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How Can Digital Maps of Religions Inform Us about Fractionalization and Polarization in Post-Communist Romania?

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Abstract: This study explores religious diversity in Romania and how the trends of indices of religious fractionalization and polarization manifest at the county level in a post-communist period. The county level was selected as the relevant level for analysis due to its more clearly visible spatial dynamics with regard to religions. Recent studies have revealed that the erosion of diversity is an important aspect for any country and needs to be considered as an important aspect of democracy. This paper highlights how digital mapping of religious polarization and fractionalization in Romania has been generally maintained, although the regions of Transylvania, Banat, Dobrogea and Western Moldova remain areas in which there are different religions. Other than the general aspect of religious diversity depending on ethnic trends, there has been a rise of Pentecostals and Baptists at the county level. This aspect has further implications for our study, which calls for creating new institutions for dialogue between majority Orthodox communities and Protestants, not only so that potential conflicts do not appear between Orthodox and emerging religious communities but also to ensure objective, cultural, religious coherence. Our maps revealed the distribution patterns and the temporal evolution of religious denominations for the 1992–2011 period. The major line of originality in our research rests in the findings that after conducting a bivariate spatial autocorrelation analysis of religious fractionalization and polarization, we were able to identify two distinct clusters with spatial overlap over historical provinces.

Keywords: digital mapping of religions; religious diversity; quantitative methodology; fractionalization; polarization; counties; Romania



Citation: Rotaru, Marina-Alexandra, Remus Crețan, Ioan Sebastian Jucu, Ana-Neli Ianăș, and Marcel Török-Oance. 2024. How Can Digital Maps of Religions Inform Us about Fractionalization and Polarization in Post-Communist Romania? *Religions* 15: 763. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070763>

Academic Editor: Ihsan Yilmaz

Received: 1 April 2024

Revised: 8 June 2024

Accepted: 18 June 2024

Published: 24 June 2024



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1. Introduction

There is growing interest among social science researchers in studying how digital mapping and cultural diversity plays an important role in shaping social, political and economic outcomes (Rotaru et al. 2023). Research related to this issue is of great importance and is also relevant to various public policies (Singh and vom Hau 2016). People frequently adapt to the diversity of religions in society, and it is therefore possible that an increase or decrease in this phenomenon could engender different consequences over time. For instance, in the case of the dissolution of multi-religious states, ethnic and religious diversity can rapidly decline, posing completely different challenges to new homogeneous societies. On the other hand, countries with increasing religious diversity marked by different patterns of spatial dispersion may be more willing to introduce institutions that effectively manage the problems of greater populational heterogeneity than countries with shorter histories of diverse ethnic and religious societies and lower average rates of change in diversity (Easterly and Levine 1997). Failure to take account of these historical evolutions could hinder an understanding of the effects of ethnic and religious diversity of a population in a given region.

Since there may be a close correlation between religious fragmentation and polarization of a population in a specific region and a risk that tensions or even conflicts in society

can appear at certain times (Easterly 2001), the aims of this paper are to present a digital mapping analysis of the religious fragmentation and polarization of the population at the county level in post-communist Romania. Since ethnic and religious diversities based on different social, economic and political backgrounds may change over various layers of time and produce national and regional demographic patterns with multiple spatial, social, economic and cultural consequences, this paper aims to explore these aspects, considering post-socialist Romania as a fertile case study for examining ethnic and religious implications on the current shape of the religious landscape in Romania. Ethnicities and religions are among the main cultural traits that, under various political and economic systems, continuously shape and (re)shape social relations on a spatial and temporal scale (Rotaru et al. 2023). Accordingly, we aim to better understand how these religious processes have been spatially developed in Romania and how they work in this post-communist country through the lens of religious polarization and fragmentation.

In recent decades in Romania, under the capitalist umbrella, multiple religious spatial patterns occurred that must be carefully examined in order to not only understand the cultural aspects of national demographic dynamics but also foresee new paths and policies connecting changes in the national demographics in terms of culture, according to new spatial development policies. Furthermore, there is a need to connect the digital mapping of religions and demographic situations to international agendas on regional, national and international development; demographic diversity can be used as a key and critical tool for new avenues in establishing adequate policies in the economic progress of a place, regardless of whether it is local, regional or national or whether it spans the political borders of a certain area. The main questions for this study are as follows:

1. How was Romania spatially shaped from a demographic perspective through the lens of mapping religious fragmentation and polarization?
2. What spatial changes occurred at the NUTS (Nomenclature Units of Territorial Statistics) 3 level (i.e., Romanian counties) from the perspective of each religion, and how have the religious landscapes been altered or not?

To answer these questions, first, a theoretical background will be presented. Then, the authors will draw attention to the various religious contexts present in Romania. Methodology and data selection, as well as some results and discussions, will also be presented, and finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

2. Theoretical Background

The concept of religion concerns belief in the divine or sacred and in the supernatural, as well as the values and institutions associated with this belief, moral codes, dogmas and ritual practices (Paris and Bastarache 1995). Although there is great historical and geographical diversity of religious manifestations, their common feature is characterized by sacredness and the aspiration to human perfection—a value vector opposed to the profane, which signifies the degradation of human beings. Throughout its development, religion has taken a large number of forms in different cultures and peoples. Religion is a powerful tool for building and preserving the identity of various ethnic communities or even communities only formed by adherence to a particular religious faith. Therefore, religion is the bond of social life, as well as an instrument for increasing social cohesion (Zamfir and Vlăsceanu 1993).

Religion can be a starting point for examining issues of ethnic identity formation (Peach 2002). Geographers studying the negotiations of religious identity within different communities are often concerned with the overt articulation of religious identity, for example, how adherents from different locations establish their distinctive identities (religious and cultural) through their own understandings of religion and how they outwardly present their religious adherence (in terms of religious practice, ritual and behavior) (Chivallon and Belorgane 2001; Gale 2007).

As a general issue, the articulation of religious identity ranges from the material aspects of symbolizing religious identity (such as architecture and establishing a physical presence),

to negotiations and struggles in asserting religious identity in the face of persecution and exclusion, and to practices of ritual and religious behavior that restore one's religious identity (Kong 2005).

In addition, migration processes have led to the development of religious and ethnic pluralism but also to tensions between migrants and native people (O'Brien et al. 2023). This aspect highlights the importance of the cultural diffusion of religions, which determines significant changes in local cultural landscapes and in the local religious landscape of a place as having specific cultural value. This is because religious diffusion shapes certain religious values that tend to be dominant in certain places and landscapes, given that people's beliefs and cultural aspirations are expressed in terms of their practiced religions (Cipriani 2001). Against such a background, religion, through its specific ways of diffusion, influences communities and spreads, develops and impacts people's lives and communities (C. Park 2005), enculturating the local values of a community and providing a functional substitute for people's behaviors and communities (Cipriani 2017). Therefore, through religious diffusion, places and communities turn into spaces of acceptance (Montgomery 2001); the role of local policies in cultural landscape change is enhanced (Mataic 2018), as historical records concerning religious acceptance shape specific landscapes in local communities (Matthews et al. 2013), which are in a state of ongoing change and movement, with this demonstrating the religious and cultural identity of a place in terms of a geographical approach.

However, the landscape changes that accompany the movement and settlement of religiously defined communities are a key issue in the study of geography and religion (Kong 2010). Traditional cultural geographical approaches related to the study of religion are mainly concerned with determining the impact of religion on a landscape. A more contemporary approach to the study of the intersections between geography and religion not only highlights the role of religion in affecting landscape change and in ascribing sacred meanings to specific places but also recognizes how religious ideology and practice in specific spaces are guided and transformed by their location (Kong 1990, 2002).

A key focus in the study of religious sites is identity politics, which concern belonging and the meaning ascribed to those sites and the constant negotiations for power and legitimacy. In particular, in multicultural settings, contestation for legitimacy, public approval and negotiations for the use of particular spaces are central to determining how communities understand, internalize and struggle to compete for the right to practice their religious traditions in public spaces (Kong 1990, 2010). This relationship has to be unpacked in order to depict their intricate and intimate involvements, as well as their implications for various spatial scales, because these are responsible for shaping both spatial patterns and different religious landscapes. In this regard, religion seems to turn to cultural traits that make sense to a place, to a community or to a nation (Morello et al. 2017), and multiple religions present in a place are responsible for framing both new spatial patterns and religious landscapes with highly political relevance when it comes to social relations and cultural diversity (Hedges 2017; Moerman 2019; Willander 2019). This is the case because the ongoing changes in politics and policies allow new forms of religious structures to be involved in regional and national cultural communities (Klingorová and Havlíček 2015).

