

## Article

# Heterogeneity in Religious Commitment and Its Predictors

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, people show various forms of religious commitment. To better understand this heterogeneity, it is necessary to analyze the factors that predict that commitment. For this purpose, the paper raises the question of whether and how such commitment is predicted by (a) the character of the religious institution to which the individual belongs; (b) individual characteristics, such as intelligence and attitude toward religion; and (c) social environment, such as one's religious upbringing in the family home. According to logistic regression analysis, it is predominantly religious belonging and religious socialization in the family home that predict religious commitment. Religious socialization is by far the most effective predictor when the difference between marginal and slight religious commitment is regarded. The predictive power of religious belonging depends on the particular religious tradition, as being Muslim has a bigger effect on religious commitment than being Protestant or Catholic. Individual characteristics, however, have no impact on how an individual engages with religion.

**Keywords:** religious commitment; religious belonging; religious socialization; attitude toward religion; migration background



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## 1. Introduction

While religious heterogeneity is a concept that has been used in the study of atheism for some time (LeDrew 2013; Lim et al. 2010), it is increasingly being used in both the analysis of diversity within religious traditions (Markovits and Garner 2020; Tolstaya 2020) and the discourse of religious education (Büttner et al. 2018; Grümme 2017; Lindner and Tautz 2018). Many aspects of religious heterogeneity can be explained by the sociological concepts of secularization, individualization, or pluralization (Gabriel 1996; Pickel 2010; Taylor 2007, respectively). All these concepts, for example, lead to the same conclusion, which is that the bond between religious institutions and the individual is loosening. On a macro level, various worldviews have emerged alongside Christianity, and there is no evidence as to which worldview would serve best to cope with life. On a meso level, religious institutions are a legitimate player in civil society but have lost their power to dominate the discourse of this society. On the micro level, religious communities have lost their power to shape their adherents' life. There is, however, still research needed to precisely predict the various intensities of religious commitment in an individual's relationship with their religious community. Can religious commitment, for example, be predicted by the character of the religious community one belongs to? Is it individual characteristics that moderate that commitment? Or is it the social environment in which one has been brought up or is living in today, respectively? This paper addresses these questions. For this purpose, it first describes the state of the art regarding research in religious commitment, then it delineates the methods of the present study, maps its results, and discusses the latter.

### 1.1. Religious Belonging, Religiousness, and Religious Commitment

Often, the relationship between religious institutions and individuals has been conceptualized by religious belonging (Fukuyama 2018; Liedhegener 2016). The fact that an individual is Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc., has been taken as an indicator of the relationship between the institution and the individual. The underlying theory is that, when a person has been raised in a Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc., environment, their individual worldview is structured according to the doctrine and practice of the relevant religious tradition. In consequence, the individual will develop a collective identity that is—more or less—in line with the relevant institution's ideals and convictions. On the one hand, the modern condition of Western society undermines this theory by the processes outlined in the previous paragraph. Grace Davie's formula of "believing without belonging" became iconic in this regard (Davie 1994). On the other hand, individuals from religious minorities, in particular, often take their religious belonging as the backbone of their identity (Pickel et al. 2020; Timol 2020). Sharing the same religious background creates a space of conformity in a culturally antagonistic social surrounding—often even when the way in which this background is practiced in everyday life varies remarkably. In this regard, religious belonging is a suitable identity marker for religious minorities, even in a Christian surrounding as indicated by the case of Northern Ireland (Mitchell 2005). All in all, religious belonging may moderate the relationship between the institution and the individual in the religious realm, but it is very likely that this belonging is constitutive only in the case of religious minorities. As a general approach to the relationship between the religious institution and the individual in modern Western society, religious belonging has lost much of its exploratory power.

