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Personal experience or cultural tradition: The difference between Christian identity in the Netherlands and Denmark

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Abstract

Denmark and the Netherlands are both countries with a Christian heritage, where only a minority of the population are actively religious. Behind the similarities, there are also striking differences. While Danish Christians tend to be largely nominal members, Dutch Christians are more likely to believe in God, pray and attend church regularly. Previous research has highlighted insecurity as a source of national differences in religiosity. In this comparative study, we explore whether insecurity and threat to personal control partially contribute to one or both forms of religiosity, using data from a survey experiment and secondary international survey data. Our main findings are that Danish Christians identify more with Christianity as a cultural tradition, whereas the Dutch Christians identify more with Christianity as personal experience. Christians in both countries were more likely to identify as Christians based on their personal beliefs after a control threat manipulation. This finding suggests that belief in a higher power, rather than group tradition, is the aspect of religious identity that is triggered by insecurity and lack of control.

Keywords:

Compensatory Control, European Christianity, Cultural Religion, Survey Experiment

Introduction

Sources of Religiosity

People are religious for a variety of reasons. Two possible intra-individual psychological functions that religion may perform are to fulfil the need to belong to a group, and to provide compensatory control in situations of insecurity and unpredictability (Kay, Gaucher, McGregor and Nash, 2010). Denmark and The Netherlands are countries that are very similar in many respects, but whose religious profile appears different. As a simple generalization, one might characterize Danes as believing in belonging (Davie, 2007, p. 141) whereas the Dutch profess religious identity primarily when they actually have faith in a transcendent power. In the present study, we investigate whether these differences can be attributed to the need to compensate for lack of control, via either a social or personal route. Building on previous research which found a relationship between financial insecurity and religiosity (Fritsche & Jugert 2017; Immerzeel & van Tubergen, 2011; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Storm, 2017a; Storm, 2017b) we are particularly interested in the potential for threats to control over personal economy to alter religious identity and expression. In addition, we look at the role of religious upbringing in establishing a religious identity based on cultural tradition or personal beliefs.

Building on insights from social psychology, as well the sociology of religion, this study differentiates between religiosity as a relationship with God and as group identification on the basis of tradition, in order to determine which is the most important aspect of religious identity regarding compensatory control processes. By performing the same study in two different national contexts that have different types of Christian identification, we hope to increase the understanding of these differences. Specifically, we want to find out whether the cultural context could influence what aspects of group identity are increased by economic

threat. We use primary data from a survey experiment (SCND, 2018) as well as secondary data from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2014) to explore the national differences in Christian identification between the Netherlands and Denmark.

Christianity in Two Countries

Denmark is characterized by a strong connection between church and state, despite having a relatively secular population. 76 percent of the population were still members of the Danish National Church in 2017 (Statistics Denmark, 2017). However, less than 13 percent attend church once a month or more often (ESS, 2014). The National Church is important primarily as an institutional provider of rituals both for the nation state in the form of Royal or governmental ceremonies and private rites of passage, such as baptism, weddings and funerals. A similar arrangement can be found in the other Scandinavian countries and is often known as the "folk church" model (Warburg, 2005, p. 91).

The folk church can be seen as creating and upholding a set of common values in the population through use of symbols and rituals, in what has frequently been characterized as "Civil Religion" (Warburg, 2005, p.97). The term "cultural religion" is also used to describe this situation in which "religion affords a sense of personal identity and continuity with the past even after participation in ritual and belief have lapsed" (Demerath 2000, p. 127). As the Danish Church is primarily a provider of group identity rather than personal spirituality, many Danes call themselves Christians, remain church members, and even baptize their children, even if they do not believe in and never pray to God (Zuckerman 2009).

On the other hand, Christianity in the Netherlands is seen more in terms of personal beliefs and practices. According to the European Social Survey (2014), 17 percent of the Dutch

population is Roman-Catholic, 14 percent are Protestant, while 63 percent classify themselves as having no religion. The Netherlands' religious pluralism, combined with the secularity of the state may explain why many see religion as a private affair (Lechner, 1996).

However, the Netherlands was not always so secular. During the first half of the 20th century, it was arguably one of the most religious countries in Europe (van Rooden, 2003, p. 125). In a system known as "Pillarization", everything from schools, sport clubs and newspapers to trade unions and political parties were organized along denominational lines (Lechner, 1996, p. 258).

Since the 1960s, the churches have lost much of their influence over these institutions, and this change has been accompanied by a rapid decline in religious belief and practice in all Dutch Christian denominations. Unlike Denmark, where the church is often associated with a national identity that is still salient, in the Netherlands religion was part of a kind of identity that has sharply declined in importance, namely that of the denominational pillar. According to Lechner (1996, p. 259) the Dutch are abandoning packaged religious group-identities for personal spiritual and secular alternatives.

Religion may appeal as a social response to threat in part because it, much like nationality or language, often is perceived as an "inherited" cultural identity. In order for religion to constitute a salient group-membership, it must be nested in the social environment of the individual, as well as providing continuity with the past (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hervieu-Léger, 2000). It is possible that there are differences in the way Danish and Dutch Christianity is transmitted through childhood socialization, which may account for some of the religious differences between the two countries.

Identification with the Danish folk church requires minimal effort for young people, but comes with a number of benefits, ranging from monetary gifts for confirmation and other rites of passage (Kasselstrand, Zuckerman, Little, & Westbrook 2018, p. 90) to less tangible feelings of being part of the national majority. In the Netherlands, Christian affiliation implies having a personal experience or relationship with God, which would require more individual engagement. This difference has parallels to Allport and Ross' (1967) distinction between extrinsic (utilitarian) and intrinsic (personal) religion. However, this theory assumes an individual (even selfish) motive in the extrinsic religiosity, rather than conformity for the sake of unity and mutual collaboration. A more appropriate terminology may be the distinction between collective group-oriented religion, and personal experienced religion.

Based on the history of Christianity in each country, as well as current statistics on membership, affiliation and practice, we hypothesized that *H1) the Danish would identify more as collective Christians and the Dutch more as personal Christians.*

Religion as Compensatory Control

There is evidence from both lab experiments and large scale survey research that religiosity may be a response to unpredictability, insecurity, threat, and lack of control (Immerzeel & van Tubergen, 2011; Kay et al., 2010; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, and Laurin, 2008; McGregor, Haji, Nash, & Teper, 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012; Storm, 2017b). Specifically, studies have found associations between financial insecurity and religiosity, which may account for why richer countries are on average less religious than poorer ones (Immerzeel & van Tubergen, 2011; Storm 2017a),. However, there are at least two different mechanisms that could be responsible. Firstly, the relationship could be caused

by a surrender of control to a supernatural authority, and secondly it could be caused by an increased sense of group identification or belonging (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder, 1982; Stollberg, Fritsche, Barth & Jugert, 2016).

