

Exploiting the Discursive Opportunity of the Euro Crisis

The Rise of The Finns Party

Outline

- Introduction
- Three-fold ideology
- Finnish elections 2007 & 2011
 - Background
 - Media studies (Pernaa, Railo, Välimäki, Kantola etc.)
 - Finns Party Campaign
 - Manifestos, party newspaper (qualitative analysis)
 - Electoral results
- Discussion

Introduction

- *Perussuomalaiset* (PS), “The Finns”
 - Formerly unofficially the True Finns
 - *Perus*: Fundamental **ordinariness** as a virtue
 - “down-to-earth”
 - “straightforward”
 - Founded in 1995, successor to SMP (Finnish Rural Party, 1959–1995)



Three-fold ideology

1. Populism

- Common people vs. corrupt elite
 - 2007–2011: “People” and “elite” change

2. Social justice

- Strong left-wing defence of welfare state
 - 2007–2011: Toned down

3. Nationalism

- Sovereignty and unity of the people
 - 2007–2011: Amplified

Elections 2007: Consensus and Status Quo

- “Big Three”
 1. Social Democrats
 2. Centre Party
 - Formerly *Agrarian League*
 3. National Coalition
 - Moderate right, conservative
- **Minor differences** in opinion over discussed issues (student benefits, pensions, climate)
 - (Borg & Paloheimo, eds., 2009; Pernaa, Niemi & Pitkänen, eds., 2007)



Ihmiselle hyvä
kautta maan



PERUSSUOMALAISET

Finns Party Campaign 2007: The People

- *The people* = the disadvantaged, the underprivileged
- “For justice, well-being and rule by the people!”
- Party newspaper:
 - “Voice of the Finnish people”
 - “We speak directly, with clear facts”
 - “...the most forgotten ones: the elderly, the disabled and the homeless”
 - “The heartless policies of the government weaken the basic security of people with small and medium incomes, pensioners, families with children, the sick, the handicapped, the unemployed, the precarious workers, students and single parents”

Finns Party Campaign 2007: The Elite

The old parties are “cheating the pensioners” like they “cheated the students”, their representatives “raised their own salaries” and voted to “lower the taxes on the rich”. They are “the parties in power who only remember the rich, the stock option predators and the EU big spenders”, and the “lords who laugh, with their grilled meats and champagne glasses in hand, on the upper mezzanine”, while “the people stumble on the stairs of democracy from one election to another, never making it to the top.” They are teamed up with “EU and domestic bureaucracy”, and their policies support business elites, described as “Big Money”, “rentiers, machine millionaires and cognac drinkers”. (paper)

