

One Nation (and International Community?) Under God:
Examining the Link Between Religiosity and Trust in International Political Institutions

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1. Introduction

Across the world, general dissatisfaction with, and mistrust in, government institutions is perceived to be on the rise, as evidenced by the growth of anti-establishment sentiment and populist parties in countries such as the United States as well as many member states in the European Union, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic recession (Algan et al, 2017). At the same time, the way many individuals interact with religion, especially the institutionalized notion of it that has traditionally been conceptualized throughout the Western world, though with some exceptions, has simultaneously undergone substantial transformations, as has been widely observed and studied (Bréchon, 2021; Green, 2010). As both these processes have begun to unfold, a growing amount of research has started to examine the relationship between these two phenomena, evaluating how variations in levels of religiosity and trust in government institutions interact. However, such investigations have almost exclusively analyzed this relationship in the context of domestic institutions, with very little focus given to examining how religiosity affects trust in the mechanisms that underpin global governance institutions such as the UN. As a result, in this paper, I will look to begin filling this gap, setting out to explore whether a statistically and substantively significant relationship between religiosity and trust in international governance institutions, controlling for several other potential explanatory variables, can be observed.

To do so, in the sections that follow I will first provide an overview of the current literature and discuss the hypotheses to be tested in this paper stemming from this previous research. Next, I will outline the methodology that will be used to investigate these predictions. Finally, I will present the results gleaned from such methods, ultimately concluding that a statistically significant, though substantive small linkage can be observed between religiosity and trust in international governance institutions, before offering some final concluding remarks on future implications and further research required.

2. Theory and Expectations

As alluded to previously, research related to the causal link between religiosity and trust in political institutions, though still relatively unexplored, as argued by Dilmaghani (2017) in her review of the literature, has grown recently as distrust in the government has become a more salient issue, demonstrated by those such as Schyns & Koop (2010) to be potentially harmful to the effectiveness of policy, citizens' acceptance of laws, and democracy at large. Within this expanding literature, religiosity, though with some variation, has been generally delineated as a, "Measure of one's depth of immersion"(p. 800) in religion, itself defined as a, "Specific set of actions and beliefs regarding sacred things as practiced by an identifiable community of individuals"(Creel, 2022, p. 797). Meanwhile, trust in political institutions has been largely conceptualized as a, "Summary judgment that the [political] system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny"(Miller & Listhaug, 1990, p. 358), involving evaluations of, "Whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with the normative expectations held by the public"(p. 358). In the context of these interpretations, several studies have been conducted analyzing the connection between both variables.

Branas-Garza, Rossi, & Zaclicever (2009), were among the earliest of these investigations, utilizing survey data from 18 Latin American countries in 2004, and discovering a positive relationship between respondents' level of religiosity and their trust in government institutions. This core finding was further confirmed by, among others, Wisneski, Lytle, & Skitka (2009), who studied survey responses in the United States related to trust in the Supreme Court, and Creel (2022), who analyzed data obtained from the World Values and European Social Survey, and theorized that religious people's greater propensity to accept government authority can be connected to higher levels of conditioning to accept hierarchical structures often found in religious institutions and doctrine.

Finally, actually expanding upon the initially explored conceptualization of religiosity, a number of studies, such as Ben-Nun Bloom & Arikan (2012; 2013), making use of observations from the World Values Survey from 1999-2001 and 2005-2007, and Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn (2021), analyzing results from the US General Social Survey from 1972-2108, evaluated the impact of religiosity on trust in government institutions from a multidimensional context, arguing that religiosity is best conceptualized as a "double-edged sword", with a public aspect, characterized by involvement in religious networks, which contributes positively to trust in institutions as a result of the civic and democratic norms instilled through such communal activities, as well as a private dimension, determined more exclusively by level of belief in the central spiritual tenets of a religion, which tends to be negatively associated with political trust as a result of the exclusive individualism and conservatism that high levels of doctrinal belief often entail.

