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Comparing Integration of Muslims in Europe: The Cases of the Netherlands and Sweden

Cover Page Footnote

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Muslim Integration in Sweden and The Netherlands in the Twenty-First Century

Nicholas Lorenzo

sponsored by Robert Goeckel, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Middle East has seen increased violence and revolutions in recent years, producing a surge of millions of refugees, many of whom made their way to Europe. In addition to fueling far-right populist parties, this phenomenon has challenged existing norms of religious freedom, toleration, and churchstate relations in Europe. I was eager to see how different countries handled this new Muslim minority. I chose to compare the response of both Sweden and the Netherlands. Unlike Eastern Europe, the Netherlands and Sweden share a long history of democracy and religious tolerance. However, Sweden differed from the Netherlands in that until 2000 the Lutheran church was the established church, whereas the Netherlands is characterized by “principled pluralism” of Protestant, Catholic, and a large non-religious sector of society. My findings indicate that, despite having less experience with Muslim immigrants, Sweden has done a much better job. The country refrained from passing laws that restricted religious practice by Muslims and mobilized the substantial infrastructure of the Swedish church to integrate new Muslim immigrants, whereas the Netherlands has restricted certain Muslim practices and the churches have lacked the resources in civil society to support integration.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 2000s the Middle East saw a massive increase in the amount of violence occurring in the region. This first began with the United States’ “War on Terror” in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Violence in the Middle East would persist into the next decade. The Arab Spring began in 2011 which resulted in attempted revolutions in several Middle Eastern countries, including Egypt and Syria. The Muslim world was then rocked by a resurgence of terrorist organizations in the 2010s, such as ISIL in Syria and Iraq as well as Boko Haram in Nigeria. The various revolutions and the presence of terrorist groups in the Muslim world created millions of Muslim refugees, many of whom would make their way to Europe en masse during the 2010s. This large influx of

Muslim refugees entering Europe brought to the surface variations in religious tolerance throughout the continent.

Contrary to the beliefs of people like Samuel Huntington, modernization in many European countries did not coincide with a strictly secular society. Instead, each would see a different relationship between church and state, highlighting the idea of Peter J. Katzenstein that modernity would look very different in various countries, and not every society would become a secular one. This is what Katzenstein defines as “multiple modernities” and is the basis for our understanding that each country has a different relationship between religion and state (Byrnes & Katzenstein, 2006, p. 5). The Netherlands and Sweden provide good examples of contrasting models of church and state relationships within Europe. These two countries also had different responses to the increase of their respective Muslim populations, which is reflective of their differing “modernities” and opinions on the issue of what the proper relationship between religion and government should be. These countries also had varying reactions in their civil societies. The Netherlands and Sweden are good countries to compare because of their similar historical backgrounds. While not identical, both have reputations of religious tolerance. They also did not have large domestic Muslim populations until well into the 20th century, and both countries would see a dramatic increase of their Muslim populations in the 21st century (Stutje, 2016, p. 125). Comparing the reaction to the new minority population (Muslim) in both of these countries also allows us to compare the reactions of two differing models of church-state relationship. The Dutch church–state relationship is one of positive neutrality, whereas the Swedish case is one of a de-facto establishment model (the church of Sweden was stripped of its title as a state-religion in 2000, but little has changed in the church’s function in civil society) (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 5).

GOVERNMENT REACTIONS

Netherlands

The Netherlands is a country known for having a secular culture, as a majority of the country does not identify with a religious group. The Netherlands is also known for its system of positive pluralism between the state and the country’s religions. The Dutch government has made their commitment to positive pluralism clear in their constitution, as the first chapter’s first article reads: “All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted” (*The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 2008*, 2008). The Dutch constitution also provides the right to practice religion in a community, and the right to an education in the religion of your choosing, funded by the government. The constitution clearly sets out a charter for a country that values its positive pluralism, and we can see this in the initial Dutch response to the nation’s first real encounter with Islamic terrorism. In 2004 a Dutch film and television director, Theo van Gogh, was shot and stabbed to death by a 26-year old radicalized Dutch Moroccan citizen (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019). For the next several years Dutch politicians spoke of terrorism as a community

problem that was not attributable to any one religion. This is highlighted in the 2007 'Actionplan Polarization and Radicalization' Which address terrorism of all shades, not just Islamic terrorism specifically (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019). This bill passed though the Dutch legislative body advocates for preventing terrorism through a "fix it in society" approach and aims to curb polarization or an "us v. them" dynamic developing in the country, as polarization is seen in a very negative light in the country. However, this tendency to not name Islamic terrorism by name and not singling it out will eventually change, breaking with the Dutch tradition of strict pluralism.

