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**ARTICLE**

# Can we trust the natives? Exploring the relationship between national identity and trust among immigrants and their descendants in Denmark

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**Abstract**

Politicians often seek to strengthen national identity by encouraging immigrants to adopt the 'national values', thus supposedly boosting trust. However, empirical studies of the social effects of national identity have focused almost exclusively on the native majority. In this article, we instead ask how national identity among immigrant minorities affects *their* trust, including towards natives. We draw on unique survey data from a representative sample of the five largest non-Western immigrant groups and their descendants in Denmark. This reveals that national belonging, national pride and citizenship preferences are positively linked to social as well as institutional trust. These relationships hold even when controlling for the perception of sharing one's values with others and the extent to which one holds 'typically Danish' values widely shared among the majority population. This suggests that the emotional component of national identity, but not its content in the form of values, indeed forms an important basis for social cohesion.

**KEYWORDS**

national identity, national values, non-Western immigrants, social cohesion, trust

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, strong national identities and shared societal values have increasingly been called upon as the glue for keeping ethnically and culturally diverse societies together. The assumption that national identity helps raise trust and solidarity, thereby boosting societal cohesion, typically goes under the name of ‘the national identity argument’. This argument forms a crucial part of the recently revived literature on liberal nationalism (Gustavsson & Miller, 2020; Kongshøj, 2019; Miller, 1995, 1996). It has also found its way out of academia and into highly contentious political debates, where it has been taken to undergird policies such as the now mandatory posters of ‘British values’ on school walls across Britain, cultural canons on everything from literature to design in Denmark, and mandatory citizenship tests requiring immigrants to profess their commitment to a list of ‘national values’ (Cantle, 2001; Miller & Ali, 2014).

In this article, we will focus on the link between national identity and trust that relates to the first part of the national identity argument, as well as to recurrent concerns in the public debate about an erosion of the social contract. We will focus on the weaker form of the argument—the probabilistic claim that national identity tends to boost trust—as opposed to the stronger form of it, which claims that national identity is necessary for trust. We will also bracket the vexed question of whether trust in turn also leads to social justice, democratic deliberation and democratic accountability, as liberal nationalists tend to assume, but their critics have questioned (Abizadeh, 2002; McBride, 2010). Our concern is thus not with political trust, such as confidence in elected representatives, the government or the democratic system overall. Instead, our focus lies with social trust (e.g., in other citizens), and trust in public institutions, which serve an important, but often overlooked, critical function in most people’s life (Rothstein, 2005: 108). These latter types of trust have been shown to be crucial for good governance and a well-functioning welfare state—an outcome that has less to do with the legitimacy and quality of democracy than with that of the social contract as such. The reason for this is that the less trust we have in other citizens upholding their part of the deal, so to speak, and in public officials making sure everyone does so by treating everyone with impartiality, the more likely it becomes that we ourselves eventually defect from the social contract, even if we believe that it is wrong, for example, by trying to avoid paying taxes, cheating on benefits, bending the law in other ways or refraining from taking responsibility for the common good. This is because most reasonable people will only uphold their part of the social contract if they believe others will reciprocate, and that public officials like teachers, health care staff and council workers will operate based on fair procedures (Rothstein, 2021).

Importantly, moreover, we will study the link between national identity and trust among immigrants and their descendants. These groups are often at the heart of the debates in which national identity is recommended as a cohesion and social contract booster. Nevertheless, the scholars who have studied how national identity affects trust have focused exclusively on the feelings of the native majority, or on their perceptions of how much the minority identifies with the shared national identity (Banting et al., 2020). We thus know quite a lot by now about how national attachment and perceptions of nationhood among the majority affect their trust (Breidahl et al., 2018; Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020; Kongshøj, 2019; Reeskens & Wright, 2013), solidarity (Gustavsson, 2020; Wright & Reeskens, 2013), political participation (Huddy & Khatib, 2007) and attitudes towards immigrants (Huddy & del Ponte, 2020; Jeong, 2013). We also have extensive knowledge of the determinants of host country identification among immigrants and their descendants (e.g., Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018; Leszczensky et al., 2019; Maliepaard & Verkuyten, 2018).

However, we still know virtually nothing about how such feelings of national identity affect trust among immigrants and their descendants, especially in the main out-group from their perspective, for example, the native majority population. It could for example be that, for immigrants and their descendants, national attachment and pride only raise trust to the extent this reflects the experience of having been fairly treated by society. In other words, once the effect of non-discrimination is accounted for, perhaps national identity has little additional impact on trust for immigrants and their descendants? If that is indeed the case, we need to know. For if national identity is really to perform as a common in-group identity able to overcome cultural and ethnic divisions in society (Singh, 2015;

Transue, 2007), it is not enough for it to perform this role for the native majority. We also need to know that it does so for immigrants and their descendants. If it does not, then there is a risk that by emphasising national identity we end up with an even larger gap than before between the very groups that were meant to be brought together by sharing this identity.

Instead of looking at national identity among the non-immigrant majority and how it affects their views on, for example, minorities, we thus turn the question around. We will do so by zooming in on Denmark and Danish national identity among immigrants and their descendants. In many ways, we have to do with an extreme case. For the last two decades, the public debate in Denmark has been rife with concerns that immigrants and their descendants are unwilling to take part in society and do not share supposedly Danish values, such as the high commitment to democracy, gender equality, and gay rights. Consequently, the importance of sharing so-called Danish values has become a prominent feature in public debates on immigrant integration, social cohesion, law-abidingness and good governance (Breidahl, 2021).

How, we ask, do different aspects of national identity among immigrants and their descendants relate to their general trust in strangers, particular trust in natives and other immigrants, and trust in public institutions? This is our main research question. In addition, we also probe a second question: To the extent we do find a positive link between some aspects of national identity and some forms of trust, is it driven by a commitment to certain 'national values' that are widely shared in the majority population and a perception of sharing values with one's co-nationals? This is how the 'national identity argument' is often expounded (Breidahl et al., 2018; Holtug, 2017). Or is such a link rather driven by simply feeling connected to the same group, even in the absence of such shared values, as has been suggested by others, but never empirically investigated (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020)?

Our study uses survey data collected in 2014 among a representative sample of the Danish population as well as immigrants and their descendants from the five largest non-Western immigrant regions in Denmark: Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iraq and ex-Yugoslavia. This allows us to draw more robust conclusions about immigrants and their descendants than is possible with larger cross-national surveys, where immigrant respondents are both fewer and typically not representative of the entire immigrant population. This survey is also the only one, to our knowledge, to contain a measure of the perception that one shares values with one's co-nationals, which is key for assessing whether the link between national identity and trust must go via shared values.

