

Religiosity and Political Participation: Differences in Political Involvement and Participatory Intentions

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Abstract: Political participation represents a critical outcome not only for democratic functioning but also for political marketing, which relies on citizen engagement as a prerequisite for effective communication, voter mobilization, and relationship building between political actors and their constituencies. Among the various factors influencing participation, religiosity has been identified as an important source of social values, norms, and community integration. However, its relationship with different dimensions of political engagement remains insufficiently explored, particularly within the political marketing framework and in transitional democratic contexts. This study examines differences in electoral participation, political involvement, participatory intentions, and selected political attitudes across levels of religiosity. Religiosity is conceptualized as a socio-cultural factor that may shape both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of political engagement. Using survey data from a national sample of adult citizens, respondents were grouped according to their level of religiosity, and differences were analyzed using independent samples t-test. The results indicate significant differences in past electoral participation and intention to vote, with more religious individuals reporting higher levels of electoral engagement. In contrast, no significant differences were found in political involvement or in higher-order forms of political participation. At the same time, religiosity is associated with differences in several attitudinal dimensions, including political information seeking, party loyalty, satisfaction with party choice, trust in political actors, and perceived political risk. These findings suggest that religiosity plays a role in shaping routine electoral behavior and political alignment, while its influence on deeper cognitive engagement and more demanding forms of participation remains limited. The study contributes to political marketing literature by highlighting religiosity as a relevant segmentation variable, particularly in relation to voter turnout and loyalty rather than broader political activation. More broadly, the results underline the importance of distinguishing between different dimensions of political engagement when assessing the role of socio-cultural factors in transitional democratic environments.

Keywords: religiosity; political participation; political involvement; political marketing; market segmentation; voter behavior; political consumer behavior

1 Introduction

Political participation is a key element of democratic systems, as it allows citizens to influence political decisions and contributes to the legitimacy of political institutions. It is also increasingly important in the field of political marketing, where citizen engagement is essential for effective communication, voter mobilization, and building long-term relationships between political actors and voters. Understanding what drives different forms of political engagement is therefore both theoretically and practically relevant.

One of the factors that has received considerable attention in this context is religiosity. Religion shapes individuals' values, norms, and social interactions, and through religious communities, people are exposed to shared beliefs and social networks that may influence their political attitudes and behavior. Previous research suggests that religiosity can encourage political participation by providing civic skills and opportunities for mobilization. However, its effects are not consistent and often depend on how religiosity is defined, as well as on the broader political and cultural context.

At the same time, existing research has mostly focused on voting, while other forms of engagement—such as political involvement, participatory intentions, and higher-order participation—have received less attention. There is also limited understanding of how religiosity relates not only to behavior but also to political attitudes, including information seeking, trust, and party attachment. These gaps are particularly relevant in transitional democratic contexts. In addition, the role of religiosity in political marketing remains underexplored, especially when it comes to distinguishing whether it influences behavior, attitudes, or both.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between religiosity and multiple dimensions of political engagement, including electoral participation, political involvement, participatory intentions, and selected political attitudes. Using survey data from a national sample, respondents are grouped according to their level of religiosity, and differences between groups are analyzed using independent samples t-tests.

By taking a multidimensional approach, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how religiosity relates to different forms of political engagement and to offer insights relevant for political marketing, particularly in distinguishing between participation, attitudes, and their relationship.

2 Literature review

The relationship between religiosity and political participation has been widely examined in political science, yet findings remain inconsistent and context-dependent. Religion is generally understood as a powerful socio-cultural force shaping individuals' values, norms, and identities, which in turn influence political attitudes and behavior.

Religiosity differs from other socio-demographic factors such as gender, education, and employment, which tend to have relatively consistent effects across countries. Instead, religiosity may have varying directional effects on political participation depending on historical and institutional contexts. In particular, its impact depends on the nature of church–state relations and the role religious institutions have played in processes such as democratization. While religion cannot fully explain overall differences in participation, it is especially relevant in explaining cross-national variation [1].

