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OLD AND NEW PATHS OF RELIGIOSITY FOR
SLOVAKIA AND FOR HUNGARIANS
IN SLOVAKIA¹

Abstract: The religious landscapes of Slovakia and Hungary are historically very diverse. Both countries have certain peculiarities, but some aspects (e.g., diversity, a relationship between politics and religion, etc.) seem to follow similar trajectories. Under the combination of local factors and broader societal influences (e.g., secularization or assimilation), we try to describe the religiosity of Hungarians living in Slovakia. The religious diversity of the Hungarian population in Slovakia is very similar to that of the Slovak population, but the former's resistance to secularization is slightly stronger, although the last twenty intercensal years have been very dynamic in the case of the Hungarians as well. The relationship between demographics, educational attainment, and the breakdown of religious denominations among Hungarians does not reveal a favorable situation: the aging population and lower proportion of university-educated individuals present a long-lasting issue that slowly transforms religiosity over time. However, the internal differences in the factors of age and education levels among the religious denominations of Hungarians unveiled interesting and mostly historically conditioned results.

The social and cultural space of the Carpathian Basin is notable for its dynamics. In its essence, it fits into the overall transforming character of Europe and especially of East-Central Europe. The dynamics reside in the historical establishment and cohabitation of various religious and ethnic identities. For a long time faith and ethnicity have been the source of uncountable transformations in this region, influencing politics and international relations, as well as essential ingredients of powers that have formed and transformed boundaries. The boundaries are characterized by dividing the ethnic and religious groups and setting a scene where various agents and forces can operate and create more or less diversified landscapes. Therefore, if an ethnic or religious group is divided by a boundary, we can trace how divergently or convergently they evolve, change their social and de-

1 This paper was funded by SRDA grants APVV-22-0063 (Reproductions of Religious and Worldviews Structures in Slovakia. A Hundred and Fifty Years of Change) and APVV-20-0432 (Suburbanization: Community, identity and everydayness).

mographic characteristics, and reflect the dynamics of the political situation. Hungarians living in Slovakia are a good example of an ethnic group connected over boundaries with its mother nation, reflecting such dynamics. Scientific interests are mostly aimed at the transformation of ethnicity, but in this article we look more closely at changes in religious affiliation within the community of Hungarians. The specificity of this approach resides in influences that have their sources in the European context (secularization), and the transformation of the religious landscape is frequently reflected by politicians. On one side we see the regions of Slovakia and Hungary as historically intertwined, but 100 years of boundaries and changes of political regimes must have inevitably created landscapes with aspects that might be historically as common as they are different. Therefore, the supreme concept of our approach is to find not just contrasts between but also common issues of both countries: Slovakia and Hungary.

A deep analysis of the change in the religious identity of one nation's ethnic group that resides in a neighboring state requires a broad starting platform. With the confrontation of different developments in each of these two states, not just a spatial approach but also a broader temporal approach is required to provide stark arguments of a common past and common experience. With such an initial platform, we have two goals, the first of which is to describe basic historical similarities of religious identity formation in Slovakia and Hungary, which share not just geographical proximity but also a cultural and political experience of one empire. These similarities have continued even in the 20th and 21st centuries with the shared experience of socialism, specific positions in the European context, and the fight for the right to one's own perception and penetration of many societal processes and transformations in Western Europe (such as migration or minorities rights). Overall, we focus closely on the situation of Hungarians in Slovakia, with their shared societal processes. We presume certain peculiarities of this community that are different from those of Slovaks in Slovakia and Hungarians in Hungary.

Methodological Aspects

One of the most advantageous aspects of religion and religious identity analysis is the availability of data it provides on various levels and over a long period. Especially nowadays, we have relatively robust data from the Slovak 2021 Census, combining several social and demographic variables, which makes the combination of ethnic and religious identities easy to analyze, even allowing us to add more variables, such as the spatial aspect (limited

scope) and age categories. For this study, most of the data from the Slovak 2021 Census were compared with the data of the 2001 Census, as a 20-year period provides a sufficient interval to analyze the implementation of the transformation of the religious landscape in Slovakia. This is especially true given the methodologically similar censuses and similar data on ethnic and religious identities available to compare. In the case of comparison with Hungary, for which the newest census data are not yet available, we compared data from 2011 with previous periods, such as 1950 (in Czechoslovakia) or 1949 (in Hungary). Years after World War II, at the advent of socialism, both countries carried out censuses with data on religious affiliation for the following 40 years.

Most of the analyses are based on several aspects of the religious identity of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia, with an attempt to encompass the demographic and geographic aspects of the declared religious identity of Hungarians. For the first time, such data on these aspects of society are published on a dedicated web page and are freely accessible.² Observing that the social and cultural space of the Carpathian Basin has many aspects in common, we provide a brief introduction of the broader description of both countries' religious landscapes, using some information from the past but mostly that from the current times, targeting politics and the instrumentalization of religion in political discourse, which, in many cases, Slovakia and Hungary have in common.

Historical sources for common or diverse paths of religion in Hungary and Slovakia

Religious diversity as a typical regional characteristic

Central Europe represents a specific arena of various social identities and diversities. Historically, this space was profoundly influenced by various religious denominations. Still, although the Roman Catholic majority present in the Carpathian basin is undeniable, several religious minorities have successfully performed and completed the palette of the local religious landscape. Since this region had more visible religious bodies, John Madeley³ included Central Europe (especially the areas of Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary) in the

2 Population – Basic results, The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, accessed December 6, 2023, <https://www.scitanie.sk/en/population/basic-results/number-of-population/SR/SK0/SR>.