In the following two sections, we elaborate our theoretical expectations. Next, we consider the Danish context and present our data, measures and methods. We then present our main empirical results raising a number of further questions, which we discuss in the concluding section.

## 2 | NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY: NATIONAL BELONGING, PRIDE AND CITIZENSHIP PREFERENCE

In this article, we approach national identity as a specific instance of a social identity, for example, 'that part of a person's self-concept that derives from the knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership' (Tajfel, 1981: 255). Drawing on social identity theory, Gustavsson (2019), Huddy and Khatib (2007), and Huddy and del Ponte (2020) have theorised and empirically verified the existence of three dimensions of this phenomenon: (1) national attachment or belonging, the cognitive issue of seeing oneself as close to and part of the national in-group; (2) national pride, the positive feeling of taking pride in this identity and the achievements connected to it; and (3) national chauvinism, the perception that one's own country and co-nationals are superior to others.

We will follow this general conceptualization and use 'national identity' as the umbrella term for several related dimensions. Most previous studies have not differentiated between them; instead, as Miller and Ali revealed in their study from 2014, they have tended to measure just one of them or collapsed several into one index. Although some of these studies have found that national identity does indeed raise trust (Johnston et al., 2010, 2017;

Robinson, 2016; Theiss-Morse, 2009), others have in turn found that it does not, or even that it works in the opposite direction (Breidahl et al., 2018; Reeskens & Wright, 2013).

Recent work by Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) suggests that these results may be less contradictory than they may at first seem. National identity, they argue, is in fact both a blessing and a curse for trust; it all depends on which dimension of national identity we consider. They find that the first of our three dimensions—which they call national attachment, but we have decided to call national belonging—raises social trust, and that national pride in turn raises political trust. National chauvinism, by contrast, turns out to erode both kinds of trust, at least in the Netherlands, whereas in the United States, it erodes social but not political trust. This picture of national belonging and pride as the positive sides of national identity, while national chauvinism constitutes its darker side, is also supported by studies on how these dimensions affect political involvement (Huddy & Khatib, 2007) and openness to international collaboration and immigration (Huddy & del Ponte, 2020; Jeong, 2013).

In this article, we expect national belonging and national pride to behave similarly for immigrants and their descendants, with the former raising their social trust and the latter their institutional trust. This is because we see no reason why the socio-psychological mechanisms suggested to underpin them among the majority should not also apply to this minority. There is a vast empirical literature showing that group identification motivates trust towards other group members. According to social identity theory, the reason for this is that the more one feels that one belongs in a group, the more likely one also becomes to attribute positive characteristics, such as trustworthiness, to other group members. This is ultimately due to the fact that people do not want to feel part of just any group, they specifically also want to belong to a group that makes them feel good about themselves (Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Tanis & Postmes, 2005).

Moreover, self-categorisation theory, an offshoot of social identity theory, suggests that those who feel a strong sense of belonging to a group will also be more likely to conform to prescriptive group norms (Terry et al., 1999; Turner et al., 1987) and to feel better when they do so (Christensen et al., 2004). Thus, it also matters here that trust is undoubtedly a strong norm in Denmark, so that Danes are often ranked as the most trusting people in the world (Breidahl et al., 2021). This, then, is also likely to make immigrants and their descendants who feel part of the Danish identity also exhibit more social and institutional trust than those who feel less Danish.

National pride in turn goes beyond a sense of belonging to a group: By definition, it also involves a positive evaluation of that group identity. And the more pride one takes in a group identity, the more one is also likely to view the symbols of this group identity, such as its institutions, in a positive light (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). In line with this, Gangl et al. (2016) found in experiments from Austria that people who were primed with national achievements (which raised national pride rather than national identification) became more trusting of public institutions. We also know that the strength with which a person identifies with her country predicts the legitimacy she attributes to the national tax system (Wenzel & Jobling, 2006) and that historically national identity has played a crucial role for the emergence of Social democratic welfare states (cf. Ferrera, 2005).

In sum, we expect the main findings from Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) about national belonging raising social trust, and national pride doing the same for vertical trust, to also apply to immigrants and their descendants in Denmark. This can be formalised in the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** National belonging will be positively related to social trust among immigrants and their descendants.

**Hypothesis 2.** National pride will be positively related to institutional trust among immigrants and their descendants.

Previous research has pointed to a negative relationship between national chauvinism and social trust among the majority population (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). This finding has partly been explained by the lack of open-mindedness and the more authoritarian mindset that national chauvinism is related to, which in turn tends to

dampen trust (Huddy & Khatib, 2007: 71; Huddy & del Ponte, 2020). However, we believe it is questionable whether feelings of national superiority capture a similar closedmindedness and thus have negative effects on trust, among immigrants and their descendants. In these groups, those who think their host country is better than others seem almost per definition more reflective and less dogmatic than natives who think so. After all, they are not just extolling the country they automatically belong to by origin; they are consciously choosing to extol the country in which they now live, over that in which they or their parents were born.

In order to still capture the comparative component that chauvinism gets at, and which goes beyond mere pride so as to also include a preference for the national identity at hand vis-à-vis others, we will use the only available measure of this in the survey: whether or not one prefers to be a citizen of Denmark rather than of any other country. This item is sometimes included in national chauvinism batteries, but we believe it is more appropriate in this context to term it 'citizenship preference'. Note that it is far from obvious that immigrants and descendants have stronger citizenship preferences for the country they are currently living in compared to somewhere else. The sample of immigrants included in this article have been granted residence permit on many different grounds (asylum, employment, family reunification etc.) and around 40% of the immigrant population in our survey state that they came to Denmark as refugees. Refugees have not necessarily freely decided to move to Denmark although we cannot preclude that Denmark was their first choice of destination country. Finally, it is an open question whether descendants consider their life in Denmark as better than a life elsewhere, they may well be disillusioned and feel themselves relatively deprived. As we are not sure what to expect regarding this particular aspect of national identity, we will refrain from formulating any specific hypothesis but rather just explore the relationship between this dimension of national identity and trust.

### 3 | SHARED IDENTITY RATHER THAN SHARED VALUES?

Our second research question revolves around the mechanisms that might underlie a potentially positive relationship between national identity and trust. It has often been assumed that the national identity argument and thereby such a link, if it exists at all, must operate via the sharing of values (Breidahl et al., 2018; Holtug, 2017). In our view, however, such a link should not be expected to be dependent on shared *values* but on a shared identity (also see Theiss-Morse, 2009: 44). The latter only needs to be shared in an emotional sense. A person shares a national identity with other Danes, in our case, if she feels she belongs in the group—that is, if she identifies as a Dane, quite independently of what she takes this identity to mean in more substantial terms, and independently of whether or not she believes she shares her values with other Danes.

