Disentangling national and religious identification as predictors of support for religious minority rights among Christian majority groups

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2022-04

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It is often assumed that, in Western societies, Christian values are embedded in national identities, yet, the association between religious identities and prejudice has seldom been studied in parallel to national identity. According to both the social identity theory approach and integrated threat theory, group identification is important for perceiving threats and expressing corresponding attitudes. Nevertheless, their independent roles on intergroup outcomes have often been ignored, although they are two of the most salient and important identities when considering support for religious minority rights. We address this gap in research by looking at the associations of religious identity with support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular in parallel to national identity through diversity threat. This study was conducted among the members of majority groups in four Western countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway ($N = 1,532$), all of which are characterised as traditionally Christian. We found that a higher religious identification was associated with greater support for religious minority rights in general and for those of Muslims in particular, while national identification had no direct association with support for either groups' religious rights. However, both group identifications were also associated with heightened perceived diversity threat, which in turn, predicted reluctance to support religious minority rights. This demonstrates the dual role that religious identities may play in intergroup relations.

The religious landscape of the Western world started to change dramatically in the 1960s. Many traditionally Christian societies have increasingly accommodated non-Christian religious groups such as Muslims. At the same time, general levels of religiosity as measured by affiliation and church attendance have steadily declined among members of the Christian majority over the last 60 years (Pew Research Center, 2018). However,

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when studying the reactions of national majority group members to increasing religious diversity, research rarely disentangles the roles of their national and religious identification. Instead, it departures from the notion that national identities are built on common ideals of the nationhood that have an underlying expectation of ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship (Kunovich, 2006; see also Van der Noll, Rohmann, & Saroglou, 2018). Many still refer to the cultural Christian identity of Western European countries and the Western world in general (cf. McCrea, 2013; Modood, 2011). Yet, the link between religious and national identities is increasingly challenged (Niemelä, 2015), and many countries are now making distinctions between church and state to better detach these two social identities from each other and to achieve a more inclusive national context for members from different religious denominations (Carol & Koopmans, 2013; Saukkonen & Pyykkönen, 2008).

In this study, we aim to examine the respective links between national and religious identification and support for religious minority rights in general, and the religious rights of Muslims in particular, among national majority group members in four traditionally Christian countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway. We also adopt a threat perspective when explaining the reactions of national majority group members to Muslims and other religious minorities. In line with the integrated threat theory (ITT; Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 1996), we argue that strong ingroup identification makes people concerned about and perceive threats posed by outgroups to their ingroup, and these threat perceptions, in turn, may cause outgroup negativity. We analyse perceived diversity threats (i.e., a specific kind of symbolic threat posed by growing religious diversity on the worldview of and sense of cohesion among majority group members), as a mechanism explaining the possible negative association between ingroup identification and support for religious minority rights. This way, we aim to complement previous research on the roles of religious and national identities in intergroup outcomes. By particularly focussing on support for religious minority rights, we respond to the call for research addressing majority group members' collective action intentions to support the rights of minorities, as an important driver of societal change (Mallett, Huntsinger, Sinclair, & Swim, 2008).

Our interest is especially in support for the religious rights of Muslims, and we determine this by comparing attitudinal reactions to the rights of Muslims with the rights of religious minorities in general. We focus on Muslims' rights because especially after 9/11 and the so-called refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, Islam is viewed as a threat to the religious and national identities of Christian majorities (Obaidi, Kunst, Kteily, Thomsen, & Sidanius, 2018). For example, in 2018, almost half of the general population across 15 countries in Europe agreed with the statement that 'Islam is fundamentally incompatible with national culture and values' (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Similar opinions prevail overseas: almost half of Australians project that Muslims will not adopt the Australian customs or their way of life (Poushter, 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that compared to other religious minorities, Muslims seem to evoke the most negative attitudes (Staerklé, Sidanius, Green, & Molina, 2010; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008).

Therefore, in this study, we make two important distinctions. First, we distinguish between national and religious identification and so examine the independent roles of religious and national identities for support for religious minority rights. It is often assumed that Christian values are embedded in national identities, yet the independent role of religious identities' association with prejudice has seldom been studied next to national identity (but see Bilali, Iqbal, & Çelik, 2018). Second, we also disentangle generalised prejudice from target or group-specific prejudice (e.g., Meeusen & Kern,

2016; Spruyt & Van der Noll, 2017) by examining support for the religious rights of religious minorities, in general, and of Muslims, in particular, since the latter group is one of the most stigmatised in discourses on immigration and cultural diversity. Perceptions of Muslims might differ in important ways from the way immigrants in general are viewed (i.e., Staerklé et al., 2010). Following ITT (Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 1996), we also expect perceived diversity threat to account for the association between religious and national identifications and intergroup outcomes.

