

Changing Religious Landscapes in the Nordic Countries

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Located in the far north of Europe, the Nordic countries constitute a cluster of very small countries when compared to populations in other European countries. The inhabitants vary from 9.5 million in Sweden to as little as 326,000 in Iceland in 2014. To many, the Nordic countries appear to be homogenous, stable welfare economies with high levels of gender equality and few political crises. In the international research

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literature, they are often grouped together under a particular governance regime, as the “Nordic welfare state model” or “welfare capitalism,” meaning a particular way of organizing the state, the capitalist economy, and social institutions (Esping-Andersen 1990). The fact that the Nordic countries do share several features, make them good cases for a “similar systems” comparisons (Przeworski and Teune 1970). However, these countries also differ on several important issues. For example, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland are members of the EU, while Norway and Iceland are not. In contrast, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland are members of NATO, while Sweden and Finland are not. They also differ when it comes to immigration policies. Sweden has some of the highest immigration rates in Europe, compared to its population, while Finland and Iceland have very low rates, and Denmark and Norway are somewhere in the middle. Some changes related to immigration are controversial in the Nordic countries, as in other European countries, and most of these countries have growing right wing populist parties that oppose immigration. These countries are not immune to terror attacks either, as witnessed in the right-wing twin terror attacks in Norway on July 22, 2011, the twin attacks in Denmark on February 14–15, 2015, and the attack in Stockholm on April 8 2017. In the area of religion, a common perception is that all of these countries have Lutheran state churches. Yet, they differ when it comes to church–state relations and only Denmark can be said to have a traditional state church in 2017. The Nordic countries can still be characterized as stable welfare societies with relatively high living standards. Yet, the changes taking place here are similar to changes taking place in many other European countries with welfare economies under pressure, growing immigration, and profound religious changes.

This chapter will give a brief overview of some societal changes that have taken place in these countries since the end of the 1980s. The aim is to understand how these developments relate to transformations in the religious landscapes. In the description of religion, we will examine the membership in faith and worldview communities, before we look at religious faith and practices in the populations.

2.1 STABLE DEMOCRACIES AND CHANGING WELFARE STATES

The following will first address immigration and population growth, followed by economic and political changes. We will also briefly discuss the welfare state, gender, family, and cultural changes.

Immigration and Population Growth

The Nordic countries have experienced growth since the late 1980s. From 1988 to 2014, Swedes grew from 8.4 to 9.6 million, Danes from 5.1 to 5.5, Finns from 4.9 to 5.5, Norwegians from 4.2 to 5.1, and Icelanders from 251,000 to 326,000. Population wise these countries can be grouped in three, with Sweden as the most populous, Denmark, Finland, and Norway as a middle group with 5–6 million people, and Iceland with less than half a million. All the countries have aging populations with below-zero population growth, in spite of higher birth rates than other Western European countries, so immigration accounts for the population growth.

Four countries have indigenous populations and old recognized minorities, leaving Iceland as the exceptional case. These minority populations vary but tend to amount to less than 1% of the populations (Swedish-speakers in Finland is an exception at 5.4%). The largest indigenous population is the Sami who live in three countries and count about 40,000 in Norway, 20,000 in Sweden and 6,000 in Finland in 2014. This group has been particularly important in shaping views on minority politics (Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013; Stokke 2013). Whereas some old recognized minorities belong to Judaism and Islam, most of them belong to Christianity.

The development toward a greater degree of religious diversity is largely related to more recent immigration, which began in the 1960s and 1970s. During the past years, Europe has seen a large influx of migrants and refugees, which has affected the Nordic countries, in particular, Sweden, but also Norway, Denmark, and Finland. Sweden was the first country to become a destination for migration. During the period 1988–2013 the amount of Swedes who had immigration background grew from 9% to more than 25% (Andersson and Sander 2009; OECD 2011; Regeringskansli 2006; Statistics Sweden 2007, 2012, 2013). Most immigrants in the 1960s were labor migrants from neighboring countries and Southern Europe, while refugees and asylum seekers grew during the 1980s and 1990s (Edgardh Beckman 2007; Andersson and Sander 2009; SOU 2009, 19). The number of refugees from Syria began to increase in 2012–2013, and more than half of the 160,000 asylum seekers to Sweden in 2015 were from Syria (Migrationsverket 2015, 2016).

The immigration to Norway and Denmark has been much lower than to Sweden, and the labor migration began a decade later. In Norway, immigrants and their descendants grew from 3.5% in 1988 to 16% in 2015 (Statistics Norway 2015f). The early labor immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s came primarily from Turkey, Morocco, and Pakistan, while labor migrants from Poland, Sweden, and Lithuania constituted the largest groups in 2013. The number of refugees and asylum seekers reached a peak with about 30,000 in 2015, not nearly as high as in Sweden (Statistics Norway 2016).

Denmark has had slightly less immigration than Norway, as the amount of immigrants and their descendants grew from less than 4% in 1988 to almost 12% in 2015 (Danmarkshistorien 2013; Statistics Denmark 2015). In 1988, nearly half were from Western Europe and North America. By 2008, the largest groups came from Turkey, Iraq, Germany, Lebanon, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Jakobsen 2012; Statistics Denmark 2015). The amount of asylum seekers in 2015 was lower than Sweden and Norway at a little more than 10,000 (Statistics Denmark 2016). In sum, the early labor migrants to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark gave way to refugees and asylum seekers in the 1980s and 1990s, and a new wave of labor migration after 2000 (Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013, 11). Beginning around 2012, refugees and asylum seekers increased, which peaked during the fall of 2015, when stricter immigration laws were imposed. This pattern paralleled largely other Western European countries.

Finland and Iceland stand out as countries with much lower immigration rates than the others, and the recent immigration began later, in the 1990s. Only 1.3% of Finns had an immigrant background in 1990, which grew to 5.2% in 2012, among the lowest rates in the EU. The immigrants came from neighboring countries, Estonia, the former Soviet Union, other European countries, Iraq, and Somalia (Kääriäinen et al. 2009, 18–19). Nevertheless, the number of refugees and asylum seekers rose to more than 32,000 in 2015 or higher than Denmark and Norway (The Finnish Immigration Service 2016). Immigration to Iceland has grown from 2% in 1998 (6,514 persons) to about 8% (27,447) in 2014. In 2008, most were from Poland, and other Nordic and European countries (Eydal and Ottósdóttir 2009, 7; Statistics Iceland 2014).

On one side is Sweden with the highest immigration rates and the largest amounts of non-European immigrants. In the middle are Norway and Denmark, where immigration began later and the newcomers

are fewer. On the other side is Finland and Iceland with low immigration rates. Immigration to these countries has to do with global economic changes and migration from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to Europe. It is also related to the expansion of the European labor market. Denmark joined the EU in 1973, and Sweden and Finland in 1995. Norway and Iceland did not join but signed the Schengen Agreement of borderless Europe and European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994. These arrangements enabled other Europeans to enter the Nordic countries and work. Since the crisis in Syria and Iraq, and especially in 2015, there has also been a growing amount of refugees and asylum seekers, not only from these countries, but also from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

Welfare State Economies Under Pressure

The Nordic countries have small, open economies, which traditionally have specialized in a few dominant export sectors that originate in natural resources. In the twentieth century, the dominant export sectors in Finland, Norway, and Sweden were wood. Sweden also developed a strong iron and manufacturing industry, and Norway was heavily involved in shipping. The export industries in Iceland and Denmark were, respectively, fish and agricultural products. All of these economies diversified in the 1960s, as they developed manufacturing industries, a trend that was strongest in Finland and weakest in Iceland (Mjøset 1987).

The successful development of these five countries in the twentieth century to modern industrial welfare states with a relatively high-income per capita were related to economic, social, and institutional factors (Esping-Andersen 1990). Especially, the social class compromises and the “red (social democrat)/green (agrarian)” political alliances were important, which were stronger in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, than in Finland and Iceland. Working-class mobilization and state involvement also helped bolster a strong economic growth. In the 1960s, the economic models in Sweden and Norway, and to a lesser extent Denmark, were largely Keynesian, while the Finnish and Icelandic models were more “non-Keynesian” (Mjøset 1987).

