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An Exploratory Study on the Attitudes of the Greek Believers towards the State's Measures during the First Wave of Coronavirus Pandemic

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Abstract: During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic (16 March–5 May 2020), the Greek government took measures to close churches in order to protect the public health of the population. In this case, the purpose of this paper is to explore the response of Greek believers and Churches to the measures of the state, and whether these attitudes are affected by sociodemographic characteristics. Moreover, there was a collection of data on the attitudes of 353 believers through questionnaires, and the proper examination of these data through descriptive analysis and cross-tabulation analysis. The survey results showed that most believers are convinced that national measures are necessary, and they also revealed that believers' attitudes vary according to demographic variables.

Keywords: Greek Church; believers; coronavirus; religion; descriptive analysis; chi-square test

1. Introduction

On 16 March 2020, the Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, announced via twitter the suspension of church services in all places of religious worship of every dogma and religion, regardless of size and capacity throughout Greece¹. On the same day, a joint ministerial decision was published in the *Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic*, imposing the specific ban², which, with continuous renewals, finally lasted until 5 May 2020. It was a necessary decision to prevent the spread of the coronavirus to the believers, who are mainly middle-aged and elderly people.

Some Churches recognized from an early stage the danger of coronavirus and they decided on their own to take measures. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis' liturgies for Holy Week and Easter held without public attendance this year (Hannah 2020), and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who urged all believers to follow the hygiene guidelines of the World Health Organization and the relevant suggestions and legislative provisions of their states³ and on 18 March 2020 requested the closure of all churches of the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate around the world (Kalmoukos 2020).

It was not an easy decision for the Greek government. The ruling party, New Democracy, is an amalgam of conservative liberal politicians and has traditionally had very good relations with the Church. The Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis contacted for the first

¹ Prime Minister GR. [@PrimeministerGR]. By decision of the government, the services in all areas of religious worship of any dogma and religion are suspended. Churches remain open [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/PrimeministerGR/status/1239653497118875648?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etfwembed%7Ctwterm%5E1239653497118875648&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.star.gr%2Ffeediseis%2Fellada%2F493462%2Fkorwnoi-os-kleistes-oles-oi-ekklhsies (accessed on 16 March 2020).

² Imposition of the measure of temporary prohibition, the performance of any kind of services and rituals in the religious places of worship for the period from 16 March to 30 March 2020, no. 2867/Υ1, Official Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, no. 872, vol. B, 16 March 2020, pp. 9587–88.

³ Romfea.gr. The Ecumenical Patriarchate for the Coronavirus. <https://www.romfea.gr/oikoumeniko-patriarxeio/35813-to-oikoumeniko-patriarxeio-gia-ton-korono%CF%8A0> (accessed on 11 March 2020).

time on 28 February 2020 with Archbishop Ieronymos, head of the Greek Orthodox Church to which 81.4%–90% of the Greeks belong (Chiotis 2015), asking for the Church's help in the fight against the coronavirus. It is worth mentioning is that the term "the Church" used in the text, it should be understood as "The Church of Greece". The Holy Synod, the highest governing body of the Church, sent a document to all the churches with basic ways of protecting the population from the seasonal influenza. Its members did not understand that the Greek government was asking the believers to decide not to attend the church, the cancellation of Holy Communion, and the closing of the churches⁴. On 9 March 2020, the government announced new emergency measures against coronavirus, but did not decide to suspend gatherings in churches or to ban Holy Communion⁵. However, two days later, on 11 March 2020, the Prime Minister in his speech to the people stated that he draws strength from his faith, but as Prime Minister he was going to take measures for the gatherings in the churches⁶. The government pressured the Church to close the churches⁷. However, it was impossible for the Church to interrupt the performance of the Divine Liturgy and the Divine Communion on its own. Therefore, he took action and banned all religious services. The government's policy was in line with that of the opposition parties. In fact, both SYRIZA (Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras—Coalition of the Radical Left)⁸ and KINAL (Kinima Allagis—Movement for Change), former PASOK (Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima—Panhellenic Socialist Movement)⁹ have been pushing the government to close the churches before.

The Church at first erroneously estimated that the State intervenes in matters of faith. That is why it refused to accept the state's urgings to close the churches and stop the Divine Liturgy, but it realized that the pressure was gradually increasing (Lakasas 2020). In the following days, Archbishop Ieronymos publicly supported the government's measures to close the churches from a hygiene point of view (Karekla 2020a). This showed that the Church understood the measures but could not suspend the worship itself because it would be like canceling itself. The decision of the Archbishop to discipline and support the measures of the state had the consent of the hierarchy and the clergy. Following the government's measures to close the churches and the cessation of the Divine Liturgy, the Archbishop himself and several metropolitans officially supported the measures¹⁰. Few metropolitans spoke publicly against the government's decisions, such as the Metropolitan of Mesogaia¹¹, a region close to Athens, the Metropolitan of Kythera, a small Aegean

⁴ Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. Note No.1371. http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklloi/619_17032020.pdf (accessed on 17 March 2020).

⁵ Iefimerida.gr. Coronavirus: 73 cases, the measures increase: Schools are closed on occasion, Open Care Center for the Elderly, the stadiums are emptied. <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/koronoios-ayxanontai-ta-metra-gia-ton-periorismo-toy> (accessed on 9 March 2020).

⁶ Amna.gr. Message of the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the citizens about the Coronavirus. <https://www.amna.gr/pr-view/208195> (accessed on 11 March 2020).

⁷ Orthodoxtimes.com. Government Spokesperson: We expect self-regulation by the Church of Greece. <https://orthodoxtimes.com/government-spokesperson-we-expect-self-regulation-by-the-church-ofgreece/?fbclid=IwAR1sz19PUwOtkkYr-MzEZfgO-nf-P4Y-xw5IlzMiPDU7egLYeHwgv6kCeM> (accessed on 16 March 2020).

⁸ Tanea.gr. Precautionary measures in the churches requested Al. Tsipras. <https://www.tanea.gr/print/2020/03/06/greece/proliptika-metralfkai-stis-ekklisies-zitise-o-al-tsipras/> (accessed on 6 March 2020).

⁹ Liberal.gr. F. Gennimata: The closure of schools is positive—The Church is not excluded. <https://www.liberal.gr/news/f-gennimata-thetiko-to-kleisimo-ton-scholeion-den-exaireitai-i-ekklisia/291085> (accessed on 10 March 2020).

¹⁰ Ecclesia.gr. Archbishop: We stay home out of love, not out of fear. http://www.ecclesia.gr/epikairota/main_epikairota_next.asp?id=2989&fbclid=IwAR2b9xzOALjXsnWYnhd9tpSdtvgM49aa0OZ7sdcAyITP1fCp1ptvz14nBtU (accessed on 20 March 2020)/ Anesti, K. Metropolitan Anthimos at iefimerida.gr: The Prime Minister was right and closed the Churches. <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ellada/anthimos-ekklisia-poly-kalakekane-o-prothypoyrgos-kai-ekleise-tis-ekklisies> (accessed on 20 March 2020).

¹¹ Ekklisiaonline.gr. Mesogaia: The ban on worship is wrong and must be corrected. <https://www.ekklisiaonline.gr/nea/mesogeas-i-apagorefsi-tis-latrias-ine-lathos-pou-prepi-na-diorthothi/?fbclid=IwAR03k3bf5KqjwBjhCSA8Ki9jEFwlbMAs5x3OCKReAqiFjBlpH89O-8ctWw> (accessed on 22 March 2020).

island, who performed the service of Salutations on 20 March 2020 in the presence of the believers and he was arrested¹² and the Metropolitan of Corfu, an island near Italy¹³.

Traditionally, the Church in Greece has played a significant role in the country, society and the public sphere. It publicly expresses its positions and arguments and even intervenes in a number of issues that do not relate to its responsibilities. For its part, the state maintains close and unbreakable bonds with the Church. In all the constitutional texts of Greece it is recognized that the predominant religion in the Greek territory is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Paparizos 2000). The Preamble to the Constitution invokes the Holy Trinity as well as the oath of the President of the Republic and the deputies. Additionally, article 3 of the Constitution defines the administration and the way of formation of the Greek Orthodox Church (Ktistakis 2019). All official services of the Greek state take place in the presence of hierarchs. The salary of the clergy of all levels, as well as of the administrative employees of the Church is part of the obligations of the State. The state also maintains a Ministry, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, which deals with ecclesiastical issues. In general, the relations between the Greek nation and the Church are long-term and interconnected. The same goes for the relations between the Greek state and the Church (Vlasidis and Karekla 2018).

