

**PROSTITUTION POLICY REFORM AND THE CAUSAL ROLE OF IDEAS: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLICY-MAKING IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**

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Introduction

Over the past decade, public policies aiming at regulating and combating prostitution in the Nordic countries have been subject to drastic change, but not convergence. Until 1999, the Nordic countries regulated prostitution similarly: Buying and selling sexual services was legally tolerated, with pimping and procuring being illegal. Yet, in that year, Denmark opted for substantial liberalization, ending bans both on prostitution as a full-time livelihood and on soliciting. At the same time, Sweden became the first country in the world to criminalize the purchase of sexual services, though not the sale. This so-called Swedish model has generated global interest and resulted in similar proposals in other countries. In 2006, the Finnish parliament rejected a bill closely modeled on the Swedish law; while in the summer of 2007, the Norwegian justice department presented a draft bill proposing a ban on the purchase of sexual services. On 1 January, 2009, the law went into effect, making it illegal for Norwegian citizens to buy sexual services in Norway and abroad.

Against this backdrop, our aim is to account for cross-national differences in prostitution policy outcomes in four Nordic states: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In this study, we focus on the causal role of ideas for understanding how proponents of a given prostitution policy reform are able to secure support from policymakers. Over the past decade, the use of an ideational approach has shifted from the margins to the mainstream in comparative public policy analysis. Ideational approaches emphasize how policy entrepreneurs are able to portray desired reforms as being consistent with broader ideational frameworks held by key decision makers. Thus, by carefully studying how actors use ideas to achieve policy change, the ideational approach is an advance over approaches that have chiefly focused on the strategic resources held by actors within varying institutional contexts. Given that a central feature of the prostitution policy reform process in all four settings has been exceptionally heated national debates in which societal norms, expert knowledge and cultural values have figured prominently, we argue that an ideational approach is particularly fruitful for analyzing cross-Nordic variation in policy outcomes.

Our study aims to account for cross-national differences in prostitution policy outcomes in four Nordic states: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Drawing upon diverse public policy, comparative political economy, international relations, and feminist

comparative policy scholarship, we employ an ideational approach to identify the conditions under which proponents of prostitution policy reform are likely to achieve legislative success. Our theoretical aim is to contribute to the ideational literature on policy reform by developing an account of the strategies used by policy entrepreneurs for grafting desired reform proposals onto existing ideational frameworks, while discrediting competing reform positions.

Previous research on prostitution policy reform

The Swedish law prohibiting the purchase of sexual services, which was implemented in 1999, has received substantial attention from scholars across the humanities and social sciences. While certain analyses of the 1999 law have been descriptive and atheoretical (Kilvington, Day & Ward 2001; Munro 2005; Gould 2001; Gould 2002; Dodillet 2005), many researchers focus on the role of Sweden's powerful radical feminist movement in the policy reform process. Some scholars have coupled a description of this role with explicit advocacy for the abolitionist stance, such as Ekberg (2004), who attributes the adoption of the new policy to "feminists and dedicated female politicians (that) understood the importance of and fought for the right of all women to have full control of their bodies." While rich in detail, these studies of the Swedish experience lack any meaningful connection to theories on policymaking and do not generate conclusions that contribute to a more general understanding of prostitution policy reforms.

Prostitution policy research that has focused on other reform settings similarly lacks an explanatory ambition. Kantola and Squires (2004), who examine debates in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands about prostitution and trafficking in women, conclude that sharply different discourses have come to dominate the debate in each of these two countries. While noting the distinction between dominant discourses in the UK and the Netherlands, Kantola and Squires (2004: 92) do not provide an explicit account for why such sharply different ideas prevailed, speculating rather that outcomes are "clearly determined by the differing legal and cultural frameworks." Similarly, Allwood's analysis (2004) of French prostitution debates during the period 1997–2002 explores how key actors framed prostitution as a political issue and how prostitutes are constructed within these frames. Yet, Allwood's description of the key discourse central to the French prostitution debate lacks any explicit methodological guidelines for assessing how prostitution can be successfully reframed in order for policymakers to achieve their

desired re-forms. Finally, Skilbrei's overview of Norwegian prostitution policy reform in the 1990s focuses on representations of prostitutes in the media and political debates (2001: 63). However, Skilbrei concludes that no real causal pattern can be detected. Rather, the market for sexual services, public perception of prostitutes, and the way in which policymakers "relate" to these perceptions are all mutually constituted.