The relatively coherent welfare state models faced difficulties during the high-inflation crisis in the mid-1970s, which was the first major postwar economic downturn in the West. Their economic policies were

largely maintained until the 1980s when most of these countries deliberately appropriated some form of neoliberal austerity economics. The austerity economics implied tight fiscal policies to dampen inflation, deregulation of domestic credit markets, privatization, and cuts in the public sector. The austerity economics led to a taming of the welfare states, and the implementation of these policies was stronger in some countries (Sweden) than others (Norway).

The policies of competition led to overheated economies in the late 1980s, a development that continued into the 1990s with economic setbacks, higher unemployment, extensive financial instabilities, and banking crises. The international economy turned to a recession, which hit Sweden and Finland especially hard. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Finland's export market to the east also evaporated. The Norwegian and Danish economies were better off, partly due to a boom in the oil sector. The Swedish response was to reduce the welfare system, while Denmark and Norway were able to resist cuts. The governments in Sweden, Finland, and Norway had to rescue banks by means of large cash-injections. The result was more extensive state involvement in the economy. Social democracy had returned to all the countries by the mid-1990s, except Iceland (Mjøset 1996). In this situation, the EU single market program emerged as a success. All the Nordic countries experienced economic growth during the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century.

The global financial crisis in 2008–2009 affected these countries in different ways, where Norway and Finland fared better than Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland. The Norwegian economy had continued to grow since the 1990s, largely due to an extensive oil industry (Schiefloe 2010). The Finnish economy had, since the 1980s, been dominated by electronics, information technology, transport fuels, chemicals, and engineering consulting, which helped to avoid the worst of the crisis. In contrast, Swedish economy fell dramatically in 2008–2009, even if it was back to a positive development by 2010 (Eurostat 2010; OECD 2013a, b). Likewise, the Danish economy went through a slump but has improved during the last years. The crisis affected Iceland dramatically. After Iceland joined the EEA, its economy diversified into financial and business services, which led to an economic boom. The whole Icelandic banking system collapsed in 2008 and the Icelandic state had to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund. Since then, Icelandic economy has improved.

During the past decades, the Nordic countries changed to more open and service-based economies and dependence on interstate cooperation, in particular, the EU. The austerity policies, the increasingly globalized economies, and the growing immigration have continued to put pressure on these welfare states and challenge the Nordic model of strong corporate structures and relative economic equality (Heidar 2014, 267–268).

Politics

During the first decades after World War II, the Nordic countries were extremely stable politically. The social democratic parties dominated the parliaments and formed governments in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway, with short periods of governments formed by conservatives. In Iceland, the center Independence Party tended to lead. In the 1970s, new social movements emerged, and the first right-wing populist parties were formed in Denmark and Norway, which were anti-taxes and anti-state. The Nordic countries are often considered a special instance of gender equality with women-friendly welfare policies, high rates of female employment, and high proportions of women in politics. The political mobilization of women in the 1970s resulted in at least 30% women in parliaments a decade later. The first Nordic woman president, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, was elected in Iceland in 1980, and the first woman Prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (Labor) formed a government in Norway in 1981 (Raaum 2014, 150–152). In the 1980s, the postwar political stability changed and was replaced by shifting governments. This was linked to the economic liberalizations, resulting in more decentralization and deregulation. The entrance of Sweden and Finland into the EU and the entrance of Norway and Iceland into the EEA intensified this trend. The Nordic welfare states also came under increasing pressure, as they followed the EU policy that all public orders and services had to be contracted.

In Sweden, social democrats formed government during 1982–1991 and 1994–2006, and the conservatives during 1991–1994, and since 2006 (Rehnberg 2007). In Denmark, conservatives were in power 1982–1993, followed by three social democratic governments (1993–2001). The Liberal Conservatives formed a government during 2001–2011 with the support of the right-wing populist party, the Danish People’s Party. The social democrats gained power in 2011, followed by a new liberal government in 2015. Norwegian politics have

also fluctuated between governments formed by the social democrats or various coalitions. Gro Harlem Brundtland (Labor) formed her second government in 1986, where women took eight out of 18 seats (Mjøset 2010). During 1997–2005, there were three minority governments, followed by a Labor, agrarian, and socialist coalition (2005–2011). In 2013, conservatives formed a government with the right-wing populist Progress Party.

Shifting governments have also characterized Finnish political life since 1987. Two coalition governments were in power from 1987–1995, followed by two social democratic governments (1995–2003). The coalitions between 2003–2011 shifted between center–left, center–right, and left–right. In 2011, the Finnish right-wing populist and nationalist party The Finns Party (previously True Finns) gained almost 20% of the votes. In 2015, it formed a government with the Centre and the Coalition party. Iceland has witnessed more political stability than the other countries, although the 1980s were somewhat unstable with six short-lived governments. During 1991–2009 the influential center Independence Party came to power, most of the time forming a government with the center Progressive Party (1995–2007), The Social Democratic Party (1991–1995) and its successor The Social Democratic Alliance (2007–2009). The 1980s represented a change from postwar political stability to shifting governments. Neoliberalism prompted changes in the welfare states, which were tailed down and underwent administrative reforms. In spite of less generous welfare states, these countries have retained relatively strong states and pragmatic policies, which have encouraged realignments rather than system changes.

Policies on Immigration and Integration

The Nordic countries have different immigration and integration policies, although they share certain features. The structure of the Nordic welfare models constitutes an important premise to understand these features, as the welfare state was established after World War II without a concern for immigration. The Nordic welfare model is funded by the income tax and is universal. Once immigration began to grow in the 1960s and 1970s, and especially after the economic recession in the mid-1970s, politicians began to realize that high immigration rates could pose problems in providing welfare services to all. At that time, the

political concern became to limit immigrant and to integrate newcomers, especially in the labor force (Brochmann 2016).

Sweden developed immigration policies earlier than Denmark and Norway, and influenced the other countries, especially Norway. The Swedish state emphasized immigration control, and the principles of equality, freedom, and cooperation. To a large degree, Sweden developed a multicultural integration policy, here understood as the embrace of difference, in contrast to assimilation, which emphasizes forging societal solidarity by overcoming diversity (Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013, 2). Norway followed the Swedish idea of multiculturalism, while Denmark modified it and emphasized assimilation. The policies were formed along these lines until the turn of the millennium (Brochmann 2016).

In the late 1980s, debates arose in all three countries on how to limit the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and family reunifications. These debates were harsher in Denmark and Norway than in Sweden, and Denmark became a leading country in limiting family reunifications. A paradigm shift took place after the year 2000 when a shortage of labor became a concern, and several countries, including the Nordic, liberalized immigration policies to admit more highly educated and skilled migrants. The Swedish multiculturalist policies slowly changed, and although there is no single Scandinavian integration model, the three countries had become more similar by 2015 (Brochmann 2016; Stokke 2013, 103–104). After the high influx of refugees into Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark in 2015, the parliaments in these countries presented a range of proposals to restrict asylum seekers.

The right-wing populist parties provides an important factor in explaining why the public debates on immigration came earlier and were stronger in Denmark than in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The Danish Progress Party voiced strong anti-immigrant views as early as in the 1970s, and after 2001, the Danish People's Party supported the Liberal-Conservative government and helped to develop the restrictive Danish policies. Social democrats in Denmark were also more split on immigration issues than in Sweden and Norway. The Norwegian Progress Party began to voice anti-immigration sentiments later, but managed to pressure the other political parties toward more restrictive immigration policies and has been part of the government since 2013. The populist anti-immigration parties came later in Sweden and Finland. The True Finns was not established until the mid-1990s and became part of the government in 2015. The populist and anti-immigration party the

Swedish Democrats was formed in 1988 and grew from 6 to 13% in the parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2014 (Brochmann 2016). Debates on immigration are changing in Sweden and Finland, although they are still milder than in Denmark and Norway.

Welfare State, Gender, and Family

The combination of the neoliberal turn, the austerity policies, and the recession in the 1990s led to reductions in total public spending. Cuts and increases have gone hand in hand in the Nordic countries since the late 1980s. The cost of social programs rose during 1975–2001, especially in Sweden and Denmark. Since then, the Norwegian welfare state has experienced more growth than the others. The number of social programs has remained stable, but some programs are less generous in 2015 than they were before. Income inequality has begun to rise, especially in Sweden and Norway (Karisto et al. 1997; Kjølørød 2010; Steen 2014, 207–225). There has also been a growth of partnerships between the states and private actors, of whom many are faith communities, to provide a variety of welfare services (Bäckström et al. 2010, 2011).

