

Believing and Doubting in Science and Religion: Exploring Attitudes among Mexican Religious ‘Nones’

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the non-religious population (“nones”) in Mexico, with an emphasis on their attitudes toward religion and science. According to the national census in Mexico, the “nones” represent 10.6% of the total population, i.e., 13.3 million individuals (INEGI, 2020). Religion is a central discourse for the unaffiliated identity. When analysing the reasons individuals give to explain their religious disaffiliation, findings in the Mexican context show common attitudes, such as criticism of religion, autonomy, and indifference. The role of science, on the other hand, also frequently appears within the non-religious narrative, especially as a validation of the irreligious position. However, the incorporation of science is neither univocal nor unidirectional. This work elaborates further on some identified attitudes, such as: believing in science, science as a horizontal discourse, and the critique of the scientific realm as a dominant ideology. Following the postulate that individuals cope with social reality using religious and secular positions in different parts of their lives, this paper also suggests that religious and secular discourses, such as science, can coexist and converge in plural identities—especially in a cultural context such as the Mexican, defined by its baroque ethos.



Keywords: Nones, Religion, Science, Pluralism, Baroque Modernity, Mexico.

Creer y dudar en la ciencia y la religión: explorando actitudes entre los sin religiosos en México

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo explorar la población sin religión en México, con énfasis en sus actitudes hacia la religión y la ciencia. Según el censo nacional en México, los no religiosos representan el 10.6% de la población total, es decir, 13.3 millones de individuos (INEGI, 2020). La religión es un discurso central para la identidad no afiliada. Al analizar las razones que dan los individuos para explicar su desafiliación religiosa, los hallazgos en el contexto mexicano muestran actitudes comunes, como la crítica a la religión, la autonomía y la indiferencia. El papel de la ciencia, por su parte, también aparece con frecuencia dentro de la narrativa no religiosa, especialmente como validación de la posición irreligiosa. Sin embargo, la incorporación de la ciencia no es ni unívoca ni unidireccional. Este trabajo profundiza sobre algunas actitudes identificadas, como creer en la ciencia, la ciencia como discurso horizontal y la crítica del ámbito científico como una ideología dominante. Siguiendo el postulado de que los individuos enfrentan la realidad social utilizando posiciones religiosas y seculares en diferentes partes de sus vidas, este trabajo también sugiere que los discursos religiosos y seculares, como la ciencia, pueden coexistir y converger en identidades plurales; especialmente en un contexto cultural como el mexicano, definido por su ethos barroco.

Palabras clave: sin religión, religión, ciencia, pluralismo, modernidad barroca, México.

Acreditar e duvidar na ciência e na religião: explorando atitudes entre os sem religião no México

Resumo

Este trabalho tem como objetivo explorar a população sem religião no México, com ênfase em suas atitudes em relação à religião e à ciência. Segundo o censo nacional no México, os sem religião representam 10,6% da população total, ou seja, 13,3 milhões de indivíduos (INEGI, 2020). A religião é um discurso central para a identidade não afiliada. Ao analisar as razões que os indivíduos dão para explicar sua desafiliação religiosa, os achados

no contexto mexicano mostram atitudes comuns, como a crítica à religião, a autonomia e indiferença. O papel da ciência, por outro lado, também aparece com frequência dentro da narrativa não religiosa, especialmente como validação da posição irreligiosa. No entanto, a incorporação da ciência não é nem unívoca nem unidirecional. Este trabalho elabora mais sobre algumas atitudes identificadas, como: acreditar na ciência, a ciência como discurso horizontal e a crítica do âmbito científico como uma ideologia dominante. Seguindo o postulado de que os indivíduos enfrentam a realidade social utilizando posições religiosas e seculares em diferentes partes de suas vidas, este trabalho também sugere que os discursos religiosos e seculares, como a ciência, podem coexistir e convergir em identidades plurais; especialmente em um contexto cultural como o mexicano, definido por seu ethos barroco.

Palavras-chave: sem religião, religião, ciência, pluralização, modernidade barroca, México.

Introduction

This paper explores Mexico's non-religious population ("nones") and their attitudes toward religion and science. Religious disaffiliation is a relatively new area of research in Latin America (Lecaros and Barrera, 2017). Religiously unaffiliated individuals express a distance from at least one confession of the religious landscape, without necessarily exhibiting an absolute absence of beliefs and practices rooted in religious traditions or spiritual backgrounds. These are consistent findings observed across various Latin American contexts, such as Mexico and Argentina (De la Torre *et al.*, 2020; Esquivel *et al.*, 2020). In the case of Mexico, the 2020 national census registered that the people without religion, unaffiliated individuals, atheists, and agnostics represented 10.6% of the total population, i.e., 13.3 million individuals (INEGI, 2020).

Religion and science are both relevant discourses for the identity of secular individuals. On the one hand, existing research shows a complex relationship between non-believers and religion (Blankholm, 2022). When analysing the reasons individuals give to explain their religious disaffiliation, findings in the Mexican context reveal common positions, such as criticism of religion, a search for autonomy, and indifference (Mora Duro, 2017a). On the other hand, the notion of science frequently appears within the non-religious narrative, especially as a validation of the secular viewpoint. However, the incorporation of science into this identity is neither univocal nor unidirectional. This work further explores some identified

positions among non-religious individuals such as belief in science, science as a horizontal discourse, and critique of the scientific realm as a dominant ideology.