In addition, the Church has always enjoyed the trust of the majority of Greeks in all institutions. According to several surveys, the Church and the Army are the two institutions that the Greeks trust. The 2019 survey showed that Greeks more or less certainly trusted the Church at a rate of 64.8%, which put it in 3rd place in the institutions, after the Greek Family (81%) and the Armed Forces (75%)¹⁴. Therefore, there was no permanent confrontation between the Church, the Government, and the majority of society, as is the case in other countries, but it arose specifically on this issue.

The pressure was created by social media. Before the government even started communicating with the Church to impose social distancing measures on the churches, the dialogue had already started on social media and specifically on twitter. The most dynamic hashtag #close_the_churches (in Greek language) was the one that had the most hostile attitude towards the Church. It started on 26 February 2020, at the same time as the first case of coronavirus was reported in Greece.

A public sphere was created on social media, where those opposed to the Church seemed more and more aggressive than its defenders. They were liberal supporters of the state-church separation, real old-time leftists, and people from the field of citizens' movements and non-governmental organizations, but also apolitical people. The most aggressive of them were opposed to the Church on other issues or atheists, so for them it was another episode in the fight against it, but there were also many neutrals who turned against the Church especially on the issue of dealing with the pandemic. The controversy over whether or not to close the churches was reported on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The initial controversy took place on twitter where the posts showed a total opposition to the Christian religion, its hierarchy, its standard, that is, it was an expression of a form of atheism and anticlericalism. They cared little about public health or Holy Communion; they just wanted a victory against the Church. Facebook was the medium that began to produce disparaging stories against the Church and fed Twitter with the sharpest to accompany the small texts of its users in the struggle against the Church. The creation was based on Facebook while the fierce controversy and insults appeared on Twitter. There was even an interaction with the traditional media. Traditional media journalists follow social media. When they see a post that has journalistic interest, they make it a topic for the media in which they work. Then social media users repost the specific topic. In this

¹² Kathimerini.gr. The Metropolitan of Kythera Seraphim was arrested-He performed a service despite the ban. <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1070300/article/epikairothta/ellada/synelhf8h-o-mhtropolitsh-ky8hrwn-serafeim---telese-leitoyrgia-para-thn-apagoreysh> (accessed on 21 March 2020).

¹³ Ert.gr. Corfu: The Metropolitan requests the establishment of a special permission for the churches. <https://www.ert.gr/perifereiakoi-stathmoi/kerkira/kerkyra-kathierosi-eidikis-adeias-gia-tis-ekklisies-zita-o-mitropolitsh/> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

¹⁴ Athensvoice.gr. Poll: Which institutions do the Greeks trust the most. Athens Voice. https://www.athensvoice.gr/politics/547740_dimoskopisi-poiyos-thesmoys-empisteyontai-perissotero-oi-ellines (accessed on 22 May 2020).

way a circular path of the same news or point of view is made, which in the process greatly increases the impact of the original publication (Roese 2018).

Eventually the battle between the followers of public health and therefore the inclusion of the Church in the rules for lock down and the supporters of the Church ended with an overwhelming defeat of the latter. The defenders of the Church could not prevail because they were not a single group. There were several religious people who disciplined the measures, but protested strongly and publicly about the war against Holy Communion that took place through the media and social media (Giachnaki 2020). Secondly, the Church itself contributed to the communicative and political defeat as it did not realize the seriousness of the situation and the extent of the dangers, judging that it was a government intervention in matters that it considered to be exclusively its object, i.e., theological issues.

Although the leadership of the Church kept a low profile after the closing of the churches and did not make any resistance moves, it still comes out of the whole ordeal wounded. Its public image has been damaged. On 20 March 2020, the results of MRB poll (MRB HELLAS S.A. is one of the biggest research agencies in Greece) were published for the 'Star' television channel, for the Greek government's handling of the coronavirus. This poll was based on a sample of 1000 respondents approximately. In total, 55.7% judged the attitude of the Church negative or rather negative and only 20.2% definitely positive or rather positive¹⁵. According to opinion poll, 78.6% said they were very satisfied with the prime minister's decision to close the churches and 11.4% quite happy¹⁶. These surveys were done on the crisis, so the results were expected and products of affect. However, in a survey conducted by the Laboratory of Journalism Studies and Communication Applications of the Department of Communication and Media of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, during the crisis, when asked "How much do you trust the Church at the present time", only 9% answered that they trust the Church, while 67% answered that they do not trust it at all. This survey was based on a sample of 2525 people. It should be noted that the vast majority of the sample were people with a very high level of education, young in age, and living in Athens, but again the results were disappointing for the Church (Papathanassopoulos et al. 2020). This shows that the public image of the Church remains damaged even though for two decades it was the institution that the Greeks trusted the most (Demertzis 2006)¹⁷.

However, what was not the subject of survey by the survey companies was the attitude of the believers, that is, how those who identify themselves as believers judged the measures of the state towards the Church and how they assessed the reaction of the Church. Furthermore, we explored whether these attitudes are affected by sociodemographic characteristics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate these issues through quantitative data analysis. In this context, the need to explore the attitudes of the believers considered both of mature and imperative, especially after the implementation of the measures of the state to prevent the coronavirus from spreading further.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic affected not only the working and social life but also the religious life of many people in the world. For this reason, in the literature there are some recent research works about the COVID-19 pandemic that focus primarily on the religious issues. Some works focused on the link between religion and the COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of quantitative research methods. More specifically, James et al. (2020) and Vermeer and Kregting (2020) provided empirical evidence that

¹⁵ Protothema.gr. MRB poll: Seven out of ten applaud the government's handling of the Coronavirus. <https://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/987067/dimoskopisi-mrb-epta-stous-deka-epikrotoun-tous-heirismous-tis-kubernisis-gia-ton-koronoio/> (accessed on 20 March 2020).

¹⁶ Protothema.gr. Coronavirus-Barometer Opinion: 85% applaud the actions of Mitsotakis. <https://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/989207/koronoios-varometro-opinion-85-epikrotoun-tis-energeies-tou-mitsotaki/> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

¹⁷ Which institutions do the Greeks trust. (27 July 2003). To Vima. The Greeks trust the Internet, the army and the Church. (12 December 2011). Eleftheros Typos. Public Issue: Greeks trust the Army, the Police and the Schools. (7 December 2018). Proto Thema. Police, justice and the church are more trusted by young people aged 18–35. (19 July 2017). Kathimerini.

the collective worship services in the churches facilitates the spread of the coronavirus in Arkansas and Netherlands. Given this strong relationship between church activities and the spread of the virus, governments of the world justifiably “took drastic measures” such as the restriction of religious activities and “the closing of churches” in order to limit the spread of coronavirus (Vermeer and Kregting 2020). Further, Boguszewski et al. (2020) in Poland conducted a quantitative and survey research of a sample of 1001 respondents about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Poles’ religiosity as measured by increased devotion to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic. This research has shown that religious practices increased during the Polish government’s strictest lockdown (Boguszewski et al. 2020).

On the other hand, some works focused on the cooperation between Churches and State from the point of view of qualitative research methods. More specifically, the response of the religious communities towards the State’s measures against the coronavirus pandemic was studied in other countries, such as in Indonesia (Sukamto and Parulian 2020) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Begović 2020). In Poland, Sulkowski and Ignatowski (2020) studied how COVID-19 affected the religious life and what measures the Christian Churches took against the pandemic, using interviews. In addition, Phuong (2020) in Vietnam searched the legal framework used by the government in order to put restrictions on religious rituals against coronavirus’ spread.

In Vietnam, the state gained the support of “religious organizations” in application of the regulations against coronavirus’ spread due to “legal, institutional, and religious factors” (Phuong 2020). One of these regulations was the limitation of the “religious activities” (Phuong 2020). On the contrary, in Indonesia the state could not restrict religious services because religion is concerned as such a delicate topic in the country (Sukamto and Parulian 2020). Therefore, the government tried to persuade the people not to go to temples but pray from home (Sukamto and Parulian 2020). Although at first some religious communities were averse to this government’s urging, at the end they followed its policy against COVID-19 (Sukamto and Parulian 2020). In Germany, also, there was cooperation between state and church in implementing protecting measures against coronavirus’ spread (Berkmann 2020).

