



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLÍGEACH ÉIREANN

Religious Practice in Ireland

A summary of European Social Survey Round 3 data

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Introduction

The European Social Survey (the ESS¹) 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 2002 and 2005), the survey covers Ireland, the UK and 30 other 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. The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) is the archive and distributor of the ESS.

In Ireland, the National Coordinator is Dr Susana Ferreira, University College Dublin, 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 included in this report but the sample is analysed in the context of the UK population. NI data are merely aggregated with the data from the Republic where appropriate.

This report is a follow up to the report produced by the Council for Research & Development in April of 2006. It includes the most up to date data for Ireland and compares data across the three rounds of the ESS as well as a comparison with selected European countries. Specifically delineated are those data 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.

The following table outlines the sample size for the survey in the Republic and Northern Ireland in round 3 of the ESS:

2006/07 (round 3)	Total Sample	Catholics	Catholics as a percentage of sample	Catholics as a percentage of the area's population (Source: CSO and NISRA)
Republic of Ireland	1382	1296	94%	87% (2006)
Northern Ireland (on its own)	44	21	48%	43% (2001)
Northern Ireland (as part of the UK)	528	252	48%	1.3% (2001)

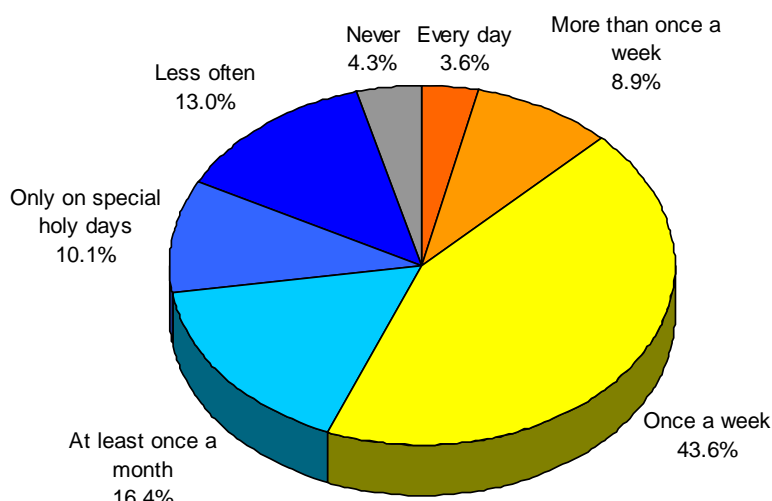
¹ R Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, *European Social Survey 2006/2007: Technical Report*, London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University (2007)

Mass attendance amongst Catholics on the island of Ireland

In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the rate of decline of the proportion of Catholics in Ireland attending mass weekly or more often. In the 2006 report, it was seen that 63.4% of Catholics in Ireland attend religious services (apart from special occasions) once per week or more often. This was in line with data analysed from the late 1990s and drawn from the International Social Science Project where approximately 65% of Catholics in Ireland attended weekly or more often. Weekly or more often mass attendance was declining from the late 1980s but had levelled off at the 64% figure by the late 1990s.

The most recent data from round 3 of the ESS shows that weekly or more often mass attendance in the Republic currently stands at 56.4% of the Catholic population. The chart below shows the breakdown in mass attendance figures from the third round of the ESS.

Figure 1: Attendance at religious services apart from special occasions, 2006/07. Base: ROI Catholics. Source: ESS.



43.6% of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland attend mass once per week with a further 12.5% attending more often than that. 16.4% attend at least once per month and another one in ten Catholics in the Republic of Ireland attend only on special holy days. The weekly or more often attendance figure of 56.1% is down from recent surveys; the table presented below summarises these data from three rounds of the ESS.