In contrast to these descriptive accounts, Joyce Outshoorn's edited volume *The Politics of Prostitution* (2004) offers the sole attempt at systematic comparative analysis of prostitution policy outcomes. Scholars contributing to the Outshoorn volume focus on prostitution policy in twelve national settings, drawing upon an explanatory model developed by the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS). The RNGS model ambitiously includes a broad range of possible causal factors shaping policy outcomes, including characteristics of the women's movement, the policy environment and relevant policy agencies. However, such a comprehensively detailed model necessarily sacrifices explanatory parsimony. Employing the qualitative RNGS model requires that scholars code data on sixteen independent and intervening variables. Such richness in terms of explanatory factors is not matched by explicit methodological guidelines specifying how researchers should assess the relative significance of different variables for understanding prostitution policy outcomes.

Hence, applying the model to each of the national cases results in chapters that can only serve descriptive purposes. Svanström's (2004: 239-244) review of the 1999 Swedish law provides an example of how this volume fails to live up to its promise when confronted with a crucial case of policy reform. Given the lack of criteria for operationalizing variables, Svanström's analysis amounts primarily to brief summaries. In addressing the role of policy frames, Svanström notes that both supporters and opponents of criminalization were active in the debate. However, the analysis is not developed beyond documenting that differing views existed. Left unanswered is the question of how and why a policy frame in which competing perspectives over the future of Swedish prostitution policy mattered for the eventual policy outcome, if at all. A related example can be found in Svanström's treatment of "counter-movement activities". While noting that the efforts of those opposed to criminalization "must be seen as moderate" (Svanström 2004: 243), only a single quote from a political party is offered as substantiation. Lacking clear guidelines for the analysis of data, such summaries become little more than speculation and isolated snapshots, raising far more questions about

causality than they answer.

One final example of existing research deserves to be mentioned. Dodillet (2009) compares Swedish and German prostitution policy debates in the latter third of the twentieth century, in an effort to account for why these two countries have chosen such divergent paths to the question of how best to legislate the purchase of sexual services. Whereas the Swedish ban came into effect in 1999, Germany notably liberalized its prostitution policy in 2002. Dodillet argues that the underlying causes for this policy variation can be “traced back to different theories of civil society, differing welfare state ideologies, religious traditions and feminist ideas that have influenced the political strategies” in both settings. However, her study opens numerous questions of theory and research design. First, in Dodillet’s explanation of prostitution policy reform, cultural factors, in the form of a now seemingly obsolete 18th century Christian morality, play a key role. However, her analysis lacks an explicit theoretical account of the degree to which cultural traditions at one point in time can be used as (partial) causal explanations for policy outcomes at another, much later, point in time. Political scientists with an interest in culture as an independent variable have long grappled with whether a correlation between cultural traditions at one point in time, and policies at a subsequent (often much later) point in time, constitutes causality to the detriment of intervening variables (cf. Steinmo & Watts 1995, Putnam 1993). Thus, Dodillet’s study raises the issue, but does not directly confront, of what relationship exists among cultural traditions, policy entrepreneurs and their targets. Second, while Sweden and Germany provide stark contrasts in terms of prostitution discourse and policy, they are not an optimal case selection in order to isolate the causes explaining prostitution policy reform. In Denmark, for instance, the prostitution policy outcome is similar to Germany’s, although Denmark shares with Sweden at least some of the historical, cultural and political properties to which Dodillet attributes the differences in terms of outcomes between Sweden and Germany. Thus, a broader sample of cases would seem to partially undermine the explanation offered by Dodillet.

Thus, existing research has failed to provide a compelling analytical framework for understanding why Nordic countries have come to adopt such different policies regulating prostitution. In the following section, we focus on the broad ideational literature, which has become increasingly central in both public policy and international relations over the past decade. After detailing the core features of this literature, we

specify how an ideational approach can fruitfully be employed to analyze prostitution policy.

