

# Religion and Democratic Accountability in Contemporary Democracies

Aida Just

Bilkent University

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# Religion and Support for Democratic Governance: Are they compatible?

- Sceptics: Democracy requires pluralism, competition, and appreciation of diversity, while religion encourages an uncritical acceptance of authority and intolerance to opposing views (e.g. Hunsberger 1995; Gill 2001)

But:

- There is large variation among and within religions in their expression of support for various aspects of democracy (e.g. Tessler 2002; 2010)
- No religious doctrine is univocally pro- or anti-democratic (Stepan 2000: 44; Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005: 141)
- Religious institutions vary greatly in their official positions towards democratic and dictatorial regimes across countries and over time (Kalyvas 1996; Gill 1998; Warner 2000).

# Insights from Research on Public Opinion

- Important to distinguish between *religious belonging, belief, and participation* (e.g. Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan 2012a; Jelen and Wilcox 2002; Eisenstein 2006)
- Mixed results with respect to the consequences of individual religiosity and attendance of religious services for citizen democracy attitudes (Meyer, Tope, and Price 2008; Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan 2012a, 2012b)
- But belonging to different religious groups/denominations has no effect on citizen democracy attitudes (Meyer, Tope, and Price 2008; Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan 2012a, 2012b; Patterson 2004)
- *Puzzle*: religiosity is negatively related to support for democracy in principle but positively related to satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in one's country (Patterson 2004; Hayes 1995; Norris and Inglehart 2011, Ch.6)

# This paper

- Focuses on one fundamental aspect of democratic governance – democratic accountability
- Argues that religious commitment in a form of individual religiosity and attendance of religious services weakens people's attitudes and behavior necessary to hold governments accountable for their performance while in office.

# Religion and Just World Beliefs

- Religion is closely linked with believing that the world is just where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (e.g. Kaplan 2012; Overcash et al. 1996; Szmajke 1991; Rubin and Peplau 1975)
- Religion makes just world beliefs particularly resilient to empirical disconfirmation by providing believers with behavioral guidelines how to cope with the outside world, as well as cognitive tools – a comforting and compelling worldview to explain the occurrence of adverse events (e.g., Pargament and Hahn 1986; Pargament 1997).
- Just world beliefs were used to explain why religion is negatively related to people's support for income redistribution (e.g. Scheve and Stasavage 2006; Benabou and Tirole 2006; but see Huber and Stanig 2011).

# Hypotheses

If religious people believe that the world is just where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get, they are more likely to think that individuals who occupy powerful positions in fact *deserve* their positions.

- *Hypothesis 1*: More religious people should express higher levels of satisfaction with their national governments than less religious individuals.

# Hypotheses

Religion shapes people's motivations for responsibility attribution: by focusing on God as the ultimate causal agent capable of correcting all injustices, religion reduces the relevance of political authority in handling their country's problems.

- *Hypothesis 2*: More religious people are less likely to believe that governing parties should be punished in elections when they have done a bad job than less religious individuals or non-believers.
- *Hypothesis 3*: The relationship between economic evaluations and government satisfaction should be weaker among more religious individuals in comparison to weak believers or non-believers.

# Data and Measures

- The *European Social Survey* (ESS) (wave 6) 2012-13
- Seventeen established democracies
  - Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.
- Multi-level mixed-effects estimations
  - Random intercepts
  - Random slopes for the economic evaluations variable in government satisfaction models



# Dependent Variables

- Support for democratic accountability in principle
  - “Thinking generally rather than about [country], how important do you think it is for democracy in general that governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job?”
    - Ranges from 0 to 10 (extremely important)
- Government Satisfaction
  - “Now thinking about the [country’s] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?”
    - Ranges from 0 to 10 (extremely satisfied)

# Independent Variables

- Religiosity

“Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?”

- Ranges from 0 to 10 (very religious)

- Attendance of religious services

“Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?”

- Ranges from 0 to 6 (every day).

# Control Variables

- Religious affiliation
  - Christians, Muslims, Jews, other believers, non-believers
- Partisan and ideological leanings
  - Feeling close to a party in government
  - Left-right self-placement
- Socio-demographic characteristics
  - Education, income, professional skills, age, gender, marital status, urban residence
- Social and political grievances
  - Discriminated against, crime victim, left-right extremism

