

Immigration, Integration and the Finns Party: Issue-ownership by coincidence or by stealth?

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Introduction

In the winter of 2015 one of the hot topics in Finnish media was the Immigration Policy Programme of Perussuomalaiset (PS-The Finns Party). The party launched it as one of seven separate policy programmes, which altogether formed the party's election manifesto. Legal experts debated the nature of the programme with some of them agreeing that it was potentially racist and anti-constitutional or at least represented views that went against the spirit of the constitution. It was claimed that the programme portrayed migrants as a less valuable and more problematic group than the native population, and for some experts this distinction was the key reason for claiming that the programme was potentially unconstitutional.¹ It is a well-known fact that the programme was mostly written by Jussi Halla-aho, a PS MEP and self-appointed leader of the party's anti-immigration wing. What followed was a heated debate between legal experts and some of the party's more radical wing, especially MP Juho Eerola and MEP Halla-aho. The argument continued during the months leading up to the elections and to the subsequent coalition negotiations.

Fast-forward to 2016 and large parts of PS' Immigration Policy Programme are now government policy after PS became a member of the centre-right coalition government in 2015. The government has introduced tighter border controls, more restrictive rules for family reunification, and committed itself to calculating the costs of immigration to the country.² Some claim that the main opposition parties allowed these changes to take place, especially in context of the so-called European migrant crisis of 2015, in order to deter asylum-seekers coming to Finland. As such, it was beneficial to paint a picture of Finland as a 'rude country'.³ While some of these developments can be understood with reference to the wider EU developments in the aftermath of this 'crisis', it is nevertheless remarkable that many of the aims of a previously so contentious election manifesto have become government policy.

The change of direction in Finnish immigration policy is remarkable in and of itself. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that very few seem to question the nature of this new approach, even though the same policy caused considerable controversy when it was originally presented as a part of the Finns Party manifesto in 2015. Moreover, since the three mainstream parties, namely, Suomen Keskusta (Kesk-The Centre Party of Finland), Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue (SDP-The Social Democratic Party of Finland) and Kansallinen Kokoomus (Kok-The National Coalition Party), have not taken a clear stance - one way or the other - and also seem to largely have 'bought into' the anti-immigration creed orchestrated by PS, we have to ask what the drivers and motivations behind this development might be. As the manifesto data demonstrate, the immigration 'issue' is largely not touched upon by the three mainstream parties, that is, they tend to communicate fairly non-committal positions to the electorate. In the past they have consistently lent slightly towards L/M-stances (H₁), an approach which they have by now by and large abandoned. This has effectively left PS with free range to take on the 'issue' into its own territory (H₃). This presents us with an interesting puzzle - why did the Finnish mainstream let a PRR contender take the lead on what is arguably one of the most contentious issues in Europe, and one that seems to be highly salient amongst the electorate?

This chapter will examine how and to what extent immigration and integration were discussed by the Finnish mainstream and the PRR contender during the last three elections (that is, 2007, 2011 and 2015). We investigate whether it is possible to conclude that PS now owns the immigration 'issue' and, if so, how this situation was able to develop. We discuss a number of plausible explanations - and further implications - related to our findings. We suggest below that what happened with Finnish parties is that while PS went for an openly anti-immigration strategy - which thus contributed towards producing the electoral goods for them in the 2011 and 2015 elections - the approaches pursued by the three mainstream parties were, if anything, to downplay the importance of the 'issue', instead focussing on economic policy and the structural reforms needed to get Finland out of the recession. We also argue that the Finnish mainstream, rather than strategically ignoring immigration and integration or 'wimping out' from speaking their minds in fear of losing votes, instead concentrated more on presenting themselves as the responsible alternative with the necessary statecraft to deal with the economic crisis.

The chapter proceeds in three stages. First, in order to understand the specifics of the Finnish case, we need to understand the context in more detail. We look at factors both internal and external to the party in understanding how populist politics has been shaped in Finland. Internally, the legacy of agrarian populism from the late 1950s to the 1980s and how it became more or less mainstream has had a deep impact. Furthermore, the way in which the leadership of the Finns Party has dealt with its own radical anti-immigration opposition as a 'party within a party' is a significant strategic point that might have also influenced the way in which the mainstream parties have approached the party as an electoral contender and the immigration as an issue. Externally, significant contextual factors are in the Finnish political tradition of inclusion instead of *cordons sanitaires* and how even the populists have been considered as natural parties of government after electoral victories. Second, we then look at the data and findings that point at how the Finnish mainstream parties gradually gave the

issue of immigration to the Finns Party through increasingly ignoring it in their manifestos. Finally, we give some answers to why this has been the case. Here also, the contextual factors, both internal and external to the party, play a key role. While the ‘party within a party’ approach together with the mainstream parties giving immigration to the Finns Party has delivered the electoral goods, the Finnish political tradition of inclusion instead of *cordons sanitaires* and isolation has been equally important. In fact, it could be argued that getting sole ownership of immigration as an issue can be the source of both the success and failure of the Finns Party – success in opposition but possibly failure in government, especially as it seems that the government, like its so many other European counterparts, was helpless in the face of the wave of immigration in 2015. After all, the opinion polls since joining government in 2015 present a disastrous drop in support for the party. A year after the elections, the party’s support had dropped from third place with 17.7% to sixth place with 7.6%.⁴

