

Religion and belief among Catholics in Ireland

A short review of recent ESS data

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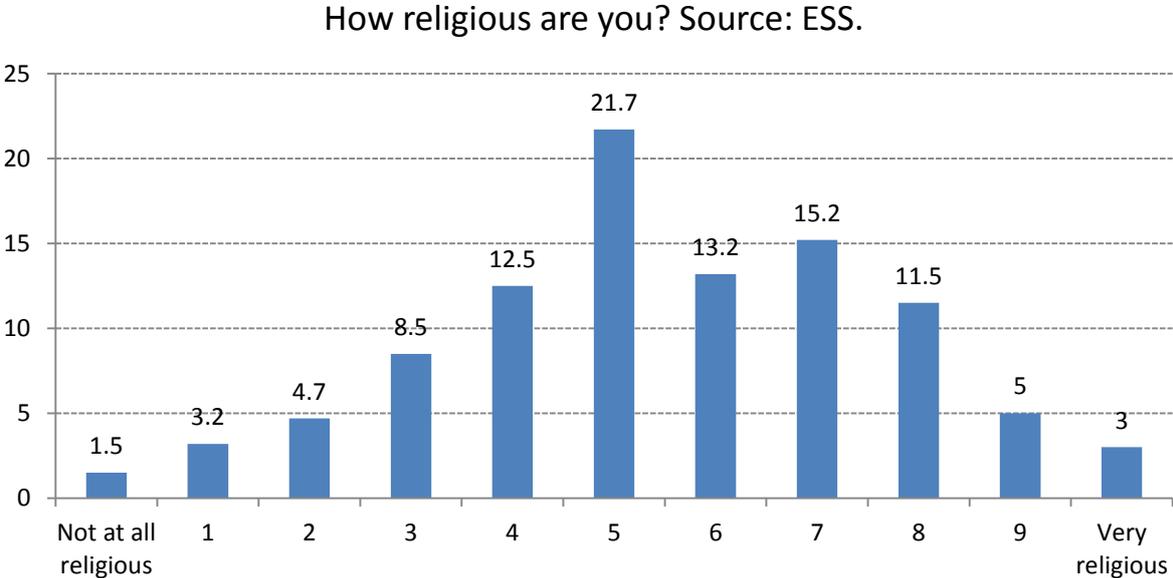
Introduction

Every two years, the results of the most recent European Social Survey become available. This short report outlines the results of the 2010 round of the survey (round 5). While the ESS is administered across Europe, the data are collected on a national basis which means that data for Ireland are divided between the UK and the Republic. Northern Ireland’s subset of data is too small to be analysed on its own. Consequently, only data for the Republic are presented here.

The following data present the views, opinions and some practices of the 1,843 people who declared themselves to be Roman Catholic in the Republic for ESS round 5. This is the vast majority of the dataset as a whole. The data was analysed using IBM SPSS 20 software. The data is weighted using the Design Weight proposed by the ESS itself. More details about the survey are available from Eoin O’Mahony (eoin.omahony@iecon.ie) and from the ESS website, <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>.

