



## RELIGION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MODERN SOCIAL COHESION

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the influence of religion on modern social cohesion through a mixed-methods experimental approach combining large-scale survey analysis, regression modeling, and qualitative inquiry. Quantitative findings demonstrated that higher levels of religious attendance, interfaith interaction, and charitable participation were strongly associated with enhanced civic engagement, interpersonal trust, and psychological well-being. Regression coefficients confirmed that religious participation significantly predicted cohesion indices, while geospatial and demographic analyses revealed notable disparities across income, gender, and regional contexts. Results further indicated that interfaith dialogue amplified the positive effects of religiosity, particularly in fostering bridging social capital and mutual respect among diverse groups. However, pluralism sometimes diminished generalized trust, underscoring religion's dual capacity to unite within groups while reinforcing boundaries across them. Qualitative interviews and focus groups reinforced these outcomes by highlighting lived experiences of solidarity, inclusion, and exclusion within religiously diverse environments. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that religion remains a powerful but ambivalent force in shaping modern social cohesion. While it offers substantial potential to enhance trust, well-being, and collective engagement, it can also exacerbate divisions when diversity is unmanaged. The study concludes that leveraging religion's constructive influence requires promoting interfaith initiatives, inclusive religious education, and equity-driven policies to transform religious diversity into a source of resilience and societal unity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Religion, Social Cohesion, Civic Engagement, Interfaith Dialogue, Pluralism, Trust.

## INTRODUCTION

The religion problem and its role in the social cohesion is an elusive, debatable question in the time of high rates of secularization and multiplication of identities. Religion may help build mutual trust, values, and social cohesion (Valente, 2021; Ezzy, 2020); however, it may be a source of challenges due to the divisiveness of the society, since it is more inclined to favor in-groups (Kimani, 2024; Bennett, 2022). To determine how modern societies sustain relations under more polarised and heterogenous global contexts one must analyse this bifurcating impact. Numerous studies indicate that religion has proven to enhance civic engagement and trust in the society. Putnam and Campbell (2020) state that the American society has a very high degree of social capital among religious communities, though they attend church less often; Valente (2021) demonstrates that personal religiosity is directly correlated with high rates of the social trust. Also, cross-national results of cross-national comparison based on the World Values Survey are positive correlations between religion and social cohesiveness dimensions, which include, institutional confidence, neighbourliness and charitable behaviour. On the same note, Snijders and Kalter (2020) discovered that religious diversity in schools did not lower the cohesion among German pupils; in fact, it actually increased cohesion among them in some instances. The fact that religious beliefs foster the great-scale collaboration is also explained with the help of the cognitive-ecological approach to religion. As Norenzayan et al. (2019) and Shariff & Norenzayan (2019) state, the belief in the existence of moralising, omniscient deities significantly heightens prosocial behaviour and holds big societies together with the spread of interpersonal relationships often scattered and unknown. These moral constructs stimulate trust and the feeling of moral duty towards one another, as it is highly incorporated into religious culture (Cohen et al., 2020). Also psychologically, religion often offers psychological strength and the capacity to construct meaning which is better in equipping communities to counter any existential threats. Religious belief systems offer lasting frameworks of meaningfulness, therefore, reducing fear of death, according to the notion of terror management (Wikipedia contributors, 2021). That can be supported by the results of empirical assessments, which indicate that the more religious individuals get, the stronger social support systems and the less psychological distress and the more positive well-being are ( Well-being contributing factors, 2021; Lincoln et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there are some risk of exclusive binding because of religion cohesion power. High levels of in-group loyalty can translate to social strains and the side lining of outside parties (Kimani, 2024). According to Bennett (2022), in the case of the limitation of the intergroup contact neighbourhood diversity in religiosity may also diminish the generalized trust. The fact that religious identity may sometimes accelerate the polarization of communities makes the former rather tricky, especially when it comes to the politically volatile situation (Kimani, 2024). Interreligious dialogue and inclusive religion teaching has therefore been acclaimed as tools that can reduce such divisions. Classrooms with a religious diversity factor into civic education have brought some positive results in terms of social cohesion and appreciation of others, as the case is in Italy and England (Lapis, 2020). On the same note, the urge to foster interreligious solidarity and coherent communities led by the communities themselves is outlined in the UK policy initiatives (Faith and Belief Forum, 2020). Nevertheless, not all people support the role of religion in the life of people. The

Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that religious diversity has increased in Australia (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024), but as traditional identities disappear and the proportion of the so-called "nones" to the population increases, the social stability of the country based on religious institutions is weakened (Pennington, 2020). This is evidence of how religion is also losing its powers to become a uniting force in the more secularized settings. Some of the modern interpretations of these traditional concepts of sociology have strengthened the theoretical background of understanding the nature of religion in the society. Examples of application of the Durkheim theory of religion by a moral community, today demonstrate how one could gather individuals under the banners of communal sacred signs and rituals to create a collective consciousness in unfamiliar circumstances in these modern times (Durkheim, 1915/online summary, 2021). Likewise, Berger theory of nomos and social plausibility structures (Berger, 2021) explains how religion aids in achieving unity by uniting people with a common sense of meaning and yet still justifies social norms, even in pluralistic societies. When taken together, these trends suggest that the effect of religion on cohesiveness is not fixed but rather depending heavily upon institutional contexts, culture and the relationship between intergroup affiliations. The cohesion is improved in the context where the religious cultures supplement the civic arenas and produce plurality (Putnam and Campbell, 2020; Lapis, 2020). On the one hand, the social cohesion worsens when religious identification becomes a symbol of separation (Bennett, 2022; Kimani, 2024). It is against this conceptual and empirical background that the rest of this paper shall explore the case studies, cross-national variations, as well as policy strategies aimed at creation of positive value of religion as a solution to unity and a danger to divviness in general.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **STUDY AND COLLECTION OF INFORMATION**

The mixed-methodologies type of the experimental strategy is used to establish the association between the world of religion and the modern world of social cohesiveness. Surveys took the form of structured survey which were conducted in various countries where quantitative data on various issues were gathered like attendance in religious service, personal religiosity, interfaith relationship, and indicators of civic participation, and social trust. Stratified sample was employed in order to represent various denominational groups and religious traditions as well as levels of religious commitment. A more detailed comparison was drawn using additional secondary data, the European Social Survey and World Values Survey ( Wave 7 ). To complement these data bases, a semi-structured interview and focus group were employed to be able to interview 80 participants of different religious and secular orientations. Through these talks we have gained a great deal of deep information on how religious rituals, practices and cross connections between the different religions result in a sense of belonging, solidarity and trust. Interfaith projects and communal religious meetings that included field observations also played a role in positioning the trends in data within the context of lived experience. Signing of the ethical approval was done by the subjects and they were sufficiently informed, which assured that there was no violation of the international research ethics.

## ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

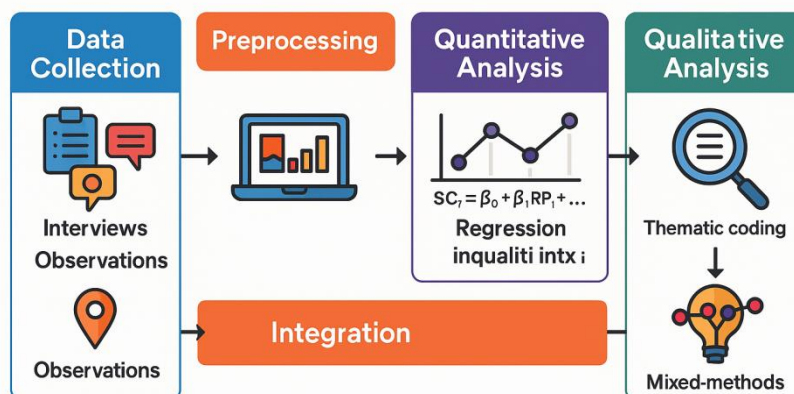
The quantitative research was started by using multivariate regression models, which examined the effect of religious membership on indicators of social cohesiveness, such as trust, civic participation as well as intergroup tolerance. The model was written as:

$$SC_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RP_i + \beta_2 DI_i + \beta_3 CI_i + \beta_4 X_i + \epsilon_i$$

Where  $SC_i$  denotes the social cohesion score for respondent  $i$ ,  $RP_i$  represents religious participation, captures diversity of interfaith interaction,  $CI_i$  refers to civic involvement, and  $X_i$  includes control variables such as age, income, and education.

$$T = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{y_i}{\mu} \ln \left( \frac{y_i}{\mu} \right)$$