Against such a background, mapping the religious attributes of a place is an important step in understanding the most important implication of religion in regional and national contexts, which are continually shaped by specific religions. This argument referring to the mapping of religion highlights the geographical relevance of religion in recent studies (Scott and Simpson-Housley 2001; C. Park 2002, 2005), connecting it to (ethnic) cultural proximity (Berceanu et al. 2023; Crețan et al. 2014) and elections (Barsanuc et al. 2021; Doiciar and Crețan 2021), as well as to specific concepts of space, place and identity that frame new landscapes and spatial patterns and often relate to new paradigms for various problematizing dialogues on religious backgrounds and religion from a geographic perspective (Stump 2008; Knott 2008; Tong et al. 2021; Yorgason and della Dora 2009; Berceanu et al. 2023; Yang and McPhail 2023). As regards religion geographies, Romania

remains an interesting European spatial sample, with certain dynamic religious patterns framed both during past layers of time and in recent post-socialist decades with interesting, real diversity, which will briefly be investigated in the next section.

3. Methods and Data

This study uses descriptive statistics, as well as two indices of diversity—religious fractionalization and religious polarization applied to the territory of Romania. Statistical data were based on data supplied by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics for the post-communist period (Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011; See Supplementary Material). From these data, we constructed graphs, by means of which various spatialities of religions in Romania are critically presented and examined. These descriptive statistical data are useful because they can summarize population data (Dodge 2006). The software ArcMap 10.4 was helpful as a means of spatial representation and analysis with a geographic information system (GIS). Bar charts to graph population changes were created in GIS, in which both the spatial distribution of the different religions in Romania and the temporal evolution of the number of believers are represented cartographically.

This study also makes use of two fundamental indices: the fractionalization index (FRAC) and the polarization index (Q) (Taylor and Hudson 1972; Esteban and Ray 1994; Reynal-Querol 2002; Vigdor 2002; Alesina et al. 2003; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005; Rotaru et al. 2023).

As Lu and Yang (2020) argued, there are clear-cut differences between fractionalization and polarization because religious fractionalization indicates “the degree to which a population is composed of a number of different small-size groups” (p. 82). On the other hand, religious polarization reflects “how much a population is divided by a few similarly strong subgroups, with its extreme case being a population composed of two groups of equivalent size” (Lu and Yang 2020, p. 82).

3.1. Fragmentation or Fractionalization Index (FRAC)

The fragmentation or fractionalization index (FRAC) (Taylor and Hudson 1972) is determined as follows:

$$\text{FRAC} = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2$$

where

n = number of religious groups;

p_i = the relative proportion/frequency/empirical ratio in the form of a coefficient of the religious group “ i ” in the total population, which is determined as the fraction between the number of inhabitants of the religious group “ i ” and the total number of inhabitants.

The religious fractionalization index usually measures diversity as a steadily increasing function of the number of groups in a country. It is based on the probability that two individuals drawn randomly from a country belong to two different religious groups. The FRAC index takes values between 0 and 1, where 0 is a perfectly homogeneous population from a religious point of view. If the number of religious groups increases, the value of this index will also increase.

3.2. Polarization Index (Q)

The polarization index (Q) measures the standardized distance of a religious distribution, and we used the following formula:

$$Q = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{0.5 - p_i}{0.5} \right)^2 * p_i$$

where

n = number of religious groups;

p_i = the relative proportion/frequency/empirical ratio in the form of a coefficient of the religious group “ i ” in the total population, which is determined as the ratio between the number of inhabitants of the religious group “ i ” and the total number of inhabitants.

Both FRAC and Q were mapped, and the maps were used further for spatial analysis. Therefore, simultaneous analysis of the spatial distribution of both FRAC and Q was made using binomial local indicators of spatial autocorrelation (LISA) implemented in GeoDa software 1.22 for each year. LISA is a geostatistical method that identifies and assesses the presence of spatial clustering in a dataset (Anselin 1995). Local Moran’s I statistic is a key component of LISA. It calculates a measure of spatial autocorrelation for each observation in the dataset by comparing the value of that observation with the values of its neighbors (Anselin 2019). The result is a local indicator that highlights the degree of spatial clustering at a specific location and also identifies the presence of outliers.

A positive value on the LISA index indicates a clustered distribution of the data. It could be a high–high (HH) cluster (a high value surrounded by high value areas) or a low–low (LL) cluster (a low value area surrounded by low value areas). A negative value on the LISA index signals the presence of an outlier, which can be a high–low (HL) outlier (a high value area surrounded by low value areas) or a low–high (LH) outlier (a low value area surrounded by high value areas).

4. The Context of Religious Dynamics in Post-Communist Romania

The international study conducted in March 2015 by the “Gallup International” Institute and entitled “Religiosity and Atheism Index” shows that Romania ranks as the seventh most religious country in the world. In 2012, 89% of the population declared themselves to be religious, up from 85% in 2005. Romania is the only country in the European Union that appears in this listing of the top religious countries (Aktual 2015).

Contemporary Romania is a homogeneous state in terms of the majority of population (81.28%), whose religion is Orthodox (see Table 1). On the other hand, Romania is home to a large number of ethnic minorities with a religion other than Orthodox.

Table 1. Dynamics of the denominational structure of the post-communist Romanian population.

Religious Denomination	Year					
	1992		2002		2011	
	Number of Persons	Percentage	Number of Persons	Percentage	Number of Persons	Percentage
Orthodox	19,862,758	87.08%	18,856,122	86.97%	16,353,947	81.28%
Roman Catholics	1,161,942	5.09%	1,026,429	4.73%	870,774	4.33%
Greek Catholics	223,327	0.98%	191,556	0.88%	150,593	0.75%
Protestants	879,162	3.85%	768,021	3.54%	658,618	3.27%
Neo-Protestants	518,135	2.27%	643,253	2.97%	689,504	3.43%
Muslim	55,928	0.25%	67,257	0.31%	64,337	0.32%
Mosaic religion	9670	0.04%	6057	0.03%	3519	0.02%
Other religion	56,329	0.25%	89,196	0.41%	30,950	0.15%
No religion	24,314	0.11%	12,825	0.06%	18,917	0.09%
Atheist	10,331	0.05%	8524	0.04%	20,743	0.10%
Undeclared	8139	0.04%	11,734	0.05%	1,259,739	6.26%
Total	22,810,035	100.00%	21,680,974	100.00%	20,121,641	100.00%

(Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011).

It should be noted that the “Declaration on Religious Tolerance” was adopted for the first time in Europe in 1568, in the Principality of Transylvania. On the other hand, during the communist regime in Romania, interference in the statute on freedom of conscience and religion was allowed (Decree No. 177 of 1948, Monitorul Juridic 1948). At present, the Romanian

Constitution, according to the principle of freedom of religious belief, Article 29—Freedom of conscience—guarantees freedom of religious life ([Romanian Constitution 2019](#)).

There are 18 religions registered in Romania, predominantly Orthodox Christians, followed by Roman Catholic Christians and other religious groups, as shown in Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2. The data were obtained by collecting and recording the absolute values corresponding to population censuses carried out after 1990, as well as by determining them in percentages ([Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011](#)).

