
IMMIGRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NORWAY

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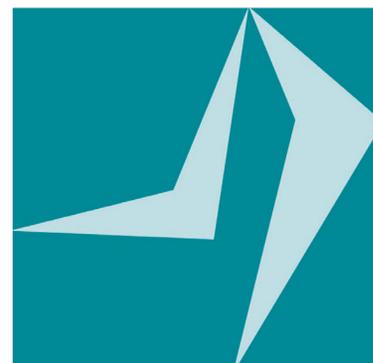


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Executive Summary

Between 1995 and 2011, the number of immigrants and their descendants in Norway almost tripled — reaching 600,000 out of a total population of 5 million. Alongside the rapid growth of the nation's ethnic minority population, debates about integration, immigration policy, multiculturalism, and national identity have flourished in Norway in recent years. The atrocities of July 22, 2011, revealed an active, militantly anti-immigrant (and particularly anti-Muslim) fringe that sees the government's acceptance of cultural pluralism as treacherous. Although less than one-third of immigrants in Norway are from predominantly Muslim countries, it is Muslim immigrants who find themselves at the center of the most heated political and social debates.

Debates about integration, immigration policy, multiculturalism, and national identity have flourished in Norway in recent years.

Over the past 20 years, successive governments have largely succeeded in creating a framework of equal opportunities for Norway's increasingly diverse population. Policies have sought to replicate for immigrants the social mobility that large parts of the Norwegian population experienced in the second half of the 20th century. Such policies have primarily focused on improving education outcomes and preventing discrimination. However, the unemployment rate for immigrants remains consistently far higher than for ethnic Norwegians. There are also growing concerns about increasing residential segregation, particularly in the greater Oslo region where the majority of Norway's immigrants live.

Looking ahead, a society that has historically been very ethnically and culturally homogenous faces the key challenge of adjusting to its increasing diversity. In order for the nation to instill solidarity and cohesion among its diverse inhabitants, a number of steps need to be taken:

- **Strengthening unity and citizenship.** The government should make efforts to ensure that all members of society are treated fairly and justly; symbolic events (such as citizenship ceremonies) could strengthen the sense of shared belonging.
- **Promote diversity within a framework of Norwegian values.** It is important to make a sharp distinction between social integration and cultural assimilation. A national identity not based primarily on ethnic identity must appear credible to all citizens, not least to minorities. Cultural and religious diversity must be seen to bolster, not undermine, the fundamental values associated with Norwegian society.
- **Ensure representation of diversity.** The country will need to deemphasize ethnicity and religion in the public sphere, while simultaneously ensuring that minorities are represented in key positions in politics, the bureaucracy, the media, academia, and other important institutions of public life, such as health services and education. Likewise, immigrants should be encouraged to show their loyalty to Norway more visibly by taking active part in all aspects of public life — as more settled minorities tend to do — which would make it difficult to argue that they “do not wish to integrate.” This would entail not only participation in the labor market (which is high and rising anyway) or in public celebrations, but also, and possibly more importantly, a heightened participation in voluntary activities in civil society, such as community work, school meetings, and children's sports activities.



- **Prevent discrimination.** Tendencies toward ethnic segregation in the labor market must be addressed. Ethnic minority youths are already well represented in higher education; now anti-discrimination laws must be used to prevent unequal outcomes.
- **Diversity should once and for all replace multiculturalism as a descriptive term.** There may or may not be meaningful differences between groups; therefore, using the term “diversity” makes it possible to reconceptualize Norway as a country that recognizes the diversity among all individuals, not just among ethnic or immigrant groups.

I. Introduction

The terrorist attacks of July 22, 2011,¹ revealed a dimension of Norwegian society that was scarcely known outside of the country, and was poorly understood within it. After that terrible day, no one could deny the existence of an active, militantly anti-immigrant, notably anti-Muslim, network loosely connected through websites and social media,² as will be discussed at greater length further in this report. Adherents posted online messages attacking the government as treacherous and the national elites as spineless for accepting cultural pluralism and continued immigration into the country. While the most vociferous, they are not the only ones to hold such views. Associated with the right-wing populist Progress Party (PP), anti-immigrant sentiments can be found across the political spectrum. One opinion poll indicates that 25 percent of the population thinks that “there are too many Muslims in the country;”³ of these, many state that their voice is not being heard. Indeed, a possibly deepening rift in Norwegian society divides the defenders of diversity from those who fear encroachment on Norwegian culture by immigrants, in particular Muslims, who represent values that are ostensibly incompatible with the liberal individualism and democratic ideals valued by the majority. This report assesses the connection between the recent rise of resentment against immigration (particularly against Muslims) and broader trends in Norwegian nationalism, and proposes a few policy recommendations with the aim of minimizing this rift in Norwegian society.

II. The Norwegian Context

Unlike nearly all other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, Norway was scarcely affected by the financial crisis that began in 2008. Its petroleum wealth and the fact that it is not part of the European Union have effectively insulated it from the effects of the euro crisis and other signs of economic instability, and have contributed to keeping unemployment very low. In March 2012 the official unemployment level was only 3 percent.⁴ It is important to keep this

- 1 Anders Behring Breivik acknowledged killing 77 people and injuring more than 200 others in a bombing and shooting rampage in Oslo and a summer youth camp on Utøya island on July 22, 2011. Breivik, a right-wing extremist, said he acted in defense of Norway and to protect the country from multiculturalism and Islamic “colonization” of Europe.
- 2 Although Breivik claimed membership in a shadowy pan-European militant nationalist organization known as the Knights Templar, Norwegian police testified at trial that Breivik acted alone and there was no evidence of the existence of the group. See Valeria Criscione, “Oslo police refute Breivik’s claim of terrorist network, saying he acted alone,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 30, 2012, www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0530/Oslo-police-refute-Breivik-s-claim-of-terrorist-network-saying-he-acted-alone.
- 3 It should be noted that the public survey figures for Oslo, where more than half of the Muslims live, is only 16 percent. See Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), “En av fire nordmenn ser på islam som en trussel,” *NRK.com*, October 26, 2011, www.nrk.no/nyheter/norge/1.7847186. The survey was carried out by Norstat on behalf of NRK.
- 4 Statistics Norway, “Focus on: Labour,” 2011, <http://www.ssb.no/en/arbeid-og-lonn>.



economic context in mind when analyzing the circumstances surrounding immigration to Norway, and society's reaction to it.

