

Department of Social Research  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
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# **The Populist Toolkit**

## **Finnish Populism in Action 2007–2016**

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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*Cover illustrations:* Olaus Magnus (1555) *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (History of the Northern Peoples), woodcut illustrations digitized and annotated 2007 by Lars Henriksson, available copyright-free at <http://www.avrosys.nu/>

Top: “Book 7, Ch. 17. A crowd of peasants are attacking the castle of a cruel bailiff. They are rolling two large burning stacks of logs against it. The favourable wind conditions are indicated in the upper left corner of the woodcut. The stacks of log will eventually set the castle ablaze and until this happens it protects the men which are rolling it forward.”

Bottom: “Book 4, Ch. 2. Laps in the Finnmark are defending themselves against seafarers they believe are pirates. The fire on the shore is a trick to get ships to run aground.”

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## Abstract

Populism has often been understood as a description of political parties and politicians, who have been labelled either populist or not. This dissertation argues that it is more useful to conceive of populism in action: as something that is done rather than something that is. I propose that the populist toolkit is a collection of cultural practices, which politicians and citizens use to make sense of and do politics, by claiming that ‘the people’ are opposed by a corrupt elite – a powerful claim in contemporary politics, both in Finland and internationally. The concept of the populist toolkit has analytical utility, since it can separate a set of populist repertoires from others, for example that of exclusionary nationalism, and takes seriously the effect culture has on action, while avoiding cultural determinism.

I study four instances in which the populist toolkit was used in Finnish politics from 2007 to 2016. As data, I use party publications, a Voting Advice Application, newspaper articles and opinion pieces, and a large set of online media data. Methodologically, I employ qualitative text analysis informed by theories of populism, cultural practices, frame analysis and Laurent Thévenot’s sociology of engagements, as well as topic modeling.

Article I argues that the state of the Eurozone in 2011 gave the Finns Party an opportunity to frame the situation as a crisis for Finland and to present itself as a righteous populist challenger to established parties. Article II shows that the Finns Party uses anti-feminist arguments to present itself as a populist alternative. Article III presents a theory of how populist argumentation can use familiar emotional experiences in bonding ‘the people’ together. Article IV tackles the populist epistemology: while populism can be critical of intellectuals and experts in general, the article shows that another populist strategy is counterknowledge, incorporating alternative knowledge authorities. This strategy is particularly employed by the populist radical right.

After the monumental success of right-wing populism in Western democracies, the next big question is whether left-wing or liberal actors will take up the tools of populism, or will they rather position themselves on the side of pluralism, democratic institutions and scientific expertise. This will have to be assessed by future studies.



## Abstrakti

Populismia on usein käytetty kuvailevana käsitteenä poliittisten puolueiden, poliitikkojen ja joskus myös äänestäjien ominaisuuksista: onko joku populistisi vai ei. Väitän, että on tutkimuksen kannalta hyödyllisempää ymmärtää populismi poliittisena toimintana, jossa erotetaan positiiviseen valoon asetettu kansa negatiivisessa valossa nähdystä eliitistä. ”Populismien työkalupakki” on kokoelma kulttuurisia käytäntöjä, joiden avulla niin poliitikot kuin kansalaisetkin ymmärtävät ja tekevät politiikkaa kansan ja eliitin vastakkainasettelun kautta. Populismien työkalupakki on käsitteenä hyödyllinen, koska se erottelee populististen käytäntöjen joukon muista työkalupakeista, kuten kansallismielisyydestä. Se huomioi kulttuurin vaikutuksen toiminnalle, välttämällä kuitenkin kulttuurisen determinismin.

Tutkin neljää tapausta, joissa populismien työkalupakkia käytettiin Suomessa vuosina 2007–2016. Aineistoina käytän Perussuomalaisen julkaisuja, *Helsingin Sanomien* Vaalikonetta, yleisönosastoa ja journalistista materiaalia, *Hommaforumin* keskusteluja sekä *MV-lehden* sisältöjä. Analysoin niitä käyttäen kvalitatiivista tekstianalyysia, jota ohjaavat populismien ja kulttuuristen käytäntöjen teoriat, kehysanalyysi ja Laurent Thévenot’n sitoumusten sosiologia, sekä laskennallista aihehallinnusta.

Artikkeli I osoittaa, että euroalueen talous vuonna 2011 antoi Perussuomalaisille mahdollisuuden kehystää tilanne kriisinä Suomelle, ja samalla itsensä oikeamielisenä populistisena haastajana valtapuolueille. Artikkelissa II näytämme, kuinka Perussuomalaiset käyttää feminisminvastaisuutta esittääkseen itsensä populistisena vaihtoehtona. Artikkelissa III esittelee teorian siitä, kuinka populismi voi käyttää hyväkseen tuttuja tunnekokemuksia sitoakseen ”kansaa” yhteen. Artikkelissa IV käsittelee populismien tietoteoriaa: vaikka populismi on usein yleisesti asiantuntijakriittistä, toinen mahdollinen populistinen tietostrategia on tuottaa vastatietoa ja vasta-asiantuntijuuksia, ja tämä strategia sopii erityisesti oikeistopopulismiin.

Oikeistopopulismien länsimaissa saavuttaman suosion jälkeen on jatkotutkimuksissa olennaista kysyä, omaksuvatko vasemmistolaiset ja liberaalit toimijat jatkossa populismien työkalut, vai asemoivatko ne itsensä populismia vastaan; pluralismin, liberaalidemokraattisten instituutioiden ja asiantuntijatiedon puolelle.



## Preface & Acknowledgements

I became fascinated with populism in 2010 at the University of the West of England, while attending an excellent lecture and seminar series by Dr. Nicholas Startin on the ‘Rise of the Far Right in Contemporary Europe’. The (True) Finns Party was not yet a major player in Finnish politics and not widely known internationally. Thus, when other students and Dr. Startin eagerly questioned me for insight into the Finnish case during the seminars, I tended to downplay the significance of right-wing populism in Finland, both in terms of its prevalence and its radicalism.

The unprecedented success of the (True) Finns in Spring 2011 after the inclusion of anti-immigrant activists in the party – a monumental event in Finnish politics – proved how wrong I was. Since that was also the time when I had to decide on a topic for my Master’s thesis, there was no other option in my mind than to start studying Finnish populism. This dissertation is the culmination of that research project, as the Master’s thesis then left too many questions unanswered not to continue with a PhD. As the PhD is now complete, even more questions remain unanswered, as new ones have popped up constantly during this project. I now realize one could keep on studying Finnish populism forever.

Populism in Finland has been very much a moving target in the past few years, and each day researchers, journalists and laymen alike offer thousands of interpretations, analyses and opinions of it on various media. This has made it difficult to focus on producing an analytical, academic understanding of the issue without being side-tracked by heated public debates. This is the nature of populist politics: it is aggressive, polarizing, and incites dramatic responses on purpose, as it divides people into ‘*the people*’ and its enemies. These enemies are the elite, who do not belong to the people, and in the case of nationalist populism, the Others, who do not belong to the nation.

The two woodcuts printed on the cover of this book, originally published in Swedish archbishop Olaus Magnus’ 16<sup>th</sup>-century landmark work *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (History of the Northern Peoples), illustrate these two facets. In the top picture, peasants are attacking a bailiff’s castle, an image that in this context depicts *the people taking power back from the elite*; while in the bottom one, native Laps are throwing rocks at approaching ships they believe are pirates, to stop them from entering their

lands; *excluding Others from the nation*. While it would be anachronistic to claim the woodcuts depict Nordic populism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they do illustrate two central themes about 21<sup>st</sup>-century Finnish populism in action.

Some research on populism is conducted with the explicit aim of opposing populist politics, while some of it aims to facilitate populist mobilization. I have always believed we should instead try to keep politics and research separate, even if it is difficult. Perhaps this also relates to my conviction that sociology should be primarily an empirical rather than a theory-centric social science. My primary motivation as a sociologist is to understand the world. While as a citizen I disagree with many of the opinions of the people I study, as a researcher, I have always tried to approach their opinions, arguments and reasoning with an open mind, to try and understand them as a sociologist.

To be clear, I do not claim to be ‘objective’ – a utopia in research on politics – but I do claim to have striven to separate my moral judgment from my analysis while maintaining a critical sensitivity to the nuances of political argumentation, in an effort to get *closer* to the truth, even if it remains perpetually out of grasp (Popper 1962). Moral condemnation is human, but as a basis of research it can only blur our vision, as psychologist Jonathan Haidt vividly describes in *The Righteous Mind* (2012). And as sociologist Max Weber put it in his lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (‘Science as a Vocation’) in 1918: “Whenever the man of science introduces his personal value judgment, a full understanding of the facts ceases.” (Translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 1946.) Still, as we know, Weber was no naïve positivist, a believer in our ability to simply acquire ‘scientific facts’ about society – but instead a staunch supporter of *Verstehen*, understanding.

These are some of the principles that have guided me in this endeavour. Hopefully, my work will help others understand populism, regardless of whether they themselves oppose or support it.



In the five years which I spent on this project I gained many new friends. Thankfully, I did not lose nearly as many. I want to thank Sonja Kosunen and Mikko Posti, two of my most long-standing friends, who have become my academic colleagues during our friendships. Conversely, many col-



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The part played by the rest of my family in me becoming a researcher has been considerable too, since they are all social scientists as well; my mum, dad and sister: Leena, Pekka and Anna.

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The pre-examiners of this thesis, Benjamin Moffitt and Suvi Keskinen, were both sufficiently critical, as they should, each from their own perspectives. I have taken their comments into consideration to the best of my ability, even though I did not agree with all of them – which highlights that responsibility for any mistakes is, of course, only mine.

During this project, something happened that is much more important than scholarship – I met my dear wife, Matilda Merenmies, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart for never-failing support and love, which I hope to return in full.



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# List of Original Publications

This thesis is based on the following publications:

- I Ylä-Anttila, Tuomas & Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka. 2015. “Exploiting the Discursive Opportunity of the Euro Crisis: The Rise of the Finns Party.” In: Hanspeter Kriesi & Takis Pappas (eds.): *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*. ECPR Press. Reproduced with permission of ECPR Press.
- II Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka & Luhtakallio, Eeva. 2017. “Contesting Gender Equality Politics in Finland: The Finns Party Effect.” In: Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan & Andrea Petö (eds.): *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.
- III Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka. 2016. “Familiarity as a Tool of Populism: Political Appropriation of Shared Experiences and the Case of Suvivirsi.” The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in *Acta Sociologica*, 26 December 2016, by SAGE Publications Ltd. All rights reserved. © Tuukka Ylä-Anttila. <http://online.sagepub.com/>
- IV Ylä-Anttila, Tuukka. “Knowledge and Contemporary Populism: Contesting Epistemic Authority in Anti-Immigration Countermedia.” Unpublished manuscript, under review in *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.



# 1 Introduction

This is an empirical study of populism in Finland from 2007 to 2016, and a theoretical examination – based on that empirical work – of *the toolkit of populism*. Populism has thus far been most often understood as a description of political parties and/or politicians, who have been labelled either populist or not. Moreover, the term has been pejorative in connotation to many. But parties and movements all over the world increasingly often accept the label ‘populist’ not as an insult but as a badge of honour (Houwen 2011: 32). At the same time, claims about the supposed ‘populism’ of a variety of political actors on the left and right have become ever more commonplace (Houwen 2011: 28). As I will argue, it is more useful to conceive of populism in action: as something that is done rather than something that is. In this dissertation, I propose that it is a political practice – or, more accurately, a set of practices – that forms what we might call the ‘toolkit of populism’ (after Swidler 1986, also see e.g. Lamont & Thévenot [eds.] 2000; Silber 2003).

Political actors use tools from this toolkit whether rarely or more often, and this is determined not only by their inclination to do so – are they ‘populists’ or not, some might say – or which ideologies (see Stanley 2008) and ‘deep stories’ (see Hochschild 2016) they believe in.<sup>1</sup> Crucially, it is also affected by the situation they are in, broadly construed (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 16–17; Joas 1996: 132–133, Luhtakallio 2012: 203). The situation includes the political culture within which they act (Eranti 2016: 17–19), and what kind of and how much material and cultural resources they have at their disposal (Eranti 2016: 20–23). In the case of political parties, one often mentioned situational variable affecting their use of populism is whether they are in government or in opposition: when in government, parties tend to use populist tools less (Kriesi & Pappas 2015: 9; Rooduijn, de Lange & van der Brug 2012).