Finns Party Campaign 2007: Social Justice

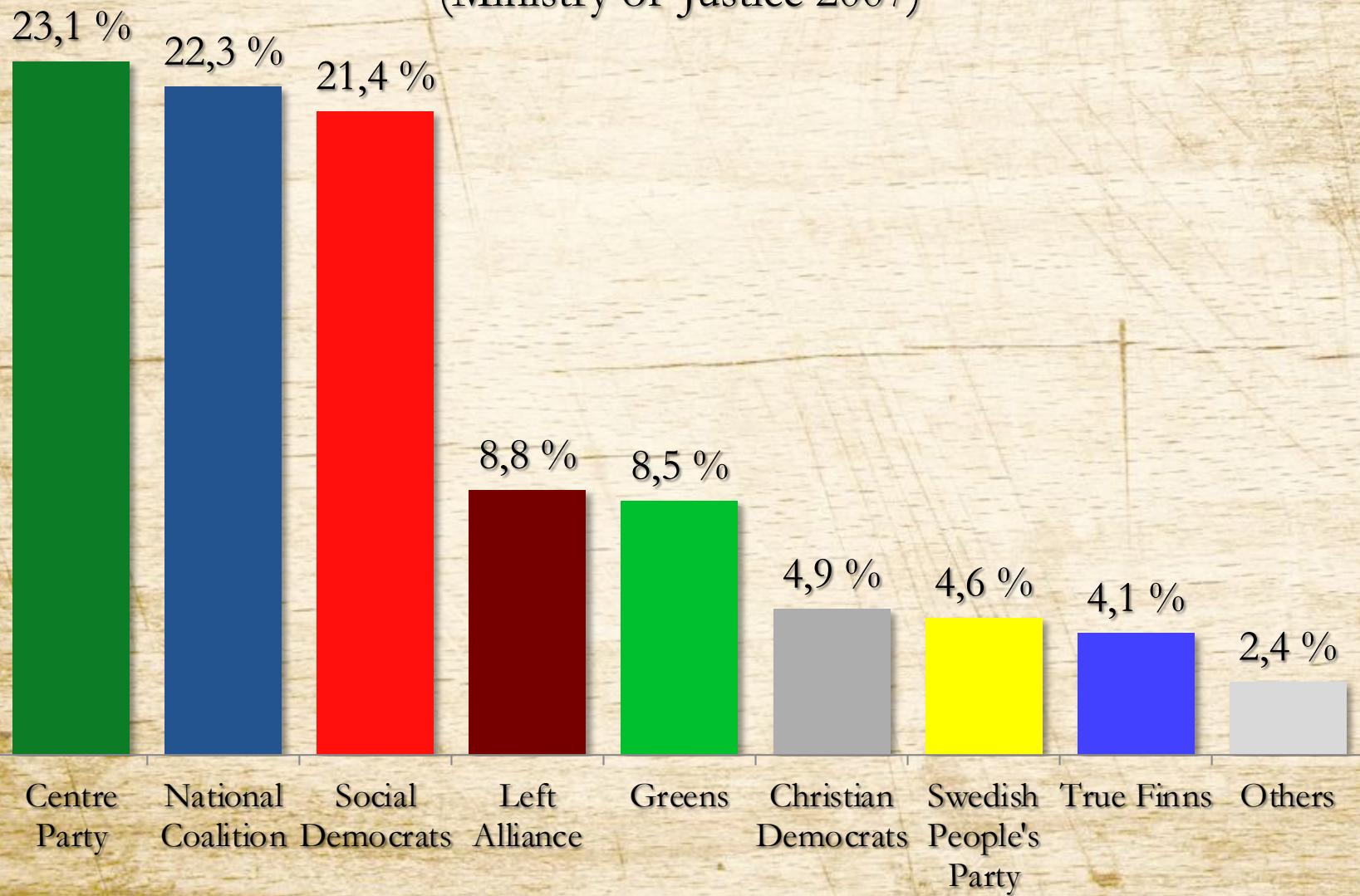
- “Away with poverty!” (paper)
 - “I challenge the powerholders of the old parties in the electoral campaign to debate tax policy. I shall demand a change in the current line of overtaxing work and favouring lazy capital gains” (paper)
 - “Finland has become an ultra-capitalist exploitation society” (paper)
 - ”Accepting poverty and exclusion as normal phenomena represents an Anglo-Saxon tradition of thought, in which the most important function of the state is only to guarantee the free functioning of markets.” (manifesto)

Finns Party Campaign 2007: Nationalism

- **Manifesto: “A minimal EU”**
 - “Citizens’ EU critique has been labelled as resulting from lack of information and irrational. In Finnish, ‘stupidity’.”
 - “Finland must fast-track the refusal of unwarranted claims for asylum so that resources can be directed to helping real refugees, and so that attitudes towards refugees would not tighten unnecessarily.”
- **The youth organization more radical: “no to multiculturalism” (paper)**

2007 Results

(Ministry of Justice 2007)



Elections 2011: Corruption and Crisis

- **Three discursive openings**
 1. Election funding scandal, 2008–
(Kantola, Vesa & Hakala 2011, Mattila & Sundberg 2012)
 2. Euro crisis, 2010–
(Pernaa 2012, Railo 2012)
 3. Immigration debate, 2010–
(Railo & Välimäki 2012a; 2012b)
- “Finns Party phenomenon” one of most reported politics stories 2010–2011, chairman Timo Soini invited to “prime minister debates”
(Pernaa 2012, Railo & Välimäki 2012b)

Olemme valmiit kantamaan vastuuta



Kansanedustaja Pentti Oinonen osallistui Lahja ja Velkko Hurstin hyväntekeväisyysjärjestön järjestämään itsenäisyyspäivän juhliin Helsingin Hakaniemessä.

