

Religion, Society and Politics

A Comparative Analysis of Thirteen Central, Eastern and Southern European Countries

INTRODUCTION

As has been stated in many papers about post-communist countries, the "post-communist" label underlines historical similarities of many countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe but is quite unproductive in explaining current social processes and, moreover, developmental possibilities.¹ This is true in particular for the role of religion in light of not only very different religious situations in different countries (measured by the usual sociological indicators of religiosity) but also different confessional traditions (Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy but also Islam and Protestantism to a certain extent), and differences in their church–state relations. Thus, the notion of diversity(-ies) more accurately describes the role of religion in post-communist countries than does the notion of similarity. Diversity, on the other hand, poses another problem, as it lacks an adequate theoretical frame for understanding trends in socio-religious development. Is there any theoretical explanation (e.g. secularization, revitalization, globalization, modernization, post-modernization, religion as a memory, politici-

zation of religion) that can adequately describe all post-communist countries, or at least for a group of countries?

The main aim of this paper is to discuss the notion of religious diversities, as this is usually neglected in literature on post-communist countries. In so doing, the discussion touches, if only partially, on the issue of the relation between religion and politics, engaging in a theoretical discussion about main trends in socio-religious development. Hence, the paper is divided in four parts. After this introduction, the second and the main part is about the religious image of the thirteen countries based on different sociological indicators of religiosity. The relation between religion and politics forms the third part and is based on the analysis of the connection between indicators of religiosity and different value statements about democracy and politics. The fourth section summarizes the results of the study and discusses them briefly in relation to theoretical debates on religion in post-communism.

¹ This paper is a revised and shortened version of Črpić and Zrinščak 2014.

THE RELIGIOUS IMAGE OF THIRTEEN COUNTRIES

The data presented here come from the 2008 European Value Survey dataset, comprising results from thirteen countries. Aligning with our main aim to compare Croatia with other similar/neighbouring countries, these thirteen countries include the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosova) and countries which formed the Austrian-Hungarian

Empire before World War I (Austria, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia), as well as two countries with which Croatia shares historical similarities but under Catholic hegemony (Italy and Poland).

Graph 1 confirms greatly the statement of diversity. Among the thirteen countries analysed, four were "Catholic" countries, with the share of Catholics above 70%: Croatia, Italy, Austria and Poland. The share of Catholics is above 60% in Slovenia and Slovakia. Countries with an Orthodox majority

