THE TRUE FINNS IDENTITY POLITICS AND POPULIST LEADERSHIP ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE PARTY'S ELECTORAL TRIUMPH

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Abstract

In the Finnish general elections of 2011 the nationalist-populist True Finns Party gained a ground-breaking victory: its parliamentary group of 5 members grew to 39 members. This article examines the party's leader and co-founder Timo Soini's populist leadership in the context of the Nordic consensual multiparty system. The focus is on the direct communication Soini targeted to the party's (possible) supporters in his Internet blog and columns in the party's paper. Applying populist strategies in the circumstances of a Finnish political reality called for balance on several fronts. First, Soini's rhetoric balanced the dynamics of rousing the troops to the frontlines on the one hand, and integrating them to follow a certain set of behavioural norms and rules for party activities on the other. Although the separation of 'us' and 'them', typical for populist political strategy, was also substantial in Soini's argumentation, the 'other' was mainly not immigrants but various domestic and European elites. In his leadership, Soini balanced between two central questions. How, on the one hand, could the party be unique and gripping enough to attract support from both formerly passive voters and those who tended to vote for traditional parties? How, on the other hand, to remain respectable enough to suit the taste of the traditionally somewhat moderate Nordic voter?

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Introduction

The nationalist-populist True Finns Party[1] led by Timo Soini gained a historic victory in Finland's parliamentary elections in spring 2011. The parliamentary group, which had consisted of 5 members after the 2007 elections, now suddenly grew to 39 members. At the same time the party fractured the traditional configuration of three main parties and became the third-largest party in the Parliament.

In Finland, as elsewhere in Europe, scholars have explained the rise of populism using various circumstantial factors, ranging from errors made by other parties to the skilful media strategy of the newcomer party, the overall uncertainty linked to a high unemployment, the rise of immigration and crime, and the rapid structural changes in society which not everyone feels they can be a part of, as well as times of economic hardship and, recently, the context of the European financial crisis, which is favourable to these parties' critical message (see, e.g. Helander 1971; Widfeldt 2000; 2008; Pedahzur and Brichta 2002; Golder 2003; Rydgren 2004; Kestilä 2006; Mudde 2007; Albertazzi and McDonnel 2008; Pauwels 2010; Borg 2012).

Since the 1980s, Finnish voters have become less committed to political parties and increasingly critical towards established political actors. The overall voter turnout in elections has been decreasing. According to Borg, there has been a potential for a notable change in the country's political map, but it did not materialise before the general election of 2011 (Borg 2012, 193-194). The thrust for fundamental changes in a country's party system is very often found in societal changes that cause widespread discontent among citizens (Ivarsflaten 2007, 4). The ability to feed and exploit this resentment politically has been a key element in the breakthroughs of populist parties. However, forceful political leaders who can formulate the message and get it through in the media are needed even in favourable circumstances (see van der Brug and Mughan 2007, 31-32; Pedahzur and Brichta 2002). Furthermore, the reasons why populist movements have been unable to gain ground in some countries, have included the lack of a strong leading personality (Smith 2010, 1490).

So far, studies on the True Finns Party include analyses of the process of its origination and its connections to its predecessor, the Finnish Rural Party (*Suomen Maaseudun Puolue, SMP*), the development of the party's ideologies and platforms, the media publicity the party gained before the elections of 2011, the party's electoral transformation, and the role of intra-party competition in mobilising voters (Kestilä 2006; Arter 2010; 2012; 2013; Mickelsson 2011; Ruostetsaari 2011; Niemi 2012; Borg 2012; Pernaa and Railo 2012; Raunio 2012). However, as pointed out by Raunio, given the True Finns' recent breakthrough in national politics and the general lack of electorally-successful radical right parties, Finland has normally been excluded from comparative publications on populist or radical right parties (2012, 5).

Studies of the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2011 show that Soini's political leadership was important to voters (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, 182; Borg 2012, 200-202). So far research has, however, largely glossed over Soini's actions as party chairman. From the perspective of populist leadership, Timo Soini's strategies in responding to the challenges of media publicity preceding the elections of 2011 have gained attention (Niemi 2012), but his rhetoric and his aspirations to influence the voters on his own terms, without journalistic intervention, deserve more attention.

