

Political parties and Muslims in Europe. The regulation of Islam in public education

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Abstract

Despite growing anti-immigrant discourse and radical-right party electoral support, most Western European states include Islam in religious education classes in public schools. What are the conditions that explain these policy changes? Who are the main political allies of Muslims' demands for inclusion in religious education? Based on an original dataset that gathers data on religious education policies in 13 European countries between 1970 and 2010, this article inquires how party ideology and secularisation explain the timing and equal inclusion of Islam. The article shows that, while Left-dominated governments are the main drivers for introducing Islam within curricula, Christian-Democratic parties in power promote equal terms of inclusion, especially in contexts with a secular approach to religious education. These findings enrich our understanding of political parties in secular times by illustrating how the aim of upholding religious influence in education systems motivates Christian Democrats to promote equal rights for Muslims.

Keywords: political parties; Christian-Democratic parties; immigration; Islam; religious education

Debates related to religious education policies lie at the intersection of two dimensions: the place of religion in state schools and the inclusion of ethnic minority religions in public education. The study of religious education policy, although long neglected by political science research (see Fuess 2007; Hofhansel 2010), epitomises late secularisation trends, while being the most prevalent indicator of state support for religion in western democracies (Fox 2019:14). On this perspective, religious education is discussed as a morality policy that provokes conflicts over individual freedoms and collective values (Knill 2013). Additionally, scholarly research on immigrant incorporation and multiculturalism observes the expansion of Islamic religious education as a key policy area related to immigrant citizenship rights, notwithstanding increasing anti-Muslim discourse among radical-right parties (Koopmans *et al.* 2012; Minkenberg 2018). Yet these streams of literature lead to puzzling, if not divergent, findings regarding the role of political parties in the enactment and subsequent changes of policies on religious education and the inclusion of Islam.

Some scholars point to the linkages between immigrant electorates and leftist parties (Bergh and Bjørklund 2011), which would lead to the expectation that left-wing government parties are more open to including Islam in public school curricula (Hofhansel 2010; Triadafilopoulos and Rahmann 2016; von Blumenthal 2012). However, some scholars argue that party ideology does not matter for the recognition of citizenship rights of immigrants (Koopmans *et al.* 2012) and that it does not have a uniform effect on Islamic religious education policies at the sub-national level in federal states (Euchner 2018). However, another stream of research finds that the centre-right actually promotes minorities' cultural and religious rights (Minkenberg 2018). Similarly, the literature on morality policies is inconclusive as to how party ideology specifically shapes the regulation of morality issues (see Budde *et al.* 2018). While Christian Democrats are known to delay permissive policy reforms (Engeli *et al.* 2012), this pattern is more diffuse today due to intra-party struggles (Euchner 2019).

This paper argues that the inconclusiveness concerning party influence on the regulation of Islamic religious education can be explained by a misspecification of the concept of policy change (Capano 2009). Given that in Western Europe, the majority religion (Christianity) receives material and symbolic support from the state that leaves minority religions at a disadvantage, the presence of Islam raises not only a question of timing (when should Islam be introduced in the religious education curricula?) but also one of equality (to what extent should Islam and Christianity be taught on equal terms?) (Modood and Kastoryano 2006). Consequently, this article studies both the timing of policies that include Islam in public education, and the extent to which these policies entail the equal teaching of the Christian and Islamic religions. We show that leftist parties in government are the main drivers for adopting policies for including Islam in religious education. However, when analysing the degree to which Islam is incorporated on an equal basis with the majority religion (Catholic or Protestant), our analysis demonstrates that Christian-Democratic parties in government contribute to fairer terms of inclusion. The analysis is based on an original and unique dataset that gathers data on religious education policies in 13 Western European states over 40 years (1970-2010), thus covering a diverse palette of denominational and non-denominational teaching of religion in public schools.

Islam and religious education: a fine-tuned conceptualization of policy change

There are three regulatory models of religious education in public schools in Europe, which correspond to three ideal types of minority religious inclusion: no religious teaching, non-denominational religious teaching and denominational religious teaching. France is the only example of the first model. Here, knowledge about religion is taught indirectly via history and philosophy classes. The second model, non-denominational teaching, provides information about world religions under the framework of “religion for all”. Classes are organised to inform

about religions, and their specificities and content are organised and controlled by the state. Lastly, denominational religious education which disseminates the creed and its content is mainly organised and controlled by religious communities themselves (Ferrari 2013; Fuess 2007). Countries with educational responsibilities at the regional level (Belgium, Germany, Switzerland) do not represent a unique model but a combination of the above-mentioned types, varying from region to region (Table A1). In consequence, ethnic minority religions have two incorporation venues in public education: as part of a “religion for all” curriculum in non-denominational systems, and as separate classes, alongside Catholic and/or Protestant instruction, in those countries with denominational religious education (Davis and Miroshnikova 2013; Nielsen *et al.* 2014).

Despite its official classification, the denominational/non-denominational dichotomy in religious education has received substantial criticism in academic research. A brief comment on this is necessary for a better understanding of the process of incorporating minority religions in public education. The non-denominational approach does not necessarily entail the full secularisation of religious education policy¹, since no Western democracy completely separates religion and politics nowadays, with the disputable exceptions of France and the US (Casanova 2011; Fox 2019). The teaching of Christianity in public schools remains an important landmark of national identity reproduction across several European states, even in systems with a non-denominational focus (Berglund 2014; Ferrari 2013; Jackson 2004; Jensen and Kjeldsen 2014; Skeie 2007). This intertwining of Christianity and national identity in several European countries (Brubaker 2012; Casanova 2011), including those with a “religion for all” approach, suggests that the presence of Islam and other minority religions in the school curricula does not entail that they are considered and taught equally. Moreover, even when separate classes on

¹ While there is no shortage of definitions of secularisation, we chose as reference the classical works of Casanova (2011) and Chaves (1994), where secularisation refers to the differentiation of religious institutions from state institutions and the declining scope of religious authority in overseeing political and policy processes.

Islam are organised in schools, states may take charge of the curriculum and teacher training with the intention of Europeanising Islam (Fetzer and Soper 2005), while leaving full competence to Christian churches for organising these classes. In consequence, the study of Islam in religious-education policies includes not only the question of timing but also of equality. As we detail in the research design section, we study the regulation of Islamic religious education both from the perspective of a) when these policies have been adopted and b) whether policy changes entail a greater degree of equality between Christianity and Islam in public education. The following part will theorise on the variation of both types of policy change by elaborating on the role of political parties and the secularisation dynamics in which they are embedded.