As has been argued by Gustavsson (2019), if we really think of national identities as forms of social identity, we should also expect them to be fully able to develop and motivate people to cooperate even in the absence of shared beliefs. After all, we know from experiments within the 'minimal group paradigm' that mere awareness that someone else is similar to ourselves in also overestimating or underestimating a certain number of dots is able to spark a social identity that in turn motivates solidarity (Tajfel, 1981). We also know that just being reminded of national symbols strengthens prosocial attitudes towards other co-nationals, even across religious (Charnysh et al., 2015), and ethnic divides (Robinson, 2016; Transue, 2007). In line with Abizadeh (2002), we suggest the power of these symbols does not hinge on a shared interpretation of the values they may stand for. The flags, maps and pictures of national landscapes (Gangl et al., 2016) used as primes in such experiments remind people *that* they have a national identity in common with others, but not necessarily what the content of this identity is in terms of values, nor that co-nationals are likely to share their values.

This implies that feeling a sense of belonging and taking pride in one's nationality can raise trust independently of whether or not one shares or perceives oneself to be sharing values with one's co-nationals. An illuminating parallel could be that of rooting for a certain football team. Most fervent supporters of their team probably share few values or other substantial beliefs in life, and are well aware of this. They may further disagree vocally among

themselves regarding what tactics the coach should use, or which players should be sold off. If asked to trust or help other supporters from the same team, however, strongly identifying supporters would probably nevertheless be more likely to do so than those who identify less with their team, for the simple reason that the other supporters are part of what they consider 'their' in-group, in this case supporters of 'their' team. It is not uncommon, thus, for supporter help-groups to raise funds for supporters with disadvantaged families. Disagreeing on almost everything, including how a good supporter should behave, does not typically diminish the strength and motivating power of that particular social identity. Nor, then, should it do so when it comes to the national identity.

Note that our claim is more modest than saying that values do not matter at all. We do not want to deny that shared values may be conducive to trust. Our point, instead, is that the link from a shared national identity to trust is also likely to take the route of an additional, and more emotional, mechanism. If that is true, it means that the relationship between national identity and trust should not be *reduced* to a matter of values alone. This leads us to formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** National belonging and national pride will be positively related to trust even when we control for national values, and the perception of sharing values with one's co-nationals.

#### 4 | CONTEXTUALIZATION OF DANISH NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DATA

What does it take 'to be a real Dane'? Studies of majority population perceptions of nationhood reveal that (1) respecting Danish political institutions and laws, (2) being able to speak Danish, and (3) feeling Danish are considered fairly or relatively important by 90%–95% of the population (Larsen, 2017).

However, the ability of these measures to capture an over-all national identity—rather than how people position themselves in relation to specific political debates—has recently been questioned (Pehrson, 2020). Moreover, the public debate in Denmark gives us reason to suspect that it may not in fact suffice to act lawfully, speak the language or feel Danish to be considered a Dane, after all. For at the same time as the number of immigrants and descendants in Denmark has grown consistently over the last decades,<sup>1</sup> the importance of sharing so-called Danish values has become a prominent feature in public debates on integration of immigrants and social cohesion for the past two decades. This reflects how the dominant approach towards immigrants and descendants in Denmark is not only about adapting to a special way of living but also about accepting a special way of thinking. A recurrent claim in the public debate is that immigrants and their descendants do not share supposedly Danish values and that the welfare state and the social contract will crumble unless they become more Danish in this regard (Breidahl, 2021).

These concerns are also found in the Danish population. In an opinion survey from 2014 as many as 50% agreed 'that the biggest challenge of immigration is that immigrants do not adapt to Danish values' (Torpe, 2016). Judging from the public debate, the more specific nature of these 'Danish values' revolves around equality, and more specifically political equality. The importance of sharing these specific values has several times been brought up in the broader political elite debate and a number of White papers produced by changing governments have been legitimated as attempts to combat lack of commitment to these values among immigrants (e.g., The Danish Government, 2018). Three recurrent examples of such values are a strong commitment to democratic participation (such as everyone's right to vote, and also using that right), to gender equality and to gay rights.

Such values are widespread in the Danish majority population and also make the Nordic countries stand out in the famous cultural map of the World Values Survey (Breidahl, 2021; Puranen, 2019). As an example, the 2019 Citizenship Survey reveals that only 6% of the Danish respondents state that they are in opposition to 'representative democracy' (6% find it bad or very bad 'that citizens elect politicians to represent them, making important decisions on their behalf'), and as few as 3% agree that 'if jobs are scarce, men should have the right to a job at the expense of women'. As many as 93%, by contrast, support equal rights for LGBT people (The Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). Also, public support for democratic participation is strong among Danish respondents

(Breidahl, 2021). However, although these values can be broadly defined as liberal and progressive, they are also often seen as anchored in a particular Danish identity (Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013). This has led some scholars to see Denmark as a typical case of the 'nationalisation of liberal values' (Laegaard, 2007).

All this, we suggest, makes Denmark a tough test for our third hypothesis, which holds that the positive links from national identity to trust are not dependent on shared values among co-nationals. In such a context, where certain shared 'Danish' values have long been emphasised in the political elite rhetoric as an important precondition for being a 'good Dane', one could expect that feeling Danish or proud to be so would not be enough in order for immigrants and their descendants to also become more trusting of other Danes. They might still, namely, experience other Danes as very different from themselves in terms of values, because that is a recurrent idea in the public debate. Put differently, if the link between national identity and trust primarily goes through values, then this should certainly be expected to manifest itself in a country like Denmark, where the debate on social cohesion and integration has been centred on sharing values for a long time. If, by contrast, we find that there is a link between national identity and trust that does not go through shared values, then chances are that this will also be the case in other contexts where potential value differences between the majority and immigrant minorities are less salient in the public debate.