Nationalistic Populism in Finland and Scandinavia

Historically, the Nordic countries have not been a fertile breeding ground for radical right-wing or fascist style parties. Finland has actually been the exception – the only Nordic country where a powerful fascist movement had an impact on the political system during the inter-war years (Widfeldt 2000, 486; Kestilä 2006, 171; Arter 2012, 841). There were forerunners in the topical rise of nationalist populist parties in both Norway and Denmark, and Sweden and Finland followed behind (Widfeldt 2000, 486, 488). For the first time in the history the Nordic region now has a group of parties (True Finns, Sweden Democrats, Danish People's Party, and the Progress Party, Norway) combining in varying measures to form an anti-establishment populism, welfare chauvinism, traditionalism, moralism, and ethnonationalism – including euroscepticism – and preferring a monocultural society over a multicultural one. In the most recent elections, support for these parties ranged from under 6 percent in Sweden to nearly 23 percent in Norway (Arter 2012, 841-842).

The politicisation of the immigration topic has been central in creating niches for populist parties in the electoral arena (Rydgren 2004, 476). Among Nordic populist parties, a significant distinction concerns specifically the strategies for handling immigration policies. The True Finns' Scandinavian counterparts have attacked immigration more severely and openly also at the platform level (see Rydgren 2004; Widfeldt 2000; Mickelsson 2011; Ruostetsaari 2011; Hellström et al. 2012). Compared, for example, to Sweden Democrats, which were, at least in the early stage, disregarded as an immature movement with neo-Nazi tinges (Rydgren 2002, 34; Hellström et al. 2012, 187), the True Finns' premise is very different. The True Finns are a successor party for an agrarian populist party that was established already in late 1950s; in fact, Finland has the oldest populist tradition of all Nordic countries (Widfeldt 2000, 492). Although anti-immigration policies have not been the core issue in True Finns' policies, the party has clearly contributed in bringing critical sentiment towards immigration to the public discussion.

Efforts to define populism in earlier studies have been hampered by the diversity and imprecision of existing terminology (Weyland 2001, 1; Jagers and Walgrave 2007, 321; Zaslove 2008, 320; Barr 2009, 29-30; Jansen 2011, 78-81). Many definitions of populism are also limited by their breadth. What scholars agree most on is that the tension between the people and the elite is at the core of defining populism (Cf. Mudde 2004, 543; Jagers and Walgrave 2007, 322-323). In this study, populism is understood as the sum of three complementary viewpoints. First, I see populism as an ideology stating that politics should be an indication of the will of the people (Mudde 2004, 543); second, as a political strategy that enables dominant leader figures to strengthen their positions in politics (Weyland 2001, 14), and third, as a flexible way of gaining political support and mobilising citizens (Jansen 2011, 77, 81-82).

Research Frame

According to Taggart, the chameleon-like nature of populism explains its success in re-emerging again and again. Populism adapts to its surroundings, thereby adjusting to the present environment and harnessing it for strength (Taggart 2000, 2, 4, 76). To implement a populist strategy, understanding the circumstances and knowing the unique national culture in which the party operates is therefore vital.

As Paloheimo rightly points out, consensual multiparty democracies such as the one in Finland have generally offered a more fertile ground for populist parties than two-party democracies based on majority rule. In a consensual system the election results have less influence on policies, which gives populist newcomer parties more ground to criticise the established parties for acting as an elitist cartel that neglects the concerns of the man on the street (Paloheimo 2011, 329). In Finland, one of the central features of the political landscape is indeed the fragmented party system that facilitates consensual governance and ideological convergence between parties wishing to join the cabinet. Moreover, the cabinets are typically surplus majority coalitions bringing together parties from the left and right (Raunio 2012, 10).

Although consensual democracies are generally more favourable for the rise of populism than two-party systems, there are certain features affecting the possible actions of a party wishing to gain ground by implementing populist strategies. Strong confrontations, which are characteristic for populist policy making, are less familiar in the political debate of consensual systems, including the one in Finland. Launching a confrontational or even hostile and openly populist electoral campaign might damage a party's prospects to join the coalition government later.

However, for populist parties, joining the Cabinet is not always the ultimate target. Being perceived as part of the ruling and responsible political forces might water down a support based on anti-establishment sentiment. Furthermore, if a party's main objective is not to join the Cabinet, it does not have to pay so much attention to its ability to co-operate with other parties in the future. If the aspiration is simply to gain more seats in the elections and remain as a critical opposition party, there is more latitude to attack and criticise rivals both during electoral campaigns and after the election.

It is important to note that even if a party does not try to achieve governmental power, the conventions of political reality narrow its possibilities from another direction. In a consensual multiparty system like the one in Finland, political discourse is typically somewhat moderate and constructive. This has twofold consequences. On the one hand, it is relatively easy to stand out and gain public attention by simply displaying populist, adversarial rhetoric. On the other hand, there is a risk of being seen as too extreme, argumentative, and uncooperative to be taken seriously. Furthermore, while inciting conflicts has oftentimes been an advantageous strategy for populist parties, it runs the risk that some of the party's supporters might get too carried away in a manner that harms the party's public image.

