

Contesting Gender Equality Politics in Finland: The Finns Party Effect

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The Finns Party and Finnish Equality Politics

What are the consequences of far-right electoral success in a country with a strong tradition of equality politics? In this chapter, we juxtapose the politics of gender advanced by the candidates and party publications of the Finns Party with Finnish equality politics.

The right-wing populist Finns Party¹ (Perussuomalaiset [PS]) broke through in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections, more than quadrupling its share of votes (19.1 %); it continued to do relatively well in the 2012 municipal elections (12.3 %), and entered government following the 2015 parliamentary elections with a strong result of 18.2 %. Men are over-represented in the party's electorate (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, 159), as is common with European radical right populist parties (Mudde 2007, 111–112). The gender repartition of candidates is also strongly male-dominated: 66.8 % in the 2011 parliamentary elections, 76.7 % in the 2012 municipal elections, and 64.7 % in the 2015 parliamentary elections (Statistics Finland 2011, 2012, 2015). In the 2011 and 2012 elections, the overall percentage of female candidates dropped. For the municipal elections, this was the first time since the 1950s (Holli et al. 2007, 19–23). This is significant in the Finnish context, where a strong equality discourse has marked party politics since the 1970s. The Finns Party's linked discourses on nationalism and gender challenge the status quo on gender equality and create a counter-trend to recent developments in other parties, both quantitatively and qualitatively (see also Kantola and Saari 2012).

In this chapter, we first present an overview of the rise of the party and the context of the Finnish equality discourse. We then analyse two facets of the Finns Party's rise: the gender gap and the gender discourse. We compare the arguments of the party's male and female candidates on various policy issues, and present a view of the party's gender politics by analysing its publications. The comparative analysis finds that the party's

left-populist elements—stressing social justice and poverty reduction—are more typical of female candidates, while the far-right candidates are mostly men. The analysis of the party's gender politics, in turn, indicates that the party strongly challenges prevailing Finnish conceptions of gender equality.

The Rise of the Finns Party

The Finns Party breakthrough in the 2011 elections was largely a protest against a stagnant political sphere, which had been dominated by three mainstream parties for decades. The euro crisis and a political corruption scandal fuelled the debate; these were served to the Finns Party as if on a silver platter right before the election (Arter 2010; Borg 2012; Mattila and Sundberg 2012; Pernaa 2012; Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015). The growing support for the party also made it a credible alternative to voice objections to immigration, mobilized in particular by a lively online anti-immigration movement. The party was able to mobilize previous non-voters while also attracting voters away from mainstream parties. The Finns Party voters come from all societal classes, but especially from the working class. One of the most notable characteristics of their voter base, however, is its male dominance (Borg 2012; Ylä-Anttila 2012, 2014).

The argument that populism is a backlash against stagnant politics (Canovan 1999; Taggart 2004) fits the Finnish situation rather well. This is not to say that the PS vote could be brushed off as 'just a protest' without political content: it is undoubtedly ideological (Eatwell 2003, 51–52; Kestilä 2006). Anti-elitism and conservatism, frustration with politics in general, and anti-EU and anti-immigrant sentiments in particular were mobilized when the opportunity arose. One feature of the Finns Party's conservative ideology is that it represents an 'alternative' to the dominant gender equality politics. Yet, as our analysis will show, the relationship between the Finns Party and the 'hegemonic gender equality discourse' detected in Finnish politics (Holli 2003) is more complex than it may seem. We argue that the Finns Party is under strong pressure to include women, like many populist parties (see Niemi and Parkkinen 2012), while still emphasizing traditional gender roles. First, however, we will consider the context of Finnish equality politics.

Gender and Equality in Finnish Politics

The Finnish party system and gender equality politics are historically intertwined; the two entered the public sphere nearly in step. Finland was the first European country

to grant women the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1906, followed by municipal elections in 1917. The parliamentary elections in 1907 made Finland the first country in the world to have women MPs (Ministry of Justice 2007, 13). Nevertheless, the early elections and parliaments were largely the domain of men. As late as 1954, only 15.2 % of candidates were women. This gradually increased to 41.2 % in 1991, but dropped slightly to 39.0 % in 2011, together with the rise of the Finns Party (Statistics Finland 2003a, b, 2007, 2011).

