

Irish Bishops' Conference

Council for Research & Development

The European Social Survey Round 2

A review of 2005 religious practice data

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April 2006

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Introduction

The European Social Survey (the ESS) is an academically-driven social survey. Its three aims are, firstly - to monitor and interpret changing public attitudes and values within Europe and to investigate how they interact with Europe's changing institutions, secondly - to advance and consolidate improved methods of cross-national survey measurement in Europe and beyond, and thirdly - to develop a series of European social indicators, including attitudinal indicators. It examines attitudes and beliefs in a range of topics including the media, social trust, political interest and participation in socio-political orientations.

Now in its third round (after 1999 and 2002), the survey covers 23 nations and employs the most rigorous methodologies. It is funded via the European Commission's 5th and 6th Framework Programmes, the European Science Foundation and national funding bodies in each country.

In Ireland the National Coordinator is Michael O'Connell, University College Dublin and the project is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities & Social Sciences (IRCHSS). The survey organisation is the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Data for Northern Ireland is not examined as the sample was too small to draw firm conclusions – see Appendix 1.

In this report, results from the most recent ESS (round 2, 2005) are examined. Specifically delineated are those that relate to mass attendance by Catholics from a Republic of Ireland and European perspective. A brief commentary is provided at the end of the report. Data from the following five questions are examined in detail:

1. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
2. How is your [mental and physical] health in general?
3. Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?
4. Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?
5. Apart from when you are at religious services, how often, if at all, do you pray?

The following table outlines the sample size for the survey in the Republic in round 2 of the ESS:

<i>2005 (round 2)</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Catholics as a percentage of sample</i>
Republic of Ireland	2046	1600	78%
Northern Ireland	64	16	25%*

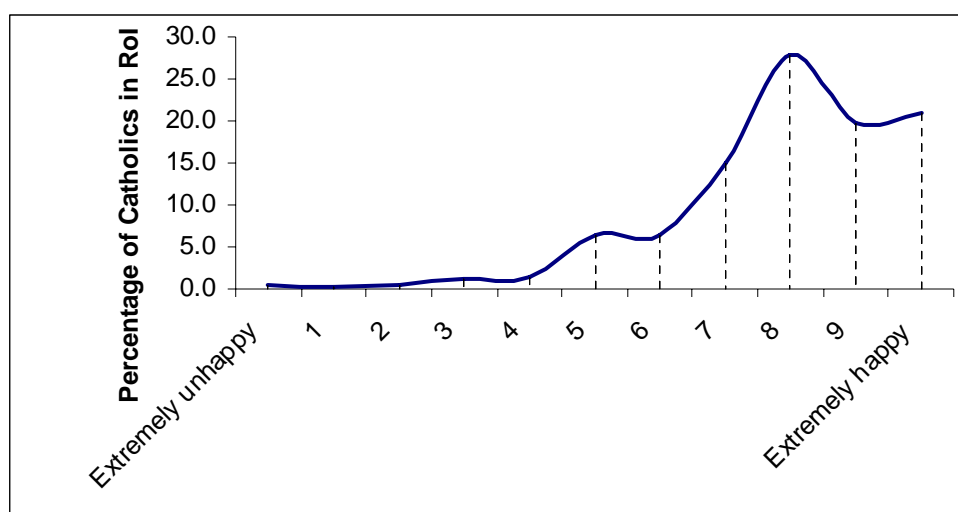
* Based on a weighted proportion sample of all of the UK – see Appendix 1.

Republic of Ireland results for 2005 (round 2)

The results that follow are based a representative sample of all of the Catholics in the Republic of Ireland. The sample was drawn using three-stage probability sampling and is weighted across each country surveyed to take account of sample size.

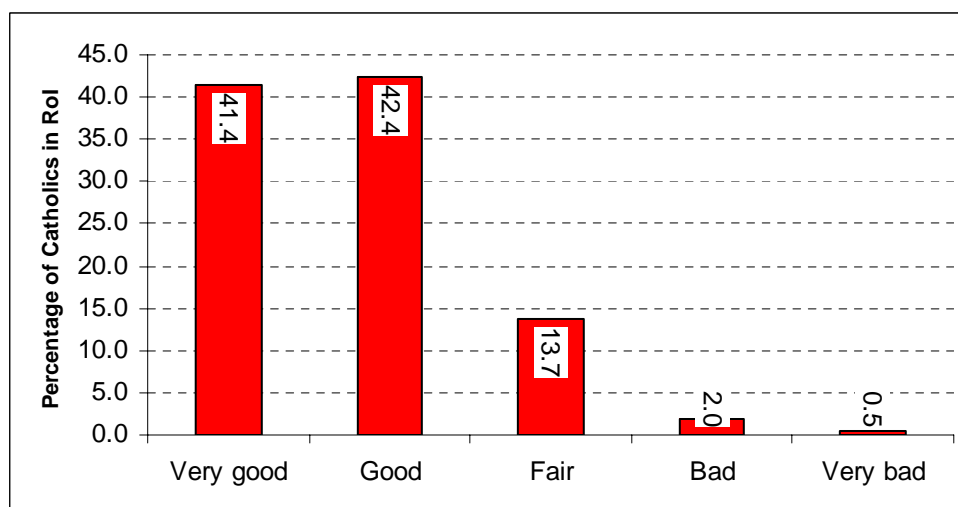
In an attempt to come to some understanding of general wellbeing, the sample was asked “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?” The following responses were given by the Catholics in the Republic:

Figure 1: Subjective general happiness. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C1



It can be seen from the graph above that the majority specified that they are happy. 41% of the sample was extremely happy. To develop this understanding the sample was also asked “How is your [physical and mental] health in general?”:

