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Digital Media
Observatory



Religious beliefs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

Coffee Beans

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The differences in religious affiliation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia are almost proverbial. The Czechs are known as the most atheistic nation in Europe, while Slovakia is one of the countries with the highest religious identification in Europe, alongside countries such as Poland, Ireland and Malta, due to the number of people who subscribe to institutionalized religion, but also due to some legislative specificities (the threshold for registration of religious organizations in the Czech Republic is 300 members, in Slovakia it is 50,000, and the Slovak Republic also has a specific treaty with the Holy See).

As Nešpor and Václavík write, religion scholars and historians see the roots of the difference between Slovakia and the Czech Republic in the historical relationship to the Catholic Church, which at the time was closely linked to the Habsburg Empire and the Habsburg dynasty in general. The Habsburgs were strong supporters of the Catholic Church, so much so that Catholicism was perceived as part of the Habsburg, and therefore Austrian, identity. In the Bohemian milieu, the "alliance of throne and altar" is still mentioned today.

This relationship begins to complicate the situation from around the 18th century, when nationalism and national sentiment enter into complicated regional and imperial identities. The various groups that had hitherto been part of the Habsburg Empire came to be seen as separate nations, and after the advent of Romanticism, the notion of the right to self-determination became associated with them. And here, somewhere, the relationship of the Czechs to the Catholic Church begins to erode definitively, while the relationship of the Slovaks had no reason to change.

The lands of the Czech Crown were part of the Habsburg Empire, but it was a territory whose historical legitimacy was also recognised by the Emperor. The Kingdom of Bohemia was an important part of the monarchy. Slovakia, on the other hand, was part of Hungary, and the Slovaks did not feel the "Austrian boot", but the "Hungarian boot". Thus, part of the Czech national identity was resistance against the Habsburgs, who were associated with Catholicism, while the Slovak national identity was formed in resistance to the Hungarians and Hungarianization, where the Austrian Habsburgs represented a distant, but nevertheless an ally. Slovaks thus had no reason for cognitive dissonance - a "good Slovak" could also be a good Catholic. But the nationally conscious Bohemian had a strongly complicated position, since resistance against the Habsburgs often meant going hand in hand with resistance against the Catholic Church. This is also why a much larger number of Protestant alternatives arose in the Czech Republic - the nationally sentient Czechs were looking for a Christian alternative to Catholicism, which they could not reconcile with their national sentiments, given their relationship to the Habsburgs.

As a result of this historical fermentation and the formation of national identities, we encounter the following figures when it comes to religious affiliation:

Zákon č. 3/2002 Sb. Zákon o svobodě náboženského vyznání a postavení církví a náboženských společností a o změně některých zákonů.

§ 11 a § 12 písm. d) zákona č. 308/1991 Zb. o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení církví a náboženských spoločností v znení neskorších predpisov.

Zoznam zmlúv medzi SR a Svätou stolicou: <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/cirkev/p/apostolska-nunciatura/c/zmluvy-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-svatou-stolicou>

Nešpor, Z., Václavík, D. a kol., Příručka sociologie náboženství, Slon, 2008, str.10-11.

Graph 1: Overview of the development of self-declared religious beliefs in the Czechia and Slovakia (1991 – 2021)

