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Title: Religion in Practice: Regional and Demographic Variation in Turkish Religiosity

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## Abstract

The research investigates religious behavior patterns in Turkey by studying worship attendance and prayer frequency among various demographic and regional groups. The research uses Wave 7 data from the World Values Survey to examine how age, gender, education, income and regional location affect religious expression in public and private domains. The research indicates that religious practice is positively influenced by age but gender influences public worship attendance without affecting private prayer behavior. Educational attainment has a small but significant negative effect on both dimensions of religiosity, while income shows no meaningful relationship. The Aegean region stands out as the least religious area while Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean region show the highest prayer frequency. The research findings show that religiosity exists as a multifaceted behavior which stems from individual aspects and institutional aspects. The research demonstrates how cultural expectations and institutional norms and regional histories combine to shape religious life in Turkey which maintains secular state institutions alongside broad religious practices. The research provides a sociological analysis of religion in everyday Turkish life by studying behavior instead of belief which helps advance discussions about secularization and modernization and religious diversification.

**Keywords:** Religiosity, Sociology of Religion, Turkey, World Values Survey



## Introduction

Religion continues to influence people's daily lives despite the decline of its influence following the enlightenment period and the scientific revolution. The religious beliefs of people continue to influence their daily activities including their voting decisions and dietary choices. The Turkish population exceeds 90% in religious affiliation according to census data. Religious affiliation by itself does not provide sufficient understanding of religious diversity or religious engagement depth. The examination of worship attendance and personal prayer behaviors helps researchers understand the religiosity levels of people to study religious influence on daily life. The research investigates the differences in religious experiences between Turkish demographic groups based on their regional location and age and gender and educational background and financial status. The study provides sociological insights about religious practice in addition to religious belief through its analysis of these factors.

Much of the existing research on religion in Turkey has focused on political identity, secularism, or belief systems, often drawing sharp contrasts between Islamism and secular modernity. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the ideological dimensions of religiosity, they often overlook the day-to-day practices through which religious life is expressed. Research on religious behavior in Turkey tends to emphasize the urban–rural divide or treat the country as culturally monolithic. However, religiosity is not experienced equally across social or geographic lines. Scholars like Yeşim Arat and Şevket Pamuk have highlighted how internal migration and urbanization have reshaped the social fabric of Turkey, but their focus lies more on demographic transformation than on religion itself. This study builds on that foundation by examining how religion is practiced — not just believed — across demographic divides such as age, gender, education, income, and region.

This paper investigates how religious practice varies across Turkey's social and geographic landscape using nationally representative data from the World Values Survey (Wave 7, Turkey). Rather than focusing on belief or affiliation, it centers on two key behavioral indicators of religiosity: worship attendance and frequency of prayer. These practices offer insight into how religion is performed in daily life and how it reflects broader patterns of social structure. The study examines how these behaviors vary across age, region, gender, education, and income — variables often analyzed separately but rarely brought together in a single framework. Through multivariate regression analysis, the research tests three hypotheses: (1) older



individuals exhibit higher levels of religious practice; (2) religiosity varies significantly between regions; and (3) the effects of age and region remain significant even when controlling for gender, education, and income. By centering the analysis on what people do, rather than what they claim to believe, the study provides a behavioral and demographic perspective on the lived experience of religion in contemporary Turkey — a society often described as religiously homogeneous but socially diverse.



## Literature Review

Religiosity refers to the level of religious belief and practice in a person's life. Scholars usually divide it into two main components: belief and behavior. Religious belief includes a person's faith in God, acceptance of sacred texts, or identification with a religious tradition. Religious behavior refers to visible practices such as attending services, praying, fasting, or observing religious holidays. While belief reflects internal convictions, behavior shows how those convictions are performed in daily life. Stark and Glock (1968) were among the first to argue that religiosity is multidimensional, and should not be reduced to just one aspect. Later research has emphasized that belief and behavior do not always align — for example, someone may identify as religious but rarely participate in religious activities. In Muslim-majority societies like Turkey, where religion is deeply embedded in cultural identity, people may report belief even if they do not practice it regularly. For this reason, measuring behavior gives a more grounded understanding of religiosity in everyday life. Worship attendance and prayer frequency are two of the most widely used indicators for behavioral religiosity in survey-based research (Cornwall et al., 1986). These practices provide insight into how religion functions not only as a private matter, but also as a social action that reflects norms, routines, and expectations. This study focuses on behavioral religiosity to better understand how people in Turkey engage with religion beyond affiliation or belief.