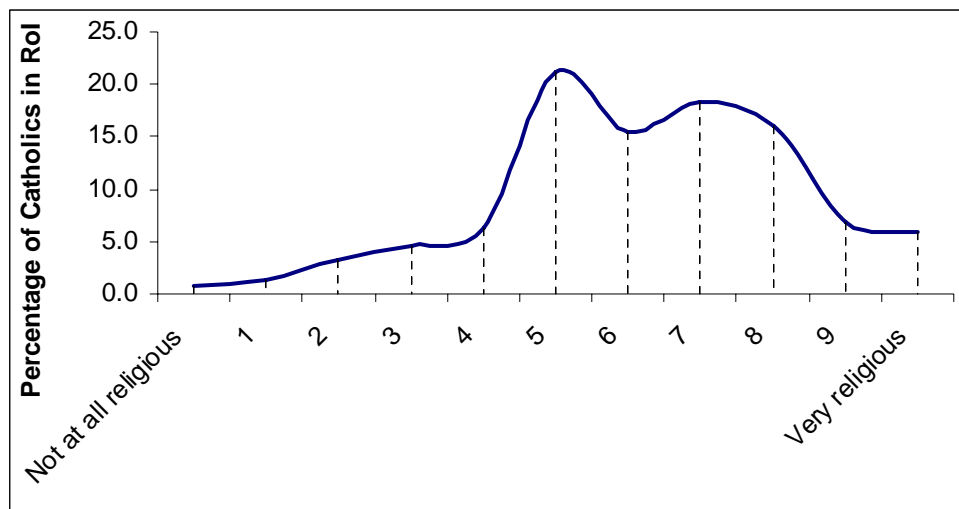
Figure 2: Subjective general mental and physical health. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C7



It is apparent that a majority of people feel themselves to be in very good or good health indicating a high level of subjective good health, both physical and mental. Fully, over 83% of respondents felt good or very good in general.

The sample was then asked “Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?” and among the Catholics in Ireland the following responses came forward:

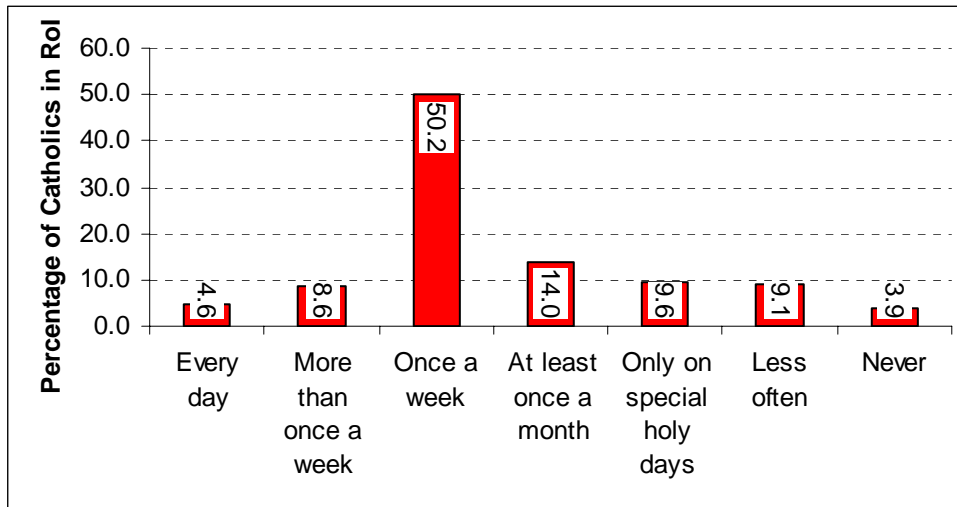
Figure 3: Subjective feelings of religiousness. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C13



The results indicate that a large majority feel themselves to be religious / very religious (63% rate themselves above 5 on the scale) and just over one third of all Catholic respondents judging their religiousness at the 6 and 7 mark on the scale. What may be surprising however is the high number of respondents who chose the midway point on the scale – 21% - or over 1 in 5 respondents. Most people would see themselves as religious but not intensely so. Respondents’ sense of being very religious might be tempered by a social construction of what being ‘very religious’ actually is. Perhaps the respondents identify the very religious as those ordained or professed in orders?

Examining the more substantive questions on religious practice, we can see that among Catholics in Ireland that the numbers attending religious services on a weekly basis *only* now stands at 50%. As the graph below shows, weekly mass attendance is still the main focus of Catholic practice in Ireland.

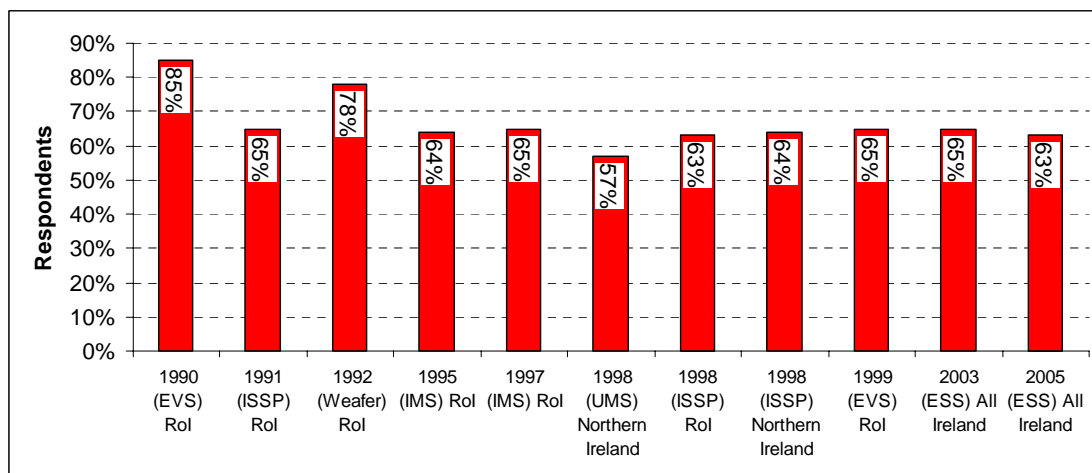
Figure 4: Attendance at religious services outside of special occasions at present. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C14



In total 63.4% of Irish Catholics attend religious services (apart from special occasions) once per week or more often. Smaller fractions of Irish Catholics attend only on special holy days and on a monthly basis. In all, and based on the representative sample and the 2002 Catholic population, 159,280 Catholics attend daily mass which is equivalent to almost two full attendances at Croke Park. If this group were a county of Ireland it would be the 5th largest county - after Limerick.

