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# CHURCH AFFILIATION AND TRUST IN THE STATE: SURVEY DATA EVIDENCE FROM FOUR NORDIC COUNTRIES

## *Abstract*

Reforms in state-church relations in the Nordic countries have been a center of academic discussion in the last few decades. Previous research has found that the bond between the Nordic states and their national churches remains strong. However, the effects of these ties on the individuals' perceptions seem to have been neglected. Utilizing the European Social Survey data, this research examines the effect of religious affiliation on trust in the state. Descriptive findings show that individuals belonging to the national churches trust the state the most and that other Protestants trust the state more than those with no religion. However, linear regression reveals that when controlling for level of religiosity, those belonging to the national churches remain the most trusting, but other Protestants exhibit the least amount of trust. We suggest that this is an indication of the distinctive position of this group, which should be researched further.

**Keywords:** religion, church and state, Nordic countries, trust in the state, free churches, national churches

## Introduction

The ties between state and church are at the heart of the scholarly discussion of religion in the Nordic countries. In 2011, the *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* presented a special issue on state and religion, which was comprised of five papers, each studying the state-church relations in a different Nordic country. Using legal and financial regulations, Pettersson (2011) queries the extent to which the state-church disestablishment of 2000 in Sweden has indeed led to a separation of the state and national church. In her research of Norway, Schmidt (2011) uses legislative and constitutional documents to examine the direction of the state-church relations, particularly emphasizing the 2008 constitutional changes and their effects. Kääriäinen (2011) scrutinises the Finnish attempts to accommodate religious pluralism, and the terms of the legal position of different religious establishments in Finland. Vejrup Nielsen and Kühle (2011) discuss the close relations between the state of Denmark and the Danish national

church as a reciprocal relationship, in which the state gives the church a favourable treatment and gains a level of control over it. Petursson (2011) interviews key decision makers to learn about the gradual changes in the state-church relations in Iceland. All five studies argue that despite a recent movement towards equal rights for religious organizations, a strong bond is sustained between the states and their respective Lutheran Evangelical churches.

The works published in the special issue have covered in a thorough and methodical way these bonds at the macro level. However, they have not discussed the effects that these relations have on the individual's perspective. Our study aims to extend the discussion to include the micro level, and thus to provide a more comprehensive picture of the state-church ties. Using survey data, we aim to answer the question: *How does an individual's connection to the church influence his or her trust in the state?* We chose to use the measure of trust, since it captures the individual's feelings and point of view, rather than evaluating specific elements of state conduct. We suggest that there is a difference in the level of trust in the state between those who belong to the national churches, other Protestant churches (commonly called «free churches»), and those who have no religion. Additionally, we claim that the well-established connection between self-assessed religiosity and political trust (e.g. Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006) does not dismiss the distinct relationships between church belonging and trust in the state. Utilizing a quantitative analysis of data from the European Social Survey (2008, 2010), we explore this problem in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. Unfortunately the survey data from the European Social Survey does not include data from Iceland.

The ESS is a survey of individuals, conducted in an array of European countries since 2002. This dataset allows us to compare the Nordic countries, however, country-specific questions on religious affiliation were only asked since 2008. Additionally, for all countries but Denmark, we are able to differentiate between the groups of interest to this study: those identifying with the national church, other Protestants, and those with no religion. The dataset contains measures for trust in the parliament and trust in politicians, which together allow us to view individuals' feelings towards the state. We predict that those belonging to the national churches will feel more positively about the state than those who affiliate with other Protestant churches or those who do not have a religion.

In the next section, we review the existing debate on the two key elements of this work: the relations between trust in institutions and religiosity, and the political history of churches in the Nordic countries. First, we discuss trust in institutions and review previous research on the relationship between values and opinions on the one hand, and religious affiliation or religious beliefs on the other. Second, we present the historical context of national churches in the Nordic countries, as well as the current roles of these churches vis-à-vis the state. Furthermore, we provide a detailed description of our methodology, which includes the hypotheses, relevant variables, and method of analysis. In the fourth section, we present our findings and discussion, and finally, we conclude and make suggestions for future research.