An alternative conceptualization of this relationship focuses on religiousness (Paloutzian and Park 2021; Saucier 2019). Religiousness can be defined as "the way an individual is religious" (Krauss and Hood 2013, p. 24). In that regard, religiousness can be perceived as the inner bond between an individual and their religious community. The more religious an individual is, the more they should be inclined to believe in the relevant community's doctrine and to engage in that community's practices. Often religiousness is measured by a single question, for example, one's self-assessment as being religious or nonreligious, though sometimes more complex scales are used (Francis 2007). This concept is often used in the psychology of religion to determine the relationship between religion and personality (Saroglou 2002) or religion and mental health (Villani et al. 2019). Obviously, in modern conditions, this assumption is being questioned, because believing and belonging seem to be two separate kinds of being religious (Davie 1994). Moreover, religiousness is not as a simple concept, as indicated by the previous definition. Gordon Allport, for example, distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Allport 1950). Intrinsic religiosity focuses on the belief of a person and to what extent this belief is lived out. Extrinsic religiosity is instead the practice of faith for self-serving gains, often without the integration of one's belief into daily life. Later, Daniel Batson added a third type, namely, quest religiosity (Batson and Schoenrade 1991a, 1991b), focusing more on the way beliefs are held and less on the content of a person's beliefs. In consequence, some argue that only intrinsic religiousness establishes a bond between the individual and the relevant community, while extrinsic religiosity represents a utilitarian approach to such communities (Van Camp et al. 2016). Finally, there are conceptual problems with regard to distinguishing religiousness from spirituality (Saucier and Skrzypińska 2006; Zinnbauer and Pargament 2013). Both religiousness and spirituality refer to the individual's sense of transcendental realms. Religiousness, however, is often seen as being oriented toward religious institutions, while spirituality represents a holistic, anti-institutional mindset (Heelas and Woodhead 2007). Nevertheless, this theoretical distinction could not be reconstructed empirically. Consequently, religiousness and spirituality have been conceptualized as overlapping constructs (Hill and Pargament 2003; Zinnbauer et al. 1997).

Finally, the relationship between the religious institution and the individual is captured by the concept of religious commitment (Krauss and Hood 2013; Meintel 2021). Basically,

religious commitment is about the engagement of the individual with their belief. It can be defined as “the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living” (Worthington et al. 2003, p. 85). Accordingly, religious commitment is a complex phenomenon comprising cognitive as well as affective and behavioral aspects (Wesselmann et al. 2016). Unlike the concept of religious belonging, religious commitment focuses on the individual and their traits and states. Regarding the relationship between the religious community and the individual, the religious commitment approach suggests that the more committed an individual is to their community, the more intensive the relevant relationship is. On the one hand, studies on leaving one’s religious community indicate that, in most cases, a missing relationship is a major driver in this process and the former members do not feel committed to the community they previously belonged to (Riegel and Faix 2019). On the other hand, religious commitment is not an unconditioned state of the individual but rather refers to the individual’s evaluation of the community’s convictions as true and reliable (Schellenberg 2021). A basic condition of a positive evaluation in this regard is a lively relationship of the individual with their community.

### *1.2. Theorizing and Measuring Religious Commitment*

There are various theories to explain the intensity of religious commitment. Some scholars from the sociology of religion suggest that such commitment is driven predominantly by the relevant religious institution’s character. The stricter the behavioral norms of religious communities are, the more the believers are committed to their community (Iannaccone 1994). According to this concept, it is the orthopractic rather than the orthodox beliefs that stimulate religious commitment in modern times (Lazar 2004). Others explain such commitment by the antagonism between a community’s belief and the worldviews of one’s social environment: the bigger this antagonism is, the more comfort and support the believer receives from engaging in this community (Stark and Finke 2000). In this perspective, it is the tension between in-group and out-group convictions that drives religious commitment. Wellman and Corcoran offer a situated explanation, embedding religious commitment in location (Wellman and Corcoran 2013). In their study, they reveal that both evangelical and liberal religious communities maintain complex relationships with their surroundings, having both oppositional and cooperative aspects. Therefore, the tension between the in-group and the out-group is too simple to explain the dynamics of religious commitment. They conclude that it is necessary to study how the religious experiences of individuals are different due to the local environments in which they reside.

An alternative approach to religious commitment addresses the individual’s intellect because some studies show a negative correlation between intelligence and religiosity (Pennycook et al. 2016; Zuckerman et al. 2013, 2020). Such studies are of interest for this paper because they operationalize religiosity via religious commitment. Basically, these approaches refer to religion’s function of offering meaning and consolation in life. In this regard, clever people do not support religions to get orientation in life or to cope with contingency any better. Some muse that intelligent people tend to adopt an analytic thinking style, which has been shown to undermine religious beliefs. Others assume that intelligent people are less likely to conform and, thus, are more likely to resist religious dogma. Unlike the previous theories, these approaches do not focus the community’s character but rather on the individual’s characteristics, namely their intellect or cognitive style, respectively. Recently, Wesselmann et al. (2016) argued that religious commitment is an effect of the individual’s openness to interpersonal relationships.