As far as in Balkans, Begović (2020) analyzed the restrictions on religious activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the attitude of the main religious groups towards them by studying the guidelines of the state and of the religious communities and media. Even religious leaders of the country underlined to their flock the significant meaning of the implementation of public health guidelines, the religious communities did not endorse at the same extent government’s measures against COVID-19 (Begović 2020). In order to frame these measures by theological perspective, religious communities argued about “the value of human life and the virtue of caring for the well-being of the community” (Begović 2020). Similar arguments were used by Archbishop of Athens, Ieronymos, and other hierarchs in Greece. In addition, the Christian Churches in Poland, as Sulkowski and Ignatowski (2020) argued, followed the policy of other countries, restricted their activities, and urged people to “stay at home”.

3. Research Questions and Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to explore the impact the measures of the Greek government on the behavior of Greek believers during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, two research questions are examined: (1) what are the attitudes of the believers against the measures of the state towards the Church and the reaction of the Church? (2) If there is significant influence the attitudes of the believers by sociodemographic characteristics?

We achieved the goal of this study to answer the specific questions through the creation of a small survey group immediately after the opening of the churches (June 2020). The team conducted a survey with a printed questionnaire in churches in the Greek capital Athens (3,100,000 inhabitants) and in another city with a population of 850,000 inhabitants

(Thessaloniki) and in smaller towns and villages. This method was chosen because the purpose was to investigate the opinion of the believers and not the average Greek citizen regardless of their religious beliefs, so random telephone interviews would not help the survey. Therefore, the target population of the study includes Greek believers. The creation of a form in Google docs was rejected as many believers are old and do not have a good relationship with technology.

The questionnaire is organized in three sections and it includes totally 11 closed-format questions (see Appendix A). The first section consists of two questions which concern people's views about the measures of the state towards the Church for the coronavirus. The first question of this section is closely related to the Greek government's restrictions whereas the second question ask believers their opinion on why the government took measures. The second section consists of four questions which concern believers' views about the attitude of the Church for measures of the state and several ecclesiastical matters. The first question of this section is closely related to the reaction of the Church that it is expressed by Archbishop of Athens, Ieronymos and other hierarchs in Greece. The second question concerns the way that churches have been opened after consultation between the government and the Church. Two last questions of this section are closely related to the action of the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta Amvrosios to excommunicate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education. It is worth mentioning is that the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta Amvrosios was opposed to the measures of the state and his action is taken place in public sphere after lockdown. The third section consists of five questions which concern the demographic characteristics of the believers. These questions evaluate the variables of interest. More specifically, the independent variables consist of five demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, marital status, education level, and city or geographic location. The dependent variables consist of six questions, such as the country's measures against the coronavirus, believers' attitudes towards church closures, the Church's attitude during health crisis, believers' attitudes towards church openness and believers' attitudes about the former metropolis of Kalavryta to excommunicate the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education, and the believers' attitude towards the Holy Synod. This occurred because the Holy Synod did not accept the excommunication of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education.

The result of the research gave 353 completed valid questionnaires from believers in regions such as Athens, Thessaloniki, and other small towns. We then categorized the believers' responses on an Excel spreadsheet and performed a data analysis using open source statistical software R. Data analysis was divided into two stages: firstly, descriptive analysis of independent variables and dependent variables was performed through frequency analysis. Secondly, conduction of a cross-table analysis to establish the relationship between dependent variables (such as believers' attitudes toward the country's measures to the coronavirus church) and independent variables (such as demographic characteristics) through the Chi-Square significance test.

4. Results

In this section, we introduce the results of descriptive analysis and cross-tab analysis.

4.1. Results of Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive results of the demographic variables of the sample.

The results of the survey show that the public of the Church is not holding a common attitude towards the measures of the State. Based on Table 2, a clear majority of 54.67% considers the measures as necessary and relaxing or very relaxing so they would like more stringent measures. On the other hand, there is a significant percentage of 43.62% who consider that the measures taken by the State were more or less strict. This public is not united, as 7.08% judge the measures a little strict, so they may be hesitant about the substance of the measures. However, the remaining 36.54% judge the measures as strict to

very strict. This percentage shows that there is a serious opposition of some believers to the government's measures.

Table 1. Overview of the demographic variables of the sample.

Gender			City		
Categories	Frequency	% Total	Categories	Frequency	% Total
Man	139	39.4	Countryside	110	31.2
Woman	214	60.6	Large city	243	68.8
Total	353	100.0	Total	353	100.0
Age			Education		
Categories	Frequency	% Total	Categories	Frequency	% Total
15–24	33	9.3	Elementary	22	6.2
25–44	91	25.8	High School	29	8.2
45–64	175	49.6	Lyceum	88	24.9
65+	54	15.3	University	214	60.6
Total	353	100.0	Total	353	100.0
Marital Status					
Categories	Frequency	% Total			
Unmarried	78	22.1			
Married	53	15.0			
Widow	21	5.9			
Single family	3	0.8			
Married with children	186	52.7			
Divorced	6	1.7			
I do not know/I do not answer	6	1.7			
Total	353	100.0			

Table 2. Results for the measures of the State for coronavirus.

Categories	Frequency	% Total
Very strict	70	19.83
A little strict	25	7.08
Strict	59	16.71
Necessary	186	52.69
Relaxing	6	1.70
A little relaxing	0	0
Very relaxing	1	0.28
I do not know/I do not answer	6	1.70
Total	353	100.00

The opposition to the measures in its majority is in small villages and urban centers (54.5%). Even if the percentage of those who believe that the measures are a bit strict (10%) is excluded, the remaining 44.5% is higher than the 42.5% who support the measures. On the other hand, in Athens and Thessaloniki the acceptance rate of the measures reaches 59% (57.2% + 1.6%). Given that the religious sentiment of the survey sample is not disputed in the two major cities and in the rest of the country and all participating church members on a regular basis, the difference must be due to the fact that cases and deaths from coronavirus were minimal in the Greek province in reference period, so the believers had no contact with the epidemic as in the cities.

There is a group of believers that makes up 50%–60% of the survey sample and which fully approves the measures of the state towards the Church for the management of the health crisis during the survey as well as the attitude of the Church which disciplined to these measures. This is apparent by the answer that it considers the measures of the state

necessary (52.69%) and relaxing (0.28%) or a little relaxing (1.70%), total 54.67% as is shown in Table 3 and considers that the measures were taken to protect the state the believers from the coronavirus (60.62%) total 60.62% as is shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Results for the measures of the State for coronavirus relating to the residence of believers.

City/Attitude	Necessary	Strict	I Do Not Know/I Do Not Answer	A Little Strict	Very Strict	Very Relaxing	Relaxing	Total
Countryside	47 (42.7%)	23 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	11 (10%)	26 (23.6%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	110 (100%)
City	139 (57.2%)	36 (14.8%)	6 (2.5%)	14 (5.8%)	44 (18.1%)	0 (0%)	4 (1.6%)	243 (100%)
Total	186 (52.7%)	59 (16.7%)	6 (1.7%)	25 (7.1%)	70 (19.8%)	1 (0.3%)	6 (1.7%)	353 (100%)

Table 4. Results for the attitudes of believers for the closing of Churches.

Answers	Frequency	% Total
To protect the believers from COVID-19	214	60.62
To attack the Church	81	22.95
To serve foreign interests	58	16.43
Total	353	100.00

Respectively, this group is satisfied with the attitude of the Church to accept and comply with the measures of the state to a great extent (35.41%) and a little (32.86%) total 68.27% as is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results for the attitude of the Church during the health crisis.

Answers	Frequency	% Total
Very satisfied	125	35.41
A little satisfied	116	32.86
Not at all satisfied	93	26.35
I do not know/I do not answer	19	5.38
Total	353	100.00

The percentage of acceptance of the way in which the services in the sacred churches started again is higher as they are very satisfied with a percentage of 42.49% and a little satisfied with a percentage of 33.14% total 75.63% as is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Results for the attitudes of believers for the reopening of Churches.