The next section develops a theoretical framework to understand how individual identities incorporate secular discourses, such as science, while simultaneously recognising the relevance of religious representations and practices. This interplay reflects the collective imaginaries of Latin American societies, where the secular and the religious are interwoven in syncretic representations that creatively process the “baroque modernity” of the continent. The second section focuses on regional statistics, highlighting broader patterns of pluralisation and disaffiliation, despite religious history in the area. Here, I briefly explore findings on the complex identity of the “nones” in Latin America. Finally, the paper analyses how Mexican “nones” incorporate discourses of religion and science into their worldviews. These observations support the argument that individuals can maintain a pluralistic identity, especially in a context characterised by the dynamic interplay of various discourses in everyday conversation.

Qualitative data analysed in this document are derived from my doctoral dissertation on the non-religious phenomenon in Mexico. As part of this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling. The cases include participants living in Mexico City who identified as non-religious (Mora Duro, 2017b, 2021). Furthermore, I draw on censuses from the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), and recent studies, such as the National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Practices in Mexico (ENCREER) conducted by the Network of Researchers of Religious Phenomena in Mexico (RIFREM) (De la Torre *et al.*, 2016).

Pluralism and Baroque Modernity

In contemporary societies, there is more dialogue between contrasting points of view, including religious and secular. In this context, Peter Berger proposes that modernity does not necessarily lead to secularisation, but rather to inevitable pluralisation, both in society and in the mind of individuals. As a result of this pluralistic process, all viewpoints are nowadays relativised. In other words, pluralism, as a global phenomenon, increases the chances of dialogues among multiple worldviews. This dialogical encounter relativises the previously taken-for-granted perspectives by realising that the world can be understood differently.

“Open one window and the whole turbulence of pluralism may come in” (Berger, 2014, p. 29).

Berger correlates the pluralistic experience with the emergence of a structure of plausibility, where every point of view, religious and non-religious, is plausible in society. The sociologist claims that an important difference from previous pluralism is the powerful presence of secular discourse in society. However, he criticises the premise that we live in a secularised world, arguing that the world today “is furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.” (Berger, 1999, p. 2). Modernisation would thus have some secularising effects, but secularisation is only one of the possible outcomes. This process can also correlate with the upsurge of religion or counter-secularisation movements (Berger, 2002; Karpov, 2010).

Regarding the notion of science, Harrison (2018) argues that the narrative of science as a primary driver of secularisation—and as a catalyst for the progression of human societies from a religious to a scientific stage—was a prevalent view in the 19th century, however, most scientists today would reject that social change is driven primarily by scientific advancement. At the same time, the available evidence does not support the prediction that religion will decline due to science. Berger asserts that science does not necessarily lead to a secular world, simply because “scientific reasoning” does not “dominate the way they (modern people) think in ordinary life” (Berger, 2014, p. 19). In this sense, he critiques the debate between secularity and religion, questioning whether we live in a secular or religious world when, in reality, individuals must navigate both secular and religious attitudes in their daily experiences.

Using the example of a hospital, which can be considered a “temple of modernity,” Berger (2015) argues that this space illustrates the interaction between secular discourse and religious beliefs and practices. Regardless of religious convictions among the hospital personnel, they are expected to operate, says Berger, “as if God did not exist.” Religious people may view their medical practices as actions to repair the universe, but their beliefs and spiritual practices are not particularly in dispute during their job duties. Berger concludes that, in structural terms, the secular discourse has not supplanted other discourses in society, especially religious ones. Moreover, modern individuals, particularly religious ones, may cope with the social reality by employing both religious and secular perspectives; and “they

find ways (not necessarily coherent theoretically) of applying the two discourses in different parts of their lives” (Berger, 2015, p. 410).

Thomas Luckmann (1967) explored individual strategies to resolve the latent contradictions between the secular and the religious viewpoints in modern societies. He suggests that individuals may adopt a *naive attitude*, where they remove inconsistent secular elements from their religious-secular relationship, leading to an out-worldly commitment and tolerance of worldly affairs. Another position entails a *leap of faith*, characterized by a period of doubt, followed by the reconstruction of individual religiosity or a return to a “pre-reflective attitude” and religious practices. Lastly, some individuals prefer to organise a *secular value system* in which religious elements are abandoned or performed on opportunistic occasions, resulting in the privatisation of religion. In this sense, Luckmann argues that the sense of autonomy in modern industrial societies resembles a consumer experience in a marketplace, where one can access to a variety of sacred cosmos and secular discourses.

Following Luckmann’s hypothesis, the strategies to resolve the secular-religion tensions imply reducing one domain in favour of the other. Berger attempts to transcend this reductionism by suggesting that individuals can navigate social reality using both frameworks in *different* areas of their lives. I argue in addition that in a pluralistic context, individuals may *simultaneously* incorporate both religious and secular discourses to shape a pluralistic worldview. This fluid perspective, blending secular and sacred elements, can influence numerous aspects of both social and individual life. In this respect, I agree with the lived religion approach that individuals hardly ever express a “totalizing identity”—in other words, they are neither entirely religious nor wholly secular (Ammerman, 2014). Instead, social discourses, such as religion and science, coexist in everyday conversation, whether in public affairs or personal identities.

