

PROGRESSIVE ANSWERS TO POPULISM IN FINLAND

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Introduction

During the last decades, the Finnish political system had been dominated by the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, and the National Coalition party. In the parliamentary election of 2015, this habitual political triangle was shaken by the one and only genuinely populist political party, the Finns Party. The party received 17.7% of the votes, making it the second largest party in the Finnish multiparty system. The Finns Party entered into the government in coalition with the Centre Party and the National Coalition party. This new role induced many changes in the Finns Party tactics. Their participation in the government also created platform for a more radical right-wing inside the party, and finally the party split during the summer 2017. This division created two populist parties, one with even more far-right orientation, but also with less support. In the latest polls the support for right-wing populism in Finland has fallen to 10 percent. The other consequence of the split resulted in a new type of Finns Party, which resembles to right-wing populist parties in Sweden (Sweden Democrats) and in Germany (Alternative for Germany).

Short history of Finnish populism

Contemporary populism in Finland basically equal to the **Finns Party**, previously known as the **True Finns** (In Finnish *Perussuomalaiset*, PS). The Finns Party is a political movement with a strong nationalist ideology, founded in 1995 following the dissolution of the Finnish Rural Party, the first clearly populist political movement in Finland.

The Finnish Rural Party had been the first genuinely populist party in the country, which was found in 1959, as a breakaway faction from the Centre Party (called the Agrarian League at that time, founded in 1906). It was a new movement to answer the intense urbanisation and structural change of the Finnish society and economy in the 1960s. Finland was converting from an agrarian society into an urban, industrial and service-based one, accompanied by a liberalisation of social norms and the mainstreaming of mass media.⁴³ As other agrarian parties, The Finnish Rural Party worked to respond new societal challenges and changes in people's everyday life by catering increasingly not only the small farmers of rural areas but also many urban voters that had moved to the suburbs. In its new kind of populist rhetoric, the Rural Party spoke about "the forgotten people", referring to the underprivileged victims of urbanisation, specifically small farmers and new kind of marginalised groups outside the biggest urban centres of the country. In the Rural Party rhetoric, "people's enemy" was the political and economic elite in the cities, the "money power", which Veikko Vennamo – the Finnish Rural Party founder and the populist founding father in Finland – famously referred to as "crime lords".⁴⁴

43 Ylä-Anttila 2017, Palonen & Saresma 2017, 19-22
44 Soini 1988: 23–40; Ylä-Anttila 201: 25-27.

Timo Soini, the Finns Party leader from 1997-2017, armed with his charm of “a common man”, adopted a lot from the Rural Party’s and Vennamo’s political vocabulary. Soini had studied Finnish populism and the Rural Party was already in the focus of his MA thesis in political studies.⁴⁵ He managed to modernise this populist tradition, but at the same time, his party started to adopt new right-wing (immigration) policies too. This new type of populism was clearly visible in the municipal and parliamentary elections of the 2000s, when the boxer and wrestler Tony Halme from East-Helsinki’s eastern urban neighbourhood appeared on the lists of Finns Party as an independent candidate, with clear anti-immigration attitudes. Halme was elected MP from 2003 to 2007 and started and continued his political career with continuous media scandals (using of drugs and illegal gun, for example). This behaviour was largely accepted by Timo Soini because people like Halme brought a new kind of support for the party. Halme-kind of media persons attracted many people in the suburbs – with active appearance in the yellow press (and some even with Nazi sympathies). They were thought to be persons who “dare to say things as they are”, even though there were also critics to the racist tendencies inside the party. Timo Soini was still able to control all the fractions of the party, and with this new kind of urban and local profiles, the Finns Party started to significantly increase its support at the election in 2011 and 2015.

The Finns Party has also managed to win over large segments of the society living in regions of traditional Finnish forest industry. In this process, we can observe various similarities to President Donald Trump’s campaign among the US Rust Belt blue-collar workers. The structural global changes and feeling of social uncertainty is often behind the success of new kinds of populist movements. In Finland,

45 Soini 1988

the economic crisis after 2008, and especially the closure of various paper factories and pulp mills – at the same time as lot of Finnish pulp production moved to China and Latin America – changed the voting behaviour of traditional Social Democratic workers. The populists' adaptation of traditional leftist anti-neoliberal and anti-globalisation rhetoric was quite efficiently combined with the simplified idea that by closing the borders, the Finnish industry can keep its workplaces. Many voters of traditional industrial regions – and also from the countryside – have also adapted the Finns Party immigration antipathy. The EU, the immigration, and the global liberal politics has become a useful “enemy” of the populists. These were, according the Finns party, platforms where “elites” want to define the life of normal Finnish people. Critique was targeted also to classical left-wing parties – especially to their traditional international solidarity towards others, as Muslims, refugees and migrants.

