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Embedded or Embattled? Constructing Legitimate Religion in Finnish Political Party Platforms

Jere Kyyrö and Titus Hjelm

The “summer hymn controversy” is a media event that reoccurs almost every summer towards the end of the school year in Finland. It concerns the *Suvivirsi* (“Summer hymn”), or hymn 571 of the official hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), traditionally sung at end of academic year festivities in primary and secondary schools across the country. For some, the hymn represents a relic that does not fit the secular and increasingly religiously diverse world of publicly funded schools in 21st century Finland.¹ For others, it is an inseparable part of Finnish culture. The controversy, then, is about whether the *Suvivirsi* should or should not be sung at the end of the school year in an assembly compulsory to all pupils. Individual schools solve the issue in different ways, but if anything is certain, it is that someone is bound to be unhappy, and that the media will be there to report it.

The Summer hymn is a microcosm of the broader pattern of religion in 21st Century Finland—and Norden more broadly (see Furseth 2018). On the one hand, there is the undeniable decline of all indicators of individual religiosity, whether church membership, religious practice, or self-identification. The extent varies across regions and there are few indicators of religion “disappearing”, but the direction of change is clear, as is the fact that decline has accelerated since the beginning of the 2000s. On the other hand, as in the other Nordic countries, Finland has a historical legacy of very close state and church relations (Kääriäinen 2011). This constitutionally and culturally privileged position affords the ELCF (and to a lesser degree, the Orthodox Church of Finland, OCF) broad visibility that includes a presence in Finnish schools, for example. In addition to this double dynamic, increasing religious diversity, the outcome of immigration and (to a much

¹ Since schools are not allowed to collect tuition fees, even “private” schools are in practice publicly funded in Finland.

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smaller extent) spiritual seeking, calls into question many taken for granted practices regarding the place of religion in Finnish society. Although people may be increasingly indifferent to religion as a personal worldview, it is, paradoxically, increasingly difficult to be indifferent to religion as a citizen (Hjelm 2015).

With that in mind, it is curious that we know so little about what politicians think about the proper place of religion in modern Finnish society. We do know that Finnish Members of Parliament (MPs) are rather reluctant to talk about religion, and even more reluctant to use religious language in parliament (Äystö & Hjelm 2024a). The Finnish parliament (*Eduskunta*) still passes legislation regarding Church Law, although nowadays the parliament merely accepts or rejects legislative initiatives proposed by the Church Synod of the ELCF. Otherwise, religion may pop up in discussions concerning topics such as abortion, female genital mutilation, and same-sex marriage (Äystö & Hjelm 2024a; Äystö & Hjelm 2024b). The latter discussions are not, strictly speaking, about religion *per se*, but rather cases where religion plays a role in justifying an individual MP's political stance. We know much less about what contemporary political parties talk about when they talk about religion, and whether they have (explicit or implicit) policies regarding religion.

To remedy this lacuna, we ask in this article how political parties construct the legitimate place of religion in 21st century Finland. We seek the answer in the political party platforms (*poliittinen ohjelma*, also referred to as programmes and manifestoes in British English) of those registered parties (*rekisteröity puolue*, r.p.) that have been in the Finnish parliament between 2000 and 2023. Using mixed methods, we code different framings (or discourses) of religion in these platforms, displaying the variety of ways in which political parties talk about religion in their most important official policy documents. We do not, however, stop at describing these frames, but go on to analyze what these framings *do*, with a focus on how particular ways of talking about religion construct a legitimate place for religion in Finnish society. We also pay attention to how some frames in these platforms *delegitimize* certain religious practices and traditions. Importantly, after the qualitative

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coding, we measure which parties are more likely to portray religion in a particular way, and which background variables of the parties explain the differing treatment. We thus provide, for the first time, a systematic mapping of contemporary Finnish politics of religion. Although there are variations on the map, the main dividing line is between portrayals of religion as a “hot” or divisive topic—when the issue is religious privilege, values, and religion as a threat—and portrayals of religion as a “lukewarm” issue (sometimes conceptualized as “banal religion”) such as when the ELCF is considered less as a religious community and more as a welfare provider, or when religious equality is discussed among other human rights. We close by suggesting that established political culture where religion barely registers may be giving way to more contested visions of the legitimate place of religion in Finnish society.

The Religious and Political Context in Finland

The ELCF dominates the Finnish religious field, with a majority of the population being church tax paying members. The membership trajectory has been one of steady decline, however. Starting from 1950 (95.0 percent), the membership fell gradually to 90.3 percent in 1980, and again to 85.1 percent in 2000. Thereafter, a steeper decline has ensued, with membership numbers falling to 78.3 percent in 2010 and again down to 62.2 percent at the end of 2024. There has been little religious switching, so the loss of ELCF membership is mainly reflected in the rapidly growing share of the “nones” (a minority of whom are, however, members of unregistered Pentecostal communities and some who practice any of the many forms of “new spirituality”). As membership information is recorded officially for taxation purposes, the numbers are accurate in a way that membership numbers in many other countries are not (e.g. Field 2021). The ELCF is mentioned in the constitution and it and the much smaller OCF are governed by separate Church Laws. All other religious communities are treated under the Freedom of Religion Act. The state also collects a church tax on behalf of these two churches. Because of this, the ELCF is often referred to as a “state church”,

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especially in international scholarship, whereas the ELCF itself and some Finnish commentators prefer the term “folk church” (Hjelm 2020). The Lutheran mainstream can be characterized as relatively secularized and liberal, but there are several more conservative revival movements within and outside the church. Thus dynamic means that “the church” rarely speaks with one voice, but rather that liberal and conservative views coexist within it. Although Finland has become religiously more diverse, Islam is the only non-Christian religion that comes even close to a one percent of population threshold of adherents, even if counting Muslims is difficult when membership of a mosque or a registered religious community is not considered an important feature of religious life (Pauha & Martikainen 2022). Yet, religious pluralism denotes more than the actual numbers on the ground; it also refers to inclusive, human rights -based politics (Beckford 2003), which has become the norm since the 1990s, and which Finland shares with (most) other European Union countries. Public discourse is yet another thing and does not necessarily reflect loftier political ideals, as is apparent, for example, in the way in which Finnish media continues to report on Islam mostly as an issue of global security concern (Taira & Kyyrö 2021).

Turning to politics, we will consider the parties in parliament during the period of our enquiry. Starting with age and size, the traditional “big three” of Finnish politics are the center-left Social Democrats (*Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue*, founded in 1899), the rural and center-right Center Party (*Suomen Keskusta*, 1906), and the conservative-liberal National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen kokoomus*, 1918). During Finland’s independence, most governments have been coalitions of two of these parties and supporting smaller parties in various configurations. The Swedish People’s Party (*Suomen ruotsalainen kansanpuolue*, 1909) is one of the oldest, representing the Swedish-speaking minority in officially bilingual Finland. Their vote share dovetails with the slowly declining Swedish-speaking population (see Table 1). The Left Alliance (*Vasemmistoliitto*), founded in 1990, was formed from the ashes of the old Communist and Socialist parties, which dissolved after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Green League (*Vihreä liitto*) was established in 1987

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as the parliamentary manifestation of the new environmentalist movement (for an overview of the Finnish party spectrum, see Mickelsson 2021; Hjelm & Maude 2021).