Our empirical analysis draws on 'Community conceptions among ethnic and non-ethnic Danes', a survey that was conducted in October and November of 2014 by Statistics Denmark (a web-and-telephone combination). It consists of a representative sample of the five largest non-Western migrant groups and their descendants living in Denmark in the 18–60 age range: Turkey ( $n = 92$ ), Pakistan ( $n = 110$ ), Iraq ( $n = 105$ ), Lebanon ( $n = 82$ ) and the former Yugoslavia ( $n = 129$ ). The sample is overall representative in terms of gender, age, household composition, geography, education, income and socio-economic status. However, some minor mismatches between the survey population and sample reflect the fact that response rates were somewhat lower among groups with lower socio-economic status. For example, 36% of the population is not in employment, whereas this group accounts for only 32% in the survey. Consequently, the data in this article are weighted (which, however, only makes a minor difference to the results). The response rate was 33%, which is low but also rather common in survey studies among immigrants (Font & Méndez, 2013; Kongshøj, 2015). As regards self-selection, we examined whether there was a tendency for immigrants and descendants to respond in ways that are considered 'politically correct' to a number of questions. This did not seem to be the case, for example, as regards attitudes towards gay rights.

Throughout the empirical analysis, immigrants and descendants are merged together in one category. The overall focus of this article is namely not to compare different generations or minority groups to each other, but to expand existing research on minority–majority relations. Often, in particular in the Danish case, descendants are referred to as a minority when it comes to adapting to national values. Furthermore, as we will demonstrate in Figures 1–3 below, immigrants and descendants in our survey data do not differ much in terms of their Danish identity or trust. Finally, bringing these two groups together raises our statistical robustness.

The survey offers the following measures to capture our different dimensions of national identity:

**National belonging:** 'To what extent do you feel like a Dane?' ('wholly' to 'not at all').<sup>2</sup>

**National pride:** 'How proud are you of being a Dane?' ('very proud' to 'I do not feel like a Dane').

**Citizenship preference:** 'I would rather be a citizen of Denmark than of any other country in the world' ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree').

To control for internal consistency and thereby the closeness of the three items of national identity, a test of Cronbach's alpha was provided. Because the alpha is below 6 (whereby they do not correlate), we approach them as three independent dimensions.

This data set also contains the following item, which is seldom used in survey studies on national identity and which allows us to study our second research question regarding shared values:



**Perception of shared values:** 'To what degree do you believe that your values are shared by other Danes' ('to a high degree' to 'not at all').

As for support for values that are often depicted as 'typically Danish' (both widely shared among the native population and emphasised as prominent in the broader political elite debate (Breidahl, 2021), we use commitment to gender equality, gay rights and democratic participation.

**Support for gender equality:** Women and men should have the same rights in society ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree').

**Support for gay rights:** Homosexuals should have the same rights in society as other citizens ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree').

**Commitment to democratic participation:** Everyone with the right to vote should vote in public elections ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree').

Moving on to trust, we make a distinction here between social and institutional trust, the latter of which we capture with measures that go straight to the heart of the perceived fairness of public officials and their procedures (Rothstein, 2021). These are the survey items we will use:

### Social trust

**Generalised trust:** 'To what extent do you generally trust people you meet for the first time?' ('wholly' to 'not at all').

**Trust in natives:** 'To what extent do you trust people with a Danish origin?' ('wholly' to 'not at all').

**Trust in immigrants/refugees:** 'To what extent do you trust immigrants/refugees?' ('wholly' to 'not at all').

### Institutional trust

**Trust in fair treatment:** 'To what extent do you trust public institutions to treat you fairly and decently?' (0: not at all to 10: very much).

**Trust in the police:** 'To what extent do you trust the police to treat you fairly and decently?' (0: not at all to 10: very much).

**Trust in the courts:** 'To what extent do you trust the courts to treat you fairly and decently?' (0: not at all to 10: very much).

Because the three items on institutional trust (trust in public institutions) are highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha above 8), we constructed a common institutional trust index from them.

We will use linear regression to investigate the hypothesised associations between the different dimensions of national identity and those of trust. The results from our regression models will be presented in 12 figures (Figures 4–15) with coefficient plots, visualising coefficients (unstandardised regression coefficients) and confidence intervals for each category of the strength of national identity. In each figure, a weak national identity (e.g., feeling 'not at all/very little' like a Dane) will be the reference point, and coefficients for the strength of national identity will show differences relative to the ones with the weakest degree of national identity, on the dependent variable. This makes it easy to visually assess whether differences in the strength of national identity matter for trust and to see how well our models explain these differences once we include additional variables. The first model for each type of trust is 'binary' without controls. The second model includes controls for gender, age, education, labour market attachment, danish language skills and political left–right self-placement. This is to make sure that any links we find between national identity and trust are not in fact driven by such underlying variables affecting both these attitudes. In the third model, we add ethnic identification: 'To what extent do you identify with the country your mother was born in?' to make sure that the findings not just reflect that some people tend to identify more with all kinds of groups (e.g., not just the host country but also that of the country they or their parents emigrated from) and that such persons also tend to be more trusting than others. In the third model, we also include a measure of feeling looked down upon in society. This is because we know that the experience of ethnic or cultural discrimination among immigrants and their descendants drives both their host country national identification and pride and their trust in the political institutions, so we want to make sure that

this underlying variable is not what is in fact driving any of the relationships we find (Dinesen, 2010). Moreover, the third model includes sense of religiosity as previous studies have linked religiosity to social trust (Dingemans & Ingen, 2015). In the fourth model, in addition to all the variables from the previous models, we also include perception of shared values and the three values often framed as typically 'Danish'. This allows us to test our third hypothesis, which holds that national belonging and pride will retain their relationships to trust even when the level of perceived shared values is held constant.

As we are using figures with coefficient plots to illustrate the findings, we will not present coefficients for the specific control variables. Instead they can be found in an online appendix and, if necessary, we will refer to them throughout the next section.

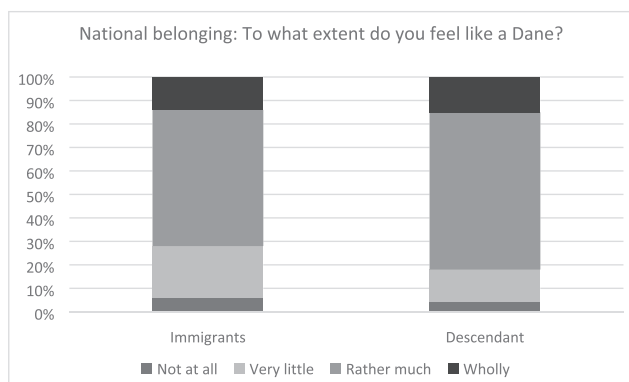
## 5 | RESULTS

Figures 1–3 report descriptive findings for our three measures of national identity. This provides insights on the extent to which the group of non-Western immigrant and their descendants in our survey feel Danish (national belonging), take pride in being Danish (national pride) and would rather be a citizen of Denmark than of any other country in the world (citizenship preference). Although only immigrants and descendants have been asked about the first measure in our survey, the two latter measures allow us to compare with natives.