The first mechanism is consistent with Kay et al.'s (2010) understanding of religious and ideological beliefs as compensatory control that offers a relief from the anxiety associated with insecure and unmanageable situations. Kay et al. (2008; 2010) showed in a number of experiments that a lowered sense of personal control led to increased support for external systems of control, whether that was a controlling God, or a controlling government. The implication is that internal and external locus of control and authority to some extent are interchangeable. A belief in God could thus be one mechanism through which people fulfil their need to perceive the world as "structured, orderly, and non-random" (Laurin & Kay, 2017).

Secondly, the relationship between insecurity and religion could be caused by a stronger sense of group identity and belonging among people in insecure situations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Collective forms of religious identity, like family membership or nationality, may be a way of feeling belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which could be particularly relied upon in situations of uncertainty or threat (Fritsche et al., 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Storm, 2017b). People tend to support world views that are already part of their identity when faced with threat (Rutjens, van Harreveld et al., 2010), likely as a way to bolster their sense of group control and collective agency, rather than rely on external "compensatory" control (Stollberg et al. 2016). According to Social Identity theory (Hogg, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social categorization and group belonging reduce uncertainty. Fritsche et al. (2013) and Shepherd, Kay, Landau, and Keefer (2011), also found that threats to personal control were associated with ingroup bias. This interpretation is supported by

sociological research which finds that (relief from) insecurity is associated more with participation in communal worship, than private worship or personal belief (Ellison & George, 1994; Lim & Putnam, 2010; Storm, 2017a). This is also consistent with psychological research that shows perceived social support is related to lowered anxiety and increased sense of control (Lakey & Cassady, 1990).

While the precise mechanisms may not be clear, there are reasons to expect identification with the collective group to increase when personal control is threatened. From an evolutionary perspective, we would expect people confronted with uncertainty to be motivated to engage in social relationships and organizations that increase the opportunity for the individual to engage in reciprocity, cooperation and collective action (Hruschka & Henrich, 2013; Wilson, 2002). Personal control could be compensated by a belief or knowledge that there is a social support network in place that can compensate for personal mistakes or lack of control (Kay et al., 2010, p. 40).

According to Stollberg et al. (2016) previous studies of compensatory control do not distinguish between effects based on secondary control strategies (e.g. a controlling God) and effects based on extended primary control (e.g. identification with a religious group). For religion this is particularly complicated because a personal relationship with God is often what defines ones religious identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). It does not make it easier that the two processes, increased group identification and appeal to external authorities, are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Kay et al., 2010; Rothbaum et al., 1982; Stollberg et al., 2016). Religious compensatory control could be found simultaneously and for the same person, both within the power of the collective self (extended primary control) and external sources of support (God, personal relationships with religious group-members etc.). That said, given that the two processes could in principle operate separately, and given

the number of people who affiliate with a religious tradition without believing in God or vice versa (Storm 2009), we think it is worth attempting to analyze the relative importance of each mechanism.

We propose that *cultural context* may help us distinguish between different processes of control restoration. We know that religion is usually more than a belief in a controlling God, and in different cultural contexts, the social, traditional and ritual aspects of religion are emphasized more than the beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967; Hervieu-Léger, 2000). In addition, it is important to note that personal beliefs (in God; Kay et al., 2008), engaging in ritual behavior (Legare & Souza, 2014), and collective group membership (Fritsche et al., 2008) all have been shown to function as compensatory control mechanisms. This difference in salience of any of these aspects of religion may affect which aspects of collective identity are turned to in order to compensate for low personal control. According to Fritsche et al. (2013, p.21) "it should be the case that collective reactions to lacking control occur when group membership is already salient in a situation". If the most culturally normative form of religiosity is emphasized when personal control is threatened, and collective group identity is indeed an important part of religiosity, then this aspect should be emphasized. In a similar vein, when the normative form of religiosity primarily revolved around personal beliefs, then this aspect should be most emphasized.

Our second hypothesis was therefore that *H2) a threat to personal control would increase the divergence between Dutch and Danish Christian identity, where the Dutch would increase their "personal Christianity", and the Danes would increase their "collective Christianity"*.

Data and Methods

This study uses data from three sources: the European Social Survey (2014) and a survey experiment of Christians in the Netherlands and Denmark (SCND, 2018),

The descriptive analysis relies on nationally representative, and comparative survey data from the European Social Survey round 7 (2014), which had 1502 respondents (771 Christians) in Denmark and 1919 (594 Christians) in the Netherlands. The ESS asks about respondents' religious affiliation, self-rated religiosity and attendance, as well as social networks, political participation, trust and social attitudes. The data is available from www.europeansocialsurvey.org (ESS, 2014).

In addition to the secondary data, we used primary data from a survey experiment to test the effects of financial uncontrollability on belief. The survey experiment data was collected in October 2017 by polling company YouGov Denmark, which has access to large panels of respondents in each of the two countries. Around 1000 respondents in each country who identified as Christian, Protestant or Catholic when asked what religion, if any, they belong to were entered into the full questionnaire. In Denmark 82 percent of these identified as Protestant, six percent as Catholic, and eleven percent another Christian denomination. In the Netherlands 37 percent were Protestant, 52 percent Catholic, and twelve percent other Christian. YouGov collects information on gender, age, geographic region and education of their panel respondents, and the sample is representative, and weighted according to these characteristics. The questionnaire was designed in English and translated (and back translated) to Dutch and Danish respectively to ensure the similarity of meaning in the different languages. The data and documentation is available from the UK Data Archive (SCND, 2018).

The survey experiment was conducted as a 2x2x2 design, with Country, Prime and Frame being the distinguishing variables.

Prime: In each country participants were randomly assigned to two equally sized groups. Each group was primed with a brief statement about either the *Uncontrollability* of their financial future, or their *Controllability* of their financial future (see Appendix Table A1). In each condition, they were also asked to provide three reasons (in their own words) why they were either in control or not in control of their financial future (SCND 2018).

Frame: The participants were then given ten statements about their religiosity to answer on a scale from (0) "Do not agree at all" to (10) "Completely agree". In order to limit the number of questions per participant and increase the distinction between collective and individual identity, each participant was presented with one of two different frames (Shepherd et al., 2011):

The *collective identity* frame includes the following statements:

> "I consider myself a Christian because: I am Danish / Dutch, I celebrate Christmas, I was Baptized, My mother and/or father are Christian, I do not belong to any other religion, I go to Church, I think it is important to keep traditions, I like to feel like I belong to something larger than myself, I was brought up Christian, I think Christian values are important for society"

The *personal identity* frame includes the following statements:

> "I consider myself a Christian because I have a personal relationship with God, I believe in an afterlife, I am a spiritual person, I think my beliefs make me a better person, I pray or meditate, I think it is important to believe in something, God watches over me, I believe Jesus died for my sins, I am inspired by the Holy Bible, I have had a religious or spiritual experience, I can feel that God exists."

