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Denominations of Faith in the Census

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with two interrelated sets of research questions: how did non-conformism spread in Norway, which was completely dominated by the State Church, and where can such developments be studied in the censuses more internationally? Some nations have century-long series of census-based aggregates about religious affiliations, while other nations have never or rarely included faith oriented items in their census questionnaires. Contrary to what could be expected with the increased awareness of privacy protection, several European countries, like the United Kingdom, have introduced a census question about religion at the start of the new millennium. This makes an overview of faith questions in the censuses topical both for historical and contemporary studies. This article deals in greatest detail with the differentiation of religion according to the censuses in Norway. Hopefully, this can inspire similar studies on the basis of the international overview of censuses in the first part of the article.

After dissenters were allowed from the 1840s, the Norwegian censuses provide one of the longest overviews of the spread of alternative beliefs, from 1865 to 1980. The slow growth is attributable to Norway as an anti-pluralistic society, where the voluntary activity of the independent congregations had difficulty competing with the State Church's professional organization. Local dissenters could still stand strong with up to one third of the population as followers. They had solid bastions especially in along the coasts in the north, the south-east and the south-west, mostly strong positions for alternative Lutheran congregations. Relatively speaking, dissenters were stronger in towns than in the countryside, which among other things can be seen from the predominance of women among the many migrants to urban areas and among the dissenters.

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This article first gives an overview of the census questions about religious affiliation used to analyze statistically the distribution of denominations in many countries. In which parts of the world and for which periods did the census ask questions about religion? The most common connection between the census and religion has been to create aggregates about the size of different congregations and to cross-tabulate this with other variables such as gender, occupation, ethnicity or region. Enumerations with questions about religion were performed in many countries from the mid-19th century. As a case in point, the second research question is to analyze the spread of non-conformism in Norway from the mid-19th century. Earlier, most censuses were statistical only, with questionnaires reporting purely quantitative information and without names or other personal characteristics on the individual level. This made it difficult to fit marginal variables onto the census forms, and it has not been documented that a variable about religion was included until the censuses became nominative with information on the individual level. In surveys generally, the religion question may be looked upon as one about faith (which God do you believe in?), second as a question about religious practice (what holy places do you visit?) and third as a question about affiliation (what religious community do you belong to?) (Sherif 2011, p. 4). It is this third definition that the census questions are based on in the overwhelming number of cases. Even so, the census may be looked upon as an instrument for defining the emerging national states, the state religion being part of the basis for national identity (Lie 2001; Desrosiers 1998).

Which countries asked about religion in their censuses?

The first attempt to record an individual's religion in a census was in Belgium, where the multi-genius Adolphe Quetelet organized censuses in Brussels in 1842 and in the whole country in 1846. Quetelet aimed to explain the fluctuations in population developments and considered both material and cultural background factors - religious affiliation among the latter (Bulletin 1843). The question about religion did not ask for specific thought patterns, but social affiliation to various religious groups; for example, "What religious congregation are you a member of?", as has been customary in most censuses since. Quetelet played a leading role in the international statistical congresses until the 1870s, and his Belgian initiative became the model for censuses in other countries, inspiring many to include a similar question about religion. The main exceptions excluding the religion variable from their censuses were the United States and Britain, and from the late 19th century also in the Catholic countries of Southern Europe and later in countries in the communist bloc, which we shall come back to.

For the period until World War II there are no comprehensive overviews of which countries' censuses included religion variables. The best overviews are from the IPUMS' of the Minnesota Population Center covering post war censuses and the three volume *Handbook of National Population Censuses*

which also covers some older enumerations. South and North-American censuses, except in the US, have generally included a religion query from the mid-19th century. But while areas dominated by Catholics in the Western Hemisphere tended to ask such a question, this was only exceptionally the case in the Catholic countries in south-west Europe. It is not easy to explain this anomaly unless it should be an attempt to conceal the under-representation of Catholics behind each cardinal in the Americas compared with European countries. Likewise, nearly the whole Communist bloc was solidly against asking people to identify their religion in the censuses. On the other hand, Muslim countries tended to ask a faith query in their censuses, as did the members of the British Commonwealth. Most notably, the British asked the religion question consistently in multi-religious India since 1872, while not introducing it in Great Britain until 2001. More extensive census taking in the colonies than in the homeland used to be the rule; it also goes for the 17th and 18th century censuses organized by the British, the French and the Danes in pre-revolutionary US, in Canada and in Norway while there were still dependencies.