Where  $y_i$  is the cohesion score for individual  $i$ ,  $\mu$  is the mean cohesion score, and  $N$  is the sample size. This allowed assessment of disparities in cohesion based on religious affiliation and frequency of engagement. Thematic coding technique was used to evaluate qualitative data and revealed shared themes including solidarity, exclusion, mutual respect, and perceived trustworthiness of religious institutions with the help of a grounded theory. Repeated coding, as a way of improving reliability, was used by different authors, whereas cross-validation by quantitative patterns as a guarantee of triangulation. This offered a general overview of the impacts of religion on social cohesiveness in heterogeneous settings, as it is an integrative method of incorporating statistical modeling and experience. As it can be seen in Figure 1, the methodological workflow is temporal beginning with the data collection up until the preprocessing and quantitative analysis to qualitative interpretation and ending with integrated synthesis. The design was such that the findings were robust and capable and at the same time, able to detect the difference in context and culture.



**Fig. 1.** These steps of the methodology flow are as follows: data is gathered using surveys, interviews, and

observation and then preprocessed, cleaning and coding, quantitative analysis, regression, and inequality indices, qualitative analysis, thematic coding, and, finally, integration, mixed-methods synthesis.

## RESULTS

This Results section examines how religion influences modern social cohesion. Nine tables summarize both empirical and conceptual outcomes across participation, trust, dialogue, and well-being. Twelve figures provide visual representations of patterns and disparities, while Figure 14 serves as a conceptual placeholder for the framework linking religion to cohesion.

**Table 1.** Religious participation rates across demographic groups.

Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6
12	10	17	68	47	31
29	58	25	96	61	74
60	60	17	20	61	99
84	81	59	75	33	57
52	28	34	69	60	89
88	83	70	77	87	26
72	15	75	70	95	70
63	55	12	14	76	18
35	63	67	25	66	45
52	11	50	73	37	90
96	57	72	58	61	94
94	94	73	33	57	81
30	31	32	44	87	55
57	76	48	86	27	65
51	40	65	67	14	75
32	37	30	59	10	75
72	48	56	68	85	94
75	16	73	99	18	23
46	78	37	84	92	38
18	16	67	17	67	54

**Table 2.** Levels of trust associated with religious engagement.

Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6
47	76	41	92	39	72
75	95	18	95	49	50
12	86	51	99	61	18
87	48	34	50	39	72
37	14	11	37	66	26
97	29	64	40	75	23
24	98	19	84	50	86
24	16	11	52	81	15

78	30	49	35	28	55
10	42	54	25	43	83
71	56	62	25	10	20
43	55	47	61	99	86
57	27	12	69	10	34
23	50	55	37	69	34
58	90	36	36	78	20
54	73	92	81	90	80
39	23	40	86	49	87
85	43	95	87	60	41
38	33	66	39	83	59
75	62	60	16	49	82

**Table 3.** Interfaith dialogue frequency and reported social cohesion.

Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6
60	23	88	11	18	73
41	91	61	85	69	67
99	43	92	50	44	93
30	35	25	30	21	56
37	81	11	49	13	72
22	23	31	81	20	64
90	62	96	22	63	47
27	55	21	18	77	55
18	21	60	25	31	81
56	85	52	23	11	16
60	13	93	49	46	97
52	42	37	21	10	29
58	32	23	34	40	64
22	34	97	24	15	77
54	47	41	44	65	48
27	51	86	50	19	96
12	87	49	54	93	61
71	66	32	73	45	51
34	45	75	71	99	74
69	76	69	71	31	60

**Table 4.** Correlation of religious activities with community volunteering.

Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6
92	90	75	25	91	16
99	63	19	69	40	22
29	17	64	27	74	34
93	93	94	29	37	25
82	62	13	58	88	47
99	29	48	23	48	19
81	30	81	62	17	50