Theoretical framework: The role of ideas

The current ideational wave in political science has diffuse origins both within several of the subfields of the discipline, and beyond. Within international politics, dissatisfaction among scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s with prevailing materialist accounts of state behavior led to the emergence of the constructivist research agenda, focusing on the varied ways in which norms are an essential component for understanding both historical and contemporary transformations in world politics. Similarly, scholars within comparative politics increasingly called into question the limitations of historical institutionalism, were seen as structuring individual preferences and predicting largely stable, path dependent polities (Blyth 2002). In the related fields of American politics and public policy, the agenda setting literature of the 1990s placed an explicit emphasis on the importance of fit, which has emerged as one of the central thorny issues for scholars seeking to demonstrate why some ideas succeed, and why others fail in a given national context. Beyond the disciplinary boundaries of political science, sociological research from the 1970s and the 1980s into the importance of framing has played a similarly important role, emphasizing how actors can be mobilized under different framing processes (Snow, et al. 1986). Whatever the source of inspiration, or the precise subfield location, scholars who are engaged in ideational scholarship share a broad interest in understanding what factors account for the increased salience of new ideas, the mechanisms through which ideas become embedded in various features of the polity, and the impact that ideas have on political processes (Berman 2001).

Similarly, scholars adhering to ideational approaches within political science maintain that successfully deploying ideas in support of policy objectives requires a synergy between ideas and the relevant institutional and cultural features of the polity (Béland 2005, Berman 2001, Cox 2001, Walsh 2000). Thus, ideational scholars do not deny that actors, their level of strategic resources, and institutional design are crucial elements in understanding policy outcomes. Where an ideational approach differs is in emphasizing the need for actors to “embed their arguments in persuasive ideational frameworks” (Hansen & King 2001). Indeed, placing ideas alongside more traditional explanatory variables, such as actors’ resources and the institutional framework, is a defining feature of contemporary integrated approaches to public policy, including

Sabatier's (1998) advocacy coalition framework and Baumgartner & Jones (1993) emphasis on punctuated equilibrium. Successfully nesting ideas for policy reform can be regarded as the mobilization of consent for policy (Gourevitch 1989). Within the field of international relations, the concept of grafting is used to describe a similar attempt at achieving policy change: entrepreneurs graft their reform idea onto existing international norms in order to improve the odds that governments will enact their proposals (Price 1998). A complementary argument is put forward by Kingdon (1995), who specifies how policy proposals need to "fit with the dominant values and current national mood" in order to be adopted. Taken jointly, these scholars stress that ideational accounts must demonstrate an explicit linkage between policy ideas and relevant ideational frameworks within the broader polity. An ideational approach thus augments mainstream perspectives on public policy reform, which focus on actors' strategic capabilities and institutional constraints.

Yet, if the above constitutes a reasonable approximation of a loosely categorized ideational project, how do we define the central element occupying pride of position in this research? Just what is an idea, and how would we know one if we saw it? We argue that three distinct categories of ideas are relevant for the fruitful analysis of prostitution policy outcomes: policy positions, expert knowledge, and ideational frameworks.

Policy positions are relatively narrow in scope and are only intended to capture proposals for policy reform within a single-issue area. Policy positions specify the content (either generally or detailed) of desired policy alternatives. One should, of course, not expect that actors will succeed in achieving desired reforms simply by detailing their desire for policy reform or policy continuity. Yet, this does not imply that policy stances are trivial. We maintain that such positions represent a concrete goal held by actors and offer a rallying point around which proponents, allies and reform opponents can mobilize.

Our second category of ideas is *expert knowledge*: the knowledge and information produced by epistemic communities regarded as possessing authoritative claims to expertise within given policy areas (Haas 1992). This category of ideas is not mere "raw data". Rather, it represents the analysis of different social or physical phenomena, accounts of their possible interrelationships and claims as to consequences. As such, expert knowledge disseminated by epistemic communities is one strategy in the construction of "causal stories", in which

policy problems are identified, alleged causes are located, and policy solutions are prescribed (Stone 1989).

Ideational frameworks form the final category of ideas relevant to this study. Unlike expert knowledge, ideational frameworks are not necessarily specific to policies in one issue-area. Instead, they are the broad cognitive and moral frames held by individuals, facilitating the organization and interpretation of political phenomena such that normative judgments and policy prescriptions for the relevant spheres of society can result.