**Table1. Models of support for democratic accountability in principle.**

Variables	With Religiosity			With Religious Services Attendance		
	Base model	With religious groups	No Israel	Base model	With religious groups	No Israel
Religiosity	<b>-.019***</b> (.004)	<b>-.014***</b> (.004)	<b>-.009*</b> (.004)	-	-	-
Religious services attendance	-	-	-	<b>-.066***</b> (.009)	<b>-.059***</b> (.009)	<b>-.057***</b> (.009)
Belonging to religion	.001 (.029)	-	-	.028 (.028)	-	-
Christian	-	-.024 (.029)	-.036 (.029)	-	.010 (.028)	.008 (.028)
Muslim	-	-.113 (.082)	.108 (.087)	-	-.059 (.081)	.183* (.086)
Jew	-	2.244*** (.115)	-.083 (.326)	-	2.291*** (.115)	-.026 (.326)
Other religion	-	.182 (.123)	.130 (.122)	-	.214 (.123)	.178 (.121)
Other controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.215*** (.121)	7.230*** (.173)	7.372*** (.123)	7.196*** (.122)	7.216*** (.174)	7.364*** (.125)
Number of observations	29,999	29,999	27,772	30,023	30,023	27,794
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (df)	782.47 (7)***	1,217.43 (10)***	697.15 (10)***	825.79 (7)***	1,356.61 (10)***	731.56 (10)***

*Note:* Results are multi-level (random intercept) linear regression estimates (using STATA's xtmixed command). Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors; \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed). Non-religious are the reference category for religious groups.

**Table2. Models of government satisfaction using religiosity and its interaction with economic evaluations.**

<i>Variables</i>	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>	<b>Model III</b>	<b>Model IV</b>
Religiosity	<b>.060***</b> (.008)	<b>.057***</b> (.008)	<b>.073***</b> (.011)	<b>.070***</b> (.013)
Attendance of religious services	.051*** (.010)	.042*** (.009)	.026* (.011)	.022 (.012)
Satisfaction with economy	.608*** (.022)	.583*** (.022)	.601*** (.025)	.619*** (.028)
Religiosity*Satisfaction with economy	<b>-.004**</b> (.001)	<b>-.003**</b> (.001)	<b>-.006**</b> (.002)	<b>-.008***</b> (.002)
Christian	-.001 (.029)	-.017 (.028)	-.092 (.113)	-.072 (.112)
Muslim	.320*** (.082)	.350*** (.079)	.294* (.134)	.402** (.137)
Jew	.509*** (.114)	.304** (.110)	.261 (.158)	-.220 (.322)
Other religion	.029 (.122)	.071 (.118)	-	-
Feeling close to a party in government	-	1.066*** (.026)	1.092*** (.034)	1.120*** (.035)
Other controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.501*** (.173)	1.668*** (.160)	1.647*** (.222)	1.711*** (.234)
Number of observations	27,592	27,592	16,350	14,272
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (df)	1,538.34 (20)***	3,385.44 (21)***	2,215.10 (20)***	1,897.06 (20)***

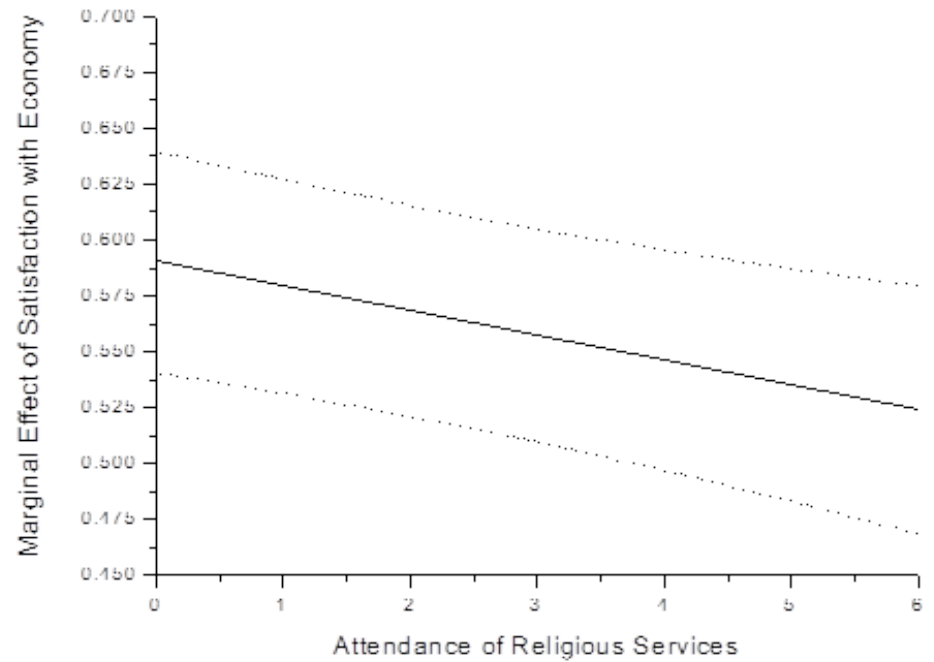
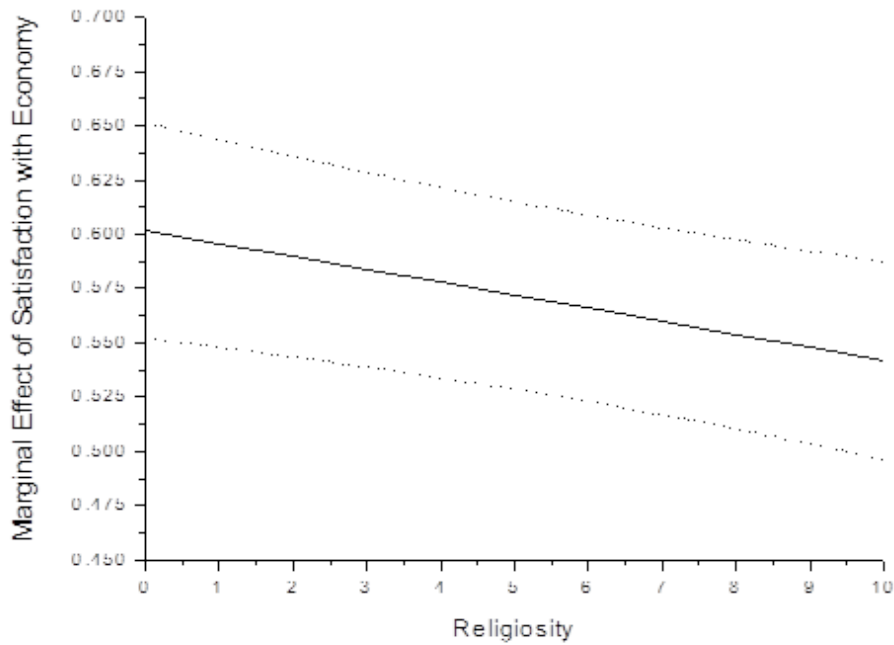
*Note:* Results are multi-level (random intercept and random slope) linear regression estimates (using STATA's xtmixed command). Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors; \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed). Non-religious are the reference category for religious groups; in the model for believers only, the reference category is other religions.