While, in this fashion, the current literature has so far succeeded in analyzing the relationship between religiosity and trust in governance in an ever more granular and precise manner, such studies have almost always taken place in the context of domestic political institutions, with very few studies testing the link between religiosity and trust in supranational organizations. Building off of this previous research then, in this paper, I will set out to examine the multidimensional effects of religiosity on trust in international governance institutions, testing whether the null hypothesis, that no statistically significant relationship exists between any aspect of religiosity and trust in international governance institutions, can be credibly rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, that such a statistically significant relationship does exist, with the public aspect of religiosity having a positive impact on trust in international political institutions, and the private aspect having a negative effect. Finally, if the alternative hypothesis can indeed be supported, I will additionally attempt to determine the substantive significance of the various facets of religiosity, expecting that their observed impact will be of a lesser magnitude than their effect on trust in domestic institutions as a result of the less direct connection many citizens draw to international governance institutions relative to their domestic government.

3. Methodology

To test these various hypotheses, I will leverage data from Round 9 of the European Social Survey (2018), analyzing 32,301 observations, each representing a single respondent, out of a total of 49,519 who participated in the survey, thus omitting 17,218 observations due

to their missing at least one response to a survey question relevant to the operationalization of the numerous variables examined in this paper.

Concerning such operationalization, building off current research trends, I have chosen to measure the independent variable, religiosity, along three different dimensions. Frequency of attendance of religious services is the first aspect of religiosity that this study will evaluate. I will operationalize this component through survey question C16, which asks individuals how often they attend religious services apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, and expect a positive effect on trust in international political institutions to be observed stemming from the increased levels of tolerance and democratic norms associated with religious attendance. Next, I will inspect religiosity in terms of frequency of private prayer, measured by survey question C17, which prompts respondents to determine, how often they pray apart from when at religious services. In contrast to the previous dimension, I predict that this measure will be negatively associated with trust in international governance institutions through the logic of private religiosity being associated with more conservative ideology and distrust towards change as well as people of different faiths. Finally, general religiosity, operationalized by survey question C15 asking respondents how religious they are regardless of whether they belong to a particular religion, represents the last axis of religiosity that this study will investigate. I expect a positive relationship to exist between this dimension of religiosity and political trust in line with previous research that has shown that the positive impacts of social religiosity are generally stronger than the negative impacts of private belief.

Moving on to the dependent variable, I will operationalize trust in international governance institutions through survey question B6-12, which asks respondents to determine, alongside other institutions, how much they, trust the United Nations. Being the most widely known and accepted international political organization around the world, this measure should suffice well to represent individuals' trust in international governance institutions. Additionally, in order to be able to more holistically evaluate the substantive impact of the multiple dimensions of religiosity on trust in international political institutions, this study will also model the relationship between these measures of religiosity and domestic political institutions, so that the effects on international trust can be compared relative to the more traditionally studied measure of domestic trust. To operationalize this variable, I will create an index variable consisting of the weighted average of three additional components (with a high Cronbach's alpha score of 0.92) of survey question B6-12 related to how much respondents trust politicians, parliament, and political parties respectively.

Additionally, to isolate the effects of religiosity on political trust, I will control for the impacts of several other variables commonly included in prior investigations (Branas-Garza, Rossi, & Zalcicever, 2009; Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2021; Wisneski, Lytle, & Skitka, 2009). Among these control variables, I will first include gender, operationalized by survey question F21, and considered because variation in trust in governance could be impacted by the often institutionalized prejudice historically and currently still largely experienced by women relative to men. Next, education level, delineated by survey question F15 which asks respondents to select the highest level of education they have received, has been included as education level has been demonstrated in countless studies to have substantial effects on political outlook and preferences. Household income level has additionally been controlled

for in this regression model as it too has been extensively shown to impact variation in political outlook. It has been operationalized by question F41, which asks respondents to determine what income decile they fall into. Following that, left-right ideology, measured in this model by survey question B26 which has respondents determine their ideology on a left-right scale, as well as age, operationalized by question F31B, have been included. Finally, the effects of country-level variation, operationalized in survey question 5, have been modeled in this experiment to control for the potential impacts that the substantial differences in domestic political and economic contexts could have on international trust levels.