## Literature review

Trust in the state has been noted in the literature as a cardinal element of democracy (Newton 2001; Inglehart 1999). The connection between political trust and the strength of democracy can be explained by the theoretical conceptualization of social capital. Social capital can be seen in the social sciences as having various meanings, all revolving around the idea of social ties being an important asset, both to the individual and to society (Portes 2000). For the purpose of this paper, we follow Putnam's (2001) view of social capital as political trust, which is necessary for the creation of associations between individuals. In turn, these associations are necessary for the creation and consolidation of democracy (Putnam 2001). As a clarification of trust in institutions, Devos et al. (2002) explain: «If someone trusts an institution, it implies that he or she believes that this collective entity, on the whole, is competent, fulfills its obligations, and acts in responsible ways» (2002: 484). This view of trust as a measure of satisfaction and efficacy is in line with Dalton's (1998) typology of political support, in which he places trust as a form of evaluation of the political system in general, and political institutions in particular.

Previous research has discussed the origins of trust in the state, and examined possible causes in the national and individual levels (Job 2005; van der Meer 2010; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Newton 2001). Several studies show that, when compared with other regions, Nordic countries rank very high in political trust in national institutions (e.g. Listhaug and Ringdal 2008; Catterberg and Moreno 2006). Furthermore, previous research indicates the importance of religiosity as a determinant of trust and other forms of social capital. In their exploration of the social role of religion in the United States of America, Putnam and Campbell (2012) emphasize the important role religion plays in constructing social capital and societal cohesion. This tie is consistently found in empirical research looking at the effect of religiosity on civic engagement (e.g. Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006) as well as the effect of social networks on religiosity (Stroope 2012). Focusing on the relations between religion and trust in institutions, Devos et al. (2002) found a positive correlation between religious affiliation and trust in institutions in Switzerland. However, they do not explore whether this is a result of the religious affiliation itself, or the individuals' self-assessed religiosity.

The history of the church in the Nordic countries offers an exceptional opportunity to study the relationship between religion, state, and church. At the time of the Reformation, Protestantism was introduced as the official religion of the state in a majority of Northern European countries, undoubtedly the single most influential event responsible for shaping the current religious and cultural landscape in these nations. With the Reformation, the state took control over the church to an extent unseen beforehand. Llobera (1994) discusses this event and explains that, «once the unity of Christendom was broken, the oneness of society could only mean that the national church completely coincided with the national state» (1994: 135–136). He further argues that while these «national churches» became subject of the state, the state generally did not interfere with spiritual matters. Nevertheless, the state church served as a social insti-

tution for values and morals, which the state used to transmit ideology. Similarly, Anthony Marx (2005) claims that leaders in the early modern times were aware of the significance of social cohesion in achieving a strong and stable level of power, which led to social institutions, such as the church, being of utmost importance. In line with this, he maintains «That the social bonds of religion could or would be used as the basis of national cohesion is not surprising, for faith was then the most pervasive form of identity among the populace whose loyalty was sought by state rulers» (2005: 25).

Furthermore, the state was able to use the church for various purposes so that the church (and thus the state) formed an integral component in the everyday life of people. Bäckström et al. (2004) present this virtual unity of state and church in the case of Sweden as they explain that the church was previously in charge of welfare, healthcare, and education, and in that way, the church and the state served as one unit (2004: 23–24). Similarly, Kääriäinen et al. (2009) describe that the bond between the state and the church has historically been very important in Finland as, «the religious homogeneity of the people was seen in Finland as a condition for the success of the state’s policies of internal integration» (2009: 13).

These key characteristics of the church-state relationship are still prominent in the Nordic countries today. This relationship takes different forms in each of the four countries, though there are many similarities in the expressions of it. In Denmark, the Lutheran Evangelical Church of Denmark still holds its position as the state church. While small changes can be seen in practice and public opinion over the past two decades, no official alterations have taken place in the firm church-state relationship (Vejrup Nielsen and Kühle 2011; Christoffersen 2006). The church conducts civil registration and is by law the authority in charge of burials for all people regardless of faith. In relation to this, the authors argue that, «it has often been difficult to tell the church and the state apart» (Vejrup Nielsen and Kühle 2011: 184).