There were more specific reasons why a religion variable was introduced or kept out of the censuses in some countries, such as in the Soviet Union, the US and Great Britain. The first and only formal census was taken in the Russian Empire (excepting Finland) in 1897, when religion and mother tongue was asked for. Religion was allegedly removed by Lenin himself during preparations for the aborted 1920 census and dropped in the first complete-count census organized by the USSR authorities in 1926 (Corley 1993, p. 404; Goyer and Draijer 1992, pp. 471-472). As an ardent Marxist, Lenin held uncompromising opinions on religion, and there was no reason to waste resources on a phenomenon which would soon be replaced by atheism anyhow (Pospelovsky 1987, p. 20). In 1937 the need for updated population numbers in the Gosplan forced the authorities to take a new census in spite of the economic and political turmoil which marked the 1930s. The timing of Census Day created special problems since the organizers had, on short notice, moved it one month forward to 6th January - the start of Orthodox Christmas. There are indications that the questions about religion and nationality became topics for endless discussions both internally between respondents and with census makers. Persons 16 and older were asked to distinguish themselves as "believers" or "non-believers" and in the former case to state what kind of "dogma" they adhered to (Corley 1994, p 405). Thus, this is an exception from the rule that censuses explicitly asked about religious *affiliation* - in 1937 the heading of the relevant field simply read "Религия" - Religion. Some people thought it risky to state that they were still religious, while others hoped high religiosity numbers would force the authorities to reopen the churches (Merridale 1996, p. 234).

After initial articles in the Pravda asserting that education and literacy were flourishing while religion was almost eradicated, complete silence

descended on the 1937 census operation. Behind the scenes, in February, census and statistics directors Kvitkin and Kraval had to report that the population of the USSR was only 162 million, some eight million inhabitants short of the projected estimates. Such figures were unacceptable for the Bolshevik leaders, since Stalin allegedly had cited optimistic figures based on theoretical population projections made in the Gosplan to prove the success of the socialist state (Merridale 1996, p. 235, Blum and Mespoulet 2003, p. 131). Since the census manuscripts were scrapped soon after, it is difficult to substantiate the population numbers or the figures reporting the continued popularity of religious sentiments; allegedly less than half the population 16 years and older may have identified themselves as atheists (Corley 1994, p. 407). Both Kvitkin and Kraval were arrested and later shot, while other census officials ended up in Gulags; the census had become part of the Moscow processes. Also in the next census taken in the Soviet Union in 1939 there was under-enumeration allegedly also because religious people refused to participate even if the question about religion had been removed (Corley 1994, pp. 412-413). In later 20th century censuses organized in the Communist Bloc further attempts to include a question about religion have hardly been documented, and the question never reappeared in Soviet censuses.

A country which consistently has kept all questions about religion out of its censuses is the US. When preparing for the 1960 census administrators in the Census Bureau in Washington seriously intended to include a question about the respondents' religion (Schultz 2006). The Constitution orders censuses to be taken, but does not forbid the inclusion of specific questions e.g. about religion. The inclusion initiative came from within the Census Bureau where assistant director for demographic data in the 1960 census, Conrad Taeuber, had a natural interest in religion, being the son of a priest. His initiative resonated with an opinion among census administrators, social scientists, some politicians and parts of the general public, thinking that religious faith was a crucial factor in US society well worth studying. As the large waves of immigration became a thing of the distant past, questions about birthplaces returned less and less data about ethnic origin and information about adherence to religious societies might complement the information about ethnicity, race and birthplace in order to compensate the relative decline of cultural insights from the census over time. The advent of electronic computers into census taking from 1950 signaled the realism of including more rather than fewer variables. The Catholic Church was especially in favour of including religion and in September 1956 the Jesuit weekly *America* found that concerns about privacy provided no reason for hesitation because all census results would be published anonymously. During a test run in Milwaukee in November only three out of 456 households refused to answer the question "What is your religion? Baptist, Lutheran etc.",

consciously not phrasing the question as “Are you a Jew?” which was deemed to be too controversial (Schultz 2006, pp. 366-367).