From an educational perspective, religious commitment stems from the input that the individual received while growing up (Attfield 1999). Two theoretical approaches can be distinguished in this regard, focusing on the unintentional and the intentional formational aspects, respectively. First, the concept of socialization takes religious commitment as an indirect effect of the condition in which the individual was raised (Aygün 2013; Riegel 2018; Zehnder et al. 2009). Growing up in a religious family or being a member of a lively

religious community imputes this family's or community's convictions and practices to the individual. The focus of this concept is, therefore, on the children's and adolescents' informal learning, not on intentional treatment within the family and/or the religious community. Second, the concept of education sees religious commitment as a direct effect of the educators' input on the individual (Jackson 2007; Knoblauch 2017; Schweitzer 2006). Accordingly, religious commitment is stimulated by intentional treatment. In the family context, such treatment may be the parent's evening prayer with their children, reading stories from holy scriptures, or explaining how to behave during service. Even the question-and-answer ritual in the Jewish Passover between the father and the oldest son is part of such intentional education. In the community context, such treatment can include catechetical actions such as the preparation for the first holy communion or confirmation in Christian parishes or the introduction of young people to the Qu'ran in Muslim madrasas. Moreover, religious education at school can be seen as part of such education. In both concepts, the basic idea is that the more input is offered to the individual, the more religious commitment will develop. The question is, however, to what extent this assumption is still valid in modern conditions. First of all, empirical studies indicate that the input of the parents, grandparents, and community officials is more effective than that of peers and teachers (summary by Schröder 2012, pp. 334–35). Furthermore, purely cognitive input seems to be less effective than multi-dimensional experiences with religion (Forschungsgruppe "Religion und Gesellschaft" 2015; Schweitzer et al. 2010; Schweitzer 2019).

To assess religious commitment, scholars often use compound measures. For example, Carpenter et al. utilized a self-report of religiosity, personal religious activities, and attendance of religious activities to grasp religious commitment (Carpenter et al. 2012). Ziebertz asked participants about their religious socialization, their religiosity, their belief in God, the experience of uniqueness in the religious realm, and their contact with other people from their religious community (Ziebertz 2018). Alternatively, scholars use established instruments or scales when assessing religious commitment. For example, Clements and Ermakova (Clements and Ermakova 2012) determined that concept by using the Surrender Scale, an instrument for determining the individual's surrender to God's will, developed by Wong-Macdonald and Gorsuch and comprising 12 items (Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch 2000). Cohen et al. (2006) developed a six-item "Religious Commitment Scale" based on general questions about one's religiosity (sample items: "How religious are you?" and "How much do you believe in the teachings of your religion?"). Worthington et al. (Worthington et al. 2003) propose a 10-item "Religious Commitment Inventory", which mainly assesses the impact of religion on daily life (sample items: "Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life" and "I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith."). Recently, Villani et al. (Villani et al. 2019) used the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS) (Crocetti et al. 2010; Meeus 1996) to measure such commitment. This instrument conceptualizes commitment via identity status, referring to Erikson's theory of identity status (Erikson 1950). It comprises 13 items, operationalizing the identity types of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment within the religious domain. Finally, in 1992, Chatters et al. (1992) proposed a Religious Involvement Scale, which incorporates three correlated dimensions of religious involvement, termed organizational, nonorganizational, and subjective religiosity. Each of these three dimensions was then operationalized in four items. All these scales, however, take a considerable time to fill in. Therefore, a more economic instrument was designed by Clements et al. that comprises only three items (Clements et al. 2015). This RSAS-3 combines two items about religious surrender and one item on attending religious services.

### 1.3. Research Question and Assumptions

Given the current condition of Western society, religious commitment seems to be an adequate concept to conceptualize the relationship between religious institutions and the individual. The concept itself, however, is complex because it comprises cognitive as well as affective and behavioral aspects. There is no handy definition of religious

commitment. Additionally, there is some evidence of how religious commitment affects mental and physical health (c.f. Villani et al. 2019) but hardly any empirical information about which predictors influence the development of commitment. According to relevant literature, it can be the individual's attitude, the religious community's character, or the social surrounding in which an individual was raised and/or is living today. This paper addresses the latter desideratum of research by answering the following research question: How is religious commitment predicted by characteristics attributed to the individual themselves, the religious community the individual belongs to, and the social surrounding they were raised in or are living in today, respectively?

We assume that it is predominantly religious belonging and religious socialization in the family home that predict religious commitment. On the one hand, orthopractic religions with their particular focus on correct behavior develop more social power in engaging with one's religion than orthodox religions do (Lazar 2004). On the other hand, in a religiously individualized and pluralized society, it is the family home that has the biggest impact on the individual's engagement with religion. According to our assumption, both factors should show the biggest impact on religious commitment. The consequence would be that, regarding religious commitment, the individual themselves would hardly be of any relevance.