Perceived diversity threats as a mechanism decreasing support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular

In this study, we focus on perceptions of religious diversity threat (and not cultural or social diversity in general) as a form of symbolic threat. We suggest perceived diversity threat as a factor explaining the link between the national and religious identification of majority group members and their behavioural intentions to support the rights of religious minorities in Europe. Although ethnic and religious minorities can spark different types of threats, Islam as a religion is often posed as a threat to 'Western culture', and their values are seen as different from those of majority groups (see Eskelinen & Verkuyten, 2018)[1]. Although all of them have quite different immigration patterns, discussions around religious diversity are present in all of the countries examined in this study and in all of them, the majority of them has a primary focus on Islam.

We argue that the link between religious and national identification and support for religious minority rights cannot be meaningfully assessed without accounting for perceived threats to the ingroups' identity and welfare. To better understand this link, we combine ITT with a social identity approach (SIA). ITT (Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan, Ybarra, Martnez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998) is considered as a key theorisation on the association between ingroup identification, perceived intergroup threat, and outgroup attitudes. It builds on the legacy of realistic conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif, 1966) and threats to ingroup identification as an antecedent of perceived intergroup threats (e.g., realistic and symbolic threat), which further are theorised to lead to more negative outgroup attitudes.

Importantly, both ITT (Stephan, 2014; Stephan et al., 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 1996) and SIA (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1999) argue that the association between high ingroup identification, threats, and prejudice is dependent on the status differentials and intergroup context in general. A number of studies have shown that high identifiers tend to perceive more diversity threat from outgroups to which they attach different values and worldviews (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006), which, in turn, explains their negative behavioural intentions toward these outgroups (Aberson & Gaffney, 2009; Stephan et al., 2002; Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). Importantly, research shows that heightened threat perceptions are linked with both national and religious identification, particularly in highly politicised intergroup contexts, due to accentuated group differences concerning national values, morals, beliefs, attitudes, and standards (Badea, Iyer, & Aebischer, 2018; Obaidi et al., 2018). For example, it has been found that national identification among majority members enhanced the perception of symbolic threats, which in turn led to more negative attitudes

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[1] *Australia is a settler society (Bouma, 2011), Germany (e.g. Joppke, 1996) and Norway (Pettersen and Østby, 2013) have had migrants from Muslim countries in the 1960s, whereas Finland is a relatively new country of immigrants with the first wave of Muslims coming in as refugees from Somalia in the 1980s, Sakaranaho, 2019).*

towards outgroup members such as Muslims (Bilali et al., 2018; Caricati, 2018; Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2014) often mediating this relationship fully (Velasco Gonzalez et al., 2008). Opposition to Islamic practices is often justified by a threat to the Christian identity of Europe, which can mobilise even people with less commitments to their national identification to oppose Muslims' religious rights (Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2011). Thus, whereas high ingroup (religious and national) identification as such might not in itself predict negative intergroup outcomes, it might do so via perceived diversity threats.

We particularly examine the national majority groups' willingness to support the rights of Muslims within Europe, as this minority group is central in the landscape of inter-religious relations in the receiving Christian societies (see Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007) while being also portrayed as specifically value-threatening outgroup in societal discourse (Obaidi et al., 2018). Previous research supports this view as increasing religious diversity and growing multiculturalism are perceived as a threat to 'Western culture' (e.g., Spruyt & Van der Noll, 2017). It also demonstrates that these threats are especially associated with Islam (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007), which is particularly harmful for attitudes towards Muslims in comparison to religious minorities in general (e.g., Pew Research Centre, 2018; Staerklé et al., 2010; but see Strabac, Aalberg, & Valenta, 2014). For example, in a study by Van der Noll, Poppe, and Verkuyten (2010), perceived diversity threat was the main determinant of political intolerance for Muslims among both prejudiced and non-prejudiced Dutch majority group members. Discussions about a potential threat because of increased religious diversity and integration of Muslims are present in the four countries examined in this study (Pew Research Centre, 2018; Poushter, 2017). Consequently, in this study, we expect that high national and religious identifiers will perceive increasing religious diversity to pose a threat to the worldview and way of life of their ingroup (McLaren, 2003; Velasco Gonzalez et al., 2008), and this will explain their particularly negative attitudinal reactions towards Muslims as compared to religious minorities in general.

National and religious identities as antecedents of support for religious minority rights

According to SIA, social identities, such as religious and national identities, provide people with a frame of reference with regard to ingroup–outgroup distinctions, and a lens that guides their beliefs, norms, and values (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Verkuyten, 2009). Identification is associated with, and is a product of, a desire for positive distinctiveness and motivation for intergroup comparison and social competition that produce ingroup preference. This is because high identifiers are motivated to protect their ingroup (Ellemers et al., 1999; Brewer, 1999). High identifiers are tuned to monitor the intergroup context and evaluate potential threats when the intergroup context changes (Riek et al., 2006, see also Hodson, Dovidio, & Esses, 2003; Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001; Reynolds et al., 2007). Brewer (1979) argues that when outcomes are perceived to be zero-sum (i.e., when ingroup's outcomes improve only when the outgroup's benefits decrease), it becomes difficult to downplay bias.

