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The climate change movement and political parties

Mechanisms of social media and interaction during the 2019 electoral period in Finland

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Abstract

Building on the framework of electoral contention, we investigate the interaction dynamics between social movements and political parties during elections. We argue that social media today is an important venue for these interactions, and consequently, analysing social media data is useful for understanding the shifts in the conflict and alliance structures between movements and parties. We find that Twitter discussions on the climate change movement during the 2019 electoral period in Finland reveal a process of pre-election approaching and post-election distancing between the movement and parties. The Greens and the Left formed mutually beneficial coalitions with the movement preceding the elections and took distance from one another after these parties entered the government. These findings suggest that research on movement-party interaction should pay more attention to social media and undertake comparative studies to assess whether the approaching-distancing process and its constituent mechanisms characterise movements beyond the climate strikes in Finland.

Keywords: social movements, climate movement, electoral contention, contentious politics, social media

Introduction

When Greta Thunberg sat down in front of the Swedish Parliament in August 2018, holding a sign that read “Skolstrejk för klimatet” [School strike for climate], she sowed the seeds of the global “Fridays for Future” climate movement. The fast-spreading mobilisation wave inspired by Thunberg hit the shores of Finland by the end of 2018. The first strike in Helsinki attracted 300 protestors. By 27 September, the fourth global climate strike was organised in several Finnish cities and towns; the biggest strike in Helsinki attracted more than 10,000 protestors.

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The 2019 mobilisation of the climate movement in Finland occurred simultaneously with two elections: the parliamentary elections in April and the European Parliament elections in May. These Finnish parliamentary elections were described by many observers as the world's first climate elections (Barry & Lemola, 2019). Indeed, they were the first major elections after the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's influential report, *Global warming of 1.5 degrees*, the subsequent media debate, and a widespread, global mobilisation of the climate strike movement. Climate change played an important role in the pre-election debates and the government taking power in Finland after the elections announced significant changes towards more ambitious climate change policy.

The scale of the climate mobilisation, both nationally and globally, and its impact on the elections in Finland motivate this case study research investigating how the themes of global climate mobilisation and climate elections were tied together throughout 2019. In this article, we examine the interaction between the climate movement and political parties before, during, and after the electoral period, with two research questions:

1. How did Finnish political parties and the climate movement interact on Twitter during the electoral period?
2. How did interaction patterns change after the elections?

Studying this case is useful for understanding the dynamics of interaction between social movements and political parties and showing how social media has become an increasingly important venue for such interaction. We focus in particular on the communication patterns during the electoral campaign and the shifts that occurred in these patterns once the election was over and the new government had been formed. Our results show that the Green League and the Left Alliance in Finland formed mutually beneficial ties with the climate movement before the elections and that the movement mobilised more frequently and in larger scale prior to the elections. The ties between the movement and parties weakened after the elections: the parties distanced themselves from the movement and the movement criticised the new government to which the Greens and the Left belonged. Overall, during the campaign, the climate movement received support from all political parties except the populist-right Finns Party.

Literature review and theoretical framework: Movements, parties, and hybrid media systems

We build on and contribute to two streams of literature: one examining the interactions between social movements and political parties and the other focusing on the relationship of movements and (social) media in the current context of hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017). The primary focus of our analysis is the interaction between movements and parties. This focus is motivated by the observation

that these interactions, despite being arguably important for both movements and parties, have received relatively little attention among social movement scholars. What is more, the rise of social media and the emergence of hybrid media systems have changed these interactions in ways that remain not well understood.

In social movement studies, a theoretical perspective that has made some efforts to understand movement-party interaction is the contentious politics approach. Its proponents argue that much social-movement scholarship has suffered from a “movement-centric bias”, in which the internal dynamics of movements have become too strongly accentuated at the expense of interactions with other actors in the political field and attention to context (McAdam & Boudet, 2012; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010, 2019). The contentious politics approach builds on literature that has considered the connections between social movements and the social and economic contexts they are embedded in (e.g., Thompson, 1968; Tilly, 1964, 1978), perhaps most notably the political process approach (Kriesi, 2015; Tilly, 1978). The primary objective of the contentious politics approach, first developed by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), is to shift attention to the dynamics of interaction between movements, their targets, and other actors, including political parties (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 5) originally provided a definition of contentious politics:

Episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.

This definition stresses public and episodic collective struggles and interaction within the political field. It focuses on episodes of contention: the dynamics and mechanisms of interactions between various actors or claimants that affect the direction of future events (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). It often highlights the dynamics between social movements and political parties, although the definition leaves room for the specification of involved actors (see, e.g., McAdam & Tarrow, 2010, 2013, 2019). Importantly, the approach is more attentive towards the fluid boundaries between institutionalised and non-institutionalised realms of politics – recognised by Goldstone (2003) – than the earlier political process approach, thus recognising the reciprocity of movement-party interactions. Although the contentious politics approach makes room for a variety of unconventional or innovative strategies that may be adopted by social movements, it places more importance to the institutionalised tactics of social movements, such as educational strategies, organisational structure, and campaigning around elections (McAdam & Tarrow, 2013).