I have never cared much for disciplinary boundaries, and as such, this transdisciplinary work spans – at least – the fields of political and cultural sociology, social movements studies, political science, and political communication. Still, my training as a political and cultural sociologist is undoubtedly evident in many preconceptions and methodological choices.

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<sup>1</sup> On the value-basis of action, see Vaisey 2008, 2009, 2010.

Luckily, the field of populism studies – previously largely dominated by political scientists – has recently seen a resurgence of perspectives that can be deemed ‘sociological’ (see e.g. Hawkins 2010; Jansen 2011; Moffitt 2016), whether or not their authors identify as sociologists (which is not important).

If the conception of populism as a cultural toolkit was the first sign of my sociological perspective on populism; the second is the position that politicians and parties are only one instance of those doing politics. Breadth is the hallmark of a sociological conception of politics. Politics is something citizens do in social movements, labour unions, social movements, party organizations and everyday discussions (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999) – in addition to what politicians do in campaigns and parliaments. This is true of populism as well: not only politicians use the toolkit of populism.

That is why this dissertation – despite taking Finland as its case – not only deals with the (True) Finns Party,<sup>2</sup> identified and studied by political scientists as a populist radical right party (e.g. Arter 2010), but also populist acts by politicians of other parties, non-affiliated activists, and ordinary citizens in newspaper opinion pieces and online discussions. These empirical studies, published in academic books and journals in 2015–2017, are printed in this volume after this introductory and summarizing section. They each investigate a specific research setting related to the overarching research question of this dissertation: **How was the cultural toolkit of populism used in Finnish politics from 2007 to 2016?**

In the next chapter (2), I will more comprehensively introduce ‘the populist toolkit’, followed by a brief history of Finnish populism in chapter 3. Then, in chapter 4, I will present the research design, including research questions, and how to answer them in terms of data and methods. After summarizing the four empirical articles in chapter 5, I will wrap things up in chapter 6 with a discussion of the implications of this work for the study of populism.

All in all, I will claim that understanding populism as a cultural toolkit enables us to study populist practices not only of parties labelled as ‘pop-

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<sup>2</sup> *Perussuomalaiset*. The first part of the party name, *perus*, refers to a fundamental ordinariness, with the latter part, *suomalaiset*, meaning Finns. They previously used the translation True Finns but adopted the official English name The Finns in August 2011, after receiving international media attention (HS 21 Aug 2011). Having clarified this, I will refer to the party as the Finns Party.



ulist’, but everyday political actors including citizens participating in public debates, and politicians not necessarily considered explicitly ‘populist’. Understanding populist practices, in turn, is critical to understanding contemporary politics, I argue. I will further empirically analyse four specific populist tools used in Finnish politics 2007–2016: I) creating conceptions of **crisis**, II) opposing hegemonic conceptions of **gender** equality, III) appealing to a familiar **emotional** experience and IV) questioning established **knowledge**. These tools have enabled political actors to claim they represent ‘the people’ against a corrupt elite – a powerful claim in contemporary politics, both in Finland and internationally.



## 2 Populism

[D]emocracy as we know it in modern polities is an uneasy combination of two different strands, populist democracy and liberal constitutionalism [...] In a sense, then, the populists are right to see in contemporary democracy a conspiracy to keep power from the people, and they are dangerous precisely because they are right.

(Canovan 2005: 67, 85)

Why is it important to study populism? After all, by choosing to do so, I have already used theory to delineate a piece of the social world to be studied. I have not, in this sense, followed Latour's imperative "to follow the actors themselves" (2005: 12), but imposed my own concept on them. Despite some political actors self-identifying as populists, my definition for the word is one based on scholarly tradition, explicated below, and does not necessarily correspond to the understandings of the actors themselves. However, I will defend the usefulness of the concept in this chapter.

In choosing 'populism', I have also made the choice not to frame what I study – at least primarily – in terms of 'the radical right' (Arter 2010), 'welfare nationalism' (Pyrhönen 2015) or 'anti-immigration activism' (Mäkinen 2016), concepts that others have used as their primary tools to analyse the same empirical things, partly even the same data. I will argue in this chapter that a focus on populism, particularly, *is* useful for understanding certain facets of contemporary Finnish and global politics.

### 2.1 A Contested Concept?

It is customary to start any treatise on populism with the assertion that it is a contested concept, even a convoluted and conflicted one. However, this is an exaggeration. The term has been given enormous attention by scholars in political science, sociology, social psychology and communication, among some others. But in all of these, as Houwen (2011: 35) as well as Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser (2012a: 8) note, a remarkable number of authors have more or less agreed that the word denotes **politics that posits a positively connoted 'people' against a negatively connoted 'elite'** (e.g. Aslanidis 2015; Canovan 1999; Hawkins 2010; Jansen 2011; Laclau 2005; Moffitt 2016; Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008; Taggart

2000). What they disagree on is whether it is a logic (Laclau 2007), a discursive frame (Aslanidis 2015), a worldview (Hawkins 2010), an ideology (Stanley 2008), a mode of political practice (Jansen 2011), or a style (Moffitt 2016). Indeed, as Wiles (1969) put it early on: “To each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds” (p. 166).

I would like to argue that this has to do mostly with the school of thought the author hails from, rather than any substantive analysis of *what populism is*. In an academic world of fragmented disciplines, it makes very little sense for a global group of scholars from various fields and schools to debate ‘what something is’, as the discourse theorist will always see discourses, whereas the scholar of ideology will see the same thing as ideology. (I am guilty of this as well, as someone who prefers the theoretical tools of pragmatic sociology, seeing most social things as practices, tools or repertoires – see Silber 2003.)

Rather than depicting a field in a hopeless state of disarray, I would like to suggest that the fact that scholars of such different persuasions can even agree that something like populism exists and is relevant – and that the word means a kind of politics that posits a positively connoted ‘people’ against a negatively connoted ‘elite’ – speaks for the assertion that populism is, indeed, a somewhat stable and lasting feature of politics, globally. Whether we should see it as a style, an ideology, a practice or something else altogether is secondary, and depends largely on the methodological tools we wish to use to analyse it, and some of these conceptions are more compatible with one another than others. I will argue that one of the merits of my ‘toolkit’ approach is that it can incorporate and utilize many of the other approaches, rather than attacking other schools of thought as inferior.

As such, I am proposing that something called ‘populism’ does exist in a form stable enough to be studied – in the form of continued usage of populist practices in contemporary political spheres (see also Hawkins 2010: 8). Paradoxically, this may be at least partly the result of the extensive scholarship on populism: we know that the Finns Party chairman Timo Soini wrote his Master’s thesis on populism (Soini 1988) before founding the party, and that leading members of both Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have been strongly influenced by the work of Laclau (Judis 2016). Thus, the scholarly concept of populism and the populism of “the actors themselves” (Latour 2005: 12) have long ago been ‘cross-bred’. Still, populism survives, with astonishing tenacity.

## 2.2 The Populist Toolkit

A *practice turn* (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Seivigny [eds.] 2001) can be discerned in contemporary cultural and political sociology. Instead of the previous paradigmatic orientation of conceiving culture as “the entire way of life of a people” or a provider of “the ultimate values toward which action is oriented”, a practice-oriented approach sees culture as “the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning”; that is, “such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (Swidler 1986: 273).

These practices, which can also be called *cultural tools*, both constrain and facilitate the social actions of people by providing a set of ways to communicate with others (Eranti 2016: 14–26; Luhtakallio 2012: 12). Collections of these ‘tools’ form ‘toolkits’, which are recognizable orientations towards the social world. Populism, for example, is such an orientation towards politics. Others include ideologies such as liberalism or socialism, but also everyday “styles of action” (Lichterman & Cefai 2006), like demonstrations, unionization, disobedience, voluntarism, activism, advocacy, or campaigning. Political cultures are collections of such cultural toolkits, and as such, the ability of citizens to understand politics and participate in it depends on the availability and diffusion of these toolkits.

### 2.2.1 Why ‘toolkits’?

This view makes it possible to take culture seriously, as culture does indeed constrain and enable social actions, but at the same time, prevents cultural determinism and gives weight to the free will of the actor. We as citizens do not act the way we do simply because ‘it is in our culture’ to do so, even though culture does guide our actions to an extent. The ‘toolkit’ view of political culture has been employed in recent political sociology particularly in studies on social movements. It has helped to understand the different resources groups of people may have for political organization, because they have been taught different tools of participation (Baiocchi et al. 2014). And it has shed light on the effect of national political cultures on citizenship and protest (Luhtakallio 2012). More broadly, it has given rise

to a new field of comparative cultural and political sociology (see e.g. Lamont & Thévenot [eds.] 2000). Understanding populism as a set of cultural tools helps us explain its sustained re-emergence across history and the globe, despite geographical differences and historical changes (Jansen 2011; Moffitt 2016; Swidler 1986: 277–278).

The toolkit perspective is not in conflict with the concept of ideology, since ideologies are “explicit, articulated, highly organized meaning systems” (Swidler 1986: 278); that is, particularly well-defined (if rather abstract) cultural toolkits. For analysing populism theoretically or empirically, it is most often unnecessary to determine whether populism fulfils this criteria of ‘ideology’ (see e.g. Aslanidis 2015), since it does not often matter for the political actors using the tools of populism. In some cases, it may be an ideology, whereas in others it may be used as a more habitual toolkit.<sup>3</sup>

Moffitt (2016) has previously taken a rather similar view to populism, drawing mainly on the writings on ‘political style’ by Hariman (1995), Ankersmit (2002) and Pels (2003), as well as notes on the performativity of populism by Laclau (2005; 2007). He argues, likewise, for moving “from seeing populism as a particular ‘thing’ or entity towards viewing it as a *political style* that is performed, embodied and enacted across a variety of political and cultural contexts” (Moffitt 2016: 3, emphasis in original). For him, this *style* refers to “the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life” (p. 38). Moffitt himself notes that this resonates with what he calls “the turn towards social action in political sociology” (p. 38) – my attempt here is to more explicitly integrate the literature on populism, mostly written by political scientists, with that of contemporary political sociology.

Moffitt does note that the word ‘style’ he uses may have a connotation of superficiality, which he does not intend to convey. Instead “[s]tyle and content are interrelated, and style can generate, affect and interact with content” (2016: 49). This is one reason I prefer to use the vocabulary of ‘cultural toolkits’ rather than that of ‘style’ – to avoid the notion of superficiality – in addition to explicitly connecting my work with Swidlerian

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<sup>3</sup> One may imagine research settings in which the distinction between populism as organized ideology and populism as ‘merely’ habitual tools would be relevant – party institutionalization, for example.

cultural sociology. Like ‘style’, ‘toolkits’ should also be generally intelligible to scholars and laymen alike, avoiding sociological jargon.

Understanding populism as a style leads Moffitt to focus on populist leadership (2016: 51–69), whereas my understanding of populism as a cultural toolkit leads me to focus on the use of populist argumentation by ordinary citizens, particularly in Articles III and IV. This discussion dovetails with the notion in political sociology of ordinary citizens imbued with critical capacity, taking part in moral and political debates in everyday situations (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999).