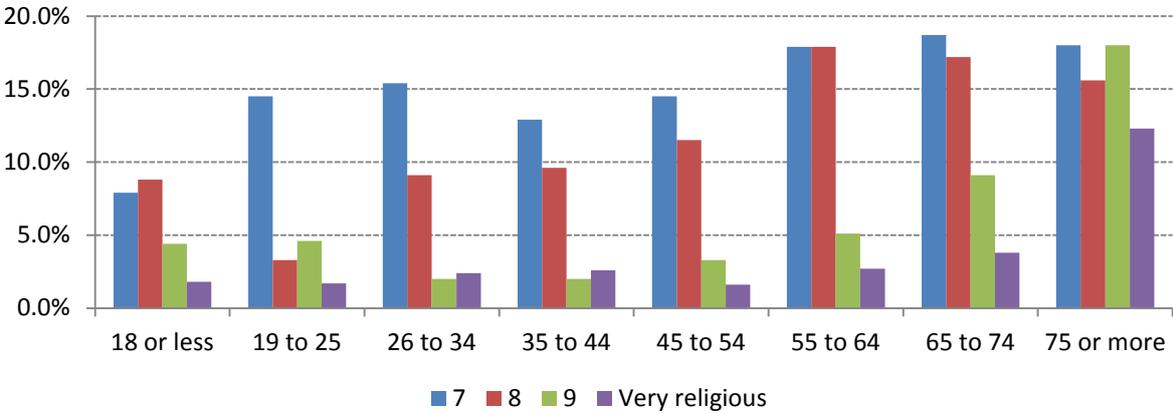
Religiosity and practice

Respondents are asked to place themselves on a scale from zero to ten which best represents how religious they are. Among the Catholics in the Republic, just over 30% state that they are not particularly religious (to point 4) while a further 21% place themselves half way on the scale. The chart below shows the results of this question.



Larger numbers of Catholics in Ireland feel that they are religious than not very religious. If these data are examined by age, there is a continuing trend toward younger cohorts of people believing themselves to be not so religious. However, those who define themselves as very religious (here taken to be point 7 on the scale and above) also show some relevant trends. The chart below shows the proportions in each of the age groups and their definition of themselves as religious. The vertical axis represents proportions of Catholics in that age cohort. As can be seen, those aged 55 and above are far more likely to define themselves as

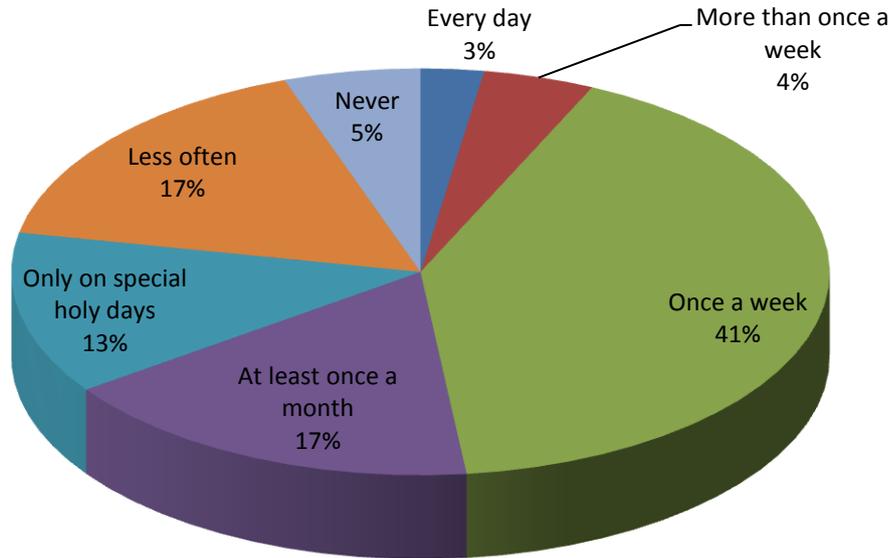
more religious than those aged under 35, even among those higher up on the on the scale. The taller bars on the right as well as the blue bars indicate larger proportions of Catholics in that cohort choosing more religious definitions of themselves.



The blue lines above mark the least ‘most religious’ in the graph with those marking the final point on the scale increasing with age. Over time, as the percentage of the entire population describing themselves as Catholic decreases, the proportions within the Catholic population defining themselves as religious or very religious increases with age. As before, both the differences in the region of residence and the gender of the respondent are significant to the sense of how religious the respondent feels herself to be.

Turning to elements of religious practice among Catholics in Ireland, 41% now attend Mass on a weekly only basis with a further 7% attending more often than this. In total, 48.2% of the Catholic population in Ireland attends Mass once per week or more often. This represents a small decrease on the data from round 4 two years earlier. The first chart below shows the Mass-attending rates of Catholics in Ireland in 2010.

How often do you attend religious services apart from special occasions? Source: ESS



In 2002, 63.2% of Catholics in Ireland attended Mass weekly and more often. This decreased to 56.2% of Catholics by 2006. There is a trend toward less frequent Mass attendance amongst Catholics in Ireland at the moment. If these data are examined alongside the age data, we can see this defined trend more clearly as age and Mass attendance are related to each other. The table below shows these data broken down by age.

