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## Attitudes: Tendencies and Variations

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## Chapter 2

# Attitudes: Tendencies and Variations

**Abstract:** This chapter presents an overview of religiosity and attitudes to religious diversity in media and other public spaces based on a cross-Scandinavian survey conducted in 2015. Although Scandinavians in general have a weak personal connection to religion, Christianity still holds a privileged position as an expression of cultural identity. Scandinavians express support for equal rights to practice religion, but also doubtfulness towards public expressions of religion. More than one-fourth of respondents discuss news about religion and religious extremism regularly. There is a widespread sentiment that Islam is a threat to the national culture, even though most respondents state that they oppose an open expression of hostile attitudes towards foreigners. Political orientation and gender are salient aspects that shape diverging opinions regarding tolerance or scepticism towards the public visibility of religious diversity. Furthermore, Danes and Norwegians are more critical of public expressions of Islam than Swedes.

**Keywords:** survey, religiosity, political orientation, gender, Islam, religious extremism

## 2.1 Introduction

Social and political transformations in each society, and on a global scale, are challenging the formerly largely homogeneous culture and self-understanding of the Scandinavian countries. These changes shape attitudes to increasing religious diversity in the populations and the higher visibility of religion, in particular, of Islam, in the public debates that are discussed in Chapter 1. Since changes in values were first measured in the 1980s the World Values Survey Institute<sup>1</sup> has described Scandinavia as the place in which late-modern secular-rational and self-expression values are ranked highest in the world. Given this

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1 World Values Survey, Institute for Futures Studies, accessed 23 Aug 2017, <http://www.iffs.se/en/world-values-survey/>

background, how are Scandinavians responding to the new diversity of religious expression in public spaces, and to the role of the media in this situation?

In order to provide a context for the following case studies of controversies over religion in various media settings, this chapter presents an overview of religiosity and attitudes to expressions of religious diversity in the media and in other public spaces. This overview is based on a cross-national, comparative survey. The first part of the chapter will present the common tendencies in the survey. In the second part, the differences between and within the populations in Scandinavian countries will be discussed with regard to how social factors, such as age, gender, religiosity, and political opinion, influence views on religion. Finally, we will briefly discuss how the survey findings compare to the findings on religiosity and with attitudes to cultural diversity found in the European Social Survey (ESS).

## 2.2 A Cross-National Comparative Survey

A survey with population representative samples in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden was undertaken by the project behind this book (see the Preface) in April 2015.<sup>2</sup> There were about 1,000 respondents aged 16 years and above in each country<sup>3</sup>. The media coverage at that time was focused on the dangers experienced by refugees crossing the Mediterranean, and on the terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in January and February of the same year. The survey was thus conducted a few months before the peak number of refugees arrived in the Scandinavian countries in the autumn of 2015.

Data were collected through web panels. Such surveys cover the adult population with access to the Internet which, in Scandinavia, is almost everyone (see Chapter 1, section 1.8). The survey is thus sampled to be representative at the country level, but it does not permit meaningful statistical inferences about minority groups in the population.<sup>4</sup> All of the data have been weighted by gender, age, and geographical region.<sup>5</sup>

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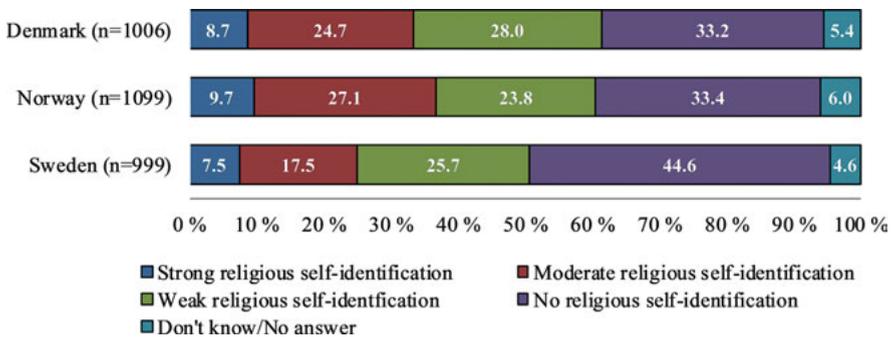
**2** The questions were formulated by CoMRel researchers in cooperation with TNS Gallup in Norway (now Kantar TNS) and were translated into Danish and Swedish. The responses were collected by TNS Gallup in Norway and Denmark, and by TNS Sifo in Sweden, in the period 16–21 April 2015 (Lundby and Jortveit 2015).

