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Do Mexicans want a secular state? A typology of attitudes towards secularism policies in four religious self-identification groups

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by

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ABSTRACT

Do Mexicans want a secular state? A typology of attitudes towards secularism policies in four religious self-identification groups

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Secularism in Mexico (*laicidad*) has been characterized by its anticlerical origin, liberal-radical ideology, and inclination for strict legal surveillance and control of religious expressions. Some authors report that such secularism is increasingly accepted among Mexicans. However, the high rates of religious affiliation in the country and the ambiguity of the statistical indicators used so far suggest that these claims may not be completely accurate. In this thesis I problematize whether Mexicans agree with the model of secularism instituted in the country, looking at its specific policies. Using multivariate analysis techniques and data from the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016, I classify Mexicans' attitudes towards secularism, breaking them down into four groups of religious self-identification: Catholics; Protestants/Evangelicals; Biblical; and Non-religious. I propose that among the study subjects there are four typical attitudes: 1) partial or strategic adherence; 2) systematic opposition; 3) "free market"; and 4) greater support. The group most opposed to Mexican secularism represented almost half of the sample (48%), while only 7% belonged to the subgroup most supportive of this type of regime. Beyond the acceptance of laicidad, I argue

that these results suggest its polysemy, as well as different ways of imagining religion in the public sphere

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I. Tying the case study with the scholarly landscape: Secular Studies and Secularization Theory

During the 1980s, debates and questions surrounding the theory of secularization intensified. Previously, the idea that modernization processes led to the decline or privatization of religious beliefs and expressions enjoyed a broad consensus in the social sciences.[1] However, in the late 1970s, a series of political developments involving different religious traditions around the world seemed to offer sufficient evidence to suggest that the assumptions of secularization needed to be revised.[2] Specifically, postulates that viewed religion, in a singular and abstract sense, as a pre-modern phenomenon destined to disappear and lose public relevance with the advance of modernity were criticized (Casanova 2012, 6).

In contrast to these "subtraction stories,"[3] arguments were wielded that not only pointed to a religious "revitalization," but even claimed that most of the world remained as

[1] Peter Berger (2016, 45-46) explains that it was around 1950 when scholars started calling "secularization theory" to an assumption that, based on the intellectual heritage of the classics of the social sciences, indicated that modernity, in any context, would inevitably come with a generalized decline of faith was called. According to this reading, secularization implies a withdrawal of organized religion from the public sphere as a result of various expressions of modernization (urbanization, industrialization and the irruption of science and technology into daily life). In this scenario, not only governments and public life become autonomized from the religious, but also the irrelevance of the sacred in the realm of the private grows, which is observed in a decline in both attendance at worship services and membership in churches and religious communities (Baker 2013, 182).

[2] Among the events most frequently referred to in the literature as the first signs of a religious *revival* are the Islamic Revolution in Iran; the trip of John Paul II to Poland, which paved the way for the emergence of *Solidarność*; the rise of the new religious right in the United States, or the spread of liberation theology in Latin America with its respective impact on the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. Of more recent date are the attacks of September 11, 2001, the political irruption of Evangelicals in Latin America (particularly transcendent in Brazil and Central America), and the participation of Pope Francis in the temporary thaw in relations between Cuba and the U.S. (Blancarte 2012b, 60–61; Casanova 2012, 9; Habermas et al. 2011, 111–12).

[3] Charles Taylor (2014, 50) coined this term to name those narratives that portray modernity and secularity as a consequence of humanity freeing or ridding itself of certain illusions or interpretative frameworks that hindered its knowledge and other underlying traits that were always present but inhibited.

religious as ever (Berger 2016, 9-16; Casanova 2012, 6-7; Davie 2007, 2-4; Habermas et al. 2011, 116). This suggested that experiences of decline or privatization of the religious were not the norm, but rather trends specific to some countries in Europe and to groups with access to Western-style higher education (Berger 1999, 10-11; Blancarte 2012b, 76-77).

Since then, different positions have been articulated around the revision of the secularization paradigm. Some authors have insisted on the plausibility of a positive relationship between the processes of economic and political modernization and some kind of secularization of practices and values (Bruce 2002; Inglehart 1997). This would not be in contradiction with the fact that, for demographic reasons, there is an increase in the religious population in different parts of the world (Norris & Inglehart 2011).

Another group recognizes a certain flaw in the forecasts imposed by the theory of secularization, but does not consider it to be completely erroneous. Thus, rather than leaving it aside, they affirm that what is required is to adjust or clarify its contents. Differentiating and discriminating the theses that make up the paradigm, these researchers agree that secularization is not necessarily about the decline or privatization of religion, but rather about the reconfiguration of its role in modern societies (Daniéle Hervieu-Léger seen in Blancarte, 2012b, p. 68).[4]

[4] Olivier Tschannen (1991, 395; 404-6), for example, argues that, rather than an inevitable weakening of religions, secularization entails three transformations in social life: 1) a *differentiation* of religion from other institutional spheres-such as the economy, art, science, or politics; 2) a *rationalization* of such non-religious spheres-that is, a development of autonomous criteria of rationality that respond to their specific social functions; and 3) a worldliness, even of religious organizations themselves (Blancarte 2015, 663). In a similar vein, José Casanova (2012, pp. 19-32) identifies three ways of understanding secularization: 1) as functional differentiation and emancipation of secular spheres; 2) as decline of religiosity; and 3) as privatization of religions. In Casanova's opinion, it is the differentiation thesis that stands as the most solid and defensible core of secularization theory.

A third distinguishable current is the one that uses the concept of the "postsecular" to refer to modern communities, with largely secularized institutions and representations, but which, simultaneously, preserve religious groups and traditions with relevant public and private vitality (Casanova 2012, 286; Habermas et al. 2011, 131). Those who employ the idea of the postsecular tend to do so in two senses: 1) in a more descriptive tone, to clarify that the secularization of the state does not imply the secularization of society (Habermas 2006, 33); 2) with a more normative nuance, to advocate for a public sphere that overcomes the private nature of the religious in favor of a more open society (Ferry 2016, 26-27; Leclerc 2016, 65-75).

A critique that has also joined the efforts of secularization specialists is the one that considers that a good part of the theory's deficiencies are the product of its ethnocentrism and insufficient attention to what happens in the non-Western world and developing countries. (Blancarte 2012b, 76). Adapting Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's idea of "multiple modernities," the notion of "multiple secularities" has been proposed with the aim of recognizing the culturally diverse development of the secular, which implies understanding the way it is shaped by local civilizational trajectories and by dynamics of global interconnectedness (Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr 2013, 606). This presupposition has motivated the promotion and construction of a comparative research agenda with a view to empirically test the argument about the historical transformation of world religions under the presumed dynamics of structural differentiation implied by secularization (Casanova 2012, 12; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, 882).