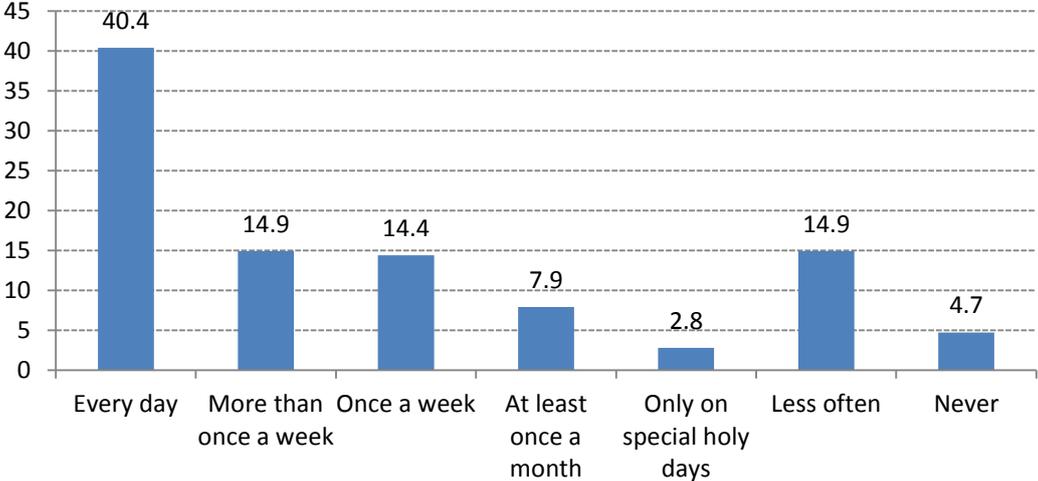
| | Every day | More than once a week | Once a week | At least once a month | Only on special holy days | Less often | Never |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------|-------|
| 18 or less | - | 0.9% | 42.2% | 24.1% | 11.2% | 16.4% | 5.2% |
| 19 to 25 | - | - | 26.6% | 17.0% | 19.5% | 26.1% | 10.8% |
| 26 to 34 | - | 0.8% | 22.7% | 21.1% | 23.5% | 25.1% | 6.8% |
| 35 to 44 | 0.3% | 2.0% | 31.2% | 21.9% | 15.3% | 22.9% | 6.3% |
| 45 to 54 | 0.7% | 2.6% | 48.8% | 15.8% | 11.6% | 16.2% | 4.3% |
| 55 to 64 | 3.4% | 7.8% | 54.1% | 16.6% | 7.8% | 7.1% | 3.4% |
| 65 to 74 | 9.0% | 11.9% | 56.7% | 8.1% | 4.3% | 7.1% | 2.9% |
| 75 or more | 10.5% | 12.9% | 56.5% | 8.9% | 4.8% | 4.0% | 2.4% |

Pearson score: .000

The top left of the table contains no data from the survey indicating that no one among the respondents until the age of 34 attends Mass on a daily basis. Those aged under 18 have a regular Mass attendance but this declines as reach their 20s. Just under one quarter of 26 to 34 year old Catholics in Ireland attend Mass on a weekly only basis. Holy Day Masses remain relatively popular but generally speaking, those in the older age cohorts are more likely to