By 2014 the Dutch government had essentially done away with not addressing Jihadist terrorism by name. Before 2014 "terrorism" in government documents could have referred to anything from animal abuse to terrorism for any cause or religion. The language coming from the government clearly depicted radical Islamic terrorism as the enemy (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019). This was most evident in the debates held in Dutch parliament after the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, where the blame was shifted from being a societal problem, to being a problem that the Muslim community must handle (van Meeteren & van Oostendorp, 2019). Some of the comments even started to become Islamophobic. This subtle difference in the wording used by the Dutch government to address the issue would coincide with a more direct approach to radical Islam in the country.

Over the past couple of years this harsh rhetoric led to a departure in government policy from the religious pluralism that the country was known for. The first is the proposed ban on ritual slaughter. This first passed the Dutch house of representatives with 80% in favor of the measure. When the bill made it to the Dutch senate, the Labor (PvdA), Liberal(VVD), and D66 (Democrats of '66) parties completely changed course and voted against the bill, recognizing it violated religious freedom too much to outweigh the claims of some animal rights groups that what these religious communities were doing should be considered animal abuse (Valenta, 2012, p. 28). Although an outright ban in 2011 was not successfully reached, restrictions on the ability of Muslim and Jewish delis to perform ritual slaughter have become stricter (Siegal, 2017). Ritual slaughter is necessary to create many of the hallal and kosher cuisine that is made by Muslim and Jewish people in the Netherlands. In 2017 with support from the right-wing party for freedom (PVV) lead by MP Geert Wilders, the Dutch legislature would place bans on the amount of animals that can be ritually slaughtered, and would also produce very strict guidelines on how it ought to be performed (Valenta, 2012, p. 28; Siegal, 2017). This political issue is one of the main issues concerning the new Dutch Animal Rights Party, which has a small share of the seats in the Dutch congress. Nonetheless it has not relented in its pursuit (along with far-right parties) to see a complete ban on ritual slaughter become law. The ritual slaughter controversy is important because it provides a glimpse of the changing relationship between religion and state among the various Dutch political parties. Since the second world war the Liberal and Labor parties had been staunch defenders of ritual slaughter and religious freedom in general, however many members of these parties now oppose ritual slaughter along with the other secular left and right parties. In this specific case, the secular parties were pitted against the Christian Democrats and other religious

parties and indicates a shift in public opinion of what the ideal relationship between minority religions and the state ought to be in the Netherlands (Valenta, 2012, p. 28).

The second instance of the Dutch government challenging the country's reputation of religious pluralism was when it became illegal to wear face coverings in public in 2018 (Hauser & Stack, 2018). Although the "Act Partially Prohibiting Face-Covering Clothing," known colloquially as the "Burqa Ban," was written to apply to face-coverings of all kinds, it was fairly obviously directed at preventing Muslim women from being able to wear their religious head covering, whether it be a Burqa or a Niqab (Gesley, 2020). Evidence for this lies in the statements made by PVV (party for freedom) party leader Geert Wilders, as he has been one of many voices stating that this bill was specifically made to stop Islam and the Islamization of the Netherlands (Hauser & Stack, 2018). This particular right wing party is in the current governing coalition. The party completely politicized Islam and voiced vehement opposition to it, making clear that they are Islamophobic.

