A report on the demographic composition of countries defined by the Danish Government as 'Western'

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Executive summary
The purpose of this report is to explore the racial, ethnic and religious composition of the countries defined by the Danish Government as 'Western'. Drawing together data from a number of different sources, including national census data and sample surveys such as the European Social Survey, the report presents analysis that provides strong evidence that what characterises the group of countries selected by the Danish Government as 'Western' is not the fact that they are geographically clustered or economically similar – they are clearly not – but that they are *ethnically* similar and, in particular, that in every case the majority of their population is white.

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A. Introduction
The purpose of this report is to explore the racial, ethnic and religious composition of the countries defined by the Danish Government as 'Western' (see box). It is difficult to measure race and ethnicity, particularly in a cross-national comparative context, and at the threshold it is important to stress that the analysis presented here is intended to give insight into the broad racial/ethnic/religious composition of the countries on the government list, rather than detailed estimates of the incidence and prevalence of particular population groups.

Western countries: All 27 EU countries, Andorra, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, the UK, the USA, and the Vatican State.

Non-Western countries: All other countries.

Taken at face value the list of countries labelled 'Western' by the Danish Government looks odd. Inclusion of the EU27, plus the UK, presumably reflects various legal requirements to treat EU citizens equally. Iceland and Norway have strong cultural ties to Denmark, and like the smaller European states, and Switzerland, have multiple formal links with the EU. But why Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA? These are not all 'western', nor do they have strong historical or cultural links with Denmark. The suspicion is that these countries are historically and culturally European, 'white' (and Christian). They are also wealthy, something that may set them apart from South American countries such as Argentina and Uruguay.

In this note I explore the extent to which the list of countries above are, indeed, predominantly populated by people of European descent. This is achieved by bringing together data from a range of sources that have generated population estimates of the numbers of people from different ethnic, religious and other groups within the countries concerned.

There is a rich tradition, in many parts of the world, of measuring race, ethnicity and related concepts in Censuses, surveys and other data collection exercises. There are multiple reasons for doing so, but particularly important in many contexts is the need to delineate and explore the economic, social and other often experienced by minority groups, and to track the success or otherwise of policies put in place to combat these (Simon 2012 disadvantages). For the sake of clarity, Part B below outlines how I have approached the concepts involved.

B. Key concepts

Race
While 'race' has no biological or genetic underpinning, as a 'social fact' it is a central feature of life in many societies around the world. Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, defined social facts as "a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him" (1895: 52). Social facts, in other words, are 'socially constructed' via human culture and interaction, yet have direct, material effects on people's lives. The 'races' to which people are assigned clearly falls into this category.

In many countries measuring race is standard practice. The 2020 US Census, for example, specifically asks respondents to indicate the *race* of themselves and others living in their household. (e.g. "What is Person 1's race"). Boxes and printed 'origins' included: White, Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native, and a number of other categories.[1] Guidance to respondents included the following information about the categories to be used:

> *White:* The category "White" includes all individuals who identify with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Polish, French, Iranian, Slavic, Cajun, and Chaldean.

> *Black or African American:* The category "Black or African American" includes all individuals who identify with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, and Somali. The category also includes groups such as Ghanaian, South African, Barbadian, Kenyan, Liberian, and Bahamian.

Ethnicity
A commonly accepted definition of ethnic group comes from the sociologist Max Weber:

> 'ethnic groups' [are] those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and migration' (Weber 1978: 389).

The crucial distinction between race and ethnicity is that the latter is by definition subjective. "Whether a particular group of people can be counted as an ethnic or cultural group is a matter for the members of that group to decide, not for outside observers to stipulate" (Schneider and Heath 2020: 536). People place themselves into ethnic groups; race, by contrast, tends to be something that is assigned to an individual or group by external processes, as in Jim Crow era US and apartheid South Africa.

C. Data sources
When it comes to assessing the size of different ethnic and racial populations within countries, census and similar sources are the ideal source, as they provide accurate population counts. Like the Danish government, though, several countries in the set of interest to us here do not collect race or ethnicity data as a matter of policy. Moreover, different countries have approached the measurement of race, ethnicity and related concepts in different ways, making cross-national comparison difficult.