Age is one of the most studied variables in relation to religiosity. Many large-scale studies consistently show that older individuals tend to be more religious than younger ones in both belief and behavior. This pattern is often explained through secularization theory, which claims that modernization weakens the influence of religion over time, especially among younger generations (Bruce, 2002). Inglehart and Norris (2004), in their theory of existential security, argue that people raised during more insecure times are more likely to rely on religion for stability and meaning. As societies become more stable and economically developed, younger cohorts are socialized in secular environments, which reduces their attachment to religious institutions. This pattern, known as generational replacement, suggests that declining religiosity is not just due to aging, but due to younger generations being less religious overall. However, some scholars have argued that the decline in religiosity among younger people may be overstated, and that religion is changing form rather than disappearing (Roof, 1999). While much of this research is based on Western societies, there is limited evidence on whether these findings apply in countries like Turkey, where the population is largely religious but the state remains officially secular. This study tests whether the age effect



on religiosity is still visible in the Turkish context and whether it holds when other demographic variables are considered.

Religiosity is not only shaped by individual traits but also by geography. Many studies focus on the differences between urban and rural populations when explaining variation in religious behavior. These studies often argue that urban areas tend to promote more secular lifestyles, while rural areas preserve traditional forms of religious expression due to tighter social networks and slower cultural change (Tschannen, 1991; Greeley, 1989). In Turkey, this rural–urban distinction has often been used to explain political and cultural divisions. However, focusing solely on the rural–urban divide overlooks important regional differences. Regions vary in their historical ties to religious institutions, ethnic composition, levels of industrialization, and exposure to migration. For example, religious practices in Southeastern Anatolia, where conservative tribal structures and ethnic minorities are more common, differ from those in the Marmara region, which is economically developed and highly urbanized. Despite these differences, many studies treat Turkey as a culturally homogeneous religious space, often overlooking these spatial nuances. Public surveys, including those conducted by KONDA and the Turkish Statistical Institute, rarely present region-specific data on religious practice. Yeşim Arat and Şevket Pamuk (2023) discuss how internal migration and urbanization have reshaped Turkey’s demographic structure, but they do not focus directly on religious behaviour. This study addresses that gap by comparing macroregions and testing whether religiosity differs significantly between them even when controlling for other demographic factors.

Global research demonstrates that gender serves as a reliable factor which determines religiosity levels. The research findings consistently demonstrate that women demonstrate stronger religious beliefs and practices than men do. Several explanations exist to explain the observed gender difference. According to Miller & Stark (2002), socialization theory states women develop expressive and emotionally connected traits together with moral responsibility which matches religious values. The traditional gender roles of society place women in domestic duties and caregiving tasks which match religious expectations yet men are steered toward competitive secular activities. The gender difference in religious practice exists throughout both public and private religious activities in Muslim-majority nations including Turkey. According to research conducted by Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2009), Turkish women pray more frequently and believe in religious leadership more strongly than Turkish men do. Findings from the KONDA Barometer (2019) also support this pattern, showing that women report higher religious sensitivity and more regular prayer behavior than men across all age groups. Researchers propose that religious norms



which limit women's public religious activities force them to express their religiosity through private practices. The complex nature of gender differences in religious behavior indicates that researchers should not consider these differences as permanent or absolute across all populations. The research includes gender as a control factor to determine if the differences in prayer practice and worship attendance remain significant after considering regional and age variables.

