



Catalyst of engagement or shadow of grievance?

The role of religion in immigrants' political participation in Sweden

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Abstract: Immigrants are less politically engaged in Western societies, and it is important to improve that situation. Religious engagement, as one form of civic engagement, is often suggested as having the potential to promote political participation for immigrants by providing civic skills and native networks. However, being both religious and an immigrant is also often associated with economic deprivation, which could discourage political participation. In this study, I revisited the question in the Swedish context, where the political participation levels are generally high, the immigrant community is ethnically and religiously diverse, but the political climate on the migration issue is increasingly polarized. Using the Swedish Level of Living Survey for the Foreign Born and Their Children (LNU-UFB), I show that, contrary to findings in the previous literature, religious engagement is negatively associated with political participation for immigrants, particularly for those who have experienced discrimination. Religious engagement leads to more engagement in other civil societies, but it does not facilitate political participation for immigrants by providing civic skills or native networks. Also, economic disadvantage does not explain why religious immigrants refrain from political participation. Thus, more policy efforts should be made in Sweden to improve the political integration of immigrant religious organizations.

Keywords: Immigrant political participation, religion of immigrants, civic engagement, social capital, Swedish politics



1. Introduction

The Swedish general election in 2022 was among the most dramatic in recent decades. On the one hand, the anti-immigrant radical right Sweden Democrats were surging to become the second-largest party and a crucial partner of the new right-wing government. A large part of the election campaigns were heated debates on issues of migration and integration, as well as the crime that has been strongly associated with the former two in the public discourse (Anderson and Kwai 2022). On the other hand, a new Muslim interest party, Nuance, had gained electoral success in several immigrant districts, with the agenda of representing minorities, while spreading misinformation and smearing messages about Swedish society in the same time.

The election turmoil reflected the heated and relatively new political discussion intersecting immigration, religion, and integration in contemporary Sweden. For a long time, Sweden has had a profile of social democracy, egalitarianism, and humanitarianism, and it has harbored a large number of immigrants and refugees from all over the globe. However, the integration of immigrants has not been smooth, with serious urban ethnic segregation in major cities and prevalent ethnic discrimination (Quillian et al. 2019; Thörn and Thörn 2017). In the meantime, religion has re-emerged in the domestic politics of Sweden, one of the world's most secular countries in which religion has played a limited role in politics (Kitschelt 2018; Willander 2019). However, the situation has been escalating, characterized by rising crime, far-right activists' Quran burning, and countering riots in immigrant concentrated areas (Reuters 2022).

While immigrants have become a center of political debate, it cannot be ignored that their voices have been limitedly represented. People with migrant backgrounds, especially those experiencing deprivation and discrimination, are often underrepresented in normal political participation (de Rooij 2012). The perpetuation of this situation will damage democracy. Having a substantial and growing social group alienated from democratic practices would be against Robert Dahl's (1998) seminal ideal for democracy that 'every adult subject to a government and its laws' should be included. It will further foster the rising radical anti-immigrant rhetoric in the West that non-Western immigrants, especially Muslims, are 'inclined to authoritarianism and violence' and 'incompatible' with liberal democracy (Kallis 2018). It is therefore of utmost importance for Western societies that immigrants can freely exercise their political rights to ensure political integration.

One factor that facilitates political participation in Western societies is religion. A substantial amount of international literature has shown that religious engagement facilitates immigrant

political participation in Western societies (Bevelander and Pendakur 2009; Fleischmann et al. 2016; Just et al. 2014; Moutselos 2020). The argument is drawn from the neo-Tocquevillian thesis that democratic values and practices can be promoted and maintained through engagement in civic organizations, including religious ones, via extended resources, skills, and networking (Almond and Verba 2015 [1965]; Putnam 2000). Moreover, as mainstream religions such as Christianity and Islam operate across ethnic groups, this pan-ethnic nature also helps to generate stronger political resources and networks by promoting shared identity and collaboration across ethnic communities and even national borders (Kastoryano and Schader 2014; Levitt 2008). However, debates continue as relevant findings have been inconclusive across contexts and regarding mechanisms (Eggert and Giugni 2011; Jacobs and Tillie 2011; Strömblad and Adman 2010; van der Meer and van Ingen 2009).

In the current study, I investigated the role of religious engagement in immigrant political participation in Sweden and explored the potential mechanism, including political resources, skills, networks, and socioeconomic deprivation. The study contributes to our knowledge about the role of religion in immigrant political participation in the Swedish context, which is not only being overlooked but also presents a novel and interesting case for such inquiry. Since 1976, foreign citizens in Sweden have been allowed to vote in general elections at regional levels. The country has a large ethnically and religiously diverse immigrant population, enabling the examination and comparison of different religious groups among immigrants. Sweden is also facing the challenges of serious ethnic segregation and integration problems, increasing crime and violence, a surging radical right party (Elgenius and Rydgren 2019), and politicization over immigrants and religion. Using the unique Swedish Level of Living Survey for the Foreign Born and Their Children (LNU–UFB) data, this study demonstrates that, surprisingly, in Sweden, religiously engaged immigrants are generally less politically active than their secular counterparts, which cannot be explained by economic deprivation. Also, religious engagement does not benefit immigrants' political participation by providing more potential networks and skills. The findings call for more active policy initiatives to improve the political engagement of immigrant religious communities in Sweden.

2. Theories, literature review, and hypotheses

Overview of immigrant political participation

There is abundant research on immigrant political participation. Similar to natives, socioeconomic disadvantages constitute the main barriers to political participation for

immigrants, as political participation requires resources, time, and skills (Smets and van Ham 2013; Verba et al. 1995). The immigrant–native political participation gap can be explained largely by immigrants’ socioeconomic disadvantages compared with natives (Adman and Strömblad 2000; Öhrvall 2006). Additionally, immigrants’ political participation is facilitated by their socialization and integration within their host countries. Citizenship, longer residence in the host country, and identification with the host country are associated with increased political participation (Bloemraad 2006; Kranendonk 2018; Messina 2006). Having a more politically active family or residential background provides more incentives for political participation (Andersson et al. 2022; Martin and Mellon 2020).

The neo-Tocquevillian thesis and critiques

A large stream of the literature on political participation emphasizes the contribution of civic engagement, with many studies focusing on immigrants (de Rooij 2012; Fennema and Tillie 1999; Togeby 2004). The neo-Tocquevillian civic engagement thesis stems from Alexander de Tocqueville’s (1999 [1835]) claim that civic organizations in early America bred democratic norms and values and laid the foundation for democracy. Later, scholars elaborated on the approach. For instance, Verba et al. (1995) proposed resource accessibility as an important mechanism linking civic engagement to political participation, which requires resources, not only money and time, but also political knowledge and skills. Lack of available resources becomes an obstacle to the disadvantaged to be politically active (de Rooij 2012; Smets and van Ham 2013). Engagement in civic organizations can either provide resources or lower the barrier to their acquisition and create convenience for political participation (de Rooij 2012; Verba et al. 1995). Another important argument is from the social capital perspective. Putnam (2000) suggested that people become interested in collective actions, build mutual trust, and learn to cooperate to achieve common goals through engagement in voluntary organizations, such as religious ones, which need not be political. Civic organizations also expand one’s social network, which may include politically interested kin and friends, and even make one visible to political recruiters, thus boosting political participation (Abrams et al. 2011; Myrberg 2011). From these arguments, I draw the following hypotheses:

H1: The relationship between religious engagement and immigrant political participation is positive in Sweden, which can be explained by skills for political participation.

H2: The relationship between religious engagement and immigrant political participation is positive in Sweden, which can be explained by social capital factors.

However, critics point out the gap between the civic engagement thesis and its empirical support. First, there may be differences depending on the type of organization. Putnam (2000) highlighted the distinction between two forms of social capital gained from civic engagement: ‘bonding’ vs. ‘bridging.’ Putnam stressed that bridging social capital, which results from the intermixing of people with different identities, is more conducive to establishing external networks and cooperative norms. Conversely, bonding social capital, formed by homogeneous group members, tends to reinforce members’ own identities and may lead to intolerance of and hostility toward out-groups and the establishment of inter-group barriers (Putnam 2000). Civic organizations with bridging social capital may therefore promote political mobilization, while those with bonding social capital may not. A second criticism of the civic engagement thesis concerns causality. While an association between civic engagement and political participation is often found, it is possible that politically enthusiastic people self-select into both types of activities. According to van der Meer and van Ingen (2009), although civic organization engagement strongly correlates with political participation in Europe, the difference between active and passive civic engagement is not substantial, implying the existence of self-selection. Thus, civic organizations may not be ‘schools of democracy’ that foster democratic values and practices but rather ‘pools of democracy’ that attract already politically minded people (van der Meer and van Ingen 2009).