Existing literature on discursive practices points out that individual identity is not static but actively constructed and negotiated through the discourses employed in multiple social contexts (De Fina *et al.*, 2011). This argument is especially relevant in Latin American religious pluralism, where complex interactions between religious and secular discourses frame identities and interactions in both public and private domains (Casanova, 2018). The modernity that emerged in Latin America cannot be described as a secularising model, as experienced in North Atlantic nations. In the region, modernity is defined by various forms of

adaptation/resistance to the social life promoted by North Atlantic modernity. According to Bolívar Echeverría, a characteristic of Latin American modernity is the baroque ethos, which involves the “theatricalization” of modern attitudes, as the performance is capable of “inverting” the devastation of the “social-natural nucleus of life” and rescuing that core “at least in the plane of the imaginary”. The anti-modernity of the baroque, therefore, challenges the expected “person” that capitalistic modernity imposes as a part of its civilising project (Echeverría, 2019, p. 175).

Considering the above, it is not difficult to imagine that individual identities in Latin America incorporate secular discourses such as science, while simultaneously recognising the relevance of religious visions and practices. This dynamic reflects collective imaginaries in societies, where the secular and the religious are interwoven in syncretic representations that creatively process the orientation of baroque modernity. The Mexican context provides interesting illustrations of reinterpreting symbols of Catholic Christianity through a baroque style that simulates and resists the assimilation of the colonising agents (De la Torre, 2023).

Mexican Baroque Religiosity

In 1979, Pope John Paul II proclaimed “*Mexicum, semper fidele, siempre fiel*” (Mexico always faithful) during his first pastoral visit to Mexico, evincing the vibrant Catholicism of the nation. He declared that Mexico’s religious history involves devotion to the faith set down by the first missionaries—a simple but deep-rooted religiosity—and sincere faithfulness to the point of sacrifice (Juan Pablo II, 1979). According to Bolívar Echeverría, this statement reaffirmed the vitality and unquestionable validity of Catholic doctrine, rituals, and ecclesiastical organisation in Mexico, despite the growing presence of statistical data suggesting a decline in these elements (Echeverría, 2019, pp. 137–138).

The significance of Catholicism in Mexico is also evident in the association between the nation’s identity and the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most important symbol of popular religiosity (Lafaye, 2015). This figure played a central role during Mexico’s War of Independence in 1810. The priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla used the Virgin’s image to lead the movement for emancipation from Spanish colonialism. Even today, the centrality of this religious symbol is evidenced in the identification of the country as a Guadalupian and Catholic nation.¹ Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church since 2013, has claimed that the

¹ Mexican Catholicism is in fact a *guadalupanismo*. A cult that emphasises the Marian figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe as just another goddess in the religious cosmos. This performativity recreates a polytheistic

devil is punishing Mexico with violence because the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared in the territory (Expansión-CNN, 2015).

Against this background, some scholars view Mexico as an illustration of “assertive secularism,” which has dominated since the late 19th century. This political programme promotes an active and sometimes anti-clerical state that seeks to exclude religion from the public sphere (Kuru, 2009). In this context, public secular discourses challenge the idea of religious national cohesion by drawing on the ideology of state secularism. Political classes, along with intellectual elites, actively reject the influence of religion in public affairs, while supporting and promoting the North Atlantic modernity and secularisation in the country. Peter Berger describes this group in the global context as a highly influential stratum of secular intellectuals, educated in the Western outlook, and predominantly found in humanities and social sciences (Berger, 2002).

Despite the expectations of assertive secularism, in practice, religion and politics often intersect in various aspects of public life in Mexico (Blancarte, 2001). In 2016, Pope Francis expressed that Catholicism and devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe remain important in the nation, even for those who declare “I am Atheist, but Guadalupano” (Konferenz Weltkirche, 2017). The *Guadalupano*-atheist imaginary emerges dialectically within the public discussion between religious and secular (sometimes anticlerical) discourses in Mexico. Identifying as *Guadalupano* does not necessarily imply personal devotion to the Virgin, just as identifying as an atheist does not mean the complete rejection of religious symbols. This social figure exemplifies the pervasive influence of Catholicism in Mexican society, even amid strict political secularisation (Navarro Floria, 2004). Sandra Lorenzano notes, when describing Mexican identity, that Mexicans are *Guadalupanos*; even progressive and left-leaning individuals often describe themselves as *Guadalupano*-atheists or *Guadalupano*-Marxists (Lorenzano, 2016).

constellation that changes according to the places of worship and the times; and thus denies the formula of monotheism implicit in Catholic dogma (Echeverría, 2007).



Figure 1. Marx and Guadalupe.

Source: X, @Marx_ilustrado (2022).

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe embracing Karl Marx (Fig. 1), circulating on social media, offers a compelling synthesis of the secular and religious interplay in contemporary Mexico. Individuals may identify as atheists or Marxists while expressing religious sympathies or participating in the popular religiosity of the *Guadalupeana*. When analysing the growth of non-religious individuals in Mexico, it is crucial to consider this baroque orientation within their secular identity. Moreover, the growing presence of “nones” should be understood as a part of the broader phenomenon of pluralisation, where multiple discourses coexist in society and individual identities.