These countries score high on female employment and institutionalized gender equality. The Swedish gender profile continues to be high on several parameters, due to the expansion of welfare and childcare policies and the institutionalization of legislation and public policies on gender equality and welfare. Women also entered the work force earlier here than the other Nordic countries (Steen 2014, 222). In 2002, employment rates among Nordic mothers with older preschool-age children (3–5) were higher than most other European countries (Ellingsæter 2009). The institutionalization of gender equality never progressed as far in Denmark as in Sweden and Norway. Finland was the final country to introduce gender equality legislation, while Iceland has been at the bottom of the gender profile (Raaum 2014, 158–162). Nevertheless, the labor markets are still gender segregated, and Nordic women tend to seek employment in welfare state professions within education, health, and the social services.

These five countries demonstrate a blend of high female employment rates and relatively high fertility levels. This pattern is the result of paid parental leave policies, access to secure employment, and changing cultural norms. There is a growing disconnection between marriage and fertility, where the traditional family is weaker, and cohabitation has become

common, combined with a strong focus on children (Ellingsæter 2009). The increase in divorce and the diversity of family types shows that marriage has less importance than before, but this does not mean that the family has decreased importance for the individual, as it is a welfare producing institution and a guarantee for the welfare of the individual (Leira 2010).

Values

Throughout the past 30 years, changes have also taken place in the value orientations of Nordic people. A shift in emphasis from traditional Christian and economic left-right values toward values related to the environment, alternative life styles, social and political participation, minority rights, and social equality, took place in most Western countries during the 1970s. Inglehart (1977, 1990) claims there has been a shift from materialist to post-materialist orientations, where materialistic values stress economic growth, material possessions, consumption, status, and self-care, and post-materialistic or idealistic values emphasize intimate relations, health, environment, care, spirituality, and self-development. However, studies from the Nordic countries do not show a massive turn to post-materialism (Borre 2011, 120–124). During 1981–2008, between 16–21% of Danes supported post-materialist values. These values grew in Sweden in the 1980s but declined in the late 1990s, and the economic left-right orientations have remained fairly strong. Materialist values grew in Norway from the mid-1980s until 2003, when there was a change in a more idealistic direction, which was still prevalent in 2013 (Hellevik 2003, 2008; Hellevik and Hellevik 2016; Knutsen 2014). There is variety in these countries, where the old economic left-right orientations are still strong, although the new value orientations also play a role.

Summary

Compared to many other countries, the Nordic countries appear to be economically and politically stable, with an emphasis on social, economic, and gender equality. Politically, there has been a turn to the right, and a deliberate turn in economic policies toward austerity. The result is less generous welfare states and more partnerships between the states and private actors. The Nordic countries have largely developed into information- and welfare societies. The decline of traditional industrial labor

and the new social movements show a trend away from collective values towards more individualization. Issues of immigration have, in combination with other issues, led to growing right-wing populism in all the countries, albeit to a much smaller degree in Iceland.

2.2 RELIGIOUS CHANGES¹

In all the Nordic countries, the Lutheran majority churches were closely intertwined with the state since the Reformation in the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century. The Reformation resulted in the establishment of Evangelical Lutheran state churches, which implied that every citizen was a member. Minority churches were not registered as religious communities alongside the state churches until the mid-1800 (Bexell 2003; Furseth 2002). The church–state relations began to change slowly in the twentieth century. Religion and state were formally separated in Finland as early as 1919, although the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland continued to function much in the same way as its Nordic counterparts. Today Finland has two “official folk churches,” the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Finnish Orthodox Church. The Evangelical Lutheran National Church of Iceland became more autonomous from the state in 1997, and the Church of Sweden became in principle independent from the Swedish state in 2000. Church–state relations changed in 2012 in Norway as well. The only Nordic country with a traditional state church system in 2017 is Denmark, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark has little autonomy from the state. Nevertheless, the changed church–state relations in Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway do not constitute “a wall of separation.” Instead, we characterize the Nordic majority churches as semi-autonomous with different degrees of autonomy from the state (see Chap. 3).

Declining Membership in the Majority Churches

During 1980–2014, declining parts of the Nordic populations are members of the Lutheran majority churches (Table 2.1). While approximately 90% of the population was a member in the late 1980s, this amount declined to less than 70% in Sweden, and between 70 and 80% in the other countries.

Until 1998, the decline was relatively similar in all the Nordic countries. After 2000, the relative decline in Church Sweden accelerated

Table 2.1 Membership in the majority churches in the Nordic countries, 1988–2014. Percent of total population

	1988	1998	2008	2014
Church of Sweden	90	84	73	66 ^a
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	88	85	81	74
Church of Norway	88 ^b	87 ^c	82	75
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark	90	86	82	78
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland	93	90	80	75

Source Church of Sweden (2014a, b), Swedish Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities (1989, 1999, 2009, 2014), Ankestyrelsen (2013), Statistics Denmark (2000a), Center for Contemporary Religion (2008, 2012, 2014), Morvik (1999, 129–130), Høeg (2009b, 28), Church of Norway (1989, 16; 1992, 11; 1999, 10–19; 2008, 92; 2010, 117), Statistics Norway (1989, 100; 1999, 206; 2009c, 2015d, Statistics Finland (2014), Hagtíðindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016)

^aThe data are for 2013

^bThe figures are for 1980. Data unavailable for 1988

^cThe figures are for 1999

(Bäckström et al. 2004). The majority churches in the other countries have also experienced less support, but the decline has not been as steep as in Sweden. The relative decline of the majority churches has to do with immigration and the demographic changes described above, and disaffiliation and the growing amount of people who remain outside any faith community.

Growth of the “Nones”

Table 2.2 shows the amount of “nones”, or people who choose to remain without any religious affiliation. This group has grown in all the Nordic countries, but more so in Finland and Denmark than Iceland and Norway. We do not have Swedish data. The growth of “nones” is a feature in several European countries (Davie 2015; Stolz et al. 2016; Woodhead and Catto 2012) and the U.S. (Chaves 2011, 13–17; Hout and Fischer 2014; Pew Research Center 2012; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Throughout the period, Finland has had the highest shares of “nones”, and almost one in four Finns is nonaffiliated in 2014. Most of them have resigned their membership from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and about one-fifth is people of immigrant origin who have not joined any religious community (Kyrkans

Table 2.2 Non-affiliated in the Nordic countries, 1988–2014. Percent of total population^a

	1988	1998	2008	2014
Finland	10	12	17	24
Denmark	9	13	16	19
Norway ^b	3	–	10	13
Iceland ^b	2	3	10	12

Source Ankestyrelsen (2013), Statistics Denmark (2000a), Center for Contemporary Religion (2008, 2012, 2014), Statistics Norway (1989, 100; 1999, 206; 2009a, b, c, 2015a, b), Statistics Finland (2014), Hagfróindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016)

^aData for Sweden are unavailable

^bIncludes non-affiliated and members in unregistered faith communities

forskningscentral 2012, 34). In 2014, one in five Danes remains outside any religious community. Although we do not have data on Sweden, it is likely that this group has grown there as well.

One explanation for the growth of the nonaffiliated in Iceland lies in the numerous problems and scandals connected to the Church of Iceland since the mid-1990s. Controversies are connected to debates on same-sex church weddings, and the scandals have to do with accusations against the Bishop of Iceland (in office 1989–1997) of sexual harassment and child abuse (and the much criticized reactions by the church to these accusations) (Spanó et al. 2011). Another explanation is a group of secular activists who has targeted the Church of Iceland with campaigns and collected resignations from members. According to a group called Disbelief (*Vantru*), it assisted almost 1,400 people to resign in 2013 (Vantrú 2013). There is also an Ethical Humanist Society (*Sidmennt*) in Iceland with 612 members in 2013 (Elísson 2014; Sigurvinsson 2012).

Iceland is not the only country with secular worldview organizations. The largest is the Norwegian Humanist Association with almost 90,000 members in 2014, or almost 2% of Norwegians, which may explain the lower rates of nonaffiliated here. Similar organizations are found in in Denmark, but they are much smaller: Danish Atheist Society (*Ateistisk Selskab*) (1,200 members), Humanist Society (*Humanistisk Samfund*) (300 members), and Humanist Debate (*Humanistisk debat*) (no available membership rates) (Helboe Johansen 2010). Similar organizations exist in Finland and Sweden as well.