A. National Identity and Ethnic Minorities

Like most national identities in the modern world, the Norwegian one claims an ancient ancestry.⁵ Viking mythology became a prominent element of the mainstream Norwegian self-understanding during the final decades of the 19th century.⁶ Growing out of the Romantic movement of the time, Norwegian nationalism has historically been based on ethnicity, while also being influenced by Enlightenment concepts of human rights (it should nonetheless be noted that rights were initially accorded only to men with property and that minority rights were not on the agenda) and the failed 1848 democratic revolutions in continental Europe. Because of its historical homogeneity, and because Norwegian society has always been relatively small (there were 0.9 million inhabitants in 1814, 3 million in 1945, and 5 million in 2012),⁷ the institutions of the modern state, from mass media to the educational system and the labor market, have been capable of building, and making credible, an image of the nation as a family. In addition, the perceived vulnerability of Norwegian nationhood — full independence from Sweden was achieved only in 1905, and the country was under German occupation from 1940 to 1945 — contributes to a sense that today's Norway, distant from an aggressor Viking past, might again be besieged by foreigners.

Norwegian nationalism has historically been based on ethnicity, while also being influenced by Enlightenment concepts of human rights.

Ethnic minorities in Norway have historically been few in number, with the exception of the Sami (Lapps)⁸ of the far north. “National minorities” include Jews, Romani (a mixed, “travelling” group of partly Gypsy origin), Roma, and Kyens (long-established groups of Finnish origin). Numbers are uncertain since “national minorities” are not registered statistically by ethnicity. An estimate is that there are 15,000 Kvens, 1,500–2,000 Jews, 2,000–3,000 Romani, and around 400 Roma.⁹ Despite these relatively small numbers, there has been considerable animosity toward minority groups. In the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, Jews were not even allowed into the country. Groups of itinerant Roma from Southeast Europe are even today associated with begging and petty crime (a phenomenon not unique to Norway). “Norwegianification” (*fornorskning*) was the official policy well into the 1970s toward the Sami, once a largely nomadic group of reindeer herders.

5 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 3rd edition (London: Pluto, 2010).

6 Before this, after a mass conversion to Christianity in the 11th century, the pagan Vikings had not been a significant element of Norwegian self-understanding. Following the emergence of a Romantic nationalist ideology in the mid-19th century, the heroism and boldness that characterized the warlike Vikings were largely seen as positive expressions of Norwegian national spirit (*Volkgeist*).

7 Statistics Norway, “Focus on: Population,” <http://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning>.

8 The indigenous people of northern Scandinavia, the Sami, speak a Finno-Ugric language and are associated with reindeer herding, which is still the main source of livelihood for a minority of the Sami. In Norway they number about 40,000 and are fully integrated into the modern Norwegian state, but maintain special linguistic and cultural rights and, since 1989, have had their own parliament with legislative power over cultural and regional issues.

9 See the Norwegian government's white paper on legal protection against ethnic discrimination; Arbeidsdepartementet, *Rettslig vern mot etnisk diskriminering* (Oslo: Arbeidsdepartementet, 2002), www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ad/dok/nouer/2002/nou-2002-12/27.html?id=145445.



During the German occupation, resistance was widespread, and the Germans enjoyed limited legitimacy. However, the resistance movement was mainly nationalist in character, and did not visibly engage with the issue of the genocide against Jews and other minorities. In other words, unlike in Germany, but not entirely unlike in Austria, the ethnic undercurrents that formed part of Norwegian nationalism before the war were not dealt with critically in the aftermath of the war and were allowed to continue to thrive.

B. Immigration to the Welfare State

Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, Norway was a net exporter of people. About one-third of the population emigrated before World War I, mostly to North America — at a rate among the highest in Europe. After 1945 this flow reduced to a trickle, and since the late 1960s, Norway has been a net importer of people.

Before 1975, most non-Western immigrants to Norway, largely from Pakistan and Turkey, came for jobs. In 1975 the government imposed a general ban on immigration (with exceptions for the neighboring Nordic countries), leaving only two ways for third-country nationals to legally enter Norway: through family reunification or as refugees. This finally changed with the European Union's 2004 enlargement, when migration from the new Member States of the European Union grew significantly. Although Norway is not an EU Member State, it has signed the Schengen free movement agreement and coordinates many of its policies with the European Union, including policy on labor migration. As the figure below suggests, the number of first- and second-generation immigrants nearly tripled in the 16 years from 1995 to 2011, rising from 215,000 to 600,000.¹⁰ Of this population, 500,000 are first-generation immigrants and 100,000 are Norwegian born to immigrant parents. A further 210,000 people were Norwegian born with one foreign-born and one Norwegian-born parent.¹¹ These numbers are considerable in a population of 5 million.

Norway's stability, safety, wealth, and welfare system make it an attractive destination for migrants from many backgrounds.

