## Towards a Society of Stable Nones: Lifelong Non-Denominationalism as the Prevailing Pattern in East Germany

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*Article*

# Towards a Society of *Stable Nones*: Lifelong Non-Denominationalism as the Prevailing Pattern in East Germany

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**Abstract:** The increase in the number of people who do not belong to any religion ("nones") has long been observed in many societies in the Northern hemisphere. This process is already well advanced in East Germany, where the proportion of "stable nones", i.e., those who grew up without any ties to religion from childhood onwards, has become particularly large and will most likely form the majority in the near future. Given the sociocultural relevance of this group, it is worth taking a closer look at them. In this paper, we examine how far they differ in terms of their familial religious conditions of origin and their present-day religiosity from the nones who still grew up in a religious-denominational tradition ("leavers"), and also from those who still have ties to a denomination ("affiliates"). Finally, we discuss the consequences for the future development of the religious field that arise from the fact that the group of "stable nones" will constitute the majority.

**Keywords:** East Germany; religious nones; secularization; individualization; socialization

## 1. Introduction

There were for a long time very few studies in the social sciences on the so-called "nones", i.e., those who do not belong to any denomination or do not associate themselves with any religious tradition. This has changed recently, however, which undoubtedly has to do with the fact that this group has gained enormously in importance in many countries, and especially in the "Western" world (see Balazka 2020; Chaves 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pollack and Rosta 2017; Voas and Crockett 2005). The course that this development has taken over time, as well as the speed and extent of the development, has varied depending on the specific framework conditions in individual countries. Significantly, the countries where this development has progressed furthest include previously post-communist societies such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, and the former GDR/East Germany (see Müller 2013).

The GDR and later East Germany provide a good example of how the interplay of various factors could lead to a comparatively early, all-encompassing, and lasting dechurchification of society, and some of the same factors came into play there that are also cited when it comes to explaining how the "nones" have gained in strength in "Western" societies: namely, increasing existential security, the questioning of firmly established worldviews through "cognitive contamination" (Berger 1967) as a result of cultural-ideological pluralization, the church's loss of authority in questions, for example, of lifestyle as a result of individualization and changing values, the competition between churches on the one hand, and ideologically secular providers and leisure activities on the other, and resistance to the political interference of church authorities in political questions (see Bruce 1996; Chaves 1994; Pollack and Rosta 2017; Schwadel 2010; Stolz et al. 2020), but here, as in other post-communist societies (see Tomka 2005), there is also, of course, the very decisive and lasting factor of "enforced secularization" (Meulemann 2004), i.e., the political repression

of churches and religion as a whole by the ruling state-socialist regime (for a detailed account of this, see Pollack 1994). That the processes of secularization had a particularly strong effect here in comparison to many other post-communist states is in turn attributed, among other things, to the fact that East Germany was a country strongly shaped by Protestantism. As such, it was more susceptible to such tendencies due to the lower resistance of Protestantism than many Catholic or Orthodox countries, where the dominant church or religious tradition was also able to muster greater resistance as an important factor of national identity (see Martin 1978; Pickel 2003; Pollack et al. 2003; Spohn 2010, 2012; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009).[1]

The fact that the end of the political suppression of the churches and religion in re-unified Germany saw no upswing in the largely depressed church-religious life in East Germany, and indeed even a continuation of the process of dechurchification and secularization, can be explained besides other factors (see Pollack and Müller 2010) above all by the fact that the anti-church policies of the GDR regime made more and more sections of the population so alienated from church life and religious questions, as well as from all knowledge to do with faith and religion, that they were unable to find a way to faith or the church even when it would have been politically easy to do so. Some had distanced themselves from the churches and religion only in the course of their lives; but many, especially younger, East Germans did not have from the very beginning the opportunity either in their families or in their circle of friends and acquaintances to come into contact with religious questions at all—let alone receive a religious upbringing. This sub-group of the non-denominational will most likely form the majority in the near future, which is the reason that it is the particular focus of our attention here.

Our focus, then, is primarily on the study of the phenomenon of non-denominationalism. We do not claim to study non-religion or non-religiosity in its entirety and in all its facets (for such a perspective see, e.g., the comprehensive anthologies by Cipriani and Garelli 2016 and, with a specific focus on Central and Eastern Europe, Bubík et al. 2020a). Nevertheless, this aspect naturally also plays an important role in our considerations. We include this aspect in our analyses in such a way that we empirically answer the question of the connection between non-denominationalism and non-religion from a socialization-based view of religious change. Unlike studies that differentiate the non-denominational according to their religious-spiritual convictions and practices (see Pickel 2013; Pickel et al. 2019; Stolz et al. 2016), we distinguish between two fundamental types of the non-denominational: those who grew up in a religious tradition and later left their denomination (*leavers*), and those who grew up from the beginning without any ties to a religion (*stable nones*). We examine how these groups have developed quantitatively, which (family) conditions of origin characterize them, and what their current religiosity is like. To classify better the similarities or differences between these two non-denominational groups, we use as a contrast group those who still belong to a denomination (*affiliates*). Finally, we explore what consequences there are for the development of the religious field in East Germany.

## 2. State of Research

Although the number of those without denominational ties is growing steadily, they are still relatively rarely the focus of academic interest, at least as an independent object of study distinct from other groups. Most research that explicitly deals with the nones refers to the situation in Western European countries or in the non-European "Western" world (see Baker and Smith 2009; Bullivant 2017; Clements and Gries 2017; Hayes 2000; Hout 2017; Hout and Fischer 2002; Lim et al. 2010; Merino 2012; Scheitle et al. 2018; Schwadel 2010; Tanner 2022; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017, 2020; Vernon 1968; Voas and McAndrew 2012; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Woodhead 2016, 2017; for a global overview, see the report by Balazka 2020). Nonetheless, there have been an increasing number of studies published primarily in German over the past 25 years on the characteristics, situation, and development of the nones in East Germany (often in comparison to West Germany) (see,

for example, Neubert 1998; Pickel 2000, 2003, 2013, 2014b; Pickel et al. 2019; Pittkowski 2006; Storch 2003; in English, see, for example, Hardy et al. 2020; Stolz et al. 2020).

Many studies have found the nones to be younger than average, predominantly male, often unmarried, and with a relatively high level of education (Baker and Smith 2009; Campbell 1971; Lim et al. 2010; Pickel 2013; Tanner 2022; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Zuckerman 2009, 2012), which is essentially the pattern that stage-of-decline approaches in secularization and individualization theory postulate for societies in the midst of the process of dechurchification or secularization (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017, p. 65; Voas and McAndrew 2012). However, in societies where this process is more advanced, these typical socio-demographic differences between the nones and those tied to a denomination seem to blur as a result of the "normalization" of non-denominationalism (Voas 2015; see also Voas and McAndrew 2012; Woodhead 2016).

Whether we denote the religious change that is taking place in many societies, and primarily in the northern hemisphere, as secularization or individualization is determined ultimately by the question of whether the rejection of institutionalized forms of religion goes hand in hand with non-religiosity or not (see Müller 2011; Pollack and Pickel 2007; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015). In this respect, the nones also represent a group that we can study in order to further discussions about the nature of religious change.[2] Previous studies have arrived at different results or differently nuanced answers depending on the time periods or religions studied. Ultimately, however, the results indicate that the nones are neither a homogeneous nor a necessarily secular group in terms of their religious profile, and that non-denominationalism should not be equated *per se* with non-religion. They differ, for example, in terms of their beliefs, religious convictions, and opinions about religion as a whole, in terms of what role religion plays in their lives, in terms of how religious or spiritual they see themselves, and in terms of what religious or spiritual practices they engage in and how often (see Clements and Gries 2017; Hout 2017; Lim et al. 2010; Singleton 2015; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015). There are now a wide variety of attempts to name, categorize, or typologize nones on the basis of their religiosity or attitudes towards religion, the spectrum identified ranging from secular, atheist and anti-religious, to agnostic and religiously ambivalent, to spiritual, and including "structural", "cultural", "stable", and "liminal" nones (see Baker and Smith 2009; Clements and Gries 2017; Lim et al. 2010; Stolz et al. 2016; Tamney et al. 1989).[3]

In order to outline the situation in Germany, we should refer here to two typologies developed by Pickel (2013) and Pickel et al. (2019). The older version distinguishes between "devout", "tolerant", and "normal" non-denominationalists, as well as "fully distanced atheists". While the first two types, who still have a benevolent to open attitude towards religion (though not necessarily towards the churches), form the absolute majority among the nones in West Germany with just over 50%, the category of "fully distanced atheists", who distance themselves not only from the church but also from any religion (Pickel 2013, p. 22), account for almost 60% in East Germany. Pickel and colleagues use a somewhat different typology in the later study. Focusing more on concrete beliefs and also including alternative forms, they distinguish between atheists, areligious, spiritually open-minded, and individually religious. As with the older typology, the two forms that have practically no positive ties to religion and tend to be dismissive or at best indifferent towards religion are clearly more widespread in East than in West Germany (76% vs. 54% overall). The spiritually open-minded account for 23% in the West and 16% in the East; the individually religious, who still partly hold to a traditional belief in God, make up 22% of the non-denominational in the West, and only 8% in the East.