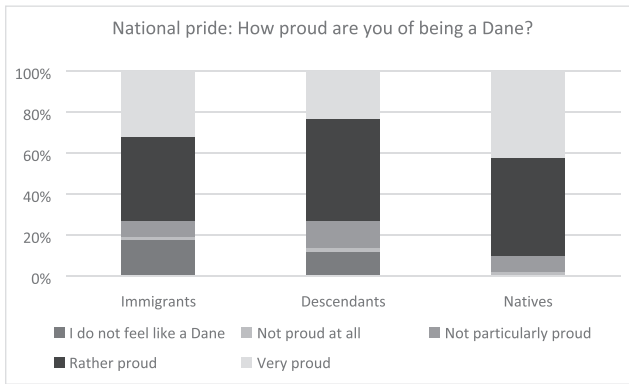
In Figure 1, we see that most report feeling 'rather much' (58%/67%) or 'wholly' (14%/15%) like a Dane. However, a large minority of immigrants express a lower level of national belonging (22% 'very little' and 6% 'not at all'). This is also the case for descendants (14% 'very little' and 4% 'not at all'). As expected, Figure 2 shows that natives are significantly prouder than immigrants and descendants. However, it is also noteworthy that the majority in all three groups feel 'very' or 'rather' proud. At the same time, a worryingly large share of immigrants (18%) and descendants (12%) indicate that they do not feel like a Dane at all. Finally, the differences between the groups are smaller when it comes to citizenship preferences in Figure 3. The majority in all groups agree that they would rather be a citizen of Denmark than any other country of the world.

Overall, the differences between immigrants and descendants in terms of national identity are small. For example, 73% of both immigrants and descendants are rather or very proud of being a Dane. This supports our decision to collapse the two groups in the following.

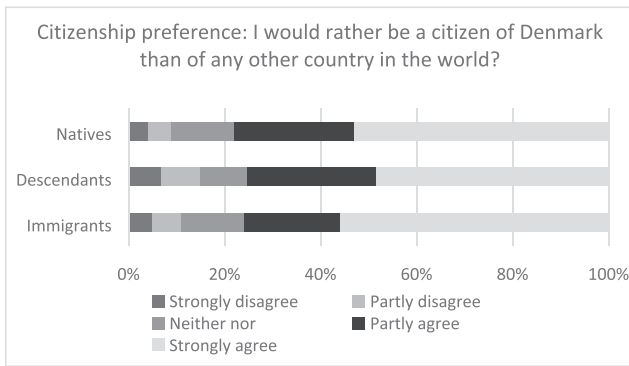
As regards trust levels (not depicted here), trust among immigrants and descendants is remarkably lower than among natives on all four dimensions, which is well known from previous research (Breidahl et al., 2021). This is in



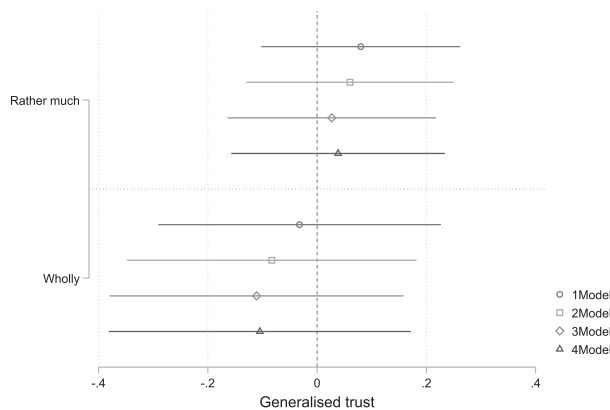
**FIGURE 1** National belonging ( $N = 506$ )



**FIGURE 2** National pride (N = 1,253)



**FIGURE 3** Citizenship preference (N = 1,251)

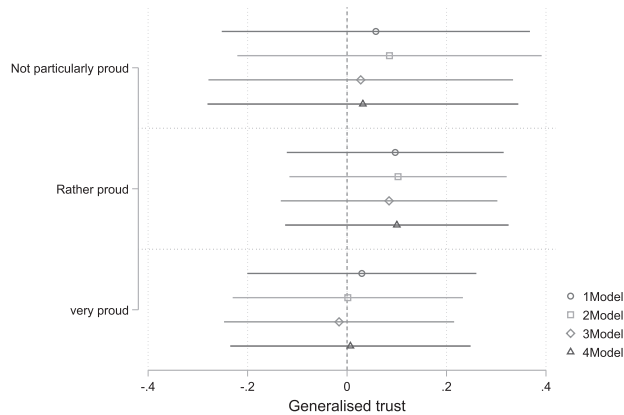


**FIGURE 4** The link between national belonging and generalised trust (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale). (N = 415)

particular the case for trust in people one meets for the first time, and in native Danes. Descendants are actually a bit less trusting than immigrants (63% of the natives trust people they meet for the first time, whereas the equivalent number for immigrants is 31%, and for descendants 19%).

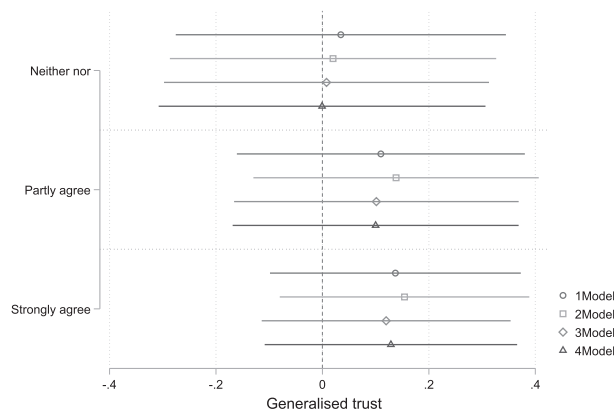
Now, let us turn to the relationship between national identity and different forms of social trust. Is there support for Hypothesis 1, that national belonging boosts this type of trust? And what are the relationships between the other dimensions of national identity and social trust?

