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Christian Religiosity, Religious Nostalgia, and Attitudes Toward Muslims in 20 Western Countries[1]

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Radical ethnonationalism has drastically risen in Western politics, largely mobilized by nostalgia for the country's past with homogeneity and Christianity as a cultural symbol against non-Western immigrants, especially Muslims. However, how nostalgia for Christianity's past significance can invoke anti-Muslim sentiments is unknown, especially given that Christianity is increasingly losing its previous status under secularization, resulting in radical backlash from the Christian right. In the current study, I examine whether nostalgia related to religion and the religious–secular gap in the perceived status of religion can induce anti-Muslim attitudes among Christians from 20 Western countries using International Social Survey Programme data and mixed-effect multilevel modeling. Contrary to expectations, anti-Muslim attitudes are stronger for people with higher levels of Christian religiosity and doctrinal belief, and exclusivist view on religion, when they have less religious nostalgia by perceiving a stronger status of religion. Moreover, in countries with a larger religious–secular gap in the perceived status of religion, people holding exclusivist views on religion are more hostile to Muslims. Yet, the findings can still be consistent with theoretical expectations, since anti-Muslim attitudes are likely promoted through backlash from the Christian community against religious diversity, expressed in demands for a larger salience of religion rather than nostalgia.

KEYWORDS: anti-Muslim sentiments; Christianity; nostalgia; radical ethnonationalism; religious backlash; religious–secular gap.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the rise of radical ethnonationalism has profoundly impacted Western societies' politics (Bonikowski 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Populist radical right parties, with strong ethnonationalist profiles against immigrants and ethnic minorities, have gained electoral success and even become governing parties across European countries (Akkerman and De Lange 2012; Minkenberg 2017). In places where radical right parties have not governed, we have instead observed: (1) the radicalization of the mainstream right parties, such as the US Republican Party under Trump; (2) radical right parties realizing their agenda, such as the case of Brexit; or (3) mainstream parties, not limited to the right, adapt-

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ing to restrictive sociocultural policy positions under influence from the radical right (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020).

One of the popular explanations for the rise in ethnonationalism is the resentment toward present socioeconomic or sociocultural status under the nostalgia of the nation's past. People who cannot adapt to drastic social changes and perceive greater status decline caused by change tend to develop hostile attitudes toward society's "outgroups," primarily ethnic and religious minorities. In the case of ethnonationalism, Muslims have, as of late, been a primary target of populist radical right parties (Brubaker 2017; Kallis 2018). Outgroups are blamed for, through an economic lens, rising competition in the labor market and, through a cultural lens, undermining a society's mainstream culture by increasing diversity (Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Meuleman et al. 2019). Thus, radical ethnonationalists refer to the country's "glorious past," where society is presumably more prosperous, homogeneous, and secured as its role models (Bar-On 2018; Elgenius and Rydgren 2019; Griffin 2000). It is widely found that ethnonationalist attitudes against immigrants, Muslims, and voting for radical right parties are strongly related to perceived status decline, threats to the national mainstream culture, and nostalgia for the nation's past (Kurer 2020; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Smeekes et al. 2011; Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018).

However, the role of the Christian religion in ethnonationalist resentment derived from nationalist nostalgia has so far been overlooked in the literature. In the Western context, Christianity remains the majority religion and has historically acted as a powerful social, cultural, and political institution (Ruiter and van Tubergen 2009). Christianity still profoundly impacts individual attitudes, behaviors, and the national political process, even in the current secular age (Minkenberg 2018a; Siegers 2019; van der Brug et al. 2009). Christian religion and culture are also crucial parts of Western national identity (Halikiopoulou 2008; Trittler 2017). Therefore, radical right movements and parties in the West often use Christianity as a symbol in parading their radical nationalist agenda, primarily to target Muslims, who are painted as the "religious outsiders" (Camus 2007; Perry et al. 2021; Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020). Despite these apparent linkages, the relationship between Christian religiosity and ethnonationalist attitudes and behaviors is not empirically consistent, likely due to the multidimensional nature of religiosity and the "encapsulation" of moderate mainstream right parties strongly connected to Christian churches (Doebler 2015; Immerzeel et al. 2013; Storm 2011a; Xia 2021).

On the other hand, over the past few decades, Christianity has undergone a drastic decline in Western societies due to secularization. Most Western countries have experienced a decline in individual religiosity in the native population when measured using factors such as membership and church attendance (Voas and Doebler 2011). Religious diversity has grown, as with immigration (van Tubergen 2007), and traditional moral values that used to be supported and governed by the church have also been liberalized (Strimling et al. 2019). As one of the major pillars of Western politics, Christian cleavage voting has also weakened to varying extents (Jansen et al. 2012; Kriesi et al. 2008). With a dramatic decline in status, Christians could be inclined toward the radical ethnonationalist discourse, especially regarding the religious outgroup, promoted by fear of further decline and nostalgia for their

historically dominating cultural and political significance. This is also in line with the currently debated "religious defense" thesis, which states that the Christian population will develop more religious-conservative attitudes in contrast to the rest of the population due to self-selection mechanisms and the strengthening of symbolic boundaries, as they are increasingly marginalized in society (Achterberg et al. 2009). Therefore, the current study will investigate how perceived nostalgia for the lost status of Christianity, from both individual and contextual perspectives, could be related to the anti-Muslim attitudes of Christians in Western societies.