For example, there is evidence that a stronger national identification is associated with more prejudice towards immigrants and religious minority groups, particularly Muslims (e.g., Sarrasin, Green, Bolzman, Visintin, & Politi, 2018; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Wagner, Christ, & Heitmeyer, 2010). Accordingly, it has been argued that national identification is an important antecedent of negative sentiment towards religious minorities, because for national majority group members, religion represents cultural conformity, and religious minorities are often seen as not fitting within the symbolic boundaries of the ethno-

religious ingroup (Storm, 2018). Similarly with religious identification, there is also a plethora of research on the role of religiosity in intergroup relations (Bohman & Hjerm, 2014; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Hello, 2002). For example, a meta-analytic review on the link between religiosity and racism in the United States showed that stronger religious ingroup identification was associated with derogation of racial outgroups tolerance (Hall et al., 2010). Due to differences in religious worldviews, higher religious identification has also been found to be associated with more prejudice, when other religious groups are perceived as rejecting the ingroup's religion's absolute truth (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

However, there is also growing evidence suggesting a possible neutral or even positive association between higher religious identification and outgroup attitudes (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). For example, in Australia, Christians (in comparison to non-Christians) held more positive attitudes towards asylum seekers (Perry, Paradies, & Pedersen, 2015). In their study on support for religious rights of Muslims and Christians in multiple European countries, Carol, Helbling, and Michalowski (2015) found that religious Christians were more supportive of Muslim's religious rights in comparison to non-religious individuals, which they argued was due to religious solidarity being based more on belief rather than belonging to a specific religious community. Similarly, in the case of national identification, its direct association has been challenged: often after accounting for perceived threats, this association has become non-significant (Badea et al., 2018; Velasco González et al., 2008) Therefore, in this study, we suggest perceived diversity threat to serve as a mediating mechanism explaining why this association is potentially negative. We explore whether after accounting for these mediating mechanisms are religious and national identification associated with more or less support for the rights of religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular in Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway.

Aims and hypotheses

This study investigates the associations between religious and national identification and outgroup attitudes via perceived diversity threat among majority group members in four Western national contexts characterised by increasing religious diversity. As dependent variables, we will assess support for the rights of religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular. By assessing the behavioural intentions or willingness to support the rights of these two target groups, we aim to gain new insight into how national and religious identification are associated with generalised and group-specific (anti-Muslim) prejudice and policy support (see also Van der Noll, 2014).

We will take an exploratory approach with respect to the direct associations between religious and national identification and support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular, given inconclusive previous research. However, we expect a higher religious and national identification to be associated with a higher perception of a diversity threat from religious outgroups (H1). We further expect higher levels of perceived diversity threat to be associated with less support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular (H2). Finally, we expect the negative association between threat and Muslims' religious rights to be stronger than the negative association with religious minority rights in general (H3).

To respond to the call for systematic cross-cultural studies on the effect of majority group members' religiosity on their attitudes towards religious outgroups other than atheists (Bohman & Hjerm, 2014), we test our model with data gathered from

community samples in Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway. Despite some differences in their religious composition and church-state relations, the national culture in all these countries is deeply influenced by a history of Christian dominance (Pew Research Centre, 2018; Poushter, 2017). Furthermore, these contexts share many more implicit and underlying structures, values, traditions, and customs that have Judeo-Christian roots (e.g., the Gregorian calendar, see Carol et al., 2015). Notably, however, all of these countries are also characterised by two demographic developments: increasing secularisation and increasing Muslim immigration, with institutional bodies and policies being created to foster the incorporation of Muslim minorities (Bouma, 2011; Carol et al., 2015; Cinalli & Giugni, 2013; Mansouri & Vergani, 2018; Sakaranaho, 2019). Finally, it is important to acknowledge that while religious and national identities bind people to larger communities, official church-state policies are not directly reflected in the attitudes of their individual members (see, e.g., Saukkonen & Pyykkönen, 2008 but see Van der Noll, 2010). Therefore, individual religiosity does not necessarily reflect the stances of religious institutions (Van der Noll, 2019), which highlights the importance of gaining knowledge of the grass-root level of inter-religious relations among majority group members with different levels of religious identification.

Method

Data and participants

The participants were all national majority members from four Western countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway. In total, 1,792 participants took part in this study (N = 514 Australians; N = 440 Finns; N = 421 Germans; N = 415 Norwegians). Community samples of adult majority population were surveyed using assistance of private survey companies in Australia, Finland, and Germany and with the help of research assistants in Norway. In Norway, research assistants recruited participants through social media advertisement and by posting in groups focussing on a variety of religious and non-religious topics. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Data collection started in spring 2017 and was finalised in spring 2018 by online surveys (Australia, Germany, and Norway) and phone interviews (in Finland). We targeted both believers and non-believers. With regard to believers, all of our countries targeted Christian participants in the recruitment process, specifically Protestant Christians, regardless of their degree of religiosity with one of the requirements being a national citizen in the country of study. Our final sample had an equal distribution of both believers (50.5%) and non-believers (49.5%).