While the Church of Sweden no longer serves as a formal state church, it does, nevertheless, play a role as a national church. Specific legislation governs the organization’s structure, sustaining an important tie to the state that other organizations operating in Sweden do not have. This includes the church providing funeral services for all citizens, the requirement to remain a democratic organisation, its commitment to serve all regions of the country, functioning as the official and mandatory religion of the monarch, and the obligation to be open for all to take part in (Alwall 2000; Bäckström et al. 2004). Though the last 20 years saw a significant organizational change in the state-church relationship with the disestablishment of the state church in the year 2000, the ties of the state and church in Sweden are still very strong (Pettersson 2011).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland holds a unique status, which is relatively autonomous of the state. According to Kääriäinen (2011), while the Church of Finland has a high level of internal autonomy, it is still significantly tied to the state on the financial and administrative level. For example, similar to its Swedish and Danish counterparts, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is responsible for maintenance of cemeteries. A new Burials Act was enacted in 2004 giving other organizations this right, but it had very limited implications in practical terms (Kääriäinen 2011: 169; Kääriäinen et al. 2009: 14).

Norway's church and state have officially separated by a constitutional amendment in May 2012. Describing the period that led to this separation, Schmidt (2011) argues that while Norway is moving towards an official change in the state-church relations, the Church of Norway still has a distinctive role as Norway's folk church. This role is described as a means to uphold the Norwegian cultural and historical heritage. Schmidt (2011) further states that even after a formal separation, the Church of Norway will have important ties to the state. These ties are mainly reflected in the church being funded through public means and just as in the other nations, its responsibilities in relation to the practical aspects of burials.

As presented above, the national churches provide services for the state, suggesting that church and the state are still strongly connected in the four nations of study. For example, while other faiths conduct separate funeral ceremonies, the national churches serve as the official burial authorities for all citizens. One reason for this agreement is the state funding that the churches receive, which exists, at least to some extent, in all four countries in our study. Stark and Finke (2000) explain that «those who pay the piper control the tune» (2000: 229), and argue that the state, especially in Scandinavia, has a profound impact on church governance. This may lead to the church commonly being viewed as a government institution rather than a religious entity, which could provide a reason to believe that feelings towards the two are connected. This is argued by Berger et al. (2008) who state that, «Where religion is closely identified with the state, resentments against the latter almost inevitably come to include the former» (2008: 16). The perception of the church being a branch of the government could also mean that the state prioritizes its own political agenda over church doctrine. Not denying that there are mutual benefits in the relationship, the state currently uses the church to perform in matters other than spiritual, just as Marx (2005) and Llobera (1994) argue was the case in the past.

At the time of the survey, both the Church of Denmark and the Church of Norway served as official state churches, while the state churches in Finland and Sweden had been disestablished. In line with this, Kühle (2011: 115) describes the national churches in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway as having a low degree of autonomy from the state, while the churches in Sweden and Finland have considerably greater independence. Despite the differences, we will analyse the four countries in the same fashion for two important reasons. First of all, as stated above, objective legal ties remain between the national churches and the states even in those cases where the church has lost its official status as a state church. Secondly, the national churches represent deeply rooted cultural traditions that have formed over centuries (Ryman et al. 2005).

As mentioned by Schmidt (2011), given the long history of the established state churches, the national churches in the Nordic countries project a cultural representation, which quite possibly exceeds their role as spiritual entities, commonly referred to as «cultural religion» (Demerath 2000; Zuckerman 2008; Schmidt 2011). Since the state arguably represents the nation and its culture, one may argue that support for the two are linked. Interestingly, using data collected on students at a university in Swit-

zerland, Devos et al. (2002) present findings that suggest that values supporting culture and tradition are positively correlated with trust in institutions.

