

# RELIGIOSITY AND VALUES IN ROMANIA

Sorin Dan ŞANDOR  
Marciana POPESCU

**Sorin Dan ŞANDOR**

Associate Professor, Public Administration Department,  
Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication  
Sciences,

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Tel/fax: 0040-264-431361

Email: sandor@apubb.ro

**Marciana POPESCU**

Associate Professor, Fordham University,  
Graduate School of Social Service New York

Tel: 0765119650

Email: marcianapopescu@yahoo.com

## Abstract

In Romania the state supports religion. The main reason is claimed to be the fact that religion will improve the shared values (moral, social, economic or political) of our society.

*Based on the data from the Public Opinion Barometer November 2005 (which included the questions from The World Values Survey 2005)* this study explores the relationship between religiosity and work ethic, moral values and tolerance; as well as the ways in which religiosity affects political and gender-based attitudes.

Regarding most of the values included a weak but significant relationship was found. A poorer work and general ethic, attitudes towards women and homosexuals or the preference for a more authoritarian regime are the most disquieting findings.



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## 1. Introduction

While religious freedom is granted in every democratic state, the State-Church relationship varies greatly from one country to another. Countries like France or the United States of America refused any kind of entanglement between those two. Other countries seem to favor a different approach. Romania is a country that fits very well in this latter category, in which religion is supported by the state. Central or local governments are paying for church personnel (clerical or not), religion is a part of the school curricula, churches are built on public land from public money (in various proportions with private donations), there are public displays of religious symbols in state institutions.

After the fall of the Communist regime, when a new Constitution was drafted (being adopted in 1991) state support for religion was not questioned. After 45 years of communist regime in which the public speech was based on atheist ideas the turn was radical but somewhat expected. The debate started only several years after, focused on the role of Orthodox Church: one side blamed orthodoxy in general and the Orthodox Church in particular as factors impeding the modernization of Romania and the other side took on defending the church as keeper of the national identity – a position intrinsically linked to intensified nationalist feelings. The common idea for both sides is that religion strongly influences values and shapes attitudes (moral, social, economic or political). A lot of efforts were made in order to assure that the majority church (the Orthodox church) will not become an established one and that the rest of religions receive a similar treatment from the state. In 2006 public display of religious symbols came under scrutiny, yet not questioning the relationship between church and state, but rather as an attempt to prevent discriminatory attitudes towards other religious groups<sup>1</sup>.

The idea that the state should support religion in order to have better citizens (especially in terms of morality) is widely accepted. There is a strong body of literature to support that claim. Religious ideas played a very important role in forming moral, social, economic or political ideas. In every field we can find strong evidence for that. As an example Golembiewski (1992) considers that Judeo-Christian values play an important role in the management of public organizations and there are many other possible examples.

The main line of critique against such claims is that moral codes are based on similar values (for most religious but also for secular ones) and religion is only one of many ways to foster them. Especially in the last century religion lost a lot of its importance as promoter of values.

There are other claims about general benefits of religion. Koenig&Larson (1998, p. 385) notes that: “religious persons experience not only greater well-being and higher life satisfaction, but less anxiety and depression, lower rates of suicide, less alcoholism, less loneliness, and better adaptation to stress than do persons without spiritual resources” However, our study will not address the impact of religiosity on the quality of life, but rather explore ways in which religiosity contributes to the shaping of attitudes and values.

## 2. Religious behaviors in Romania

Romania is considered to be similar to some of the most religious countries in the world. Norris&Inglehart (2003) exploring the World Values Surveys data from 1981 to 2001, and using two dimensions to measure religiosity - church attendance and frequency of prayers – placed Romania close to the most religious countries (like Ireland, USA, Uganda, Philippines, etc), just above Iran. Among Orthodox countries Romania had the highest church attendance (together with Greece) and the highest frequency of prayers.

This study used the data drawn from the Public Opinion Barometer November 2005, which served also as World Values Survey 5<sup>th</sup> wave, to assess the religiosity of Romanians. The vast majority of the people in the sample (86.5%) declared themselves as Orthodox, 6.1% as Catholic, 2.7% as Protestant, 1.4% as Greek-Catholic, 2.6% belonged to other religious denominations, only 0.4% declared that they do not have a religious affiliation. 91.5% are considering themselves as being a religious person.

