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THE INFLUENCE OF INCOME AND EDUCATION LEVEL ON ISSUES OF RELIGION IN ROMANIA

Alexandra Georgiana PARASCA*

Abstract: *In this research paper the main focus is on religion and how it is influenced by income and education level, how people from different social classes look at religion nowadays. It is a known fact that our income, our education will influence our opinion regarding religion and I analyzed these aspects using a survey carried out by Gallup International for 2014, in Romania. The statistical data shows us clear differences between people with low income and basic education, and people with high income and high education, when it comes to religiosity. Therefore, we can say that income and educational attainment impacts religious belief, but we have to take into consideration that there are exceptions among people and this does not apply to all.*

Keywords: income, education level, religion, Romania

JEL Classification: Z12

Introduction

The economics of religion is trying to address issues which before were approached by other social sciences: the determinants of religious belief and behavior, the nature and behavior of religious institutions, but also the economic impact of religion. Today, we can talk about a secularization movement and the decline of religion. Therefore, it is important to take in consideration how societal and individual attitude regarding religion evolves (Barros, Garoupa, 2002).

It is said that culture has a role in influencing economic outcomes, therefore, it affects personal traits like honesty and work ethic. One of the main theories is the hypothesis of secularization through which the economic development determines individuals to be less religious. Also, economic development determine organized religion to intervene less in political decision making and in legal and social processes (Barro, McCleary, 2003). Weber (1930) says that religious belief and practices have important consequences on economic development.

1. Research Issues

The purpose of this paper is to observe the influence of income and education level on issues of religion in Romania, how do individuals approach religion depending on their income and education, how it affects religious participation, the level of trust in religious leaders and institutions, to understand the role of religion in people's life, but mostly how this is perceived in Romania. This

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research takes into account the relationship between income, education and religion, about positive and negative aspects of this relationship.

2. Literature Review

Some researchers believe that there is an inverse relationship between social class and religious practices, ideologies and affiliation. Group members of an inferior social class will prefer more strict and conservative religious ideas, behavior determined by a strict education in their childhood, so it is more likely that they recognize authority. People from a superior social class prefer religious ideology that will confirm their position in society.

A traditional sociology of religions reflects that individuals affiliate with religious groups who are numerous with people of the same social status or groups with a higher social status than theirs, because of the benefits and prestige which these groups offer (Sherkat, Wilson, 1995). Stark and Finke (2000) present a theory in which the relationship between social class and religion determines the middle and superior social class to be attracted by other aspects of religion, to those who are from an inferior social class.

Social class, represented especially by education level and income, is a key predictor of religious activities and preferences (Schwadel, 2012). Many factors are behind the discrepancies between religions, some of them are more obvious, like education and income (Leonhardt, 2011). Norris and Inglehart (2011) believe there is a probability that people are more religious when their lives are at risk, therefore, poor nations are more likely to be religious and wealthier nations tend to be more secular. Nevertheless, there are some countries with poor population, like Vietnam, who are not religious, so there are some exceptions from the “rule” (Grant, 2011). Other researchers believe that religious people are more accepting of a life of perpetual economic hardship. They consider that their belief in God determines them to not assume the responsibility when it comes to evaluating, questioning and improving upon the shortcomings of their state (Palani, 2008).

Lipford and Tollison (2003), by using US state-level data, argued that religion can have an important effect on the level of income of its adherents, religion being the one who discourages acquisition of material wealth. This starts from the religious teachings which talk about “afterlife consumption” and “treasures in heaven”, opposing the idea of present consumption and “treasures on earth”, and religious people/participants with low income will be likely to favor “afterlife income” over present income. They also conclude that income alters religious participation and they try to understand religion’s role in people’s lives.

Education is seen as a key factor when it comes to the decline of interest in religion, in modern society. The higher the level of education is, the more it erodes the individual's participation and religious belief. The theory of secularization sustains the fact that people become less religious when education level is higher, focusing on the idea that science has a destructive influence on religious belief. The conflict between religion and science is obvious, mostly when religious knowledge is in contradiction with scientific one (Schwadel, 2011). Ruiter and Tubergen (2009) take into consideration in their research paper that better educated people abandon religion and if people do not have to worry about their future, they are not so interested in religion. Hungerman (2014) estimates through his results that education might lower religiosity, considering that when we are exposed to secondary education, our earnings and professional options, knowledge of science and familiarity with other cultures might alter.