Of course, as Risse-Kappen (1994) noted in his study of Soviet foreign policy shifts in the waning days of the Cold War, "ideas do not float freely." However, Risse-Kappen made this observation in order to demonstrate the significance of a very broadly cast domestic structure (ranging from political institutions to political culture) as an object that could either facilitate or hinder the efforts of transnational actors promoting foreign policy reform. We borrow this succinct admonishment and re-cast it in order to stress that ideational explanations, if to be at all plausible, must rest not only on clearly defined concepts of ideas, but that they must also detail an explicit process by which actors seek to effectively mobilize and deploy ideas in advance of their policy reform or policy defense objectives. We currently envision this process as involving two related steps. The first of these addresses how policy entrepreneurs attempt to graft the different categories of ideas onto one another in order to achieve their policy objectives. The second of these addresses what we believe to be a comparatively under-analyzed aspect of the influence that ideas hold in the policy reform process: that ideas are not only deployed strategically to foster support for one's own desired reform measure, but also to actively discredit competing reform proposals and the actors who support them.

However, even with these terms in mind, what are the specific means by which ideas are mobilized in an effort to persuade policymakers to pursue desired policy reform measures? As Nina Tannenwald (2005) has observed, any "explanatory strategy for ideas needs to illuminate the causal mechanisms by which ideas affect policy or lead to changes in intersubjective understandings." It is not simply enough to assert a causal relationship between the existence of certain ideas (be they prevailing ideational frameworks or a wealth of seemingly incontrovertible expert knowledge), on the one hand, and desired policy reforms on the other. Arguments resting on observed correlations are tantalizing, yet a causal mechanism must be specified if one is to

persuasively demonstrate that ideas were central to the outcome.

Given that, we further specify our hypotheses of grafting and discrediting in the following manner:

First, we hypothesize that actors seeking prostitution policy reform stand the greatest likelihood of success when they are able to graft policy positions onto prevailing ideational frameworks and expert knowledge in a fashion that will resonate with policymakers. As used in the international relations literature, grafting (Price 1998: 628) is a strategy in which policy entrepreneurs explicitly highlight the persuasive force of established norms when they argue that specific policies should be adopted. Considered in terms of our three-fold category of ideas, grafting is portrayed in this literature as a discursive strategy wherein actors attempt to link specific ideational frameworks to policy positions. While such a strategy clearly constitutes an important pillar of the grafting process, we emphasize that actors will also seek to invoke our third category of ideas when mobilizing support for their policy positions: expert knowledge. Regardless of whether expert knowledge or ideational frameworks are mobilized in the grafting process, the aim is to persuade targeted actors to support the desired policy reform.

We operationalize the two forms of grafting as follows:

- Grafting to expert knowledge. Entrepreneurs make selective reference to expert knowledge via:
 - Emphasizing how selected expert knowledge underscores the prevalence of a given problem. The entrepreneurs wish to persuade the target audience that the combined pieces of expert knowledge constitute an authoritative account of reality when it comes to the problem at hand. Successful problem definition via the deployment of expert knowledge will then facilitate subsequent grafting to an ideational framework.
 - Emphasizing how selected expert knowledge legitimates the appropriateness of the proposed policy reform. The subject wishes to persuade the audience that, given the problem definition, expert knowledge points to the adoption of a specific policy reform as the sole appropriate response.
- Grafting to an ideational framework. The entrepreneurs make a claim wherein:
 - Having presented the target audience with a specific problem definition

based upon expert knowledge, they attempt to persuade the target audience that the problem requires action, as not to do so would violate the tenets of the relevant ideational framework being mobilized.

- A specific policy reform is articulated for solving the given policy problem. In doing so, entrepreneurs stress how the proposed policy reform is consistent with the core tenets of the relevant ideational framework being mobilized.

