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Religious Pluralism and the Transmission of Religious Values through Education

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Highlights

- We analyze the role of formal religious education in the intergenerational transmission of religious values.
- We develop a model of school choice in which the demand for religious schooling is driven partly by the desire of parents to limit their children's exposure to the influences of competing religions.
- The model predicts that when a religious group's share of the local population grows, the fraction of that group's members whose children attend religious schools declines.
- In addition, if the motivation to preserve religious identity is sufficiently strong, the fraction of *all* children that attend a given denomination's school is an inverse *u*-shaped function of the denomination's market share.
- The model implies that the overall demand for religious schooling is an increasing function of both the local religiosity rate and the level of religious pluralism, as measured by a Herfindahl Index.
- Using both U.S. county-level data and individual data from ECLS-K and NELS:88, we find evidence strongly consistent with all of the model's predictions.
- Our findings also illustrate that failing to control for the local religiosity rate, as is common in previous studies, may lead a researcher to erroneously conclude that religious pluralism has a negative effect on participation.

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