

RELIGION AS A MEANS TO SOCIETAL COHESION IN NORDIC POLITICS 1988 – 2010

Abstract

While the Nordic countries have a history of many similarities in core values and institutional arrangements, a number of differences have developed in recent years in relation to religion, due to political reasons. In this article, findings from four empirical studies on religion in Nordic parliamentary politics are analysed in terms of weak or strong politicisation for the purpose of homogeneity or in diversity. From an analytical model, different patterns of the use of religion in politics in the five countries are identified, due to the relationships between church and state, the level of religious diversity and the presence of right-wing populist parties. The conclusion is that religion once again has become a means to societal cohesion in Denmark, but also to some degree in Norway and Sweden in a search for a core authority in society. The main reason behind this change is the impact of globalisation.

Key Words: Nordic, politics, religion, church, right-wing populist, globalisation

Introduction

The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – have a history of being similar to each other in terms of their welfare model, societal core values and institutional arrangements. These characteristics include more or less close relationships between the states and the Evangelical Lutheran majority churches and yet extreme levels of secular-rational values among the Nordic citizens². In here lies what seems to be a particular Nordic paradox³.

However, in recent years, religious diversity has increased particularly in Den-

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2 Lene Kühle, *Concluding Remarks on Religion and State in the Nordic Countries*, 2011; Inglehart and Welzel, *Mass Priorities: The Link Between Modernization and Democracy*, 2010, pp. 553-554.

3 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Politics as a Means to Societal Cohesion: An Empirical Study on Party Platforms and Parliamentary Debates 1988-2012*, 2015a, p. 103.

mark, Norway and Sweden⁴. Furthermore, the majority churches have been disestablished in Sweden (2000)⁵ and Norway (2012)⁶ and as early as in 1919 in Finland, although with continuous close relationships between church and state⁷. Meanwhile, the majority churches in Denmark and Iceland continue to function as state churches. As a recent example, the contemporary Danish Liberal minority government has declared that “Denmark is a Christian country” and that the majority church has a special position, despite religious diversity and the freedom of religion.⁸

Thus, we can assume differentiated patterns between the Nordic countries in their respective approaches between the states, majority churches and religious diversity. To be able to describe such possible changes, we need to be aware of the different ways in which religion may be used in politics. Historically, religion has been well known to be able to communicate collective values, to provide political legitimacy and to be a normative force⁹. In such senses, religion has been used as civil religion and/or as (part of) nationalism¹⁰. However, with increasing religious diversity, such uses of religion have been increasingly questioned¹¹. The two major alternative solutions have therefore been to either reinforce religion as a private matter or to try to handle it through the use of human rights¹².

In this article, I will analyse the patterns in which these different uses of religion take place in Nordic politics and discuss how we may understand and explain these possibly different patterns through the use of an analytical model. The analysis will be based on four empirical studies on the relationship between religion and politics in the Nordic countries and a theoretical background, which I will turn to next.

Theoretical background

One of the fundamental dilemmas for democracy is to try to establish what it takes to constitute a demos, meaning the people of a democracy¹³. For democracy to function, it needs a degree of solidarity based on a common culture, for

4 Lene Kühle, *Concluding Remarks on Religion and State in the Nordic Countries*, 2011, p. 208.

5 Per Pettersson, *State and Religion in Sweden. Ambiguity Between Disestablishment and Religious Control*, 2011.

6 Pål Ketil Botvar, Anders Sjöborg, *A comparative study of the relation between religion and human rights among young people*, 2014, p. 236.

7 Kimmo Kääriäinen, *Religion and State in Finland*, 2011, pp. 155-157.

8 Regeringsgrundlag juni 2015. Sammen for fremtiden. 2015:29.

9 Marie Demker, *Religion och politik*, 1998, p. 13.

10 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Om samhällsfördraget eller Statsrättens grunder*, 2003, Robert Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, 1967, Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, 2003, pp.13-18.

11 E. g. Jürgen Habermas, *The Political. The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology*, 2011, p. 24.

12 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Politics as a Means to Societal Cohesion: An Empirical Study on Party Platforms and Parliamentary Debates 1988-2012*, 2015a.

13 Olof Petersson, *Vår demokrati*, 2009, p. 143.

people to engage with public elections and to respect the results of such votes and their chosen representatives. According to communitarian political traditions, a thicker cultural layer is preferable and according to more liberal traditions a thinner layer, focused on common rights and obligations, should be enough to constitute such demos¹⁴.

Historically, religion has been used to communicate common values, to contribute to political legitimacy and to create normativity¹⁵. However, through functional differentiation religion has lost influence in most Western societies and such uses of religion have gradually been replaced with secular alternatives, such as the use of 'overlapping consensus', an agreement on particular principles of justice despite inconsistent conceptions of justice, in Rawls' thinking¹⁶.

Today, the pendulum may swing back again. Through globalisation, the political power of nation-states has decreased, as a number of problems in society now need to be dealt with supranationally¹⁷. Such problems may be related to the environment, capital markets, terrorism and pandemics. Furthermore, with increasing migration and global communication technologies such as the Internet, national borders become increasingly porous, which contributes to growing pluralism with possibly-competing ethical standards¹⁸.