The two parties most obviously relevant for our analysis are the Christian Democrats (*Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit*), founded in 1958 by members of the National Coalition Party unhappy with the secularizing trends of the time. They represent the conservative end of the political spectrum, and their background is in the new Pietist Protestantism that became an antithesis for the folk church mainstream Lutheranism after World War II. Today, much of the Christian Democratic party membership (41.5 percent) is comprised of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians who are not ELCF members (Hjelm et al. 2023). Finally, the Finns Party, established in 1995, started as a populist party, but has been moving further and further toward the far right since 2017, opposing immigration (especially Muslim immigration), LGBT rights, and gender equality policies. Relevantly, their MPs have included several prominent conservative Christians. The meteoric rise of the Finns Party in the 2011 parliamentary elections (from 4 percent to 19 percent share of the vote) can be said to be the biggest changes in Finnish politics since independence in 1917, with the Finns Party ousting the Center party from the “big three” (until 2025 when, after two years in an unpopular government, the Finns Party fell to fourth place, returning the Center Party to the top three). The size of the parties can be seen in Table 1. There have also been a few smaller parties with either a small number of seats or a short period in the parliament, which have been excluded from this study.²

² The Åland autonomous region has one representative in the Parliament, who usually sits in the Swedish People’s Party’s parliamentary group. In parliamentary elections, there have been one-man parties such as Remonttirymä and Liike Nyt. Additionally, there have been breakaway groups, such as the short-lived Siniset which broke from the Finns party and Vasenryhmä, which broke away from the Left Alliance.

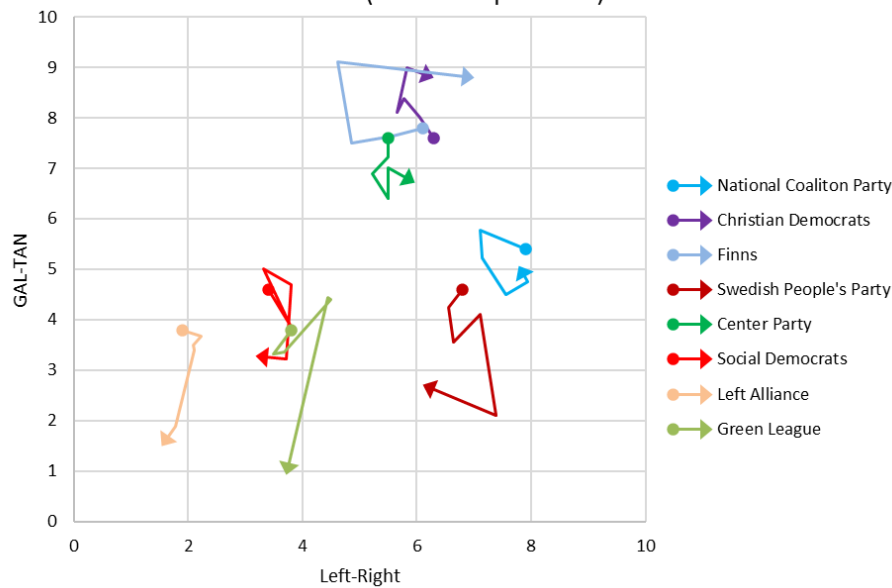
Table 1. Parties' founding year and share of seats (%) in Parliament (CHES Europe 2019; Mickelsson 2021)

Party	1999	2002	2006	2010	2014	2019	Avg.
National Coalition Party (1918)	23.0	23.0	20.0	25.0	22.0	19.2	22.0
Christian Democrats (1958)	5.0	5.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	2.5	3.8
Finns Party (1995)	0.5	0.0	1.5	2.5	19.5	19.7	8.7
Swedish People's Party (1909)	5.5	5.5	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.8
Center Party (1906)	24.0	24.0	27.5	25.5	17.5	15.7	22.4
Social Democrats (1899)	25.5	25.5	26.5	22.5	21.0	20.2	23.5
Left Alliance (1990)	10.0	10.0	9.5	8.5	7.0	8.1	8.9
Green League (1987)	5.5	5.5	7.0	7.5	5.0	10.1	6.8
Other	1.0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

To represent the political positioning of the parties, we chose two scales. The first scale combines the measures of ideological (“general”) and economic left–right positioning, using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES Europe; Jolly et al. 2022).³ The second, referred to as the GAL–TAN scale (short for Green, Alternative, Libertarian – Traditionalist, Authoritarian, Nationalist), measures party positions on a scale of cultural on social values instead of ideology and economic distribution. We have combined these two scales to produce Figure 1, where the parties’ position on the left–right scale is combined with the GAL-TAN score. The change in the parties’ positions between 1999 and 2019 is represented by tracing the different points in time. So, for example, the Finns Party’s move to the right and toward a more conservative position is shown in light blue. In contrast, the Left Alliance is stable on the left–right scale but becoming more liberal on the GAL-TAN.

³ The CHES survey asks political scientists to estimate individual parties’ positions on different scales. The number of experts on the Finnish parties varied between five (in 1999) and fourteen (in 2019). The validity of the expert approximations can be evaluated by analyzing their variances and correlations. For example, in the Finnish data from 1999, the similarity of the approximation was more than 99% and the reliability more than 96% (Steenberger & Marks 2007). The CHES Europe survey was conducted in six waves in 1999, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019. All Finnish parliamentary parties were covered by the dataset. We selected the ideological and economical Left-Right scales as well as the GAL-TAN scale because they were assessed in all six waves.

Figure 1. Individual party positions between 1999 and 2019 on Left-Right (Average of General and Economic) and GAL-TAN scales (CHES Europe 2019.)



Mickelsson (2021, 325–326) has suggested that the current era is characterized by a polarization between liberal and conservative views, which has replaced the earlier opposition between left- and right-wing economic views. While Mickelsson’s description of the “global angst era” as a dispute between post-materialist liberals and materialist nationalists seems to hold true, according to the CHES data, in Finland the post-materialist or liberal half can be further divided into left and right-wing clusters.

Conceptualizing Legitimation

Any discussion of legitimation and legitimacy begins rightly with Max Weber’s classic discussion of legitimate types of authority (Weber 1978[1920]; Habermas 1973). Following Berger and Luckmann’s equally classic *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967[1966]) we, however, conceptualize legitimacy as a process rather than a quality a political party, a policy, or a religious belief, practice, or community (in our case) possesses—or does not possess (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway 2006). Hence,

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legitimacy is an active achievement of legitimation. Legitimation in turn happens mainly through language, in the ways in which a particular construction of the world is “sold” to audiences (Berger & Luckmann 1967, 112; van Leeuwen 2007, 91–92; Hjelm 2024, 108–109). Political platforms are well suited for an analysis of legitimation, because their very function is to justify policies the political party wants to implement. So, while not all language has a legitimating function, much of political language does (Thompson 1990, 61–62; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). This is also because the fundamental assumption in pluralist democracies is that other parties have competing visions, which must be presented as lacking legitimacy or, put differently, *delegitimated*.