While similar to the conclusions that can be drawn from the international studies mentioned above, those drawn from the two German studies point somewhat more strongly in the direction of secularization. For one, the authors point out that the number of those who describe themselves as having no religion represents the largest group among the non-denominational. For another, given the increasingly unfavorable socializational and social conditions for preserving and transmitting religion, they see as the most plausible scenario

the continuing growth in the number of non-denominational *and* non-religious people in society (Pickel et al. 2019, p. 147). This is in line with what is emerging from many studies on the nones: not only are the non-denominational gaining in importance quantitatively; they also appear to be becoming increasingly less religious (Lipka 2015; Pollack and Pickel 1999; Singleton 2015; Storch 2003; Tanner 2022; Voas 2008; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015).[4]

As far as the reasons for the increasing number of people who do not belong to any religion or do not feel they belong to any religion are concerned, researchers point among other things to general processes of socio-economic change and to shifts in values, to the dwindling acceptance of church-religious dogmas, and to the rejection of the interference of religious authorities in other spheres of society and in people's own lives (see Bruce 1996; Chaves 1994; Inglehart 2021; Pollack and Rosta 2017). When people decide to turn their back on the church or religion, this is generally not a spontaneous decision, but one often made after a long time period of time.[5] Moreover, in the case of those who have never belonged to a church or religious community, it does not require a decision of their own.

In connection to the factors mentioned above, an all-important aspect is socialization. Although many sociologists of religion assume that the formation and stability of individual religiosity require a body of knowledge supported and legitimized by the social environment (Berger 1967; Bruce 1996; Iannaccone 1990; Pollack and Rosta 2017; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Stolz 2009), empirical work on religious change often refers only indirectly or in passing to the process of generating such plausibility structures. Where the aspect of religious socialization has found its way into such analyses as an independent variable, it has proven practically everywhere to be one of the most significant predictors with regard to explaining individual churchliness and traditional religiosity (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere 1993; Kelley and De Graaf 1997; Müller 2013; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pollack 2008; Sasaki and Suzuki 1987; Stolz 2004, 2009; Stolz et al. 2016; Voas and Crockett 2005; Voas and Doebler 2011). Cited as influential instances of socialization here are the family (Francis and Brown 1991; Hoge and Petrillo 1978; Hunsberger and Brown 1984; Myers 1996), peer groups (Hoge and Petrillo 1978; Wuthnow 1994), and religious authorities (especially in the context of religious instruction in church institutions and schools; Erickson 1992; Francis 1987; Greeley and Rossi 1966; Johnstone 1966). However, the literature considers intra-familial religious socialization to have the strongest impact (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997; Bengtson et al. 2009, 2013; Chatters and Taylor 2005; Manning 2015; McIntosh and Spilka 1995; Pollack and Müller 2013; Smith and Snell 2009; Smith et al. 2014; Tanner 2022). Most studies, though, focus on the successful transmission of religion, which they link to a number of favorable and mutually reinforcing factors within the family, this transmission apparently succeeding best in a family environment that is "religiously settled" and ideally religiously homogeneous (Bengtson et al. 2013, pp. 113–29; Dahl et al. 2019, p. 271; Nelsen 1990; Tanner 2022, pp. 77–78; Voas 2003; for East Germany, see Pollack 1994, p. 385; Storch 2003, p. 237). As well as the parents (especially the mother), who play the central role here, it is the grandparents in particular who are key to supporting the process of socialization (see Bengtson et al. 2013, 2018; Manning 2015; Pickel 2014a; Schwab 2007). Communication about religion in the family, as well as shared religious practice (mostly measured by family attendance at religious service), have been identified as factors that favor the intergenerational transmission of religion in the family (Bader and Desmond 2006; Clements and Bullivant 2022; Milevsky et al. 2008; Müller 2013, p. 217; Storm and Voas 2012). In addition, various studies have also pointed to the relevance of family constellations that are not directly related to religion but are of a more general nature, such as parental warmth and attention and unconditional love and support, which have also been found to be conducive to the transmission of religion (Bengtson et al. 2013; Haumann 2009).

## 3. Objectives and Questions

Many studies on the nones have focused on internal differentiation with regard to their beliefs, experiences, and other attitudes towards religion and the churches. As explained above, we want to take a slightly different perspective, and differentiate our analyses

according to whether a person has been non-denominational all her or his lifetime, or only through leaving the church.[6] The reasoning behind this is that it most likely makes a fundamental difference whether someone has hardly any or no direct ties to a church or religious community from the beginning, or whether that person only decides to turn her or his back on the church or religious community at some point later in life (be it as a result of a freely chosen decision or a decision forced on them due to external, e.g., political, circumstances). While those who still have at least a rudimentary religious socialization have a certain religious capital that they can fall back on if necessary, those who grew up without a denomination or religion are very unlikely to see religion or religiosity as a functional option for coping, even in situations of contingency or crisis (Lim et al. 2010; Merino 2012; Myers 1996; Sherkat 1998; Storch 2003, p. 234).[7] The latter are of particular interest to us, since we can assume that those who have never come into contact with forms of institutionalized religion will sooner or later be the "normal case" or the cultural-ideological majority in East Germany.

In order to avoid any terminological confusion, we will present again the terms that we use for the respective groups. Following the now predominant English-language usage (Baker and Smith 2009; Lim et al. 2010; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015; Woodhead 2016; from a critical perspective, see already Vernon 1968), we call the non-denominational, i.e., those who at the time of the survey in East Germany did not belong to any constituted church or religious community, the *nones*.[8] We then differentiate within the nones between those who had ties to a denomination as a child but who no longer have such ties (*leavers*), and those who grew up without ties to a denomination as a child and who still have no such ties today (*stable nones*). In order to classify the differences between these two types of nones better, we use as a comparison group those who had denominational ties as a child and still have such ties today (*affiliates*).

We start with an inventory of how the stable nones, the leavers, and the affiliates are distributed in the total population, and how the proportions are represented across birth cohorts or "generations". We also outline the socio-demographic profile of these groups. We then structure the analyses along the temporal-biographical axis "past" (childhood of the respondents)—"present" (respondents as adults)—"future" (children of the respondents). Thus, we first explore, always with a special focus on the stable nones, which families of origin and which (familial) socialization the groups that we study come from. Then we look at how the groups differ in terms of their religiosity in adulthood (i.e., at the time of the interview), before finally investigating the attitudes that the stable nones, the leavers, and the affiliates have with regard to socializing their own children.

## 4. Data, Methodology and Variables

Our analysis is based on quantitative data collected in a population survey that we conducted between January and March 2021 as part of the John Templeton Foundation-funded project "The Transmission of Religion Across Generations". The total of 901 respondents in the sample in East Germany were selected from the population aged 18 and over in a multi-stage sampling process, and interviewed via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), which took into account landline and mobile phone numbers.

The socio-demographic profile (for the complete list of key data, see Table A1 in the Appendix A) is based on the respondent's age and gender, her or his area of residence as a child and at the time of the interview, level of education, and self-assessment of the social position of the childhood family, as well as of her or his own social position at the time of the interview.

As for the family conditions of origin, which we collected retrospectively from the respondents, we measure the religiosity of parents and grandparents, as well as the denomination of the parents (which in turn allows us to create an index of the denominational homogeneity of the parents). We measure aspects of religious socialization on the basis of the answers to the following questions: who brought up the respondent religiously (mother, father, and maternal and paternal grandmothers and grandfathers; from this

we then also form an index depicting various combinations that we can use for further analyses); whether and with whom the respondent talked about religious issues; and what influence the respondent thinks different people had on her or his becoming a religious or non-religious person. The latter two variables relate not only to the core family of origin, but also in addition siblings to friends, teachers, and religious authorities. We also use questions on the frequency of various religious practices in the family of origin (mealtime prayer; bedtime prayer; prayer on other occasions; observation of holy days at home; attending religious services; and singing religious songs) to take into account the practical aspect of religious socialization. In order to depict the atmosphere in the childhood family, we ask the respondent about the attitude towards religion in his or her childhood family, about the role of religion in the family as a whole, and more generally about her or his closeness to parents and grandparents.

Following the tradition established by Glock (1962), we gauge the religiosity of the respondents as adults multidimensionally, and distinguish on another level, other than affiliation, intensity, practice, and belief, also between church-institutionalized and "private" religiosity, as well as between traditional and "alternative" forms. Denominational affiliation both in childhood and at the time of the interview serves first and foremost as a criterion for forming our study groups (see below). We use religious self-assessment to gauge the intensity of religiosity. Churchgoing and frequency of prayer represent the dimension of practice (once in its institutionalized, and once in its private, form). Following the European Values Study, we measure the dimension of belief by asking what most closely corresponds to the respondent's beliefs (there is a personal God; there is some sort of spirit or life force; I don't really know what to think; I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force; see EVS 2020), which enables us to look at intermediate forms (such as deistic conceptions and agnostic attitudes) that lie between traditional, church-derived conceptions on the one hand and decided unbelief on the other. We also cover the "alternative" spectrum through spiritual self-assessment and the frequency of meditation.

Finally, we measure the extent to which respondents transmit religiosity to their own children through the question of whether they have brought them up religiously, or (if the respondent has said that she or he has no children) of whether she or he would bring them up religiously.[9]

Due to the very different historical-social conditions in East and West Germans, especially with regard to the effects of religion, we only include those respondents in the analyses who not only lived in East Germany at the time of the interview, but also lived in the territory of the (former) GDR as a child. In addition, we exclude those who have missing values with regard to their denomination today (affects 0.9% of the respondents who also lived in East Germany as a child) or as a child (2.1%). Finally, because the number of cases is too small, we do not take into account those who did not belong either to a Christian denomination or to any denomination as a child, but who do so today.