When examining the trend from a number of sources in the last 15 years, there is a steadying in weekly (or more often) mass attendance in Ireland.

Figure 5: Percentage in attendance at religious services 1990 - 2005. Source: ESS and Council for Research & Development.

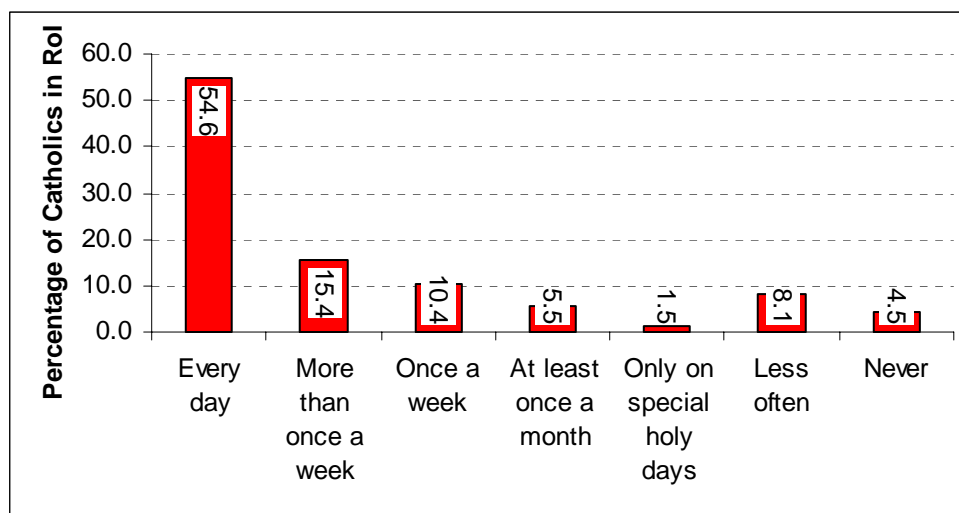


It should be acknowledged that this series of surveys was carried out for a number of purposes and the regularity of survey is not across the 15 year period examined; there is a clear steadying in the weekly mass attendance figures among Catholics in Ireland. It is unclear from the information available if surveys carried out before ESS round 1 (2003 data) were polling only Catholic sub-samples.

In light of the steady trend since the 1998 ISSP survey in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, it is suggested that at least weekly mass attendance levels in 2005 in Northern Ireland are broadly similar to the 63% found in the Republic. As appendix 1 explains, the small number of Catholics found in the NI sample disallowed analysis of any significance. As will be seen below, at least weekly mass attendance rates in the Border region (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo) is above the national average at almost 67%.

Turning to another feature of religious practice, prayer, the 2005 data bear out the following results. The results are encouraging given the specificity of the question posed. Respondents were asked “Apart from when you are at religious services, how often, if at all, do you pray?”

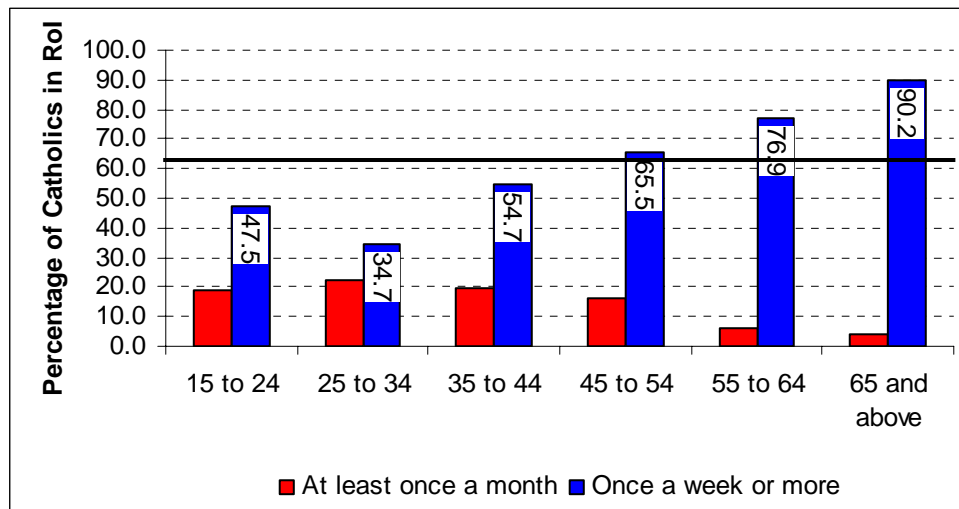
Figure 6: Frequency of prayer outside of services. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C15



55% of Catholics in Ireland pray every day (outside of services) and 80% pray once a week or more often. It is clear that prayer, and especially daily prayer, forms a central feature of Catholicism in Ireland.

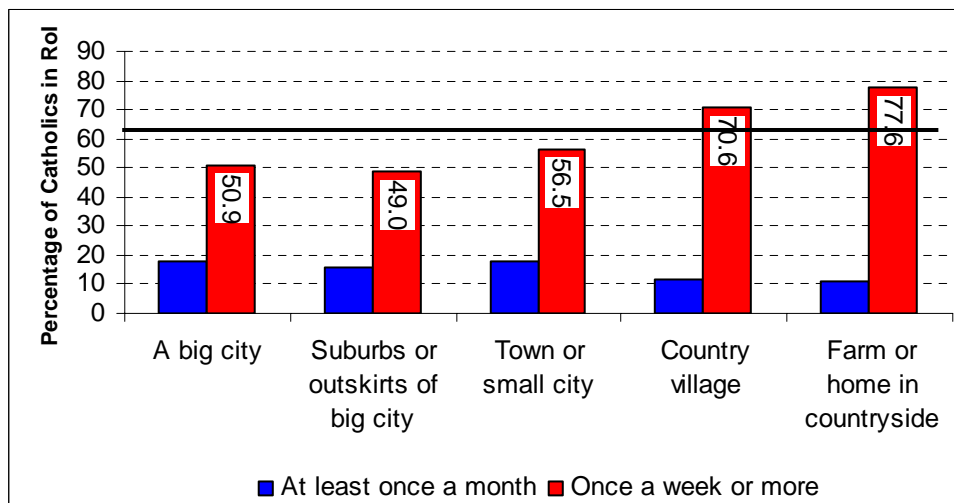
Of the 1,600 Catholics in the sample, we can see how many in each recoded age group attend mass once per week or more often. From the chart below we can see that at least weekly mass attendance is higher for older age groups. At least weekly mass attendance is just under 50% of the 15 – 24 year old age group and about 35% for those in the 25 – 34 age group. The horizontal black line in the next series of graphs is the 63% attendance figure discussed above. It is evident then that it is the older age cohorts in this sample who attend weekly mass in greater numbers. 65% of 45 to 54 year old Catholics attend weekly mass while for those aged over 65, the figure is above 90%.