A factor analysis and reliability analysis was performed on the items after the data collection to make sure they each were internally correlated and represent separate dimensions from one another[i]. The effects of the different prime condition on Christian identity were analyzed in a

multivariate regression model controlling for the respondents' age, gender, education and employment. There are 2,014 cases in total, and no missing values in the regression models.

This experiment should give insight both into the national differences in religiosity, and more generally the effect of control manipulation on different aspects of religiosity (personal experience vs. group belonging). Assuming that the "financial uncontrollability prime" increases the salience of lack of control, and that this in turn increases religiosity, there are three main possible outcomes: 1) both populations become more personally religious, 2) both populations become more collectively religious, 3) the populations diverge further, such that the Danes become more collectively religious and the Dutch become more personally religious. The first outcome would indicate that supernatural belief is the most important aspect of religion for control compensation. The second would indicate that identification with a social group or category is the main benefit of religion for control compensation. Finally, the third outcome would indicate that the benefit of religion to feeling of control is culturally dependent, and varies depending on the particular religious tradition and national context.

Results

National Differences

The difference between Danish and Dutch Christians can be explored by looking at the self-reported religious behavior of Christians in the two countries, using data from the ESS (2014). Table 1 shows the frequency of religious service attendance outside of special occasions such as weddings and funerals, and prayer outside of religious services among

Christians in Denmark (N=771) and the Netherlands (N=594) respectively. Non-Christians are not included in this analysis.

[Table 1]

While the majority of Christians in both countries attend services less often than once a month, there is a considerable difference between them. Only 5% of the Danes who identify as Christian attend services once a week, compared to 24% of Dutch Christians ($\chi^2[1]$=104.45, p<0.001). The difference is even more striking when it comes to prayer outside of services – more than 40% of Dutch Christians say they pray every day compared to only 13% of Danish Christians($\chi^2[1]$=136.85, p<0.001).

Across treatments and regardless of their personal belief in God, the Dutch participants in the survey experiment (SCND 2018) identified as Christian because of personal religiosity and belief in God more than the Danish did ($M_{Netherlands}$=5.91, SD=2.75 vs $M_{Denmark}$=4.87, SD=2.61), whereas the Danish identified as Christians for reasons of family and national tradition more than the Dutch ($M_{Denmark}$=8.51, SD=1.83 vs. $M_{Netherlands}$=6.90, SD=2.07). These significant differences ($F_{Personal}$=37.83, p<0.001, $F_{Collective}$=169.98, p<0.001) confirm Hypothesis 1 that the Danish identify more as collective Christians and the Dutch more as personal Christians. Note that in both countries people agreed more with the collective identity statements than the personal belief ones, but the difference is much larger in Denmark. The only significant denominational difference (F=36.08, p<0.001) is the lower mean personal religiosity in the Netherlands among Catholics (M=4.97, SD=2.64), compared to Protestants (M=6.89, SD=2.53) and Other Christians (M=7.00, SD=2.42). We combine all Christian denominations for the rest of the analysis.

[Figure 1]

Because Danish Christian identity appears more based on family and national tradition, we explored whether it was also more "inherited", than Dutch Christian identity which appears to be more based on personal experience and individual choice.

[Figure 2]

As shown in Figure 2, there is a greater difference in the Danish sample between those with Christian upbringing and not on both measures indicating that Danish Christians are more influenced by their parents and family tradition when it comes to identification with Christianity. That said, the influence of upbringing only accounts for a small part of the national difference. Even among those who discovered Christianity without parental influence, the Danish are more likely to be collective Christians, and the Dutch more likely to be personal Christians.

Taken together, this evidence supports our assumption of a difference between the two countries in what people regard as being "Christian", as well as a potential difference in expected behavior among Christians. A majority of the Danish Christians identify with Christianity based on their family traditions, such as the celebration of Christmas and Easter, and nominal membership in the National Church. In the Netherlands such passive commitment-free adherence is less widespread, and to "qualify" as Christian there is some requirement to either believe or participate in ritual or both.

Compensatory Control

Financial hardship

In order to analyze whether there is a national difference in Christianity as compensatory control, it is first necessary to establish whether there is a general difference between the two countries in the relationship between insecurity and religiosity. Data from ESS 2014 allows us to examine this question with regard to financial insecurity measured by their experience of their household income. Figure 3 shows predicted probabilities of a respondent being Christian (vs non-religious) in each country by their experience of their household income controlling for age, sex and number of people in household. (For the logistic regression analysis, see Appendix Table A2).

In Denmark, those who live comfortably on their income are the most likely to be Christian (56%), and those who find it very difficult to get by are the least likely to say that they are Christian (39%). In contrast, there is no significant difference between these categories in the Dutch population.

[Figure 3]

We further conducted a linear regression analysis on religiosity measured on 11-point scale from 0) not at all religious to 10) very religious, with interaction effects between country and household income experience controlling for respondent's age, sex and number of people in household. To ensure that this is measuring Christian religiosity, people affiliated to non-Christian religions are excluded from the analysis. The predicted value from the regression models when holding all other variables at their mean, are shown in Figure 4 (For the full analysis, see Appendix Table A2).

[Figure 4]

In the Netherlands, those who find it difficult to get by are on average more religious (*Predictive margin*=4.12, *SE*=2.18) than those who live comfortably on their household income (*Predictive margin* =3.89, *SE*=0.92) (Figure 4)[ii]. This is similar to the general tendency in Europe for lower income to be associated with higher levels of religiosity (Storm 2017a). In Denmark, however, there is no significant relationship between household finances and Christian religiosity. In short, this analysis of the ESS, shows that religiosity is more associated with financial insecurity in the Netherlands than in Denmark.

Uncontrollability

A oneway ANOVA on the effect of the uncontrollability vs. control manipulation in the survey experiment, had one significant main effect. For the whole sample, the mean of Collective Christianity was lower in the uncontrollability (*M*=7.55, *SD*=2.18) compared to the control condition (*M*=7.86, *SD*=2.03, *F*=5.65, *p*=0.018). However, there was no significant effect on Personal Christianity (M_{control}= 5.36, *SD*= 2.75; $M_{\text{uncontrolability}}$=5.41, *SD*=2.70, *F*=0.08 *p*=0.776) and a two way ANOVA with interaction between country and prime was also not statistically significant.

The main analysis was done by a multivariate linear regression model, where we controlled for whether the respondent had a Christian upbringing, age, gender, three categories of education[iii] and full-time employment. These sociodemographic variables are known to be related to religiosity (Immerzeel & van Tubergen, 2011; Storm, 2017a; Storm & Voas, 2012), and may also influence how the respondent react to the suggestion that they are in control or lack control over their financial future.