These changes taken together are politically challenging to the nation-states and may be the major reason why nationalism is on the move, not least through the growing influence of right-wing populist parties in Europe. With nationalism, traditional institutional religion such as the Nordic majority churches may once again be used to support a thicker cultural layer, a higher degree of homogeneity. That way, anyone who does not belong to Western Christianity in a cultural sense is defined as part of the 'outgroup' rather than the 'ingroup', which is standard behaviour in identity building¹⁹.

While religion in Danish politics was considered to be a 'non-issue' in Danish politics in the mid 1980's²⁰, we may today speak of an increased politicisation of religion not only in Denmark but in all of the Nordic countries²¹. A higher degree of politicisation of any issue, means that it to a higher degree is associated with political conflict, in this case as a marker between 'us' and 'them'²².

14 Olof Petersson, *Vår demokrati*, 2009, p. 148.

15 Marie Demker, *Religion och politik*, 1998, p. 13.

16 John Rawls, *The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus*, 1999, pp. 446-448.

17 Jürgen Habermas, *The European Nation-State: On the Past and Future of Sovereignty and Citizenship*, 1998, p. 398, Olof Petersson, *Vår demokrati*, 2009, p. 38.

18 José Casanova, *2000 Presidential Address. Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalisation*, 2001a, p. 429.

19 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 2007, p. 63.

20 Ole Riis, *Danmark*, 1985, p. 34.

21 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Politics as a Means to Societal Cohesion: An Empirical Study on Party Platforms and Parliamentary Debates 1988-2012*, 2015a.

22 John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 2011, p. 198, Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 2007, p. 89.

Method, aim, research questions and definitions of religion

As I will return to shortly, this article builds on the results from content analysis in four empirical studies, in which party platforms from all Nordic parliamentary parties from around 1988, 1998 and 2008 and the records from Nordic parliamentary debates 1988-2012 have been analysed²³. On the basis of a substantial definition of religion, a set of keywords have been used to find references to religion in these empirical sources²⁴. Next I have analysed which issue-areas religion has been related to in those findings, such as education, immigration or national identity²⁵. In the second article²⁶, I have also categorised all speeches with references to religion in keyword clusters, by which political party each speaker belongs to and whether religion is associated with tensions or not in each speech. In the third article²⁷, I have categorised parliamentary speeches by which reason(s) that each speaker argues with in relation to the majority church. In the fourth article²⁸, I have similarly categorised parliamentary speeches by which values that each speaker argues with.

On the basis of the results from these studies I then aim to analyse in which way the Nordic parliamentary parties use religion as a means to societal cohesion. To reach the aim, I will pose two research questions:

1. Which patterns are discernible in the way Nordic parliamentary parties use religion between 1988 and 2012, in terms of weak or strong politicisation for the purpose of homogeneity or in diversity?
2. What may this tell us about changes in the use of religion as a means to societal cohesion?

To be able to answer these questions I will pose an analytical model, which I will present after having given an account of the results from the empirical studies. In that part of the article, I will apply a functional definition of religion, meaning that I understand religion as culture, identity and power, which gives me the opportunity to discuss nationalism and human rights as religion alongside civil religion and privatised religion²⁹.

Results from four empirical studies

Through four empirical studies, I have analysed the way that religion has been used in Nordic parliamentary politics. I will present the major findings from those

23 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013.

24 Michael Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, 1973, p. 42-43.

25 Thomas L. Brewer, *An Issue-Area Approach to the Analysis of MNE-Government Relations*, 1992, p. 300.

26 Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a.

27 Jonas Lindberg, *Renegotiating the Role of Majority Churches in Nordic Parliamentary Debates on Same-Sex Unions*, 2014b.

28 Jonas Lindberg, *Values and Veils in Danish and Norwegian Parliamentary Debates*, 2015b.

29 Linda Woodhead, *Five concepts of religion*, 2011.

studies here and then use them in the analytical model that I will present in the next section.

First, I have analysed party platforms from the Nordic parliamentary parties from around 1988, 1998 and 2008³⁰. While the selection is only partial, party platforms are usually published with several years in between and the unit of analysis is therefore more of a census than a sample. Through the study, I have found that religion has been related to a higher number of issue-areas in platforms from around 2008 than in ones from around 1988. That has most obviously been the case in Denmark and then in turn in Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The difference is not only in general terms but also in terms of which specific issue-areas that have been related to religion. In platforms from around 2008, have not least issue-areas such as human rights, immigration, security and foreign policy been more commonly referred to in relation to religion than in platforms from around 1988. These issue-areas have also increasingly been associated with tensions over time, not least in Denmark, followed in turn by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland.

In general, parties on the traditional right wing have referred more to issue-areas related to religion than parties on the left wing and particularly to Christianity as part of national identity and on the majority churches. That is most obviously so in the case of the Christian Democrats, not least with their common association between Christianity and party identity. Right-wing populist parties have rarely referred to Christianity as part of party identity, but always in relation to national identity. Meanwhile, parties on the traditional left wing have focused primarily on issue-areas such as human rights and welfare.