Scholars of religion, in turn, have been interested in legitimation especially in cases where certain religious groups seemingly lack legitimacy or are the targets of active delegitimation campaigns. Such has been often the case, for new and unconventional religions (Lewis 2003). Increasingly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, 2001, Islam has been the main target of public scrutiny and delegitimation (e.g. Petley and Richardson 2011). So far, however, the focus of research has been more on media discourse and the activities of “moral entrepreneurs”, who actively oppose minority religions, rather than on how politicians or—even more rarely—political parties treat religion in their official policy outlines.

To understand Finnish political parties’ treatment of religion better, however, it is not enough to simply note that the language of the party platforms legitimates and delegitimates religion. We also want to know *how* these legitimations and delegitimations are achieved. Constructing a legitimate place for religion (and religions) may be done in a myriad of ways and how the platforms do it is a choice, which can tell us interesting things. This is where “frames”—or more precisely “legitimation frames”—come in. Frames organize and limit social interaction by portraying the world from a particular perspective. Frame analysis is the analysis of such basic elements that are used in the organization of experience (Goffman, 1974, p. 10–11). As said, we are particularly interested in how different framings legitimate or delegitimize religion (in general), particular religious communities, or

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particular religious beliefs and practices. For example, when the ELCF is portrayed as a public utility, the framing legitimates the church as a socially useful organization. Portraying the ELCF as an institution that saves souls is a different framing with different consequences for evaluating the legitimate role of the church in society.

Data and Methods

We collected the party platforms published by those parties in parliament between 2000 and 2023 using the Pohtiva database maintained by Finnish Social Science Data Archive, which has all the published platforms of all Finnish political parties from the period (Pohtiva, n.d.). To manage the text mass, we wrote a script in the Python programming language, which we used to go through a list of URL's collected from Pohtiva. We then downloaded the structured data from the webpage (including the platform text, party name, publication year and platform type) and went through each paragraph, checking if it contained words from a keyword list used in an earlier survey of parliamentary religion-speech (Äystö & Hjelm 2024a). Later, we split the paragraphs into sentences, which were saved in a matrix, with a sentence containing a keyword-hit being the basic observation unit. The keywords were pre-classified based on which religious tradition they refer to (general worldviews, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Other minority religions; cf. Krippendorff 2004, 267, 272—281; Lindberg 2013, 136). In total, there were 638 sentences from 167 platforms that contained a keyword. Finally, we recorded religious tradition, party name, and year and type of platform as variables, and combined the GAL-TAN, left-right (average of general and economic) values to each data point, selecting the values from the closest preceding year in the CHES dataset.

In the second phase, we took the sentences that included a religion reference and used qualitative content analysis (QCA) to code what we identified as dominant frames. This was done by looking at, for example, word choices and recurrent discursive features, which we classified with the help of cognate concepts and earlier research. In the now-established sense (Hsieh & Shannon 2005), we

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conducted a “directed” type of QCA. The frames we identified are described in detail in the next section.

Finally, we subjected the coded data to a two-step quantitative analysis: First, we cross-tabulated the legitimation frames with other categorical variables, supplemented by chi-square (χ^2) tests for statistical significance (Krippendorff 2004, pp. 195—197). This part of the analysis is exploratory, providing an overview of the background variables. In the second part, the focus shifted to how selected continuous covariates predict the presence of individual frames of legitimation. This was done by means of multinomial logistic regression. We performed the analysis with SPSS 28 by using the Forward: stepwise method, where covariates are added to the model if they improve the significance of the model⁴.

Legitimation Frames: Qualitative Analysis

We identified seven frames from the manually coded data. The first of these, which we call simply “neutral presence” (N=38), is not strictly speaking a *legitimizing* frame, as in these instances religion is used illustratively, but the main topic is not religion itself. For example:

Ylivieskan kirkon tuhopoltto järkytti kansalaisia laajasti. (Christian Democrats 2017.)
(The arson of Ylivieska church shocked citizens widely.)

Kuntien ja seurakuntien lisäksi veroluontoisia maksuja saavat myös Kansaneläkelaitos sekä työeläkevakuuttajat. (Social Democrats 2018.)

(In addition to municipalities and parishes, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland and employment pension insurers receive tax-like payments.)

The second frame, “public utility” was also the second most common one (N=119). In this framing, religion—meaning, in most cases, ELCF parishes—is portrayed as *useful*, thus legitimating its place in society. This utility comes in two forms, either in the sense of performance of social duties and

⁴ The step summary is available from the authors. We excluded the Neutral presence frame (N=38) from the regression model to focus on unambiguous cases of legitimation, rather than mere mentions of religion.

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services (Beyer 1994, 80) or as a moral resource which provides a putative social glue (Davie, 2006, p. 25; 2007). For example:

Varhaisnuoriin panostaminen vaatii entistä parempaa yhteistyötä kunnan nuorisotoimen, koulun, kirkon, kolmannen sektorin ja kodin välillä. (National Coalition Party 2001.)

(Investing in early adolescents requires better cooperation between communal youth services, school, church, third sector, and home.)

Aktiivinen osallistuminen yhdistysten ja seurakuntien toimintaan luo hyvinvointia ja vaikuttaa ratkaisevalla tavalla elämänlaatuun. (Swedish People's Party 2015.)

(Active participation in association and congregation activities creates welfare and crucially affects the quality of life.)

Harrastajateatterit, nuorisoseurat, kotiseutuyhdistykset, työväenyhdistykset, kristilliset yhdistykset, soittokunnat, orkesterit, kuorot sekä monet muut toimijat ovat jo kymmeniä vuosia tarjonneet laadukkaita ja osallistavia kulttuuripalveluita. (Christian Democrats 2020.)

(Amateur theaters, youth clubs, local heritage associations, labor unions, Christian associations, bands, orchestras, choirs, and many other actors have been offering high-quality and participatory cultural services for decades.)

Vapaaehtoistyötä tekevät ihmiset, järjestöt, yhdistykset ja seurakunnat ovat tärkeitä kuntalaisten hyvinvoinnin ja hyvän elämän rakentajia. (Center Party 2020.)

(People, organizations, associations, and congregations engaged in volunteer work are important builders of the well-being and good life of municipal residents.)

In the public utility frame ELCF parishes are mentioned as one unquestioned service provider among others. This is in sharp contrast to, say, debates about “faith-based initiatives” in the United States at the turn of the millennium (e.g. Farnsley 2007), that is, whether and to which extent religious groups should enjoy public funding. To some Finnish political parties at least—who at different levels of governance decide on the distribution of public funding—inclusion of “parishes” is completely unproblematic. This “common sense” inclusion of parishes as welfare service actors is an example of a dynamic where *not* being recognized as religion acts in some situations as a way of maintaining a privileged social position (Griera & Clot-Garrell 2015, 23–24).

