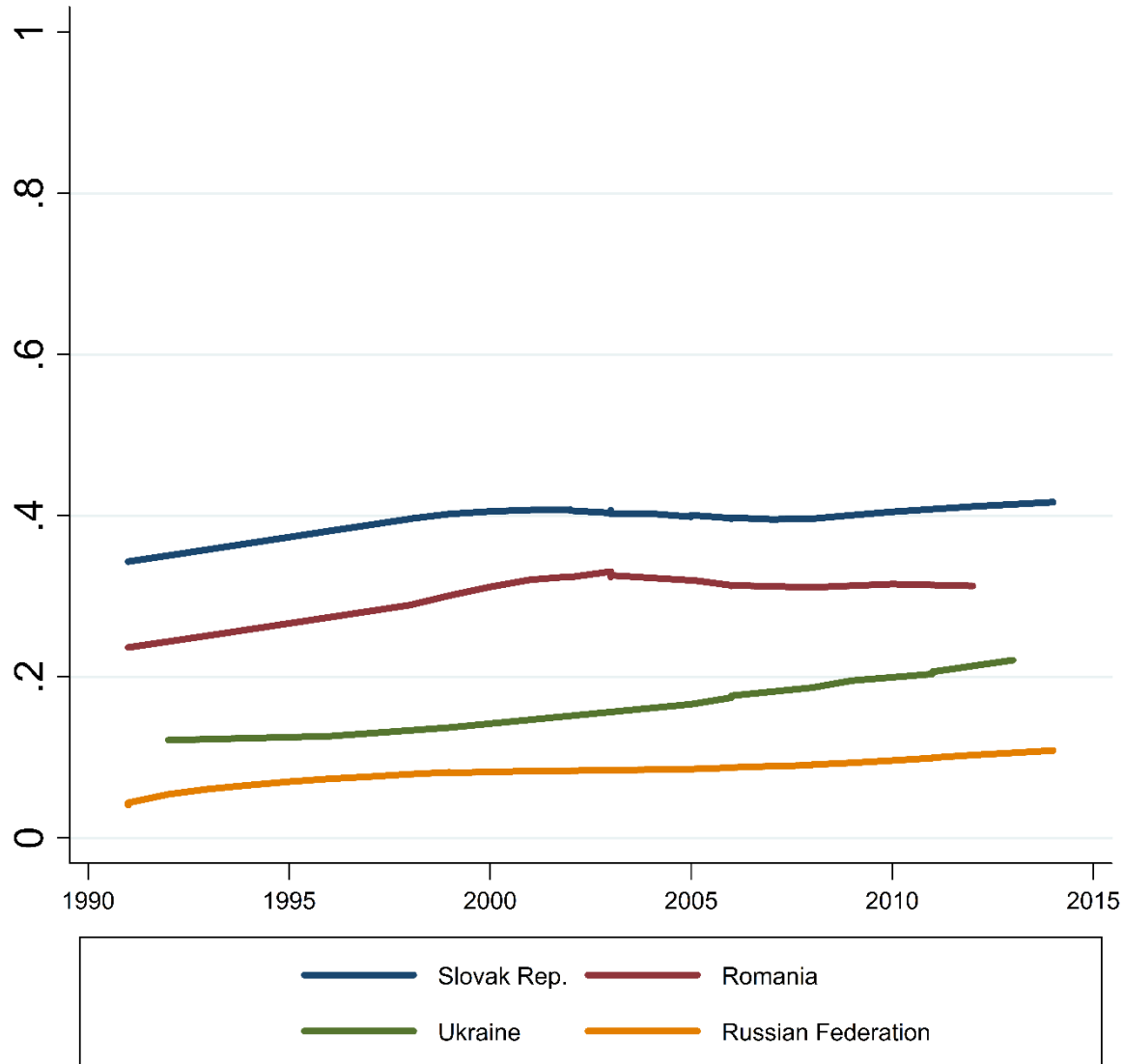
# A small test:

## *Linear piecewise regression*

---

Country	Linear	PW(1990-1999)	PW(2000-2015)	R <sup>2</sup> Linear	R <sup>2</sup> PW	f-test
Romania	0,004 ***	0,011 ***	-0,002	0,285	0,566	***
Russian Federation	0,002 ***	0,004 ***	0,001	0,352	0,385	
Slovak Republic	0,003 ***	0,008 ***	-0,001	0,260	0,491	***
Ukraine	0,005 ***	0,001	0,007 **	0,675	0,706	