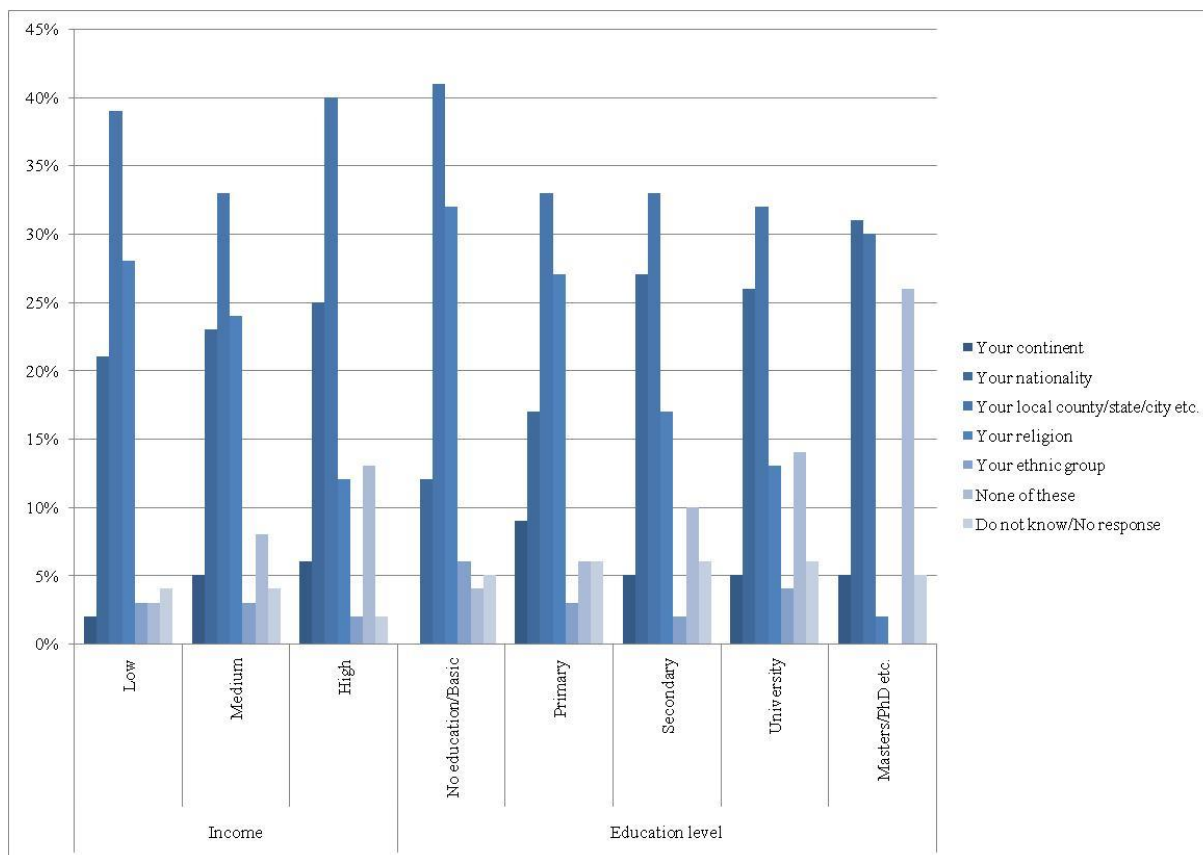
3. Method and Methodology

This research paper is based on bibliographic study, analyzing articles which approach themes like economics of religion, religion and income, religion and education, using bibliographic database, but also other resources. I used statistical data collected by Gallup International through a survey which was held in 2014, using only the data concerning religious aspects, and processed them using Microsoft Excel.

4. Research Results

After analyzing the statistical data, it results the fact that income and education attainment impacts religiosity among Romanians, observing differences in results depending on low/ high income and basic/high education. The aspects taken into consideration are: the importance attached to religion, the degree of religiosity, how much they empathize with refugees who are deprived of religious and political freedom, and how trustful are in religious leaders.