A key argument of the contentious politics approach is that political conflict, in democracies, is manifested especially in two places: elections and social movements. However, the *relations* between these two major forms of conflict have not been researched systematically, although the link between them is apparent.

During elections, political parties are aware of social movements as signals of public interests and may adjust or align their agendas based on these indications to appeal to larger crowds or gain stronger support for existing agendas (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). McAdam and Tarrow (2013) view elections and movements as mutually constitutive forms of politics and thus criticise the stark division of research fields between social movement studies and electoral studies. Social movement scholars have paid too little attention to parties, and conversely, electoral studies scholars have shown little interest in social movements. McAdam and Tarrow (2013) have attempted to bridge the gap between movements, parties, and elections by introducing the concept of electoral contention. The concept refers to recurring links between movements and elections that showcase their reciprocal relationship. The approach is based on identifying *mechanisms* of contention that combine into *processes* of contention (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). The mechanisms provide insight into the relationships between movement actors and parties during elections. The book that originally presented the contentious politics approach, *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdam et al., 2001), included a set of over twenty mechanisms with almost as many case studies. However, electoral contention research focuses on a coherent group of six mechanisms that form a functional framework for research. Three of the six mechanisms are relevant for this paper and will be introduced here.

The “electoral coalitions” mechanism points to formation of movement-party alliances that can provide a social movement access to institutionalised power by aligning agendas with parties. Political parties benefit from such alliances by strengthening their agendas and increasing their appeal to voters. Some movements choose the option to participate directly in elections to access institutionalised power directly in consensus democracies (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). This strategy has been successfully utilised in the rise of Green parties around Europe. More recently, feminist parties founded in Sweden in 2005 and in Finland 2016 have grown from social movement backgrounds into political parties.

The “proactive mobilisation” mechanism describes strategically timed mobilisation prior to or within the context of elections, motivated by an opening of the institutionalised realm of politics. Movement actions and tactics are influenced by opportunities and threats posed by elections. Social movements can become increasingly active if the election agenda provides an opportunity for tactical mobilisation or protest action (Blee & Currier, 2006). Some movements function predominantly before elections. For example, the “BlackVotersMatterFund” is a movement project attempting to increase voter registration in the US, mobilising specifically in electoral contexts (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010).

The “polarisation of parties” mechanism outlines how movements that have previously formed electoral alliances with the victorious political parties mobilise after the elections. The mobilisation can indicate and strengthen support for the newly elected government. However, the mobilisation may also result in increasing tensions between the demands of the movement and the agenda of

the political party, which faces the challenge of transitioning from the electoral arena to policy-making. The increasing tension may result in conflict between the movement and the political party or in polarisation within the party, depending on the closeness of the alliance (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). As observed by Zald and Berger (1978), movements may also emerge within parties, resulting in polarisation or splits within the organisation. A recent example in Finland has been the Finns Party, which split in 2017, resulting in the abandonment of the party by more than half of their MPs and the establishment of the Blue Reform Party.

These mechanisms of electoral contention individually capture various dynamics of movement-party relations. However, when combined, they help to identify chains of occurrences, changes, or shifts in the relationships throughout elections. Despite its many merits, the contentious politics literature doesn't consider the diverse aims movements may have outside of institutional politics; aims for cultural change can also impact movement-party dynamics. The approach is also relatively vague concerning the specific venues in which interactions take place, as well as the impact of the prevailing media system for the tactical use of various venues. We argue that social media is an increasingly important venue for these interactions.

Social movements and hybrid media systems

Research on media and social movements has oscillated between enthusiasm focusing on successes and critical accounts instead emphasising the continuing importance of offline action and warnings of new opportunities for surveillance of movement activists by repressive regimes. The development of the media has indeed been instrumental to the rise of modern social movements starting from the connections between printed newspapers and revolutionary movements of the eighteenth century (Ylä-Anttila, 2005). In this light, it is not surprising that scholars eagerly pointed to the potential of early digital media technologies for social movements, analysing successful cases of new media use by the global justice movement and related mobilisations around the turn of the millennium (Mattoni, 2008; McCurdy, 2008; Morris, 2003; Pickard, 2006), emerging forms of “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2007) and moving on to social media and the Arab Spring (Howard et al., 2011), Occupy (Kavada, 2020), the Gezi protests in Turkey (Tufekci, 2017), and so on. Others have been sceptic, arguing that social ties forged online may lack the depth required for ties that mobilise people into action, especially in high-risk contexts (Diani, 2000; Earl, 2019), or pointing out that online activism sometimes amounts to “clicktivism” or “slacktivism”: easy online activism that buys the participants good conscience, but is politically ineffective (Christensen, 2011). Yet others have reminded that new media technologies also offer repressive regimes unprecedented means for surveillance and punishing of activists they see as a threat (Morozov, 2011).

