

## **Religiosity and Political Participation across Europe**

**Anna Kulkova**

Western Social Scientists of the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century believed that the role of religion would little by little decrease until religion would only remain in the private sphere of people's lives. Nevertheless, from the 1960s we can witness the failure of the secularization theory predictions: new religious movements appear, “old” religions actively participate in the social life, churches cooperate with each other and governments, and the East is quickly Islamizing. On the other hand, political participation rates vary from country to country that can be associated with the type of political regime but also can be a consequence of different predominant religions or different history of state-church relations. Existing studies from the USA and Russia suggest that religiosity is capable of shaping political participation through religious doctrines and practices. Thus, atheists are usually more active in politics compared to followers of all religious traditions while participation in religious community's affairs is positively linked to political participation. European countries are culturally close still showing great variance in predominant religions and state-church relations experience. All these factors can influence political participation and lead to different participation rates if religiosity is taken into account. **Consequently, the question arises: whether religiosity can account for cross-country variance in political participation and if so, then through what channels it affects political participation?**

The topic of political participation and its determinants is rather well explored (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Norris 2007), still little attention is paid to religion as potential cause of differences in levels of political activism. Today researchers suggest several ways through which religiosity can influence political participation and all these ways differ in what we understand under religiosity. Representatives of the first approach, that can be called sociological, suggest that differences in levels of political participation may arise from religious affiliation (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1990; Philpott 2007). Religious traditions are based on doctrines that can either prohibit or promote political participation of its followers. In other words, different religious traditions establish different behavioral norms in all spheres of life including politics and believers follow these norms. Thus, belonging to a particular religious tradition can predispose the types of political activities that a person will take part in because they are perceived as common practice in his/her community. Furthermore, support for political activism may depend on the characteristics of particular religious community such as traditional moral values that are promoted by the church and whether it establishes severe discipline among

its followers. Higher levels of discipline lead to political uniformity – consolidated support for some political actions or some political party among community members, while traditionalism may influence the overall inclination of community members to take part in politics in accordance with religious doctrines.

Secondly, the degree of person’s religiosity can have an influence on his/her inclination to take part in politics because there is a great difference between identifying with religious tradition and following its rules and prescriptions. The degree of religiosity can be understood as both strength of beliefs (the extent to which God and religion are important for the respondent) and religious activism (church attendance/praying rates). For instance, the major political cleavage in Europe today lies not between Protestants and Catholics, but between those who are integrated in their religious communities and those who are secular or have just formal ties with their communities (Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008). From this perspective the church is not only a community whose members share common values, but it is also an agent of socialization that promotes its values and behavioral patterns. Thus, the person who is more involved in his religious community is more likely to follow religious norms promoted by it, regardless of whether they imply political participation or absenteeism (Guth et al. 2002). Similarly, churches can serve as mobilization centers as they have an opportunity to convince their followers in importance of taking part in elections and voting for particular parties or candidates. Religious participation can also lead to political participation because individual can get used to participation regardless of what actual type of participation it is – religious or political (Macaluso and Wanat 1979).

It is important to notice that all these papers are related to the USA primarily, while we can expect to see some differences in political participation of the Europeans that can be linked to religiosity. From this perspective Europe is a very interesting case because there are culturally similar countries that have undergone different political experience of regime transformations and consequently witnessed different state attitude towards political participation. On the other hand, religiosity–political participation relations have not been explored for the Orthodox Christians that may differ from other Christian denominations because of its political theology and historical experience.

Moreover, there is still no comparative cross-cultural research of religiosity–political participation relations, as it is a challenging task to compare both countries and religions. Differences may also arise from the state-church relations: we may expect to see different levels

of political participation in countries with free religious services and in those where state oppresses religion.

***What is left unexplored?***

1. The link between religiosity and political participation for Orthodox Christians
2. Religiosity-political participation relations in Post-Communists states
3. European countries with different predominant religions and past experience of state-church relations.