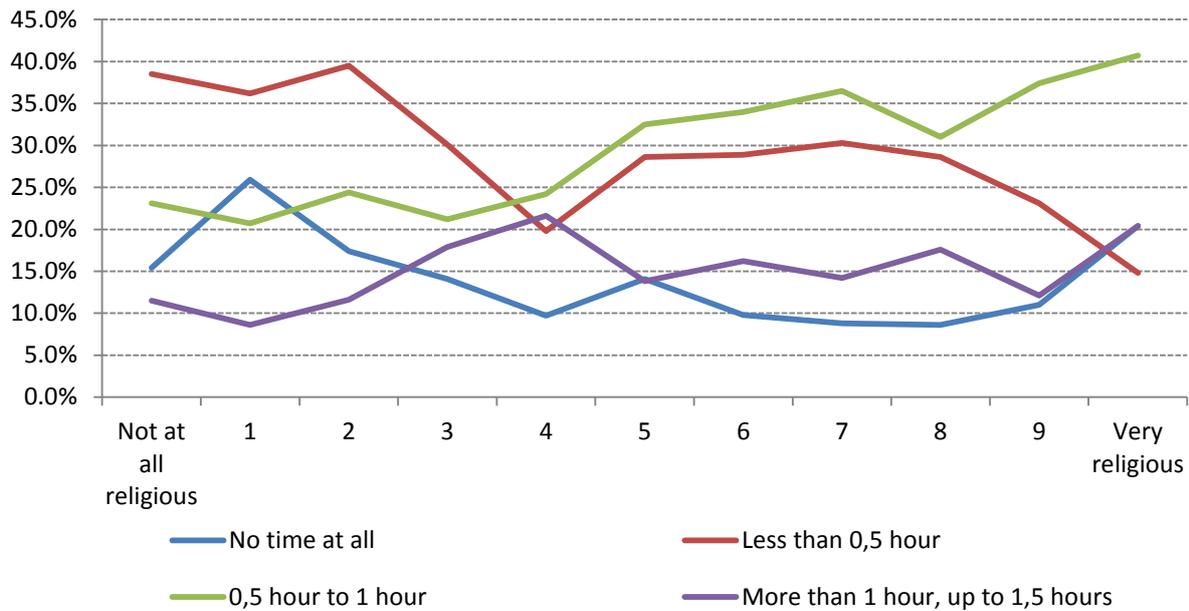
attend Mass more often. Prayer continues to play a prominent role in the life of Catholics in Ireland. The chart below shows how frequently Catholics pray outside of religious services.

How often do you pray apart from at religious services?
Source: ESS

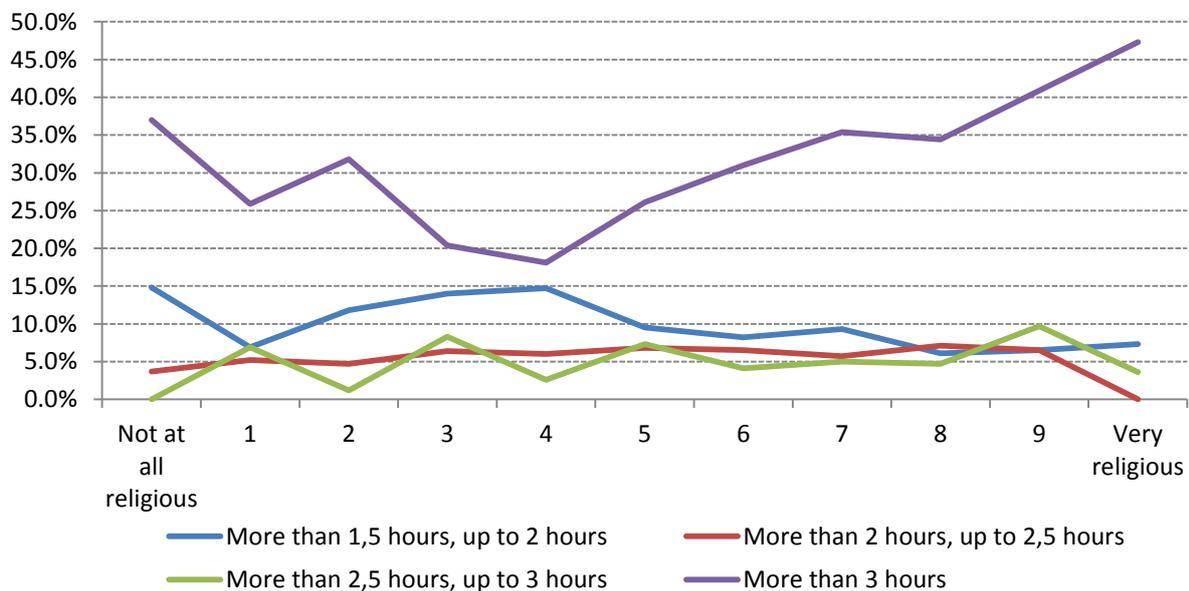


Catholics and the use of mass media

This section looks at a set of the data relating to the use of the main forms of mass media by Catholics in Ireland. It is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between their self-defined religiosity and the forms of media they use. Firstly, the data on average time spent on a weekday watching TV politics and current affairs are presented. The chart below shows the differences in watching patterns among those with different senses of their own religiosity. In particular, there is a marked difference at the half hour mark.



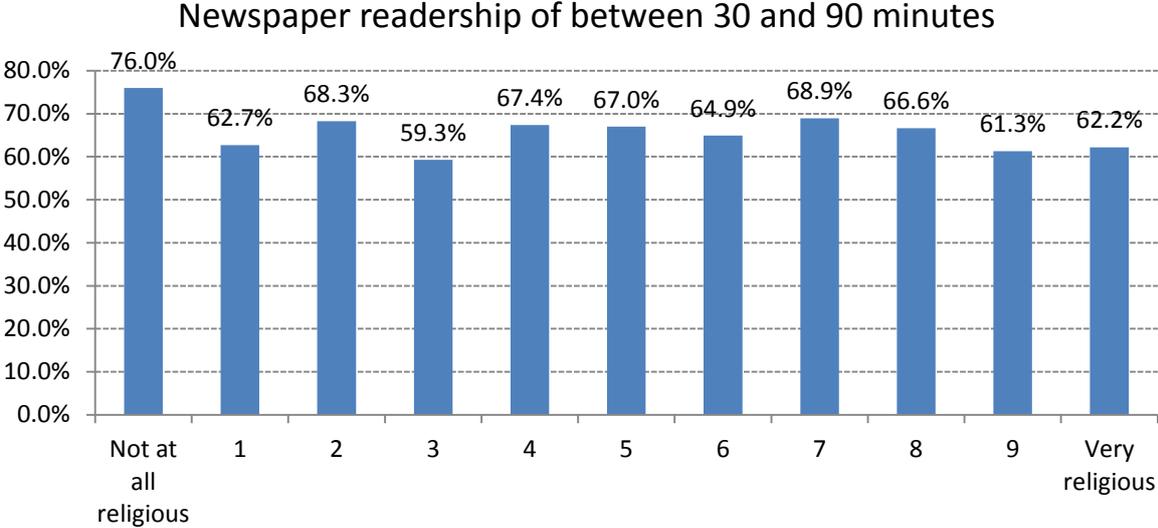
While those Catholics who say they are not that religious (about zero to three on the scale) watch TV based current affairs for less than half an hour daily, those more religious watch for longer. Turning to general radio listening, the graph below shows some striking differences in listening habits among those Catholics who define themselves as more and very religious. Among those defining themselves as very religious, longer radio listenership is clearly evident with over 40% of those defined as most religious listening for more than three hours daily. The graph shows selected listening rates to radio.



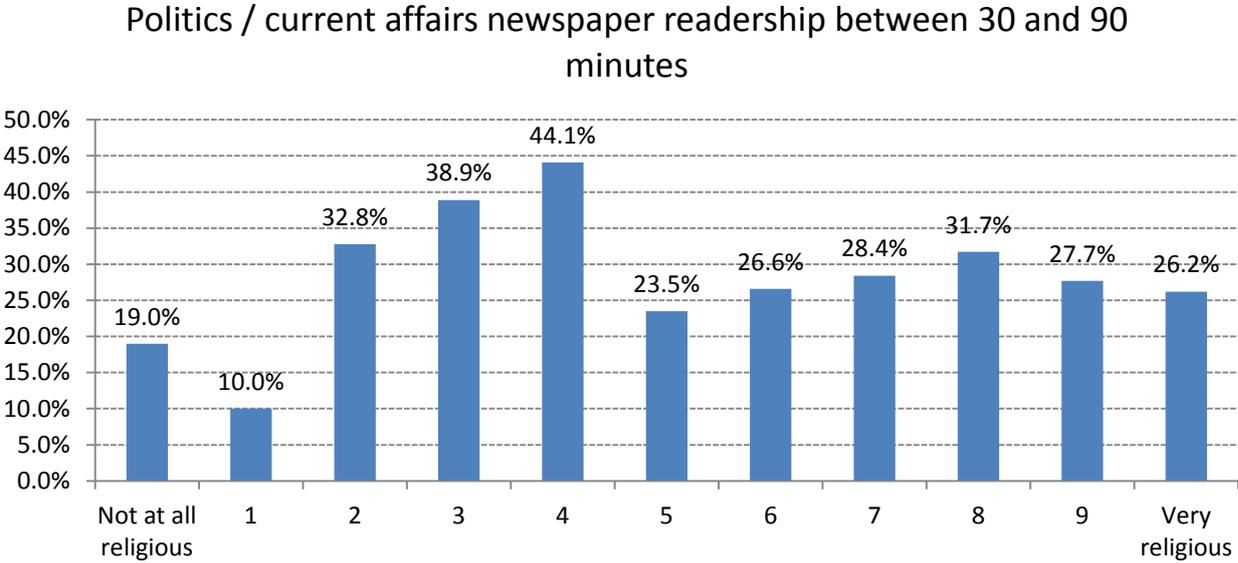
Higher proportions of longer listenership is evident among those defining themselves as not at all religious. For those in the middle of this scale, between one and a half and two hours of radio listenership is normal.