**3** 1099 from Norway, 1006 from Denmark and 999 from Sweden. See table 2.2.

**4** This is due to the low number of minority respondents, including ethnic minorities (i.e. respondents that answered that they or their parents were born outside Scandinavia) and small minority religious groups.

## 2.3 Scandinavian Religiosity: Believing and Belonging

Our study confirms the World Values Survey findings that Scandinavians, in general, have a weak personal connection to religion. As Figure 2.1 shows, fewer than 10 percent of the respondents have a strong religious self-identification.<sup>6</sup> The survey also shows that less than 10 percent report that they visit a religious building to attend a service or prayer meeting each month or more frequently. At least one-third of the respondents in each country do not identify themselves as religious. Religious identification is weaker among Swedes and stronger among the Norwegians and Danes.



**Figure 2.1** Religious self-identification in Scandinavia. Percentages. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

Despite the low levels of religious self-identification, a majority of the respondents in the survey state that they primarily feel affiliated to Christianity as part of their culture or national identity. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the religious landscape of Scandinavian societies has historically been dominated by

<sup>5</sup> It was not weighted by education, which may imply some over-representation of higher education.

<sup>6</sup> A variable showing the degrees of religious self-identification among the respondents was constructed based on the two following items in the survey: ‘To what extent do you regard yourself as religious,’ and ‘To what extent do you regard yourself to be a believer.’ Those who identified themselves with these terms fully or to some extent are considered to have a ‘strong or moderate’ religious self-identification. Those who did not, or to a small extent, regard themselves as ‘religious’ or ‘believers’ have a ‘weaker or no’ religious self-identification (see further Lundby et al. 2017)

Lutheran majority churches with strong connections to the state. The majority of the populations are still members of these churches. As suggested by Grace Davie, the normal stance in terms of religion in the Nordic countries can be characterized as ‘to belong without believing’ (Davie 2005, 135). Religion, in the form of Christianity, thus seems to retain significance as a form of cultural belonging for Scandinavians, even though a minority of them identify as ‘believers’.

## 2.4 Political Orientation

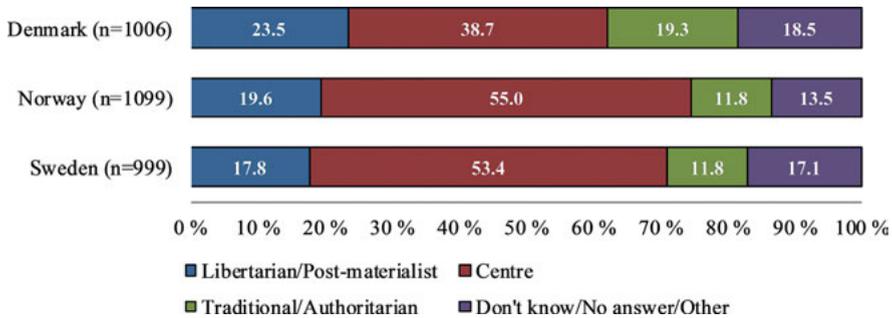
The Scandinavian societies have historically been characterized by a relatively stable party structure that is organized primarily around an economic left–right dimension. In recent decades the growth of new political parties, such as environmentalist and right-wing populist parties, have challenged the traditional structure and introduced new political cleavages in which cultural values represent a key dimension (Lövheim et al. 2018; Flanagan and Lee 2003).

In the survey, political orientation is analysed by combining data on the respondents’ political party preferences with information from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey on party positions, in terms of views on democratic freedoms and rights (Bakker et al. 2015). Based on this information, we have placed the survey answers in one of three categories: ‘libertarian/post-materialist’, ‘centre’, and ‘traditional/authoritarian’.<sup>7</sup> The distribution of political orientation in the three Scandinavian countries is shown in Figure 2.2.