Figures 4–6 show the links—or, rather, the lack of them, given that few of the coefficients reach statistical significance, as can be seen from the fact that the confidence intervals all overlap with 0—between the different dimensions of national identity and trusting strangers in general. We can note that neither commitment to specific values nor the perception of shared values have a significant positive link to generalised trust. Instead, age (being older) and educational level matter more (see the online appendix). The fact that we do not find such a link to general trust may at first seem puzzling, but only if we think of general trust as the sum of how much one trusts other Danes and immigrants. This, however, is not how general trust seems to work, perhaps especially not for immigrants, who are likely to have not only their host country but also their old country in mind when answering questions about trusting people in general. This is corroborated by a Canadian study, which found that it was mainly pre-migration cultural experiences that mattered for general trust, while post-migration experiences had a significant effect mainly on trust in



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = I do not feel like a Dane/Not proud at all

**FIGURE 5** The link between national pride and generalised trust (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) ( $N = 415$ )

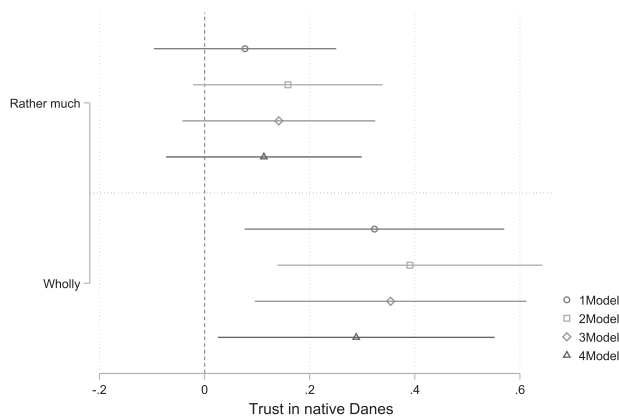


Note: Reference category (vertical line) = Strongly disagree/partly disagree

**FIGURE 6** The link between citizenship preferences and generalised trust (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) ( $N = 415$ )

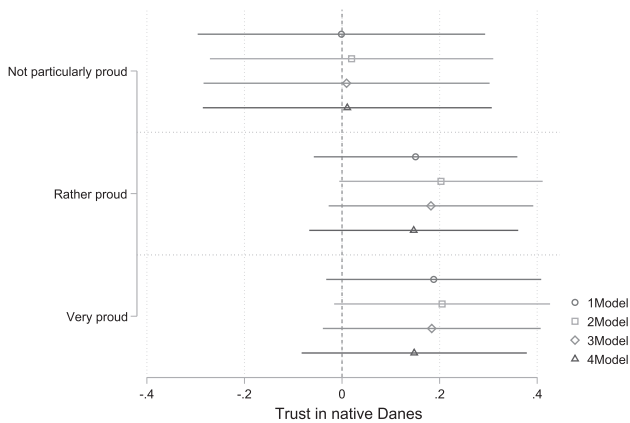
other Canadians (Bilodeau & White, 2016). It is also likely that general trust taps into a more stable and personality oriented form of trust than the more specified forms (Uslaner, 2002) and that this makes the former less susceptible than the latter to influence from a group identity, such as the national one. It is also possible that immigrants (but not descendants) are more wary of people they meet for the first time than others because of being deprived of social cues in the new country.

So far, we see no support for Hypothesis 1. But what about trust in native Danes? In Figures 7 and 9, we see that immigrants and descendants with a very strong Danish belonging or a clear Danish citizenship preference are indeed significantly more trusting of native Danes than those who feel less Danish or prefer Danish citizenship less. These relationships are in line with Hypothesis 1 and remain strong and significant throughout Models 1–4. The fact that national pride does not seem to have a similarly significant impact on trust in natives, as Figure 8 reveals, is also in line with our hypothesis about national belonging rather than pride being key for social trust. Furthermore, the fact



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = Not at all/very little

**FIGURE 7** The link between national belonging and trust in native Danes (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 416)



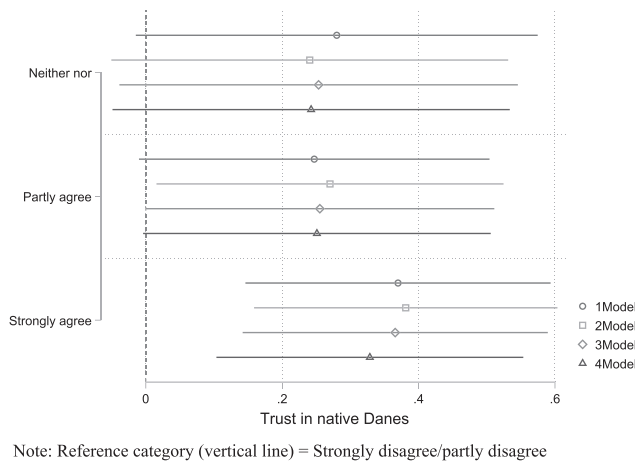
Note: Reference category (vertical line) = I do not feel like a Dane/Not proud at all

**FIGURE 8** The link between national pride and trust in native Danes (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 416)

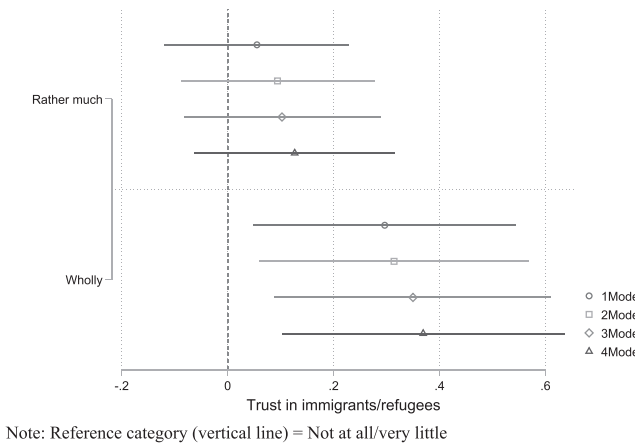
that including controls for the perception of shared values and support for gender equality, gay rights and democratic participation (in Model 4) does not reduce the links from national belonging lends support to Hypothesis 3, according to which these emotional aspects of identity boost trust independently of shared values.

As regards trust in Danes, we find, again, that older people and higher educated people are significantly more trustful across Figures 7–9. Moreover, once again, we can note that commitment to specific values and perceptions of shared values do not have a significant positive link to social trust. It may seem surprising that self-perceived good Danish language skills tend to have a negative impact on trust in Danes. However, it is a common finding in the literature on the ‘integration paradox’ that well educated and high skilled migrants in some cases also tend to turn away from the host country (Verkuyten, 2016). This could also be the case for social trust.