3 John Madeley, "A framework for the comparative analysis of church–state relations in Europe," *West European Politics* 26, no. 1 (2003): 23–50, 28.

so-called *multi-confessional belts* that formed regions of various religious contents that were located among denominational blocs of Catholics, Lutherans, and Orthodox Christians. Similarly, the multid denominational character of Central Europe is outlined in the Central European Atlas,⁴ and while the majority of the Hungarian and Slovakian regions have Roman Catholicism as a dominant denomination, the growing diversity across this region is evident: regions with no dominant denomination represent a diversity belt spanning from northeastern Slovakia to the region around Szeged and Timisoara. Therefore, the historical background of the current religious diversity is not strictly bound to the current state boundaries but rather represents a lengthy process of the formation of religious identity that reflects and encompasses many factors. The period of crystallization of the denominational situations in individual regional settings is referred to as *confessionalization*.⁵ This process came to the forefront mainly after the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods in local history, which is notable for its dynamics of religious identity over time. On the one hand, the paradigm of confessionalization explains the advent and further development of society in modern times, especially leading to the particularization of Hungarian society from the pre-1920 period and the formation of distinct denominations that attempted to maintain their own identities and integrity and to thrive so that they may increase their political status.⁶ However, the process of confessionalization unveiled the perplexity of religious and secular concerns present in the interconnection of church and state, which ultimately also brought about the decline of confessionalization and the emergence of the secularization processes present within.⁷

Diversity indices are among the most effective tools for the study of the internal structure of a population's denominational circumstances. They present complex figures that are comparable over time and between regions. A deep study of diversity is salient, especially for East-Central Europe. As Nándor Csikós and András Máté-Tóth⁸ state, regarding the municipality levels in Romania, Hungary, and Poland, there is a great difference in religious diversity between municipalities within the former borders and inside the present borders. Therefore, in a certain way, the diversity reflects the historical continuity of the identity of regions and the specific aftermath of distinct developments in a concrete country. For a brief contextual comparison, we calculated diversity indices for three of the four East-Central European countries (we omitted Poland due to different boundaries in

4 András Rónai, ed., *Atlas of Central Europe* (Budapest, Balatonfüred: Society of St. Steven – Püski Publishing House, 2003).

5 See more: Peter Kónya, *Konfeszionalizáció na Slovensku v 16.-18. Storočí* [Confessionalization in Slovakia in 16th-18th centuries] (Prešov: Prešovská univerzita, 2010).

6 Kónya, *Konfeszionalizáció*, 208.

7 Ibid, 16

8 Nándor Csikós and András Máté-Tóth, "Confessional pluralism in Central and Eastern Europe—a GIS approach," *Geographica Pannonica* 27, no. 1 (2023): 25–37, 35.

1921 and 2011). In this, we used Simpson’s diversity index⁹ with values between 0 and 1, where the closer the index value is to 0, the more diverse the society is. The changes in index values between countries seem less notable than changes over time. Hungary remains the most religiously diverse country, while Slovakia is becoming more heterogeneous at the slowest pace. Czechia has undergone the most significant change in diversity, moving toward greater heterogenization. Moreover, while in 1921, Czechia was a more religiously homogeneous country than Slovakia, now Slovakia is more religiously homogeneous; furthermore, the diversity index value of Czechia is now slightly closer to Hungary than it is to Slovakia (see Table 1).

Table 1: Simpson index of religious diversity for Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary in 1921 (1920) and 2011

	1921 (Hungary 1920)	2011	Difference 2011–1920
Czechia	0.681	0.334	-0.347
Slovakia	0.528	0.419	-0.109
Hungary	0.460	0.273	-0.187

Source: 1920, 1921, and 2011 Censuses¹⁰

Oppressive experience with socialism in post-WWII period

Apart from the increasing heterogeneity of the religious landscape in East-Central Europe in the twentieth century, there is another aspect worthy of focus with a common

9 Based on Edward H. Simpson, “Measurement of diversity,” *Nature* 163 (1949): 688.

10 Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények: *Az 1920. évi népszámlálás, ötödik rész – részletes demográfia* [The 1920 Census, 5th volume – the Demography in Detail], vol. 73. Pesti Könyvnyomda: Budapest, 1928, 52–55.; Československá statistika: *Sčítání lidu v republice Československé ze dne 15. února 1921* [The Population Census in the Czechoslovak Republic from February 15, 1921], I.díl, svazek 9, řada 6. Státní úřad statistický: Praha, 1924, 84., “Sčítání lidu, domu a bytů 2011: *Obyvatelstvo podle věku, náboženské víry a pohlaví* [The 2011 Population, and Housing Census: Population by Age, Religious Affiliation and Sex],” Český statistický úřad, accessed December 6, 2023, [https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&pvo=OBCR614C&z=T&f=TABULKA&katalog=30719&u=v1050_VUZEMI_97_19&v=v1051_null_null_null#w=](https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&pvo=OBCR614C&z=T&f=TABULKA&katalog=30719&u=v1050_VUZEMI_97_19&v=v1051_null_null_null#w=;); “Népszámlálás 2011: A népszerűség vallás, felekezet és nemek szerint [The 2011 Census: Population by Religion, Denomination, and Sex],”. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, accessed December 6, 2023, https://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/docs/tablak/demografia/04_01_01_29.xls; “Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2011: Obyvatelstvo podľa pohlavia a náboženského vyznania [The 2011 Population and Housing Census: Population by Sex and Religious Affiliation],” Štatistický úrad SR, accessed December 6, 2023, <https://census2011.statistics.sk/SR/TAB.%20118%20Obyvate%4%BEstvo%20pod%4%BEa%20pohlavia%20a%20n%3%A1bo%5%BEensk%3%A9ho%20vyznania.xls>.