While the early developments of the 1900s did not render women's political representation equal to men's (Holli and Kantola 2005, 62), a programme for gender equality in political representation is inherent to the history of Finnish party politics. It has become customary to describe this feature through the concept of state feminism, meaning the plethora of policy issues specifically aimed at improving the gender equality that was included in the Finnish welfare state project, and the strong representation of the women's movement within party politics and state structures (see Kettunen 2008, 128–171; Holli and Kantola 2005, 2007), as illustrated by the importance of strong and independent women's associations within political parties. All major Finnish parties have a women's association, and these associations are all members of the umbrella organization 'Women's Associations in Cooperation' (Naisjärjestöt yhteistyössä ry [NYTKIS]). NYTKIS is a good example of the wide cross-party cooperation between women's party associations and other civil society actors, characteristic of the Finnish field of gender equality politics, and leading to a certain level of consensus in major equality issues (Kantola and Saari 2012, 2, 7). This consensus has been effective in realizing several policies that were considered 'advanced' in terms of gender equality at the time, such as day care for children and a relatively long maternity leave as subjective rights. The consensual cooperation has also established a 'hegemonic' gender equality discourse, providing a means of 'equality education' for newcomers in the field (ibid.).

However, developments in recent decades have revealed that the Finnish style of equality politics is afflicted by an implementation problem: despite lengthy efforts and comprehensive legislation, essential equality indicators such as equal pay, gendered violence, or shared parental leave show stagnation rather than strong progress (Holli and Kantola 2007). The Finnish political sphere has a dual take on gender: on the one hand, gender equality has the status of a hegemonic discourse; on the other hand, implementation of equality policies falls short on multiple levels of governance. Gender discrimination is a difficult issue to discuss, as it tends to provoke deliberate underestimation or even hostile denial (Holli 2003, 2012; Holli et al. 2007; Luhtakallio 2012). This dualism also figures in the Finns Party discourse, as we will show.

The stagnation of contemporary equality politics is shown in women's political representation: the percentage of female electoral candidates began to stagnate in the 1990s and even drop slightly in the 2010s, coinciding with the electoral gains of the Finns Party. The party had more than doubled its number of candidates since the municipal elections of 2008, and 76.7 % of its candidates were men (Statistics Finland 2012). This over-representation of men marks a clear difference from other parties (Fig. 1), especially the Greens, who represent an opposition to the Finns Party on almost any issue (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, 183).

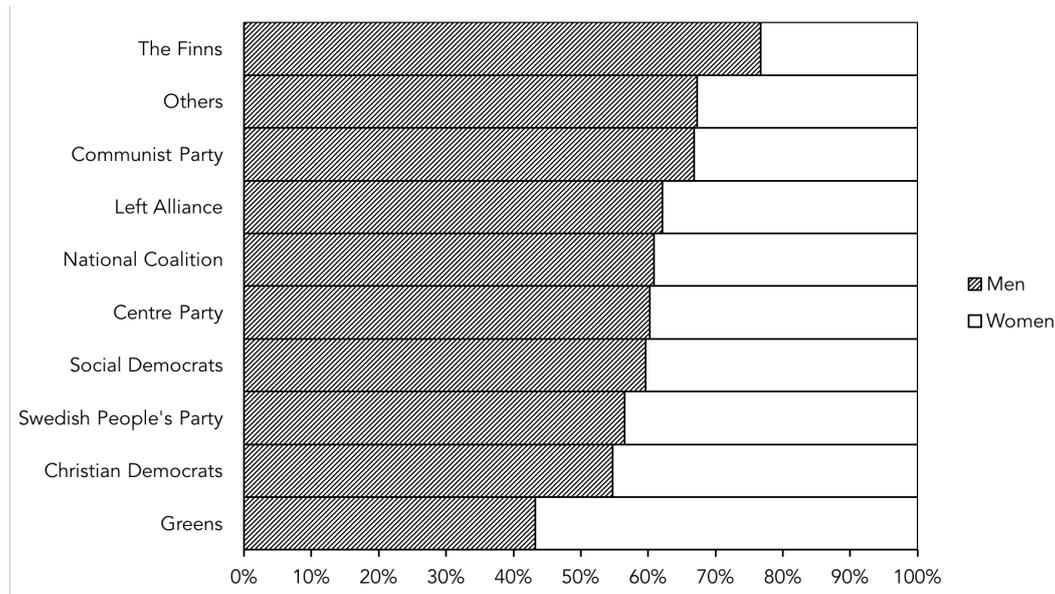


Fig. 1 Gender distribution of candidates by party in Finnish municipal elections 2012 (Statistics Finland 2012)

The elections of 2011 marked a step towards reversing the trend of women as more active voters due to an exceptionally strong mobilization of male voters, as Fig. 2 shows. This is partly explained by the Finns Party (Grönlund and Westinen 2012, 159), which was particularly successful in mobilizing men who did not previously vote (Borg 2012, 196).