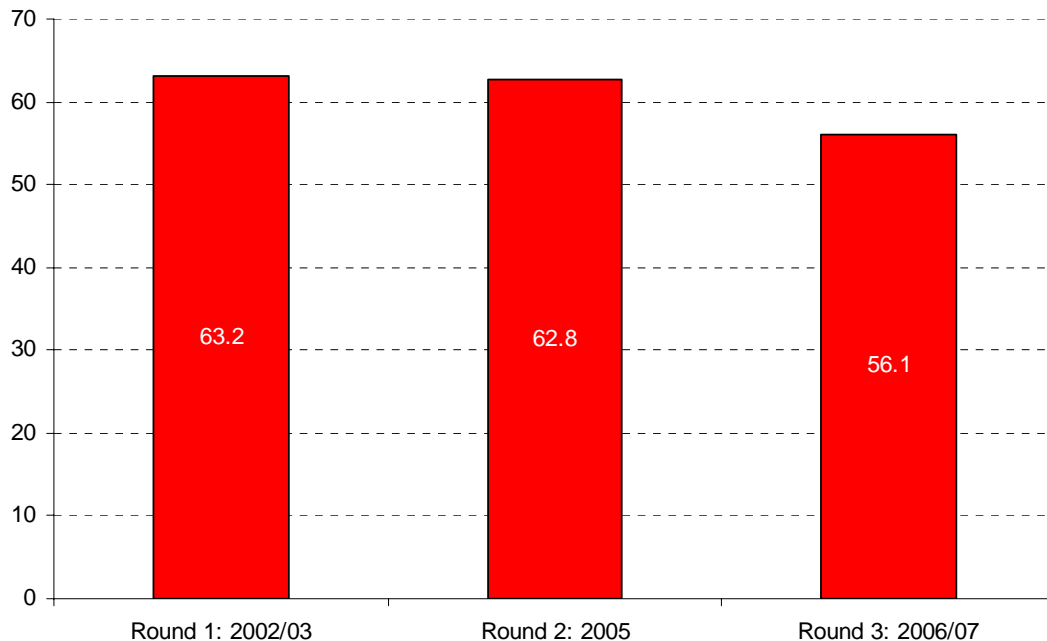
**Table 1: Attendance at religious services apart from special occasions, ESS rounds 1,2 and 3.
Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS**

	Every day	More than once a week	Once a week	Once per week or more often ²	At least once a month	Only on special holy days	Less often	Never
R1: 2002/03	4.4	8.5	50.3	63.2	14.4	9.6	9	3.9
R2: 2005	5	10.8	47	62.8	14.1	10.1	10.2	2.8
R3: 2006/07	3.6	8.9	43.6	56.10	16.4	10.1	13	4.3

Once per week mass attendance is currently at 43.6% of all Catholics, down from just over half of all Catholics in 2002/03. At the same time, more than once per week attendance has remained relatively stable. Those attending everyday continues to call over the period. This may be partly accounted for by the

Once per week or more often mass attendance across the three rounds of the European Social Survey can be summarised in the following graph. In 2002/03, once per week or more often attendance was 63.2% of the Catholic population. By 2006/07 this had declined to 56.4%.

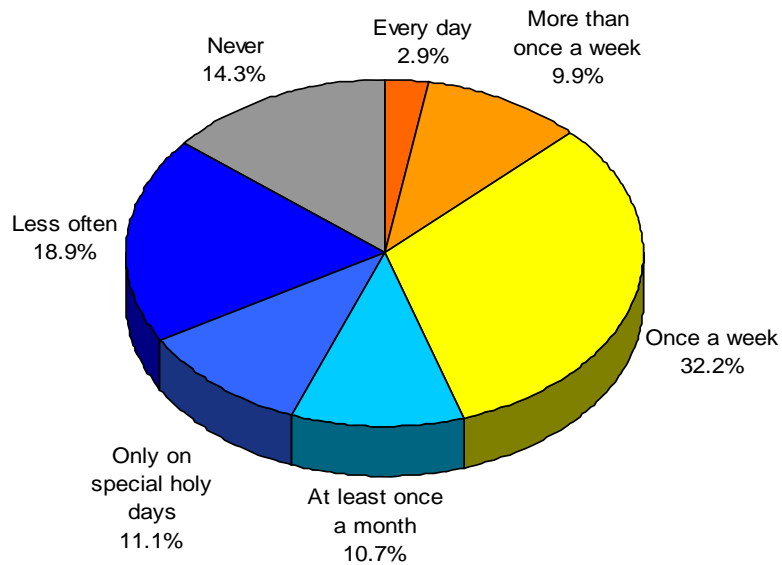
Figure 2: once per week or more often attendance at mass rounds 1,2 and 3. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS



In Northern Ireland, smaller percentages of Catholics attend mass on a weekly or more often basis when compared to the Republic. 45% of Catholics in Northern Ireland attend mass weekly or more often. This is an aggregation of the percentage scores marked in orange and yellow in the pie chart below.

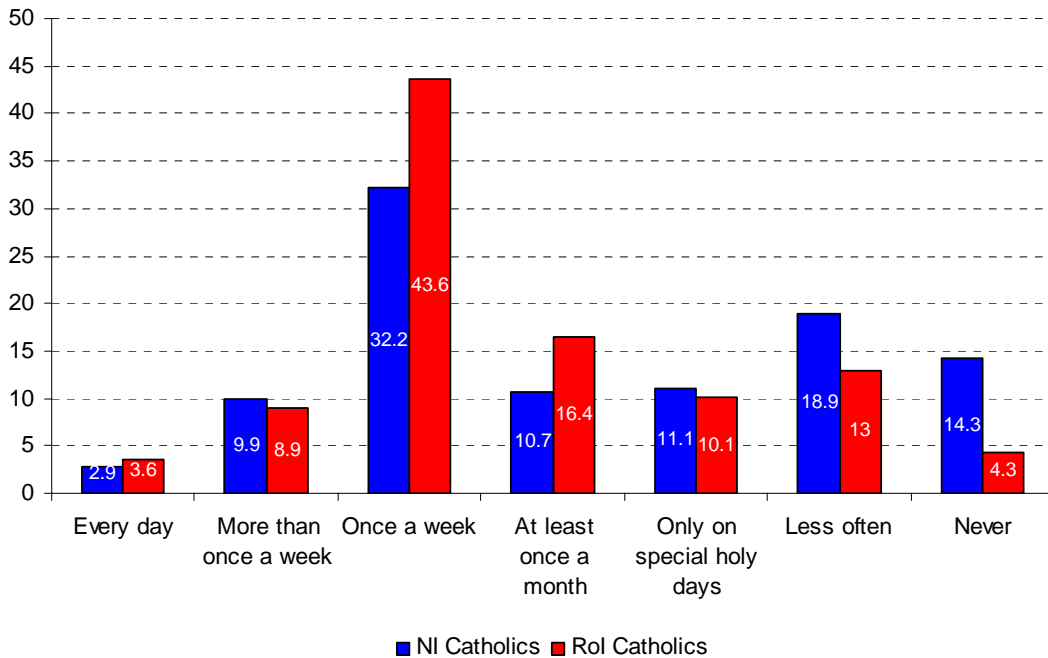
² Aggregated from the three columns to the left. This option is not given to the respondents in the survey.

Figure 3: Attendance at religious services apart from special occasions, 2006/07. Base: NI Catholics. Source: ESS.



