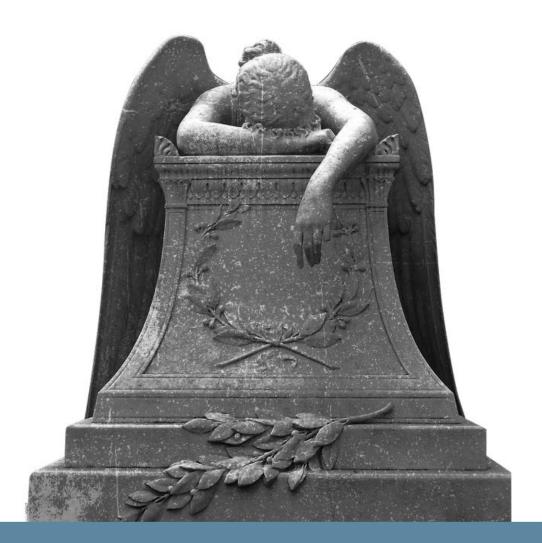# Did Secularisation Kill God?

Changes in Religiosity and Values Among Natives and Migrants in Europe

Tommaso Virgili and Benedetta Panchetti

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Wilfried
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About
the authors

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Executive summary

This study examines religiosity and secularisation trends among natives and migrants in the EU, exploring the variations across different member countries and societal groups, as well as the implications of these trends for the acceptance of liberal democratic values and societal cohesion.

The findings reveal an overarching pattern of increasing secularisation in Europe, evident both in personal religiosity and societal values. However, this tendency varies across EU member states and different religious and social groups. North-western, mainly Protestant, countries emerge as the most secularised, while eastern, mainly Orthodox ones exhibit higher levels of religiosity and more conservative values. When examining generational shifts, it becomes evident that secularisation tends to increase with younger generations, although this progression is not strictly linear and may feature fluctuations, even in traditionally secular countries.

Concerning immigrant populations, the study first provides a statistical overview of the major immigrant groups across several EU nations, from a historical and contemporary perspective. It then addresses religiosity, secularisation and values. Overall, immigrants exhibit higher levels of religiosity and conservatism compared to native populations, although they tend to align more closely with national averages over time and across generations. Muslims stand out as they prove more resistant than any other religious group to secularisation and acculturation processes, even across generations. Ukrainians also present distinct peculiarities, as they manifest a unique pattern of increased religiosity alongside increased acceptance of secular values.

Finally, the study discusses the implications of religiosity for social cohesion in diverse societies and the challenges they pose. Research highlights a clash between traditional religious values and modern liberal ideals, underscored by the negative correlation between religiosity and the acceptance of secular values. This issue is particularly sensitive among immigrants, especially those originating from more religious and conservative backgrounds, who may have trouble adapting to the European normative framework. Consequently, the study advocates for policies that promote secularism and socio-cultural assimilation in order to foster societal cohesion while celebrating diversity. It concludes by offering specific policy recommendations for the centre–right political family which will allow it to pursue these objectives.

Introduction

Why this study? The relevance of religion to migration and integration

Any observer of contemporary Europe cannot but be struck by secularisation as an increasingly prevalent legal and social reality. The influence of religion and religious authorities, which was prominent just a few generations ago, seems to have significantly diminished in shaping individual beliefs, behaviours, and collective social and political decisions.

Yet even in today's secularised Europe, the social significance of religion should not be underestimated. Religion remains a powerful force that shapes societal culture, and its values leave an imprint on the ethos, worldviews and ideologies of people, regardless of their individual religiosity.[1] The reverse is also true: the more a society distances itself from religion, the more its values are bound to change.[2] This in turn affects the status of religion and its transmission from one generation to the next, which is destined to diminish if there is a discrepancy between religious values and the evolving dominant ethos.[3]

Given the importance of religion in shaping individual and societal culture and norms, we can expect it to be a primary factor in the immigrant integration process. To quote Richard Alba and Nancy Foner,

> In Western Europe, religion has become a bright boundary that separates a significant proportion of immigrant minorities from the mainstream or the cultural, institutional core of their societies. Or to put it somewhat differently, religion is a key site for the demarcation of boundaries between the native majority and individuals of immigrant origin, many of whom are perceived as 'other' because of their religion.[4]

[1] P. Norris and R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43, 54 and 134.
[2] C. Reynolds, 'Religion and Values in the ESS: Individual and Societal Effects', in M. J. Breen (ed.), *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence From the European Social Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[3] R. T. Cragun, 'The Declining Significance of Religion: Secularization in Ireland', in M. J. Breen (ed.), *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence From the European Social Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 28.
[4] R. Alba and N. Foner, *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 118.

In this study, we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. Are Europeans becoming increasingly secular, and what does this imply in terms of values?

2. Do levels of religiosity and secularisation differ between natives and immigrants?

3. Do large discrepancies between secularisation levels affect the acceptance of liberal democratic values, and consequently societal cohesion?

Theoretical background and definition of the terms

Religiosity

When we discuss the role of religion in a given society, we need to measure its impact based on people's religiosity. This is a polysemous and multidimensional term that can be assessed using different categories pertaining to an individual's formal affiliation, self-perceived identity, inner beliefs and the external manifestation thereof.[5] For instance, a person may be formally affiliated to a church by birth, and even consider herself part of it, without necessarily believing in God ('belonging without believing'), or, vice versa, hold spiritual convictions without feeling any attachment to an organised faith system ('believing without belonging'). Faith may also be a mere feeling or rather an individual practice (e.g. prayer), or a communitarian one (e.g. participation in religious services). Furthermore, belief may or may not reflect values and affect daily life choices and behaviours in terms of clothing, dietary requirements, sexual conduct, voting patterns and so on.

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[5] A. Guveli, 'Are Movers More Religious Than Stayers? Religiosity of European Majority, Turks in Europe and Turkey', *Review of Religious Research* 57/1 (2015); M. Aleksynska and B. R. Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe', *Review of Economics of the Household* 11/4 (2013).

Finally, religiosity has different degrees of intensity, culminating in what is known in literature and the media as religious fundamentalism. According to a widely accepted definition, fundamentalism is: 'The belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the . . . inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by the forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past'.[6]

Sociologist Ruud Koopmans has distilled fundamentalism into three interrelated tenets:

1.   the need to go back to unchangeable rules laid down in the past;

2.   the contention that only one religious interpretation is valid, and it is binding for all believers; and

3.   the claim that religious laws have priority over secular laws.[7]

Fundamentalism should not be confused with religious orthodoxy, which only refers to the belief in established dogmas, without any other implication. 'Orthodoxy is mere subscription to faith; fundamentalism, unconditional subjection to faith. Orthodoxy can be open; fundamentalism, always closed. Orthodoxy is generally traditional; fundamentalism, usually radical'.[8] Orthodoxy per se merely reflects on the personal sphere, while fundamentalism affects believers' social lives, causing them to oppose laws and behaviours that are in contrast with religious rules: 'fundamentalists . . . oppose the propagation of those secular and liberal views that are considered doctrinally blasphemous and socially destructive'.[9]

In this study, we shall attempt to capture and disentangle all these different aspects.

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[6]   R. Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups: A Comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41/1 (2015), 34.

[7]   Ibid.

[8]   D. Marbaniang, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Social Order: A Philosophical Perspective', paper presented at the National Seminar on Religious Fundamentalism and Social Order, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India, 26–7 February 2010.

[9]   Ibid.

Secularisation

Just like religiosity, secularisation is not a univocal concept. Two authoritative scholarly definitions have described it as 'the progressive autonomisation of societal sectors from the domination of religious meaning and institutions', and as 'a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere, and the concomitant differentiation and specialisation of religion within its own newly found religious sphere'.[10]

We can connect secularisation to the different dimensions of religiosity examined above and describe it as:

- a decline in individual piety;

- a decline in attendance at religious services, which, depending on the theory, may imply a decline in individual piety or a privatisation thereof; and

- societal changes, including the separation of church and state and the erosion of core beliefs and values as shaped by religions.[11]

There are various theories postulating the drivers and dynamics of societal secularisation. The prevalent one in religious studies is the secularisation theory,[12] according to which modernisation, at different levels, brings about secularisation. This can be considered the outcome of a variety of factors, mainly cultural and economic: an increase in education and scientific knowledge brings about the decay of religious worldviews, while a growth in material wealth deprives religions of their main social function, namely providing reassurance in uncertain times and promoting a set of values and rules that guarantee the survival and perpetuation of the community. This process is exponential, in that individuals tend to comply with the dominant collective norms: the more secularisation advances, the less religious communities and leaders can exert their influence in society.[13]

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[10] R. F. Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline: What's Causing It, and What Comes Next?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 39.

[11] L. Halman and V. Draulans, 'How Secular Is Europe?', *British Journal of Sociology* 57/2 (2006); Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*; F. Molteni and F. Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe: A Multilevel and Multidimensional Analysis Based on the European Values Study', *Social Compass* 65/3 (2018).

[12] Molteni and Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe'.

[13] For an overview of the different theories, see F. Van Tubergen, and J. Í. Sindradóttir, 'The Religiosity of Immigrants in Europe: A Cross-National Study', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50/2 (2011); R. J. Barro and R. M. McCleary, *International Determinants of Religiosity*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper (Cambridge, MA, December 2003).

It should, however, be noted that there is no universal consensus on this trajectory. According to some, religiosity in the world is not declining but merely changing, as individuals, while increasingly refusing the medium of established religious institutions, are still developing their own spirituality.[14] Others adopt a market perspective and claim that, in modern democracies, religiosity is actually bound to increase, due to the higher supply and diversity of religions.[15] However, there does not seem to be much empirical evidence supporting these theoretical assumptions.[16]

Finally, a specific theory that becomes relevant, especially when dealing with minorities, is that of reactive religiosity, which postulates that the perception of discrimination or unfair treatment strengthens collective and/or individual religious identity.[17] Religiosity, from this perspective, becomes a proxy for national, ethnic or political identity.[18]

In the course of this study, we will engage with these different theories to test the trajectories of secularisation among both natives and immigrants.

Religious versus secular values

References to 'religious' or 'secular' values can appear extremely vague, or even controversial. After all, we introduced this work by saying that religion informs culture: where do we draw the boundaries between one and the other? And which religions or secular ideologies are we talking about? Certainly, the secular values of the EU are not the same as those of the Soviet Union; nor are the religious values of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin, both of which are openly pro-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights and have LGBT ministers, the same as those of radical Christian and Muslim preachers, some of whom even invoke the death penalty for homosexuals. Furthermore, we are aware that people may have overlapping identities in which different values coexist, or they may reinterpret established religions in a non-orthodox way that, in their view, neglects the letter of religion to save its authentic spirit.

[14] Molteni and Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe', 4.
[15] Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 13.
[16] R. F. Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 43.
[17] A. Just, M. E. Sandovici and O. Listhaug, 'Islam, Religiosity, and Immigrant Political Action in Western Europe', *Social Science Research* 43 (2014), 130.
[18] R. T. Cragun, 'The Declining Significance of Religion, 17.

With all these caveats in mind, we cannot deny the fact that all major religions have traditionally promoted a set of values (especially around gender roles, sexual self-determination and obedience to authorities) that are increasingly being abandoned due to the secularisation of societies, in favour of liberalism, individualism and self-determination.

According to Norris and Inglehart, religions have promoted pro-fertility norms that, in pre-modern societies with low levels of existential security, had the social function of ensuring the safe perpetuation of the community. This started to change with the improvement of human conditions.[19] Whether or not we espouse this theory, the connection between religiosity and traditional values is statistically proven: according to World Values Survey (WVS) data, the most secular countries in the world are also those with the most strongly pro-individual-choice norms, while the most religious ones are also those that oppose individual-choice values the most.[20] In terms of cultural macro-areas, the Muslim world emerges as both the most conservative and the most religious.[21]

We therefore agree with the relevant literature on the subject, and we define 'religious' or 'traditional' as being those values that, in core ethical matters such as gender roles, homosexuality, abortion, divorce and others, follow the main traditional religious guidelines and authorities. We define 'secular values' (also called 'liberal values'[22]) as those attitudes that, in these domains, promote individual self-fulfilment and emancipation from religious dogmas and religious authorities.[23]

Methodology and structure

This study aims to provide a policy-oriented assessment of the disparities in secularisation between the migrant and native populations in the EU, and the implications of these for social cohesion and political strategies for the European centre–right. To achieve this, we rely mostly on quantitative data on migration, religiosity and values from survey institutes and academic literature. We also engage with the relevant scholarly works on religiosity, secularisation theories and migrant integration.

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[19]   Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

[20]   Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 60 and 62.

[21]   Ibid., 35 and 60.

[22]   S. Astor and N. Dompnier, 'A Geography of Family Values in Europe', in P. Bréchon and G. Frédéric (eds.), *European Values: Trends and Divides Over Thirty Years*, vol. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[23]   Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 40; *WVS*, 'Findings and Insights'.

Our analysis is both longitudinal, highlighting diachronic trends in the matters of our concern, and cross-sectional, comparing existing differences between countries and groups. Regarding the choice of the sample countries, this has been made to respond to the specific objectives of each section, highlighting the main patterns and contrasts. Thus, to draw a picture of migration in Europe we follow the criterion of historical and numerical relevance for the migration phenomenon, which nowadays concerns the majority of member states; however, to address the secularisation of natives, we have selected a smaller spectrum of countries with the aim of maximising the variety of geographical location and secularisation patterns. As to the groups, we make a comparison between natives and migrants, including both newcomers and their descendants, and between different migrant groups. Special attention throughout the work is devoted to Ukrainians (due to their special situation in the European landscape resulting from the Russian invasion) and to Muslim migrants, because of their peculiar resistance to acculturation and secularisation patterns.

The study is structured into five sections. After this introduction, Section 2 provides a historical account of migration waves in what is now the EU, as well as a statistical picture of the current situation, with special attention paid to the countries receiving larger numbers of migrants. We look at both first- and second-generation migrants, with the caveat that data on the latter are not harmonised.

In Section 3, our focus shifts to the religiosity and values of native populations and how these have changed over time. After sketching a picture of the overall secularisation underway in Europe, we delve into a selection of countries, chosen to represent a variety of characteristics; thereby, we show that attitudes and trends vary greatly across the continent, both in terms of religiosity and values.

Section 4 is dedicated to an assessment of the religiosity and secularisation processes of migrants. At the macro-level, we compare them to the native populations, finding that migrants tend to have higher levels of religiosity and slower rates of secularisation. At the micro-level, we focus on Ukrainians and Muslim migrants, both of which groups exhibit distinct peculiarities.