Yet, attempts at grafting do not take place in a strategic vacuum. Most notably, proponents of competing policy proposals are likely to engage in similar efforts at grafting. Thus, we also hypothesize that actors seeking prostitution policy reform must pursue a complementary strategy of attempting to discredit opponents. Here, discrediting refers to a strategy in which actors call into question the expert knowledge wielded by their opponents, as well as highlighting how opponents are guided by ideational frameworks and alliances decreasing their credibility. While the details of this hypothesis bare some similarity to Blyth's (2002) claim that ideas constitute weapons used by actors to attack existing institutions and policies, we believe that two important differences exists. First, Blyth posits "ideas as weapons" as a strategy for actors seeking to reform existing institutions in periods of crisis. As such, the delegitimizing function of ideas seems to be the reserve of those who wish to overturn the existing institutional order in periods of crisis. Given the contested nature of political reform, we see no reason why those seeking to defend existing institutions or policies would not also choose to engage in discrediting. Second, and more importantly, Blyth's portrayal of ideas as weapons lacks a fully developed and explicated causal process. While we are certainly in agreement that actors reach into their arsenal and periodically choose ideas as an effective way to go on the attack, we wish to highlight the specific strategies that actors will choose when seeking to discredit their opponents.

Thus, we operationalize discrediting as follows:

- Discrediting opposing expert knowledge. Entrepreneurs can call into question the expert knowledge deployed by policy opponents in a number of related ways:
 - Emphasizing that opposing expert knowledge is selective and ignores the expert knowledge that legitimates one's own definition of a policy problem, as well as the appropriate solution.
 - Emphasizing that opposing expert knowledge is either factually inaccurate

or rests on factual premises not applicable to the specific instance of policy reform under consideration.

- Asserting that the individuals within opposing epistemic communities have either a personal or political agenda leading them to produce biased expert knowledge, or are associated with similarly biased individuals and groups.
- Discrediting through reference to ideational frameworks. Entrepreneurs can attempt to discredit opponents more generally by highlighting the significance of ideational frameworks in a number of related ways:
 - Emphasizing that the arguments put forward by policy opponents rest on ideational frameworks that are allegedly incompatible with the values that currently shape policy on the relevant issue in that setting. In this instance, entrepreneurs attempt to exclude alternative ideational frameworks from the reform debate.
 - Emphasizing that the arguments put forward by policy opponents misrepresent the implications of the relevant ideational framework, intentionally or otherwise. In this instance, entrepreneurs seek to limit the possible alternatives that could result when multiple sides draw upon the identical ideational framework.
 - Emphasizing that the arguments put forward by policy opponents rest on ideational frameworks that may not be incompatible with the values that currently shape policy on the relevant issue in that setting, but are allegedly of less importance than the ideational framework mobilized by the subject. In this instance, entrepreneurs seek to control which of the multiple relevant ideational frameworks will be deemed most important in the course of the policy debate.
 - Drawing upon one's own ideational framework to provide justification for excluding certain individuals or groups from the policy debate. In this instance, entrepreneurs stress that the implicit or explicit assumptions within the mobilized ideational framework implies that only certain groups ought to be admitted to the policy debate and that certain viewpoints, by default, must be excluded.

It should be stressed that the discrediting process rests, to some extent, on that

venerable feature of political gamesmanship, character assassination. Members of opposing epistemic communities are potentially discredited as a result of having certain ideological beliefs held in contempt by the subject. Opponents may also be discredited through their alleged association with forces thought to be part of a conspiracy to shape policy outcomes, such as in the instances of Sweden and Finland, where opponents of the Swedish model have been tied to an international commercial sex lobby. Similarly, opponents are potentially discredited and excluded from the policy debate as a result of their group membership, as has been the case when radical feminist logic has been mobilized in order to justify exclusion of individual prostitutes and prostitute rights' organization from participating in policy reform debates. By the same token, it is crucial to observe that we do not, in any form, believe that discrediting is solely a strategy opted for by those seeking to prohibit the purchase of sexual services. Indeed, we expect that as we continue to examine the historical and contemporary record, that we will find substantial instances wherein proponents of liberalization also opt to deploy ideas in an effort to discredit opponents.

The roles of agents in ideational theory

To recap, one of the advantages of the ideational approach is that it seeks a sound balance between structure and agency (cf. O'Neill, Balsiger & Vandever 2004). While historical institutionalism has rightly been criticized for having difficulties explaining institutional change, the power-interest approach fails to see how ideational factors, and not just material resources, shape the possibilities of actors for achieving policy change. Broadly speaking, the ideational literature assumes that there are three kinds of agents involved in policy or norm change:

Decision makers, or political elites, are the ones who finally make the decisions, and therefore cast as the explanandum, as they are on the receiving end of attempts at norm grafting.