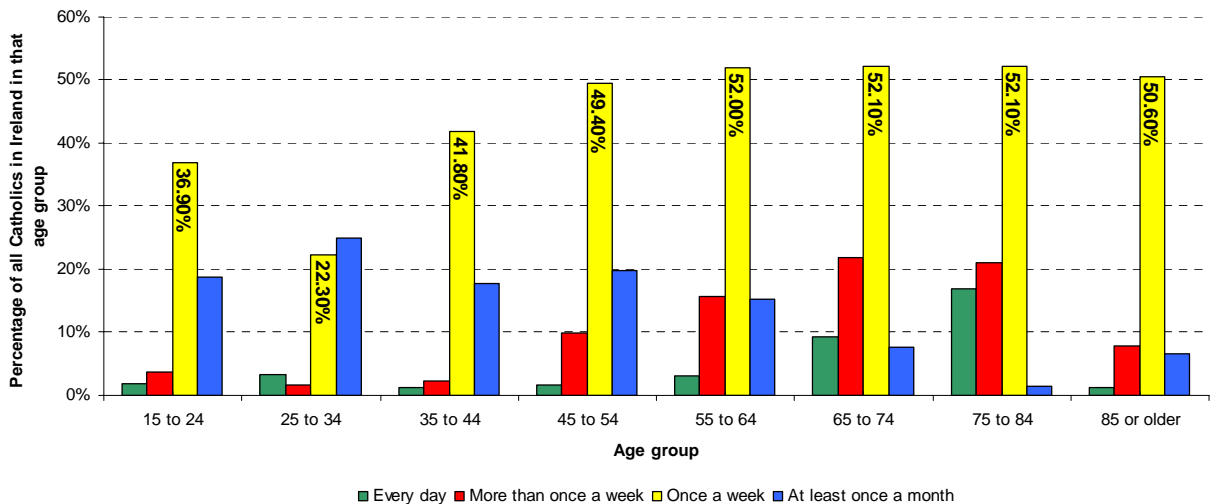
Comparing the two areas side by side, we can note some distinct differences. As can be seen from the chart, 32.2% of Northern Ireland's Catholics attend mass weekly compared with 43.6% of the Catholics living in the Republic. Once a week or more often mass attendance also differs between the two parts of the island. We have already noted that 56.4% of the Republic's Catholics attend mass weekly or more often but the figure for Northern Ireland is lower and mostly due to lower weekly only mass attendance: 45%.

Figure 4: Attendance at religious services apart from special occasions by area, 2006/07. Base: NI & ROI Catholics. Source: ESS



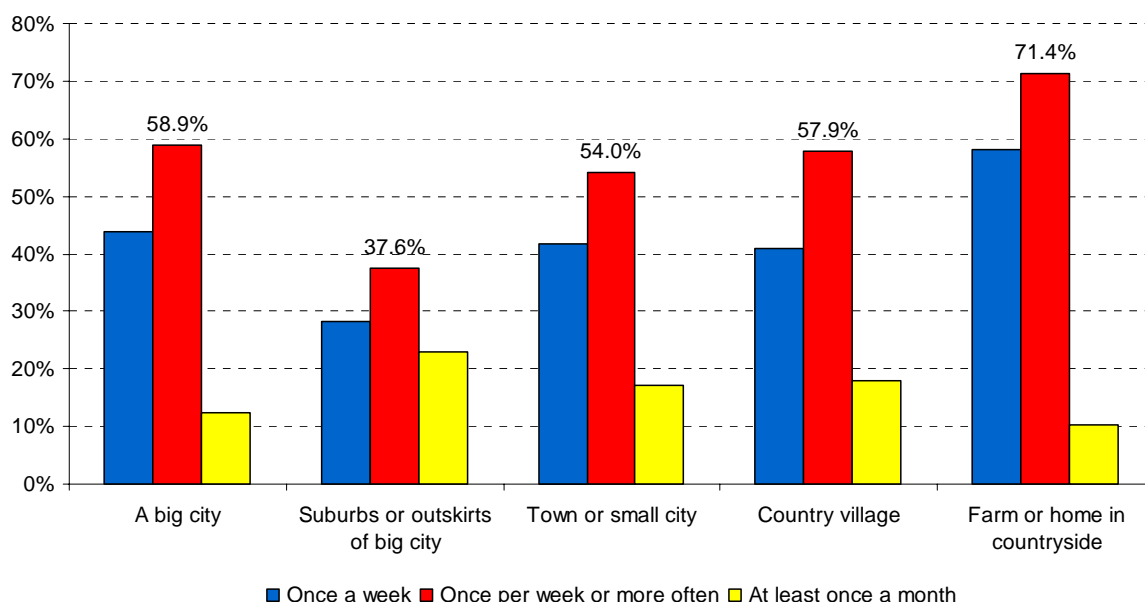
Of the 1,318 Catholics in the sample, we can see how many in each recoded age group attend mass once per week or more often. From the chart below we can see that at least weekly mass attendance is higher for older age groups. Weekly only mass attendance is just under 37% of the 15 – 24 year old age group and about 22% for those in the 25 – 34 age group. It is evident that it is the older age cohorts in this sample who attend weekly mass in greater numbers. Just short of 50% of 45 to 54 year old Catholics attend weekly mass while for those aged over 65, the figure is above 50%. More than once per week mass attendance is also more prevalent amongst those aged 65 and over.