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The third frame, “values and culture” (N=90), in contrast, makes the legitimation visible by actively recognizing the religion’s connection to central social values and culture. In some cases, Christian values are quoted as part of the party’s identity:

Jokainen yhteiskuntamme jäsen on yhtä ainutlaatuinen ja arvokas; kristillisen ihmiskäsityksemme perusteella emme hyväksy ihmisarvoa loukkaavaa politiikkaa. (Finns Party 2001.)

(Every member of our society is equally unique and valuable; according to our Christian view of what a person is, we do not accept dehumanizing politics.)

Vaalimme kristillisiä arvoja ja hyviä suomalaisia perinteitä. (Christian Democrats 2020.)

(We cherish Christian values and good Finnish traditions.)

Kansallinen herääminen, talonpoikaisuudet, kristilliset arvot ja sivistysaate yhdistyivät vuonna 1906 perustetun edistyksellisen keskustaliikkeen ajattelussa. (Center Party 2006.)

(National awakening, peasant roots, Christian values, and the ethos of education were consolidated in the thinking of the progressive centrist movement established in 1906.)

In a more combative form, familiar from culture war rhetoric (Äystö & Hjelm 2024a) and referencing the Summer hymn controversy that we described in the beginning of the article, Christian tradition is equated with Finnish values (“Finnish terms”), as in the Finns party 2011 parliamentary election platform:

Suomessa elämme kuitenkin suomalaisin ehdoin ja se merkitsee sitä, että me pidämme joulujuhlamme ja laulamme suvirtemme niin kuin tähänkin asti. (Finns Party 2011.)

(However, in Finland, we live on Finnish terms, which means that we continue to celebrate our Christmas festivities and sing our Summer hymns just as we have done up to now.)

Together, these three frames (1–3) could be said to amount to a higher-order frame of “embeddedness”, that is, conveying a sense of a religion—in this case, the ELCF—that is either invisible in its taken-for-grantedness, or is culturalized (Astor & Mayrl 2020) by positioning it as part of broader (national) culture rather than a differentiated religious sphere. Either way, the

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embeddedness frames downplay the religious elements, highlighting the social performance rather than the soul-saving function of the church.

The next three frames (4-6), in turn, could be grouped under the broader frame of “entitlement”.

They spring from two sources: On the one hand, they are commentary on the close relationship between the ELCF and the state, where this privileged status is the point of contention. On the other hand, the political platforms endorse broader human rights -based policies, including that of freedom of religion and conscience. However, as can be seen below, this freedom can be constructed as positive (freedom to) or negative (freedom from). All frames, in their different ways, try to answer the question “Do religious groups and individuals need special privileges or freedoms, or should these be removed?”

The fourth frame, “protecting special status” (N=110), is rather self-explanatory. These statements in the political platforms concern both institutional and individual privileges, as the two below examples, respectively, show:

Valtion tulee edelleen osallistua vanhojen, historiallisesti arvokkaiden kirkkorakennusten ylläpitoon kulttuuriperinnön säilyttämiseksi ja kustantaa oman uskonnon opetus kouluissa, sielunhoitotyö vankiloissa ja sotilaspappijärjestelmä puolustusvoimissa. (Christian Democrats 2006.)

(The state should continue to participate in the maintenance of historically valuable church buildings and pay for the teaching of one’s own religion in schools, pastoral care in prisons, and chaplains in the military.)

Lääkäriä tai muuta hoitohenkilökuntaa ei tule pakottaa suorittamaan eutanasiaa, jos se on hänen katsomuksensa vastaista. (Green League 2014.)

(A doctor or other member of medical staff should not be forced to commit euthanasia, if it is contrary to their conviction.)

These two examples also begin to show the political disparities in the framing of religion, with the conservative Christian Democrats being concerned about protecting the privileges of the ELCF— interestingly, since no other party has as many members from other Christian churches as the

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Christian Democrats, and the privileges the section refers to do not extend to other Christian groups.

In contrast, the liberal Green party emphasises the rights of the individual.

Fifth, the “denying special status” frame (N=68) can be considered the inverse of the protecting special status frame. In political platforms—the official blueprints of party policies—this challenging of religious privileges is mainly targeted at the privileged position of the ELCF and concomitant arrangements (such as providing Religious Education in school according to one’s membership in a church/religious community). In their speeches on the parliament floor, Finnish MPs have commented on the hierarchy between individuals’ religious rights and professional duties as public employees as, for example, when the parliament debated the right of medical personnel to decline performing abortions (Äystö & Hjelm 2024b). On the programmatic level, however, the focus is on church–state arrangements:

Valtiolla ei pidä olla erityissuhdetta mihinkään uskontoon tai uskontokuntaan. (Left Alliance 2006.)

(The state should not have a special relation with any religion or religious denomination.)

Kirkon varojen kerääminen yhteisöveron avulla tulee lopettaa ja kirkon lakisääteiset tehtävät tulee siirtää valtion ja kuntien hoidettavaksi. (Green League 2014.)

(Collecting funds for the church [ELCF] with the help of the community tax should be ended and its legally sanctioned duties should be given to the state and the municipalities.)

Koulujen uskonnonopetus on korvattava kaikille yhteisellä yleisellä katsomusaineella. (Green League 2010.)

(Religious Education in schools should be replaced with common worldview-teaching.)

Common to many of these framings is that they comment on and seek to dissolve already existing privileges by offering a non-confessional alternative. It is noteworthy that this frame also counteracts the public utility frame, which legitimates churches’—or to be more precise, the ELCF’s—privileges based on their social contribution. Again, the point is not to terminate such provision, but for the

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public authorities to take it over. The overall effect, nevertheless, is to delegitimize the current privileged position of the ELCF.

Where the denying special status frame relates to existing structural arrangements between (mostly) the ELCF and the state, the “equality” frame (N=124), the most common frame in our data, focuses on the individual, or on more abstract level, freedoms and rights:

Emme hyväksy ihmisten syrjimistä sukupuolen, ihonvärin, uskonnon, kielen, sukupuolisen suuntauksen tai syntyperän takia. (Swedish People’s Party 2015.)

(We do not accept discrimination of people by their gender, skin color, religion, language, sexual orientation, or origin.)

Vanhempien elämäntilanne, taloudellinen tilanne, kulttuuritausta, uskonnollinen vakaumus tai seksuaalinen suuntautuminen eivät saa muodostua hyvän lapsuuden esteeksi. (Left Alliance 2002.)

(The parents’ life-situation, economic situation, cultural background, religious conviction, or sexual orientation should not become an obstacle for a good childhood.)

Ketään ei saa syrjiä iän, etnisen alkuperän, kansalaisuuden, uskonnon, vakaumuksen, kielen, mielipiteen, poliittisen toiminnan, perhesuhteiden, vammaisuuden, seksuaalisen suuntautumisen tai muun syyn perusteella. (Christian Democrats 2017.)