We excluded all participants who identified themselves as members of a religious minority group in the context studied (N = 201), or as non-national citizens with an immigrant background (N = 89). We also excluded all participants who answered that they could not promise to give their best answers (N = 4). Therefore, the final sample size was 1,532 (N = 374 Australians; N = 407 Finns; N = 421 Germans; N = 330 Norwegians). There was an equal distribution of males and females in the whole data and in each sub-sample with the age of respondents ranging from 16 to 83 (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the main study variables

	M (SD)	Scale	1	2	3	4	5
Religious identification	2.98 (2.04)	1–7	1				
National identification	5.91 (1.24)	1–7	.16***	1			
Diversity threat	3.54 (1.67)	1–7	.15***	.27***	1		
Support for religious minority rights	4.65 (1.68)	1–7	.17***	−.06*	−.40***	1	
Support for Muslim religious rights	4.43 (1.87)	1–7	.13***	−.14***	−.46***		1

***$p < .001$.

Measures[2]

Support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular were measured by three items adapted from a previously used scale by Phelps, Eilertsen, Türken, and Ommundsen (2011) to reflect support for religious minority rights and Muslims respectively. The items were: 'All [religious minorities/Muslims] should have equal rights to practice their religion in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', 'All [religious minorities/Muslims] should be able to have their own sanctums in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', and 'I am ready to defend the rights of [religious minorities/Muslims] in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway] when I see they are violated'. All items were measured on a 7-point scale with 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) as endpoints. Support for religious minority rights (Australia $\alpha = .91$, Finland $\alpha = .80$, Germany $\alpha = .90$, Norway $\alpha = .86$) and support for Muslim rights (Australia $\alpha = .93$, Finland $\alpha = .84$, Germany $\alpha = .91$, Norway $\alpha = .91$) were treated as separate latent constructs in the analyses.

Religious identification was measured by two items: 'I consider myself to be a religious person' and 'I feel myself being a member of a religious group'. The items were modified from the Centrality of Religiosity Scale by Huber and Huber (2012).[3] Both items were measured on a 7-point scale with 1 (*strongly disagree*), and 7 (*strongly agree*) as endpoints. Higher scores, hence, reflected stronger religious identification. The average of the two items were used to calculate the mean score (Australia $r = .88$, Finland $r = .82$, Germany $r = .83$, Norway $r = .77$).

National identification was measured by three items that were adapted and shortened from previously used scales by Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) to reflect the specific host national identities of each country: 'I see myself as [Australian/Finn/German/Norwegian]', 'I am proud to be a [Australian/Finn/German/Norwegian]', and 'I feel connected to the [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians]'. All three items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) as endpoints, such that

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[2] It should be noted that due to the study being part of a larger project, the questionnaires also included additional measures (e.g. religious orientations scale, identity motives, feeling thermometers). These measures were not analyzed for this paper as they fell outside of its scope.

[3] Our reviewers pointed out an important question why we did not measure religious identification with a validated measure based in SIT. When assessing religious identification, we focused on the cognitive (sense of belonging) dimension of identification only. Our point of departure was the notion that all majority group members, be they believers or non-believers, make sense of their (non)religious identities by evaluating their belongingness and connection to the religious community by identifying with or dis-identifying from it to various degrees (Pauha et al., 2020). In contrast, the measurement of emotional significance or value attached to the religious group membership, though being typical dimensions in research in SIT, would in this study not have been suitable for those participants, who consider themselves as non-believers (i.e. "I'm proud to be religious/part of a religious group"). Therefore, it would have prevented them from evaluating the strength of their religious identification. For this reason the measurement of religious and national identification slightly differ in this study.

higher scores reflected stronger national identification (Australia α = .80, Finland α = .70, Germany α = .79, Norway α = .94). The scale was used as a latent variable in the analyses.

Four items were used to assess perceived *diversity threat*. All items were modified and adapted from three previously used scales (Shortle, & Gaddie, 2015; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). The items were modified to tap into the perceived threat of growing religious diversity: 'Growing religious diversity threatens the historically Christian heritage of [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', 'Growing religious diversity threatens the sense of cohesion among [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians]', 'Growing religious diversity threatens the possibility of non-religious [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians] to live according to their own worldview', and 'Growing religious diversity threatens the possibility of religious [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians] to live according to their own worldview'. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) as endpoints. The scale was used as a latent variable in the analyses (Australia α = .89, Finland α = .88, Germany α = .92, Norway α = .81).