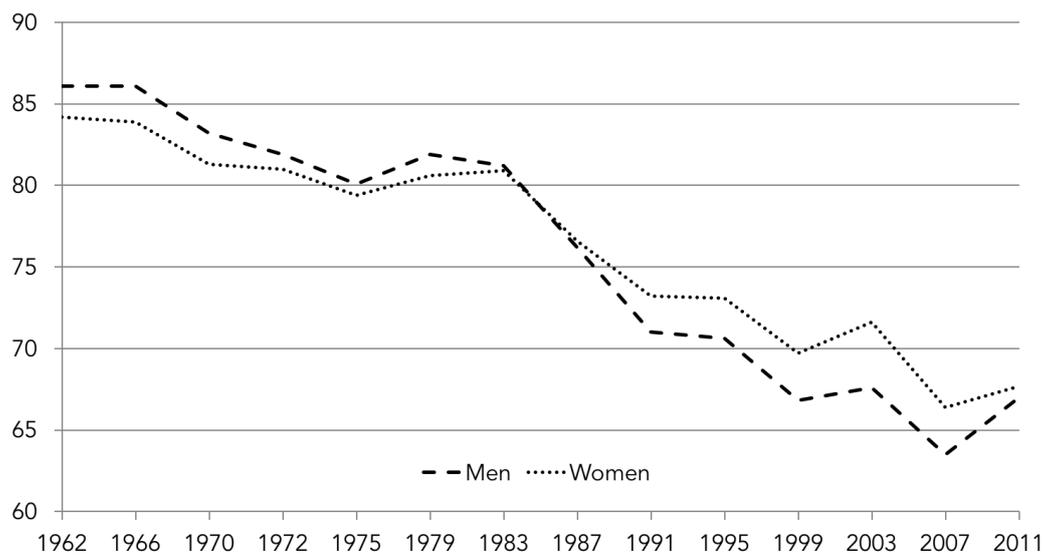


Fig. 2 Turnout (%) in Finnish parliamentary elections by gender, 1962–2011 (Statistics Finland 2007, 2011)

Finnish equality policies and legislation are also facing recurrent problems. Studies on implementation of the gender quota law (Holli et al. 2006) show that attempts to circumvent the law are regular, and civil servants have a tendency to ‘forget’ to implement it (Holli et al. 2006; Holli 2011). A survey (Parviainen 2006, 300–302) found that 54 % of male respondents were ready to abolish the quota law, whereas 74 % of women felt it was a necessary measure. The resistance against quotas was particularly strong among male representatives of right-wing parties.

Nousiainen et al. (2013) suggest that a concept of equality that stresses quantitative ‘factual’ equality, and disregards more complex intersections of power and equality policies, creates conditions for calling into question the legitimacy of equality measures, regardless of their legal status. At least since the 1980s, Finnish equality struggles have been marked by recurrent attempts to deny the existence of gender discrimination (e.g. Holli et al. 2006, 2007; Holli 2011). Furthermore, Kantola and Saari (2012) argue that the emphasis on numerical claims regarding, for example, the representation of genders in the quota law, the ‘women’s euro is 80 cents’ argument in equal pay debates, or the statistics of shelter visits and police intervention in gendered violence, enables problems underlying these phenomena to be concealed along with sources of gender discrimination in cultural practices and political power struggles. In their view, reducing equality to technical arguments about numbers and statistics is a sign of a recent turn towards conservative and right-wing thinking in the Finnish gender equality discourse (ibid.).

In sum, it seems that the new nationalist movement in Finnish politics is led by men and is connected with counter-arguments against the earlier gender equality politics. The hegemonic nature of the discourse on ‘already achieved’ gender equality, however, much of a fiction it may be, makes it a fruitful ground for ‘fresh questioning’ that undermines the legitimacy of equality policies. Next, we will examine how the Finns Party gender politics takes shape in this context.