Despite the overwhelming dominance of the national churches in the Nordic countries, other religious denominations do exist and operate in these countries, including Protestant denominations, often referred to as «free churches». However, few studies have been conducted on those who affiliate with free churches specifically, perhaps partly as a result of limited data on this group (Hamberg and Pettersson 1994: 209). Given the distinctive relationship between the state and the Lutheran-Evangelical church, it is indeed of interest to explore feelings and experiences of those who belong to such religious organizations. Stark and Iannaccone (1994) mention the situation of free churches in Sweden. Their article was written prior to the disestablishment, but as church and state are not separate in the full sense (Pettersson 2011), their points may still apply. They state that:

Although Sweden permits other faiths to operate, it is not really true that they enjoy complete religious freedom, despite being called «free churches.» For example, evangelical Protestant groups often find it difficult to get the proper permits to qualify a building as suitable for public meetings and to otherwise deal with a state bureaucracy that has no sympathy for unnecessary challenges to state Lutheranism (Stark and Iannaccone 1994: 238).

It is possible then that those belonging to free churches, also referred to in this study as other Protestants, may feel frustrated with the state. A similar notion was presented by Plesner (2001) who describes church and state in Norway as she claims that, «a state church system in itself is not necessarily in conflict with the principle of religious freedom from a strict legal point of view, but that it creates certain tensions both in relation to the rights of members of the state church and members of other faith communities» (2001: 15). Furthermore, with the case of Denmark, Lodberg (2000: 53) explains the predicament of having a functioning state church as well as a commitment to freedom of religion. He argues that despite increasing pluralism the Church of Denmark has avoided collaborating with other religious organizations, which may indeed be a reason for tension between the national churches and free churches. Additionally, Stark and Finke (2000) state that, despite a shift towards religious deregulation, «the stigmas attached to its competitors by the old monopoly faith will linger, sustaining various forms of prejudice and discrimination» (2000: 201).

The complex structure of religion, church affiliation, culture and tradition, and support for the state will be examined in this article. Based on its unique history, we predict that in the Nordic case, national church affiliation will be positively correlated with trust in the state even when controlling for religious beliefs. We also expect affiliation with other Protestant churches to be negatively correlated with trust in the state as such churches have not had the close tie to the state, have not received the special attention that the Lutheran-Evangelical churches have, nor do they represent national culture to the extent that the national churches do. In the next section, we will present the methods we use in our examination of these connections.

## Methods

### *Hypotheses and data*

As presented in the previous two sections, we believe that the key relationships of study are those between institutional trust and affiliation to national churches, other Protestant churches, or no religion. In this study, we theorize that church affiliation influences trust in the state, rather than vice versa. We have two reasons for this; First, belonging to a church (whether free church or national church) is often a situation a person is born into, rather than a choice made later in an individual's life. It is strongly associated with family traditions and upbringing, as people in the Nordic countries have frequent encounters with the church throughout their life (Zuckerman 2008: 150). We therefore believe that it is more likely that being raised in a certain religious tradition would affect their view of the state, rather than the other way around. Second, the social relationships within a community (such as a free church) undoubtedly serve as strong agents of socialization for values and attitudes (e.g. Stryker 1980). In line with this, we argue that the position of free church organizations in relation to the state may foster a sense of discrimination (e.g. Stark and Finke 2000). These feelings would then influence the trust they feel towards the state as a whole; Nevertheless, we do not deny that it is possible for trust in the state to precede church belonging, or that a disposition towards trust will affect both stands, but as presented above, we believe this is less common. Our hypotheses are consequently:

- H1:* Those who belong to the national churches score higher on trust in the state than those who belong to other Protestant churches and individuals with no religious affiliation.
- H2:* Those who belong to other Protestant churches score lower on trust in the state than those who belong to the national churches and individuals with no religious affiliation.
- H3:* Individuals with no religious affiliation score lower than those belonging to the national churches but higher than those belonging to other Protestant churches on trust in the state.

We tested the hypotheses with comparisons of means through Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and multiple linear regressions. We used data from the European Social Survey to investigate the problem of study. The data is available on multiple European countries and was collected in five rounds (so far) between 2002 and 2010, and the two latest rounds (2008 and 2010) contained the variables of interest. We initially tested for the effect of specific rounds, but no significant difference between the two rounds was found. We therefore used the two rounds together. We singled out our four countries of interest: Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

The question on religious affiliation asked in the questionnaire was «Do you consider yourself as belonging to any particular religion or denomination?» This suggests personal identification with a religious organization and does not account for official membership, although we can expect a large degree of overlap between belonging and

membership. Nonetheless, it is important to note that when we use the term «church affiliation» in this paper, we refer to religious belonging in the subjective sense, and not necessarily to objective membership.