The Evangelical Lutheran majority churches have received a high degree of support in Danish and Icelandic party platforms as well as in Finnish platforms, although less often there. In Norwegian party platforms, an increasing degree of parties have over time called for a disestablishment of the church, in most cases for the sake of freedom of religion and for the church to be able to manage its own affairs. In Swedish platforms from around 2008, meaning after the disestablishment of the majority church in 2000, most parties called for even further separation of church and state for the sake of freedom of religion.

Second, I have analysed records from parliamentary debates in the Nordic countries from 1988/89, 1998/99 and 2008/09³¹. Through the study, I have found that the number of speeches with references to religion were higher in 2008/09 than in 1988/89 in all countries but Sweden and most obviously so in Denmark, followed by Norway. However, in 1988/89 the coming disestablishment of the majority church was fairly intensely debated in the Swedish parliament, which contributed to a relatively high number of speeches with references to religion that year.

30 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013.

31 Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a, Mia Lövheim et al, *Religion on the political agenda*, forthcoming.

In a similar way as in my study on religion in party platforms³², religion has here become associated with issue-areas such as not least human rights to a much higher degree in 2008/09 than in 1988/89 and particularly so in Norway and Sweden and to some degree also in Denmark. Related issue-areas such as foreign policies, immigration and security were also more common in 2008/09 than in 1988/89 in Denmark, but not in the other countries. Furthermore, a number of major debates in Denmark and Norway in 2008/09 were found to belong to the issue-area 'symbols', which is a more complex issue-area where issues of national identity, secularism, immigration and human rights are interwoven. The only issue-area that has been more often referred to in relation to religion than human rights is organised religion, which includes references to the majority churches, and that issue-area has been fairly stable in terms of number of speeches in all countries in comparison between 1988/89 and 2008/09.

A different way to measure the difference between the different years is to analyse keyword clusters. In 1988/89, Christianity was the most common keyword cluster in all of the five countries, while in 2008/09, Religion in general was the most common keyword cluster in Sweden and Islam was the most common one in Denmark, where almost every second speech had references to Islam. Just as in the case of party platforms, the difference between 1988/89 and 2008/09 is also noticeable in a higher degree of tensions with the references to religion in the latter year, not least with regards to Islam, not least in Denmark.

Among the different parties, the right-wing populists in Denmark and Norway are characterised by having made a greater number of speeches with references to religion than all (Denmark) or almost all (Norway) other parties in 2008/09. Moreover, they have differed from speeches made by other parties in a higher degree of tensions in relation to religion or more particularly Islam, with greater focus on issue-areas such as immigration and symbols, but lesser focus on organised religion and human rights. For comparison, the study also shows similar patterns when the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats entered the Swedish parliament in 2010/11.

Third, I have analysed records from the final Nordic parliamentary debates on the introduction of registered partnership and same-sex marriage³³. The Nordic countries were pioneers in introducing legislation on same-sex unions with registered partnership, beginning in Denmark 1989. However, before taking the next step to introduce legislation on same-sex marriage to be in all respects equal to heterosexual marriage, a long process took place, prolonged not least by objections or hesitance by the religious denominations including the majority churches that all could perform legally binding weddings. With the final decision

32 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013.

33 Jonas Lindberg, *Renegotiating the Role of Majority Churches in Nordic Parliamentary Debates on Same-Sex Unions*, 2014b, Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Politics as a Means to Societal Cohesion: An Empirical Study on Party Platforms and Parliamentary Debates 1988-2012*, 2015a.

(Norway 2009, Sweden 2009, Iceland 2010, Denmark 2012 and Finland 2014), the Nordic countries were in comparison passed by countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium that introduced same-sex marriage already in 2001 and 2003 respectively, countries which however does not have the double track system that allows for religious and civil marriages to have the same legal status.

The analysis shows that both proponents and opponents of the new legislations have referred to the majority churches as authorities in these debates to a high degree. In a similar way they have also stated that the majority churches and other religious denominations should be allowed to adapt to the new legislations at their own pace, rather than be forced in order to keep their right to perform heterosexual weddings. The result is particularly interesting in Sweden, where most of the political parties stated in their platforms from around 2008/09 that the disestablishment of the majority church should be completed with the introduction of a compulsory civil union instead of the double track system³⁴. When such suggestions were heard in the Swedish as well as in the Norwegian debates on same-sex marriage, they were now turned down. The analysis concludes that these debates may therefore be understood as a re-negotiation of the relationships between church and state, at least in this particular respect.

Fourth, I have analysed the Danish and Norwegian parliamentary debates in the first half of 2009 on whether judges (Denmark) or policewomen (Norway) should be allowed to wear religious or political symbols and in particular (Muslim) veils in their line of duty³⁵. In both cases, the suggestions to allow for the wearing of veils were turned down.

In similar debates in Great Britain about the wearing of veils in public (although not particularly among state officials), the freedom of women and women's equality were among the most common values to be used as part of the argument³⁶. A similar approach could therefore be expected in the Danish and Norwegian debates that I refer to here, not least given the high esteem of gender equality in the Nordic countries.

However, the analysis shows that the most common value to refer to as part of the argument was secularism and secular progress as well as an alleged neutrality and thus the credibility of the courts of law or the police. That means that religion has been stated to be a strictly private matter, unless it is part of what has been claimed to be a cultural understanding, such as the cross on the logotype of the Danish courts of law. In both the Danish and Norwegian debates, the right-wing populist parties were the driving forces.