What is problematic about ‘tools’ as concepts, however, is that they may be confused with the view that populism is a demagogic vote-maximizing tactic or strategy (e.g. Betz 2002; Weyland 1996; 2001). This is not my intention, because in the Swidlerian view, actors do not necessarily use these tools strategically as means to particular ends, but more importantly, the tools give their action meaning. In other words, they use the tools to make sense of the world, as frames (Goffman 1974), not (just) for political gains. Or, as Hawkins (2010: 29) puts it, populism is about “what politics should be and what democracy is for. This includes causal beliefs about how the world operates but also normative ones about how the world *should* operate.” The ‘tool’ metaphor may, unintentionally, somewhat obscure the fact that values and worldviews do have effects on action.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Hawkins’ approach of ‘populism as a worldview’, cited above, is quite compatible with the one employed here as well, because it is a middle ground between discourse theory and a realist philosophy of science: “the argument that our shared language ‘constitutes’ or creates our identities and accompanying roles gives too little causal force to our genetic makeup and the material world around us [...] On the other hand, discourse theorists are absolutely right in arguing that we cannot easily disentangle ideas and language” (Hawkins 2010: 31–32). The notion of cultural toolkits nicely captures this idea of the role of culture: actors have agency, but it is somewhat limited (if also made possible!) by the cultural tools available to them. Moreover, the way the ‘toolkit theory’ is developed and operationalized in the work of Boltanski & Thévenot (2006) and Lamont & Thévenot (2000) explicitly emphasizes that cultural tools are not purely discursive, but dependent on the material environment (as shown

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<sup>4</sup> For a thorough critique of the Swidlerian school based on this assertion, see Vaisey 2008, 2009, 2010.

in Article III) – something that Hawkins (2010: 242) argues should be noted in future research into populism.

### 2.2.2 What’s in the populist toolkit?

Since the key definition of populism is that it posits a positively connoted *people* against a negatively connoted *elite*, its key task is to define ‘the people’. It is always a subset of the population, since ‘the people’ as a population-wide entity with a general will is a myth (Canovan 2005). This construction of the people happens in contrast to the constitutive outside formed by the elite (Laclau 2005; 2007), and in the case of exclusionary nationalist (right-wing) populism, *Others* – typically immigrants – as enemies of the people, which the elite unfairly prioritizes over the people, it is claimed (e.g. Sakki & Pettersson 2016).

This central concept of ‘the people’ in populism is rather flexible: for example, in left-wing populism, the people is often defined in terms of class, whereas in right-wing populism it is often defined in terms of nation (Mény & Surel 2004: 172–196). But Taggart (2000) notes that despite this, what the concept does always imply is that ‘the people’ are “numerous and in the majority [...] so confer greater legitimacy on those who speak in their name” (p. 92). Using the populist toolkit, claims are made to represent “the silent majority”, who are “working, paying taxes and quietly getting on with life” (Judis 2016: 93), and have “no natural inclination to become involved with the minority (elite) pursuit of politics” (Judis 2016: 93) – they are “reluctantly political” (Taggart 2000), and as such “it is the mass citizenry who represent the heart of the population and indeed perhaps the very soul of the country” (Judis 2016: 93). This is who populist argumentation claims to represent. The Finns Party is named accordingly: in *Perussuomalaiset*, often translated as the ‘True Finns’, ‘Ordinary Finns’ or ‘Basic Finns’, the prefix *perus* refers to fundamental ordinariness as a virtue, similarly to expressions such as ‘down-to-earth’ or ‘straightforward’.

*The populist toolkit is a culturally shared interpretive framework that defines and valorizes the people, against the elite, and allows this distinction between the people and the elite to be used to understand society and do politics. Posing the people against the elite is the central tool.*<sup>5</sup> Some of the most typical supplementary tools

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<sup>5</sup> By ‘against’, I mean both that the people is discursively constructed in contrast to the constitutive outside of the elite (in Laclauian terms), and that it is claimed to be in an antagonistic relationship, politically, with the elite. However, by ‘discursively’ I do



used to achieve and ground this central distinction include defining and denigrating Others who are to be excluded from the people, appealing to the people's familiar experiences and emotions as a source of (moral) knowledge in various ways, and denouncing expertise. I will turn to these next.

### 2.2.3 What's in the Finnish populist toolkit?

In the Finnish case, studied here, examples of the populist toolkit in action include the othering of Southern Europeans to construct a unified nation (Article I), 'common-sense' views of 'caring' womanhood against 'elite' feminists (Article II), invoking emotional belonging via nostalgic familiarity (Article III), and denouncing knowledge authorities (Article IV). In all these cases, a line was drawn between the people and its enemies. But these cases by no means constitute an exhaustive list of uses of the populist toolkit in Finland, 2007–2016, merely four notable examples. And these examples are indeed somewhat specific to the Finnish case and the studied instances of political actors, most of whom can be defined as nationalists in their ideology. For example, the othering of Southern Europeans in the context of the Eurocrisis was only possible because of Finland's economic and political standing in the Eurozone, and particularly suited for a nationalist flavour of populism, which the Finns Party turned to. Demonizing 'elite' feminists was particularly salient because of the Finnish discourse of 'achieved' equality, and particularly suitable for a right-wing conservative value base. The nostalgic familiarity evoked in the case of *Suivirsi* was made possible by the Finnish tradition of singing the hymn. And regarding knowledge, valorization of experiential knowledge seems specifically compatible with rural populism, whereas counterknowledge is more suited to anti-immigration populism. (All these will be elaborated in chapter 5.)

Still, all of these tools could be adapted and employed elsewhere by other types of populist movements, with certain modifications: the othering of *Northern* Europeans *was* conversely used by Greek populists during the Eurocrisis (see Aslanidis & Ylä-Anttila 2014). Antifeminism is a noted feature of the populist radical right (Keskinen 2013). Shared experiences of singing emotional songs have been used to cement nationalist populist

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not mean that this construction would happen *purely* discursively, irrespective of the material world, as I explained in 2.2.1. I will also come back to this in 2.4, as well as Article III.

sentiments in Russia (Oushakine 2011), arguments appealing to emotion have been noted to be typical to populism (Berezin 2001, 2002, Canovan 1999, Demertzis 2006, 2014), and anti-intellectualism is an age-old populist trope (Hofstadter 1962, Saurette & Gunster 2011).

In other words, while the particular cases are specific to Finland, the forms of action (Simmel 1971), the populist tools, seem to be somewhat shared cross-culturally. They can thus be used by populist movements globally, according to the particular affordances granted by their context. Populism is global, even though there are variances between local populisms. Or, as Luhtakallio (2012: 12) puts it in her comparison of French and Finnish political cultures: “[T]here may be a hammer in both French and Finnish kits, although not an identical one.”

## 2.2.4 Populism and other political toolkits

Finally, to help us further understand what the populist toolkit is, let us briefly compare it to some other political toolkits. First of all, in terms of modes of participation (Ekman & Amnå 2012), I mentioned before that many of the toolkits political sociology recognizes are tools of informal democratic participation, such as demonstrations, but populism is most often identified in the sphere of party politics instead. I suspect this is not because there is no populism outside of party politics, but rather because populism has received the most attention from political scientists, who tend to focus on party politics, whereas sociologists have concentrated more on extra-parliamentary modes of politicization. I attempt to bridge these disciplines to the best of my ability in this work, particularly in articles III and IV.

Secondly, and analytically, a useful distinction is to understand populism as the opposite of *technocracy*. While technocracy emphasizes intellectual expertise, populism values ‘folk wisdom’ or alternative experts (Cramer 2016: 123–130; Hawkins 2010: 7; Hofstadter 1962; 2008; Oliver & Rahn 2016); technocracy stresses formal conduct whereas populism is about disregard for established manners; technocracy is the ideology of stable progress but populism preaches crisis and cataclysm. In fact, crisis is an “*internal feature* of populism” instead of “something that is purely external to populism” (Moffitt 2016: 9) – populism appropriates crises and creates them in hearts and minds. Crises do not exist without someone interpreting them as such, as we argue in Article I. This axis between tech-

nocracy and populism can also be called a ‘high–low’ axis of politics between ‘good’ and ‘bad manners’, along with the more established (one might say ideological) axes of left–right and conservative–liberal (Moffitt 2016: 43–48; Ostiguy 2009; Ostiguy & Roberts 2016; Wiles 1969: 170). This emphasizes populism’s gradational nature: a political actor is not either ‘populist’ or ‘non-populist’ but can be more or less populist at various times and in various situations, as I have argued (see also Gidron & Bonikowski 2013: 9; Hawkins 2010; Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011).

And thirdly, regarding populism’s empirical co-occurrence with other ideological toolkits, exclusionary nationalism is a toolkit that populism is often combined with – to the extent that many observers confuse the two with each other. This is something I will address next.

### 2.3 Why Populism?

Why concentrate on populism – why not the *populist radical right* (Mudde 2007), for example, which conceptually includes exclusionary nationalism? After all, most of the empirical work in this book is on the right-wing populist Finns Party and other nationalist political actors. As noted previously, plenty of academic research is carried out on similar empirical materials, but under the varying labels of ‘populism’, ‘racism’, ‘nativism’, ‘welfare chauvinism’, ‘the radical right’, and so on. I argue for the importance of understanding populism, in its own right, for five reasons.

First, populism is a broader concept than the populist radical right, to which it is often reduced; and this is useful for my work. As the recent rise of non-right-wing populist movements and parties such as Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and M5S in Italy, and the near-successful candidacy of Bernie Sanders in the US shows, populism without the right-wing component is quite possible (and currently salient). This makes an understanding of populism itself particularly important for understanding contemporary societies; we seem to be living in times of populism, not just right-wing populism (Chwalisz 2015; Moffitt 2016). And even right-wing populism follows the logic of populism:

Populists may also target particular Others – such as asylum seekers, immigrant workers or particular minority groups – as enemies of ‘the people’, but these Others will be linked to ‘the elite’. For example, it might be argued that ‘liberal elites’ have allowed increased immigration, which has led to an influx of migrants, which has threatened ‘the people’s’ livelihood.

(Moffitt 2016: 43–44)

But while populism without the exclusion of Others demonstrably exists, cases of the opposite are more rare in modern Western polities: right-wing exclusionary movements that do not use populist claims.<sup>6</sup> This, I suspect, is largely because most European constitutions and transnational treaties – indeed, a larger societal consensus – is explicitly anti-racist; and thus to be explicitly, politically racist, or even to publicly oppose immigration and multiculturalism, one *has* to be anti-establishment to an extent, in which case anti-immigration values may lead to adopting populist practices.

In fact, the second reason to study populism is that an empirical link between populism and exclusionary nationalism is often implicitly or explicitly posited, but not explicated. Furthermore, there are hints of a causality going both ways, which have been neglected by lumping ‘right-wing populism’ together as a monolithic phenomenon. A possible mechanism of anti-immigration values necessitating populist practices, because of a societal anti-racist consensus, was mentioned above. Conversely, a proposition of populism as a cause of exclusionary nationalism is evident in accounts that explain radical-right voting by insecurity and resentment felt by ‘globalization losers’. These are argued to result from economic and societal changes brought about by a relative loss of status, rendering globalization losers susceptible to “frames that scapegoat immigrant groups” (Rydgren 2013: 6). Such analyses, I would like to argue, explain *populism*, which is based on a people’s resentment of the system, but not right-wing populism – for that, one would need an additional mechanism explaining why the scapegoating frame is adopted. In other words, why is the resentment directed at immigrants?

To be fair to Rydgren, he does provide possible mechanisms; namely the ethnic competition thesis, according to which “voters turn to the new radical right because they want to reduce competition from immigrants

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<sup>6</sup> An elitist racist movement that does not care about appealing to ‘the people’, for example, would qualify, as pointed out by Benjamin Moffitt in the pre-examination of this dissertation.

over scarce resources such as the labor market, housing, welfare state benefits, or even the marriage market” (Rydgren 2007: 250). There are also possible “supply-side” (Rydgren 2007: 242) explanations, i.e. ones related to the politics that is ‘available’ to voters in the party system: while there is now a right-wing populist ‘option’ in most electoral systems, many countries simply lack a credible left-wing alternative for someone who wants to ‘vote populist’. (Which leads one to ask: why?) Still, these mechanisms remain understudied, possibly because of the conflation of populism and the radical right; for example, to what extent are the motivations for voting populist and voting radical right the same? Why do structural problems in contemporary Western societies (often identified as the primary source for the populist momentum) tend to be blamed on immigrants (something which the populist radical right excels in)? These are questions that merit further research.

