

TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF IRRELIGION IN POST-YUGOSLAV STATES

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ABSTRACT: In the twenty-five years after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the percentage of the irreligious population has decreased sharply in all post-Yugoslav states with the exception of Slovenia. This article attempts to present the complexity of the topic by answering five relevant questions: (1.) How do we distinguish between irreligiosity and religiosity in an effort to extract and understand the subject of the sociology of irreligiosity in the post-Yugoslav states? (2.) What has occurred in the areas of irreligiosity and the irreligious in the past twenty-five years? (3.) How do we explain the different trajectories observed in various post-Yugoslav states? (4.) What are the basic socio-demographic and other characteristics of the irreligious? (5.) What possible scenarios are there for the future of irreligiosity and the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states? Finally, it is established that the processes that have been observed do not refute the theory of secularization when the latter is not meant to exclude possible processes of de-secularization (when appropriate conditions exist).

KEYWORDS: post-Yugoslav states, irreligion, (de)secularization, civil religion, existential security, ethno-religious mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of the post-Yugoslav successor states make them highly suitable for research into religiosity and irreligiosity. Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, these societies, once parts of the same socialist ('atheist') state, have been exposed to a number of factors which affect ir/religiosity. Twenty-five years after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the time is ripe to assess the main changes in ir/religiosity and to test certain sociological theories. For sociologists of religion whose usual subject of investigation is religiosity, observing irreligiosity poses a particular challenge and requires a change in perspective and interpretation.¹

The title of this paper refers to one of the rare comprehensive discussions of irreligiosity in sociology: namely, Colin Campbell's *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* (2013[1971]). In choosing

¹ This paper is based on the lecture I gave at the ISORECEA Conference, Religion and Non-religion in Contemporary Societies: Theoretical, Empirical and Methodological Challenges for Research in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, in Zadar, Croatia, in April 2016.

the title, I am first giving credit to Campbell's book, which provided me with guidance and inspiration, and, second, emphasizing that the present article is merely an introduction into a topic that has not yet received comprehensive study in the field of the post-Yugoslav sociology of religion. It has to be emphasized that this paper cannot take into account all the complexities of the topic, which derive from the problem of definition of irreligion as presented by Campbell (2013, 19, 21-22, 24-32).

My goal in this paper is to provide a skeletal answer to the following questions: (1.) How do we distinguish between irreligiosity and religiosity in an effort to extract and understand the subject of the sociology of irreligiosity in the post-Yugoslav states? (2.) What has occurred in the areas of irreligiosity and the irreligious in the past twenty-five years? (3.) How do we explain the different trajectories observed in various post-Yugoslav states? (4.) What are the basic socio-demographic and other characteristics of the irreligious? (5.) What possible scenarios are there for the future of irreligiosity and the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states?

1. HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH IRRELIGIOSITY FROM RELIGIOSITY?

When attempting to answer the first question, either in general or specifically as it relates to post-Yugoslav societies, we inevitably encounter two problems: first, the presence of religion in phenomena that are usually considered irreligious and, second, the presence of irreligion in phenomena that are usually considered religious. To explain these let us take into account the period before the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav socialist regime, although officially irreligious, did contain certain characteristics that could be perceived as religious. Josip Broz Tito, the country's charismatic leader, was the object of veneration both when he was alive and after his death, and this veneration was not utterly profane in nature (Sretenović and Puto 2004; Flere 2007, 688-690). This characteristic of Yugoslav socialism was noted early. Here, I quote a passage by American-Slovene author Louis Adamic in *The Eagle and the Roots*, written after his visit to Yugoslavia during which he met Tito.

Someone once said that heroes are bred where making a living comes hard. That fits Yugoslavia, the Balkans, like a kid glove. People do dream of God, of gods and demigods, of saviors, when they're poor and afraid. It may well be that in Yugoslavia (and in Russia) 'Marxism-Leninism' has less to do with a set of precise but adjustable theories like socialism and communism, and with a deliberate conscious lunge into a new order, than with a people's need to be proud of being Serbians, to have an identity as Yugoslavs (or Russians). Setting up a demigod in place of the old God of the Church, suddenly doubted or rejected. Setting up a Here-and-Now, where eventually everybody may have a chance, in place of the old Hereafter where the last were to be the first. (Adamic 1952, 92- 93)

In this passage, the author recognizes what, from a sociological point of view, would be called functions of integration, compensation, and nomization (according to Berger) in developing a leader cult. Durkheim would have probably loved this passage. Drawing on Campbell's deliberations, it could be claimed that the passage describes an ideology that is 'relative irreligion' because it is a rejection of a particular traditional religion; however, it is not 'absolute irreligion' (2013[1971], 33) or 'a pure type of irreligion' (2013[1971], 35) for it itself contains some religious elements.

Since the 1930s, European communism has often been perceived as a type of 'religion' itself, in a critical and rejecting manner, a (scientifically) neutral manner, or an affirmative fashion. Critics and authors who promoted such an interpretation notably included B. Russell, N. Berdyaev, R. Aron, R. Toynbee, J. Maritain, J. P. Taylor, V. Zincone, T. Parsons, M. Kundera,

and J. Krejči. Interestingly, even Pope John Paul II (1991) in his encyclical letter *Centesimus annus* (§ 25) defined communism as ‘secular religion’. The most far-reaching of these reflections conceive of secularization—and not only communism—as the expression of a new faith. For instance, Milan Machovec, a Czech Marxist theologian, believed that ‘secularization represents an up-to-date way of believing’; ‘secularization /.../ may be understood as temporalism, a radical worship of all that is this world’ (1971, 100).²

Sociological theorists developed several alternative terms to deal with this problem, such as secular religion/religiosity, political religion/religiosity, pseudo-religiosity, and civil religion/religiosity. Each of these terms or conceptualizations raises issues that are beyond the scope of this paper. While many similar phenomena could be considered ‘religious’ in some way, it would be a mistake to entirely reduce irreligion to religion in the case of Yugoslav socialism.