In the last section, we draw conclusions regarding the normative implications of religiosity and secularisation, and explore how these impact social cohesion and the European centre–right. Finally we formulate policy recommendations aimed at preventing due respect for religious freedom from causing societal divisions and human rights violations.

A statistical picture of migration in the EU

In this section, we paint a picture of immigration to the EU, providing an overview of the historical background and paying particular attention to the prevalent groups that will be the subject of Section 4.

Before we proceed, we must offer one caveat: while multiple sources provide harmonised data on migratory movements, there is no comprehensive EU-wide database on ethnic minorities (including their religion) and second-generation individuals.[24] This is a consequence of the lack of uniformity between member states as to whether they gather these data and the criteria they use. Unlike in the Anglosphere, some EU countries do not officially collect statistics on ethnic and/or religious identities, and similarly there is no uniformity in how countries count second-generation individuals.[25] States also use different criteria and denominations to categorise them. For this reason, we were forced to conduct a country-by-country analysis.

We attempt to cover the most relevant EU countries in terms of population size and the impact of migration. We thus exclude smaller states as well as countries with less involvement in migration flows. Greece is not included due to its peculiar situation, primarily revolving around the undocumented migrants who enter the country from Türkiye. The Central and Eastern EU member states are examined collectively due to similar migration patterns.

For the purposes of this study and given the different legal status of EU citizens residing in another member state, we focus on non-EU immigration, except for making a few historical remarks and highlighting the changing dynamics. However, since official national statistics often include all non-citizens among the immigrant population, generic references to 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' should be understood to also include mobile EU citizens unless otherwise specified.

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[24] C. Balestra and L. Fleischer, *Diversity Statistics in the OECD: How Do OECD Countries Collect Data on Ethnic, Racial and Indigenous Identity?*, OECD Statistics Working Paper (Paris, 12 November 2018), 15–16.

[25] A notable case is that of France, which since 1978 has forbidden the collection of data on race, ethnicity and religious opinions unless the subject gives express consent, making only private qualitative research possible. A. LaBreck, 'Color-Blind: Examining France's Approach to Race Policy', *Harvard International Review*, 1 February 2021.

A brief historical background

Since the Second World War, Europe has experienced multiple waves of migration. Between 1950 and 1970, migration was predominantly from poorer southern and eastern European countries to the wealthier northern and western ones, driven by post-war industrial development and economic growth. Various bilateral agreements on quotas of foreign workers were signed for this purpose.[26] These migration waves also involved population movements from non-European countries, particularly Türkiye, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, due to colonial political relations and the economic bilateral agreements those countries signed, notably with Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.[27]

In this phase, European and non-European workers had limited rights and were expected to return home when their work was no longer needed. However, things turned out differently. Initially conceived to be temporary, these agreements had a lasting impact as the workers settled in the receiving countries and were additionally granted the right to family reunification.[28]

In the 1960s-1970s, decolonisation led to new migration patterns, as people from newly independent countries resettled in their former colonial powers for economic and political reasons. France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain were especially affected by this phenomenon.[29]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Eastern Europe experienced a wave of emigration as Communist regimes collapsed, while conflicts in the Balkans further increased immigration to Western Europe. Asylum requests thus surged in Western European countries, with Germany receiving the highest number of applications.[30] Meanwhile, the adoption of the Schengen agreement in 1985 led to the first set of European rules on migration and the consequent changes to national immigration laws.[31]

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[26] M. Colucci, 'L'emigrazione italiana verso i paesi europei negli anni '60 e '70', *Quaderni di Sociologia* 86/65 (2021).

[27] F. Loriaux, 'L'immigration marocaine en Belgique (1964-2004)', *Centre d'animation et de recherche en histoire ouvrière et populaire* (2004), 2–4; C. Van Mol and H. de Valk, 'Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective', in B. Garcés-Mascareñas and R. Penninx (eds.), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe: Contexts, Levels and Actors* (New York: Springer, 2015).

[28] Van Mol and De Valk, 'Migration and Immigrants in Europe', 59.

[29] Ibid., 33–4.

[30] Ibid., 36.

[31] L. Gabrielli, *Corridor Report on Spain: The Case of Ecuadorian and Moroccan Immigrants*, INTERACT Research Report, European University Institute (2015), 2.

The twenty-first century presented new challenges. In particular, after 2010 the Arab Spring and conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa led to a surge in the number of asylum seekers, which peaked with the 2015–16 migration crisis.[32] Countries implemented different measures to manage the influx of migrants. Germany took a bold step by accepting the largest number of asylum seekers,[33] but other countries also faced substantial asylum requests.[34] A new wave of asylum seekers, albeit with very different characteristics, started to arrive from Ukraine after the Russian attack in 2022.[35]

To summarise, since the end of the Second World War, Europe has witnessed complex and diverse migration patterns, influenced by economic, political and historical factors. While all European countries have experienced varying degrees of immigration and significant demographic changes due to migration over the decades, each has had its unique migration patterns and challenges, and these have shaped the respective policies and societies.

Among the most important changes, we must emphasise the development of increasingly religiously pluralistic societies, especially due to the significant increase of the Muslim population, particularly in Western Europe. Eastern EU countries have experienced a different trajectory: immigration flows were comparatively lower until the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, when these countries became the front line for the influx of Ukrainian asylum seekers into the EU.

In 2021, 2.3 million extra-EU immigrants arrived in the EU27. As of 1 January 2022, 23.8 million people (5.3%) of the 446.7 million people living in the EU were non-EU citizens.[36] Eurostat statistics indicate that in 2021, 827,000 people acquired citizenship of an EU member state, 85% of them being previously non-EU citizens. Moroccans, Syrians, Albanians and Turks were at the top of the list of naturalised people.[37]

[32] *International Organization for Migration*, 'Irregular Migrant, Refugee Arrivals in Europe Top One Million in 2015' (22 December 2015).

[33] J. Grote, *The Changing Influx of Asylum Seekers in 2014–2016: Responses in Germany. Focussed Study by the German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN)*, Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Nuremberg, 2018), 5.

[34] *Eurostat*, 'First Instance Decisions on Applications by Citizenship, Age and Sex – Annual Aggregated Data' (13 June 2023).

[35] *Eurostat*, 'Ukrainian Citizens in the EU' (November 2022); *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migration – Displacement from Ukraine' (October 2023).

[36] *Eurostat*, 'Migration and Migrant Population Statistics' (March 2023).

[37] *Eurostat*, 'Citizenship Granted to 827 000 People in 2021' (1 March 2023).

Current picture of migration

Belgium

Data about migration to Belgium mostly reflect the long-term consequences of both its bilateral agreements signed with Morocco and other countries and its generous naturalisation policies.

- As of 31 December 2022 the population of Belgium consisted of about 11.6 million people. Among them, non-Belgians accounted for slightly more than 1.5 million individuals, representing about 13.4% of the overall population. Belgian citizens of a 'foreign family background', as per the official definition, numbered around 2.5 million (21% of the population), while Belgian citizens of a 'Belgian family background' totalled about 7.7 million (65.5%).[38]

- In 2022 about 53% of the total number of Belgians of foreign background and non-Belgians were of non-EU origin. Among those, the most numerous were people of North-African descent, who accounted for 17.3% of the total proportion of non-EU citizens.[39] As concerns national origin, people of Moroccan descent represented the largest non-EU national group: in 2021 about 347,000 Moroccans lived in Belgium and 74% of them had dual Belgian citizenship.[40]

- During the 2015–16 migration crisis, Belgium saw a strong growth in asylum applications: in 2014 slightly less than 14,000 people applied for asylum, while in 2015 this number peaked at 39,000.[41] In 2015–16 Syrians formed the largest national group of asylum seekers; in 2020 they were surpassed by Afghan applicants.[42]

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[38] Belgium, *Statbel*, 'Diversité selon l'origine en Belgique' (8 June 2023).
[39] Ibid.
[40] *Centre Fédéral Migration Myria*, 'La migration en chiffres et en droits 2023. Cahier du rapport annuel. Population et mouvements' (24 April 2023), 6.
[41] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations' (2023).
[42] Ibid.

- The naturalisation rate for Syrians has boomed in the last few years. In 2021 the number of Syrians naturalised (about 3,400) almost caught up with that of Moroccans (3,700).[43]

- In 2022 Belgium granted temporary protection to about 61,700 Ukrainians.[44]

- In 2016 the Pew Research Center estimated that Muslims made up 7.6% of the overall population, and its projections indicated that by 2050 Muslims would form between 11.1% and 18% of the population.[45]

Denmark

Like other northern European countries, Denmark initially experienced immigration in the 1960s following the signing of bilateral working agreements—notably with Türkiye and Pakistan. However, immigration remained a marginal phenomenon until the 1980s, when a significant wave of asylum seekers arrived in the country. The turn of the century marked a critical juncture for Danish immigration policy, as it was made harder for immigrants to be granted asylum and receive permanent residence permits and family reunification visas.[46]

- In 2023 immigrants and their descendants accounted for 15.4% of the overall population, totalling approximately 5.8 million residents. In the last 20 years, from 2003 to 2023, this percentage has almost doubled.[47] Non-EU immigration predominates.[48]

- Turks and Pakistanis represent the oldest waves of immigration. In 2022 there were over 66,000 Turkish people and their descendants in Denmark, with around half of them second-generation

[43] Belgium, *Statbel*, 'Belgium Recorded 39,275 Nationality Changes in 2021' (16 June 2022).

[44] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.

[45] A. Cooperman, C. Hackett and A. Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, Pew Research Center (2017), 30.

[46] P. Mouritsen and C. Hovmark Jensen, *Integration Policies in Denmark*, Migration Policy Centre, INTERACT Research Report, Country Report 2014/06, 7–8.

[47] *Statistics Denmark*, 'Immigrants and Their Descendants' (2023). Under the Danish definition, an immigrant is defined as a person born abroad whose parents are both foreign citizens or were both born abroad, while a descendant is defined as a person born in Denmark whose parents are either immigrants or descendants with foreign citizenship.

[48] Ibid.

immigrants. Pakistanis share the same generational trend, although their numbers are lower.[49] These communities have experienced stable growth despite the 2004 introduction of strict laws on family reunification and naturalisation that have made it challenging for first-generation immigrants to enter the country and obtain Danish citizenship.[50]

- Immigration in the last decade has been marked by waves of asylum seekers, mostly Syrians and Afghans, although, compared to other EU countries, it has been a relatively modest influx. During the 2015–16 crisis, asylum applications peaked, with more than 20,800 requests in 2015.[51]

- In 2022 the country granted 32,000 temporary protection visas to Ukrainians.[52]

- Overall, the most significant migratory flows to Denmark over the decades have arrived from Muslim countries. The Pew Research Center estimated that Muslims made up about 5.4% of the overall Danish population in 2016. Projections for 2050 range from Muslims forming a minimum of 7.6% of the population in a zero-migration scenario, to 11.9% if things remain constant, to a maximum of 16% in a high-migration scenario.[53]

France

Due to France's colonial history, migration to the country dates back to the nineteenth century, and has since been nourished by work agreements, waves of decolonisation and the recent refugee crisis.

- In 2022 the number of immigrants[54] in France reached 7.0 million, accounting for 10.3% of the overall population (67.8 million). Of this figure, 2.5 million were naturalised French citizens.[55]

49 Ibid.
50 Mouritsen and Jensen, *Integration Policies in Denmark*, 7.
51 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
52 Ibid.
53 Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.
54 *Insee*, 'L'essentiel sur . . . les immigrés et les étrangers' (13 June 2023). As per the official French definitions, an 'immigrant' refers to a non-French person born abroad who subsequently immigrated to France, including naturalised French citizens who are binational immigrants. The terms 'foreigners' and 'foreign population' pertain to people residing in France who do not hold French citizenship. This includes immigrants who migrated and have never acquired citizenship, as well as individuals born in France to two non-French parents. Individuals born in France with at least one foreign parent are referred to as 'descendants of immigrants' and are identified by their foreign parent's country of origin. If both parents are immigrants, conventionally, the father's origin is retained.
55 *Insee*, 'L'essentiel sur . . . les immigrés et les étrangers'.

- The remaining 4.5 million immigrants represented the majority of the foreigners residing in the country. The total number of foreigners actually equalled 5.3 million, due to the 800,000 people who were born in France to two foreigner parents.[56]

- Of this 5.3 million, 13.5% came from Asia and 48.2% from Africa, with the Maghreb region alone (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) accounting for more than 35% of immigrants. Due to their colonial links, migrants from these three countries have represented the main national groups since the 1970s.[57]

- In total, in 2021 there were 7.35 million descendants of immigrants, accounting for 10.9% of the overall population.[58] The Maghreb region also dominates the second-generation landscape. Overall, comparing 2011 and 2021 data, descendants of migrants of African origin have surpassed those of European origin, with descendants of Algerians being the largest group (over 1.1 million people in 2021), followed by those from Morocco and Tunisia (together more than 1.3 million people).[59]

- Due to the 2015–16 migration crisis, asylum requests in France rose from fewer than 59,000 in 2014 to about 92,000 in 2017—not a dramatic increase compared to other EU countries. In 2015–16 the numbers of Sudanese claiming asylum surpassed those of both Syrian and Afghan origin[60] while from 2018 to 2022, Afghani asylum seekers were the leading national group.[61]

- In 2022 France granted about 66,000 temporary protection permits to Ukrainians.[62]

- Migration patterns have contributed to the growth of the Muslim population in France. The Pew Research Center estimated that there were 5.7 million Muslims in France in 2016, that is, 8.8% of the overall population. The study also projected that France would be among the top three countries in Europe in terms of its Muslim population by 2050, with the proportion of Muslims expected to range from a minimum of 12.7% to a maximum of 18% of the overall population.[63]

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 *Insee Références*, 'Immigrés et Descendants d'immigrés En France' (2023), 14 and 80.
59 Ibid, 12.
60 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.

Germany

Current statistical data about migration to Germany reflect both its long-term position as one of the EU's most attractive countries and the long-term consequences of bilateral agreements with Türkiye, dating back to the 1960s.