The distribution of religious denominations can be seen in Table 1. Here, we present the number of respondents who belong to national churches, other Protestant Churches (Pentecostalism, «Free Church,» Advent Church, and «Other Protestant»), other Christians (e.g. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and «Other Christian denominations»), and other religion (e.g. Islam, Judaism, «Eastern religions,» and «Other non-Christian religions»).

In our main model, we only included data on individuals who identify with one of our three groups of interest: national churches, no religion, or other Protestant. By focusing on these alone, we were to some extent able to control for immigrant backgrounds and individuals who relate to a different religion as a component of a culture other than that of study. Moreover, these individuals may have an entirely different perspective on trust in the state that is beyond the scope of this research. Additionally, we controlled for being born in a different country in our initial model and found the effect to be insignificant. Consequently, we removed the variable from our final model. While we have a large sample of those affiliated with the national church and those with no religion, the low number of other Protestants in our sample is indeed a limitation to the study. Nonetheless, the number was large enough to produce significant results.

**Table 1. Distributions of religions in the country-specific questions**

|                  | Finland |       | Denmark |       | Norway |       | Sweden |       | Total |     |       |
|------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-----|-------|
| National Church  | 1056    | 54.7% | 859     | 54.6% | 1500   | 45.8% | 781    | 22.9% | 3337  | 859 | 43.1% |
| Other Protestant | 27      | 1.4%  |         |       | 98     | 3.0%  | 65     | 1.9%  | 190   |     |       |
| No Religion      | 795     | 41.1% | 632     | 40.2% | 1499   | 45.8% | 2386   | 70.0% | 5312  |     | 52.2% |
| Other Christian  | 41      | 2.1%  | 38      | 2.4%  | 86     | 2.6%  | 104    | 3.1%  | 269   |     | 2.6%  |
| Other Religion   | 13      | 0.7%  | 43      | 2.7%  | 92     | 2.8%  | 71     | 2.1%  | 219   |     | 2.2%  |
| Total            | 1932    | 100%  | 1572    | 100%  | 3275   | 100%  | 3407   | 100%  | 10186 |     | 100%  |

As the Danish version of the ESS survey did not include a breakdown of those belonging to the national church and other Protestants, we were unable to use data from Denmark in the two main models where we compared national church and other Protestant. However, Denmark is included in the third and fourth models, which explore differences between Protestants and those with no religion. Even though Protestants in this case also include those who identify with free churches, a large majority of Protestants in Denmark (and indeed in the Nordic countries overall) belong to the national churches. Moreover, International Religious Freedom Report (2011) presents religious demograp-

hics in Denmark, suggesting that other Protestant churches make up a very small minority of the population, with Baptists being the largest at around 0.1 per cent of the population. Arguably, the difference between «Protestants» in our study and those belonging to the national church in Denmark is minimal. Furthermore, given the similar context with the Lutheran Evangelical church in Denmark and the other Nordic nations in our study, we expect the findings in relation to differences between the national church and other Protestants for Norway, Sweden, and Finland, to also hold in Denmark, an assumption that we nonetheless are unable to test with the current data.

### *Dependent variables*

As our two dependent variables, we have chosen «trust in the parliament» and «trust in politicians.» We believe that these two components of trust are crucial in providing an overview of an individual's feelings towards the state. However, it is important to emphasize that these are proxy measures of trust in the state. The state could have many meanings and representations, including legal, cultural, political and social elements. The two variables we chose to use represent some of the state's political aspects. Previous research shows that trust in one political institution tends to be positively correlated with trust in other institutions (Grönlund and Setälä 2007; Christensen and Læg Reid 2005). Therefore, although not all of the state's political institutions are represented in this research, we believe that the findings could be cautiously generalized to trust in the state.