Graph 1. Confessional identification, %²

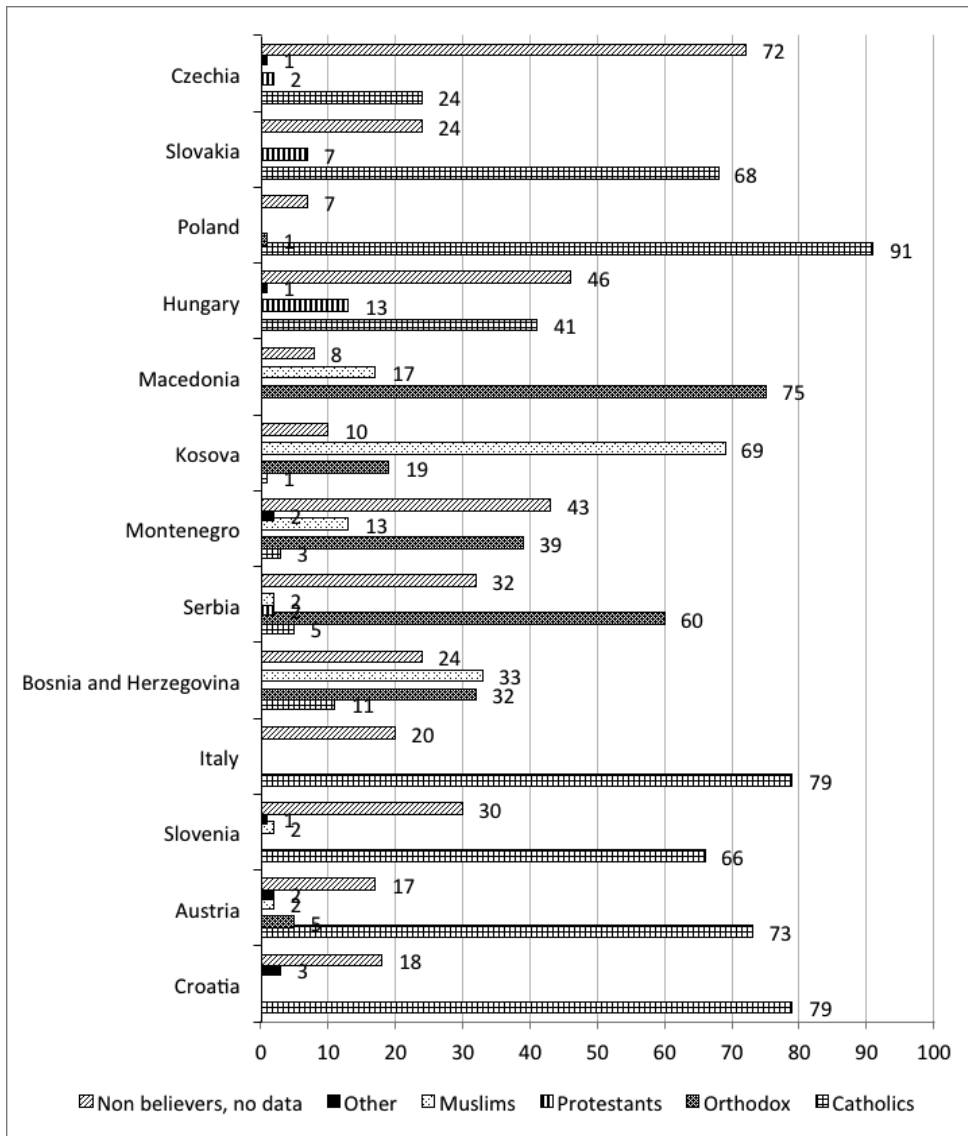


Table 1. Belonging to Religious Denominations

Subgroup	Countries	Yes (%)
1	Poland	94.3
	Macedonia	93.0
	Kosova	91.1
2	Croatia	82.7
	Austria	82.7
	Italy	80.2
3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	76.7
	Slovakia	76.3
4	Slovenia	70.6
	Serbia	68.9
5	Montenegro	58.0
	Hungary	54.5
6	Czechia	28.2

include Macedonia (above 70%) and Serbia (above 60%). Bosnia and Herzegovina is a mixed country with the share of Muslims and Orthodox above 30% and Catholics above 10%. Other countries can also be included as "mixed", but are those with very different (non-)confessional compositions: 41% Catholic and 46% non-believing in Hungary, 39% Orthodox and 43% non-believing in Montenegro and even 71% non-believing in Czechia. Given the diversity of these data, the confessional structures of these thirteen countries can only be explained by a longer historical development specific to each country.

Tables 1–5 present the religious picture in more detail. Indicators that describe religiosity from different angles in the European Value Survey were used for this survey article. The following tables thus show data on belonging to religious denomination, attendance of religious services, indicators of more personal engagement with the faith (prayer outside religious service and importance of God in

everyday life), and trust in church. Countries in the following tables are grouped based on chi-squared tests and subgroups indicate whether or not countries belong to the same group according to each indicator.

The indicator of belonging to religious denomination (Table 1) is another proof of diversity. This table additionally shows how countries of very different confessional traditions can be grouped together. Hence, Poland, Macedonia and Kosova are in the first group, in which more than 90% of citizens belong to a religious denomination, these countries being of Catholic (Poland), Orthodox (Macedonia) and Muslim (Kosova) majority. Croatia, Austria and Italy, as traditional Catholic coun-

2 Only percentages higher than 1% are presented. As the survey data usually underrepresent minorities, this graph should not be seen as an accurate picture of minority presence in specific countries.