‘Nones’ in Latin America and Mexico

In recent decades, the Americas have witnessed a decline in Catholicism in parallel with the rise in both non-Catholic affiliations and non-religious individuals (Lipka, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2014; Smith et al., 2024). Some scholars emphasise American exceptionalism—a secular modern society which remains religious—or the growing number of “nones” in the U.S. (Casanova, 2007). On the other hand, in Latin America, religious studies often focus on the rise of Protestant and Evangelical churches. Scholars such as Peter Berger consider the growth of non-Catholic Christianity in the region as evidence that the world today is as religious, if not more so, than in the past; noting that this proliferation has brought about significant cultural transformation in societies (Berger, 2010).

Interestingly, less attention has been paid to the growing number of “nones” in Latin America. In some cases, the proportion of the religiously unaffiliated exceeds that of nations in the global North. However, no one has argued that this trend represents a cultural transformation. For example, recent studies show that in the U.S., 29% of the population is religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center, 2022), while in Chile this figure reaches 35%, in Uruguay 31%, and in El Salvador 30% (Fig. 2).

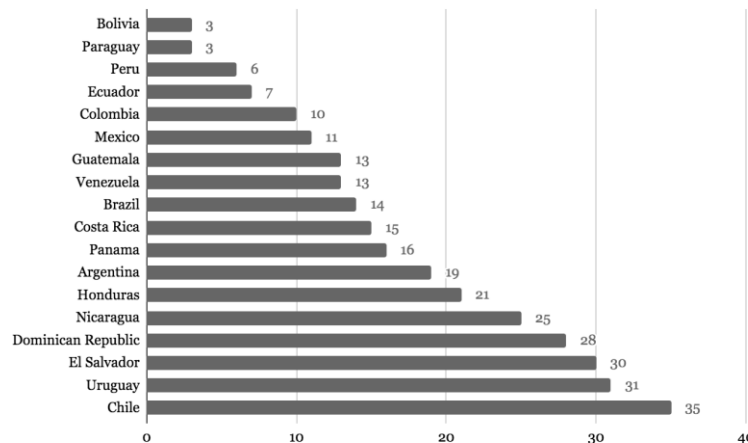


Figure 2. Non-Religious Individuals in Latin America, 2017 (%).

Source: Latinobarómetro (2017).

The Mexican religious landscape has undergone similar transformations, particularly since the second half of the 20th century. Contrary to the assumption of an entrenched Catholic tradition, the country’s religious affiliations reflect a dynamic and pluralistic market for salvation goods. This is evident in the expansion of non-Catholic Christianity (Bastian, 2013) and the increasing plausibility of religious disaffiliation for many individuals. In 1895, almost all Mexicans identified as Catholics. However, by 2020 that figure has dropped to 77.7% (around 97 million people). This data clearly shows a trend of Catholic decline in the last century. In contrast, the category of Evangelicals & Protestants—which includes Protestant, Pentecostal, self-identified Christian, Evangelical, or belonging to the Biblical religion, and other non-Evangelical denominations—accounted for less than 2% of the population until 1970. Nevertheless, by 2020 this figure had risen to 14.1 million people, representing 11.2% of the population (Fig. 3).

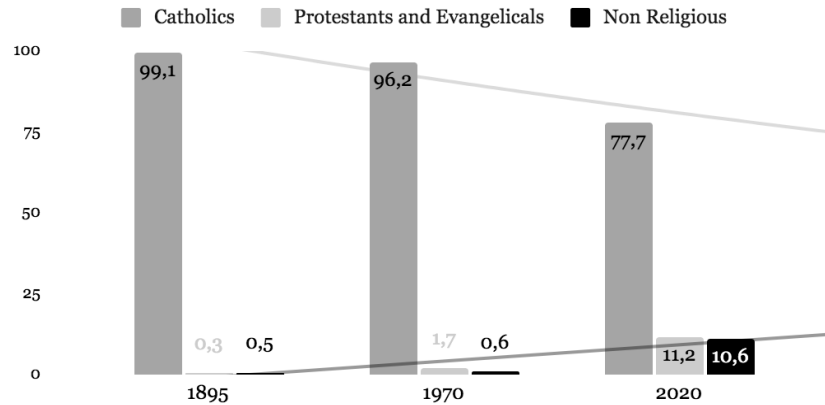


Figure 3. Catholics, Protestants & Evangelicals, and Non-Religious Persons in Mexico, 1895, 1970, 2020 (%).

Source: INEGI (2010, 2011, 2020).

On the other hand, by 2020 the proportion of the religiously unaffiliated has reached 10.6% of the total population (13.3 million people), representing the highest growth rate of any group within Mexico’s religious landscape. This is a significant shift, given that less than 1% of the population was reported as non-religious in both 1895 and 1970. In fact, between 1970 and 2020, the “nones” experienced an average growth rate of 53.2%, Protestants & Evangelicals grew by 51.5%, and Catholics declined by 1.2%. Thus, Mexican non-religious exhibit an upward trend as significant as in countries such as the U.S., where the proportion of “nones” increased from 5% in 1972 to 29% in 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2022).

The 2020 census in Mexico disaggregated the non-religious category (*sin religión*), as shown in Figure 4. Among the Mexican “nones,” 23% identify as religiously unaffiliated believers (*sin adscripción religiosa creyente*), while 71% claim to have “no religion.” In contrast, only 5.4% identify as atheists or agnostics, representing just 0.6% of the total population. The evidence does not indicate a substantial rise in atheism and agnosticism, despite the overall growth of the religiously unaffiliated in Mexico.