In the beginning of the 2011 electoral campaign, the circumstances were indeed favourable for a critical, populist message by the opposition party: the EU economic crisis, domestic economic hardship, and recent corruption scandals involving the established parties had fed dissatisfaction among the voters.

An essential factor in populist mobilisation is the creation and utilisation of political indignation. Key here is the feeling among the people that their way of life is threatened. Typically supporters of populist parties do not take the initiative but must be roused first (Mudde 2004, 547-548), which means that communication directed at them is vital. In this, the role of a leader is essential. Populist parties are often born of and built by and around a strong, public leader figures. These leaders are characteristically thought to make the effort to reach out to their supporters directly, and to have an almost instinctive ability to sense the mood of the people – or at least to give that impression (Mazzoleni 2003, 5; Eatwell 2005, 108; see also

Weyland 2001, 13-14; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 5). Because the organisation of these parties is often very loose, there are few intermediaries between the supporters and the leader (Weyland 2001, 13).

The present study analyses Soini's populist political leadership and argumentation in the context of consensual Finnish party culture. In the circumstances of the 2011 elections, Soini's central task was to mould the apparent dissatisfaction in the Finnish constituency into political support for the True Finns. In order to succeed, Soini had to balance between two tasks. First was how to use populist strategies successfully to activate and inspire potential voters, including those who were traditionally politically passive but who might potentially find the True Finns' message appealing. Second was how to keep the growing enthusiasm among the party's supporters in check to ensure that those still hesitating would not be put off.

The materials analysed in this article consist of two groups of sources where Soini addresses his audience directly, without being limited by journalistic practices. The first primary source is Soini's blog on his website, given the folksy title of *Ploki*.[2] Contrary to the basic nature of social media, Soini's blog lacks the possibility for interactive communication, as commenting on the entries has been blocked. The analysis material begins with the entry entitled 'Electoral Themes' (*Vaaliteemoja*) published on 22 July 2010, and ends with the first publication after the election on 18 April 2011 entitled 'That Was a Big Bang' (*Tuli iso jytky*). The material includes over 40 blog entries.[3]

The second primary source comprises Soini's editorials in the 'Chairman' (*Puheenjohtaja*) column of the 24-page, triweekly newspaper of the True Finns Party, *Perussuomalainen* (The True Finn).[4] The paper is available free of charge on the party's website. The material includes the issues between August 2010 (10/2010) and the first post-election issue in April 2011 (6/2011), giving a total of 14 issues, one of which is an election special.

The material is analysed via qualitative content analysis. The focus is on arguments that:

(1) Describe the nature of the True Finns Party;
(2) Describe rivals and reasons for dissatisfaction, and encourage challenging them;
(3) Express leadership by striving to affect supporters' actions.

What was the identity politics and mobilisation talk of Chairman Timo Soini like prior to the party's victory in 2011 when there was no journalistic involvement affecting his message? As noted before, as a political strategy and ideology, populism has a chameleon-like nature, a tendency to adopt features from its surroundings to better suit the wishes of the voters. Was this also the case in the context of the True Finns' breakthrough? How did Soini express populist leadership and apply populist strategies within the circumstances of Finnish consensual political reality?

True Finn Is a True Finn

A folksy, simplifying vernacular, aphorisms, and appealing to the common people are central to the communication of populist leaders (Stewart et al. 2003, 226, 228; Mazzoleni 2008, 55), and in this sense Timo Soini was no exception. Just as with its Scandinavian counterparts (Widfeldt 2000, 488; Hellström et al. 2012, 190, 201), the True Finns Party claims to represent the 'man on the street' against the establishment.

As the chairman of a party, a professional politician, and member of the European Parliament, Master of Political Science Timo Soini can hardly be considered an image of the 'people' he represents. However, the rhetoric does not become convincing based on socioeconomic facts, but on a political actor's ability to interpret social conflicts and present him- or herself in opposition to the ruling powers and to behave as one of the people (Barr 2009, 32). The problems of the man on the street need to be solved on his terms and based on his values (Mudde 2004, 559-560; see also Weyland 2001, 15).

By criticising the elite, populist leaders position themselves outside this group and stand together with the people, whom they portray as sincere and striving for good. Who are the people with the moral backbone and who are the parasitic elite often remains obscure: populist leaders typically present the idea of the people as a self-evident, natural group including most of the community (Jansen 2011, 84). This was also characteristic of Timo Soini's rhetoric.