Religiosity depends on two major factors which are education level and income level. The majority of research indicates that people who achieve higher education levels tend to practice religion at lower intensities. The development of critical thinking and scientific reasoning and individual autonomy through education stands as a conflict with traditional religious teachings (Berger, 1967). Education's effect on religiosity demonstrates variability between different populations. Education in Muslim-majority societies leads to personal religious exploration instead of diminishing religious beliefs (Haddad & Smith, 2002). Turkish state secularism through formal education creates a connection between students and secular practices which results in reduced religious participation. Studies like Öztürk and Topal (2015) have shown that university-educated individuals in Turkey are significantly less likely to engage in collective religious practices, such as attending mosque services, compared to individuals with lower levels of education. The relationship between income and religiosity demonstrates multiple intricate patterns. According to the existential security thesis, people with lower incomes turn to religion for psychological and social support especially when faced with instability (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The cultural marker and identity resource functions of religion exist as a distinctive pattern among higher-income communities in conservative areas. Data from the Türkiye Sosyal-Siyasal Eğilimler Araştırması (TÜSES, 2020) indicates that lower-income groups report higher prayer frequency and stronger reliance on religious values in daily decision-making. Education and income interact with class and modernization factors and regional differences; thus, this study uses them as controls to verify whether age and regional religiosity patterns continue to exist after considering these socioeconomic variables.

Most research on religiosity either focuses on belief or studies behavior in isolation from structural and geographic factors. While age, gender, education, and income are frequently analyzed in separate models, few studies examine how these factors interact within a single framework. In the case of Turkey, where religion is both a cultural norm and a political issue, religiosity is often treated as a stable national characteristic rather than a behavior that varies across social groups. There is a lack of research that connects demographic factors with regional variation in religious behavior using nationally representative data.



Existing studies rarely combine behavioral measures like prayer and attendance with controls for region, education, and income in the same model. While Yeşim Arat and Şevket Pamuk (2023) explore the demographic shifts brought about by internal migration and urbanization, they do not examine religious behavior directly. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how religious practices such as worship attendance and prayer frequency differ across regional and demographic lines. By combining variables that are often studied separately, the research contributes to a more complete understanding of religiosity in modern Turkey and challenges the idea that religious behavior is culturally uniform across the country.



## Data, Operationalization and Method

This research relies on the data collected through Wave 7 of the World Values Survey that occurred from 2017 to 2020. The World Values Survey (WVS) conducts extensive international research that gathers data about human values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns across various domains including political matters and religious beliefs. The Turkey dataset of this project contains 2,415 responses from the population. A stratified multistage random sampling method was used to conduct face-to-face interviews, which made the survey representative of the entire nation. Researchers gathered data through interviews that obtained responses from participants across all age ranges, economic levels, educational backgrounds, and residential areas. The WVS delivers reliable, extensive data that enables researchers to study religious practices throughout Turkey. The survey's combination of belief- and behavior-based questions allows for a distinction between genuine religious practice and mere identification or private belief. The analysis only uses behavioral indicators of religiosity because this approach focuses on religious practices in daily life rather than belief or cultural affiliation. A nationally representative sample with adequate demographic distribution makes this survey suitable for testing age and religious practice relationships. The data enables researchers to examine Turkish society by analyzing worship attendance and prayer frequency at a single point in time.

The research examines two behavioral religiosity indicators through the assessment of worship attendance and prayer frequency. The study uses data points from Q171 and Q172 in World Values Survey Wave 7 to analyze these variables. The survey uses Q171 to measure worship attendance by asking participants about their service attendance outside of weddings and funerals. Q172 assesses prayer frequency among respondents outside of formal religious rituals. Both questions use ordinal response scales. In their original coding, lower values represent higher religiosity. The response scale for Q171 ranges from 1 for “More than once a week” to 7 for “Never,” while Q172 uses an eight-point scale from 1 for “Several times a day” to 8 for “Never.” These variables were reverse-coded before analysis to align with the assumption that higher values reflect greater religiosity. In the reversed versions, the most religious responses receive values of 7 or 8, while the least religious responses receive a value of 1. This transformation improves the interpretability of the regression output, as positive coefficients correspond with stronger religious practice. These two dependent variables are analyzed separately because they capture different types of religious behavior. Worship attendance reflects public, collective religious activity, while prayer frequency represents private,



individual religious expression. The study evaluates religious behavior across the Turkish population using both survey questions.