Third, numerous scholars have by now analysed the nationalist and nativist features of the Finns Party, its opposition to immigration, the racism and sexism exhibited by some of its politicians, and both online and offline anti-immigration activism in Finland. They have e.g. classified the Finns Party as a populist radical right party (Arter 2010), noted the difficulty of integrating online anti-immigration activism within a party (Hatakka 2016), noted the antifeminism of online anti-immigration activists (Keskinen 2013), connected the anti-immigration movement with concerns over the welfare state (Keskinen 2016; Pyrhönen 2015), and with neoliberalism (Mäkinen 2016; Nykänen 2016). What is lacking is research on the populist component intersecting Finnish politics, not only right-wing movements (however, on Finnish populism, see Helander [ed.] 1971; Paloheimo 2012; Wiberg [ed.] 2011). While clearly populism and nationalism are intertwined, nationalism has drawn most of the attention. This has been the case in spite of exit polls in the 2011 elections – in which the Finns Party truly made its mark (see Article I) – finding that “wanting to see some change in a stagnant party system”, a typical populist proposition, was the top reason for voting for the Finns Party (Borg 2012: 201). Nationalist and conservative issues such as curbing immigration, supporting traditional values, and opposition to the EU closely followed, but still, in this light, populism has been understudied in the Finnish case.

Fourth, the reasons advanced for the supposed primacy of the nationalist component in study of contemporary European right-wing populism

tend not to be very convincing. Mudde (2007: 16) states that for contemporary European radical right populist parties, “the core concept is undoubtedly the ‘nation’”, while populism comes second, if “one looks at the primary literature”, but is unclear what that literature is. He then proceeds to define right-wing populist parties by their nationalism, arguing in a manner which to me seems circular: nationalism is the core ideological component for a party family he defines by its nationalism. Rydgren (2007) asserts that a doctrine of opposing ethnic mixing, rather than populism, “is the most distinguishing ideological characteristic of the new radical right party family” (Rydgren 2007: 244), basing this largely on his assessment that “populism is a characteristic but not a distinctive feature of the new radical right” (p. 246); other parties use populism as well. But again, if we set out to study something defined as the radical right, it makes sense that we find that it largely corresponds to the features we expect to see in the radical right. I do not claim to have indisputable grounds for the primacy of populism in contemporary European right-wing populist movements either; merely that there are insufficient grounds to simply subsume it under “the populist radical right”.

And finally, fifth: separating populist practice from right-wing populist practice, xenophobic practice, racist practice, or exclusionary practice is in line with my theoretical conception of populism as *a toolkit* and fits what I do empirically. Populism, nationalism and racism are not labels for people, they are things that are done – toolkits in action: it is simply untenable to label someone a ‘radical right-wing populist’ and expect them to act like one at all times. Political actors may use the populist toolkit and they may use right-wing tools; this work focuses primarily on the populist toolkit, for the reasons explicated above, but touches upon radical right tools as well since they often go together.

Recently, Stavrakakis et al. (2017) have taken a step in the right direction in an article which attempts to break the ‘reified association’ of populism and far-right politics. Still, they fall short of understanding populist *and* right-wing tendencies in contemporary politics as separate but interconnected phenomena, often but not always employed by the same political actors. Instead, they again focus on the unnecessary exercise of labelling contemporary right-wing populist politicians as *primarily* right-wing, and only secondarily populist, based on a methodology of finding the “core signifiers” of each discourse (Stavrakakis et al. 2017: 1), but actually

using politicians as the unit of analysis and labelling them. Again, a circular definition causes issues here: it is not very surprising to find that the analysed politicians are right-wing, since the politicians chosen for analysis were selected because they were right-wing (Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen).

In my view, breaking the reified association between the far right and populism requires a commitment to refrain from labelling any single actor as ‘far right’ or ‘populist’ (or ‘far right populist’ or anything of the sort), instead analysing separately the right-wing and populist *practices* exhibited in political *action*.

## 2.4 Roots of Populism

Why are populist tools currently so popular in democracies the world over? In which contexts does populism thrive? A direction in which Moffitt’s (2016) understanding of populism as political style leads him is the media. The *mediatization* of contemporary societies leads public spheres to focus on precisely the features that populism kindly provides: simplification, polarization, personalization, emotionalization and the prioritization of conflict and scandals (Strömbäck 2008; Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese 2011; McManus 1994; Sabato, Stencel & Linchter 2000; cited by Moffitt 2016: 70–94). The mass media also enables communication of “images of ‘the people’ [...] combining potent symbolism (flags, signs, crowds, colours and so forth) with a visual sense of cohesion and homogeneity amongst ‘the people’ [...] strongly implying presence and corporeality – and thus existence – of ‘the people’” (Moffitt 2016: 104). And furthermore, with the rise of social media comes “the valorisation of commentary from ‘non-elites’ in the forms of blogs, mailing lists and the like, [in which] we see both a glorification of ‘the people’ and ‘common sense’, and an associated dismissal of expert knowledge” (Moffitt 2016: 91–92), which I deal with more comprehensively in Article IV.

But since populism’s historical roots are demonstrably American (Houwen 2011; Judis 2016; Kazin 1998; Wiberg 2011),<sup>7</sup> I believe that one

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<sup>7</sup> There were, of course, roughly at the same time as the original American Populists (in the late 1800s), the *Narodniki* in Russia, comprised of “middle-class intellectuals who endorsed a romanticized view of rural life” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012a: 3). Whereas the American Populists’ tradition remained ‘bubbling under’ and raised

often overlooked avenue for understanding European populism is to understand American populism, even though there are some crucial differences.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Finns Party, some indicators of direct influence include the fact that their youth organization arranges study trips to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC, see issue 2/2013 of the Finns Party Youth's magazine); a list of influencers on the website of the party think tank's director, Simo Grönroos, includes Ron Paul and Pat Buchanan; and in 2017, chairman Timo Soini participated in the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. (Yle 16 Dec 2016). Some key activists of the Finns Party are looking to US conservatives for example, making them rather unique in Finnish politics in this sense. These links have thus far been missed in research on Finnish populism and would deserve further scrutiny.

Even more importantly, recent research on US populism has noted some important issues that seem applicable to populism elsewhere as well. Namely, *resentment* and *deservingness* have been identified as two interconnected experiences which can act as seedbeds for populism. Cramer (2016) identifies in contemporary American politics a *politics of resentment*, in which “political differences [...] have become personal. In a politics of resentment, we treat differences in our political points of view as fundamental differences in who we are as human beings” (p. 211). In explaining this, she notes a strong rural–urban divide: The Tea Party (and, more recently, Donald Trump) were heavily supported in rural areas – which applies to the Finns Party as well (Borg 2012: 196). Cramer argues that rural support for populism is rooted in a “rural consciousness” (p. 5), “an identity as a rural person [which] includes a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places” (pp. 5–6). The key to that consciousness is that

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its head multiple times during the 1900s (Kazin 1998), Russian Narodnik ideology was quickly superseded by socialism.

<sup>8</sup> The Anglo-American two-party system with first-past-the-post voting effectively provides a niche for populist challengers who position themselves as ‘outsiders’ from the established duality (Canovan 2005: 38, 72; Judis 2016: 12–87, 43–45). And in the American two-party system, the left–right and liberal–conservative axes are conflated – so that the left wing is also liberal and the right wing is conservative – making Donald Trump’s usage of the populist low–high axis particularly disruptive: it is radically different from the single axis employed by all other politicians (Moffitt & Ostiguy 20 Oct 2016). Furthermore, Canovan (2005: 127) notes that the populist ‘myth of redemption’, in which power is returned to the people from corrupt politicians, corresponds to the United States’ foundation myth, in which Americans overthrow their British rulers and found a democracy of popular rule.



rural people are “hard working and [thus] deserving” (p. 6) – resentment is a result of not getting a fair reward for hard work. It is about “feeling overlooked, ignored, and disrespected” (p. 40) economically and culturally – and this feeling is strongly tied to place. It is not just about money, since most of the people interviewed by Cramer, and Hochschild (2016) as well, do not want welfare money, but want to work for it. With hard work comes *deservingness* (Cramer 2016: 88). Working hard but not receiving amounts to a sense of injustice and victimhood: “These days, American men are an endangered species too”, as one of Hochschild’s (2016: 61) informants puts it.

Hochschild (2016) connects this to an American ‘deep story’ – “a story that *feels as if* it were true” (p. 16) – about working hard trying to earn your place in the world, while some ‘cut in line’ (public sector workers, blacks, refugees, immigrants – people who supposedly do not work as hard, pp. 136–151). Hard work, not getting anything for free, is an honour. Cramer (2016: 101) calls this “a pervasive work ethic” and “a fighting American spirit”. One could well ask how different this is from the Finnish deep story of *sisu* – ‘tenacity’ – working (together as a nation) to achieve something better through hardship. In both cases, social welfare recipients are viewed as lazy and undeserving; rewards must be earned. On this view, the worst insult not just to you personally but your (national) identity is when someone from abroad comes and takes the welfare check you have proudly refused. Money should be *earned* (Mäkinen 2016; Pyrhönen 2015).

Indeed, such resentment is a powerful political tool of populists everywhere: the fact that “conservative politicians encourage people to focus on the undeserving” has not only been noted recently by Cramer (2016: 167) in the US, but by Hoggett, Wilkinson and Beedell (2013) in the UK, and by Judis (2016: 100) in the case of the Danish People’s Party. Everywhere, those who value hard work and deservingness despise ‘freeloaders’. At the same time, left-wing parties that used to represent the workers’ interest, have become more focused on social and cultural issues such as minority rights, which many working-class people see as betrayal (Judis 2016: 56–57; Kazin 1998: 5; Kitschelt 2004: 9).

In fact, according to Kazin (1998), a historian of populism, the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century roots of populism are in a *producer ethic*: “it held that only those who created wealth in tangible, material ways (on and under the land, in workshops, on the sea) could be trusted to guard the nation’s piety and liberties” (Kazin 1998: 13). The ‘elite’ opposed by the original populists, the “money

power” (bonds, stocks etc.), was power “whose value was not directly connected to human labor” (Kazin 1998: 20).

This elucidates why a cultural emphasis on hard work and deservingness is still stressed by populist appeals, which in turn may explain why working-class men are overrepresented among populist voters everywhere, including Finland (Borg 2012: 195) – not because of direct economic concerns over immigration, as is sometimes argued, but via culture and identity (Oesch 2008; Rydgren [ed.] 2013). It’s still “NOT the economy, stupid” (Kaufmann 2016; Mudde 2007) – instead populist parties are largely parties for *cultural discontents* of the ‘globalization losers’ (Kriesi et al. 2008). They are, above all, less educated workers, “who tend to work in sectors that are shrinking in Western Europe” (Rydgren 2013: 1). They have “cultural capital invested in ‘old’ modes of production” and thus “have found themselves in social decline” in terms of status and future prospects, at least in relative terms (Rydgren 2013: 7). This creates a crisis, a breakdown, a disruption in *cultural* terms – a point in time that is ripe for political reorientation and adoption of new frames to interpret reality – such as the populist toolkit (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999; Eranti 2016: 13–26; Rydgren 2013: 5–9; Snow et al. 1998; Swidler 1986: 278–280).

Finally, to revisit the argument that crisis causes populism (e.g. Hawkins 2010: 86–165), I take the position that rather than being structurally caused by crisis, the populist toolkit frames situations in terms of crisis and attributes guilt for it (to elites and Others). Of course, creating crisis out of thin air is not easy – a situation that can be interpreted as a crisis, and thus an opportunity for populist mobilization, must exist (Eranti 2016: 13–19). This highlights the usefulness of a theoretical framework which considers both discourse and material affordances (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 16–17; Hawkins 2010: 31–32). I will further explore this in Article I, which deals with how the Finns Party appropriated the economic crisis from 2010 onwards.

## 2.5 Consequences of Populism

Opponents of populism tend to understand it as a threat to democracy, while its proponents believe it *epitomizes* democracy. Indeed, the populist toolkit is not inherently democratic or antidemocratic. Even on the very simplest analysis, democracy consists of at least both the will of the people

and democratic institutions designed to uphold the rights of individuals and the rule of law. Populism is *for* the enactment of the will of the people as directly as possible, but *against* most of the institutions, which are seen by populists as unnecessary restrictions (Moffitt 2016: 136). As such, it reflects an inherent tension within liberal democracy, between ‘redemptive’ and ‘pragmatic’ democracy (Canovan 1999; 2005) – democracy as a provider of feelings of exaltation over the success of a common cause, and democracy as ‘business as usual’, taking care of everyday governance. Both are needed, but populism tries to tip the scales from the bureaucratic to the effervescent.