source but a different aftermath. After the collapse of the Iron Curtain, similar destinies and historical settings did not form the same environment as during the era of socialism. Secularization, with its hard backbone in the form of an atheistic regime, has evolved differently in each state with completely individual landscapes. Countries like Poland, East Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary might have had a similar experience with socialism, but the development of each country after 1990 progressed almost independently. Miklós Tomka¹¹ describes that in every East-Central European socialist country, churches held a position defined by three factors: 1) the persecution of the churches, 2) moral distress, and 3) the slow political relevance of the churches. In more rural and traditional countries with higher birthrates and strong communal ties (e.g., Poland, Slovakia, and the Balkan states), modernization accelerated slowly, and the Church—especially the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in the Balkans—was more tightly anchored to people than in countries with more intense industrialization, urbanization, and modernization (e.g., Czechia, Slovenia, or Hungary).¹²

Table 2: Percent change in the absolute numbers of believers in major denominations in Slovakia and Hungary, 1950–2001¹³

	Slovakia	Hungary
	1950–2001	1949–2001
Roman Catholic	+41.4%	-15.2%
Byzantine Catholic	-2.5%	+8.3%
Lutheran	-15.9%	-36.8%
Reformed/Calvinists	-1.8%	-19.5%
Other	+836.4%	+494.1%
None	+7106.6%	+11968.7%
Total	+56.3%	+10.8%

Source: 1949, 1950, and 2001 Censuses¹⁴

- 11 Miklós Tomka, *Church, State, and Society in Eastern Europe* (Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: 2005), 101.
- 12 Tomka, *Church, State*, 102–103.
- 13 We chose 2001 data over 1991 data in order to include a decade after the collapse of socialism to let the trends in the religious landscape from the previous regime “settle down” and be confirmed or rejected.
- 14 “Népszámlálás 2001: A népesség, vallás”; Štatistický úrad SR: *Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov v roku 2001. Slovenská republika* [The 2001 Population and Housing Census, The Slovak Republic]. Štatistický úrad SR: Bratislava, 2004. 16 ; Československá statistika: *Sčítání lidu, domů a bytů v republice Československé ke dni 1. března 1950, díl I.* [Population and Housing Census in the Czechoslovak Republic from the March 1, 1950, volume 1] Státní úřad statistický: Praha, 1957. 6.

The internal structure of the transformation of the religious landscape in Hungary and Slovakia can be analyzed using the percentage change in the numbers of the major denominations in each country (see Table 2). Although there are inevitable characteristics of heterogenization and secularization, the major churches have had different vectors of their development since the middle of the 20th century. Although the population increased in both countries, the gains from this increase have mostly fallen into those identifying their denominations as “None” or “Other” (as a result of heterogenization). Only Roman Catholics and Byzantine Catholics in Slovakia grew despite the political situation. On the one hand, this church grew in absolute numbers, but on the other hand, the percentage share of Roman Catholics in the population decreased, just like with other churches. However, the most striking feature here is a robust decline of both historically Protestant denominations, that is Calvinists and Lutherans, and particularly the latter. Over seventy years, both historical Protestant denominations lost almost a quarter of their believers in Hungary and 13% in Slovakia. In the case of Lutheranism in Slovakia, one of the sources of this decline may have been a slower (or less successful) intergenerational transmission compared to that of other denominations.¹⁵ Still, Lutheranism in Eastern Europe has the general characteristic of being the least successful in preserving its numbers in many Eastern European countries (e.g., in Czechia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia).¹⁶ In Hungary, social modernization, with anti-church propaganda, pushed the churches to the margins of Hungarian social life.¹⁷ Miklós Tomka¹⁸ also observed that in surveys carried out in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the younger the age group, the lower the proportion of Protestants and the higher the proportion of Catholics. Additionally, in many Eastern European countries, the loss of Protestants was generally higher than the loss of Catholics, Catholics reported a greater feeling of strength and peace than Protestants, and Catholics retained higher rates of religious practice and belief.¹⁹ The more evident character of the secularization of Protestants in Hungary after the collapse of socialism can be explained by the low rates of disaffiliation of older generations and lower affiliation rates in the younger

15 Dagmar Kusendová and Mojmir Benza (eds.), *Historický atlas Evanjelickej cirkvi augsburského vyznania na Slovensku* [Historical Atlas of the Lutheran Church in Slovakia] (Liptovský Mikuláš: Tranoscius, 2011), 148.

16 Detlef Pollack, “Modifications in Religious Field of Central and Eastern Europe,” *European Societies* 3, no. 2 (2001): 135–165.

17 Zsolt Enyedi, “The Contested Politics of Positive Neutrality in Hungary,” in *Church and State in Contemporary Europe. The Chimera of Neutrality*, eds. John Madeley and Zsolt Enyedi (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 2005) 153, 157–176.

18 Miklós Tomka, *Expanding Religion. Religious Revival in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 219.

19 Tomka, *Expanding*, 223.

population, continuously replacing the older.²⁰ To a certain degree, this may also indicate a universal behavior of some Protestant groups in Eastern Europe of a diminishing intergenerational transmission after WWII.

A search for one's own identity in the dynamic world

Apart from the demographic and social aspects of the transformation of the religious landscape, the relationship between church (religion) and state has its own specificities. Recently, thirty years after the collapse of socialism, a specific transformation of religion in the public sphere has become perceptible. This transformation has occurred in a slightly different manner than in Western Europe, as in many aspects, the transformation of church and state—just like the level of secularization in Western countries—serves not as an example but rather as a warning to certain political parties in Eastern Europe. Secularization in Western Europe diminished the interweaving of church and state, or more specifically, between church and religion on one side and nation and state on the other.²¹ This was further increased by an increasing amount of migration as part of an intensifying globalization process, something that was projected onto the transforming religious landscape in the growing number of mostly non-Christian religions (i.e., especially Islam) and worldviews. This heterogenization of a religious landscape caused religion to become a topic of political discourse again.²² For example, in Slovakia, a 2016 law raised the requirements for a new church registration, which barred the possibility for new religious bodies to become part of an official religious scene. This means that Slovakia remains one of the few countries in Europe with no official acceptance of Islam.²³

The protection of values and the drawing of fault lines are typical characteristics of a so-called “wounded” region or regions with a wounded collective identity.²⁴ The tradition of collective threat reinforces the critical need for security, and values representing nation, religion, and family are sources of security seen as in need of protection. This process is

20 Mary L. Gautier, “Church Attendance and Religious Belief in Postcommunist Societies,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 2 (1997): 289–296.