Answers	Frequency	% Total
Very satisfied	150	42.49
A little satisfied	117	33.14
Not at all satisfied	60	17.00
I do not know/I do not answer	26	7.37
Total	353	100.00

Almost the same percentage as those who are more or less satisfied with the attitude of the Church disagree or do not agree with the action of the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta to excommunicate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education (total 68.84%) as is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Results for the attitude of the believers about the action of the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta.

Answers	Frequency	% Total
Yes	61	17.28
No	243	68.84
I do not know/I do not answer	49	13.88
Total	353	100.00

This percentage is almost identical to the percentage of those who approve of the nonacceptance of excommunication by the Holy Synod (total 66.57%) as is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Results for the attitude of the believers about the action of the Holy Synod to dismiss the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education.

Answers	Frequency	% Total
Yes	235	66.57
No	65	18.41
I do not know/I do not answer	53	15.01
Total	353	100.00

On the contrary, based on Table 2 there is another group that considers that the measures taken by the state were a little strict (7.08%), strict (16.71%), and very strict (19.83%), total 43.62% and believes that the state had other goals than to protect the believers from the coronavirus. Thus, 16.43% stated that the state closed the churches to serve foreign interests and 22.95% to attack the Church (total 39.38%; see Table 4). The percentage of those who are not at all satisfied with the way the churches were opened for worship is 17% (see Table 6).

Significantly lower is the percentage of those who go so far as to approve the action of the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta Amvrosios to excommunicate the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education (total 17.28%; see Table 7) while does not know or does not want to answer for this action a very significant percentage 13.88%. Similar and slightly higher comparatively are the percentages of those who disagree with the action of the Holy Synod not to accept the excommunication of the government officials, total 18.41%, and not relevant/no opinion 15.01% (see Table 8).

From the above we see that the public of the believers is not united. There is a majority group (52.69%–68.84%) which generally agrees with the measures of the state and the reaction of the Church. It is important to mention that a higher percentage of those who approve of the actions of the Church leadership than those who approve of the actions of the state.

Respectively, another minority group appears in relation to the previous one, which is suspicious or hostile towards the state and the Church in the matter of managing the health crisis. This group shows its disagreement with the measures of the state to a greater extent (39.38%–43.62%) in relation to its dissatisfaction with the reaction of the Church. Thus, they are not at all satisfied with the reaction of the Church at a percentage of 26.35% (see Table 5), not at all satisfied with the way 17% of the churches were opened (see Table 6), and they agree/approve the taking of harsh measures against government officials 17.28%–18.41% (see Tables 7 and 8).

According to the data it is obvious that the reaction of this group towards the State is solid (average 41.5%) and shaped. On the contrary, the disagreement with the Church does not have the same characteristics. A hard core appears, with average 7.55%, who completely disagree with the policy of the Church and call for conflict with the state, a percentage of 26.35% who are not satisfied with the policy of the Church (see Table 5). At the same time, however, there are percentages of those who are confused, they are

probably not satisfied with the whole management of the issue, they do not want to see the State–Church confrontation, but they have not formed an opinion or want to keep it to themselves. These are a group that extends from a little satisfied with the attitude of the Church towards the state and the way the churches were opened (32.86%–33.14%, see Tables 5 and 6) to the not relevant/no opinion towards the measure of the Church against the state (13.88%–15.01%, see Tables 7 and 8).

4.2. Results of Cross-Table Analysis

We performed a chi-square test for each combination between the demographic variable and the dependent variable to explore this relationship. In the chi-square significance test, two hypotheses were tested:

Null hypothesis: these two variables are statistically independent of each other.

Alternative hypothesis: variables are statistically related.

When the p -value is less than or equal to 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$), we accept the alternative hypothesis, which means that the two variables are related or correlated. The test results are summarized in Table 9. We then described these relationships in more detail statistically. In the event that there are observations in some cells of the crosstab, we then could calculate the p -value by Monte Carlo simulation instead of the standard asymptotic chi-square distribution.

Table 9. p -values of chi-square tests between the dependent variables and demographic variables.

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	City
Measures of the State for coronavirus	0.360	0.196	0.253	0.653	0.037
Attitudes of believers for the closing of Churches	0.619	0.009	0.577	0.001	0.188
Attitude of the Church during the health crisis	0.050	0.000	0.008	0.131	0.015
Attitudes of believers for the way the Churches have been opened	0.029	0.013	0.008	0.030	0.005
Attitudes of the believers about the action of the former Metropolitan of Kalavryta	0.396	0.138	0.080	0.557	0.364
Attitudes of believers about the action of the Holy Synod	0.572	0.167	0.209	0.852	0.211

According to Table 9, there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' cities and their perceptions of national measures. For a particular group of people living in big cities, as many as 57.2% of them responded that government's measures were necessary, whereas people who live in rural areas this percentage was only 42.7%. This difference was statistically significant as we can see Figure A1 in the Appendix B.

Demographic variables such as age and education do significantly differentiate the perception of believers regarding Greek government's decision to close churches. More specifically, among men and women aged 25–44, 45–64, and 65+ only, over 50% believe that the measures taken by the state were to protect believers whereas among young believers (15–24 years old only) this percentage was 39.4%. Young believers are more likely to state that the government took the measures of closing Churches to attack the Church (48.5%) as we can see in Figure A2 in the Appendix B. Furthermore, among people with elementary and university education only, 69%–73% stated that the state has adopted measures to protect believers and 16%–18% stated that the government's decision was to hurt the Church; yet among people with high school education only (High School and Lyceum), 41%–43% responded protection from COVID-19 and 35%–38% responded damage towards the Church as we can see in Figure A3 in the Appendix B.

Looking over the results in Table 9, we see that there is a statistically significant relationship between demographic variables (such as gender, age, marital status, and geographical location) of the interviewees and their perceptions of church response. During the health crisis, the attitude of the Church is expressed by the decision of the Archbishop

of Athens, Ieronymos, and other hierarchs in Greece to support the government's measures. The results in Figure A4 in the Appendix B suggest that among women only, 42.3% state they were very satisfied with the church's response and 27.7% state they were a little satisfied; yet among men only, 25.2% were very satisfied and 41% were a little satisfied with the Church's response. The results in Figure A5 in the Appendix B show that among believers that are 45 and older only, 35.4%–67% were very satisfied with their response and 14.8%–31.4% were a little or not all satisfied. On the contrary, among people between ages of 15–24 and 25–44 years old only, 15%–24% were very satisfied and 42%–46% were opposed (or a little satisfied) to the Church. The results in Figure A6 in the Appendix B demonstrate that among believers who are married, with or without children and divorced only, 38%–84% stated very satisfied and 17%–33% stated a little satisfied about the reaction of the Church. Among those who are unmarried or single only, 17%–33% were very satisfied and 32%–46% were a little satisfied or fully dissatisfied with the church's response. Finally, the results in Figure A7 in the Appendix B suggest that among respondents living in large cities (such as Athens and Thessaloniki) only, 40.3% were very satisfied with the church's response and 26%–28% were dissatisfied. Among believers living in rural areas only, 24.5% were very satisfied and 28.2%–43% were a bit satisfied or not satisfied at all with the reaction of the Church.

According to Table 9, there is a statistically significant relationship between five demographic variables (such as gender, age, marital status, education, and geographical location) of the interviewees and the perception of the reopening of the Church. It is worth mentioning that reopening of churches took place after cooperation between the government and the Church. The results in Figure A8 in the Appendix B show that among women only, 45.1% were very satisfied with the way the church reopened and 15%–32% were a little or not at all satisfied. On the other hand, among men only, 39% were very satisfied and 20.9%–35% were not satisfied or dissatisfied at all. Looking over the results in Figure A9 in the Appendix B, we will see that among believers over 65 years-old only, 66.7% were very satisfied with the Church's approach concerning its reopening and 13%–16.7% were a little or fully dissatisfied. We should also note that men and women between the ages of 14–24, 25–44 and 45–64 only, 36%–38% stated very satisfied and 50%–54% were little satisfied or completely dissatisfied with the reopening of the church. The results in Figure A10 in the Appendix B suggest that most of the believers that were satisfied were widowed and divorced or they were married with or without children (42%–90%). On the other hand, believers who were slightly satisfied or dissatisfied were part of single families or were unmarried (58%–99%). The results in Figure A11 in the Appendix B show that most of the believers who have attended elementary school and university were very satisfied (43%–77%) whereas those who have attended high school and lyceum were a little satisfied or dissatisfied at all (58%–58.6%). Finally, the results in Figure A12 in the Appendix B demonstrate that most of the respondents living in large cities were very satisfied with the reopening of the church (48.6%), while those living in the countryside are a little satisfied or dissatisfied at all (23.6%–38.2%).