Figure 5: Attendance at religious services outside of special occasions (selected) by age groups. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS.



Studies of secularisation processes in Europe point to less frequent religious service attendance in urban and suburban areas than in rural areas. For Ireland, frequent mass attendance is lower in the eastern and (sub)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. In the European Social Survey, 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 self-defined place we see that at least weekly mass attendance is higher in country villages (58%) and in households on farms / other homes in the countryside (71%) than in suburban areas. It is in these suburban areas where the lowest rate of frequent mass attendance is seen. Weekly only mass attendance is more prevalent among Catholics who live in households in cities (44%), or the outskirts of these cities (approx. 28%) than in rural households.

Figure 6: Attendance at religious services (outside of special occasions) by location of respondent's household. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS.



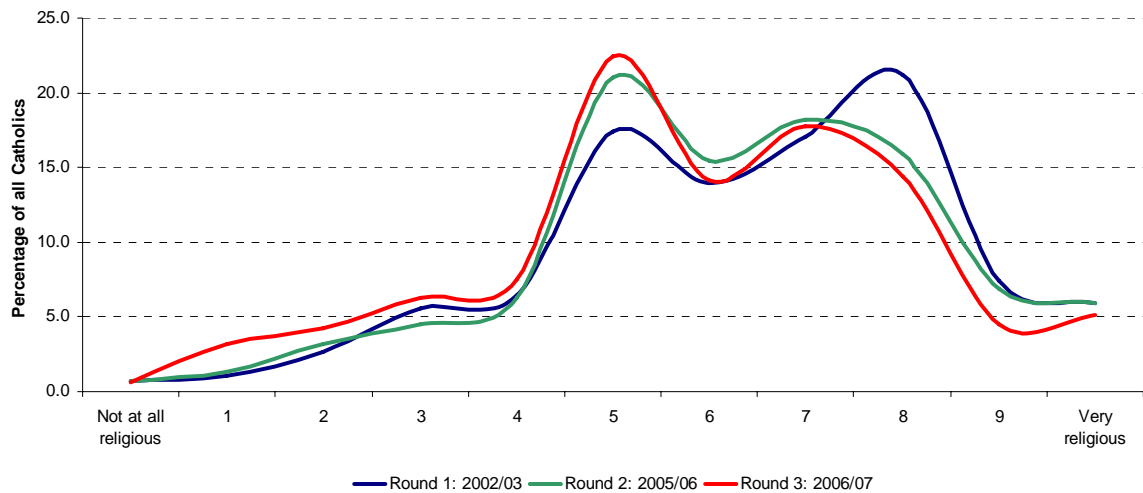
The third round of the ESS did not include an analysis by NUTS3 regions – the administrative units used at European level. As a result, no regional analysis can be conducted in this report.

Comparing the 2003 (round 1), 2005 (round 2) and 2007 (round 3) ESS data for Ireland

In the last report on these data, we noted that longer trends in practice would not be evident from as short a time span as three or five years. Having said this, there are some notable trends in the round 1, 2 and 3 datasets for Ireland. In this section, we examine similar data across three rounds of the ESS.

