

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

---

## Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion

Eriksson, Lise

*Published in:*  
Nordic Journal of Religion and Society

*DOI:*  
[10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03](https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03)

Publicerad: 01/01/2019

*Document License*  
Publisher rights policy

[Link to publication](#)

*Please cite the original version:*  
Eriksson, L. (2019). Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 32(1), 40–54. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Eriksson, Lise (2019) Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 32 (1): 40-54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway

Lise Eriksson

Uppsala University, Sweden and Åbo Akademi University, Finland

### *Abstract*

This article comparatively studies intersections between biopolitics and religion in Finnish and Norwegian parliamentary debates on assisted reproductive technologies and biotechnology. In both countries, references to religion have been prevalent in policy processes and parliamentary debates on these issues, with Christian Democrats actively promoting bioethics. The article analyses references to religion and the role of national churches and Christian Democratic parties. It also discusses under what conditions religious positions influence political decisions and how these cases bring nuance to theories of politicisation of religion. Legal sources and parliamentary proceedings of plenary sessions are analysed through critical discourse analysis. The article suggests that reproductive politics has contributed to politicisation of religion in the Finnish and Norwegian parliaments, identifying blurred boundaries between public and private spheres and a discursive framework of values debates.

*Keywords:* assisted reproductive technologies; biopolitics; Finland; Norway; politicisation of religion

### **Introduction**

Developing national legislation on assisted reproductive technologies (ART) is often a process causing tensions concerning values and interests. Religious institutions often perceive ART and other biopolitical issues as challenges to be understood related to religious teachings. Christian Democrats and right-wing populists tend to draw attention to religious positions in Nordic debates. We find several current examples of neo-conservatism in reproductive politics in Europe, for example anti-abortion campaigns and restrictive regulation of biopolitical issues in Italy, Ireland and Poland, where the Catholic Church has strong political influence. Political discourse in these countries emphasises the contrast between women's rights and fetuses' rights (De Zordo, Mishtal and Anton 2017). Nordic state policies on ART are not predominantly

influenced by “pro-life” arguments, but are characterised by diversity of arguments, and sometimes values clashes occur.

This article’s aim is to comparatively study intersections between biopolitics and religion in Nordic parliamentary debates on ART and biotechnology through case studies from Finland and Norway. The following research questions are analysed: How have national churches and Christian Democrats influenced the Finnish and Norwegian policymaking processes on ART? How are references to religion made in parliamentary debates and policy documents? Under what conditions do religious positions achieve influence in political decisions? How can these cases bring nuance to theories of politicisation of religion? References to religion have been prevalent in legislative processes and parliamentary debates on ART and biotechnology in both countries. Finnish and Norwegian Christian Democrats have actively promoted bioethics as important for the parties (Eriksson 2016a; Eriksson 2016b; Kanckos 2012, 173–77; Melhuus 2012a, 2012b; Spilker and Lie 2007, 332).

Foucault’s (1990; 2008) concept of biopolitics references politicisation of human life and the government of populations. New technologies in biomedicine have contributed to politicising medicine, human life and biotechnology (Rose 2007). Despite commitment of religious groups in the domains of ART, bioethics and biotechnology, there is little empirical research on intersections between biopolitics and religion. However, the article also draws on related discussions on the public–private dichotomy in sociology of religion and the interdisciplinary field of reproductive studies. The comparative approach should also contribute to empirical analyses of religion’s role in political discourse in Nordic countries (e.g. Christensen 2010; Hjelm 2014; Jacobsen 2009; Kanckos 2012; Lindberg 2014a; Lövheim et al. 2018).

The article examines discursive similarities and differences in Finnish and Norwegian policy documents and parliamentary debates. These countries are culturally and religiously similar, making them a good case for this comparative study. Religion generally has weak influence in people’s daily lives in the highly secularised Nordic countries. The level of religiosity measured in terms of belief and participation is low, by international comparison, and the countries are increasingly culturally and religiously diverse (Niemelä and Christensen 2013, 6). Despite similarities between the Nordic countries, i.e. a tradition of strong welfare states, harmonising legislation and similar religious landscapes, there is no common Nordic policy on ART. The countries have developed legislation at different decades with different content (Nordic Council

of Ministers 2006, 73–78). However, Nordic ART policies share an emphasis on equal opportunities and gender equality, contributing to quite permissive ART policies, except for Norway, with one of the most restrictive ART policies in Europe (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006, 78; Spilker 2016, 100–03).