As the figure shows, in Norway and Sweden nearly 12 percent of the respondents can be categorized as having a traditional/authoritarian political orientation, on the basis of their political party preferences. In Denmark, political parties with a traditional/authoritarian orientation have greater support among the respondents, with 19 percent of the surveyed population. The tendency to polar-

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of ‘libertarian/post-materialist’ parties include *Enhedslisten* and the *Liberal Alliance* in Denmark, *Venstre* in Norway, and *Vänsterpartiet* and *Miljöpartiet de Gröna* in Sweden. Examples of ‘traditional/authoritarian’ parties include the *Dansk Folkeparti* in Denmark, *Kristelig Folkeparti*, and *Fremskrittspartiet* in Norway, as well as *Sverigedemokraterna* in Sweden. Parties that occupy the ‘centre’ include *Socialdemokratiet* and *Venstre* in Denmark, *Arbeiderpartiet* and *Høyre* in Norway, and *Socialdemokraterna* and *Moderaterna* in Sweden. A respondent is classified as being ‘libertarian/post-materialist’ if his or her preferred party scores between 0 and 3 on the GAL–TAN scale, ‘centre’ if the party scores between 3.01 and 6.99, and ‘traditional/authoritarian’ if the party scores between 7 and 10. ‘Other’ includes respondents who said they would not vote, or who would vote for a party that was not included in the survey.



**Figure 2.2** Political orientation in Scandinavia (GAL–TAN scale). Percentages. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

ization between libertarian/post-materialist and traditional/authoritarian orientations is also somewhat stronger in Denmark than in the two other countries.

## 2.5 Attitudes to Religious Diversity

A particular feature of the Scandinavian society and culture is the strong emphasis on individual self-expression, combined with equal treatment of all citizens, administered by a strong welfare state (Trägårdh 2011). As discussed in Chapter 1, a tendency to link equality with similarity is particularly strong in Scandinavia (Gullestad 2002, 46). How, then, do the Scandinavians respond to increased heterogeneity of religious beliefs and practices in society?

More than 70 percent of respondents in the survey agree that all religions should be respected, and more than half of Norwegians and Danes, and almost two-thirds of the Swedes, strongly or partially agree that all religious groups should be entitled to the same rights in society. On a general level, freedom of religious expression thus seems to be supported in Scandinavian societies. However, when asked about tolerance for particular expressions of religion in public spaces, opinions differ depending on the religion. Around 80 percent of respondents from all Scandinavian countries agree that a cross, church tower, or other Christian symbol may be visible on buildings in public space. Seventy-five percent also agree that signs showing the location of a mosque should be visible. But, when asked about minarets being visible in public space, support drop to about 60 percent of respondents in Sweden and Norway, and 56 percent in Denmark.

That the tendency to support publicly visible expressions of religious faith is conditioned by the particular religion in question is also evident in responses to

questions about the display of religious symbols in particular social contexts. Table 2.1 shows stronger support for pupils in school to express their religious faith through wearing a cross rather than a hijab in all the Scandinavian countries. This tendency is also found amongst teachers in high school, hospital staff, news presenters, and police officers, although the strength of support differs depending on the professional group. While a majority of respondents accept that teachers should be free to express their religious faith by wearing a cross, less than half support police officers publicly expressing their faith in this manner.

**Table 2.1** Should people in the following groups be allowed to wear a cross or hijab to express their religious faith? Percentage of respondents answering yes. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

	Denmark		Norway		Sweden	
	<i>Cross</i>	<i>Hijab</i>	<i>Cross</i>	<i>Hijab</i>	<i>Cross</i>	<i>Hijab</i>
Pupils in school	73 %	52 %	77 %	54 %	75 %	57 %
Teachers in high school	68 %	47 %	61 %	38 %	66 %	48 %
News presenters	56 %	36 %	55 %	32 %	57 %	40 %
Police	46 %	27 %	39 %	16 %	49 %	31 %
Hospital staff	61 %	40 %	52 %	31 %	59 %	40 %
N	1006		1099		999	

*Note:* 'Do not know' and 'Do not want to answer' excluded from the tabulations.