Table 2. Religious Service Attendance apart from Weddings, Funerals and Christenings

Subgroup	Countries	Monthly and more often (%)
1	Poland	71.6
2	Italy	50.0
	Kosova	49.8
3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.2
	Slovakia	44.2
4	Croatia	41.0
5	Austria	29.0
6	Slovenia	25.4
	Macedonia	25.0
7	Serbia	21.0
8	Hungary	15.4
	Montenegro	14.5
9	Czechia	12.5

tries, follow similar trends at between 80% and 83% indicating religious affiliation. At the end of the scale are Montenegro and Hungary (54–58% of belonging), but the real outlier is Czechia, in which only 28.2% of citizens reported belonging to a religious denomination.

While religious belonging is pretty much consistent with confessional identification, the same is not true for attendance at religious services. The scale used in this study spanned from "never" to "every day". Table 2 presents the percentage of those who reported attending service at least once a month or more often. The picture that emerged from these data is very fragmented, as we arrived at nine subgroups. Attendance was found to be the highest in Poland, Italy, and Kosova, and the lowest in Czechia, though Hungary and Montenegro also projected very low figures, not much higher than in the Czech Republic. The differences between religious belonging and attendance are interesting, as they range from as high as a difference of 68% in Macedonia, 53.7% in Austria, and 47.9% in Serbia.

Such a discrepancy between religious belonging and actual practice is usually interpreted as secularization. There is no space here to enter into this debate, but the question that emerges from these data is why citizens continue to report religious belonging irrespective of their (much lower) attendance rates. This is at least the case in some countries, though not all. The difference between belonging to a religious denomination and attendance at religious services was the lowest in the most religious (Poland: 22.7%) and the least religious country (Czechia: 15.7%).

Tables 3 and 4 present data that tell more about personal religiosity, i.e. how important religion is in everyday life. Other similar indicators, though not shown here, are statements whether a person consider himself or herself religious and if a person derives comfort and strength from religion. If, for example, basic confessional affiliation or attendance at religious services can be seen also as signs of basic social identification with larger social groups, e.g. nations, the social function of this "personal religiosity" is more connected to an individual, to a person who

Table 3. Prayer to God outside Religious Services

Subgroup	Countries	Every day or more than once a week (%)
1	Kosova	61.1
2	Poland	57.7
	Italy	55.1
3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	47.8
	Slovakia	46.2
	Croatia	46.1
4	Macedonia	31.4
	Serbia	29.6
5	Austria	27.0
	Hungary	26.7
6	Montenegro	23.4
7	Slovenia	20.1
8	Czechia	13.5

Table 4. Importance of God in Everyday Life

Subgroup	Countries	Answers 6–10 on the scale from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important) (%)
1,0	Kosova	91.1
2,0	Bosnia and Herzegovina	81.5
	Macedonia	80.8
	Montenegro	77.9
3,0	Italy	75.7
	Poland	75.3
	Serbia	74.4
	Croatia	72.0
4,0	Slovakia	55.8
5,0	Austria	47.3
6,0	Hungary	41.9
	Slovenia	39.6
7,0	Czechia	18.6

Table 5. Trust in Church

Subgroup	Countries	A great deal and quite a lot (%)
1	Kosova	88.0
2	Macedonia	76.3
3	Italy	67.3
	Poland	65.2
4	Montenegro	63.4
5	Serbia	60.7
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	59.4
6	Slovakia	56.1
	Croatia	53.4
7	Slovenia	49.3
8	Hungary	43.0
9	Austria	36.3
10	Czechia	19.9