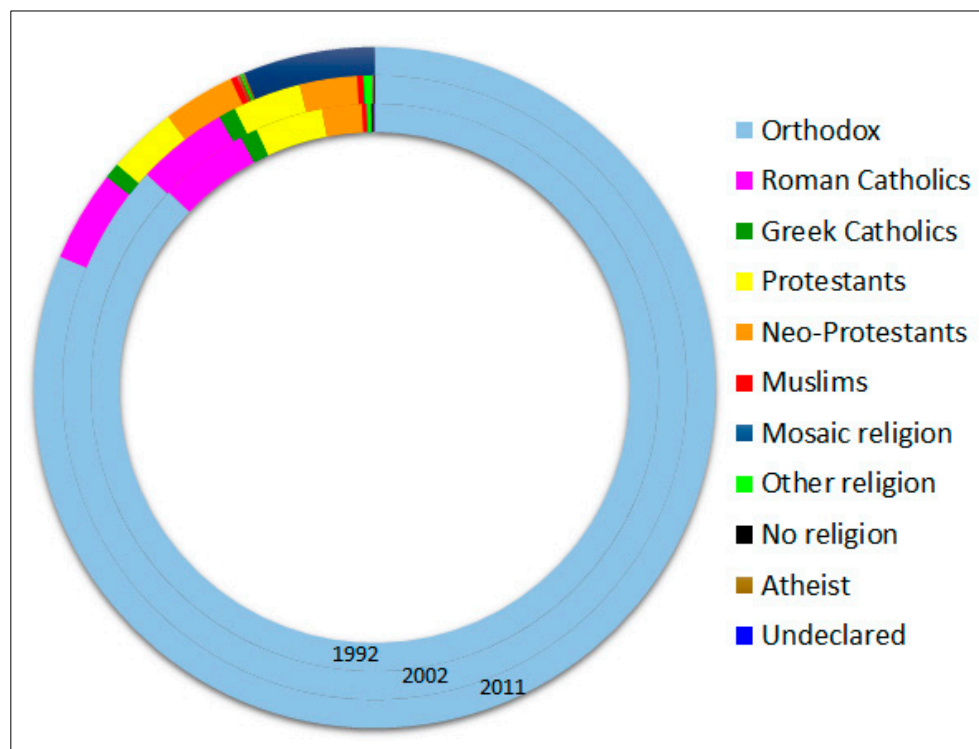


Figure 1. Dynamics of the religious structure of the post-communist Romanian population.

An important point to note is that in the 2011 Population Census, a high percentage (over 6%) of the population did not declare their religion, compared to about 0.05% in the 2002 Population Census and about 0.04% in the 1992 Population Census.

Regarding the evolution of the Orthodox population in Romania and their spatial distribution at the NUTS 3 level in the post-communist period, it can be seen that Orthodox Christians are present in all counties, but in some counties, their numbers are much lower than in other counties (Figure 3). Harghita and Covasna have the lowest number of Orthodox Christians in the whole country, and in the post-communist period, their evolution followed a decreasing trend in all counties. All this has been the result of the population decrease and emigration that Romanians have undergone over the last three decades. Moreover, the other lower numbers of Romanian Orthodox people are explained by the fact that in some counties, the overall population is lower.

In addition to the Orthodox religion, there are 17 other religions that are officially registered in Romania.

Roman Catholics comprise the second largest religious denomination in Romania, with their share of the total stable population varying between 4% and 5% ([Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011](#)). In 1054, the rupture between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, known as the Great Schism or East–West Schism, occurred due to the theological and political differences between Eastern and Western Christianity that had developed over the previous centuries ([Angle 2007](#)). Despite the efforts of Catholic popes and Orthodox patriarchs, only limited progress has been made towards reconciliation in recent decades ([Johnstone 2011](#)).

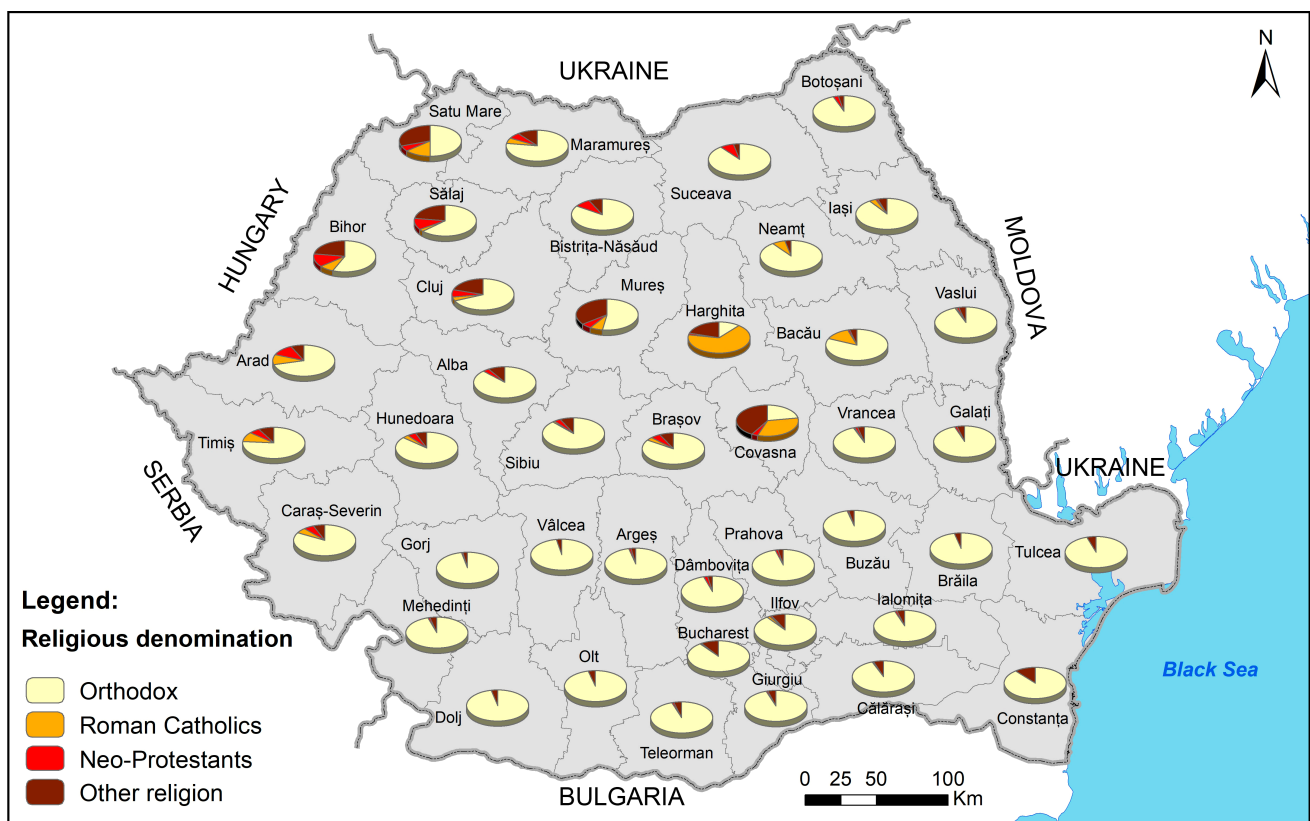


Figure 2. Share of religions at the NUTS 3 level in Romania based on the 2011 census data.