Figure 7: Attendance at religious services outside of special occasions (selected) by age groups.
Base: ROI Catholics. Source: ESS C14 & F



There have been reports that more frequent mass attendance is lower in the eastern and urbanised areas of the Republic. From the data in this survey and based on the geographical categories available, there is considerable difference between places and between regions within Ireland. Respondents were given a card and asked “Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live?” If we analyse mass attendance data within this framework of place we see that at least weekly mass attendance is far higher in country villages (71%) and in households on farms / other homes in the countryside (78%). Less frequent mass attendance (indicated in blue) is more prevalent among Catholics who live in households in cities (20%), or the outskirts of these cities (approx. 15%) than in rural households.

Figure 8: Attendance at religious services (outside of special occasions) by location of respondent's household. Base: ROI Catholics. Source: ESS F5

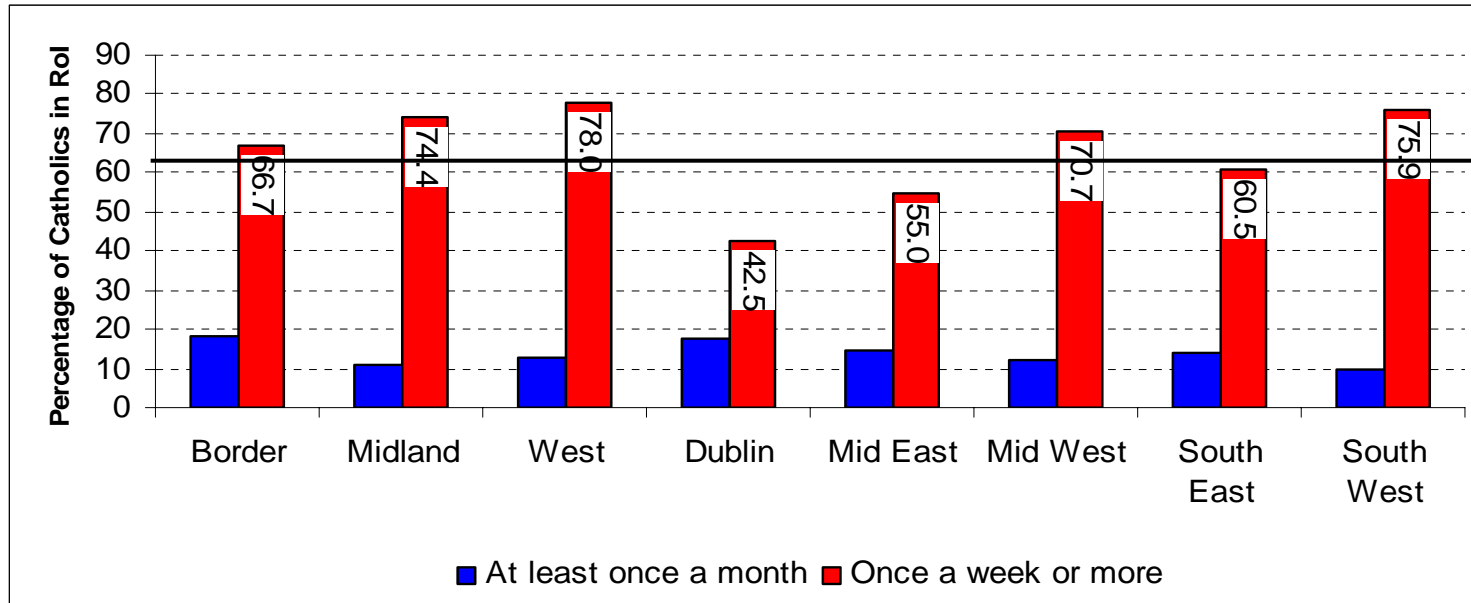


The administrative regions used by Government and others (known as NUTS3) were also available and the following data should be examined in light of the large scale of these regions. While 78% of Catholics in the Western region attend mass weekly or more often, 67% of Catholics in the adjacent Border region do so. The lowest

recorded percentage in at least weekly attendance is in the Dublin and mid-east regions where (based on Census 2002 figures at least) the greatest concentration of urban and suburban settlement is to be found.

Proportionately, more Catholics in the Dublin region go to mass at least once a month (18%) than all but other region (Border) and this may hold some significance in terms of patterns of practice yet to emerge. Mass attendance in the more urbanised areas appears to be based on lessening frequency rather than outright non-attendance. While those in more rural areas do attend mass more frequently, there are higher percentages of monthly attendees in more urban areas. Generally speaking, a majority of the Republic's regions have above average mass attendance albeit in areas where population densities are lower.