- As of 31 December 2022 there were over 13 million non-Germans living in Germany out of a total population of 83.1 million. Of these, over 11.7 million were born abroad, while approximately 1.6 million were born in Germany.[64]

- In 2022 approximately 20.2 million residents, including dual citizens, had either migrated to Germany or were born in Germany to two immigrant parents, while there were another 3.9 million people with one immigrant parent.[65]

- Looking at immigrants' geographical origins, Türkiye represents the largest national group of immigrants in terms of both first and second generations.[66] In 2022 the almost 1.5 million Turks made up the largest group of foreign citizens, while the more than 377,000 second-generation Turks constituted the largest non-German community born in the country.[67]

- In 2016, out of slightly more than 1 million immigrants entering the country, about 723,000 were asylum seekers.[68] Between the 2015–16 migration crisis and 2022, Syrians were the second largest national group after Turks.[69]

- Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Germany received more than 1.1 million Ukrainians,[70] 936,000 of whom received temporary protection.[71] Ukrainians thus became the second-largest foreign group in the country.[72]

[64] Germany, *Federal Statistical Office*, 'Foreign Population by Place of Birth and Selected Citizenships' (1 June 2023).
[65] *Deutsche Welle*, 'Germany: Immigrants Made up Over 18% of 2022 Population' (20 April 2023).
[66] Germany, *Federal Statistical Office*, 'Foreign Population by Place of Birth and Selected Citizenships'.
[67] Ibid.
[68] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[69] Germany, *Federal Statistical Office*, 'Foreign Population by Selected Citizenships and Years' (1 June 2023).
[70] Germany, *Federal Statistical Office*, '1.1 Million Arrivals of People From Ukraine in 2022' (16 February 2023).
[71] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[72] Germany, *Federal Statistical Office*, '1.1 Million Arrivals of People From Ukraine in 2022'.

- In 2022, 75% of asylum applicants (mostly Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis) declared themselves Muslim.[73] The Pew Research Center pointed out that the net number of Muslims had increased from 4.1% of the total population in 2010 to 6.1% in 2016. Its future projections estimate that by 2050 Muslims could form a minimum proportion of 8.7% of the total population if immigration stops, 10.8% if immigration remains stable and a maximum proportion of 19.7% if immigration increases.[74]

Italy

Italy experienced its first massive wave of immigration in 1991, with the arrival of Albanians. Previously, small groups of mainly young male workers had arrived from Morocco and Tunisia, and, in more significant numbers, women had immigrated from Eastern Europe.[75] Since the 1990s, unlike other EU countries, immigration to Italy has been characterised by a mosaic of nationalities.

- As of 1 January 2022, out of the more than 59 million people living in Italy, Italian national statistics recorded about 5 million foreign citizens legally residing in the country, about 8.7% of the overall population.[76] Contrasting with trends in other EU states, in Italy this was a slight decrease on previous years; furthermore, since 2014 the growth rate in the number of foreigners has been almost nil.[77] This is the consequence of two main factors, namely that newcomers have tended to move on to other EU countries, and that those who acquire citizenship are counted as Italians with no further clarification.

- As of 1 January 2022 the largest non-EU foreign communities were formed of Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese and Ukrainians, but there were also significant populations from a wide range of other Asian and African countries.[78]

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[73] *Statista*, 'Distribution of Asylum Applicants in Germany in 2022, by Religion' (30 March 2023).

[74] Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.

[75] M. Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia. Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri* (Rome: Carocci, 2018).

[76] Italy, *National Institute of Statistics*, 'Previsioni della popolazione – Anni 2022–2080' (30 June 2023). The category of 'foreign citizens' in Italian statistics refers to all non-Italian citizens, regardless of where they were born—which includes those who are born in Italy to two foreign parents, but not those who have acquired citizenship or received it by birth from one Italian parent.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

- In 2021 Albanians and Ukrainians were the main non-EU groups in terms of naturalised people.[79] At that time, Italy was host to the second-largest Ukrainian community in the EU after Poland: around 230,000 people, predominantly women, who had been arriving since the 1990s.[80]

- From 2014 to 2017 the migration crisis brought hundreds of thousands of migrants to the Italian coasts: over 625,000, with a peak in 2016. The wave did not stop in subsequent years.[81] However, because Italy is largely used as a transit country, in the same period (2014–17) the total number of asylum requests did not exceed approximately 394,000.[82]

- The 2022 war in Ukraine led Italy to grant temporary protection to more than 145,000 Ukrainians, thus making it one of the largest EU recipients.[83]

- According to 2021 quantitative data on foreigners' religious affiliations, Muslims made up 27.1% of the overall non-Italian population living in the country, the second-largest religious group after Orthodox Christians.[84] Overall, according to the Pew Research Center, Muslims represented 4.8% of the Italian population in 2016, and projections for 2050 estimate a Muslim presence of between 8.3% and 14.1% of the population.[85]

The Netherlands

The Netherlands combines a history of colonisation with a history of labour agreements with southern European and non-EU countries, notably Morocco and Türkiye. The long-lasting consequences of both phenomena are represented by the current immigration picture.

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[79] *Eurostat*, 'Citizenship Granted to 827 000 People in 2021'.
[80] *Eurostat*, 'Ukrainian Citizens in the EU'.
[81] *Fondazione ISMU*, 'Sbarchi e accoglienza: 10 anni tra alti e bassi' (19 April 2023).
[82] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[83] Ibid.
[84] A. Menonna, 'L'appartenenza religiosa degli stranieri residenti in Italia. Prime ipotesi al 1° gennaio 2021', *Fondazione ISMU* (2021).
[85] Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.

- In 2021 approximately 2.5 million people residing in the Netherlands were immigrants born abroad, accounting for nearly 15% of the overall population of 17.6 million, while 2 million residents were born in the Netherlands to at least one foreign-born parent (12% of the population). Overall, 27% of the population was immigrant or did not have a fully Dutch family background.[86]

- Out of the foreign-born immigrants, 75% were born outside the EU, mainly in Türkiye, Suriname[87] and Morocco.[88]

- Out of the 910,000 residents born in the Netherlands to two foreign-born parents, Moroccans and Turks were again by far the largest groups.[89] Of the 1.1 million Dutch-born residents with one foreign-born parent, 57% have a non-EU parent, mainly Indonesian.[90]

- Like many other EU countries, the Netherlands experienced a peak of in asylum seekers in 2015,[91] with Syrians being the most numerous applicants. In the last decade, the number of Syrians living in the Netherlands has increased tenfold.[92] Among the refugee population there is also a significant Turkish presence, formed of individuals fleeing political persecution.[93]

- Despite a restrictive law that compels any foreigner who applies for Dutch citizenship to renounce his or her previous one, the Netherlands has experienced an increase in naturalisations, with a significant growth rate since 2019.[94] In 2021 the Dutch naturalisation rate was the second highest in the EU.[95] Syrian nationals have played a crucial role in this increase as, between them, the Netherlands and Sweden have granted citizenship to about 70% of the total number of naturalised Syrians in the EU.[96]

[86] *Statline*, 'Bevolking; Geslacht, Lft, Generatie En Migr.Achtergrond, 1 Jan 1996–2022' (2022).
[87] Due to the colonial legacy.
[88] *Statistics Netherlands*, 'How Many Residents Have a Foreign Country of Origin?' (2022).
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *KCMD,* 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[92] In 2010 there were about 10,300 Syrians in the Netherlands; in 2022 this had risen to 126,300. *Statista*, 'Number of Syrian Nationals Resident in the Netherlands from 2010 to 2022' (15 June 2023).
[93] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[94] Ibid.
[95] *Eurostat*, 'Citizenship Granted to 827 000 People in 2021'.
[96] Ibid.

- In 2022 the Netherlands granted more than 102,000 temporary protection permits to Ukrainians.[97]

- According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010 Muslims accounted for 6% of the overall population, increasing to 7.1% in 2016. Projections for 2050 indicate Muslims forming 9.1% as a minimum proportion, 12.5% as a middle proportion and 15.2% as the maximum proportion of the population, depending on Muslims' rate of immigration to the country.[98]

Spain

Immigration to Spain started to increase in the mid-1990s: the immigrant population rose from about 1.2 million in 1998 to 6 million by 2008.[99] Spain's colonial history and its linguistic ties influence its migratory landscape, as non-EU citizens from former Spanish colonies have a faster pathway to Spanish citizenship. Furthermore, Moroccans were entitled to enter Spain without a visa until Spain joined the Schengen agreement.[100] The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco have played a role in illegal immigration dynamics.[101]

- Out of the 47.5 million people living in Spain in 2022, statistics indicated that about 5.5 million were non-Spanish citizens (slightly less than 12% of the population)[102] and about 7.5 million were foreign-born immigrants (over 16% of the population).[103]

- Breaking down the data by country of origin, we find that the majority of immigrants were born outside the EU and, unsurprisingly, about 3.4 million of these people come from the American continent. Indeed, since 2016 most asylum requests in Spain have been from Venezuelans,[104] who to this day constitute the primary group of asylum seekers.[105] African immigrants number 1.3 million—the vast

97 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
98 Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.
99 S. Rinken and C. Finotelli, 'A Pragmatic Bet: The Evolution of Spain's Immigration System', *Migration Information Source*, 18 April 2023.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Spain, *National Statistical Institute*, 'Población (españoles/extranjeros) por País de Nacimiento, sexo y año' (2022).
103 Ibid. The definition of 'non-Spanish citizens' includes people who were born in Spain to two non-Spanish parents and were not granted Spanish citizenship at birth, meaning that they hold their parents' foreign citizenship. The definition of 'foreign-born people' includes immigrants who reside in Spain, thus also including naturalised people.
104 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
105 Ibid.

majority being Moroccans,[106] and this group also topped the naturalisation list in 2021.[107]

- Before the 2022 war, the Ukrainian community in Spain totalled about 98,000 people.[108] By the end of 2022, Spain had granted temporary protection to about 158,000 Ukrainians.[109]

- According to the Pew Research Center, Muslims constituted about 2% of the Spanish population in 2016. Nevertheless, its 2050 projections show a strong expected increase, between a minimum of 4.6% of the population and a maximum of 7.2%.[110] Analyses published by the Islamic communities themselves in 2021 counted about 2.4 million Muslims in Spain, that is, already more than 5% of the population.[111]

Sweden

While in the 1960s Sweden received mostly Turkish migrant workers, in the space of a few years migration had shifted from being worker-driven to refugee-driven. As early as 1970, foreigners already constituted 6.7% of the overall population,[112] but the country became especially attractive to migrants after the implementation of markedly multiculturalist policies in 1975.

- In 2022 Sweden had 2.15 million foreign-born citizens—forming around 20% of the 10.52 million population.[113]

- Syrians and Afghans constitute the largest national groups of refugees.[114] Excluding naturalised people, Syrians, Afghans and Eritreans are the largest non-EU national groups;[115] if we consider those who have acquired Swedish citizenship, Iraqis, Syrians and Iranians emerge as the most prevalent non-EU foreign-born individuals.[116]

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[106] Spain, *National Statistical Institute*, 'Población (españoles/extranjeros) por País de Nacimiento, sexo y año'.
[107] *Eurostat*, 'Citizenship Granted to 827 000 People in 2021'.
[108] *Eurostat*, 'Ukrainian Citizens in the EU'.
[109] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[110] Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.
[111] Observatorio Andalusì, *Estudio Demográfico de La Población Musulmana*, Unión De Comunidades Islámicas de España (Madrid, 2023), 7.
[112] M. Wickström, *The Multicultural Moment. The History of the Idea and Politics of Multiculturalism in Sweden in Comparative, Transnational and Biographical Context, 1964–1975* (Turku: Juvenes Print, 2015), 37.
[113] *Statistics Sweden*, 'Population in Sweden by Country/Region of Birth, Citizenship and Swedish/Foreign Background' (31 December 2022).
[114] *Statista*, 'Number of Refugees Living in Sweden in 2022, by Country of Origin' (13 December 2022).
[115] Sweden, *Statistical Database*, 'Foreign Citizens by Country of Citizenship, Sex and Year. Year 1973–2022'.
[116] Sweden, *Statistical Database*, 'Population by Country of Birth, Age and Sex. Year 2000–2022'.

- With over 80,000 naturalisations in 2021, Sweden topped the EU rankings, with a naturalisation rate of 10% (compared to an EU average of 2.2%).[117]

- Following the Ukrainian crisis in 2022, Sweden granted temporary protection to more than 45,500 Ukrainians, and a further 1,800 applied for asylum.[118]

- Swedish migration is predominantly from Muslim countries. The Pew Research Center found that the Muslim presence in Sweden had almost doubled from 4.6% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2016. Projections for 2050 are particularly remarkable, as they indicate a minimum rise to 20.5% of the overall population if immigration-related trends remain stable, to a maximum of 30.6% if the Muslim afflux increases.[119]

Eastern EU countries

Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia share some basic characteristics as concerns migration patterns. This allows us to describe them from a common perspective, while still taking into consideration national specificities.

- After the end of Communism, these countries experienced significant waves of emigration to Western Europe. Since their accession to the EU, these nations have had a growing role as host countries, but on a lesser scale than their Western counterparts, as shown by 2018–19 OECD data.[120] This observation pertains to both foreign residents and immigrants born in other countries.

- The lowest EU immigration rates belong to Poland, where less than 1% of the population is foreign and only 2% are foreign-born residents, while Czechia has figures that are much closer to Western ones. Latvia and Estonia represent exceptions, with about 15% of their populations being formed of foreigners and foreign-born residents due to the presence of Russian enclaves.[121]

[117] *Eurostat*, 'Citizenship Granted to 827 000 People in 2021'.
[118] *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
[119] Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.
[120] *OECD*, 'Migration – Foreign-Born Population' (2022); *OECD*, 'Foreign Population' (2022).
[121] *OECD*, 'Migration – Foreign-Born Population'; *OECD*, 'Foreign Population'; *Legal Information Centre for Human Rights*, 'New Immigrants in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania' (Tallinn, 27 May 2010).

- According to EU data, most immigrants come from neighbouring non-EU countries, such as Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. There are some exceptions: for instance, in 2014 Chinese immigrants were the most conspicuous group to receive first residence permits in Hungary.[122]

- Ukrainians have long immigrated to these countries, with a significant increase in the last decade. At the end of 2021, the eastern EU states with the highest Ukrainian populations were Poland, with approximately 651,000 Ukrainians; followed by Czechia, with around 193,500; Hungary, with over 63,000; and Slovakia, with more than 54,000. Poland also had the largest Ukrainian population among the EU27.[123] In most of these countries, Ukrainians represented the largest foreign community.[124]

- After the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland continued to rank highest in terms of Ukrainian immigrants as it granted around 957,000 temporary protection permits, followed by Czechia (431,000), Bulgaria (147,000), and Romania and Slovakia (about 100,000 each).[125] Even the Baltic states contributed, despite the geographical distance and their small territorial sizes.[126] Hungary, by contrast, granted a significantly lower number of permits to Ukrainians—less than 30,000 by the end of 2022.[127]

- Concerning Muslim populations, in 2016 the Pew Research Center calculated that Muslims made up less than 1% of the population in all eastern EU countries (with the exception of the Bulgarian autochthonous minority). Even in the case of a high-migration scenario, estimates for 2050 show much lower increases in the Muslim population size compared to Western Europe, with total populations expected to stand at around a maximum of 2%, with the exception of Hungary, where the population could reach a maximum of 4.5%.[128]

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122 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
123 *Eurostat*, 'Ukrainian Citizens in the EU'.
124 *KCMD*, 'Atlas of Migrations'.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Cooperman, Hackett and Schiller, *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 30.