To a certain extent, the sociology of religion in Yugoslavia accepted the concept of secular or civil religion. Many authors have written about this,³ and sociologists adopted it in various ways in their reflections on the Yugoslav political regime. Civil religiosity was even the subject of a survey in the largest Yugoslav sociological research project ever to be conducted, *Klasno biće (scr.) / Razredna bit (sl.)* (Jambrek et al. 1987). Three ‘indicators of social orthodoxy’ (Hafner-Fink 1994, 134) were considered indicators of ‘civil (political) religiosity’. Chart 1 shows the interesting relationship between traditional religiosity and civil religiosity. One can see that the Yugoslav republics with the lowest percentage of traditional religiosity had the highest percentages of civil religiosity. The most socio-economically developed Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Croatia, were the least religious in terms of civil religiosity. The republics with an Eastern Orthodox tradition showed a lower level of traditional religiosity and a higher level of civil religiosity. Civil religiosity was high also in Bosnia- Herzegovina, which had a religiously mixed population.

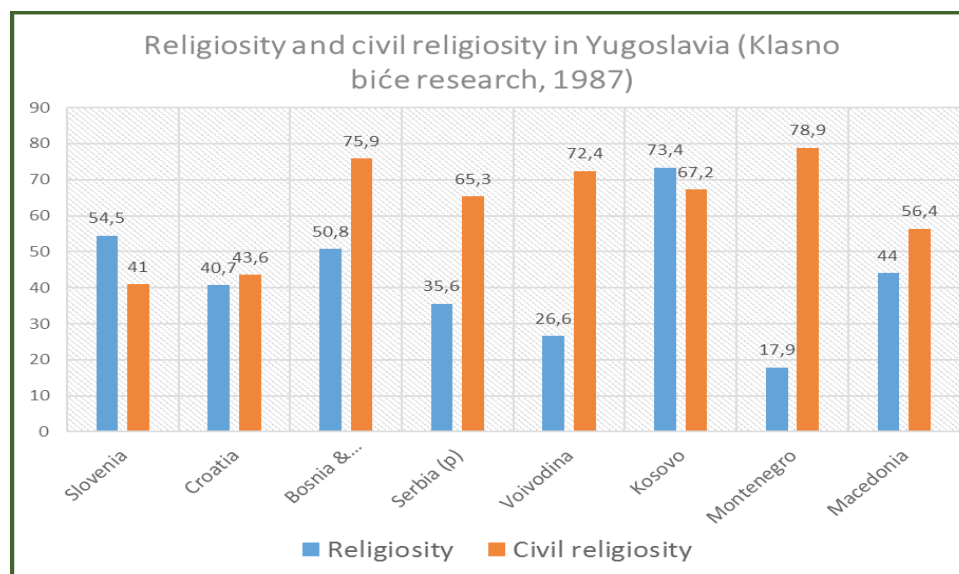


FIGURE 1: Religiosity and civil religiosity in Yugoslavia. *Klasno biće* research / *Razredna bit*, 1987. N= 18,059)

In addition to religion in irreligion, there exist (or existed) elements of irreligion in religion or – In a narrower sense – elements of disbelief in belief in both the Yugoslav and post-

² And continues: ‘/.../ unbelievers are only “other believers”, believers in something different /.../’ (99). ‘From this point of view, Marx and his movement are not a movement of nonbelievers, but a movement of those who seek the new belief, the new conviction, the new *metanoia*, the new great conversion, the new and deeper humanity’ (99-100).

³ Here I mention Dragomir Pantić’s *Klasična i svetovna religioznost (Classical and Secular Religiosity, 1988)* and Nikola Dugandžija’s *Svetovna religija (Secular Religion, 1990)*.

Yugoslav environments. In addition to the publication of Campbell's book, several eminent scholars contributed in the same year to a collection of papers entitled *The Culture of Unbelief* (Caporale and Grumelli 1971).⁴ In his contribution to this collection, Yugoslav sociologist Mandić (1971, 112) quoted Charles Glock, who theorized that belief in particular objects is at the same time disbelief in other objects: '/.../ a supernatural-objectivist believer is at the same time an objectivist-natural unbeliever'. A believer in the tenets of one religion is an unbeliever in the tenets of another religion. Absolute religiosity is impossible, for it is not possible to believe in all tenets or entirely contradictory tenets at the same time. In other words, everybody is irreligious in relation to something. This duality of simultaneous belief and disbelief is generally not recorded in the empirical research of religiosity.

The problem of irreligion in religion can be illustrated with a case from the history of Zadar. The world-famous basketball player from Zadar, Krešimir Ćosić, converted to Mormonism (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) during the time he played professional basketball in the United States. Upon his return to Yugoslavia in 1973, he established the first Mormon congregation in the country, and encountered problems. What was disturbing to his fellow Croatians was not that Ćosić believed in something else but rather that, by believing in something else, he expressed disbelief in what he was supposed to believe. From the standpoint of the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia, he should have believed in Catholicism; from the standpoint of the Communist Party, he should have believed in socialism.