World Values Survey used several dimensions for religiosity, each measured by a number of variables:

Dimensions (variables)	Results
<b>RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION</b>	
Church attendance	27.3% at least once a week 18.7% once a month 30.9% only in Holydays 23.1% rarely or never
Do you pray?	95.8%
<b>RELIGIOUS VALUES</b>	
Importance of Religion	58% very important 32.5% important 7.2% less important 2.4% at all
Importance of God	Mean 9.17 (out of 10)
<b>RELIGIOUS BELIEFS</b>	
Believe in life after death	'Yes' 63.4%
Believe in heaven	'Yes' 69.9%
Believe in hell	'Yes' 73.8%
Believe in sin	'Yes' 88.8%
Believe in God	'Yes' 98.3%
<b>THE PERCEIVED ROLES OF THE CHURCH</b>	
Moral	'Yes' 79.0%
Family	'Yes' 69.6%
Social	'Yes' 44.9%
Spiritual	'Yes' 88.9%

**Table 1:** Religion in Romania

As we can see from the data above only church attendance seems to be rather low. In rest we can see that religious life appears important or very important for the huge majority of Romanians, religious beliefs are shared by almost two thirds of them (on a much bigger scale than in the rest of Europe) and praying is a very common practice (in this wave the question was rephrased, not concerning the frequency of prayers but the existence of this practice). The church is seen as having the role to solve almost every type of problems people can have.

Norris and Inglehart tried to compare religions at world scale, considering each country as being of a certain religion. In the case of Romania it is hard to compare religions within the country. We have a vast majority religion and small percentages of the population for other religions. Instead of comparing religions we will try to compare religiosity, understood as the strength of religious beliefs, behaviors and values. How should we measure religiosity? There are several dimensions that are to be included:

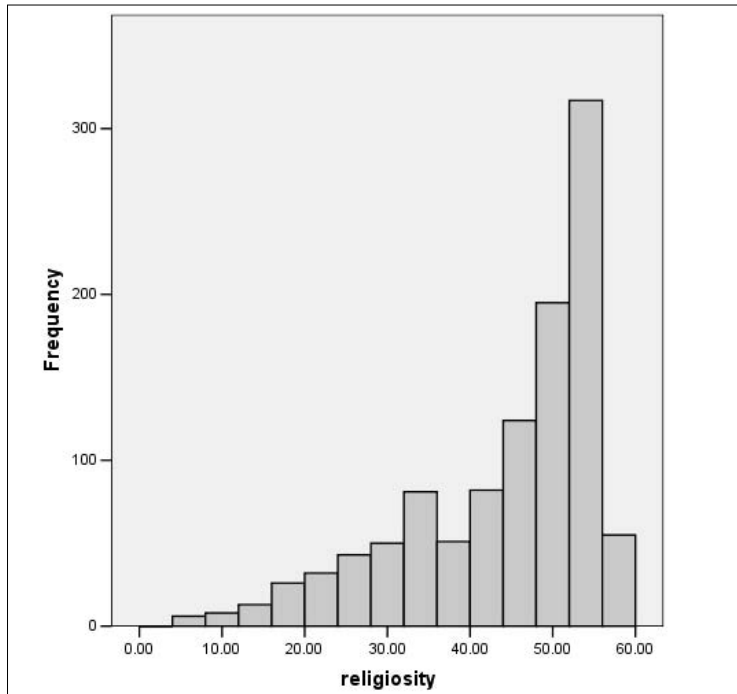
**Beliefs** believing that Life after death, Hell, Heaven or Sin do exist – basically trusting the reality of some major religious symbols;

**Church** – believing that the church offers solutions to people’s morale, social, family or spiritual problems;

**Values** – trust in the existence of God, the importance of God and religion in one’s life and praying.

A factor analysis based on the principal component extraction method and a Promax rotation method with Kaiser normalization is confirming the existence of those factors. These three factors are explaining 58.8% of the total variance of religion-related variables in the survey. Interesting enough, the church attendance variable has a low factor loading for each factor. One possible explanation is that going to church is more of a social habit than a manifestation of religiosity.

Using the variables mentioned above we designed a religiosity index. The distribution of this index shows us that we have a significant number of highly religious people.



**Figure 1:** Religiosity in Romania

### 3. Religion and values

#### Work ethic

Since Max Weber's famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* it is widely believed that religion can shape work ethic. The ascetic capitalism gave birth to a work ethic that was the catalyst of modern capitalism.