The Finns Party Gender Gap

What does the male dominance of the Finns Party mean for its politics? Does the political argumentation of Finns Party men differ from that of Finns Party women? We examine this by analysing male and female Finns Party candidates’ arguments in the 2011 parliamentary elections. The dataset we use is the Helsingin Sanomat Voting Advice Application (HS VAA), a website set up by the largest daily newspaper in Finland, designed to facilitate voters’ decisions by a political questionnaire. VAA’s have become very popular among voters in Finland (Mykkänen 2011, 17).

The candidates who responded to the questionnaire also posted free-text comments on the questions, which were released, with the multiple-choice answers, as Open Data (HS 6 April 2011). This dataset offers a substantial body of non-moderated text produced by candidates, especially valuable for studying a populist party that typically accuses the media of misrepresenting their opinions. In this dataset, 202 (84.9 %) out of a total of 238 PS candidates posted written comments. Three questions were selected for analysis, representing left–right and liberal–conservative ideological cleavages. These were questions about income equality, immigration policy, and gay adoption rights, constituting a text dataset of roughly 15,000 words. These texts were qualitatively analysed, coded for recurring arguments and compared by gender.

Left-Wing Women, Right-Wing Men

In the question on income equality—‘Since the mid-1990s, income inequality has increased rapidly. How would you respond to this?’—Finns Party responses predominantly called for levelling income cleavages on the basis of social justice, an argument typical of the political left. Two populist subcategories of this argument were, first, appealing to the injustice experienced by disadvantaged people, and second, condemning the unjust position of elites. Some saw income equality as a matter of national unity, while others still argued, in right-wing fashion, that income cleavages are in fact necessary to encourage competition and reward achievement (Table 1).

Table 1 Arguments by gender for question on income equality^a

	Women (N=48)	Men (N=98)	Difference (Women- Men)
Social justice	56 %	39 %	17 % *
Poverty	42 %	19 %	22 % **
Anti-elitism	17 %	18 %	-2 %
Unity of the people	8 %	10 %	-2 %
Economic competition	0 %	13 %	-13 % *

Comparing respondents by gender, women argued more often for levelling of income cleavages to achieve social justice, but a difference is especially evident in those responses that specifically referenced the distress of the poor; this was more than twice as common among female respondents. ‘The differences in income between the highest earners and the poorest, the “true underclass”, are huge. [...] Income differences invoke despair and pessimism in the poorest part of the people. [...] the poor cannot afford anything but the most necessary of necessities’ (F, 35)².

In the anti-elitist and the nationalist ‘unity of the people’ argument, there was no gender gap. However, only men used the right-wing argument that income cleavages have positive effects. ‘I don’t see differences in incomes as a signal of injustice as such. The problem is not that some earn plenty [...] I believe it is good that a person can get wealthy by honest work [...] This should not be prevented by unduly hard taxation’ (M, 39).

The VAA also contained another question on economic redistribution: whether child benefits should be paid universally or according to income. Here, women again stressed poverty relief, while some men argued that child benefits are a ‘reward’ for mothers for rearing children to uphold the vitality of the nation.

Minority Rights: Mixed Messages of (In)tolerance

The second question we analysed dealt with immigration policy: ‘During the parliamentary term 2007–2011, immigration policy was tightened by several separate decisions. Do you feel that Finland’s current immigration policy is too strict, agreeable, or

^a Some respondents voiced several arguments, which is why the sum of percentages may be more or less than 100 %. **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05 based on a Pearson’s chi-squared test (two-sided tests)

too slack?’ Here, the respondents most often argued in favour of selective immigration that would be economically beneficial for Finland, typically in the form of ‘employment-based immigration’, rating immigrants on the basis of job qualifications. Other recurring arguments included a discursive connection of immigration with crime, demanding the deportation of criminal immigrants. A simple ‘Finns first’ argument was that Finnish politics should focus on the interests of (ethnic) Finns, and an anti-multiculturalist argument was that while a diversity of cultural identities is positive in principle, cultures should be protected from mixing (see, e.g. Betz and Johnson 2004, 316–320) (Table 2).