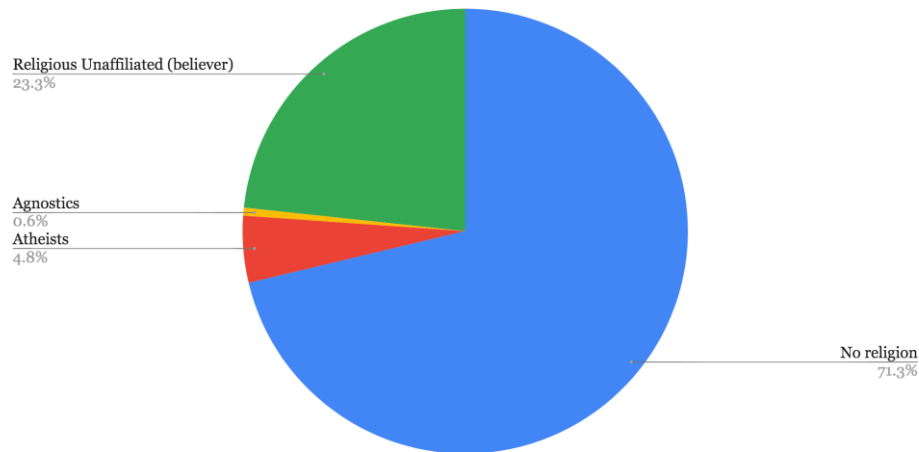


Figure 4. Non-Religious Subgroups in Mexico, 2020 (%).

Source: INEGI (2020).

The distinction between *non-religious* and *non-religious-believers* can be challenging, as even atheists or agnostics may exhibit characteristics associated with transcendental beliefs. According to the National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Practices in Mexico (ENCREER), while only about one out of four “nones” identifies as a believer (whether traditionally, by conviction, practising, or in their own way), 71% state they believe in God or a supreme being (De la Torre *et al.*, 2016, 2020). This exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between the “nones” and the religious discourses.

In 2017, the Brazilian journal *Estudos de Religião* published a dossier on the non-religious in Latin America, which was an important contribution to this relatively new area of research, with case studies from Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Ecuador (Lecaros and Barrera, 2017). The research in Mexico has shown that the “nones” hold a common disaffiliation from at least one tradition within the religious landscape. However, this religious *abandonment* cannot be interpreted as an absolute absence of beliefs and practices rooted in religious traditions or spiritual backgrounds (Mora Duro, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Similar findings have been observed in other studies conducted in the Americas.

In Peru, Romero and Lecaros (2017) explain that the contemporary non-religious population (about 4% of the national population) involves atheists and people who, being believers and/or occasionally attending religious activities, have distanced themselves, temporarily or definitively, from a religious community. Furthermore, those who consider themselves non-religious may exhibit a lack of firm convictions or express an intention to explore other beliefs or religious communities. Hence, “nones” in Peru may alter their

opinions on religious matters depending on the circumstances (Romero and Lecaros, 2017, p. 114).

In Argentina, the approach of Hugo Rabbia (2017) defines this group as non-religious by belonging (*sin religión de pertenencia*). These individuals represent those who indicate in censuses or surveys that they do not belong to or have no religion. This does not necessarily imply a position of religious indifference, irreligiousness, or unbelief, although these states may be present. What is clear, according to Rabbia, is that the trajectory of disaffiliation among religious “nones,” non-identification, or unbelief in Argentina, as evidenced by their autobiographical narratives, is not necessarily linear (Rabbia, 2017, pp. 133–135).

In the case of Brazil, Denise Rodrigues (2007, 2009, 2012) identifies two profiles: the non-religious “nones” and the religious “nones.” Among the first group, one can find atheists and agnostics, however, the researcher points out that they do not represent most individuals in the religiously unaffiliated category. Accordingly, most Brazilians “nones” express a degree of religiosity, while they reject religious institutions, as they do not consider them necessary to express their spirituality. These individuals maintain close ties with the sacred and do not reject the notion of higher intelligence (or force), thus maintaining private deterministic beliefs such as a particular notion of God.

As the literature shows, religious disaffiliation in Latin America does not follow a singular path of decline in confessional beliefs or practices, although criticism of religion is often directed toward established institutions, such as the Catholic Church. I consider the attitudes of Latin American “nones” as counterevidence to secularising modernity, which assumes that increased modernity leads to a greater decline in religious practices and beliefs or their privatisation to the private domain (Casanova, 2007). Instead, the “nones” reflect social imaginaries where the religious and the secular are interwoven in syncretic representations that creatively process orientations of the baroque ethos.

Positions on Religion and Science among Mexican ‘Nones’

This section presents some excerpts from my investigation of the non-religious phenomenon in Mexico. I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews in Mexico City, beginning with the question: “What is your religion or church?” If respondents identified as non-religious, atheist, or agnostic, the interview proceeded with a pre-set questionnaire, allowing space for open-ended responses to build a comprehensive narrative. Participants

were selected through personal networks, which facilitated trust and rapport, although public spaces such as parks, public transport, and social media platforms were also used to diversify the sample. Data collection occurred between 2014 and 2015, alternating with fieldwork in the rural community of San Pablo Chalchihuitán in Chiapas, Mexico.²

In the Mexican context, religion appears as a central discourse for the identity of the “nones,” but one cannot reduce this relevance to binary oppositions: believers or non-believers, religious or non-religious. Mexican “nones” of course tend to describe a dispossession or lack of identification with a religious tradition. Dispossession occurs when individuals question their belonging to a belief lineage, often received involuntarily, as part of family or community traditions. This attitude is predominantly directed against the Catholic Church, whereas a growing distance from other churches is a notable feature of the recent pluralist experience in the region.