In Norway, ARTs are currently regulated by the Act relating to applications of biotechnology in human medicine (5.12.2003/100) (the Biotechnology Act). In Finland, ARTs are regulated by the Act on Assisted Reproduction (1237/2006), in effect in 2007. Because of the regulative differences, I will sometimes refer to both ARTs and biotechnology. The broad category of biotechnology in the Norwegian Biotechnology Act also includes prenatal diagnosis, embryo research, cloning, genetic testing and gene therapy.

### **Method and material**

Fairclough's (1992; 2003) critical discourse analysis (CDA) involves both analysing the text and its social context and how it is received and interpreted. Fairclough's three-dimensional concept includes text (written or spoken language), discursive practice (production, distribution and consumption of texts) and social practice (social and cultural context). CDA is particularly suitable for analysing political texts and ideological aspects of discourses. Discourse analysis can detect social structures beyond specific textual statements, because language and ideology are interrelated.

This article empirically contributes to the theoretical and methodological approach of discursive study of religion (e.g. Hjelm 2014; von Stuckrad 2010; Taira 2013). Hjelm argues that not only policies and policy outcomes but also policymaking processes are of interest for sociological analysis of religious pluralism: "From a discursive perspective on political secularisation, the political discourse can be very secular even if the outcome of the political debate is not – and vice versa" (Hjelm 2014, 29).

I identify and analyse discourses by searching for similar meaning constructions, recurrent words and ways of speaking (i.e. discourses) that receive hegemonic status. The criteria for identifying "references to religion" concern religion's analytical definition. I pay particular attention to how hegemonic Christian vocabulary is used, because of Lutheran churches' privileged position in the Nordic countries. I also analyse references to religious identity or belonging, religious traditions, religious diversity, religious norms and values, and statements by religious organisations. I also analyse how religious vocabulary is used in competing

discourses. I select quotations either representative of the material or as critical incidents bringing something different to the text and representing a boundary or interruption in the debate (Fairclough 1992, 230).

The case study material comprises legal sources (laws, bills, Members' initiatives) and parliamentary proceedings of plenary sessions. The Finnish and Norwegian materials are comparable, because they represent the same decade. However, the Finnish material is more extensive. I analyse the most recent Finnish Bill on ART (HE 3/2006) and the proceedings of the Finnish parliamentary debates (PTK 13/2006; PTK 15/2006; PTK 100/2006; PTK 101; PTK 104/2006; PTK 106/2006; PTK 107/2006). I also analyse a Finnish Member's initiative on ART (LA 140/2005), debated in conjunction with the bill (PTK 116/2005). The Norwegian material includes the White Paper on ART and biotechnology in 2002 (Meld. St. 14 [2001–2002]), the parliamentary debate (Proceedings of Stortinget 17/06/2002), the Bill (Ot.prp. nr. 64. [2002–2003]) and the parliamentary debate (Proceedings of Odelstinget 18/11/2003). Following these debates, the Norwegian Biotechnology Act was passed in 2003. However, at the time of writing, the Biotechnology Act is under evaluation (Meld. St. 39 [2016-2017]).

### **Religion and biopolitical issues in political discourse**

By “politicisation of religion” I mean increasing references to religion in political discourse. Politicisation of religion should be understood in a context of broader social and religious changes in society, i.e. globalisation, migration, growing religious diversity and changing relations between religion and state. Ivanescu (2010) describes politicisation of religion as a process where religion becomes directly involved in political debates; religious and political actors influence each other through public interaction between religion and politics.

The sociological debate on religion's public role was inspired by Casanova's (1994) study of public religions and “deprivatisation of religion”, Berger's (1999) talk of “de-secularisation” or “resurgence of religion” through conservative religious movements' increased importance, and Habermas's (2008) claim that European previously secularised societies have developed into a post-secular situation where religion has received new public visibility. Claims of religion's renewed visibility have often been criticised within the sociology of religion (e.g. Beckford 2012; Hjelm 2015; Moberg, Granholm and Nynäs 2012, 5–6). It is not clear how a public resurgence of religion should be measured; methodological problems are associated with such claims (Linderman and Lövheim 2016). The significance of issues concerning relationships

between religion, society and the state varies in Europe, and there is evidence of both religious revival and religious decline (Madeley 2003, 2). Hjelm (2015, 2) also notes that increased visibility of religion does not necessarily equate with increased vitality or influence.

The relationship between the state and the Evangelical Lutheran churches has historically been close in all Nordic countries, but this relationship has changed (Lövheim et al. 2018, 137–38). The Lutheran tradition is characterised by toleration of intra-confessional differences. Lutheran church statements on biopolitical issues are often influenced by decision-makers' values; this often results in intra-confessional debates (Eriksson 2016b).