Political participation is commonly defined as activities through which individuals seek to influence political decision-making [2]. These activities are typically divided into conventional participation (e.g., voting, party membership, campaigning) and unconventional participation (e.g., protests, boycotts, strikes). This distinction is crucial, as the effect of religiosity differs across these forms.

Previous research from the field suggests that religiosity is more strongly associated with conventional political participation, particularly voting, while its relationship with unconventional participation is weaker or even negative [1, 3]. For example, [4] find that religiosity increases political engagement but tends to restrain protest activities. Similarly, [5] reports a negative relationship between religiosity and both conventional and unconventional participation in the Turkish context. These findings indicate that religious individuals, when they do participate, are more likely to do so through institutionalized and socially accepted channels.

One of the most influential explanations of the religiosity–participation link is the resource model, which emphasizes the role of religious institutions in providing civic resources. Churches function as social organizations that facilitate the development of civic skills, social networks, and mobilization opportunities, all of which increase the likelihood of political engagement [5, 6]. Empirical research confirms that participation in church activities is positively associated with political participation, as it exposes individuals to political information and recruitment networks [4, 5].

However, the literature also highlights that religiosity is not a homogeneous construct. Instead, it is widely conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing beliefs, practices, and belonging [7]. Different dimensions of religiosity have different effects on political participation. For instance, participation in church activities tends to increase political engagement, while mere

identification with a religious tradition may have neutral or even negative effects [7]. Similarly, [4] distinguishes between internal religiosity (beliefs) and external religiosity (church involvement), showing that these dimensions influence participation in different ways.

More recent research extends the resource-based explanation by incorporating psychological mechanisms. [2] argue that religiosity fosters political participation not only through organizational resources but also through psychological factors such as transcendent accountability and religiopolitical awareness, which motivate individuals to engage politically. Similarly, experimental evidence shows that religious messages can increase political participation by enhancing individuals' sense of efficacy and moral responsibility [9].

Despite these positive associations, several studies suggest that religiosity does not always lead to increased participation. [10] using large cross-national data, find that religiosity alone may act as a deterrent rather than a mobilizing force, while membership in religious organizations increases participation. This distinction highlights the importance of separating religiosity as belief from religiosity as social engagement.

Furthermore, research indicates that the relationship between religiosity and political engagement is shaped by broader contextual factors. [11] show that while individual religiosity is positively related to democratic participation, higher levels of religiosity at the national level may be associated with lower overall participation. Similarly, comparative studies demonstrate that religiosity can have opposite effects across countries. For example, [1] find a negative effect of religiosity in Spain but a positive effect in Brazil and South Korea, reflecting differences in historical mobilization and church–state relations.

Another important dimension of the religiosity–politics relationship concerns political attitudes. Religiosity is often linked to stable value systems that influence political preferences and attitudes. [12] show that religiosity affects political attitudes through underlying value orientations. Similarly, [13] demonstrate that the relationship between religiosity and political attitudes depends on the level of engagement with political discourse, suggesting that religiosity shapes attitudes more strongly among politically engaged individuals.

In addition, empirical evidence from different national contexts supports the idea that religiosity is particularly important for electoral participation. Studies in Poland show that religiosity influences voting behavior through both value-based and institutional mechanisms, while research in Russia highlights the importance of distinguishing between religious belonging and behavior when analyzing participation patterns [14, 15, 16].

Overall, the literature suggests that religiosity is most consistently associated with low-cost, routine forms of participation, such as voting, while its relationship with more demanding forms of engagement, such as activism or political involvement,

is weaker and more inconsistent. This indicates that religiosity may shape political predispositions and attitudes more strongly than actual political behaviour.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to both religiosity and political participation. Rather than assuming a uniform effect, the literature demonstrates that religiosity operates through multiple mechanisms—organizational, psychological, and contextual—and its influence varies depending on the type of participation, the dimension of religiosity considered, and the broader socio-political environment.