Belief in God, as either a personal God or a spirit or life force, was included in model 2. The existence of non-theist Christians in the sample should allow us to discriminate between religious group identification and compensatory control through an external agent (Stollberg et al. 2016). If a feeling of compensatory control relies on a supernatural authority (Kay et al., 2010; Laurin & Kay, 2017), we would expect those with a prior belief in God to be more susceptible. On the other hand, those who have a clear set of religious beliefs and a defined personal relationship with God, may not be as easily swayed by a temporary feeling of personal control, or lack thereof. To see whether the effect of the control manipulation varied depending on the respondents' belief in God, we included an interaction term in model 3. The results are shown in Table 2

[Table 2]

In the first model, the only significant difference is in the Dutch sample who score 0.4 points lower on the "Collective Christian" identity when prompted to think about their lack of control compared to control (β= -.46, *SD*=.20, *p*=0.019), and this held whether or not controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and belief in God (see Table 2, model 1-2).[iv], Dutch Christians were less likely to identify as Christians based on collective traditions when their sense of personal control was challenged, but no less likely to identify based on their personal beliefs.

In model 3, we also found a significant interaction in the Danish sample between the manipulation and believing in God. In essence, the manipulation seems to only have had a significant effect on those Danish Christians who said they either did not believe in God or did not know what to think. Danish nonbelievers are both more likely to be personal Christians (β=.72, *SD*=.29, *p*=0.015) and less likely to be collective Christians (β=-.62, *SD*=.27, *p*=0.021) in the uncontrollability manipulation compared to the control

manipulation. In contrast, the control threat made no significant difference to either personal or collective Christianity among Danish believers. These results are shown as predicted scores in Figure 5.

[Figure 5]

The hypothesis (H2) that we would expect personal Christianity to increase for the Dutch, and collective Christianity to increase for the Danish as a result of threat to personal control is not supported. Instead, personal Christian identity increased relative to collective Christian identity for both nationalities when prompted to reflect on the lack of control over personal finances, but it only increased for the nonbelievers in Denmark.

Discussion

This comparative study of Christian identity in the Netherlands and Denmark has allowed us to compare two countries with similar levels, but different "types" of Christian religiosity.

Our findings show that adherents of Danish Christianity, on average, are more likely to ascribe their identity to national and family tradition, than to any personal beliefs or experiences. Conversely, Dutch Christians are more likely to identify as Christian because they hold particular beliefs, pray regularly or have had a spiritual experience. We also find that this difference is partly due to the influence of upbringing. There is a closer relationship between having a Christian upbringing and current Christian affiliation or practice in Denmark than we find in the Netherlands. The acceptability and social norm of a low-investment membership of the national Church, make it possible for Danes to continue family tradition in the form of a Christian "identity" without personal belief or active participation.

However, our hypothesis that the two forms of Christianity would diverge in response to control threat, is not supported. Instead we find that one form of Christianity appears to serve the purpose of control compensation better than the other. Both the overall result for the Dutch sample and the result for the nonbelieving Danes suggest that collective Christian identity is weakened as a result of control threat among some respondents. Although the questions about personal and collective Christianity were not asked of the same sample, it is possible that respondents, by appealing to supernatural authority to restore (secondary) control, discount the group identity and traditional elements of their Christian identity (extended primary control) (see for example Kay et al., 2010, p.44). However, it should also be emphasized that much of the literature describes these processes as working together rather than being mututally exclusive (Kay et al. 2010, p.44; Stollberg et al., 2016).

The results from this study are important for understanding whether extended primary control through religious group identification could be the main mechanism for compensatory control rather than appeal to a secondary "external" agent or structure (Stollberg et al., 2016). The results seem to indicate that it depends on the type of Christian identity. The majority of people in the Netherlands and Denmark with a collective Christian identity do not regard the Church as having sufficient agency to restore personal control (Stollberg et al., 2016). That would require more than simply being a part of a Christian "category" or tradition (Stollberg, Fritsche, & Bäcker, 2015), such as a more personal relational identification with Christian beliefs. Notably, even in the Danish context, where nominal church membership is widespread and associated with family upbringing and national identity, collective Christianity appear to lack control-restorative power. The ubiquitousness of Danish Folk Church Christianity and its public perception as moderate and inoffensive, may even reduce its appeal when some form of action is required.

Finally, the finding that the control threat made a difference to Danish nonbelievers but not Danish believers may indicate that the religious identity of atheist and agnostic Christians is more malleable by personal control threat than the Christian identity of believers. That we found this result only in Denmark may very well be due to "cultural Christianity" and church membership without belief or practice being very common. Those who hold this identity may be both more open to reduce their traditional belonging and increasing their personal beliefs and commitment when the situation calls for it. This result could have wider applications for Compensatory Control theory and methodology. It could suggest that either the control manipulation, or indeed the compensatory control mechanism, is more effective among people whose identities, values and beliefs are "fuzzy" (Storm, 2009), contradictory and unclear from the outset. Internal consistency of worldviews may be a variable that should be included in future studies of compensatory control.

There was no significant effect of the control threat manipulation on Danish believers' Christianity, either on a collective or personal level. However, even if they do not increase in response to control threat, existing beliefs in both external agency and extended primary control could play a role in attenuating uncontrollability and uncertainty. Danish believers' prior levels of engagement with both God and the group may have been sufficient to restore their sense of control without increasing their commitment to either. In contrast, the nonbelieving respondents are engaged in extended primary control by claiming Christian identity, but do not believe in the existence of the external controlling agent (God). For this group, secondary control may be the most important mechanism. Future research could shed light on this potential mechanism underlying the present results.

The results from the ESS data supports the finding from our survey experiment that threats to financial control made respondents less collectively religious, and more personally religious.

The more personal, active and spiritual character of Dutch Christianity (on average – see Table 1) seems more effective at buffering stress and restoring a sense of control compared to the more tradition-oriented Danish Christianity. This could account for why religiosity is more associated with financial insecurity in the Netherlands.

It is also possible that the slightly different welfare regimes in the two countries could account for some of the differences we found. While the safety net of welfare benefits does not give more *control* it could make an uncontrollable financial situation less threatening. Both The Netherlands and Denmark have comprehensive "social democratic" (Esping-Andersen, 1990) welfare regimes. However, while the welfare state in Denmark is closely associated with the church, the Netherlands universal provision of welfare is tempered by Catholic conservatism, which reduces the role of the state (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp.51-53; van Kersbergen, 1995, p.4). Put simply, the Dutch have somewhat less access to welfare so may feel more need for religion when struggling financially.

Limitations and further directions

This study has several limitations, which could be addressed in future studies of the relationship between personal control, religious identity and cultural context. Firstly, the financial control manipulation only measures one aspect of personal control. Friesen et al. (2014, p.598) found no significant difference between financial domain threat and a general control threat on attitudes to hierarchical organization. However, it is possible that a more general control prime, such as that used by Whitson and Galinsky (2008) would generate different results.

