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Survey Report Montenegro

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Survey report Montenegro

By Nenad Zekavica

Survey sample

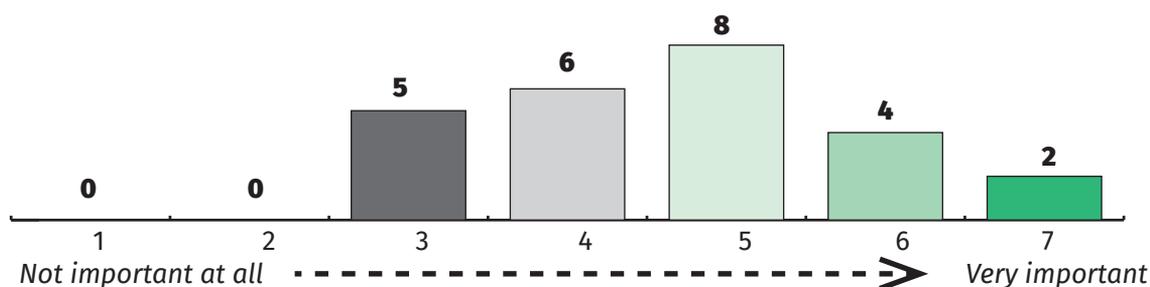
During March and April 2019, a survey was conducted as part of the regional project that deals with the role of religion in Western Balkan countries. The survey was conducted as part of a research project and was conducted among members of the cultural and political elite of society. Its purpose is to give a sketch of the religious beliefs of different societies. The survey itself was developed as the result of the mutual cooperation among four partner institutions in the Balkans.

After the selection of respondents, around 60 surveys were sent to the candidates. As a result, we received 25 surveys with the data. The respondents included politicians and government employees (N=3), religious leaders (N=3), academics (N=5), civil society leaders (N=6), journalists and opinion-makers (N=4) and young leaders (N=4). Of the respondents, 19 were male (76%) and six (24%) were female. The average age of the respondents was 39 years, with the youngest respondent being 24 years old and the oldest 58 years old. With regard to respondents' education, seven respondents have a bachelor's degree, 13 respondents hold an MA, while five of them have obtained a PhD degree or above.

The role of religion in Montenegro

In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked to estimate the importance of religion for most people living in Montenegro on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 marks complete irrelevance and 7 marks significant influence, the average mark was 4.56.

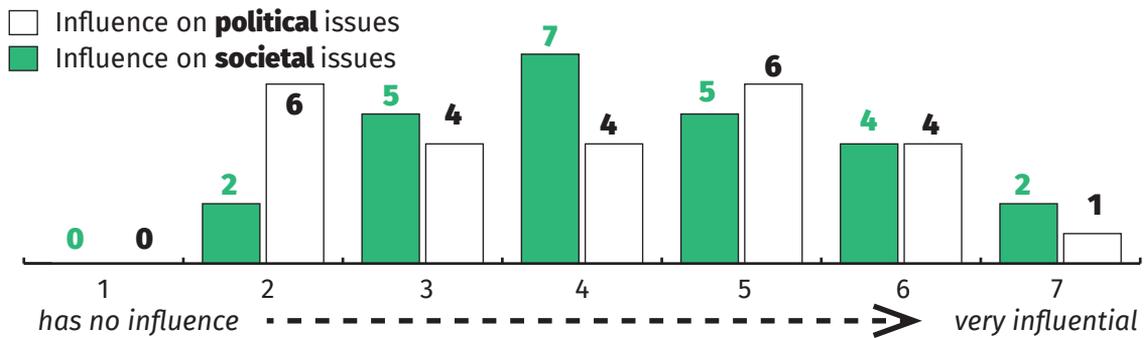
Figure 17: Importance of religion in Montenegro



Respondents were then asked to grade the influence of religion on societal issues, such as poverty, justice, equality, crime, social cohesion etc. The respondents answered with an average assessment of 4.4 on a scale from 1 (no influence at all) to 7 (significant influence). This is only a small drop from the average grade in the first question.

But when asked about the influence of political issues in Montenegro, such as democratic participation, voter behaviour, political parties and others, respondents distributed differently along the same scale as in the previous question and gave the average grade of 4.04.