Recent studies have revealed a complex relationship between the “nones” and religious discourse. Blankholm (2022) has explored how the attitudes of non-believers relate to their understanding of religion. If religion primarily signifies belief, other practices may be *purified* and drawn into the secular realm; however, a broader understanding of religion may *contaminate* elements of confessionality to a large extent. In this regard, the unaffiliated status in Mexico is associated with various perceptions: 1) distance from a physical community where people interact, communicate, associate, and show solidarity—a concept Durkheim referred to as the moral community of religion (Durkheim, 1915, p. 46); 2) separation from an imagined community of past believers and potential successors within a religious tradition (Hervieu-Léger, 1993); and 3) an increasing secularisation of religious institutions and ecclesiastical hierarchies—the structure that administers and mediates between religious symbols and the faith community. Bureaucratic cadres, stripped of their divine charisma, are therefore constantly scrutinised, and this criticism constitutes one of the commonplaces to explain the rupture with religious belonging (Mora Duro, 2017b, p. 260).

² The interviewees in Mexico City included 16 women and 14 men, with an average age of 35, and ages ranging from 17 to 75. Most (63%) reported being single, while 37% were married or in a partnership, and only one out of three interviewees had children. Educationally, over half held a university degree, and a third had completed postgraduate studies. Most interviewees were employed in various sectors, including government, private companies, academia, freelance work, NGOs, and local businesses, while only two were economically inactive. Moreover, 77% earned over 10,000 pesos (632 dollars) monthly, while 23% earned below this (Mora Duro, 2017b).

Following the above, when examining how Mexican “nones” disclose their religious disaffiliation, a prevalent attitude identified is the *critical one*. According to the analysis of the *Encreer* survey (De la Torre *et al.*, 2016), around 50% of Mexicans exhibit this position. It reflects statements such as, “All religions are false,” and “I do not believe in religious authority and have my own beliefs.” Typical profiles in this group include “atheists” and “freethinkers”. These individuals often question the plausibility of a higher entity’s existence (e.g., God, creator, or divine substance) and claim that religion restricts freedom of thought (Mora Duro, 2017a, p. 175). Common narratives, especially among the highly educated and urban sectors, express a critical deconstruction of religious institutions and actors, sometimes drawing on assertive secularism in the country. This perspective can be seen in the following comments by Tamara (34, female), a research professor at a university in Mexico City, who questions the control and power concentrated in religious hierarchies.³

For me, religion is a form of control—effective, very effective—because it does not allow human development; on the contrary, religion limits it. The potential of human beings to act [freely] within these coordinates is being reduced, and I don’t like that [...]. I find the existence of churches and the existence of a God quite absurd and questionable in the face of so many injustices [...]. Some people can be worthwhile in religious formation, but I detest those who profit from faith. They have too much power.

A second attitude among non-religious people in Mexico is one of *autonomy*. This group demonstrates individual agency to reorganise resources of religious traditions, alongside other spiritual and secular discourses, including science. The autonomous subject, about one out of four individuals according to our research, includes personas such as the “spiritual but not religious,” the “spiritual seeker,” or those expressing interest in “studying the Bible” (Mora Duro, 2017a, p. 175). This position is reflective of the pluralistic experience in Mexican society in recent decades. Carla (29, female), who oscillates between atheism and agnosticism, is an intern at a public institution. She describes that, although she cannot conceive of a world without religion, she prefers mysticism in her personal life.

Religions legitimise an order of things. If we didn’t have religions, everything would be allowed, and although I would prefer a world without churches, I think it is dangerous [...]. A relationship with a religious institution is not important to me; however, mysticism might have a place in my

³ All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. Interlocutors’ names have been changed for anonymity. Excerpts have been edited for readability. All participated with consent.

life, as it makes me feel at peace. The universe would be a big joke if it weren't possible to have *something higher*.

A third position one can identify in the Mexican context is *indifference* or an uncritical attitude, which is present in two out of ten “nones.” Here we find people who identify themselves as “agnostics,” but also those who practise “traditions” without categorising them as *religion*, as well as those who have been socialised in a family environment with little or practically no religious orientation. Like the autonomous position, some of these “nones” can accept the existence of something transcendent, but very often their positioning reflects a direction of indifference or apathy rather than criticism or autonomy (Mora Duro, 2017a). Alejandro (36, Male), a master's student who used to participate assiduously in a non-Catholic Christian church, expresses his current *disinterest* in religious discourses.

I would define myself as *disinterested* in religious matters—not in everything religious, but in spirituality and so on. I'm very interested in it [religion] as a social and cultural phenomenon. But in terms of transcendentality, I don't think like that [religiously] anymore. I've never openly said that I'm an atheist, because I think that requires a level of commitment I don't feel. I'm not committed to the idea of 'God doesn't exist, and I don't care' no, no, no.

It is important to note that the positions expressed by the “nones” show a visible correlation with their life course. The analysis of individual narratives reveals varied trajectories among Mexican non-religious: 1) The experience of *lax religion* involves people who were ritually incorporated into a religious tradition (baptism) and other religious rituals without explicit commitment, gradually drifted away from the confessional space. 2) *De-conversion* corresponds to a reconfiguration of personal identity, often involving a turning point, from confessional practices and religious worldview to a position where religion has reduced its importance.⁴ 3) The trajectory of the *secular native* describes almost no contact with the resources and symbols of any organised religion (no baptism). Throughout their lives, there is a lack of incentives for a specific religious doctrine, and this absence of faith produces in the individual a sense of estrangement from religious forms and actions (Mora Duro, 2017b).