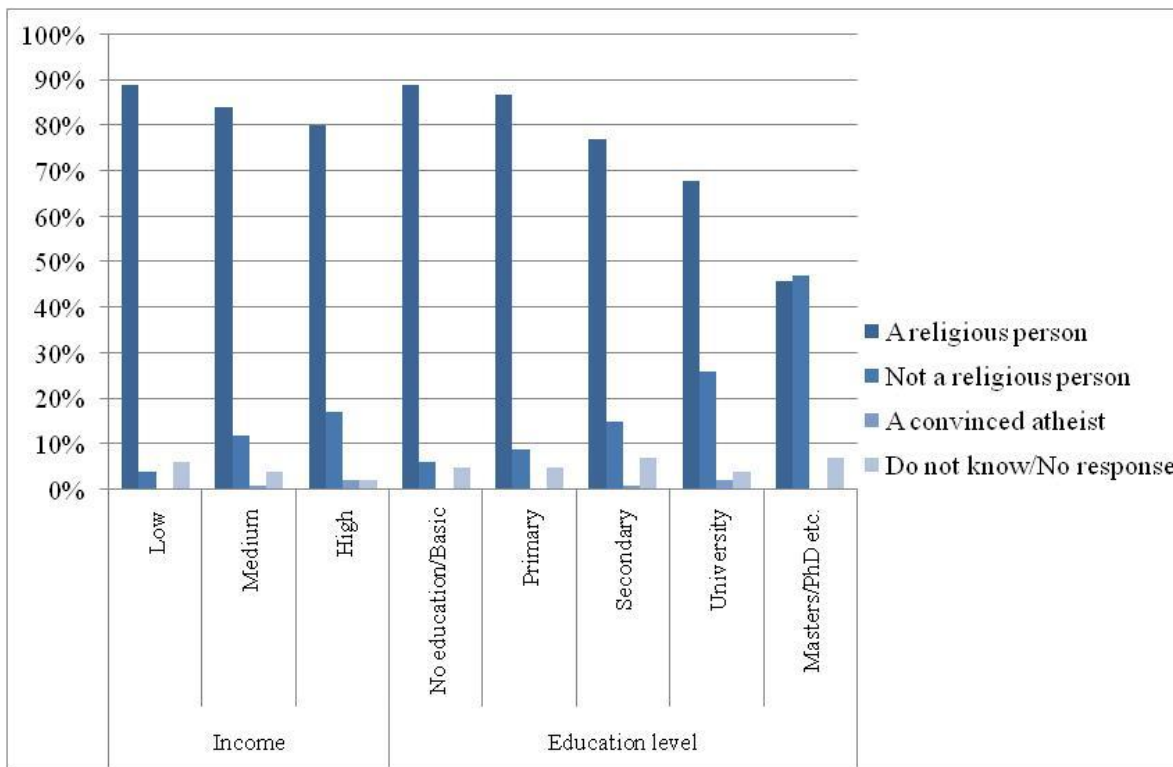
Figure 1 – The importance attached to religion compared to other aspects, in relation with income and level of education, Romania, 2014



Source: statistical data from Gallup International Association (www.gallup-international.com)

We could easily see that persons with a lower/medium/high (39%/33%/40%) income give more importance to their local county/state/city, while religion comes on the second place for people with lower and medium income, with 28% and 24%, but for the persons with a higher income, religion comes on the fourth place. Some researchers believe that religion occupies an important role in seriously dysfunctional societies, and according to them there is no situation where a really highly religious nation is highly successful socially (Stastna, 2013). Regarding the educational level, the people who give more importance to religion (32%) are with no education or basic education, while people with higher education (masters, PhD etc.) give less importance to religion (2%), considering that nationality is more important (31%).