Although the commitment to the recognition of diversity within secularism enjoys popularity, the impression of infinite fragmentation and possible scenarios that the idea of

multiple secularities gives rise to has been questioned. This debate runs the risk of losing sight of the connection of the local variants of secularism with a universalizing project of Western hegemony, whose mechanisms of reproduction and expansion condition the possibilities of variation. In the opinion of Saba Mahmood (2016) the idea of multiple secularities furthermore seems to implicitly accept that there is a singular secularity underlying such multiplicity, whereby individual trajectories of secularism are either a deviation or adaptation of the prototypical Western model, or else local histories with minor contributions to the conceptualization of the secular.

More generally, in their effort to specify, qualify or complexify what secularization can be, the positions presented so far seem to take for granted its counterpart: religion. In this regard, it is pertinent to comment that the discursive construction of religion has been the object of critical examination by scholars who question its status as a universal phenomenon (Dubuisson 2003), as well as the impression that it is a dimension easily distinguishable or separable from other aspects of culture (Fitzgerald 2000, 225; Lofton 2020, 74). From this perspective, reflections have been elaborated such as that the determination that a datum is relevant to the study of religion is never an operation of mere external observation, but an active process of construction and reconstruction, interweaving discussions of empirical evidence with questions of authority (Curts 2016).

In the same vein, numerous scholars have drawn attention to the modern origins of the use of religion as an analytical and juridical-political category (Casanova 2012, 6; Smith 1998) especially in a context of European colonial expansion in which the mobilization of the concept led to the transformation of various non-Western traditions into distinct religions (Masuzawa 2005). This reification of religion as a distinguishable sphere and as a universal

and transhistorical phenomenon is co-constitutive of the differentiation of other social components as "secular" (Gauthier 2020, 16). By problematizing the assumed nature of what is considered religious and tracing the genealogy of the term, these perspectives invite a reflection on the constructed nature of religion as a category and the dynamics of power and knowledge implicated in defining it (Asad 1993; 2003).

While the arguments of these investigations should not necessarily lead us to conclude that the semantic content of the category of religion is completely undetermined (Blankholm 2022a), rescuing the genealogy of its formation reveals its instability, of which the secular participates given its dynamic linkage and interaction (Hirschkind 2011, 643). Therefore, to close this literature review exercise, I am interested in recovering the discussion that, from the emerging subfield known as "secular studies", questions the conventional conceptions of secularism (such as the separation between Church and State) or its "anemic" representations (such as the hollowing out of the religious) (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2016; C. Taylor 2014). From this perspective, the boundaries between the secular and the religious are not fixed (Hurd 2008), nor are they given in advance, but are continuously and reciprocally determined in a process of internal self-differentiation that gives rise to productive tensions or generative contradictions (Hirschkind 2011, 643).

Thus, rather than as the remnant or the void left when religion withdraws from social life, the secular is seen as an ontology, epistemology (Asad 2003, 22; 43) or discursive tradition (Blankholm 2022b, 200), "with new inventions, recent self-conceptions, and related practices" (C. Taylor 2014, 50), that involves a historically unprecedented regulation of what is considered "religious" (Mahmood 2016). The secular is part of the normative logics and discursive regimes that structure the modern world (Blankholm 2022b, 199) and that

produce religion as a category opposed by definition to the rest of social life (Gauthier 2020, 16). These investigations contribute to the dereification of terms that are assumed as a *priori* elements of the organization of modern societies (the public as distinct from the private, and the political as separate from the religious), pointing out the discursive mechanisms of power that create these dimensions, and that define their limits and meanings (Mahmood, 2016).

The perplexity aroused by the "return" of religion to the public sphere and the concern still generated by the overlaps between the "political" and the "religious" have, over the last five decades, oriented much of the academic debate on secularization towards the search for theoretical and practical solutions to address what is perceived as paradoxical. The anxiety that arises from the possibility of failure of the supposedly most defensible thesis of the paradigm —the differentiation of institutional spheres (Casanova 2012, 19-32; Gauthier 2020, 6)— still animates part of these efforts, and prevents one from seeing that, like the theses of the decline or privatization of religion, it seems to be a product of its own invention (Blankholm 2022b, 199).

Rather than seeking their solution, here I consider it fruitful to document the generative contradictions of the secular and the instability of its boundaries with the religious, as they seem to be a condition, rather than a limitation, for the exercise of its discursive power (Hirschkind 2011, 643). These paradoxes inform discussions, representations, and decisions about the boundaries of social space, as well as the mechanisms by which religion is constructed as a category in the context of secular governance. The research I present below seeks to contribute to this debate by providing empirical evidence on the discursive construction of the secular in Latin America.

II. *Laicidad* as a Project in Mexico and how to measure its acceptance among the population

In response to the hegemony of Catholicism in the region, and under the influence of French *laïcité*, the model of state-church separation in Latin America was born with a belligerent character that has shaped the ideal of consolidating a public sphere free from the influence of religious expressions in the region (Ruiz Miguel 2013, 4; Mendoza Delgado 2010, 12; Baubérot 2005). Gustavo Morello (2021, 152-53) contrasts this conception of the role of religion in the public sphere with cases such as the United States —where the idea of the "wall of separation" did not prevent Christian churches from articulating charitable organizations or educational institutions— or that of European countries with national churches —where it was believed possible to maintain a neutral public space and at the same time allow the State to support the activities of established churches. In Latin America, on the contrary, the model has historically aimed less at the formation of an impartial space that guarantees religious freedom and the functioning of churches, and more at the consolidation of a purely secular public sphere where religion is not welcome.

Roberto Blancarte (2008a, 139; 143; 152-53) identifies a series of historical factors to explain the combative and anticlerical character of Latin American secularism. Originally, the separation policies of the nascent Latin American states —such as the establishment of civil registration, the institution of marriage as a civil contract, the secularization of cemeteries and the disentailment of ecclesiastical property— were shaped in response to the "intransigence" of a Catholic hierarchy that was unable to deal with the wave of independence revolutions in the 19th century. At the same time, Freemason, liberal and positivist circles would have been responsible for popularizing the idea of secular education

among the political elite. Finally, the still current tendency to legally control religion would be a legacy of *Regalismo* and the *Patronato Real* —institutions that, during the colonial period, allowed Spanish sovereigns and viceroyalty authorities to enjoy exclusive privileges granted by the Catholic Church such as the administration of its temples in the conquered lands (Blancarte 2004a, 19; 2013, 20).

Laicidad was not only incorporated as a state doctrine in modern Latin American nations,[5] but it is also part of the tacitly normative and prescriptive discursive patterns that shape the social sciences in the region. (Zavala Pelayo 2020, 13-14). Theorized in general terms as "a social regime of coexistence, whose political institutions are legitimized primarily by popular sovereignty and no longer by sacred or religious elements" (Blancarte 2012a, 237), specialists in *laicidad* think of it as a project under construction, rather than as a fixed or finished form. (Blancarte 2008c, 30). Its specific realization in each society would be the result of particular processes of *laicization*,[6] which give rise to "[...] differences in the ways of living [*laicidad*] [so] the emphases of the various ['*laicidades*'] are not universally interchangeable or applicable as if it were a transplantable mold" (Da Costa 2011, 214).