Figure 9: Attendance at religious services outside of special occasions (selected) by area of residence. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C14 & F

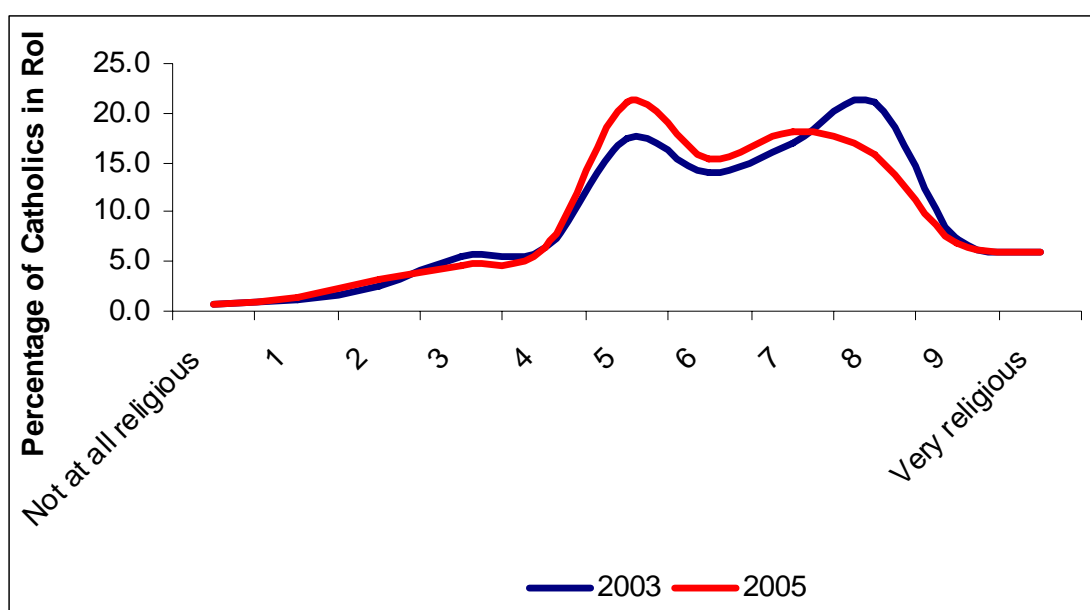


<i>Border</i>	<i>Midland</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>Dublin</i>	<i>Mid-west</i>	<i>Mid-east</i>	<i>South East</i>	<i>South West</i>
Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Sligo	Laois, Offaly and Westmeath, Longford	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown, South Dublin County, Fingal, Dublin city	Clare, North Tipperary & Limerick city and County	Kildare, Meath, Wicklow	Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford city & County, Wexford	Cork city & County Kerry

Comparing the 2003 (round 1) and 2005 (round 2) ESS data for the Republic of Ireland

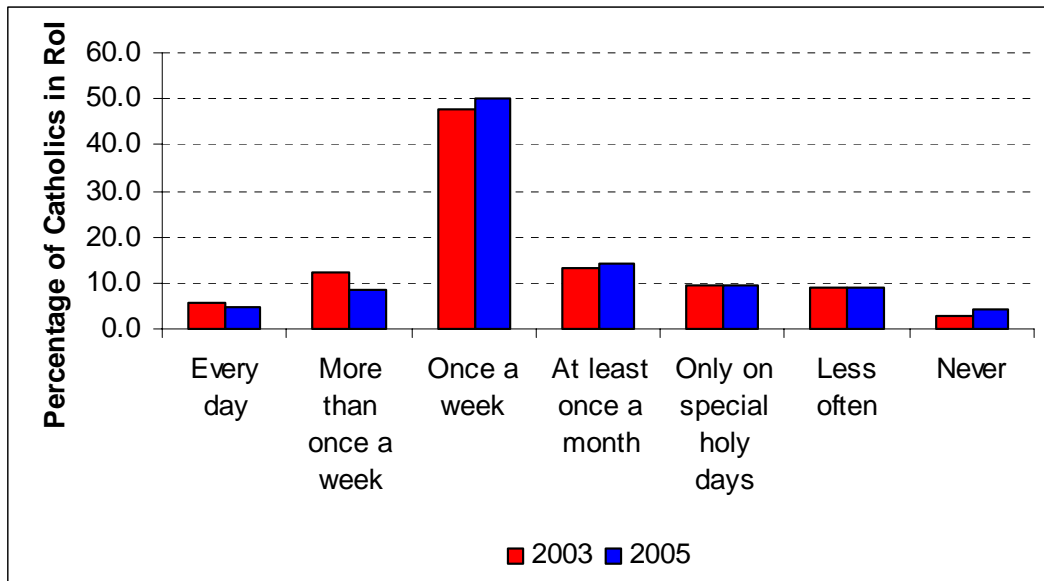
Although longer trends in practice would not be evident from as short a time span as three years, there are some notable trends in the round 1 and round 2 datasets for Ireland. In terms of the respondents own sense of being religious, there has been some change in the percentage of Catholic respondents feeling more religious over the three year period. Notably there has been an increase in the numbers indicating neither not religious nor religious – the midway point on the scale – from 17% in 2003 to 21% in 2005. In addition, there is a decrease over this time period in the numbers indicating that they are very religious.

Figure 10: Subjective feelings of religiousness 2003 and 2005. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS



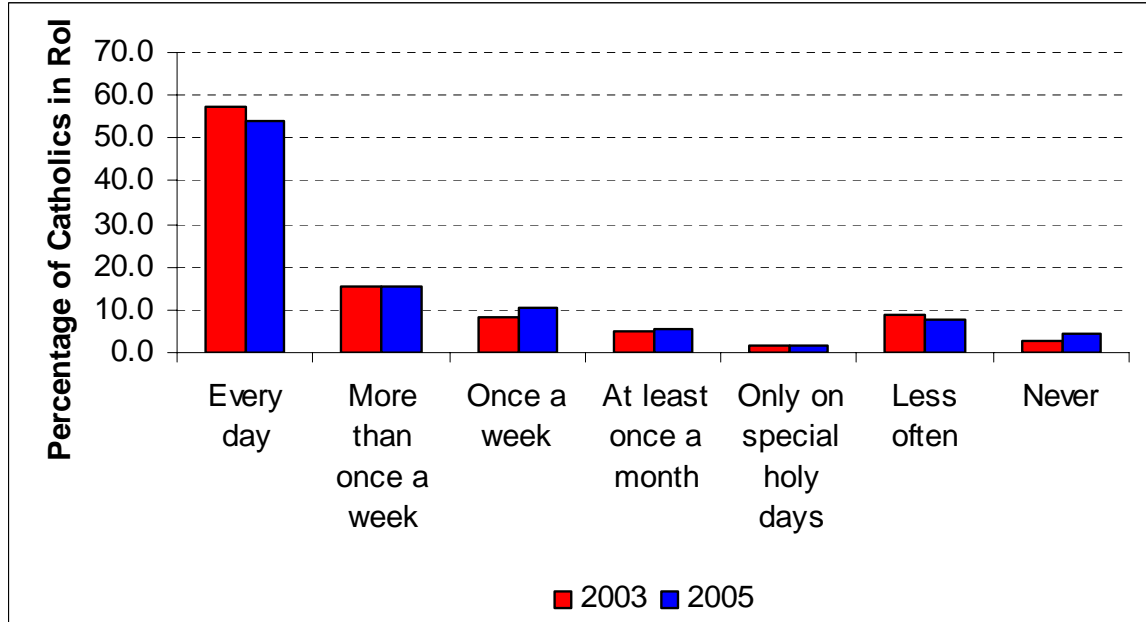
Between 2003 and 2005, there is a 3.4% decrease in the aggregated percentage of Catholic respondents attending mass at least once a week. As can be seen from the graph below, at least once a week mass attendance has declined a little but once a month attendance is up slightly from 13% to 14%. Across the categories there is no significant change. 65% attended mass at least once per week in from the 2003 survey; this declined to 63% from the 2005 survey.