This research uses two main independent factors: age and regional location. The World Values Survey contains Q262 to measure age through continuous numeric values. The research uses Q262 in its unmodified form to detect age-related changes in religiosity across the full age range. This allows researchers to determine whether older people report higher levels of religious practice than younger people. The variable N\_REGION\_WVS identifies participants' home region based on Turkey's NUTS-2 classification system. The dataset contains 26 region codes, which were transformed into seven macroregions: Marmara, Aegean, Central Anatolia, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Eastern Anatolia, and Southeastern Anatolia. These regions were recoded into dummy variables, with Marmara selected as the reference category due to its strategic economic and political importance. This setup allows the model to estimate whether each macroregion is associated with higher or lower religiosity relative to Marmara. The study examines how behavioral religiosity in Turkey is shaped by both age and regional cultural context. The use of a continuous age variable and categorical regional dummies enables the analysis of religious behavior across both temporal and spatial dimensions.

The study incorporates three control variables alongside age and region: gender, education level, and income level. The gender variable Q260 uses 1 to indicate male respondents and 2 for female respondents. The variable was recoded into a dummy variable named *dfemale*, where 1 represents female and 0 represents male. The education variable Q275A includes detailed Turkish education system categories, which were simplified into four ordinal levels. The lowest level includes individuals with no education or only primary education. The second level includes middle school graduates, the third level includes high school graduates, and the highest level includes university graduates. The new education variable is named *educ4*. The income level variable Q288 allows respondents to place themselves on a 1–10 ladder, where 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest. This variable is treated as a continuous measure. These control variables were chosen based on previous findings that link them to variation in religiosity. Gender is included to test whether women report higher religious involvement, as suggested by both global and Turkish studies. Education is included because higher educational attainment is often associated with lower religious participation. Income is included to assess how economic security influences religious behavior as a source of emotional and social support. These controls allow the model to test whether age and region remain significant predictors of religiosity after accounting for basic demographic differences.



The researchers inspected the data for consistency before cleaning it to enhance the accuracy of the statistical models. All cases with missing or incomplete responses on the main variables were excluded. Observations coded with system-missing values or flagged with responses such as “don’t know” or “refused to answer” were removed. Variables were renamed and recoded to simplify interpretation and ensure consistency across the dataset. These transformations were carried out prior to analysis, producing a cleaned dataset with uniform coding across dependent, independent, and control variables. This process ensured a consistent and fully usable dataset for the final analysis.

Two separate regression models were estimated to assess how the independent variables influence worship attendance and prayer frequency. A multivariate regression approach was used to isolate the contribution of each predictor while controlling for other variables. Standardized beta coefficients were calculated alongside unstandardized coefficients to compare the relative influence of variables that operate on different scales. Robust standard errors were used to increase the reliability of statistical estimates. The analysis was structured to directly test the three main hypotheses by examining whether age and regional location predict religious practice while adjusting for gender, education, and income.