Finns Party Campaign 2011: Populism

- Analytically defined in manifesto:
 - “The Finns Party is for a populist model of democracy, which means one based on the will of the people, instead of an elitist, that is, bureaucratic model of democracy.”
 - “According to a populist view of democracy, citizens want to choose representatives they agree with and that are able to unite people across different interest groups. In contrast, an elitist view of democracy stresses bureaucratic expertise instead of views and opinions of the people.”
- ***Kansanvalta*** [rule by the people]

Finns Party Campaign 2011: *kansanvalta*

- *kansa* [people, nation] → *kansanvalta* [rule by the people]
 - Instead of *demokratia*, to construct a **populist** and **nationalist** democracy: *A unified nation is the legitimate sovereign.*
- Manifesto:
 - "Community is based on shared values and norms, out of which a society and democracy can be formed. Democracy is rule by the people and is not possible without a people."
 - "The Finns Party wants to defend the popular sovereignty of Finns, which means that the people and the people only, which constitutes its own nation, separate from other nations, has an eternal and unlimited right to always freely and independently decide about all of its own issues."
 - cf. nativism (Mudde 2007, 19), state "belongs" to the native group

Finns Party Campaign 2011: Anti-Euro

- EU incompatible with *kansanvalta*
 - “To assume that the EU could [be] ... a system of popular rule ... we would also need to assume that Europeans could ... become a unified nation. [We] believe it is utter madness...” (manifesto)
 - “We must stop shovelling money under the palm trees”
“You lied and cheated to get into the Eurozone [...] You knew you were cheating.” “[T]he innocent, like the Finns, are made to pay for the silliness of the others.”
“We were tricked into giving money to Greece and Ireland.” “The interests of the Fatherland have been forgotten.” (paper)

Finns Party Campaign 2011: Anti-Immigration

- **Anti-immigration movement**, mobilized online, enters The Finns Party in 2011
- Jussi Halla-aho, *Nuiva vaalimаниfesti*
- Party newspaper:
 - ”Taxpayers’ money is spent on uniting immigrant families, even for their plane tickets. The poor of our own country have been forgotten and their constitutional rights trampled over.”
 - “Finland must not become the place to store asylum seekers whose applications have been deemed unfounded by other countries [...] in the recent weeks and days big crowds of such asylum seekers have entered Finland.”

Some are more extreme...

“Unfortunately, due to unrestricted Muslim immigration, Finland will experience increased amounts of ... discrimination, unbearable arrogance and bad behaviour, hatred, subjugation of women, mutilation of children, sexual harrassment and persecution of minorities, rioting, flag-burning, hullabaloo, drugs, looting, rape, pedophilia, polygamy, child marriages, shame violence, ritual slaughter, punishment by lashing, stoning and other thoroughly repulsive and completely perverse habits and phenomena. Eventually even suicide bombings and terrorism.”