This study capitalizes on two unique regarding the perceived status of religion compared to the past as proxies for religious nostalgia from the Religion Module of International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data. Surprisingly, for highly religious Christians, it is found that a higher perceived status of religion (i.e., less nostalgia for the past significance of religion) is positively related to anti-Muslim attitudes. Also, in countries where the committed Christians and the more secular others hold disparate views on the status of religion in society, people who hold more exclusivist views on religion, though not necessarily religious per se, develop stronger anti-Muslim attitudes. This suggests that, instead of nostalgia, demand for the continuing dominance of past norms drives Christians to be more hostile toward Muslims. Moreover, it shows that the strong salience of religion can even invoke anti-Muslim attitudes among secular ethnonationalist people.

THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES

Ethnonationalism and Nostalgia

Current ethnonationalist political parties and movements are hostile against immigrants, especially those from non-Western backgrounds, specifically Muslims (Bar-On 2018; Bonikowski 2017; Rydgren 2007, 2008). In recent years, the issue salience of immigration and multiculturalism has significantly risen throughout Western societies as a consequence of factors such as migration and globalization, economic crises, counter-movements against cultural liberalism, changes in political cleavages, and party systems (Bonikowski 2017; Kitschelt 2007; Kriesi et al. 2008; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In a nutshell, ethnonationalist discourse depicts immigrants as a burden on society. Economically, immigrants are scapegoated for the economic deprivation of natives, especially those who are already economically vulnerable, for increasing competition in the labor market and access to welfare (Kurer 2020; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). Culturally, they accuse immigrants from non-Western backgrounds (alongside the broader net of multiculturalism) of undermining the country's traditional culture and social cohesion by creating crimes and social instability (Burscher et al. 2015; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). Therefore, they emphasize homogeneity based on ethnic natives and national tradition, call for a reduction in migration and even the deportation of migrants, and oppose the equal rights of minorities to observe their religion and culture (Kallis 2018; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2008). An abundance of studies show that strong identification with a nation and its culture and traditions are often associated with prejudice against immigrants and supporting radical right parties (Lubbers and Coenders 2017; Pehrson

et al. 2009; Storm 2011a). Since the September 11 Attacks and the subsequent associated raging rhetoric on "Clash of Civilizations" and "War on Terror" linking Islam to terrorism (Kallis 2018), Muslims have been the primary target of prejudice (Doebler 2014; Strabac and Listhaug 2008). Besides the traditional nationalists that emphasize the conflict between Islam and native Christianity, a new stream of radical ethnonationalism also emerged with a frame of "Judeo-Christian civilization" in mind; however, this time, it combines Christian civilization and modern liberal values, including secularism, gender equality, and LGBT rights, while claiming that Islam is incompatible with, and thus threatening to, its frame (Brubaker 2017; De Koster et al. 2014).

Beyond prejudice and hostility toward the outgroup, contemporary ethnonationalist ideology also holds a longitudinal view highlighting nostalgia for the nation's history, which differs from previous fascism (Griffin 2000). Ignazi (1992) defines the radical ethnonationalist movement as a "silent counter-revolution" to sociocultural changes, including the growth of immigration. Norris and Inglehart (2019) also argue that the rise of ethnonationalism is a backlash against cultural liberalist trends, which have drastically radicalized as the older conservative cohorts are marginalized and face replacement shortly. While opposing present societies with increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, radical ethnonationalists prefer and glorify their country's "golden age" with high homogeneity and perceive it to be more secure and cohesive than the present (Bar-On 2018; Betz and Johnson 2004; Elgenius and Rydgren 2019). Beyond the relationship between ethnonationalism and negative attitudes toward immigrants and Muslims (Lubbers and Coenders 2017), the role of nostalgic views on national history and tradition is less examined. For instance, studies have shown that perceived socioeconomic status decline is related to support for radical right parties (Kurer 2020; Steenvoorden and Harteveld 2018). For the sociocultural domain, Lubbers (2019) shows that national pride and pride in national history are strongly correlated with voting for the Dutch radical right party, Party for Freedom (PVV). Also, in the case of the Netherlands, nostalgia for the nation's history is associated with increased hostility against Muslims and support for radical right parties (Smeekes et al. 2015; Smeekes and Jetten 2019) and can be triggered by fear of the decline of Christian traditions in the country (Smeekes and Verkuyten 2014). Similar findings are also reached in the US context (Wohl et al. 2020). However, cross-national comparative research on how nostalgia, especially those related to national identity, religion and culture, mobilizes radical ethnonationalism is scarce and requires more contributions. It is worth studying, especially considering the symbolic salience of Christianity in Western ethnonationalist discourse.