The approach taken in this paper
This paper takes a pragmatic approach to assessing the size of different ethnic and racial populations within countries. This is defined by two basic assumptions. First, that there is a very close association between the set of ethnic and cultural identities that can be broadly categorised as European, on the one hand, and 'whiteness', on the other. Second that all ethnic *majority* groups – i.e. the majority ethno-cultural or ethno-

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[1] https://www.2020census.gov/en/about-questions.html

national group(s) – within European countries are white (as, indeed, are the majorities in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand).[2] It follows from this that some but not all *minority* ethnic groups in these countries will be non-white. Estimates of the overall size of minority populations, therefore, will provide *upper bounds* of plausibility for the size of the non-white population, since some of the ethnic minority population will in fact be white (e.g. people of Polish origin living in the UK). Other metrics will be used to help triangulate this basic premise. And, finally, multiple sources will be used, not least in order to cover as many of the countries at issue as possible. We do not need to rely solely on official data, as alternative survey-based estimates are available.

Four main data sources, or sets of data sources, are used in this report:

- **National censuses/population registers.** Most 'Anglophone' countries include in their Census, population register or official surveys indicators of race, ethnicity, or both, as well as measures of other related concepts. This type of data provides the most accurate insight into the issues at hand; however, as noted above many continental European countries do not include similar measures in their national data collection exercises.
- **Eurostat.** Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. It aggregates data on a wide range of national sources, including, of interest here, on country of birth. Since most of this data is from national censuses and population registers it, too, can be considered highly accurate.
- **The European Social Survey (ESS).** The ESS "is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since its establishment in 2001. Every two years, face-to-face interviews are conducted with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations" (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/). Within each participating country, samples are representative of all persons aged 15 and over resident within private households, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language. This means that estimate from the ESS are nationally representative within these bounds. The data used here are primarily from the 9th wave of the ESS, for which fieldwork was conducted in 2018 and 2019.
- **Eurobarometer Surveys.** The Eurobarometer programme has conducted regular surveys on behalf of the European Commission and other European agencies since the 1970s. Like the ESS, within each country the Eurobarometer sample is representative of the resident population aged 15 and over who live within private households. The data used here are from Eurobarometer 91.4, for which fieldwork was conducted in 2019.

Using survey data
As data sources the ESS and Eurobarometer must be considered less accurate than Censuses and population registers. To give just one reason why, both the ESS and Eurobarometer exclude people not living at private addresses (e.g. students living in dorms and residents of institutions such as prisons, hospitals and army barracks). Since they are surveys, they also provide only *estimates* of population characteristics. These estimates are subject to a margin of error. While I have not provided confidence intervals for ESS and Eurobarometer figures below, as a fairly conservative rule of thumb these are in the region of +/- 3%. In other words, if the survey estimate for the overall size of the ethnic majority population in a country is 90%, the true value is likely to be somewhere between 87% and 93% (90% is however the 'best guess').

A word on religion
In contrast to race/ethnicity, religion is relatively easy to measure. One can simply ask what religion a person feels they belong to. It is important to remember, though, that religion is itself a marker of ethnic identity in many contexts, for example in relation to many Muslim minorities in Europe. Data on religion, while of interest in their own right, therefore also complement data on ethnic minority status and/or membership.

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[2] See Table 3 for empirical support for this claim.

D. The population structure of the countries labelled 'Western' by the Danish government

This section presents the main findings of this report. It proceeds in two parts. First, as an introduction the most relevant cross-national comparative indicators I could find are presented. These are from two items fielded in recent waves of the ESS – one that considers the question of 'cultural and ethnic origin', and one that considers subjective ethnic minority status – which allows an immediate overview and comparison of most of the countries of interest. Second, country profiles are presented which draw on a range of sources to present a more nuanced picture of what might be termed the ethno-cultural composition of each.