Although examining legislation that affects Muslims and parties with anti-Muslim sympathies provides insight into Dutch relations with its Muslim minority, it does not provide the whole picture of what the integration of Muslims looks like in the country. Despite some controversial laws passed in The Netherlands over the past few years, the government has taken the lead role of trying to integrate its Muslim population in the country. For years prior to the first major integration project in the 21st century by the Dutch government in 2013, first generation Muslim immigrants were able to integrate at much lower rates of success than immigrants from other parts of the world. This is proven by several studies that have concluded that the level of religiosity amongst first-generation Muslim immigrants is negatively associated with their integration in West-European societies (Beek, & Fleischmann, 2020, P. 3656). There are several reasons for this, including the fact that sexual and gender norms are often recognized as being sources of conflict between Muslims and the European mainstream. Islam holds allegedly traditional views regarding these matters, especially compared to the views of the majority population in West-European societies (Beek & Fleischmann, 2020, p. 3657).

When trying to understand integration efforts in the Netherlands it is important to understand radical movements and ways that the Dutch government tried to curb them by promoting integration. In the advent of the 2010's a movement called Sharia4Holland and Sharia4Belgium emerged that advocated for Sharia law. These were groups of a couple hundred young Muslims who were creating "aggressive" confrontations against those that they saw as "enemies of Islam" in the Netherlands. The radical sentiments of these groups were aided by the fact that the mosques in the Netherlands were in-large funded by Salafist groups from Saudi Arabia. The Saudi's would bring a more "traditional" (which typically means illiberal) brand of Islam to these mosques that did not have the same level of tolerance that many in western societies have (Hoorens et al., 2015, p. 9). Many Dutch policymakers had fears that these radical groups could turn to armed violence. As these Dutch policymakers predicted, some of these Muslim-Dutch youths did, as some of them had fled the country to join the ranks of the terrorist groups in the

Middle East (de Koning, 2020, p. 132). This paired with several terrorist attacks (like the murder of Theo van Gogh) made the Dutch government realize action needed to be taken considering the sharp rise in Muslim population.

A major step was taken in 2013 when the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment rolled out an integration plan. The plan placed responsibility of integration on the newcomer to undertake necessary steps to succeed (European Union, n.d.). It aimed to increase participation in society and self-reliance, living together and dealing with other Dutch people, internalizing Dutch values, and making limits clear and educating the new immigrant. The Civic Integration Act (Valid as of February 2014) allows many of these migrants or refugees to begin this process before they even arrive in The Netherlands. The latest update to government integration protocols was enacted in 2017, which added an expectation that refugees and migrants learn the Dutch language. It also granted a three-year residency permit for refugees. Recognized refugees would also follow language courses at the state asylum center from day one and the supply in early education programs was increased (Netherlands: Highlights from the 2017 Coalition Agreement, n.d.). The new integration legislation implemented these changes by stripping funding from institutions in the civil society for the integration of refugees, as the government wished to “mainstream the integration process” (European Website on Integration). Considering how recent some of these changes are, data will more than likely be produced in the future to see if these changes have a positive impact on the country. One thing that can be inferred from this approach by the Dutch government is that government believes it will do a better job at integrating the Muslim refugees and other migrants than independent actors in the civil society can.

While the Dutch government has made attempts to improve the integration of the Muslim population into Dutch society, the restrictions on ritual slaughter and the bans on burqas in the Netherlands have tested the ideal of religious pluralism in the country. Before Muslim refugees began making their way to Europe in massive numbers and the threat of radical Islamic terrorism was on the minds of the Dutch, religious tolerance was virtually unquestioned in the country. However, this clash of cultures in the Netherlands has produced a sense of Islamophobia among some in Dutch society. These passions have led to parties like the PVV entering governing coalitions and attempting to deprive Muslim people of equal religious liberty under the law by justifying the banning of ritual slaughter and face coverings. Although government funding of religious education and programs is still very much plural, these two political issues are certainly eroding norms and institutions of religious freedom in the country. The amount of damage these efforts have done to the reputation of the Netherlands as a country that values religious freedom is still unknown, as the future could see a backlash to the anti-Islamic rhetoric that has existed in Dutch politics as of late, or it could see further attacks on the freedom of religious minorities to practice their religions.