Christianity, Ethnonationalism, and Secularization

According to Durkheim (1965 [1912]), religion serves the function of maintaining social cohesion and social identity with group consciousness based on collective worship. Christianity has a great symbolic influence on nationalism and national identity across Western countries; therefore, it is deployed by radical ethnonationalist movements in their political rhetoric. For instance, Donald Trump consistently

emphasized the Christian heritage of the United States in his presidential campaigns to appeal to conservative voters and had indeed gained massive support from people who hold strong Christian nationalist ideals (Baker et al. 2020; Whitehead et al. 2018). The Italian radical right party Lega still profiles itself as protecting the Catholic Italian society against Muslim immigrants (Ozzano 2019), despite the Pope being openly pro-immigrant.

The use of Christianity in radical ethnonationalist discourse is not only limited to religious countries, but also to European countries where actual religiosity is low, with Christianity being an essential part of the national identity discourse and used to mobilize antagonism against immigrants (Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville 2021; Storm 2011a, 2011b; Trittler 2017). In particular, radical right parties use Christianity in their anti-Muslim agendas, although these parties are not necessarily religious (Akkerman 2005; Minkenberg 2018b; Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020). However, Christianity has a mixed relationship with anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes and voting for radical right parties. Contrary to conventional theoretical arguments (Arzheimer and Carter 2009; Montgomery and Winter 2015), Xia (2021) demonstrates that European Christians are not necessarily more pro-immigrant and less supporting of radical right parties due to their pro-social teachings or rich social capital. Enduring attachment to mainstream right parties likely explains Christians not supporting the radical right (Arzheimer and Carter 2009; Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville 2021) but could be changed with mainstream parties adopting an ethnonationalist agenda (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Otjes 2021). Moreover, numerous studies show that how Christian religiosity relates to prejudiced attitudes is mixed (Billiet et al. 1995; Doebler 2014; Vaughan 2021). Religious orthodox belief, with strong belief in religious doctrines and exclusivist views rejecting other religions, more consistently leads to higher levels of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments (Doebler 2014, 2015; Immerzeel et al. 2013).

Western societies have undergone drastic secularization, so Christianity's role in ethnonationalism must be re-examined. More potent nostalgia may be observed considering the declining status of religion in society. In the past decades, most Western countries have experienced a decline in individual religiosity for native Christians in terms of factors such as membership and service attendance (Voas and Doebler 2011), while non-Christian religions have grown significantly with international migration (van Tubergen 2007). Traditional moral values that used to be governed by religion have also been liberalized and modernized, with previous taboos, including homosexuality and abortion, being increasingly tolerated (Halman and van Ingen 2015; Strimling et al. 2019). Christian voting cleavage, as one of the major pillars of post-war Western politics, has also been weakened to different extents in various countries (Jansen et al. 2012; Kriesi et al. 2008). Thus, with the social and political power of Christianity dramatically declining, and the decline of, and nostalgia for, the past dominance could potentially trigger stronger hostility toward non-Christian religions, especially Muslims, with the latter growing in size and public salience, as group position theory suggests (Blumer 1958). Many theorizations, notably the "religious defense thesis" (Siegers 2019), argue that under secularization, the marginalization of the religious group, Christians in the current case, would make them more adherent to their conservatism and deviant from

secular others given the consequence of self-selection in religion and its sharpened symbolic boundary (Achterberg et al. 2009). In a similar vein, Norris and Inglehart (2019) propose the rise of radical ethnonationalism as a response from the increasingly marginalized religious and conservative group to cultural liberalization. In this sense, the role of nostalgia of past religious status should be investigated, which is overlooked, except in Dutch and American studies linking Christian heritage to nationalist nostalgia in the formation of anti-Muslim attitudes (Smeekes et al. 2011; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2014; Wohl et al. 2020). Therefore, in this paper, I will test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: For Christians in Western societies, religiosity is more positively (or less negatively) related to anti-Muslim attitudes if the person holds stronger nostalgia for religion's past status.

Hypothesis 2: For Christians in Western societies, religious orthodox belief is more positively (or less negatively) related to anti-Muslim attitudes if the person holds stronger nostalgia for religion's past status.

The literature on the consequences of secularization has also extensively emphasized the impact of contextual factors moderating individual religiosity (Siegers 2019; Vaughan 2021). With secularization enhancing the symbolic salience of religion and polarization between the religious and the secular (Achterberg et al. 2009; Siegers 2019), polarization can induce further salience and contention of the issue (Finseraas 2010; Rapp 2016). Thus, in countries where the devoted Christian population perceives more nostalgia while the secular population holds a strongly opposite view, Christianity would be more salient in the political discourse and likely to be mobilized into ethnonationalism against Muslims as the religious outgroup. Thus, the following hypotheses will also be tested:

Hypothesis 3: For Christians in Western societies, religiosity is more positively (or less negatively) related to anti-Muslim attitudes in contexts where there is a larger gap in the perceived status of religion between the highly religious and the secular people.