Explaining timing and equality in Islamic religious education policies

Political parties

Religious education policies bear the traces of a central political cleavage in modern European politics. The shrinking role of religious authorities in education dates back to the conflict between “the aspirations of the mobilising nation-state and the corporate claims of the churches” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 15). While the loss of financial and property assets was a central feature of the church-state conflict, the fundamental issue was related to the control and formation of future generations, and their spiritual estate and morals. For parties such as Liberals, Radicals and, later, Socialists, schools were the cradle of the allegiant citizen. From the time of their creation, these parties became agents of secularisation. For the Catholic church and emerging religious movements, schools were the central institution for the transmission of Christian virtues. These movements formed what Lipset and Rokkan (1967) call “parties of religious defence” by taking as a model the organisations of their political and ideological rivals, the liberals and the socialists (Kalyvas 1996).

These historical patterns of party conflict over religion and education are still likely to structure party competition today, and might therefore motivate leftist parties to refrain from granting religious authorities more influence in public schools (Hofhansel 2010: 194). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Left would still promote minority religious education, despite its historical role as secularisation agent, because it frames such education as a human right and a benchmark of equality (Lövheim *et al.* 2017). This corroborates the findings that leftist governments tend to support expansive immigrant rights and naturalisation (Givens and Luedtke 2005; Janoski 2010) and promote the granting of individual liberties over collective moral goods rooted in Christian doctrines (Budde *et al.* 2018). The related hypotheses are the following:

Leftist dominance of government is associated with an earlier adoption of policies that include Islam in religious education (H1a). Given their ideological commitment to the concept of equality, they are also more likely to include Islamic religious education on equal terms with Christian religious education (H1b).

Yet, arguments can be made regarding the inclusive and supportive role of Christian-Democratic parties towards the recognition of religious minority rights (Minkenberg 2018). First, Christian-Democratic parties are known for their “catch-all nature, cultivated art of mediation, moderate outlook and avoidance of radical programmes and ideologies” (Kalyvas 1996: 263). Historically, they have been able to mediate between, and find a common denominator for, a plurality of (class) interests and social identities (Alberti and Leonardi 2004). Although Christian Democrats’ habitus for finding consociational solutions has been primarily expressed in the inter-class conflict between business and workers, Minkenberg (2018) argues that the same moderate “middle path” prompts Christian-Democrats *not* to oppose immigrants’ cultural and religious rights.

Second, strategic considerations can play an important role. Although playing on a secular political field, Christian-Democratic parties have repeatedly struggled with their “unsecular” identity, that is, with finding the balance between an exclusively Christian ideology and a moderate, Christian-inspired package of beliefs, values and norms (Van Kersbergen 2008: 276). Addressing the interests of core Christian voters has always been the concern of Christian-Democratic parties, although political and historical contingencies have been crucial in determining how salient these interests should be for party strategies. Country analyses from Van Hecke and Gerard (2004) show that the renewal of Christian Democratic parties in Europe meant both a strategy of attracting non-Catholic voters through downplaying religious inspired principles and a maintenance, and the refinement of certain moral or religious issues and interests on the agenda (Beke 2004; Lucardie 2004; Madeley 2004). This latter strategy implies that Christian Democrats have an interest in expanding their leverage in education, especially in denominational regimes of religious education (all Catholic), where the church has important organisational responsibilities. Against a background of increased religious pluralism, conspicuous ethnic minority claims for cultural and religious rights (Koopmans and Statham 1999) and decreasing numbers of pupils who self-identify as Christian, the hegemony of the Catholic church is preserved by accommodating minority religious demands.

Third, the incorporation of certain aspects of religious pluralism and the addressing of Muslim migrants’ demands for recognition can also form part of a broader strategy to expand the voter base. This has been the case among Belgian, Scandinavian or Dutch Christian Democrats, who after the mid-1990s opened the door to non-Christian members and candidates (Gerard and Van Hecke 2004). Furthermore, equal recognition of Islam in the school syllabus can be seen as essential for successful Muslim integration. In this case, a non-radical version of Islam is taught, and the state is able to oversee teaching activity and the selection of teachers

(Fetzer and Soper 2005). This is not possible if Islamic teaching is offered exclusively by imams in mosques and Saturday classes (Euchner 2018; Füss 2007).

However, Christian Democrats may not necessarily rush to adopt such changes. As with their behaviour in relation to morality policies, they tend to support the (restrictive) regulatory status quo in many issues related to religious values (i.e., abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia). Nonetheless, the politicisation of value-based policies over the recent decade, coupled with growing religious diversity, compels Christian Democrats to formulate a strategy regarding their position on religious education. Accordingly, Christian Democrats – when in government – have to respond in order to avoid the accusation of governmental ineffectiveness and the loss of their religious voter base (Euchner 2019). For this reason, we hypothesise that

Christian Democratic dominance in government is associated with a slower reform process but with an equal incorporation of Islam in religious education policies (H1c).

Although conservative and liberal parties are often located close to Christian Democrats on the classical right-left axis, they do not have religious roots and therefore no intention of defending the role of religion in policy-making. By contrast, they are most often agents of laicisation, promoting the strict separation of church and state. Known for their centrist position on immigration (Bale 2008), liberal parties can support integration policies but not necessarily the promotion of religious rights for migrants. Conservative parties tend to have a more critical stance towards Muslim immigrants. They often oppose the inclusion of immigrant groups, as well as the associated costs of social welfare (Mudde 2007). Accordingly, these actors should be expected to be unwilling to promote not only Muslims' civil rights but also their religious rights. For this reason, we hypothesise that

The dominance of liberal and conservative parties in government is associated with a slower reform process and less equal incorporation of Islam in religious education policies (H1d).

Secularisation

The issue of the incorporation of minority religions in public education does not arise in a pristine policy space, but follows centuries-long processes of church-state accommodation (Fuess 2007). In Western Europe, church-state regimes build on a terrain of moderate secularisation, i.e., the differentiation of the spheres of politics, economy and culture from religious institutions and norms, and the decreasing religiosity of individuals (Casanova 2011). There are two broad paths for structuring church-state relations: a polarising laicisation in Catholic countries, and a more consensual and conjoint secularisation of state and religion in Protestant and mixed countries (Casanova 2011; Martin 1978). The non-denominational teaching of religion is found in Protestant countries, although its neutrality has been frequently disputed (Skeie 2007). The denominational teaching of religion is found in countries with a predominantly Catholic tradition, where other religions may benefit from treatment similar to that given to Catholicism after they have acquired official recognition. These inherited relations between church and state, as well as religious legacies, determine the accommodation of immigrant religions such as Islam (Carol and Koopmans 2013; Fetzer and Soper 2005; Fuess 2007). As this literature suggests, countries with a smaller degree of separation between church and state, such as the UK, are more inclusive of Islam in their religious education policies.