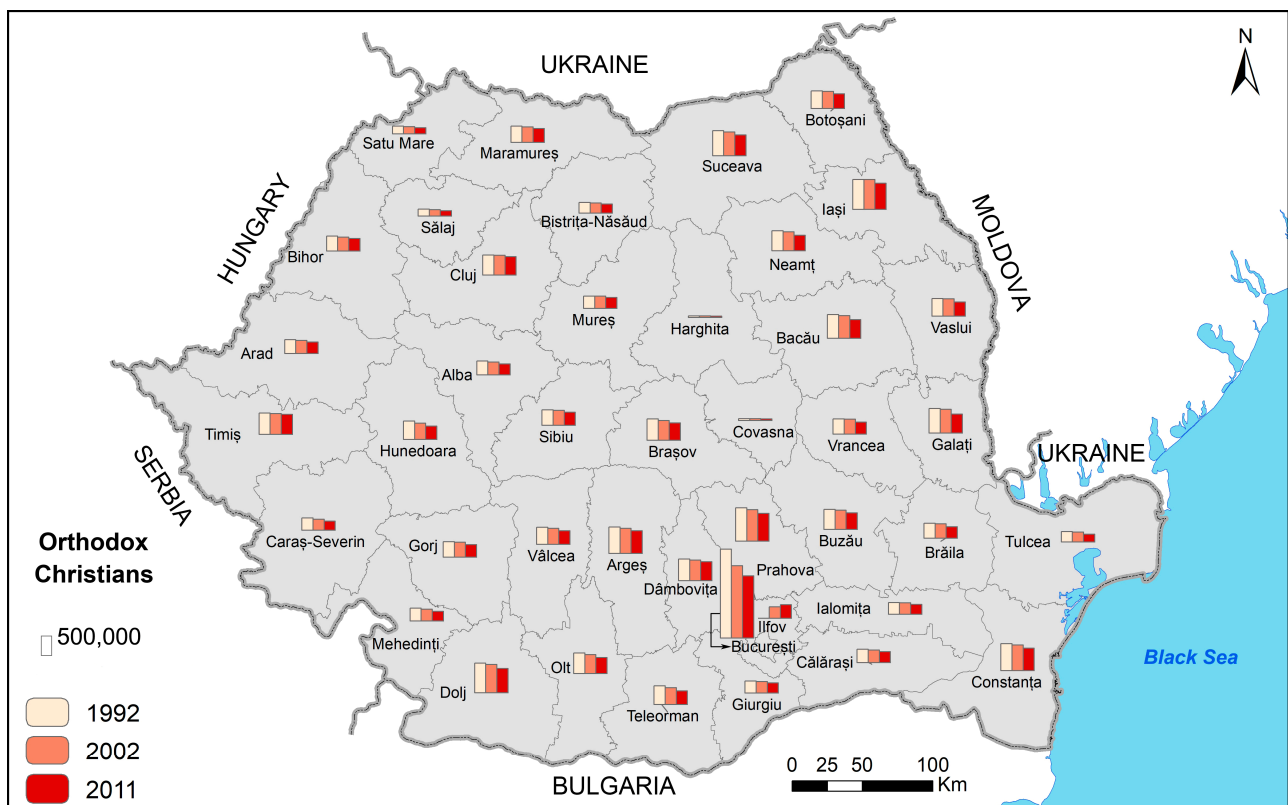


Figure 3. Numerical evolution of Orthodox Christians according to the censuses of 1992, 2002 and 2011 at the NUTS 3 level (i.e., county level).

The Roman Catholic Church in Romania is a Latin Rite Christian Church, part of the Catholic Church worldwide, under the spiritual leadership of the Pope and the Curia of Rome, with its administration in Bucharest (Gherca 2013). The earliest traces of Catholicism in the present territory of Romania were recorded in Transylvania, as a result of the expansion of Hungarian rule and, respectively, the integration of this Romanian province into the Kingdom of Hungary (Prodan 2002). Inaugurated by the early presence of the Benedictines, the Roman Catholic churches in the present territory of Romania had been strengthened by the colonization of the Transylvanian Saxons, by missionary activities among the local Romanian population and strong conversion efforts (Ștefănescu 1991).

During the communist regime, Romania broke off all diplomatic contact with the Holy See. The communists had continually tried to persuade the Catholics to organize themselves into a national church and cease contact with the Holy See but without success (Cioroianu 2007).

Shortly after the December 1989 Revolution in Romania, the Romanian state allowed for the resumption of Catholic Christian ties with the Holy See, making the Catholic population in Romania the fourth largest in the ex-socialist bloc, following Poland (majority Catholic), Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992).

More than half of the Romanian citizens of the Roman Catholic denomination are Hungarians, about a third are Romanians and the rest are mostly Germans and Slovaks. In smaller numbers, there are also Bulgarians, Poles, Croats, Czechs and Italians (Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011).

In the post-communist period, the number of Roman Catholic Christians has decreased considerably (Figure 4a). This decrease, especially in the first decade, is due to new demographic policies and the emigration of ethnic Germans to the West. On the other hand, as far as the evolution of Roman Catholics at the NUTS 3 level is concerned, Roman Catholic Christians are found in all counties, but mainly in Harghita, Covasna, Mures, Bacau, Neamt, Iasi, Timis, Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad, Sibiu and Bucharest (Figure 4a). The evolution of Roman Catholic Christians in Romania has followed a decreasing trend in all counties in the post-communist period.

Greek Catholics are another important Christian religion in Romania whose numerical share is very low, being less than 1% of the total stable population in the post-communist period (Romanian National Institute of Statistics 1992, 2002, 2011).

The Romanian Church United with Rome (also called the Greek Catholic Church of Romania) is traditionally considered, together with the Romanian Orthodox Church, as part of the Romanian national church (Togan 2010).

The existence of Greek Catholics is due to the fact that, starting in the second half of the 17th century, the Habsburg Empire began to extend its influence in Transylvania. Towards the end of the century, at the Synod of Alba-Iulia, several clerics from Transylvania voluntarily joined the Roman Catholic Church, as the Transylvanian Christian Orthodox Romanians had switched to the Catholic Church. However, they kept the traditions and the rite of the Eastern Church (Ghitta 2001) and were granted similar advantages and rights as the believers whose religions were accepted by the Habsburgs (Ghișa 2006).

During the communist regime (from 1948), the United Romanian Church was outlawed due to strong Soviet influence, and many clergy and even ordinary Greek Catholic believers were subjected to harsh persecution. The banning of this church during the communist period led to its patrimony becoming the property of the Romanian Orthodox Church or the Romanian communist state (Vasile 2004; Bozgan 2005).

Shortly after the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, the decree by which the communist authorities banned the existence of the United Romanian Church was repealed, and this church was again officially recognized by the new democratic authorities. The authorities even decided to return the properties confiscated by the communists (Dămășa 1994), but this was difficult to achieve, and there are still some legal disputes concerning this issue (Seiche 2010).

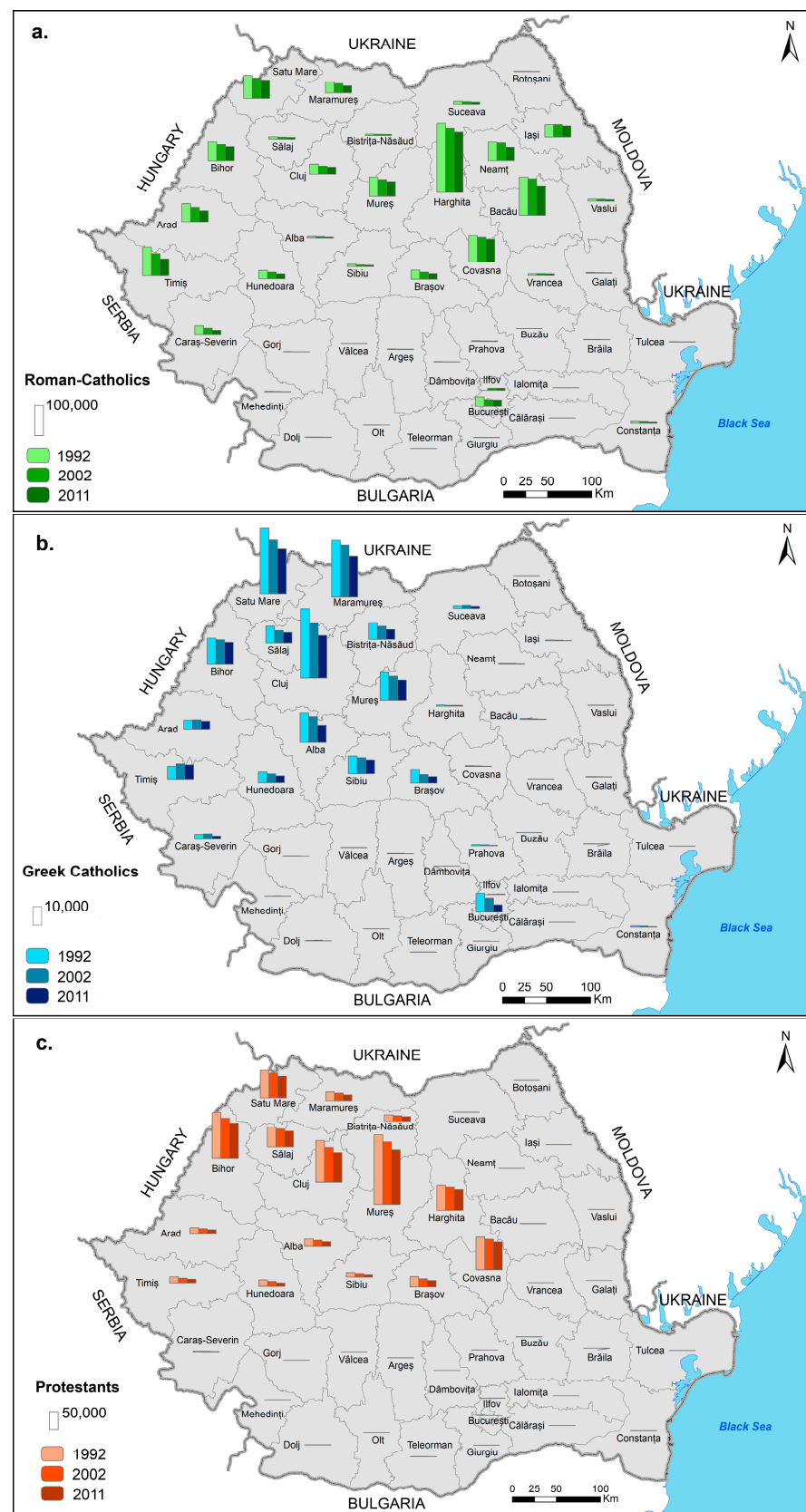


Figure 4. Cont.