Finns party grows and becomes part of government coalition (2011-2017)

In the 2011 parliamentary elections – held during the aftermath of the European economic crisis – the Finns party won 19.1% of votes, and became, surprisingly, the third largest party in the Finnish Parliament. The state of the Eurozone – and the heated media discussion about the economic crisis in Greece and Portugal – gave the Finns Party an opportunity to frame the situation as a serious challenge for Finland and for the Finnish national sovereignty. The Finns Party also to present itself as a serious populist challenger to established “old” parties.⁴⁶

46 Borg, 2012; Arter 2010; Kuisma 2013, Ylä-Antila & Ylä-Anttila 2015

Again, in the next elections in 2015, the party got 17.7% of the votes, making them this time, the parliament's second largest party. In 2015, the ongoing "refugee crisis" in Europe triggered extra support for the party, and also the party's very popular leader Timo Soini attracted many traditional voters from the left and the right.⁴⁷ In his rhetoric and media appearances, he has always seemed very successfully as the "man of the people".⁴⁸

Before these two latest elections, the Finns Party was small (between 1 and 5%), and it was in opposition for the first 20 years of its existence. Even though there were strong pressures and possibilities in 2011 to be part of the government after their surprise victory, the so-called "Jytky" (a new word in Finnish political vocabulary, meaning "huge bang"), the Finns Party stayed in opposition. The party joined the government only after 2015 for the first time, together with a centrist and a conservative party (the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party), in a coalition lead by the Centre Party Prime Minister Juha Sipilä.

47 Ylä-Anttila & Ylä-Anttila 2015.

48 Niemi 2012

Table 7 - The Finns Party in parliamentary elections

| Election | Votes | % | Seats | +/- | Rise of Position |
|----------|---------|-------|----------|-----|-------------------|
| 1999 | 26,440 | 0.99 | 1 / 200 | | 9 th |
| 2003 | 43,816 | 1.57 | 3 / 200 | ▲2 | ▲8 th |
| 2007 | 112,256 | 4.05 | 5 / 200 | ▲2 | - 8 th |
| 2011 | 560,075 | 19.05 | 39 / 200 | ▲34 | ▲3 rd |
| 2015 | 524,054 | 17.65 | 38 / 200 | ▼1 | ▲2 nd |

Source: https://www.vaalitutkimus.fi/en/eduskuntavaalien_tulokset.html

Party splits

In June 2017, the Finns Party hold a very dramatic party conference, when its undisputed leader and Sipilä’s government’s foreign minister Timo Soini announced his resignation from the movement’s presidency. The protégé of Timo Soini, Sampo Terho, and Jussi Halla-aho, a member of the European Parliament with harsh anti-migration profile, ran for the leadership. Halla-aho had skilfully organised a movement behind the scenes that guaranteed his victor, and on 10 June 2017, he became the elected leader of the Finns Party. Leaders of the Centre Party and the Conservative Party immediately announced that they would not continue the government coalition with the Finns Party as Halla-aho was charged with incitement to racial hatred and was convicted of breach of the sanctity of (the Muslim) religion. Subsequently, twenty Finns Party MPs, including Soini, one of the party’s founding fathers, defected to form a new parliamentary group under the name **New Alternative**. All cabinet ministers were among this group of defectors. For a few days, it looked that

Sipilä's government coalition was about to break apart, but Soini and the New Alternative group agreed to continue staying in the government coalition.⁴⁹ This group, consisting of the more social reformist and not openly racist former members of the Finns Party, formed later, in November 2017, a new party called Blue Reform Party. This party has five ministers in Sipilä's government and their current support in opinion polls has been between 1-2%. At the same time, the old Finns Party, with a new and strengthened anti-migration profile has had 8-10% support in polls since the split.

In short, the division of the Finns Party in 2017 created a new Finns Party, which resembles quite a lot to right-wing populist parties in Sweden (Sweden Democrats) and in Germany (Alternative for Germany). This party holds the old name, Finns Party, while the small Blue Reform Party desperately searches new topics and electorate support but, apparently, the movement is without future in the Finnish political map.