Table 2 Arguments by gender for question on immigration policy

	Women (N=37)	Men (N=86)	Difference (Women- Men)
Calculation of (economic) effects of immigration	35 %	33 %	2 %
Immigrant criminals	11 %	9 %	2 %
Finns first	11 %	7 %	4 %
Cultural incompatibility / ethno-pluralism	8 %	5 %	3 %

Most notably, we observed the lack of any significant differences. All of the categories identified are uniformly supported by both genders. Male and female respondents are equally critical of Finnish immigration policy and often advocate selective immigration, where immigrants would be evaluated for their potential contribution to the Finnish economy. ‘Finland needs to be open to immigration that is neutral or beneficial in quality. We need to be strict when effects are negative [...] Finland cannot be the social office for the whole world [...] I would employ a citizenship test, a language test and a scoring system’ (M, 24).

The final question analysed addressed adoption rights for gay couples: ‘The Parliament legalized intra-family adoption for gay and lesbian couples in 2009. Should gay and lesbian couples have the right to adoption in general?’ While the most common and repeated argument—‘a child has a right to a mother and a father’—showed no gender gap, the argument of ‘normality’ of heterosexuality and the ‘abnormality’ of gay couples did. Men used this argument three times as often as women. ‘Every child has a biological father and mother. According to my view, an adoption family should attempt to mimic this biologically “normal” arrangement, thus no one should have two mothers or two fathers’ (M, 39).

Women, on the other hand, argued in favour of equal adoption rights for homo- and heterosexual couples roughly twice as often as men, often adding that gender or orientation does not matter as long as the child is cared for. ‘A good father or mother is just that, even if the child is not their own. Being homosexual doesn’t reduce the ability to be a parent. [...] Homosexuals have fought a difficult battle to become accepted: that’s a school [that] undoubtedly gives one an outlook on things different from narrow-minded intolerance’ (F, 43).

Finally, the conservative Christian ‘homosexuality is sin’ argument was mentioned by a handful of men (Table 3).

Table 3 Arguments by gender for question on homosexual adoption rights^b

	Women (N=40)	Men (N=84)	Difference (Women- Men)
Child has a right to a mother and a father	25 %	26 %	-1 %
Heterosexuality is normal	10 %	31 %	-21 % *
Equal rights for gays	30 %	14 %	16 % *
Gayness is sin	0 %	6 %	-6 % *

In sum, female Finns Party respondents expressed left-wing views on social justice, and poverty reduction in particular, more often than men. In contrast, only men used the right-wing argument that income cleavages enhance economic competition. The majority of both male and female candidates opposed immigration, and justified this with economic or cultural arguments or by connecting immigration with crime (see, e.g. Eatwell 2003; Hainsworth 2008; Mudde 2007). On the issue of gay adoption rights, the women of the party are more liberal. This shows that the connection between gender and far-right attitudes matters for the party: its hard-line right-wing policy seems partly to be a product of its male majority.

The Finns Party Gender Discourse

From the gender gap, we now turn to the gender discourse the party puts forward. We analysed how gender and equality politics figure in texts aimed both at supporters and at the wider public: the public material of the Finns Party women’s organization, the party’s electoral manifestos and the party magazine. To match the above analysis of the

^b ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05 based on a Pearson’s chi-squared test (two-sided tests)

2011 VAA, we chose the electoral manifesto of the 2011 parliamentary elections and volumes 2011 and 2012 of the party magazine *Perussuomalainen*.³

'Women, Not Feminists'

The women's organizations of all Finnish mainstream parties (The National Coalition, the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, the Green League, the Left Alliance, the Swedish People's Party and the Christian Democrats) state their mission in very similar terms, being mainly concerned with advancing gender equality in politics and in society. On the websites of all organizations except the Finns Party, the first paragraph of the introduction contains the terms 'gender equality' or 'feminism'. The stated *raison d'être* of the Finns Party Women diverges from this: 'The goal of the women's organization is to gather together on a Christian social basis, and in cooperation with the party, those population groups whose interests and socially, economically and socially equal status have not been justly taken care of' (Finns Party Women 2012).

Only after listing seven population groups in need of 'more equality', including families, pensioners and the unemployed, none of which are specified in terms of gender, the website portrays five missions that aim at the aforementioned goal: 'creating a national network of women', 'promoting women's equality and general economic and social benefits', 'advancing the value of women's work in the contexts of society and the home as well as the changing labour environment', 'developing the maternity leave system and pension security', and 'defending the right of children to a safe and humane growing environment'.