## 2. Method

To answer the research question and to test our assumptions, we utilized data from an evaluation of religious education in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Note that, since religious education in Germany is denominational in this federal state, the trial of cooperative learning included Protestant and Catholic religious education only. Non-Christian students are welcomed in these courses, as are Muslim or Orthodox Christian students. However, the majority of the students are either Protestant or Catholic. In the fall of 2019, students completed an online questionnaire on cooperative learning in this school subject. This questionnaire also comprised variables assessing both their religiosity and basic features of their living conditions. This information enables us to answer the research question.

### 2.1. Participants

Data were collected from September to December 2019. All classes that participated in the trial of cooperative learning in religious education were invited to fill in the questionnaire. The convenience sample was composed of 7808 students aged 7–19 ( $M = 12.20$ ;  $SD = 2.06$ ). It was balanced in terms of gender (female students: 51%). Furthermore, 28.98% of the students showed a so-called "migration background": either they immigrated to Germany themselves or were born in Germany, but their parents immigrated to the country. In terms of religious belonging, the majority of the participants were Catholic ( $n = 3923$ ; 50.24%) or Protestant ( $n = 3456$ ; 44.26%). There were, however, also 429 (5.49%) Muslim students in the sample. The portion of Orthodox Christian students was too small to meet the requirements of the statistical routines utilized in this paper and was, therefore, dropped.<sup>1</sup>

The religiosity of the participants was measured by the five-item short form of the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber and Huber 2012). Participants stated that they muse about religious questions (13.06%), believe strongly in God (44.86%), attend religious services at least once a month (25.20%), pray at least once a month (22.08%), and often feel the presence of God in daily life (18.14%). Participants were also asked to indicate how strongly they identified with their religion—39.86% showed a strong identification, 33.18% a slight identification, and 26.96% hardly any.

### 2.2. Concepts and Measures

As previously described, religious commitment is perceived as "the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in

daily living” (Worthington et al. 2003, p. 85). To assess this engagement, we combined the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-5) (Huber and Huber 2012) with an item on the individual’s identification with their religious community. These six items comprise cognitive aspects of commitment (belief in God, reflecting on religious issues), affective aspects (feeling of God’s presence, identification with religious community), and behavioral aspects (attending religious services, praying). To draw conclusions from the answers to these items on the participant’s religious commitment, we conducted three steps: First, the answers on the CRS were recoded according to the hermeneutical patterns of Huber and Huber (Huber and Huber 2012, p. 720), with three representing a clear presence, two some background presence, and one marginal to no presence of commitment. Then, identification, which was measured on a six-point Likert-scale, was recoded by categorizing the answer categories six and five as clear presence, the categories four and three as some background presence, and the categories two and one as marginal to no presence of commitment. Second, sum scores of the six items were calculated. Third, according to the individual sum score, each participant was assigned to one of three types of commitment: scores lower than 10 represented a marginal religious commitment, scores between 10 and 15 represented a slight commitment, and scores greater than 15 a high commitment. This procedure produced the following finding: 2381 (30.49%) participants who were marginally committed to their religious community, 4494 (57.56%) who were slightly committed, and 933 (11.95%) who were highly committed.

The predictors of religious commitment were classified according to whether they referred to the individual’s attitude toward religion, the religious community’s character, or the social surrounding in which an individual was raised and/or is living today. In this paper, the individual’s attitude toward religion is represented by the participant’s account of religious education. This choice was driven by two reasons. First, attitude is a kind of evaluative reaction of a person as to how they perceive an issue (Banaji and Heiphetz 2010; Fabrigar et al. 2005). The attitude toward religion, therefore, is not religiosity itself. It is the individual’s account of religion, the perspective in which the individual looks at this issue. Second, in North Rhine-Westphalia, religious education is a compulsory school subject for every student who is a member of a religious community.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, most students must deal with religion whether they are believers or not. They are confronted with the question of what the benefit of attending these courses could be. Basically, two such benefits are feasible: learning something about religion and/or learning how to live a decent life (Clarke and Woodhead 2015; Gärtner 2015). These two benefits represent typical accounts of religion in modern Western society, namely either taking religion as social fact and learning about it or taking religion as source of meaning and looking for orientation in religious norms, stories, and concepts. While the first perspective represents a cognitive account of religion, the second perspective is about an ethical account. In the questionnaire, eight items offered the potential benefits of religious education. Three of them were about learning something about religion (sample item: “learning something about Catholic belief”), three of them about living a decent life (sample item: “find out what is good and what is bad”), and two about one’s own spirituality (sample item: “find out what I believe in myself”). Each item was assessed on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Exploratory factor analysis resulted in two factors ( $KMO = 0.85$ ), one comprising the three cognitive items and the other containing the items on decent living and one’s spirituality. In consequence, the first factor represents a cognitive account of religion and the second an ethical one. Internal consistency of the factors was high (cognitive:  $\alpha = 0.67$ ; ethical:  $\alpha = 0.83$ ). Therefore, two new variables were created, representing these factors by the mean of the relevant items. This procedure revealed that most students showed an ethical account of religion ( $M = 3.43$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ), while the portion of students holding a cognitive account was slightly lower ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 0.98$ ).

In addition to attitude toward religions, the intellectual capacity of the students is also meant to predict religious commitment in a negative way. In this paper, this capacity was represented by school marks, which were stated by the participants themselves. In detail,

the questionnaire comprised a question about the participant's mark in mathematics and one about their mark in the German language. Both subjects refer to different forms of competency, with mathematics being a discipline of the realm of science and German being a discipline of the realm of humanities. Together, they are suitable candidates to measure the students' intellectual capacity. In the sample, 8% of the participants stated that they were excellent in both subjects and another 75% stated that they did well in the subjects.

The character of a religious community can be determined from the basic spiritual dynamics within the big religious traditions. In principle, these traditions can be distinguished by whether they promote an individualist or a collectivist form of spirituality (Triandis 1995). Alternatively, such basic dimensions have been characterized as orthodox or orthopractic (Lazar 2020). Both approaches have a common assessment of Protestantism as a very individualistic religious tradition, while Islam and the Orthodox Christian Church are perceived as collectivistic and orthopractic religious traditions. Often, the Roman Catholic Church is seen as being in the middle of that continuum. In this paper, we build on the conceptualized distinction and, therefore, take religious belonging as an indicator of the character of one's religious community. As previously seen, the participants were Catholic (50%), Protestant (44%), or Muslim (6%).

Finally, the social predictors refer to religious socialization as well as to modern living conditions. Regarding religious socialization, the questionnaire comprised three items on whether the participant's parents read stories from holy scriptures, talked to them about God, or said grace with them. To construct the variable "religious socialization", the mean of these three variables per participant was calculated. Few participants experienced some religious practice in their family home, while most of them got hardly any religious socialization ( $M = 1.88$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ). The recent living conditions were represented by three variables. First, membership in a sports club or some similar association measured the social involvement of participants—71.61% were socially involved in that way. Second, playing a musical instrument or singing in a choir was used as an indicator for artistic activity. Such activity covers an alternative dimension of life to sports, which was represented in the sample by a weak correlation between both items ( $r = 0.12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ )—37.91% of the participants showed artistic activity. Third, having a close interaction or relationship with people who belong to a different religion than oneself indicates represents the openness of the respondents toward other religions—56.49% of the participants had at least two such friends.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

To test the effects of the participants' attitude toward religion, religious belonging, religious socialization, and recent living conditions on their religious commitment, we utilized logistic regression analysis based on average marginal effects (Backhaus et al. 2011, pp. 267–336). Because our theoretical model comprised three types of predictors (individual's attitude, community's character, social surrounding), we ran a nested analysis. Model 1 estimated the effect of the background variables of age, gender, intellect (assessed by the average of their marks in mathematics and the German language), and migration background. Model 2 additionally calculated the effect of the individual's attitude. Model 3 was amended by the variables representing religious belonging, and Model 4 also comprised the variables about the social predictors.

To rule out multicollinearities, prior to regression analysis, we calculated variance inflation factors. None of the factors exceeded the critical benchmarks (O'Brien 2007).

The nested logistic regression analysis was run three times to test (i) the participants with marginal religious commitment against those with a slight religious commitment, (ii) the participants with marginal religious commitment against highly committed ones, and (iii) the participants with marginal religious commitment against those with slight commitment. All three models were statistically significant according to the chi square test,  $p < 0.001$ . There were some marginal interaction effects on migration background and religious practice in the family home within the models without any effect on the explained

variance. Therefore, we also dropped these interaction effects from the tables but refer to them in the description of the tables. The data analysis was computed using the statistical package STATA 16.

### 3. Results

The comparison between the marginally committed and the slightly committed participants reached a satisfactory pseudo  $R^2$  when the individual’s attitude toward religion was added to the model (see Table 1). This explained variance did not change significantly on adding religious belonging to the model. There was, however, a remarkable rise in pseudo  $R^2$  when the social predictors were included. Then, pseudo  $R^2 = 0.30$  indicated that Model 4 explains 30% of the variance in the data.

**Table 1.** Logistic regression on marginally committed participants against slightly committed ones.

|  | Model 1                           | Model 2                            | Model 3                            | Model 4                             |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|  | <i>dy/dx</i>                      | <i>dy/dx</i>                       | <i>dy/dx</i>                       | <i>dy/dx</i>                        |
| Gender (being male)                    | −0.079 ***                        | −0.045 ***                         | −0.044 ***                         | −0.036 ***                          |
| Age                                    | −0.074 ***                        | −0.056 ***                         | −0.055 ***                         | −0.035 ***                          |
| Migration background (yes)             | 0.048 ***                         | 0.052 ***                          | 0.039 **                           | 0.018                               |
| Intelligence                           |                                   | 0.013 *                            | 0.016 **                           | 0.004                               |
| Ethical account of religion            |                                   | 0.077 ***                          | 0.077 ***                          | 0.064 ***                           |
| Cognitive account of religion          |                                   | 0.106 ***                          | 0.104 ***                          | 0.079 ***                           |
| Being Protestant                       |                                   |                                    | 0.103 ***                          | 0.114 ***                           |
| Being Roman Catholic                   |                                   |                                    | 0.118 ***                          | 0.083 **                            |
| Being Muslim                           |                                   |                                    | 0.284 ***                          | 0.153 ***                           |
| Being Orthodox                         |                                   |                                    |                                    |                                     |
| Member of association                  |                                   |                                    |                                    | 0.027 *                             |
| Artistic activity                      |                                   |                                    |                                    | 0.032 **                            |
| Religious socialization in family home |                                   |                                    |                                    | 0.214 ***                           |
| Friend of other religious belonging    |                                   |                                    |                                    | 0.002                               |
| <i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.09                              | 0.20                               | 0.21                               | 0.30                                |
|  | $X^2(4) = 853.26;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(6) = 1810.56;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(9) = 1919.05;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(13) = 2726.06;$<br>$p < 0.001$ |

Legend:  $n = 7.103$ ; \* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

Going into detail, religious belonging and religious socialization were found to be the factors that predicted religious commitment (see Table 1). If someone had experienced some religious practice in their family home, the probability of them being slightly committed was 21 percentage points higher than that of being only marginally committed. Therefore, religious socialization was by far the most effective predictor of the difference between marginal and slight religious commitment. The character of the religious community was relevant, too, but this relevance depended on the particular religious tradition one belongs to. Being Muslim indicated a difference of 15 percentage points, being Protestant 11 percentage points, and being Catholic 8 percentage points. In this regard, belonging to the Roman Catholic Church equaled the effect of the individual’s account of religion. Finally, the decreasing predictive effect of being Muslim from Model 3 ( $dy/dx = 0.284$ ) to Model 4 ( $dy/dx = 0.153$ ) can be explained by the interaction of belonging to Islam and religious socialization. Obviously, growing up in a Muslim home is correlated with experiencing relevant religious practice, which is well in line with the assumption of Islam being an orthopractic religion.

The results of the first regression analysis were backed up by testing marginally committed participants against highly committed ones (see Table 2). The explained variance of each model was better than in Table 1, which could have been foreseen since the differences between marginally committed and highly committed participants should be greater than

in the previous constellation. Model 4 explains 69% of this variance, which is remarkably high for studies in the realm of the social sciences.

**Table 2.** Logistic regression on marginally committed participants against highly committed ones.

|  | Model 1                            | Model 2                            | Model 3                            | Model 4                             |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|  | <i>dy/dx</i>                       | <i>dy/dx</i>                       | <i>dy/dx</i>                       | <i>dy/dx</i>                        |
| Gender (being male)                    | −0.010 ***                         | −0.066 ***                         | −0.068 ***                         | −0.028 ***                          |
| Age                                    | −0.065 ***                         | −0.047 ***                         | −0.044 ***                         | −0.007 **                           |
| Migration background (yes)             | 0.202 ***                          | 0.189 ***                          | 0.144 ***                          | 0.028 **                            |
| Intelligence                           |                                    | 0.018 **                           | 0.022 **                           | 0.002                               |
| Ethical account of religion            |                                    | 0.081 ***                          | 0.082 ***                          | 0.043 ***                           |
| Cognitive account of religion          |                                    | 0.091 ***                          | 0.084 ***                          | 0.025 ***                           |
| Being Protestant                       |                                    |                                    | 0.194 ***                          | 0.098 **                            |
| Being Roman Catholic                   |                                    |                                    | 0.193 ***                          | 0.084 **                            |
| Being Muslim                           |                                    |                                    | 0.625 ***                          | 0.160 **                            |
| Being Orthodox                         |                                    |                                    |                                    |                                     |
| Member of association                  |                                    |                                    |                                    | 0.014                               |
| Artistic activity                      |                                    |                                    |                                    | 0.014                               |
| Religious socialization in family home |                                    |                                    |                                    | 0.123 ***                           |
| Friend of other religious belonging    |                                    |                                    |                                    | 0.005                               |
| <i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.14                               | 0.27                               | 0.33                               | 0.69                                |
|  | $X^2(4) = 5552.44;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(6) = 1109.28;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(9) = 1341.98;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(13) = 2816.45;$<br>$p < 0.001$ |