The Blue Reform Party has transformed into a silent supporter of Sipilä's government, supporting the coalition's neoliberal working life and health system reforms. In short, after the split of Finns Party, both of its inheritors, the new anti-migration Finns Party, and the Blue Reform Party, have shifted to the right. Based on the opinion poll numbers, this shift has also affected negatively their electoral support.

49 Nurmi 2017, 247-272

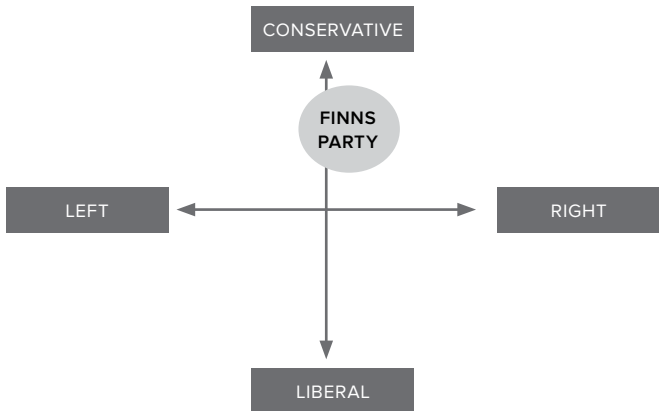
Finnish populism on the political map

The Finns Party is a unique movement in European context. The originally very rural party combines social democratic or left-wing welfare state economic policies, with traditional conservative values, such as homeland security, Lutheran religion⁵⁰ and ethnic Finnish nationalism. On the other hand, the value-conservativeness of the party has been repeatedly challenged by various media scandals of its members of parliament – such as drunkenness, violent and macho behaviour or racist comments. Although, many researchers describe the Finns Party as economically left-wing and socially conservative, as a “centre-based populist party” or the “most left-wing of the non-socialist parties”, there are many right-wing populist elements in the party’s programme and ideology. The party’s leaders and voters predominantly describe themselves as “centrists”. The party has drawn people from left-wing parties, but many features of their program – especially anti-migration aspects – have attracted supporters from conservative and centrist parties. The Finns Party share values of most populist right-wing parties in Europe, especially in terms of euroscepticism and anti-globalisation.⁵¹ Its economic policies support welfare state – but restricting its services to “ethnic Finns”. In the European Parliament, the Finns Party belongs to the European Conservative and Reformist Group where it co-operates with parties like the Conservative Party of the United Kingdom, Law and Justice of Poland and the Sweden Democrats.

50 A remarkable fact is that the Finns Party’s most famous leader, Timo Soini, is an active Catholic – in Finland, where 70 % of the population is Lutheran and less than 1% Roman Catholic. In this way, he represents “the others” in the Finnish political scene.

51 Kuisma 2013

Graph 1 - Values of the Finns Party in a political map



Source: HS <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000002818175.html>.

The party ideology in a nutshell

Because of the Finns Party electoral success of 2011 and 2015, and because of its split in 2017, populism has become a hot political issue in Finnish political life. The party members have directed important ministries in Juha Sipilä's coalition, and they are followed with special interest in Finnish media. To produce analytical, objective academic understanding of the Finns Party, without bias by heated public debates, especially in social media, has proven to be quite complicated. Finns Party members' comments are often quite aggressive, polarising, and incite "dramatic responses on purpose, as it divides citizens into the

‘people’ and its enemies”.⁵² As for other populist movements, the enemies of the Finns Party supporters are the traditional elite and media, as well as the immigrants and refugees. Also, feminists, Swedish speaking Finns and homosexuals have often been targeted by Finns Party supporters.⁵³

As often in populist movements, the “hidden ideology” of the party is not pronounced clearly in its official descriptive documents⁵⁴. It has to be looked for in acts and everyday politics, not in the softened official texts formulated to be suitable for all possible voters. The Finns Party itself informs in its official web pages that the party’s *platform and policy is built on work ethics, entrepreneurship, and a balanced social welfare system linked to Christian values*. This kind of agenda could be easily found in many traditional Christian or conservative parties.

The Party underlines that it has *support from all sectors of the political spectrum and defies being put into any traditional left-right pigeon hole*. It states that it seeks *rational solutions with emphasis on activism and creativity while maintaining respect for both social and individual responsibility*. It further says it is oriented towards the individual as the building block in the society and cautious towards the growing harmfulness of corporatism. The official web-page (in English) summarises that the *basic foundation of the Party is a recognition of the Progressive traditions of equality of opportunity for all, an equitable and defendable distribution of wealth, and a public responsibility towards those citizens who, due to circumstances beyond their control, lack the possibility to pursue a good life*.