Except for these missions that directly concern women, the organization's material stresses issues that are of general importance to the party. It highlights the significance of 'family values', and emphasizes equality between socio-economic and age groups rather than genders. In the party magazine, the chairwoman of the organization, Marja-Leena Leppänen, emphasizes that Finns Party women want to cooperate with men and be 'women, not feminists' (parliamentary elections issue 2011). The Finns Party Women's promotion leaflet strengthens this image, giving special emphasis to motherhood and caring, such as caring for elderly relatives, and associated social policies. In addition, women's entrepreneurship receives attention.

In the Finnish party subsidy system, around 10 % of the state subsidy is allocated to each party's women's organization (Ministry of Justice 2009; Finnish Government 2013). The party loses this share of the subsidy if it does not have a women's organization. The Finns Party Women's chairwoman admits in an interview in the party magazine (parliamentary elections issue 2011) that this is indeed the reason why the

organization was founded and exists—to qualify for the subsidy. She adds that this is ‘just like in all other parties’, which is not the case: other women’s party organizations were founded well before the subsidy came into effect—most of them decades ago. For instance, the history of the Social Democrats’ women’s organization (founded in 1900) dates back to the struggle for women’s right to vote (Social Democratic Women 2013).

Traditionalism Meets Hegemonic Gender Equality?

Gender issues are few in the texts of the women’s organization. Also, the 2011 electoral manifesto rarely addresses gender explicitly, even though it deals with diverse policy issues, including immigration, the EU, social and health issues, special needs of war veterans, the elderly, families, and so on. An exception is the question of parental leave, which the manifesto addresses by calling for an even division of the expenses between the employers of both parents.

Nevertheless, gender issues are important in the parts of the manifesto which deal with the party’s vision of the role of the family in a society. They outline how the family should be connected to the notion of nationhood: ‘The family is the basic unit of society and children are the future of the nation’. Initiatives to increase fertility are endorsed, and ‘marriage is meant to unite a man and a woman’. It follows that the idea of gay marriage as an equality issue is turned down.

In the Perussuomalainen party magazine, gender equality does figure as a recurrent theme. The president of the organization has a column in several issues, and reports on the women’s organization are frequent. Articles describe the organization’s annual meetings and festivities, as well as events organized by its local subsections. Additionally, women in active campaign work for the party get publicity in the magazine. The tone is often ‘empowering’, and the general message suggests that women should be encouraged to join the party activities in greater numbers. The headlines are full of enthusiasm: ‘The Finns Party Women Lapland: Power isn’t given, it has to be taken!’ (12/2011), ‘Feminine energy on the road’ (9/2012), or ‘Women with an important cause: the Finns Party Women rolled up their sleeves and addressed societal problems in the Kemi spring meeting’ (10/2012). The value of women’s work for the party is emphasized, and the women themselves are described rather solemnly, for example: ‘The Finns Party Women don’t run wild at celebrities’ parties, and no scandal headlines will be written [about] us. We are ordinary, or lone wolves, we are women, spouses, mothers and grandmothers. We are women who, year after year, work for the party for the sake of [the] common good along with running the everyday routines’ (9/2012).

Equality is addressed in some stories, and the argument is in line with the typical hegemonic equality discourse we described previously, that is, equality is a national Finnish virtue that should be fostered and enhanced when it is in need of (small) amendments. However, mentions of gender equality politics are rare and often accompanied by ‘pleasant’ stories to ‘soften’ the topic, like in an article about the Lapland subsection’s drive in which gender equality is discussed while distributing sweets: ‘The Finns Women of Lapland delighted people on the slope of the Levi fell by distributing a thousand and one chocolate kisses on Women’s Day, March 8th. With cheerful spirits and smiles, everybody got a kiss regardless of age, nationality, or gender. The theme of The Finns Party Women was a woman’s life course. Sharing the expenses of parenthood, decrease in university intake, unemployment, entrepreneurship, and EU politics were discussed. Women’s equality is in reality still unaccomplished. Domestic work and the burden of family responsibilities stop many women from being active, for example, in party politics’ (5/2012).

The quotation repeats a recurrent feature of the Finnish political discourse on equality in general, that is, the idea of equality as a state of things that can be accomplished once and for all, instead of equality as a process or an ever-ongoing struggle (e.g. Holli et al. 2007). The examples given of the ‘problems’ that prevent equality from being realized are all directly related to motherhood. The emphasis on the joyfulness of the event and the humoristic allusions to kisses in the story are typical of articles reporting on women’s organization activities—they serve to render the issues discussed sympathetic and perhaps less likely to trigger conflict within the party.