Disbelief can also be felt toward individual components or elements of the religion to which a believer belongs: some members of the same religion disbelieve in objects/tenets that others believe in. Let me quote another interesting example from Zadar's history: in 1991, the Catholic bishops of Yugoslavia gathered in the city to decide whether apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje were authentic or not. In the so-called 'Zadar declaration', they decided that they were not. The bishops were expressing their disbelief in one particular element of folk Catholicism. This could be an example of what Campbell calls irreligiosity in respect to a specific component of a religion ((2013[1971] 34).

There are also phenomena in religion that might be defined as invisible irreligion.⁵ In addition to doubts that have always been acknowledged as a part of religion and belief, there are many other possibilities. Certain ideas grounded in the philosophy or psychology of the split subject are particularly provoking. Two Slovene philosophers, Alenka Zupančič Žerđin and Slavoj Žižek, address different aspects of these phenomena. According to the former, religious fanaticism can, paradoxically, indicate weak faith and may be expressed by those who do not believe yet yearn for the feeling of belief (2015, 38). According to the latter (2015) one can believe 'through others'—just like one can laugh through others by way of 'canned laughter': 'There are beliefs without first-person believers. There are beliefs that nobody really believes [in], but function as social beliefs, for example, believing in Santa Claus' (Žižek 2015). In my opinion, many beliefs in the post-Yugoslav space function in this way.

Given that religion exists in irreligion and irreligion in religion, the subject investigated by the sociology of irreligion becomes blurred and is more difficult to approach than it could first appear. This is the case in general and specifically with regard to the post-Yugoslav states. Nevertheless, the recognition of these two aspects allows us to avoid the naïveté characteristic of some other discussions of this subject.

⁴ *The Culture of Unbelief* is a collection of papers, discussions, and responses based on studies and proceedings from the First International Symposium on Belief held in Rome from 22-27 March 1969. American and European sociologists and theologians participated in the symposium.

⁵ They are similarly invisible to the empirical sociology of religion, as is Luckmann's 'invisible religion' (1967).

2. WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN THE AREAS OF IRRELIGIOSITY AND THE IRRELIGIOUS IN THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS?

What happened in the area of irreligion at the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the creation of the Yugoslav successor states? When trying to answer this question, the following observations must be considered:

(1.) Yugoslav civil religion – [and] to an extent religion in irreligion – collapsed. As a result of this process, there was less religion in the irreligion that remained after the breakup. Irreligion ceased to be a state-sponsored ideology and thus lost its broad ideological foundation.

(2.) A number of new political/civil religions, often inspired by charismatic leaders, emerged on the basis of ethnicity and at the expense of more rational discourses. These new civil religions were mostly pro-religious in terms of their attitudes towards traditional religion/churches.

(3.) Traditional religions expanded in terms of de-secularization at the individual level. As a result, irreligion shrank at this level. In some environments (like Montenegro, Voivodina, and Serbia), irreligion retreated from a majority to a minority phenomenon. Traditional religions expanded by integrating people who had previously been irreligious or religious only in terms of civil religiosity.

(4.) In many ways, religion has been ‘secularized’ – in terms of its politicization and ethnicization/nationalization; it is serving present-day interests, the ‘saeculum’. To use religious language, it became more this-worldly and less other-worldly. In a way, it is possible to say that it became less religious or more irreligious.

(5.) Some new organizational forms of irreligion emerged, such as movements and organizations of atheists, nonbelievers, and sceptics. This process has mostly occurred in reaction to de-secularizing tendencies at the societal level.

(6.) Differences between the Yugoslav successor states can be noted as regards these changes. In this sense, there is a fundamental dividing line between Slovenia and other post-Yugoslav states.

Table 1 shows data on the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states. Irreligious groups include respondents who declared themselves nonreligious or convinced atheists in the World Values Survey and European Values Study. We notice that the percentage of the irreligious dropped sharply in all post-Yugoslav states with the exception of Slovenia.⁶ Although these data are not directly comparable with data from the *Klasno biće* research (Chart 1), the differences reveal the following: first, the parts of Yugoslavia that were most irreligious in the 1980s are now the most religious, and, second, the parts of Yugoslavia that were most religious in the 1980s in terms of civil religiosity are now the most religious in terms of traditional religiosity. This probably means that, in the attempt to measure civil religiosity, the surveys actually measured some kind of religiosity. After the collapse of Yugoslavia, these civil religious sentiments flowed at least partially into traditional (and nationalized) religiosity.

⁶Some national surveys have observed a similar trend: e.g. for Croatia, Marinović Jerolimov and Zrinščak (2006) and Perica (2006); for Serbia, Blagojević (2006, 244-245, 2008, 42-43, and Kuburić and Gavrilović (2012, 19); for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ana Hacic Vlahovic (2008) and Cvitković (2001, 2009); and for Macedonia, Cacanaska (2001).

	EVS 1990	WVS 1995	EVS 1999	WVS 00/04	EVS 2008	WVS 2010	Diff. in %
Slovenia	26.8	29.0	29.8		27.2	28.6	+ 6,7
Croatia		27.8	16.2		16.4		- 41
B & H		29.3		25.2	5.1		- 82,6
Serbia		37.5		23.4	9.8		- 73,9
Macedonia		27.1		15.4	16.1		- 77,5
Montenegro		47.5		22.8	12.4		- 73,9
Kosovo					0.6		

TABLE 1: Shares of the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states

The decrease in the percentage of the irreligious is part of the process of de-secularization that took place in most post-communist European states with a few well-known exceptions. If the percentage were to be calculated in millions of citizens, it would show that the number of the irreligious has declined by several dozen million. In Russia alone, this figure represents some 48 million people between 1989 and 2012.⁷ However, following the thesis about socialism/communism being a secular religion, this decrease also signifies a decrease in (secular) religiosity. In other words, a portion of what is perceived as de-secularization should in fact be understood as religious transformation.