The ascendance of PS and its place in the Finnish party system

Finland was, until the General Election of 2011, one of only handful of countries that did not have an established PRR party. Sweden was equally an exception but, as Rydgren correctly estimated, it was only a matter of time before these ‘exceptions’ would fall in line with the rest of Europe’s party systems.⁵ However, well before the emergence of the latest wave of populism, Finland experienced the presence of a populist political party. Suomen maaseudun puolue (SMP-The Finnish Rural Party), which had its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. Taggart classified SMP as a ‘new populist party’,⁶ be it that its roots were much more in agrarian populism.⁷ Hence, its politics was actually also in line with the first wave of populism of the 19th century, the most well-known examples of which are the Narodniki Movement in Russia and the US People’s Party.⁸

SMP was established by Veikko Vennamo in 1959 as a splinter group from the Agrarian League (later Centre Party) and set up in protest to the corrupt style of politics of the then President Urho Kekkonen and his cronies, as well as in defence of the 'forgotten people'.⁹ At its electoral peak in the 1970s and 80s, the party achieved around 10% of the vote, and in 1970-75 it had as many as 18 MPs in the Finnish Parliament (Eduskunta). For a significant part of the 1980s SMP was also a part of the more established mainstream, as it entered Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa's (SDP) 'red-ochre' government in 1983. This was the most typical Finnish post-war coalition with SDP and Keski being the main coalition partners and where the smaller parties had supporting roles. Veikko Vennamo's son Pekka became the leader of the party in 1979 and sat in Sorsa's cabinet as a minister in the Ministry of Finance, a position which was at the time better known as the Second Minister of Finance, with main responsibility over tax policy. He also served as the Minister of Transport and Communications in Harri Holkeri's (Kok) 'blue-red' government 1987-89.

SMP had previously been marred by internal divisions and controversies but declining public support and deep financial problems in the 1990s finally brought its political life to an end. After SMP's 'bankruptcy', a few active figures within the party, including Timo Soini, the last General Secretary of SMP, and its final remaining MP, Raimo Vistbacka, wanted to form a new party and PS thus emerged from the ashes of SMP in 1995. At the time of its inception PS was neither a major political player nor a particularly radical party. It was SMP's successor and continued largely with the well-known and clearly defined platform of its predecessor. Until the European Parliament Elections in 2009, its support was also marginal (mostly well below 5%) and only one of their MPs, the former wrestler, boxer and actor, Tony Halme, caused any significant controversy with his extreme political views.¹⁰ Halme sat in the Eduskunta for one parliamentary cycle (2003-2007) after getting the fifth largest share of personal votes in the 2003 elections (16,390). It could be argued therefore that Halme paved the way for a more obviously radical approach within the party, which emerged only a year or so after he had

exited the political arena.¹¹ It also gave Timo Soini the opportunity to develop a political strategy that would prove useful in the future. That is, Halme was tolerated by the party elite because he brought in votes but at the same time he was kept at arm's length and his loose association with the party offered a useful "get out of jail" card to the leadership when things eventually got too problematic.¹²

The anti-immigration wing becomes the 'party within the party'

The increasing popularity in 2008 of a radical anti-immigration and anti-Islam blogger - Jussi Halla-aho - presented Soini and PS with an opportunity to gain support for the party among an increasing group of immigration critics. The comment section on Halla-aho's anti-immigration blog had become too active for his website to handle and a completely new anti-immigration discussion forum called Homma was set up toward the end of 2008.¹³ A few months later, and ahead of the European Parliament elections, Halla-aho's supporters began collecting signatures in case Halla-aho would need to stand as an independent candidate, as it seemed like the party might not nominate him as a candidate. Afterwards, as Halla-aho publicly accused the party for giving media the power over its candidacy selection, Soini retaliated. He criticised the "propellerheads" associated with Halla-aho for coming up with a "plan B" of Halla-aho standing as independent in the event of the party not nominating him. After the party found out about this contingency plan, they refused to nominate Halla-aho. Soini challenged Halla-aho to become a serious and responsible politician and to do the 'right thing' by accepting the party's decision and not standing as an independent candidate. Otherwise the party would block his candidacy in the 2011 general election as well.¹⁴ To the surprise of many, Halla-aho decided not to stand as an independent and instead wait for his time to come. In the 2011 parliamentary elections, he was the leading candidate for PS in Helsinki and subsequently got elected to the Eduskunta with 15,074 personal votes, the sixth

largest number in the whole country. His personal votes alone meant that two other PS candidates in the Helsinki constituency also got elected. Other - more radical - anti-immigration candidates were equally successful and Soini's task was then to find a balance between the more mainstream populist wing of the party, inspired by Veikko Vennamo's politics, and the more radical anti-immigration elements. Both factions benefited from being together in one party but it was not always easy for the party's leadership to manage them.