Echoes of the baroque ethos are evident in all the attitudes described above. Individuals may identify as atheists while still believing in a transcendent entity, such as the universe.

⁴ Another term used in the literature on the subject is *nonverts*. This describes the subset of “nones” that were previously affiliated, but at the time of the study are not (Bullivant, 2022).

Moreover, they may engage in religious practices, such as daily prayer or wearing religious symbols in their everyday interactions. These actions do not contradict their non-religious identification, simply because it does not entail a fixed or totalitarian identity. The intersection of the religious and the secular does not pose a dilemma for Mexican “nones,” because confessional elements are purified by their relevance to socialisation and personal concerns, beyond their religious significance (Mora Duro & Fitz Herbert, 2024). Rafaela (36, female), a teacher with a lax religious background, explains that she always carries religious items because they signify a *connection* with her mother.

I keep an image of the Virgin of *Guadalupe* and *El Señor de las Maravillas* in my wallet. Why? Because my mum is reassured that I have that accompaniment, and it doesn't harm me either. If you ask me if it has helped me, well, no, I don't think a mugger would stop because I have holy images. It doesn't hurt me to carry them [religious images] though.

The attitudes of the “nones” feed back into the baroque amalgam in the public space—where the assertive ideology of the secular state and the continued participation of religions in politics and social life coexist. I have defined this confluence as sacred secularism, since the religious can be purified by the secular, but the secular can also be sacralised by the religious (Mora Duro, 2024). This continuous interplay can also be observed in the identities of the religiously unaffiliated and their incorporation of discourses such as science. In this way, I argue that, just as religion cannot be reduced to a mere realm excluded from the identities of the “nones,” science cannot be relegated to a strictly secular discourse that grounds attitudes without religion.

My research on Mexican “nones” included specific questions concerning religion, e.g., What is your religion or church? Do you attend religious services? And what factors have influenced your current attitude towards religion? (Mora Duro, 2017b, p. 283). In contrast, without inquiry, science appeared in the narratives of several individuals as a relevant social discourse characterising their position as non-religious. The perspectives of the interlocutors indicate, nevertheless, that the incorporation of science is neither univocal nor unidirectional. It cannot be argued in this sense that the more scientific an individual is, the less religious they become.

One attitude observed among the Mexican “nones” is *belief in science*. This stance reflects the use of scientific discourse to fill the space left by religious disaffiliation or to shield individuals' non-religious position, especially when religious accompaniment is

necessary, such as in moments of personal vulnerability. The perspectives of the following interlocutors illustrate this. Malena (45, female), a political consultant, states that she has no religious affiliation, while Daniela (26, female), a master's student in social sciences, identifies as agnostic.

Malena: You place your faith or belief in things. Perhaps for me, it is the scientific method, because it is accessible to my reasoning—far more than the idea of a God who observes and decides everything. I don't think I could deal with that idea [of God]; I would have to be able to sit down and talk to that God to feel at ease.

Daniela: My mum was diagnosed with cancer. Luckily, it wasn't cancer in the end. I felt angry and scared, [...] but I never said, 'hey God, or anything like that'. I just said, 'let's trust in science,' right? That's why I'm not an atheist, *I believe in fucking science*—scientism, whatever you call it. 'It's going to be fine, and if it's not? Well, that's it.' The body has an expiration date.

In the same vein, Mariana (64, female), a government employee who defines herself as non-religious yet with an esoteric and metaphysical mindset, expresses a suggestive plural identity that incorporates the discourse of science as a belief. When she describes that she was convinced by the scientific method, she describes a sort of scientific conversion that dictates her life path.

I had a workshop on scientific methodology—totally subversive—and I have since been convinced (*convencida*) to scientific thinking. [...] If God exists, we have a good relationship, we respect each other. [...] You go to India, you see these colourful, voluptuous, glamorous goddesses—a goddess with a flute, a spear, an animal. I would like to believe in that kind of character, however, *science dictates* to me 'No, and there is no way.'

Belief in science, rather than describing a secular worldview, practically embeds science in the baroque cosmos of religious, spiritual, and other secular discourses, thus rejecting the idea of a totalising secular identity. Indeed, for some religiously unaffiliated individuals, science can be a way of approaching the mystical understanding of life. For example, when people claim not to believe in God, but argue that we are part of a whole—a universe—since science has shown that matter is neither created nor destroyed.

Another perspective identified among Mexican “nones” is the narrative of *science as a horizontal discourse*. Some informants described in this line that science is not superior to religion or any other social knowledge; while others claimed that science cannot explain everything in the world. These views do not reject the scientific perspective but see science as complementary to other discourses available in society. This supports the argument for a

structure of plausibility in plurality that allows for the consideration of any point of view in society. Much like a consumer in a market, where the scientific is one discourse among others that individuals can incorporate. Antonio (33, male) is an employee who declares himself an atheist because “there is no place for God” in his life. He believes in “evolution,” but also notes that science has its limits in explaining certain phenomena, e.g., energies or ghosts.