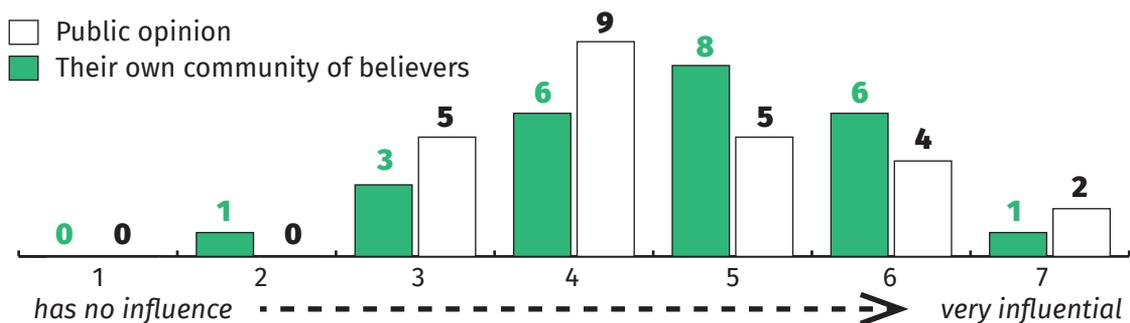
Figure 18: Influence of religion on political and social issues in Montenegro



Religious leaders

The next segment of the survey dealt with the influence of religious leaders in their religious communities in Montenegro on the one hand and their influence on wider public opinion on the other hand. As in the previous questions, respondents were asked to rate this on a 1–7 scale, where 1 stands for ‘no influence at all’ and 7 marks ‘very influential’. When it came to the influence within their respective communities, the average was 4.72. With regard to the influence of religious leaders on broader public opinion, the average was a bit lower at 4.56. The difference between the two is not as large as in some other countries in the Western Balkans. Based on these survey results, it seems that religious leaders in Montenegro are influential to some extent in their respective communities but in public opinion also.