21 Hans Knippenberg, *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe* (Amsterdam: HetSpinhuis, 2005), 203.

22 Knippenberg, *The Changing Religious*, 203–206.

23 Ani Sarkissian, “Religious nationalism and the dynamics of religious diversity governance in post-communist Eastern Europe,” *Ethnicities* (2023): 1–17.

24 András Máté-Tóth and Gábor Dániel Nagy, “Hidden Dynamics of Religion and Human Rights in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 917.

labeled as securitization, which includes both threat-identification and threat-avoidance and encompasses how an individual operates with these as a member of certain social and religious networks.²⁵ The four main fields that are a matter of securitization in East-Central Europe (i.e., sects, Islam, imported holidays, and LGBTQ+ minority rights) go beyond purely religious platforms. The presence of prejudice and the need for a collective defense provide a bridge for proximity to right-wing populists but also a bridge to religion. Religion here can function in two ways: 1) socially engaged and thinking believers are pro-democratic and against prejudice, and 2) fundamentalist and dogmatic believers develop an elective affinity with right-wing beliefs that are anti-pluralistic and anti-democratic.²⁶ The incorporation of religious ideas into populism represents a dividing line between Western and Eastern Europe. While Western European populists often emphasize the secular nature of their countries (e.g., France and the Netherlands), in Eastern Europe, religion is often constitutive to a country's image (e.g., Poland and Catholicism or Hungary, where Christianity is defined as a defining force for the nation).²⁷ Therefore, religion can be integrated into the ideology of a state, with the effects of traditional Christian beliefs being legitimized by the inclusion of national heroes whose presence in public life is accepted and supported by an unaffiliated part of the population, even though these national heroes may have religious backgrounds.²⁸ In overall characteristics of the relationship of religion and state, Slovakia and Hungary are described as countries where religion is seen as a “public good” and mutual autonomy is accepted, but certain privileges are granted to historical denominations with their acknowledged role in society and certain declarative documents (such as the Preamble to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic).²⁹

In terms of the historical transformation of societies, we see in Slovakia and Hungary many similar experiences, a strong interconnection of political regimes, and church–state

- 25 András Máté-Tóth and Réka Szilárdi, “Securitization and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe Theoretical Considerations,” in *In Service for a Servant Church. Outlines and Challenges for Catholic Theology Today. Documentation of the INSeCT Conferences in Manila 2019 and Vienna 2020 Religion in Contemporary European Society*, eds. Gunter Prüller-Jagenteufel, Ruben C. Mendoza, Gertraud Ladner (Padenbord: Brill, 2022), 147–161.
- 26 Susanne Pickel and Gert Pickel, “Political Values and Religion: A Comparison Between Western and Eastern Europe,” in *Values – Politics – Religion: The European Values Study, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations*, eds. Regina Polak, Patrick Rohs (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 157–203.
- 27 René Wagenvoerde, “The Religious Dimensions of Contemporary European Populism,” in *Religion and European Society: A Primer*, eds. Benjamin Schewel and Erin K. Wilson (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons: 2019), 111–123.
- 28 Miroslav Tížik, “Religious Minority as a Source of National and State Identity: The Case of Slovakia,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 50, no. 4 (2021): 513–538.
- 29 Daniel Vekony, Marat Ilyasov, and Egdūnas Račius, “Dynamics in state-religion relations in postcommunist Central Eastern Europe and Russia,” *Religion, State, and Society* 50, no. 4 (2022): 415–435.

relationships with impacts on the dynamics of internal religious diversity and possibilities of how to cope with societal diversification in general. However, the more similarities and analogies of general trends we find at the state level, the more peculiarities may emerge at the level of individual ethnic groups with intense relationships with their mother countries at many levels.

Ethnicity and Religion: The Case of Hungarians in Slovakia

The interconnection of religious and ethnic identities was salient in historical Hungary, mainly in terms of mutual identity maintenance in a diversified and layered society. Therefore, many particular regions defined their populations by both identities. The interconnections were not easy to disentangle from each other, for example, in the case of different demographic behaviors.³⁰

There is no doubt that the mutual support of both identities became more crucial in times of political change and instability and—in the case of historical Hungary—in the time of forming new states after 1920. The hitherto unity of ethnic bodies suddenly ruptured, and all were placed in different political situations and possibilities to maintain their own identities; such an interconnection of religion and ethnicity provided better chances of survival.³¹ The interconnection of religion and ethnicity can be an important factor in the perception of inter-ethnic conflicts. In Vojvodina, for example, intensive religiosity plays a more important role in the perception of communism, and the Balkan Wars had a similar intensity in both ethnic and religious groups. Still, intensive religiosity can play an important role, such as in mutual reconciliation.³²

The specific character of ethnic groups and their religious affiliation is a hallmark of twentieth-century societal transformations in the Carpathian Basin. The specificity of this aspect of the cultural identity of Hungarians living in Slovakia underwent a notable transformation; however, it retained a slightly distinct characteristic that differentiated itself from Slovaks in Slovakia and from the population of Hungary. Already in the period of the first censuses, Hungarians living in Upper Hungary were, in terms of their religious identi-

30 See for example Gabe Harrach, “The demographic role of religion in Hungary. Fertility of denominations at the beginning of the 20th century,” *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 62, no. 3 (2013): 267–288.