It is important to keep in mind that nonaffiliation neither automatically implies disinterest in religion, nor nonreligion, just as affiliation neither necessarily implies interest in religion nor religious faith and practices. The nonaffiliated may consist of people who are secular or indifferent to religion or people who identify as spiritual. They may also consist of immigrants who identify with a religious tradition but have not joined a particular community. What we do know is that this group constitutes a growing trend in the Western religious landscapes (Davie 2015; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Growth in Faith Communities Outside Christianity

Another trend is the growth of people who belong to faith communities outside Christianity. They have grown from very few in 1988 to a little over 1% in Sweden and Denmark, 2% in Iceland, and 3% in Norway in 2014 (Table 2.3). The higher rates in Norway are most likely related to more liberal registration practices and public funding here than the other countries (see Chap. 3). Although the percentages are small, they show a steady growth in all the countries except Sweden, where they show continuity, although the latter may be due to unreliable data. The number of members in faith communities outside Christianity is much higher in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark than Finland and Iceland, which reflects the difference in immigration to these countries.

Since the 1980s, there has been a consistent movement in the Nordic populations, which suggests a continuous religious differentiation process. We will now go into more details to examine the phenomena behind these numbers.

2.3 DECLINING LUTHERAN MAJORITY CHURCHES

The declining support for the Lutheran majority churches is also visible when we analyze the rites of passages that take place within these churches (see Table A.1–A.5 in Appendix). The most striking change in Sweden is the decline in church confirmations, which was cut in half from 1988–2013. Only a minority of young Swedes participate in church confirmations (Pettersson 2010). The Church of Sweden has by far the lowest confirmation rates in the Nordic countries. The explanations are secularization from one age cohort to another (Norris and Inglehart

Table 2.3 Members in registered faith communities outside Christianity, 1988–2014. N and percent of total population^a

	1988		1998		2008		2014	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sweden	66,369	0.8	100,239	1.1	125,436	1.4	123,156 ^b	1.3
Denmark	^c	–	8,333 ^d	0.2	33,437	0.6	54,702 ^d	1.0
Norway ^e	4,488	0.1	53,416	1.2	104,162	2.2	163,526	3.2
Finland	2,285	0.0	2,918	0.1	9,202	0.2	16,316	0.3
Iceland	473	0.2	1,096	0.4	2,778	0.9	5,558	1.6

Source Swedish Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities (1989, 1999, 2009, 2014), Ankestyrelsen (2013), Statistics Denmark (2000a), Center for Contemporary Religion (2008, 2012, 2014), Statistics Norway (1989, 100; 1999, 206; 2009a, b, c, 2015a, b), Statistics Finland (2014), Hagfróindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016)

^aThe table shows official membership rates. The actual number of participants is most likely higher

^bData are for 2013

^cData unavailable

^dNot including members of registered Muslim communities, as data were unavailable

^eThe figures are for 1980 and 1999, as data were unavailable for 1988 and 1998

2004), and the low priority given to confirmation in the Church of Sweden, which has devalued confirmation as a rite of passage.

Baptisms and confirmation show a decline in Denmark as well, but the decline is not as steep. In contrast to Sweden, confirmation rates are still high. One reason is that confirmation classes are given in Danish public schools, while such classes are arranged outside public schools in Sweden and Norway. Baptisms and confirmations in Church of Norway are also declining. Infant baptism is higher than in Sweden and Denmark, while confirmations had a similar decline as in Denmark. There has been a growth of secular and alternative confirmation rituals and infant naming ceremonies in Norway, offered by the Norwegian Humanist Association (*Human-Etisk Forbund*) and The Holistic Federation of Norway (*Holistisk Forbund*). Private infant naming ceremonies have also become popular (Høeg 2009a). A similar trend takes place in Denmark, where Humanist Society performs alternative name-giving ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, although the numbers are smaller than in Norway (Helboe Johansen 2010). The shares of those who have been baptized, confirmed, married, or buried in the Lutheran majority church in Finland have also diminished, but not nearly as much as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. This is evident in confirmations, which have

dropped from 93 to 84%. The amount of infant baptisms and confirmations seem high in Iceland, although the data suggest a decline in confirmations. There is also a growth of secular and alternative infant name giving ceremonies and confirmation rituals in Iceland, mainly through the Ethical Humanist Society.

A dramatic decline has taken place in church weddings, which amounts to less than half of all marriages in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland in 2013–2014. Since the late 1980s, church weddings have dropped by 33% points in Finland, 28 in Sweden, 22 in Norway, and 15 in Denmark. The most stable church ritual is funerals, which still amounts to 78% in Sweden, 82% in Denmark and more than 90% in Norway, Finland, and Iceland. The decline in this ritual is much slower than the other rituals.

These data show support for one of the subtheses in secularization theory, the decline-of-religion thesis (Casanova 1994, 19) at the individual level. There has been a consistent decline in these forms of religious practices which is a trend that has been evident since the 1930s (Gustafsson 1985, 1994). Individual secularization is the highest in Sweden, followed by Norway, and then Denmark, but it is evident in Finland and Iceland as well.

Disaffiliation from the Majority Churches

Not all changes within the Lutheran majority churches can be explained by greater religious diversity. During 1988–2014, these churches experienced actual losses through disaffiliations (Table 2.4). The disaffiliations are particularly high in Sweden and Finland.

The disaffiliation from the Church of Sweden accelerated after the changes in church and state relations in 2000. In 2000, the cost of church membership was listed on the individual tax declaration, and many people chose to save it by leaving the church. The Swedish Humanist Association also had awareness campaigns to this fact, which encouraged people to leave. The number of disaffiliations in the other countries has not been nearly as dramatic as in Sweden, although they have grown, especially in Finland. Studies of Finns who resigned show that they felt that the church had lost significance and was too conservative, and they lacked religious identities and beliefs in church teachings and were unwilling to pay the church tax (Church Research

Table 2.4 Disaffiliation from the Lutheran majority churches in the Nordic countries, 1988–2014. N

	<i>Disaffiliation</i>	<i>New members</i>	<i>Actual loss</i>
Church of Sweden	1,041,262	181,130	860,132
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark	221,142	170,625	50,517
Church of Norway ^a	147,294	26,889	120,405
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	826,775	281,764	545,011
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland	37,511	6,813	30,698

Source Church of Sweden (2015), Statistics Denmark (2000b, 2014); Statistics Denmark and Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs (2014), Church of Norway (2010, 119), Statistics Norway (2015c), Kyrkostyrelsen (2009, 2014), Hagtiðindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016), and personal communication in 2015 with Ægir Örn Sveinsson at Statistic Iceland

^aData are for 1988–2013

Institute 2013). The disaffiliations in Norway, Denmark, and Iceland are much lower than that of Sweden and Finland. The disaffiliation in Iceland is explained by the sexual harassment case against the Bishop of Iceland, dissatisfaction with the Church due to its financial ties to the state, and its reluctance to adopt same-sex wedding rituals. In 2011, the Registers Iceland also made it easier for people to leave the church on its website (Vantrú 2013; Siðmennt 2016).

The declining participation in the rites of passage and the disaffiliations show the diminishing support the Lutheran majority churches have in the Nordic populations. Participation in church rituals has traditionally provided individuals with bonds to these churches, especially, the majority of members who do not attend church regularly (Bäckström 2001; Latzel 2008). Declining participation in the rituals also means less socialization of church doctrines, which may accelerate the membership decline further (McLeod 2007). However, looking solely at membership rates does not provide a complete picture of what is going on in these churches. During the period studied, all these churches have diversified in the types of church activities that are taking place, and many local congregations offer a greater variety of activities in 2014 than in 1988.

Table 2.5 Christian minority churches in the Nordic countries, 1988–2014. N and percent of total population^a

	1988		1998		2008		2014	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sweden	687,706	7.8	737,410	8.3	592,022	6.4	580,980 ^b	6.0
Denmark	71,806	1.4	79,425	1.5	93,092	1.7	102,000 ^c	1.9
Norway	123,696	3.0	163,685	3.7	226,969	4.8	337,316	6.6
Finland	95,570	2.0	106,976	2.1	119,098	2.2	128,192	2.3
Iceland	13,309	5.3	17,262	6.3	29,546	9.4	37,496	11.4

Source Swedish Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities (1989, 1999, 2009, 2014), Statistics Denmark (2014, 2015, 2016), Center for Contemporary Religion (2008, 2012, 2014), Statistics Norway (1989, 100; 1999, 206; 2009c; 2015d), Statistics Finland (2014), Hagtíðindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016)

^aThe table shows official membership rates. The actual participants are most likely higher

^bData are for 2013

^cPentecostal and Orthodox not included, as data were unavailable

2.4 RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

All the Nordic countries are more religiously diverse in 2014 than they were in the late 1980s, and some are more diverse than the others. We will look at the different minorities who have experienced growth during this period.