D1. Cultural or ethnic origin in the ESS

Here I use a survey item and concept developed by Anthony Heath and colleagues specifically for inclusion in the ESS (Heath et al 2016). They explain thus:

> "The central concept which the new question intends to measure is that of 'cultural or ethnic origins', that is the cultural or ethnic group an individual considers himself or herself to descend from. We use … 'cultural or ethnic origins' as the term ethnic group has acquired a rather restrictive set of connotations, often being reserved for minorities of a non-European heritage [and] many national minorities such as Scots or Catalans tend not to describe themselves as ethnic minorities. Since we wish to include these national minorities as well as those with a migration background, we opt for a more inclusive term. Our approach is closely modelled on that of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which uses the same terminology of 'cultural and ethnic groups'." (Schneider and Heath 2020: 535).

In the survey item designed by Heath and colleagues, respondents are asked "How would you describe your ancestry? Please use this card to choose up to two ancestries that best apply to you". The design of the card varies from country to country – examples from Portugal and the UK are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: ESS show card for Portugal and UK

A29   CARD 13 How would you describe your ancestry? Please use this card.
INTERVIEWER: CODE MAXIMUM OF TWO ANCESTRIES.

Response options Portugal	Response options UK
Portuguese	Bangladeshi
Angolan	British
Brazilian	Chinese
Cape Verdean	English
Guinean	German
Indian	Gypsy/Roma
Mozambican	Indian
Roma	Irish
Ukrainian	Jamaican
Other (WRITE IN)	Nigerian
	Pakistani
(Refused)	Polish
(Don't know)	Scottish
	Somali
	Welsh
	Other (WRITE IN)
	(Refused)
	(Don't know)

Source: ESS Round 7 Pilot Questionnaire
(Heath et al. 2016: 13)

At the coding stage a detailed set of rules are used to assign each possible response a code that fits into a detailed multi-level classification. The first two levels of this classification are shown in Table 2. Subsequent levels include more detailed national, sub-national and non-national codes: for the UK, for example, these include English/Welsh/Scottish, etc., then Manx or Shetlander.

The crucial point for current purposes is that the classification developed by Heath and colleagues is capable of distinguishing between those with European and non-European cultural or ethnic origins. Results from this question are shown in Figure 1. The dark red bars in shows the proportion of people in each of 31 ESS countries who indicated only European cultural/ethnic origins. Those who indicated one European origin and one other, e.g. Caribbean, are included in the 'other' category, which is shown in light yellow, as of course are those who indicated two non-European cultural/ethnic origins. Of the countries

shown in Figure 1 only Israel, Montenegro, Serbia and Russia are not on the list of Western countries drawn up by the Danish government. The data show that the population of all the ESS countries, with the exception of Israel, is overwhelmingly 'European' and therefore, one can assume, white.

Table 2: Coding rules for the ESS ancestry item

Broad groups	Narrow groups
1 European	10 European nfs
	11 West European
	12 North European (Nordic)
	13 South European
	14 South-East European
	15 East European
2 North African, Middle Eastern and Central Asian	20 North African, Middle Eastern and Central Asian nfs
	21 Arab
	22 Jewish
	23 Turkish
	24 Iranian and Central Asian
	25 Other North African and Middle Eastern
3 Sub-Saharan African	30 Sub-Saharan African nfs
	31 West and Central African
	32 Africa's Horn
	33 East and South African
4 South and South-East Asian	40 South and South-East Asian nfs
	41 South Asian
	42 Mainland and Buddhist South-East Asian
	43 Maritime and Muslim South-East Asian
5 East Asian	50 East Asian nfs
	51 Chinese Asian
	52 North-East Asian
6 Latin American	60 Latin American nfs
	61 South American
	62 Central American
7 Caribbean	70 Caribbean nfs
	71 English-speaking Caribbean
	72 Non-English speaking Caribbean
8 North American and Australasian	80 North American and Australasian nfs
	81 North American
	82 Australasian
9 Not classifiable	99 Not classifiable

Source: Norwegian Centre for Research Data (2016b)
(Heath et al. 2016: 16)