The features Soini linked to the True Finns party supporters were those that are commonly seen as Finnish virtues, such as authenticity, integrity, modesty, humility, and diligence. "Language and the mind are set deep in the Finnish soul,"[5] as Soini phrased it. He also called the True Finns a "home-grown political ideology."[6] Soini stressed that the party had been elevated through "hard work and high morals."[7] Expressions such as "[w]e do not brag"[8] implied that others may do so. Soini presented the True Finns as a "party that brings the people together and unifies them, combining the national basic values of enterprise, work, and social justice."[9]

Other important characteristics were a sense of justice, and being upright and trustworthy.[10] "The True Finns are a party without smears or debts. We have not been marinated in shady money,"[11] Soini wrote, referencing the recent corruption scandals involving several other parties. Considering the opposites of the preceding descriptions offers a fairly good idea of how Soini presented the 'old' parties and his other political competitors, such as the Greens.

Naming the Enemies, Challenging the Rivals

"Punches will be thrown, that's natural.
You must be able to take some hits."[12]

Populist parties tend to define their opponents and those who are not a part of 'us' more precisely than their own group (Mudde 2007, 63-64). In addition to an emphasis on the people, central tenets of populism are anti-elitism and various strategies of exclusion (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, 322; on anti-elitism, see Barr 2009; Arter 2010, 489; Cf. Helander 1971, 18). In order for the people to be presented as a unified, internally coherent and monolithic group, some people must be left outside either explicitly or implicitly (Rydgren 2006, 7). "The True Finns is our party,"[13] Soini stated. By constructing a group that he referenced in his writings as 'us,' Soini also created its opposite – there were also 'others.'

A common feature among current European populist parties is a negative attitude towards immigration. This has been an element in the True Finns' thinking as well; the party favours monoculturalism over multiculturalism. The welfare of Finns is considered a priority – it should not be harmed by immigration (Arter 2010, 497-499). Although Soini's separation of 'us' and 'them' was substantial, in his argumentation the 'other' was mainly not immigrants but various domestic and European elites.

Find the EU, Find Soini

The EU-critical attitude that had been central to the True Finns' politics for several years became a highly visible and useful tool in electoral campaigning in the parliamentary elections of spring 2011 due to the economic crisis (Cf. Niemi 2012, 9-14). Among individual topical issues, the EU financial crisis was the one Timo Soini dealt with most often, especially in his blog entries.[14] "Times will be so tough that rats will be shaking under the bridges,"[15] he claimed. Financial insecurity and debate about the cost Finland would bear for support packages gave him the chance to heavily criticise those who are in favour of support packages and close integration of the EU. The central criticism was that the people were paying but not deciding:[16] "no one is asking the ordinary people."[17]

Soini based his argumentation on the idea of the sovereignty of the people. In his view, only a distinct, sovereign people have the "eternal and unlimited right to always decide freely and independently on all their own issues."[18] The central tenet of populism, i.e., the great and direct influence of the people, appeared to be threatened by the European Union. Soini's criticism of the EU was therefore aligned with the international debate about the EU being a bureaucratic arena for the abuse of power by an unelected elite of officials. This set-up infringed on the people's inalienable right to self-determination (see also Fitzgibbon and Guerra 2010, 275-277).

The True Finns' brand of populism has taken a socio-economic stance that is more leftist than its Nordic cousins, but more conservative in terms of values than left-wing parties. Hence the term "centre-conservative" fits for the party, even if nationalistic, authoritarian features that deviate from the party's centre have increasingly been observed (Ruostetsaari 2011, 143), and the party has also been seen as "nationalist-populist" (Mickelsson 2011, 152-153; see also Borg 2012, 195, 199; Ruostetsaari 2011, 140-143). Because Eurosceptic parties can be found at both the left and the right ends of the political spectrum, the criticisms of the EU that they present are also different. While right-wing parties have focused on national sovereignty and the significance of national identity, the left wing has opposed further integration due to its neoliberal nature and the perceived financial insecurity associated with it (De Vries and Edwards 2009, 6; see also Kriesi 2007, 86). In his critique, Soini presented both aspects. The True Finns' ambivalence about the left-right axis has given the party room to manoeuvre and present their criticism from more than one position.

Corrupted Old Parties, Arrogant Greens, and the Rotten Media Elite

> *"The current decadence and lack of morals of the ruling parties demand a clear alternative."*[19]

Most commonly, Soini has grouped his political opponents under the term "old parties." He was referring to the three largest parties, the National Coalition Party, the Centre Party, and the Social Democratic Party. The key campaign message of the True Finns was smashing the domination of these parties. Very often talk of the old parties was appended with mentions of their "hangers-on," a term Soini used for the smaller parties, especially the Greens, or "the mainstream media."