The processes described above have many facets, including the following:

(1.) From veneration to defamation: The collapse of the Yugoslav civil religion took many forms, among them the defamation of its fundamental tenets. For example, Tito was an object of veneration in Montenegro during his lifetime, while, after his death and the transition, many Montenegrins exposed him to defamation. A fresco in the Church of Christ's Resurrection in Podgorica – a city known as Titograd until the end of Yugoslavia – features Tito, Marx, and Engels in hell. Such expressions of defamation are also an expression of disbelief within the revitalized religion: if the artists had really believed in the final judgment, they would have not judged by themselves. In the wider Orthodox sphere (in Serbia and parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina), some frescoes have revitalized the *ktetor* tradition that elevates living people, in particular politicians.⁸ This is an illustration of the 'secularization' of religion in the sense that it serves present-day (secular) political interests.

(2.) Falling taboos and iconoclasm: As with every other religion, the Yugoslav civil religion had taboos. These included the war of national liberation and its symbols. In Croatia, during and after the military conflict with the Yugoslav People's Army (i.e. Serbs), 3,000-4,000 Partisan monuments were demolished (Perica 2006, 316; Pupovac 2015). In contrast, several thousand new monuments were erected in post-Yugoslav societies that symbolize the newly ethnicized (pro-religious and pro-church) civil religions.

(3.) Nationalization of expanded religions: While the Yugoslav civil religion was a transnational creed with a paramount value or dogma of 'brotherhood and unity', many revitalized traditional churches fell into the trap of nationalism (Velikonja 2003, 12); yet, this happened to different extents, as Grzymala-Busse points out in relation to the whole post-communist world (2015). According to Serbian anthropologist Ivan Čolović, there is a constant contradiction between officially universalist Christianity and its nationalized forms in the post-Yugoslav states (2015). Čolović calls this phenomenon 'the transfer of sacrality'. While in

⁷ I used the data quoted by Sinelina (2015, 293): between 1989 and 2012 the percentage of the irreligious dropped from 53% to 20%.

⁸ Including members of the mafia (Pečo and Kalmujić 2014).

the past, irreligion was tied to the transnational values of Yugoslav ideology, it reveals in its reduced version a more critical attitude towards nationalism.

(4.) Revitalization of religion as the profanation of religion: The revitalization of religion often takes the form of its profanation, its profane goals being defined by the people who became religious only recently. Some Serbian sociologists of religion (notably M. Đorđević and M. Vukomanović) mention semi-criminals who used religion as a pretext for war crimes. A whole range of Serbian nationalists later sought by the Hague War Crimes Tribunal found legitimation for their deeds in religion, while they enjoyed the support of the Church and even received its blessings.

The largest church in Slovenia – the Roman Catholic Church – saw the transition as a historical chance to return to its former position in the centre of society in a fairly profane way: by reinforcing its economic power. The building of the Church's financial empire ended in a spectacular bankruptcy, the so-called 'Holy Crash' (Smrke 2014), and the deposition of two successive church leaderships – four archbishops (Smrke 2016).

(5.) A rapid decrease in irreligiosity: The rapid increase in religiosity is also related to apparent and 'ignorant' religiosity. Many saw in the new religiosity an opportunity to emphasize their national affiliation and national feelings (Voicu 2012, 11). As Radić (2010) points out in relation to the Serbs, the 'new religious' are not convincing believers in terms of belief, knowledge of their religion, or religious practice; and Bosnian philosopher Esad Bajtal has observed for all ethnicities and religions in Bosnia-Herzegovina 'believers' who 'only believe that they believe' (2007, 79).

(6.) The emergence of new irreligious movements: Post-Yugoslav societies also witnessed the emergence of new religious movements. What is more important for this discussion, however, is the emergence of new irreligious movements. The latter emerged as a criticism of the occurrences and processes described above and were spurred, to echo Campbell, by 'moral outrage and ethical rebellion against religious bigotry' (2013[1971], 125). Campbell's book (2013[1971], 46-91) provides a thorough study of such movements and organizations in general. A similar effort in relation to post-Yugoslav states is something that still needs to be undertaken. Some potential new classifications are possible. For one thing, it has been noted that the emergence of new irreligious movements in the Catholic sphere have different causes than in the Orthodox sphere.

As a way to conclude the last two sections of this article, it should be noted that there was less irreligiosity in the socialist era than appeared at first glance, while, in the time of undeniable post-socialist 'de-secularization', there is less religion than appears at first glance.

3. HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENT TRAJECTORIES OBSERVED IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV STATES?

How do we explain the different trajectories of irreligiosity in the post-Yugoslav successor states, particularly the fundamental division between Slovenia and other post-Yugoslav states and the very distinct decrease in irreligiosity in most of these countries? Different theories of secularization and religion can be applied, but the rationale of some of these theories must be

adapted and even reversed; indeed, the aim is to explain irreligion, and explaining changes in irreligiosity is not always a mirror image of changes in religiosity.

In my opinion, the following theories deserve consideration:

(1.) The theory of existential security. According to this theory, irreligion grows if existential security grows and vice versa. A combination of changing economic conditions (high levels of economic development) and social inequality (low inequality) is the most important factor (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 79).

(2.) Rational choice theory. According to this theory, irreligion grows if there is a sufficient or growing availability of rewards for increasingly more people and vice versa. However, there are some objective limits to this process due to the fact that certain rewards simply do not exist. As a rule, war, in which there is a scarcity of rewards, creates unfavourable conditions for irreligiosity (Yang 2005, 425).