The survey also asked respondents if they agreed that religious leaders have a stronger right than others to express their views on cultural, moral, and ethical issues in public. Seventy percent or more of the respondents disagree with this statement for Muslim leaders, but also more than 60 percent oppose Christian leaders doing so.

These findings suggest that Scandinavians, on an abstract, general level, support a plurality of expression of religion in society, but that they are more doubtful towards the expressions of Islam than Christianity. This tendency seems stronger when public manifestations of religion are connected to state authority, such as in the case of police officers or other state officials wearing the hijab. Furthermore, the majority of respondents do not think religious leaders should enjoy any privileged position on such matters.

## 2.6 Media Coverage of Religion

The Scandinavian media model described in Chapter 1 implies that the media are regarded by citizens as part of the communication services that offer public goods, and that therefore they are expected to handle different religions and world-views in an equal manner. A majority of Scandinavians still use conventional mass media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, on a daily basis. What, then, are their opinions about the ways in which media should engage with both religion in general, and with controversial aspects of religious issues in particular?

As can be seen from table 2.2 below our survey shows that, on the one hand, Scandinavians do not think that the media should increase the coverage of religious topics or of the major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (see further Chapter 5). On the other hand, the majority want the media to be more critical in their coverage of religion.

**Table 2.2** Percentage of the respondents who fully or partially agree with statements on what the media ought to do in relation to their coverage of religion. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

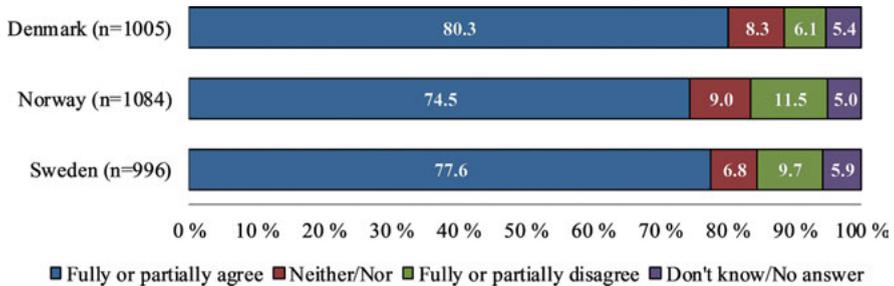
The media ought to...	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
... give more attention to religious topics	26 %	32 %	24 %
... give space to conflicts about religion	72 %	85 %	75 %
... be critical of problematic aspects of religion	76 %	81 %	71 %
... cover religion in satirical ways	65 %	68 %	64 %
... invite dialogue when there are tensions over religion	72 %	81 %	76 %
N	1006	1099	999

*Note:* ‘Don’t know’ and ‘Do not want to answer’ included in the tabulations.

Furthermore, the table shows that a large majority in all three countries support the notion that the media should engage with problematic aspects of religion, for instance by giving space to coverage of conflicts, and by being critical and satirical about religion, but also by inviting dialogue when tensions over religious issues occur.

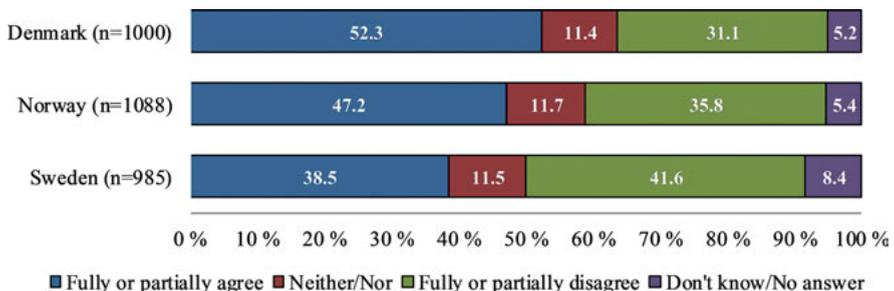
## 2.7 Religion and Culture in Conflict

The survey findings reveal the contested nature of public expressions of religion, in particular of Islam, among Scandinavians today. As shown in Figure 2.3, a majority of the respondents agree with the statement that religion leads to conflict rather than to peace.



**Figure 2.3** Looking at the world, religion leads to conflict rather than to peace. Percentages. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

This question referred to religion in general. Against the background of emerging political tensions over issues of immigration from Muslim countries and integration policies, a survey question explicitly asked whether Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are perceived as threats to national culture. The responses concerning Islam are shown in Figure 2.4.



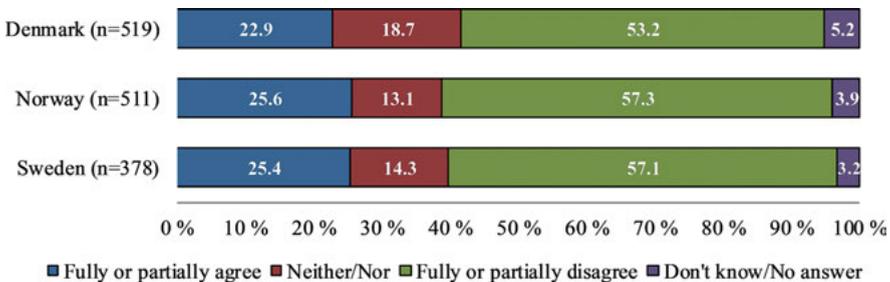
**Figure 2.4** Do you consider Islam a threat to Danish/Norwegian/Swedish culture? Percentages. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

As the figure shows, there are differences between the Scandinavian countries. About half of the Danes (52 percent) fully or partially agree that Islam is

a threat to their culture. Among Norwegians, almost half (47 percent) agreed with the statement, while 38 percent of Swedish respondents see Islam as a threat to national culture. The differences regarding the other world religions is remarkable: only around 11 percent of all Scandinavians agreed that Judaism is a threat to their culture, and 6 to 8 percent that Christianity represents a threat.

The survey was taken a few months before the escalation of the war in Syria and the increasing number of refugees going to Scandinavia in the autumn of 2015. These events may subsequently have made the perception of Islam as a threat even more pronounced. Furthermore, the question did not include any specification of ‘culture’. We thus do not know how individual respondents interpreted the term, or to what extent these attitudes are related to other opinions or actions. Finally, even though the results show a widespread negative sentiment towards Islam in all three countries, the population is divided over the issue. A third of Scandinavians disagree to some extent with the postulation that Islam poses a threat to national culture.

Following the escalation of media reports on Islamist terror and the general swing towards populism and nationalism in public discourse, one might expect a similar pattern of scepticism towards immigrants in general. The survey shows that between 13 and 18 percent of the respondents agree that hostile attitudes towards foreigners should be accepted in society. While a majority, then, of Scandinavians seem to oppose xenophobic attitudes, the countries differ also on this issue. Sixty percent of Danes, 67 percent of the Norwegians, and 73 percent of the Swedes answered that hostile attitudes to foreigners should not be tolerated. Figure 2.5 shows the need for a closer look at the relationship between the responses of those individuals who perceived Islam to be a threat to national culture and those who accept hostile attitudes against foreigners.



**Figure 2.5** Agreement with the statement ‘hostile attitudes towards foreigners should be accepted’ among people considering Islam a threat to national culture. Percentages. From CoMRel survey, April 2015.

In all three countries, as Figure 2.5 shows, a majority of those who consider Islam a threat to national culture do *not* tolerate hostile attitudes against foreigners, while about a fourth of them tolerate such attitudes. If we look at the whole population in the Scandinavian countries, those who tolerate hostile attitudes against foreigners *and* are sceptical of Islam make up 10–12 percent of the population. This finding also raises the question of whether some of the respondents might interpret tolerance of hostile attitudes towards foreigners as part of an argument supporting freedom of expression, rather than a critique of other ethnic or religious groups *per se*. These findings underline the importance of further analysis of the relationship between attitudes that concern freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and tolerance of religious diversity. The present study did, however, not provide data to conduct this kind of analysis.

## 2.8 Patterns of Similarity and Difference

The general tendencies in the survey's findings, presented above, strengthen the image that, against the backdrop of high levels of secular-rational values among Scandinavian populations, religious diversity in the public sphere in Scandinavia is a topic on which opinions diverge, and which gives rise to tensions over cultural identity and common values (as suggested in Chapter 1). The similarities and differences between Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes in the survey show the need for a further discussion about how various factors of historical experiences and social stratification in Scandinavian societies play into the general tendencies. The World Values Survey shows that secular-rational values and self-expression values are more frequent among the younger generations, while traditional values and strong religiosity are more common among the older generations. High levels of self-expression values are also connected to the tolerance of foreigners and gender equality. This makes it relevant to ask how the main tendencies in the attitudes towards religion that are found in the survey differ with regard to age and religious self-identification, as well as gender.

In this last part of the chapter, we present an analysis of differences between the countries reported in the previous sections. The purpose of this analysis is to test and validate whether central findings from the descriptive analysis hold when we control for the effects of key independent variables, such as age, gender, political opinion, and religiosity. We focus on differences that are related to a number of issues from the survey's findings which concern attitudes to expressions of religious diversity in public spaces and to controversial issues regarding religion, such as religious extremism and intolerance.

## 2.9 Critique and Tolerance of Religion

We conducted regression analyses of five dependent variables. The variables in the regression analysis concern two groups of questions. The first set of questions are those that have been discussed on a general level in the previous sections, that is, questions concerning attitudes to Islam as a threat to national culture, tolerance for hostile attitudes against foreigners, and satire of religion as an expression of a critique against religion in public settings. For these variables we conducted multinomial regression analyses. Here, we focus on the general findings from the regression models. For detailed results and information on the variables included in the analysis, please see table A.2 in the Appendix.

The general finding of a widespread concern about Islam as a threat to national culture is qualified by our analysis. Of the different social factors included in the analysis, political orientation is associated with the strongest effect in terms of differences in attitudes. Individuals with a traditional/authoritarian orientation seem more inclined to agree with the statement, particularly if compared to those with a libertarian/post-materialist orientation, but also, to a certain extent, if compared to individuals holding a centrist position. Besides political orientation, there are statistically significant effects of gender and age. Men are more inclined to agree with the statement that Islam represents a threat than are women, and the older generations are also more inclined to agree than the younger ones. Finally, Danes and Norwegians are significantly more inclined than Swedes to regard Islam as a threat. The effect of religious self-identification is not statistically significant.

This pattern is, to a large extent, replicated with regard to responses to the statement about whether xenophobic attitudes should be tolerated. Individuals with a traditional/authoritarian political orientation are more likely to agree that such attitudes should be tolerated, while those identified as libertarian/post-materialist are more likely to disagree. The effect of gender is also statistically significant, with men being more likely to agree with the statement than are women. Again, Swedes are significantly more likely to disagree with the statement about tolerating xenophobic attitudes than are the Danes and Norwegians. Stronger religious self-identification and higher age are also associated with a higher likelihood of agreeing with the statement. However, these effects are far weaker than the effects of political orientation and gender.

The same patterns that show up in attitudes to Islam and to xenophobic statements also seem to be relevant to questions concerning tolerance of satire of religion in public discussions. The effects of gender and political orientation are particularly strong, with men, and individuals with a traditional/authoritar-

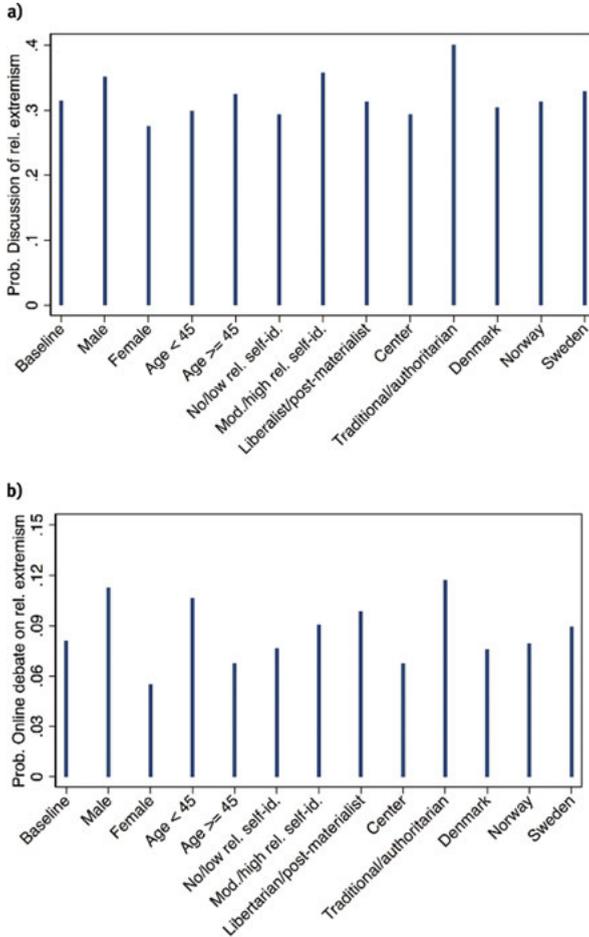
ian political orientation, more inclined to agree that such expressions should be allowed in society. The effects of age, religious self-identification, and country are also statistically significant, but the associations are not as strong as are those of gender and political orientation.