Figure 11: Attendance at religious services (outside of special occasions) 2003 and 2005. Base: RoI Catholics. Source: ESS



Turning to the numbers of Catholics and their frequency of prayer, the comparative data show that slightly smaller numbers pray daily in 2005 when compared with 2003 but, as with the above, there is little change in the balance of the proportions.

Figure 12: Frequency of prayer (outside of special occasions) 2003 and 2005. Source: ESS



The Republic of Ireland in a European context (round 2)

Taking one of these questions – frequency of service attendance – we can place the most recent Irish data in a European context. The data from the second round of the ESS allow a comparison between the religious practices of the Republic of Ireland with those of other European countries whose Catholic population makes up 75% of the total population.

The table below shows the percentages for mass frequency in those countries in round 2 that had more than 75% of their total population Catholic. As can be seen, the Republic of Ireland has the survey's highest rates of frequent mass attendance up to once per week. Catholics in Ireland are frequent mass attendees but, as we have seen from the above, in smaller numbers than 15 years ago.

Table 1: Frequency of service attendance (outside of special occasions) by country with more than 75% Catholic population - 2005. Base: All Catholics. Source: ESS C14

	<i>Every day</i>	<i>More than once a week</i>	<i>Once a week</i>	<i>At least once a month</i>	<i>Only on special holy days</i>	<i>Less often</i>	<i>Never</i>
Austria	2.8	4.0	19.5	21.3	23.9	16.9	11.5
Belgium	0.9	1.3	19.5	14.7	20.3	20.9	22.4
Czech Republic	0.8	6.6	18.2	14.2	22.2	21.6	16.4
Spain	1.6	4.2	20.3	12.0	19.4	19.2	23.3
France	0.5	1.4	13.0	12.4	28.8	17.5	26.4
Republic of Ireland	4.6 (1 st)	8.6 (1 st)	50.2 (2 nd)	14.0 (7 th)	9.6 (9 th)	9.1 (8 th)	3.9 (8 th)
Italy	2.4	5.1	29.9	13.3	22.2	19.7	7.4
Poland	1.0	7.0	51.7	20.1	15.8	2.7	1.6
Portugal	2.1	4.7	26.6	18.3	9.3	24.3	14.8
Slovenia	0.3	3.2	31.5	16.6	34.1	8.3	5.9

Aggregating the first three columns of data from above, we can see that the Republic of Ireland has the highest rate of weekly (or more often) mass going among countries with more than 75% of Catholics in the total population. While 8.6% of Catholics in the Republic attend mass more than once per week, just over 6% of Czech Catholics and 7% of Polish Catholics do so. Among those who attend mass every day, Catholics in the Republic of Ireland again stand out: 4.6% of Catholics in Ireland attend every day whereas just fewer than 3% of Austrian Catholics do - the next highest percentage in the array. As frequency at service attendance trails off after once a week, Ireland's rank among those countries with a 75% Catholic population drops dramatically. For Ireland's Catholics, at least in terms of mass attendance, there appears to be an 'all or nothing' orientation.

Table 2: Percentage of Catholics attending services (outside of special occasions) once a week or more often in countries with more than 75% Catholic population 2005. Base: All Catholics.
Source: ESS

	<i>Once a week or more often</i>
Austria	26.3
Belgium	21.7
Czech Republic	25.6
Spain	26.1
France	14.9
Republic of Ireland	63.4 (1st)
Italy	37.4
Poland	59.7
Portugal	33.4
Slovenia	35.0

Among this array of Catholic populations, 63.4% of the Republic of Ireland's Catholics attend religious services once a week or more often which is over 4 times that of France and 3.7% greater than the country with next highest percentage, Poland.

Conclusions

This report has examined the results from the Republic of Ireland for the second round of the European Social Survey. The survey measures among other matters, frequency of mass attendance and how religious people feel. As was seen from the data presented above almost two thirds of Irish Catholics feel somewhat religious. One third of all Catholics rate their religiousness at the 6 and 7 mark on the scale presented to them. The highest proportion of respondents feels neither very religious nor not at all religious indicating a preference for seeing their religious feelings as being about average. It is speculated here that a subjective feeling of religiousness might be based on not wanting to be perceived as *too religious* by others although this would have to be confirmed with a more detailed study.

Respondents were asked how often they attend religious services outside of special occasions. At least weekly mass attendance in the Republic is steady off at 63% of Catholics although this varies considerably by geography and age. Almost 5% of Catholics attend daily mass. Above average rates of at least weekly mass attendance is seen for those aged 45 and above. For those born before 1960, weekly mass attendance retains an importance to their faith. Very high weekly mass attendance rates can be seen among those aged 65 and above. Among the younger age groups, it is the 15 to 24 year olds who have the higher at least weekly mass attendance – 48%.