Overall assessment

Immigration today is a transversal phenomenon in all EU member states. While north-western countries, and Germany in particular, stand out for historical, political and economic reasons, southern and eastern European states have also turned from countries of emigration into countries of reception. Turks and Moroccans are the largest immigrant groups in north-western Europe, as a lasting consequence of the labour agreements of the 1960s and 1970s. Turks are especially numerous in Germany and have a significant presence in other countries, such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, while Moroccans are the largest migrant group in Belgium. France also has a high proportion of Moroccans and other people of Maghreb origin due to the enduring colonial and linguistic links. In central and northern Europe, we find significant numbers of Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis and other nationals who arrived as asylum seekers, with a spike in arrivals occurring during the 2015–16 migration crisis.

In Spain and Italy, immigration is a more recent phenomenon. While in Spain we find mostly Latin-Americans and Moroccans, Italy's migrant population is characterised by a mosaic of nationalities, especially but not exclusively from close countries such as Albania, Tunisia and Morocco, plus Ukraine.

In Eastern Europe, significant waves of immigration are a recent phenomenon and mainly followed the countries' accessions to the EU in the 2000s. Ukrainians were already particularly numerous before 2022.

After the 2022 Russian invasion, Ukrainian migration into the EU spiked, constituting the second EU-wide wave of asylum seekers following the 2015–16 migration crisis. However, the effects of this wave have been very different from the legal, social and geographical perspectives. The migrants of the 2015–16 wave were Middle Eastern people, mostly Syrians but also Iraqis and Afghans, who had had to face the obstacles of a perilous journey, an uncertain asylum procedure, and a heterogenous reception from the member states and their populations. Ukrainians, in contrast, have benefited from an automatic pathway of humanitarian protection across the Union. Another difference is that the Middle Eastern populations seem to have settled for good, while Ukrainians have already started to go back in substantial numbers, even as the war continues. The religious–cultural aspect is another major difference.

Overall, old and new migration patterns show a large presence of Muslim migrants and their descendants in the EU, with a potentially increasing trajectory. This is relevant for our analysis because Muslims prove more resistant than other groups to secularisation and acculturation dynamics, as we will show in Section 4.

Religiosity and secularisation among natives

General reflections on the progressive secularisation of the EU population

If we look at the overall picture of Europe, we can state that all aspects of religiosity in private and public life (affiliation, attendance, prayers, self-description and values) have steadily decreased over the last century.[129] According to the WVS, 86% of Europeans declared themselves religious in 1982; this percentage had fallen to 66% in 2008. Regular participation[130] in religious services declined from 36% to 25% in the same period.[131]

The secularisation trend is strongly linked to age: the younger Europeans are, the less religious they are. The prevalent theory attributes the phenomenon to generational, rather than age, changes.[132] Another aspect that confirms the secularisation theory is that secularisation coincides with the embrace of secular values: with some exceptions, the younger the Europeans, the more liberal they are.[133]

The picture is, however, less linear than some theoreticians of secularism suggest. First, there are differences when it comes to religious denominations.[134] Among Christians, Protestants are on average the least religious.[135] Among Catholics, we can observe contrasting trends.[136] Members of Orthodox churches, who have become even more religious since the 1950s cohorts,[137] seem to be the main exception to the secularisation trend.

[129]   D. Voas and S. Doebler, 'Secularization in Europe: Religious Change Between and Within Birth Cohorts', *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 4/1 (2011); M. Simsek, F. Fleischmann and F. van Tubergen, 'Similar or Divergent Paths? Religious Development of Christian and Muslim Adolescents in Western Europe', *Social Science Research* 79 (2019), 162; R. Kwon and K. McCaffree, 'Muslim Religious Accommodations in Western Europe: Do Multicultural Policies Impact Religiosity Levels Among Muslims, Catholics and Protestants?', *International Migration* 59/1 (2021); Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

[130]   We consider 'regular participation' the attendance of religious services at least once a month.

[131]   C. Dargent, 'Religious Change, Public Space and Beliefs in Europe', in P. Bréchon and G. Frédéric (eds.), *European Values: Trends and Divides Over Thirty Years*, vol. 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 105.

[132]   Halman and Draulans, 'How Secular Is Europe?', 269; Voas and Doebler, 'Secularization in Europe', 45; Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 78.

[133]   Astor and Dompnier, 'A Geography of Family Values in Europe', 18.

[134]   There is not space here to discuss whether this is due to the nature of the denomination itself or to contingent elements (geographical, social, cultural etc.).

[135]   See below.

[136]   Dargent, 'Religious Change, Public Space and Beliefs in Europe'.

[137]   Molteni and Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe', 14.

Geographically, the findings for eastern EU countries are especially contradictory, even comparing cases in which history, proximity and common religion would lead one to expect otherwise. Thus, a highly secularised state, such as Czechia, happens to be located next to a significantly more religious one, Slovakia,[138] despite the two countries being historically mostly Catholic, sharing the same history of Communist rule and even being part of the same state until 1993.

There is debate as to the causes and significance of this phenomenon. Some scholars argue that the religious revival in the East after the fall of the Soviet Union could reflect an ongoing period effect more than a counter-tendency to the secularisation trend.[139] From this perspective, religion would serve as a proxy for national identity and the reconstruction of a collective memory.[140] Others speak of the search for individual spirituality as underlying the surge in new forms of religiosity.[141] Yet others confine the phenomenon to certain countries—especially those with a small presence of non-Christian minorities (such as Poland)[142]—or dismiss it altogether as an ephemeral trend.[143] At any rate, the fact that nations with similar religious traditions and political experiences are showing divergent outcomes suggests that there are more factors at play.

Nuances in the secularisation theory also appear elsewhere in Europe. For instance, Italy has shown resistance to the secularisation trend in terms of overall religiosity, but conformity with it in terms of religious practice. Conversely, the youngest cohorts in Spain, France and Denmark show slight increases in religious practice.[144] In some cases, minimal fluctuations could fall within the margin of statistical error; however, taken together these data show that secularisation is not a simple, linear process.

In the next sub-section, we will analyse some emblematic countries, observing attitudes towards religiosity and secular values.

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138   K. J. Starr, 'Once the Same Nation, the Czech Republic and Slovakia Now Look Very Different Religiously', *Pew Research Center*, 2 January 2019; Reynolds, 'Religion and Values in the ESS: Individual and Societal Effects', 64.
139   Voas and Doebler, 'Secularization in Europe', 56.
140   Molteni and Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe', 16.
141   Ibid.
142   S. Grodź, 'Christian–Muslim Experiences in Poland', *Exchange* 39/3 (2010), 272.
143   Voas and Doebler, 'Secularization in Europe', 41–2.
144   Dargent, 'Religious Change, Public Space and Beliefs in Europe', 111.

Trajectories of secularisation in emblematic countries

In this section, we analyse the secularisation trajectories in several emblematic countries based on the findings of the WVS. We consider diachronic and synchronic trends in religiosity and values, providing generational data when relevant.

Countries have been selected with the intention of providing variety in terms of geography (north, south, east and west), prevalent religions (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) and coverage of the entire spectrum of the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023

Source: Adapted from *WVS*, 'Findings and Insights'.

In line with the various determinants of public and private religiosity mentioned above, and to establish a correlation with secular values, for each examined country we consider the following WVS questions:[145]

On religiosity:

- Religious person: 'Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person, an atheist?'

- Importance of religion: 'For each of the following aspects, indicate how important it is in your life. Would you say it is very important, rather important, not very important or not important at all (Religion)?'

- Religious practice/attendance of religious services: 'Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?'

On values:

- 'Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified or something in between, using this card (1–10-point scale).'

    - 'Divorce'
    - 'Homosexuality'
    - 'Abortion'

- 'For each of the following statements, can you tell me how much you agree with each. Do you agree strongly, agree, disagree or disagree strongly?'[146]

    - 'On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do'.
    - 'When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women'.

- 'Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means "not at all an essential characteristic of democracy" and 10 means it definitely is "an essential characteristic of democracy"':

    - 'Women have the same rights as men'.

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[145] Unless otherwise specified, all data used in this section are from *WVS*, 'WVS Database'.

[146] In some cases, the job question does not make the distinction between 'strongly agree' and 'agree', and between 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'.

France

Historically a Catholic country, France has developed a model of assertive secularism, keeping the religious and civil spheres rigidly separated ('*laïcité de combat*').

Secularism also has strong roots in society: according to the latest WVS wave (2017–22), about 62% of French respondents see religion as unimportant and 57.2% identify as non-religious. Among the youngest cohort (16–24), 69% are non-religious, and only the over-65 cohort shows a slight majority of religious people, which demonstrates that secularism is an ingrained and cross-generational phenomenon. Its extent emerges even more potently as far as religious practice is concerned: only 12.4% of respondents attend religious services regularly, and this low trend is consistent across age groups, including the over-65 cohort.

As far as values are concerned, opinions are perhaps less secular than one would expect. On divorce, only 34.9% of respondents consider it 'always justifiable', rising to 50.4% among the 16–24 year-olds. Concerning homosexuality, the two extremes of 'never justifiable' and 'always justifiable' score 13% and 33.5% respectively. Considering the secularisation level of the country, these do not come across as particularly permissive views, especially if we consider that abortion (usually a more divisive issue) scores pretty much the same. It is relevant however, that the 'abortion is always justifiable' option holds a relative cross-generational majority, including among the over-65s (although with half as many agreeing as compared to the youngest cohort), while this is not the case with homosexuality, where a steady increase emerges as the age range decreases ('always justifiable': from 17.6% among the over-65s to 48.5% among the 16–24 year-olds).

Attitudes towards gender equality are also lower than anticipated. Around 52% of respondents consider gender equality an essential characteristic of democracy, which is notably lower compared to other countries and not significantly higher than in past WVS waves. Yet, about 80% disagree that, in case of scarcity, men have more right to a job than women. An even greater proportion of respondents disagree than men make better political leaders. Curiously, the youngest cohort (16–24 year-olds) has less egalitarian views than older ones up to the age of 54, with the most egalitarian being the 35–44 year-old cohort.

Germany

Germany is relevant to our study as it is a mixed Catholic–Protestant country, which used to be geopolitically divided between the West and the Soviet bloc.

The dynamic of secularisation is quite interesting. Private religiosity actually shows a *counter-secularisation* tendency: whereas in the 2005–9 wave religiosity reached an all-time low, with 41% identifying as religious and 54% not, in the 2017–22 wave the majorities were reversed (respectively, 50.5% and 45.7%). In a similar fashion, religion was 'not at all important' for about 42% of respondents in 1994–8, but only for 26% in the latest wave. Religious practice has not similarly increased, however: regular attendance was reported by 16% of respondents in 1994–8, and by 19% in 2017–22. The generational trend towards secularisation is present but not dramatic, at least not from the oldest cohort down to the 25–34 year-old one. Among the youngest group (16–24 year-olds), the most noteworthy aspect is that non-religious respondents form the vast majority (58.4%).

The picture is clearer as far as values are concerned, suggestive of an ongoing strong secularisation process. For the first time, the 2017–22 wave registered an absolute majority (53%) claiming that homosexuality is 'always justifiable'—more than twice the figure in the 2010–14 wave. While acceptance decreases with age, it is noteworthy that the absolute majority of participants select the most liberal response in all cohorts except the oldest one (where there still is a relative majority).

The acceptance of divorce and women's rights show a similar trend. Divorce is now 'always justifiable' for 41% of respondents, doubling the 2010–14 rate. Concerning women's rights, 84% consider gender equality an essential characteristic of democracy, and 88% and 79% disagree respectively that men make better political leaders and that men have more right to a job in case of scarcity.

A very different dynamic applies to abortion, for which we actually see a descending curve on the 'always justifiable' answer, from 15% in the 1994–8 wave to 8% in the 2010–14 one, before jumping to 20% in the latest wave. The opposite answer ('never justifiable') even enjoyed a relative majority (23%) in 2010–14, and this sentiment remains quite common at 16%. Here the age effect is virtually absent between the 16–24 and the 55–64 cohorts, and between the over-65s and the 16–24 groups the difference is not as prominent as for the other items.

Hungary

Historically Catholic with a significant Protestant minority, Hungary is a peculiar case of a former Communist country that is secular in many respects, but one where 'Christianity' has acquired an identitarian value and is exploited as a political tool.[147]

A slight majority of respondents (around 53%) consider themselves religious, compared to 43.7% who do not. This indicates an increase in religious identification compared not only to the 1981–4 wave, which preceded the fall of Communism, but also to the 2005–9 one. At the same time, the majority (54%) consider religion unimportant in their lives, and only 17.2% regularly attend religious services. This seems to validate our hypothesis that the role of religion is more identitarian than spiritual for the majority of Hungarians.

In terms of values, Hungary clearly stands at the illiberal end of the spectrum regarding certain issues and at the liberal end on others. A relative majority of respondents (45%) declare that homosexuality is 'never justifiable'—jumping up from 31.5% in the 2005–9 wave. While younger generations tend to be more liberal, a sizable portion (31%) of 16–34 year-olds still consider homosexuality 'never justifiable'. As concerns divorce, 21.5% of respondents view it as 'always justifiable', and 12.3% as 'never justifiable'. Interestingly, the latter response has been slowly but steadily increasing since the 1990s. Younger cohorts are more secular, with 32.7% of the youngest group responding that divorce is 'always justifiable' (significantly higher than their peers in Italy, for comparison). Abortion is 'never justifiable' for a relative majority of respondents (23.7%)— another record high in the post-Communist era. The age/cohort effect is quite unremarkable on this issue.