Several previous studies on politicisation of religion in Nordic countries have focused on immigration and religious diversity and the role of right-wing populist parties (Christensen 2010; Jacobsen 2009; Lindberg 2014a; Lövheim et al. 2018). Lövheim et al. (2018, 139–40) argue that growing religious diversity since the 1980s has contributed to a more complex role of religion in Nordic politics and that religious values, symbols and beliefs can become detached from particular actors and traditions and be used as cultural resources. The authors identify several trends of increased politicisation of religion in Nordic parliaments but conclude that “more debates on religion in national parliaments might not mean more influence of religious actors and arguments, but rather contribute to more control of the public presence of religion, or less influence for religious organizations” (Lövheim et al. 2018, 140).

Individuals' everyday lives become objects of public debate and regulation through politicisation of reproduction and family. Perspectives of human rights and feminism have particularly contributed to reassessing legislation affecting gender, reproduction, family and sexual minorities (Kanckos and Björkgren 2011). In addition to legislative issues concerning reproduction, the introduction of legislation on same-sex unions contributes to tensions between religious institutions and states in the Nordic countries (Lindberg 2014b, 85–86).

Politicisation of issues considered to belong to the private sphere has contributed to a “sacralisation of civil society”, where social movements in civil society, advocating issues concerning family, sexuality and intoxicants, have provided religion a prominent space in politics (Pieper and Young 2009, 362–63). Religious institutions sometimes resist institutional differentiation between sacred and secular authority or differentiation of public and private spheres. Thus, politicisation of “the private” may contribute to increased visibility of religion in political discourse. Pieper and Young (2009, 362) claim that politicisation of the private

combined with a political resurgence of religion has happened in national contexts worldwide. However, their conclusion seems coloured by an American understanding of religion and politics, and examples from Europe are missing.

Casanova's (1994, 6) concept "deprivatisation of religion" also redefines boundaries between private and public spheres, between legality and morality, and between family, civil society and the state. However, from a discursive perspective, I want to nuance the picture of public-private boundaries. Social groups and political parties often have different ideological views on whether an issue is private or public. The transfer of issues from private to public spheres is often a gradual shift or an oscillating process (Kanckos and Björkgren 2011, 202).

The Christian Democrats play a decisive role in legislative processes on biopolitical issues, such as ART and abortion, in all Nordic countries except Iceland, where there is no established Christian Democratic party. In a Nordic comparison, issues involving personal values seem to matter most in Norwegian party politics and least in Icelandic party politics. (Bengtsson et al. 2013, 174–77) In Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands, Christian Democratic parties have contributed to delays in the legislative process on ART (Engeli 2009, 65–66). However, Engeli concludes that "controversies on reproduction tend to cut across classical political cleavages" (Engeli 2009, 67). Christian Democratic parties in many European countries have struggled to adapt to secularisation, losing their religious identity and losing voters. The issue of ART provides religious parties the opportunity to draw new attention to religious arguments (Engeli and Rothmayr Allison 2016, 95). However, a strong mobilisation of Christian Democrats does not necessarily result in restrictive ART policy, because the parties often require institutional support and allies in other parties to impact ART regulations (Engeli and Rothmayr Allison 2016, 96–98).

### **Finnish parliamentary debate on ART**

Finland's first Act on Assisted Reproduction (1237/2006) became law in 2007. The legislative process continued for a couple of decades. The first draft, prepared in 1988, did not result in a bill, and several working groups published reports on ART in the 1990s. The first bill (HE 76/2002) was withdrawn by the government in 2003 because of disagreements with the Legal Affairs Committee concerning issues of donor anonymity and lesbian couples' and single women's access to treatments. Improvement of same-sex couples' rights was on the government's agenda. Just like the first bill, the second (HE 3/2006) proposed women's access

to ART regardless of sexual orientation or marital status. The majority of the Legal Affairs Committee again disagreed, but the parliament voted in favour of the bill's proposal. Finland offered one of the most permissive regimes in Europe regarding ARTs, when the country lacked specific legislation for it. Heterosexual couples, lesbian couples and single women could receive ART treatment. Egg donation, embryo donation and so-called altruistic surrogacy were practised (Eriksson 2016a; Malin and Burrell 2004). The most important changes through the 2007 Act were that surrogacy treatments were forbidden at clinics and that donors of gametes (eggs or sperm) or embryos could no longer be anonymous. The Finnish Act is a relatively light policy, since it changed the liberal practice at clinics only to a limited extent. It gives women the right to ART regardless of personal circumstances, civil status or sexual orientation, but with some limitations. Treatment costs are reimbursed for heterosexual couples, but not for single women or lesbian couples (Eriksson 2016a).