52 Ylä-Anttila 2017

53 Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio 2017

54 <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/kielisivu/in-english/>

Social democratic or even socialist tendencies are also pronounced clearly in the Finns Party's texts – the party is for all, and for the poor, but not for the elites. The state's role in Finnish society and welfare policy – to help provide opportunity and education and health – is emphasised. However, they claim that *the individual has the responsibility to make every effort to provide for their own well-being and that of their families and communities – self-reliance is a valuable attribute which should never be under-estimated.*

The slogan “Justice for all” summarises the party's main ideology and policies. An important part of the “justice for all” declaration is that enforcement and punishment related to laws should be applied equally to all – with no consideration given to different economic and political standing of those violating laws. In practice, the “*all*” seems to mean only ethnic Finns and not all the people living in Finland.

According to the Finns Party's texts, private enterprises and creative market environment and infrastructure must be ensured in Finland. The Party seeks support both from traditional Finnish working class (mainly from the paper and metal industry) and from owners of small and medium-sized businesses. In the cities, also the unemployed “ethnically” Finnish voters support the Finns Party, especially in suburbs with a relatively high immigrant population.

The Finns Party declares that the general national economy consists of “cake makers” and “cake eaters” – and that the Finns Party is oriented towards the “cake makers” – be they business owners, logistics industry workers, health care professionals etc. Especially immigrants and refugees are seen as “cake eaters”. According to the populists' rhetoric, they are taking jobs from “real Finns”, using national resources in a wrong and corrupt way.

Law and order are the last key topics underlined in the party texts. Likewise, the fight against all kinds of corruption is mentioned in the Finns Party populist toolkit – as in most European populist parties’ narrative. In Finland, the Finns Party has surprisingly many policemen as activists and also as MPs.

Last but not least, nationalism is a theme consistently repeated in all party texts. The Finns party presents populism as a noble ideology, which just seeks to empower the people. Often nationalism is a rhetorical device that offers refreshing change to the politically correct “jargon” of “old parties” and mainstream media. The Finns Party have succeeded in gaining supporters from the traditional left-wing parties by presenting a new and more attractive or simple form of criticism to neoliberalism and globalisation than other parties. Criticism to the EU was also strongly pronounced, especially in the 2011 elections, when all Finns Party candidates pronounced repeatedly that “Finnish financial support” should not be given to Greece or Portugal.

Nationalist stereotypes

The most pejorative or negative connotation of populism has been identified with radical right-wing political parties. But there is also a new trend: many parties and movements all over the world increasingly often accept the label “populist” not as an insult but as a badge of honour.⁵⁵ In a way, Donald Trump’s style to do politics has converted – surprisingly – the traditional US Republican Party into the biggest and most influential populist party of the world. In

55 Houwen 2011, 32; Ylä-Anttila 2017, 1

this way, claims about the supposed “populism” of various political actors on the left and right have become ever more commonplace. Somehow, especially today, *Populism is best defined as a political strategy*.⁵⁶

What is obvious is that movements like the Finns Party have been very successful in using nationalist stereotypes in their policy and rhetoric. The key ideology of the party – along with the “justice for all” approach –, nationalism, is loaded with stereotypical concepts, opinions and beliefs. For populists, nations need an “other,” and stereotypes do a good job of constructing this “other”. Stereotyping is built on a cognitive process of categorisation that requires simplification to help people make sense of world events, objects and experiences as well as create a seemingly common-sense discourse about others. Hence, stereotypes produce simplified images of ethnic groups, different cultures or behaviours together with a positive or negative valence related to these images.

Stereotypes allow us to simplify and systematise ambiguous information. With stereotypes, the growing amount of data is easier to understand, recall and predict. Producing stereotypes is thus also, recognisably, one element of the “post-truth” era. National stereotypes are a strong element in both (social) media and politics – and all the populist parties have been capable of using this political method and weapon.⁵⁷

The Finns Party uses these stereotypes: “they vs. us”, “national vs. EU”, “internal vs. external”. Also, an anti-immigration aspect was

56 Weyland 2001, 189

57 Pakkasvirta 2018

openly declared in the Party's Program for the 2011 elections.⁵⁸ It asks immigrants to accept Finnish cultural norms, without exactly explaining what these norms are. The party also underlines the role of national sovereignty over EU in immigration issues. Recent documents and programs for elections ask for immigration policies to be based on "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." The Finns Party also says that immigrants who are legitimate employees or entrepreneurs are welcome in Finland. However, *immigration not related to work should be limited via minimising financial incentives and through a more severe family unification policy.* The Finns also reject mutual European policy of "burden-sharing" and claims that refugee quotas must be adjusted to national financial situation, and that criminal immigrants must be deported to their home countries.