American Civil Liberties Union protested immediately against an obligatory question about religion, but could tolerate a voluntary question, but in early 1957 the Jewish Statistical Bureau started the counter offensive. Jewish statisticians lobbied their co-ethnic organizations, most notably the American Jewish Congress who launched a press campaign. The numerous articles pointed to the recent persecutions of Jews in Europe in particular and religious freedom in general. Those who wanted to copy the religion question from the Israeli census were silenced, while some Catholics protested against the view of their own organization and most Lutherans remained neutral. The letter writing campaign organized by the American Jewish Congress in the autumn created enough political pressure that the Commerce Department ordered the Census Bureau to not publish the results about religion based on the 1957 survey (ibid.). The bosses in the Census Bureau realized that the idea of including a religion variable in the upcoming census must be abandoned. It seems unrealistic that Congress will change the census law from 1976 which prohibits mandatory questions about religious belief or membership (Pew Forum 2008, p. 110).

As in the US, there was much organized effort from religious communities to include a question about religion in the censuses of the United Kingdom. Unlike in the US the effort succeeded, both because there was relatively little organized opposition and because political leaders supported the reform. The initiative was taken by the Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) in the mid 1990s, established to promote dialogue between representatives for different religious communities. A committee headed by Reverend and theology professor Leslie Francis was appointed and recommended that a question about religious affiliation in the upcoming census would be useful in areas such as medicine, sociology, psychology and gerontology. However, the reply from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in August 1996 was discouraging, stating that “this is not a priority need for Census users” (Sherif 2011, p. 2). Confronted with lobbying from Anglican and other religious leaders, in the spring of 1997 the ONS complied and successfully tested a potential question on a small sample with a question about religion, although there was doubt about how it was interpreted by different respondents. Further pressure was exerted by academics who pointed out the usefulness of the ethnicity question, which had been asked in the 1991 census. Still, in a census cost-benefit analysis ran by the state departments, religion ended up towards the bottom of the potential questions list.

The ICRC backed by the newly launched Muslim Council of Britain decided to lift the issue to the political level in a meeting with Home Secretary Jack Straw, and furthermore in a reception organized by the Muslim Council for Tony Blair in May 1999, where the Prime Minister responded with a

promise to help arrange the inclusion. It also helped that the Jews decided to not protest actively, but rather demanded that “Jewish” should be one of the options in any pick-list. Professor Francis and his group made a plan whereby a Private Bill was introduced in the House of Lords, including a clause making answering the question voluntary. It was more difficult to find a time slot for the bill in the busy House of Commons, and so it was decisive that Blair allowed the religion in the census legislation into a time slot allocated to the government. In June 2000 the law was passed with 194 for and 10 against (Sherif 2011, pp. 10-11). Francis attributed the success of the lobbying more equally between different religious denominations than does Sherif, who stresses Muslim influence (*ibid.*; Francis 2003). The latter group clearly helped to get the response rate as high as 93% by publishing articles and posters in English, Urdu, Bengali and Gujarati recommending people to answer the voluntary question “What is your religion?”. The following options were listed: No religion; Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations); Buddhist; Hindu; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh and finally “Any other religion, write in” The latter open-ended option inspired some persons to respond in unexpected ways; for instance 390,000 persons in Britain claimed that “Jedi” was their religion in 2001. Professor Francis praised Scotland for a census form which differentiated between different types of Christianity (Francis 2003). Questions about religious affiliation were repeated in the 2011 census when Eurostat recommended the inclusion of a similar question also in other countries such as Germany and Poland (United Nations Economic Commission 2006).