Norway's stability, safety, wealth, and welfare system make it an attractive destination for migrants from many backgrounds, in spite of its cold climate and peripheral location. The fast growth in immigrant numbers must chiefly be understood in this context, rather than as something encouraged by state policy. In actual immigration policy, Norwegian governments, whether majority Labour or Conservative, have on the whole been neither more nor less liberal than other West European governments.

The largest national groups of immigrants are currently Swedes and Poles. Official records indicate that about 60,000 Poles and 34,000 Swedes live in the country;¹² the actual numbers are higher, although many are temporary residents. As EU citizens, Swedes and Poles are not registered as labor migrants. They live and work in Norway periodically without settling permanently, and there is no perceptible resentment against them. In contemporary discourse, both private and public, the word "immigrant" (*innvandrere*) does not apply to Swedes and Poles, but rather connotes non-Europeans, usually Muslim.

10 Statistics Norway, "Population, immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrants by country background. 1970-2012. Absolute numbers and per cent," www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/10/innvbef_en/tab-2012-04-26-06-en.html.

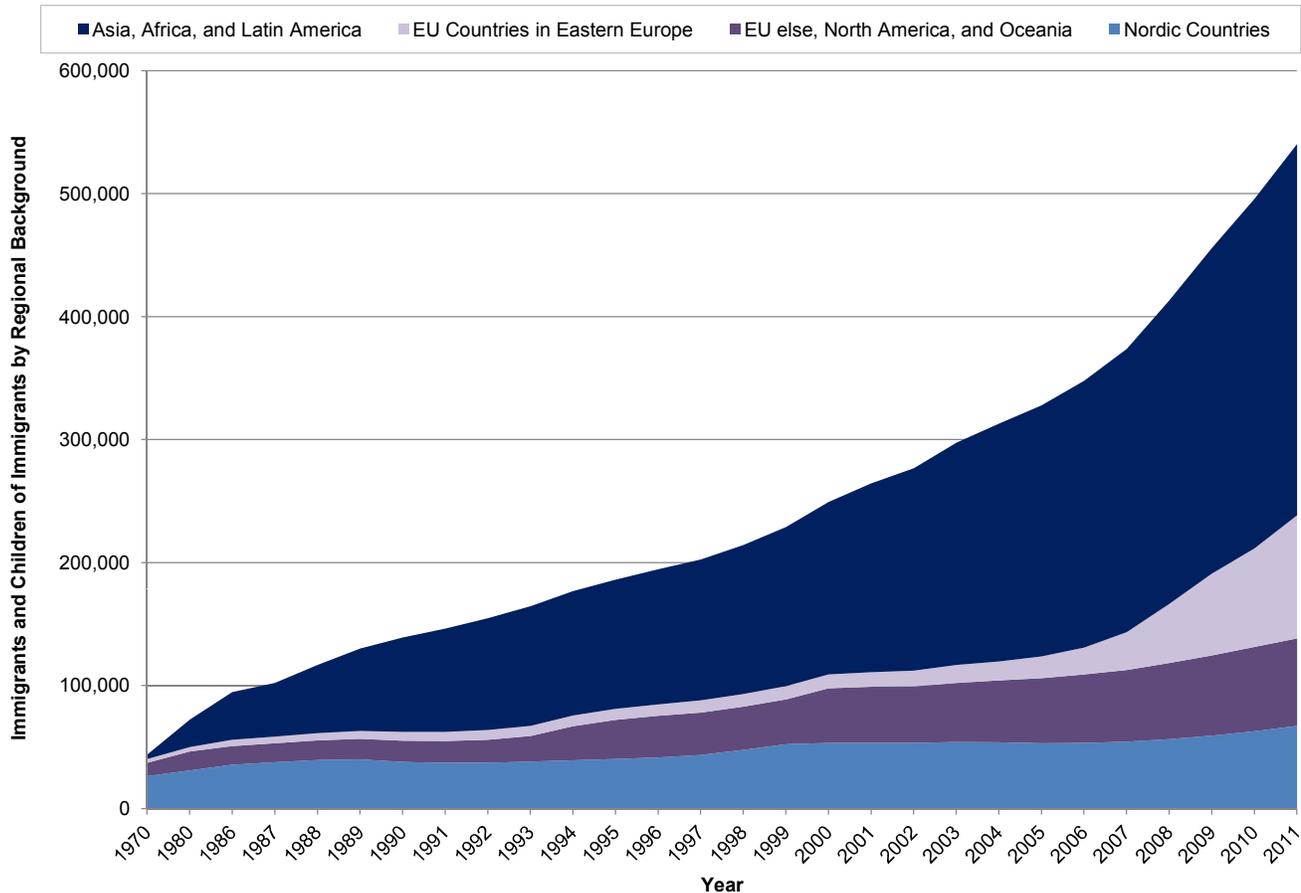
11 Statistics Norway, "Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Immigrant Parents," 1 January, 2012, www.ssb.no/innvbef_en/.

12 Statistics Norway, "Population, immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrants by country background. 1970-2012. Absolute numbers and per cent."



Slightly less than one-third of the total immigrant population — about 180,000 people — comes from a predominantly Muslim country; membership in Muslim congregations is fewer than 100,000 (or less than one-sixth of the total immigrant population).¹³

Figure 1. Immigrants and Norwegian-Born Children of Immigrant Parents, by Regional Background, 1970-2011



Source: Statistics Norway, "Focus on: Immigration and Immigrants," 2011, <http://www.ssb.no/en/innvandring-og-innvandrere>.