Finally, concerning the actual analytical methods utilized in this study, making use of these operationalizations, I will first generate descriptive statistics for each of the variables to better understand their spread, central tendency, and distributional shape. Then I will evaluate their causal impacts by utilizing multivariate linear regression analysis to create two regression models (one with trust in domestic institutions as the dependent variable, and the other with trust in the UN as such), both of which will minimize the sum of squared residuals for each observation, and then output slope coefficients for each variable included in the model, corresponding to the associated effect of a one-unit increase in each explanatory variable, controlled for the effects of every other variable, on the dependent variable. This output will also generate standard errors for each slope coefficient, as well as associated p-values. For this study, I will denote statistical significance, and the ability to reject the null hypothesis, with a p-value of less than .05, signifying that less than 5% of the time a slope coefficient atleast as extreme as the one predicted would be found if the null hypothesis were true. Finally, I will determine the robustness of these results by determining the homoscedasticity and multicollinearity of the regression model.

4. Results

To begin the investigation, as outlined above, I produced descriptive statistics to evaluate the spread and central tendencies of all the variables included in the two regression models created for this study. The results related to this study's dependent variables can be observed in Table 1, as well as in Figures 1 and 2. Of particular note in these visualizations,

Table 1: Dependent Variables Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>IQR</i>	<i>STD</i>
<i>Trust in Domestic Institutions</i>	4.19	4.33	10.00	3.67	2.26
<i>Trust in UN</i>	5.35	6.00	10.00	3.00	2.53

are the standard deviations of each dependent variable found in Table 1 – 2.26 for trust in domestic institutions and 2.53 for the UN – which will be of use later in interpreting the substantive significance of the slope coefficients of the explanatory variables from the linear regression model, the higher mean and median level of trust in the UN compared to trust in domestic institutions, also displayed in Table 1, and finally the general shapes of the

distribution of responses for each measure, shown in Figures 1 and 2, both of which appear at least somewhat normal, though with some interesting dynamics occurring such as a large

Figure 1: Distribution of Trust in Domestic Institutions

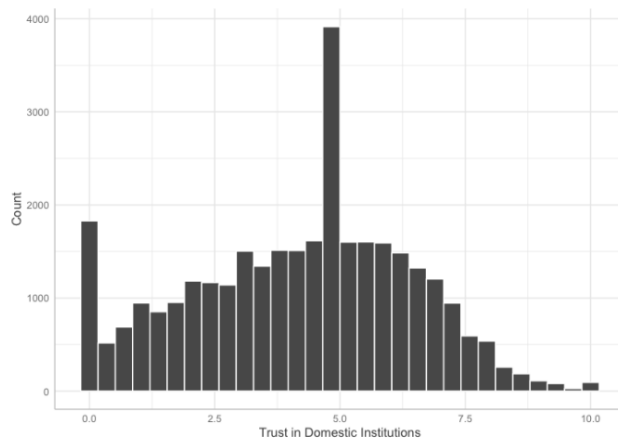
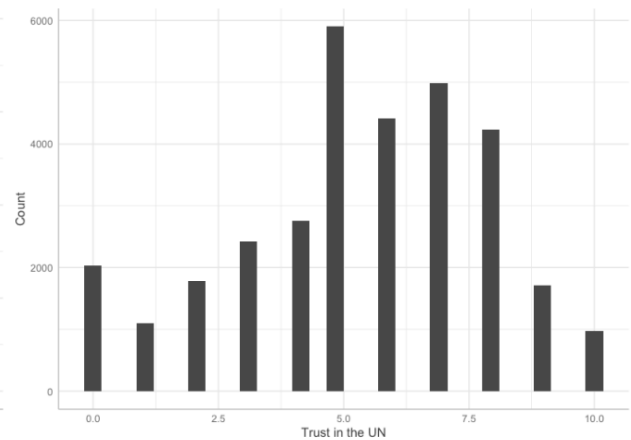


Figure 2: Distribution of Trust in the UN



number of observations with a level of trust in domestic institutions around 5.0. Next, the findings from the exploratory analyses related to the multiple dimensions of religiosity operationalized in this investigation can be observed in Table 2 as well as Figures 3-5. Of

Table 2: Independent Variables Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Range	IQR	STD
Frequency of Religious Attendance	0.35	0.29	0.86	0.29	0.20
Frequency of Prayer	0.44	0.29	0.86	0.57	0.33
General Religiosity	0.44	0.50	1.00	0.50	0.31

interest in these are again the relative differences in central tendencies and spread between the three variables, outlined in Table 1, with the frequency of religious attendance being the measure of religiosity with the lowest mean, median, interquartile range, and standard deviation, as well as the unique shapes of the distributions for each dimension, displayed in Figures 3-5, with the frequency of religious attendance appearing generally positively (right) skewed, the frequency of prayer trending towards being bimodal, and general religiosity looking closer to a normal distribution.

Figure 3: Distribution of Frequency of Relig. Attendance

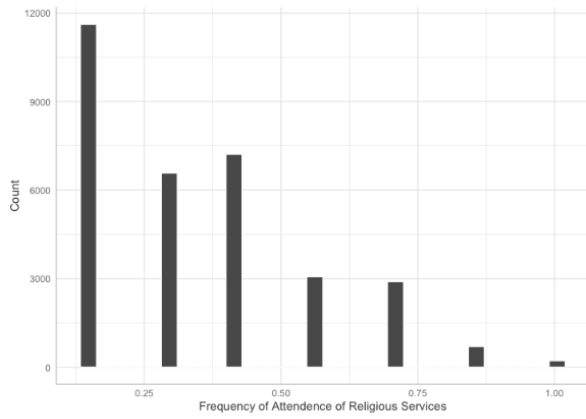


Figure 4: Distribution of Frequency of Prayer

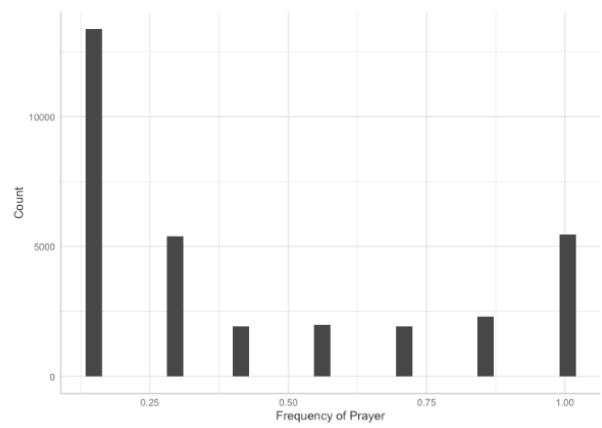
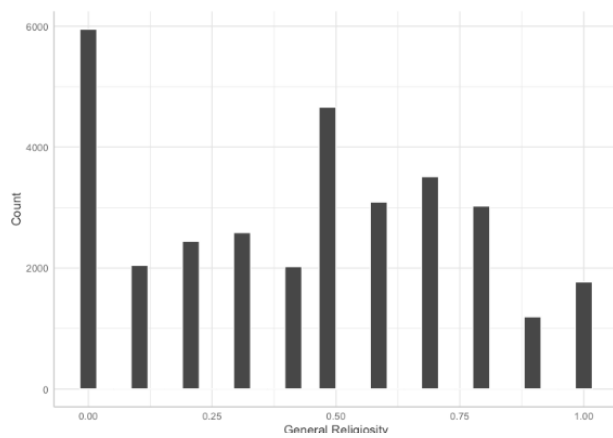


Figure 5: Distribution of General Religiosity



Finally, the results of the exploratory analysis of the various control variables can be observed in Table 3. Of note in this visualization are the various measures of central tendency and spread useful in understanding the general characteristics of the individuals observed.