Salience of religion

Religion has had a profound impact on political engagement in the West. The Christian political cleavage, profiled by Christian democratic or conservative parties and representing the Christian population by defending traditional values, is a major political division in European politics (Kitschelt 2018). Church engagement is therefore positively associated with political participation for natives (Verba et al. 1995). Immigrants, however, often have different religious backgrounds than the majority population of the host country. Even Christian immigrants may attend their own ethno-religious churches rather than mainstream churches, thus not necessarily absorbed by Christian democratic or conservative parties. Immigrants in Western societies tend to support left-leaning parties with more pro-migration profiles

(Dancygier and Saunders 2006; Strijbis 2014). Yet, friction may exist between those parties' socio-liberal ideologies and the relatively high levels of cultural conservatism among immigrants, especially Muslims (Dancygier 2017). As few political parties represent immigrants, such as the newly emerged, but still marginal Nuance in Sweden, there is rarely observed a political cleavage regarding the political participation of immigrants.

As Western societies have become increasingly secular, the salience of religion per se and its role in politics has declined (Kitschelt 2018; Voas and Doebler 2011). With religion's function of providing social integration being weakened by modern states, people who remain religious are likelier to be socially and economically deprived (Ruiter and van Tubergen 2009). The socioeconomic differential of religiosity is also relevant among immigrants, although they tend to retain higher levels of religiosity compared with natives in general (van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011). Thus, the relationship between religious engagement and political participation could be negative if the more religious people tend to be the more economically disadvantaged, who more often refrain from politics (Smets and van Ham 2013). This is further ambiguous if one considers the nature of religious engagement. If immigrants were only active in identity-based religious organizations (i.e., bonding type), they would probably remain enclosed within their own communities and be less active in external politics (Putnam 2000). Anti-immigrant right-wing politicians frequently argue that immigrants refuse to integrate into mainstream society, although empirical studies refute this argument (Fennema and Tillie 1999; Hirschman 2004). Here, I propose the following hypothesis:

H3: The relationship between religious engagement and immigrant political participation is negative in Sweden, which can be explained by economic deprivation.

It is particularly worth noting that in Europe, including Sweden, anti-immigrant discourse is becoming increasingly influential (Rydgren 2007). Immigrants face a more hostile climate and discrimination in labor markets (Connor and Koenig 2015; Strabac and Listhaug 2008). Discrimination can, in fact, bolster or depress the political participation of immigrants, depending on the context (Oskooii 2020). Although not able to directly test the mediating role of discrimination due to data restriction, this study will additionally provide descriptive results on how the experience of discrimination is related to immigrant political participation.

Previous findings

There are mixed empirical findings concerning the above hypotheses. Related research in the European context earlier tended to focus on the role of ethnicity rather than religious engagement in immigrant political participation. Fennema and Tillie (1999) showed that in Amsterdam, engagement in ethnic organizations was at the time associated with greater engagement in other organizations, including political organizations. Later studies in different contexts generally showed that engagement in ethnic organizations was positively associated with political participation (Berger et al. 2004; Jacobs and Tillie 2011). Challenging Putnam's (2000) bonding vs. bridging differentiation, Long (2016) found that both bonding and bridging types of social capital can benefit immigrant political participation, but the impacts are shown respectively regarding different forms of participation. In the Nordic context, Togeby (2004) found that, in Denmark, engagement in ethnic organizations strongly promotes immigrant political participation, although patterns diverge across ethnic groups. Earlier evidence from Sweden suggested that participation in non-ethnic organizations also has a more substantial impact on promoting immigrant political participation (Myrberg 2011; Strömblad and Adman 2010). The impact of civic engagement can be explained by the existence of elaborated political skills and extended political networks gained from engagement (Myrberg 2011). However, a recent Norwegian study showed a positive association between ethnic organization engagement and political participation among immigrant youths in Oslo (Ødegård and Fladmoe 2020).

Specifically regarding religion, Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) reported that religious attendance promotes political participation across ethnic and religious groups in Canada. Later studies in the U.S. context showed that the effect of religious attendance on the political participation of American Muslims varied greatly with differences in political culture and level of integration (Dana et al. 2011; Westfall 2019). Studies based on Australian and German Muslims showed that engagement in the religious community can strengthen interpersonal ties and promote civic and political participation (Peucker and Ceylan 2017). In the European context, Eggert and Giugni (2011) studied Muslim and Christian migrants in four European cities and found that religious attendance only had a positive impact on political participation for Christians in London. Analyzing Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands, Fleischmann et al. (2016) determined that mosque attendance mobilizes voting participation among Turkish but not Moroccan immigrants, with engagement in non-religious civic organizations as the main mediating mechanism. In a study of four other European countries, Moutselos (2020)

showed that mosque attendance increases voting participation by Muslims in the Netherlands, Germany, and the U.K., which is mediated by political knowledge and skills and engagement in other civic organizations. Finally, a cross-national study by Just et al. (2014) found that a Christian religious identity and a Muslim religious identity both reduce immigrants' political participation in Europe, but that religious attendance has a positive impact on both groups. These diverse findings suggest that lessons from other countries should not be directly applied to the situation of immigrants in Sweden, which I empirically examine in the following sections.

3. Context, materials and methods

The Swedish context

At present, more than 34% of the Swedish population are foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent (SCB 2021). Immigrants in Sweden are religiously and ethnically diverse. Immigration to Sweden has been characterized by labor migration from other Nordic countries, especially Finland, Yugoslavia, and Turkey, since the 1950s, as well as migration for reunification and asylum for those coming from Latin America, East Africa and the Middle East since the 1980s (Bevelander 2015). The sizable population of Middle Eastern Christians in Sweden adds nuance to this study, as most other related studies in Europe have focused solely on Muslims (Fleischmann et al. 2016; Moutselos 2020). In 1976, Sweden was among the first countries in Europe to grant non-citizens voting rights in general elections at municipal and country levels, but the electoral participation gap between natives and immigrants remains substantial (Bevelander 2015). Despite Sweden's reputation for liberal policies concerning migration and multiculturalism, major cities have problems with ethnic segregation (Thörn and Thörn 2017), and ethnic discrimination in the labor market is regarded as particularly severe within the Western context (Quillian et al. 2019). In addition, Sweden is extremely secular (Willander 2019), and religion plays a limited role in Swedish domestic politics, which until recently has long been strongly focused on economic rather than cultural issues (Kitschelt 2018). However, the electoral breakthrough of the radical right Sweden Democrats has increased antagonism toward immigrants, particularly targeting Muslims (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2018). The SD's anti-immigrant agenda has become more salient and was adopted by the mainstream parties during the 2022 general election (Anderson and Kwai 2022).

Data and measurements

This study utilized data from the LNU-UFB, conducted in 2010 (SOFI 2010). The LNU–UFB is the first large-scale survey of non-adopted immigrants in Sweden, covering topics such as life course history, socioeconomic status, and civil society participation. The survey also has a unique design, stratifying respondents into seven groups by country of origin: other Nordic countries; other Western developed countries (EU+); other European countries;¹ the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); Sub-Saharan Africa; and other Asia and Latin America, facilitating comparisons of groups of immigrants (Wadensjö 2013). Post-stratification weights calibrated according to immigrant group, socioeconomic status, residence place, etc. can be applied to improve representativeness (Carlsson 2010). The data can also be linked to information extracted from the Swedish register data (SCB 2016), thus providing more detailed socioeconomic and geographical information.

Dependent variable: In line with the literature, this study distinguished between electoral and non-electoral participation forms (de Rooij 2012; Just et al. 2014), using all four indicators of political participation in the survey. Two indicators captured electoral participation, asking respondents whether they *voted in the 2006 general election* and *voted in the 2010 general election* (at the national, county, or municipal level, all taking place at the same time). An indicator measuring voting in the European Parliament election was excluded, as within-EU immigrants may vote in their home countries instead of in Sweden. For non-electoral participation, the respondents were asked if they had participated in *demonstrations* and political *meetings* in the past year. All of the variables are binary. Table 1 shows the levels of political participation across immigrant groups in the data, compared with the levels for the general population.² MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin American immigrants have relatively high levels of political participation—even higher than the general population level for non-electoral participation. Immigrants, however, have lower electoral turnouts than the general population. The immigrant turnouts across the groups here are 10%–15% higher than those observed in previous Swedish studies based on registry-based surveys (Bevelander 2015). This may reflect the fact that the surveyed respondents had been in Sweden for at least five years and were therefore better integrated and relatively more active in politics.