According to the aforementioned results, it is shown that the average profile of the believers who accept the measures of the State and simultaneously are very satisfied with the Church is mainly women over 45, people who have attended elementary school and university, are divorced or married with children and live in a large city. On the other hand, those who disagree with the excommunication tend to agree with the decision of the Holy Synod. They also consider that the measures were necessary in order to protect the believers. Therefore, it is shown that there is no considerable differentiation among the believers in respect to demographic variables.

The average profiles of people who believe that the state has taken measures in order to attack the Church or to serve foreign interests is mainly men and women between the ages of 15–24 and have attended high school or lyceum. The average profile of the respondents who state that they are dissatisfied or fully satisfied with the attitude of the

Church or the reopening of the Churches is mainly men between 15 and 24 who have attended high school, are unmarried or single, and live in the countryside.

5. Discussion

Based on obtained empirical results, we addressed the following research question: what are the attitudes of the believers against the measures of the state towards the Church and the reaction of the Church? This question we may now answer as followed: the attitudes of the believers are not united and there are two groups of believers. Therefore, there is a majority group of the believers which generally express positive attitudes towards the measures of the Greek government and the reaction of the Church. This high percentage of positive attitudes is due to the several reasons: (a) it is reasonable the majority of believers is closely complied with the requirements of the Greek government that would be beneficial to all of the citizens since the Orthodox Church of Greece maintains close bonds with the state. Furthermore, the Church expresses arguments in an important number of issues that related to state most of the time. (b) The majority of believers may have been influenced by the public support of Archbishop of Athens, Ieronymos, towards the government's measures to close the churches and the restrictions of religious activities. Furthermore, he prompted to the believers to stay at home and keep in touch with the faithful each other using modern technologies. (c) This group of believers may have been convinced by mass media that dense gatherings in public places facilitate the transmission of coronavirus and therefore they feared for their lives. This may have been the motivation for the believers to give positive support to the measures of the state to flatten the rise of COVID-19 cases. On the other hand, this study raised another minority group of believers that are suspicious or hostile towards the state and the Church. The position of this small group may have been influenced by the dynamic and popular hashtag #close_the_churches on Twitter which was one of the most hostile attitudes towards the Church or by conspiracy theories circulating on the Web. Additionally, this group of believers perhaps expresses the most conservative religious views on most issues.

Based on research literature, we can observe that the attitudes of the two groups of Greek believers do not differ from the positions taken in other European countries or religions (Sukamto and Parulian 2020; Begović 2020; Sulkowski and Ignatowski 2020).

We also addressed the second research question of this study: is there a significant influence on the attitudes of the believers by sociodemographic characteristics? We may answer as followed: the attitudes of believers are differentiated by their demographic profile. More specifically, perceptions of believers against the measures of state differ only by place of their residence. This makes sense because men and women in large cities have progressive and positive views compared to believers in small towns. What is worth mentioning is that data may show that the attitudes of believers differ among gender, age groups, or education but these differences are not statistically significant according to Table 9. However, the views of believers about the closing of Churches differ in respect to age and education. Young men and women (age 15–24) with high school education believe that state closed the Churches in order to attack the Church or to serve foreign interests as opposed to older people with elementary or university education who have positive support. The attitudes of young people may differ due to the fact that they are influenced by social media (such as Facebook, Twitter) that are exposed to the various conspiracy theories. Finally, the views of believers against the reaction of the Church for the measures of state or for the opening of the Churches differ by most demographic variables (such as gender, age, marital status, education, and city). In this point, the majority group of believers that have positive support against the reaction of Church are represented by women aged over 45 who are married with children or divorced and live in large cities. This makes sense because the older women are closely attached to the worship services and they also attend several religious activities (such as catechism, etc.) according to tradition in Greece.

6. Conclusions

From the results of the survey, we can say that the attitude of the believers in Greece is in line with the attitude of the Church towards the measures taken by the state to protect public health by closing the churches. The majority of the believers consider that the measures were necessary, an attitude taken by the ruling Church after the announcement of the government to close the churches and tried to pass on to the believers through speeches and statements of both the Archbishop of Athens (Karekla 2020b) and the metropolitans (Papageorgiou 2020).

The results regarding the attitude and beliefs of the young believers (15–24 years old) who appear more conservative than the young of their age, in relation to the older ones, make a special impression. The young people believe that the state has taken the specific measures to attack the Church, that the attitude of the Church is a little to not at all satisfactory, and they appear a little happy with the way in which the churches were reopened.

Furthermore, the residence of the believers seems to significantly affect their beliefs as those who live in large cities consider the measures of the state necessary, its attitude towards the Church is a little strict or to strict, the attitude of the Church during this period very satisfactory, and they are very happy with the way the churches have been opened. While, those living in small towns appear more conservative, as they believe that the measures of the state were too strict or strict, its attitude towards the Church is unacceptable, the attitude of the Church is a little unsatisfactory, and the state is little or not at all happy with the way the churches were opened.

The main limitation of the present research is that the sample was limited to some geographical areas of Greece such as Athens, Thessaloniki, as well as small provincial towns. In this context, future research could strengthen the findings of this study by exploring the attitudes of believers about the measures of state and the reaction of the Church in other cities. It would be interesting to extend the survey research only to Greek clergymen in order to investigate their attitudes towards the restrictions imposed by state on the activities of the Churches. Another future research direction is to explore the attitudes of believers by applying multivariate statistical methods such as logistic regression models and/or correspondence analysis.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

Exploratory Study of the Attitudes of the Greek Believers on the Measures of the State and the Reaction of the Church

Note: We are conducting research on attitudes of believers for the measures of the state and the reaction of the Church. We would appreciate if you could dedicate a few moments of your time to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire is anonymous and its results, in the form of aggregated summaries, will be used only for academic purposes. Thank you very much in advance for participating in the survey.

Section 1: State measures against the coronavirus

- 1. How did the measures of the state against the coronavirus seem to you?**
 Very strict A little strict Strict Necessary
 Relax A little relax Very relax I do not know/I do not answer
- 2. Do you think that the State has taken the measures to close the temples?**
 To protect the believers from COVID-19
 To attack the Church
 To serve foreign interests

Section 2: Evaluation of the attitude of the Church and Ecclesiastical matters

- 3. Are you satisfied with the attitude of the Church during the crisis?**
 Very A little Not at all I do not know/I do not answer
- 4. Are you happy with the way the temples are being reopened?**
 Very A little Not at all I do not know/I do not answer
- 5. Do you agree with Ambrosios' act to excommunicate Mitsotakis, Kerameos and Hardalias?**
 Yes No I do not know/I do not answer
- 6. Do you agree with the act of the Holy Synod not to approve the aphorism of Mitsotakis, Kerameos and Hardalias by Ambrosios?**
 Yes No I do not know/I do not answer

Section 3: Demographic Characteristics

- 7. Sex**
 Man
 Woman
- 8. Age**
 15–24 25–44 45–64 65 +
- 9. Marital status**
 Unmarried
 Married
 Married with children
 Widow
 Divorced
 Single family
 I do not know/I do not answer
- 10. Education**
 Elementary
 High School
 Lyceum
 University
- 11. Geographical location**
 Big city (Athens or Thessaloniki)
 Provincial city

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix B. Cross-Tabulation Results

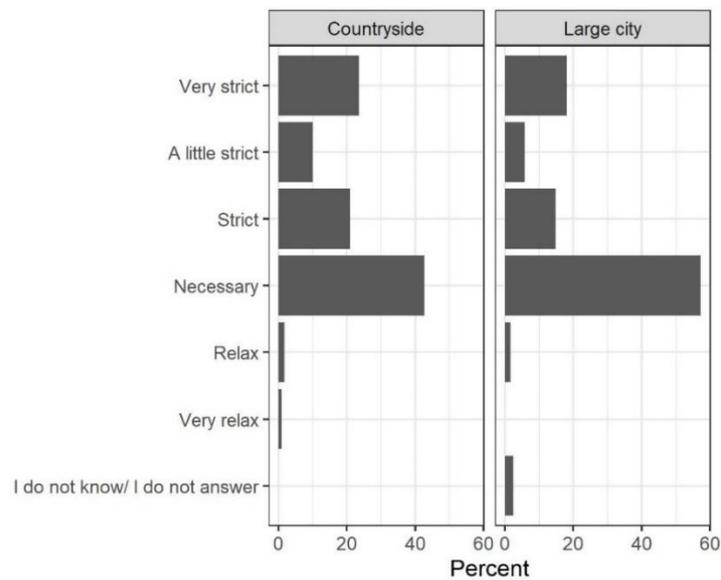


Figure A1. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers towards the measures of the state by city (% by city). $\chi^2 = 12.72$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.037$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