**Table3. Models of government satisfaction using attendance of religious services and its interaction with economic evaluations.**

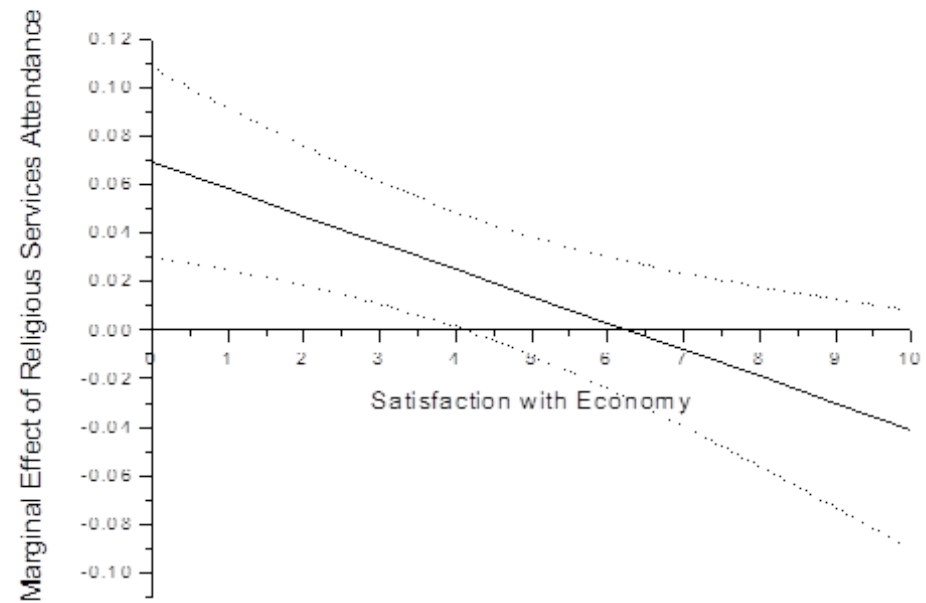
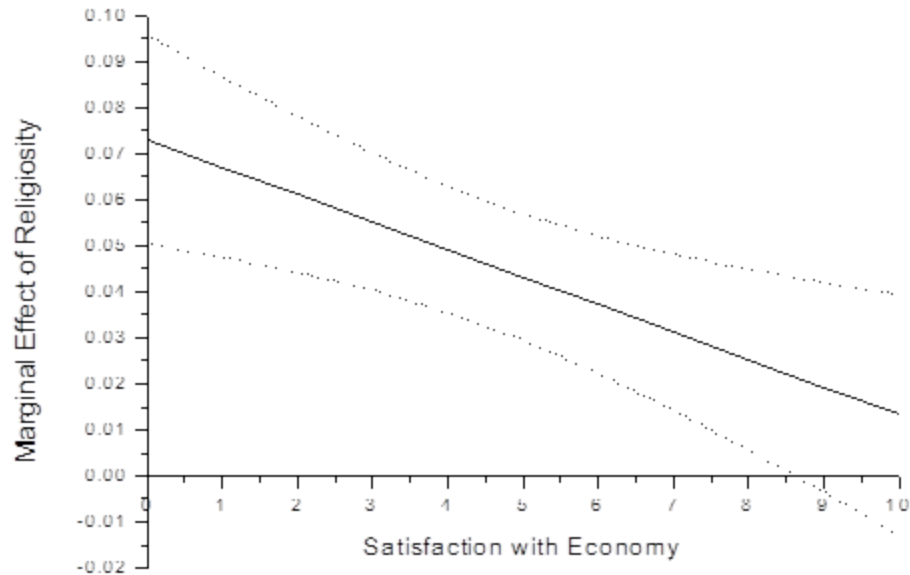
<i>Variables</i>	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>	<b>Model III</b>	<b>Model IV</b>
Religiosity	.043*** (.005)	.042*** (.005)	.047*** (.007)	.035*** (.008)
Attendance of religious services	<b>.093***</b> <b>(.016)</b>	<b>.082***</b> <b>(.015)</b>	<b>.075***</b> <b>(.019)</b>	<b>.069***</b> <b>(.020)</b>
Satisfaction with economy	.604*** (.022)	.580*** (.021)	.588*** (.023)	.590*** (.025)
Attendance of religious services*Satisfaction with economy	<b>-.009***</b> <b>(.003)</b>	<b>-.009***</b> <b>(.003)</b>	<b>-.011***</b> <b>(.003)</b>	<b>-.011**</b> <b>(.004)</b>
Christian	.001 (.029)	-.015 (.028)	-.091 (.113)	-.073 (.112)
Muslim	.324*** (.082)	.353*** (.079)	.295* (.134)	.403** (.137)
Jew	.516*** (.114)	.311** (.110)	.265 (.158)	-.228 (.322)
Other religion	.029 (.122)	.071 (.118)	-	-
Feeling close to a party in government	-	1.066*** (.026)	1.092*** (.034)	1.120*** (.035)
Other controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.526*** (.173)	1.687*** (.159)	1.712*** (.218)	1.848*** (.228)
Number of observations	27,592	27,592	16,350	14,272
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (df)	1,519.33 (20)***	3,366.45 (21)***	2,206.27 (20)***	1,887.86 (20)***