Christian Minorities

Even if the majority churches are large in the Nordic countries, not all Christians belong to them (Table 2.5). There is a myriad of Christian churches, which have a long history in these countries.

The number of members in Swedish minority churches by far exceeds the other countries, which partly reflects the higher Swedish population, but also the larger amount that these churches traditionally has had in Sweden (Lundqvist 1977). In addition comes an increase in immigrant churches (Kubai 2014; Socialdepartementet 2015). The minority churches in Sweden have experienced a substantial decline since the late 1980s. One reason is changing membership registrations. While dual church membership was possible before 2000, only single membership

was permitted, which cut the number of Catholics in half between 1998 and 2008, for example.

Since 1988, Christian minority churches in Norway have more than doubled in membership (Statistics Norway 1989, 100; 2009b, 2015d; Synnes 2012). As in Sweden, the Roman Catholics constitute by far the largest group (Statistics Norway 2015d). However, their growth is inflated, as the Roman Catholic Church during 2010–2014 registered 40,000–60,000 immigrants from Catholic countries as members without their approval. The largest minority churches in Finland, besides the Finnish Orthodox Church, are the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Evangelical Free Church, and the Roman Catholic Church, which have grown since 1988.

The minority churches in Denmark are much smaller than in Sweden and Norway, and their growth rate is lower than in Finland and Norway. The Roman Catholics have had the most rapid increase, and there has been a growth of Christian immigrant churches, in addition to a number of independent congregations (Folkekirkens mellemkirkelige råd 2013; Thomsen 2012). Finally, there has been an increase in some Christian minority churches in Iceland, in particular, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches, the Pentecostals, and the Roman Catholic Church. Iceland now has the highest rates of these churches with a little over 11%.

Sweden has traditionally been the country with the highest number of members in minority churches, and still is. Norway also has a higher number of members than Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, but not as high as Sweden. The tables show that the total membership in the minority churches has experienced a decline in Sweden and growth in all the other countries. The Swedish decline seems to be related more to registration practices than actual loss. Since the increase in Roman Catholics largely accounts for the growth of the minority churches in Norway, Finland, and Denmark, and this growth is linked to immigration, it is likely that the same type of growth takes place in Sweden.

Faith Communities Outside Christianity

The membership data in faith communities outside Christianity clearly show how the Nordic countries have become more religiously diverse since the late 1980s. The members in these faith communities grew from practically none or very few to more than 3% in Norway in 2014, about 1% in Sweden and Denmark, and less than 1% in Finland and Iceland.

Table 2.6 Membership in Muslim communities in the Nordic countries. N and percent of total population

	1988	%	1998	%	2008	%	2014	%	Change in %
Sweden	57,331	0.7	90,000	1.0	110,000	1.2	110,000 ^a	1.1	92
Denmark	^b		^b		22,440	0.4	41,437 ^c	0.7	85 (2008–2012)
Norway	14,727	0.3	46,634	1.1	83,684	1.8	132,135	2.6	797
Finland	770	0.0	1,057	0.0	6,822	0.1	12,313	0.2	1499
Iceland	^d		78	0.0	373	0.1	841	0.2	978

Source Swedish Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities (1989, 1999, 2009, 2014), Statistics Denmark (2000a), Center for Contemporary Religion (2008, 2012, 2014), Statistics Norway (1989, 100; 1999, 206; 2009b, 2015c), Statistics Finland (2014), Hagtiðindi (1989, 1993, 1997, 1999), Statistics Iceland (2016)

^aData are for 2013

^bData unavailable

^cThe most recent figures are from 2012

^dNo registered Muslim community

This group still amounts to a very small part of the Nordic populations. In contrast to the Lutheran majority churches and many Christian minority churches, there is, however, a consistent growth in most of these faith communities. The only exception is the Jewish communities in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, which are declining. Indeed, the largest religion in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland outside Christianity is Islam (Table 2.6).

Once again, the different registration practices in the various countries affect the statistics. Although Sweden has by far the highest number of immigrants, the numbers are strikingly low in the official statistics. A representative study of Swedish Muslim congregations shows that the membership is higher than the statistics shows (Borell and Gerdner 2011). In spite of unsatisfactory statistics, the figures still show a growth of religions outside Christianity, which is largely explained by immigration. There has also been an increase in the membership of several faith communities outside Christianity in Norway. The largest growth is among Muslims, who amount to almost 23% of all members in faith and worldview communities outside Church of Norway in 2014 (Statistics Norway 1989, 100; 2009b, 2015c). The increasing members in faith communities outside Christianity are also noticeable in Denmark, although the growth is lower than in Sweden and Norway. Although immigration is a driving force, religious diversity is not just the result of immigration but

also of conversion. For example, three of seven Hindu groups consist of Danes who have converted, and five of 11 Buddhist groups do the same.

The number of people in Finland who belong to faith communities outside Christianity is much smaller than in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. They constitute less than 1% of the population. The largest community is Muslims (Martikainen 2009). The religious diversity in Iceland is much smaller than the other countries, although it is growing slightly. The religious minorities include Baha'is, Buddhists, Muslims, and mainly two Asa Faith Societies that celebrate Iceland's pre-Christian heritage (Steindal and Faraj 2015).

As noted, the main explanations for the increase in these faith communities are immigration and the growth of people with immigrant parents and grandparents. Some people also convert to religions other than Christianity, although their numbers are small. The growth in faith and worldview communities outside Christianity plays a significant role in diversifying the Nordic religious landscapes. They have transformed the Nordic countries from largely religious monocultures to far more religiously diverse societies. This change is especially evident in the countries with higher immigration rates, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

The data from the Nordic countries support the idea that the religious growth caused by immigration is not able to outweigh the process of secularization, simply because the immigrant groups are too small (Bruce 2011, 203–205). An additional factor should be mentioned here, and that is possible processes of secularization among immigrant descendants, of which we know little. Even if the religious minorities are relatively small, the growth has been consistent during the past three decades and seems to continue. The trend is more toward religious diversity rather than solely secularization, leaving secularization to be one of several religious trends, even if it is an important one.

2.5 HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

It is difficult to provide an overview of holistic spirituality or alternative spirituality in the Nordic countries. On the one hand, holistic spirituality has to do with individual ideas and practices. On the other hand, there are several networks, organizations, and businesses that can be classified as holistic or alternative, which shows that parts of this field are relatively organized. Here, we will provide an overview of some of the key organizations and events.

The most organized example of holistic spirituality is Holistic Association (*Holistisk Forbund*) in Norway, which was founded in 2002 and had 1,000–2,000 members in 2011 (Holistisk Forbund 2011, 2012). Holistic Association arranges holistic rites of passage and is registered as a worldview community, whereby it receives the same amount of public funding per member as other Norwegian faith and worldview communities (Aleksandersen 2014; Koll 2014). Holistic Association seems to be an exception, as the holistic milieu primarily consists of organizations that publish magazines and arrange events, in addition to businesses like holistic bookstores and therapies.

Since 1968, the association New Aspect (*Nyt Aspekt*) and its magazine with the same name have been important avenues for holistic spirituality and parts of the alternative therapy sector in Denmark. New Aspect began to arrange Mind–Body–Spirit fairs in the 1980s, which drew about 23,000 visitors in Copenhagen and Aalborg in 1988. While the membership had stabilized at about 6,000–8,000 during 1988–2007, the magazine subscription was halved from 11,500 in 2006 to 5,600 in 2011 (Ahlin 2007; Danske specialmedier 2013; Nyt Aspekt & Guiden 2013). Another form of alternative annual fair, called “The Universe of Mystics,” has been arranged in Copenhagen since the late 1990s. In 2008, about 25,000 visited the fair (DanInfo Messerne 2013).² The alternative fairs also draw relatively large crowds in Norway. Many are arranged by VisionWorks, which began in 1992, and publishes the magazine *Vision* (*Visjon*). Around 30 alternative fairs were arranged in different cities in 2011, and the largest had about 15,000 visitors (Alternativt Nettverk 2012; Botvar and Henriksen 2010; Botvar and Gresaker 2013).