Studies have offered varying accounts of how the development of digital media has shaped social movements. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) famously

argued that social movements today combine the twin logics of collective action – mediated by organisations – and connective action, in which activists, often relatively independent of formal organisations, share personal content in self-organising networks. The climate change movement certainly displays this duality of logics, combining personal online communication with mass protests in which environmental organisations have joined forces with relatively loosely organised groups of high-school students (Savolainen et al., 2020). Although the impact of the development of the information and communications technologies for social movements is undeniable, pinpointing straightforward consequences is difficult, because neither social movements nor digital media exist in vacuums. Both are embedded in differing and evolving political and media contexts. Communication cultures outline activists’ engagement in digital media (Kavada, 2013). Furthermore, activists may use technology and digital media in ways they were not originally intended for (Cammaerts et al., 2013). Users of digital media shape it, and the interactive production of online spheres ties together various actors, platforms, audiences, and incentives. Capturing the multifaceted nature of public contention in case study research is a complicated task, but it is a goal worth striving for (Kavada & Poell, 2020).

The literature on media and social movements has pointed to at least four ways in which social movements use different kinds of media. First, they use media platforms to mobilise supporters to offline action, such as the school strikes organised by the climate change movement. Second, they use social media platforms for online protest, such as the Earth hour 2021 “virtual spotlight” that gathered over 2 million participants globally. Third, movements use social media platforms for internal debates in which the movement’s goals and strategies for achieving them are formulated and sharpened. Fourth, and most importantly for the present study, movements use the media – old and new – to engage their potential allies and opponents. During electoral periods, arguably the most important set of potential allies and opponents for movements to target are political parties.

Today’s media systems are hybrid, in the sense that content circulates in networks comprised of older (press, television, radio) and newer (social media) platforms and is created by a diverse set of actors, from journalists and other communication professionals to politicians, activists, and momentarily engaged citizens (Chadwick, 2017). According to Chadwick (2017: 25), “actors in this system [...] create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others”. This point about influencing the agency of others is particularly important for our study. From this perspective, we theorise that the mechanisms of electoral contention outlined above represent the ways in which movements and parties each try to strengthen their own agency by drawing on the power resources of the other, strengthening the agency of each other in the process. The movements’ power resources here include moral leadership (appearing as unsoiled outsiders to the political system advocating for their key issues without being doubted for doing so only to gain

votes), organisational resources (which vary greatly between different movements), innovative media tactics not always available to parties (such as online and offline mobilisations to gain visibility), and the reputation and visibility they may have already achieved using these tactics. Parties, on the other hand, tend to command greater organisational and financial resources than movements, and, especially in the case of relatively established parties, they tend to have established connections to journalists and high visibility in the mainstream media. Moreover, the most important power resource of the parties is their potential to gain control of the government and turn their agendas into public policies – a key goal that is attainable for movements only indirectly through parties and other actors involved in policy-making. It is for these reasons, we argue, that movements and potential ally parties interact in hybrid media systems by supporting each other. Conversely, movements and potential opponent parties interact to use their resources to diminish each other's agency. In this way, the cooperation and competition of political actors in mediated environments reflect the dynamics of the conflict and alliance structures between movements and parties throughout the episodes of contention.

Social media platforms are particularly important for movement-party interactions, because the ability to make use of mainstream media, such as press or television, is not equal to all actors. As Mattoni and Ceccobelli (2018) note, limiting research to the mainstream media or to institutional political actors results in the investigation of elite media and elite politics. While social media is not immune to inequalities, the development of information and communications technologies and the hybridisation of media systems have improved citizens' and activists' abilities to express their opinions, form networks, and engage with other actors (Kavada, 2013; Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018). We contribute to expanding the research agenda beyond institutional politics and mainstream media to observe the ebbs and flows of interactions between party and movement actors in social media, where interactions are publicly (re)produced. Thus, we examine social media as a venue of the electoral contention mechanisms in our case study.

Case selection, research design, data, and methods

We constructed a case study research design to investigate the dynamics of the relationship between the climate strike movement and the Finnish political parties on Twitter before, during, and after the electoral period. Table 1 shows the MPs (members of parliament) of each party in the 2015–2018 and 2019– Finnish Parliament, as well as the MEPs (members of the European Parliament) in the 2014–2018 and 2019– European Parliament (Eduskunta, 2019, 2020; Ministry of Justice Finland, 2014, 2019). The 2019 elections were characterised by a growing representation of young politicians and female MPs, resulting in a loss for the Centre Party, which was curiously the only party to remain in the government. Table 1 also shows the compositions of the coalition governments of the two electoral terms. The parties in the governments of each electoral term are in bold.

Table 1 Number of MPs and MEPs by political party

Party	MPs		MEPs	
	2015–2018	2019–	2014–2018	2019–
Centre Party	48	31	3	2
National coalition Party	38	38	3	3
Social Democratic Party	35	40	2	2
Blue Reform Party	17	0	0	0
Finns Party	17	39	2	2
Green League	15	20	1	2
Left Alliance	12	16	1	1
Swedish People's Party	10	10	1	1
Christian Democrats	5	5	0	0
Movement Now	2	1	0	0
Seven Star Movement	1	0	0	0

Source: Eduskunta, 2019, 2020; Oikeusministeriö, 2014, 2019

We look at the relationship between political parties and the climate movement through the lens of Twitter data. A browser-based software service, Mohawk Analytics, was used to collect data, and the data is country specific, as determined by use of the Finnish language. Data published in private accounts is inaccessible. Various test searches were conducted to define a sufficient dataset and to follow the principle of data-minimisation. The data was searched using the keywords in relation to the climate movement in social media: “ilmastolakko” [climatestrike] or “#nytonpakko” (#actnow). The timeframe was set as 1 January 2019–31 December 2019 to explore the development of movement-party interactions throughout elections. The amount of data was extensive: the initial search including various platforms produced 88,076 posts (see Table 2). Most of these were found on Twitter: 78,887 tweets contained one or both search words, while only 3,471 Facebook posts were found. Other platforms produced less than 2,000 public posts.