About 6 in 10 adult Catholics in Ireland read a newspaper generally on a daily basis. Readership generally lasts between 30 and 90 minutes on an average weekday. There are

insignificant differences in self-defined religiosity in this pattern however as the graph below shows.



Those Catholics defining themselves as more religious and very religious spend less time reading newspapers in general. However, when the respondents are asked how long they spend reading politics and current affairs in newspapers, the differences become more significant. It might be noted that those who define themselves as zero on this scale appear as a significant proportions in both graphs.



Politics and current affairs newspaper readership is more marked among those who define themselves as not so religious (up to point four) while those defining themselves as more and very religious read politics and current affairs for much shorter times.

The European Social Survey also measures frequency of use of the internet, email and the web. In the final table, we can see how frequently different groups of Catholics in Ireland access these media according to their self-defined religiosity.

| | No access at home or work | Never use | Less than once a month | Once a month | Several times a month | Once a week | Several times a week | Every day |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------|
| Not at all religious | 7.4% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 11.1% | 29.6% | 51.9% |
| 1 | 3.4% | 15.5% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 3.4% | 10.3% | 6.9% | 58.6% |
| 2 | 4.6% | 9.2% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 2.3% | 8.0% | 19.5% | 55.2% |
| 3 | 8.9% | 8.9% | 1.3% | 3.8% | 5.1% | 1.9% | 10.2% | 59.9% |
| 4 | 13.0% | 6.5% | 1.3% | 3.9% | 3.9% | 5.2% | 10.4% | 55.8% |
| 5 | 10.0% | 17.0% | 1.0% | 0.5% | 6.0% | 3.3% | 16.5% | 45.6% |
| 6 | 13.1% | 18.0% | 0.8% | 0.4% | 1.6% | 3.3% | 15.6% | 47.1% |
| 7 | 14.6% | 18.5% | 3.6% | 1.1% | 2.5% | 7.1% | 12.5% | 40.2% |
| 8 | 20.4% | 19.9% | 0.9% | 0.5% | 1.9% | 5.7% | 14.2% | 36.5% |
| 9 | 34.1% | 26.4% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 1.1% | 4.4% | 3.3% | 29.7% |
| Very religious | 35.2% | 24.1% | 0.0% | 1.9% | 0.0% | 3.7% | 3.7% | 31.5% |

Pearson score: .000

As is evident, those defining themselves as more and very religious have no home or work access and so tend not to use it these media at all. Daily and several times a week usage is common among all groups if access is available. We must consider here however the impact of age cohorts and accessibility.

What kinds of conclusions can we draw from these data on mass media use? Firstly, those who define themselves as more religious spend longer watching politics on television. Secondly, Catholics who define themselves as more religious also listen to more radio on an average weekday when compared with their less religious neighbours. Thirdly, and in contrast, longer newspaper reading of news and current affairs is evident among Catholics who define themselves as less religious.

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