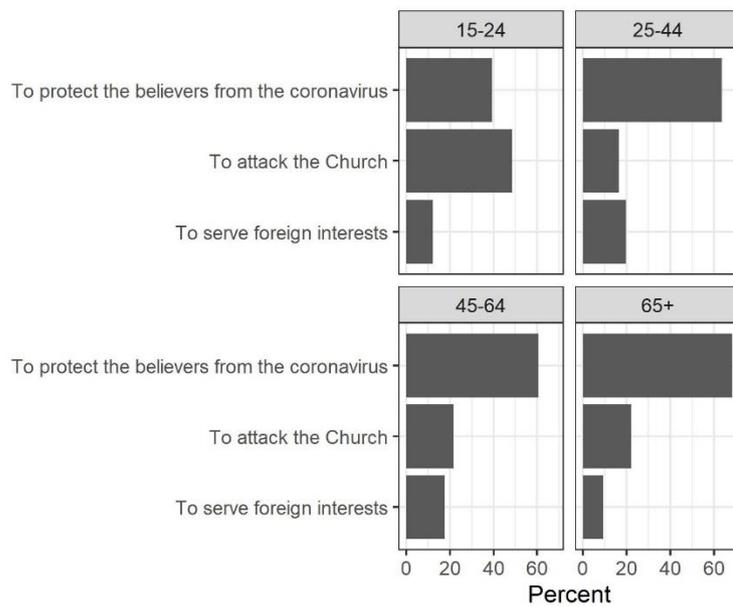


Figure A2. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers for closing of Churches by age (% by age). $\chi^2 = 17.1786$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.009$.

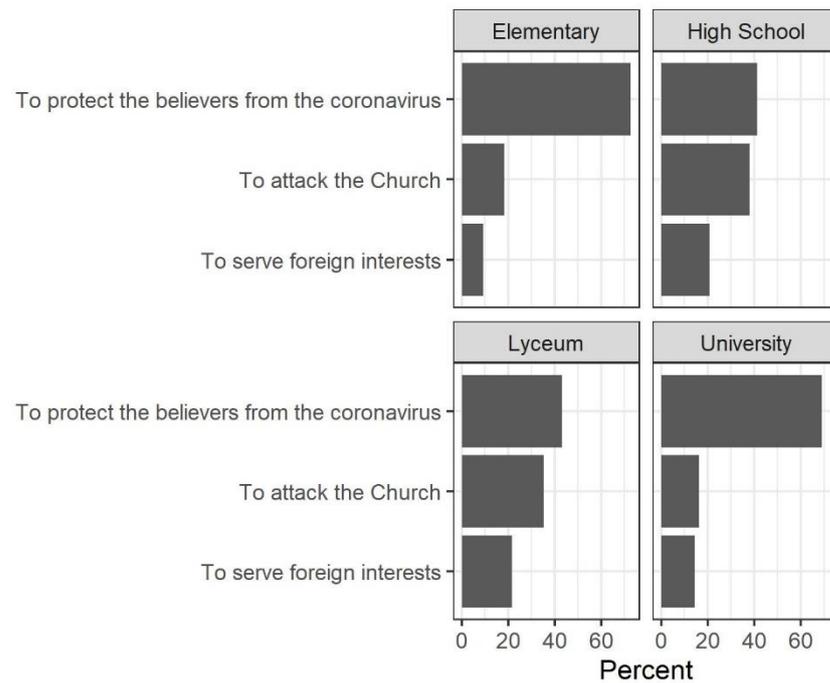


Figure A3. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers for closing of Churches by education (% by education). $X^2 = 25.142$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.001$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

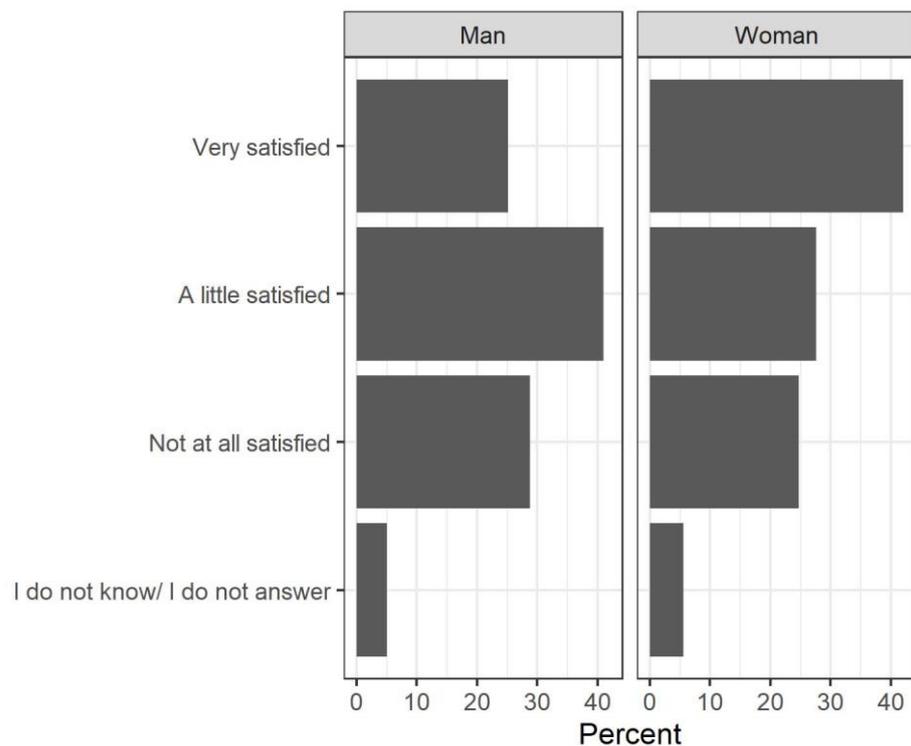


Figure A4. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reaction of the Church by gender (% by gender). $X^2 = 14.9245$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.05$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

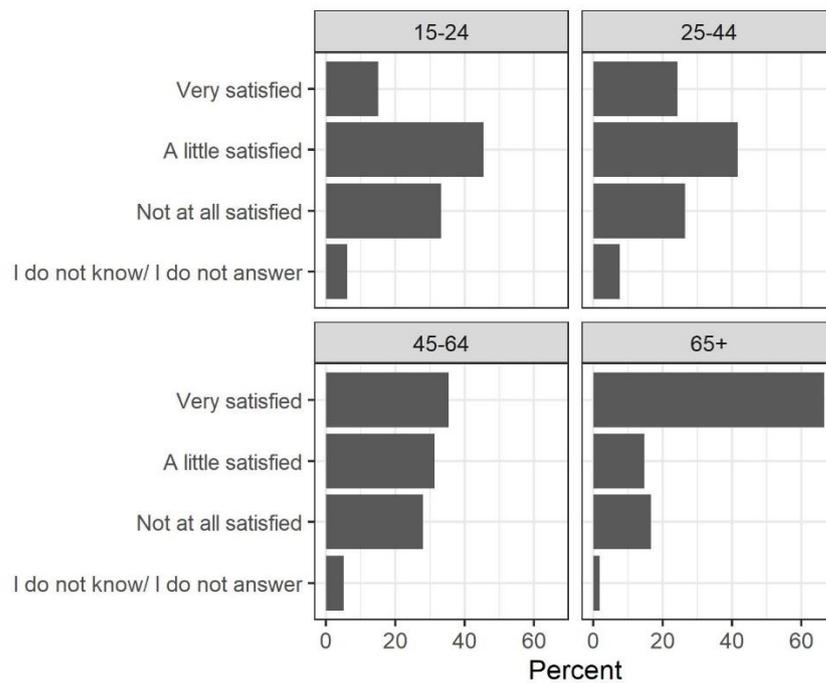


Figure A5. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reaction of the Church by age (% by age). $X^2 = 36.125$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.000$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