Figure 1: Cultural or ethnic origin by country, 2018/19
Proportion of people within each country indicating they are of only European cultural or ethnic origin vs. all others
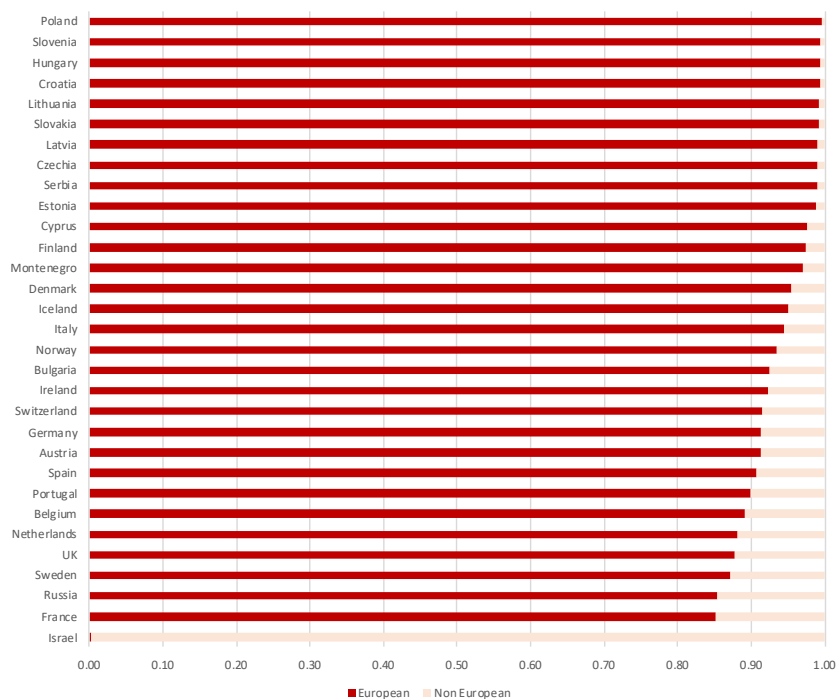
Notes: Israel, Iceland and Russia data are from 2016; Denmark data are from 2014.

By way of comparison, Figure 2 plots the second ESS question of primary interest, which asked respondents whether they considered themselves to be members of an ethnic minority in the country in which they lived. While not directly comparable with Figure 1 – a Serb living in Croatia may indicate they are from a minority group, but have only European ancestry – the message is again clear. In all countries shown, the proportion of people who feel they come from an ethnic *minority* group – represented in by the lighter bars – is only a very small part of the whole.

Figure 2: Ethnic minority/majority status, 2018/19

Proportion of people within each country indicating they from an ethnic minority or not
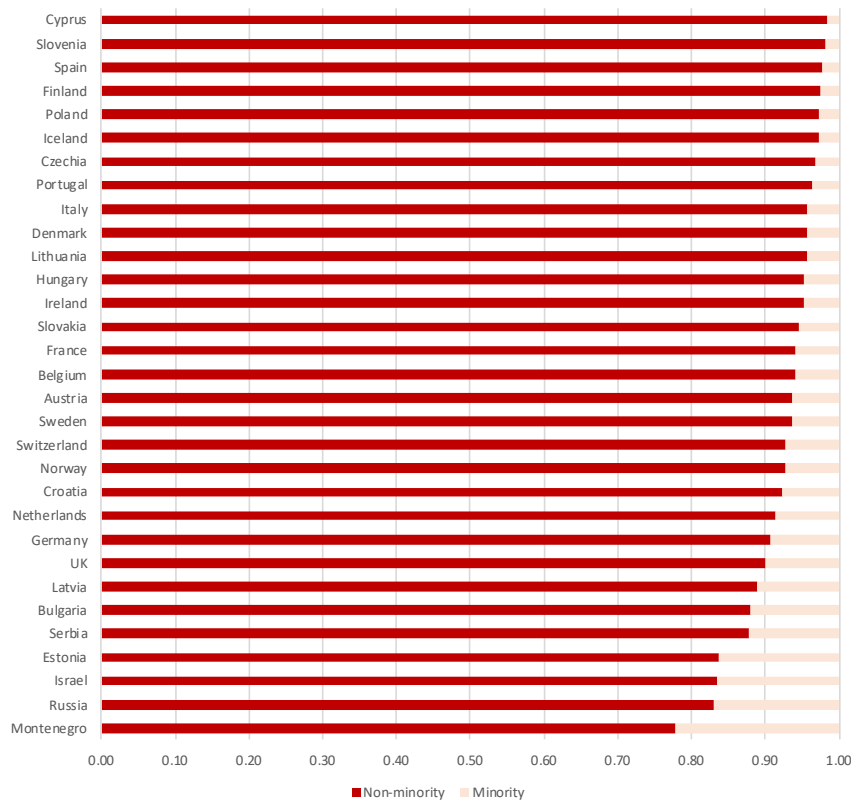
Notes: Israel, Iceland and Russia data are from 2016; Denmark data are from 2014.
Source: ESS