Together with Uruguay, Mexico is one of the countries that has most radically embraced the project of secularism in Latin America (Morello 2021, 153). The distinctive features of its model of state-church relations are identified as its anticlerical origins, its liberal-radical ideology, and its "jurisdictionalist" orientation —that is, its inclination for strict surveillance and control of religious expression through the law (Blancarte 2008a, 152-

[5] Costa Rica is the great exception to the rule and remains as the only state in the region that recognizes Catholicism as its official religion.

[6] This notion was coined by Karel Dobbelaere (1981, 5-22) and consists of the path by which the political and religious spheres are dissociated in a society, which, in turn, can have juridical implications (Blancarte 2012b, 67; Milot 2009, 27-30).

53). Under the assumption that the State must protect individual freedoms from the potential threat posed by religious doctrines, the legal framework of secularism in Mexico stipulates a clear separation between the political and religious spheres, and the public and private, especially in the educational sphere (Blancarte 2004a, 19; 2018, 320).

Part of the legal framework of secularism are constitutional articles 3º —which expresses that public education "shall be secular and, therefore, shall remain completely alien to any religious doctrine" and that based "on the results of scientific progress, it shall fight against ignorance and its effects, servitudes, fanaticism and prejudice"—; 24 —which, after a reform in 2013, not only protects the freedoms of conscience and religion, but adds that of "ethical convictions"—; 40 —which, since 2012, establishes as the form of government of the United Mexican States the representative, democratic, *secular* and federal republic—, and 130 —which recognizes the "historical principle of the separation of the State and the churches" and prohibits ministers of worship from holding public office, while allowing them to vote, but not to participate as candidates in electoral processes ("Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Texto vigente" 2022). Likewise, these legal provisions are complemented by the *Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship* (2015) —whose Articles 16 and 21 prevent religious associations from being concessionaires of broadcast media, and condition the transmission of religious content on television and radio to prior authorization by the Ministry of the Interior— and the *Regulations of the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship* (2012).

Paradoxically, the separatist nature of Mexican secularism and the anticlerical bias still present in some of its institutions does not seem to coincide with the religious affiliation of the majority of its population. According to the last census in Mexico, 77.7% of Mexicans

consider themselves Catholics; 11.2% say they are Protestant or Christian-evangelical; 0.2% profess another religion; 2.5% declare themselves believers without religious affiliation; and 8.1% report not having any religion (INEGI 2021). Mendoza Delgado (2010, 12) highlights the perplexity that this apparent contradiction often causes, and it is worth asking to what extent a society with such high rates of religious affiliation as Mexico's coincides with the type of secularism established in its political institutions.

In the past, the attempt by the government of Plutarco Elías Calles to fully implement the legal framework of secularism —at that time more openly anticlerical— led to the second most important civil conflict of the 20th century in Mexico after the Revolution: the Cristero War. This insurrection could only be stopped when, during the subsequent administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas, an implicit agreement was reached with some Catholic hierarchs to relax the application of secular laws. This pact is referred to in the literature as *modus vivendi* or *entente* cordiale (Blancarte 2013, 54-55; De la Torre 2019, 161). Although the current formulation of the legal framework of secularism is less combative, the tendency to simulate its enforcement persists (Esteinou Madrid 2020; Barranco Villafán and Blancarte 2019).

Even so, in the public and academic debates on the relationship between the state and religious organizations over the last two decades, arguments have been mobilized about a growing acceptance of secularism in Mexican society (De la Torre 2008, 20; De la Torre, Gutiérrez Zúñiga, and Hernández 2020, 301-2). This position has been part of the parliamentary discussions on some of the most recent modifications to the legal framework of secularism (Blancarte 2008b).

Among the evidence referred to argue for the growing acceptance of secularism are several statistical reports. One of them is the *Survey of Catholic Opinion in Mexico*, which, in its 2003 and 2014 editions, recorded that the majority of respondents agreed that the Catholic Church should not have an influence on the political decisions of those in power (82% in 2003 and 72% in 2014) (Aldaz 2003; 2014).[7] With more modest estimates and on a sample that considers all Mexicans and not only Catholics, the 2014 *National Survey on Religion, Secularization and Secularity* reported that 51% of respondents agreed that religious authorities should not influence government decisions (Applied Research and Opinion Area 2014).[8]

Although it is not uncommon to measure acceptance of secularism by looking at attitudes around the influence of religious organizations on government (Hichy et al. 2012, 163), the ambiguity of the measure does not make it entirely clear what respondents support or reject. In this sense, different authors who have taken on the task of measuring secularism or political secularism have emphasized the multidimensionality of the category (Arzheimer 2022; Blancarte and Cruz Esquivel 2017; Blancarte 2012a; Prieto 2015),[9] warning,

[7] It should be noted that the reports of the 2010 and 2021 editions of the same survey do not include this item (Aldaz 2010; 2021). (Aldaz 2010; 2021).

[8] The proportion was estimated by discounting those who did not take a positive or negative position on the issue.

[9] Part of this literature seems to be oriented towards determining the nature or essence of an authentic secularism. In this paper I distance myself from this perspective and rather consider that the efforts to measure and make secularism empirically visible are part of its discursive construction. In this regard, the challenges that some of these authors have reported to reach a global formulation of the category are suggestive, given that the politics of secularism vary according to the context ("Declaración Universal de la Laicidad en el Siglo XXI" 2005). Thus, in their measurement proposal, Blancarte (2012a) explains that, while the secularism agenda in France considers the issue of the use of the burqa as relevant, in Mexico the issue is inconsequential and other issues such as the prohibition of political parties to contain religious elements in their names and slogans are of interest. I believe that the findings of Blankholm (2022, 218) on the different ways of being secular and anxiety about the religious as a constitutive feeling of the secular tradition help to understand the variation of secularism agendas in different contexts. What is felt as too religious is not the same in all societies or at all historical moments.

moreover, that the legal separation between the state and religions is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to determine the degree of secularization of a political regime (Blancarte 2008c, 30).[10]

Thus, in order to measure the degree to which Mexicans agree with the secularism project, it seems convenient to include a broader set of indicators that are representative of the politics of secularism in the country. Such need is best covered by the *National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Practices in Mexico* (ENCREER/RIFREM 2016), elaborated by the Network of Researchers on the Religious Phenomenon in Mexico (Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre 2016). Specifically, the study includes a section called "Perception on Church-State relations" composed of a battery of 13 questions that address different policies of the legal framework of secularism in the country.

The analysis of the survey results by the study's authors already hints at the possibility that, although *laicidad* is a term with considerable legitimacy among Mexicans, its use and interpretation are not homogeneous (De la Torre 2023, 59-60; De la Torre, Gutiérrez Zúñiga, and Hernández 2020, 301-4). Although they represent a substantive advance, these explanations start from an individualized analysis of each of the statistical indicators for the population as a whole, which entails three limitations: first, it makes it difficult to evaluate the support or rejection of the Mexican secularism project as a whole; second, it leaves aside the possibility that, in the group of policies that scholars have identified as part of the secularism project, the population identifies differentiated subsets of

[10] Blancarte (2008c, 30-31; 36; 41) and Milot (2009, 30) argue that there are societies whose political governance is independent of religious organizations despite not having a legal separation of church and state, and there are also formally secular regimes although in fact the majority religious groups have influence in public decision making -as is the case in Mexico. In addition, there are countries -such as the USA and Turkey- with considerable secularization of the state, although secularization is low in other areas of social life, and highly secularized nations -such as England and Denmark- that maintain an official link with some religion.

agendas; finally, derived from the previous point, referring to the totality of Mexicans hides the possibility that the population can be differentiated according to their patterns of support or rejection towards the distinctive subgroups of policies that make up the secularism project in Mexico.

In this sense, the multivariate analysis techniques that I use below to propose a typology of attitudes towards secularism among Mexicans overcome these difficulties. Specifically, factor analysis helps to distinguish how Mexicans differentiate the sub-agendas of secularism by identifying the latent dimensions that explain the variation of the observed variables. On the other hand, cluster analysis produces a classification of the population according to the similarity or difference of their answers to the questions on secularism included in the survey.[11] Finally, I considered it pertinent to cross-tabulate the typology classes with the religious self-identification labels of the respondents in order to offer an incipient approximation to the religious and secularist motivations of the respondents with respect to their attitudes toward Mexican secularism. I consider that this phase of the analysis opens the door to investigate some of the different ways of imagining religion in the public sphere present in Mexico.

[11] In this sense, the classes produced through cluster analysis can be qualified as extracted types according to the classification of typologies by McKinney (1968, 35-37). This means that the similarities shared by the elements of each class are "typical" in that they stood out strongly in the average values of the variables of interest.

III. Data and methods

As I mentioned in the previous section, to meet the goal of this research, I used the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016. Table 1 synthesizes the main characteristics about the methodological design of this study.

Table 1.

Methodological design of the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016.

Sampling frame	List of AGEB and rural localities of INEGI
Target population	Mexicans over 18 years of age, belonging to four religious groups: Catholics, Evangelicals (Protestants and Pentecostals), Biblical (Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists and Mormons) and people with no religion. The sample does not include Jewish, Islamic and other minority religions present in Mexico.
Sample size	3,000 individuals from 253 AGEB (in sample of 59,193) and 47 rural localities (in sample of 187,722).
Survey period	October 29 to November 30, 2016.
Sampling method	Stratified random subsampling and proportional selection by size.
Survey mode	Face-to-face domiciliary.
Confidence level	95%
Statistical error	±2.5%

Note. Own elaboration based on Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016). In accordance with the classification of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016 distinguishes between evangelical and biblical churches. The latter category groups a set of Christian churches that —by their own decision and due to differences in the interpretation or constitution of their sacred books— refuse to be categorized as evangelicals (Garma-Navarro 2018, 358; Pérez-Guadalupe 2018, 15).

Specifically, I considered in my analysis the 13 variables of section V, called "Perception of Church-State relations". As can be corroborated with my description of the legal framework of secularism in the previous section, a good part of these items are representative of the policies of secularism instituted in Mexican law. Additionally, the survey includes some questions on gender and sexual and reproductive rights. The inclusion

of such items is not unjustified since various research in Mexico and other geographical contexts has linked such agendas to debates about secularism and secularism at the level of the state, society, its ideologies and normative practices (Brena 2015, 438; Caro 2008, 6-7; Uribe 2012, 118; Wiering 2017; Verkaaik and Spronk 2011).

Given the way in which the survey questions were formulated and in keeping with the purposes of the study, I recoded the response categories. Thus, the results for these variables were divided into two main categories: "Non secular responses" —that is, those positions contrary to the policies of secularism instituted in Mexican law— and "Secular responses" —that is, those statements that coincide with the policies of Mexican secularism. In this regard, it is worth clarifying that this way of labeling respondents' answers is not necessarily applicable to other political regimes, nor does it coincide with other non-institutionalized ways of understanding secularism. Table 2 summarizes the changes made.

Table 2.

Recoding of the perception variables on church-state relations from the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016.

Variable code	**Variable (*Do you agree or disagree with the following statements*?)**	**Original answers**	**Recoded answers**
V21a	Members of any religious worship should have the same citizenship rights granted by the State.	1. Yes 2. No 3. I don't care/ I am not interested/ I am indifferent. 0. Couldn't say/ Did not answer	0. Non secular response 1. Secular response
V21b	Religious content or values are taught in public schools.		
V21c	Teaching about sexuality in public schools		
V21d	Gender content in school textbooks (which ignore the biological differences between men and women).		
V21e	Celebration of traditional festivities linked to Catholicism in public schools (graduation masses, pastorelas)		
V21f	Celebration of altars of the dead in public schools		
V21g	Same-sex marriage law		
V21h	The right of homosexual couples to the adoption of children		

Variable code	Variable (*Do you agree or disagree with the following statements*?)	Original answers	Recoded answers
V21i	Abortion not prosecuted or punished by law		
V21j	That candidates for popular election use religious symbols or resources to win votes.		
V21k	Churches should report their tax movements to the Treasury Department.		
V21l	That religions participate openly in electoral politics.		
V21m	Churches owning mass media outlets		

Note. Own elaboration based on Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016). For variables V21a, V21c, V21d, V21g, V21h, V21i, V21k, the answer "Yes" was considered as a "Secular response", while "No", as a "Non-secular response". On the other hand, for items V21b, V21e, V21f, V21j, V21l, V21m, "No" was transformed into "Secular response", while "Yes", into "Non secular response". Also, with recoding, the categories originally labeled 0 and 3 were considered missing values for all cases.

After recoding, I proceeded to process these data using two multivariate analysis techniques: 1) factor analysis and 2) cluster analysis. First, I performed a principal factor analysis based on a tetrachoric matrix. The purpose was to construct a small subset of summary measures identifying the dimensions underlying the variables of interest. As shown in Table 3, the statistical exercise led me to retain three factors, since they were the only ones that met the latent root criterion; that is, they had an *eigenvalue* greater than 1. Together, the three retained factors account for 88.3% of the variance of the 13 items on the perception of state-church relations.

Table 3.