Table 3: Control Variables Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Range	IQR	STD
Education Level	0.60	0.57	0.86	0.43	0.26
Income Level	0.55	0.50	0.90	0.50	0.28
Left-Right Ideology	0.50	0.50	1.00	0.20	0.22
Age	51.46	52.00	75.00	29.00	17.81

Moving on, the results from the two multivariate linear regression analyses conducted are displayed in Table 4. In terms of statistical significance, likely owing at least in part to the large sample size, the slope coefficients for all three dimensions of religiosity in the UN model meet the determined threshold of having a p-value less than .05, thus allowing for the null hypothesis, that no statistically significant relationship exists between religiosity and supranational political trust, to be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, that such a relationship does exist. Interpreting the results in terms of substantive significance, the slope

Table 4: Regression Output for Multivariate Linear Regression Models

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Domestic Govt Trust</i>	<i>UN Trust</i>
<i>Intercept (Gender = Male, Country = Austria)</i>	3.34 (0.08) ***	4.29 (0.09) ***
<i>Frequency of Religious Attendance</i>	0.86 (0.08) ***	0.51 (0.09) ***
<i>Frequency of Prayer</i>	-0.41 (0.05) ***	-0.35 (0.06) ***
<i>General Religiosity</i>	0.72 (0.05) ***	0.51 (0.06) ***
<i>Gender (Female)</i>	-0.04 (0.02)	0.10 (0.03) ***
<i>Education Level</i>	0.80 (0.05) ***	0.83 (0.06) ***
<i>Income Level</i>	0.43 (0.05) ***	0.53 (0.05) ***
<i>Left/Right Ideology</i>	0.57 (0.05) ***	0.11 (0.06)
<i>Age</i>	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00) ***
<i>R²</i>	0.21	0.12
<i>Adj. R²</i>	0.21	0.11
<i>Num. obs.</i>	32,301	32,301

*Notes: (*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$); Country-level has additionally been controlled for but is not shown in the regression table*

coefficients in the UN Trust model of 0.51, -0.35, and 0.51 for frequency of religious attendance, frequency of prayer, and general religiosity respectively, when compared relative to the standard deviation for trust in the UN of 2.53 identified in the exploratory analysis, show that the predicted substantive effects of a one unit increase in each factor, representing a jump from the low extreme to the high extreme in each measure, result in an increase in trust level in the UN of 20.0% ($.51/2.53 = .20$) of a standard deviation for the attendance and general religiosity dimension and a decrease of 14% ($.35/2.53 = .14$) of a standard deviation for the prayer dimension, ultimately leading to the conclusion that their substantive significance is relatively small. What's more, the findings suggest, as hypothesized, that the associated impacts of each facet of religiosity on trust in international institutions are less than their respective effect on domestic political trust. This dynamic is visualized in Figures 6-11, each of which plots the various values of domestic and supranational political trust that are predicted by the two models based on the level of each dimension of religiosity. Thus, for instance, in Figures 6 and 7, which display expected levels of political trust based on variation in the frequency of religious attendance for each model, the positive relationship between the two factors is exhibited, as well as the smaller magnitude of the effect on trust in an international context, as can be seen in the more gradual slope. A similar dynamic can be observed in Figures 8-9 as well as Figures 10-11, in which the directional impact in each model is the same, but with more gradual slopes predicted for trust in international government institutions compared with trust in domestic political actors.