However, other scholars find that there is no univocal relationship between church-state arrangements and the inclusion of Islam in public education (Euchner 2018; Hofhansel 2010; Minkenberg 2008). Minkenberg contends that “religious and cultural groups (in particular Muslims) enjoy greater rights in those Protestant countries where there is a clear separation of church and state” (2008: 16). In a comparative analysis of Islamic religious education in German states, Euchner (2018) shows that a close relationship between the state and Christian churches in education policy impedes the introduction of Islam in public schools. The main reasons are an administrative culture fostering prejudices about the managerial role of Muslim communities in education. Accordingly, we test if

The inclusion of Islam in religious education policies is enacted sooner in countries with a larger degree of separation between church and state (H2a) and in Protestant countries (H2b) and

The equal incorporation of minority religions is likely to occur in countries with a smaller degree of separation between church and state (H2c) and in Protestant countries (H2d).

Beyond the historical secularisation patterns of contemporary church-state regimes, state involvement in religious education is likely to facilitate the integration of Islam within the school curriculum. On the one hand, the modern state's appeal to secularism and neutrality requires the maintaining of an equal distance from religion when designing public policies. On the other hand, secularism in a plural society obliges democratic and liberal states to grant equal respect to different world-views and sets of values (Taylor 2011). In consequence, the neutrality and equality principles require the recognition of cultural and religious rights for migrants (Maclure and Taylor 2011). This entails that a larger degree of state engagement in designing and implementing religious education leads to an increased pluralisation of religious teaching, compared with when religious communities themselves are in charge (Carol and Koopmans 2013; Jackson 2004). Consequently, it is expected that

Increased state competence in the field of religious education better accommodates ethnic minority demands and prompts the adoption of policies that include Islam in public education (H2e) on an equal basis with Christianity (H2f).

Religious legacies (Catholic or Protestant) and the degree of secularisation of religious education are likely to affect how parties address Muslim demands. This is especially true for Christian Democrats, who have to take into account the interests of an increasingly secular electorate, an electoral core of religious voters and growing numbers of non-Christian residents. Non-denominational religious education, characteristic in Protestant countries after the 1980s, may prompt Christian Democrats to be even more open to Muslim demands for

fairer incorporation of Islam in public education, and so to hit two birds with one stone: they will not imperil the authority of the church in religious education, since that authority has already been transferred to the state; at the same time, they can attract Muslim voters with the argument that the state should treat all religions from an egalitarian perspective. This latter has been the strategy of Scandinavian Christian Democrats, who appealed to conservative non-Christian voters, particularly Muslims, by defending more restrictive positions on abortion, homosexuality or assisted dying, and by condemning the anti-immigrant and racist strategies of far-right parties (Madeley 2004: 234). Additionally, the governmental coalition of these parties with other moderate, centrist parties, is another mechanism that may explain their egalitarian stance towards the inclusion of Islam.

By contrast, Christian Democrats in countries with denominational regimes, mostly Catholic, may not be as receptive as their Nordic peers. While they may still endorse the incorporation of Islam in public education in order to defend the privileges of Catholic church in this area, they are expected to do so at a slower pace than in countries with a “religion for all” approach, where the majority Christian church has already lost control over religious education. Consequently, we hypothesise

Christian Democrats in countries with non-denominational religious education are more likely to defend the equal inclusion of Islam than their ideological peers in denominational regimes (H3).

Case selection, operationalisation and methodology

The empirical analysis presented in this paper is the first attempt to offer a comprehensive understanding of the regulation of Islamic religious education in public schools. We examine a large number of European countries between 1970 and 2010, including both denominational and non-denominational religious education regimes. We have selected 13 Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Italy, Ireland,

Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and UK) because of their variation in religious education policies (denominational or non-denominational, with varying geometries of church and state responsibility) and their numbers of non-Christian immigrants. France is not included because it bans the teaching of religion in state schools and therefore does not allow the study of the incorporation and timing of policy equality towards Islam. Federal states such as Germany, where responsibility for religious education policies lies at the subnational level, do not have a single religious education policy. For this reason, we analyse the partisan effect on religious education and Islam in all 16 German *Länder* between 1970 and 2010 separately.

Measuring timing and equality in religious education policies

To measure the timing of policies that include Islam in religious education, we identify the year when such a policy was enacted. The dependent variable is coded as 1 when there is a policy change that allows the establishment of Islamic religious education in countries and *Länder* with denominational religious education (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and all *Länder* except for Hamburg, Brandenburg and Bremen). In countries and *Länder* with non-denominational religious education (Brandenburg, Bremen, Denmark, Finland, Hamburg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK) the inclusion of Islam is coded as 1 when there is a policy change that mandates teaching about other religions, in particular Islam. Since no European country, except for Sweden, included Islam in religious education before 1970, we consider this the year in which European states started to be “at risk” of adopting inclusion policies towards Islam.

The second dependent variable, “policy equality”², considers all legal changes in the field of religious education in primary schools between 1970 and 2010, and draws on primary and secondary sources regarding the content of such classes. The variable assesses the

² For a detailed explanation of this variable see “Methodological Appendix”

proportion between teaching about Islam and Christianity respectively, and ranges between 0 and 1. In countries with denominational religious teaching, the variable is 1 when Islam and Christianity are taught under the same conditions. For “trial classes” that take place in various German federal states, the variable is calibrated between 0 and 1 (see Methodological appendix for details). In countries with non-denominational teaching, the variable quantifies the proportion of classes or hours devoted to Islam and Christianity in the curriculum.

Explanatory variables

The estimation of government-party ideology is based on several variables from the Comparative Political Dataset (CPDS) (1960-2015) (Armingeon *et al.* 2017). The variables indicate the strength of left, centre and right-wing parties in government, for each country and year. According to the classification used in the CPDS, *gov_left* contains the percentage of cabinet posts of social democratic and other leftist parties in percentage of the total cabinet posts, while *gov_centre* refers to the share of cabinet posts of centre parties (mostly Christian Democrat or Catholic parties and a minority of centrist or liberal parties). Since the variable does not exclusively identify Christian-Democratic parties, we add two additional measurements: a dummy that specifies if a Christian-Democratic party is in government and its percentage of the vote at the last election. *Gov_right* denotes the relative cabinet posts of right-wing parties (conservatives or liberals) (Armingeon *et al.* 2017: 42). These variables are introduced in separate regressions due to the collinearity among them (the sum of all three is 100%).