On the other hand, some countries have recently stopped including questions about religion in their censuses, one of which is Norway. This is paradoxical, since the study of the extensive growth in alternative world views or religions through the last few decades would have benefitted from a census variable about religions. However, the slow growth of non-conformism through most of 1800s and 1900s has received even less attention in the research literature. This is unfortunate and unnecessary, because the basic source material to study this long-term development is readily available in the censuses, where Norway has the world's longest continuous series of questions about religion together with Canada. This section will outline the differentiation of religious communities in the Norwegian population from 1865 to 1980, as well as the growing proportion of people proclaiming to be non-religious. The census should in this context be defined as nominative enumerations of in principle the whole population, listing names and other characteristics of each individual. However, it is customary to give the term ‘population census’ a wider meaning to include lists on major parts of the population and purely quantitative censuses where no individuals are mentioned by name. Cases in point are the male censuses taken by the Danes in Norway in the 1660s and the statistical censuses from the period 1815 to 1855.

Norway's full count, nominative censuses

The male censuses from the 1660s in Norway noted names, residence and employment, usually also age groups, but never the persons' religious affiliation. Neither was this variable included in the full-count Icelandic census in 1703, the Danish one in 1787 or the one covering the entire Danish kingdom in 1801. When the first director of Statistics Norway, Anders N Kjør (1838-1919), attended the international statistical congresses after he became chief of Statistics Norway's forerunner the "Table Office" in 1864, he was already aware of the religion question in Quetelet's original recommendations. For the religious Kjør it must have been obvious to include this variable when the nominative census was reintroduced in 1865, with space for new categories in the questionnaires. In religiously homogenous Norway the new column could hardly excite particular attention or discussion. Still, the Danes had waited from 1834 to 1855 before they introduced the religion column in their nominative censuses, while the Swedes waited until 1880 - the census was constructed by the priests from their Lutheran State Church parish records during the period 1860 to 1945.

The questions about cultural affiliation had a somewhat different design in Norway's censuses over time. Initially, in 1865 the heading of column No. 9 in the form was "Profession of faith, insofar not belonging to the State Church." Nothing more was explained either in the questionnaire or in the attached instructions about how religious minorities should be enumerated in the census. There was little change in the recognition of religious communities from census to census. For example, in the 1900 census the column header of the religion rubric listed different faiths on somewhat more equal terms: "Religious Community. For those which belong to the Norwegian State church, write the letter S, for others write the relevant religious community's name, or if relevant: "Withdrawn, no Society ". Inconsistency between the form and the attached instructions likely caused small problems, the latter specified "Faith" instead of a religious community, but the column heading probably had the greatest impact when filling the forms. After many decades of small changes, in 1970 and 1980 the categorization of religions was simplified, asking people to check one of three boxes, either "The State Church", "Profession of faith outside the State Church" or "Does not belong to any denomination." Both feedback from census takers and discussions in the international statistical congresses explain many of the changes in the census design. As far as the religion variable is concerned, the small changes until 1970 hardly affected the comparability of the statistical results significantly. However, Muslims immigrating into Norway from Pakistan especially since the 1960s were for this reason not singled out in the census statistics.

Since 1990, census data is increasingly obtained from a combination of population registers, merging these into census records using the social security number as the ID key. This development was caused both by the high

costs of form-based census taking, increased concerns about the collection of sensitive personal data and the alternative option to obtain information about the religious groups directly from the religious communities themselves. Since Norway became more culturally heterogeneous during the last decades and the need for statistics in this field thus increased, data on religious affiliation from the censuses would have been valuable both to corroborate the reports from the congregations and combine the information with other variables. Today's numerical estimate is based on the number of members in the different congregations receiving public economic support. Because of the cost of form-based censuses and privacy restrictions on linking lists from the congregations with other records, it is unlikely that a religion variable will return to the census in Norway. Instead, we must content ourselves with the congregations' self-reporting and data from representative surveys. Thus, there has been a break in the statistical series about the denomination from 1980, and we will for the sake of comparability limit the following quantitative analysis of Norwegian religious communities to the period 1865 to 1980.