Hypothesis 4: For Christians in Western societies, religious orthodox belief is more positively (or less negatively) related to anti-Muslim attitudes in contexts where there is a larger gap in the perceived status of religion between the highly religious and the secular people.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data

In this study, I deploy data from the ISSP's Religion Module (ISSP Research Group 2020). ISSP is an international social survey collaboration project that

collects representative data annually across over 40 countries covering various socioeconomic, political, and cultural domains. With a special focus on religion and spirituality, the Religion Module was most recently updated in 2018.

To provide reasonable political and cultural grounds for cross-national comparisons, I will focus on countries with Christians as the majority religion and who have stable democratic regimes. Therefore, the sample consists of 17 EU member states and three other English-speaking developed OECD countries. The selected countries are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the United States. In these countries, hostility against Muslims, often branded under slogans of "Judeo-Christian civilization," is a core agenda of radical ethnonationalist political parties and movements (Brubaker 2017; Kallis 2018; Rydgren 2007).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable measures respondents' attitudes toward the Muslim religious group and ranges from one to five, with a higher value indicating more negative views toward Muslims.

Religiosity

Previous studies have shown that how religiosity relates to xenophobia and prejudice depends on the dimension of religiosity being assessed (Billiet et al. 1995; Doebler 2015). Therefore, first, I used *church attendance* to measure the respondents' level of engagement in the Christian community. The value ranges from one, or "Never," to nine, or "Several times a week." Second, a seven-level item captures how individuals assess themselves as religious, from extremely non-religious to extremely religious. With two items, the effects of religiosity from external religious networks and internal religious teaching could be differentiated (Wuthnow 1991). Beyond these, I differentiate Christian *denominations*, including Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox, while non-Christian religious people are excluded from the analyzed sample.

Religious Orthodox Belief

The literature has also identified that religious orthodox beliefs are more strongly associated with hostility against the outgroup (Doebler 2014; Immerzeel et al. 2013). Religious orthodox belief is also measured from two aspects. First, an index for *doctrinal belief* was constructed combining items on believing in life after death, heaven, hell, and religious miracles (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92). Second, *religious exclusivist views* are measured by identifying how respondents accept people from other religions marrying their relatives and, second, to what extent they believe that people from different religions can get along. The exclusivist views will serve as proxies of religious fundamentalism, that is, only recognizing one's own religion as

true and rejecting others (Doebler 2014). The two items scored low in reliability, so they are tested separately.

Religious Nostalgia

There has yet to be a standard measure of religious nostalgia in the literature, as it is not often examined. Therefore, I use two unique questions regarding past, present, and future religious views as proxies to capture religious nostalgia for Christians. The two questions are "Do you think that religion represents the past or the future?" and "Do you think that religion is still as relevant today as it was in the past?" These are coded as lower values that indicate the respondent thinking religion is not relevant or representative compared to the past, thus having more religious nostalgia in the case of Christian religious respondents. The two items were tested separately due to a lack of reliability as an index together.

Furthermore, to test the hypothesis on religious nostalgia's religious–secular gap, I aggregate the two items for the committed Christian people (church members with at least monthly attendance) and the secular others (either inactive church members with less attendance or people unaffiliated to the church). The difference between the two groups is calculated by country as an indicator of the gap in the perceived status of religion between the highly religious and secular populations, which could lead to higher polarization and salience of the issue in the country.

The proxies may not be ideal for capturing religious nostalgia. However, these are the only available measurements in established cross-national survey programs that specifically reflects how people perceive the changing status of religion, referring to a comparison with the past situation when religion had strong social, political, and cultural dominance. Thus, they would provide the best approximation of nostalgia in religion given the data available. The limitations and implication of this issue will be further addressed in the concluding section.

Control Variables

Furthermore, the models control for the individual- and country-level factors related to ethnonationalism and attitudes toward Muslims (Arzheimer 2018; Doebler 2014; Gesthuizen et al. 2021; Kaya 2019; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012). On the individual level, controls include age, gender, urban/rural residence, employment status, social class (in the EGP Scheme, missing values as a separate category), educational years, and trust in political institutions (tapping four items). At the country level, I control for GDP per capita, unemployment rate, the share of Muslims in the population, having a state church, and aggregated church attendance levels in 2018.

Modeling

I will use mixed-effect multilevel models to estimate the effects of individual variables that could be heterogeneous across countries and conditioned on country-level moderators. The mixed-effect model has recently received criticism for requiring

large upper-level clusters and not sufficiently capturing heterogeneity at the upper level (Elff et al. 2021; Heisig and Schaeffer 2019). To address these problems, I include country-level random intercepts and random slopes for the tested individual-level variables and deploy restricted maximum-likelihood estimation (Elff et al. 2021).

