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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE IN ROMANIA SINCE 1859 TO THE PRESENT DAY

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## Abstract

The article below represents the first statistical analysis of the evolution of religious congregations in Romania over a long lasting period. To realize this, official statistical data, obtained from the results of demographic records over 150 years of national statistics, has been used. The aim of the author is to offer specialty readers not only a general overview of the structure of the religious congregations on the Romanian territory and the respective changes occurred due to the historical environment.

This paperwork is part of the study entitled „*Representative statistical data regarding the historical past of socio-economical evolution in Romania at different stages*”, a project that takes into account valuable information registered in the National Statistics Institute’s archives. This scientific study was first printed in the Romanian Statistics Magazine No. 1/2012.

**Key words:** religious congregations, congregation statistics, demographic records, trends.

## I. The Modern Period

The history of the Romanian official statistics coincides with the history of the modern Romanian national state. The double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza on January 24, 1859, represents the beginning of the modernization of the Romanian countries by establishing some new institutions following the European model. The need to know the socio-economic realities called for the establishment of the Office for Statistics.

During the modern period, the Romanian Statistics ran three censuses, the first in 1859, the second after four decades, in 1899, and the last, before the Great Union, in 1912. One piece of information of interest obtained through the census was the religious structure of the Romanian people. As in this period the territorial structure of the country did not significantly change, the data obtained through the three censuses are comparable (see Table 1)

### Religious structure during the period 1859-1912

Table 1

Religion	Year					
	1859		1899		1912	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4424961</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5956690</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7235320</b>	<b>100%</b>
1. Orthodox	4198862	94.89	5451787	91.52	6735444	93.09
2. Mosaic	134168	3.03	266652	4.48	241088	3.33
3. Catholic	45154	1.02	149667	2.51	157938	2.18
4. Protestant	28903	0.65	22749	0.38	24727	0.34
5. Armenian	8178	0.18	5787	0.10	6985	0.10
6. Lippovan	8375	0.19	15094	0.25	21628	0.30
7. Mohammedan	1323	0.03	44732	0.75	46406	0.64
8. Other religions	-	-	222	< 0.01	1104	0.02

According to the first census, the majority of the Romanian population was of Orthodox confession, almost 95%, followed at a substantial distance by the Mosaic community, with less over 3%, the rest of the other religions totalling around 2%.

Along with the religious structure, the census of 1859 also counted the places of worship (see table 2). According to that survey results, the number of places of worship amounted to 7230 at a population of 4424961, thus resulting an average of 612 parishioners per worship place. From this perspective, the Orthodox Church was above the average (630 parishioners/church), the busiest places of worship being the Protestant ones, with an average of 2408 parishioners, while the less busiest were the synagogues, with 486 parishioners. Basically, the Hebrew community had the most places of worship per number of parishioners.

### Number of places of worship by religion and size of religious communities in 1859

Table 2

Religion	1859		
	Number of parishioners	Number of worship places	Number of parishioners / worship place
<b>Total</b>	<b>4424961</b>	<b>7230</b>	<b>612</b>
1. Orthodox	4198862	6658	630
2. Mosaic	134168	276	486
3. Catholic	45154	63	716
4. Protestant	28903	12	2408
5. Armenian	8178	11	743
6. Lippovan	8375	7	1189
7. Other religions	-	3	-

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The territorial changes produced following the war of independence in 1879 did not significantly influence the religious structure of the population of Romania. After conceding to the Russians the three counties that composed the Southern Basarabia (Cahul, Ismail and Bolgrad) and taking over of Dobrogea, with Tulcea and Constanța counties from the Ottomans, a plus of Muslim population was brought about, its percentage rising from 0.03, as it was in 1859, to 0.75% at the census of 1899.

In 1899 the Orthodox population represented the majority of the inhabitants of Romania, with a percentage of 91.52%, while all the other religions totalled 8.5%. The Orthodox community is followed by the Mosaic one with a percentage of 4.5 % (the second Hebrew community, as weight, in Europe, after that in Austria – 4.6%), than by the Catholics with 2.5%, the Mohammedans with 0.7% and the Protestants (Lutherans, Reformed, Evangelists, Calvinists) with 0.4%. Compared to the previous census, a growth of the other religions is registered, growth that was uneven from a religion to another. The highest growth was registered by the Catholic community of around 230% and by the Mosaics of 98%. The rise in number of the Catholics can be explained only as being the result of the emigration, given that their natural growth was weaker than that of the other confessional communities. The growth of the Mosaic population was the result not only of the emigration but also of their natural growth, known as a very high one. As to the Mohammedans, their growth is the result of the incorporation of Dobrogea that brought about some 41677 persons to the country. The same thing happened with the Lippovan population. The only religions that were reduced in number were the Protestants and the Armenians, even though Dobrogea brought about more significant contingents of religious minorities compared to what was lost by the retrocession of the Southern Basarabia.