Table 1. Political participation across immigrant groups.

	Voted 2010	Voted 2006	Demonstration	Political Meeting
Nordic	80.2%	79.0%	8.0%	4.6%
EU+	82.3%	78.6%	14.4%	9.2%
Other Europe	81.9%	82.2%	9.7%	5.8%
MENA	86.3%	85.2%	30.8%	7.6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	84.0%	83.6%	23.5%	10.9%
Other Asia	77.6%	73.4%	8.1%	5.0%
Latin America	88.4%	84.0%	29.1%	9.5%
General population	91.4%	91.9%	10.4%	6.4%

I create a *religious engagement* variable by combining religious membership and religious attendance. Respondents were initially classified using a four-level scale³ on religious engagement into *core members* (religious believer attending service at least once a month), *marginal members* (believer with less attendance, or non-believer with sense of belonging in religion), and *non-religious* (without beliefs or sense of belonging). Further, I distinguished between religious *denominations*, including Christian, Muslim, and other religious groups. I also combined the two variables for more detailed analysis, with each denomination divided into core and marginal members (not for other religions since the sample size was too small).

Mechanism factors: For variables for testing mechanisms, *social capital* was captured from two dimensions with four indicators. First, *native ties* were measured by whether the respondent had a Swedish-born spouse or not (people with no spouse as another category), and if their closest friend lived in Sweden. Having native close ties would increase the chances of political participation in the host country (Boyd and Couture-Carron 2015). Second, *civic engagement* was measured by the respondent's engagement in non-religious organizations, namely trade unions and other organizations. For trade unions, the respondents were either core members (having attended meetings in the last year or holding a position), marginal members (inactive members), or non-members. For other civic organizations, the respondents were divided into core members (attending meetings at least once a month), marginal members (attending meetings less frequently), and non-members. The survey did not ask directly about the respondents' *political skills and knowledge*. Therefore, I took *Swedish language proficiency* (general comprehension and reading Swedish newspapers) and *Swedish citizenship* as proxies. Immigrants who had better language ability and citizenship in the host country were expected to have better knowledge of political institutions and democratic rights, and thus

would be more active in political participation (Bevelander 2015; de Rooij 2012). *Economic deprivation* was measured by income quantiles, with no income as a separate category.

I controlled factors typically related to political participation, including age, gender, migration generation, urban/rural, education (7-level scale), class status, number of children, and length of stay in Sweden (Bevelander 2015; Smets and van Ham 2013; Spies et al. 2020). Experience of discrimination, measured as whether a respondent had experienced bullying or harassment based on their religion, was also controlled for, although it could not be tested as a mechanism, since it was only asked of respondents who had religious membership. The analysis also included controls at the municipal level: the share of foreign-background residents and the average share of votes for right-wing parties⁴ which typically propounded more anti-immigrant views in the 2006 and 2010 general elections. Respondents who were not eligible to vote during elections and those who only answered the short-form, basic question survey were excluded. Weighted descriptive statistics are presented in Tables A1 and A2 in the appendices. After removing cases with missing information, the sample contained 2,081 individuals.

Analytical strategy

To test the hypotheses regarding both the main effects and mediation effects, I deployed a two-step analytical approach. I used logistic regression because the dependent variables were binary. First, the main effects of religious engagement, religious denomination, and their combination on four indicators of political participation were tested in separate models. Second, I added the proposed mechanism factors individually into the engagement model and gauged the mediation effect by observing the coefficient changes of the main effects. Since non-linear models typically have a rescaling problem in such mediation analysis that will bias the result, I also deployed the Karlson–Holm–Breen (KHB) method to counter this (Karlson et al. 2012). I apply post-stratification weights to the analysis (Carlsson 2010).

4. Results

Main models

First, models without mechanism factors were estimated for the effects of religious attendance and denomination (see Table 2). Religious attendance was negatively associated with all four indicators of political participation but only statistically significant for demonstration. When examining the results by denomination, I found that Christians participated least often in

demonstrations compared with the non-religious, while those who belonged to religions other than Christianity and Islam reported lower turnouts in both the 2006 and 2010 elections compared with the non-religious.

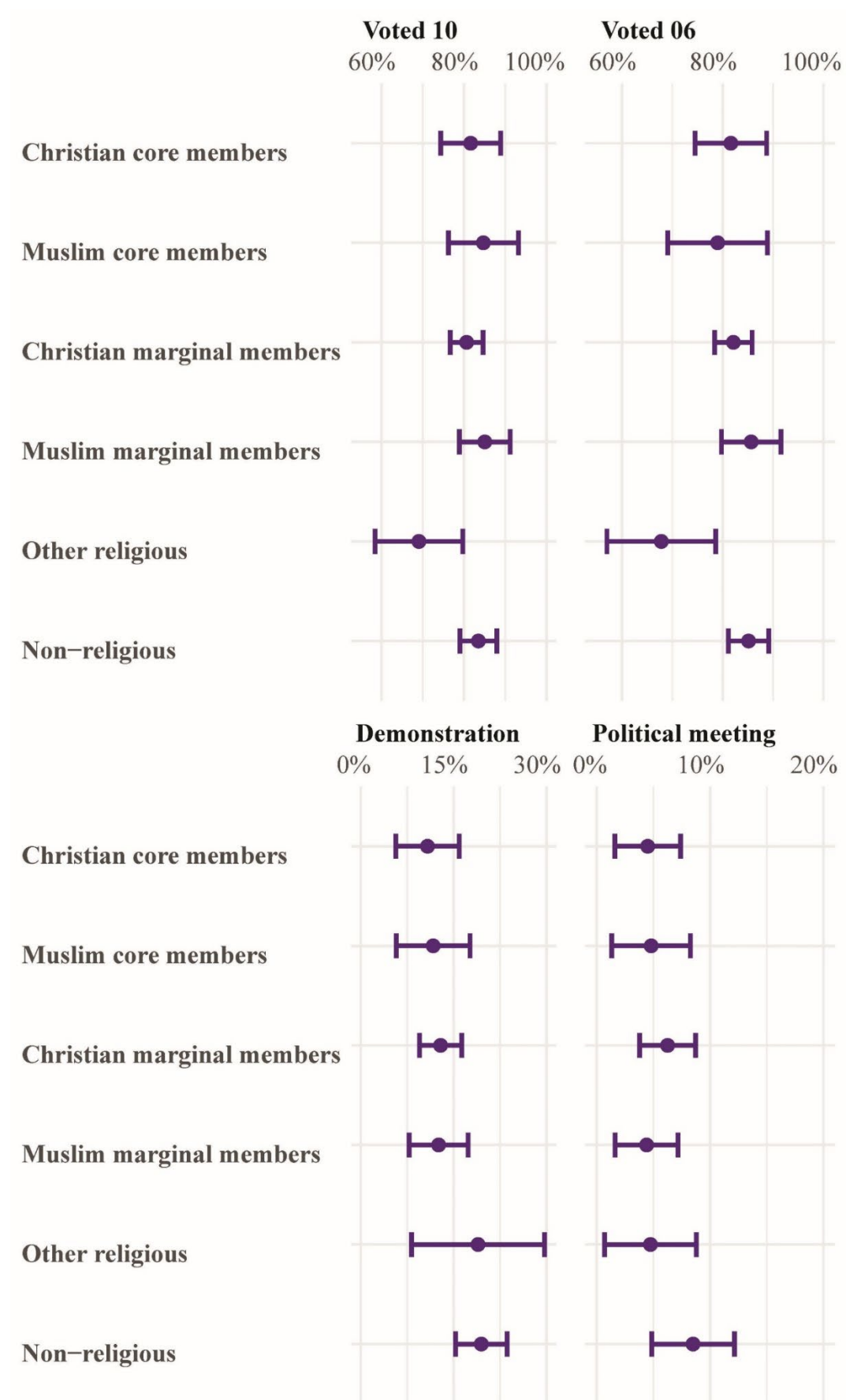
The combination between attendance and denomination was further tested (Figure 1). Among Christians, both marginal and core members participated less in demonstrations than the non-religious. No significant effects concerning demonstrations or other forms of participation were found for Muslims. Immigrants who belonged to other religions were less likely to have voted in elections than other groups, with very large confidence intervals due to the small size of this group. In sum, religion was negatively associated with immigrant's political participation in both electoral and non-electoral forms, with greater significance found for the latter. There were few differences among denominations.