In the first model, I will present the effects of all variables included on anti-Muslim attitudes without interaction. In the second set of models, I will test the interaction between indicators of religiosity, religious orthodox belief, and religious nostalgia. In the third set of models, I will test the interaction between individual-level religiosity and indicators of religious orthodox belief and the country-level gap between the committed Christians and the secular others on the perceived status of religion. The sample size was 15,249 after removing respondents with missing values. Descriptive statistics are presented in appendices (Table A1).

FINDINGS

Before testing the models, I performed a bivariate analysis on the correlations between individual religiosity, religious orthodox belief, nostalgia of religion, and attitudes toward Muslims (Table I). As expected, Christian religiosity and doctrinal belief measures were strongly correlated with each other. As for religious exclusivist attitudes, opposition to interreligious marriage is positively related to religiosity and belief, but opposition to interreligious relationships is negatively correlated to religious measures. This is a surprising finding, indicating that the two items could measure two different types of exclusivist views on religion. Rejecting good interreligious nonmarital relationships is actually more common among secular people. Meanwhile, religiosity and doctrinal belief are negatively related to nostalgia in religion, so the more religious people would perceive religion to have continuing representation and relevance as it did in the past. Finally, people who are more religious have stronger doctrinal beliefs, and hold less nostalgia for religion show more positive attitudes toward Muslims. In contrast, those who hold stronger religious exclusivist views are more negative toward Muslims.

In the first model, I tested the effects on anti-Muslim attitudes with all independent and control variables included, with a random intercept on the country level (Table AII). People with higher levels of anti-Muslim attitudes tend to be older, less educated, working class, and less trusting of political institutions. These findings are consistent with the literature (Doebler 2014; Strabac and Listhaug 2008). On the country-level, anti-Muslim attitudes are correlated with a smaller percentage of Muslims in the population and lower levels of average church attendance. Like the bivariate results, anti-Muslim attitudes are negatively related to individual religiosity and perceived status of religion but positively related to religious exclusivist views.

In the following models, I test how the effects of religiosity and religious orthodox belief on anti-Muslim attitudes are conditioned on individual-level religious nostalgic views (Tables II and III). For two indicators of religiosity, they have positive and significant interaction effects, with both perceived religion representing the future and relevance of religion now. The same goes for doctrinal belief, as it

Table I. Bivariate Correlations

	Church attendance	Self-religiosity	Doctrinal belief	Opposing inter-marriage	Opposing inter-relationship	Religion representing	Religion's relevance	Anti-Muslim attitudes
Church attendance	1.000							
Self-religiosity	0.622***	1.000						
Doctrinal belief	0.586***	0.669***	1.000					
Opposing inter-marriage	0.087***	0.116***	0.065***	1.000				
Opposing inter-relationship	−0.049***	−0.018**	−0.037***	0.261***	1.000			
Religion representing	0.322***	0.378***	0.349***	0.024***	−0.185***	1.000***		
Religion's relevance	0.333***	0.376***	0.378***	0.094***	0.056***	0.347***	1.000	
Anti-Muslim attitudes	−0.130***	−0.115***	−0.121***	0.295***	0.307***	−0.151***	−0.087***	1.000

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table II. Interaction Models with Perceived Religion Representing Future

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)					
Church attendance	−0.054*** (0.013)	−0.029*** (0.005)	−0.029*** (0.005)	−0.024*** (0.005)	−0.027*** (0.005)
Self-religiosity	−0.040*** (0.008)	−0.036*** (0.008)	−0.080*** (0.016)	−0.038*** (0.008)	−0.038*** (0.008)
Doctrinal belief	0.001 (0.012)	−0.098** (0.030)	−0.001 (0.012)	0.003 (0.012)	0.001 (0.012)
Opposing inter-relationship	0.200*** (0.008)	0.200*** (0.008)	0.200*** (0.008)	0.146*** (0.027)	0.196*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-marriage	0.272*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.272*** (0.010)	0.163*** (0.036)
Representing future	−0.058*** (0.017)	−0.094*** (0.021)	−0.090*** (0.021)	−0.083*** (0.019)	−0.118*** (0.021)
Relevance now	−0.053*** (0.008)	−0.054*** (0.008)	−0.054*** (0.008)	−0.054*** (0.008)	−0.055*** (0.008)
Representing × attendance	0.008** (0.003)				
Representing × self-religiosity		0.029*** (0.007)			
Representing × doctrinal belief			0.015*** (0.004)		
Representing × opposing relationship				0.019** (0.006)	
Representing × opposing marriage					0.045*** (0.008)
AIC	41058.2	41028.6	41052.5	40962.1	40980.0
BIC	41302.4	41272.8	41296.7	41206.3	41224.2

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; control variables yield similar results as previous.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table III. Interaction Models with Perceived Religion's Relevance Now