Membership in Norwegian religious and world view communities

More than one hundred thousand inhabitants now adhere to other religions than Christianity; hundreds of thousands are Christian dissenters (Daugstad and Østby 2009). In 2013 just over three quarters of Norway's population remained registered as members of the Norwegian Church, as the State Church has been renamed. This is in contrast to its membership a few decades back. In the first edition of the authoritative book *Norwegian Society* from 1968, the prominent social scientist Johan Galtung theorized about a country with "extreme anti pluralism", based on 96% of the inhabitants being members of the State Church and that the proportion of immigrants and of students in private schools stood at low levels. In the book's second edition the characteristic was reformulated to "singularism" (Galtung 1968, Rolland 2011). The censuses can be analyzed to show how the situation was characterized by relative stagnation, but not lack of changes through the long century that passed from the ordinance ban on alternative religions was repealed in the 1840s.

Only little has been published about the slow development of the number of dissenters from next to zero to about four percent during the latter half of the 1800s and till 1970. Statistics Norway in 2011 produced a "demand analysis" - a chronological overview of the religion variable in their publications. This summarizes statistics about religious professions and surveys membership in religious communities. The publication which previously treated religious affiliations most systematically was the published aggregates from the 1950 census where one volume in its entirety was devoted to religious groups. It contained a systematic classification of membership in religious communities (or lack of such membership) in thirty different groups together with an alphabetical list of the major religions

reported in the 1950 census manuscripts and their classification. The thirty groups were quantified by cities and countryside and there is a full version of the abridged table reproduced somewhat misleadingly elsewhere, following statistically the thirty religious groups from 1875 to 1950. The main content of this volume was on how the population was distributed geographically within and outside the State Church, in the country's deaneries and parishes. Other tables described the eleven dissenter communities, people unrelated to religious communities by age and persons over 15 years cross-tabulated by occupations.

Figure 1 (see below) is based on the statistics from the 1950 aggregate census volume and supplemented by results from the 1865 and 1960 to 1980 censuses. According to the censuses prepared in 1865 and 1875, less than half a percent of the population reported membership outside the State Church. Only by the 1891 census could such "outsiders" be counted in tens of thousands, and right up to the 1930 census they numbered less than one hundred thousand individuals. The percentage in the State Church (ca. 96 %) was quite stable from 1930, but in the 1980 census had declined to under ninety percent. Until then, its membership had essentially kept pace with the population growth, and it was only with the many cancellations of membership after 1970 that the State Church experienced a decline in the number of members. The impression of religious homogeneity is reinforced by the fact that churches with faiths similar to the State Church dogma used to dominate among the dissenters. Methodists were the only ones enumerated in the thousands already in 1875, but after that they exceeded ten thousand believers at the turn of the century and remained stable. The Lutheran congregations grew steadily until the 1920s, while churches with a more deviant doctrine and liturgy grew more significantly in the first half of the 1900s; especially Baptists and Adventists. At the same time Quakers and Mormons saw their number of adherents decline, which was due to overseas chain migration to the US. The Jewish religious community's growth stagnated even before the war, when their numbers as we know were decimated because of Holocaust - most of those recorded in the 1946 census were returnee emigrants who had fled to Sweden in the autumn of 1942. National unity during the war seems to have dampened the popularity of the dissenting congregations; membership outside the State Church was stable in the 1940s and 1950s. However, we hypothesize a relationship between persons unrelated to all denomination and the radicalization of the labour movement from about 1910 and the radicalization of large population groups in the 1960 - and 1970s.