The variable on the degree of separation between church and state measures government involvement in religion (GIR) as calculated by (Fox 2008: 106). The General GIR score is a composite variable of legislation in the field of state support for religion, religious discrimination, official restrictions, religious legislation and religious regulation, and is an average for the years 1990-2002. Although the score varies slightly across years, we use one

value of GIR per country for all years between 1970 and 2010 due to missing data for the entire period. Given the lack of a GIR score at the level of German *Länder*, we calculate a variable on church-state separation based on the work of von Blumenthal (2009). The religious legacy variable distinguishes between Catholic and Protestant countries based on Minkenberg (2003).

The degree of policy secularisation is operationalised via two indicators. The first, state involvement in religious education, sums up the following indicators: religious education type, training, hiring and firing of religious education teachers, the establishment of the religious education curriculum, the compulsory nature of the subject and an opt-out option if it is compulsory (Table A1). Each indicator is given equal weight except for the last one, which is possible only if religious education is compulsory. The second operationalisation employs the dummy variable confessional/non-confessional RE only in order to better disentangle the role of party ideology in the two religious education models. When this variable is used, we do not control for religious legacy (Protestant/Catholic) given their high association (ϕ coefficient=0.84).

Control variables

Ethnic minority religious education policies are not disconnected from the impact of anti-immigrant parties (Bale *et al.* 2010; Van Spanje 2010). Therefore, we control for the electoral success of anti-immigrant parties (relative vote share) and identify them based on Polyakova (2015).

The secularisation of religious education policies should be understood in the broader context of societal secularisation. We control for societal secularisation by introducing the percentage of respondents who claim to attend church at least once a month (EVS 2011). Since the survey waves do not cover the 1970s, we assume a similar value as in 1981, with the caveat that the share of practising believers is underestimated.

Several studies find a strong correlation between the size of the Muslim community and recognition of cultural and religious rights (Koopmans *et al.* 2012). We control for the percentage of Muslims in each country-year based on the World Religion Project dataset (Maoz and Henderson 2013). Given the lack of official sources on the percentage of Muslim population per federal state/year, we control for the percentage of Christian believers when estimating the models in the German sample. This variable is a proxy for the percentage of Muslims, as lower values of Christian believers denote both an increase in non-believers and larger numbers of non-Christians.

Estimation strategy

The dataset covers all legal changes in religious education policies in 12 European countries and 16 German *Länder* over a period of 40 years. We separate the two estimations given the weight of Germany in the overall sample. The modelling of policy timing in the field of minority religious education requires event history analysis, a type of estimation strategy that analyses time-to-event data, where events are discrete occurrences and explanatory factors can be both time-varying and constant (Cox 2018; Eaton 2013). Event history analysis is largely used in the study of policy timing, with the Cox proportional hazard model as the most appropriate statistical estimation strategy due to its flexibility to model the time function and to include time-varying and time-constant explanatory variables (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997; Eaton 2013). The modelling specifies that observations are clustered by country or land, and it employs clustered standard errors.

The data on the equal recognition of Islam in public education, the second dependent variable, has a time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) format since it is comprised of yearly observations of the degree of equality between Islam and Christianity in religious education policies (12 and 16 units respectively over 40 years). The main feature of TSCS data is the observation of a small number of units during a relatively long period of time (Beck and Katz

1995). This data format violates basic assumptions of ordinary least square estimations related to the distribution of standard errors and heteroscedasticity. Beck and Katz (1995) recommend a Panel Corrected Standard Error (PCSE) approach in order to account for heteroscedasticity with Prains-Winsten (AR1) correlations in order to correct for the serially corrected standard errors (Plümper et al 2005). We present results with and without a lagged dependent variable, given the lack of consensus in the literature regarding the most appropriate modelling of TSCS data (Keele and Kelly 2006). However, from a theoretical point of view, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable is justifiable, as reforms in the field of religious education policies are quite infrequent, ranging between zero and four during the period of study. Consequently, policy status quo is an important determinant of subsequent reforms. Fixed effects estimations are also provided with the caveat that they account only for the variation within countries across time, but fail to test differences between countries and the impact of country invariant factors such as church-state regimes and religious legacies. We also employ random effects estimations with clustered standard errors in order to correct for heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation (Table A4).

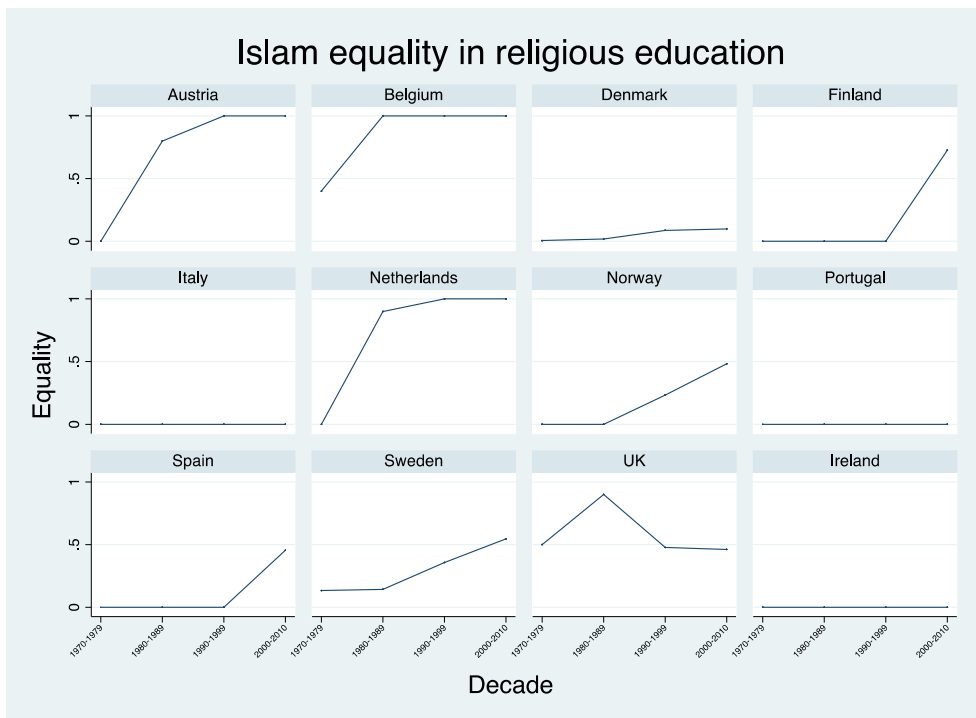
Results

The evolution of Islamic religious education policies in Western Europe

The adoption of policies that include Islam in public education took, on average, 22 years within the period studied (1970-2010). Hence, the early 1990s witnessed an increasing number of countries adopting policies of Islamic inclusion. However, the variation is large, with countries such as Italy and Ireland that did not adopt such policies until 2010. Protestant countries with non-denominational religious teaching display the shortest time to adoption – 15 years after 1970, while the Catholic cluster included Islam, on average, only after 30 years, that is, during the 2000s. These descriptive statistics show that Protestant countries are pacesetters as regards the inclusion of Islam in public education.