Because populist politics is not tied to the interests of a certain class, the reasons to support the party must be found elsewhere, for example, in the errors and mis-

deeds of those in power. Because, unlike other isms, populism does not have core values to bind itself to, it can be used flexibly to promote very divergent goals (Cf. Taggart 2000, 3-4). An intrinsic claim by parties campaigning on anti-elitist platforms is that those in power have failed to respond to the needs of 'the people' (Barr 2009, 37). The campaign by Soini and the True Finns was timely, and resonated well with the electorate in declaring the demand for change to be one of their central goals.

The criticism of rival parties was especially reinforced by the recent election funding scandal in Finland. According to Soini, these parties were beset not only by a state of moral decay but also by complacency about power, assumptions of entitlement to power, and hanging on to power.[20] In his rhetoric of juxtaposition Soini produced and maintained solidarity by referring to 'us' and a common enemy.[21] He reminded his readership constantly of how the True Finns were intimidated and demoralised by claims of how the party's supporters took little interest in elections.[22]

In the run-up to the elections, among other similarly-sized parties, the Greens offered the True Finns the best ground to work on for their identity politics. In Soini's writings the Greens represented everything that the True Finns were not, and vice versa. The Greens were envious and arrogant elitists living in ivory towers thinking they were better than others.[23] Timo Soini put forward the True Finns as representatives of 'ordinary' Finnish men and women on the street, also defending their right to self-determination in everyday life, where, for example, motoring, travel abroad, and dietary habits were concerned.[24]

Mistrust and criticism of media publicity and the 'media elite' is common in the parlance of populist parties (see Mudde 2007, 67). Although there are exceptions, populist leaders commonly have good media skills: the ability to manufacture headlines, and to bring the topics of their choice to the fore in the media (Mazzoleni 2008, 49, 55). This characteristic can be described as media agility: the skill to react quickly, to survey the situation and modify the message accordingly, to appeal to the audience's feelings, and so on (Cf. Niemi 2012). Interestingly, while strongly criticising the media, populist leaders commonly feature heavily in media publicity. Timo Soini's speeches and actions contradicted themselves, in that while he constantly criticised the mass media for partiality and mistreatment of the True Finns, he was himself active in the media (Niemi 2012, 15).

The goal of making the distinctions and creating tension is to gather political support by political discourse that draws on discontent (Albertazzi 2007, 335; Cf. Barr 2009, 31-32). At the same time, the idea of common enemies serves to foster a group feeling and to create the sense of a dynamic environment where the party is fighting its way towards victory. Although Soini himself was active in attacking his rivals, he oftentimes adopted the role of an underdog. "The True Finns are under the microscope," Soini claimed. "The stronger your support is, the stronger the opposition,"[25] he analysed.

Leading the Way: Towards Good Partisanship

"The True Finns will win the elections provided we don't muck it up ourselves."[26]

In light of the research materials covered here, leading a populist party appears to be an exercise in the art of balancing. Every possible voter had to be brought on

board, and the pace had to increase all the way up to the elections. After the party's support began to grow enormously, the worst threat seemed to come from their own ranks. As Soini said, victory would be theirs if their own people don't blow this chance.[27] The "line must hold" and people must also be able to stand headwinds,[28] he reminded his troops. The situation called for "a cool head," because the "deluders" were on the move.[29]

> *"You should never lose your nerve in politics. You win the laughs, you win the issue. You lose your nerve, you lose the issue."*[30]

> *"You should look carefully at what you say and especially at what you leave unsaid. Silence is golden."*[31]

The columns Chairman Timo Soini wrote for the *Perussuomalainen* paper emphasised the goal of creating a social bond in political activities. Soini repeatedly instructed his party staff to comport themselves well and pull together. He emphasised dedication, loyalty, respect, and manners, and set his personal devotion as an example. Soini used his own behaviour, which he considered exemplary, to justify his high demands of others: "I demand a lot of our candidates, because I give it my all."[32] He drove his troops to work harder: he admired how the candidates worked fiercely and he thanked the volunteers, but in the same breath he called for more. Everyone had to know their duty.[33] He especially valued selflessness, placing the interests of the party as a whole before personal needs.[34] Furthermore, Soini reprimanded his troops and even punished and rewarded electoral districts by awarding or denying his personal campaign aid according to how peaceably things were handled in each district.[35]

In his role as chairman, Soini tried to restrain his supporters by reminding them that "[u]nhealthy competition, frenzy, and suspicion" would hinder the success of the party as a whole.[36] He spurred candidates to compete even with each other in a constructive spirit.[37] "Honourable tasks must be conducted with honour";[38] "feet must stay on the ground";[39] support is gained by "being worthy of our party,"[40] were Soini's counsel. When shepherding his flock, Soini often came across as a father settling arguments between his children, praising those who resolved issues without acting up.

