The majority churches of Scandinavian countries are often considered important integrating national symbols. However, Sweden formally abolished the state-church system in 2000, and debates on relations between state and church in the other Scandinavian countries, especially Norway, are intensifying. The “national factor” is one of the topics in this debate. Some commentators are worried that the majority church will cease to function as an integrating national symbol if it is split from the state. Others are more concerned about the idea of religious equality, a principle they consider to be in conflict with a state-church system. Thus, the debate has concentrated on the institutional level. But how does the existing organisational system function on the individual level? What views does the general public have on the majority church and its relations to the state? Is a formal split between church and state likely to alter the public’s attitude? In this chapter, I analyse the link between people’s relations to the majority church, on the one hand, and their views on the nation and on immigrants, on the other. The research question is whether a close relationship with the church and certain attitudes towards the church model make people more inclined to have negative views concerning immigrants. If, for example, those who support the folk church also have negative attitudes towards immigrants and people whose faith is non-Christian, this would undermine the ability of the church to function as an integrating national symbol. However, such assumptions have to be empirically tested.

Although this is a controversial subject, it is nevertheless highly relevant to the public debates currently taking place in Denmark and Norway. Using data from the survey “National Identity 2003”, conducted...
in Denmark, Norway and Sweden by the International Social Survey Programme in the autumn of 2003, I examine the relationship between these factors on the individual level.²

Before 2000, the three Scandinavian countries had rather similar church-state systems, as each country had a national church with special privileges granted by the state. But in 2000, Sweden took a step away from this model when it decided formally to divide the church and the state. It is not clear how much the Swedish case really differs from the other two after the formal changes took place in 2000, since the Swedish church still is a majority church and as such has a privileged position. Nevertheless, the Swedish situation is considered by many to be different from the rest of the Scandinavian countries. The fact that over a period of four years some 300,000 Swedes actively have resigned from the Swedish Church shows that the relationship between the people and the church is vulnerable to such formal changes in the organisational system.

The different historical backgrounds of the three nations may influence the way people look at the role of the church. The national revivals of the 19th century took quite different paths in the three Scandinavian countries. According to Øyvind Østerud (1991), Norway and Sweden represent differing forms of nationalism, while Denmark could be placed somewhere between these two. In Norway, the nationalistic movement was a grass-roots movement led by representatives of politically active peasants. The leaders of the pietistic laymen’s movement were also engaged in the process. Nationalist ideology was combined with the struggle for democracy and freedom from Swedish oppression, while in the Swedish case, the dominant form of nationalism was aristocratic and conservative (Østerud 1991, 200). Thus, the Swedish folk church, as a national symbol, is associated with conservatism and elite groups. Such a form of nationalism is not easily transformed into civil religion.

² The data utilised in this article were documented and made available by the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung, Köln. Independent institutions in each country collected the data for the ISSP. The Danish survey was conducted by the Dept. of Economics, Politics and Public Administration, Aalborg University. The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) conducted the Norwegian survey. The Swedish survey was conducted by the Department of Sociology, University of Umeå. Neither the original researchers nor the Zentralarchiv bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.