(No one should be discriminated because of his or her age, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, conviction, language, opinion, political activity, family relations, disability, sexual orientation, or other reason.)

Maailmankatsomuksen ja uskonnon vapautta on puolustettava ja valtion tulee kohdella kaikkia uskonnollisia yhteisöjä tasaveroisesti. (Green League 2010.)

(The freedom of worldviews and religion must be defended, and the state should treat all religious communities equally.)

Osallisuus, syrjimättömyys, ajatuksen-, omantunnon-, uskonnon- ja sananvapaus sekä vapaa tiedonvälitys ovat välttämättömiä edellytyksiä sille, että voimme tulevaisuudessakin ylläpitää ja kehittää demokraattista ja avointa yhteiskuntaa. (National Coalition Party 2020.)

(Participation, non-discrimination, freedom of thought, conscience, religion and speech, and free communication are preconditions for our future ability to maintain and develop a democratic and open society.)

Importantly, the equality frame considers religion as part of identity but as shown above, as one element of identity, or rights and freedoms, among others. In this sense, like the embeddedness

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framings, portraying religion as part of a broader identity palette de-emphasizes its particularity. In terms of legitimation, this can be read in two ways—as the above excerpts demonstrate: On the one hand, religion is a legitimate part of identity and everyone should have equal rights regardless of their religion, or lack thereof. On the other hand, religious identity is not a legitimate reason to override other rights, such as children’s rights (Ahonen & Hjelm, forthcoming).

Finally, the seventh framing, “threats and governance” (N=89), is in a category of its own, although not unrelated to the previous ones. Diametrically opposed to the embedded framings, this framing explicitly seeks to construct religion—in this case, almost always Islam—as something separate from Finnish society and culture, and more broadly, “western civilization” (Ahonen & Hjelm, forthcoming)—nor is it framed as an issue of individual rights or identity. For example:

Pääosa maailman kriisipesäkkeistä sijaitsee islamilaisen maailman alueella. (Finns Party 2006.)

(Most of the world’s crisis hotspots are located in the Islamic world.)

Länsimaisen uskonnonvapausajatuksen haastaa suunnitelma suurmoskeijan rakentamisesta. Mikäli hanke olisi puhtaasti uskonnollinen, ongelmaa ei olisi. Suurmoskeija edustaa muslimeille kuitenkin eri asiaa kuin vaikkapa tuomiokirkko kristityille. Se on islamilaisen valloituspolitiikan keskus, jollaisia myös suuri osa länsimaisista muslimeista vastustaa. Euroopassa sijaitsevien suurmoskeijoiden yhteys radikalisoitumiseen sekä terrorismiin on kiistaton. Niitä islamin käytäntöjä, jotka entisestään vaikeuttavat muslimien integraatiota demokraattiseen yhteiskuntaan, ei tule yhteiskunnallisista toimin tukea. (Christian Democrats 2016.)

(The plan of building a Grand Mosque challenges the Western understanding of religious freedom. If the project was a purely religious one, there would be no problem. The grand mosque, however, represents a different thing to Muslims than, say, a cathedral to Christians. It is a center of Islamic politics of conquest, which most of western Muslims also oppose. The connection between European Grand Mosques and radicalization and terrorism is undeniable. Those practices of Islam that make Muslim integration to democratic society more difficult, should not be supported by social actions.)

These framings follow the now recognized securitization of Islam, where Muslims are singled out as a threat and subsequently as targets of special governmental measures (Fox & Akbaba 2015). In the Finnish examples, the threat construction happens mostly in the context of opposing immigration

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from Muslim-majority countries, when the focus is on using broad brushstrokes (“most of the world’s crisis hotspots”) to delegitimize Islam and Muslims as a whole.

The excerpts above already point to a certain distribution of frames along party lines, particularly when it comes to delegitimation, where it seems that left-liberal leaning parties are keener to dismantle religious privileges, while right-conservative parties are more concerned with retaining these privileges and policing Islam. In the next section, we will map how accurate this impression is.

Legitimation Frames: Descriptive Statistics

We analyzed the occurrence of the different frames against platform type, religious tradition, and party. These cross-tabulations show interesting patterns that mostly confirm our expectations from the qualitative analysis. In terms of platform type, the interesting things to note are threefold: First, the single largest category where religion was mentioned was what we named “special platform”. These include separate cultural and immigration policy manifestoes, for example. Although ELCF parishes hold elections for parish councils every four years, and most parliamentary political parties draft platforms for these elections as well, in order to avoid bias in Christianity-related content, we left these platforms out of the dataset. Second, the public utility frame was emphasized in communal or regional election platforms, mostly with reference to ELCF parishes. In contrast, and third, parliamentary and European Union elections foregrounded the more divisive topics—again, perhaps unsurprising, since broad human rights -based politics is defined on the national and supranational legislative level.

In terms of religious tradition, the distribution along the frames is shown in Table 2. Again, three things stand out here. First, the numbers support our suggestion that Christianity (again, in most cases either an explicit or implicit reference to ELCF parishes) is most visible in its embedded forms, as public utility or as a value base. Second, the category of “general worldviews” refers to those

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instances where religion or “worldview” (*maailmankatsomus*) is referred to in an unspecified manner. This kind of reference is most common in the equality frame, which again, is understandable, since those who talk about equality think that every religion or worldview should be treated equally by the law. In practice, however, in the Finnish context, the privileged status of the ELCF (and to smaller extent, the OCF) is often not considered a problem for equality (see also Hjelm 2014; 2020). Third, although explicit mentions of Islam are relatively few in the data, they appear almost exclusively in the threat and governance frame—again, something suggested by our qualitative analysis and earlier research on the public image of Islam in Finland. Finally, the category “Several” refers to cases, where two or more of the previous categories are mentioned (e.g. both “religion” and “Christianity”). This category is most visible in protecting special status and threat and governance frames, signaling that these framings rely on more diverse descriptions of the religious field than the other frames.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of legitimization frames by references to religion

Reference to religion		Legitimation							Total
		Neutral presence	Denying special status	Equality	Protecting special status	Public utility	Threat and governance	Values and culture	
Christianity	N	14	8	4	16	82	0	58	182
	%	7.7%	4.4%	2.2%	8.8%	45.1%	0.0%	31.9%	100.0%
General worldviews	N	21	48	100	58	23	28	15	293
	%	7.2%	16.4%	34.1%	19.8%	7.8%	9.6%	5.1%	100.0%
Islam	N	0	2	2	0	0	20	0	24
	%	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Several	N	3	10	18	36	14	41	17	139
	%	2.2%	7.2%	12.9%	25.9%	10.1%	29.5%	12.2%	100.0%
Total	N	38	68	124	110	119	89	90	638
	%	6.0%	10.7%	19.4%	17.2%	18.7%	13.9%	14.1%	100.0%

