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values, identities, and politics



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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
BELGRADE

RELIGION AND CAPITALISM IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY: VALUES, IDENTITIES, AND POLITICS

(ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Silver Lake, Veliko Gradište, 4–5 September 2026

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS*

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OF THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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**RELIGION AND CAPITALISM IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY:
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INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF FAITH AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AS POLITICAL CAPITAL IN THE NEOLIBERAL CONTEXT: COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF SERBIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The end of the Cold War brought the triumph of neoliberal ideology and profoundly altered the structure of the international system and order. The states emerging from the dissolution of the SFRY, as a part of the former Eastern Bloc, faced a multidimensional crisis in the post-Cold War period — institutional, identitarian, axiological, and economic. The consequences of war, the absence of adequate economic and institutional capacities, and the lack of historical experience in market competition contributed to the emergence of a transitional vacuum.

The dominant neoliberal model presupposes a reduced role of the state in market relations, the curtailment of social policies, and the emphasis on individualism as a supreme value. The successor states of the SFRY did not follow an identical path in their transformation processes, which consequently did not unfold at a uniform pace. These states transformed themselves employing different models, resulting in varying degrees of (un)success. In addition to international factors, local specificities and context also influenced the formation of the transitional vacuum. The lack of capacity for the autonomous implementation of transitional policies, combined with the simultaneous reduction of the state's role in social policy and market relations, enabled new actors to assume functions that had previously belonged exclusively to the state. This lack of capacity for competitive and sovereign participation in the neoliberal contest created conditions in which emerging political elites were presented with an opportunity to instrumentalize religious identity for the purposes of the struggle for political power and influence.

Religious identity was thus transformed into political capital, while religious symbolic capital and institutions were mobilized

by political elites and parties to secure political support and legitimacy. The relationship between religious and political elites is not unidirectional — religious actors, in turn, receive resources, privileges, and influence. Political elites exploited prevailing identitarian and moral disorientation to deploy religious identity as an effective political resource, compensating for the loss of social security by reinforcing a sense of identitarian belonging and shaping normative frameworks.

The main questions of this paper are why the mechanism of converting religious identity into political capital functions effectively within the neoliberal context of post-socialist states, which actors contribute to this conversion, and how this mechanism differs in the comparative cases of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research aims to analyze the mechanisms through which political and religious actors in these two states convert religious identity into political capital and vice versa. The findings enable identification of the structural conditions facilitating this conversion, the concrete strategies employed by political parties, and the forms of reciprocity in the relationship between religious and political actors. The theoretical framework draws on Pierre Bourdieu's models of capital conversion, José Casanova's desecularization thesis, and Rogers Brubaker's approaches to the study of nationalism and religion. Methodologically, the study employs a comparative case study design (Serbia and BiH), incorporating a discourse analysis of public statements by religious and political actors, institutional analysis of the legislative framework and formal state–church agreements, as well as a secondary analysis of the existing theoretical and empirical research.

Keywords: neoliberalism, religious identity, political instrumentalization, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina