

## **Extreme value conflicts, culture wars, and Muslim minority inclusion in contemporary Europe**

**Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, Prof.**

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**Hörsaal 10, Rathausstraße 19, 1090 Vienna**

### ***Abstract:***

At the heart of contemporary politics in the old democracies in Europe and North America is a significant puzzle. How come the far right, advocating a nativist agenda particularly opposed to Muslims and Islam, is advancing at a time when public opinion research documents stability or decline in illiberal values in these populations at large? Current studies understandably focus on accounting for exclusion – opposition to Muslims, prejudice, islamophobia, and nativism. In this talk, I propose to expand the scope of inquiry beyond drivers of exclusion to investigate the openness of non-Muslim majorities to the inclusion of Muslim minorities. I ask, under what conditions—on what terms—are they open to inclusion? This research question brings conceptual and empirical attention to different aspects of public opinion and different segments within the public than are currently at the center of attention in research on intergroup attitudes and support for the far right. The talk will be based on three papers in progress from the Inclusive Politics Project. The first paper introduces the idea of extreme value conflicts and argues that this specific kind of conflict—and not value conflicts more generally—put Muslim minorities most at risk of political discrimination. Extreme value conflicts are distinctive from ordinary value conflicts in that they move otherwise liberal citizens to oppose Muslims' fundamental democratic rights. The second paper addresses the idea that political elites generally or liberal political elites more specifically are out-of-touch with the public in culture war questions that center on Muslim inclusion. From data collected simultaneously on elected representatives, public officials, journalists, and voters, we find that elites are consistently more liberal than voters in these questions. Nevertheless, we find evidence that political elites, whether on the mainstream left or right, are broadly in-touch with public opinion, in the sense that they correctly estimate where majorities stand when the public opinion signal is clear. By contrast, elites who place themselves at the extremes—either left or right—are more likely to overestimate agreement with their own voters' views. The third paper calls attention to the resources of cultures to resolve seeming impasses between the values of non-Muslim majorities and Muslim minorities in everyday situations. The focus is on handshaking controversies that appear to pit gender equality against religious freedom. Data is based on a trio of experiments fielded in Germany and show remarkable drops in demands for conformity to the handshaking custom when an alternative gesture of respect is introduced.

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