31 Tomka, *Church, State*, 86.

32 András Máté-Tóth, Gyula Lencsés, and Melinda Adrienn Paizs, “Ethnicity, religiosity, and memory: a case study in Vojvodina, Serbia,” *Religious Dialogue and Cooperation* 1, no. 1 (2020): 121–133.

ty, different from those living in other regions of Hungary. For example, in 1880, one-third of the population with Hungarian as their mother language was Reformed (Hungarians living in Transylvania had a higher proportion), but Hungarians in Upper Hungary had a greater proportion of Roman Catholics, at 60%.³³ In the rest of Hungary, Roman Catholics made up only 55%. The denominational breakdown of Hungarians living in Slovakia and its development can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Transformation of the religious breakdown of Hungarians in Slovakia, 1930–2021

	Roman Catholic	Byzantine Catholic	Reformed/ Calvinist	Lutheran	Other	None	Total
1930	71.3	2.1	21.4	3.4	1.7	0.1	100.0
1950	75.0	1.2	20.5	3.1	0.2	0.1	100.0
2001	72.8	1.6	15.5	1.5	2.3	6.4	100.0
2021	62.3	1.9	13.9	1.7	3.1	17.1	100.0

Source: 1930, 1950, 2001, and 2021 Censuses³⁴

The changes in relative figures among Hungarians are not surprising, taking into account the figures of the populations of Slovakia and Hungary. After the fall of socialism, the affiliation rate of Hungarians was, on one side, unclear (due to the high rate of individuals who did not answer this question in the 1991 census). Later, the 2001 Census data revealed that Hungarians were more affiliated than Slovaks (Hungarians had only 6.4%

33 Juraj Majo, “Niekoľko poznámok k fenoménu etnicity v súčasnej slovenskej humánnej geografii [Some Remarks on the Ethnicity Phenomenon in the Contemporary Slovak Human Geography],” *Acta Geographica Universitatis Comenianae* 58, no. 2 (2014): 149–172.

34 Československá statistika: *Sčítání lidu v republice Československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930, díl 1 [The Population Census in the Czechoslovak Republic from the December 1, 1930, volume 1]*. Státní úřad statistický: Praha, 1934. 105–106.; Československá statistika, 1957. *Sčítání lidu, domů, 6; Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2001: Bývajúce obyvateľstvo*; “Sčítanie obyvateľov domov a bytov 2021: Obyvateľstvo podľa národnosti, náboženského vyznania, rodinného stavu a vzdelania [Population According to Ethnicity, Religious Affiliation, Marital Status and Educational Attainment],” Štatistický úrad SR, accessed December 6, 2023, https://disem.scitanie.sk/SASVisualAnalytics/?reportUri=%2Freports%2Freports%2F1d3bcfe5-995c-4dbd-98a2-2c7249c4012a§ionIndex=0&sso_guest=true&sas-welcome=false&language=sk..

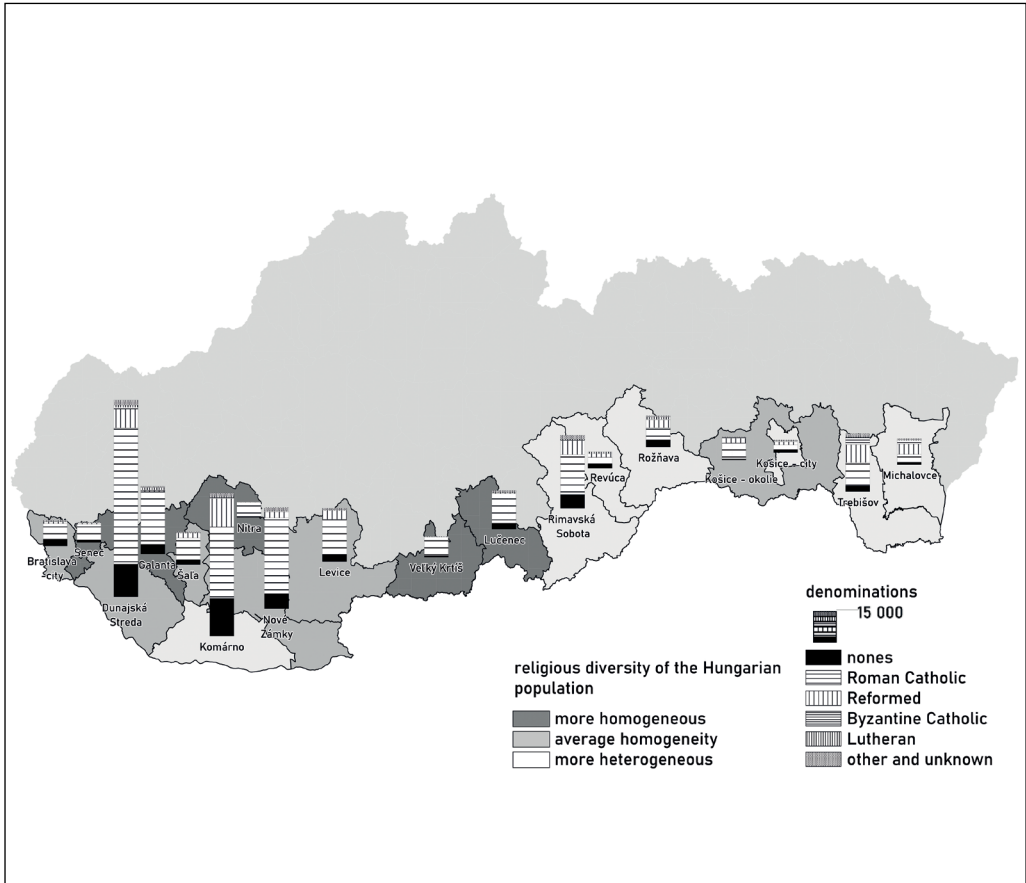
reporting “None” as their affiliation, and Slovaks had 13.7%).³⁵ We can see therein the results of the processes of secularization (especially since the turn of the millennium). As mentioned earlier, the historically rooted decline of historical Protestant denominations is similar for many Eastern European countries. Moreover, the current level of religious diversity among Hungarians (0.438)³⁶ is very similar to that of Slovaks (0.423), and although Hungarians were historically anchored in Roman Catholicism with a solid Calvinist minority, the last census revealed several striking changes. First, among Hungarians there are already more unaffiliated individuals than Reformed, and there is a growing prevalence of Byzantine Catholics over Lutherans. Byzantine Catholics are the only denomination growing larger among Hungarians. This trend is also evident at the level of the total population of Slovakia. Byzantine Catholics constituted the largest denomination with an increase in the number of adherents between 2011 and 2021.