Figure 19: Influence of religious leaders in Montenegro

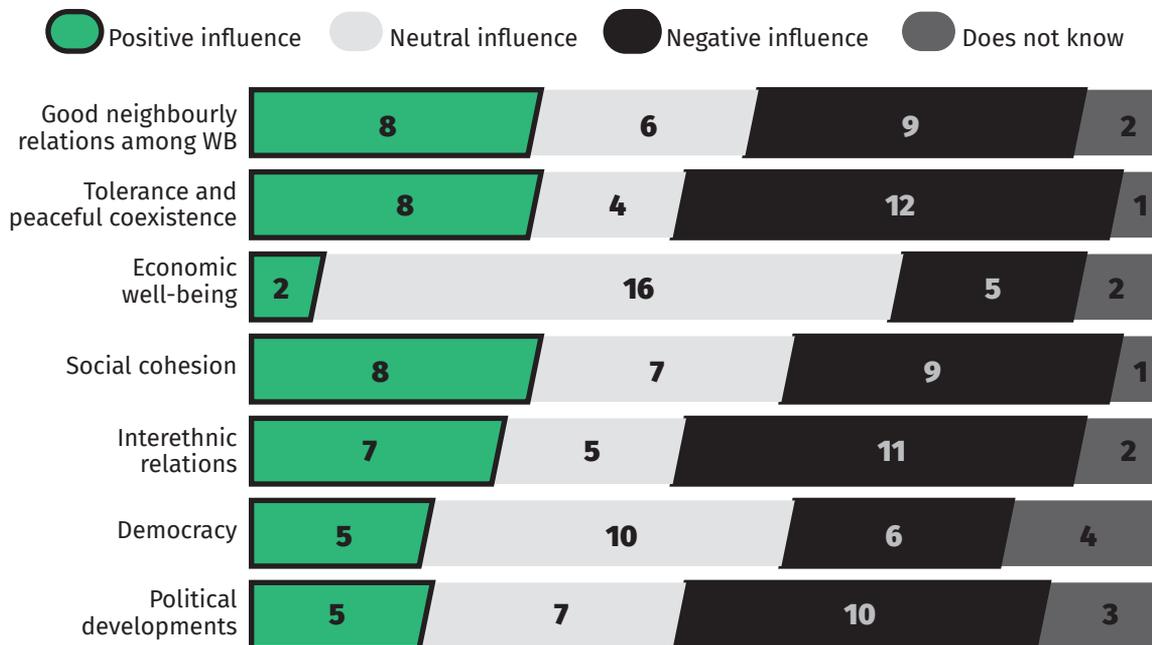


The influence of religion on developments in Montenegro

Respondents were asked whether they perceived that religion, as dominantly interpreted and presented in the public discourse, has positively or negatively influenced developments in Montenegro. The specific kinds of developments influenced by religion they were asked about are political developments, democracy, interethnic relations, social cohesion, economic well-being, tolerance and peaceful coexistence and development of good neighbourly relations among countries in the Western Balkans.

Concerning the political developments, people mostly see religion as a negative influence (N=10), a smaller number did not see an effect of religion (N=7) and only five saw a positive influence (two of were religious leaders), while three respondents marked that they do not know. The answers related to the development of democracy show similar results. Out of 25 respondents, ten of them did not see the influence on this, while five saw positive and six saw negative consequences for the development of democracy. The section regarding interethnic relations showed us that respondents (N=5) tend to believe that religion does not affect the development of those relations; 44% of respondents saw religion as having a negative influence on the development of interethnic relations; with an additional 28% of respondents who claimed that religion has a positive impact. When asked about the influence of religion on social cohesion respondents seem to be almost equally divided on positive influence (N=8), neutral influence (N=7) and negative influence (N=9). It is interesting to note that religious leaders all saw the positive impact of religion on social cohesion, while the four out of six members of civil organizations see it the other way around. The attitude of the respondents is pretty much the same as in other Western Balkan countries when it comes to economic well-being. The largest part of the respondents saw no active influence on the economic state of the people (N=16), while five respondents saw the negative impact and only two the positive one. Among those two are one young leader and one religious leader.

Figure 20: The influence of religion on politics and society in Montenegro

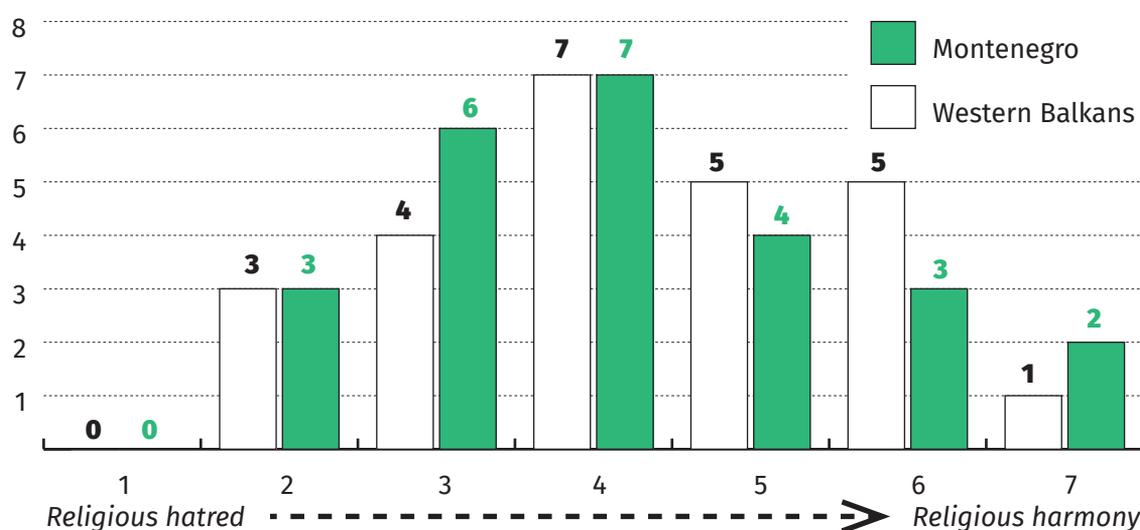


The next section of this question dealt with the development of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. When asked about the influence of religion on the development of tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Montenegrin society, respondents depicted that as predominantly negative (N=12). However, there were eight who believed that religion helps with the development of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, while four respondents said that religion does not influence this development and one respondent who answered 'Don't know'. The last part of the question dealt with the religion's influence on the development of good neighbourly relations among Western Balkan countries. It seems that a small majority of the respondents recognised the negative (N=9) influence of religion on relations between Western Balkan countries, with an additional six respondents who did not recognise the influence of the religion in this matter at all. Eight of the respondents claimed that religion positively influenced this development.