# An Eastern European pattern: 4+5. *Short period effect + increasing trend*

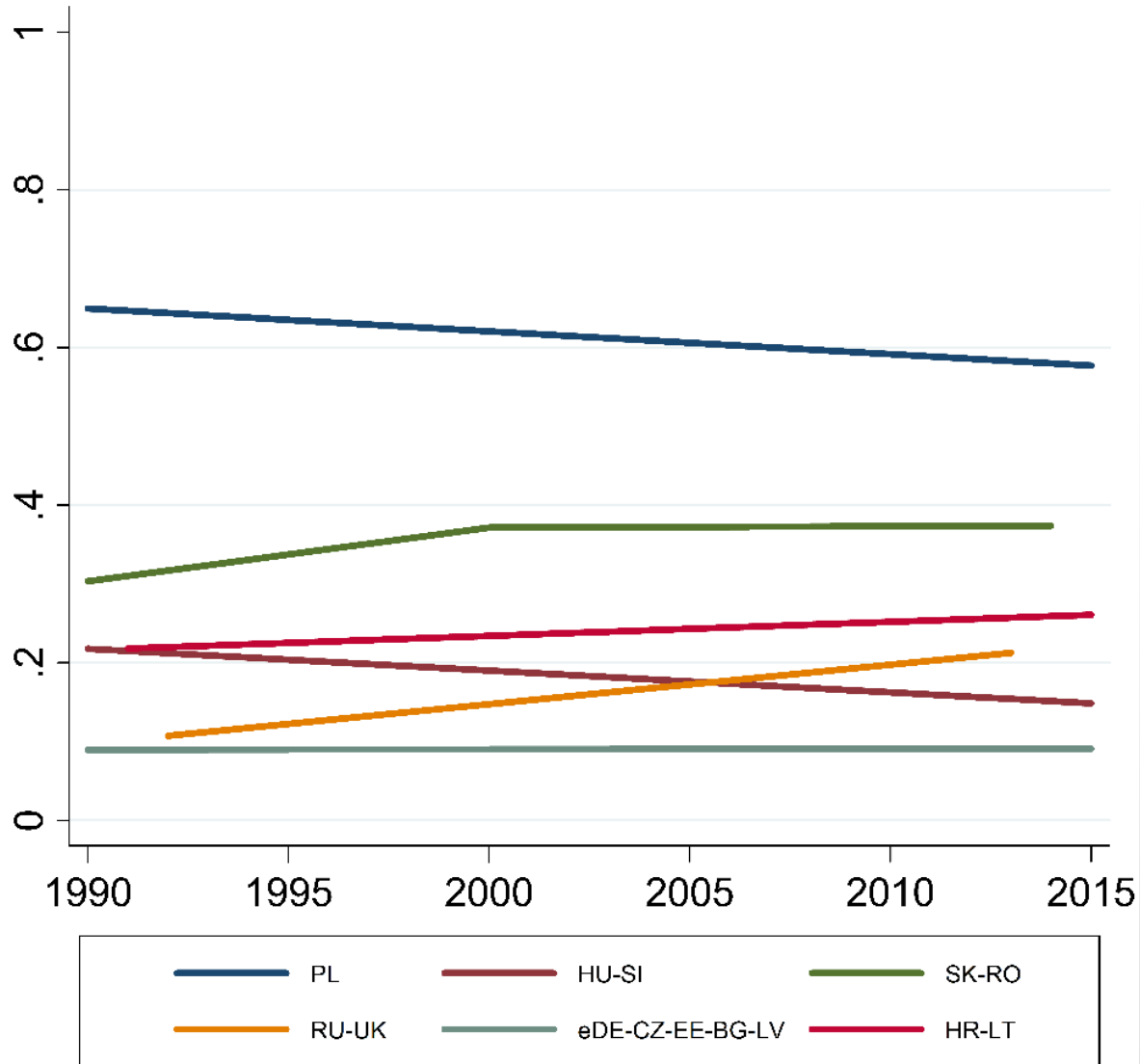




# Comparing to Brenner (2016)

Low and stable	Declining	Mixed/ Fluctuating	High and stable	Increasing
Czech Republic	Argentina	Belarus	Brazil	Bulgaria
Denmark	Australia	Mexico	Chile	Puerto Rico
Estonia	Austria	South Africa	Colombia	Romania
Finland	Belgium		Peru	Russia
Iceland	Canada		Philippines	
Latvia	France		Venezuela	
Norway	Germany			
Slovakia	Hungary			