In the Finnish parliamentary debates, ART was framed as an issue concerning women's equal rights and the child's best interests, illustrated by MP Räsänen, the Christian Democrats chairman: "If you should compare a woman without a man, for example a lesbian or a single woman, to childlessness or to fatherlessness of a child, I think society must first and foremost support the child" (Päivi Räsänen/Christian Democrats, PTK 116/2005).<sup>1</sup>

By opposing single women's and lesbian couples' right to ART, the majority of the Legal Affairs Committee contributed to discussions framing it as a debate on values: "When people listen to this, they will find that they are listening to a values debate and are able to evaluate our values" (Simo Rundgren/Center Party, PTK 13/2006). MP Rundgren emphasises his point by repeating the word "values". The Christian Democrats often used the discursive framework of a values debate as a starting point for references to religion. MP Rauhala mentions a heteronormative argument about God's creation as a natural order of men and women:

Thus, the Legal Affairs Committee highlighted values. The way in which I have analysed this issue myself is very strongly based on values, and specifically the values that come from the Christian view on human beings, the Christian worldview, in which God has created human beings as men and women. (Leena Rauhala/Christian Democrats, PTK 106/2006)

In the Finnish parliament, personal values are not strongly politicised in issues considered moral issues. With reference to freedom of conscience, most parties allow members to vote without

---

<sup>1</sup> Citations are translated by the author.



party discipline in rare cases, so-called “matters of conscience”. In the parliamentary vote on bill HE 3/2006, a third of attending MPs of government parties voted against it (Kanckos 2012, 128–29). An interlinking factor across parties was religious conviction. Many MPs built their arguments on references to conservative Christian tradition, but also MPs accounting for more permissive or moderate Christian values referred to religion. As a values issue, ART was framed as a private issue concerning individual values. However, as an equality issue, ART was understood as on the boundary between private and public. Religious values and Christian churches’ views on ART and same-sex relationships were perceived as relevant for both competing discourses. Thus, the blurred boundaries between private and public contributed to politicisation of religion in Finnish parliamentary debates on ART (cf. Casanova 1994, 6; Pieper and Young 2009, 362).

Statements of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church Council (2005) and the Church Delegation for Human Rights (KION 2006) considerably influenced the debate, suggesting that church institutions attained central roles in the legislative process. In the referral debate of bill HE 3/2006, the most frequent words related to religion were “Church Council”. Other words with religious connotations included “church”, “religious”, “Bible”, “denominations”, “Lutheran”, “Catholic”, “Orthodox”, “God”, “sacred” and “pope” (PTK 13/2006; PTK 15/2006). Thus, the most frequent references to religion relate to a hegemonic Christian vocabulary.

Likewise, these opinions of different religions are surprisingly easily ignored here, even though the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Jews, Islam, and also our Church Council are all broadly in agreement. They are quite well-founded opinions. It’s a different thing that maybe some people do not accept it, but do we regulate laws just based on opinions? (Eero Akaan-Penttilä/National Coalition Party, PTK 15/2006)

MP Akaan-Penttilä refers collectively to opinions of Christian denominations, Judaism and Islam as moral authorities and as a relevant basis for regulation of laws. This is a good example of politicisation of religion, but the reference to religion is detached from a specific religious tradition.

The Church Council (2005) emphasised the child’s best interests and heterosexual marriage as the most secure family model for children and claimed donor gametes would weaken the marriage institution. This statement was used by MPs arguing that ART should be limited to heterosexual couples. KION’s statement (2016) was framed within human rights discourse,

arguing that parenting should be based on social factors and love rather than biology. KION's statement was used by MPs advocating equality between women and lesbian or single women's right to ART.

The Christian Democrats have played a significant role in Finland's parliament in issues such as ART and same-sex unions as a defender of the heterosexual marriage institution and restrictive Christian values. Just like the Church Council's position (2005), a Member's initiative presented by Christian Democrats proposed that ART should be conducted only for married, medically infertile heterosexual couples, with their own gametes (LA 140/2005). Using religion as a frame of reference, Christian Democratic ideology was represented as opposing Liberal Green ideology in the debate on gender and family values:

Tonight, two ideologies compete against each other here in the hall, Christian Democracy and Liberal Greens. [...] Men's part in the Green's vision is to be sperm machines when female couples and single women want children through ART. (Kari Kärkkäinen/Christian Democrats, PTK 100/2006)