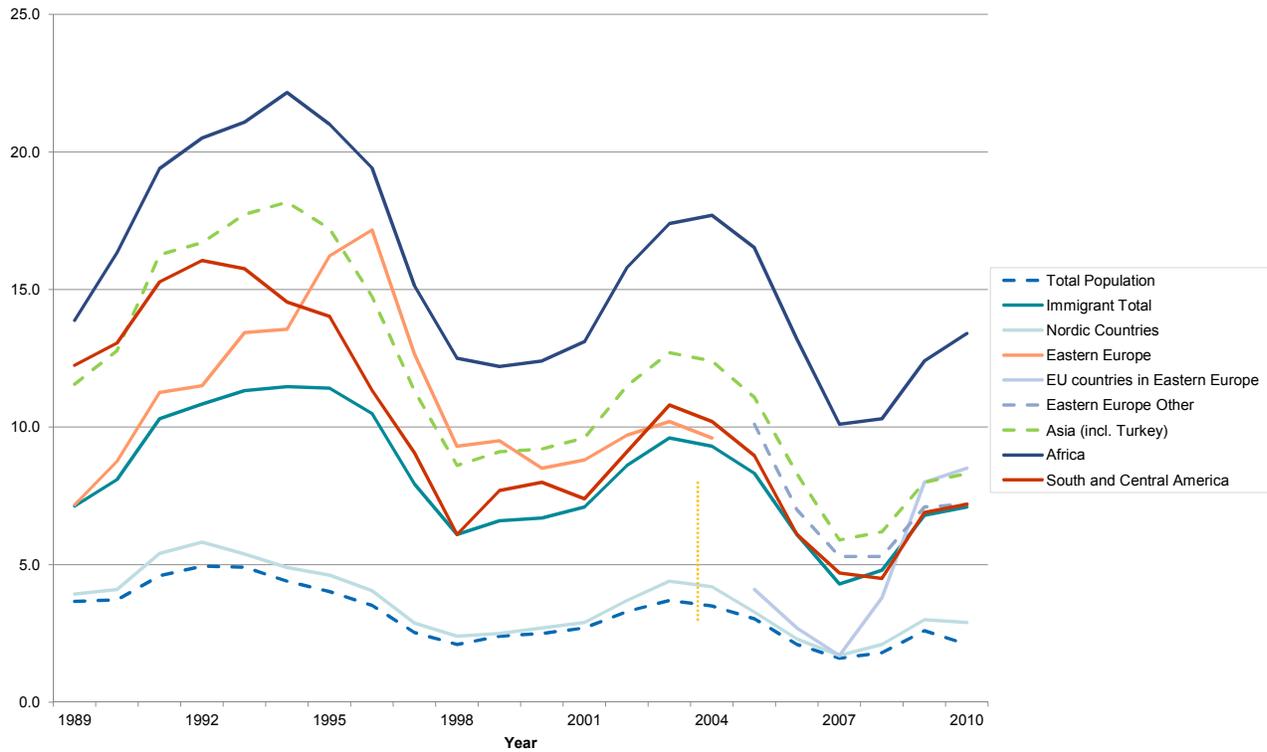
Non-European migrants tend to have lower labor force participation rates than ethnic Norwegians and European immigrants, and tend to retire earlier.¹⁴ There are notable differences between nationalities: Sri Lankans (70 percent), for example, are closer to the majority pattern than Somalis (30 percent). Generally, participation in the labor market increases with the length of residence in Norway. Gender also plays a role, as men tend to work more than women. These discrepancies are cause for concern in the Norwegian bureaucracy and public sphere.¹⁵

¹³ Statistics Norway, "Medlemmer i Den norske kirke og i tros- og livssynssamfunn utenfor Den norske kirke. 2011," (Members of the Church of Norway and of Religious Associations outside of the Church of Norway, 2010). http://www.ssb.no/a/minifakta/no/main_08.html.

¹⁴ See Vebjørn Aalandslid, *A Comparison of the Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada and Norway* (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 2009), www.ssb.no/english/subjects/06/01/rapp_200931_en/rapp_200931_en.pdf.

¹⁵ Grete Brochmann, Torben M. Andersen, Anne Britt Djuve, Einar Niemi, Knut Røed, Inge Skeie, and Sverre Try, *Velferd og migrasjon: Den norske modellens framtid (Welfare and Migration: The Future of the Norwegian Model)*, (Oslo: Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion, 2011), www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/bld/dok/nouer/2011/nou-2011-07.html?id=642496.

Figure 2. Registered Unemployed (Ages 16–74) as Share of Labor Force by Regional Background, 1989–2010



Source: Statistics Norway, “Focus on: Immigration and Immigrants,” 2011, <http://www.ssb.no/en/innvandring-og-innvandrere>.

III. Immigrant Integration: Government Policies and Social Reactions

Alongside the rapid growth of the ethnic minority population, debates about integration, immigration policy, multiculturalism, and national identity have flourished in Norway and have, as in many other European countries, become a central political issue since the end of the Cold War. Norway’s success in maintaining high levels of welfare, security, and employment — in the midst of global economic turmoil — also may contribute to the rise of xenophobic views. The notion that “we Norwegians” are a vulnerable island of prosperous stability in a rough sea may be seen as reason to close ranks and restrict flows across borders.

A. Integration: Multiculturalism versus Assimilation

As do all Western European countries, Norway — especially as it diversifies — has a pressing need to strike a balance between equality and difference, between unity and diversity, as the government attempts to foster a fair and just society that includes both old and new Norwegians. Throughout Norway’s postwar history and especially under the leadership of the Labour Party (in power since 2005), inclusion and the values associated with equality have been seen as paramount.

One primary objective of the Norwegian government is to ensure high participation by inhabitants in



the labor market. To this end, ethnic discrimination in the labor market is illegal. The main organization for employers, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises (NHO), has run campaigns encouraging its members to employ people of minority backgrounds. It should be noted, however, that discrimination has been documented,¹⁶ although convictions have not followed.