As such, among populism’s possible positive effects on democracy, one can count that it “can give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites, by putting forward topics relevant for a ‘silent majority’”, “mobilize” and “represent excluded sections of society”, “increase democratic accountability” and “bring back the conflictive dimension of politics and thus help revitalize both public opinion and social movements in order to foster the ‘democratization of democracy’”. On the other hand, unchecked populism may “contravene the ‘checks and balances’ and separation of powers of liberal democracy”, “circumvent and ignore minority rights”, and “lead to a moralization of politics, making compromise and consensus extremely difficult” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012a: 21). These are two sides of the same coin, and the balance between them largely hinges on the stability of democratic institutions in the polity in question, as well as the success of populism. It seems that the institutions populists would like to demolish are just what protect societies from the potentially detrimental effects of populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2012b: 210).

As such, the effects of populism in a polity are an empirical question, which also has been studied comparatively (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser [eds.] 2012). At least in the cases of Belgium (de Lange & Akkerman 2012) and Canada (Laycock 2012), populism has had mildly positive effects on democracy by forcing mainstream parties to be more responsive and making democracy more direct. In Belgium, the electoral gains of Flemish Interest (VB) have coincided with increases in political trust and satisfaction with democracy (de Lange & Akkerman 2012: 41–44), and the party has contributed to an “increase of political awareness, interest, and participation” (p. 43). And in Finland, the rise of the Finns Party contributed to a

rise in voter turnout and interest in politics in 2011 (Elo & Rapeli 2012: 289).

However, in the cases of Greece and Hungary (Pappas 2014), highly polarized and unstable ‘populist democracies’ have emerged as a result of populist practices becoming the new norm, instead of merely representing a democratic challenge, with irresponsible fiscal policies and the state being unable to protect vulnerable minorities. In Peru, Levitsky & Loxton (2012: 160) argue, the popularity of populism led to “the destruction of institutional checks and balances”, and ultimately Alberto Fujimori’s authoritarian regime, shadowed by extrajudicial killings and other human rights abuses. In Austria as well, successful use of the populist toolkit by radical right-wing parties contributed to a situation where the “rights of minorities were either ignored or reduced” (Fallend 2012: 134). In the Venezuelan case, while Hugo Chávez originally campaigned on a democratic populist platform and was received optimistically by both the majority of Venezuelans and many scholars; it was precisely his populism and its accompanying dismissal of institutional restraints on power that ultimately made his reign so detrimental to democracy and the economy (Hawkins 2003; 2010). As in the proverb, populism seems to be *a good servant but a bad master*.

Still, movements using the populist toolkit can also achieve political influence even without getting their representatives elected, because they present radical alternatives which shift the discursive field, making the unimaginable imaginable (Laycock 2012). UKIP’s influence in realizing Brexit was undeniable, despite having only a single elected Member of Parliament. Such ‘unrealistic’ demands are as much ideological as strategic to populism. When Donald Trump says he will build a wall on the Mexican border and make Mexico pay for it, or when Syriza proposes that Greece default on its debts, these are not just policy positions, but ways of differentiating the speaker from mainstream politicians, siding them with ‘the people’ rather than ‘the elite’, enabling them to represent a true paradigm shift instead of the old incremental policy modifications (Judis 2016: 30, 118–119, 130, 134–135, 158–160). Getting elected might in fact be undesirable to someone heavily reliant on populist tools, because being in power and having to deal with responsibility is not well-suited to presenting yourself as a radical alternative to the establishment (Fallend 2012; Judis 2016: 140). There is a case to be made for the merits of populist uprisings in ‘waking up’ democracies, but in many cases, it seems best

for both the polity and the populist that they end up just short of coming to power.

In the end, the consequences of populist successes have to be assessed politically rather than scientifically. What is to some a redemptive experience of 'the people's voice' being finally heard in politics is an abhorrent display of the tyranny of the masses to another.



### 3 Populism in Finland

Since the dominant view of populism in political science has been that of populism as an ideology, and most research has conflated populism with right-wing movements (e.g. Arter 2010, Hatakka 2016, Keskinen 2013, 2016, Nykänen 2016), there is no existing research on Finnish populism as a practice in the sense explained previously; looking at the use of populism by various political actors, that is, populism in action. Instead, works on Finnish populism thus far have considered only empirical instances that have been *a priori* named ‘populism’ – that is, ‘populist parties’ – and even those are few in number (e.g. Helander [ed.] 1971; Paloheimo 2012; Wi-berg [ed.] 2011). This chapter provides a concise survey of the history of Finnish parties that have been identified as ‘populist’, to contextualize the empirical articles that will follow. It regrettably lacks material on the history of populist action outside of ‘populist’ political parties.

The Finnish Rural Party (*Suomen maaseudun puolue*, SMP) was founded in 1959 as a breakaway faction from the Agrarian League (*Maalaisliitto*, founded 1906), by Veikko Vennamo, a former Agrarian League MP. This happened at the beginning of an era of intense urbanization and structural change in the Finnish society and economy; from an agrarian society to an urban, industrial and service-based one, accompanied by a liberalization of social norms and the mainstreaming of mass media (Sänkiahö 1971). The Agrarian League responded to the changing times by catering increasingly to urban voters as well, renaming itself the Centre Party in 1965 – precisely the kind of development Vennamo wanted to oppose. His Rural Party’s ideas and rhetoric were those of classical agrarian populism: he particularly often spoke of ‘the forgotten people’, referring to the underprivileged victims of urbanization, specifically small farmers. The enemy was the political and economic elite in the cities, ‘the money power’, which Vennamo famously referred to as ‘crime lords’ (*rötösherrat*) (Soini 1988: 23–40). He was to remain chairman until 1979, after which his son Pekka Vennamo took the helm; but even then Veikko remained parliamentary group leader, truly personifying his party throughout its lifespan.

The Rural Party, or simply the Vennamoists (*vennamolaiset*), had two peaks of success. The first was in the general election of 1970, with 10.5%

of the vote and 18 MP's, largely attributed to a protest against urbanization and structural transformation of the economy (Sänkiäho 1971). The second came in the 1983 elections, with 9.7% of the vote and 17 MP's, after a campaign heavily focused on exposing alleged corruption among political and business elites (Räisänen 1989: 7–16). This time, the party entered government in a coalition with the Social Democrats, Centre Party and Swedish People's Party.

In government, the party was plagued by internal strife: while Pekka Vennamo was now party chairman and a government minister, his father Veikko was still the chairman of the Rural Party parliamentary group, and his polemical style was more suited to opposition politics than government. These two strong leaders disagreed on significant policy issues including nuclear power, which impacted the government's credibility and efficiency negatively, as Veikko continued criticizing his own party's actions in government as if he was still an opposition leader (Räisänen 1989: 42–45). This led ultimately to numerous defections, a loss of popularity, Veikko Vennamo's retirement, and the party finally ended up bankrupt in 1995.

But by 1979, a 16-year-old Timo Soini had already joined the Rural Party. He had seen Veikko Vennamo speak at a party rally the previous year and was so impressed that he embraced Vennamo's populism and became his apprentice (IS 5 July 2003). Soini steadily advanced in the ranks of the party. He became vice-chair in 1989, the year after graduating from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, with a Master's thesis about populism – a work of political theory and practice from which a deep admiration of his mentor Vennamo shines through (Soini 1988). He ran unsuccessfully for parliament for the fourth time in 1995, as one of the last candidates the Rural Party fielded. But after the bankruptcy of the party that year, he became one of four Rural Party veterans to found the Finns Party in its place. He was first named as the vice-chair and party secretary, then chairman in 1997.

In 2000, Soini stated in an interview (*Karjalainen* 2 Dec 2000) that he wanted to build the Finns Party into “the same kind of right-wing populist party that exist in Norway and Austria”, referring to the Progress and Freedom parties that were starting to gain ground. He speculated on renaming the party the Progress Party, and said he was looking for a new charismatic leader, in fact a “prophet” who could “channel the people's



agony”, and forecast a 10% vote for the new party. But he ended up becoming that leader himself.

While the Finns Party had started out as a successor to The Rural Party, with largely similar agrarian populist positions and rhetoric, party leader Soini was true to his word and started a shift towards the right, as well as catering to urban voters. The first major sign of this was the parliamentary candidacy and election of former boxer and show wrestler Tony Halme in 2003, on a provocative anti-immigrant platform (Jungar 2016: 119–120). This was also the first time Soini himself became an MP, after five failed attempts, thrice with the Rural Party and twice as a Finns Party candidate.

But the big shift to the right and to the immigration issue started in earnest with an online movement, *Hommaforum*, which is further analysed in Article IV. It was founded in 2008 after lively discussions which took place in Jussi Halla-aho’s blog’s guestbook. Halla-aho, a Helsinki academic linguist, had started his blog *Scripta* in 2003 (with the tagline: ‘Writings from the sinking West’), and positioned it within the global *counterjihadist* movement, most acutely represented by the *Gates of Vienna* blog (which later inspired Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik; see Archer 2013). Halla-aho’s blog and *Hommaforum* brought together Finns who wanted to politicize immigration, and particularly make Islam a cultural-political issue in the public sphere.

While this new online anti-immigration scene was initially divided on whether to enter parliamentary politics – and if, through which party – the anti-immigration movement quickly took parliamentary form within the Finns Party. First, Jussi Halla-aho ran for parliament as an independent Finns candidate in 2007, but did not get elected. At this time, immigration was still a minor issue for the party, but Halla-aho’s candidacy (and Halme’s before him) had started to change this, as we see in Article I.

In 2008, Halla-aho was elected as Helsinki city councillor. This attracted the attention of the media, gave increased visibility to the movement and led many of the activists to join the Finns Party ranks. While party leader Soini was reluctant at first to include this new movement in his party, denying Halla-aho candidacy in the European elections of 2009 for example, he must eventually have realized the electoral potential of combining his established brand of populism with the radical right positions advocated by the new movement. Several *Hommaforum* candidates

ran on the Finns Party ticket in 2011, with phenomenal results, further analysed in Article I.

Veikko Vennamo, Timo Soini and Jussi Halla-aho have been monumental figures for Finnish party-political populism. But while the first two represent a relatively seamless continuation, the last two have been at odds with each other. While Halla-aho has advocated making the Finns Party more focused on opposing immigration, Soini has preferred to not talk about the issue, while at the same time allowing his party to include strong anti-immigrant voices – and this has proved crucial for the party’s success, for which Soini has worked for his whole life.

Announcing his retirement after 20 years as party chairman in an emotional interview in March 2017, Soini expressed his pride in building up the Finns Party from the ashes, but also a hint of regret for “some of the things that have been built up with it” (MTV News 5 Mar 2017), a thinly veiled reference to the rise of the anti-immigration movement. The following morning, the party office held a press conference announcing MEP Sampo Terho as a candidate for chairman, complete with perfectly-timed tweets of support from several popular names of the party. Terho presented himself – and, indeed, was presented by the party leaders – as someone who could unite the party’s agrarian-populist and radical-right factions, as Soini had somewhat successfully done, and seemed quite credible at it.

But he was challenged by Halla-aho, the unofficial leader of the anti-immigration faction. His supporters rallied behind him, starting an online campaign on *Hommaforum* to get as many of them as possible to register as members of the party and to show up in person to vote at the party convention. The project proved successful, with Halla-aho beating party elite favourite Terho on the first round of voting on 10 June 2017. This immediately resulted in the split of the party: three days later, 21 MPs loyal to Soini and Terho defected, forming their own group, hastily and rather ambiguously named ‘Blue Future’ (*Sininen tulevaisuus*). The Finns Party, now led by Halla-aho, was kicked out of government by the other two ruling parties due to “fundamental differences in our values” (IL 10 Jun 2017) and because they refused to further toughen up immigration policy (Yle 12 Jun 2017), and the splinter group Blue Future was included in government in the Finns Party’s stead.