(3.) Supply-side theory (i.e. the religious deregulation and religious mobilization thesis; religious market theory). According to this theory, irreligion decreases if religious diversity increases or if a previously controlled religious market becomes deregulated.

(4.) Social identity theory. According to this theory, religion has certain advantages in constructing group identities (Seul 1999). Irreligion consequently decreases in conditions that increase group identity competition. This is especially true if a national cause becomes religiously expressed in this competition, or if religion becomes a marker of ethnic or national affiliation.

There are two variants to this thesis. The cultural defence thesis (Bruce 1996, 96, 2011, 49-51) and the ethno-religious mobilization thesis. Both accentuate the role of conflict, rivalry, and war in strengthening religious identity. Irreligion decreases when ethnic and religious identities tend to overlap in conditions of conflict.

(5.) The void ideological space thesis. If a certain ideology collapses, it will be replaced with another one that fills the created vacuum, generally with an ideology that is the opposite of the previous ideology. If the first ideology was irreligious (or anti-religious), the replacement ideology tends to be religious. If religious elites and state (political) elites find a common interest, they will promote the (pro)religious ideology at the expense of the irreligious population (Karpov 2013). As a consequence, an irreligious status will bring social costs.

(6.) The hegemonic narrative thesis. According to this thesis, there is always a struggle for the status of a socially dominant ideology (narrative) in society. If a pro-religious/pro-Church narrative prevails, irreligion will be endangered. In the newly emerged hegemonic narrative, irreligion will be assessed as negative through myths and stereotypes.

(7.) The social conformity thesis, or religious mimicry thesis (as its variant). This has an important connection to the two theses mentioned immediately above. If people anticipate pro-religious social change, they will sometimes adapt in advance. Consequently, irreligion, which is on the decrease, becomes (in part) a dissimulated conviction, while religion, which is on the rise, becomes (in part) a simulated conviction.

These theories and theses do not mutually exclude each other. Indeed, I allow the possibility that several of them illuminate their own specific findings in relation to changes in irreligiosity.

Based on different surveys, it is nevertheless possible to draw conclusion(s) on which of these theories are most convincing in this particular case, as follows:

(1.) The theory of existential security seems especially convincing. Cross-tabulations of different indicators of existential security (economic development and social inequality) with indicators of irreligiosity (EVS 2008) show a fairly strong correlation. For example, the higher IHDI (inequality adjusted human development index) (UNDP 2011, 135-136) is in a given society, the higher the percentage of the irreligious in that society. This is true not only in the case of post-Yugoslav societies ($R^2 = 0,47$) but these linkages are also positive if we take into account most European post-socialist societies ($R^2 = 0,36$). These results concord with the results (for post-communist states) Inglehart and Norris obtained using older data from WVS 1990-2001 (2011, 129). It is interesting to note that this theory is not validated if we consider data obtained in Yugoslav times; indeed, the most socio-economically developed Yugoslav republics were not the most irreligious. However, if one adapts the thesis to include civil religion as religion (and 'adds' it to traditional religiosity), then the same correlations are observed.

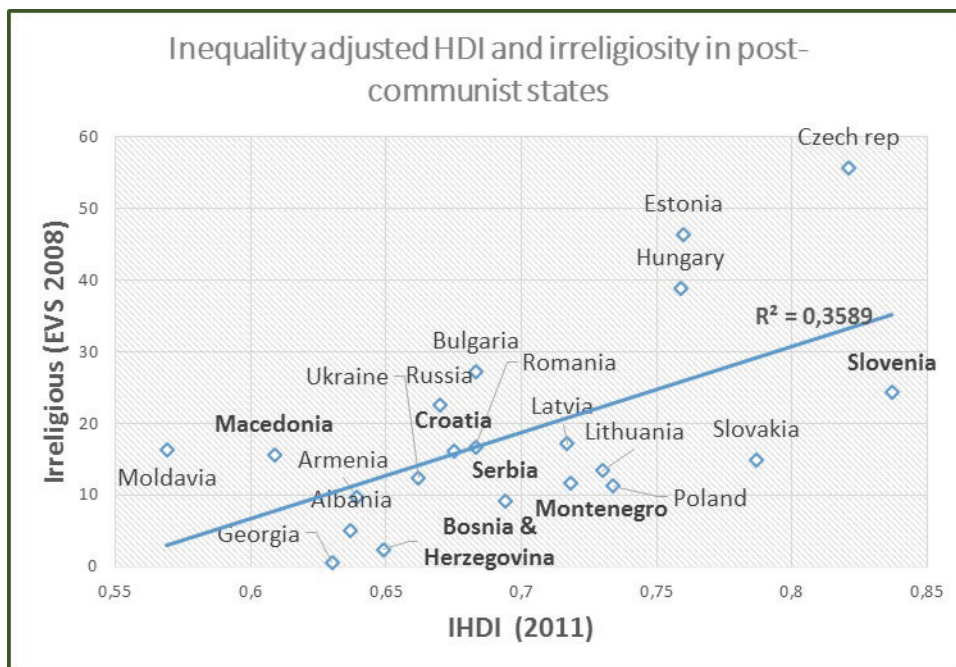


FIGURE 2: Correlation between inequality and shares of the irreligious

(2.) The rational choice theory partly coincides with the theory of existential security. Basic differences in irreligiosity among post-Yugoslav states can be explained by considering different indicators of the availability of social rewards, including the level and growth rate of GDP per capita and the duration of military conflicts as periods during which the scarcity of rewards prevails. Between 1990 and 2009, the GDP per capita in other post-Yugoslav states dropped significantly when compared with Slovenia (Štiblar 2013). In other words, their economic lag increased (Look Chart 3). In Slovenia, which underwent only a ten-day military conflict on its path to independence, the need for compensators was never as strong as it was, say, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which suffered through a far longer conflict and more significant scarcity of rewards.