I have interpreted these debates as an expression of how symbolic politics may work through the use of the narrative of secular progress³⁷. Values such as

34 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013.

35 Jonas Lindberg, *Values and Veils in Danish and Norwegian Parliamentary Debates*, 2015b.

36 Linda Woodhead, *The Muslim Veil Controversy and European Values*, 2009.

37 Linda Woodhead, *The Muslim Veil Controversy and European Values*, 2009.

tradition and religion are thought to be superseded by values such as modernity and the secular. That means that a value such as women’s equality may be interchangeable with any other value that is part of that narrative and which supports the main objective to tell the majority from certain minorities, such as in this case Muslim immigrants.

Analytical model

In order to answer my research questions, I will use a two-by-two model to analyse the way contemporary Nordic parliamentary parties use religion and to discern possible different patterns among the different countries. The model is based on the assumptions that religion may be used for the purpose of homogeneity or in diversity and that religion in this way may be politicised to a lower or higher degree, depending on its association with political conflict.

use of religion	weak politicisation	strong politicisation
for homogeneity	civil religion	nationalism
in diversity	privatised religion	human rights

Figure 1. [Model of four different ways to apply the political uses of religion in relation to homogeneity, diversity, and weak or strong politicisation]

I will structure this section on the basis of one example of each of the four ways to use religion: civil religion, privatised religion, human rights and nationalism. I will operationalise each example in order to be able to analyse how the empirical findings in the previous section here fit with the model and then give a general description of the example as well as how it relates to the Nordic context.

Weak politicisation of religion for homogeneity: civil religion

I will start with the upper left box of the model. Here, I understand civil religion as an example of weak politicisation of religion in order to establish and maintain homogeneity, with the intention to be inclusive to all citizens of a country. I will operationalise it as references to Christianity as part of national identity and references to the Evangelical-Lutheran majority churches, where their status in society is not questioned and when they are not contrasted with any religious others, such as Muslims. In the following I will give a background to civil religion in the Nordic countries, to support my choice of such operationalisation.

The concept of civil religion was originally developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau but contemporary scholars rather refer to Robert Bellah's interpretation of the concept³⁸. To Bellah³⁹, civil religion is the religious dimension in the life of every people, through which the people understand their own social and historical experience as a result of the intentions and actions of a transcendent reality, such as God. Civil religion in this sense is empirically observable in beliefs, symbols and rituals⁴⁰.

The concept is inclusive in that it is not tied to a particular political ideology or religious confession, but rather is an expression of an autonomous sacralisation of the modern society and state⁴¹. However, I agree with scholars that claim that the Nordic majority churches have come to fulfil the same functions as 'non-confessional' civil religion does⁴². As an example, the annual opening ceremony of the Nordic parliaments all include a church service hosted by the majority churches⁴³. In Sweden, the church service includes representatives from different religions⁴⁴.

There are some differences among the Nordic countries in the use of the majority churches as part of civil religion. In Sweden, such use has been claimed to be the result of the (Social Democratic) 'folkhem' ideology, through which the majority church could be used to manifest national community and cohesion⁴⁵. However, the use of the majority churches as part of civil religion has been most widely accepted in Denmark and Finland and less so in Norway and Sweden,

38 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Om samhällsfördraget eller Statsrättens grunder*, 2003.

39 Robert Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, 1975, p. 3.

40 Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg, *Introducing Civil Religion, Nationalism and Globalisation*, 2009, p. 3.

41 Emilio Gentile, *Political religion: a concept and its critics – a critical survey*, 2005, pp. 29-30.

42 E. g. Susan Sundback, *Medlemskapet i de lutherska kyrkorna i Norden*, 2000, pp. 41-42, Pål Ketil Botvar, Anders Sjöborg, *A comparative study of the relation between religion and human rights among young people*, 2014, pp. 235-236; Margit Warburg, *Gud bevare Danmark. Dansk civilreligion i det store og det små*, 2013, pp. 9-10.

43 Brian Arly Jacobsen, *Civil religion in the Danish parliament*, 2009, pp. 172-174.

44 Inger Furseth, *Return of Religion in the Public Sphere? Religion and State, Politics, Media, and Civil Society in the Nordic Countries since the 1980s*, forthcoming.

45 Göran Gustafsson, *Tro, samfund och samhälle: sociologiska perspektiv*, 2000, p. 184.

according to Susan Sundback⁴⁶. She explains the difference with the fact that the nineteenth-century revival movements were organised outside the majority churches in Norway and Sweden.

Weak politicisation of religion in diversity: privatised religion

In the lower left box of the model, I have chosen privatised religion as an example of weak politicisation of religion in diversity. I will operationalise it as explicit references to religion as a private matter and to the separation of church and state as well as a decreasing general number of references to religion. While a separation of church and state does not indicate a privatisation of religion per se, it still may indicate that religion is no longer needed for public political purposes. In the following, I will outline how I understand privatised religion in the Nordic countries.