Furthermore, we have chosen to include the variables «trust in politicians» and «trust in the parliament» in our research because they represent two prominent and substantial elements of state activity. Politicians are often an individual's first point of contact or association with the state, while the parliament shapes the state policy, and provides a strong representation of it. Together, these variables provide a range of state representations. Moreover, our findings show that the parliament receives a substantially higher level of support than politicians. This provides us with a range of levels of support as well as a range of substantial political representations. The variables are both coded between 0 and 10, where 0 means «no trust and all» and 10 means «complete trust.» These two representations of the elusive concept of the state receive different levels of support: «Trust in the parliament» has a mean of 5.87 and the mean of «trust in politicians» is 4.82.

### *Independent variables*

We constructed two dummy variables of church affiliation. The first one is called «Other Protestant» and is coded as 1 for respondents identifying with other Protestant churches and 0 for national church or no religion. The second dummy variable is called «No Religion» and is coded as 1 for respondents with no religion and 0 for other Protestants and those identifying with the national churches. This makes national church the reference category meaning that a 0 on both variables implies a respondent belonging to a national church. We included a self-assessment of religiosity to see its effects on trust as well as to control for religious beliefs in the relationship between trust and

church affiliation. In other words, this variable enabled us to look at the correlation between religiosity and trust, and between church belonging and trust, discretely. This variable is called «religiosity» and is based on the question «how religious are you?» It was coded from 0 to 10, 0 meaning «not at all religious» and 10 «very religious.»

Furthermore, we used a number of control variables. First, we created three dummy variables for country, one each for Norway, Finland, and Denmark, where Sweden is the reference category. The dummy variable for Denmark was only included for the third and fourth models, as explained earlier. We also included a variable of age, educational level, political orientation, political interest, and sex of the respondent as previous research shows their importance in the analysis of religiosity as well as trust (e.g. Bruce 2002; Stark and Finke 2000; Iannaccone 1998; Furseth and Repstad 2006; Devos et al. 2002; Patterson 1999; Guterbock and London 1983). The variable of respondent’s sex was named «Female,» where 1 means female and 0 means male. Age and education were measured in number of years, political interest between 1 and 4 where 1 means «very interested» and 4 «not at all interested,» and political orientation on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means «left» and 10 «right.» Another control variables that was considered but not included in the final models due to insignificance was «Immigrant.»

## Findings

### *Levels of religiosity and trust*

**Table 2. Comparison of mean scores between our three key groups**

|                      | National Church | Other Protestants | No Religion | sig. |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|------|
| N                    | 3310-3337       | 186-170           | 4709-4774   |      |
| Church Attendance    | 2.4924          | 4.2421            | 1.7690      | ***  |
| Praying              | 3.3322          | 5.8842            | 1.8899      | ***  |
| Religiosity          | 5.20            | 7.30              | 2.98        | ***  |
| Trust in Parliament  | 5.93            | 5.74              | 5.74        | ***  |
| Trust in Politicians | 4.88            | 4.81              | 4.60        | ***  |

Table 2 displays significant differences between the three groups in our study. The number of respondents in each group is different, reflecting both the groups’ representation in the population and the differences in the questions asked in different countries and rounds of the survey. For reasons described in the methods section, the group of «No Religion» is the only one that includes Denmark in it. The three groups hold significant and consistent differences in their religious behavior as well as self-assessed religiosity. This has been measured through analysis of variance (ANOVA), which is a statistical test that analyses the significance of the differences in means between groups. The results show that those with no religion score lowest in the three measures – praying, attending church, as well as their level of religiosity. Those who identify with the nati-

onal churches were consistently in the middle on these three measures, while other Protestants scored the highest on these measures.

The picture changed regarding measures of trust. Those belonging to national churches exhibit the highest levels of trust in both the parliament (5.93) and politicians (4.88), which is in line with our initial hypotheses. However, those with no religious affiliation have the same mean score (5.74) of trust in the country's parliament as other Protestants. Moreover, other Protestants have higher trust in politicians (4.81) than those with no religion (4.60). The differences between the groups are significant at less than 0.01. This means that we can be more than 99 per cent certain that the differences between the groups in our sample also hold in the population. These results counter our hypothesis that other Protestants have lower levels of trust. Since levels of trust in the state and religiosity have shown to be correlated with each other, this could, as argued earlier, be due to the high levels of self-assessed religiosity of other Protestants. This form of bivariate analysis does not allow us to examine the relations between church belonging and trust in political institutions separately from the relation between trust in these institutions and self-assessed levels of religiosity. To account for this complex picture we conducted linear regressions. Within the models, we tested for the assumptions underlying multiple regression. The residuals were normally distributed and no problems were found with multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, or linearity. This confirms that multiple linear regression is an appropriate technique for our data and specific models.