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)					
Church attendance	−0.051*** (0.013)	−0.027*** (0.005)	−0.029*** (0.005)	−0.024*** (0.005)	−0.025*** (0.005)
Self-religiosity	−0.042*** (0.008)	−0.038*** (0.008)	−0.080*** (0.016)	−0.038*** (0.008)	−0.041*** (0.008)
Doctrinal belief	0.002 (0.012)	−0.053 (0.029)	−0.001 (0.012)	0.002 (0.012)	−0.000 (0.012)
Opposing inter-relationship	0.199*** (0.008)	0.199*** (0.008)	0.201*** (0.008)	0.196*** (0.027)	0.195*** (0.008)
Opposing marriage	0.274*** (0.010)	0.276*** (0.010)	0.275*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.296*** (0.034)
Representing future	−0.034*** (0.008)	−0.032*** (0.008)	−0.033*** (0.008)	−0.037*** (0.008)	−0.035*** (0.008)
Relevance now	−0.080*** (0.015)	−0.091*** (0.020)	−0.116*** (0.019)	−0.060** (0.020)	−0.060** (0.020)
Relevance × attendance	0.008* (0.003)				
Relevance × self-religiosity		0.015* (0.007)			
Relevance × doctrinal belief			0.015*** (0.004)		
Relevance × opposing relationship				0.001 (0.006)	
Relevance × opposing marriage					0.000 (0.008)
AIC	41071.3	41053.9	41068.6	40972.6	41025.7
BIC	41315.5	41298.1	41312.8	41216.8	41269.9

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; control variables yield similar results as previous.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

positively interacts with both relevance and representation indicators on the effect on anti-Muslim attitudes, with statistical significance. Therefore, the findings suggest the opposite of the predictions of H1 and H2. For Christians who are highly religious in terms of church attendance and self-assessed religiosity, and who hold strong doctrinal Christian beliefs, having nostalgic views on religion actually reduces the level of anti-Muslim attitudes. As for religious exclusivist views, both indicators positively interact with less religious nostalgia measured by perceived religion representation, but not relevance, again contradicting H2. For people holding stronger exclusivist views on religion, prejudice against Muslims increases with the perceived extent of religion representing the future. However, the interaction effect with opposition to interreligion relationships should not be interpreted as a moderating effect of religious nostalgia, as secular people tend to view that different religions do not get along.

In the next set of models (Tables IV and V), I interact religiosity, religious orthodox belief, and religious exclusivism with the contextual moderators: gap on perceived status of religion between the committed Christians and the secular populations. Here, the interaction effects corresponding to the hypotheses are only statistically significant for ones between religious exclusivist views and the gap in perceived religion representing the future. In countries where the committed Christians perceive religion as more representative of the future than the secular people, people who have exclusivist views on religion, that is, rejecting interreligious marriage and general relationships, are more negative toward Muslims. In countries with a larger religious–secular gap on the perceived relevance of religious, people who attend churches more are actually less negative toward Muslims. These findings lend partial support to H4, but not to H3. Again, the two results regarding exclusivist views should be interpreted separately since religious people tend to be more against intermarriage but accept general relationships more. To further ascertain the effects of differentiating religious and secular people, I perform additional analysis testing three-way interactions between religiosity (in church attendance), religious exclusivism, and the contextual gap of views on religion's status (Table AIII). Yet, the three-way interactions show no statistical significance, so the cross-level interaction effects do not differ between religious or secular people.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Radical ethnonationalism, which often uses Christianity in political rhetoric as a symbol against immigrants, especially Muslims, has risen massively in the past three decades across Western societies (Minkenberg 2018b; Rydgren 2007). Ethnonationalism also emphasizes nostalgia for the country's "golden age," with high ethnic, cultural, and religious homogeneity instead of the current diverse situation (Betz and Johnson 2004). However, the role of nostalgia in mobilizing radical ethnonationalist attitudes and behaviors has been undertested, especially regarding the role of Christianity and its decline due to extensive secularization.

In this study, I examined whether religious nostalgia is related to stronger negative attitudes toward Muslims on behalf of Christians. The analysis included 20 Western

Table IV. Interaction Models with Gap in Perceived Religion Representing Future

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)					
Church attendance	−0.008 (0.019)	−0.028*** (0.007)	−0.026*** (0.007)	−0.025** (0.009)	−0.027** (0.009)
Self-religiosity	−0.043*** (0.008)	−0.026 (0.025)	−0.042*** (0.008)	−0.043*** (0.008)	−0.045*** (0.008)
Doctrinal belief	0.003 (0.012)	0.004 (0.012)	0.038 (0.045)	0.005 (0.012)	0.003 (0.012)
Opposing inter-relationship	0.198*** (0.008)	0.199*** (0.008)	0.198*** (0.008)	0.037 (0.034)	0.193*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-marriage	0.275*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.271*** (0.010)	0.115** (0.043)
Gap in representing	−0.079 (0.412)	−0.172 (0.399)	−0.133 (0.368)	−0.653 (0.461)	−0.345 (0.501)
Gap in relevance	−0.171 (0.328)	−0.048 (0.316)	−0.046 (0.292)	0.045 (0.366)	−0.229 (0.399)
Gap in representing × attendance	−0.025 (0.022)				
Gap in representing × self-religiosity		−0.023 (0.027)			
Gap in representing × doctrinal belief			−0.058 (0.051)		
Gap in representing × opposing relationship				0.201*** (0.039)	
Gap in representing × opposing marriage					0.228*** (0.049)
AIC	41080.2	41067.9	41046.3	40933.9	40986.2
BIC	41316.8	41312.1	41290.6	41178.1	41230.5

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; control variables yield similar results as previous.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table V. Interaction with Gap in Perceived Religion's Relevance Now

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)					
Church attendance	0.007 (0.019)	−0.028*** (0.007)	−0.026*** (0.007)	−0.025** (0.009)	−0.027** (0.009)
Self-religiosity	−0.044*** (0.008)	−0.015 (0.024)	−0.042*** (0.008)	−0.043*** (0.008)	−0.045*** (0.008)
Doctrinal belief	0.003 (0.012)	0.004 (0.012)	0.038 (0.047)	0.005 (0.012)	0.003 (0.012)
Opposing inter-relationship	0.198*** (0.008)	0.199*** (0.008)	0.198*** (0.008)	0.185** (0.056)	0.193*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-marriage	0.275*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.274*** (0.010)	0.271*** (0.010)	0.191** (0.060)
Gap in representing	−0.090 (0.411)	−0.190 (0.399)	−0.157 (0.366)	−0.580 (0.480)	−0.258 (0.518)
Gap in relevance	−0.143 (0.328)	−0.018 (0.318)	−0.022 (0.292)	0.083 (0.382)	−0.279 (0.414)
Gap in relevance × attendance	−0.045* (0.023)				
Gap in relevance × self-religiosity		−0.040 (0.029)			
Gap in relevance × doctrinal belief			−0.062 (0.057)		
Gap in relevance × opposing relationship				0.017 (0.069)	
Gap in relevance × opposing marriage					0.141 (0.074)
AIC	41077.7	41066.6	41046.2	40949.5	40997.1
BIC	41314.3	41310.9	41290.4	41193.8	41241.3

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; control variables yield similar results as previous.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

countries subjected to two unique questions regarding the status of religion across time, using ISSP data. The analysis yielded some surprising findings. Contrary to the original hypothesis H1, Christians that are highly religious and have less nostalgic views on religion (i.e., they perceive religion as still relevant now and representing the future as it was in the past) have stronger anti-Muslim attitudes. The same applies to religious orthodox belief. The perceived enduring status of religion is associated more positively with anti-Muslim sentiments for those with stronger doctrinal Christian beliefs, opposition to intermarriage and opposition to good relationships between religions.

Furthermore, the study also tests whether the relationship between religiosity and anti-Muslim attitudes is conditioned on the contextual factor of how the devoted religious and secular polarize in the perceived status or nostalgia of religion, which could promote the salience of the issue. Here, the contextual gap in the perceived status of religion only strengthened the effect of the exclusivist view of religion on anti-Muslim attitudes. For interpretation of the results, two points are worth noting, both of which are major limitations of the study and should be improved with future research.

First, although Christians with less religious nostalgia were shown to be more negative toward Muslims, contrary to what H1 and H2 expect, it does not contradict the theoretical expectations. The operationalization of religious nostalgia uses proxy items on the perceived status of religion compared to the past, which may not be an ideal measurement of nostalgia. It could be the other way around that the perceived higher status of religion for Christians actually indicates stronger nostalgia. Under the current situation, with Christianity dramatically losing social and political salience, Christians would express a stronger perceived importance of religion for demanding more significance in the public discourse. However, the actual mechanism is yet to be known, with data containing more accurate questions on religious nostalgia for Christians (which has no established operationalization in the field so far), how Christians relate the current status of religion and nostalgia to the past, as well as its consequences in attitudes and behaviors, should be examined with clear-cut measurements.

Second, the results demonstrate stronger anti-Muslim attitudes among people who oppose good relationships between religions, especially when they view religion as having more salience status for the present and future and when the religious–secular gap on perceived status of religion is more significant. However, the explanation could be secular rather than religious, as the item is negatively related to actual religiosity. In fact, the effect could be driven by secular anti-Muslim discourse, which has increased significantly in Northern and Western Europe. This non-religious and "civilizationist" anti-Muslim discourse views Muslims as a "backward" religion and a threat to secular Western societies (Akkerman 2005; Brubaker 2017; De Koster et al. 2014). Therefore, they may perceive religion as having salience due to the presumed threat from Islam and oppose the interreligious relationship based on the discourse that Muslims are "incompatible" with Western culture, which can also be strengthened by the salience of religion in the national political discourse, as reflected in the religious–secular polarization on the status of religion.