Figure 6: Predicted Trust in Domestic Institutions by Relig. Attendance

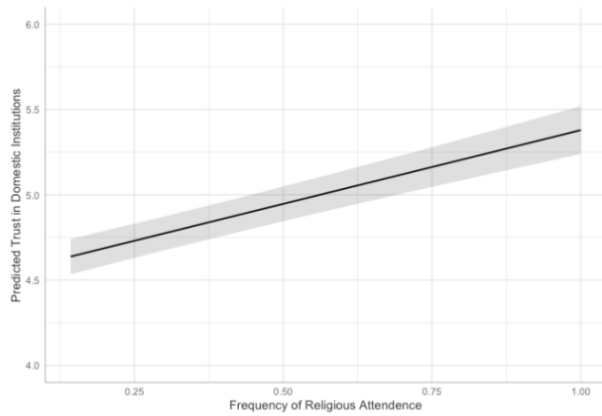


Figure 7: Predicted Trust in UN by Relig. Attendance

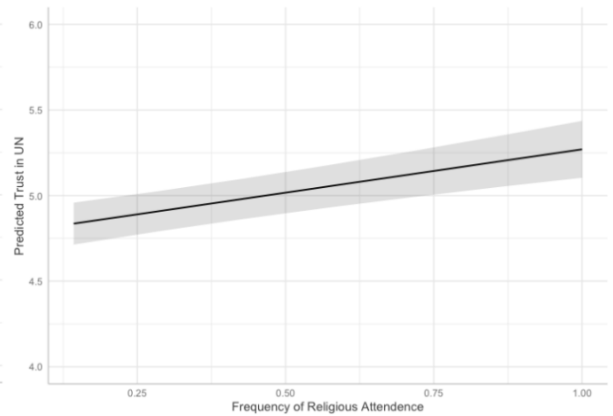


Figure 8: Predicted Trust in Domestic Institutions by Prayer Freq.

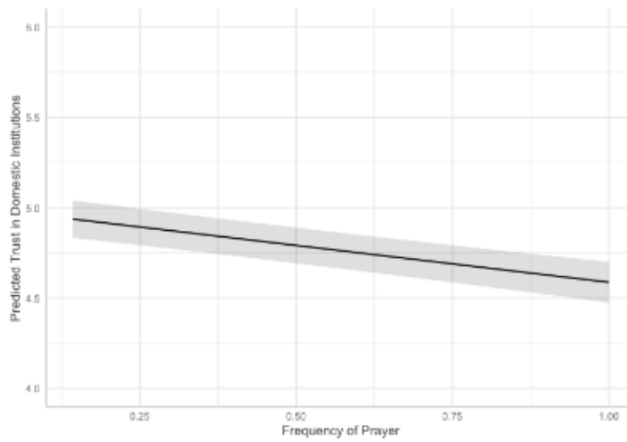


Figure 9: Predicted Trust in UN by Prayer Freq.

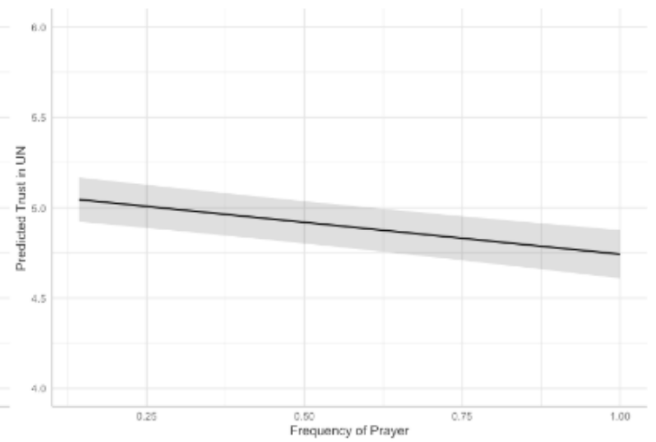


Figure 10: Predicted Trust in Domestic Institutions by General Religiosity

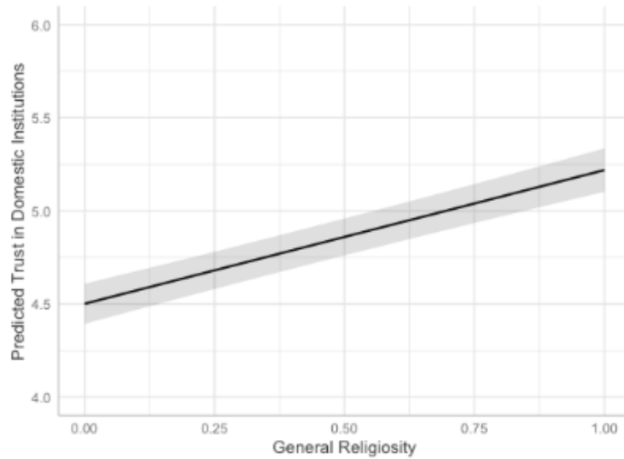
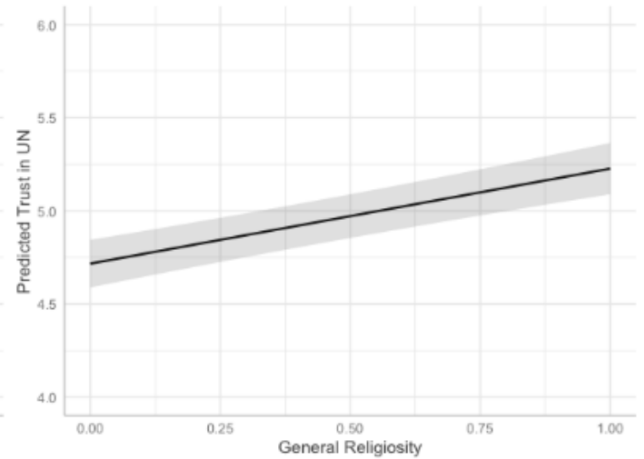