Legend:  $n = 3446$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Again, religious belonging and religious socialization turned out to be the most effective predictors. The relevance of religious socialization, however, was not as effective as in the previous model. The possibility of being highly committed was 12 percentage points higher than that of being marginally committed if the participant had experienced some religious practice by their parents at home. This was still more effective than being Protestant (10 percentage points) or being Roman Catholic (8 points) but less effective than being Muslim: Participants who belonged to Islam showed a 16 percentage point greater likelihood of being very religiously committed than participants who did not belong to Islam. Interestingly, the relevance of Islam was even greater in Model 3 (63 percentage points). Again, this decrease was due to the interaction effect of being Muslim and religious socialization. Finally, in Model 1, even the migration background showed a remarkable effect (21 points): Participants whose families immigrated to Germany were more likely to be highly religiously committed than participants with families that had already lived in Germany for some generations. However, this effect was almost totally negated on adding religious belonging and religious socialization. One may conclude that the latter variables were more pronounced in the group of migrants to Germany than in those with no migration background.

Finally, the slightly committed participants were tested against the highly religious participants (see Table 3). In this regression, only Model 4 reached a noteworthy pseudo  $R^2$ . This model explains 26% of the variance; the other three models hardly explain anything. In this model it was, again, religious socialization that predicted the difference best. Those who experienced some religious praxis in their family home were 12 percentage points more likely to be highly committed than those without such practices if slightly committed participants were considered the baseline. Note that religious belonging did not significantly contribute to this difference.

**Table 3.** Logistic regression on slightly committed participants against highly committed ones.

|  | Model 1                           | Model 2                           | Model 3                           | Model 4                             |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|  | <i>dy/dx</i>                      | <i>dy/dx</i>                      | <i>dy/dx</i>                      | <i>dy/dx</i>                        |
| Gender (being male)                    | −0.025 *                          | −0.023 *                          | −0.024 *                          | −0.017                              |
| Age                                    | 0.000                             | 0.004                             | 0.003                             |                                     |
| Migration background (yes)             | 0.120 ***                         | 0.127 ***                         | 0.105 ***                         | 0.034 **                            |
| Intelligence                           |                                   | 0.008                             | 0.011                             | 0.002                               |
| Ethical account of religion            |                                   | 0.026 ***                         | 0.028 ***                         | 0.023 ***                           |
| Cognitive account of religion          |                                   | 0.023 ***                         | 0.024 ***                         | 0.010                               |
| Being Protestant                       |                                   |                                   | 0.089 *                           | 0.063                               |
| Being Roman Catholic                   |                                   |                                   | 0.087 *                           | 0.053                               |
| Being Muslim                           |                                   |                                   | 0.275 ***                         | 0.020                               |
| Member of association                  |                                   |                                   |                                   | 0.012 *                             |
| Artistic activity                      |                                   |                                   |                                   | 0.021 *                             |
| Religious socialization in family home |                                   |                                   |                                   | 0.123 ***                           |
| Friend of other religious belonging    |                                   |                                   |                                   | 0.012                               |
| <i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2</sup>           | 0.03                              | 0.04                              | 0.05                              | 0.26                                |
|  | $X^2(4) = 125.17;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(6) = 178.69;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(9) = 233.30;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | $X^2(13) = 1345.06;$<br>$p < 0.001$ |

Legend:  $n = 5555$ ; \* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

#### 4. Discussion

In this paper, we address the research question of how religious commitment is predicted by characteristics attributed to the individual, the religious community they belong to, and the social surrounding they were raised in or are living in today, respectively. We assumed that it was predominantly religious belonging and religious socialization in the family home that predicted such commitment. Generally, our results support these assumptions. First, religious socialization predicted the differences in all three constellations that were tested. Second, in two out of three of these constellations, religious belonging showed some effect as well. Third, the individual’s attitude toward religions did not have any real impact on their religious commitment or the background variables.