Interestingly, Soini also justified his position and his style of leadership and took the liberty of guiding his troops through patriarchal scolding:

"A chairman must simultaneously be tough and gentle. The party must be directed, and here one can't please everybody all the time. One must be consistent and fair. Whether the chairman has succeeded is up to the party congress to decide. Its support has been considerable and this is the mandate I have used."[41]

Soini claimed that he led the party in the way his supporters wanted him to: the True Finns "want their chairman to lead."[42] In light of studies on populist leadership, he was right. Populist leadership seems to be met with a particular set of expectations. While the supporters of these parties expect to be heard on matters of importance, they expect leadership above all. The supporters of populist parties seem to prefer leaders who appear to instinctively understand their feelings and needs, rather than those that "listen to the people" (Mudde 2004, 558).

Populist Leadership as the Art of Balancing

"The True Finns have been a good small party. Now we must be a good big party."[43]

This article has looked at Timo Soini's populist political leadership prior to the True Finns' major electoral victory in 2011, specifically, how Soini expressed populist leadership and applied populist strategies to ensure his party's victory in the circumstances of Finnish consensual political reality.

Succeeding in leading a populist party to its historical victory in the circumstances of a Nordic consensual multiparty system called for balancing on several fronts.

A country comparison conducted by Kestilä (2006) indicated that the breeding ground for radical right populism was as fertile in Finland as in most other West European countries. In addition, anti-immigrant attitudes and dissatisfaction with the Finnish political system were most accentuated among older, poorly educated men with no interest in politics. The studies conducted after the general elections of 2011 confirm that the main reasons to vote True Finns were the overall wish to see a change in Finnish politics, a willingness to limit immigration, and a critical attitude towards the EU (Borg 2012, 203-204). Furthermore, the ability to activate passive voters was an important part of the party's success (Borg 2012, 207).

Of the various causes for disappointment among European citizens, discontent about immigration policy has been the strongest asset of right-wing populist parties – even to the extent that their ability to present this criticism has been a basic requirement for their success (Ivarsflaten 2007, 14, 18). It is of interest to note that Timo Soini hardly touched upon the immigration issue; instead the main target of the party was to change Finland's EU policy (see also Niemi 2011, 8, 12). Still, as is characteristic of populist politicians, the world view of 'us' and 'others' was produced by the set-up he promoted.

My argument is that, from this viewpoint, Soini had to find a balance between separate aims. On the one hand, he needed to convince the voters who were critical of immigration that the True Finns was the right party for them. On the other hand, Soini needed to avoid having either the True Finns or himself labelled as hostile or too radical, as that might have frightened another important voter base, the supporters of the True Finns' predecessor (see Toivonen 2011, 86-87, 91). After all, the party's newly-elected parliamentary group also included representatives that were more enlivened about helping the disadvantaged of society than about limiting immigration (Mickelsson 2011, 163). On this front, Soini created a balance mainly by allowing candidates who were critical towards immigration to share their views relatively freely, while the leader himself remained passive on this issue and represented himself as the friend of everyman.

As the leader and the best-known figure of his party, Timo Soini outlined the True Finns' goals and built its identity in public. His message not only justified the significance of the party and described its character, but also encouraged voters to take an active political role among the party's ranks. When campaigning went on, the creation of a social bond among the party's supporters and paternal guidance to ensure an electoral victory became paramount, as the feelings of a group of largely politically inexperienced supporters heated up. While Soini was on the one hand spurring and encouraging his troops on the campaign trail, he tried to regulate

their behaviour on the other. Soini stressed the need for restraint; he created a social bond among the party's supporters in order to foster political activity, sometimes with very concrete instructions, and reminded them of the rules of the game. He asked them to avoid excess, to believe in their cause, and to campaign vigorously.

After the election of 2011, the True Finns, as the only winner of the election and the third largest party in the country, had the apparent possibility to join the Cabinet. However, as the party was not willing to step back from its strict policies regarding the handling of the EU financial crisis, it was impossible to reach a consensus on a government platform and party remained in the opposition. It may seem that the party had a price to pay for its sharp rhetoric during the electoral campaign. Another, more plausible interpretation is that, in regard to EU policies, Soini and his party did not try to create a balance. Joining the Cabinet and being seen as responsible for governmental decisions, especially in a time of economic hardship, might have watered down the party's support base, so on this front party and its leader gave themselves more freedom to utilise populist strategies.