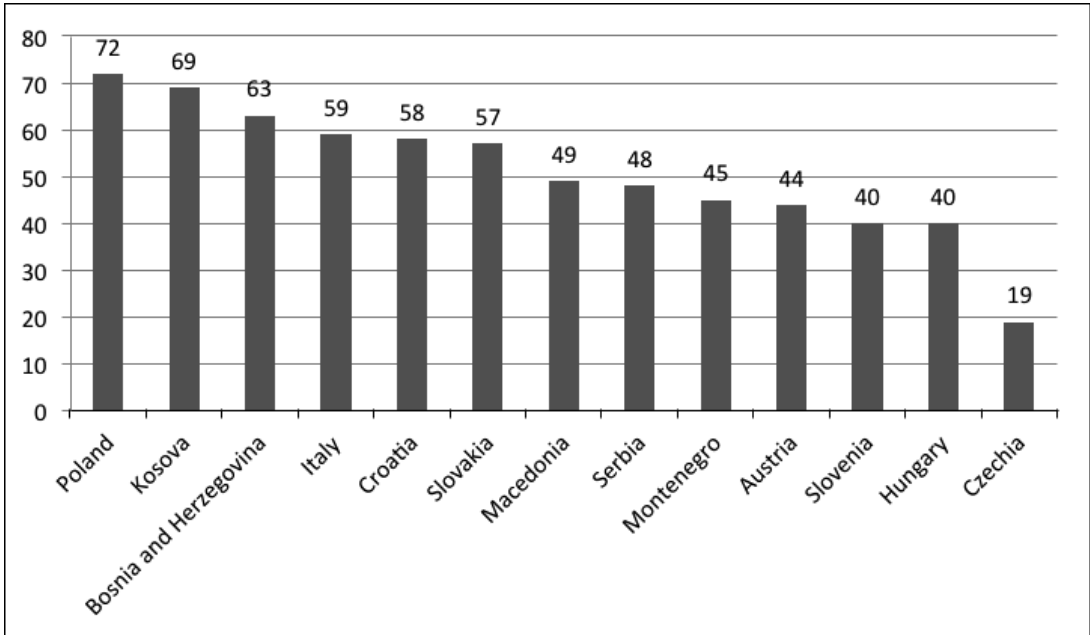
highly values the fact of being religious and of living religiosity in everyday life. Prayer to God outside religious services was most common in Kosova, followed by Poland and Italy, and very low in Slovenia and Czechia. Prayer was found to be rather common (46–48%) also in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia and Croatia. The importance of God in everyday life is, interestingly, rated highly in four countries of the former Yugoslavia: Kosova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. As these are countries of different confessional traditions and, in general, different levels of religiosity, this can indicate the social importance of religion in countries with a very turbulent immediate past, i.e. collapse of Yugoslavia, wars and conflicts, a matter that we will touch on below. As always, Czechia occupies the last position, but the importance of God was also rated relatively low in Hungary, Slovenia and Austria.

The last indicator shown in this survey article is trust in Church. This indicator is more connected with the general image of religious institu-

tions and may not be correlated with other data on religiosity. It should also be noted that trust in religious institutions is, in general, very low in all post-communist societies. For example, Croatia ranks only sixth (with 53.4% of citizens reporting great and very great trust) in Table 5, but, in Croatia, the church is the most trusted institution, as all other institutions garner very low trust, as do the government, parliament, justice system and media.³ Kosova and Czechia are at polar opposites in this table, and, in Kosova, the church was rated with a very high trust (88%). Italy and Poland, predominantly Catholic countries, were rated at a very high trust (65–68%), while the position of the church seemed to be questionable in Slovenia, Hungary and Austria.

Graph 2 summarizes the position of each country based on the ten indicators, calculated and summed up in percentages. These indicators are as follows:

Graph 2. Overall Religiosity According to 10 Indicators



- Belonging to a religious denomination (yes)
- Attendance at religious services other than weddings, funerals and christenings (monthly or more often)
- Belief in God (yes)
- Prayer to God outside of religious services (every day or more than once a week)
- Importance of God in everyday life (6–10 on a scale of 1 [not at all important] to 10 [very important])
- Trust in Church (3–4 on a scale of 1 [none at all] to 4 [a great deal])
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to moral problems and the needs of the individual (yes)
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to problems of family life (yes)
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to spiritual needs (yes)
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to social problems facing the country today (yes)

The summarized picture is more accurate (due to different values of different indicators), but it basically reproduces what was already visible in the previous presentation according to separate indicators. Countries with the highest religiosity are Poland, Kosova and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Countries with high religiosity are Italy, Croatia and Slovakia, followed by Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Austria. Countries with low religiosity are, finally, Slovenia and Hungary, while Czechia was found to have the lowest religiosity.