D2. Detailed country data

In this section a range of data, from different sources, is brought together to develop a more nuanced picture of the countries of interest (i.e. those defined by the Danish government as Western). Where possible – the precise number of indicators varies from country to country – the following indicators are shown (with the data source in brackets):

- Cultural or ethnic origin (% European) (ESS – source data for Figure 1)
- Subjective ethnic majority status (% majority) (ESS – source data for Figure 2 – and Eurobarometer)
- Country of birth (% born in country) (Eurostat, ESS)
- Non-immigrant (% not first- or second-generation immigrant) (ESS)
- Religion (% Christian) (ESS, Eurobarometer)
- Race/ethnicity (% white) (national census/population registers)

Table 3 shows the results of this process. Each cell shows the percentage of people within a country (shown in the rows) with the characteristic in question (shown in the columns): the topmost left-hand cell, for

example, indicates that 89% of people in Australia have a European cultural origin, a figure that was obtained from the 2016 Census in that country. The table has been colour-coded to add interpretation – the deeper the shading in a cell, the closer its value to 100%.

Table 3: Ethno-cultural indicators, countries defined as 'Western'
All data are 2018/19 unless otherwise stated
Percentages

Country	European cultural/ethnic origin	Subjective ethnic majority status		Born in country		Non-immigrant	Christian religion		White race/ethnicity
	ESS/National data	ESS	Eurobaro	Eurostat/National data	ESS	ESS	ESS/National data	Eurobaro	National data
Australia	89			72		79	52		
Austria	91	94	95	81	87	83	67	69	
Belgium	89	94	95	83	85	80	37	59	
Bulgaria	92	88	93	98	100	99	66	79	
Canada	89						67		77
Croatia	99	92	98	87	93	90	68	86	
Cyprus	98	98	98	78	92	91	93	96	
Czechia	99	97	98	96	98	98	20	29	
Denmark	95	96	98	88	94	93	52	68	
Estonia	99	84	98	85	89	82	24	44	
Finland	97	97	99	93	96	96	53	71	
France	85	94	99	88	88	83	43	47	
Germany	91	91	98	83	86	82	50	62	
Greece			100	88				95	
Hungary	99	95	97	95	99	99	48	75	
Iceland	95	97		84	96	95	41	87	
Ireland	92	95	96	83	85	84	63	85	93
Italy	94	96	98	90	91	90	75		
Latvia	99	89		87	93	87	42		
Liechtenstein				34					
Lithuania	99	96	95	95	99	97	84		
Luxembourg			97	53				63	
Malta				82					
Netherlands	88	91	98	87	91	88	26	38	
New Zealand	70			75			37		
Norway	94	93		84	91	90	42		
Poland	100	97	97	98	100	99	87	90	
Portugal	90	96	95	91	92	92	71	85	
Romania			96	97				96	
Slovakia	99	94	98	97	99	99	70	82	
Slovenia	99	98	98	88	90	87	52	74	
Spain	91	98	92	87	89	88	59	62	
Sweden	87	94	98	81	84	81	34	41	
Switzerland	91	93		70	74	67	50		
UK	88	90	94	86	86	83	38	50	86
USA				86			65		72