## Descriptive Statistics

The distribution of worship attendance responses shows that Turkish respondents exhibit various levels of religious participation in public services. The measured variable has a mean of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 1.85, covering all attendance frequencies from 1 to 7. Most participants fall into the “only on special holy days” category, as 4 represents the median response. The survey reveals that 27.8% of participants attend religious services weekly (level 6), and 9% attend more than once a week (level 7). At the other end, 13.7% of respondents never attend religious services, while others attend irregularly. These results suggest that weekly service attendance is practiced by a large segment of the population, but most people tend to participate only on special occasions. The left-skewed distribution shows a slight tendency toward higher engagement, but a wide range of participation levels exists across the sample.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Worship Attendance (Q171_rev)	2219	4.287517	1.851883	1	7
Prayer Frequency (Q172_rev)	2302	6.374891	1.925093	1	8
Age	2414	38.831810	12.674110	18	95
Macroregion	2415	3.167702	2.063118	1	7
Education (educ4)	2406	2.475478	0.908279	1	4
Female (dfemale)	2415	0.500207	0.500104	0	1
Income	2329	5.343495	1.721504	1	10

**Table 1** summarizes the central tendencies and distributional characteristics of the variables used in this study.



The religiosity scale for prayer frequency shows even stronger concentration at the high end of the spectrum. Most respondents reported praying frequently, with a mean score of 6.37, a standard deviation of 1.93, and a median value of 7. The distribution reveals stronger left-skew than worship attendance, as 43.1% of participants chose the highest level (8 = “several times a day”). In addition, 13% reported praying once a day, while 18.4% said they pray several times each week. Only 4.5% of participants said they never pray. These findings demonstrate that private religious practices are more frequent and consistent than communal worship. Prayer, as a flexible and personal behavior, appears to be more integrated into daily routines and thus more widespread than public religious service attendance.

The dataset contains age information that spans from young adulthood to old age, allowing for detailed insight across different life stages. Respondent ages range from 18 to 90, with a mean of 42.5 and a standard deviation of 16.1. This wide and fairly balanced distribution ensures strong demographic representation across generations and supports the use of age as a continuous variable in regression analysis. No unusual skewness toward younger or older respondents is observed, which increases the reliability of age-based comparisons. Since both global and Turkish studies have consistently shown associations between age and religiosity, this variable remains essential for studying life-course differences in religious behavior, especially in relation to both private and public dimensions of faith.

The gender distribution of the sample is nearly equal, with 50.02% female and 49.98% male respondents. This balanced distribution eliminates concerns about gender bias in the sample and enables valid comparisons in gender-based analysis. Gender is included in the regression as a binary variable (*dfemale*), coded as 1 for women and 0 for men. Prior research often suggests that women report higher levels of religiosity, particularly in private practices such as prayer. However, public religious expression among women may be shaped by cultural or institutional restrictions that reduce their visibility in communal worship spaces. The balanced gender structure of this dataset provides a solid foundation for analyzing whether these patterns persist within the Turkish context and how they interact with other variables such as education, region, and income.

Educational attainment in the sample is captured through a four-level ordinal variable (*educ4*) that reflects key milestones in the Turkish education system. The lowest level includes those with no education or only primary schooling, followed by respondents who completed middle school, high school, and university,



respectively. While the distribution is relatively even, a considerable share of the sample falls into the lower or middle categories, with fewer respondents having completed university-level education. This pattern is consistent with national education statistics and illustrates how access to education continues to vary across different social groups. Education is included in the regression model as a control variable due to its well-established relationship with religiosity. In particular, higher educational attainment has often been linked with lower levels of religious participation in institutional contexts, such as worship attendance, although the association with private practices like prayer may be more complex.

Income is measured through a self-placement scale ranging from 1 to 10, where respondents rate their perceived income position. The mean income value falls just below the midpoint of the scale, indicating that the sample leans slightly toward lower and middle-income brackets. As with education, income is included in the analysis to control for the socioeconomic context of religious practice. The relationship between income and religiosity is not necessarily linear; for some individuals, economic insecurity may increase reliance on religious structures for social or psychological support, while for others, religious practice may serve as a cultural or symbolic identity marker regardless of income level. Including income in the regression helps to isolate the effects of regional and demographic variables by adjusting for baseline differences in financial well-being.