Following hypotheses were developed:

H1 (Past electoral participation): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher rates of past electoral participation compared to less religious individuals.

H2 (Voting intentions): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher intentions to vote in future elections compared to less religious individuals.

H3 (Higher-order participation): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher rates of higher-order political participation compared to less religious individuals.

H4 (Political involvement): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly different levels of political involvement compared to less religious individuals.

H5 (Political information seeking): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly different levels of political information seeking compared to less religious individuals.

H6 (Perceived risk): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly different levels of perceived political risk compared to less religious individuals.

H7 (Political trust): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher levels of trust in political actors compared to less religious individuals.

H8 (Party loyalty): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher levels of party loyalty compared to less religious individuals.

H9 (Satisfaction with party choice): Individuals with higher levels of religiosity exhibit significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their party choice compared to less religious individuals.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The main data were collected with an in-person survey conducted on a convenient sample of all persons over 18 years of age, i.e., all persons with legal voting rights. The research instrument used was a structured questionnaire based on previous research in the field. The research was conducted on a sample of five Slavonian counties: Brodsko - Posavska, Osječko - Baranjska, Požeško - Slavonska, Virovitičko - Podravska, and Vukovarsko – Srijemska in Republic of Croatia. The investigators were instructed to examine one woman and one man from each age group (18-31 years, 32-45 years, 46-59 years, and 60 years and older) to ensure equal representation of all age and gender groups. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

		n	%
Gender		658	100
	Male	328	49,7
	Female	331	50,3
Age group		657	100
	18 – 31	170	25,9
	32 – 45	169	25,7
	46 – 59	163	24,8
	60+	155	23,6
Level of education		658	100
	Elementary school	62	9,4
	High school	372	56,5
	Faculty	221	33,4
	PhD	3	0,7
Employment		662	100
	Student	110	16,6
	Unemployed	64	9,7
	Employed	320	48,3

	Retired	168	25,4
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Table 1.
Sample description
Source: Author

3.1 Variables and measurement

This study employed multiple variables to capture different dimensions of political engagement, including behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive aspects. All variables were measured using Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5, where higher values indicate stronger agreement or higher frequency, depending on the construct.

Religiosity was measured using a scale specifically developed for the purposes of this study. Respondents evaluated their level of religiosity through three statements: *“I consider myself a religious person,”* *“Religion plays a significant role in my life,”* and *“Religion is an important part of my life values.”* Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, and the items were combined into a single composite variable representing overall religiosity.

Political participation intentions were measured based on the framework proposed by [17] which distinguishes between different forms of political engagement. The scale included items capturing both conventional and non-conventional participatory intentions, allowing for a broader understanding of individuals’ willingness to engage in political activities.

Political information seeking was measured using a five-item scale adapted from [18]. Respondents assessed how frequently they inform themselves about politics through different media channels (television, radio, printed media, online news platforms, and social media), using a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Satisfaction with political choice was measured using a five-item scale adapted from [19]. The scale captures respondents’ level of agreement with statements reflecting satisfaction with their previous electoral choice, including the political party or candidate they supported in the last election.

Party loyalty was measured using a three-item scale adapted from [20]. Respondents evaluated their agreement with statements reflecting their commitment and attachment to a specific political party or candidate. Perceived political risk was measured using a five-item scale adapted also from [20]. The scale captures respondents’ perceptions of uncertainty and potential negative outcomes associated with political decisions and participation.

Political involvement was measured using a five-item scale also adapted from [20]. This variable reflects respondents’ interest in politics, as well as the perceived importance of political issues in their lives.

Political trust was measured using items adapted from [19], capturing respondents' level of trust in political actors, political programs, and political parties. Respondents indicated their agreement with statements reflecting their confidence in political institutions and actors on a five-point Likert scale.