Although the dynamics and trends are similar to those of the Slovakian population, there are some peculiarities between the denominational breakdown of ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Slovaks in Slovakia. For one, Slovaks have a much higher proportion of unaffiliated individuals (26%) than do Hungarians (17%). Even in the city of Bratislava (Pozsony), where the Slovaks were already in 2021 predominantly unaffiliated, the Hungarians were still predominantly Roman Catholics. Arguments for such a divergent situation in a large city can lie in a historically more rural population and, presumably, stronger ties with rural communities among Hungarians than among Slovaks. According to the 2021 Census, 62% of Hungarians lived in communities with a population below 5,000 inhabitants (Slovaks 46.7%), or, more specifically, 22% of Hungarians lived in communities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants (Slovaks 15%).

35 László Gyurgyík, “Zmeny v demografickej, sídelnej a sociálnej štruktúre Maďarov na Slovensku [The Transformation of Demographic, Settlement and Social Structure of Hungarians in Slovakia],” in *Maďari na Slovensku (1998-2004). Súhrnná správa. Od zmeny režimu po vstup do Európskej únie* [Hungarians in Slovakia (1998-2004). Summary Report. From the Regime Change to the European Union Accession], eds. József Fazekas and Péter Hunčík (Šamorín: Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín, 2008), 155–198.

36 Simpson’s diversity index; Simpson, “Measurement,” 688.

Figure 1: Map of religious diversity and denominational breakdown of the Hungarian population of districts of Slovakia in 2021



Source: 2021 Census³⁷

The internal diversification of the Hungarian community is easily perceptible even at the district level where the data are available (see Fig. 1). We have taken into account districts with at least 1,000 Hungarians and considered the cities of Košice (Kassa) and Bratislava as merged units (as both are composed of city districts). The highest proportion of unaffiliated Hungarians can be found in three regions: the city of Bratislava (28%), the Komárno (Komárom) district (26%), and south-central Slovakia (Gemery; Gömör), where in the districts of Rožňava (Rozsnyó) and Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat), there proportions of unaffiliated Hungarians are 23% and 26%, respectively. In the latter two regions,

37 Sčítanie 2021, "Obyvateľstvo podľa národnosti...".

the unaffiliated numbers contribute greatly to the religious diversity, while in eastern Slovakian districts, the major sources of diversity are much stronger Reformed communities than elsewhere in Slovakia. The Michalovce (Nagymihály) district is the only one where, among Hungarians, the Reformed are dominant over Roman Catholics, although they do not represent a relative majority among Hungarians (40%), and there is quite a strong Byzantine Catholic community as well (13.5%). Hungarians are most heterogeneous in the Rožňava district, where in addition to the numerous unaffiliated, the largest Lutheran community among Hungarians can be found (7.8% of the district, representing 15% of the population of Lutherans in Slovakia with Hungarian ethnicity).

Age and education as a demographic parameter of the religiosity of Hungarians in Slovakia

There are many options through which to analyze the demographic portrait of religious denominations. Two of them, age and educational attainment, can express the internal dynamics in a complex way, both of which include qualitative and quantitative aspects of the internal structure of denominations. We must also remain aware that although the data were collected at one specific point, they reflect a much longer history. Beyond merely the historical internal aspects of religious and ethnic communities, external sources have served as influences at various levels.

Regarding *age structure*, Hungarians in Slovakia have been considered a more aging population than Slovaks for a longer time.³⁸ The sources of such considerable aging are not just demographic behaviors, with certain southern Slovakian regions having a tradition of restricted fertility, but also assimilation, mixed marriages, and migration hamper the successful transmission of Hungarian identity. Therefore, in 2021, Hungarians had a population segment in the 65+ age group that made up a proportion more than 4% higher than among Slovaks and, similarly, a lower proportion of the 0–14 age group (see Table 5).

38 See Gyurgyík, “Zmeny,” 164–165.

Table 5: The proportion of the 65+ age group in the denominations of Hungarians and Slovaks in Slovakia (2021)

65+	Hungarians	Slovaks
None	11.8%	11.6%
Roman Catholic	23.9%	19%
Byzantine Catholic	19%	17.3%
Reformed/Calvinist	23.5%	17.1%
Lutheran	29.5%	26.5%
Other	13.1%	9.6%
Total	21.5%	17.1%

Source: 2021 Census³⁹

Religious affiliation can have different figures when broken down according to age category or generation. In the literature, we find examples of the transformation of the relationship of certain generations to religion. One example is the baby boomers,⁴⁰ who under certain circumstances (e.g., profound cultural, political, and medical changes and changes in human rights perception) and for certain denominations (such as Protestants) represent the generation that launched a set of changes in their relationship toward religion, religious participation, and involvement in religious communities. This is also inevitably reflected in the lower intensity of the intergenerational transmission of such values.