Combining the two dichotomized variables, "Religion as a child" (question: "What religion, if any, were you raised in?"; 0 = None; 1 = Roman Catholic/Protestant without Free Churches/Evangelical [Free Churches]) and "Religion today" (question: "And what is your religion today"; same characteristics), yields four categories or groups: those who grew up without a denomination and are still non-denominational today (stable nones; 42.4%); those who grew up with a denomination and are now non-denominational (leavers; 29%); those who grew up with a denomination and are still denominational today (affiliates; 26.9%); and those who grew up without a denomination and are now denominational (1.7%). We will not give further consideration to the fourth category, since it is quantitatively negligible. In the end, the adjusted sample consists of 43.2% stable nones (N = 303), 29.5% leavers (N = 208), and 27.3% affiliates (N = 192). At slightly more than 70%, the total number of nones corresponds to the order of magnitude for the total East German population aged 18 and over, as also determined in other recent surveys (see GESIS 2019).

## 5. Results

*5.1. Distribution and Development, and Socio-Demographic Profile*

We want to continue our reflections by dynamizing the perspective and looking at the distribution of the three groups studied in the cohort or generation sequence. We distinguish between those born up to 1945, those born between 1946 and 1965, those born between 1966 and 1985, and those born between 1986 and 2003. The oldest cohort represents those who were born before the founding of the GDR and grew up in the wartime and postwar period until the construction of the Wall. The two middle cohorts were socialized entirely in the GDR, with the younger cohort spending their childhood or adolescence in the GDR, and the older also spending part of their working lives there. The youngest cohort, which due to the minimum age of the respondents (18 years) stretches to the year of birth 2003, went through its formative phase after reunification and can therefore be called the "post-transition generation".[10]

Figure 1 first confirms the initial assumption that the group of nones as a whole is becoming increasingly important across the birth cohorts under consideration, the development of the group sizes showing that the steady growth is due ultimately to the gains among the stable nones. The strongest dynamics can already be observed in the transition from the oldest to the second oldest cohort, which once again illustrates how early the process of dechurchification took hold in East Germany, and how quickly the repressive church policies of the SED regime were felt (see also Pollack and Rosta 2017, p. 237ff.): while only about one in ten of those born before 1945 belong to the stable nones, this group already represents the relative majority in the cohort of those born between 1946 and 1965, at just under 38%. In the cohort born in the final phase of the GDR or later (1986+), this group then also forms a clear absolute majority with more than 60%. The process towards lifelong non-denominationalism has thus continued unabated even in this cohort, which in part grew up without the state repression of churches and religion. The group of leavers, on the other hand, which at 50% is on the threshold of becoming an absolute majority within the oldest cohort, is virtually becoming a "discontinued model", and in the youngest cohort is even below that of the affiliates in terms of numbers (13.9% vs. 23.3%). The latter are no longer the relative majority in the oldest cohort (40%) and the smallest group in the second-oldest cohort (27.9%). From then on, however, their number seems to have stabilized at a certain "base level" of a quarter of the total cohort.

56% of the stable nones are female and 44% male, which roughly corresponds to the distribution of the total sample (surprisingly, however, with a slight excess of female respondents). Unsurprisingly, the stable nones have the lowest average age of the three groups at around 48 years. In addition, they have a significantly higher level of education compared to the leavers and the overall sample. They grew up predominantly in urban areas (more than 70% in a small town, suburb, or big city), and at the time of the interview about one third lived in a big city. The leavers, on the other hand, are more likely to have grown up in rural or small urban areas (over 40% in the countryside or in a village, another 30% in a small town); even today, about 65% still live in such areas. In terms of gender distribution, they are more similar to the affiliates; however, none of the other differences to the affiliates (age, social position, social position of the childhood family, and educational status) are significant (Table A1 in the Appendix A). Almost 80% of the leavers belonged to the Protestant church as a child, 15% to the Catholic church, and 5% to a Protestant free church (see Table A2 in the Appendix A). This means that they barely differ from the affiliates in their denominational socialization.
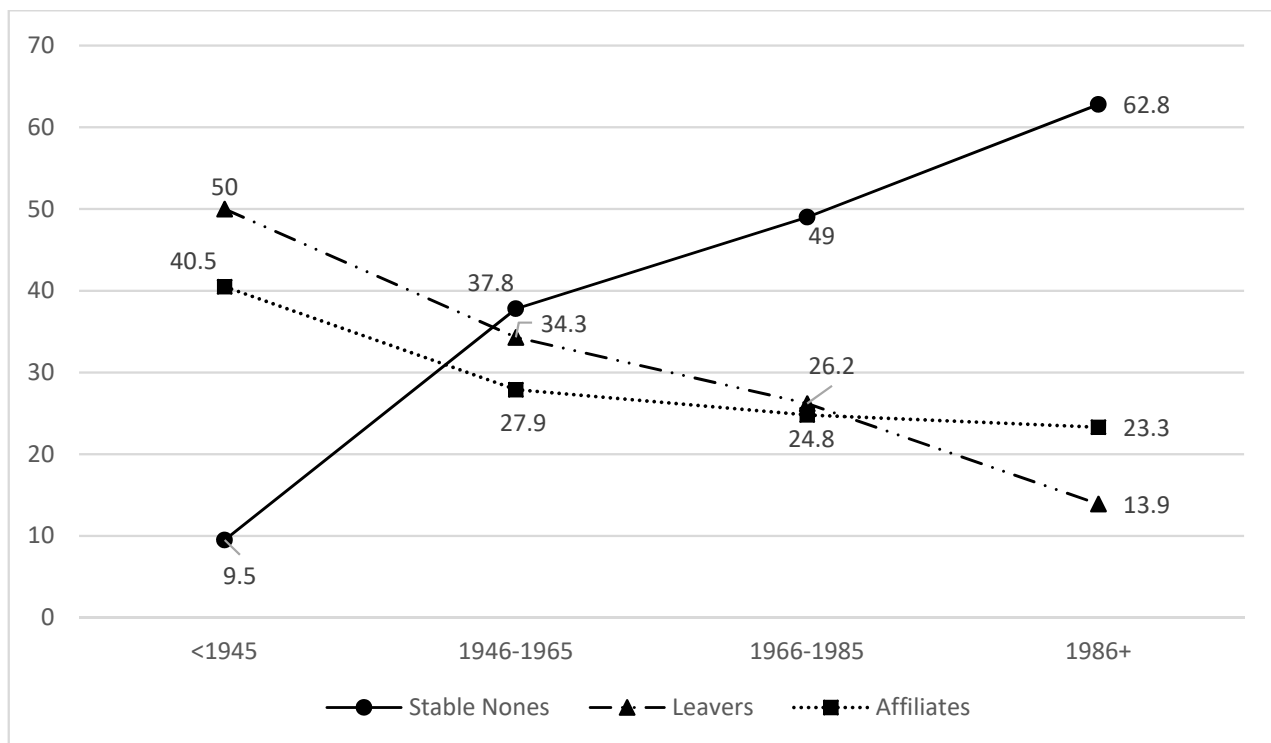
**Figure 1.** Stable nones, leavers, and affiliates by cohorts.In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

What, then, can be said in summary about the socio-demographic profile of the groups? The traditional boundaries are obviously not yet completely blurred. However, a comparison of the groups shows that the stable nones differ more from the other two groups than they differ from each other. In some respects (young, more highly educated, city dwellers), though not all (gender), we can recognize the characteristics that secularization and individualization theory classically attributes to the nones as a whole. Because the stable nones are becoming more and more important in quantitative terms, they will in all likelihood have a strongly heterogeneous socio-demographic profile in the future, which at the same time will increasingly reflect the average of East German society as a whole.[11]