All multi-item scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$)

4 Research results

The empirical analysis examined differences between religious and non-religious respondents across multiple dimensions of political engagement using independent samples t-tests. The results reveal a differentiated pattern of relationships between religiosity and political behavior, participatory intentions, and political attitudes. Results of the analysis are depicted in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 1. Electoral participation and participation intentions

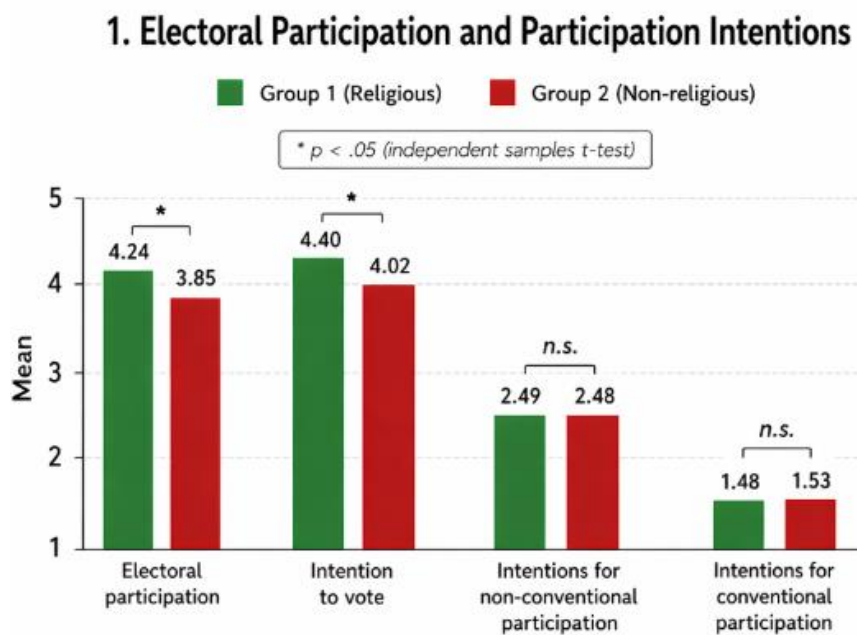


Figure 2.
Political involvement, political information seeking and perceived political risk
Source: Author