Such a discursive technique is in use when the magazine reports on the annual meeting of the women’s organization, a rather undramatic proceeding described very matter-of-factly—the sitting president continues and a new board is elected—but at the end, the reporter describes how, during the evening’s festivities, the women are invited to dance by ‘willing, courteous local gentlemen’ who are delighted to be cavaliers to Finns Party ladies (15/2012).

Women Are Welcome, But Gender Doesn’t Matter

A recurrent theme in Perussuomalainen articles is the importance of women for the party and the good treatment they get, especially from party leader Timo Soini. He is portrayed as a (god)father figure who extends special protection to women party activists. As the president of the women’s organization recounts in one of her columns, he welcomes a women’s delegation to Brussels with a warm hug, encourages women to continue the good work, and ‘also knows how to listen’ (16/2011).

However, few women are in the party, the magazine highlights them with both words and images. The majority of these stories and pictures are not connected with gender equality issues, but create the impression that women have a front row seat in the party (see Niemi and Parkkinen 2012). ‘Finns Party women improve the quality of politics’ (3/2011), states the magazine, and then presents a variety of stories that repeat this message, without, however, going into further detail on how the party’s politics may or may not be affected by the work of women activists.

On the one hand, the party’s gender discourse builds on a repeated insistence that women are and should be welcome to be active in the party. On the other hand, it stresses that gender actually does not matter at all. The following story about women members of a local party association in eastern Finland captures the paradox: ‘We have been accepted in the party with a lot of encouragement, and they have even made room so that women have been able to join the activities. I could say that womanhood has been a sheer benefit in this regard. [...] Men have quickly included women in the tasks of the party district. Women have been active themselves and have shown with their own work that they can take responsibility for things. [...] “Talking business and taking matters forward does not have to do with gender”, says one of the party veterans. [...] The Finns Party Women of Etelä-Savo [...] find equality between genders in the party, both in the district and on the part of the party leaders, so self-evident that they have never even thought about the matter’ (5/2011).

Women have been included, they feel welcome, men have happily ‘made room’ for them, and women have shown that they are worthy of the room given—and yet, gender ‘does not matter’, so much so that no one has ever given it a thought. The above quotation seems to portray the negotiation of a peaceful resolution of the ‘gender issue’ between the party activists: a male party veteran confirms that doing politics is gender neutral, and the women state that gender equality is not an issue of any importance. Furthermore, the story insinuates a critique of the ‘traditional’ conception of equality and positions gender equality as an old-fashioned concern.

Men’s Rights

Finally, *Perussuomalainen* magazine often treats gender and equality issues via discussions about child-care politics—and men. The debate on the Finnish child-care subsidy system gains plenty of attention. The coverage is univocal: the right to an allowance for home care of children gains unquestioned support, and strong appreciation of stay-at-home mothers is voiced. Home care is ‘cost effective’ (6/ 2012), and being a stay-at-home mother is ‘a precious title’ (13/ 2012).

Interestingly, discussions on fatherhood and child-care also get significant attention. These stories bring forward an important feature of the Finns Party equality politics. Whereas women's importance in the party is emphasized in multiple ways, as shown above, societal gender equality problems that particularly concern women, such as unequal pay or violence against women, are mainly ignored. In contrast, the question of fatherhood is directly linked to a discussion on men's rights in society and the need to promote men's equality. A story that reports on the founding of the Finns Party men's organization *Perusäijät*, 'Ordinary Blokes', depicts a man washing the bottom of a newborn baby: 'The ordinary bloke does not give in easily! The ordinary Finnish man sings at a karaoke night "I will never give in..." At home, it's a different story. Tough brute on the exterior, yet the ordinary bloke bends but does not break. In a tough spot, even a male may breed. A hardened shovel of a hand holds the newborn baby with tenderness. [...] "Everything works except breastfeeding", said a metal worker from Rauma, father of the newborn Nuppu' (15/2012).

The language the article uses to describe the man taking care of the baby is striking: the 'tough brute' and his 'hardened shovel of a hand' echo a 'good old' working class masculinity that is contrasted with the newborn baby girl Nuppu (Blossom). The story continues with an anti-feminist argument of equality 'gone too far' and claims that the party men's organization is needed to ensure that men are not discriminated against and women favoured 'in the name of equality'.