The regional variable is derived from Turkey's NUTS-2 classification and has been recoded into seven broader macroregions: Marmara, Aegean, Central Anatolia, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Eastern Anatolia, and Southeastern Anatolia. Each macroregion contains multiple provinces and reflects not only geographical but also social and economic diversity. Marmara, which includes Istanbul and other major urban centers, was selected as the reference category in regression models due to its centrality and development level. The dataset provides adequate representation across all seven regions, allowing for meaningful comparisons. Including regional location as a categorical predictor enables the analysis to move beyond individual-level factors and account for broader structural and cultural contexts that shape religious life in Turkey. Regional variation is particularly relevant in the Turkish setting, where conservatism, urbanization levels, and ethnic composition can differ sharply across regions. These contextual elements play a key role in shaping both public and private religious behavior. The next section presents multivariate regression results that evaluate how these demographic and regional variables influence worship attendance and prayer frequency.



## Results

**Table 2 Regression Results for Worship Attendance(Q171)**

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	P-value	Beta
Aegean	-0.6333	0.1093	0.000	-0.1225
Central Anatolia	0.2532	0.1017	0.013	0.0496
Mediterranean	-0.7188	0.1260	0.000	-0.1220
Black Sea	-0.1506	0.1238	0.224	-0.0249
Eastern Anatolia	-0.6762	0.2263	0.003	-0.0727
Southeastern Anatolia	-0.0125	0.1221	0.918	-0.0021
Age	0.0117	0.0029	0.000	0.0806
Female (dfemale = 1)	-1.6035	0.0705	0.000	-0.4348
Education (educ4)	-0.0866	0.0424	0.041	-0.0423
Income	-0.0096	0.0216	0.656	-0.0090
Constant	5.0535	0.2176	0.000	—

The regression analysis shows that individual characteristics together with geographic location play an essential role in defining how people behave publicly with respect to religion in Turkey. According to the findings age proves to be a positive variable that results in a statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.001$ ) with an increase of 0.081 points for each year of age. This finding verifies the first hypothesis that religious practices become more prevalent with growing age. Being female produces the largest impact on all variables because it results in a significant reduction of worship attendance by 0.435 ( $p < 0.001$ ). The observed findings match expectations for Turkish Islamic traditions because Friday

prayers function as a mandatory obligation for men yet remain optional for women. The results show that higher education levels create a small negative effect on communal worship participation ( $\beta = -0.042$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ). The statistical data fails to demonstrate any meaningful connection between income and religious attendance ( $\beta = -0.009$ ,  $p = 0.656$ ).

Several macroregions in Turkey display notable variations from the Marmara region in their data. The Aegean and Mediterranean regions have lower attendance rates ( $\beta = -0.123$  and  $-0.122$ , respectively;  $p < 0.001$ ) yet Central Anatolia presents a small positive effect ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ). The region of Eastern Anatolia exhibits negative correlations ( $\beta = -0.073$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) whereas the Black Sea and Southeastern Anatolia regions show no statistical significance. The findings validate Hypothesis 2 about regional



differences in religiosity and validate Hypothesis 3 because age and regional factors remain significant predictors of worship attendance after controlling for gender, education, and income. The model demonstrates a moderate ability to explain worship attendance by explaining 22.5% of the total variance ( $R^2 = 0.2249$ ).

**Table 3 Regression Results for Prayer Frequency (Q172)**

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	P-value	Beta
<b>Aegean</b>	<b>-0.5191</b>	<b>0.1273</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>-0.0966</b>
<b>Central Anatolia</b>	<b>0.8412</b>	<b>0.1033</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.1588</b>
<b>Mediterranean</b>	<b>0.6615</b>	<b>0.1294</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.1099</b>
<b>Black Sea</b>	<b>0.0370</b>	<b>0.1329</b>	<b>0.780</b>	<b>0.0058</b>
<b>Eastern Anatolia</b>	<b>-0.0359</b>	<b>0.2802</b>	<b>0.898</b>	<b>-0.0036</b>
<b>Southeastern Anatolia</b>	<b>0.1681</b>	<b>0.1537</b>	<b>0.274</b>	<b>0.0280</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>0.0149</b>	<b>0.0033</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.0981</b>
<b>Female (dfemale = 1)</b>	<b>0.0668</b>	<b>0.0795</b>	<b>0.401</b>	<b>0.0174</b>
<b>Education (educ4)</b>	<b>-0.1231</b>	<b>0.0503</b>	<b>0.014</b>	<b>-0.0581</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>0.0016</b>	<b>0.0242</b>	<b>0.947</b>	<b>0.0014</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>5.9024</b>	<b>0.2476</b>	<b>0.000</b>	—