Is there a risk that immigrants and descendants who identify as Danes do so at the cost of also feeling more distanced from other immigrants? Not really. In Figure 10, we see that, on the contrary, national belonging turns out to have an even more positive and robust link to this form of trust than to trust in native Danes (Figure 7). This suggests



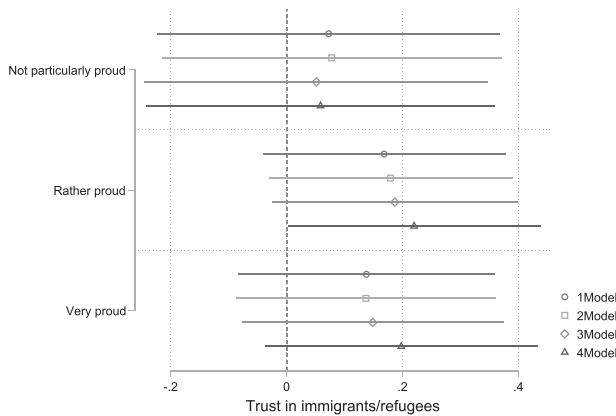
**FIGURE 9** The link between citizenship preferences and trust in native Danes (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 416)



**FIGURE 10** The link between national belonging and trust in immigrants/refugees (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 414)

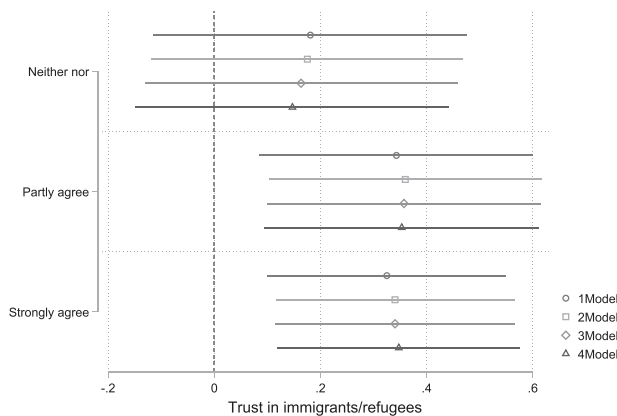
that immigrants and descendants who identify strongly as Danes also recognise other immigrants and refugees as co-nationals, and thus perceive themselves to be sharing a national identity with them, which also makes them more likely to trust them. We can note that national pride (feeling ‘rather proud’) also has a positive relationship to this outcome in all four models.

Again, citizenship preference also turns out to have a positive link to social trust: here, specifically trust in other immigrants and refugees (Figure 12). In line with our third hypothesis, moreover, neither support for ‘typically Danish’ values nor the perception of shared values has a significant relationship to trust in other immigrants and refugees, and nor do they weaken the link between the three dimension of national identity and trust in immigrants and refugees. As regards the many control variables included in the models, it is only education (and not age) that has a positive influence on this trust dimension (cf. the online appendix).



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = I do not feel like a Dane/Not proud at all

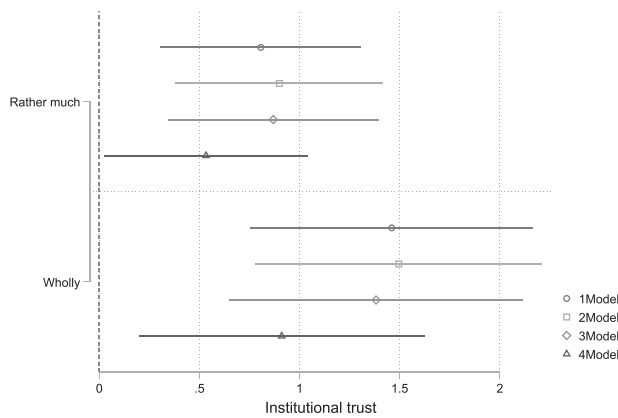
**FIGURE 11** The link between national pride and trust in immigrants/refugees (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 414)



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = Strongly disagree/partly disagree

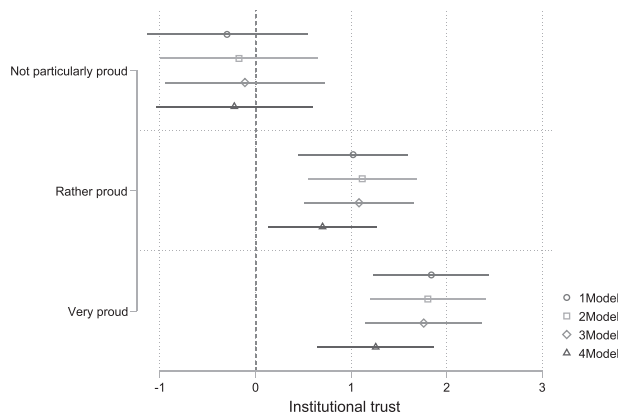
**FIGURE 12** The link between citizenship preferences and trust in immigrants/refugees (unstandardised beta) (1–4 scale) (N = 414)

Our second hypothesis, finally, holds that national pride will boost institutional trust also among immigrants and descendants, as it has been shown to do for the majority (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). The results in Figure 14 support this expectation. National pride has a very strong and highly significant relationship to institutional trust, even after controlling for all the other variables in Model 4. Furthermore, Figures 13, and 15 respectively show that national belonging and citizenship preference are also positively related to institutional trust throughout Models 1–4. The results reveal, interestingly, that the perception of sharing values (Model 4) does not manage to wipe out the effect from national belonging, national pride or citizenship preference. However, it is notable that perceptions of shared values and support for gender equality do indeed have a strong and significant impact on institutional trust. The results also reveal that age is the only additional control variable (of the ones mentioned above) that has a positive impact on institutional trust in the full model across all three national identity dimensions (cf. online appendix).



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = Not at all/very little

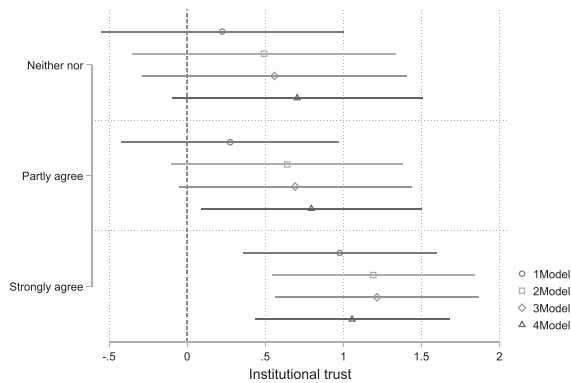
**FIGURE 13** The link between national belonging and institutional trust (unstandardised beta) (0–10 scale) (N = 404)



Note: Reference category (vertical line) = I do not feel like a Dane/Not proud at all

**FIGURE 14** The link between national pride and institutional trust (unstandardised beta) (0–10 scale) (N = 404)





Note: Reference category (vertical line) = Strongly disagree/partly disagree

**FIGURE 15** The link between citizenship preferences and institutional trust (standardised beta) (0–10 scale) (N = 404)

## 6 | CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this article was to study how, if at all, different aspects of national identity relate to trust among immigrants and their descendants. Our expectations were that within these groups, just as for the non-immigrant majority, national belonging would raise social trust (Hypothesis 1) and national pride would do the same for institutional trust (Hypothesis 2). Furthermore, as regards the second research question, we expected these links not to be dependent on shared values (Hypothesis 3).