To recapitulate, gender equality issues are not addressed in the party manifesto, and it instead presents the traditional nuclear family as central to the vitality of the nation. In the party magazine, women feature strongly, and gender is often presented as the reason for writing about them; they are on display to show that there are active women in the party. The stories stress their activities as women, but womanhood often equals motherhood and other traditional caregiver roles. Gender equality politics is often labelled old-fashioned or in need of a 'new' perspective, that is, men's rights. Nevertheless, women's visibility in politics and men's right to stay at home with their children are topical questions of gender equality, and it is not without importance that the Finns Party magazine grants them space on its pages.

Conclusions

In this article, we have explored the Finns Party from a gender perspective and juxtaposed our findings with what previous studies have taught us about Finnish equality discourses and politics. The landslide electoral gains of a male-dominated and conservative Finns Party coincide with stagnating women's representation in Finland, and

with a conservative turn in discourses on equality. We have shown how these developments resonate within the Finns Party by comparing the male and female candidates' opinions, and by analysing the gender discourses the party's publications portray.

There is indeed a gender gap in the party: women stress social justice and the rights of the disadvantaged in a left-wing vein. However, in terms of immigration politics, the Finns Party women and men follow the same line of thought, and opposition to immigration unites the party.

Our reading of party materials shows that Finns Party gender politics are conservative, if not outright anti-feminist. The prevailing conception of gender leans on traditional roles in representing women and men. The *Perussuomalainen* magazine does give women a special place in party publicity, but the role is mostly a supporting one: women confirm and prop the canon of the party. Gender equality is conceptualized either as society's support of motherhood, an accomplished fact, or, in some cases, through men's roles and rights as fathers.

In sum, we suggest, firstly, that populist right-wing politics and an antifeminist political agenda are linked in several ways in Finland today. Despite men forming the majority of Finns Party candidates and voters, and being responsible for the most right-wing attitudes within the party, Finns Party women also refrain from supporting a feminist agenda in equality politics or politics that aim at dismantling power structures behind discriminatory practices, such as gendered violence or unequal pay. Secondly, the Finns Party equality discourse challenges Finnish state feminism by using features of the 'hegemonic' gender equality discourse. Conceiving equality as a matter of national pride, something already or nearly achieved, enables belittling gender discrimination and concealing power structures that cause gender inequality because they cannot possibly exist in a country that 'has gender equality'. In this regard, the Finns Party represents a backlash to gender equality politics in Finland, and its electoral gains can be seen in part as the victories of a new wave of masculinist politics.

Finally, while the Finns Party attempts to include more women to continue its electoral success, we can speculate on the effects of the potentially growing role of women in the party. On the one hand, the women's organization's participation in NYTKIS is likely to spread know-how on equality politics among the Finns Party women. This, combined with the Finns Party women's more left-wing opinions compared to men, indicates that an increase in the number of women could pull the party in a more liberal direction. On the other hand, there are signs that after electoral success, the party has rather moved even further towards the socially conservative far right (e.g. Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015). Politicians with conservative gender agendas may further challenge Finnish state feminism by using a dualist equality discourse—where equality as

a norm is taken as a given, while the existence of actual problems is denied. The Finns Party and its women may play an important role in this, as they emphasize ‘already achieved’ equality, the traditional conception of women as caregivers, the party’s male leadership and men’s rights.

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Notes

¹ Previously often translated as the True Finns, Ordinary Finns or Basic Finns, Perussuomalaiset adopted the official English name The Finns after receiving international media attention (HS, 21 Aug. 2011). The word perus refers to fundamental ‘down-to-earth’ ordinariness as a virtue.

² The gender and age of the candidates are portrayed.

³ Seventeen issues of Perussuomalainen magazine were published in 2011, and 16 issues in 2012. An average issue contains 24–28 pages and 42 articles, including feature stories, interviews, political columns, commentaries and opinions. We read through titles, introductions and subtitles in the 2011 and 2012 volumes. If any of these indicated that the story touched upon equality politics and/or gender-related issues, we included the article in our corpus. We found and analysed 47 gender and/or equality-related articles. We looked at the general themes these articles treated, as well as the recurrent discursive techniques used to address gender and equality. We will refer to the magazine by no. of issue/year of publication.