Table 2. Effects of religious engagement and denomination (N = 2081).

	Vote 10	Vote 06	Demonstration	Political meeting
Model 1: Religious engagement				
Non-religious		(Reference)		
Marginal members	-0.188 (0.209)	-0.246 (0.204)	-0.532** (0.188)	-0.428 (0.287)
Core members	-0.213 (0.264)	-0.486 (0.254)	-0.706* (0.277)	-0.690 (0.379)
Model 2: Religious denomination				
Non-religious		(Reference)		
Christian	-0.198 (0.215)	-0.241 (0.210)	-0.616** (0.199)	-0.409 (0.291)
Muslim	0.110 (0.296)	-0.115 (0.284)	-0.606* (0.286)	-0.662 (0.427)
Other religions	-0.902** (0.325)	-1.083*** (0.325)	-0.036 (0.439)	-0.633 (0.519)
Model 3: Combining engagement and denomination				
Non-religious		(Reference)		
Other religion	-0.899** (0.325)	-1.093*** (0.324)	-0.040 (0.441)	-0.646 (0.520)
Christian marginal	-0.212 (0.224)	-0.238 (0.218)	-0.562** (0.208)	-0.344 (0.303)
Muslim marginal	0.126 (0.332)	0.045 (0.325)	-0.594 (0.312)	-0.725 (0.469)
Christian core	-0.141 (0.320)	-0.274 (0.310)	-0.789* (0.346)	-0.702 (0.445)
Muslim core	0.097 (0.409)	-0.454 (0.381)	-0.687 (0.392)	-0.631 (0.511)

***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses; results for control variables similar to Table A3 and omitted here.

Figure 1. Religious engagement, denomination and political participation.



Next, I introduced all mechanism and control factors into the model, testing engagement-denomination categories (Table A3). Results for control and mechanism variables partially corresponded to theoretical expectations and previous literature on immigrant political participation in Sweden (Adman and Strömblad 2000; Bevelander 2015; Bevelander and Hutcheson 2021; Öhrvall 2006; Strömblad and Adman 2010), and some findings were noteworthy. Immigrants from MENA, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa were generally more politically active than other groups. Municipalities with a higher share of foreign background had lower electoral turnouts in both the 2006 and 2010 elections. The length of stay in Sweden surprisingly only had a significant positive effect of participation in demonstration, which may have been due to the fact that citizenship and Swedish language abilities were controlled for in the models. Immigrants who had undergone discrimination based on religion were less likely to vote in the 2010 general election.

Regarding mechanism factors, citizenship had strong significant effects on voting participation, but Swedish language ability did not have significant effects. Engagement in civic organizations and trade unions predicted higher levels of electoral and non-electoral participation. However, there is little incremental effect of active engagement, consistent with the ‘pools of democracy’ argument (van der Meer and van Ingen 2009); that is, more frequent civic organization engagement did not necessarily promote political participation, and the observed effects may have been due to self-selection. Higher income levels were associated with more active electoral participation. Having a close friend living in Sweden significantly related to higher electoral turnouts, but not to having Swedish-born partners.

Mediation analysis

In the next stage, I entered variables for mechanism into the models and tested how that would change the main effects. For simplicity, only mediation on religious engagement was examined (Table 3; Figure 2-5). There were no statistically significant mediating effects of Swedish language ability, citizenship, native ties, union engagement, and income. Therefore, the results offered no support for *H1*, *H2*, and *H3*. Although social capital, knowledge, and skill proxy, as well as socioeconomic indicators, in many cases, did reduce the main effect of religious engagement when they are controlled for, the reductions nevertheless did not pass the statistical significance level. Interestingly, civic

organization engagement raised the negative main effect of core membership on two electoral outcomes (Diff = 0.036 for 2010; Diff = 0.042 for 2006) and demonstration (Diff = 0.046), thus presenting themselves as ‘suppressors’ (or negative confounders; see Mehio-Sibai et al., 2005). Active religious engagement was actually positively associated with active civic engagement, which was positively related to political participation. However, the association between religious engagement and political participation was negative. Such findings indicate that civic engagement is not enough to offset the negative impact of religious engagement.

Robustness checks

Two analyses were conducted for robustness of the findings. First, tests based on small categories could undermine statistical power. A robustness check of the effects of religious engagement was conducted, treating the original four-level attendance scale as continuous. Second, the two electoral participation indicators were combined into one index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.73).⁵ The results were generally consistent for both tests (Tables A4-A5).

Table 3. Mediation analysis for religious engagement.

	Swedish	Swedish news	Citizenship	Civic organization	Union	Income	Swedish partner	Swedish friend
<hr/>								
Vote 10								
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Marginal member								
Reduced	-0.192	-0.189	-0.181	-0.201	-0.232	-0.241	-0.191	-0.188
	(0.209)	(0.209)	(0.212)	(0.209)	(0.214)	(0.212)	(0.210)	(0.209)
Full	-0.194	-0.183	-0.137	-0.277	-0.234	-0.244	-0.209	-0.196
	(0.209)	(0.209)	(0.212)	(0.210)	(0.214)	(0.212)	(0.212)	(0.209)
Diff	0.001	-0.006	-0.044	0.076	0.002	0.004	0.018	0.008
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.058)	(0.048)	(0.063)	(0.043)	(0.025)	(0.024)
<hr/>								
Core member								
Reduced	-0.211	-0.212	-0.190	-0.219	-0.256	-0.277	-0.216	-0.200
	(0.266)	(0.265)	(0.269)	(0.267)	(0.274)	(0.268)	(0.266)	(0.268)
Full	-0.194	-0.178	-0.143	-0.333	-0.194	-0.215	-0.207	-0.167
	(0.268)	(0.267)	(0.269)	(0.269)	(0.273)	(0.268)	(0.267)	(0.269)
Diff	-0.017	-0.033	-0.047	0.115*	-0.062	-0.063	-0.010	-0.033
	(0.019)	(0.033)	(0.058)	(0.055)	(0.065)	(0.047)	(0.022)	(0.027)
<hr/>								
Vote 06								
<hr/>								
Marginal member								
Reduced	-0.250	-0.244	-0.203	-0.317	-0.280	-0.296	-0.250	-0.256

	(0.204)	(0.204)	(0.210)	(0.203)	(0.208)	(0.210)	(0.207)	(0.202)
Full	0.001	-0.003	-0.047	0.075	0.004	0.003	0.005	0.009
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.062)	(0.044)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.020)	(0.025)
Diff	-0.250	-0.244	-0.203	-0.317	-0.280	-0.296	-0.250	-0.256
	(0.204)	(0.204)	(0.210)	(0.203)	(0.208)	(0.210)	(0.207)	(0.202)
<hr/>								
Core member								
Reduced	-0.487	-0.489	-0.486	-0.480	-0.518*	-0.548*	-0.485	-0.478
	(0.254)	(0.254)	(0.259)	(0.259)	(0.260)	(0.260)	(0.254)	(0.255)
Full	-0.476	-0.469	-0.436	-0.610*	-0.468	-0.504	-0.475	-0.444
	(0.256)	(0.255)	(0.259)	(0.258)	(0.258)	(0.260)	(0.255)	(0.256)
Diff	-0.010	-0.020	-0.050	0.130*	-0.050	-0.044	-0.010	-0.035
	(0.017)	(0.032)	(0.062)	(0.052)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.015)	(0.028)
<hr/>								
Demonstration								
Marginal member								
Reduced	-0.534**	-0.532**	-0.530**	-0.519**	-0.534**	-0.566**	-0.537**	-0.532**
	(0.188)	(0.188)	(0.189)	(0.195)	(0.189)	(0.188)	(0.189)	(0.188)
Full	-0.532**	-0.538**	-0.533**	-0.596**	-0.535**	-0.569**	-0.528**	-0.534**
	(0.188)	(0.188)	(0.188)	(0.196)	(0.189)	(0.188)	(0.191)	(0.189)
Diff	-0.001	0.006	0.003	0.077	0.001	0.003	-0.009	0.001
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.045)	(0.033)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.005)
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Core member								
Reduced	-0.710*	-0.715*	-0.705*	-0.704*	-0.674*	-0.736**	-0.710*	-0.706*
	(0.277)	(0.278)	(0.277)	(0.285)	(0.276)	(0.277)	(0.277)	(0.276)
Full	-0.727**	-0.751**	-0.709*	-0.840**	-0.642*	-0.734**	-0.719**	-0.700*
	(0.279)	(0.283)	(0.276)	(0.289)	(0.276)	(0.278)	(0.278)	(0.276)
Diff	0.018	0.037	0.003	0.136**	-0.032	-0.003	0.009	-0.006
	(0.019)	(0.033)	(0.009)	(0.052)	(0.036)	(0.034)	(0.017)	(0.015)
<hr/>								
Political meeting								
<hr/>								
Marginal member								
Reduced	-0.427	-0.426	-0.428	-0.430	-0.435	-0.426	-0.426	-0.429
	(0.288)	(0.285)	(0.288)	(0.292)	(0.293)	(0.290)	(0.287)	(0.287)
Full	-0.428	-0.411	-0.428	-0.470	-0.427	-0.428	-0.429	-0.432
	(0.288)	(0.283)	(0.286)	(0.290)	(0.294)	(0.289)	(0.286)	(0.288)
Diff	0.001	-0.014	0.000	0.041	-0.008	0.003	0.003	0.003
	(0.007)	(0.030)	(0.010)	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.010)
<hr/>								
Core member								
Reduced	-0.692	-0.715	-0.690	-0.720	-0.692	-0.695	-0.687	-0.692
	(0.377)	(0.373)	(0.378)	(0.381)	(0.379)	(0.379)	(0.379)	(0.378)
Full	-0.681	-0.632	-0.691	-0.797*	-0.701	-0.675	-0.683	-0.680
	(0.385)	(0.383)	(0.377)	(0.384)	(0.377)	(0.385)	(0.379)	(0.379)