Views are more liberal regarding women's rights, with some fluctuations. Of the respondents, around 67% consider gender equality an essential component of democracy (much higher than in France, as we have seen). Furthermore, 64% of respondents disagree that men make better political leaders (a significant jump compared to the mid-1990s, when those disagreeing were in the minority), but only 55.8% disagree that men have more right to a job in case of scarcity. On this, just as on the homosexuality issue, we see some backsliding compared to the 2005–9 period, despite a tendency towards more egalitarian views in the younger cohorts.

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[147] H. Bienvenu, 'How Viktor Orban Went From Being an "Agnostic Liberal" to a Defender of Christian Values', *Le Monde*, 29 April 2023.

Italy and Spain

Italy and Spain represent two southern countries, both deeply Catholic in terms of history and tradition, which have evolved in different directions. It is therefore worth looking at them in parallel.

While in Italy more than 65% of respondents consider religion important, in Spain a similar percentage consider it unimportant. Non-religious people form about 21% of the population in Italy (still, almost double the percentage from the previous survey) but 50% in Spain. In Italy, even the youth (16–24) remains predominantly religious (around 54%), but each generation is less religious than the previous one. In Spain, percentages are lower, but we find the peculiar phenomenon of the 16–24 cohort having more religious respondents than any other group up to 55 years old. Concerning regular attendance of religious services, the difference is also marked (around 41% in Italy, approximately 23% in Spain), but it becomes even more prominent if we consider that in Spain a substantial majority (58.4%) goes 'less than once a year' or 'practically never', compared to 28% of Italians. Interestingly, though, all dimensions of religiosity in Spain have increased between the 2010–14 and 2017–22 waves, and this is reflected in the responses to the values questions, thus confirming the secularisation theory.

Concerning divorce, only 21.6% of Italian respondents consider it 'always justifiable', jumping up from 5.7% in the 2005–9 wave but still just twice as many as those who gave the 'never justifiable' response. The only remarkable cohort effect is discernible among the over-65s (where the 'never justifiable' response enjoys a relative majority). In Spain, divorce has been more accepted for decades. The 'never justifiable' response reached an all-time low in the 2010–14 wave, before doubling to 9.2% in the latest wave—a curious phenomenon that returns the value to its position in the early 2000s. At any rate, it remains 'always justifiable' for a relative majority of about one-third of respondents. The cohort effect is evident: 44.5% of 16–24 year-olds selected this answer.

As regards homosexuality, in Italy the relative majority completely shifted along the scale between 2005–9 and 2017–22: the percentage of respondents considering it 'never justifiable' dropped dramatically from 46.8% to 14.7%, while the 'always justifiable' option rose from 5.7% to 22.7%. The younger the respondents, the more accepting they are, both in Italy and in Spain. In the latter, however, the degree of acceptance is notably higher in every cohort, with a peak of 41.8% among the 16–24 year-olds. As with divorce, the difference between the two countries reflects a long-standing trend.

Concerning women's rights, things are different: 66% of Italian respondents view gender equality as an essential characteristic of democracy, versus 58.6% in Spain—a decrease compared to previous waves. However, 88.4% of Spanish respondents disagree that men make better political leaders, compared to 77% of Italians.[148] The difference is even more marked on the job question: in Spain, 76.3% disagree that men should have more right to a job than women in case of scarcity (again, a lower figure compared to 2010–14), while in Italy more than 25% of respondents agree, and only a tiny majority disagree. Responses were slightly more egalitarian in the 2005–9 wave. The age/cohort effect, however, reveals a marked generational split.

The views on abortion remain more conservative. Italy departed from a lower base but has witnessed a consistent shift: while in 2005–9 only 1.9% considered it 'always justifiable', this value has jumped up to 11.4% in the latest survey, while the 'never justifiable' option dropped from 37.1% to 22.2%. In Spain the (already higher) level of acceptance has not dramatically changed: in 2005–9, 16.4% deemed abortion 'never justifiable' while 14.2% considered it 'always justifiable', with the figures now respectively at 17% and 19.7%. If we exclude the oldest cohort, the age effect is present but not strong.

Poland

Poland is a traditionally Catholic country in which Communist rule, far from succeeding in eradicating religion, turned the latter into an instrument of resistance and a mark of Polish identity.[149]

Even to this day, religion remains a predominant force, and the diachronic secularisation trend, albeit present, is less pronounced than in other countries. For instance, when asked whether they see themselves as religious, 83% of respondents say they do (a slight decrease from the peak of 92% in the 2005–9 wave), while the numbers of non-religious people, although having more than doubled since 2005–9, remain low, at 13.6%. After steadily increasing from 1989 to 2009, the importance of religion is now on a descending curve but is still higher than in the immediate post-Communist period (when it was 'very'/'rather' important for 78%). A substantial majority of respondents (64%) also attend religious services regularly, a trend which shows a steady but slow downward curve. What is most striking here is the generational data: religion also remains important among the youngest, and we can even see an increase in religious practice: 40% of the 16–24 cohort attend religious services once a week—more than any other cohort under the age of 55. Among the 16–24 year-olds, atheists account for only 7.3%, but this is still two or three times higher than among the older generations.

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[148] It will be interesting to see in future waves whether the first female prime minister in Italian history will change this long-standing trend.

[149] Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 112.

The jury is still out on the overall trends in values as well. On divorce, a mere 15% of people view it as 'always justifiable'—this is less than the 19.7% for whom it is never justifiable. However, this percentage has strongly increased compared to all previous waves. In terms of age, younger generations are only slightly more liberal. In contrast, a clear trend of acceptance emerges on homosexuality, despite absolute values that remain far from Western European standards. The percentage of respondents who consider homosexuality 'never justifiable' has decreased from 75.7% in the early 1990s to 44.2%, while those answering 'always justifiable' rose from 2.3% to 13.9%. Younger generations are not much more liberal: if anything, the 35–44 age group is, by a slight margin, the most accepting cohort.

Concerning women's rights, views are more progressive. Of the respondents, 68.2% consider equality of rights an essential characteristic of democracy, with no relevant generational divergence. About half of the sample disagrees that men make better political leaders; this figure was 27% in the mid-1990s. A marked progression is also visible in attitudes towards women in the labour market: 65.8% disagree that men have more right to a job in case of scarcity, with a marked increasing trend. For both statements, the age/generational effect is clear but it stops with the youngest cohort, which reverts to more conservative positions.

These views contrast with those on abortion, which, for a relative majority of 38.5% of respondents, is 'never justifiable'. This is, however, the lowest level for this response since the 1989–93 wave, with the peak of non-acceptance having been reached in 2005–9 (47.3%). Again, the generational trend towards more permissive views is present but is neither strong nor univocal.

Romania

Romania is a prevalently Orthodox country, formerly part of the Communist bloc, and, according to the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map, the most conservative nation in the EU.

In the 2017–22 wave, about 80% of respondents report being religious and attaching importance to religion in their life, with atheism virtually non-existent. The religiosity curve has slightly descended from its peak during the 2005–9 wave. Regular attendance of religious services, however, has remained stable, at about 46%, while the proportion of respondents who attend 'less than once a year' or 'never' has even decreased in the same period, from 20% to 13%. All indicators attested a lower level of religiosity in the 1990s. Generationally, a secularisation trend and a reduction in religiosity with the decreasing of age can be observed, but it is not conspicuous. Even among the 16–24 group, a strong majority of more than 74%

view themselves as religious. For comparison, in Bulgaria, another strongly religious, Eastern European, Orthodox country, this is 46%.

Romanians' prevalent values also defy the secularisation theory. Attitudes towards homosexuality remained steady from the mid-1990s to the latest wave, with a record high 66% of respondents considering it never acceptable and less than 3% unconditionally approving. Even among the 16–24 year-olds, more than half consider homosexuality never justifiable.

Concerning the other questions, positions are becoming even more conservative. A relative majority of respondents consider divorce never justifiable (35.8%), and only 8.4% view it as always justifiable (the lowest score in the diachronic series, almost twice as low as in the 1990s). The counter-trend is even more evident on abortion: half of respondents consider it never justifiable—almost twice as many as in 1994–8. On both items, the age effect is scarcely remarkable and certainly less relevant than the period effect.

On gender equality, only 51% of respondents consider equal rights an essential characteristic of democracy—a sharp decrease from 64% in the 2010–14 wave and 68% in 2005–9. Some 2.5% of the sample even spontaneously called it 'against democracy'. This may seem an irrelevant percentage, but it appears less so when considering that it is similar to the percentage of those who unconditionally accept homosexuality. Similarly, in the 1994–8 wave, 37.4% agreed and 33.7% disagreed that men have more right to a job than women in case of scarcity, while in 2017–22 these figures were, 41.3% and 34.9% respectively. A clear trend towards a more egalitarian position is, however, evident regarding the role of women as political leaders. While in the 1994–8 wave 59% agreed that men make better political leaders, in 2017–22 this percentage had dropped to 39%, with 55% holding the opposite opinion. Once again, the age effect is not particularly conspicuous, with slightly more egalitarian attitudes on certain issues balanced by more conservative ones on others.

Sweden

Sweden is a traditionally Protestant country that has been predominantly secular for decades, despite the presence, until 2000, of an official state church.[150]

More than 70% of respondents consider religion unimportant and they do not see themselves as religious (with a record high of 19.2% being atheists). Religious practice is also very low, with less than 10% of the population attending religious services regularly and an absolute majority never practising religion. Diachronically, secularisation trends are not dramatic, since religiosity and religious practices have been at low levels since the 1980s.

The age/cohort effect is present—the younger generations generally being less religious than the older ones. However, this trend is not linear: for instance, religion is less important for the 35–44 year-olds than for the 16–24 age group. As to religious practice, respondents who attend religious services regularly, albeit in low numbers, are almost twice as common among the 16–24 cohort (around 11%) than among the 35–44 one (6.2%). This was not the case in previous waves. Especially noteworthy is an all-time high of 7% of 16–24 year-olds who now report practising at least once a week. This suggests a possible spiritual revival or the impact of immigration.

In terms of values, Sweden is a conspicuously secular country, but the generational oddity emerges here as well. A clear majority of 58.5% consider divorce 'always justifiable'—by far the highest among the countries examined here—with an uninterrupted upward trend since the 1980s. Interestingly, though, the 35–54 year-olds appear to be the most accepting.

Concerning women's rights, 93.7% disagree that men make better political leaders than women, 86.9% consider equality in rights an essential characteristic of democracy and 93.5% disagree that men have more right to a job in case of scarcity. Previous waves have always pictured a society supportive of gender equality, including among the over-65s.

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[150] A phenomenon often defined in the literature as 'belonging without believing'.

Abortion is 'always justifiable' for the majority of the sample (50.6%—again, the highest in our analysis)—with this trend increasing uninterruptedly from the 9.1% of the 1989–93 wave. Remarkably, it is the middle-age cohorts who most share this view, while the 16–24 cohort is the only one besides the over-65s where this response falls short of an absolute majority.

The attitude towards homosexuality is perhaps the most outstanding indicator, with 70.5% of respondents considering it always justified—up from 16.3% in 1989–93, and also from 59.3% in 2010–14. This absolute majority holds even among the over-65s, and in this case, the generational trend is straightforward, reaching 80.9% among the 16–24 year-olds.

Overall assessment

Europe conveys the picture of a continent that, overall, is rapidly secularising. This reality is supported by data on both religiosity and values. Another clear finding is that higher religiosity is unmistakably correlated with more conservative values, and vice versa. This conclusion holds at both the aggregate and the group-specific level. From a country-wide perspective, both in traditionally religious nations as well as in more secular ones, a resurgence of religiosity, regardless of age cohort, goes hand-in-hand with values becoming more conservative. If we break it down by group, the WVS shows that those who do not belong to a religious denomination are almost invariably the most progressive in terms of homosexuality, abortion, divorce and women's rights.

However, as our country selection demonstrates, we should be careful in making generalisations from these observations. First of all, there are differences between religious groups. Confirming the literature on the matter,[151] Orthodox populations seem more religious than Catholics, who are in turn more religious than Protestants (which is also mostly the case in terms of conservatism in values). At a country-wide level, we should nevertheless be careful with the causal inference, given that many other factors are at play, *in primis* historical backgrounds and state policies. For instance, Catholic France is more secular than Catholic Italy and Spain, and the highly religious Bulgaria and Romania show oddly secular results on certain items

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[151] Molteni and Biolcati, 'Shifts in Religiosity Across Cohorts in Europe'; Halman and Draulans, 'How Secular Is Europe?'; Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 35.

related to women's rights, which could be due to the Communist legacy. This also applies to other Eastern European countries.[152] Furthermore, we should not neglect the fact that the specific cultural zone where every population lives influences its convictions and behaviours.[153]

All these factors create important exceptions to the overall reality of a secular, and secularising, continent. A substantial divide exists between EU countries on all matters under consideration, and the rift between the most secular and the most conservative ones is larger than between the latter and countries in other continents with completely different traditions. In other words, as the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map shows, on issues such as religiosity, women's rights, homosexuality and the like, the distance between Romanians and Iranians is smaller than that between Romanians and Swedes.[154] Trends are also oscillating: no matter whether we talk of highly secularised or highly religious countries, we do not see a linear and uninterrupted progression from religious to secular, whether diachronically or generationally. This is clearly a pitfall of the secularisation theory, which proves unable to explain this kind of fluctuation.[155]

Having said that, it seems too far-fetched to draw the conclusion whereby 'the variance of transformations, country by country, leads us to question the significance of [the] average [religious decline]'[156] in Europe. Acknowledging that a progression is not linear does not equate to denying it altogether. If we take a medium/long-term perspective, we can see that things are moving, even in the most religious and traditional places. Not every country or issue shifts at the same pace, not every generation is necessarily more secular than the previous one, but contesting the idea that Europe is remarkably different now to how it was 30, 20 or even 10 years ago would be short-sighted, missing epochal changes, the significance of which is hardly deniable.

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[152] Astor and Dompnier, 'A Geography of Family Values in Europe'.
[153] Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline,* 35.
[154] A caveat is perhaps redundant but still worth reiterating: the map shows people's attitudes and views—it has nothing to do with the democratic functioning of the political systems, which if reflected, would radically change countries' positions.
[155] Dargent, 'Religious Change, Public Space and Beliefs in Europe', 115.
[156] Ibid.

Religiosity and secularisation trends among immigrants

In this section, we focus on the religiosity and secularisation trajectories of migrants in Europe. After presenting general considerations that apply to immigrants as a whole, we move our focus first to Ukrainians, and then to Muslims.

As concerns Ukrainians, while their presence in EU countries predates the latest war, we deemed it appropriate to use recent data gathered in Ukraine itself in order to get a better sense of the potential implications of the post-2022 migration wave, for which no specific survey is available. We rely once again on the WVS and on a specific decade-long investigation by a local think tank.