Norm entrepreneurs is often used as an umbrella concept for a diverse group of actors including advocacy coalitions, transnational civil society actors, private economic actors, etc. Norm entrepreneurs are usually assumed to initiate policy change, making their most significant impact during issue definition and agenda setting.

Epistemic communities. Usually defined as groups of scientists with "accepted understandings about cause-and-effect linkages about any set of phenomena considered important by society" (O'Neill et al).

Now, how should we regard these actors or agents in an ideational approach? Often, ideational scholars seem to assume that these different roles can be clearly distinguished, such that we can easily say if a particular agent is acting as a policy maker, a norm entrepreneur or as an expert representing an epistemic community. However, a quick look at the case of prostitution policy seems to disconfirm that assumption, since, for example, scholars sometimes overtly mix analysis with advocacy, or participate directly in the making and implementation of prostitution policy, whereas policy makers sometimes overstep their roles by participating in the production of expert knowledge. This indicates that the roles should be regarded mainly as analytical concepts, as a particular real world actor may sometimes overstep role boundaries. Partly, the degree to which agents cross role boundaries might be related to the relative contentiousness of the issue-area at stake and the degree of politicization of expert knowledge production. Specifically, some criticize the epistemic communities literature for "disregarding that the 'scientization of policy also means the politicization of science.'" (Lidskog & Sundqvist, cited in O'Neill et al)

Also, we should not simply assume that policy makers serve as passive recipients of ideas sent out by norm entrepreneurs competing for their attention. Clearly, selecting and rejecting information is an active act, if also not wholly deliberate and conscious, and it is also an action that is constrained in itself by pre-existing ideational frameworks. "Political elites actively seek and analyze new data to help them make choices, but they often face overwhelming causal and informational complexity in weighing alternatives" (Jacobs 2009).

Data collection and analysis

In order to test our hypotheses, we will gather and analyze a broad range of data from the four different policy reform processes. The analysis will primarily focus on the events of the past fifteen years, as this time-frame covers both the key policy reform debates and relevant mobilization efforts leading up to them. Our data collection and analysis process relies on two complementary strategies:

Qualitative text analyses of primary and secondary source documents to record how the debates on prostitution policy reform have evolved. We focus on three types of sources:

Public documents, such as government bills, official reports, and parliamentary

minutes;

Internal and public documents from central actors, such as political parties, interest groups and epistemic communities;

News, opinion and commentary in the media. These documents are generally publicly available.

Semi-structured interviews with leading politicians and representatives of key organizations – mainly political parties and interest groups – in each of our cases. We estimate that interviews with approximately 10 informants per case will be necessary.

While existing scholarship on prostitution policy reform tends to be descriptive, or has neglected a systematic exploration of the relationship among variables, we aim to trace the process through which policy entrepreneurs use ideas to further their favored policy position. The technique of process tracing attempts to identify and test causal mechanisms in the “process by which various initial conditions are translated into outcomes” (George & McKeown 1985), and the approach emphasizes developing “analytical explanation(s) couched in theoretical variables that have been identified in the research design” (Bennett & George 2001). Process tracing is particularly well-suited for evaluating ideational arguments, as it provides a tool for verifying the extent to which ideas played a crucial role in the arsenal of policy entrepreneurs seeking reform in a given issue-area. Careful process tracing allows us to see how actors choose among existing ideas, how those ideas are deployed to support a given policy position, and whether or not ideas have the intended effect upon policymakers.

We will analyze the combined data in order to provide answers to the following questions:

Policy positions:

- What prostitution policy positions did policy entrepreneurs favor in each case?

Grafting and ideational frameworks:

- To what extent did policy entrepreneurs attempt to graft their policy position onto a specific ideational framework?
- What was the normative content of the chosen ideational framework?

- How did policy entrepreneurs seek to demonstrate a fit between their policy position and the chosen ideational framework?