Perhaps the most illuminating cross-tabulation concerns the relationship between individual parties and the legitimization frames (Table 3). There are several things going on here but we focus on three observations. First, perhaps unsurprisingly, but equally significantly, the Christian Democrats

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dominate the religion landscape of political platforms. Almost half of all mentions of religion are in one of their platforms during the period under investigation.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of legitimation frames by parties

Party		Legitimation						Total	
		Neutral presence	Denying special status	Equality	Protecting special status	Public utility	Threat and governance		Values and culture
National Coalition	N	2	0	2	1	7	1	3	16
	%	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%	43.8%	6.3%	18.8%	100.0%
Christian Democrats	N	16	3	32	86	58	40	63	298
	%	5.4%	1.0%	10.7%	28.9%	19.5%	13.4%	21.1%	100.0%
Finns Party	N	1	21	0	8	1	25	16	72
	%	1.4%	29.2%	0.0%	11.1%	1.4%	34.7%	22.2%	100.0%
Swedish People's Party	N	1	0	6	1	4	0	1	13
	%	7.7%	0.0%	46.2%	7.7%	30.8%	0.0%	7.7%	100.0%
Center Party	N	5	0	3	3	26	7	2	46
	%	10.9%	0.0%	6.5%	6.5%	56.5%	15.2%	4.3%	100.0%
Social Democrats	N	5	1	6	0	5	2	1	20
	%	25.0%	5.0%	30.0%	0.0%	25.0%	10.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Left Alliance	N	2	14	13	4	1	6	0	40
	%	5.0%	35.0%	32.5%	10.0%	2.5%	15.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Green League	N	6	29	62	7	17	8	4	133
	%	4.5%	21.8%	46.6%	5.3%	12.8%	6.0%	3.0%	100.0%
Total	N	38	68	124	110	119	89	90	638
	%	6.0%	10.7%	19.4%	17.2%	18.7%	13.9%	14.1%	100.0%

Second, our tally confirms an earlier result based on the analysis of parliamentary speeches, which suggested that the more established the political party, the less religion features in their political publicity (Äystö & Hjelm 2024a). The Social Democrats, National Coalition, and the Swedish People's Party all have fewer than 20 religion-related mentions in their platforms. The Center Party scores slightly higher, but this is only to be expected from a mainly rural party that has featured multiple ELCF pastors as MPs during the years. Further, when we zoom in on the frames, the Center Party's treats religion mostly as a public utility, suggesting that when religion/parishes are mentioned, they are mentioned mainly in a secular frame. Perhaps most surprisingly, the Center Party does not endorse the values and culture frame, despite their historical identification with the "home, religion,

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and fatherland” ideology, which can be considered as comprising “the central Finnish values between the world wars” (Virkkunen 1981, 207).

Finally, a cleavage along liberal–traditionalist lines emerges from the analysis. The Finns Party, again, stands out with a pronounced share in the threat and governance frame, explained by the anti-Muslim references in their platforms. The other conservative parties, in turn, emphasize either the public utility or the values and culture frame, with the Christian Democrats also standing out in the protecting special status frame. In contrast, at the liberal end of the scale, the equality frame becomes most prominent among the Swedish People’s Party, the Left Alliance, and the Green League. Of these three, the Greens talk about religion and worldviews in general significantly more than the other liberal parties. There is a whiff of more traditional left-wing criticism of church–state relations in the Left Alliance platforms, but the denying special status can also be found in the Finns Party texts, so it does not signal a left–right cleavage. Also, the qualitative difference is that for the left, the issue is ELCF privileges, whereas the Finns are more concerned with protections afforded to Muslims. Below we assess how strong these associations are, statistically speaking.

Legitimation Frames: Predictors

As the final step of our analysis, we wanted to measure which background variables of the parties best predict the presence of a particular frame in the party platforms. We performed multinomial regression analysis, using the Equality frame as a reference category, against which other frames were compared, and calculated the predicted probabilities for each data point based on the model.

**Table 4. Multinomial regression model.
Significant Covariates in Bold.**

Legitimation Frame	Covariate	Exp(B)	Std. Error	Sig.	Legitimation Frame	Covariate	Exp(B)	Std. Error	Sig.
Denying special status	Intercept		0.537	0.259	Threats and governance	Intercept		0.480	0.775
	Party Age (Z-score)	0.374	0.570	0.085		Party Age (Z-score)	1.183	0.378	0.656
	GAL-TAN (Z-score)	2.637	0.360	0.007		GAL-TAN (Z-score)	5.894	0.322	0.000
	Share of Seats (Z-score)	2.646	0.521	0.062		Share of Seats (Z-score)	4.898	0.536	0.003
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score)	0.474	0.566	0.186		Left-Right (combined, Z-score)	0.943	0.381	0.876
	Party Age (Z-score) *	0.684	0.383	0.322		Party Age (Z-score) *	0.442	0.362	0.024
	Share of Seats (Z-score)					* Share of Seats (Z-score)			
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * Party Age (Z-score)	0.360	0.424	0.016		Left-Right (combined, Z-score) *	0.769	0.208	0.206
	GAL-TAN (Z-score) *	7.655	0.526	0.000		* Party Age (Z-score)			
	Share of Seats (Z-score)					GAL-TAN (Z-score) *	1.661	0.493	0.304
Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * GAL-TAN (Z-score)	1.432	0.340	0.291	Share of Seats (Z-score)					
Protecting special status	Intercept		0.487	0.475	Values and culture	Intercept		0.540	0.341
	Party Age (Z-score)	1.189	0.344	0.614		Party Age (Z-score)	0.423	0.324	0.008
	GAL-TAN (Z-score)	6.914	0.364	0.000		GAL-TAN (Z-score)	2.035	0.384	0.064
	Share of Seats (Z-score)	1.134	0.561	0.823		Share of Seats (Z-score)	1.471	0.612	0.528
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score)	1.039	0.483	0.937		Left-Right (combined, Z-score)	5.164	0.559	0.003
	Party Age (Z-score) *	0.711	0.337	0.313		Party Age (Z-score) *	1.042	0.371	0.911
	Share of Seats (Z-score)					Share of Seats (Z-score)			
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * Party Age (Z-score)	0.763	0.310	0.383		Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * Party Age (Z-score)	0.293	0.340	0.000
GAL-TAN (Z-score) *	5.517	0.630	0.007	GAL-TAN (Z-score) *	1.730	0.571	0.337		
Share of Seats (Z-score)				Share of Seats (Z-score)					
Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * GAL-TAN (Z-score)	1.636	0.370	0.183	Left-Right (combined, Z-score) *	0.456	0.567	0.166		
Public utility	Intercept		0.474	0.926		* GAL-TAN (Z-score)			
	Party Age (Z-score)	1.534	0.249	0.086		Intercept			
	GAL-TAN (Z-score)	2.222	0.264	0.002		Party Age (Z-score)			
	Share of Seats (Z-score)	1.077	0.533	0.890		GAL-TAN (Z-score)			
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score)	2.656	0.440	0.026		Share of Seats (Z-score)			
	Party Age (Z-score) *	1.237	0.323	0.510		Left-Right (combined, Z-score)			
	Share of Seats (Z-score)					Party Age (Z-score) *			
	Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * Party Age (Z-score)	0.752	0.183	0.119		Share of Seats (Z-score)			
GAL-TAN (Z-score) *	3.085	0.389	0.004	GAL-TAN (Z-score) *					
Share of Seats (Z-score)				Share of Seats (Z-score)					
Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * GAL-TAN (Z-score)	2.410	0.391	0.025	Left-Right (combined, Z-score) * GAL-TAN (Z-score)					

Reference category: Equality

Figure 2.