*5.2. Childhood Family and Socialization*

The fact that stable nones, leavers, and affiliates differ significantly from each other when it comes not only to their formal denominational ties, but also to the circumstances of their socialization, can already be seen very clearly in the highly significant mean differences with regard to the religiosity of their parents and grandparents (see Figure 2). A very consistent, graded pattern emerges across the groups for all family members: the stable nones retrospectively assess the religiosity of their parents to be the lowest for the time when they were a child; the group of affiliates, the highest; and the leavers lie between the two. The same pattern can be seen among the grandparents, albeit at a somewhat higher level of religiosity than among the parents. All group differences are statistically significant (see Table A4 in the Appendix A). What the findings clearly show is that religiosity was already significantly lower in the grandparents' generation in the case of the nones (and especially the stable nones) than among the affiliates, i.e., the direction that the respondents would take was already set two generations earlier.
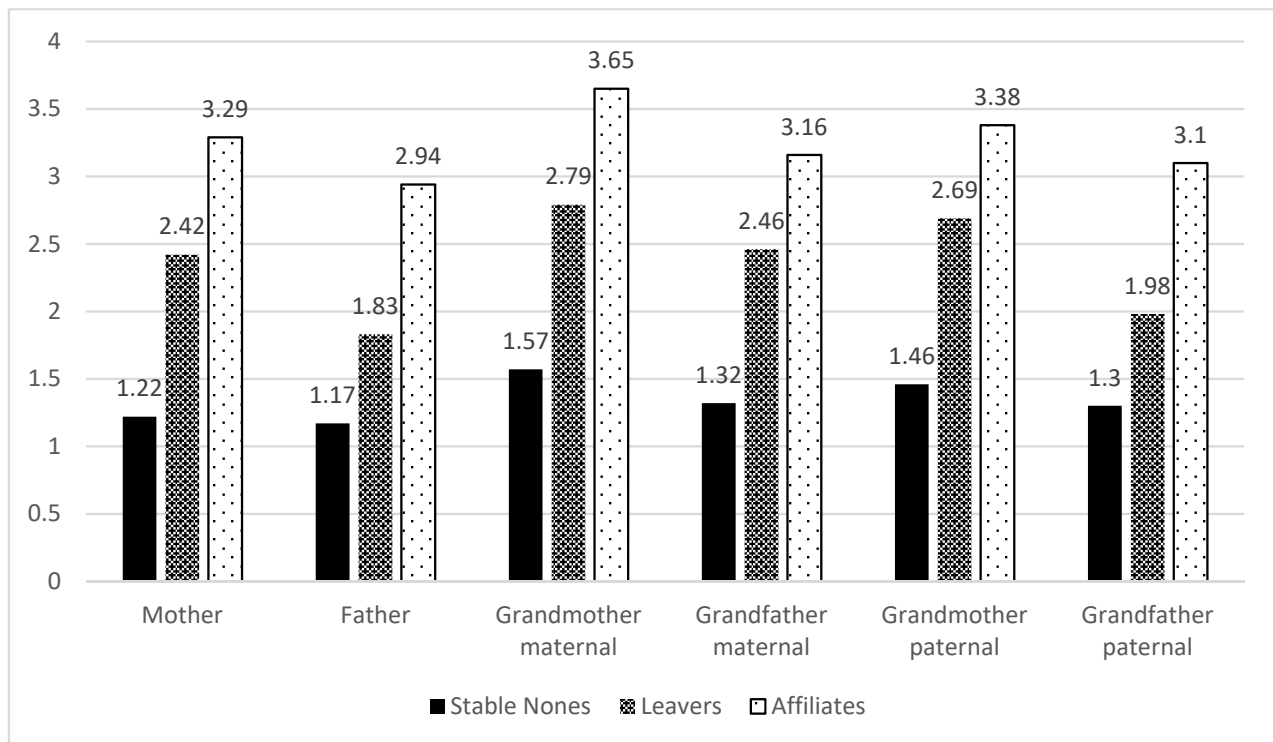
**Figure 2.** Religiosity of parents and grandparents when respondent was a child. Means. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A; significance levels of the mean comparisons: see Table A4 in the Appendix A.

It is not uncommon to find non-denominationalism already in the second generation. For example, two out of three stable nones come from families in which both parents no longer had denominational ties (65.5%; Table 1). Although the majority of the leavers still come from a home where both parents belonged to a Christian denomination (65.2%),[12] we can also see here the detachment from the church in the parental home: the proportion of those where one parent is denominational and the other is non-denominational is about 30% of the cases, about twice as high as among the affiliates. Almost 85% of the latter come from a family in which both parents belonged to a Christian denomination. The fact that, in percentage terms, more affiliates come from parental homes with religious ties than nones from parental homes without denominational ties should not of course lead us to conclude that the former are more successful than the latter in passing on their tradition: ultimately, non-denominationalism is inherited much more frequently in East Germany than membership of a denomination.[13]

**Table 1.** Parental denomination.

| Parents . . . | Stable Nones | Leavers | Affiliates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Both with denomination | 12.2 | 65.2 | 84.5 |
| Both without denomination | 65.5 | 5.3 | 1.0 |
| Mixed/other | 22.3 | 29.5 | 14.5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Questions and categories: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

The fact that the formal ties of the parental home alone have long ceased to be a guarantee for the intergenerational transmission of this tradition can be seen in the group-specific answers to the question of whether and by whom the respondents remember being brought up religiously. It is not surprising that hardly any (approx. 4%) of the stable nones

say that they were brought up religiously, while only 40% of the leavers say that they were brought up in a religious tradition (see Table 2). On the other hand, almost 70% of the affiliates say that they were brought up religiously. It is striking that one in three affiliates say that they were brought up by their parents and grandparents together (33%), which points to the importance for the success of religious socialization of a unified attitude on the part of the whole family.[14]

**Table 2.** Religious upbringing by different family members.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents | 2.0 | 20.6 | 35.6 |
| Parents and grandparents | 0.3 | 9.6 | 33.0 |
| Grandparents | 2.0 | 11.1 | 5.8 |
| None | 95.7 | 58.7 | 25.6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

The mere question of whether someone was brought up religiously or not says nothing about the concrete form of this upbringing. As already explained above, the state of research says that religious communication and common religious practices are two central aspects here. With regard to religious practices carried out together in the family (see Figure 3), the now familiar pattern is confirmed: they are hardly reported by the stable nones, little by the leavers, and most frequently by the affiliates. The order of frequency of the practices is similar for the leavers as for the affiliates. The item *Observed the holy day(s) of religion in home*, which is more influenced by culture and community tradition, is the practice that took place most often in all three groups. In the case of the leavers, churchgoing is also much higher than the other more private practices, which presuppose above all a strong tradition in everyday life.

Communication about religious issues also points in the same direction (see Table A8 in the Appendix A): the stable nones report that they did not regularly discuss religious issues with their family or friends, let alone with teachers or religious authorities. However, also only six to seven per cent of the leavers report having had such conversations regularly with their mothers, grandparents (6%) or religious authorities (6%). Such conversations took place somewhat more frequently among the affiliates; for example, one in five report regular conversations with their mothers, 13% say that their fathers were regular conversation partners, and 17% report this about religious authorities. All in all, the regular discussion of religious questions and themes (without, of course, saying anything about the concrete manner) seems to have a certain connection to religious affiliation, but it does not seem to have played a particularly pronounced role in everyday communication, even among the affiliates.

Besides the active transmission of religion, another aspect is considered elementary: namely, the atmosphere in the childhood family, i.e., how the general attitude towards religion was, but also how close the relationships with parents and grandparents were. As for the overall role of religion in the family, the three groups studied differ significantly from each other. Again, it is the stable nones who report that religion hardly played a role (mean of 1.27 on a scale from 1 "not at all" to 5 "a lot"). Religion played a comparatively large role for the affiliates (3.53), while the leavers are pretty much in between (2.41; see Table A4 in the Appendix A).
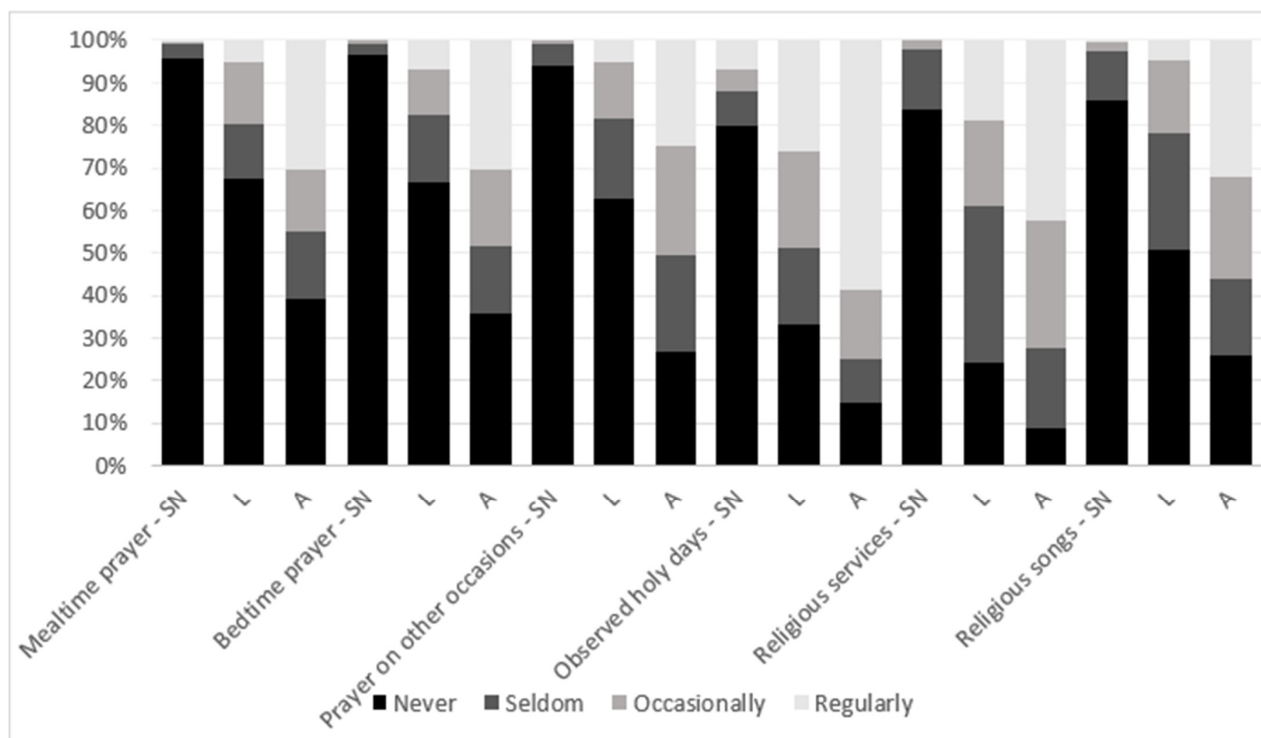
**Figure 3.** Shared religious practices in childhood. In %. SN: Stable Nones; L: Leavers; A: Affiliates. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

As far as the general attitude of the family towards religion is concerned, the group of stable nones report a negative attitude more often than the other two groups, but this still only applies to about one in seven stable nones (see Table 3). While every fifth person in this group even remembers a positive attitude, the most frequent reports are of a mixed or indifferent attitude (34% and 25%, respectively). Religion was thus seen somewhat more negatively overall in the families of origin of the stable nones than in the other two groups, but it is not the case that an attitude hostile to religion predominated. Rather, a more or less benevolent indifference can be discerned, which points to a pronounced distance from religion in the sense that religion was regarded as something largely irrelevant that one did not have to or did not want to deal with. The picture is somewhat different among the leavers, but points in a similar direction: while about 8% report a negative attitude towards religion and about half a mixed or indifferent one, 40% state that the attitude towards religion in the childhood family was basically positive. Two-thirds of the affiliates report that it was positive in their childhood family, and only about 5%, negative.

