
Religion and Society. Over the past few years, religion has been frequently addressed in a broad range of WZB projects, both within the Research Area on Migration and Diversity and across research units. The role of religion is being considered in education and labor-market research as well as in research on political attitudes. A network of scholars interested in aspects of religion holds frequent meetings, discussing institutional, legal, political, and social dimensions of religious life.

Rules and How They Work The Relationship between Religion and State Shapes Our Attitudes towards Muslims

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Over the past two decades, the immigration of Muslims has become one of the most controversial political issues in most Western European countries. We often question the extent to which the values of Islam are compatible with those of Western societies. Academics are still divided over the extent to which these discussions differ from the more general disputes over immigration: Are Muslims simply a new group of migrants, or do they present their host countries with completely new challenges? What is certain is that religious practices such as wearing a hijab or a burka, as well as religious buildings such as mosques or minarets, are at the center of recent debates concerning immigration. So are Muslim immigrants primarily considered a religious or an ethnic minority?

Regulation plays a crucial role

Most studies examining our attitudes towards Muslim immigrants have used explanatory factors previously employed in studies on xenophobia. In the past few years, the role of contextual factors has been given more weight in research on xenophobia. These have proven that individual attitudes towards immigrants are influenced by a country's economic situation and the number of immigrants. In addition, closer attention has been paid to the influence of political regulations. Many studies have proven that integration policy and citizenship policy play an important role: In countries with a restrictive naturalization policy, individual attitudes are more negative than in countries with a more liberal policy.

These aspects are certainly useful in explaining negative domestic attitudes towards Muslims. But we feel that specific explanatory approaches should be formulated and tested as well, paying particular attention to the unique characteristics of Muslim immigration. In our study we have focused on the relationship between state and church. We believe that the way in which a state regulates religion exerts an influence on the attitudes of citizens towards Muslim immigration. A close link between state and church reinforces a Christian cultural

Summary: European democracies are far from secular, and matters of religious regulation cannot be reduced to abstract values or constitutional clauses. Under conditions of high state support of religion, accommodating new religious minorities involves the changing of existing rules and everyday habits. As a result, citizens see Muslim immigrants as a threat to their way of life and react with animosity to their practices and demands. This argument is supported with original data on religious regulation in 26 Swiss cantons.

identity and can foster negative attitudes towards new religious groups.

Even though Western European citizens are becoming less and less religious, collective identities and public institutions are still firmly anchored in historical religious traditions. These values and identities are not only propagated by religious communities, but also through education and the media. Thus religion is part of everyday life, even for those who would not describe themselves as religious. In Western European societies, religion and religious policy are much more than merely an abstract moral value system or general constitutional principles. In societies that describe themselves as secular in particular, religious-political institutions play an important role, and one which is very visible to the citizens: The state collects church tax, is responsible for religious education in public schools, works closely with religious organizations in the charity sector, and declares religious holidays. Under such conditions, any new religious group, with its requests for religious rights, can quickly be branded as a threat to a religious-cultural identity and to existing privileges.

Our argument for testing the relationship between state and church empirically was difficult in the sense that, across countries, there is hardly any comparable data on attitudes towards Muslims. Despite the topicality of the issue of religion, international surveys are still very much aimed at assessing attitudes towards immigrants in general. So we decided to hone in on the situation in Switzerland. Switzerland stands out due to its controversial minaret initiative: In a direct democratic referendum, a majority of the population voted to ban the building of minarets. But for us it was particularly significant that Switzerland, as a federal state with twenty-six cantons, exhibits great diversity in its religious policy, and particularly that state support for religion varies drastically from canton to canton. We were able to show that the variation within this regime is comparable to the differences that can be observed between Western European countries. While a clear division between church and state, similar to the French model, is evident in some cantons, a Scandinavian-style system of state churches exists in others. This offered us the unique opportunity to examine the impact of various forms of religious policy on social unity within a confined space and under controlled conditions. In this way, Switzerland served as a kind of laboratory for the whole of Europe.

In order to gauge individual attitudes, we used data from the 2011 Swiss voter polls, which included for the first time questions examining attitudes towards the hijab and the building of minarets, rather than just towards Muslims themselves. Following the example of Jonathon Fox's 2008 Religion and State Project, we also measured the regulation of religion at canton level. The Religious Support Index measures, among other things, whether schools provide Christian religious education, whether churches and church-run aid organizations are financially supported, whether church taxes are levied, religious holidays are protected by law, and whether cantonal flags bear any religious symbols.

Our results prove that state promotion of religion is closely intertwined with the attitudes of the population. In cantons in which traditional Christian cultural identity is reinforced by the state, more of those surveyed were of the opinion that there are too many Muslim immigrants in the country. They were also more likely to have the view that Muslims should not have the right to build minarets. The same applied when it came to the question of wearing the hijab in public.

What is especially interesting is that this result is primarily linked to symbolic-cultural aspects of state policy, rather than to purely economic factors—so to statutory religious holidays, religious education in state schools or even religious symbols on cantonal flags—or to regulations that affect the population, such as church tax. This can be explained by the fact that, in the context of a strong religious-cultural saturation of public life, religious newcomers are more likely to be seen as a threat to extant traditions and lifestyles. This is because any religious-political concession to the Muslim minority would always entail a renouncement of some of the privileges and customs enjoyed by the majority religion. When state and religion are more clearly separated, there is less at



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stake. Muslims are then perceived less as competitors, and rights are conceded to them more readily. Moreover, this always seems to be the broad cultural consensus within a population, as religious and secular citizens do not differ at all in their attitudes towards Muslims.

The findings of our study represent a significant contribution to the current debate on immigration, as well as to the fundamental question of the relationship between religion and democracy in modern Western European societies. First of all they prove that, alongside questions of demography and the economic situation, political contexts and institutional roles are also decisive factors in the explanation of attitudes towards immigration. At the same time, they emphasize the importance of considering the specifics of Muslim immigration when attempting such an explanation. Muslims are perceived as a cultural-religious threat to societies whose collective identities and public institutions are much less secular than they claim to be. So in order to understand the attitudes of the majority towards Muslims and their religious rights, it is clearly more important to examine the dominant institutions of religious regulation, rather than considering integration policy in general.

In this respect, a link can be made between immigration research and religious research. Experts in the economics of religion such as Brian Grim and Roger Finke have already assumed that restrictive religious policy can lead to social tensions and inter-faith conflicts. In addition to this, our results suggest that even a liberal religious policy can have unintentional and damaging consequences for the coexistence of religions within a society.

This conclusion is relevant when it comes to the theory of democracy. The classical liberal demand for a clear division between state and religion has found itself on the defensive in recent times. In Western Europe, state support of religion is not only widespread, it is also classified as unproblematic by many researchers. Our results, however, sound a note of caution. They prove that wherever the state prioritizes certain religions on a political level, democratic values such as religious tolerance, freedom and equality can be substantially affected.

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