There are also various nationalist anti-immigrant elements in the section *For the protection and furtherance of Finnish culture.* The party documents declare how *Finnishness is a unique element of the world's culture. It is something to be valued as the cornerstone of Finnish society. It must be preserved.* One aspect of the ideology of the Finns is given in the party's interpretation for multiculturalism: *Multiculturalism is one of the relevant attributes of the 21st century world. Being Finnish is one aspect of that world and its part in it should be promoted and defended*". For the Finns Party, *patriotism means selflessness for the cause of the Finnish community.*

58 English Summary of the program: https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Perussuomalaisten_eduskuntavaaliohjelmalla_2011-english_summary_2.0.pdf

All the programs can be downloaded from here: <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/tietoa-meista/puolueohjelma/>. The document that declared openly the new, more radical trend in True Finns immigration policies is made in 2010 by Jussi Halla-aho's group. It is called in Finnish "Nuiva Manifesti": <http://www.vaalimanifesti.fi/>

The party's 2015 immigration programme proclaims even harder conditions for immigration: *The refugee quota has to be lowered, the burden-sharing mechanisms of the Common European Asylum System has to be opposed, the use of public funds to advance multiculturalism has to be prevented, the conditions of family unification by migrants have to be tightened, the positive discrimination (of refugees) has to be ended.*

Gradually, the Finns Party has transformed into a right-wing anti-immigration party. This is historically somewhat paradoxical as the founder of the Finnish Rural Party – which is the predecessor of the Finns Party –, Veikko Vennamo, has organised the biggest Finnish reception of refugees in 1944: the resettling of 400 000 Karelian war refugees from Russia in Finland.⁵⁹

Attitude of the Finns Party voters

In order to better understand the attitude and the motivation of the Finns Party voters, focus group interviews were conducted (two in Helsinki, two in Kouvola) in autumn 2018. Based on the interviews, we can make five statements:

First, there was a strong and nostalgic pining after something “old”, even among young people. They were longing for *the independent and authentic Finland* that somehow existed in their minds before EU-membership and the arrival of refugees and migrants (even though the number of the “others” in Finland has been relatively very low compared to other Nordic countries).

59 Virtanen 2018; Vaarakallio & Palonen 2017, 50-51

However, many discussants emphasised the need of stability, referring also to the actual status quo: *do not change anymore the Finnish society*. Most interviewees felt that the “liberals” and social democrats are representing “change” and “globalisation”, while the Finns Party defends stability.

Second, national identity was a very important value in all focus groups. There were deep worries about the survival of Finnish culture and traditions, especially because of the *uncontrolled immigration*. The Finns Party was considered by the interviewees to be in favour of national identity while Social Democrats were, again, seen as defenders of globalisation and some “bad kind of internationalism”. The national economic stability was an important issue for all. They claimed that Finland should be more financially sound. In general, globalisation was seen as negative, because profits are going abroad and not to those Finns who have been working for decades for the benefit of the nation. This is quite a strong anti-neoliberal statement. However, many interviewed young people saw also positive aspects in globalisation, such as free movement within the EU and travelling (but this should only be available for the Finns: [only] *for us to move and travel in Europe and the world*). Even the often-criticised euro got some positive mentions for this very reason.

Third, the words “freedom” and “security” raised lot of discussion. Both values were understood as very important, but most interviewed chose security over freedom. Insecurity was linked to immigrants, terrorism, sexual harassment of women, etc. Again, the Finns Party was seen best to represent security in the complex world.

Fourth, according to most interviewees, the demand for social and cultural equality and political correctness, in general, have gone too far in Finland and in general in the world. There is *enough equality, other things are also important*. However, social equality was mentioned as something important – *the society should help the people with problems but not too much*. That is why individual responsibility was also emphasised as important, also for ethnic Finns: *it is not only immigrants who misuse the social security system*. Focus group participants also said that *our own problems have to be resolved first*, only after that comes the world, the refugees and other problems.