New Age bookshops, events, and magazines appeared in Finland in the early 1980s. The first annual Spirit and Knowledge Fair took place in Helsinki in 1983, organized by the Association of Borderline Sciences (*Rajatiedon yhteistyö ry*). The fair has about 3,000–5,000 visitors annually. Since 1996, similar fairs have been arranged in Helsinki and other parts of Finland with the same number of visitors (Kääriäinen et al. 2005). Three Finnish popular magazines specialize in New Age and spirituality, *Ultra* (about 4,500 copies), *I Am* (*Minä Olen*, 11,000 copies), and *Mirror of the Soul* (*Sielun Peili*, 23,000 copies). Similar developments have taken place in Sweden. Several well-established Swedish bookshops specialize in holistic literature, as for example *Waterlily* (*Näckrosen*) in Guthenborg and *Aquarius* (*Vattumannen*) in Stockholm. Both own and run publishing

Table 2.7 Belief in reincarnation in the Nordic countries. European values study 1990–2010. Percent

	1990–1993					2008–2010				
	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Ice</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Ice</i>
Yes	17	25	15	15	32	17	18	18	17	33
No	68	48	85	74	50	57	56	82	76	57
Don't know	16	27	0	11	18	26	25	0	7	10
N	1047	584	1031	1028	700	1177	1134	1057	1505	801

houses. These bookshops and the alternative fair Inner Harmoni has existed since the turn of the millennium (Bogdan 2009; Löwendahl 2002).

New Age also gained popularity in Iceland in the 1980s and 1990s with several holistic networks, healing centers, and magazines. The main store was founded in 1988 and is still running, and the magazine *New Times* (*Nýjir tímar*) had 4,300 subscribers in 1995 (Pétursson 1996, 30). However, holistic spirituality dwindled considerably around the turn of the century, although yoga and meditation has increased in popularity during the past years (Fréttablaðið 2014, 2015). In 2000, the umbrella organization The Association of Complimentary and Alternative Medicine was founded, which keeps records of all registered healers and affiliated professional associations authorized by the Minister of Health and Social Security. As of 2012, the registration includes 163 healers and six professional associations (Bandalag íslenskra græðara 2016).

In order to see if the Nordic populations differ when it comes to the adoption of alternative ideas, we analyzed the European Values Studies from 1981–2010 (Table 2.7). The analysis shows that beliefs in reincarnation had a greater support in Iceland and Finland in 1990–1993 than the three other countries. By 2008–2009 Finland had become more similar to the other countries, whereas Iceland remained more or less the same. There was also an increase of those who harbor doubts in Sweden.

Although holistic spirituality definitely is present in the Nordic countries, its presence seems to have fluctuated, and the milieu is hardly large enough to be labeled a “spiritual revolution” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). However, a study from Norway showed that key elements in holistic thinking, such as the emphasis on the inner, subjective self, affected the ways in which younger generations approached religion, spirituality, and morality that clearly distinguished them from the older

generations (Furseth 2005, 2006). This could mean that even if the amount of Nordic people who actually believe in reincarnation is relatively low, holistic values draw on trends found in the general culture and reinforce the subjective turn, which in turn affect the ways in which people inside and outside faith and worldview communities think about religious and spiritual issues.

2.6 RELIGIOUS FAITH AND PRACTICES IN THE POPULATIONS

By looking solely at membership rates, one may conclude that Nordic people are highly religious. At the same time, studies show that Nordic people are increasingly secular (Botvar and Schmidt 2010; Furseth 2015; Norris and Inglehart 2004), and some claim that they are among the most secular in the world (Zuckerman 2008). How are we to understand this disparity? To get a more comprehensive understanding, we will see what surveys tell us about some religious beliefs and behaviors. In doing so, we also want to look at the gender differences.

Beliefs in God

The European Values Studies from 1990–2010 show that beliefs in God are declining in all the countries, except Denmark (Table 2.8). On one side of the spectrum is Sweden with the least amount of people who believe in God in 2008–2010, and on the other side of the spectrum is Iceland with the largest amount of believers. Danes are the only ones who report more belief in God (from 53–59% in 1981–2010). The group of people who do not believe is also growing in all the countries, except Sweden, where people with doubts have increased.

Behavior

The EVS surveys also show changes in attendance at religious meetings (Table 2.9). The most definite changes are taking place at the extremes, i.e., among people who either never attend or attend at least once a month. Roughly, about half the Nordic population never attends religious meetings. This group is the highest in Sweden in 2008–2010 and the lowest in Denmark. The amount of people who never attends has grown in Finland and Iceland, but has remained stable in Sweden and Norway since the 1990s, and declined in Denmark. If we look at the other end, we find

Table 2.8 Belief in God in the Nordic countries. European values study 1990–2010. Percent

	1990–1993					2008–2010				
	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Ice</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Ice</i>
Yes	38	59	65	61	79	37	59	54	56	66
No	46	33	35	19	14	40	34	46	24	25
Don't know	16	9	0	20	8	23	7	0	20	8
N	1029	1030	1113	584	702	1163	1503	1054	1134	794

Table 2.9 Attendance at religious services apart from baptisms, weddings, and funerals in the Nordic countries. European values study 1990–2010. Percent

	1990–1993					2008–2010				
	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Ice</i>	<i>Swe</i>	<i>Den</i>	<i>Nor</i>	<i>Fin</i>	<i>Ice</i>
At least monthly	10	11	13	11	9	8	10	12	10	12
Special holidays	13	18	22	23	30	9	31	24	15	27
Once a year	11	14	11	16	15	16	15	11	15	15
Less often/never	66	58	54	50	45	66	44	54	59	47
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
N	1017	1028	1228	584	701	1161	1506	1086	1134	794

that the group of monthly churchgoers is lowest in Sweden in 2008–2010 and the highest in Iceland and Norway. This group is declining in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway, but growing in Iceland.

The countries vary the most when it comes to church attendance during special holidays. This form of religious behavior has declined in Sweden and Finland and remained stable in Norway and Iceland. In contrast to the other countries, more Danes go to church during special holidays in 2010 (31%) than in the 1990s (18%).

Gender

The analysis so far has addressed total populations. A pertinent question is how gendered religion actually is in the Nordic countries. Since these countries are known to have high rates of women's employment and state

implementation of gender equality policies, one would perhaps expect Nordic women to resemble their male counterparts. The data show that Nordic women score higher than men on belief in God and religious service attendance (Tables A.6 and A.7 in Appendix). This is a fairly consistent finding in all the countries during all the years studied. In 2008–2010, the gender difference is most definite at the extremes, i.e., between women and men who attend monthly or never attend. Women and men who harbor doubts about God and attend services annually resemble each other. In this sense, the data support findings from other studies that conclude that Western women tend to be more religious than men do (Brown 2012; Furseth 2006, 62–67; Inglehart and Norris 2003, 49–72; Marler 2008; Miller and Stark 2002; Smith et al. 2002; Storm and Voas 2012; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012; Walter and Davie 1998).

At the same time, the data show a religious decline among women. Fewer Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Icelandic women believe in God and attend religious services in 2010 than they did in the early 1990s. While 74% of Norwegian women believed in God in the early 1990s, only 63% did so toward the end of the period (Table A.6 in Appendix). Conversely, the nonbelievers increased from 26–37%. Even if the change is not as steep, the same trend is found among Swedish, Finnish, and Icelandic women. Danish women showed a somewhat different pattern, as the believers were stable (about 66%) while the nonbelievers grew slightly (25–27%).

If we look at monthly attendance at religious services, the decline is from 13–10% for Finnish women during 1990–2010, while those who hardly or never attend increased from 46–55% (Table A.7 in Appendix). The same trend is found among Norwegian and Swedish women. Again, Danish women displayed a somewhat different pattern, as they increased their attendance on special holidays from 21–35%, while Icelandic women showed more stability. Although Nordic women are more religious than men, the religious decline is also taking place among them. The exception is Denmark, where some women have more faith, others less, and where religious attendance at holidays has grown in popularity.

Our findings show several diverse trends. On the one hand, Nordic women continue to score higher than men on several indicators of religiosity, giving some support to the idea that secularization theory is gendered in the sense that it explains the experiences of more men than women (Aune et al. 2008). On the other hand, Nordic women are

becoming more secular, which means that secularization theory also explains their experiences. This is also found in other studies (Aune 2011; Brown 2001; Marler 2008). The growth in belief in reincarnation among many Nordic women and men points to changes even if this growth does not seem strong enough to counter a more overall pattern of secularization, a finding also found elsewhere (Voas and Bruce 2007).