When it comes to social integration, the term *multiculturalism* is increasingly shunned for connoting segregation and misguided tolerance. Few politicians today would describe themselves as multiculturalists. Instead of *multicultural*, the word *diverse* is more often used to describe the composition of the population of Oslo (where 29.6 percent of residents have an immigration background).¹⁷ Politicians emphasize that diversity presupposes equal participation in shared institutions such as the educational system and the labor market. Policies that could be deemed multiculturalist with a view to according special treatment for Muslims nevertheless exist, for instance, in health services (where Muslim women can choose to be examined by female doctors), in prisons and hospitals (where halal food is an option), and in some schools where girls can seek exemption from showering after gym class (this last issue is decided at the local level).

The thrust of Norwegian policies toward immigrants has nevertheless trended in the direction of equality, sometimes understood as assimilation. One reason may be that the same word, *likhet*, means both “equality” and “similarity” in Norwegian. In other words, no terminological distinction is made between equal rights and cultural similarity. Claiming equality, therefore, is an understandable and laudable thing to do in Norway, while claiming the right to difference is more difficult to handle ideologically. This is partly a result of the history of Norwegian nationalism, dealt with above; and also partly an indirect outcome of the Labour-led construction of the welfare state, where equality has always been associated with cultural homogeneity.

Politicians emphasize that diversity presupposes equal participation in shared institutions such as the educational system and the labor market.

In academic parlance, a distinction between *integration*, *assimilation*, and *segregation* is often made. Assimilation entails the eventual disappearance of any difference between groups, leading to one group “swallowing” another. Segregation takes many forms, including “malign” forms such as apartheid and “benign” forms such as strong forms of multiculturalism that encourage cultural autonomy among the constituent groups of society. Segregation implies internal self-governance on the part of minorities, and highly regulated, restricted contact across ethnic boundaries. In social science literature on ethnicity and cultural pluralism, integration refers to the maintenance of a distinctive cultural identity while simultaneously participating as equals in greater society.¹⁸ While integration in this sense has been the goal of successive Norwegian governments, it has proved elusive.

While, over the past 20 years, the Norwegian government has largely succeeded in setting policies to foster equal opportunities for its increasingly diverse population, policy is not necessarily practice. This is evident, for example, in the continued existence of ethnic discrimination in the labor market. Yet it

16 Ronald Craig, *Systemic Discrimination in Employment and the Promotion of Ethnic Equality* (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2007).

17 Statistics Norway, “Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, by country background and municipality. 1 January 2012. Absolute numbers and per cent,” www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/10/innvbef_en/tab-2012-04-26-09-en.html.

18 See Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*.



is undeniable that Norwegian policymakers have been determined in their efforts to foster social well-being for the entire population. On the other hand, they have dealt with minorities' claims to the right of difference in less consistent and, arguably, less satisfactory ways. For example, religious organizations automatically receive substantial state support, while other minority organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) do not. As a result, the state indirectly encourages immigrants to identify along religious lines, which may not have been the intention in the first place. Moreover, language policy in schools has been inconsistent. There is no national policy concerning instruction in minority languages versus Norwegian in the first years of primary school, where decisions are taken at the municipal level.

In conclusion, Norwegian governments have been skilled in legislating equality, but less skilled in dealing with diversity. Partly, this is a result of the history of the Norwegian welfare state, where cultural diversity was not an issue, but it should also be pointed out that diversity today is associated with national or ethnic groups, not individuals; people are treated as Tamils, Vietnamese, etc., and not in accordance with their basic, individual human concerns and needs. Regardless, ethnic discrimination (although illegal) continues to exist and the promise of equal treatment is often not fulfilled, be it in the labor market, the housing market, or education.

B. Areas of Tension

In the aftermath of the 1970s oil shock, the main criticism of immigration (from the left and right alike) was that it would lead to unemployment and depress wages for natives. Since the mid-1980s, however, when Norway began to enjoy very substantial oil revenues, the arguments around immigration shifted in nature. While one argument against immigration continues to be economic, the other centers on the perceived cultural “otherness” of immigrants. Since Norway has a comprehensive welfare state that relies largely on a high level of taxation, there is some concern across the political spectrum about immigrants contributing less and taking relatively more from the welfare state than the majority. Meanwhile, contemporary public debates do not reference the competition for jobs or the economic crisis. On the contrary, many immigrants are welcomed by large segments of the population precisely because they are viewed as carrying out the work that Norwegians would be loathe to take. Resentment, where it exists, is largely associated with the perceived cultural otherness of immigrants, but the suspicion that many arrive as “welfare tourists” is also still very much alive.

Resentment, where it exists, is largely associated with the perceived cultural otherness of immigrants.

Public discontent over the level of immigrant integration can be analyzed within a number of different policy areas, including housing, crime, gender equality, and religion. First, there is a broad and increasing concern around “ghettoization.” In the greater Oslo area, home to nearly a quarter of the country’s overall population and more than half of the immigrant minority population,¹⁹ there is a tendency toward territorial ethnic segregation. Always a deeply class-divided city along east-west lines, class is now being supplemented by ethnicity. The majority of non-Western immigrants live in the eastern parts of the city, where ethnic Norwegians form a diminishing minority. The tendency of “white flight” from the most immigrant-dense suburbs in the outer suburbs of Grorud Valley (*Groruddalen*) has been documented

¹⁹ Statistics Norway, “Immigrants and Norwegian-Born to Immigrant Parents.” Immigrants and their descendants represent 12 percent of the national population, but 28 percent of the city’s population.



and caught the attention of the media in the summer of 2011.²⁰ Today, there are several primary and lower-secondary schools in the area where the proportion of children of non-European immigrants ranges from 60 to over 90 percent.²¹ For the city as a whole, the number of non-European immigrant children rose from 31 percent to 40 percent between 2000 and 2010, and in 51 of the 125 primary/lower-secondary schools, minority children are the majority. It is often argued that these children are being poorly integrated, and that the communities in which they live are hotbeds of crime and religious fundamentalism.²² However, this latter allegation has not been documented.