As we argue below, following scholars such as Jungar¹⁵, the party has gone through a process of radicalisation after it had become somewhat mainstream, building on SMP's legacy of, for instance, being in the coalition government in the 1980s. The key strategy of the party was having a 'party within the party'. In other words, the mainstream part of PS pursued a more respectable and professional direction, marked by traditional statecraft and competency, while the anti-immigration wing managed to remain more radical while simultaneously serving as a pressure relief valve for the party and its members. One example of this is the accommodative strategy the party leadership pursued when they allowed the so-called 'sour election manifesto' to be published (*Nuiva vaalimanifesti*). This manifesto was co-authored by several radical party members and led by Jussi Halla-aho.¹⁶ This permitted PS to maintain its position as being on the fringes of the political mainstream. But it also allowed for a more radical agenda to enter the party agenda. Soini has since played a skilful game of keeping this element of the party at arm's length yet close enough so that he is able to take charge as and when necessary. This is similar to the strategy he used with Halme in the early 2000s. In terms of their chances of continuity and stability this strategy has proven successful and the party has so far worked quite well in consolidating their ideological diversity. This could be key to longer longer term success too, as it has been argued that what is needed in order for a PRR party to establish itself, is rapid institutionalisation after the first election victory.¹⁷

No *cordons sanitaires* please, we're Finnish

In terms of how the other parties have treated PS, it can be argued that the experience of having SMP (as a governing party) meant that the approach taken towards PS has been less confrontational and more cooperative than might otherwise have been the case. This might also have had an impact on the self-image of PS' leadership and the approach they have taken to politics. What is more, the consensual nature of Finnish politics has often meant that *cordons sanitaires*, which is widely employed elsewhere in Europe, has not been a feature of the Finnish political tradition. It is not even clear that a *cordons sanitaires* would necessarily have worked either. For instance, it may well cause further radicalisation or political rigidity in the party system.¹⁸ In any case, Finnish parties, especially since the end of the Cold War, have not resorted to isolating or excluding opposition forces. During the Cold War, of course, the Soviet Union did impose from the outside what could be described as a *cordons sanitaire* towards Kok because it saw the party as being too right-wing. It applied a similar attitude towards the more centrist factions of SDP, but apart from these exceptions, all Finnish parties have traditionally been able and willing to work with each other. It could be argued that also because of Soini's relatively moderate personal approach and the party's legacy within the Finnish mainstream, PS has been largely tolerated by the established parties.

A recent example of this consensual approach includes Paavo Lipponen's 'Rainbow Government' (1995-99) that included five parties ranging from the liberal bourgeois Kok and Svenska Folkpartiet i Finland (SFP-Swedish People's Party of Finland) to Vihreä Liitto (Vihreä Green League), SDP and Vasemmistoliitto (Vas-Left Alliance). Remarkably for a coalition partner of most of the established Finnish right-wing parties, the predecessor of Vas was Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto (SKDL-Finnish People's Democratic League), a political organisation that also had among its members Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue (SKP-The Communist Party of Finland). After Lipponen's 'Rainbow Government', Jyrki Katainen's

'six pack' coalition (2011-2014) continued this tradition, which Paavo Lipponen called the 'Finnish model'.¹⁹

After the landslide results in 2011, it was obvious that PS was in a strong position to be included in government negotiations, even though mainstream parties do not usually view PRR parties as credible government partners.²⁰ However, in Finland the approach has always been that the winner(s) of an election should also have the right to at least be included in the coalition negotiations. Additionally to the Finnish convention of including winners, some within the mainstream might also have hoped that the inclusion of PS would "tame the dragon".²¹ This is, indeed, a reasonable assumption, since for any party, especially in proportional systems, being in power usually means being in a coalition. The task for coalition partners is to try and bridge any ideological gaps and make compromises on policy positions.²² Having said that, de-radicalisation is not a necessary precondition for getting into power, as some PRR parties in, for instance, Italy have done well with sticking to their radical agenda even when in power.²³ No exclusions had been agreed on by the other parties and PS entered into government negotiations in April 2011. After a painfully long period of talks, PS finally exited these negotiations in early June, as they could not agree to support the European Stability Mechanism (ESM).²⁴ PS made their opposition to European bailouts as a non-negotiable issue, which Soini also publicised worldwide in an article published in the Wall Street Journal on 9 May 2011.²⁵

They then spent the next four years in opposition but after the 2015 election SP entered the new centre-right coalition government of Juha Sipilä (Kesk), which is also the first government since the mid-1990s to break Lipponen's 'Finnish model', as the government now consists of three large centre-right parties (Kesk, PS and Kok). The 2015 election was fought in a context where immigration had become an increasingly more salient important. We will

now turn to these questions, and investigate especially the ways in which the mainstream parties positioned themselves (if at all) in relation to PS' immigration policy stances.

Data and findings

The impact of parties' positioning in relation to voter attitudes and election outcomes has been studied already but less is known about the effects on policy agendas.²⁶ Furthermore, the effect of the radical right on the policy agendas of mainstream parties is even more of an uncharted territory. One assumption many have is that with regards to immigration policy we might see a contagion effect from the radical right on the mainstream.²⁷ Hence, if this assumption is correct, we should be witnessing mainstream parties moving closer to the PRR on issues of immigration and integration.

The research conducted for this book has produced some very interesting finding. In the 2007 manifestos, most of the parties say very little or nothing at all about the immigration 'issue'. SDP and Keski include a couple of statements supporting labour migration. SDP claims that a more liberal stance comes with two benefits. First of all, it helps to fill gaps in the labour market and, secondly, it makes integration less 'costly'.