Predicted Probabilities by Predictor (Solid Line = Reference (Equality) or Significant, Dashed = Not Significant)

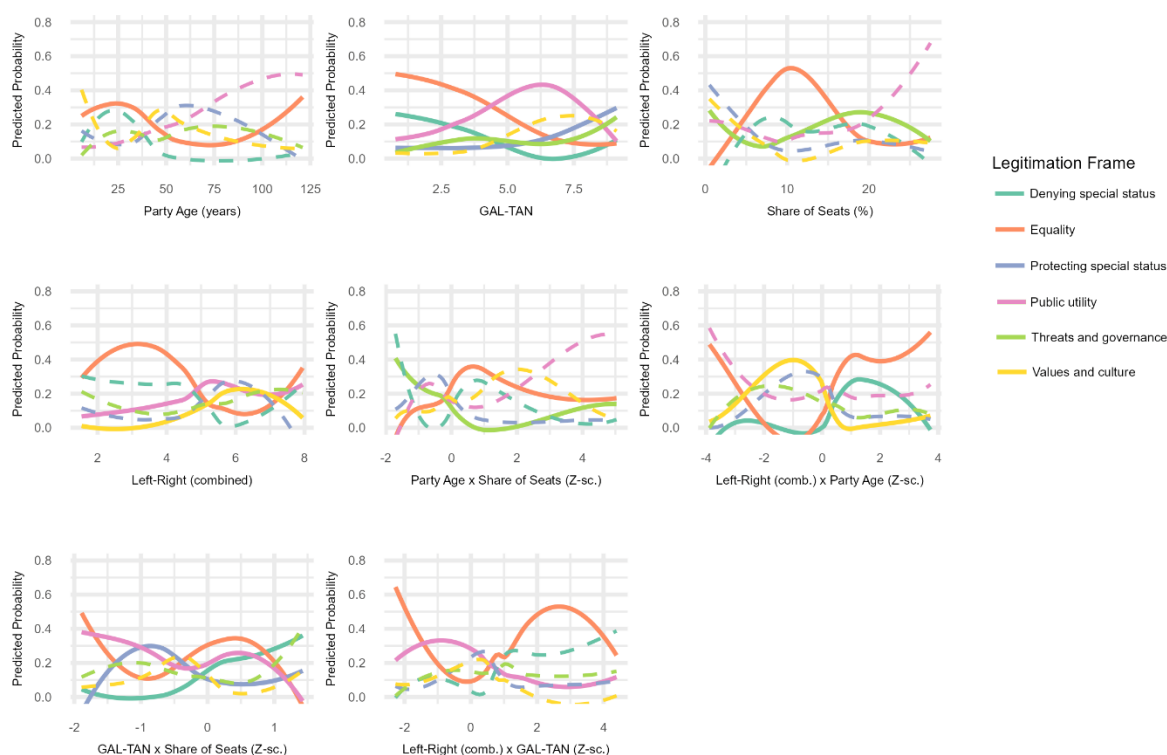


Table 4 presents the variables included in the model, as well as the coefficients, standard errors and the p-values of the model, and Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities for the presence of each frame by the background variables. We used only continuous variables as predictors and excluded the party-variable because the categories would have been too small for the model to settle. We included the GAL-TAN and combined left-right scales that measure the parties' ideological position, and with the parties' age and share of seat, we approximate the extent of parties' political establishment. In the following, we interpret the predicted probabilities (Figure 2) and focus on statistically significant covariates and interactions (see Table 4).⁵

⁵ The Neutral presence frame was excluded from the regression model. The analysis was performed with SPSS 28 using Forward: stepwise method. Predicted probabilities were calculated and the figures drawn with R. The multicollinearity of the background variables was controlled, and the Left-right (general) and Left-Right (economic) scales, which correlated heavily, were combined to one variable. The model summary and the R scripts are available at https://github.com/jerekyvro/pol_platforms/blob/main/README.md.

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<Insert Figure 2 here>

While Party age did not itself produce significant differences, the low and large share of seats had a positive effect on the presence of Threats and governance frame (Figure 2). The interaction between Party age and Share of seats shows that the two terms have somewhat opposite effects regarding the Threats and governance frame. This means that the probability of the Threats and governance frame is somewhat ambiguous regarding the party's age and share of seats. The obvious reason is that the frame was employed most by the small and "middle-aged" Christian Democrats, and the Finns Party, a young party with a significant growth in its share of seats between 2010 and 2014 (Table 1).

The GAL-TAN and combined Left-Right axes measure the ideological positions of the parties. While the presence of the Public utility frame was most prominent for the slightly conservative parties, Equality and Denying special status frames were more popular at the liberal end of the GAL-TAN scale (Figure 2). This confirms the descriptive evidence from the earlier section: National Coalition and Center Parties and the Christian Democrats all emphasize the public service-providing role of the ELCF, whereas the Greens and Left Alliance question the ELCF's privileged position, and speak of religion more generally as one instance of equal human rights (Table 3). Quite expectedly, the Protecting special status and Threats and governance frames were more popular at the conservative end. Looking at the Left-Right scale, both the Public utility and Values and culture frames gain popularity moving from the political center towards the Right. (Figure 2.)

Finally, we looked at significant interactions. An interaction between two variables means that the effect of one variable depends on the level of the other—so the influence of Left-Right ideology on frame use may differ depending on how old the party is, and vice versa. This is particularly relevant for the Values and culture and Denying special status frames. The predicted probabilities show that

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Denying special status frame is more likely among slightly right-wing and older-than-average parties, while Values and culture is more likely among younger and more left-wing parties. This contrasts with the descriptive data, where Denying special status is most used by younger, ideologically diverse parties like the Finns Party and the Left Alliance, and Values and culture is more common among older, right-wing parties like the Christian Democrats and National Coalition. Explanation for the Denying special status frame is that the frame is associated with *younger parties* on both sides of the spectrum, but the continuous interaction forces this into a single curve that looks like a mid-right peak. For the Values and culture frame, a similar effect happens due to the dominance of the Christian Democrats. Such discrepancies show that interaction effects on continuous scales may not fully reflect the distribution of frame use across parties.