We have found not only some evidence in favour of our hypotheses but also some unexpected results. The first hypothesis is partly supported by the fact that for two of the three measures of social trust we studied here (trust in native Danes as well as in immigrants/refugees), we did indeed find a positive link from national belonging.

Our second hypothesis is more clearly supported, because we did find a positive and robust relationship between national pride and institutional trust. This relationship also—something we did not hypothesise—holds for national belonging and citizenship preference. Could the direction of causality here go in the opposite direction from what we have assumed? Perhaps. It is not entirely unlikely, after all, that someone who believes he or she will be fairly treated by public institutions also becomes more proud, feels more belonging and prefers her country more, because of this. In the end, only experimental evidence would be able to settle the direction of causality, and unfortunately we have no such data available. Because we controlled for being looked down upon in society, however, we do not think that the link we have found between national identity and institutional trust could be explained away as a case of some immigrants being less discriminated against by these institutions than others and therefore becoming both more trusting of them and for example more proud to have the host country nationality.

As regards citizenship preferences, the results were quite convincing: strongly agreeing with the statement ‘I would rather be a citizen of Denmark than of any other country in the world’ had a positive influence on trust in native Danes, immigrants and refugees, and institutional trust. Sometimes our item for citizenship preference is used in studies of majority populations as a civic version of national chauvinism (Huddy & del Ponte, 2020: 43). The item certainly taps the feeling that the country at hand is better compared to all others. In that light it is notable that the lack of open-mindedness that generally tends to diminish trust and that has been found to be associated with national chauvinism among the majority in a country (Huddy & Khatib, 2007: 71), may be absent for immigrants and descendants who prefer their new country to others. However, we do not find it entirely surprising, because for immigrants, agreeing that one would rather be a citizen of one's host country than any other

is likely to reflect a less authoritarian position than it does for natives, who in contrast to immigrants and their descendants may have less to compare to when they say their country is better than others. This reminds us of the importance of being reflective about how different groups in society interpret the same survey items.

Turning finally to our second question and our third hypothesis, the data do indeed support our expectation that the positive links from national identity to trust are not dependent on having or perceiving that one has the same values as one's co-nationals. Because the identified relationships remain strong even when controlling for such a perception, and typical 'Danish' values, the emotional mechanism is indeed more likely than the value-based one. This is in line with what has previously been argued but never empirically verified by Gustavsson (2020).

Note that this second question of ours is not just of academic interest; it is crucial for policy decisions. It is one thing to promote shared national values, for example, through value contracts or national curricula stressing these values, and quite another to promote a shared feeling of pride in or belonging to the nation, for example, through national holidays, national symbols or sports events, which may be able to bring people together despite vast differences in values, religions and other fundamental outlooks on life.

Sometimes debates and policies designed to further shared values may even undermine the sharing of an identity and taking pride in it. Knowing these are not really necessary for boosting cohesion through national identity is thus an important insight to build on, and to study further. Consider for example the Muhammad cartoons affair in Denmark, or the veil ban debates in France, both of which were part of a discourse that stressed the importance of establishing and paying tribute to supposedly Danish and French values. These values, moreover, were seen as largely incompatible with both the taboo of portraying the Prophet Muhammad and the practice of wearing a Muslim veil (Gustavsson, 2014). Although these debates may certainly have tried to form a clearer sense of the values that need to be shared within the respective countries, it is highly likely that by doing so these debates also ended up undermining many Muslims' identification with and pride in Denmark and France, respectively, as well as wanting to be a citizen there rather than anywhere else. Yet it is these latter dimensions of national identity, this article has argued that we should rely on as means for boosting trust among immigrants and their descendants.

Our conclusions thus speak for nuancing the national identity argument, rather than abandoning it altogether. The latter conclusion is sometimes drawn by the critics of liberal nationalism based on the observation that policies aimed at fostering shared national values may in fact undermine rather than further trust (Abizadeh, 2002; McBride, 2010). We agree that policies seeking to inculcate shared *values* may indeed be counterproductive. However, this does not entail that national identity as such is unable to further trust. What our findings suggest is rather that reminding citizens—perhaps especially immigrants and descendants—of their affective national attachments, rather than so-called national values, is likely to benefit their trust across ethnic and cultural cleavages.

Altogether, our findings indicate that for immigrants and their children to trust native Danes, each other, and their shared institutions (including the police and the courts), it helps if they feel like Danes, are proud of this identity and are keen to be citizens of Denmark rather than any other country. Whether they also believe they share values with their co-nationals is certainly important for institutional trust, we have seen, but not for their social trust. This is good news, we believe, for the simple reason that feelings of national identity like these are likely to be much easier to achieve for many minorities than are shared values—beyond the more fundamental belief in democracy as such, which a vast majority of immigrants and their descendants already share with native Danes (Breidahl, 2021). Such feelings of identity are also less problematic as the basis for social cohesion from a normative view, for in contrast to shared national values they do not require uniformity or substantial agreement. Instead, they are possible to combine with a publically well-known diversity in values, religions and moral outlooks among the members of the common national in-group. What matters for cohesion, in the end, may not be so much *what* the shared identity is thought to consist of, but rather *that* there is one in the first place to which immigrants and their descendants feel they belong.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Between 1980 and 2019, the number of immigrants living in Denmark increased from 135,000 to 608,000 (which is roughly 10% of the population) (Statistics Denmark 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Note that although this formulation may make identification somewhat more difficult than questions that omit feelings and ask about what one's identity is, or who one 'is', we believe it captures the core idea of national belonging better than these other formulations. This is because it so clearly asks about the extent to which a person feels as part of the national in-group, whereas questions about who one identifies as or who one is could also capture a respondent's assessment of whether or not others perceive them to be Danish etc., and this is a slightly different thing. This item also comes rather close, we believe, to what experiments priming national identity try to make salient: for example, precisely the extent to which one feels like part of a given national group.

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