In 1899, the population differed from one region to another by religion. From the point of view of historical provinces and living environment, the situation was much different from the national averages. The Orthodox contingent is mainly encountered in Oltenia (98.5%), while the opposite is Dobrogea, with an Orthodox population of 73.4%, followed by Mohammedans who represented 15.6%.

Significant differences, compared to the national average, are concentrated in the urban area (see table 3) where, at national level, the Orthodox population was of 72.54 %, followed by the Mosaics, with an average of 18.98 %, the most numerous Hebrew communities were in Moldova (55.71%), especially in the county capital cities: in Dorohoi over 53%, in Iași around 52%, in Botoșani 52%, etc.

**The percentage of the urban population, by religion, in 1899, at national level and by province**

*Table 3*

Religion	1899				
	Percentage of the urban population by religion				
	Romania	Moldova	Muntenia	Oltenia	Dobrogea
1. Orthodox	72.54	55.71	80.50	86.93	74.31
2. Mosaic	18.98	38.72	10.64	4.09	5.59
3. Catholic	5.60	4.37	6.35	7.58	2.82
4. Protestant	1.37	0.35	2.13	1.13	1.06
5. Mohammedan	0.92	0.07	0.21	0.28	12.23
6. Armenian	0.40	0.60	0.17	< 0.01	1.82
7. Lippovan	0.19	0.16	< 0.01	-	2.14
8. Other religions	0.01	0.02	< 0.01	< 0.1	< 0.01

The results of the 1912 census did not produce major surprises, the religious structure being similar to that in 1899, with the mention that the Mosaic population decreased due to emigration. It is worth mentioning that between 1912 and 1918 some changes occurred at territorial, ethnic and, of course, religious level due to the annexation of Cadrilater. The population of the new province was mostly Turkish-Tatar, respectively Muslims and Bulgarian, of Orthodox confession, aspect revealed by the 1930 census when the Muslim community had over 185 thousand souls.

## II. The Interwar Period (1918-1940)

The religious structure of the population of Romania between the two world wars was recorded by the 1930 census. During the time elapsed since the 1912 census, events that led to the change of the territorial, ethnic and confessional structure of the Romanian nation took place, the major event being the Great Union of 1918. By the union of Basarabia, Crişana, Maramureş, Bucovina, Banat and Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, the ideal of centuries of the Romanian people has come true: *The Great Romania*.

With the unification of all Romanians in a single state, the structure of the Romanian nation has changed considerably, both ethnically and religiously. If according to the 1912 census, the weight of the Romanians and of the Orthodox religion was of 93.5% and 93.1%, respectively, they were to decrease to 71.9% and 72.6%, respectively, with the 1930 census. (See table 4)

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### The religious structure in 1930

Table 4

Religion	1930	
	number	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18057028</b>	<b>100%</b>
1. Orthodox	13108227	72.59
2. Greek-Catholic	1427391	7.90
3. Roman-Catholic	1234151	6.83
4. Mosaic	756930	4.19
5. Reformed-Calvinist	710706	3.94
6. Evangelist-Lutheran	398759	2.21
7. Mohammedan	185486	1.03
8. Unitarian	69257	0.38
9. Baptist	60562	0.34
10. Lippovan	57288	0.32
11. Adventist	16102	0.09
12. Armenian-Gregorian	10005	0.06
13. Armenian-Catholic	1440	0.01
14. Other religion	7434	0.04
15. Without religion	6604	0.04
16. Undeclared	6686	0.04

The new provinces brought about to the Romanian nation a 56% Romanian population, the rest of 44% being represented by other “peoples”, the most numerous being Hungarians (14.7%), Germans (7.6%), Ukrainians (6.4%) and Hebrews (5.1%). A very important aspect of the Romanian religious structure of the new provinces is the emergence, for the first time, of the Greek Catholic religion (or united) whose believers were almost exclusively the Romanians in Transylvania and to a less extent those in Banat. This confession was declared by the Law of Religion of 1927 “national” religion together with the “dominant” orthodox one, its weight amounting to 5%. Along with the Greek-Catholic religion, the Neo-Protestant, Baptist and Adventist confessions also appear. The religious structure of the new provinces is shown in table 5.

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## The number of population of the new provinces, by religion

Table 5

Religion	Number	%
Total	9265774	100%
1. Orthodox	5054762	54.55
2. Greek-Catholic	1396694	15.07
3. Roman- Catholic	1058605	11.42
4. Reformed-Calvinist	697581	7.53
5. Mosaic	492892	5.32
6. Evangelist-Lutheran	369940	3.99
7. Unitarian	68420	0.74
8. Baptist	57835	0.62
9. Lippovan	34574	0.37
10. Adventist	7373	0.08
11. Armenian-Gregorian	1547	0.02
12. Armenian- Catholic	1284	0.01
13. Mohammedan	620	0.01
14. Other religion	5079	0.05
15. Without religion	4465	0.05
16. Undeclared	4499	0.05

## II. The Period 1940-1945

Since the summer of 1940, Romania lost a significant part of its territory together with the related population; Basarabia, Northern Bucovina and Herța land were annexed by the Soviet Union, Northern Transylvania was annexed by Hungary and Cadrilater was returned to Bulgaria.