Secondly, the two countries studied here are both welfare states. It is possible that the effect of the financial control manipulation would be stronger in societies with genuine lack of

social security. Further studies should include countries where lack of control over personal finances would have more severe consequences.

Further, the finding that non-theist Christians in Denmark are more susceptible to the prime, was unexpected and deserves further investigation. We propose a follow up study of Danish respondents focusing on the difference between believers and nonbelievers in the use of religion as compensatory control to validate and further explain this finding. If indeed the beliefs of "cultural Christians" are generally more malleable to control manipulations, that suggests that some of them have latent beliefs which are only expressed under some circumstances.

Conclusion

Our analysis, although far from conclusive, appears to support Kay et al. (2008; 2010) and Laurin and Kay's (2017) contention that there is something about the belief and trust in a higher power, rather than mere identification with a group or tradition, which is appealing in situations of insecurity and lack of control. This could also partly account for the different distribution of Christianity among socio-economic groups in the two countries. While Dutch Christians tend to be more religious the more they struggle financially, Christian affiliation is most common among the financially comfortable in Denmark.

In sum Danish Christians identify primarily with the cultural tradition of Christianity, based in large part on their family upbringing, whereas the Dutch Christians identify more with Christianity through personal faith or spiritual experience. In spite of this difference, Christians in both countries base their identity less on collective tradition when their sense of personal control was challenged. Identification based on religious belief appears to increase with lack of personal control, but religious group identification per se does not.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are ESS 7, 2014 available from http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org, and SCND, 2018, available from UK Data Archive http://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/853138/ DOI:10.5255/UKDA-SN-853138.

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Notes

[i] Cronbach's alpha: Personal Christian (α=0.94), Collective Christian (α=0.85). Factor analysis yielded single factors for both dimensions, accounting for more than 85% of the variance in each country. Detailed results available on request.

[ii] In an alternative regression model using a more objective measure of household income (in deciles relative to the national average), the Dutch are also more religious the lower their income. Mean religiosity increases by .12 (SE=.05) per decile dropped in income.

[iii] High education is defined as university or other tertiary education beyond three years. Medium education is post-secondary vocational or university education up to three years. Low education is anything below that.

[iv] In alternative models, we controlled for whether the respondent identified as Catholic, Protestant or Other Christian, but the results were the same, and there was no significant interaction between denomination and the prime. This analysis was excluded for parsimony, but is available on request.

Table 1. Frequency of religious activity among Christians in Denmark and the Netherlands

	Service Attendance		**Prayer**	
	DK	NL	DK	NL
Never	20.9	21.9	45.1	17.2
Less often than once a month	60.3	37.0	25.2	17.2
At least once a month	13.6	16.8	7.3	7.6
Once a week	3.2	17.3	5.0	7.7
More than once a week	1.7	6.9	4.5	9.6
Every day	0.3	0.0	12.98	40.7
Total %	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*
Total N	*771*	*594*	*763*	*594*

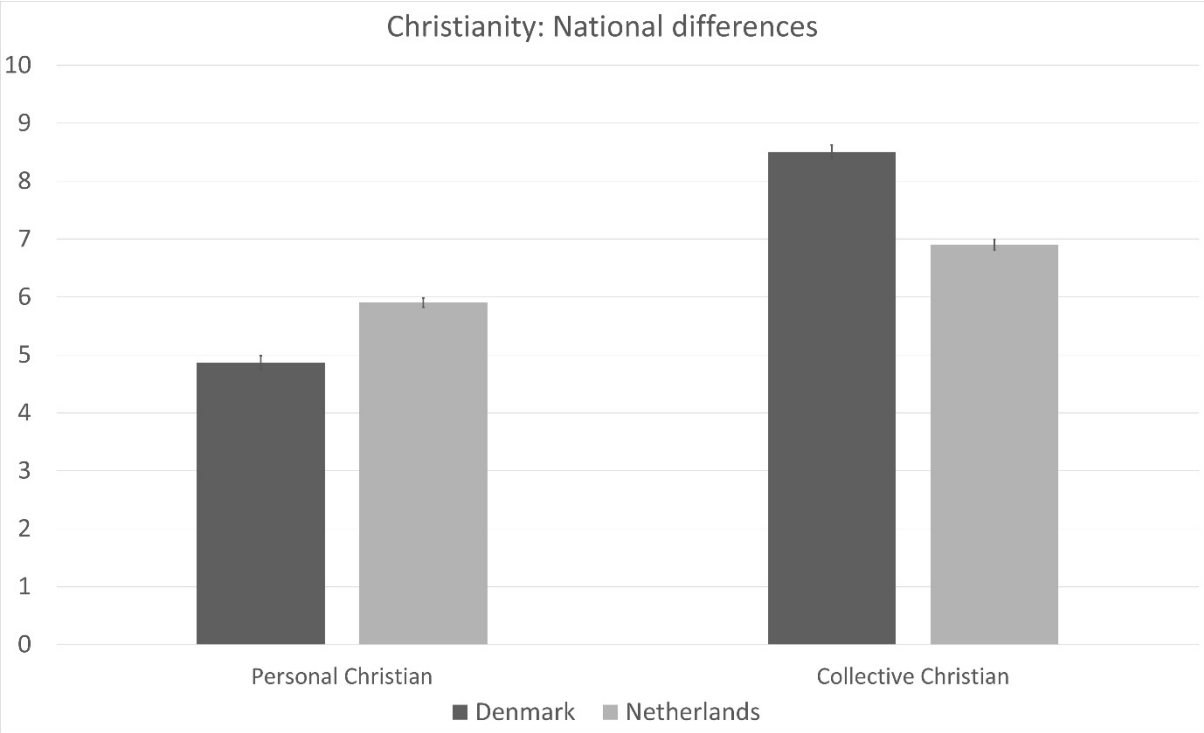
ESS 2014 (Only Christians included). χ^2 (Service attendance, df=5)=134.410 ($p<0.001$), χ^2 (Prayer, df=5)=208.793 ($p<0.001$)