Speakers advocating lesbian couples' and single women's right to ART often adapted their statements to the hegemonic framing of a values debate, for example by referring to the child's best interests or to church statements, thereby positioning themselves as Christians or members of a religious community. MP Ojala said, "I would also note that in church circles, independently of the Church Council's position being as it is, there is an actively engaged group which explicitly defends that ART can be provided equally also to lesbian couples. [...] I myself also belong to the church" (Outi Ojala/Left Alliance, PTK 15/2006). MP Ojala positions herself as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. This is unusual for a Left Alliance member, as the party's policy is neutral towards religions, and it has historically advocated church-state separation. This is an example of the contemporary more sympathetic attitude of the Left Alliance towards the church and religion, reinforced by ART being treated as a "matter of conscience". The MP argued with gender equality discourse against other religiously motivated arguments, particularly against the Church Council. However, not everyone appreciated the frequent references to religion; MP Thors claimed, "I cannot help but suspect that religion is now being misused in politics" (Astrid Thors/Swedish People's Party of Finland, PTK 100/2006).

Despite frequent references to religion, and the strong mobilisation of Christian Democrats, Finland's parliament still enacted a permissive ART policy.

### **Norwegian parliamentary debate on ART and biotechnology**

The Norwegian Act relating to artificial procreation (12.6.1987/68), taking effect in 1987, was the first Nordic law covering the broad category of ART (Engeli and Rothmayr Allison 2016, 90; Nordic Council of Ministers 2006, 31). Enacted when in vitro fertilisation was a new technique, it had a restrictive function, for example by restricting ART to married couples (Melhuus 2012b, 58). The 1980s ART debate was a continuation of the 1970s abortion debate, when Christian Democrats fought for unborn children's rights. The debate around ART gave them an opportunity to use arguments of human dignity and protecting unborn children (Nordic Council of Ministers 2006, 31). The Act was incorporated in the 1994 Biotechnology Act, which was based on a precautionary principle; imagining what biotechnologies might entail (Melhuus 2012b, 12). A contested issue was whether values should be interpreted in relation to Christian tradition and if there should be a conscience clause on religious grounds regarding biotechnological issues (Melhuus 2012b, 63). The Biotechnology Act was revised in 2003, 2007 and 2013.<sup>2</sup> Through a revision of the Marriage Act in 2009 granting same-sex couples the right to marry, married lesbian couples were permitted to ART. However, egg donation is still not permitted but has been an issue of debate for several decades (Melhuus 2012b, 50–52, 72; Spilker and Lie 2007; Spilker 2016). Surrogacy is not permitted in Norway, but legislative attempts have been made to simplify the process of transferring parenthood for children born through surrogacy abroad. Multiple revisions of the legislation on ART and biotechnology indicate these issues are contested in Norwegian society (Melhuus 2012b, 50).

The Christian Democrats have opposed revisions of the Biotechnology Act. Despite several revisions, Norwegian legislation on ART and biotechnology has remained quite restrictive. In biopolitical debates on abortion, ART and prenatal diagnosis, the party has used arguments about human dignity and the Norwegian notion of the “sorting society” (*sorteringssamfunnet*), ideas now pervasive in Norwegian biopolitical debates (Melhuus 2012b; Spilker and Lie 2007, 332). The sorting society refers to a fear of eugenics and selective abortion, through which human embryos, and by extension people with disabilities, can be “sorted” out of society (Melhuus 2012b, 16).

---

<sup>2</sup> The revision in 2007 concerned embryo research and preimplantation diagnosis, which are not the focus of this article.

Through the 2003 Biotechnology Act revision, sperm donors' anonymity was rescinded. Norway's government was a centre-right coalition of Liberals, Conservatives and Christian Democrats, and the Minister of Health, Dagfinn Høybråten from the Christian Democrats, was in charge of revising the Act (Melhuus 2012b, 65). The White Paper was clearly influenced by Christian Democratic ideology, and central arguments concerned human dignity and the sorting society. Building on Christianity and humanism, human dignity is referred to as the normative basis of the Act: "Humanism's emphasis on human ability for sensible thinking and ability to acknowledge, together with Christianity's emphasis on the human intrinsic value and management assignment to creation, form the basis for a positive assessment of this kind of new medical knowledge and technology" (Meld. St. 14 [2001–2002], 4). In the parliamentary debate, the White Paper was defined as the Minister of Health's Christian Democratic agenda. Some articulations of human dignity resembled pro-life arguments: "The Christian Democrats are very pleased that the majority cherishes the weakest and most helpless of all human life, the fertilised egg" (Åse Gunhild Woie Duesund/Christian Democrats, Proceedings of Stortinget 17/06/2002, 3163). A central discourse concerned children's right to their biological parents. The main argument against anonymous sperm donation was a child's right to know its biological origins, and references to the child's best interests were frequent in this context. A competing discourse concerned gender equality, particularly concerning comparisons of egg donation to sperm donation.