If baby boomers were salient for religious change in the second half of the twentieth century, today, we must aim our scientific scope at the generations of millennials and individuals born after the turn of the millennium. Several papers focus on the results of

39 "Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2021: Obyvateľstvo podľa pohlavia, 5-ročných vekových skupín, národnosti, ďalšej národnosti, náboženského vyznania, vzdelania, zamestnania (ISCO - triedy) a postavenia v zamestnaní [Population by Sex, 5-year Age Groups, Ethnicity, Another Ethnicity, Religious Belief, Education, Employment (ISCO - Classes) and Employment Status]; Štatistický úrad SR, accessed December 6, 2023, https://www.scitanie.sk/themes/web-sodtb/assets/public/disem/extreports/RV_O_099_SK.zip.

40 See for example: Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Dean, R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Juraj Majo and Marcela Káčerová, "Sú seniori v Česku a na Slovensku viac veriaci ako zvyšná populácia? [Are Seniors in Czechia and in Slovakia More Religious than the Rest of the Population?," *Demografie* 61, no. 1 (2019): 61–70.

transmission (or lack of transmission) in very specific circumstances and peculiarities of the digital era.⁴¹ The extent of such influences and trends among the younger generation should be of scientific scope, especially in the case of intertwining religious and ethnic identities. Moreover, many questions arise when we attempt to fully understand the processes of religious socialization. There are issues of religious transmission in nontraditional families; the role of grandparents, siblings, and romantic partners; the complicated relationship of technology, the role of college, and differences between those who commute and residents; and the socialization of those who do not attend college.⁴² The most recent census data reveal that the younger generation of Hungarians seems less influenced by these transforming processes and, during their life course, seem to have different trajectories. We can illustrate these differences with examples of age-specific affiliation rates in five-year age categories for the populations of Slovak ethnicity and Hungarian ethnicity in eastern Slovakia. (Due to the specific religious structure, for Hungarians, the line for the Reformed Church was added.)

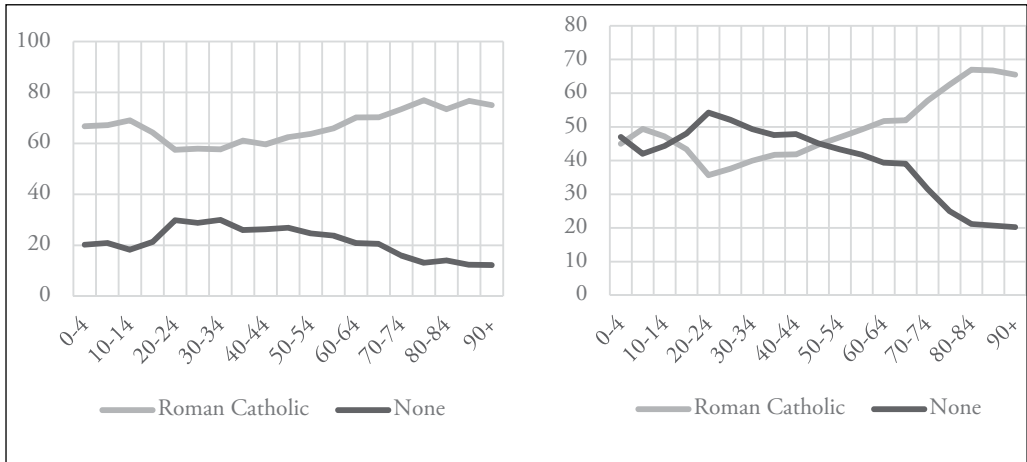
Figures 2 and 3: Age-specific affiliation rates for Hungarians (left) and Slovaks in eastern Slovakia (Košice and Prešov regions) in 2021



Source: 2021 Census⁴³

- 41 Sarah Laflamme-Wilkins, *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials: The Generation Shaping American and Canadian Trends* (Abingdon, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2022) or currently in Slovakia: Juraj Majo, “Well, I Have to Believe In Myself; Otherwise, It Makes No Sense’—An Outline to the Path of Non-religiousness of Young People in Slovakia,” *Slovenský Národopis* 70, no. 4 (2022): 493–506.
- 42 Richard, J. Petts and Scott A. Desmond, “Adolescence and Emerging Childhood,” in *Handbook of Religion and Society*, ed. David Yamane (Dordrecht: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 241–262.
- 43 Sčítanie 2021, “Obyvateľstvo podľa pohlavia”.

Figures 4 and 5: Age-specific affiliation rates for Hungarians (left) and Slovaks in the Bratislava region (Bratislava capital and adjacent suburban regions) in 2021



Source: 2021 Census⁴⁴

An analysis with more detailed data (available for the whole population of Slovakia for individual ages)⁴⁵ has indicated the process described earlier, where young people, to a certain extent, have the highest probability of disaffiliating under various circumstances and motives. The slight affiliation rate drop in young adulthood can be seen in Figures 2–5. Here, geography matters both for Hungarians and Slovaks: on the one hand, the affiliation rate grows with age more steadily in eastern Slovakia, but on the other hand, the trends of disaffiliation in young adulthood are not present for Hungarians to a visible and notable extent.

A completely different situation is in the Slovak capital city. Although Hungarians are still more affiliated than disaffiliated, compared to Slovaks, the trends of loosening ties with religion are here much more evident than elsewhere. The situation in the case of Slovaks in the capital is completely different. We use this example to compare how differently individuals from majority and minority groups and with different religious (or irreligious) backgrounds behave. For a part of the lifespan when individuals become more independent and more decisive (not just toward themselves, but toward the next generation, as this is the age when individuals settle down and have children), the Slovaks are already more disaffiliated than affiliated—especially in the area of the capital city, where in total, there are already more unaffiliated inhabitants than Roman Catholics.