Diff	-0.011	-0.083	0.000	0.077	0.009	-0.019	-0.004	-0.012
	(0.022)	(0.070)	(0.010)	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.030)	(0.015)	(0.022)

***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; *standard errors in parentheses*

Figure 2. Mediation on voting 2010.

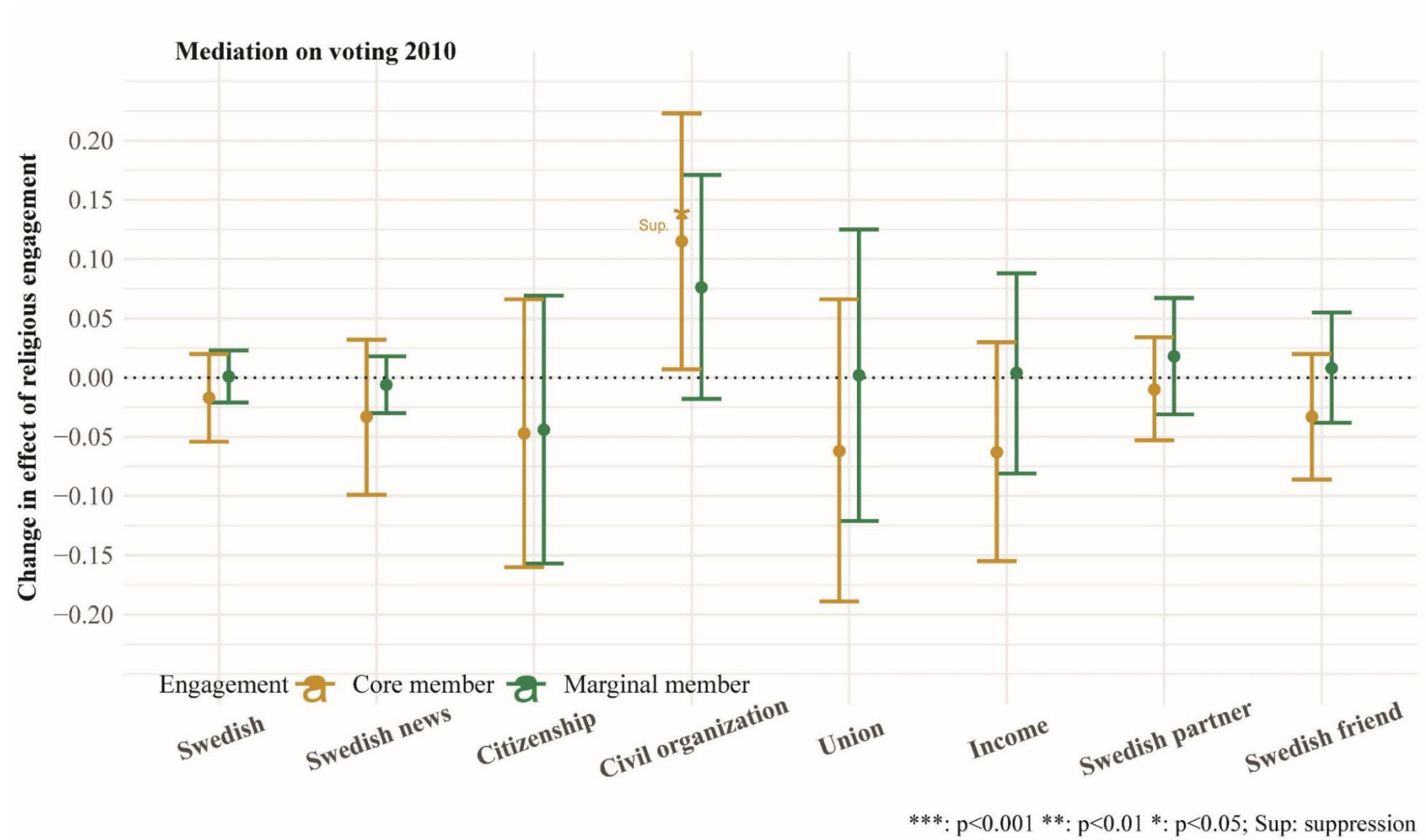
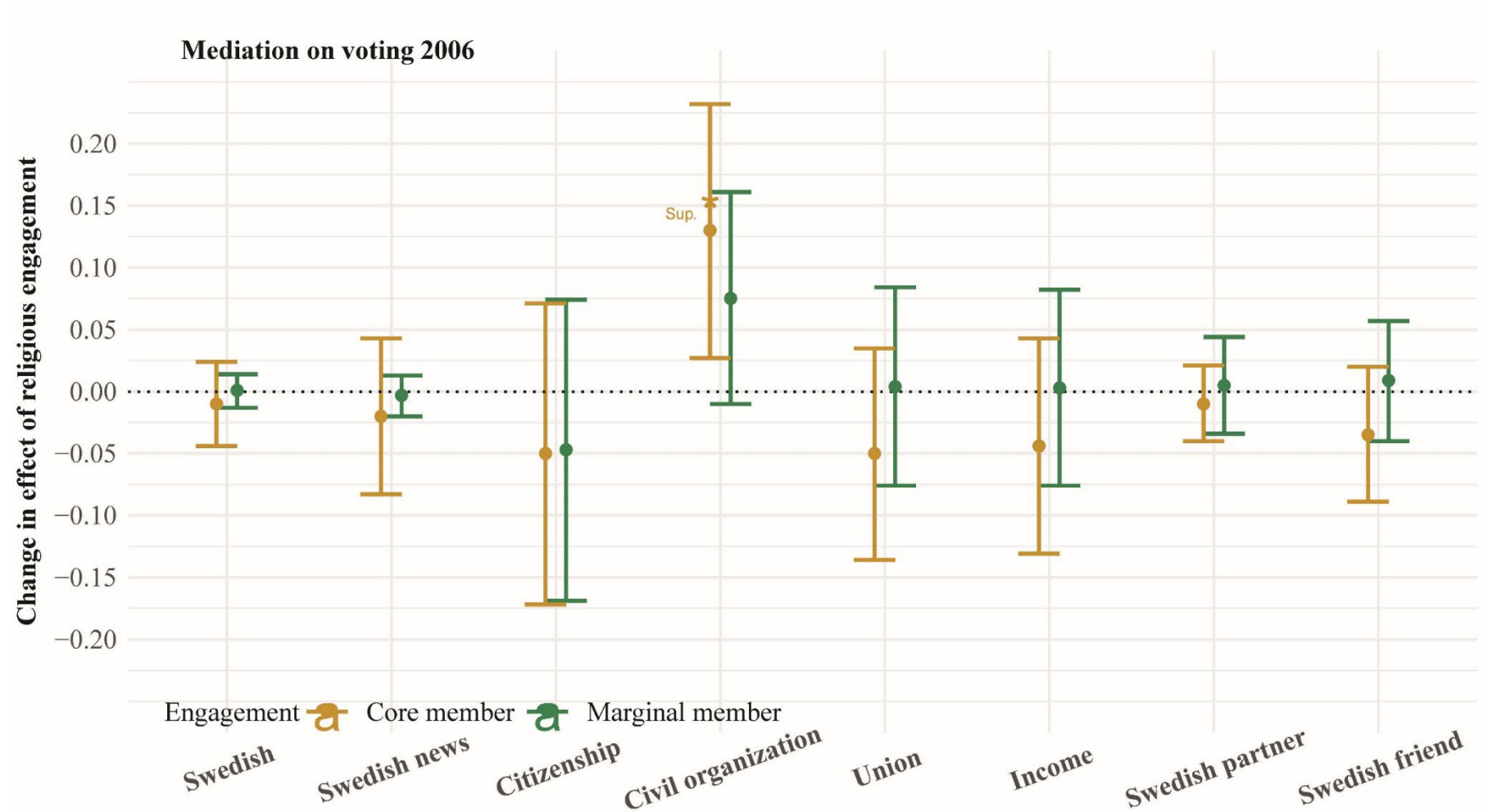


Figure 3. Mediation on voting 2006.