Control variables. We controlled for some demographic variables to ensure that our results would not be confounded by other factors: age (continuous), education (1 = *no formal education*, 7 = *doctoral degree*), gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and political orientation (1 = *left-wing*, 7 = *right-wing*). In the case of the educational level variable, participants who stated their educational level as 'Other' were coded as missing ($N = 9$), since it was not possible to deduce whether they had a lower or higher education.

Analysis

Measurement model

A confirmatory factor analysis was computed with all the items of religious and national identity, diversity threat, and support for religious minority rights and Muslim religious rights to test whether our proposed 5-factor measurement model had a good fit to the data. To estimate the model, we used Mplus 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2020) with robust maximum likelihood estimation taking account the possible non-normalities of the data. The model fit was acceptable χ^2 (80) = 1,202.441, $p < .001$ CFI = .900; TLI = .869; RMSEA = .096 [90% CI = 0.091, –0.101], $p < .001$; SRMR = .044. After allowing the residual covariances of the items 'I am ready to defend the rights of religious minorities in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway] when I see they are violated', and 'I am ready to defend the rights of [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway] Muslims when I see they are violated' that loaded on the support for minority and Muslim religious rights factors to co-vary, the model fit of the 5-factor solution was excellent χ^2 (79) = 616.675, $p < .001$ CFI = .952; TLI = .937; RMSEA = .067 [90% CI = .062, –.072], $p < .001$; SRMR = .037.

To be able to make cross-country comparisons, we next computed a measurement invariance test with forward selection across the four countries. We first analysed a configural invariance version of the model in which all intercepts, factor loadings, and residual variances were allowed to vary across the four countries. The model showed good fit to the data, χ^2 (232) = 734.016, $p < .001$ CFI = .948; TLI = .930; RMSEA = .075 [90% CI = 0.069, –0.081], $p < .001$; SRMR = .041. We subsequently estimated the metric version of the model that restricts factor loadings to be the same across countries, which showed acceptable fit, χ^2 (238) = 772.180 $p < .001$, CFI = .945; TLI = .928; RMSEA = .077 [90% CI = 0.071 –0.083], $p < .001$; SRMR = .072. However, when the residual covariances of the items 'Growing religious diversity threatens the possibility of

non-religious [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians] to live according to their own worldview', and 'Growing religious diversity threatens the possibility of religious [Australians/Finns/Germans/Norwegians] to live according to their own worldview' were allowed to co-vary, the model fit of the metric model improved, χ^2 (234) = 640.837 $p < .001$, CFI = .958; TLI = .944; RMSEA = .067 [90% CI = 0.061, –0.074], $p < .001$; SRMR = .070, $\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 51.386, $p < .001$. Therefore, we were able to proceed to analyse a scalar model for which only residual variances allowed to vary across countries. The model did not have an acceptable fit, χ^2 (282) = 1,055.157 $p < .001$, CFI = .920; TLI = .911; RMSEA = .085 [90% CI = 0.079 –0.090], $p < .001$; SRMR = .111. To be able to compare countries, we needed to achieve at least partial scalar invariance. To do this, we allowed three more residual covariances between the support for religious minority rights and Muslim religious rights (1) Between 'All religious minorities should have equal rights to practice their religion in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]' and 'Muslims should have equal rights to practice their religion in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', (2) 'All religious minorities should be able to have their own sanctums in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', and 'Muslims should be able to have own Mosques in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]', (3) 'All religious minorities should have equal rights to practice their religion in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]' and 'Muslims should be able to have own Mosques in [Australia/Finland/Germany/Norway]') to co-vary and relaxed two intercepts: one on the religious identity factor ('I consider myself to be a religious person') and another on the national identity factor ('I see myself as [Australian/Finn/German/Norwegian]'). Consequently, we achieved a partial scalar model with comparable fit indices to that of the metric model, χ^2 (267) = 708.833 $p < .001$, CFI = .954; TLI = .947; RMSEA = .066 [90% CI = 0.060, –0.072], $p < .001$; SRMR = .081, $\Delta\chi^2$ (33) = 57.0553, $p < .001$.[4] Although the chi-square of the partial scalar model was slightly worse, the other fit indices such as CFI and RMSEA were similar and in acceptable limit (see Rudnev, Lytkina, Davidov, Schmidt, & Zick, 2018 for a discussion). Therefore, we were able to proceed to the structural model being able to make cross-country comparisons.

Results

Descriptive results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations can be found in Table 1. Bivariate correlations were computed to assess the correlations between the main constructs. These preliminary analyses were mainly in line with our predictions. Higher levels of religious identification correlated with higher levels of national identification. Both religious and national identification correlated positively with diversity threat. Whereas higher religious identification correlated positively with support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular, higher national identification correlated negatively with both support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. Diversity threat correlated negatively with support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. Finally, support for the rights of religious minorities and the support for the rights of Muslims were positively intercorrelated.