According to a common understanding of secularisation theory, religious change relies mainly on functional differentiation, which means that increasing complexity and competition have led to increasing specialisation⁴⁷. As a consequence, religion has increasingly become a private matter to anyone but religious professionals. Gradually stronger focus on individual religiosity, through pietistic piety, processes of individuation and the reflexive nature of religion have furthermore been claimed to contribute to the privatisation of religion⁴⁸.

However, such development is not simply a natural consequence, but also the result of deliberate choices not least by social movements and political parties⁴⁹. According to a common narrative of secular progress, values such as modernity, freedom and secularity will supersede over tradition, oppression and religion⁵⁰. The strive for privatised religion leads to little public influence for religion and therefore there is also little reason to politicise religion, regardless of the degree of religious diversity.

The Nordic countries have been claimed to be individually secularised to a very high degree, in terms of belief in God⁵¹. However, such claims may be contrasted with high degrees of membership and participation in baptisms, weddings and funerals in the majority churches⁵². Nevertheless, the Finnish majority

46 Susan Sundback, *Medlemskapet i de lutherska kyrkorna i Norden*, 2000, p. 72.

47 Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 1933, José Casanova, *Secularization*, 2001b, p. 13.788.

48 José Casanova, *Secularization*, 2001b, p. 13.791.

49 Karel Dobbelaere, *Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization*, 1999, p. 233, José Casanova, *Secularization*, p. 13.788; Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, 2012, p. 375.

50 Linda Woodhead, *The Muslim Veil Controversy and European Values*, 2009.

51 Ronald Inglehart and Kristian Welzel, *Mass Priorities: The Link Between Modernization and Democracy*, 2010, pp. 553-554.

52 Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh Beckman, Per Pettersson, *Religious Change in Northern Europe: the Case of Sweden. From State Church to Free Folk Church. Final report*, 2004, pp. 86-87.

church has been more or less disestablished since 1919, the Swedish since 2000 and the Norwegian since 2012, while the Danish and Icelandic majority churches remain state churches⁵³. The changes in state-church relationships may indicate an increasing privatisation of religion on a macro level, while all of these churches still retain a privileged position in terms of financing and/or legal status.

However, José Casanova claims that religion has become increasingly de-privatised and Jürgen Habermas speaks of the post-secular, as a consequence not least of increasing visibility of Islam in the Western World⁵⁴. Such claims may indicate that a one-directional turn towards privatised religion in general can be questioned.

Strong politicisation of religion in diversity: human rights

In the lower right box of the model, I have chosen to use human rights doctrines as an example of strong politicisation of religion in diversity. As human rights is not a unitary concept, I define it here as explicit or implicit references to one or more of the three most salient human rights documents in the Nordic context: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950). I will operationalise human rights as references to the issue-area human rights and the keyword cluster religion in general, as two different ways to categorise the same kind of references. The operationalisation is limited in that it does not include references to human rights in general but only in relation to religion. However, I believe that it may still be a good indicator of the salience of human rights doctrines in general as well. Here, I will outline what I mean by human rights and its current status in the Nordic countries.

With increasing religious diversity, civil religion may be claimed to be discriminatory to religious minorities and non-believers, despite the intended inclusivity of the concept⁵⁵. As I just have referred to, the privatisation of religion has also been questioned with reference to the impact of religious diversity⁵⁶. Charles Taylor suggests that a strong 'philosophy of civility' would pose a better alternative and Habermas calls for a constitutional frame for the multicultural world society⁵⁷. In my understanding, the use of human rights to handle religious diver-

53 Kimmo Kääriäinen, *Religion and State in Finland*, 2011, pp. 155-157, Per Pettersson, *State and Religion in Sweden*, 2011, Lene Kühle, *Concluding Remarks on Religion and State in the Nordic Countries 2011*, Pål Ketil Botvar, Anders Sjöborg, *A comparative study of the relation between religion and human rights among young people*, 2014, p. 236.

54 E. g. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 1994, Jürgen Habermas, *Notes on a post-secular society*, 2008.

55 José Casanova, *What is a public religion?*, 2003, p. 128.

56 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 1994, Jürgen Habermas, *Notes on a post-secular society*, 2008

57 Charles Taylor, *Why we need a radical redefinition of secularism*, 2011, p. 47, Jürgen Habermas, *The Political. The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology*, 2011, p. 28.

sity fits well with such suggestions⁵⁸.

To some scholars, human rights are convincing enough without divine legitimation⁵⁹. Others claim that they are dependent on the belief that every human is created in the image of God⁶⁰. Thus human rights can either be seen as a substitute for the use of traditional institutional religion in politics or as a complement to, or expression of, traditional institutional religion.

In the Nordic countries, human rights doctrines and religiosity may be closely associated with each other in a form of 'protestant humanism'⁶¹. Pål Ketil Botvar and Anders Sjöborg claim that human rights function as a sort of cohesive values, not least in young people's lives⁶². They also refer to how human rights have received an increasing degree of formal status in the Swedish national school curriculum and in an amendment to the Norwegian constitution as a fundamental value to society. On the basis of their findings, Botvar and Sjöborg, claim that human rights fulfil the criteria to be understood as a (new) civil religion in the Nordic countries⁶³.