In Soini's rhetoric, the various social elites and those classed with them were tarnished by being estranged from the common people, and by their arrogance and complacency about being in power. In this view, power and remaining in power came across as a negative, because power corrupted those wielding it and separated them from everyday life. One of the interesting contradictions of populism is how these parties also aspire to power and standing in politics, even if they consider that it has been detrimental to other parties.

When Soini described the rotten nature of those in power, he concurrently justified why citizens should take an active part in politics, particularly with the True Finns. He encouraged people to engage actively in politics by presenting several reasons for disappointment with the current state of affairs and those in power, and recommended that voters vent their frustration through the True Finns.

Soini's message for the voters seems well targeted, and Taggart's notion (2000) of the chameleon-like nature of populism holds true also in the Finnish context. In his rhetoric, Soini gave the audience a sense of pride which arose from the simple fact that they happened to be Finns. Being a supporter of the True Finns Party and being a Finn were linked to each other: for a Finn it was 'natural' to be a True Finn and being a True Finn featured all of the positive aspects of being a Finn. Soini's message for (possible) supporters included hope, a sense of togetherness, self-respect, solidarity, and direction.

The tasks of the True Finns have been of a similar nature as, for example, their Swedish counterpart: how to be unique and magnetic enough to attract support from both formerly passive voters and the voters of traditional parties, and how, at the same time, to remain respectable enough to suit the taste of the traditionally somewhat moderate Nordic voter.

Notes:

1. The new official name of the Perussuomalaiset party in English is the Finns Party. This article will use the more commonly used, unofficial, but already established translation 'True Finns.'

2. The daily number of visitors to the the *Ploki* (http://timosoini.fi/category/ploki) was approximately 200 per day, but rose from 1,000 to 2,000 visits after a new entry was published. The record number of visits was 6,000-7,000 after the election victory. (Oral communication by Timo Soini 17 March 2012; information from party office).

3. In addition to the written entries, the *Ploki* also included about 15 other publications – for example, links under 'Timo TV' and 'Radio Soini' – to Soini's public appearances. Audio-visual materials have, however, been excluded from the materials used for this study.

4. The paper's circulation before the election was approximately 5,000, though an election special was printed in far larger numbers at around 200,000 copies. (Oral communication by Timo Soini 17 March 2012; information from party office).

5. 'Yhden miehen show?' ('One Man Show?'), *Ploki* 17/8/2010.

6. 'Ohjelma perustana' ('Basis in the Party Programme,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 11/2010.

7. 'Paluu arkeen' ('Back to the Daily Grind,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 1/2011.

8. 'Vanhat puolueet hermostuvat' ('Old Parties Losing Their Nerve,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 12/2010.

9. *Ibid.*

10. 'Rohkene voittaa vaalit' ('Dare to Win the Election,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 5/2011; 'Vuosikatsaus ja katse uuteen vuoteen' ('Yearly Review and a Look at the Coming Year'), *Ploki* 31/12/2010; 'Hyvä ehdokas' ('A Good Candidate'), *Ploki* 23/12/2010.

11. 'Itsenäiseltä pohjalta vaaleihin' ('Going into the Elections on an Independent Platform,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 13/2010.

12. 'Kiitos ja työ jatkuu' ('Thank You, the Work Goes On,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 2/2011.

13. *Ibid.*

14. E.g. 'Pari sanaa budjetista ja Slovakiasta' ('Some Words on the Budget and Slovakia'), *Ploki* 19/8/2010; 'Hölmöilyä hölöstööpissä' ('Buffoonery in Brussels'), *Ploki* 7/9/2010; 'Irlanti seuraava Kreikka?' ('Ireland, the Next Greece?'), *Ploki* 16/9/2010; 'Kreikka ja Kanada' ('Greece and Canada'), *Ploki* 29/11/2010; 'Missä EU, siellä ongelma' ('Find the EU, Find the Problem'), *Ploki* 16/11/2010; 'Everybody Knows, Portugal Goes,' *Ploki* 24/3/2011.

15. 'Missä EU siellä ongelma' ('Find the EU, Find the Problem'), *Ploki* 16/11/2010.

16. E.g. 'Missä EU, siellä ongelma' ('Find the EU, Find the Problem'), *Ploki* 16/11/2010.

17. 'Kansainvälistä politiikkaa' ('International Politics'), *Ploki* 29/9/2010.