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[4] *Most of the changes made were on the support for religious minority and Muslim religious rights covariation. It was examined whether a higher order factor of the two latent variables could suffice better for the model. Nevertheless, this caused multiple convergence issues. Therefore, we proceeded with the two variables as separate.*

Structural model

A multi-group mediation model with country as the grouping variable was first fitted with robust maximum likelihood in Mplus 8.2 to examine our hypothesised predictions across the four countries. We included the changes made to the model to achieve partial scalar invariance and all control variables in our analyses. The model fit was good, χ^2 (451) = 1,094.810, p < .001, CFI = .946; TLI = .930; RMSEA = .062 [90% CI = 0.057, –0.066], SRMR = .070 (see Appendix S1 for the results of this model). Due to not having specific hypotheses by country we also fitted a model with all paths constrained to be the same. The model fit was worse than that of the model with all paths freed, χ^2 (535) = 1,308.126, p < .001, CFI = .935; TLI = .929; RMSEA = .062 [90% CI = 0.058, –0.066], p < .001; SRMR = .094, $\Delta\chi^2$ (84) = 213.715, p < .001. Therefore, we then freed paths as suggested by the modification indices. Our final model was a partly constrained model with the paths from religious and national identification to support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in specific as well as the path from diversity threat to support for Muslims' religious rights constrained to be the same across countries. The model fit did not significantly differ from the unconstrained version, χ^2 (466) = 1,115.719, p < .001, CFI = .946; TLI = .931; RMSEA = .061 [90% CI = 0.056 –0.066], SRMR = .072, $\Delta\chi^2$ (15) = 20.211, p = .164.

Higher levels of religious identification were associated with more support for the rights of religious minorities and Muslims in particular (see Figure 1). National identification was not associated with support for religious minority rights in general or Muslims in particular. In turn, higher levels of religious identification were associated with more diversity threat in all countries except for Germany, therefore confirming H1 for all but one country. National identification was associated with higher levels of diversity threat in all countries except for Australia, thus mostly confirming H1. In turn, perceived diversity threat was further associated with less support for religious minority rights in general, and Muslims in particular, confirming H2 in all countries. We found partial support for H3, since the association between threat perceptions and support of the religious rights of Muslims was especially negative compared to the religious rights of religious minorities in general in Australia (Wald χ^2 (1) = 7.78, p = .005) and Finland
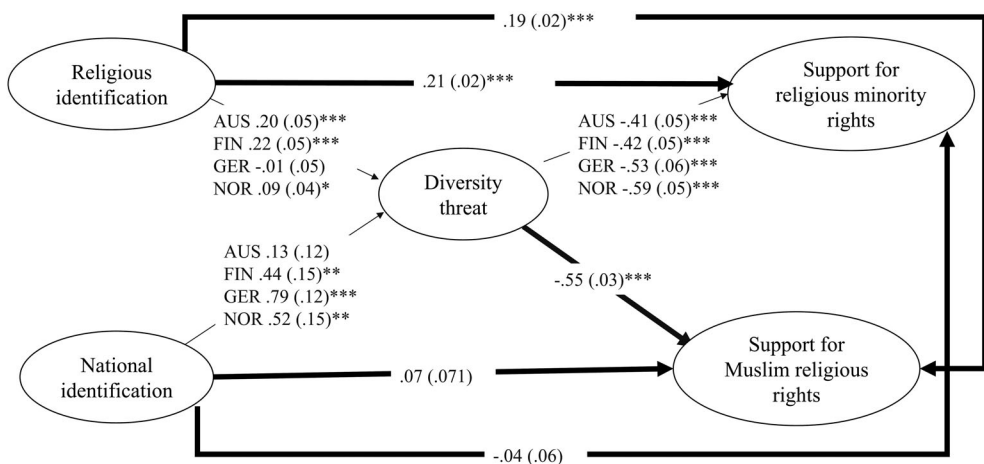

Figure 1. Partly constrained structural equation model. *Note.* Constrained paths are presented in bold. Unstandardised estimates are presented

Table 2. Indirect effects of religious and national identification via diversity threat on support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular

Country		Support for religious minority rights b (SE) [95% CI]	Support for Muslim religious rights b (SE) [95% CI]
Australia	Religious identification via diversity threat	b = −.081 (.020), [95% CI −0.138; −0.031]	b = −.107 (.026), [95% CI −0.176; −0.040]
	National identification via diversity threat	b = −.052 (.052), [95% CI −0.206; 0.067]	b = −.068 (.067), [95% CI −0.263; 0.086]
Finland	Religious identification via diversity threat	b = −.095 (.024), [95% CI −0.160; −0.040]	b = −.123 (.030), [95% CI −0.206; −0.051]
	National identification via diversity threat	b = −.187 (.070), [95% CI −.384; −.017]	b = −.242 (.087), [95% CI −.485; −.023]
Germany	Religious identification via diversity threat	b = .003 (.025), [95% CI −0.062; 0.070]	b = .003 (.026), [95% CI −0.061; 0.072]
	National identification via diversity threat	b = −.421 (.073), [95% CI −.638; −.258]	b = −.436 (.073), [95% CI −.651; −.273]
Norway	Religious identification via diversity threat	b = −.054 (.022), [95% CI −0.108; 0.003]	b = −.050 (.020), [95% CI 0.101; 0.003]
	National identification via diversity threat	b = −.307 (.096), [95% CI −0.612; −0.084]	b = −.284 (.089), [95% CI −0.562; −0.080]

Note. Unstandardised estimates presented.