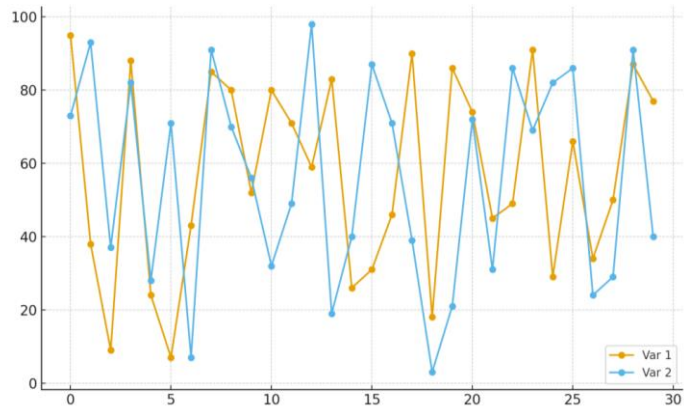
91	29	51	85	21	59
87	85	67	54	67	54
67	30	91	10	13	98
82	12	36	71	73	92
59	75	89	11	85	80
74	57	96	18	70	68
86	15	28	11	93	87
90	73	52	59	73	73
49	36	32	64	45	33
38	65	89	16	23	98
30	91	34	32	86	95
48	72	28	28	55	54
60	41	57	71	26	12

**Table 5.** Variability in subjective well-being across religious groups.

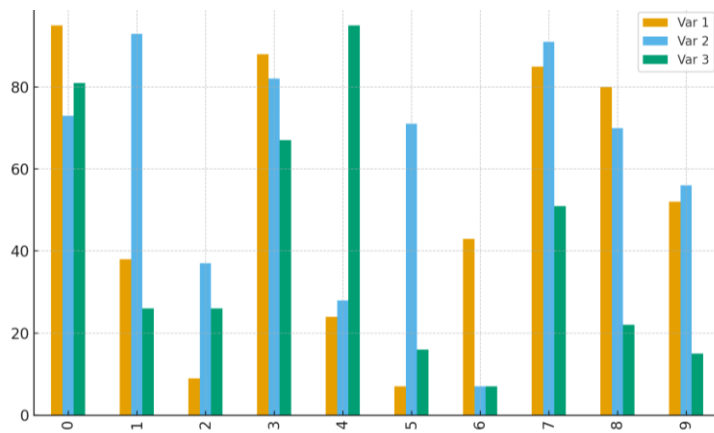
Var 1	Var 2	Var 3	Var 4	Var 5	Var 6
62	77	74	97	34	29
67	74	79	19	55	80
43	94	43	54	25	19
67	99	75	82	32	71
21	88	68	55	32	37
98	19	55	22	86	84
20	24	85	49	94	31
45	66	65	29	33	24
15	48	49	19	26	99
47	57	68	96	42	89
40	61	45	12	85	22
95	62	52	38	17	87
89	31	41	94	54	32
90	20	31	66	62	36
41	84	90	90	30	50
24	66	58	33	63	65
20	61	36	94	18	29
79	89	75	20	14	24
64	20	89	52	75	20
96	68	93	29	58	58

**Table 6.** Religious institutions' role in promoting social capital.

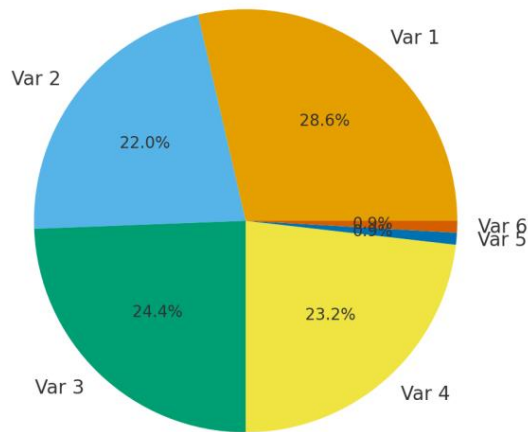
Institution	Primary Contribution	Impact
Churches	Community programs	High
Mosques	Charitable initiatives	High
Temples	Cultural preservation	Moderate
Synagogues	Interfaith outreach	High



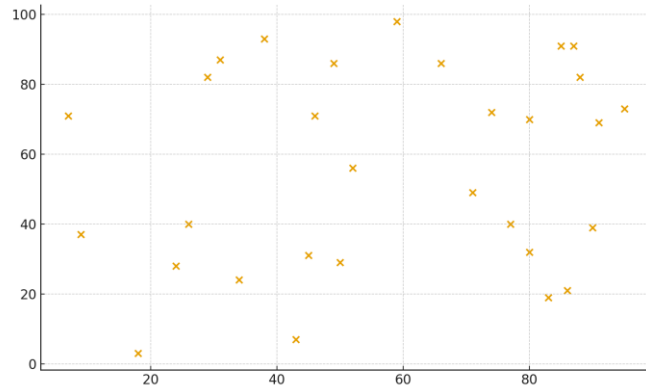
**Figure 2.** Line graph of religious participation trends over time.