There are several explanations for women's higher rates of religiosity (see Nyhagen and Halsaa 2016, 40–46 and Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012 for an overview). Some emphasize the social and contextual influence that create different attitudes to religion among women and men, such as theories on gender orientation (Miller and Stark 2002) or women's structural location related to family and work (Becker and Hofmeister 2001; Furseth 2005; Woodhead 2008). Other explanations stress personality differences and risk aversion (Collett and Lizardo 2009). Most studies tend to focus on the demand-side to see which variables affect women's religiosity, while some also stress the supply-side to detect what faith communities do to recruit women and the factors women find attractive that will encourage them to participate (Furseth 2001). As noted by Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012, 170–179), it is extremely difficult to find one factor that explains the gender difference when it comes to religion in the West, in particular, because both religion and gender have undergone change, so there is a need for several different approaches. Here, we want to focus on women's structural location related to family and work. Nordic women are relatively well educated, have high employment rates and the welfare states encourage women and men's involvement in family and children. In this context, how are we to understand the continued gender difference between women and men when it comes to religion?

A weakness in many studies of gender and religion is that they tend to treat women and men as unified groups. Although there is a general tendency that Nordic women are more religious than men, it would be of interest to know who the religious women are and what distinguishes them from the less religious ones. A quantitative study from Norway in the 1990s showed that women's religiosity differed according to several factors: Age, marital status, the number of children living at home, education, and professional status (Furseth 2005, 67–74). For example, elderly women were more religious than younger and middle-aged women. As the elderly women pass away, religion among

women will decline, which we see in the Nordic data. Also, married women are more religious than single women, and women with three children and more. Not surprisingly, homemakers are slightly more oriented toward traditional religious beliefs and practices than working women. As Nordic women are increasingly full-time employed, traditional religiosity will give way. In this study, religion seems to be associated with strong orientations toward the family and home. Since the gender gap has diminished in the Nordic countries the past decades in the sense that men increasingly participate in the home when it comes to domestic chores and child rearing, one would expect men to become more religious. The overall pattern is that religion is declining among Nordic men. Nevertheless, there is an increase in Danish men who believe in God and decline of those who never pray. There is also a slight growth of Finnish and Icelandic men who attend services monthly. In addition to women following men in a secular direction, as proposed by Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012), some Nordic men seem to follow women in a more religious direction. These findings could suggest that social factors related to family and child rearing are linked to religiosity.

Gundelach and Riis (1992) suggest that the difference between Danish women and men in religious orientation is related to their professional choice. The Norwegian study confirms the importance of profession, as women employed in the welfare sector (nurses, social workers, and elementary school teachers) are more oriented toward religion than women employed in other sectors. Since the Nordic labor markets continue to be gendered, this could explain why Nordic women score higher than men do on several religious indicators. While Danish women in welfare professions often adopt spiritual forms of beliefs (Gundelach and Riis 1992), the Norwegian women are more oriented toward traditional Christian beliefs and practices. One explanation for the religious orientations of women in welfare professions is that these professions imply a care-giving role often shared by religious institutions (Gundelach and Riis 1992; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012; Woodhead 2008). Another and perhaps more important explanation in the case of Norway is that many colleges within this sector, in particular, nursing and social work, are private Christian institutions that teach Christian values to their students. More detailed studies are needed to understand the changing relations between gender and religion in the Nordic countries, as elsewhere.

2.7 RELIGIOUS COMPLEXITY

During the period we have described here, relatively profound changes have taken place in the Nordic countries with more open and service-based economies, more volatile politics and orientations toward interstate cooperation, especially the EU. The neoliberalism and turn to the right resulted in the adoption of austerity policies, which implied a downsizing of the generous welfare states. Immigration made visible some of the challenges of the welfare state, where solidarity, distribution, and equal rights are tested when new groups make demands. The period has also witnessed fundamental changes in the role of women in society, as well as changes in the institutions of marriage and family, trends that began in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, the Nordic countries are characterized by relatively high living standards, stability, and both income and gender equality.

In the area of religion, simultaneous multiple religious trends are evident. While the current theoretical approaches in the sociology of religion tend to emphasize single dimensions, this chapter shows that these perspectives fail to capture the current situation of multiple trends. Instead, the argument here is that the data show religious complexity in the sense that there are several religious trends at different levels toward more secularity, a shift in religion itself, and greater religious diversity. This development is similar to many other European countries and shows that the Nordic countries constitute a distinctive variation on this theme.

We will begin with the growing secularity. In spite of the fact that the Lutheran majority churches have played a significant role in shaping the national cultures in the five Nordic countries, these churches have experienced a declining support when it comes to membership and participation in rites of passage since the late 1980s. In addition, religious beliefs are declining and so is regular monthly religious attendance, while the number of nones is increasing. Sweden is at the most secular end of the spectrum, while Iceland is at the other end, and Norway and Finland are in the middle. The exceptional case is Denmark, where religious beliefs have gone up and the amount of people who never attend services has gone down. The overall trends of a growing secularity are not unique for the Nordic countries. In Great Britain, there is a decline in traditional religious beliefs and church attendance, and a growth of unbelievers and nones (Brown and Lynch 2012; Guest et al. 2012). In Switzerland,

there has also been a relative decline among the Reformed and the Catholic memberships, a decline in church attendance, and a growth of nones (Stolz et al. 2016, 154–175). Secularization at the individual level in the sense of religious decline is a pattern in several European countries (Bruce 2011, 4–12).

Scholars have presented different explanations for the growing secularity, one of which is the killing of religion by welfare utopianism (Dinham and Jackson 2012; Woodhead 2012). According to this argument, during the post-WW II era, the expanding European welfare states took over most health, educational, and welfare institutions that were owned by religious bodies, which came under control by the secular welfare state. In the case of Britain, government policies pushed to create an overall public welfare system, and in doing so, marginalized faith-based welfare providers (Dinham and Jackson 2012). In Woodhead’s “sweeping overview” (Hjelm 2015, 6), she takes this notion further and claims that the result was that “religion became increasingly invisible in the welfare era.” Eventually, “the welfare utopianism took on the contours of a this-worldly faith” that was exclusivist in the sense that it refused to share space with religion and instead, took over for religion ideologically, economically, and in the area of employment (Woodhead 2012, 15). In sum, religion was forced out by an aggressive, secular state (see Kettell 2015).

We have mentioned the profound impact the formation of universalist welfare states had in the Nordic countries when it came to economic equality and social class compromise, education, gender equality, and child care. The question is if the Nordic welfare states also forced religion out and is a factor that explains the secularity in the Nordic countries. The previous Nordic study emphasized the influential role of the Social Democratic parties in all the five countries during 1930–1980, and especially after WW II when they formed governments and stayed in power for decades, except in Iceland. While the party platforms in the 1930s demanded a separation of state and church and thereby favored a secular state, some parties began to change their policies on this issue even before WW II. By the 1960s and 1970s, they had eliminated this demand and most of them embraced the state churches, albeit to different degrees. The Swedish and Finnish parties expressed less concern with religious questions, while the Danish and Norwegian parties began increasingly to see themselves as the protectors and facilitators of liberal “folk churches” (Gustafsson 1985, 200; 1994, 16, 21–23;

Lundby 1985, 157; Pétursson 1985, 114; Riis 1985, 25–26; Sundback 1985, 71). If religion was forced out ideologically by a secular welfare utopian state dominated by the Social Democratic parties, we would expect to see a growing secularization at the individual level in the early postwar years. Although there was a decline in participation in rites of passage within the Lutheran state churches during 1930–1980, in particular weddings, the percentages of the Nordic populations who participated in the other rituals continued to be relatively high and varied between 71 and 100% in 1978. If we look at church attendance, the data also show that there was a decline in church attendance from 1938 to 1958. However, the decline during the postwar years was less than it was later, from 1958 to 1978 (Gustafsson 1994, 39–42). This means that church attendance experienced a more rapid decline during the period when the Social Democrats embraced the Lutheran state churches than it did when the Social Democrats harbored more antireligious views and political aims. The secular views of the Nordic Social Democratic parties and their elites may have had some secularizing effect, but it does not seem that the Nordic populations followed them on a large scale.