**Table 3.** Attitude towards religion.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Negative | 14.1 | 7.7 | 5.3 |
| Mixed | 33.6 | 40.0 | 24.5 |
| Positive | 21.7 | 38.7 | 66.4 |
| Indifferent | 24.9 | 11.5 | 3.4 |
| *dna/dk/na* | *5.7* | *2.1* | *0.4* |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

As for relationships to other family members (see Table A4 in the Appendix A), we can see that the stable nones and the leavers were equally close to their parents. The affiliates, on the other hand, feel significantly closer to their parents than the two groups of nones,

which could indicate that religious families in secular societies have developed (or have to develop) a particularly close relationship with their children in order to be able to pass on their religion (diaspora effect).[15] There are not sufficiently clear, group-specific, and significant results to establish whether there are similar patterns for the relationship with grandparents.

Finally, if we investigate the relevance of different persons in making the respondent a religious or non-religious person, then it is the mother who stands out across all groups. She has the greatest influence on making her children a religious or non-religious person, above all other family members, but also friends, the partner, and religious authorities (see Table A4 in the Appendix A). For her, but also for the other possible persons, the affiliates again show the highest values, which would confirm the diaspora effect already mentioned.

The results so far point to the great differences in family conditions of origin and socialization between the non-denominational and the affiliates on the one hand, and between the leavers and the stable nones on the other: while the former have had at least some experience of certain aspects of religion, especially through their parents, the latter have had virtually no contact with any form of religion since childhood. Religion simply did not take place in their lives, not even non-church forms of religiosity. What this means for openness towards religion in adulthood can be guessed at, but concrete empirical investigations will now make the implications clear.

### 5.3. Religiosity in Adulthood

In order to draw as comprehensive a picture as possible of how the three groups studied differ with regard to their religiosity in adulthood, we look at various dimensions or facets. If we first look at religious self-assessment, we see that the stable nones have a very low average value of 1.27 on the scale from 1 (not at all religious) to 5 (very religious). The leavers consider themselves slightly more religious than the stable nones (1.93), but the mean value is also clearly in the range of non-religiosity. The gap between the leavers and the affiliates, who have a value of 3.12, which is slightly above the theoretical mean value (3) of the scale, is clearly larger than the gap between the leavers and the stable nones (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Religiosity, religious practice, and spirituality.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Religious self-assessment (***; ***; ***) | 1.27 | 1.93 | 3.12 |
| Religious service (n.s.; ***; ***) | 0.83 | 0.82 | 12.8 |
| Prayer (n.s.; ***; ***) | 8.10 | 17.59 | 108.69 |
| Meditation (n.s.; n.s.; n.s.) | 13.20 | 11.68 | 24.53 |
| Spiritual self-assessment (*; ***; ***) | 1.72 | 1.98 | 2.52 |

Means. Religiosity and spirituality: five-point scales (1 = not at all to 5 = very); religious service, prayer and meditation: six-point scales, per year; questions and variable construction: see Table A9 in the Appendix A; significance levels of the mean comparisons (t-test): stable nones—leavers; stable nones—affiliates; leavers—affiliates; * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant.

As far as the dimension of religious practice is concerned, it is hardly surprising that the frequency of churchgoing is at a very low level for both groups of nones, with an average of less than one instance of churchgoing per year, with the stable nones and the leavers barely differing. The affiliates report an average of about 13 church services per year, which would be roughly equivalent to attending a church service every month. With regard to private religious practice, the nones show very low values, with the stable nones once again being clearly below the leavers (8 vs. 18 times a year on average). The gap between the two groups and the affiliates, who say that they pray the equivalent of more than 100 times a year, is also considerable here (see Table 4).

If we look at forms of "alternative" religiosity, then the nones show slightly higher values overall for the indicators that we selected than for church and "traditional" religiosity;

for example, both rate themselves somewhat higher on average on the spirituality scale than on the religiosity scale, and among the stable nones, the frequency of meditation is also somewhat higher than that of praying (see Table 4). However, the values here are also at a low level overall. The values for spirituality among the affiliates are also much higher than they are among the two groups of nones (however, there are no significant differences in the mean values for the frequency of meditation). In contrast to the nones, the affiliates nevertheless consider themselves to be more religious than spiritual. Overall, all groups tend to show a correlation between religiosity and spirituality, as has also been observed in other studies (see Marshall and Olson 2018; Pollack and Pickel 2007).[16]

    Let us now turn to the dimension of faith, which in our survey also includes both traditional and "alternative" components (Table 5). Our data confirm the assumption that increasing distance from institutional religion is accompanied by a change in the type of belief, which on the one hand becomes less concrete, while on the other also often fading away completely and disappearing. Practically none of the stable nones now believe in a personal God; that figure is only 6% among the leavers, while about every third affiliate believes in a personal God. The "gap" between the leavers and the affiliates shows that, even though about half (47%) of the former still believe in a rather unspecific, deistic entity, their distance from denomination is also accompanied by a distance from the traditional, Christian belief in God. Similarly, many leavers also state that they do not believe in any higher power or the like. Finally, the majority (64%) of the stable nones do not believe that there is such a thing as a God or any higher power. Although we cannot say that those who were brought up without a denomination necessarily deny the existence of a higher power (after all, one third of the nones do believe in a higher power or are not sure of their belief), the differences between the leavers and the stable nones make clear that growing up without points of reference to institutionalized religion also makes access to some kind of belief in a transcendent entity, if not impossible, then much more difficult.

**Table 5.** Religious belief.

|  | Stable Nones | Leavers | Affiliates |
|---|---|---|---|
| There is a personal God | 0.5 | 5.7 | 31.2 |
| There is some sort of spirit or life force | 20.7 | 34.9 | 43.3 |
| I don't really know what to think | 8.9 | 12.0 | 8.5 |
| I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force | 64.2 | 46.8 | 13.2 |
| *dk/na* | *5.7* | *0.6* | *3.8* |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Question: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

*5.4. Transmission to the Next Generation*

    Finally, we want to take a look at the next family generation, i.e., the children of the respondents (Table 6). We asked those respondents who indicated in the questionnaire that they had children whether they have brought up their children religiously or not. We asked those who said that they did not (yet) have children whether they would bring up their children religiously. The findings are clear and confirm the statement made earlier that the transmission of non-religiosity is much more successful than that of religiosity. Overall, no more than three to four per cent of the stable nones and ten per cent of the leavers say that they have brought up their children religiously or would do so if they had children, with the vast majority saying that they have not. About two in three of the affiliates say that they have brought up their children in the faith or would do so, although 30% also say that they have not done so or would not do so. The proportion of those who could imagine bringing up their children religiously among the respondents who do not have children is once again much lower among the leavers (just under 4% vs. 12%), but especially among the affiliates (48% vs. 72%) than among those with children.[17] Since the group of those without children consists predominantly of younger respondents who are still to start a

family, this indicates that the trend towards a non-religious upbringing will intensify to the extent not only that the non-denominational will hardly ever bring up their children religiously, but also that those who still belong to a denomination will increasingly forego bringing up their children religiously. Moreover, as we have seen before, even in the case of those who intend to bring up their children religiously, it is far from certain that they will succeed.

**Table 6.** Passing on religion to the next generation.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Total* |  |  |  |
| Yes | 3.5 | 10.2 | 67.3 |
| No | 94.7 | 87.1 | 30.3 |
| *dk/na* | *1.8* | *2.7* | *2.4* |
| *Respondents with children (Have brought up children religiously)* |  |  |  |
| Yes | 2.4 | 11.7 | 71.6 |
| No | 97.0 | 85.8 | 27.7 |
| *dk/na* | *0.6* | *2.5* | *0.7* |
| *Respondents without children (Would bring up children religiously)* |  |  |  |
| Yes | 5.9 | 3.7 | 48.3 |
| No | 89.6 | 93.1 | 41.8 |
| *dk/na* | *4.5* | *3.2* | *9.9* |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

## 6. Conclusions

East Germany has become a society where non-denominationalism is the norm. The proportion of stable nones, who have never belonged to a religion, is growing and already represents the majority among the younger cohorts. Unlike the leavers, who grew up denominationally and only later turned their backs on their church or religious community, and of course the affiliates, who have maintained their religious affiliation in adulthood, the stable nones barely came into contact with religion even in childhood. Their parents and even grandparents were often already not very religious, and thus there was no one in the family to take care of their religious upbringing. Religion was neither practiced in the family, and nor was it even a topic of conversation. Religion was not even regarded as an enemy; at best, it was treated with a benevolent indifference.[18] Unlike the affiliates and the leavers, the stable nones could not form any religious capital, meaning not only that they lacked religious answers when "needed"—they did not form any religious questions in the first place. Thus, they become in adulthood not only distant from the church, but generally non-religious, with barely any belief or religious practice, and, of course, they do not consider bringing up their children religiously, either. They also show little openness to "alternative", spiritual forms of religiosity. All in all, there is very little to suggest that this group will find its way back to any kind of religion.