The country of Sweden is very similar to the Netherlands in that it is a country with a reputation for religious tolerance as well as accepting and encouraging multiculturalism. The Constitution of Sweden makes it abundantly clear what the relationship between

religions and the state is in the country, stating that “Everyone shall be guaranteed... freedom of worship: that is, the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others” (*Sweden’s Constitution of with amendments through 2012*, n.d.). However, it should be noted that Sweden differs from the Netherlands in that until recently its model of church-state relationship was that of having an official national church, which was the Lutheran Church of Sweden until 2000 (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 4). Even though the Lutheran Church of Sweden is no longer the officially recognized religion of the state, its position in Swedish society has not changed much because of it.

Sweden

In recent history, the Swedish people have prided themselves as being a safe haven from violence for refugees (Brljavac, 2017, p. 96). This was not always the case though, as in the interwar period between World War I and II, the Swedish people derived their pride from a collectivist and ethnic type of nationalism and a sense of ethnic superiority (Åberg, 2019, p. 28). This was represented by the Swedish government creating a state-funded institute to study Eugenics at Uppsala university in 1922. After World War II this ethnic nationalism lost its appeal. By the 1960s’ Sweden would become a progressive and modern nation, and in the 1970’s the Swedish would embrace multiculturalism and immigration. This was a stark departure from Sweden’s past as they no longer saw ethnic homogeneity as desirable. Sweden would first embrace labor force immigration and then refugees from all over the world (Åberg, 2019, p. 28). The country opened its doors to refugees from Augusto Pinochet’s regime in Chile as well as those fleeing the Yugoslavian civil war. The Swedish people were also enthusiastic about accepting refugees from the Syrian civil war initially (Brljavac, 2017, p. 96). The country began taking in higher amounts of refugees than any other Nordic country as well since the early 2000s. However, attitudes began to sour as the number of asylum seekers began to explode during the Syrian Civil War and the refugee crisis that hit Europe during the mid 2010’s.

Before the civil war, the country was taking in anywhere from 15,000 to 36,000 asylum seekers per year, and between 2000 and 2600 of those were unaccompanied minors (Brljavac, 2017, p. 97). After the outbreak of the Arab Spring and subsequently the Syrian Civil War in 2011 the number of asylum seekers began to skyrocket. In 2015 the number of asylum seekers had surpassed 162,000 that year in a country with a population below ten million (Sweden and Migration, n.d.). To make matters worse, 35,000 of those refugees were unaccompanied minors (Brljavac, 2017, p. 97). Before the refugee crisis, Sweden was already struggling to relocate below 3000 children a year (Brljavac, 2017, p. 97). However, because of the broad non-partisan support of immigration as an important part of the Swedish identity, the government and the people of Sweden gladly accepted this undertaking initially. This sentiment was highlighted in early 2015 when the Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Lovfen, stated passionately that “My Europe does not Build Walls” while simultaneously criticizing other European countries for not doing more to aid the refugees (Brljavac, 2017, p. 97; Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 4). By October of 2015 the Swedish government came to a nonpartisan consensus and finally recognized that it could no longer accept such massive amounts of refugees, as many feared that it

would collapse the welfare system, and the social tensions between the new immigrant population and the native Swedes began to rise (Åberg, 2019). The reintroduction of internal border controls to halt the flow of refugees into the country came as a sense of relief to some, but many others in Swedish civil society, including the Archbishop of the church of Sweden, voiced sharp criticism (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 5). The refugee crisis that reached its peak in 2015 would permanently change Swedish politics going forward and would bring forth a new problem of assimilating the new large Muslim refugee population into the country (Åberg, 2019, p. 28).

When it became apparent that the Swedish government needed help financially and needed help culturally assimilating the Muslim population in 2015, it looked to the Lutheran Church of Sweden for assistance (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 4). Even though the church of Sweden had lost its title of being the official church of Sweden 15 years prior, its relationship with the people of Sweden had not really changed (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 5). This was due to the fact that a majority of Swedish people (59%) still associated with the Lutheran Church of Sweden and was still recognized as the de facto church of the country (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6). Throughout Swedish history the Lutheran church had played a large role in civil society, providing welfare services to the people of Sweden officially until the end of the 19th century, and education until the 20th century. The rise of the welfare state in Sweden in the late 20th century would replace the church as the primary source of welfare in Swedish society (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 5). However, the church of Sweden would see itself as “an active supporter” of the welfare state and would come to the Swedish welfare states’ aid when it needed it most during the refugee crisis (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6).