Strong politicisation of religion for homogeneity: nationalism

Finally, in the upper right box of the model, I have chosen to use nationalism as an example of strong politicisation of religion for homogeneity. In my understanding, nationalism differs from civil religion in that it explicitly strives for homogeneity through the exclusion of 'others' and therefore it is politicised to a higher degree. I will operationalise nationalism as references to assumed common national core values including religion, in contrast to values and religions that are portrayed as 'foreign'. Here, I will outline what I mean by nationalism, how traditional institutional religion may be used as part of nationalism and how nationalism and religion is part of the growth of right-wing populism in the Nordic countries.

The modern nation-state has grown out of the eighteenth-century French and American revolutions and Enlightenment thinking, when the assumed God-given legitimacy was replaced with popular sovereignty⁶⁴. That means that a

58 C. f. José Casanova, *2000 Presidential Address. Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalisation*, 2001a, p. 430, Marcela Cristi, *Durkheim's political sociology. Civil religion, nationalism and cosmopolitanism*, 2009, p. 74, Helle Porsdam, *Human rights: a possible civil religion?*, 2012, pp. 38-39.

59 Paul W. Kahn, *A civil religion of human rights?*, 2012, p. 44.

60 Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, 2012, p. 381.

61 Ole Riis, *The Role of Religion in Legitimizing the Modern Structuration of Society*, 1989, pp. 143-144.

62 Pål Ketil Botvar and Anders Sjöborg, *A comparative study of the relation between religion and human rights among young people*, 2014, pp. 236-238.

63 Pål Ketil Botvar and Anders Sjöborg, *A comparative study of the relation between religion and human rights among young people*, 2014, p. 255.

64 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 2006, p. 7; Charles Taylor, *Why we need a radical redefinition of secularism*, 2011, p. 43.

stronger collective identity needed to be created, in Benedict Anderson's terms an imagined political community⁶⁵. With Anthony Smith⁶⁶, I understand *national identity* as the identification of individuals with 'the reproduction and reinterpretation of myths, symbols, memories, values and traditions' and with Cas Mudde⁶⁷, I understand *nationalism* as a political doctrine that strives for the unification of the cultural and political dimensions of a nation-state.

Nationalism may replace traditional institutional religion as the means to societal cohesion, but such form of religion may also be used to support nationalism⁶⁸. However, nationalism may also keep symbols, rituals and messianic fervour from traditional institutional religion, but continue to be secular in content. When religion is used in this way, it may become part of an effort to define who belongs to the national community and who does not.

Since the late 1970s, Europe has seen the growth of a new group of political parties, which I here will refer to as right-wing populist parties⁶⁹. Nativism or nationalism is part of their core ideology, with the objective to define cultural 'ingroups' and 'outgroups'⁷⁰. Today, all Nordic countries with the exception of Iceland have a right-wing populist party in parliament, although the Sweden Democrats did not enter parliament until 2010. All of these parties are anti-immigrant parties, except the True Finn Party, which may be labelled anti-establishment⁷¹. Another common feature is that all of these parties use Christianity and the majority churches as part of their rhetoric to different degrees to underline national identity⁷².

Discussion

In order to answer my first research question, I will now discuss the empirical results in relation to the analytical model and then conclude the discussion by showing different patterns for the Nordic countries in relation to religion. In order to answer my second research question, I then intend to explain the patterns with the use of theoretical perspectives.

First, I will discuss the use of the majority churches as part of Nordic civil religion, as an expression of weak politicisation of religion for homogeneity. As mentioned before, all Nordic countries have continued to include a church service hosted by the majority churches as part of the annual opening ceremony

65 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 2006, p. 6.

66 Anthony Smith, *Hierarchy and Covenant in the Formation of Nations*, 2009, p. 23.

67 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 2007, p. 16.

68 Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, 1971, Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, 2003, pp. 13-18.

69 Jens Rydgren, *Explaining the Emergence of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties: The Case of Denmark*, 2004, p. 478.

70 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 2007, p. 63.

71 David Arter, *Scandinavian Politics Today*, 2008, p. 116.

72 Jonas Lindberg, *Uses of Christianity in Nordic Nationalist Parties' Opposition to Islam*, 2011, p. 154.

of their parliaments. Organised religion and particularly the majority churches have been the single most common issue-area both in party platforms and in parliamentary debates⁷³. The majority churches have received a high degree of support in Danish and Icelandic party platforms, to a lower degree in Finnish platforms and in Norway and Sweden most parties have increasingly called for the disestablishment of the majority churches over time. In all countries Christianity has been decreasingly referred to in relation to national identity over time.

However, the parliamentary debates on same-sex unions indicate a re-affirmation or re-negotiation of the relationships between the states and majority churches, at least in a limited respect⁷⁴. Finally, the high share of parliamentary speeches with references to religion in relation to the symbols issue-area in Denmark and Norway also indicates that religion has become part of a more complex understanding of national identity than before.

Second, I will discuss privatised religion as an expression of weak politicisation of religion in diversity. Such privatisation is less visible in Nordic politics as religion rarely has been explicitly referred to as a private matter, with the exception of the Danish and Norwegian debates on the wearing of veils by judges and policewomen⁷⁵. However, in those debates that argument has been used to distinguish between non-acceptable forms of religion (the wearing of veils in a public office) and what has been perceived as cultural and neutral expressions, rather than between public and private religion. As the number of speeches with references to religion was higher in 2008/09 than in 1988/89 in all countries but Sweden that finding neither supports an increased privatisation of religion⁷⁶. The most obvious indicator of the privatisation of religion is instead the disestablishment of the majority churches in Norway (2012) and Sweden (2000) within the timeframe of these empirical studies.