As concerns Muslims, the paucity of country-by-country respondents of Islamic faith in the different WVS waves[157] prompted us to avoid replicating the same type of analysis conducted in Section 3, and rather corroborate the assessment with specific literature.

Macro-level: immigrants versus natives

Overall, migrant populations in Europe are more religious than native ones.[158] Interestingly, immigrants report a higher level of religiosity irrespective of religion, income and educational level.[159] This means that, even if we compare members of the same religion (specifically, Christianity as the majoritarian creed of autochthonous Europeans), migrants emerge as more religious than natives.[160] The disparity becomes even more prominent if we specifically consider religious attendance and frequency of prayer.[161]

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[157] In some cases, less than 20 or even 10 Muslim respondents.
[158] F. Molteni and F. van Tubergen, 'Immigrant Generation and Religiosity: A Study of Christian Immigrant Groups in 33 European Countries', *European Societies* 24/5 (2022), 3; Aleksynska and Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe'; I. Kasselstrand and S. Mahmoudi, 'Secularization Among Immigrants in Scandinavia: Religiosity Across Generations and Duration of Residence', *Social Compass* 67/4 (2020).
[159] Aleksynska and Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe', 571.
[160] Simsek, Fleischmann and van Tubergen, 'Similar or Divergent Paths?', 165.
[161] van Tubergen and Sindradóttir, 'The Religiosity of Immigrants in Europe', 281.

Both personal and societal aspects influence migrants' religiosity. Regarding personal aspects, more years of education have a significant negative impact on immigrant religiosity,[162] which confirms the secularisation theory. Unemployment positively affects immigrants' religiosity,[163] but a higher income is also surprisingly correlated with higher religiosity among immigrants—the opposite being true for natives.[164]

Concerning societal factors, the religious milieu of the receiving society has a multifaceted impact. Lower religiosity among natives is strongly associated with lower religiosity among immigrants,[165] while stricter social attitudes in the destination country are associated with higher religiosity.[166] The religious freedom that characterises Europe also facilitates immigrants' religiosity, but immigrants in countries with high religious pluralism tend to be less religious, contradicting the religious market theory.[167]

Belonging to a minority can also have an impact, in line with the reactive religiosity theory. For instance, Christian migrants tend to be more religious when they migrate to a nation where their denomination is not the same as the one of the majority (e.g. Catholics in a Protestant country),[168] or when reasserting religiosity is a means to preserve a specific group identity and cultural roots. This seems to be the case, for instance, for Arab Christians who have migrated to northern European countries since the 1960s to escape political turmoil and anti-Christian persecution: qualitative studies report a high level of personal and social religiosity among this group.[169] This likely serves as a way to keep both their Christian identity vis-à-vis Arab Muslim migrants and their Arab identity vis-à-vis the European autochthonous majority.[170] While individuals from both the first and second generations describe their religious identity as a pillar of their personal one,[171]

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[162] Ibid., 282.

[163] Ibid., 283.

[164] Aleksynska and Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe', 589.

[165] van Tubergen and Sindradóttir, 'The Religiosity of Immigrants in Europe', 284.

[166] Aleksynska and Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe', 587.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Molteni and van Tubergen, 'Immigrant Generation and Religiosity', 18.

[169] A. Rabo, '"Without Our Church We Will Disappear": Syrian Orthodox Christians in Diaspora', in P. Shah and M.-C. Foblets (eds.), *Family, Religion and Law: Cultural Encounters in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2014), 186.

[170] Ibid.; M. L. Conte, 'Welcome to Mesopotäljie, the Middle-East in Sweden', *Fondazione Internazionale Oasis*, 22 April 2022; F. McCallum Guiney, 'Middle Eastern Christian Identities in Europe', *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 8/1 (2020); S. L. Sparre and L. Paulsen Galal, 'Domestication of Difference: Practices of Civic Engagement Among Middle Eastern Christians in Denmark', *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 8/1 (2020).

[171] Conte, 'Welcome to Mesopotäljie'.

those in the second generation are nonetheless more likely to reject religious rules on family matters by choosing a native European partner, embracing European habits with regard to women's rights and social roles, cohabiting outside marriage or seeking divorce.[172] We shall return to this matter later when focusing on Muslim migrants.

Differences between immigrants and natives tend to diminish with the former's permanence in the destination country, as both their religiosity and religious attendance show a statistically significant tendency to decline with time.[173] Nevertheless, migrants are in general more resistant to secularisation processes across generations: the transmission of subjective religiosity is more successful in immigrant families than in native ones.[174] This is confirmed by the fact that immigrant adolescents (both first and second generation, with at least one foreign-born parent) are significantly more religious than native adolescents.[175]

While this is the general picture, specific conditions affect the secularisation trajectory among second-generation migrants. Not surprisingly, children born to intermarried couples show a more pronounced secularisation pattern than those born to two immigrant parents.[176] Furthermore, the societal–religious environment not only affects the religiosity of first-generation immigrants but also that of their descendants, which means that cross-generational secularisation is less pronounced in more religious countries.[177] Finally, noteworthy differences exist between immigrant religions: while the religiosity of Christian migrants in Europe significantly decreases from the first to the second generation,[178] this is mostly not the case in Muslim families, as we will show below.

In terms of values, trends among migrants confirm the secularisation theory. Adhering to a religion is connected to higher levels of homonegativity, and this effect increases when subjective religiosity increases. Thus, non-religious migrants are significantly less homonegative than Christian migrants, who in turn are

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[172] Rabo, '"Without Our Church We Will Disappear"', 185–7.

[173] Aleksynska and Chiswick, 'The Determinants of Religiosity Among Immigrants and the Native Born in Europe'; van Tubergen and Sindradóttir, 'The Religiosity of Immigrants in Europe', 283.

[174] de Hoon and van Tubergen, 'The Religiosity of Children of Immigrants and Natives in England, Germany, and the Netherlands', 203.

[175] Ibid., 201.

[176] Molteni and van Tubergen, 'Immigrant Generation and Religiosity', 18; Kasselstrand and Mahmoudi, 'Secularization Among Immigrants in Scandinavia'.

[177] Molteni and van Tubergen, 'Immigrant Generation and Religiosity', 18.

[178] Ibid., 11; Just, Sandovici and Listhaug, 'Islam, Religiosity, and Immigrant Political Action in Western Europe', 134.

less homonegative than migrants belonging to other religions, with Muslims being the most homonegative.[179] Similarly, first-generation immigrants tend to report more traditional views in terms of gender attitudes, with the relevant exception of those with no religious affiliation, and religiosity is strongly connected to less egalitarian attitudes, with a particularly pronounced effect for Muslims.[180] While these differences tend to disappear in the second generation, this is, once again, not the case for Muslims.[181]

Case study 1: Ukrainians

The great majority of Ukrainians are Christians of various Catholic and Orthodox churches—the latter being the biggest group. Their religiosity and secularisation trajectories show some peculiarities, as demonstrated by the results of the WVS and a 2000–21 study led by the Razumkov Centre—a Ukrainian think tank focused on religiosity and religious practices.[182] According to the latter, in 2021, 60% of Ukrainians defined themselves as Orthodox (belonging to any of the Orthodox churches), 8.8% belonged to the Greek–Catholic Church and 0.8% to the Roman Catholic Church, while 8.5% defined themselves as 'simply Christian' and 18.8% did not share any religious affiliation.[183]

The data of both the WVS and the Razumkov Centre evidence a two-decade-long increase in the importance of religion in people's lives and in the number of people who define themselves as 'believers'. These findings reinforce the thesis that there has been a strong revival of religiosity since the end of the Communist regime, as has happened in other Eastern European countries.[184] The percentage of respondents to WVS surveys who stated that religion was 'very important' or 'rather important' increased from 48.8%

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[179]   K. Van der Bracht and B. Van de Putte, 'Homonegativity Among First and Second Generation Migrants in Europe: The Interplay of Time Trends, Origin, Destination and Religion', *Social Science Research* 48 (2014), 117.

[180]   A. Röder, 'Explaining Religious Differences in Immigrants' Gender Role Attitudes: The Changing Impact of Origin Country and Individual Religiosity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37/14 (2014), 2621.

[181]   Ibid., 2628.

[182]   *Razumkov Centre*, 'Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine: Trends 2000–2021' (2021).

[183]   Ibid., 39.

[184]   See Section 3.

in the 1995–8 wave[185] to 62% in the 2017–20 one.[186] Regular religious practice also went up, from 17.1% of respondents participating in 1995–8[187] to 33.8% participating in 2017–20.[188] Notably, the rate of people who never attended any religious service fell from 32.2% in 1995–8[189] to 13.9% in 2017–20.[190]

If we further break down these data by region and Church, we first observe a strong divide between western regions, where there have always been higher levels of religiosity, and the rest of Ukraine.[191] Notably, western regions are the only ones where Orthodox Christians form less than 50% of the population, with the share of Greek Catholics reaching almost 35%.[192] Contrary to our findings concerning the EU, Orthodox Christians in Ukraine show lower levels of both belief and attendance than Catholics.[193] Furthermore, they agree more than Catholics that the separation of church and state is a key pillar of democracy.[194] This could possibly be an outcome of the recent conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, as the Russian invasion of Crimea produced a split at the top level of the Orthodox hierarchy that may have impacted believers' support for the church.[195]

As concerns key moral values and behaviours, we focus on divorce, homosexuality, abortion and women's rights in order to make a comparison with the EU states analysed in the previous section.

According to WVS data, the most surprising trend relates to attitudes towards homosexuality: in the 1995–8 wave, despite the largely non-religious society, 61% of respondents viewed it as 'never justifiable',[196] while by 2017–20 that rate had dropped to 42.1% despite the increased religiosity.[197] The low social acceptance of abortion does not seem to be linked to religion either, as in 1995–8 respondents already largely opposed

[185] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine (1995–1998)', 2.

[186] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine (2017–2020)', 9.

[187] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 41.

[188] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 55.

[189] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 41.

[190] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 55.

[191] *Razumkov Centre*, 'Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine', 34.

[192] Ibid., 40.

[193] Ibid., 50.

[194] Ibid., 101.

[195] Once the war erupted in Crimea, some Orthodox laypeople and clergymen started to reshape their religious identity and, in 2018, they rejected the Russian Orthodox authority and asked the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople for official recognition of an autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

[196] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 46.

[197] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 60.

abortion: only 4.4% considered it 'always justifiable' and 24.2% saw it as 'never justifiable',[198] while in the 2017–20 wave these figures were 2.4% and 26.7% respectively.[199] These trends seem to show a disconnect between religiosity and moral values, which challenges the role of Christian religious leaders as moral guides. As confirmation of this, the Razumkov Centre found that respectively 16.8% and 20.2% of believers consider the churches' stances on homosexuality and abortion 'conservative'.[200]

The large social acceptance of the institution of divorce is less surprising, as Orthodox Churches have always granted religious divorce under specific conditions.[201] In any case, views on divorce became more permissive between the 1995–8 wave and the 2017–20 one, with 'never justifiable' responses falling from 14.9% in 1995–8 to 11.6% in 2017–20, and 'always justifiable' responses increasing from 5.9%[202] to 7.8%.[203]

Contradictory findings emerge on gender equality. In the 1995–8 wave, 42.4% of respondents disagreed that 'when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women', surpassing those (34.7%) who agreed with that statement.[204] In the 2017–20 wave, the percentage of respondents disagreeing remained stable at 43%, while those in agreement fell to 29%.[205] In other words, there has been no major evolution here. If we consider instead the political sphere, a clear egalitarian trend emerges, as the number of respondents who viewed men as 'better political leaders than women' significantly decreased from 53.4% in 1995–8[206] to 39.9% in 2017–20, and was surpassed by those who disagreed (the percentage of whom rose from 30.8% to 49% in the same period).[207] An even more significant growth trend applies to gender equality as a pillar of democracy: respondents in support increased from 43.7% in the 2005–9 wave[208] to 61.8% in the 2017–20 wave.[209]

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[198] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 47.
[199] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 61.
[200] *Razumkov Centre*, 'Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine', 73.
[201] K. Schembri, Oikonomia, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2017, Kanonika 23).
[202] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 47.
[203] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 61.
[204] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 11.
[205] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 15.
[206] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 3 Ukraine', 20.
[207] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 14.
[208] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 5 Ukraine', 111. This question was not asked in Wave 3, so we refer to the first wave available chronologically.
[209] *WVS*, 'World Values Survey Wave 7 Ukraine', 84.

When it comes to generational trends, the studies of both the WVS and the Razumkov Centre evidence that the older generations are more religious and more attached to religious values than the younger ones. Indeed, there is a big rift between the overwhelmingly religious over-50s, among whom believers account for more than 70%, and the youngest generation (18–24 years), in which the share of believers falls below 50%.[210] The latter is also the least religious group in terms of religious attendance[211] and the most secular as regards views on abortion, homosexuality and gender equality.[212] Other elements that confirm the secularisation theory concern the social composition of believers, whose number is higher among the less educated and those living in rural areas.[213]

Overall, data about religiosity and values in Ukraine paint the picture of a heterogeneous landscape that is, in certain aspects, in line with some eastern EU countries. In particular, personal religiosity, rather than diminishing, has constantly increased in the most recent decades, although with a marked divergence between the oldest and the youngest generations. At the same time, two aspects stand out: first, contrary to the wider findings, Catholics seem more religious than Orthodox believers; second, the progression of religiosity has not impeded a parallel secularisation of values, even where this is in open conflict with the churches' teachings. It remains to be seen how these characteristics of the indigenous Ukrainian population translate to the values and outlook of the Ukrainian refugees and migrants who are going to remain in the EU.

[210] *Razumkov Centre*, 'Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine', 35.
[211] Ibid., 49.
[212] *WVS*, 'Database Wave 7 (2017–2022)' (2022).
[213] *Razumkov Centre*, 'Specifics of Religious and Church Self-Determination of Citizens of Ukraine', 5.

Case study 2: Muslim immigrants

In this section, we focus on Muslim immigrants, for three reasons:

- Muslims are more religious than both natives and non-Muslim immigrants, and they are less touched by secularisation processes, both during an individual's lifetime and across the generations.

- They are comparatively more prone to fundamentalism and out-group hostility.