The difference between Protestant and Catholic countries is nonetheless marginal, when we analyse the degree of equality between Islam and Christianity in religious education policies. For the whole period studied, the average score of equality is 0.25 in Catholic countries and *Länder*, and 0.28 in the Protestant ones. Yet, when the data is analysed by decade, the cluster of Protestant countries displays a larger policy dynamic and lower scores during the decade of the 2000s than those which are predominantly Catholic (Figure 1). Although Protestant countries subscribe to a non-confessional approach to religious education, Christianity occupies a large part of the curriculum, most often justified by the “importance of Christianity for the foundational values of our culture” as stated by the Danish Educational Act from 1993 (Buchardt 2014; Jensen and Kjeldsen 2014). A similar reasoning motivates the Swedish religious education curriculum for primary education, which, despite offering greater space to ethnic minority religions, remains “marinated in Lutheran Protestantism” (Berglund 2014). In the UK, the liberal approach to the teaching of religion from a multi-faith perspective during the 1980s has been dwarfed by the 1988 Education Reform Act. Here, influential factions of the Christian right, and also some Muslim religious leaders, pushed for a curriculum with Christian dominance and statutory recognition of Islam and other ethnic minority religions (Thobani 2010). A further modification occurred in 1994 when non-statutory models for religious education promoted separate treatment for each faith and greater instruction time for Christianity.

Figure 1. Development of policy equality between Islamic and Christian religious education (1970-2010)



Explaining the timing of Islamic inclusion in religious education policies

Table 1 presents the findings of the event-history analysis. It shows that the timing of the inclusion of Islam in religious education is substantially influenced by the ideological profile of government parties. Model 1.1 tests the impact of Left dominance in government and shows that it is positive and significant (hazard ratio larger than 1). This finding supports hypothesis H1a and entails that one percent increase in leftist parties’ share in government increases the hazard of adoption by 1.036. The pioneering role of left-wing parties in including Islam in school curricula is independent of religious legacy or type of religious education in a country (interactions not shown here, available upon request). The Social Democratic party in Catholic Austria and Spain, both with a confessional RE regime, promoted the inclusion of Islam in public schools in a similar way to their ideological peers in Sweden, Denmark and the UK, which are characterised by a “religion for all” approach. In consequence, the Left can be considered the main driver for the inclusion of Islam in Western European public education. Models 1.2 and 1.3 corroborate this finding. The dominance of centre parties, mainly Christian Democrats, is not significantly associated with a higher chance of policy adoption. The

dominance of right-wing parties such as conservatives and liberals is negatively associated with the adoption of religious education policies that include Islam, but the effect becomes insignificant once we control for the percentage of Muslim residents (Model 1.3). Most likely, increasing numbers of Muslim residents in all Western European countries during the 1990s and 2000s prompted anti-immigrant discourses but also tempered party behaviour that would otherwise have restrained or delayed the recognition of ethnic-minority religious rights.

Table 1. Timing of religious education policies that include Islam, hazard ratios. Cox regression with clustered SE. Sample without Germany

	(1.1) Left wing parties in government	(1.2) Centre parties in government	(1.3) Right wing parties in government
Left-wing parties as % of total cabinet posts	1.036* (0.017)		
Center parties as % of total cabinet posts		0.987 (0.022)	
Right-wing parties as % of total cabinet posts			0.955 (0.037)
Protestantism	0.020* (0.040)	0.079* (0.107)	0.317 (0.510)
General GIR	0.930 (0.043)	0.930 (0.072)	1.005 (0.085)
State involvement in RE	2.697** (1.027)	2.013*** (0.393)	2.198* (0.804)
% Votes radical right parties	0.927 (0.068)	0.893 (0.074)	0.979 (0.087)
Church attendance	0.000* (0.001)	0.000* (0.000)	0.002 (0.011)
Percentage Muslims	12.377* (18.168)	8.091*** (4.549)	8.788 (13.369)
Observations	248	248	248
Countries	12	12	12

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

The second category of hypotheses tests the impact of secularisation, such as the religious legacy, the public regulation of religion and state involvement in religious education. The first two variables are not significant, a fact which does not allow us to confirm H2a and H2b respectively. In keeping with this, Figure 1 shows that both the Protestant and Catholic clusters display large variation in adopting Islam-inclusion policies in the early 1980s, with others delaying the process until the mid-2000s. The insignificant effect of GIR implies that

the intensive regulation of religion, which covers several aspects such as funding or restrictions on religious activity, does not necessarily lead to the rapid inclusion of minority religions in schools. However, among the various dimensions of secularisation, what prompts the speedier incorporation of Islam is the degree of state involvement in religious education, confirming H2e. Models 1.1-1.3 show that the hazard of adoption of policies that include Islam in public education doubles with each unit increase of state involvement in religious education.

Control variables show that the electoral strength of anti-immigrant parties does not necessarily reduce the probability of policy adoption. This finding is in line with previous research, which questions the strong and direct impact of the radical Right on integration policy-making. Religiosity does not affect the adoption of policies that include Islam in religious education. However, the share of Muslim believers is significant and positive, proving that the increase in the Muslim population is an important driver of policy responsiveness to immigrant demands (Koopmans *et al.* 2012).

Explanations for policy equality of Islam in religious education

The complementary analysis of equal inclusion of Islam in religious education policies illustrates that policy change in religious education is a multi-faceted phenomenon that responds to distinct patterns of party influence (Table 2). The incumbency of left-wing parties is not significantly associated with more Islamic equality. While this may seem a puzzling finding, given left-wing parties' role as pacesetters for Islamic inclusion, it can be explained by their ambivalent stance towards religious education: a school subject to be secularised, on the one hand, and a vehicle for minority integration, on the other. This ambivalence may prompt leftist parties to de-emphasise and de-politicise the issue, and to avoid further reforms once Islam and other immigrant religions have been included. Model 2.2 indicates that there is an overall positive effect caused by centre parties, a category comprised mostly of Christian Democrats but also Scandinavian centre-right parties with strong government representation.

When fine-tuning the influence of Christian Democrats, Model 2.3 entails an overall positive effect of their electoral strength, although their presence in government per se is not statistically significant. Finally, Model 2.6 shows the negative effect of conservative and liberal governments on the degree of equality between Islam and Christianity in public education. These party variables maintain the sign, but lose significance in the models that do not control for a lagged dependent variable (Models 2a.3 and 2a.6 in Table A3), implying that the positive effect of a centrist government and the negative impact of a right-wing dominated one are significant only when controlling for the policy status quo.