The model for prayer frequency shows distinct patterns from worship attendance models especially regarding the effect of region and gender. Religiosity increases with age ( $\beta = 0.098$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) according to the results thus validating Hypothesis 1 again. The findings show that older people tend to pray more often than younger individuals and the strength of this effect is greater than in the worship attendance model. The analysis reveals that higher educational attainment leads to fewer prayers ( $\beta = -0.058$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) although the effect remains small. The results show no statistical significance for gender in prayer frequency ( $\beta = 0.017$ ,  $p = 0.401$ ) which indicates no discernible difference between men and

women in their self-reported prayer activities after adjusting for other variables. The results fail to show any significant effect of income on the dependent variable ( $p = 0.947$ ).

The regional effects present a contrasting landscape. The results show that Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean region have significantly higher prayer frequencies than Marmara ( $p < 0.001$  for both regions). The results from the Aegean region show a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -0.097$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) that matches its lower ratings in the worship attendance model. Prayer behavior does not differ from Marmara in



the Black Sea and Southeastern Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia regions. This model achieves lower explained variance at 0.067, suggesting that while meaningful predictors exist, prayer behavior remains influenced by unobserved and more individual-level factors. The findings support Hypotheses 2 and 3 to some extent while revealing different patterns between public and private religious practices.

The comparison between these two models exposes vital differences between factors which determine public versus private religious conduct in Turkey. The results confirm that age functions as a positive factor which increases religiosity in both attendance at worship services and the frequency of prayer. Women exhibit lower participation in religious services than men but their reported prayer practices are equivalent to those of men. The social and cultural barriers that affect women's ability to participate in religious activities seem to influence their religiosity more than their private prayer habits. Education creates negative effects on both public and private religiosity but shows a slightly greater impact on prayer frequency. The effects of region on religiosity differ across the two distinct dimensions. The Aegean region maintains its position as the lowest in religiosity across both models yet Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean area show higher prayer frequency but not uniform higher attendance. The distinct influences on public and private religiosity require separate theoretical frameworks to understand these differentiating patterns. The prayer model exhibits reduced explanatory power at  $R^2 = 0.067$  which suggests private religious practice exists on a more individual level with less social structure.



## Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for understanding religiosity in Turkey, particularly in relation to demographic and regional variation. One of the most consistent patterns in the literature is the positive relationship between age and religious behavior. This study confirms that older individuals in Turkey are significantly more likely to engage in both public (worship attendance) and private (prayer) religious practices. This supports the hypothesis that religiosity increases with age and is in line with global findings from secularization theory and existential security models. However, the Turkish case also invites a more nuanced interpretation. The persistence of religious practices among older individuals does not automatically translate into a future trajectory, as younger cohorts may not follow the same path. Thus, rather than viewing aging as a universal trajectory toward increased religiosity, the findings encourage further research into how religiosity evolves within generational cohorts in Turkey's unique socio-political context.

The regional patterns uncovered in the analysis suggest that religiosity in Turkey is far from homogeneous. Contrary to the image of Turkey as a monolithically religious society, the results show significant geographic variation. The Aegean region, long associated with secular political preferences and economic development, consistently exhibits lower levels of both worship attendance and prayer frequency. By contrast, regions such as Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean demonstrate higher levels of religious engagement, particularly in private prayer. These differences reflect the enduring cultural, historical, and socioeconomic distinctions between Turkish regions, pointing to the importance of spatial analysis in the sociology of religion. These findings challenge the binary framework that often pits Istanbul-style secularism against Anatolian religiosity by showing that the spatial distribution of religious practice is more complex and multidimensional.