Table 2 Social media posts mentioning “ilmastolakko” or “#nytonpakko”, 1 January–31 December 2019

Source	Posts
Twitter	78,887
Facebook	3,471
Internet forums	2,629
Instagram	2,006
News comments	532
Blogs	531
YouTube	19
Google+	1
Total	88,076

The Twitter data was analysed using descriptive statistics and social network analysis. The use of network analysis was inspired by Tremayne (2014), who studied Twitter networks of the Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as Ruoho and Kuusipalo (2018), who researched Finnish political networks on Twitter with network analysis methods. The Finnish police force provided additional data on the numbers of participants in climate protests, which were used to assess the extent of offline mobilisation of the movement. Furthermore, a survey conducted in the September 2019 Climate Strike in Helsinki and observations about the nature of the protests were used to support the analysis and to showcase the changing attitudes of climate protestors (Savolainen et al., 2020).

Limiting the data to Twitter posts increased the coherence and comparability of the data. The data was initially grouped by filtering it in Excel. First, a list of MPs in 2019 was collected, including all MPs from the 2015–2019 electoral period and those elected in the 2019 elections, a total of 286 MPs. Next, we compiled the Twitter accounts of the MPs: 250 MPs had a Twitter user account and 36 did not (or it was not found). We then used the advanced-filter function in Excel to extract tweets published by MPs that mentioned our keywords “ilmastolakko” or “#nytonpakko”. We divided the tweets into four categories to construct our analysis:

1. Tweets of MPs
2. Tweets of MPs before and during parliamentary elections
3. Tweets of MPs after parliamentary elections
4. Tweets of MPs that mention another user

We used the categorised tweets to compare how the MPs tweeted before and after the elections and to observe tweeting at the party level.

Results

Electoral coalitions

Two political parties formed a close electoral alliance with the climate movement: the Green League and the Left Alliance were suitable allies for the movement due to their voter bases and environmentally conscious agendas. The Green League has its roots in the environmental movement, but since it is a well-established political party with routine access to institutional power, it has a different position in the political realm compared with a social movement.¹ During the electoral campaign period, the Green League, the Left Alliance, and the climate movement had well-aligned agendas as part of their electoral alliance, which was apparent in two ways. Firstly, the parties interacted with and promoted the climate movement in social media. Second, the climate movement showed public support for the parties.

The Green League and the Left Alliance interacted with the climate movement and promoted it by using the two keywords significantly more compared

with other political parties. Together, the MPs of the Green League and the Left Alliance published 78.9 per cent of all tweets by MPs that mention either keyword prior to the elections. The MPs of the Green League published 349 tweets (59.8% of all tweets) with the keywords; the MPs of the Left Alliance were less active with 112 tweets (19.2% of all tweets), but nevertheless more active than the remaining parties. The MPs of each remaining party published less than 40 tweets with the keywords.

The use of the keywords in tweets shows that MPs either mentioned the movement itself or used the hashtag “#nytonpakko”, which was created and initially used by movement activists. Furthermore, use of the keywords indicates that a tweet concerns the climate movement and groups it together with other tweets concerning the movement, inviting interaction. The MPs who mentioned the keywords promoted the climate movement to their audiences on Twitter. Alternatively, the use of the keywords could indicate public criticism towards the movement, but this is unlikely in the case of the Green League and the Left Alliance, due to their environmental agendas and voter bases consisting of young and environmentally conscious voters.