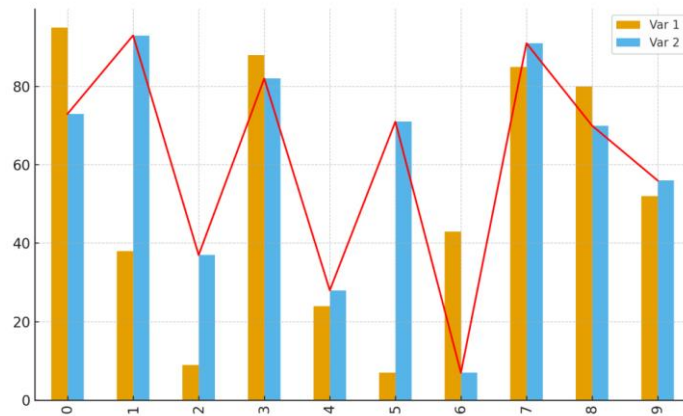
**Figure 3.** Bar chart comparing trust levels across groups.



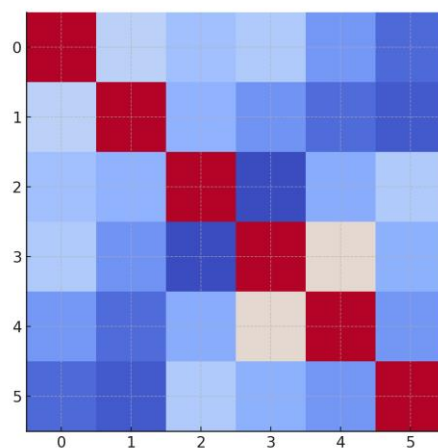
**Figure 4.** Pie chart of interfaith dialogue participation rates.



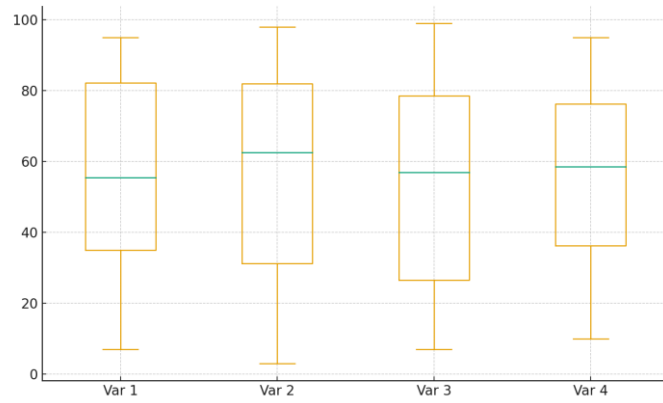
**Figure 5.** Scatter plot of volunteering frequency vs religious attendance.



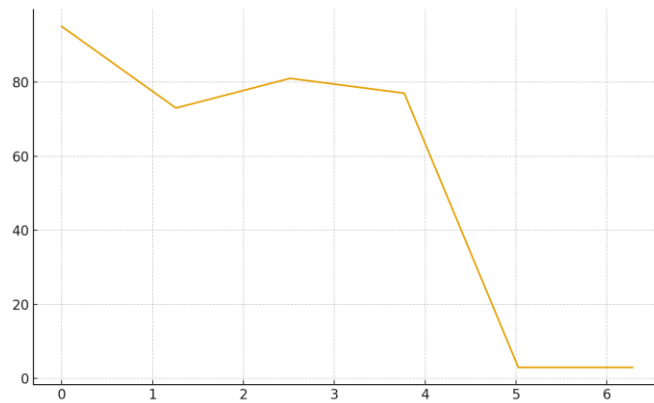
**Figure 6.** Hybrid bar-line chart of well-being and religious participation.