In terms of geography, we see high at least weekly mass attendance rates in the Midland, West and South West regions. In contrast Dublin has one of the country's highest at least monthly attendance rate – 18%. Lower rates of at least weekly mass attendance rates are found in Dublin and the mid-east indicating differing forms of practice among those in more urbanised and suburbanised settings. This is confirmed (although the strength of the relationship has to be tested) by the respondent's description of the location of their household: below average at least weekly attendance rates are to be found in the big cities and their suburbs. Higher rates are to be found in villages and farms and other rural households.

Further detailed examination of the data by geography demonstrates this trend: the percentage of respondents indicating feelings of religiousness (6 and above on the scale presented) is higher in the Midland, Border and South West regions.

Almost 55% of Catholics pray daily with a further 15% more than once a week indicating a high level of frequent prayer. There is also a strong positive relationship between feelings of religiosity and (at the 1 and 9 points at least) and frequency of prayer as the grid below demonstrates.

Table 3: Subjective feelings of religiosity BY frequency of prayer. Base: ROI Catholics. Source: ESS

%	Every day	More than once a week	Once a week	At least once a month	Only on special holy days	Less often	Never
Not at all religious	25.0	8.3	-	-	8.3	33.3	25.0
1	19.0	4.8	9.5	4.8	4.8	19.0	38.1
2	11.8	3.9	9.8	5.9	3.9	43.1	21.6
3	12.3	8.2	16.4	9.6	5.5	27.4	20.5
4	17.5	13.4	11.3	14.4	1.0	24.7	17.5
5	45.0	15.6	15.6	8.4	1.8	9.6	3.9
6	49.2	21.1	11.8	9.8	1.6	6.1	0.4
7	62.9	21.6	10.0	2.4	1.0	2.1	-
8	75.4	14.1	7.0	1.6	0.8	0.4	0.8
9	85.5	11.8	2.7	-	-	-	-
Very religious	89.4	5.3	3.2	-	-	1.1	1.1

Because the statistics contained in this table are based on a sub-sample, they are consequently subject to usual sampling error variances.

Patterns emerging from a comparison between rounds 1 and 2 are difficult to detect. However, weekly mass attendance is increasing slightly as is monthly mass attendance. Feelings of religiousness may also be moving toward the centre of the scale presented.

Finally, Ireland has a very high rate of weekly mass attendance when seen in a European context. Over 63% of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland attend mass at least once per week compared with just under 6 in 10 for Poland and just under 4 in 10 in Italy. It is significant that both Ireland and Poland retain high levels of frequent mass attendance given the two countries close migration linkages in recent years. Choices about migration are influenced by more than economic opportunities. These continuing high attendance figures in both countries have implications for a Polish migrant in Ireland ministry in the coming years.

Appendix 1 – Northern Ireland and the ESS

This report does not analyse the results of the data from Northern Ireland (NI). This is because the samples are weighted differently as the NI survey is administered within the UK. As can be seen from the table below, the Republic of Ireland’s representative sample is composed of 2,046 respondents, 1,600 of whom are Catholic. This accounts for about 78% of the sample, a percentage slightly lower than the percentage recorded in Census 2002. The disparity is partly due to the standard design weight employed by the ESS and utilised here to ensure cross-comparison with other countries’ data.

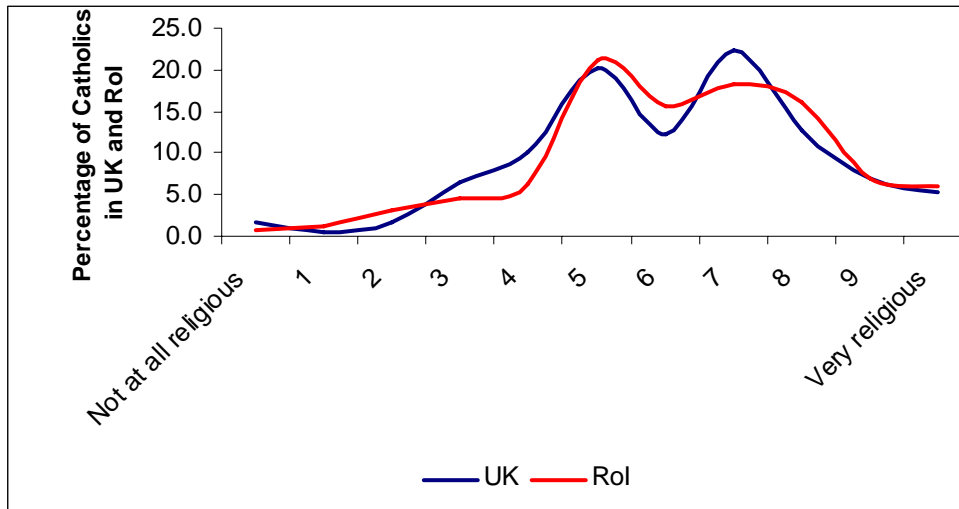
<i>2005 (round 2)</i>	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Catholics as a percentage of sample</i>
Republic of Ireland	2,046	1,600	78%
Northern Ireland	64	16	25%*
“False” all Ireland sample and proportion	2,110	1,616	76%

As part of the UK, NI’s sample is weighted within the UK and so only accounts for 64 (or 3.1%) of the 2,052 people surveyed in the UK. Catholics make up about 25% of the UK’s sample rather than the 40% they make up within NI’s recorded religious denominations. If NI had been surveyed as part of an all Ireland survey, the Catholic sub-sample would be closer to 337 people, i.e. 0.05% (RoI proportion) of 40% of the population of NI. Clearly the numbers extracted from the UK portion of the ESS is too small to draw any meaningful conclusion for attitudes and beliefs in NI. A “false” all Ireland total for a sub-sample for Catholics would be thus 1,616 people.