Sweden	Ireland			
United Kingdom	Italy			
	Lithuania			
	Netherlands			
	New Zealand			
	Poland			
	Portugal			
	Slovenia			
	Spain			
	Switzerland			
	Ukraine			
	United States			

# The overall picture



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

FERRUCCIO BIOLCATI

FRANCESCO MOLTENI

Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali e Politiche

Università degli Studi di Milano

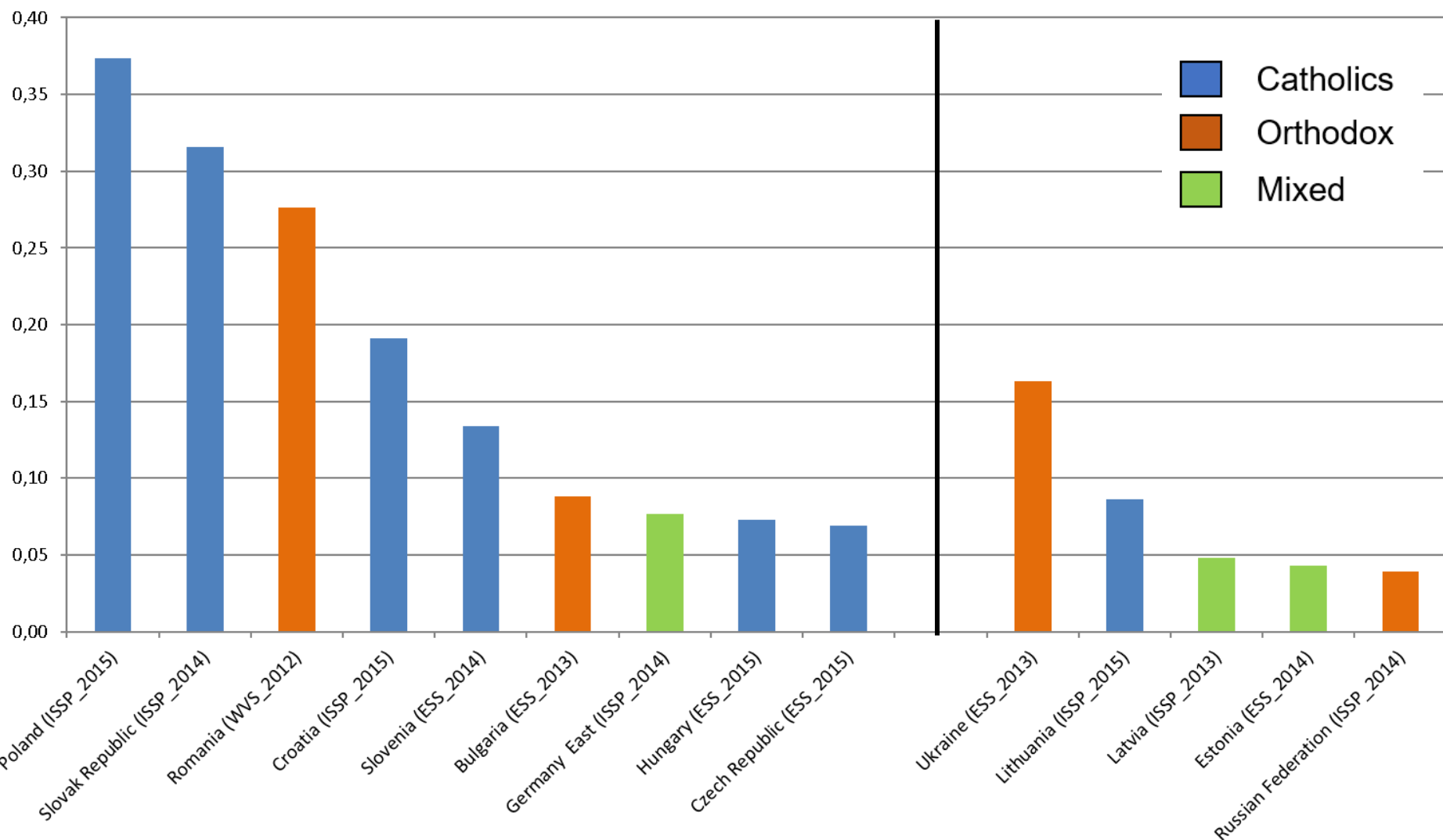
via Conservatorio, 7 - 20122 Milano (MI) - ITALY