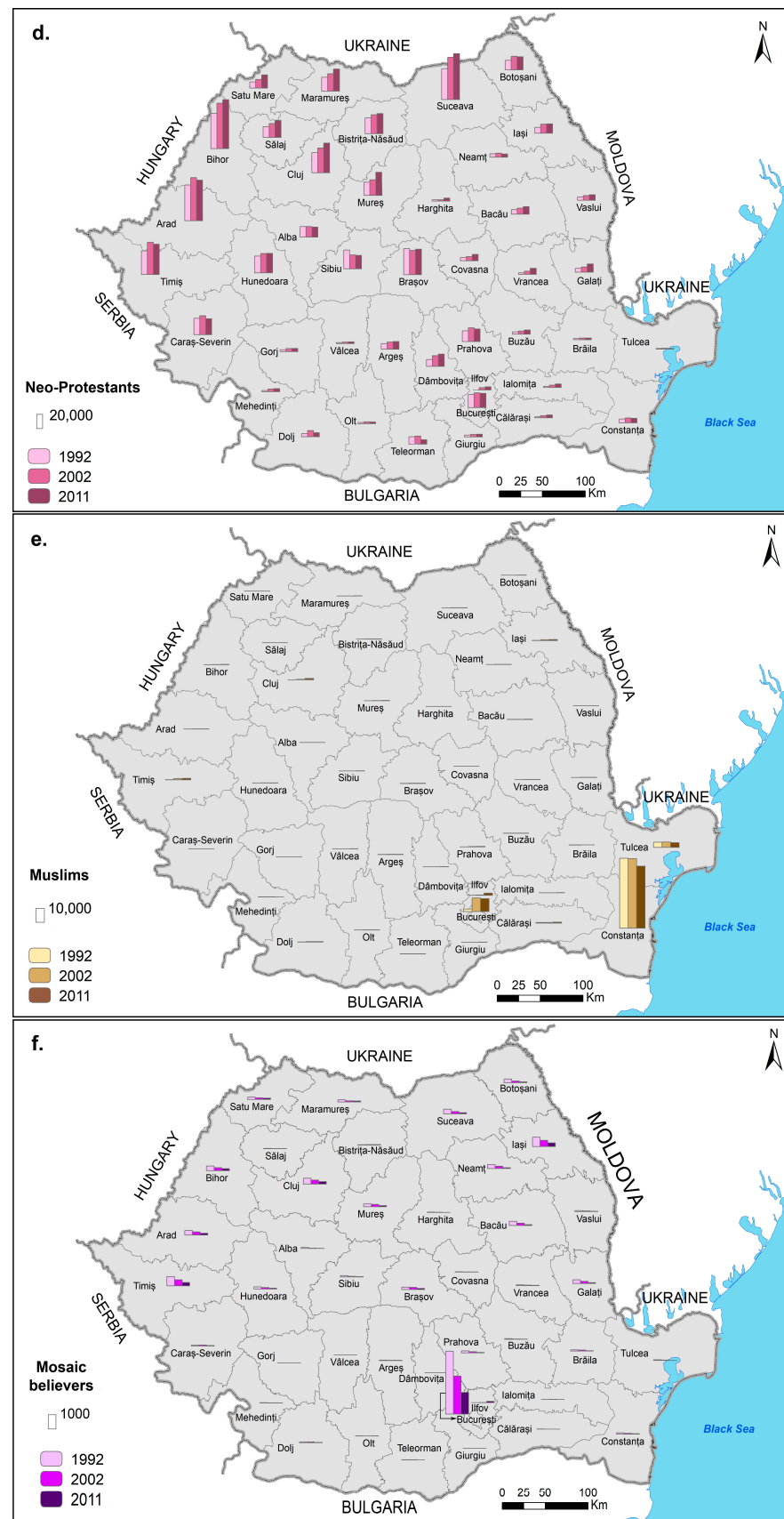


Figure 4. Numerical evolution of the main denominations, according to the censuses of 1992, 2002 and 2011 at the NUTS 3 level (i.e., county level) in Romania ((a) Roman Catholics; (b) Greek Catholics; (c) Protestants; (d) Neo-Protestants; (e) Muslims; (f) Mosaic believers).

Analyzing the numerical evolution of Greek Catholics at the NUTS 3 level, it is evident that they are predominantly dispersed in the regions of Transylvania, Maramureș, Crișana and Banat (see Figure 4b).

Protestants are another important group of Christian believers in Romania. Protestants have their own ecclesiastical structures, historically rooted in Martin Luther's Reformation against the Catholic Church but based on Christian ideologies (Blond 1976; Ryrie 2018). Protestantism is diverse and divided into various religions, without forming a single structure (Hillerbrand 2004). At the same time, non-denominational, charismatic and independent churches are growing and constitute a significant part of Protestantism (Heussi 1991; Juergensmeyer 2005).

In Romania, Protestants are divided into Reformed (comprising mostly ethnic Hungarians), Unitarians (ethnic Hungarians) and Lutherans (ethnic German Saxons, Hungarians, Slovaks). Analyzing the numerical evolution of Protestants at the NUTS 3 level, it is evident that they are predominantly dispersed in Transylvania, Crișana and Maramureș (see Figure 4c).

Neo-Protestants are another important group of Christian believers in Romania who are detached from Protestants as a result of a new protest against Catholicism and its teachings. Neo-Protestantism had originally been a religious stream within Protestantism and then became a religion in its own right (Cowan and Bromley 2007). In Romania, Neo-Protestants appeared in the 19th century, coming from Western Europe and the United States (Ramet 1991). Neo-Protestantism in Romania includes, among others, Baptism, Pentecostalism, Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals and the Gospel Christians Church (Petraru 2006).

During the communist regime, the number of neo-Protestants was intensely supervised and kept under strict control by the state authorities due to the atheism promoted by the regime. The mobility of the believers was determined by evangelization missions but, above all, by the links and contacts of the Neo-Protestants with the Western countries from which these denominations originated (Petcu 2005).

It can be seen that in the post-communist period, there has been a significant increase in the number of Neo-Protestants, and they are widespread in all the counties of Romania, with their numbers increasing (see Figure 4d).

Muslims are also an officially recognized group of believers in Romania. Their religion is Islam, one of the three great monotheistic religions. Dobrogea is the first Romanian province whose territory was inhabited by Turks, who founded the Muslim city of Babadag about 750 years ago (Anghelescu 2014; Ekrem 1994; Mehmed 1976). The Islamic presence in northern Dobrogea expanded under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, with several successive waves of migration of Turks to these lands, but it began to steadily decline from the late 19th century (Rădulescu and Bitoleanu 1979).

During the communist regime, Muslims in Romania were subjected to surveillance measures by the state (Ionescu 1994). However, after the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, the Muslim group began to emancipate itself.

It can be seen that in the post-communist period, there has been a significant decrease in the number of Muslims (see Figure 4e) in Romania as a result of the immigration of ethnic Turks, with lower demographic rates visible as well. Analyzing the numerical evolution of Muslims at the NUTS 3 level, it is evident that they are predominantly dispersed in the counties of Dobrogea (Constanța and Tulcea), where the trend was downward, as well as in Bucharest, where there was significant increasing trend in the first post-communist decade and then a slight decrease.