***: $p < 0.001$ **: $p < 0.01$ *: $p < 0.05$; Sup: suppression

Figure 4. Mediation on demonstration.

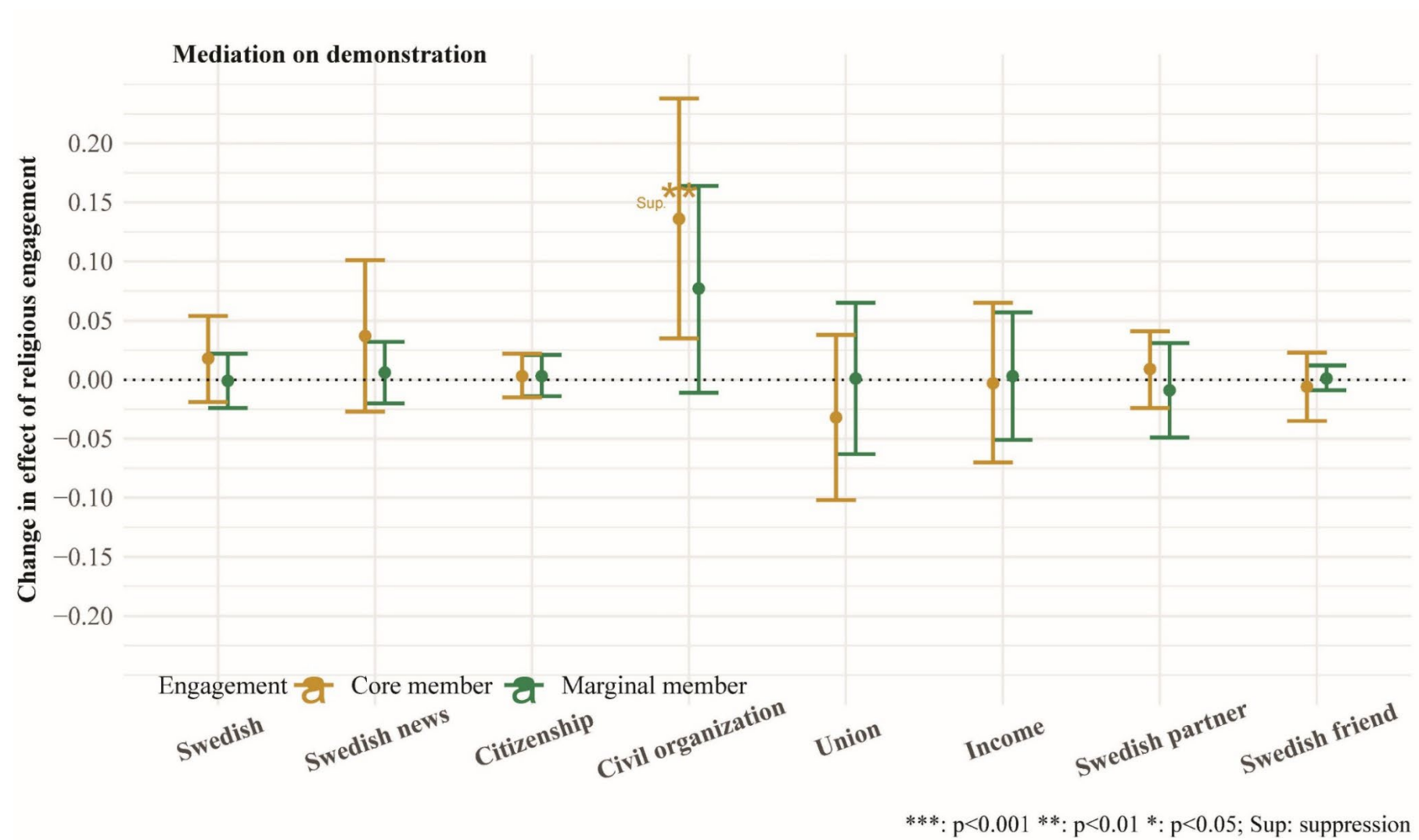
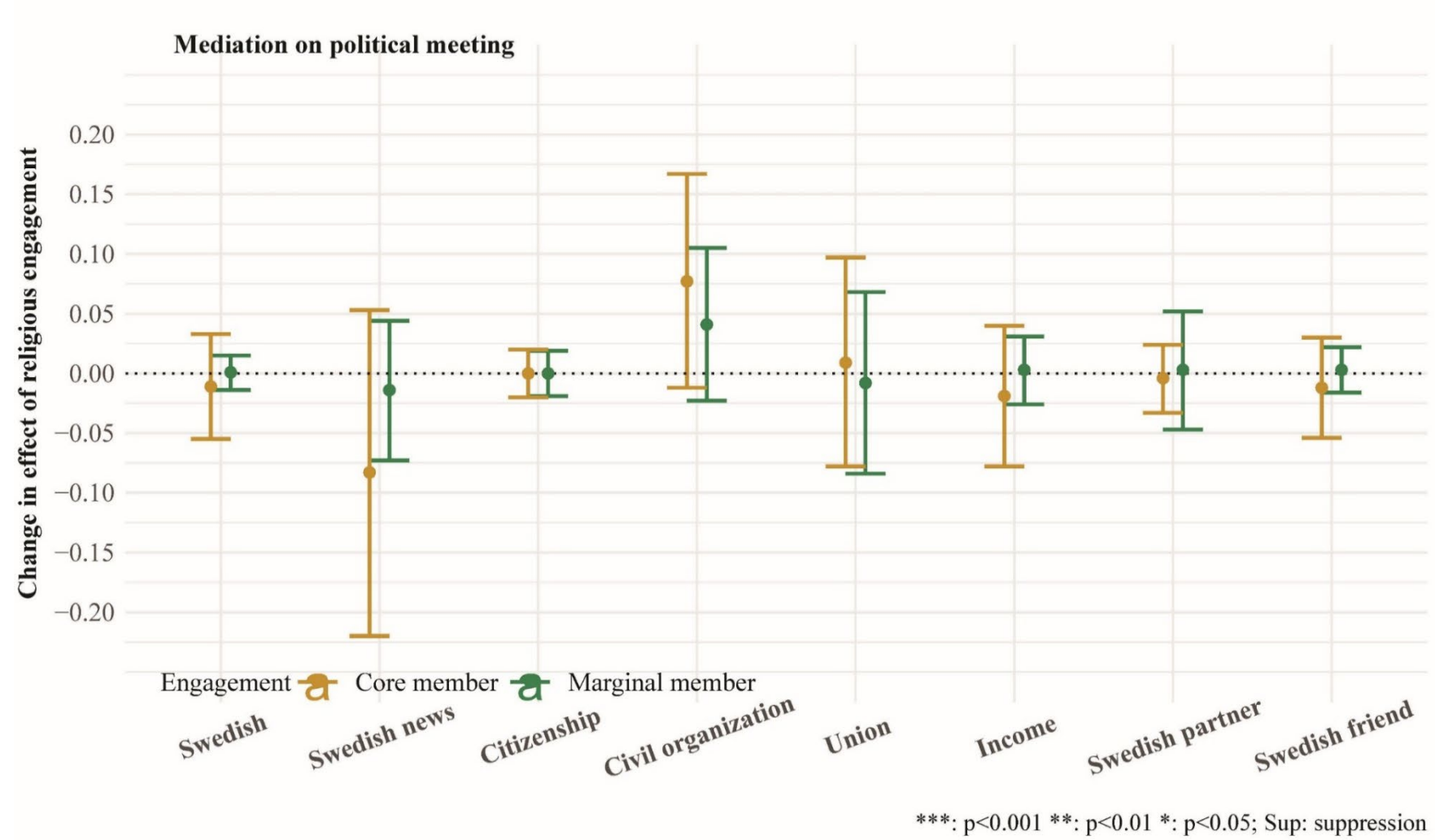


Figure 5. Mediation on political meeting.



