

International Conference:  
Religious Communities and Sustainable Development.  
Points of Departure for a Post-2030 Development Agenda  
08 – 11 June 2021

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**The role of religion in social cohesion during the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany -  
Empirical results from a comprehensive online survey**

Social scientists and development practitioners have recently recognized the significance of “social cohesion” as an important prerequisite and part of sustainable development (see for example: [www.socialcohesion.info](http://www.socialcohesion.info); <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/social-cohesion/>). The current Covid-19 pandemic in particular poses major challenges to the cohesion of societies: do their members stick together more (because they “sit in the same boat”) or do they drift apart? I explore this question using primary data for the current context in Germany, specifically examining the role of religion.

In my paper, I first lay out the theoretical framework. Literature-based I conceptualize “social cohesion” as a multidimensional construct that manifests in social and political relationships between citizens among each other and between citizens and the state: to the extent that social/institutional trust, inclusive social/national sense of belonging, social/institutional responsibility and social/political engagement are present. Regarding my independent variable “religion” I focus on the individuals’ “religiosity” (micro level) and specify three dimensions: *belonging* (religious affiliation), *believing* (faith intensity/contents) and *behaving* (private/social religious practice).

After deriving hypotheses about the relationships between these variables, I test them empirically with statistical quantitative methods. I use primary data from the comprehensive (non-representative) online survey that the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the WWU Münster – in cooperation with the Research Institute of Social Cohesion in Leipzig – conducted in Germany. Between July 2020 until January 2021 about 2,300 respondents participated.

Since the role of religion is ambivalent, I proceed as differentiated as possible in my empirical analyses. Initial results show, for example, that – despite Corona and contact restrictions – people tend to stick together more, showing solidarity and togetherness. Concerning religiosity, social religious practices such as church attendance as well as an image of a benevolent God are positively associated with many of the cohesion dimensions. However, negative relationships are found with regard to intensive private prayer, a punitive image of God, and exclusivist beliefs about the superiority of one’s own religion over other religions and disciplines like science.

Keywords social cohesion, religion, Covid-19, Germany