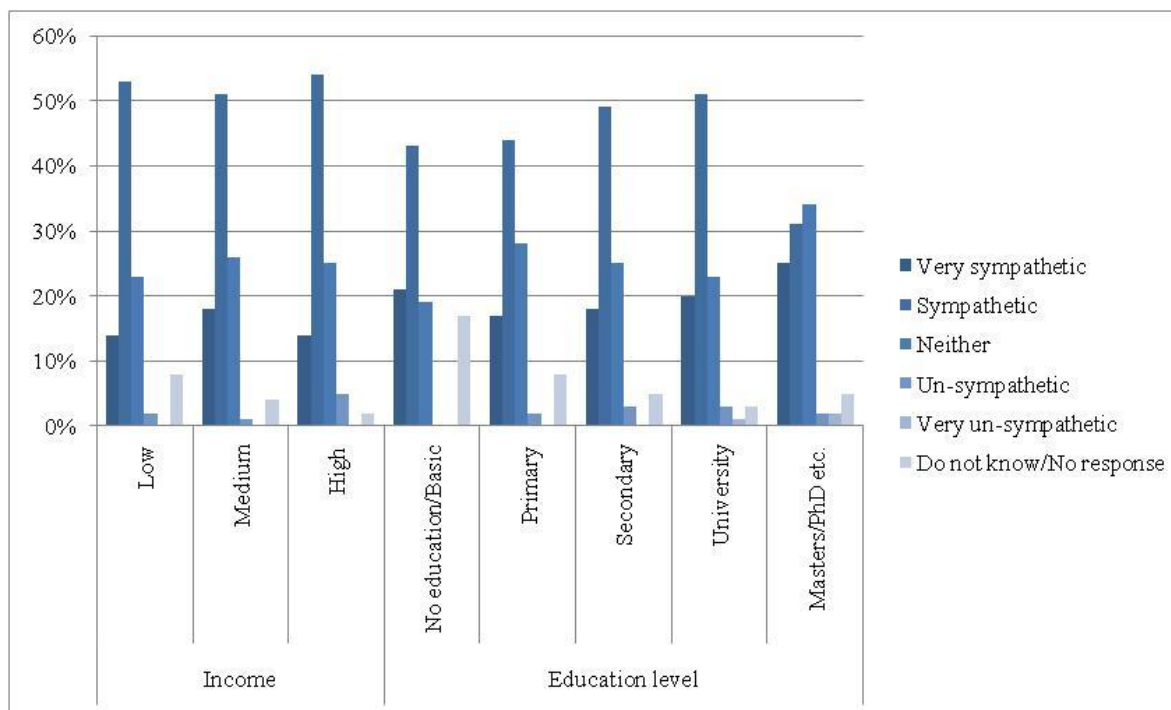
Figure 2 – The degree of religiosity of Romanians in relation with income and education level, 2014



Source: statistical data from Gallup International Association (www.gallup-international.com)

Even though from the previous figure we could observe that people with a higher income do not give much importance to religion, most of them consider themselves religious persons (80%). From the comparison, we can observe that people with a lower income are more religious persons (89%). When we talk about not being a religious person, we can see in **Figure 2** that the percentage is bigger for the persons with a higher income. After the research made by Gallup, they realized that most of the religious countries are relatively poor, reflecting a strong relationship between a country's socioeconomic status and the religiosity of its residents (Crabtree, 2010). This happens because the residents of these countries find help in religion when they have to struggle with daily problems, providing for their families, etc. This also applies to people with lower income. When it comes to education level, we can see that the percentage it is gradually decreasing, from people with basic education to people with higher education, the most religious persons being the ones with no education/basic education. Thus, we can conclude that if a person's level of education is higher, it is likely that he/she is less religious, but it is not generally available.