These results are further refined if we consider how secularisation dynamics influence party behaviour in relation to the incorporation of Islam (H3). We present the interaction coefficients between Christian-Democratic ideology and religious education type; they are stable regardless of the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable (Models 2.4 and 2.5 in Table 2 and Models 2a.4 and 2a.5 in Table 3A).³ Models 2.4 and 2.5 entail that the type of religious education policy (confessional vs. non-confessional) moderates the effect of Christian-Democrats' electoral strength and government incumbency respectively. While Christian Democrats positively influence the equal teaching of Islam in both denominational and non-denominational regimes, this effect is stronger in countries with non-denominational teaching (all of them Protestant). When calculating predicted equality values based on Model 2.4, the degree of equality in countries without confessional religious education increases from 29 to 90 when the vote share of Christian Democrats increases from 0 to 80%. In countries with confessional religious education, the degree of equality rises from 28 to 42 when the vote share of Christian Democrats passes from 0 to 80%. Likewise, the predicted values based on Model 2.5 entail a similar dynamic and further refine the effect of Christian-Democratic incumbency:

³ We performed several other tests including the interaction between party orientation on the one hand and religious legacy (Protestant/Catholic), state involvement in religion (GIR score) and state involvement in religious education policy respectively on the other, but their significance is not preserved across models without a lagged dependent variable.

the degree of equality in countries with non-confessional religious education increases from 31 to 38 when Christian Democrats are in government. In countries with a denominational regime, the equality between Islam and Christian teaching increases from 31 to 32 when Christian Democrats gain power. Although there is a clear correspondence between religious education type and religious legacy (Protestant or Catholic), this latter variable does not generate a significant effect of the interaction when not controlling for policy status-quo/lagged dependent variable. The explanation relies on the fact that during the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s several Protestant countries had a confessional religious education regime. Sweden had been a pacesetter in the late 1960s when it reformed its confessional religious education regime into a “religion for all” approach. Other Protestant countries, however, took longer. Denmark enacted the policy change in 1975, the Netherlands in 1981 and Norway in 1993. Finland continued to have a confessional regime until 2010. The inclusion of Islam occurs once these countries adopt a “religion for all” approach that progressively includes minority religions as well. Consequently, the influence of Protestantism on party behaviour is indirect: only after these countries secularise religion in public schools do Christian Democrats also defend a more equitable approach towards minority religions. These results are also supported by the alternative estimation in Model 5, Table A4.

To summarise, Christian-Democratic electoral strength and incumbency have a positive effect on the equal teaching of Islam, but its size depends on the degree of secularisation of religious education policy, as hypothesised in H3. In denominational regimes, all of them Catholic by 2010, Christian-Democratic incumbency is not a barrier to further inclusion. However, the positive effect is minimal. In non-denominational regimes, characteristic of Protestant countries starting in the late 1970s, Christian Democrats in power contributed to a more egalitarian incorporation of Islam in public education. In Protestant countries, where these parties had already “lost the battle” over a non-secular approach to religion in education,

there was no rationale for fiercely opposing the incorporation of Islam or for not recognising the demands of an increasing Muslim population. In Catholic Europe, however, Christian-Democratic parties are under pressure to protect the privileges of Catholicism in state schools because they are commonly faced with strong secular party opponents (Engeli *et al.* 2012). Moreover, they cannot deny or reject increasing demands for multicultural recognition. For this reason, they do not act as barriers to the incorporation of Islam in state schools.

Table 2. Policy equality of Islam in religious education. Linear regression with PCSE and AR1 correlation.

Sample without Germany

* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	2.1 Leftist parties	2.2 Centre parties	2.3 CD strength	2.4 CD strength*RE	2.5 CD in gvt*RE	2.6 Right-wing parties
Leftist parties % of total cabinet posts	0.013 (0.021)					
Centre parties % of total cabinet posts		0.058* (0.032)				
Christian- Democrats in government			1.102 (1.720)	0.678 (1.757)	5.334* (2.367)	
% Votes Christian- Democrats			0.316*** (0.094)	0.772*** (0.183)	0.233** (0.085)	
% Votes Christian- Democrats* Confessional RE				(0.181)		
Christian- Democrats in government* Confessional RE					-6.064* (2.883)	
Right-wing parties % of total cabinet posts						-0.036* (0.019)
Protestantism	-5.395* (2.738)	-4.094 (2.755)	-6.612* (2.712)			-4.248 (2.614)
General GIR	0.079 (0.151)	0.190 (0.157)	0.336* (0.162)	0.544*** (0.156)	0.329* (0.139)	0.134 (0.151)
State involvement in RE	1.020* (0.459)	1.092* (0.458)	1.860*** (0.500)			1.033* (0.438)
Confessional RE				-0.876 (2.932)	-1.689 (2.947)	

Radical right parties percentage	-0.089 (0.132)	-0.150 (0.135)	-0.278* (0.143)	-0.149 (0.140)	-0.152 (0.138)	-0.114 (0.126)
Church attendance	-1.085 (6.668)	0.759 (6.392)	-8.333 (6.512)	0.192 (4.895)	-3.159 (4.788)	1.323 (6.563)
Percentage Muslims	3.214*** (0.848)	3.364*** (0.844)	3.425*** (0.823)	3.419*** (0.887)	3.182*** (0.853)	3.032*** (0.826)
Lagged DV	0.850*** (0.030)	0.844*** (0.031)	0.818*** (0.031)	0.797*** (0.034)	0.827*** (0.032)	0.862*** (0.029)
Constant	-0.452 (6.745)	-4.714 (6.801)	-8.396 (6.799)	-11.476** (4.405)	-5.265 (3.760)	-1.294 (6.343)
Observations	467	467	467	467	467	467
R ²	0.834	0.840	0.843	0.833	0.841	0.852

When the role of secularisation is considered independently, countries where Protestantism is the dominant religion are more likely to display *unequal* processes of Islamic incorporation, failing to support H2d. Religious-education scholars bring qualitative evidence for this finding by showing that, especially in Protestant countries, the dominance of Christianity in religious education is perceived as a “banal” national identity mark (Berglund 2014; Buchardt 2014; Ferrari 2013; Skeie 2007). In a manner similar to policy adoption dynamics, the degree of state involvement in religion (GIR) is not significant for the equal recognition of Islam. Instead, the degree of state involvement in religious education policy significantly predicts equal processes of Islamic incorporation (H2f). This finding and the complementary one on policy timing bring empirical evidence to the multiculturalist claim that religious pluralism does not require a secular (a.k.a. laicist) state, but an institutional context that accommodates religions on the principle of equal respect and consideration (Modood and Kastoryano 2006).