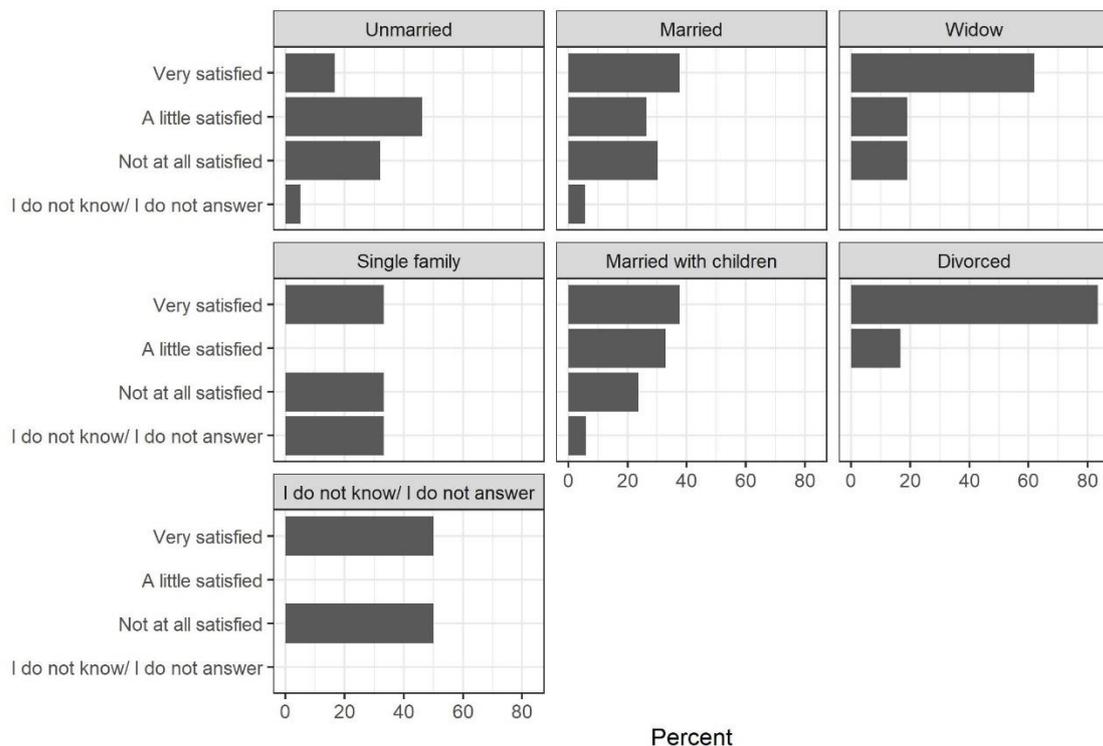


Figure A6. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reaction of the Church by marital status (% by marital status). $X^2 = 37.37$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.008$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

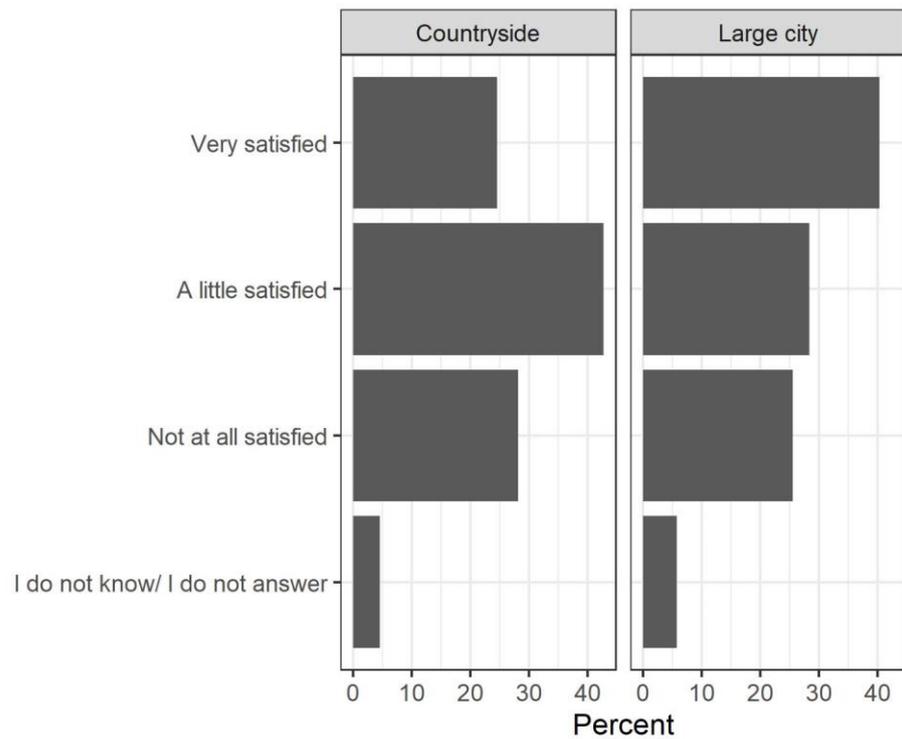


Figure A7. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reaction of the Church by city (% by city). $X^2 = 10.4732$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.015$.

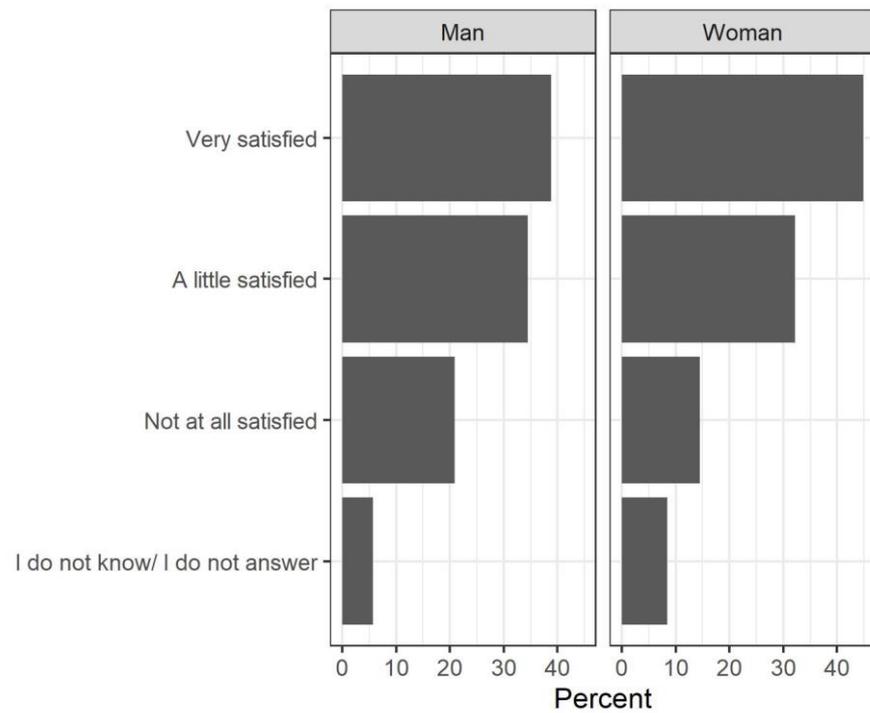


Figure A8. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reopening of the Churches by gender (% by gender). $X^2 = 16.03$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.029$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with Scheme 2000. replicates).