We also need immigrants in working life. And immigrants need work. The best means to integration is to guarantee everyone with a place in the labour market. A job gives a person an identity and feeling of being a member of a community. It creates a network of community and colleagues.²⁸

Keski associates similar benefits with immigration. They make reference to education in general and to language education in particular as ways to (culturally) integrate immigrants more successfully.

Keskusta aims to support labour migration, improve the integration of immigrants and to develop their continuing education and language training.²⁹

Kok equally advocates a liberalisation of naturalisation policies by suggesting a reduction in the residence requirements from six to four years. They base this on a fictional example of “Miguel Migrant” who has studied in Finland and whose naturalisation the party would want to make easier by cutting the number of years required before he can apply for citizenship by also including years spent as a student in Finland. This would thus make it easier for migrants like Miguel to stay and plan their futures in Finland.³⁰ Besides these sparse statements, which clearly point to an L/M-positioning of these parties, only PS makes any obvious R/A-claims. Although their manifesto does not mention labour migration, family reunification or integration, they communicate a strongly restrictive position on asylum. For example, they argue that asylum seekers whose applications have already been turned down by other EU member states should be deported immediately. The party also flags up Finland’s ‘problem with numbers’ and voice a desire to have the refugee quota reduced, with reference to the worry that as many as 1,300 asylum seekers did, according to the party, disappear from Finnish reception centres.³¹

By the 2011 election, there are two clear changes. First, SDP has toned down its L/M-position and does not mention immigration at all. The centre-right parties, conversely, maintain their L/M-stance, in particular regarding the need for migrant workers to maintain a sufficient supply of labour for the welfare sector (Kok),³² and also mention, as they did in 2007, the need for the state to provide language training and education to facilitate integration (Kesk).

Immigrant families need to be supported in many ways and they need to be guided into Finnish culture. The aim is to increase integration and the level of education. Educational equality is advanced by targeted study advice and sufficient language education. The role of municipalities in language education, liberal education and the third sector needs clarification. The cost of language education will be funded by the state.³³

However, it is in this election campaign that PS takes a significant step towards a clear R/A approach. They harden their stance on asylum seekers and, in general, adopt a “good vs. bad

immigrants” approach.³⁴ The first group consists predominantly of labour migrants and is characterised by its contribution to society, while the second, entailing mainly asylum seekers and refugees, is considered to be a drain on national resources.³⁵ Yet even in this campaign, PS did not put forward an entirely explicit anti-immigration position. Instead they stood behind the idea that some immigrants are more welcome than others. They significantly hardened their approach towards asylum seekers compared to the 2007 manifesto and repeated calls for the quota to be cut. The party also identified family reunification as a particularly problematic category, claiming that many immigrants abuse the system by getting, for instance, elderly relatives to join them with the sole aim of getting better social and health care. Indeed, while the party still talked about reducing the refugee quotas and the problems associated with illegal migration, one important shift in their thinking seems to be in how the party concentrates on integration or on the difficulties associated with it. In terms of former, the 2011 manifesto is a clearly assimilationist. This is in some ways not too different to what Kesk advocated in 2007 but PS places a greater emphasis on immigrants having the duty to make an effort, rather than it being the state’s duty to offer high quality language education and other types of integration assistance.

The starting point has to be the responsibility of society to offer language education but at the same time it is the immigrant’s responsibility to take part in language education as a condition for receiving social benefits.³⁶

The reasons for this shift relate largely to the emergence of the anti-immigration wing of the party, partly grouped behind Jussi Halla-aho. Ahead of the 2011 election this group published the ‘Sour Election Manifesto’ (*Nuiva vaalimanifesti*) written and signed by a number of the party’s immigration-critical candidates led by Halla-aho and the party’s then deputy chair Vesa-Matti Saarakkala. The manifesto was a stand-alone piece and was not officially endorsed by the party, yet those parts of the main manifesto that relate to immigration were taken directly from the Sour Manifesto. The Sour Manifesto was the party line on immigration but

only informally. It was useful when the reception was positive and the party then distanced itself from the Sour Manifesto once the debate became more negative. Thus, Soini's earlier approach to MP Tony Halme was applied here too.

This picture remained relatively similar in 2015 but in this election campaign, Kesä also withdrew all statements relating to labour migration, leaving Kok as the sole mainstream party to (briefly) mention this category. In the light of the amplification of the voices on immigration emerging from PS during and after the 2011 election campaign and the numerous scandals associated with the party's new and larger parliamentary group, this is a truly remarkable feature. This meant that only party to fully engage with the immigration 'issue' was PS since the mainstream competitors had more or less let go of it. This is perhaps a rather surprising or counter-intuitive turn of events, although one that has some overlap with the Swedish case, and suggests that the Finnish mainstream adopted a dismissive strategy for dealing with the anti-immigration position offered by PS. And it seems that this has played an important role in the increasing electoral fortunes of the party.

Finns Party and immigration: Issue ownership by coincidence or by stealth?