Third, I will discuss human rights as an expression of strong politicisation of religion in diversity. In both party platforms and parliamentary debates⁷⁷, the share of references to religion as part of human rights has become much higher over time and particularly so in Norway and Sweden. These countries are also the ones, together with Denmark, that has the highest degree of religious diversity through its higher levels of immigrants. With the high share of references to religion in relation to the symbols issue-area in Denmark and Norway, human rights can also be claimed to be part of an increased complexity together with national identity, secularism and immigration.

73 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013, Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a.

74 Jonas Lindberg, *Renegotiating the Role of Majority Churches in Nordic Parliamentary Debates on Same-Sex Unions*, 2014b.

75 Jonas Lindberg, *Values and Veils in Danish and Norwegian Parliamentary Debates*, 2015b.

76 Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a.

77 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013, Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a.

Fourth, I will discuss nationalism as an expression of strong politicisation of religion for homogeneity. While there has not been a right-wing populist party in the Icelandic and Swedish (until 2010) parliaments and the Finnish party rather has been anti-establishment than anti-immigration, the two parties in Denmark and Norway have had a particular impact on the political debates on religion. To these parties, religion or more explicitly Christianity is rarely part of their party identity, but to a high degree of their references to national identity⁷⁸. In fact the Danish right-wing populist party made the greatest number of speeches with references to religion and the Norwegian party in a similar way made the second highest number of such speeches in 2008/09⁷⁹. These two parties were also the driving forces in the symbols-related debates and in general in criticism of Islam as ‘the other’ of their own national identity. When the Swedish right-wing populist party entered the parliament in 2010, similar tendencies could be noticed as in Denmark and Norway.

From these empirical findings in relation to the analytical model, we can discern different patterns in the way religion is used in parliamentary politics in the different Nordic countries, as an answer to my first research question.

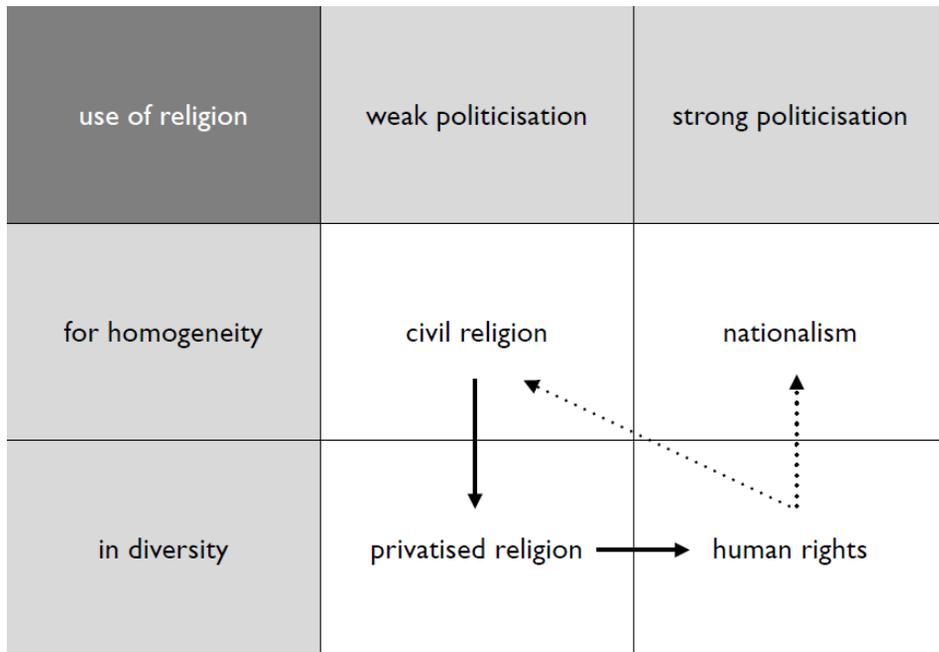


Figure 2. Model of four different ways to apply the political uses of religion in relation to homogeneity, diversity and weak or strong politicisation. The arrows illustrate the changing tendency in Norway and Sweden, 1988-2012]

78 Jonas Lindberg, *Religion in Nordic Party Platforms 1988-2008*, 2013,

79 Jonas Lindberg, *Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988-2009*, 2014a.

In Norway and Sweden, the majority churches have been disestablished within the timeframe, as a major indicator of a change from civil religion to privatised religion. However, with increasing religious diversity the share of references to human rights has increased to become the second most common issue-area, in the efforts to handle different disputes over acceptable expressions of religion. However, the right-wing populist parties in particular instead handle these differences by striving for increased homogeneity through nationalism with definitions of ingroups and outgroups through the use of religion. Finally, although with very few indications so far, it is possible that we will see the growth of a civil religion based on human rights, possibly with the inclusion of traditional institutional religion. One example of such development is the inclusion of representatives from different religions in the church service at the annual opening ceremony of the Swedish parliament.