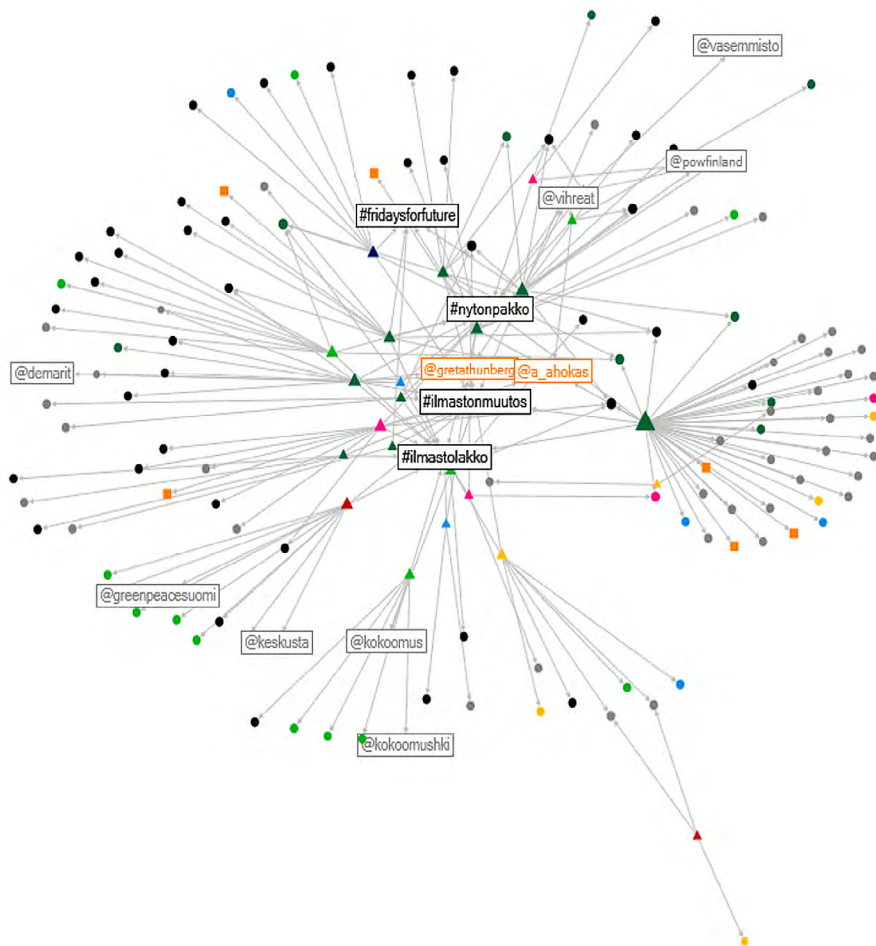
The ally parties received electoral campaign support from the movement. A campaign under the slogan “Korvaamaton” [Irreplaceable] – bringing together environmental, climate, and development organisations – published a report evaluating the commitment of parties to the climate agendas of the organisations. A maximum score of 30 points indicated strong support for the suggestions of the organisations. The Green League was awarded 29/30 points and the Left Alliance received 24/30 points, while other parties scored between 0–15 points each. The results of the report were published by various organisations, such as WWF Finland, during the electoral period. The campaign supported the ally parties by pinpointing that the agenda of the Green League was almost perfectly aligned with that of the organisations, and the agenda of the Left Alliance reflected the interests of the organisations closely (Korvaamaton, 2019a).

The Green League furthered their alliance with the climate movement by interacting with climate activists and interest group members of the movement on Twitter. Figure 1 shows a network graph of MPs tweets mentioning other users and with the words “ilmastolakko” [climatestrike] or #nytonpakko [#actnow].

The MPs of the Green League were the most interactive towards other users. While the communication with activists on Twitter wasn’t extensive, it showed further interaction. For example, one MP invited an activist to the parliament house. Only three MPs of the Left Alliance used the mention function in their tweets at all, although the number of tweets concerning the climate movement was high. The MPs of other parties included few mentions in their tweets.

Previous research shows that party leaders have used the @-mention function of Twitter more frequently in recent elections compared with before (Larsson, 2017). Enli and Skogerbø (2013) highlighted that Twitter hosts consistent dialogue between politicians and citizens during elections. In line with these findings, the

Figure 1 Network analysis of MPs' tweet mentions of "ilmastolakko" or "#nytonpakko", 2019



Comments: MPs are presented as colour-coded triangles: darker green = Green League; pink = Left Alliance; light green = Centre Party; red = Social Democrats; light blue = National Coalition Party; yellow = Finns Party. The mentioned users are orange squares if they are activists and coloured circles corresponding to the colours assigned to MP parties if they are politicians not serving as MPs or grey circles if they are private individuals. Black circles represent hashtags.

Twitter data showed interaction between MPs and the climate movement before elections. The Green League's MPs used Twitter to engage with the movement and to promote climate issues during the electoral campaigning. The Left Alliance's MPs used Twitter before the elections to promote the climate movement, but did not extensively engage with activists. In line with Marttila (2018), the distribution of the tweets that use the @mention function is not evenly distributed among MPs.

The electoral alliances were reflected in the ways in which the MPs used Twitter and in the alignment of agendas, as evaluated by a report published by the "Korvaamaton" campaign. The alliances transcended the boundaries of social media, and some MPs participated in climate protests before elections. The climate march organised just eight days prior to the elections was especially attractive to

politicians: The Green League and the Left Alliance both had a block in the march. The parties' youth organisations were involved with local climate march events. In Kainuu, a region in Eastern Finland, for example, the march was organised by a local youth division of the Left Alliance.

Other parties adopted some aspects of the climate movement agendas for beneficial interaction. The Social Democratic Party took a positive stand towards climate issues, but the MPs didn't extensively tweet about it. However, the MPs participated in the climate march as a part of their election campaign. The National Coalition Party extended their environmental programme and took a rationalistic approach, proposing or discussing possible climate policies. The Centre Party was the most polarised party in their position toward the movement, as some MPs voiced strong critique of the climate movement on Twitter, while other MPs tweeted about their participation in the climate march or supported it online.