Gender differences in religious behavior also emerged as significant, but in different ways across the two models. While women were significantly less likely to attend public religious services, they did not differ significantly from men in their frequency of private prayer. This suggests that gendered norms and institutional constraints continue to shape public religious life, limiting women's participation in collective rituals even while private forms of religious expression remain widespread. In this sense, the findings echo those of Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2009) and others who argue that religious expression among women



often takes more individualized and private forms. This distinction between private and public religiosity underscores the importance of disaggregating religious practices when studying gendered religious behavior.

Education appears as a small but consistent negative predictor of religious practice in both models, particularly with respect to private prayer. This aligns with the broader literature linking educational attainment with lower levels of traditional religious adherence, though the effect size remains modest in the Turkish context. Importantly, this does not suggest that education leads to secularism in a straightforward manner. Rather, it points to a complex interaction between educational exposure, critical thinking, and cultural norms. The weak relationship between income and religiosity in both models also speaks to the limitations of purely economic explanations for religious behavior. While theories such as Inglehart and Norris's existential security model suggest that economic insecurity should increase religiosity, the Turkish data does not provide strong support for this claim, at least in terms of self-reported prayer and attendance. This may be due to the country's uneven development and the persistence of strong cultural traditions across class lines.

Finally, the explanatory power of the two models differs significantly, with the model for worship attendance explaining a much larger portion of variance than the model for prayer frequency. This highlights the individual and less structurally determined nature of private religious behavior. While public religiosity is shaped by a more visible and institutional set of forces — including gender roles, regional cultures, and political ideologies — private prayer appears to reflect more intimate and personal dimensions of faith. This distinction calls for further theoretical refinement in the study of religiosity: public and private religious practices may be governed by different logics and may respond differently to changes in education, mobility, or modernization.

In conclusion, this study confirms several widely recognized findings in the sociology of religion — including the importance of age and regional variation — while also drawing attention to the specific contours of the Turkish case. The differences between public and private religious practices, the regionally uneven distribution of religiosity, and the gendered nature of religious participation all suggest that religiosity in Turkey is both persistent and dynamic. The findings urge researchers and policymakers alike to avoid overly simplistic characterizations of Turkey as a "religious" or "secular" country, and instead to examine the layered, situated, and evolving nature of religious life in a rapidly transforming society.



## Conclusion

This study examined how religious behavior in Turkey varies across demographic and regional lines by analyzing two key behavioral indicators: worship attendance and prayer frequency. Using data from the World Values Survey (Wave 7), the analysis revealed that religiosity in Turkey is not monolithic but shaped by multiple intersecting factors including age, education, gender, and geography. Age consistently emerged as a positive predictor of both public and private religious practice, affirming that religiosity tends to increase over the life course. While women participated less in communal worship, their private prayer behaviors were comparable to those of men, highlighting the role of cultural constraints in shaping religious visibility. Education exhibited a modest but consistent secularizing effect, and income showed no significant relationship with religiosity. The most striking variations appeared across regions, with Central Anatolia and the Mediterranean showing higher levels of prayer, and the Aegean region consistently ranking lower in both public and private dimensions.

These findings underscore the importance of analyzing religiosity through both behavioral and contextual lenses. Public and private religious practices respond to different structural pressures and cultural dynamics, and conflating them risks overlooking the complexity of lived religion. By using separate behavioral indicators and controlling for key sociodemographic factors, the study advances a more nuanced understanding of religiosity in contemporary Turkey. It highlights the persistence of religious practice in an officially secular yet religiously identified society and points to emerging patterns that reflect both continuity and change. Future research could build on this framework by incorporating longitudinal data or qualitative insights to explore how personal narratives and social change interact with evolving forms of belief and practice.



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