Occupations related to the religious communities

To what extent can the spread of dissenting religious communities be explained by a professional corps of employees in the free churches who could recruit members in competition with the State Church? This can be

studied most efficiently in the completely transcribed, digitized census, the last available from 1910, where profession and religious affiliation may be combined at the individual level. Only The Salvation Army had a handful of women entered in religious professions, otherwise men dominated completely. And employees of the State Church dominated the religiously oriented workplaces; less than 10% of those with religious occupations had other type of religious membership. Somewhat surprisingly, few persons reported professions related to religion as secondary occupations, which gives rise to the assumption that work in the free churches was often unpaid and therefore went unreported in the censuses. With much of the dissenters' organized activities being voluntary, while the State Church was run by a large professional staff, this helps explain the slow growth of dissenting societies.

Who stood outside the State Church?

Censuses can help in two different ways to illustrate the rise of dissenting congregations and other groups standing outside the State Church in Norway. Until 1910, we have individual level data so that we can make detailed lists of different groups' compositions. For the 1875 and in particular the 1891 census, however, we still miss parts of the country. From the period 1920 to 1950 little has been digitized. From the census in 1960 - the last one to ask details about citizens' belief affiliations - Statistics Norway provided a representative, anonymous sample of ten percent of the population. This is not ideal for the study of small groups, but the sample gives more details about dissenters than do the published statistics.

To start with there were more adherents of dissenting congregations in the countryside (about 3,000) than in urban areas (about 2,000) - according to the census in 1865. However, since the population of the countryside was almost six times greater than in the towns, the relative urban proportion was significantly larger, even considering the caveat that villages are counted as part of rural municipalities. It was likely easier to recruit new proselytes in dense urban communities with many in-migrants to who were easier to influence than the rural inhabitants, most often born and well integrated in the State Church culture. This urban tendency was particularly strong among those who were affiliated to the Jewish community - where everyone lived in towns - and among Mormons where almost half were urban. Both groups had clear focal points around the capital, while the Quakers were concentrated in the south-west. Baptists were strongest in the south-east of Oslo, close to Sweden.

Dissenting concentrations in urban places were reinforced during the rest of the 1800s. In 1900, the cities matched rural municipalities with regard to the absolute numbers outside the State Church, strengthened by the significant migration to towns. Dissenters had also spread their operations to more remote parts of the country and improved their standing there. This applied particularly to the Lutheran free congregations, Baptists and

Methodists who, respectively, had more than nine, four and three thousand followers in Norwegian rural municipalities. There were more than seven thousand with no religious affiliation, as well as a similar number in the towns. There the Methodists remained strongest among the dissenters (almost 7,000), while the Lutheran and Baptists were weaker in urban areas with about five and two thousand adherents each. In rough and relative terms the dissenters were strongest south of Oslo and in parts of Northern Norway.

The map in Figure 2 (see below) attempts to summarize how dissenters spread through the first generation after the ordinance ban was reformed. The map is based on the proportion of dissenters in censuses about twenty years apart, i.e. in 1866, 1891 and 1910. In the white parishes, the State Church dominated to the extent that less than one percent of the population belonged to other religious movements. The black areas in contrast mark municipalities where more than one percent reported such an association already in the census of January 1866. This applies to all parishes in the northernmost provinces of Finnmark and Troms, including the Tromsø town. Their second main area is found in south-western Rogaland, including Stavanger town. The dissenters' foremost core area, however, was in south-eastern Norway, in the provinces of Østfold, Vestfold and Telemark, south of Oslo. The dark gray areas had reached at least one percent dissenter in 1891, while the light gray areas reached this level only in the census of 1910, mostly as a dispersion from the core areas along the coast. The State Church dominance in the two northernmost counties was much due to the low-church Laestadians keeping their membership despite significant theological disagreement. In some places significant minorities with other religious affiliations than the State Church were found during the last century. Vegårshei in Aust-Agder county was special with over a third of the population down as dissenters, while the Holmsbu settlement south of Oslo and Meløy, Dverberg and Rødøy municipalities in Nordland county had about eighty percent of the population in the State Church.