## 2.10 Discussing News on Religion and Religious Extremism in the Media

As the core of this study concerns contestations of public expressions of religion in the media, the second set of questions referred to discussions of news about religious extremism in the media. The survey included a question about the frequency of discussing news coverage of religion and religious extremism. More than one-fourth of the respondents answered that they discuss news on religious extremism daily or weekly. The survey also shows that such discussions primarily take place in settings like the home, and with friends. These findings will be further discussed in Chapter 3. For the analysis in this chapter, we focus on how factors such as age, gender, political orientation, and religiosity affect the probability of discussion of religious extremism. For these variables, we conducted binomial logistic regression analyses. See Table A.3 in the Appendix for detailed results.

The previous sections show that concerns about increased religious diversity and how such concerns should be expressed in public discussions differ, in particular between respondents of different political orientation and gender, but also with a person's age, religiosity and country. Are there similar differences among the quarter of the respondents that discuss news on religious extremism daily or weekly?

The results show, firstly, that respondents with a high or moderate level of religious identification seem more inclined to discuss news about religious extremism with others. Turning to political orientation we see that individuals with traditional/authoritarian and liberal/post-materialist preferences are more likely to discuss news on religious extremism with others compared to individuals voting for centre parties. Gender also has a strong effect with regard to likelihood of discussing news on religious extremism with others and on the contexts where these discussions take place. Men seem more inclined than women to discuss news on religious extremism, and to discuss these issues in the workplace and on social media. Women prefer to discuss such issues in the family or among friends. Men also report higher participation in public debate on religion, for example by participating in debate in print and online



**Figure 2.6** Influence of selected variables on discussions of news on religious extremism: Substantive effects. Based on the CoMRel survey, April 2015.

*Notes:* Baseline in the two graphs (a and b) refers to the predicted probability of participating in (a) a discussion of news on religious extremism and (b) an online debate on religious extremism when all independent variables are held at their mean values. The remaining pillars in each graph show how the probability of participating varies when we alter the value on each variable from 0 to 1 while holding the remaining independent variables constant at their mean values.

media. Men seem in general more critical of expressions of religion in public, especially Islam, and support critical coverage of Islam and Judaism in the media more than women do. Women appear to be more supportive of the statement that all religions should be respected. Finally, age has a strong effect when it comes

to discussions of news on religious extremism online. Individuals younger than 45 are more inclined to discuss religion and religious extremism online than older generations.

## 2.11 Scandinavian Attitudes in European Comparison

The survey findings show that although Scandinavians in general have a weak personal connection to religion, Christianity still holds a privileged position as an expression of cultural identity. Scandinavians express support for equal rights to practice religion in general, but are doubtful towards public expressions of religion that grows when these are connected to public institutions and officials, and explicitly references Islam. A majority in all three countries equate religion with conflict and support media engagement in criticism of religion, but also wish that media would initiate dialogue about tensions over religious issues. More than a quarter of respondents discuss news about religion and religious extremism regularly. There is a widespread sentiment that Islam is a threat to national culture, even though most respondents state that they oppose the open expression of hostile attitudes towards foreigners.

Our analysis of differences related to various social factors indicates that political orientation and gender are salient factors in shaping diverging opinions towards toleration or scepticism of the public expression of religious diversity, and of how such opinions may be expressed in society. There are also differences across countries, where Danes and Norwegians seem more critical of public expressions of Islam than Swedes. These differences mirror to some extent historical and political differences between Scandinavian countries and social groups as discussed in Chapter 1, such as the prominence of right-wing political parties criticizing Islam in public debate.

To what extent do the general tendencies and differences emerging in our survey represent a particular Scandinavian pattern, or are Scandinavians rather becoming more like other European countries in attitudes to religious diversity? We compared the patterns emerging in our survey and similar questions asked in the 2014 European Social Survey (ESS)<sup>8</sup> in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, with four other Western European countries – Germany, the Netherlands, France, and the UK. The comparison confirms that the Scandinavian countries have the relatively

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<sup>8</sup> The questions and variables used in the ESS 2014 study can be found at ESS online analysis module: <http://nesstar.ess.nsd.uib.no/webview/> (Accessed 4 Aug, 2017).

fewest people who consider themselves very religious. Also, gender differences, especially in attitudes to ethnic and religious diversity, are rather more marked in Scandinavian countries than in the other countries. In Scandinavia as well as in the other countries chosen for comparison women score slightly higher than men on most measures of liberal/post-materialist values.

Individual Scandinavian countries have some outlier results in the ESS relevant to attitudes to mediatized conflicts involving religion. Sweden stands out (in 2014), for welcoming attitudes to Muslim migrants compared to a European average.<sup>9</sup> Norwegians rate their contact with people from other ethnic or racial groups less favourably than the European average.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Danish respondents give the most negative evaluation of laws against ethnic discrimination in the workplace, with 12 percent judging these ‘extremely bad for the country’, which is more than twice as high as anywhere else in Europe.

These differences between the Scandinavian countries belies the idea that Scandinavia represents a homogeneous cultural entity. Looking at the particular set of values asked about in the ESS 2014, individual Scandinavian countries are closer to other European countries than to each other on some items. Sweden is for example on several issues closer to Germany than to Denmark, which often comes out closer to the UK. This suggests that a variety of social and political factors are needed to explain attitudes to religious and cultural diversity. The differences between the countries should be related to different experiences of migration and institutional multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), combined with differences in the media representation of Islam and Muslims; certainly, recent studies point to a more negative media frame in Denmark than in Sweden (ECRI 2012; Lundby et al. 2018; see also Chapter 12), which may in turn reflect different recent histories. For example, experiences of crises such as the Muhammad cartoon affair have made the Danish debate about immigration and Islam somewhat more polarized than in other Scandinavian countries.

The CoMRel survey indicates that, within the group of respondents frequently discussing religion and religious extremism in the media, men are more inclined to engage in such discussions in public settings while women prefer private settings like family and friends. The ESS data support that women in Scandinavia seem to be more tolerant to religious diversity than men. Previous research points to the importance of exposure to other religious faiths, through

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<sup>9</sup> The ESS shows 37.6 percent of Swedes agreed with the statement ‘allow many to come and live here’ compared to a European average of 11 percent.

<sup>10</sup> In Norway, 48 percent rate their contact at 7–10 on a scale from 1 ‘extremely bad’ to 10 ‘extremely good’ compared to a European average of 57 percent.

personal encounters and in communities, for tolerance of religious diversity (Smith 2007, 351). The ESS includes questions about frequency and quality of contact with people of other cultures.<sup>11</sup> There is no overall pattern across countries relating frequency of contact to gender. In quality of contact however, a clearer pattern emerges. More women rate quality of contact very positively (7 and above on a scale of 1–10) than men in the seven countries in our comparison (except Germany), though the differences are small.

Further studies are needed to shed more light on the relationship between people's attitudes to religious and cultural diversity in society, and their liberal/post-materialist or traditional-authoritarian political orientation and gender. Nevertheless, the general tendencies and differences revealed in our survey set the stage for how contestations over religion are played out in the media and how various individuals in the population engage with them. In this way, the survey findings provide an important contextualization for the case studies in the coming chapters of this book.

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**11** Questions about contact were phrased 'How often do you have any contact with people who are of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people when you are out and about?' and 'Thinking about this contact, in general how bad or good is it?'. Answers given on a scale from 1 (extremely bad) to 10 (extremely good).

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