Second, the link between migration and crime is frequently made in the press and by certain politicians. Immigrants are overrepresented in crime statistics;²³ most involving young men from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Nearly all rapes in public spaces in Oslo have in recent years been committed by immigrants.²⁴ This contributes to growing resentment within Norwegian society.

Third, issues concerning gender equality are central to the Norwegian debates on minorities and integration. When the Muslim headscarf is discussed in Norway, it is not with reference to secular values (as in France), nor to notions of “common values” (as in the Netherlands), but exclusively as a question of women’s rights. Gender equality has recently become a value central to Norwegian self-understanding; even the PP, which in the past defended traditional gender roles, now represents itself as favorable to gender equality. Within this context, opposition to the headscarf has almost exclusively been framed within a feminist discourse, where the argument has been that women who wear the hijab must necessarily be oppressed by their husbands, brothers, or fathers. When it comes to marriage, there are fundamental differences between mainstream Norwegian culture’s focus on individualism and the cultures of many immigrant communities, where family and kinship are seen as paramount to well-being. It is important to note here that a number of first- and second-generation Norwegian Muslims have defended the ideal of gender equality that is prevalent in Norwegian society, criticizing their cobelievers for lagging behind in their cultural adaptation to modernity.²⁵

Fourth, the role of religion in public life has been widely debated for years, particularly as it pertains to freedom of expression. The issue of how to balance freedom of expression and respect for religion reached a climax during the Danish cartoon controversy of 2005–06,²⁶ which spilled into Norway when a small Norwegian magazine reprinted the Danish cartoons. There is a belief voiced in certain segments of the Norwegian blogosphere that the media consists solely of leftist multiculturalists who practice self-censorship and refuse to criticize Islam and Muslims. Conversely, others argue that one can hardly open a newspaper without finding an article that criticizes this group. Such arguments point to the existence of a deepening rift within Norwegian society about issues of cultural diversity and, in particular, Muslims. Those who defend diversity and certain multiculturalist policies (such as supporting religious minorities as well as non-religious minority organizations financially) argue that it is possible to be a good Norwegian citizen who is committed to the democratic values of society without sharing the majority’s

20 City Council of Oslo, “Flyttestatistikk for Oslo 2010” (Demographic Mobility in Oslo 2010), 2010,

www.utviklings-og-kompetanseetaten.oslo.kommune.no/oslostatistikken/flytting.

21 City Council of Oslo, Board of Education, “Elever med et annet morsmål enn norsk og samisk i Oslo — skoleåret 2010—2011” (Pupils with Another Mother Tongue than Norwegian or Sami in Oslo — the School Year of 2010-2011), www.utdanningsetaten.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/utdanningsetaten%20%28UDE%29/Internett%20%28UDE%29/EFP/Dokumenter/Minspr_prosent_2010_publ.pdf.

22 See, for example, Human Rights Service, www.rights.no, and Document.no, www.document.no, for influential websites where this view is frequently presented.

23 Torbjørn Skarðhamar, Lotte Thorsen, and Kristin Henriksen, *Kriminalitet og straff blant innvandrere og øvrig befolkning* (Crime and Punishment among Immigrants and the Rest of the Population) (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 2011), www.ssb.no/emner/03/05/rapp_201121/rapp_201121.pdf.

24 See, for example, Oslo police quoted in Nettavisen.no, “45 av 48 voldtekts-mistenkte er utlendinger,” Nettavisen.no, October 27, 2011, www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/article3260189.ece.

25 Among the most outspoken public intellectuals on this issue are the writer-comedian Shabana Rehman and the politician-lawyer Abid Raja.

26 On September 30, 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published an editorial with caricatures of what the Prophet Mohammed might have looked like, using illustrations from 12 different political cartoonists. This sparked outrage among many religious Muslims who viewed the drawings as offensive; defenders of the cartoons said the newspaper was simply exercising its right to free speech.



way of life in every respect. They also do not see a possibly irreconcilable conflict between the Muslim faith and Norwegian identity. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre illustrated this point in 2008 when he gave a much-cited speech titled “A New and Larger ‘We’” in an Oslo mosque, where he emphasized the need to expand the conceptualization of what it meant to be Norwegian. Those of this view are characterized as “multiculturalist elite” by the anti-immigration lobby, and consist of politicians, editors and journalists, intellectuals, and academics.

Finally, as mentioned above, when it comes to debates on diversity and multiculturalism, it is really one group that is the center of discussion — Muslims. Concerns about migration, which had once largely been on economic grounds, took on a cultural and religious focus following the Salman Rushdie affair in 1988²⁷ and the end of the Cold War. This was exacerbated after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Today it can be said that Norwegian xenophobia and racism are no longer centered on “visibly different” people, previously the main target of ethnic discrimination,²⁸ or Jews (anti-Semitism is not very visible, although criticism of Israel is), but Muslims, regardless of their origins. Generalizing statements about Muslims have become common in the media, even if frequently countered by more nuanced or opposing views. In contemporary Norway, “the other” is now a Muslim — if a man, a possible perpetrator, if a woman, a potential victim.

When it comes to debates on diversity and multiculturalism, it is really one group that is the center of discussion — Muslims.