While in 1900 the number of dissenters was too small to make an impact on the gender proportion among State Church followers, among the dissenters there was a significant majority of women. Both Methodists and Baptists had 55% women, while the proportion was about 52% in the Free Lutheran congregations. Private letters indicate that women made their mark on dissenting church life beyond the purely numerical impact. It is possible that women's relatively strong position in parts of today's Christian church, relative to other religions, is due to their active participation for a long time. We should also point out the excess of males (57%) among those who indicated lack of religious affiliation. These were more often (46%) married than the average (30%), a tendency to a lesser extent prevailing among Methodists and Baptists (respectively 33% and 36%). In demographic terms, the typical Methodist or Baptist was an unmarried woman, while the typical freethinker was a man living in the capital, often married.

One explanation for the labour movement's radicalization in Norway in the early 1900s was historian Edward Bull's theory that migrants to cities were easier to influence ideologically because they had left their original social environment. Is this also relevant for those who had left the State Church and entered into alternative religious groups? This can be studied in the nominative censuses where we have information both about the person's place of birth, residence and religious community. Aggregates combining these three variables were never published by Statistics Norway. Therefore, I choose to study the question in the full-count digital edition of the 1910 census, the last where we can combine these variables at the individual level. In this source 45,386 individuals are listed as dissenters, while 17,958 stood outside any religious community. In both of these groups about 46% had moved to a different municipality than their birthplace, while the corresponding proportion for the State Church was about 30%. The significant majority of women among urban migrants means that demographic factors explain a significant part of the migration effect on dissenters, but this is not the case with regard to the non believers whose majority were men. Thus, the theory about the relationship between migration and political radicalism can also be applied to explain religious non-conformism. This applies particularly to the lack of church membership, which can be perceived as radical, but to some extent also relating to alternative faiths which are often conservative, even if the breach with the majority religion in itself can be considered radical. The same tendency was found in the census from 1960, where we have a statistically representative sample.

We should also be open to a hypothesis that membership in Free Churches provided close social contacts which could ease the lives of migrants to a new place and be conducive to career, especially in urban communities (c.f. Thernstroms theory of "the urban escalator"). Secondary social relations in a society's life can be traced in the primary social contacts in the workplace, residential and marriage market. We will find this easier to study when we have built a longitudinal historical population register that includes the townships.

Summary

In many countries, the most comprehensive source for statistics about membership in religious societies is the census, but the degree to which religious affiliation has been asked about in the censuses varies significantly from country to country. Some nations, such as Canada and Norway, have series of census based aggregates about religious affiliations covering more than a century, while other nations have never included faith oriented items in their census questionnaires or did so only occasionally. The US has been consistent in leaving out the religion question, while the communist bloc usually did not ask about religious affiliation in their censuses. The most notable exception was the Soviet Union census of 1937, which likely returned a lower proportion of atheists than the authorities wanted to make public.

Contrary to what could be expected with the increased awareness of privacy protection, some European countries like the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland have introduced a census question about religion in the new millennium. Thus, in many places there is a need to employ census data on the individual and statistical levels to create a more detailed picture of the diversification of religious affiliation along the lines which is shown here for Norway.

While Norway asked about religious affiliation for the last time in the 1980 census, the series of nominative censuses asked this type of question every decade since 1865. This has been used as a case in point to describe the spread of non-conformism since the ban on religious activities outside the State Church was lifted in the 1840s. The spread was slow, with the proportion of people in alternative religious societies reaching only a couple of percent by 1900. From 1930 to 1960 the proportion remaining in the State Church was stable at around 96%. The impression of conformity was strengthened by the major alternative societies being Methodists and Lutheran Independents, thus theologically close to the State Church, whose professional apparatus could hardly be matched by the clergy of the other congregations who often held non-religious jobs. From the 1960s the proportion of people without any faith-oriented membership and with more divergent religions (Catholicism, Muslims) have grown rapidly, so that by 2013 one quarter of the population stand outside the State Church.