The anti-immigration faction had now won the battle over control of the party, but at high cost. As for Blue Future, the Soini-loyal spinoff, it is

too early to tell at the time of writing (August 2017) what their ideological niche will be, and whether or not it will succeed.<sup>9</sup> In terms of brand-building and party institutionalization, it will be an uphill battle. And as for populism, both parties will likely continue employing its tools – to what extent and in what ways will be investigated by future studies.

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<sup>9</sup> Some hints were given on 14 August 2017 (Yle) when the new group presented their first policy suggestions: lowering taxes for the working and middle classes and small businesses, raising them for the most well-off and big corporations. These may signal an attempt to continue the Rural Party left-populist tradition and distinguish Blue Future from right-wing populism.



## 4 Research Design and Datasets

Empirically, this study takes as its starting-point the observation that Finnish political culture has traditionally employed institutionalized mechanisms of consensus. There has been a strong cultural requirement to frame political arguments in terms of efficiency and rationality (Eranti 2016; Lonkila 2011). Disagreements are often framed as technical, instead of being based on ideological struggles – compared to France, for instance (Alapuro 2005; Lamont & Thévenot [eds.] 2000; Luhtakallio 2012; Ylä-Anttila 2010: 100–103). However, the proliferation of populism seen in the 2010s is introducing new tensions, emotional argumentation, and polarization. This leads to the main research question of this book: **How was the populist toolkit used in Finnish politics from 2007 to 2016?** This is answered via the four more specific questions of the four empirical articles:

1. *Did the Eurocrisis affect populist mobilization in Finland, and if so, how?*
2. *How does gender matter for the Finns Party, quantitatively and discursively?*
3. *How can emotional familiarity be used for doing populism?*
4. *How are claims about knowledge used in doing populism in online media?*

To study such questions dealing with populist political action in various situations, there is a case to be made for getting ‘closer’ to political actors, to achieve thicker descriptions and understanding in the form of in-depth interviews or ethnographic participant observation (in the case of right-wing populism, see Berezin 2007; 2009). However, using text as data has other merits: it is the most prominent medium of public political communication, increasingly so in the age of social media, for formal and informal political discussions. Text data can provide a representativeness difficult to achieve otherwise (Bail 2014).

Still, texts are always written by someone, for someone, and convey a particular representation of reality, not an accurate reflection of it. This is ‘a feature, not a bug’, if you are interested in the depictions and interpretations of reality in those texts, such as using the populist toolkit. In fact, in the case of investigating populism as a facet of political culture, they are central, since populism is something intersubjective, something that happens in communication between individuals (Hawkins 2010: 70). Another way to put it is that texts contain traces of worldviews (Hawkins 2010:

238), and these traces are what we can reliably observe. Below, I elaborate on why I use different types of text data in this work.

## 4.1 Party Materials

Manifestos, party newspapers and other party publications are some of the most classic materials of political science. They lend themselves well to assessments of official party positions and their change over time (see e.g. the Manifesto Project, <http://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>), but only represent views sanctioned by the party office. They do not necessarily cover all views espoused by politicians of the party, not to mention candidates, voters or other supporters. Manifestos and newspapers by the Finns Party were used for a qualitative analysis in Article I, in which the central interest was the change in the party's policy frames brought about by the economic crisis. They were also used in Article II, but in that case complemented by Voting Advice Application data, described below.

## 4.2 Voting Advice Applications (VAAs)

Voting Advice Applications (VAA, *Vaalikone*) are online questionnaires meant to facilitate voter choice. The candidates answer multiple-choice questions on topical political issues, and can also make open-ended comments on them. The prospective voters can then answer the same questionnaire, and have the application calculate a compatibility percentage between them and each candidate. The voters receive the percentages in the form of a compatibility ranking of candidates, hence the 'voting advice', and can compare the candidates' answers with their own. VAAs have become popular in Finnish elections in the 2010s (Mykkänen 2011: 17) and have very high rates of candidate participation: 80.0% of the 2011 parliamentary candidates answered the VAA by *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), Finland's largest daily newspaper. This creates a comprehensive dataset of candidates' policy positions and justifications for them – essentially a candidate survey with both multiple-choice and open-ended text answers. HS publishes the candidate responses as Open Data, freely available online for journalists, citizens and researchers. I use the open-ended comments from the 2011 HS VAA data in Articles II and III.

Some of the advantages of VAA data include that they are largely unmoderated by either the parties or the VAA operators, whereas official party publications only represent views sanctioned by the party office, and media data can be biased; populists particularly often claim it is, a discontent which researchers should take seriously. Additionally, the VAA covers all candidates, not just elected representatives.

The downside is the brevity and specificity of the free-text answers, which stem from each one being a comment on a specific multiple-choice question. Thus, even the open-ended answers lend themselves best to a fairly specific and restricted coding scheme rather than discourse analysis, for example (see e.g. Hawkins 2010: 71). This is why I used them for a quantitative gender-comparative content analysis in Article II, and complemented them with media data in Article III.

### **4.3 Media Data**

The mass media is perhaps the most important discursive field of the public sphere of modern democracies, where political actors engage in debates and compete for influence (Bail 2012; Habermas 1962; Koopmans & Olzak 2004; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio 2016), making media data crucial for studying public debates, as I do in Article III, in an analysis based on Laurent Thévenot's sociology of engagements (Thévenot 2001; 2007a; 2007b; 2014).

But media data always comes with bias, as it is moderated and edited by press gatekeepers – which is why I also employ VAA data in Article III. This has the additional benefit of having a perspective on politicians' views on the issue, not just those of journalists, opinion piece writers, interviewees and others whose messages are conveyed by the media.

### **4.4 Textual Big Data from Online Media**

While the jury is still out on the effects of online and social media on democracy (see e.g. Adamic & Glance 2005; Dahlgren 2000; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela 2011; Hargittai, Gallo & Kane 2008), what we know is that online media of various types are becoming increasingly important for public debates. While the caricatural social media is an unrestricted free-

for-all, some online media are just as subject to editorial oversight as print media, and most fall in between: production of content is open to many (pseudonymous registered users, most often) and editorial policy is lax.

The boon of online media for social scientists is the availability of social data. Never before have we been able to gather so many ‘naturally existing’ discussions, network links and other records of people going about their daily business; working, shopping, procrastinating and talking politics with others – doing things we social scientists are interested in. At the same time, advances in natural language processing and machine learning have made it possible to analyse such big social datasets. This has led to a burgeoning Big Data movement within the social sciences (see Adamic & Glance 2005; Bail 2014; boyd & Crawford 2012; Cioffi-Revilla 2010; Conte et al. 2012; Grimmer & Stewart 2013; Halavais 2015; Hanna 2013; Hopkins & King 2010; King 2011; Laaksonen et al. 2017; Lazer et al. 2009; Purhonen & Toikka 2016; Wallach 2014). This movement is as much about new data as it is about new methodology, because big datasets are useless without the means of analysing them.

The development of these methods and data also affect the social itself, since social media and the changing habits of its use – new facets of social action – are largely based on the same technological advances as the Big Data movement studying them. An example of such a change is the advent of ‘countermedia’, the subject of Article IV. The opportunity for anyone not only to communicate online, but to produce new knowledge claims and found new media to authoritatively disseminate them, are toppling the established *epistemic authorities* of the media and public officials.

In Article IV, online ‘alternative news’ posts and anti-immigration discussions (altogether a bit over 330,000 posts) were used as text data and analysed by a combination of topic modeling (Bail 2014; Blei 2012; DiMaggio, Nag & Blei 2013; Evans 2014; Levy & Franklin 2013; Meeks & Weingart 2012; Mohr & Bogdanov 2013; Mohr et al. 2013) and qualitative, interpretive frame analysis (Entman 1993, Nisbet 2009). The role of the computational analysis was to locate the discussions of interest in a way that is representative and reproducible, while the qualitative frame analysis provides an interpretative understanding, a thick description (Geertz 1973) not possible with computational methods.

While content analysis based on word frequencies has previously been criticized in the study of populism, topic modeling partly circumvents the problem, which is that “the ideas that constitute the underlying worldview



are held subconsciously and conveyed as much by the tone and style of the language as by the actual words” and that “there is no single word or phrase distinct to populist discourse or a particular location in the text where we can usually go to find the speaker’s ‘statement of the issue’” (Hawkins 2010: 71). It does this by focusing on word *co-occurrences* rather than particular words, taking into account the relationality of meaning, that is, the fact that words have different meanings in different contexts (DiMaggio, Nag & Blei 2013). Still, there needs to be a significant element of post-modeling interpretive work, as I will argue.



## 5 Original Publications Summarized

The empirical research in this dissertation consists of four articles, which fall into two main sections. The first two document the rise of the Finns Party using material from 2007 to 2014, and employ two different viewpoints; that of the economic **crisis**, and that of **gender** and equality politics. The last two analyse populism more broadly than just in parliamentary politics: in the media and online discussions. They use data from 2011 to 2016, and proceed from the perspectives of **emotions** and **knowledge**. The order of the articles is thus roughly chronological, starting from how the current political landscape came about, before moving on to scrutiny of the situation as it is now; but also proceeds from a general and descriptive standpoint towards a more specific and analytic angle, as well as from parties to individuals as political actors (Eranti 2016).

### 5.1 Article I: Crisis

Article I was co-authored by Tuomas Ylä-Anttila and myself as part of a comparative, collaborative book project led by Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis S. Pappas ([eds.] 2015). In it, we claim that the state of the economy provided the Finns Party with an opportunity to frame the situation as a crisis and to present itself as a righteous populist challenger to established parties.

The volume, *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, takes crisis as its departure point. Innumerable scholars have noted that crisis and populism go together in one way or another, but there is considerable disagreement on whether crisis is an exogenous phenomenon that *causes* populism, or whether populism *creates* crisis, by spreading claims that there is one, thus creating the crisis in hearts and minds, taking advantage of events and giving them a particular political interpretation (Moffitt 2014) – in the words of Eranti (2016: 13–19), turning crisis into opportunity. The book sets out to empirically test the causal hypothesis that crisis causes populism, by comparing 17 European countries. In each, the chapters look at the ‘independent variable’ of whether the country experienced a (political or economic) crisis in the wake of the economic recession, and

the ‘dependent variable’ of whether this crisis resulted in a rise of populism in that country.

While the results are not entirely clear-cut, the hypothesis that economic and political crises fuel populist success is supported by the country cases in the volume (Kriesi & Pappas 2015: 303–325). However, the cases are so diverse that this is by no means a linear relationship. In our chapter on Finland, we propose that political, cultural and economic specificities must be considered in explaining national populist successes.

First of all, we note that before the economic crisis which hit Europe in 2009–2010, the Finnish party field was stagnant, having been dominated for two decades by ‘The Big Three’: The Centre Party (formerly the Agrarian League), the Social Democrats and the moderate-right National Coalition. While the populist Finns Party had made some progress, they were marginal until their breakthrough in 2011, right after the crisis.

In line with the edited volume’s shared conceptual definitions, the article considers populism a ‘thin-centred’ ideology combined with complementary ideologies to form a complete ideological base (Freeden 1998: 750; Mudde 2004: 544; Stanley 2008). It compares Finns Party electoral manifestos from 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012, together with twelve pre-election issues of the party newspaper *Perussuomalainen* (‘The True Finn’) from 2007 and 2011 via a qualitative content analysis. We argue that 1) the party ideology’s ‘thin’ core is that of populism: a defence of the common people against the corrupt elite. This core is complemented by 2) a left-wing populist defence of the underprivileged against market-led policies promoted by the elite and 3) a nationalist defence of the sovereignty and unity of the Finnish people against immigration and the federalist tendencies of the European Union.

Over the timespan in question, 2007–2012, tenet 2 (framing the people as the underprivileged class) of their ideology has been downplayed and tenet 3 (framing the people as the nation) emphasized. This was done to exploit the *discursive opportunity* (Koopmans & Olzak 2004) presented by the Greek economic situation. In the Finnish case, it enabled the populist party to shift from blaming domestic elites to blaming the Southern debtor countries of the EU. All in all, the party indeed benefited from the crisis, but not directly or structurally (such as generating widespread unemployment resulting in resentment), but by gaining an opportunity to frame their politics in a salient way: by giving the European economic crisis a

nationalistic interpretation, as a crisis for Finns as Europeans, directing resentment against the Southern countries.