5. Discussion

This study examined the role of religious engagement in mobilizing immigrants' political participation in Sweden. In the neo-Tocquevillian tradition, religious engagement is a form of civic participation and is expected to increase group members' political participation through extended resources of political knowledge, skills, and networks (Putnam 2000; Verba et al. 1995). However, religion is also often associated with lower socioeconomic status, which is detrimental to political participation (Smets and van Ham 2013). The study used survey data from LNU-UFB. However, two limitations regarding the data are worth mentioning. First, it covered only immigrants who had been in the country for over five years and were thus relatively well integrated into Swedish society. This could explain the particularly high political participation rate and the lack of statistically significant findings. Second, the variables used may not have adequately represented theoretical angles. For instance, without an actual question of the respondent's political knowledge and skills, I used citizenship and Swedish language skills as proxies. The measurement for religious engagement is also crude, although I performed robustness analysis treating the categories as linear. Nevertheless, LNU-UFB is the only large-scale survey focusing on immigrants in Sweden, with the merit of comprehensively covering all major immigrant groups in Sweden. It was the most suitable source for the current research inquiry.

The present empirical results refute most of the existing theoretical arguments. First, neither religious membership nor religious attendance increased political participation. Muslim and Christian immigrants are less active than the non-religious ones in demonstration, and immigrants of other religions are less active in elections. Religious attendance was negatively associated with the four political participation forms tested, although only one (demonstration) reached significance. Beyond these, on the one hand, there was little evidence that religious immigrants would be more active in politics as a result of the extended social capital, civic engagement, and enriched political skills and knowledge potentially provided by religious organizations. The findings contrast with other studies in Western societies which examined cross-national samples (Just et al. 2014) or samples of Muslims in one or multiple Western countries (Dana et al. 2011; Fleischmann et al. 2016; Moutselos 2020), which showed that that religious attendance increased political participation. On the other hand, economic deprivation was not shown to be factor that drove immigrants away from political participation.

One possible explanation for the differing results is that a substantial number of religious immigrants in Sweden, both Christians and Muslims, often self-divide into various, often

ethnically based religious congregations (SST 2019). Religious engagement for Swedish immigrants is more likely to involve bonding social capital, in Putnam's (2000) sense, which contributes little to networking with out-groups and building political participation. Yet, examples from other countries have shown that even bonding capital from religious/ethnic organizations actually enhances political engagement for immigrants (Fleischmann et al. 2016; Long 2016; Ødegård and Fladmoe 2020), challenging the explanation from the social capital perspective. Therefore, another factor that may be playing a role is that ethnic organizations in Sweden are generally functioning as culture-promoting agencies, relatively distant to politics (Soininen 1999); hence, they would have limited function as the engines of either electoral or non-electoral collective actions for immigrants. The study also notably shows that other forms of civic engagement have a stronger positive influence on political mobilization than religious participation does, but the incremental effect of being active is marginal. One more possibility is that the political participation level of immigrants in Sweden, especially in elections, is considerably higher than in other countries (Bevelander 2015; de Rooij 2012; Moutselos 2020). Therefore, their participation rates may have reached a ceiling effect such that religious engagement can do little to further increase them.

In sum, the findings suggest that there is much space for policymaking to improve the role of ethnic and religious organizations as institutions facilitating immigrant political participation in Sweden (Bloemraad 2006; Soininen 1999). The state should take a more active initiative to make use of immigrant religious communities as a channel to facilitate their political integration. Given the increasingly polarized political climate and the seeming mobilization of Muslim immigrants by the new party Nuanse, more research should be conducted to investigate the relationship between religious engagement and political participation in Sweden. In particular, the context of political participation, such as the policies and political climates toward immigrants, strength of different parties, and the existence of candidates from the same ethnic/religious minority, could be crucial to gaining a better understanding of this issue (Tyrberg 2020; Bloemraad 2006; Dancygier 2017). Thus, further research is urged for, with updated more recent data, as well as more accurate and sophisticated measurements for religiosity and mechanism factors.

Notes

1. The “EU+” group contains non-Nordic EU members, Switzerland and English-speaking developed countries, but not Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU after the 2004 enlargement.
2. Also generated from the LNU survey (SOFI, 2010b).
3. The original four levels are: believer with services at least once a month; believer with less frequent attendance; no religious believes but with a sense of belonging in religion; no belonging to religion.
4. Right-wing parties include the Moderates (M), Christian Democrats (KD) and Sweden Democrats (SD).
5. For non-electoral forms, a similar index cannot be constructed, as two indicators show low reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.38).

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Appendices:

Table A1. Descriptive statistics (N = 2081).

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	Missing rate
Voted 10	0.83	0.38	0	1	1.25%
Voted 06	0.81	0.39	0	1	10.41%
Demonstration	0.17	0.38	0	1	1.66%
Political Meeting	0.07	0.26	0	1	0.81%
Swedish understanding	3.79	0.54	1	4	0.91%
Swedish news reading	3.83	0.47	1	4	0.85%
Citizenship	0.82	0.38	0	1	0.00%
Closest friend in Sweden	0.79	0.40	0	1	13.18%
Experience of discrimination	0.05	0.23	0	1	4.97%
Length of stay	26.33	13.33	6	71	0.78%
Age	45.58	15.42	22	74	0.00%
2 nd generation	0.22	0.41	0	1	0.10%
Female	0.53	0.50	0	1	0.00%
Education	3.96	1.59	0	7	3.21%
Number of children	0.80	1.09	0	7	0.17%
Urban residence	0.89	0.31	0	1	0.03%
Percentage of foreign-background residence	0.24	0.10	0.05	0.53	0.03%
Share of right-wing voting	36.88	7.46	4.20	59.20	0.03%

Table A2. Frequencies of categorical variables.

	N	%
Religious engagement		
Non-members	717	24.24%
Marginal members	1607	54.33%
Core members	586	19.81%
Missing	48	1.62%
Denomination		
Christian	1329	44.93%
Muslim	560	18.93%
Other	209	7.07%
None	792	26.77%
Missing	68	2.30%
Civil organization		
Non-members	1953	66.02%
Marginal members	443	14.98%
Core members	540	18.26%
Missing	22	0.74%
Trade union		
Non-members	1563	52.84%
Marginal members	938	31.71%
Core members	429	14.50%
Missing	28	0.95%
Partner status		
Partner born in Sweden	825	27.89%
Partner born outside Sweden	968	32.72%
No partner	1141	38.57%
Missing	24	0.81%
Income quantiles		
No income	903	30.53%
Quantile 1	674	22.79%
Quantile 2	683	23.09%
Quantile 3	697	23.56%
Missing	1	0.03%
Class status		
Manual workers	1294	43.75%
Service workers	1112	37.59%
Self-employed	218	7.37%
Missing	334	11.29%
Region of origin		
Nordic countries	447	15.11%
EU+	446	15.08%
Other Europe	439	14.84%
MENA	416	14.06%
Other Africa	352	11.90%
Other Asia	394	13.32%
Latin America	464	15.69%

Table A3. Full model results (N = 2081).