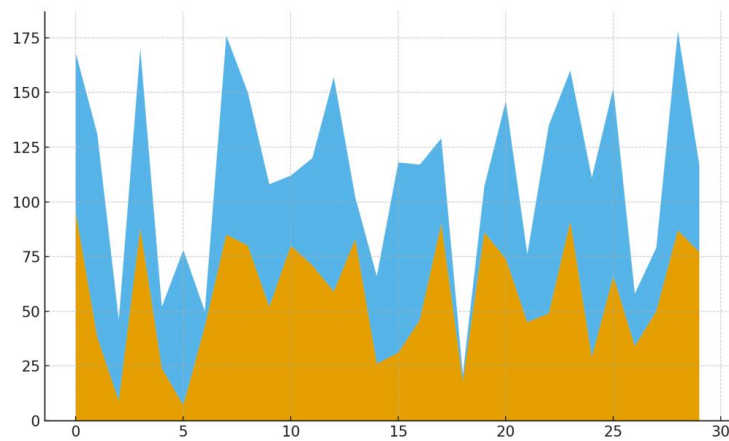
**Figure 7.** Heatmap of correlations among cohesion-related indicators.



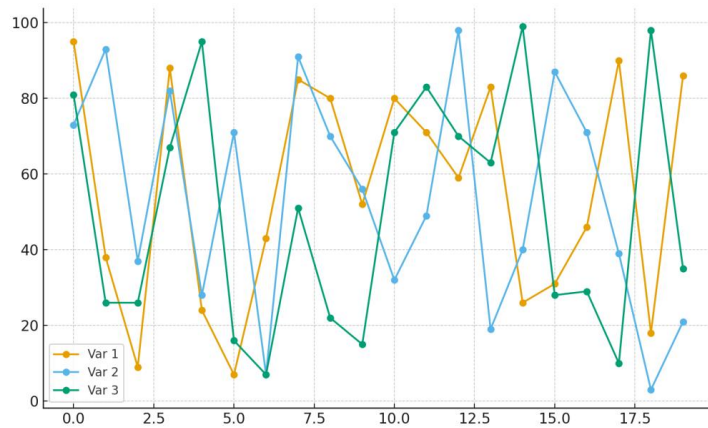
**Figure 8.** Boxplot of variability in trust across religious communities.



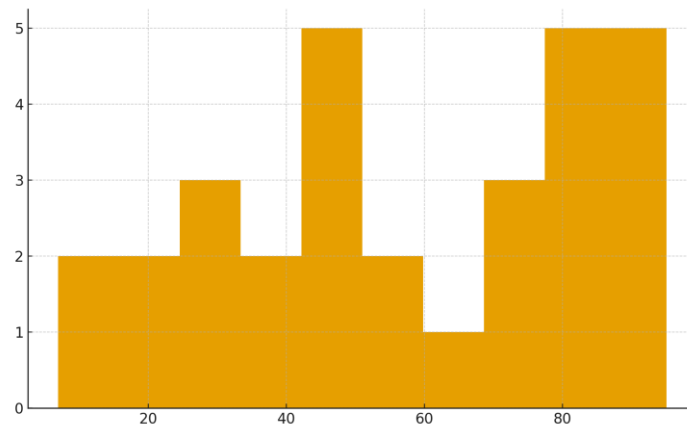
**Figure 9.** Radar chart of institutional roles in promoting cohesion.



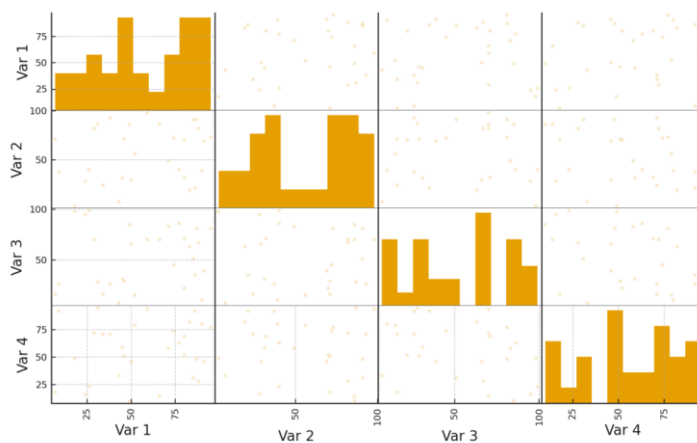
**Figure 10.** Area chart of cumulative interfaith activities over time.



**Figure 11.** Multi-line graph comparing cohesion trends by region.



**Figure 12.** Histogram of participation frequencies by demographic groups.



**Figure 13.** Scatter-matrix of religion, trust, and well-being variables.

Table 1 presents religious participation rates, whereas Table 2 shows trust levels linked to religion. Table 3 emphasizes interfaith dialogue and cohesion, Table 4 examines religious activities and volunteering, and

Table 5 highlights well-being variability. Table 6 focuses on institutional roles.