(Wald χ^2 (1) = 10.86, p = .001). There was no difference between the support for religious minority rights in general in Germany (Wald χ^2 (1) = .12, p = .733) and Norway (Wald χ^2 (1) = 1.14, p = .287). See Appendix S2 for control variable results.

We then computed a bootstrap of 5,000 estimations to calculate the standard errors and confidence intervals of the indirect effects of religious and national identity on support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The mediated indirect effects were not significant in the case of national identification in Australia and in the case of religious identification in Germany and Norway (Table 2). In Australia and Finland, diversity threat partially mediated the relationship between religious identification and support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. In the case of national identification, a full mediation was observed in all countries except for Australia. In other words, higher national identification was associated with lower support for the rights of religious minorities in general, and Muslims in particular, which could be explained by higher levels of perceived diversity threat. When examining the total effects in both groups, total positive effects of religious identification on support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular remained significant, even after taking into account the opposing indirect effects through diversity threat.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the role of religious and national identification for support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular through perceived diversity threat in four Western, predominantly Christian countries. We included in our analysis two different distinctions: religious and national identification, and collective action

intentions aimed at religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular. Past research has shown that while the independent and direct associations between identification and prejudice may vary (e.g., Hall et al., 2010; Sarrasin et al., 2018; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Wagner et al., 2010), perceived diversity threat is an important mediator in the link between ingroup identification and prejudice. High identifiers are motivated to protect their ingroup (Ellemers et al., 1999; Brewer, 1999), which can also mean that outgroups are perceived to pose threats to the norms and values of this ingroup (Riek et al., 2006). In our study, we found that higher religious identification was associated with more support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. In contrast, national identification was not directly associated with support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. However, both religious identification and national identification were positively associated with higher levels of diversity threat that further resulted in less support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. In other words, a dual pathway emerged: although religious identification was directly associated with more support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular, it was simultaneously related to higher levels of diversity threat, which in turn was associated with less support.

Our findings seem to confirm the notion that higher religious identification enables the support of the rights of religious outgroups. This echoes the findings of Carol et al. (2015) who found that religious Christians were more supportive of Muslim's religious rights in comparison to non-religious individuals, due to religious solidarity being based more on belief rather than denominational belonging. Previous research has shown that religious residue is present even among non-believers in predominantly Christian countries, which can improve attitudes towards religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular (Pauha et al., 2020).

However, since higher religious identification is associated with more diversity threat, the interesting fact is that religious identification has a total positive effect on support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. This may be indicative of the relationship between religious identification and outgroup attitudes being more complicated than just a question of being more prejudiced or not. It could also be that higher religious identification is associated with more support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular under a superordinate religious identity as in Kunst, Thomsen, and Sam (2014). However, high religious identifiers at the same time feel threat to their religious groups' position in society but also their Christian norms and values. In a previous Australian study, only after accounting for right-wing authoritarianism, Christians (in comparison to non-Christians) held more positive attitudes towards asylum seekers (Perry et al., 2015). In our study, in the German sample, there was no association between religious identification and diversity threat. This could be indicative of Germany's longer history of accommodating religious minorities, such as Muslims, in comparison to the other Northern European countries in this study (cf. Cinalli & Giugni, 2013).

In all other countries except for Australia, national identification was not associated with diversity threat. It demonstrates that higher national identification as such is not necessarily associated with more outgroup derogation but in highly politicised context, through higher levels of threat, a higher national identification may be associated with less support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular (Bilali et al., 2018; Caricati, 2018; Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2014). However, this relationship between national identification and diversity threat was not present in Australia. This indicates the intricacies of national identity content and how different meanings are attached to

national identities in different countries. Whereas the Northern European countries in this study are traditionally Christian nation states, settler societies are often more diverse in their ethnic and religious make-up (cf. Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Verkuyten, 2007). Thus, national identity content may be more diverse and less threatened by increasing religious diversity in the latter context. Nevertheless, national identification was still not associated with support for religious minority rights in general or Muslims in particular in Australia.

