

The role of religion in the public sphere. A comparative study of the five Nordic countries (NOREL)

2. Religion and politics

NOREL analyzes the role of religion in more contemporary politics. Which issues have engaged the different governments and in which ways?



This theme focuses on political parties and political debates in the Nordic societies. What types of policy do political parties have when it comes to religion? Which issues are addressed in party platforms and parliamentary debates? What are the implications of the transformation from mono-religious to multi-religious societies for parliamentary debates? What are the different positions taken with regard to the majority churches and religious minorities? How are different democratic ideals, such as gender equality, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, balanced? Which changes between different political parties and between countries can be discerned during the period studied?

The indicators that will be studied the respective years 1988, 1998, and 2008 are:

1. Party programs

- A qualitative and a quantitative study of political party programmes focusing on:
 - The type of issues where religion is addressed
 - The approach towards institutional religion (the state or national churches) and religious minorities (especially their visual appearance in the public sphere).

This analysis will focus on when and how religion is constructed as a problem or resource for individuals and society.

2. Parliamentary debates

- A qualitative and a quantitative study of parliamentary debates that addresses the following issues:
 - When does religion become a topic? Does religion tend to be connected to other issues?
 - How often is religion debated?
 - How are issues of religion, gender, and ethnicity related in these debates?

3. Members of parliaments

- A quantitative overview and analysis over time of members of parliaments who have a religious profile (profession, religious belonging or party, organizational belonging).

4. Changes in the Nordic populations on the view on religion and politics

- A quantitative study based on existing ISSP survey data from the Nordic countries on changes in views in the populations on religion and politics, and the role of religion in different parts of the public sphere.

5. Comparative case study

- A qualitative comparative case study of two or more countries analyzing debates in the parliaments and/or in the media where politicians participate. The case study will study how secularism is expressed on different levels in the different countries, from a local perspective to a national one.

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Summary of Findings:

Since around 1988, religion has become increasingly politicised in Nordic politics, particularly in Denmark, but also to a high degree in Norway and Sweden and to some degree in Finland and Iceland. Over time, religion has been referred to in relation to a higher number of issue-areas in political party platforms and parliamentary debates, not least with the ones that may be associated with globalisation, such as immigration and human rights. Religion, and in particular Islam, has been increasingly problematized, not least by right-wing populist parties. Meanwhile, there are many references to the Lutheran majority churches in the party platforms and the parliamentary debates. Among voters, fewer accept a direct link between religion and politics over time, while more voters accept religious diversity among their political representatives.