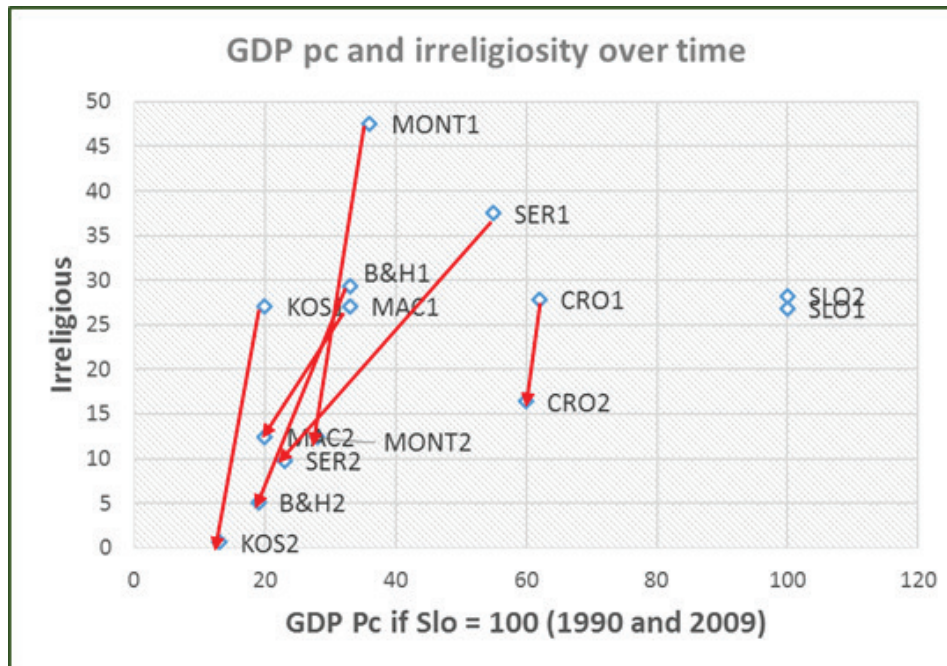


FIGURE 3: Economic condition as compared with Slovenia and shares of the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states

(3.) Based on current studies, the supply-side theory does not seem convincing. Post-Yugoslav states with higher religious diversity are the states with a higher (not lower) percentage of irreligious population (EVS 2008). These links were tested against various indices of religious diversity, including the RDI as calculated by the Pew Research Center (2014) and CERES at Bochum University (2016). The results achieved were similar to those in twenty-one post-communist states taken as a group ($R^2 = 0.24$ when the correlation should be negative). The findings concord with Inglehart and Norris's older analyses (2011, 127).

(4.), (5.), and (6.) The identity formation factor and the cultural defence factor in the formative 1990s were significantly unfavourable for irreligion and the irreligious. The decline of Yugoslavia and the fall of socialism ushered in an identity crisis. This was particularly the case in certain areas of the former common state, for example, among Bosniacs (Cvitković 2001, 36), who on average had chosen the Yugoslav identity above their own national (or ethnic) affiliation. Ethno-religious mobilization was strongest in those parts of the disintegrating Yugoslavia and those newly emerged states that either engaged in military conflict with each other or suffered internal inter-ethnic conflict. It was in these states that the percentage of the irreligious dropped most significantly. In Slovenia, these processes took place at a level below the average, and consequently the cultural defence process never occurred.

In most post-Yugoslav states, such conditions did occur, and religion entered the struggle for ideological hegemony and the rewriting of history. Again, this occurred to a lesser extent in Slovenia.

(7.) Many post-Yugoslav sociologists, most notably Cvitković (2009, 15-23) and Radić (2010, 220), have used the social conformity thesis to explain the revitalization of religion and the decrease of irreligion.

In my effort to explain the religious situation in post-Yugoslav states, I developed the theory of social mimicry (2007). According to it, people are able to anticipate ideological change. In this respect, they are highly attentive during periods of social transition. If they anticipate pro-religious social change, they – unconsciously or consciously – tend to adapt by emitting signals of the new behaviour that society wishes for. Religious mimicry functions as a positive

feedback loop. The more people mimicking/simulating religious signals, the higher the social pressure is to do so. Dissimulation of irreligious convictions is another facet of the same process. This phenomenon is congruent with the type of irreligion that Campbell calls covert irreligion (2013, 39); a conviction that is at first simulated can become genuine over time.

Signs of religious mimicry are found everywhere in the post-communist world. In my research, I first applied the biographical method in this area, while, more recently, I have focused on the motif of mimicry conversion in post-Yugoslav fiction. An example of this is Slovene Tone Partljič's short-story entitled *Dialectic of Slovenian Biography* (1998, 34-36). The humoresque consists of two biographies of the same person: one from 1975 and one from the 1990s. In the first biography, all the action serves to express the narrator's affection for the working class and the Communist Party. In the second, the Christian faith as an old family tradition becomes the most important feature of the biography.

In conclusion, my explanation for the decline in the percentage of the irreligious population in post-Yugoslav societies takes into account several theories and several social factors that these theories emphasize. Some of these theories are more convincing than others; some are not convincing at all. The fundamental dividing line between Slovenia and other post-Yugoslav states is easy to explain. It is equally easy to explain the significant decrease of the irreligious in most post-Yugoslav states. In addition, it seems reasonable to relativize changes by opening perspectives that see religion in (decreasing) irreligion and vice versa.

4. WHAT ARE THE BASIC (SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND OTHER) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IRRELIGIOUS?