Other visible minorities in Norway have not provoked negative reactions from the native population. For example, there is no controversy around the religious practices of Tamils, the dietary habits of Hindus in general, or the wearing of the Sikh turban. Although forced marriages (as opposed to arranged marriages) occur among several immigrant groups,²⁹ the practice is associated with Islam. Similarly, female circumcision is believed by many to be a Muslim custom (which it essentially is not).

Criticism of Muslims and Islam takes many forms, from the reformist (“Make Islam conform with modern life”) to the Manichaeic (“Islam represents absolute evil and must be fought at any cost”). Differentiating between these positions is important, lest one lose the ability to distinguish between a concern to strengthen social cohesion in the country through common values, at one end of the spectrum, and calls for civil war and the dehumanization of the “other,” at the other. To this we now turn.

IV. Islamophobia in Norway

Classic right-wing extremist groups (notably neo-Nazis and skinheads) have been visible but never prominent in Norway, and are certainly more marginal today than they were 20 or 30 years ago. However, the development of resentment and militant contempt toward Muslims had not been mapped

²⁷ Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* was partly inspired by the life of Mohammed and refers to an alleged part of the Quran. While well received in some Western countries, the book provoked widespread protests (some violent) from Muslims who accused it of mocking their faith, and Rushdie faced death threats.

²⁸ See Marianne Gullestad, *Plausible Prejudice* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006).

²⁹ Anja Bredal, *Mellom makt og avmakt (Between Power and Powerlessness)* (Oslo: Institutt for samfunnsforskning, 2011).



by the police, partly because such sentiments were not considered a major security risk before the mass killings that shocked the world on July 22, 2011, and partly because these ideological tendencies were not anchored in organizations and were therefore difficult to gauge and observe.

That said, *Fremskrittspartiet* (the Progress Party, or PP) is a well-established formal political party that shares many right-wing views. The party was founded in 1975 as a libertarian, anti-establishment voice; beginning in the mid-1980s, it oriented its identity around an anti-immigrant platform. Its leadership has openly argued against “the dream from Disneyland” (of multiculturalism), and its legendary leader, Carl I. Hagen, said, in 2007, that “not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.” In 2009 this party received 22.9 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections. Its performance in the local elections of 2011 was much weaker, with a national average of 11.4 percent. The decline, which may have been temporary, is likely to be connected to the fact that Anders Behring Breivik, perpetrator of the July 2011 terrorist attacks, had been a member of the party for a decade.

A. The Extremists

The new Islamophobic right is not formally associated with any political organizations (though the PP shares some of their views); instead, Islamophobia can be found among adherents of many different political parties. It is therefore impossible to measure how widespread the ideology is. What is clear is that after the 2011 attacks, the Norwegian authorities have (belatedly) discovered that it may represent a security threat. However, anyone who has followed the discourse on the more popular anti-Islamist websites,³⁰ which between them have tens of thousands of unique users every week, would have expected violence to erupt, although not on this scale and in this form.³¹

The anti-diversity discourse on the Internet has two salient characteristics. First, contributors cannot easily be identified; most write under assumed names and form a loosely knit network. Also, they are ordinary citizens, often with middle-class jobs (albeit often somewhat downwardly mobile) — not tattooed, leather-wearing skinheads.³² Many feel that the Norway they love is being transformed into a culturally diverse society where one is discouraged from speaking one’s mind because of the predominance of “politically correct” tolerance. Second, the discourse on these websites creates self-confirming, closed circuits where the reality check that would have been offered by broader and more nuanced access to information is absent. One may spend one’s days perusing selected websites without once being exposed to a counterexample or counterargument. Breivik would not necessarily have been exposed to the fact that most Muslims in Norway are Democrats, and that many are not practicing the religion of their ancestors. His preferred sources of information instead warned him about the weak and spineless “multiculturalist elite,” the fanaticism (and evil) of Islam, and secret deals made with Muslim states by the politically correct government.

It is within this camp where we see routine attacks on the “multiculturalist elite” and politicians who support multicultural policies, delivered in often extremely violent language; the one-sided depiction of ethnic relations in Norway (Muslims are always medieval, brutal, and wrong; Norwegians are gullible and naïve); and the open flirtation with paranoid “Eurabia” thinking (according to which European political elites are complicit in conspiracies aiming to Islamicize Europe).³³ Online posts commonly express doubt about the fundamental legitimacy of the democratically elected government; doubt that it is possible to get the media to present the “truth;” and voice the belief that the country’s cultural and intellectual elites are unprincipled, anti-national, relativist, and treacherous. Experience from elsewhere indicates that such strong expressions of religious and racial prejudice are a recipe for violence.

30 These include sites such as: www.rights.no; www.document.no; and www.honestthinking.org.

31 Most of the 77 fatalities were white Norwegian members of the Labour Party’s youth wing.

32 Øyvind Strømme, *Eurofascism* (Lulu.com, 2008).

33 An oft-mentioned book on this is Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).



Such conspiratorial and paranoid views represent a dark undercurrent of Norwegian nationalism — marked by racial supremacism and a complex moral superiority harking back to Protestantism and the early days of social democracy — that has never been addressed critically in this country. Although rare, traces of this outlook can easily be found in mainstream Norwegian society, where “Islam” is sometimes depicted as a festering boil on European culture and identity.³⁴ These expressions are not only dangerous in that they call into question the legitimacy of the democratic process, but also in that they see the presence of certain cultural minorities in the country as impossible to reconcile with nationhood. Anti-defamation laws notwithstanding, in practice it is impossible to stop this kind of discourse as it unfolds on the Internet.