– James Hirvisaari, Finns Party candidate/MP, 4.2.2010

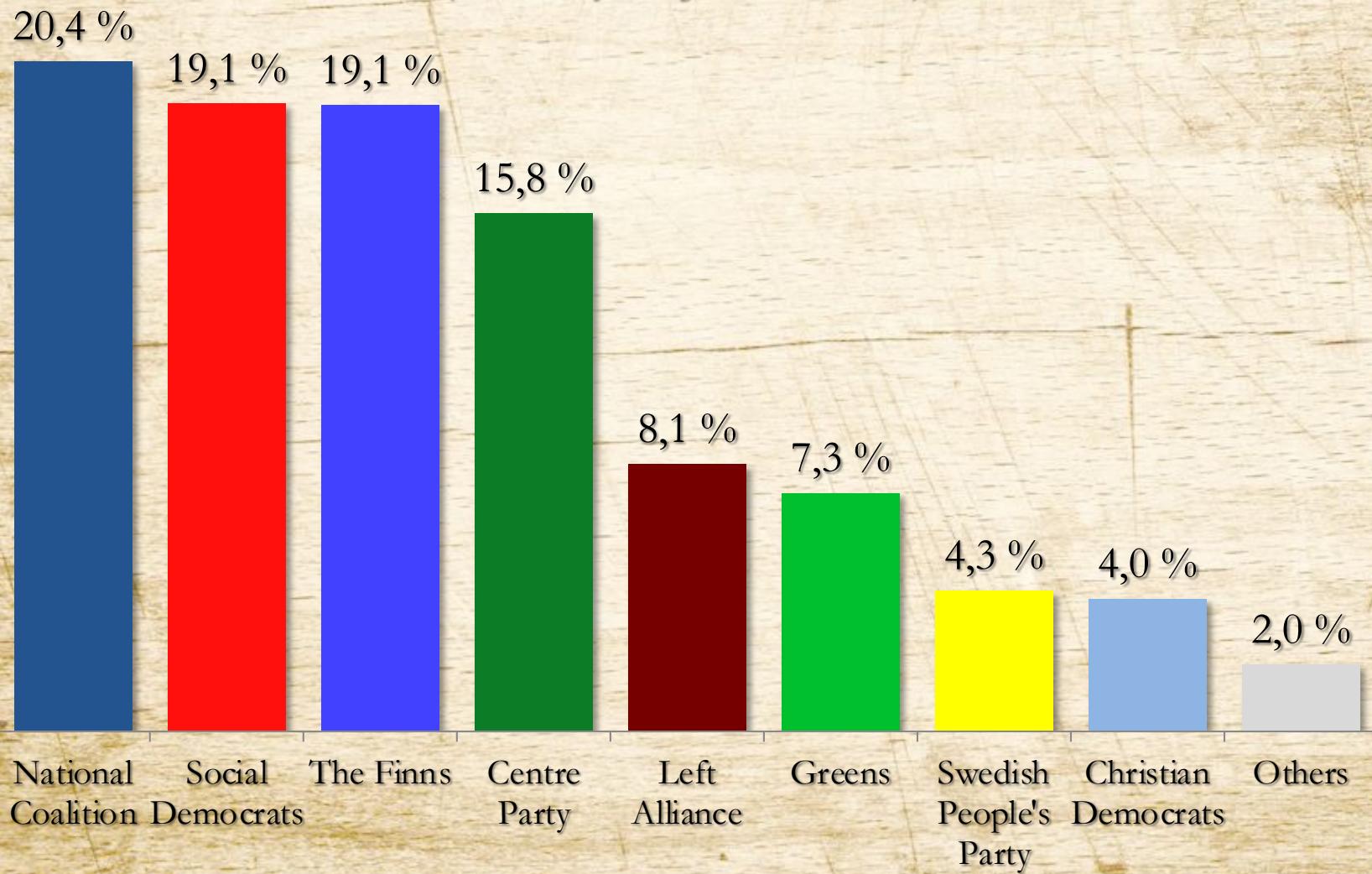


KUHIOSSI!

james.hirvisaari@eduskunta.fi

2011 Results

(Ministry of Justice 2011)



Conclusions

1. Populism

- 2007–2011: *Kansanvalta* analytically defined
- The target enemy shifts: *domestic* → *foreign*
- The **people** is now national, not class-based (cf. Kriesi 2013, 3–4)

2. Social justice

- 2007–2011: Toned down but still there – the enemy that steals the food out of the poor's mouth is now the EU.

3. Nationalism

- 2007–2011: Influx of anti-immigration candidates, immigration stance tightens. Euro crisis facilitates strong critique of Southern EU countries.

Discussion

- Euro crisis intrinsically linked to
 1. **ideological transformation** (nationalism) and...
 2. **...success** (opportunity, appeal) of The Finns Party
- Future research interests:
 - Welfare chauvinism? (e.g. Mudde 2007, Pyrhönen 2013)
 - Welfare & economy arguments popular, vs. immigration & EU
- Populism as a “wake-up call” for a stagnant polity, a productive force? (Kriesi 2013, Canovan 1999)
 - Interpretations of populism context-specific!

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