At country level Norris and Inglehart are showing that religion is no longer the main factor. The Protestant countries, which include the most developed countries of the world, under the influence of a leisure culture, do have now the weakest work ethic.

The authors had identified three dimensions and eleven variables concerning the work ethics. We will present them along the influence that religiosity has and the significance of that for Romania.

Dimensions (variables)	Influence	Significance
<b>Intrinsic rewards</b>		
Value: An opportunity to use initiative.	-	.038*
Value: A job in which you feel you can achieve something	-	.039*
Value: A responsible job		.642
Value: A job meeting one's abilities		.113
Value: A job respected by people in general		.120
Value: A job that is interesting		.962

<b>Material rewards</b>		
Value: Good hours		.455
Value: Generous holidays	-	.016*
Value: Good pay	+	.003*
Value: Not too much pressure		.134
Value: Good job security		.127
<b>Work as a duty</b>		
Agree/disagree: People who don't work turn lazy	-	.040*
Agree/disagree: Work is a duty to society	-	.000*
Agree/disagree: It is humiliating to receive money without work	-	.004*
Agree/disagree: Work should always come first	-	.000*

**Table 2:** Work Ethic and Religiosity

\* - significant at 0.05. Significance was computed using One-Way ANOVA

The results are contradicting the theory. While the differences are not that big (less than 3 points) in most cases religiosity has a negative effect on the importance of each factor. In terms of Intrinsic rewards initiative and the possibility of achieving something seem to be less important for people more religious. In terms of Material rewards more religious people are more interested in good pay (while in traditional religious beliefs – in the Orthodox tradition mostly – the accumulation of wealth is not necessarily a virtue) and less in holidays. Religiosity seems to have also a small negative influence on seeing work as a duty, including a more indulging opinion about people who do not work or of people who are living out of charity or social benefits.

### Ethics

Ethics are supposedly greatly influenced by religion. The results for Romania are showing the opposite. There is a small but significant correlation between religiosity and approval of some unethical behaviors.

	Correlation
Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled	.113**
Avoiding a fare on public transport	.078*
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	.107**
Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties	.068*

**Table 3:** Ethics and Religiosity

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Moral issues

Religion was for a long time considered as the primary source of moral values. Moral rules appeared as God's decrees and enforcing them is a duty that each church is trying to fulfill. Religion may be considered as a strong and yet autonomous mean

for social control. Sometimes the effects are too strong (as in the case of fundamentalist societies), sometimes too weak.

For Romania we selected several issues and tried to see the correlation between religiosity and the approval for several behaviors.

	Correlation	% saying 'never justified'
Homosexuality	-.149**	73.0
Prostitution	-.155**	69.2
Abortion	-.190**	48.4
Divorce	-.176**	34.7
Euthanasia	-.122**	56.2
Suicide	-.041	82.7
Wife beating	.049	79.4

**Table 4:** Moral issues and Religiosity

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant for all items except suicide and wife beating, the correlation (again small) shows that religious people tend to disapprove (along with the church) homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, divorce or euthanasia. Knowing that the Romanian society is a more traditional one the results are not that surprising. Homosexuality is legal but the battle around that issue was serious, and it was only legalized as part of external imperatives imposed by the European Community. Prostitution is not legal but it is quite wide-spread. Abortion was legalized after the downfall of Ceaușescu as a reaction to his demographic policies, and we actually witnessed a slide to the other extreme, in which abortion became the prevalent means of contraception<sup>2</sup>. This, in turn, might partially explain that now the attitude against abortion, fueled by religious feelings, is increasing. Divorce is not a very significant topic for the Orthodox Church – although divorce is not entirely approved, based on current religious norms, it is possible for divorced people to still have a religious ceremony/blessing for consecutive marriages.

### **Tolerance**

There are no significant differences among the degree of acceptance as neighbors for different kinds of people. What we notice, and can be a sign of concern, is that overall (religious or not), Romanians tend to have low tolerance towards specific population groups – such as alcoholics, homosexuals and Roma. This is one area in which religiosity does not appear to improve attitudes towards others.

### **Attitudes towards women**

Asked 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?' with response varying from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, religiosity is correlated with attitudes towards women like this:

	Correlation
A house wife is self-realized as much as one who works	0.067**
Men are better political leaders	.095*
Higher education is more important for boys than for girls	.129**
Men are better managers than women	.145*

**Table 5:** Attitudes towards women and Religiosity

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We can see that religious people tend to agree more with the above statements, showing a more conservative view on the role of women.