National Sources and notes
Australia: https://www.abs.gov.au (2016 Census). Cultural/ethnic origin includes 'European' and 'Australian'
Canada: https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/start (2016 Census). Cultural/ethnic origin includes 'European' and 'Candian'. 'White' = not visible ethnic minority. Religion data are from the 2
Ireland: https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics (2016 Census). 'White' includes white Irish and other white.
New Zealand: https://www.stats.govt.nz (2018 Census)
United Kingdom: https://www.ons.gov.uk (2016 Mid-year population estimates). 'White' includes white British and other white.
United States: https://www.census.gov/en.html (2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates). 2018 Religion data from Pew Research (https://www.pewforum.org)
ESS: Iceland data are from 2016; Denmark data are from 2014.

A number of points are of note. First, even when the non-EU/European countries are added – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States – the populations of the group of countries covered are overwhelmingly European and, where data is available, white.[3] Second, there is strong comparability across the different indicators. These are also countries where a large majority of people feel they are from the ethnic majority, where most have been born in the country where they live, and where most do not come from an immigrant background.

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[3] Note that some of the very small countries included in the Danish government's list - Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and the Vatican State – are excluded from this analysis. Even Eurostat does not seem to have data on these countries.

Third, the partial exception to this rule is religion. According to ESS/national data, in only 19 of the 36 countries listed does the proportion of people identifying as Christian exceed 50% - this is due to the large number of people in many European countries who do not have a religion: for example, according to the ESS, fully 80% of people in Czechia indicate they are atheist or agnostic, as do 69% in the Netherlands, 60% in Sweden, 55% in the UK and 52% in Hungary - although Christianity remains the most common religion in all 36.

Fourth, equation of European ancestry with 'whiteness' appears to the supported by this data, at least in as much as, for example, 93% of people in the 2016 Irish census indicated they were white Irish or from some other white group, and the 2018 ESS found that 92% of people living in Ireland indicated they had only European ancestry. For the UK the equivalent figures are 86% and 88%, respectively; while for Canada they are 77% and 89% (although note that the measures used in Canada differ somewhat).

Finally, note the data in Table 3 relating to Denmark. Across all indicators we find that people in Denmark are overwhelmingly of European ancestry (and therefore, we assume, white). For example, in the 2014 ESS 95% of people in Denmark reported a European ethnic or cultural origin, while 96% reported there were from the ethnic majority in the country. In the 2019 Eurobarometer this latter figure was 98%. Unlike some other European countries, a majority of Danes also reported they belonged to the Christian religion: 52% in the ESS and 68% in the Eurobarometer.[4] On this basis, we can conclude that Denmark is indeed a largely white and Christian country.

D3. Supplementary analysis

The analysis presented in Table 3 looks only at the overall prevalence of particular characteristics within the populations in question. It does not take into account that people have, of course, multiple characteristics (i.e. immigrants to a European country who are themselves of European ancestry). Another way to analyse the ESS data – the fullest single source available for this type of analysis – is to combine characteristics together to derive an indicator that is representative of the 'native' population. Accordingly, I created a dummy variable for each ESS respondent which was coded 1 if they had the following set of characteristics (and 0 if they did not):

- born in the country where they live; and
- both of their parents were born in the same country; and
- speak the national language(s) at home; and
- do not consider themselves to be members of an ethnic minority; and
- indicate only European cultural/ethnic heritage

Figure 3 shows the distribution of this new indicator. Each bar represents the proportion of people in the relevant country that have *all* of the above characteristics. To be clear, this represents the lowest plausible bound, or most conservative estimate, of the proportion of people living in each country who consider themselves to be of European cultural heritage, are not immigrants, and are therefore, in all likelihood, white. The extent of the conservatism of this measure is nicely illustrated by Switzerland, where only 53% of people have the set of characteristics outlined above, the lowest of any country shown. It would actually seem rather *implausible* to suggest that 47% of people living Switzerland are non-white. Note that for Denmark the score on this indicator was 86%