Muslims experience greater resistance than other religious outgroups due to Islamophobia being currently more socially acceptable in receiving Western societies (Creighton & Jamal, 2015; Uenal et al., 2020). This tendency was partly confirmed since we found that diversity threat was more negatively associated with support for Muslims' religious rights than with support for religious minority rights in general in Australia and Finland. Our results are in line with previous research finding a difference between intergroup attitudes towards other religious outgroups and Muslims (e.g. Pew Research Centre, 2018; Staerklé et al., 2010). However, such a difference was not found in Germany and Norway in the present research. In terms of Muslims who live in Europe and other religious groups as well, attitudes towards them largely depend on the history, traditions, economy, and cultural values of the country. The extent of support for religious minority rights is thus dependent on the social and political standing and visibility of the outgroup (Meeusen & Kern, 2016). Indeed, research by Spruyt and Van der Noll (2017) demonstrated that what seems to matter is whether people associate the category of 'immigrants' or 'strangers' with Muslims in specific or whether it is a more inclusive category of immigrants or religious minorities. In our study, it could be that in the case of the association between diversity threat and support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular, participants already had Muslims in mind. In many Western societies, discourses and public policies have especially focussed on Muslims in the last 10 years, with issues ranging from basic religious rights such as wearing religious symbols to how to take religious diversity into account with regard to religious holidays (cf. Carol et al., 2015). However, we cannot be certain about this; therefore, we would encourage future research to further examine these questions. Our findings seem to confirm that the 'essence' of national majority in some Christian countries is currently less inclusive for Muslims than other religious minorities in general due to support for Muslims' religious rights being lower.

Limitations and future research

This study does not come without limitations. First, we used cross-sectional data, thus causal inferences cannot be made. Secondly, our religious identification measure consisted of only two items. By having more items, we could have a more nuanced measurement of religious identification. Yet, high inter-item correlations suggested that the measure was reliable, and we believe that it still adequately captured participants' overall religious identification (cf. Huber & Huber, 2012). Thirdly, we acknowledge that perceived threat could also moderate the relationship between social identification and outgroup attitudes (e.g. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Our choice to test the mediation and not moderation model was, however, justified by ITT (Stephan, 2014) and also supported, for example, by results of a study by Brylka, Mähönen, and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2015), in which they tested whether the relationship between national identification of majority Finns and their attitudes towards Russian immigrants living in Finland was moderated or mediated by

threats perceived to result from immigration. These authors' results supported the mediation hypothesis; those individuals who identified stronger with their national ingroup perceived more threats related to increased immigration and these perceptions, in turn, were associated with more negative attitudes towards immigrants. Similar findings were made by Obaidi et al. (2018).[5] Finally, our research lacked measures that could address the multi-dimensionality of religiosity. For example, religious fundamentalism and Protestant ethics could be important in distengtangling the 'darker side of we' in the religious domain (cf. Doebler, 2014).

Current research on religious identification lacks assessments of the varieties of religious and denominational belonging with more reliable scales. Often membership category is used as a measure for group belonging, despite the fact that much research from a social identity perspective has proved this to be an insufficient approach (Ellemers et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In our research, we only addressed religious identification but future research could assess both religious and non-religious identification categories simultaneously to assess whether their relationships with outgroup attitudes differ. Future research could also address the complexity between national and religious identities. Our findings demonstrate that religious and national identification both have independent and positive associations with diversity threat, which is not completely in line with previous research on religious nationalism that focuses only on a subset of a more fundamentalist population that feels threatened by religious diversity (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). However, although religious nationalism has gained much attention in the last years, the research is still focussed on the North American context (cf. Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). Thus, there is a call for more research on this in other Western contexts to disentangle the separate but also possible interactive roles of the two.

Conclusion

This work contributes to the study of religiosity and prejudice by assessing religious and national identification in four Western predominantly Christian countries and testing their associations with support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. Our results demonstrate a religious dual pathway model: religious identification was directly related to more support for religious minority rights in several contexts, but indirectly to less such support through higher levels of perceived diversity threat. By contrast, national identification had no direct association with support for minority rights, but it predicted this support indirectly through higher perceived diversity threat. Our findings demonstrate the importance of the role that both religious and national identification play in perceptions of diversity threat which itself threatens intergroup harmony by diminishing support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular.

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[5] *We analysed two models with interactions. The model results were not in line with previous research – an interaction with identification and threat resulted in more support for religious minority rights in general and Muslims in particular. Results are available from the first author upon request.*

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Viivi Eskelinen: Conceptualization (equal); Data curation (equal); Formal analysis (equal); Funding acquisition (equal); Methodology (equal); Visualization (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Tuuli Anna Renvik:** Conceptualization (equal); Methodology (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Teemu Pauha:** Conceptualization (equal); Methodology (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Jolanda Jetten:** Conceptualization (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Jonas Kunst:** Conceptualization (equal); Methodology (equal); Supervision (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Jolanda van der Noll:** Conceptualization (equal); Data curation (equal); Methodology (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Anette Rohmann:** Conceptualization (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti:** Conceptualization (equal); Funding acquisition (equal); Methodology (equal); Project administration (equal); Supervision (equal); Writing – original draft (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal).

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Supporting Information

The following supporting information may be found in the online edition of the article:

Appendix S1. Table for country results.
Appendix S2. Control variables.