The parliamentary debate was discursively framed as a debate on values: "This has been a future-oriented debate and a values debate" (Dagfinn Høybråten/Christian Democrats, Proceedings of Stortinget 17/06/2002, 3176). The values debate also included explicit references to religion, although references to ethics and values were more frequent.

With the development of biotechnology and its medical use, new areas of knowledge and new opportunities are opened to divest nature of its secrets. Now, as many times earlier when knowledge barriers were broken, developments are met with resistance and fear of the new. Already in the Old Testament, man was warned about the knowledge — the tree in the Garden of Eden. Do not eat of the tree of knowledge, God exhorted Adam — for in knowledge was the seed of the Fall. (Britt Hildeng/Labour Party, Proceedings of Stortinget 17/06/2002, 3155)

The MP uses hegemonic Christian vocabulary and biblical metaphors, the Garden of Eden and the Fall, as theological interpretations of the origin of ethical reason. Her point is that the government, including the Christian Democrats, represents a fear of the new. She later mentions

“a fear of the sorting society” and the “government’s line of prohibition” to distinguish the Labour Party’s progressive line in favour of egg donation, prenatal diagnostics and research on fertilised egg cells. References to religion represent the hegemonic discursive framing as a values debate, and the discourse explicitly builds on the hegemonic Christian culture. Thus, religion is used as a cultural resource, but detached from a religious organisation (cf. Lövheim et al. 2018, 140). For example, the Norwegian debate does not include references to church statements. However, references to Christian Democratic ideology were frequent: “With its religious, fundamentalist view, equating moral status and legal protection of fertilised eggs with born humans, the Christian Democrats in the government prepares a new battle on abortion” (John I. Alvheim/Progress Party, Proceedings of Odelstinget 18/11/2003, 68).

Norwegian legislation on ART and biotechnology was previously considered a matter of personal conviction or conscience, and MPs were not obliged to vote along party lines during enactment of the 1987 law (Melhuus 2012b, 59–61). However, the revised Biotechnology Act was passed in November 2003 by 67 votes to 2, almost unanimously (Melhuus 2012b, 65), indicating that MPs voted along party lines.

## **Discussion**

Despite similarities between Finland and Norway in frequent use of Christian vocabulary and the Christian Democrats’ central role in ART debates, the main difference is that Norwegian legislation on ART and biotechnology has been among the most restrictive in Europe since the 1980s, while Finland’s legislation has been among the most permissive. This can partially be explained by time differences when the laws were enacted and by stronger public governance of biopolitical issues in Norway. Norwegian Christian Democrats also achieved more influence in political decisions compared to Finnish Christian Democrats (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Comparison of religious positions in Finnish parliamentary debates on ART in 2005–2006 and Norwegian parliamentary debates on ART and biotechnology in 2002–2003.

	Finland	Norway
First ART Act	2007	1987
Current legislation	Act on Assisted Reproduction (1237/2006)	The Biotechnology Act (5.12.2003/100)
Hegemonic discursive framing and arguments	Values debate: religion, child’s best interests, equality	Values debate: Christian values, the “sorting society”, human dignity, biological origin, child’s best interests, equality
Christian Democrats	Conservative, promoting Christian values, in opposition	Conservative, promoting Christian values, Government party
Public – private	Personal values are not strongly politicised: conscience vote	Personal values are politicised: not a conscience vote
Politicisation of religion	Blurred boundaries between private and public	Relatively uncontested discursive framing by Christian Democrats
Result	Permissive ART policy	Restrictive ART policy

In both countries, parliamentary debates on ART were discursively framed as values debates, where references to religion or Christian values occurred more frequently than usual. The central arguments in Finland and Norway include some differences. The Finnish debates were particularly polarised on the issue of lesbian couples’ and single women’s access to ART, i.e. norms concerning gender, sexual identity and kinship. ART belongs to conscience vote issues in Finland. Boundaries between private and public spheres were blurred, contributing to politicisation of religion by opening space for religious positions, for example references to church statements and Christian vocabulary. The Christian Democrats were active speakers, but they were in opposition, and the government’s proposal corresponded to the permissive practices of fertility clinics. The result was a permissive ART policy.

In the Norwegian debate on ART and biotechnology, a relatively uncontested discursive framing created by the Christian Democrats, emphasising human dignity and the “sorting society”, contributed to politicisation of religion. Similarly to the Finnish debates, the main competing discourse emphasised gender equality. Personal values were more strongly

politicised in Norway; MPs often referred to the party's official policy and voted along party lines, although ART was a conscience vote issue in the 1980s. Despite several revisions, the Norwegian Act on Biotechnology remained restrictive.