- 'In much of Western Europe, religion has come to be viewed as a problem for immigrant minorities and for the societies in which they now live. The concerns and tensions are almost exclusively about Islam, which numerically overwhelms other non-Western religions. Nearly 40 percent of migrants from outside the European Union are Muslim'.[214]

Higher religiosity

Muslim minorities in European countries are 'overwhelmingly' more religious than the majority,[215] but they also stand out compared to other immigrants, from which they 'differ significantly' in this aspect.[216] Indeed, Muslims report higher levels of religiosity than non-Muslim migrants in all dimensions under consideration (subjective religiosity, prayer frequency and service attendance).[217] This difference exists despite the fact that different migrant groups share key social features, such as their origin in less developed countries, high levels of endogamy, high residential concentrations and social contacts predominantly within their religious community of origin.[218] Not only are Muslims more religious; they are also more fundamentalist than other religious groups. Among Muslims (but not among Christians), mere religious identification is an important predictor of fundamentalism.[219]

[214] Alba and Foner, *Strangers No More*, 119.
[215] V. Eskelinen and M. Verkuyten, 'Support for Democracy and Liberal Sexual Mores Among Muslims in Western Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46/11 (2020), 2348.
[216] Kasselstrand and Mahmoudi, 'Secularization Among Immigrants in Scandinavia', 620.
[217] Simsek, Fleischmann and van Tubergen, 'Similar or Divergent Paths?', 165.
[218] D. Voas and F. Fleischmann, 'Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations', *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012), 538.
[219] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 45.

This rift is cross-generational: while among Christian migrants religiosity significantly decreases from the second generation, as noted above, several studies highlight the opposite trajectory among Muslims, with an increase in religiosity, religious identification and religious practice.[220] Muslim immigrant children are significantly more religious than non-Muslim immigrant children, in both the first and second generations (i.e. with at least one foreign-born parent).[221] Unlike Christians (both native and immigrant), Muslim immigrants do not exhibit a trend towards secularisation during the teenage years.[222]

Religious identity is one of the main cultural elements transmitted across generations among European Muslims.[223] Religious rules are likewise transmitted from parents to children: when it comes to behaviours such as abstaining from pork and alcohol, reading the Koran, going to mosque and wearing the veil, most second-generation Muslims across several European countries maintain the same behaviours as their parents.[224] Interestingly, the same data also apply to inter-ethnic families.[225]

Muslim religiosity and secular values

Religious continuity is associated with cultural continuity.[226] Higher religiosity among Muslims does not manifest itself only in personal beliefs but also in different aspects of orthopraxis. In other words, 'religious norms seem to be shared and reinforced in Muslim migrant communities in Europe'.[227]

In line with our premise, this has an impact on secular values, such as women's and LGBT rights. Several studies across different countries have shown that European Muslims are less accepting of liberal

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[220] Just, Sandovici and Listhaug, 'Islam, Religiosity, and Immigrant Political Action in Western Europe'; N. Foner and R. Alba, 'Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?', *International Migration Review* 42/2 (2008), 134; Voas and Fleischmann, 'Islam Moves West'; J. Fourquet, 'Exclusif. Jérôme Fourquet : 'Le "tchador" n'a pas encore dit son dernier mot', interview by T. Mahler, *Le Point*, 18 September 2019.

[221] de Hoon and van Tubergen, 'The Religiosity of Children of Immigrants and Natives in England, Germany, and the Netherlands', 201.

[222] Simsek, Fleischmann and van Tubergen, 'Similar or Divergent Paths?', 169.

[223] A. Duderija, 'Emergence of Western Muslim Identity: Factors, Agents and Discourses', in R. Tottoli (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (London: Routledge, 2015), 201.

[224] van de Pol and van Tubergen, 'Inheritance of Religiosity'; Fourquet, 'Jérôme Fourquet'; T. Virgili, *Lifting the Integration Veil: Outcasts from Islam in Western Europe*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Brussels, 2020).

[225] van de Pol and van Tubergen, 'Inheritance of Religiosity', 100.

[226] D. Güngör, F. Fleischmann and K. Phalet, 'Religious Identification, Beliefs, and Practices Among Turkish Belgian and Moroccan Belgian Muslims: Intergenerational Continuity and Acculturative Change', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 42/8 (2011), 1369.

[227] M. Maliepaard and D. D. Schacht, 'The Relation Between Religiosity and Muslims' Social Integration: A Two-Wave Study of Recent Immigrants in Three European Countries', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41/5 (2018), 875.

sexual mores compared to other groups.[228] They are much more conservative in family values compared to Christians and Jews,[229] and they are more patriarchal regardless of societal and individual conditions.[230] This means that, even when controlling for religiosity, social status, education, country of origin and other characteristics, Muslims always turn out to be more patriarchal than non-Muslims in the same category.[231]

Overall, the more Muslims in Europe are religious, the less they support secular values.[232] While this finding is not exclusive to Muslims per se, the link between religiosity and patriarchy reveals a distinct feature of Islam: 'Even at the highest level of religiosity, self-identifying Muslims hold much stronger patriarchal values than people from other denominations, including Hindus, Orthodox Christians and the main branches of Christianity. These findings justify dichotomizing self-identifying Muslims against all other religious denominations'.[233]

A similar reasoning applies to homosexuality. Although religious people are in general more homonegative than non-religious ones, irrespective of creed,[234] research consistently shows that Muslims are the most homonegative believers.[235] Less religious and non-practising Muslims, conversely, show lower levels of homonegativity.[236]

[228] Eskelinen and Verkuyten, 'Support for Democracy and Liberal Sexual Mores Among Muslims in Western Europe'.

[229] Astor and Dompnier, 'A Geography of Family Values in Europe'.

[230] A. C. Alexander and C. Welzel, 'Islam and Patriarchy: How Robust Is Muslim Support for Patriarchal Values?', *World Values Research* 4/2 (2011); D. Kretschmer, 'Explaining Differences in Gender Role Attitudes Among Migrant and Native Adolescents in Germany: Intergenerational Transmission, Religiosity, and Integration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44/13 (2018).

[231] Alexander and Welzel, 'Islam and Patriarchy', 66.

[232] E. Banfi, M. Gianni and M. Giugni, 'Religious Minorities and Secularism: An Alternative View of the Impact of Religion on the Political Values of Muslims in Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42/2 (2015), 10.

[233] Alexander and Welzel, 'Islam and Patriarchy', 51.

[234] S. Jäckle and G. Wenzelburger, 'Religion, Religiosity, and the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality—A Multilevel Analysis of 79 Countries', *Journal of Homosexuality* 62/2 (2015); F. Van Droogenbroeck et al., 'Religious Quest Orientation and Anti-Gay Sentiment: Nuancing the Relationship Between Religiosity and Negative Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Young Muslims and Christians in Flanders', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55/4 (2016).

[235] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 47; J. Anderson and Y. Koc, 'Exploring Patterns of Explicit and Implicit Anti-Gay Attitudes in Muslims and Atheists', *European Journal of Social Psychology* 45/6 (2015); M. Lowe et al., 'Antigay "Honor" Abuse: A Multinational Attitudinal Study of Collectivist- Versus Individualist-Orientated Populations in Asia and England', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36/15–16 (2021), 7870; Jäckle and Wenzelburger, 'Religion, Religiosity, and the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality', 230; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 'Religious Quest Orientation and Anti-Gay Sentiment', 794.

[236] Van der Bracht and Van de Putte, 'Homonegativity Among First and Second Generation Migrants in Europe'; A. Siraj, 'The Construction of the Homosexual "Other" by British Muslim Heterosexuals', *Contemporary Islam* 3/1 (2009), 51; Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 53.

Fundamentalism also plays a role in this picture. As noted above, the connection between religious identification and fundamentalism is particularly strong among Muslims. This is especially problematic from the perspective of integration and coexistence, because fundamentalism is powerfully connected to out-group hostility, namely to intolerance towards minorities perceived as defying the religious ethos.[237]

Muslim religiosity has an inverse correlation with support for secular values, not only in the first generation but also in the second.[238] A study combining migrants' country of origin and their children's integration into Western Europe showed that second-generation migrants who are born to Middle Eastern, North African or Sub-Saharan African parents tend to be the most culturally conservative of all geographical groups.[239] When it comes to secular values, on certain matters second-generation Muslims are even less liberal than their parents—significantly, on gender issues, various aspects of orthopraxy and the radical interpretation of shariah law.[240] In some cases, parents themselves have been shocked by their children's commitment to return to what they believe to be the 'real Islam'.[241]

Religion or ethnicity?

Having observed this Muslim resistance to acculturation and secularisation processes, we need to raise the question of whether this is a trend related to religion per se or rather to national and ethnic factors. To do so, we highlight limited but important exceptions to the trend of higher Muslim religiosity, and to the connection thereof with the rejection of secular values.

The first point to raise is that the intergenerational transmission of religiosity does not follow identical patterns among different Muslim communities. Quantitative studies comparing Turks and Moroccans in Belgium and the Netherlands have shown some differences between them. In particular, second-generation Turks are more influenced by their parents' religiosity and values than Moroccan Muslims.[242] This seems to

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[237] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups'; Virgili, *Lifting the Integration Veil*.

[238] Banfi, Gianni and Giugni, 'Religious Minorities and Secularism'.

[239] A. F. Heath and S. L. Schneider, 'Dimensions of Migrant Integration in Western Europe', *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (2021), 10–11.

[240] Virgili, *Lifting the Integration Veil*, 39; Kretschmer, 'Explaining Differences in Gender Role Attitudes Among Migrant and Native Adolescents in Germany', 2206.

[241] Voas and Fleischmann, 'Islam Moves West', 534.

[242] van de Pol and van Tubergen, 'Inheritance of Religiosity', 100; Güngör, Fleischmann and Phalet, 'Religious Identification, Beliefs, and Practices', 1359.

be linked to the fact that Turkish immigrants exert more control and pressure to conform at the community and family level than Moroccan immigrants.[243] We should not, however, confound religious transmission and religiosity: Moroccan Belgians actually report higher levels of religiosity than Turkish Belgians.[244]

A second observation is that certain Muslim communities of migrant origin seem to follow a totally different pattern, more in line with the secularisation trend evident among natives. A relevant example is that of Albanian Muslims, whose religiosity stands out compared to that of other Muslim immigrants. While research has found that religion shapes their collective identity, this manifests in family traditions rather than in outright religiosity, likely reflecting the highly secularised environment Albanian immigrants come from.[245] Indeed, secularism in Albania is not only a consequence of the state atheism that was enforced by the Communist regime, but is also a policy actively pursued both before and after that time as a means to anchor the country to European modernity.[246] In the words of Prime Minister Edi Rama, 'this is not a Muslim, but a European country. Not only Albania, but Albanian people have always been and remain believers of Europe'.[247]

While this statement underestimates the influence of the radical preachers and foundations from the Gulf that enjoyed free rein in the country in the late 1990s/early 2000s,[248] two undeniable dynamics have been observed that are quite unique to Albanian Muslims (both in their home country and post-emigration): one is their rejection of Islam as their way of expressing adhesion to the West, in line with the perceived dichotomy that we have just highlighted;[249] the second is a religious syncretism with Christianity, based on the idea of the unicity of God.[250] As a consequence, it is not unusual for Albanian Muslims in Western countries to be

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[243] Güngör, Fleischmann and Phalet, 'Religious Identification, Beliefs, and Practices', 1359.

[244] Ibid., 1364.

[245] I. Kokkali, 'Albanian Immigrants in the Greek City: Spatial "Invisibility" and Identity Management as a Strategy of Adaptation', in H. Vermeulen, M. Baldwin and R. van Boeschoten (eds.), *Migration in the Southern Balkans. From Ottoman Territory to Globalized Nation States* (Cham: Springer Open, 2015), 134; R. King and N. Mai, 'Italophilia Meets Albanophobia: Paradoxes of Asymmetric Assimilation and Identity Processes Among Albanian Immigrants in Italy', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32/1 (2009), 131.

[246] A. Elbasani and A. Puto, 'Albanian-Style *Laïcité*: A Model for a Multi-Religious European Home?', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19/1 (2017).

[247] Ibid., 63.

[248] Ibid., 60.

[249] Kokkali, 'Albanian Immigrants in the Greek City', 135; G. de Rapper, 'Religion in Post-Communist Albania: Muslims, Christians and the Concept of "Culture" (Devoll, South Albania)', *Anthropological Notebooks* 14/2 (2008).

[250] Kokkali, 'Albanian Immigrants in the Greek City', 136.

baptised or attend Mass.[251] Finally, while religion shapes Albanians' family bonding, it does not seem to have relevant effects on the wider social capital of Albanian immigrants, who do not tend to form communities based on ethno-national kinship.[252] There is no Molenbeek of Albanians, so to speak.

Another tiny but interesting exception to the general finding of higher Islamic religiosity concerns those Muslims who migrated to Poland during the Cold War to pursue their academic studies. Communist-ruled Poland officially registered them as 'Arabs' rather than 'Muslims'; religion was never officially recorded among their personal information, nor were they granted spaces to practise their faith.[253] While some returned to their countries of origin, those who remained in Poland did not build any relations with the Tatars—the tiny but long-standing Polish Muslim community—nor did they ever show any form of religiosity at the private or social level. They defined Islam as a cultural element of their personal identity more than a religious one.[254]

Finally, some minorities within Muslim communities represent noteworthy exceptions—not with regard to their level of religiosity per se but to its reverse link with secular values. A study comparing the Muslim majority groups with Ahmadis and Alevis shows that 'net of the degree of religiosity—as measured through a scale that includes a variety of aspects—and other things being equal, the fact of being part of a Muslim religious minority discriminated in the home country makes one more incline to support secular values'.[255] In other words, the fact of being persecuted in their home countries for religious reasons seems to be the determining factor leading these minorities to appreciate a secular framework, irrespective of their degree of religiosity.

Belief or identity?

Another conundrum we have to address is whether the higher level of Islamic religiosity has more to do with profound belief or with the identitarian turn that we have described in connection with Christian migrants and the autochthonous European populations.

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[251] Ibid., 127; King and Mai, 'Italophilia Meets Albanophobia', 131.

[252] King and Mai, 'Italophilia Meets Albanophobia, 132; Kokkali, 'Albanian Immigrants in the Greek City', 127.

[253] Grodź, 'Christian–Muslim Experiences in Poland', 277.

[254] Ibid., 276.

[255] Banfi, Gianni and Giugni, 'Religious Minorities and Secularism, 11.