E. Conclusion

Taking the evidence presented above as a whole, there seems to be strong evidence that what characterises the group of countries selected by the Danish Government as 'Western' is not that fact that they are geographically clustered, or economically similar (compare the US with New Zealand and Romania, for example), but that they are *culturally* and *ethnically* similar and, in particular, that the majority of their population is white. Assuming one accepts that 'European socio-cultural origin' equates with whiteness, it

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[4] The difference between these numbers is likely to be partly explained by what are known as context effects – how and where questions are asked in surveys. Questions on religion are particularly prone to context effects, with a crucial distinction being whether respondents interpret the question as relating to their cultural identity, on the one hand, or to whether they actually practice a religion, on the other. In many European countries some people identify themselves as Christian even if they do not practice or necessarily have faith.

would be hard to interpret the data presented above in any other way. And as Table 3 indicates, Denmark itself sits firmly within the group of countries that are majority white, and Christian.

Figure 3: Estimates of the lowest plausible bound of the white population
Proportions
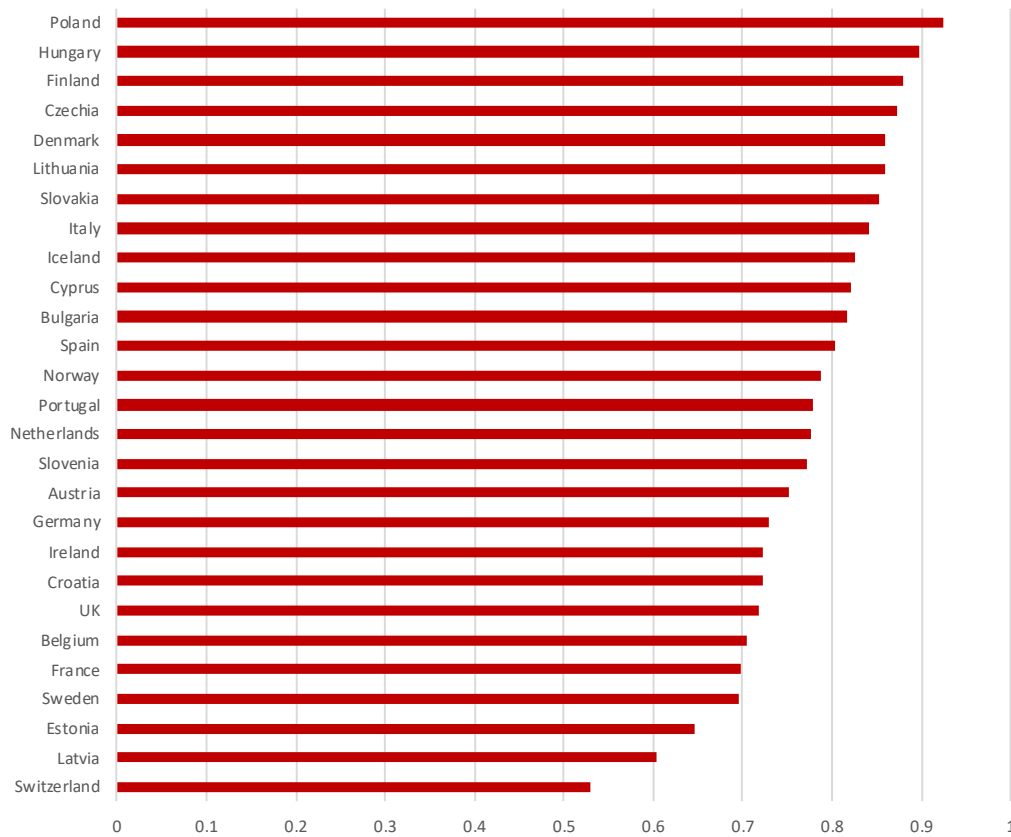
Notes: Iceland data are from 2016; Denmark data are from 2014.
Source: ESS

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