3 The trust in the Croatian Parliament was as low as 11.8% in 2008, in the courts 18.9%, in media 14.5%, in trade unions 17.3, etc. The most trusted institutions were the church (53.4%), education (55%) and army (44.7%). See Nikodem and Črpić 2014.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion and politics are widely discussed issues, and there are different opinions whether religion(s), and in particular dominant churches, should play a political role and influence, in different ways, social development. Here, we do not discuss the role of religion at the societal level but rather focus on how religion influences political attitudes at an individual level. This is also an important aspect of the role religiosity plays in each society. The particular questions are, here, whether there is a difference in that respect:

- Among countries with high and low levels of religiosity
- Among countries in which the immediate past has been more turbulent (as was mainly the case in countries of former Yugoslavia) and those which passed through the transition from communist to pluralist, democratic, market-oriented societies, but in which countries the transition was not coupled with war or violent conflict

Hence, we would expect religion to exercise more influence on political attitudes in countries that have experienced wars and/or highly turbulent social and political processes and in countries with higher levels of religiosity. For this purpose, a regression analysis was conducted, and the results, though not presented here in detail, will be summarized below. Only the results in which religiosity explains more than 5% of analysed variables were taken as relevant.

As predictors, nine indicators were used, those already discussed above and which present different aspects of religiosity in each country:

- Attendance at religious services apart from weddings, funerals and christenings
- Belief in God
- Prayer to God outside of religious services
- The importance of God in everyday life
- Trust in Church
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to mor-

al problems and the needs of the individual

- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to problems of family life
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to spiritual needs
- Church(es) give(s) adequate answer to social problems facing country today

As variables by which influence of religiosity is discussed, nine are used, covering different attitudes toward democratic values and politics:

- Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with the parliament and elections
- Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country
- Having the army rule the country
- Having a democratic political system
- Democracy may have problems, but it's better than any other form of government
- In a democracy, the economic system runs badly
- Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling
- Democracies aren't good at maintaining order
- Proud to be a (country) citizen.

In general, the results showed a very weak influence from religiosity. For four of our statements, the influence of religiosity is non-existent or negligible: (1) having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country, (2) having a democratic political system, (3) democracy may have problems, but it's better than any other form of government, and (4) in democracy, the economic system runs badly. Thus, these statements are either agreed or disagreed with irrespective of a person's religiosity. In addition, in five out of thirteen countries analysed, no correlation was found for any of the above statements: Czechia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Hungary. Some influence, though usually weak (but higher than 5%), was detected for some of the statements and in some of the countries.

The statement about having a strong leader who does not have to bother with the parliament and elections was positively correlated with religion in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosova. For example, in Austria, the statement was accepted more by those who believe in God than by others, and those who believe the church gives adequate answer to problems of family life and to social problems. The statement about having the army rule the country was associated with religiosity in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosova and Slovakia. In Kosova, for instance, the statement was more accepted by those who trust the church more, those for whom God is more important in everyday life, and those who think the church gives adequate answers to social problems. On the statement that democracy may have problems, but it's better than any other form of government, the connection with religiosity is observed only in Kosova, and only among those who attend religious service more often and those who think the church gives adequate answers to social problems, though the same group do not have much trust in the church. Kosova was also the only country in which a positive correlation was found between religiosity and the statement that democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling. That democracies aren't good at maintaining order was found to correlate with religiosity only in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosova. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, this statement was more accepted by those who pray to God outside of religious services more often and those who think the Church gives adequate answers to social problems. Finally, the only statement found to have a high correlation across countries was the statement about being proud to be a (country) citizen. This correlation was found in Italy, Kosova, Croatia, Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Italy, for instance, this statement was correlated with persons for whom God is more important in life, who trust more in the church, and who think the church gives adequate answers to social problems.