What do the results mean for the development of the religious field in East Germany? The fact that the stable nones are doing much to set the trend here is already evident in their rapid spread. The development is fostered by the fact that the secular environment is making it increasingly difficult for families to bring up the following generations religiously: success is by no means guaranteed, even in denominationally homogeneous families, in families where there is intergenerational agreement on questions of religious upbringing, in families where religious practices are regularly cultivated and where religion is discussed openly. That is not all. One of the most important preconditions for transmitting religion can also no longer be assumed: even those who belong to a church or religious community are caught up in the pull

of the secular majority to the extent that they intend less and less to bring up their children religiously.

East Germany is increasingly characterized by a culture not only of non-denominationalism, but also of non-religiosity (see Müller et al. 2012, p. 115). Both can be clearly observed not only among the stable nones, but also among the leavers. Although the latter were brought up with a certain amount of religion, the fact that they then left the church (whether voluntarily or involuntarily, as was often the case in the GDR) has obviously also had an effect on their religiosity as a whole. Thus, it is not only their traditional church religiosity that is as similarly weak as it is among the stable nones; they also have values that are usually closer to those of the stable nones than to those of the affiliates with regard to alternative ideas and practices, too. We therefore find less evidence for the validity of the individualization thesis, or for the pattern of "believing without belonging" (Davie 1994). More valid instead is the argument that, if institutional religion becomes less relevant, then this will sooner or later also apply to "private" religiosity and even to "alternative" spirituality (see Müller 2011; Pollack and Pickel 2007; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015). East Germany, where "cohort secularization" (Tanner 2022, p. 78) continues to advance, seems to confirm the thesis forwarded by Voas (2008, p. 167) that "[f]uzzy fidelity is not a new kind of religion, or a proxy for as yet unfocused spiritual seeking; it is a staging post on the road from religious to secular hegemony".

Finally, we would like to address some of our study's limitations and remaining questions. First, the respondents were asked about their childhoods and family members by means of retrospective questions, which might raise the fundamental question of their reliability (Baddeley 1979; Van Der Vaart et al. 1995). However, the methodological problems often associated with such retrospective questions should not have an excessive impact in this specific case: even if, especially in the case of older respondents, we are dealing with periods of time long in the past, the respondents should have quite a good memory overall of the events surveyed. Since we limited ourselves here to asking the respondents about "facts" or general assessments (e.g., about the level of religiosity of their parents and grandparents, but not about their concrete beliefs), we can reduce, if not completely exclude, the risk of memory errors or subsequent rationalizations. Second, the data are based on a cross-sectional survey, which does not allow any reliable findings about changes over time. If we speak occasionally of processes or trends, then this is based on the assumption that the patterns presented at the beginning of the empirical section (Figure 1) mainly reflect cohort effects or intergenerational processes. Further insights could be gained here through studies based on repeated cross-sectional or ideally even longitudinal surveys. Third, we have limited ourselves to descriptive and bivariate analyses, while more far-reaching multivariate analyses would be required to provide complex explanations of why someone becomes a stable none, a leaver, or an affiliate, and to answer questions about the relative weighting of individual factors. Fourth, the number of cases on which our studies are based did not always allow us to go into as much detail as would sometimes have been desirable. Fifth, we focused primarily on non-denominationalism in our group comparisons and have not considered the related phenomenon of non-religion or non-religiosity in all its manifestations. This is not intended to negate the insight or demand that non-religion should not be understood and conceptualized solely as a negative foil of (organized) religion. To arrive at deeper insights about "positive" elements or the "essence" of nonreligion per se (Bubík et al. 2020b, p. 321; see also Lee 2015) than we have, further analyses using other methods and data would be necessary (see, for example, the edited volumes by Cipriani and Garelli 2016; and Bubík et al. 2020a). Not least, we must of course remember the fundamental limitations of quantitative data and analyses, which are primarily suitable for revealing general processes, patterns, and relationships. In contrast, qualitative analyses are better able to provide deeper insights into (family) biographical trajectories, as well as into concrete mechanisms that underlie certain processes (including breaks or contradictions associated with these processes) (see Manning 2015; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; on East Germany, see Gärtner 2022, in this special issue; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009).

**Appendix A**

**Table A1.** Socio-demographics.

| | Stable Nones | Leavers | Affiliates | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** (%) | | | | |
| Female | 55.9 | 50.1 | 49.5 | 52.4 |
| Male | 44.1 | 49.9 | 50.4 | 47.5 |
| Diverse | | | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| **Age** (Means: ***; ***; n.s.) | 47.63 | 59.21 | 56.25 | 53.41 |
| **Area as child** (%) | | | | |
| in a rural community | 8.3 | 13.7 | 21.4 | 13.5 |
| in a small village | 18.5 | 27.1 | 28.4 | 23.7 |
| in a town or a small city | 36.5 | 29.5 | 29.5 | 32.6 |
| in the suburbs or outskirts of a large city | 6.1 | 4.1 | 3.2 | 4.7 |
| in a large city | 30.6 | 25.6 | 17.5 | 25.5 |
| **Area today** (%) | | | | |
| in a rural community | 14.0 | 15.3 | 12.2 | 13.9 |
| in a small village | 17.2 | 14.1 | 19.4 | 16.8 |
| in a town or a small city | 27.3 | 35.5 | 32.7 | 31.2 |
| in the suburbs or outskirts of a large city | 7.8 | 7.9 | 8.5 | 8.1 |
| in a large city | 33.7 | 27.2 | 27.2 | 30.0 |
| **Family's social position as child** (%) | | | | |
| 1 | 5.2 | 3.4 | 4.8 | 4.6 |
| 2 | 19.8 | 21.7 | 19.2 | 20.2 |
| 3 | 52.4 | 49.9 | 55.8 | 52.6 |
| 4 | 15.4 | 14.2 | 11.3 | 14.0 |
| 5 | 4.6 | 9.2 | 6.6 | 6.5 |
| *dk/na* | *2.6* | *1.6* | *2.2* | *2.1* |
| **Family's social position as child** (Upward scale 1–5; means: n.s.; n.s.; n.s.) | 2.94 | 3.04 | 2.95 | 2.98 |
| **Social position today** (%) | | | | |
| 1 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 0.7 | 2.1 |
| 2 | 12.8 | 7.1 | 6.9 | 9.5 |
| 3 | 66.4 | 67.1 | 67.6 | 67.0 |
| 4 | 13.6 | 19.3 | 19.9 | 17.0 |
| 5 | 2.8 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 3.0 |
| *dk/na* | *1.6* | *0.8* | *1.7* | *1.4* |
| **Social position today** (Upward scale 1–5; means: *; **; n.s.) | 3.01 | 3.14 | 3.18 | 3.09 |
| **Level of education** (low-middle-high; means: *; n.s.; n.s.) | 2.45 | 2.33 | 2.37 | 2.39 |

Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A. Significance levels of the mean comparisons (t-test): stable nones—leavers; stable nones—affiliates; leavers—affiliates; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant.

**Table A2.** Religion in which respondent was socialized.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Catholic |  | 15.4 | 15.5 |
| Protestant |  | 77.9 | 76.8 |
| Evangelical free church |  | 5.3 | 6.2 |
| Other Christian |  | 1.4 | 1.5 |
| None | 100 |  |  |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

**Table A3.** Denomination of respondent's parents (detailed combination).

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Catholic-Catholic | 1.5 | 3.9 | 9.7 |
| Catholic-Protestant | 1.9 | 12.4 | 4.8 |
| Catholic-Free churches | 0.4 | 2.2 | 1.1 |
| Catholic-none | 1.9 | 2.8 | 2.2 |
| Protestant-Protestant | 9.1 | 53.9 | 61.3 |
| Protestant-Free churches | 0 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| Protestant-Muslim | 0 | 0 | 0,5 |
| Protestant-none | 8.3 | 15.2 | 10.8 |
| Free churches-Free churches | 1.5 | 2.2 | 7.5 |
| Free churches-none | 0 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| None-none | 75.4 | 6.2 | 1.1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A. The percentages here differ somewhat from Table 1 (see in text above). This is due to the fact that the total N in the two tables is different, since here (A3) all cases were also excluded for which there is no information for one parent or even both, which end up in Table 1 in the category Mixed/other.