During the World War II, the territorial structure was again changed: Basarabia was freed and Transnistria was annexed. Naturally, those territorial changes brought about some changes in the religious structure of the population. The changes mentioned before were statistically recorded only to certain extent by the Census of April 6, 1941 because the information collected, due to political unrest, could not be fully processed and used.

## III. The Communist Period 1945-1989

The main characteristic of the communist period, in terms of religious statistics, is the lack of information as a result of the elimination of this indicator from the data collected from censuses. The first census of Romania, after the Paris Peace Treaties when the present borders had been established, was done in 1948 but data only focused on the mother tongue, not the nationality or the religion.

The Constitution of 1948 guaranteed the freedom of religion and the new law of religion acknowledged new religious organizations, among which

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the Pentecostals whose evolution was the most dynamic during the communist period (but the same law outlawed the Greek-Catholic church). However, the three censuses that followed (1956, 1966 and 1977) recorded only the “nationality” and not the “religion”, which prevented a statistical exposure of the evolution of the religious structure of the Romanian people for the almost five decades of communism.

#### **IV. The Post-Communist Period 1989-Present**

With the collapse of the communist regime and the elaboration of the new Constitution of Romania, religious freedom becomes not only theoretically guaranteed but factual reality to be statistically captured by introducing “religion” in the next censuses. In the 24 years since the events of December 1989, there were three censuses performed, comparable in terms of geographical area.

The first census, that one of 1992, did not detect the results of the atheistic indoctrination from the communist period. Surprisingly, only 0.17% of the population declared to be atheist or without religion, the majority declared the affiliation to a religious community. According to the latest census, simultaneously run in the states of the European Union in 2011, after 21 years of religious freedom in former communist countries, the percentage of atheists or persons without religion in Romania continued to be the lowest, of 0.19%, compared to the Czech Republic where the percentage was 34.2%, to Hungary with 23% and to Bulgaria with 11.8%. It is a paradox given that the communist regime in Romania was much more oppressive than the rest ones in the communist block.

It was also the 1992 Census that statistically noticed the tragic fate of the Hebrew community and of the Greek-Catholic church. The dramatic events during the World War II and then the policy of the communist regime led to a significant decrease in number of the Mosaic population. The decrease in number of the Greek-Catholic parishioners is the result of the document of 1948 when the new regime ordered the unification of the Greek-Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church.

**The religious structure of Romania, according to census results of the post-communist period**

*Table 6*

Religion	Year					
	1992		2002		2011 <sup>1</sup>	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	22810035	100	21680974	100	20121641	100
1. Orthodox	19802389	86.81	18817975	86.79	16307004	86.45
2. Roman-Catholic	1161942	5.09	1026429	4.73	870774	4.62
3. Reformed	802454	3.52	701077	3.23	600932	3.19
4. Pentecostal	220824	0.97	324462	1.50	362314	1.92
5. Greek-Catholic <sup>2</sup>	223327	0.98	191556	0.88	150593	0.80
6. Baptist	109462	0.48	126639	0.58	112850	0.60
7. 7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventists	77546	0.34	93670	0.43	80944	0.43
8. Muslim	55928	0.25	67257	0.31	64337	0.34
9. Unitarian	76708	0.34	66944	0.31	57686	0.31
10. Jehovah's Witnesses	-	-	-	-	49820	0.26
11. Evangelicals	49963	0.22	44476	0.21	42495	0.23
12. Old Rite Christians	28141	0.12	38147	0.18	32558	0.17
13. Old Calendar Orthodox Church	32228	0.14	-	-	-	-
14. Evangelic Lutheran (Synod-Presbyterian)	21221	0.09	27112	0.13	20168	0.11
15. Serbian Orthodox	-	-	-	-	14385	0.08
16. Romanian Evangelic	-	-	18178	0.08	15514	0.08
17. Evangelical Augustan	39119	0.17	8716	0.04	5399	0.03
18. Mosaic	9670	0.04	6057	0.03	3519	0.02
19. Armenian	2.023	0.01	775	0.004	393	0.002
20. Other religion	56129	0.25	89196	0.41	30557	0.16
21. Without religion	26314	0.12	12825	0.06	18917	0.10
22. Atheists	10331	0.05	8524	0.04	20743	0.11
23. Undeclared	8139	0.04	11734	0.05	-	-
24. Unavailable	-	-	-	-	1259739	6.25

Notes

1. The 2011 Census used administrative data for the first time. The religious affiliation of the persons questioned based on those sources could not be identified as religion is a consensual act, declared by each of them, thus the column "Unavailable". The number of the persons mentioned before was very high, almost 1.3 million, representing 6.25% of the total population questioned, those shortcomings affecting the interoperability of data. The percentages were calculated for 2011 based on the population for which the religion had been registered.

2. The representatives of the Romanian Church United with Rome - Greek-Catholic contested the results of the censuses of 1992, 2002 and 2011, considering the data collection inadequate.



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