Tel. + 39 02 503 21287 - Fax + 39 02 503 21240 - [ferruccio.biolcati@unimi.it](mailto:ferruccio.biolcati@unimi.it)

Tel. + 39 02 503 21142 - Fax + 39 02 503 21240 - [francesco.molteni@unimi.it](mailto:francesco.molteni@unimi.it)



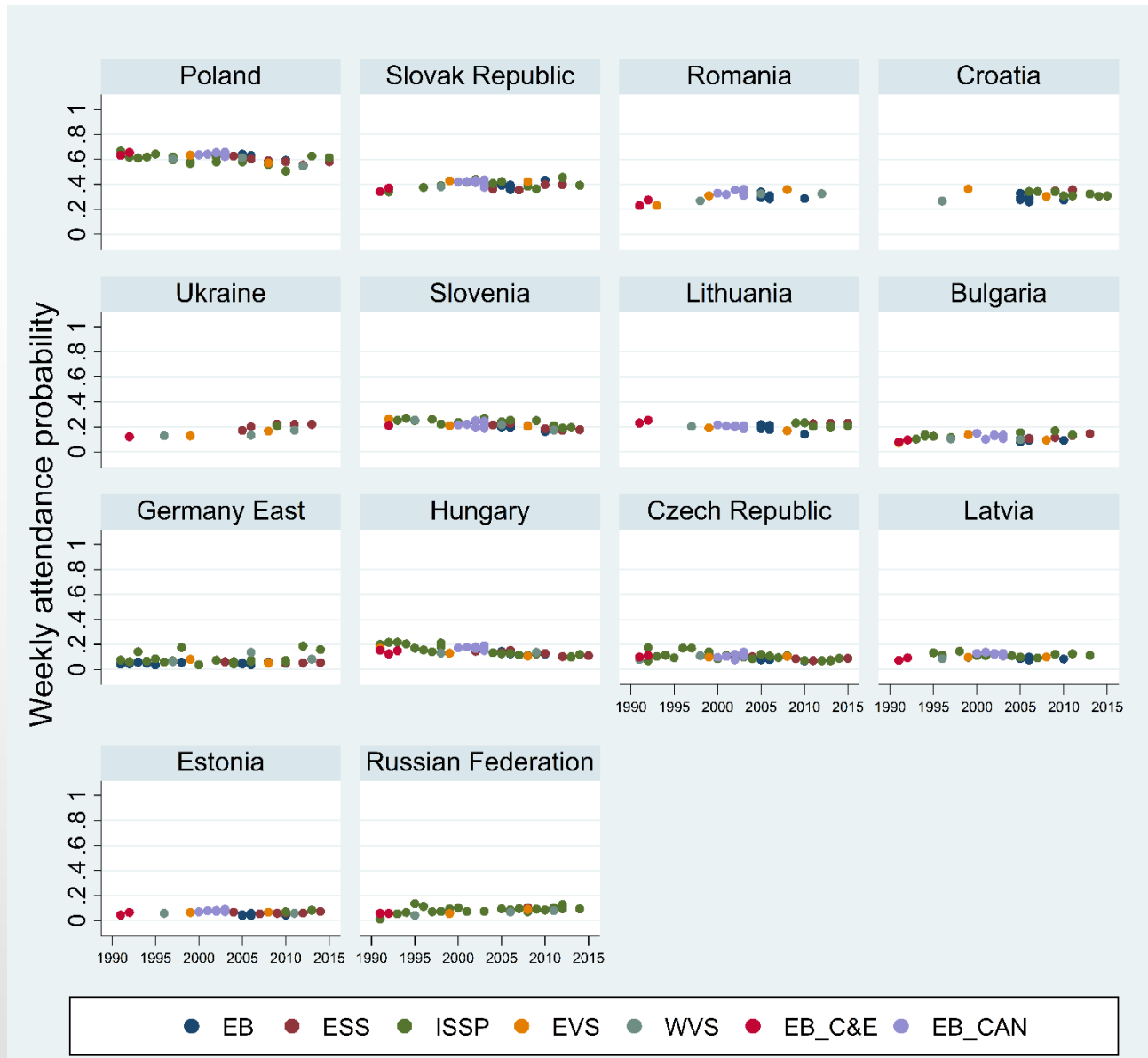
## Implied probability of weekly church attendance in the last available year (2012-2015)