At least three developments can be identified during the last decade that may help to explain why immigration has produced the electoral goods for PRR-type parties. The first one is associated with the global economic recession following the subprime mortgage crisis that started in the US in late 2007. As a consequence, most European economies, including Finland's, shrunk, while the size of their public debt started to grow due to, *inter alia*, rising unemployment.³⁷ Not only has this prolonged crisis increased financial pressures on the Finnish government, but it has also served as an impetus for welfare state reform, both long-term structural changes, such as pension reform, and short-term austerity measures including

cutbacks in social protection schemes.³⁸ The state of the economy, and the general crisis environment, are also closely connected to immigration policy. On one hand, immigration can be considered important for maintaining a sufficient workforce, but, on the other, during a recession immigration may easily fuel xenophobia and an increase in anti-immigration sentiments, not only among the PRR but also among the mainstream parties. For example, according to Boeri, immigrants and ethnic minorities are increasingly stigmatized as 'undeserving' welfare tourists and such attitudes have a tendency to gain further strength in times of an economic downturn, rising unemployment and insecurity.³⁹ As Bauman also pointed out, the 'strangers among us' often serve the purpose of scapegoats in times of hardship and increasing insecurity.⁴⁰

Second, a sentiment of 'welfare state paradise lost' has also spread across many European countries. This refers to the crumbling of the ontological security that welfare states used to provide to their citizens and to the rising inequality that can be witnessed all over the OECD area.⁴¹ Despite 'Third Way' attempts to recalibrate 'passive' welfare schemes most European governments have not been able to curb income inequality effectively. The middle classes have not experienced sufficient upward income and employment mobility while the richest percentile, conversely, improved their situation dramatically.⁴² While opinion surveys show widespread and persistent support for old-style, 'passive' and protective welfare state measures, there is simultaneously a growing conception that the welfare state is being downsized and universal welfare services demoted. This is said to have led to public disappointment and grievances, which, in turn, opens the door for PRR parties.⁴³ It appears that within this context, characterised by various structural pressures, it has thus been difficult to construct a clear and consistent L/M-policy agenda.

Third, the external environment has changed substantially due to what is often referred to as the European 'migrant crisis'. In the Finnish context, this 'crisis' became visible

in 2015 as the number of asylum seekers increased dramatically due to the wars in Iraq and Syria. From a yearly average of around 3000, numbers suddenly rose to over 30,000 in 2015.⁴⁴ As a consequence of this drastic change, but also because of the economic recession, immigration has become more salient as an issue. But it has also become an issue where elites as well as citizens now are able to identify challenges more readily.

As it is clear that the political climate is hospitable towards political parties raising immigration as an electoral issue, we need to ask why the Finnish mainstream handed over ownership to PS, seemingly without a fight. Did this happen by coincidence? In other words, did the other parties simply concentrate on other 'more important' issues and then accidentally let go of immigration and integration? It could have also been a matter of giving PS ownership of the issue by stealth, since it was simply too difficult to handle and associated with too many controversies and dilemmas. Either way, it is not clear that their electoral fortunes would have automatically suffered from these events.

Overall, the Finnish immigration debates and the role of PS in these are a less straightforward compared to the overall European experience. In order to understand these complicated developments and relationships, a detailed outline of the structural and institutional context is of crucial importance. Usually, it is claimed that what unifies PRR parties is immigration and the restrictive stances they adopt.⁴⁵ However, this is where the Finnish story gets more nuanced. As we discussed above, PS' history as SMP's successor party plays an important role here. The fight against a corrupt elite and the cartelisation of the Finnish party system have been relatively easy points to make and have also resonated well with the electorate.⁴⁶ In addition to shedding light on the nature of the party itself, the SMP heritage also helps us understand the ways in which the Finnish mainstream might have treated PS and then engaged with their policy proposals in ways that might seem relatively counterintuitive at first.

However, one possible reason for the mainstream reaction to PS' proposals can be found from the internal politics of PS and the way in which the party managed the 'issue' internally. PS is definitely the brainchild of its current leader Timo Soini and his personality and charisma have been very important to the party. Especially in the early years he was seen as the one and only 'face of the party'. Despite this, the party cannot be considered a 'personal party' similar to Berlusconi's parties in Italy.⁴⁷ Soini has actively and strategically tried to change that over the years in order to ensure continuity for the party.⁴⁸ We argue here that there are issues related to both policy and leadership which can be linked to this strategy and, most importantly, that both of these relate to the way in which the party handled its stances on immigration and integration. Soini himself is not an immigration critic. Indeed, he has never considered immigration to be of a particular importance to him.⁴⁹ However, the way he has dealt with the 'issue', by allowing a radical anti-immigration wing into the party, thus meant that he has instead created his own accommodation strategy towards significant opposition within the party. One consequence of this 'party within the party'-approach seems to be that it has exploited the 'quintessentially mercurial' nature of populism, as pointed out by Taggart,⁵⁰ which has thus made it difficult for other parties to address.

The way Soini accommodated the critical wing within PS made him seem more reasonable and mainstream as he was able to call his house into order without too much in-fighting or disruption. The other parties also realised that it would be difficult to govern without PS. However, in relation to Meguid's three approaches to dealing with a PRR challenger, i.e. being accommodative, dismissive or adversarial,⁵¹ what seems to have happened in the Finnish case mostly relates to the second category, especially when it comes to the three main political parties.⁵² Vihr and Vas have possibly been the most vocal adversaries of PS and while their electoral significance is a lot smaller than that of the 'big three', the role they played in coalition governments since 2007 has been significant. However, the dismissive stance adopted by the 'big three' has not necessarily been a mere electoral

strategy to counter PS. In fact, it makes more sense to view these actions as being anchored in the Finnish (political) tradition of avoiding conflict and confrontation in the interest of consensus and cohesion. The immigration 'issue' has definitely proven to be inflammable for even PS to handle and it might have been a conscious strategy of the other parties to avoid it altogether.