Religious tolerance

The next part of our questionnaire dealt with the issues of religious tolerance and interreligious relations in Montenegro and in Western Balkans. Participants of the survey tried to assess the state of today's interreligious relations. They were first asked to give their answer on a 1-7 scale, where 1 represents religious hatred and 7 represents religious harmony. Based on these two questions we can see that the respondents see interreligious relations in Montenegro in a worse condition than they are in the Western Balkans as a whole. The average mark of the state of interreligious relations in Montenegro was 3.92 according to our respondents. When it comes to the present state of the interreligious relations in the Western Balkans the results seem to point to slightly better relations with an average score of 4.32.

Figure 21: Interreligious relations in Montenegro and the region

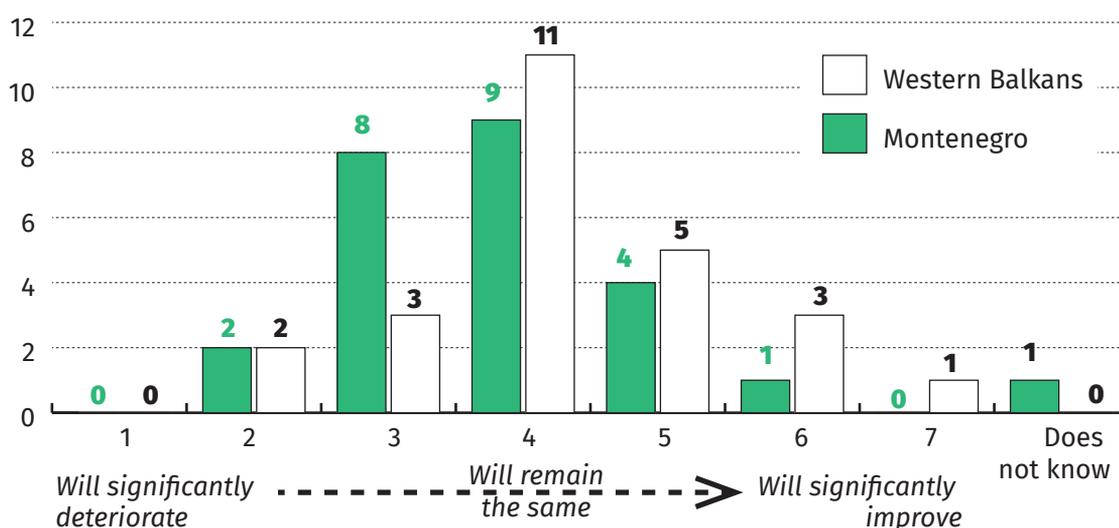


The respondents were then asked to estimate the future development of interreligious relations over the next five years in Montenegro and in the Western Balkans and to further

explain their selection. Once again they had to choose from the scale 1–7, where 1 indicated ‘will significantly deteriorate’, 7 indicated ‘will significantly improve’ and 4 indicated ‘it will remain the same’.

Our respondents doubt that any significant change will happen over the period of the next five years. The majority of respondents tended to think that relations will stay exactly the same. In the case of Montenegro, nine respondents do not see any kind of change in those relations, while in the case of the Western Balkans 11 respondents feel that relations between different religious organisations and communities will not change to a large extent. The respondents seem to be a bit more optimistic when it comes to interreligious relations in the Western Balkans compared to Montenegro. Eight respondents (32%) believe that mutual relations in Montenegro will further, but not drastically deteriorate, while nine respondents believe that those relations are going to improve to some extent in the Western Balkan countries. Some of the stated reasons for the unsatisfactory state of their relations is connected with the new draft law on freedom of religion and the problems between Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Church on the one hand, but also an increasing level of problems between the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro and members of the Albanian minority lately.