44 Ibid.

45 See for example: Majo, “Well, I Have to Believe,” 501.

Finding a relationship between education attainment and religion is not an easy task. According to Dana Hamplová⁴⁶ and her findings in Czechia, there is a negative relationship between the proportion of believers and the proportion of university-educated individuals. Still, in a more detailed view, we must also take into consideration age structure and rural settlements and the fact that people with higher educational attainment more educated people and those living in urban settlements are more attracted, for example, to occultism or alternative spirituality. In terms of broader Central European research, it seems⁴⁷ that the relationship between education and religion is the weakest and least unambiguous among other social variables. Only in Austria and Czechia (until 1999) was it found that educational attainment raises religiosity. In other countries, the relationship is negative and becomes more insignificant.⁴⁸

In terms of the Hungarian ethnic group in Slovakia, education attainment has gained scientific interest due to relatively notable differences between the majority and the minority. The crucial difference was the lower proportion of individuals with university attainment among Hungarians in 2001.⁴⁹ It should be underlined that there are lower educational attainment levels among Hungarian women and, in general, the system of schooling and preference for a job and income against a longer education. We must also take into account the higher proportion of Hungarians living in the countryside compared to the Slovakian population.

According to the latest census data, the lag in education attainment is still present. Although 13% of Hungarians are university educated, among Slovaks, this number is 22% (calculated from the population over 16 years of age). Hungarians also have a higher proportion of individuals with only an elementary education than those with a university education. The proportion of university-educated Slovaks is higher than that of elementary-educated Slovaks (see Table 6).

46 Dana Hamplová, *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí* [Religion in the Czech Society at the Beginning of the 3rd Millennium], (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), 112.

47 Tatiana Podolinská, Vladimír Krivý, and Miroslav Bahna, "Religiozita: Slovensko a jeho susedia [Religiosity: Slovakia and its Neighbours]," in *Ako sa mení slovenská spoločnosť* [How does the Slovakian Society Change], ed. Vladimír Krivý (Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2013), 181–256.

48 Podolinská et al., "Religiozita," 221

49 Štefan Šutaj, "Maďarska menšina v slovenskej politike po roku 1989 [Hungarian Minority in the Slovak Politics after 1989]," in *Národnostná politika na Slovensku po roku 1989* [Ethnic Policy in Slovakia after 1989], ed. Šutaj, Štefan (Prešov: Universum, 2005), 93–101; In: (ed.): Universum: 2005. 93–101. 95–96; Gyurgyík, "Zmeny," 169.

Table 6: The proportion of university-educated individuals according to religious denomination among Slovaks and Hungarians in 2021 (over 16 years of age) in Slovakia

	Hungarians	Slovaks
None	16.4	28.7
Roman Catholic	12.5	19.6
Byzantine Catholic	11.4	19.8
Reformed/Calvinist	16.9	18.9
Lutherans	13.2	23.3
Other, Unknown	10.8	19.3
Total	13.7	22.2

Source: 2021 Census⁵⁰

Within both ethnic groups, there are tendencies of the population of unaffiliated individuals—and partially also of the population of historical Protestant denominations—to be the most educated, except for Hungarian Lutherans. The biggest difference in university-level educational attainment between Slovaks and Hungarians can be seen between those with no religious affiliation and Lutherans. On the other side of these statistics, we see that Lutherans and Reformed individuals have the lowest proportion of the elementary-educated population (20.6% and 21.2%, respectively).

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the East-Central European region underwent many societal and political changes in the twentieth century. There were evident transformations of countries, boundary shifts, population movements and migration, and changes in political systems. These dynamics inevitably started to profoundly influence the identities of people living under such conditions of constant change and the uncertainty of the vectors of this type of dynamics. History has proven that the most sensitive to such dynamics are

50 Sčítanie 2021, “Obyvateľstvo podľa pohlavia”.

religious and ethnic identities. In our region, these identities are interconnected and contribute significantly to the “wounded” character of these identities. Although boundaries have created individual platforms for these identities, some interconnections and common evolutions transcend these boundaries. On the one hand, we see the use and misuse of religion and ethnicity in everyday political discourse and their presentation as safeguards of the traditional lifestyle of this region, but on the other hand, we see how religion and religious practice, in certain ways, retreat from the everyday lives of people and institutions. Secularization is an important and evident process in our society, and we see it in qualitative and quantitative data as well. Therefore, the language of politicians that uses religious identity must be taken with utmost caution and challenge in this region.

This study of the interconnection of ethnic and religious identities of Hungarians in Slovakia revealed remarkable results. We dare to say that—to a certain extent—it represents a bridge between Slovakia and Hungary, unveiling the internal structure of a community of individuals who ethnically are Hungarian but politically are citizens of Slovakia. The most cardinal aspect of the religious identity of Hungarians in Slovakia is that they succumb less to the secularization process. The proportion of unaffiliated is lower in comparison to the overall populations of Slovakia and Hungary. Secularization among Hungarians does not influence young individuals as much as it does in the case of Slovaks. Hungarians are not yet dominantly unaffiliated even in the biggest city, while Slovaks already are. However, the process of believers’ aging is a common matter among Slovaks and Hungarians as well, and it influences all major denominations (especially Lutherans, where almost one-third of believers are over 65 years old), with the lowest imprint among the unaffiliated (where the proportion of those 65+ is almost identical among Hungarians and Slovaks). The long-lasting processes of aging and aspects of intergenerational transmission have resulted in an overall transformation of denominational breakdown among Hungarians. Historically, the community of Hungarians has always been Roman Catholic with a strong Reformed minority, but since 2021 this has transformed into a community of mostly Roman Catholics with a large unaffiliated population. Moreover, at the level of smaller denominations, Byzantine Catholics are becoming more numerous than Lutherans. We attempted to prove that the data and trends in the religiosity of Hungarians in Slovakia demand more scientific interest as the transforming internal structures are influenced by factors that need to be more thoroughly examined.