Another important contextual point to make relates to the economy. For example, there are concerns about the impact of immigration on the labour market, in terms of the size of the workforce, and the extent to which migrant workers might compete with the native population for jobs. Questions are also asked about how increased immigration might expose problems of integration and so on. Immigration has thus become an imminent factor in most globalized economies bringing important benefits to both society and the economy but one that is often also related to social costs, risks of segregation and welfare dependency.

Immigration, as was argued by the mainstream parties in their 2011 and 2015 manifestos, can be beneficial for the Finnish economy, since immigrants, if successfully integrated into society and into the labour market, can contribute to the workforce and help to rebalance the dependency ratio. At the same time immigrants can easily be seen as a burden to an already strained economy and to a welfare state suffering from a lack of resources. In Finland, where the economy has been in a recession for about seven years and where recent governments have implemented a number of structural reforms to cut public expenditure, further immigration can easily be seen as a challenge involving societal costs and/or welfare misuse. As noted by Boeri, anti-immigration sentiments have become more widespread across Europe during the last twenty-five years and they have tended to increase in strength during times of economic instability and insecurity.⁵³ This is also very much the case in Finland where cuts to unemployment and child benefits and ongoing socio-economic reforms have all been part of the government's austerity programme. What these reforms have

in common is an accentuation of higher conditionality and tighter eligibility criteria in tandem with a less generous level of benefits paid out. Taken together, these changes have disproportionately affected groups that already have a weak attachment to the labour market, particularly students, the unemployed, and, perhaps ironically, immigrants. Many PRR parties across Europe have thus used this as a platform to up their anti-immigration rhetoric but they have also exploited these changes as an electoral strategy to build a 'welfare state paradise lost' narrative.

Accordingly, some have argued that globalization, open borders and excessive neo-liberal policies have all contributed towards the demise of the traditional welfare state and opened up for immigrants to come and claim benefits in countries with generous and universal social rights. As a consequence many populist parties, including PS, have opted for a pro-welfare rhetoric advocating passive and 'insider-based' social protection. This approach is closely linked to what some have called 'welfare chauvinism'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, welfare chauvinism has begun to resonate significantly with European populations during the recent economic recession.⁵⁵ This has been a particularly fruitful strategy as it appeals to groups that are seen as the 'losers of globalization', de-industrialization and welfare state reforms.⁵⁶ Namely, those with low levels of education who are structurally unemployed but these changes also affect a large proportion of the lower middle classes who have struggled to adapt to the post-industrial economy. They are, in short, the electorate that are primarily lured by promises of a return of the 'good old national welfare state', with its internal promise of ontological security and of the times when everything was better.⁵⁷ Often this kind of rhetoric goes hand in hand with a critical position vis-à-vis immigrants and refugees since these groups are often viewed as undeserving profiteers that claim welfare benefits that rightly belong to the countries' own citizens or elements that drive up unemployment and create social unrest.

Another important factor is the increase in income inequality that has taken place in many OECD countries over the last two to three decades. The Nordic countries have also been affected by these changes, although they are often considered strongholds of egalitarianism and wealth redistribution.⁵⁸ While large parts of the population have been at the losing end of increasing wage differentials and income mobility, other parts have seen their incomes increase, mostly due to increased shares of capital income.⁵⁹ The problem that follows is that it conflicts with people's sense of justice and affects their trust in society and in politics – in other words, it undermines the social, political and economic foundations of a society. For example, Wilkinson and Pickett show that levels of inequality are closely linked to the prevalence of several social problems and to lower health outcomes.⁶⁰ They explain this linkage by pointing to the relational socio-psychological and cultural aspects of human wellbeing. Put simply, human beings are social creatures affected by others living in social proximity to them. If they have less income than their fellow citizens this is likely to have a detrimental impact on their health and their sense of trust in the system. This suggests that there is merit in the notion of a social contract that safeguards at least a basic modicum of fairness, wellbeing and equality in the distribution of resources. It is this 'social glue' that holds societies together and provides continued existence. If this 'glue' falls apart, we can thus expect negative outcomes in the overall social, economic and democratic stability. But such developments can also affect politics. Higher levels of inequality are not only linked to lower levels of political trust⁶¹ and to lower levels of political participation,⁶² they are also associated with a growing disillusionment with representative democracy.⁶³ Furthermore, both developments are said to provide a fertile ground for the emergence and success of the PRR.⁶⁴

As noted above, there is a connection between the economy and immigration, and we have tried to draw attention to some aspects of this link. Another more recent issue is the rapid increase of asylum seekers especially since 2015. According to the Finnish Immigration Service numbers increased slowly after 2012 but rose dramatically from circa 4,000 to over

30,000 between 2014 and 2015.⁶⁵ This took Finnish authorities by surprise and crystallised debates of whether or not Finland should grant a larger number of positive asylum decisions. Overall, the immigration 'issue' was perceived as a possible threat to the financial sustainability of the welfare state due to the higher socio-economic costs that full-scale integration would imply. Needless to say perhaps, this development fuelled the anti-immigrant rhetoric PS but also made the Finnish mainstream more reluctant to dwell on immigration and integration issues. The political mainstream was already aware that anti-immigration positions could well be hazardous in electoral terms since they could frighten off core constituencies. But even before the dramatic increase in asylum seekers took place the three mainstream parties were reluctant to address issues relating to immigration. And when they did it mostly related to general statements on the need for labour migration, introducing effective integration policies and/or highlighting the virtues of multiculturalism and an ethnically plural society.