Table 3 MP tweets mentioning "elections" and "ilmastolakki" or "#nytonpakko" before Finnish parliamentary elections

Party	Number	%
Green League	134	38.4
Left Alliance	38	33.9
Social Democratic Party	8	20.5
Centre Party	9	25.0
National coalition Party	13	46.4
Swedish people's Party	4	30.8
Finns Party	1	16.7
Total	207	35.4

Taking part in the discussion about the movement was related straightforwardly to elections or electoral campaigns. The MPs of the National Coalition Party, Green League, and the Left Alliance were the most active in mentioning elections in their tweets (see Table 3). The MPs of the National Coalition Party mentioned elections in 46.4 per cent, and the Green League MPs 38.4 per cent, of tweets before elections. The MPs of the Left Alliance mentioned elections in 33.9 per cent of tweets before elections. Twitter allowed politicians to voice the importance that they placed on climate issues in the context of their electoral campaigns.

Proactive mobilisation

The climate movement mobilised proactively by protesting more frequently before elections. Table 4 shows climate-themed protests that occurred in Helsinki during 2019, of which the police were informed by a notification of a public meeting. Additional climate protests likely occurred outside the national capital, but no data is collected nationally. The police may not have been informed of all protests, but the statistics provided by the police do seem to correspond quite well to news

coverage on protests throughout the year. The numbers do not include the weekly Fridays for Future protests, with approximately 5–20 participants per protest.

Table 4 Number of climate protests in Helsinki, 2019

	Climate protests	Large-scale climate protests
January	2	0
February	1	0
March	4	2
April	9	3
May	20	2
June	2	0
July	4	1
August	0	0
September	5	1
October	2	0
November	1	0
December	0	0
Total	50	9

April and May of 2019 saw an increase in the frequency of climate mobilisations. May was the most active month with 20 protests, including two campaigns by Greenpeace, consisting of 10 protests in total. A second wave of mobilisation occurred in September, with lower frequency of protests. The data corresponds to the proactive mobilisation mechanism, showing that the climate movement mobilised prior to elections in greater frequency than after elections. The period leading to elections saw not only more frequent, but more large-scale, protesting. Three large-scale protests were organised in April, all before the elections on the 14th. The second wave of mobilisation in September and October included one large-scale protest. It is possible that the protests were more attractive to the public before elections or that more resources were used to encourage mobilisation. The opening of the institutionalised politics in the electoral period provoked an opportunity for mobilisation, and especially climate protesting and increased interest of citizens to take part.

In addition to protesting, the climate organisations mobilised strategically in the context of the elections. The “Korvaamaton” campaign highlighted climate issues in connection with the parliamentary elections:

The spring 2019 elections resolve whether Finland commits to climate politics in accordance with the 1.5°C goal. Our campaign, along with citizens, aims to remind politicians about what is irreplaceable to us Finns. This is how we will help future MPs to make priorities [translated]. (Korvaamaton, 2019b)

The campaign mobilised through organisations and encouraged citizen involvement to express and underscore climate issues to politicians, exemplifying proactive mobilisation.

Polarisation of parties

The Green League and the Left Alliance emerged victorious in the April 2019 elections, moving from opposition to the government. Joining a coalition government compels parties to adjust and compromise to find common ground, but the strong position of climate issues in the government programme suggests that the government prioritised climate issues. Despite this, the ally parties took distance from the movement after the elections, possibly due to transitioning from the electoral arena to policy-making. The changing role of politicians from electoral candidates to MPs may also account for changing use of Twitter.

Throughout September, October, and November 2019, a total of eight climate protests were organised. The Global Climate Strike in September was large in scale. Although the timing of the strike was determined by the global strike movement, the attractiveness of the strike, along with the seven other protests during the three months, indicates the significance of the second mobilisation wave. The second protest wave showed two signs of increasing tensions between the movement and the governing parties: the distancing movement-party relations and the reactive, dissatisfied mobilisation.

Table 5 shows that MP tweeting with the keywords was much more active prior to than after the elections.² More time and energy were used for interaction before elections by MPs. The timeframe before elections is 15 weeks, while the timeframe after the elections extends to 37 weeks. The average amount of daily tweets suffered a significant decrease. The parties forming the government after the 2019 elections (bold in the fourth and fifth column in Table 5) tweeted less about the movement after the elections than before the elections. The MPs of the Green League published an average of 99.7 tweets mentioning “ilmastolakko” or “#nytonpakko” in the month before the elections, but after the elections, the monthly number of tweets dropped to an average of 16.6. Similarly, the number of tweets posted by the MPs of the Left Alliance dropped from a monthly average of 32 tweets to only 4.4.