**Table A4.** Religious socialization variables—means.

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Religiosity of parents and grandparents** | | | |
| Religiosity mother (***; ***; ***) | 1.22 | 2.42 | 3.29 |
| Religiosity father (***; ***; ***) | 1.17 | 1.83 | 2.94 |
| Religiosity grandmother (mother's mother) (***; ***; ***) | 1.57 | 2.79 | 3.65 |
| Religiosity grandfather (mother's father) (***; ***; ***) | 1.32 | 2.46 | 3.16 |
| Religiosity grandmother (father's mother) (***; ***; ***) | 1.46 | 2.69 | 3.38 |
| Religiosity grandfather (father's father) (***; ***; ***) | 1.30 | 1.98 | 3.10 |
| **Shared religious practices in childhood** | | | |
| Prayed at mealtime (***; ***; ***) | 1.05 | 1.57 | 2.36 |
| Prayed at bedtime/night-time prayer (***; ***; ***) | 1.05 | 1.58 | 2.43 |
| Prayed together on other occasions (***; ***; ***) | 1.07 | 1.61 | 2.49 |
| Observed the holy day(s) of religion in home (***; ***; ***) | 1.39 | 2.42 | 3.19 |
| Attended religious services (***; ***; ***) | 1.19 | 2.34 | 3.06 |
| Sang religious songs (***; ***; ***) | 1.17 | 1.76 | 2.63 |
| Index practices (***; ***; ***) | 1.15 | 1.89 | 2.69 |

**Table A4.** *Cont.*

|  | Stable Nones | Leavers | Affiliates |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Role of religion in childhood family** | | | |
| Role of religion (***; ***; ***) | 1.27 | 2.41 | 3.53 |
| **Closeness to family** | | | |
| Close to mother (n.s.; **; **) | 4.28 | 4.24 | 4.52 |
| Close to father (n.s.; ***; **) | 3.74 | 3.77 | 4.17 |
| Close to grandmother (mother's mother) (n.s.; n.s.; n.s.) | 3.80 | 4.04 | 3.86 |
| Close to grandfather (mother's father) (*; n.s.; *) | 3.48 | 3.85 | 3.45 |
| Close to grandmother (father's mother) (*; *; n.s.) | 3.11 | 3.45 | 3.45 |
| Close to grandfather (father's father) (**; **; n.s.) | 2.62 | 3.10 | 3.21 |
| **Relevance of who made R a religious/non-religious person** | | | |
| Mother (n.s.; ***; ***) | 3.06 | 2.93 | 3.59 |
| Father (**; **; ***) | 2.78 | 2.38 | 3.18 |
| Siblings (n.s.; ***; ***) | 2.16 | 1.93 | 2.76 |
| Grandmother (mother's mother) (n.s.; ***; ***) | 2.11 | 2.07 | 2.78 |
| Grandfather (mother's father) (n.s.; ***; ***) | 1.75 | 1.73 | 2.43 |
| Grandmother (father's mother) (n.s.; ***; ***) | 1.82 | 1.97 | 2.58 |
| Grandfather (father's father) (n.s.; ***; ***) | 1.60 | 1.53 | 2.18 |
| Friends (n.s.; *; **) | 2.33 | 2.25 | 2.66 |
| Partner (n.s.; ***; **) | 2.12 | 2.32 | 2.88 |
| Religious leader (***; ***; ***) | 1.09 | 1.48 | 2.74 |

Means. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A; significance levels of the mean comparisons (t-test): stable nones—leavers; stable nones—affiliates; leavers—affiliates; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant.

**Table A5.** Parental denomination (outflow).

|  | Homogeneously None | Mixed/Other | Homogeneously Tied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stable nones | 93.9 | 43.3 | 11.0 |
| Leavers | 5.2 | 38.9 | 40.3 |
| Affiliates | 0.9 | 17.8 | 48.7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. See Table 1 above; here with exchanged row and column percentages.

**Table A6.** Religious upbringing (outflow).

|  | Parents | Parents and Grandparents | Grandparents | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stable nones | 5.1 | 1.2 | 15 | 63.1 |
| Leavers | 36.8 | 23.8 | 57.5 | 26.3 |
| Affiliates | 58.1 | 75 | 27.5 | 10.6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

In %. See Table 2 above; here with exchanged row and column percentages.

**Table A7.** Mean value of a person's own religiosity according to who brought her or him up religiously.

|  | Stable Nones | Leavers | Affiliates | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents | (1.77) | 2.12 | 3.15 | 3.15 |
| Parents and grandparents | (4.54) | 2.46 | 3.37 | 3.37 |
| Grandparents | (1.07) | 2.16 | 2.92 | 2.92 |
| None | 1.26 | 1.73 | 2.82 | 2.82 |

Means. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A.

**Table A8.** Talking about religious issues with . . .

|  | **Stable Nones** | **Leavers** | **Affiliates** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mother | 1.3 | 6.5 | 19.9 |
| Father | 0.2 | 0.9 | 13.4 |
| Grandparents | 0.3 | 5.5 | 8.4 |
| Siblings | 0.4 | 1.9 | 7.4 |
| Other relatives | 0 | 0 | 1.0 |
| Friends | 2.0 | 2.4 | 9.9 |
| Teacher | 0 | 2.8 | 1.9 |
| Religious leader | 0 | 5.6 | 16.7 |

In %. Questions: see Table A9 in the Appendix A, here: "regularly".

**Table A9.** Variables and indices.

| Variable | Question/Item(s) | Scale | Categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Socio-demographics** | | | |
| Cohorts | Formed according to age in years | | 1: <1946<br>2: 1946–1965<br>3: 1966–1985<br>4: >1985 |
| Gender | Entered by interviewer (asked, if not clear) | 1 = male<br>2 = female<br>3 = diverse | |
| Area as child | Where did you mostly live when you were a child? | 1 = in a rural community<br>2 = in a small village<br>3 = in a town or a small city<br>4 = in the suburbs or outskirts of a large city<br>5 = in a large city | |
| Area today | Do you live . . . | see *Area as child* | |
| Region as child | When you were a child, in which region did you mostly live? | 77 = Schleswig-Holstein<br>78 = Hamburg<br>79 = Lower Saxony<br>80 = Bremen<br>81 = North Rhine-Westphalia<br>82 = Hesse<br>83 = Rhineland-Palatinate<br>84 = Baden-Württemberg<br>85 = Bavaria<br>86 = Saarland<br>87 = Berlin<br>88 = Brandenburg<br>89 = Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania<br>90 = Saxony<br>91 = Saxony-Anhalt<br>92 = Thuringia | East Germany/former GDR: 87–92 |
| Region today | Filled in automatically | see *Region as child* | |
| Education | What is the highest level of education that you have successfully completed? | 1 = (Not yet) a general school leaving certificate<br>2 = Elementary or middle school/completion of 8th grade of polytechnic high school in the former GDR ("Haupt-bzw. Volksschulab-schluss")<br>3 = Secondary school/completion of 10th grade of polytechnic high school in the former GDR<br>4 = Aptitude for technical college ("Fachhochschulreife")<br>5 = General university entrance qualification, high school diploma ("Allgemeine Hochschulreife")<br>6 = Other | Low: 1 or 2<br>Middle: 3<br>High: 4 or 5 |

<div align="center">**Table A9.** *Cont.*</div>

| Variable | Question/Item(s) | Scale | Categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family's social position | Thinking back to when you were a child, where would you locate your family on a social scale, if 1 means the lowest position and 5 means the highest? | 1 = lowest position<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5 = highest position | |
| Social position today | Some people think they belong to the [upper classes] of society, and others believe they are at the bottom of the social scale. Imagine a five-graded-scale representing your social position. Where would you locate yourself on this scale? | see *Family's social position* | |
| **Family items** | | | |
| Religiosity of childhood family | Thinking about your parents and grandparents when you were a child. How religious would you say your parents and grandparents were at that time?<br>1 your mother<br>2 your father<br>3 your grandmother (mother's mother)<br>4 your grandfather (mother's father)<br>5 your grandmother (father's mother)<br>6 your grandfather (father's father) | 1 = not religious at all<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5 = very religious | |
| Religion of parents/ denominational homogeneity of parents/ denominational combination of parents | What was the religion of the following family members when you were a child?<br>1 Mother<br>2 Father | 1 = Roman Catholic<br>2 = Protestant (without free churches)<br>3 = Evangelical (free churches)<br>4 = Other Christian<br>5 = Muslim<br>6 = Jewish<br>7 = Other non-Christian<br>8 = none | Homogeneously (Christian) bound: Mother and Father 1–4; Homogeneous None: mother and father: 8; Mixed/Else: other constellations and missing values in one or both parents. |
| Religious upbringing | There are various ways to be brought up religiously. Which of the following, if any, apply to you? | 1 = I received religious instruction at school.<br>2 = I received religious instruction at a religious institution.<br>3 = My mother brought me up religiously.<br>4 = My father brought me up religiously.<br>5 = One or more of my grandparents brought me up religiously. | Parents: 3 and/or 4 (and not 5); Parents and grandparents: 3 and/or 4 and 5; Grandparents: (3 and 4 not) 5; None: neither 3, nor 4, nor 5 |

**Table A9.** *Cont.*

| Variable | Question/Item(s) | Scale | Categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relevance of who made R a religious/ non-religious person | How important were the following people for making you a religious or non-religious person today? 1 Mother 2 Father 3 Siblings 4 Grandmother (mother's mother) 5 Grandfather (mother's father) 6 Grandmother (father's mother) 7 Grandfather (father's father) 8 Friends 9 Spouse/partner 10 Religious leader or professional (e.g., clergy, monastic, rabbi, imam, priest) | 1 = Not important at all 2 3 4 5 = Very important | |
| Religious practices in childhood | To what extent did you engage in any of the following practices with one or more of your parents or grandparents when you were a child? Prayed at mealtime Prayed at bedtime/night-time prayer Prayed together on other occasions Observed the holy day(s) of religion in home Attended religious services Sang religious songs | 1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = occasionally 4 = regularly | |
| Talking about religious issues with ... /Religious communication | When you were a teenager, how often did you talk about faith or religious issues with the following people? 1 mother 2 father 3 one or more of my grandparents 4 siblings 5 other relatives or family members 6 friends 7 teacher 8 religious leader or professional (e.g., clergy, monastic, rabbi, imam, priest) | 1 = never 2 = seldom 3 = occasionally 4 = regularly | |
| Attitude towards religion in childhood family | On the whole, as you remember it, what was the general attitude towards religion in your family during childhood? Was it ... | 1 = negative 2 = positive 3 = mixed (several persons had different attitudes) 4 = indifferent | |
| Role of religion in childhood | Now think of the role religion played in your family during your childhood. Which number of the scale describes best to what extent religion was present in your family during childhood? | 1 = not at all 2 3 4 5 = a lot | |