One can therefore identify three potential explanations for why the Finnish mainstream refrained from making the immigration 'issue' an electoral priority, whereas PS became its de facto owner. First, the mainstream parties may have consciously wanted to avoid politically inflammable topics as per their attempts to seek consensus. In other words, campaigning on the 'issue' may simply have been viewed as too risky not only since it may frighten off traditional supporters but also since it might create further friction within and between the mainstream. As a consequence, this left PS as the sole actor to not only talk about immigration but also to claim ownership over it.

Second, the political mainstream may not have considered immigration to be an 'issue' worth putting on the political, or at least electoral, agenda in the first place. Saving the economy and the welfare state in a time of crisis became a primary mission for the Finnish mainstream, which made them revert back to a 'comfort zone'. As 'insider' parties, the

mainstream not only constituted the main contenders for government but they also nurtured an ideological outlook as ‘state bearers’, that is, parties that were ready and capable to govern effectively and create jobs, manage the public economy and provide citizens with decent standards of living. The fact that Finland experienced a severe economic recession with growing public debt and soaring unemployment forced several governments, from Jyrki Katainen’s (Kok) ‘six-pack’ coalition (2011-2014) to the current centre-right coalition, to pursue structural reforms and to curb public expenditure through a number of austerity measures. Although these attempts have not been altogether successful, with for example the social and health care reform facing constitutional and other obstacles on a frequent basis, they nevertheless forced mainstream parties to put their emphasis to these areas rather than on ‘niche issues’ such as immigration. In short, while the mainstream focussed on saving the economy and the welfare state, PS exploited an opening in the party system and successfully managed to make immigration one of its core topics. However, since joining the government in 2015, PS has experienced a significant drop in support. It has gone from winning big bang election victories to being the sixth largest party by 7.6% support in July 2016.⁶⁶

Third, there is also a chance, albeit an unlikely one, that all parties under scrutiny here may have shared a mutual fear of large-scale immigration and that they considered immigration as a threat to both the financial viability of the Finnish welfare state and to society at large. But while PS made immigration into one of its key electoral narratives, mainstream parties refrained from doing so. In other words, PS played the ‘bad cop’ forcing the ugly truth out. Or put differently, the party allowed itself – and was allowed by its competitors – to voice the ugly truths. In any case, this bias in power relations meant that PS was left as the owner of the immigration ‘issue’. Consequently, it allowed PS to also put forward a narrative as safeguarding the existence of the welfare state and of Finnish society. If one considers the unlikely trio that currently governs Finland, this scenario suddenly becomes less farfetched.

Conclusion

The Finnish case introduces some counterintuitive results to the research questions of this book. In terms of the three hypotheses, all of them are, to some extent, confirmed. For H₁, we confirmed that there are no significant positional differences between the Finnish mainstream, that is, at least if PS is still not considered as a part of the political mainstream. The latter were all leaning towards a moderate L/M-position in 2007 and have then gradually moved away from this stance. However, this move does not mean that they have adopted (or even co-opted) the positions of PS. Instead, what we identify is how the ‘position’ taken up is one which ignores immigration altogether. But rather than making the issue disappear, this behaviour has effectively handed issue ownership over to the PRR contender. In terms of H₂, we can also confirm that there are no significant R/A choices offered by any of the three mainstream parties and, while this continues to be the case, PS will be able to capitalise – largely uncontested – on their restrictive and demanding approaches towards immigration and integration. In terms of H₃, then, we find that the decision to ignore immigration may very well have contributed to the success of PS. However, it is not possible to say to what extent this was a decisive factor in the election results. While it seems likely that taking a R/A-approach may have benefited PS, especially when the other parties refused to either challenge or to accommodate its views, joining the government has not been an equally positive development as the party experienced a dramatic drop in support.

What we have done in this chapter is predominantly to offer an explanation for the reasons why the Finnish mainstream decided to largely ignore the immigration ‘issue’, thereby giving ownership of the issue to PS. In our analysis, we have pointed at important contextual factors in Finnish politics and the place that PS holds within the party system. Most of all, what we have highlighted is that the reason for why mainstream parties chose to neither accommodate nor to challenge the position of PS also lies in the strategic action based on a

process of intra-party accommodation that took place within the party itself. The 'party within the party'-strategy thus served to radicalise PS but without jeopardising attempts to institutionalise itself as part of the political mainstream. And this is why it has continued to be a party that other (mainstream) parties can work with.

¹ YLE, *Rasistinen Vai Ei?*

² Valtioneuvosto, *Hallituksen Maahanmuuttopoliittiset Toimenpiteet*

³ Lindholm, *Näin Perussuomalaiset Sanelivat*.

⁴ YLE, *Puoluekannatusmittari*.

⁵ Rydgren, "Radical Right Populism in Sweden."