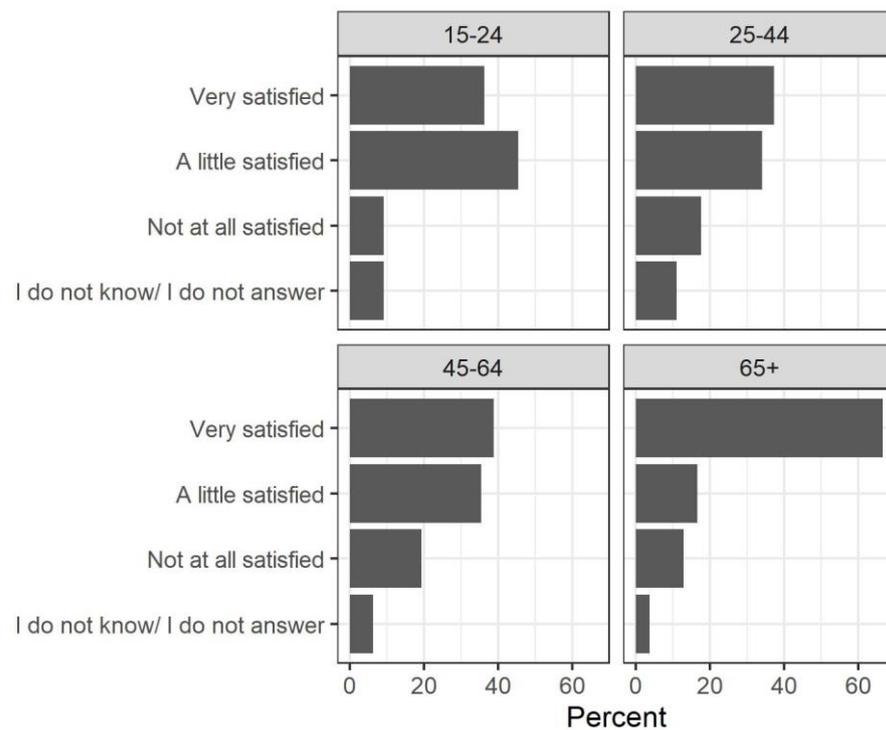


Figure A9. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reopening of the Churches by age (% by age). $X^2 = 20.43$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.013$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

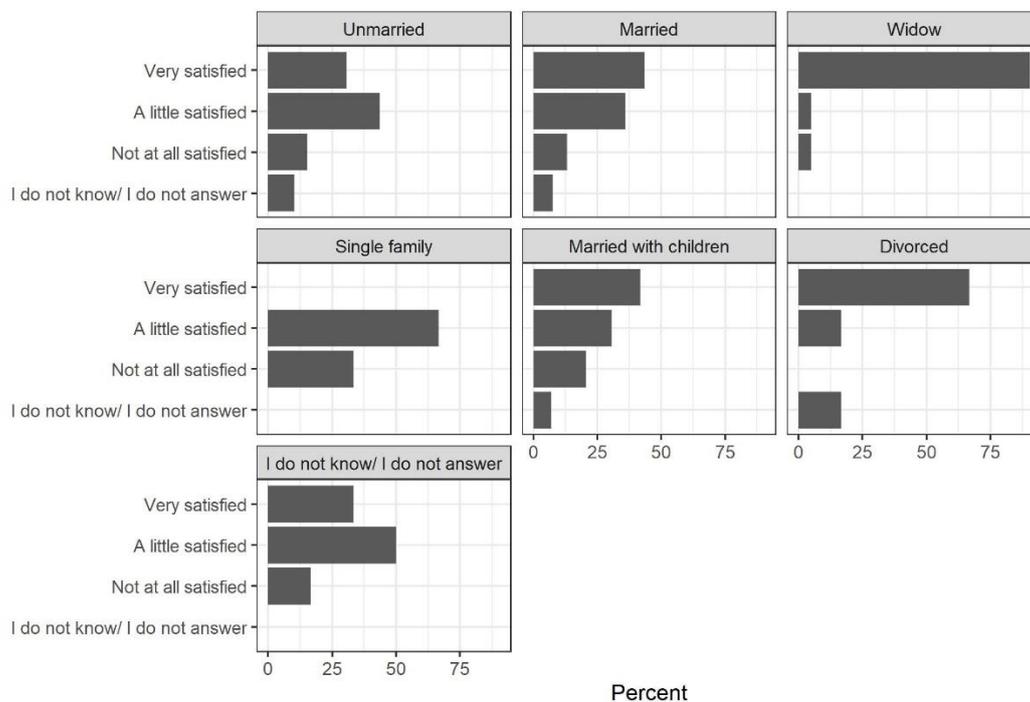


Figure A10. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reopening of the Churches by marital status (% by marital status). $X^2 = 37.37$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.008$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

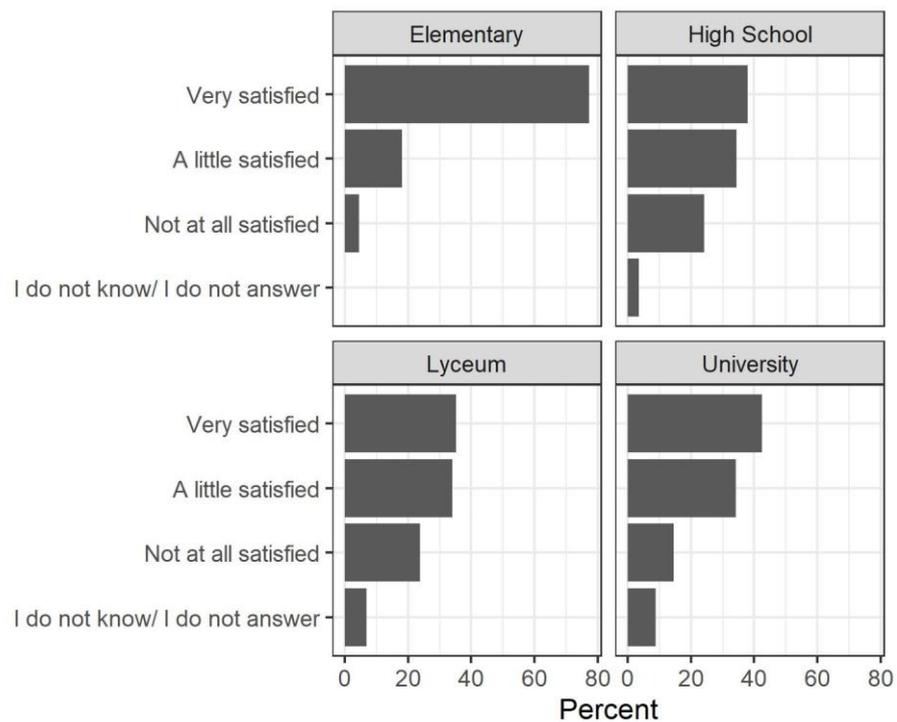


Figure A11. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reopening of the Churches by education (% by education). $X^2 = 18.121$, $df = NA$, $p = 0.030$ (Pearson’s Chi-squared test with simulated p -value based on 2000 replicates).

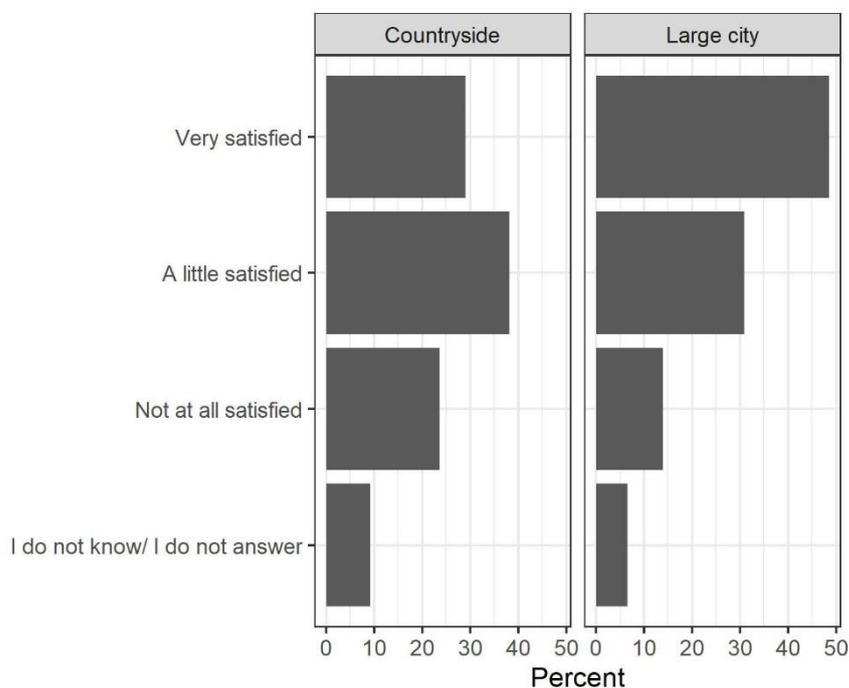


Figure A12. Cross-tabulation of attitudes of believers about the reopening of the Churches by city (% by city). $X^2 = 12.7676$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.005$.

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