Principal factor analysis for the perception variables on church-state relations from the 2016 ENCREER/RIFREM.

```
Factor analysis/correlation                      Number of obs    =      3,000
    Method: principal factors                    Retained factors =          3
    Rotation: (unrotated)                        Number of params =         36
```

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	3.76971	2.22259	0.4996	0.4996
Factor2	1.54712	0.20246	0.2050	0.7046
Factor3	1.34465	0.44226	0.1782	0.8828
Factor4	0.90239	0.55409	0.1196	1.0024
Factor5	0.34830	0.11270	0.0462	1.0485
Factor6	0.23560	0.17017	0.0312	1.0798
Factor7	0.06543	0.05705	0.0087	1.0884
Factor8	0.00838	0.05452	0.0011	1.0895
Factor9	-0.04614	0.05494	-0.0061	1.0834
Factor10	-0.10108	0.02784	-0.0134	1.0700
Factor11	-0.12892	0.06576	-0.0171	1.0529
Factor12	-0.19468	0.01015	-0.0258	1.0271
Factor13	-0.20483	.	-0.0271	1.0000

```
LR test: independent vs. saturated:  chi2(78) = 2.3e+04 Prob>chi2 = 0.0000
```

Note. Own elaboration based on data from Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016).

As the last step of the factor analysis, I proceeded to perform an oblique rotation maneuver for interpretative purposes only —that is, I retained the unrotated factors for subsequent analyses. This rotation facilitated the interpretation of the variables defining the profile of each retained factor. The results of this operation are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.

Oblique rotation of retained factors.

Rotated factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Uniqueness
V21a				0.9158
V21b	0.5868			0.6150
V21c	-0.5211	0.3453		0.4749
V21d	-0.4786	0.3434		0.5432
V21e	0.9395			0.1631
V21f	0.7641			0.2960
V21g		0.9476		0.0976
V21h		0.8805		0.2144
V21i		0.3227		0.8796
V21j			0.6576	0.4943
V21k			-0.3519	0.7858
V21l			0.8272	0.3239
V21m			0.6902	0.5350

(blanks represent abs(loading)<.3)

Note. Own elaboration based on data from Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016).

As can be seen, factor 1 is determined to a greater extent by the items related to the presence of religion in public education (V21b; V21c; V21d; V21e and V21f); factor 2 derives its identity from those variables on gender, sexual diversity, and sexual and reproductive rights (V21c; V21d; V21h; V21g and V21i); finally, factor 3 encompasses a more miscellaneous set of regulatory restrictions for religious actors in electoral, fiscal and media matters (V21k; V21m; V21j; V21l).

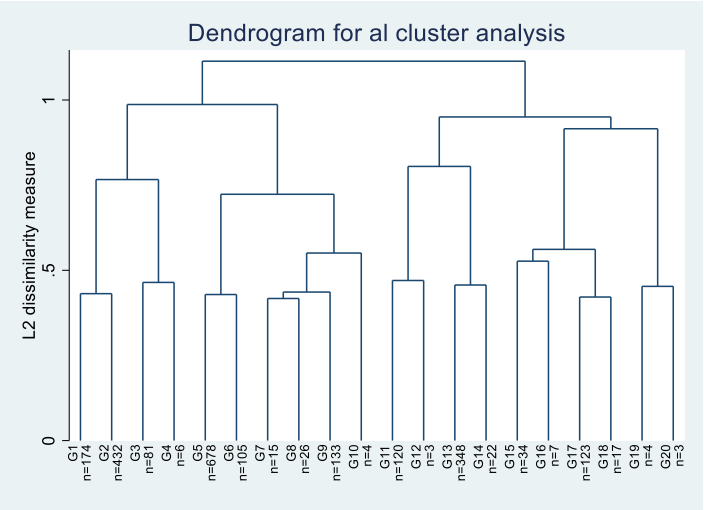
It should be noted that item V21a presented an extremely high degree of uniqueness (.916). This means that its variance has practically zero association with those of the rest of the statistical indicators considered to measure support for secularism. The result is relevant since the variable addresses one of the most typical discussions in the normative-theoretical treatises on political secularism; namely, the equality of citizens before the law regardless of their religious identity and, consequently, the neutrality of the State in matters of religion ("Universal Declaration of Secularism in the 21st Century" 2005, 154; Habermas 2006, 131;

Leclerc 2016, 66; Milot 2009, 17-21). This finding suggests a gap between the discursive construction of the project of secularism in Mexican state institutions and academic literature, on the one hand, and the way in which society perceives and associates its different agendas.

Once these three summary measures were constructed, I proceeded to use them to segment the sample by means of a cluster analysis. I resorted to the Q-side of the hierarchical family of methods, selecting Euclidean distances as the dissimilarity measure, as well as the *average linkage* method. In this way, I was able to develop a taxonomy whose classes are distinguished empirically —that is, from the answers given by the interviewees. To determine the number of clusters into which the sample was divided, I used two resources: first, a dendrogram or tree diagram, which facilitates the visualization of the possible clusters to be included in the classification (Illustration 1).

Figure 1.

Dendrogram or tree diagram



Note. Own elaboration based on data from Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016).

In the second instance, I calculated the Duda-Hart statistic, which suggests that the optimal number of clusters is given by the highest values on this measure, as well as the smallest pseudo-T squares (Urbina and Bárcena, 2019, p. 105). This information is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5.

Duda-Hart statistic

Number of clusters	Duda/Hart	
	Je(2)/Je(1)	pseudo T-squared
1	0.6733	1132.00
2	0.4048	2428.78
3	0.5333	594.28
4	0.7809	52.18
5	0.3167	1059.55
6	0.5608	541.07
7	0.4610	1121.32
8	0.6008	118.95
9	0.9130	16.77
10	0.5646	30.07
11	0.9195	10.59
12	0.7955	21.85
13	0.8705	54.75
14	0.2838	12.62
15	0.6591	88.95

Note. Own elaboration based on data from. Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016)..

Based on both tools, I decided to opt for a division of the sample into four clusters. While such a segmentation is readily apparent in the dendrogram, the Duda-Hart index suggested that 11 clusters seemed to be a more convenient arrangement. However, since I was seeking a parsimonious interpretation of the results, I determined that I would use no more than five subsets. Hence, a four-cluster partition was the most efficient alternative according to the results of the same index.

IV. Results

In this section I propose that the four subsets constructed based on the cluster analysis represent a different type of attitude towards secularism among Mexicans; namely, 1) partial or strategic adherence; 2) systematic opposition; 3) "free market"; and 4) greater support for the jurisdictionalist model of Mexican secularism. Table 6 facilitates the interpretation of the distinctive features of each cluster by summarizing their proportion of secular and non-secular responses. These percentages are broken down for each subset of items derived from the factor analysis. Additionally, the table reports how the sample was distributed in each of the *clusters*.

Table 6.

Proportion of secular and non-secular responses by cluster.