⁶ Taggart, "New Populist Parties."

⁷ Arter, "The Breakthrough of True Finns."

⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, "Populism."

⁹ Arter, "Analysing 'Successor Parties'," 819.

¹⁰ Kuisma, "'Good' and 'Bad' Immigrants," 99.

¹¹ Hannula, *Maassa Maan Tavalla*, 72-80; Arter, "The Breakthrough of True Finns."; and Kestilä, "Is There Demand?"

¹² Kuisma, "'Good' and 'Bad' Immigrants."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Soini, *Peruspomo*, 28-30.

¹⁵ Jungar, "From the Mainstream."

¹⁶ Six out of the 13 signatories of the Sour Election Manifesto were elected to the Finnish *Eduskunta* in the 2011 elections. Many of them are significant figures within the party. Vesa-Matti Saarakkala was, at the time of the publication of the Sour Manifesto, one of the party's deputy leaders; Juho Eerola served as a deputy leader 2011-2015; Riikka Slunga-Poutsalo became the General Secretary of the Party in 2013; and, maybe most significantly, Maria Lohela was elected as the Speaker of the *Eduskunta* in 2015. In 2012, Matias Turkkila one of the co-founders of the anti-immigration Homma discussion forum was also appointed as the editor of the party newspaper *Perussuomalainen* and as the webmaster of the party website.

¹⁷ de Lange and Art, "Fortuyn Versus Wilders."

¹⁸ van Spanje and van der Brug, "The Party as Pariah."

¹⁹ Arter, "The Finnish Election 1999," 184.

²⁰ Downs, "Pariahs in Their Midst."; van Spanje and van der Brug, "The Party as Pariah."; and van Spanje and van der Brug, "Being Intolerant of the Intolerant."

²¹ Akkerman and Rooduijn, "Pariahs or Partners," 1140.

²² Ibid.

²³ Albertazzi and McDonnell, "The Lega Nord."

²⁴ Soini, *Peruspomo*, 116-19.

²⁵ Soini, "Why I Don't Support".

²⁶ Akkerman and Rooduijn, "Pariahs or Partners."

²⁷ Norris, *Radical Right*.

²⁸ Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue r.p., *Election Manifesto 2007* (our translation).

²⁹ Suomen Keskusta r.p., *Election Manifesto 2007* (our translation).

³⁰ Kansallinen Kokoomus r.p., *Election Manifesto 2007* (our translation).

³¹ Perussuomalaiset r.p., *Election Manifesto 2007* (our translation).

³² Kansallinen kokoomus r.p., *Election Manifesto 2011* (our translation).

³³ Suomen Keskusta r.p., *Election Manifesto 2011* (our translation).

³⁴ Kuisma, "'Good' and 'Bad' Immigrants."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Perussuomalaiset r.p., *Election Manifesto 2011* (our translation).

³⁷ Reinhart and Rogoff, *This Time Is Different*.

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- ³⁸ Nygård and Autto, *Finnish Family Policy*.
- ³⁹ Boeri, "Immigration to the Land of Redistribution."
- ⁴⁰ Bauman, *In Search of Politics*.
- ⁴¹ see for instance Immervoll and Richardson, *Redistribution Policy*.
- ⁴² Sayer, *Why We Can't Afford*.
- ⁴³ Banting, "Looking in Three Directions."; and de Koster et al., "The New Right."
- ⁴⁴ Finnish Immigration Service (FIS), *First Residence Permits Issued*.
- ⁴⁵ Van Der Brug et al., "Anti-Immigrant Parties."; van Spanje, "The Wrong and the Right."
- ⁴⁶ Arter, "The Breakthrough of True Finns," 485-86; Jungar, *Finnish Version of Populism*.
- ⁴⁷ Arter and Kestilä-Kekkonen, "Measuring the Extent."
- ⁴⁸ Soini, *Peruspomo*.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Taggart, *Populism*, 2.
- ⁵¹ Meguid, "Competition between Unequals."
- ⁵² see also Bale et al., "If You Can't Beat Them."
- ⁵³ Boeri, "Immigration to the Land of Redistribution."
- ⁵⁴ Andersen, "Denmark: The Progress Party."
- ⁵⁵ Keskinen et al., "The Politics and Policies Of."; Keskinen, "From Welfare Nationalism To."
- ⁵⁶ Kriesi et al., *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*.
- ⁵⁷ Andersson, *När Framtiden Redan Hänt*.
- ⁵⁸ Immervoll and Richardson, *Redistribution Policy*; and Official Statistics of Finland, *Income Distribution Statistics*.
- ⁵⁹ Official Statistics of Finland, *Income Distribution Statistics*.
- ⁶⁰ Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*.
- ⁶¹ Rahn and Rudolph, "A Tale of Political Trust."
- ⁶² Schäfer, "Die Folgen Sozialer Ungleichheit."; and Anderson and Beramendi, "Income, Inequality."
- ⁶³ Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*; and Giddens, *Runaway World*.
- ⁶⁴ Pappas, *Populism Emergent*; and Rydgren, "Radical Right-Wing Populism."
- ⁶⁵ Finnish Immigration Service (FIS), *First Residence Permits Issued*.
- ⁶⁶ YLE, *Keskusta Selvästi Suurin Puolue*.

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