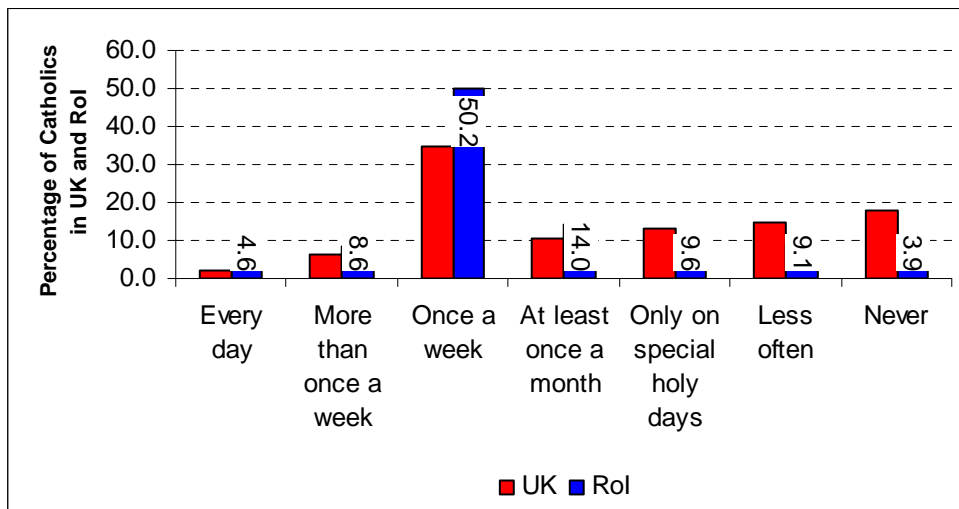
In 2001, the UK Census recorded that 2.9% of the UK’s population was resident in NI. 1.2% of the total UK population are Catholics resident within NI. We do not know from the UK Census how many Catholics are resident in England and Wales but the Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2002 states that there are 5,035,000 Catholics (about 12% of those resident in Britain who recorded their religion) on the island of Britain. In the ESS, Catholics make up 189 of the total sample of 2,052 people, representing about 9.2% of the respondents who indicated their religion. (It should be noted that the UK has a high non response rate for this question – 51%). The proportions are not dissimilar.

The data presented here is the analysis of this 189 sub-sample of Catholics in the UK *including* the 16 Catholics in NI, compared with the Republic of Ireland sub-sample of Catholics.

Appendix 1 - 1: Subjective feelings of religiousness. Base: UK and RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C13



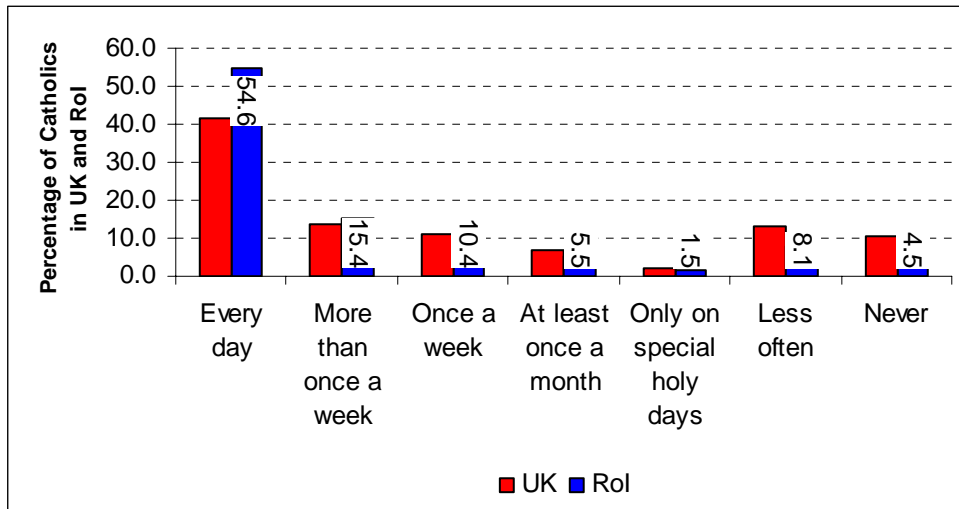
Appendix 1 - 2: Attendance at religious services outside of special occasions at present. Base: UK and RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C14



Appendix 1 - 3: Attendance at at least weekly religious services outside of special occasions at present. Base: UK and RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C14

At least weekly mass attendance	
UK	43.4%
RoI	63.4%

Appendix 1 - 4: Frequency of prayer outside of services. Base: UK and RoI Catholics. Source: ESS C15



Appendix 2 - Discrepancies in recorded Catholic populations in Ireland

	Catholic Population from CCO website – updated 2004. Source: Diocesan returns.	Catholic Population in 2006 Catholic Directory - mostly 2002 data. Source: Diocesan returns.	Difference
Armagh	210,342	212,500	2,158
Dublin	1,041,100	1,087,285	46,185
Cashel & Emlly	78,536	79,763	1,227
Tuam	121,536	121,536	0
Achonry	34,826	34,826	0
Ardagh & Clonmacnois	71,806	71,806	0
Clogher	86,047	86,047	0
Clonfert	32,600	36,000	3,400
Cloyne	129,823	129,823	0
Cork & Ross	220,000	220,000	0
Derry	225,508	233,201	7,693
Down & Connor	315,381	317,622	2,241
Dromore	63,200	63,400	200
Elphin	68,500	68,500	0
Ferns	100,446	100,446	0
Galway	98,157	102,425	4,268
Kerry	127,850	127,850	0
Kildare & Leighlin	183,105	183,105	0
Killala	38,115	38,115	0
Killaloe	110,170	110,170	0
Kilmore	53,995	53,995	0
Limerick	169,500	169,500	0
Meath	212,858	212,858	0
Ossory	76,049	78,873	2,824
Raphoe	80,500	79,720	-780
Waterford & Lismore	135,879	136,029	150
Ireland	4,085,829	4,155,395	69,566
Difference		69,566	

	Catholics	
NI 2001. Source: NISRA.	678,462	
RoI 2002. Source: CSO.	3,462,606	
Total 2001/2	4,141,068	
	CCO Website	2006 Directory
Differences	55,239	14,327

Difference between...	Catholics
CCO website & 2006 Directory	69,566
CCO website & Censuses	55,239
2006 Directory & Censuses	14,327