		C1 (Partial or strategic adherence)	C2 (Systematic opposition)	C3 (Free market)	C4 (Support for Mexican secularism)	Whole Sample
	Proportion of the sample (%)	20.25	48.15	24.98	6.62	100
V21a (citizenship rights for all regardless of religion)	Secular R. (%)	89.03	91.36	96.35	91.49	92.11
	Non-secular R. (%)	10.97	8.64	3.65	8.51	7.89
Factor 1 (public education and religion)	Secular R. (%)	71.17	40.12	43.57	75.64	53.03
	Non-secular R. (%)	28.83	59.88	56.43	24.36	46.97
Factor 2 (gender, sexual diversity, and sexual and reproductive rights)	Secular R. (%)	29.29	38.38	80.69	76.17	47.64
	Non-secular R. (%)	70.71	61.62	19.31	23.83	52.36
	Secular R. (%)	75.51	73.93	70.84	80.98	74.89

		C1 (Partial or strategic adherence)	C2 (Systematic opposition)	C3 (Free market)	C4 (Support for Mexican secularism)	Whole Sample
	Proportion of the sample (%)	20.25	48.15	24.98	6.62	100
Factor 3 (regulatory restrictions in electoral, fiscal and media matters)	Non-secular R. (%)	24.49	26.07	29.16	19.02	25.11

Note. Own elaboration based on data from Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016). I used a heat scale to evidence the degree to which non secular (shades tending to red) and secular (shades tending to green) responses predominate in each cluster. These shades are relative, as they are assigned in comparison with the rest of the clusters. For example, it is observed that, when contrasted with the other subsets, cluster 4 showed higher proportions of secular responses in all factors, as well as lower percentages of non-secular responses. Additionally, a column was included with the proportion of secular and non-secular responses for the entire sample —that is, without dividing it into clusters.

Before interpreting the distinctive features of the clusters, it is worth noting that 92% of the sample positioned themselves favorably on the question of whether citizenship rights should be granted to all people regardless of their religion (a proportion that is quite similar in the four clusters). As I have mentioned, this item represents one of the most recurrent normative discussions in theoretical treatises on political secularism. If I had restricted the analysis to one such indicator, I would have concluded that there is strong support for secularism in Mexico, as suggested by other analysts. However, when considering a broader range of indicators representative of the project of secularism in Mexico, the results are extremely different and make the debate more complex.

I denominate the first conglomerate —which groups 20% of the observations— as having *partial or strategic adherence*[12] since it is the one that presents the most opposed positions to the liberal ideology of Mexican secularism with regard to the items on gender

[12] I decided to name the first conglomerate in this way in allusion to the academic discussion on "strategic secularism". Various authors have documented how religious and non-religious actors instrumentally mobilize different conceptions of the secular, making clear the polysemic character of the term, and the constant creation and reconstruction of its meaning (Engelke 2009; De la Torre 2023, 60-61; Blankholm 2014).

and sexual and reproductive rights; however, it is also one of the clusters that showed greater support to its separatist disposition in the educational sphere. As shown in Table 7, another aspect that characterizes this subset —and that may offer clues about their positions on educational and gender issues— is that most of the members of the evangelical (67.48%) and biblical (73.59%) churches tended to place themselves in this subset.

This high presence of Christian minorities in the subgroup allows us to speculate on the reasons for the rejection of the interference of religious elements in public education: such a provision would protect the younger members of the evangelical and biblical churches from the imposition of practices and beliefs proper to the majority church (De la Torre 2023, 60-61). In addition, it should be remembered that some of the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016 items on public education and religion explicitly talk about Catholic festivities. Likewise, regarding positionings against sexual and reproductive rights, Pérez-Guadalupe (2018, p. 87) highlights the identification of evangelical churches with a conservative pro-life political agenda and in defense of the “traditional” family. In fact, these ideas have allowed them to establish political alliances with members of the Catholic Church.

On the other hand, cluster 2, or *systematic opposition to Mexican secularism*, stands out not only because it was the cluster in which the positions opposed to secularism policies predominated the most, but above all, because it is the one that groups the highest proportion of observations. According to estimates generated from a survey with statistical representativeness such as ENCREER 2016, 48% of Mexicans would be located in this subset. This data challenges the narratives about the broad advance of a "secular culture" in

Mexico, evidencing the high rate of conservative positions on gender and on the agreement with the presence of religious values in public schools.

It should also be mentioned that, as shown in Table 7, more than half of all Catholics interviewed (52.19%) were located in this cluster. This Catholic majority in the cluster with the most adverse positions to the policies of secularism in Mexico suggests that the rejection of secularism may be related to its historical purpose of decatholicizing the public space (De la Torre, Gutiérrez Zúñiga, and Hernández 2020, 256-57).

Table 7.

Distribution of religious self-identification groups in the clusters.

Cluster	No religion (%)	Catholics (%)	Protestant/Evangelical (%)	Biblical (%)	Total (%)
1	31.65	14.56	67.48	73.59	20.25
2	25.1	52.19	22.29	14.65	48.15
3	18.45	27.34	5.4	6.4	24.98
4	24.79	5.92	4.84	5.36	6.62
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note. Own elaboration based on data from. Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016).

I decided to call the attitude of cluster 3 as *free market, with an approach to ultraliberalism and away from jurisdictionalism*, in reference to one of the axes of Émile Poulat's typology for the classification of State-church relations (seen in Blancarte 2004b, 18). According to this author, ultraliberalism, as opposed to the legal control of jurisdictionalism, consists of a religious *laissez faire, laissez passer in* which the State renounces any right to oversee these matters. This way of characterizing the cluster also coincides with that of other classificatory exercises such as those by Casanova (1994) and Jelen and Wilcox (1997).

I consider that conglomerate 3 is close to this scenario since it would seem to favor freedom of conscience and religion to the detriment of the State-church separation. This is

suggested by 1) its rejection of the State's prohibition of religious elements in public schools; 2) its positions on gender and reproductive rights —which are the most favorable to Mexican secularism, even more so than those of cluster 4—, and 3) and that it is slightly more flexible in relation to the regulatory restrictions that weigh on religious actors in electoral, fiscal and media matters. Finally, it seems appropriate to comment that it is the second cluster with the highest presence of Catholics (27.34%) —only behind cluster 2. This helps to qualify the potential simplifications that arise from descriptive statistical exercises, recalling the internal diversity of the Catholic community.

Finally, cluster 4 stands out both because it is the cluster with the *greatest support for the jurisdictionalist model of Mexican secularism*, as well as for being the smallest in size, since it only concentrates 7% of the individuals in the sample. Together with the results of cluster 2, it is also the one that most challenges the assumptions about a widespread secular culture in Mexico. As I will explore in more detail in the following section, these findings have certain parallels with the assertion of Berger (1999, p. 10) about how adherence to secular values is a phenomenon of an elite subculture. Although other factors such as education or income level of the members of this subgroup would have to be analyzed, it is at least evident that the strongest adherents of Mexican secularism constitute a minority proportion of the population.