### Political attitudes

When asked what they think about what would be better for Romania, in terms of political administration/governance, several options were offered: a strong ruler, technocracy, a military regime and a democracy. The responses correlated with religiosity as follows:

	Correlation
To have a strong ruler which does not bother with the Parliament or elections	.100**
Experts, not the Government, should take the decisions	.000
To have a military regime	.078**
To have a democratic regime	-.095**

**Table 6:** Political attitudes and Religiosity

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is expected that religious values will bring a rather traditional perspective regarding public life as well as the role of the government in society. There is a preference for clear structures of authority for religiously minded people, thus democracy tends to be rejected in favor of more authoritarian regimes. For our sample, the majority of the respondents participating in this study appear in favor of authoritarian regimes: 65.7% considered strong leadership as good/very good for the country; 60.2% favor technocracy, and 16.8% appear to consider as best a military regime. Democracy has 83.2%, making the first option.

What is essential for democracy? Using a scale from 1 (not essential) to 10 (essential), the respondents were asked to rank the different aspects of democratic governance that we then correlated with religiosity items, to explore the impact of religiosity on people's expectations from a democratic government:

	Correlation
Government to tax the rich and to subsidize the poor	.178**
Religious authorities to approve the laws	.332**
Free elections	-.114**
Unemployment benefits	-.024
The army to take charge when the government is incompetent	.153**
Civil rights to protect freedom	-.088**
Prosperous economy	-.084**
Criminals should be punished harshly	-0.022
People can change laws through referendums	.033
Women to have the same rights with men	-.079**

**Table 7:** Democracy and Religiosity

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on this data, the more religious people are the more likely they are to approve of government's strong role in regulating redistribution and taking responsibility for the welfare of its citizens; as well as of religion's influence on governance/laws. Interestingly enough, religiosity appears to also lead people towards favoring military intervention to regulate poor governance. Free elections, civil rights, the economy or rights for women seem to be less important in the democratic equation for religious people.

### Religion and politics

Attitudes towards the influence that churches should have over politics and politicians are representing an area where we expected to find the biggest differences related to religiosity.

	Correlation
Politicians who do not believe in God should not occupy public positions	.317**
Priests should not influence the way in which people vote	-0.140**
It will be better for Romania if public positions will be occupied mostly by people with faith	.384**
Priests should not influence political decisions	-0.132**

**Table 8:** Religion and politics

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

We can see that, even if in a small measure, religiosity favors a bigger involvement of priests and faith in politics.

## 4. Conclusions

Relationships, if existing, are weak. Many other factors can be more influential. Religiosity is greater in villages, where values are significantly different from those shared in cities. So the urban/rural divide may account for all or a portion of what was observed. Education and gender have also significant relationships with religiosity

and may be the real factor influencing the results. Future research may provide more indications.

Laying apart all claims of causality the results are still proving that religiosity is not fostering the desired social values. More religious people tend to share more traditional views. Some of those views are not helping in building a better society. Some of the most serious concerns raised by the findings of this study are: an increasingly poor work ethics, and overall lack of ethical conduct, discriminatory attitudes towards women and homosexuals as well as the preference for a more authoritarian regime. One question here that could inform future research is whether the desire for an authoritarian regime comes as a nostalgic reaction to the shortfalls of the new “democracy” more than a religiosity-shaped value.

Considering state support for religion as a public policy we can see that the desired effect (more religious people with better values) does not appear to actually produce results. It is hard to believe that this policy will change in the next years. The political aspect of the issue may prevail against all other considerations in the eye of all politicians. Support for the church is considered to be an important part of electoral efforts; support from the church is sought by many politicians. In a country where religion has such an important place in the life of citizens (yet, not in forming better values) such a policy is very hard to be changed.

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## Endnotes

\* Public Administration Department, “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Romania

\*\* Fordham University, New York

<sup>1</sup> The National Council for Combating Discrimination found it a case of discrimination and asked the Ministry of Education to act, but the Ministry deferred the issues to local communities and nothing happened.

<sup>2</sup> In 1990 17.76% of all women aged between 15 and 49 had an abortion; since then the figure decreased to 2.9% in 2005 – *Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2006*