Lastly, control variables display similar dynamics, as discussed in the previous part. The electoral strength of the radical Right is not significantly associated with the degree of equality (or rather inequality) between Islam and Christianity in religious education policies, showing that policies in the field of integration are shielded from the broader electoral dynamics of party competition. The degree of religiosity does not influence policy changes that

bring equal recognition of Islam in public education. However, the percentage of Muslims in a country's population is an important predictor for the equal incorporation of Islam in public education.

Islamic incorporation in a mixed regime: the German case

Models 3.1-3.5 estimate the impact of party ideology and secularisation on the incorporation of Islam in German public education. Separate analyses of Germany *Länder* are not only statistically sound (to avoid a strong influence of the German case on the overall sample) but also enlighten the dynamics of party ideology and Islamic incorporation in a “mixed regime”, characterised by diversity in terms of the type of religious education (confessional versus non-confessional) and religious landscape and legacy (Catholic versus Protestant dominance).

Länder in western Germany were among the first to incorporate teaching about Islam in “religion for all” classes or, more recently, Islamic education classes (Figure 2). Among eastern *Länder*, only Berlin acknowledged the inclusion of Islam in public schools in 2002. Unlike their counterparts in other Western European countries, German Social Democrats did not have a pioneering role in incorporating Islam across *Länder*. One of the explanations for this is the differentiated role the Social Democratic Party (abbreviated as SPD in German) played in Catholic and Protestant *Länder*, with the latter being more likely to include Islam in religious education classes than the former. Thus, Model 3.2 indicates that the likelihood of an SPD-dominated government adopting policies that include Islam is 1.04 times greater in Protestant *Länder* than in Catholic ones. Several of the former *Länder* offer non-confessional religious education, such as Hamburg, Bremen and Berlin. All three Protestant *Länder* were pace-setters in including Islam in the late 1990s and early 2000s, while Catholic *Länder*, although some had had social-democratic governments for several years, delayed the reform.

Similarly, the Christian-Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) has not had a uniform effect on the timing of religious education policies that include Islam across *Länder*. Christian-Democratic governments in Catholic-majority *Länder* adopted policies that include Islam sooner than their counterparts in Protestant *Länder* (Model 3.4). In the former case, Christian-Democrats sought to maintain the privileges of confessional religious education, while responding to an increasing number of Muslim residents who claimed an equal right to religious education in public schools. However, the incorporation of Islam occurred later than in the case of Protestant *Länder* with Social Democrat governments, and mostly on the basis of trial models restricting IRE to a limited number of schools. As regards the FDP, their incumbency is positively associated with a delay in incorporation, although it does not have a differentiated effect across *Länder* and their religious legacies.

Table 3. Timing of religious education policies that include Islam in Germany, hazard ratios. Cox regression with clustered SE

	SDP in gvt 3.1	SDP in gvt 3.2	CDU in gvt 3.3	CDU in gvt 3.4	FDP in gvt 3.5
SPD % of total cabinet posts	1.010 (0.008)	0.996 (0.020)			
Protestant lander # SPD % of total cabinet posts		1.046* (0.021)			
CDU/CSU % of total cabinet posts			0.992 (0.010)	1.010 (0.026)	
Protestant lander # CDU/CSU % of total cabinet posts				0.944* (0.024)	
FDP % of total cabinet posts					0.908* (0.037)
Protestant lander	0.482 (0.779)	0.027* (0.049)	0.582 (0.899)	4.041 (9.277)	0.180 (0.333)
Church-state separation	0.570 (0.781)	1.256 (1.903)	0.495 (0.638)		0.328 (0.390)
State involvement in RE	1.100 (0.326)	1.053 (0.277)	1.128 (0.328)	1.127 (0.282)	1.007 (0.253)
Radical right parties percentage	0.588* (0.160)	0.482* (0.172)	0.592* (0.168)	0.461* (0.144)	0.617* (0.165)
Church attendance	1.052 (0.059)	1.101 (0.071)	1.053 (0.056)	1.112 (0.079)	1.068 (0.072)

Percentage Christians	0.898 (0.099)	0.880 (0.106)	0.903 (0.096)	0.885 (0.096)	0.852 (0.094)
Western lander	190.729 (925.541)	223.716 (1161.325)	169.951 (801.755)	234.017 (1153.821)	1113.110 (5308.387)
Observations	446	446	446	446	446
<i>Länder</i>	16	16	16	16	16

Clustered standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Secularisation variables, such as church-state separation and state involvement in religion do not have an overall significant effect among German *Länder*. As regards control variables, the electoral strength of the radical Right significantly impacts Islamic inclusion. Thus, policy makers in *Länder* with increasing support for radical-Right parties delayed reforms more than those for whom the radical Right did not pose an immediate threat. This pattern is distinct from other Western European countries where the radical Right did not have a significant effect on Islam incorporation. Lastly, church attendance, the percentage of Christian believers and the dichotomy between western and eastern *Länder*, do not explain the incorporation of Islam in public education. While the effect of the latter variable may be surprising given that almost no eastern *Land* offers Islamic religious education, the explanation is that all eastern *Länder* have only been “exposed” to the incorporation of Islam in religious education policies since 1990, while all western *Länder* have experienced the probability of adoption since 1970. The modelling strategy takes into account the duration of exposure and the length of time that units have any likelihood of adopting a policy.

Concerning the equal inclusion of Islam, our second dependent variable, the aforementioned dynamics are reproduced, while party ideological influence changes in line with the cross-country analyses presented earlier (Table 4)⁴. The presence of the SPD in government, either alone or in coalition, constitutes a positive factor for the process of Islamic inclusion in state schools, especially in Protestant *Länder*. When calculating predicted values

⁴ All estimations have a lagged DV. The estimations without a lagged DV do not significantly change the results

based on Model 4.2, the degree of equality increases from 10.8 in Protestant *Länder* without SPD in government to 12.5 in Protestant *Länder* with the SPD in government. Similarly, the effect of Christian Democrats is distinct across the different religious legacies (Protestant and Catholic) of the *Länder*. In Catholic-majority *Länder*, Christian-Democratic incumbency increases policy equality from 9.8 to 13.3, while its effect is almost non-existent in Protestant-majority *Länder* (predicted values from Model 4.4). The result is further supported by Model 4.5, which shows that the strongest positive effect of the Christian-Democratic vote occurs in *Länder* with less secular religious teaching (i.e., with stronger responsibilities held by religious communities).