In this regard, it is suggestive that, in comparison to the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016, the most recent *Opinion Survey on politics, religion and sexuality* by Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir reports considerably more favorable percentages for gender and sexual and reproductive rights policies associated with *secularism* (Aldaz 2021, 5; 12). At the same time, this research has two methodological limitations: 1) a significant overrepresentation of

people with higher-technical and university education (30% and 34%, respectively); 2) conversely, Mexicans with basic education or less are also underrepresented in the sample (36%). According to data from the last census, only 21.6% of Mexicans have had access to higher education, while 49.3% have basic education and 4.9% report not having attended school (INEGI 2021).

It also seems pertinent to point out that people with no religion and Christian minorities play an important role in this cluster. Even so, it should not be overlooked that the non-religious respondents were almost equally divided in clusters 1, 2 and 4 (31.65%, 25.1% and 24.79%, respectively), and that the category "No religion" is not completely equivalent to secular.

V. Discussion

The application of multivariate analysis techniques to the indicators of "Perception of Church-State relations" of the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016 has contributed to problematizing the debate on the degree of acceptance of the project of secularism in Mexico. Despite its consolidation in the country's legal framework, the findings presented evidence heterogeneous attitudes among Mexicans towards secularism —at least in the way it has been instituted and studied in the academic literature.

In this sense, it seemed relevant to me to highlight that it was the cluster with positions most opposed to the jurisdictionalist model of Mexican secularism that had the highest number of observations (48%), while less than 7% of the sample was located in the subgroup that most clearly supports it. As a provisional hypothesis, I have mentioned that these percentages may be associated, on the one hand, with the anticlerical origin of secularism in Mexico, which historically sought to decatholicize the public space (De la Torre, Gutiérrez Zúñiga, and Hernández 2020, 304). On the other hand, I commented that the minority support for the jurisdictionalist and liberal regime of Mexican secularism resonates with Peter Berger's (1999, p. 10) assertions about secular culture as an elite phenomenon.

To corroborate such assertions, it would be necessary to develop a methodologically oriented analysis to determine the causes behind the attitudes identified in this study, which is beyond the scope of this article. Even so, the observations I commented on regarding the distribution of religious groups within each cluster, as well as the possible link between education level and support for secularism policies —suggested by the groups under- and

over-represented in the survey by Aldaz (2021)— may offer directions for research with such objectives.

Although the systematization of such evidence is still pending, the gap between the institutional definition of secularism and its assimilation by the bulk of the population seems to correspond to the warning by Berger (2006, 39-40) about the small proportion that official and theoretical interpretations of reality represent in the cognitive and normative edifice that in society is considered to be knowledge. Therefore, the fact that secularism is recognized in Mexico's legal framework does not imply that Mexican society as a whole agrees with or has homogeneously assimilated this principle.

As I mentioned, the same author and others such as Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt (2012, 888-89) posit that the assimilation of dominant ideas that legitimize secularism may be peculiar to elite groups. Specifically, Berger claims that secular culture is subscribed to by a globalized elite subculture.....

> [...] composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, that is indeed secularized. This subculture is the principal "carrier" of progressive, Enlightened beliefs and values. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the "official" definitions of reality, notably the educational system, the media of mass communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system. They are remarkably similar all over the world today, as they have been for a long time [...] I cannot speculate here as to why people with this type of education should be so prone to secularization. I can only point out that what we have here is a globalized *elite* culture (Berger 1999, 10).

Thus, it is common that in societies with secular regimes, there are practices of a significant sector of the population that contravene values akin to institutionally defined secularism. Religious movements with a populist character —such as the "cultural war" in the United States or those in defense of the family in Mexico— are distinguished in their protests by maintaining the secular elite as one of their adversaries (Berger 1999, 11).

Berger (2016, 11-14; 108) also suggests the possibility of a scenario in which the principles that give raison d'être to secular culture are reformulated or interpreted in a pre-theoretical sense that harmonizes with the religious consciousness of devout people; thus, rather than a "disjunctive dichotomy," most people would tend to articulate religious and secular elements as a "fluid copulative construction." Under such premises, it would be understandable that some religious people would claim to be in favor of secularism while at the same time displaying behaviors contrary to it.[13]

Although plausible, this reasoning has limitations. In the first place, it seems to assume that there is an essence of secularity that can be empirically verified. Based on the above, this perspective would presuppose that it is possible to determine the authenticity or legitimacy of different conceptions of this concept, thus implicitly imposing a hierarchy among them. Likewise, this view runs the risk of giving the impression that the features of secularism emerged *ex nihilo*, waiting to be identified in the academic discourse, thus disregarding the character of the project as a construction.

In this regard, an alternative lies in reorienting the debate on secularism in Mexico from the prescription of its essence, or the denunciation of its non-compliance, to the exploration of its ongoing constitution as a discursive space in dispute. Taking up the idea of Talal Asad (2009) on a discursive tradition and its application to the case of the secular by Joseph Blankholm (2022, 201; 210), this approach would renounce the goal of reaching a universally acceptable definition of *laicidad*. Instead, this approach would start from the

[13] Under this logic the case of Arturo Farela may be interpreted as such. As president of the National Confraternity of Evangelical Christian Churches (Confraternice), Farela, in the name of secularism, has expressed his desire to reform Article 130 of the Constitution to allow ministers of worship to be voted for (Barranco Villafán 2019).

assumption that writing about secularism involves establishing a narrative relationship to the project, whereby any definition or description of it —even if carefully documented— has some degree of constructed narrative and is thus open to contestation.[14] In this way, this orientation contributes to understanding how specialists in secularism, in analyzing it, participate substantively in its configuration, but at the same time recognizes that other actors outside academic, state and institutional spaces also dispute and reconstruct its meaning. Finally, by paying attention to the different actors involved in the construction of secularity, this approach also helps to open debates on the influence of their positionality and subjective biases on the project.