The latter is worth scrutinizing in more detail. Within the background variables, age and gender did not predict more than 3 percentage points at best, and intellect—measured via marks in mathematics and the German language—was hardly significant in any of the three constellations. Only the migration background turned out to be of some effect with regard to the difference between marginally committed and highly committed participants. This effect, however, was due to some of the participants’ adherence to Islam and to having had some religious socialization. This finding is consistent with the findings of the studies that found higher average religiosity among immigrants (Brettfeld and Wetzels 2007; Diehl and Koenig 2009). Since Muslims and Orthodox Christians mainly made up the group of migrants in these studies and because these participants normally show a higher engagement in religious practice, it is plausible that migration background may only be an indirect predictor of religious commitment.

The missing predictive effect of the individual’s characteristics contradicts the studies that indicate a negative correlation between intelligence and religious commitment in terms of religiosity (c.f. Zuckerman et al. 2020). In this study, there was no effect at all. Perhaps the difference is—at least partly—caused by the samples. While most of the studies that found a negative correlation involved college students (Zuckerman et al. 2020), the population of this study was younger. This difference can more likely be explained by the measures used to assess intelligence in the various studies. For example, Pennycook et al. (2016) correlated cognitive styles with religious commitment. In this regard, school marks may be a less precise indicator of intelligence. At any rate, there is evidence that the correlation between religiosity and intelligence is task sensitive (Daws and Hampshire 2017). The way

that religiosity and intelligence are measured affects their relationship. Here, more research is needed.

The predictive power of religious socialization is well in line with theories of secularization and religious individualization (Gabriel 1996; Pickel 2010; Taylor 2007). The more religious institutions lose their power to shape their adherents' lives, the more the individual's living condition affects their religious commitment. Growing up in a religious home was by far the most effective condition in this regard, while social connectedness—measured via membership in associations—and artistic activity did not show any effect. On the one hand, this finding supports approaches in the discourse of religious education that point to the importance of religious practice in the family home (Schmälzle 1995; Schröder 2012, pp. 334–35). On the other hand, this finding is alarming because studies show that the younger the respondents are, the smaller the portion of those who experience some religious practice in their family homes is (Pollack and Müller 2013). If religious socialization is the most effective predictor of religious commitment, and if religious commitment is the reason for people belonging to a religious community, then it is very likely that the exodus from the Christian churches will continue.

Regarding these findings, this exodus might not affect Islam to a similar extent, because being Muslim is the second effective predictor for religious commitment. First of all, this supports the theories that distinguish between orthodox and orthopractic religions (Lazar 2004). In these theories, Islam and Orthodox Christianity—as well as Orthodox Judaism—are the prime examples for orthopractic religious traditions. Since Protestantism is the prime example of being an orthodox religion, it is well in line with the theories that being Protestant does not affect religious commitment in a similar way to which being Muslim does. However, religious belonging predicts only the difference between marginally committed and slightly committed participants to a noteworthy extent. If people are committed in some way, the variance in this commitment seems to be independent of religious belonging. In this regard, our assumption of a general effect of religious belonging must be reformulated more carefully: The character of the religious tradition that one belongs to predicts to some extent whether the individual shows some religious commitment or not. However, the strength of this commitment is independent of religious affiliation.

The discussion of these findings should also reflect the limitations of this study. First of all, this study analyzed data from a convenience sample. This was particularly true for the Muslim subsample because it comprised only those Muslim students who participated in cooperative Christian education. In Germany, Muslims also have the chance to take part in ethical education, which does not refer to religion at all. Some Muslims opt for this education, while others opt for Christian religious education. Next, the sample was drawn in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Although this federal state is plural in terms of religion (Krech and Hero 2008), it is part of Western Germany, a culturally religious region. Participants from East Germany, which is culturally secular, may have shown different effects regarding religious commitment. Finally, Orthodox Christian and Jewish students were missing from the sample. Because they are also prime examples of orthopractic religious traditions, it would have been interesting to see whether similar effects could have been found in both of those subsamples to those found in the Muslim subsample. More research in this regard is needed.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Note that students who did not belong to any religion were dropped from the sample because, in these cases, religious commitment is a concept with no reference.
- <sup>2</sup> Note that it is possible to opt out of religious education classes. However, relatively few students take advantage of this option.

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