Fifth, the concept of trust was an important issue in the focus groups. The interviewed had strong trust in Finnish security and law. Policemen and firemen were mentioned as the most trusted persons/professions. The trust for traditional politicians and EU institutions was very low in all groups. Many also mentioned that Finland is too much like a *good pupil* in the EU – a country that follows 100% strictly all the financial and legal regulations and EU standards, meanwhile many other countries do not. Finland is said to be just a *stupid payer* within the EU.

Other issues raised in discussions were, for example, the feeling of belonging and community. Social media was criticised – it creates too much discussion on *marginal issues*. Also, politically correct leftist or green activists in social media disturbed many interviewed. Younger participants also mentioned that not necessarily the immigrants are the problem – the problem is that in Finland they are given too much space.

The question of “majority” was also often present in the discussions. Many interviewed mentioned that the opinion of the “majority” is not heard – without defining who really the majority

is. This reflects one of the basic ideas of populism: the belief that there is somewhere a “real people”, or a unique “one nation”. This shows that it is still quite easy to sell the political agenda that there is a homogenous political community in many European states – a “majority”. Even though we know very well that what they call “majority” is usually only a party or an idea with the support of maximum of 20% of the population.

Lessons to learn from populism in Finland

In political history, populism is often understood and explained in negative terms – as a description of political parties or politicians, who have been accused to act in “populist” or in other inconvenient ways. On the other hand, almost all political movements carry populist elements. Most of our actual leading Western politicians perform often – especially in the media – in a populist way. Perhaps, a more interesting definition to populism, thus, comes from Ernesto Laclau, who presents populism in a more positive way, as an emancipatory social force through which marginalised groups challenge dominant power structures. The populism always has two faces – and many definitions, in Finland and elsewhere.

All new European populist right-wing movements declare that they are nationalist in their policy, practice and ideology. The nationalism is the true basis of populism. To respond the challenge of anti-immigration nationalism – in Europe and worldwide – the traditional liberal and left-wing parties have to be able to redesign their understanding of nationalism. Nationalism is a kind of a chameleon phenomenon – it survives in the global world and it offers an important toolkit for every electoral process. A deep and

a new kind of analysis of the meaning of nationalism and the (new) social media is needed even more, especially for the traditional progressive political movements in Europe.

Nationalism can be understood not only as a creation of political community, but also as a construction of the world.⁶⁰ Nationalism reflects long-term mental changes (values, norms, and the psychology of the masses). Many populist parties have been successful in representing this kind feelings of their voters, in simple but also efficient ways. The populists have understood – and thoroughly believe – that nationalism is the most useful human strategy and successful socio-cultural recipe for the construction of the surrounding world.

In Finland, because of the growing importance of the Finns Party since 2011, all the parties have sharpened and nuanced their political vocabulary concerning nationalism and immigration. The most significant impact of the Finns Party has been that almost all parties are more critical to immigration issues. Consequently, many voters who had opted for the Finns Party between 2011 and 2015 seem to go back to their preceding parties. The other obvious lesson to learn is that taking on government responsibilities has heavily damaged the populist party in Finland, eventually even causing its split into two parties.

For progressive political movements, one of the challenges is how to balance between “positive nationalism”, international solidarity and new social insecurities of our time. “Positive nationalism” could mean alternative ways and methods to accept the complexity of modern life – combining of social openness with

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reliable national control and security. Communities, some kind of frontiers, and social networks are apparently still important for the voters. “Positive nationalism” could offer a political community that combines freedom and responsibility – be it inside one nation or in a union of nations.

Nationalism is getting stronger and stronger every single day by the media. Evidences show that social media discussions maintain and even fuel nationalism and national stereotypes.⁶¹ Internet has made new kinds of communication possible for different groups and social movements. Many right-wing populist movements used to criticise globalisation, and specifically globalisation of capital, but now they are also openly racist or at least very negative towards immigrants and refugees.

Post-truth politics constitute a new political and media culture — a culture in which debates are framed largely by their appeals to emotions and disconnected from truth and facts. Social media is especially efficient at producing repeated assertions and ignoring factual rebuttals — and falsifying facts or their importance. All this is strategically used to create alternative political realities that benefit particular political movements or players. As much as it is important to understand these mechanisms, it is perhaps even more important to focus on the power of lay people’s community to collectively reflect upon and reproduce the social and political reality.

Our era of the internet communication offers new opportunities to explore the collective formation of political realities, and to question traditional explanations concerning modern identities

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and the ways in which diverse realities are constructed. This especially concerns citizens' perceptions of their own nations and that of the "others." Seen the heated discussions on migration and the rise of new forms of national populism, progressive politics and policies face huge challenges.

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