	Vote 10	Vote 06	Demonstration	Political meeting
Religious engagement and denomination (reference: non-religious)				
Other religions	-1.114** (0.359)	-1.365*** (0.366)	-0.134 (0.446)	-0.640 (0.531)
Christian marginal	-0.305 (0.240)	-0.283 (0.236)	-0.710*** (0.214)	-0.362 (0.303)
Muslim marginal	0.012 (0.367)	-0.053 (0.353)	-0.690* (0.317)	-0.736 (0.487)
Christian core	-0.227 (0.332)	-0.354 (0.309)	-1.047** (0.346)	-0.758 (0.451)
Muslim core	0.160 (0.440)	-0.471 (0.405)	-0.842 (0.438)	-0.625 (0.553)
Experience of discrimination	-1.156** (0.403)	-0.649 (0.408)	0.528 (0.377)	0.862 (0.544)
Understand Swedish	-0.107 (0.235)	-0.125 (0.235)	-0.070 (0.202)	-0.273 (0.276)
Read Swedish news	0.007 (0.276)	-0.096 (0.281)	-0.257 (0.225)	0.686 (0.464)
Citizenship	1.625*** (0.234)	1.780*** (0.227)	-0.171 (0.276)	-0.047 (0.348)
Civic engagement (reference: non-members)				
Civil organization marginal members	1.076*** (0.263)	0.701** (0.241)	0.551* (0.224)	0.100 (0.285)
Civil organization core members	0.551* (0.245)	0.800** (0.265)	1.005*** (0.222)	0.503 (0.275)
Trade union (reference: non-members)				
Union marginal members	0.232 (0.205)	0.333 (0.207)	0.322 (0.206)	-0.396 (0.331)
Union core members	1.110*** (0.317)	0.594* (0.289)	0.964*** (0.252)	0.514 (0.308)
Income (reference: no income)				
Income quantile 1	0.380 (0.259)	0.672** (0.259)	-0.370 (0.269)	-0.169 (0.360)
Income quantile 2	0.199 (0.256)	0.254 (0.254)	0.144 (0.270)	0.193 (0.366)
Income quantile 3	0.585* (0.260)	0.553* (0.267)	-0.592 (0.313)	-0.097 (0.407)
Partner status (reference: no partner)				
Partner non-Swedish born	0.200 (0.222)	0.033 (0.222)	-0.211 (0.228)	-0.004 (0.344)
Partner Swedish-born	0.398 (0.234)	0.250 (0.243)	-0.375 (0.245)	0.085 (0.322)
Closest friend in Sweden	0.473* (0.234)	0.549** (0.243)	0.044 (0.245)	0.103 (0.322)

	(0.222)	(0.209)	(0.220)	(0.313)
Region (reference: other Nordic)				
EU+	0.666*	0.434	0.877*	0.783
	(0.293)	(0.282)	(0.347)	(0.418)
Other Europe	-0.027	0.109	0.658	0.788
	(0.292)	(0.294)	(0.388)	(0.487)
MENA	0.453	0.747*	2.292***	0.936
	(0.358)	(0.354)	(0.396)	(0.537)
Other Africa	0.701	0.713	1.697***	1.651**
	(0.401)	(0.366)	(0.409)	(0.521)
Other Asia	0.321	0.380	0.462	0.813
	(0.370)	(0.361)	(0.512)	(0.579)
Latin America	0.603	0.369	2.263***	1.037*
	(0.328)	(0.297)	(0.358)	(0.479)
Female	0.423*	0.334	0.061	-0.528*
	(0.183)	(0.180)	(0.187)	(0.269)
Second-generation	0.174	-0.034	0.081	0.410
	(0.305)	(0.289)	(0.288)	(0.382)
Educational level	0.064	0.062	0.203**	-0.064
	(0.073)	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.104)
Class status (reference: manual worker)				
Service worker	0.551*	0.384	0.250	0.488
	(0.234)	(0.228)	(0.225)	(0.318)
Self-employed	0.123	0.154	-0.347	-0.517
	(0.355)	(0.368)	(0.387)	(0.452)
Class status missing	0.233	-0.064	0.385	0.793
	(0.413)	(0.378)	(0.357)	(0.448)
Urban	0.576*	0.152	0.029	-0.968*
	(0.274)	(0.307)	(0.339)	(0.385)
Length of stay in Sweden	0.007	0.010	0.027*	-0.002
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.014)
Number of children	0.002	-0.044	0.158	0.133
	(0.099)	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.143)
Age	0.025*	0.038**	-0.021	0.012
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Share of foreign-background	-2.218*	-2.162*	0.191	1.560
	(0.967)	(0.924)	(0.892)	(1.180)
Share of right-wing voting	0.016	0.024*	0.012	0.010
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.018)
Constant	-3.204**	-3.219**	-2.840*	-5.333**
	(1.153)	(1.175)	(1.197)	(1.886)

***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses

Table A4. Robustness check – mediation on effects continuous religious attendance scale (N = 2081).

	Discrimination	Swedish	Swedish news	Citizenship	Civic organizati on	Union	Income	Swedish partner	Swedish friend
Vote 10									
Reduced	-0.139 (0.082)	-0.144 (0.083)	-0.144 (0.082)	-0.142 (0.084)	-0.143 (0.083)	-0.162 (0.084)	-0.165* (0.083)	-0.145 (0.083)	-0.141 (0.083)
Full	-0.114 (0.082)	-0.141 (0.083)	-0.137 (0.083)	-0.118 (0.084)	-0.180* (0.084)	-0.137 (0.083)	-0.146 (0.083)	-0.144 (0.083)	-0.134 (0.083)
Diff	-0.026* (0.012)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.007 (0.008)	-0.024 (0.015)	0.037* (0.015)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.019 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.006)
Vote 06									
Reduced	-0.161* (0.080)	-0.164* (0.081)	-0.164* (0.081)	-0.166* (0.081)	-0.160 (0.082)	-0.174* (0.081)	-0.183* (0.082)	-0.163* (0.081)	-0.161* (0.080)
Full	-0.147 (0.080)	-0.162* (0.081)	-0.159* (0.081)	-0.140 (0.081)	-0.202* (0.082)	-0.155 (0.081)	-0.170* (0.082)	-0.160* (0.081)	-0.153 (0.081)
Diff	-0.015 (0.011)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.008)	-0.026 (0.016)	0.042** (0.015)	-0.020 (0.012)	-0.013 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.007)
Demonstration									
Reduced	-0.286*** (0.085)	-0.281*** (0.084)	-0.281*** (0.084)	-0.279*** (0.084)	-0.280** (0.087)	-0.274** (0.085)	-0.294*** (0.085)	-0.283*** (0.084)	-0.280*** (0.084)
Full	-0.302*** (0.087)	-0.285*** (0.084)	-0.290*** (0.085)	-0.281*** (0.084)	-0.327*** (0.088)	-0.262** (0.085)	-0.292*** (0.085)	-0.285*** (0.085)	-0.279*** (0.084)
Diff	0.015 (0.010)	0.004 (0.004)	0.009 (0.008)	0.002 (0.004)	0.047** (0.015)	-0.012 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	0.002 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)
Political meeting									
Reduced	-0.250* (0.121)	-0.238* (0.120)	-0.244* (0.119)	-0.238* (0.120)	-0.241* (0.120)	-0.236 (0.122)	-0.240* (0.120)	-0.238* (0.120)	-0.240* (0.120)
Full	-0.274* (0.124)	-0.236 (0.121)	-0.224 (0.119)	-0.238* (0.120)	-0.267* (0.120)	-0.238* (0.120)	-0.234 (0.123)	-0.237* (0.121)	-0.237* (0.120)

Diff	0.024	-0.002	-0.020	0.000	0.026	0.002	-0.006	-0.001	-0.003
	(0.014)	(0.005)	(0.018)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.005)

***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses

Table A5. Robustness check – electoral participation index as outcome.

	Discrimination	Swedish	Swedish news	Citizenship	Civic organization	Union	Income	Swedish partner	Swedish friend
Core members									
Reduced	-0.343 (0.241)	-0.366 (0.240)	-0.361 (0.240)	-0.362 (0.247)	-0.359 (0.240)	-0.398 (0.248)	-0.429 (0.250)	-0.366 (0.243)	-0.359 (0.239)
Full	-0.290 (0.246)	-0.368 (0.240)	-0.358 (0.240)	-0.308 (0.247)	-0.431 (0.238)	-0.402 (0.248)	-0.427 (0.250)	-0.390 (0.245)	-0.365 (0.238)
Diff	-0.053 (0.034)	0.002 (0.011)	-0.003 (0.008)	-0.053 (0.074)	0.072 (0.044)	0.005 (0.052)	-0.002 (0.047)	0.024 (0.029)	0.006 (0.015)
Marginal members									
Reduced	-0.409 (0.303)	-0.428 (0.314)	-0.431 (0.312)	-0.422 (0.315)	-0.425 (0.317)	-0.470 (0.321)	-0.515 (0.320)	-0.434 (0.313)	-0.421 (0.314)
Full	-0.332 (0.303)	-0.412 (0.317)	-0.413 (0.314)	-0.366 (0.315)	-0.544 (0.313)	-0.404 (0.317)	-0.459 (0.320)	-0.425 (0.314)	-0.402 (0.316)
Diff	-0.077 (0.043)	-0.016 (0.021)	-0.018 (0.037)	-0.056 (0.074)	0.119* (0.055)	-0.067 (0.056)	-0.057 (0.054)	-0.009 (0.026)	-0.019 (0.021)

***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$; standard errors in parentheses

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