



---

# ANDREA FILETTI

---

## **Politics and Religion in Post-Soviet Countries. A Comparative Analysis of Political Cultures in Georgia and Azerbaijan**

The relationship between religion and democracy has always been a hot topic for Social Sciences. Classical modernization theories, which have usually associated modernity with the progressive decline of religion (the weberian *Entzauberung*), has been recently called into question by the persistence of religious beliefs in the public sphere, not only in the U.S. (previously considered as a deviant case) but throughout the whole world. Both theoretical (Habermas 2007) and empirical analysis (Stepan 2010; Norris 2011) have shown that religion and democratic attitudes should not be considered at odds, since high

degrees of religiosity are not necessarily associated with minor support for democratic rules.

Though acknowledging their important contributions, these analysis can be improved. First of all, the reliability of the indicator "support for democracy" has been recently called into question, since supporting democracy is "socially desirable and has positive connotations" (Inglehart, Welzel 2009). Secondly, many authors have highlighted the fact that democracy has no unique meaning throughout the world, but rather it is interpreted in various manners. Consequently, "asking people whether they support democracy is, in effect, asking them whether they support whatever democracy means to them" (Coppedge 2012).

Therefore, a more in-depth analysis about the impact of democracy on more reliable indicators can give interesting indications on the topic. The paper undertakes a dual path: on the one hand, it uses the Caucasus Barometer 2011 (the most stable and reliable source of data for this area) to identify proper indicators for Azerbaijani and Georgian political culture, not simply referring to the "system dimension", but rather taking into consideration also the other three dimensions of Almond and Verba's most-cited definition of political culture, i.e. the "input and output aspects and the self as a political actor" (Almond, Verba 1963). Secondly, it embraces Inglehart and Welzel's suggestion, according to which "certain other items that do not explicitly mention democracy at all, are even stronger predictors of stable democracy" (Inglehart 2003). Starting from the assumption that democracy is, first of all, an 'emancipative achievement', genuine popular support is expected to derive from the endorsement of the principles underpinning it (among others equality, liberty and tolerance), which will be analyzed thanks to the CB 2011. Both results

will be crossed with control-variables related to religiosity: this will make possible an evaluation of the impact of religion on the "subjective orientations toward the political object" in all four dimensions and on the emergence of the so-called emancipative values.

The comparison between Georgia and Azerbaijan is eased by many factors that concur in making them two "most similar cases" (size, post-Soviet legacy, geopolitical factors, Human Development Index); it allows an evaluation of the role (stabilizing or not) that religion can play in hybrid/authoritarian contexts. More specifically, it confirms the hypothesis according to which religion has not played a unique role after the Soviet breakdown and offers the opportunity for original interpretations of the politics-religion relationship.