Table 4. Policy equality of Islam in religious education in Germany. Linear regression with PCSE and AR1 correlation

	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6
SPD % of total cabinet posts	-0.002 (0.015)					
Presence of SPD in government		-3.487* (1.689)				
Presence of SPD in government # Protestant lander		5.223* (2.471)				
CDU/CSU % of total cabinet posts			0.005 (0.015)			
CDU/CSU in government				3.587* (1.725)	1.624 (1.576)	
CDU/CSU in government # Protestant lander				-5.336* (2.745)		
% Votes CDU/CSU					0.373* (0.190)	
% Votes CDU/CSU # State involvement in RE					-0.185* (0.075)	
FDP % of total cabinet posts						-0.025 (0.055)
Protestant lander	0.180 (1.929)	-2.469 (2.289)	0.209 (1.935)	3.015 (2.358)	0.481 (1.958)	0.150 (1.934)
Church-state separation	-4.704** (1.750)	-5.214** (1.796)	-4.747** (1.755)	-5.321** (1.854)	-7.802*** (2.166)	-4.611** (1.774)
State involvement in RE	0.322 (0.592)	0.242 (0.599)	0.326 (0.591)	0.329 (0.590)	6.549* (2.606)	0.280 (0.583)
Radical right parties percentage	-0.254 (0.257)	-0.333 (0.271)	-0.247 (0.252)	-0.331 (0.260)	-0.248 (0.276)	-0.280 (0.251)
Church attendance	0.276** (0.101)	0.271** (0.101)	0.274** (0.101)	0.282** (0.102)	0.280** (0.100)	0.276** (0.099)
Percentage Christians	-0.453*** (0.102)	-0.471*** (0.103)	-0.456*** (0.103)	-0.491*** (0.106)	-0.451*** (0.107)	-0.451*** (0.101)
Western lander	20.474*** (5.248)	21.053*** (5.206)	20.661*** (5.285)	21.446*** (5.290)	21.241*** (5.372)	20.326*** (5.075)
Lagged DV	0.833***	0.827***	0.832***	0.820***	0.807***	0.835***

Constant	(0.043) 15.119*** (4.567)	(0.043) 17.878*** (4.981)	(0.043) 14.789** (4.736)	(0.043) 15.143** (4.872)	(0.043) 1.450 (7.725)	(0.042) 15.232*** (4.604)
Observations	497	497	497	497	497	497
R ²	0.767	0.767	0.766	0.760	0.762	0.769

p < 0.10, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

In other words, German Christian Democrats' behaviour in relation to the equal inclusion of Islam varies according to religious legacy and the degree of secularisation of religious education. Similarly, to their ideological peers in Catholic countries, the CDU supports the organisation of Islamic religious education in order to preserve the prerogatives of the Catholic church, while also responding to increasing demands from Muslim communities. Moreover, they are able to argue that the empowerment of Muslim religious communities in organising Islamic religious education is strictly overseen and coordinated by the state and the respective inter-religious authorities (Euchner 2018). Distinct from the patterns in other Protestant countries, the minimal effect of Christian Democrats in Protestant *Länder* may be explained by contextual characteristics: only three in nine Protestant *Länder* offer non-confessional religious education; moreover, five of these *Länder* are in the east, where both the numbers and the demand for Islamic religious education are much lower.

The effect of the Liberal party (FDP) is negative, although it is insignificantly correlated with Islamic equality. As regards the effect of secularisation, both religious legacy and state involvement in religion have a mediating effect, as we could see in Models 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5, while strict separation has a negative effect across all *Länder*, which relates to the aforementioned dynamics. As expected, more religious *Länder* also enable an egalitarian teaching of Islam, while the percentage of Christian believers is inversely associated. Most likely, this is due to the higher percentage of Muslims in *Länder* with smaller percentages of Christians, which, in turn, has a strong positive effect, as the results for the other European countries suggest. Lastly, the teaching of Islam in public schools is significantly more egalitarian in the western *Länder* than in the eastern ones.

Conclusions

This paper focuses on the regulation of Islam in religious education in Western Europe between 1970 and 2010, and it is based on a unique dataset that contains data not only on the timing of reforms but also on the degree of equality between Islam and the majority religion. Our findings make an original contribution to various streams of scholarship such as religion and politics, multiculturalism and morality policies, by showing how political parties contribute to reproducing religions' presence in public institutions. This presence should not be understood as the return (or persistence) of dogma in public education but as a process in which more and more religions acquire a role in public institutions. Political parties, both from the mainstream left and right sides of the ideological spectrum, are indeed central agents of secularisation, but of a secularisation understood as diversity and multiculturalism rather than laicism deprived of any religious element.

We show that although most states have adopted policies that allow the teaching of Islam within religious education classes, it is rarely the case that Islam and Christianity are taught on equal terms, with the latter continuing to dominate the school curriculum as part of national-identity reproduction. This approach follows the theoretical insights of policy scholars opting for more fine-tuned conceptualisations of policy change (Capano 2009) and of multiculturalist theories that distinguish between inclusion and equality (Modood and Kastoryano 2006; Peach and Vertovec 1997).

This distinction contributes to solving a puzzle that is insufficiently explored among scholars of religion and politics. Who are Muslims' party political agents in their claim to have Islam introduced in school curricula? Our findings show that leftist parties are pacesetters in including Islam in public education in comparison to their competitors. Policies that acknowledge teaching about Islam in non-denominational systems or separate Islamic religious education classes in the denominational ones are adopted sooner in countries with a strong

presence of leftist parties in government. In other words, if we look at the timing of reforms, it is the Left that becomes the political ally of Muslims claiming religious education in public schools, in line with findings from other policy fields (Akkerman 2015; Givens and Luedtke 2005).

A complementary picture emerges in relation to Christian Democrats' influence on the extent to which Islam and Christianity are incorporated on equal terms in public schools. In Protestant countries, Christian Democrat parties promoted the progressive incorporation of Islam under a non-confessional framework, although full equality between Christianity and Islam has been only achieved in a few cases. In Catholic Europe, Christian Democracy did not act as a barrier to the inclusion of Islam in public schools. While its effect is less pronounced than in non-confessional regimes in Protestant countries, Christian Democratic incumbency has managed to preserve the privileges of confessional Catholic religious education in state schools, while timidly responding to increasing Muslim demands for multicultural recognition. This general pattern is also characteristic for Germany, especially in the case of Catholic *Länder*. The promotion of equal religious rights for Muslims increases Christian Democrats' leverage in controlling religious education that favours the interests of their core Christian constituents. Thus, religious pluralism is also a means to maintain their control over education and religious policies.

We also signal some limitations of our study, concerned with its relatively low number of observations. While future studies could test the hypotheses in additional countries, we conducted several robustness checks to confirm that the number of observations does not affect our results. Due to lack of data for the timespan covered in this article, we could not test the effect of additional factors that may shape Islamic incorporation such as immigration policies and numbers of refugees. This constitutes a promising future research endeavour.

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