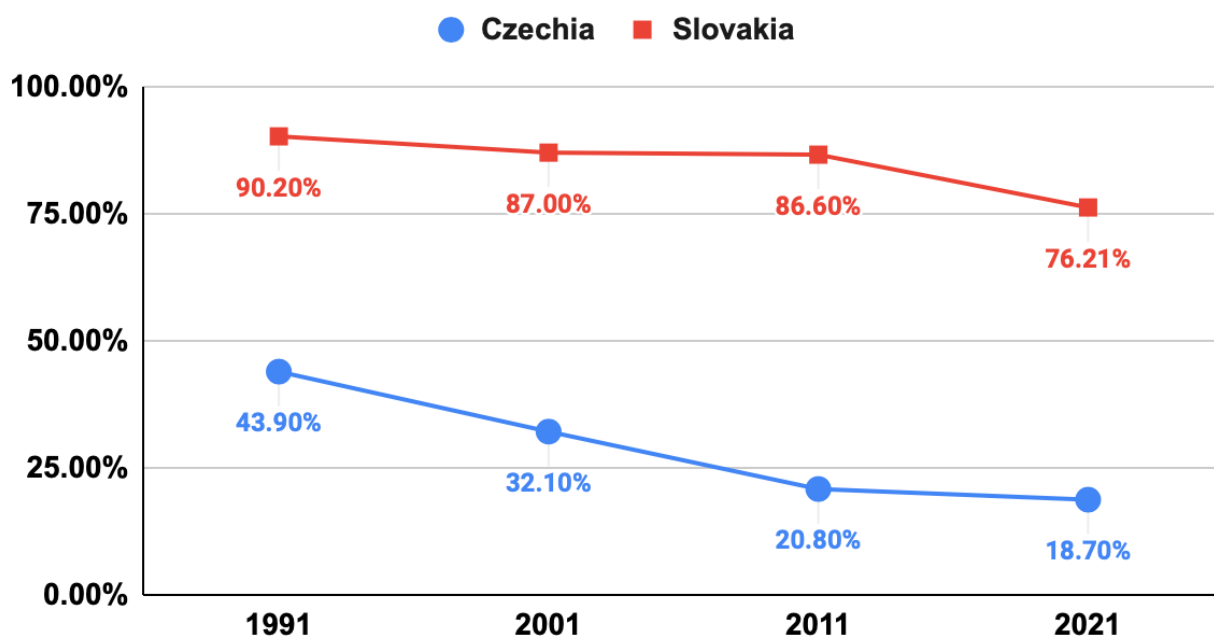
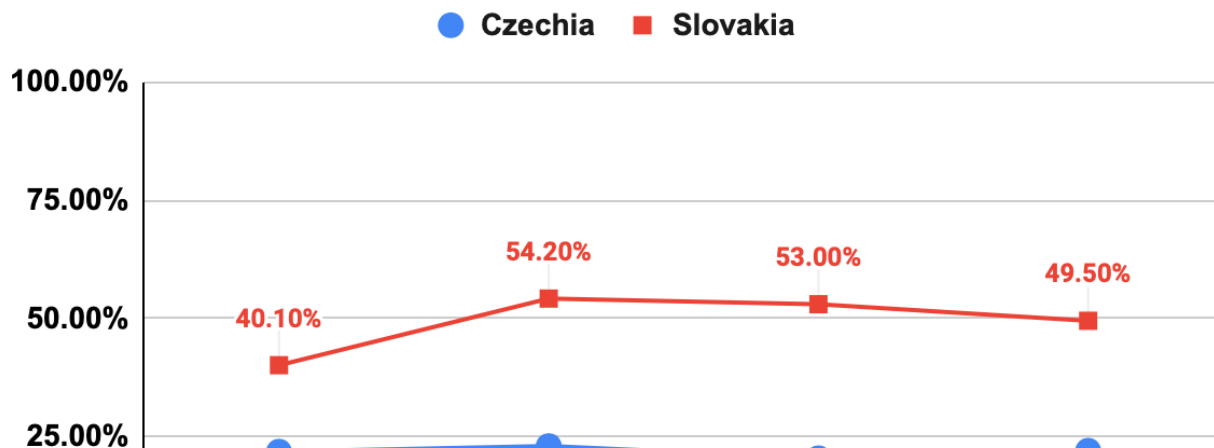
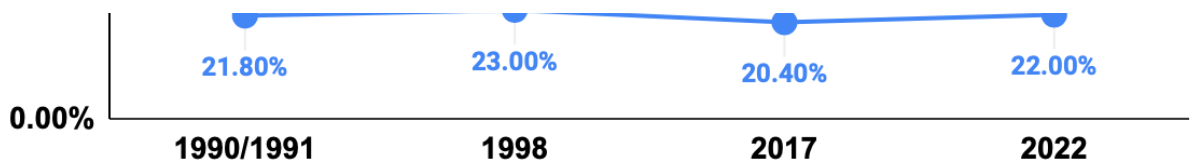


Chart 2: Development of the subjective perception of religion as important in the respondent's life in the Czechia and Slovakia (1990 – 2022)





Thus, we see a massive difference between the so-called institutional religious affiliation (the survey does not measure non-institutional spirituality) in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which influences the social dynamics in both countries to this day.



Datasets:

Chart 1:

Religious confession of the population of the Czechia 1991, 2001, 2011

<https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/20551795/1702201401.pdf/68758640-22b5-4eba-9733-95c75a479d42?version=1.0>

Religious confession of the population of the Slovakia 1991, 2001, 2011

https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/wcm/connect/54eb0cba-ec99-4549-8a33-5c86eead59c1/Tab_14_Obyvatelstvo_SR_podla_nabozenskeho_vyznania_scitanie_2011_2001_1991.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

Religious confession of the population of the Czechia 2021

<https://www.scitani.cz/nabozenska-vira>

Religious confession of the population of the Slovakia 2021

<https://www.scitanie.sk/obyvatelia/zakladne-vysledky/struktura-obyvatelstva-podla-nabozenskeho-vyznania/SR/SK0/SR>

Chart 2:

EVS (2022). European Values Study 2017: Integrated Dataset (EVS 2017). *GESIS, Cologne. ZA7500 Data file Version 5.0.0*, <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13897>.

World Value Survey Wave 2. Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & Puranen, B. et al. (Eds.) (2018). World Values Survey: Round Two - Country-Pooled Datafile. JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.

World Value Survey Wave 3. Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & Puranen, B. et al. (Eds.) (2018). World Values Survey: Round Three - Country-Pooled Datafile. JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.

World Value Survey Wave 7. Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & Puranen, B. et al. (Eds.) (2018). World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile. JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.