In 2015 when the refugee crisis reached its peak, the refugees were distributed all over the country. The Swedish Lutheran church had parishes across the country, and thus had the infrastructure to provide services to many of these refugees (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6). The church as an institution saw itself having a duty to be “value guardians in the welfare state” (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6). The church would act as that guardian by having eighty percent of their parishes engaged in providing welfare to the large refugee population (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6). These parishes would provide many services by working in tandem with the Swedish government to provide assistance. An example of this was the municipality of Mölndal reaching out to the local parish to assist in relocating many of the unaccompanied minors who had reached Sweden and needed to be placed in a home. The Mölndal church enthusiastically agreed to this as the Vicar of that church saw it as the parish’s duty (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 8). The Lutheran parishes would also provide shelter, food, and clothing to many of the refugees (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 4). The churches would gather these resources by asking for donations from the community which was generally supportive of the work that the church was doing.

The actions of the Swedish church were not just limited to providing welfare to the Muslim refugees, as they also tried to integrate the refugees into Swedish society. The churches did this by organizing language cafés with many of the locals and establishing sus-

tained connection between the refugees and the government (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 6). Perhaps the most important thing that the church of Sweden did was provide the Muslim refugees a place to worship in their own churches (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 10). This resulted in Muslims praying in one room of the church while Lutherans sang Christian chants in another room, this is a good example of the lengths to which the Church of Sweden went to provide welfare to the refugees. Since then, there are various examples of both the Swedish government paying for permanent places of worship and Middle Eastern groups providing funding and training to teach Islam in schools and within the Muslim community (Berglund, 2019, p. 226).

The refugee crisis of 2015 reinforced the role of the Church of Sweden in Swedish society. Although the Lutheran Church of Sweden was no longer the official church of Sweden, it recognized the immense sense of responsibility it had as an actor in the civil society (Ideström & Linde, 2019, p. 4). However, despite all of the church's efforts, Muslim integration into Swedish society has not been smooth, in fact it has been far from it.

The arrival of so many refugees into Sweden was bound to create social tensions of some kind from the beginning. The consequences of this have resulted in a changing political landscape in the country. For decades it was taken as a given that the Swedish people generally agreed that the country should take in a high number of refugees per capita and embrace multiculturalism. After the refugee crisis that dynamic has changed and has coincided with the rise of a far-right movement in the country. This far-right movement is embodied in the platform of the Sweden Democrat party which has risen from obscurity to become the third largest political party in Sweden, winning 62 seats in the Riksdag in the last national election in 2018 (Tomson, 2020). In other countries, being the third largest party in a country would often find you in a governing coalition. After the 2018 elections the right-wing parties (commonly referred to as the alliance) had won more seats in the Riksdag than the left-wing coalition of parties (called the red-greens or the Lofven cabinet). However, because the other right-wing parties viewed the Sweden Democrats as being too radical for their tastes, the center and liberal parties refused to create a government with them, and instead opted to allow the Social Democrats (separate from the Sweden Democrat party) to make Stefan Lofven Prime minister in a government where he is governing as the minority (Tomson, 2020). This was significant because it highlighted the increasing polarization of Swedish politics and because over the past few decades Sweden hadn't seen a far-right movement like most other European countries had, making them an outlier. However, because of the Sweden Democrats this was no longer the case.

To understand the significance of the Sweden Democrats it is necessary to understand their origins. The Sweden Democrat party was founded in 1988 and had close ties to the former Swedish fascist and Swedish neo-Nazi movements. The first elected party chair had ties to the neo-Nazi Nordic realm party, and when old pictures of party members wearing Nazi insignia surfaced in the 1990s, the party banned the wearing of any kind of Nazi uniform and strongly denounced Nazism (Tomson, 2020). When their current party chair, Jimmie Akesson, was elected as party leader in 2005 he sought to modernize

the party and make it more acceptable to the public. Akesson had helped push the party away from openly racist groups to a more populist message, however the anti-Islamic message of the party was still very much alive (Tomson, 2020).

The anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim messaging of the Sweden Democrats has been a hallmark of the party, with Jimmie Akesson himself claiming that “I see [Islam and Muslims in Sweden] as our biggest foreign threat since World War II” back in 2009 (Tomson, 2020). This kind of messaging is very similar to that of the Freedom Party in the Netherlands and would inevitably find supporters in Sweden after the refugee crisis. Many Swedes saw the cultural contrast between themselves and the new large Muslim minority as being undesirable, and is a stark contrast from the desire for multiculturalism in Sweden that has existed since the 1970’s. A good example of this shift in thinking can be seen in a 2018 election debate when all of the parties were asked if they supported multiculturalism. All of the parties except the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats said yes, showing that the once nearly unanimous desire for multiculturalism in Sweden is no more (Åberg, 2019, p. 29). One of the platform positions that has increased the popularity of the Sweden Democrats was their opposition to Muslim mosques issuing an adhan, calling it an “alien” practice which has no place in Sweden (Ringmar, 2019, p. 107). An adhan is a public call to prayer by means of a loudspeaker. When a local imam in the town of Vaxsjö applied for permission from local authorities to do this weekly, the issue was picked up by media outlets and quickly became the subject of an intense public debate. Although the local officials in this small town eventually solved the issue by allowing mosques to pray as long as they did not disturb their neighbors, the issue certainly drew concern from a growing number of people who would end up voting for the Sweden Democrats that year. Another platform position held by the Sweden Democrats would be a ban on the Burqa and Niqab, as Sweden Democrat MPs have made attempts to get a Burqa ban voted on in the Riksdag (Jakku, 2018). These policy positions played into a larger theme of the Sweden Democrats platform which emphasized a non-negotiable requirement of cultural assimilation in order to gain citizenship and full membership in a homogenous Swedish nation (Åberg, 2019, p. 29).

Although these actions taken by the party of Sweden Democrats do not constitute physical violence against Muslim refugees, the country has not been immune from far-right attacks against Muslims. In the aftermath of the refugee crisis, there were waves of arson attacks against refugee shelters, with the antagonists oftentimes claiming that they are protecting their citizens from “criminal immigrants” (Koehler, 2016, p. 97). The country has also seen some fairly vile public displays of Islamophobia in public that have resulted in violent riots in the country. One such display occurred in August of 2020 as a far-right group burned a Quran in a neighborhood that had a large minority population in it and posted a video of it online. In response, violent protests broke out in Malmö, seeing rioters set fires and throw objects at police and rescue services, slightly injuring several police officers and leading to the detention of about 15 people (*Riots in Sweden after Quran Burning by Far-Right Activists*, 2020). In Sweden the fear of violence perpetrated against Swedes by immigrants is high, so high that the Swedish government produced its own facts on crime in their country to try and dispel some of the misinformation that can be

found on the internet. The Swedish government produces its own crime statistics through a government agency called the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). In a 2019 study on patterns of criminal activity in the country, the government agency found that Muslims are over-represented in crime statistics. However, this government agency has concluded criminal activity has a strong correlation with an individual's level of income, and not their race or ethnicity; therefore Muslims are disproportionately represented in crime statistics because Muslims are poorer than native Swedes on average (Regeringskansliet, 2017). Although there have been a few instances of Muslim terrorists in the country, these hate crimes are rare and the common misconception that Sweden has a major Muslim crime problem doesn't hold up when the data is presented.