### *Results of regression analysis*

In Table 3 below, we present linear regression models with the dependent variables «trust in parliament» and «trust in politicians.» In this table, the independent variables are (1) church affiliation, in which other Protestants and those who do not belong to a religion are compared to those who belong to the national churches; (2) religiosity is used to identify the discrete effects of church affiliation. Furthermore, we controlled for the effect of country, sex, education, political orientation, political interest, and age in this model.

The results in Table 3 show a significant effect of the independent variables. As expected following previous research (e.g. Devos et al. 2002), an individual's self-assessed level of religiosity has a positive effect on trust in the state. In addition to this effect, by looking at the size of the coefficients, we can see that «Other Protestants» and «No Religion» have significantly less trust in the parliament and in politicians than those identifying with the national church. This means that when controlling for all the other variables in the model, we can see a distinct relationship between church belonging and trust in the state. It is interesting to see that the two groups differ in their attitude towards the state: «Other Protestants» have a lower score of trust in the country's parliament (-0.558) than those with no religion (-0.191). The difference is smaller, yet substantial, relating to trust in politicians: «Other Protestants» score 0.411 lower than those who belong to the national churches, while those with no religion score only 0.168 lower than those who belong to the national churches. We therefore see that

church affiliation has a significant effect on trust in the state, which is isolated from the effect of religiosity. Our adjusted r-squares are 0.082 and 0.097 respectively, which means that our models roughly explain between eight and ten percent of the variation in political trust.

In other words, the findings confirm our three hypotheses and demonstrate a clear scale, in which those who belong to the national churches trust the state the most, those with no religion trust the state less, and those who belong to other Protestant denominations have the least trust in the state. Interestingly, had we not controlled for religiosity, our results would have been largely different. As is presented above, the mean level of trust in politicians is actually higher for «Other Protestants» than for «No Religion,» and the two groups have the same mean trust in the Parliament. However, when controlling for religiosity, the relationship changes drastically.

**Table 3. The differences between national church (reference category), other Protestants, and no religion in Sweden (reference category), Finland and Norway**

|                       | <b>Trust in Parliament</b> | <b>Trust in Politicians</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (Constant)            | 6.382                      | 5.714                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Other Protestants     | -.558                      | -.411                       |
|                       | .001***                    | .006***                     |
| No Religion           | -.191                      | -.168                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .001***                     |
| Religiosity           | .067                       | .092                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Age                   | -.009                      | -.009                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Interest in Politics  | -.537                      | -.548                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Political Orientation | .057                       | .038                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Female                | -.133                      | .141                        |
|                       | .006***                    | .002***                     |
| Years of Education    | .077                       | .027                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Finland               | -.707                      | -.482                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Norway                | -.153                      | -.031                       |
|                       | .006***                    | .553**                      |
| Adjusted R Square     | .097                       | .082                        |
| N                     | 7918                       | 7937                        |

\*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05

Table 4 displays linear regression models with the dependent variables «trust in parliament» and «trust in politicians.» In this table, the independent variables are (1) church affiliation, in which Protestants are compared to those who do not belong to a religion; (2) level of self-assessed religiosity is used in the same manner as in Table 3. We again control for the effect of country, gender, education, political interest, political orientation, and age. As explained in the methods section, these models test whether the results of the first two could apply to Denmark as well. As in the first two models, the results in this table show a positive and significant correlation between trust in country’s parliament and politicians, and a person’s level of religiosity. Moreover, we see that Protestants, the vast majority of whom belong to the national churches, score higher on our two trust variables than those with no religion, suggesting that the findings of this research could indeed be relevant to Denmark as well.