Table 2: Linear regression models

Denmark	**Collective Christian (mean)**									**Personal Christian (mean)**								
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P
Lack of control	-0.153	0.148	0.299	-0.139	0.146	0.342	-0.622*	0.267	0.021	-0.202	0.235	0.389	-0.056	0.199	0.779	0.717*	0.293	0.015
Believer				0.579*	0.167	0.001	0.209	0.220	0.341				2.700*	0.201	0.000	3.305*	0.252	0.000
Lack#Believer							0.683*	0.321	0.034							-1.185*	0.394	0.003
Christian upbringing	1.408*	0.212	0.000	1.314*	0.214	0.000	1.284	0.212	0.000	0.776*	0.259	0.003	0.311	0.220	0.158	0.361	0.220	0.102
Male	-0.093	0.159	0.560	-0.031	0.157	0.842	-0.027	0.156	0.861	-0.094	0.244	0.702	-0.156	0.201	0.440	-0.149	0.201	0.457
Age	0.019*	0.005	0.000	0.018*	0.005	0.001	0.018*	0.005	0.000	-0.021*	0.008	0.012	-0.014*	0.007	0.044	-0.015*	0.007	0.038
Education (ref:Low)																		
Medium	-0.127	0.174	0.464	-0.095	0.173	0.583	-0.105	0.171	0.540	-0.222	0.299	0.458	-0.491*	0.239	0.040	-0.444*	0.238	0.063
High	-0.636*	0.265	0.017	-0.643*	0.257	0.013	-0.665*	0.257	0.010	0.544	0.431	0.208	-0.149	0.364	0.683	-0.141	0.361	0.697
Work full time	-0.158	0.172	0.360	-0.138	0.169	0.415	-0.120	0.167	0.474	-0.666*	0.240	0.006	-0.413*	0.206	0.046	-0.414*	0.204	0.043
Constant	6.971*	0.351	0.000	6.552*	0.342	0.000	6.806*	0.345	0.000	5.870*	0.507	0.000	4.255*	0.472	0.000	3.784*	0.472	0.000
N	504			504			504			502			502			502		
R squared	0.167			0.188			0.195			0.037			0.293			0.305		
Netherlands	**Collective Christian (mean)**									**Personal Christian (mean)**								
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P	Coeff	SE	P
Lack of control	-0.461*	0.196	0.019	-0.429*	0.196	0.029	-0.235	0.383	0.540	0.145	0.263	0.583	-0.032	0.216	0.880	-0.271	0.404	0.503
Believer				0.591*	0.229	0.010	0.727*	0.306	0.018				3.610*	0.241	0.000	3.461*	0.311	0.000
Lack#Believer							-0.251	0.452	0.579							0.324	0.484	0.503
Christian upbringing	1.059*	0.404	0.009	1.111*	0.414	0.008	1.134*	0.421	0.007	0.462	0.628	0.462	-0.016	0.440	0.971	-0.025	0.435	0.954
Male	-0.321	0.194	0.097	-0.292	0.193	0.130	-0.295	0.193	0.128	-0.612*	0.278	0.028	-0.522*	0.244	0.033	-0.519*	0.244	0.034
Age	0.003*	0.006	0.675	0.003	0.007	0.672	0.003	0.007	0.695	-0.013	0.009	0.143	-0.004	0.008	0.611	-0.004	0.008	0.627
Education (ref:Low)																		
Medium	0.055*	0.250	0.825	-0.043	0.256	0.867	-0.033	0.257	0.897	0.087	0.327	0.790	-0.048	0.267	0.858	-0.061	0.267	0.819
High	-0.166	0.281	0.555	-0.309	0.293	0.293	-0.300	0.296	0.312	0.550	0.352	0.119	0.212	0.308	0.491	0.185	0.311	0.551
Work full time	0.110	0.210	0.601	0.107	0.209	0.610	0.100	0.210	0.634	0.354	0.301	0.239	0.197	0.244	0.421	0.192	0.245	0.432
Constant	6.479*	0.613	0.000	5.989*	0.621	0.000	5.867*	0.671	0.000	6.628*	0.810	0.000	4.150*	0.658	0.000	4.263*	0.660	0.000
N	503			503			503			505			505			502		
R squared	0.040			0.053			0.054			0.031			0.356			0.357		