Curiously, the MPs of the Finns Party slightly increased the number of tweets about the climate movement after the elections, which could be an implication of transitioning from the government to the opposition, resulting in increased criticism towards the climate movement and climate politics. Although the number of tweets increased, the monthly average number of tweets remained less than two. Thus, the total amount of criticism remained insignificant. The National Coalition Party remained supportive towards the movement, despite the slight decrease in tweets. The leader of the party tweeted in September:

I don't think there is a reason for suspicion over the motives of children and youth. By far, the biggest reason to participate in #climatestrike is the concern towards the future of the earth. Solutions require political decisions in Finland but particularly globally. Full support to stricter climate politics [translated]. (Orpo, 2019)

Table 5 MP tweets mentioning "ilmastolakko" or "#nytonpakko" before and after elections, 2019

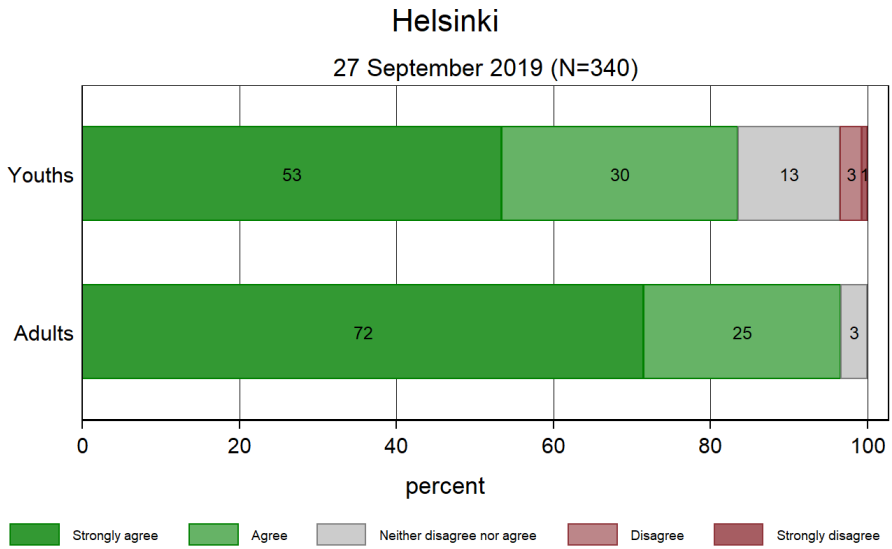
Party	Number of tweets before elections	Monthly average of tweets before elections	Number of tweets after elections	Monthly average of tweets after elections
Green League	349	99.7	141	16.6
Left Alliance	112	32.0	37	4.4
Social Democratic Party	39	11.1	11	1.3
Centre Party	36	10.3	35	4.1
National Coalition Party	28	8.0	55	6.5
Swedish People's Party	13	3.7	5	0.6
Finns Party	6	1.7	16	1.9
Total	584	166.9	303	35.6

The National Coalition Party and the Finns Party kept their respective stance and tone before and after the elections: the Finns Party remained critical, while the National Coalition stayed supportive.

On the side of the movement, the September strike showed rising criticism towards the government. Politicians were forbidden to talk in the events, unlike in the spring protests, where they were scheduled to speak. Before the elections, the climate mobilisation was inclusive towards the electoral candidates, but in September, MPs were criticised for participating in protests. Furthermore, the protestors were critical towards the government in their slogans, which included "Että ne kehtaa!" ["How dare you!"] and "Edustajat esille" ["Bring out the representatives!"] (Sirén et al., 2019). The developments demonstrated an increasing distance between the demands of the movement and the agendas of the former ally parties. Responses of the survey conducted among strike participants indicate that the demands of the protestors concerned stricter policies on climate issues (Savolainen et al., 2020). The protestors evaluated statements regarding solutions for climate change. Figures 2 and 3 show that more than 80 per cent of both youth and adults agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, demanding prioritisation of climate issues above other matters.

The responses, combined with a more critical and exclusive attitude towards politicians, support the claim that the protest demanded a stronger position from the government towards climate issues. The reaction of the movement after elec-

Figure 2 Support for prioritising protecting the environment over economic growth and loss of jobs

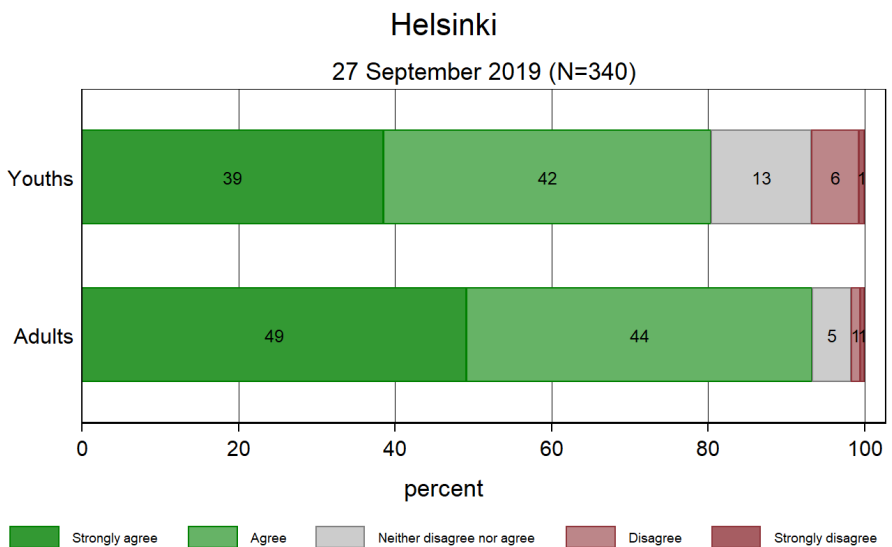


Protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs

Comments: Graph shows agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “Protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs”.