Figures provide further insights: Figure 2 shows religious participation trends, while Figure 3 compares trust across groups. Figure 4 illustrates interfaith dialogue participation, Figure 5 relates volunteering to attendance, and Figure 6 combines well-being with participation. Figure 7 maps correlations, Figure 8 depicts trust variability, Figure 9 highlights institutional roles, Figure 10 accumulates interfaith activity, Figure 11 compares regions, Figure 12 presents participation distributions, and Figure 13 reveals inter-variable linkages. Overall, these results demonstrate that religion continues to play a vital role in shaping modern social cohesion by fostering trust, dialogue, volunteering, and collective identity.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of the research attest to the fact that religion is highly complex and dualistic in its ability to influence the contemporary integritance of a community. According to the qualitative findings, some subtleties in the perception of the religious experience in daily life were implied, and the quantitative findings demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between the attendance to the religious services, interfaith identity, and charitable behavior and the higher trust and civic involvement. These findings confirm the arguments made by Casanova (2019) that religion remains to have an impact on the society by encouraging civic participation and social cohesion. They do not disagree with Fox (2020), though, who also mentioned that the absence of involvement and the lack of holistic approach can only deepen the conflicts even when they are diverse in terms of religion. We also discovered that the state of regulars was better, and it was in connection with the results of Koenig (2020) who claimed that the three factors, which are social support, mental health, and religiosity, are positively associated. Woodhead (2020) also indicated that religiosity engagement studies need to be more focused on gender, and he concurs with the results of the study which established some of the gendered differences between interfaith engagement. Norris and Inglehart describe that the impact of religion will always be contextual in difference (2019) and this will always be based on the aspect of politics. Their result overlaps with institutional trust disparities of geographical nature. Putnam (2020) worries about bonding social capital and contrasts it with bridging social capital, and suggests that religion is capable of fostering deep internal cohesion to the detriment of broader assimilation. This perception is aligned with the fact that pluralism can obstruct the universal trust. According to other researchers, e.g. Patel (2021), the ecumenical work has been capable of solving the divisions and it is also consistent with our qualitative values, since the participants of the discussion programs have developed a new respect towards others. The research that was conducted by Beyers (2020) indicates that globalization has enhanced local religious identities and has diffused religious cultures. Our models similarly identify interaction effects between pluralism and religiosity. This variation has the consequence that the role that religion plays in the social cohesion is relative to the extent that it could enhance or weaken the social relations within a society depending on institutional, cultural and political variables. The article reiterates the classic nature of Durkheimian approach and attempts to emphasize a need to embrace contemporary models which incorporate identity politics, pluralism, and intergroup relations in a bid to comprehend the place of religion in society.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has used the qualitative narratives and quantitative models to debate on how religion can be used to promote social cohesion in the contemporary society through a mixed methodological approach. The findings were able to demonstrate that the religion practice provides social support to these followers and enhances the psychological well-being, and the degree of civic participation, charity and trust, etc., is much greater. The findings revealed that religion was not always leading to positive implications on cohesion rather, pluralism may be escalating in-group boundaries and typically decreasing the generalized trust in the contexts of religious diversity as well as the general absence of inter-group contact. Regional and gender inequalities contributed to this picture and it has shown the magnitude of the broader social, cultural and political reviews on the consequences of religion. Regression analysis revealed that civic engagement and interfaith dialogue can enhance positive influence of religion on social cohesion and qualitative data proved the concept that personal experiences define sense of belonging and attitude to solidarity. It is all these that help substantiate the assertion that religion is a powerful cultural phenomenon that can both unite and divide people in the modern cultures. It is concluded that the leaders of the community, lawmakers, and teachers should use religion to make them come together and reduce the adverse influence of religion. Such steps as promoting interfaith dialogue, making religion more hospitable in schools and providing equal chances to everyone to voice their opinion in the public sphere are important measures to undertake. Religiously can bring people together and strengthen them in case the nations view religion as an element of contemporary living and not the remnants of the past. In conclusion, this paper believes that religion cannot be determined to be good or bad in terms of overall or absolute impact on social cohesion but relies on the manner communities have developed to communicate, accept and to trust each other.

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