The adepts of the Mosaic religion are another group of officially recognized believers in Romania whose religion is the original Hebrew religion of the Israelite prophet Moses and is an eminently ethnic religion also known as Judaism (Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 2000).

The first presence of Jews in Romania is not exactly known. During the Reconquista in the 16th century, the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were expelled. Additionally, large groups of Jews also arrived in the current Romanian territory (Eskenasy 1986).

The history of Jewish communities in present-day Romania has been sinusoidal. During the interwar period, Jews in Romania had the opportunity to assert themselves in economic, social, political and cultural life (Iancu 2009). However, the fascist and anti-Semitic ideology in Europe also reached Romania. The Iron Guard or the Romanian fascists promoted anti-Semitic ideas, which even led to the physical elimination of ethnic Jews, causing the Holocaust during the Antonescian regime (Eskenasy 1986).

The establishment of the communist regime in Romania and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 led to the emigration of Jews from Romania to their new homeland, which led to a massive decrease in their numbers (Constantiniu 2010). Moreover, during the communist regime, the Jews were subjected to surveillance measures by the state (Ionescu 1994).

From the analysis of the data presented for the post-communist period in Romania (see Figure 4f), it can be seen that there is a significant decrease in the number of Mosaic believers, which is largely due to the immigration of ethnic Jews in communist times. Analyzing the numerical evolution of Mosaic believers at the NUTS 3 level, it is evident that they live in all counties, especially in large cities such as Bucharest, Timișoara and Iași, with their numbers having decreased continuously in post-communist years.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Digital Maps and Their Importance in Understanding the Spatialities of Religious Communities

The maps reveal a pattern of the territorial distribution of the denominations in Romania, which is closely related to the historical provinces of Romania. Therefore, against the background of an almost uniform spatial distribution of Orthodox Christians, there is a spatial grouping of Catholics, Protestants and Greek Catholics in Transylvania and Banat, provinces under Habsburg occupation for a long time. Muslims are concentrated in Dobrogea, a province that was part of the Ottoman Empire. Jews appear in greater numbers in Moldova and Banat, provinces known in the past for their large numbers of mosaic believers. Neo-Protestants are concentrated in a larger number in Banat and Transylvania, just like the Protestants, from which they detached. As a result of religious freedom after the fall of communism and the practice of proselytizing, Neo-Protestants are present in all counties. As the main pole of attraction, Bucharest is characterized by the presence of all denominations, of which the Orthodox are the most numerous and the Protestants are the least numerous.

5.2. Religious Fractionalization and Polarization of the Population in Post-Communist Romania

Changes in religious diversity within countries are of particular importance. Some studies have concluded that religious diversity can have a negative impact on economic development, macroeconomic stability, social trust, participation in government, quality of governance, democracy and other socioeconomic outcomes (Fum and Hodler 2010; Singh and vom Hau 2016). Some researchers believe that religious fragmentation can also impact the distribution of consumption, with independent negative consequences, and with denominational heterogeneity in the population negatively affecting the provision of public goods (Miguel and Gugerty 2005). Given the redistributive nature of public goods, reduced provision could lead to the negative impact of religious fragmentation on social inequality (Banerjee et al. 2005; Banerjee and Somanathan 2007). High levels of religious inequality can lead to conflict and crime (Murshed and Gates 2005), inefficient redistribution (Lee 2017) and lower rates of economic growth (Persson and Tabellini 1992).

However, some researchers argue that it may be useful to rethink the assumption that religious diversity is relatively invariant over time, as changes in the religious heterogeneity of a population may play a role in affecting the relationship between religious diversity and socioeconomic outcomes (Baldwin and Huber 2010).

Analyzing the long-run effects and time-varying changes (fast or slow) of a population's religious diversity could help advance our knowledge of peaceful coexistence in religiously diverse societies.

5.2.1. Religious Fractionalization

On the basis of post-communist Romanian population census data and using the formula for calculating the fractionality index (FRAC), we obtained data on fractionalization/fragmentation (see Figure 5). The values obtained shows that the religious fragmentation of the population in Romania has undergone some changes during post-revolutionary years, in the sense that it has reduced in some counties and has remained at a low level in other counties.

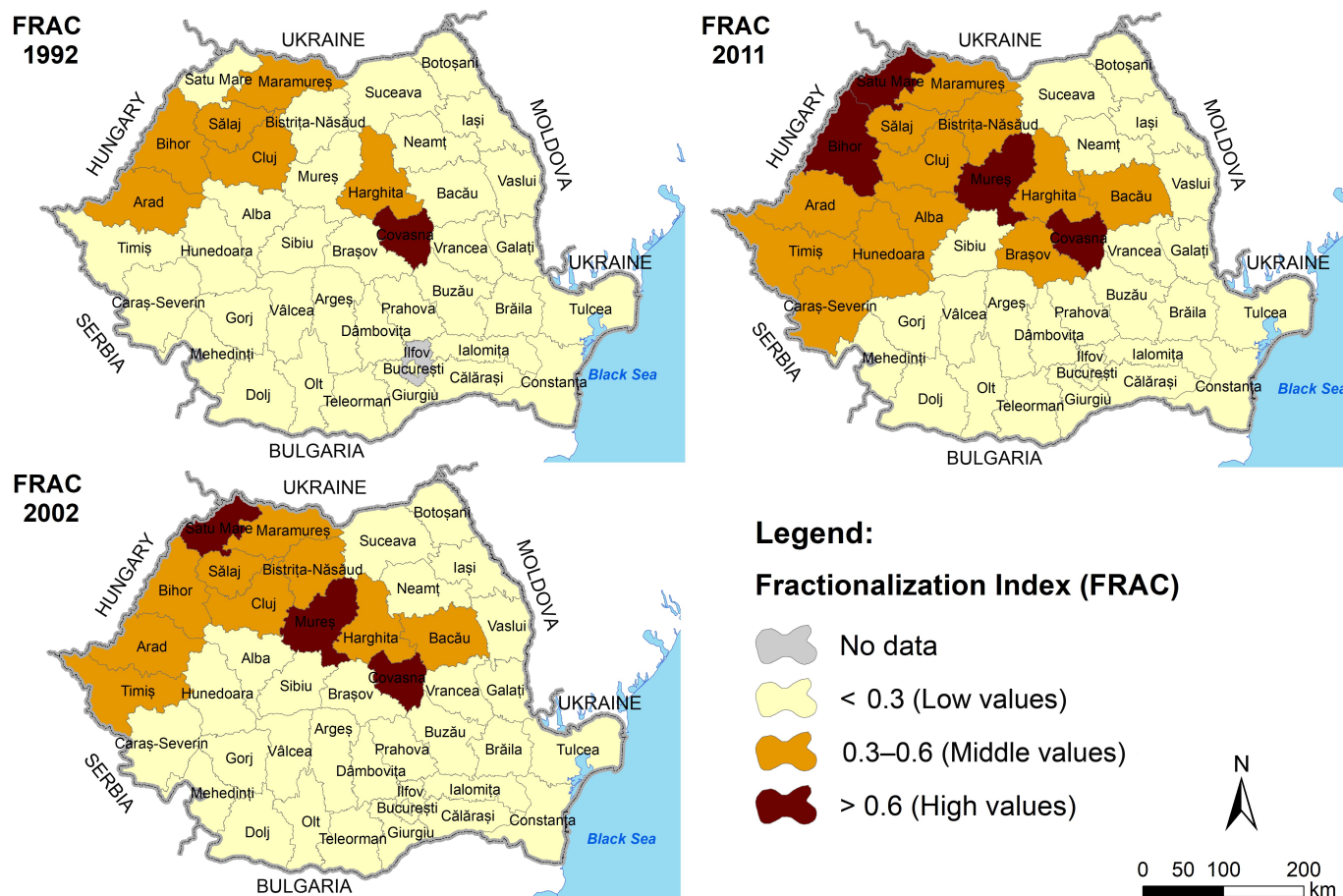


Figure 5. Religious fractionalization index at the NUTS 3 (i.e., county) level in Romania.