In the party's 2007 and 2008 campaigns, economic justice for the underprivileged had been central, with manifestos and newspapers touting slogans such as 'YOUR social security is in danger!', 'For justice, well-being and rule by the people!' and 'Protest so they can feel it!' The elite was described as 'corrupt cognac drinkers', 'big money' and 'stock option predators'. Nationalism was visible as opposition to the EU because the 'Finnish model of the welfare state was being cut back because of various EU-led strategies', but anti-immigration candidates were peripheral and did not receive much space in the official party materials.

This changed profoundly after the economic crisis. The Finnish economy was doing well in 2008, but was very dependent on heavy industry exports, the demand for which dramatically declines in a recession (Rouvinen & Ylä-Anttila 2010: 11). This means that the economic crisis did affect Finland, but with a delay: it did not, for example, create widespread unemployment or bankruptcies. A wealthy state and a stable job market buffered the crisis. The severe political effects came only in 2010 when Greece began seriously faltering.

When it became clear that EU countries would have to save Greece from going bankrupt, the Finns Party was the only one that could feasibly oppose this plan, which was very unpopular amongst the Finnish electorate (Pernaa 2012: 20–22), the mainstream parties being tied to their commitment to the EU project (Railo 2012: 231). This enabled the Finns Party to present themselves as a radical alternative to the perceivedly corrupt mainstream parties – fulfilling the populist promise. Moreover, framing their populism as more strongly *nationalist* than before enabled them to speak for 'all Finns', not just the underclass, as their previous left-populism had done.

Our analysis of the 2011 manifestos and newspapers shows an increased emphasis on national sovereignty of the Finnish people, and the elite the party opposes is now the 'cheaters and liars of the Eurozone' – specifically, Greece, into which party chairman Timo Soini now claims Finland is 'shoveling money'. This is very much in line with the populist notions of hard work and deservingness, reviewed in chapter 2.4.

We conclude that in the Finnish case, populism did get a significant boost from the economic situation, because it enabled the populist party to present itself as a righteous challenger to the corrupt mainstream parties

and as a protector of the Finnish people. This was not a direct, structural, causal effect, but a result of the agency of the party, responding to a changed situation by modifying its toolkit and framing, employing more nationalist elements. This also made it a more appealing option for the growing anti-immigration movement, further analysed in Article IV.

## 5.2 Article II: Gender

Article II was co-authored with Eeva Luhtakallio for another comparative European book project, *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Köttig, Bitzan & Petö [eds.] 2017). It shows that the Finns Party uses notions of traditional femininity and masculinity to oppose a hegemonic conception of gender equality and present itself as a populist alternative.

Finland has strong traditions of equality politics, manifested as ‘state feminism’: a plethora of policies aimed at improving gender equality as part of the welfare state project, together with strong representation of women and the feminist movement within party politics and state structures (Kettunen 2008: 128–171; Holli & Kantola 2005; 2007). However, despite enjoying broad cultural acceptance in principle, state feminism faces implementation problems since the issues of equal pay, equally shared parental responsibilities, gendered violence, and male-dominated political and business leadership have in fact faced stagnation rather than strong progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Holli & Kantola 2007). Finnish gender equality discourse has a paradoxical duality about it: equality politics are considered a matter of national pride, and equality even enjoys the status of a hegemonic discourse; but discrimination persists on multiple fields of society, and criticizing it is often met with denial, since ‘in Finland, we already have equality’ (Holli, Luhtakallio & Raevaara 2006; Luhtakallio 2012).

What are the consequences of a proliferation of right-wing populist politics, dominated by men, in such a case? We analyse two facets of the Finns Party’s rise: firstly, the party’s internal gender gap, comparing the VAA answers of their male and female candidates for the 2011 elections; and secondly, the party’s discourse on gender and equality, analysing their 2011 electoral manifesto, the 2011 and 2012 volumes of the party magazine *Perussuomalainen* (‘The True Finn’), and public materials produced by

the party's womens' organization that were available on their website and in the National Library of Finland.

We used open-ended responses by the candidates as qualitative material to analyse the candidates' justifications for their positions, not just simple policy choices, which were then compared quantitatively. The material revealed a left–right gender gap. When asked about income inequality, a minority of men (13%) argued in a typically right-wing fashion that income inequality is in fact good, because it rewards competition; a small minority. But the percentage of women who argued so was *zero*. A majority of male candidates (39%) advocated the levelling of income cleavages on social justice grounds, but the percentage of women who did so was higher (56%); furthermore, female candidates more often did so on grounds of poverty relief and explicitly mentioning the underprivileged (42%); over twice as often as men (19%).

Both the men and the women of the Finns Party were equally opposed to immigration, and justified this mostly on economic grounds, arguing that immigration was supposed to be financially beneficial and not detrimental 'for Finland'. Some also mentioned immigrant crime and 'cultural incompatibility' of (Muslim) immigrants and native Finns.

But when asked about homosexual adoption rights, a gender gap emerged again in that female Finns Party candidates were decidedly more liberal, defending equal rights for sexual minorities (30%) more than twice as often as men (14%). Very few women resorted to the argument that heterosexuality is 'normal' and homosexuality 'abnormal' (10%), whereas male candidates did so more than three times as often (31%).

In sum, whereas we already knew the Finns Party represents radical right-wing populism and is male-dominated, this analysis showed that this is no coincidence and the connection also holds true within the party, its male candidates voicing more right-wing and socially conservative moral arguments than its female candidates. The party's hard-line right-wing politics seems to be partly a product of its male majority.

As for the Finns Party's use of gender and equality framing, we analysed written materials produced by the party women's organization, and relevant portions of the party's 2011 electoral manifesto, together with the 2011 and 2012 volumes of the party newspaper (articles that either mention the party's women, gender, or equality). We show that the party women's organization mostly speaks of issues that are important to the party as a whole (such as unemployment, pensions and veterans), rather

than emphasizing their role as women. They explicitly state they are ‘not feminists’, and when they do talk of women’s issues, they speak of a traditional, domestic, caring womanhood. Motherhood is emphasized, and staying home taking care of children instead of working is portrayed as an important women’s right. The traditional role of women is of great importance for the nation, because “the family is the basic unit of society and children are the future of the nation” (Finns Party electoral manifesto 2011). Even if women become politically active, they must continue to take care of the home: “We are women who, year after year, work for the party for the sake of the common good along with doing the everyday chores” (The True Finn 9/2012). The role of women in the party, according to our reading of the party materials up to 2012, is largely to support the male leadership.

All in all, our results show that while the success of the Finns Party contributes to a turn to the conservative right in Finnish politics, it does so particularly in terms of gender. The hard-line right wing of the party is mostly a product of men, and the gender and equality politics of the party are conservative, even anti-feminist. The ‘ordinary’ women of the party are portrayed as outsiders compared to the feminist women of the mainstream, ‘elite’ parties. The paradoxical duality of Finnish political discourse on gender equality provides a convenient tool for conservative politics to argue against further equality policies, because it offers the argumentative frame of equality ‘already achieved’.

### 5.3 Article III: Emotional Familiarity

Article III moves from the Finns Party towards populism understood more broadly. It forms a pair with Article IV, which focuses on knowledge, by focusing on emotion. Specifically, it presents a theory of how populist argumentation can use familiar emotional experiences in bonding ‘the people’ together. It does so by analysing the Finnish debate on *Suivirsi*, the Summer Hymn, primarily by using Laurent Thévenot’s pragmatist *sociology of engagements* (Thévenot 2001; 2002; 2007a; 2007b; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2014; 2015) to analyse media texts from 2002 to 2014 and political candidates’ opinions and justifications in 2011 (VAA).



*Suivirsi*, which pupils in Finnish schools traditionally sing at spring graduation ceremonies, has become a site of political struggle. Some question whether Christian hymns are appropriate in public schools, while others defend the cultural tradition. Right-wing populist arguments emphasize the hymn's Finnishness (even though it is originally Swedish) and defend it against a cultural threat they claim has been introduced by (Muslim) immigrants.

To most Finns, it is a familiar practice enabling remembrance and tradition. That familiarity is used to anchor right-wing populist discourse in shared experience. Through its familiarity, *Suivirsi* provides a vessel to connect political argumentation with a solid base of everyday practices, which produce experiences of belonging, to bridge the gap between familiar experience and institutional politics.

Laurent Thévenot's sociology of engagements separates the typical sphere of politics, the *regime of justification* – in which conventionalized value-systems such as market exchange, traditions, or rational efficiency are accepted as yardsticks of what is measurably valuable (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999; 2006; Thévenot 2001: 71) – from the *regime of familiarity*, in which people can act from habit, without critical reflection on the value-basis of their actions, while maintaining a feeling of ease (Thévenot 2007: 416; 2011b: 14–16; 2014: 13–15, 19–28). Objects we engage with in the familiar regime, which may be material or cultural artefacts, and which Thévenot calls *commonplaces*, are invested with a “strongly personal engagement” and breed “confidence” (Thévenot 2011a: 49). They “are not merely symbols, or signs, because they are the vehicle for deeply personal attachments” (Thévenot 2014: 20). Familiarity is perhaps best described “by the phrase: ‘inhabiting a home’” (Thévenot 2001: 69). We have a personal relationship with our everyday material and cultural surroundings, we are used to them. *Suivirsi* is a prime example of a commonplace.

Such familiar engagement using commonplaces can take the form of political action, even though it is “not taken into account in most approaches to politics” (Thévenot 2014: 10). Commonplaces can even be “instrumental in support of authoritarian power” (Thévenot 2015: 98), since they are “by construction, rather foreign to strangers” (Thévenot 2015: 98) – while they form a strong bond between those who share them, they also exclude strangers. This is also apparent in the *Suivirsi* debate, and is what gives *Suivirsi* its exclusionary power. In the debate, two solutions emerge: that of *justification* (appeals to shared values) and that of a

return to *familiarity* (appeals based on an experience shared by a community). The latter is more compatible with populism, because it constructs a people around the commonplace and valorizes the felt experience of the people participating. This is the analytical dichotomy I employ: justification vs. familiarity. For example, when a participant in the debate argued that *Suivirsi* should be sung because it has been done for decades, this argument was classified as justification based on the generally accepted value of cultural traditions. On the other hand, when participants referred to the concrete situation or the experience of singing the song and the emotions it evokes, the argument was classified as based on familiarity.

In total, I located 67 appeals to *justification* and 33 appeals to *familiarity* in the 139 documents of the media material on *Suivirsi*.

Most of the debate focused on whether *Suivirsi* should be identified as part of the social worlds of ‘culture’ or ‘religion’, and then justifying opinions by referring to the worth of *Suivirsi* in that world. However, participants also reminisced about their experiences of singing *Suivirsi* as schoolchildren, and noted how singing the song now arouses ‘feelings of nostalgia’. The singing of *Suivirsi* was described as ‘beautiful and tender’, something ‘most Finns have experiences of’, even ‘a part of the shared experience of many generations’. The hymn contains ‘a powerful emotional charge’ which can elicit even physical responses: it can ‘move’ you and ‘make you weep’, cause ‘shivers’ and ‘make your heart pound’. Such expressions do not appeal to a shared cultural value-system but a shared familiar experience, a commonplace – crucial to claiming convincingly that this is what ‘the people’ feel.

The cultural and religious justifications seen in the media debate were reflected in the 2011 VAA candidate questionnaire as well (with 199 appeals to justification), but familiarity was also salient (with 55 appeals) – particularly for Finns Party candidates (with 24 appeals). For them, the heartfelt emotional familiarity of the song is powerful. Many seem to genuinely feel insulted by the potential ‘loss’ of the experience – it is not just about the song itself, but the continued practice of singing it – and for some, this should count as an argument, without need for further justification. As the song represents something familiar, the candidates see the practice of their offspring continuing this tradition as a touching gesture of the succession of generations.