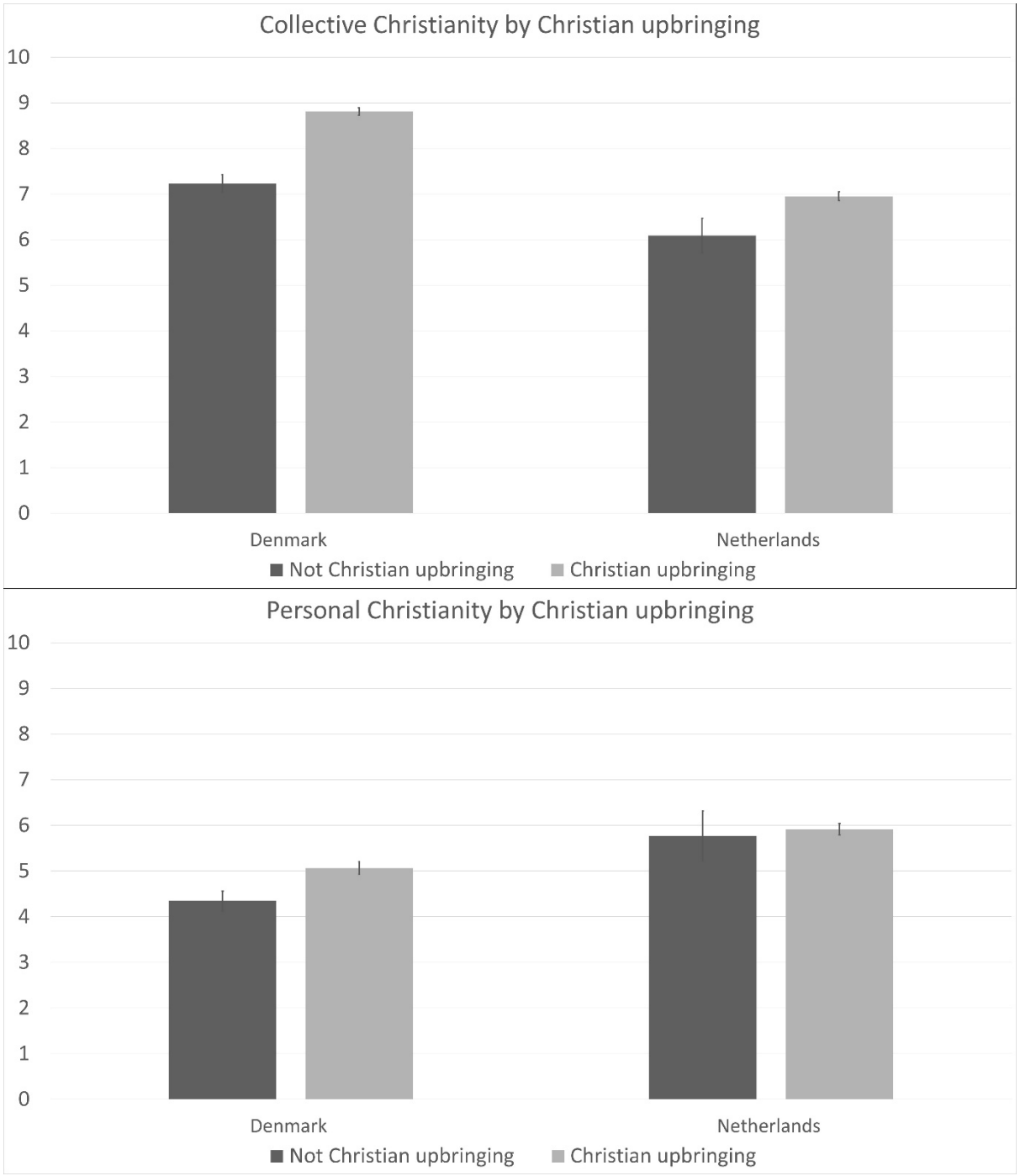
SCND 2018

Figure 1. Mean score on two Christian identity scales by country



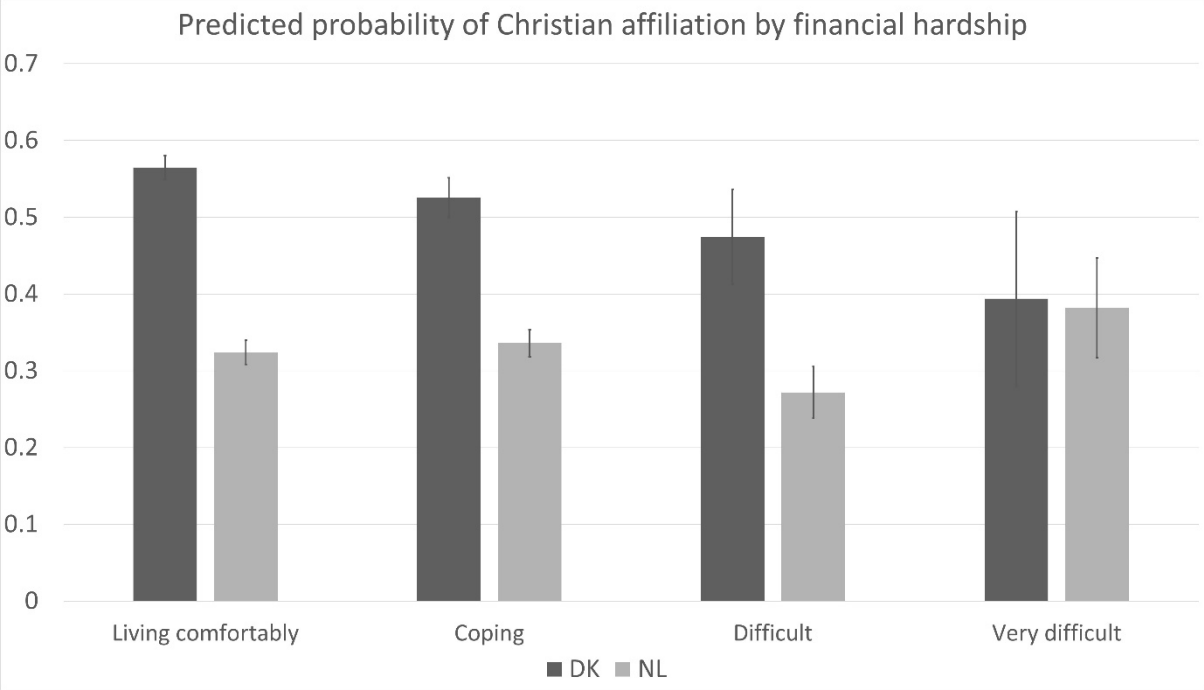
SCND 2018, N=2014 (Mean, with standard errors)

Figure 2. Mean score on two Christian identity scales by country and Christian upbringing



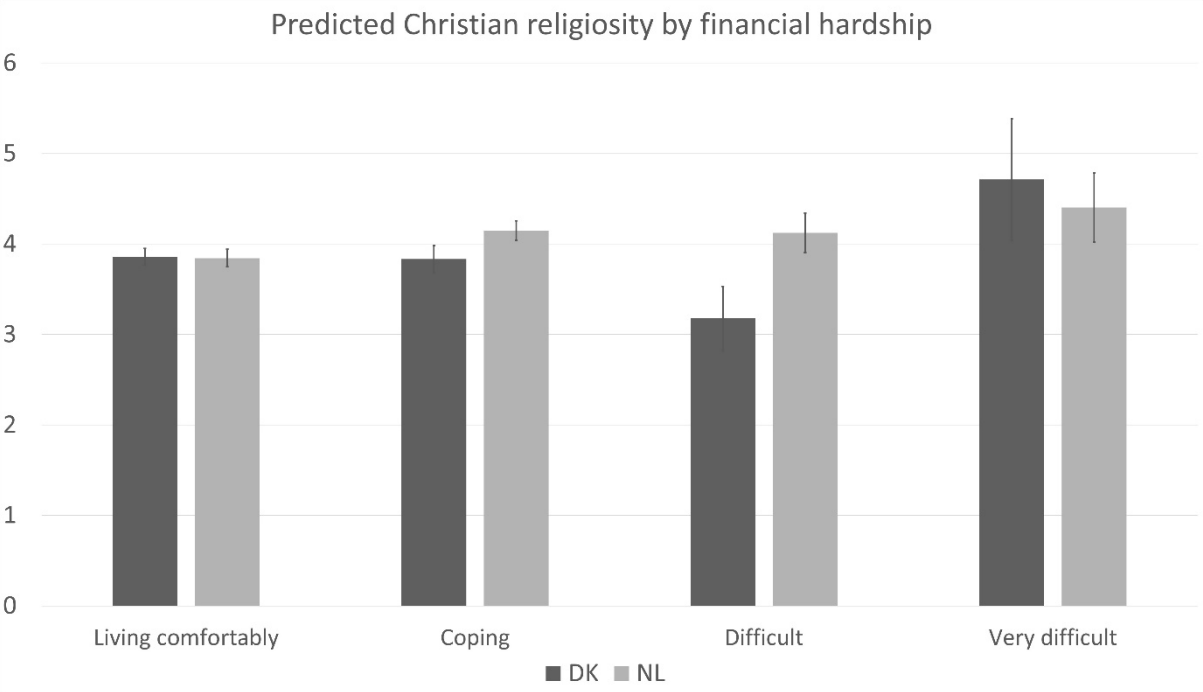
SCND 2018, N=2014 (Mean, with standard errors) *Collective Christian:* N=504: Difference DK: t=-8.12 p<0.001; Difference NL: t=-2.17 p= 0.030. *Personal Christian:* N=502: Difference DK: t= -2.79 p=0.006; Difference NL: t=-0.30 p= 0.768.