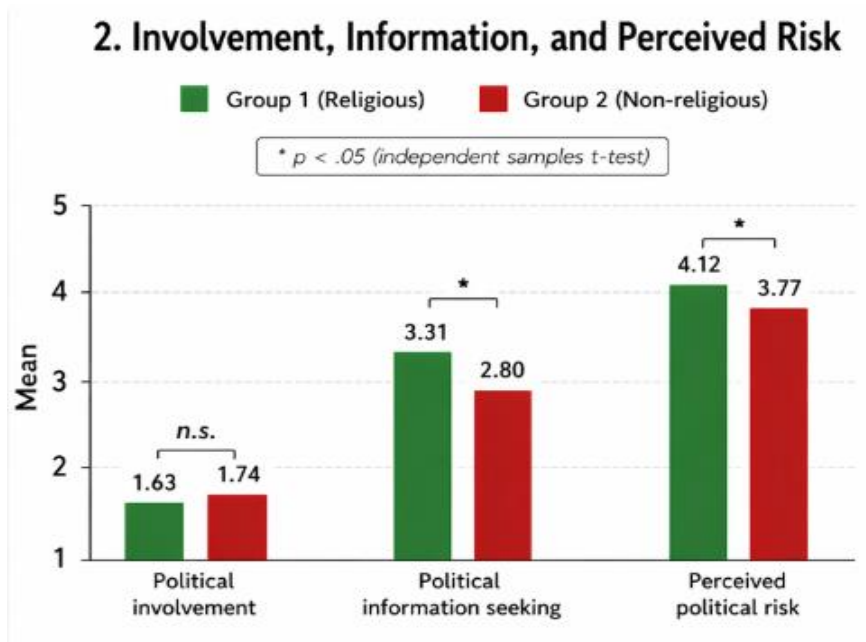


Figure 3.
Trust in people, programs and parties
Source: Author

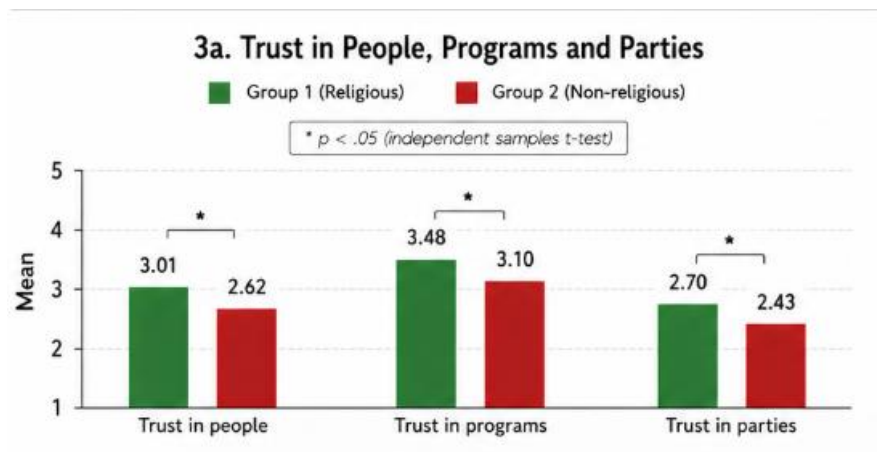
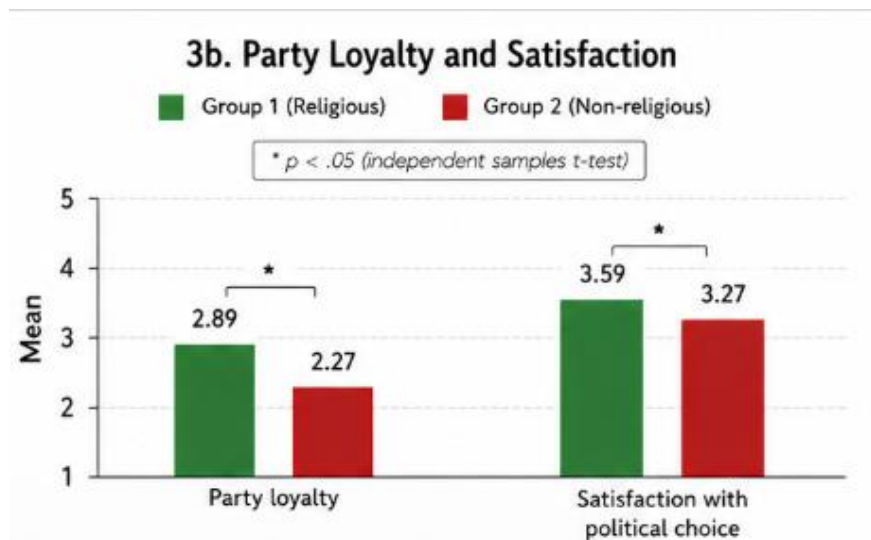