18. 'Vaalit kerrallaan' ('One Election at a Time'), *Ploki* 2/12/2010; 'Kansainvälistä politiikkaa' ('International Politics'), *Ploki* 29/9/2010.

19. Ohjelma perustana (Basis in the Party Programme), *Perussuomalainen* 11/2010.

20. 'Vanhojen puolueiden valtioneuvosto' ('Old Party Cabinet'), *Ploki* 17/10/2010. See also 'Ohjelma perustana' ('Basis in the Party Programme,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 11/2010.

21. On juxtapositions, see 'Vanhat puolueet hermostuvat' ('Old Parties Losing Their Nerve,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 12/2010; 'Haaste ehdokkaille' ('A Challenge to Candidates,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 14/2010; 'Kiitos ja työ jatkuu' ('Thank You, the Work Goes On,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 2/2011; 'Rohkene voittaa vaalit' ('Dare to Win the Election,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 5/2011; On solidarity, see also, e.g. 'Vaalivoiton ainekset ovat kasattuna' ('The Elements for an Election Victory Are in Place,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini). *Perussuomalainen* 16/2010.

22. 'Omaishoito on kynnyskysymys' ('Care for Close Relatives Is an Essential Question,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 15/2010.

23. 'Kateudesta vihreät vihreät' ('The Greens, Green with Envy'), *Ploki* 10/8/2010.

24. *Ibid.*

25. 'Pääministeri- ja eduskuntavaalit' ('Elections for PM and Parliament,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 3/2011; 'Pääministeri ja Eduskuntavaalit,' *Ploki* 16/2/2011.

26. 'Itsenäiseltä pohjalta vaaleihin' (Puheenjohtaja-palsta, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 13/2010.

27. *Ibid.*, 'Independent Basis for the Elections,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini.

28. *Ibid.*, 'Independent Basis for the Elections,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini.

29. 'Vanhat puolueet hermostuvat' ('Old Parties Losing Their Nerve', the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 12/2010.

30. 'Perussuomalaiset – aikaansa edellä' ('True Finns – Ahead of Their Time'), *Ploki* 9/9/2010.

31. 'Oppia vaalikentiltä' ('Lessons from the Campaign Trail'), *Ploki* 21/3/2011.

32. 'Haaste ehdokkaille' ('A Challenge to Candidates,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 14/2010.

33. 'Vanhat puolueet hermostuvat' ('Old Parties Losing Their Nerve,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 12/2010; 'Vanhojen puolueiden vuodeosasto' ('Old Parties' Old Folks,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 10/2010; 'Itsenäiseltä pohjalta vaaleihin' ('Independent Basis for the Elections', the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini). *Perussuomalainen* 13/2010; 'Kiitos ja työ jatkuu' ('Thank You, the Work Goes On,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 2/2011; 'Lämmin kiitos' ('Warm Thanks,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 6/2011.

34. 'Ohjelma perustana' ('Basis in the Party Programme,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 11/2012.

35. 'Haasteehdokkaille' ('A Challenge to Candidates,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 14/2010; 'Vaalivoiton ainekset ovat kasattuna' ('The Elements for an Election Victory Are in Place,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 16/2010.

36. 'Vaalivoiton ainekset ovat kasattuna' ('The Elements for an Election Victory Are in Place,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 16/2010.

37. 'Ohjelma perustana' ('Basis in the Party Programme,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 11/2010; 'Oppia vaalikentiltä' ('Lessons from the Campaign Trail'), *Ploki* 21/3/2011; 'Myllerrystä meillä ja muualla' ('Turmoil at Home and Abroad'), *Ploki* 15/3/2011; 'Kiitos ja työ jatkuu' ('Thank You, the Work Goes On,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 2/2011.

38. 'Haaste ehdokkaille' ('A Challenge to Candidates,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini). *Perussuomalainen* 14/2010.

39. 'Omaishoito on kynnyskysymys' ('Care for Close Relatives Is an Essential Question,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 15/2010.

40. *Ibid.*

41. 'Vaalivoiton ainekset ovat kasattuna' ('The Elements for an Election Victory Are in Place,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 16/2010; see also 13/2010; 'Kolme päivää elämää,' *Ploki* 1/9/2010.

42. 'Itsenäiseltä pohjalta vaaleihin' ('Independent Basis for the Elections,' the 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 13/2010.

43. 'Lämmin kiitos!' ('Warm thanks!' The 'Puheenjohtaja' column, Timo Soini), *Perussuomalainen* 6/2011.

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