Figure 22: How interreligious relations will develop in the next five years in Montenegro and the region

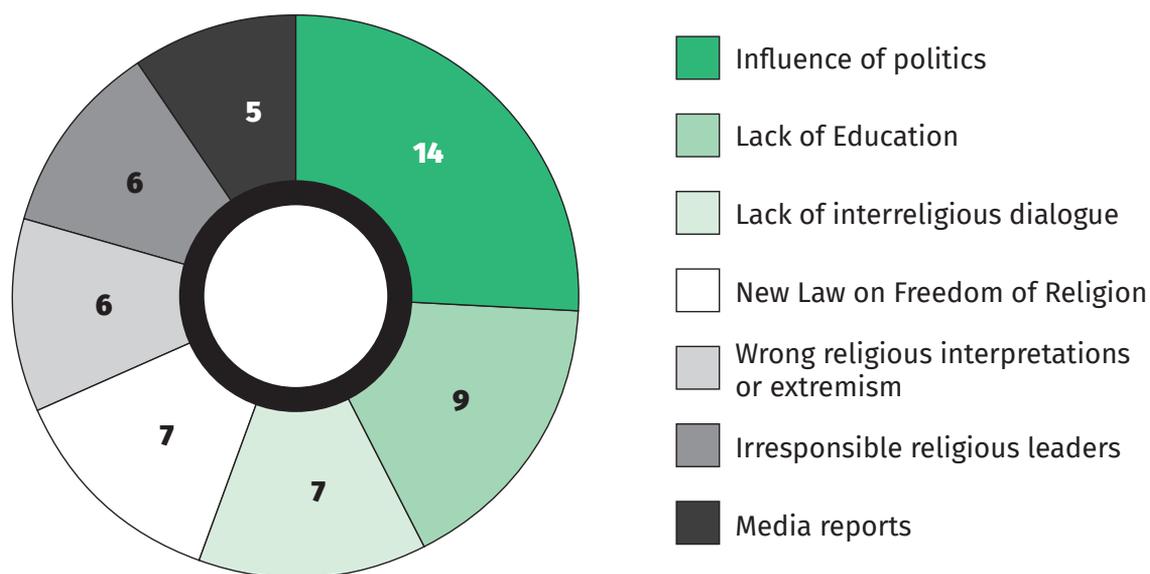


Threats and opportunities for religious tolerance in Montenegro

The final part of the conducted survey explored the possible threats for the further development of religious tolerance but also explored possible opportunities for the development of religious tolerance in Montenegro. The last question dealt with the possible areas of influence for religion in Montenegro. Our respondents were asked to list the three potential threats to religious tolerance. Most of the respondents’ mentioned politics in some form to be the biggest threat to the religious picture of Montenegro. For example, one of the members of academia claims that the ‘new draft law could be very

problematic in terms of the property of religious communities, it could create problems and tension in the region and not only in the religious picture of Montenegro'. Some respondents also noted that authorities tend to influence religious affairs and that some politicians capitalise on the religious feeling of Montenegrins in order to recruit potential voters. One representative of an NGO saw other factors including: 'Religious leaders and communities lack openness and readiness to have an honest dialogue with members of other communities'. One religious leader, besides political influence, saw education as one of the problems for better understanding between the distinctive religious communities in Montenegro: 'It would be good to include some kind of formal religious education in primary and secondary schools in order to raise the level of knowledge about one's own religion, but also about the religion of others. It seems to me that it is the easiest way for people to make a distinction between their religion and ethnic identity'. One of the religious leaders also pointed out the way media reports shape public opinion: 'For them [media], the essence is not about the story itself, but rather in the bringing as many readers or viewers to read or watch them. With that kind of approach, all good initiatives and good examples of mutual respect and life in multi-ethnic parts of the country will stay less visible than incidents'. Although the situation regarding religious tolerance and interreligious relations in Montenegro is not without difficulties, respondents recognise the existing potential for things to change. However, there are many limiting factors which tend to change slowly and gradually, and stop the positive development of them.

Figure 23: The biggest threats to interreligious relations in Montenegro



Despite that, one academic said: 'There is plenty of room for the upgrade of capacities for democracy by applying twin toleration in mutual relation between state and religious organisations'. Another member of academia sees the unused potential in religious communities when it comes to tackling different social issues from poverty to other inequalities in Montenegrin society. Interreligious initiatives focused on this could lead to a higher level of social cohesion.