Figure 3. Christian affiliation by experience of household income



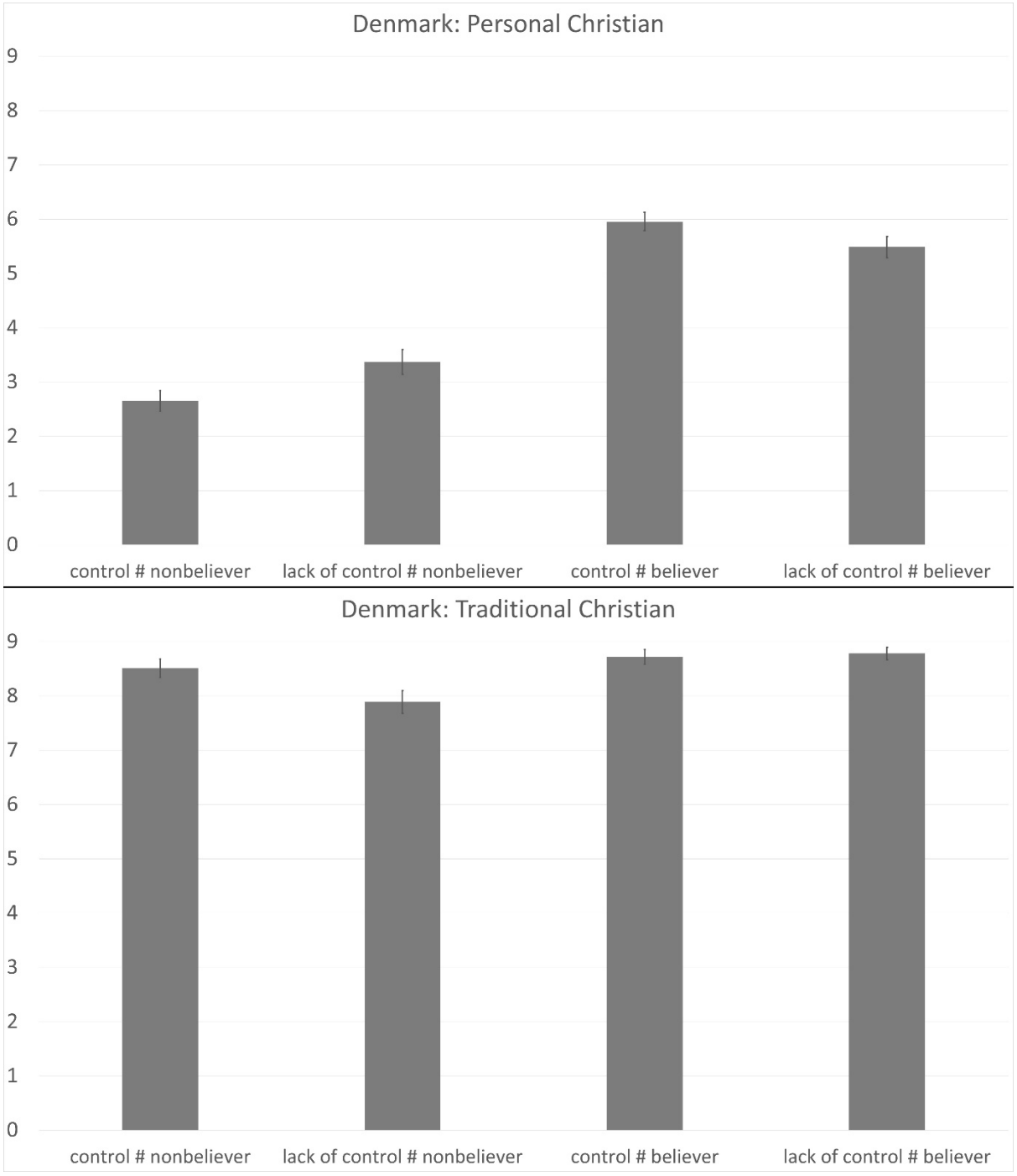
ESS 2014, N=3204 (Missing values=23). Predicted probability with standard errors. Controlling for respondent's age, sex and number of people in household. Non-Christian religious affiliation excluded.

Figure 4. Christian religiosity by experience of household income



ESS 2014. N=3196 (Missing values: 31). Predicted margins with standard errors. Controlling for respondent's age, sex and number of people in household. Non-Christian religious affiliation excluded.

Figure 5. Predicted scores for Traditional and Personal Christian identity in Denmark



SCND 2018 *Personal Christian:* N=502: Difference nonbelievers: P=0.015; Difference believers: P= 0.073. *Collective Christian:* N=504: Difference nonbelievers: P=0.021; Difference believers: P= 0.836. These are marginal effects when controlling for all variables in Table 3, Model 3.

Appendix

Table A1. Prime conditions

Uncontrollability Prime: "There are many factors that determine future outcomes in life, and it is often difficult to predict what will happen to you tomorrow, next week, or in a year from now. An example is ones finances, which may deteriorate as a result of for example dropping housing prices. This is why, for most people, unpredictability and lack of control are essential parts of their financial situation. You can never know for sure what your financial future will look like. *Please try to come up with 3 reasons why the fact that your financial future is uncontrollable and unpredictable. "*
Controllability Prime: "There are many factors that determine future outcomes in life, and to a large extent you are in control of your own life. An example is your finances, as you are able to make decisions that help to increase your income and reduce expenses. You are also in control of decisions that could help you to avoid unnecessary financial risks. You are in charge of your own financial future. *Please try to come up with 3 reasons why you have control over your own financial future.*

SCND 2018

Table A2. Regression models: Christian affiliation and degree of religiosity

	Logistic regression			**OLS regression**		
	Christian affiliation (0-1)			Degree of religiosity (0-10)		
	Coef.	SE	P	Coef.	SE	P
Age	0.017**	0.002	0.000	0.009**	0.002	0.000
Female	0.328**	0.075	0.000	0.846**	0.101	0.000
Household size	0.041	0.033	0.215	-0.038	0.042	0.367
Experience of HH income (Ref: Living comfortably)						
Coping	-0.163	0.125	0.192	-0.027	0.175	0.878
Difficult	-0.373	0.263	0.157	-0.682*	0.368	0.064
Very difficult	-0.712	0.495	0.150	0.853	0.679	0.209
Netherlands (ref: Denmark)				-0.016	0.134	0.903
Experience of HH Income*Netherlands	-1.026**	0.099	0.000			
Coping*NL	0.219	0.166	0.186	0.333	0.228	0.144
Difficult*NL	0.118	0.324	0.717	0.963*	0.439	0.028
Very difficult*NL	0.974*	0.575	0.090	-0.292	0.785	0.710
Constant	-0.875	0.184	0.000	3.064**	0.179	0.000
Log likelihood	-2064.1					
R sq				0.038		
N	3204			3196		

ESS 2014 **P<0.01, *P<0.1 N=3227. Missing values: 23 (affiliation), 31 (attendance). Members of Non-Christian religions excluded.

Coef.= Coefficient. The estimated size and direction of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable, when all other variables in the model are held constant.