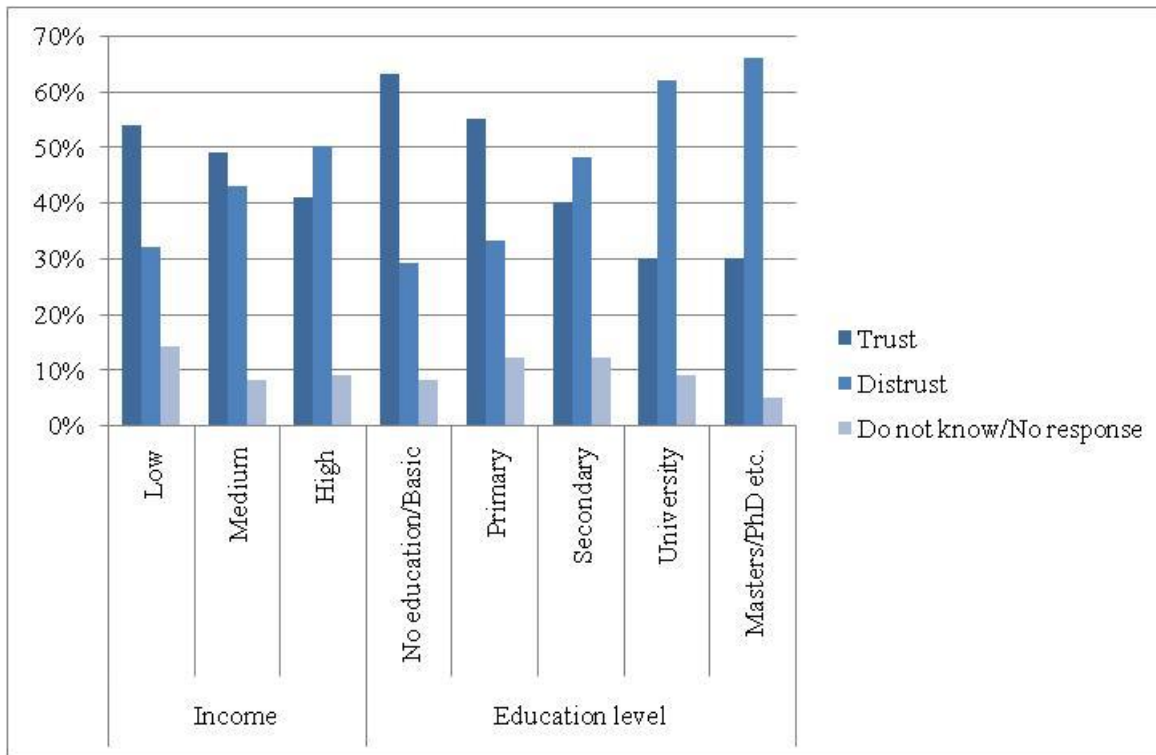
Figure 3 – How much Romanians empathize or do not empathize with refugees who come in their country for the following reason: lack of political and religious freedom in their country, 2014



Source: statistical data from Gallup International Association (www.gallup-international.com)

It is obvious from the **Figure 3** that when we speak about refugees who come in Romania because of lack of political and religious freedom in their country, we can observe that it does not matter the level of income or education, most of them being sympathetic when it comes about this matter. Maybe this is the result of the education we receive at home, where we mostly learn how to be tolerant with others. Another cause it would be the fact that most of them can relate with their issues and empathize with their problems. Also, Romania is a country who protects religious freedom through laws and policies, though there are some restrictions for minority religious groups in terms of registration requirements and granting official religious status, as the US embassy in Romania said on her website in the Report on International Religious Freedom (2013).

Figure 4 – The level of trust that Romanians grant for religious leaders, 2014



Source: statistical data from Gallup International Association (www.gallup-international.com)

In the fourth figure it is represented the level of trust that Romanians grant for religious leaders. As we can see, people with higher income do not trust so much religious leaders, like ones with lower income do, the difference between these two groups being of 13%. We have the same result when it comes to education level: people with no education/basic trust religious leaders, while at the opposite, stand people with higher education (masters, PhD etc.) who distrust religious people. Maybe this distrust comes from the fact that religious belief is contradictory to evolutionary science, who most of people with higher education identify themselves. Another reason may be that people feel misrepresented/misunderstood by religious leaders, or their attitude towards people confronting problems could be outdated (Voeten, 2013).

Conclusions

In this research I analyzed the impact of income and education level on religious issues like religiosity, how important is religion in their life, what opinion do they have regarding refugees for religion reasons and how much do they trust religious leaders. After analyzing the statistical data I could observe the fact that there is a difference between people with higher income and people with

lower income, and this also in the case of people with no education/higher education. Those with higher income and higher education tend to be less religious, to be more oriented towards scientific facts, to be more distrustful when it comes to religious leaders, to put their nationality on a pedestal before religion. At the opposite stand people with lower income or lower education who are more religious, tend to put religion, if not on the first place, at least on the second place, are more trustful in religious leaders. However, there is a common ground for both of these categories: they both empathize with refugees for lack of religious and political freedom, here being a slight difference between results.

That being said, we can conclude that there are visible differences between these categories of social classes and it can be said that income and education level have an influence on religious aspects of Romanians life. They have different opinions due to the fact that they live in different social worlds, are part of a different social class. This is just a mere and general interpretation, taking into consideration the statistical data, but we have to take into account that there are also exceptions: not all people with high income and high education are less religious or distrustful in religious leaders, and not all people with low income and basic education are very religious.

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