This study is among the first to explore the role of the Christian religion in connecting nostalgia to past and ethnonationalist attitudes, keeping in mind the limitations mentioned above. The findings show that while not necessarily expressed as nostalgia, for those who have high levels of religiosity or religious exclusivism, the status of religion is deeply connected to hostility against Muslims from Christians in Western societies. In other words, for highly religious Christians, the perceived continuing salience of religion could reflect the demand for a stronger role for the Christian religion under the current secular age. Therefore, they would be likelier to perceive threats from, and hence are more negative toward, Muslims, and this is in line with the theorization on the backlash from the remaining Christian population against cultural liberalization and diversification (Achterberg et al. 2009; Ignazi 1992; Norris and Inglehart 2019). However, nostalgia per se should be more specifically and accurately examined with better measurements of nostalgia and a research methodology that can investigate the mechanism, preferably with qualitative or experimental methodological approaches.

APPENDICES

Table AI. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Individual level (N = 15,249)				
Anti-Muslim attitudes	3.19	1.09	1	5
Church attendance	2.96	2.28	1	9
Self-religiosity	3.70	1.64	1	7
Doctrinal belief	2.21	0.98	1	4
Opposing inter-marriage	1.83	0.83	1	4
Opposing inter-relationship	2.59	1.12	1	5
Religion's relevance now	2.67	1.15	1	5
Religion representing future	2.89	1.11	1	5
Female	0.51	0.50	0	1
Urban	0.70	0.46	0	1
Age	49.40	17.02	15	88
Educational years	13.54	3.95	0	64
Employed	0.62	0.49	0	1
Manual worker	0.23	0.42	0	1
Non-manual worker	0.65	0.48	0	1
Farm worker	0.03	0.16	0	1
Social class missing	0.09	0.29	0	1
Political trust	3.00	0.76	1	5
Catholic	0.36	0.48	0	1
Protestant	0.29	0.46	0	1
Orthodox	0.03	0.16	0	1
Non-church member	0.32	0.46	0	1
Country level (N = 20)				
GDP per capita (1,000 USD)	45.84	12.29	22.91	69.71
Unemployment rate	5.90	3.08	2.24	15.25
Percentage of Muslim	2.80	2.47	0.03	7.60
Average church attendance	2.94	0.69	2.12	4.23
State religion	0.25	0.44	0	1
Gap in religion representing	0.79	0.39	0.08	1.45
Gap in religion's relevance	0.74	0.35	0.06	1.63

Table AII. Main Model

Random intercept model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)	
Female	−0.008 (0.016)
Urban	−0.011 (0.017)
Age	0.005*** (0.001)
Educational years	−0.011*** (0.002)
Employed	0.003 (0.018)
Manual workers	−0.082*** (0.020)
Farm workers	−0.055 (0.049)
Social class missing	−0.046 (0.032)
Political trust	−0.163*** (0.011)
Catholic	0.028 (0.026)
Non-church member	0.008 (0.025)
Orthodox	−0.161* (0.076)
GDP per capita	0.011 (0.010)
Unemployment rate	0.036 (0.031)
Percentage of Muslim	−0.100* (0.040)
Averaged church attendance	−0.322* (0.164)
State religion	−0.034 (0.244)
Church attendance	−0.026*** (0.005)
Doctrinal belief	−0.000 (0.012)
Self-religiosity	−0.040*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-relationship	0.200*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-marriage	0.277*** (0.010)
Religion representing future	−0.035*** (0.008)
Religion's relevance now	−0.057*** (0.008)
Gap in religion representing	0.008 (0.403)
Gap in Religion's relevance	−0.298 (0.321)
Constant	3.772*** (0.652)
AIC	41102.8
BIC	41324.1

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table AIII. Three-Way Interaction Models

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)		
(Other variables yield similar results)		
Church attendance	−0.050 (0.028)	−0.051 (0.028)
Opposing inter-relationship	−0.007 (0.042)	0.193*** (0.008)
Opposing inter-marriage	0.271*** (0.010)	0.035 (0.052)
Religion representing future	−0.037*** (0.008)	−0.034*** (0.008)
Religion's relevance now	−0.053*** (0.008)	−0.055*** (0.008)
Gap in perceived religion representing future	−0.702 (0.472)	−0.399 (0.513)
Gap in perceived religion's relevance now	0.062 (0.371)	−0.237 (0.406)
Gap representing × attendance	0.007 (0.033)	0.001 (0.034)
Gap representing × opposing relationship	0.228*** (0.047)	
Opposing relationship × attendance	0.013 (0.008)	
Gap representing × opposing relationship × attendance	−0.007 (0.010)	
Gap representing × opposing marriage		0.281*** (0.060)
Opposing marriage × attendance		0.023* (0.010)
Gap representing × opposing marriage × attendance		−0.015 (0.013)

Table AIII. (Continued)

Random slope model on anti-Muslim attitudes (N = 15,249)		
AIC	40955.5	41000.7
BIC	41222.6	41267.8

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; Control variables yield similar results as previous.
AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

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