## **Conclusion**

Several previous studies on politicisation of religion have focused on immigration and religious diversity (Christensen 2010; Ivanescu 2010; Jacobsen 2009; Lindberg 2014a; Lövheim et al. 2018). Drawing on the case studies, I conclude that political issues relating to family, reproduction and same-sex unions may also contribute to politicising religion. Biopolitical issues have contributed to increasing influence of religious actors and increasing references to religion in political discourse in the Finnish and Norwegian parliaments. The Christian Democrats had a decisive role in the politicisation of religion by raising questions about values. Discursive framing as a values debate, combined with blurred boundaries between public and private spheres, can make space for religious positions in competing discourses. Thus, these blurred boundaries also blur the differentiation of religious and secular spheres (Ivanescu 2010, 323). The blurred public–private boundaries seem to have unsettling effects, contributing to tensions between values cleavages. Contrasting with previous research emphasising Christian Democrats' role in politicising religion in regulating biopolitical issues (Engeli 2009; Engeli and Rothmayr Allison 2016), I wish to nuance the representation of “religious actors”, who are difficult to identify in the case studies. The Christian Democrats were a government party in Norway and in opposition in Finland at the time of the case studies. Yet Christian Democrats in both countries actively used the discursive framing of a values debate to make religious and moral interpretations of biopolitical issues. Hegemonic Christian vocabulary was used in competing discourses by MPs representing different parties. References to religion have the role of authority arguments, because they fit the hegemonic discursive framing of a values debate. These findings relate to Ivanescu's (2010, 313) claim that religiously defined morality in political debates contributes to religious and political actors influencing each other and to a renewed public visibility of religion.

The case studies are examples of religion receiving public attention in political discourse in the Nordic countries. However, through increasing religious diversity, the role of religion in Nordic politics becomes increasingly complex. For example, religion is sometimes used as a cultural resource, detached from a tradition. (Lövheim et al. 2018) Thus, the political discourse of these

Eriksson, Lise (2019) Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 32 (1): 40-54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

debates was not very secular, but this does not mean that religious organisations had a direct influence on the outcome of the political debate (cf. Hjelm 2014, 29).

## References

Beckford, James A. 2012. "Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1: 1–19. 10.1111/j.1468-5906.2011.01625.x

Bengtsson, Åsa; Kasper Hansen, Ólafur Þ. Harðarson, Hanne Marthe Narud, and Henrik Oscarsson. 2013. *The Nordic Voter: Myths of Exceptionalism*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Berger, Peter L., ed. 1999. *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Casanova, José. 1994. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Christensen, Henrik Reintoft. 2010. "Religion and Authority in the Public Sphere. Representations of Religion in Scandinavian Parliaments and Media." PhD diss., University of Aarhus.

De Zordo, Silvia, Joanna Mishtal, and Lorena Anton, eds. 2017. *A fragmented Landscape: Abortion Governance and Protest Logics in Europe*. Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books.

Engeli, Isabelle. 2009. "The Challenges of Abortion and Assisted Reproductive Technologies Policies in Europe." *Comparative European Politics* 7, no. 1: 56–74. 10.1057/cep.2008.36

Engeli, Isabelle, and Christine Rothmayr Allison. 2016. "Governing New Reproductive Technologies Across Western Europe: The Gender Dimension." In *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*, edited by Merete Lie, and Nina Lykke, 87–99. Oxford/New York: Routledge.

Eriksson, Lise. 2016a. "Finland as a Late Regulator of Assisted Reproduction: A Permissive Policy under Debate." In *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*, edited by Merete Lie, and Nina Lykke, 124–35. Oxford/New York: Routledge.

Eriksson, Lise. 2016b. "Finnish Legislation on Assisted Reproductive Technologies: A Comparison of Church Statements." In *Reconsidering Religion, Law, and Democracy - New*



Eriksson, Lise (2019) Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 32 (1): 40-54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

*Challenges for Society and Research*, edited by Anna-Sara Lind, Mia Lövheim, and Ulf Zackariasson, 139–55. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, Norman. 2003. *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London/New York: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The history of sexuality. Vol. 1: The will to knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The birth of biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2008. “Notes on a post-secular society.” *Signandsight.com*, June 18, 2008. <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html>.