B. The Rest of the Spectrum

While those who subscribe to the beliefs previously mentioned may be seen as extreme, not all who are skeptical of the Muslim presence in Norway fit under the heading “extreme right.” Many gravitate toward the PP, but many are disillusioned Social Democrats, self-designated feminists, and political centrists. One member of the fiercely anti-Muslim organization SIAN (Stop the Islamification of Norway) was also a member of the Socialist Left party. Many Islamophobes are far from identifying with the PP politically and would probably have voted for an anti-immigration Social Democratic party if possible. In other words, anti-Muslim sentiment is spread across most of the political spectrum, if not evenly.

*Anti-Muslim sentiment is spread across most of
the political spectrum, if not evenly.*

The most important view shared by all who associate with these loosely knit networks is the belief that Muslims cannot become good Europeans, or good Norwegians, until they cease to be Muslims. This view has not only been voiced by members of Parliament (MPs) from the PP, but also by various commentators and intellectuals who do not identify with the right wing. Historian Nils Rune Langeland, in an interview with influential left-of-center newspaper *Dagbladet* only days before the terrorist attacks, spoke of a coming *reconquista* (referring to the fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Moors in 1492), raised the possibility that the “Germanic peoples of the North may yet rise,” and concluded by stating that Muslim girls may get good grades at university but “they will never crack the European code.”³⁵ With the hindsight of the terrorist attack, Dr. Langeland’s analysis reads almost like a recipe for armed revolt against creeping “Islamification by stealth” (a PP term) and the loss of honor and masculine strength among mainstream Norwegians.³⁶ However, the interview was published without much initial controversy, which illustrates that this perception of Muslims has become so commonplace that Norwegians today hardly raise an eyebrow when they read statements like those made by Langeland. What is interesting, in other words, is the ordinariness of his generalizations and the trivialization of his contempt.

34 For example, in a recent headline from the country’s largest and most influential newspaper, *Aftenposten*, “Islam ulmer i Paris’ forsteder” (Islam Smouldering in Paris Suburbs), October 17, 2011. Of course, religions do not “smoulder.”

35 Inger Merete Hobbelstad, “På sporet av det krigerske,” *Dagbladet*, July 15, 2011,

www.dagbladet.no/2011/07/15/kultur/nils_rune_langeland/europa/islam/velferdsstaten/17321062.

36 For an analysis of masculinity in this context, see Michael Kimmel, “A Tale of Two Terrorists Redux,” *Sociological Images*, July 27, 2011, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/07/27/a-tale-of-two-terrorists-redux/>.



V. Looking Ahead: Conclusions and Recommendations

Contemporary Norway is divided when it comes to questions of cultural diversity and immigration. For at least a decade, the main focus has been on Islam and Muslims, but this may shift with changes in the international political and economic scene and migration patterns to Norway. With the current economic crisis in large parts of Western Europe, increased migration from the European Union, particularly Southern Europe, may be envisioned in the near term. It should also be kept in mind that even today, arguably the most stigmatized and excluded minority in the country are Roma, who are not Muslim. (Today, the Roma minority is minuscule and itinerant, but this, too, may change.)

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The problem facing Norway and its national identity in this century is the fact that the country was founded on the premise of ethnic homogeneity (and a considerable degree of cultural homogeneity), while contemporary Norway displays increasing diversity. In other words, the old map does not fit the new territory. The 2011 terrorist attacks were intended by Breivik as a first step toward cultural and ethnic purification of the country, although the targets were Norwegian “traitors” and not immigrants.

In order for the nation to instill solidarity and cohesion among its diverse inhabitants, a number of steps need to be taken. These include:

- **Strengthen unity and citizenship.** The government should make efforts to ensure that all members of society are treated fairly and justly, and to create symbolic events with a strong ritual content, in order to strengthen the sense of belonging. Citizenship ceremonies for new Norwegians may be a step in the right direction in this respect, as would public rituals celebrating the “unity in diversity” of the new Norway. The significance of emotionally charged rituals outside of sport (winter sports, hugely popular among ethnic Norwegians, do not necessarily help integrate newcomers) has probably been underestimated by leading politicians.
- **Promote diversity within a framework of Norwegian values.** It is important to make a sharp distinction between social integration and cultural assimilation in order for a national identity not based on ethnic identity to appear credible, not least to minorities. This would allow cultural and religious diversity to coexist with a cohesive society based on fundamental values associated with Norwegian society, such as trust, accountability, democracy, informality, egalitarianism, and gender equality. First and foremost — and this may be the most urgent task — the leaders of society must state, in no uncertain terms, that being Norwegian is not a question of racial or ethnic origin but of citizenship and commitment to the common good for society.
- **Ensure representation of diversity.** The country will need to deemphasize ethnicity and religion in the public sphere, while simultaneously ensuring that minorities are represented in key positions in politics, the bureaucracy, the media, and academia, as well as socially important institutions such as the health service, educational sector, and police force. Meanwhile, immigrants and their descendants must be encouraged to show their adherence



and loyalty to their new country by taking part in all aspects of public life, ranging from participation in the labor market, public celebrations, and civil society, on par with the majority.

- ***Prevent discrimination.*** Tendencies toward ethnic segregation in the labor market must be addressed. Minority youth are already well represented in higher education; antidiscrimination laws should be effectively implemented across job sectors.
- ***Diversity should once and for all replace multiculturalism as a descriptive term.*** Diversity may or may not refer to differences between groups and this makes it possible to reconceptualize Norway as a country where individuals may be diverse, and not just groups. It is true that in the 20th century, the project of nation-building and of developing a welfare state entailed policies aimed at creating a stable, homogeneous national identity. In the 21st century, this must be supplemented with legal and factual recognition of diversity and a full acknowledgement of the compatibility between a cohesive society and cultural diversity.

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