What are the fundamental sociological characteristics of the category of the irreligious in post-Yugoslav societies? Because of the lack of systematic research on this subject, I can only provide a brief outline of the basic socio-demographic characteristics, social orientation, and values of the irreligious. Certain negative stereotypes about the irreligious that religions and their functionaries spread as part of the new hegemonic narrative and new history writing would be worthy of empirical testing and reflection.

(1.) According to the 2008 European Values Study (EVS), the basic socio-demographic characteristics can be summed up by the following statements. In all post-Yugoslav societies, irreligion is more characteristic of men than women, most notably in Serbia, Macedonia, and Croatia. The irreligious are better educated than the religious. In all countries except Montenegro, the irreligious have a higher monthly household income and enjoy a higher social status. In all these countries, irreligion is more typical of the urban population. Slovenia is the only post-Yugoslav country where the percentage of the irreligious decreases with age, as is typical for the average of all countries that are included in EVS 2008.

(2.) In post-socialist conditions, various negative stereotypes and prejudices have been directed at the irreligious.

In particular, I empirically tested the statements made by Slovene Catholic functionaries. The Archbishop (and later cardinal) Franc Rode, head of the Slovene Roman Catholic Church from 1997 to 2004, provided most of the impetus for examining and then denigrating the characteristics of the irreligious. Rode's derogatory statements regarding atheists and the irreligious (Smrke and Uhan 2012) motivated empirical research on the relationship between irreligion (atheism) and happiness, trust, social distance, and the perceived meaning of life and morality. None of the findings of the research provided any justification for Rode's derogatory

remarks. In this paper, I widen my focus to all post-Yugoslav societies, providing data were available.

The relationship between irreligion and happiness is consistent with the dividing line between Slovenia and other post-Yugoslav states (Chart 4). In all surveys made over the last twenty years, the irreligious Slovenes, particularly the convinced atheists, represented the happier segment of society. In Macedonia, there is no difference between the categories. In Croatia and Serbia, there is a small difference in favour of the religious being happier. In Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro, the irreligious clearly represent the less happy segment of society.

It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the cognitive minority status of the irreligious, as well as the intensity of the fall of Yugoslav civil religiosity and irreligiosity in general, must provide part of the explanation. In addition, the age structure of the irreligious might contribute an explanation for these differences.

The irreligious express a higher level of general trust in people in all post-Yugoslav states (as well as in the average of all ISSP states, N = 50,291) with the exception of Montenegro. This is congruent with the findings that the irreligious express a lower social distance to five selected social minorities,⁹ except in Macedonia where there is no difference in the categories. For example, the irreligious in all post-Yugoslav countries are considerably more accepting of homosexuals than the religious are.

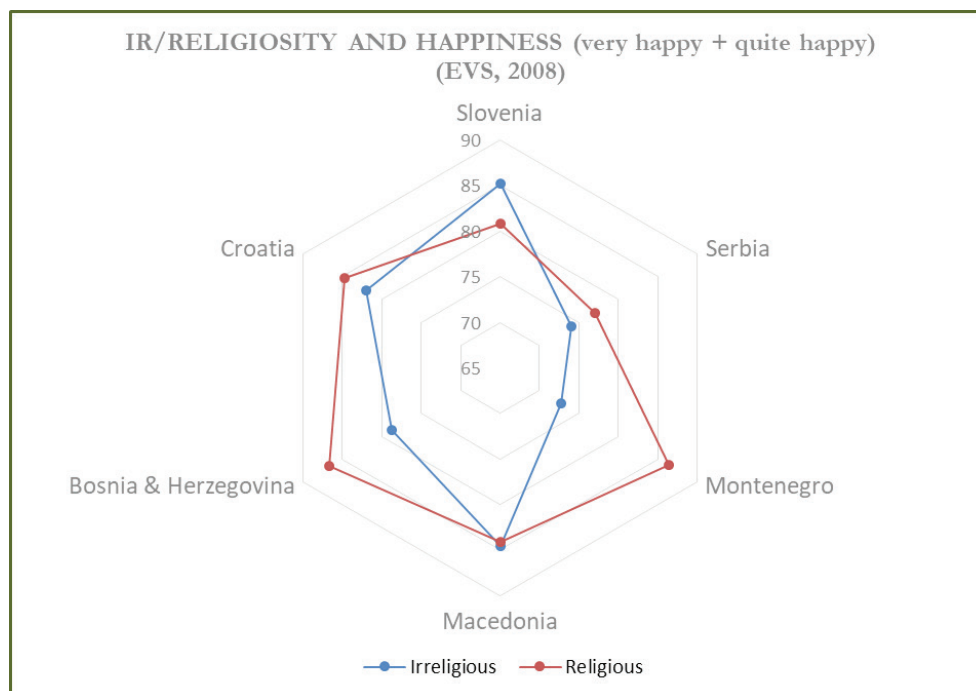


FIGURE 4: Ir/religiosity and happiness

As regards the perception of the meaning of life, the only available data are the ISSP data for Slovenia and Croatia. In both these countries, those who 'do not believe and have never believed in god' most strongly disagree with the statement that life has no purpose. In addition, atheists show stronger disagreement on integrated data for all ISSP 2008 countries (N = 49.096).