Central and Balkan countries

Former SSSR countries

# Implied probability of weekly church attendance in Eastern European countries by study (1990-2015)



# Implied probability of weekly church attendance in Western European countries (1973-2013)



# Complete coding plan

	ESS	Eurobarometer (Mannheim Trend File)	EVS/WVS	ISSP 1985	ISSP 1986-1987	ISSP 1988-2000	ISSP 2001-2010
Every day	0,99						
Several times a week + every day							0,99
Several times a week		0,99					
More than once a week	0,99		0,99				
Once a week or more						0,99	
Once a week	0,99	0,99	0,99	0,99	0,99		0,99
Two-three times a month						0,58	0,58
Once to three times a month				0,50	0,50		
At least once a month	0,23						
Once a month			0,23			0,23	0,23
Several times a year				0,12	0,12	0,12	0,12
Few times a year		0,12					
Twice a year, once a year					0,03		
Only on special holy days	0,03		0,03				
Other specific holy days			0,03				
Once a year		0,02	0,02				0,02
Less frequently				0,03	0,01	0,03	0,01
Less often	0,01		0,01				
Never	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00

# Believing without belonging in Eastern Orthodox Europe?

---

- Other authors found the same results (Borowik 2002, Greeley 1994 and 2003)
- What interpretation?
  - Different meaning attached to attendance in orthodox countries
  - Bricolage (Pollack 2003)
  - Reconstruction of memory (Borowik 2002 and 2006)
- Opposite implication for “Believing without belonging”



# Conclusions

---

- Clustering VS: common pattern approach: contexts VS. mechanisms
- Similar patterns in many Eastern and Western European countries (Brenner 2016, Norris and Inglehart 2011, Pollack 2003)
- Glock's paradox and secondary analysis
- Short-term revival?

# Why church attendance?

---

- We focus on the **development of vitality of religious practice** by looking at one specific indicator, that is church attendance
- **Arguments of different nature**, both conceptual and practical:
  - the **ubiquity** of the church attendance indicator allows considering many surveys
  - the associated question to tap church attendance is **relatively simple** to formulate and easy to understand for respondents
  - church attendance focuses on one aspect of religious change (religious practice) **particularly effective** for measuring the ritualistic dimension of individual religiosity; belonging

# Research agenda

---

- Looking for the **explanans**
  - Cohort analysis



# Summary of Religious Service Attendance Trends (Brenner 2016)

Low and stable	Declining	Mixed/ Fluctuating	High and stable	Increasing
Czech Republic	Argentina	Belarus	Brazil	Bulgaria
Denmark	Australia	Mexico	Chile	Puerto Rico
Estonia	Austria	South Africa	Colombia	Romania
Finland	Belgium		Peru	Russia
Iceland	Canada		Philippines	
Latvia	France		Venezuela	
Norway	Germany			
Slovakia	Hungary			
Sweden	Ireland			
United Kingdom	Italy			
	Lithuania			
	Netherlands			
	New Zealand			
	Poland			
	Portugal			
	Slovenia			
	Spain			
	Switzerland			
	Ukraine			
	United States			



# Implied weekly probability *(Hout and Greeley 1998)*

Dichotomy	Categories (ISSP 2004)	Probability
1	Several times a week	0.99
1	Once a week	0.99
0	2 or 3 times a month	0.58
0	Once a month	0.23
0	Several times a year	0.12
0	Once a year	0.02
0	Less frequently	0.01
0	Never	0.00

- *Example:* Once a month:  $12/52$  weeks = 0.23