Figure 11: Predicted Trust in UN by General Religiosity



Finally, to determine the robustness of these conclusions, I analyzed the degree of homoscedasticity present in each model by visually assessing the distributional shape of the residuals for each fitted value, the findings of which can be observed in Figures 12 and 13,

Figure 12: Residuals vs Fitted Values - Domestic Trust Model

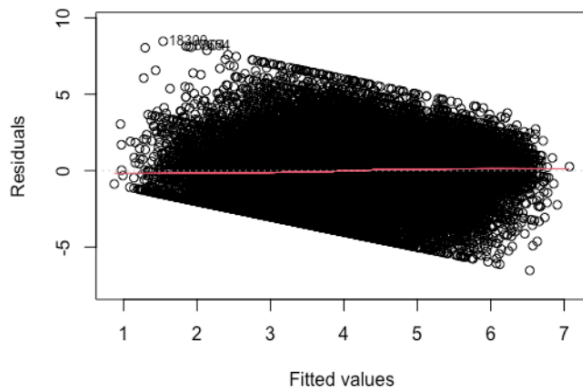
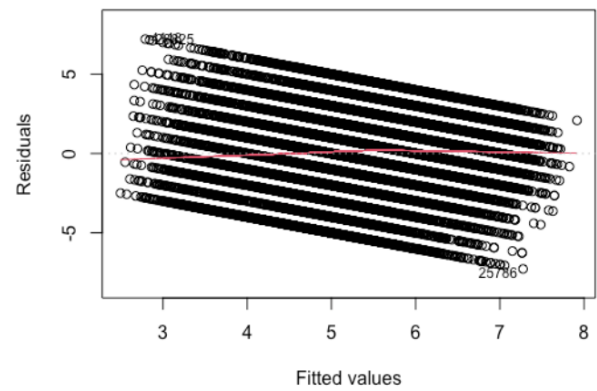


Figure 13: Residuals vs Fitted Values - UN Trust Model



as well as by running studentized Breusch-Pagan tests to determine whether the assumption of homoscedasticity needs to be rejected. Unfortunately, these analyses suggest that the assumption of homoscedasticity cannot be supported for the regression models utilized in this paper as both Breusch-Pagan tests resulted in p-values smaller than .05. However, in evaluating the multicollinearity of both regression models by generating variance inflation factor values for each explanatory variable, no value greater than 2.5 was found, indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue in this paper.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this examination I have explored whether a significant relationship can be observed between religiosity and trust in international governance institutions, filling a gap in the current literature by evaluating this linkage in a supranational context, in contrast to the domestic one that this connection has traditionally been studied in. To do so, I utilized relevant data from the 2018 European Social Survey to generate descriptive statistics for each variable included in the study, leverage multivariate linear regression analysis to determine the controlled substantive effects of each factor, as well as their associated p-values indicating statistical significance, and finally test for robustness by evaluating the homoscedasticity and multicollinearity of the regression models. The findings indicate that a large statistical, and relatively small substantive significance exists between the various dimensions of religiosity and trust in international institutions, while also pointing to at least one potential limitation on the robustness of the findings in terms of the homoscedasticity of the models used. Consequently, as mistrust in political institutions continues to rise in prevalence at the same time that societal transformations in terms of religiosity take place, further studies will be needed to more fully explore the causal links between these two increasingly salient factors.

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Dataset

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