**Table A9.** *Cont.*

| Variable | Question/Item(s) | Scale | Categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family closeness in childhood | How close did you feel to the following family members when you were a child?<br>1 to my father<br>2 to my mother<br>3 to my grandmother (mother's mother)<br>4 to my grandfather (mother's father)<br>5 to my grandmother (father's mother)<br>6 to my grandfather (father's father) | 1 = not close at all<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5 = extremely close | |
| **Respondent's religiosity** | | | |
| Religion as a child | Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself; first, about your religion. What religion, if any, were you raised in? | 1 = Roman Catholic<br>2 = Protestant (without free churches)<br>3 = Evangelical (free churches)<br>4 = Other Christian<br>5 = Muslim<br>6 = Jewish<br>7 = Other non-Christian<br>8 = None | |
| Religion today | And what is your religion today? | See *Religion as a child* | |
| Religious self-assessment | How religious would you say you are? | 1 = not religious at all<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5 = very religious | |
| Belief | Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs? | 1 = there is a personal God<br>2 = there is some sort of spirit or life force<br>3 = I don't really know what to think<br>4 = I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force | |
| Religious service | Thinking of the time before the corona crisis, apart from special occasions like weddings and funerals, how often did you attend religious services? | 1 = never<br>2 = less than once a year<br>3 = about once or twice a year<br>4 = several times a year<br>5 = about once a month<br>6 = about every week or more often | $1 \rightarrow 0$<br>$2 \rightarrow 0.5$<br>$3 \rightarrow 1$<br>$4 \rightarrow 6$<br>$5 \rightarrow 12$<br>$6 \rightarrow 52$ |
| Praying | About how often do you pray? | 1 = never<br>2 = less than once a year<br>3 = at least once a year<br>4 = about once a month<br>5 = every week<br>6 = once a day or more | $1 \rightarrow 0$<br>$2 \rightarrow 0.5$<br>$3 \rightarrow 1$<br>$4 \rightarrow 12$<br>$5 \rightarrow 52$<br>$6 \rightarrow 365$ |
| Meditation | How about meditation? How often do you meditate (or contemplate or other spiritual practice)? | 1 = never<br>2 = less than once a year<br>3 = at least once a year<br>4 = about once a month<br>5 = every week<br>6 = once a day or more often | $1 \rightarrow 0$<br>$2 \rightarrow 0.5$<br>$3 \rightarrow 1$<br>$4 \rightarrow 12$<br>$5 \rightarrow 52$<br>$6 \rightarrow 365$ |

**Table A9.** *Cont.*

| Variable | Question/Item(s) | Scale | Categories |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spiritual self-assessment | How spiritual would you say you are? | 1 = not spiritual at all<br>2<br>3<br>4<br>5 = very spiritual | |
| Transmission of religion to the next generation | Have you brought up your own children religiously?<br>If you were to have children, would you bring them up religiously? | 1 = Yes<br>2 = No | |

## Notes

[1] These are, of course, only some of the more general conditioning factors that could explain similarities and differences in the state and development of church life and the religious landscape as a whole in Central and Eastern Europe. Specific historical, ideological and political constellations, including the question of whether the churches are perceived as more aligned with the rulers or more close to the people, also play a role, of course (see, for example, Höllinger 1996; Spohn 2012; Tomka 2005; and with the focus on the development of freethought and atheism Bubík et al. 2020a; Vorpahl and Schuster 2020). Since we do not claim to pursue this question in more detail and in comparison, but consider East Germany as a case in which circumstances have developed particularly unfavorably for the churches and religion, we will refrain from further elaboration on the differences between individual societies in Central and Eastern Europe at this point.

[2] Mention can only be made in this context of Davie's (1994) formula "believing without belonging", which refers to the situation in Great Britain. Voas and Crockett (2005) countered this with the diagnosis "neither believing nor belonging".

[3] For a typology for a post-communist Central European country, see the article about Slovakia in this special issue of *Religions* (Tižik 2022, p. 9), which distinguishes six different types of nones.

[4] In a way, this is only the flipside of the strong internal relationship often established empirically between church and "private" religiosity (Müller 2013, p. 169; Pollack and Pickel 2003; Pollack and Pickel 1999).

[5] When asked why they had turned their backs on the church, the most frequent reasons given in a survey of former members of the Protestant Church in Germany in 2012 were that the church was untrustworthy and that people were indifferent to it. This was followed by more fundamental motives such as "I don't need religion for my life", "I can't get started with faith", and "faith doesn't fit into modern society" (Pickel 2014b, p. 81).

[6] For a similar research question, but in a Canadian context, see Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme (2017).

[7] Pickel (2013, p. 22), for example, makes clear with regard to the different distribution of the types of non-denominational people that he identifies in West and East Germany how important the religious constitution of the family of origin is for people's subsequent points of contact and attitudes to religion: while the "devout non-denominationalists" come from parental homes that were still shaped by a denomination and only later left the church themselves, most of the "fully distanced atheists" come from families where the parents were already non-denominational.

[8] Reference is not always made here in the international context to a strict principle of membership, but often also to a kind of identification with a church or religious community. While it is possible at least in the case of the Christian churches to determine a kind of relationship of membership to the extent that this is established by the fact of baptism, this can also be cancelled in Germany for reasons of religious and tax law by a declaration confirmed by the civil registry office (Storch 2003, p. 231; see also Könemann 2021, p. 10). Since we refer substantively in the following to those who either do not belong or belonged to a Christian church or religious community in Germany (although it should be said that, in our overall sample for East Germany, only just under 6% of today's nones were socialized in a non-Christian tradition anyway), we do not pursue this conceptual problem further, either theoretically or empirically, but point out that our categorization also follows this membership principle.

[9] An overview of all the variables and indices used, as well as their expressions, can be found in Table A9 in the Appendix A.

[10] From a "Western" perspective, these cohorts correspond (except for minor deviations) to the generational cohorts as they are anchored in common usage and also conceived in the literature, i.e., the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (or Millennials; in our case partly including Generation Z; similarly also used by Bengtson et al. 2018).

[11] It must be taken into account at this point, however, that we can only present an overview across cohorts here, as the sometimes low number of cases does not allow us to make reliable statements about such socio-demographic differences between the cohorts.

[12] In the majority of cases, both parents were Protestant, which reflects the confessional landscape of East Germany (see Table A3 in the Appendix A).

[13] This becomes clear if one reverses the perspective and looks at the outflow instead of the inflow (Table A5 in the Appendix A): then, 99% of the children from homes where both parents did not belong to a denomination were also non-denominational at the time of the survey. Even if only one parent did not belong to a denomination, more than 80% of the children turned out to be non-denominational later in life (43% stable nones and 39% leavers). In contrast, only just under half of the children from families where both parents had ties to a denomination stated that they were members of a Christian religious community at the time of the survey.

[14] Once again, a change of perspective proves to be revealing (see Table A6 in the Appendix A): of those who were brought up religiously by parents and grandparents, 75% are affiliates and only 24% are leavers. The strong formative power of the shared religious upbringing by parents and grandparents is also expressed in the fact that those affiliates and leavers who were brought up religiously by parents and grandparents together today have by far the highest religious intensity within their group compared to the other constellations of upbringing (see Table A7 in the Appendix A).

[15] Given the assumption that a close family connection is generally advantageous for the transmission of values and traditions within the family, such a connection would naturally also be plausible in a similar form among the stable nones. However, such a relation may not even be necessary in secular societies, since non-denominationalism is favored by the secular context anyway. On the possible effects of different contextual conditions on the success of religious socialization, see Kelley and De Graaf (1997), and the critical discussion of this in Voas and Storm (2021).

[16] This is confirmed by bivariate correlation analyses of religious and spiritual self-assessment: thus, Pearson's r is 0.315 for stable nones, 0.524 for leavers (both values significant at the 0.001 level), and 0.375 for affiliates (significant at the 0.01 level).

[17] There are several reasons why we should not overinterpret the fact that the value for the stable nones with no children (yet) who state that they intend to bring up their children religiously is somewhat higher than for those who state that they have brought up their children religiously. On the one hand, we should point to the relatively small number of cases in the individual cells. On the other, it should nevertheless make a difference, especially in a secular environment such as in East Germany, whether a person declares such a (more or less concrete) intention and then actually implements it. It is of course not impossible for families to find their way back to the church or religion, perhaps through their children. However, these cases are obviously so rare that the circumstances under which this can happen cannot be examined in detail, at least within the framework of general population surveys based on usual sample sizes. These individual cases can in any case not stop the general trend.

[18] The fact that non-religiosity is not necessarily in explicit opposition to religion, especially in East-Central European societies due to a lack of religious socialization, is also emphasized by Remmel et al. (2020, p. 18).

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