In Denmark, with its established majority church, the pattern is rather focused on continuity in the use of religion as part of civil religion, with a lower degree of references to religion as part of human rights than in Norway and Sweden, but with a higher degree of criticism against Islam as part of the nationalism, as promoted in particular by the right-wing populist party.

In Iceland, the majority church also continues to be established, but with a lower degree of religious diversity and the lack of a right-wing populist party, the primary pattern is still the continuous use of the majority church as part of civil religion.

In Finland finally, religious diversity has hardly been visible in parliamentary politics, in comparison to the other countries. While the disestablished majority church is well supported by most political parties, the tendency has nevertheless been to move towards a higher degree of privatised religion over time.

Let us now, as part of this discussion, turn to my second research question. While religion in the Nordic countries seemingly is a paradox with more or less established majority churches and a very high degree of individual secular-rational values, religion or rather Christianity continues to be part of Nordic parliamentary politics. That has been the case traditionally, with the majority churches as part of civil religion, which may be understood as a way to communicate collective values, to provide political legitimacy and to be a normative force (and thus to establish a *demos*⁸⁰). Over time, such way to use religion has been replaced with secular alternatives, making religion into a private matter to an increasing degree.

However, with increasing religious diversity and possibly also other impacts of globalisation, such as the weakening of the political power of nation states, religion has increasingly become politicised, particularly in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The approach to handle religious diversity with the use of human rights

80 Marie Demker, *Religion och politik*, 1998, p. 13, Olof Petersson, *Vår demokrati*, 2009, p. 143.

doctrines has been most common in Norway and Sweden, while nationalism has been a more common response in Denmark. However, in all of these three countries, the right-wing populist parties are influential on the debates on religion with their strive for increasing homogeneity or in other words societal cohesion, where the majority churches and Christianity become cultural resources and markers towards immigrants of other religious belongings.

As part of this change, issues of societal core values turn up in the parliamentary debates. That was particularly the case with the discussions on whether Danish judges and Norwegian policewomen should be allowed to wear veils, where the cultural values of Christianity were associated with the modern democratic state in contrast to other religious identities. While this may be understood as an expression of identity or symbolic politics it also indicates a search for a deeper grounding in society that I would like to label 'core authority'.

What is particularly interesting with this turn in the use of religion in Nordic parliamentary politics is that it runs counter to the long-term development of increasing functional differentiation between church and state⁸¹. However, it should be well noted that this development just indicates a change in use of religion on a macro level and therefore does not say anything about any micro level changes in individual religiosity.

Conclusions

In this article, my aim has been to analyse in which way the Nordic parliamentary parties use religion as a means to societal cohesion. To reach the aim, I have posed two research questions, to which I will conclude the answers in turn:

First, I asked which patterns are discernible in the way Nordic parliamentary parties use religion between 1988 and 2012, in terms of weak or strong politicisation for the purpose of homogeneity or in diversity? Based on findings from four empirical studies 1988-2012, I have claimed that the pattern in Norway and Sweden has turned from weak politicisation of religion as part of civil religion, towards increasing privatisation. However, with increasing religious diversity, religion has also become more politicised, either with the use of human rights doctrines in diversity or with a strive for increased homogeneity through the use of (religion in) nationalism. In a possible further development, we may see human rights as part of a new form of civil religion.

In Denmark, the pattern rather indicates a combination of religion as part of civil religion and nationalism, where the strive for homogeneity is the common aim. In Iceland, civil religion is (still) the common pattern, whereas Finland shows tendencies to move from civil religion towards privatised religion.

Second, I asked what this may tell us about changes in the use of religion as

81 Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 1933, José Casanova, *Secularization*, 2001b, p. 13.788.

a means to societal cohesion? With the impact of increasing religious diversity and possibly also the weakening of the political power of nation states, not least the influence of the right-wing populist parties on the parliamentary debates on religion indicate a turn. While functional differentiation has weakened the relationships between church and state over time in the Nordic countries, these studies point to an increasing search not only for borders between ingroups and outgroups but also for a deeper grounding or core authority in society.

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Јонас Линдберг

РЕЛИГИЈА КАО СРЕДСТВО ДРУШТВЕНЕ КОХЕЗИЈЕ У ПОЛИТИЦИ НОРДИЈСКИХ ЗЕМАЉА 1988 – 2010.

Сажетак

Иако нордијске земље имају историју са много заједничких именитеља као што су заједничке вредности и институционални аранжмани, одређен број различитости се развио током последњих година у сфери религије, а због политичких разлога. У овом чланку, подаци скупљени из четири емпиријске студије о религији у нордијским парламентарним политикама су анализирани у смислу слабе или јаке политизације исте у сврху хомогенизовања или диверзификовања. Наш аналитички модел је показао да постоје четири обрасца употребе религије у политици у ових пет земаља, а у зависности од односа цркве и државе, нивоа верске различитости и постојања десничарских популистичких партија. Закључак је да је религија још једном постала средство друштвене кохезије у Данској, али и у Норвешкој и Шведској као потрага за главним ауторитетом у друштву. Главни разлог који стоји иза ове промене је утицај глобализације.

Кључне речи: Нордијске земље, политика, религија, црква, десничарски популисти, глобализација

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