**Theoretical framework**

Research is conducted in accordance with the logic of behavioralism: individuals are perceived as main units of analysis, whose religious and political preferences are extremely important and the relation between which is studied. These individuals are studied not in isolation but with regard to the context that surrounds them and can influence political participation as well as religion (Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996). Moreover, the paper suggests looking for the differences not only between individuals, but also transcending to the country-level of analysis in order to grasp potential differences in religiosity-political participation relations typical of European countries. The research will be based on the complex approach towards exploring the influence of religiosity on political participation that suggests to operationalize religiosity as both religious affiliation, importance of God and religion for the respondent as well as quantitative measures of religiosity like church attendance rates and praying frequency (Guth et al. 2002; Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008).

**Core Variables and Hypotheses**

Political participation will be regarded as a dependent variable in a form of an additive index of political actions performed by the individual during the last year. Political actions include: voting, attending demonstrations, signing petitions, contacting politicians and working for political parties and NGO's. Additionally, these measures of political participation may be used separately: for instance, while an individual can have some freedom in whether to attend one demonstration or another, as well as when and what petition to sign, there is no much freedom of choice when it comes to elections that are held on regular basis. While other types of political activism are more voluntary, voting is close to a civic duty that should be performed by a

responsible citizen and may not reflect the actual attitude of the respondent towards political participation.

*Explanatory variables* will include:

1. religious affiliation (that perhaps should be supplemented with religious tradition in which a respondent was raised in order to grasp potential differences in beliefs)
2. degree of religiosity: importance of God/religion
3. practical religiosity: religious services attendance, praying frequency

In order to control for other factors that can have an effect on political participation, additional *control variables* will be introduced:

1. socio-economic status of a respondent (age, gender, income, education, size of the town where he/she lives, being a citizen of a country)
2. ideological preferences of a respondent
3. country where a respondent lives
4. dummy variable for a country being a post-Communist state
5. predominant religion in a country (may also grasp the difference in political behavior between members of small and big denominations)
6. state-church relations (Barro-McCleary index)
7. political regime type

The main *hypothesis* of the paper is that European countries do differ in the way political participation is influenced by religiosity. The paper suggests that we should study not only individual dimensions of religiosity, but also treat country specifics of religiosity and previous Church-state relations experience as potential sources of variance.

For example, Catholics in Poland may differ in their attitude towards political participation from Catholics in Czech Republic because of different state-church relations experience. In Poland Catholic church was in active opposition to the communist regime encouraging believers to take part in politics. Czech Catholic church was close to the regime, materially depended on it. Consequently it didn't promote participatory values among its followers. Thus, we may expect Polish Catholics to be more active in politics than those from Czech Republic. Alternatively, religion is not linked to political participation rates across Europe and these are political factors only that determine the cross-country variance.

Nevertheless, cross-country variance may occur not only because of different historical experience, but also because of different religion that is predominant in the country or can be a result of regime type.

### **Analyses and Modelling**

Multi-level model will be used in order to test whether there are any differences in religiosity – political participation relations across European countries. On the first level such a relation will be tested for the individuals, then transcending to a country-level.

The *data* will come from the ESS 2012 data-set on European countries. For robustness checks data from previous rounds may be used as well as the data from WVS 2010-2014 – 6<sup>th</sup> wave that includes questions on political actions recently performed by a respondent.

## Literature

1. Beyerlein, Kraig, and Mark Chaves. 2003. “The Political Activities of Religious Congregations in the United States.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 2: 229–46.
2. Brady, Henry E., Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman. 1995. “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation.” *American Political Science Review*, no. 02: 271–94.
3. Carmines, Edward G., and Robert Huckfeldt. 1996. “Political Behavior: An Overview.” *A New Handbook of Political Science*, 223–54.
4. Driskell, Robyn, Elizabeth Embry, and Larry Lyon. 2008. “Faith and Politics: The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Political Participation.” *Social Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell)*, no. 2 (June): 294–314.
5. Guth, James, John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt. 2002. “Religion and Political Participation.” In , 1–31. American Political Science Association.
6. Macaluso, Theodore F., and John Wanat. 1979. “Voting Turnout & Religiosity.” *Polity*, no. 1: 158–69.
7. Norris, Pippa. 2007. “Political Activism: New Challenges, New Opportunities.” *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, 628–52.
8. Philpott, Daniel. 2007. “Explaining the Political Ambivalence of Religion.” *American Political Science Review*, no. 3: 505–25.
9. Wald, Kenneth D., Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill. 1990. “Political Cohesion in Churches.” *The Journal of Politics*, no. 1: 197–215.