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Figure 1: Number of members in selected religious societies from 1865 to 1960, the number of people not belonging to such societies 1865 to 1980 (left axis) and the proportion of the population stating membership in the State Church 1865 to 1980 (relative numbers on the right axis). Sources: censuses 1950 (Volume 7 - Religious community. NOS XI. 153, Table 1), 1865 nominative census (own processing), 1960 (Pamphlet 8, NOS XII 140, Table 2), 1970 (Volume 1, NOS A 679, Table 10) and 1980 (Country summary municipality volumes, table 3).

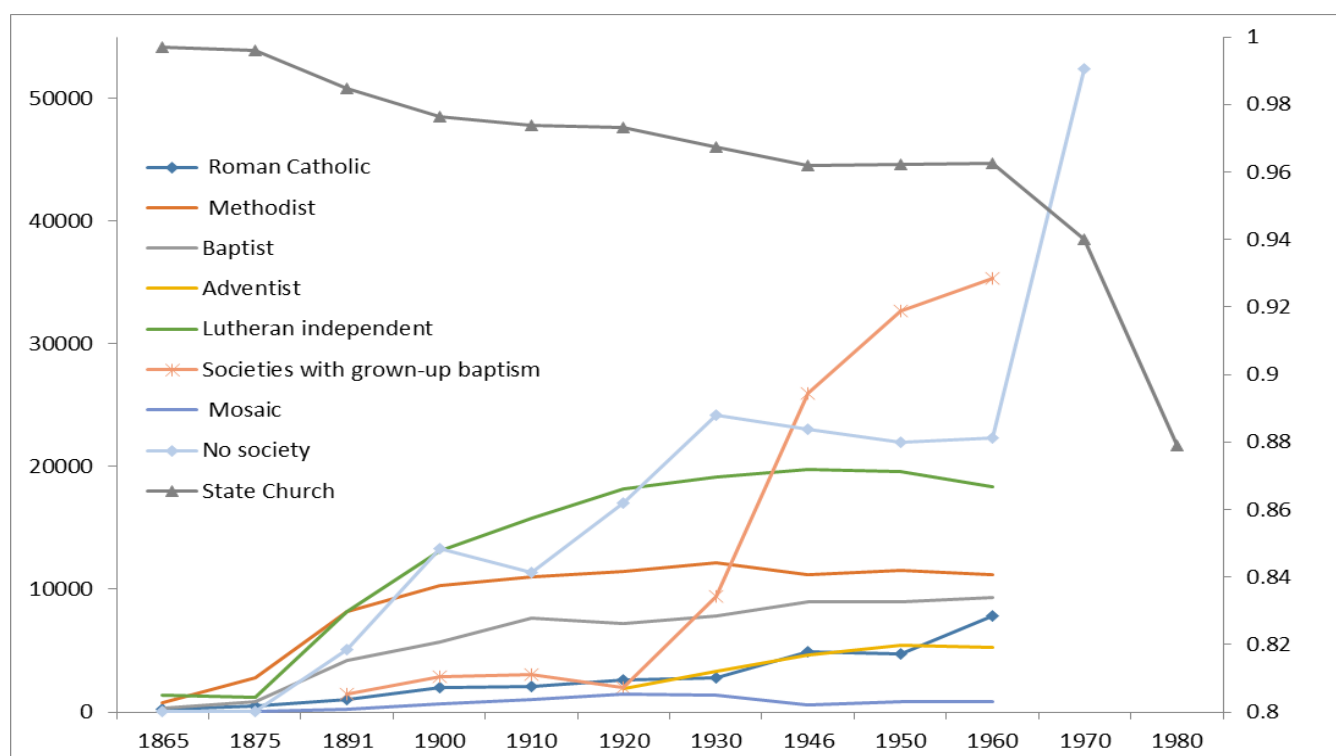


Figure 2 (next page): Relative number of dissenters in the municipalities according to the censuses in 1865, 1891 and 1910. Census year when a municipality reached at least one percent dissenters. Source: Municipality Database, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