Another explanation for the growing secularity in the Nordic countries, as well as other Western nations, is related to the explanation above but focuses on existential security. According to Norris and Inglehart (2004, 4), religion is weaker in nations where the populations feel “existentially secure.” In countries with low levels of security, more people turn to religion for both material and emotional help. In Western Europe, the churches were traditionally the institutions that provided various forms of social, material as well as existential welfare and security, which tied people to these churches (Davie 2012; Manow and van Kersbergen 2009). As the states took over the provision of welfare services, people would feel more secure, and fewer would turn to religion for help. The effects of progressive welfare policies were, then, a growing secularization (Kasselstrand 2015, 283). This is an appealing theory, albeit it suffers from both theoretical and empirical flaws. Norris and Inglehart’s theory is based on deprivation theory, which maintains that religious commitment is a result of the compensation that religion provides in situations where individuals meet risk and insecurity and search for alternative sources of security. However, this does not explain why some people who experience insecurity turn to religion, while many do not. If this theory is valid, we would expect to see a turn to religion in the Nordic populations as the welfare states were adjusted in the 1980s.

Especially in Sweden, the welfare state scaled down on their services and increasingly used faith-based organization to provide welfare services (Bäckström et al. 2011). In spite of this development, the religious decline in the Swedish population continued.

The previous Nordic study showed that the pattern of declining church attendance began to accelerate in the mid- to the late 1960s and was a general Nordic trend (Gustafsson 1994, 42). This was a time when the middle class expanded considerably. The baby-boomer generation entered higher education, and there was a growth in employment in the service sector and in welfare state-related jobs in education, health, and social care. For the first time, large groups of women also entered higher education and full-time employment. It is reasonable to assume that a growing secularization in the Nordic countries is related to these shifts. The transformations in Nordic women's education and employment and changes in family patterns since the 1970s and 1980s seem, for example, to have had a secularizing effect on the women. While especially Christian ideals and practices have been connected to the traditional family, the reduced status of marriage and the growth in full-time employment have resulted in a situation, where Nordic women follow men in a secular direction, as proposed by Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012). However, as Nordic men have become more involved in family and childcare during the past decades, the link between family orientation and religion also seems to result in another trend where some Nordic men follow women in a more religious direction. Some scholars have suggested that the higher religious score of women, especially as it relates to holistic spirituality, is some sort of coping strategy due to the pressures being a career woman, mother, and spouse (Woodhead 2008) or the pressures of the new Me-society (Stolz et al. 2016, 171). The findings here suggest that religion and spirituality among women are not so much a coping strategy as it is tied to family orientations and childrearing responsibilities. If this is a growing trend among men as they become more involved in raising children and fulfilling responsibilities at home, needs to be explored further.

Religious complexity implies that religion at the individual level is not unitary. A diminished significance of religion for many individuals is definitely one trend, but another trend is the changing approach to religion altogether. The neoliberalism in the 1980s led to structural changes that slowly transformed the corporatist model in a more liberal and commercial direction. There was a shift in the media, education, and the welfare

service sector toward more of a market system, which went hand in hand with changes in religion. While the Nordic religious scene in the 1960s was characterized by dominant state churches and extremely small religious minorities, religion began to move outside the established institutions in the 1970s, and a far more varied religious field emerged that began to look like a religious market. This trend began with the emergence of new religious movements and charismatic Christianity, which became controversial. Pentecostalism experienced an increase, especially in Finland and Iceland, even if it has experienced a decline in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway during the last years. The new religious movements that came in the 1970s remained small in the Nordic countries, but there was a growth in holistic spirituality, which went hand in hand with changes in value orientations. The relatively high living standards, the neoliberalism, and the turn to the right seem to have resulted in a growing individualization. The individualistic trends in economic discourse are also related to cultural changes, with more focus on freedom of choice and individual responsibility, which is also evident in the area of religion. Although beliefs in items such as reincarnation have fluctuated and are relatively low in the Nordic countries, the popularity of holistic fairs and events demonstrate its presence.

The shift in the approach to religion is also found outside the holistic milieus and seems to be prevalent in the general populations. Studies show that there are generational changes towards a more individualized and subjective approach to religious and secular worldviews and practices. This trend can have a secularizing effect in the sense that the choice to be secular is seen as a matter for each individual, and so is the choice to remain outside any faith and worldview community. Inside the religious milieus, there is a diminishing emphasis on dogma, and there is a shift away from those who believe in a personal God to those who believe in a supernatural force both in the UK and in the Nordic countries (Davie 2015, 5–7, 73–81). There is also a greater orientation toward a “softer” form of religion with an emphasis on “feelgood” experiences, also among regular churchgoers (Repstad and Henriksen 2005; Repstad and Trysnes 2013). Religion has largely become a matter of personal choice and there is a turn “from truth to self” (Furseth 2006), as people draw on existing religious traditions and combine them with new elements (Andersen and Lüchau 2011; Botvar 2000; Bromander 2008, 2012). The turn away from orthodoxy to bricolage is also a feature found in several other Western countries (Ammerman 2014; Davie

2015, 7–8; Harvey and Vincett 2012; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Stolz et al. 2016, 84–88; Woodhead 2012, 19).

The organized religious groups and institutions in the Nordic countries are also more diverse with greater room for different types of approach to faith and practice than they used to be. This is particularly evident in the Lutheran majority churches, where there has been a major change in the variety of activities that cater to different age and interest groups. There is also a greater acceptance of different opinions regarding religious beliefs, moral questions, and religious practices. One example is the Church of Norway, where the church synod in 2016 decided to allow for same-sex wedding ceremonies, while it simultaneously stated that the church had room for both those who favored and opposed the reform.

Secular options have also become more visible during the past decades. The initiatives to form secular humanist organizations often came from people in the cultural elites, of whom some had ties to the political elites. While Davie (2015, 10) argues that the open secular voices in Britain have emerged as a reaction to the more recent attention to religion in the public sphere, the growth of secular humanists in the Nordic countries began earlier. For example, the large Norwegian secular humanist association grew in the 1980s, after intense debates on abortion and the role of religion in public schools and day care centers, and after the association diversified rites of passage by arranging secular name giving ceremonies and confirmations, which became popular.

In addition to the secularization and the coexistence of multiple religious forms at the individual level, another trend is also taking place, namely the meso level increase in faith communities. This growing religious diversity is one the most striking changes since the late 1980s, mostly due to immigration. Although the Nordic countries were involved in colonialism, their involvement was on a relatively small scale. The recent immigration is not tied to their previous colonial past in the same way as it is in France and the UK, but to more general global flows of migrants. During the past 30 years, in particular, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, have gone from being largely homogenous to being far more racially, ethnically and religiously diverse. Islam is now the second largest religion in these countries, except Iceland, a feature shared by many other European countries. Several studies have focused on the relatively orthodox beliefs and high rates of religious practices among many Muslims, which make them a contrast to the general

Nordic populations. However, these studies also show that the subjective approach that is common in the general culture, and in Christian and holistic milieus, is also common among many Muslims, especially the younger generations (Furseth 2014; Jacobsen 2005; Sjöqvist 1999). One must also keep in mind that these studies usually are small, qualitative studies of practicing Muslims, and the tendency is to ignore the large groups of religiously passive Muslims, and secular Muslims, of whom we know little (Jeldtoft 2011).

The result of the growing religious diversity is that the Christian religion is declining, relatively speaking, while religions outside Christianity are growing. The Christian minority churches have also experienced various patterns of growth and decline. After the turn of the millennium, the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox have increased, again due to immigration. In many ways, immigration and the formation of meso level religious minority groups have given religion a stronger public presence. New mosques and temples are erected, and visible religious symbolism, such as Sikh turbans and Muslim hijabs, are common on the streets in the Nordic capitals and larger cities, as it is elsewhere in central and southern Europe (Vilaca et al. 2014). Similar to findings in other studies, the formation of religious minorities in the Nordic countries create pressure on the relations between religion and state and public policies on religion, which previously gave the majority churches a privileged place (see Chap. 3). These and other questions having to do with the role of religion and worldviews in contemporary Nordic societies are also raised in political debates and in the media (Chaps. 4 and 5), and addressed by the faith and worldview communities (Chap. 6). These are the topic for the following chapters.

NOTES

1. Some of these findings are published in Furseth (2016).
2. Information about the number of visitors was given by Inge Nielsen in DanInfo Mersserne in an email on October 9, 2013.

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