Figure 4.
Party loyalty and satisfaction with political choice
Source: Author



Source: Author

The results indicate statistically significant differences in both past electoral participation and intention to vote, supporting hypotheses H1 and H2. Religious respondents reported higher levels of electoral participation ($M = 4.24$) compared to non-religious respondents ($M = 3.85$), with the difference being statistically significant ($t = -3.897$, $p < .001$). Similarly, religious individuals expressed stronger intentions to vote ($M = 4.40$) than non-religious individuals ($M = 4.02$), with a statistically significant difference ($t = -3.676$, $p < .001$). In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found in political involvement or higher-order political participation, including both conventional and non-conventional participatory intentions. These results do not support hypotheses H3 and H4, indicating that religiosity does not extend its influence to more demanding or resource-intensive forms of political engagement. The analysis further revealed statistically significant differences in several attitudinal dimensions, supporting hypotheses H5, H6, H7, H8 and H9. Religious respondents reported higher levels of political information seeking ($M = 3.06$ vs. 2.79 ; $t = -3.471$, $p < .01$), higher perceived political risk ($M = 4.12$ vs. 3.77 ; $t = -3.803$, $p < .001$), higher trust in people ($M = 3.01$ vs. 2.62 ; $t = -3.865$, $p < .001$), higher trust in political programs ($M = 3.48$ vs. 3.10 ; $t = -3.688$, $p < .001$), higher trust in political parties ($M = 2.70$ vs. 2.43 ; $t = -3.227$, $p < .01$), greater party loyalty ($M = 2.89$ vs. 2.27 ; $t = -4.712$, $p < .001$) and greater satisfaction with political choice ($M = 3.59$ vs. 3.27 ; $t = -2.986$, $p < .01$).

These findings indicate that religiosity is strongly associated with attitudinal and cognitive aspects of political engagement, including trust, information processing, and political alignment.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on religiosity and political participation by offering a multidimensional perspective on political engagement in a transitional democratic context. The results indicate that religiosity is significantly associated with electoral participation and voting intentions, but not with more demanding forms of political involvement.

The positive relationship between religiosity and voting behavior aligns with previous research emphasizing the mobilizing role of religious institutions [8, 16]. Religious environments provide individuals with civic skills, social networks, and exposure to political information, which facilitate participation in low-cost, institutionalized activities such as voting. These findings support the resource-based explanation of political participation, according to which religious organizations act as important channels of civic engagement.

In contrast, the absence of significant differences in political involvement and higher-order participation confirms that religiosity does not uniformly increase all forms of engagement. This is consistent with studies suggesting that religiosity alone may not be sufficient to stimulate active or demanding forms of participation, particularly when not accompanied by organizational involvement [10]. More complex forms of engagement, such as activism or campaigning, require higher levels of political efficacy, motivation, and resources, which religiosity does not necessarily provide.

The results also reveal that religiosity is strongly associated with several attitudinal dimensions, including political information, party loyalty, satisfaction with political choice, trust in political actors, and perceived political risk. This suggests that religiosity plays an important role in shaping political predispositions and alignment, reinforcing stable value systems and ideological consistency. These findings are consistent with research showing that religiosity influences political attitudes through value-based orientations and identity mechanisms [13].

An important contribution of this study lies in identifying a potential “attitude–behavior gap” in the relationship between religiosity and political engagement. While the results indicate that religiosity is associated with several attitudinal dimensions—including political information, party loyalty, satisfaction with party choice, trust in political actors, and perceived political risk—these differences do not translate into higher levels of political involvement or more demanding forms of participation. In other words, more religious individuals appear to be cognitively and attitudinally engaged with politics, yet this engagement does not consistently result in concrete political action.

This pattern suggests a decoupling between political predispositions and behavioral outcomes, which is consistent with prior literature emphasizing that political participation requires not only motivation and attitudes but also sufficient resources, opportunities, and mobilization mechanisms [8, 13]. While religiosity may contribute to the formation of stable political orientations and value-based

alignment, it does not automatically overcome the barriers associated with higher-cost political activities. These barriers may include limited political efficacy, lack of targeted mobilization, or contextual constraints typical of transitional democratic environments.

From this perspective, religiosity appears to operate primarily at the level of cognitive and normative engagement, rather than as a direct driver of behavioral participation. Religious individuals may be more informed, more politically oriented, and more consistent in their attitudes, yet still remain relatively inactive in terms of actual political involvement. This finding reinforces the argument that social norms and value systems do not necessarily translate into observable behavior, particularly in the absence of effective mobilization.

This insight has particularly important implications for political marketing. Rather than assuming that religious individuals are more politically active, the findings suggest a more detailed interpretation: religious individuals may be easier to target, but not necessarily easier to mobilize. They appear to be more receptive to political messages, more capable of processing political information, and more likely to hold stable partisan preferences. However, this does not imply that they will automatically engage in political action without additional stimuli.