The meaning of the song cannot be grasped by referring to its lyrical content or even the generalized values of Christianity or Finnishness it is

claimed to represent. The emotional experiences referenced by respondents indicate that the ‘good’ conveyed by the song is strongly attached to the very experience of singing it with others at a specific event (the school-year-ending ceremony) held at a specific place (the school), a specific age (childhood) and a specific time of year (spring). They reminisce about the sound of the hymn and the smell of spring, visceral bodily experiences that cannot be conveyed by referring to principles of justification, only by appealing to the familiarity of the commonplace – to those that share that familiarity – the ‘people’ of their populism. “I believe everyone knows it by heart”, as one candidate put it.

The emotional experience of this cultural habit is tied to the actual physical situation, via personal attachment to a commonplace, not just discursive descriptions of it. ‘Tapping into’ this experience is a politicization of the everyday experience of the ‘common people’. The implication is that one cannot truly understand the significance of the song unless one has participated in the springtime ritual by singing it.

The populist reaction in this case can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the imperative for justification. Instead, it turns back to the heartlands and commonplaces of familiarity – in this case, the supposed homogeneous national community ‘before multiculturalism’ – to fix the crisis by returning to times before it happened, before the habit had to be justified, when one could ‘sing the song as it has always been sung’, instead of engaging in a public debate over plural orders of worth. These participants in the debate demand the acceptance of their experience as ‘common people’ in the sphere of politics, without need for justification by value-systems, let alone politicians, bureaucrats or other authorities. This is a populist and exclusionary politicization of the familiar experience of ‘the common people’, to which ‘everyone’ is claimed to belong.

#### **5.4 Article IV: Alternative Knowledge**

Whereas Article III provided a view of the emotional component of populism, Article IV tackles the populist epistemology: populism’s theory of knowledge. While populism can be critical of intellectuals, experts and knowledge authorities in general, the article shows that another populist strategy is the creation of *counterknowledge*, incorporating alternative

knowledge authorities, and that this strategy is particularly employed by the populist radical right.

Since populism opposes elites (typically in terms of political power), it also tends to oppose knowledge elites – that is, experts and epistemic authorities. This tendency captured the public imagination in 2016, as seen in a proliferation of accounts in the press about so-called ‘post-truth politics’, which supposedly eschew facts in favour of emotional appeals and identity (e.g. Economist 10 Sep 2016, Guardian 15 Nov 2016). Previously, an epistemology that valorizes “the knowledge of ‘the common people,’ which they possess by virtue of their proximity to everyday life”, has been termed *epistemological populism* by Saurette & Gunster (2011: 199). This tendency to eschew experts in favour of ‘folk wisdom’ is a well-known tool of populism (Cramer 2016: 123–130; Hawkins 2010: 7; Hofstadter 1962; 2008; Oliver & Rahn 2016; Soini 1988: 4). But, as I argue in this article, ‘epistemological populism’ is not the full picture of *populist epistemology*. Another kind of populist epistemology is what I call *counterknowledge* – epistemic opposition to established experts by the production of alternative knowledge authorities – and it has played a significant role in Finnish populism in the 2010s.

The inclusion of anti-immigrant activists in the Finns Party was largely made possible by their consolidation on *Hommaforum.org* since 2008, a discussion forum for self-proclaimed ‘critics of immigration’. More recently, spurred on by the spike in numbers of refugees in 2015, several ‘counter-media’ websites sprung up, publishing political news often of questionable truth value; accusing immigrants of serious crimes, mainstream journalists of covering them up, and politicians of facilitating a destructive assault on Finnish society by immigrants. The most popular of these is *MV-lehti* (‘WTF Media’). ‘Countermedia’ combine facts with fiction and rumours, sometimes intentionally blurring the lines or spreading outright lies, other times cherry-picking, colouring and framing information to promote a radical anti-immigrant agenda. These websites quickly became immensely popular, while street violence against immigrants simultaneously intensified and government asylum policy was tightened.

Article IV argues that production and dissemination of counterknowledge can be instrumental in populist mobilization. An effective way to question mainstream policies, such as the intake of asylum-seekers and state-sanctioned multiculturalism, is to claim they are supported by false knowledge, and produce and circulate alternative knowledge countering

it. I analyse counterknowledge on Hommaforum and WTF Media by a combination of computational topic modeling (Bail 2014; Blei 2012; DiMaggio, Nag & Blei 2013; Evans 2014; Levy & Franklin 2013; Meeks & Weingart 2012; Mohr & Bogdanov 2013; Mohr et al. 2013) and qualitative, interpretive frame analysis (Entman 1993, Nisbet 2009). The role of the computational analysis here is to locate the discussions of interest in the large dataset (more than 330,000 messages and news articles) in a way that is both more representative and reproducible than either a fully qualitative selection (such as Mäkinen 2016) or a keyword search would be. Qualitative frame analysis, on the other hand, provides an interpretative understanding, a thick description (Geertz 1973) not possible with computational methods.

According to the findings, the predominant framing of truth on Hommaforum and WTF Media looks similar to a populist framing of power and democracy. Like the populist assertion that limitations of liberal-democratic institutions – checks and balances that are in place to protect minorities – should be lifted to uphold democracy; the same applies on Homma and WTF for any limitations on freedom of speech, which are portrayed as detrimental to the truth.

Moreover, an empiricist-positivist ‘counterknowledge epistemology’ is explicit especially on Homma: truths about society are presumed accessible by scientific methods, and these truths could be adopted for governance; but the multiculturalist-relativist hegemony and the corrupt research community prevents such work. An example of their positivist empiricism is the habit of framing the immigration question as purely economic, thus enabling calculations of the monetary value of people and rejection of those who are not deemed of value to the national economy (see also Mäkinen 2016). Such an economization of the immigration question can in fact be described as technocratic, and as such is quite incompatible with the traditional populist dismissal of expert knowledge, ‘epistemological populism’ (Saurette & Gunster 2011). Instead, it is a political tool associated with the radical right.

WTF Media is received quite positively by the anti-immigration activists of Homma, despite some contributors condemning WTF’s ‘obvious’ neo-Nazism and apparent political connections with Russia, using these connections to frame it as unreliable. Homma users praise WTF for ‘saying what others won’t’; even though much of the information might be bogus, some of it is correct and not available elsewhere. The participants

emphasize that the same scepticism should be felt against mainstream media and countermedia, and that smart media consumers can assess information themselves, without gatekeepers, like a rational *homo economicus* in a marketplace of ideas. This portrait of the ‘ideal *knower*’ is, again, very different to that of ‘epistemological populism’ (Saurette & Gunster 2011), in which members of the ‘common people’ *know* things based on their common sense and lived experience. The ideal *homo economicus* ‘knower’ of counterknowledge is a rational selector instead.

Thus, it seems that unlike what Wodak (2015: 22) claims, right-wing populism does not simply correlate with anti-intellectualism; it is *populism* that does so. The contemporary European amalgam of populism with radical right-wing thought is in fact quite comfortable with intellectualism, as long as that intellectualism is technical-rational in nature and can be used against the ‘false truths’ of political opponents. Rather than an ambivalent and experiential truth orientation – as suggested by the ‘post-truth’ thesis and ‘epistemological populism’ – right-wing populists take *some* expert knowledge very seriously, in fact often overestimating possibilities to arrive at the right solutions to political issues by inquiry. Both ‘epistemological populism’ (populist folk wisdom) and a ‘counterknowledge epistemology’ (radical right rationalism) nevertheless provide tools to denounce opponents as enemies, since opponents are not only politically but epistemologically wrong.

## 6 Discussion

In this dissertation, I have argued that a sociological perspective based on the vocabulary of cultural toolkits and practices is useful for analysing populism, and that populism is a useful concept for analysing society, particularly contemporary Finnish politics. Of course, this is not the only possible theoretical framework, because social scientific theories do not just provide hypotheses to be empirically tested, thus *explaining* phenomena in a causal sense, but must also assist in choosing the right questions and perspectives, and ultimately help *understand* society. Some of the insights provided by this work could perhaps have been formulated using other theoretical tools as well. But the practice-oriented perspective used here helped us to study populism in action, as something that is done by political actors who are constrained but also enabled by their situations. This reminds us to consider in our studies not only institutions and the motivations of organizations and individuals – and not just cultural discourses either – but the *agency* of political actors, whether they are party politicians or citizens in everyday political debates.

I believe theories in social sciences have to be assessed by their usability in empirical research – which I hope to have demonstrated in the four empirical articles – and their usability for scholarly cooperation. I want this latter point to emphasize that the ‘toolkit theory’ is quite compatible with (and translatable into the language of) many other theories employed in not only sociology, but political science, communication and related branches of study.

If we allow ourselves to consider the ‘toolkit theory’ vindicated at least to some extent, what about the concept of populism? Is it a term we should be using; does it help us understand society? And how were populist tools used in the Finnish case? I hope that the four empirical articles have proven the relevance of populism as a concept as well. Firstly, in Article I, the populist juxtaposition of a positively connoted ‘people’ and a negatively connoted ‘elite’ was identified as a prominent frame in Finns Party manifestos. But before the Eurocrisis, ‘the people’ was mostly defined as the ‘underclass’ and the elite as the ‘money power’ in a classical populist sense. The dire economic situation of the European countries, mainly in the South and culminating in 2010, presented the party with a new opportunity: because the mainstream parties were committed to the Euro

project, the Finns Party could begin employing an argumentative frame of *defining the situation as a crisis for Finns as well* – despite the fact that the crisis was buffered by the country’s strong economy and institutions – and blaming the crisis on the Southern countries. They were still employing the toolkit of populism, but ‘the people’ were re-defined in terms of the Finnish *nation*, and its opponents as European elites and the ‘lazy’ Southerners they were coddling. In other words, they moved towards right-wing populism, which identifies elite-pampered Others as enemies. Their populist toolkit was modified according to the situation, and it was made more exclusionary.

In Article II, we illustrated how the populist toolkit was used in terms of gender: to draw a line between the ‘ordinary’, ‘common women’ of the Finns Party and the ‘elite feminists’ of other parties. This valorization of traditional womanhood led them to support caretaker positions rather than public positions for women. In terms of the gender gap within the party, the radical right tools which were identified in Article I were shown in Article II to be primarily deployed by the men of the party. Radical right politics are associated with men and masculinity.

Moving on from the Finns Party to other parties as well as ordinary citizens, Article III noted the power of *familiarity* as a tool of populism. By referencing a shared emotional experience, that of singing the hymn *Suivirsi*, political actors were able to infuse their proposition of who ‘the people’ are with a solid experiential foundation. Those who have sung the hymn together were a ready-made *community of feeling* that was now given a nationalist definition. Whereas populism has often been identified as ‘emotional’, Article III analysed the populist use of emotions as political tools more closely, showing the importance of familiarity.

Finally, in Article IV, the focus turns from emotions to knowledge – and epistemology, theories of knowledge. It is often argued that populism valorizes ‘folk wisdom’; this has been called ‘epistemological populism’. But a combination of computational text analysis and frame analysis in Article IV shows that while Finnish anti-immigration activists denounce knowledge authorities, they often posit alternative knowledge authorities in their place instead of completely shunning expertise. This was identified as production of *counterknowledge*, in contrast to populist epistemology. The theory of the populist toolkit has trouble capturing these anti-immigration activists; instead counterknowledge seems to be specifically a *right-wing* populist frame.



Thus, not all the phenomena studied in this work neatly fit under the umbrella of the ‘populist toolkit’. Still, the populist toolkit has analytical utility, since it can separate a set of populist repertoires from others, for example that of radical right repertoires, in a way that takes into account culture in action.

Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, M5S in Italy, the Pirate Party in Iceland, and Bernie Sanders in the USA prove that not only radical-right movements can use the populist toolkit, for better or for worse. Bornschieer & Kriesi (2013) have argued that the populist uprising we are witnessing now in Europe and North America – and which has taken primarily right-wing forms – is a delayed backlash against the New Left of the 1970s and 1980s. If so, is the next wave going to be left-wing and/or liberal parties taking up the tools of populism? *Should* they do so, or instead embrace the ‘new axis’ between populism and technocracy precisely by doing the opposite: placing themselves *against* the populists, by defending pluralism, democratic institutions, evidence-based policy, scientific knowledge and expertise; finding non-populist ways of listening to the grievances of the people, helping them voice their discontents? This is the question that would keep me up at night, were I a politician.



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## Original Publications