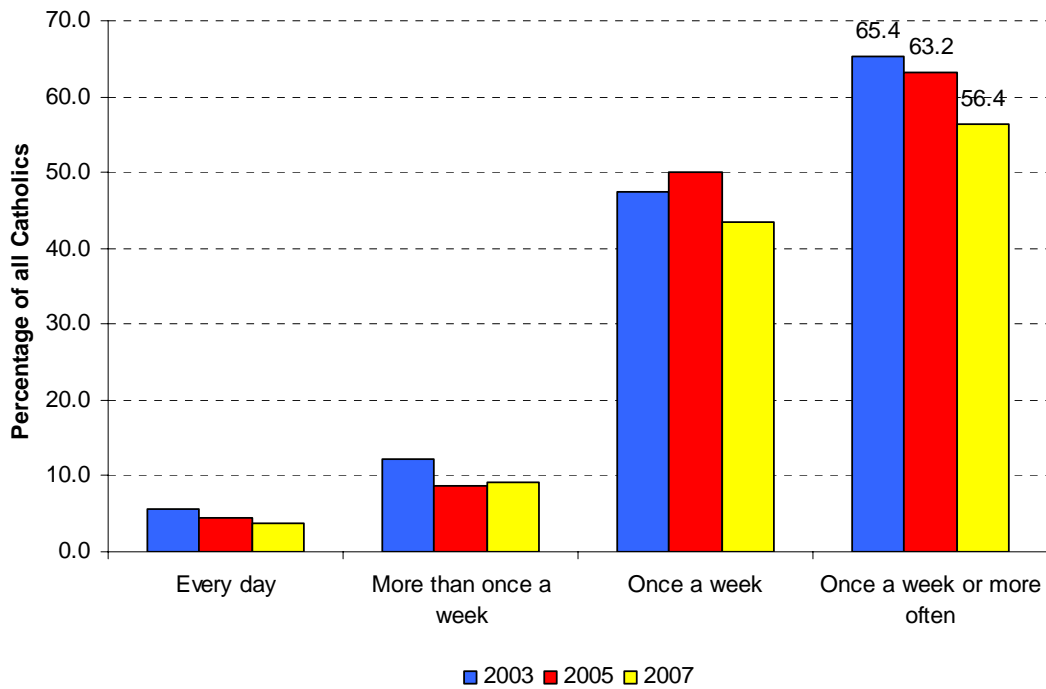
In terms of the respondents own sense of being religious, there has been some change in the percentage of Catholic respondents feeling more religious over the three year period. Notably there has been an increase in the numbers indicating neither not religious nor religious – the midway point on the scale – from 17% in 2003 to 21% in 2005. This has increased to 22.4% of the sample in the 3rd round of surveys. In addition, there is a decrease over the time period in the numbers indicating that they are very religious – approximately 6% of the sample to 5% of the sample.

Figure 7: Subjective feelings of religiousness 2003, 2005 and 2007. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS



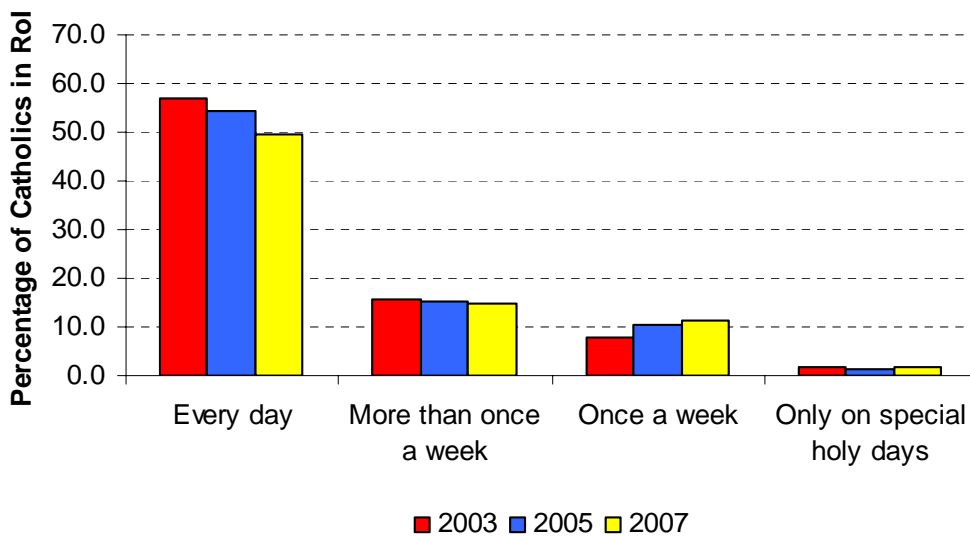
Between 2003 and 2005, there is a 3.4% decrease in the aggregated percentage of Catholic respondents attending mass at least once a week. As can be seen from the graph below, at least once a week mass attendance has declined a little in the third survey. Across the categories, there is no significant change. 65% attended mass at least once per week in from the 2003 survey; this declined to 63% from the 2005 survey and further still to 56% in 2007.

Figure 8: Attendance at religious services (outside of special occasions) 2003, 2005 and 2007.
Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS



Turning to the numbers of Catholics and their frequency of prayer, the comparative data show that slightly smaller numbers praying daily in 2007 when compared with 2003 and 2005 but, as with the above, there is little change in the balance of the proportions.

Figure 9: Frequency of prayer (outside of special occasions) for selected occasions, 2003, 2005 and 2007. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS



Final Remarks

This report has examined the results from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland for the third 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 56% of Catholics in Ireland feel somewhat religious. 32% of all Catholics rate their religiousness at the 6 and 7 mark on the scale presented to them although this has dipped slightly since the 2005 survey. 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.

Respondents were asked how often they attend religious services outside of special occasions. At least weekly mass attendance is now at 56.4% of Catholics although this varies somewhat by geography and age group. Less than 4% of Catholics attend daily mass. Above average rates of at least weekly mass attendance is seen for those aged 45 and above. This is particularly marked for those aged 65 and above. For those born before 1962, weekly mass attendance retains an importance. Among the younger age groups, it is the 15 to 24 year olds who have the higher at least weekly mass attendance – 42% although this too has declined in recent surveys. There is below average at least weekly attendance rates in the big cities and their suburbs. Higher rates are to found in villages and farms and other rural households.

Almost 50% 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 2: Subjective feelings of religiosity BY frequency of prayer. Base: all Catholics. Source: ESS

	How often pray apart from at religious services						
	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	-	-	-	-	-	37.5%	62.5%
1	19.0%	11.9%	7.1%			40.5%	21.4%
2	11.5%	11.5%	5.8%	17.3%	0.0%	25.0%	28.8%
3	12.3%	7.4%	7.4%	18.5%	4.9%	27.2%	22.2%
4	18.0%	14.0%	14.0%	10.0%	4.0%	32.0%	8.0%
5	41.0%	15.4%	17.7%	7.8%	1.7%	11.6%	4.8%
6	53.3%	19.8%	12.6%	6.0%	1.1%	4.4%	2.7%
7	59.0%	17.5%	11.4%	4.4%	0.9%	5.7%	1.3%
8	72.2%	15.0%	8.0%	0.5%	2.7%	1.1%	0.5%
9	80.0%	16.7%	1.7%	-	-	-	1.7%
Very religious	95.5%	3.00%	1.5%	-	-	-	0.0%

Patterns emerging from a comparison between rounds 1, 2 and 3 are difficult to detect. However, weekly mass attendance is decreasing again after a slight increase between rounds 1 and 2. Feelings of religiousness may also be moving toward the centre of the scale presented.

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