Consequently, political campaigns targeting religious segments may need to shift from a predominantly persuasion-oriented approach to a more explicit activation strategy. While persuasion efforts may be effective in shaping or reinforcing attitudes among religious voters, mobilization requires addressing the gap between predisposition and action. This may involve stronger calls to action, personalized outreach, or the use of trusted community networks to lower participation barriers. In this sense, religiosity should be understood not only as a segmentation variable, but also as an indicator of different campaign needs, where the key challenge lies not in influencing attitudes, but in converting them into behavior.

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the relationship between religiosity and different dimensions of political engagement, with a particular focus on electoral participation, political involvement, participatory intentions, and political attitudes. The findings provide evidence that religiosity is not a uniform driver of political behavior, but rather a selective factor that operates differently across various forms of engagement.

The results show that religiosity is significantly associated with routine electoral participation and intention to vote, with more religious individuals reporting higher levels of both past voting behavior and future voting intentions. At the same time, no significant differences were found in political involvement or higher-order forms of participation, suggesting that religiosity does not extend its influence to more demanding or resource-intensive types of political activity. In addition, religiosity is linked to several attitudinal dimensions, including political information, party

loyalty, satisfaction with party choice, trust in political actors, and perceived political risk. Taken together, these findings indicate that religiosity primarily shapes cognitive and attitudinal engagement, rather than consistently translating into behavioral participation.

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of an attitude–behavior gap in the context of religiosity and political engagement. While religious individuals appear to be more informed, more politically oriented, and more stable in their attitudes, this does not automatically lead to greater political involvement or action. This gap suggests that the relationship between predispositions and behavior is mediated by additional factors, such as mobilization efforts, perceived efficacy, and contextual constraints, particularly in transitional democratic environments.

From the perspective of political marketing, these findings carry important implications. Religiosity can be considered a relevant segmentation variable, especially in relation to electoral behavior and attitudinal alignment. Religious individuals appear to be more receptive to political communication, more likely to process political information, and more inclined toward stable partisan preferences. However, they are not necessarily more likely to engage in political action without targeted mobilization. This implies that political actors should not assume that favorable attitudes will automatically result in participation. Instead, campaign strategies should differentiate between persuasion and activation. While persuasion strategies may be effective in reinforcing attitudes among religious voters, activation strategies—such as personalized outreach, community-based mobilization, and clear calls to action—are necessary to convert these predispositions into actual participation. In this sense, religiosity highlights not only who can be targeted, but also how they should be engaged.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the use of cross-sectional survey data limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationship between religiosity and political behavior. Second, religiosity is measured as a general socio-cultural variable, which does not fully capture its multidimensional nature (e.g., differences between belief, practice, and organizational involvement). Third, the analysis relies on self-reported measures of participation and attitudes, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Fourth, the findings are context-specific and may not be fully generalizable beyond the observed national and transitional democratic setting.

These limitations point to several avenues for future research. Further studies should incorporate more refined and multidimensional measures of religiosity in order to distinguish between its different components and their respective effects on political behavior. Longitudinal or experimental designs would be particularly valuable in establishing causal mechanisms and in examining how religiosity interacts with political mobilization over time. In addition, future research should explore the role of intermediary factors, such as political efficacy, social networks, and exposure to

campaign communication, in bridging the attitude–behavior gap. Finally, comparative studies across different political and cultural contexts would help to clarify the extent to which the observed patterns are context-dependent, particularly in relation to varying levels of democratic consolidation.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of treating political participation as a multidimensional phenomenon and of recognizing religiosity as a factor that shapes political engagement in selective and context-dependent ways. Rather than uniformly increasing participation, religiosity appears to strengthen electoral behavior and attitudinal alignment, while leaving deeper forms of political involvement largely unaffected.

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