As we have seen, the reactive religiosity theory postulates that perceptions of discrimination or unfair treatment strengthen collective and/or individual religious identity. In the case of Muslims, the larger cultural distance could explain why they are more religious than Christian migrants and natives: they might embrace Islam to preserve the group identity,[256] or as a way of rejecting a society from which they feel excluded. This would also explain why religiosity increases among the second generation.[257]

This theory, however sound, remains controversial when put to the empirical test. For instance, quantitative studies have found that the levels of individual religiosity among European-born Turkish and Moroccan people are not significantly related to perceived discrimination.[258] There is even proof to the contrary: when it comes to recognition of Muslim minorities and their societal demands, it emerges that Muslim religiosity is actually *higher* where there are accommodating, multiculturalist policies in place,[259] and this also applies to fundamentalism.[260] Finally, it cannot be argued that ethnic exclusion causes out-group hostility, considering that the latter is equally present in the countries of origin, where Muslims are the majority.[261]

It remains unclear, in conclusion, whether the Muslim specificity is related to faith, ethnicity, identity or, most probably, to a mixture of the three.

Overall assessment

In this section, we have examined the complex relationship between migration, religiosity and acceptance of secular values, with a special focus on Ukrainians and Muslim immigrants. Several key findings have emerged from our analysis.

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[256] Simsek, Fleischmann and van Tubergen, 'Similar or Divergent Paths?', 169.
[257] Foner and Alba, 'Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe', 373.
[258] Voas and Fleischmann, 'Islam Moves West', 537.
[259] Kwon and McCaffree, 'Muslim Religious Accommodations in Western Europe', 231.
[260] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 47.
[261] Ibid., 53.

First, it is evident that immigrants, on average, tend to be more religious than native populations, irrespective of the specific religion. This finding underscores both the fact that immigrants tend to originate from less secular societies and the significance of religiosity as a marker of identity within immigrant communities.

Second, the correlation between higher religiosity and lower acceptance of secular values, already identified among natives, is confirmed among immigrants as well. In consideration of their higher religiosity, this may prove problematic for their cultural adaptation to the values of the host countries.

However, our research indicates that, on the whole, migrants progressively tend to conform to the average national data in terms of religiosity and acceptance of secular values. This conformity is observed both across generations and as a function of the number of years migrants have resided in their host countries, reflecting a dynamic process of adaptation and integration within new cultural contexts.

Distinct features emerge within the two specific groups we have analysed. As concerns Ukrainians, the diachronic analysis shows an intriguing pattern of increased religiosity along with a simultaneous increased acceptance of secular values, a trend that distinguishes them from other populations. Another finding is that Catholics appear to be more religious than Orthodox Christians—a pattern which is at odds with the general trends observed in the EU.

Muslim immigrants, in contrast, emerge as a unique subgroup with higher levels of religiosity, a more pronounced adherence to fundamentalist beliefs and lower levels of acceptance of secular values. Additionally, our research suggests that Muslim immigrants may be less influenced by cross-generational secularisation processes, which raises important questions about the persistence of religious traditions in these communities when it comes to acculturation and assimilation processes. While religiosity serves as a potent marker of identity, the impact of reactive religiosity remains the subject of ongoing debate and further research.

In summary, there is a clear interplay between religiosity, migration and the acceptance of secular values, which underscores the role of religious beliefs on immigrants' adaptation to host societies. Policy interventions should take this element into account in order to promote harmonious integration and coexistence in diverse societies, as we will argue in the next section.

Conclusions

Implications of religiosity and secularisation for societal cohesion

As stated at the beginning, and shown throughout this paper, religiosity is deeply connected to a set of traditional values that are increasingly being challenged by the modern, secular ethos upheld by liberal democracies. Traditional religious beliefs often encompass moral codes and behavioural guidelines that diverge from the contemporary values of individual autonomy, gender equality and freedom of belief and expression.

This factual statement does not, per se, imply a contradiction between religiosity and liberal democracy. On the contrary, freedom of religion and belief is actually a precious accomplishment and pillar of this system, and it must extend even to strongly conservative religious convictions, as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others and they do not seek to pursue the submission of state laws to religious ones.

This is where the boundary lies. When personal and group religiosity negates the common framework of individual freedom and equality, it can impair the harmony and the cohesive fabric of diverse societies. The challenge lies in fostering an environment where differing beliefs can coexist while promoting shared values and mutual respect under a common state law that upholds individual freedom.

There is not a single valid model to articulate the relations between religions and the state, as demonstrated by the different approaches within the EU, but some minimal prerequisites are necessary: the primacy of state laws over religious rules, formal and substantial respect for the fundamental rights of all individuals (including their freedom to change or abandon religion), and the principle of non-discrimination between believers.

The lack of acceptance of this secular framework and the exploitation of religion for socio-political ends pose a real challenge to European values. Three interrelated articulations of religiosity have an impact on this:

1. *Religion regarded as a source of law*. When believers consider religious rules to be above state law, they tend to force them on others against their will, producing oppression and out-group hostility, as well as pushing them onto the entire society; blasphemy laws and honour crimes are relevant examples.

2. *Religious fundamentalism*. Fundamentalism differs from orthodoxy, as stated in the introduction. A high level of religiosity is not a problem per se, but when it is correlated with a blurred distinction between moral and legal imperatives, it can imply a switch from orthodoxy to fundamentalism, which is, in turn, a breeding ground for non-violent and violent radicalisation.

3. *Religion as a predominant identity*. When religiosity takes an identitarian turn, it can become a barrier to integration, preventing immigrants from assimilating into the host society and accepting its values. One relevant example is a lack of social mixing, perpetuated by the social pressure towards endogamy and the creation of closed communities. The insular nature of marrying within the same religious or cultural group can impede interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, hindering the development of cross-cultural understanding and unity. Similarly, the tendency to form ethnically and religiously homogeneous neighbourhoods impedes intra-community contacts and reinforces in-community pressure to conform to the dominant mores, in a vicious circle that strengthens the role of religion as an exclusionary identity.

These challenges are particularly evident within the context of immigration. As shown above, immigrants in Europe often come from more religious societies or even from theocratic states, and they may have a hard time adapting to the secular context they come to live in. Muslims seem particularly resistant to secularisation. Studies have found that Muslims exhibit a lesser degree of acceptance of liberal gender and sexual norms compared to natives and non-Muslim counterparts. Furthermore, there is a distinct correlation between Muslim religiosity and a lesser degree of acceptance of fundamental liberal democratic principles. It is crucial for European authorities to reassert the paradigm of secularism, at least in its procedural sense, without exception.

This objective cannot be achieved by mere formal or socio-economic integration. Failed integration, the proliferation of extremist groups and the presence of ethnic/religious enclaves even in countries with a generous welfare system and easy naturalisation policies prove that a permissive approach does not bring about assimilation and societal cohesion. Formal integration must always be accompanied by a process of socio-cultural assimilation within a secular framework.

Overall, the implications of religiosity for social cohesion in pluralistic and diverse societies are complex and multifaceted. The clash between traditional religious values and modern liberal ideals poses challenges to societal harmony and peaceful coexistence. In navigating these challenges, societies must find ways to celebrate diversity while nurturing common values that transcend religious differences.

Implications for the centre–right

The religiosity and secularisation of natives and migrants are certainly issues of high political relevance. To address the implications for the centre–right, we should consider two aspects: impact on voting behaviour and the normative positioning of the political family.

As concerns the direct political impact, higher levels of religiosity have traditionally been linked to a preference for conservative parties. Data from the mid- to late 1990s from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems show a consistent relationship between religiosity and voting preference for the right—stronger than any other socio-economic indicator.[262] The WVS has also consistently indicated that, in industrial and post-industrial societies, religious participation is associated with right-wing self-placement,[263] even after controlling for age, education, income and social class.[264]

Yet, with the increase in secularisation, this connection has started to weaken. The support for religious parties has decreased, especially in Catholic Europe.[265] It is true that religious people in the EU and the US still tend to support conservative parties,[266] especially along the fault-line of traditional versus progressive values, but this now tends to benefit populist, right-wing parties rather than the centre–right. The contrast between religiosity and 'new [progressive] cultural norms' is a stronger predictor of this type of political preference than grievances related to the economy and migration.[267]

However, the opposite socio-political force is also at play, namely the distancing of liberal-leaning voters, especially the younger generations, from parties that do not embrace the increasingly dominant secular values. In other words, as much as religion influences political choices, secularisation does so too, and can

[262] Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 201.
[263] Ibid., 202.
[264] Ibid., 207.
[265] Ibid., 210.
[266] Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 149; A. Kulkova, 'Religiosity and Political Participation Across Europe', in M. J. Breen (ed.), *Values and Identities in Europe: Evidence from the European Social Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 40.
[267] Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 152.

even change people's approach to religion itself.[268] This should not come as a surprise, given the intimate link between religion and culture that we described in the introduction. For these reasons, the centre–right should be wary of following religious narratives that could advantage the far right and alienate the younger electorate.

As regards its normative positioning, the centre–right is a political family composed of several branches, which include Christian Democrats and liberal–conservatives. It acknowledges Judeo-Christian values as the foundation of European societies, as well as the importance of the protection of individual freedom and the rule of law against any form of totalitarianism.[269] The political family further believes in subsidiarity and in not imposing overarching models on society where not necessary.

Given this, the centre–right should navigate the issues related to immigration by defending a few core principles—with the aim of balancing the legal and moral duties towards immigrants and the need to guide them towards true social integration—all while protecting and imposing state law, respect for individual rights and the core principles of European societies.

First of all, the centre–right should not neglect the legitimate concerns of its constituencies, which value cultural heritage, security and respect for the rules,[270] and it should address these in the framework of the rights of the majority, along with those of the minorities.[271] At the same time, it should refrain from the temptation to build a 'fortress Europe', keeping in mind that an open society contributes to the material and non-material prosperity of the continent. In this sense, the centre–right has the space to distinguish itself from the far right: rather than nurturing the unrealistic promise of stopping immigration altogether in the name of a war of civilisation, it should present itself as a force that intends to control the phenomenon and its outcomes, protecting those who are really in need of asylum and drawing legal pathways to enter the EU for those who are searching for job opportunities.[272]

On the other hand, the centre–right must be clear in countering the narrative and policies of the left, which tends to deny the security aspects correlated with uncontrolled migration and to disregard the importance of

[268]   Ibid., 164; Reynolds, 'Religion and Values in the ESS: Individual and Societal Effects'; Cragun, 'The Declining Significance of Religion', 28.
[269]   *European People's Party Group in the European Parliament*, 'Our Mission & Values'.
[270]   A. Geddes, L. Hadj-Abdou and L. Brumat, *Migration and Mobility in the European Union* (Red Globe Press, 2020), 16.
[271]   L. Orgad and R. Koopmans (eds.), *Majorities, Minorities, and the Future of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[272]   R. Koopmans, *Die Asyl-Lotterie: Eine Bilanz der Flüchtlingspolitik von 2015 bis zum Ukraine-Krieg* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2023).

cultural integration. The left has persisted in idealising the multiculturalist society despite its failure to create safety and cohesion, ascribing to migrants the role of victims of racism and economic exploitation. At the two extremes, both the far right and the left are similar in the sense that they embrace identity politics, for the majority or the minorities respectively.[273] In this picture, religion assumes an identitarian connotation and becomes a barrier to virtuous coexistence.

Individual liberty, at least in its negative connotation of freedom from external constraints, must be the guiding light for liberal–conservatives. It must therefore constitute the ultimate barrier against prevarication attempts, including religious ones. State secularity is a necessary precondition to guarantee this principle and attain social coexistence.

All this leads to the following conclusions:

- Immigration is neither a phenomenon to be halted nor one to be passively endured. Centre–right constituencies legitimately value security and respect for rules and culture. Their parties of reference have a duty to address these concerns.

- The centre–right is constituted of both Christian Democratic and liberal–conservative parties that should work towards a common framework of secularism, leaving each country free to determine its relationship with religions while guaranteeing the supremacy of universal state law and individual liberties, including freedom of and from religion.

- Protecting the cultural heritage of European society is not in contradiction with this posture, as long as this aim is not embraced to set one religious identity against other religious identities, but to defend the rights of both the majority and the minorities.

- Research shows that increased secularisation brings about increased acceptance of individual freedoms. A political family that values the individual should appreciate this outcome of secularism and promote the latter in the framework of integration policies and, more widely, as a pillar of European society.

[273]   I. Krastev, 'Can Europe Go Wrong? Of Course. Political Scientist Ivan Krastev Talks About the Fault Lines Between West and East', interview by J. Vogt, *Tipping Point*, 18 September 2018.

- Centre–right parties should support laws protecting secular spaces (such as political institutions, schools and hospitals); Western culture will definitely decline if it accepts the idea of religious-based separation in public places.

- For the same reasons, they should resist attempts to elevate one or more religions above other systems of values, as happens when blasphemy laws are in place, or to create religious exceptions to general principles, especially in criminal law[274] or matters of public security.[275] Both international and EU law guarantee the equality of theistic and non-theistic beliefs.

- Efforts towards achieving social cohesion might involve initiatives that foster interfaith dialogue, promote inclusive education based on knowledge of the core legal principles enshrined in every national constitution and EU treaty, and provide platforms for communities to engage in shared activities regardless of religious background.

- The promotion of an open and secure society within a secular order, respectful of local traditions and sensibilities (as long as these do not entail discrimination), would allow the centre–right to positively distinguish itself from both the left and the far right.

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[274] For example, the right to invoke exonerating or mitigating circumstances in the case of culturally orientated crimes.
[275] For instance, the right to carry religious weapons or to cover the face for religious reasons in derogation to general law.

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This study provides an assessment of the disparities in secularisation between the migrant and native populations in the EU. Although religion is a force that continues to shape societal culture, secularisation—the progressive autonomisation of societal sectors from religious meaning and institutions—is gaining strength across the bloc.

The study, which relies on scholarly works and quantitative data from survey institutes, explores variations across different member countries and societal groups. It finds that north-western, mainly Protestant, EU countries are the most secularised, while eastern, mainly Orthodox, ones exhibit higher levels of religiosity and more conservative values. Overall across the EU, immigrant populations exhibit higher levels of religiosity and conservatism compared to native populations. Muslims prove more resistant than any other religious group to secularisation and acculturation processes, even across generations. Ukrainian nationals manifest a unique pattern of increased religiosity alongside increased acceptance of secular values.

The study advocates for policies that promote secularism and socio-cultural assimilation in order to foster societal cohesion while celebrating diversity. The centre–right in the EU should work towards a common framework of secularism, while respecting national differences. It should balance the legal and moral duties towards immigrants on the one hand, and the protection of state law and respect for individual rights on the other hand.

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