I think there are many things science cannot explain. You can call them whatever you want [...] ghosts, energies. It doesn't mean that they are really demons, but I do think that there are things that science cannot explain [...]. The so-called demons, but they don't have to be bad.

The “nones” in the research group also emphasised a critique of *science as a dominant discourse*. Just as some question religion, they also disagree with the idea of science as the ultimate standard and judge of all matters concerning humanity. Their attitude therefore questions the unreflective assimilation of scientific discourse. As already mentioned, this perspective does not imply an anti-scientific or anti-modern position; instead, they are objecting to a version of modernity in which science, rather than enlightening humanity, is seen as leading to its oppression. The opinion of Juventino (25, male), a freelancer living in Mexico City, provides an interesting perspective on this position. He defines himself as an atheist and “highly sceptical” of both religion and science.

I'm very sceptical [...] I've heard of the evil eye, binding spells (*amarres*), purifications (*limpias*), and Cuban *Santería*, but I don't believe in any of that either. However, this is more cordial (*simpático*) to me. Sometimes they seem like spaces that can be good because the *imposition of science* over all kinds of knowledge bothers me. I don't believe in the scientific capacity to measure and be accurate about life experience. And I like the capacity of witchcraft (*brujería*) or that kind of stuff to challenge taken-for-granted scientific knowledge, although I don't believe in witchcraft either.

The 2017 Survey on Public Perception of Science in Mexico found that seven out of ten Mexicans consider that the country relies too much on faith and too little on science (INEGI and CONACYT, 2018). Some researchers argue that the questioning of science, from a politically secular position (*laicidad*) also leads to criticism of dogmatic scientific positions—namely that scientific knowledge must be critically scrutinised to ensure its advancement (Salazar *et al.*, 2015, p. 50). Beyond a linear—secular and scientific—assimilation, it can be concluded that the “nones” exhibit, in their beliefs and doubts about science (and religion), a creative identity far removed from the model expected by Western capitalist modernity. The

pluralism of the Mexican context and its baroque cultural tendency are undoubtedly frameworks that help us to understand the range of attitudes that intertwine science and religion among non-religious people.

Conclusion

The non-religious population in Mexico has grown visibly in recent years within a context of increasing pluralisation of the religious landscape. This context fosters the plausibility of multiple discourses in society, including both religious and secular ones. Moreover, the baroque modernity in the region encourages the logical and paradoxical confluences of religious symbols and secular elements, as observed in the sacred secularism of the country and the suggestive reinterpretation of devotional figures. This paper has illustrated the latter phenomenon with social imaginaries such as the *Guadalupano* atheist—a secular attitude imbued with the sacralisation that permeates cultural representations in Mexico.

Against this background, individuals cope with social reality using religious and secular positions in varying domains of their lives. This paper also suggests that in a pluralistic context, individuals can maintain a baroque identity, both secular and sacred at the same time. This configuration influences numerous aspects of both social and individual life. As individuals do not ordinarily display totalitarian identities, religious and secular discourses—such as science—can coexist and converge in the conversations and attitudes of everyday life. Thus, rather than propose that religious disaffiliation in Mexico is evidence of secularising modernity, the work has observed that Mexican “nones” navigate a spectrum of attitudes towards religion and science, influenced by social imaginaries and individual biographies.

Regarding religion, the critical position entails a rejection of religious authority and doubts about the plausibility of religious beliefs. It resonates especially among the educated urban population, which questions religious institutions and actors for their perceived flaws. There is also an attitude of autonomous reorganisation of religious resources, alongside other discourses such as mysticism, new spiritualities, and secular humanism. This approach reflects the pluralisation of the religious landscape in Mexico and underlines the baroque fluidity of religious identities. On the other hand, indifference or an uncritical attitude expresses a lack of active engagement with religious traditions. Although some individuals in

this category may recognise the existence of transcendent elements, their disinterest in religious matters is manifested as apathy rather than explicit rejection.

The incorporation of science among the Mexican “nones” provides another layer of complexity to their worldview. Some individuals believe in science and prioritise scientific discourse in their life trajectories; however, this does not exclude mystical or religious thinking. Rather, science is embedded in the cosmos of religious, spiritual, and other secular discourses. Others see scientific knowledge as a complementary discourse alongside religion and spirituality since science “does not have all the answers” to human experience. Meanwhile, there is also an opposition that criticises science as a hegemonic discourse. This group questions the notion of a monolithic scientific worldview and stresses the importance of pluralism in public discourse.

Some scholars have observed that there is a paradox among secular individuals, while “avoiding” religion and “embracing” something like it (Blankholm, 2022). We have found that individuals may identify as atheists and science-believers while maintaining a belief in a transcendent entity, e.g., the whole or the universe. Even if they have an apathetic attitude towards religion, they may engage in spiritual practices, such as daily prayer or carrying religious symbols, which are purified by their relevance to socialisation and personal concerns (Mora Duro & Fitz Herbert, 2024). These actions do not contradict their non-religious identification, because it does not entail a fixed or totalitarian identity. In this sense, believing in and doubting both religion and science implies an opposition to total identities, whether scientific or religious. Even in the face of possible tensions in the definition of personal identity, this can be addressed within the framework of the baroque ethos. This cultural orientation, beyond the predominance of plural and modern discourse, has meant resistance and adaptation to hegemonic social discourses, producing creative representations, and reversing the exercise of power, at least on the imaginary level.

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