*Note:* Results are multi-level (random intercept and random slope) linear regression estimates (using STATA's xtmixed command). Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors; \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 (two-tailed). Non-religious are the reference category for religious groups; in the model for believers only, the reference category is other religions.

# Marginal effects of economic evaluations on government satisfaction at various levels of religiosity (left) and attendance of religious services (right)



# Marginal effects of religiosity (left) and attendance of religious services (right) on government satisfaction at various levels of economic evaluations





# Conclusions

- Religious commitment in a form of individual religiosity and attendance of religious services is negatively related to people's attitudes and behaviour necessary to uphold democratic accountability
  - Strong believers express less support for the idea that governing parties should be punished in elections when they have done a bad job compared to weak believers or non-believers.
  - The relationship between economic evaluations and government satisfaction is weaker among more devout individuals.
- But religious commitment is associated with more government satisfaction, even when controlling for people's partisan and ideological leanings.
  - => Religion as a source of political stability?

# Future research

- More tests are needed
  - Using the CSES data, one could examine whether more religious individuals are less likely to reward or punish incumbent parties for their performance at the time of elections.

*Thank You!*

**Table1. Descriptive Statistics**

<i>Variables</i>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Importance of democratic accountability	30,640	8.33	2.01	0	10
Government satisfaction	31,023	4.34	2.54	0	10
Satisfaction with economy	31,361	4.50	2.64	0	10
Religiosity	31,579	4.67	3.06	0	10
Attendance of religious services	31,628	1.47	1.54	0	6
Belonging to religion	31,741	.60	.49	0	1
Christian	31,741	.50	.50	0	1
Muslim	31,741	.03	.17	0	1
Jews	31,741	.07	.25	0	1
Other religions	31,741	.01	.09	0	1
Feeling close to a party in government	31,741	.23	.418	0	1
Left-right self-placement	28,704	5.185	2.25	0	10
Left-right extremism	28,704	1.64	1.52	0	6
Discriminated against	31,741	.08	.26	0	1
Crime victim	31,674	.19	.39	0	1
Education	31,532	12.77	4.42	0	51
Income	31,351	2.06	.85	0	3
Manual skills	31,741	.54	.50	0	1
Age	31,671	48.53	18.78	15	103
Male	31,728	.52	.50	0	1
Married	31,741	.49	.50	0	1
Urban	31,714	2.13	1.23	0	4