The interaction between GAL-TAN and Share of seats shows that being a large and conservative party has a positive effect for both Public utility and Denying special status frame (Figure 2). The former points towards the Center party's dominance in the use Public utility frame, and the latter to the Finns Party's significant role in the Denying special status frame. GAL-TAN and Share of seats work in opposite directions regarding the Protecting special status frame, pointing again towards the small but conservative Christian Democrats.

The interpretation of the predicted probabilities of the multinomial logistic regression model mostly confirmed our findings in the descriptive section. However, especially with the interaction of Left-Right and Party Age scales, the findings diverged from the descriptive findings. This can be mostly explained by the dominant use of a frame by a certain party (e.g. Christian Democrats and the Values and culture frame). Thus, we recommend including party-level categorical variables to explanatory models when possible, or combining descriptive and explanatory analysis, as we have done in this article.

Conclusion

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Despite institutional differentiation and a marked decrease of individual piety, religion remains visible in 21st century Finland, Norden, and Europe. It is therefore important to know how political parties construct the legitimate place of religion in society. Furthermore, it is important to analyze how these different constructions reflect—and become—political cleavages. Our analysis of the platforms of those Finnish political parties who sat in parliament between 2000 and 2023 suggests three key issues that shed light on the Finnish case but also provides pointers for further analysis in similar contexts.

First, as to political cleavages, the analysis is in line with both “common-sense” expectations and previous research (Hjelm 2014). Conservative parties are more likely to talk about protecting special status, values and culture, and threat and governance. That is, continuing privileges for the established religion and stricter control for those not included in the national community, which includes the ELCF. Parties on the liberal end of the scale, in turn, are more likely to talk about religion in the frame of equality.

Second, our analysis confirms Äystö and Hjelm’s (2024a) earlier assessment that Finnish political culture is secularized. On the one hand, it is particularly striking that longer experience in representative politics decreases the parties’ willingness to consider religion a political issue in the first place. This is especially striking in the case of the Center Party, which has traditionally been strong in conservative revival movement areas, and where several Lutheran pastors have made a career as MPs. On the other hand, when religion is discussed, it is discussed overwhelmingly in secular tones (see Demerath 2000), that is, as a public institution (especially the ELCF) or as a secular threat to society in the form of violent radicalism (especially Islam, but also undefined). Although the Christian Democrats and the Finns Party explicitly identify as Christian in their Party Manifestoes, this is a reference to undefined values rather than explicit justification of policy by reference to the Bible, for example.

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Note, however, that our operative word is *secularized*, not *secularist*. That religion is mostly invisible for some of the parties does not mean that they want to change the current arrangement, where the ELCF enjoys a constitutionally and legally privileged position compared to other religious communities. On the contrary, as already mentioned, the invisibility enables the quiet reproduction of this privilege (Griera and Clot-Garrell 2015). God may not be on the political agenda, but there is little incentive for any political party to attempt to dismantle the institutional status quo. Although the Left Alliance and the Greens have made several allusions to challenging the ELCFs privileges on the level of programmatic political principles, there have been few practical attempts towards disestablishment. The single example from our period of examination was an abject failure (see Hjelm 2014).

Finally, as a reflection of the times, the analysis shows the pronounced presence of the Threat and Governance frame. It would have been improbable even in the 1990s, when Finland experienced its first wave of noticeable Muslim immigration, to see religion discussed as the target of control in Finnish political parties' discourse. In the post-9/11 world and with recurrent concern over asylum seekers everywhere in Europe, Threat and Governance has become a normalized framing. Notably, although unsurprisingly pronounced in the Finns Party platforms, other parties also employ this frame. In fact, it appears particularly on the left and liberal side of the political continuum. The difference is that where the Finns Party, like their sister far-right parties everywhere in Europe, openly speaks about Islam and Muslims, the other parties prefer to leave the threat unnamed. However, in the same way that the French law prohibiting "conspicuous" religious symbols was initiated by opposition to Muslim girls' headscarves (Konttori 2016), the themes that the other parties mention—gender equality, right to bodily autonomy—implicitly point to Muslims more than other groups (see Farris 2017; Ahonen & Hjelm, forthcoming).

Together the embeddedness of the ELCF on the one hand and the exclusion of Muslims (and other undefined religious threats) on the other create a situation which Lori Beaman (2013) has called "the

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‘religion’ of the minority versus the ‘culture’ of the majority”. That is, on the one hand the religious aspects of the ELCF fade out the more political discourse identifies the church as a public utility or as part of national identity. The ELCF, Lutheranism and, to some extent, Christianity more broadly, becomes culture—is *culturalized* (Astor & Mayrl 2020). In contrast, Islam and Muslims—regardless of an individual’s actual religious commitment—become *religionized* in the sense that Muslims are first and foremost identified by religion rather than any other aspect of their identity. This, of course, dovetails with developments in other countries. For at least the last quarter of a century, Muslimness has been a negative identity marker, which has made integration challenging (e.g. Pauha 2018, 1–8. This is especially so after the 2010s in Finland when, as part of a wave of far-right resurgence that swept through all European countries, the Finns Party turned islamophobia and racism into political capital.

This analysis of Finnish party platforms raises two questions for the future: First, it will be interesting to see whether approaching the 50 percent mark in church membership has any impact on political parties’ willingness to reconsider the privileged status of the ELCF. Church membership is of course no indicator of church–state relations: Sweden and Norway disestablished their national churches when membership was still clearly above 50 percent (although the change was mainly symbolic, with many of the structures of close relationship—e.g. the state collecting the church tax—remaining in place). Conversely, the Church of England has not had a majority status in a very long time yet remains very much established. The loss of majority status does mean, however, that the taken-for-grantedness of the privilege may be questioned more robustly. Consequently, it will be likely that the ELCFs legitimate place as part of Finnish *culture* will be emphasized even more in the future.

Second, in the United States, White Christian Nationalism has been the most discussed religion-related topic since the first election of Donald Trump in 2016, and certainly after the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2020 (e.g. Gorski & Perry 2022). Christian Nationalism is an ethnonationalist movement, where Christianity is used as a marker to separate “us” from “them”

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and manifests itself particularly in “culture war” issues such as abortion, racial equality, and LGBT rights. Although it is unlikely that it will have similar appeal in much more secularized Finland and Norden, there are already some indicators in other European countries that Christianity is used as a prop to justify the exclusion of some groups (particularly Muslims) from the national community. Like Marine LePen in France, Finland’s far right leaders have moved from open atheism and secularism to an appreciation of Finland’s Christian “heritage” (e.g. Äystö 2017, 200–201). Sociologist Rogers Brubaker calls this development in secularized Europe “Christianism”: a “civilizational and identitarian” [...] “matter of belonging rather than believing, a way of defining ‘us’ in relation to ‘them’. Crudely put, if ‘they’ are Muslim, then ‘we’ must, in some sense, be Christian. But that does not mean that ‘we’ must be religious” (Brubaker 2017, 1199). World events unfolding as they are in 2025, it is certain that regardless of the rate of decline in individual measures of religiosity, religion will continue to be on the public and political agenda in Finland, Norden, and Europe.

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