Research into the relationship between irreligion and morality is the most delicate. The variables that are often considered indicators of morality may not necessarily be so. A public opinion survey cannot measure practices because personal practices may differ from the

⁹These minorities include people of different race, immigrants, homosexuals, Jews, and Romani.

opinion expressed in a public poll. It therefore seems more appropriate to discuss indicators of (theoretical) moral rigor and permissiveness. As a preliminary study, I compared correlations between ir/religiosity and rigor or permissiveness in the area of civil morality. As indicators of civil morality, I considered attitudes towards unjustified receipt of state benefits, cheating on taxes, and accepting bribes (EVS 2008).¹⁰ In the cases of Slovenia and Serbia, there were no significant correlations between the variables. The percentage of the irreligious in Kosovo is too small to allow such an analysis. The irreligious showed slightly higher permissiveness vis-à-vis accepting bribes in Bosnia Herzegovina and Macedonia, in regard to cheating on taxes and accepting a bribe in Croatia, and in relation to cheating on taxes in Montenegro.

(3.) Attributing atheism and irreligion in general with traits such as unhappiness, distrustfulness, immorality, lack of social solidarity, and the absence of reflection about the meaning of life might be interpreted in the following ways: first, as an arbitrary ideological deduction with a long tradition (see Campbell 2013[1971], 15) that is revitalized during times when the role of churches increases, for example in post-socialist societies (no doubt expressions of historical resentment toward the former regime); second, as a variant of what Campbell identified as 'the problem-creating function' of religion (Campbell 2013[1971], 136), namely that religions create different 'problems' in order to impose themselves as a solution, and; third, as prejudices against the irreligious that can be understood as a specific strategy to increase the church's authority in post-socialist society.

In conclusion, the irreligious in the post-Yugoslav successor states differ little from the demographic characteristics found in studies of atheists in Western societies. They are definitely not a part of society that should be treated as problematic per se. Some differences between the irreligious populations found in post-Yugoslav countries indicate that there are reasons for the discussion of different irreligious cultures, as Campbell and the authors of *The Culture of Unbelief* proposed. Some differences in these cultures are the consequence of the fact that every irreligion is a response to the religion of its environment (Lee, 2013, XXI; Campbell 2013[1971], 28). Some differences arise from different levels of de-secularization and the percentage of the irreligious. A more cogent judgment of the differences between the discussed cultures would require additional and more specifically targeted research.

5. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF IRRELIGION?

What will happen with irreligiosity and the irreligious in post-Yugoslav states in the future? Will the decrease in the percentage of the irreligious continue, stop, or reverse? Will the differences between post-Yugoslav societies decrease, increase, or stabilize in the long term?

To formulate an idea of what might happen, one needs to first understand what has happened in the past twenty-five years and second anticipate the force and dynamics of the factors that might contribute to a decrease or increase in irreligiosity in the future.

(1.) To understand what has happened in post-Yugoslav states in the last twenty-five years, one needs to consider whether or not the events were in line with the secularization thesis. This is not an easy question to answer for a number of reasons. Campbell saw two problems with regard to the relation between irreligiosity and secularization: the complex relationships between the irreligious and the secular and the complex and ambiguous concept of secularization (Campbell 2013[1971], 5-7). In this paper, I deliberately addressed two

¹⁰ Values from 1 (I never approve) to 10 (I always approve) were re-coded in three values (1 +2 +3 +4; 5 + 6, and 7 + 8 + 9 +10).

additional issues, namely the relation between religion and secularity and the presence of religion in irreligion (in the socialist era) and irreligion in religion (in the post-socialist era).

To avoid getting entangled in difficult questions, I will limit the understanding of secularization to a decrease in religiosity at the individual level and a decrease in religiosity expressed by the indicators considered by the research surveys referred to in this paper. Consequently, despite the obvious decrease of the irreligious, I agree with some proponents of the secularization thesis: what happened in most post-Yugoslav states and in many other post-communist societies (in my opinion, what happened is a decrease in irreligiosity) in principle does not refute the secularization thesis. The theory of secularization as developed by Inglehart, Norris, and Bruce allows for circumstances and factors that can slow down or reverse processes of secularization. The authors refer to them as short-term or mid-term setbacks.

According to these authors, the factors contributing to these setbacks in post-Yugoslav states include widespread feelings of existential insecurity caused by the disintegration of the federal state, interethnic conflicts (Bruce 1996, 96), and 'the sudden introduction of neo-liberal free markets' (Inglehart and Norris 2011, 114). According to this theory, we should expect a continuation of secularization after – that is if – the sources of the setback cease to operate. These expectations have been confirmed in Slovenia, which did not experience de-secularization. Secularization was preserved precisely because of the absence or weakness of the factors that these authors recognize as forces of de-secularization. I further added to this discussion additional factors that could be integrated into this theory of secularization.

(2.) As regards the second part of the question, one cannot exclude the possibility that the factors that contributed to de-secularization will remain active and strong in the long run. Many economic and political factors are hardly promising in terms of short-term secularizational effects. The enlargement of the EU to include Western Balkan states (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina) will not necessarily bring prosperity and greater existential security. On the intricate ethnic map of post-Yugoslav societies, the cultural defence factor is always near at hand. Unexpected external factors such as the migrant crisis can arouse it. Religious organizations in most post-Yugoslav states have (in the sense of partial de-secularization on the societal level) assumed various institutional positions that enable them to maintain advantages for the religious. Narratives were put in place that placed irreligious minorities in an inferior position. Because of this, it seems unlikely that in the short or medium term (that is, in the next twenty-five years) a pronounced revitalization of irreligiosity will take place in most post-Yugoslav states. It is much more likely that a decline will occur in the religious zeal brought by the 1990s. Research surveys conducted in this period (had there been any) might already point to such a development.

In any case, decreasing and low percentages of the irreligious were possibly an indication of new freedoms some twenty-five years ago. However, as a persistent characteristic of society, this would indicate a troubled society, as suggested by Adamic when he commented on the reasons for Tito's demigod status.

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