Source: Savolainen et al., 2020

Figure 3 Support for the government prioritising what climate scientists say over public opinion



The government must act on what climate scientists say even if the majority of people are opposed

Comments: Graph shows agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “The governments should act on what climate scientists say even if the majority of people are opposed”.

Source: Savolainen et al., 2020

tions was tied to the increasing distance between the demands of the movement and the agendas of the governing alliance parties.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we set out to investigate social media interaction between the climate change movement and political parties. We noted that scholars in social movement studies have argued that there is a “movement-centric bias” in the field (McAdam & Boudet, 2012; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010, 2019), meaning that not enough attention is paid to the context in which social movements operate and the interactions they engage in with allies and opponents. It is worth noting that a similar argument could be made concerning the field of media studies: like any discipline, it may easily become too focused on its primary object – the media – and not pay enough attention to the context in which the media operates and to the research advances in scholarly fields that study this context. Our aim, thus, was to combine insights from the political science and sociology perspective of social movements and parties, on the one hand, and from the media studies perspective of social movements and hybrid media systems, on the other, in order to understand the interaction between the climate change movement and political parties around elections.

Previous literature on movement-party interactions has been relatively vague on the question of what the venues of such interaction are (Tilly & Tarrow, 2016). We began by assessing the extent to which social media currently constitutes a platform for movement-party interaction and found that Twitter seems to be particularly important in this respect; our search string found some 80,000 tweets related to the climate movement, compared to less than 10,000 posts on all other social media platforms combined. This suggests that Twitter has become an important venue of interaction between movements and parties.

We also found a process of pre-election approaching and post-election distancing to characterise movement-party interactions over time. This process was driven by three mechanisms. The electoral coalitions mechanism explains how the Greens and the Left Alliance formed mutually beneficial coalitions with the movement in the pre-election phase. The proactive mobilisation mechanism corresponds to the way the movement saw an opportunity provided by the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s *Global warming of 1.5 degrees* report and the increasing willingness of parties to make climate one of the central electoral themes, and consequently, increased its mobilisation efforts in the pre-election phase. The polarisation of the parties mechanism, in turn, highlights how the movement and parties distanced themselves from one another in the post-election period when the movement’s ally parties had become a part of the government.

Earlier literature has examined these mechanisms in a relatively isolated manner (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). We suggest that combined, they form a process that is likely to be found, in different variations, in cases that involve a variety of movements in different political contexts. Whether post-election distancing occurs

is, of course, contingent on several factors. The theory of protest cycles (Della Porta & Tarrow, 1986), which argues that after intense bouts of activity, movements tend to fade or at least retreat to gather steam before the next cycle, would suggest that such distancing is common. One reason why it might be particularly pronounced in multi-party democracies like Finland is that coalition governments are the norm (Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021), and to enter the government, parties must often be prepared to moderate their electoral promises to some degree to forge compromises with coalition partners. Such moderation is one possible cause for social movement activists to take a more critical stance towards their former allies after they become a part of the government.

Furthermore, our network analysis contributed to the literature on movement-party interactions by showing what kind of relations between individuals in practice constitute the electoral coalitions mechanism. The MPs of the Green League in particular discussed climate change with activists and other individuals in the context of the movement and linked their climate-related posts to the movement by using the movement's hashtag in their tweets. Mutual promotion of climate issues and well-aligned agendas were valuable to both actors.

Finally, we found that all parties tweeted favourably about the movement, except for the only party openly critical of more ambitious climate policy, the populist-right Finns Party. Representatives of the Finns did not bother to counter the movement on Twitter. This is interesting in light of the findings by Chen and colleagues (2020), showing that opponents of strong climate policies in Finland are very active on Twitter, and climate change is a polarising issue where bubbles align strongly with party bubbles, with the Finns Party bubble on one side and the Green-Left bubble on the other. While strong climate policies are contested in social media debates (but rarely in the mainstream media, see Vesa et al., 2020), this contestation does not involve countering the climate change movement. This suggests that the pro-climate movement and the anti-climate action advocates in social media interact with their allies but not much with their opponents. These findings support the claim that political activity is associated with identity bubbles in Finnish social media (Koivula et al., 2019).

The alliances we observed on social media between movements and parties may nevertheless be an indicator of activists forming new types of “virtual elites” with politicians. Previous research has shown that politicians use Twitter for building such virtual elites (Ruoho & Kuusipalo, 2018). With respect to the climate movement, the ability to tactically use Twitter can allow the movement to connect movement networks with such elites. Thus, the blurring boundaries between interacting and building networks and relationships can have implications for the position of social movements in the collective “conflict and alliance” structure of politics.

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Notes

1. Only 3 per cent of protestors in the September Climate Strike in Helsinki were active members of a political party, and only 3 per cent of youth and 11 per cent of adults were passive members or financial supporters of a political party.
2. Members of some parties (Movement Now, Seven Star Movement, the Blue Reform, and Christian Democrats) are excluded, because their MPs did not tweet with the keywords during the timeframe. Three of these parties have few seats in the parliament, which can partly explain the lack of tweets.

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