DISCUSSION

Our main aim has been to describe the religious situation in thirteen countries in Central, East-

ern and Southern Europe. As stated at the outset, these are countries which share some similarities (like the communist experience, except for Austria and Italy which are included as neighbouring and dominantly Catholic countries), but are very diverse when it comes to overall historical and current social development. This is reflected in religiosity both in terms of different confessional belongings (Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam) and in terms of different indicators of religiosity. It seems that, concerning religiosity, we are facing completely different worlds, and this is particularly visible in the comparison of Poland and Czechia. While these are neighbouring countries in Central Europe, 94.3% of Poles reported religious affiliation compared to only 28.2% of Chechs.

These facts problematize the use of revitalization theory as a general theory for interpreting religiosity in post-communist countries. However, this theory is based more on the fact that religion entered the public sphere in post-communist countries and positioned itself as a key social actor than on increasing religiosity at the individual level. As demonstrated by the case of Czechia (the situation is also very similar in Estonia and in the former Eastern Germany), the very low religiosity level is a product of a rapid and repressive process of secularization during its communist period, but the longer history should also be taken into account here.⁴ In addition, the social transformations after the collapse of the communist regime has often preceded a secularization process, as is the case in much of Western Europe. Still, it has been argued that so-called contextual or differentiated secularization is here a more appropriate term, as it takes into account specific circumstances in certain countries.⁵

This can be explained by taking Croatia as an example. For centuries, the role of the Catholic Church as a dominant religion, though always debated and partly contested, has been an important element in the social orientation and ethnic iden-

4 For the case of Eastern Germany, see Wohlarb-Sahr 2011. For the Czech case, see Vaclavik 2014.

5 See, e.g., Pickel 2011; Pickel, Pollack and Müller 2012.

tity of Croatians. This role has been strengthened by the close proximity of the country to countries with dominant religions, i.e. Orthodoxy and Islam, and having been caught in the middle of wars, occupations, changing of states and borders, etc. The communist history of the repression of religion in multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic Yugoslavia, and the post-communist history of the building of the independent state under the circumstances of war, are just recent examples of what has been happening throughout history. This is, however, a very general framework. Further analyses show that, in the post-communist period, the socio-religious Croatian landscape achieved stability but also the following at the same time:⁶

- The image of high religiosity is not consistent in all dimensions of religiosity,
- In comparison to previous research, a clearer distinction arises among believers and non-believers, as non-believers remain only very loosely affiliated with a religion,
- The church is perceived as a symbolic, sacred canopy by the majority, but irreligiosity is not marginal, and the decline of trust in the church is also noticeable,
- There is a co-existence of high institutional religiosity and individual shaped religiosity

These factors suggest that the involvement of religion in politics, an undeniable fact, should be put into the context of a complex picture of religiosity and a problematic involvement of the church. This was confirmed also by the relationship between religion and politics in our discussion. In an analysis of the influence of religiosity on individual statements about democracy and politics, we did not find any differences between countries with high or low religiosity. The influence was found to be low and inconsistent in general. This is not to say that religion and churches do not influence political life but that this influence is obviously mediated by other social factors not addressed here. It is also worth noting that countries in which we found no correlations at all between religiosity and political attitudes toward democracy are predominantly Orthodox countries

with very different levels of religiosity (i.e. Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro) and Central Europe countries with lower or very low levels of religiosity (i.e. Hungary, Slovenia and Czechia). Still, correlation between religion and politics at the individual level was found in particular in two countries, those which experienced wars and internal ethnic and social conflicts in 1990s, namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. We believe that these historical events exerted an impact on how citizens grapple with religion and politics, but how much of an impact and, in that respect, what role specific confessional traditions played in these two countries have yet to be determined.

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6 See Črpić and Zrinščak 2010; Nikodem and Zrinščak 2012.

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