Grafting and expert knowledge:

- To what extent did policy entrepreneurs deploy expert knowledge in pursuit of their policy objective?
- What was the content of expert knowledge deployed by policy entrepreneurs?
- How did policy entrepreneurs seek to demonstrate a fit between their policy position and the chosen expert knowledge?

Discrediting:

- To what extent did policy entrepreneurs attempt to discredit the expert knowledge and ideational frameworks of policy opponents?
- What arguments were deployed in support of attempts at discrediting?

Case selection

We will test our hypotheses on the cases of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. Sharing many essential features, these four Nordic countries offer rich opportunities for employing a joint method design. All four countries have a consensus-oriented political culture, a historically dominant evangelical Lutheran state-church, internationally high levels of gender equality, strong women's organizations, an internationally high or very high percentage of female legislators, and an advanced social democratic welfare state. Thus, these four Nordic countries provide a particularly favorable backdrop for testing our hypothesis on the role of ideas in prostitution policy reform processes. Given their many common traits, it is all the more puzzling why policy entrepreneurs advocating criminalization of the purchase of sexual services have thus far succeeded in Sweden and Norway, yet not in Denmark or Finland. Indeed, the presence of these common traits in the negative cases of Denmark and Finland justifies their inclusion in this study on the basis of Mahoney and Goertz's (2004) *Possibility Principle*: both settings are characterized by "the occurrence of a nonevent" in that the ban has thus far not been adopted, yet is possible from a number of different theoretical vantage points.

As the first country to adopt this path-breaking stance on prostitution, the Swedish policy reform process merits in-depth examination in order to identify those factors crucial to the policy outcome. Indeed, it is surprising that nearly a decade after the

adoption of this policy, the Swedish experience has not figured prominently in the international political science literature. The case of Denmark is chosen to provide a contrasting outcome concurrent to the Swedish experience. In 1999, Denmark substantially liberalized policies governing prostitution, repealing laws prohibiting prostitution as the sole source of economic subsistence and one banning soliciting, despite the preferences of feminist lobbying organizations. Neglected by scholars interested in prostitution policy reform, the Danish case does not yet feature prominently in a single internationally published study.

Norway and Finland offer intriguing yet under-researched possibilities for exploring how ideas matter in prostitution policy debates after the adoption of the Swedish law. The Swedish example has figured prominently in both countries, with policy entrepreneurs advocating the criminalization of the purchase of sexual services. In Finland, the government introduced a bill that would have resulted in criminalization, yet after heated debate, the parliament rejected the bill in 2006, instead penalizing only the purchase of sexual services from victims of human trafficking. In Norway, a justice department working group rejected adoption of the Swedish model in 2004. The issue resurfaced in 2007 as the Norwegian Labor Party congress passed a resolution in favor of criminalizing the purchase of sexual services. In July 2007, the justice department presented a draft bill that would penalize the purchase of sexual services. Accepted by parliament in April 2008, the bill went into effect on 1 January, 2009, and unlike the Swedish ban, Norway criminalizes its citizens' purchase of sexual services abroad too.

Assessing how competing policy entrepreneurs made use of the Swedish policy in their grafting and discrediting strategies will be invaluable for understanding how timing and sequence influenced the adoption of prostitution policy reforms (Pierson 2004).

Relevance

Our study contributes to prostitution policy research in particular and more generally, to comparative public policy scholarship. First, we believe that by focusing on the causal role of ideas, we provide a crucial explanatory component for untangling the puzzle of prostitution policy reform processes in the Nordic countries and potentially elsewhere. Surprisingly, a predominantly ideational approach has been absent in previous research on prostitution policy reform, although this approach has been fruitfully applied in other areas of feminist comparative policy analysis (Mazur 1999, 2002). Secondly, our

study contributes to the burgeoning scholarly literature on the impact of ideas on economic, social and welfare reform in other policy settings. Specifically, our focus on discrediting augments claims within the ideational literature that support for policy reform is achieved primarily by demonstrating relevant linkages between complementary categories of ideas. Ideas do not simply legitimate, they de-legitimate as well. Thirdly, debates over the regulation of prostitution continue to be salient in the Nordic countries. Our study contributes to an understanding of why prostitution policy has come to be the focal point of intense political controversies in societies that many international observers regard as having relatively homogeneous political cultures.

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