We obtained the following patterns of fractionalization: 0 to 0.3 are low levels; 0.3 to 0.6 are quite homogenous areas in terms of fractionalization; and over 0.6 are high levels of fractionalization. Places with low levels of religious fractionalization include counties in south and south-eastern Romania (such as Ialomița, Argeș, Brăila and Buzău), while places with high levels of fractionalization extending from 0.6 to 0.8 include counties located in north-western and central Romania, including Satu Mare, Covasna, Bihor and Mureș.

These data indicate that more smaller-sized groups of Neo-Protestants (such as Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gospel Christians and others) have appeared in north-west Romania and in the central and south-eastern part of Transylvania.

5.2.2. Religious Polarization

The polarization index (Q) is used to measure the standardized distance of an ethnic/religious distribution from a bimodal distribution (a bimodal distribution is found when there are two perfectly equal groups in a community, i.e., each group represents 50% of the community).

Based on the population census data from the post-communist period in Romania and using the formula for calculating the polarization index (Q), we obtained data about religious polarization (see Figure 6).

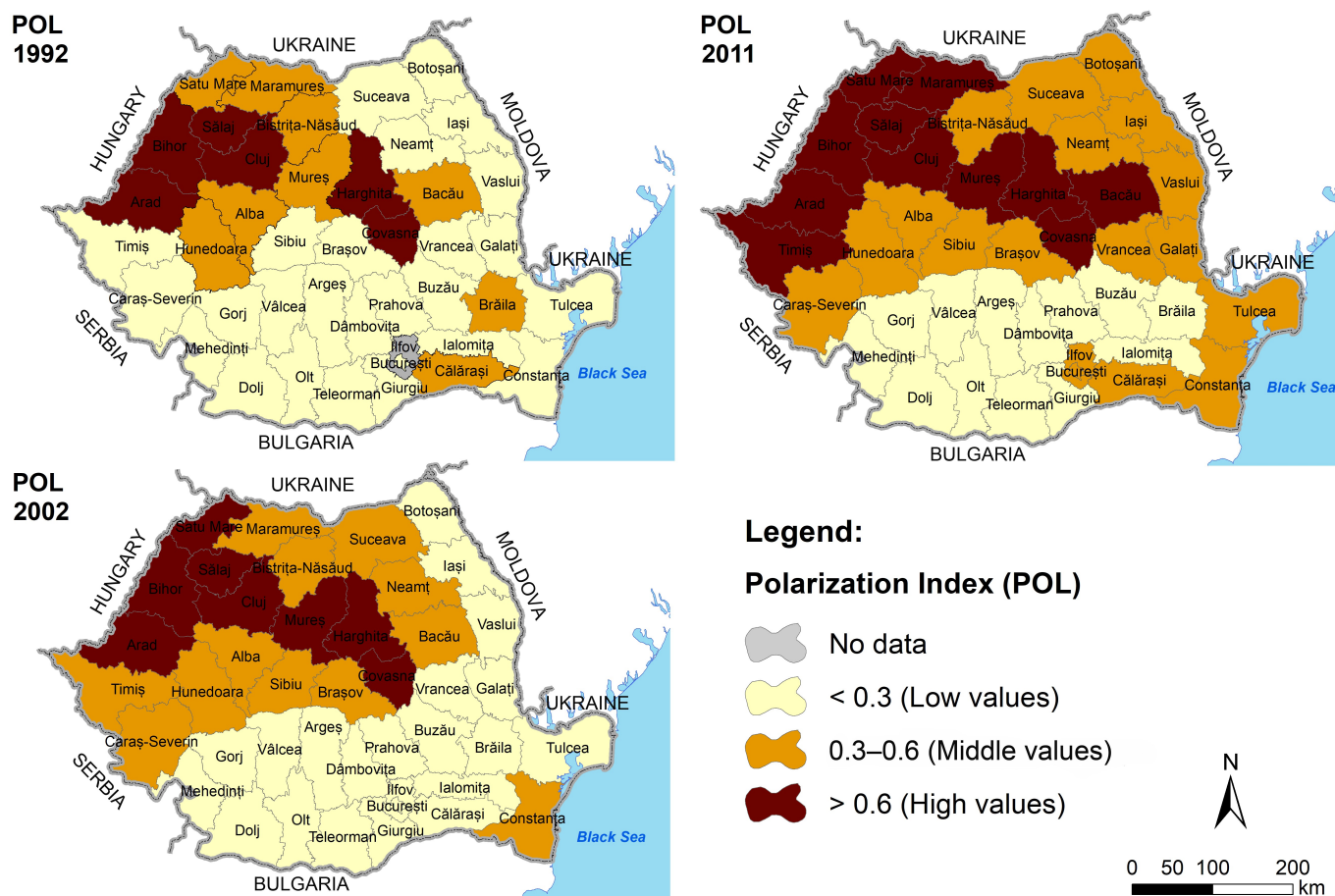


Figure 6. Religious polarization index at the NUTS 3 (i.e., county) level in Romania.

The values show that the religious polarization of the population in Romania has undergone some changes in the last three decades, in the sense that there have been some increased fluctuations in western and central Romania where stronger Neo-Protestant groups (Pentecostals and Baptists) grew in number. This means that the population in those regions is divided by a few strong religious groups (i.e., besides the Orthodox, there are important religions such as Roman Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals and Baptists).

We identified three different patterns of polarization. Taking values 0 to 0.3 as low levels of polarization, 0.3 to 0.6 as middle-level polarized areas, and over 0.6 as high levels of polarization, we notice that counties that have less religious diversity also have lower polarization index scores (Dolj, Prahova, Olt, Vâlcea). On the other hand, counties with higher values of polarization (over 0.6) are those where different stronger religious groups coexist (Sălaj, Satu Mare, Harghita, Covasna, Cluj, Timiș).

5.2.3. Spatial Autocorrelation between Religious Fragmentation and Polarization

Following the bivariate LISA spatial autocorrelation analysis of the religious FRAC and Q indicators, a digital map was obtained for each analyzed year (see Figure 7).