Hjelm, Titus. 2014. “National piety: Religious equality, freedom of religion and national identity in Finnish political discourse.” *Religion* 44, no. 1: 28–45. 10.1080/0048721X.2013.857366

Hjelm, Titus. 2015. “Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion”. In *Is God Back? Reconsidering the New Visibility of Religion*, edited by Titus Hjelm, 1–16. London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Ivanescu, Carolina. 2010. “Politicised religion and the religionisation of politics.” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, no. 4: 309–25. 10.1080/14755610.2010.527611

Jacobsen, Brian Arly. 2009. ”Religion som fremmedhed i dansk politik. En sammenligning af italesættelser af jøder i Rigsdagstidende 1903–45 og muslimer i Folketingstidende 1967–2005.” PhD diss., University of Copenhagen.

Kanckos, Lise, and Malena Björkgren. 2011. “Legitimacy Challenges in Gender Politics – Challenges to Political Legitimacy in Parliamentary Debates concerning LGBT Rights, Assisted Reproduction and Domestic Violence.” In *Legitimacy: The Treasure of Politics*, edited by Tage Kurten, and Lars Hertzberg, 185–207. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.

Kanckos, Lise. 2012. ”Barnets bästa i politikens främsta rum. Finlands riksdags debatt om assisterad befruktning.” PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University.

Eriksson, Lise (2019) Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 32 (1): 40-54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

Lindberg, Jonas. 2014a. "Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988–2009". *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 15, no. 4: 565–82. 10.1080/21567689.2014.965693

Lindberg, Jonas. 2014b. "Renegotiating the Role of Majority Churches in Nordic Parliamentary Debates on Same-Sex Unions." *Journal of Church and State* 58, no. 1: 80–97. 10.1093/jcs/csu103

Linderman, Alf, and Mia Lövheim. 2016. "Measuring Resurgence of Religion? Methodological Considerations in a Study of Swedish Editorials." *Nordicom Review* 37, special issue: 101–14. 10.1515/nor-2016-0026

Lövheim, Mia, Jonas Lindberg, Pål Kjetil Botvar, Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Kati Niemelä, and Anders Bäckström. 2018. "Religion on the Political Agenda." In *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing the Nordic Countries*, edited by Inger Furseth, 137–91. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Madeley, John T. 2003. "European Liberal Democracy and the Principle of State Religious Neutrality." In *Church and State in Contemporary Europe. The Chimera of Neutrality*, edited by John T Madeley, and Zsolt Enyedi, 1–22. London/Portland: Frank Cass.

Malin, Maili, and Riitta Burrell. 2004. "Finland: Unregulated Practices, Familiarity and Legality". In *Third Party Assisted Conception Across Cultures. Social, Legal and Ethical Perspectives*, edited by Eric Blyth, and Ruth Landau, 73–93. London and New York: Jessica Kingley Publishers.

Melhuus, Marit. 2012a. "Hva slags mening gir sorteringssamfunnet? – En hendelse og noen refleksjoner omkring kunnskap, likhet, valg, individ og samfunn i Norge." *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift* 23, no. 1, 33–47.

Melhuus, Marit. 2012b. *Problems of Conception. Issues of Law, Biotechnology, Individuals and Kinship*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Moberg, Marcus, Kennet Granholm, and Peter Nynäs. 2012. "Trajectories of Post-Secular Complexity: An Introduction." In: *Post-Secular Society*, edited by Peter Nynäs, Mika Lassander, and Terhi Utriainen, 1–25. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Niemelä, Kati, and Henrik Reintoft Christensen. 2013. "Religion in newspapers in the Nordic countries in 1988–2008." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 26, no. 1: 5–24.

Eriksson, Lise (2019) Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 32 (1): 40-54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2019-01-03>

Nordic Council of Ministers. 2006. *Assisted Reproduction in the Nordic Countries. A Comparative Study of Policies and Regulation*. TemaNord 2006:505. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers. <http://ncbio.org/nordisk/publikationer/>.

Pieper, Christopher, and Michael P. Young. 2009. "Religion and Post-secular Politics." In *Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective*. Edited by Kevin T. Leicht, J. Craig Jenkins, 349–65. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.

Rose, Nikolas. 2007. *The politics of life itself. Biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Spilker, Kristin, and Merete Lie. 2007. "Gender and Bioethics Intertwined: Egg Donation within the Context of Equal Opportunities." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14, no. 4: 327–40. 10.1177/1350506807081879

Spilker, Kristin H. 2016. "Norwegian Biopolitics in the First Decade of the 2000s: Family Politics and Assisted Reproduction Understood through the Concept of the Trickster." In *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*, edited by Merete Lie, and Nina Lykke, 100–11. Oxford/New York: Routledge.

Stuckrad, Kocku von. 2010. "Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: An Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 2–3: 156–69. 10.1163/157006810X512347

Taira, Teemu. 2013. "Making space for discursive study in religious studies." *Religion* 43, no. 1: 26–45. 10.1080/0048721X.2013.742744