The last thing that ought to be considered when analyzing how well the Muslim population has integrated into Swedish society is to understand how the Muslim communities' opinions on Swedish society and what sort of societal changes they have demanded. In other European countries it has been suggested that the Muslim population ought to be able to enforce Sharia law amongst themselves. A similar proposal was brought forth by a member of the Swedish Muslim community back in 2006. Prior to the parliamentary elections that year, the leader of the Swedish Muslim Association (Sveriges Muslimska Förbund), Mahmoud Aldebe, wrote an official letter to the political parties. The letter was published in the newspaper Dagens Nyheter on April 27, 2006. In the letter, Aldebe asked for legislation giving Muslims the right to take leave on religious festivals, to have a mosque in every city, to have particular days for men and women in the local swimming pools, and to have sectoral legislation in family legislation issues. This article written by Aldebe advocating for Sharia law received nearly universal criticism from other members of the Swedish Muslim Association and other Muslim leaders in the country, as many publicly rejected his claims and stated that Aldebe is not the voice for all Muslims in the country (Roald, 2013, p. 127). The opinions of Aldebe, calling for laws which discriminate by gender, were soundly rejected. As this example shows, Aldebe is an outlier in the Swedish Muslim community. He was also a fairly recent immigrant to the country who lacked an understanding of its boundaries, which played a large role in the writing of his article. Many Swedish Muslims who reside in the country long-term tend to embrace Swedish culture and tend to harbor Swedish identities and loyalties. There are various reasons for this, chief among them is the rejection of the populist and Islamophobic Sweden Democrats by the current government (Roald, 2013, p. 128).

DISCUSSION

The countries of Sweden and The Netherlands are two countries which have had to deal with integrating a large Muslim population into their societies in the 21st century. While both of these countries had similar backgrounds with respect to their history with the Islamic faith, the approaches of both of these countries looked quite different from one another. The Swedish government is a country best described as a defacto establishment model, because even though the Lutheran church of Sweden was no longer recognized as the official church of Sweden in 2000, its role in society did not change for the most part. The close relationship between the church and the state in Sweden allowed the

Swedish government to reach out to the Church of Sweden to assist with the integration of Muslims into Swedish society. The church subsequently used 80 % of the parishes in the country to help with sheltering the Muslim refugees. These local parishes would cooperate with local government officials to further help Muslim refugees establish themselves as being a part of Swedish society. On the other hand, the Netherlands was a vastly more secular country that did not have a religious body that acted as a strong actor in civil society. This may be part of the reason for the Dutch government not relying on any organizations in civil society at all, as the government has stripped integration funding from civil society actors. Instead, the Dutch government would prefer a much more streamlined approach that would be completely controlled by the government.

Despite the efforts of both governments to integrate the new Muslim populations into their respective countries, the arrival of so many foreign refugees into both countries certainly produced a backlash. Both countries would see the rise of far-right political movements over the past five years, and the catalyst for this is almost solely the refugee crisis that resulted from the Arab spring and the Syrian civil war. In the Netherlands the ironically named “party for freedom” led by Geert Wilders has found themselves among the new governing coalition and has been successful in promoting bans on face-coverings and restrictions on the ability of Muslims and Jews to perform ritual slaughter in the country. The country of Sweden has seen a similar backlash to Muslim integration, which led to the rise of the Sweden Democrat party. The Sweden Democrats are a party with origins that are related to the small neo-Nazi and fascist movements that still existed in the Nordic realm post World War II. This party has become the third largest party in Sweden and has pushed for restrictions on public Muslim prayer and face-coverings like the burqa in the past. In these regards the Sweden Democrats are a populist far-right movement that is very similar to the freedom party in the Netherlands.

CONCLUSION

Providing a metric to measure which integration method has seen more success in each country is a challenge. However, using the information gathered on the government responses to the influx of Muslim refugees and comparing it to electoral and legislative responses, we can get a rough idea of which country did a “better” job. The Dutch government in large part was not supported by a large civil society actor and chose to take a much more government-oriented approach to integrating its refugees and Muslim immigrants. The Dutch government has also successfully passed laws restricting the wearing of the burqa and many restrictions on the practice of ritual slaughter. Additionally, the Netherlands has seen radical Muslim movements such as Sharia4Holland which have advocated for Sharia law in the Netherlands and have been quite aggressive. On the other hand, Sweden has not seen its far-right party join the governing coalition. In addition, the Riksdag has so far rejected any attempts at a Burqa ban, and has thus far been able to avoid passing controversial legislation that some could accuse of restricting the rights of the Muslim minority to practice their religion. Lastly, the country of Sweden has not seen a radical Islamic movement develop, and a vast majority of the Muslim community does not support the Swedish government imposing Sharia law to any extent. With this

background information, if the “better” response is the one which has seen less infringement by the government on the religious freedoms of its minority religion and less radical activity, then the Swedish government has arguably done a better job.

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