Following this line, I am interested in warning, perhaps counterintuitively, that the typology proposed here, with its corresponding classes, is not so important in itself. It is not my primary purpose to advocate its generalizability or replicability in other contexts. In fact, it seems important to me to make explicit that its elaboration is conditioned by the indicators included in the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016. This note is not to the detriment of the survey, because, as I explained above, compared to previous exercises, it contributes to making possible a multidimensional measurement of *laicidad*. Although it is always possible to

[14] In this sense, a historical reconstruction of secularism that emphasizes its anti-Catholic origin, such as the one I presented in the introduction, can be revisited. This narrative seems to be convenient to portray the development of secularism in Mexico as a transition from anticlericalism to a regime of neutrality in matters of religious worldviews at present. Nevertheless, this account seems to minimize the good relationship of the Protestant-historical press and churches with nineteenth-century Latin American liberal politicians who advocated church-state separation (Bastian 2015; Freston 2001; Garma-Navarro 2018; Martínez-García 2000; Ruiz-Guerra 1985; Seiguer 2019), as well as research documenting how *laicidad* was part of the "Protestant creed" in Latin America until at least the mid-20th century (Avila-Arteaga 2008). In Mexico, the cooperative bond would have persisted during the Porfiriato and even in the early years of the revolutionary regime. These findings are relevant in the context of the criticisms that some authors have raised of the supposed neutrality of secularism, since the separation of religion and politics is based on distinctions implicitly akin to a Protestant worldview that privileges private beliefs and the personal relationship with God over the ritual performance of worship in public (Asad 2003; Hill 2019; Hurd 2008; Mahmood 2016).

include more indicators,[15] the relevance of the questions considered by Hernández, Gutiérrez, and De la Torre (2016) lies in the fact that they reflect parsimoniously the policies of the State-church relationship instituted in the Mexican legal framework, as well as the agendas of a very specific way of imagining and constructing the project of secularism in Mexico.

Thus, the typology is relevant, rather, because, even restricting the analysis to indicators that reflect the definition of secularism instituted in the Mexican legal framework, it offers clues as to how Mexicans seem to have different ways of imagining religion in the public sphere.[16] The evidence of majority support for a more general formulation of secularism —as state neutrality in matters of religious worldviews— accompanied by a diversity of positions with respect to other more specific agendas —education, gender, elections, etc.— suggests that by focusing our attention on a single way of understanding it, we may be failing to see how the concept is assimilated and redefined by other groups.

I have already mentioned that, analyzing the same data, De la Torre (2023, 59-60) recognizes that *laicidad* as a term seems to enjoy an important legitimacy, but that Mexicans seem to assign different contents and nuances to it. In view of the above, I consider it

[15] The instruments of Area of Applied Research and Opinion (2014); Blancarte (2012); Blancarte and Cruz Esquivel (2017); Brown (2019), and Prieto (2015) address other issues on the relationship between the state and religions, such as the type of constitutional prescription for state-church relations; public funding to religious institutions; cooperation between religious actors and rulers in public policies; the presence of religious images in public institutions, or the opinion of religious leaders on economic and political issues —a topic whose treatment by religious actors enjoys greater legitimacy among Latin Americans, according to Morello (2021, 171-72). An instrument with 76 items that synthesizes these aspects plus the questions contemplated by the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016 can be consulted in Hawley (2021, 157).

[16] On the peculiarity of the way in which political secularism imagines religion, Talal Asad (1993, 28; 35) argues that, far from being a universal and transhistorical phenomenon, a conceptualization of religion as a realm empirically differentiable from politics and other institutional spheres is the product of a unique post-Reformation history. It would have been precisely a cognitivist way of imagining religion, which restricts it to the sphere of belief and worship, detaching it from the social practices of discipline and authority, that allowed the separation of religion and politics to become the norm in the West.

relevant to advocate for research that documents the emic meanings of secularism that different actors seem to be articulating in Mexico. As argued by Blankholm (2014), ignoring or arguing against non-institutionalized visions, or attempting to propose definitions that encompass all possible understandings, runs the risk of obscuring the way in which the polysemic character of secularity is exploited by different actors, with varied purposes, to create and recreate its meaning.

Understanding secularity as a contested discursive space allows us to bring together in a single object of study conflicting positions on its content, as well as to outline a "modest" but empirically feasible, and politically and theoretically relevant research objective; namely, to document "who defines the secular, in what context, how, and why" (Blankholm 2014, 788). In this regard, I find instructive ethnographic research exercises such as Graham W. Hill (2019) who recorded the Christian affirmations of the secularity of an evangelical brotherhood of businessmen in Mexico. The way in which these groups (and others like them) mobilize the term might appear to be a tactical or feigned effort to disguise as secular a message of faith that otherwise could have no place in the public sphere — which resonates with the strategic support for secularism that I postulate for the members of the first conglomerate in the typology proposed here. Nevertheless, Hill argues that these appropriations of secularity also constitute serious attempts to repudiate conventional binary oppositions between the religious and the secular in order to experience a relationship with God outside of these categorical divisions.

Such findings help problematize the conception of religion as a phenomenon centered on beliefs and detached from worldly affairs. They also remind us that the opposition between the religious and the political is a historically constructed discourse and

not necessarily universally shared, as Asad (1993, 28) suggests. In tune with the analysis developed here, they invite us to consider how partial or total disagreements in the statistics presented on the separation between the political and the religious may be indicative of different ways of imagining religion and, consequently, the secular.

VI. Conclusions

By applying factor and cluster analysis techniques to the ENCREER/RIFREM 2016 data, I have shown that, far from there being a growing and homogeneous support to the secularism project instituted in the Mexican legal framework, there are heterogeneous perceptions among the population. Specifically, I have proposed four typical attitudes —in the sense that they stood out strongly in the average values. Namely, 1) of partial or strategic adherence —where 20% of the sample was located—; 2) of systematic opposition —represented by 48% of the interviewees—; 3) of "free market" —which groups 25% of the observations—, and 4) of greater support for the jurisdictionalist model of Mexican laicism —with a proportion of only 7%.

Unlike the reports that, using a single statistical indicator, argued a majority support for secularism among Mexicans, the measurement of this work was based on a multidimensional approach to the concept. Although other studies had already elaborated an analysis of support for secularism in Mexico based on more than one variable, their conclusions were derived from individualized observations of each statistical item, making it difficult to obtain an overall view.

The multivariate analysis techniques employed in this article allowed us to overcome this limitation, in addition to suggesting with statistical criteria how Mexicans distinguish the sub-agendas of secularism, and how the population can be classified according to the similarity or difference of their responses. In addition, the cross-tabulation of the typology classes with the religious self-identification labels of the interviewees offers an exploratory approach to the possible religious and secularist motivations behind each of the attitudes identified. Added to the comments on the possible links between education level and support

for the type of secularism instituted in the Mexican legal framework, the findings offer orientations for a future study interested in the causes behind the attitudes identified.

Does all this mean that Mexicans do not want a secular state? Not necessarily — especially if one considers the broad support for a more abstract way of defining it. As I have sought to argue by proposing its understanding as a discursive space in dispute, the answer depends on what we understand by secularism; the different interpretations of the statistical reports referred to here are proof of this.

In fact, I have affirmed that, conditioned by the questions contemplated in the dataset used, the attitudes identified are not so relevant for their possibilities of generalization, as for the way in which they suggest different ways in which Mexicans imagine religion in the public sphere, and, therefore, the secular. In this sense, I hope that this research will motivate us to continue, through empirical data, debating what we as scholars understand as *laicidad*, the way in which we ask questions about it, the narratives we have constructed to portray its historical development, and, above all, what it can mean for Mexicans beyond its institutional definition.

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