**Table 4. The differences between no religion (reference category) and Protestants in Sweden (reference category), Denmark, Finland and Norway**

|                       | <b>Trust in Parliament</b> | <b>Trust in Politicians</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (Constant)            | 6.529                      | 5.580                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Protestant            | .186                       | .160                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Religiosity           | .059                       | .087                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Age                   | -.011                      | -.009                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Interest in Politics  | -.565                      | -.535                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Political Orientation | .061                       | .046                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Female                | -.137                      | .135                        |
|                       | .002***                    | .001***                     |
| Years of Education    | .064                       | .021                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Finland               | -.681                      | -.473                       |
|                       | .000***                    | .000***                     |
| Norway                | -.145                      | -.032                       |
|                       | .008***                    | .533                        |
| Denmark               | -.383                      | .033                        |
|                       | .000***                    | .598                        |
| Adjusted R Square     | .094                       | .082                        |
| N                     | 9331                       | 9348                        |

\*\*\*p<0.01 \*\*p<0.05

## Discussion and conclusions

Our research question asks: *How does an individual's church affiliation influence his or her feelings towards the state?* As is presented above, there are strong historical, legal and financial ties between the state and the church in the Nordic countries. These ties have arguably led to a differentiated view of the state by those who belong to different religious denominations. In accordance with the fact that the national churches receive support from the state, and also provide services for and on behalf of the state, individuals who identify with the national churches have relatively high levels of trust in the state. On the other hand, other Protestants could feel deprived by the lack of support their churches receive, and have relatively weak trust in the state.

The empirical evidence presented in this research show that the strong ties between the state and the national churches in the Nordic countries are not limited to the legal and national level, but also affect public opinion. A comparison of means showed that those who belong to the national churches had the highest levels of trust in the state, but those with no religion had lower levels of trust than other Protestants. However, a multiple linear regression revealed that when controlling for levels of religiosity, individuals who belong to the national churches had the highest levels of trust, and other Protestants had the lowest levels of trust in the state. The regression models also showed that the effect of church affiliation on trust in the state is discrete from the effect of religiosity. Thus, the correlation found in the literature between political trust and religiosity is accompanied by the new finding of the effect of church belonging on this trust.

It is important to note that these results are only valid for Sweden, Norway and Finland. As the data from the European Social Survey does not include Iceland, it was not part of our analysis. There is evidence that suggests that the situation is similar in Denmark, though the lack of differentiation between the Church of Denmark and the other Protestant churches in the ESS prevents us from achieving a similar conclusion when it comes to Denmark. Furthermore, support for the state is a complex concept, which could be measured in various ways. This study focuses on measures of trust, and a different measure could produce different outcomes.

Our study contributes to the understanding of micro level attitudes that reflect the state-church relationships on the macro level that were presented in the 2011 special issue. Moreover, our study adds to the body of literature on religiosity, religious affiliation, and values (e.g. Devos et al. 2002; Rokeach 1969; Roccas and Schwartz 1997; Schwartz and Huisman 1995), where we, by isolating the effect of religious beliefs, discover the unique characteristics and attitudes of individuals associated with the free churches. It is indeed remarkable that this group is significantly less trusting in the state than those who belong to the national churches or no religion. We speculate that this may be because of the position that other religious organizations have with the state – that of a legitimate religion that nonetheless are not at par with the, explicitly or implicitly, favored national church.

Several questions remain open, and could form a base for future research. First, the expansion of our findings to the other Nordic countries – Denmark and Iceland – would

be an important step. Additionally, a longitudinal study could examine the trends in the relationship between church affiliation and trust in the state over time, and to relate these trends to changes in the political situation in the different countries. Furthermore, it is important to consider the possibility that levels of trust in the state are largely different between specific free church denominations, where some are likely less accepting of contemporary government policies than others. Finally, to capture the meaning of the church, the state, and the relationship between the two as perceived by individuals, a qualitative study could be conducted. Such a study could be particularly interesting if it includes individuals who identify with free churches. In summary, the exceptional position of national churches in the Nordic countries provides an opportunity to improve the sociological understanding of the relationship between state, church, and religion.

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