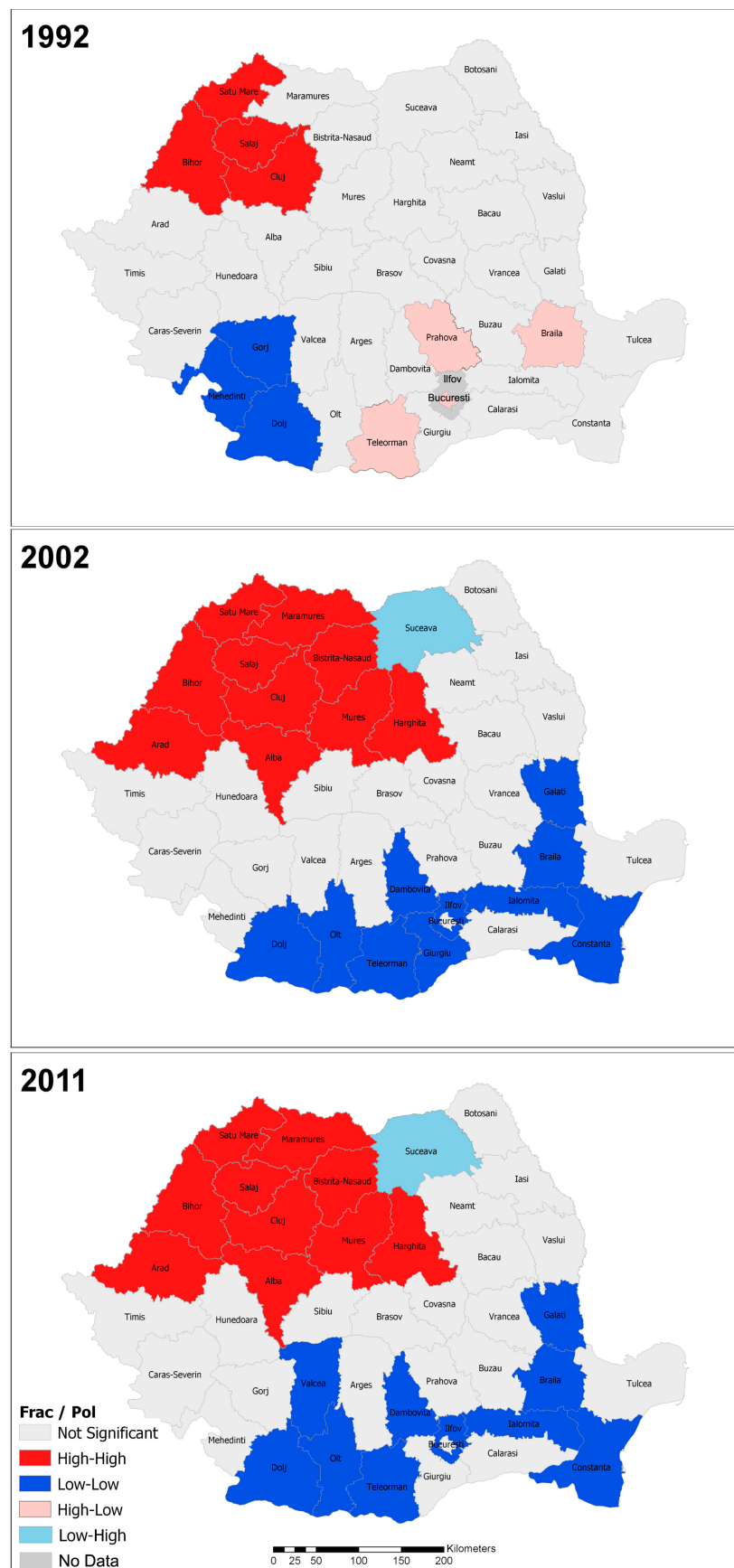


Figure 7. Bivariate LISA maps of the religious fragmentation and polarization indicators.

The value of the local Moran index (Moran's I) for the year 1992 is 0.111 ($p > 0.05$) and indicates that the distribution of the data is more random than clustered. There is an HH (high–high) cluster, containing four counties in Transylvania, and an LL (low–low) cluster, grouping three counties in the south of the country in Oltenia. Four HL (high–low) outliers, including Bucharest, were also identified in the south of Romania. There are no LH (low–high) outliers.

The distribution pattern of the two indicators changed considerably in 2002. The value of the Moran's index is high (Moran's $I = 0.628$, $p < 0.0001$) which proves that the spatial distribution pattern is clustered. There are two big clusters of equal size (10 counties each): one HH cluster that overlaps almost all of Transylvania and Crişana and one LL cluster that groups counties located in the south and southeast of the country. Suceava County stands out as an LH outlier. There are no HL outliers.

The map for the year 2011 is similar to the one from 2002. The Moran's I value is 0.588 ($p < 0.0001$); although high, it is still a little lower than in 2002. The HH cluster is unchanged, but the LL cluster, although it is still formed from 10 counties, underwent a series of changes. Therefore, this cluster now includes Vâlcea county, which was not statistically significant in previous years, while Giurgiu county becomes not statistically significant.

Summing up, we demonstrate the importance of such an analysis to depict the spatial correlation between religious fragmentation and polarization indices. The analysis of Moran's index values during the analyzed period shows a clustering trend between 1990 and 2011. However, after 2002, there is a small fragmentation trend of low–low clusters in the southern part of Romania. Also, in this case, the spatial distribution of the HH and LL clusters can be better understood if we consider their spatial overlap over historical provinces. Therefore, the HH cluster falls entirely in Transylvania, a province characterized by a mixture of denominations, each with many believers, except Muslims. Unlike this, the LL cluster overlaps over Muntenia and Dobrogea, where Orthodoxy is the religion with the most followers—the other religions being less represented.

To conclude, the cultural diffusion of religions could lead to significant changes in the local religious landscape of a place (Cipriani 2001; Cipriani 2017; C. L. Park 2005). As religious diffusion (and other migration patterns in general) influences local and regional communities (C. Park 2005), places and communities turn into spaces of acceptance (Montgomery 2001) or spaces of rejection (O'Brien et al. 2023). In this respect, local policies should be adapted to the changes in religious cultural landscapes (Mataic 2018). Fractionalization and polarization in post-communist Romania constitutes an interesting case because the diffusion of religions has encountered some changes in fractionalization and polarization due to the rise of some Neo-Protestant religions, mainly in north-western and central Romania. Furthermore, religious diversity in Romania is unfolded statistically as an HH (high–high) cluster in four counties in Transylvania. On the other hand, the LL (low–low) cluster is grouped around counties in the south of Romania. Bucharest remains among the four HL (high–low) outliers in the south of Romania.

6. Conclusions

This paper deals with important geographical questions of demographic diversity and religious landscape in Romania in order to portray the main implications of religious spatialities at both regional and national scales. Over time, Romania has constructed a certain demographic background, with religious diversity being one of the features that has best ensured specific models of inter- and multiculturalism. This diversity has continuously shaped Romanian space and territory both in communist and post-communist times with different forms of fragmentation and polarization, which are visible at the regional scale. This present analysis highlights how the religious diversity of Romania preserved its initial patterns even though traditional religions such as Mosaic religion and German Evangelicalism underwent a decrease in their numbers due to Jews and Germans migrating to different countries, especially Israel, Germany, Austria and Hungary. On the other

hand, an increasing number of Neo-Protestants has been noted in post-communist times, a process that unfolds in higher values of fractionalization and polarization in Romania.

Spatial analysis based on religious maps allowed for a better understanding of the phenomenon of religion in Romania, highlighting spatial disparities and identifying clusters with different degrees of correlation between religious polarization and fragmentation. Religious polarization and fragmentation are more evident in the historical regions of Romania such as Transylvania, Banat, Crişana, Maramureş, Bucovina and Western Moldavia, where Catholic and neo-Protestant minorities are still well represented in the demographic background and religious landscape of these regions. Therefore, after conducting a bivariate spatial autocorrelation analysis of religious fractionalization and polarization, we were able to identify two distinct clusters that spatially overlap over the Romanian historical provinces. If the HH (high–high) cluster appears in several counties in Transylvania, the LL (low–low) cluster is grouped around counties in the south of Romania. These visible and functional patterns that we identified are necessary to consider in national political agendas in order to (re)frame adequate strategies for fertile dialogue and human and cultural interactions within a general religious background. This should be based on mutual recognition and reciprocal respect, thus framing a continuous cultural environment based on inter- and multiculturalism.

The appearance of new, strong, interreligious and cultural institutions that could enhance fertile dialogue about the recognition of religions, with respect to other religious minorities, is a key aspect for policymakers; these have the power to accord mutual recognition of all religious minorities in order to eliminate all potential tensions that could alter religious peace at local and regional scales. Policymakers should create new tools or institutions for permanent, constructive dialogue between the majority Orthodox population and religious minorities in different spatial contexts.

There are several limitations of our study. First, our study is based on quantitative data, excluding the last Romanian census. This is due to the fact that, at the moment of writing this article, census data for 2021 were not released. Second, we do not have space in this article to also include a statistical interpretation of data concerning urban and rural dimensions, but further studies on Romanian religions could develop the outcomes of this article by including different trends in fractionalization and polarization at urban and rural levels.

The case of Romania and its historical regions generally follows Eastern European religious paths and could be further explored in order to provide new critical insights into a post-socialist religious background. This could be viewed through the lens of fragmentation and polarization and new social, cultural and demographic policies to sustain national religious diversity in a global dynamic world where religions tend to be spatially more fluid than ever.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/rel15070763/s1>, File S1. Denominational religious structure in post-communist Romania; File S2. Fractionalization and polarization data/Frac and Q data.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.-A.R., R.C. and I.S.J.; methodology, M.-A.R., A.-N.I. and M.T.-O.; software, M.-A.R., A.-N.I. and M.T.-O.; validation, M.-A.R., A.-N.I. and M.T.-O.; formal analysis, M.-A.R. and R.C.; investigation, M.-A.R. and R.C.; resources, M.-A.R.; data curation, M.-A.R.; writing—original draft preparation, M.-A.R. and R.C.; writing—review and editing, M.-A.R., R.C., I.S.J., A.-N.I. and M.T.-O.; visualization, M.-A.R., A.-N.I. and M.T.-O.; supervision, R.C.; project administration, M.-A.R. and R.C.; funding acquisition R.C. All authors contributed equally to writing this article. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the first author. The data are not publicly available due to the fact that there is a large volume of data that we would like to use in our future studies.

Acknowledgments: We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, which contributed to improving the first version of this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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